



*Medical
Romance*TM

CAROLINE ANDERSON

The Fiancée He
Can't Forget



Caroline Anderson

The Fiancée He Can't Forget

«HarperCollins»

Anderson C.

The Fiancée He Can't Forget / C. Anderson — «HarperCollins»,

Seeing ex-fiancée Amy at his brother's wedding throws Matt Walker's world dangerously off-balance. Their relationship imploded years ago, but he's never got her out of his head – and neither can resist a one-night-only reunion! But Matt wants a lifetime by Amy's side, not a night, and a pregnancy bombshell gives him the chance to prove it...The Legendary Walker Doctors finally find the women who can live up to their dreams!

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About the Author

CAROLINE ANDERSON has the mind of a butterfly. She's been a nurse, a secretary, a teacher, run her own soft-furnishing business, and now she's settled on writing. She says, 'I was looking for that elusive something. I finally realised it was variety, and now I have it in abundance. Every book brings new horizons and new friends, and in between books I have learned to be a juggler. My teacher husband John and I have two beautiful and talented daughters, Sarah and Hannah, umpteen pets, and several acres of Suffolk that nature tries to reclaim every time we turn our backs!' Caroline also writes for Mills & Boon® Cherish™.

The Fiancée He Can't Forget

Caroline Anderson



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More praise for Caroline Anderson:

‘Photojournalist Maisie Douglas and businessman Robert Mackenzie have been more or less amicably divorced for almost two decades, but the upcoming marriage of their daughter, Jenni, stirs up old emotions on both sides. Very young when she married him, Maisie—pregnant and disowned by her family—was miserable living in Scotland with Rob’s judgmental parents, and left after little more than a year. Maisie hasn’t found another partner, and neither has Rob. Can they find a way to trust each other again, after all this time? This lovely reunion romance is rich with emotion and humour, and all of the characters are exquisitely rendered.’

—*RT Book Reviews* on MOTHER OF THE BRIDE

CHAPTER ONE

‘ARE you OK?’

Was she?

She wasn’t sure. Her heart was pounding, her legs felt like jelly and her stomach was rebelling, but it was Daisy’s wedding day, so Amy dug around and dredged up some kind of a smile.

‘I’m fine.’

‘Sure?’

‘Absolutely!’ she lied, and tried to make the smile look more convincing. She didn’t even need to ask how Daisy was. She was lit up from inside with a serene joy that was radiantly, blindingly obvious. Amy’s smile wavered. She’d felt like that once, lifetimes ago.

She tweaked Daisy’s dress for something to do and stood back. ‘Are you ready?’

Her smile glowed brighter still. ‘Oh, yes,’ Daisy said softly. ‘Do I look OK?’

Amy laughed indulgently and hugged her. ‘You look stunning. Ben will be blown away.’

‘I hope not, I want him here!’ Daisy glanced down at Florence, fizzing silently on the end of Amy’s arm, on her very best behaviour. She looked like a fairy in her pretty little dress and she was so excited Amy thought she was going to pop.

‘OK, darling?’ Daisy asked.

Florence nodded, her eyes like saucers, and for a second she looked so like Ben—so like Matt—that Amy’s heart squeezed painfully with the ache of loss.

‘Let’s go then,’ Daisy said, stooping to kiss her about-to-be stepdaughter, and with a quick, supportive hug for Amy that nearly unravelled her, she turned and took her father’s arm.

As they gave the signal for the processional music, Amy sucked in a deep, slow breath.

You can do this, she told herself desperately. Ignore him. Just keep your eyes on Daisy’s back, and you’ll be fine.

And then with Florence at her side, she fell in behind them, her eyes glued on Daisy as they walked slowly down between the rows of guests to where Ben was waiting.

Ben, and Matt.

Don’t look ...

Matt’s hair was slightly longer than his twin’s, more tousled, the dark, silky strands so familiar that her fingers still remembered the feel of them. His back was ramrod straight, his shoulders broad, square, uncompromising.

She shouldn’t have looked. She should have kept her eyes on Daisy, but they wouldn’t obey her and her heart was pounding so hard she was sure he’d hear it.

Please don’t turn round ...

He didn’t move a muscle.

He couldn’t see her, but he could feel her there, getting closer. She was behind him, over his left shoulder, and there was no way he was turning round to look. Just getting through the ceremony was going to be hard enough, without making it harder by rubbing salt into the wound her presence here had ripped wide open.

Not that it had ever really healed.

Ben’s hand brushed his, their fingers tangling and gripping for a second in a quick, wordless exchange.

You OK?

Sure. You?

Never better, and you’re lying, but thanks for being here.

You’re welcome. Wouldn’t have it any other way.

Out of the corner of his eye Matt saw Daisy draw level with Ben, saw him reach out to her. He could feel their love like a halo around them, the huge depth of caring and emotion threatening to swamp him. The sort of love he'd felt for Amy ...

Hang on in there. You can do it. It won't take long.

He heard Ben murmur something to Daisy, heard her murmur back, but he had no idea what they said. All his senses were trained on the woman standing behind Daisy. He could hear the rustle of her dress, feel the tension radiating off her, smell the slight drift of her achingly familiar perfume.

How could he be so aware of her? He closed his eyes, taking a moment to calm his thoughts, to settle it all down, to get the lid back on the box. There. He was fine. He could do this.

The ceremony began, and then it was his turn. All he had to do was to take the rings from his pocket and hand them over. Which meant he had to move, to turn—not far, but just far enough to see—

Amy ...

The lid blew off the box with the force of an explosion, and he dropped the rings in Ben's outstretched hand and stepped sharply back to his place, his emotions reeling.

He had to concentrate on Ben and Daisy. This was their day, and he and Amy were in the past. Gone.

But not, apparently, forgotten.

Not by a long way.

The ceremony was interminable.

Her whole body was shaking and she was finding it really hard to concentrate on anything but Matt. Crazy, since she worked with Ben almost every day and they were scarily alike. The most identical of identical twins, with one huge difference—she loved Matt with all her broken, guarded heart, and today was the first time she'd had to face him in four years—

Don't go there!

She felt Florence wriggle at the end of her arm, and glanced down.

'You're squeezing me!' she whispered, and she realised she had a death grip on the little girl's hand. 'Sorry,' she mouthed, wincing, but Florence smiled up at her and patted her hand.

'S OK, Amy, I know you're scared,' she replied in a stage whisper that made several of the guests smile, and in the row beside her Amy heard Florence's mother give a quiet, despairing chuckle.

But then the ceremony was over, and Ben was kissing Daisy while everyone clapped and cheered, and Florence wriggled out of Amy's loosened grip and ran to them. Laughing, Ben scooped her up and kissed her, too, and as Amy watched Matt turned slowly towards her and their eyes met and locked.

