Medical Romance™

CAROLINE ANDERSON

Tempted by Dr Daisy

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Аннотация

When a messy divorce leaves Ben Walker's young daughter distraught, she automatically takes priority over his love-life. But little Florence finds bubbly colleague and girl-next-door Daisy Fuller as lovable as Ben does! Perhaps together they can persuade Daisy to open her heart again…to two people who'll cherish her for ever! The Fiancée He Can't Forget 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™.

Tempted by Dr Daisy
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Praise for Caroline Anderson:

‘From one of category romance’s most accomplished voices comes a beautifully told, intensely emotional and wonderfully uplifting tale of second chances, new beginnings, hope, triumph and everlasting love. Caroline Anderson’s WEDDING OF THE YEAR is an engrossing, enthralling and highly enjoyable tale

that will move you to tears and keep you riveted from the first page until the very last sentence. Kate and Nick's story is sure to satisfy all those readers who have been waiting with bated breath for their story. Moving, heartbreaking and absolutely fantastic, with WEDDING OF THE YEAR Caroline Anderson is at her mesmerising best!'

—*www.cataromance.com* on ST PIRAN'S: WEDDING OF THE YEAR

Dear Reader,

When I was asked to write a duet of two closely linked books, I thought 'How close can people be?' And the answer? Identical twins who are both gorgeous guys and amazing doctors—my LEGENDARY WALKER DOCTORS. But they're not just normal twins, but twins who'd shared the same amniotic sac, who'd been in touch with each other from the first moment and who now, 34 years later, were still very close emotionally and in their working lives. You really can't get closer than that—and for both Ben and Matt, their journeys have been paved with tragedy and pain.

But then Ben moves to Yoxburgh, where Daisy and Amy, dear friends and colleagues, are waiting in the wings.

Ben has a daughter, little Florence, who is the centre of his world—until he meets Daisy. He just has to find a way for both of them to trust again, so together they can give Florence the family they all long for in TEMPTED BY DR DAISY.

For Matt and Amy, the past is so painful they can't bear to go there again, but when Ben and Daisy fall in love, her best friend and his twin are brought together again and circumstances conspire to force them to face their past and deal with the loss that drove them apart in THE FIANCÉE HE CAN'T FORGET.

Writing their stories was heart-wrenching but wonderful, and I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed coaxing them along each step of the way.

With love,

Caroline

CHAPTER ONE

SHE could hear water running.

Her new neighbour, whoever he might be, was up and about already. Well, she hoped he'd slept better than she had, she thought grumpily. He'd kept her awake until midnight moving things, and the cat deciding she was hungry at five thirty *really* didn't help.

To be fair, he hadn't been that noisy, but she wasn't feeling fair after *another* hen weekend, and *another* of her friends settling down to matrimonial bliss. That left her and Amy, but she couldn't see Amy letting anyone close, and as for her—well, where *were* all the decent single men without a ton of emotional baggage? Not in Yoxburgh, that was for sure, and even if they were, she wasn't sure she was quite ready to dip her toe in that particular pond again.

She fed Tabitha, made herself a cup of tea and went out to the conservatory. Dawn was breaking, the sky washed pale pink above the rooftops to the east, and she curled up on a chair overlooking her pretty little garden, pressed the mental 'reset' button and let herself come to slowly.

It was her favourite time of the day, before the rest of the world got up, and she cradled her mug in her hands, snuggled further down into the chair and listened to the sounds of the glorious spring morning.

The birds were singing, and she could hear boards creaking next door, more of those masculine footsteps running down the stairs, a muffled exclamation—and an almighty crash that sent Tabitha fleeing for the hills and made Daisy spill her tea.

'Oops!' she murmured, trying to tune out the man's voice as she blotted uselessly at her dressing gown, but it was hard to ignore. What on *earth* had he done? Something pretty drastic, judging by the expletives seeping through the thin party wall.

And then there was silence.

'Are you OK?' she called warily—although she didn't really need to raise her voice.

'Um—yeah. Sort of,' he replied, his voice muffled by the wall. 'Sorry. Minor crisis.'

'Anything I can do?'

A despairing laugh, then, 'Not unless you're a plumber.'

She heard footsteps striding down the hall, then a door opening, and a knock at her front door.

She opened it, and her mouth sagged. Wow, he was …

Well, he was many things. Tall. Broad. Gorgeous. Young enough to be interesting, old enough to have something about him. And there was *plenty* about him. He was covered in filthy, sodden debris, his suit drenched and splattered, his hair full of bits of stuff, his once-white shirt a dirty, streaky grey. In the striking, really rather fabulous blue eyes lurked a hint of irony that made her smile.

Then the eyes tracked down her dressing gown and stopped

on the huge tea-stain. 'What happened to you?' he asked incredulously, and she gave a stunned little laugh.

'I thought that was my line,' she said, trying not to laugh any more because it really, really wasn't funny, but his mouth quirked.

'Ah. My ceiling came down,' he explained unnecessarily, and Daisy had to bite her lip. To her surprise his eyes creased in a smile.

'Sorry about the noise. And the language. I'm Ben, by the way,' he said, holding out his hand, then withdrawing it and wiping it on his trousers, scanning it before offering it again. She took it, noting that as well as being a little wet and gritty, it was warm and firm. Strong.

And his voice—a hint of something that could have been Yorkshire? A little gruff. A little blunt. And a *lot* sexy.

'Daisy,' she said, and let herself smile properly. 'Welcome to Rivenhall Villas. May it get better.'

He gave a slightly desperate laugh and closed his eyes, dragging his hand over his face and smearing the dirt into it. A streak of blood joined the dirt, welling slowly from a thin cut over his eyebrow.

'I can only hope. I don't suppose you know a plumber?'

She tightened the belt of her saturated dressing gown, hopped over the low fence between the diamond-patterned paths and peered down his hall at a scene of utter devastation. His kitchen had disappeared under a sea of sodden lime plaster and broken

laths, and there was a slow, steady drip from a dangling lump of ceiling. The rush, she sensed, was over, but …

'Just a plumber?' she murmured thoughtfully, and behind her she heard another wry laugh.

'A plumber would be a pretty good start. An electrician might be a handy second, that light's hanging at a jaunty angle. And a plasterer, perhaps?'

'Mmm. It seems to have stopped, though.'

'Yeah. I reckon it was the waste. I'd just had a bath.'

'Ah. Very likely, then. I tell you what,' she said, turning back to him and finding him right behind her. She took a step back, and a nice deep breath, because under the plaster filth and the wet dog smell coming off his suit was the lingering remains of some seriously interesting aftershave. Citrusy, with a touch of amber …

'You were about to tell me something,' he prompted, and she collected herself.

'Um—yes. Why don't I throw on some clothes and come and help you clear up? I've got an hour before I have to leave for work.' And a nice long shower planned, but she could feel that going out of the window rapidly.

'Lucky you. I have to leave now. Let's face it, it can't get any worse, but I can't do anything about it and I've got bigger fish to fry. It's my first day in a new job, I don't have another suit or any way of getting the filth out of my hair, and there's no way I'm turning a tap on! I guess I'll just have to make do with spitting

on a handkerchief.'

Obviously he hadn't looked in a mirror yet.

'This is going to take more than spitting on a hankie to sort out,' she said drily. 'And you've got a cut over your left eye. Do you have another shirt?'

