Portia Da Costa

Gentlewoman's Predicament



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The Ladies' Sewing Circle Book One Sofia Harewood's problem: finding a partner who can please her in the bedroom better than her disappointing first husband! She senses there should be so much more to lovemaking—and she's determined to discover what she's been missing.

Sofia's mission takes her to A. Chamfleur, purveyor of "Intimate Advice to the Gentlewoman"...but the encounter is not at all what she had imagined. For A. Chamfleur turns out to be *Monsieur* Chamfleur—and he and his associates are more than willing to introduce Sofia to a new world of sensual delights....

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It all begins at the Ladies' Sewing Circle.

Somehow, I find myself revealing my predicament to Lady Arabella Southern, and instead of being horrified, she's unexpectedly sympathetic.

"Of course, my dear Sofia. It *is* a predicament, and you owe it to yourself to ensure things turn out differently in your second marriage. Especially as an independently wealthy woman like you can have her pick of any number of suitors."

"But I'm not even being courted by any gentlemen yet, Arabella." I smooth down my dove-grey gown. "Officially, I'm still in half mourning. Surely, it's unseemly to be thinking about intimacy again so soon?"

"It's never too early to educate oneself, Sofia. In this modern age a young woman is entitled to look out for her own welfare. Goodness me, my dear, we have a member of our sex on the throne of England."

"I hardly think our good queen ever had any difficulties of an intimate nature, Arabella. Just think how many children she had, and it's common knowledge that she and Prince Albert were idyllically happy."

"As could you be...with Mr. Trentham...or Lord Lotherton...or the earl of Davy...if you play your cards right, my dear."

"Ah, but that's my problem, Arabella. I have to learn how to play the game itself first, so to speak."

She gives me a little nod, and taps the side of her nose. Then reaches into her reticule and brings out a small white card.

Mme. A. Chamfleur, Intimate Advice to the Gentlewoman, it proclaims in a very handsome copperplate script, followed by an address in Hampstead, and the words *Consultations By Appointment*.

"Go here, Sofia my dear, go here." Arabella smiles as she presses the little rectangle into my hand. "Go here and you'll learn all you need to know."

Is that so? I wonder... Shall I go?

Well, here I am, a week later, standing on the step of a rather imposing residence. My carriage is speeding away already and my heart's thudding behind my corset I'm so nervous. I reach out and ring the bell before I can change my mind and bolt.

Within seconds, the door swings open and I get quite a surprise. Instead of the parlor maid I'd been anticipating, a handsome and rather cocky young man with light brown hair stands in the doorway. He's fashionable dressed in a rather flashy waistcoat and sharp-cut narrow trousers. His level gaze is disturbingly bold.

Before either of us speaks a single word he looks me up and down, slowly and probingly, his blue eyes sharp as if he's imagining my breasts, my hips and my belly beneath my clothes!

It's a thoroughly disquieting experience, but it makes my heart leap and bump even harder, and a strange, tense feeling gather and twist in the pit of my belly. I'm almost compelled to reprimand him, but he forestalls me.

"Ah, you'll be Mrs. Harewood, eh? We've been waiting for you. Do come in."

He steps back, to let me pass, his eyes still on me.

The hallway is pleasant, high-ceilinged and airy. A number of small prints adorn the walls, but I'm in no mood to peruse them. Not while I'm still being perused myself, and so insolently.

"I'm Clarence. Pleased to meet you." This personable, roving-eyed young man offers his hand, smiling broadly in a very knowing way. When our fingers touch, his are warm even through the kidskin of my glove, and they linger around mine far longer than is polite, and hold too tightly for common propriety. But despite that, they feel nice and I'm irrationally disappointed when he frees me. "Do come this way. I'm afraid *Madame* is with a lady at the moment, and the poor dear is proving exceptionally nervous and taking longer than expected." As I follow him toward a door at the end of the hall, he turns suddenly, and I could swear he winks at me. "You're not nervous are you, Mrs. Harewood? There's nothing to be afraid of here. Not a thing."

His frisky demeanor quite takes me aback, and I don't quite know what to say. But it doesn't seem to matter. He smiles at me as if we're having the most civil of conversations and ushers me in to a small but cozy parlor.

"I'm sure *Madame* won't be too long. I'll come and fetch you when *she's* ready to receive you."

What is this strange emphasis on the words *Madame* and *she*? And why does he seem to chuckle he says them? I thank him and attempt to maintain my equilibrium. A difficult task given the delicacy of my mission here, and the unnerving, heated scrutiny of Clarence.

"Read a journal while you're waiting," he recommends, waving in the general direction of a pile of periodicals stacked on the top of a bureau. "They'll relax you, they will, and put you in the mood."

Exactly what mood would that be? I wonder when he's gone, given the kind of advice I hope to receive at the hands of "Madame" Chamfleur.

