



*Kate Hardy*

*The Baby Doctor's*  
**DESIRE**



**MILLS & BOON**  
MEDICAL

**Kate Hardy**

# **The Baby Doctor's Desire**

Серия «Mills & Boon Medical»

Серия «London City General», книга 2

## **Аннотация**

When two very caring doctors cannot deny – but cannot let on – that they’re attracted to each other, their only option is to have a secret affair! But for maternity consultant Kieran Bailey, keeping his relationship with Dr. Judith Powell private proves impossible. The hospital grapevine is rife with rumours at London City General, and if their secret is exposed the consequences will be huge! Can Kieran afford to let his feelings for this stunning but fiery redhead get in the way of his family responsibilities? Life (and love) in the fast lane at LONDON CITY GENERAL

# Содержание

“We could have dinner. Just you and me. Nobody else needs to know about it.”	5
Dear Reader,	6
MILLS & BOON	8
CONTENTS	9
CHAPTER ONE	10
CHAPTER TWO	28
CHAPTER THREE	41
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	57



**“We could have dinner. Just you and me. Nobody else needs to know about it.”**

Kieran was silent for a long, long time. Just when Jude thought he was going to refuse, he said softly, “I thought we were just doing friendship?”

“We were. But...” She took a deep breath. “It’s not enough for me. Not now.”

“Me, neither,” he admitted. “But you said you didn’t do affairs.”

“There’s a first time for everything.” She bit her lip. “And if I don’t, I think I’m going to spontaneously combust in the middle of the ward.”

“Mmm, and we can’t have that, can we?”

He was looking at her mouth. She shook her head. “Stop it.”

“Why?”

“Because...” Because she knew he was thinking about kissing her.

## Dear Reader,

I was planning my next book when three doctors leaped into my head and hijacked me! Zoe, Judith and Holly trained together, are best friends, and work together at London City General.

Zoe's the clever one, a real high-flyer who's never found love, until she meets gorgeous Brad, on secondment to pediatrics from California. Can she heal his broken heart—and can he help her feel less haunted by the secret she hasn't even told her best friends?

Judith's the glamorous one who delivers babies by day and sings at hospital fund-raisers by night. She falls in love with Kieran, the new maternity consultant. But after a discovery threatens to tear their love apart, can she teach him to believe in her—and in himself?

Holly's the “prickly” one with a soft heart—but it'll take a special man to get close enough to find out! She chose the fast-paced life of the E.R. to help her forget her lost love. But when David walks into her life again, will it be second time lucky?

The best bit about working on a trilogy was that I didn't have to say goodbye to my characters. They made appearances in each other's stories! I loved being able to explore a hospital's community and see how different departments work together, and I hope you enjoy life in the fast lane at London City General

as much as I did. Look out for more stories set in London City General—coming soon.

With love,

Kate Hardy

The Baby Doctor's Desire

Kate Hardy



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For Ali, with love

# CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Dear Reader](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FIVE

CHAPTER SIX

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHAPTER NINE

CHAPTER TEN

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CHAPTER TWELVE

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

[Extract](#)

[Copyright](#)

# CHAPTER ONE

‘TESS, it’s going to be OK. Really it is.’

‘But Charlie’s been sick over your new suit! And...’ Tess broke into sobs.

Kieran held her close and stroked her hair. Why had his nephew had to bring his milk up over him today, of all days? After clearing up, Kieran was already ten minutes late for his shift—and he hadn’t even left the house yet!

How to make a good impression on your first day as consultant. Not.

But his little sister didn’t need to know that. After the junk life had thrown at her this past month, she could do without the extra stress. Besides, big brothers were supposed to be protective, not needing a fuss made of themselves. He forced himself to breathe normally, and hoped Tess couldn’t tell that he was only pretending to be calm. ‘Hey. I’d better make tracks.’

‘But your suit?’

‘It’s OK. I’ve sponged it off. And nobody’s going to notice baby sick under my white coat. If they do...’ He shrugged. ‘I work on a maternity ward, remember. Babies are sick over us all the time.’

‘Really?’ Tess gazed at him from red, swollen eyes.

‘Really.’ He dropped a kiss on her forehead. ‘Go and have a shower. Don’t worry about Charlie, I’ve changed him and I’ve

put the light show on in his cot and he's got his soft book and a teddy, so he'll be fine for a few minutes. You've got your mum and baby group this morning, haven't you?"

Tess made a face. 'It's going to be horrible. All they'll talk about is babies.'

'Of course it won't be horrible. And, yes, they'll talk about babies at first because that's what you've all got in common. But once you break the ice and get to know each other, it'll be fine.' He pulled a face at her. 'Guess what? All they'll talk to me about this morning is babies, too.'

'Yes. I suppose.' She gave him a wobbly smile, and Kieran felt the tension in his stomach begin to uncoil again. She was going to be OK. He almost—almost—asked her if she'd try to remember to put the washing machine on. But that would start another discussion and he really, really didn't have time. It'd be quicker to do it himself, after his shift.

'See you later, kiddo. I'd better go,' he said.

The moment he was out of sight, he rang the hospital. He was put through to the obstetric director's secretary and explained he'd been delayed but was on his way in.

And because he'd waited to make the call, he missed the next tube train and had to wait. Funny how his watch was working on a different timescale from the clock at the station: the second hand was racing round his watch, reminding him just how late he was going to be, but the station clock still insisted the next train would be in four minutes.

It seemed like for ever before he managed to get to London City General. He didn't bother waiting for the lifts. If they were anything like the ones at his old hospital, it'd be lunchtime before he started his shift. As it was...

He made it. Forty-five minutes late. Briefcase in locker, white coat on—hmm, he still smelled suspiciously of baby sick but never mind. Chances were, nobody would comment. Not to his face. And he could ignore anything said behind his back. He was old enough and tough enough.

He was on his way to the obstetric director's office when he saw her. The most beautiful woman he'd ever set eyes on. She was sitting on the edge of a desk, talking to one of the midwives—she couldn't work in the maternity unit, then, or she'd be in the middle of a round or with one of the mums. She clearly wasn't pregnant and was wearing a white coat, so the odds were she was staff on a different ward. Paediatrics, most likely. She was tall—not far off six feet, he guessed—with legs up to her armpits. Her red hair was pinned back in a neat knot at her nape, but it would drop like silk to her shoulders if she loosened it. She had a beautiful clear, creamy complexion, blue eyes that crinkled at the corners as she smiled and a mouth that made his knees go weak.

Even weaker when she threw her head back to laugh, and he saw the line of her throat. He wanted to stride over there, grab her and kiss a necklace round it.

Oh, hell. This was a complication he didn't need right now. Until Tess was back on an even keel, he couldn't possibly think

about a relationship. Or even lust after someone in secret. Tess needed help to sort her life out, and right now he was the only one who could give her that help.

Besides, the redhead had to be spoken for. No way could a woman that beautiful be single. And no way was he going to be responsible for breaking up a relationship. So he'd better keep his eyes to himself.

He shook himself, turned away from the redhead and knocked on the consultant's door.

'Ah, Mr Bailey. Come in,' Arabella Hunter said.

'I'm sorry I'm late, Miss Hunter,' he said. 'I'll stay late to make up the time.'

'At least you had the manners to call my secretary. I appreciate that.' She gestured to the chair in front of her desk. 'Sit down. And it's Bella. We work on first-name terms on this ward.'

