

S A P P H I R E 2 B R I D E S

A Beauty Refined

TRACIE
PETERSON



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Tracie Peterson, *A Beauty Refined*
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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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Dedicated to Helen Motter with thanks for being such an incredible editor. You have made the stories so much better with your input and eagle eye. May God richly bless you in all that you do for Him.



1

HELENA, MONTANA, JUNE 1907

I'm quite certain you will find these rooms to be to your liking, Count Von Bergen," a young bellman declared as he ushered the Von Bergen party into a suite of rooms. "The Broadwater Hotel has only recently been reopened, and we've worked hard to make it an appealing and welcoming retreat."

Phoebe Von Bergen glanced around the large sitting area. The wood floors had been polished to perfection. Colorful carpets, mostly Turkish or Wilton velvet, were placed in strategic order to offer beauty and comfort while complementing the dark wood beneath them. Gold and blue silk velvet draperies framed wood-trimmed windows of beveled glass, and cascaded to brush the floor. The room was decorated with expensive pieces of cherry, mahogany, and walnut furniture, as well as statuettes and other bric-a-brac to enrich the surroundings. The fireplace mantel held several books, which Phoebe promised herself she'd investigate at a later time.

"This door opens to your bedchamber," the young man announced as he opened one of the doors in the room. "I believe

you'll find everything in order. Your luggage has already been delivered. There is a complete bathroom with facilities designed to give you whatever comfort you desire. There is hot and cold running water." He paused and pointed to the far side of the room. "Behind that door is another room for your valet. Your daughter's room will be across the hall and her maid's room will adjoin. These are the keys." He placed two keys atop a nearby table. "We can bring wood for the fireplace, but each room has a radiator for heat as well. The nights are quite chilly, even cold to some."

Phoebe watched her father take in the surroundings. "It isn't nearly as opulent as I was led to believe," the stocky older man declared in his usual detached manner. The younger man opened his mouth to reply, but Count Frederick Von Bergen, or Graf Von Bergen, as he was titled in his homeland of Germany, wasn't one to be interrupted. "I suppose it will have to suffice. We will have our meals served here, *ja?*"

"If you like," the young man said, glancing at Phoebe and then to their two servants. "We have three beautiful dining rooms, however, and our chef is French. It is said that our meals are as good as any served in the finest hotels and restaurants in America . . . and Europe."

"I suppose," Phoebe's father said, dabbing a handkerchief to his mouth, "that shall remain to be seen. However, I believe *frühstück*—breakfast—should be enjoyed at leisure in the privacy of one's own rooms. I would like to see it delivered at precisely eight o'clock each morning."

"For you alone, sir?"

Phoebe felt sorry for the younger man, who seemed completely intimidated by Graf Von Bergen. Despite her father's short stature and stocky frame, he had a look about him that put people on edge. Phoebe put herself between the two men as

she came to her father's side. "I should enjoy trying the dining rooms, if you don't mind, *Vater*."

Her father glanced at her momentarily and nodded. "Very well. Bring food for me alone. You will, of course, inform my manservant where he and my daughter's maid might dine."

"Yes, sir." The young man looked hesitant. "Ah . . . I . . . that is, you should also know that the natatorium is open for your enjoyment. The pool is one hundred by three hundred feet and fed by nearby hot springs. There are swimming outfits available in all sizes in the men's and women's dressing rooms. Also we have a billiards club complete with a private bar for . . ." He glanced at Phoebe and gave her a hesitant smile before adding, "gentlemen only. There are also a variety of diversions on the grounds that might appeal to the ladies. The gardens are beautiful."

Von Bergen gave a grunt. "Thank you."

Phoebe could tell by her father's dismissive tone that he'd heard more than enough. As if to prove this, he signaled his man, Hubert, who led the hotel bellman away. As her father's valet and bodyguard, Hubert was used to handling unwanted people. Phoebe saw Hubert tip the man, then all but shove him from the room.

"Gerda, please see to our rooms." Phoebe took up the key and handed it to her maid. "Also prepare a bath, and I should like the burgundy silk for dinner."

"Ja, I'll do it right now." The dark-haired maid curtsied and took the key.

Phoebe waited until she had gone and Hubert had taken himself off to arrange her father's bedchamber before she spoke. "I am quite spent after the train trip here. I do hope you won't expect me to keep late hours tonight." She used their native German, hoping it would soothe her father's tense nature.

