

CAN A HOSPITAL MEND
A BROKEN HEART?

L.A. METRO



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Excerpt

L.A. Metro

Entering the park, Kim followed the signs that lead to the dog run area. Jess had really managed to shock her yesterday. Having Jess ask her to meet with her outside the hospital was the last thing she had expected. While it was what she had been hoping for, Kim was still nervous. She wasn't sure what to expect. *I can do this.* Finally spotting what she was looking for, she headed for the large fenced-in area.

Dogs of all shapes and sizes were playing in the bright fall sunshine. She easily spotted Jess leaning against the fence just inside the dog run, near the gate. Kim stopped for a minute to admire the woman. Instead of the Dockers and button-down shirt or scrubs she was used to seeing Jess wear, she was dressed in Lycra shorts and a T-shirt. Kim's gaze ran appreciatively over her well-muscled body. Broad muscular shoulders, well defined biceps, and a flat stomach with trim hips led down to heavily muscled legs. Kim knew that Jess was a

beautiful woman, but now, dressed like this... Kim shivered as a wash of arousal cascaded down her body. The strength of her response surprised her. *Friends*, she sternly reminded her wayward libido. *I'm going to be her friend*. She forced the distracting feelings away before heading over to Jess.

“Hey, Jess. Good morning.”

Jess offered a tentative smile. “Hi, Kim. Glad you could make it.” She opened the gate for Kim and motioned her inside the dog run.

The realization that Jess was a bit anxious made Kim feel better about her own nervousness. To give them both a chance to get used to being together in a non-work situation, Kim took the time to look around. Excited dogs chased each other, nimbly dodging the park benches scattered throughout the area. A black lab was splashing in one of the large water bowls strategically placed around the run.

Several small dogs ran up. Their exuberant yipping pierced the crisp morning air. Kim knelt down and held out her hand to be sniffed. Once assured of their friendliness, she petted them. She smiled at Jess when

she squatted down next to her and offered her own gentle ear rubs to the canine trio.

Kim stood as the small dogs scampered off. A lot of her tension had eased. Dogs were great stress relievers. She looked at Jess, pleased to see she appeared more relaxed as well. “They were cute, but I still like big dogs best.”

“Well, luckily I can help you out there,” Jess said. “Ready to meet my boy?”

Knowing Jess had a big dog, Kim checked out the dogs nearby. The only two dogs she saw that she considered big dogs were a German Shepard and a very large Doberman. “Which one is he?”

Jess quickly scanned the area, glancing right past both dogs Kim had spotted. “He must be down at the other end. See where those trees are? He’ll come when I call.”

That’s when Kim noticed just how large the fenced area really was. “Great. I’m looking forward to meeting him.” Kim glanced over at Jess. *Uh-oh. Never saw that look before.* Jess had a little half smirk on her face. The look screamed—look out; here comes trouble. Kim tried to brace herself for whatever was coming. At the same

time, she was delighted to see Jess relaxing the tight control of her emotions she maintained at work.

Jess led them over toward a group of benches. Just as they reached the seats, Jess let out a piercing whistle, causing Kim to jump. “Sorry about that. I should’ve warned you.” She pointed off to the left. “Here he comes.” Jess slapped her palms against the tops of her thighs. “Come on, Thor. Come here, boy!”

Kim turned toward where Jess had pointed and nearly fainted. Charging straight at them was the biggest dog Kim had ever seen.

“Oh my God, Jess, that’s not a dog. That’s a horse!” Kim took a step back and moved slightly behind Jess.

Jess grinned as the big dog skidded to a halt in front of her. “I thought you said you liked big dogs.”

Embarrassed that her bravado had slipped so badly, Kim mock-scowled at Jess. “Yeah, big dogs. You didn’t say anything about a Clydesdale.”

