

IS LOVE ENOUGH TO HEAL...

WOUNDED  
*Souls*



EMERGENCY



RJ NOLAN

# CHAPTER 1

LOGAN GAVE ONE LAST LONGING glance at the crowded beach before turning away. After she had arrived in LA that morning, the lure of the sand and surf had been too tempting to ignore. Despite the wind and chilly weather, apparently a lot of people had decided to enjoy the ocean and the impending sunset. She retraced her steps along the trail, back across the point, toward the parking lot. When she'd spotted the tiny parking area earlier, she had hoped that translated into a fairly unpopulated beach. No such luck.

As she veered to the right, following the trail, she noticed a smaller, less used path that she had not seen on her way to the beach. There was a sign on the trail, but it was too far away to read. She smiled when she reached the sign. It simply said *beach* with an arrow pointing in the exact opposite direction she had taken before.

What the heck, it was worth a try. She slapped her thigh and called to her companion. "Come on, Drake."

He glanced up from whatever smell had enticed him from her side. For a moment, he looked as if he was going to balk. A shake of his leash, which made the tags on his collar jangle, convinced him otherwise.

The trail narrowed and then ended at the top of a stairway. Logan looked down and hesitated. The stairway to the beach was narrow and steep. From what she could see, the beach below looked empty. She eyed the stairway again, which sported a handrail on each side. It was too tempting.

"Don't worry, boy. We'll take it slow and easy. Let's go."

Halfway down, she glanced back to see how he was faring with the steps. He grinned at her, his tongue lolling.

When they reached the bottom of the steps, her gaze swept the secluded cove. There was not a person in sight. *Perfect*. She settled onto the sand and leaned back against the cliff wall, letting the sound of the surf wash over her. She patted the sand next to her. The big dog settled down by her side. “Well, Drake, this is it. We made it all the way across country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific.” She stroked his head where it rested on her thigh and sighed. “I just wish I knew where we go from here.” There was one thing she was sure of: there was no going back to Boston.

The sun sank into the ocean, painting the sky with vivid hues of orange, red, and purple. As the sky darkened, her thoughts meandered through all of the places they had been in the last two years.

A sudden low growl from Drake made Logan jump.

A stranger was almost on top of them. The rapidly fading light and the sound of the incoming tide had shrouded the stranger’s approach.

Logan’s heart slammed against her ribcage like a trapped bird trying to escape.

Drake leaped to his feet and planted himself between the stranger and Logan.

The stranger skidded to a halt. She backpedaled, almost tripping in her haste to put some space between them.

Logan scrambled off the sand and grabbed the flashlight off her belt. Her thumb hovered over the button that would turn the ordinary looking flashlight into a stun gun.

“Sorry about that. Didn’t see you there.”

At the sound of the woman’s voice, the tension left Drake’s body, but he remained in place in front of her. It took a long moment before Logan made her thumb move off the stun gun’s button. She returned the flashlight to

the holder on her belt. Blowing out a breath, she berated herself for letting her fears get the better of her. Her hand strayed to her chest.

“I rarely come across anyone here,” the woman said. “Most people prefer Point Dume Beach on the other side of the promontory. And not too many people want to take on those steps, even in the daylight. So this little cove is usually pretty deserted.”

Which was exactly why Logan had chosen it. “No problem.”

“Anyway, I’m sorry I startled you. I should’ve had my light on.” She pulled out a flashlight and turned it on.

Even with the added light, the only things it illuminated clearly were the woman’s gray sweatpants and red running shoes; her face remained shrouded in shadow.

Her solitude gone, Logan gave up on the beach. “Drake. Side.” The big dog immediately moved to her side and pressed his shoulder to her thigh. “Good boy.”

As soon as Drake moved, the woman took several steps backward, giving him a wide berth.

While the woman had given her a fright, she didn’t like to see anyone afraid. Logan hugged Drake’s head to her side for a moment. “Great Danes really are gentle giants. He won’t bother you.”

The woman nodded, but her body language said she wasn’t convinced. “Have a good evening,” she said and with a wave continued down the beach.

“We better head back to the campground, boy. Probably going to be a long drive in traffic.” She glanced down the beach where the other woman had gone. She was already lost in the darkness. Logan turned in the opposite direction and headed back toward the stairs.

Her thought turned to tomorrow and having to meet the head of the ER department. She scowled. What made the woman think LA Metro’s ER was so special? No use worrying about it now. She’d find out soon enough.