'Bella,' he repeated dutifully.

'And you're Kieran, yes?'

He nodded.

'Good. I've rostered you with Judith Powell today—she's one of our registrars. She'll introduce you to everyone.' Bella rolled her eyes. 'I would have taken you round myself, but I've got a meeting with the trust directors in five minutes. Jude'll look after you, though.'

'Powell?'

He only realised he'd spoken aloud when Bella nodded. 'Yes, she's Ben's daughter. She's a nice girl.'

Professor Ben Powell was the obstetric director at Hampstead Free—the hospital where Kieran had worked until last Friday.

‘She didn’t want to work for her father, so he had a word with me.’

Oh, great. His first day as consultant here, and he’d be working with a makeweight, a woman who’d got the job because of who her father was. So he’d be doing double the work here as well as at home.

He forced a smile to his face. ‘I look forward to meeting her.’

‘Come along, then.’ Bella ushered him out of the office. And took him straight to the redhead, who was still chatting at the midwives’ station.

‘Jude, this is Kieran Bailey, our new consultant. Look after him for me, will you, sweetie?’

‘Course I will, Bella.’

The gorgeous redhead—the one who was chatting, not working—was the professor’s daughter?

She was going to be working with him?

She slid off the desk and Kieran discovered that she was just as tall as he’d guessed. Five feet eleven, so she barely had to tip her head back to look into his eyes. And her voice was incredibly sexy. Low, deep, a little husky. Like melted chocolate.

He definitely shouldn’t have thought of that. Because now he had another image in his mind: himself, trailing melted chocolate across her creamy skin and then licking it off.

Stop it. You’re a professional, not a sex-crazed lunatic, he

reminded himself.

‘Welcome to the ward.’ Her eyelashes were long. And dark—which meant they were either dyed or mascaraed. But she didn’t wear a scrap of any other make-up. Didn’t need to.

Stop it. Focus.

‘I’m Judith Powell—Jude to my friends.’ She held her hand out.

He took it.

Hell and double hell.

Shaking hands was meant to be an ordinary, everyday occurrence. It wasn’t supposed to feel as if an earthquake had just hit him. His skin wasn’t supposed to tingle like this.

‘Kieran Bailey.’

Stupid. She knew that already—Bella had told her his name. But for the life of him, he couldn’t think of anything else to say. His mind had gone completely blank, and his mouth felt as if he’d been eating sand. Anyone would think he was a teenager, not a well-balanced thirty-two-year-old.

‘We usually do a ward round about now. So I’ll introduce you to everyone as we go round, if that’s OK?’

‘That would be fine.’

Ur-r. Now he sounded stuffy and prim. But that was marginally better than what he really wanted to say. Which was along the lines of, Linen cupboard. You. Me. Now.

He’d never, ever done the chest-beating Tarzan-type thing. What was it about this woman that made him feel like that?

‘Right. This is Louise, our senior midwife. Known to everyone as Lulu.’

The woman she’d been chatting to. In her late thirties, dark-haired, little and plump with a friendly smile. And a knowing look in her eyes. No doubt a smile from Judith Powell melted the brain of just about every male she met, and it was obvious to everyone that he was no exception. ‘Pleased to meet you,’ he said.

‘And you.’

‘Catch you later, Lulu.’ Judith took a sheaf of files from the desk. ‘Right. Our first mum is Lisa Ford.’

Not ‘patient’, he noted. Good. So Judith took the modern approach rather than seeing pregnancy as a condition that needed to be treated.

‘It’s her first baby, she’s thirty-four and the baby’s breech presentation.’

Meaning that the baby was bottom down rather than head down in the womb. ‘So she’s in for a section?’ he asked.

Judith shook her head. ‘She wants a vaginal delivery, if possible.’

‘What sort of breech?’

‘Frank,’ Judith explained. This was the most common type of breech presentation, with the baby’s hips flexed and knees extended. ‘The ultrasound didn’t show anything conclusive but I’d like her to have another ultrasound after delivery—it’s possible that she has fibroids in her uterus.’

‘How are you planning to manage the delivery?’

‘I’m going to try ECV, when we finish the ward round.’ ECV, or external cephalic version, was a way of turning the breech baby to a normal presentation, through a kind of forward somersault.

‘You’re sure she’s a suitable candidate?’

‘The baby’s been breech since twenty-six weeks and I discussed it all with Rowan.’

His predecessor, who’d taken a sideways move to a consultant’s post in Birmingham, to be nearer his parents when their first grandchild was born in three months’ time.

Clearly Kieran’s doubts showed on his face, because she took him through Lisa’s case history. ‘She’s thirty-eight weeks now, it’s a singleton baby and not small for dates. Lisa has no uterine scars, no signs of hypertension or preeclampsia—so there’s a much smaller risk of placental abruption. Oh, and she’s rhesus positive, before you ask. And she’s had nothing by mouth since midnight. I’ve got the portable scanner on standby and the cardiocograph ready. I thought we could do an ultrasound now to check the position of her placenta and the baby, whether the baby’s growth rate is satisfactory and whether the volume of amniotic fluid is normal. Then we’ll set the CTG running for half an hour so we can check the baby isn’t distressed.’

She was more thorough than he’d expected. Maybe he’d got it wrong and she wasn’t a makeweight. Maybe she’d been on her break when she’d been chatting to Louise, not simply wasting time. ‘And you’re experienced in ECV?’ he asked.

‘No. But I believe you are. So you can talk me through it.’

He frowned. ‘How do you know?’ Had his résumé been passed round the ward?

She looked embarrassed. ‘When we heard you were joining us from the Hampstead Free, I, um, asked Dad about you.’

‘Right.’ It was tempting—very tempting—to ask what Professor Powell had said about him. But Kieran had no intention of falling into that trap.

‘So will you work through it with me?’

He nodded.

‘Great. Thanks.’ She flashed him another of those knee-weakening smiles. He didn’t dare smile back. The safest place to look was at her hands.

Though even that was dangerous. There was no ring on the left hand, he noted. No white mark either, so it wasn’t that she removed a ring for her job. But the lack of a ring didn’t mean anything. Tess’s ex had never given her a ring, but she’d still been committed to him—and completely devastated when he’d dumped her three weeks ago.

Tess. Tess, who needed him right now. He should be thinking of his baby sister, not lusting after his colleague.

When Judith had introduced Kieran to the patients, written up their notes and introduced him to Margot and Daisy, the other two midwives on duty, they returned to Lisa Ford.

‘OK, Lisa,’ Judith said warmly. ‘The CTG results look fine—the baby’s happy. Your pulse and blood pressure are a little bit

higher than normal, but I'd guess that's because you're nervous.'

'A bit,' Lisa admitted.

'It's your choice. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do,' Judith reminded her.

Lisa bit her lip. 'Is it going to hurt?'

'It might be a bit uncomfortable, but it shouldn't be painful,' Kieran said.

'I'll be brave, then.' She swallowed. 'Because I really, really don't want a section. I'd do anything to avoid it.'

'We can't guarantee this is going to work—and even if it does, your baby might be one of the stubborn ones who turns himself right back again,' Judith warned gently. 'But that's why we've left trying the manoeuvre until after thirty-seven weeks, to give you a better chance of him not turning back again.'

'Let's do it,' Lisa said.

