

L.A. METRO
RJ NOLAN



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Excerpt

By

RJ Nolan



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Lesbian Fiction: Romance

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CHAPTER 1

A THICK BROWN haze shrouded the upper reaches of LA Metropolitan Hospital. Heat shimmered off the asphalt of the parking lot. As Dr. Kimberly Donovan stepped from her car, the thick air burned her nose and the heat hit her like a wave. *Ah, August in LA. The wonder of smog alerts.* She pushed damp blond hair off her face. Despite the weather and the circumstances that had led to her being here, Kim was happy to be back in California. She was more than ready for a fresh start.

Kim made her way up to psych on the fourth floor. She smiled when she spotted the nameplate outside the door: Dr. Philip Alerman, Chairman of Psychiatry. *Seems moving to a new hospital worked out well for him. Hope it'll work for me too.*

As Kim reached for the door handle, the door swung open.

"Hey, Kim. Welcome to LA Metro. Ready to go to work?" Philip asked.

Kim smiled warmly and shook hands with Philip. "Yes. I'm looking forward to it." His curly brown hair was thinner than Kim remembered when they worked together during her psych residency, but his tall frame was still trim and he wore the same round wire rim glasses. "Thanks for getting my packet expedited with the Credentials Committee. I'm glad there wasn't any problem with the paperwork from Memorial."

Philip shook his head. "After what happened, I don't think Dr. Pruitt would have dared to hold up your paperwork."

Kim scowled as a surge of anger at her former boss filled her. *You don't know him like I do. I wouldn't put it past him.* She sighed, pushing away the unproductive emotion. "You're right.

The sooner I was gone and forgotten, the better he liked it I'm sure."

Philip reached out and squeezed Kim's shoulder. "Don't let it bother you. It's their loss. As I told you on the phone, we're short-staffed and need the help of a competent psychiatrist."

Some of her tension eased and Kim smiled. "Thanks, Philip. I appreciate the support."

"You're welcome," Philip said. He glanced at his watch. "Morning chart review should be just about finished. Let's head for the staff lounge and I'll introduce you around."

Philip led her to a set of double doors that opened into the psych ward. He stopped to enter a code into a keypad next to the door, then turned back to Kim. "The ward clerk will provide you with all the door codes, as well as issue you a pager."

Kim followed Philip down the hall, past a central nurses' station, to the staff lounge. Several people were sitting at a large round table that was covered in charts.

"Good morning." Philip strode over to the table. "I've brought us some much needed help." He turned and motioned Kim to his side. "This is Dr. Kim Donovan. She's our newest staff psychiatrist." Everyone at the table offered a wave or a smile. "Kim, let me introduce you to some of the crew."

Pointing to each person in turn, Philip made the introductions. There were two psychiatrists and three nurses. "Now that you've met everyone why don't we —" Philip's pager sounded. "Excuse me." He flipped open the pager and glanced down at the display. "I'm sorry, Kim. I need to take care of this. Why don't you hang out here for a bit and familiarize yourself with the unit. I'll be back as quickly as I can."

Kim spared a fleeting glance at Philip's retreating back before turning to face her new colleagues. She felt a moment's trepidation, then firmly pushed it away. *Time to see what things are really going to be like around here.* Kim knew from previous experience she was more likely to hear the inside scoop on the

department now that the chairman of the department wasn't present.

As the door swung shut behind Phillip, Trent, one of the nurses, pulled out the chair next to him. "Have a seat, Dr. Donovan," he offered with a friendly smile.

The staff filled her in on the department procedures and the different rotations. Kim winced internally when talk eventually turned to the ER. Mention of the ER immediately turned her thoughts to her former lover, who headed the ER at Memorial. Things had not ended well between them.

"Most of the rotations aren't too bad," Dr. Roberts said. The short, stocky man with dishwater blond hair was one of the staff psychiatrists. "But watch your step when you cover the ER psych consults. The ER chief can be a real hard-ass."

Kim mentally rolled her eyes. *Great. Just what I need. I haven't even been here a day yet and I'm already hearing about the ER Chief.*

"That's not quite fair, Dr. Roberts," Trent piped up. "Okay, she does act like a hard-ass, but you have to admit she's a gorgeous hard-ass."

Trent and Dr. Roberts shared a laugh. The two female nurses at the table shared a perturbed look.

While Kim was interested in hearing about the woman she would be working with, she also curiously watched the interaction of her new colleagues.

Dr. Kapoor, a fellow psychiatrist, cleared his throat. "I'm sure, Dr. Donovan is quite capable of forming her own opinion of our ER chief." He stared pointedly at Dr. Roberts. "Maybe she would find a rundown of the responsibilities while covering the ER more helpful than a personal critique of Dr. McKenna's shortcomings."

Dr. Roberts shot Dr. Kapoor a dirty look.

The door opened to admit Philip. He walked over to stand by Kim's chair. "Sorry for the delay. Come on, I'll show you around the rest of the hospital."

* * *

Philip stopped as they once again reached the elevators. They had covered the departments that interacted with psych except of the ER. "We'll stop by the Chief of Staff's office next. I do feel I should warn you. Dr. Rodman can sometimes be arrogant and condescending, but he is a great surgeon and we just try to ignore the rest. You won't have any day-to-day interaction with him, but he does like to meet all new staff. After that we'll head to the ER."

The secretary in the outer office greeted them and directed them into the inner office. "Dr. Rodman will see you now."

Kim stepped into the office after Philip and got her first look at the Chief of Staff. Even sitting behind the desk Kim could see he was short. He had a slim build with thin, mousy brown hair that was combed over in an apparent attempt to hide a wide bald spot. When he rose from his chair and stepped out from behind the desk, he was even shorter than Kim imagined.

Philip made the introductions. Kim's eyes narrowed as Dr. Rodman's eyes traveled slowly up her body and lingered on her breasts before finally meeting her eyes.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Donovan. Be sure and let me know if there is anything, anything at all, I can do for you." His eyes remained on her breasts as he spoke. "My door is always open for you."

Kim gave him a disgusted look. "I'm sure that won't be necessary."

"We won't take anymore of your time, Dr. Rodman. Thank you for seeing us." Philip quickly led them out of the room.

Neither spoke as they made their way back to the elevator.

Philip finally broke the uncomfortable silence. "I'm really sorry you were subjected to that, Kim."

"How does he get away with that kind of behavior in this day and age?" Kim asked.

