

The Ex-Files: Mayhem and Maddie

Dakota Cassidy

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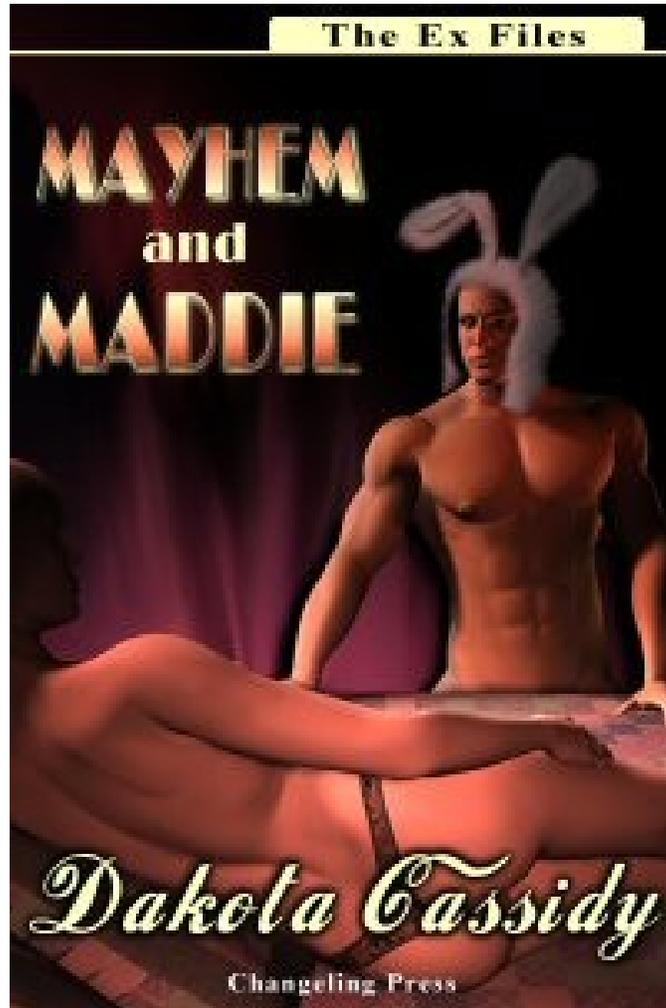
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Dedication

This book is for Da Girls... you know who you are -- MO, VB, KB, AM, PH, CR, JV, DSK... These stories are for all of you. Because of you. In honor of your treasured friendships. Always know that those gifts, far beyond any I have received, are priceless to me. Tucked safely away in my heart, given back to all of you in the only way I know how, with my words and with the greatest of respect and appreciation.

With love always,
Dakota :)

Chapter 1

Dear Diary,

I am officially divorced. Done... finito... O-V-E-R, with the man of my dreams. Okay, so maybe he wasn't my dream man, but he wasn't a total nightmare either.

Madison Blake snorted at that, as she threw down her pen and her *emotional journal*. It was a stupid name for a stupid task.

Her therapist said she should keep a journal to help her get through this post-divorce depression. Maddie thought he was more cracked than she was with all of his fancy words and two-hundred dollar sessions. They spent much of their time together *visualizing* and using affirmative statements like "I will."

"See yourself alone in the pictures of your mind, Maddie." he would say in dulcet tones, stressing the *alone* thing.

Yeah, she saw herself all right, alone, in her rocking chair. With a dozen cats or so camping out around her feet while she shared a can of cat food with them.

Yum-yum.

Visualize that, you friggin' whack-job. Maddie flopped back on the bed and sighed. A bed she now spent all of her nights alone in, thinking about how much *more* time she would spend alone in it. She missed just knowing at eleven sharp, Albert's warm body would climb in beside hers. She ran a hand over the empty space and her heart clenched. In the same moment, anger burned in the pit of her belly.

Fucking asshole.

Why the hell should she spend a wasted moment on him? He'd dumped her like day old bread. Kicked her to the curb. He didn't deserve her longing. But it hurt like hell just the same. All of the day-to-day routines were gone. Every last shred of normalcy yanked rudely out from under her. Nothing was the same, *nothing*. Albert

was off joyfully finding his happy place in Nirvana while she struggled to understand what kind of underwear single girls wore these days.

Oh, she'd tried to find some sort of balance in this mess. She'd done all the things her friends told her would help her get back on her feet. She'd read all the books they'd thrust at her on divorce. Began counseling with Mr. Wing-nut, of the soothing tones and lame catch phrases. Found a cute bachelorette pad that was conveniently located in the heart of meat market row.

Now all she had to do was move on. Live her life like every day was the last. Maddie looked up at the spot on the ceiling. It needed to be painted. Maybe she should decorate. Corrine said that would make the space her own. She'd even brought paint chips for Maddie to choose colors from. They were gathering dust on her nightstand.

Thing was, she didn't want *her own* space. She wanted to continue to share it with Albert. As pitiful as that was.

Well, you can't do that anymore because he doesn't want to share with you. He wants to share it with a bimbo or two... or three.

