



MIDWIVES ON-CALL

**SUSANNE
HAMPTON**

Midwife's
Baby Bump



Susanne Hampton

Midwife's Baby Bump

Аннотация

One night...Student midwife Flick had given up on finding ‘the one’ so she certainly didn’t expect to be swept off her feet by gorgeous surgeon Tristan Hamilton at the hospital ball...or to end up in bed together!With consequences!Three months later Flick crashes back into Tristan’s life...with a baby bump! But for Tristan, Flick’s news is devastating – born with a congenital heart defect, he’d been determined never to pass it on. Yet his feelings towards Flick and the baby are impossible to deny...He’s hoping for a miracle, but perhaps love really can conquer all!Midwives On-CallMidwives, mothers and babies—lives changing for ever...!

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Married to the man she met at eighteen, **SUSANNE HAMPTON** is the mother of two adult daughters—one a musician and the other an artist. The family also extends to a slightly irritable Maltese shih-tzu, a neurotic poodle, three elderly

ducks and four hens that only very occasionally bother to lay eggs. Susanne loves everything romantic and pretty, so her home is brimming with romance novels, movies and shoes.

With an interest in all things medical, her career has been in the dental field and the medical world in different roles, and now Susanne has taken that love into writing Mills & Boon[®] Medical Romance[™].

**Midwife's
Baby Bump
Susanne Hampton**



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Dear Reader,

Writing this book came with challenges, as I had never been a part of a continuity and the idea of writing Felicia and Tristan's love story within a much larger story was daunting. But it was equally exciting. It provided the opportunity for my hero and heroine to interact with characters who had already overcome obstacles to love and to introduce characters who would quite soon have their love story unfold.

Tristan Hamilton doesn't see long-term love in his future. He has devoted his career to improving the quality of life of his tiny patients as he doesn't want them to have the kind of sterile childhood he endured. Felicia Lawrence is a midwife in training who wants love, marriage and the whole white picket fence—because she never enjoyed anything close to that growing up. Flick never met her father, and she's determined to provide her future children with a wonderful, loving home, but she won't settle down with just anyone. She's waiting for that one special man.

One unexpected night of passion sees Tristan and Flick's lives steered by fate in a very different direction, and they have more than just themselves to consider. They have to take a leap of faith, learn to trust and open their hearts to a life they never planned.

I hope you enjoy their journey, filled with joy and setbacks, happiness and disappointment, and the discovery that true love

is worth the risk.

Susanne Hampton

Thank you to Sarah and Kate, two young women who dedicate their lives to helping others and still find time to offer me nursing and midwifery advice for my books.

I have a deep admiration for the women and men who choose careers in the field of medicine and the valuable ancillary services. They willingly and selflessly provide care for those who cannot care for themselves and emotional support for their families.

We would be lost without you.

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PROLOGUE

IT ALL BEGAN just before lunch on the beach at Port Melbourne. Felicia Lawrence, or Flick as her family and friends knew her, squinted against the midday sun's brilliant glare. Her sunglasses, she quickly realised, were still sitting on the kitchen bench.

As her feet sank into the soft warm sand, she decided not to walk back across the beachside road, up the stairs and unlock her second-floor apartment again. The sun's heat felt so glorious on her bare shoulders and she felt sure if she headed inside she would find chores to do or even some study and she wanted the day to be different. She wanted to step away from her routine. Normally she was up early for her daily walk and back in the shower before six, well before work, but not this day. She was attending the Victoria Hospital ball and it was the first big gala event she had attended so Flick wanted everything about the day to be special.

She was a midwife in training, and it was her final-year placement at the Melbourne Maternity Unit within the large teaching hospital. Another midwife, Sophia, had encouraged her to attend the glitzy social function and she'd agreed. Since they were both single, they would be each other's plus one.

Flick had slept in a little longer, enjoyed a light brunch and headed out about an hour before lunch. Wearing denim shorts

and a bikini top, she walked down to the foreshore, tiptoeing over the expanse of broken seashells on her way to the shallows. She was making her way along the pristine sand when she heard her mobile phone ring. Caller ID showed it was her younger half-sister.

‘Hi, Megan.’

‘Hi, Flick, hope you’re doing absolutely nothing, just like I told you last night. No housework, no study, zilch. For once in your life make the day about you, Felicia Lawrence.’

‘As instructed.’ She laughed. ‘I’m walking along the sand and getting my feet wet.’

‘Speaking of getting your feet wet, what about looking for a boyfriend while you’re out tonight? It’s been for ever since you actually dated.’

Flick rolled her eyes. ‘Sophia and I are going as each other’s date. We just want to dress up in something other than scrubs and have some fun.’

‘I guess it’s a start.’ Megan’s voice sounded a little deflated. ‘At least you’re getting out, which is a damn sight better than your usual non-existent social life.’

Flick stopped walking as she reached the water’s edge and let her toes sink into the wet sand. The tepid water rushed up to her ankles.

‘I’m studying and doing my final placement. I don’t think now’s exactly the right time to think about my social life.’

‘I’m just saying if you find a handsome prince at the ball

tonight, for God's sake, Flick, don't do your usual midnight cold-feet bolt! Just let it happen. You might surprise yourself.'

'I'm not looking for anyone.'

'I know, you've never been looking. You've had a sum total of two boyfriends, which isn't surprising since you were working two jobs to save enough money for both of us to have the chance to study. You've built your life around taking care of everyone else. Look at yourself, Flick, even your career is delivering other women's babies. Plus you have that ridiculously minute herb garden, your latest time-wasting mechanism and another way to fill your life and avoid a relationship. You don't have to hide from men or procrastinate about accepting a date. There are some nice guys in the world, it's just that our mother never brought that type home ... or married one. And just because both of your boyfriends weren't *the one*, so you told me, doesn't mean *the one* isn't out there somewhere.'

Flick listened to the sisterly lecture, knowing there were more than a few half-truths. Her two boyfriends had been nice, perhaps too nice, she'd realised not long into each relationship. She had chosen both men because they'd been nothing like the type her mother would date. They'd been sensible, and stable with nice office jobs, hadn't drunk more than light ale, and that had only been on weekends, they'd been averse to gambling and had seemed to share her dream of marriage and children.

They'd both ticked all the boxes but it hadn't taken long to discover that being the opposite of her mother's type didn't

guarantee love or anything close to it. There had been no spark, no chemistry, no fireworks. Something had been missing and Flick had known it wouldn't be fair to string either one along. So they'd parted as friends since there had been no passion to incite a deeper reaction, and she'd found out that both had since married. They had offered a picket-fence ending, but Flick needed more. She wanted to raise her children in a happy family but she knew she needed to fall completely and hopelessly in love with the father of her children. She wanted to be swept off her feet by desire and spend her life with the man of her dreams. But she soon realised it was just that. A dream.

