



200
HARLEY
STREET

CAROL
MARINELLI
Surgeon in
a Tux

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200 Harley Street: Surgeon in a Tux

«HarperCollins»

MARINELLI C.

200 Harley Street: Surgeon in a Tux / C. MARINELLI —
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Unbuttoned by the boss! Renowned plastic surgeon Leo Hunter has sacrificed everything to restore the Hunter Clinic to its former glory. Now this legendary playboy—equally at home in a tux as he is in his scrubs—always has a glamorous woman on his arm. So why is he drawn to his prim and über-efficient new head nurse, Lizzie Birch? She's the first woman in a long time who is resistant to Leo's intoxicating charms. And it might break all his rules, but Leo can't resist the challenge of unbuttoning the intriguing Lizzie! 200 HARLEY STREET Glamour, intensity, desire—the lives and loves of London's hottest team of surgeons!

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Praise for Carol Marinelli:

‘A heartwarming story about taking a chance and not letting the past destroy the future. It is strengthened by two engaging lead characters and a satisfying ending.’

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200 HARLEY STREET

Welcome to the luxurious premises of the exclusive Hunter Clinic, world renowned in plastic and reconstructive surgery, set right on Harley Street, the centre of elite clinical excellence, in the heart of London’s glittering West End!

Owned by two very different brothers, Leo and Ethan Hunter, the Hunter Clinic undertakes both cosmetic and reconstructive surgery. Playboy Leo handles the rich and famous clients, enjoying the red carpet glamour of London’s A-list social scene, while brooding ex-army doc Ethan focuses his time on his passion—transforming the lives of injured war heroes and civilian casualties of war.

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200 HARLEY STREET

Glamour, intensity, desire—the lives and loves of London’s hottest team of surgeons!

Begin your sensational eight-book journey with ...

200 HARLEY STREET: SURGEON IN A TUX by Carol Marinelli

Dear Reader

I so enjoyed writing the first book for this wonderful *200 Harley Street* continuity.

I am very glad that the editors choose who writes which story, because I confess, had it been left to me, I would have struggled to choose between the two brothers—Leo and Ethan Hunter. Actually, had it been left to me, I'd have probably gone for the deliciously dark and tortured Ethan—but the editors do know best because had I been given Ethan I'd never have fallen in love with the reprobate Leo—and fall in love I did.

Yes, he was reeling me in by the time my gorgeous heroine, Lizzie, first picked up the phone and spoke to him. He's sexy, snobby, funny and, in his own way, just as tortured as Ethan. I hope you love him too!

I can't wait to read the rest of the stories and get back to the glamour and heartbreak at *200 Harley Street* and find out what happens to the rest of the characters (especially Ethan!).

Happy reading!

Carol x

CAROL MARINELLI recently filled in a form where she was asked for her job title and was thrilled, after all these years, to be able to put down her answer as 'writer'. Then it asked what Carol did for relaxation. After chewing her pen for a moment Carol put down the truth—'writing'. The third question asked: 'What are your hobbies?' Well, not wanting to look obsessed or, worse still, boring, she crossed the fingers on her free hand and answered 'swimming and tennis'. But, given that the chlorine in the pool does terrible things to her highlights, and the closest she's got to a tennis racket in the last couple of years is watching the Australian Open, I'm sure you can guess the real answer!

200 Harley Street: Surgeon in a Tux

Carol Marinelli



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PROLOGUE

‘ACCOMMODATION PROVIDED’ WAS starting to take on a whole new meaning!

Lizzie Birch took the lift to the fifth floor with her heart in her mouth, sure that there must have been some mistake—that this couldn’t possibly be her new home.

When she had been given the trendy Marylebone address Lizzie had convinced herself it would be something like the rather drab nursing accommodation she had shared in earlier days—a stunning old building, divided into bedsits perhaps ...

This was anything but that.

As she turned the key Lizzie stepped into a tastefully furnished, high-ceilinged flat and caught the scent of flowers. Turning, she swallowed when she saw an elaborate bouquet and a basket of luxurious nibbles and wines there to greet her.

Lizzie walked over and inhaled the gorgeous fragrance of spring, but on a cold January morning. They must have cost a fortune.

The place must be worth a fortune, Lizzie thought, biting into a chocolate champagne truffle and closing her eyes in bliss, but when she opened them she blinked, completely overwhelmed at her new surroundings. Only now was she starting to fully realise the true coup of becoming Head Nurse at the Hunter Clinic at 200 Harley Street.

There was a note to say that the uniforms she had sent her measurements in for were waiting for her at the clinic. It was a far cry from the usual package of white dresses or theatre scrubs that Lizzie was rather more used to. It was all as rich and as expensive as the voice Lizzie had so far only heard on the other end of a telephone.

Leo Hunter.

‘You come highly recommended.’ There had been an edge to his voice that had made Lizzie frown; after all, the recommendation as to her suitability for the position had come from Leo’s own brother, Ethan.

‘Thank you.’ Lizzie hadn’t really known what to say. ‘I was very flattered when Ethan suggested that I apply. He said to call and hopefully arrange an interview—’

‘The job’s yours,’ Leo had interrupted. ‘There’s no need for an interview, unless you want to hop over to Switzerland.’ Lizzie hadn’t been sure if he’d been joking or had meant it. She’d heard the sound of rich laughter in the background and Leo had apologised for the noise—explaining that, like all good cosmetic surgeons, now that the Christmas rush was over, he was skiing—and then Lizzie had frowned in confusion as he’d told her that he looked forward to seeing her in the New Year.

Was that it?

He hadn’t even asked about her employment history! He didn’t seem to care that her work with Ethan had simply been agency work and that she was, in fact, a senior nurse in Accident and Emergency.

He’d given the job as easily as that!

‘Oh,’ Leo added, just before he rang off. ‘Did you want accommodation?’ As easily as that he tossed it into the conversation—his clipped, well-schooled voice delivering the offer almost as an afterthought. ‘As Head Nurse of the Hunter Clinic, we can offer you that.’

‘Offer it?’ Lizzie checked.

‘A furnished flat ...’

Lizzie clutched the phone as he thanked someone, presumably for a drink because she could hear the chink of ice cubes as his attention came back to her. ‘I’m not sure which one, we’ve got a few within walking distance of the clinic.’ Lizzie was about to decline—anything within walking distance of 200 Harley Street would be way out of her price range—but then Leo continued, ‘It’s part of the package, though if you already have somewhere to stay, we can come to—’

‘That would be great.’ It was Lizzie interrupting now. Trying and failing to sound blasé, but a furnished flat within walking distance would save a fortune, not just on rental but on travel. Lizzie had moved from Brighton to London a couple of years ago and had found it fiercely expensive, especially with all her parents’ nursing-home bills. She wasn’t used to perks and certainly not one of this magnitude. ‘The flat would be marvellous.’