He fingered his eyebrow gingerly and nodded. 'And trousers and a jacket, but not the power suit, sadly.'

'Can't help you there,' she said, giving up all hope of starting her day with any kind of normality. 'However, I do have a shower. Why don't you grab some clean stuff and sort yourself out while I find you a plumber?'

'Really?'

'Really. Find your clothes, I'll get dressed and I can make a start on the clean-up, too. I have a vacuum that's very good for sucking up spills.'

'Spills?' He choked on a laugh, and the smile that crinkled his eyes made her stomach turn over. 'There's a bathful of water on that floor.'

'No problem. It can cope. I'll just have to empty it lots—if I can find the sink.'

He frowned. 'Daisy, are you sure? It's a hell of an imposition.'

Well, at least he realised it. Her morning was running away with her, but she couldn't just leave him like this. She found a smile—not as hard as she'd thought, because those eyes were really quite …

'I thought you were in a hurry?' she said, and squeezed past

him, hopped over the fence and ran upstairs, dragged on her gardening clothes, put a towel in the bathroom for him and had just hauled the vacuum up from the cellar as he appeared at her door.

'Look, you really don't have to clean up—'

'Don't be silly, it's nothing. Bathroom's at the top of the stairs, straight ahead of you. I've put you out a towel on the side of the bath and the plumber's calling me back.'

He didn't believe it.

He should. Things like this seemed to happen to him these days. He tipped his head forwards so it was under the stream of hot water and let out a tired, frustrated sigh. He'd known moving into the house before it was fixed was rash, but—this rash?

Thank God for Daisy. The shower was bliss. He could have stood there all day under the streaming hot water, but he didn't have time. He borrowed some of her shampoo and washed the filth out of his hair, and discovered some interesting lumps and bumps on his scalp. The cut over his eyebrow was stinging, too. Damn. He sluiced the grit and grime off his body, gave himself a very hasty rub-down with Daisy's borrowed towel, then dressed in record time, scowled at the cut on his eyebrow, frowned at a mark on his shoes that wouldn't shift and gave up.

There was nothing more he could do. Nothing he had time to do. His ruined suit was lying in a soggy heap in the bottom of Daisy's pristine and rather beautiful bath, and he left it there. He'd sort everything out with her later, once he'd got today out

of the way.

He could hear the vacuum going next door, sucking up the water. Bless her heart. Of all the days—and of all the neighbours, he thought with a bemused smile. What a star.

A small black cat with huge ears and brilliant green eyes watched him disdainfully through the banisters as he went downstairs. He stretched out a hand to her, and after a second she turned away, and he carried on down with a wry chuckle, dismissed.

He hopped over the pointless but decorative little fence and went into his house, to find Daisy in the middle of the kitchen somehow bringing order to the chaos. The water was largely gone, and she was shoving debris to the side with a broom.

'Daisy, you don't have to do that! I'll clear it up later.'

'I'm nearly done. I've cleared the rubble off the boxes to give them a chance to dry out. I think you might have lost some crockery or glasses—that one tinkled a bit.'

He shrugged. Glasses he could live without. At least he was alive. He fingered the cut again, and she peered at it.

'You need a plaster on that.'

He shrugged again. 'No idea where they are, but I'm sure I'll live. I don't suppose you've heard from the plumber, have you?'

'No, not yet. Take my mobile number and give me a missed call, and I'll send you a text when I hear from him.'

He keyed it in, then slid the phone back into his pocket and ran a hand through his damp hair. 'Look, I'm sorry, I've left my

suit in your bath, but I have to go now. I'll deal with it later, and all of this. You don't have to do any more—'

'Go. I'm nearly done. I'll see you later. Can I just drop the door shut on the latch?'

'That's fine. Thank you so much. I owe you, bigtime.'

'Too right. I'll expect a slap-up dinner at the least,' she said drily, swiping an armful of soggy plaster rubble off the worktop onto the filthy floor.

'Consider it done.'

She flashed a smile at him, a streak of dirt on her cheek giving her the impish, mischievous look of a little girl having way too much fun—and he didn't really want to start thinking about Daisy having fun, because it was a long, long time since he'd had fun with a woman, and for all she might look fleetingly like the little girl she'd once been, there was nothing but woman under those clothes. And he was taking her out to dinner?

He cleared his throat, nodded curtly and went.

'Phew.'

Daisy straightened up, blew the hair back out of her eyes and looked around. Utter chaos, but at least it was organised chaos now. The rubble was swept into a heap, the boxes had been blotted dry and the water sucked up—and she was going to be late for work, today of all days!

She fled, grabbing the quickest shower on record and dragging on her clothes. Her hair would have to do, she decided, pulling it back and doubling it into a loose bun in an elastic band. No

time for makeup. No time for anything, and the new consultant was starting today.

Great start, she thought. Please God he wasn't an arrogant snob—or a tedious box-ticker. One of them on the team was more than enough. She ran to the car, paused in the street to shut her garden gates and headed for the hospital.

On the way she took a call from the plumber, then dropped Ben's suit into the cleaners in the hospital reception area, instructing them to be careful. She'd seen the label, and it had made her wince.

Then she legged it for the ward.

By the time she got there, people were clustered around the nursing station. She could see a man's head slightly above the rest, hear a quiet voice giving some kind of team-leading chat, and her heart sank. Damn. He was here already, doing the meet and greet. So much for making a good impression.

Evan Jones, the specialist registrar, gave the ward clock a pointed look as she squeezed into the group.

'Sorry I'm—' she began a little breathlessly, and then stopped in her tracks as the man turned and met her eyes, and if she hadn't been so busy staring at him in shock she would have missed the quickly masked flicker of surprise.

'Mr Walker, this is Dr Fuller,' Evan said, sounding and looking unimpressed, but Ben's professional smile did something utterly different in his eyes, and he brushed Evan smoothly aside.

'Yes, we've met. Dr Fuller's very kindly been doing something

for me,' he explained, cutting him off at the knees, and then turned back to her. 'Any joy?'

Still shocked, running on autopilot and ready to fall in love with him for saving her from another tedious lecture, she nodded. 'Yes, it's sorted,' she told him without missing a beat. He'd found a plaster, she thought, staring at the cut above his eyebrow, but apart from that you'd never know how his day had started. He looked cool, calm and in control—more than she was.

'Thank you. I don't think you've missed much,' he said with a wry smile, then he looked back at the group. 'As I was saying, I'm looking forward to working with you all, and I hope you'll forgive me when I ask silly, irritating questions and don't know where things are or how they're done here. I'll do my best to make this transition as painless as possible, if you'll just bear with me, and if you've got anything you want to talk about, my door's always open, so to speak.'

He smiled at them all. 'Right, that's it, everybody. I know you've all got plenty to do, so I won't hold you up. Dr Jones, rather than keep you from our patients any longer, why don't I get Dr Fuller to show me round? I need to speak to her anyway, so she might as well give me a quick tour and I'll introduce myself to her properly, then I suggest we meet for coffee at nine thirty, if that's all right, and you can fill me in on anything she might have missed and show me the department in detail. Any problems with that, either of you?'

Evan looked a bit startled, but conceded with a stiff little nod.