Time stopped. She felt the room start to swim, and she dragged in a quick breath, then another. Matt frowned, then moved swiftly, his fingers gripping her elbow. 'Are you all right?' he murmured, his voice low, gruff and painfully familiar.

She swayed against him. All right? Not in a million years, but she wasn't telling him that. She straightened up.

'I'm fine. Low blood sugar,' she lied, and with a slight frown he let her go. Not that it made any difference. The skin of her arm was tingling from the touch of his fingers, her highly sensitised flesh branded by each one.

'We have to sign the register,' he said, and she nodded. They did. They should have done it years ago, but not like this. Not as witnesses ...

'OK now?'

'Fine,' she said shortly, and took that vital and symbolic step away from him before she gave into the urge to turn her face into his chest and howl.

He thought it would never end.

The smiling, the greeting of old friends and family, the meeting of new people. And of course there were people there who'd known Amy. People who should have been at their wedding.

'Isn't that ...?'

'Yes—small world, isn't it? She and Daisy are old friends. How are you? It's good to see you again ...'

And on, and on, until he was ready to scream.

He drank rather more than was sensible, considering he had to make a speech, but every time he caught sight of Amy it was as if he'd been drenched in iced water and he felt stone cold sober. They sat down to eat at last, strung out in a line with Ben and Daisy and two sets of parents between them, and he was glad that his brother and his new sister-in-law had opted for a long top table instead of a round one.

Or maybe that was why they had, thinking ahead to this moment.

Florence was with Jane and Peter at another table, and he winked at her and she winked back, her little face screwing up as she tried to shut just one eye. It made him laugh, in an odd, detached way.

And then finally the food was eaten, the champagne glasses were filled and it was time for the speeches.

Amy didn't want to listen to his speech, but she had little choice. None, in fact, but she loved Daisy and she'd grown increasingly fond of Ben, and this was their wedding and she wanted to be here for it. And Matt wasn't going to spoil it for her, she told herself firmly as Daisy's father got to his feet.

He welcomed Ben to their family with a warmth in his voice that made Daisy cry, then Ben gave a funny, tender and rather endearing speech about Daisy and the change she'd made to his life, thanked everyone for coming to share their day, and then with a grin at Matt he said, 'Now, before I hand you over to my clone for the ritual character assassination I'm sure I've got coming, I'd like you to raise your glasses to two very special and beautiful women. One is my wife's dearest friend, Amy, and the other is my precious daughter, Florence. I know Daisy's appreciated their support and their help in giving us such a wonderful day to enjoy together. Amy particularly has worked absolutely tirelessly on the arrangements, and I think she's done a brilliant job. And Florence has painstakingly decorated and filled the little favour boxes for you all, so we hope you enjoy them. Ladies and gentlemen, the bridesmaids!'

She was grateful to little Florence, who was kneeling up on her chair giggling and attracting all the eyes in the room, because it meant fewer people were looking at her while she struggled with her prickling eyes and the rising tide of colour on her cheeks.

And then it was Matt's turn, and he was smiling engagingly at everyone as if he did this kind of thing all the time. He probably did, she thought. He'd always had a way with words.

'You'll have to forgive my deluded brother,' he began drily. 'Being the firstborn just makes him the prototype, and we all know they need refining, but I'm very pleased to be here today because after thirty-four years of arguments, black eyes, mind-blowingly foolish stunts and some underhanded, downright cheating, it's been settled. I am officially the best man, and now we can move on with our lives!'

There was a ripple of laughter round the room, but then he went on, 'On the subject of twins, we didn't get to bed very early last night. Ben, Daisy and I ended up delivering two rather special babies shortly before midnight, and I found myself wondering, will those little girls have as much fun growing up as we did? Because it wasn't all fights. I always had a friend, a playmate, someone to lean on. Someone to swap with. We did that quite a lot—in fact, Daisy, are you sure that's Ben? You wouldn't be the first person to fall for it. I think Jenny Wainwright's still confused.'

'No, I'm quite sure, he's much more good-looking!' Daisy said, laughing and hugging Ben.

It sounded silly, but Amy absolutely understood how she felt. The similarities were obvious. The differences were more subtle but they were definitely there, not only in their looks but in their characters, and her reaction to them was utterly different.

Ben could talk to her and she just heard his words. Matt talked, and her soul seemed to tune into his—but right now, she didn't need that spiritual connection that seemed to call to every cell in her body. She didn't need to feel the rich tones of his deep, warm voice swirling round her, that slight Yorkshire accent teasing at her senses, and with an effort she made herself listen to what he was saying.

She was glad she did. He was very, very funny, but also very moving. He told tales of their childhood escapades, but also their closeness, their enduring friendship, and finally he wound up, and she felt her heart hammer because she knew—she just knew—he was going to look at her and she was going to have to smile.

'Now, my job—as the best man,' he added with a grin, 'is to thank Ben for his kind remarks about Daisy's beautiful bridesmaids, and I have to say he's right, Florence is the cutest little bridesmaid I've ever seen. And as for Amy ...' He turned to face her, as she'd known he would, and his smile twisted a little. 'Well, it's my duty and privilege to escort this beautiful woman for the rest of the day, so sorry, guys, you'll have to find someone else to dance with. She's all mine. There have to be some perks to the job.'

Amy tried to smile as he tilted his glass to her, drained it and sat down to cheers and applause, but it was a feeble attempt.

She was dreading the rest of the party. She would *have* to dance with him, and there was no getting out of it. As chief bridesmaid and best man, that was their role, but the irony wasn't lost on her.

As far as she was concerned, Matt wasn't the best man—he was the only man.

And when the chips were down, when she'd needed him most, he'd walked away.

'Good wedding—the hotel have looked after you well. It's a great venue.'

Ben smiled. 'Isn't it? We were really lucky to get it at such short notice. Good speech, by the way. Thank you.'

Matt frowned slightly, feeling another stab of guilt. 'Don't thank me. I wasn't there for you last time. I should have been.'

'No. You were absolutely right at the time, neither of us should have been there. I shouldn't have married Jane, and you weren't exactly in the right place to worry about me. You had enough going on with Amy. Matt, are you really OK with this?'

Matt met Ben's eyes briefly and looked away. 'Yeah, I'm fine.'

'Amy's not.'

'I know.'

'She still loves you.'

He snorted rudely and drained his glass. 'Hardly. I think she's finding it a little awkward, that's all. She'll be fine.'

Or she would as long as he kept avoiding her.

Ben made a soft, disbelieving noise and caught Daisy's eye. He nodded and looked back at Matt, his eyes seeing far too much for comfort. 'We're going to cut the cake now, and then have the first dance. And then—'

'I know.' He pretended to straighten Ben's cravat. 'Don't worry, I won't renege on my duties.'

'I wasn't suggesting you would. I was just going to say be kind to Amy.'

He looked up at Ben again, his older brother by mere moments, and laughed. 'What—like she was kind to me?'

'She was hurting.'