‘Good,’ Leo clipped. ‘Gwen, the clinic manager, will be in touch with all the details and I’ll see you in the New Year.’

Happy New Year, Lizzie thought as she looked out of the window, marvelling at the glimpse of Regent’s Park, unable to believe all this was really happening to her.

Leo’s brother, Ethan, had been a patient of Lizzie’s. He had returned injured from Afghanistan and Lizzie had been making home visits, treating his badly injured legs. She’d known Ethan was a doctor but had had no idea of his dazzling family history. Ethan had been silent and brooding and, knowing some of what he had been through, Lizzie hadn’t taken it remotely personally. Instead she had filled the long silences with chatter about her own life—her aging parents, her mother’s Alzheimer’s, the on-going concern she had for them despite the fact they were both in a home. How the decision to sell the family home had been a hard one. How expensive it all was. How she tried to get down to Brighton to visit them most of her days off.

How it hurt that her mother rarely recognised her.

Her tongs had paused in mid-dressing, she had been talking more to herself, but it had been Ethan who had, for once, broken the silence.

‘They’re lucky to have you.’

‘No.’ Lizzie had smiled, glad to hear him engaging. ‘I’m lucky to have them.’

Slowly Ethan had started talking and when he had told her that he was thinking of working in the family business, heading up the charity side of his brother’s cosmetic and reconstructive clinic, Lizzie had taken an interest, more because she’d been glad that Ethan was finally communicating.

It had never entered her head that he would put her forward for the position of Head Nurse at the clinic. More than that, she had never thought she would be accepted.

Lizzie was plagued with insecurity about the sudden change in her career, sure that one look at the very fresh-faced Lizzie and Leo Hunter would change his mind.

She wandered through the flat and to the gorgeous bathroom and stared at her reflection in the large mirror, wondering what head nurse to a renowned cosmetic surgeon ought to look like.

Lizzie looked at her light brown wavy hair and brown eyes and a face that rarely wore make-up and thought of all the celebrities and beauties she would be facing come Monday.

She thought too of facing Leo.

Of course she had looked him up and life hadn’t been the same since!

It was rather like the day her blushing mother had told a very naïve Lizzie the facts of life. The autumn crocus in her elderly parents’ lives, Lizzie had been cosseted and protected from such things. The day they’d had *the talk*, suddenly it had seemed that periods and sex were everywhere—from adverts on television to full pages in magazines.

It was the same with Leo Hunter—he was everywhere now.

He was the chiselled-jawed, blue-eyed hunk that cavorted on snow-capped mountaintops behind royalty as they were photographed.

Black hair brushed back, he was that beautiful face on the table next to a celebrity, he was that man walking beside a stunning model as she tripped on her way out of a nightclub.

Lizzie had just never paid attention till now.

Leo Hunter was a heartbreaker, surgeon to the stars, irredeemable playboy and, as of Monday, he would also be her boss.

CHAPTER ONE

‘I HIRED HER, didn’t I?’ Leo’s response to his brother was terse. ‘So why wouldn’t I be nice to her?’

‘You know what I mean, Leo.’

Rarely was Ethan the one to walk away. He turned on his heel and attempted to stalk out of his brother’s plush office but despite the simmering anger, despite ten years, no, a lifetime of rivalry, Leo’s jaws clamped together at the painful sight of his brother’s attempt to stalk off.

God only knew the mess of Ethan’s legs, Leo thought. Ethan certainly never spoke about them and Leo had only read about them. Leo could still remember the pain and humiliation of having to learn from a news article that his brother was recovering in hospital.

So much for being next of kin.

Ethan’s time in Afghanistan was something Ethan chose not to discuss but his pain was evident and, yes, Leo wished his brother would share, open up, but why would he? Leo thought.

They’d never been close.

Their father had seen to that long ago.

‘You’re not proving anything by refusing to use a walking stick.’ Leo watched as Ethan’s shoulders stiffened but, hell, if his older brother couldn’t say it then who could?

‘If I want a further opinion I’ll go to someone who ...’ Ethan didn’t finish, he didn’t have to—that was the dark beauty of being brothers, there was enough history to know exactly what the other meant without having to spell things out. As Ethan’s disdain for Leo’s work briefly broke through the tense, simmering surface, exposing the rivalry beneath, Leo merely shrugged.

‘Mock it all you like,’ he said, as Ethan turned to face him. ‘But I’ll tell you this much—my patients walk out of here feeling one hell of a lot better than they did when they first walked in, and,’ he added, ‘might I remind you that it’s my work and subsequently my patients’ word of mouth that have pulled the Hunter name out of the gutter. While you were busy playing soldiers ...’ Leo broke off, wishing he could retrieve his own words, because Ethan hadn’t been playing at anything. Ethan’s injuries were a product of war. He was a hero by anyone’s standards—especially Leo’s. ‘That was below the belt,’ he admitted.

‘Yes, and so is the shrapnel.’

Leo just stood there silent for a moment. His appalling playboy reputation combined with a passion for fast living meant that having a wounded soldier for a younger brother needled on so many levels. ‘While you’re peering down your nose at your celebrity surgeon brother, just remember that my work allows the charity side of things to happen,’ Leo pointed out. ‘Without the money coming into the Hunter Clinic those charity beds at the Lighthouse Hospital and Kate’s wouldn’t be funded and you wouldn’t be working here.’

‘I get it,’ Ethan growled.

‘You abhor it, though ...’ Leo said, as his eyes drifted to the crystal decanter that sat on the walnut table in his office. ‘But you don’t seem to mind extravagance when you’re knocking back the hundred-year-old malt ...’ He walked over and lifted the decanter. ‘I must remember to replace the stopper more carefully in future.’ His voice was dripping with sarcasm. ‘It seems to be evaporating at a rate of knots.’

Ethan said nothing. It was Leo who chose not to leave it. ‘Don’t you have a home to go to, Ethan? I’m assuming that you crashed here again last night ...’

It was an obvious assumption. Ethan was wearing the same clothes as yesterday and was the antitheses of the impeccably groomed Leo who, despite a late night at an A-list function and an energetic romp with yet another blonde beauty in his bed, had been out for a run at dawn, before showering and heading to work.

Ethan, it would seem, had crashed again on Leo's leather sofa.

'I was working late.' Ethan offered the same excuse as he had on several occasions since coming to work at the Hunter Clinic.

Leo could feel the tension in his jaw, heard his own hiss of breath as he felt the pages of history turning. Yes, Ethan may be a hero but he was very much a wounded one and it wasn't just his legs that were injured, Leo was sure of it. But even if Ethan's mental scars ran deep there was no way that Leo was about to let history repeat itself. He could still remember, as if it had happened yesterday, the time when everything had finally come to a head—their father, James, turning up for work drunk and causing a scene in front of the clients.

