

MILLS & BOON



Vintage *Cherish*

A Very Special Delivery

MYRNA MACKENZIE

Myrna Mackenzie

A Very Special Delivery

«HarperCollins»

Mackenzie M.

A Very Special Delivery / M. Mackenzie — «HarperCollins»,

I'm going to have my baby. Right now! Rushing to the rescue, Mick Hannon swept the vulnerable, delicate woman into his arms—and straight to the Maitland Maternity clinic door. But before he could leave, he suddenly found himself coaxing—and coaching—her through the birth! Mick was secretly investigating some odd incidents at the clinic. Yet protecting penniless but proud Laura Maitland and her beautiful, newborn baby girl quickly grew more important. Although Laura's past had opened her to suspicion, Mick couldn't believe she was anything but good and honest. But how to tell her his own secrets...?

© Mackenzie M.

© HarperCollins

Содержание

“Be careful. Don’t marry someone just to give your daughter a father,”	6
A Very Special Delivery	7
MYRNA MACKENZIE,	8
THE MAITLANDS:	9
Contents	10
Chapter One	11
Chapter Two	17
Chapter Three	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	27

**“Be careful. Don’t marry someone
just to give your daughter a father,”**

Mick warned.

Laura looked surprised. “I don’t intend to marry at all.”

Mick’s eyes seemed to turn fiercer than before, but he only gave her a quick nod. He gently touched her baby’s cheek, then he took Laura’s hand in his and studied it, as if remembering the hours they’d spent with their fingers linked.

Carefully he curled Laura’s fingers closed. “Sleep,” he whispered. “Rest. Have a good life.”

Laura watched him disappear. Mick wasn’t the first man who’d walked out of her life. Her father had walked away many times. Her baby’s father had left. So she shouldn’t feel sad to see Mick leave. Heavens, she didn’t even know him! Even so, he wasn’t a man she would easily forget.

“I hope there’s nothing to this imprinting thing, sweetie,” Laura crooned to her child. “Don’t go getting attached to Mick. Just don’t.”

Maitland Maternity: The Prodigal Children

The Inheritance by Marie Ferrarella

Silhouette Single Title

A Very Special Delivery by Myrna Mackenzie

SR #1540

The Missing Maitland by Stella Bagwell

SR #1546

A Very Special Delivery

Myrna Mackenzie



www.millsandboon.co.uk

MYRNA MACKENZIE,

winner of the Holt Medallion honoring outstanding literary talent, has always been fascinated by the belief that within every man is a hero, and inside every woman lives a heroine. She loves to write about ordinary people making extraordinary dreams come true. A former teacher, Myrna lives in the suburbs of Chicago with her husband—who was her high school sweetheart—and her two sons. She believes in love, laughter, music, vacations to the mountains, watching the stars, anything unattached to the words physical fitness and letting dust balls gather where they may. Readers can write to Myrna at P.O. Box 225, LaGrange, IL 60525-0225.

THE MAITLANDS:

MEGAN MAITLAND:

Matriarch of the Maitland family. Her life had been filled with sorrow, excitement and joy. Once she was reunited with her long-lost son, she'd thought all would be well. But now strange things were happening at her clinic, and she wasn't sure who was behind the mystery. Was her dream of a maternity clinic going to fail?

JANELLE MAITLAND:

The oldest of black sheep Robert Maitland's children. Ambitious and grasping, she'd stolen and blackmailed and lied to gain the Maitland money. She'd been captured and sent to jail, but she has broken out. Could she be behind the incidents? And was she representative of all the prodigal Maitlands?

RAFE MAITLAND:

The youngest of Robert's children. Hardworking rancher. He'd always lived life alone, but in the past few months he'd acquired a daughter—and a wife! Now he would do anything to protect his family....

LAURA MAITLAND:

Robert's third child. Vulnerable new mother. She'd swallowed her pride to ask for help with her child. She'd vowed never to depend on another man again, but Mick Hannon was very hard to resist....

LUKE MAITLAND:

Robert's second child. Even investigative reporter Blossom Woodward couldn't find anything out about his past. Or his future...

Contents

Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten
Chapter Eleven
Chapter Twelve

Chapter One

“I—I’m sorry, but I think I’ve waited too long. Please help me. I’m going to have my baby. Right now.”

The soft, shaky words caught Mick Hannon’s attention and he spun from where he’d been reviewing a set of blueprints outside Austin’s Maitland Maternity clinic to see a pale, delicate woman with long brown hair swaying on her feet. Her eyes were wide with distress, her arms cradled her abdomen. She was staring beseechingly at one of the gardeners who’d been trimming the bushes at this end of the long drive.

Just at that moment, the woman sucked in a deep breath and a low moan spilled from her pale lips. Her knees began to buckle.

The unfortunate gardener’s eyes went round and scared. He didn’t move.

“Hell,” Mick said, and he threw off his hard hat and rushed forward, slipping his hand behind the woman’s back to support her as she began to slide downward.

“Easy, darlin’,” he crooned kneeling as he helped her to sit down. “Easy, now. We’ll get you inside where the doctors will take care of you.” With his arm looped around her, the silk of her hair drifted against his neck, soft and smelling of flowers. In spite of her condition, she felt as light as froth. But as she leaned her weight against his shoulder, she stiffened, and he felt the tension of her body against his side. The contraction rippled through her, tightening her slender arms and legs. He looked straight into huge green eyes glazed with pain. A light sheen of perspiration had dampened a few strands of her hair, making them catch against her lips.

A sense of panic and urgency filled him. This might be a maternity clinic, but he was only here to add a wing to the building. Pregnant women and babies were outside the realm of what he knew or wanted to know.

“I’m—all right,” she said as if she’d read his very thoughts, and he wondered if he’d spoken without realizing it. “Don’t worry. This is—the way all women do it, I think. It’s supposed to hurt.” But her teeth sank into her lip and all he could think was that it wasn’t fair that a woman this tiny should have to bear a pain this big for a baby that would come back in sixteen years and break her heart fifty thousand times.

He slid in closer, meaning to lift her, hoping it was the right thing to do and that he wouldn’t hurt her.

But she shook her head slightly, gasping. “I think— I think maybe I should get up and walk. All the books tell you to walk,” she said in a strained voice the size of a field mouse.

Mick duly noted her need to be in control of her situation. He also noted how pale her skin was against her dark lashes. Gently, he adjusted his grip on her, trying to make her more comfortable, as she struggled to rise.