'And I wasn't?' He gave a harsh sigh and rammed a hand through his hair. 'Don't worry. I'll be good. You go and cut your cake and have your dance, and I'll play my part. I won't let you down.'

'It's not me I'm worried about,' Ben muttered, but Matt pushed him towards his wife and turned away. He didn't need to scan the room for Amy. His radar hadn't let him down. She was right there, by the French doors out onto the terrace, talking to two women that he didn't recognise.

One was visibly pregnant, the other had a baby in her arms, and for a moment his heart squeezed with pain. *Ahh, Amy ...*

She could feel him watching her, the little hairs on the back of her neck standing to attention.

He was getting closer, she knew it. She'd managed to avoid him up to now, and she'd known it was too good to last.

'Excuse me, Amy—they're going to cut the cake and then have the first dance.'

And then it would be time for the second dance, the one she'd been dreading, and she'd have to dance with him and look—well, civilised would be a good thing to try for, she thought as she turned round to face him.

'OK. I'll come over. Give me a moment.'

She turned back to Katie and Laura, and after a second she felt him move away, and her shoulders sagged a fraction.

'Amy, are you all right, honey?' Katie asked, juggling the baby with one arm so she could hug her.

She returned the hug briefly and straightened up, easing away. 'I'm fine.'

'Well, you don't look fine,' Laura said, her eyes narrowing. 'Are you sick? You're awfully pale.'

'I'm just tired. It's been a busy week. I'd better go.'

She left them, letting out a soft sigh as she walked away. She'd never told them about Matt, and she'd asked Daisy not to discuss it. The fewer people at the wedding who knew they had history, the better. It was hard enough facing his mother, who'd given her a swift, gentle hug and patted her back as if she was soothing a child.

She'd nearly cried. She'd loved Liz. She'd been endlessly kind to her, incredibly welcoming, and she hadn't seen her since—

'Amy, we're going to—Gosh, sweetheart, are you all right?'

Daisy's face was puckered with concern, and Amy rolled her eyes.

'Daisy, don't fuss, I'm just tired. We didn't go to bed till nearly one and the cat was walking all over me all night. And we've been up for hours, if you remember.'

'I know. I just—'

'I'm fine,' she said firmly. 'Matt said you're going to cut the cake.'

'We are. Amy, are you sure you can do this? If you want to leave—'

'I don't want to leave! It's your wedding! Go and cut the cake, and we can have champagne and cake and dancing and it'll be wonderful. Now shoo.'

Amy turned her round and pushed her towards her husband, who held his hand out to her and drew her into his arms for yet another kiss.

'They do seem genuinely happy together.'

She froze. How had he crept up on her? She hadn't felt him approaching—maybe because she'd been so intensely aware of him all day that her senses were overloaded.

'They are,' she said, her voice a little ragged. 'They're wonderful together.'

'She's very fond of you.'

'It's mutual. She's lovely. She's been through a lot, and she's been a really good friend to me.'

'Which is why you're here, when you'd rather be almost anywhere else in the world.'

'Speak for yourself.'

He gave a soft huff of laughter, teasing the hair on the back of her neck. 'I was,' he answered, and despite the laugh, his voice had a hollow ring to it. 'Still, needs must. Right, here we go. I think Ben's going to make a bit of a speech to welcome the evening guests before they cut the cake.'

He was still standing behind her, slightly to one side, and she could feel his breath against her bare shoulder, feel the warmth radiating from his big, solid body.

The temptation to lean back into him—to rest her head against his cheek, to feel him curve his hand round her hip and ease her closer as he would have done before—nearly overwhelmed her.

Instead, she stepped away slightly, pretending to shift so she could see them better, but in fact she could see perfectly well, and he must have realised that.

She heard him sigh, and for some crazy reason it made her feel sad. Crazy, because it had been him that had left her, walking away just when she needed him the most, so why on earth should she feel sad for him? So he was still alone, according to Ben. So what? So was she. There were worse things than being alone. At least it was safe.

'Daisy chose the music for our first dance,' Ben was saying, his smile wry. 'It has a special meaning for us. While we're dancing, I'd like you to imagine the moment we met—just about thirty seconds after the kitchen ceiling and half a bath of water came down on my head.'

And with that, they cut the cake, the lights were dimmed and the band started playing 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face'.

There was a ripple of laughter and applause, but then they all went quiet as Ben, still smiling, drew Daisy into his arms as if she was the most precious thing he'd ever held.

Damn, Amy thought, sniffing hard, and then a tissue arrived in her hand, on a drift of cologne that brought back so many memories she felt the tears well even faster.

'OK?'

No, she wasn't. She was far from OK, she thought crossly, and she wished everyone would stop asking her that.

'I'm fine.'

He sighed softly. 'Look, Amy, I know this is awkward, but we just have to get through it for their sakes. I don't want to do it any more than you do, but it's not for long.'

Long enough. A second in his arms would be long enough to tear her heart wide open—

The dance was over, the music moved on and without hesitation Matt took her hand, the one with the tissue still clutched firmly in it, led her onto the dance floor and turned her into his arms.

'Just pretend you don't hate me,' he told her, with a smile that didn't reach his eyes, and she breathed in, needing oxygen, and found nothing but that cologne again.

Holding her was torture.

A duty and a privilege, as he'd said in his speech?

Or just an agonising reminder of all he'd lost?

She had one hand on his shoulder, the other cradled in his left, and his right hand was resting lightly against her waist, so he could feel the slender column of her spine beneath his splayed fingers, the shift of her ribs as she breathed, the flex of the muscles as she moved in time to the music. She felt thinner, he thought. Well, she would. The last time he'd held her, he thought with a wave of sadness, she'd been pregnant with their child.

One dance merged into another, and then another. He eased her closer, and with a sigh that seemed to shudder through her body, she rested her head on his shoulder and yielded to the gentle pressure of his hand. Her thighs brushed his, and he felt heat flicker along his veins. Oh, Amy. He'd never forgotten her, never moved on. Not really.

And as he cradled her against his chest, her pale gold hair soft under his cheek, he realised he'd been treading water for years, just waiting for the moment when he could hold her again.

He sighed, and she felt his warm breath tease her hair, sending tiny shivers running through her like fairies dancing over her skin. It made her feel light-headed again, and she stepped back.

'I need some air,' she mumbled, and tried to walk away, but her hand was still firmly wrapped in his, and he followed her, ushering her through the crowd and out of the French doors into the softly lit courtyard. Groups of people were standing around talking quietly, laughing, and she breathed in the cooler air with a sigh of relief.

'Better?'

She nodded. 'Yes. Thanks.'

'Don't thank me. You look white as a sheet. Have you eaten today?'

‘We just had a meal.’

‘And you hardly touched it. My guess is you didn’t have lunch, either, and you probably skipped breakfast. No wonder you had low blood sugar earlier. Come on, let’s go and raid the buffet. I didn’t eat much, either, and I’m starving.’

