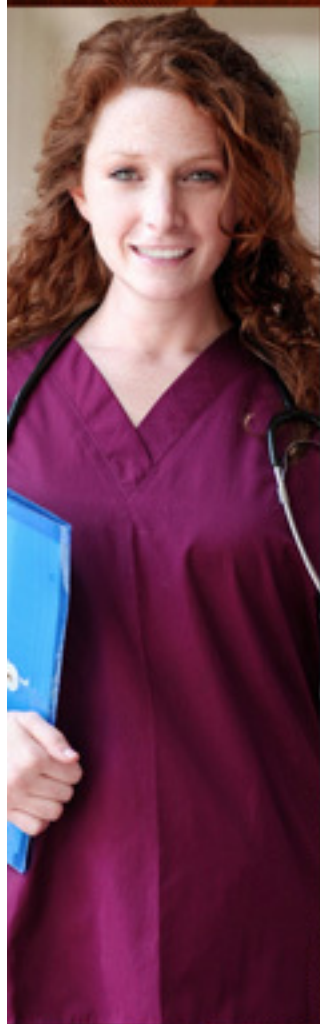


CAROL MARINELLI



JUST
FRIENDS?



ST PIRAN'S

PART 6



CAROL MARINELLI

Just Friends?

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Just Friends? / C. MARINELLI — «HarperCollins»,

NICU nurse Diego and consultant Izzy are supposed to just be colleagues. After all, she's carrying her dead husband's child. But can a kiss change everything?
St Pirans: Part 1 - The Secret Son Part 2 - The Big Move Part 3 - Too Much At Stake Part 4 - The Wedding Part 5 - Pregnant Cinderella Part 6 - Just Friends? Part 7 - Baby Emergency Part 8 - Staying the Night Part 9 - A Family At Last Stay tuned for more in the St Pirans series!

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Just Friends?
Carol Marinelli



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Chapter One

DIEGO was not in the best of moods.

Not that anyone would really know.

Though laid back in character, he was always firm in the running of his unit. His babies came first and though friendly and open in communication, he kept a slight distance from his staff that was almost indefinable.

Oh, he chatted. They knew he loved to swim in the Cornish sea, that he came from an affluent long line of doctors in Madrid, they even knew that he was somewhat estranged from his family due to his career choice, for Diego would roll his eyes if any of them rang him at work. His staff knew too about his rather pacy love life—the dark-eyed, good-looking Spaniard was never short of a date but, much to many a St Piran's female staff member's disgust, he never dated anyone from work.

No, the stunning women who occasionally dropped in, waiting for him to finish his shift, or called him on the phone, had nothing to do with hospitals—not public ones anyway. Their hospital stays tended to be in private clinics for little *procedures* to enhance their already polished looks.

There was just this certain aloofness to Diego—an independent thinker, he never engaged in gossip or mixed his private life with his work.

So no one knew that, despite his zealous attention to detail with his precious charges that day, there was a part of Diego that was unusually distracted.

Cross with himself even.

Okay, his relations with women veered more towards sexual than emotional, and if his moral code appeared loose to some, it actually came with strict guidelines—it was always exclusive. And, a man of honour, he knew it was wrong to suddenly be taking his lunches in the canteen instead of on the ward and looking out for that fragile beauty who was clearly taken.

Wrong, so very wrong to have been thinking of her late, *very late*, into the night.

But why *was* she so stressed and unhappy?

If she were his partner, he'd make damn sure...

Diego blew out a breath, blocked that line of thought and carried on typing up the complicated handover sheet, filling in the updates on his charges, now that Rita the ward clerk had updated the admissions and discharges and changes of cots. It was Monday and there was always a lot to be updated. It was a job he loathed, but he did it quicker and more accurately than anyone else and it was a good way of keeping current with all the patients, even if he couldn't be hands on with them all. So Diego spent a long time on the sheet—speaking with each staff member in turn, checking up on each baby in his care. The NICU handover sheet was a lesson in excellence.

'I'm still trying to chase up some details for Baby Geller,' Rita informed him as Diego typed in the three-days-old latest treatment regime. 'Maternity hasn't sent over forms.'

'He came via Emergency.' Diego didn't look up. 'After you left on Friday.'

'That's right—the emergency obstetric page that went out.' Rita went through his paperwork. 'Do you know the delivering doctor? I need to go to Maternity and get some forms then I can send it all down and he can fill it in.'

'She.' Diego tried to keep his deep voice nonchalant. 'Izzy Bailey, and I think I've got some of the forms in my office. I can take them down.'

'Is she back?' Rita sounded shocked. 'After all that's happened you'd think she'd have stayed off till after the baby. Mind you, the insurance aren't paying up, I've heard. They're dragging their feet, saying it might be suicide—as if! No doubt the poor thing *has* to work.'

Diego hated gossip and Rita was an expert in it. Nearing retirement, she had been there for ever and made everyone's business her own. Rita's latest favourite topic was Megan the paediatrician, who she watched like a hawk, or Brianna Flannigan, the most private of nurses, but today Rita clearly had

another interest. Normally Diego would have carried on working or told her to be quiet, but curiosity had the better of him and, not proud of himself, Diego prolonged the unsavoury conversation.

‘Suicide?’ Diego turned around. ‘Are you talking about Izzy’s husband?’