Expecting the *Ladies' Home Journal* or the *Tatler*, something familiar that will settle my mind for the approaching interview, I don't recognize any of the titles. The top one on the pile, a journal called *Divertissements* seems innocuous enough, so I take it with me and take a seat next to the window, overlooking the garden.

I open the magazine at a random page, and my jaw drops in shock. I suddenly feel hotter than ever. With it laid open on my lap, I loosen my walking jacket, and take off my gloves.

The page in question consists of one large illustration, an extremely fine lithograph.

And it's a lifelike engraving of yet another handsome and personable young man, exotically dark this time, rather than fair like Clarence, but this young man is *naked*. Completely bare. Not a stitch on him from head to toe.

Oh, dear, I feel breathless. But I can't look away. I suddenly wish Clarence would

return so I could ask him to bring me a glass of water. But then, perhaps better not. I'm so overheated by the sight of this beautiful, unclothed youth in a state of masculine excitement that I certainly don't want cheeky Clarence to see me blushing.

After a moment, I settle down.

Is this not what I'm here for, after all? To learn more about the sensual side of life? Madame Chamfleur has probably left this journal here in her waiting parlor for that very reason. Allowing her female clients to be gently introduced to masculine nudity and its pleasures.

And he *is* a very fine specimen indeed.

Slim and muscular, with a head of jet-black curls, perfect clear skin and a vigorous growth of dark hair on his broad chest. As well as lower...

He has a thick thatch of black hair at his groin, and protruding below, an extraordinarily large and vital member.

Dear me, it's enormous. And he's touching it, his long fingers resting languidly on the thrusting branch, lightly curled around it as if to draw attention to its splendor.

As if it needed attention drawing to it. My curious female eyes can't be torn away from it.

What would it be like to touch such a mighty staff? Feel it throb and burn in my small hand. The late Mr. Harewood was not abundantly provisioned in his intimate areas. Possibly the reason for our disappointing marital endeavors? In addition to the fact that he didn't quite seem to know what to do with what he *did* have.

And being neither experienced nor bold, I suffered his inept fumbling whilst knowing there was more, so much more to connubial joining, if only I could work out what was missing.

But that's all behind me, and I'm resolved to make sure that I get what I want when I marry again, and I'm here to learn precisely what that is.

From "Madame."

Touching my fingertip to the smooth paper, I wonder if Mr. Trentham, or Lord Lotherton, or even the earl of Davy are as generously proportioned as this beautiful young man.

What it would feel like to have such a magnificent organ lodged inside me?

"Ah, I see you've found Yuri," says an amused masculine voice from somewhere near my elbow. "He has a magnificent cock on him, doesn't he? Not as big as mine, of course. But he's still a very fine fellow."

Blushing furiously, I look up to find that Clarence has crept up on me like a cat burglar and is staring down at my fingertips, where they rest incriminatingly at the base of handsome Yuri's abdomen.

I open my mouth to speak, and find myself completely incapable of uttering a word. Not satisfied with ogling the image of one young man's nakedness, I suddenly find myself speculating about Clarence's body. And whether his member is as big as he says. Goodness me, it must be enormous!

Dangerous thoughts stir, as does that strange and delicious heaviness deep in my

belly and the very quick of my body. It's uncomfortable, but also curiously exciting.

"Not to worry, Mrs. Harewood. Ladies do like looking at pictures of naked men, you know," continues Clarence cheerfully, "and pretty pictures are the very least you'll see in this house."

Showing no propriety whatsoever, he takes me by the arm and almost lifts me to my feet. "Please come this way, won't you? My employer will see you now, if you're ready."

Too flustered to speak, I snatch up my gloves and my reticule and follow his lead along the corridor and then up a flight of stairs. He doesn't urge me to precede him, but instead climbs ahead of me, offering me a clear view of his buttocks in his pale, fashionable trousers. They look firm and muscular, and the tips of my fingers tingle with the compulsion to reach out and lay hands on him. The flesh of his backside is so inviting. It lures me to exploration and the desire to fondle.

Whatever is happening to me? I've only been in this house around ten minutes or so, and already I'm turning into a wanton.

But isn't that what you want, Sofia?

Of course it is, but I'm still not ready reach out and goose Clarence spontaneously. On the first floor he escorts me to the door at the end of the landing and knocks.

A peculiarly deep voice for a woman calls out, "Enter!"

The room beyond is even cozier and more inviting than the parlor below.

Heavy mahogany furniture gleams, as do the spines of many, many books ranked in floor-to-ceiling shelves. A cheerful fire burns in the hearth, and to one side of the room stands an imposing leather-topped desk, to the other a very inviting chaise longue. Underfoot, the Persian carpet is dense and soft.

A hugely tall and very strapping gentleman comes out from behind the desk to greet me, a warm smile on his lavishly whiskered face. His eyes are bright and brown, his thick dark hair is a little silvered but most attractive, and his teeth look very white between full, almost sultry pink lips. He's beautifully dressed in an elegant morning coat, narrow trousers and immaculate linen.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Harewood," he says in a deep, ever so slightly accented voice, his eyes twinkling. "What an enormous pleasure it is to meet you." He catches my hand in both his colossal ones and gives it an enthusiastic squeeze.