'You might be more comfortable if you empty your bladder first,' Kieran said. 'You'll feel a bit of pressure on your tummy.'

When she'd left the room, he turned to Judith. 'So I'll tell her what you're doing as you do it.'

Judith nodded. 'Fine. I've read up on it—but it's not the same as doing it yourself.'

'If it doesn't work, don't think that you're a failure or that it's your fault,' he said quietly.

Oh, no. Were her insecurities that obvious? She'd had to work hard to get this far. Really hard. Studying a lot longer than anyone else she knew. And if Zoe Hutton, her best friend, hadn't coached

her through some of her exams she would have failed.

Sometimes she wondered if she'd done the right thing. If she should have given up and gone for a career in music after all. But she hadn't been able to stand the idea of disappointing her father. He'd wanted a son to follow in his footsteps. Judith was his only child. QED: she'd tried to make him forget that she was a girl, and had followed in his footsteps.

Except she didn't have the natural brilliance of Zoe or the quickness of Holly Jones, her other best friend. She had to rely on reading up on things, and carrying obstetric handbooks in her pockets so she could double-check that she was managing complications properly. She'd only just been made a registrar; whereas Holly and Zoe had been promoted ages before. And Zoe was on the fast track to becoming one of the youngest consultants in the hospital.

A failure? Oh, he could say that again.

Then she made the mistake of looking at him. Lord, he had a beautiful mouth. A full, generous lower lip that made her want to lean forward and touch her own to it. And those dark, dark eyes—so deep she could drown in them.

She only just stopped herself raising a hand to touch his cheek, to find out if his skin was as soft as it looked. Kieran's forebears must have some Mediterranean blood, she thought, because his hair was almost bluish-black and his skin had a faint olive tinge to it. Italian? Spanish?

Before she could make a fool of herself, Lisa returned, to

Judith's relief. She helped Lisa onto the bed. 'I'm going to dust your tummy with talc,' she said, 'so I don't pinch your skin.'

'Thank you.'

Kieran took over. 'With her right hand, Judith's going to lift your little one's bottom out of your pelvis. Her left hand's going to be on the top of the baby's head, and she's going to push his head down so it follows his nose—as if he's going to do a forward roll in your tummy. You'll feel her left hand pushing his head down while her right hand pushes his bottom upwards at the same time.'

Judith tried it, then turned her head to mouth at Kieran, 'It's not working.'

'But some babies like to be different,' he said with a reassuring wink. 'They'd rather do a backward roll than a forward roll, so Jude's going to try that one next.'

Judith swallowed hard. It had looked so simple in the textbooks she'd pored over last night. She hadn't bargained for a particularly stubborn baby.

'Take your time, Jude. There's no rush.' Kieran smiled at her, then at Lisa. 'Are you OK there, Lisa?'

'Yes, Dr Bailey.'

'Kieran,' he corrected with a smile. 'OK. Take some nice deep breaths for me. That's it. Relax.'

He had a gorgeous voice. Judith could imagine lying face down on a bed, while his hands eased the knots out of her shoulders. Deep breaths...Relax...

She remembered where she was and could have kicked herself. Her mind needed to be on her patient, not her consultant! Even if he was the most attractive man she'd met in years.

'Come on, little one,' she coaxed, almost under her breath. 'Turn for me. That's it. Keep going. Keep going.' She stared at Kieran. 'Wow. I think he's done it!'

Kieran quickly checked Lisa's abdomen. 'Yep. Well done, both of you.'

'I didn't do anything—I just lay here,' Lisa protested.

'You relaxed and let it happen. That's important,' Kieran said. 'Now I'm going to check your baby's heartbeat with the cardiocotograph again.' He put the sensors back in place and looked at the trace. 'His heart rate's a bit slow, but this happens in around forty per cent of cases—it's all down to compression around the head.'

Bradycardia or a slow heartbeat could also mean that the umbilical cord had been knotted, Judith knew, in which case she'd have to turn the baby back to a breech position and they'd have to admit Lisa for observation—maybe even for a Caesarean.

'I'll keep the CTG going for a bit longer, until I'm happy that the heart rate's come back up again,' Kieran said.

'What happens then?' Lisa asked.

'It's up to you. We can induce you, or you can go home to wait until labour starts naturally.'

'If you wait, there's a chance the baby might turn back again. But if you're induced, there's more chance that you'll need us to

help you deliver the baby. So it's your choice,' Judith said.

'If the baby turns again, will I definitely have to have a section?' Lisa asked.

'Not necessarily,' Kieran advised. 'If you'd like to try for a vaginal delivery, and provided the baby isn't distressed, that's fine.' He smiled at her. 'Baby's heart rate is coming back up again, and I'm happy with the trace. Everything seems fine. Do you have any pain anywhere?'

Lisa shook her head.

'Good. If you feel any pain or experience any bleeding, you need to ring your midwife straight away, or come straight here,' he advised.

'So I can go home now?'

'Rest for a little while first,' he said. 'But as soon as you feel ready to go, provided you're not in any pain, let one of the nurses know and I'll come and check you over before you go.'

'Thank you. Both of you,' she said, looking relieved.

Judith liked his bedside manner, the way he'd made Lisa feel at ease. Kieran Bailey was more than just a pretty face, she thought. And from the look on Lisa's face, she thought so, too.

But as Judith left the room, she noticed a familiar scent. Baby sick. Kieran smelled faintly of baby sick. As she knew for a fact no babies had been sick on him on the ward that morning, it could only mean one thing.

His own baby had been sick on him that morning before work. And that would explain why he'd been late on his first day.

She sighed inwardly. Just her bad luck. It was the first time she'd been attracted to someone in a long time—and he was married. Or at least involved with someone. The lack of a wedding ring didn't mean anything.

And as for that flash of awareness she'd seen in his eyes, she'd make sure she kept him at arm's length. She had no intention of smashing up someone else's relationship. Hopefully the attraction would fade after a few weeks.

Or even less than that. Memories threatened to choke her. 'Are you taking your lunch-break now, Jude?' Louise asked. Judith glanced at her watch. 'If that's OK with you, Mr Bai—Kieran?' she corrected herself.

'Fine.'

'Why don't you go, too?' Louise suggested. 'I can bleep you if you're needed.'

Judith remembered her promise to Bella to look after Kieran. Damn. She needed some space right now to get her head straight. But it was his first day. It wasn't fair to abandon him. 'Um, would you like to come to the canteen with me?' she asked. 'I'm meeting a couple of friends, but they won't mind if you join us.'

'Thanks, but...'. Something that looked like guilt flickered over his face. 'There are a couple of things I need to do. I'll, um, see you later.'

'Sure.' She wasn't sure if she was more disappointed or relieved that he wasn't joining them. Relieved because she had a chance to put some distance between them. As for the

disappointment, it was better this way. Besides, Zoe and Holly would have grilled the poor man until he'd given them his complete life history.

Her best friends were already waiting for her in the canteen. 'Chicken salad wrap, orange juice and the last strawberry yoghurt,' Zoe said, sliding the plates across to Judith's place.

'Angel.' Judith hugged her and sank into her seat. 'You've obviously had a good morning, Holls—you're usually the last one here, not me.'

'So what were you up to?' Holly asked.

'My first ECV, no less.' Judith blew on her nails and polished them on her sleeve. 'Well, with a bit of help from our new consultant.'