“Not at all,” her father said, pulling out his watch. “I have meetings tomorrow with the sapphire mining representatives and do not intend to make it a late evening for myself. It’s nearly four. You should have time for a rest before dinner.”

Phoebe nodded. “That was my hope. Just come for me when you desire to go down to dinner. I promise to be ready.”

Her father sank into a wing chair. “Very well.”

Again that dismissive tone signaled Phoebe to leave without pressing any other issue. Her father’s limited patience could be particularly tried when people failed to realize his mood. After twenty-two years of life, Phoebe could read him quite well.

Making her way to the room across the hall, Phoebe suppressed a yawn with one gloved hand while opening the door with the other. This room was not nearly as large as her father’s, and the sitting area was combined with the bedroom.

Gerda bustled about the room, rambling on in German. “The bathing room is just over there.” She pointed. “My room is at the far end.” Again she pointed. “I have the water running for the bath and have just put in some lavender salts. Your bath soaps are laid out, as well as a fresh nightgown.”

Phoebe pulled off her gloves and placed them on a lovely oval table of walnut. Next she removed her hatpins and then the hat. She placed these beside the gloves and stretched her arms overhead in a most unladylike fashion. Gerda didn’t say a word as she hurried to assist Phoebe with her clothes.

Phoebe switched back to English. “I hope I don’t fall asleep in the tub.”

Gerda smiled and spoke English for the most part. “It has been a long day, ja?” She put aside Phoebe’s traveling jacket and then began to unbutton the high-necked lacy blouse.

“Well, Vater assures me it won’t be a late evening for us. In fact, while I’m down to dinner, feel free to enjoy the bathing

facilities here. I know there was mention of a shared bathroom for servants, but I cannot see you having to go out among strangers.”

“*Danke, gnädige Fräulein.*”

Phoebe smiled at her maid’s words. *Gnädige Fräulein*, or *gracious miss*, was the common way servants addressed her, but it seemed much too formal for America.

“Use English, Gerda, and just call me miss or Miss Phoebe.”

“Ja—yes, miss.” Gerda bobbed her head and began to remove Phoebe’s blouse. “I will arrange for your traveling clothes to be cleaned.”

“It’s hard to believe we’ve been away from home for over a month now.” Her home along the Rhine in Baden seemed a million miles away, but Phoebe had enjoyed the travel. She had seen a good portion of Europe with her father and mother, but that was years ago. Never until now had Phoebe been to America, and she found it all very fascinating. It was truly nothing like her homeland.

“Ja, I think we will not see it again for months to come.” Gerda helped Phoebe from her skirt. “But America is beautiful, ja?”

“Ja, *es ist schön*,” Phoebe said, slipping into her native tongue again, despite having admonished Gerda to refrain. Phoebe had been trained to speak English, German, and French, but since her mother’s death ten years earlier, English was seldom spoken at home.

Gerda finished helping Phoebe from her corset. “I can manage the rest.” Phoebe yawned. Her eyelids suddenly felt like lead weights. “*Danke, Gerda.*”

The woman, who was not quite twice Phoebe’s age, gave a bobbed curtsy. “I’ll shut off the water and then turn down the bed.” She hurried ahead of Phoebe and took care of the

water. Next she arranged a thick towel and washcloth in close proximity. “If you need anything, I will be in the next room.”

“I’ll be fine, Gerda. Thank you.”

Phoebe closed the bathroom door and sighed. She felt an overwhelming sense of emptiness. There was really no good reason for it, but thoughts of her mother always seemed to make her sad.

Sinking into the deep porcelain tub, Phoebe closed her eyes and eased back, letting the water soothe her tired muscles. They were in America on behalf of the Sapphire Duchess, an eccentric old Prussian noblewoman who demanded all of her jewelry be designed with sapphires. Phoebe’s father had fallen into the job of assisting the old woman with her purchase of gemstones via a family friend who had introduced them a score of years earlier. For as long as Phoebe could remember, her father had traveled to various parts of the world for the duchess, and now his travels had brought him to America. Of course, this was only a portion of their travel, and Phoebe presumed it to be personal. The duchess demanded her stones be purchased in Ceylon, where she believed only the best-quality gems could be had. They were only in America because her father had heard all about Montana’s Yogo sapphires from his gemstone connection in London. Phoebe wasn’t sure what he hoped to gain by coming here. Her father never allowed her to question him about his business affairs, and as a result she had learned to keep quiet regarding such dealings. Besides, Father’s interest in America had afforded her an opportunity to accompany him and see new lands.