'Let's face it, we both had a pretty crappy childhood,' Megan interrupted Flick's thoughts. 'I can't remember one Christmas without our mother disappearing after a takeaway lunch to meet another potential boyfriend. And let's not forget the presents she never bothered to wrap because she spent every spare minute updating her online dating profile. And then we were blamed each time a man left her. It was as if having children was a burden, preventing her from finding true love.'

'True love isn't often found in the front bar of the local hotel ...'

'No, but apparently both of our fathers were.'

They shook their heads in unison, neither knowing the other had done the same. There were no fond memories of their childhood, neither had met their father but at least they had each other.

‘I know you brought me up and as my big sister you don’t usually take my advice, plus I’m like a million years younger than you ...’

‘Not quite a million,’ Flick cut in, laughing at her half-sister’s teasing as she stepped from the watery pool her feet had made and continued on her walk. ‘Try four!’

‘Anyway, take my little, but ever so much more worldly, sister advice and just let your stunning blonde hair down. Have just one night of fun and don’t over think it. You have been so ridiculously responsible your entire life and you need to walk a little on the wild side, even if it’s just for one night. And don’t spare our mother a second thought. Believe me, she’s not thinking about us right now.’

‘What makes you say that?’

‘Apart from the obvious, Flick, which is the fact she never has thought about us so nothing has essentially changed and never will in our lifetimes.’ She paused to draw breath after her rant. ‘She took off for Bali yesterday so if the boyfriend is spending money then we won’t hear a peep from her. So follow my amazingly insightful advice and please make tomorrow all about you!’

‘Maybe I will. Thanks, Megan.’

‘You’re welcome, big sis. Make me proud. Live a little, take a risk or two ... but just don’t post *anything* on any social media. Whatever happens tomorrow is like they say about Vegas, it stays there ... so it needs to be your secret.’

Encouraged further by Megan's advice, Flick decided she had started the right way to make it her day. To take life with both hands for once and actually have fun. The warm breeze was blowing in from the ocean and she felt good about everything. The fact she had not finished the housework and slept in showed she could step out of her comfort zone, if only for one day. She playfully kicked some of the salty water up with her foot. Then she made a mental note. If she was going to live on the wild side for a day then she needed to paint her toenails bright red to match her mood. She smiled as she thought about the nail polish that Megan had given to her for her last birthday and which lay unused in the bathroom cabinet. She would vamp it up, just tonight.

There were joggers and people being walked by their dogs; others reading books or magazines under the shelter of oversized beach umbrellas; small children building sandcastles and squealing as they ran into the shallow waves to collect water for the moats; and a few very tanned older men in swimsuits so brief and inappropriate that it made Flick shudder a little and look away quickly. *Gold Lycra, really?*

She grimaced at the thought her mother had more than likely dated one of them. Then she mentally reprimanded herself for thinking about her mother again. The woman had singlehandedly deterred Flick from dating for fun after watching her many poor choices come and leave their home on a dating conveyer belt. Flick had weighed up men as potential husbands from the get-go. She was looking for the family she had never had and it

coloured her choices. Megan was right. She needed to leave the drama behind. The ball was going to be about having fun and not thinking about anything too serious. And that was what she intended to do.

In general everyone on the beach appeared to be doing the same. They were relaxed and a few gave a casual greeting or comment about the weather as she walked past. Her pace had picked up during the stroll and was now brisk. Nothing really distracted her until she had almost reached home again. That's when a striking figure on the beach demanded her attention. Suddenly she was mesmerised and couldn't look away.

A very masculine, very toned body stripped bare to the waist was jogging towards her. Flick was tempted to shield her eyes with her hand to get a better view, but she refrained. She controlled her curiosity and continued at her brisk pace along the shallows, pulling her gaze down to the crystal blue water. The midday sun was directly above her in the sky but her body was feeling hotter from something other than that. Her heart picked up speed at the sight from the corner of her eye that she could see approaching. Even averted and with the sun's glare, she could make out a very tanned, very taut ... and suddenly very familiar man.

He was almost upon her when she looked up and realised it was the elusive and ridiculously handsome Dr Tristan Hamilton, a neonatal cardiothoracic surgeon at the Victoria Hospital. She averted her eyes again quickly. He was appealing enough in

his scrubs but now, in little more than low-slung board shorts, he was mind-numbingly gorgeous. Her cheeks, she felt certain, would be pink with thoughts he was stirring. She was just grateful he had no idea who she was and he would just jog by her, completely unaware of how his body was arousing her imagination. Immediately she knew Megan was right—she needed to get out more. Her reaction was embarrassing even her.

‘Felicia?’

She froze. Her cheek colour gained momentum. He had not only recognised her, he knew her name. Flick had had no idea he’d even realised they worked at the same hospital let alone knew her by name. She had only been there on clinical placement for a few weeks.

‘Dr Hamilton,’ she said, attempting to sound casually surprised.

He drew to a halt beside her, his sun-kissed skin aglow with the perspiration from his morning run. ‘Please, call me Tristan. There’s not a patient in sight so we can throw hospital formalities out the window. I suspect you’re younger than me by a *few* years, but the whole doctor thing makes me feel about a hundred. So, please, stick with Tristan.’ His deep voice was raspy and breathless from the run.

Flick tried to laugh but all the while her mind was spinning and her body reacting in a way she had never experienced before. ‘Sure,’ she finally responded a little nervously, still not entirely sure about anything. ‘Tristan,’ she said, emphasising his name.

‘So you like jogging.’

She had no idea why she’d asked such a silly question. It was ridiculous and stupid in equal amounts. Of course he liked jogging and with the sweat that he had built up, he had been running for a while. She clearly liked making a fool of herself. She was grateful that he grinned and nodded and she didn’t have to address the way her body and mind were reacting.

With his rapid breathing settling by the minute, he took a sip from his metal water bottle and looked out across the crystal-clear water. ‘Beautiful part of the world, isn’t it?’

Flick was still a little surprised by his relaxed demeanour and the fact he didn’t look at her strangely after her awkward attempt at conversation. She had thought he would be a little rigid and uptight. It seemed to go with the specialist territory but he was not even close to some of the stiff, pompous specialists she had met during her other placements. Age didn’t seem to discriminate when it came to the formalities that some of them demanded. He was so different from what she’d imagined and it was unexpected. She was not normally social inept but he was upsetting her usual calm by being so unpretentious and friendly.

