

*(Scene opens to a subway station in New York City.)*

The subway station is crowded as usual. As I run toward the train, I'm grateful to be in scrubs and sneakers.

(I couldn't imagine rushing to catch the train to Manhattan in heels and a pencil skirt.)

Today is my first day as a surgical resident.

Countless late nights and coffee-fueled study sessions during medical school paid off. Memorial Kent is one of the best teaching hospitals in the country.

(The last thing I want is to be late!)

I dash inside the car just before the doors close.

As I reach for a pole, the engine gives a lurch. Sudden force sends me sprawling toward the floor.

FIRSTNAME: "Oof!"

HANDSOME MAN: "Careful!"

I look up to see a man so handsome, it should be illegal in at least twelve states. His biceps are like boulders, and he's pulled me against his chest.

HANDSOME MAN: "Are you okay?"

FIRSTNAME: 1. "Yes."

2. "I've been better."

3. "I am now that you're here."

*(Option 1)*

FIRSTNAME: "I'm alright. Good catch, by the way."

The gleaming smile he offers me promises heartache.

HANDSOME MAN: "Thanks. If there had been more pretty girls like you to catch back in high school, I might have made varsity."

Heat blooms in my cheeks at the compliment.

*(Option 2)*

FIRSTNAME: "Ow. This is not how I was hoping to start this morning."

Sympathy plays across his face at the remark.

HANDSOME MAN: "I think most people try to avoid the subway floor. God only knows what's been spilled on it."

*(Option 3)*

FIRSTNAME: "I am now that you're here."

FIRSTNAME: "Falling into a handsome stranger's arms isn't the worst way to start the morning."

FIRSTNAME: (God, that sounded better in my head.)

Luckily, he flashes me a rugged grin.

HANDSOME MAN: "In that case, I'm glad to be of service."

*(All options lead back here)*

I step back from the handsome man and take hold of the pole. Once I've regained my balance, I steal a glance at him.

He cuts an impressive figure, sculpted muscles packed tightly beneath a fireman's uniform.

HANDSOME MAN: "I'm Damien, by the way."

FIRSTNAME: "I'm [FirstName] [LastName]."

FIRSTNAME: "Are you with Station Five?"

DAMIEN: "I am! We're the best station in all of New York...if you believe our Twitter account."

DAMIEN: "You must be working at Memorial Kent. We take patients there all the time."

DAMIEN: "Are you a doctor?"

*(Major points for assuming I'm a doctor, rather than a nurse.)*

FIRSTNAME: "I am! Today's my first day as a resident."

DAMIEN: "Oh wow. Are you nervous?"

FIRSTNAME: "A little. My sister is an attending there, so she was able to tell me about the program."

DAMIEN: "Sounds like she gave you some insider's knowledge. But what do you think of working at the same place as your sister?"

DAMIEN: "I love my brothers, but I'm not sure I'd want them at the station with me."

In truth, I feel the same way. My sister is as smart as they come, but she tends to swallow up any room she steps into.

It's made her successful. She's spoken at more conferences than I can count since she started her diabetes research.

*(I'm not eager to be in her shadow.)*

FIRSTNAME: "I'm not sure yet. She and her husband are on a mission trip to Guatemala. We won't work together for another year."

DAMIEN: "That sounds like a good way to start off. It'll give you a chance to establish your own name."

The train comes to a halt before I can say anything further.

DAMIEN: "This is my stop. I hope to run into you sometime again, Doc."

Damien finishes that sentence with a wink, and I'm left blushing as he steps off the train.

Two new passengers step inside.

One is a woman a few years older than me. She's lithe as a mountain lion, her strides quick and purposeful.

She's wearing a pair of blue scrubs beneath a dark hoodie.

*(Is she at Memorial Kent too?)*

Suddenly, she turns her gaze on me. It's only a quick glance, but her eyes are as hot and intense as wildfire.

I look away before she can see my cheeks color red.

The train stops again, and several of the passengers depart. Someone new grabs hold of the pole next to me.

They're dressed in an expertly tailored sleek grey suit.

They catch me looking a moment later, a slow smile spreading over their full, sensuous mouth. (God, is everyone on this train hot?)

Before I can explore that thought, the sound of breaking glass and torn metal roars through the compartment.

PASSENGER: "What's going on?!"

The darkness that follows is like something out of a summer horror flick.

My ears are still ringing when the lights come back on. Every window in our compartment has shattered.

Frantic screams echo from the platform. I see the wreckage of a second train up ahead.

(Oh my god, there's been a crash!)

The woman from earlier slowly rises to her feet. The person in the grey suit is lying on their back, unmoving.

Without a moment's hesitation, she rushes to their side. Her slim fingers press against their throat and feel for a pulse.