'The one who worked with your dad,' Zoe remembered. 'What's he like?'

'OK.'

'Oh,' Zoe said meaningfully.

Judith pulled a face at her. 'Don't take that tone with me—just because you're disgustingly happily married, it doesn't mean everyone else has to be.'

'No.' Zoe flushed. 'Sorry, Jude. No matchmaking attempts, I promise.'

Judith sighed. 'Oh, hell. I'm sorry for snapping, Zo. And you know I'm pleased you and Brad are happy.'

'So tell us about the new boy,' Holly prompted.

Judith took a bite of her chicken salad wrap, making her

friends wait. Then she smiled. ‘Kieran Bailey? OK. He’s taller than me, dark hair, eyes like black velvet.’ And a mouth I want to feel on mine. Except I can’t have him.

‘Are you sure you’re not smitten?’ asked Holly.

Her face must have given her away. Damn. ‘You know my track record with men,’ she said lightly. ‘I always pick the louses.’

Zoe frowned. ‘You said he was OK. What makes you think he’s a louse?’

‘Because he’s married.’ Judith fiddled with her glass. ‘Why else would he smell of baby sick?’

‘Because you work in the maternity unit perhaps?’ Holly asked. ‘You’re jumping to conclusions, Jude.’

‘You should have brought him to lunch with you.’ Zoe grinned. ‘I’d have asked him for you.’

Judith rolled her eyes. ‘I know you would, Hurricane Zoe! Anyway, he said he had things to do.’

‘Which doesn’t have anything to do with being married. You can be single and have things to do,’ Holly pointed out.

‘Jude, if he’s nice and you like him—go for it,’ Zoe said.

‘You’re barely back from honeymoon and you’ve still got your rosy glasses on,’ Judith said, patting her hand. ‘It’s so not going to happen.’ Zoe and Holly had been her best friends for years. They knew the score where Judith and men were concerned: it just didn’t work. Judith had spent her time at med school studying rather than socialising—gaining a reputation as an ice maiden in the meantime. Which meant the nice men had been scared off,

and the only ones who approached her now saw her as a challenge to be conquered and then boasted about.

So nowadays Judith settled for friendship. And as for the awareness that had prickled down her spine when Kieran had shaken her hand...well, she'd just have to learn to ignore it. Because nothing was going to happen between them.

Was it?

## CHAPTER TWO

BY FRIDAY, Kieran felt as if he'd been working at London City General all his life. Everyone on the ward was friendly, Bella was the kind of boss who trusted you to get on with your job and see her if you had a problem, and even Tess seemed to be settling a little more at home—at least, she hadn't cried as much as usual that morning before he'd left, and he'd managed to get to work on time ever since Monday.

The only sticking point was Judith Powell.

Because he couldn't get her out of his head. Her smile, her voice, the vanilla scent of her perfume: they filled his senses. The back of his neck started to tingle the moment she walked into a room.

He knew from hearing the midwives teasing her about being married to her job that she was single. Which meant she wasn't really off limits. Except...she was the daughter of his former boss. She was his colleague at work. There was Tess to consider. So, although he was tempted, it would be way, way too complicated if he started seeing Judith—even if she wanted to start seeing him, which was by no means a definite.

But sometimes when they were having a case conference he caught her eye. And the flicker of a smile that said, maybe. Or was that just his imagination? Was it just that the pull was so strong for him, he wanted it to be the same for her? That same

urge to reach out and touch. Taste. Kiss.

‘Just the man I wanted to see,’ Margot said, breaking into his thoughts. ‘You’re going to buy a ticket for our fundraiser, aren’t you?’

‘Fundraiser?’

‘Jude’s Wednesday night music club.’

He frowned. ‘Jude? Our Jude?’

Margot nodded. ‘Oh, come on. Don’t say you haven’t heard about Jude’s singing. She’s...’ She stopped, and grinned. ‘Well, you can buy a ticket and hear for yourself.’

‘Jude sings?’ he queried.

‘Yes. And we get a third of the profits.’

So who got the other two-thirds? The question must have been written all over his face because Margot added hastily, ‘Paeds gets a third and ED gets a third, too. It’s a joint fundraiser with them. Jude does it every month.’

‘Right.’

‘Even if you don’t come, you can still buy a ticket. It’s for a good cause.’

How could he resist the idea of seeing Judith Powell outside the hospital? ‘Sure. When is it?’

‘Next Wednesday, at the hospital social club. There’s food as well. Zoe Hutton in Paeds makes the best cheese straws in London, and her brownies are to die for.’

Social club. Maybe, just maybe... A lightbulb flicked on in the back of his head. ‘Is it limited to just staff?’

‘No, you can bring a friend. Or a partner.’ Margot gave him a curious look.

Kieran didn’t particularly want to explain about Tess—if he did persuade her to come, the last thing she needed was to think that people were gossiping about her. But maybe a night out would do his baby sister good. Teach her that although she’d loved Aidan desperately and he’d let her down in the worst way, there was still a world outside. A world with people who’d be kinder than her ex. His next-door neighbour, Rosemary, would look after Charlie for them—she’d been keeping half an eye on Tess for him while he was at work.

Though if it meant glamming up, Tess would probably run a mile. He’d have enough of a job persuading her to put on some lipstick. Since Aidan had dumped her, Tess hadn’t seen the point in a lot of things. ‘How dressy is it?’

‘Comfortable. Smart casual,’ Margot said.

He might be able to persuade her, then. ‘Put me down for two tickets,’ he said with a smile.

‘So you’re bringing your partner?’ Margot asked.

He chuckled. ‘Honestly. Midwives must be the nosiest bunch going!’

‘Well, if you will be secretive,’ she teased back.

His smile faded. He wasn’t secretive. Just protecting his little sister. ‘Yeah, well,’ he said, and paid up.

Later that morning, Judith rapped on the door of Kieran’s office. ‘Got a minute?’

‘Sure.’ More than a minute, where she was concerned.

But this was a professional question. It deserved a professional answer. ‘What’s up?’

‘I’ve just had a mum admitted—Pippa Harrowven. She’s thirty-five weeks. She rang her midwife because she wasn’t feeling well, and the midwife sent her straight here. I’ve examined her and I’m not happy. Her temperature’s up, her heart rate’s up and so is the baby’s. She’s feeling sick but not actually vomiting, she says it hurts to pee and when I examined her there was some muscle guarding—I think it’s more than just cystitis.’

‘Has anyone done an MSU?’

A mid-stream urine sample could tell them if Pippa had an infection and what had caused it. ‘Yes—I’ve sent it to the lab for culture and sensitivity tests. Her urine’s cloudy, but when Daisy tested it, it wasn’t acid, so it’s not *E. coli*.’

‘Are you thinking acute pyelonephritis?’ Kieran asked.

She nodded. ‘I was. Except it’s not *E. coli*, so that rules it out.’

‘Not necessarily. I know *E. coli* accounts for eight-five per cent of cases, but it could be three or four other organisms, including *Klebsiella* and *Proteus*,’ he reminded her. ‘Any other symptoms?’

‘She’s complaining of pain and tenderness around the loins, and it seems to be following the path of the ureters. She said it started last night and it’s just got a lot worse.’

Kieran nodded. ‘It sounds very like acute pyelonephritis.’

‘I’ve asked Daisy to do her obs, and keep an eye on her

temperature and pulse. But if it is pyelonephritis, we're talking possible problems with growth and preterm labour, aren't we?"