At the hospital, he had never acknowledged her with more than a nod. She didn’t think he had really noticed her, although she had more than noticed him. She spent a great deal of time out in the community during her placement, but when she was at the hospital she always seemed to catch sight of him as she moved about the maternity unit and the wider hospital. Her heart,

for some silly reason, would always skip a beat when their paths crossed but reason told her to stay away. He wouldn't be the marrying kind. More than likely, although there were no rumours to confirm her suspicions, she reckoned him the bachelor type with a little black book bursting with names. She wasn't about to be listed with a hundred others under 'L'.

'It's wonderful,' she managed, still trying to control her racing pulse and not appear as nervous as she had become with him so close. She hadn't been jogging but her heartbeat was completely out of rhythm. Logic and caring about his address book were suddenly swept away in the summer breeze.

'I love coming down here when there's no one around. It's so quiet some mornings, all you can hear are the waves crashing on the shore and the occasional seagull cry,' he said, with the appreciation of simple pleasure dressing his face. 'It's good for the soul to have time to just be grateful to be alive.'

Flick noticed a far-away look in his eyes. It was as if he was truly thankful. It wasn't a catch phrase or throwaway line. She didn't offer a reply as it was a statement more than a question. She imagined, as a surgeon, he would have lost patients and that would give him a deep appreciation of life. Being a student midwife certainly had done that for her.

'Do you live around here or drive down from another part of town, like me?'

Flick pointed in the direction of a whitewashed apartment building with a blue-tiled roof. It stood out like a sore thumb

amongst the stunning modern high-rise glass architecture that claimed most of the prestigious beach road. The building was about forty years old with a Greek island feel to it, which wasn't surprising as her landlords spent half the year on the island of Mykonos and returned to Australia only for the summer months.

'I live up there in one of the flats on the second floor. It overlooks the beach and I love waking up and looking out across the ocean.' She wasn't sure why she needed to give him that much detail. It had just come tumbling out.

'Sweet,' he replied. 'Prime real estate. Although I wouldn't have been able to run to it when I was studying... they must pay student midwives well.'

He even knew her profession. She had imagined that if he'd even noticed her he would have no idea that she was a midwife, let alone on placement.

'It's not as much as I imagine the modern places around here would normally cost. They'd definitely be out of my league. My apartment is quite antiquated and tiny but I like it and I just go without other things to live here. It's a small sacrifice. I drive a twenty-year-old car but wake up to million-dollar views.' Suddenly her nerves were abating and she felt comfortable talking to him. She noticed him smile, the most gorgeous smile, and then he removed his sunglasses and she noticed his dark, charcoal eyes with thick black lashes were smiling back at her too.

'Wise choice, Felicia. A car for a location like this, it's a great

compromise. Who wouldn't want to live here and wake up to the ocean view every morning?'

Flick was taken aback again. His comment resonated with someone very down to earth. He just happened to also be extremely handsome. She couldn't help but notice a scar that ran down his chest, ending just above his belly button. Her eyes were drawn to it but she looked away quickly. It was faded and she imagined it was from an operation performed years before but it was significant in size. The fact that he didn't hide it, she assumed, meant that the scar was perhaps by now only on the outside but she wasn't about to test that hypothesis by making mention of it.

'Looks like the hospital has given us both the day off ... or are you playing hooky?'

Flick laughed, a little awkwardly. 'No, not playing hooky, I'm on an RDO.'

Tristan fell silent for a moment, as if he was taking a moment to really think about his words before he spoke. Flick wasn't sure if the lull in conversation was her cue to leave so she smiled and turned to walk up the sand towards her apartment before it became uncomfortable.

'Don't go,' he called to her. 'I was wondering if you would like to join me for a coffee or juice. There's a café just up the road and they have the best coffee and smoothies.'

Flick turned back when she noticed that his voice seemed a little unsure. She was surprised by both the invitation and the

tone. Before today, the man asking her to share a coffee had never even spoken to her. He had acknowledged her with little more than a nod in the corridor and now he wanted them to spend additional time together. She didn't want to refuse but she also didn't want to sit in the café in her shorts and bikini top and bare feet. She was happy to be on the beach dressed that way but would feel self-conscious in a restaurant filled with the lunch crowd while she was so scantily clad and shoeless.

'I make a pretty good coffee too, I'm not even close to barista standard, but I can promise it won't be instant either,' she called back to him. 'Would you like to come up to my place and I can make us both a cup.'

'I don't want to impose ... or cut short your walk.'

'You wouldn't be doing either,' she reassured him, feeling a warmth rush over her. She wanted to be near him. 'I was heading back anyway and I don't have any plans for the next hour or so and I'd feel more comfortable at home dressed like this.'

'I suppose my gear's not really befitting a restaurant,' he remarked, looking down at his shorts and sports shoes as he caught up to her. 'Although you look sensational, so there wouldn't be any complaints from patrons or management if you waltzed in dressed like that.'

Flick smiled nervously. 'Follow me,' she said, half-wondering why she had suggested they head to her place. She barely knew Tristan but something about him made her feel safe. It was crazy, she knew, but her intuition was pushing her in a direction that

reason would never normally have chosen. ‘And by the way,’ she said, ‘if we’re ditching protocol, my friends call me Flick.’

They talked for more than an hour, sitting on the narrow balcony of Flick’s apartment. She wasn’t fussed that she hadn’t finished cleaning. She was too relaxed to care. More than once, she joked it was more like a wide ledge than an actual balcony. The weather-beaten outdoor furniture had seen better days, but it served its purpose and allowed them to enjoy both their coffee and an uninterrupted view of the beach. Sharing the tiny, sunny space was a three-tiered planter box filled with herbs that Flick used for cooking. Basil, she told him, was her go-to herb that turned average into sensational. And oregano was her landlord’s favourite, so she would give him a small bunch every Friday morning when she paid the rent.

‘I can see you have a love of cooking and walks on the beach, but what is it that you love about being a midwife?’

Flick didn’t have to think about her reply. ‘Everything. It’s a privilege to travel the journey with a woman to the birth of her baby and then a little beyond that and see how the new family member is adapting to life. And how quickly everyone falls in love with the little person.’

Tristan noticed her face become animated as she spoke. Her love of her work was palpable.

‘Do you prefer attending home or hospital births?’

Again her answer was spontaneous. No debate needed. ‘Home births. I love working in MMU, but for me being out in the

community and assisting with home births, that's what makes it all worthwhile. It's all about continuity of care,' she said. 'The mother feels safe that she knows us, and we're like part of the family from around sixteen weeks into her pregnancy until six weeks after the birth. It's an amazing time and I feel so blessed to be a part of such a beautiful experience.'