He was right on all counts. She *was* hungry, and she *had* skipped lunch, but only because she’d lost her breakfast. She never could eat when she was nervous, and she’d been so, so nervous for the last few days her stomach had been in knots, and this morning it had rebelled. And that dizzy spell could well have been low blood sugar, now she came to think about it.

‘It’s probably not a bad idea,’ she conceded, and let him lead her to the buffet table. She put a little spoonful of something on her plate, and he growled, shoved his plate in her other hand and loaded them both up.

‘I can’t eat all that!’ she protested, but he speared her with a look from those implacable blue eyes and she gave up. He could put it on the plate. Didn’t mean she had to eat it.

‘I’ll help you. Come on, let’s find a quiet corner.’

He scooped up two sets of cutlery, put them in his top pocket, snagged a couple of glasses of wine off a passing waiter and shepherded her across the floor and back out to the courtyard.

‘OK out here, or is it too cold for you in that dress?’

‘It’s lovely. It’s a bit warm in there.’

‘Right. Here, look, there’s a bench.’

He steered her towards it, handed her a glass and sat back, one ankle on the other knee and the plate balanced on his hand while he attacked the food with his fork.

He’d always eaten like that, but that was medicine for you, eating on the run. Maybe he thought they should get it over with and then he could slide off and drink with the boys. Well, if the truth be told he didn’t have to hang around for her.

‘You’re not eating.’

‘I’m too busy wondering why you don’t have chronic indigestion, the speed you’re shovelling that down.’

He gave a short chuckle. ‘Sorry. Force of habit. And I was starving.’ He put the plate down for a moment and picked up his glass. ‘So, how are you, really?’

Really? She hesitated, the fork halfway to her mouth. Did he honestly want to know? Probably not.

‘I’m fine.’

‘How’s the job?’

‘OK. I like it. As with any job it has its ups and downs. Mostly ups. The hospital’s a good place to work.’

‘Yes, so Ben says.’ He stared pensively down into his glass, swirling it slowly. ‘You didn’t have to leave London, you know. We were never going to bump into each other at different hospitals.’

No? She wasn’t sure—not sure enough, at least, that she’d felt comfortable staying there. Up here, she’d been able to relax—until Ben had arrived. Ever since then she’d been waiting for Matt to turn up unexpectedly on the ward to visit his brother, and the monoamniotic twins they’d delivered last night had been something he’d taken a special interest in, so once Melanie Grieves had been admitted, she’d been on tenterhooks all the time. Waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Well, now it had, and it was every bit as bad as she’d expected.

‘I like it here, it was a good move for me,’ she said, and then changed the subject firmly. ‘Who’s Jenny Wainwright?’

He laughed, a soft, warm chuckle that told her a funny story was coming. ‘Ben’s first girlfriend. We were thirteen or so. They’d been dating for weeks, and she wouldn’t let him kiss her, so I talked him into letting me take his place on the next date, to see if I had more luck.’

‘And did you?’

His mouth twisted into a wry smile. 'No. Not that time. I did about two years later, though, at a party, and she told me he kissed better, so I went and practised on someone else.'

She laughed, as he'd wanted her to, but all she could think was that whoever he'd practised on had taught him well. She ought to thank her—except of course he wasn't hers to kiss any more. Regret swamped her, and as she looked across and met his eyes, she saw tenderness in them and a gentle, puzzled sadness. 'I've missed you,' he said softly, and she gulped down a sudden, convulsive little sob.

'I've missed you, too,' she admitted, her voice unsteady.

He stared at her searchingly, then glanced down. 'Are you all done with that food?'

Food? She looked at her plate. She'd eaten far more than she'd thought she would, to her surprise, and she was feeling much better. 'Yes. Do you want the rest?'

'No, I'm fine, but I'm supposed to be entertaining you, so let's go and dance.'

Out of duty? Or because he wanted to? She hesitated for a second, then stood up, raising an eyebrow at him. Whichever, she wanted to dance with him, and she wasn't going to get another chance.

'Come on, then, if you really want to.'

Oh, yes. He wanted. He got to his feet and led her back to the dance floor.

She'd always loved dancing, and he loved dancing with her, loved the feel of her body, the lithe, supple limbs, the sleek curves, the warmth of her against him.

He didn't get to hold her, though, not at first. The tempo was fast—too fast, he decided, after a couple of dances, so he reeled her in and halved the beat, cherishing the moment because he knew it wouldn't last. How could it, with all they had behind them? But now—he had her now, in his arms, against his heart, and his body ached for her.

The tempo slowed, moving seamlessly from one unashamedly romantic, seductive number to another, until they were swaying against each other, her arms draped around his neck, his hands splayed against her back, the fingers of one hand resting lightly on the warm, soft skin above the back of her dress, the other hand lower, so all he had to do was slip it down a fraction and he could cup the firm swell of her bottom and ease her closer ...

She felt his hand move, felt him draw her in so she could feel every move he made. Their legs had somehow meshed together so his thigh was between hers, nudging gently with every slight shift of his body, brushing the soft silk of her dress against her legs and driving out all her common sense.

She knew him so well, had danced with him so many times, and it was so easy to rest against him, to lay her head against his chest and listen to the deep, steady thud of his heart, to slide her fingers through his hair and sift the silky strands that she remembered so well.

Easier, still, to turn her head, to feel the graze of stubble against her temple and tilt her face towards him, to feel the soft warmth of his lips as they took hers in a tentative, questioning kiss.

I love you ...

Had he said that? Had she?

She lifted her head and touched her lips to his again, and his breath seared over her skin in a shuddering sigh.

'Amy—'

'Matt ...'

He lifted his head and stared down at her in the dim light on the edge of the dance floor, their eyes locked as each of them battled against the need raging within them. She could feel him fighting it, feel herself losing just as he closed his eyes and unclasped her hands from behind his neck, sliding his hand down her arm and linking their fingers as he led her off the dance floor and up the broad, sweeping staircase to the floor above in a tense, brittle silence.

They didn't speak to anyone. They passed people in the hall, people on the stairs—they didn't stop, didn't look left or right, until the door of his room was opened and closed again behind them, and then he cradled her face and stared down into her eyes once more.

Still he didn't speak, and neither did she. What was there to say? Nothing that would make any sense.

Slowly, with infinite tenderness, he touched his lips to hers again, and she whimpered softly and clutched at him, desperate for the feel of him, for his body on her, in her, surrounding and filling her.

'Please,' she whispered silently, but he heard her and took a step back, stripping without finesse, heeling off his beautiful handmade shoes, his hired suit hitting the floor and crumpling in a heap. After a brief fight with his cufflinks the shirt followed, then the boxers, the socks, and he spun her and searched blindly for the zip.

