



The Love We Keep Preview

EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT

“Son of a bitch.”

Suzanne looked across the room. The monster was awakening. And maybe she shouldn't be thinking of him in such harsh terms, but his opening line backed it up.

“Would you like something to eat?”

“No.”

“Grumble, grumble,” she murmured under her breath.

“What?” he snapped.

“Nothing. But you have to eat, so I'm going to make you a sandwich. Do you need the bathroom?”

No answer. Because surely he did, but just dreaded dealing with it.

Ready to try her damndest to do Cal proud, she cut him some slack and simply said, “I think our best bet is the crutches.”

“Or you can just bring me something to pee in,” he muttered, clearly not proud of the request but making it anyway.

“I don’t have any receptacles I’m willing to sacrifice to urine, and you need to learn to use the crutches.”

“How the hell do you expect me to do that?” he barked. “My damn leg doesn’t move! Or haven’t you heard?”

She’d anticipated the barking and didn’t let it affect her. “I expect you to use the other limbs that still do move.” She could ask if the clinic had a wheelchair, but she wanted to make him work – get used to working – to get around.

“I can’t,” he growled.

She drew in a deep, calming breath. He’d just declared defeat before even trying. But even if that attitude might be fair right now – the news was very fresh – she still refused to stand for it. “Yes, if you don’t try you definitely can’t. But I don’t want pee in my mattress – or anything else unpleasant for that matter – so it’s time to put on your big boy pants and give it a shot, tough guy.”

Propped up on his elbows now, he glared at her. “Who the hell do you think you are?”

Even without the use of one leg, his harsh tone made her want to recoil. But for Cal, and for Dahlia, and even for the gruff, angry, man in the bed who she’d never liked, she instead forced herself forward – until she practically hovered over him. “I think,” she began, “that I’m your only resource right now. So maybe you should think about the fact that I’m trying to help you – and have the brains to try to help yourself.”

With that, she reached for the crutches leaning against the wall and thrust them at him. “Are you ready to do this?”

She met his dark gaze, glimmering beneath the layer of tension weighing down the room, and saw his temple pulsing. But finally he said, “Yeah, I’m ready.”

It was grueling getting him out of bed, yet they eventually did, getting him up on the crutches and working out a system.

“Crutches. Left foot. Crutches. Left foot.” She repeated the words, watching his useless right foot drag on the floor behind him as he inched forward. But he was inching forward. She’d

placed a supportive arm around his waist on his weak right side for balance, aware of the well-toned muscles in his arms and stomach.

“They’ll become even stronger the more you use them,” she murmured.

“What will?”

“Your muscles.”

He glanced over at her – putting their faces close. “Were we talking about my muscles?” He looked confused.

And she felt confused. Since of course they weren’t – until she’d accidentally noticed them. “No, but ... it’s good you have them, for using the crutches.” She feared she sounded nervous. Over the fact that he has muscles? Ridiculous. It was just weird to get so up close and personal with him.

Once they were in the bathroom she said, “Can you handle the rest on your own?”

He lifted his gaze to her once more. “Are you volunteering to help if I can’t?”

Heat filled her cheeks. “I most certainly am not.”

“Then you better get out ‘cause I gotta go.”

Suzanne withdrew uncertainly, thoughts whirling. Was he flirting with her? No, closer to being a smartass. And the pain meds might be affecting his behavior. And maybe from a nursing standpoint she should have helped him – but the very notion made her face burn even hotter as a vague memory floated through her brain: Meg had once told her, after too many cocktails at the Pink Pelican up the street, that he had a nice butt.

A moment later, from outside the door, she heard him going. How utterly bizarre to be listening to Zack Sheppard pee. Please let him be able to get his pants back up. Getting them up would be harder than getting them down. She felt about as mature as a fourteen-year-old girl.

A few minutes later, when all was quiet and too still, she called gently, “Everything okay in there?”

“Nope – can’t get my damn pants pulled back up.”

Crap. It was almost as if she’d willed it. “Well, keep trying.” Yep, very mature.

“Aren’t you supposed to be a nurse?”

Of all the times for him to make a sensible point. “Yes, but ...”

“For crying out loud,” he muttered. “I need some goddamn help in here, woman.”

She had no choice. You’re gonna have to go in. “Can you ... face away from the door?”
Fourteen going on twelve. But this wasn’t just a patient – it was Zack.

“Yeah, sure, whatever – consider me faced away.”

Taking a deep breath, Suzanne rushed in, bent down, grabbed the waistband of Zack’s sweatpants with both hands, and yanked upward. There was a little hangup in front that made him flinch and her cringe, but soon she was back outside the bathroom, teeth clenched lightly. Over the hangup in front. Over having touched his bare thighs, hips. And because Meg had been right about his butt.

[Order The Love We Keep today!](#)