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August



A mother's
wish

THE LAWMAN
AND THE LADY
PAT WARREN

Tate's thoughts drifted to Detective Nick Bennett.

She could tell he wanted her to open up to him, but how would a man like him ever be able to understand her problems? If she revealed too much, somehow her son could be in danger. And what could she do then to stop it?

Closing her eyes, she tried to concentrate on something pleasant. Unbidden, her mind conjured up a pair of steady gray eyes in a tanned face, ~~and a mouth that looked hard~~ and a little grim, yet that she imagined could be soft and warm.

Now she knew that Nick Bennett wasn't the man for her. No man was.

But she could dream....

Dear Reader,

What is there to say besides, "The wait is over!" Yes, it's true. Chance Mackenzie's story is here at last. *A Game of Chance*, by inimitable *New York Times* bestselling author Linda Howard, is everything you've ever dreamed it could be: exciting, suspenseful, and so darn sexy you're going to need to turn the air-conditioning down a few more notches! In Sunny Miller, Chance meets his match—in every way. Don't miss a single fabulous page.

The twentieth-anniversary thrills don't end there, though. A YEAR OF LOVING DANGEROUSLY continues with *Undercover Bride*, by Kylie Brant. This book is proof that things aren't always what they seem, because Rachel's groom, Caleb Carpenter, has secrets...secrets that could break—or win—her heart. *Blade's Lady*, by Fiona Brand, features another of her to-die-for heroes, and a heroine who's known him—in her dreams—for years. Linda Howard calls this author "a keeper," and she's right. Barbara McCauley's SECRETS! miniseries has been incredibly popular in Silhouette Desire, and now it moves over to Intimate Moments with *Gabriel's Honor*, about a heroine on the run with her son and the irresistible man who becomes her protector. Pat Warren is back with *The Lawman and the Lady*, full of suspense and emotion in just the right proportions. Finally, Leann Harris returns with *Shotgun Bride*, about a pregnant heroine forced to seek safety—and marriage—with the father of her unborn child.

And as if all that isn't enough, come back next month for more excitement—including the next installment of A YEAR OF LOVING DANGEROUSLY and the in-line return of our wonderful continuity, 36 HOURS.



Leslie J. Wainger
Executive Senior Editor

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**THE LAWMAN
AND THE LADY
PAT WARREN**

Silhouette® 
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If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

**This book is dedicated to my cousin, Vi Brown,
with love and affection.**



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THE LAWMAN AND THE LADY

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PAT WARREN,

mother of four, lives in Arizona with her travel agent husband and a lazy white cat. She's a former newspaper columnist whose lifetime dream was to become a novelist. A strong romantic streak, a sense of humor and a keen interest in developing relationships led her to try romance novels, with which she feels very much at home.

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Loving Dangerously

SECRETS!

Thank You
Baby

A Family Bond

A
PLACE
CALLED
HOME

Chapter 1

She was drop-dead gorgeous! Detective Nick Bennett couldn't help thinking as he stood in the shadowy doorway of the private hospital room staring at the woman talking softly to the patient in the bed. Small-boned yet with a lush figure that her white silk blouse and slim charcoal slacks couldn't disguise, she had a wild fall of auburn hair resisting all attempts at taming by the gold clip at her nape.

He was here to do a job, not gawk at a beautiful woman. But, at thirty-three and having been around the block a few times, Nick wasn't often stopped in his tracks by a woman who could cause his mouth to go dry. She didn't have the freckled skin usual for a near redhead, but rather her coloring resembled that of a fresh peach. Stunning, Nick thought. Absolutely stunning.

His gaze shifted to the reason he was here, the woman lying in the hospital bed looking as pale as the starched white sheets. A sixty-five-year-old widow, Maggie Davis had arrived home and interrupted an intruder who'd proceeded to

attack her. Her doctor had told Nick just now that she had a broken arm most likely due to its being severely twisted behind her back, two cracked ribs, several bruises and a swollen cheek from a nasty punch to her face.

What could this small, elderly woman have done to warrant such a beating? Nick wondered. According to the notes taken by the first officer on the scene, the downstairs of her two-story house had been thoroughly ransacked. Had the thug been looking for valuables to steal or searching for something in particular?

The officer's notes indicated that Tate Monroe, twenty-nine years old, lived with Ms. Davis, along with her seven-year-old son, Josh. Tate had been at work at Brennan's Book Emporium in downtown Tucson where she was the manager. The report didn't indicate where the boy had been, but he hadn't been with Maggie Davis at the time of the assault. Fortunately.

