

Unforgettable



Robert regretted giving Maddie the brandy...

Giggling, she raised her hand and pointed a manicured fingernail at him. “Do you know you have the same name as the famous playwright who writes those silly plays? His name is Robert Kendall, too. Why, you even *look* like him!” She gave her thigh a slap. “Hot damn! I’ll bet people ask for your autograph, thinking you’re him. And you sign ‘em too, don’tcha, you sly little devil?”

Robert gave a low laugh. She was just too cute to resist. Playing along with her, he drawled, “Yup. I sign every one. That’s because I really am him.”

“No!” she giggled again.

Robert shook his head and smiled. “It’s true. I am. I have no reason to lie.”

“All men lie,” she remarked dryly, her mind flashing back to that afternoon and Alex.

Robert picked up on it. “My guess is that you’ve been burned and badly. Who hasn’t? Just don’t judge me by someone else.” He rose from his seat and turned the radio on. The haunting rendition of *Unforgettable* enveloped the room. The soul-wrenching duet by the late Nat King Cole and his daughter had been Alex’s love song to her. Now he was gone, and the melody cut through Maddie like a knife...

Unforgettable



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~Author Acknowledgment~

To Dr. Christine Wenberg ... without your help,
none of this would be possible.

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by

Lucille Naroian



CHAPTER ONE

*H*ad Maddie Price been paying attention to her surroundings instead of driving recklessly at night in hot pursuit of Alex Bradford, she would have seen the caution lights on the side of the road, slowed down, and avoided the accident. But at that particular moment, Maddie was oblivious to everything. Not even the rain that fell in sheets was capable of putting a halt to her seemingly impossible quest. Therefore, when her Chevy's left front tire slammed into the crater-size pothole and blew out, Maddie was totally unprepared.

Instinctively she hit the brakes, sending the vehicle skidding across the washed-out double lane highway. For a spine-tingling minute the car spun out of control, then stopped on the muddy shoulder of the road.

When the erratic pounding of her heart finally quieted, she turned off the ignition and gave the steering wheel a frustrated whack.

"Damn you, Alex! It's all your fault!" she yelled, blaming him for causing another catastrophe to come her way. Truth was, she was solely to blame for this mess. Hell-bent on reaching him, she defiantly set out from Boston to Provincetown in a blustering rain storm that was rapidly sweeping up the Eastern seacoast. Fully aware that the

major arteries leading south to Cape Cod were flooded, she unwisely disregarded the weatherman's warning to keep off the roads.

Under ordinary circumstances, Maddie would have waited. But time was not on her side. It was imperative she reach Alex tonight ... before dawn ... before he boarded that plane to Paris.

Just thinking about it brought a lump to Maddie's throat. *I can't let that happen*, she told herself, her fury mounting.

With a determined hand, she twisted the key in the ignition and willed the car to move. When the battered tire thumped and sank deeper into the mud, Maddie let out a defeated sob. What was she going to do now? There wasn't a gas station in sight, and even though she wasn't marooned on some desolate road, at this particular stretch she couldn't see any signs of civilization.

Slumping down into the seat, she tried to relax and come up with a viable solution. That's when she remembered catching a glimpse of a large beach house on the right about five minutes earlier. Its stately elegance had somehow caught her eye, and she'd noticed, through the rivulets streaming down the side window, a faint ray of light filtering from one of its windows.

A wave of relief swept over her. Someone was nearby. Hope was not lost after all.

She tucked the tapered legs of her jeans into her brown leather boots, and decided to walk back to the house, ignoring the fact that such a trek could put her into a situation more perilous than the one she was in now. Nevertheless, it was a chance she had to take.

With her purse tucked under her arm, she reached for

the door handle. Just as she touched it, a jagged streak of lightening split the sky. A violent gust of wind rocked her small car. Sheer terror gripped her as she waited for the car to still. When it finally did, she reconsidered the danger and abandoned her attempt to seek help.

Gazing forlornly out the rain-drenched window, she considered her options. Not a soul had passed by since she'd been there, and it was doubtful that anyone would. Therefore, option one was to stay put and wait out the storm. Mulling it over, she decided that choice was out of the question. The idea of spending the night in an impotent vehicle sent shivers along her spine.

What if the storm developed into a hurricane? She'd have no chance of survival in her old Chevy. The car was too light-weight to guarantee her safety. Therefore, option two was her only choice. She'd have to change the tire herself. It didn't matter that she'd never attempted to change a tire before. The fact was, it had to be done.

Resigned to her fate, she took a deep breath and accepted the challenge. With a not so steady hand, she removed the key from the ignition, tied a silk scarf around her coiled, honey blonde hair, and turned up the collar on her navy pea jacket.

