

ENGLISH GIRL
IN NEW YORK

SCARLET WILSON

Cherish

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English Girl in New York

Аннотация

Rescued on her doorstep After an annus horribilis, the glittering lights of Manhattan are irresistible to English girl Carrie McKenzie. She's climbed the Empire State Building, but can't get a smile from her gorgeous neighbor! Until a tiny abandoned baby on her doorstep brings her to his door.... Cop Dan Cooper has an obligation to protect, and with Carrie out of her depth, he must come to her rescue. Surely two pairs of hands are better than one? Until she becomes a distraction, not just because of her tempting curves, but because of the pain in her eyes when she looks at the precious bundle in their charge....

“I told you—I’m not an expert in all this. I have no idea how to look after a baby!”

Dan reached over and touched her hand. She was getting flustered again, starting to get upset. “Carrie McKenzie?” He kept his voice low.

“What?” she snapped at him.

Yip, he was right. Her eyes had a waterlogged sheen. She was just about to start crying.

He gave her hand a little squeeze. “I think you’re doing a great job.”

Those dark brown eyes were still looking at her.

Still looking at her as if he understood a whole lot more than he was letting on. As if he’d noticed the fact that she was seconds away from cracking and bursting into floods of tears.

She looked down to where his hand covered hers. It was nice. It felt nice. And that was the thing that scared her most.

When was the last time someone had touched her like that? At the funeral? There had been a lot of hand-squeezing then. Comfort. Reassurance. Pity.

Not the same as this.

He smiled at her. A sexy kind of smile. The kind that could take her mind off the nightmare she was currently in.

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SCARLET WILSON wrote her first story aged eight and has never stopped. Her family have fond memories of *Shirley and the Magic Purse*, with its army of mice, all with names beginning with the letter 'M'. An avid reader, Scarlet started with every Enid Blyton book, moved on to the Chalet School series and many years later found Mills & Boon.

She trained and worked as a nurse and health visitor, and currently works in public health. For her, finding Mills & Boon[®] Medical Romance[™] was a match made in heaven. She is delighted to find herself among the authors she has read for many years.

Scarlet lives on the West Coast of Scotland with her fiancé and their two sons.

This is Scarlet Wilson's debut novel for Mills & Boon[®] Cherish[™]. Other titles by the author are available at www.millsandboon.co.uk

My first Mills & Boon[®] Romance story has to be dedicated to my own three personal heroes, Kevin, Elliott and Rhys Bain.

This story is set in New York, and they helped me celebrate

my 40th in New York in style!

Also to my editor Carly Byrne, who is soon to have her own adventure! Thank you for your support, and I hope to collaborate with you on lots more stories. x

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SUBWAY RATTLED into the station, the doors opened and Carrie felt herself swept along with the huddled masses on the platform, barely even looking up from her hunched position in her woefully thin coat. It had looked better on the internet. Really. It had.

She resisted the temptation to snuggle into the body in front of her as the carriage packed even tighter than normal. Just about

every train in the city had ground to a halt after the quick deluge of snow.

The streets had gone from tired, grey and bustling to a complete white-out with only vaguely recognisable shapes in a matter of hours.

An unprecedented freak snowstorm, they were calling it.

In October.

In the middle of New York.

The news reporters were having a field day—well, only the ones lucky enough to be in the studio. The ones out in the field? Not so much.

And Carrie appreciated why. Her winter coat wasn't due to be delivered for another two weeks. She could die before then. Her fingers had lost all colour and sensation ten minutes ago. Thank goodness she didn't have a dripping nose because at these temperatures it would freeze midway.

'They've stopped some of the buses,' muttered the woman next to her. 'I'm going to have to make about three changes to get home tonight.'

An involuntary shiver stole down her spine. Please let the train get to the end of the line. This part of the subway didn't stay underground the whole way; parts of it emerged into the elements and she could already see the thick white flakes of snow landing around them.

A year in New York had sounded great at the time. Magical even.

A chance to get away from her own annus horribilis.

A chance to escape everyone she knew, her history and her demons.

The only thing she'd taken with her was her exemplary work record.

In the black fog that had been last year it had been her one consistently bright shining star.

She should have known as soon as her boss had invited her into his office and asked her to sit down, giving her that half sympathetic, half cut-throat look. He'd cleared his throat. 'Carrie, we need someone to go to New York and represent the London office, leading on the project team for the next year. I understand this year has been difficult for you. But you were my first thought for the job. Of course, if it feels like too much—or the timing is wrong...' His voice had tailed off. The implication was clear. There were already two interns snapping at her heels, anxious to trample her on the way past.

She'd bit her lip. 'No. The timing is perfect. A new place will be just what I need. A new challenge. A chance for some time away.'

He'd nodded and extended his hand towards her. 'Congratulations. Don't worry about a thing. The firm has an apartment in Greenwich Village in the borough of Manhattan. It's a nice, safe area—easily commutable. You'll like it there.'

She'd nodded numbly, trying not to run her tongue along her suddenly dry lips. 'How long until I have to go?'

He'd cleared his throat, as if a little tickle had appeared. 'Three weeks.' The words were followed by a hasty smile. 'One of the partners will be leaving for business in Japan. He needs to brief you before he leaves.'

She'd tried hard not to let the horror of the time frame appear on her face as she'd stood up and straightened her skirt. 'Three weeks will be fine. Perfectly manageable.' Her voice had wavered and she'd hoped he didn't notice.

He'd stood up quickly. 'Perfect, Carrie. I'm sure you'll do a wonderful job for us.'

The train pulled into another station and Carrie felt the shuffle of bodies around her as the passengers edged even closer together to let the hordes of people on the platform board. It seemed as if the whole of New York City had been sent home early.

A cold hand brushed against hers and a woman gave her a tired smile. 'They've closed Central Park—one of the trees collapsed under the weight of the snow. I've never heard of that before.' She rolled her eyes. 'I'm just praying the school buses get home. Some of the roads are closed because they don't have enough snow ploughs and the grit wasn't due to be delivered for another two weeks.' Her face was flushed as she continued to talk. 'I've never seen it so bad, have you? I bet we're all snowed in for the next few days.'

Carrie gave a rueful shrug of her shoulders. 'I'm not from around here. I'm from London. This is my first time in New York.'

The woman gave a little sigh. 'Poor you. Well, welcome to the madhouse.'

Carrie watched as the train pulled out of the station. It didn't seem to pick up speed at all, just crawled along slowly. Was there snow on the tracks, or was it the weight of too many passengers, desperate to get home before the transport system shut down completely? Please, just two more stops. Then she would be home.

Home. Was it home?

The apartment in West Village was gorgeous. Not quite a penthouse, but part of a brownstone and well out of her budget. West Village was perfect. It was like some tucked away part of London, full of gorgeous shops, coffee houses and restaurants. But it still wasn't home.

Today, in the midst of this snowstorm, she wanted to go home to the smell of soup bubbling on the stove. She wanted to go home to the sound of a bubble bath being run, with candles lit around the edges. She wanted to go home somewhere with the curtains pulled, a fire flickering and a warm glow.

Anything other than her own footsteps echoing across the wooden floor in the empty apartment, and knowing that the next time she'd talk to another human being it would be with the man who ran the coffee stall across the street on the way to work the next morning.

She wrinkled her nose. It might not even come to that. The sky was darkening quickly. Maybe the woman next to her was

right. Maybe they would end up snowed in. She might not speak to another human being for days.

She shifted the bag containing the laptop in her hands. She had enough work to last for days. The boss had been clear. Take enough to keep busy—don't worry about getting into the office. If the snow continued she couldn't count on seeing any of her workmates.