'Here.' She lifted her arm so he could find it, sucking her breath in as he tugged it down and the dress fell to the floor, puddling round her ankles and leaving her standing there in nothing but a tiny scrap of lace.

A rough groan was torn from his throat and he lifted her in his arms and lowered her carefully to the middle of the bed. Fingers shaking, he hooked his fingers into the lace at her hips, easing it away, following its path down the length of her legs with his lips, the slight roughness of his stubble grazing the sensitive skin as he inched his way to her feet, driving her to the edge.

He turned his head, looked back at her, and his eyes were black with need. She whimpered, her legs twitching under his warm, firm hands, and he moved, nudging her thighs apart, so nearly there—and then he froze, his face agonised.

'Amy, we can't—I haven't—'

'I'm on the Pill.'

The breath sighed out of him in a rush, and he gathered her into his arms, held her for a moment, and then his lips found hers again and he was there, filling her, bringing a sob of relief from her as his body slid home and she tightened around him.

'Matt ...'

'Oh, God, Amy, I've missed you,' he whispered, and then he started to move, his body shaking with control until she was sick of waiting and arched under him, her hands tugging at him, begging for more.

And he gave her more, pulling out all the stops, driving her higher and higher until she came apart in his arms, her reserve splintering under the onslaught of his unleashed passion.

Then he held her, his body shuddering in release, his heart slamming against his ribs so hard he thought they'd break, until gradually it slowed and he rolled to his side, taking her with him, their bodies still locked together as the aftershocks of their lovemaking faded slowly away into the night.

CHAPTER TWO

HE MADE love to her again in the night, reaching for her in the darkness, bringing her body slowly awake with sure, gentle hands and whispered kisses. She laid her hand tenderly against his cheek, savouring the rasp of stubble against her palm, her thumb dragging softly over the firm fullness of his lower lip.

He opened his mouth, drawing her thumb inside and sucking it deeply, his tongue exploring it, his teeth nipping lightly and making the breath catch in her throat. She shifted so she could reach him, her hands running over him now, checking for changes and finding only sweet, familiar memories. He moved on, his mouth warm and moist against her skin, and she joined in, their lips tracing tender trails across each other's bodies. They were taking their time now for leisurely explorations, the darkness shielding them from emotions they couldn't bear to expose—emotions too dark, too painful to consider.

That wasn't what this night was about, Amy thought later as she lay awake beside him listening to the deep, even rhythm of his breathing. It was for old times' sake, no-longer lovers reaching out to touch fleetingly what had once been theirs to love.

She was under no illusions. After the wedding, Matt would be going back to London, and she'd be staying here, nursing her still-broken heart but with a little more tenderness, a little more forgiveness in her soul. He wasn't indifferent. Clearly not. But their lives had moved on, gone in different directions, and maybe it was for the best.

Maybe this was the way forward, for both of them. A little healing salve smeared gently over their wounds, kissing each other better.

She shifted slightly, seeking the warmth of his body, and he reached for her again in his sleep, drawing her closer, their legs tangled, her head pillowed on his shoulder as she slept, until the first light of dawn crept round the edges of the curtains.

He woke her gently, his voice a soft murmur in her ear.

'Amy?'

'Mmm.'

'Amy, it's morning.'

'Mmm.'

'You're in my room.'

'Mmm. I know.'

'Sweetheart, *everyone* will know soon.'

Her eyes flew open, and she sucked in a breath, the night coming back to her in a flood of memory and sudden awkwardness. 'Oh, rats. Damn. Um—Matt, help me get dressed.'

She threw the quilt off and starting searching for her underwear. Stupid, stupid ... 'Where the hell are my pants?'

Pants? He nearly laughed. Try cobwebs.

'Take the dressing gown on the back of the door—have you got your room key?'

'Yes, of course. It's—'

In her clutch bag, which was—somewhere. She flopped back down onto the edge of the bed, dragging the quilt back over herself to hide her body from his eyes. Pointless, after he'd explored it so thoroughly, knew it so well in any case, but she was suddenly smitten with shyness. 'It's in my clutch bag,' she admitted.

'Which is ...?'

Good question. 'Downstairs?'

He groaned and rolled away from her, vanishing into the bathroom and emerging a few minutes later damp, tousled and unshaven. And stark naked, the water drops still clinging to his body gleaming

in the spill of light from the bathroom door and drawing her hungry eyes. He flipped open his overnight bag, pulled out some jeans and boxers and a shirt, dressed quickly and took the room key out of the door lock.

‘What’s your bag look like?’ he asked briskly, and she dragged her mind off his body and tried to concentrate.

‘Cream satin, about so big, little bronzy chain. It’s got a lipstick, a tissue and the room key in it.’

‘Any ideas where?’

She shrugged. ‘The edge of the dance floor? I put it down at one point.’

He left her there, hugging her knees in the middle of the bed, looking rumpled and gorgeous and filled with regret.

He knew all about that one. How could he have been so stupid?

And why was she on the Pill, for heaven’s sake? Was she in a relationship? Or did she do this kind of thing all the time?

Hell, he hoped not. The thought of his Amy casually—

He swallowed hard and ran downstairs, to find that staff were already starting the mammoth clean-up operation.

‘I’m looking for a cream satin evening bag,’ he told someone, and was directed to the night porter’s office.

‘This the one?’

He wasn’t sure, so he opened it and found exactly what she’d said inside. Well, if the room key fitted ...

He went to it, and it gave him immediate access. Her case was there, unopened, inside the unused room, and he carried it back to her.

‘Oh, Matt, you’re a star. Thank you.’

‘Anything to spare a lady’s blushes. I’ll go to your room,’ he said, ‘and if anyone knocks on the door, just ignore them. It’ll only be Ben or my parents, and they’ll ring me if it’s anything important.’

He slipped his mobile into his pocket, picked up his wallet and did the same, then gave Amy an awkward smile. ‘I guess I’ll see you at breakfast.’

She nodded, looking embarrassed now, her grey eyes clouded with something that could have been shame, and without dragging it out he left her there and went to the room that should have been hers, lay on the bed and let his breath out on a long, ragged sigh.

What a fool. All he’d done, all he’d proved, was that he’d never stopped loving her. Well, hell, he’d known that before. It had hardly needed underlining.

He rolled to his side, thumped the pillow into the side of his neck and tried to sleep.

How could she have been so stupid?

She’d known seeing him again would be dangerous to her, but she hadn’t realised how dangerous. She pulled the hotel gown tighter round her waist and moved to the chair by the window. She had a view over the courtyard where they’d had their buffet supper, could see the bench if she craned her neck.

Sudden unexpected tears glazed her eyes, and she swiped them away and sniffed hard. She’d done some stupid things in her life, most of them with Matt, and this was just the icing on the cake.

She got up and put the little kettle on to make tea, and found her pills in her washbag and popped one out. Thank God for synthetic hormones, she thought drily as she swallowed the pill. Or maybe not, because without the medication to control her irregular periods, they would never have spent the night together.