There it was again, the familiar tug at her heart over Albert's betrayal. Over his incessant need to be the center of all things Albert.

Jesus, how happy could you be to see the person you heard farting all night long after ten years of marriage? Was she supposed to drop everything and hump his leg in overwhelming gratitude because he came home every night? Should she have thanked him profusely for gracing her with the duty of washing his crusty underwear? Maybe she should have gotten down on her knees and given him a blowjob while she stirred the pasta sauce, because he'd *allowed* her to make his dinner.

Maddie rolled over, grabbing a pillow and hugging it tightly to her chest. She was tired of trying to figure out where *she'd* gone wrong. If loyalty and faithfulness weren't enough, fuck Albert.

Fucking.

Now, there was a word she feared might never enter her vocabulary again. She and Albert had enjoyed a decent enough sex life. She couldn't remember seeing stars or

anything, but she'd orgasmed a time or two in ten years. She'd given her fair share of head and Albert didn't complain. But not even Albert had seen her completely naked in more than ten years. Only God saw her in the buff and that was the way it would stay. Didn't single guys want to see single girls naked?

Screw that. No naked.

Maddie retrieved her pen and journal. Scribbling out the first entry, she made another.

Dear Diary,

This is total crap with a capital "C." I am divorced and Albert was a putz for putting me through this. I deserved better than him. Maybe I'll give "better" a shot. Maybe I'll screw everything with a cock and then screw them again for good measure, just for the sheer pleasure of screwing.

Oh, all right. So I probably won't do that. Sorta goes against my good girl nature. But look what being a good girl got me. A big, fat divorce...

Maddie threw the pen at the wall. The journal followed shortly thereafter. They clattered together and fell to the floor. She smiled with satisfaction at the noise it made, then frowned, worrying she might have awakened someone in the next apartment.

A tear trickled down her face as she remembered there wasn't anyone *here* to awaken.

* * *

"Look, Corrine, I don't want to go to parties. Just because *THE ASSHOLE* and I are divorced doesn't mean I want to bar hop." Corrine's sigh crackled across the lines of Maddie's cell phone. Maddie could see her twirling her long chestnut hair in aggravation. They'd only had this conversation a hundred times since she and Albert divorced.

"I'm not talking about bar-hopping, Maddie. I'm talking about getting the hell out of that damn apartment at night. Please. It's a party, *not* an orgy, okay? I swear no one will ask you to get on your knees and perform wild acts of lasciviousness, all right? It's just a function I have to attend and I thought it would be good for you to get out. So

stop being such a pain in my ass and come with me.”

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad to get out. It beat the hell out of watching the Home and Garden channel until her eyes refused to stay open and she crawled off to bed.

Alone.

Albert was probably out every night boinking anything that moved. What was she waiting for? She had to begin to live.

Or quit breathing.

Her choices were becoming limited.

“Fine. But I'm only staying for *one* drink and I'm not going to stand for you introducing me to 'one of your clients,' as you so tactfully dub them. They're not clients, they're looking to hook up. I don't want to hook anything but a rug, okay?”

Corrine was fairly bubbling with joy. Maddie heard her rapid breathing as she spoke as calmly as she could while hovering on the brink of orgasm over Maddie finally giving in. “Oh, honey, I'm so glad you're going to come with me and I *promise*, no 'clients'.”

“What time and where?” Maddie's tone was flat as she ran a hand over her hair in exasperation.

Corrine clucked at her. “Honey, could you sound just a wee bit excited? I'm not inviting you to your own hanging. It's just drinks and liver pâté on a cracker.”

Says you.

To Maddie it was like going on a trip around the world. She hadn't gone out socially in over six months. She went from her apartment, and to the office, occasionally making a stop at the grocery store to buy more coffee. She lived on coffee. As a result, she was a very skinny nervous wreck.

“Forgive me if I don't offer you an ovary as a 'thank you' gift.” She heard the dryness of her tone, but she couldn't seem to help it. She didn't want to go anywhere but back to her house in the suburbs.

Silence. That meant Corrine was pouting.

Maddie blew a gust of air out and watched as the papers on her desk scattered.

"I'm sorry, Corrine. I never would have made it past the suicide stage if it weren't for you. I just can't seem to feel motivated about anything. I want to, I do. I just don't. I don't care."

"I know, believe me we all know you don't care. But *I do*. I want you to begin to live again. I want you to see that you're a beautiful thirty-five-year-old woman who has so much going for her. Your life doesn't have to involve a man, but it has to involve something more than a carton of ice cream and the Home and Garden channel."

Tears stung Maddie's eyes in gratitude. Corrine had hung tough with her through this whole divorce thing. Long nights on the phone while Maddie sobbed over the loss of her marriage. Packing up and moving her to a new apartment. Holding her hand the day she'd gotten the divorce papers. She wasn't being very grateful.

"I'm sorry, Corrine. I know I've been nothing but a big baby. I'll try harder." Contrite was always the best way to appease Corrine.