Philip grimaced. "I'm not defending his boorish manners, but I will say he is a very gifted surgeon. Honestly, I've never seen

him act that badly before, arrogant yes, but nothing like he pulled today. Then again, I'm sure having your brother on the hospital board of trustees tends to make you think you're bulletproof. And so far, that's been the case."

Kim shook her head. It wasn't the first time she had run into that type of behavior and it surely wouldn't be the last.

"Thankfully, there is no reason for you to have any further contact with him. You'll be happy to know that he stays clear of the psych floor," Philip said with a chuckle. "Anyway, enough about him, let's head for the ER. As I discussed with you when you interviewed, I would like you to act as liaison between the ER and psych. We've had some problems with staff conflicts down there."

Kim immediately thought of Dr. Roberts. *I can see why if his attitude in the norm among psych personnel.* She couldn't help wondering if he just had a problem with women in positions of power. Kim pushed aside the useless speculation. She would find out soon enough.

"If she's not busy, I'd really like to introduce you to Dr. McKenna," Philip said. "The two of you will be working together quite a bit. She runs the ER with an iron fist. That said, she's very compassionate with her patients and a great physician. It just takes a little getting used to her very reserved demeanor. It can be a little off-putting."

Wondering just what she had gotten herself into, Kim followed Philip into the elevator.

* * *

The ER waiting room as usual was bedlam. There were a multitude of patients waiting in chairs. The admitting desk in the corner had patients lined up waiting their turn to be checked in.

Philip bypassed the admitting desk and pushed through the double doors that led into the ER proper. Medical personnel flowed in and around a large circular nurses' station. There was

constant traffic up and down the hall leading to the trauma rooms. For all the chaos there was also the unmistakable sense of the underlying order of a well-run ER. Kim followed Philip as he approached the nurses' station. A woman in her late twenties, slightly overweight with short, stylishly cut red hair and pretty, green eyes was manning the desk.

"Penny, is Dr. McKenna available?" Philip asked.

"Hi, Dr. Alerman. Last time I saw her she was in the staff lounge."

"Thanks, Penny. Ah, before I forget. This is Dr. Donovan. She's our new staff psychiatrist. Give her a hand if she needs anything, okay?"

"Sure, Dr. Alerman." Penny nodded at Kim and smiled. "Dr. Donovan."

"Hello, Penny," Kim said.

Philip motioned for Kim to follow him. He filled her in on the desk clerk as they made their way down the hall. "Penny is the most experienced clerk in the ER. She's got contacts in every department in the hospital. Plus she's a miracle worker when it comes to wading through paperwork."

When they reached the door marked Staff Lounge, Philip pushed the door open and motioned Kim in ahead of him. A woman sat working at a table covered in charts. Her head was down and her black hair slightly obscured her face. Kim admired the broad shoulders and muscled biceps showing past the arms of her scrub shirt. When the woman looked up Kim couldn't help but stare. If this was Jess McKenna, Trent hadn't exaggerated. The woman was indeed absolutely gorgeous.

"Dr. Alerman, can I help you?" the woman asked.

"I came down to introduce you to the new psych liaison I spoke to you about, Dr. Kim Donovan. I know we've had some problems between our departments. With Dr. Donovan's help, I hope to improve relations with the ER." Philip turned to Kim. "Kim, this is the Chairman of the ER, Dr. Jess McKenna."

As Dr. McKenna stood, Kim allowed her gaze to briefly glide over the doctor's tall body before meeting her eyes.

"Nice to meet you, Dr. Donovan." Dr. McKenna's voice was low and husky.

Before Kim could respond, her gaze locked with the most incredible blue eyes she had ever seen. They were breathtaking. As she watched, they turned the most amazing shade of bluish silver. Hearing Philip clear his throat, Kim tore away from those striking eyes and struggled to find her voice.

"Nice to meet you, Dr. McKenna," she said, finally noticing the woman was holding her hand out.

Kim's hand was clasped in a firm handshake. She made eye contact with Dr. McKenna again, seeing something flicker in those engaging blue eyes before they turned almost silver and expressionless.

"Well, Kim, I need to head back to psych," Philip said. "Once you're done here, come back to the floor and I'll finish up your orientation. For now, I'll leave you in Dr. McKenna's capable hands."

Kim mentally shook herself, trying to regain her composure. She had been thrown a bit off balance by her strong reaction to the ER chief. She turned her attention back to her boss. "Thanks, Philip. I'll meet you back on the psych floor."

"See you later," Philip said as he turned to walk toward the door. He stopped just before stepping out. "Take good care of her, Dr. McKenna. We don't want to scare her off right away."

Dr. McKenna nodded without comment. As the door closed behind Philip, Dr. McKenna turned to Kim. "If you'll follow me, I'll give you a basic overview of the ER layout, and familiarize you with our procedures."

Dr. McKenna walked toward the door without waiting for a response.

Kim was taken aback by the woman's demeanor. She had expected a bit of a welcome or at least some attempt to connect with a new colleague. *Philip did warn you.* Kim hurried after her.

They had only taken a few steps out of the lounge when someone called out to Dr. McKenna. Kim turned to see a young Asian woman rushing down the hall toward them.

Kim glanced at the woman's ID badge as she skidded to a halt. This must be one of Dr. McKenna's residents.

"What can I do for you, Dr. Phan?" Dr. McKenna asked.

"The patient you saw with me earlier in Bed Three is still complaining of chest pain. His EKG was normal. I'm still waiting on his cardiac enzymes to come back from the lab. His other blood work was normal."

"He has no history of cardiac problems. Correct?" Dr. McKenna asked.

"None."

"Any sign of arrhythmia?"

"No."

"And what was his age?"

The resident quickly flipped through her notebook. "Forty-one."

"Your patient is still in pain. So what do you do next?" Dr. McKenna asked.

Dr. Phan looked down at her notes and then quickly back at Dr. McKenna. "So far, all the tests for a heart attack have come back negative." She hesitated for a moment and then continued, "I would recommend trying a liquid antacid while we wait for the cardiac enzymes to come back. If that doesn't help then possibly a nitrate patch."

"Good. Try the antacid and see if that helps. Once his enzymes come back reevaluate the situation and decide if the nitrate is warranted. Get Dr. Bates to back you up if you need more help."

"Thanks, Dr. McKenna."

Kim shook her head as she watched the young resident turn and sprint down the hall. "Let me guess, new resident?"

"Yes, she is. Sorry for the interruption."

Kim hurried after Dr. McKenna as she turned and headed down the hall without another word.