The people in her apartment block nodded on the way past, but there had never been a conversation. Never a friendly greeting. Maybe they were just used to the apartment being used by business people, staying for a few weeks and then leaving again. It would hardly seem worthwhile to reach out and make friends.

A shiver crept down her spine and her mind started to race.

Did she have emergency supplies? Were there any already in the apartment? How would she feel being snowed in in New York, where it felt as if she didn't know a single person?

Sure, she had met people at work over the past two months. She'd even been out for a few after-work drinks. But the office she worked in wasn't a friendly, sociable place. It was a fast-paced, frenetic, meet-the-deadline-before-you-die kind of place. She had colleagues, but she wasn't too sure she had friends.

The train shuddered to a halt at Fourteenth Street and the door opened. 'Everybody out!'

Her head jerked up and the carriage collectively groaned. 'What?'

‘No way!’

‘What’s happening?’

A guard was next to the door. ‘This is the last stop, folks. Snow on the tracks. All trains are stopping. Everybody out.’

Carrie glanced at the sign. Fourteenth Street. One subway stop away from the apartment. She glanced down at her red suede ankle boots. She could kiss these babies goodbye. The ground outside was covered in thick, mucky slush. She didn’t even want to think about what they’d look like by the time she reached the apartment.

The crowd spilled out onto the platform and up towards the mezzanine level of the station on Fourteenth Street. Carrie could hear panicked voices all around her trying to plan alternative routes home. At least she knew she could walk from here, no matter how bad it was outside.

The sky had darkened rapidly, with thick grey clouds hanging overhead, continuing their deluge of snow.

Snow. It was such a pretty thing. The kind of thing you spent hours cutting out of paper as a kid, trying to make a snowflake. Then sticking on a blue piece of card and putting on the classroom wall or attaching to a piece of string and hanging from the Christmas tree.

It didn’t look like this in the storybooks. Thick wads of snow piled at the edges of the street, blanketing the road and stopping all traffic. The whiteness gone, leaving mounds of grey, icy sludge.

There was a creaking noise behind her and across the street, followed by a flood of shouts. ‘Move! Quickly!’

In slow motion she watched as a large pile of snow slowly slid from a roof four storeys above the street. The people beneath were hurrying past, blissfully unaware of what was happening above their heads.

It was like a slow-moving action scene from a movie. All the inevitability of knowing what was about to happen without being able to intervene. Her breath caught in her throat. A woman in a red coat. A little boy. An elderly couple walking hand in hand. A few businessmen with their coat collars turned up, talking intently on their phones.

There was a flash of navy blue. The woman in the red coat and little boy were flung rapidly from the sidewalk into the middle of the empty street. The elderly couple pressed up against a glass shop window as some frantic shouts alerted the businessmen.

The snow fell with a thick, deafening thump. A cloud of powdered snow lifting into the air and a deluge of muddy splatters landing on her face.

Then, for a few seconds, there was silence. Complete silence.

It was broken first by the whimpers of a crying child—the little boy who had landed in the road. Seconds later chaos erupted. Onlookers dashed to the aid of the woman and small child, helping them to their feet and ushering them over to a nearby coffee shop. A few moments later someone guided the elderly couple from under the shelter of the shop’s awning where

they had been protected from the worst of the deluge.

‘Where’s the cop?’

‘What happened to the cop?’

A policeman. Was that who had dived to the rescue? Her eyes caught the flicker of the blue lights of the NYPD car parked on the street. It was such a common sight in New York that she’d stopped registering them.

Some frantic digging and a few choice expletives later and one of New York’s finest, along with one of the businessmen, emerged from the snow.

Someone jolted her from behind and her feet started to automatically move along the sludgy sidewalk. There was nothing she could do here.

Her own heart was pounding in her chest. Fat use she would be anyway. She didn’t have a single medical skill to offer, and the street was awash with people rushing to help. She could see the cop brushing snow angrily from his uniform. He looked vaguely familiar but she couldn’t place him. He was holding his wrist at a funny angle and looking frantically around, trying to account for all the people he had tried to save.

A tissue appeared under her nose. ‘Better give your face a wipe,’ said another woman, gesturing towards her mud-splattered coat, shoes and face.

Carrie turned towards the nearest shop window and did a double take. She looked like something the cat had dragged in. ‘Thanks,’ she muttered as she lifted the tissue to her face,

smudging the mud further across her cheek. Her bright green coat was a write-off. The dry-clean-only label floated inside her mind. No dry-cleaning in the world could solve this mess.

She stared up at the darkening sky. It was time to go home. Whether it felt like home or not.

* * *

Daniel Cooper coughed and spluttered. His New York skyline had just turned into a heavy mix of grey-white snow. Wasn't snow supposed to be light and fluffy? Why did it feel as if someone were bench-pressing on top of him? A pain shot up his arm. He tried his best to ignore it. Mind over matter. Mind over matter.

There was noise above him, and shuffling. He spluttered. Snow was getting up his nose. It was strange being under here. Almost surreal.

He didn't feel as if he was suffocating. The snow wasn't tightly packed around his face. He just couldn't move. And Dan didn't like feeling as if things were out of his control.

The scuffling above him continued and then a few pairs of strong arms pulled him upwards from the snow. His head whipped around, instantly looking to see if the mother and child were safe.

There. On the other side of the sidewalk. He could see the flash of her red coat. Throwing them towards the street probably hadn't been the wisest move in the world, but the street was deep in snow, with not a car in sight. People were crowded around them but they were both safe, if a little shocked. The woman

lifted her head and caught his eye. One of her hands was wrapped around her son, holding him close to her side, the other hand she placed on her chest. She looked stunned, her gaze registering the huge mound of snow that they would have been caught under, the horror on her face apparent. Thank you, she mouthed at him.

He smiled. The air left his lungs in a whoosh of relief. Snow was sticking to the back of his neck, turning into water that was trickling down his spine. As if he weren't wet enough already.

The elderly couple. Where were they? And why was his wrist still aching so badly? He spun back around. The elderly couple were being escorted across the street towards a sidewalk café. Thank goodness. He gave a shiver. He didn't even want to think about the broken bones they could have suffered—or the head injuries.

'Buddy, your wrist, are you hurt?' A man in a thick wool coat was standing in front of him, concern written all over his face.

Dan looked down. The thing he was trying to ignore. The thing he was trying to block from his mind. He glanced at the pile of snow he'd been buried under. There, in amongst the debris, were some slate shingles. Who knew how many had fallen from the roof above. He was just lucky that one had hit his wrist instead of his head.

Darn it. His eyes met those of the concerned citizen in front of him. 'I'll see about it later,' he muttered. 'I'm sure it will be fine. Let me make sure everyone's okay.'

The man wrinkled his brow. 'They've called an ambulance for

the other guy.’ He nodded towards the sidewalk, where one of the businessmen was sitting, looking pale-faced and decidedly queasy. Truth be told, he felt a little like that himself. Not that he’d ever let anyone know.

He tried to brush some of the snow from his uniform. ‘Who knows how long the ambulance will take to get here. We might be better taking them to be checked over at the clinic on Sixteenth Street.’ He signalled across the street to another cop who’d appeared and was crossing quickly towards him. ‘Can you talk to dispatch and see how long it will take the ambulance to get here?’

The other cop shook his head and threw up his hands. ‘The whole city is practically shut down. I wouldn’t count on anyone getting here any time soon.’ He looked around him. ‘I’ll check how many people need attention—’ he nodded towards Dan ‘—you included, then we’ll get everyone round to the clinic.’ He rolled his eyes. ‘It’s gonna be a long shift.’