Tristan watched her face continue to light up as she spoke. It was definitely her calling and she'd needed no prompting as to why she'd chosen that career. They continued to chat about the hospital, their careers and the gala ball that they discovered they were both attending that night. Tristan became aware of how much of Flick's time he had taken up and reluctantly he knew he had to leave. He didn't want to outstay his welcome and he suspected she would want to get ready for the evening's event.

'Can I drive you to the gala tonight?' he asked as he stood. 'I could swing by and pick you up if you haven't arranged transport.'

Tristan seldom went out socially and even less often accepted an invitation to a woman's apartment so the day was by no means a regular in any way for him. He had met a gorgeous young woman on the beach, who he knew a little about from the hospital, he had accepted her suggestion of coffee at her apartment and now he wanted to take her out. He wasn't sure what was happening. Logic reminded him that it wasn't a date, she already had a ticket and he was merely offering to be a friendly chauffeur, but his heart was warming in a way that he hadn't expected.

He'd already known before they'd shared a chat over coffee that Flick was naturally gorgeous and now he added fun, intelligent and passionate about her career as a midwife. The hour had passed like a few minutes, and he didn't want their time together to end. He wanted more. He felt as if he had just touched the tip of a beautiful iceberg and although he had always kept his personal life very separate from the hospital, he suddenly wanted to throw that rule away and to know everything he could about her.

And his libido had also joined the debate.

'That's very kind of you but I've made plans with my friend Sophia, she's a caseload midwife, and I'm shadowing her during my placement. I couldn't let her down, she's hired a limousine to take us there.'

'I completely understand. My car, nice as it is, couldn't compete with a limousine.'

Flick's lips curved to a smile. 'That's not the way I meant it to sound.'

Tristan returned a friendly smile but his body was imagining what it would be like to kiss her. It took all of his self-control not to pull her to him and feel the softness of her mouth on his. He had no doubt her kiss would be as sweet as she was, but he sensed there would also be passion in her lips ... and her body.

Reaching for the chilled water on the table beside him, he gulped the entire glass in the hope of bringing himself to his senses. He watched her walk barefoot inside her apartment and

put her glass and cup in the sink. She was so naturally sexy, just watching her silhouette made him want to feel her body against his, and thinking that way was out of character for him.

Swallowing hard, he followed her lead and placed his glass in the sink on the way to the front door. He was fascinated by her. He had never felt this way in such a short amount of time. The midwife dressed like a beach bunny had definitely crept under his skin.

He walked down the outside steps that led to the road below, leaving Flick at the top of the steps, but he couldn't resist turning back for a second. 'Maybe I'll convince you to dance with me before the night is over.'

Flick smiled back at him in silence. She knew it wouldn't take much convincing.

Flick stepped from the limousine and onto the red carpet, wearing a strapless floor-length gown of midnight blue satin with a crystal-beaded bodice. The price tag had made her gasp, but she had decided that the dress she wore to her first ball would be one she would remember for ever, so she bought it anyway. Her hair was down and in loose curls that skimmed her bare shoulders. She wore kitten-heel slingbacks and small crystal stud earrings, and carried an evening purse that she had bought to match her dress. If she had already blown her budget, she decided she may as well have the accessories. She was generally careful with her money, something she had learnt to do during her studies, so she could afford to splurge once in a while.

‘Ooh, red carpet, very nice,’ Sophia said, as she too stepped out of the limousine, wearing a long cream silk gown that also skimmed her shoulders and was a stark contrast against the rich mahogany curls of her hair. Very high-heeled gold shoes were only just visible at the hemline. She was quite petite, almost six inches shorter than Flick, so had decided to teeter all night in the name of fashion, and a little bit of vanity.

Sophia walked alongside Flick, smiling as they entered the ballroom that was abuzz with the noise of the guests’ chatter and a live jazz band.

‘Let’s see what tonight brings, then, shall we?’ Sophia said as she linked her arm through Flick’s.

They were seated at a round table of eight with a vascular surgeon and his wife, two single nurses and two medical students, who were also single and more than a little smitten with the attractive nurses. Unfortunately they were only first-year students and not exactly husband material in the young nurses’ eyes, so their advances were politely ignored.

The table decorations were simple but effective: huge square-cut crystal vases on each table filled with twelve long-stemmed white roses tied with a large cream organza bow. The tablecloths were black, as were the napkins. It was without doubt the most elegant affair that Flick had attended and she was very happy she had worn a dress befitting the event.

A delicious salmon entrée was followed by a main course of lamb in red-wine jus. When the plates from the second course

were being collected, Flick tried not to appear obvious as she looked around the room for Tristan. She had not seen him when she'd arrived for pre-dinner drinks, neither could she find him in the sea of elegantly clad guests when everyone was seated. Her heart sank a little and she surmised that it was more than likely he had been called to an emergency at the hospital. She was surprised when a wave of disappointment washed over her and threatened to dampen the entire evening.

He was all she'd been able to think of while she'd showered, dressed and applied her make-up and during the limousine drive to the ball. While being attracted to him was a little exciting, the thought of acting on it scared her to the core. But something was still drawing her to him despite being scared. It was an odd feeling, one she had definitely never experienced before.

Flick suddenly felt fabric brush across her back and assumed it was the waiter bringing more wine.

'No, thank, you. One glass is enough for me,' she said, placing her hand over the rim of the glass.

'I'll remember that, Flick. Now you've cleared it up, I won't randomly pour wine into your glass each time I pass by you.'

Flick recognised Tristan's voice from the time they had spent together that afternoon and she turned to find him smiling down at her, all six feet two of him dressed in black. While in his scrubs at work he was undeniably attractive and the near-naked, swimsuit look that morning had been amazing, her breath was stolen when she saw him in his black tuxedo. The crisp white

shirt exaggerated his tan further and his jaw was freshly shaven. She even noticed the platinum and black cufflinks and his highly polished patent-leather shoes. He was a vision of a male model, only better. And the scent of his cologne made her very aware of just how close he was to her.

‘I hope you’re enjoying the evening.’

‘Very much,’ she replied, still absorbing just how handsome and how close he was to her. ‘And you, are you having a nice time?’

He nodded his response, acknowledged the others at the table and then walked away without saying anything more. Flick looked ravishing and it validated his earlier decision to arrive late to the event. When he’d left her apartment that afternoon he’d known that his attraction to her was undeniably strong. And nothing good would come of it. But while he didn’t want to become involved, he couldn’t stay away. As he had sat on his bed, looking at his tuxedo hanging on the door, he’d told himself firmly to step back. Let Flick meet another man that night. There would be a number of eligible doctors who could give her what he couldn’t.