* * *

During the tour of the ER, Dr. McKenna had introduced her to some of the ER staff and shown her the whole ER from top to bottom. She explained the procedures they used before calling down psych and the protocols the hospital used for holding patients. Kim had been particularly interested when several staff members approached Dr. McKenna with questions or problems. Her responses were the same as they had been with Dr. Phan, crisp and professional. There was none of the banter and camaraderie that Kim was used to seeing among an ER staff. In a high stress environment like an emergency room it was almost a requirement.

While Kim realized that as the Chief of the ER, Dr. McKenna might feel the need to distance herself a bit from her staff, this seemed more extreme than that. She had yet to see Dr. McKenna even smile. Kim wondered if the strict emotional control extended to the woman's personal life. Despite her off-putting demeanor, Kim was unwillingly attracted to her.

Kim was pulled out of her thoughts as Dr. McKenna stopped in front of the door to the staff lounge.

"I think that about covers it," Dr. McKenna said.

Kim smiled. "Thank you for the tour. I appreciate you spending the time with me."

"Not a problem. Did you have any other questions?"

"Not that I can think of off the top of my head," Kim said.

"All right then, I need to get back to work." With that, Dr. McKenna turned and headed down the hall deeper into the ER.

Kim stared after her for several moments. When she realized what she was doing, she turned away. *Stick to business*, she chastised herself as she made her way out of the ER. *The last*

thing you need is to get involved with another ER Chief. Besides, you don't even know if the woman is a lesbian.

CHAPTER 2

JESS STOOD NEXT to the nurses' station as she waited for her quarry to emerge from the treatment room. When she noticed Penny watching her she randomly selected a chart from the rack.

Jess stared unseeingly at the chart. *This is not a good idea.* Although Jess had been telling herself that for days, here she was anyway. She was waiting for Chris Roberts to finish up with his patient so she could talk with him. Normally, she didn't have a lot of use for the man. He had made it clear on numerous occasions that he did not like to cover the ER. However, in this case, he could prove useful.

Inexplicably, she had not been able to get Kim Donovan out of her mind. The beautiful psychiatrist had dominated her thoughts since their brief meeting three weeks ago. Against her better judgment, she intended to try and learn more about the woman before she started her rotation in the ER next week.

Which was why she was waiting for Roberts. If anyone up in psych knew anything about Kim Donovan it would be him. Jess was sure that by now he had probably already asked Kim out. Not that she could blame him, but in this instance, she would have bet her next paycheck that it would not do him any good.

Jess was sure that Kim had checked her out when Philip introduced them, but it was more than that. She readily admitted that she had been immediately attracted to Kim. Who wouldn't be? Her curly shoulder-length blond hair coupled with warm sky blue eyes were an attractive start. Add in a beautiful face and a tall, lithe body and you had a spectacular combination. Jess vividly remembered the first time their eyes had met and held. It was as if a strong current had flowed between them. It had been

disconcerting to say the least. Even now, Jess wondered if she had just imagined it.

A gurney banging against a wall broke Jess out of her contemplations. She cursed under her breath when she realized Roberts had walked past her while she was lost in thought.

"Dr. Roberts," she called after him. Jess caught up with him just as he reached the elevator. The doors slid open.

"What?" he asked in an impatient tone.

"I'd like to talk to you for a minute," Jess said.

"Fine." Roberts motioned for the people in the elevator that was waiting to go ahead without him. He turned back toward Jess with a scowl.

Now that Jess was facing him this didn't seem like such a great idea. She was unexpectedly tongue-tied. That in itself was so unlike her. *I knew this was a bad idea.*

"Is there a problem?" Roberts asked. "I'm needed back on the psych floor."

Jess scrambled for something to say. She cursed herself for not thinking this out before she approached Roberts. "Do you think the record of the patient you just saw should be flagged for possible drug seeking behavior?"

"Yes. I already told your resident that."

"Okay. Good. So how is the new psychiatrist working out?" *Great segue, genius.* "Um... Dr. Donovan... Right?" *Like you don't know exactly what her name is.*

"Kim is settling in fine," Roberts said. His confusion was plainly written on his face. "Was there something else you wanted?"

"No. That's it. Thanks." Jess turned and quickly walked away. *Great, you looked like a total idiot. That's why you never do this. You're terrible at it. Stick to business. Last thing you need is to become interested in someone you work with. It worked out so well last time,* she sarcastically reminded herself.

* * *

Kim picked up an empty tray and headed for the food line in the cafeteria. She glanced up when she heard her name called. She smiled and waved when she spotted Brenda, a psychiatric nurse-practitioner she worked with on the psych floor. She made her selections, and then headed for the table where Brenda sat.

"I see you decided to descend from the ivory tower today," Brenda said.

Kim laughed as she took a seat at the table. Brenda was a feisty, middle-aged black woman. She had taken Kim under her wing.

"It does feel good to get off the floor for a little while. See how the other half lives... so to speak," Kim said. That was one of the reasons Kim liked rotating in the ER. It could be isolating to spend an extended period on the psych ward.

"Ready to face the loony toons in the ER next week? And I don't mean the patients!" Brenda said.

Kim laughed. "I'm sure I can handle whatever they throw at me."

"I know you can," Brenda said. "Well, I need to get back to the floor. Group starts in an hour. I'll see you upstairs." She gathered her tray and with a wave headed for the exit.

Kim watched for a moment as Brenda walked away. It was hard to believe she had been at LA Metro for three weeks already. The time had just flown by. Although she was busy getting to know her fellow psych staff and settling in, she thought of the beautiful ER chief often and the brief time they had spent together on her first day. She had never reacted so strongly to anyone as she had Jess McKenna. The thought of her first rotation in the ER next week filled her with equal parts of anticipation and trepidation.

Enough of that. Kim turned her attention to the chart she had brought with her. She glanced up when a shadow covered her work.

"Hey, Kim. Mind if I join you?"

Kim smiled at Chris Roberts. "Hi, Chris. Have a seat." Despite her poor first impression of Chris when he had bad mouthed Jess McKenna, he had turned out to be a good co-worker. She had worked closely with him during her first week and found him to be very helpful and pleasant to work with. "How did the ER consult go?"

Chris scowled as he set his tray down and slid into the chair next to Kim. "Same incompetence as usual down there. They shouldn't need a psychiatrist to tell them some junkie is drug seeking. You'd think McKenna could train her residents better than that."