Dan grimaced. The city was in crisis right now. People would be stranded with no way of getting home. Flights were cancelled. Most of the public transport was shutting down. How much use would he be with an injured wrist?

A prickle of unease swept over him as he looked at the streets crowded with people. He should be doing his job, helping people, not sloping off to a clinic nearby.

He hated that. He hated the elements that were out of his control. He looked at the crowds spilling out onto the sidewalk from Fourteenth Street station and took a deep breath.

Things could only get worse.

* * *

Carrie stared out of the window. The sun had well and truly disappeared and the streets were glistening with snow. Not the horrible sludge she'd trudged through earlier—but freshly fallen, white snow. The kind that looked almost inviting from the confines of a warmly lit apartment.

Her stomach rumbled and she pressed her hand against it. Thank goodness Mr Meltzer lived above his store. Every other store in the area had pulled their shutters and closed. She glanced at the supplies on the counter. Emergency milk, water, bread, bagels, cheese, macaroni and chocolate. Comfort food. If she was going to be snowed in in New York she had every intention of eating whatever she liked. It would probably do her some good. After the stress of last year she still hadn't regained the weight she'd lost. Gaining a few pounds would help fill out her clothes. It was so strange that some women wanted to diet away to almost nothing—whereas all she wanted was to get her curves back again.

Her ears pricked up. There it was again. That strange sound that had brought her to the window in the first place. This apartment was full of odd noises—most of which she'd gotten used to. Rattling pipes with trapped air, squeaking doors and floorboards, sneaky unexplained drafts. But this one was different. Was it coming from outside?

She pressed her nose up against the glass, her breath steaming

the space around her. The street appeared deathly quiet. Who would venture out on a night like this? The twenty-four-hour news channels were full of Stay indoors. Don't make any journeys that aren't absolutely necessary. Anyone, with any sense, would be safely indoors.

She pushed open the window a little, letting in a blast of cold air. Thank goodness for thermal jammies, bed socks and an embossed dressing gown.

She held her breath and listened. There it was again. It was like a mew. Was it a cat? Downstairs, in the apartment underneath, she could hear the faint thump of music. It must be the cop. He obviously wouldn't be able to hear a thing. She didn't even know his name. Only that he must be a cop because of the uniform he wore. Tall, dark and handsome. But he hadn't looked in her direction once since she'd arrived.

Who had left their cat out on a night like this? Her conscience was pricked. What should she do? Maybe it was just a little cat confused by the snow and couldn't find its way home. Should she go downstairs and investigate? She glanced down at her nightwear. It would only take a few seconds. No one would see her.

She could grab the cat from the doorway and bring it in for the night. Maybe give it a little water and let it curl in front of the fire. A cat. The thought warmed her from the inside out. She'd never had a cat before. It might be nice to borrow someone else's for the night and keep it safe. At least she would have someone

to talk to.

She opened her door and glanced out onto the landing. Everyone else was safely ensconced in their apartments. Her feet padded down the flights of stairs, reaching the doorway in less than a minute. She unlocked the heavy door of the brownstone and pulled it open.

No.

It couldn't be.

She blinked and shut the door again. Fast.

Her heart thudded against her chest. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Her brain was playing horrible tricks on her. Letting her think she was safe and things were safely locked away before springing something out of the blue on her.

Maybe she wasn't even awake. Maybe she'd fallen asleep on the sofa upstairs, in front of the flickering fire, and would wake up in a pool of sweat.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

She turned the handle again, oh-so-slowly, and prayed her imagination would get under control. Things like this didn't happen to people like her.

This time her reaction was different. This time the cold night air was sucked into her lungs with a force she didn't think she possessed. Every hair on her body stood instantly on end—and it wasn't from the cold.

It was a baby. Someone had left a baby on her doorstep.

CHAPTER TWO

FOR A SECOND, Carrie couldn't move. Her brain wouldn't compute. Her body wouldn't function.

Her ears were amplifying the sound. The little mew, mew, mew she'd thought she'd heard was actually a whimper. A whimper that was sounding more frightening by the second.

Her immediate instinct was to run—fast. Get away from this whole situation to keep the fortress around her heart firmly in place and to keep herself sheltered from harm. No good could come of this.

But she couldn't fight the natural instinct inside her—no matter how hard she tried. So she did what any mother would do: she picked up the little bundle and held it close to her chest.

Even the blanket was cold. And the shock of picking up the bundle chilled her.

Oh, no. The baby.

She didn't think. She didn't contemplate. She walked straight over to the nearest door—the one with the thudding music—and banged loudly with her fist. 'Help! I need help!'

Nothing happened for a few seconds. Then the music switched off and she heard the sound of bare feet on the wooden floor. The door opened and she held her breath.

There he was. In all his glory. Scruffy dark hair, too-tired eyes and bare-chested, with only a pair of jeans clinging to his hips—and a bright pink plaster cast on his wrist. She blinked. Trying to take in the unexpected sight. His brow wrinkled. 'What the—?'

She pushed past him into the heat of his apartment.

‘I need help. I found this baby on our doorstep.’

‘A baby?’ He looked stunned, then reached over and put a hand around her shoulders, pulling her further inside the apartment and guiding her into a chair next to the fire.

‘What do I do? What do I do with a baby? Why would someone do this?’ She was babbling and she couldn’t help it. She was in a strange half-naked man’s apartment in New York, with an abandoned baby and her pyjamas on.

This really couldn’t be happening.

Her brain was shouting messages at her. But she wasn’t listening. She couldn’t listen. Get out of here.

She stared down at the little face bundled in the blanket. The baby’s eyes were screwed shut and its brow wrinkled. Was it a girl? Or a boy? Something shifted inside her. This was hard. This was so hard.

She shouldn’t be here. She absolutely shouldn’t be here. She was the last person in the world qualified to look after a baby.

But even though her brain was screaming those thoughts at her, her body wasn’t listening. Because she’d lifted her hand, extended one finger and was stroking it down the perfect little cold cheek.

* * *

Dan Cooper’s day had just gone from unlucky to ridiculous. He recognised her. Of course he recognised her. She was the girl with the sad eyes from upstairs.

But now she didn’t look sad. She looked panicked.

He was conscious that her gaze had drifted across his bare abdomen. If she hadn't been banging on the door so insistently he would have pulled on a shirt first. Instead, he tried to keep his back from her line of vision as he grabbed the T-shirt lying across the back of his sofa.

He looked back at her. Now she didn't look panicked. She'd stopped babbling. In fact, she'd stopped talking completely. Now she just sat in front of the fire staring at the baby. She looked mesmerised.

His cop instinct kicked into gear. Please don't let her be a crazy. The last thing he needed today was a crazy.

He walked over and touched her hand, kneeling down to look into her eyes. He'd heard some bizarre tales in his time but this one took the biscuit. 'What's your name?'

She gave him only a cursory glance—as if she couldn't bear to tear her eyes away from the baby. 'Carrie. Carrie McKenzie. I live upstairs.'

He nodded. The accent drew his attention. The apartment upstairs was used by a business in the city. They often had staff from their multinational partners staying there. His brain was racing. He'd seen this girl, but had never spoken to her. She always looked so sad—as if she had the weight of the world on her shoulders.

He racked his brain. Had she been pregnant? Would he have noticed? Could she have given birth unaided upstairs?

His eyes swept over her. Pyjamas and a dressing gown. Could

camouflage anything.

He took a deep breath. Time was of the essence here. He had to ask. He had to cover all the bases. ‘Carrie—is this your baby?’

Her head jerked up. ‘What?’ She looked horrified. And then there was something—something else. ‘Of course not!’