I'm befuddled.

Another extraordinarily good-looking man. Another lewd flutter down below that exceeds even my response to Clarence and Yuri. For a moment, outrageous ideas prance fully formed through my mind, all featuring this mighty, well-set-up gentleman with his virile mutton-chop whiskers, his merry smile and his exceptionally strong-looking body.

But where is Madame Chamfleur? There's no sign of her. And what I have to confess here can only be told to a woman.

I open my mouth to speak, but once again, I'm struck dumb.

"Come, my dear lady, let's sit down." Still holding my hands, my host leads me to

the chaise longue and settles me upon it, most courteously. "Clarence, kindly bring some spiced Madeira for Mrs. Harewood. I'm sure a taste of it will calm and relax her."

"Right ho, Mr. C.!"

As Clarence speeds away, my new companion focuses all his considerable attention upon me.

Up close, he seems even bigger than I first thought. His hands are massive, as is everything about him. Deep chest, huge thighs...and, oh, dear, I can't prevent myself from glancing at his masculine endowments.

And in that department, he's even more blessed than young Clarence and Yuri!

Blood rushes into my face, especially as he seems to notice me noticing him. A delightful knowing smile creases his broad face as he sinks onto the chaise beside me.

All of a flutter, I blurt out, "Sir, thank you for your kindness, but could you tell me when we can expect Madame Chamfleur? I'm anxious to meet her."

His laugh is like deep, sonorous music.

"I'm afraid there is no Madame Chamfleur. Except my late mother. I'm sorry you've been deceived."

"But...er...why would you do that, Mr....er...Monsieur Chamfleur? Why would you advertise the services of a woman when you are in fact a man?"

Very much a man, my wayward eyes confirm again. Why can't I keep control of where I'm looking? I can't seem to stop staring at his groin.

Still smiling, he chafes my bare hands, his fingers warm and clever and soothing. "My name is Ambrose. Please call me that." I find myself calming, and settling, while paradoxically the tension in my nether regions increases. "I use my mother's name out of expediency, really. It's more convenient. Most ladies wouldn't dream of discussing their intimate problems with a gentleman, but when the name of 'Madame' is presented, they eagerly come along."

"But…"

Still his fingers move over mine, gently, rhythmically. "Believe me, Mrs. Harewood, I can help you. Choose whatever problem concerning intimate human relations you have, I can advise you in the most perfect discretion. You can trust me completely, and also those who serve on my staff."

It seems preposterous. Indeed, it *is* preposterous. But still his steady brown eyes, and his softly moving fingers, continue to lull me. Maybe he can help, this huge man, with his twinkling smile, his ever-so-slight French accent and his perfect self-possession?

Clarence arrives with the Madeira. He pours it from a jug into a Russian tea glass with a silver-plated holder. It's warm when he puts it into my hands.

"Try it. It's my own special infusion of spices. I think you find it both soothing and invigorating," says Monsieur Chamfleur. Or Ambrose, as I suppose I must think of him. I feel like telling him that I find him both soothing and invigorating, too.

The spiced Madeira is delicious, and all the more potent for my nearly empty stomach. I was too nervous to eat before I came out.

I drink deeply and find that I've all but emptied the glass. Clarence takes it from me, and seems about to refill it when I wave him away. He puts it aside, retires to the far end of the room and sits down on a hardwood chair.

"Please, Mrs. Harewood, won't you tell me what's been troubling you?"

Ambrose reaches for my hands again and folds them into his.

The room is warm, and I feel so comfortable now that I open my mouth.... Then I remember that Clarence is still with us.

"Don't worry. No secrets from Clarence. He's my most trusted associate and he assists with the therapies."

"Therapies?"

"Yes, of course, my dear lady, there are therapies. How else could we help resolve intimate problems?"

Indeed. I glance at Clarence, and he gives me a small nod, his merry face serious for once.

I return my attention to Ambrose. His expression is composed, serious and professional. And yet, somehow, far back in his eyes, a demon twinkles.

What is this place? What new predicament have I got myself into?

Still his fingers gently stroke mine, slowly and soothingly. I imagine them touching me elsewhere, just as slowly, just as soothingly.

Ambrose doesn't prompt me, but suddenly I find myself pouring out my story. The words are halting at first, then rapidly grow more fluent. I blush like the very devil, but still I can't stop myself, and I describe the deficiencies of my marriage bed, my confused feelings, my sense that there should be more, so much more.

And my dogged determination to ensure things are better, the next time round.

"I want to be sure that I know in advance how to please my husband...and...um... that he knows how to please me in return. Mr. Harewood was not at all diligent in that quarter."

"And did you receive no pleasure at all from him?"