Sensing his presence, Tate Monroe straightened. Eyes the color of the green Caribbean Sea, where he'd once vacationed, met Nick's assessing gaze. A frown creased her forehead and a look of wariness had her taking a step back. She glanced quickly to the corner chair where a young boy was asleep. Probably her son, Josh.

Although the male in Nick would like to question Tate Monroe, preferably alone in a quiet place, the detective in him was more interested in the now sleeping boy. The officer's report indicated that, though hurting badly, Maggie had mumbled that the man beating on her kept asking where Josh Monroe was. However, no matter how hard he hit her, she wouldn't tell him anything. Why would the trespasser be interested in the schoolboy son of a single mother? Nick asked himself.

He stepped inside the hospital room and watched the wariness in Tate Monroe's eyes deepen. Deliberately he moved close to the bed and gave Maggie Davis a reassuring smile.

"I'm Detective Nick Bennett from the Tucson Police Department, Ms. Davis," he said, his voice gentle as he made note of several purpling bruises on her neck. He flashed his badge, then put it in his pocket. "I wonder if you feel up to answering a couple of questions."

Tate moved closer to Maggie's other side, wishing the police had sent a Columbo-type older, rumpled detective instead of this tall, attractive cop with his short black hair and gray eyes that seemed to look right through her. She dealt much better with silver-haired fatherly types. "She already told the officer at the house everything she knows," Tate told him protectively. "The man had his hands on her throat, bruising her. It hurts her to speak."

"It's all right, Tate," Maggie managed to say in a croaking voice, reaching toward the younger woman.

Mrs. Davis was a small woman with sharp blue eyes and snow-white hair worn short and curly. Rimless glasses sat low on her nose. Despite her many bruises, she squared her shoulders against the mound of pillows and seemed unafraid, as if to say she's no one's victim. This time Nick's smile was one of admiration.

"I don't want to cause you more discomfort," he told her. "Why don't you just shake or nod your head by way of an answer?"

Maggie nodded, but Tate again protested.

"You don't have to do this *now*, Maggie. I'm sure the detective can wait until you're feeling better." She spoke to Maggie but her narrowed gaze was on Nick.

"No, no," Maggie whispered. "I want to help catch the man."

Nick found himself liking the spunky senior citizen. "Did you recognize him?"

Maggie shook her head. "Wore a ski mask," she rasped out followed by a short cough. She grimaced at the pain in her throat, but gamely continued. "He had black hair in a

long ponytail and wore black pants and shirt." She began coughing more strenuously.

Tate decided she'd had enough. "No more questions for Maggie today," she told Nick. "Let's go out in the hallway and I'll fill you in." She again glanced at the boy sleeping soundly in the corner chair before turning to Maggie. "I'll be right back. Try to rest."

Leaving the room with the detective close behind her, Tate felt uneasy. She knew he was trying to help find the creep who'd done this terrible thing to Maggie and that persisting with questions was part of that objective. Nonetheless, she wouldn't allow Maggie to be upset further. Despite her show of bravado, the older woman was more fragile than she seemed. Tate had been terribly shaken up since she'd received the phone call at work about Maggie's ordeal. Her hands were still trembling as she led the way to a small alcove off the hallway.

Swinging around to face Nick Bennett, she crossed her arms over her chest and took a moment to study him. He didn't look like her mental image of a detective. He was quite tall, several inches above six feet, causing most people to have to look up at him. That probably came in handy if he used it to intimidate suspects.

His face was tan, angular, square-jawed, his eyes a pewter-gray and somewhat hooded. His shoulders under a blue shirt open at the throat and a tan lightweight sport coat seemed wide as a fullback's. His hands were big and looked callused, as if he worked outdoors. The clean, pressed jeans he wore hugged powerful thighs and long, long legs. He noticed her taking inventory, yet didn't seem impatient. He appeared relaxed but there was a hint of intensity in his steady gaze. Right now, he looked slightly amused as he waited for her to speak.

"What is it you need to know?" Tate finally asked him.

"Good-looking boy," Nick began, waving a hand toward

the room where the child slept. "Lucky he wasn't with Maggie today. Where was he?" Maggie had told the officer that she often baby-sat Josh Monroe.

"On a field trip to the zoo with his second-grade class on the last day of school."

"Does he still take naps?" How was it that at two in the afternoon, a second-grader was fast asleep?

