



LUCKY IN LOVE

CATHERINE CHERNOW

A Total-E-Bound Publication



www.total-e-bound.com

Lucky in Love

ISBN #978-0-85715-482-8

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Edited by Elizabeth Delisi

Total-E-Bound Publishing

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Published in 2011 by Total-E-Bound Publishing, Think Tank, Ruston Way, Lincoln, LN6 7FL, United Kingdom.

Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

LUCKY IN LOVE

Catherine Chernow

Dedication

This story is dedicated to all the women who have reached that mid-point in their lives.

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Jell-O: Kraft Foods Holdings, Inc.

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Chapter One

"Oh, no, you're not getting the best of me. Not this time."

Maddie Summers aimed the knife at her rival.

"I've had just about all I'm going to take from you."

She glanced across the kitchen table, then she licked her lips.

"Phil, you're hard to resist," she purred.

Maddie lowered the blade, intent on making the first cut.

"I'll just eat the whole damned thing." She sighed. "Mr. Conroy won't get a bite."

She tossed the butter knife down on the table next to Phil, the nickname for her favourite bakery treat, a crumb-topped pound cake, Philly Cream Cheese Loaf.

An oldies song drifted by her ears, its familiar melody a signal that she had a cell phone call. She recognised the number immediately. It was her neighbour from the other end of the block.

"Hi, Lucille. What's doing?"

"That's what I want to know. Did you meet our new neighbour, Mr. Conroy?"

"Just saw his car in the driveway. I figured I'd go over there now and bring him one of my welcome-to-the-neighbourhood goodie baskets."

"Mmm... With that pound cake in it?"

Maddie imagined Lucille licking her lips. She grinned in response to the mental picture.

"You're a good neighbour, Maddie."

"Well, I hope Mr. Conroy thinks so. You know, I can't make sense of all those crazy hours he works."

"Mr. Conroy works at Republic Airport. He's a pilot."

Maddie glanced outside. Conroy's car was still in the driveway. She looked over at Phil, sitting on her kitchen table. The urge to take a bite was strong.

"Gotta run. Otherwise, Mr. Conroy's basket will be light. I just may eat Phil." Maddie grinned.

She finished packing Mr. Conroy's goodies.

Grabbing the basket, she walked outside into the bright, May sunshine, ready to do her neighbourly duty.

A few minutes later, Maddie stood outside Mr. Conroy's front door.

Ding dong!

No answer.

She peeked through the window but didn't see anyone inside.

Ding! Dong!

She was about to put her finger on the doorbell again when it occurred to her that she might be disturbing Mr. Conroy's sleep. Maddie spied a picnic table under the shaded carport. She walked over to it and placed the basket there.

When she turned around, her nose collided with white cotton and a delicious odour, like citrus, combined with the smell of clothes dried outside in the sun. Her eyes drifted upwards, settling on a masculine chin. Beard-shadowed and angular, the only thing that softened such a strong jaw was the small dimple set dead centre.

"Oh, excuse me. I—I didn't think anyone was at home."

"That's all right." The man grinned. He pointed at the basket. "What's that?"

Maddie couldn't tear her eyes from him. He was tall—over six feet. The T-shirt her nose had bumped against earlier stretched across a wide, muscular chest.

A silver and gold watch gleamed against the tanned skin of his arms. She had a 'thing' for a man's arms. A fine smattering of dark hairs lined his, the play of muscle in his forearms prominent.

His feet were bare—nice long, narrow feet.

"Cat got your tongue?" He smiled, revealing a mouth full of white, even teeth.

Maddie's hormones, the ones she thought had deserted her fifty year old body, returned with a vengeance. The little nubbin of flesh nestled between her thighs quivered.

He walked past her to grab the basket. That's when she got a good look at his blue jean-clad butt. It was tight. Round. She had to quash the urge to reach out and grab it.

"Who is this for?"

She swallowed. Hard.

"It's for Mr. Conroy. I'm Maddie Summers, but you can call me Lucky. I live next door."

"Lucky, huh?" He smiled again.

She wished he wouldn't do that, because each time he grinned, her pulse raced.

"How'd you get that name?"

She nodded towards the basket. "There are lotto tickets in there. Five dollars' worth. Whenever I buy them for one of my neighbours or friends, one of them is always a winner. Not much, a couple of bucks, but, well—"

Was that her rambling on like an idiot?

"I like it."

"What?"

"Your nickname." He angled his head as if he were studying her. "Lucky. It suits you."

She reached behind her head and scrunched her curls.

Damn, there are so many grey hairs back there!

"I'm, uh, glad you like it." She finished on a murmur, not wanting to turn around, suddenly feeling very self-conscious.

At least, the front of my hair still has some blonde in it, even if the grey is making it look silver.

"Something wrong?" He furrowed a brow.

"Uh, no. I came here to leave the basket for Mr. Conroy." She looked around. "Is he at home?"

"He's home." He started opening the basket.

"Wait a second." She walked over to him. "Why don't you open it when he wakes up?"

"When who wakes up?"

"Mr. Conroy." She bit her lower lip. "Is he your father?"

He snapped his brows together. "My father..."

"Had I known there were two of you, I would have brought another Philly Cream Cheese Loaf. One for you and one for your dad."

He removed the cellophane wrapper from the pound cake and broke off a piece.

"Wow, this is good." He took another bite, chewed, and swallowed. "It's better than sex." His grin turned sheepish. "Sorry."

She had the most unholy urge to lick the crumb that lingered on the corner of his wide, generous mouth.

"I kind of feel the same way about Phil."

"Who's Phil?"

"My pet name for what you just ate. It's really called a Philly Cream Cheese Loaf, but sometimes it's like an old friend, giving comfort, particularly if I've had a crappy day."

"I've had my share of those."

"I guess we all do. Well, I'll be going. I'll stop by with another loaf for your dad."

She started to walk away.

"Maddie?"

She turned around.

"If you're going to get one for my father, you'll have to ship it to California."

"California? Why?"

"That's where my father lives."

She shook her head. "Wait a minute, I thought Mr. Conroy lived here."

"He does."

He walked down the driveway to where she stood. Her heart started to gallop, her clit following suit. It trembled in perfect time to the beating of her heart. She wished she could cross her legs and stop her traitorous hormones from running amok.

The young man stuck out his hand. "Jake Conroy is the name, and I'm very pleased to meet you, Maddie."

His deep voice washed over her like a wave of warm, soothing water.

She reached for his hand, allowing him to enfold hers in his larger one.

"Oh...I...well, I-I'm, uh, available anytime."

She felt her face grow hot but knew it wasn't from the sun. It had ducked behind a cloud a few minutes before.

"What I meant to say was, I—"

"I think you're very sweet, Maddie." He gave her fingers a gentle squeeze, but he didn't let them go. "Looks like *I'm* lucky to have a neighbour like you."

His eyes locked with hers.

Her hormones were gearing up again. This time, her entire body felt like an inferno. For once, she wished she could blame it on one of her hot flashes.

She pulled her hand away and walked down the driveway. Maddie didn't dare turn around. She just kept walking, until she got inside her house, mindful that his eyes seemed to bore through her back.

Inside her home, she shut the door, bracing her back against it. She took a deep breath, wondering how in hell she could be so attracted to Jake Conroy.

A man young enough to be her son.

* * * *

Jake watched Maddie walk away, admiring the sway of her hips. The neighbours had told him a terrific lady lived next door. Judging from the ages of everyone else in this suburban neighbourhood of Long Island, he'd figured Maddie 'Lucky' Summers was as old as they.

Not.

Or was she?

She had a body that rocked. Her face didn't look wrinkled and had just a few delicate lines around her eyes. Laugh lines, he thought. Isn't that what everyone called them?

He wondered if she did much of that – laughing.

He'd like to see it. Jake smiled in response to a mental image he had of Maddie laughing...

In bed.

Maddie's hair was like pure-white winter snow. She had a crazy hairdo. The front angled straight down, past her chin, but the back revealed tons of short, silvery-white curls. He longed to run his fingers through them and somewhere else on her body, too.

Damn, if his stiff cock didn't agree.

Now his fingers tingled, too, imagining what the curls between her legs would feel like.

Lucky. Her nickname rolled around in his head.

Yeah, he certainly was.

He thought he'd never look at another woman after Tatiana had left him.

Boy, was *he* wrong.

Chapter Two

Monday morning, Maddie sat alone in her office, nursing her third cup of coffee.

She stared at her computer screen, trying hard to concentrate.

Coffee, emails, then making the rounds of the customer service reps. The people she was in charge of took service complaint calls from the millions of subscribers to Cablemedia Television, where Maddie had worked for the past eighteen years.

Years that just seemed to get away from her quickly. How thin she used to be, she mused, while perusing her emails. She took another sip of coffee, a shiver running down her spine when she realised it was cold. Well, better cold than heat pouring through her. Sometimes, hot coffee did that. Lately, she felt like 'alien woman'. Menopause sucked. It did strange things to her body...

She had put on weight as she approached the age of fifty, shedding some of it, but not much. Maddie still had a generous middle, no matter what new diet she attempted. In her younger days, she could shed pounds easily.

Along the way, she'd managed to shed her husband, too.

Or rather, he'd got rid of *her*. He'd traded her in, she would quip to her friends, for a newer, younger model—his secretary. The affair had gone on for months before Rich had told Maddie, walking out on her and their daughter. Sometimes, it seemed like that happened so long ago, in another lifetime.

She wondered if the ache in her heart would ever go away.

She refilled her mug and took a sip of her favourite French vanilla coffee, glancing at the emails on her computer screen. Her eyes widened.

"Cablemedia is proud to announce the new head of advertising."

"Maddie?"

She looked up at the young woman standing in her office.

"I'm sorry, Nina, did you want something?"

"I should have knocked. I—I didn't realise you were busy."

"That's okay. What's up?"

Maddie bit her lower lip, glancing at the computer screen once more.

"Is this a good time? Or should I come back?"

"No, it's fine." She nodded.

"Great. I just wanted you to know, I'm throwing my hat into the ring for the Assistant Customer Service Manager position."

Maddie smiled. "You should. You've been here almost nine years. You know the ropes."

"Does that mean I have a chance?"

"You know I can't say." Maddie schooled her features. "But I'm glad to hear you're applying for the job."

She didn't want to make any promises she couldn't keep. Even though she thought Nina would make a great assistant manager, the decision was still up to Stephen Delaney, the president of Cablemedia.

Maddie glanced at his email again, wondering if she'd read it correctly.

Oh, she had to get a grip and concentrate! All she could think about was Jake Conroy. Her sleep became restless. It wasn't hot flashes that woke Maddie at night, it was *him*. Once, she woke to find her hand between her thighs, her fingers rubbing her throbbing clit.

"Thanks, Maddie."

She looked up. Nina was still there. "I'm looking forward to the interview."

"So am I." She flashed Nina a quick, bright smile.

The young woman left her office.

Maddie was alone again with her thoughts and her emails. She read the one on the screen again.

"But how can that be?" she mused aloud.

"Hello, Maddie."

Stephen Delaney walked into her office.

"Stephen." She reached out and shook his hand. "What brings you this way?"

"Just wanted to introduce you to the new head of Advertising."

A familiar face greeted Maddie from behind Stephen.

"Maddie Summers, I'd like to introduce you to Jake Conroy. Jake, this is Maddie, our Customer Service Manager."

Her legs felt like loose Jell-O.

"I...h-how do you –"

"Pleased to meet you, Ms. Summers."

Jake took her hand and gave it a hearty shake, holding it for a few seconds before releasing it.

It gave her enough time to ease into her chair.

Jake didn't say another word.

"You okay, Maddie?" Stephen furrowed his brow.

"Yes, fine."

She pasted another smile on her face.

"Well, if you don't mind, I'd like to give Jake a little tour of Customer Service."

"Of course."

She remained in her chair as if her ass was rooted in it.

"Maddie?"

"Yes?"

"I meant that you should join us."

"Right. I'm coming, Stephen."

It just couldn't be possible! Jake Conroy – sexy, young, Jake Conroy was the head of advertising?

She thought he worked at the airport.

Walking out of her office between Jake and Stephen, she couldn't stop the fluttering of her heart. It hadn't beat like that in years. She could hear its familiar 'lub-dub' sound in her ears. Jake's nearness left her feeling unsettled, like the ground beneath her feet was slipping away.

She walked down the hall, wondering how she got her legs to move.

* * * *

Later that week, Maddie sat in Cablemedia's movie theatre, housed in the corporate offices.