Ambrose's face is still calm, his demeanor attentive. Did I imagine that naughty gleam in his eye, I wonder? He seems all sober and thoughtful now, and to my shock, I feel bitterly disappointed. I suddenly want wickedness, and daring, and seduction, and something that I don't yet quite understand.

"None. Just discomfort...and certain female friends hinted that there would be rapture, transports of bliss, helpless passion."

"Quite so. Indeed there should be." Ambrose makes a gesture, and Clarence efficiently provides me with more Madeira. Just a few sips, but I'm grateful for the richness and the spices.

"I can help you, Mrs. Harewood. Indeed I can." His voice is softer now, almost a whisper as he leans close and allows me to smell his intoxicating shaving lotion. "But first we must examine you to see if there's anything physical amiss."

A thousand questions and protests speed through my mind. Is Ambrose a physician? And if not, how outrageous and inappropriate is it for him to lay hands on me?

Whirling hot blood rushes to my face. "Examine me?" My senses teeter and tilt as the blood seems to rush to other places, too, making them agitated. The tips of my breasts, the pit of my belly, my secret recess.

"Why, yes, of course." Ambrose's smile is gentle but his brown eyes are shining like dark stars.

What is this place? Who is he? Who are they? I ask myself, aware that Clarence is hovering still, close by.

"Don't be shy, Sofia. You're safe here. No need to worry." Ambrose's fingers have slid under the sleeve of my frock and are stroking, stroking. "Come on, my dear, let's be off with all these heavy, constricting clothes."

So this is howit happens?

He urges me to my feet, and it's off with my bonnet, my jacket and my boots, followed swiftly by my bodice and my skirts and petticoats.

Both Ambrose and Clarence handle my clothing with smooth efficiency, and I wonder vaguely just how many other nervous gentlewomen they've cleverly undressed in this warm room.

Denuded down to my corset and bustle, I shudder and sway as if in a feverespecially when Ambrose slides his fingers down my throat and across my bosom and beneath the edge of the sternly laced garment.

"Dear God, this is like armor! How can women possibly feel free and experience pleasure while trussed up on monstrosities like this? I suggest that when you get home, you fling it on the fire."

Before I can protest, he and Clarence attack the garment that offends him so. Bustle dispensed with, two pairs of extraordinarily deft male hands negotiate the corset's hooks and lacing, and within the wink of an eye, Ambrose flings the entire construction across the room in disgust.

"There, that's better."

I gasp as his whole hand settles lightly on my breast, through my chemise. He cups the soft orb with a delicate touch, his fingers curving and caressing. I stand like a statue, shaking and confused in my just the chemise, my drawers and my stockings. The heat of the softly glowing fire is like a caress, too, warming me through my linen. A hot blush surges through my skin and through my veins. Between my legs, I feel a pulse, slow and liquid.

"You're very beautiful, my dear," whispers Ambrose, hand still upon me, "but you're a modest young woman and I know all this is new to you." His mouth is so close to my cheek that I almost imagine he's going to kiss me. But he doesn't. "Perhaps you'd like to retain your undergarments for the moment, to spare your blushes?"

Spare them? Too late for that. My entire body is in a state of conflagration. He's barely touched me but I'm an inferno down below.

"Come along, Mrs. Harewood. Let's get you settled comfortably on the chaise."

Like the proverbial lamb to the slaughter, I let him lead me to the plush, upholstered couch and help me up onto it. As I settle into place, not knowing what to expect, I close my eyes. And as I prepare to meet my fate, Clarence's skillful fingers ease the pins from my hair and fan it out across the cushions. All the while, Ambrose lightly strokes my hand.

What am I doing here? Why am I allowing these two men that are scarcely even acquaintances make free with my clothing and my body? I must have lost my wits or the Madeira was drugged.

But I know that's not so. And I know this is what I've wanted for a long time. The thing I knew existed but was missing from my life.

When my pulses have settled, and I've calmed a little, Ambrose releases my hand and gets straight down to business. Slowly, seductively, he strokes my cheek, then my chin, then my throat. A moment later, he's at the tiny silk ribbons that fasten the front of my chemise, undoing them swiftly.

Without speaking, he folds the soft fabric aside and exposes my pale body to his gaze, and to Clarence's.

When he touches me, *really* touches me, I cry out like a child, and instantly Clarence is at my head, stroking my hair like a skilled groom calming a skittish pony. He murmurs to me, "There, there..." while Ambrose handles my breasts, gently fondling and cupping and kneading.

His actions are light, circumspect, almost respectful, but their effect is like nothing i've ever known. I squirm on the upholstery, my body excited, twisting and uneasy. When he increases the intensity of his caresses, I whimper helplessly. How can this be? How can such simple manipulations create such a cornucopia of delight. My late husband mauled my bosom, and I felt nothing then.

