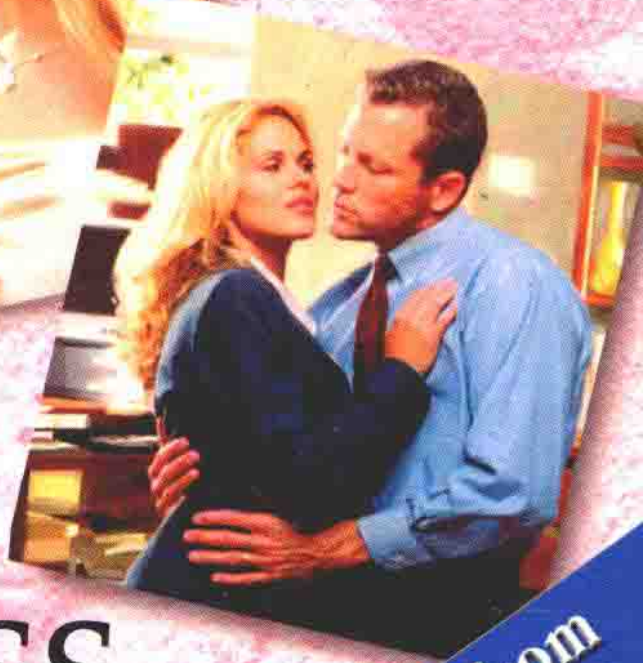




# MATLAND MATERNITY

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FOSTER



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## **MARRIED TO THE BOSS**

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## From Megan Maitland's Diary

Dear Diary,

Things are getting out of hand with all this ridiculous publicity, and I hate feeling so helpless. R.J. gets more withdrawn each day, but oh, Dana puts him on his ear! She's just what he needs, though I doubt he's realized it yet. I want to spend more time with him, but there's so much going on, so much that has to be tended to—what with the reporters here constantly, and that witch Tanya Lane stirring up trouble. And now—I can scarcely believe it!—Connor is back!

And the baby. I do so love that baby. I suppose I'll just have to trust Dana to see to R.J.'s needs. Heaven knows she's been doing so for years. In many ways, she's as close to R.J. as his family. I love her.

I wonder when R.J. will wake up to the fact that he loves her, too.

Dear Reader,

There's never a dull moment at Maitland Maternity! This unique and now world-renowned clinic was founded twenty-five years ago by Megan Maitland, widow of William Maitland, of the prominent Austin, Texas, Maitlands. Megan is also matriarch of an impressive family of seven children, many of whom are active participants in the everyday miracles that bring children into the world.

As our series begins, the family is stunned by the unexpected arrival of an unidentified baby at the clinic—unidentified, except for the claim that the child is a Maitland. Who are the parents of this child? Is the claim legitimate? Will the media's tenacious grip on this news damage the clinic's reputation? Suddenly, rumors and counterclaims abound. Women claiming to be the child's mother materialize out of the woodwork! How will Megan get at the truth? And how will the media circus affect the lives and loves of the Maitland children—Abby, the head of gynecology, Ellie, the hospital administrator, her twin sister, Beth, who runs the day care center, Mitchell, the fertility specialist, R.J., the vice-president of operations—even Anna, who has nothing to do with the clinic, and Jake, the black sheep of the family?

Please join us each month over the next year as the mystery of the Maitland baby unravels, bit by enticing bit, and book by captivating book!

Marsha Zinberg,  
Senior Editor and Editorial Co-ordinator, Special Projects

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**Printed in U.S.A.**

**Lori Foster's** first book, a Harlequin Temptation, was published in January 1996. Her second book launched the BLAZE subseries. Since then, she's seen more than twenty of her books make their way into print, has written several novellas and has published with five different houses.

Lori also contributes articles to Writer's Digest, the online writers' colony, Painted Rock, and writes a bi-monthly column in the Romance Writer's Report.

Though Lori loves writing, her first priority will always be her family. She and her husband have been together since high school, and her three sons, all humorous, handsome and honorable fellows, are quickly following in their father's footsteps.

**To Emily Toerner,  
A gem for a gem. I couldn't have chosen better myself,  
and that surely puts my mother's heart at ease.**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

AS SOON AS R. J. Maitland turned into the sweeping drive of Maitland Maternity Clinic, he saw the mob. Not a rioting mob, but every bit as bloodthirsty. *Reporters.*

They wouldn't destroy property, but they were certainly doing their best to destroy his reputation and that of the clinic. As president of Maitland Maternity, he felt responsible for its good name.

As a man, he felt a red-hot rage.

His hands tightened painfully on the wheel of his Mercedes, the only sign he allowed of his inner turmoil. Damn Tanya Lane for naming him as the father of the abandoned baby. And damn himself for having ever been involved with her in the first place.

Hoping to go unnoticed by the milling, impatient crowd, he drove to the parking lot around the corner. It turned out to be a futile effort; his car was spotted, and the mob rushed his way, flashbulbs popping, video cams zooming in, reporters with microphones extended, running to reach him, hoping for the first damaging quote of the day.

Since the baby had been discovered on the steps of the clinic in September, it had been like this, but now the focus had changed. He was the target.



Though his anger was near the boiling point, he remained outwardly aloof, ignoring them all and walking with an unhurried stride to the door. A security guard stood there, ready to block out the unwelcome press, but it wasn't easy getting past them. Questions were shouted at him, questions he couldn't honestly answer, and that made the rage all the worse.

"R.J.! Are you the father of the baby?"

"What do you intend to do about your child?"

"How does your family feel about this unexpected turn of events?"

