

PASSION'S  
BRIGHT FURY

*by*

RADCLYFFE



2006

## PROLOGUE

It was an ordinary Monday morning in July, and she scarcely noticed the people crowding her as she leaned against the metal pole in the center of the subway car. Her briefcase was secured in one hand; in the other she held the *Times* folded in half lengthwise in front of her face. It was 7:40 a.m., the height of rush hour. She had thirty blocks to ride underground to her destination.

Early-morning commuters filled every seat and pressed against her in the narrow aisle. She had given up trying to drink coffee during the trip; she had ruined one too many suits while attempting to manage a cup as she was jostled. This morning, had she stopped to purchase her usual espresso-spiked French roast, she would have taken a different train.

Sometimes, five minutes can change the course of a lifetime.

“Damn driver’s gonna shake us all to death,” someone grumbled.

“Excuse me, sorry,” her pole-mate mumbled after losing his balance yet again and stumbling into her.

“No problem,” she murmured.

Lowering her paper, she glanced through the thick, scratched glass of the sliding double doors opposite her to the dimly lit tunnel. Vertical concrete supports cast flitting shadows and the gaping mouths of dark recesses flew by quickly. Too quickly.

When the businessman next to her lurched into her once again, she tucked the newspaper under her arm, pressed the briefcase to her chest with an elbow, and grasped the pole with both hands. The car rocked heavily, and her pulse quickened as she fought to steady herself. She

had to spread her feet to keep her balance. Everyone else was having difficulty staying upright, too.

The train went into a curve and seemed to tilt up on one side. Over the noise of her heart pounding erratically in her ears, she heard the reassuring squeal of the brakes being applied. *We're stopping. Nothing to worry about.*

That was her last clear thought before the world turned upside down amidst the sounds of rending metal and the screams of helpless humanity. Then there were only fragments of words and dizzying images that catapulted her in and out of consciousness, until finally reality coalesced into a blinding light in her eyes and a crimson roar of pain in her head.

She struggled to sit up, but the slight movement caused a new surge of agony in her right leg. Its terrible intensity forced the air from her lungs, and almost instantly, she realized that her arms were tied down. She fought to open her eyes and found herself staring into a huge silver disk suspended over her head, a hot white bulb in its center.

Through the piercing glare and a curtain of pain, she heard voices, strident tones forming half-sentences and clipped shorthand phrases.

*Closed head injury...open tib-fib fracture...  
Somebody call the OR...another one coming up...  
Type and cross her...four units...  
We need a CT of the chest and abdomen...STAT...*

It took all her strength to speak. “Wha...oh, God...where...” She tried unsuccessfully to focus as a silhouette took shape in her field of vision, backlit by the bright light.

Gentle hands restrained her and a deep, calm voice spoke. “You were in an accident. You’re at Bellevue. Can you tell me your name?”

She tried to shape the sounds of her name, but they floated away from her on a new wave of agony. She continued to gaze upward, dimly aware of fingers brushing over her face. Gradually, features began to emerge from the shadows above her, giving her something to cling to in the sea of confusion and pain. A face bending near—blue eyes so dark they were almost purple, intense and penetrating. Black hair, thick and unruly, escaped from beneath the band of a surgeon’s cap that slashed across a strong, broad forehead. Prominent cheekbones and a bold, nearly masculine jaw swam into view.

“You’re going to be fine.”

She had no choice but to deliver herself into those confident unwavering eyes—and to believe.



## CHAPTER ONE

### *Five years later*

I don't have time for interviews," Saxon Sinclair said with barely contained irritation as she walked unannounced into the chief of surgery's office late in the last week of June. "And I'd appreciate it if you didn't schedule things for me without discussing them first."

The distinguished-looking fifty-year-old man behind the walnut desk smoothed his expensively styled, silvered hair, carefully placed his Waterman pen into the chest pocket of his spotless, starched white lab coat, and leaned back in his padded swivel chair to regard her. "I'm sorry," he said in his practiced bureaucratic voice. "I thought my secretary had cleared it with your office."

