



Missing Mother-To-Be

By Elle Kennedy

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Mercenary Deacon Holt can't understand Lana. She should hate him. Instead, she refuses to believe he's coldhearted. Though Deacon tries to remain detached, he can't deny he still wants Lana.

And when Lana's life is threatened, Deacon will risk all to help her escape....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

A RITA-award nominated author, Elle Kennedy grew up in the suburbs of Toronto, Ontario, and holds a B.A. in English from York University. From an early age, she knew she wanted to be a writer, and actively began pursuing that dream when she was a teenager. Elle currently publishes with Silhouette Romantic Suspense and Harlequin Blaze. She loves strong heroines and sexy alpha heroes, and just enough heat and danger to keep things interesting!

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Were there right and wrong ways to pee on a stick? Lana stared down at the plastic cylinder between her trembling fingers, the two pink lines as clear as a billboard in Times Square. She must be doing something wrong. This was the fourth test she'd taken in two days. Eight pink lines. It *had* to be a mistake.

"*Attention tous lespassagers,*" a loud voice blared in French through the PA. The voice informed her that the train to Florence was now boarding, prompting Lana to leave the bathroom stall.

Her shaky legs carried her to the trash can near the door, where she tossed the pregnancy test before turning to examine her reflection in the mirror. Her blond hair was pulled back in a low ponytail, her face was makeup-free and there were dark smudges under her eyes. She looked tired.

Didn't look pregnant, though.

Her gaze slid down to her abdomen, which was flat beneath her red V-neck tee. And her snug black capris fitted the same as always, comfortably circling her waist

She lifted her head, suddenly feeling silly. Of course she wouldn't be showing yet. It had only been two weeks. Two weeks since that crazy, wonderful night with Deacon.

Quickly washing her hands, she dried them with a paper towel then dropped it in the trash, effectively covering the pregnancy test that seemed to glare accusingly up at her.

She drew in a calming breath. Okay. Okay, this wasn't the end of the world. She was pregnant, not deathly ill. She would get on the train, go back to her apartment in Florence and figure things out.

How will you find him? a desperate little voice demanded.

Lana left the bathroom, tugging on the handle of her sleek black suitcase and rolling it behind her. The distressed plea in her mind was hard to ignore. How *would* she find him? She'd gone back to his hotel last night, after the first two tests had shown positive, but the clerk in the lobby informed her that Mr. Holt had checked out. Holt. At least she got a last name out of that visit.

She dodged a woman dragging an enormous suitcase, and continued down the terminal. The station was busy, filled with evening travelers rushing up and down the tiled floor. People chattered on in French, Italian and a smattering of other languages, completely oblivious to Lana's inner turmoil.

How on earth would she track down Deacon? The hotel didn't have a forwarding address for him, and a quick Google search on her laptop had come up with nothing. She didn't even know what he did for a living,

for Pete's sake. A businessman, he'd said. Great. So much to go on there.

"May I help you with your suitcase?" a purser asked in French as Lana approached the track. "*Merci, oui,*" she murmured.

The thin man picked up her suitcase then helped her onto the train. A loud whistle pierced the air. Travelers were bounding down the platform, boarding at the last minute, while the PA crackled again to announce the train's departure.

A pretty woman with shiny brown hair escorted Lana to her compartment. It was a private sleeper car, and she'd already arranged for a wake-up call for tomorrow morning, when she'd need to take the connecting train in Milan. The cabin was cozy and comfortable, but Lana doubted she'd get any sleep. Probably just sit in silence for the next nine hours and try not to cry.

God, what kind of mess had she found herself in?

She sank down on the plush bench and promptly buried her face in her hands.

"Is everything all right, mademoiselle?" the stewardess asked hesitantly.

Lana lifted her head. "Everything is fine," she managed. "I'm just tired."

The woman stored Lana's suitcase on the overhead rack and edged to the door. "I will let you rest then. Enjoy the trip."

Lana muttered a thank-you, then let out a breath as the door of the compartment closed and she was alone. Alone.

Oh, God, she'd have to raise this baby by herself.

The moment the thought slid into her mind, a surprising sense of calm settled over her. Ever since she'd taken those tests, she hadn't allowed herself to think about what she planned to do with the baby. She was twenty-four years old, unmarried, still being supported by her parents to supplement the small income she made selling her sculptures. Having a child hadn't been in her foreseeable future.

But circumstances had changed. She was pregnant. And no matter how unexpected this development, she knew she would keep the baby.

