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Not My Fault
Misty Malone

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NOT MY FAULT



MISTY MALONE



CHAPTER 1



TEARS STREAMED DOWN Miranda's face to the point she could barely see. She knew she should not be driving like this, but all she wanted to do right now was get as far away from that awful Matthew Black as she could. Or at least to the safety of her home, so she could break into pieces.

The street she lived on came into view and she felt relief. Her own little sanctuary was just ahead. She'd made it—almost. She heard a noise and looked in her rear view mirror, only to be horrified. Flashing blue lights were shining at her, even through her tears! Well, this was just great. She pulled over, wondering what she'd done wrong, but within just a few moments, she had to admit she wasn't really too surprised. After all, she could barely see through her tears. As she sat there waiting for the officer, she realized how stupid it was for her to even attempt to drive as upset as she was. She knew better than that. What if she'd hurt someone? With those thoughts in mind, she started crying harder, ashamed of herself. She let her face fall into her hands and simply cried.

That was how Officer Dennis Nelson found her when he

approached her car. Instantly on alert, Officer Nelson took a good look at the crying damsel in distress. "Ma'am, are you okay?" When he didn't get a reply, he tried a different approach. "Ma'am, are you hurt? Do you need an ambulance?"

The mass of beautiful strawberry-blonde hair shook from side to side. He thought he heard a muted, "No, I'm okay," but he wasn't positive. He was a good officer and knew he should keep himself on high alert, as this could be an act, but he was also a pretty good judge of people. He felt this young lady was truly upset about something.

He did a quick scan of the inside of her vehicle and everything looked clean. Well, not exactly clean, actually far from it, but he saw no weapons or anything that gave him cause for concern. What he did see was a rather large collection of fast food wrappers and empty soda cans. Hidden in amongst them was a jacket, a pair of shoes, and what he was guessing was a change of clothes. There was also a very nice briefcase, which looked totally out of place.

Seeing nothing that alarmed him, he leaned down at her open window to try to talk with her again. This time, he used a somewhat softer voice. "Ma'am, are you all right? Is there someone you'd like me to call to be with you?"

Again, the head full of pretty hair moved from side to side. He watched the little lady as she obviously tried to pull herself together. After a couple moments and a deep sigh, she pulled her face away from her hands far enough that he could understand her when she said, "I'm sorry, Officer, I'm not usually such a mess. I've just had an absolutely horrible day, and it wasn't my fault. It was his."

"What wasn't your fault?"

"Losing the account. It was all his fault."

"Whose fault?"

"Matt's. I know I'll get blamed for it, but it wasn't my fault."

"Of course, it wasn't. It was all Matt's fault."

"Thank you. I'm glad someone realizes that." Before he could say anything else, she continued. "So since you understand, you wouldn't mind explaining that to my boss, would you?"

Officer Nelson couldn't stop the grin on his face. "I can see if I can arrange it." That brought a chuckle from the woman, who was now beginning to recover, or at least pull herself together a bit, and he was sure he recognized the laugh. Leaning in a little closer to get a better look at the petite lady, he was shocked. "Randi, is that you hiding under all that beautiful hair?"

She immediately looked up and smiled, even through her tears. "Denny? What are you doing here?"

Smiling, he pointed to the badge. "Working. I've been an officer here for about five years. What about you? I thought you moved to the big city after college to find your fame and fortune?"

"Yeah, well, I did. I got a job working for an advertising agency, but it turns out I don't like living in the city as well as I thought I would. The first opening they had in their smaller office here, I jumped at it. I just moved back here two weeks ago, and now I'll probably get fired."

"Oh, Randi, come on, I doubt that it's that bad. You always did have a flare for the dramatics. Why don't you tell me all about it, though, and we'll get caught up over dinner?" He had a thought then and blushed. "Unless, of course, you have a husband or boyfriend who would frown on our reunion dinner?"

"No, no husband or boyfriend," she assured him. "I take it no wife or girlfriend?"

"Nothing but my dog, and as long as I feed him first, he won't mind. So, where shall I pick you up and when?"

"Actually, I live right down the street here. I just need about ten, fifteen minutes to fix my face, so I'll be ready whenever you want to come over."

They chatted a few minutes and decided Denny would follow her home and wait while she got ready. Then he'd take her to his place so he could change and feed his dog. He had been on his way home and was officially off the clock. He hadn't had any plans for the evening, but now he was looking forward to getting caught up with Randi.