"Apparently not." She didn't believe him for a second and knew it showed in her tone. "I've got three fresh attendings, a first-year fellow, and a handful of brand-new residents starting in my trauma unit this week. I can't spare a minute to meet with some journalist. You'll have to get someone else to talk to him."

Preston Smith smiled, thinking how much he'd like to fire her arrogant ass. The intense, dark-haired woman in navy surgical scrubs was standing too close to the front of his desk to be respectful. She wore two beepers on her belt—the trauma pager that would summon her to the helipad or the trauma admitting area and the code beeper that would call her to the trauma intensive care unit in the event that a patient arrested. Rangy and lean, she was too athletic-appearing for his taste, and too aggressive for his liking. She probably wasn't even

aware that she was leaning forward with her feet spread and her hands clenched at her sides.

Too bad the university was so concerned about the gender and minority profiles of their department chairs and division heads that his hands were tied. A clear bias might have a negative impact on future state and federal funding, especially now that every institution was feeling the financial crunch. The powers that be—more importantly, the powers that controlled his budget—would not take kindly to his firing one of the few female chiefs in the entire university hospital system. He conveniently ignored the fact that she was also one of the premier trauma surgeons in the state and had been the focus of several newspaper and magazine articles. Private and solitary, apparently wedded to her work, she was frustratingly competent and her reputation was unimpeachable. He couldn't find even the smallest thing, professional *or* personal, to hold over her head so he could force her into line. Seeking to conceal his aversion to her, he assumed a familiarity she had never invited. "You're the one they want to talk to, Sax," he said solicitously. "You're the one with the name recognition."

"Then they can come back and talk to me in September." She started toward the door. *Pompous idiot. He hasn't actually been in the operating room in so long, he's forgotten how hairy the first few weeks of July can be.*

"I thought you'd want to meet with these folks and lay down the ground rules," he called after her, "but it's up to you, of course. You know how you want to run your unit."

*These folks?* She stopped and pivoted slowly, eyes narrowed. "Is there something *else* you haven't told me, Preston?"

"Image is everything in today's marketplace, and we're no exception. We're not the only level one trauma unit in Manhattan, or the only cancer center, *or* the only tertiary care facility," he said as if she weren't aware of these facts. "St. Michael's needs the exposure, and this is a perfect opportunity."

"What is this *opportunity*, exactly?"

He couldn't quite hide his triumphant smile. "One of the independent networks will be airing a documentary medical series, and the production company plans to film it here. It's an excellent vehicle for free advertising."

For a moment, she simply stared, rigidly still but for a muscle

that jumped along the chiseled line of her jaw. Very quietly, in a voice edged in steel, she asked, "And what precisely does that have to do with me?"

"The producers felt that the series would have more impact if viewers could identify with a particular individual throughout the episodes, so they're going to present a year-long show based on the life of a surgical trainee."

"Which trainee?"

Smith made a show of moving some papers around on his desk, but Sax knew damn well that he didn't need to search for a name. This had all been decided without her input and had probably been set in motion weeks before.

"Ah...here we are. Deborah Stein."

"My new trauma fellow." It was a statement, not a question. Sax rubbed her eyes and contemplated homicide. "Does Stein know about this?"

"Of course. She agreed to it when she signed her contract." He didn't add that the final contract was contingent upon that agreement, and that he had led her to believe Saxon Sinclair was aware of the circumstances.

"Are you trying to tell me that I'm going to have civilians crawling around in my trauma unit with cameras and microphones and God knows what else while I'm trying to triage injured patients? You can't be serious."

Preston Smith stood up, his eyes suddenly hardening. "Actually, Dr. Sinclair, that's exactly what I'm telling you. The hospital needs this, and I've already agreed to it. You'll have to find a way to live with it, so I suggest that you meet with the film director as planned."

Saxon left without another word, because any longer and she wouldn't have been able to contain her temper. This was a fight she knew she couldn't win, and she had much more important battles to wage.