'Yes.' Kieran couldn't figure it out. Judith had reached a diagnosis, and from what she'd told him it sounded like the correct one. So why was she still so unsure? She was the daughter of an obstetric professor. She must have grown up hearing obstetric terms bandied about the house—so surely she should be too confident, if anything.

Unless she'd once been overconfident and had made the kind of mistake that made you question every action for a very, very long time afterwards. And Bella had said that Judith didn't want to work with her father. Kieran had worked with Ben for years and found him very fair. There was definitely more here than met the eye, and it intrigued him. 'Want me to come and have a look?'

Her brow smoothed with relief. 'Please.'

'Sure.' He followed her into the ward and Judith introduced him to Pippa.

'I'm just going to examine you, Pippa, if that's all right?' He paused for the young mother-to-be's agreement. 'OK. Tell me if it hurts.' Gently, he palpated her abdomen. As he moved along the path of the ureters, Pippa flinched.

'It hurts. And I need to pee again. Except I probably won't be able to—I couldn't last time, and I haven't had anything to drink since then. And...' She turned her head and a stream of vomit splashed over Kieran's shoes and trousers.

'Oh, no, I'm so sorry,' she said miserably.

‘You’re not feeling well. There’s no need to be sorry.’ He nodded to Daisy to fetch a cloth and water, then mopped Pippa’s face. ‘I’ve had worse over me.’

‘But—’

‘But nothing.’ He smiled at her. ‘We’ll have you feeling better soon, though I’m afraid you’ll be on bed rest for a while. As soon as the lab results come back, we’ll know which antibiotics to give you.’

‘But aren’t antibiotics dangerous for the baby?’

‘We’re going to keep a very close eye on you both,’ Kieran promised. ‘Jude thinks you’ve got something called pyelonephritis, and I think she’s right. It’s an infection of the kidney and the tubes that carry urine away from the kidneys, so we’ll need to give you antibiotics to stop it. I can also give you something to bring your temperature down, and we’ll put you on a drip to make sure you don’t get dehydrated.’

‘We can give you a heat pad for your back, to help with the pain,’ Judith added. ‘And Daisy’s going to keep an eye on your temperature and your pulse rate.’

‘You said bed rest. How long will I be in?’

‘A week or so,’ Kieran said.

‘But I can’t be! I—I’ve got a pile of work to do. I’m a freelance artist. If I don’t work, I don’t get paid and I’ll probably lose my client, and...’ Pippa’s lower lip trembled.

‘Is there someone we can call for you?’ Kieran asked. ‘And maybe your partner can explain to your client.’

Pippa shook her head. ‘He left me when we found out I was pregnant. He doesn’t want a baby to complicate things. But I couldn’t bring myself to have a termination. And...’ She shook her head, choked by tears.

‘How about your mum?’ Judith asked gently. ‘Or a good friend?’

‘My mum’s in Lincolnshire. I can’t drag her all the way up to London.’ Pippa wiped her hand across her eyes. ‘There’s my best friend. Except she’s busy and—’

‘If my best friend was in hospital, pregnant and ill and scared, I’d be there for her,’ Judith cut in. ‘It wouldn’t matter how busy I was.’

‘Sorry, I’m not usually this pathetic,’ Pippa said.

‘Hey. You’re not feeling well, and your hormones are all over the place,’ Kieran told her. ‘So you’re not being pathetic at all.’

‘How did I get it?’ Pippa asked.

‘You’re more likely to get it in pregnancy because urine moves more slowly from the kidney to the bladder, due to hormone changes. As your uterus gets bigger, it puts more pressure on your ureters—they’re the tubes that connect your kidneys to your bladder. And that means it’s easier for germs to grow.’

‘So it’s not something I did?’

‘No,’ Kieran reassured her.

‘Is the baby going to be all right?’

Judith nodded. ‘There’s a risk you might go into labour early, but you’re thirty-five weeks now, so your baby’s got a good

chance.’

‘But you need to tell us if you feel any tightening around your uterus or stomach cramps or a low ache in your back,’ Kieran added. ‘We’ll test another urine sample forty-eight hours after we start giving you the antibiotics, and you need to have a sample tested every time you see your midwife. It might come back, so you’ll need to take antibiotics for about six weeks after you have the baby, and your GP should book you in for a check six weeks after that so we can make sure you’re not going to have any more problems.’

‘A week.’ Pippa shook her head. ‘I can’t stay in bed for a week. I really can’t.’

‘Up to you,’ Kieran said. ‘But if we don’t treat you and you end up with sepsis—that’s infection in your blood—you’ll be here for a lot longer.’ If she survived. Not that he was going to frighten her by telling her that now. He’d wait until the infection cleared.

‘I’ll call your friend,’ Judith said. She squeezed Pippa’s hand. ‘You’ll be fine. I promise.’

When the test results came back, Kieran called Judith into his office. ‘Well spotted,’ he said, passing the results to her.

She read them swiftly. ‘Klebsiella. You were right.’

‘No, you were right. You said it wasn’t E. coli. So we can start her on IV antibiotics. I’d like Daisy to do her obs at least four-hourly.’

‘Sure. I’ll go and see her.’

As she reached the door, Kieran said softly, ‘Hey.’

Judith paused and looked round. ‘What?’

‘Don’t doubt yourself. You’re doing a great job.’

‘I...’ Colour washed into her face, and she muttered something he couldn’t catch before she left his office.

Stop wishing, Kieran thought. She’s not yours, she’s not going to be yours. You just work together. Leave it at that.

Except his heart most definitely wasn’t listening.

The following Wednesday night, Tess looked dubiously at her brother. ‘I’ve changed my mind. I don’t want to leave Charlie.’

‘It’s only for a couple of hours. He’ll be absolutely fine. He likes Rosemary, she used to be a childminder before she retired so she knows everything there is to know about babies, and I’ll keep my mobile phone switched on so she can get us if she needs us.’

‘I thought you weren’t allowed to use mobiles in hospitals?’

‘It’s in the hospital social club. Different building,’ Kieran explained. ‘Come on, Tess. It’ll be fun.’

The doorbell rang, and he saw the panic in Tess’s eyes. He sighed inwardly. ‘Look, if you really don’t want to come, I understand. But it’d be nice for us to go out and let our hair down. Just for a couple of hours. We don’t have to stay late.’

‘I won’t know anyone.’

‘You’ll know me.’ He wrinkled his nose at her. ‘Anyway, it’d be a waste of good lippy if you stay in now.’ Lipstick that he’d bought her on the way home from work, hoping it would tempt her into making an effort with her appearance.

‘I look a frump.’

She certainly didn’t dress as fashionably as she had before Charlie’s arrival, but no way could anyone call Tess Bailey a frump. He’d once teased his kid sister that she’d manage to look great in a bin bag. ‘Course you don’t. And you’re going to be on the arm of the best-looking man in the hospital.’

She pursed her lips. ‘I thought I was going with you.’

Kieran grinned. That was more like the old Tess—teasing and keeping her big brother in his place. ‘You are. Come on, let’s get Rosemary settled.’

Tess had an enormous list of things to check, but finally Kieran and Rosemary persuaded her out of the door. And when they got to the hospital social club and Tess froze, Kieran slid his arm round her shoulders. ‘You’re going to enjoy this,’ he said, hugging her. ‘And if you’re a very, very good girl, I might even let you buy me a pint.’

