

CHAPTER 1

Touch Down

THE TIRES HITTING the runway set off Diana Baker's phobia. She twisted around in search of the nearest emergency exit. Her elderly seatmate smiled and patted her hand. "It's okay, dear, no matter how often I fly, I get heart palpitations when we land."

"Thank you, Mrs. Tripp, I'll be fine." Diana grasped the armrests and peered out the window as the plane taxied to the gate. The flight from Naperville, Illinois to Portland International Airport had been uneventful; however, her visit would be extraordinary. Diana was at the front of the plane and able to exit without a hitch. As she rolled her suitcase up the exit ramp, she felt lightheaded, tears filled her eyes, and her heart felt full to bursting.

This is it. I'm finally going to meet my family for the first time since my birth. She entered the terminal and scanned the crowd. Everyone looked the same, no one stood out ... until she saw a couple standing apart from the rest. Her mother was blonde and her father had sandy-red hair. They waved and ran toward her. It was clear they recognized Diana in a heartbeat.

Diana dropped her backpack on the terminal floor and fell into Emily's outstretched arms. James, her husband, edged in, encircled the women with his arms, and said, "No one will ever hurt us again. No one."

The airport crowd thinned, leaving the family huddled in the middle of the concourse. When Diana lifted her head, she saw the blue eyes that had visited her childhood dreams: her mother's eyes, which were now damp with tears of joy.

"I've waited eighteen years to hear your voice and see your beautiful face." Emily swallowed. "I almost gave up, but God told me to hold on even when all hope was gone."

"Mother." Diana leaned into the cleft of Emily's shoulder to fit like a puzzle piece and complete the perfect picture of mother and daughter.

James sniffled and pulled a crisp white handkerchief from his back pocket. He wiped his eyes and nose, looked around, and then said, "Maybe we should go, dear."

"Wait." Diana looked to her father. "I need a hug, too." She wrapped her arms around his waist. James rested his chin on top of his daughter's head before he pressed his lips against her soft cloud of blonde hair and breathed in. He stepped back to get a clear view of his long-lost daughter.

Diana covered her mouth and hiccupped; followed by Emily. Diana laughed at her private joke. *We're alike.*

The three strolled the concourse with arms entwined. The burgeoning crowd of harried travelers wove around them; some brushed their shoulders, a few frowned as they hurried on their way.

* * *

Once inside the car, Diana laid her head back on the headrest, closed her eyes, and sighed. *I'm finally going home like Dorothy Gale returning from Oz.* In the front seat, her parents' voices blended with classical music and lulled her into a deep sleep.

"Diana, we're almost home. Your brother and sisters can't wait to meet you," Emily said.

"What? Sorry, I kind of fell asleep."

Emily smiled. "Understandable. It was a long flight. You must be exhausted."

"I am, actually." Diana rubbed her eyes and tried to focus.

"After you get settled, we want to take the whole family to an early dinner and celebrate your homecoming. What is your favorite food?" James asked.

Without missing a beat, Diana said, "Hamburgers, french fries, and Coke."

"A girl after my own heart." James glanced at this wife. "Yes, siree, she's a girl after my own ..." He didn't finish.

"Concentrate on driving, dear." Emily patted his knee.

James pulled into the driveway. Diana leaned forward and peered between her parents to see twin girls, not much younger than herself, and a boy who looked ten or eleven.

The girls jumped off the porch, ran to the car, and left their brother leaning against the porch pillar with hands stuffed in his jeans' pockets. A frown wrinkled his freckled face.

Emily stepped out of the car and hugged the twins; she kissed their cheeks and brushed a tear from her eye. The girl in green shorts pulled away and pointed to the car. "Is this Diana?"

"Who else would it be, silly?" The twin in the yellow shorts jabbed her twin sister in the ribs.

Diana opened the door, swung her feet out, and paused before she looked up and met two sets of blue-green eyes. Kerri and Kate broke into smiles; each one held a lock of blonde hair in their forefinger and twirled it into a knot. *They do the same thing I do when I'm nervous.* Diana let out a giggle which broke the tension.