The hot water intensified her exhaustion, so Phoebe reluctantly opened her eyes. To her right were two arched stained-glass windows. Their design in colors of lavender, gold, blue, and rose reflected muted light against the white-and-gray marble

fixtures. Phoebe thought it all quite perfect. She took up a bar of rose-scented soap and smiled. So far she had really enjoyed America. They had docked in New York City and experienced all sorts of wonderful entertainments and delightful meals. The hotel there had been beautiful, easily meeting her father's standards. He had grumbled throughout their journey by ship that America was a very savage and unrefined country. New York had given him a pleasant surprise.

Since then they had traveled by private rail car, and as the stops had become fewer and less opulent, her father's foul mood had become more and more prominent. The Broadwater Hotel and Natatorium had been advertised and praised as a European resort in the wilderness. One advertisement stated it was "the true Carlsbad of America." Phoebe had gone to the Carlsbad resort in Bohemia with her parents and remembered it as quite beautiful. Several people had recommended this respite in Montana, and while lovely, it seemed completely different from the spa in Carlsbad. Apparently her father thought so too, despite its being highly recommended to him by the mining representatives he was to meet. He was also quite disappointed with the small town nearby. Since Helena was the capital city of the state, her father had been certain the town would be large and offer the best choices. Perhaps in Montana this was one of the largest towns, but that wasn't saying a whole lot.

Phoebe thought the hotel decor was finer than any she'd seen since leaving New York City. However, it didn't seem to hold the grandeur that her father had come to require in life. Their own palatial home in Germany was proof of her father's demands. The entire house was designed with the finest of woods, crystal chandeliers, marble, and gilded trimmings. They dined on the finest china, walked on the richest of rugs, and enjoyed enough fine art pieces to fill a museum. To Phoebe it didn't

matter, but perhaps that was only because she'd never known anything but the finer things of life. Nevertheless, the American West fascinated her. She had seen vast open lands of crops and herds of cattle. She had seen her first cowboys on the train out of Chicago. These ruffian men with their broad-brimmed hats were quite a lively bunch. They spoke in boisterous voices about branding and roping and something called *rodeos*. She didn't dare voice her fascination about it. Her father believed, as did many in her class, that those of noble birth were to never offer any overt display of emotions.

With her bath finally complete, Phoebe managed to dry off before donning her nightgown. Her last chore was to pull out all of the pins that held her blond tresses in neat order. When this was done, she didn't even bother to brush her hair, but instead hurried to climb into bed. The soft mattress seemed to wrap itself around her, and Phoebe closed her eyes with a sigh.

She awoke some time later when Gerda called her name. "Miss Phoebe, I'm so sorry. It's nearly six. Your vater said to tell you that he'll escort you to dinner at exactly six thirty."

"You should have awakened me earlier," Phoebe said, springing from the bed. "Goodness, but now we shall be in a rush."

"I am sorry. I'm afraid I stretched out to rest for just a moment and fell asleep."

"It's all right, Gerda. I'm sure you were as tired as I. We shall simply have to do our best to make me presentable." Her father would never have tolerated such behavior from a servant, but Phoebe treated her maid with greater patience.

Phoebe allowed Gerda to hurry her into her undergarments, stockings, and shoes. After Gerda cinched Phoebe into her corset, the maid went to retrieve the gown.

"I pressed out the wrinkles," she said, opening the skirt of

the gown to slip it over Phoebe's head. The silk splayed out around her. Gerda adjusted the rounded bodice, then saw to the narrow cap of black lace that constituted sleeves. As soon as Gerda finished up the buttons, she directed Phoebe to sit.

"Don't make my hair too elaborate, Gerda. We simply haven't time." Phoebe rubbed her bare arms. Perhaps this gown had been a poor choice. "It's cold in here. Didn't that bellman say that each of the rooms had a radiator?"