But now...now, Ambrose's fingers are so clever, so devilish. He plucks at my nipples, playing with them in a way that feels like he's playing with my entire body and setting light to the most divine, unknown sensations. I wriggle shamelessly, scissoring my thighs in a lewd and passionate frenzy, wanting more, more, more. Anything to assuage the rapidly gathering inner tingling.

"You see, Mrs. Harewood, you *are* a sensual woman!" Ambrose's voice is both cajoling and triumphant, and yet an intimate whisper, right in my ear. While he still plays with my breasts, Clarence moves again, toward the foot of the chaise.

My eyes fly open.

Whatever are they planning now?

"I'll need your help now, Clarence, if you will?" Ambrose almost kisses me, his breath hot against my brow. "I'd like you to unfasten Mrs. Harewood's drawers and stockings, and then ease them down as far as her knees."

"Oh, no, please, Monsieur Chamfleur, please no!"

Oh the shame, to be exposed so.... Why does it excite me and make me want to wiggle and wriggle even harder?

"Calm yourself, sweet Mrs. Harewood, rest easy." His lips brush my skin, just for a moment. "And please do call me 'Ambrose,' I beg of you. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Except myself, and a degree of lust and licentiousness I've only just this afternoon become aware of.

Clarence makes himself busy at my waist, and a moment later I feel cooler air whisper across my belly and my thighs even though the room is warm. His hand beneath my bare bottom, he lifts me, and then settles me back on the fine plush velvet upholstery. To feel it's sumptuous texture against my naked skin is willfully decadent.

"Magnificent," they exclaim, almost a chorus. Then Ambrose kisses my face, just once, in a kind of signal, and the two men change places.

Clarence, at my head now, is just as gentle and solicitous as his master was. I look up into his periwinkle-blue eyes, almost afraid to let my glance stray toward Ambrose and his intentions, and I see Clarence's expression is both kind and impish. He cradles me with one arm, and lets his free hand drift to my breast and take up the delightful ministrations that Ambrose began. I groan with delight while he teases and tickles me, at the same time anticipating more, much, much more, down below.

I close my eyes. Not because I don't want to look at their handsome, fervent faces, but because I'm not sure I can bear such intense wonders in the light.

My cries increase as I feel an ethereal, indefinable pressure slide unhurriedly across the skin of my belly. In a ferment now, I could swear it's a feather that's caressing me. A long, stiff, resilient feather whose soft tip glides first across one thigh, then with tantalizing slowness across the other. Having tormented me thus, it returns to the plane of my abdomen, floating like mist into the pit of my navel and circling there, making me squirm on the chaise.

"Quietly, quietly..." purrs a voice so softly that I'm not even sure whether it's Clarence or Ambrose, and as I endure the feather, I'm all the time aware of skilled fingers still at work on my bosom. A multitude of nerve ends have woken from their slumbers, in both the zones my new friends are exploring, and in others, as yet unvisited.

Between my thighs, I'm intensely troubled. If that be the word. My feminine parts are wracked by simmering heat and agitation, a wicked, wicked craving to be touched and rubbed and played with. It's so excruciating, I want to play with them myself.

I feel confused, my head whirling, lost but also strangely safe. These must be the sensations that I dimly imagined I was missing in my marriage bed. But they're so powerful, so befuddling, yet so beautiful. My eyes fill with tears, but I'm not sad. No, never that.

Reaching for knowledge, I almost coo in response to my two paramours.

Who respond to my silent, formless prayers.

Clarence kisses me, his tongue pressing importunately into my mouth, searching, tasting. At almost the same moment, I heave up from the surface of the chaise in delicious shock.

A finger-a stiff, warm, clever finger-pushes inside me.

Ambrose breaches my hot body in a smooth, bold action, and as his finger enters me, his broad, flat thumb settles on the tiny sensitive bead at the apex of my womanhood. Instantaneously, delight seems to pierce me like a spear, touching not just the warm, sticky crevice of my sex, but also my breasts, my lips, my toes, my heart and my very soul.

The men move in. They overwhelm me. I'm exquisitely assaulted by questing fingers and warm tongues, and by the scents of my body and the clean odors of their linen and their flesh.

The heat and the tension in my flesh soars to a sweet, unbearable pitch, building like a raw flame in my loins...and then, and then... I cry out into the kissing mouth of Clarence, when without warning, all that selfsame pressure seems to release in a great, wild rush and throb through my body in a wrenching wave so profound I almost swoon.

Goodness, what's happened to me? Did I lose my senses?

Opening my eyes, I realize that I'm just lying here, on the chaise, my heart and my body all of a flutter. My breasts and belly are still naked and I'm cradled in Ambrose's arms. My face is wet, and I realize I've been weeping.

Struggling to sit up, I look around and find that Clarence has discreetly slipped away.

"Were those the transports of delight that my friends have whispered of?" I ask Ambrose as I struggle to gather just a few of my scattered wits. The deficiencies of my marriage are now readily and distressingly apparent to me. Are all men as lacking in the sensual arts as my poor late husband was? "I confess that's the first time I've experienced them."