Which would have been a *good* thing, she told herself firmly. But telling him she was on the Pill was a two-edged sword. He probably thought she was a slut.

'I don't care what he thinks, it's none of his damn business and at least I won't get pregnant again,' she said to the kettle, and made herself a cup of tea and sat cradling it and staring down into the courtyard until it was stone cold.

And then she nearly dropped it, because Matt was there, outside in the courtyard garden just below her, sitting on the bench with a cup in his hand and checking something on his phone.

He made a call, then put the cup down and walked swiftly across the courtyard out of sight. One of his patients in London needing his attention? Or Melanie Grieves, mother of the little twins they'd delivered on Friday night?

Or just coming inside to see whoever he'd spoken to—his parents, maybe?

Moments later, there was a soft knock at the door.

'Amy? It's Matt.'

She let him in reluctantly and tried to look normal and less like an awkward teenager. 'Everything OK?'

'Yes. I'm going to see Melanie Grieves. Ben asked me to keep an eye on her.'

She nodded. 'Are you coming back for breakfast and to say goodbye to everyone?'

'Yes. I don't want to be lynched. Let me take my stuff, and I'll get out of your way. Here's your room key. Hang onto mine as well for now. I'll get it off you later.' He scooped up the suit, the shirt, the underwear, throwing them in the bag any old how and zipping it, and then he hesitated. For a second she thought he was about to kiss her, but then he just picked up his bag and left without a backward glance.

Amy let out the breath she'd been holding since he'd come in, and sat down on the end of the bed. There was no point in hanging around in his room, she thought. She'd shower and dress, and go downstairs and see if anyone was around.

Unlikely. The party had gone on long after they'd left it, and everyone was probably still in bed—where she would be, in her own room, if she had a grain of sense.

Well, she'd proved beyond any reasonable doubt that she didn't, she thought, and felt the tears welling again.

Damn him. Damn him for being so—so—just so *irresistible*. Well, never again. Without his body beside her, without the feel of his warmth, the tenderness of his touch, it all seemed like a thoroughly bad idea, and she knew the aftermath of it would haunt her for ages.

Years.

Forever?

Melanie Grieves was fine.

Her wound was healing, her little twins were doing very well and apart from a bit of pain she was over the moon. He hadn't really needed to come and see her, he'd just had enough of sitting around in the hotel beating himself up about Amy.

Not that he shouldn't be doing that. He'd been a total idiot, and she really, really didn't need him falling all over her like he had last night. And leaving the dance floor like that—God knows what everyone had thought of them. He hadn't even asked her, just dragged her up the stairs and into his room like some kind of caveman.

He growled in frustration and slammed the car door shut. He'd better go back, better show his face and try and lie his way out of it. Better still, find Amy and get their story straight before his mother got her side of it and bent his ear. She'd always taken Amy's side.

Oh, hell.

He dropped his head forwards and knocked it gently against the hard, leatherbound steering wheel. Such a fool. And his head hurt. Good. It would remind him not to drink so much in future. He'd thought he was sober enough, but obviously not. If he'd been sober—

His phone rang and he pulled it out of his pocket and stared at the screen. Ben. Damn.

He ignored it. He'd talk to Amy first—if he got to her before they did. If only he had her number. She'd probably changed it, but maybe not. He dialled it anyway as he turned into the hotel car park, and she answered on the second ring.

'Hello?'

'Amy, it's Matt. We need to talk—we will have been seen last night. Where are you now?'

'Oh, damn. In the courtyard. Bring coffee.'

Stressed as he was, he smiled at that. He found a breakfast waitress and ordered a pot of coffee and a basket of bacon rolls, then went and found her.

She was waiting, her heart speeding up as she caught sight of him, her nerves on edge. She couldn't believe what she'd done, couldn't believe she was going to sit here with him and concoct some cock-and-bull story to tell his family. Her friends. Oh, lord ...

'How's Mel?' she asked, sticking to something safe.

'Fine. The babies are both doing well.'

'Good. Ben and Daisy'll be pleased.'

Silence. Of course there was, she thought. What was there to say, for heaven's sake? *Thank you for the best sex I've had in over four years? Not to say the only ...?*

'Any sign of the others?' he asked after the silence had stretched out into the hereafter, and she shook her head.

'No. I put my bag in the car. Here's your room key. So—what's the story?'

'We wanted to talk?'

'We didn't talk, Matt,' she reminded him bluntly.

Pity they hadn't, she thought for the thousandth time. If they'd talked, they might have had more sense.

'You were feeling sick?' he suggested.

'What—from all that champagne?'

'It's not impossible.'

'I had less than you.'

'I think it's probably fair to say we both had more than was sensible,' he said drily, and she had to agree, but not out loud. She wasn't feeling that magnanimous.

'Maybe nobody noticed?' she said without any real conviction, and he gave a short, disbelieving laugh.

'Dream on, Amy. I dragged you off the dance floor and up the stairs in full view of everyone. I think someone will have noticed.'

She groaned and put her face in her hands, and then he started to laugh again, a soft, despairing sound that made her lift her head and meet his eyes. 'What?'

'I have some vague recollection of passing my parents in the hall.'

She groaned again. It just got better and better.

'Maybe you thought I needed to lie down?' she suggested wildly. 'Perhaps I'd told you I was feeling rough? It's not so unlikely, and it's beginning to look like the best option.'

'We could always tell them the truth.'

If we knew what it was, she thought, but the waitress arrived then with the tray of coffee and bacon rolls, and she seized one and sank her teeth into it and groaned. 'Oh, good choice,' she mumbled, and he laughed.

'Our default hangover food,' he said, bringing the memories crashing back. 'Want some ketchup?'

'That's disgusting,' she said, watching him squirt a dollop into his bacon roll and then demolish it in three bites before reaching for another. The times they'd done that, woken up on the morning after the night before and he'd cooked her bacon rolls and made her coffee.

He'd done that after their first night together, she remembered. And when she'd come out of hospital after—

She put the roll down and reached for her coffee, her appetite evaporating.

'So when are you off?' she asked.

'Tuesday morning,' he said, surprising her. 'Things are quiet at work at the moment, so I said I'd keep an eye on Mel till Ben and Daisy get back. They're only away for two nights.'

'Are you staying here?'

'No. I'm going back to Ben's.'

She nodded. It made sense, but she wasn't thrilled. She'd be tripping over him in the hospital at random times, bumping into him at Daisy's house when she went to feed Tabitha—because if he was next door at Ben's, there was no way she was going to stay there, as she'd half thought she might, to keep the cat company.

Or moving in and renting it as they'd suggested, come to that. Not after last night's folly. The last thing she wanted was to be bumping into Ben's brother every time he came up to visit them.