## CHAPTER 2

DALE RUBBED HER ACHING THIGH. Every step she took caused pain to throb through her leg as she made her way down the corridor toward Jess McKenna's office. It just figured that she had chosen last night to push herself by going to Pirate's Cove before work. Even after three years, she still felt the need to prove to herself that she could do anything she used to.

The night in the ER had started out quietly but had turned chaotic when the fog had rolled in and covered a large swath of I-5, causing a multiple-vehicle pileup. It hadn't helped any that the other ER doctor had once again been unable to see her share of patients. Dale knocked on Jess's door and opened it when Jess called out admittance.

"What are you still doing here, Dale? After the kind of night you had, I thought you'd be out the door as soon as you could. Is there a problem with the turnover?"

"No. Everyone's been taken care of. I need to talk to you about Gretchen...again."

A frown marred Jess's face before her usual all-business expression reappeared. She motioned toward the chair in front of her desk. "Have a seat."

Dale sank into the offered chair. She reached out to rub her thigh and stopped herself just in time. "Look, I sympathize with what she's going through. I know she can't control when she has morning sickness, but it's causing problems. We were overwhelmed last night with incoming from the pileup on I-5. Riley and Craig had already taken patients to the OR. It was an all-hands-on-deck kind of thing. We had a bilateral flail chest, and

Gretchen bolted from the room in the middle of putting in a chest tube. I had to talk the resident, who took over for her, through the procedure while I got the guy intubated and inserted a chest tube on the patient's other side." Dale raked her fingers through her hair. "I know I said I'd take up as much slack as I could, but this has been going on for two months now. We need help on the night shift."

"I understand, and I'm working on it." Jess pulled over a file from the corner of her desk. "I don't want a repeat of what happened with the last guy."

Dale scowled as she remembered what a fiasco that had been. The guy had been an abrasive jerk who did as little work as he could manage in between alienating as many patients as possible. "I'm with you on that one. But what choice do you have but to take who the agency sends?"

"I've already talked to Dr. Tate. This time, I'm going to review the applicants' past work history." She tapped the file in front of her with one finger. "If they want the part-time position, they'll have to work with me for a few days before I agree to the hire."

Dale's already abundant respect for Jess went up another notch. She knew Jess cared about the ER, but getting the new Chief of Staff to agree to going well beyond the normal procedure for hiring a physician for a limited-time position must have been a hard sell.

"Not to be too pushy or anything, but do you think you can get us some help by the end of the week?"

"I'll see what I can do. I've got an applicant coming in this morning."

"Great." Dale grinned at the prospect of getting some much needed help. "Thanks."

Jess shook her head. "Don't thank me yet. I'm going to put this woman through her paces before I agree to the hire." She held up her hand to stop Dale's protest. "I know you need help, but it would be better to take a

couple of extra days and be sure we've got someone really good than to have to go through this again in a week."

Dale sighed. "You're right. And thank you for understanding about the situation with Gretchen."

Jess's office door swung open, and her wife, Kim, stepped into the room. "Oh, sorry. Didn't realize you were busy." She started to back out the door.

"Wait," Jess said as she rose from her chair, a glowing smile lighting her face. She glanced at Dale. "We all set here?"

"We're good. Thanks again." Dale smiled at Kim in passing. "Have a good day." As she closed the door on the pair, she couldn't help envying them. How wonderful it must be to not only have a wife but one that you worked with every day. She shook her head. *Dream on.*

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Logan stopped outside the entrance to LA Metro's ER. The dark, thick clouds that blotted out the sun matched her mood perfectly. "Time to go face the new boss," she muttered with a scowl. Having to pass muster with the department head was not the usual procedure for locum tenens work. The company she worked for specialized in providing physicians to fill short-term positions all over the country. Normally, the hospital hired the company, and as long as the physician met the criteria for the hire, you got whoever the company sent.

Why couldn't LA Metro be like every place else? She had been tempted to refuse, but there were no other offerings in the area, and she needed to work. If she wanted the job, she just had to suck it up. "Fine, let's get this over with."

She marched up to the ER front desk. The area was fronted with thick glass like the teller area of a bank. A small grill was inset into the glass, along with a slot for passing papers back and forth. She leaned in close to the glass. "I'm here to see Dr. McKenna."

The clerk looked up from the computer screen. "Which one?"

