

Reluctant Love

Chapter One

Rarely did Dr. Maggie Garrett walk leisurely through her department, and today was no exception. An emergency room physician, she was accustomed to rapid decision-making and fast-paced action. Hurrying through the emergency room corridor with a fresh cup of coffee in her hand, she nearly ran into Dr. Scott Devereaux as he rounded the corner, walking backwards and talking to an attentive group of medical students.

A quick pirouette, while holding the steaming cup away from her body, avoided certain disaster. The gasps from the students froze Scott in his tracks, and he turned immediately.

“I am so sorry,” he said, extending his hands to prevent a collision.

Maggie raised an eyebrow. “It might help if you face the direction you’re walking, Doctor.” She lowered her cup of coffee, glanced at the students, and then back to Scott.

His cheeks warmed as he grinned. “Really, I do apologize. You’re right. I should be looking where I am going. Lucky for me you have quick reflexes, Doctor ... ?”

“Garrett.”

“Maggie Garrett?” His eyes locked on hers as his smile grew wide, and he extended his hand. “I’ve heard so much about you! I’m Scott Devereaux.”

Scott’s deep blue eyes mesmerized Maggie momentarily, melting away any irritation. She glanced at his hand, then shook it. “I suppose I shouldn’t have charged around the corner like that either. I’m sorry.”

“No problem. Maybe I’ll ... uh ... run into you later.”

Maggie could have sworn Scott winked at her. Her cinnamon brown eyes reflected her smile through her dark lashes as she shook her head slightly. Scott turned to his students and continued down the hall. Maggie heard him say, “That was Dr. Maggie

Garrett, one of the best ER doctors we have here at Eastmont. If you ever get the chance to follow her, grab it.” Maggie grinned as she continued toward the nurses’ station, wondering who Dr. Scott Devereaux was, where he came from, and how he knew anything about her.

The clamor of the emergency room quieted after early evening, and Maggie took advantage of the lull to relax in the staff lounge with another cup of coffee. She closed her eyes and leaned her head against the back of the beige sofa, holding the Styrofoam cup in her lap. Venturing near the edge of sleep, she did not hear the door open and close. Vaguely aware of the cup in her hand moving, she slowly opened her tired eyes.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you. I was just worried you might spill this.”

The thin veil of sleep that threatened to cover Maggie’s consciousness instantly vanished, and she sat up and stared, once again, into the clear blue eyes of Scott Devereaux.

Maggie looped a lock of her long auburn hair behind her ear. “Thanks, Dr. Devereaux.” She smiled weakly, taking the cup from the strikingly handsome man before her. “I suppose I really should’ve set it down.”

“Scott,” he said, sitting across from her in a slightly overstuffed beige lounge chair. “Long night?”

Maggie nodded. “Slow ones always seem long.”

“I’m glad I found you in here. I wanted to apologize again,” said Scott. “I tend to get caught up in my teaching and forget there is real business going on around me. I seldom get down to the emergency room.” He paused for a moment, and tilted his head. “I definitely need to come down here more often. Clearly, I’ve missed the most attractive part of this hospital.”

A slight warmth rose in Maggie’s cheeks, and she hoped the light was dim enough so Scott didn’t notice her blush. To her relief, her pager went off. She glanced down at it, simultaneously

silencing its call.

“Duty calls?”

She nodded. “Yes. Never ends.” She took a final sip from the cup before tossing it into the trash. She stood and straightened her lab coat, and started toward the door.

“Maggie?” She stopped and turned toward Scott.

“Yes?”

“What time are you off?”

Her eyes narrowed as she prepared a mental defense. Then she sighed. “If all goes well, I’m off at seven.”

“Could I interest you in breakfast? I could meet you in the cafeteria.” Scott stood up and waited for her answer.

Well, I have to eat breakfast anyway, so what would it hurt?

She shifted her weight from one foot to the other. “... I’ll meet you there at seven.”

Maggie arrived at the cafeteria at seven-forty, fully expecting to have breakfast alone. Without Scott’s pager number, the only way to let him know she was running late was via the hospital loudspeaker system, and she vetoed that notion. She opened the door to the physician’s dining area, and several other doctors nodded their greeting.

If he’s not here, no problem. I can eat and then go home. That might be better anyway.

Quickly scanning the room, she saw Scott at the same time he noticed her. He waved, set down his paper, and motioned to the empty chair across from him.