“Shh. Be still. You can walk later,” he suggested. “After the doctors say it’s all right.”

And right then, her body quivered and tightened and he could tell the roll of pain was gathering speed and depth. Her teeth clicked together as she held on to the scream he was sure she needed to give vent to.

“Hold on,” he said gruffly, trying not to jostle her and hurt her any more than she already was. “I’ll get a doctor. Don’t move.” Carefully he helped her to settle back against one of the pillars of the clinic’s entrance, then dashed off to find help.

The doors of the clinic slid back with an electric swish, and Mick strode into the waiting room, taking in his surroundings. There was no doctor, only a young receptionist in serious conversation with Megan Maitland, CEO of Maitland Maternity and matriarch of the Maitland clan, one of the first people he’d learned to recognize when he arrived in Austin a week ago. The tension in his shoulders relaxed ever so slightly. Megan probably knew a lot about women on the verge of giving birth.

“Ms. Maitland, please. There’s a woman outside who needs you,” he said, and to his relief, Megan only looked startled for a second before she nodded and rushed out the door in front of him.

Mick followed close behind her, but his heart nearly stopped beating when he saw his pregnant beauty standing on unsteady legs and trying to move toward the building. Her face was pale, her eyes stricken. She slipped, and Megan rushed forward, catching her as they both nearly went down. The older woman gave the younger one her strength.

The pregnant woman shuddered and spoke, her words coming out in a garbled whisper. She closed her eyes and once again struggled to rise.

This wouldn’t do. To hell with what the doctor’s would advise—or anything else. Mick stepped in and scooped this fragile, valiant woman into his arms, holding her close.

He glanced down at her. “You all right?”

She opened her eyes and nodded tightly, then took a gasping breath of air as she looked toward Megan.

“Now, blow it out,” he directed, when it seemed as if the air had gotten trapped in her lungs.

She did, then took another breath and let it out, then another. She stole another quick glance toward the woman who was a legend in the baby birthing business.

“Okay. I’m—I’m...better now,” the soft bundle of woman he was holding managed to say, and his attention was drawn to those green eyes that were now gazing straight into his own. “I—thank you for being here, and for helping me, but—I think I’ve finally pulled myself together now.” Her glance took in both Mick and Megan. “I’m sorry that I acted so—so—”

“Pregnant?” he guessed with a hint of a smile.

She tried to smile back, but it was obvious that she was very weak. How in the world had she even managed to get here? “Pregnant,” she agreed. “And stupid in not realizing my back pains were real contractions. But—I’m sure I’m fine now. You can put me down. Now that I’ve caught my breath I can walk,” she said. She pushed against his chest with those delicate, fluttery hands of hers. A fruit fly would have made more of an impact. Her breath still sounded a bit labored, and he made no move to follow her instructions.

He also noticed that she wasn’t wearing a ring. So? Maybe she didn’t have a husband...or maybe, well, there were plenty of pitiful excuses for husbands around. His father and stepfather had been cut from that very cloth, but with that thought, his beauty’s baby chose that moment to move into action again. Mick felt the quick catch in her breath. Tension climbed his body as he clutched the woman close.

“Let’s get her inside,” Megan said. A chill trickle of fear ran sprints up and down his spine. “We’ll get her into a wheelchair and into the delivery room.”

But the lady in his arms clutched tighter as the pain climbed and Megan shook her head.

“All right, never mind the wheelchair—or protocol. Come with me. I’ve had three babies of my own and I’m definitely of the opinion that when a woman is in labor, she deserves to be given whatever she needs. Right now, Mr. Hannon, this woman appears to need you.”

For half a second, Mick wondered how the woman knew his name. But then, he’d heard she made a point of learning the names of those who worked for her. With the recent acts of vandalism at the clinic, she’d want to be able to identify the temporary employees. That wasn’t good. The less the Maitlands knew of him the better. He should really leave now that he’d gotten his silken-haired beauty some help.

He opened his mouth to suggest that he needed to get back to work, but then the woman in his arms closed her eyes. Her delicate jaw tensed. And the gates of reason swung shut with a muffled click. He reluctantly nodded his agreement to Megan. He would stay here a few minutes longer.

Briskly Megan led the way into the clinic, past the cool pastel reception area and down a corridor into a birthing room decorated in pale blue and white with honey-toned wood accents. It looked more homey than the hotel room Mick was staying in right now.

Gently, he deposited the lady in his arms in a cushioned rocker, but she was apparently beyond noticing her surroundings. Indeed, she had curved those slender hands around his fingers and was holding on for dear life as if only he could save her. She looked up at him with deep distress in her eyes and, automatically, he dropped to his knees, his jeans sinking into the plush carpet. He kept his eyes on hers and let her try to crush his big hands with her small ones.

"It's all right," he said. "Hold on to me."

"You're going to do just fine," Megan said. "Mick and I are going to make sure of that."

For half a second Mick's concentration broke. Belatedly, he remembered what he'd known for years. He was no woman's champion, and he had excellent reasons to steer clear of tempting women who were nesting. Still, right now his reservations, his hard-and-fast rules for living his life would have to be set aside. He turned his attention back to his damsel in distress.

"You'll be fine, sunshine," he whispered reassuringly. "And so will baby sunshine."

His lady gave a quick, chopping nod of her head, then simply stared back at him fiercely as if he possessed some secret he knew he didn't have. She held herself almost motionless, only her never-let-go grip on his fingers revealing the battle being fought within her body.

She's too still, Mick thought. As if she weren't even alive. "Ms. Maitland?" he asked.

"Breathe," Megan directed the woman. "Like this." And soon Mick was breathing along with her, his pregnant beauty watching his every move and taking her cues from him.

When the contraction finally passed, she looked down at her hands, at her onion-white knuckles and her choking grip on his fingers. Carefully she opened her hands and released him.

"Sorry," she whispered weakly. "Thank you." Her voice was small, some might say prim.

"Don't mention it." He softened his usually low, gruff voice as much as he could. "You're much too small to hurt me."

"I'm sure this isn't how you planned to spend your afternoon," she said, licking dry lips.

He handed her the glass of water Megan passed to him. "Hey, sweet stuff, you're making my day a lot more interesting than it might have been. It's not all that often that a man gets to take a beautiful woman in his arms on his coffee break. I'll be the envy of my men." From somewhere he managed to dredge up a reassuring smile.

"Thank you for being kind." An entrancing trace of pink tinged the lady's cheeks. She looked away. As if she thought he would repeat tales of her most private moments to his men.