There was no sense going home. After all, what was she rushing home to?

A big, empty house, made bigger and emptier by her daughter, Susan's, and her four-year-old son, Tyler's, absence. While Maddie wished them nothing but good in the new house Susan had opted to rent for her and Tyler, she still missed them.

Tyler was the joy of her life.

Now, she visited him, and Susan brought Tyler to visit her, but only on certain days and special times. Tyler had started full-day preschool.

Maddie wished she could be home to watch him all the time, while Susan worked as a special education teacher, but...

There was that exhaustion factor. A day spent chasing after Tyler left her feeling happy but drained.

Maybe it was all for the best. Susan needed her independence, and Tyler needed to make friends at school, and not just be with 'Grandma Lucky'.

She just wished she could convince her heart.

Maddie's stomach growled. She glanced at her watch. It was almost five-thirty, and the movie was about to start. Something about a Greek tour guide and her life being in ruins.

Ancient Greek ruins. Yeah, okay, she got it, and now that she understood the movie's theme, she also identified with it. Her life had felt like it was in ruins plenty of times.

Her stomach rumbled again.

She reached into her handbag, carefully extracting the one-hundred-calorie snack pack of chips she'd slipped in earlier. The last thing she needed was for someone to see her, Cablemedia's Customer Service Manager, breaking the 'no food, no drink' rule of the company movie theatre—the place where she and her fellow Cablemedia employees and their guests could see first-run movies for free.

A nice perk. One of the reasons she stayed on at Cablemedia.

Hearing another crinkle of paper coming from a couple of rows away, she didn't feel so bad opening her bag of chips, knowing that other people snuck them in, too.

She ripped the bag open, carefully removing one of the potato chips. Then she placed it in her mouth, enjoying its salty taste and crunchy texture.

"Gotcha!"

The chip stuck in her throat. She coughed.

Violently.

"Oh, hey! I'm sorry. Put your hands up over your head, that should help."

Maddie felt a slight tap on her back. Then another.

The offending chip slid down her throat. It tasted and felt like sand.

Maddie looked over to see Jake standing there. He eased his tall frame into the seat next to her.

"Are you all right?"

Her eyes watered.

"Fine." She croaked.

She handed him the bag of chips. He grabbed it while she extracted a small bottle of water from her pocketbook. She removed the cap and took a sip.

"Better?"

"Yes."

He smiled that sexy grin. "Come here often?"

"That is still the corniest line I've ever heard."

He laughed, the sound warm and rich. It made her toes curl and her belly do a little flip. "Okay, I'm confused," she admitted. "My neighbours said that you worked at the airport."

"On the weekends, I'm a pilot at Republic Airport. I ferry people back and forth, like to Atlantic City. I also give sightseeing air tours of Long Island. I really enjoy it."

He settled his long legs out in front of him. Maddie liked how Jake looked in his dark, three piece suit, dress shirt and tie.

Oh, hell, she just liked how he looked.

Period.

"How come you don't do that for a living if you like it?"

"*This job* pays the bills. Besides, it's a lousy economy. People aren't chartering planes like they used to."

He glanced over at a group of people who entered the theatre.

"Will you excuse me for a minute?"

Maddie looked at the men and women who'd just walked in, recognising some of the advertising account reps.

"Of course. Go join them."

While Jake chatted with his reps on the other side of the theatre, Maddie took several deep breaths.

Having Jake as a neighbour was enough to make her lose sleep at night.

Knowing he worked just one floor above hers made her heart race like a runaway train.

She shifted in her seat and reached for the bag of chips he'd left on the chair, brushing some of the crumbs off the seat. No use in leaving any evidence that might give her away. Soon the lights dimmed, and the movie started.

Someone took the seat next to her.

She looked over and saw Jake.

"Wouldn't you rather sit over there?" She whispered, nodding her head in the direction of the group of account reps on the other side of the theatre.

He stole a chip from her snack bag. He leaned his head towards her, his hair brushing her temple. It felt soft, smooth...silky. In the darkened theatre, it looked shiny and jet-black. He smelt good, too – like soap and man.

Delicious.

"I'd much rather be sitting here," he whispered, keeping his voice low.

Maddie let go of the breath she hadn't realised she'd held.

"I like your secret snacks better." He munched happily. "I like you better, too."

Her clit throbbed so hard from the sound of Jake's deep voice and the way he whispered in the darkened theatre. It was like being sixteen all over again and having a futile crush on the tall, dark, handsome quarterback in high school. She remembered how she'd felt back then.

Miserable.

She reached for another chip.

Jake's hand covered hers. His felt warm and solid.

"Careful, I don't want you to choke again."

If only she could be so lucky.

* * * *

An hour and a half later, Jake walked out of the theatre with Maddie. They left the building and stood outside on the sidewalk.

"Did you like the movie?" they both asked at once.

Once their laughter died, Jake couldn't think of a reply. He knew he should say something—something easy like 'yes' or 'no'—but for the life of him, he couldn't seem to form an entire coherent thought.

That's because Maddie was close. So close that he could smell her perfume, just like he had inside the theatre. The fragrance drifted by his nose, making him want to pull her into his arms and kiss her senseless. He also got a good look at her eyes. They were large and round, an unusual colour...

Purple. As the sun set, the purple hue deepened.

Yeah, he had it bad. When a woman's eyes got to him, he was sunk.

And sinking deeper.

"It was a great movie," he said.

Cool. Smart. Real glib, Jake!

What he really wanted to do was ask her to join him for dinner. It was easy to say. All he had to do was say it, damn it.

No. She'd probably slap him with a sexual harassment suit, and he really couldn't blame her if she did. He couldn't take his eyes off her. Maddie possessed a lush, round figure. The yellow, sleeveless, button-down blouse she wore covered an ample bosom. Her skirt, the hem just above her knees, showed off shapely legs.

Oh man, he was in trouble.

"So, I guess I owe you another basket." Maddie gave him a tiny smile.

"You do?"

"A 'welcome to Cablemedia' basket of goodies."

"As long as you include... What did you call it?"

"Philly Cream Cheese Loaf."

"Yeah. Good ol' Phil."

"Phil," she murmured. "Sure. I'll put a loaf inside the basket."

He nodded his head. Was he absolutely out of his mind? Why couldn't he speak?

"Well, goodnight, Jake."

"Night, Maddie."

He watched her walk away then he grabbed the car keys from his pocket and headed towards his car.

Glancing at his watch, he realised it was only seven-thirty. He didn't want to go home yet.

He got in his car and typed a search for local area restaurants into his navigation system. A place called Kenney's Cafe caught his eye. He heard some of the account reps chatting about it, and it was only about five minutes from Cablemedia.

He'd stop in there, grab a brew and watch the Mets play.

Then he'd go home and dream about Maddie like he'd been doing ever since she'd stood on his doorstep. Many times, he'd woken at night, his cock so hard he thought it would fall off. Only a cold shower and his hand could relieve his longing.

He drove to Kenney's Cafe and parked his car.

A group of tall purple irises caught his attention. Damn if they weren't the exact colour of Maddie's eyes.

* * * *

Maddie glanced at the clock on her kitchen wall.

Eight p.m.

She opened the refrigerator and glanced inside. There was left over Chinese food, but she wasn't sure how old it was. There was pasta too, leftover from the last time she cooked for Susan and Tyler.

She turned around and noticed a small, fuzzy stuffed bear on the floor beneath her kitchen table.

Tyler's.

She had to get out of the house. She couldn't spend another lonely night pining away for them.

She grabbed her pocketbook and keys and got into her car.

"Where to now, Lucky?" she mused aloud. She started the engine and decided to stay local.

Kenney's Cafe would suit her just fine.

She could have a nice, chilled glass of Pinot Grigio wine and one of Ken's big, juicy burgers.

Perfect.

Better than sitting home alone. It was better than nothing.

Lately, it felt like that's all she had in her life...

Nothing.

She hated feeling that way.

It was time to change it.

* * * *

Later, Maddie walked into Kenney's Cafe, enjoying the wonderful smell of burgers grilling.

"Hi there, Lucky!"

"Hi, Ken." She shook his hand.

He grabbed a menu and led her to a table. "Want your usual?"

"Sure, a glass of chilled Pinot would be perfect."

He signalled a waiter. "Must've been movie night at Cablemedia."

"How did you know?"

She perused her menu, thinking about a salad, but knew in her heart of hearts that only a big fat juicy cheeseburger would make her happy. All her life, she'd battled her weight. Maybe it was time to stop and accept herself for what she was—a middle-aged woman with a spreading *middle*, who'd rather eat a big fat cheeseburger than pick at a salad.

"The reason I know it's movie night is because there's another person here from Cablemedia. Said they saw some movie there tonight about a girl in ruins."

She smiled. "The girl wasn't in ruins, her life was."

The waiter brought her the wine. She sipped its fruity coolness.

"You know him?"

"Who?" She furrowed her brow.

"The guy from Cablemedia. Says he just started a job there."

The wine glass almost slipped from her hands. She looked around the dining room, but didn't recognise the other patrons.

"He's not in here. He's sitting at the bar, watching the game." Ken aimed his thumb over his shoulder.

She bit her lower lip. Mustering her courage, she rose to her feet. "I'm not sure if I know him. Let me go look."

Maddie exited the dining room and stood by the entrance to the bar. Jake sat at the far end, watching the baseball game. His long fingers delved into a dish filled with nuts. He popped several in his mouth.

She noticed his loosened tie, revealing the long, strong, column of his throat. Her belly did a little flip when she saw his shirtsleeves. They were rolled up to just beneath the crook of his arm, showing his tanned forearms.

Her courage fled. She was about to walk away when he caught sight of her.

Damn. She couldn't leave now. It would be rude. Taking a deep breath, she walked over to him.

"Come here often?"

He chuckled. "That's *still* the corniest line I've ever heard."

"Yeah, well, I heard it from someone who's...corny."

She liked bantering with him. Her courage returned. It rose up in her like a wellspring. "How about joining me for some dinner?"

He didn't reply.

She blew out a breath. "I-It's fine if you don't want to, I only meant—"

Jake gave her one of his killer smiles.

"I'd love to, Maddie."

Chapter Three

A little while later, she munched happily on her burger, its juicy goodness trickling down her fingers. She picked up her napkin and wiped her hands.

"I haven't had one of Ken's burgers in a while." She gave Jake a sheepish grin.

"Glad you talked me into it."

She laughed. "It didn't take much. No sooner did the word 'burger' leave my mouth and you were ordering it."

He took a sip of his beer. Maddie watched the corded muscles in his neck contract, and his Adam's apple rise up and down.

"Whenever I'm craving beef, it's never a steak, but a burger. Isn't that weird?" he asked her.

"Not so weird." She took a bite of hers. "I feel the same way. And when they're cooking, like at one of those fast food places —"

"Yeah, I know what you mean! There's that one place on the turnpike, right by our street. Depending on which way the wind's blowing, I can smell those burgers even if I'm in the house."

She chuckled. "I always say, how can something that smells so darn good be so bad for you?"

"Agreed. So, when can I start calling you 'Lucky?'"

"Whenever you want."

"Uh-uh." He held up his hand. "You said only your friends call you that."

"You're my neighbour."

"Does that count?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I guess it does."

"You don't have to worry, you'll be 'Ms. Summers' if I see you at Cablemedia."

"Why, thank you, *Mister Conroy*."

"I heard a rumour that Stephen Delaney fired one of the editors at that newspaper he recently bought."

"That's true." Maddie replied. "The editor allowed a story to be printed about that scandal involving one of the players on the basketball team Delaney owns. He didn't like the story, called the editor in, and fired him for allowing it to go to print. If he owns something, you can't say anything bad about it. And he's very conservative."

They ate in silence. Outside, the sun set below the horizon. The waiter came by and lit the candle in the middle of the table.

Jakes green eyes glowed in the muted light.

Maddie's breath caught and held in her chest.

"So, what else can you tell me, Lucky?"

"Oh, let me see...I could tell you that Stephen Delaney also owns a chain of movie theatres and the Island Sports Arena and —"

"I meant, about you."

She chewed her lower lip.

"You've worked at Cablemedia long?" he asked.

"Eighteen years."

He whistled. "Impressive."

"It's been good to me."

"These days, no one seems to stay in one place or job for very long."

"The job at Cablemedia came along when I needed one very badly."

He leant back in his chair and crossed one long leg over the other. "When was that?"

Oh, boy...