Of course he had been sent home, disgraced, but instead of sleeping it off James had carried on with his bender, eventually collapsing and dying. The Hunter reputation had fallen like a house of cards and it had been Leo who had painstakingly rebuilt it brick by brick, client by client, personal recommendation by personal recommendation.

He'd sacrificed way too much to see it fall again.

Leo felt the heavy weight of the stopper in his palm for a moment before he replaced it in the decanter. 'If you ever—' Leo started, but Ethan broke in.

'It's not going to happen.'

'You're quite sure about that?' Leo's eyes were as blue as the ocean and, despite the seemingly decadent lifestyle, just as clear. Unlike Ethan's—his hazel eyes were bloodshot and although Leo appeared unshaven it was designer stubble on his chin, whereas Ethan looked like a man who *had* spent the night on a sofa—albeit an expensive one.

'I shan't be making excuses for you, Ethan.'

'Learned your lesson, have you?' Ethan asked. Yes, there was a dark beauty to being brothers, because in that short question Ethan had demanded answers to the impossible. Why had Leo kept such a lid on things with their father? Why had Leo constantly smoothed over the gaping cracks? Why, when Ethan had wanted to confront their father, had Leo insisted otherwise as their father had spiralled further out of control?

Even as children, Leo had been the same, defusing situations with wit and humour—even pouring his father a drink at times just to knock him out.

Ethan would have preferred different methods to produce the same result.

His fists.

'I don't think now is the time or the place,' Leo said.

'There never has been a right time and place,' Ethan responded, then turned the conversation from the impossible to the practical. 'Just make sure that you're nice to Lizzie.'

'I can't wait to meet her,' Leo clipped. Despite wanting the conversation over, Leo just couldn't help himself, he simply could not resist a dig. Oh, there was history, so much history that threaded every word of his taunt. 'She must be pretty amazing if she's got into that cold black heart of yours.'

'I'm just asking you to go easy on her,' Ethan said. 'Lizzie isn't one of your usual tarts.'

'You really do have a thing for her ...' Leo drawled. 'Good in bed, is she?'

Had Ethan thumped Leo it wouldn't have been in defence of Lizzie. Both men's minds had turned now to the woman who had ultimately divided them—so much so that Olivia might just as well be standing in the room watching them, listening to them fight, just as they had ten years ago, almost to the very day.

'How sad that that is your measure of a good woman,' Ethan responded.

'Do I look sad?' Leo's lips sneered into a smile. 'I'm not the one who's turning into a recluse. I'm out every night, I'm living ...'

'Really?' Ethan had heard enough. It had been a stupid idea to come back and an even more stupid idea to expose Lizzie to the toxicity. There was a fight waiting to be had, an explosion about

to come sometime soon and, were his legs not about to give way, Ethan might have dealt with it then. He looked at Leo—so arrogant, so assured, so, despite his insistence otherwise, messed up.

What had he been thinking, coming to work here?

‘It’s not living, Leo, it’s existing—I should know!’ Ethan walked out then, calling over his shoulder as he left, ‘Just keep it in your pants for once. Lizzie deserves better than that.’

Leo stood there as the door slammed.

Their voices hadn’t been particularly raised and the walls were thick but the tension in the clinic was almost palpable and the staff must surely be noticing it by now. Had it been a mistake to ask Ethan to come and head up the charitable side of the business? Leo truly didn’t know. There was no doubt that his brother was a brilliant surgeon and that his skills could be well utilised, but there was just so much water under the bridge between them.

‘Leo ...’ Gwen, the clinic manager, interrupted his train of thought as she buzzed through on the intercom. ‘I’ve got—’

‘Send her straight in,’ Leo broke in, bracing himself to meet Saint Lizzie—the woman who had got under his brother’s skin.

‘Leo.’

Leo’s head jerked around at the sound of a low, sensual voice and, no, it wasn’t the new head nurse who stepped into his office, instead it was what he had hoped was finished business—Flora Franklin, who was as far removed from a saint as it was possible to be!

Incredibly beautiful, Flora was dressed in a long expensive coat and her heels were so high she was almost as tall as Leo, who stood stock still as she walked towards him. ‘You didn’t return my call,’ Flora reproached him.

‘Because there’s nothing more to say. We’re finished.’ Leo didn’t like to have to repeat himself and he already had, once, but twice was one time too many. ‘We’ve been through this ...’

‘Well, this might change your mind.’

Flora opened her trench coat and let it fall from her shoulders to the floor. Leo looked down at the sight of her spectacular body almost on full display in the sexiest of red underwear, her nipples peeking out between lace, and what man wouldn’t be tempted?

Yes, his body might be, there was no denying that fact, but Leo’s mind certainly wasn’t. Even as she rained kisses on his face and her hands got to work, Leo reminded himself that he was through with Flora. Yes, it had been fun while it had lasted but it was over. He had tried to let her down gently, but it was time to make things very clear.

‘Flora ...’ Leo’s voice was as detached as it was firm. ‘You really need to ...’ His voice trailed off to the sound of gentle knocking and as the gap in the partially open door widened and Lizzie stepped in, all Leo could think was that this was *so* not how he had wanted to greet the new head nurse.

‘Dr Hunter, I presume?’ He saw her tight smile, saw colour flood her rounded cheeks as she took in the situation, and though Lizzie didn’t actually say, *your reputation precedes you*, her eyes most certainly did.

‘Mister.’ Even in the most compromising of situations, Leo corrected mistakes. He’d worked hard for his fellowship after all. ‘You must be Lizzie.’ Leo returned an equally tight smile as he attempted to peel Flora off, not that Lizzie hung around to watch. With a brief shake of her head she turned and walked out of Leo’s office and, unlike Flora, Lizzie did think to close the door properly. There was no door slamming but, just as it had with Ethan, Leo could feel the lingering disapproval.

‘Where were we?’ Flora purred, not in the least embarrassed by the interruption.

Rarely, Leo was.

‘The same place we were a few moments ago,’ Leo answered brusquely, getting straight to the brutal point. ‘Finished.’

‘Leo ...’ Flora attempted, grabbing the arm that was trying to retract itself, but Leo shook her off—he was in no mood for debate.

‘Cover yourself up, make sure that you are out of here by the time I get back. I need to go and sort out this mess.’ He marched out of his office and through the plush corridors and because, unlike Lizzie, he knew his way around, Leo had caught up with her before Lizzie made it to the changing rooms.

‘Your timing’s impeccable,’ Leo offered, and gave a wry smile to Lizzie as he tucked in his shirt. ‘I’m serious,’ he added as she shot him an incredulous look. ‘I was actually trying to get rid of her.’