Which reminded him, his co-workers would be thinking he'd gone back to Dallas and left them behind.

"Excuse me, Ms. Maitland, but..." He nodded toward the window, not wanting to mention his concern and worry his lovely little mother-to-be even more.

Megan nodded. "I already had our receptionist let your crew know we had commandeered your services. You don't mind?"

He minded, but he could tell that the beauty was listening. The truth was that he'd spent his whole adult life avoiding women who represented hearth and home. In fact, the last time he'd been this intimate with a woman, he'd been intent on making sure he didn't make any babies while he took his pleasure. He'd certainly never thought to see the inside of a birthing room.

Shouldn't be here now, he thought, but he turned his attention to the woman and Megan, who was, essentially, his employer these days.

"You came in alone," Megan said to the woman. "Have you met with one of the doctors here before?"

A vehement shaking of the head followed. "I just arrived in town today."

"Do you...have someone meeting you here?"

Those soft green eyes looked suddenly unsure. "I'm here alone. I'm—not married, if that's what you mean. But I'm okay. Really, I can do this on my own," the woman added quickly, looking at Mick.

In spite of her uncomfortable condition, she managed to raise that delicate chin in an attempt at bravado. Her skin was dewy and pale, a startling contrast to pink lips, dark hair and the vulnerable but rich green of her eyes. The thought that some man had tasted those lips, brushed his fingers through that silken hair and gazed into those eyes as he joined his body to hers nine months ago skimmed through Mick's mind, and his breath snagged in his throat. Instantly he felt like even more of a heel than the jerk who'd left her to deal with the consequences.

But she was still staring at him, waiting. Obviously she wanted him to leave. No surprise. This was an intimate situation. He could understand her reluctance to share it with a stranger. She'd be even more reluctant to have him here, and so would Megan if they knew who he was and that he was at Maitland Maternity under false pretenses.

"You're quite a gutsy lady," he said with a nod of admiration at his dark-haired woman. "Make sure and say hello to your little one when she arrives."

He started to rise, but Megan shook her head.

"Not yet," she said, before turning to her patient.

"I admire your determination, dear, but I hope you'll reconsider," Megan said gently. "I've gone through labor alone, and believe me, it's much better to have someone coach you along, even if they're inexperienced. Mr. Hannon's been given the green light to stay. It's unorthodox to have him here, perhaps, but we'll find him a help. You will help, won't you?"

He wanted to say no, but there didn't seem to be any answer but yes. If he left, who would she hold on to when the pain came? Megan's fingers looked much too fragile. The nurse who had entered moments ago had other details to see to.

"I'll stay," he agreed.

"That wouldn't be fair," the woman was saying. "You just had the misfortune to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. And really—I don't need anyone. I want to do this by myself."

He really ought to be relieved at her dismissal. The thought of staying here and watching this woman suffer ranked right at the top of the list of things he didn't want to do today or ever. But the memory of that lost, frightened look in her eyes was still fresh.

"I'd consider it an honor if you'd let me stay," he said, countering her request. "Who knows when I might need to know how to do this again?" he tried to tease, and it seemed to work.

"See there, dear. You'd be doing Mick a favor for when he has his own children," Megan agreed brightly.

Even though he'd never have any children, Mick thought.

Still, when the next contraction started, he reached out for her hand and welcomed the soft pads of her fingertips pressing into his skin. He stroked his thumb over her palm.

"Don't worry, sweetheart," he whispered. "You're the bravest woman in the city right now. Your baby's going to be lucky to get someone who's such a fighter."

He slipped his hand behind her and rubbed small circles over her slender lower back as Megan directed him to.

The woman looked up at him helplessly.

"Hold on to me," he whispered. "Let me help you. Yell at me if it helps. Tell me what you think of the male race," he urged when she simply clamped her hands down harder on him.

That made those green eyes flash. "Men—I—yes. I—I just can't say. I don't want to talk now. I can't think straight," she choked out, but the words were said with such intensity that Mick hoped that she'd found some release.

Finally the contraction slid away. The woman slumped back in her chair. She cast a slightly guilty look at Mick, but not too guilty, he noted. There was a little resentment thrown in, as well.

He grinned at her. "I almost got you to swear, didn't I?" he asked.

"I never swear."

"But you wanted to. And you didn't think about the pain while I was irritating you, did you?"

A wan smile lifted one corner of her lips. “Now I’m on to you,” she said tiredly. She looked down. “Thank you,” she said in a small voice. “You ever consider doing this for a living?”

“I’ll take it up with my boss. If any of the guys go into labor, maybe he’ll make use of my services.”

Megan chuckled. She’d been coaching Mick during the contraction, but now she took up the clipboard the nurse had carried in with her and turned to her patient. “Well, dear, we really seem to be doing things backward today,” she said, “but we do need to get a bit of information from you, now that we have some breathing space.”

The woman seemed to gather a cloak of pride around her. She withdrew her hand from Mick’s. Her fingers absently pleated a fold of her yellow maternity top. “You want to know who I am.”

“For starters, yes,” Megan said gently.

The woman took a long, deep breath. For a minute Mick thought she was going to have another contraction, but then she squared her shoulders and nodded slowly.

“I’m Laura Maitland,” she said in that soft voice.

To her credit, Megan barely blinked. “From Las Vegas?”

Laura’s body stiffened slightly, as if someone had traced a probing finger down her spine. “Yes. A long time ago.”

“My late husband William’s niece,” Megan said. “I’ve been trying to get in touch with you.”

Laura looked away.

“Yes, I know. I’m—afraid my family hasn’t been very good to yours. I can understand why you’d want to confront my brothers and me. Our family has wronged you terribly.”

Mick had read the story about how Janelle Maitland had kidnapped Megan’s grandson. He knew of the eventual recovery of the child. He’d heard that Janelle had a sister.

“If I could change the past, I would,” Laura whispered to Megan. “I don’t expect you to welcome me. I wouldn’t have come at all if I’d had anywhere else to go, but there wasn’t much money and no insurance. I was worried about my baby, and...well, I’ve seen news of the clinic on television and you had sent me that invitation to the Maitland Christmas reunion, so I just...headed here. I—I can’t pay you right away, but my baby’s birth won’t be charity, I promise. If you let me have my child here, I’ll make it up to you, somehow.”

A long silence followed. Laura turned sad, worried eyes to the blue-eyed matriarch of the Maitland clan.