Her words came out in a rush. If she didn't speak quickly, she was afraid she'd never say it. "After my husband left me. He left me for his secretary. A very pretty, very *young* woman."

He didn't say anything at first then replied. "It's the strangest thing, I think I would have felt better if you had said he died." He took a sip of his beer. "I think your husband was a jerk." He put the beer bottle down on the table. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that. I only meant that —"

"Yeah, well, *I* think he was a jerk, too." She angled her head. "How about you?"

"Me?"

"Who's the love of your life?"

He probably has scores of girlfriends!

He uncrossed his legs and sat forward in his chair, resting his forearms on the table. Oh, how she liked looking at them! She stopped herself from reaching out and placing a hand over one of them.

She was dying to feel if they were as hard and muscular as they appeared.

"There was a love in my life – Tatiana. She got tired of waiting for me to 'grow up' as she called it. She viewed my piloting on the weekends as playing with a very expensive 'toy'. So, she left. I guess she thought she was competing with an aeroplane, and maybe, she was." He ran a finger over the rim of his water glass. Then he looked up at Maddie. "She left me then this job at Cablemedia came through. I decided to take it and move to Long Island. I think I needed the change of scenery."

"I envy you. After my husband left me, I had to raise my daughter by myself. She was a teenager, going through a very rough time in life, coupled with the fact that her father decided to leave us."

He placed a hand over hers. "That must have been tough."

She looked down at the top of his hand, the skin made golden by the sun. "It was, but we muddled through."

Maddie didn't pull her hand away. She let it rest beneath his. It felt strong and warm. It felt too damned good.

Maybe it was time to leave, before she did something stupid like...

She looked at his mouth. What would it feel like to kiss him?

You're crazy, Maddie! You're acting like a kid, younger than him.

"Well, I think I had better get going."

"No dessert?" He grinned.

"I've got a whole pint of chocolate-chip ice cream waiting for me in my freezer at home."

He reached into his pocket and withdrew some cash.

"No, Jake, really, this –"

He leant over and placed his index finger against her lips.

Maddie's breasts responded this time. She could feel the contact of his finger in her breasts – clear down to her nipples.

"My treat," he told her.

He placed the cash on the table then rose to his feet and stepped behind her chair. He pulled it out a bit so she could stand. Then he slipped her jacket over her shoulders, giving them a squeeze. For one crazy second she felt pampered, cherished...alive. She hadn't realised how much she had died inside when her husband had left.

But something was springing back to life now.

Jake walked her outside, then to her car.

"Thanks for the company tonight."

"You're welcome, Jake. Thanks for dinner."

She pressed the remote on her key ring and unlocked her car.

Maddie watched him walk to his car then she pulled out of the parking lot and made a left onto a small, two-lane highway.

Five minutes later, her car started to act up. It slowed, the engine dying with every second that passed.

She pulled her car into the shoulder of the road.

"Damn!" She pounded her hand on the steering wheel while the vehicle came to a complete stop, the engine giving out.

A familiar car pulled up behind her.

Jake got out and walked over to her driver's side window.

"What happened?"

"The engine died. I—I think it's the battery."

"No worries, I'll give you a jump."

Her eyes met his. A splash of red touched his cheeks.

"Uh...I'll, uh, just go get the jumper cables out of my trunk," he told her. "I'll be right back. Just sit tight."

He walked away then returned with the cables.

"I'm going to move my car in front of yours."

She sat there, watching until his car was nose-to-nose with hers. Then he got out, lifted the hood of her car and attached the cables to the battery. He did the same with his.

"Okay, turn on the engine."

It roared to life.

"Let it run a few minutes," he instructed.

A little while later, he removed the cables. He put them in his trunk then walked over to her driver's side window again.

"I think Sears is still open. We can get you a battery there."

She glanced at her watch.

"It won't take long for them to replace your battery. That way, you won't have to worry about it in the morning."

He followed her to Sears and helped her pick out a battery. A half hour later, she had it installed and was on her way home.

She pulled into her driveway, and Jake pulled into his. Then he walked over to her house.

"You okay?"

She fished the keys from her pocketbook.

"Yes, and thanks again. You were very helpful."

He stood there for a while. Then he walked away.

"Jake."

She took a few steps towards him. When he turned around, she came so close to him that her breasts brushed his chest. Her breathing quickened, her nipples tightening.

She stood on her tiptoes and kissed him.

He reached for her shoulders, drawing her forward, leaning down to kiss her mouth. She placed her hands on his chest, enjoying the feel of the hard muscle there. Slowly, his hands eased around her back, pulling her close. His mouth remained fused with hers, his lips sliding against her lips, once, twice...three times.

Jake pulled away, his breathing ragged.

"I've been dying to do that since I met you."

She ran her hand over his strong jaw. "I'm glad you did."

"Maddie, I'm so —"

"Don't say you're sorry. I'm not. We kissed. Let's just leave it at that."

He smiled down on her, brushing a stray lock of hair from her cheek.

"That's just it. I can't leave it. I don't want to. I was trying to tell you that I'm so damned attracted to you that it's almost painful." His grin turned rueful. His stiff cock brushed her thigh. "Is it wrong to say that I want you?"

"I feel that way, too."

He wrapped her in his arms and pulled her against his chest. His lips grazed her forehead, her temple. They felt soft and warm.

He released her.

She laid a hand on his arm.

"Don't leave."

He lifted her hand, placing a tender kiss on the inside of wrist. She shuddered pleasurably when his lips grazed her skin.

"Are you sure?"

It had been a long time since she felt sure about anything, but tonight, standing there in the moonlight, looking into Jake's green eyes, she knew what she wanted.

"Stay with me tonight."

* * * *

Maddie led Jake to her bedroom.

Outside, the moon hung full and golden. Soft light shone through the windows, illuminating Jake's tall form.

He took her in his arms and kissed her, sipping at her lips like a thirsty man deprived of water. She had only kissed one other man since her husband's defection, a widower she'd dated a couple of times. His kiss had seemed as dry and dull as cardboard compared to the way Jake melded his mouth with hers.

His hands gently cupped her face, his fingers trailing along her jaw. Soon, his lips replaced them, dotting her chin with small, butterfly kisses. Then his lips moved lower, to her neck and right shoulder. Jake wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her close then he opened the top three buttons of her blouse. He moved it aside so he could kiss and caress the delicate bone just below her neck.

A shudder of pure pleasure snaked down Maddie's spine.

A niggling feeling of doubt crept in. She hadn't made love to a man since...

"I—I don't think I'm very good at this sort of thing."

Jake stopped kissing her long enough to smile. She felt his hard, stiff erection nudge her thigh.

"You're doing just fine, Maddie." He grinned. He opened the remaining buttons of her blouse, revealing the lacy cups of her bra. "Very fine." He murmured, gazing at her breasts.

"You'll be disappointed."

He unhooked the front catch of her bra. She took a deep breath.

"I doubt that very much."

Her breasts spilled into his hands.

She bit her lower lip, wondering if he'd notice how they sagged.

"Magnificent." He gazed down at her naked chest.

Then he ran the pads of his thumbs across her nipples. Her breasts felt heavy, her clit pulsing like crazy when he leant down to kiss each little hardened peak.

She removed her blouse and bra then her skirt came next, followed by her panties. If she didn't undress fast, she was afraid her courage would wane.

He smiled. "Maddie, slow down. We have all night."

All she had was now, this moment. If Jake wanted to see the real her then she'd show him—sagging breasts, spreading middle and all.

"You're gorgeous." He pulled her close, kissing her tenderly.

He glanced down at the curls between her legs. His smile widened. "I love the colour of your hair. It's like silvery tinsel from a holiday tree." He stripped the clothes from his body, tossing them aside.

Maddie reached out, tracing the muscles of his chest with her fingers, revelling in the hardness she felt there. She glanced down at his large, stiff erection, her breath catching in her chest.

Had she any right to be doing this?

Her ex-husband didn't think twice about leaving her for his young mistress. Maybe it was time she had some fun and got some revenge.

Jake reached for her, taking her into his arms. He didn't pull or tug. He just eased her into them, stroking her back and bottom with his large, warm palms. Each time he stroked her bottom cheeks, her clit responded, pulsing wildly with each pass of his hands.

He reached down and caressed her between her legs, his fingers sliding across the little pearl of flesh nestled there. She tipped back her head and moaned.

"Easy," he crooned, but he didn't stop touching her.

"I—I...oh..."

She creamed into his hand, her juices flowing.

Maddie gripped his shoulders, her legs shaking from the exquisite torture he wrought between her thighs.

Jake eased her onto the bed, sliding his tall frame next to her. He leant down and kissed her breasts, taking each of her nipples into his mouth. The tip of his tongue touched each swollen little tip. Maddie felt wild with need. She arched her back, pushing them farther into his mouth. She could feel the pull on her breasts down to her clit.

More. She needed more!

He placed the tip of his penis near her little bud, rubbing her gently. A tiny drop of his essence spilled onto her, moistening her entrance. Slowly, he pushed inside.

Maddie felt stretched, filled to the brim with Jake.

He caressed her breasts with his mouth, kissing them while he fitted himself inside her.

Easing his body on top of hers, he rode her slowly at first, allowing her to get used to his rhythm. Soon, her hips rocked in time with his thrusts. Then he slowed it again, making sure the tip of his hard cock caressed her clit, bringing her to the brink of orgasm.

"Jake!"

He covered her mouth with his, his tongue delving inside, and continued to ride her. Then he pulled out, breathing hard.

"Why did you stop?" she moaned, wrapping her arms around him, pulling him close.

"I want to make this good for you. I want to pleasure you some more."

He slid down her body. Then he lifted her legs and hooked them over his shoulders.

His mouth and tongue wreaked sweet havoc on her clit. She ground her bottom into the bed each time he sucked her little bud into his mouth.

She dug her fingers into the mattress, grasping the sheet in her fisted hands.

He drove his tongue inside her, pulling it out slowly so he could pass the tip across her swollen, throbbing little button of flesh.

She stood on the rim of a giant abyss of sexual gratification.

He slid up her body and placed his cock inside. Then he rode her to oblivion.

“Maddie!” he cried. “Maddie...” he whispered.

His cock pulsed inside her.

Her body was spent, so was her mind. All she knew in that moment was Jake. She laid her hand on his chest. Jake took it and kissed the pad below her thumb.

He rolled to his side, taking her with him. Holding her close, he kissed her temple. He drew the covers across them, wrapping Maddie tightly against his side. She felt as if she were cocooned in warmth, in something new and wonderful...

Jake.

She fell asleep, the sound of his heart beating softly in her ears.

Chapter Four

Morning came all too soon.

Maddie opened her eyes to find Jake sleeping by her side, his arm thrown around her waist, her bottom cushioned against his thighs.

How nice to wake up with someone.

Someone like Jake.

She thought she'd get him out of her system, that making love with him would be sweet revenge for what her ex did to *her*. Gazing at his handsome face, relaxed in slumber, she realised the joke was on her. She wanted much more than one night with Jake.

Slowly, his eyes opened. He grinned when he saw her and leaned over to kiss her shoulder.

"Hey there, Madz." His deep voice dipped an octave. It was a little gravely.

She loved the sound of it. "Is that my new nickname?"

He grinned lazily, propping his head in the side of his hand. "While I like 'Lucky,' I kind of feel that it describes *me* now that I've had a taste of you."

"Oh, Jake." She shook her head. "What are we going to do?"

He frowned. "About what?"

"Us." She swallowed, hard. "I-I don't want a fling. I want..." Maddie shook her head. "Never mind. I'm talking out of my...ass."

He chuckled warmly, patting her bottom beneath the covers. "It's a nice one, too." Jake gave her a long look. "What if I told you that I don't want a 'fling' either?"

She let go of the breath she hadn't realised she'd held.

"I'd say you're crazy, to get mixed up with a middle-aged woman. I'm a loser, Jake, lucky in lots of things, except love. I'm —"

He placed an index finger over her lips. "Yeah, I'm crazy, Madz. About you. I have been, ever since you showed up on my doorstep. You're all I can think about."

His erect shaft nudged the back of her thighs.

Maddie rolled over, her breasts brushing his chest. Jake reached under the covers to stroke her between her legs. She shut her eyes, savouring the feel of his fingers toying with

the curls there, the tips of her breasts peaking when they met the fine, dark hair covering Jake's pecs.

He inserted his finger deep inside her, pulling it out slowly, making sure to pass the tip of it across her clit. She inhaled sharply, her desire growing, the little bud he caressed so sweetly throbbing for release.

