

Pregnant Nurse, New-Found Family, by Lynne Marshall
Medical Romance™ August 2008
ISBN#9780263199000

Chapter One

The last thing Gavin Riordan had ever expected was to be a full-time father again. The family courtroom drama had been legendary over the custody of his son three years before, but in the end the judge had ruled, as was most traditional, on the side of the mother.

He shook his head that Tuesday evening, and jogged down the hall in the clinic section of Los Angeles Mercy Hospital with his son in tow.

"Bupinder, have you got a minute?" He pulled the resistant nine year old, Patrick, along behind.

The allergy doctor slowed down to let them catch up.

"May I run something by you?" he asked.

"Of course," she said.

"I tell you, it's the strangest thing." Gavin accompanied the petite allergist along the clinic corridor. "One minute Patrick was fine. The next he had a huge asthma attack. Got any ideas?"

Dr. Bupinder Mehta slanted her head in thought and studied Gavin's son with large brown eyes. She turned back and asked, "Has he taken any antihistamines in the last week?"

"Not since the last big attack a month ago." That asthma attack had made sense, as his mother was leaving for England the next day and Patrick had been torn up about saying goodbye. But why had he had the asthma flare-up this time?

They'd gone to the movies in the afternoon and had a good time. Gavin was determined to make up for not being the father he should have been all along, now that Patrick was living with him again. As usual, as soon as they'd returned home Sunday afternoon, Patrick had run to his bedroom and slammed the door. A short time later, he came out wheezing. "This last time he just needed inhalers."

"Then let's do a skin test. Pollens, food, we can do the whole panel if he's willing and you've got the time." She brushed her long, black braid over her white lab coat and pushed on the double doors to a large, bright waiting room.

"I guess there's no time like the present." Gavin rushed ahead and held the door open with one hand and scratched his neck with the other. He sent a glance his son's way and quickly saw the pursed lips and usual defensive resolve. His was

positive his ex-wife Maureen's sudden departure for England for four months had something to do with Patrick's return of asthma after all these years.

Thinking of asthma as an emotional disease had been out of favor with the experts for a long time, yet Gavin still felt there was a connection. After he got some concrete medical answers, he'd deal with the emotional triggers in Patrick's life.

On a whim, Maureen had decided to take a university extension course in art history at Oxford. She'd left Patrick with Gavin, even though it meant putting him in a new school for the last few months before summer vacation and losing contact with all of his old friends. Maureen had always been impulsive, especially when it came to spending Gavin's money. Patrick was definitely unhappy with the situation. And Gavin was still adjusting to the added responsibility of being a full-time single dad while running the Mercy Hospital ER.

"Beth, will you do one last skin test for me, please?" Dr. Mehta's precise British accent echoed in the almost empty room.

The nurse snapped her head around and looked straight at him.

"I know it's late, but I'd like to do my colleague a favor,

if you don't mind."

At first she looked startled, as if a spark of recognition flickered in her intense hazel eyes. She quickly recovered, and her stare washed over him like a cold wave. Holy smoke. It was the woman from the party.

"I think you've got the wrong person," she'd murmured in the hallway of the chief resident's condominium after the kiss that had made his toes curl.

"Feels pretty right to me." He tilted her chin and kissed her again. "My name's Gavin."

"I'm Bethany. Beth," she whispered over his mouth before smothering him with another brain-melting kiss.

Oh yeah, she wanted him.

He hadn't used the best judgment that night. But he'd had no regrets. Not one. That was, until now.

She looked different with her hair pulled back into a tight ponytail, no make up on, and baggy uniform scrubs, but she couldn't fool him. Though nothing like the wild woman he'd encountered a month ago, it was Beth nevertheless. She ignored him, while turning a deep shade of crimson, smiled at her boss, nodding her head as though no earth-shattering recognition had just occurred.

They were both adults. They'd made a choice to make love without knowing each other. So why did he feel so off balance? Because he'd never done anything as crazy as that before!

"I need to check Mr. Plescia's arms, then I'll be right with you." She flicked her glance away before he had the chance to smile at her, and walked across the room to her other patient.

This could get awkward.

He'd hoped he would see her again, but he'd had to leave the party in a rush when his charge nurse, Carmen, had beeped and alerted him that Patrick had been admitted into an ER fifty miles away in Irvine with a full-blown asthma attack. That had been the Saturday night before his ex left for England--his last weekend of freedom before becoming a full-time father again--and he'd acted like a crazed college student at a frat party. But damn, he'd been angry with Maureen for pulling another stunt, and nervous about having his son come to live with him, and, well, he'd decided to cut loose. Not much to be proud of.

After the news about Patrick's asthma attack, he'd been so distracted he'd forgotten to ask for her full name or to get her phone number. It was an easy stretch to assume she thought he'd used her. In a way he had. He regretfully shook his head. Damn he was out of practice. The least he could have done was found out where she worked and called her.

Well, surprise! She worked in Allergy, five stories up from the ER and located in the adjoining Clinic wing of Mercy's large campus.

Patrick squeezed his hand. "I don't want to do this test."

"We've got to find out what keeps setting off your asthma,

Patrick.”

“What if it hurts?”

“I’ll ask the nurse to be extra-gentle.” The comment seemed to work as Patrick now studied the nurse with his pewter-colored pleading eyes.

The diminutive allergist nodded her head as she meticulously wrote on a green sheet and signed the allergy testing forms.

“Beth, do a complete panel and throw in all of the foods we have. I know it’s late, but I’ll be sure you get overtime pay.” She motioned for Gavin and Patrick to sit behind the patient interview counter. “I’ll be in my office.”

A huge blip crossed Beth’s radar screen. This was the man from the party last month! His eyes had worked better than a hypnotist’s watch while they stood assessing each other in the hallway at that resident’s party that night, and she’d definitely been entranced by him. He’d felt so good pressing against her, good height, firm muscles spanning his chest and arms. They’d shared a first and second kiss as if a slow-motion magnet had been between them. And then ...

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