

The Beginning
(or This is the First
Day of the Rest of
Your Life)

By Marcia Gloster

I hope you have had a chance to read and enjoy Parts One and Two of "The Interview," short stories that are prequels to my new novel I Love You Today, due to be published April 18th. They were a lot of fun to write and I hope they have given you, my reader, a chance to discover a bit about the main characters and the unique era in which they meet and play out their story.

Although this is a work of fiction, I lived and worked with characters such as Maddie and Rob, and while the sixties may be history, this story remains ever-present.

I Love You Today is the story of Maddie Samuels, who arrives in New York in the summer of 1964 with dreams. Dreams she has already been warned might be unattainable. Ever optimistic but naïve, she meets challenges she never expected in her efforts to avoid becoming just another secretary and to find the job she really wants. And while hoping she'll meet some cool guys, she's surprised that the heretofore respectable young men she dated while living at home have suddenly developed drastically different viewpoints, particularly when it comes to working girls living alone in the big city.

Rob McLeod, on the other hand, is a brash and confident art director who is convinced he can bend the world of advertising, especially the female part of it, to his will. In this final prequel, he has hired Maddie at the magazine and, while she has no intention becoming anything more than his assistant, he, accustomed to getting whatever he wants, has other goals.

Rob pushed open the heavy glass door. Eleanor was already behind the receptionist desk unwrapping a piece of Juicy Fruit gum. The week before she had gone out of her way to inform the entire office that it was supposed to help her stop smoking the two packs a day she was convinced was affecting her special phone-answering voice. Rob shook his head, marveling at what he considered her unique ability to chew, answer, and rout calls while typing, reading a magazine, filing her nails, and even occasionally painting them. Looking closer, he saw that today's eye shadow was a shiny sky blue over her eternally black-lined doe eyes.

"A bit late this morning, Rob?" she asked, her gum cracking. Her accent was pure Queens. New York, not London.

"Yeah. Today's excuse was that there was ice on the tracks from the storm last night. Ice? It's only October. Did I ever mention how much I hate the New Haven railroad?" he growled, heading toward the corridor to his office.

After shouting, "Every day," she smirked to herself. "Well. Almost every day."

He stopped and poked his head around the corner. "Very funny. Is Tara in? She's not at her desk."

"Yeah. She's with your new girl."

"My what?"

"Um, your new assistant? Did you forget she was starting today? By the way, I gave her an envelope for you. Some photographer dropped it off."

When he got to his office, he lit a cigarette and opened the envelope, taking out several black-and-white photographs and a couple of contact sheets. Satisfied, he replaced them and put the envelope down on his desk. Looking out through the glass wall of his office, he saw Tara shepherding his new assistant around the office, introducing her to the editors and other assistants in the bullpen. For a second, he forgot her name, but with a small shake of his head, it came to him: Maddie.

Tara walked into his office a few minutes later, Maddie following.

"Have a seat, Maddie. We need to go over a few things. And, by the way, welcome to *Status*."

"Thank you, Mr. McLeod."

He looked at her with a grin. "If I'm going to call you Maddie, I think you should call me Rob. How's that?"

Maddie blinked; if she had been anywhere else but in his office she might have responded with an enticing look of her own. She reminded herself this was her first day at a new job and if he was always going to be this seductive, she had better learn how to respond in a more serious fashion. The problem was not only that he was incredibly attractive, but he also had a warm smile that radiated an innate charm, not to mention sexuality. Suddenly recalling one of her friends asking if he was married – her response being she didn't know and, for that matter, didn't care – she glanced at his left hand. She saw no ring.

Tara rolled her eyes as if she had lived this scene before and with a smile asked if anyone wanted coffee.

Maddie thanked her, asking for black, as did Rob.

Rob settled back in his chair and picked up the manila envelope on his desk. After opening it, he looked

in and then replaced it. Maddie waited, thinking she should probably ask a question, but her mind had unexpectedly gone blank. She glanced around the office and then back at him seeing him staring at her. Although it was a strangely awkward moment, she suddenly experienced that rare but unmistakable recognition that sparks between two people before they truly understand what it might mean – especially in a situation where it shouldn't mean anything at all.

He broke his silence as Tara returned with coffee and, with a glance back, went to her desk.

The rest of the morning was spent with Rob explaining all aspects of the magazine and the work, both editorial and production, that Maddie would encounter. After showing her where she would be working – her drawing board was well within his sightline – he said that her first project was to lay out several spreads on a couple of new galleries in SoHo. He handed her a few pages of text and the photos that he had taken from the manila envelope. She put the pages down but looked at the photos.

“These are good,” she said.

He smiled and thanked her.

“You took these?”