Her hand covered her stomach, a rush of startling joy sweeping through her as she imagined the tiny life growing inside her. A baby. *Her* baby.

And Deacon's...

The joy faded into frustration. Yes, this was Deacon's child, too. And he had no clue.

She had to find a way to contact him. Sure, he probably wouldn't be thrilled about the news. For all she knew, he'd turn on his heel and march away without a backward glance, not wanting anything to do with this child. The notion brought a spark of pain and anger to her gut, but she wasn't naive enough to dwell on the anger. She and Deacon were strangers. Two strangers who'd met one night and found comfort and magic in each other's arms.

She couldn't expect him to welcome the idea of fatherhood with open arms. She wouldn't even blame him if

he didn't. But he still had a right to know. Lana wouldn't be able to live with herself knowing she'd kept something as important as a *child* from the man.

She had to track him down. So what if he didn't seem to want to be found? So what if it would be difficult? She was Lana Kelley, after all. Her shoulders straightened in determination. When she reached Florence, she'd call a private investigator and hire him to find Deacon. And then she'd sit down and figure out what to do about this last year of school. She could probably finish out the winter semester, but she wanted to be in the States when the baby was born. She wanted her family to— Her family.

Lana felt all the color drain from her face. "They're going to kill me," she mumbled to herself.

She pictured her brothers' faces when they heard the news and suddenly grew nauseous. Her parents might understand, maybe even support her. They might have their own problems at the moment, but everything would be straightened out eventually. Once that happened, she knew her mom and dad would help her.

Her brothers, on the other hand...

Dylan and Cole would be furious. Jake might be supportive, if he ever returned from his mysterious undercover assignment that had taken him away from them for two years now. Chase probably wouldn't care—he'd washed his hands of the family years ago. And Jim, well, he'd probably hunt Deacon down and rip his throat out.

A hysterical laugh bubbled in her throat. At least then she'd be able to tell Deacon the news.

Reaching for the black leather purse she'd set down beside her, Lana fumbled inside it until she found her cell phone. The train was already tearing down the tracks, heading for Florence, but she couldn't wait until she got there. She had to talk to someone. Anyone. She needed some moral support badly.

She scrolled through her contact list, hesitating on her mother's number. No, she finally decided. Mom had her own worries right now. Regret gathered in Lana's belly. Darn it. She hated adding any more stress on her mother's already overfull plate.

Caitlin O'Donahue's number was what she dialed instead. Lana considered Caitlin family, the older sister she'd never had, not to mention her very best friend. Caitlin had babysat Lana when they were growing up, and over the years had become her closest confidante.

"Hey, you've reached Caitlin. Leave a message and I'll get back to you," her friend's voice chirped.

Lana hung up in frustration, not bothering to leave a message. *I got knocked up after a one-night-stand* wasn't something you wanted to say over voice mail.

She shoved the phone in her bag and leaned her head back. What a mess. Why had Deacon checked out of his hotel so abruptly?

And why couldn't she get him out of her head?

The memory of their night together floated into her mind like a balmy summer breeze. Her body grew hot, tight and achy, as she remembered the feel of his strong arms wrapped around her.

"You're stunning," he'd whispered into her neck. And then he'd looked at her with those sexy hazel eyes, as if he'd truly never known beauty until that night.

The entire encounter was still so surreal. The tangy flavor of the red wine they'd sipped. His warm breath, heating her skin. His lips, kissing their way along her collarbone, her jaw, finally pressing against her mouth.

Her skin broke out in shivers. God, those kisses. Soft and romantic, teasing, fleeting and then hot and passionate, as the heat between them exploded in a raging fire that had left her utterly sated.

"This isn't a good idea," he'd murmured between kisses, uncertainty flickering on his handsome face. "We're strangers."

Yes, they were. Two strangers who'd met in a museum, shared a few glasses of wine in a hotel room and wound up needy and naked in bed.

It had been the best night of her life.

Lana's gaze dropped to her flat abdomen. Maybe the worst, too, yet she couldn't quite bring herself to regret the result of their passion. A baby. God, a *baby*.

Those two words continued to echo through her mind, and she clung to them. The tiny life growing inside her was the only thing keeping her grounded at the moment. The only reason she hadn't gone into a total panic and started roaming the streets of Paris in search of Deacon. She needed to be strong for this child. She needed to love it and protect it.

Protect it, she repeated in her mind, as her eyelids became heavy. She wasn't sure why the slightly ominous notion rolled inside her head, but she clung to that, too, as sleep slowly crept in...

Users Review

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