‘No, you go ahead, Mr Walker. I’m sure Dr Fuller can tell you everything you need to know. I don’t really have time, anyway. There are some patients I need to see urgently.’

‘Clare Griffiths,’ she said, worrying about her as she had been all weekend. ‘How’s she doing?’

‘I’ve seen her already. Don’t worry, I can manage without you,’ he said dismissively, and Ben frowned. He didn’t like the sound of that at all. In fact, he was beginning not to like Evan Jones …

‘Fine. We’ll catch up with you later,’ he said, and without pausing for breath, he ushered Daisy towards the doors.

‘Doing something for you?’ she muttered under her breath, and his laugh, low and soft and inaudible except to her whispered over her nerve endings and made her shiver.

She gulped as he swiped his ID over the sensor and pushed the door open for her.

‘Well, you were, it wasn’t a lie. OK, first things first. I want you to fill me in on everything there is to know about the department and its politics—starting with the location of the nearest decent coffee.’ His mouth tipped into a wry grin. ‘Breakfast was unexpectedly cancelled.’

She had a vision of him covered in his ceiling, and grinned back. ‘Indeed. Full English, Mr Walker, or would you rather have something sweet and sinful?’

His eyes flared slightly, and for a second her breath hitched in her throat. ‘Oh, I think sweet and sinful sounds rather promising, Dr Daisy, don’t you?’ he murmured, and followed her out of the

ward while she tried to remember how to breathe.

'So—the plumber's coming at seven?' Ben said as they sat down with huge mugs of coffee and wickedly sticky buns—sweet and sinful, she'd said, and he had to try very, very hard to keep his thoughts on track as he watched her bite into hers. 'Is that seven today or in three years' time?'

'No, today,' she said with a laugh, taking down her hair and twisting it back up again into a knot. Pity. He preferred it down. It looked soft, silky, and he could almost imagine sifting the long, dark strands through his fingers—

He stirred his coffee for something safe to do with his hands and dragged his mind back in line again. 'So how come he's available this quickly? Usually if a tradesman's any good, you have to wait weeks. Do you know him?'

She nodded. 'Yes. He's doing it as a favour to me, and he is good. He refitted my bathroom for me.'

'Ah. Yes. Your lovely bathroom. I'm afraid I left it in a horrendous mess.'

'Don't worry, it's fine, I'll deal with it later.'

'So did he charge a fortune, or did your landlord pay?'

'Landlord? I don't have a landlord,' she said ruefully. 'It's my house, and he was very reasonable, as plumbers go.'

'You're buying it alone?' he added, fishing, although it was none of his business and utterly irrelevant, he told himself firmly. He was *not* interested.

She nodded and pulled a face. 'Although sometimes I wonder

how I got myself in this situation. I must be mad. I wanted my own house because I was fed up with unscrupulous landlords but I'm not quite convinced I'm really grown up enough!'

Oh, he was sure she was. She was certainly grown up enough to satisfy his frankly adolescent fantasies, he thought. She was biting into the sticky bun again and it was giving him heart failure watching her lick her lips.

And they were colleagues *and* neighbours? Sheesh, he thought, and was hauling his mind back to work when she spoke again.

'So how about you?' she asked, her clear green eyes studying him curiously. 'I mean, you're a consultant, so clearly you're old enough to have a house, but—well, without being rude, what's a consultant doing buying a run-down little semi in a place like Yoxburgh?'

Good question—and one he had no intention of answering, but at least it had dragged his mind out of the gutter. 'What's wrong with Yoxburgh?'

She shrugged. 'Nothing. I love it. It's got the best of both worlds—good hospital, nice community, the sea, the countryside—it's a lovely town.'

'Exactly. So why should I be flawed for wanting to be here?' he asked, curious himself and trying to divert attention back to her and off his personal life.

'Oh, no reason. It's not Yoxburgh, really. It was just—I would have expected you to have a better house. Bigger. More in

keeping …' She trailed to a halt, as if she felt she'd overstepped the mark—which she probably had, but she'd rescued him before six o'clock in the morning without batting an eyelid, lent him her shower, cleared up his mess, got him a plumber …

'I'm divorced,' he admitted softly, surprising himself that he was giving so much away to her, and yet oddly knowing it was safe to do so. 'And it might be modest, but the house suits my needs perfectly—or it will, when the plumber's been and I've thrown a whole lot of money at it. Besides, maybe I don't want to live in anything flashy and ostentatious—more "in keeping",' he added, making little air quotes with his fingers.

She coloured slightly, her thoughts chasing each other transparently through her eyes, and he had to stifle a smile as she gathered herself up and sucked in a breath.

'Sorry. None of my business,' she said hastily. 'And talking of suits, I dropped yours into the dry cleaners in the main reception on the way in, and it'll be ready at five—and before you panic, I told them to take good care of it.'

'Chasing brownie points, Daisy?' he murmured, and she laughed.

'Hardly. I didn't know who you were then. I'm just a nice person.'

'You are, aren't you?'

'Not that nice. I've still got my eye on dinner,' she said with a teasing grin that diverted the blood from his brain, and he wondered how the hell he was going to keep this sudden and

unwanted attraction in its box.

With huge difficulty. Damn.

He turned his attention back to his coffee, and then she said quietly, 'Thanks for covering for me so smoothly, by the way. Evan's a stickler for punctuality, and he was getting all ready to flay me later.'

'It was the least I could do. I was hardly going to throw you to the wolves for bailing me out—literally! And Evan doesn't strike me as the friendliest of characters. He was pretty dismissive when you asked about that patient.'

A flicker of what could have been worry showed in her eyes. 'Oh, he's OK really. He can come over as a patronising jerk, but he's a good doctor. He's just a bit miffed that you got the job, I think. He was advised to apply for it, and I reckon he thought it was a shoo-in.'

'And then they had to advertise it by law, and I applied. And with all due respect to Evan, I would imagine my CV knocks spots off his.'

'Exactly. So he won't welcome you with open arms, but you should be able to rely on him.'

He gave a choked laugh. 'Well, that's good to know.'

Her mouth twitched, and those mischievous green eyes were twinkling at him again. 'So, I hope you've got some good ideas about what I was supposedly doing for you?'

He leant back in his chair and met her eyes with a twinkle of his own. 'Oh, let's say finding me some statistics on twins on

the antenatal list. That should cover it. Anyway, I thought it was pretty good for a spur-of-the-moment thing. Sorry if it sounded a bit patronising, but I thought it was better than explaining I'd already had a shower in your bathroom,' he said softly, and then felt his legs disintegrate when a soft wash of colour touched her cheeks.

He cleared his throat.

'Tell me about Yoxburgh Park Hospital,' he suggested hastily, and she collected herself and gave a tiny shrug.

'It's old and new, it's on the site of the old lunatic asylum—'

'How delightfully politically incorrect,' he said drily, and she chuckled.

'Isn't it? Nearly as politically incorrect as locking up fifteen-year-old girls because their fathers or brothers had got them knocked up and if they were put away here for life then the family could pretend they'd gone mad and carry on as normal.'

'Lovely.'

'It was. It was a workhouse, really, and the pauper lunatic label was just a way of covering up what they were doing, apparently. I mean, who's going to go near a lunatic asylum? You might end up inside, and so they got away with murder, literally. But life was cheap then, wasn't it?'

'So was building, which I guess is why the old Victorian part is so magnificent.'