A feeling of relief swept over him. He’d been a cop long enough to know a genuine response when he saw one. Thank goodness. Last thing he needed right now was a crazy neighbour with a baby.

He reached over and pulled the fleecy blanket down from around the baby’s face. The baby was breathing, but its cheeks were pale.

The nearest children’s hospital was Angel’s, all the way up next to Central Park. They wouldn’t possibly be able to reach there in this weather. And it was likely that the ambulance service had ground to a halt. He had to prioritise. Even though he wasn’t an expert, the baby seemed okay.

He stood up. ‘How did you find the baby?’

Her brow wrinkled. ‘I heard a noise. I thought it was a cat. I came downstairs to see.’

He couldn’t hide the disbelief in his voice. ‘You thought a baby was a cat?’

Her blue eyes narrowed as they met his. His tone had obviously annoyed her. ‘Well, you know, it was kinda hard to hear with your music blaring.’

He ignored the sarcasm, even though it humoured him. Maybe

Miss Sad-Eyes had some spunk after all. 'How long since you first heard it?' This was important. This was really important.

She shook her head. 'I don't know. Five minutes? Maybe a little more?'

His feet moved quickly. He grabbed for the jacket that hung behind the door and shoved his bare feet into his baseball boots.

She stood up. 'Where are you going? Don't leave me alone. I don't know the first thing about babies.'

He turned to her. 'Carrie, someone left this baby on our doorstep.' His eyes went to the window, to the heavy snow falling on the window ledge as he slid his arms into his jacket. 'Outside, there could be someone in trouble. Someone could be hurt. I need to go and check.'

She bit her lip and glanced at the baby before giving a small cursory nod of her head. He stepped outside into the bitter cold, glancing both ways, trying to decide which way to go. There was nothing in the snow. Any tracks that had been left had been covered within minutes; the snow was falling thick and fast.

He walked to the other side of the street and looked over at their building. Why here? Why had someone left their baby here?

There were some lights on in the other apartment buildings on the street. But most of the lights were in the second or third storeys. Theirs was the only building with lights on in the first floor. It made sense. Someone had wanted this baby found quickly.

He walked briskly down the street. Looking for anything—

any sign, any clue. He ducked down a few alleyways, checking behind Dumpsters, looking in receded doorways.

Nothing. Nobody.

He turned and started back the other way. Checking the alleys on the other side of the street and in the opposite direction. His feet moving quickly through the sludgy snow.

He should have stopped and pulled some socks on. The thin canvas of his baseball boots was soaked through already. The temperature must have dropped by several degrees since the sun had gone down. He'd only been out here a few minutes and already he was freezing.

He looked up and his heart skipped a beat. Carrie was standing at his window, holding the baby in her arms. There was a look of pure desperation on her face—as if she were willing him to find the mother of this child.

It was a sight he'd never expected to see. A woman, holding a child, in his apartment. She'd pulled up his blinds fully and the expanse of the apartment he called home was visible behind her. His large, lumpy but comfortable sofa. His grandmother's old high-back chair. His kitchen table. His dresser unit. His kitchen worktop. The picture hanging above the fireplace.

Something niggled at him. His apartment was his space. He'd rarely ever had a relationship that resulted in him 'bringing someone over'. He could count on one hand the number of girlfriends who'd ever made it over his doorway. And even then it seemed to put them on an automatic countdown to disaster.

He didn't really do long-term relationships. Oh, he dated—but after a few months, once they started to get that hopeful look in their eyes, he always found a way to let them down gently. They eventually got the message. It was better that way.

So seeing Carrie standing in his apartment with a baby in her arms took the wind clean out of his sails. The sooner all this was over with, the better.

Still, she was cute. And even better—from London. She'd have no plans to stay around here. Maybe a little flirting to pass the time?

He gave himself a little shake and had another look around. There was no one out here. The streets were completely empty.

It was so funny being on the outside looking in. He loved his home. He cherished it. But he'd never really taken a moment to stand outside and stare in—to see what the world must see on their way past if he hadn't pulled the blinds. His grandmother had left it to him in her will and he knew how lucky he was. There was no way a single guy on a cop's salary could have afforded a place like this.

But it was his. And he didn't even owe anything on it. All he had to do was cover the bills.

A little thought crept into his mind. He hadn't quite pulled the blinds fully tonight. He just hadn't gotten round to it. Was that why someone had left their baby here?

Did they see into his home and think it would be a safe place to leave a baby?

It sent a shudder down his spine. The thought that a few minutes ago someone could have been out here having those kind of thoughts.

The snowfall was getting even heavier—he could barely see ten feet in front of him. This was pointless. He was never going to find any clues in this weather. He had to concentrate on the immediate. He had to concentrate on the baby.

He hurried back into the apartment. Carrie turned to face him. ‘Nothing?’ The anxiety in her voice was obvious. Was she just a concerned citizen? Or was it something else?

He shook his head and pulled off his jacket, hanging it back up behind the door.

He walked over to where she was standing at the window and had another quick look out into the deserted street, searching for something, anything—a shadow, a movement. But there was nothing. Just the silence of the street outside.

He stood next to her, watching the way she cradled the baby in her arms. She was holding the baby, but he could sense she was uneasy. She’d said she didn’t know the first thing about babies—well, neither did he. And in a snowstorm like this, it was unlikely they could get any help.

Most of the people who stayed around here were professionals. He couldn’t think of a single family that stayed on this street. There were a couple of older people who had lived here for years. Mrs Van Dyke upstairs, but her family had long since moved away. There really wasn’t anyone they could call on

for help.

He watched her. The way her blue eyes were fixed on the face of the baby, still swaddled in its blanket. It was then he noticed the way her arms were trembling. It was slight—ever so slight. Making her chestnut curls waver and the pink flush of her cheeks seem heated.

She was beautiful. Now that he was close enough to take a good look at her, Carrie McKenzie was beautiful. Even if she didn't know it herself. Even with the realm of sadness in her blue eyes. He wondered what they looked like when they were happy. Did they sparkle, like the sun glinting off a turquoise-blue sea?

They were standing too close. He was sure his warm breath must be dancing across her skin. He could smell the orange scent of her bath oils, still present on her skin. He liked it. It was nicer than the cloying scent of some perfumes that women wore. The ones that prickled your nose from the other side of the room. This was like a warm summer's day. Here, in his living room, in the middle of a snowstorm in New York.

She looked up at him with those sad blue eyes. She didn't pull away from him. She didn't seem to think he had invaded her personal space. It was quite unnerving. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been this close to a beautiful woman in his apartment—and certainly not one in her nightwear.

A smile danced across his face. If he'd ever pictured a woman in his apartment in her nightwear it certainly hadn't been in fluffy pyjamas and bed socks. She blinked and it snapped him out of

his wayward thoughts and back to the current situation.

‘I don’t even know your name,’ she whispered.

Wow. He hadn’t even introduced himself. What kind of a New Yorker was he that his neighbour didn’t even know his name? His grandma would kill him for his lack of manners and hospitality.

Why hadn’t he ever introduced himself? Was it because he was so used to the constant flow of traffic up above him that he hadn’t thought it worth his while? The thought shamed him. Because this woman definitely looked as if she could do with a friend. ‘Dan. Daniel Cooper.’

‘Daniel,’ she repeated, as if she were trying to associate his face with the name. Her lips curled upwards. ‘It’s nice to meet you, Daniel,’ she whispered, her gaze steady on his. ‘Even if I am barely dressed.’ He liked that about her. Even though her arms were trembling and she was clearly out of her depth, she could still look him clear in the eye and make a joke at her own expense.

