THE GREEK DOCTOR'S NEW-YEAR BABY

Kate Hardy



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The Greek Doctor's New-Year Baby

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New Year, New Father Madison Gregory's temporary new boss, obstetric consultant Theo Petrakis, has everything – gorgeous body, gorgeous mind, gorgeous heart. He's a great doctor and he can cook! She knows he's the one, even if she won't admit it. There is just one problem – he has vowed never to marry or have children. However much he wants Madison, he knows it wouldn't be right to have a relationship with her when he can't fulfil her dreams.Yet Theo's behaviour just doesn't add up. He behaves as if he loves her, he just doesn't say it, and he adores kids, so why doesn't he want any of his own? Then, just as Madison discovers the reason, she also discovers she is pregnant with his child…THE LONDON VICTORIA These city doctors are ready to wed!

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Kate Hardy lives in Norwich, in the east of England, with her husband, two young children, one bouncy spaniel, and too many books to count! When sheâ##s not busy writing romance or researching local history, she helps out at her childrenâ##s schools. She also loves cookingâ##spot the recipes sneaked into her books! (Theyâ##re also on her website, along with extracts and stories behind the books.) Writing for Mills & Boon has been a dream come true for Kateâ##something she wanted to do ever since she was twelve. Sheâ##s been writing Medicalâ#¢ Romances for nearly five years now, and also writes for Modern Heatâ#¢. She says itâ##s the best of both worlds, because she gets to learn lots of new things when sheâ##s researching the background to a book: add a touch of passion, drama and danger, a new gorgeous hero every time, and itâ##s the perfect job!

Kate Hardy is the winner of the RNA Romance Prize 2008 for her Modern Heatâ#¢ novel BREAKFAST AT GIOVANNIâ##S.

Kateâ##s always delighted to hear from readers, so do drop in to her website at www.katehardy.com

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Dear Reader

I love writing linked booksâ##probably because I hate saying goodbye to my characters!â##so I was delighted when my editor agreed to let me write a duo. Iâ##m very pleased to introduce the Gregory cousins, Madison and Katrina, who enjoy life and love at the London Victoria Hospital.

What drew me to their stories? Several things. Firstly, I wanted to set myself a challenge and do something a little bit differentâ##so the stories actually take place in more or less the same timeframe. This meant I had to keep the events of Madisonâ##s story very much in mind when I wrote Katrinaâ##s! (THE CHILDRENâ##S DOCTORâ##S SPECIAL PROPOSAL is available next month). Secondly, I was thinking about fairy tales and Prince Charming: in modern days, do you have to go and look for your prince, or will he come and find you? Add the fact that thereâ##s something irresistible about a Mediterranean doctor and even more so about ruined castles (I spent a week in Wales during the summer while I was planning the books and fell in love with the areaâ##not to mention the recipe in Katrinaâ##s story, which my editor begged for before Iâ##d even written the book!). And, finally, the books have a lot of me in them: Madison shares my love of music and Katrina, like me, has impaired hearing.

And the little country church at the very end of Katrinaâ##s story? Actually, thatâ##s real (albeit moved to suit my fictional world). I was privileged to attend a special family wedding there just as I was writing the wedding sceneâ##which is why Iâ##ve dedicated the second story to my cousin Lee and his lovely bride Lucy, and also borrowed the weather from their dayâ#¦

So with this in mind I had a lot of fun creating Madison and Katrinaâ##s world. I hope you enjoy reading their stories as much as I enjoyed writing them.

Iâ##m always delighted to hear from readers, so do come and visit me at www.katehardy.com

With love

Kate Hardy

THE GREEK DOCTORâ##S NEW-YEAR BABY

BY
KATE HARDY



www.millsandboon.co.uk

For Annette, Grant, Amy and Lauren,
With love.

CHAPTER ONE

MADISON noticed him the moment he walked into the room.

Despite the fact that the hospitalâ##s charity ball was heaving with people, all wearing Venetian masksâ##and he was dressed the same as all the other men in a dinner jacket, dark trousers, white shirt and bow-tie, plus a plain gold eye maskâ##there was something about the tall, dark-haired man that set him apart from the others. Some kind of energy that drew her eye.

Not that she was going to do anything about it. Not tonight.

As the chair of the committee for the hospitalâ##s fundraiser ball, Madison Gregory had work to do. Such as making sure that everything was running like clockwork behind the scenes. Being there to troubleshoot any last-minute problems. Charming people with a sweet smile and fixing any little niggles without a fuss.

But so far any problems had been minor, because everything had been planned down to the last detail. There had been a few murmurs at first in committee meetings when sheâ##d suggested a jazz trioâ##a band sheâ##d heard several times at her favourite clubâ##but Madison had stuck to her guns. In her view, a rock band really didnâ##t suit a masked ball, and although ballroom dancing had become popular again, thanks to TV shows, having a string quartet playing waltzes would have felt too formal. Whereas soft, easy-listening jazzâ##bright upbeat numbers and slow crooning ballads that people knew and could dance toâ##was perfect for a ball.

Now she could even see couples mouthing the words of â##Fly Me to the Moonâ## to each other, smiling and laughing and just having fun on the dance floor. Relief flooded through her. Sheâ##d got it right. This was going to work.

With this lovely, warm, relaxed atmosphere, people would be more willing to be parted from their money. Theyâ##d buy loads of tickets for the tombola prizes she and the rest of the committee had talked local companies into donatingâ##balloon rides, spa treatments and a chocolate hamper that her cousin and best friend Katrina desperately wanted to win and had bought so many tickets in lieu of being at the ball that Madison had decided, if Katrina didnâ##t win it, sheâ##d buy her the very same hamper as consolation.

And maybe, just maybe, the fund for the new scanner would reach the halfway point as a result.

Eve, one of the senior nurses from the emergency department, came up to her. â##Maddie, youâ##ve been rushing around since an hour before everything started. Why donâ##t you take a break?â##

A little voice in Madisonâ##s head added, *And go and find out who the man in the gold eye mask is*. She brushed it aside and smiled at Eve. â##Itâ##s OK. Iâ##m fine.â##

â##You paid for a ticket, too,â## Eve reminded her. â##Which means youâ##re entitled to dance and have some fun. Just because youâ##re the chair of the organising committee, it doesnâ##t mean you canâ##t enjoy yourself.â##

â##I *am* enjoying myself.â## And it was true: Madison loved being in the thick of things. Sheâ##d been hard put to choose between specialising in emergency medicine and her final choice,

obstetrics, because she enjoyed the buzz of being too busy almost as much as she loved those magical first minutes of a new life.

And then, as the music changed and the pianist seemed to flow seamlessly into â##It Had to be Youâ##, a hand touched her arm. â##May I?â## a deep, unfamiliar and slightly accented voice asked.

Even before she looked up, she knew who it was going to be, and a shiver ran down her spine.

The man in the gold mask.

He was looking at her with the most sensual, smouldering gaze sheâ##d ever seen: dark eyes with a hint of green and gold and grey. Stunning.

Not to mention a slow, sweet smile that actually made her knees go weak.

â##Iâ#¦â## Her throat dried, and Eve gave her a shove.

â##She means yes,â## Eve said sweetly. â##Have fun.â##

Before Madison could protest, she was dancing with the stranger.

Theo had been aware of her all evening: the girl in the floaty dress with the pink and gold cat mask covering her upper face and the most incredible smile. Heâ##d seen her talking and laughing with plenty of people, though he hadnâ##t actually seen her on the dance floor.

And now he was dancing cheek to cheek with her. Whoever had chosen this music was an utter genius: it had neither the formality of ballroom dancing nor the slight distance of pop. This was old-fashioned dance music, the kind of stuff his grandparents lovedâ##and, so heâ##d discovered recently, his mother had loved too.