But then, looking at his watch and knowing the evening would be over soon, his feet hit the floor and he grabbed his suit. There was no turning back.

Flick was surprised and a little disappointed when Tristan left so quickly but imagined there were a lot of VIPs he needed to rub shoulders with at an event of this scale.

She noticed his table wasn't far from the podium at the front of the ballroom.

'*Flick?*' Sophia leant in and whispered, with one eyebrow raised as she studied her friend's face.

Flick smiled back nervously.

'When did the most eligible but elusive cardiothoracic surgeon at the Victoria start calling you Flick and not Felicia or Midwife Lawrence?'

'This morning, at the beach,' Flick answered quickly, then, changing the subject, she reached for the menu. 'I wonder what's for the main course?'

'We just finished main course,' Sophia said, as she gently eased the glossy menu from Flick's fingers and dropped her voice again. '*At the beach this morning?* You didn't mention anything on the drive here tonight. What exactly happened? You're not getting out of this one that easily, Flick. I confide in you and you keep your rendezvous with Dr Oh-My-God Gorgeous to yourself.'

Flick turned to Sophia and in an equally quiet voice responded, 'I was walking on the beach, he was jogging, we started talking and he had coffee with me on my balcony. End of story.'

'Excuse me ... end of story? I don't think so. I think it's just the beginning. I saw the look in his eyes. It's so obvious he has the biggest crush on you. So you, my single, gorgeous friend, are going over to his table right now to pick up where you left off

this morning.’

‘I can’t leave you alone,’ she argued, as she shifted uncomfortably in her seat.

‘Flick, I know a zillion people in the room. So you’re not leaving me alone.’

‘But Oliver Evans has just sat down with him. I’m not about to interrupt their discussion. It’s probably something quite important and of a serious medical nature.’

‘And that is exactly why you are going over to rescue Tristan from a long-winded medical discussion at a social event. He can chat about all things medical tomorrow. Tonight he should be having fun and so should you. How often do we get to let our hair down and enjoy ourselves?’

‘I’m not sure, Sophia.’

Looking straight into her friend’s eyes, Sophia smiled. ‘Believe me, he needs saving. You’re the only one who can do it! Stop hiding away, Flick. You have to grab life with both hands.’

Sophia’s words struck a chord, and reminded her of her sister’s phone call that morning, but it was the feeling stirring inside her that made Flick rise from her chair. ‘I hope I don’t regret this.’

Sophia rested back in her chair and took a sip of her wine as she watched Flick make her way to Tristan’s table. ‘I’ve got a feeling you won’t regret anything about tonight, Flick Lawrence,’ she muttered.

Tristan’s face lit up as Flick approached and his elated expression wasn’t lost on Oliver.

‘I think I’m needed back at my table,’ Oliver said as he stood to leave. ‘I’ll catch you in your office tomorrow, Tristan. Enjoy your evening.’ He smiled at Flick before he walked away.

‘I hope I didn’t scare Dr Evans away.’

‘Flick, this is a compliment and I hope you take it that way. You couldn’t scare a mouse, let alone Oliver Evans. He wouldn’t run from a stunning woman. He’s being polite in leaving and I will thank him for it tomorrow.’

Flick blushed as Tristan pulled out a chair for her next to him.

As they chatted over the fine wine and the key lime dessert that arrived a short time later, she found she had his complete attention and he had hers. Then later, as she rested back against his strong hand in the curve of her spine as he guided her effortlessly around the dance floor, she felt there was definitely more than just a professional connection between them. There was chemistry and sparks. Everything that had been missing with the men who had held her before was obvious in Tristan’s touch. He was bringing her body alive with little effort.

‘Would you allow me to drive you home tonight?’ he whispered, as she rested her head on his shoulder during a slow number. ‘Or do you have a limousine booked?’

Flick had seen Sophia leave the ball half an hour before. Her friend had waved and sneaked out early, and Flick felt so deliciously comfortable she didn’t lift her head as she spoke. ‘There’s no limousine. I would love you to take me home.’

‘It was a wonderful night,’ Flick said casually as she waited

with Tristan for the valet to bring his car.

‘Yes, it was so much more than I had expected.’ His voice didn’t give away too much, neither did his eyes, as the car arrived and he opened her door and waited for her to climb in. After she lifted the hem of her dress inside, he closed it again and went to the driver’s side. He tipped the valet and took off into the night with her.

She considered his handsome profile for a moment and was curious if the entire evening had been an improvement on what he had envisaged or if it was spending time with her that had lifted the night. She wasn’t sure why she hoped it was their time together as she barely knew the man driving her home but there was something special about him.

Flick smiled and looked from the passenger window at the people walking along the still busy Melbourne city street to their cars. Many had obviously attended the same grand event that they had just left. The men were all in tuxedos while the women wore varied styles. Some had chosen floor-length gowns while a number of the younger female guests had chosen stunning cocktail dresses that skimmed their knees. All of them looked gorgeous with their sparkling jewellery and beautifully styled hair. Flick loved the glamorous feeling of the evening.

She felt a little like Cinderella but she hadn’t run anywhere at midnight; instead she was being driven home by a gorgeous and intriguing surgeon. She was glad the darkness of the car masked the colour that rushed to her cheeks.

‘I’m very glad you came over to my table.’

‘It was Sophia’s idea. She said you two looked much too serious and were probably discussing the latest in vitro surgical procedure and, although that in itself is incredibly important, she thought tonight should be about fun. I honestly didn’t want to interrupt.’

‘So it wasn’t your idea?’ he asked, keeping his eyes on the road. ‘Now I get the picture. Sophia forced you to sit with me?’

‘Gosh, it did sound that way, didn’t it?’ She laughed. ‘It’s as if I’m making Sophia take responsibility for my actions and I’m not. I did want to spend some time with you.’ Flick suddenly felt comfortable enough to be honest. It may have been fate or an accident that had brought them together that morning, but that evening, she had admitted, was of her doing.

‘Whatever the catalyst, I’m glad you did.’ His voice was deep and husky and eyes left the road and lingered on Flick long enough to make her heart skip a beat. ‘And thank you for inviting me up for coffee on your balcony.’

‘You mean my slightly shabby herb-filled *ledge!*’

Tristan smiled at her. He doubted that she realised how beautiful she really was and how captivating he found her. ‘Let’s agree it might be *small* but in terms of view it’s a perfectly positioned balcony.’

Flick smiled nervously. She had never felt drawn to a man so quickly. The chemistry was both unexpected and undeniable and made her pulse quicken and her stomach fill with butterflies. He

had always been aloof when she had passed him in the hospital corridors. There was no doubting how attractive he was but he'd seemed distant. Flick hadn't taken it personally as she'd surmised a role such as a neonatal cardiothoracic surgeon would be high pressured and he probably didn't even see the medical staff around him at times, let alone a student midwife on placement, who randomly popped into the hospital between home visits.