The baby let out a whimper, reminding them of its presence, and he jerked back to reality. ‘Maybe it’s time to find out whether we’ve had a boy or a girl.’ He raised his eyebrows at her and held out his hands to take the bundle from her.

It only took a few seconds to relieve her of the weight. There was a noticeable sigh of relief in her shoulders as she handed the baby over.

He walked closer to the fire and unwound the little blanket. His cast made it awkward. There were no baby clothes underneath—no diaper. Just a little wrinkled towel. Carrie let out

a gasp, lifting her hand to her mouth at the sight of a piece of string and a barely shrivelled umbilical cord.

Dan sucked in a deep breath. 'Well, like I said, I'm no expert but I guess this means we have a newborn.' A million thoughts started to flood into his head but he tried to push them aside. 'And I guess I should say congratulations, we've got a boy.' He rewrapped the blanket and lifted the little one onto his shoulder, trying to take in the enormity of the situation.

'I have a friend who works at Angel's, the children's hospital. Let me give her a call.'

'Her?'

He lifted his head. It was just the way she said the word her. As if it implied something else entirely.

'Yes. She's a paediatrician. Since neither of us know what we're doing and we can't get any immediate help, I guess she's the best bet we've got.'

He walked over to the phone and dialled quickly, putting the phone onto speaker as he adjusted the baby on his shoulder, away from his cast. 'Can you page Dr Adams for me? Tell her it's Sergeant Cooper and it's an emergency. Thanks.'

It only took a few seconds to connect. 'Dan? What's up?'

The relief he felt was instant. Shana was the best kids' doctor that he knew. She would tell him exactly what to do.

'Hi, Shana. I've got a bit of a problem. I've had a baby dumped on my doorstep and from the looks of it, it's a newborn.'

'What?' He could hear the incredulous tone in her voice. 'In

this weather?’

‘Exactly.’

Shana didn’t mess around. She was straight down to business.

‘Is the baby breathing?’

‘Yes.’

‘How cold? Do you have a thermometer? What’s the baby’s colour? And how is it responding?’

Carrie burst in. ‘We think he was outside for just over five minutes. His skin was cold when I brought him in—and he was pale. But he’s started to warm up. He looks pinker now.’ Her brow was furrowed. ‘Do you have a thermometer, Dan?’ She was shaking her head. ‘I don’t.’

‘Who’s that?’

Daniel cleared his throat. ‘That’s Carrie, my neighbour from upstairs. It was she who heard the baby crying. And no, Shana, we don’t have a thermometer.’

‘No matter. Crying? Now that’s a good sign. That’s a positive.’

Carrie shook her head. ‘Not crying exactly, more like a whimper.’

‘Any noise is good noise. You said he’s a newborn. Is the cord still attached? Is it tied off?’

‘Yes, it’s tied with a piece of string. Doesn’t look the cleanest. But the baby was only wrapped up in a blanket. No clothes. No diaper.’

‘Sounds like no preparation. I wonder if the mother had any prenatal care. Does the baby look full term?’

Daniel shrugged and looked at Carrie, who shook her head and mouthed, I don't know.

'To be honest, Shana, neither of us are sure. I guess he looks okay. What does a full-term baby look like?'

'Does he have a sucking reflex? Is he trying to root?'

'What? I have no idea what you're talking about.' He was trying hard not to panic. This was all second nature to Shana. These types of questions were the ones she asked day in, day out. To him it all sounded like double Dutch.

They could hear the sound of muffled laughter at the other end of the phone. 'One of you, scrub your hands thoroughly under the tap then brush your finger around the side of the baby's mouth. I want to know if he turns towards it, as if he's trying to breastfeed or bottlefeed.'

Daniel nodded at Carrie, who walked over to the sink and started scrubbing her hands. 'Give us a second, Shana.'

Carrie dried her hands and then walked back over and lifted her finger hesitantly to the side of the baby's mouth. It took a few gentle brushes to establish that the little guy was reacting to her touch, turning towards it and opening his mouth.

'Yes, Shana. We think he is responding.'

'Good. That's a sign that he's around full term.' She gave an audible sigh. 'Okay, Daniel, you're not going to like this.'

'What?' Did she think something was wrong with the baby?

'There's no way I can send anyone from Angel's to get that baby. Our emergency room is packed and the roads around us are

completely impassable. And from the weather report it's going to be like that for a few days.'

'Is that the good news or the bad news?' The mild feeling of panic was starting to rise.

Shana let out a laugh. 'Probably both. It sounds as if your baby is doing okay. Thank goodness. He will need a proper assessment as soon as possible. I'll put the necessary call in to social services, but they are on the other side of the city from you and everyone is in crisis right now. It will be a few days before they get to you. In the meantime the first thing you need to do is feed the little guy. Do you have somewhere local you can get some supplies?'

Blank. His brain had instantly gone blank. He'd never had any reason to look for baby supplies before. Where on earth would he get them?

Carrie touched his arm. 'Mr Meltzer stays above his store. I'm sure he'll have some powdered baby milk and diapers we can buy.'

Instant relief, followed by a sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach. 'Shana, you can't seriously expect us to look after a baby. Me, Shana? Seriously?'

'Daniel Cooper, you're one of the most responsible guys I know. I can't think of a single other person I would trust with a newborn baby right now. You're like any brand-new parent. None of them have experience. They just learn as they go. You'll need to do the same.'

'But they have nine months to get used to the idea. They read

dozens of books about what to do—’

‘And you have your own personal paediatrician at the other end of a phone. Not that I think you’ll need me.’

Daniel could feel his heartbeat quicken in his chest. He wasn’t afraid—not really. As a New York cop he’d dealt with most things in life. He’d had a gun pulled on him, a knife—on more than one occasion. He’d stopped a young girl from being abducted once, and managed to resist the temptation of doing what he really wanted to the potential kidnapper. He’d even talked a guy down from the edge of a rooftop before. But this? Looking after a baby? Why did it seem more intimidating than anything else?

‘Shana, I don’t think I’m the best person for the job.’

‘Why not? You’re practical. You’re resourceful. And right now you’re the best that baby’s got.’ She was beginning to sound exasperated. Angel’s must be under an enormous amount of pressure right now, and he really didn’t want to add to it. ‘You’ve even got some help from your neighbour.’

He glanced over at Carrie, who was shaking her head frantically. No, she was mouthing.

‘Suck it up, Daniel—and call me if you have any problems.’ There was a click at the other end of the phone.

Carrie’s chin was practically bouncing off the floor. ‘Suck it up, Daniel? Suck it up? That’s what she says to you?’ Her voice was getting higher pitched by the second and the baby was starting to squirm in his arms, reacting to the noise.

Reactions? Was that a good sign, too? He really didn't have a clue.

He shrugged. 'She's my best friend's older sister. It isn't the first time Shana's told me to suck it up—and it won't be the last.' He walked over to the sofa and sank down onto the cushions. This little guy weighed more than he thought. Or maybe it was just because he couldn't swap him between his arms.

'I'm going to have to put a call in to the station, to let my captain know about the abandoned baby.'

Carrie sagged down next to him on the sofa. She shook her head and squeezed her eyes shut. 'I know we've just met, Daniel, but I'm sorry. I just can't help you with this. I can't do it. Babies—' she hesitated '—they're just not my thing. I won't be any help anyway. I don't know a thing about babies.'

He stared at her. Hard. 'You've got to be joking, right?'

Her eyes opened and widened. It was clear she was instantly on the defence. 'No. Why?'

He shook his head in disbelief. 'You turn up at my door with a baby, and now you're expecting to dump it on me in the middle of a snowstorm.'

