

*Melissa on the Line*

*Book 1 Love on Life's Zip Line*

Sample

Chapter 8

On Wednesday Jason was standing outside their statistics classroom when Melissa arrived. He grabbed her hand and squeezed it. He leaned over brushing his lips against her ear. He whispered, "You look wonderful today."

"Watch it," she teased, "I don't think too much PDA is proper behavior for a preacher's kid, an Eagle Scout, and a recently retired United States Marine."

She smiled up at him, tempting his self-control.

"I'll give you that and I'll make a deal with you."

"What's the deal?"

"I will not embarrass either one of us now if you'll come to my apartment when you get off work this afternoon. I want to cook for you."

"You cook, too?" she teased.

"Not as well as you, but I had a grandmother, too. When we lived in Indiana, I spent a lot of good times with her in her big farmhouse kitchen. She had other grandchildren, all girls except me. I thought so then and I still do, I was her favorite one. She never told me that, but I just knew."

Melissa held his eyes. She said, "I wouldn't miss it for anything. What time?"

"7 o'clock would be good."

Melissa took care to dress in something becoming for her evening with Jason. She chose the skinny black jeans and the purple sweater set she had worn the first time they went out. It was a little too cool for sandals, but she slipped into her new black strappy sandals anyway. She checked herself in the mirror and combed through her dark hair with her fingers.

When she arrived that evening, he kissed her tenderly and she returned his kiss.

He took her windbreaker and hung it on a hook by the door.

"What is that wonderful aroma?"

"Come into the kitchen and I'll show you."

He took her by the hand and led her straight to the oven. He opened it.

She bent over and peered in. "It's an apple pie!" she exclaimed.

Jason closed the oven. He said, "My grandmother had several apple trees on her farm. Making an apple pie was my first cooking lesson. When she told me she was going to teach me to make a pie, I told her boys don't make pies. Girls do."

He laughed. "That set her off. She squatted down and put her hands on my shoulders and told me never to say a silly thing like that again. She raised her voice a little and told me cooking is not just for girls. Cooking is a way of loving people, and that's for everyone."

"Wow, she was a wise woman," Melissa said.

"Yes, she was. Anyway, she proceeded with the cooking lesson. When I tried to roll out the crust, I made a terrible mess. I cried and told her I couldn't do it. She said of course you can. She took the dough in her hands, rolled it back into a ball and placed it on the floured wax paper on the counter. She told me to try again. She said, 'It's all in the wanting to.' That may be the best advice I ever got. 'Try again. It's all in the wanting to.'"

He paused before continuing. "It got me through more than one bad day in basic training for the Marines."

Melissa reached up and kissed him. She said, "That is a beautiful story. I wish I had known her."

She looked around the kitchen. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Jason said, "You could put a salad together."

"Sure. A garden salad?" She opened the refrigerator and checked for ingredients.

"I think you'll find everything you need in there."

She pulled out lettuce, tomatoes, green onions. "Is it OK if I throw in some carrot chips?" She asked.

"Whatever you like."

She raised up and found herself in his arms.

"I hope you don't mind. I just want to be close to you," he said.

She tiptoed to kiss him and said, "I don't mind, but I think you'd better check your apple pie."

"Good call." He moved over to the oven and opened the door. "It's almost ready."

Melissa eased over to check it, too, putting her hand on his right thigh for just a moment.

He looked over and said, "You don't have to stop that."

She smiled. "I think I do if I want dinner anytime soon."

"OK. While you finish the salad, I'll warm up the brisket in the microwave."

"Brisket? Do you have an outside grill?"

"I cook brisket in the oven," he said. "I cooked it last night."

"How did you know I would say yes to dinner tonight?"

"I didn't. I guess I would have had to ask some other woman if you turned me down."

She looked up from her salad making to see him smiling.

"Just kidding," he said. "Just kidding."

After they finished the brisket and gravy, salad and rolls, Melissa helped Jason clear the table.

She said, "I'd like to know your secret for the brisket. It was wonderful. And, that gravy. I never had such good gravy. I don't have an outdoor grill. It would be a handy thing to know your oven recipe."

"I'd really rather come to your place and cook it for you, but I will share. It's simple. Buy a lean brisket, put it in a deep ovenproof baking dish, and drench it with one or two bottles of Italian salad dressing. You can use fat free dressing if you like. It works just fine."

He continued, "Cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and bake at 350 or 375 for at least four hours. Check it for tenderness after about four hours. If it's not tender, baste it with the dressing, and let it cook until it's tender. Be sure to take the foil off for about a half hour to let it brown at the end. Then take it up and slice it. Use the dressing residue to make gravy. And, you're done."

"Did your grandmother teach you how to cook that, too?"

"No. A fellow Marine told me about it. His girlfriend taught him."

"Who knew Marines swapped recipes?"

"Now, for the pie. I have vanilla ice cream for it."

"No thank you. I want mine just as it comes out of the oven."

"We agree on that." He sliced the pie and handed her a piece and cut one for himself.

"I hope you like it."

Melissa took a bite and smiled. "You are a remarkable grandson. Surely hers wasn't better than this."

"Like she said, 'It's all in the wanting to.'"

She nodded and smiled. "How is your dad doing?"

"I haven't heard anything lately. He started a new medication recently that might help. By the way, I read all the material on Alzheimer's disease that you gave me. When I go home, I'll share it with my mom. If I'm lucky, I can wait until Thanksgiving to go."

"I hope the new medication helps."

"Thanks. Maybe we'll get a break."

Melissa said, "This was a remarkable meal. Looks like it's time to clean up."

By the time they finished putting away the leftovers and cleaning the kitchen, it was 9 o'clock. They went into the living area and sat down on the green couch. Jason put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her to him. He whispered, "What would you like to do now?"

She looked into his eyes. "I just want to stay here and snuggle with you just a little while. I need to go slow, if you don't mind."

He kissed her and said, "We will go as slow as you need to go. I don't want you to feel uncomfortable for a minute." He kissed her again. "Not one minute."

She put her head on his shoulder, snuggling around a bit to find the sweet spot. “You are a special person. Considerate. Talented. Handsome.” She slid her hand across his chest, caressing him gently. She turned to meet his long slow kiss.

“I think I’d better go now. I still have some studying to do.” She gave him a kiss and stood up. They walked toward the door, arm in arm.

She stood in his arms at the door. She put her head against his chest, aroused by the pounding of his heart.

She lifted her head and said, “Thank you for a beautiful evening. I am glad we found each other as friends before we became something more. Thank you for understanding that I need a little extra time as we find our way.”

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him deeply.

“Good night,” she said, opening the door and closing it behind her.

When she got home, she couldn’t settle into studying. All she could think about was how wonderful it was to be in Jason’s arms. She felt like she belonged there.

When she stretched out under the covers, Melissa thought about how wonderful it would be to give herself completely to Jason. That moment was coming soon. She knew that now.

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