CAROL MARINELLI

The Socialite's Secret

MEDICAL ROMANCE™

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Аннотация

The doctor she can’t forgetTwo years ago, socialite Scarlet Portland spent one wild night with A&E doc Luke Edwards. She hasn’t forgotten their sizzling heat – it’s branded on her mind forever – or that night’s devastating emotional repercussions…Now Scarlet’s back in London and back in Luke’s life. All she wants is one more chance, to see if the happiness she’s only ever felt in his arms was real. But though their chemistry burns hot as ever, will he want her when he discovers the truth?

Содержание

Scarlet felt the heat of his palms caress her cheeks and then his mouth was soft on hers and he kissed her. Oh, how their mouths needed each other … It was a soft morning kiss and because of it, Scarlet knew, she would float better through the day. 6
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Praise for Carol Marinelli

'A well written, enjoyable medical romance. With lovable characters and an interesting plot line, this book makes me even more excited for the upcoming books in 200 Harley Street.'

—*Harlequin Junkie* on *200 Harley Street: Surgeon in a Tux*

‘A compelling, sensual, sexy, emotionally packed, drama-filled read that will leave you begging for more!’

—*Contemporary Romance Reviews* on *NYC Angels: Redeeming the Playboy*

Scarlet felt the heat of his palms caress her cheeks and then his mouth was soft on hers and he kissed her. Oh, how their mouths needed each other … It was a soft morning kiss and because of it, Scarlet knew, she would float better through the day.

She kissed him back, feeling again the lips she missed, and so gentle and unexpected was he that Scarlet felt tears sting in her eyes.

But it was just a kiss and neither pushed for more.

‘Look at me,’ Luke said, still holding her face, yet she would not meet his eyes.

‘I can’t.’

‘You can …’

But she couldn’t. Not after what had happened.

Dear Reader,

Luke and Scarlet surprised me all the time as I wrote their story.

Sometimes I wondered how they would get to their happy ending. This couple had so much to work through, and yet every time I doubted they could Luke stepped in and reassured me that he knew where they were headed.

I love a hero who is one step ahead—not just of the heroine but also the author!—and Luke has the calm assuredness that I felt Scarlet needed. I *do* believe in love at first sight, and their story confirmed that for me.

Happy reading!

Carol x

CAROL MARINELLI recently filled in a form asking for her job title. Thrilled to be able to put down her answer, she put 'writer'. Then it asked what Carol did for relaxation and she put down the truth—'writing'. The third question asked for her hobbies. Well, not wanting to look obsessed, she crossed the fingers on her left hand and answered 'swimming'. But, given that the chlorine in the pool does terrible things to her highlights, I'm sure you can guess the real answer …

The Socialite's Secret
Carol Marinelli

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CHAPTER ONE

NO NEWS WASN'T always good news.

It was just the tiniest of diversions from Luke Edwards's usual morning routine but, having poured a glass of grapefruit juice, Luke turned the television on and listened to the news as he got ready for work.

It was just after 5:00 a.m. on Monday.

There was the usual stuff that should make mankind weep, yet it was immediately followed by the news that Anya's Saturday night performance at the O2, the last in her sell-out world tour, had been amazing and she would be heading back to the States today. The reporter moved to the next piece of celebrity gossip—a football star's wife who was rumoured to have had buttock implants.

He changed channels and found that it was just more of the same.

Luke flicked the television off and, though he still had half an hour to kill, he was restless so he decided to head into work. He went upstairs and selected a tie, which he put in his jacket pocket. As he came back down he grabbed his keys and glanced in the mirror, wondering if he really ought to shave.

No.

His straight dark hair needed a cut too but that could wait for next week.

It was still dark outside as his garage door opened and Luke headed out into a cold and wet November morning. He drove through the practically deserted, sleepy, leafy village, where he lived, towards the heart of London. He had recently been promoted to Consultant in a busy accident and emergency department at a major teaching hospital.

People sometimes said that he was crazy to live so far out but he also had a flat at the hospital for the times when he was on call or held back at work.

Luke liked it that where he lived was between Oxford, where his family were, and London, where he worked. The very distinct separation between his work and home life suited him well. The village was friendly but not overly so. He had been living there for close to a year now and was getting to know the locals at his own pace. Luke knew that, despite what others might think, he had made the right choice.

Or not.

It all depended on today.

It was a long, slow drive but he was more than used to it. Often he listened to music or a lecture he had heard about, but this morning he turned on the radio.

He needed to know if there was any news.

For the last four days Luke had been on edge and hypervigilant while doing all he could not to show it.

The traffic was terrible, he was told.

Thanks for that, Luke thought as he glanced at the time.

There was a huge snarl-up on the M25.

Luke was in the middle of it.

Finally, just before 7:00 a.m., the sun was coming up, the hospital was in sight and a new day had dawned.

He drove towards the underground car park, where he had a spot reserved, and was just about to flick off the radio, as reception was disappearing, when there was a break in a song.

'Unconfirmed reports are starting to come in that Anya …' the newsreader said, and Luke sat, blocking the traffic and listening to the brief report, before he drove into the basement. He parked but, instead of heading straight into work, Luke sat for an essential moment to collect himself.

His instincts had been right.

Today was the day, just not for the reasons he'd hoped.

Luke got out of the car and went up the elevator and made his way through the hospital.

Security guards were starting to race towards the accident and emergency entrance but Luke refused to rush. The only concession that his skills might be immediately required was that, as he walked along the corridor, he put on his tie.

'Morning,' Luke said to Geoff, one of the security guards, as he raced past him.

Not 'good morning'.

They weren't any more.

'Have you heard who's coming in?' Geoff answered by way of response, though he did slow down and fall into step with Luke.

‘I have.’ Luke nodded. ‘It just came on the news. Can you call for backup and start setting up the security screens? How long until she gets here?’

‘Ten minutes.’

Luke nodded his thanks and walked into the department.

‘Thank God you’re here early.’ Paul, his registrar, came straight over.

Yes, Paul was very glad that his boss was here. Luke Edwards epitomised the calm that the department would be needing today—Luke never got ruffled and simply dealt with what was. ‘Anya is on her way in,’ Paul explained. ‘She’s in full cardiac arrest. The place is going to blow.’

Luke disagreed with Paul’s assessment. Yes, drama was about to hit but the place would not blow.