Jake played with her some more, massaging her aching button of flesh, bringing her to the brink of orgasm again.

His cock replaced his finger, his hips moving in time to her. A little while later, they climaxed together.

Maddie's body folded, her mind spent of all thought.

Jake grinned. "Now, that's how I really like to say 'good morning'."

He placed an arm beneath her shoulders, drawing her close. Maddie rested her head against his chest. How could she tell him what was in her heart? Her mind? All her fears seemed to roll together into one giant ball of anxiety. She moved away from him, drawing the sheet up to cover her breasts.

He tugged on the linen. It fell around her waist like a white pool of water.

Jake stroked her breasts.

She sighed, enjoying the feel of his hands. She laid one of hers over his.

"Jake, how old are you?"

"Thirty-five. Why?"

She rolled her eyes. "In case you haven't noticed, I'm fifteen years older than you."

"You're positively ancient." He chuckled.

"We have to be careful."

"Okay." He grinned. "I'll sneak into your backdoor at night under the cover of darkness and make love to your sweet body."

"Be serious. You can't—"

"At work, I'll get you alone in a broom closet. We'll make wild love together next to the vacuum and cleaning supplies." He waggled his brows.

"Jake, this isn't a laughing matter. You just started a job at Cablemedia, and I've been there a long time. Stephen Delaney is a very conservative man—we could both be out on our butts."

He sat up, his face drawn in tight lines. "I know this is serious business, Maddie. I've been around the corporate game before, but we can't hide forever. I never thought I'd feel alive again after Tatiana left me. I never thought I'd meet anyone like you...ever." He took her hand and kissed it. "But you don't have to worry, I'll play along, I won't jeopardise what we have."

She stroked his chin. "Thank you."

"Now, Madz..." He grinned, his smile wide and seductive. "I'm going to leave, but not before I give you something to think about until the next time you're with me."

Her heart raced with anticipation, her clit pulsing all over again.

He rolled her swiftly to her side then entered her from behind.

She gasped once when his hand roamed to the curls between her legs.

He rode her to heaven and back, while he played with her pussy. She came so hard, she couldn't catch her breath. Jake's cock spasmed inside her then he eased his way out. He nestled her in the crook of his arm, leaning over to kiss her deeply.

She let go of a contented sigh, her body relaxed and replete.

Jake shook his head. "You look like a contented cat."

"I feel like one," she purred.

He chuckled. "Madz, it's going to kill me not to be able to kiss you or hold you at work."

"I know, but we—"

"Have to be careful," he finished. "I'm going to find some way around it."

She snapped her brows together. "How?"

His grin became wicked. "You'll see."

* * * *

In the days that followed, Jake never approached Maddie at work. He stayed out of her way, and she stayed out of his. It was for the best, she knew that, but deep inside, she wished Stephen Delaney wasn't such an old-fashioned jerk.

She sat at her desk, going over the customer service log, and glanced up when she heard a knock on her door. Her heart raced with anticipation. Had Jake decided to seek her out after all?

Maddie looked up to see Nina standing there. She schooled her features, so Nina wouldn't read the disappointment on her face.

"Have they made a decision yet on that Assistant Customer Service Manager position?"

"Nina, the interviews were only yesterday. You have to be patient."

Nina was not Stephen's first choice. He liked someone else—someone from one of his 'parent' companies. Maddie didn't know what to say, realising she couldn't say *anything* until he made his final decision.

"Did Mr. Delaney like me?"

How am I going to tell her this?

"He, uh, was impressed with your...experience."

Nina frowned. "You're not giving me much to go on here, Maddie."

"Because it's not my decision." Was that her speaking so harshly? "I'm sorry, Nina. It's just that I can't say anything."

"Yeah, I figured. Well, thanks." She turned on her heel and exited Maddie's office.

Nina had nine years' experience—more than that other idiot Stephen liked. But Nina didn't interview well. She was too nervous.

Damn.

Maddie glanced at the clock. She might as well stay another half hour and catch the six-thirty movie downstairs in Cablemedia's theatre.

She finished some more paperwork then at six-twenty she headed downstairs to the first floor.

Soon, the theatre grew dark, and the movie came on the screen. Maddie noticed there were only two other people in the theatre besides her. They sat up front, closer to the screen.

A third of the way into the movie, Maddie was mesmerised. Johnny Depp's sensitive portrayal of a gangster made her body buzz. She squirmed in her seat, her panties growing damp when she imagined Jake making love to her the way Johnny Depp made love to the girl in the movie.

Someone grabbed her hand and squeezed it.

"Good evening, Madz."

Jake's deep voice drifted by her ears.

His hand moved to the waistband of her pants. While Johnny Depp gave the girl on the screen pleasure, Jake did the same, slipping his hand inside Maddie's pants, his fingers toying with the band around her underwear.

Maddie sucked in a breath. She squirmed in the chair when the tips of his fingers toyed with the curls between her legs. She shut her eyes while the tip of his index finger made contact with her clit.

"Don't—"

"Ah, but I can," he whispered in her ear. "And I think you like it. Sitting here in this dark theatre, where no one can see what I'm doing to you."

His dirty talk and deep voice made her cream her panties.

"You're so wet. So naughty. Letting me play with your pussy."

Oh, God! She thought she'd expire on the spot. Jake's wicked voice made her quake with need.

"Don't move. Don't make a sound. If you do, I'll have to paddle your bare ass."

The thought of Jake spanking her almost sent her over the edge.

In her mind, she saw herself lying face down over Jake's lap, her naked bottom totally exposed to his eyes.

She sucked in a breath.

He chuckled then removed his hand from her pants.

"So, my little Madz likes when I talk dirty."

Oh my, do I!

Her clit throbbed so hard she thought it would explode.

"Meet me at your house in ten minutes." His voice grew deeper and more...commanding.

She managed to nod her head, but that was it.

"I'll sneak through the back gate between our two yards. Be ready." His lips caressed the skin just below her ear. "I'll give you your spanking then."

She felt his lips curve into a smile against her neck.

He got up and left.

A few minutes later, so did she.

She walked out of Cablemedia, her body humming, a strange eagerness coursing through her. When she got to her car, she leaned her forehead against the steering wheel, gripping the sides. She took a deep breath and smiled.

Jake had found a way around things...

Right to her secret desires.

* * * *

A little while later, Jake pulled into his driveway. He saw Maddie's car parked in hers so he ran up his cement walkway, fumbling with his keys. He dropped them and bent to retrieve them from the stoop. When he got his hands to stop shaking, he inserted the key into the lock, opened the front door and shut it firmly behind him.

He raced through the house, stopping at the sliding doors to the deck leading to his backyard. Was he totally out of his mind? Yeah. He was. Out of his mind with need for Maddie. Days without seeing her sent him into a tail-spin of longing. He hadn't been this horny since he was a teenager.

He took several deep breaths, a mental picture of Maddie's soft, gentle face in his mind, her eyes growing bigger by the second when he'd talked dirty to her.

His dick was so hard his pants stretched uncomfortably across his groin.

He walked out the sliding doors, heading towards the gate that led to her backyard. He was determined not to lay a hand on her beautiful ass, unless of course, she really wanted that.

Tatiana had been into some kinky things. It was just too bad it wasn't with *him*. By the time he'd realised she was seeing someone else behind his back, he'd felt like the world's biggest idiot.

But not with Maddie.

Everyone at Cablemedia knew Maddie 'Lucky' Summers. She stuck by her customer service reps, treated them like gold. Her reputation was flawless.

People his age didn't seem to possess her qualities. With Maddie, he'd found a sweet haven.

His lips curved into a smile when he saw his Madz waiting at her backdoor. He stopped walking.

His Madz?

Jake's smile widened. He enjoyed the sound of that.

He walked across his yard and into hers, determined to give 'his Madz' the best night of pleasure she ever had.

* * * *

Maddie tugged Jake inside her house, her body vibrating with need.

She grabbed his face between her hands, pulling his head down to give him a hard, deep kiss.

Then she led him through the house, stopping along the way to kiss him or shed a piece of clothing....hers and his. Maddie explored every inch of his tall, strong body, her hands roaming everywhere.

She reached around to grab his bottom cheeks, pulling him closer, grinding her pelvis against him. "My dirty girl." He crooned in her ear.

She slithered against him, the little nubbin of flesh between her legs pulsing so hard she thought she'd come right there.

Her hands strayed to his cock, running her fingers along the hot, hard length of him. She rubbed the tip of his penis against her clit, sliding it back and forth. A drop of moisture kissed her entrance, making it slick.

Jake led her over to a club chair, bending her face-down over the back of it.

He whispered in her ear, "I'm going to take you, here, over this chair." He kissed the side of her neck and shoulder.

She arched her back, her body primed and ready.

"Naughty girl," he whispered, running a hand across her bottom.

He gave it a light tap with his open palm.

"*Jake...*" Maddie sighed, drawing out his name, the sound filled with pleasure.

He smiled against her neck. "You like that?"

"I love it."

He gave her bottom another smack. She moaned and writhed against him, her ass stinging, heat building there. Jake gave her another tap. The warmth she felt travelled lower, between her legs.

His hand strayed to the inside of her thighs, his fingers delving into her.

"You're so wet, such a bad girl."

He smacked her bottom again.

"Spread your legs."

She sucked in a breath, his deep command sending a shiver of longing down her spine.

Opening her legs, she arched her back while Jake pushed his cock inside her pussy and rode her with wild abandon. Then his hands were on her breasts. He kneaded them, his open palms passing across her nipples.

"Jake!"

She threw back her head, her orgasm ramming into her.

He bent over her, resting his face next to hers, his cheek against her cheek. He pulled out then lifted her high against his chest before walking to the bedroom with her nestled in his arms. He eased her down onto the floor. Maddie's legs shook, but she managed to stand upright.

Jake knelt before her, his dark head level with her pussy. He grasped her around the hips, holding her firmly in place. Then he licked her clit, sliding his tongue upwards, slowly. He finished with the tip of his tongue massaging her quaking little button of flesh.

She gasped, the exquisite torture almost too much to bear. Maddie threaded her fingers through his soft, dark hair, as he drew her clit inside his mouth, sucking gently.

She bent over his head, gripping it tightly, another orgasm overtaking her body.

Jake rose swiftly to his feet then he laid her on the bed. He kissed her face, her neck, her shoulders, treating her breasts to the same magic his mouth wrought on her clit.

He took her again, sliding his stiff, hard cock inside her. She matched his rhythm, stroke for stroke, moving her hips in time with his.

"Jake!" She cried, clutching his shoulders. Her orgasm left her breathless. She had just enough energy left to lean towards Jake and kiss him.

She drifted to sleep, wrapped in his arms.

Chapter Five

The next morning, the sun streamed in through her bedroom window. Maddie rolled over, seeking Jake's hard body, her arm reaching out to touch his side of the mattress.

He wasn't there.

She rose from the bed and padded over to where her robe lay on a chair near her bedroom door. She froze, catching sight of her bare ass in the mirror. Her face turned pink. It matched the colour of her bottom.

Was she totally losing it? Fooling around and having kinky sex with a man fifteen years younger than her!

Oh, but she adored the way he made love. Her ex-husband and that stodgy widower she dated had never known what she wanted in bed.

Jake did.

How could a man that young be so in tune with her sexual needs?

She donned her robe, lifting her nose in the air when the delicious aroma of coffee drifted by. Maddie didn't remember setting the timer on the coffeepot. She made her way to the kitchen where she found Jake frying eggs. Two pieces of perfectly browned bread popped out of her toaster just as she walked in.

"Hey there, sleepy head."

Jake walked over to Maddie. He took her face between his hands and kissed her forehead, his lips travelling down her temple, to her cheek. He stroked her jaw with the pads of his thumbs.

She glanced at his attire—jeans and a T-shirt. His long feet were bare. She felt a stirring in her loins.

"I went home and changed clothes then I grabbed some eggs, bread and coffee. I'm glad I got back before you woke up." He kissed the tip of her nose. "I wanted to surprise you."

Maddie shook her head. "You're cooking? For us?"

When was the last time anyone had prepared a meal for her?

"Damn straight." He grinned.

Jake tugged her close, reaching around to swat her bottom lightly with a spatula.

She giggled.

I haven't laughed like this in years.

"You wore me out last night, woman. I need to eat if I'm going to keep pace with you."

She took a seat at the table and poured each of them a cup of coffee.