Moving quickly, she reached over to the glove compartment and withdrew a dented yellow flashlight. She couldn't remember the last time she'd used the old thing, and was certain that by now the batteries were dead. Holding her breath, she switched it on. A bright beam of light spread across the seat. Maddie smiled. Something had finally gone right. She switched off the light, pushed open the door, and carefully stepped out.

To her horror, the water on the road reached to the

top of her boots. Worse yet, the pothole had practically swallowed the useless tire completely. Emitting a groan, she squinted her eyes against the driving rain and crouched down beside the fender to inspect the damage, wondering how she was going to wedge a jack under a bumper she could barely see, and on solid ground when there was none. Her worries went into overdrive. What if the damage went beyond the tire? What if the axle or frame was broken? If that were the case, she'd have to total the car because the cost of repairs would far exceed what the old clunker was worth.

Suddenly, Maddie shook her head and stood upright, refusing to give in to another negative thought. It was simply tire trouble, she told herself, and nothing more. And if she was ever going to reach Alex tonight, she'd better get moving.

Pulling the jacket collar tighter around her neck, she turned and waded to the rear of the car. Just as she reached the trunk, she heard a sound. Hesitating a moment, she scanned the washed-out road, the stretch of isolated beach, then the sides and rear of the car, but saw nothing. Her imagination was playing tricks on her, she decided, as she shrugged her shoulders and slid the trunk key into the lock.

No sooner did it click when she heard the sound again. Switching on the flashlight, she aimed it in the direction of the noise. What she saw turned her insides to jelly.

Coming at her with lightening speed was the largest Doberman Pinscher she had ever seen. Black as the night, it charged through the murky water, its glassy eyes and sharp pointed teeth well illuminated by the lightening.

Unable to move, Maddie heard a sob leave her

throat, and her knees went weak as she realized in a moment she would become the victim of this deadly creature.

With only the thin flashlight for protection, she clutched it tightly, crossed her arms against her chest, and dug her chin deep into her jacket collar. It was all just too much! Standing beside a useless hunk of junk with that hellhound charging toward her, she vowed that if she lived through this, she would get even with Alex one way or another.

The dog, just inches away, focused its eyes intently on her. When she heard the beast's low, throaty growl, she flung the flashlight in its path and somehow found the strength to run. It was a mistake she soon regretted. As if fired from a cannon, the dog shot up on its hind legs and pounced its huge paws onto Maddie's shoulders, pinning her to the side of the car. She could actually feel the heat of its breath on her throat as it opened its jaws wider.

A wave of dizziness came over her, and for a moment she prayed she *would* faint. Unable to face her fate, with the attack-dog snarling at her throat, she shut her eyes tight. Her only thought now was that she didn't want to die ... not here ... not like this.

What Maddie needed was a miracle, and it came, just in time, in the form of a pickup truck that screeched to a halt beside her. Because of the howling wind, she didn't hear the driver's door slam, but she did hear a piercing whistle, and that's when her eyes flew open. The animal responded immediately to the sound and mercifully slid its heavy claw-tipped paws from Maddie's trembling shoulders. Immediately she felt a different pressure replacing the dog's paws – a pair of strong, yet comforting hands.

Maddie's eyes lifted to meet the stranger's shadowed

face. When he spoke, his voice was gentle with seeming genuine concern. "Are you hurt?"

"N-no," she stammered with a sigh of relief as she wiped the stream of tears and rain from her eyes. "B-but the dog. Please get him away from me!"

The stranger pulled the hood of his slicker further down to shield his face from the pounding rain. "Don't be afraid, Miss!" he shouted. "He belongs to me. I'm real sorry he frightened you."

Immediately anger replaced her fear. "Frighten me!" she snapped. "He was ready to tear out my throat! How dare you let something like that run loose? He belongs on a leash. Better yet, in a cage!"

The man stiffened. "I never let Caesar run loose. He got away from me when I went outside to lock the gate. Hard to believe, but he's never done this before. He must have sensed there was trouble up the road, and apparently he was right." The man reached down and patted the dog, who now stood still beside his master. Turning, the animal jumped onto the open back of the truck.

The man took a step backwards, reached into the pocket of his slicker, and took out a long silver flashlight. Switching it on, he gave the Chevy the once over. "What's wrong with your car?"

Maddie's shoulders sagged both from embarrassment and utter helplessness. "I'm afraid I wasn't paying attention and hit something hard in the road!" she shouted, trying to be heard above the wind. "It wrecked my tire."

"Must have been that damn pothole!" he shouted back. "Didn't you see the warning sign?"

"What warning sign?"

"Back there on that pole," he answered, pointing in

its direction. "There's a sign and a set of bright yellow caution lights. Even in this rain, you couldn't have missed them."

