

OH BAUBLES

HARMONY KENT



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BOOK DESCRIPTION



After a tragic accident one Christmas, Charlene loses her husband and her leg.

Scarred and damaged, the losses leave her lost and reeling, and a long recovery lies ahead of her.

When John, a hot young physiotherapist, comes into her life with his ripped abs and good-god good-looks, she can't imagine he'd give somebody like her a second glance.

Then she falls for him.

Can Charlene overcome all obstacles to gain back her life and find true love once more?

Find out in this fun-filled, clean Christmas romance novella from award-winning author Harmony Kent.

THE CONSULTATION



A trim and neat-looking nurse with her hair up in a severe bun stood gripping a thick file to her torso. Throughout the last two-hour's wait, it was by far the biggest file that Charlene had seen any of the staff toting around. She flushed with embarrassment. It was hers. Had to be.

'Mrs Dickens?'

Her flush paled, her hands grew clammy, and she felt sick. She struggled to gain her feet and untangle her two crutches. 'It's Matthers. Miss Matthers. My husband ... he's dead ...'

But the nurse had already turned away and begun to head off down the long corridor, oblivious. As usual, she walked too quickly for Charlene to be able to keep up. They all did. And none of them ever thought to hold open the heavy double doors for her either. Honestly, hospitals seemed the least equipped to deal with disabled people of anywhere she'd been since ... since the ... the accident.

The nurse had reached the end of the endless corridor, and only then did she notice that her charge wasn't with her. With an

impatient sigh, she turned around and faced Charlene, tapping her fingers on that oversized file while she waited for the slow patient to lumber over the highly polished tiles—treacherous in their slipperiness. Why did all hospitals go for such a high shine?

At the consultation cubicle—no doctor’s office this time—the nurse dumped the file on a high table with a monitor above it and turned and walked off, her job done. The consultant, Dr David Bloodletter, stood at the monitor with his back to her—I know, right? What sort of name is that for a doctor? Had it been Charlene’s name, she would have changed it by deed poll. It reminded her of the first time she’d ever flown, and the captain had come over the tannoy to introduce himself. Already nervous of both heights and flights, her jitters had gotten a lot worse when he announced his name, ‘Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Captain Sinker, and I’m flying you to Majorca today.’ *Sinker*. Seriously, did they choose their jobs because of their names? If she read that sort of stuff in a book she would turn her nose up at it and call it silly. But then, the medical staff must have thought that of her the Christmas before last. ...

... ‘*MRS DICKENS, can you hear us? Are you with us? Mrs Dickens?*’

Groggy, Charlene blinked her way back to awareness. Bright lights, beeping monitors, and white-clad doctors surrounded her, along with a confetti-smattering of light-blue nurses’ uniforms and the pale grey of nursing assistants. Where was she? What had happened?

A crash. An accident. Tim ... where was her Timmy?

‘Mrs Dickens? Can you tell us where you are?’

‘Hospital?’ she guessed.

A tight smile. A bright beam from a pen light aimed into her right eye and then her left. She winced. ‘What happened?’

A hesitation. A pause. A flood of dread. 'Tim? Where's my husband?'

A nurse, senior judging by the navy blue of her trousers and tunic, leant over and took one of Charlene's hands. 'I'm so sorry. Your husband succumbed to his injuries. He's dead. I'm sorry.'

And there it was in all its awful irony ... no Christmas future for the Dickens. No Christmas present, either. Only a Christmas past. 'It should have been me,' she sobbed, heart-broken.

The nurse frowned. 'Hush now. It'll be all right. I promise you. Try and rest.'

Rest?! Of all the absurdities. The tears fell unabated. And while Charlene Dickens sought blissful oblivion, her brain refused to deliver and kept her resolutely awake and conscious.

'It should have been me. I should have died'—she felt an urgent need to explain to the nurse, to tell somebody the truth—'He couldn't free me, and my head kept going under the water. So he wedged his head under mine. Pushed my face up with his cheek. Kept me above the water. He died. For me. Tim should be alive, not me.' A raw wail of grief tore from her against her will. 'I'm not worth it.'

And then came the longed for oblivion. A doctor inserted a syringe of clear liquid into the tap of the cannula in the back of her hand, and Charlene slipped into a dreamless sleep. ...

... 'MRS DICKENS?'

The consultant had noticed her at last. Realised he stood blocking her way. 'Oh,' he said in a cold and judgmental voice, 'you're on crutches already, I see.'