Jake piled eggs onto their plates, along with the toast.

Maddie dug in. She shut her eyes, savouring the fluffy scrambled eggs, perfectly cooked, the delectably browned toast and...

She glanced at the clock. It was almost ten a.m.

"Oh, my God!" Her eyes widened. She dropped her fork.

Jake grabbed her hand, his face drawn into worried lines.

"What's wrong?"

Maddie jumped up from her seat as if it was on fire. "Jake, do you see the time?"

He glanced at his watch. "It's ten o'clock."

"We're two hours late for work!" She'd started to exit the kitchen when she felt a tug on the back of her robe.

Jake chuckled. "Come back here, silly."

Her backside connected with his thighs.

"Jake, it's..."

He placed one finger over her lips. "It's Friday, Maddie. The start of Memorial Day weekend, remember?" He grinned. "We're off today, the weekend and Monday."

"I'm the world's biggest idiot." She buried her face in his shoulder.

His chest rumbled with laughter.

"No, you're not." He pushed her chin up with his thumb and forefinger. Then he kissed her. "You're beautiful. And I'm crazy about you."

He opened her robe to fondle her breasts.

Maddie's breath caught and held in her chest.

"Wanna spend the day with me?" He grinned.

"I—I can't think straight when you do that."

Jake stroked the pads of his thumbs across her nipples. She squirmed on his lap. He reached over and loaded his fork with eggs, placing them near her mouth.

"I like having breakfast together this way," she told him.

He fed her a bite of eggs and toast then reached between her legs to stroke her clit.

"So, are you?" he asked.

"What?" She replied dreamily. She tried to remember what in hell they'd talked about.

He gave her a sip of juice, then toyed with her sensitive little bud again.

"Are you going to spend the day with me?"

An entire day with Jake! It sounded heavenly.

"Yes," she breathed.

Jake's index finger circled her clit. It throbbed and swelled.

"As long as you keep doing that."

He tipped back his head and laughed.

"My pleasure."

* * * *

I'm crazy about you! While they drove along the highway a little while later, Jake's words swirled through her mind.

She glanced his way. *He should be with a girl his own age, not an over-the-hill old fart like me.*

"Did you mean what you said earlier?"

Jake stopped the car at a red light. He leant over and stole a kiss, slipping his hand beneath her shirt to fondle her breasts.

Honk!

Jake looked up. "Damn, but these lights don't stay red long enough."

He removed his hand from her shirt and continued to drive.

"I meant—" Maddie was breathless. It was hard to speak, her breasts felt so heavy.

"What you said earlier... That you're—"

"Crazy about you?"

She nodded. "Yes, that."

"I am, Maddie. I can't get enough of you."

"Oh, Jake. That's so sweet."

He frowned. "I didn't say it to be 'sweet'. I said it because you're special. To me."

She melted inside.

"You're special to me, too."

He slowed the car to a stop at an intersection. "I hope so." He wagged his brows. "You better not let any other man spank you but me." He grinned.

Her face heated, and her clit throbbed. She squirmed in the seat, tugging on her jeans.

"Something the matter?" He gave her look that could melt ice cream.

"You wretch. Every time you say something like that to me, I—"

He chuckled. "I *love* saying those things to you. Your purple eyes get big and round. They dilate right away." He turned her chin towards him. "And your beautiful face gets all soft and sexy looking."

The light turned green. He continued to drive.

"So, where are we going?"

"It's a surprise."

She clapped her hands. "I love surprises. Can I guess?"

"Go ahead."

They made a right turn near a shopping mall.

"Are we going shopping?"

"Nah." He shook his head.

They passed the Cinema Five complex.

"To the movies?"

"Nope."

He slowed down to stop at another light.

Maddie folded her arms across her chest and frowned. "Hmm... Well, we just had breakfast, so we're not having another meal." She noticed the driving range up ahead. "Golf?"

"Wrong again."

A few minutes later, Jake made a left turn into Republic Airport.

"What are we doing here?" Her eyes grew wide.

"I'm going to take you to heaven and back, Maddie, but this time, in my plane."

* * * *

A little while later, Maddie watched the airplanes take off and land from her seat near a large window in the terminal.

Jake walked over. "Okay, we're all set."

She swallowed. Hard. Her throat felt as if it closed up.

"I... uh...we are?" she managed.

"What's wrong?" Jake took a seat next to her.

Maddie blew out a breath. "Jake, I-I've never been on an aeroplane."

"Ever?" He raised his brows.

She nodded.

"How come?"

"Well, let's just say...I'm terrified of flying."

"Ah, Maddie. You'll love it." He raised her hand to his mouth and kissed her fingers.

"You'll be with me. I won't let anything happen to you. I promise."

She removed her hand from his. Hers shook. "I know you wouldn't, but what if something went wrong? What if we crashed? What if—"

"That could happen while you're in a car, too."

"Y-yes, but in a car, you're on the ground."

"If you don't want to do this, it's fine. As long as I spend the day with you, it's okay."

"You really mean that?"

He rose to his feet, extending his hand. "I never say things I don't mean. Come on, we'll go do something else."

She took his hand and rose from her seat.

They started to walk out of the airport.

All her life, she'd missed so much because she wouldn't get on an aeroplane...vacations with friends, lots of good times.

If she wanted to change her life, she'd have to make sacrifices. So why not face her fear of flying with Jake and take a ride in his plane?

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"How long will we be up there?" She pointed upwards with her index finger.

He stopped walking. "Just about an hour."

"That's all?"

"That's all."

She bit her lower lip. "I—I changed my mind. I'd like to go."

"Maddie, no. You don't have to do this. Not for me, I—"

This time, she placed a finger over his lips.

"I'm doing this for me." She smiled, angling her head. "Besides, I'd be crazy not to."

"Why?"

She glanced around. Lowering her voice she said, "Because I've got the sexiest pilot ever to take me to heaven and back."

He didn't say anything for a few seconds.

"Did I say something wrong?" She frowned.

"No, it's just that you're amazing."

"I'm tired of being scared all the time. Of not taking a chance." She glanced out the window, saw another plane take off. "Come on!" She grabbed his hand, tugging him back towards the main part of the terminal. "Let's do this before I lose my nerve."

* * * *

A little while later, Maddie sat in the seat next to Jake in his roomy, four-passenger Cessna Skyhawk.

"Madz, open your eyes."

She shook her head. "No way."

Maddie gripped the armrests of the seat, her knuckles whitening.

He reached over and patted her hand. "Open your eyes, but just look out. Straight across, don't look down. You're going to love what you see."

She let go of a shaky breath and cracked one eye open. A beautiful, blue sky greeted her line of vision. There were a few clouds, but it was a bright, clear, azure sky she saw.

Slowly, she opened the other eye. Her grip on the seat loosened. She rubbed her sweaty palms on the thighs of her jeans.

A bird flew by, sailing right past her window.

"Jake! Look."

"A seagull." He smiled. "They're always around. Now, when you feel comfortable, you can look down, and see everything with a new perspective."

She looked at his strong profile, her fear drifting away like the clouds in the sky.

Maddie glanced down, to the scene below. She viewed houses, streets, highways, even some small bodies of water.

"We live over there." Jake nodded towards the left.

He guided the Cessna in that direction. "Here we are, Madz. What's that old song? Right here, 'on the street where you live'."

She looked down.

"Oh my, our houses! We're flying right over where we live!"

Jake glanced her way, his face serious.

"What's wrong?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. Not a damned thing. Your face, it's...so filled with wonder."

When she looked down at her hands, she realised they'd stopped shaking.

She wasn't dizzy, either. She thought she'd be lightheaded.

Too soon, Jake landed the small aircraft. He helped her out.

"Couldn't we have stayed up longer?"

He led her back inside the terminal. "We'll go again soon. This was your first time. I just wanted to whet your appetite for more."

Her mind was filled with wonderful images. Of sky, land and water. Of her neighbourhood, too, viewed in a new and different way.

She felt new...different.

Wonderful.

They walked into the terminal. When Jake was finished at the counter, they strode outside, hand-in-hand.

"My Madz. I'm so proud of you."

Jake raised both of her hands, kissing the back of each.

"I'm proud of myself."

"You should be. That took guts." He grinned. "So, what now, my little co-pilot? What would you like to do?"

She grabbed hold of his shirt and drew him forward, kissing him hard on the mouth.

"I want to make love with a sexy pilot I know."

He raised a brow. "Oh really? There are *lots* of pilots here."

"Uh huh." She gave him a cheeky grin. "I'll have a hard time choosing."

Jake reached around and gave her bottom a squeeze.

"Choose wisely." He whispered in her ear. "Pick one who's going to make love to every single inch of your beautiful body, someone who knows just what you want."

Her smile widened. "Pilot to co-pilot. I'm ready."

* * * *

A little while later, they pulled into Jake's driveway.

When he parked the car, she pulled his head down to hers, their mouths mating in a fiery kiss that left them both breathless. She placed small, butterfly kisses along his jaw, the tip of her tongue swirling in the small cleft on his chin.

"Maddie." His voice was deep, ragged. "If we don't get inside and make love now, I'll —"

"Shit!"

She ducked her head, sliding down in the seat.

"What's wrong?" Jake glanced around.

"It's Lucille, our neighbour from down the block. She's walking up my driveway."

She slunk lower, huddling her body on the floor.

"So?"

"I love her dearly, but she's nosy."

Jake glanced over at Maddie's house. "She'll go away when she realises you're not answering the doorbell."

"No, she won't." Maddie hissed. "My car is in the driveway. She'll think I'm home and not answering because something is wrong. She won't let up." She shook her head. "If we get out of your car together, she'll tell everyone on the block that she saw us and —"

"Calm down." Jake patted her shoulder. "I'll go inside my house then you sneak around the carport to my backyard. I pulled into the driveway far enough so there's no space between the car and the end of my carport. Lucille won't see you. She won't suspect a thing."

He grinned.

"I'm glad you think this is funny."

"Hey, sometimes, you just have to laugh at things, Maddie. Now, just wait for me to get inside my house. I'll leave the driver's side door open just a bit, so the car alarm won't go off when you get out." He exited the car. "Just be careful climbing over the console and keep your head down."

She rolled her eyes. "I feel like I'm in some kind of caper movie."

"It's the case of the nosy neighbour." He waggled his brows.

Maddie waited a bit then she started to climb out.

"Yoo hoo! Mr. Conroy!"

Shit and double shit.

Maddie ducked her head.

"Yes?"

"Do you know if Lucky is home? I'm Lucille Watson, her friend from down the block."

Maddie heard Jake's footsteps. She turned her head slightly to see him standing by the passenger side of his car, blocking Lucille's view.

"I've been knocking on Lucky's door, and I even rang the bell. I see her car in the driveway, but —"

"Just give her a few minutes, maybe she's out back."

"Right."

Maddie wiggled across the console, heading towards the driver's side door, being careful to stay flat on her belly. She pushed open the car door and slid head first onto the driveway, her hands connecting with the pavement. She tumbled to the ground in an inglorious heap, her bottom stuck high in the air.

"Well, have a nice day, Lucille."

"You, too, nice meeting you."

Maddie crawled on all fours until she reached Jake's side yard. Then she raced through the gate, across his yard and into hers.

She was breathless by the time she unlocked her backdoor and ran through her house.

Ding! Dong!

"I'll be right there!"

She took several deep breaths then yanked open her front door.

"Hi, Lucille."

"Hey, there, Lucky, I just came by to borrow —"

She reached up and removed a twig from Maddie's hair, glancing at her legs. The denim material covering the knees on Maddie's pants was filthy.

Lucille handed the twig to Maddie. "You're a mess. What were you doing?"

"Gardening." Maddie shrugged, wishing that Lucille would just go away.

"I thought you hated gardening." Lucille raised a brow.

"Yes, well, I was weeding, actually." She chewed her lower lip. "Um, was there something you wanted?"

"Oh, yes, that recipe for pasta sauce, the one you made when Susan and Tyler were here. You said Tyler loved it. My grandkids are coming over. I want to make it for them."

"Sure."

Maddie walked away and rifled through some papers on her kitchen counter. She found the recipe and handed it to Lucille.

"There you go." She laid a hand on Lucille's shoulder, turning her towards the door.

"Why are you in such a hurry to get rid of me?"

Damn Lucille and her perceptive hide!

"I'm in the middle of a movie."

Lucille shook her head. "Wait a minute... Didn't you just tell me you were gardening?"

"I—I meant, I'm watching a gardening show, on TV."