Despite his dance partnerâ##s high-heeled shoes, she wasnâ##t that tall and he had to dip his head slightly to dance with her, but she felt perfect in his arms. And those blue, blue eyes behind the mask were just stunning. Like a Mediterranean sky on a late summer evening, shading to dark navy at the very edges of her irises. Her dark hair was loose around her shouldersâ##not perfectly straight, but not a riot of curls either. Soft, enticing waves that made him want to tangle his hands in them, feel the silkiness against his fingertips.

Even more than that, he wanted to see her hair spread over his pillow. And he really, really wanted to explore that beautiful mouth. Tease it with kisses until it opened beneath his mouth, letting him deepen the kiss.

Kyrios. He couldnâ##t remember when heâ##d last felt a pull of attraction this strong.

But right now she was in his arms, holding him close. And it felt good.

The strangerâ##s touch was perfectly decorous, Madison thought. And yet somehow it felt personalâ##intimate, even. They were dancing close enough for her to feel his breathing, hear his heartbeat. And he had a perfect sense of rhythm, guiding her round the floor so effortlessly that it actually felt like floating. Sheâ##d never been so in tune with a dance partner before.

They didnâ##t speak as they dancedâ##they didnâ##t need toâ##and suddenly everyone around them just melted away. They could have been dancing on a little terrace overlooking a garden in Tuscany, just the two of them, in the moonlightâ#¦

She shook herself. Of course not. This was *London*. And if it wasnâ##t for the fact that sheâ##d deliberately stuck to sparkling water because she was responsible for the way things ran tonight, she wouldâ##ve been sure this heady feeling was from drinking too much champagneâ##almost like tiny bubbles fizzing through her veins.

The fact it was all from dancing with him scared her and excited her at the same time. Sheâ##d never reacted this strongly to anyone before. Even Harry.

Part of her wanted to ask the stranger what his name was, but she knew that talking would break the spell. And right now she didnâ##t want it to end. Just the two of them and the music, the singer crooning and the soft jazzy piano counterpointed by the double bass and guitar.

Two and a half minutes had never passed so slowly.

Or so very, very fast.

When the song ended and his hands dropped from her body and he took a step backwards, it felt so wrong.

And then he bowed to her, lifted her right hand and kissed the pulse on the inside of her wrist.

She could barely breathe.

His eyesâ##dark and as sexy as hellâ##held hers. â##Thank you.â##

Again, that slight accent. She couldnâ##t quite place it, but it was incredibly attractive.

Just as her mouth started to frame a response, an introduction, a question, a different pair of arms caught her round the waist. â##Maddie! Hereâ##s my girl.â## She found herself spun into a hug. Into arms she recognisedâ##Ed, the registrar in the emergency department sheâ##d dated a couple of times, a month or so back.

Oh, help.

Ed was beaming. A champagne-induced sort of beaming, and heâ##d clearly forgotten that theyâ##d agreed to be just good friendsâ##that they werenâ##t dating any more.

By the time Madison had extricated herself and jollied Ed into remembering that they were just friends and she was busy tonight anyway with her chairwoman hat on, and had informed him that heâ##d just been incredibly rude to the man whoâ##d danced with her by cutting in like that, Mr Gold Mask was nowhere to be seen.

The disappointment felt as if someone had just driven past her through a deep puddle, dousing her in cold water.

Which was utterly ridiculous. The man was a complete stranger. No way should she be reacting this strongly to himâ##a man whoâ##d danced with her once and whom she was unlikely to see again, because she certainly didnâ##t recognise him as one of the hospital staff sheâ##d chivvied into getting a table together.

Madison Gregory, you need to get a grip, she told herself silently, then went to check that everything was proceeding smoothly with the tombola.

Hereâ##s my girl.

Well, of course a woman that attractive wouldnâ##t be single. Even though Theo had instinctively checked her left hand before asking her to dance and there had been no sign of a ring, he shouldâ##ve realised that she would have a boyfriend.

And a dance was just a dance. It wasnâ##t going to lead to anything else.

He pushed away the regret. It wasnâ##t as if he was looking for a relationship anyway. Wasnâ##t that half the reason why heâ##d left Greece, because his family was constantly trying to fix him up with an eligible woman and it was driving him crazy? And he was only here tonight because he was at a loose end the weekend before he started his new job. Buying a ticket for the hospital fundraiser had seemed like a good ideaâ##a chance to meet some of his new colleagues socially, get to know people. Heâ##d enjoyed chatting to people tonight.

But all the same he needed some fresh air. A cool breeze to bring his common sense back and give him some immunity to the sweet, seductive tones of the singer. As she segued into â##Bewitched, Bothered and Bewilderedâ##, he allowed himself the briefest of smiles. Theo Petrakis most definitely didnâ##t let himself get bewitched, bothered and bewildered by anyone.

And that included a beautifulâ##and very much off-limitsâ##woman by the name of Maddie. Heâ##d go back in, buy a few tombola tickets to help swell the fundraising coffersâ#¦and then maybe heâ##d have an early night.

Madison kept the smile on her face for the rest of the evening. And although she allowed herself to relax in between checking that all was well and danced with a dozen different men, none of her partners on the dance floor matched up to the man in the gold mask. They didnâ##t have his fluidity or his intuitiveness.

It was pretty stupid even to be thinking about the man. Sheâ##d never met him beforeâ##or she would most definitely have rememberedâ##and she probably wouldnâ##t meet him again.

She didnâ##t even know his name.

And you couldnâ##t fall for someone whose name you didnâ##t even knowâ#¦could you?

She shoved the thought to the back of her mind. Besides, tonight wasnâ##t about her. It was about raising money for the new and hugely expensive medical equipment that the hospital trust dearly wanted but just couldnâ##t afford. So she was going to schmooze and schmooze and talk people into buying more tombola tickets.

When the evening was over and everyone had gone home, Madison stopped by the hotel kitchens to thank the staff for their hard work and deliver the chocolates sheâ##d bought them to show her appreciation, then headed for the hospital. Right now, she was wide awakeâ##and unless Katrina, as the on-call doctor, was in with a patient, the chances were sheâ##d be free for a quick coffee-break.

When the night sister let her into the paediatric department, Madison was delighted to discover that her cousin was in her office, catching up with paperwork.

â##You missed a great evening,â## she said, settling herself on the edge of Katrinaâ##s desk. Even though Katrina, being deaf, wasnâ##t over-keen on dark, noisy, crowded environments, Madison knew that her cousin would have enjoyed the ball.

â##I wanted to be there, Maddie, you know thatâ##but weâ##re so short-staffed right now I just couldnâ##t work it.â## She looked hopefully at Madison. â##So, did you take my hamper back to your place before dropping in? Or have you scoffed half of it already?â##

Madison shook her head. â##Sorry, hon. You didnâ##t win it. But you did get a full body massage and a manicure.â## She produced the vouchers from her handbag.

Katrina smiled wryly. â##Can you see *me* having a manicure?â##

â##Wellâ##no,â## Madison admitted. She enjoyed doing girly things, but her cousin most definitely didnâ##t. Katrina was practical. Too practical for her own good.

â##Then *you* have them. With my love.â##

Madison shook her head. â##I canâ##t do that. You spent a fortune on tickets, Kat.â## And she hadnâ##t won a single thingâ##so Madison had told a teensy fib and given her cousin her own prizes. â##Look, at least have the massage. Youâ##d enjoy it. Really, you would. Itâ##s really relaxing.â##

Katrina wrinkled her nose. â##Thanks, but itâ##s not my style.â## And she clearly suspected Madison of having had a hand in the prizesâ##which she had, but not quite in the way Katrina thought. â##Look, if you really donâ##t want them, Iâ##ll raffle them off in the department and you can add the proceeds to the scanner fund.â## Katrina paused. â##Did you meet Prince Charming tonight, then?â##

â##Hey, are you calling me Cinderella?â## Madison teased.