Not while he was in charge.

‘What do we know?’ Luke asked as they walked into the resuscitation area where the nursing staff were already setting up.

‘Just what I told you,’ Paul answered.

‘Have you called for an anaesthetist?’

‘The first on call is in Theatre. The second on is David. He’s coming just as soon as he can but he’s with a sick child on PICU,’ Paul answered, as Luke started checking and labelling the drugs that Barbara, a very experienced senior nurse, was pulling up. ‘I was about to see if Switch could do a ring around …’

‘It’s fine.’ Luke shook his head before Paul could suggest otherwise. ‘We’ll more than manage until David gets here.’

‘Do you even know who Anya is?’ Paul checked, because Luke looked completely unruffled by the news of who was on their way into the department and the fact that the anaesthetist wasn’t there.

‘Yes.’

Oh, Luke knew.

Better than most.

Anya had been famous for forty of her fifty years of life and would, after today, be even more so.

Especially if she died.

‘You’d better let the director of nursing know,’ Luke said.

Paul gave a worried nod. ‘I already have.’

‘Good. I’ll go and make sure the screens are up outside.’ As he went to go out, Heather, the director of nursing, was running down the corridor towards him.

‘Do we know what she’s taken?’ was the first thing that Heather asked when she caught up with Luke.

‘We don’t know that she’s taken anything.’ Luke’s response was tart and Heather flushed as Luke continued to speak. ‘Let’s just make sure that the screens are up and no cameras can get a shot of her.’

The media were already starting to gather. He could hear the sound of a helicopter hovering overhead but thankfully the ambulance bay was covered.

Right now it was about affording Anya some privacy.

Whether she would want it or not.

Paul came outside and briefed them further. ‘Ambulance Control has just called. It’s an unspecified drug overdose …’

‘Well, that was never going to happen.’ Heather’s response was sarcastic.

‘If you want to help—’ Luke had heard enough innuendo and the patient hadn’t even arrived. He turned and faced Heather and made his feelings on the subject very clear. ‘—then cast judgement aside. If you can’t manage that—leave.’

He meant it.

Luke had long ago learnt not to judge and to keep his own feelings very much in check, and it would take everything he had in him to maintain that today.

‘I was just—’ Heather attempted.

‘Well, please don’t,’ Luke interrupted.

Heather looked over at Paul and they shared a glance. Luke had worked at the Royal for just over two years now. He was never the sunniest of people but he rarely snapped and his mood seemed particularly dark today.

The ambulance arrived and as Luke opened the doors he saw that Anya was being given cardiac massage by a paramedic and that a sun-tanned man was shouting orders in a strong Californian accent. He informed Luke, only when asked, that his name was Vince and that he was Anya’s private physician.

Luke already knew.

And he hated that man more than anyone could possibly imagine.

‘What’s the story?’ Luke asked him, as the paramedics worked skilfully on the unconscious woman while they wheeled her in and Luke pulled on a gown and gloves.

‘She must have taken some sleeping tablets,’ Vince said.

It was a vague response but, with time of the essence, for now Luke ignored him. Instead, he listened to Albert, one of the paramedics, who relayed far more information than the private physician seemed willing to give.

‘She was found unconscious by her daughter at six a.m.,’ Albert said, as they moved Anya over to the resuscitation bed.

‘Semiconscious,’ Vince corrected.

‘The daughter, Scarlet, is hysterical,’ Albert said. ‘It was hard to get any information out of her. Apparently Anya was given an opiate reversal but then vomited and went into respiratory and then cardiac arrest.’

‘What has she taken?’ Luke asked Vince, but any clear information remained unforthcoming.

‘We’re not sure.’

Albert gave Luke a wide-eyed look, which he took as meaning that the paramedics had had as much trouble extracting details.

Paul took over the cardiac massage as Albert relayed the rest of what he knew. ‘There were no bottles or syringes and she had been intubated before we arrived.’

Oh, so they’d had a little tidy up, Luke thought, and he looked over to Vince as he listened to Anya’s chest. ‘What medication is she on?’ Luke asked.

Vince gave Luke a short list that consisted of antianxiety medications and some light sleeping tablets.

'So why are there no bottles or packets to be found?' Luke pushed.

'I give Anya her medication,' Vince answered coolly. 'I also have her on a strict regime of nutrients …'

'We'll get to them later,' Luke snapped, as he started delivering vital drugs that might reverse anything Anya could have taken. 'Any opiates?'

'Only when her back injury is exacerbated.'

It would take pliers to extract any useful information from him, Luke was sure. 'Get a toxicology screen,' Luke said to Barbara, who was pulling blood as he listened to Anya's chest.

'Her chest sounds terrible.' Luke was very concerned that the tube might be somewhat blocked. 'I want to replace the tube.' He wasn't happy that the right size had been inserted or that, given Anya had vomited, the tube was clear, so he decided to reintubate her.

'Watch the vocal cords!' Vince warned.

The billion-dollar vocal cords!

Luke did not look up but Heather swallowed as she watched Luke's jaw clamp down as he was delivered an unnecessary order.

Luke did not pause in his treatment plan, he just carried on with the procedure and then secured the tube, but he offered two words in response to a very unwelcome guest in his resuscitation

room.

'Get out.'

The celebrity physician did not.

Luke repeated his command, but added a couple of expletives this time, and everyone startled because Luke rarely showed emotion. He never really swore or raised his voice. He didn't need to assert himself angrily. He just chose to now.

No one present could even guess at Luke's true loathing for this man.

Luke listened to Anya's chest again and, happy that the tube was in the correct position and that her air entry was better, he pulled off his stethoscope and asked Vince to repeat whatever it was he had just mumbled.

'I'm not leaving Anya,' he said.

'Oh, but you are,' Luke responded. 'Unless you can tell me, right now, exactly what Anya has taken, and why it took so long for you to get her here, you are to leave my area now.'

Foolishly he did not.

David, the anaesthetist, arrived then and took over the care of Anya's airway. Luke called for more anti-opiate and inserted that into Anya's IV line and then awaited its effect.

'Can we can call for Security?' Luke said.

'Security?' Heather checked, knowing that they were busy outside and wondering why they might be needed in here.

'I want him out,' Luke responded, and as he did so he briefly turned to the unhelpful and unwelcome visitor in his emergency

room who was diverting his concentration yet still refused to move.