"No, it's just that he has asthma and the vegetation at the zoo spiked his allergies. I picked him up after I got the call about Maggie and gave him his medication before he could work up to a full-blown attack. It makes him sleepy."

"I see. Do you know anyone who'd do this to Ms. Davis and why?"

Tate drew in a deep breath. "Maggie's a wonderful woman, but she's a tad eccentric. It's been rumored for years that her late husband brought back some valuable artifacts from World War II and a large sum of money, then hid them all over the house. Would-be thieves broke in a while back when no one was home and thoroughly searched the place then, too, leaving a godawful mess." //

Nick found himself fascinated with her expressive face, the way emotions came and went, ~~her~~ her full lips bearing just a trace of pink lip gloss. He took out a small notebook and pen, thinking he'd better make a few notes since he was having trouble concentrating standing so close to her. "Any truth to the rumors?" he asked, jotting down a few key words.

"None at all. Contrary to the stories of hidden riches, after her husband, Elroy, died, Maggie had to turn her large home into a boardinghouse for college girls since it's near the University of Arizona. The income supplemented her social security checks. She has no living relatives. Their only child, Peggy, died in a boating accident at the age of twelve. Maggie gets by on very little and still owes on back taxes. Thank goodness Elroy worked for the city so she has good health insurance."

He was staring at her, Tate noted. She'd been stared at since her early teens and was quite used to it, but she felt oddly disappointed that this calm, confident man was like all the rest. Why that was so, she couldn't have said.

"And you think the rumors of hidden wealth caused someone to break in and search the place?" Apparently Tate didn't know that the intruder kept asking about her son.

"Well, sure." She dropped her gaze and studied her black leather flats. "What else could it be? I'm certain we'll find that nothing's missing because Maggie doesn't have anything of value. Perhaps that's why he beat her up, because he was frustrated to realize the rumors were wrong."

Funny how she averted her eyes just then and her husky voice sounded nervous. Now she shifted her feet, tightened her arms and gazed longingly toward Maggie's room. In the course of his career, Nick had studied body language, something that helped him determine a person's unspoken thoughts. And veracity. He was certain that Tate Monroe wasn't telling him everything and that she badly wanted to get away from him.

"That's one theory, I suppose," he said. "How long ago did the other break-in occur?" He'd check it out when he got back to the precinct, but he wanted her version.

On safer ground, she looked up. "Two years ago, I believe. We weren't living with Maggie at the time."

"Mmm-hmm. I would've thought that word would have spread that there was nothing of value in Maggie's house. Random thieves seem to pick up on that kind of information."

Tate shrugged, trying for nonchalance. "Maybe this thief is new in town, or maybe he's cocky enough to believe he could find buried treasure that someone else missed. I really don't know."

He shifted gears somewhat, hoping to keep her a little off balance. "Is that how you met Maggie, staying at her board-

inghouse when you were in college?" That had to be some time ago, Nick thought, since she was twenty-nine with a seven-year-old.

"Yes. There are three bedrooms and two baths upstairs. My two roommates and I were the first to live in Maggie's house. She has a first-floor bedroom off the kitchen. We stayed until graduation."

"Maggie was like a house mother, then?"

"More than that." Tate's expression softened as she thought back. "For one reason or another, none of the three of us had had a strong maternal influence before meeting Maggie. She not only filled in the gaps, but she became something of a surrogate mother to all of us. And many of those who followed, I'm sure." A bit embarrassed at having revealed so much, Tate assured herself she'd only done it because she felt that the more the police knew, the quicker they could find the man in the ski mask.

(And she prayed he'd turn out to be a random thief and not the man she feared it might be.)

"Tell me about your roommates," he said, watching her carefully. "Do you stay in touch with them?" Tate Monroe was without a doubt one of the most beautiful women he'd ever met, yet there was something about her that bothered Nick. Not just because she was holding something back, not an uncommon happening in any investigation. But rather there was a deliberate distancing, a warning not to get too close. Was it because he was with the police or was it something about him personally that caused this edginess in her?

"I honestly don't see what they would have to do with this break-in. They're both married and haven't lived in Tucson since graduation. They..."

"Humor me." He'd noticed the absence of a wedding ring on her finger and wondered where Josh's father was and if he had anything to do with Maggie's invasion.

Resigned to his insistent probing, she began. "Molly Ship-

man was the first to move in at Maggie's. She had a full scholarship and is positively brilliant. She dropped out in her senior year to get married. The marriage broke up after four or five years and she was taking accounting courses to become a C.P.A. when she met Devin Gray, the author. They got married about a year and a half ago and built a house in north Scottsdale."