â##Youâ##ve gone red. Aha. So you *did* meet someone.â## Katrina gave her a wicked smile. â##Come on. Details. All of them. Right now.â##

Madison shrugged. â##Thereâ##s not a lot to tell. We danced. Once.â## She left out the fact that the man in the gold mask had kissed her inner wrist and she could still feel the touch of his mouth against her skin.

â##And?â## When Madison didnâ##t reply, Katrina asked, â##Whatâ##s his name? Which ward is he on?â##

â##No idea, to both.â## Madison forced herself to sound offhand. â##Kat, it was just a dance.â## *And a kiss*. â##And he was wearing a mask, so I didnâ##t even get to see his face.â##

But she had seen his eyes and his mouth. Sheâ##d class both as the sexiest sheâ##d ever seen.

â##You didnâ##t even ask? Sounds like you missed a great opportunity,â## Katrina said. â##He might have been really nice.â## She shook her head. â##Youâ##re so picky. How are you ever going to meet someone if you never give them a chance?â##

Madison grinned. â##Says the woman whoâ##s waiting for her prince to come and find her.â##

â##I looked. I kissed some of them, even. And they turned into frogs.â## Katrina shrugged. â##Anyway. Iâ##m happy with my career.â##

â##So am I,â## Madison said.

Katrina raised an eyebrow. â##Honey, youâ##ve been broody for the last five years.â##

â##Which is why I made such a huge mistake with Harry. I know.â## Madison shrugged. â##Next time, Iâ##ll get it right. Find myself the perfect manâ##gorgeous body, gorgeous mind, gorgeous heart.â##

â##In that order?â##

â##Colour me shallow.â## Madison laughed and spread her hands. â##Actually, the order doesnâ##t matter, as long as theyâ##re all present.â## Though she knew which ones were the most important. The two Harry had turned out not to possess.

â##I think youâ##re going to have to compromise somewhere,â## Katrina said.

Madison shook her head. â##No compromising.â## Not any more. Sheâ##d compromised with Harry, and look where that had got her. Divorced and disillusioned at the age of twenty-six. Except now, at thirty, she had her bounce back again. â##Look, our mums managed it, didnâ##t they?â##

â##Iâ##m not so sure our dads are perfect,â## Katrina said thoughtfully. â##I love Dad and Uncle Bryan to bits, but theyâ##re not perfect, Maddie. Nobody is. Theyâ##re only human.â##

Madison was saved from having to agree by a soft knock on the door. â##Kat, sorry to interruptâ##I need you to come and have a look at Joseph. Iâ##m not happy with his obs,â## the paediatric nurse said, looking worried.

â##On my way,â## Katrina said. â##Sorry, Maddie.â##

â##Hey. I only dropped in to give you your prizes. Iâ##ll catch you later.â## Madison hugged her cousin, and left the ward.

But she still couldnâ##t get that kiss out of her head. It had been chaste and decorousâ##yet, at the same time, the hottest thing sheâ##d ever experienced. Full of promise. If Ed hadnâ##t interrupted, who knew what could have happened?

â##Get a grip, Maddie. Real world,â## she informed herself. The ball was over. And sheâ##d probably never see the stranger again, so what was the point in wondering what might have been?

CHAPTER TWO

ON MONDAY morningâ##the day before he was supposed to startâ##Theo Petrakis walked on to the maternity unit.

He liked what he saw. Everything was organisedâ##well, as organised as you could get in a ward where babies decided to arrive earlier than expected, or made their parents wait around and worry before they finally made their appearanceâ##and there were plenty of hand sanitation gel dispensers around, so clearly they were hot on hygiene here. And the warm, relaxed atmosphere heâ##d noticed at his interview was still present, to his relief. Before now heâ##d worked in a unit where the midwives and doctors had been practically ranged against each other instead of recognising that they were a team.

â##Can I help you?â## the midwife sitting at the reception desk asked.

He smiled at her and held out his hand. â##Iâ##m Theo Petrakis. Strictly speaking, Iâ##m not supposed to be here until tomorrow, but I thought Iâ##d drop in and say hello.â##

â##Theo Petrakisâ##our new consultant, yes?â## She returned the smile. â##Iâ##m Iris Rutherford.â## The senior midwife, according to her name badge. She took his hand and shook it warmly. â##Pleased to meet you. Especially as youâ##ve picked a nice quiet moment.â##

â##As opposed to three in the morning, when all the babies decide itâ##s the perfect time to make their arrival?â## he asked wryly.

She laughed. â##Too right! If youâ##ve got a few minutes spare, I can show you around and introduce you to everyone.â##

â##Thanks. Iâ##d like that.â##

And by everyone, Theo discovered, she *meant* everyone, including the health-care assistants.

It had definitely been a good decision to take this temporary post, he thought. A six-month stint as a locum for the senior consultant, who was off on long-term sick leave. It would broaden his experience so he was ready to make the step up to a senior consultancy role. As it looked as if heâ##d be part of a team here that believed in working together, this job was going to be a real pleasure.

Then he noticed the slight frown on Irisâ##s face as they got back to her desk. â##Whatâ##s up?â##

â##I was hoping youâ##d get to meet our registrar, but sheâ##s in one of the delivery rooms right now. Sheâ##s brilliant at her job, good with the mums and the babies. Sheâ##s going to make an excellent consultant in a couple of years.â##

â##Ambitious?â## Theo asked, trying to read between the lines.

Iris smiled. â##She certainly hasnâ##t met the man whoâ##ll come between her and her career. But she wonâ##t give you a hard time for taking over from Doug, if thatâ##s what youâ##re asking.â##

By the time Theo left the ward, the registrar still hadnâ##t emerged from the delivery roomâ##and no way would he interrupt what was clearly already a difficult situation for a woman in labourâ##but he wasnâ##t particularly worried about not meeting her before he started. If she was anything like her colleagues, theyâ##d get along just fine.

The following morning, again the registrar wasnâ##t there when he arrived because she was helping out with a difficult birth. But he was just making himself a mug of coffee when she walked into the wardâ##s kitchen.

â##Hello. You must be the newâ#¦â## She stopped dead, clearly recognising him.

Just as he recognised her.

Even without the mask, he knew her instantly. Those beautiful eyes. That mouth. The prickle of awareness that ran all the way down his spine.

Which was crazy.

Apart from the fact he never mixed work and relationships, it would be impossible here anyway. He was only here for six months, and she was involved. The best he could hope for was a good working relationship. Which meant defusing any embarrassment right from the start.

â##Doctor,â## he finished lightly. â##Yes. I didnâ##t get a chance to introduce myself to you at the ball on Saturday. Theo Petrakis.â## He held out his hand.

â##Madison Gregory. Everyone calls me Maddie. Welcome to the ward.â## She took his hand.

Using her right hand. And heâ##d kissed her right wrist on Saturday night, touched his lips to the pulse point.

The impulse to do it again shocked him, it was so strong. He just about managed to shake her hand and then drop it again. â##I was making coffee. The kettleâ##s hot. What can I get you?â##

â##Iâ##m impressed. Youâ##re well trained,â## she teased.

He shrugged. â##I donâ##t mind taking my turn to make coffee. I certainly donâ##t intend to pull rank and expect my team to run around after me.â##

â##Dougâ##ll be pleased to know his departmentâ##s in safe handsâ##and that you share his attitude towards the team,â## she said. â##Thanks. Thatâ##ll be a lot of milk and no sugar for me, please. And a little bit of cold water, too, so itâ##s cool enough to drink.â##

A trick most doctors learned very early on, Theo knew. If you waited for your drink to cool, the chances were you wouldnâ##t even get a first sip before you were called to a patient. â##Busy morning, hmm?â## he asked.