When he said the words out loud they were even worse than the thoughts in his head.

Her face paled. 'But I...'

'I nothing.' A grin appeared on his face. 'Suck it up, Carrie.'

She drew back from him and he could sense her taking some deep breaths. 'It's not quite like that.'

He shook his head. There was no way she was leaving him high and dry. He waved his cast at her. 'What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to bath a baby with one of these? Sure, I can probably manage to feed a baby and make up some bottles. But be practical, Carrie. I'm hardly the ideal babysitter right now.' He could see her staring at his pink cast and trying to work things out in her head. 'Least you can do is give me some help.'

Her cheeks flushed with colour, as if she'd just realised how mean it looked to walk away.

She pointed at his cast. 'How did you end up with that anyway? And what made you pick a pink cast?'

He snorted. 'Pick isn't the word I would choose. There was an accident earlier today, a tonne of snow fell off a roof and I got trapped underneath it pushing people out of the way.'

Her eyes widened. 'On Fourteenth Street? That was you?'

He sat up a little straighter. 'How do you know about that?'

'I was there. I saw it happen.' She tilted her head to the side and stared at him again. 'I didn't realise it was you—I mean, I didn't know you.' She reached over and touched his cast. 'I remember. I remember seeing you hold your wrist at a funny angle. I guess it's broken, then?'

He nodded.

'And the pink?'

He smiled. 'It seems that today was the biggest day in the world for fractures at the clinic on Sixteenth Street.' He waved his wrist. 'Pink was the only colour they had left.'

She started to laugh. 'I can just imagine the look on your face when they told you that.'

He started to laugh, too. 'I was less than impressed. The air might have been a little blue.'

'Not pink?'

'Definitely not pink.'

She shook her head. 'That was really scary. I just remember the noise and the shouts. What about that woman in the red coat and her little boy? And that elderly couple?'

She really had been there. And she could remember the details. The lady could be a cop. 'All checked out and okay. One of the businessmen twisted his ankle and the other was being assessed for a head injury. He kept being sick.'

'Wow. Thank goodness you were there.'

Her words struck a chord with him. He hadn't really thought about that. He'd been too angry at breaking his wrist and being out of action for the NYPD. He hadn't really had time to stop to think about what could have happened to that elderly couple, or the woman and her young son.

A vision flashed in his eyes. The woman in the red coat cradling her son with one arm as if he was the most precious thing on earth. Then looking at him, with her hand on her heart, and mouthing, Thank you. He hadn't really had time to talk to her properly, but that one action had been more than enough for him. He didn't do this job for the thanks.

The little bundle shifted in his arms and started to whimper

again. There was colour coming into the baby's cheeks and his tongue was starting to play around the edge of his mouth. He sighed. 'I guess our boy is getting hungry. I'll give Mr Meltzer a call and see if he can open the store so we can get some supplies. Know anything about making baby bottles?'

Carrie shook her head quite forcefully. 'I've told you—I can't help. This isn't my thing.'

But Dan was already on his feet, shifting his weight and moving the baby into her arms, whether she was ready or not. 'My computer's right next to you. Do an internet search while I'm gone.' He flicked through the nearby phone directory and punched a number into his phone. 'I'll only be five minutes.'

He grabbed his jacket and headed for the door again. What was her problem? He wasn't so chauvinistic that he expected all women to want to be mothers, but he did expect any responsible adult to help out in an emergency situation.

Maybe it was just the cop in him. Maybe his expectations of the average person were too high. But he'd seen the way she'd looked at the baby. She might not have experience, but she couldn't hide the tenderness in her eyes.

Maybe she was just uncomfortable with the pyjama situation. Maybe he should offer to let her go back upstairs and get changed.

He pressed the send button on his phone as he headed along the white street. Whatever it was, she'd better get over it quick. There was no way he was doing this on his own.

* * *

Carrie sat frozen on the sofa.

This wasn't happening. This couldn't be happening.

There was a weight pressed firmly against her chest. Like a huge dumb-bell just sitting there, taunting her to try and pull some air into her lungs.

He was scowling at her again. The baby. Nearly as much as Daniel Cooper had scowled at her when she'd tried to pull out all the lame excuses under the sun to get out of here.

It must make her seem like a bitch. But right now she didn't care.

She could feel tears starting to flood into her eyes. This was someone's precious baby. Someone's living, breathing, precious bundle. What on earth could happen in this life that would make you leave a baby on someone's doorstep in the middle of a snowstorm?

It wasn't fair. Life wasn't fair.

Last time she'd held a baby it hadn't been moving. Its little chest didn't have the rise and fall that this little boy's had. It didn't have the pink flush to its cheeks.

She blinked back the tears. The tightening in her chest was getting worse.

It.

A terrible term.

But she couldn't use any other right now. She couldn't think about her daughter. She couldn't think about Ruby McKenzie.

She couldn't let that name invade her thoughts.

Because then she would spiral downwards. Then she would remember the nursery and pram. Then she would remember the routine check at the midwife's, followed by the urgent scan. Then she would remember the forty-eight-hour labour, with no cry of joy at the end of it.

Then she would remember the disintegration of her five-year relationship, as both of them struggled to cope with their bereavement.

The whimpering was getting worse, turning into full-blown screams.

She'd have given anything to hear the screams of her daughter. She'd have given anything to see her daughter screw up her face and let out a yell like that.

She shifted the baby onto her shoulder. Five minutes. Dan would be back in five minutes.

She put her hand on the keyboard of the computer and did a quick search. If she could keep her mind on something else, she could fight back the feelings. She could stop them from enveloping her. How to sterilise and prepare bottles.

She read the screen in front of her, scanning quickly. Her hand automatically moving and patting the baby on the back. She could do this. She could help him make a bottle and then leave.

He couldn't expect any more. She couldn't give any more.

She could feel herself pulling in—withdrawing inside herself. Turning into someone else. Stepping outside herself to a place

where there was no hurt, no memories. Switching off.

It was the only way she'd coped before. And it was the only way she could cope now.

She glanced at the clock. Ten minutes maximum.

She could keep this face painted in place for ten minutes when he got back. That was how long it would take to sterilise the bottle, make up the powdered milk and leave him positioned on the sofa.

Her eyes registered something on the screen. Darn it! Cooled boiled water. How long did the water have to cool for before it was suitable to give a baby?

Maybe he'd only just boiled the kettle. She juggled the baby in her arms and walked over to the kitchen countertop, putting her hand on the side of the kettle. Stone cold. She picked it up and gave it a shake—and practically empty.

Nightmare.

She ran the tap and filled the kettle, putting it back into position and flicking the switch for it to boil.

Then she felt it—and heard it.

That first little squelchy noise. Followed by a warm feeling where her hand was resting on the baby's bottom.

No nappy. This little boy had no nappy on.

Her heart sank like a stone as she felt the warm feeling spread across her stomach. Could this night really get any worse?

CHAPTER THREE

DAN ENDED THE CALL on his phone. His captain had let

out the loudest, heartiest laugh he'd ever heard when he'd told him about the baby. It hadn't helped.

He could hear pandemonium in the background at the station. He should be there helping. Instead of doing a late-night recce for baby supplies.

Mr Meltzer, on the other hand, had been full of concern. Loading up supplies on the counter and waving his hand at Dan's offer of payment.

'If I help the little guy get a better start in life that's all I need.'

The words tormented him. Ground into him in a way they shouldn't. If only everyone felt like Mr Meltzer.

He pushed open the door to the apartment building and kicked the snow off his favourite baseball boots. They were really beyond repair.

Carrie was waiting and she pulled open the inside door. 'Did you get some milk?'