She'd try not to think about him after he left her sight when she returned to MMU but she knew the nurses and midwives all spoke about him. Many had crushes from a distance but none appeared to have had first-hand experience. She admired him for keeping his personal and professional life discreet and separate.

But as she sat beside him in the privacy of his car, she didn't want to think about the hospital, the midwives, or whether he had a little black book. Instead, she channelled Megan's words. Tonight would be hers. It was time she took a risk.

Tristan's gaze was very intense, his mouth only inches from hers when he said goodnight to her. The chemistry between them was electric and couldn't be ignored. The gentleman in him had insisted on parking his car and taking the stairs with her to her door. Then the gentleman was no longer when, without warning, and without resistance, he took possession of her lips and then her willing body. When Flick fumbled with the keys, Tristan took control and opened the door, scooped her up in his powerful arms and then kicked the door closed with his foot. With his mouth still hungering for hers, he carried her through her streetlamp-lit

apartment to her bedroom.

With desire steering every move of his skilful hands, he unzipped her dress and threw it to the floor. His kisses trailed from her mouth down her bare neck as he laid her on the bed. Standing before her, he removed his jacket and tie, unbuttoned his shirt, all the while admiring the beautiful, nearly naked woman now reaching for him. His tanned torso was bare and Flick's fingers needed no encouragement to explore his warm, firm skin as together they removed the rest of his clothes and then her strapless black lingerie.

Tristan was in no hurry as he gently lay down with her in the softness of her bed. His hands took their time slowly roaming her eager body, bringing her to a peak then letting her desire settle for the shortest time before teasing her back to the brink. Flick had never been so ready and so sure of anything when he finally took her and they became one for the first time that night.

The morning light slipped through the gap in the curtains and found Flick lying naked in her bed with Tristan asleep beside her. She was happier than she could ever remember. But also unsettled when she realised the enormity and repercussions of what she had done. She had slept with Tristan on the first night. It had been amazing and he was a wonderful lover in every way.

The feeling of his skilful hands caressing her body had filled her senses and fought with her doubts that it was too soon. They should have waited, her practical side told her. Her mind was spinning as she slipped from the warmth of her bed and into the

shower. She needed space. Room to gather her thoughts without the scent of Tristan lying beside her and making her have crazy, romantic thoughts about the way he had made love to her. The way no man had ever done before.

The warm water felt good as it washed over her body and she tried to make sense of what had seemed natural only hours before. Rushing in so impulsively was nothing that Flick ever did but when he'd kissed her at the door she'd been unable to resist him. She just needed a few moments alone to sort out how she felt about the night ... and the man still lying in her bed.

Tristan woke and reached out for Flick but he was alone. He could hear the water running in the bathroom. He wondered if it was his cue to leave; to disappear without any uncomfortable goodbye. It wasn't how he wanted their time together to end and it seemed out of character for Flick. Even though they had spent less than twenty-four hours together, he felt that he knew her enough to say that taking a man home on the first night was not something she did often.

He lifted his hands behind his head and lay in the warmth of her sheets, thinking back over the night. It had been amazing and he wished it could be the beginning of something deeper between them but he couldn't do that to her. He would end it as quickly as it had begun, just the way he always did. But this time it felt different.

As he slowly lifted his head from her pillow and climbed from the bed, he felt a sudden ache inside for what he was ending so

abruptly. He paused and looked back at the crumpled bed where Flick had been lying and he felt a strange feeling of regret. This was nothing like other mornings when he left a woman's bed. This time he was fighting the urge to stay and if she walked out of the bathroom, with or without her towel and smiled her gorgeous warm smile, he knew he would not leave. This time he wanted to stay.

But she didn't come out. The shower was not running but she was still behind the door. He wasn't sure if she really did want him to go. Perhaps he didn't know her the way he thought.

And perhaps it was for the best.

He wasn't looking for long term. He was fooling himself to think he could make it more than what it was. It wouldn't be fair to Flick to let her think he intended pursuing a relationship, and marriage would never be on the table. Tristan had good reason for not considering himself husband material but he wasn't about to share that with a woman after only one night, no matter how amazing the night had been and how he thought he felt about her. His reasons were solid and not negotiable.

Her diplomatic disappearance under the shower made Tristan think that she didn't want an awkward morning-after goodbye. But knowing she was within arm's reach behind a thin wooden door tugged at a place deep inside Tristan. It was a feeling he'd never experienced before. He looked around her apartment, knowing he would never be there again. Yesterday had been different. His visit had been casual but now they had crossed the

line there was no way he would ever return.

One night would be all they would share. One breath-taking night, his body reminded him as he stepped over the sea of clothes that lay strewn over the wooden floor. Her expensive dress entwined with his tuxedo just as their bodies had all night. Collecting his belongings, Tristan dressed quickly. He picked up his keys and after slipping them in his trouser pocket, along with his mobile phone, he left. The bathroom door opened just as he quietly closed the front door and made his way down the steps to his car.

Pausing for a moment to look back up at Flick's apartment, Tristan breathed a heartfelt sigh. He wished that life could be different and he could have stayed in the softness of her bed, wrap his arms around her naked body and persuade her to see if what they had could be more than just one night.

But one night was all he could offer.

And it appeared it was all she wanted.

Flick stepped out of the bathroom. Finally her heart had won over her head in the steam-filled room. Maybe, just maybe they could make something more from their crazy, wonderful night. Perhaps she could learn to trust him and let him into her life despite the way they'd rushed into sleeping together. She was willing to try and she wanted to tell him just that as she slipped back into his arms. Her freshly scrubbed face was lit with the promise of what they might share.

Her stomach sank as she looked at the bed. It was empty. She

looked around the room. Tristan's clothes, his keys, all sign of him had gone. He had left, without any goodbye; he had just climbed from her bed and walked out of her apartment.

His action spoke louder than any words ever could. There was no tomorrow to plan—nothing more to talk about. Clearly for him it had just been for one night.

CHAPTER ONE

TRISTAN SIPPED HIS coffee as he looked from the window of his third floor office at the Victoria. He had returned from early morning rounds and had an hour before his surgical schedule began.

His mind wandered for a moment back to Flick, just as it had every day for the previous three months. He had hoped that as time passed so would his feelings, but they hadn't. Ninety-one days and nights had not erased or even paled what they'd shared that one night together. She was different from any woman he had ever met. She was sweet and funny and desirable. Everything he could want in a woman and then some. But he couldn't be with her, not even for one more night. He was scared that if he caved in to his feelings then he would never want to leave.