Megan laid a gentle hand on the woman’s shoulder. “My dear, any woman in the world would ask for help when her child is at stake. I’ve been a woman in need myself, so please don’t distress yourself. Of course you’ll have your baby here. And please, don’t worry about the other just now. It wasn’t your doing, and the past doesn’t matter one whit when there’s a baby being born.”

But Mick knew the past did matter. If a person forgot his history, he made mistakes. He could hurt people. It helped to remember that and to know which paths were open to a man and which were closed.

But then the nurse looked at him, and his only thought was to get out of the way so that she could help prepare Laura for what lay ahead.

He took Laura’s hand into his own and touched his lips to the soft skin of her palm. “You’re doing great, angel,” he told her with a smile. “I’m just going to leave you to the pros now. Don’t swear too much at the medical professionals,” he teased.

But she hung on to his hand when he started to pull away.

“Thank you, Mr. Hannon,” she said solemnly, and he knew she thought he meant to slip away permanently.

Indeed, when he exited the room, he thought she was right. He did his best to think of Laura Maitland only as an interesting incident in his day, not as a real, living, flesh-and-blood, steel-and-silk woman.

Probably no one would blame him for simply going back to his job. It was the smart thing to do. He had come to Austin for a good cause, but to accomplish his goal, he needed to remain anonymous, in the shadows. Something as unusual as a construction worker helping out in the delivery room just might attract speculation.

“Be smart, Hannon. Don’t go letting sentiment or an overabundance of testosterone lead you around. A man in your position would do well to stay far away from Laura Maitland,” he whispered to himself.

He said that. He meant it, but then he heard a low moan. Laura was having another contraction. She would be scared.

Mick shoved the door open and entered the room uninvited.

Chapter Two

When Mick Hannon strode back into the birthing room, all broad shoulders and determination, Laura's tension level dropped several notches. His intense, blue-eyed gaze bypassed the doctor, the nurse and Megan, targeting Laura, where she now lay on the bed. She stared back as the man's presence filled the room. He moved to her without asking anyone for permission or instruction, and the rest of the room fell away. The pain was no less. In fact, the great rolling waves biting into her were stronger than ever. Still, three seconds earlier she had doubted her ability to stay sane all the way to the end of the contraction. Now she knew that she would at least do that.

He held out his hands and she reached for the life-line. She stared into his eyes and concentrated on that deep blue flecked with silver. She breathed when he told her to breathe.

When her mind wavered and she thought she would go crazy with pain, she squeezed his hands harder and strove to blot out everything but the gravelly tones of his voice as he whispered encouragement.

"You're amazing," he told her, and that one statement distracted her. It was enough to keep her holding on for five seconds longer, even though she knew better than to believe the pretty lies that men offered.

Hours later, Laura took one last tired glance into Mick Hannon's fierce blue eyes, gripped his fingers tightly, and with a cry of pain and exhaustion, pushed her child into the world and into Dr. Abby Maitland's waiting hands.

For two seconds, there was total silence as the wonder of life renewing itself filled the room. Then a tiny, angry cry rang out.

"Thank heaven and Texas," Mick said on a breath. He shook his head in amazement as Laura fell back against the bed and gazed tiredly up at him.

"You did it, lady," he whispered, leaning over her, and he gently smoothed her damp hair back from her brow. "Congratulations. You brought your baby safely into the world."

His words were so intimately low that for a moment Laura thought he was going to pull her close in a hug, or maybe he was even going to kiss her. The look in his eyes was that intense. But then the baby let out another cry and Mick took a deep, audible breath. He stopped his forward momentum and straightened to his full and considerable height.

"You're okay, aren't you?" he asked quietly.

She tried to nod her head.

"You're tired," Megan said sympathetically.

"I'm okay," Laura managed to say. "My baby. Is my baby—"

"She's perfect," Megan said with a soft smile. "Your daughter is so perfect. So beautiful." Her tone was awed and reverent, as if this experience was new for her all over again. Laura noted for the first time that the woman had shed the jacket to a suit that could only have been designed by Donna Karan. Her lovely hair had grown a bit mussed. Megan had jumped right in to help, as if she were a midwife, not a CEO. Now she looked tired but pleased. Laura understood why expectant mothers flocked to her clinic.

"Isn't this just the most precious child you've ever seen, Mick?" Megan was saying, and Laura turned again to look at the man, the total stranger who had helped Megan coach her through the most painful, rewarding hours of her life. For the first time she saw him clearly, not through a haze of pain. His black hair was rumpled where he'd brushed long, lean fingers through it countless times. The blue chambray of his shirt clung to his broad shoulders damply in spite of the air-conditioned room. His mouth looked incredibly soft, even as his lips parted slightly in bewildered amazement.

Laura gazed at him, waiting for his answer.

For the first time he looked...awkward. "She's a feisty little thing," he finally said. "And she's definitely got all her fingers and toes. Cute little fingers and toes, too. Even some hair on her head."

Laura wished she had the energy to laugh. She knew just how red and wrinkled and, well, not particularly beautiful most babies would seem to the average male. While she waited for the doctor and nurse to finish with her baby, she smiled her gratitude at Mick. He was trying so hard to think of something positive to say.

But then he looked at the baby again and his eyes darkened with concern. "Is she really supposed to be that tiny?" he asked Dr. Abby. "Surely not. She's not much bigger than my cupped hands. How could anything that small cause so much trouble?"

Megan chuckled. "I'm sure she'll cause her mother a great deal more trouble before she's grown up. It's one of the wonderful things children do, you know." Laura had the feeling she meant every word.

When Dr. Maitland gave Laura her baby to cuddle close to her, Laura captured one tiny flailing hand and kissed the softness of her child's skin. A sudden sense of wonder, of having been involved in a small miracle, of having been given a gift too overwhelmingly generous for anyone to ever deserve, filled her. Unbelievable as it seemed, this baby had come from her, from inside her own body. This vulnerable, amazing child was hers to keep and care for and love. From a relationship that had ended ugly, from an experience that had threatened to overpower her, had come this amazing, sweet little being. Gratitude filled her soul.

She looked up into Mick's dark blue eyes. He was gazing at her and her daughter intensely, with a sense of awe and disbelief that rivaled her own, and with an unmistakable air of...reservation. As if he wanted to move closer and edge away at the same time.

Laura smiled at him. She held out her free hand. "Thank you for helping me," she said weakly. "I was pretty scared there for a while, I think."