She pulled into the parking lot of her apartment and he followed her. By the time she gathered her purse and briefcase, he was at her car door, opening it for her. "I forgot how good you are at getting doors," she told him as he took her briefcase and helped her out.

"My parents were big on manners while I was growing up. It's second nature now."

"Well, more parents should have been like yours then," she said. "I always liked that about you." The look in his eye caught her attention. She wasn't exactly sure what it meant.

She opened her door and invited him in. "Make yourself at home, Denny. There's stuff to drink in the fridge if you're thirsty. I'll just be a minute."

A cold glass of water or iced tea sounded pretty good, so while she made her way back the hall, Denny went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. He found some bottled water and helped himself to one, but he couldn't help but notice the collection of junk food and soda she had. The fridge was full, but certainly not with fresh fruits or vegetables. There was a shelf of assorted cans of soda, a box with leftover pizza, half a cherry pie, a package of lunchmeat, and some hot dogs. Glancing around her kitchen, he saw a box of donuts, a box of microwave popcorn, and a bag of chips.

He took his water into the living room and sat down on the couch to wait. His mind wandered back to their senior year in high school, when they were dating. They'd had a lot of fun together. They got along really well, except for two things. Denny took his health seriously, and it showed. He was a big man with broad shoulders, and he worked out regularly. Although he wasn't a health food fanatic, he didn't believe in putting too much junk food in your body, either.

Randi, on the other hand, saw nothing wrong with junk food and didn't know why people would want to drink plain old water if there was soda around. She was a small lady, only a couple inches over five foot, and although she didn't like to exercise and therefore didn't do it, she never had a weight problem. That was totally due to heredity and the high metabolism rate her parents had passed on to her, something she said she would always be grateful for. Denny had tried his best back then to get her to see the importance of eating healthy foods once in a while, anyway, but had never had much luck.

He wasn't too concerned about her opposition to working out because she was one active little fireball. She was very athletic, loved to swim and ride bikes and was always up for a game of tennis or a pickup game of baseball or basketball. It made no difference if it was males, females or a combination of both playing these games. She'd jump in with both feet no matter who was playing, and she could hold her own against anyone.

These games occasionally brought out her other downfall, though, and that was her temper. She had a temper the likes of which Denny had never seen before. She was very competitive when participating in any kind of sports, and if she messed up, she was hard on herself. If she dwelt on it too long, it could lead to a temper tantrum, which was a problem. No matter what caused the temper tantrum, once it

started, it was as if she had no control over her actions or her mouth.

Denny was shaking his head and smiling at those memories when Randi came into the living room.

She couldn't help but smile as well. He looked good sitting on her couch. She'd missed him and had wondered several times where he was and what he was doing. She always assumed he was married by now and had a couple kids. Not only was he incredibly good-looking, with his thick, dark, almost black hair that made her want to run her hands through it, but he had impeccable manners and a great sense of humor. He was such a catch, she couldn't believe he was still single. "What are you smiling about?"

"Memories," he told her honestly.

"We did have some good times, didn't we?"

"Yes, we did," he agreed. He smiled as he added, "I see you still have your penchant for junk food."

She at least looked a bit sheepish as she nodded. "Guilty." Seeing his frown and knowing he wasn't serious, she motioned toward him. "And I see you still take good care of yourself." They both laughed and enjoyed an easy banter for a couple minutes about their differing views on the subject.

They stopped at his house so he could change clothes, and she immediately fell in love with his dog, Sparky. Denny opened his back door and let him out into the fenced-in yard. He got a can of food out for him and Randi offered to feed Sparky while he changed clothes. When he came into the living room, he found her sitting on the floor giggling while Sparky was on his back in front of her and she was scratching his belly.

"Do that too much and you'll spoil him," Denny warned with a big smile. "He loves that and would be happy to let you do it all night long."

"I don't know if my hand would hold out for all night, but I love playing with him."

"If you can leave my dog long enough, are you ready to go eat?"

She teased him, looking from him to Sparky and back a couple times before finally agreeing. "Okay, I guess I am getting pretty hungry." He chuckled and led her to his car, opening the door for her. They continued their relaxed, casual conversation on the way to the restaurant.

It wasn't until after the waitress took their orders that Denny was ready to catch up. "So, I know you're in advertising, and I know you just moved here from the big city. You said you had a bad day today, and I know it was all Matt's fault. What happened, and who's Matt?"

"Matt is the jerk who fired me and the ad campaign I sold him on last year."

"Why did he do that?"

"Because he's an asshole."