‘Really?’

She had a very soft but exceptionally clear voice, though it was, Leo noted, her eyes that did most of the talking and what they had to say was less than flattering—especially as they briefly drifted down and, with a slight purse to her lips, returned to meet his cool gaze. Without needing to check, Leo knew, just *knew* what she had seen—his flies were undone.

Leo could have blushed.

Or cursed.

Perhaps he should have chosen to ignore it.

His response was far less forgivable.

He laughed.

A shameless, deep laugh as he deftly rectified the situation.

Lizzie, he noted, didn’t laugh.

He noted a few other things too. She was incredibly ... Leo’s mind hesitated. As one of Britain’s top cosmetic surgeons he was usually able to sum up a woman’s looks in an instant. It came as second nature to him to notice any work that might have been done or, perhaps more pointedly, to guess what work a woman might be considering. As a patient walked into his office, Leo’s eyes were already assessing their features and had guessed by the end of that first handshake what was on the patient’s mind.

He just couldn’t work out what might be on Lizzie’s.

Rather than noticing very slightly protruding teeth, Leo saw only her full lips. Her creamy complexion didn’t come from a bottle—if it did, Leo would have held the patent, and as for that body ... With Flora his response had been automatic, clinical, but with Lizzie it was far from that. He’d had no idea what to expect from the new head nurse, but it certainly hasn’t been this ball of femininity.

‘Flora and I recently broke up,’ he explained. ‘She just hasn’t got used to the idea yet.’

Lizzie really didn’t want to hear about his love life. Her cheeks were on fire—a mixture of coming into the warm clinic from a cold January day, nerves at starting her new job, and the sight that had greeted her.

Right now, all she wanted was to get as far away from Leo Hunter as possible to attempt to get her head together. ‘If you will excuse me, I’d like to get changed and then I’ll come and introduce myself and we can hopefully start again—more professionally this time.’

‘Sure,’ Leo responded, realising that in very few words she had stated her case. Lizzie Birch was far from impressed, but right now he had other things to deal with—namely, a near-naked, scorned woman who, Leo thought as he heard the sound of sobbing, was not going to go quietly.

Lizzie was *so* far from impressed.

She stepped into the staff changing room, which looked as if it might belong in some exclusive gymnasium rather than a medical clinic. There were huge mirrors, showers and wall-to-wall fluffy towels. Lizzie half expected an attendant to come out and offer to take her coat.

Thankfully it was empty and Lizzie dragged in a breath. Oh, she was so far from impressed, not just at the scene in his office but at her own response to Leo.

Did he have to be so good-looking? So overpowering, so completely male?

Yes, she’d seen photos but not one of them had adequately captured the beauty or the overwhelming charisma of Leo Hunter close up.

She had expected a slightly older version of Ethan, but instead he seemed younger, lighter and far more reprobate than his serious younger brother. And, unlike Ethan, Leo's eyes were blue but, more than that, they beckoned to bed.

'Oh, no!' Lizzie actually said the words out loud. For all her misgivings about the new position, for all her worry and concern about taking on such a prestigious role, never had it entered her head that on sight her stomach would be doing somersaults and it actually had very little to do with the compromising situation she had found him in.

He'd laughed.

At what should have been the most embarrassing, awkward of moments, when anyone else would have been cringing and red faced, he'd had the audacity to do what, to Lizzie's surprise, she found herself doing now. As a shocked gurgle of laughter filled the room Lizzie's eyes widened in brief surprise at her own reaction to her new boss but then the smile faded.

'He would crush you in the palm of his hand,' Lizzie told her reflection. She was here to work, to make decent money, to finally get ahead.

There was no way she would allow herself to even think of fancying him.

Lizzie was far too sensible for that.

In her new role, Gwen had explained that she would be expected to wear a suit. Lizzie unzipped it from its cover and pulled on the slim charcoal-grey skirt. There was also a cream blouse with a cowl neck and small buttons at the back.

Hardly practical, Lizzie thought, changing from boots to low heels, slipping on the jacket and then stepping back to check her reflection.

Even though she was thirty-two years old, Lizzie felt like a child trying on her mother's clothes. They were tailored, fitted ... elegant.

Lizzie didn't normally bother with make-up at work but, having seen Gwen and a couple of the other staff on her entrance, she wished she had thought to bring some.

She walked towards Leo's office, wondering how best to face him.

As it turned out, it wasn't facing Leo that proved to be the problem.

Instead it was Flora!

CHAPTER TWO

‘I’VE GOT THIS ...’ Leo said.

He was attempting to cover Flora with her coat and guide her from the sumptuous reception either out the main door or towards his office. Lizzie wasn’t sure which. But, as stubborn as a mule, Flora dug in her stilettos and stood beneath the chandelier in the reception, telling anyone, who had no choice but to listen, what a bastard Leo was.

‘Not here.’ Leo was attempting to smooth things and steer her away.

‘Yes, here!’ Flora insisted.

Leo had been making a coffee, trying to give Flora the chance for a somewhat dignified exit, when the one-woman protest had started.

There was something quite unattractive about a near-naked woman furiously ripping off jewellery and tossing it at a very calm man, Lizzie thought.

‘And he was worried about me creating a scene ...’ Ethan walked out of his own office and made the dry comment as Lizzie joined him. ‘Welcome to 200 Harley Street, Lizzie. You’ve met my brother, I presume?’

‘Is it always like this?’ Lizzie asked.

‘That depends.’ Ethan shrugged. ‘They’ve been together for a few weeks, including Christmas, which is a bit of a record for Leo. I hope to God he gets it sorted before patients start to arrive.’

Lizzie was starting to doubt it.

‘Flora!’ Leo was trying to calm Flora down and failing. ‘You’re being ridiculous.’

‘No.’ She hurled a necklace at him and Lizzie realised she was holding her breath as it flew through the air and thankfully missed its target. ‘What’s ridiculous is you throwing away all we have. Why can’t we work on it?’

Leo opened his mouth to say something but then changed his mind and Flora carried on. ‘Do you remember what you said when you gave me this?’ she demanded, as she wrenched off a ring.

‘No,’ Leo admitted shamelessly.

‘Bastard.’ She tossed the ring and this time it did meet its mark. If a diamond could cut glass then it made light work of Leo’s cheek—a gash opening as Leo stepped forward to restrain Flora. She was clearly about to hit him but Lizzie got there first. She took the woman’s wrist and held it, and for the second time Leo heard the calm ice of Lizzie’s voice.

‘Now, that really would be stupid,’ Lizzie said. ‘If this doesn’t stop right now I shall have the police called.’ Absolutely she meant it. ‘I thought I’d left the fights in Accident and Emergency behind when I came to work here.’