"Ja. I'll see to it that it's running and warm by the time you return. I put out long gloves and a shawl for you. I heard one of the workers say it gets quite cold at night." Gerda brushed out Phoebe's waist-length blond hair and then fashioned the mass into a simple upswept style.

With this accomplished, Gerda hurried to bring Phoebe the gloves and shawl. The clock atop the dresser chimed the half hour just as a knock sounded on the hotel door.

"That will be Vater, likely upset because I wasn't ready and waiting in his suite." Phoebe motioned Gerda aside and opened the door. "Hello, Vater." She pulled on her elbow-length gloves.

Her father eyed her with a frown. "I've been waiting."

Phoebe wrapped the black lace shawl around her shoulders and smiled. "Well, you needn't wait any longer."

Her father grunted a reply, then offered his arm. They made their way downstairs, and only when they'd reached the dining room did Phoebe comment.

"It's quite lovely, don't you think, Vater?" Across the room were artistically arranged tables draped in damask tablecloths and set with beautiful crystal and silver.

"I suppose." Her father surveyed the room as a waiter approached.

"Good evening, sir. I will show you to your table."

The waiter seated them near one of the bay windows. Phoebe

smiled at the scene. “I’m glad it’s still light enough to see the grounds. Aren’t they beautifully kept?”

Vater barely murmured an acknowledgment and instead focused on the menu. “It would seem that if the menu choices are any indication, we might fare well enough this evening. They are offering eight courses, including *consommé châtelaine*.”

“There, see? You love that, as well as the *mousse de faisan chasseur*.” She knew the buttery demi-glace of mushrooms and shallots atop the pheasant mousse would please her father as long as it was executed properly. “And it looks as though they are offering some very fine wines to accompany the dishes.”

“I’ll no doubt need them to settle my stomach.”

Phoebe put the menu aside. “I look at all of this as a great adventure, Vater. We can certainly allow that the food will be different from what we have at home. However, that needn’t keep us from enjoying ourselves.”

The waiter approached, and Phoebe allowed her father to order for them both. Meanwhile, Phoebe glanced around the room at the sparse collection of diners. Perhaps others had dined earlier. Americans seemed to be well-known for that. Nevertheless, she wouldn’t fault the establishment, nor Americans as a whole. She pulled off her gloves and set them aside.

“I do hope you’ll find something to enjoy about this place.”

“I’ll enjoy getting my business tended to,” her father snapped. “As I remind myself, I will often be gone from this . . . place.”

Phoebe decided to leave off with the small talk. It was apparent her father’s thoughts were consumed with other issues, and nothing she said would change his mood.

When their first course of varied *hors d’oeuvres* appeared, Phoebe selected several that looked promising. She sampled the deviled kidney but found it rather bitter. Next she had a bit of the pickled lamb’s tongue, but this was too tart for her

taste. Last of all she took a bite of the *carciofini*. The artichoke was savory with just the right amount of garlic butter. When the consommé arrived, Phoebe realized she was famished. She sampled the soup, finding it delicious, although fearing the flavor of chestnuts to be a bit strong for her father's taste. The courses continued with Vater saying very little. Halfway through the meal, however, he let his thoughts be known.

"I credit them for palatable food." He finished off the last of his beef. "The mustard-and-red-wine sauce on this beef is quite acceptable."

Phoebe nodded. "Indeed, Vater." When the dessert finally arrived, Phoebe found herself too full to partake. She was just about to say as much when two gentlemen approached the table and introduced themselves to Phoebe's father.

"Graf Von Bergen, or should we call you Count Von Bergen?" one of the men asked.

"Either will suffice."

Phoebe knew the title was important to her father. A graf was equal to a count or earl, and that entitled her father to a nobleman's respect. And her father definitely demanded such.

Not wishing to appear rude, Phoebe tolerated the introductions. The men were apparently connected to the mining interests of her father. She didn't recognize their names, nor did she have any desire to partake of their conversation.

She pulled on her long gloves. "I can see that you gentlemen would like to talk. If you'll excuse me, I should enjoy a short walk before it grows too dark." One of the men assisted her as Phoebe rose.

Her father waved her away while the two gentlemen took chairs at the table. Phoebe made her way to the hotel lobby, noticing the enticing pattern of colorful squares and triangles

on the floor. She thought it a fine contrast to the rich woodwork everywhere else in the hotel.

