

S A P P H I R E 3 B R I D E S

*A Love Transformed*

TRACIE  
PETERSON



BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Tracie Peterson, *A Love Transformed*  
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2016. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2016 by Peterson Ink, Inc.

Published by Bethany House Publishers  
11400 Hampshire Avenue South  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438  
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Peterson, Tracie, author.

Title: A love transformed / Tracie Peterson.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2016] | Series: Sapphire brides ; book 3

Identifiers: LCCN 2016017969 | ISBN 9780764213380 (hardcover : acid-free paper) | ISBN 9780764213267 (softcover) | ISBN 9780764213397 (large print: softcover)

Subjects: | GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Love stories.

Classification: LCC PS3566.E7717 L686 2016 | DDC 813/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016017969>

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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.

Cover design by LOOK Design Studio

Cover photography by Aimee Christenson

16 17 18 19 20 21 22

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Tracie Peterson, *A Love Transformed*  
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2016. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

To my own dear Auntie Madeline and Unca Paul.  
You have blessed my life with your love.  
We don't get to pick our relatives,  
but if we did—I'd pick the two of you!  
I love you dearly.



# 1

NEW YORK CITY, APRIL 1917

*I*t was snowing the day Jack Brindleson showed up at Clara Vesper's door with the news that her husband was dead. He delivered the report with the same indifference he held for the snow outside. It was simply a matter of fact, and nothing could be done about it.

"Dead?" She shook her head. Her throat tightened. Her knees weakened. She had been married to Adolph Vesper for twelve years, and while their marriage had been arranged and no great passion engulfed them, Clara couldn't imagine how life would go on without him.

She sank into the nearest chair and looked at her husband's secretary. "What happened?"

"He was shot in an alleyway." Again Jack's casual telling of the matter bothered Clara almost more than the news itself.

"Shot." She murmured the word over and over as if repeating it could make more sense of the situation.

"Otto said the police believe it to be a robbery gone wrong. Nothing was taken, however, so they also believe the assailant

was interrupted by the approach of others.” Jack flicked off snow from his coat, mindless that it fell onto the medallion design of the expensive Wilton carpet.

Clara found herself just watching the snow melt into the velvet-like fibers of the rug while Jack went on about her brother-in-law Otto coming later to see her. At that moment, Clara found that nothing seemed quite real. She drew a deep breath and looked up.

Jack offered her a tolerant nod. “I know this is hard news to hear. I wish there were an easier way to break it to you, but I find just getting to the point to be the best. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to make several other stops at your brother-in-law’s behest.”

“Of course.” She rose to accompany him to the door but found her feet wouldn’t move.

Her husband’s secretary seemed to think nothing of it. He gave a slight bow and headed out of the room like a man marching off to war. Clara watched after him for several moments before the butler showed up.

“Madam, are you all right?”

Clara turned to the man she’d come to trust almost more than her husband. “Perkins, I’m afraid there’s been bad news. Mr. Vesper met with an accident—a shooting.” She shook her head, still trying to let the truth sink in. “He’s dead.”

His eyes widened. “Are you quite certain, madam?”

She nodded. “Mr. Brindleson just delivered the news. He tells me my brother-in-law is soon to stop by.”

“I am sorry. Is there anything I might do for you?” Perkins looked at her with an expression of complete sympathy. “The staff is at your disposal.”

“I’m not quite sure what I’m to do. I suppose I will wait until Otto arrives. He will most likely take charge of the arrangements.”

“Of course. Will you receive him here?”

Clara glanced around the formal sitting room. She received most of her company in this room, but it seemed inappropriate for planning her husband’s funeral. “No. Put him in the library. Have Cook prepare some refreshments. Hot tea and scones might be nice.” She didn’t know if such things were proper for discussing funeral arrangements, but at the moment Clara felt she needed the bolstering of normalcy.

“Very good, madam. Should I also send for the children’s nanny?”

*The children.* She hadn’t yet considered telling them about their father, a father they barely knew.

“Yes. Have Mim come see me in the library.”

