



THE GREGORY SISTERS, BOOK 2

WHILE LOVE STIRS

A N O V E L

L O R N A S E I L S T A D



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To Judy Miller, my “writing mom.”
I treasure your friendship,
and I thank God
for bringing us together.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding
abundantly above all that we ask or think.

Ephesians 3:20

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THURSDAY,
MAY 12, 1910

Charlotte Gregory stared at the elderly doorman. With his arm outstretched, he barred her access to Saint Paul's recently opened Million-Dollar Hotel.

"Sir, what is the meaning of this?" She fought the urge to shove past him and march inside. Creating a scene was not the way to make a good impression on the hotel's staff.

In front of her, the revolving door swished, and a stylish couple entered the establishment unimpeded.

Charlotte motioned her head in their direction. Perhaps the doorman would catch on.

He simply smiled.

She glanced down at her outfit. While not as fancy as that of the lady who'd been allowed inside, the cream-colored walking suit was one of her best, and her wide-brimmed hat was practically brand-new. Surely she looked good enough for a day visit to the prestigious hotel.

She tried to step around the man, but he moved to block her.

"Sir, I need to go inside. I'm here to apply for a position as the chef's assistant. Now, if you'll kindly let me pass—"

When he didn't drop his arm, she darted to the right. She'd come too far to let a portly little gray-haired doorman stop her.

For a portly, gray-haired man, he moved quickly.

“Miss.” He dipped his head respectfully. “If you don’t have a gentleman escorting you, you’ll want to enter through the door on the side.”

“Isn’t this the public entrance?” She glanced at the curved front of the hotel and reread the signage.

“Yes, miss.” He gave her a disarming smile. “But you lovely unescorted ladies enter through a separate door—for the protection of your reputation, of course.”

“Of course.” Charlotte’s cheeks warmed. Why hadn’t she remembered that? She’d read about this kind of hotel etiquette before, but it still seemed absurd—especially in 1910. “In that case, sir, where exactly do I find this ladies’ entrance?”

“It’s to your left, miss.” He pointed his gloved white fingers to a door on the side. “It’ll lead you directly into the lobby. The hotel’s restaurant isn’t open yet, but the roof garden and the Palm Room Café are. May I recommend a cup of tea to ward off the chill of this lovely spring morning?”

The doorman’s deep, sonorous voice made it difficult to stay cross. Besides, he was simply doing his job. She only hoped this wasn’t an indication of the rest of her day.

“Thank you. Perhaps I will have a cup of tea.” *To celebrate when I get the position.* Charlotte nodded her head in thanks and slipped around the corner.

Unlike the grand entrance, the door for unescorted ladies sported no awning or fancy woodwork. But similar to the grand entrance doors, this one opened to the hotel’s lobby. Square marble pillars rose from the floor toward the high ceiling. A large potted palm tree hung its fronds over a collection of leather-clad furnishings. The dining room was situated to the left of the check-in desk. Even this early, enticing scents wafted from its doors. Onion. Chicken. Garlic. Thyme. Was the chef making something like coq au vin?

She stepped inside the restaurant and her breath caught. From the arched wood panels on the walls to the rich crimson carpeting

on the floor, everything spoke of exquisite taste. The tables, all draped in their starched white linens, were set with fine china and silver. Crystal chandeliers sparkled throughout the room.

A waiter looked up from polishing a glass. “Sorry, miss, we’re not open for another ten minutes.”

“I know. I’m not here to dine, but I would like to speak to the chef.”

“The chef?” He rolled his eyes. “He doesn’t like to be interrupted while he’s *creating*.”

The waiter said the last word in his best French accent, and Charlotte giggled. “If you’ll direct me toward the kitchen, I’ll take my chances.”

He shrugged and pointed the goblet to the right. “Keep your head down if he starts waving pots around.”

Charlotte followed the tantalizing aromas and clanging pots until she reached the swinging door of the kitchen. She paused, uttered a silent prayer, and licked her dry lips.

When she entered the kitchen, the bustle of the room came to an abrupt halt. The chef turned to face her.

“*Bonjour*, Chef.” She approached him and held out her hand. “I am Charlotte Gregory, recent graduate of Fannie Farmer’s School of Cookery. I’m here to apply for a position in your kitchen.”

His brows furled. “My kitchen?”

“Yes. I have experience in various food preparation techniques, chafing dish cookery, and menu planning.”

“But you are a woman!”

Charlotte frowned at the incredulity in his voice. “Women have been cooking for centuries. Did your own mother not cook in your family’s kitchen? Were your first cooking lessons not at her table?”

“There will be no woman in the kitchen of Chef Boucher. Go.” He dismissed her with a swish of his hand.

“Chef Boucher, you’re making something akin to coq au vin, are you not?”

He dropped a handful of mushrooms into a sizzling skillet. “*Oui*.”

“You look like you could use some extra hands in here. What if I volunteer to help you today? Then, if you like what you see, we can talk about me securing a permanent position.”