Kim forced her expression to remain neutral. *I bet there was more to the consult than that. What is it with him and Jess McKenna?* She still wasn't sure if his dislike was of the ER in general or Jess in particular. He had been covering the ER for the last two weeks and done nothing but complain about it.

Chris pulled the ER pager off his belt and shut it off. At Kim's raised eyebrow he said, "I'm on my lunch break."

Although irritated by Chris's behavior, Kim knew there was nothing she could do about it — yet. *No wonder there are problems between the ER and psych.* "Well, the good news is today is your last day. I'll be taking over on Monday," Kim said.

"Ah... that reminds me. Be on your guard when you get down there. I don't know what she's up to, but McKenna stopped me as I was leaving the ER just now and asked about you."

Concern flared for a moment, then Kim shrugged it off. It wasn't uncommon for people to be curious about new staff members. "What did she want to know?"

"That's the strange part. She asked how you were working out. I've never heard her ask about anyone new before. That's why I wanted to warn you to be careful when you're covering the ER consults."

A sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach made Kim queasy. *Don't jump to conclusions. If she found out about what happened at Memorial, so be it. You didn't do anything wrong.*

She pushed away her tray no longer having any appetite. "Okay. Thanks. I should probably head back to the floor."

Chris put a gently restraining hand on Kim's arm when she started to stand. "Hang on a sec," he said.

As she resumed her seat, Kim gazed at Chris questioningly. Faint warning bells started to ring when he stared at the table, and then began to shift nervously.

"I know it's short notice on a Friday night." Chris looked up and met Kim's eyes. "Would you have dinner with me tonight?"

Kim sighed to herself. He had already tried the "let's get together as new colleagues" bit last week. *You should have told him then instead of just saying no thanks.* The one thing Kim had never been was closeted. She didn't flaunt her sexuality at work, but never hid it either. For the first time she hesitated, then immediately berated herself for doing so. *This isn't Memorial. Philip not only knows but supports you.*

"If you're busy we can make it another time," Chris said, misunderstanding her lack of response.

Kim mentally cursed Dr. Pruitt for making her unsure of herself. *Just tell him.* "Thank you, but no." Kim held up a hand to keep Chris from interrupting. "Let me be honest with you. I'm a lesbian."

Chris's mouth dropped open, then he looked down at the table. His expression went totally blank.

Kim braced herself for his reaction.

Chris finally looked up. "Didn't see that one coming." He shook his head and his smile reappeared. He seemed to regain his equilibrium. "Are you sure?" he asked with a teasing glint in his eyes, though he sounded half serious.

Kim laughed, more relieved than she cared to admit. "Positive." She stood and picked up her tray. "I really should get back up to the floor."

"Okay. I'll see you up there later," Chris said. He grinned up at Kim. "Oh, and if you should ever change your mind about the guy thing..."

Kim was glad Chris was taking her revelation so well. She shook her head and laughed. "I wouldn't hold my breath if I were you."

* * *

Making her way out of the cafeteria, Kim's thoughts once again turned to Jess McKenna. *Why is she asking questions about me?* Kim resolutely pushed away her worries. Regardless of what Chris thought, maybe Jess was just curious about a new colleague.

Kim pushed through the cafeteria doors. As if conjured by her thoughts, she spotted Jess about to enter from the other side. "Hello again, Dr. McKenna," she said with a friendly smile.

Jess looked momentarily startled, then her face resumed its normal placid expression. "Dr. Donovan," she said before moving to continue on her way.

"Could I speak to you for a minute?" Kim asked quickly before Jess could walk away.

Jess moved away from the swinging doors and back into the hallway outside the cafeteria. Once she was out of the way of traffic, she turned to Kim. "What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to let you know I'll begin covering the ER on Monday."

"Yes, I saw your name on the schedule," Jess said.

Knowing what Chris's attitude was like when he covered the ER, Kim felt the need to assure Jess that she did not feel the same. She met Jess's eyes. "I'm looking forward to working in the ER. I've always found it an interesting and challenging place to work."

A brief half smile flashed across Jess's face before she resumed a businesslike expression. "Your help will be a welcome addition to the ER."

Before Kim could respond, Jess's pager went off. Taking it off her belt she glanced down at the display. "I have to go." Jess didn't immediately walk away.

It seemed as if Jess wanted to say something more but her pager beeped again.

"I'll see you on Monday," Jess said. With a brief nod, she turned and headed down the hallway at a fast walk.

Kim watched Jess go as she played over in her mind the fleeting smile that had transformed Jess's face. It had softened her features for just a moment. What was quickly becoming her new mantra echoed through her mind. *Stick to business.*

CHAPTER 3

JESS STEPPED INTO the center area of the nurses' station and beckoned to Aimee Phan. The first-year resident hurried over. "As soon as Dr. Donovan gets down here —"

Penny called out a greeting to Dr. Donovan.

Jess glanced up at the clock and was pleasantly surprised. Today was Kim's first day covering the ER. *She's prompt. I'll give her that.* The page to psych had gone out less than ten minutes ago. It was not uncommon for a patient to wait an hour or more before someone from psych finally put in an appearance.

"Good Morning, Dr. McKenna, Dr. Phan. What can I do for you?" Kim asked with a friendly smile.

"Dr. Phan will fill you in on the patient," Jess said. She motioned for the resident to go ahead, and then stood by to listen while the resident gave the patient's basic history. Jess watched Kim's reactions. It had been her experience that none of the psychiatrists had any interest in working with the ER residents.

Aimee quickly finished up her presentation of the patient.

"I think the best way to start is with a full patient mental status examination," Kim said. "Have you ever done one, Dr. Phan?"

Aimee shook her head. "Just the basic questions that are part of a history and physical."

"This is quite a bit more detailed than that. Let's go see your patient and I'll walk you through the assessment procedures."

"Great." Aimee smiled broadly. "Thanks, Dr. Donovan."

Jess nodded to herself. *Better and better.* She was pleased to see that Kim had not blown the resident off and taken over the case. And best of all, she was providing a teaching experience to Aimee.

"Dr. McKenna, will you be joining us?" Kim asked.

Jess momentarily lost her train of thought when her eyes met Kim's. *Focus, McKenna.* "No. You and Dr. Phan seem to have everything under control."

Kim nodded, then turned toward the resident with a smile. "Dr. Phan, lead the way."

Jess watched as the two women walked away. Her first impression of the new psychiatrist was a very positive one.