Perkins nodded, then departed the room, leaving Clara to make her way to the library. The house, a large four-story in a most fashionable part of New York, twisted and turned with halls, rooms, and stairs. The library was situated on the south side near the middle of the house. This was one of Clara’s favorite rooms. She had always loved reading, and the shelves were stocked with volumes of her favorite books. Even Adolph had recognized the effect on her spirit and had put in a very ornate lady’s desk for her. It was here where she was able to sketch and enjoy designing jewelry.

She sighed. Entering the room was akin to entering a sanctuary where one might find refuge from the trials of the world. Clara breathed deeply and let the silence wash over her. The door at the far end of the room drew her attention. That door led to her husband’s private office. It seemed hard to imagine he’d never again sit behind the massive mahogany desk. She tried to shake off such thoughts. A numbing took hold of her. Her marriage had never been built on love, but over the years they had found a mutual respect and kindness for each other.

Clara hadn't been sure such an amiable situation could ever happen after the marriage had been forced on her by her mother.

*Mother.* That brought an entirely different threat. Once her mother found out she was widowed, Clara would no doubt have to deal with her mother's insistence on finding her another husband—one even more prominent and wealthy than Adolph Vesper.

The very thought of her mother invading her peaceful life sent Clara to the sofa. She had no desire to see her mother. The overbearing, opinionated Harriet Oberlin was well known in society for imposing her wishes on everyone and getting whatever she wanted. No one who knew her relished her arrival.

A light knock on the library door caused Clara to put aside her thoughts. After all, dreading her mother wasn't going to do anything to stave off her appearance. "Come in."

Miriam Wolff opened the door. "Perkins said you needed to see me."

Clara nodded. "Come sit with me, Mim."

The stocky, slightly older woman nodded and closed the door behind her. "Perkins said there's been bad news."

"Yes. I'm afraid there has been. It has to do with my husband."

Mim took a seat on the sofa beside Clara. "What has happened?"

"I'm sorry to tell you so bluntly, but Mr. Vesper has been killed."

The nanny, who'd become one of Clara's dearest friends, reached out to take hold of her hand. "Oh no. Whatever happened?"

"Apparently it was a robbery. They shot him, and he is dead. My husband's secretary was just here to give me the news. He said my brother-in-law will be by shortly."

“Have the police any idea of who did this?” Mim asked, stroking Clara’s hand in a reassuring manner.

“I don’t know. I suppose Otto is taking care of all of that. I must say, Mim, I am completely untrained for such events.”

“Would you like me to tell the children?”

Clara shook her head. “No. I’ll tell them later. It’s not like they knew their father all that well anyway. He wasn’t given to playing with them and was so seldom home when they were awake. I doubt very much it will matter to them one way or the other.”

“I suppose not. However, you’ve always been good to speak kindly of their father to them. They might sense the loss and feel some sadness.”

“Perhaps.” Clara shook her head. “Given they’re only four—well, almost five—I don’t know that they will really comprehend death anyway.”

“I believe they will understand well enough. We came across a dead bird in the garden once as you might recall. I explained to them about death at that point. It has been a long while since that event, but they may well remember.”

“I will tell them tonight before dinner.”

“Will you order new gowns or have some of your old ones dyed?”

The question didn’t make sense for a moment, and then it dawned on Clara that she would be expected to wear black. “I hadn’t given it any thought. Do you suppose I could have the dressmaker bring something over?”

“I’m certain she could arrange it. Why don’t I have Perkins send a boy with a note? Given the large staff your dressmaker employs, I would imagine they could bring something later this afternoon. If not, I’m certain any number of stores might carry suitable mourning attire.”

“Yes, do have Perkins send someone. Ask to have whatever is currently appropriate created as soon as possible. Perhaps I should order two or three such gowns.”

Mim got to her feet. “I will go right now and see that it’s done. Is there anything I can bring you?”

“I had Perkins order refreshments for my meeting with Otto, but I would like a cup of tea now. And perhaps someone could build up the fire. It’s quite cold.”

“The weather has been most unpredictable,” Mim said, nodding. “Here it is April and it’s snowing, with no end in sight. The skies are quite heavy and gray.”

