

The Interview
Part One, Rob
By Marcia Gloster

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.

This prequel is first in a series of three short stories in which you will meet them both and discover their truths and their lies, what drives them, and what brings them to the defining moment that will change their lives forever. Although this is a work of fiction, I lived and worked with characters such as those you are about to meet. And while the sixties may be history, this story is ever-present.

There were three pink message slips, placed strategically front and center, on his desk. Rob swore under his breath. How long had he been at lunch with the guys? About three scotches; maybe an hour and a half? He couldn't believe Allison had actually called three times. Shaking his head, he reached for the phone just as the receptionist buzzed.

"What, Eleanor," he said impatiently.

"Your three o'clock appointment is here, Rob," she said, her voice a bit too breathy.

"Yeah. Okay. Give me a minute. I'll send Tara out to get her when I'm ready."

He sat down and glanced at his datebook. The girl's name was Maddie something. He had written it down so fast he couldn't even read her last name. But Collins at the employment agency had assured him that although she'd only been working for a little over two years, she had solid experience. Wasn't that what they all said? He'd already interviewed, what, about eight men and one other girl? The girl was a lightweight, but one of the guys was pretty good and was currently at the top of his list. He'd needed a decent assistant since that last one left, not quite by her choice, two weeks before. The magazine was thriving, and they were adding extra pages. He had promised Fred he'd make a decision today.

He looked at Allison's messages again and noticed another, tucked underneath. It was from Jackie, always a pleasant surprise. For whatever reason, Tara, his rather possessive secretary, didn't like Jackie and often hid her messages. It never mattered; she always called again.

He sat back, taking a minute before the interview for a cigarette break and thinking about the night he had met her.

It was June, and he remembered he had loosened his tie before shrugging on his jacket. It was warm out and he didn't really need it, but it wasn't exactly cool walking into PJ's with your sport jacket over your arm.

Carl rushed by. "C'mon, let's go. The guys are probably there, already drinking without us."

Rob had laughed and followed him to the elevator. A couple of girls, secretaries from the law firm down the hall, had just pushed the "down" button. They glanced at him and then back at one another, giggling. They were both dressed for summer in sleeveless blouses and skirts that seemed to be getting shorter every month – to his and every other man's delight. All the guys gawked at the girls on the street in May and June when the coats came off, but by August stockinged legs, bare arms, and a peek of bra straps had become commonplace and therefore held less interest.

PJ's was jammed, as always, but one of the guys from the office had snagged a table. Carl, noticing three girls at the bar who appeared to be looking around for a place to sit, had nudged him. "Dig those chicks. Want to ask them to join us?"

He had turned, seeing two brunettes and a blond, tall and curvy. "Sure. Why not?"

Carl shook his head. "You go. They won't say no to you."

Rob had laughed and stood up, careful to avoid looking at them. He took a long, slow drink of his Johnnie Walker Red and then turned, not surprised to see their eyes already on him. He was tall and slim with thickly lashed green eyes few women could resist. One, he couldn't remember which, had called them "bedroom eyes."

"Hey, ladies. If you're waiting for a table, Why don't you join us." With a sweeping gesture he indicated Carl and the other three guys from the office who were staring in anticipation.

He expected they would glance at one another, and he mentally shook his head as they did just that. "Thanks," the blond said, following him to the table where he pulled out a chair for her. The other guys got up and dragged over chairs for the brunettes.

He sat down and lit a Marlboro. "Want one?" he asked.

The girl nodded and smoothed her hair. "I'm Jackie," she said. When the other girls murmured their names he didn't bother to listen.

"Nice to meet you, Jackie. I'm Rob. And, let's see, this is Carl and Don, Alex and Irv."

Jackie smiled, saying she was a receptionist at a model agency. He had little doubt she was trying to become one herself. She had stayed for about an hour before saying she had to leave. The other girls got up as well. She looked slightly disappointed, and he wondered if she expected him to leave with her, but he only stood up, as had the other guys, gentlemen to the end, to say goodnight. It was late, although that seldom mattered, but the next day was going to be long and

he would have to be on his toes. He watched her leave, a pleasant sight. At the door she glanced back at him.

The next day he met the photographer, stylists, and other assorted assistants at the studio. As the associate art director at *Cavalier*, a trendy men's monthly, he oversaw most of the photography sessions. In truth, he considered it less work than pleasure, despite that the days tended to be long and intense. But there were always the girls. These weren't models, not in the sense of Jean Shrimpton or Twiggy. These girls posed nude, or almost so. Most of them had made the mere drape of a shawl into an art form and every glance a seduction. And the shoot was only part of it. When the transparencies showed up the following week, all the guys in the office would come in to gawk and offer opinions, requested or not.

Yet Rob had loftier goals. He hadn't mentioned it to anyone, but he was looking for a new job, one that would get him noticed by an advertising agency. Magazines were fun, but they were amateur night compared to the big agencies where new creativity was soaring. Every time he saw one of the "Think Small" ads for Volkswagen, he knew that was where he wanted, actually deserved, to be. He should never have taken that first job at Time-Life but instead gone straight to the ad agencies. Now his immediate objective was to become an art director at a bigger, more prestigious magazine, a stepping stone to get him ever closer to Madison Avenue.