“Don’t worry,” Jess said, trying hard to control her laughter. Reaching out and stroking the big dog, Jess reassured Kim. “He’s big, but he’s harmless.” Jess took Kim’s hand and urged her to stand next to her. “Kim, this

is my Great Dane, Thor.”

Kim offered her hand to be sniffed.

“Thor, this is Kim. Be nice,” Jess said.

Thor took a step forward to check her out. Kim swallowed a bit nervously when she realized the dog’s head was almost chest height. And she was tall for a woman, she only missed by a couple of inches matching Jess’s almost six-foot stature. He wagged his tail and proceeded to give her a thorough sniff. She smiled as her trepidation eased. Kim quickly saw what a gentle giant the big dog truly was and began to stroke his head and ears.

Thor made his approval known. He gazed into her eyes, and then laid his head against her breasts.

“I don’t believe it,” Jess muttered. She shook her head and stared.

“What?” Kim asked as she continued to pet Thor.

“I’ve never seen him do that with anyone except myself or my sister. He’s not unfriendly, but he tends to be standoffish about offering affection to strangers. Usually he sniffs someone and then just walks away.”

Thor suddenly leaned harder into Kim, forcing her to

step back as his weight against her increased.

“Thor.” Jess grabbed his collar. “Back up.” She urged Thor back several steps. “Sorry.”

Kim laughed. “It’s okay. He’s not bothering me.” Pointing to the bench next to her, she said, “Why don’t we sit down and you can tell me about this handsome boy.”

Jess sat down, but kept a firm grip on Thor’s collar.

“He’s fine, really. Let him go,” Kim said as she moved to a spot on the bench near Jess.

As soon as Jess let go of Thor’s collar he headed for Kim.

Kim was a little taken aback when Thor stepped close. The huge dog’s head was now level with hers. She met his eyes and was surprised by the intelligence that shone in his dark brown eyes.

Thor gently laid his head in Kim’s lap. When she began to stroke his head, he closed his eyes and sighed in contentment.

“Come on, you big moose. Kim is not a cuddly toy.” Jess reached for Thor’s collar, intent on pulling the big dog off of Kim’s lap.

Kim laughed. “Honestly, he’s fine. Leave him.” She stroked her hand down his shining black coat. “I’ve never seen a Great Dane that looked like this before.” His black head and body shone in sharp contrast to his white neck and chest. “He looks like he’s dressed in a top hat and tuxedo.” Kim slid her hand down one of his strong front legs. “He even has the white spats to go along with his formal attire.”

“He’s what’s called a Mantle Great Dane,” Jess said. “Most people are more familiar with Fawn or Brindle Great Danes.”

“I knew Great Danes were big,” Kim reached down and tried to close her hand around Thor’s front leg but couldn’t, “but I never realized they were this huge,” she said.

“They can get pretty big. Thor is larger than average. He’s thirty-nine inches tall at the withers and just shy of two hundred pounds.”

Kim gulped. It appeared to her that most of that two hundred pounds was solid muscle. “Good thing he’s so docile.”

“Yeah, they’re big babies for the most part. But under

the right circumstances they can be very protective of their owners.” Jess stretched, arching her back.

Kim struggled to keep her eyes on Jess’s face where they belonged. “Ready to go jogging?” *Either that or I’m going to need a cold shower.*

“Sure. Let’s go.” Jess snapped Thor’s leash onto his collar.

* * *

Jess guided them back to where they had started before slowing down to a walk. Knowing Kim had not jogged in a few months, Jess had offered the one-mile route. Kim had opted for the two-mile trail. *Bet she’s regretting that decision about now.* Kim was bent over at the waist with her hands resting on the top of her thighs as she tried to catch her breath.