"Don't *appease* me," Corrine said with a sharp accent on the 'S' in appease. "I understand how you really feel. I just don't want you to feel that way anymore."

Maddie groaned into the phone. Did Corrine really think she wanted to feel this way? God, what she wouldn't give to wake up one morning and not have that hollow, empty canyon of pain in the pit of her belly. To wake up minus the ache of loneliness that sucked her dry and left her shaking, when she realized it was just her in the bed. Wake up and find there was something to look forward to besides the big, black void of her future.

Maddie gulped. Albert was a lying, cheating puke, and she wasn't going to waste another nanosecond mourning him.

Not right now, anyway.

Swiping at the escaping tears, she swallowed her grief. "I don't want to feel this way anymore either, Corrine. So tell me when and where and I'll be there with bells on." Well, maybe not bells, but at least heels and a dress that wasn't something Holly Hobby would wear.

Maddie jotted the details down and stuffed them in her purse. There was

nothing left to do but go home and wait. Her stomach turned as she thought about going home to her quiet apartment. Maybe she'd get a cat... or two.

Meow.

* * *

This was *quite* the event. Tuxedo clad waiters drifted silently in and out of the hushed groups of over-dressed executives. Champagne glasses clinked as trays of food were offered. Maddie watched the golden liquid swirl in her glass as she smiled and refused the crackers with brown, yucky stuff on them.

Liver pâté.

Ick.

Not a weenie in a blanket in sight.

Corrine waved her over to the group of colleagues she was deep in conversation with. Crossing the room, she hoped her heels didn't buckle. She didn't wear them much anymore and she certainly didn't need to land flat on her ass. This wasn't an ass landing party. Smoothing a hand over her black cocktail dress, she approached Corrine and her group of friends hesitantly.

Corrine gave her an air kiss and introduced her. "This is my good friend, Madison Blake. She sells real estate, so if you're in the market for a new home, Maddie's your girl."

Well, at least she didn't tell them she was newly single. She always felt desperate and naked when that particular tidbit was revealed. Maddie smiled and nodded at everyone, while Corrine finished her conversation with the really old guy who needed a nostril trim.

Maddie stifled a yawn while Corrine talked stock options. Her bladder began to protest all of the bubbly and lack of liver pâté.

She needed a bathroom and a cigarette.

Leaving Corrine, quietly so as not to be noticed ditching this shindig, she went off to locate the ladies room. Crossing the wide marbled lobby, she found the restrooms.

With her bladder empty, she needed a smoke. Digging through her purse, she

searched for a pack of cigarettes. Damn, she'd left them at home. Upon further inspection, she found one lone cigarette, crumpled but still completely smoke-able. She peeked around the corner of the bathroom door, only to find "no smoking" signs prominently displayed in every damn corner.

Well, shit. Going back outside was not an option. It was cold, and she'd left her jacket back with the coat check near Corrine's little soiree. If Corrine caught sight of her, she'd haul her back to that damn party and make her eat liver pâté.

Ick.

Maddie made her way down the long carpeted corridor. Music blared from the other end of it. Her ears pricked to the tune of Livin' La Vida Loca.

Oh, she loved this song! Upside inside out... She used to try to get Albert to dance with her to it.

This is your Albert alert... remember Albert is a fuck head. Forget Albert. Think Ricky Martin. He's yummlicious and not at all a fuck head.

Right, Albert is a fuck head. Ricky, on the other hand, is babe-o-licious. Sobering at that thought, she still found herself drawn to the beat of the music.

Twin oak doors with brass handles led to the party inside. Maddie hesitantly pulled on them and stuck her head inside.

Everyone was dressed in an animal costume, shimmying to the Latin beat of Ricky. They looked like the kind of costumes you'd see at a kid's party. Where was Barney when you needed him? She was a little out of place.

Maddie sniffed the air. Smoke, she smelled smoke, glorious health threatening, death inducing smoke. Looking down at her dress, she figured she'd be pretty out of place without a costume, but the room was darkened and thick with the haze of cigarettes. If she just slipped in unnoticed, she could find a quiet corner to huddle in and light up.

A group of blue squirrels were clustered in a corner, rubbing up against one another.

Odd.

Alrighty, somebody's had too much to drink...

Hookay, corner number two had a variety of species. A tiger, a squirrel, and a really cute fox. This must be the corner where species discrimination was *not* tolerated, so maybe they wouldn't mind an uncostumed mammal joining them. Maddie spied an ashtray on the table next to them. She hunkered down and slid along the wall, making her way to the chairs scattered about.

Her hands shook as she lit up. Taking a deep drag, she glanced at her watch. Hell, it was almost eleven now. She'd miss the Home and Garden channel's Makeover Madness marathon. Staring down at her feet, she noticed a run in her nylons.

Figured, she was hopelessly screwed, right down to her control top pantyhose.

Maddie jumped. A pair of big, fluffy feet stood parallel to hers. Her eyes traveled upward.

A big, fuzzy bunny. Cripes, he was tall.

But his whiskers were promising. Cute, very cute whiskers. His floppy ears swayed with the nod of his head as he motioned to the chair beside her. He looked like Thumper.