She nodded. â##But I love mornings like this. When things look as if theyâ##re going to go pear-shaped, and all the worst-case scenarios are running through your head while youâ##re maintaining absolute calm to stop the mum and her partner worryingâ##and then suddenly it all works

and you end up with a new mum and dad, all misty-eyed and cuddling their little miracle. That first moment when the whole world seems brand new.â##

Clearly she loved her job. And he knew what she meant: those first moments with a newborn baby always took his breath away, too.

He made the coffee the way sheâ##d specified and handed the mug to her.

â##Thanks.â## She took a sip. â##Oh-h-h. This is perfect. Just what I needed.â##

She seemed to be about to say something else, but then her pager bleeped. She glanced at the readout, then sighed and put the mug on the draining board. â##Sorry. Iâ##ll finish it later. I have to go. The emergency department needs a second opinion on a pregnant patient with back pain.â##

â##Can I come and observe?â## he asked.

She blinked, looking faintly surprised. â##Well, if you really want to, sure. Iâ##m not worried about someone senior observing me,â## she added, â##but four would definitely be a crowd and I had intended to take my fourth-year students down with me.â##

â##Your students?â##

His surprise must have sounded in his voice because she admitted, â##Strictly speaking, I suppose theyâ##re *your* students, but before Doug went on sick leave he agreed I could take over the mentoring side of things. And Sanjay and Nita are doing really wellâ##especially Sanjay, whoâ##s blossomed since heâ##s been with us. I want to keep his confidence up.â##

Theo raised an eyebrow. â##I thought only consultants were mentors.â## And she was a registrar, wasnâ##t she?

â##Look, Iâ##ll explain on the way down to ED. If you want to observe, weâ##d better not take the students with us this timeâ##itâ##s not fair to our mum to have too many people in a cubicle with her, especially as sheâ##s in the emergency department and probably panicking like anything right now. Plus Sanjay and Nita really need to meet you properly before you observe them.â##

Theo had to suppress a smile at the way Madison was taking control when officially she was his junior, but he liked her confidence and the way her first thoughts were for other peopleâ##s well-being. â##Sure.â##

She stopped off at the reception desk and rang down to the emergency department to reassure them that she was on her way, then ushered him out of the department.

â##So talk me through the mentoring stuff,â## he said.

â##You know as well as I do, we have a recruitment crisis in our specialty,â## she said. â##All the surveys say that students donâ##t want to work in obs and gynae because they have such a bad time on rotationâ##either theyâ##re made to feel they get under the feet of the midwives, or theyâ##re stuck in the furthest corner of an operating theatre watching a Caesarean.â##

â##So they never really get to do any of the work and they donâ##t feel part of the team.â##

â##Exactly,â## Madison said. â##Weâ##re organised nowadays so the team means a whole department, rather than the old way of having a â##firmâ## of a consultant, registrar and house officers who always work together, and in a way thatâ##s a shame because it makes it harder for junior doctors to settle into the team. I really think students need a single point of contact in a department to help them feel theyâ##re really part of whatâ##s going on. Yes, they have to sort out their logbooks and what have you, but they also need proper contact with patients and they need *real* jobs to do if theyâ##re to get the best out of their attachment.â##

â##Responsibilities for something practical, such as a departmental audit,â## Theo suggested.

That earned him another of the gorgeous smiles. â##Absolutely. On our ward, we have two students at a time on attachment. Iâ##m responsible for bedside teaching, and they attend my clinic and theatre sessions.â##

â##Are you pure obstetrics?â## Theo asked.

She nodded. â##Though Iâ##m interested in foetal medicine as well.â##

â##So what about the gynae work?â##

â##I liaise with the consultants and the other registrars so the students get sessions with them, tooâ##but Iâ##m still their point of contact if theyâ##re worried about anything, or if they want to see more of a particular subspecialty outside pure obstetrics. I also get them to spend time with the midwives, so they develop a rapport and a bit of respect for our colleagues, as well as a chance to see some low-risk births.â##

â##Instead of thinking that life in our ward is all epidurals and emergency sections,â## Theo agreed. â##That sounds good. I notice you have a sensory room here.â##

â##And a water-birth suite. We want our mums to have the best, most natural and relaxing experience possible. Our midwives are fantastic, and we only intervene when weâ##re asked for help.â##

â##Amen to that,â## he said feelingly.

The emergency registrar met them practically at the door and gave them a swift handover. Theo recognised the manâ##s voiceâ##he was the one whoâ##d swept Madison off her feet at the ball. Yet Madison didnâ##t greet him as if there was anything more than a professional relationship between them. And Iris had said that Madison hadnâ##t met the man to come between her and her career. So did that mean she was single after all?

Crazy. He shouldnâ##t even be thinking about her like that.

And yet he couldnâ##t take his eyes off her. There was something about her. Something that made him want to break all his personal rules.

Which was even crazier.

The registrar introduced them both to the patient, then left to see the next on his list.

â##Mrs Ellis, Iâ##m Madison Gregory and this is Theo Petrakis,â## Madison said. â##Ed called us from the maternity department. I understand youâ##ve been having back pain.â##

Mrs Ellis nodded. â##And it hurts here.â## She pointed to her groin, and clearly the movement hurt her because she grimaced.

â##Has it been going on for long?â## Madison asked.

â##Iâ##ve had twinges for the last week, but today itâ##s absolute agony.â## She dragged in a breath. â##Pleaseâ##Iâ##m not going to lose the baby, am I?â##

â##Aches and pains are pretty common in pregnancy and they donâ##t necessarily mean that youâ##re miscarrying or thereâ##s a problem with the baby,â## Madison reassured her, â##but youâ##ve done exactly the right thing coming to see us. Do you mind if I examine you?â##

With the patientâ##s permission, she examined Mrs Ellis gently but effectively, then listened to the babyâ##s heartbeat. â##Thatâ##s nice and strong, so try not to worry too much. The babyâ##s doing just fine. But what we need to do is stop this pain. Do you get the pain all the time, and does anything make it feel worse or better?â##

â##Itâ##s only there some of the time. Itâ##s worse when Iâ##m going upstairs or getting dressed or turning over in bed,â## Mrs Ellis explained.

Given where the pain was and the description, Theo knew exactly what the problem was. But rather than muscling in, he waited for Madison, who smiled at Mrs Ellis and squeezed her hand. â##The babyâ##s in absolutely no danger. What youâ##ve got is something called symphysis pubis dysfunctionâ##SPD for short. It sounds a lot scarier than it is, and an awful lot of women get it. At eighteen weeks, youâ##re practically halfway through pregnancy, and thatâ##s the most common time to start noticing the pain.â##

She sat down next to the bed, drew a notebook and pen from her pocket, and sketched a swift diagram to show their patient. Theo liked the way she was managing this: focusing on the patientâ##s worries, making it easy for her to understand. That kind of empathy would make her a brilliant consultant, as Iris had said. And on a personal levelâ#¦

No. No involvements. Heâ##d made his decision years ago: he wasnâ##t going to settle down, get married and have children. Sure, he datedâ##he was only humanâ##but he always made sure

his dates knew he wasnâ##t able to offer anything long term. If that meant people thought he was a shallow playboy, then fineâ##he could live with that. As far as he was concerned, other people didnâ##t have to know the real reason behind his decision. He wasnâ##t prepared to put the woman he loved through childbirth, knowing first-hand what could happen when everything went wrong. And no way was he going to go through what his father had gone through.

He forced himself to concentrate on what Madison was saying, just in case she decided to throw a question or two his way.