He nodded and dumped the bags on the counter.

'Wow, how much stuff did you get?'

He pulled his arms out of his jacket. 'Who knew a baby needed so much? Mr Meltzer just kept pulling things off his shelves and saying, "You better take some of that".'

Carrie tipped one of the bags upside down. 'Please tell me you got some nappies and dummies. We need both—now.'

'What? What are you talking about?'

She waved her hand in the air. 'Oh, you Americans. Nappies—diapers. And dummies—what do you call them? Pacifiers? He's

starting to get restless and it will take a little time to sterilise the bottles.’ She rummaged through the bags. ‘You did get bottles, didn’t you?’

‘What’s that smell?’ He wrinkled his nose and caught sight of the expression on her face. ‘Oh, no. You’re joking. He can’t have. He hasn’t eaten yet.’ He pulled out a pack of baby wipes. ‘I take it we’ll need these?’

She nodded. ‘Do you have a towel we can lay him on? I’d say getting a nappy on the little guy is a priority.’

Dan walked over to the laundry cupboard and started throwing things about. ‘I know I’ve got a brand-new set of towels in here somewhere. My friend Dave just got married. He was drowning in the things. Ah, here we are!’ He pulled out some navy blue towels and laid one down on the rug, a little away from the fireplace. He glanced at his cast. It was more inconvenient than he first thought—to say nothing about the constant ache that was coming from his wrist. ‘Can you do this?’

He could see her taking a deep breath. ‘Fine,’ she muttered through gritted teeth. She grabbed the bag of diapers from the counter, along with the wipes and some diaper sacks. ‘Did you get some cream?’

‘Cream? What for?’

‘For putting on the baby’s bum, of course. Everyone knows you put cream on a baby to stop them from getting nappy rash.’

He shrugged his shoulders. ‘Mr Meltzer didn’t seem to know—and he knew everything else.’ He pulled something from a

second plastic bag. ‘Look—ready-made formula in a carton. We’ve got the powdered stuff, too, but he said this was ready to use.’

She scowled at him as she laid the baby down on the fresh towel and peeled back the blanket.

‘Eww!’

‘Yuck!’

The smell was awful and filled the apartment instantly. The baby, on the other hand, seemed to quite like the freedom the open blanket gave and started to kick his legs.

‘How can all that stuff come from one tiny little thing?’ He really wanted to pinch his nose shut.

Carrie was shaking her head, too, as she made a dive for the baby wipes. ‘I have no idea, but the next one is yours.’

He looked at her in horror. ‘No way.’ He waved his pink cast again. ‘Can you imagine getting a bit of that caught on here? It would stink forever. I would smell like this for the next six weeks.’ He shook his head. ‘At least you can wash your hands.’

Carrie was deep in concentration, wiping and thrusting the dirty wipes into the supposedly scented diaper sack. She pulled out one of the diapers and held it up. ‘Well, at least you seemed to have got the right size.’

Dan bit his lip. ‘Actually, there was a whole shelf of the things. Mr Meltzer picked them out.’

She raised her eyebrow. ‘Can you ask him to come babysit, too, please? He seems to be the only person around here who

knows anything about babies.’

‘I tried. He wasn’t buying it.’

Carrie positioned the diaper under the clean little bottom and snapped the tapes into place. ‘There, that’s better. Pity the smell hasn’t disappeared.’ She picked up the blanket by the corner. ‘This will need washing. Where’s your machine?’

‘In the basement.’

She let out a sigh. ‘I don’t get that about New York. Why does everyone have their washing machine in the basement?’ She waved her hands around. ‘You’ve plenty of room in here. Why isn’t your washing machine in the kitchen? Everyone in London has their washing machine in their flat. You don’t have to walk down miles of stairs to do the laundry.’

‘Worried about leaving your underwear unguarded?’

There it was again. That cheeky element coming out. He couldn’t help it. She seemed so uptight at times.

Just as he suspected, a pink colour flooded her cheeks. He could almost hear the ticking of her brain trying to find a way to change the subject quickly.

She nodded over to the counter. ‘We need to sterilise the bottles.’

‘I think he gave me some tablets for that.’ Dan started to root around in one of the bags.

‘He probably did, but according to the internet the bottles would need to be in the sterilising solution for thirty minutes. It only takes ten minutes if we boil them. That way you can use the

ready-made formula and get it into him quicker.'

'What about one of these? Can we give him a pacifier in the meantime?'

Carrie shook her head. 'I think we need to sterilise them, too. And we need to use only cooled boiled water with the powdered milk. But I've no idea how long water takes to cool once you've boiled it. And I don't know whether we should put the milk in the fridge or keep it at room temperature—everyone seems to have a different opinion on the internet.' She was getting more harassed by the second, the words rattling out of her mouth and her face becoming more flushed. 'I told you—I'm not an expert in all this. I have no idea what I'm doing!'

Something clenched in his stomach. He could sense the feelings overwhelming her, and he had a whole host of some himself.

Deep down, having a woman in his apartment—without an expiry date—was freaking him out. But these weren't normal circumstances. He needed Carrie McKenzie's help. He couldn't do this on his own and right now he could sense she wanted to cut and run.

He was feeling a bit flustered himself. Flustered that some gorgeous Brit was in his space. But this wasn't about him. This wasn't about Daniel Cooper and the fact he liked his own space. This wasn't about the fact his relationships only lasted a few months because he didn't want anyone getting comfortable in his home—comfortable enough to start asking questions. This was

about a baby. A baby who needed help from two people.

So, he did what his grandma had always taught him. Her voice echoed in his head. You get the best out of people when you compliment them—when you thank them for what they do.

He reached over and touched Carrie's hand. She was getting flustered again, starting to get upset. 'Carrie McKenzie?' He kept his voice low.

'What?' she snapped at him.

Yep, he was right. Her eyes had a waterlogged sheen. She was just about to start crying.

He gave her hand a little squeeze. 'I think you're doing a great job.'

* * *

The world had just stopped because she wasn't really in it.

This was one of those crazy dreams. The kind that had your worst type of nightmare and a knight in shining armour thrown in, too. The kind that made no sense whatsoever.

She wasn't here. She wasn't awake.

Her earlier thought had been true. She was actually fast asleep on the sofa upstairs. She would wake up in a few minutes and this would all be over. This would all be something she could shrug off and forget about.

Except those dark brown eyes were still looking at her.

Still looking as if he understood a whole lot more than he was letting on. As if he'd noticed the fact she was seconds away from cracking and bursting into floods of tears.

But he couldn't, could he? Because he didn't really know her at all.

Daniel Cooper was an all-action New York cop. The kind of guy from a romance movie who stole the heroine's heart and rode off into the sunset with her. A good guy.

The kind of guy who looked after an abandoned baby.

She was trying to swallow. Her mouth was drier than a desert, and it felt as if a giant turtle had started nesting at the back of her throat.

She looked down to where his hand covered hers. It was nice. It felt nice.

And that was the thing that scared her most.

When was the last time someone had touched her like that? At the funeral? There had been a lot of hand squeezing then. Comfort. Reassurance. Pity.

Not the same as this.

He smiled at her. A crooked kind of smile, revealing straight white teeth.

A sexy kind of smile. The kind that could take her mind off the nightmare she was currently in.

There was a yelp from the towel. Dan moved his hand and looked down. 'I guess baby's getting hungry. I'll stick the bottles in the pot.'

Carrie left the baby on the towel and started to look through the bags on the counter. Five prepacked cartons of formula, two different kinds of powder, more dummies and a whole

mountain's worth of baby wipes.