"Uh, hi. Do you mind if I sit down?" Thumper's voice was muffled by the head of the costume. She could just make out what he said over the music and his bunny suit.

"Er, sure." Maddie smiled at him, turning her attention to the middle of the dance floor where the electric slide had turned into some dirty dancing. Whoa, this was *some* kid's party. She hoped he'd go away. She didn't want to talk to anyone, let alone a big white bunny with a yellow bow tie. Where was the birthday boy or girl anyway?

"I'm Cole Ashton."

She fought a groan. He wanted to make small talk.

Oy.

"Madison Blake, Maddie for short." Now go away, scamper off to the forest and wreak havoc with Mr. McGregor's lettuce.

"Are you a furry?"

Maddie frowned. A who? Was this like a personal question? Grabbing a sneak

peek at her legs, she was relieved to find she'd shaved. She was decidedly *not* furry.

"Um, no, I don't think so."

"Ah, then what brings you here?"

Maddie held up her cigarette. "A smoke. You?"

She cringed. Now she was encouraging him to engage in witty repartee she just didn't have the mindset for.

Thumper/Cole shifted in his seat, tugging at the head of his costume. "Well... I..." He was struggling to form a coherent sentence. Jeez, maybe she should have sat with the squirrels, bet they were better conversationalists. "My friend talked me into it," he said finally.

"Talked you into coming to a kid's party?"

"This isn't a children's party."

Maddie leaned into him. "What?"

"I said," he shouted, "this isn't a kid's party."

Oh.

Halloween was long past and they were well on their way to Christmas.

"Then what is it?" Ooh, she could just slap herself. She just never knew when to shut up. Maddie didn't want to talk to him, yet she was compelled to forge ahead anyway.

Cole sat forward, resting his forearms on his big, fuzzy thighs. "It's called a furcon, or fur-swap... or... or something like that."

Okay, she'd play the game with the nice bunny. He obviously wasn't going away, and she didn't want to go back to Corrine and her stuffy friends. "What's a fur swap?"

Three or four costume clad people sat at the opposite table scratching one another. Must be itchy in those damn things and hot.

"Um... look, I didn't come here willingly. My friend talked me into it. He's over there in the chipmunk costume." Cole lifted a big paw, pointing in the direction of the far corner of the room.

Looked like Mr. Chipmunk was gettin' a little muskrat love. He was pressed tightly up against another animal she couldn't quite identify. Should one really behave this way at a party for a child?

Maddie sat up straight when Cole said, "I think they're yiffing..."

Tilting her head, she looked Thumper in the eye, his big, glassy blue one. Could he see her? And what the hell was yiffing?

"Yiffing?"

"Look, do you think you could help me out of this damn headpiece, and I'll explain. I can't get the stupid thing off. My buddy said it's some kind of erotic thing these people do. Now please help me get this off?"

The fuck she would. *Erotic? These people?*

The music had become a slow, sultry ballad. Squirrels and chipmunks and all the little forest creatures of the land were bumping and grinding.

Holy hedgehog hoedown! These people were hooking up!

Time to go.

Maddie rose from her chair quickly, before Thumper had the chance to say anything more, but he stopped her by standing up in front of her, blocking her exit. She stamped out her cigarette in the ashtray.

"Look, bunny man, I don't know what the hell a fur... swap --" Maddie shook her head, "-- meet is and I sure as crap don't know what yiffing is all about, but I have a funny feeling it isn't for this girl. So get out of my way, or I'll call that big, bad wolf over here to kick your bunny ass."

Yeah. You tell 'em, Maddie.

Cole chuckled. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I won't hurt you. Cross my widdle bunny heart and hope to die. This place isn't for me either. I just didn't know it until I ran into you."

Maddie couldn't help it. She began to giggle. "So what's the matter with *you* -- you don't like to yiff?"

His wide bunny shoulders shook with laughter. "Um, not dressed like this.

Come with me and I'll take you to my bunny hideaway. I have juicy carrots."

Laughing again, Maddie figured it couldn't hurt to follow him out of there, so she trailed a distance behind him. Picking her way through the throng of tigers and assorted wildlife, she scooted out the door.

Jesus, she really needed to give up smoking.

Chapter 2

She and Cole managed to wrestle the bunny head off, and Maddie got her first glimpse of the not-so-fond of yiffing Cole.

Wow. He was cute in a very non-bunny way.

His dark, curly hair was almost black but for a strand or two of gray, as dark as Maddie was light. They'd found a small alcove to sit in, set apart from the noise. Cole pulled out a chair for her. She eyed him with suspicion.

"So why don't you explain to me what exactly was going on in there?" Maddie raised an eyebrow and waited patiently for an explanation. She shouldn't ask, but she found she couldn't stop her innate sense of "what the fuck was that?" needing fulfillment.

"I told you, it's called fur something and all these people dress up like animals. It has something to do with a love of plush animals. Like your stuffed toys. My friend's girlfriend is into it and he invited me along. He claimed it was a good way to meet people..."