Wow, he’s still here!

Maggie strolled over to his table. Scott rose and pulled out the chair for her. Surprised, she sat down. “I’m sorry. I had a croupy little girl and her mom was very upset. I wanted to assess her oxygenation level before I left, so I had to wait for the ABG results.”

Scott gazed into her sparkling eyes. “No need to apologize. I

understand completely. I had some reading to catch up on, so this worked out great for me.” He gestured to the papers beside him. “Student work. Hungry?”

Maggie glanced down at the stack of papers and nodded. “Starved. I don’t even remember the last time I ate.” They both stood and walked together to the serving area of the cafeteria.

Returning to their seats, Maggie observed Scott slightly bow his head and close his eyes for a moment, before taking a bite of his Denver omelet. *Did he just pray?* She quickly took a forkful of cottage cheese, hoping that he didn’t catch her staring at him.

“So, tell me about yourself,” Scott said as he took a sip of his coffee.

Tell him about myself? What am I supposed to say?

She swallowed a bite of toast. “Let’s see, I am the best ER doctor here, and students should follow me whenever they get the chance ... but you already know that.”

Scott glanced up at her, with an I-don’t-know-what-you’re-talking-about look. He chuckled softly.

“I heard you talking to your students. While I appreciate your compliment, I’m not so sure it’s true.”

Scott wiped his mouth with a paper napkin. “Then you aren’t talking to the same people I talk to. I understand you’re extremely gifted at what you do.” Scott took another sip of coffee. “The nurses think very highly of you, and that is quite a compliment. I usually hear how much they dislike a doctor, not how much they admire one. I’ve heard that not only do you know your stuff, but you are a very compassionate physician with your patients, and ... your staff.”

Maggie felt the heat rise in her cheeks. Emergency medicine had been her dream, and she had pursued it relentlessly, putting in long hours to learn her craft, hoping to be proficient and adept at every aspect of her chosen profession.

“What about you?” she asked, sipping her coffee.

Scott grinned. “I don’t think you really told me anything about you.” He placed his fork on the edge of his plate. “I think I

should get my answer first.”

Maggie smiled. “Well, I have one brother. He is an oncologist. I like the ocean. I am—”

“Seeing anyone special?” Scott’s earnest face caught Maggie off guard, and so did his eyes. She shook her head slightly and shrugged her shoulders.

“No, no one special. My schedule doesn’t seem to be conducive toward an active social life, unless you count shopping with my sister-in-law, who tells me that I need to get out more.”

That was lame.

Scott tilted his head. “Hmmm ... I agree. You should. Life is too short to spend all your time in a hospital.”

“Really? And what do you do for fun?” She crossed her arms, and leaned back in her chair.

“I usually invite pretty doctors to breakfast.” He winked at Maggie, his smile exposing perfectly white teeth. “And I like to sail, play the piano, and snowboard. Oh, I also like to go to Dodger games.”

“You’re into football?”

Scott laughed. “Baseball, Maggie. The Dodgers play baseball. You have been to a baseball game, right?” He frowned when she shook her head. “Never?”

“Never. I’ve never really had any time for sports.”

Scott’s eyes widened. “You’re kidding! Maggie, you’ve got to come to a game. It is a great way to spend an evening! Hot dogs, popcorn, cheering—you have to let me take you to one. Besides...” he said softly, “you can never hear a pager go off there.”

He pulled a pocket-sized schedule of games from his jacket. “Let’s see... they play next Tuesday.” He looked at Maggie. “Interested?”

Maggie could hear her sister-in-law’s voice telling her how she needed a life, but she had always found an excuse for getting out of any social activity. She let out a deep sigh. “Alright. That sounds like it might be fun.”

“Great!” Scott tucked the schedule back into his shirt pocket.

“We can work out the details later.” He checked his watch. “Wow, I’m sorry, but I need to go. I have a class.” He stood and flashed a smile. “I enjoyed breakfast.”

“Me, too.” Maggie took another sip of her coffee. “I’ll see you later.”

“Count on it,” Scott said as he tossed his trash into the nearby bin. Standing a half-inch above six feet tall, his ruggedly handsome face was framed by the darkest shade of chestnut hair.

Maggie’s gaze followed him until he left the dining room.

What am I thinking? A baseball game? She pursed her lips and shook her head. Elbow on the table, she rested her chin in her hand, contemplating her impulsiveness before rising to head home.