Luke kicked at a silver metal trolley. It clattered into a wall and the implication was clear—Anya's private physician would be leaving by any method that Luke saw fit to use.

Paul's assessment had been right after all—the place was about to blow, only not for the reasons anyone had been expecting!

What the hell was going on with Luke?

'You make me sick!' Luke shouted, and, wisely perhaps, Vince chose to leave.

Everyone glanced at each other but Luke made no comment. He simply did all he could to focus his attention fully on Anya, who was on the very brink of death.

It was a long and lengthy resuscitation.

The drugs were reversed and her heart started beating but she had aspirated too. It was more than an hour before they had Anya under control. Then it was another fifteen minutes before she started to rouse and began gagging at the tube.

'It's okay, Anya,' Luke said, and then blew out a long breath because for a while there he hadn't thought that it would be. 'You're in hospital.'

Anya was fighting and confused, which were good signs—all her limbs were moving and her terrified eyes briefly met Luke's before David put Anya into an induced coma.

'I want her up on ICU,' David said, and looked over at Heather,

who was just returning from a lengthy phone call with Admin. ‘Can you call them and ask how long until they’re ready and then arrange to clear the corridor?’

Heather nodded. ‘I’ll get onto it now. Luke, will you speak to the press?’

Luke hated how normal policy seemed to have been thrown out of the window. He was certain, quite certain, without checking, that the department would have seen several drug overdoses overnight. He just loathed how everything had changed simply because of who Anya was.

‘I’ll speak with Anya’s family first,’ Luke said in response to her request.

Even Heather had the grace to blush. ‘I’ve put them all in the staffroom.’

‘Who?’ Luke checked.

‘Her manager, the vocal coach, her doctor, her bodyguards. Scarlet’s in there too.’

‘Scarlet’s her daughter,’ Paul added, because unless it was rugby or medicine, no doubt Luke wouldn’t have a clue who she was.

‘Okay, I’ll speak with her now,’ Luke said, as he binned his gloves and gown.

He walked out and although the department had grown busy in the hour or so that he had been working on Anya, all eyes were on Luke as he walked past. Everyone wanted to know what was going on and how Anya was.

Luke didn't stop to enlighten them.

Instead, he walked around to the staffroom and saw that Anya's huge entourage were all there on their phones. As Luke went to go in and speak with the daughter, one of them had the nerve to ask for his ID.

'It's your ID that I need here,' Luke responded, and with that line he warned them how any dealings with him would be.

'How is she?' a frantic woman asked.

'We've been waiting for more than an hour for an update,' another person said.

Luke just ignored them and walked into the very full staffroom. 'I'm Luke Edwards, I've been taking care of Anya. I'd like to speak with the immediate family.'

And there, in the midst of it all, she was.

Scarlet.

Still beautiful, Luke thought.

She was sitting, trembling, with her head in her hands. Even her cloud of black ringlets was shaking as her knees bobbed up and down. She seemed oblivious to her surroundings but then she suddenly looked up and her already pale face bleached further in recognition.

'Luke?'

'Luke Edwards,' he said, doing all he could to keep them anonymous, to not let everyone present know the agony this was. 'I've been treating your mother. Are there any other relatives?' Luke checked.

Scarlet shook her head and opened her mouth to speak but no words came out so she shook her head again but then managed two words. 'Just me.'

'Then I'd like to speak to you alone.'

'We need to know what's going on,' a woman said. 'I'm Sonia, Anya's manager.'

'I'm speaking now with her next of kin.'

Luke's stance was not one to be argued with. It wasn't just that he was tall and broad—after all, there were far more burly bodyguards than he. More it was his implacable expression and cool disdain that had the manager step back and the path cleared for him to leave.

Scarlet was seriously shaken; her legs felt as if they were made only of liquid.

She was about to be told that her mother was dead, Scarlet was quite sure of that.

'This way,' Luke said, and down another corridor they went, and when she needed him to take her arm, instead he walked on briskly.

Luke opened the door to his office and she could see his grim expression.

She was dead, Scarlet was sure.

Luke was here.

Scarlet was very used to feeling conflicted but it was immeasurable now.

She stepped into his office and the first thing that hit her was

that it was so quiet.

So completely quiet and calm that after the chaos of that morning the stillness hit her like a wall.

For the first time since she had found her mother, there was, apart from her own rapid breathing, the sound of silence.

Stepping into her mother's hotel bedroom had been something she would never forget.

'Mom?'

She had crept in quietly and seen her mother lying in her bed, face down. 'Mom?'

She had tried to turn her over but Scarlet was of slight build and she hadn't been able to.

She had screamed for help and after a couple of moments a shocked butler had arrived.

From then on it had been chaos. Hotel staff had started to appear. Vince, her mother's physician, had arrived dressed, wearing trousers and a shirt, and Scarlet couldn't understand why he had taken a moment to get dressed.

She had stood back, sobbing, watching chaos unfold, and finally had picked up her cell phone and dialled the UK emergency number.

She shouldn't have rung it, she had been told.

There was already a private ambulance on the way.

Scarlet opened her mouth to ask the inevitable question —'Is she …?' But her throat had been dry and scratched from screaming and no words had come out.

Luke could see her confusion and anguish.

'Take a seat,' Luke said, and he turned the engaged light on above his door that warned people he was not to be disturbed.

Still Scarlet stood there.

She was going to hell for all that she'd done, Scarlet knew. In fact, she was going to hell twice because, instead of asking how her mother was, instead of begging him to tell her the news, she blurted out what was now at the forefront on her mind.

'I'm sorry …'

'Just take a seat,' Luke said.

She went to take a seat, but the chair seemed a very long way off and Luke's hand went on her shoulder to guide her towards his desk, but then he changed his mind.

His hand slid from the nearest shoulder to the farthest arm and he turned her into him. Luke's arms wrapped around her and he pulled her right into his chest and he held her so tightly that for a moment nothing remained but them.

There was the scent she had missed, the body she had craved and the understanding that Scarlet had never known till him.

It was an embrace she had been absolutely sure she would never, ever feel again.

'I'm so, so sorry,' Scarlet wept.