‘It’s not like that,’ Flora attempted.

‘It’s exactly what it’s like,’ Lizzie said, releasing Flora’s hand and watching the woman’s anger turn to horror as she realised what she had done. ‘Now ...’ Lizzie quickly put on Flora’s coat and did up the buttons, then tied the belt as she spoke. ‘I think we’ve all seen enough drama ...’ She looked briefly over at Ethan and at Leo, who had blood pouring down his cheek. Seeing Lizzie had control of things, they both gave a brief nod at her dismissal of them but before they disappeared into Ethan’s office Leo had a very quiet word with Lizzie.

‘See that she gets home okay.’

‘Sure.’

All the fight had gone out of Flora and Lizzie couldn’t help but feel sorry for her and perhaps embarrassed for her too.

‘You need to go home and calm down,’ Lizzie said.

‘I can’t believe it’s over.’ Flora said. ‘He told me—’

‘I don’t think going over things will be very helpful now,’ Lizzie interrupted.

‘I thought we were going to get engaged!’ Flora sobbed. ‘I thought it meant something ...’

‘This is a medical clinic.’ Lizzie kept her voice practical. ‘It’s not the place to cause a scene. Whatever is going on between you and Leo is to be sorted well away from here.’ Lizzie simply refused to prolong the conversation. ‘I’ll call a taxi for you.’

‘I’ll take her home.’ Gwen walked down the corridor and gave Lizzie a tight smile. ‘Come on, Flora.’

‘Hold on.’ Lizzie picked up the jewellery that was scattered over the floor. ‘You don’t want to leave these behind.’ She was warmed to see a very pale smile on a dazed Flora’s lips as Lizzie carefully slipped the jewellery into her coat pocket. ‘That really would be a stupid mistake.’

‘Thank you.’

Lizzie just nodded.

Before Gwen headed off with Flora she told Lizzie there was someone watching the front desk as patients would soon be arriving.

Luckily none were here yet.

For a moment Lizzie wondered how to play it when she saw Leo—whether to pretend that it hadn’t happened, carry on as if nothing had, or face things.

There really wasn’t a choice—yes, she wanted this job but she couldn’t work in, let alone be head nurse of, a clinic with this type of thing going on and not state her case.

Lizzie knocked once and opened the door.

‘Don’t you wait to be called in?’ Leo asked, his tone telling Lizzie he was joking. He was leaning back in his leather chair as Ethan opened up a suture pack.

‘I don’t think there’s much point.’ Lizzie’s response was dry. ‘I’ve seen far more than I wanted to already.’

‘Yes, well, sorry about that.’

He gave a slight wince as Ethan probed the wound. ‘You need a couple of stitches.’

‘I don’t.’

‘It’s deep,’ Ethan said. ‘If you don’t want it opening up ...’

‘Just do it, then,’ Leo snapped, and then his blue eyes opened to Lizzie. ‘Things are normally far calmer ...’

‘He’s lying.’ Ethan was opening up a vial of local anaesthetic. ‘My brother tends to bring out the worst in women.’

‘Don’t bother with the local.’

‘Suit yourself.’ Ethan shrugged.

‘Why do women always say they want to work on things?’ Leo pondered out loud, saying now what he’d been sensible enough not to say to Flora. ‘I save work for work.’

‘Just what did you say when you gave her the ring?’ Ethan asked.

‘I said that it *wasn’t* an engagement ring. I made it very clear.’ Lizzie winced for Leo as Ethan put in a stitch, then she winced for Flora as Leo thought for a moment and then spoke on. ‘Actually, I can remember what I said, I said that it was the closest I’d come to one ...’

‘Leo!’ Ethan’s exasperation was clear but for the first time since she’d met him, even if Leo couldn’t see it, Ethan was actually smiling.

‘I didn’t mean it like that. What I was trying to say ...’ Leo jumped to his own defence then gave in. ‘Bloody hell, I think I must have had too much *Goldschläger* or something.’

‘*What’s that?*’ Lizzie checked, and Leo actually smiled as the second suture went in and Lizzie picked up some scissors and cut for Ethan.

‘Cinnamon schnapps,’ Leo said. ‘Lethal stuff.’

‘How was Switzerland?’ Ethan asked, putting in the third.

‘Far more romantic than intended, it would seem.’ Leo sighed. ‘I’ll ring her and apologise ...’

‘Don’t,’ Lizzie said, and one blue eye peeped open and for the first time she properly met his gaze. ‘False hope.’

‘Okay.’

‘Just leave it,’ Lizzie said. ‘I think she’s got the message.’

‘You think?’ Leo checked.

‘I’m quite sure she’s worked out what a top bastard you are.’

She smiled sweetly as she said it.

‘Thank you.’

‘You’re welcome.’ Lizzie snipped the stitch and then made herself say it. ‘Keep arguments away from work.’

‘Leo never argues,’ Ethan said. ‘He ends things long before arguments start.’

‘Well, I don’t want to walk into that again.’ Lizzie knew she had to address it and as she did so he opened the other eye and stared back at Lizzie as she spoke on. ‘I’m not just talking about the scene in Reception, I’m talking about what I walked into before—I could have been a patient.’

‘But you’re not.’

‘Even so.’ Lizzie put down the scissors as Ethan, tongue in cheek as his brother got a scolding, applied a small dressing. ‘It’s not very professional.’

‘I’m extremely professional,’ Leo smarted.

‘I can only go by what I’ve seen.’ Lizzie retorted. ‘Am I being hired to merely smile or am I to be the head nurse of the clinic?’

‘Head nurse,’ Leo said through gritted teeth.

‘Then let there be no repetitions.’ She gave him a smile and then smiled at Ethan. ‘I’ll go and show myself around.’

She walked out, again closing the door behind her, and let out a long slow breath as, on the other side, Leo did the same.

‘You didn’t tell me I was hiring an old-school matron,’ Leo grumbled, picking up the mirror he usually held up for patients and examining the damage to his cheek as he mimicked Lizzie’s voice. “‘Let there be no repetitions’—I feel like I’m back at school.’

‘God help Lizzie then,’ Ethan said, but then the smile faded from his face as he watched Leo’s gaze briefly drift to the door Lizzie had just walked out of. Ethan watched as, simply on instinct, Leo dragged in the last dregs of the feminine scent lingering in the air and, not for the first time, Ethan wondered if, by seeing she got this job, he had been doing Lizzie a huge disservice.

Yes, the money might be great but if Leo set his cap on her ...

Ethan let out a worried breath. He knew better than most the true cost of a broken heart.

CHAPTER THREE

LIZZIE DID SHOW herself around and chatted to a couple of the staff, who were very friendly.

‘Welcome to the Hunter Clinic.’ Charlotte, one of the nurses introduced herself. ‘I’m just heading over to Kate’s or I’d show you around.’