'Oh, absolutely, and the other plus side is that because they wanted it isolated, we've got glorious parkland all around us,

tons of parking and plenty of room to expand. The locals have access to it for recreation, we have a lovely outlook—it couldn't be better, and the hospital's great. Quite a few areas of it are brand new and state of the art, like the maternity wing, and it's earning an excellent reputation. We've got a bit of everything, but it's still small enough to be friendly and it's a good place to work. Everybody knows everybody.'

'Is that necessarily a good thing?'

She gave a wry smile. 'Not always. You wait till they find out we're neighbours, for instance.'

'You think they will?'

She laughed. 'I give it three days—maybe less.'

Oh, that laugh! Musical, infectious—it was going to kill him. And then she flicked the tip of her tongue out and licked the icing off her lips, and his eyes zeroed in on them and locked.

'So—guided tour?' he suggested hastily, because if he had to sit there opposite her for very many more minutes, he was going to have to strap his hands down by his sides to stop himself reaching out and lifting that tiny smear of icing off the corner of her mouth with his fingertip.

'Sure. Where do you want to start?'

'Maternity Outpatients?' he suggested wryly. 'Then you can ask about the twins, so it's not a lie, and there's an antenatal clinic with my name on it later today, so

I'm told, and it would look better if I could find it.' His eyes twinkled. 'Can't have me turning up late, clearly. Evan would

have a field day with it.’

CHAPTER TWO

IT WAS a hectic day, with very little time to think about her new boss and neighbour.

She took Ben for a quick walk through the hospital—the antenatal clinic, as they'd discussed, and other key areas that he might need to visit as well as the location of the dry cleaners, and then armed with the twin statistics she took him back to the maternity unit and gave him a lightning tour of the department—the gynae, antenatal and postnatal wards, the labour ward, the theatre suite, SCBU as well, just for information, and then handed him over to Evan Jones on the dot of nine thirty and went back to the gynae ward to check her patients from last week. She had three to discharge before the afternoon antenatal clinic, then it was back to the antenatal ward and the young first-time mum with pre-eclampsia that she'd been worrying about.

Evan had said he'd already looked at her, but she wanted to see with her own eyes, and she was glad she did. Clare wasn't looking so great. Her blood pressure was up, her feet and hands were more swollen and she was complaining of a slight headache.

Daisy had thought they should deliver her on Friday, Evan had wanted to give her longer for the sake of the baby. He'd won. And now it was looking as if it might have been the wrong thing to do.

'Right, I want you much quieter,' she told her softly, perching on the bed and taking Clare's hand. 'I guess you've had a bit of

a busy weekend, and we're going to have to slow things down for you and make you rest much more. So the telly's going, the visits are down to hubby only, once a day, and I really want you to sleep, OK?'

'I can't. I'm too scared.'

'You don't need to be scared. We're taking good care of you, and all you need to do is relax, Clare. I know it's hard, but you just have to try and find that quiet place and let go, OK? Try for me?'

She nodded, rested her head back and closed her eyes.

'Good girl. We'll keep a close eye on you, and I'm tweaking your drugs a bit, and you should feel better soon. If anything changes or you feel unwell, press the bell, and I don't want you out of bed for anything. OK?'

Clare nodded again, and Daisy left the room, closing the door silently behind her, and was repositioning the 'Quiet, Please' sign more prominently when she became aware of someone behind her.

'Is this the woman you were concerned about?' he said softly.

'Yes—Clare Griffiths. She's got pre-eclampsia.' Daisy's voice was a quiet murmur. 'Actually, can I have a word with you about her?'

'Sure.'

They walked away from the door, and Daisy filled him in. 'I don't know if she's OK to leave. I was going to order another ultrasound. She's only 32 weeks, and Evan wants the baby to have

as long as possible, so I've told her not to move a muscle, to close her eyes and rest, but it's easy to say and much harder to do, and today her hands and feet are more swollen and she's complaining of a headache. She's got a urinary catheter and we're monitoring her fluid balance.'

'Are those the notes?'

She handed him the file, and he scanned through it, and met her eyes. 'Gut feeling?'

'I think we're going to end up delivering her today.' She bit her lip. 'I wanted to do it on Friday, but Evan—'

'Evan wanted to wait. And you disagreed. He said something about that.'

She frowned. 'What?'

'Oh, just the implication that you were over-cautious.'

Daisy shrugged, disappointed that Evan had thought that rather than respecting her judgement, but maybe he'd been right. Maybe she was overreacting now. 'Do you want to examine her?'

'I thought you'd just done it?'

'I have, but—'

'But nothing. The notes tell me what I need to know. I don't want to stress her by going in straight away. If she sees me, she'll think she has to panic. And I trust you, Daisy.'

'Is that wise? You know nothing about me.'

'I know you're thorough and meticulous with the notes. Evan thought you lacked confidence. That implies to me that you should have more confidence in your judgement, not less.'

She nodded and bit her lip. 'OK. Well, we can watch her if you're happy to. She's had steroids, the baby's as ready as it can be. I'm thinking that waiting much longer's probably not an option but I could be wrong.'

'Or you could be right. So alert Theatre, have SCBU on standby, order another ultrasound and hourly obs, and we'll give the drugs time to work and wait and see. We aren't fortune-tellers, we just have to watch and wait. Keep me up to speed.'

She nodded, and with an encouraging wink, he handed her back the notes and walked away.

There wasn't time for lunch, and she arrived at the antenatal clinic at the same time as Ben and Evan.

They were seeing the tricky patients, the mums with known problems, and she was working her way steadily through the more routine cases and trying not to think about her new neighbour and boss when her pager bleeped.

Clare Griffiths. Damn. She must have deteriorated. Handing her patient over to the clinic midwife to refer to Evan, she went straight up to the ward and found Clare looking pale and sweaty. Her face was looking more bloated, and she was clearly wretched.

As soon as she saw her, Clare started to cry.

'I'm so glad you're here. My feet really hurt, and I can't bend my fingers, my headache's worse, and I can't really see—there are flashing lights and it's as if I've got worms wriggling about all over the inside of my eyes. I'm so scared.'

Retinal haemorrhages, Daisy thought, scanning the monitor and her test results and fluid balance. The ultrasound result showed that the baby hadn't grown since the previous Thursday, and that meant it wasn't getting enough nutrition. She perched on the bed and held her hand, feeling the difference in her fingers even in two short hours. Have more confidence, Ben had said, and he trusted her. Well, let's hope I'm not overreacting now, she thought.

She rubbed her fingers soothingly. 'Don't be scared, Clare, we're looking after you,' she said, trying to inject some of that confidence into her voice, 'but I'm afraid your blood pressure's gone up again, and your blood results show your kidneys are struggling and the baby's not growing. Let me call Mr Walker and ask him to come and look at you.'

'Is this it?' she asked, sniffing and looking even more worried. 'Are you going to have to deliver me?'

'I think so,' Daisy told her honestly, and Clare swallowed.

'But it's so early—what about the baby?' she asked, welling up again.

'The baby should be all right, but if we leave it where it is it certainly won't be, and nor will you. I'm sorry, Clare, we haven't got any choice in this. I'll get Mr Walker, and I'll ring your husband and get him to come in. You might want him with you.'