I race to join her, pulling a stethoscope out from my purse.

A lot of my classmates laughed when they found out I started keeping this stuff on hand, but I've never been more grateful to be prepared.

(The best doctors are.)

I rip through their suit in an instant. The person's breathing seems normal at first glance, but there's a massive bruise on their side.

I hook the stethoscope into my ears and angle the resonator against their chest. Before I can listen for anything, the other woman slaps my hand away.

WOMAN: "Careful! Do you see that bruise? The last we need right now is to give them a pneumothorax."

FIRSTNAME: "One of their lungs could have already collapsed! We won't know unless I listen."

WOMAN: "If you mess this up, you risk pushing their ribs into their lung. It'll pop like a balloon."

WOMAN: "I don't have time to babysit some medical student. Give me your stethoscope."

FIRSTNAME: 1. Take charge. (27 hearts.)  
2. Hand over the stethoscope.

*(Option 1)*

Anger boils my veins, but I rein it in. Surgeons are ruthlessly calm during a crisis. I'm not about to be goaded by this woman.

FIRSTNAME: "I am not a medical student. I am a resident at Memorial Kent, and I am going to do what is best for this person. You can either help me or stay out of my way."

Fire flashes through her eyes, but she doesn't try to swat me again.

I turn my attention back to the patient and listen to their lungs in several sections. The bruise is ugly, but it doesn't seem to have punctured anything important.

FIRSTNAME: "They're in good shape. I don't hear anything abnormal."

WOMAN: "Lucky for them."

She's collected a pen and written down vitals on the patient's arm.  
They're strong and healthy. Hopefully, they'll wake up soon.  
(I don't want to imagine what will happen if they don't.)

*(Option 2)*

Fuming, I hand the stethoscope over to the woman.  
But as I watch her deft hands move over the patient, my resentment fades. She quickly keys into the sound of their lungs despite the shouting outside.  
(Wow, she's incredible.)  
In the end, it's about what's best for the patient. And she clearly knows what she's doing.

WOMAN: "Respirations are normal. Make yourself useful and take some vitals."

Her bossy tone puts me back on edge.  
(And to think I was having such charitable thoughts about her.)

*(All options return here)*

Slowly, the patient's eyes blink open. Confusion makes their brows furrow into a harsh crease.

PERSON: "Ugh...what happened?"  
WOMAN: "You were in a train accident."

Her voice is surprisingly gentle when she speaks to them.

WOMAN: "I'm Luna Dominguez. I'm a nurse with Memorial Kent. Can you tell me your name?"  
PERSON: "Casey Townsend. Attorney with Briggs & Travis, if we're handing out business cards."

(Briggs & Travis? That's one of the best law firms in the city!)  
I manage to slip back into my doctor mode before I start fangirling.

FIRSTNAME: "We'll take good care of you until the paramedics arrive, Casey. Don't worry about a thing."  
LUNA: "And try not to move until then."  
FIRSTNAME: "Yes, definitely avoid moving. Everything will be much better if you stay still."

Casey glances up at me, a crooked smile tugging the corners of their lips.

CASEY: "For you, Angel, I can manage that."

(Oh my.)  
(Bruised, bloodied, lying on the ground...and they're *still* suave.)  
(So much for not fangirling.)  
Paramedics and firefighters soon arrive to take us away from the accident.  
Damien is one of the first responders on the scene.

DAMIEN: "Doc, this is not what I meant when I said I wanted to run into you again."  
DAMIEN: "Are you hurt?"

FIRSTNAME: "No, I'm alright. Casey's the one that needs the most attention."

He and his partner carefully hoist Casey into a stretcher and beckon us to follow.

*(Scene transition to hospital.)*

We reach Memorial Kent in record time. Casey is rushed off for an X-ray, while Luna and I are escorted to the trauma bay.

ALEJANDRO: "Well, if it isn't my favorite new resident!"

Alejandro pulls back the curtain and greets me with a brilliant grin. My sister's best friend is a welcome sight after this morning's events.

FIRSTNAME: "Have you come to check up on me?"

ALEJANDRO: "Oh, my favorite attending would never let me hear the end of it if I didn't."

He cups my face, pressing down on my temples and jawline to ensure nothing is broken or damaged. His hands are surprisingly strong and warm.  
(How have I never noticed before?)

ALEJANDRO: "Have you heard anything from her?"

FIRSTNAME: "Nothing since Saturday. They just settled into the village."

ALEJANDRO: "I'm sure they're busy doling out vitamins, birthing babies, and digging latrines. The whole shebang, if your sister has any say in it."

FIRSTNAME: "Knowing her, she'll be running the town by the midnight."