“Yes. I do a bit of photography.” He looked at the photos in her hand then in her eyes. She blushed, took a breath, and reminded herself that she was in an office, not a bedroom.

“Well. I'll leave you to it. Come back when you're done.”

She nodded, watching him return to his office.

Rob smiled as he sat down at his desk. There was a message from Jackie but he was in no mood to return it, at

least not at the moment. He looked across the corridor at his new assistant. She was prettier than he remembered, and her skirt today was a lot shorter than at her interview. He had already noticed a couple of the men in the office blatantly appraising her. He was tempted, but reminded himself that, as Fred put it, he'd "overstepped" with his last assistant and ended up having to fire her after, well . . . after. She had become just too intense. He wondered why girls couldn't lighten up a bit. They always seemed to have expectations way before he, and most guys he knew, understood what was happening.

Tearing his eyes away, he considered that maybe he shouldn't have hired Maddie, just gotten her phone number. Now it was too late and anyway he had promised Fred he'd keep his hands, if that was the right word, off of her. "Time to get to work," he muttered to himself and picked up the phone to call a photographer for a shoot he was planning in a couple of weeks.

At noon Tara came by and invited Maddie to lunch along with a couple of the editorial assistants. They had hardly sat down at the coffee shop before the girls began gossiping, mostly about Rob. One of them, Cynthia, warned her that not only did she have to watch out for his moods, but that he qualified as "a male chauvinist pig who fired his last assistant after sleeping with her." And yet even that first morning she had noticed most of the girls, and a few guys as well, gazing at him as he strode through the bullpen.

One morning a few weeks later, Maddie was in Rob's office going over a couple of layouts when he suddenly

asked if she had always wanted to work in publishing or if she had ever considered advertising.

"When I came to New York I definitely preferred to work at an agency, but I had too many disappointing interviews. Most of the art directors I met with were nice, and occasionally I was even called back for a second meeting. But then I'd be told either that the job was filled or they had never hired girls in the art department. Maybe if I'd had more experience, you know, that first job, it would have been easier. But how do you get that first job if no one will hire you because you're a girl? It was frustrating." Suddenly she stopped, as if realizing something for the first time. Looking back at him, she said, "You know, I've never really thought about it before, but I guess you could say that it was discrimination. Not like in the South. This was more like a fraternity where the big bosses only allowed the boys in. I didn't question it at the time, I'm not sure anyone did. It's just the way it was."

He shrugged. "But now with the Equal Rights Act and this new women's lib movement, it should begin to change."

"You know about Women's lib?"

He grinned. "I know what Gloria Steinem wrote about her stint at the Playboy Club." Maddie rolled her eyes.

He laughed. "Looking back, I wish I'd given myself the time to interview with agencies. I got the assistant's job at Time-Life while I was still in college and felt like I couldn't turn it down."

"Why don't you go for it now?"

He shrugged. "Maybe one day I will." It wasn't the time or place to tell his new assistant that this was exactly what he was thinking. Instead, he turned back to the layouts they were working on. That was the day he

asked her to have lunch with him, but she had told him she had plans to meet a friend from *Today's Bride*. She had smiled and said, "Maybe another time."

Danny, who was sort of her boyfriend, had asked her out for the night before Thanksgiving. That Wednesday morning, Fred had announced, to wild applause, that he would close the office at noon, and Maddie was looking forward to an afternoon of pampering herself before her date. She even considered getting her nails done. At 11:59, as everyone was racing for their coats, Eleanor rang through to say Danny was on the phone. With a smile, she picked it up and in a breathy voice said, "Hi Danny. I'm just about to leave."

"Maddie. I'm sorry, but a big client just came into town and I have to take him out. Maybe if it's not too late I'll call you." She could hear the apology in his deep voice.

Although she was disappointed, she said, "It's all right, Danny. I understand. And if it's late, don't worry. I know you have an early flight tomorrow."

"Thanks, Maddie. I'll call you Sunday after I get back from my folks. And, by the way, have a happy Thanksgiving."

"You too," she murmured, trying to hide her disappointment. Dropping her coat on her chair, she sat for a minute staring at an unfinished layout. With a sigh, she picked up her coat and hung it up again. Since there was no longer any rush to go anywhere, she decided she might as well complete the layout, get some other work done, and then leave in about an hour.

She was almost finished when she saw Rob come out of Fred's office. He stopped next to her holding several typewritten pages and photographs. "How come you're still here, Maddie?"

Not about to tell him her date had cancelled, she said, "I just wanted to finish up a few things. I'll leave soon. How about you?"

"Can't. Not yet. We just had a, um, screw-up with a writer and have to substitute a big article. I need to make some calls. Can you do me a favor? This is the new article and these are the photos. Would you mind roughing out a couple of layouts?"