He'd been asking himself the same things over and over again, ever since the basket with the little boy had been left at the clinic with a note claiming that he was a Maitland. Now, of course, the situation was worse.

Tanya Lane, an ex-girlfriend, had deliberately labeled him the father.

He forged onward, his jaw locked, his hands curled into fists. Just as he stepped through the polished brass-and-glass door, another reporter shouted loudly, "R.J., do you think you and Ms. Lane will reconcile now?"

R.J. stopped in midstep, then turned with fatal deliberation, jaw set, eyes hard. He sought out the reporter, who blinked owlishly in response to his visible fury, and with icy disdain said, "No."

A hush settled over the reporters with the finality of that single word, then they quickly erupted with more questions. Damn it, he knew better than to re-

spond to the press at all. It was best to simply ignore them, to claim *no comment*. But he was sick and tired of their barbs, and he was fed up with being labeled as the type of bastard who would walk away from his responsibilities. He was used to controlling his life, to adjusting events, plans and people to suit his purposes. But in this, he had little control at all. It was intolerable.

Turning his back on the throng of reporters, R.J. headed into the clinic while the doorman struggled to close the door behind him. *Reconcile with Tanya?* he thought with acid disgust. *Not in this or any other lifetime.* He hadn't seen the woman for months. If it hadn't been for that TV reporter Chelsea Markum, offering a paltry bribe to get the negligent mother to come forth, he probably still wouldn't have heard from Tanya. Their parting hadn't been particularly pleasant, but it had been final.

At the time, Tanya had accepted his decision, taking the farewell money he offered her and walking away—as he'd known she would. She'd said nothing about a baby, not even about the possibility of a baby. Yet a baby had been left, alone and unprotected, on the clinic doorstep, and that sickened him as nothing else could.

If Tanya Lane was the mother, R.J. thought viciously, she would be wise to stay the hell out of his sight, and well out of his reach.

The elevator was thankfully empty as he rode to the second floor, where his office was located, giving him the few necessary moments to reign in his tem-

per. He wanted, needed to shut himself inside and concentrate on work, on getting back on track. He hoped to find the usual relief in his daily routine, but he doubted he would, given his dark mood.

The second he stepped through the office door he saw Dana Dillinger, his longtime secretary, preparing a cup of coffee. Dana was quietly efficient, totally competent and a balm to his escalating frustration. Somehow, Dana always seemed to know exactly when he would walk in, and she continually found ways to make his work environment as comfortable for him as possible. Today he appreciated that more than ever before.

He eyed her prim back for a moment, watching her economical, graceful movements. "Good morning, Dana."

She looked up at him with a commiserating smile as she stirred just the right amount of creamer into his coffee. As usual, her dark blond hair was neatly swept into a sophisticated twist at the back of her head, and her light gray suit was tailored, perfectly pressed and eminently suitable for the secretary to the president. "I guess you saw the reporters outside?"

"They'd be damn hard to miss."

She didn't so much as flinch at his sarcastic statement. Instead, she followed him into his office with the coffee in one hand and a bagel in the other. "You probably haven't eaten today, have you?"

As well as being a top-notch secretary, Dana had the tendency to coddle. She was, in fact, the only

woman he let get away with it. "I'm fine," he said as he sat in the black leather chair behind his desk.

"No, you're not." Never one to be affected by his moods or surly temper, she set the steaming coffee at his elbow then insistently pushed the bagel in front of him. "Eat. You'll feel better."

He stared at her in disbelief. Feel better? Is that what she thought, that he merely needed to *feel better*? Everything he'd carefully constructed—his reputation, his standing in the community, his contacts and associations—was threatened by the recent scandal. And the reputation of the clinic was undergoing critical speculation.

"Dana," he growled, not bothering to regulate his tone now that he was away from the press, "I seriously doubt a goddamned bagel is going to do much to repair the damage from all the vicious gossip."

She bit her lip, then sighed. As usual, she took his moods in stride, never backing off, never flashing her own temper in return. That, too, was a blessing, allowing him the total freedom to be himself, without having to concern himself about the impression he might give.

At moments like this, she positively amazed him.

"R.J., anyone who knows you realizes you'd never abandon a woman just because she got pregnant. You're far too conscientious for that. Miss Lane's ridiculous story that you got her pregnant and then refused to marry her is just that—utterly ridiculous."

Her overwhelming belief in him made his stomach



muscles tighten in response. He watched her, his expression deliberately impassive. “She was no more than a casual, ill-advised fling, Dana. Available for what I wanted, which sure as hell wasn’t marriage. I’d hardly rush to the altar with her, regardless of the situation.”

Though a blush brightened her fair complexion and her eyes wouldn’t quite meet his, she muttered stubbornly, “Maybe not, but you wouldn’t abandon her, either. You wouldn’t leave her to take care of the situation on her own.”

He gave her a hard look, judging her earnestness, then shook his head. In a low, nearly imperceptible whisper, he muttered, “You sound pretty sure of that.”

Her chin lifted resolutely. “I am.”

R.J. wasn’t given to self-doubt or worry, but then, this was a unique situation. No woman had ever dared to try manipulating him as Tanya had, and never before had his honor been questioned. He found himself moving the bagel from one side of the plate to another as he considered his very limited options. A sleepless night had done little to help resolve the issues. He wanted—needed—to talk, to sort out his thoughts, and right now his family had more than enough to deal with. That left Dana as his only sounding board.

Without an ounce of apology, he met her steady gaze and admitted, “It’s possible that I could be the father.”

Dana stared at him, her expression blank. He’d