He shook his head. "You were pretty brave, I think, and no thanks are needed. You were the one who did all the work."

He took a deep breath and now she was absolutely sure that he wanted to step away, that now that the crisis had passed he wanted to get out of here fast. Well, he'd definitely earned his freedom. He probably had plenty of important tasks waiting for him, maybe even a woman wondering where he was. Of course he would have a woman, and of course there was no reason for him to have to stay any longer, but she couldn't let him go without letting him know just how important his presence had been.

She reached out and took one of his big callused hands, turning it over. In spite of her exhaustion or maybe because of it, a frisson of sensation spiraled down her arm and headed straight through her body when her skin met his. Strange that she should react to the man now when she'd been gripping these same hands for hours, thinking only that they represented safety and strength. Small red indentations marred his palms.

"You let me dig my fingernails into you, and you didn't complain," she said softly. "The guys on the crew are sure going to wonder what you've been doing." Exhausted as she was, she wanted to do this right. She knew that once he walked out that door, his part in her life would be past. But it had been such an important part. She wanted him to leave feeling good about this experience, not uncomfortable. He'd teased her earlier when she'd been embarrassed. How could she do any less?

"No problem. I'll just tell them I've been wrestling with a tigress," he promised. "A courageous, determined, green-eyed tigress. That'll make them wonder. In fact, I should be grateful to you, Ms. Maitland. You've probably made my reputation. I disappear for hours and come back scratched and barely able to think straight."

She couldn't help smiling. "Ah, we've done a good day's work then, love," she told her baby, kissing the top of her head.

“You have,” Megan agreed, and Laura turned her attention to the beaming eyes of the woman still standing beside her.

Tears came to Laura’s eyes. “Thank you for helping me,” she said softly. “I see now why your clinic has such a good reputation, even among the rich and famous. Do you always give such personal service?”

Abby Maitland chuckled.

For the first time Megan Maitland looked mildly flustered. “Any woman would have done the same. And you are family. Now, you rest. I’ll see you around, my dear,” she said, tucking her hair back into place and smoothing her jacket as she repaired whatever damage had been done. “Come on, Abby,” she told her daughter. “Let’s let Laura have some time to get acquainted with her baby.”

Mick started to move away, too, as the women filed out the door, but Laura reached out and touched his arm.

He stopped.

She realized that they were totally alone for the first time since this ordeal had begun. She realized what an incredibly, stunningly handsome man he was. The kind of man who undoubtedly had women hitting on him every day and not because they needed a labor coach, either.

“I know I’ll see Megan again, but I doubt we’ll meet again, Mr. Hannon. I’d like to repay you in some way. And please don’t say it’s not necessary,” she said as he opened his mouth. “As nice as you’ve been, I know this couldn’t have been on your list of things to do on a busy workday.”

He gave her that “are you crazy?” look that some men are so very good at. “Top of the list,” he insisted. “Holding a beautiful woman’s hand is always a pleasure.”

She smiled. “You’re quite a charmer, Mr. Hannon, but seriously, let me do something for you. At least give me your address so I can send you an appropriate thank-you gift.”

His lips thinned into a stubborn line. “I don’t live in Austin. I’m just in town for the duration of the job.”

“And there’s nothing I can do for you?”

He looked down at where her baby was sleeping on her stomach.

“If she were a boy, I’d gladly name her Mick,” she said gently.

He shook his head. “Thank you, but you wouldn’t want to do that. Just...be careful. Don’t marry the first man who comes along just to give her a father. The results can sometimes be disastrous.”

She widened her eyes. “I suppose you don’t have to worry, then. I don’t intend to marry at all.”

His eyes seemed to turn fiercer than before, but he only gave her a quick nod. “Then that won’t be a problem, will it?”

He gently touched just the tip of his finger to her baby’s cheek, then he took her hand in his and studied it, as if remembering the hours they’d spent with their fingers linked.

Carefully he curled her fingers closed. He lay her hand back on her child. “Sleep,” he whispered. “Rest. Have a good life, Ms. Maitland.”

And quietly he turned to leave her. She watched his broad back disappear.

He wasn’t the first man she’d watched walk out of her life. Her father had walked away many times. Her baby’s father had been offended that she would even ask for him to consider taking home the daughter of a Vegas showgirl to meet his family.

So it shouldn’t have made her feel a bit sad to see Mick Hannon leaving. Heavens, she didn’t even know him. She certainly didn’t want him to stay. She didn’t want any man in her life anymore, especially one as wickedly handsome and tempting as Mick Hannon.

Even so, he wasn’t a man she would turn around and forget by morning. Lifting her hand, palm up, she examined the skin that looked no different than it had this morning. But something had changed. The sensation of Mick Hannon’s strong fingers tangled with hers lingered.

"I hope there's nothing to this imprinting thing, sweetie," Laura crooned to her child. "Remember, you're not a baby duck, angel. The first man you see isn't going to be your father. So don't go getting attached to Mr. Hannon. Just don't."

Laura woke to the sound of frantic whispers outside her room. She immediately looked toward the small bassinet beside her bed. Her baby had awakened several times during the night, but now she was sleeping quietly. Whatever was going on, it didn't have anything to do with her child.

The whispers rose a pitch, and she looked expectantly toward the door.

"You can't go in there, Mr. Maitland. Visiting hours won't be for several more hours."

But the door swung back, anyway, and a tall, dark-haired, green-eyed man moved in.

Laura blinked several times, then a smile lifted her lips. "Rafe? It can't really be my baby brother, can it? You're here?" She sat up in a rush before remembering what a battering her body had taken yesterday.

A tiny gasp escaped her, and Rafe rolled his eyes and strode to her bedside, catching her up in a gentle hug. "You get out of that bed and I'll show you that I'm still bigger than you even if you're two years older. And you bet I'm here. A hundred rattlesnakes couldn't keep me away once I heard the rumors about what had been going on here yesterday. I've been trying to reach you for weeks. Ever since I got that first invitation from Megan to come here for the family reunion."

"Mine had to be forwarded several times," she admitted. After Greg, her fiancé, had made it clear he wasn't going to be a husband or father, she'd left California, needing a fresh start and a place to heal in private.

Rafe's eyes turned fierce. "You could have told me," he said, his voice breaking slightly as he looked toward the baby. "Hon, why didn't you tell me? We talked on the phone often enough up until you moved and we lost touch a few months ago."

Laura felt the threat of tears as she tried to find some answer that would make sense. She shook her head.