Sometimes thoughts of her came to him when he lay down in bed at night, exhausted from a long day's surgery. Lying on his back on the cool cotton sheets, his arms above his head as he stared into the darkness and thought back to that night. The hum of the ceiling fan gently moved the heavy night air but it didn't shift his thoughts. Nor his regrets. His mind was consumed with the memory of the hunger and desire they'd had for each other. And he pictured Flick's beautiful smile. A smile that had lit up the ballroom on that night as they'd sat talking for hours, the sparkle in her eyes as he'd held her in his arms on the dance

floor, and the passion that they'd shared in her bed all haunted him before he finally succumbed to sleep. And even in his dreams she would appear some nights.

Dreams that felt so real he could touch the softness of her skin. And taste the sweetness of her mouth.

But Tristan knew that it had had to end before it had begun. He couldn't pursue a relationship. Flick deserved better. Although they didn't speak of her future goals and dreams outside her career, her profession made him feel sure one day she would want a family, and a family was the one thing he couldn't give her.

He looked over at the family photo on his desk. His medical graduation. It had been a day with more meaning to him and his mother and father than to many other graduates. It had been the first step on his journey to becoming a neonatal cardiothoracic surgeon. A journey he had chosen at sixteen when he'd received his heart transplant after spending years wrapped in cotton wool as his name had moved slowly up a waiting list. His mother was beaming in the photograph and his father wore a strained smile. His mother was thrilled that Tristan was alive to live his dream, his father worn down by years of worry.

More study had been ahead but Tristan had never doubted his path and finally he'd qualified. He'd become a heart surgeon who was also a heart transplant recipient and he'd wanted to specialise in neonatal heart surgery.

Tristan was determined to surgically alter the course of seriously ill newborn babies' lives. Giving them a chance for

a regular childhood, something he'd never enjoyed. It was his contact with children with whom he felt a bond and it satisfied his paternal longings. He had decided early in his studies that he would never have a child to call his own. With his medical history and the dire genetic inheritance for any future children, it wasn't worth the risk.

His thoughts returned to Flick. He had to be cruel to be kind. One day she would meet a man who could provide her with everything she wanted and deserved, and Tristan did not want to stand in the way of her happiness. She might hate him now but keeping his distance would allow her to meet the right man. Someone who could give her a perfect life. But at least he would always have that one night they'd shared. A night he never wanted to forget.

The beeping of his pager brought Tristan back to reality. He looked down at the details then put a call through to the emergency department.

'Tristan Hamilton. I received your page.'

'Dr Hamilton, transferring you now to the A and E surgical resident,' the young female voice replied, before putting him on hold for a moment.

'Tristan, it's Dylan Spencer. A patient presented in Cas ten minutes ago in first-stage labour, gestational age approximately thirty-seven weeks. On examination she revealed that she's been monitored for the congenital heart disease of her unborn son—transposition of the great arteries. I didn't want to let labour

progress without your advice.'

'Any other history?' Tristan asked, concern colouring his voice. 'Who provided the antenatal care?'

'Her husband says they were notified of TGA at the twenty-week scan and his wife has been under the care of Dr Hopkins, the neonatal cardiologist at Sydney Eastern Memorial.'

'What are they doing in Melbourne?'

'Family gathering. Drove down for her aunt's birthday or something like that.'

Tristan shook his head but did not voice his opinion. Transposition of the great arteries was a life-threatening condition for the baby and travelling so close to term was, in his mind, not the most sensible decision or one that he imagined would have been condoned by their specialist. The patient was fortunate labour had not begun on the journey.

'I'll put a call through to Nate Hopkins, but in the meantime please call OR and have them contact the obstetric resident, prep for an emergency C-section and then prepare the adjacent Theatre for a neonate balloon atrial septostomy. You're right, we can't allow labour to progress without intervention. The infant may not survive the birth canal.'

Tristan had just ended his call to the Sydney neonatal cardiologist when the scrub nurse arrived at his office door with A and E medical records in hand.

'Dr Hamilton, here's the notes for the emergency delivery.'

Tristan was already on his feet and heading towards the door,

where he took possession of the medical records and slipped his own notes from the phone call inside.

‘They estimate from the previous ultrasound the baby may be close to six pounds,’ she informed him as they made their way towards the lifts.

‘How’s the mother?’

‘She’s holding up well. The epidural was administered but she’s still somewhere between shock and denial that she’s about to have her baby. Sophia, a community midwife from MMU, is in there with her, along with her student placement, Flick. They’re providing some emotional support while the obstetrician prepares for the C-section.’

Tristan flinched a little when she mentioned Flick. Just the mention of her name brought his still raw feelings rushing to the surface again. He had to pretend their night together hadn’t happened until one day he could forget it actually had. He would never allow himself to fall in love. Not with Flick or any other woman. Up until now that hadn’t been difficult but something about her had got under his skin and was causing him to lose sleep.

The lift doors opened and they both stepped inside.

‘As you instructed, the radiographer and paediatric anaesthetist are scrubbing in in the adjacent Theatre now in preparation for the atrial septostomy.’

They entered the empty lift and headed down to Theatre quickly and in silence as Tristan read the examination

observations on the way.

The Theatre nurse met them as the lift doors opened and walked them to the scrub room. ‘Dr Hamilton, the father is waiting to speak with you but I explained that would be after the delivery when you have assessed their son and can provide a more accurate prognosis.’ Her voice was calm yet firm, her years of experience evident. ‘Both parents are aware that major surgery will be needed in the next few days for their son. The paediatric resident discussed the need for the immediate atrial septostomy with Mr Roberts, the child’s father, and obtained signed permission. And by the way, we have a medical student in Theatre to observe today.’

Tristan nodded as he scrubbed and gowned and entered the operating Theatre. Everything had been prepared for the emergency procedure on the newborn infant. The slightly nervous but very eager-looking medical student had also scrubbed in and was waiting in the Theatre, his expression close to that of a deer in headlights.

‘Tristan Hamilton, neonatal cardiothoracic surgeon,’ Tristan introduced himself as he checked the sterile surgical tray. He knew that everything would be in order as the Theatre team was second to none in detail and process, but it had been a ritual since medical school and one he never omitted.

‘Jon Clarke, third-year med student. I’ve heard so much about you and hope to specialise in paediatric cardiology but I’m keeping my options open.’

‘Welcome aboard, Jon,’ Tristan replied, keeping an eye on the doors to the Theatre and the impending arrival of the newborn patient. ‘In a few minutes we will have a neonate, approximately thirty-seven weeks with a transposition of the great arteries. As I’m sure you are aware, the natural history of untreated transposition of the great vessels in the neonate was quite poor but has improved dramatically. Surgical correction has been possible for over fifty years now with an arterial switch procedure that’s considerably lowered mortality rates.