Daisy had stayed in her own house adjoining Ben's until the wedding because of Florence, but she'd be moving into his half when they came back, and they'd offered her Daisy's house. They wanted a tenant they could trust, and her lease was coming up for renewal, and it was a lot nicer than her flat for all sorts of reasons.

It had off-road parking, a garden, a lovely conservatory—and the best neighbours in the world. She'd been debating whether to take it, because of the danger of bumping into Matt who was bound to be coming back and forth to visit them, but after this—well, how could she relax?

She couldn't. It would have been bad enough before.

'Why don't we just tell them to mind their own business?' she suggested at last. 'It really is nothing to do with them if we chose to—'

She broke off, and he raised a brow thoughtfully.

'Chose to—?'

But his phone rang, and he scanned the screen and answered it, pulling a face.

'Hi, Ben.'

'Is that a private party over there, or can we join you?'

He looked up, and saw his brother and brand-new sister-in-law standing in the doorway watching them across the courtyard.

Amy followed the direction of his eyes, and sighed.

'Stand by to be grilled like a kipper,' she muttered, and stood up to hug Daisy. 'Well, good morning. How's the head?'

Daisy smiled smugly, looking very pleased with herself. 'Clear as a bell. In case you didn't notice, I wasn't drinking.'

Amy frowned, then looked from one to the other and felt the bottom fall out of her stomach. Ben's eyes were shining, and there was a smile he couldn't quite hide. 'Oh—that's wonderful,' she said softly, and then to her utter humiliation her eyes welled over. She hugged Daisy hard, then turned to Ben—just in time to see Matt release him with a look in his eyes she hadn't seen since—

'Congratulations, that's amazing,' he said gruffly, and gathered Daisy up and hugged her, too, his expression carefully veiled now.

Except that Amy could still see it, lingering in the back of his eyes, a fleeting echo of a grief once so raw it had torn them apart.

'So, when's it due?' he asked, going through the motions. Not that he wasn't interested, but today of all days ...

'The tenth of May. It's very, very early on,' Daisy said wryly. 'I did the test this morning.'

'Right after she threw up.'

Matt gave a soft huff of sympathetic laughter. 'Poor Daisy. It passes, I'm reliably informed by my patients.' *That's right, keep it impersonal ...*

'It's a good sign,' Amy said, her voice slightly strained to his ears. 'Means the pregnancy's secure.' *Unlike hers. Oh, God, beam me up ...*

'Changing the subject, it's none of my business, but—' Ben began, but Matt knew exactly where this was going and cut him off.

'You're right, it's not. We needed to talk, there were a lot of people about. Amy slept in my room, and I went to hers.'

At a quarter to six this morning, but they didn't need to know that, and he was darned sure they wouldn't have been up and about that early. But someone was.

'Yeah, Mum said she saw you coming out of your room and going to another one at some ungodly hour.'

Damn. Of all the people ...

'I went to get my phone so I could ring the hospital,' he lied, but he'd never been able to lie convincingly to Ben, and as their eyes met he saw Ben clock the lie and yet say nothing.

As he'd said himself, it was none of his business, and he obviously realised he'd overstepped the mark. He'd back him up, though, if their mother said any more, of that Matt was sure. 'So how is Mel?' Ben asked, moving smoothly on, and Matt let out a slight sigh of relief.

'Fine. They're all fine. I've been in to see them, and they're all doing really well. She was keen to hear all about the wedding. I promised I'd take her some cake—unless you want to do it when you come back?'

'No, you go for it. I'm glad she's well. Thanks for going in.'

'My pleasure. Did you order coffee or do you want me to do it?'

Daisy pulled a face. 'Can we have something less smelly, and something to eat? I really don't think I can wait till breakfast.'

'Sure. I'll order decaf tea. What about bacon rolls?'

'Oh, yes-s-s-s!' she said fervently. 'Amazing! Matt, you're a genius.'

He smiled, glancing across at Amy and sensing, rather than seeing, the sadness that lingered in her. She was smiling at Daisy, but underneath it all was grief, no longer raw and untamed, maybe, but there for all that.

Would it ever get easier? Ever truly go away?

He hoped so, but he was very much afraid that he was wrong.

'Well, hello, Mummy Grieves! Are you up for visitors?'

'Oh, yes! Hello, Amy, how are you? How was the wedding? Did Daisy look beautiful?'

'Utterly gorgeous, but I bet she wasn't as gorgeous as your little girls. Aren't you going to introduce me?'

'Of course. I hope you don't mind, but we've called them Daisy and Amy, because you two have been so kind and we really love the names.'

'Oh, that's so sweet of you, thank you,' Amy said, her eyes filling. In a rare complication, the twins had shared the same amniotic sac, and the danger of their cords tangling had meant Mel had been monitored as an inpatient for several weeks, and she and Daisy had got to know Mel very well. And this ... She blinked hard and sniffed, and Mel hugged her.

'Thank *you*,' she corrected. 'So, this is Amy. Want a cuddle?'

'I'd better not—infection risk,' she lied. That was why she'd gone on her way in, so her clothes were clean, but the last thing she wanted was to hold them. Delivering babies was one thing. Going out of her way to cuddle them—well, she just didn't.

She admired them both, though, Amy first, then Daisy, their perfect little features so very alike and yet slightly different. 'Can you tell them apart yet?' she asked Mel, and she smiled and nodded.

'Oh, yes. I could see the differences straight away. Adrian can't always, but he'll learn, I expect. And Mr Walker and his brother—they're very alike, too, aren't they, but I can tell the difference. There's just something.'

Amy swallowed. Oh, yes. Ben didn't have the ability to turn her into a total basket case just by walking into the room, and just to prove it, Matt strolled in then and she felt her stomach drop to the floor and her heart lurch.

'Talk of the Devil,' she said brightly, and saying goodbye to Mel, she slipped past him, trying not to breathe in the faint, lingering scent of soap and cologne, but it drifted after her on the air.

Just one more day. He'll be gone tomorrow.

It couldn't come soon enough ...

He found her, the next day, working in the ward office filling out patient records on the computer.

'I'm off,' he said, and she looked up and wondered why, when she'd been so keen to see him go, she should feel a pang of sadness that she was losing him.

Ridiculous. She wasn't losing him, he wasn't hers! And anyway, since the wedding they'd hardly seen each other. But that didn't mean they hadn't both been painfully, desperately aware. Yet he hadn't once, in all that time, suggested they repeat the folly of Saturday night—

'Got time for a coffee?'

She glanced up at the clock. Actually, she had plenty of time. There was nothing going on, for once, and although no doubt now she'd thought that all hell would break loose, for the minute, anyway, it was quiet.

Did she *want* to make time for a coffee? Totally different question.

'I can spare five minutes,' she said, logging off the computer and sliding back her chair.

He ushered her through the door first, his hand resting lightly on the small of her back, and she felt the warmth, the security of it all the way through to her bones. Except it was a false sense of security.