â##Basically your pelvis is in two parts and itâ##s held together by a joint called the symphysis pubis, which is strengthened by lots of ligaments. When youâ##re pregnant, your body produces a hormone called relaxin, which softens your ligaments to make it easier for you at birthâ##but that also means your pelvis can move during pregnancy, and the movements are what cause the pain.â##

â##Can you make it stop?â## Mrs Ellis asked.

â##Iâ##m going to give you a support belt, which will help, and you can take paracetamol to help with the painâ##thatâ##s perfectly safe for the baby. Iâ##m also going to refer you to a physiotherapist, who can teach you some exercises for your tummy and pelvic floor that wonâ##t hurt the baby but will help ease the pain. I canâ##t promise youâ##ll get an appointment with the physio today,â## Madison warned, â##but if I can do it, I will.â##

â##Thank you.â## Mrs Ellis wiped away the tears that had started to spill over. â##I was so scared I was going to lose the baby.â##

â##Itâ##s always the first thing that goes through your mind,â## Madison sympathised, â##but youâ##re going to be absolutely fine. Even better news is that there are a few things you can do to help make the pain go away.â##

This was his cue, he thought. â##Why donâ##t I tell Mrs Ellis while you talk to the physios? â## Theo suggested.

Her eyes narrowed for a moment, as if she thought he was trying to take over; but then she nodded, clearly realising that this was going to save them some time. â##Is that all right with you, Mrs Ellis?â##

â##Thatâ##s fine. I donâ##t mind talking to student doctors.â##

She thought he was a student? Well, it was an easy mistake to make. Madison had been planning to bring her fourth-year students with her, and no doubt the emergency department had cleared it with Mrs Ellis first. Theo just about managed to suppress his grin, though as Madison left the cubicle he could see amusement all over her face. Well, he could live with it. Telling Mrs Ellis that actually he was Madisonâ##s boss wasnâ##t going to achieve anything other than make her feel awkward and embarrassedâ##and his patientâ##s comfort was much more important than his dignity.

He talked her through the things she could do to help herself, and was just discussing the birth plan with her when Madison swished the curtain aside, carrying a support belt. â##Iâ##m sorry, Mrs Ellis. The physiotherapy department is completely booked up todayâ##but Iâ##ve persuaded them to squeeze you in first thing in the morning, just before their list starts. For now, Iâ##m going to show you how to put this belt on and thatâ##s going to take some of the strain for you.â##

â##Thank you so much,â## Mrs Ellis said, looking relieved that she wasnâ##t going to have to suffer pain for much longer.

â##My pleasure.â## Madison smiled at her. â##Do you have any questions, or has Mr Petrakis already answered them?â##

â##Mr Petrakis said I should put it in my birth plan to make sure I get the most supportive birth position, and it might affect my pain relief. Will I have to have a Caesarean?â##

â##Iâ##m not going to rule it in or out at this stage,â## Madison said gently. â##Weâ##ll see how you go. But I will promise you that weâ##ll do the best for you and your baby.â##

â##Will I get it again if I have more children?â## Mrs Ellis asked.

â##We honestly donâ##t know,â## Theo replied. â##You might not get it at all, or it might be not as severe, or it might be worse. It really, really varies. But the best advice we can give you is to leave a good two years between pregnanciesâ##if you do get SPD next time round and your babyâ##s not walking yet, youâ##re going to find lifting really hard.â##

When Madison had fitted the support belt and checked that Mrs Ellis had transport home, she and Theo walked back up to the ward.

â##So are you happy that I know what Iâ##m doing, or do you want to supervise me with some more cases?â## she asked.

â##I wasnâ##t checking up on you,â## Theo corrected. â##I wanted to get a feel for how you worked, and Iâ##m going to be doing the same with all the staff. Mentoring isnâ##t just for students, you know.â##

She looked surprised. â##What do you mean?â##

â##Whatever the stage of your career, you need development or youâ##re going to feel stuck in a rut and be miserable. The last department I worked in had a policy of job enrichment, and that worked really well. If you donâ##t already have that here, maybe we can introduce itâ##and Iâ##ll make sure I liaise with Iris, because I want the midwifery team to be happy with any changes we make and they might have some good suggestions, too.â##

She smiled at him. â##I like the way you think. Iâ##m going to enjoy working with you.â##

A feeling, Theo thought, that was very much mutual.

Even though for the rest of the day he was in clinic and she was in Theatre, Theo was aware of Madison all afternoon. To the point that, when their shifts ended and he found himself in the locker room at the same time as her, he said, â##Come and have a coffee with me.â## Seeing a slightly nervous look on her face, he added, â##Look, I donâ##t mean coffee as in a date. I know youâ##re involved with the guy in the emergency department.â##

â##The guy in theâ#¦?â## She looked mystified for a second, then smiled. â##Oh, you mean Ed.â##

â##The one who called you down to Mrs Ellis,â## he confirmed.

â##Iâ##m not involved with Ed.â##

â##Then youâ##re free.â## Even though he knew he ought to be sensible about it, he couldnâ##t help mentally punching the air. And then he caught the expression on her face. â##To take pity on the new boy, that is,â## he said swiftly. â##Iâ##ve spent the last five years working in the Midlands, so I donâ##t know the area at all, and I could do with someone to show me where I can get some good coffee around here.â##

She shrugged. â##The hospital canteenâ##s OK.â##

â##They do espresso?â## he checked.

â##Oh. You mean *serious* coffee.â## For a moment, he thought she was going to give him the brush-off. Then she smiled. â##I know the perfect place.â##

She led him to a small cafÃ© not far from the hospital. â##Giovanniâ##sâ##itâ##s Italian?â## he asked.

She nodded.

â##A little family place. Sounds good to me.â##

â##Actually, itâ##s a chain,â## she corrected. â##But itâ##s a good one. And Iâ##m very glad thereâ##s a branch just round the corner from the hospital. They do the best coffee in Londonâ##not to mention these fantastic organic chocolate brownies.â##

She ordered a frothy cappuccino and a brownie, and shook her head when he ordered a double espresso. â##That much caffeine is seriously bad for you, Theo. How on earth do you sleep?â##

â##Iâ##m used to it.â## He smiled. â##Espresso is the nearest I can get to Greek coffee outside home. Unless you happen to know a decent Greek restaurant around here?â##

She shook her head. â##Iâ##m afraid Greek coffee is a taste I havenâ##t acquired. Itâ##s all the *bits*.â## She grimaced. â##That thick gloopy stuff at the bottom.â##

He laughed. â##Youâ##re not supposed to drink it to the last drop. And the *kaimaki*â##the frothâ##is gorgeous, if itâ##s made properly. Like an espresso. But I admit itâ##s an acquired taste, and I canâ##t drink it sweet, the way my father does.â## He paused. â##I enjoyed working with you today. Youâ##re as good a doctor as you are a dancer. Intuitive and empathetic.â##

To his pleasure, her eyes widened slightly. So she wasnâ##t entirely indifferent to him, then? She felt this same weird pull, the chemistry between them?

â##Thank you.â## She inclined her head. â##Iâ##m sorry I didnâ##t get the chance to thank you for the dance at the ball.â##

He shrugged. â##Your friend was ratherâ##how should I say?â##*intent* on seeing you.â##

She rolled her eyes. â##Put it down to too much champagne. On his part, not mine.â##

â##I hear you organised the ball. And that you made enough for half a scanner.â##

â##Only the first half of it.â##

â##Thatâ##s still a pretty big achievement.â##

She shrugged it off. â##I was part of a committee.â##

â##But the ball was your idea?â##

â##The music was.â## She grinned. â##One of these days Iâ##m going to convert these philistines and make them admit that the old songs are the best.â##

â##So you donâ##t like modern music?â##

â##I just like something I can sing along to. The kind of stuff that puts a smile on your face when you hear it because itâ##s so full of verve. And I donâ##t care if people think itâ##s old-fashioned: I like it.â## She took a sip of her coffee. â##I suppose itâ##s because itâ##s the stuff I grew up with. Dad always had it playing in the garage when he was tinkering with a car. Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, that sort of stuff.â##

He couldnâ##t help smiling. â##So would I be right in guessing that your favourite films are musicals?â##

â##Absolutely. You canâ##t beat a good Gene Kelly film,â## she said, smiling back.