She shrugged. "Sure. Why not?"

"I hate to hold you up."

"It's okay. My plans have changed. There's no rush."

He looked as though he was going to ask something, but instead just nodded. "Thanks."

It was close to five when she finally finished and brought the layouts to Rob. He glanced at them then asked if she would leave them with Fred before she left. She was on her way back from Fred's office when she saw a note pinned to her chair. *A note?* There was no one in the bullpen, and Rob was still in his office. She picked it up. *Have a drink with me?* was all it said. When she looked up, she saw Rob standing in the doorway with a smile on his face.

"Did you leave this?"

He glanced around. "I think that's the obvious conclusion. What about it? Just a quick one."

Before she could ask herself what she was doing, she took a breath and nodded.

They went to the Four Seasons where Rob had appeared to be surprised when three of his friends showed up. Maddie had been uptight at the beginning, but after a couple of drinks and listening to Rob and

his friends trade jokes and stories, she began to relax. It wasn't long before Rob mentioned they should move uptown to a rugby bar he knew. She said she should go home, but the four of them insisted she come along.

It was after eleven and she'd had about enough of the noise and the raucous crowd cheering on Rob while he arm-wrestled several of the rugby players, all the while downing shots of Irish whisky. Squeezing between two of the largest players, she yelled in his ear that she was leaving, with or without him. At that, he got up and announced he had to go. The crowd yelled, "No," saying that he couldn't leave, not yet. But seeing Maddie at the door, he retrieved his coat and waved goodbye. His other friends were already outside laughing about what a blast the night had been and that if it wasn't Thanksgiving and they didn't have to get home they'd have stayed longer. One of them hailed a taxi and they all piled in on their way to the West Side.

Maddie, expecting Rob to take the next cab that came along, said she lived nearby and could walk home. But Rob shook his head and said he'd made her wait long enough and there was a bar down the street where they made great cheeseburgers.

"Don't you have to get home? It's getting late."

He looked at his watch and shook his head. "No problem. I'll catch a late train. How about you?"

She shrugged. "I don't have to be anywhere until tomorrow, but . . ."

He cut her off. "Then we're good. Come on, Maddie," he said taking her hand. But the bar, as well as every bar and restaurant on the Upper East Side, seemed to have closed early for the holiday. They found only one Chinese place, about to close, that let them take out a few things.

She was putting the cartons out on her small dining table when she suddenly wondered just how “one quick drink” had turned into this crazy night that had unexpectedly ended at her apartment. While they ate, they talked and laughed until she again looked at her watch.

“Rob, it’s almost one. What about the train?”

He smiled. “I think I just missed the last one.”

“What?” she exclaimed, getting up. “Well, you can’t stay here.”

“Why not?”

“I think it’s obvious. I’m not going to get involved with you, that’s why.”

Although he was still smiling, Rob couldn’t believe what he had just heard. No woman had ever turned him down; well, not once he had gotten as far as her apartment and a mere ten steps from her bedroom. He knew she liked him and, despite that he had never gotten very far with her in the office, they had locked eyes from time to time. So what was this? She was actually saying no? He took a breath; he wasn’t a bully and had no intention of pushing her. That wasn’t his style. Raising his hands as if in surrender, he said, “All right, Maddie. But I’ll need to rent a car.”

She pointed to a closet. “There’s a Yellow Pages on the top shelf.”

He sat on the sofa, the Yellow Pages open on his lap and the phone in his hand. “Come on Maddie. Are you sure? It’s just one night. We don’t have to get involved.”

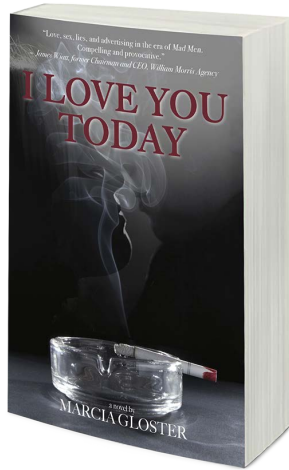
Was he serious? “*We don’t have to get involved?*” Of course not, why get involved when you can have a one-night

stand. And what then? Would they meet in the office Monday morning and just say hi? Or maybe they could give one another a big wet kiss in front of everyone. What the hell was he thinking? Forget that he was her boss and all the rest of it. No way. He shouldn't be in her apartment trying to seduce her the night before Thanksgiving, or any other time for that matter. He should be home with his family. Realizing she sounded like her mother, she softened her stance.

That's when he turned to her and said, "There are no rental cars available until Friday, at the earliest."

She took a breath and stared at him. *Now what?*

Thanks for reading!



"A romp through the Mad Men era, told from a woman's point of view." — Pamela Fiori, author and former editor-in-chief, Town & Country

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