‘Oh, you,’ Tess said, but to his relief she let him usher her into the building. They handed over their tickets, Kieran bought them both a drink, and they found a quiet table at the side of the room.

The little room filled, then the hubbub stopped, the lights dimmed and the spotlight lit up the stage.

Kieran’s jaw dropped. Judith looked incredible. She was wearing a little black dress and high heels, her hair was loose, she was wearing just enough make-up for him to notice, and his body went straight into caveman mode. His mind followed. All he could think about was rushing onto the stage, yelling ‘Mine!’

and carrying her off somewhere very private.

And then she started to sing.

Her voice was amazing. Husky and soft. And he felt as if his bones were melting as he listened to her. She looked and sounded like an angel. And he wanted her. Badly.

It was different, tonight, Judith thought. Something was different. She couldn't put her finger on it but...

And then she glanced round the room and saw him.

Out of his suit and white coat, Kieran Bailey was gorgeous. Dark trousers, what looked like a silk shirt—a mixture of purples and blues and greens. All he needed was the earring and a trace of stubble, slightly longer hair, a hat and boots, and he'd be the perfect pirate.

She almost stumbled over the words of the song, despite the fact that she knew it well. Kieran the pirate king. Carrying her off to have his wicked way with her on his ship. Her libido rose and she panicked inwardly. Please, no. She wasn't going to let herself fall for him. She wasn't going to get involved with someone who wasn't free.

Then she saw the woman sitting quietly at the table with him. Holding onto his arm very tightly, as if to advertise to everyone that he was hers. Like Kieran, she had dark hair, but her skin was much fairer. She was pretty, though she looked slightly tired and washed-out. But, then, Kieran had smelled of baby sick. Clearly they had a young baby. And with Kieran working doctors' hours, his wife would be doing most of the childcare, taking the brunt

of the broken nights.

Hell, Judith thought. Hell and double hell. He was completely off limits. And she'd just have to stay out of his way until she grew out of this crush, or whatever it was.

The problem was, even knowing what she did, she couldn't take her eyes off him. Which made her the biggest bitch under the sun.

She caught Zoe's gaze and flashed her a look to say, Help!

And Zoe, to her relief, pushed Brad onto the stage. At least singing a duet with her best friend's husband helped to take her mind off Kieran. Though she was intensely aware of those dark, dark eyes. That beautiful mouth. And the fact that he was staring just as hard at her. That he wanted her just as much as she wanted him.

How could he, when he was married—and, even worse, his wife was sitting right next to him? How could he?

Whoever the blond guy was, Kieran decided he didn't like him. He definitely didn't like the way the man was singing with Jude. At one point, the man actually put his arm round Jude's shoulders. Way, way, way too familiar. Kieran had to dig his fingernails into his palms to stop himself snarling, 'Take your hands off my woman.'

Because Jude wasn't his woman.

Yet.

'Are you all right?' Tess asked.

Oh, hell. He was supposed to be giving Tess a good evening,

not drooling over Jude. ‘Fine. Just a bit hungry.’ Maybe his blood sugar was a bit low. Maybe that was why he was feeling dizzy—it had nothing to do with being jealous of the blond guy. ‘Margot said there was a buffet. Shall we go and get something?’

Tess looked slightly nervous, but nodded.

‘Great. Come on.’

But food didn’t help. Even with his back to the stage, he was intensely aware of Judith. And he was sure that she was just as aware of him. She’d looked pole-axed when she’d met his eyes—just for a second, and then she’d gone back into professional singer mode and looked as if nothing had happened.

He was going to have to do something about this.

Like asking her out.

Tomorrow.

## CHAPTER THREE

‘MORNING.’ Kieran smiled at Judith.

‘Morning.’ She didn’t return the smile, he noted.

He tried again. ‘I didn’t realise you were so talented.’

She lifted her chin. ‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Last night. I was at your fundraiser.’ She’d caught his eye. Several times. So she knew he’d been there. ‘Your voice is gorgeous.’

‘Thank you.’

She still wasn’t smiling. Maybe she was just tired from last night. He had no idea what time it had finished because he hadn’t been able to stay until the end. Tess had started getting anxious about Charlie and, although Rosemary had reassured her on the phone, Tess had wanted to see her son for herself. No way would Kieran let his sister go home on her own, so he’d left with her. And every step away from Judith had torn at his heart.

‘The guy who sang with you—he was good, too.’ Kieran hoped he didn’t sound as jealous as he felt.

‘Brad? Yeah, he’s cool.’

‘Your boyfriend?’ Oh, for goodness’ sake! He had no right to quiz her like this. It was none of his business.

He just wanted it to be his business.

She frowned. ‘Hardly. He’s my best friend’s husband.’

Good.

When her frown deepened, Kieran had a nasty feeling that he'd just spoken aloud. 'Good that he helps in the fundraiser, I mean.'

'Of course he would. His wife started them, about eighteen months ago.'

From her clipped tone, he was aware that he'd said something very wrong, but what? Hopefully he'd be able to smooth things over during their shift, otherwise, it would be a waste of time asking her out tonight. She'd refuse flatly and it would only make things worse between them. 'I'd better do my rounds.'

'And I'm due at the antenatal clinic.'

'See you later, then.'

Her gaze most definitely said, I'd rather not. But what on earth had he done to upset her?

He was still none the wiser at the end of Judith's clinic, when she knocked on his door. 'Got a moment?'

Still not as warm and friendly as she'd been on the day they'd met, but maybe if he responded as a professional, she might relax with him again. 'Sure. Come and sit down. What's the problem?'

'One of my mums—Rhiannon Morgan. She missed her eight-week dating scan and now she's thirteen weeks. But she says she's had trouble going to the loo. She's getting cramping and abdominal pains which have been getting worse over the last couple of days.'

'Could be a UTI.' Urinary tract infections were very common during pregnancy.

‘I wasn’t happy about the scan. And she’s had some spotting.’  
‘Threatened miscarriage?’

Judith shook her head. ‘I can’t put my finger on it, but something’s not right. The angles on the screen were...’ she waved a hand, as if searching for a word ‘...odd.’

‘Have you done a pelvic exam?’

‘No.’

Kieran frowned. ‘It could be a retroverted uterus.’ He drew a quick sketch to show her. ‘You know the uterus is fixed at the cervix but it’s partially mobile, and it’s more likely to move during pregnancy.’

She nodded.

‘Around one in five women have a retroverted uterus—where it’s tipped back instead of forward.’

‘It’s linked with infertility, isn’t it?’

‘Not necessarily. Sometimes it’s associated with endometriosis, pelvic adhesions or ovarian tumours.’ He tapped his pen on the pad. ‘Is this her first baby?’

‘Her second,’ Judith said.

‘It’s more common in women who’ve had a baby before. In pregnancy, the uterus can be tipped back, though it normally returns to its normal position again. If it stays tipped back in the second trimester, there’s a risk that the uterus will get trapped—known as incarceration—though it’s not that common.’ He shrugged. ‘About one in three thousand pregnancies, roughly. You’ll need to do a pelvic exam and check the ultrasound—

retroversion sometimes mimics other problems. If you can rule out a UTI or a threatened miscarriage, it might be a malformation of the uterus.'

'Right.'