‘I’ll be scheduling that surgery within the next two days but we need earlier intervention to ensure immediate survival so shortly I’ll undertake a nonsurgical procedure to create an arterial septal defect, using a balloon catheter. Essentially we will open a small hole in the heart to allow the blue and red blood to mix and provide sufficient oxygen to the newborn.’

‘How did you diagnose the condition so quickly?’ Jon asked with interest.

‘The mother has been under the care of Dr Nate Hopkins in Sydney. He’d planned the C-section for next week but they travelled here yesterday for some family function and labour ensued. The condition was detected at the twenty-week scan. Thank God she didn’t go into labour somewhere along the Hume Highway or we might not have had the same prognosis for mother or child.’

Just then the swing doors opened and the tiny child was wheeled in on open bed. Tristan looked up to see Flick standing

in scrubs beside the infant. He caught her glance and held it. He couldn't ignore the look of pain and disappointment in her beautiful blue eyes. But there was no anger. That seemed worse to him. He fought the strongest urge to throw his gloves, gown and surgical cap to the floor and pull her into his arms. But he reminded himself sternly that it was not himself that he was protecting. It was her.

'The vernix has been wiped clear from his abdomen and suction of mouth and nasal cavity done,' Flick said, as she handed over the care of the baby, wrapped loosely in green sterile sheeting, to the Theatre nurse, then left without looking back.

Tristan hated that it was over between them and that one night would be all they ever shared, but there was no other way, he reminded himself as he refocused on the tiny child who now needed him. An infant who would be facing a childhood much like his own if this surgery was not successful.

The radiographer continued the Theatre tutorial for the student. 'I'm providing the two-dimensional transthoracic echocardiography. Essentially this is live imaging of the child's heart to allow Dr Hamilton to monitor the catheter's positioning during the procedure.'

'The procedure can also be of potential benefit in patients with other severe congenital heart defects. I can explain them later if you'd like,' Tristan added, as he watched the Theatre nurse unwrap the sterile covers and wash the baby's abdomen with antiseptic solution.

‘Today I’ll be using the umbilical vein as an access. This simplifies this procedure dramatically. It can be performed at the bedside in the neonatal intensive care unit but as the infant was down here I chose to do this immediately before the transfer to NICU. I also prefer sedation to general anaesthesia if possible.’

Jon stepped a little closer. ‘If the condition hadn’t been identified at twenty weeks, due to poor antenatal monitoring, how would you diagnose the condition after birth before it was too late to reverse the condition for the newborn?’

‘The symptoms would be detected by the neonatologist or the nursing team. The child would present as unusually quiet, he or she wouldn’t wake, and they would have a low pulse ox test. All the indicators of a congenital heart condition, so I would be called to consult immediately.’

‘Ready to go,’ the radiographer announced.

‘I’m set too,’ said the paediatric anaesthetist.

Tristan nodded and began the intricate procedure, talking the medical student through each step. ‘We’re now in the right atrium, as you can see on the echocardiography. I will now thread the catheter into the foreman ovale, the naturally existing hole between the atria that normally closes shortly after birth.’ Tristan watched the screen to ensure the catheter was positioned correctly.

‘Now I will inflate the balloon with three to four mls of dilute radiopaque solution to enlarge the foramen ovale enough that it will no longer become sealed. This allows more oxygenated

blood to enter the right side of the heart where it can be pumped to the rest of the body. To ensure that there is flow, I am now locking the balloon. I will now carefully but sharply withdraw into the right atrium to create a permanent flow.'

Tristan continued his explanation of the procedure and repeated the manoeuvre three times before he then deflated the catheter and removed it completely.

'We can monitor the effectiveness directly via the echocardiography,' he said, pointing to the monitors. 'But it's clear there's been a sharp rise in systemic arterial saturation so we've been successful. This little chap will be good to go until we can schedule his major operation in the next two days.'

Tristan and the medical student stepped away as the nursing team prepared the baby to be transferred to Neonatal Intensive Care. He was pleased that the stunned-deer expression had slowly disappeared from the young man's face and he appeared more at ease. After agreeing that Jon could scrub in on the arterial switch repair surgery, he invited the student to accompany him to visit with the parents once the mother had been released from Recovery and returned to the maternity unit ward. It was equally important to Tristan that the bedside manner of medical students was developed at the same time as their technical skills.

Tristan then headed to Neonatal ICU to brief the nursing team before he went back to his office to finalise some paperwork and grab some lunch. He had an afternoon of hospital rounds and consults, so he needed to eat something substantial.

Flick paced the corridor outside Tristan's office nervously. She had taken a break after she'd visited a new mother in MMU with Sophia. Flick loved shadowing Sophia and was learning so much about the spectrum of roles within midwifery but that day she felt removed from what was happening. She hadn't liked the feeling of not being in the moment during the birth. It was what she loved more than anything but that day her mind and her heart were weighed down by what she needed to say to Tristan.

This was her career and she would not allow Tristan to take that away from her. She would get through her personal issues because she loved what she did. She loved it all—the antenatal care, the birth and the postnatal assistance. She wanted to be a community midwife and spend more time in the field in the future.

But first she had to speak with Tristan. She had made her decision after two weeks of deliberation. She couldn't delay it any longer.

Finally, after taking a deep breath, she knocked on his door. 'Come in,' Tristan called, trying to swallow a mouthful of his sandwich as he checked his incoming emails, some of them spam from pharmaceutical and medical supply companies.

Flick's legs were shaking like leaves in the breeze as she entered his office. She looked across the room at the man who had made love to her on that fateful night and she knew immediately that there was no regret in her heart. No anger. And definitely no blame, as she had willingly invited him into her bed.

‘Flick.’ He was stunned and his voice didn’t mask his surprise at seeing her in his office. She looked even more beautiful. She had a glow, he thought as she stood before him in her shapeless hospital scrubs. He knew underneath she had the most gorgeous body but her beauty went so much deeper than that. She had a wonderful, warm spirit and the fact they couldn’t be together ate him up inside.

It took less than a minute, with Flick standing so close, to realise that his feelings for her were real and that made it so much harder to keep his distance. It tore at him that he couldn’t act on his feelings, to cross the room and kiss away the last three months. As much as he wanted to, he couldn’t let it happen. He needed to stay in control. She deserved so much better than the problems he could bring into her life.

Resolutely he knew he must deal professionally with whatever hospital matter she had come to discuss and then pretend she had never been within his arms’ reach.

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