"Watch your language, Randi."

"Sorry," she whispered, looking around to see if anyone was staring at her. "But he's a jerk. He loved the whole campaign, and it's been extremely successful."

"So what's the problem then?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Randi, I know you, remember? You'll feel a lot better if you talk about it. I may be able to help, but you have to give me a chance. Unless you've changed, if you don't talk about it with someone, it will just keep eating at you until you eventually have a blowup." He reached over, picked up her hand and gently kissed her knuckles. "We're still friends and I still care, Randi. I still want to help if I can."

Those words meant so much to Randi, her eyes started tearing up. She knew Denny and knew he meant every word he'd said. They also reminded her of the safe feeling she'd

gotten every time he'd helped her when they were together. That was a feeling she'd missed terribly since the two of them had parted ways. She quickly blinked back the tears before he saw them. "Thank you, Denny." After a few moments, she sighed. "You're right, as you always were, but I can't talk about it right now, right here. I'm too upset about it, and you know how much I hate to cry in public."

He smiled at her and squeezed her hand. "I know, sweetheart. If you'll give me your word that you'll talk to me when we get to your place, I'll drop it now."

"Thank you."

"So you'll talk to me about it later tonight, when we're alone?"

After a slight hesitation, she agreed. "Okay."

He was true to his word, and he quickly changed the subject and got her talking about a safer topic. They enjoyed their meal and shared a dessert.

Denny took her home and sat her down on the sofa. "Okay, Randi. I have really enjoyed seeing you again and all the reminiscing we've done, but I want to hear about your day now. I can see how upset you are about it, and that worries me. Why did Matt not renew your contract?"

"It's a long story."

"I've got time."

"Okay." She sighed, then started her story. "When I first started working with him, he asked me out and I said no. He kept asking and asking, and I kept saying no. I told him I don't mix pleasure with business. He wouldn't leave me alone, so I finally went out with him once. He's just not someone I could ever get serious about, and so I never went out with him again. I didn't see him in person again, but he kept calling and asking me out, and I kept saying no. Today, I saw him again when I went to his office to get our contract renewed. He asked me out again, and I turned him down."

Denny had been watching her carefully and knew she was getting upset again. He laid his hand over hers to show support. "What happened then?"

He watched the tears return to her eyes, but she steeled herself before answering. "He got right in my face and told me if I wanted him to renew the contract for another year, I'd better change my mind. He grabbed hold of me and pulled me to him and started groping me. It was awful. I pulled away and slapped his face. He told me I'd just kissed my contract good-bye, and he'd make sure no one else in this town would hire me, either."

Randi didn't know how it happened, but she instantly found herself sitting on Denny's lap, and his strong arms were wrapped around her tightly. He was rocking them gently and whispering reassurances in her ear. "I'm so sorry that happened to you, Randi. It will be okay, though, trust me."

"No, it won't, Denny. Don't you see? I'm new in this office, in this area. People don't know me here. This is the only local account I had before I came here, and I was hoping other people would learn that was my campaign and it would be my foot in the door with other companies. Now he's going to put out the word on me and I'll never get anyone to even consider my ideas."

"Calm down, honey. I don't think it's as bad as you think."

"Oh, yeah, that's right. You'd know all about it because you've been in the advertising business for what, about twenty years now?"

"Watch the attitude, Randi. I may not be in the advertising business, but I am in the law enforcement business, and what he did to you is illegal."

"So some judge slaps that bastard on the wrist and since I still have no clients, I lose my job. Sounds fair, and how is it helpful to me?"

"Randi, last warning, watch your attitude, and your language. There's more to it than that, if you'll calm down and listen to what I'm trying to tell you."

"You know what you can do with your warning? And that warning doesn't even make any sense, watch my language. How the hell am I going to watch something I can't even see?"

"What?"

"You keep telling me to watch my attitude. I can't see my attitude, so how the hell am I supposed to watch it? You have to see something before you can watch it. You watch a dog play. You can't watch an attitude."

Shaking his head, Denny said, "That does it." Randi recognized that voice, but it was too late. He already had her lying over his lap. Before she had a chance to complain, he'd brought his hand down on her fully-clothed bottom three times, quickly.

Gasping, Randi cried out, "No. Denny, no. That hurts."

He calmly told her, "Randi, it's supposed to hurt, and you know that. I'm sure you remember that. I'm sure you also remember that I won't allow you to use that kind of language, and I'm sure you remember what happens when your attitude gets out of control."