Maddie snorted. "You were suckered."

"Not really. I met you, didn't I?"

Whoop, whoop, whoop. Sirens went off in her head. No, no, no. She was not going to play the dating game.

"Aren't you a lucky bunny?" she joked, fighting to keep the terror out of her voice. She was so not good at the flirting gig. So he met her, big freakin' deal. The only meeting she wanted to have was with the remote control and her flannel bathrobe.

"So what brought you here?" The low rumble of his voice slithered up her spine. Blue eyes fringed in black sought hers, waiting for an answer.

"I came with a friend who's in another convention room. My friend, Corrine,

she's a stock broker. I was just looking for a place to smoke. I had no idea that... well, that..."

"I don't think I quite got the concept of it myself, when my friend Ian ran it past me."

"One would think the alarm bells should have sounded when he asked you to dress up like Peter Rabbit."

Cole hung his head and laughed. "He's a friend from my law firm. Who knew he'd be into *this*? You know how it goes, I just got caught up..."

Um, no, she didn't know how it went. Nor did she want to. Yes, he was cute. Yes, she was sure his bunny costume hid a fine set of carrots, but this was something she just wasn't ready for. "Well, Cole, it was nice meeting you. I'd better get back to Corrine." Sticking out a hand, she thrust it at him.

"Do you have to go? Why don't you sit with me for a little while? I'll tell you all about my bunny life."

"No, I can't. Corrine will wonder where I went and come hunt me down. It could get ugly."

His blue eyes gazed into hers, pinning her to her seat. "I get it. Corrine made you come with her, didn't she? So that must mean you either hate going out, or you've been hiding from something."

Perceptive. "Hiding... not exactly. I, well, I..."

"Divorced?"

God, that was high on her list of failure words right up there with alimony. "Yeah." Maddie wondered if she'd self-combust, now that she'd acknowledged it out loud.

"How long?"

"Six months." The sharp pang of rejection, still raw and new, shot to her gut.

"Everybody keeps telling you it's time to get on with your life, right?"

Maddie snorted disdainfully. "Yeah, this life that's waiting for me to do the getting on thing with it. It's Somewhere just around the corner, is what I hear. I think I

took the left when I should have gone right, because I keep looking and I can't seem to find it." Tears welled in her eyes.

Shit, shit, shit. This was a mistake. She should have never left her apartment.

Way to entice the bunny, Maddie... how very sexy, a divorcée with issues. Very original.

Cole reached over and rested his paw on her arm. "I'm sorry, I know that's a stupid sentiment, but it's all I have."

She pursed her lips. "Don't be sorry. He's a schmuck. I know that in my head. It's my heart that needs the wake up call."

"Any chance you'll get back together?"

While she savored the warmth of Cole's paw on her arm, the idea hit her like a ton of bricks. No, there was no chance of that, and she found her heart even rebelled against the very idea of being married to Albert again. Did she love Albert anymore? Or did she love the *idea* of him?

This was too much damn insight for one night. Furry people, hot men in bunny suits, and the death of a dream. "No, we're never getting back together. My ex is a thing of the past. I'm better off without him. It's the adjusting thing that I'm having trouble with, ya know? I mean, how do you adjust to being single? Cooking for one? Sleeping..." she stumbled, "alone... Sometimes it almost seems better to have stayed with the scumbag. At least I had someone to watch CSI with."

Cole shrugged his shoulders. "It won't always be like this, I promise you. CSI is overrated. Try Law and Order."

If she had a nickel for every time she'd heard that very promise. "Are you speaking from experience?"

He laughed. "Nah. I've never been married. But I have plenty of friends who were and aren't anymore. It's a process or so they say."

"More like a food *processor*. Chopping up your guts and pureeing your heart."

Cole winced. She noticed a tiny scar on his forehead as it puckered. "Ouch, that bad, huh?"

"It sure as hell wasn't pleasant. I gave that prick ten years of my life and he

ditched me like I was so much trash. Wanted everything to boot, too.” Maddie’s voice rose. She could hear the pitch change, but she couldn’t stop herself. “I mean, he took *everything* and expected me to ask for *nothing*? Do you know he got an earring? An earring, can you believe that? It was the most piss-poor excuse for a mid-life crisis I’ve ever seen.”

Now she was spitting and gesturing wildly with her hands. “He even got the cute little sports car to go with his brand new comb over. Know what I got? I got the damn living room sofa and a fucking hand vac! A hand vac... can you believe that? You can’t clean anything with a hand vac --”

“Did he really have a comb over?” Cole interjected her rant as he wiped his cheek free of her post divorce spew.

Maddie’s anger diffused immediately. She huffed. “No, not really, but he started doing this stupid thing with it that he thought made him look younger and instead only made him look foolish. What is it about men that makes them think they’ll be forever young if they hook up with some chick they should be driving back and forth to nursery school, not *FUCKING!*”

Cole was watching her quietly. He crossed his paws over his chest and sat back. “Was she a younger woman?”

