

THE TYCOON'S MISTAKE

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Dedicated to my son
Michael, my cheering
section

CHAPTER ONE

Morning rush hour in Manhattan was a madhouse. Compound that with dark skies and slashing downpours of rain, it was no wonder that the scurrying throngs were pushy and irritable. Julie gratefully ducked into the marquee of the glass-walled skyscraper and closed her dripping umbrella. She smiled cheerily at the doorman waiting for the next taxi to deliver its hurrying passengers. Pushing her way into the revolving door, she popped into the giant atrium. Pausing briefly to catch her breath after the soggy dash from the subway, Julie took refuge by one of the tall trees growing in tubs around the perimeter of this soaring space.

Ever awed by the sight, she gazed upwards to the barely visible glass ceiling many stories above her head. On a sunny day, it was a bright and cheerful place, the tree branches lit from above by welcome sunlight. Today, though, it was gloomy – or would be if lights throughout the towering atrium didn't mimic the sun.

Her attention was caught by the sight of a man striding through the throngs of people heading for the bank of elevators. His sandy hair and broad shoulders glistened with raindrops. Julie sighed. This was Luke MacKinnon, CEO and sole owner of Lumak Industries. She knew from office gossip that he had designed this towering space. From any floor in the lofty building you could gaze down on the atrium with its trees and fountains and the walls would recede into space and beauty.

Julie firmly turned her thoughts from Luke MacKinnon and joined the hurrying workers towards the bank of elevators.

Stowing her raincoat and umbrella in her closet, Julie gave the mirror on the closet door a quick glance, patting her chignon to be sure it was ready for the business day. The office lights glinted on the honey blonde swirls and the few wisps that had escaped to frame her face softly. She turned and checked the inbox for new messages for her boss, Frank McKay.

Gathering a small stack of papers, she moved into Frank's office to arrange them on his desk. She was tucking his scattered pencils into the holder when Frank came in. With a big smile he draped his raincoat over a chair. "Good morning, Julie! Your smile sure knocks the gloom out of this dreary day!"

Hands on hips, Julie smiled at him. Shaking her head, she picked up his damp raincoat, shook it out, and hung it in his closet. Frank grinned at her back. She may have been petite, curvy and adorable, but she acted like a mother hen!

"Say, keep an eye out, Julie. Luke's coming down to go over the plans for that new office in London."

Julie's heart gave a leap. Luke McKinnon was coming here, to their office? Frank was busy signing the documents Julie had spread out for him and didn't notice her sudden indrawn breath. She gathered the papers and went back to her desk.

Frank yelled, "Get me the London file, please. Luke will be here soon – he said first thing this morning."

Julie stilled her racing heart and went to the wooden credenza that held the horizontal files. Pulling the ones for the new London offices, she took them in and laid them in front of Frank.

"I'll put on a pot of coffee, Mr. McKay in case you and Mr. McKinnon want some. Want me to order up some Danish from the cafeteria?"

Looking up from the London plans, Frank smiled. "Yeah, that would be great."

Julie was setting cups and the coffee pot on a tray she used for visitors, when she was pleased to see the messenger turn in her door with a grin. "Danish for the pretty Miss Julie!" he sang out. Julie laughed and took the bag from him.

There, everything was set. Danish nicely arranged, small plates, coffee fixings, napkins. All was ready for their guest. She smiled. He wasn't exactly a guest; after all, this was his building! She felt a flicker in her gut. She was going to actually be close to Luke MacKinnon and not watching him at a distance.

CHAPTER TWO

Hearing voices from the corridor, Julie felt herself tremble. He was coming! She would have to speak to him!

The deep rumbling tones resonated within her. “Thanks, Charlie. Yes, I like that idea and I’ll pass it on to Frank.”

And then he was there, filling the doorway. Their eyes locked and Julie felt a strange awareness fill her as she stared into Luke MacKinnon’s piercing blue eyes.

He paused in mid-stride and stared. Who was this sprite with the mesmerizing blue eyes. He felt something deep within spring to life.

“Good morning. Is Frank in?”

Inwardly shaking herself to action, Julie jumped to her feet. “Oh yes, Mr. MacKinnon. He’s expecting you. Won’t you come in?”

Julie groaned to herself. Inviting the man into one of his own offices! Really, Julie – how dumb can you be?

Luke nodded and tore his eyes away from her and moved into Frank’s office. Julie followed with the tray. Frank hopped to his feet.

“Luke, glad to see you.” He held out his hand and they shook. “Here, Julie, just put that down here,” and he used his arm to clear a corner of his big desk.

She stiffened her arms to stop the trembling and set the tray down, then backed away. “Is there anything else, Mr. McKay?” She didn’t dare look at Luke.

“No, that’s fine, Julie. I’ll call if we need something. Thanks.”