"Lucky, you're nuts, but I love you." Lucille grinned then walked out the door. "Thanks for the recipe!" She called out over her shoulder.

Maddie stood by her front door and watched Lucille walk down the driveway. She made a right and continued on the sidewalk. Maddie's eyes didn't stray until Lucille was out of sight.

Then she slammed the door closed and slithered against it.

Oh, boy! Close call.

She gathered her wits then ran through her house until she got to the backdoor.

Jake stood outside, a big smile on his face.

"The coast is clear."

Maddie drew him inside and locked the door.

Then they both burst out laughing.

Chapter Six

Jake hugged Maddie to his chest. He kissed the top of her head, nuzzling his face in her hair.

She felt a slight tug on one of her curls.

"What the heck did you crawl through?" He held a leaf in the palm of his hand.

"There's a lot of overgrown stuff on the side of your house."

His smile turned rueful. "I've been meaning to get to that. I have to clear it out." He looked down. "Your jeans are filthy. Come on." He took her by the hand. "Let's get you cleaned up."

He led her down the hall to her bathroom. Grasping her around the waist with both hands, he lifted her onto the counter by the sink then he turned on the faucets. Taking both of her hands in his, he stuck them under the stream of warm water. He soaped them, running his hands over hers, his touch light and gentle.

"Lucky, you're a disaster," he teased.

He leant over and kissed the tip of her nose.

She poked him in the chest. "This whole caper was *your* idea, remember?"

He shook his head and frowned. "Yeah, I do. And look at your hands, they're scraped."

"I'll be fine."

He shut off the water and dried her hands with a towel, being careful not to put too much pressure on the scraped parts.

"Are your knees okay?"

"I...uh...don't know."

He lifted her from the counter and set her on the floor. Then he started to unbutton her jeans, lowering the zipper.

"What are you doing?"

He slipped the jeans down her hips and thighs, easing them over her knees. She stood before him in her panties, her jeans around her ankles. He knelt in front of her. She placed her hands on his shoulders then stepped out of the jeans. Jake tossed them aside then rose to his feet.

"Your knees are all scraped. Do you have any peroxide?"

She screwed up her face. "I hate that stuff."

"I have to clean your knees, Maddie. I don't want them to get infected."

When was the last time anyone really gave a crap about her welfare? She stood on her tiptoes and kissed his chin.

Jake walked over to her shower and turned on the faucets.

Her eyes widened. "You're taking a shower?"

"With you." He grinned.

* * * *

A few minutes later, Jake stripped his clothing...and hers.

He took her by the hand and led her into the shower, where he placed Maddie under the stream of warm water. She tipped her head back, her breasts jutting out, Jake's hungry eyes on her naked form. The water sluiced down her breasts, beading on her nipples, then it continued down her belly and thighs, drenching the curls between her legs.

The shower had a wide seat in it. Jake sat down then pulled her into his lap.

He soaped her body, his slick hands teasing her wet skin. He passed his open palms across her nipples, making her shudder with pleasure despite the warmth of the water and the steam building up around them. Then he reached down and took tender care of her scrapes.

"Your poor knees," he crooned in her ear, his tongue tickling her sensitive lobe.

She snuggled against his chest. The fine hairs covering his pecs were damp from the shower spray. They felt silky.

"I love your chest." She kissed it. "My knees feel much better, by the way."

"And how does *this* feel?"

He slipped a hand between her legs.

She squirmed on his lap. "I don't hurt *there*." She grinned.

"Just making sure."

He tipped her back in the crook of his arm and kissed her mouth, but his hand never strayed from between her legs. He stroked her clit, gliding his slick fingers across her pussy

until Maddie was mindless with need. Then he pressed the pad of his thumb gently against her little bud, sending her over the edge.

"Jake!"

He had a tight grip on her while she came. She arched her back, pushing her feet against the shower wall, Jake's arm supporting her beneath her shoulders. He allowed her release, then leant down to kiss her. She felt his stiff erection poke her bottom.

"My dirty girl," he whispered in her ear, smiling the entire time. "I think you're nice and clean *now*."

Reaching down, she grasped his stiff, hard cock in her hand. She ran her hand up and down his erection, stroking her fingers across the head of his shaft.

Jake leant his head back against the shower wall and groaned. "Maddie...that feels so good."

He rose to his feet with her cradled in his arms, placing her back against the shower wall. She held on tight with her arms around his neck, her legs wrapped around his waist.

He entered her swiftly. She gasped when his stiff erection slipped inside. He pumped into her, her need rising, his slick, hard cock pushing against her clit.

When she came, Maddie tightened her hold on his waist, squeezing him tight, her heels touching each other. He came next. His big body shuddered, the water running down his head, face and shoulders. It trickled over her, too. It felt as though a cleansing rain purged her body of tension.

They stood there, wrapped around each other. Jake leant his forehead against hers.

"You wear me out, woman." He grinned, kissing the tip of her nose.

She ran her hand along his pecs. "Do you want to continue this in the bedroom?"

"I'd love to."

He set her on her feet then he walked out of the shower, extending a hand towards her.

When she stepped out onto the mat, she shivered. Jake was ready, a large towel in hand. He wrapped her in it, drying her thoroughly. She felt warm, cuddled, and so darn in love with him that she wanted to cry.

Soon, tears leaked from her eyes.

Jake wiped her face with the end of the towel. "What's wrong?"

She shook her head, her throat so tight, she couldn't speak.

"Do your knees still hurt?"

"No," she whispered.

"Then what's wrong with my Madz?"

She kissed him. "I'm just so damn happy."

He smiled. "So am I."

They didn't leave her bed for the rest of the afternoon or evening. When morning came, Jake was gone, but he left a note,

It's a beautiful sunny day, Madz. How does the beach sound today?

It sounded perfect.

I went to my house to pack us a nice lunch. We can stop on the way and get bagels and coffee and have breakfast on the beach. I'll be back soon.

She held the note to her chest, closing her eyes, revelling in the knowledge that she was going to spend another day with Jake.

P.S. I forgot to mention... When we get back from the beach, I'm going to cook a nice steak dinner for you and make love to your sweet body for the rest of the day and night. <grin>

Her body responded, her pussy throbbing in response to Jake's love note.

Her cell phone rang. It lay on her nightstand. She thought Jake was calling. Maddie narrowed her eyes, glancing at the phone number on the screen.

It wasn't Jake, it was...

"Hi, Mom! How are you?"

Maddie gripped the phone.

"I'm fine, Suze. How about you?" she asked, keeping her voice even.

"I'm good. Listen, the reason I'm calling is to ask if you are you free to watch Tyler today and let him sleep over?"

"I...uh, well..."

No! I want to spend the day with Jake.

Guilt ate at her. She hadn't seen Tyler in days.

"Rob called."

Maddie's grip on the cell phone made her knuckles whiten. "What does he want?"

"He's asking me for a second chance, Mom. I—I want to give it to him. We're going to spend the day together, and tonight, and...well, talk things over."

Maddie snapped her brows together. "Why not take Tyler with you? Spend the day together as a family?"

"Because Rob and I need to clear the air about a few things. I don't want Tyler to feel uncomfortable."

Maddie chewed her lower lip. Jake was next door, getting everything ready so they could spend the day together, but if she didn't give Susan this chance with Rob...

Who was she to judge them? Even though Maddie thought Rob didn't want anything to do with Tyler.

"Okay, it's fine. Bring Tyler over whenever you want."

"Great! Thanks. I owe you big time."

Maddie ended the call. A few minutes later, Susan came by with Tyler.

"Hi, Grandma!"

Tyler ran to Maddie. She scooped him up in her arms and gave him a kiss.

Jake's going to be so upset.

A few minutes later, Jake was at her back door, cooler in hand.

"Good morning." He leant down and kissed her.

"Hi." She kissed him back. "Come in."

"I've got sunscreen." He grinned wickedly. "I'm going to put it on every inch of your naked body."

Maddie almost creamed her panties. She steeled herself for what she had to do next. "Jake, what would you say to a slight change in plans?"

"Like what?" He angled his head.

"Well, my daughter called. She needs me to watch Tyler, her son. He's here now."

He raised his brows. "Okay...?"

"So, what I'm trying to say is... Well, maybe we should—"

"Bring him with us."

"I...huh?" Her eyes widened.

Jake grinned. "Why not? He's old enough to go to the beach, isn't he?"

"Wait a second." Maddie placed a hand on his chest. "Are you trying to tell me that you don't mind if he spends the day with us?"

"Absolutely."

"Oh, Jake." She bit her lower lip. Tears clogged her throat. "Why?"

"Why...what?"

"Why are you so good to me?"

He hugged her to his chest. "Because I'm crazy about you, Madz. I want to be part of anything or anyone that's a part of you."

She leant up to kiss his chin. "Thank you."

"Now, where is the little guy?"

"Come on, I'll introduce you." She took Jake by the hand and brought him into the den where Tyler was playing with some toys.

"Tyler, I want you to meet my...neighbour. This is Jake."

Jake got down on his haunches in front of Tyler, his face level with the child's. "Hey there, buddy. Give me five."

Tyler smiled, slapping his open palm against Jake's. The sight of Jake interacting with Tyler tugged on Maddie's heart.

He should have children of his own with someone his own age!

She pushed her thoughts aside.

"Tyler, we're all going to the beach together. Would you like that?"

"Yippee!" he squealed.

Jake rose to his feet.

"He resembles you," he told Maddie.

"You think so?"

"Yup."

"Jake, are you sure you don't mind doing this?"

He didn't answer for a few seconds. Then he took her hand in his, lifting hers so he could place a tender kiss on the pad of her thumb. He looked her right in the eyes.

"When are you going to realise that whatever makes you happy, makes me happy?"

* * * *

The day flew by. Tyler was exhausted by the time they got back to Maddie's house, and Jake helped him out of his car seat. Maddie took Tyler by the hand and led him inside while Jake unloaded the car.

Inside, Jake asked Tyler, "Did you have a good time?"

"Yup," Tyler answered around a yawn. "Can we go to the beach again, Jake?"

"Sure, buddy." Jake extended his hand. "Now, give me five." Tyler slapped Jake's open palm.

Maddie told Tyler, "Come on, honey. Let's get you washed up and ready for bed."

"I can do it myself, Grandma." Tyler pouted. He yawned again.

"I'll get going." Jake stole a quick kiss from Maddie while Tyler wasn't looking. "See you tomorrow."

"Thank you." Maddie's heart swelled with happiness. "And thanks for stopping at McDonald's on the way home." She shrugged. "So much for our steak dinner."

"We'll have it tomorrow." He gave her a hug. "Now, you go take care of Tyler. He looks worn out."

"Goodnight, Jake."

" 'Night, Madz."

Chapter Seven

The next morning, Tyler was up bright and early. Susan came by at nine a.m.

Tyler came running into the kitchen from the den. "Hi, Mommy!" He flew into Susan's arms.

"Hi, sweetie." Susan wrapped him in a hug then kissed the top of his head.

Maddie smiled at the loving picture they made – her family. She was one lucky woman, all right.

"How did everything go?" Maddie asked, keeping her voice even.

"Okay." Susan shrugged, but the corner of her right eye twitched. Maddie knew what it meant. When Susan lied, her right eye always spasmed a little.

Maddie also knew when to let up. Susan would spill her guts eventually and sob out the story. And Maddie would be there to pick up the pieces...

She always did.

"Tyler, did you have a good time with Grandma? What did you do?"

"We went to the beach." Maddie smiled.

"Yeah, we did. Grandma, me and Jake."

A few seconds of silence filled the room. Maddie didn't know what to say.

"Who's Jake?" Susan asked him.

Maddie cut in. "My neighbour."

"Oh, you're seeing Mr. Carson again? That widower?"

"Um, not exactly *that* neighbour."

"Look, Mommy! There's Jake." Tyler was at Maddie's kitchen window.

Susan walked over and glanced outside. "Him?" She turned to face Maddie. "He looks young enough to be your son."

Maddie chewed her lower lip. She leant down and said to Tyler, "Honey, why don't you go into the den and watch some TV?"

"Okay, Grandma."

"You can put on that video you were watching earlier."

She waited until Tyler was out of earshot.

"What's going on, Mom? Who's this guy, Jake?" Susan nodded towards Maddie's kitchen window.

Maddie sucked in a breath, then let it out. *Here goes nothing...*

"Jake and I have been seeing each other. He's my new neighbour. He moved in recently and —"

Susan raised a brow. "Let me get this straight. You're seeing a guy who looks to be half your age?"