Clara nodded. “It seems appropriate.”

“I’ll speak with Perkins and the housekeeper. I’m sure between the three of us we can meet all of your needs.” Mim padded across the room, pausing momentarily at the door. “I am here if you need to talk.”

An hour later, with a fire blazing in the hearth and strong tea to bolster her, Clara rose to meet her brother-in-law as Perkins announced him from the library doorway.

“Sister,” Otto Vesper said, crossing the room in four long strides. “I am so sorry to have been delayed. I had wanted to come give you the news of Adolph myself, but the police had me answering questions and . . . well . . . identifying my brother.”

Clara nodded and allowed Otto to kiss her cheek. “It’s quite all right. Please sit, and I will ring for refreshments.” She pulled the cord that would ring in the kitchen. Otto drew a chair closer to the sofa where she’d been sitting.

Joining her brother-in-law, Clara reclaimed her seat. “I want to know everything. Do not treat me like some frail, simpering girl. I am stronger than I look.”

“And might I say you look remarkably lovely for one who

has had to bear such bad news.” Seeing she was settled, Otto took his seat.

“Thank you, but I am quite serious. I want to know what happened.”

“Well, apparently sometime early this morning, Adolph was waylaid in an alley not far from our office. The police believe it was a robbery and that things must have gotten out of hand. Adolph was shot . . . in the head. He died instantly.”

Clara steadied herself. “I’m glad he didn’t suffer.”

“No. He did not suffer.” Otto fingered his mustache as Clara had seen him do anytime he was anxious. He looked so much like Adolph that for a moment this gesture alone reminded her this man was her brother-in-law, not her husband. As identical twins they had their similarities, but also their differences. This little habit was one that Adolph had never adopted.

“Where were you when he was . . . when it happened?”

Otto shook his head, his eyes downcast. “I had not yet arrived at the offices. Perhaps if I had, I might have been able to intercede.” His expression grew quite dejected. “I wish I could have stopped it.”

Clara nodded. “I do too.” And truly she did wish that Adolph could have been spared.

“I came to let you know that I have made arrangements for Adolph . . . for the funeral.”

“Thank you. I wasn’t at all sure what I was to do.”

He nodded and gave her a sympathetic smile. “That is what I am here for. I want to ease your suffering in any way I can. The funeral will be next Friday. It will be a large affair, given the fame of our business.”

For ten years the Vesper brothers had enjoyed a growing popularity for their individually crafted jewelry using beautiful Yogo sapphires from Montana. Clara had been the one to bring

the gems to their attention. Such sapphires were unavailable anywhere else in the world and were highly praised for their coloring. They were, in fact, so beautiful that they were now often requested instead of the once popular Ceylon or Burmese sapphires.

Adolph had won acclaim for the unique designs, and everyone who was anyone vied for a piece of Vesper Yogo jewelry. Now that would come to an end. Unless, of course, Clara wanted to continue designing the jewelry as she had these last ten years. Only Adolph and Otto knew that she was the source of the beautiful pieces. Early on Adolph had taken credit for the designs, telling Clara that the jewelry wouldn't garner as much attention and approval if it were known that the pieces were created by a woman. So he had taken the credit and Clara hadn't minded. She enjoyed sketching out the various ideas that came to mind as well as helping to create the wax molds. It didn't matter that her husband and his brother were the ones lauded and praised.

"It's certain to be a large funeral, but our own Grace Church is big enough to accommodate the mourners."

"Thank you, Otto. I appreciate that you would handle this for me."

He looked at her and nodded. "But of course. There is very little I wouldn't do for you, Clara. You know that."

"I suppose I do. What I don't know is what I am supposed to do now. What is to become of us? Has Adolph set aside money for us to live on?" She had never had to worry about such things, having gone straight from her mother's house to her husband's. "Is there . . . insurance that will see to us?"

"I don't want to worry you with such matters," Otto said, then hesitated. "There are . . . some issues, but . . . well, I will do what I can to resolve them."

“What do you mean? Otto, I want to know the truth.”