* * *

Jess stood outside the curtained bed. She was watching Kim coach Aimee Phan through the patient exam process. Jess was impressed by Kim's handling of the resident. She allowed a rare smile to cross her face. *She's a good teacher.*

Kim gently patted the elderly patient's arm before turning her attention to Aimee. "If you need anything else just let me know."

"Thanks, Dr. Donovan," Aimee said with a smile.

Kim stepped over to the closed curtain surrounding the patient's bed and turned to slip through the opening.

Jess stepped back just before Kim plowed into her. She grimaced when she heard Kim's gasp of surprise. "Sorry about that. Didn't mean to startle you. I didn't want to interrupt," Jess said.

"That's okay. Were you waiting for me or Dr. Phan?"

"I was waiting for you. I wanted to catch you before you headed back to psych." So far, Kim had managed to surprise her. Regardless of that, Jess's previous experience with psych led her to expect problems. Most of the psychiatrists couldn't wait to get out of the ER. If you didn't catch them before they left the floor, it could be quite some time before they returned. Even if you managed to catch them, it didn't mean they were going to offer their help graciously. *She's been great so far. Give her a chance.* "I've got a patient I'd like you to talk to and evaluate. I think he could benefit from some outpatient counseling."

Kim smiled. "Sure. I'm happy to help any way I can. What have you got?"

Jess's tension eased. *Now this is more like it.* She turned and led Kim out into the hall. They headed toward one of the private exam rooms. Jess stopped outside the door.

"Patient is a fourteen-year-old male. He presented with several infected cuts on the inside of his right forearm. He claimed a cat scratched him. While there are four parallel cuts, they are too deep and symmetrical to be animal scratches. I examined his other arm and he has quite a few similarly inflamed but healing cuts on that arm as well. I think we're dealing with self-inflicted wounds. From the look of the cuts I think he might be just starting out. I didn't find any scarring that suggested previous cutting."

"Are his parents here?" Kim asked.

"His mother is in the waiting room. He refused to have her present during the exam."

"Okay. I'll tackle him first, and then his mother."

"You need any backup?" Even as she asked, Jess knew it wasn't needed. It was just an excuse. She was curious to see more of Kim in action.

Kim smiled at the offer. "Thanks, but no. He shouldn't be a problem. You've already treated the infected cuts... Right?"

Jess was surprised by the feeling of disappointment Kim's refusal invoked. She handed over the chart in her hand. "Yes. He's good to go after you're done with him."

Kim gave a quick nod of acknowledgment and pushed open the exam room door.

Jess remained outside the door for several moments after Kim disappeared inside. She was trying to sort out the long dormant emotions coursing through her. As had previously been the case, she was aware of the strong attraction she felt toward Kim. It was now tinged with a growing respect for the psychiatrist. Jess pushed aside the unwelcome introspection. *Now is not the time or place for exploring feelings.*

Jess's attention turned firmly back to work when she spotted Karen Armstrong, one of the first-year residents coming down the hall. *Might as well get this over with.* "Dr. Armstrong," Jess called out. Jess frowned to herself when the resident visibly hesitated before making her way over. *Yeah, you know what this is about.* "I want to talk to you," she said when the resident reached her. "Let's go into the lounge."

* * *

Jess followed Karen into the staff lounge. She motioned for her to have a seat at the table. "You weren't at morning conference," Jess said. This was not the first conference the resident had missed.

"I had to take my daughter to daycare, and then drop off my husband at work. My husband's car is still in the shop."

"I'm not interested in excuses," Jess said, her tone calm but firm. "This is the fourth morning conference you've missed in two weeks. As we discussed before, attendance at morning conference is mandatory for first-year residents."

"I'm doing the best I can," Karen said, her stress apparent in her voice.

"You need to do better. You're only in the second month your residency and already falling behind."

"I can't make them repair the car any faster." Karen jerked her stethoscope from around her neck and slapped it onto the table.

Okay. Time to get serious. Jess had not wanted to turn this into a formal counseling session but Karen wasn't giving her any choice. "It's not just conferences. It's not fair to your fellow residents when you come in late or leave early. It doesn't get any easier as you go along. You need to get a handle on things now." Jess sighed to herself. Karen had a lot of potential, but she always seemed to have some problem that prevented her from fulfilling

her responsibilities. "Do you want to stay in this residency program?"

Karen blanched and her hand clenched around her stethoscope. "What? Of course I do."

"Then I suggest you make some alternate arrangements so you arrive on time. I expect you to be at every conference for the rest of the month." Jess met Karen's gaze directly. "You should consider this a formal counseling session. If necessary, the next step will be to officially place you on probation. I will see you in conference tomorrow morning."

Jess knew she had been harsh, but hoped the resident would respond to the wake-up call. If she let Karen's behavior continue unabated now, it would carry throughout her residency. By the stunned look on Karen's face she had definitely made an impression on her. Without another word, Jess stood and made her way toward the door.

* * *

Kim made her way toward the staff lounge for a much needed cup of coffee. Unlike her colleagues, she had decided to remain in the ER as much as possible. It was only her first day and she already realized how bad things were between psych and the ER by the staff and residents reaction to her presence and help. The residents in particular had at first seemed shocked, then extremely grateful of her offer to work with them on the cases they presented. Philip had been right about the conflict between the two departments. If anything he had underestimated the depth of the problem. *I definitely need to talk to Philip.*

Kim pushed open the door to the lounge. She noticed Karen, one of the residents she had met earlier sitting at the table. Kim nodded to the resident and walked over and made herself a cup of coffee. Once she had her coffee, she approached the table where the resident sat.

Karen looked up, a sullen expression twisting her face. "Hey, Dr. Donovan."

"Hi," Kim said as she sat down at the table. She had been impressed with the resident earlier. Karen was bright and eager to learn. "How's it going?"

"Not so good," Karen said. Her scowl deepened.

Kim nodded sympathetically. "Want to talk about it?" Her first impulse was to try and help someone in turmoil.

Karen shook her head no.

Silence reigned for several minutes.

"It's not my fault she doesn't have a life and doesn't understand," Karen blurted out of the blue.

Confusion struck at the apparent non sequitur. "Who doesn't have a life or understand what?"

"Dr. McKenna," Karen said, her voice tinged with anger.

Oh crap! Kim did not want to get involved in anything between Jess and one of her residents. Not to mention the fact that it was also inappropriate for her to interfere. She sighed in resignation. *No help for it now.* She did not want to blow the resident off and leave. She decided her best option at this point would be to keep quiet and waited to see what if anything else Karen would say. It was a technique she had learned early in her own residency.