Maddie swallowed. Hard. "He's thirty-five."

"He's only a few years older than me!" Susan's eyes flashed. Her face tightened into angry lines.

"Yes, I know, but Susan, try to understand. We —"

"Understand? What? That you're fooling around with a guy who's fifteen years younger than you? What in heck am I supposed to tell my friends and the people I work with? That my mother's a cradle robber?"

Maddie's stomach knotted. "What do your friends and co-workers have to do with who I see?"

"Everything, Mom. What am I supposed to say when I go back to work tomorrow and everyone asks me how my weekend was? What should I tell them? 'Oh, my weekend was okay. I just found out that my mother's having an illicit affair with a guy who is young enough to be my brother...'"

"Stop it. That's not fair."

Susan's eyes widened. "Fair? You call sneaking around with a guy fifteen years younger than you...fair?"

"I'm happy. For the first time, in a long while, I'm happy."

"Well, la-di-freakin'-dah. You're happy." Susan clenched her hands by her sides. "And you had the nerve, the unmitigated gall to expose Tyler to this?"

"What I *exposed* him to was a great day at the beach with a very nice man."

"You're some piece of work."

"Mommy? Why are you and Grandma Lucky fighting?"

Tyler stood at the entrance to the kitchen. He had tears in his eyes.

"We're not fighting, sweetheart." Maddie went over to hug him.

Susan beat her to it.

"Come on, Tyler. It's time to go home."

"But I want to stay here with Grandma!"

Susan grabbed Tyler's backpack from the kitchen table. She took him by the hand and led him outside.

"Please don't do this," Maddie begged, her throat clogging with tears. "I thought you'd understand. I thought —"

Susan got Tyler settled into his car seat. Then she got in, started the engine and looked Maddie right in the eyes. "You thought wrong."

Those were the last words she said before she backed out and drove away, leaving Maddie standing there, her face awash with tears.

* * * *

Maddie didn't know how long she sat at her kitchen table crying.

Ding! Dong! The doorbell rang. She got up and glanced outside to see Jake standing at her front door.

Ding! Dong! She bit her lower lip, her teeth sinking into the tender flesh.

"Maddie!" he called. "Come on, open up." He pounded on her front door.

She made her way to the door, opening it a crack. Through the small opening, she could see Jake.

His face was drawn into tight, worried lines.

"I saw your daughter tear out of here like a bat out of hell." He narrowed his eyes. "Is everything all right?"

She shook her head, tears threatening to spill from her eyes.

Jake pushed open the door and walked inside.

"Maddie," he sighed. "What's wrong? You look terrible."

Her eyes felt gritty, puffy.

"T-Tyler saw you outside before."

A corner of Jake's mouth lifted. "I was getting the newspaper off the driveway. When I looked up, Tyler was at your kitchen window, looking out at me. I saw a young woman with

him, looking out at me, too. I assumed it was your daughter." He shrugged. "I waved to him."

"Susan saw you, all right, and Tyler spilled the beans and told her all about going to the beach with us."

"Oh." He lifted his shoulders in a helpless gesture. "Kids talk."

Maddie's voice broke. "I figured I might as well level with Susan and tell her about...us." Her lower lip quivered. "She accused me of being a 'cradle robber'."

"Oh, Madz." Jake took her in his arms, rocking her slowly. "She just doesn't understand how wild I am about you." He kissed the top of her head. "I'll talk to her. I'll explain everything. I'll—"

"No!" She pushed away from him, wiping the tears from her cheeks. "Don't. Please. It'll only make things worse."

"But if she understands that I lo—"

Maddie placed a finger against his lips. "Don't say anything. To anyone." She dropped her hand. "Go home, Jake."

His eyes widened. "What did you say?"

"You heard me. Go. Now."

His face fell. "Maddie, look, we can work this all out."

"No, we can't. I—I was stupid to think my daughter would understand."

"I told you, I'll talk to her."

She shook her head. "No. It won't help."

"Talking things out always does."

Silence filled the room.

"Not this time, Jake. Now, please, go home."

His voice cracked. "If that's what you want."

For just a second, Maddie thought his eyes looked shiny. Like he was going to cry. He turned around and walked out.

She shut the door behind him, leaning her head against it, her heart aching.

* * * *

The next day, Maddie went to work, her swollen, puffy eyes hidden behind dark glasses. She didn't take them off until she got into her office, shutting the door behind her.

If she could only get through the day.

She hadn't slept a wink, and now, she had to face the long days and nights ahead without Jake. He'd gone to work that morning, too. When she'd gone outside to get into her car, he'd been getting into his.

His face, filled with longing and hurt, had greeted her eyes. The image stayed with her, making her heart ache all over again.

There was a knock on her door. If it was Jake, she would tell him to leave, tell him...

It was Nina. "Maddie, can I see you for a minute?"

"Of course." Maddie pointed to a chair in front of her desk. "Have a seat."

"No thanks. What I have to say is better said standing."

Maddie sighed. "Go ahead."

"Did you read your emails yet?"

"No."

"Well, I did. The announcement was made. Stephen Delaney chose someone else for the assistant customer service manager job."

"I'm sorry, Nina."

"I'll just bet you are." Nina's voice vibrated with anger.

"I—I did my best. I went to bat for you as much as I could."

"Apparently, not enough."

"Cablemedia is a different company since Stephen Delaney bought it. You know that. He's got his own ideas, especially when it comes to hiring."

These days, no one seems to stay in one place or job for very long. Jake's words came back to her. They made perfect sense. Loyalty and years of service didn't mean much anymore, especially to a man like Stephen Delaney. Young people didn't owe an employer anything anymore because no one seemed to care about what was really important. No wonder they moved around from one job to another, from one city to the next.

Maddie looked over at Nina's pinched, hurt face. Her heart went out to her. For nine years, Nina had worked diligently, helping Maddie with everything in order to keep

customer service running smoothly. Stephen paid her back by hiring some young, hotshot from outside the company.

"I—I don't know what to say, Nina, except...I'm sorry."

Nina folded her arms across her chest. "Well, aside from that email news, perhaps you want to hear the other, uh, gossip?"

Maddie frowned. "About what?"

Nina leaned her palms down on Maddie's desk. "That you and Jake Conroy are a hot number. *Everyone* is talking about it."

Maddie froze. "My private life is no one's business."

"You don't deny it?"

Maddie rose to her feet. "What am I, on trial?"

"*Oh...* I wouldn't say that, but if Stephen Delaney should find out... You know how hung up he is on appearances."

Maddie's heart pounded. She thought it would come straight through her chest.

Nina's face was all innocence. "Why, just because I saw you and Jake Conroy looking quite cosy in Cablemedia's theatre last week —"

"Get out." Maddie pointed towards the door. Her finger shook. "Before I fire your ass."

Nina lowered her voice. "I'll make sure Stephen gets wind of the hanky-panky you've got going on with a man fifteen years younger than you."

Maddie decided to call Nina's bluff. "What do I care what you tell Stephen?"

Nina laughed, the sound snide. "Because he'll fire Jake Conroy — and you — so fast, it'll make your head spin."

She turned on her heel and walked out.

Maddie raised a shaking hand to her lips then eased her body into her chair.

Nina wouldn't, couldn't, be so heartless. Stephen Delaney wouldn't pay any attention to what Nina said. Or would he?

Maddie was positive of only one thing.

She couldn't be sure of anyone or anything anymore.

Chapter Eight

Maddie took her planned week's vacation but stayed at home, feeling dejected. Lately, the only thing she did when she was alone was cry.

Jake called. He left several messages on her answering machine.

She ignored them all.

He showed up on her doorstep one evening.

"Go away," she told him, his tall frame and handsome face a sight for her sore eyes.

"If you don't let me in so we can talk, I'll camp on your doorstep."

She raised her chin a notch. "I'll call the police."

"You do that. Then you get to explain to all of the neighbours exactly what prompted you to call the cops."

She slammed the door.

True to his word, he sat on her doorstep, his arms folded across his wide chest. When she peeked out her kitchen window, the sight of his tanned, muscular arms made her body ache for his lovemaking.

She opened the door. He jumped to his feet and walked inside, shutting it behind him.

Silence stretched between them.

Jake broke it.

"You haven't returned my calls." He took a step towards her. "I miss you."

She didn't reply. How could she? How could she tell him that she missed him so much it hurt?

"Maddie, please let me explain everything to Susan."

She shook her head. "It's not only Susan, it's—" She chewed her lower lip. "Never mind."

"Never mind what? Never mind that I'm dying here, Maddie? That I need you, want you so much that I ache inside?"

"It won't work, Jake. No one will accept what we feel for each other."

"Then to hell with everyone!" He slashed his hand out in front of him. "Who gives a crap what everyone thinks?"

"I do." She aimed a thumb at her chest then pointed her index finger at him. "And you should, too."

He angled his head. "Why should I, Maddie? The only person I care about is you."

"We have to live in the real world, with family, with friends and neighbours, and our jobs, and –"

"We can move. Live somewhere else, somewhere where people will accept our relationship."

She let go of a bitter laugh. "Ah, youth. If something doesn't work, just pack up and move." She shook her head. "Is that your answer for everything?"

He folded his arms across his chest. "You seem to want to constantly remind me of how young I am." He gave her a level look. "But it seems that you act younger than me."

She angled her chin. "Oh, really?"

He nodded. "Really. You're acting like a kid now, younger than Tyler. Only I think I just insulted all the four year olds out there. At least, I return calls. At least, I want to talk and try to work things out." He aimed a finger at her. "*You*, on the other hand, want to throw up road blocks and shut down."

"That's not true." Her voice shook.

How am I supposed to tell him about Nina and what she said? If I don't stay away from him, it could mean his job and mine, too!

"Then talk to me, Madz. Please. Don't shut me out."

She shook her head, the words locked in her mind, and in her heart. She trembled. "Go away."

He gave her another long look. "My gut is telling me that *you're* not telling me something, Maddie. What is it?"

"Nothing."

"'Nothing' my ass!" He took a step towards her and reached for her hand. "You're freezing."

She pulled it away.

"Damn it, talk to me."

She shook her head no.

"I should spank you for real."

Heat crept into her face.

"And shake some sense into you."

"I've got plenty of sense." Her voice wobbled. "More than you."

"Yeah, right." He snorted. He turned and walked towards the door, then stopped. "When you're ready to work this out, when you're ready to tell me what's really going on, I'll be right next door."

"I won't ever be ready."

His eyes met hers. His were filled with sadness.

"I'll always be ready, Madz. Always."

* * * *

Jake walked down Maddie's driveway, his heart heavy. She seemed so frightened, so scared of... What? Him?

At the end of the driveway, he stopped.

Susan parked her car near Maddie's driveway and got out.

"Jake!" Tyler squealed from the backseat.

He waved at the little boy. "Hi, buddy."

Susan released Tyler from his car seat. He scrambled out of the car and ran up to Jake, hugging him around the knees. She just stood there, watching them.

Jake gave Tyler a high five, then continued on his trek towards his house.

"Can I talk to you?"

He turned to face Susan. She walked over to him and stuck out her hand. Jake looked down on it then he raised his eyes to hers. She dropped her hand, wiping it on the side of her leg.

"I came here to tell my mother what a complete ass I've been, so I might as well tell you, too."

He raised a brow.

"I said a lot of mean things to my mother that I need to apologise for."

A corner of Jake's mouth lifted. "Mothers are very forgiving."

"Yeah, well, I can only hope mine will forgive *me* for all the awful things I said about her and...you."

His grin widened. "Trust me. She will."

* * * *

A little while later, Maddie heard someone knocking on her front door. She peered outside her kitchen window to see Susan standing there with Tyler.

Her heart skipped a beat. She raised shaking fingers to her lips, so glad to see her daughter and grandson that she thought her heart would burst!

Maddie opened the door.

Susan didn't say anything. Tyler ran up to Maddie. "Hi, Grandma Lucky!"

Maddie leant down to hug him. "Hi, sweetie."

She ushered him inside. Susan followed but didn't say a word. Her face looked pale. A tiny part of Maddie was glad to see it. Susan had said some awful things. She deserved to look crappy.

She pushed those thoughts aside and led Tyler over to the kitchen counter. She reached for the cookie jar, removing the lid. Then she held it out so that Tyler could reach inside.

"Pick two." Maddie smiled at him.

He stuck his hand inside and pulled out two large oatmeal cookies.