Allowing her eyes to run over Kim’s body for the first time, she took in the tall, slender figure before her. She had been so nervous earlier she had not really paid that much attention to Kim’s attire. Kim had on short nylon running shorts and a T-shirt. Jess had suspected a

gorgeous body lurked beneath the professionally tailored slacks and silk blouses she wore at work. The reality was much more than she had anticipated. *Your imagination sucks*. Drops of sweat trailed down Kim's well-defined arms and legs that seemed to go on forever. Her tight, sweat-soaked T-shirt clung to a flat stomach and hugged her breasts. Jess's libido immediately flared to life, and she pushed it down with difficulty. *Friends. Just friends*, she repeated what was becoming a mantra.

"You okay?" Jess asked.

Kim straightened up and started to shake out her arms and legs. "I'm fine. I know I'll probably be sore tomorrow, but it still felt good to get out and run. I need to get back to regular workouts."

"You're welcome to join Thor and me anytime on our runs." *What are you doing? This was supposed to be a one-time thing until you saw how she acted at work afterward*. Jess couldn't bring herself to retract the spontaneous offer. It felt right.

A quick glance at Kim proved she was just as stunned by the invitation as Jess was at having made it. A smile tugged at Jess's lips as Kim tried to regain her

composure.

“I wouldn’t want to intrude. I know you don’t get to spend a lot of time with Thor,” Kim said.

Beautiful and incredibly thoughtful. Jess knew Kim was offering her a graceful way out. “Thor really likes you.” *And so do I.* “It’s not an intrusion. We enjoy your company.”

That beautiful, sun out from behind the clouds smile that Jess was coming to adore, blazed across Kim’s face. “That would be great, Jess.”

Thor bumped Jess’s hip.

“Sorry, boy.” She had been so distracted by Kim she had forgotten what she was supposed to be doing. “I need to get him some water. Walk over to my truck with us?”

“Sure.”

On the way to the truck Jess couldn’t help noticing the occasional sour look Kim was throwing at Thor. She looked him over but couldn’t see any reason for Kim’s apparent ire. Nothing untoward had happened on their run.

“Is something wrong?” *Oh I bet I know what the problem is.* Jess was so used to his drool she forgot that

most people didn't appreciate being covered in Thor's slobber. Jess pulled the small white towel she had tucked in her waistband and wiped Thor's muzzle. "Sorry. Did he slime you?"

"No, he's fine." Kim glanced down at Thor, and a slight scowl once again marred her face.

Jess was getting a bit worried. Had Kim decided she didn't like Thor after all?

Kim looked up at Jess and laughed. "Don't mind me. I'm just jealous."

Huh? "Of what?"

Kim pointed at Thor.

"Of Thor? Why?" Jess asked. She looked back and forth between Kim and Thor, totally confused by this turn of the conversation.

"We just ran two miles and he wasn't even winded. He looks like he could go another two miles, easy, if not more. I'm jealous. I used to do five miles at a time and now look at me."

Jess did as instructed. Kim's hair was windblown and damp with sweat; her T-shirt was wet with perspiration, and her face was still flushed from exertion. *You're*

beautiful. While undoubtedly true, Jess figured it was best to keep that observation to herself.

Pulling on her own damp T-shirt, Jess made a show of checking herself out. “I look pretty much the same. I can’t keep up with him either. I kept him by my side today. Normally he runs in front of me and zigzags back and forth to get some extra mileage. I think he runs twice as far as I do, and he’s still not tired.” She reached over Thor’s back and patted Kim’s shoulder. “Don’t feel bad. He’s a lot younger than we are.”

Kim snorted. “Great. Thanks. I feel much better now.” She looked down at Thor. “You just wait. Once I get back in shape then we’ll see who gives out first.”

Thor let out a deep-throated woof as if accepting the challenge.

Kim jumped and then laughed. She gently bumped Thor with her leg. “No comments from the peanut gallery.”

Kim is so good with him. No wonder he likes her. She talks to him like Sam and I do. Watching the two interact, Jess had a feeling her quiet, solitary life was about to change. Her heart felt light at the prospect.

Thor's pace quickened, and he began to tug on the leash at the sight of Jess's vehicle.

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