"Maybe because even though I hated Greg for a while after he left me, I didn't want him dead. And don't tell me that you wouldn't have wanted to exact a little retribution."

Rafe opened his mouth, then closed it, his eyes angry. He couldn't tell her that he wouldn't have tried to protect her.

Which led her to the deeper reason she hadn't turned to her brothers for help. After her shipwrecked romance, she'd really needed to prove that she could survive alone. She just couldn't be like her mother, leaning on the nearest man in order to stand up. And both her brothers were men made for leaning on.

"I would have told you soon," she said. "Just as soon as I got settled. I'm here, aren't I?" she asked, trying to smile.

He took her hand, studying it as if he didn't believe she was real. It had been weeks since they'd talked on the phone, months since they'd seen each other.

"You didn't have to go through childbirth alone."

"I didn't." She'd had Mick. She'd leaned on him. The truth was uncomfortable.

"I heard." There was hurt in his voice.

"I'm sorry, Rafe," she said, meaning every word. "It's just that you and Luke and I have been on our own for a long time. Sometimes we just need to go underground." Like wounded animals who protected themselves by hiding, even from those they loved.

"Yes, we do tend to do that, but two of us weren't pregnant," Rafe pointed out. "At least I'm not. Who knows about Luke? Nobody's heard from him lately."

In spite of Rafe's attempt at a joke, a sad, awkward silence followed. Concern for Luke hung in the air.

"Oh, Rafe, I've missed you," Laura said with a small, sobbing croak.

And he caught her close and kissed her hair. "I've missed you, too, hon," he said, his voice thick. "Tons. We've got a lot of catching up to do. I want you to meet my wife, Greer. She's Megan's assistant. That's how I heard you were here."

Laura pulled back, her eyes opening wide. "You're married? You? That's...that's wonderful. I can't wait to meet the woman who finally tamed you. I guess you know I have someone for you to meet, too." She picked up her baby, who was beginning to stir. "Meet your uncle Rafe, Meggie. He's a big guy, but he's pretty sweet most of the time."

Rafe grinned. "Don't tell anyone she said that part about being sweet, little one," he told his niece, hesitantly touching just the baby's blanket. "My friends might not understand. She's so tiny," he said with awe, and Laura couldn't forget a black-haired man with fierce blue eyes saying just the same thing. She hurriedly pushed the thought away.

"She'll grow, I think," Laura promised.

"Meggie?" he asked.

Laura smiled then and shrugged. "Megan Maitland didn't have to let me stay here, but she did. What's more, a nurse told me that the reason Megan is so sympathetic to single mothers is because her first baby's father deserted her. Just like me. She made her way alone just as I want to."

"She's a good woman."

"I know. Janelle shouldn't have tried to hurt her."

Rafe's eyes darkened. "Our sister did lots of damage. You need to know that. Things have been happening at the clinic. Sabotaged water pipes. A small fire. Janelle's on the loose, and suddenly both her sister and brother show up in Austin."

Laura sucked in a deep breath. "Do you think that Janelle is behind all these attempts to sabotage the clinic?"

He shrugged. "Janelle's capable of some pretty sleazy stuff. She convinced Megan that the baby she'd thought had died at birth was Janelle's husband, when Janelle knew all along that Clarise O'Hara and her husband had illegally adopted Connor right after he was born. She knew exactly where the real Connor was and didn't tell Megan. What's worse, Janelle kidnapped Megan's baby grandson. I think she'd do almost anything for money or revenge."

"And you and I could be suspects if we left, couldn't we?" she asked. "It would look like we just came here at Janelle's behest to cause more trouble for the Maitlands."

"Does that mean you're staying?"

"I can't leave without trying to repay Megan, anyway."

Rafe opened his mouth.

Laura shook her head. "On my own, Rafe, but thank you for almost offering. I have to do this on my own. No help."

He frowned at her. "If you'd let me help yesterday, you wouldn't have needed a rogue construction worker helping you. He didn't see you naked, did he, hon?"

Laura put on her best indignant older-sister look, even though she felt a blush creeping up. "It wasn't like that, Rafe. Believe me, the man wasn't thinking about anything improper at the time."

At that, he looked like he was going to argue. She shook her head and smiled, trying to distract him by making plans to meet his wife and maybe their half siblings, R.J. and Anna, her father's other family that she hadn't even known of until now.

After Rafe had gone, Laura cuddled Meggie close. "Just you and me, sweetie," she crooned.

And the scent of her baby made her recall a man with fierce, lake-blue eyes. A man who had, as Rafe implied, seen parts of her body and her soul that no one usually ever saw.

For half a second she allowed herself to wonder what Mick Hannon was doing right now.

Chapter Three

Eight days had gone by since Mick's debut as a labor coach, but right now he felt as tense as he had then. He rapped hard on the door Mrs. Parker had directed him to in her boardinghouse, hoping that Laura was home.

"Answer the door, hon," he said, raising his clenched fist to knock again.

Just then the door swung back and there she was, all green eyes and long bare legs beneath those denim cutoffs she was wearing. His breath nearly died in his throat. He'd forgotten what a lovely creature she was.

"Mick?" A trace of pink tinged her cheeks, and her voice rose as if she hadn't seen him in eight years instead of eight days. If things had worked out, that might well have been true, but things had happened and he couldn't stay away.

"Invite me in," he suggested with a lazy smile as she stood there staring at him, her lovely lips parted slightly.

The sweet pink flush deepened. She smiled somewhat self-consciously. "Of course. Come in," she said, holding out her arm in a big swoop. "You startled me," she said by way of explanation.

No surprise. He'd startled himself by coming here.

"Where's your little munchkin?" he asked, looking around the room. Then he spied her bassinet in the corner. "Is she sleeping?" He lowered his voice to a whisper.

Just then a tiny pair of toes kicked into the air.

Laura chuckled. "I'd say...no. But she's happy right now. We can talk. Or maybe you just came to see the baby."

Confusion colored those green eyes. For a second Mick wondered how many men had lost track of their conversations just by staring into those eyes. He wondered how many men had forgotten to breathe just being this close to the soap-and-water-and-woman scent of Laura. He didn't kid himself into believing that he was the first whose chest felt tight when he looked at her. Meggie had been conceived by a man making love to Laura. A man who'd been so driven by passion that he'd failed to take precautions to protect her when he clearly hadn't wanted a child.

It wasn't a picture that he wanted to focus on, so he charged ahead with the subject that had drawn him here.

"I hear you're planning on working at the day-care center at the clinic," he began quietly.