Maddie exhaled slowly. “No, she wasn’t. She’s around my age, I hear. He never confirmed that he left me for *her*. It’s just what I suspect.”

“Men are pigs.”

“Yes, yes they are...”

Cole remained silent.

“Now would be a good time to reassure me *all* men aren’t pigs.”

“No, I can’t do that. Almost all of them are, in one way or another.” His reply was solemn, steady... sure.

Maddie stared at him in disbelief. “Then I guess you aren’t scoring any points here with me.” Jeez.

“I wasn’t looking to score points, per se. I’ll be honest. I was just looking to get

laid."

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Laid? As in the horizontal mambo, LAID? Like do the nasty, laid? Laid, like sneak a peek at the one eyed beast, LAID?

Holy shit. Someone wanted to have sex with her and it wasn't Albert!

Omigod... Omigod... Omigod.

Um, Maddie, my girl. You're not supposed to be flattered. You should be insulted.

Why? He looked at me, assessed my physical attributes, decided they weren't half bad, and then decided he wanted to screw ME!

Is that any way to secure a new relationship?

Well, who the hell said I wanted one of those?

Ah, Maddie. If this is what you want, a one night stand, filled with nothing but wild sex, then I support you one hundred percent. Just don't forget the naked thing.

Wild sex... Naked? Oh, oh, wait one minute.

What are you waiting for? Go get 'em, baby. C'mon, do the horizontal fox-trot.

Mambo.

What?

Never mind. Now what?

Now you go with the nice man in the bunny suit and have sex.

Naked.

Yup, naked.

No.

"Hey." Cole shook her arm, interrupting her wild thoughts. "I was just kidding."

Oh, sure. Ya know it *is not nice* to toy with the newly single girl. So that means he doesn't want to see me naked?

Not right now.

Maddie sighed. "I knew that."

"But I would like to see you again."

"Oh, I don't know. I mean, we don't know each other and well you do some pretty weird stuff for kicks."

Cole laughed loudly. A hearty, loud chuckle that pierced the quiet of the hotel. "No, I just got myself into something I couldn't get out of. But I can understand your hesitation over seeing me again. This," he motioned to his bunny suit, "can be a little intimidating, I suppose."

"Nah, not intimidating, just *really* freaky."

Cole laughed again, sort of husky and low. It caught her attention in the most understated way. "Look, trust me when I tell you I'm not into animals. I understand your post-divorce hesitation. How about I just give you my number and you call me if you're ever ready to date sometime this millennium?"

So he didn't want to have sex with her, because if he really wanted to, he'd have pushed harder.

He's not a serial nymphomaniac, Madd. He's behaving like a gentleman, letting you do your thing. Being all understanding. Showing you he's in touch with his feminine side, ya know? Take his number, Maddie. You don't ever have to call him. Be polite.

She reached out and took the card he had tucked in his bunny vest pocket. "Thanks. Oh," she dug around in her purse, "here's mine."

He cocked his head as he looked at the smooth vanilla card. "Real estate, huh?"

Smiling she nodded. "Everyone you know sells real estate, right?"

Cole rose and gathered his bunny head. "Nah, not really. It was nice meeting you, Maddie Blake. Take care of yourself. Oh," he said over his shoulder as he waddled out of the alcove, "and tell that ex of yours he's a jackass." He winked and was gone.

Maddie sat for a long time, thinking of getting up and leaving, but too absorbed in her thoughts to get off the chair. She turned his card over in her hands, fingering his name in black print.

Damn, he was cute.

Yep, and the girls agree.

Her nipples experienced just a little tingle. A mere acknowledgement that they still existed.

Well, Hell.

Chapter 3

Maddie tapped her fingers on the smooth granite countertop of the home she was showing, or rather wasn't showing because the client was late. Sleek and *tres chic*, it was ultra modern and overpriced. But Maddie didn't care. It sold for a small fortune and she could really use the commission.

The market was slow and so was Albert with her alimony check.

Jerk.

Glancing at her wristwatch, she noted Mr. Anxious was late. If he didn't hurry up, she'd miss her first group meeting for Divorcée's Anonymous. Corrine's suggestion. "Maybe it will help to know you're not the *only* divorced person on the planet, Maddie," she'd said. Maddie knew that, she was just learning to adjust is all. Corrine's clients highly recommended it, so Maddie figured she had nothing to lose. Besides it was Wednesday. There was nothing on the Home and Garden channel tonight.

Leaning forward on the counter, she scanned the listing, familiarizing herself with the floor plan. Nice, very nice. All chrome and black appliances. It was vacant. Well of course it was. Someone who owned this could certainly afford to move elsewhere.

Resting her head on her arms, she let the cool countertop brace her as she drifted nowhere in particular.

Hard warmth pressed up against her ass and strong hands gripped her shoulders. "Madison," a husky, vaguely familiar voice whispered in her ear. Though she struggled to turn around, the hands held her in place.

Her heart pumped wildly rape... Here in this vacant home with no one around for miles to help her, she would be raped. "Relax, Maddie... I won't hurt you."