He made it sound like a failure. Yet another in a long line. Charlene hung her head so that her long and unruly hair hung even further over her face, hiding her expression from this hateful man. Why couldn't he be nice like her other doctors? And why couldn't her hip have given her another two or three

decades so that she didn't need to get referred to the guy who specialised in young-adult hips? Her mother had been sent to a lovely man just last year. But Charlene's luck had run out two Christmases ago.

Defeated and lacking the energy to correct his use of her married name, Charlene slumped down onto the only available chair, a hard plastic affair, designed for discomfort. They didn't want you lingering at these appointments.

Mr Bloodletter noticed her prosthetic limb, 'Oh, you're an amputee. ... Below knee is it?'

'Yes.'

'What happened?'

Surely he'd read her notes? In a mumbled rush, she recited, 'Car crash. Christmas before last. Lost my right leg. Fractured my spine. Punctured a lung. Ruptured my bowel.' Killed my husband, she added in her head.

As if this were routine and not an awful tragedy, he nodded and said, 'And now you have problems with your hip?'

'Yes.'

He scanned the notes. 'Left side? That's your support side, yes?'

Tired, Charlene nodded.

He looked at her appraisingly, up and down, and her skin crawled. She did not like this man. Now she wished she'd allowed her sister to attend with her. A chaperone would have been nice.

From there, the consultation went downhill. He seemed to be a man who liked to think out loud, completely unaware of the impact of his unfiltered words. Worse still, he proceeded to list all the interventions he couldn't perform due to her physical condition and her overweight state. He checked the MRI image on the computer screen. Again, he looked her up and down and stared at her left hip and thigh.

‘Mmm, my impression is that you’re suffering from an impingement type pattern. Options for management of this present various avenues—all of them problematic.

‘You’ve exhausted the non-operative route with physiotherapy, which hasn’t helped?’

Charlene shook her head. ‘No. It made things worse.’

The doctor continued speaking aloud to himself as if she weren’t even there. ‘In the first instance, I suggest we perform a left hip injection to ascertain how much of the pain is from the hip joint itself. If it is overwhelmingly responsible for the pain, you face further possible surgical solutions.’ He glanced at his notes some more.

‘An arthroscopic procedure whilst you’re the size you are and with the depth and the extent of your socket will prove a technically difficult procedure to manage. At least in your age group, this pattern of impingement has a relatively good outcome. However, you’re an amputee.’ Another stare at her hip, and the fat which ringed it. ‘My arthroscope is only so big.’ He spaced his hands apart to give her a visual. Just how fat was he implying she was?

Charlene had gotten stuck at *‘whilst you’re the size you are.’* She’d lost two-and-a-half stone since the weight gain following initial injury. The long recuperation period had gained her roughly four stone in extra fat. Her goal was to return to her pre-injury weight of around eight stone. Honestly, she was living on one meal a day, and not what most people would call a proper meal at that. Her complete lack of mobility had played havoc with her metabolism. She tried hard to lose weight, she really did, and it was a struggle—day in and day out. And then she met men like him. As if to prove his judgment of her, he commented, ‘It’s a simple matter of mathematics, you know. What you put in, minus what you use up. Limit your intake. Exercise as much as you can.’

Tears of shame burned against her eyeballs, and Charlene blinked them back behind her curtain of hair. Not every overweight person was a greedy person who lacked self-discipline. It seemed pointless to try and justify herself to his arrogant man, though. He probably wouldn't hear her even if she did.

The doctor continued to muse out loud, 'Because of your amputation, the open surgical option will be difficult to manage postoperatively due to the touch-weight-bearing issue. The only other option I can see is joint replacement surgery. Which, again, will be difficult to manage due to your mobility limitations and your excessive weight. It's difficult to assess your BMI due to the false limb.'

Bloodletter turned his back on Charlene and stood typing into the computer terminal. After a minute or so, he noticed that she remained sitting in the hard chair. He gave her a stern look. 'You may go. We'll send you an appointment in the post for the injection.'

Injection? Obviously, she'd missed that bit. Through blurred vision, fighting to hold herself together, Charlene struggled to her feet once more, gathered her crutches, and shuffled from the examination cubicle. A nurse stood at a table just outside the curtained area. Charlene had lost all sense of direction. With a forced smile, and pretending to make fun of herself—when really she just felt mortified and sick—she flicked her hands left and right and raised her brows: *Which way?*

The nurse returned her smile and pointed to the left. Charlene mouthed a 'thank you', turned left, and shuffled away. She kept it together until after she'd climbed into the driver's seat of her small Yaris. Its hand controls allowed her to drive, but her recent issues with a frozen shoulder following a fall threatened even that small amount of independence. It seemed like everything hurt all of the time. And adequate sleep was but a distant memory.