She asked the midwife with them to prep her for Theatre, rang the antenatal clinic and then Clare's husband, and two minutes later Ben was in with Clare examining her. To her relief he

backed her without hesitation.

'Dr Fuller's absolutely right, Clare, we need to deliver your baby now. We'll get the anaesthetist to do your epidural, and then we'll take you into Theatre. You should start to feel better almost immediately, and we have lots of babies born at this stage without any problems. We'll go and scrub, and we'll see you in Theatre in a minute. And don't worry. I know it feels scary, but it's pretty routine for us, and we'll look after you.'

His smile was kind, his manner firm and confident, and Daisy felt herself relaxing. He was right, it was routine, but Clare had every right to be scared, and he'd been good with her. Very good. It was the first time she'd seen Ben with a patient, and any reservations she might have had about their new man disappeared instantly.

'Do you feel ready to lead?' he asked Daisy as they scrubbed. 'I want that baby out fast—I think she's heading for a crisis so I don't think we should hang about. Are you up to it, or would you rather I did it this time?'

'Will you? Not because I don't think I can, but because I know you can, and it's not about pride, it's about Clare and her baby.'

He gave a gentle, understanding laugh and turned the tap off with his elbow.

'Wise words. Right, let's go.'

He was slick, and Daisy was glad she'd opted to assist rather than lead. His hands were deft and confident, and within moments, it seemed, he had their baby cradled securely in his

fingers, his tiny mewling cry music to their ears.

'Hello, little one, welcome to the world,' he said softly, and then met Clare's eyes over the drapes. 'You've got a son,' he said, smiling, 'and he's looking good.'

He was—small but strong, and after a brief introduction to Clare and her flustered and emotional husband, he was whisked away to SCBU and they were able concentrate on Clare.

As much as Daisy was able to concentrate on anything except those strong, capable hands that worked so deftly, and the magnetic blue eyes that from time to time met and held her gaze over their masks for just a fraction of a second longer than necessary …

Ben made it back just in time for the plumber. He'd left Daisy settling Clare back onto the ward after he'd kept an eye on her in Recovery and then gone back to his antenatal clinic, and then she'd paged him with a message that she'd collected his suit and Clare was fine.

Brilliant.

He walked through the door, stripping off his tie and hanging his jacket on the end of the banister, and before he had time to do anything else there was a knock on the door behind him.

The man on the doorstep had a toolbox in his hand, and reassuringly grubby fingers. 'Steve, the plumber? Daisy said you'd got problems.'

The temptation to laugh hysterically nearly overwhelmed him. 'You might say that,' he offered drily, and took Steve through to

the kitchen.

Daisy let herself into the house, hung up his suit, kicked off her shoes and fed the cat. She could hear Ben moving around next door, and she sat down at the table and signed the card she'd got for him in the supermarket, propped it up against the bottle of bubbly she'd also bought and ran upstairs to shower. The bath was calling her, but she was too hungry to dawdle and she wanted to know how Ben had got on with Steve.

She rubbed herself briskly dry and went back into her bedroom. Jeans? Or sweats?

Jeans, she decided, running the hairdryer over her hair and brushing it through. Jeans and a pretty top, because a girl had her pride and he'd seen her in a dressing gown covered in tea, in her gardening clothes, in her professional 'trust me, I'm a doctor' clothes, and when she popped round with his housewarming present it would be the first time she could show him who she really was.

Which was ridiculous, because she was all of those things, and in any case, why the hell did it matter what he thought of what she was wearing? He was divorced, with no doubt all sorts of emotional baggage. And he was her neighbour, and her boss. Three very good reasons why she should keep him at arm's length and have as little to do with him as possible, she reminded herself fiercely.

And washing her hair and leaving it down was all part of shedding the working day, she told herself. Shoes off, hair down,

sweats on.

Except in this case it was jeans, and a pretty top, and the makeup she hadn't had time to put on first thing, because a girl had her pride.

'Oh!'

The knock on the door made her jump, and she swiped the blob of mascara off the side of her nose and ran downstairs, pulling the door open.

He was propped against the inside of her porch, one ankle crossed over the other, hands in his pockets and wearing a pair of jeans and a cotton shirt that looked incredibly soft. She really wanted to touch it.

He smiled at her and shrugged away from the wall, and she folded her arms and propped herself up on the door frame and tried not to grin like an idiot. 'So how did you get on?' she asked.

'Fine. He was amazing. He fixed it in two minutes, he's coming on Monday to fit a new suite and he's getting me a plasterer. And an electrician's already been and fitted a temporary light, so at least I can see in the kitchen, even if I can't really use it.'

'Told you he was good. Any idea why it happened?'

'The bath trap had pulled apart. He thought the seal might have perished, but you'd think the previous owner would have found that out.'

She shook her head. 'Mrs Leggatt couldn't get upstairs.

She washed in a bowl the whole time I knew her, and she

never had visitors. She used the shower downstairs before that, she said.'

'Did she? Well, that doesn't work, either, which might explain the bowl.'

'Not having much luck, are you?' She shifted and smiled at him, ridiculously aware of his strong, muscled body just a foot or so away. 'I was going to come and see you later to find out how you got on. I've got your suit and a little something to try and compensate for the horrendous start. Come on in.'

He followed her, and she handed him the bottle and the card. 'It's nothing special, but I thought it might help to balance things out.' He gave a quizzical smile, and shook his head slowly. 'Ah, Daisy, I think you've done far more than a bottle of bubbly ever could. I just can't thank you enough for today,' he said softly. 'You've been amazing. Bless you.'

She felt her cheeks heat, and flashed him a quick smile before turning away and heading for the kitchen. 'It was nothing,' she said, grabbing the kettle like a lifeline and shoving it under the tap. 'You're welcome. To be honest, I'm hugely relieved you aren't a property developer or crazy DIY-er who's going to do something awful to devalue my house! Well, at least I hope you're not.'

He chuckled. 'Well, I'll try not to, but I'm not having much luck so far! This is a lovely house, though. It gives me hope for mine.'

'They've both got most of their original features. That's really

rare. I hope you're going to keep them?'

'Oh, definitely. That was one of the reasons I bought it. Luckily I'd budgeted for the kitchen and bathroom.' His mouth quirked, and she felt her heart hitch. It was ridiculous! They'd been working together all day without a problem, but here, in the intimate setting of her kitchen …

'So—how's Clare now?'

'Fine,' she said, clutching the change of topic like a lifeline. Work she could deal with. 'She's settling, her blood pressure's already coming down, her urine output's up and she's feeling a lot better. And the baby's doing well.'

'Good. For what it's worth and off the record, I would have delivered her on Friday, too, looking at the notes in more detail. Just in case she'd flared up at the weekend. She was lucky.'

She spun round, eyes wide, and stared at him. He agreed with her? 'Really?'

'Really. You were justifiably cautious.'

She felt something warm unfurling inside her, and she smiled. 'Thank you,' she said softly.

'My pleasure. Have you eaten?'

'No. I picked up a ready meal on the way home and I'm just about to cook it, but it's only enough for one or I'd offer to share. Sorry.'

'Don't worry. I was going to take you out. I owe you dinner, remember?'

She flushed again. 'Ben, I was joking.'