"Do they ever visit Maggie?"

"Whenever their busy lives permit. We all try to get together on Maggie's birthday every year."

"I see. Go on."

She watched him taking notes, thinking he was way off base if he thought her friends would ever harm one hair on Maggie's head. "Laura Marshall comes from money, a lot of money. Her father owns a large real estate company with several branches in Scottsdale. I think she attended U of A partly because she wanted to get away from his smothering control. She had a bad first marriage to a real jerk who just wanted her father's money, but just recently she married a really nice guy. Sean Reagan's an obstetrician and Laura sounds very happy."

"You haven't met him? You didn't attend the wedding?"

He was probing an area she didn't want to get into. Tate glanced out the window across the hall and watched fronds from a tall royal palm shifting in a gentle May breeze. She wished she were out there, away from the sickly smell of a hospital and the scrutinizing gaze of this man. "No, I couldn't make the wedding."

Nick noticed her faraway look and wondered why she didn't make it a point to attend a close friend's wedding. She seemed genuinely pleased at both friends' good fortune in finding happiness the second time around, yet there was an underlying sadness in her voice. "Since they're both well-off, have either of these women offered to help Maggie with her financial difficulties?" He was wandering off the subject,

but she'd aroused his curiosity. He wanted to know what kind of people her best friends were.

"They sure did. After Molly married Devin, they offered to pay Maggie's overdue taxes, calling it a loan to salvage her pride. But Maggie refused. Laura has access to a large trust fund and she offered as well, but again Maggie wouldn't go for it."

"What about you?" Nick asked, wondering if it was the cop or the man wanting to know.

Tate squared her slender shoulders and her green eyes turned frosty. "I'm not rich nor do I have a wealthy husband, but I help Maggie all I can. I pay rent, pay her for watching my son when I'm at work, buy groceries and I help out around the house. Is that what you wanted to know?"

Nick drew in a deep breath and wished he hadn't as the lightly floral scent of her wrapped around him. He managed to hold his ground, but not easily. "What about the boy's father?"

Tate's expression tightened. "He's been out of the picture for years." She narrowed her eyes, not bothering to hide her annoyance. "Anything else?"

Nick pocketed his notepad and pen. "I'll need to go through the house and check the inventory as soon as possible. I'd like you to be there to let me know what if anything is missing." *shove off (get)*

Shoving her hands into her slacks pockets, Tate looked up at the ceiling, praying for patience. Why had she been naive enough to think this conversation would end her involvement? "I want to stay with Maggie for a while yet. I can meet you at the house about four." She turned, anxious to walk away from his scrutinizing gaze. *keep informal parties*

"That's fine." He knew his next statement would probably rock her, but she had to be told sooner or later. "And I'll want to talk with your son."

Frowning, she swung back. "Why?"

“The first officer to arrive on the scene wrote in his report that Maggie told him that the man in the ski mask kept asking where Josh was. Would you happen to know why that would be?”

The blood drained from Tate's face as she reached a hand to the arched wall to steady herself. *No, please, no. It couldn't be starting all over again, just when things had settled down. How long must she keep running?*

Her protective instincts on red alert, Tate straightened and licked her dry lips, trying belatedly to conceal her reaction from this observant detective. “No, I don't. Josh has known Maggie all his life. Seeing her hurt like this is very hard on him. I won't have him interrogated.”

Nick almost smiled, but knew that wouldn't win him any points with this mama bear protecting her cub. “I seldom grill little boys. I'd simply like to talk with Josh. With you present, of course. There has to be a reason the intruder asked about Josh, and perhaps whatever that is will be the key to his identity. You do want us to catch the man who did this to Maggie, don't you?”

“Of course I do.” Her words were clipped, angry. Guilt and fear mingled with her need to safeguard her son. Tate felt torn and very tired. “Please understand, I need to shield my son. He's been through a great deal in his short life.” With that, she turned and left the alcove, walking quickly back to Maggie's room.

Watching her go, Nick wondered what exactly Josh had been through to make his mother so protective, and where his absentee father was. He'd have to be careful, to go slowly in questioning both the boy and his mother. Someone had hurt Tate Monroe, hurt her badly. He hoped he could convince her that he was one of the good guys.

After stopping at the precinct to make a few calls, Nick Bennett drove his Taurus out of the parking lot heading for