She could barely make out what he was saying as he waded off to inspect the battered tire. Centering the light on the tattered wheel, he remarked, "You must have been going like a bat out of hell!"

"Never mind that!" she snapped. "The important thing is, can you fix it for me? I have a spare in the trunk."

He turned the flashlight on her angry face. "No way, Miss."

"Please, Mister," she begged. "I just have to get to Provincetown tonight!"

The stranger switched off the light and returned it to his pocket. "The tire's wedged too deeply in the mud. Looks like your car is going to have to sit here until the storm ends."

"I can't wait that long!" she shouted, blinking her eyes rapidly against the rain. "Didn't you hear me? I've got to get there tonight!"

The man became impatient. "I heard you perfectly, Miss, but again, I can't help you. Not tonight, anyway."

Maddie sighed and thought a minute. "What about a gas station? Isn't there one around here somewhere?"

"Sure," he yelled. "There's one just around the bend. But it's closed because of the storm. Sorry, but you're just going to have to wait till tomorrow."

"Tomorrow's too late!" she gasped. Balling her fists in frustration, she turned quickly and began trudging towards the driver's side of the car.

The stranger caught her by the arm. "Why is tomorrow too late?" he asked. "Is there a family

emergency?"

"No, there's no family emergency," she replied, harshly. She was not about to admit she had risked life and limb in a futile attempt to stop a man from leaving her. She turned her face away and said forlornly, "I'll just stay here for the night."

The man eyed her closely and said in disbelief, "You don't really plan to spend the night in this wreck!"

"Yes, I do," she answered, feeling absolutely sick inside.

"That's crazy!" he said, his patience obviously wearing thin. "My place is about three hundred yards back down the road. You're welcome to stay the night. It's better than being alone out here. At least you'll be dry ... and safe."

And safe. It was strange the way he had tagged on that last phrase. She understood he had paused purposely for effect.

As if capable of reading her thoughts, the man gave her a reassuring smile. "Look, I can understand your apprehension. If I were a woman in this predicament, I'd be leery of going off with a stranger myself. But, it's your choice."

Looking up at him, Maddie replied in an equally placating tone, "Thanks. I appreciate the offer."

He gave her a quick smile. "So, what do you say? And make it quick before we both catch pneumonia."

No sooner had he asked the question when a streak of lightening struck a tree stump on the opposite side of the road, splitting it in two. It was all Maddie needed. "Yes."

* * * * *

Settling herself beside the stranger in his warm truck,

Maddie got a closer look at him as he pushed back the hood on his slicker and threaded long fingers through his thick, dark hair. The sight of his handsome profile etched against the intermittent flashes of lightening brought an unexpected flush to her cheeks. She pressed her icy cold palms against her face, hoping he hadn't noticed, but he had.

Patting her gently on her arm, he said reassuringly, "Relax. Everything will turn out okay." Maddie knew he was trying to banish her fear. But what she was feeling was anything *but* fear. Sitting there so close to him, she felt the flutter of butterflies in the pit of her stomach. Swallowing hard, she managed to lie with some degree of conviction. "I'm not nervous. Just hot one minute, cold the next."

"A shot of brandy will take care of that," he replied as he removed his hand and started the engine.

Confused by her emotional response to his nearness and touch, Maddie sat back and tried to relax, but when she glanced at her disabled car, she became deeply depressed. Even if the storm ended by dawn as expected, and she was able to get help from one of the garages in town, it would be too late to reach Alex. Tears of despair brimmed her eyes, so she shut them tightly to hold them back. She remained lost in her melancholy until the stranger stopped the truck and turned off the engine.

Opening her eyes, she peered out the window and grinned, thinking it ironic that this rambling house was the one she'd tried to reach earlier.

After drawing the hood back onto his head, Maddie's companion got out of the truck, then closing the door behind him, summoned his dog with a loud whistle. Fast on his master's heels, the beast began running in circles, visibly happy to be home.

Odd, but Maddie felt the same as she followed closely behind and inspected the full exterior of the house. Flanking the crushed sea shell driveway was a low stone wall shrouded with leaves deposited by the storm from the belt of trees that formed a semi-circle around the house. Wide brick steps led to a white over-sized paneled door. Centered between the panels was a brass plate on which the name Kendall was inscribed.

Maddie turned to him and asked, “Are you *Mr.* Kendall?”

“In the flesh,” he quipped. “But please, call me Robert. And you?”

“Madelyn Price,” she answered softly. “But everyone calls me Maddie.”

“Nice to meet you, Maddie,” he returned. “Welcome to my humble abode.”