The chef seemed to consider her offer, and Charlotte’s heart skipped a beat. She crossed her fingers at her side and sent up another prayer.

“No.” He shook his head. He raised his spoon in the air and swirled it around. “I will not have a woman cooking in my kitchen. Leave now. You are not welcome here.”

A flurry of movement on the floor drew Charlotte’s attention. She gasped. A mouse scurried up the leg of a preparation table and scampered across the work surface.

“Did you see that?” Charlotte’s voice squeaked.

“*Oui.*” The chef chuckled. “Apparently he wants you to leave as much as I.”

“B-but this is a kitchen. Aren’t you going to clean the table? Scald it?” She scanned the kitchen and, as if seeing it for the first time, noticed the grease-smearred stove and food-stained floor. “This place is filthy. What have you done to this brand-new, beautiful kitchen?”

The chef grabbed a butcher knife and marched toward her. “You insolent girl. You dare come into my kitchen and hurl insults?”

“Don’t you care about your patrons’ safety? How can you call yourself a chef?”

He waved the knife in the air, his face becoming as scarlet as tomato sauce. “You’ll not work in my kitchen or any other kitchen in this hotel! I’ll see to that personally.”

Charlotte lifted her chin in the air. “I wouldn’t work in your kitchen if I was starving.”

“Get out!” the chef roared.

With a final defiant glare, she whirled and slammed open the swinging door, then zigzagged her way around the tables.

Noon patrons now began filing into the dining room. The poor souls had no idea they were taking their lives into their hands

by eating here. Anger burned inside her. How could anyone who claimed to love the art of cooking serve customers from a dangerously dirty kitchen? The hotel had only opened in April. Was the management aware of the chef's lack of tidiness? She would inform them, but they'd probably do nothing as long as the restaurant's patrons were satisfied. After all, the famous French chef had been touted all over the city.

"You'll not work in any restaurant in the city!" the chef bellowed from the doorway.

Startled by his roar, Charlotte turned back. Her eyes widened as the knife he was still waving glimmered in the dining room's lamplight. Keeping her gaze on the knife, Charlotte quickly backed out of the dining room until she struck a man's solid chest.

She jumped and spun around. "I'm so sorry."

"Are you all right, miss?"

Charlotte's cheeks flamed as she tipped her face upward. Her breath caught at the depth of the man's bottle-green eyes. "I'm fine." She stepped away and glanced at the ranting chef. He continued to bellow his accusations across the room.

The green-eyed man followed her gaze. "Pardon me for asking, but are you stirring things up with the chef?"

"Let me put it this way. Do you value your digestive tract?"

His eyebrows drew close. "As a matter of fact, I do."

"In that case, sir"—Charlotte tugged one of her long sleeves back in place—"I suggest you find somewhere else to eat."



"Dr. Brooks?"

Joel halted at the sound of his name. Having just returned from lunch, he had yet to reach his office. "Is everything all right, Nurse Willard?"

"Harvey Richmond is having trouble breathing again, sir. You'd better hurry."

He raced down the hall behind the nurse, thinking of Harvey, a

freckle-faced eight-year-old orphan with pericarditis brought on after a bout of rheumatic fever. Every day the boy grew weaker.

Joel entered the ward, greeted by Harvey's obstinate dry cough. Each episode racked his small frame. Joel slipped a hand behind the boy's back and waited while the nurse added another pillow. He lowered Harvey back on the pillow, withdrew his stethoscope from his coat pocket, and listened to Harvey's struggling heart.

"Nurse Willard, bring me the codeia, please."

"But Dr. Brooks, he's—"

Joel held up his hand to silence her. "I'll take care of it."

Since Joel had temporarily taken over two wards of City Hospital, money decisions had plagued him. He hoped to secure the position permanently and become the youngest assistant superintendent ever assigned to the task. He meticulously decided how to spend every penny he was allotted to give his patients the best care and to prove he could handle the job. Yet as much as it would mean to him for the temporary position to become permanent, this child meant more.

As an orphan, Harvey was a charity case, and hospital policy stated medication should be reserved for charity patients who had a hope of recovering, not those who required palliative care. Even if Joel had to pay for the medication himself, this little boy would be comfortable.

After ordering an ice bag, Joel administered the codeia and held Harvey's hand until the drug took effect.

"Hey, you want to play checkers tomorrow?" he asked.

The boy's heavy eyelids flickered. "Dunno if I'll be here."

"You'll be here." Joel brushed the ash-colored hair from Harvey's brow. "And if you need me, Nurse Willard will come get me right away."

Harvey didn't seem to hear the last words as sweet slumber claimed him. Joel tugged the blanket up to the boy's shoulders and met Nurse Willard's knowing eyes. Harvey had little time left for checkers or anything else.

Even though Joel had done everything he medically could, helplessness welled inside his chest. He shoved his stethoscope back into his pocket. “Come find me if there are any changes.”