'It's okay, Scarlet.' That lovely deep, calm voice hushed her. Luke's chest was such a wonderful place to lean. To feel his breath on her cheek and his hand stroke the back of her hair was a solace Scarlet had never thought she might know again. 'I think

she's going to be okay,' Luke said.

He was talking about her mother.

While she was sobbing for them, for their beautiful, painful past and all that they had lost.

CHAPTER TWO

CALM, PROFESSIONAL AND DETACHED.

That was how Luke had intended to be with Scarlet as he updated her on her mother's condition. The entire walk from the staffroom, right the way to his office, Luke had been telling himself that he was more than capable of being just that.

Luke had learnt a long time ago to push emotions aside—with patients and their relatives, with his own relatives too.

He had just never quite mastered objectivity when Scarlet was around.

It was something he knew he had better start working on.

Just not today.

Now the very last thing Scarlet needed was calm, professional and detached, but more to the point the impact of actually seeing her again meant that Luke could be none of those things.

Just yet.

As he pulled her into his arms, the embrace was as necessary for Luke as it was for Scarlet. There was so much anger and pain inside both of them. Their traumatic past was perhaps insurmountable but he dealt with the present now.

She was here. Not by the method he would have preferred—Luke had hoped Scarlet would contact him before she'd left for America today—but, yes, she was here, and so Luke held her in his arms and smelt again her hair, fighting not to kiss her salty

tears away.

How messed up was that? Luke thought to himself.

He'd had a few months to prepare for the possibility of seeing her again. Since Anya's UK tour had been announced late last year, the thought that their paths might cross had been constantly on his mind. Since Anya and her entourage had touched down in England he had been wondering if Scarlet would call, if their history meant as much to Scarlet as it did to him. And, since seven this morning, when the news had broken that Anya was in an ambulance, being blue-lighted towards the Royal, he had dealt with the knowledge that he'd face Scarlet today.

Every preconceived response to her that he'd had crumbled.

Yes, there was an awful lot that needed to be discussed but Luke knew that Anya wasn't the only vulnerable, critical casualty that had been bought into his department today. Scarlet was another and, at a very personal level, he cared about her so very much more. Luke didn't want to let her go because, when he did so, back to her world Scarlet would return and so Luke took another moment to hold her.

Scarlet held him too.

She didn't just lean on him, she had slipped her hands into his jacket and wrapped her arms around his solid waist and just breathed in the delicious scent of him. Tangy, musky, male. It was a scent that she had yearned for and never forgotten and one that had been made familiar again now.

How could it be that he felt the same to her hands?

After all that had gone on, how, on this day, could Luke's arms be the ones that were holding her up?

As she was in England she had hoped that they might meet, but she had expected harsh, accusing words to be hurled at her. Words that he had every right to deliver, but instead of that he held her and made the horrible world go away for a moment.

As she had sat in the staffroom, waiting for news, Scarlet had blocked out the sounds of the people around her. Vince had been trying to speak with her, telling her what to say, insisting that her version of events wasn't quite correct. Her mother's manager, Sonia, had demanded to know where Scarlet had got to yesterday and why she hadn't been there to see her mother go on stage.

None of them knew about the row she'd had with her mother in the early hours and Scarlet had sat revisiting that as she'd done the best to block everyone else out.

And then in the midst of the madness she had heard the calm deepness of Luke's voice.

Her frantic heart seemed to have stopped beating for a second.

Oh, she had known that Luke was a doctor but she hadn't known he worked in London. When they had met he had been here for an interview but had been unsure if he'd take the job.

It had never entered her head that Luke might be here in the hospital and be the doctor fighting to save her mother's life.

Yet he was.

When Scarlet had looked up she had felt the very same jolt that had run through her the night he had walked into the club

and their worlds had changed for ever.

He'd been wearing a suit that night and he was wearing one now.

It was the little things she noticed and remembered.

The other stuff was way too insurmountable for now.

And, as Luke had the first night they had met, when she clung to him he pulled back.

'Tell me.' Scarlet held him tighter, not ready to let go. If the news was bad, and given the morning's events she expected it to be, it was like this she wanted to hear it.

'She's doing better.'

Scarlet held her breath.

'Your mother briefly opened her eyes,' Luke explained. 'And she was fighting the breathing tube. That's good. For now she's been placed in an induced coma.'

'Is she going to die?' Scarlet asked.

'I don't think so but she came very close.'

'I know,' Scarlet said. 'I called an ambulance.'

'That's good.'

'You told me the number.'

She took a splinter of their time and they both examined it for a moment. A little shard of conversation that, had it come from another, would have been swept away, never to be examined again, but both now recalled that tiny memory with absolute clarity.

Scarlet looked up but not into his eyes.

Never again, Scarlet knew, would she be able to meet that deep, chocolate-brown gaze. There was just too much regret and shame for that. Instead, she looked at that lovely unshaven jaw and the deep red of his mouth that had once delivered paradise.

And Luke, feeling her eyes scan his mouth, despite the circumstance of this meeting, wanted to lower his to meet hers.

It was as simple as that.

But those days were gone and so, because he had to, he let her go. 'Have a seat,' Luke said in his best doctor's voice.

Calm, professional, detached.

If he was going to do this properly then he could be no other way.

Scarlet remained standing as Luke took off his jacket, threw it onto a chair and then went around the desk and sat down, waiting for her to do the same.

'Tell me what happened.' Luke kicked the interview off.

'I told you,' Scarlet said. 'I called an ambulance. Vince had called for backup but they were taking for ever and—'

'Scarlet,' Luke interrupted, 'we need to start at the beginning. Before this morning when did you last see your mother?'

'Last night,' Scarlet said, and watched as Luke picked up a pen and jotted something down. 'There was a party to celebrate the end of her tour and …' Scarlet shrugged but didn't finish.

'And how was she?' Luke asked.

'I didn't make it to the party,' Scarlet said. 'I saw her back at the hotel.'

‘What time was that?’

‘About midnight.’

‘And how was she?’

‘Tired.’

‘Who was the last person to see her?’

‘Me,’ Scarlet said. ‘I think.’

‘Around midnight?’

‘Around one. Can you stop taking notes?’ Scarlet asked. ‘I can’t talk to you when you’re writing things down.’

‘Scarlet, these details are important,’ Luke said, but he did put down his pen.

He’d been using it as a distraction.

Not a word of this conversation would he ever forget.