The more Theo talked to Madison, the more he liked her. Felt a connection with her. Wanted to spend time with her. Which made her dangerous. He should stop this right now. Apart from the fact that he was only here for six months, he knew that mixing work and relationships could make life much too complicated. And he wasnâ##t looking for a relationship in any case.

Yet his mouth seemed to have other ideas.

â##I won something pretty stunning on the tombolaâ##a balloon flight at sunrise. Why donâ##t you come with me?â##

She went very still. â##Are you asking me on a date?â##

This time his head managed to overrule his heart where his mouth was concerned. â##Iâ##m asking you as a colleague and potential friend,â## he said.

She smiled. â##Then thank you. Iâ##d like that. Iâ##ve never been in a balloon.â##

â##Then letâ##s synchronise our off-duty. When are you free?â##

She took her diary from her handbag. â##Thursday or Friday?â##

â##Not this week. How about next week?â## he suggested.

â##Tuesday and Wednesday.â##

â##Wednesday it is,â## he said. â##Iâ##ll book the flight and find out what we need to know.â##

CHAPTER THREE

THE night before the balloon trip, Madison couldnâ##t get to sleep.

She must have been crazy, agreeing to this in the first place. Quite apart from the fact she wasnâ##t a morning person and sheâ##d arranged to meet Theo at the crack of dawn, Theo Petrakis wasnâ##t relationship material.

Sure, he ticked all the boxes. He was an excellent doctor, kept the team working beautifully together, and his calm, confident manner on the ward managed to calm even the most nervous parent-to-be. And, as just about every female in the hospital would attest, Theo Petrakis was drop-dead gorgeous.

But he was only here on secondment, covering Dougâ##s sick leave for six months or so. Then heâ##d move on, and Madison was perfectly happy here in London.

Sheâ##d already made the mistake of rushing into a relationship without a future, and she had no intention of repeating it and letting her world fall apart all over again.

All the same, she couldnâ##t get Theo out of her head. Those dark eyes with the unexpected green and gold glintsâ##eyes that always seemed to be full of sunshine. That incredibly sexy smile. The dark hair, brushed back neatly from his face, that made her want to slide her fingers through it and make him look all sexily rumpled. His incredibly gorgeous mouthâ#¦ And even though it had been a week and a half since the ball, she could still remember exactly how his lips had felt against the pulse point in her wrist.

â##Stop being ridiculous and go to sleep,â## she told herself loudly, plumping her pillow and keeping her eyes firmly closed, even though she felt wide awake.

A feeling that didnâ##t last when her alarm shrilled at an unearthly hour. She had to hit the snooze button three times before she could drag herself out of bed, and she was only just ready when the doorbell rang.

â##*Kalimera*, Maddie. Good morning.â##

Oh, lord. Theo always wore a suit, shirt and tie at work under his white coat. In jeans, a sweater and a black leather jacket, he was absolutely stunning. Touchable.

And she really, *really* wanted to touch.

She hadnâ##t felt a pull this strong since Harry. And that in itself was a warning: look where that had got her. She pulled herself together and unglued her tongue from the roof of her mouth. â##Good morning, Theo.â##

â##Ready?â## he asked with a smile.

She nodded. Theo had given her the pre-flight instructions from the balloon company: to wear long sleeves and trousers, preferably in natural fibres; a hat to protect her head from the radiant heat of the burner; and sensible shoes. And although she felt slightly frumpy, wearing a thick fleece over one of the strappy camisole tops she favoured outside work, she understood the logic, and she didnâ##t want to scrape her arms on the wicker basket.

â##Letâ##s go, then.â##

She locked the front door behind her and walked with him to the tube station. It was still dark outside, and so early that the train was practically empty, apart from a couple of bleary-eyed commuters who looked as if they still wished they were in bed.

â##So are balloon flights always this early in the morning?â## she asked.

â##Apparently the airâ##s at its most stable in the first two hours after dawn and the last two hours before dusk,â## Theo told her. â##So most flights are around sunrise or sunset. The ones over London are at sunrise, though we could have gone for a different take-off point and had a later flight.â## He smiled. â##I take it that youâ##re an owl rather than a lark, then?â##

â##Usually,â## she admitted. â##Though Iâ##m never late for my shift.â##

He laughed. â##Hey. Weâ##re not at work now.â##

â##No.â##

â##But since youâ##ve got my head back in doctor mode, thereâ##s something I forgot to ask youâ##do you have any medical condition that means you shouldnâ##t fly?â##

â##Iâ##m disgustingly healthy,â## she said.

â##Good.â## He paused. â##Iâ##m sorry, this is a very personal questionâ#¦but thereâ##s no chance you could be pregnant?â##

She felt the colour wash into her face. â##No.â## She hadnâ##t actually slept with anyone for two yearsâ##and sheâ##d regretted that. Not that she was going to admit either fact to Theo.

â##OK. And Iâ##m sorry I offended you.â##

â##No offence taken.â## Though there was one problem. Because of what heâ##d asked, she was thinking about sex. Specifically, sex with him. Which her common sense told her would be a very bad idea, although her libido was turning a series of cartwheels at the thought.

In accordance with Theoâ##s instructions, they reached the meeting place near Tower Bridge at a quarter past six for the pre-flight briefing. Madisonâ##s attention was caught by the balloon itself. An enormous wicker basket with six rigid poles going up to hold the burner, and then the most enormous piece ofâ#¦what? Silk? Nylon? She had no idea. But it was fascinating to watch the balloon flight team putting everything together and inflating the balloon, first with a fan and then the flames shooting into the mouth of the balloon to warm the air and make the balloon envelope rise.

When the balloon was finally upright, the pilot put the instruments and maps on board, and then it was time for the passengers to board. As they drew closer, Madison realised just how big the basket was. How deep. And, not for the first time, she wished sheâ##d inherited the family height gene like her cousin Katrina, rather than being the shortest member of the family.

â##Want a hand in?â## Theo asked.

Part of her wanted to stand on her dignity and say, no, she could manage. But the sensible side of her knew what that would mean: a head-first, embarrassing dive into the balloonâ##even if she managed to negotiate the footholds. â##Thank you. Thatâ##d be good,â## she said.

â##I apologise in advance for the caveman bit,â## he said, and scooped her up into his arms; she was forced to slide her arms round his neck for balance until he sat her on the edge of the wicker basket. Then she twisted her legs round and slid into the basket.

â##Thanks. I think even high heels wouldnâ##t have been enough to help me climb in,â## she said brightly, trying to keep her mind off the fact that sheâ##d just had her arms round his neck and his body had been very, very close to hers.

â##Apart from the fact they wouldnâ##t be sensible footwear.â## Theo looked all the way down her body. Head to toe and then back again to meet her gaze. And the sultry look in his eyes made Madisonâ##s heart beat just that little bit faster.

It was noisy in the balloon, with the burners still heating the air inside the balloon envelopeâ##and then she realised that they were off the ground. Considerably off the ground.