Susan walked over to him. "Why don't you take your cookies into the den so that Grandma and I can talk for a while?"

His eyes widened. "You're not gonna fight again, are you?"

He looked at Maddie then at Susan.

Susan ruffled his hair. "No, we're not going to fight."

"Good, 'cause I hate when you fight with Grandma Lucky."

He marched down the hall then made a right turn into Maddie's den.

"I, uh, came to apologise."

Maddie nodded. "Go ahead."

"I'm sorry for everything I said to you."

Maddie lifted her chin.

She wasn't about to let Susan off so easy. "That's quite a turnaround for someone who called me a 'cradle robber'."

Susan winced.

"What made you change your mind?"

"I thought about lots of things."

"Like what?"

"Well, for one, when Dad left you, he gave me this whole speech about how he was still my father and would always be there for me. Over these last few years, particularly when Tyler was born, I noticed something about Dad."

Maddie raised a brow. "What?"

"He was conspicuously absent when I gave birth to Tyler. Rob was there. Rob's parents were there. *You* were there. Like you were way before Tyler was born. All the time I was growing up."

Maddie's eyes filled. She reached for Susan's hand. "You're my daughter. How could I not be?"

"You could be like Dad, but you aren't." Susan squeezed Maddie's hand gently. "I got the strangest feeling when Tyler was born that Dad was well...ashamed. He was ashamed that his daughter was giving birth to his grandchild but wasn't married to his grandchild's father." Susan gripped Maddie's hand tightly. "But you weren't ashamed. You stood by me. Through everything. Dad's been absent through it all. He doesn't even come around when it's Tyler's birthday."

Maddie eased into a chair, tears spilling down her cheeks. "I love Tyler. I love *you*."

"I love you, too." Susan sat down next to Maddie. "And despite anything stupid I said before, I want you to be happy. If that means being with Jake then I want that for you."

Maddie shook her head. "It wouldn't work."

"Do you love him?"

Maddie nodded.

"You know, I think I was jealous."

"Of what?"

Susan shrugged. "You. Of this relationship you have with Jake. I couldn't work things out with Rob, and I was angry about it. So, I took it out on you."

"Maybe Rob will see things differently one day."

"I doubt it. You were right. He doesn't want anything to do with Tyler."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. Just be happy. With Jake."

Maddie looked down at her hands. The passing years lined her skin with little crisscross wrinkles on the backs of them. It was a painful reminder of how much older she was than Jake.

"I saw Jake just before I came here."

"You did?" Maddie lifted her head.

"I apologised to him, sort of. I—I wanted to talk to you first, but I'll make sure to speak to him at length and make amends." She angled her head. "Now, how about you go and do that?"

"It isn't that simple."

"Sure it is." Susan grinned.

Maddie rolled her eyes. "Youth. You're all the same. Everything is *easy*."

Susan rose from the table and reached for Maddie. She pulled her up from her seat. "Go on. Talk to Jake." She hugged her. "Work things out."

Maddie bit her lower lip. "I don't think he'll want to hear what I have to say."

Susan gave her a big smile. "Trust me, he will."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he's the one who told me that mothers are forgiving—and he was right."

* * * *

A little while later, Maddie rang Jake's doorbell.

No answer.

She pressed on the bell again, but he still didn't come to the door.

Minutes went by.

"Oh, well." She shrugged, her eyes filling. "You were wrong, Susan," she whispered. "So wrong..."

She started to walk down the driveway.

"Maddie!"

She turned around when she heard Jake's voice. He strode down the driveway, dressed the way she liked, in jeans and a white T-shirt. His hair looked damp, his feet bare...

Like the first time I ever met him.

"I'm sorry," he said quickly, reaching for her hand. "I was in the shower."

"I—I could come back, if this is a bad time."

A corner of his mouth lifted. "It's never a bad time to see you."

She followed him inside. Maddie's eyes went directly to the glass-covered cake pedestal standing on his kitchen counter. A piece of cake and several crumbs lay inside.

"I see you've developed a penchant for Phil."

"Someone I know got me hooked on him."

Silence stretched between them.

"Want some coffee?"

Maddie shook her head. "No thanks."

Jake pointed to a chair. "Have a seat."

She eased into it.

"Susan apologised to me," Maddie told him.

Jake nodded. "Good. I'm glad."

He placed an elbow on top of the table and rested his jaw in the palm of his hand.

"Jake, I—I don't know if this is going to work."

He sat back in his chair and folded his arms across his chest. She felt a familiar stirring in her loins when she caught sight of the black leather-banded watch strapped to his wrist. The white face of the casual timepiece gleamed against his bronzed skin, the strap lining the muscles of his forearm. He looked too damned sexy for his own good...and hers.

"How about we do this, you tell me all the reasons you think we can't make a go of it."

"Okay," she replied. "Let's start with this. I'm fifteen years older than you."

He shrugged. "We already know that."

"Then maybe what you haven't considered is when you're my age, I'll be sixty-five."

"Why, you'll be an old lady!" His eyes widened, but he grinned just the same.

"Jake, be serious. I could become very ill when I'm that age."

"Then isn't it lucky for you that I'll be there to take care of you?" He angled his head. "Have you considered that I could become sick, too? That you'd have to take care of me one day?"

"Then let me ask you this, you mentioned you have a father. Is your mother still alive?"

"Yup."

"How will you introduce me to her?" Her heart raced. What if he said he *wouldn't*?

"Hmm...let me see." He stroked his chin. "I think I'll do it the usual way. 'Mom, I'd like for you to meet Maddie. Maddie, this is my mom, Virginia'."

"Oh! You!" She swatted his arm. "Be serious."

He gave her a long look. "I'll be right back."

He got up from the table and walked down the hall. He came back a few minutes later with a framed photograph in his hand. Jake placed it on the table in front of Maddie.

"My parents."

She looked at the picture. His mother looked to be about her age, but his father? He looked...

"If you're wondering how old my stepfather is, he's eight-five. My mother is sixty-five."

Maddie shook her head. "I—I never thought, I mean...you said your father lives in California. I didn't think he was so elderly."

"My real father lives somewhere in California. I'm not sure exactly where, and I really don't care." Jake sat down again. "He walked out on me and my mother when I was about Tyler's age. The man in the photograph is my stepfather."

"Oh, Jake, I'm so sorry about your real father."

"Yeah, well, I've heard it said that from all bad comes good. It's true. My mother met my stepfather not too long after my own father left. They went out for a while, and believe me, my mother's family couldn't understand why she was dating someone so *old*."

Maddie's eyes filled, but her heart felt light.

"Her family must have given her a hard time."

"Oh, they did. And my stepfather didn't have much money at the time, but he had a lot of love to give—to my mom and me. He worked two jobs until his construction business really took off. Then he made tons of money. My mother and I didn't want for anything from that point on."

"I'm sure your mother's family changed their thinking about him then."

"He was a 'rich old geezer' instead of just the 'old geezer' my mother married. But by that time, my mother didn't give a rat's ass what anyone, including her family, thought about him, because she stuck with him through the bad times, and he stuck by *us*. The only thing my mother will care about when she meets you is if you make me happy."

"Oh, Jake..." Tears leaked from Maddie's eyes. "But —"

"And you do make me happy, Madz. Very happy. There are no more 'buts'. There's only you and me, and I've got to know, are you as crazy for me as I am for you?"

She nodded.

"I love you," he told her. "Do you love me?"

"Yes," she whispered.

He pushed back his chair and patted his thighs. "Then come here, woman, and show me."

She settled in his lap, resting her forehead on his broad shoulder. He raised her chin between his thumb and forefinger then kissed her soundly.

Maddie's body responded to the heated kiss. She felt her panties grow damp.

Jake lifted her in his arms and rose from the chair. He carried her to his bedroom.

It was a nice, masculine bedroom, filled with dark cherry wood furniture. But she didn't care, she was with Jake again and that was all that mattered.

Except for one thing.

He unbuttoned her blouse, easing it off her shoulders. He placed a tender kiss on the bony ridges, then trailed his lips across her breasts. She shuddered with pleasure. But she had to tell him...

"Jake, wait," she said between kisses. "We have something else to discuss."

"I can't, Maddie." He breathed in short, shallow pants. "I'm so hot for you, if I don't get inside you right now..."

She grinned. "Youth. *Always* in a hurry."

He reached around and swatted her bottom.

"And you, *elderly lady* that you are, need a good spanking."

She batted her eyes. "I'd love one."

He tipped back his head and laughed. When his eyes met hers again, he asked, "So what is so important that you can't wait to tell me?"

She swallowed. Hard. "There might be some rumours circulating around Cablevision."

"There's always rumours going around that place." He chuckled.

"Jake, this is serious."

He sat up straight, pulling her against him. She settled between his thighs, his stiff erection poking her bottom.

Jake pushed some of her longer strands of hair away from her ear. He kissed her there, directly below her lobe.

"Nina, one of the girls in my department, saw us in the Cablemedia movie theatre together." Her face heated.

He pitched his voice low, but still smiled. "You mean that night I snuck in and talked dirty to you?"

"Yes. That night. She threatened to go to Stephen Delaney about us."

"You should have fired her sorry ass." He scowled.

"I wanted to, but I was so frightened that she would tell Stephen about us, and he'd fire *you*. I don't care about me so much as I care what happens to you."

"I'm touched, Maddie. But don't worry, I already met with Stephen Delaney, and he knows everything."

"You did?" Her eyes widened. "And he didn't fire you?"

"We spoke at length. I listened to what the arrogant asshole had to say, then I..."

Her mouth hung open.

"Quit."

"You didn't!"

"I sure did. Cablemedia's not for me. But flying is. I decided to fulfil my heart's desire." He leant down and kissed each of her breasts. "First, you." He raised her hand to his mouth and kissed the inside of her wrist. "And now, I'm going to fly my Skyhawk for a living. It's what I always wanted to do."

"But how will you get by?"

"I've got a little nest egg, and it's time I used it. *You* taught me not to fear anything."

"I did? How?"

"That day I took you up in the Skyhawk. That took a lot of courage, Maddie. I figure if you can face your fears, then I can swallow mine and do what I've always wanted to do, be a pilot. At first, it'll be tough, I'm sure, but if I stick with it, I know I can build up my business."

"That's wonderful. But you shouldn't have quit. I—I could have taken an early retirement. That way, you'd still have your job and —"

"So take early retirement." He waggled his brows. "And spend your days and nights with a sexy pilot."

"Cablemedia's not the same anymore. I used to love it. I don't now." She looked around. "Do you happen to see any handsome pilots around?"

He tickled her ribs.

"Jake! Oh, no!" She laughed. "Stop."

"Your sexy, handsome pilot is right here, lady, and don't you forget it."

He kissed her soundly.

"I won't." She stroked his face. "Looks like I'm lucky after all. Lucky in love."

About the Author

I sank my writing teeth into my first romance novel after years of reading my favourite authors...Linda Howard, Karen Robards, Kat Martin (just to name a few!) Those ladies inspired me to write my own romances and now, it's my passion.

I'm fascinated by the paranormal...I love to be scared. Ghost stories are my favourite. As a child I read 'The Haunting of Hill House' by Shirley Jackson (it was made into a movie a couple of times...a good one to watch with your favourite honey...and cuddle up to when it gets real scary!) That book made me want to write ghost stories and heightened my interest in the paranormal. I also enjoy writing spicy, sensual, modern-day romance with an added twist of suspense.

Born in the land of the 'Midnight Sun' (Fairbanks, Alaska), I'm an 'army brat.' When my mother's plane landed at Ladd Air Force Base in Fairbanks (no army base...they had to share with the air force back then!) she didn't want to get off - she and my sister were decked out in heavy winter coats and boots - my mother figured it was always icy cold & snowy in Alaska. Meanwhile, it was summer - and 100 degrees! My father stood there waiting for her on the tarmac in a short-sleeve shirt, shorts & sunglasses. She never forgot the experience - and neither did my father. That summer, my mother said the sun never set - there was 24 hours of daylight. Soon we moved on, and at the tender age of three, my family and I settled on Long Island, where I've resided ever since. Long Island's North Shore 'Gold Coast' is where many of my books & stories take place - it's beautiful! Cliffs that look out over the Long Island Sound...a rocky, sandy coastline where pirates once smuggled in contraband...and fabulous old mansions from 'old money' families abound.

When the hubby and I are not on the go, we're spending time with our two terrific children (now grown) and...our two cats.

Email: booknook56@aol.com

Catherine loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.totalebound.com>.

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