'We ought to talk,' he said quietly, once they were seated in the café.

She stirred her coffee, chasing the froth round the top, frowning at it as if it held the answers. 'Is there anything to say?'

He laughed, a short, harsh sound that cut the air. 'Amy, we spent the *night* together,' he said—unnecessarily, since she'd hardly forgotten.

'For old times' sake,' she pointed out. 'That was all.'

'Was it? Was it really?'

'Yes. It really was.'

He stared at her, searching her eyes for the longest moment, and then the expression in them was carefully banked and he looked away. 'OK. If that's what you want.'

It wasn't. She wanted *him*, but she couldn't trust him, because when her world had disintegrated and she'd needed him more than she'd ever needed anybody in her life, he'd turned his back on her.

She wasn't going through that again, not for him, not for anybody.

'It is what I want,' she lied. 'It didn't work, Matt, and there's no use harking back to it. We need to let it go.'

His eyes speared her. 'Have you?'

Let it go? *Let her baby go?*

She sucked in a breath and looked away.

'I didn't think so,' he said softly. 'Well, if it helps you any, neither have I. And I haven't forgotten you, Amy.'

She closed her eyes, wishing he would go, wishing he could stay. She heard the scrape of a chair, felt the touch of his hand on her shoulder.

'You know where I am if you change your mind.'

'I won't,' she vowed. She couldn't. She didn't dare. She simply wasn't strong enough to survive a second time.

He bent, tipped her head back with his fingers and dropped the gentlest, sweetest, saddest kiss on her lips.

'Goodbye, Amy. Take care of yourself.'

And then he was gone, walking swiftly away, leaving her there alone in the middle of the crowded café. She wanted to get up, to run after him, to yell at him to stop, she was sorry, she didn't mean it, please stay. But she didn't.

Somehow, just barely, she managed to stop herself, and no doubt one day she'd be grateful for that.

But right now, she felt as if she'd just thrown away her last chance at happiness, and all she wanted to do was cry.

CHAPTER THREE

IT TOOK her weeks to work out what was going on.

Weeks in which Matt was in her head morning, noon and night. She kept telling herself she'd done the right thing, that not seeing him again was sensible, but it wasn't easy to convince herself. Not easy at all, and Daisy and Ben being so blissfully happy didn't help.

She ached for him so much it was physical, but she'd done the right thing, sending him away. She had. She couldn't rely on him, couldn't trust him again with her heart. And she was genuinely relieved when her period came right on cue, because although she might want *him*, the thought of going through another pregnancy terrified her, and for the first time since the wedding she felt herself letting go of an inner tension she hadn't even been aware of.

She could move on now. They'd said their goodbyes, and it was done.

Finished.

The autumn came and went, and December arrived with a vengeance. It rained, and when it wasn't raining, it was sleeting, and then it dried up and didn't thaw for days. And her boiler broke down in her flat.

Marvellous, she thought. Just what she needed. She contacted her landlord, but it would be three weeks before it could be replaced—more, maybe, because plumbers were rushed off their feet after the freeze—and so she gave in to Ben and Daisy's gentle nagging, and moved into Daisy's house just ten days before Christmas.

'It's only temporary, till my boiler's fixed,' she told them firmly, but they just smiled and nodded and refused to take any rent on the grounds that it was better for the house to be occupied.

Then Daisy had her twenty-week scan, and of course she asked to see the photo. What else could she do? And she thought she'd be fine, she saw them all the time in her work, but it really got to her. Because of the link to Matt? She had no idea, but it haunted her that day and the next, popping up in every quiet moment and bringing with it a rush of grief that threatened to undermine her. She and Matt had been so happy, so deliriously overjoyed back then. And then, so shortly before her scan was due—

A laugh jerked her out of her thoughts, a laugh so like Matt's that it could so easily have been him, and she felt her heart squeeze. Stupid. She *knew* it was Ben. She heard him laugh all the time. And every time, she felt pain like a solid ball wedged in her chest.

She *missed* him. So, so much.

'Oh, Amy, great, I was hoping I'd find you here. New admission—thirty-four weeks, slight show last night, mild contractions which could just be Braxton Hicks'. Have you got time to admit her for me, please? She's just moved to the area last week, so we haven't seen her before but she's got her hand-held notes.'

She swiped the tears from her cheeks surreptitiously while she pretended to stifle a yawn. 'Sure. I could do with a break from this tedious admin. I'll just log off and I'll be with you. What's her name?'

'Helen Kendall. She's in the assessment room.'

Amy found her sitting on the edge of the chair looking worried and guilty, and she introduced herself.

'I'm so sorry to just come in,' Helen said, 'but I was worried because I've been really overdoing it with the move and I'm just so *tired*,' she blurted out, and then she started to cry.

'Oh, Helen,' Amy said, sitting down next to her and rubbing her back soothingly. 'You're exhausted—come on, let's get you into a gown and into bed, and let us take care of you.'

'It's all my fault, I shouldn't have let him talk me into it, we should have waited and now the baby's going to be too early,' she sobbed. Oh, she could understand the guilt all too well, but thirty-four weeks wasn't too early. Not like eighteen weeks ...

‘It’s not your fault,’ she said with a calm she didn’t feel, ‘and thirty-four weeks is quite manageable if it comes to that. It may well not. Come on, chin up, and let’s find out what’s going on.’

She handed Helen a gown, then left her alone for a few minutes to change and do a urine sample while she took the time to get her emotions back in order. What was the *matter* with her? She didn’t think about her baby at all, normally. It was seeing that picture of Daisy’s baby, and thinking about Matt again—always Matt.

She pulled herself together and went back to Helen.

This was her first pregnancy, it had been utterly straightforward and uncomplicated to this point, and there was no reason to suspect that anything would go wrong even if she did give birth early. The baby was moving normally, its heartbeat was loud and strong, and Helen relaxed visibly when she heard it.

‘Oh, that’s so reassuring,’ she said, her eyes filling, and she was still caressing her bump with a gentle, contented smile on her face when Ben arrived.

‘OK, Helen, let’s have a look at this baby and see how we’re doing,’ he said, and Amy watched the monitor.

The baby was a good size for her dates, there was no thinning of Helen’s uterus as yet, and her contractions might well stop at this point, if she was lucky. Not everyone was.

She sucked in a breath and stepped back, and Ben glanced up at her and frowned.

‘You OK?’

‘Just giving you a bit more room,’ she lied.

He grunted. It was a sound she understood. Matt used to do the same thing when he knew she was lying. Maybe they were more alike than she’d realised.

‘Right, Helen, I’m happy with that. We’ll monitor you, but I’m pretty sure they’re just Braxton Hicks’ and this will all settle down. We’ll give you drugs to halt it if we can and steroids to mature the baby’s lungs just to be on the safe side, and then if it’s all stable and there’s no change overnight, you can go home tomorrow.’

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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