

## One

“What do you mean there’s something wrong with the baby?” Elliott Collins said.

“That’s what the doctor told me yesterday.” Bridgette Conner shrugged her shoulders and looked at Elliott over her lunch, which remained untouched on her plate. She hadn’t had much of an appetite since the doctor’s visit.

Bridgette and Elliott were at a small café off Corrales Road in Albuquerque. They were rival reporters. He was a general assignment reporter at the *Albuquerque Journal*. She was a young reporter already earning a name for herself at the *Reporter-Herald*. They had met on election night a year ago and their attraction was immediate. Bridgette had called him at work this morning, insisting that they meet for lunch. She couldn’t go any longer without telling him.

“So this is why you wanted to have lunch,” he said. “What did the doctor say?”

“He said he thinks there’s something wrong with the baby,” Bridgette said. She looked down at her salad and toyed with a piece of red lettuce with her fork.

“But you said it was fine during the last appointment,” he said.

“The baby’s a *she*, Elliott, not an *it*,” Bridgette said, trying to keep the anger out of her voice. “And yes, the doctor said she was fine, but that was the last appointment. Now there seems to be some kind of prob—”

He cut her off. “What do you mean some kind of problem?”

Bridgette took a deep breath and settled back against the diner’s seat. “Our daughter might have Down syndrome.”

She looked out the window, her attention fixed on a traffic light changing from red to green, fighting to keep her composure. This was the first time she had given words to what the doctor had told her only a day earlier about their daughter. It had taken her breath away then, as it was doing now. She had cried all the way back to the office.

Bridgette was struggling to keep the tears at bay. She spoke finally, “He ... he said based on the results, it is a ... very likely that she a ... may have Down syndrome.”

Elliott put his fork down and slowly started to chew his food, a habit Bridgette always found annoying. She watched his Adam’s apple bob up and down. She noticed there was a nick just to left where he had cut himself shaving this morning. She thought of their morning in bed together, waking long before their alarm had gone off, talking about all the things they had planned to do once the baby was born. She couldn’t bring herself to tell him then.

“What the hell is that anyway?” Elliott’s voice was more of a growl.

“It happens when the baby has a full or partial extra copy of chromosome 21. Typically the nucleus of each cell contains 23 pairs of chromosomes, half of which are inherited from each parent.”

Elliott snapped at her. “I know what it is.”

“Do you, Elliott,” Bridgette said and her eyebrows drifted slightly upward.

“Because let me tell you I sure as hell thought I did, too. Sure, I’ve heard the word Down syndrome many times, thinking I knew what it meant. But guess what.”

She glared at him. “I know a lot more today than I did yesterday before I went to the doctor. I spent the rest of the afternoon yesterday reading everything I could find on the Internet. And lemme tell you, Elliott, you don’t know a damn thing about it, not like you think you do.”

“So you’re already an expert,” he said.

Bridgette leaned into the table. “I never said I was an expert. I just said I know more now than I did yesterday.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this morning?” Elliott’s tone was accusatory. “We were in bed for more than an hour. Why didn’t you say something then?”

“I ... I don’t know. I ... I wanted to, I wanted to tell you as soon as I found out, but I don’t know...” Bridgette looked away, biting the inside of her bottom lip. She didn’t want to tell him that she was hesitant because she was afraid of what he might say.

“So what are you going to do about it?” he asked.

His words brought her eyes to his and Bridgette couldn’t help the gasp that escaped from her mouth. She put hands gently on her stomach. “What do you mean what am I going to do about it? What about us?”

Elliott took a deep breath as he pushed his plate away. “Well, Bridgette, this isn’t something I signed up for. You’re going to need to fix it.”

“Me,” her voice sounded hollow. “How am I supposed to fix it? Elliott this is our child, our baby. We’re in this together. You’ve always wanted children and you always wanted to have them with me. We’re getting married this summ—”

“Yes, I’ve wanted kids, yeah, you’re right, Bridgette, but *normal* ones.”

He threw his napkin over his plate and gave her an abrupt stare before he looked away. “Probably came from your side.”

Bridgette shook her head in disbelief. She opened her mouth to speak, but her cell phone started to vibrate, moving in place on the table beside her plate. She picked it up and stared at the caller id.

“Finally,” she said. “I have been waiting for this call since yesterday. I have to answer this.”

She slid out of the booth without looking at him. “We can talk to tonight.”

Elliott watched her push open the cafe door and walk out into a strong afternoon sun, adjusting her shoulder bag as she talked on her phone.