Laura blinked. "My, word does spread quickly. I only made that decision yesterday, but yes, I'll be starting in about a week. Why do you ask?"

He shrugged. "I work outside the hospital, and gossip about the Maitlands spreads quickly. I know your daughter's name, that you have two brothers named Rafe and Luke, that you have half siblings named R.J. and Anna that you've just met for the first time in your life. I'm privy to all the news. That's why I'm here."

He paused to look around before continuing. "The clinic has experienced some acts of vandalism lately."

"I know that."

"It might be the Maitlands and not just the clinic that's being targeted." Mick spoke gently.

Her eyes widened. She sucked in a deep breath. "You think I have something to do with what's been happening?"

Instantly he felt like giving himself a kick in the butt. "Damn it, don't look like that. Of course I don't think that."

She raised one brow. "Why not? You don't know me."

“You think I could stare into your eyes for hours and not know you a little?” Ah, she didn’t like that much better than she’d liked his first statement. The lady didn’t want her privacy breached. Well, he understood that feeling all too well.

“Lady, I saw you with your baby, and I heard the way you spoke to me and to Megan. You wouldn’t do anything to jeopardize her or any of the babies being born in that clinic.”

“I wouldn’t,” she said solemnly. “And I thank you for saying that.”

Mick sighed. He had a feeling she didn’t completely believe his words could be trusted. And maybe they couldn’t, because there was a lot he wasn’t telling her. Like the fact that it was his stepfather, Clyde Mitchum, who had deserted a pregnant Megan years ago. And the fact that Clyde was back in town and Mick had followed him here to keep an eye on him. And there was also the fact that he wasn’t revealing that last little bit of information to anyone, least of all to Clyde.

No one knew that he and Clyde were related and no one would until he found out just what Clyde was up to, and he was definitely up to something, good or bad. He’d hinted as much on the phone a few weeks ago. But if Mick showed his hand now, he’d never know just what Clyde’s plans were. His stepfather was more than capable of going underground.

“Laura, I’m concerned for you,” he said, which was the absolute truth. “The clinic might not be a safe place. If you need a job, I’m sure I could find you one.”

That delicate brow rose again. That delicate sexy brow. She was probably wondering just what kind of pull a construction worker would have. He was probably not going to tell her that he was on the verge of becoming a partner in Dell Douglas Construction at Dell’s request, and that Dell knew most of the people in the Austin construction scene. It was how Mick had gotten this job, but saying that would lead to too many other explanations.

“You don’t have to work at the clinic,” he repeated.

She smiled. “I know. I have a brother who would take me in if I’d let him. But I want this job. It will give me a chance to start to pay back Megan. They’re short on employees at the day-care center and that means fewer employees at the clinic can leave their children there, and more absenteeism at the clinic itself. I could be a help. I love children, and I’ve studied nursing. I know enough to be of aid in an emergency.”

Okay, so there was going to be no talking her out of this. He tried to think fast.

“I’m going to worry about you, you know.” His voice dropped soft and low and he found that he was only speaking the truth this time. It was going to drive him nuts not knowing when something was going to happen next, or even if something was going to happen next. He wished he knew just who had it in for the Maitlands so badly.

“You’re such a good man, Mick.”

No, he was a heel. Here today, gone tomorrow, just like his alcoholic father had been and like Clyde was most of the time. And he could see that he wasn’t making his point.

“You’re determined to take this job?”

Her chin came up. “I’m an adult, Mick. I make my own decisions.”

“I respect that, but it doesn’t make me worry less. Will you do me a favor?”

“What kind of a favor?”

“Ease my mind. Let me at least see you to and from work. Let me stop in to check up on you now and then.”

“That’s really not necessary.”

“You’d let me suffer when I don’t have to?”

She grinned. “That’s low, Mick.”

He grinned back. “You bet it is, but it’s also the truth. I’m not asking for the world.”

She gazed down at her hands, which were resting in her lap. He was helpless not to look beyond her fingertips to that long bare stretch of legs. Mick took a deep breath and concentrated on the shiny crest of her hair.

“Laura?” he urged.

She brought her head up, her long hair swishing over her shoulders. “You stayed with me for hours. You didn’t ask for anything, really, but letting you stand guard over me seems so...nineteenth century. I can take care of myself.”

“Are your brothers capable of taking care of themselves?”

“Of course. They’re grown men.”

“Don’t you worry about them now and then?”

“Every day. Especially Luke. I don’t even know where he is.”

“So it’s okay to worry even if you trust them to be capable men.”

She smiled at him and stood up, walking toward him. Her smile was both innocent and yet terribly dangerous to him. He wanted to reach out and touch, maybe even to grab. He forced himself to hold his hands still.

“You’re too smart for your own good, Mick Hannon.”

He shrugged. “That’s not an answer.”

“I don’t see how letting you do something else for me would help in repaying you in any way.”

“It would soothe me. It would help me concentrate. It’s very important to concentrate when you’re working with heavy machinery.”

“Mick,” she drawled. “Don’t make me worry, too.”

He got to his feet. He reached out and indulged himself by running one long finger down the smoothness of her cheek. “I’m a desperate man, Laura. I’m genuinely worried.”

She nearly gasped at his touch, and a slight blush turned her cheeks an enticing, desirable rose. Skin made for nibbling on. Mick did his best to resist.

She frowned. “You shouldn’t be worrying about me. That will only attract my brother’s attention and then Rafe will be pacing the floor. You won’t approach him?”

“Afraid it’s too late. He approached me several days ago.”

Laura frowned. “What did he want? No, don’t tell me what he wanted. He didn’t ask you if you—”

The rose of her cheeks had deepened. Mick couldn’t resist. He leaned forward and touched his lips to her cheek, nibbled his way to her ear. “He asked me if I’d actually seen you naked.”

She jumped, and he brought his arms up to catch her in case she should fall.

“What—what did you tell him?” she asked, and he knew that he’d be kissing her lips soon if he didn’t step away. That wouldn’t be a wise course for either of them, but especially for her. She was at a vulnerable stage of her life. He wasn’t a man made for vulnerable women.

But he very definitely wanted to touch her again. He wanted to kiss more than just her cheek. And he wanted to do it in the dark in a bedroom.

He hesitated, then stepped away. “I told Rafe that the only thing I remember was your eyes. I was staring into your eyes the whole time.”

She gazed up into his eyes then, and the room melted away.