Again, that flicker of worry in her eyes. Her instincts had been spot on in the near fortnight he'd been working with her. Why didn't she trust herself?

Maybe he could do something about that. 'OK. If it's a retroverted uterus, what will you expect to find in a pelvic exam?'

Judith concentrated for a moment. 'Her cervix will be positioned well behind the pubic symphysis, there'll be a soft, smooth non-tender mass filling the cul-de-sac, and the uterine fundus will be in a posterior position, behind the sacral promontory.'

He nodded. 'It's pretty unmistakable. What management would you suggest?'

'Give her a catheter for twenty-four hours or so, so we can decompress her bladder, and get her to do intermittent knee-chest exercises—that might put the uterus back into the right position by itself.'

'And if that doesn't work?'

'Manipulation.' She grimaced. 'Though if you use too much force, there's a risk of injury to her cervix, or it might distort the uterus or affect the blood flow from the uterus, so it could damage the baby.'

'Mild to moderate force is fine. She'll be in the knee-chest

position and you'll need a long Allis clamp—grasp the posterior lip of the cervix.'

She frowned. 'The anterior lip, surely?'

He raised an eyebrow. Just as he'd expected, she'd picked up his deliberate mistake. 'Exactly. It's not a common procedure, Jude. You really know your stuff.'

Her eyes narrowed. 'So that was a trick question?'

'No. It was an experiment, to prove to you that you know more than you think. Trust yourself, Jude.'

She scowled. 'I'm not a child.'

'I know you're not. What I've seen of your work is good, and your instincts are spot on. But you come across—to me, that is, not to the patients—as lacking confidence.' Which was probably why she'd only recently been promoted to registrar.

Her chin came up. 'I'm fine.'

'I know,' he said, as gently as he could. 'Look, if you want to talk to me about anything, I'm very good at keeping things secret.'

Oh, yes. She knew that. Like his wife. And his baby. Any other proud father would be showing photographs to the midwives, the doctors and even their new mums. Swapping stories about broken nights and nappies from hell. But Kieran kept his private life so private, anyone would think he was unattached.

Thank God she hadn't done anything stupid. Like asking him to dinner. Like giving in to the temptation to kiss him.

He didn't smell of baby sick today. He smelled clean and fresh.

All male, with a citrus tang. A scent she liked. A lot.

This really, really wasn't good.

'I'm fine,' she said stiffly.

He raked a hand through his hair. 'Jude, I don't understand this. Since I started here, we've been getting on well—but today you're snappy with me.'

If he suggested that she had PMT or something, she'd throw his coffee over him.

Then he surprised her. 'If I've said or done something to upset you, I apologise. Just tell me what it is, so I don't do it again.'

You're looking at me, she thought. Looking at me the same way I look at you. Wanting. And knowing I can't touch. 'Nothing,' she said tightly.

'OK. Well, the offer's there. If you want to talk, I'm here. But if it makes you feel any better, Bella has a good opinion of you.'

'Right.' She swallowed. 'Well, thanks for the advice. About the retroversion,' she emphasised.

'Yell if you need a hand.'

Judith nodded, and left his office, feeling sick to her stomach. He was married. Married. She'd even seen him with his wife. So why, why, why did she still feel that pull towards him?

Maybe she should apply for a transfer. Not to the Hampstead Free: she wanted to get a job on her own merits, not just because her father was the obstetric director there. Or maybe this pull of attraction between Kieran and her would stop. Please, please, make it stop soon, she begged silently. Before either of us says

or does something we'll regret.

When Judith had finished examining Rhiannon and had done a second ultrasound, she was sure that it was uterine retroversion. She explained the condition. 'Did you have anything like this with your last baby?' she asked.

Rhiannon shook her head. 'Not a bit of it. To be honest, because it's my second, I wasn't so worried about getting a dating scan done or anything. But I've felt so weird, this last day or so... My baby's going to be all right, isn't it?'

'I'm pretty sure it'll be fine. But I should warn you, there's a risk of miscarriage if we don't get your uterus back in the right place.'

'How are you going to do that?'

'We're going to try and let gravity help you, first of all,' Judith said. 'So it means you'll be in for a couple of days.'

Rhiannon closed her eyes. 'I was hoping this wouldn't happen.' She sighed. 'I'll just have to ask the childminder to keep Livvy a bit longer for the next couple of days—and nag Greg to get home from work a bit earlier. What if the gravity thing doesn't work?'

'We can manipulate your uterus, very gently. It shouldn't hurt, though it might feel a little bit uncomfortable. I should warn you that again there's a small risk of miscarriage, but it's very, very small.'

'Leave it and I might lose the baby; fix it and I might lose the baby.' Rhiannon sighed. 'Not much choice, is there? I'm in your hands.' She paused. 'Um, is this very common?'

‘Not that common. But don’t worry, our consultant’s very experienced.’ And drop-dead gorgeous.

Judith settled Rhiannon into the ward, inserted a catheter and showed Rhiannon how to do the knee-chest positioning which would, with any luck, help her uterus move back to the right position.

Kieran was at lunch by the time Jude had finished—she wasn’t sure if she was more relieved or disappointed. It meant she didn’t have to face him—didn’t have to struggle to ignore that magnetic pull—but it also meant she didn’t have the chance to apologise. Because he was right: she had snapped at him. And he hadn’t put a foot wrong. He’d found her sore spot all right—the fear she wasn’t really good enough to do her job—but he’d encouraged her, not laughed at her or despised her for it.

True, he’d said nothing at all about his wife, but that wasn’t any of her business. And he’d been the perfect colleague. Patient with the mums, happy to spend time explaining things to the dads, good-humoured with the staff, approachable if you needed a second opinion.

On a professional level, at least, she owed him an apology. She nipped into the hospital shop, bought him a box of chocolates and had just finished scribbling a note to him when he walked into his office and saw her by his desk.

‘Hello,’ he said quietly.

Lord, his voice. The slightest trace of a posh accent. It sent ripples of longing down her spine.

But she had to stay in control. 'I was just leaving you this.' She screwed up the note and shoved it in her pocket, then handed him the chocolates. 'To say thanks. You were right about the retroverted uterus.'

'That's very sweet of you, but there's no need. You'd already picked most of it up,' he said.

'Not just that. I wanted to say thanks for the pep talk.' She flushed. 'And, um, sorry for snapping.'

Kieran shrugged. 'No problem. We all have our bad days.'

'Yes.' She should leave. Now. But she couldn't. She was stuck there, watching his mouth. Watching the heat in his eyes. Wishing that things were different. That he was single.

The air felt thick and static—if she reached out, she was sure an electric current would sizzle between them and light up the room.

Then he spoke. 'Jude, are you busy tonight?'

'What?'

'I wondered if you'd like to come out for a drink.'

Was she hearing this right? He was asking her out? 'With you?'

'Yes.'

'Just you?' she checked.

He frowned. 'Yes.'

Oh, God. He really was asking her out. And if he'd meant it in the platonic sense, he'd have asked some of the others, too. This was one on one. Just the two of them. How she wanted to say yes. But no way could she accept. Not when she knew he was

spoken for. ‘You must be joking,’ she said through gritted teeth.

His frown deepened. ‘What?’

‘I don’t know what kind of women you normally associate with —’ apart from his wife ‘—but I don’t do affairs.’

