

“Once I’m up, I’m up.”

David laughed and kissed her again. The cabbie – patient up until then – honked. Sighing, David leaned his forehead against hers. “One week . . . no more,” he said.

“I love you,” she murmured, running her fingers quickly through his hair. “Take as long as they need you, I’m not going anywhere.”

He kissed her again and opened the door. “I love you, too.”

And then he was gone.

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His flight was due at 8:15 PM. Maddie was at the airport at 8:00, just in case it was early. As it turned out, she shouldn’t have bothered. For the first time since Maddie had come to California, the sky opened up and small white flurries rained down upon the unsuspecting inhabitants of Los Angeles. From where Maddie stood, she pulled her coat more securely around herself and shivered. Even from inside, she could feel the cold of the snow.

Maddie searched the dark sky for any sign of a plane. They had announced that flight 472 from Philadelphia would be coming in any minute and she wanted to watch him coming home. Shaking her head at the corniness of the thought, Maddie glanced over at the man and a little girl standing a few feet away, also looking out the window.

The little girl looked up at her father suddenly and spoke, “Where’s Mommy’s plane,

Daddy?”

The man smoothed his daughter’s hair back and pointed to the sky. “Up there. She ought to be here any minute now.”

Maddie felt her heart squeeze and averted her gaze. She often thought about children, but always with pain and, therefore, pushed the wondering away. Now she allowed herself to ponder freely. She and David hadn’t spoken of babies – the one they lost, nor the ones of the future – and Maddie was reluctant to broach the subject. However, that did not stop the longing. She sighed and glanced up at the sky again, this time noticing lights: David’s plane.

“Daddy . . . is that it?” the little girl asked, a grin lighting up her face.

The man pressed his hand against the window and smiled. “Yep.”

Maddie watched with growing anticipation as the plane grew closer and began to descend. She made an unconscious decision in that moment to broach the subject of children with David . . . now or never.

The plane’s wheels touched the pavement of the runway and suddenly the plane was replaced by a raging inferno. A smaller explosion occurred a second later and Maddie was forced to shield her eyes from the brightness of the fire. She was aware of a woman’s short, loud scream and it took her a moment to realize that it had come from her own throat. She could feel the tears coursing silently down her face as she stood, shocked, by the window.

Gone. He was gone. He had been on the plane. The plane had exploded. He was gone. Gone.

Maddie had no idea how she got home. She just suddenly looked up and she was sitting in the BMW in front of her house. She sat there for a few moments, trying to feel something. Trying to feel anything: the bitter cold she’d grown up with, but was unaccustomed to since she’d moved to LA, the steering wheel beneath her hands, the pain that should be enveloping her and making it hard to draw breath. But none of these invaded her senses and Maddie realized belatedly that she was numb; quite possibly going into shock.

Slowly exiting the car, Maddie drew in a deep breath, happy to feel the sting of the bitter wind on her tear streaked face. At least she felt something. She quickly unlocked the front door and walked into the house, sighing in relief as the warmth covered her. Stumbling into the living room, Maddie collapsed onto the couch and curled up at one end, hugging a throw pillow to her chest. A flashing caught her eye and she turned a little to find her “new message” light blinking.

Her hand froze right above the “play” button. Could she really bear it if he had called her from the air? Could she handle it if his voice – his wonderful, deep, beautiful voice – was the one waiting for her? A voice she’d never hear again, she realized with a jolt of pain.

To get rid of this thought, Maddie yanked her hand back to her lap and forced herself to consider.

END OF PART ONE.