‘Henry Bailey!’ Rita nodded. ‘It wasn’t suicide, of course; he just drove off in a blind rage. She’d left him, but he turned up at work, waited for her in the car park...’ She flushed a little, perhaps aware that she was being terribly indiscreet and that Diego was normally the one to halt her. ‘I’m not speaking out of turn; it was all over the newspapers and all over the CCTV, though of course it would have been before you arrived in St Piran’s.’

No, it wasn’t his proudest morning, because once the handover sheet was complete, Diego headed for his office and closed the door. Feeling as if he was prying but wanting to know all the same, it didn’t take long to find out everything Rita had told him and more. Oh, he would never abuse his position and look up personal information, but it was there for everyone, splashed all over the internet, and as he read it he felt his stomach churn in unease for all she had been through.

Pregnant, trying to leave an abusive marriage, real estate agent Henry Bailey had beaten his wife in the darkened hospital car park. Rita was right, the whole, shocking incident had been captured on CCTV and images of footage and the details were spelt out in the press.

He felt sick.

Reading it, he felt physically sick and also strangely proud.

Her first day back.

Mierda! He cursed himself as he remembered his throw-away comment about the car park. He replayed the conversation they had had over and over and wished he could start with her again.

His door knocked and he quickly clicked away from the page he was viewing, before calling whoever it was to come in, but he felt a rare blush on his cheeks as the woman herself stood before him. Diego actually felt as if he’d been caught snooping as Izzy let herself in, a wide smile on her face, and he wondered how on earth she managed it.

She had leggings on again and a bright red dress with bright red lipstick and, Diego noticed, bright red cheeks as he just continued to stare up at her.

‘You need me to sign off on the delivery?’ It was Izzy who broke the silence; Diego was momentarily lost for words. ‘Your ward clerk just rang...’

‘We would have sent them down to you.’

‘Oh!’ Izzy blushed a shade darker as she lied just a little. ‘I thought it sounded urgent.’

‘I should have some forms...’ He was unusually flustered as he rummaged through his desk. ‘Or I’ll ring Maternity. Here...’ Diego found them and was pathetically grateful when the door knocked and one of his team stood there, with a screaming baby with a familiar request.

‘Would you mind?’

‘Not at all.’ He washed his hands, *thoroughly*, then took the screaming baby and plonked it face down on his forearm, its little head at his elbow, and he rocked it easily as he spoke.

‘Genevieve!’ he introduced. ‘Goes home this week, please God! I do not envy her parents.’

Well, Genevieve looked as if she’d happily stay with Diego for ever! The tears had stopped and she was already almost asleep as he bounced away.

‘If you want to get started on the forms I’ll just go and get the details you’ll need.’ He paused at the door. ‘I was just about to get a drink...’

‘Not for me, thanks,’ Izzy said, and then changed her mind. ‘Actually, water would be great.’

‘Would you mind...?’ It was his turn to say it and he gestured to the baby. Izzy went to put out her hands and then laughed.

‘Joking!’ she said, then went over to his sink and *thoroughly* washed hers. ‘Am I clean enough for you?’

Oh, God, there was an answer there!

And they just both stood there, looking a bit stunned.

Izzy flaming red, Diego biting down on his tongue rather than tell her he'd prefer her dirty.
And thank God for Miss Genevieve or he might just have kissed her face off!

Diego got them both water.

Well, he couldn't do much with two polystyrene cups and tap water but he did go to the ice dispenser and then had a little chat with himself in his head as he walked back to his office.

What the hell was wrong with him?

He hardly knew her, she was pregnant, and she obviously had *major* issues.

Why was he acting like a twelve-year-old walking past the underwear department in a department store? Nervous, jumpy, embarrassed, hell, he couldn't actually fancy her, and even if he did, normally that didn't pose a problem—he fancied loads of women.

This, though, felt different.

Maybe he felt sorry for her? Diego wondered as he balanced a file under his arm and two cups in one big hand and opened his office door.

But, no, he'd been thinking about her long before Rita had told him what had happened.

Then she looked up from the form she was filling in and smiled, and Diego was tempted to turn round and walk out.

He more than fancied her.

Not liked, not felt sorry for, no. As he washed his hands and took Genevieve from her and sat down behind his desk it wasn't sympathy that was causing this rather awkward reaction.

Diego was used to women.

Beautiful women.

Ordinary women.

Postnatal women.

Pregnant women were regular visitors to his unit—often he walked a mum-to-be around his unit, telling her what to expect once her baby was born.

He was more than used to women, yet not one, not one single one, had ever had this effect on him.

'How is Toby doing?' Izzy looked up from the forms and Diego made a wobbly gesture with one hand.

'Can I have a peek?' Izzy signed off her name and then reached for her water. 'I'm done.'

'Sure,' Diego said. 'I'll put this one down and take you over—we've moved him.'

Genevieve was sleeping now, and Izzy walked with him to the nursery. It was a far more relaxed atmosphere there.

There were about eight babies, all in clear cribs and dressed in their own clothes, the parents more relaxed and, Izzy noticed, everyone had a smile when Diego walked in and put Genevieve back in her cot.

He was certainly popular, Izzy thought as they head back out to the busy main floor of NICU.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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