"They were indeed, my dear Mrs. Harewood." Ambrose's voice is quite grave as he moves away quickly, only to return with a little more Madeira for me. It's cold now, but just as delicious, and very welcome. "And it pains me to hear that such an obviously sensual woman as yourself is only now discovering the joys of eroticism."

I still feel a little stunned. I'm shocked and surprised by what I'm capable of. But in my heart, a seed of determination has been planted. Never again will I accept second best in this matter. Never again will I lie thwarted and unsatisfied while a gentleman uses me to service his own desires. If my next husband is ignorant of my needs, by heaven, I will *show*him what I require and insist he provides it!

The Madeira braces me. I square my shoulders and look into Ambrose's intense brown eyes. My heart lifts at the look of awe and wonder there. It's as if he saw my inner transformation.

"That...that was quite a revelation. But I sense there's more to learn. Many additional tricks and techniques that I may employ to enhance my enjoyment of the bedroom."

"Indeed, my dear, and bravo! It's clear that you're a quick study and a natural born sensualist. That perfect pleasure you just experienced is called an orgasm, and now you're acquainted with it, I'm sure it'll be the first of many."

"I do hope so." And that is the truth. My glowing body is already rousing anew, despite my recent pleasure. "I'm eager to experience it again. And to learn more."

"Of course, my dear lady, of course. We usually suggest that further, shall we say, 'therapies' be explored on another day. When the client has had time to absorb the impact of her first experience and perhaps experiment a little herself. But in your case —" he pauses delicately "—in your case, I feel that you're ready to move swiftly ahead, to the second stage."

Second stage? Oh, my, what might that be?

A delicious rippling in the pit of my belly tells me my body is eager and willing to explore it.

Just as I'm about to speak, the door opens and Clarence returns with a bundle of silk and lace over his arm. When he shakes it out, and holds it up, it proves to be an exquisite peignoir of ivory *Peau de Soie*, adorned with Brussels lace and narrow satin ribbons. Ambrose hands me from the chaise longue and it seems the most natural thing in the world to divest myself of all my underclothes and slip happily into the delicate luxurious garment.

The awareness that I'm momentarily nude before both Ambrose and Clarence only excites me even further. In fact I'm almost disappointed when the silken robe is tied and my flesh is respectably covered again.

"Come this way," says Ambrose, taking my hand, and leading me out of the room. Glancing backward, I see Clarence begin to tidy up and gather my clothing. Ahead lies I know not what, but I feel a little sad when the younger man doesn't follow us.

We reach another room, which, when Ambrose escorts me within, proves to be a sumptuous if somewhat gaudily decorated bedroom, of the sort I would imagine a high class courtesan to inhabit. The bed is a huge, brass-railed four-poster, and the walls are decorated with a rich, silk wallpaper. Works of art hang here, too, as they did downstairs, but here the paintings and prints are bigger and undeniably lewd... and stimulating.

As Ambrose turns down the sheets and quilt, releasing a waft of delicious tuberose fragrance from the linen, another door to the chamber opens and a newcomer enters.

"Oh, my! You're..."

It's Yuri, the exquisite young man from the engraving.

He's naked, alive and perfect, right down to every last inch of beautiful swarthy flesh and every vibrant dark curl on his head.

His male member is enormous and already on the rise.

"This is Yuri, Mrs. Harewood, and he's here to pleasure you." Ambrose leads me forward, toward this vision of idealized male pulchritude. "And to instruct you in ways that you may pleasure him, in order to increase a man's enthusiasm and thus *your* enjoyment of the act."

"Enchanted," the young man says softly, taking my shaking hand and bringing it to

his lips for a kiss. His mouth is warm and firm, and parts slightly against my skin to allow his tongue to delicately tease.

"I...um... It's a pleasure to meet you, too," I stammer, unable to stop myself glancing at his male organ, which seems to be rising and growing yet further, as we speak.

"I sincerely hope so, madame," he whispers against my skin, his tongue flicking again in way that's positively indecent. Especially as he's at full and magnificent stand now.

"Here, let me help you," says Ambrose from behind me, and he reaches over my shoulders and unfastens my silk robe. Immediately Yuri parts the garment and exposes me. A heartbeat later, Ambrose slides it off my shoulders and makes me bare.

I'm in a room, stark naked, with two men again.

Acutely aware of Ambrose behind me, I reach, on pure instinct, for Yuri. He makes a sound of delighted surprise when I coil my arms around him, but then getting into the spirit of things, he clasps me tightly, too, and presses his lips to mine.

His mouth tastes just as sweet and spicy as the Madeira, and as his tongue probes and explores, his mighty sex pushes at my belly.

Naked skin on naked skin. Lips. Tongues. Hands. A man's hard staff against me.

All these things are right. All these things are good.

Even the intense scrutiny of a third party, another handsome man, seems to be part of my sensual destiny.