"Everyone says how she practically lives at the hospital. And she never talks about a girlfriend or anything from outside work. Maybe this job is her life, but I have a life outside this place. And a daughter and a husband who need me."

Kim's ears perked at the mention of a girlfriend. She was curious about Jess but this was not the way she had hoped to learn more about her. "Dr. McKenna has a lot of responsibility here. I'm sure that leads to very long hours for her."

Karen snorted. "I should've known you wouldn't understand."

Kim shook her head. "Actually I understand quite well. It's a lot of work to try and balance your professional life with your

personal one, especially for a woman. A lot of people depend on you."

"I know that." Karen's shoulders slumped. "Okay, I admit I missed a few conferences, and was late a few times," she said. "But that's no reason to take my residency away."

Shock rendered Kim momentarily speechless. That seemed a bit drastic to her. Despite her best intentions not to get embroiled in this she asked, "Did Dr. McKenna actually say that? That she was going to terminate you?"

"Well... No. Not exactly," Karen admitted reluctantly. "She did say she was going to put me on probation... If I didn't do better." Karen banged her fist on the table. "It's not like I'm not trying. I'm not a screw-up!" Karen met Kim's eyes defiantly. That's when it seemed to dawn on Karen that she was talking out of school to someone she really didn't know. Her eyes went wide and fear chased across her face. "I really like it here. Dr. McKenna's a great teacher. I wouldn't want her to think I don't want to be here." Karen gazed at Kim with a pleading expression.

Kim laid her hand on Karen's forearm for a moment. "It can be hard adjusting to a new place and all the responsibilities of a residency."

"It is hard." Karen sighed. "But I guess I wasn't honest before. I have been screwing up. Dr. McKenna cut me some slack my first month... and I guess I kind of took advantage of it. I got pissed when she called me on it," she admitted sheepishly. Some of the tension drained from Karen's face.

Ah. Good. Sometimes it helped to vent to someone not emotionally invested in the problem. "So it looks like you know what you have to do," Kim said.

Karen rose from her chair. She smiled down at Kim. "Thanks, Dr. Donovan. I better get back out there."

"You're welcome." Kim leaned back in her chair and sighed when the door closed behind Karen. *Not bad for your first day. Not bad at all.*

CHAPTER 4

PENNY LEANED OVER the nurses' station counter slightly to get a clear view down the hall. The ringing phone distracted her from her vigil. She answered it and dealt with the caller while keeping an eye on the door down the hall.

"Has the ortho resident shown up yet?"

Penny jumped, startled by the voice close by. She turned to face Terrell Johnson. The tall, slim black man was one of the second-year residents. "No. I haven't seen him."

Terrell sighed. "Please page him again."

Penny leaned to the side to see past Terrell. "Sure," she said distractedly. A bright smile covered her face when she spotted the person she had been waiting for walking toward the nurses' station. It quickly turned to a frown when her quarry was intercepted before she reached the desk.

Terrell turned to look over his shoulder. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I just needed to catch Dr. Donovan before she heads back to psych to give her a message," Penny said. What she didn't add was that the message was personal. She planned on asking her to lunch. She had been thrilled when the hot gossip about Kim reached her ears.

Terrell smiled. "Isn't she great? She's only been here a week and I've already learned more from her than from all the other psychiatrists combined."

"Hey. You guys talking about Kim Donovan?" Peter Bates, a fellow ER resident asked, barging into the conversation. "Man, she's hot!" He looked down the hall to where Kim stood talking with another resident. "I'd like to teach her a few things... Know what I mean?" he asked with a leer and made an obscene hand gesture.

"God, Peter. You are such a pig." Terrell's face twisted in distaste. "Grow up already."

Peter sneered. "Shove it, Terry."

Penny glowered at Peter. She knew how much Terrell hated that nickname. Terrell always treated her well. She didn't appreciate Peter giving him a hard time.

"Penny, please page ortho again," Terrell said. With one last disparaging look at Peter, he turned and walked away.

"What's got his undies in a twist?" Peter asked. He glanced down at Penny and scowled as if suddenly realizing he was talking to her.

Penny scowled right back. She was tempted to tell him that he didn't have a chance in hell with Kim. Penny snickered to herself. *I hope she tells him in front of a big crowd that she's gay.* Although Penny wasn't interested in him, it had always bothered her that the handsome blond resident had never asked her out. He had gone after most every other woman in the department. Penny was surprised when a warm, welcoming smile suddenly appeared on Peter's face.

"Hey, Dr. Donovan," Peter called out.

Penny turned to see Kim approaching with an armload of charts. Her smile was automatic at the sight of the beautiful doctor.

"How are things going?" Peter reached out and took the charts from Kim. He put them down on the counter. "I wanted to let you know if you have any questions you can come to me. I'll be glad to help you with any problems."

Penny rolled her eyes. Peter did not help anyone but himself. The way he was talking you would think he was staff instead of a resident-in-training.

The conversation was interrupted when Aimee came trotting up. "Excuse me. Peter, I need your help with a patient."

Peter glowered at Aimee. "Can't you see I'm busy? Find someone else," he said.

Kim glanced over at Peter with a perturbed look on her face, then turned toward Aimee. "Anything I can do to help?" she asked.

Aimee smiled. "I don't think so. It's not a psych case." She peered at Peter's forbidding glare, and then turned back to Kim. "You wouldn't happen to know anything about dislocated shoulders?"

Penny could almost see Peter weighing his options. *Jerk. Now what are you going to do?* He seemed to realize his abrupt response to Aimee made him look bad in Kim's eyes.

"Come on, Aimee," Peter said with a long, suffering sigh. "I'll take care of it." He turned to Kim with an ingratiating smile. "If you'll excuse me. You know how it is with these young residents. You just can't leave them on their own for a second."

He took several steps away from the desk, then turned back to Aimee. "Well, come on. I don't have all day."

Penny watched Aimee hurry to catch up with Peter. "What a jerk," she muttered. She glanced over at Kim. She didn't look particularly thrilled with Peter's behavior either. "Just in case you didn't know, Peter isn't even a senior resident. He's a second-year." Penny felt her heart give a strong thump when Kim turned to face her and their eyes met. *God, she's hot.*

"Yes. I'm well aware of that," Kim said.

"What?" Penny asked having totally lost her train of thought.

"I know Dr. Bates is a second-year."