ALEJANDRO: "Hey, it's good practice for when she institutes a benevolent dictatorship on the whole country."

Alejandro pretends to be contemplating something important as he pulls out a penlight and checks my eyes for signs of a concussion.

ALEJANDRO: "I wonder if her husband will be a king in this scenario...or her concubine."

My ears are ringing, my head is pounding, and I'm sore as a prizefighter after a big loss. But I still let out a series of giggles.

Alejandro has always been able to make me laugh.

FIRSTNAME: "Probably the latter."

ALEJANDRO: "Ha! I think so too."

Alejandro quickly determines that I'm uninjured, save for a few cuts and bruises. He cleans them up with some gauze and bandages, dabbing gently with every application.

ALEJANDRO: "I hate to tell you this...but I think you'll live."

FIRSTNAME: "You hate to tell me that? Gosh, way to make a girl feel special."

ALEJANDRO: "Chica, if wanted to make you feel special, I'd do it with a bottle of pinot and a box of Swiss chocolates."

ALEJANDRO: "And maybe a bottle of massage oil. Flavored, of course."

(That's Alejandro. One minute he's smooth as buttermilk, the next he's subtle as a Tinder swipe.)

FIRSTNAME: "I'm not sure I trust you to make good on that promise.

ALEJANDRO: "You're right. It would probably be olive oil. I'm sorry. Still edible, though."

ALEJANDRO: "Anyway, you'll live. But as I said, you might have some regrets. The first year of residency is a special level of hell."

FIRSTNAME: "That's what they said about medical school."

ALEJANDRO: "Medical school? That's just a warm up. The real torture begins during residency."

ALEJANDRO: "And you've gotten off to a hell of a start, judging by today's antics."

Someone clears their throat from behind the privacy curtain.

MAN: "Dr. Ortega?"

ALEJANDRO: "At your service!"

Alejandro peels back the curtain and grins up at another man. He's tall and imposing as a statue of a Greek warrior. But his deep voice is gentle as he speaks.

MAN: "May I speak with Dr. [LastName]?"

ALEJANDRO: "Of course, Dr. Kent. I'll give you a moment."

Alejandro tosses me one last grin before walking away. My jaw almost hits the floor when the other man takes a seat beside my bed.

Dr. Lawrence Kent is one of the most brilliant surgeons in the whole country.

His grandfather might have opened some doors, but there's no question he's the chief of surgery at this hospital because of his talents.

It's an honor just to be in the same room as him.

(And he's younger than I thought he would be.)

(Why didn't my sister mention he was cute?)

LAWRENCE: "How are you feeling, Dr. [LastName]?"

His voice is like warm honey, and sends a pleasurable tingle up my spine.

FIRSTNAME: "I'm alright, sir. It was a shock, but I'm glad we all made it out safe and sound."

LAWRENCE: "I certainly am as well. Nurse Luna mentioned you handled yourself very well during the incident."

FIRSTNAME: "She said that?"

The surprise on my face draws a grin over his.

LAWRENCE: "Don't let her fool you. She cares much more than she lets others see."

LAWRENCE: "Plenty of first-year residents would be struck dumb during an incident like this morning's."

LAWRENCE: "But you handled yourself well. You were calm, supportive, and exactly what you needed to be in order to help your patient."

The smile he offers me is surprisingly boyish. For a moment, I feel like I'm back in high school and he's asking me to prom.

LAWRENCE: "We're very lucky to have you with us, Dr. [LastName]."

LAWRENCE: "And though your first day has been unusual...I hope you'll enjoy learning the ropes here at Memorial Kent."

(Oh, I think I will.)

A sudden commotion catches our attention. Damien and the other first responders are back with another injured person.

LAWRENCE: "Excuse me."

Dr. Kent heads straight for Damien.

LAWRENCE: "Another victim from the crash?"

DAMIEN: "Yes. He hasn't woken up yet, but his vitals are stable."

LAWRENCE: "Let's get him hooked up to an IV. I'll make sure his tests are expedited."

The patient ends up in a bed next to mine. He's unconscious but peaceful, his face still and his breathing easy.

Suddenly, his eyes snap open. They're a shade of noxious green that I've never seen in another human being.

His face heats up like a firecracker on the Fourth of July. Boils bubble up along his skin.

Nearby nurses scream as they watch this man's flesh and bones dissolve into a charred heap, smoke trailing from the smoldering ruin.

Before anyone can approach, an explosion rocks the room.

The force of it knocks me back from the bed, and I shield my head with my arms.

When I open my eyes, there's nothing but a pile of cinders and broken bedframes.

I've never seen anything like that in a medical journal.

(And something tells me that train crash was no accident.)

*(TO BE CONTINUED.)*