‘You found her?’ Luke checked, and Scarlet gave a tense nod.

‘What time was that?’

‘Just before six.’

‘Were the two of you sharing a room?’

‘No.’ Scarlet frowned.

‘Were you staying in the same suite?’

‘No.’

‘So why were you in your mother’s room at six a.m.?’

‘I just went in to check on her.’

‘Why?’ Luke persisted.

‘Because I was worried about her.’

‘Why?’ Luke pushed, but Scarlet did not elaborate. ‘Come on, Scarlet. I can’t help if you don’t tell me.’

‘You can’t help me.’

‘I’m talking about your mother!’ Luke’s voice rose, just a fraction. It had to if they were going to stay on track. That little pull back served to remind not just Scarlet but himself that this was work. He watched her eyes fill with tears at the slight reprimand but he had to push through. When no further information was forthcoming he chose to be direct.

‘Has your mother been depressed lately?’

‘No, no.’ Scarlet shook her head. ‘It’s nothing like that. She just took too much.’

‘How, when her physician keeps her pills?’

‘She keeps some on her,’ Scarlet said.

Luke honestly didn’t know if Scarlet was covering up for her mother or simply had no idea how serious the problem was.

‘Scarlet.’ Luke tried to meet her gaze. ‘Why did you go in to check on your mum? I’m not going to write anything down. Just tell me.’

‘I was worried.’

‘More so than usual?’ Luke checked, and she nodded. ‘I need to know why.’

‘We had a row.’

‘About?’

‘Please don’t ask, Dr Edwards.’ It was Scarlet now who rebuked him, just a little but enough for him to get what she meant—if there were lines that could not be crossed, if he wanted to keep this professional, then, right now, the answer to

that question could not be discussed. 'We had an argument.'

'Okay.'

'They want my mother to be moved to another hospital,' Scarlet said.

Luke had guessed that they might. 'Well, as of now, the only place your mother is being moved to is Intensive Care. Here.'

'They think that she needs to be somewhere more used to dealing with …' Scarlet stopped what she had about been to say. Luke loathed the word 'celebrity'.

'She's in the best place and in no condition to be moved,' Luke said. 'As her daughter, you get to make that call.'

'I don't think so.' Scarlet gave a worried shake of her head.

'I know so,' Luke responded.

'But she has Vince. He deals with all that type of thing.'

'Yes, well, Vince is going to be a bit busy for the foreseeable future. After I've spoken with you, believe me, I'm going to be speaking with him and getting a far more accurate history than the one he gave me earlier. I may also be speaking with the police so trust me when I say that I'll back your call if you want your mother kept here.'

'Luke, please, don't bring the police into this.' Scarlet started to cry and not very quietly.

He sat and watched unmoved. *Those* tears did not move him and certainly he would not be swayed by hype and celebrity status when he made his decisions.

He just needed more facts but few were forthcoming.

His pager trilled and Luke checked it. Seeing that it was Heather, he made a phone call and rolled his eyes as she told him that the press were becoming more insistent. 'Just say no comment,' Luke responded tartly. 'How hard is it to say that?' He let out a tense breath. 'Unless there is a change in Anya's condition, or you need me for another patient, you're not to disturb me. I'm speaking with a relative now.'

He looked over and saw that in the couple of minutes it had taken to speak with Heather, Scarlet had stopped crying long enough to take out her phone. Luke watched with mounting irritation. They were speaking about her mother's near-death and yet Scarlet was checking the news reports and quickly scrolling through social media!

'What are you doing?' Luke asked.

'It's everywhere!' Scarlet said, but then she really started to cry and they weren't false tears this time. As she put the phone down on the desk, Luke saw an image, and he reached over and picked it up.

The photo that he saw was of Scarlet. She was dressed in a pair of red pyjamas and her feet were bare as she stood on the street beside the ambulance that her mother was being loaded into. Two bodyguards were restraining her from climbing in. Her black hair was a mop of wild curls, her usually pale skin was red from crying and there was a look of sheer terror on her face.

Luke looked up from Scarlet's phone and at the woman who now sat on the other side of his desk—she was the perfectly

groomed star in crisis now! Scarlet was wearing tight leather leggings and a tight black top. Over that there was a large silver leather jacket that looked as if it had been thrown on at the last minute. Her black curls were now perfectly tousled. Luke knew, though, from very personal experience, that the photo was a truer portrayal of Scarlet's morning locks.

He pulled away from that memory; instead, he looked back at the phone and the image that had been captured by the press.

It showed a rare moment of reality in a very unrealistic world and this would be the photo that would dominate, Luke was sure.

Scarlet looking less than perfect.

It was the Scarlet he far preferred.

'It's going to be worse than ever now …' Scarlet could not stop crying. Yes, she was terrified for her mother, but she'd had so much hanging on today, so many plans in place. There wasn't a hope of escaping from the press now and, Scarlet knew, now more than ever her mother needed her to be near.

'They're going to make my life hell.'

'Don't feed them, then,' Luke said. Her head was in her hands, her fingers were scrunched in her hair, but she lifted her face and gave him a scornful look as he continued to speak. 'You don't have to respond to the press, just focus on your mother and yourself.'

'What would you know?' Scarlet scoffed.

'Oh, I know,' Luke said. It was pointless to sit and pretend that he could take a comprehensive history from Scarlet and

leave the personal aside. 'David, the anaesthetist, will take a more thorough history once your mother has been transferred to ICU.' He handed her back her phone, and as he did so he looked at Scarlet's slender, manicured fingers and remembered hands that were as smooth as a kitten's paws.

No, anger at her spoiled, pampered life didn't now gnaw at him; instead, it saddened him that that funny, adventurous mind had been locked away for so long.

Yes, the world was supposedly Scarlet's oyster, but Luke knew that since the day she had been born, her life had been magnified by a lens.

'You're handing me over.'

'I'm handing your mother's care over,' Luke said. 'That's normal policy when a patient is moved. I need to get back out there, Scarlet. I have patients to see.'

'What about me?'

Typical, Luke thought, but, though he tried to generate anger, though he did his best to remind himself of the spoiled princess Scarlet was and the absolute diva she could be, he failed.

'What about us?' Scarlet said.

'There's no us,' Luke lied.

He *was* angry now as he recalled all she had done, but instead of standing to leave, he sat there.

And so did she.