‘Kate’s?’ Lizzie checked—she’d heard that name mentioned a few times in conversation.

‘Princess Catherine’s Hospital,’ Charlotte explained and, as she spoke on, Lizzie was fast finding out how little she knew about her new role. ‘Day cases are normally done here but anything other than a twilight sedation is done either at Kate’s or the Lighthouse Hospital.’

‘Do you do a lot at the Lighthouse?’ Lizzie asked, because that was a children’s hospital.

‘Loads.’ Charlotte smiled. ‘Rafael De Luca, one of our paediatric surgeons, has a theatre list there this morning and I’m—’

‘Charlotte!’

She was interrupted by rather gruff but very good-looking man who popped his head out of a treatment room like a handsome bear peering out of a cave, holding his gloved hands up in front of him and asking in a rich Scottish accent if he might have a hand.

‘I’m just on my way out ...’

‘I can help.’ Lizzie smiled, glad of the chance to be useful.

‘Lizzie’s the new head nurse,’ Charlotte explained as she dashed off.

‘Hi Lizzie, I’m Iain MacKenzie. I’m removing sutures,’ he explained, ‘but Jessica, the patient, is very distressed. I need a hand to keep her still. She doesn’t want any sedation.’

Jessica was *very* distressed; she was on an examination table and curled up.

‘Can we do it tomorrow?’ she begged.

‘The sooner they come out the less it will scar,’ Iain explained. ‘It’s not going to hurt, there will just be a little bit of tugging. This is Lizzie ...’

‘Hi, Jessica.’ Lizzie smiled. She was about to ask what had happened but Iain shot her a warning look and Lizzie decided otherwise. Instead, she made the woman as comfortable as she could and put a small sterile towel over her face so that she couldn’t see the blade Iain was using to remove the numerous tiny sutures from her neck and behind her ear.

‘You’re doing grand ...’ Iain said every now and then, but he was a silent type and was concentrating hard so it was Lizzie who did most of the reassuring as the tiny threads were removed.

‘How does it look?’ Jessica kept asking.

Iain was concentrating and it was Lizzie who spoke for him.

‘It’s very swollen and tender at the moment,’ Lizzie said, ‘but the wounds are ...’ She hesitated. How could she describe them as amazing? Yet she had never seen anything so intricately repaired. ‘It’s a marvellous job.’

She looked up and Iain gave a grim smile.

He was a man of few words but his work clearly spoke for itself. As he held up the mirror and Jessica carefully examined the wounds, Lizzie was relieved for the patient that she could see an improvement.

‘It looks so much better but—’

‘Just let it settle and I’ll see you in a couple of days and we’ll start with ointments and massage, but for now I just want the wound left. How are you?’

‘I don’t know,’ Jessica admitted. ‘The thing is ...’ She glanced over at Lizzie and when it was clear that she’d prefer privacy Lizzie made her excuses and left.

‘How is she?’ Leo was walking past as Lizzie came out.

‘Sorry?’

He nodded in the direction of his office and Lizzie followed. The corridor was perhaps not the best place to speak. 'How is Jessica?' Leo clarified. 'I was going to suture her when she came in but I knew it was going to take hours and I had a function to attend ...' He watched as Lizzie's lips tightened a fraction. 'You've been spending far too long listening to my brother about me.' Leo gave a wry smile. 'Anyway, Iain is brilliant for that type of injury. I'm just interested to hear how Jessica is.'

'Her sutures are out,' Lizzie said. 'She's just speaking with Iain. I think she wanted me to leave.'

'You don't recognise her, do you?'

'Should I?' Lizzie said, and then her eyes widened as she recalled the news last week and realised she'd just been looking after the wife of a celebrity who'd been taken in for questioning after a heated argument with his wife.

'From her injuries I thought she must have been in a car accident.' Lizzie closed her eyes for a moment. 'I thought that working here would be ...' She halted, realising Leo might not be the best person to reveal her thoughts to, but he was already one step ahead.

'You thought that it was all fake boobs and antiaging?' Leo finished for her. 'Domestic violence isn't just for the working classes.'

'I know.' Lizzie's voice was rattled, cross, but more with herself because, yes, Leo was right, people assumed that if you were rich and beautiful of course those sorts of things didn't happen and so, when they did, it was somehow more shocking.

'You'll know it for certain after a couple of months here,' Leo said. 'Right, would you mind stepping outside and then walking in again?' He saw her confusion. 'I'd like to start again.'

'It's really not necessary.'

'It really is,' Leo said. 'Go on, knock and this time wait till I call you in.'

'This is ridiculous,' Lizzie said, walking out and closing the door. She knocked and waited for his summons.

'Come in.'

But kind of fun, Lizzie decided as she opened the door to his smile.

'You must be the new head nurse.' Leo stood from his desk, walked over and shook her hand.

'You must be *Mr* Hunter.' Lizzie smiled. 'It's lovely to meet you ... Oh, what on earth happened to your cheek?'

He smiled, and Lizzie's stomach did what it had done at the door to the changing room and simply folded over on itself.

'Oh, that,' Leo said. 'Just a little tumble, skiing.'

'Ouch.' Lizzie winced. 'Poor you!'

Then Leo was serious. He offered her a seat and moved behind his huge walnut table. It really was a lovely office, which looked out onto Harley Street, and Lizzie had to snap her eyes back to Leo when he spoke as she found herself staring out of the window, unable to believe she was actually here.

'I think you'll enjoy working here,' Leo started. 'I have an amazing team—all the staff I have personally chosen for their excellence. From surgeons to receptionists I have hand-picked each one.'

'Except me.'

She didn't mince her words, Leo noted.

'Except you,' Leo admitted. 'But, then, I trust my brother's judgement.' He didn't add it had been a condition of Ethan's that if he was to take the role then Lizzie must be employed. 'So, what made you want to work at the Hunter Clinic?'

Lizzie wondered just how honest she should be—she could hardly admit that it was the dazzling salary that had first attracted her. Neither could she say that the chance for an apartment in such a beautiful part of London had been too good to pass up and that the chance to finally get ahead financially had clinched the deal for her.

'It's a very prestigious clinic,' Lizzie settled for instead.

‘It is.’ Leo’s eyes never left her face. ‘You haven’t worked in cosmetic or reconstructive surgery, though?’ he checked, and watched as her cheeks darkened. ‘What attracts you to it?’

‘People like Jessica,’ Lizzie answered. ‘It’s wonderful that such an appalling injury—’

‘I’m talking about the cosmetic side of things. People who come to the clinic for purely cosmetic reasons. Vanity even ...’

‘I’m all for it,’ Lizzie said.

‘Really?’ Leo raised an eyebrow. ‘You don’t sound very sure.’