“How are you this evening, Miss Von Bergen?” a man asked.

Startled, Phoebe looked up and recognized the hotel manager. “I am quite well, thank you.”

“It’s a beautiful evening.”

She nodded graciously as she’d been taught all of her life. “Indeed. I believe I will enjoy a walk before turning in for the evening.”

“Oh, you should definitely do that. You might want to walk down to the natatorium—just to get a look. It’s inspiring.”

“Thank you. Perhaps I will.”

Outside she strolled along the porch for a time, breathing in deeply of the crisp dry air. The skies held a glorious display of orange-gold and pink against a fading blue as the sun slipped behind the mountains. Phoebe found she liked this rustic location. Its isolation gave Phoebe a momentary sensation of being one of the last people on earth, a feeling she quite liked. Cities had always been much too crowded and noisy for her taste.

Finally Phoebe followed the path along the well-manicured lawns and cottonwood trees to the natatorium. She had been fascinated by the idea of an indoor public pool here in the middle of the Wild West. Especially one fed by hot springs. It conjured up all sorts of thoughts about Roman baths, a seeming anachronism for this western retreat.

The natatorium, unlike the American cottage style of the hotel, was done in elaborate Moorish architectural designs. Phoebe paused for a moment to marvel at the exterior, where a line of no fewer than nine circular stained-glass windows flanked each side of the triple-arched entryway. Beside the entry, two large towers rose, topped by tiered, onion-shaped domes. The intricate tile work and Moorish details gave the

building an exotic and altogether foreign appearance in its present location.

Phoebe made her way inside and was immediately aware of the warmth and the heavier, damp air. She marveled at the interior of the building just as she had the exterior. At one end of the massive pool was a waterfall she guessed to be nearly forty feet high. Water cascaded over large granite boulders and into the pool.

“You’re pretty like my mama.”

Phoebe startled. To her right a young boy in wet swimming togs smiled up at her. “My name is Kenneth, but people call me Kenny.” His blue eyes seemed to twinkle. “I’m learning to swim.”

She smiled at the blond-haired boy. “That’s an admirable goal . . . Kenny.”

“What’s your name?”

“Phoebe.”

“You can come swim with us, Phoebe.”

She shook her head. “I can’t swim, but thank you for the invitation.”

“Ian can teach you. He’s teaching me.” The boy surprised her by taking hold of her hand and pulling her in the direction of a rather handsome stranger who was using a towel to dry himself.

“This is Ian. He told me everybody ought to learn to swim.”

The man he’d called Ian stopped what he was doing and looked up with a smile. The smile faded, however, as he stared at her in what Phoebe could only describe as a dumbstruck manner. Perhaps he was just as startled by her appearance as she had been by Kenny’s. On the other hand, Phoebe knew she was considered quite beautiful. She’d had numerous suitors vying for her hand since she’d turned fourteen. Maybe this Ian was simply taken aback by her looks.

Phoebe tried her best to dispel the tension that seemed to mount by the second. “I am sorry for the interruption. We only just arrived this afternoon, and I thought to see what the natatorium was all about.”

“It’s about swimming,” Kenny said in a matter-of-fact manner. He looked up at Phoebe and beamed her a smile. “I like the way you talk. You must be from someplace far away.”

Phoebe’s training gave way and she found herself laughing. “I must say that I like the way you talk as well, and yes, I am from far away.”

“Well, now you’re here and you should learn to swim. I’m almost ten and Ian says I’ve wasted way too much time.”

She glanced again at Ian and then back to the boy. “You are quite charming, young Kenny.” She looked again to the man. “I do apologize. I will take my leave now so you can return to your instructions.”

The boy shook his head. “Don’t go.” He turned to Ian. “She doesn’t know how to swim and I told her you could teach her.”

The man cleared his throat. “I . . . uh . . . I should be the one to apologize.” His gaze never left her face. “I . . . well, you remind me of someone.”

“You can teach her to swim, can’t you, Ian?”

Phoebe felt her face grow hot with embarrassment. She couldn’t think of how to explain to Kenny the inappropriateness of having Ian teach her to swim, but then the handsome man spoke first.

“I’d be happy to teach her,” Ian replied, fixing Phoebe with a lopsided grin. “Anytime.”