After exchanging amenities, Robert inserted the key in the lock, then thrust open the door and gestured Maddie inside. When all three had entered the narrow foyer, the dog placed himself in front of her, gave a low throaty growl, and raised his proud head in protest to her admittance. Continuing to growl, he bared his sharp, white teeth. Instinctively Maddie jumped back and brought the heel of her boot firmly down on the toe of Robert’s boot. When he let out a painful howl, Maddie quickly jumped forward. Pivoting around, she came face to face with the tall, handsome Robert Kendall.

Although the foyer was dimly lit, they could clearly see each other’s face. For a moment their eyes met and locked, sending a disquieting shiver racing through Maddie’s already shivering body.

Finally she came to her senses. “E-excuse me,” she

stammered, blushing profusely.

“No harm done.” He smiled, gazing down at her face as he removed his rain-streaked slicker. He then held out his hand for her jacket and scarf. Caesar continued to growl in protest. This time the man turned to the dog and commanded, “Enough!” Maddie was impressed to find that one word was all it took to quiet the animal, who turned and sauntered towards the fireplace.

Grateful to be rid of her sopping wet coverings, Maddie quickly handed them to Robert, who draped them over a ladder-back chair near the fire.

Stepping quickly to the closet in the hall, he opened the door and deposited his slicker inside. After closing it, he placed his hands on his hips and gazed directly into her wide aquamarine eyes. A smile played gently on his lips. “Now for those wet clothes,” he practically whispered, savoring the way her V-neck sweater clung to her full rounded breasts with their peaks pointed straight at him.

Her skin tight jeans were molded to her slim hips and long shapely legs causing the muscles in his jaw to tighten. *God, she’s incredible*, he thought, then mentally shook himself from the direction his thoughts were taking him.

Maddie stood there like a mannequin, unable to move under his intimate stare, but her mind was racing a mile a minute. She knew what he was thinking, and for some inexplicable reason, she welcomed the intimate gaze. It brought an immediate flush to her cheeks. Suddenly, she remembered that they had forgotten her luggage in the trunk of her car.

“My suitcases!” she gasped. “How could I have forgotten them? Everything I—”

“Relax. I’ll go back and get them,” he said tightly, trying not to reveal his displeasure. Right now, the last thing in the world he wanted to do was take his eyes off her incredible body and trudge back out into the storm. But he had no choice, he told himself. After all, if he was going to play a knight-in-shining-armor, he had to take the bad with the good. Heaving a sigh, he pointed at Maddie and ordered, “Don’t move.”

Now what? She wondered, wrapping her arms around herself. She was freezing and he had to know it. So, why wasn’t he leading her to the fireplace to warm herself? And where was he going, she wondered as he went around the fireplace and disappeared.

He was back in seconds, holding a towel and a blue terry cloth robe, which, from the looks of its size, was definitely his, and a pair of terry cloth slippers to match.

“Here, dry off and put these on.” He pushed the items into her trembling hands. “You can put your wet things in the dryer in the mud room which is right across from you. Those jeans will take forever to dry in front of the fire.” Then, like a game show contestant who was trying to beat the clock or lose the prize, he flung open the closet door, grabbed his slicker, and went over to the dog. “You,” he snapped at the animal, who looked back at him with a raised eyebrow, “don’t you dare move! Understand?”

The dog raised the other brow at the command. His master rarely left the house without him. Caesar’s gaze turned to Maddie. So did Robert’s.

“Where are your keys?”

“In my purse on the chair. And thank y—”

“No problem,” he stated flatly. He opened the purse, grabbed the keys, and slammed the door behind him.

* * * * *

“Nice doggie,” Maddie said in a quivering voice, striving to remain calm as she stepped cautiously to the fire. The dog’s ominous stare followed her every move, increasing her nervousness. She didn’t trust the beast. Not for a minute.

As their eyes locked, she sucked in a deep, unsteady breath and slowly removed her boots. Her heart hammered wildly against her chest as she began to remove her sweater. Even when it dropped to the floor, the dog’s eyes never left hers. Becoming increasingly agitated, she wanted to tell the animal to stop looking at her *that* way.

“Now I know why they call dogs man’s best friend,” she stated, glaring back at him. “Men and dogs relate perfectly. A female is a female whether she has two legs or four.”

Still peering at him out of the corner of her eye, she removed the pins from her hair and set them on the mantle. After wiping her face dry with the towel, she pushed her hair forward, then twisted the towel around it turban style.

Praying she’d be in the robe before Robert returned, she quickly unzipped her jeans, hooked her thumbs into the waistbands of both the jeans and panties, and began inching them down her legs.

“You could at least have the decency to turn your head!” she snapped, standing totally naked before the gazing beast.

“Why should he? He has good taste, just like his master.”