She cocked her head to the left, leaning into the whisper. His body was solid

behind hers, thick and heated. Licking lips that had become dry and cracked, she fought a scream. If she remained calm... "Who are you?"

"I'm hurt you don't remember me, Maddie."

Her chest rose and fell rapidly, as he said her name for the second time. A hand snaked around to cover her waist. Lean and lightly sprinkled with fine black hair, his fingers were long and well manicured.

Closing her eyes, she fought the rising panic in her throat. "I'm... I'm sorry, have we... have we met?"

He rolled his hips toward her ass and chuckled. "Do you wanna bunny hop?"

Relief washed over her all at once and without warning. Cole! It was Cole. A visual of him, blue eyed and dark haired, flashed in her mind's eye. She began to turn toward him, the panic that had begun to set in turning to something she wasn't quite sure of. "Cole?" Her question was a mixture of relief and underlying fear of the unknown.

"Yeah, it's me. Don't turn around. I liked you that way. Leaning over the counter, those heels are sexy." He growled and Maddie wasn't sure if she should be afraid or, well, she wasn't sure.

She remained still. "I didn't know you were in the market for a house." The press of his bulk was becoming less threatening and oddly appealing. This was nuts.

"I didn't either until I met you." His hand tightened at her waist, lying just below the swell of her breast. A nipple tightened, scraping against her bra. "I'm going to tell you something, Maddie, and if you don't like it, all you have to do is say the word and I'll let you go. But promise not to move until then, okay?"

Her pulse was a rapid-fire rush of heat in her veins, but she couldn't resist his request. "Okay."

Cole dipped his knees and slid over her ass. "Do you feel that, Maddie?"

Oh my, yep. She felt it. Heat, not so unwelcome and sharp, throbbed in her pussy. This was insane. Maddie nodded mutely, acknowledging his question.

He lay flush over her, pushing her forward on the smooth granite countertop.

“It’s my cock and it’s been like that since the night I met you. I need to do something about that, Maddie, but I don’t want to freak you out.”

Maddie gasped for breath, letting the hard length pressed at her ass remain a moment. “You’ll let me go if I want you to?”

His lips found her ear and his tongue rimmed the shell slowly. “Yes, if you want me to. I would never hurt you. I’m not into forcing women to sleep with me.” A shiver ran up her spine at the wet warmth of his tongue.

Her eyes widened. “What will you do if I don’t want you to let me go, Cole?”

He groaned behind her, raspy and needy to her ears. “I’ll fuck you, Maddie. Slow and hard, but not before I put my mouth between your legs.”

Maddie’s ass lifted a bit higher at his words, straining against the bulge in his pants. Holy shit. She wasn’t ready for this kind of sexual game. But her body, tightly strung and wired for sound, said something all together different. “You’ll stop if I tell you to?” Now she was considering having sex with a complete stranger. Well, he wasn’t a complete stranger. Although she did know what he looked like in a bunny suit.

What the hell was wrong with her? It was reckless and stupid... and... and fuck it... incredibly exciting!

“Yes, if you want me to. Say the word and I’ll stop, I swear.” Cole’s hand moved to cup her breast, but he moved no further. Maddie found herself leaning into him, straining to feel his hand through the material of her blouse.

Protection, they needed protection. That would be the smart, single girl thing to ask for. “What will you do about protection?” A hand pressed against her side. Digging around he produced a foil packet, laying it on the counter in front of her.

“Is that okay?”

Maddie nodded. “You promise to stop if I ask you to?”

“I promise, Maddie.”

“You’re not like a serial killer or some kinky thing? I mean you do some pretty weird stuff, ya know?”

He chuckled in her ear as his fingers found the buttons on the front of her blouse.

"I'm not a serial killer and I already explained the animal stuff." Grazing the swell of her breast, he dipped into her lace bra.

OMIGOD. That felt like heaven. He whispered over her tight nipple and she squirmed.

So are we getting laid here, Madd's, or what?

Fingers circled the lace of her bra, lifting it over her breasts, tugging at her shirt to pull her arms out of the sleeves. He slipped the bra forward and it fell on the counter. So did her breasts, heavy and full. Unzipping her skirt, Cole slid it over her hips.

Oh, Hell's bells, she really was naked now, but she didn't care as she found her ass lifting to the pull of his hands. Cupping her breasts, he tweaked the nipples, rolling them between his index finger and thumb. Maddie heard herself groan, low and guttural as her head fell back on his strong chest.

All of a sudden, her hips rivaled a hula dancer as they circled slowly, pressing herself against him. Nipping at her shoulders, he moistened a finger and ran it over the hard bud of her nipple.

Maddie gripped the edge of the counter when her cunt experienced the first pulse of heat in many, many moons. The crisp material of his suit, or what she supposed was a suit, scraped her spine. The friction of skin and material made for a tantalizing combination. Cole ground against her ass, the thick bulge in his pants evident.

Her breath came in short, choppy pants when without warning he slipped a hand between her quivering thighs. Maddie jerked in response, surprised and frightened and hotter than hell.