*What?* Logan frowned. "The head of the ER, Dr. McKenna. I have a nine o'clock appointment with her."

"Okay, I'll let her know you're here." He picked up the phone. "Sorry, I didn't get your name."

"Dr. Logan. I'm from Barron's Staffing." She couldn't make out what the clerk was saying on the phone through the thick glass.

He hung up the phone and leaned forward so she could hear him again. "Dr. McKenna will be right out."

Logan tapped her foot and barely resisted the urge to pace. She didn't want to be standing around waiting to be grilled by some ER chief; she wanted...needed to be working. Her gaze scanned the patients that filled the waiting room. These were the people she should be helping.

The door next to the desk swung open, and a tall, dark-haired woman with striking blue eyes stepped out.

"Dr. Logan?" When Logan nodded, she held out her hand and offered a firm handshake. "I'm Dr. McKenna. If you'll follow me, please."

She trailed after Dr. McKenna as she led the way into the ER proper. The place was busy with nurses and doctors going about their business with very little chitchat. Just the type of place she liked.



## CHAPTER 3

DALE HAD A SPRING IN her step as she headed for the ER entrance. Jess had left her a message that the new locum tenens doctor would be starting work this evening. She stopped at the nurses' station and motioned to Paul, the desk clerk.

"Hey, Dr. Parker. What's up?"

"We've got a new doctor coming in tonight to give us a hand. Let me know when Dr. Logan gets here, please." She turned to walk away.

"She's already here."

Dale glanced at her watch. Her shift didn't start for half an hour. She turned back toward the nurses' station. "Where is she?"

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the cubicles along the far wall. "Curtain three, I think."

"She's seeing a patient?"

"Yeah. She checked in and went right to work."

"Thanks for letting me know." Dale scanned the intake board, confirming that Dr. Logan was indeed in curtain three. Since the problems with Gretchen's pregnancy had escalated, Dale had taken over responsibility for the night shift. This was her ER now. No one just waltzed in and started seeing patients without so much as a hello. After taking a moment to shed her jacket, she headed for the curtained cubicles with a determined stride. She paused outside the one containing Dr. Logan and her patient to take a calming breath.

Jess had vetted this doctor, so she must be fine. Dale grinned as she remembered her own time under Jess's eagle eyes just over a year ago. She could laugh

about it now. But at the time, it had been more nerve-racking than being under the scrutiny of the captain on her first overseas assignment. She doubted Jess had been any less vigilant about Dr. Logan. Still, she felt an obligation to oversee the new doctor until she was confident in her as well. Working nights was a special responsibility, as backup wasn't as readily available as during the day shift.

Dale pulled back the curtain and peered inside. The woman's back was to her as she spoke quietly with the man on the gurney. She couldn't make out what was being said. There wasn't much she could tell about her physically as a baggy, white lab coat masked her figure. Her straight dark blond hair was pulled back into a ponytail that swept her collar. She guessed that Dr. Logan's height matched her own five foot seven. Before she could make her presence known, the woman turned and spotted her. She frowned and took several quick steps toward Dale.

"Can I help you?" Dr. Logan asked.

She found herself captured by a pair of topaz-brown eyes, made striking by the golden starbursts surrounding the dark irises. It took a moment for Dale to find her voice. She inclined her head toward the hallway. "Why don't we step outside?"

Dr. Logan stepped out of the curtained area and across the hall, out of the patient's earshot. She crossed her arms over her chest. "Is there a problem?"

Taking in Dr. Logan's defensive posture, Dale needed to tread lightly. After all, the woman technically hadn't done anything wrong. And she didn't want them to get off on the wrong foot. Though she still planned on keeping an eye on her. "I just wanted to introduce myself. I'm Dale Parker, the physician in charge of the night shift." She held out her hand.

Dr. Logan took her hand in a firm grip. "Logan. Nice to meet you."

She couldn't help noticing that Logan hadn't offered her own first name. Curious, she glanced at the hospital ID hanging from the collar of her lab coat, only to find it flipped over with the back side showing. *Oh well.*

"Was there something else? I'd like to get back to my patient."

"No. I just wanted to welcome you to the night shift and tell you that if you need anything, just let me know."

"Okay. If you'll excuse me, then."

Dale's gaze remained on Logan until she reentered the cubicle and pulled the curtain shut behind her. She wasn't sure what to think of the new arrival. While she wasn't the most personable, it appeared that she was going to be a hard worker. And that was what was most important. As she walked away, she relived that moment when Logan's vivid gaze had captured her own. *Don't go there*, she sternly berated herself.