Yuri and I kiss for a long time, our hands running over each others backs and buttocks. I seem to have passed across some great Rubicon, and I know that the exact moment of my transformation was during the sublime pleasure that Ambrose visited upon me with his fingers. Even though I'm embracing one man, it's this other that I'm still strangely linked to.

Eventually, my naked companion and I part, and I turn to find Ambrose's eyes on me, burning like coals. Yet, when he extends his hand, and silently leads me to the bed, his decorum is perfect and controlled. He helps me onto the mattress, but his hands don't linger upon my limbs or my torso, even though every last sense in me screams out that he wants to. He sincerely wants to...

Yuri takes his place in the bed at my side, his long, sun-kissed body gracefully elegant. He reaches for me, touching my breast, fingertips warm and sure. I surge toward him, and yet my attention isn't entirely upon his actions. Ambrose is retreating behind me, moving toward the door...and that can't be. That really cannot be!

I turn to him, holding out my hand, even while Yuri continues to idly fondle my teat. When I glance quickly at him, he's smiling, his dark eyes aglitter.

Ambrose hesitates, just a second, then returns to the bed. He kicks off his boots, then climbs alongside us, still fully clothed, leaning on his elbow.

"I'll watch for a while," he says. His voice is quiet and calm, but I sense a thread of raw excitement.

Watching will do, then. At least for a while.

We exchange a complicit smile, then I return my attention to Yuri.

The younger man is exotic, tawny-skinned and earthy. His dark hair is a wild mass of curls and there is a simmering, animal quality about him. His lovemaking is eager and earthy, too, although I can tell he is accomplished, with many skills.

His hands rove my body, and I sink into the sensations, lolling back against the pillows like some Ottoman princess accepting the services of her swains. With one hand I slowly stroke Yuri's warm flank, indolently encouraging him, while with the other, I seek, and find, Ambrose's hand. Our fingers lace, and my heart turns over, touched by some strange, dark emotion.

Yuri kisses my cheek, my throat, my shoulder. Each with a soft intense contact and a stroke of his moist, nimble tongue. Then his mouth moves lower, drifting and sliding over the upper slopes of my bosom. I blush a little as my nipples harden even more, then smile inside at my own silliness. How far are we now beyond embarrassment? Beyond inhibition?

As Yuri takes one tight crest between his lips, I laugh out loud, knowing that shame is something I'll never know again.

I wriggle against the clean, crisp linen, excitement surging through my flesh and settling, insistently, between my legs. I turn to Ambrose, and his eyes are aflame. As my lips part on a gasp of delight, he leans across and takes my mouth in a probing kiss.

Two men's mouths for my enjoyment, what more could a woman ask?

A great deal, I realize, as perverse visions of bodies in combination fill my mind. Sumptuously lewd images parade through my imagination, magnifying my already intensely aroused condition.

A hand slides between my legs, and paddles delightfully in my feminine furrow, playing with the tiny responsive bud there. I groan around Ambrose's tongue, not even knowing whether it's his finger or Yuri's that's touching me.

I thrash. I whimper. I clasp at both men, grabbing at clothed and naked flesh. I am in a frenzy of desire.

I want more, more, more.

The two men seem to be able to communicate by some kind of mental telepathy. They work as an infernal arousing team.

Yuri smothers my breasts in a last veil of kisses, then backs and turns away for a moment. I watch in fascination as he rolls a device of fine rubber over his magnificent manhood, then Ambrose takes me by the shoulders, and moves me onto my side. I'm in such a state of voluptuous excitement that I allow myself to be handled, loving the dominance of my duo of lovers.

I am between them now, facing Ambrose, and with Yuri's sleek, nude form molded to my back. Purring like a cat, I rub myself against him, all the while gazing into Ambrose's dark eyes.

I am completely relaxed, yet in a state of high, delirious excitement. Behind me, Yuri adjusts his position, and his warm, hard member brushes the backs of my thighs, exquisitely tempting. Ambrose touches my face, his fingers infinitely tender.

The two men take possession of me, manipulate me. My hips are tilted, my thighs parted from behind, and as Ambrose holds me steady, Yuri thrusts into my slick womanhood, slowly and surely.

I am filled, sublimely filled, in a position that the late Mr. Harewood never attempted, and in a situation I would never have credited possible.

Two men. Two delicious men. Both for me.

I'm not yet bold enough to look Ambrose in the eye as Yuri ploughs me, but I bury my face in his shoulder, breathing in the fragrance of his linen and his warm, male body beneath it. He drops a kiss on my brow, and murmurs something so low I can't make it out, although perhaps Yuri can? But the tone of his voice is soothing and loving.

As is his finger as it moves deftly between my thighs.

We rock in a syncopated action, as perfectly coordinated as an expensive Swiss clock. Ambrose strokes me exquisitely throughout, taking my breath away, and I feel him hard—hard as sin—beneath his clothes.

Ambrose whispers encouragement. Yuri grunts and sighs with a deliciously animal enthusiasm. I moan like a madwoman, relishing my own freedom and my liberty from inhibition.