‘I wasn’t asking for an affair.’ Though he was thinking about one right now, Jude was sure. Colour slashed across his cheekbones and his voice sounded slightly slurred. ‘I just thought we could have a drink together. Maybe dinner. Get to know each other a bit.’

She folded her arms. ‘And how would your wife see that? Forget it!’ She looked at him in utter disgust, then walked out of his office, not bothering to slam the door behind her. He wasn’t worth it.

Kieran stared after Judith in shock. Wife? What wife? He wasn’t married!

Then he remembered Margot’s comments. If the midwife had told Jude he’d bought two tickets, maybe Jude had jumped to the conclusion that he was married. But surely she’d seen Tess with him at the fundraiser? OK, Tess had a different father, her skin was paler than his and she’d inherited her father’s blue eyes while he’d inherited his father’s dark eyes, but surely there was enough of a family resemblance for Judith to have seen it?

Or maybe not. He was about to go after her and explain when the phone rang. By the time he’d sorted out the problem, Jude was nowhere to be seen. He finally caught up with her during her teabreak. Luck was with him, because she was on her own.

‘Jude, we need to talk,’ he said.

She shook her head. ‘I don’t think so.’

‘I’m not married. The woman you saw me with at your fundraiser—’

‘Don’t tell me—she’s your sister?’ Jude folded her arms. ‘That’s what they all say. Sister, best friend—there’s always some cover story.’

Kieran stared at her in disbelief. He was telling the truth! Tess was his sister. How could Jude possibly think he was the kind of man who’d cheat on his wife? Hell. He’d seen what it had done to his mother when his father had cheated on her. He’d barely started school and he’d had to listen to his mother crying, night after night, when his father was late home. By the time he was six, he’d learned to make scrambled eggs so he could coax some food down her. When his father had finally left her for good, a month or so later, he’d watched his mother collapse in on herself. And it had only been meeting Martyn Bailey that had changed her life. Changed his, too, because at last he’d had a proper father, one who had actually been there to encourage him and teach him things. And, when he was ten, he’d had the kid sister he’d always wanted, too.

Well, he wasn’t going to crawl. If Judith could misread him that much, a relationship with her would be a nightmare. One he could well do without. Given time and enough cold showers, he’d be able to snap the attraction between them.

Wouldn’t he?

‘Suit yourself,’ he said coolly, and left the room.

Unfortunately, they still had to work together. The following afternoon, not long after Kieran had signed Lisa Ford’s discharge form, Jude came to see him.

‘How can I help you, Dr Powell?’ He couldn’t bring himself to use her first name. And maybe keeping a professional distance would help him keep a personal distance.

Her chin rose. ‘As you’re the most senior doctor on the unit right now, Mr Bailey, I wondered if you might be able to help one of my mums.’

He inclined his head slightly and waited.

She glowered and folded her arms. ‘Rhiannon Morgan. The knee-chest exercises haven’t worked. I haven’t manipulated a retroverted uterus before.’

He knew what she wanted. And she was going to have to ask. Nicely. This time he wasn’t going to jump in and offer. ‘And?’

She swallowed. Kieran watched the movement of her throat and had to dig his nails into his palms to remind himself that he didn’t want to kiss her there. He didn’t want to loosen her hair. He didn’t want to kick his door shut and kiss her until neither of them could see straight.

‘And,’ she said softly, ‘I need help.’

‘You described the manoeuvre perfectly yesterday.’ Before she’d accused him of being a philanderer—and then of being a liar. That still rankled.

‘There’s a huge difference between reading a textbook and

actually doing the procedure.’

‘True.’

‘Are you going to help me?’

‘Help Rhiannon Morgan, you mean.’

She swallowed. ‘Look, I...’

Five little letters. Two syllables. She really wasn’t going to say the ‘s’ word, was she? Stubborn as hell. And it wasn’t Rhiannon’s fault. It wasn’t fair to let one of the mums on his ward suffer, just because he was still absolutely furious with Judith Powell. ‘All right. I’ll do it, you assist. What’s her blood type?’

‘A positive.’

‘Good. So we don’t need to give her anti-D.’ The manipulation was one of the medical procedures which could cause a small exchange of maternal and foetal blood—and if the mum’s blood type was rhesus negative and the baby’s was rhesus positive, that could spell trouble for the foetus unless the mum was given special antibodies.

‘I need a long Allis clamp, and I want the portable ultrasound so I can check the positioning, the baby and the amniotic fluid before and after the procedure. Perhaps you could arrange it while I introduce myself to Rhiannon.’

‘Fine.’ She paused. ‘Thank you.’

He couldn’t bring himself to respond with ‘Pleasure’ or ‘That’s OK’. Because it wasn’t going to be a pleasure, working close to Jude. It was going to be sheer bloody torture—because although his mind knew that she was trouble, his body wasn’t listening.

He could smell her perfume and it made him want to hold her closer. To bury his face in her hair, her skin. To lose himself in her incredible body.

The procedure was simple enough. Rhiannon was in the knee-chest position, and he grasped the anterior lip of her cervix with the clamp, slid a finger into her vagina and applied pressure to the top of the uterus. While Judith kept up a gentle constant traction to the cervix, following his instructions exactly, he gradually rotated the uterus, sliding the fundus on one side of the sacral promontory.

‘OK, we’re there. Dr Powell, you can stop now. Rhiannon, you can lower your legs again.’ He smiled at the young woman on the bed. ‘Well done.’

‘That wasn’t as bad as I thought it was going to be.’

‘Good. It really shouldn’t hurt, though you might feel a little bit sore later. Can you lift up your top for me? I just want to put some gel on your tummy and give you another scan—and I’m sure you’d feel happier if you could see your little one moving around.’

Rhiannon nodded. ‘Jude told me there was a slight risk of miscarriage. And...’

He squeezed her hand. ‘I know. Percentages always seem small until they’re personal, don’t they?’

He squeezed gel onto her abdomen, then brought the head of the scanner across the gel. ‘Here we go. One baby, kicking happily. There’s the heart—it’s beating nice and strongly. Full

bladder.’ He did a few quick checks. ‘That’s absolutely fine, Rhiannon. Your uterus is in the right place and the fluid around the baby is exactly as it should be.’

‘Could my uterus slip back again?’ she asked.

He shook his head. ‘Not now. And you should find that you won’t have a problem going to the loo. I want to keep you in overnight, and if anything feels different or you’re worried about anything, ask me or one of the midwives.’

‘Thank you.’

‘That’s what I’m here for. Now, I want you to drink plenty. And I’d also advise eating half a dozen dried apricots every day—they’re a good source of iron, and they’ll also help you avoid constipation.’ He switched off the scanner. ‘Dr Powell will be looking after you, and I’m sure she’ll be able to answer any questions you have.’ He nodded at Judith without looking her in the eye. ‘Thanks for your help, Dr Powell.’

He didn’t wait to hear her reply. If she even made one.

‘He’s lovely,’ Rhiannon said to Judith when Kieran had left the room.

‘Mmm.’ A two-timing low-life, more like—just like the last man she’d dated. The man she’d met on a training course, the one who’d claimed that the woman who’d phoned him was a friend.

It had taken Jude three months to find out the truth. That he was married.

And now it was happening all over again with Kieran.

Not that Judith was going to shatter Rhiannon’s illusions. As

a doctor, Kieran Bailey was fine. As a man, definitely not.

It was just a shame she couldn't get him out of her head.

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