When Rob and Carl had gotten to PJ's that night, they were tired after the day at the shoot. They fig-

ured they'd have a quick drink and then go their separate ways. While they were working on their second scotches, Rob had noticed Jackie come in, alone. He wondered if she was meeting someone, but after seeing her scan the crowd, he realized she might be looking for him. He got off his bar stool and approached her. Seeing her smile, he invited her to sit with him. Carl rolled his eyes, finished his drink, and mumbled good night. With an obvious glance at his watch, he said, "It's getting late, Rob. Don't you have to be somewhere?"

Rob had glared at Carl as Jackie, looking perplexed, asked, "Do you have to leave?"

"Only when I want to. Would you like a drink?"

"Yes, I would," she said in a breathy voice. "But how about at my place?"

She wasn't wasting any time, he thought. But then girls these days were far more forward than in the so-called conservative yet hypocritical days of the fifties. He felt himself respond to her and he leaned over to give her a kiss, picking up the scent of expensive perfume. He could already feel the heat between them, and it was obvious she felt it as well. He glanced back at the corridor where the phones were located and started to get up to make a call, then shook his head and sat back down. He had no doubt that there would be consequences to his actions, but he put the thought aside; he'd just have to deal with those later. Right now, there was a beautiful, sexy blond sitting next to him.

He signaled the waiter for the check.

It was only a couple of days later that Fred, the managing editor, asked Rob to stop by his office. When Rob asked why, Fred had answered in a brisk voice, "When you have a minute, come and see me. I'll tell you then."

He hoped it wasn't bad news, but then asked himself how that could be. Everything, as far as he could tell was cool. The magazine was thriving, no doubt due to his help, particularly at the photography sessions. When he walked into Fred's office later that day, Fred had asked him to close the door. That's when he became really curious.

"What is it, Fred?" he'd asked.

"I just got an offer from a new, well, fairly new, magazine. They're looking for a change of direction and called me."

"That's great. Are you going to take it?"

Fred leaned forward on his desk. "Yet bet I am."

"I'll miss you."

"Only if you want to stay here. I know you love the girls, but this is a real magazine that women read as well as men. It's called *Status* and the snooty name says it all. It covers fashion, celebrities, socialites, nightlife, gossip – you name it. I thought you might want to consider coming with me as the art director."

Rob had sat back, stunned. "Please tell me you're not putting me on."

"Not at all. I think this will be a good place for you. It'll also get you away from all the temptation."

He'd laughed and shook his head. "C'mon Fred. Get real. You know as well as I that the temptation is all round us. Sexy secretaries, cute receptionists, not to mention models. What's a guy to do?"

"The first thing I'd suggest is that is that you do your best to keep it in your pants, at least if you want this job."

"That's cool, Fred." Rob got up, and they shook hands. "Let's do this."

Fred took a bottle and two glasses out of the bottom drawer. "To us, then. We'll knock 'em dead."

He had raised his glass. "And to whatever, and whomever awaits us."

Fred drained his drink and laughed. "McLeod. You never stop do you?"

"Why would I. Life is a gas, my man. Just make sure to bring that bottle. When do we meet with them?"

"How's tomorrow? Bring some of your work, just to show off."

He had nodded. "Cool."

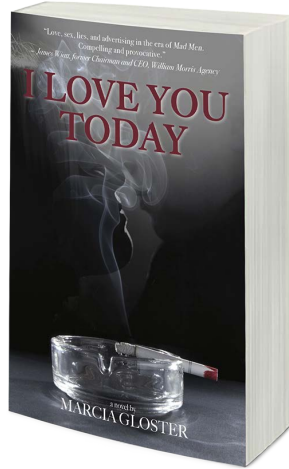
He'd left Fred's office revved. He hadn't even thought twice before calling Jackie.

Taking a breath, he mashed out his Marlboro. He and Fred had made the right decision going over to *Status*, and they'd gotten some recognition for it as well. Aware that Allison's messages were still on his desk, just sitting there as a reminder of her constant irritation, he crumpled them up and tossed them in the circular file. *Fuck it. She can wait.*

He was about to ring Tara but decided he wanted a quick preview of the chick he was about to interview. Anyway, he needed to bring a copyedited article to Fred. Taking the long way around the bullpen, he was able to glance into the reception area.

She was sitting on the sofa holding a magazine, but he could tell she wasn't reading it. *No doubt nervous*, he thought. Although he could only see her in profile, she looked cute enough. But who knew what her portfolio would look like? He was less than optimistic; the prettier the girls the less dependable their work was, at least in his experience. Usually, they only wanted to work until they met the "right" man, and then they were gone. He shook his head. Probably a waste of time, but what the hell. He signaled Tara to bring her in.

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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