When my crisis comes, I claw at Ambrose while I push back against Yuri to receive him yet deeper.

My mind reels like a joyous waltz. I soar again. I adore these men both, but the sweet courtesy and tenderness of Ambrose wins my heart. The emotion is irrational, and sudden, but I truly feel it.

And as I descend, knowing I will rise again soon, I reach for the buttons of his trousers and fumble them open. Diving into his combinations, I draw out his swollen shaft. Yuri is still hard at work in my channel, so I simply caress Ambrose with my fingers, as he caresses me.

We writhe again, we three, a squirming mythical beast of hands, fingers, arms, torsos and happily glowing genitals. I drift into such a stupor of sublime sensation that I barely know where one of us ends and the next one begins.

We are one voice, one body, even one heart.

And as one, we all cry out as we achieve sweet resolution, Yuri pumping enthusiastically inside me while Ambrose spills his seed upon my belly.

I am awash. I am debauched. I am in heaven.

For many minutes, we lie too stunned to speak or move, but as I recover my faculties I'm not so naive as to believe that such an occurrence as this is regular. I sense that it was different. Unusual. That Ambrose Chamfleur does not often take part in such frolics, or at least to such a degree.

When I look into his eyes I see them filled with wondrous happiness.

My heart fills with joy, too.

As Ambrose leans in to kiss me, I am vaguely aware of Yuri sliding from the bed behind me and padding from the room, his job well done.

"So, Mrs. Harewood, do you feel that you are fully acquainted with sexual rapture now?" Ambrose enquires when we are alone, reaching to sweep my tangled hair away from my cheeks so he may see my expression clearly. I, in turn, feast my eyes on the noble contours of his suddenly dear face.

"Fully. Although I suspect that there are many shades of bliss yet to be discovered, Ambrose."

I try to imagine looking into the eyes of Mr. Trentham, or Lord Lotherton, or the earl of Davy whilst experiencing this glorious lassitude, and I find I cannot picture them. They are nothing to me. Just ciphers. Only this man—and his delightful companions—have any reality for me.

I can see that my previous plans will have to change.

1888

She draws me aside at the Ladies' Sewing Circle. Young Lucy Montgomery. Mrs. Montgomery, as of a few months ago.

Her eyes are strained. Her face is pinched. Experience tells me that all is not well in the bed of her new husband. Mr. Montgomery is older, so much older, and her family's choice for her.

I remember when I felt as she does. Disillusioned. Disappointed. Yearning for a certain magic that I was convinced existed but had not yet experienced.

Not until I met a man named Ambrose, who has some revolutionary ideas about how ladies should learn about matters of the bedroom.

As she haltingly describes her dilemma, I find myself drifting back to that first time, just after I'd behaved like a wanton libertine, and discovered my true erotic nature in the arms of Ambrose and Yuri and Clarence.

Afterward, alone, he tended me with all the delicacy and scrupulousness of a perfectly trained lady's maid. Washing his jism off my body with a soft muslin cloth dipped in rose-scented water, talking to me in quiet tones, and all the while smiling as he described to me all outrageous delights and glories that lay ahead of me in the world of sensuality.

Alas, with such heated descriptions, and such intimate handling, it wasn't long before my dear Ambrose was spending his dear, precious essence all over me again, although this time we both naked, his clothes being off.

In the peaceful aftermath, I outlined my plan, and though nervous at first, I warmed to my theme. And so did he.

A process that led delightfully to yet more spending.

"Er...um...Lady Arabella said that you might be able to advise me...offer a consultation and perhaps some...therapy?" She twists her handkerchief in her fingers, mangling the poor scrap of lace near to destruction. "Obviously, on a professional basis, of course.... She said you were a...a consultant."

"Of course, my dear. I'll be happy to help." I still her hands with mine, then reach into my reticule for my card case. "Why not come to this address at around three p.m. tomorrow? I'm sure that my associates and I can provide you with all the answersand the therapy—that you need."

"Associates?" She looks doubtful.

"Don't be concerned. They're the most trusted of professionals. You'll be safe in their hands."

She smiles. Her spirits seem to be lifting already and her eyes are brighter.

"Thank you so much. I'll be there." She almost seems about to kiss me in gratitude. "Bless you, Madame Chamfleur. I knew I could rely on you."

As she turns away, and begins to discuss cross-stitch with another of our number, I glance down at the top card in my little case.

Mme. Sofia Chamfleur, Intimate Advice to the Gentlewoman, it proclaims in a very handsome copperplate script, followed by an address in Hampstead, and the words *Consultations By Appointment*.

I smile, happy anew every time I think of my plan, the way I invested some of my fortune, and the delicious arrangements I made. Beneath my skirts, my body warms as if readying itself for the attentions of my beloved Ambrose.

You see, I did decide to marry, after all.

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A Gentlewoman's Predicament

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