She folded her arms across her chest as she watched Dan dangle the bottles and teats from his fingertips into the boiling water. 'Clothes, Dan. What are we going to put on him?'

His brow wrinkled and he shook his head. 'Darn it, I knew I'd forgotten something. There weren't any baby clothes in the general store, and there's no place else around here that sells any. Can't we just leave him in the diaper?'

Carrie shook her head. 'Want me to do a search on that?' She started to pace. 'Don't you know anyone around here with kids who might still have some baby clothes? How long have you stayed here?'

He blinked and his lips thinned. As if he was trying to decide how to answer the question. He averted his eyes and started busying himself with the coffee maker. 'I've lived here on and off my whole life. This was my grandma's place.'

'Was it?' She was surprised but it made perfect sense. After all, how did a young guy on a cop's salary afford a gorgeous brownstone West Village apartment? She looked around, starting to take in the decor of the place. There were a few older items that didn't look quite 'him'. A rocker pushed in the corner near the window, a small antique-style table just at the front door, currently collecting mail and keys, a dresser in the more modern-style kitchen. It was kind of nice, to see the old mixed in with the new. 'It's a lovely place. Big, too. You're a lucky guy.'

He made a noise. More like a snort. 'Yeah, I guess. Just born

lucky, me.'

Carrie froze, not really knowing how to respond. What did that mean?

But he must have realised his faux pas because he changed the subject quickly. 'The ten minutes will be up soon. Once we've fed the little guy I'll go on up to Mrs Van Dyke's place. Her family used to stay here. She might have some things in storage we could use.'

'Mrs Van Dyke? Which one is she? Is she the one on the second floor who looks as if she came over on the Mayflower and is about six hundred years old?'

He raised his eyebrows. 'Watch it. According to her, her family were amongst the original Dutch settlers. And I don't think she's quite six hundred years old. She's as sharp as a stick, and she hasn't aged in the past twenty-five years.' He gave her a wink as he switched off the burner. 'Maybe you should ask her what cream she uses.'

Carrie picked up an unopened packet of pacifiers and tossed them at his head. They bounced off the wall behind him.

'Careful, careful, we've got a baby in the apartment. We don't want anything to hit him.' He glanced at his watch. 'On second thought, it's getting kind of late. Maybe it's too late to go knocking on Mrs Van Dyke's door.' His gaze was still fixed on the baby, lying on the floor, grizzling impatiently for his milk.

Carrie folded her arms as she stood next to him. 'You've got to be kidding. Mrs Van Dyke is up watching TV until four a.m.

most nights. And I take it she's getting a little deaf, because I can't get to sleep in my apartment because of the Diagnosis Murder or Murder, She Wrote reruns that I hear booming across the hall. Seriously, the woman needs a hearing aid.'

'And seriously? She'll be far too proud to get one.'

There was something nice about that. The fact that he knew his elderly neighbour so well that he could tell exactly why she didn't have a hearing aid. 'So what was wrong with me, then?' She couldn't help it. The words just spilled out.

'What do you mean?'

'You obviously know your other neighbours well, but it was too much trouble to even say hello to me in the foyer.'

The colour flooded into his cheeks. Unflappable Dan was finally flapping. He could deal with a tonne of snow falling from a roof, he could deal with a baby dumped on his doorstep, but this? This was making him avert his eyes and struggle to find some words.

'Yeah, I'm sorry about that. I just assumed you were staying for only a few days. Most of the others seemed like ships that pass in the night.'

'I've been here two months, Dan. Eight long weeks—' she let out a little sigh '—and to be honest, this isn't the friendliest place I've ever stayed.'

He cringed. 'I can hear my grandmother shouting in my ear right now. Shaming me on my bad manners. I did see you—but you always looked like you had a hundred and one things on your

mind. You never really looked in the mood to talk.'

This time Carrie felt like cringing. There was a reason Dan was a cop. He was good at reading people. Good at getting to the heart of the matter. And she had only herself to blame for this, because it was she who'd called him on his behaviour.

She gave a little shrug, trying to brush it off. 'Maybe a cheery good morning would have been enough.'

She walked over and lifted the pot, tipping the boiling water into the sink.

He appeared at her back, his chin practically resting on her shoulder, as he lifted the plastic bottles and teats out onto the worktop with a clean dish towel. 'You're right, Carrie. You're absolutely right. I should have said hello. I should have said good morning.'

She turned her head slightly. He wasn't quite touching her, but she could feel the heat emanating from his body. She wanted to step away, to jerk backwards, but her body wasn't letting her.

Her lips were curving into a smile—even though she was telling them not to—as she stared into those brown eyes again. It was nice. Being up close to someone again. His lips were only inches from hers. She wondered if he was having the same kind of thoughts she was. The kind of thoughts that made her forget there was a baby in the room...until he let out an angry wail from the floor.

They jumped back, both at the same time. She reached for one of the cartons. 'Do you have a pair of scissors?'

He opened a drawer, pulled out the scissors, snipped the edge of the carton and upended the contents into one of the cooled bottles. Carrie picked up one of the teats by the edge of its rim and placed it on the bottle, screwing it in place with the retaining ring.

The bottle sat on the middle of the counter and they stared at each other for a few seconds.

‘Don’t we need to heat the milk up now?’

She shook her head. ‘According to the internet, room temperature is fine.’

‘Oh, okay.’

Silence. And some deep breathing, followed by a whole host of screams from the floor. It was like a Mexican stand-off.

‘So, who is going to do this?’

‘You. Definitely you.’

‘But what if I do it wrong?’

‘What if I do it wrong? Don’t you dare suggest that I can do it better because I’m a girl.’

He raised his eyebrows. ‘Oh, I’d never refer to you as a girl.’

‘Stop it. He’s mad. Just feed him.’ She opened one of the kitchen drawers and handed him a dish towel. ‘Here, put this over you.’

‘What do I need that for?’

‘In case he pukes on you.’

‘Ewww...’

Dan picked up the bottle, holding it between his hands as if

it were a medical specimen. He squinted at the markings on the side of the bottle. ‘How much do I give him?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Well, look it up on the internet while I start.’

Relief. Instant relief. She wasn’t going to be left to feed the baby. She could sit on the other side of the room and do a search on the computer.

Dan picked up the baby from the floor and settled him on his lap, resting him in the crook of his arm that had his cast in place. He held the bottle with his other hand and brushed the teat against the baby’s cheek.

There were some angry noises, and some whimpering, before finally the baby managed to latch on to the teat and suck—furiously.

Carrie was holding her breath on the other side of the room, watching with a fist clenched around her heart. A baby’s first feed.

One of those little moments. The little moments that a parent should share with a child.

Daniel seemed equally transfixed. He glanced over at her. ‘Wow. Just wow. Look at him go. He’s starving.’

And he was. His little cheeks showed he was sucking furiously. But it was Dan who had her attention. The rapt look on his face, and the way the little body seemed to fit so easily, so snugly against his frame.

Her mouth was dry and the hairs were standing up on the back

of her neck. Worse than that, she could feel the tears pooling around her eyes again.

What was wrong with her? This had nothing to do with her. Nothing to do with her situation. She shouldn't be feeling like this. She shouldn't be feeling as if she couldn't breathe and the walls were closing in around her.

But Dan looked so natural, even though he kept shifting in the chair. He looked as if he was born to do this. Born to be a father. Born to be a parent.

The thing that she'd been denied.

She glanced at the screen and stood up quickly.

She had to leave now, while he was trapped in his chair and before the tears started to fall. She needed some breathing space.

'You should stop after every ounce of milk, Dan. Take the bottle out and wind the baby. I'm sorry. I have to go.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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