She moved to the door, closed it quietly, and sank gratefully into her chair. Wow! Luke MacKinnon was only a few feet away and he had actually spoken to her!

Luke eyed the closed door. “Who is that lovely girl? I didn’t know we employed any angels!”

Frank laughed and then his gaze hardened. “Look, Luke, I know the scuttlebutt is that you don’t date within the company, but you damn sure better keep your hands off Julie. She is a true innocent and I worry about her all the time. Everybody loves her and she is just too damned friendly for her own good.”

Luke stared at him. “Hey, I didn’t mean to trespass.”

Frank glared. “You know I love my wife, but she and I both worry about Julie. I wish I could hire a bodyguard to just shadow her 24/7 and pulverize any creep who tried to speak to her.”

“Whoa, pal. I hear you.” Luke turned to the coffee tray and poured two cups. Handing one to Frank, he stared at him over the rim. “I agree with your sentiments. There is definitely something special about that young lady. The city is a tough place and will chew up someone like her. All we can do is make sure she’s safe here in our building.”

Forcing his mind off the angelic face and escaped sunshine curls, Luke hauled his mind to the plans of the new London office and spent the next couple of hours debating. Julie had plenty of work to keep her busy and her fingers flew over the computer keys as she worked her way through a stack of proposals waiting for Frank. The lunch hour rolled around and the office door opened. Frank and Luke strolled out, still discussing the London office.

“We’re headed for the cafeteria, Julie. See you after lunch.” And they were gone.

Sighing, Julie got out her small purse and slipped the strap over her head and went to join her friends.

From their favorite table in the main cafeteria, Julie could see through the archway into the executive section. She watched as Luke, Frank, and several other department heads laughed and talked their way through lunch. Before they finished, a woman stopped by the men’s table. They all hastily got to their feet and she laid a hand on Luke’s arm. Julie watched, wishing mightily she could hear what was being said. The woman was tall, her head only a few inches below the top of Luke’s. She was tall even without the added inches of her heels. And slim. And elegant. Her chignon was smooth, not a hair out of place, with a dark sheen that was almost blue, it was so dark. The pearls at her ears and throat were definitely not fakes – they probably cost more than Julie’s monthly salary!

A voice near Julie commented in hushed tones. “That’s Delia Cordell. Her family owns one of those big ad agencies that handles the Lumak Industries publicity. Gossip has it that she has a yen for Luke MacKinnon. Means to be *Mrs. Luke MacKinnon*. Guess she decided to track him to his lair!”

In spite of knowing it was stupid, Julie felt a sharp pang of jealousy. Luke MacKinnon would never look her way – this elegant obviously rich woman was his kind of wife. Not a Montana country girl.

She made it back to her desk and was scrolling through her morning’s work, when Frank came back in, alone.

“I’ll print this off for you, Mr. McKay. You’ll need it for the meeting at 3:00.”

The afternoon rolled along. Frank rushed off to his meeting, hands full of the folders Julie had set up for him.

Five o'clock. Julie shut down her computer, tidied up her desk, and went to check Frank's office. His computer swirled with the screen saver so she knew it would take a password to enter, so she turned out the overhead lights and left only the desk lamp. The meeting was still going on. Reluctantly, she got her raincoat, purse, and umbrella from the closet and gave a last quick look around the office. She hated to leave, Frank might need her, but she sighed. His orders were clear. "There will be times when we have to work late, but unless I tell you specifically, you go home at quitting time. No hanging around in case I might need you."

It was still raining when Julie paused under the marquee out front and raised her umbrella. Bracing herself, she resolutely headed out into the downpour for the subway. It was crowded as usual and she swayed in the packed car until she could dodge her way off at her stop. Her street was less crowded and she reached her building quickly.

As she entered the lobby, she checked her mailbox. Just a couple of bills. Oh, well. What did she expect? A check from Publisher's Clearing House? Not likely. You have to enter to win and she knew her chances were much too slim.

Clicking her two locks and flipping on the lights, Julie paused a moment inside her apartment to enjoy the warm solitude. It wasn't much, just a small living room with a kitchen corner, a bedroom barely big enough to hold a single bed and a dresser, and the tiny bathroom. Not even room enough for a tub, just a shower. Good thing she wasn't bigger or fatter! She'd never fit in the shower otherwise!

Work clothes carefully hung up, underwear in the laundry bag on the bathroom door, and comfortably snug in her flannel pajamas and fuzzy slippers, Julie checked the fridge. She had eaten out the night before with friends and the white foam container held leftovers enough for supper. A quick spell in the microwave and dinner was ready. Julie turned on the modest flat screen TV and skipped through the channels. The news was depressing, constant, but sometimes amusing.

Rousing herself later, she realized it was late so she dumped her carryout box into the trash, rinsed her glass and silverware, and headed for bed. So much for the exciting life of a business woman in the big city!