Lizzie was really struggling. Had she had a formal interview she would have given this question some thought prior to the event, but now it had been thrust upon her. There was no escaping Leo’s eyes as her mind raced for a more convincing response.

‘Why wouldn’t I be all for it?’ Lizzie said. ‘I’ve had a little work done myself.’

‘Really?’ Leo frowned. ‘What?’

Lizzie let out a slightly shrill laugh. ‘I don’t think you’d really expect me to answer that.’

Leo frowned. He could usually spot any work—it was his job after all—and Lizzie had to sit there burning with mortification as his eyes skimmed her face and then dipped briefly before returning to meet her gaze.

‘Can I ask who did your work?’

‘No,’ Lizzie said.

‘Well, whatever he did, it was an excellent job.’

‘She,’ Lizzie said.

‘Now you’ve got me really curious.’

Leo soon got back to being serious as he explained how the clinic ran. ‘I take great pride in my work. My patients often live their lives, or have lived their lives in the spotlight,’ he explained. ‘Like it or not, the world can be a very judgmental place and I do my best for my patients. I respect them immensely for taking care of themselves.’ Lizzie looked up at the determination in his voice. ‘Though I’m seeing fewer clients now as I focus more on the business side of things.’

‘Can I ask why?’ Lizzie was curious. ‘You’re clearly in demand ...’

‘Two-fold.’ He nodded his approval of her question. ‘The more elusive I’ve become the more in demand I am and, on a more serious note, I really do want to build the charitable side of things. That’s the reason I’ve persuaded Ethan to come on board. The Hunter Clinic provides many people with very nice lifestyles but we do give back. It’s not just about donating a doctor’s time, though, it’s the hospital beds, the rehabilitation, the family ...’

‘I can imagine.’

‘Fundraising is a serious part of my role. I’m very good at the social side of things.’

‘I had heard.’

‘Someone has to be,’ Leo said. ‘I can hardly send in Edward.’

Lizzie frowned.

‘Renowned micro surgeon, absolute genius, lives with his books,’ Leo said. ‘Then there’s Iain.’

‘MacKenzie? The Scottish one?’

Leo nodded. ‘Another brilliant surgeon but useless at small talk. And can you imagine Ethan drumming up business at an A-list function? He drips disdain.’

Lizzie felt guilty doing so but she did give a small laugh because, yes, Ethan wouldn’t be wonderful at schmoozing up to anyone.

‘For all he disapproves ...’ Leo mused out loud, and then halted himself and turned the focus back to Lizzie. ‘Ethan said something about you supporting your parents ...’

‘He shouldn’t have.’

‘He wasn’t gossiping,’ Leo said. ‘It must be quite a drain on you.’

‘I look out for my parents,’ Lizzie said tartly, embarrassed to be discussing this. ‘The same way that they have always looked out for me. Like you, there comes a time when it’s right to give back.’

‘Okay.’ He wrote on his pad and Lizzie frowned. ‘I was just reminding myself not to go there again.’ He turned her visible discomfort into a smile. ‘Right, I’d better get on. I do have a patient at two who will expect only the most senior staff.’ He opened up a folder and Lizzie saw that despite the effortless small talk this meeting really had been planned because it contained all her paperwork. ‘You’ve signed the confidentiality clause?’ Leo checked.

‘Yes.’

‘You fully understand what you signed?’

‘Of course.’

‘Good. I’ll see you just before two, then. The patient I’m seeing is Marianna Dupont. Have you heard of her?’

Lizzie swallowed. You’d have to be living under a rock not to have heard of Marianna. Since her engagement to Prince Ferdinand of Sirmontane had been announced, their romance had filled the gossip columns. As first in line to the throne, his future wife would one day be queen and from the way Leo was talking, Lizzie was about to meet her.

‘I have heard of her,’ Lizzie said, attempting nonchalance and failing miserably. The wedding wasn’t till next year but it would seem some discreet preparations were being put in place for a woman who would spend the rest of her life living in the eye of the public and on the cover of every magazine.

‘Good,’ Leo said, and as Lizzie went to go his voice caught up with her at the door.

‘The salary.’

‘Sorry?’ Lizzie turned around.

‘You could have just answered that it was the salary that attracted you to the role and I wouldn’t have minded. There’s nothing wrong with wanting nice things.’

‘I know.’

‘And a lot of people have no idea what goes on in a clinic like this till they actually work in one.’

‘I’m already finding that out.’

‘You have to know it to love it,’ Leo explained.

She possibly already did.

CHAPTER FOUR

MARIANNA WAS SERIOUSLY beautiful.

Gwen showed her through and Lizzie tried to quieten the flutter of nerves in her stomach, telling herself that all patients wanted, rich or poor, was simply to be well cared for.

It didn't help.

'Leo!' Marianna was charming and greeted him like a friend. 'It's lovely to see you again.' Her voice dropped in concern when she saw the dressing on his cheek. 'What happened there?'

'Just a small tumble, skiing,' Leo said, as he kissed her on both cheeks and gave Lizzie just the tiniest wink. 'How are you?'

'Nervous,' Marianna said in her rich accent.

'This is Lizzie Birch,' Leo introduced them. 'Our new head nurse.'

'It's lovely to meet you, Lizzie.' Marianna smiled but she gave a nervous swallow when she turned back to Leo. 'I am sure that I was photographed coming in.'

'You used the basement?'

'I did, but when I was in the car—'

'You'll leave by the front door,' Leo said. 'Did you wear dark glasses on the way here, like I told you to?'

Marianna nodded. 'If anyone finds out that I'm having work done, it will be awful.'

'No one shall find out from us,' Leo assured her. 'We're very used to dealing with this type of thing, though, as we've discussed, there are always going to be rumours.'

'Of course,' Marianna sighed. 'I have already been pregnant five times.'

'You've kept your figure well,' Lizzie joked, and then blushed, but Marianna just laughed.

'How has it been?' Leo asked, pulling up some images on his computer and then coming over to Marianna to take a closer look.

'Your work is amazing,' Marianna admitted. 'Even I struggle to notice what is different about my nose—I just know that it looks so much better.'

'Marianna had rhinoplasty six weeks ago at Kate's,' Leo explained to Lizzie as he examined the soon-to-be-royal nose. He then took a couple of photos, which he transferred to his computer, and Lizzie marvelled at the change. It was almost imperceptible, yet the difference was very telling.

'I shaved a fraction here ...' Leo told Lizzie, using his pen to point to what he had done. 'And then just tweaked the tip and lifted it a millimetre ...' He turned to Marianna. 'It's going to just keep getting better,' he said. 'It's still a touch swollen.' He gave his patient a very nice smile. 'You've done the hard part now. The next surgery we can do here. It will just be local anaesthetic and light sedation. We're going to do a blepharoplasty,' Leo said, and then, seeing Lizzie blink, he translated. 'Take away some of the excess on Marianna's eyelids.' He turned back to the images on the screen and addressed Marianna. 'Taking just a sliver will open your eyes up and it will look amazing, especially for profile shots ...'