She blinked. â##Wow. I was expecting it to beâ##well, bumpier than this,â## she said. â##Like being on a boat going out to sea.â##

â##Weâ##re moving with the wind, so thatâ##s why we canâ##t feel the currents. And a passenger basket this size is really, really stable. It shouldnâ##t rock or sway at all.â##

â##Either youâ##ve done this before or you looked it up on the Internet.â##

â##Both,â## he admitted. â##I was in Australia last year and took a trip across the desert at sunrise. The sand was red and there were kangaroos bounding along, and as the sun rose the light turned all the grey saltbush to green. It was incredible.â##

â##Sounds it. Mind you, so is this. London in the early springâ##look, you can see all the trees starting to turn green over again.â## She looked down, keeping her hands firmly on the edge of the basket. The burners had gone off again, and they were just floating in the air. Everything around them was still and silent. She could hear the sound of traffic below, and gulls squawking over the Thames.

â##Iâ##ve never seen London like this before,â## she said softly. â##Even going on the London Eye is nothing compared with this. Thank you so much for sharing this with me, Theo.â##

The burners sprang into life again, and Theo was forced to bend closer to her so his mouth was close enough to her ear for her to hear his reply. â##My pleasure. Though, as one of the main organisers of the ball, youâ##re the best person for me to share it with anyway. You deserve a treat for all that hard work.â##

â##Maybe.â## She rested her hands on the rim of the basket and looked out as the pilot pointed out more landmarks. Theo was standing behind her, and it felt natural for him to be looking over her shoulder, his hands resting against the basket on either side of hers. And even more natural for her to lean back slightly against him.

The gap between their hands narrowed imperceptibly, and he moved slightly closer, cradling her body against his. And she wasnâ##t sure which of them moved first, but then her left hand was covering his, and his right hand was covering hers, and she was aware of every nerve end in her skin.

â##Would you like me to take a picture of you together?â## one of the other passengers asked.

â##Thank you. That would be lovely.â## Theo fished his mobile phone from his pocket and set it to camera mode before handing it to her.

â##Stand a bit closer togetherâ##I canâ##t quite get you both in.â##

Theo stood behind Madison and slid his arms round her waist, pulling her back against him.

â##Now, smile.â##

Smile, when her knees had just melted and her temperature had risen about ten degrees? But she managed it. Just.

The woman took a photograph, and a second â##just in caseâ##, then smiled at them. â##You make a lovely couple.â##

â##Thank you,â## Theo said.

For the return of the phone?

Or for the compliment?

Maybe theyâ##d just hit a patch of particularly thin air, because she definitely couldnâ##t think straight. â##Thank you,â## she mumbled.

Theo stayed close to her for the rest of the balloon trip. And although theyâ##d been warned that in four out of five flights the balloon landed on its side, and theyâ##d braced themselves for the impact, she still wasnâ##t prepared for the fact that the basket tipped over and she landed on top of Theo.

Full length.

Plastered against him.

His arms automatically came round her. It was the obvious thing to do, to keep them stableâ##but then again heâ##d spent most of the balloon ride with his arms round her.

If she lifted her head from his shoulder, she was close enough to kiss him.

And if they hadnâ##t had the other passengers from the balloon and the pilot with them, she knew she would have done it. Teased that gorgeous, sexy mouth until he was kissing her back and his hands were sliding underneath her fleece and her camisole to encounter bare skin. And she wouldâ##ve been just as quick to rip his clothes off.

Oh, lord.

She could feel her face burning, but Theo didnâ##t make any comment. He merely joined the others in helping to roll up the surprisingly heavy balloon and loading it into the back of the Land Rover that had followed the balloon across London to Alexandra Palace and obtained clearance for them to land.

â##So, did you enjoy your first balloon ride?â## he asked as they walked through the park towards the tube station.

â##It was amazing. Iâ##ve lived in London for twelve years now, but itâ##s made me see the city with new eyes. There are so many places I havenâ##t explored.â##

He waited a beat. â##Maybe we could explore them together,â## he suggested.

It shocked her how just much she wanted to agree. â##Maybe,â## she said.

When they were sitting on the tube, he slanted her a look. â##Are you doing anything special for the rest of the day?â##

â##Does an appointment with an ironing board and a pile of laundry the height of K2 count? â## she asked wryly.

â##That,â## he said, â##doesnâ##t sound like fun. How about having lunch with me first?â##

â##As long as you let me pay,â## she said. â##My treatâ##seeing as you shared your prize with me.â##

He smiled. â##I didnâ##t mean in a restaurant. I donâ##t live far from a tube station. Come and have lunch with me.â##

Go to his home?

Sheâ##d have to be crazy, especially given the way her body had reacted to his on the balloon. â##Itâ##s a bit early for lunch.â## It was barely eleven.

He shrugged. â##We were up early. Iâ##d say itâ##s lunchtime.â## He raised an eyebrow, as if challenging her. He couldnâ##t make it any clearer that he thought she was being a coward.

Well, she wasnâ##t. â##Lunch,â## she said, lifting her chin, â##would be lovely.â##

â##Good.â##

He unlocked the front door of a tiny Victorian terrace with a pocket-handkerchief-sized front garden. The dÃ©cor was neutralâ##which sheâ##d expected from a rented houseâ##though a brief glance into the living room as she passed the open door showed framed photographs clustered on the mantelpiece. So clearly he was trying to make the place home rather than just somewhere to live.

â##Anything I can do to help?â## she asked.

â##You can put the kettle on, if you like.â## His eyes glittered with amusement. â##Donâ##t worryâ##I have English coffee.â## He retrieved a cafetiÃ¨re and a bag of ground coffee from the cupboard above the kettle, and sliced open the seal. â##If I was going to make proper coffeeâ##the way *I* drink itâ##Iâ##d use a *briki*.â## It must have shown on her face that she didnâ##t understand, because he said, â##Itâ##s a Greek coffee-potâ##you use it straight on the stove.â##

Heâ##d already removed his jacket and hung it on the newel post, but now he stripped off his sweater to reveal a white V-necked T-shirt. One that clung in all the right places.

Heâ##d looked hot in a suit. Gorgeous in that leather jacket and sweater. But now, in jeans and that white T-shirt, he was completely edible.

Madison only just stopped herself touching him.

But no way could she keep her fleece on. She was melting as it was. â##It is OK if I put my fleece on top of your jacket?â##

â##Sure. Now, letâ##s see.â## He was rummaging in the fridge and stacking a pile of ingredients on the worktops. â##Anything you donâ##t eat or youâ##re allergic to?â##

â##I like all food.â## As long as she didnâ##t have to cook it.

â##Good. So weâ##ll start with toasted pitta and hummus, then chicken and salad.â## He handed her a bottle of milk. â##No sugar for me, please.â##

It felt oddly domestic, making coffee for them both while he chopped salad. Sheâ##d never done this with Harry. Then again, she and Harry had hardly ever been at home together. Theyâ##d nearly always eaten out, neither of them being particularly fond of cooking. â##Anything else I can do to help?â## she asked when sheâ##d filled their mugs, added milk and returned the bottle to the fridge.

â##You can lay the table in the dining room, if you like. The cutleryâ##s in the top drawer and plates are in the cupboard next to the kettle.â## Meanwhile, he was whisking lemon juice and olive oil and fresh herbs in a bowl as if he were a born chef.

She collected the cutlery and went through to the dining room. There was a small dining table with four chairs, and a computer table with a desk lamp and laptop; next to it was a bookcase, stuffed

with textbooks she recognised and other books that were printed in Greek and could have been anything from medicine to poetry. There were more photographs on the mantelpiece and a stunning watercolour of a Mediterranean seascape.

Sheâ##d just finished laying the table and was about to take a closer look at the photographs when Theo walked in, carrying a plate with hot pitta bread and a bowl of hummus.