"Oh, yeah. Right." Penny smiled at Kim. She would be content to just look at her all day. Penny was brought back to reality when Kim began gathering up the charts on the counter. "Dr. Donovan." Penny swallowed nervously when she once again met Kim's beautiful blue eyes. "It's almost one o'clock. I was wondering...." Penny marshaled her courage. "How about we go grab some lunch?"

Kim shook her head. "Sorry. No. I really have a lot of paperwork to do."

Disappointment washed over Penny. She tried to read Kim's expression but couldn't. Not willing to give up so easily she decided to try again. "Maybe some other time?" she asked hopefully.

"Sure. Maybe some other time." With that Kim gathered up her charts and walked away.

Penny was pleased when she realized that Kim was headed down the hall toward the staff lounge and not toward the elevators. Up until now, Kim had taken her charts back to psych to work on them. *Good. Just gives me more of a chance to be around her. Next time she'll say yes.* With that satisfying thought, Penny picked up the ringing phone and got back to work.

* * *

Jess pushed open the door to the staff lounge. Kim was seated at the table with Bates. She nodded by way of greeting on her way to the coffee pot in the corner of the room. As she made her coffee, she could hear the murmur of their quiet conversation but couldn't make out what was being said. Kim's voice rising and a clear no from her got Jess's attention. She turned toward the table. Kim had a clearly aggravated look on her face. Jess's jaw clenched. *Damn it. I warned this kid about his behavior.*

Jess picked up her coffee and walked over to stand next to Bates's chair. "Don't you have patients to see, Dr. Bates?" she asked in a mild tone.

Bates looked up at Jess with a frown. "I'm helping Dr. Donovan while I wait for lab results to come back." He smiled over at Kim.

"I can manage just fine on my own," Kim said.

Jess glanced down at Kim. She was sure she saw Kim roll her eyes before she looked down and her hair hid her expression. That pretty much confirmed for her that Bates was making a pest of himself. And most likely hitting on Kim. *I definitely need to have another counseling session with him.* "In that case, Dr.

Bates, I suggest you let Dr. Donovan get back to work. And attend to your own responsibilities," she said her tone taking on a slightly firmer edge.

"I'm waiting for my labs," Bates repeated stubbornly.

All right. That's it. "If you can't find a patient to see, I'm sure I can find one for you," Jess said, her voice cold and totally devoid of emotion.

Bates was up and out of his chair with alacrity. He headed for the door without another word.

Jess gazed down at Kim once he was gone. She shifted uncomfortably. She hated having to deal with this type of thing. *Why can't he just do his damn job!* "I'm sorry if he was bothering you."

Kim smiled up at her. "No problem. I can handle an over eager resident."

Some of Jess's tension dissipated. Kim was turning out to be a great addition to the ER. The last thing she wanted was for her to feel uncomfortable working here. "I'm sure you can, but you shouldn't have to. I'll talk to him." *If I don't wring his neck first!*

Jess gazed into Kim's vivid blue eyes and their eyes locked for a moment. Suddenly at a loss for words, she looked down and focused on the table. *Get it together, McKenna.* Quickly regaining her composure, she turned the conversation to a safe subject — work. "Working on charts?" As soon as Jess said it she realized how inane it sounded. *Brilliant, Einstein. What gave it away? The table full of charts?*

Kim nodded. "I figured since it was quiet, it was a good time to get caught up."

Jess still couldn't get over the fact that Kim was here working at all. None of the other psychiatrists worked on patient charts in the ER. Then again, Kim had already proven she was not anything like the other psychiatrists. In five short days she had turned the ER upside down. In all the years Jess had worked here, she had never heard so many positive comments about anyone from psychiatry. Although she hadn't had a chance to work with her

personally since that first day, she had heard staff and residents alike repeatedly praising Kim.

Jess took a sip of her coffee to hide her struggle to find something else to say. She wanted to talk to Kim and get to know her, but at the same time resisted the urge to do so. *You don't need to know anything except that she's good at her job.*

A concerned expression suddenly took up residence on Kim's face. "It's not a problem me working in here is it?" she asked.

Jess shook her head. She realized Kim had most likely misconstrued her silence. "No. Absolutely not. I occasionally work —"

The lounge door swung open. Bates peered into the room. When he spotted Jess he ducked back out and quickly closed the door.

Jess looked down at Kim in surprise when she heard her chuckle.

"He's persistent all right," Kim said. "Don't worry. Someone will eventually clue him in that it's a lost cause."

Before Jess could ask what that meant, the door swung open again.

Penny stepped into the doorway and looked around. "Have you seen, Dr. Bertucci?"

"No," Jess said.

"Okay," Penny said and hurried away. The door swung shut behind her.

Jess turned her attention back to Kim. "It can get —" The door to the lounge swung open one more time. Jess shook her head in exasperation.

Terrell stepped into the room. He glanced at Kim, then met Jess's eyes. Without a word he turned and left the room.

"As I was saying..." Jess stopped and stared at the door for just a moment.

Kim laughed.

When the door didn't immediately open, Jess continued, "As you see, it can get a little busy in here. I do work in here occasionally. Most of the staff have a small cubbyhole office they share with another staff member that they use to do their paperwork if it gets too crazy in the lounge. Unfortunately, there aren't any open offices available right now."

"Oh. Well... I guess I could go back to my office. That's where I've been doing my paperwork," Kim said. "I just thought I could be more help if I was close by and readily available."

Jess was thrilled that Kim was so willing to help. Her hard work had made a big impact on the ER. The last thing Jess wanted was for her to feel as if she did not have a place in the ER. She scrambled for a solution. "No. It's fine to work in the lounge. If it gets too hectic, you could use my office for a quiet place to work." A blast of panic hit as soon as the offer left her mouth. *What the hell are you doing! That's your only sanctuary.*

"That's really nice of you, but I don't want to intrude on your privacy," Kim said.

Jess met Kim's understanding gaze. She was surprised and equally dismayed that Kim seemed able to read her so well. She quickly schooled her features. *I can do this.* Kim had gone out of her way to integrate into the ER. This was the least Jess could do in return. *And of course, if you just happen to get the chance to spend some private time with her, even better.* Jess firmly pushed the thought away. She refused to acknowledge the truth of that statement. "It's okay. Come on, I'll show you where my office is."

* * *

Kim followed Jess to a back hall of the ER that she thought only held supply closets. Stepping into the office, Kim was surprised to find it was half the size of her office in psych. It didn't even have a window.

Jess sat on the edge of her desk. She crossed her arms over her chest, looking very ill at ease.