‘Well, I wasn’t, and you’d be doing me a favour. I’ve got no food in the house, my kitchen’s destroyed and I’m starving. I haven’t eaten anything today except that sticky bun, and low blood sugar makes me grumpy.’

‘Oh, well, we wouldn’t want you grumpy,’ she said, going belly-up with a grin, and tried to tell herself she was only doing it as a favour to her boss and her pathetically easy submission was nothing to do with those gorgeous blue eyes, or the rippling muscles she’d seen as he’d pulled off his scrub top on the way through to the changing rooms after he’d delivered Clare.

Nothing to do with that at all …

They went to the bistro on the waterfront.

It had uninterrupted views of the sea, good food and it was close enough to walk to.

Not that they could see the sea, really, this late in the evening, but they could hear it as they walked along the prom, the soft rush of the waves surging up the shore, the suck on the shingle as the water receded, and they could smell it, the tang of salt sharp in the moist air.

‘I love the sea,’ she told him. ‘I don’t think I could live anywhere landlocked.’

‘You want to try the Yorkshire Dales. It takes a good hour or more to get to the coast.’

‘But it’s worth it when you get there, surely? Doesn’t Yorkshire have lovely beaches?’

‘Oh, yes. Gorgeous. And Lancashire, on the west coast. It’s

just a bit of an expedition. London wasn't any better.'

'Is that where you've just come from?' she asked, trying not to be nosy but failing.

He grinned, his teeth flashing white in the streetlights. 'For my sins. How about you? Are you Yoxburgh born and bred?'

'No. I've only been here two years. I've got a friend working here, and she persuaded me to come.'

'Good move?'

'Oh, yes, for all sorts of reasons. Nice town, and the hospital's great, much nicer to work in than my previous one, and—well, further from someone I needed space from.'

Now why had she brought that up? Idiot! She could see the question forming in his eyes, but she was saved from having to explain by their arrival at the restaurant, and by the time they were seated and the waiter had given them menus and water and a basket of warm, squashy bread, they'd moved on.

Thankfully.

'So why obstetrics?' he asked her, reaching for the bread.

'I love it. Less keen on the gynae, except some of the surgery's quite interesting and technically challenging, but mostly it's the babies. Making a difference, saving such vulnerable little lives—I'm a sucker for it. The friend I told you about's a midwife, and I guess she influenced me a bit. You?'

He shrugged. 'All sorts of reasons, really. My father's a vet and my brother and I used to go out with him on calls sometimes when we were kids. We helped with the lambing and the calving,

and sometimes there'd be a foal, and I just loved it. And of course all the cats and dogs had litters, and we always watched them giving birth, and my mother's a midwife, so when I went into medicine it just seemed the obvious choice. My brother's an obstetrician, too, but he's a bit more focussed on his career than me.' He gave a wry smile. 'It's been a bit difficult recently. Life sort of threw a spanner in the works.'

'That's divorce for you,' she said without thinking, and could have bitten her tongue off, but he just shrugged again and smiled sadly.

'Yes, it is. Are you divorced?'

'Me? No! Single and proud of it,' she lied. Well, not about the single part, because she was, profoundly, since Mike had walked away, but she wasn't proud of it. She was more—well, lonely, really, she admitted, but she'd rather be single than in the situation she'd been in. And for all the difference it would have made, in many ways she felt divorced. Would have been, if Mike had ever got round to asking her to marry him instead of just stringing her along for years. She scraped up a chirpy grin. 'Mad spinster lady, that's what I am. Didn't you notice the cat?'

'I thought you had to have more than one to be a mad spinster?' he said softly, his eyes searching even though there was a smile teasing his lips, and she felt her heart turn over.

No! No no no no no!

'Oh, well, I've only got the one, so that's all right, then, I'm not a spinster, just mad,' she said lightly, and turned her attention to

the menu. Fast.

Ben watched her. She was distracted, not concentrating. The menu was the right way up, but it could have been in Russian or Japanese for all the difference it would have made, he was sure. She was flustered—by him?

Interesting—except that she was a colleague, and his neighbour, and he'd just got out of one horribly messy relationship and he was in no hurry to get into another.

Even if she was the most attractive, interesting and stimulating person he'd been near in what felt like decades.

He shut his menu with a snap, and her body gave a tiny little jerk, as if the sound had startled her. 'I'm having the pan-fried sea bass,' he said briskly. 'What about you?'

'Um …' She stared at the menu, blinked and nodded. 'Sounds nice,' she said, and he would have laid odds she hadn't even seen the print, never mind made sense of it.

'Wine?'

Stupid. Utterly stupid, on a week night, with work the next day.

'I could have a glass, I suppose,' she said thoughtfully.

'Sauvignon blanc?'

She nodded, and the light from the candle caught her hair and it shimmered like rich, dark silk. He wanted to reach over and catch a strand between thumb and forefinger, wind it round his fingertip and reel her in, tugging her gently towards him until those soft, full lips were in range, and then—

‘Are you ready to order, sir?’

He straightened up, sucking in a slow, silent breath and raising an eyebrow at Daisy. ‘Have you decided?’

‘Oh—um—the sea bass, like you?’ she said, saving him from the embarrassment of admitting he’d forgotten everything except the shimmer of her hair and the soft sheen of her lips.

‘Sounds good,’ he said, and added the wine to the list. A couple of glasses wouldn’t make any difference …

‘That was really nice. Thank you, Ben,’ she said, hesitating by her front gate.

They’d walked back side by side, fingers brushing from time to time, shoulders nudging gently. Not holding hands, but not far off it, and she wondered, just idly—well, no, not idly at all, really—if he was going to kiss her goodnight.

Madness! Too much wine. She shouldn’t have had the second glass.

‘My pleasure. I’d offer you coffee, but the cafetière was in the box that jingled,’ he told her ruefully, and she smiled.

‘I’ve got coffee,’ she told him before she could stop her mouth, and their eyes locked and he lifted his shoulders in an almost imperceptible shrug.

‘Coffee would be nice. Thank you.’

She unlocked her door, and he followed her in, all the way through to the kitchen. It was open to the dining area, and she directed him to the table to get herself a little space.

‘Make yourself comfortable,’ she said, and switched the kettle

on, glancing at the clock as she did so. Heavens, they'd been out for well over two hours. It was after eleven o'clock, and she had to be on the ward tomorrow at eight. Silly. She shouldn't have invited him in. Too late, and way too dangerous.

She frowned into the freezer, searching for the coffee, and then gave up and opened a new packet. She had no idea how long the other one had been open and her mind didn't seem to want to work it out.

'Black or white, and hot or cold milk?' she asked, sloshing hot water into the cafetière to warm it.

'Black, one sugar,' he said.

Of course. That was how he'd had it in the bistro, although he'd had a latte in the hospital that morning. Heavens. Was it only that morning? It seemed aeons ago!

Her thoughts miles away, she picked up the tray and found herself heading automatically to the sitting room at the front of the house. She'd meant to put it down on the dining table, but before she could change tack he'd stood up and was following. Damn! It would be too cosy in there, much too intimate, and the wine was fogging her brain.

The wine, and the company …

'Oh, this room's lovely, Daisy,' he said warmly as she put the coffee down, and she felt herself glow with his praise.

'Thanks. Do you want some music on?'