\* \* \*

"Can I give you a hand?"

Logan jumped. *Damn the woman.* Glancing over her shoulder, she found Dr. Parker leaning against the doorframe of the treatment room. She turned to look at her more fully. Her muscular build was apparent beneath a long-sleeved T-shirt and scrubs. Shaggy brown hair framed Parker's face, softening her otherwise strong features.

From their first meeting, something about Parker had struck her as tantalizing familiar. But that made no sense as they had never met before tonight. Parker's red athletic shoes caught her eyes, and a memory rose unbidden of the woman at the beach yesterday evening. She snorted to herself. Out of all the millions of people in LA, what were the chances that the two of them would end up on the same beach? Even if they had, it didn't lessen Logan's exasperation with the fact that Parker had been dogging her all night.

Logan took a deep breath, making sure her irritation wouldn't show. "I've got it under control." She went back to suturing the patient who'd been on the losing end of a bar fight. Up until now, she'd been perfectly happy with only his snores to keep her company.

"I really don't mind," Dr. Parker said as she came to stand on the opposite side of the gurney. "It's pretty quiet. I'll help you finish up, and then we can grab a cup of coffee." She smiled, tugged a raised stool close to the gurney, then reached for a pair of gloves. "We haven't had a chance to get to know each other."

And if Logan had anything to say about it, that's exactly how it would stay. She didn't want to know anything about her coworkers or vice versa. "It's not necessary. Really, I've—"

The sound of running feet drew their attention. Marco Martinez, one of the residents, grabbed the doorway as he slid to a stop. "Dr. Parker. Ambulance just pulled in. Motorcyclist versus a bus." His eyes were wide. "It's bad."

Dr. Parker rose to her feet. "Marco, finish up here for Dr. Logan." Her calm gaze met Logan's. "Let's go."

Logan was right on Parker's heels as she raced down the hall. They burst through the trauma bay doors together.

"Status," Dr. Parker barked as she slipped into protective gear. "Someone call Dr. Connolly."

Logan glanced at Dr. Parker and froze. Gone was the smiling, placid woman she'd been dodging all night. Her eyes had gone steely gray, her whole demeanor transformed. Here was a warrior poised for battle. *Wow*. She was a mesmerizing sight.

Shaking her head to force away the distracting vision, Logan focused on the scene in the trauma room. The resident hadn't exaggerated; it was bad. The patient looked as if he had been dragged under the bus. She did a quick survey of his most apparent injuries: compound

fractures of both tib/fibs, deep abrasions of the chest and abdomen, as well as a possible humerus fracture.

One of the nurses reeled off the patient's stats, even as they worked to finish removing what was left of his clothes, draw blood, and attach him to various monitors.

Logan pulled down her face shield and moved to one side of the gurney. Parker took the other.

The pulse-ox monitor began to shrill.

"Logan, get him intubated."

She moved to the head of the gurney and grabbed a 7.5mm endotracheal tube. Once she had the tube in place, she attached the Ambu bag. Giving the bag several squeezes, she listened on each side to confirm the tube's position. A radiograph would have to wait.

Without being asked, she positioned herself opposite Parker and worked on stabilizing the injuries on her side of the patient. Even in the heat of the moment, Logan was aware of how well they worked together, without getting in each other's way. It was as if they had done so a hundred times before.

The trauma bay door swung open, and a petite redhead blew into the room.

"Glad you could finally join us, Dr. Connolly," Parker said.

*What?* Why was she ragging on the woman? From what she had seen of Parker tonight, it seemed out of character. It had been less than ten minutes since she had called for the doctor. She shot a look at Parker and caught her grinning behind her face shield. She was joking; it was a common ER coping strategy.

"Had to finish up my checkers game," Dr. Connolly shot back. Her expression turned serious. "What have you got?"

Parker quickly summarized the patient's injuries.

Logan stepped back as the woman, who, was apparently a trauma surgeon, took her place at the patient's side. She felt a strange pang at losing that

momentary connection she'd shared with Parker as they worked over the patient. *What's the matter with you?* Angry with herself, she stripped off her bloody gloves and gown, then tossed them in the biohazard bin. All that mattered was work. And there were always more patients to take care of. Yet she couldn't resist one last look over her shoulder at Parker as she headed out of the room.

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SOULS

BY RJ NOLAN

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