

THE SECRETS OF GABLE HOUSE

by Nancy Fraser

EXCERPT

Maggie Shephard raised her head and scanned the dozen or so people spread out around the library's common area. Most were tourists, one or two were students from the nearby college, and then there was...him. While the others wore faded jeans and sweatshirts, he was dressed in a three-piece charcoal gray suit, likely costing more than her student loan payments. His dark brown hair held a hint of silver at the temples, the well-styled cut barely grazing the collar of his white dress shirt.

Totally out of place, he sat at the back of the room, his gaze intense and laser-focused on her.

She dropped her attention to her notes and back on her closing. "For those of you with questions, I'll be around for another hour or so. Thank you so much for joining me for today's presentation. Don't forget to take a pamphlet from the back table as you exit the library."

Maggie gathered her papers and then stepped down from the podium. When she looked up, he was there. "May I help you?"

He stuck out his hand. "I'm Noah Miller. Mr. Gallagher from Gallagher, Hastings, and West told me you were the ranking expert on all things related to the area's history."

She forced a faint smile to her lips, and placed her hand in his, immediately aware of the warmth his touch generated. The almost instantaneous reaction left her both surprised and intrigued.

"I'm flattered. Mr. Gallagher called earlier to say you'd be stopping by. I hope you didn't mind sitting through the presentation."

"No, I found it very interesting, in fact."

"Mr. Gallagher also mentioned you are the new owner of Gable House." When he nodded, she added, "I have to tell you, when we heard there was an heir, we were shocked to say the least."

He shot her a quizzical look. "Why? Is the idea of my great uncle having family that surprising?"

"Truthfully? Yes. Your great uncle was a recluse. The few in town, most of them now in their eighties or nineties, who knew Henry Hastings in his younger years, don't recall him ever mentioning family of any sort."

"He had a will, so surely someone knew."

She shrugged. "No doubt the will was many years old. I don't think Henry had left the house in over a decade."

"What about daily necessities?"

“The members of the historical society took turns running his errands. He had a housekeeping service come in every once in awhile. As a matter of fact, I believe it was one of their employees who discovered...uh—”

He raised his hand, interrupting her muddled explanation. “It’s okay. I’m aware of the circumstances of his death.”

“I don’t think anyone was surprised to hear he was gone,” she told him. “Especially given the history surrounding Gable House.”

His eyebrows arched, giving her a wider glimpse of his chocolate brown eyes, her comment obviously piquing his interest.

“History? What history?”

“Surely your immediate family has filled you in on some of the details.”

His expression hardened. His otherwise very attractive features pinching into a deep frown. “I have no immediate family, Miss...uh...”

“Shephard,” she filled in. “Maggie Shephard.”

He gave a curt nod. “Yes, of course. Gallagher gave me your name. Sorry. This whole situation has been a revelation to say the least, and a weird one at that.”

“Have you been to the house yet?” she asked.

“No. I have an appointment with a realtor at three.” He paused, and then asked, “Would you be willing to join me? I’d be happy to pay you for your time.”

“I don’t—”

“It would be nice to have an historian’s perspective on the future of the property.”

She had to admit, she was tempted, if only to see Noah Miller’s reaction to his great uncle’s home. “Okay, I can spare some time.”

“Shall I pick you up here at the library?” he asked.

Her first instinct was to accept. After all, Noah Miller was an extremely handsome man. And a welcome change from the locals she’d been fending off for years. However, he was also an unknown, a stranger in a small town where everyone knew everyone else.

“I can meet you there. I also live in Willow-By-The-Sea, within walking distance of your great uncle’s home.”

His rather docile expression lifted into a half-smile. “Well, then, I truly am getting first-hand expertise. A valuable commodity when you’re in unfamiliar territory.”