â##Lunch. And Iâ##m really ready for this. Must be the fresh air.â## He gave her another of those knee-buckling smiles.

The hummus was goodâ##to the point where she suspected it probably hadnâ##t been bought from the deli counter of the local supermarket. And when he brought in the next courseâ##a salad of cucumber, tomatoes, olives, red peppers and salty feta cheese, to go with chicken heâ##d marinated briefly in that dressing before grilling itâ##she knew for sure that heâ##d made it himself.

Theo Petrakis was simply gorgeous. Body, mind and heartâ##sheâ##d seen him in action in the department enough to know he was kind and clever. And he was a great cook to boot.

If she wasnâ##t careful, she could really fall for him.

â##That was fabulous,â## she said when theyâ##d finished. â##Youâ##re an excellent cook.â##

â##That wasnâ##t cooking,â## he said. â##That was throwing stuff together from the fridge.â## He held her gaze, his dark eyes flecked with green and gold and grey. â##One evening Iâ##ll cook you a proper Greek meal, if you like.â##

Oh, sheâ##d like. â##Thank you.â##

And again her heart felt as if it had done one of those odd little flips. She decided to take refuge in a safer topic: work. â##So where did you train?â## she asked.

â##With a surname like Petrakis, where do you think?â## he teased.

Greece? â##Your English is perfect and you barely have an accent.â## Just enough to be exotic. Sexy as hell. â##And Englandâ##s a pretty multicultural place. So Iâ##m not going to presume to guess.â##

â##I trained in Greece,â## he said. â##But I came to England five years ago. Iâ##ve been working in the Midlands.â##

â##Job enrichment?â## she guessed.

He shrugged. â##My grandparents are English. I wanted to spend some time getting to know them.â##

â##You didnâ##t see them much of them when you were growing up?â##

â##No.â##

Something in his tone warned her that this was a sore spot, something to be left alone.

â##What about you?â## he asked.

â##I trained in London, but my familyâ##s from Suffolk. My cousin Katrina lives a couple of doors down from me, so if weâ##re on the same shift I see her quite a bit out of work.â##

â##Is she a doctor too?â##

Madison nodded. â##Sheâ##s in paediatrics. And sheâ##s brilliant.â## She smiled. â##Sheâ##s practically my sister, seeing as we grew up together. Our dads have a family business and our mums are best friends.â## She paused. â##How about you? Do you have any brothers or sisters?â##

â##Three younger sisters and a brother.â## He went over to the mantelpiece and took a photograph down to show her. â##This is Sophroniaâ##sheâ##s the next one down from me. Melinaâ##s next, then Thalia, and this is Stefanos.â##

She could definitely see the family resemblance, though all had darker eyes than Theo. â##Are any of them doctors?â## she asked.

â##Just me,â## he said. â##Sophronia was trying to be a stay-at-home mum, but she missed her job too much.â## He smiled. â##And sheâ##s very, very good at PR. So sheâ##s gone back

part time. Melinaâ##s a chef, Thaliaâ##s an interior designer, and Stefanos is in his last year of an economics degree.â## He replaced the photograph on the mantelpiece.

On impulse, she joined him there. â##And who are they?â## she asked, pointing to another photograph.

â##Sophieâ##s childrenâ##my niece Arianna and my nephew Petros.â##

It was a candid shot, clearly taken by someone they knew rather than a posed professional picture, and the smiles on their faces were infectious. â##Theyâ##re gorgeous,â## she said, meaning it.

He was standing close enough for their arms to touch, and a shiver went through her at the feel of his skin against hers. Lord. She couldnâ##t remember when sheâ##d last been aware of someone in this way. Maybe not since Harry.

He must have felt the shiver, because he turned to face her. â##They are,â## he said softly. Gently, he touched her cheek with the backs of his fingers. â##So what are we going to do about this, Maddie?â##

â##About what?â##

It was a complete fib, and she knew he knew it. He meant about *them*. About the weird pull between them.

â##That night at the ballâ#¦I did this.â## He lifted her right hand and skimmed her inner wrist with his mouth. â##And then I wanted to kiss you here.â## He kissed the soft skin of her inner elbow. â##And here.â## He kissed the curve of her shoulder, bare except for the spaghetti strap of her top. â##Andâ#¦â##

She closed her eyes and tipped her head back, offering him her throat. His mouth brushed against it, and heat sprang up wherever his lips touched her.

And when his mouth finally connected with hers, her knees went weak. His mouth was soft and sweet and persuasive, and she couldnâ##t help sliding her hands round his neck, opening her mouth under his to let him deepen the kiss.

Time seemed to stop, and all she was aware of was Theo. The strength of his body against hers, the warmth of his mouth, the seductive flicker of his tongue against hers. She couldnâ##t remember ever wanting anyone this much before, even Harry.

Harry.

That was where everything had gone wrong last time.

Too much, too fast.

And an almighty mess at the end.

When he broke the kiss, she opened her eyes. â##Theo. This shouldnâ##t be happening,â## she whispered.

He took one step away. â##*Signomi*. I apologise.â##

It would be sensible to accept his apology and stop this right now. Except she couldnâ##t. The need was too strong. â##Theo, Iâ#¦ That wasnâ##t quite what I meant.â##

â##No, you were right in the first place, Maddie. We shouldnâ##t do this.â## He dragged a hand through his hair.

It only made things worse because, ever so slightly rumpled, he looked sexier than ever and she wanted him even more. â##I think my blood pressureâ##s just gone up ten points,â## she said.

â##Mine, too.â## He shook his head in apparent exasperation. â##This is crazy. Apart from the fact that Iâ##m only here for six months and dating colleagues is usually a bad idea, Iâ##m not in a position to offer you anything more than an affair. And thatâ##sâ#¦â## He grimaced. â##Well, itâ##s not particularly honourable, is it?â##

She didnâ##t quite understand. â##Whatâ##s so dishonourable about seeing each other?â##

â##Because,â## he said softly, â##usually when youâ##re over thirty, when you start seeing someone youâ##re thinking about settling down. So a relationship doesnâ##t mean just having

funâ##it means getting to know each other, seeing if you suit each other, seeing if you could be happy growing old together.â##

â##That makes it sound as if everyone of our age is on the lookout for a life partner,â## Madison said dryly.

â##So are you saying you donâ##t want to settle down?â##

â##No. When I meet the right person then Iâ##ll want to settle down,â## she admitted. â##I want what my parents haveâ##what Katrinaâ##s parents have, too. A good, strong marriage. A relationship that will last.â## Not like her previous marriage, which had collapsed within six months. She paused. â##But how do you know when you meet the right person?â##

He spread his hands. â##No idea. But Iâ##m not looking.â##

The word â##dishonourableâ## filtered back into her head. â##Youâ##re already involved elsewhereâ##your partnerâ##s back in the Midlands or in Greece?â##

â##No.â## He frowned. â##Otherwise I wouldnâ##t have asked you to come with me on the balloon.â##

Divorced, then, she guessed. â##She hurt you that badly?â## Madison asked. She could sympathise with thatâ##Harry had left her feeling burned and with major trust issues. If Theo had been involved with the female equivalent of Harry, it was hardly surprising that he was equally wary of relationships.

â##Itâ##s nothing to do with an ex.â##

She blinked. â##Perhaps Iâ##m being stupid, here, but if youâ##re not involved with anyone else, whatâ##s the problem?â##

â##I canâ##t offer you a future, Maddie. I donâ##t want to get married and have children. So seeing me would stop you meeting someone else, someone who would be able to give you what you want.â##

â##And what do you think I want?â##

â##Youâ##ve already told meâ##you want a relationship that lasts. Marriage. And, given the look on your face when I showed you the photographs of my niece and nephew, Iâ##d say you want children as well.â##

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