"But it hurts."

Denny couldn't help but grin at her response. "Sweet-heart, I know it hurts. But take a minute to get your head wrapped around this, because it is going to happen. It's been a long time, I know, but you need this, and you know you do. When your attitude gets out of control, your temper is right behind it, and today was no different. You're saying things you don't normally say, and you've got to get your emotions under control before you do something you don't want to do."

He tightened his grip around her waist, laid his other

hand on her bottom so she could feel his hands and know he was serious, and gave her several moments to come to grips with her situation. "Honey, you know as well as I do that right now, you need a little help getting yourself under control, and you should also know that I'll help you. You just need to let me." With that, he simply kept his hands where they were and gave her the time she needed.

When he felt her relax a bit, he knew she'd accepted what was about to happen, and he reached underneath her and unfastened her jeans. He was surprised, but proud of her that she didn't fight him when he pulled them down, followed quickly by her panties. He started spanking her slowly, deciding after the day she'd had, and considering how long it had been since he'd last spanked her, she deserved a bit of a warmup.

He gradually stepped the spanking up, both in speed and intensity, and soon she was crying. He kept going, varying the swats so she couldn't anticipate where or when the next one would land, and she soon lost her closely-guarded control. He smiled when that happened. He knew his Miranda well. She hated to lose control, as she called it, in public, and she absolutely hated to let anybody see her cry. He found that very ironic, because what his little lady needed occasionally was just that, to have a good cry.

And this was one of those times. When she was crying hard, he stopped the spanking. He let her lie over his knees to catch her breath, gently rubbing her back all the while. He then gently picked her up and held her on his lap, wrapping her tightly in his arms. When he thought she could hear him, he put his mouth next to her ear and softly encouraged, "Go ahead and let it out, cry all you want to, sweetie, I've got you. You're safe. You know I won't let you fall."

That was all she needed to hear. She cuddled up closer to him, almost becoming one with his chest, while he rocked

them gently and held her tight against him. They stayed like that for almost fifteen minutes, each holding on tightly to the other. Finally, she looked up at him and whispered, "Thank you, Denny."

He smiled down at her and gave her a little squeeze "Thank you for letting me help you, Randi."

"You always did know what I need even more than I do."

"And I always will. You just have to trust me."

"I do trust you. I always have."

"Good. Now, trust me when I say I think I can help you, but you're too tired right now to talk about it."

She yawned as she leaned against his chest. "What is there to talk about?"

He chuckled as he said, "Honey, you're too tired to talk now and follow what I'm saying. Tomorrow's Saturday and I don't have to work. You're off, too, I take it?" She nodded, and he said, "Good. You get some sleep tonight and we'll talk tomorrow. We'll sort out your problem and come up with a solution. What company does Matt work for?"

She yawned again as she said, "Newland Frozen Foods."

She was so sleepy, she didn't see his eyebrows rise, but she felt him pick her up and head for the hall leading to the bedrooms. "Which room's yours, Randi?"

She snuggled into his arms as she said, "Last door on the right."

He took her in and gently laid her on the bed. Taking her shoes off, he asked, "Do you want some help getting undressed and into bed, sweetie?"

"No, I can do it. But thanks, Denny."

"Hey, now that I've found you again, I'm here anytime you need me. I'm older and wiser now, and I don't plan on letting you get away from me again."

"Whoever said I planned on trying to get away again? I'm older and wiser now, too."

Denny took her in his arms for a big hug. "I'm glad to hear that, Randi." He kissed her with all the passion he'd been holding inside for her for years and was excited when she returned the kiss with the same kind of passion. "I've missed you, honey."

"I've missed you, too."

After another quick kiss, he asked, "Are you all right now, until we talk tomorrow?"

She absentmindedly rubbed her bottom as she said, "Yeah, I'm okay."

Smiling, he asked, "Still sore?"

She returned his smile as she nodded. "You know, I sure haven't missed having a sore butt, but I really have missed the feeling I always have afterward."

"What feeling is that?"

"Like I'm safe. Like I'm right side up, walking on level ground again." Scrunching her nose up, she asked, "Does that make any sense? It never did to me, but it's always been true."

"Of course, it makes sense, baby. You just need to know there's someone looking out for you, someone who won't let you spiral out of control, but will take care of you."

She smiled. "Do you think that's what it is?"

"I do. And I want to be that man if you'll let me."

"I think I'd like that. I really have missed you, Denny."

"Good. Now you get some sleep and we'll talk tomorrow morning."