

Excerpt from Not Just Make Believe

A thoughtful expression crossed Max's features as the elevator doors opened at the ping on the appropriate floor. "Andrea, I believe I owe you an apology for teasing you yesterday as well as a thank you for your excellent care of Piper."

As my Great Aunt Sadie used to say... "You bet your sweet bippie you do!"

What *I* said was, "I'm just doing my job. I hope she's back to her devilish self." Before I could get off the elevator, Max hit the Close Door button. "What are you doing? That's my floor." Oh my Lord, he *was* a stalker! Howie would be surprised when he found out he had been duped by the rich and famous. I could just see the headline now: *Up and coming assistant hotel manager stalked and killed by a notable mover and shaker. Charges won't be sought...*

"You're going to dinner with me this evening." It was a statement. He punched the illuminated button for the Lobby and we proceeded downward.

"Thanks for the invite, but I couldn't possibly accept. It's against company policy to accept gifts from clients. Not to mention, I just got off work and my clothes smell like the monkey house at the zoo."

Don't ask how I knew this. It's not a flattering story for me or the monkey.

A glance down at my outfit confirmed my description. Rumpled black skirt, white button down shirt with a yellow stain over my left boob — I have no idea what it was — and black heels. Not exactly the outfit of the dining elite. That is to say if I were actually going to dinner with him, which I was most definitely not.

When the elevator doors slid open at the Lobby, I quickly hit the seventh floor button and the doors swung closed again. Good thing we were the only ones in the car or else I would surely be in trouble. I could just hear the lecture Howie would heap upon my head. He would probably give it in front of all the staff, just to make an impression.

Of course, he would!

The elevator cars are not for your own personal amusement. I snickered as my eyes slid to Max. My idea of personal enjoyment would include a can of whipped cream and a bare-chested Max... With a start, I realized he was talking to me.

"Andrea, listen, I'll clear it with Howard. You can go as a personal favor to me." He smiled cordially to the people waiting on the seventh floor as the doors swung open. "I'm sorry, but there seems to be an issue in this car. Would you mind waiting on the second one?"

I rolled my eyes when the women tittered and nodded and the men grumbled but agreed.

With a look of triumph, Max hit the Lobby button. He was already taking out his cell phone.

What nerve this guy had! Who did he think he was? I felt my blood pressure start to rise. I had already worked a nine-hour day, which had been chock full of complaining customers and a dog that had piddled on one of the sofa cushions in the Lobby. Yeah, the Stansbury had that mythical anti-pet policy but the same fussy woman kept bringing her stupid dog and Howard kept letting her stay.

Now I had to deal with a man who apparently thought that he was God.

Stop the world, I want to get off!

How about if I just grew a backbone and put a stop to all of this right now? After this little pep talk to myself, I hit the seventh floor button again as we arrived at the Lobby. "Absolutely not! I'm going to relax in my room, order room service, and watch mindless television for the rest of the night." I grinned at the surprise on his face. "Oh, did you think you were the only one who lived here? It's part of my benefits package. At least I don't have to pay rent."

"Very efficient."

I glanced up at the humor in his voice and was immediately irritated. To top it all off, he had dimples when he smiled. Once again, I was the head float in my own freak parade.

"I'll take care of it, Andrea." He punched the Lobby button and gave me a commanding glance that clearly said stay put. "I would really like to have dinner with you. That's all."

That was the last straw. "There *are* other people in the world, you know. We don't all kowtow to your every whim." I hit the lighted seven button.

Up we went.

Max hit the Lobby button, determined to win in the battle of wills.

My fingers curled into fists until my nails bit into my palms. "You're not listening to me." Without thinking, I methodically hit every single button on the panel, until all the little numbered circles were lit up. I gritted my teeth and tried to regulate my breathing, but when my eyes met Max's dark gaze, a tiny flame of desire flared in my gut. This was not a good sign.

Two things happened simultaneously.

First off, the elevator car shuddered to a violent stop somewhere between the tenth and Penthouse floors, throwing me against Max. Second, I guess Max chose that opportunity to completely lose his mind. Before I could do much more than blink at him in surprise, his arms snaked around my waist, and he kissed me. There's no other way to tell the story. Not a swift

peck on the cheek, grandma-style. It was one of those old-fashioned curl-your-toes kinds of kisses that you would see on old movies where the heroine pops her foot up behind her. Max's lips covered mine with a warm pressure that was gentle and insistent. Shivers of excitement raced up my spine when his fingers traced circles on my back.

My traitorous body decided he was non-threatening after all and started to press itself up against the solid mass that was Max. Before I could analyze why butterflies stirred in my stomach, the moment was over.

As first kisses go, it was quite delicious. But, my foot did not pop.

In case you were wondering.