Kim had seen the brief flash of what looked like panic that crossed Jess's face when she offered the use of her office. She wondered if this was even a good idea after seeing firsthand the distance Jess kept from her staff. Kim didn't want to make Jess uncomfortable in her own office.

"Are you sure you don't mind me using your office, Dr. McKenna?" *Yeah. See. Dr. McKenna. You don't even call her by her first name. This is a bad idea.* Kim watched Jess's reactions carefully. During the past week, Kim had noticed that after a particularly stressful trauma case, Jess would occasionally disappear for a short time. Kim was sure she retreated into her office. She was loath to intrude on what was most likely Jess's personal sanctuary from the stress of her job.

Jess dropped her arms down to her sides and stood. After a slight hesitation she seemed to come to a decision. "You're welcome to use my office while you're assigned to the ER. It's very helpful to have you nearby for consults. You've done an excellent job this week."

Kim smiled brightly. It felt good to hear Jess praise her competence. It helped alleviate any lingering worries over Jess discovering what had happened at Memorial. "Thanks."

If they were going to be sharing an office, Kim decided to see if she could do away with the formal address between them. "Now that that's settled. How about you call me, Kim?" Kim sighed in disappointment when Jess's expression closed off. *Shit. Pushed too hard.* Kim quickly tried to fix things. "Of course, I only meant in private."

Jess's expression smoothed out and her body language relaxed. "Sure. And you can call me, Jess."

"Thanks, Jess."

"You're welcome, Kim." A smile ghosted across Jess's face and just as quickly disappeared. "Okay then, I need to get back to the ER. If I don't keep a tight rein on the children, all hell breaks loose."

Kim laughed softly inordinately pleased that Jess felt comfortable enough to even make such a comment. "I'm sure they're wondering where I disappeared to as well."

"They probably figure you fell into the evil clutches of the bitch of the ER."

A bit taken aback by Jess's words, Kim frowned. Jess was firm with her residents and her demeanor could be a bit stern. And while she had seen a few contentious interactions between Jess and her residents, Peter in particular, nothing she had witnessed would make her think of Jess as a bitch.

"Oh, that's one of the nicer things the residents call me." Jess shrugged. "I'm sure you'll hear them all very soon. And you'll probably call me some of them yourself before long."

Kim easily saw through Jess's defensive bravado. It was obvious to her that underneath Jess was hurt by the name calling. "Oh, I'm not worried, Jess. I'm confident we'll work well together."

Jess smiled. "I'm glad to hear it." She glanced at her watch. "It's almost the end of shift. Shall we head back into the fray one last time?"

"Of course. Lead the way." Kim was amazed at how lighthearted one rare smile from Jess made her feel. Not to mention the fact that the more she learned about Jess, the more she intrigued her. Her first week in the ER was definitely ending on a high note.

As they made their way back into the ER proper, Kim couldn't help comparing Jess to Anna, her ex-lover. It was becoming abundantly clear to Kim that the only thing Jess shared in common with Anna was their job title. Anna had reveled in the myriad of disparaging names the residents and staff alike called her. To Anna, they were a badge of honor, as if they proved to everyone how strong she was and in charge of her world — the ER.

A resident calling her name brought her thoughts back to business. Kim glanced at Jess and smiled. "See you later," she said before walking away to answer the resident's call.

This Ends the Excerpt

About The Author

RJ NOLAN lives in Southern California with her life partner. They share their home with their Great Dane. RJ has always been interested in storytelling. She has been actively writing for the last several years. You can contact RJ Nolan at her Web site: <http://rjnolan.com>.

Other Titles By This Author

All Gone – Lesbian: Mystery

Summary

DR. KODY GARRETT is a young veterinarian new to the North Park Animal Clinic. After the untimely death of her previous employer and mentor, she came to work for Dr. Herbert Donaldson. While she enjoys her work at the clinic, she has been less than happy with her new employer. His poor attitude and constant criticism has taken its toll on Kody. For the first time in the eight months that she has worked for the clinic, Dr. Donaldson is leaving Kody in charge of the clinic while he attends a medical conference. She is determined to prove to her boss that she is capable of the responsibility with which he has entrusted her. The young vet's confidence is shaken when less than twenty-four hours after being left in charge of the clinic, previously healthy dogs begin to die unexpectedly.

BJ Braden is a seasoned Animal Control Officer. When she is called by Dr. Garrett concerning the unexplained animal deaths, her suspicions are immediately aroused.

Risking the ire of her boss, Kody teams up with BJ to solve the mystery of what they soon learn are a rash of animal poisonings in their city going back several years. Amidst their growing attraction to each other, they struggle to protect the animals to whom they have devoted their lives.

A new rash of poisonings sets the pair in high gear and eventually costs Kody her job when she defies her boss and continues to help BJ investigate the newest animal deaths. Kody's life is further complicated by one of the veterinary technician's growing obsession with her. The woman relentlessly tries to pursue a personal relationship with Kody. When Kody repeatedly turns down the woman's overtures, she begins to stalk her.

Kody and BJ's relationship grows even as events begin to spiral out of control. While dealing with the threats of the stalker, the two continue to pursue the pet killers and eventually bring them to justice

* * *

Double Trouble – Lesbian: Romance

Summary

LITTLE DID KRIS know that the traditional first baseball game of the season played each April between the San Diego Padres and Los Angeles Dodgers would change her life. Tripping in front of the dark-haired Erin and caught ogling to boot, was only the preamble for the tall blonde, as both ended up splashed with beer in the stands and laughing good-naturedly about the accident and clean-up. So begins what is bound to open old wounds and make both women stronger as they find in each other a connection – love, lust, trust, kids and trouble times two – that will decidedly make their relationship a rocky one but ultimately worth every hurdle they overcome.

Back Cover Summary

L.A. Metro – Lesbian: Romance

DR. KIMBERLY DONOVAN'S life is in shambles. After her medical ethics are questioned, first her family, then her closeted lover, the Chief of the ER, betray her. Determined to make a fresh start, she flees to California and LA Metropolitan Hospital.

Dr. Jess McKenna, LA Metro's Chief of the ER, gives new meaning to the phrase emotionally guarded, but she has her reasons.

When Kim and Jess meet, the attraction is immediate. Emotions Jess has tried to repress for years surface. But her interest in Kim also stirs dark memories.

They settle for friendship, determined not to repeat past mistakes, but secretly they both wish things could be different. Will the demons from Jess's past destroy their future before it can even get started? Or will LA Metro be a place to not only heal the sick, but to mend wounded hearts?

* * *

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