'Shall I?' He was crouching down in front of her iPod dock without waiting for an answer, scrolling through her music

collection, making himself at home. He put on something soft and romantic, and she could hardly tell him she didn't like it, as it was her music. And she'd sat down already, so it was impossible to choose the other sofa when he sat at the other end of hers, a perfectly respectable distance from her and yet just close enough that her nose could pick up the scent of that citrusy cologne he'd been wearing this morning.

It had been teasing her nostrils all evening, and she could have leant against him and breathed him in.

Except that it wouldn't make any sense at all, and if she knew what was good for her she'd drink her coffee and send him on his way.

Except it didn't quite work like that.

They talked and laughed until long after the coffee was finished, and then finally he sighed and got to his feet.

'I ought to go.'

'Yes, you should,' she said, and stood up, but she'd kicked off her shoes and she tripped on one and he caught her, his hands strong and steady on her arms.

'OK?' he murmured, and she lifted her head and met his eyes and everything seemed to stop dead.

Her heart, her lungs, the clock—everything froze in that moment, and then as if someone had thrown a switch and set him free, he bent his head, so slowly that she had all the time in the world to move away, and touched his lips to hers.

She sighed his name, her heart kicking back into life like a

wild thing, and then his arms were sliding round her and he was kissing her properly.

Improperly?

He tasted of coffee and after dinner mints, his tongue bold and persuasive, coaxing her, leading her, then retreating, making her follow.

She was putty in his hands, all her senses short-circuited by the gentle, rhythmic stroke of his tongue, the soft brush of his lips, the warm whisper of his breath over her face as he sipped and touched and lingered.

If he'd led her upstairs, she would have followed, but he didn't. Instead he lifted his head and rested his chin on her hair and cradled her gently against his chest.

'I really ought to go,' he said again, but his voice was gruff this time, the soft Yorkshire burr teasing her senses, and his arms stayed wrapped around her.

She lay there another moment listening to the steady, insistent thud of his heart against her ear, and then reluctantly she dropped her arms from round his waist and stepped back.

'Yes, you should. Thank you for taking me out. You really didn't need to, but it was lovely. I really enjoyed it.'

'So did I. I'd like to do it again, but I'm not sure if that's wise. We work together, we live next door. It could get messy.'

She nodded, struggling against an inexplicable urge to cry. 'Yeah. Lousy idea.' And he was divorced. She didn't do that. Didn't do anything. Not any more.

He took a step towards the door, then turned back, his eyes lingering on her face. ‘Thank you for everything today. You’ve been amazing.’

She tried to smile. ‘Any time.’

He lifted a hand and his knuckles grazed her cheek tenderly. ‘Goodnight, Daisy. Sleep well. I’ll see you tomorrow.’

She nodded. She couldn’t speak, because for some ridiculous reason she was on the verge of tears, and as if he knew that, he gave a sad, fleeting little smile and let himself out.

CHAPTER THREE

WORKWISE, Tuesday was a day like any other.

On a personal level, Daisy thought she was going to go out of her mind. She'd hardly slept, and by the time she arrived on the ward, she'd convinced herself that working with Ben was going to be impossible.

In fact, it was easy.

He greeted her with a smile, and if it hadn't been for the lingering heat in his eyes, she wouldn't have known anything had happened between them. It was just business as usual.

No cosy coffees today, just the normal routine of a busy surgical list, including an elective Caesarean on a woman with an old spinal injury who had to have a general anaesthetic rather than an epidural. It was a good chance for him to see what she could do, and he could talk her through it without worrying the patient or her partner.

Although, in fact, he hardly said anything, just nodded reassurance and made the odd suggestion, and then stripped off his gloves and walked out. 'You're doing fine. You close, I'm going to get a coffee. Bit of a late night.'

Evil man. Thank God for a mask she could hide her smile behind, and the scrub nurse and anaesthetist deep in conversation about another colleague.

She finished, stripped off her gloves and went out to the

staffroom, to find him pouring another coffee and holding it out to her as she approached.

'Nice,' he said. 'Good hands. You remind me of my father.'

'Is that a good thing?' she asked, not sure she was flattered.

'It is if you're a good vet.'

'Like James Herriot? All stone barns and stroppy farmers?'

He chuckled. 'Things have moved on since the forties. You've got the makings of an excellent surgeon, though.'

'Just don't get me delivering calves.'

The silly banter was just what she needed to take her mind off what had happened last night—or not happened. Except of course the tension between them was still there, the incredible sexual chemistry striking sparks off her every time she was within twenty feet of him. And of all the people for it to happen with—

'Hey, it's OK,' he murmured softly, as if he realised, and then the anaesthetist stuck his head round the door and gave them the thumbs up.

'She's round, she's fine. Ready for the next?'

He got to his feet and went to scrub, and when she'd drained her coffee she joined him and the awkward, sensitive moment was gone.

For now.

Ben closed the front door behind him, rolled his neck and cradled it in his palm, massaging the tight muscles.

He'd been operating most of the day, and on top of lugging

boxes all weekend, it was getting to him. Not forgetting lying awake thinking about Daisy all night.

He groaned and shut his eyes. He really, really didn't need to think about that. It had been difficult enough having to work alongside her all day without coming home and fantasising about her all evening as well.

He put the kettle on, rang the plumber back about the electrician and the plasterer, and made himself a cup of tea. He'd just dropped into a chair in his sitting room to drink it when his mobile rang.

'So how's the new house?'

He gave a slightly strangled laugh and looked around at the hideous 1970s wallpaper and the dangling paper on the ceiling. When he closed his eyes, all he could see was the trashed kitchen. 'Let's just say it's got potential.'

'Oops.'

'Yeah. The bath waste wasn't properly connected.'

'And?'

'I don't have a kitchen ceiling now.'

'OK …' His brother was stifling a laugh, he could tell, and he could feel his own lips twitch.

'You ought to come up and see it.'

Matt didn't bother to stifle the laugh then. 'You have to be kidding. You'll have me stripping wallpaper and pulling out kitchen units before I've taken my coat off,' he said drily, and then added, 'So, how's the job? Any good?'

‘Yes, very good. The SpR’s a bit of an old woman, but the registrar’s excellent. Good team.’

‘And your neighbours? Met them yet?’

‘Ah—yes. Actually, the registrar’s my neighbour. She’s in the other half.’

‘Is *she*, now?’

Ben closed his eyes and leant back. ‘Yes, *she* is. And she was very helpful about the leak. I took her out for dinner to say thank you,’ he added rashly, and he heard Matt’s curiosity crank up a notch.

‘And?’

‘And nothing.’

Matt was laughing. ‘Oh, come on, bro, I know you better than that. I thought you were sounding pretty chipper. So let’s have it. What’s her name?’

‘Daisy.’

‘*Daisy*! What kind of a name is that?’

‘Don’t mock, you’re only jealous.’

‘Ooh, defensive—that’s interesting! So what’s she like?’

‘Average height, curvy, long dark hair, green eyes, sexy mouth—’

‘Really? How sexy?’

Damn. He sighed and shut his eyes. ‘Didn’t mean to say that.’

He heard a low chuckle. ‘I’ll bet. How sexy?’

He gave up. ‘She kisses like a goddess,’ he admitted, and there was a second of startled silence on the other end.

Then, '*When* did you meet her?'

'Yesterday.'