"I can't believe it," Kate said. "It's really you." She pulled Diana out of the car and into an embrace. Diana wrapped her arms around Kate and buried her face into her neck.

Kerri stood apart from the rest with her hand over her mouth and then, apparently feeling left out, joined her sisters to form a group hug.

James and Emily smiled as they watched, but Bryan hadn't changed his expression or left his post by the front door. He removed his hands from his pockets and crossed them over his chest.

* * *

After dinner, Diana sprawled on one of the twin beds in the upstairs guest room. Despite her sisters' urgings to sleep in their room, she begged off with a headache. The day had been a miraculous answer to prayer, but an intense emotional experience. The only cloud over the family's celebration had been Bryan's reaction to her homecoming.

She pictured his scowling face and the hostile looks he gave her between bites of his hamburger and sips of root beer. Now she was free to chuckle over him belching in the restaurant. That night, at home after dessert, Diana rose to take her plate to the kitchen, but waited at the door when she overheard him saying to his sister, "Who does she think she is, some kind of rock star?" All day long he had acted rude. She guessed he was jealous and resented her sudden appearance.

Diana rolled over and grabbed her cell phone from the bedside table. She stared at it and thought, *Even though it's pretty late there, I should call Kevin. Dad for sure. But I'm exhausted and there's so much to tell. I don't know where to start.*

When her phone rang, she dropped it like a hot coal. She saw her boyfriend's ID and grabbed it off the floor. "Kevin, I was getting ready to call."

"I couldn't wait any longer, babe. How are you? How was the reunion?"

Diana forced a laugh. "The reunion was pretty good, but now I'm about to lose it."

"Why?"

She flopped back on the bed and let out a sigh. "Let's say not *everyone* is happy to see me." Diana twirled a strand of hair into a knot.

"Who's the idiot?" Kevin sounded angry.

"Bryan. He's only ten and doesn't seem wild about sharing his family with me."

"Oh, he's only a kid. He'll get used to the idea." Kevin chuckled.

"I hope. Anyway, how about you, your job, college? Anything exciting going on?"

"No, you own all the drama. Can't wait until we're together again." Diana heard a kissing noise from the other end.

"Love you, too. I miss you." Diana stifled a sob.

"Me too. But this is *your* time and you need to spend it with your real family."

Diana sat up and felt a surge of anger. "Don't say *real* family like they're better than Dad. I'm excited to have them in my life, but we don't really know each other, yet."

"I'm sorry, Di. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. It'll happen. And I hope it's real soon."

"Me, too." Diana rocked back and forth against the headboard. "I want to feel like I belong. And I miss Socks." She hiccupped.

"I wish you had me to cuddle instead of your kitty." Kevin laughed. "But you'll have them wrapped around your finger before long. Like me."

"You know the perfect things to say. I love you."

"Love you more. I'll let you get some sleep. Call as soon as you can," Kevin said.

After hanging up, Diana couldn't decide whom she missed more, Kevin or Glenn, the man who loved her and raised her as his own daughter for eighteen years. She desperately needed to hug someone, something. She rolled over on her side and grabbed the extra pillow.

Thoughts of Roberta, the woman who had posed as her mother for her entire life, surfaced like a boil on her neck. Sleep was long in coming and when she awoke at 2 a.m., she shivered from the dream of Roberta pushing her way back into her life. She remained stick-still, staring at the ceiling and wondering if her birth parents, James and Emily, would take Roberta to court or forgive the unimaginable sin of kidnapping their daughter from the hospital nursery so many years ago. She drifted off to sleep hugging the pillow and wondering what would happen in the next few days and weeks.

Title of Book: HEARTBEAT INTERRUPTED, BOOK TWO OF THE HEARTBEAT SERIES.

Buy at:

https://www.amazon.com/Heartbeat-Interrupted-Book-Two/dp/0997988320/ref=sr_1_1_twi_pap_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506908588&sr=1-1&keywords=Donelle+Knudsen

Website: <https://donellemknudsen.weebly.com>