***June 30, 6:00 a.m.***

A figure, back turned, leaned against the wall outside Sax's on-call room, a newspaper held aloft in the traditional lengthwise, half-folded

configuration of the habitual New York City subway rider. All Sax could make out was a mass of rich red curls fanning out over the collar of a khaki safari-style shirt and long legs encased in tailored trousers. She slowed as she approached, curious, because she was quite certain she was not expecting anyone. Her orientation meeting with new residents and staff was scheduled for 7:00.

At the sound of the footsteps in the deserted hallway behind her, Jude Castle turned and got her first look at the elusive Dr. Saxon Sinclair, chief of trauma at St. Michael's Hospital in lower Manhattan. The surgeon wasn't entirely what she expected of someone with that title—particularly not with a motorcycle helmet tucked under one arm, a well-worn black leather jacket, and faded blue jeans.

Jude stared, momentarily perplexed because the woman standing a few feet away, studying her with a raised eyebrow and a slight frown, looked familiar. And yet, she was sure they had never met. She would not have forgotten someone with such simmering good looks and the unapologetically self-assured attitude this woman exuded.

*Probably a promo photo from somewhere*, she thought, dismissing the uneasy feeling of déjà vu.

“Dr. Sinclair?” She found her voice and stepped forward with an outstretched hand. “Jude Castle, Horizon Productions.”

Sax's frown deepened, but she accepted the proffered hand. The redhead's grip was firm and definite, her green eyes direct and self-possessed. Sax released her hand and pulled keys from the pocket of her leather jacket. Fitting the proper one into the lock in her door, she threw over her shoulder, “Do we have an appointment?”

“No.” Jude edged closer to the door, planning to jam her foot in the opening if necessary. “We don't. I've been trying to set something up for weeks, but your secretary can't seem to pin you down to a convenient time.”

“Probably because there isn't one.” Sax blocked the path into the small room she used as an auxiliary office as well as an on-call sleeping area. She was startled to find herself almost nose to nose with the determined producer across the threshold. “This is a hectic time of year, and I don't have time for...” She ran a hand through her hair, disheveling the already wild tangle. She wanted to say, “uninvited media people,” but restrained herself and finished with, “public relations.”

“Understood.” Jude held her ground. “I have an entire crew

arriving here tomorrow, and I'm short on time, too. Maybe we could do this over coffee?"

"Do what?" Sax pointedly stripped off her jacket and tossed it onto a narrow bed covered with medical journals and a pile of scrubs. Apparently, this woman wasn't leaving, and it wasn't really *her* foot she wanted to crush anyhow. It was Preston Smith's. She relented and motioned Jude to enter.

"Close the door," she said offhandedly as she reached for a pair of scrub pants and began to unbutton her jeans. "You can fill me in while I change."

Jude stared wordlessly for an interminable moment when it seemed Sinclair was going to step out of those sexy, nearly threadbare Levi's right in front of her. Catching herself gaping, she hurriedly faced the opposite wall where an old wooden desk labored under the weight of a modern computer system.

"I had hoped we could talk logistics." She cleared her throat, which was suddenly dry. "I don't want to get in your way, Dr. Sinclair—"

"You're *already* in my way." Sax pulled her T-shirt over her head and replaced it with a navy scrub top. She moved deftly around the redhead to her desk, found a pen, and stuck it in her chest pocket. Leaning her hip against the edge of the desk, she regarded her visitor warily. Jude Castle's stance and expression made her determination very clear. With a sigh of exasperation, Sax said, "I'm stuck with this, aren't I?"

Jude shrugged. "Fraid so. I'll try to make it as painless as possible." She wasn't sure that levity would get her anywhere with the aggravated surgeon, but she needed to do something to take her mind off how damned attractive Sinclair was. It wasn't like her to be quite so affected by a pair of deep, brooding eyes and a mane of black hair that begged for fingers to run through it. She tried to ignore the faint flush of heat in her limbs. This was work, not social hour.

Sax pushed away from the desk, strode rapidly to the door, and jerked it open. She looked back over her shoulder and called, "Well, come on, then. You've got twenty minutes to fill me in."

"Thirty." Jude hurried after her. "Make it thirty, and I'll buy the coffee." She didn't get an answer, but she could have sworn she saw a hint of a grin. It was a small victory, but she'd take it for now.