He nodded. “Well, the truth is that Adolph was never any good at managing money. He had a love for luxury and gaming . . . among other things. I’m afraid over the years he turned to me more and more to bail him out of trouble.”

This news shocked Clara almost more than hearing that her husband was dead. Adolph always had seemed the very epitome of control and fiduciary responsibility. “I don’t understand.”

Otto leaned back and crossed his legs. “I don’t doubt it. I was quite firm with Adolph that I would continue to help him so long as you and the children were unaware of the problems. I didn’t want you to have to worry with the details.”

“But I want to know those details now.”

He gave an exaggerated sigh. “I suppose I owe you that much. The fact is that Adolph left you very little. Even the house and its furnishings belong to me. Of course, I would never put you from it or take this lifestyle from you. I want you to know that I will take care of you, and the children.”

Clara tried to make sense of it all. Why had she never discussed such things with Adolph? Early on he had set up a bank account for her that would accommodate all of her spending needs. Throughout the city she had accounts that were handled by someone else. Her only responsibility had been to spend the money at her leisure. She frowned. Why hadn’t he told her that he had given over everything to his brother?

“Clara, I want to tell you something, although I know it’s much too soon. However, it might give you peace of mind. As you know, I’m well aware of the fact that you are responsible for the Vesper Yogo designs. I think it’s about time the rest of the world knew the true source. I want to move forward with creating the same quality of unique pieces, and I want to reveal to the world that you are the artist behind them.”

“But I thought you and Adolph felt the pieces wouldn’t be well received if it were known that they’d been created by a woman.”

“The line is well established and the pieces speak for themselves. With Adolph gone, people will assume the line will stop, but of course we can keep it going. I presume you have some designs I might take to begin work on.”

She nodded. There were five designs sitting on Adolph’s desk even now. “Do you really suppose people will continue to buy them once they know about me?”

“I do. In fact, I would like to have a grand affair and reveal the new pieces. With America now involved in this ridiculous European war, it would do us all good to have a more festive event to take our minds off the rest. If you could create, say, a dozen or more designs right away, we could plan for this to take place as soon as the pieces can be fashioned. Say in a month or two, after your initial period of mourning has passed.”

“I have five completed designs. I gave them to Adolph just a few days ago. I believe they are still on his desk.” She nodded toward the closed door that led to her husband’s private office. “I have an additional three in my desk that are nearly complete. I suppose I could come up with another four.”

“That would be perfect. I know this is a hard time for you, Clara, but you and I also know that this wasn’t a marriage of love. Even though Adolph was quite fond of you, I know that the marriage was forced upon you.”

“Be that as it may, I have two children who are now fatherless. I must think of them and their needs. And, frankly, I am glad to have these things resolved before my mother has the opportunity to come and insert herself into my affairs.”

Otto frowned. “Is your mother expected?”

“No, but no doubt she will hear the news. They have news-

papers even in Florida, and Mother moves in the circles where such information will certainly be the focus of discussion.”

“I’m sure you are correct on that account. So Florida is where she spends her time these days?”

“Well, it is in the winter. I believe she has a palatial estate there given to her by my stepfather. I thought she might have sold it after his death, but she seems to enjoy avoiding the cold winters of New York and has kept it. I can’t say that I’m disappointed.”

“The woman is a terror.” Otto put his closed fist to his lips, then slowly lowered it again. “I am sorry. That was most uncalled for.”

“Perhaps, but it’s true. I cannot pretend I have any desire to see her arrive here and immediately set to work finding me another husband. And, of course, she will.”

Otto shook his head. “The woman has no scruples or sense of concern for others. If she does come and proves to be difficult, get word to me. I will not tolerate her bullying you.”

The serving girl arrived just then with the tea cart. A sense of fatigue washed over Clara, and even though it wasn’t yet afternoon, she found herself longing for a nap. Perhaps Otto would take tea and then leave. After all, he had plenty to do, given the jewelry business and the funeral. Maybe once she provided him with the new designs, he would leave her to contemplate how she would handle her new responsibilities as a widow.