“You were,” she said, her voice low and soft and so terribly sexy that it was killing him. “I remember.”

So did he. All too well.

“You’ll let me be your temporary bodyguard, Laura?”

“Do you really think it’s necessary?”

“Very necessary.” It was a good thing she hadn’t asked him if it was wise, because he knew for certain that getting too close to her wasn’t wise at all. She made him feel big and protective, but he knew that wasn’t a feeling that lasted with the men in his family. Inevitably they failed the women they had sworn to protect.

“What time do you start work?” he asked.

“I’m just part-time. They’re letting me bring Meggie, of course. I begin at three and work until six.”

“This late in the year, it’ll be dark by the time you leave, then.”

She nodded, so close that her swishing hair became trapped against his shoulder. He brushed his fingers through the soft silk and slid the strands back over her shoulder.

“Will you have any trouble getting off work to come pick me up?”

“It won’t be any problem,” he promised. “I have a very understanding supervisor.” He did, but it wouldn’t have mattered. Mick was determined to do whatever it took to protect Laura Maitland from whatever threatened her.

But as he took his leave and her soft scent wafted around him, he knew there was more at risk than he’d mentioned to her.

The lady was tempting as sin, and he had just set himself the task of seeing her several times a day. It was going to be one hell of a task to maintain some distance between Laura Maitland’s lips and his own.

She definitely needed to do something about Mick Hannon, Laura thought a week later when Mick picked her up for work for the first time. It was all well and good to say that you were going to be assertive and independent, but with a man like Mick, a woman had to work very hard to stay a step ahead of him. He was a strong, stubborn man and he seemed to have a thing about protecting women.

“You really don’t have to do this,” she began, as Mick opened the door of his truck and fastened Meggie’s carrier into the back seat.

He studied her for several seconds, a note of concern in his eyes. “Am I making you uncomfortable?” he finally asked.

She stared up at him, feeling small and delicate, even though her body still bore some of the evidence of her recent pregnancy.

Was he making her uncomfortable?

Definitely. The word stuck in her mind. What woman wouldn’t feel uncomfortable gazing up at a man who was a walking ad for how the human male should fill out his jeans? But the truth was that, nervous though that thought made her, there was also a certain comfort, a certain satisfaction in just being near the man.

An unexpected smile lifted her lips. “I feel just fine,” she told him, lifting her chin in defiance.

A grin spread across his face, exposing even white teeth that contrasted sharply with his tanned skin. “That’s good then, sunshine. Ready to ride?”

That low, sexy voice slid right under every womanly defense she’d spent months building.

Please don’t let me be turning into my mother, she couldn’t help thinking. Because Veronica Maitland had loved her husband even after he’d deserted her. Through all the long years after that, of working in bars and dating men with no future and trying her best to be a good mother, she’d still held out hope that Robert would return to her. If he whistled for her, she ran to him in a pant. If he called on the phone, she dropped everything. She was a sad, lonely woman, unable to enjoy life or even to enjoy her children that much, and Laura didn’t ever intend to be like that. She’d allowed herself the mistake of hoping her father would love her. She’d even forgiven herself for thinking Greg was something he wasn’t. But no more. She’d made her last big mistake with a man.

“This isn’t going to work, you know,” she said suddenly. “You escorting me to work doesn’t count in the big book of How Laura Pays Mick Back for Helping Her.”

“It works for me.”

She laughed, even though she wasn’t feeling all that amused right now. She was sitting two feet away from a man who had a shadowed jawline made for stroking and a long, strong body made for satisfying a woman’s needs.

“How can I expect Meggie to learn how to behave if I don’t even show her the right way to thank someone?” she asked, forcing her thoughts back down the right lane.

Mick's laugh was low and seductive. "Um... Meggie would be how many days old now?"

Laura firmed her chin. "A parent should start the way they mean to go on."

Her comment brought a thoughtful smile to Mick's face. "You're an admirable woman, Laura," he said gently. "I'm sure you'll be one of the good parents. That's important."

His comment triggered a question in her mind. He sounded as if he had issues with parenting. She realized how little she knew about him. Maybe if she knew more, she'd know the right thing to do to demonstrate her gratitude. As it was, all she really knew was that he was handsome and that he was gallant. Well, okay, she did know that he worked in construction and was only here for the short term, but—

"Didn't you say you were just in from out of town?" she asked suddenly.

Instantly Mick's expression turned serious. He studied her carefully as if trying to decide what she was up to with this sudden change of subject. "Just in," he agreed quietly.

"Just here to do a job?"

"I'm here to do a job," he said.

Laura drummed her fingers lightly on the dashboard. The seeds of a plan—okay, the seeds of a very small plan—were building. Nothing great, but maybe more would come later.

"So...what do you usually do for supper?"

Mick turned curious eyes her way before looking back to the road. Suddenly he smiled.

"I usually eat," he teased.

"Where?"

He shrugged. "Fast food, a local diner, that kind of thing. Why?"

"No special reason. Just that you're away from home. Maybe you'd like food that was prepared just for you. Mrs. Parker has given me kitchen privileges if I want to have a guest rather than eat with all the other boarders. I could cook something for you. We could have a meal in my room, unless..."

"Unless?"

She felt her face burning. "I never thought. You don't have a wife who would get upset about another woman making you a meal, do you?"

In the silence that followed, the sound of the truck's engine filled her ears. Loudly.

"No wife," he finally said. "I'm not exactly marriage material."

His statement called for a question, but his tone told her he wasn't interested in answering questions.

"So would you be open to letting me work off my debt to you with food?"

"You don't have a debt."

She shook her head. "I have a bodyguard. I don't think most bodyguards work for free. Or at least they shouldn't."

Mick pulled up in front of the clinic. He cut the engine and turned dark, intense eyes her way, his arm looped over the steering wheel. Now that he wasn't driving, Laura was even more aware that he was an attractive, unmarried man...and that he was very close.

As if to punctuate that point, Mick leaned even closer. "Laura," he said softly. "I don't know how to say this tactfully, but I'm not sure it's wise for us to spend too much time alone in your room."

She sat there quietly chewing on her bottom lip, horribly embarrassed that he must have known what she had been thinking.

A low groan slipped from his lips. "Don't do that," he whispered, brushing her lip with his fingertips. And at that point of contact, she knew that he was right. It would be very dangerous for her to bring him into the private confines of her room at the boardinghouse. She'd be in much more danger than she probably ever would be in at the clinic, even with some sort of criminal harassing the Maitlands.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.