Charlotte hated hospitals.

The faint scent of alcohol stung her nose, reminding her of the awful days only two years ago that her parents lay dying. She shook her head. Time to put those sad thoughts aside. Today was a day to celebrate.

She quickened her pace as she walked down the corridor toward the maternity ward. The mews of newborn babies indicated she’d reached her destination. After stepping inside the sunny, semiprivate room, she scanned the two beds, and her gaze fell on her older sister. She barely restrained herself from racing toward the newest Gregory girl in Hannah’s arms.

Hannah, still nearly as pale as the crisp white sheet covering her, beamed as Charlotte approached. Her younger sister Tessa rose from her chair to greet her with a warm embrace.

“I’m an aunt.” Tessa giggled. “I can’t believe it. It feels like a dream.”

“I could pinch you so you’d know it was real.” With a laugh, Charlotte released Tessa, then turned to the proud father.

Lincoln lifted the tiny bundle from Hannah. “Charlotte, are you ready to meet our Ellie?”

Charlotte eased her hands around the baby’s soft blanket. “You named her after Momma?”

“Elizabeth Ruth Cole. Elizabeth for Momma, and Ruth for my favorite Bible story.” Hannah shared a knowing glance with her husband. “But I think she looks like you.”

Tucking the blanket away from Ellie’s wrinkled face, Charlotte ran the back of her index finger along the babe’s silky cheek. She touched the swath of brown hair with the same copper highlights all the Gregory sisters possessed. Ellie’s eyes were dark blue, but

Charlotte had heard that could change. Would they turn hazel like those of the Gregory sisters, or would they end up gray-blue like her father's?

"She's the most beautiful baby I've ever seen." Charlotte pressed a kiss to Ellie's forehead. "Tessa told me she was perfect, and for once our little sister wasn't exaggerating. I'm sorry it took me awhile to get here. I was out seeking a position at the Saint Paul Hotel, and I didn't know she'd arrived until I got back to Aunt Sam's house."

Hannah sighed. "Guess she decided she wanted to surprise us and make her entrance early."

"I think she wanted to do things her way." Lincoln kissed his wife's cheek. "Like her momma."

Hannah smiled. "A true Gregory girl."

"But remember, this little princess is also my daughter. I'd like to think there's some Cole in her to balance things out." Lincoln reached for the baby, and Charlotte reluctantly gave her up. "But I'll be thrilled if she takes after her mother in every way."

"If that's the case, you'll end up very gray." Charlotte sat in the straight-back chair beside Hannah's bed and took her sister's hand. "Are you feeling all right?"

"I feel wonderful." Hannah pushed up in the bed, wincing at the movement. "Tell me about the position you were seeking. Did you get it?"

"I think it's safe to say I won't be working at the Saint Paul Hotel today or at any time in the near future, but that's fine with me. The cleanliness of the kitchen was far from satisfactory."

Lincoln chuckled. "And I suppose you made sure the chef knew you didn't approve."

Charlotte nodded. "I told the management too. I had to for the sake of the patrons eating there. The management was aghast and said they'd address the situation forthwith. Still, I was so hoping . . ."

Hannah squeezed Charlotte's hand. "You'll get your own restaurant someday, Charlotte. I know you will."

An apron-clad nurse bearing a dinner tray moved to the foot of Hannah's bed. "I have your dinner, Mrs. Cole."

"Oh, good. I'm starved."

"And you should be." Charlotte helped Hannah sit up in the bed and adjusted the pillows behind her before the nurse set the tray across Hannah's lap. "Delivering a baby is hard work. You'll need to eat well to build your strength back up."

Charlotte took the tray from the nurse, but its contents made her cringe. The bowl of grayish gruel and the cup of weak tea hardly seemed adequate. At Fannie's cooking school, she'd taken additional courses in feeding the ill and convalescent, and this food did not meet Miss Farmer's criteria. Equally disappointing was its presentation on chipped enamel dishes. Who could possibly want to eat this food?

"Ma'am," Charlotte said as the woman started to leave, "as a nursing mother, my sister needs better nutrition. She requires milk, vegetables, fruit, and proteids."

"Proteids?"

"Yes—meats, eggs, nuts."

The nurse shot her an apologetic look. "The doctor ordered the food, miss."

"But why this soft, bland diet? Hannah is feeling fine. She hasn't had any digestive issues. Most new mothers can handle a regular diet on the same day as delivery. At the very least, she could tolerate a meat-based soup or stew with some vegetables. It would be more substantial than this."

Hannah slipped her spoon into the gruel. "Charlotte, this will be fine."

"No it won't. How can you expect to provide for Ellie if you don't eat well?"

"Is there a problem here?"

Charlotte turned at the sound of the male voice, only to find the same green-eyed man she'd backed into this morning. "*You're* my sister's doctor?"

"As a matter of fact, I am." He scowled, disapproval turning down the edges of those bottle-green eyes. "And I see once again you're stirring things up."