They sat in the silence of his office and as the world carried on outside, both went back to a time when things had seemed

so different.

When hope had arrived in both their hearts.

Even if it killed them to do so, both remembered.

CHAPTER THREE

'I'VE GOT A HEADACHE.' Anya closed her eyes and massaged her temples. 'I'm going to have to go back to the hotel and see Vince.'

Scarlet frowned in concern and said all the right things to her mother but inside all she felt was relief. All she wanted was to get away from the noise of the club and close her eyes and go to sleep. It was after midnight and Scarlet had been up since seven. She had given interviews and done a shoot at London Bridge, and the rest of the day had been spent propping up her mother, telling her that she could get through the show.

'We'll get you back,' Scarlet said, and nodded to her mother's bodyguard.

'What would I do without you?' Anya asked, and Scarlet felt the knot that had lived in her chest for more than ten years now tighten a notch. And then, because she was Anya, her mother changed her mind about leaving when a young guy came over to their table with a drink and told her how amazing her performance that night had been. 'I'll just stay for one more,' Anya said.

Scarlet moved over to give the young man room to sit next to her mother but then she stood up.

She saw the exit door and started to walk towards it.

Scarlet wanted fresh air.

More than that she wanted to run.

'Hey, Scarlet …' A hand was on her arm and she turned to the face of one of her mother's bodyguards. 'I'll send Troy outside with you.'

She didn't want Troy.

Scarlet didn't want anyone, she just wanted one day, one moment to be allowed out in the world alone.

She didn't want to be here in this club.

And then she looked up and saw a man who looked as if he didn't want to be there either.

He was taller than most and, unlike others, he was wearing a suit. His hair was dark and as he raked a hand through it, it remained a touch messy. He was smart yet dishevelled, present but unimpressed, and there was something about him that had Scarlet intrigued.

'We're all leaving now,' Troy suddenly informed her. 'Your mother's ready to go.'

'I'm going to stay on.'

It was a rare request.

An almost unheard-of request, in fact, and one that did not go down too well.

'I don't need your drama now, Scarlet,' Anya hissed. 'I've been working all night and my head feels as if it's about to explode …'

'Vince will sort that out,' Scarlet said.

It ended the conversation.

Scarlet had known that it would.

Anya could stay and argue for ten minutes with her daughter or head back to Vince.

How Scarlet loathed that man!

And so, as her mother left the building, Scarlet remained.

Not alone, of course. Three bodyguards were still present, but for now at least she was minus Mom.

Luke, even before they had arrived in the club, had had enough.

It was his younger brother's twenty-first birthday and Luke really didn't want to be here, but up until now he'd had no real choice.

He'd bought dinner and had done the cursory pub crawl and had decided that he'd buy the first round here, stay for a little while and then disappear.

It wasn't a regular nightclub. Marcus's friend knew someone and had got the boisterous group into some very trendy, exclusive basement club.

At twenty-eight years of age, Luke felt old.

He'd always been more sensible than most, more responsible than most, and this place tested that to the limit. Everyone was off their heads and the noise just ate at him.

Still, it was his brother's birthday so Luke had gone along with things till now. He had been down from Oxford anyway, in London for an interview, and at lunchtime he had checked into a hotel.

His interview had been scheduled for four, which should have

given him plenty of time to meet his brother and friend at seven. Except the interview had gone really well. So well that not only had he been extensively shown through the department, his potential new boss had asked him to wait back so he could meet a colleague who was in Theatre. Of course Luke had agreed. This was a senior registrar's position with a junior consultancy at the end of it at the London Royal after all.

There hadn't been time to get back to the hotel to change so he had arrived half an hour late to meet his brother and had felt on the back foot ever since. Especially here. Everyone was dressed in far less than a suit and drinking bright cocktails and were high, if not on life, just high.

'Nice to be single again?' Marcus asked, as Luke bought the drinks.

'Actually, yes,' Luke said, though it was wasted here, he thought privately.

Marcus and his friends hit the dance floor, which actually consisted of most of the place, and Luke took a mouthful of his drink and leant against the bar. He thought about the day he'd just had.

He wanted the job.

And that might prove to be a problem.

It hadn't been a difficult break up.

A painless procedure might be the best description.

Luke and Angie had been going out for a couple of years and had been about to move in together. Angie worked at the Royal

and had told him about the upcoming role. But within a week of Luke applying, their relationship had finally come undone.

There just wasn't the passion that should be there for a couple who were about to move in together. Added to that was Luke's refusal to, as Angie had annoying called it, share.

Only she hadn't been talking about the last chocolate in the box!

'I know they're in there,' Angie would insist.

'What?'

'Feelings.' Angie's response had been exasperated. 'Emotions.'

'We don't all have to ride the roller-coaster, Angie. Just because I don't …' Luke had bitten his tongue rather than admit that yes, there were hurts there. Angie would have far preferred that he rise to the bait but Luke had consistently refused to. 'I guess I'm not messed up enough for a psychiatrist to date,' Luke had offered.

Luke was straight down the line and dealt with whatever life threw in his path without fuss. He saw no need for prolonged discussions as to how the past had shaped today. He had no wish to come home from a long and difficult shift and to share how it felt to lose a four-year-old or whatever agony the day had brought.

How he felt was his concern, he'd regularly told Angie. Amicably they had agreed that opposites did not attract and had quietly broken up.

There was one thing, though, that Luke needed to do if he was

going to take the role at the Royal—and Luke was quite sure that it was his. He needed to be sure, very sure that Angie would be okay having her ex working at the same hospital.

Luke took out his phone and saw that there was a text from Angie, asking how the interview had gone, but it had been sent three hours ago.

It was far too late to return it now.

They were exes after all.

'Well?'

A soft voice, very close to his ear, pulled Luke out of vague introspection and he caught the heady scent of summer in the midst of winter as he turned to the sight of a young woman.

She had long, black, curly hair and huge navy eyes. Her face was incredibly pale but those large navy eyes were alert and smiling. Her lips were full and she wore dark red lipstick and not much else, just a tiny, tight, red dress.

'Well, what?' Luke asked in answer.

'Aren't you going to buy me a drink?'

'No.' Luke shook his head and tried to gauge her age. He was usually good at it but with her it was an impossible ask. Her skin was smoother than any he had seen and yet her eyes were wise. 'Are you even old enough to be drinking?' Luke checked.