'And you know how she *kisses*? *Already*? Sheesh, that's fast work! And she's a *colleague*? You're normally much more circumspect. She must have really lit a fire under you.'

Oh, yes. For all the good it'd do. 'It's not going anywhere. You know I'm not in the market for a relationship, Matt, any more than you are.'

'So who's talking about a relationship?' Matt asked with his usual bluntness, and he sighed again.

'She's a nice girl, not someone you take to bed for the hell of it.'

'I thought you grew out of that years ago.'

'Yeah, well, I nearly forgot.'

Matt blew out his breath. 'It must have been some kiss.' He sounded incredulous, and Ben ran a hand round the back of his neck and sighed.

'Yeah. Big mistake, kissing her. We—uh—we got a bit swept along on the moment, and we shouldn't have done. I should have had more sense, and I know it's crazy, and I keep telling myself it can't go anywhere, but—hell, I was so tempted to stay, Matt. I was that close …'

He heard her front door shut, and shook his head to clear it. 'Look, I've got to go, she's home now and these walls aren't exactly soundproof. I think I'm going round there to talk to her—tell her why it can't ever go anywhere before she gets ideas.'

‘Are you sure it can’t?’ Matt prompted, his voice soft. ‘Maybe it’s time to move on—find some time for yourself.’

And because he wanted it to be otherwise, because he was blown away by Daisy and wanted to be able to follow through but knew he couldn’t—or wouldn’t—Ben bit back.

‘I don’t see you moving on with your life,’ he said, and he heard Matt suck in his breath again.

‘Back off,’ he warned softly.

‘Sorry, ignore me. Well, no, don’t ignore me. Come up here and stay for a few days. It would be really good to see you and I promise I won’t make you strip wallpaper.’

‘I don’t believe a word of it, but I might come anyway, just to get a look at this Daisy. Good luck with her. I’ll look forward to meeting her one day.’

The line went dead, and he stood up and went out to the kitchen with his mug. He’d give Daisy a few minutes to change and feed the cat, and then he’d go round there.

And stop this thing in its tracks.

She wanted a bath. She’d wanted a bath since Sunday night, and nothing that had happened in the meantime had changed that.

She stared at it, sitting there taunting her with its promise of gentle, lapping water and utter relaxation. She still hadn’t unpacked from the weekend, there was washing waiting to go in the machine, and—

‘Oh, damn it,’ she said, and turned on the taps, poured in

a generous dollop of bubble bath, and while the delectably indulgent Victorian claw-foot bath filled with water, she put on some music, turned down the lights and lit a scented candle, then dropped her clothes into the laundry basket, stepped into the bath and slid under the bubbles.

'Oh, yes,' she groaned. Bliss.

Except she was twitchy. She could hear Ben moving around next door, unpacking probably. He was going to come round, she just knew it, and catching her in the bath really wouldn't help. She'd have to run down to the front door looking like a drowned rat, and what little was left of her pride would go straight out of the window.

She rinsed her hair in clean water, dragged herself reluctantly out of the bath, dried and picked up her dressing gown. It still had a tea stain all the way down the front, and there was no way she could wear it again until it had been washed. She really *had* to do her laundry.

She contemplated her baggy old sweats, and then put on jeans and last night's top, because she just had a feeling he'd be round. No reason. He hadn't said he would, but better to be prepared. And she resisted the urge to change the top for one he hadn't seen.

She'd dry her hair, and put on a touch of makeup—just a flick of mascara and some concealer under her eyes to hide the bags, because two nights without sleep showed on her fair skin—and then she'd unpack and tidy her room.

Not that she needed to worry about Ben seeing it, anyway, she

thought with irony as she dabbed on the concealer. He'd been the one to walk away, while she'd been teetering on the brink.

And in any case, what on earth was she *thinking*? She didn't *want* him in her bedroom! There was no way she was getting involved with another divorced man, because she was still dealing with the devastating emotional fallout from the last one. And he was her boss! *And* her neighbour!

'Huge great big fat no, Daisy,' she said firmly, and picked up her mascara.

She heard him run downstairs, then the sound of his door closing. A moment later, there was a knock on her own door, and even though she'd tried to convince herself it was the last thing she wanted, her heart raced with anticipation and her hands started to shake.

She put the mascara down before she could poke her eye out, went downstairs and opened the door.

He had flowers. A huge bunch of pure white longiflorum lilies, the scent astonishing, and he held them out to her.

'Are you trying to soften me up or is this a peace offering for trying to take advantage of my innocence?' she asked, taking them from him warily, and he felt his mouth kick up in a wry smile. If he'd wanted to take advantage of her innocence, he wouldn't have had to try very hard, she'd been with him every step of the way …

'Neither. I thought they'd mask the smell of damp plaster clinging to me.'

She gave a disbelieving little laugh and walked off, and he followed her through the door she'd left open—presumably for him—to the kitchen. She was putting the flowers in a tall vase and fiddling with them, pulling off leaves, trying to arrange the stubborn stems, and he could tell she was nervous.

Why? In case he tried anything again? No way. She was safe on that front, at least.

'Have you eaten?' he asked, and she felt her brow crease in a little frown.

'No. Not yet. I was going to have that ready meal.' *Don't ask me out again, Ben, please, don't ask me out.*

'Can I change your mind? I thought maybe we could find a pub somewhere, grab something to eat and have a chat.'

Her stomach fluttered, and she squashed the quiver of anticipation ruthlessly. 'I don't really want to go out. I could do with an early night, to be honest,' she lied, and jammed another lily stem into the vase.

He watched her thoughtfully. 'Is that, "Ben, sling your hook," or "I don't want to go out but we could have a takeaway"?' he asked, trying to read her body language.

She gave up on arranging the flowers and dumped the vase in the middle of the dining table. 'Neither. Ben, why are you here?' she asked a little desperately.

He propped himself up against the table next to her, hands thrust into his trouser pockets, and sighed quietly.

'I think we need to talk about what happened last night.'

‘Nothing happened last night.’

His laugh was low and mocking. ‘Get real, Daisy. We were *that* close.’ He held up his hand, his thumb and forefinger almost touching, and she felt heat pooling in her at the memory.

She made herself meet his eyes, and then regretted it, because they were glittering with an intensity that should have terrified her.

It *did* terrify her.

She looked away. ‘Well, spit it out, then, because you’ve obviously got something to get off your chest,’ she said briskly, and she felt the huff of his quiet laugh against her cheek.

‘It’s—complicated.’

She gave a derisive snort and straightened one of the lily stems. ‘The last man to say that told me he was going back to his wife and family,’ she said drily, and he found himself wondering about the bastard who’d hurt her.

‘I’m not going to say that, exactly.’

She felt relief try and break free, but sensed it was a little early and squashed it. And that ‘exactly’ was hanging in the air like an unexploded bomb. ‘So what *are* you saying, *exactly*?’ she prompted. ‘That you’re my boss and it’s a bad idea? You’re divorced? We’re neighbours? I’ve already worked all that out, and I absolutely agree.’

‘I have a daughter,’ he said, dropping the bombshell of all bombshells without preamble. ‘She’s nearly three, and she’s called Florence. That’s why I’m here, why I’m in Yoxburgh.

My ex moved back to be near her family and friends, and I've followed.'

Here we go again, she thought, and her heart sank. 'Because you want to get back with her and she won't play ball?'

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