Marianna nodded but she had questions. 'What about the scars?'

'We'll use laser to minimise, but there will be a small scar. It will be easily covered with make-up but if you don't want your staff to know ...'

'I do my own make-up,' Marianna said with a nod, 'and I will continue to do so.'

'Well, it won't be a problem, then. The scarring is in the natural crease anyway ...' He looked at Lizzie. 'Marianna has to think about constant close-ups.'

'I feel very vain,' Marianna admitted. 'My sister says that I am being ridiculous, but the pressure, honestly ...'

'I completely understand.' Leo nodded. 'A little bit of work now will make a huge difference to your confidence.' He looked at Lizzie. 'Can you imagine the whole world watching your every move?'

‘No,’ Lizzie admitted. ‘I’d be terrified.’

‘There can be no relaxing when you are out,’ Marianna sighed. ‘You are always on show.’

‘No getting caught with your pants down!’ Leo said, and Marianna laughed as Lizzie blushed furiously, wondering if that little reference was in regard to what had taken place earlier. ‘When would you like this done?’ Leo asked his esteemed patient.

‘How soon can you do it?’ Marianna asked. ‘I am going away at the weekend for a fortnight. I know we were looking at May, but this vacation has just come up and the place is very secluded. Ferdinand says there will be no cameras. I know it is very short notice for you.’

‘That’s not a problem.’ Leo went to his diary and it was decided the minor surgery would take place at six a.m. the following morning.

‘You’re to have nothing to eat or drink after midnight,’ Leo said. ‘That’s just as a precaution, though—it will just be very light sedation.’

‘So it will be done here?’

‘Yes.’ Leo nodded. ‘Come in at five, while it’s still dark. I’ll keep you here for the day and then we’ll have you back in the hotel by evening. Gwen, our manager, will liaise with the hotel ...’ He was completely at ease with her, Lizzie noticed—still in charge, despite who he was dealing with. ‘Right,’ Leo said. ‘Before you go I just want to take a closer look at that eye of yours.’

Marianna smiled and leant back in the chair as Leo opened up a small pack. Lizzie was too embarrassed to ask if he needed anything, she didn’t have a clue what he was doing! ‘Marianna’s fiancé bought her a puppy,’ Leo said as he opened up a small packet and an eye dressing.

‘How lovely,’ Lizzie said, frantically trying to work out what was happening. Maybe he had to check her eyes before he operated or something?

‘He’s a basset hound,’ Marianna said. ‘He talks to me, I swear.’

‘I had a parrot that did that,’ Leo said, and it was such a silly joke that Marianna started to laugh and so did Lizzie.

‘You didn’t have a parrot?’ Marianna checked as he put two fluorescein drops into her eyes—it was an indicator and any scratches to her eye would turn green.

‘Of course not.’

The laughter mixed with the drops had brought tears to Marianna’s eyes and Lizzie watched as the bright orange liquid ran down the side of her face. ‘No, there’s no scratch,’ Leo said. ‘Still, keep it covered for a few days, antibiotic drops and mild painkillers if you need them. A scratch to the cornea can be extremely painful. And watch that puppy’s claws!’

Lizzie had stopped even trying to hide her frown now—hadn’t he just said that she *didn’t* have a scratch?

Leo put a large eye patch on and taped it over Marianna’s eye. ‘Okay, dark glasses back on.’

‘Thank you.’

Lizzie saw a little of the stain running down Marianna’s cheek and went to wipe it but Leo halted her, his hand lightly dusting hers, and Lizzie pulled her hand back just a little too quickly to even try to pretend his touch hadn’t been noted. ‘Just leave it ...’ Leo said.

Only then did Lizzie realise the lengths Marianna had to go to in order to keep this procedure a secret. The puppy, the small smear of fluorescein coming from beneath the eye patch and now the dark glasses. It wasn’t her ignorance that had Lizzie’s cheeks burning, though, but the brief contact from Leo.

‘Thanks, Lizzie.’ Marianna smiled as Leo walked her out to the foyer. ‘Will I be seeing you in the morning?’

‘Of course,’ Leo answered for Lizzie.

Well, it looked like she’d better set her alarm early, Lizzie thought as she made her way to her office, but she was excited at the prospect of Marianna arriving under the cover of darkness and just thrilled to be a part of the big charade!

‘I assume the future princess was just in?’ A terribly handsome man dressed from head to toe in black leathers and carrying a crash helmet under his arm was walking towards her. ‘I’m Declan Underwood.’ He shook her hand.

‘Oh, yes, Leo did tell me about you.’ Leo had said that Declan was his second in command. ‘I’m Lizzie Birch.’

‘I know.’ Declan smiled. ‘Leo called earlier and told me that you’d started. I hear Flora kicking off was your welcome!’

Lizzie really didn’t know what to say but settled for a noncommittal smile as Leo walked over to join them.

‘I’m guessing that was Marianna,’ Declan said to Leo. ‘Lizzie wouldn’t tell me.’

‘You could be anyone,’ Lizzie pointed out.

‘Fair enough. But I knew it must be *someone* if Leo was actually rolling up his sleeves to see a patient. He pinches all the good stuff.’ Declan smiled. ‘Or rather he takes only the good stuff.’

It was good-natured teasing, Lizzie being quite sure that Declan would have more than his fair share of glamorous patients.

Declan headed off to get changed and returned a few moments later looking very suave in a suit. Leo watched as Lizzie, not knowing he was watching, rolled her eyes.

‘What?’ Leo frowned in fleeting concern. The last thing he needed was his head nurse not getting on with Declan.

‘Nothing,’ Lizzie said, then, knowing she’d been caught, admitted the truth. ‘When you hand-pick your staff ...’ she shook her head in exasperation ‘... do they have to be good looking?’

‘Do you find me good looking, Lizzie?’ Leo teased.

‘I think you know that you are.’

Leo just smiled. ‘Well, if that is part of my selection criteria then know that you ...’ He halted. It was her first day and he was determined to heed Ethan’s advice and get through it without flirting, but it was starting to prove an impossible ask. ‘It’s not all about looks, Lizzie,’ he scolded.

‘That a bit rich, coming from a cosmetic surgeon,’ Lizzie retorted lightly.

‘Tell me, Lizzie ...’ He was dying to know. ‘What have you had done?’

His finger came and lifted her chin, just slightly, and no there was no teeny scar beneath. She could feel the heat from his fingers and told herself it was second nature for Leo to examine a face.

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