'Of course I am.' Scarlet frowned at the odd question. Everyone knew how old she was. A fortnight ago she had turned twenty-three and it had been a massive affair—Anya had bought her onto the stage in Paris and had sung 'Happy Birthday' to her.

‘I’m Lucy,’ Scarlet said, just to test his reaction and to make sure that this man really didn’t know who she was.

‘I’m Luke,’ he responded. ‘And I’m still not going to buy you a drink.’ Luke had already decided that he was going back to the hotel.

The bartender came over. ‘Hey, Scarlet! Can I get you anything?’

‘Scarlet?’ Luke frowned and watched a small blush spread up her neck and to her cheeks. ‘What happened to Lucy?’

‘That’s my …’ Scarlet didn’t finish her sentence. She didn’t want to tell him about the alias that she used for hotel bookings and things. There was a heady thrill that Luke really had no idea who she was.

It was unbelievably refreshing.

‘I’ll have a glass of champagne,’ Scarlet said to the bartender, instead of answering Luke’s question.

‘Put it on mine,’ Luke said.

‘Thank you.’

‘No problem.’ Luke drained the last of his drink and turned to sort out the bill. ‘See you,’ he said.

‘You’re going?’

‘God, yes,’ Luke said as the music pumped.

‘That’s not very polite! You can’t buy me a drink and then leave me alone.’

Luke conceded with a small smile. ‘Drink fast, then.’

She took the tiniest sip.

‘And another,’ Luke said, and then he started to laugh as Lucy—or was it Scarlet?—pretended to take another tiny sip.

They were, it would seem, going to be here for a very long time.

‘Who are you here with?’ she asked.

‘My brother and his friends,’ Luke said. ‘It’s his twenty-first.’

‘And why are you wearing a suit?’ Scarlet asked, and then took another tiny, tiny sip.

‘To ensure that I look like an idiot.’

‘Well, I think that you look …’ She looked over his body and then up to his pale face. He was clean-shaven but there was a dark shadow on his jaw, and his eyes, when she met them properly, were a very deep shade of brown. So dark that she couldn’t see his pupils. ‘I think you’re beautiful.’

‘I don’t think I’ve been called that before,’ Luke said, smiling at her Californian accent. ‘Though I’m quite sure you’ve been called it many times.’

Now Luke looked at her properly, in the way he’d been wanting to since he had turned around to her voice.

That dress showed far too much pale skin and the red stilettos she wore looked a little too big for her skinny legs. His eyes moved to her face and she was way more than beautiful. That fluffy hair was at odds with her delicate features and her mouth was very full and red.

A little too full perhaps, Luke thought, wondering if she’d had fillers, but, God, she was surely way too young for all that sort

of thing.

He wanted to kiss her.

That in itself was a rather bizarre thought for Luke. While he thought about sex for approximately fifty seconds of every minute, to want to reach over and kiss, simply kiss, a virtual stranger was something he had never felt before.

Luke checked his memory.

Nope, not once.

This was a new feeling indeed.

'So who are you here with?' he asked.

'A few people.' Scarlet shrugged but was saved from elaborating when one of his brother's friends came over. 'Hey, Doc,' he said, and picked up his drink, but then he gave Luke an odd, wide-eyed look and left them.

'Doc?' Scarlet checked.

'Doctor,' Luke said, and told her a little bit more about himself. 'Which is the reason I'm wearing a suit. I was at an interview earlier.'

'Doctor?' Scarlet frowned and, almost imperceptibly, screwed up her nose, as if he had said that he specialised in sewerage and had just dropped in for a drink midshift.

'What do you do?' Luke asked her.

Scarlet looked at the bubbles fizzing up in her still very full glass and it matched her veins because they seemed to be fizzing too with excitement. Luke really didn't know who she was, which meant she could be anything she wanted to be.

Anything at all.

But what?

And then she remembered her time in Africa and a very far-off dream, and she brought it to life but with a little slant.

'I'm an OB nurse,' Scarlet said.

'Where?' Luke asked, rather hoping it was at the Royal!

'Back in LA.'

'You'd be called a midwife here.'

'A midwife?' Scarlet checked. 'A what?'

'A midwife,' Luke said, and watched as she started to laugh.

He didn't get a chance to play with words and, oh, they wanted to play with words, but his brother was heading over and Luke had no intention of sticking around for a drunken conversation with him. 'I've got to go,' Luke said, and as he moved to his full height from leaning against the bar he realised just how tiny she was because even though she was wearing stilettos he towered over her.

'So,' she asked, 'where are you moving on to?'

'Moving on?' Luke checked, and then realised that she was asking him what club he was off to next. 'Bed.'

'Yum!'

She took another sip of her drink and met his eyes. Luke had never met anyone like her in his life and, leaving aside the flirty offer, he actually wanted to know her some more, but well away from this dive.

'I meant …' Luke said, then gave up trying to correct her. 'Can

I *Call the Midwife?'*

Clearly she didn't get his little joke because she frowned at his invitation to get in touch.

'It doesn't matter,' Luke said. She was from another part of the globe after all and, yes, he was going back to the hotel, he decided, as an overly friendly Marcus joined them.

'Can I have a word?' Marcus asked, slapping him on the shoulder.

'Sure,' Luke agreed, knowing full well that Marcus would be asking for some more money to be put behind the bar before Luke left. Marcus was studying medicine and was perpetually broke. It annoyed Luke. He himself had worked all his way through med school but he chose to say nothing tonight as it was Marcus's birthday.

But as they pulled away from Scarlet, and Luke went to get out his wallet, it turned out that Marcus had other things on his mind.

'How did you two get talking?' Marcus asked.

'What?' Luke frowned. 'Do you know her?' he checked, wondering if she was cutting one of Marcus's friend's lunch. 'Is she here with—'

'You don't know who she is, do you?' Marcus grinned. 'Do you ever come out from behind that stethoscope of yours? That's Scarlet.'

'I know that.'

'Anya's daughter.'

'Oh!'

Yes, Luke did know who Anya was. After all, she had been famous before he'd even been born, not that Luke paid much attention to such things, but he had seen Anya and her entourage leave the club. Now that he thought about it, he did recall that Anya had a daughter who went everywhere with her.

He glanced over and saw that Scarlet was trying to get away from some loud, obnoxious guy who was trying to drag her over to dance, and two burly men were moving in.

She was here with her own bodyguards, Luke realised, not the vague friends that she had alluded to. Now he understood Marcus's friend's odd look when he had come over.

Scarlet was a star.

'She seems nice.' Luke shrugged. She had. 'Anyway, I'm heading off. I'll go and settle the bar tab and put some more behind. You have a good night.'

As Luke went to the bar Scarlet came over.

'Dance?' she offered.

'I'm just leaving.'

'Just once dance,' Scarlet persisted, but he shook his head.

'Not with your bodyguards watching.'

'You know who I am now, don't you?'

'Not really,' Luke said. 'I know two of your names and I've heard of your mother. You're not a midwife, I take it?' She shook her head and Luke glanced down at the bill he had just been given. 'There should be champagne on there,' he said to the bartender.

‘It’s on the house,’ the bartender said, and smiled at Scarlet as it dawned on Luke that she didn’t have to pay.

Scarlet’s presence in the club was more than enough.

It annoyed Luke.

Not that Scarlet had been playing him along—now that he understood why, it didn’t annoy him in the least—but he wanted to have bought her that drink.

‘Add it,’ Luke said, and handed back the bill.

‘Sure.’ The bartender shrugged.

He turned around and Scarlet was still there. ‘Take me with you,’ she said. Her arms went around his neck and Luke went to peel them off but then he heard the desperation in her voice. ‘Please.’ Scarlet closed her eyes. She was so tired of the noise and no doubt drama would await her when she returned to the hotel. It felt like for ever that she had been trying to escape. She looked up at Luke and he was so calm and so slightly bored with it all, as was she, and she gazed into his beautiful eyes. ‘I’ll make it worth your while.’

‘You don’t need to offer sex, Scarlet.’

‘I want to spend some time with you.’

‘Why don’t you ask me to take you for dinner?’

‘Dinner?’ Scarlet frowned.

‘Well, it’s nearly one, so I’m not sure where.’ Luke smiled but he let her hands remain around his neck and his hands moved to her hips. The urge to kiss her was back.

‘I haven’t eaten since breakfast,’ Scarlet admitted.

It was almost that time again, Luke thought, but then he pushed that aside. Unlike most men, the thought of a one-night stand didn't thrill him—his father's perpetually roving eye meant that he'd lived with the fallout for long enough to learn from James Edwards's mistakes.

'You really want to take me for dinner?'

'I do.'

'I'm sorry I lied to you,' Scarlet said. 'I just wanted to see if you'd like me if I was normal.'

'You are normal,' Luke said.

As was his body's reaction to her.

There was a need, an absolute need to get her away from here, to just talk, to get to know her some more and, yes, to get to that mouth.

'Can you lose your bodyguards?' Luke asked. He couldn't stand the thought of them overseeing things. He wanted Scarlet away from the hype and he knew he would take good care of her. Judging by her previous offer to make it worth his while, they didn't take proper care of her either.

'I can't.' She shook her head. 'You don't get how it is—I can't go anywhere without them.'

Luke didn't play games.

Ever.

'Can you lose your bodyguards?' he asked again, and Scarlet heard the warning. If she said no, he'd be gone.

'They'll dial 911 if I disappear.'

‘Well, they shan’t get very far if they do,’ Luke said, and he told her the UK emergency number. ‘I’ll take care of you but I’m not buying you dinner with an audience.’

He *wanted* to take her for dinner!

‘I could go to the loo and try to …’

‘Climb out of the window?’ Luke scoffed at her plans. ‘Why don’t you simply tell them that you’re having a night off?’ But then he halted as he realised, for the first time, that life in her world wasn’t that simple.

‘Please take me for dinner,’ she said.

‘I’ll go outside and wait down the back,’ Luke offered. ‘If you can’t get out of the loo there will be an emergency exit. But,’ he warned, ‘if you tell your bodyguards what you’re up to, if I even get a hint that they’re around, I’ll hand you back over to them. I’m not going to be playing your celebrity game, Scarlet.’

Luke meant it.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT THE HELL was he doing? Luke thought as he stood in a cold, dark, basement alley next to bins and looked up at the tiny windows.

She'd never get through them, Luke realised.

Maybe she had changed her mind, Luke decided, because it had surely been ten or so minutes that he had been waiting. He was just about to give in when he saw one red shoe poke out of a very small gap in a window, followed by one skinny, pale leg and then another.

'I've got you,' Luke said, as he guided her legs out and tried not to notice that her dress was bunching up. He moved his hands from her flesh and then held her by the hips and negotiated Scarlet's body out of the small opening. As he dropped her down to the ground he turned her around. She was breathless and Luke could see the exhilaration in her eyes.

Not just that she was free!

Scarlet's dress was ruched up from her rather undignified exit and she could still feel where his hands had made contact with her thighs. Now she faced Luke and, despite his very cool demeanour, Scarlet knew that he was as turned on as she was.

Her hands moved up back around his neck and she moved into him for warmth and for confirmation of his arousal.

'Oh,' Scarlet said.

An odd remark perhaps but she could feel him on the length of her stomach and those hands on her hips let her rest there a moment. His voice when it came was a bit ragged.

'Come on.'

He got the 'Oh' comment. Luke was feeling it too.

That urge to kiss was there and a whole lot of other urges too but a stinking dark alley wasn't at the top of his wish list and her bodyguards would no doubt realise that she was missing some time very soon. So, rather than kiss her, Luke grabbed her hand and they ran up some metal stairs and out onto a seedy street and then turned into another.

Luke hailed a black cab and, a touch breathless, they both climbed in.

He gave the name of a restaurant that he knew stayed open late, which he had been to with friends a couple of times when he'd been in London. It was nice and low-key with booths where they could tuck themselves away and he could get to know her some more.

Luke wanted that.

He really did, but as the taxi took off, the driver glanced in the rear-view mirror and must have seen just who his fare was.

'Scarlet!' He turned and smiled and it annoyed Luke that Scarlet smiled back and that she and the driver started talking about Anya's performance. Was it possible to have a conversation that didn't include her mother?

'Just drop us here,' Luke said, as they reached a busier street.

They walked into a different restaurant from the one he would have chosen but the reaction to her was the same there and they left.

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