"Relax, Maddie. Lean into me, let me feel you." He skimmed past the line of her panties, grazing her clit with slow strokes. "See, it's good, huh?"

Swallowing hard, she could only roll her head from side to side. She'd never talked during sex, and the words themselves made her blood race and her heart throb. And yes, it was good. One of the single best sensations she'd had in a long time. Not something she got from watching the Home and Garden channel, that's for sure.

“Is it good, Maddie?” He’d spread her wet flesh with his fingers, letting her adjust to his invasion.

“Yesss...” Arching into his hand, she spread her legs further as he caressed her, one hand on her breast and the other buried between her legs. Biting her lip, she clenched her eyes shut tightly and rode the callused fingers of his hand. She was afraid to come but didn’t know that she could fight the tension threatening to spring loose.

Lifting her shirt, Cole’s lips swept over her shoulder blades, trailing hot kisses down the length of her spine. He tugged at the waist of her panties with his teeth. Sliding them down over her ass and removing his hand from her pussy he pulled them to her ankles.

Cole kneeled behind her. Maddie held her breath as he wrapped his arms around her legs. She felt his hot gust of breath as he slithered his tongue along the backs of her thighs. She found herself leaning forward, letting the cool granite seep into the heat of her skin, waiting as he inched slowly toward her cunt.

“Oh...” A mere sigh of the word escaped her lips. Her calves began to shake as his hair whispered over her bare legs.

“You have great legs, Maddie. Long and lean,” he said as he drew his mouth closer to her wet warmth. Slipping between her legs, he knelt before her.

Sure, they’re great now, should have seen them *before* the divorce. Jesus Christ in a mini skirt, she was talking to herself while a man was licking her thighs. Oh... oh and now he was... she squirmed, rocking toward him when he kissed the outer lips of her cunt.

Okay, focus on the luscious tongue that is about to devour you, not on your thighs, Madd’s.

And then he was there, spreading the flesh of her pussy and swiping her swollen clit. She jerked at first, then decided to let the soft lips and rasp of his tongue become her entire focus. Oh-my-God, this was the most sinfully incredible thing she’d ever had happen to her. As Cole lapped at her pussy, Maddie forgot all about her uncertainties.

Riding the slick slide of his mouth, she rolled her hips at his face. Cupping her

ass, he pulled her flush to him, laying his tongue flat against her clit, then surrounding it with his lips.

Maddie gasped sharply when he clutched at the flesh of her ass, kneading it hard. Electricity shot through her, making her nipples bead painfully and the swell of heat in her cunt rise to claw at her. The spiral of sensation tightened, then let loose with fury, making her shudder against him.

Thrusting at his mouth, she came in a crashing wave of dizzying need for release and an almost unbearable desire to keep him between her legs forever.

Cole's tongue slowed its caress, letting her body ease its frantic pounding. Maddie felt tears sting her eyes. As silly as it seemed, this was the first time she could remember feeling every last wild sensation oral sex allowed. Each lick of his tongue, each breath he took as she rode his mouth.

Cole ducked out from between her legs and stood once again behind her. Pulling her back toward him, he whispered, "You taste incredible, Maddie. Better than anything I could have imagined in my endless fantasies of you."

Speechless, Maddie fought for breath as he once again cupped her breasts. The stir of heat began again, winding past her belly, settling in her pussy. She heard his zipper open, and he reached in front of her for the condom. A tear and then the wrapper fell to the floor.

"Maddie, do you want to stop? Say the word and I will."

She groaned at his question. "No, Cole. No, I don't want you to stop."

Maddie no longer cared about anything but the idea of his cock in her.

Soon. Now.

Cole's hands slipped back between her thighs, delving into the moist desire he'd created. The head of his cock paused at her entrance and she lifted her ass higher to meet it.

Cole plunged with a fluid thrust, making Maddie cry out.

He lay over her. "Are you okay?"

"Yes... yes, I'm okay. Don't stop," she said on a groan as he filled her, stretched

her. He was thick and hard... she let the sensation of a man within her again linger. She was having sex again, something she didn't think would ever happen as long as she lived.

And it wasn't with Albert.

Cole braced a hand on her spine, while the other reached back around her waist and skimmed her belly. In long strokes, he rode her, pushing his cock further with each roll of his hips.

Maddie stood on her toes, arching into each thrust, welcoming the fevered heat of him, clenching him greedily with her cunt. His frenzied fingers found her clit again, still swollen, still aching for his touch. His fingers slipped with ease through her dripping flesh, fondling her.

Her arms reached upward to wrap around his neck as she listened to their mingled pants for breath. Cole enticed her with his words, "Come, Maddie, with my hand between your legs and my cock in your pussy."

Flesh slapped against flesh, echoing in the empty kitchen, and Cole's words drummed in her ears. Maddie's body tightened, pushing against him. She came. Hard and hungry, freefalling with wild abandon. She felt Cole jerk within her. His cock twitched as he came.

Falling forward she let his arm brace her, resting against it on the counter. Catching her breath seemed almost impossible as Cole swept soothing kisses over her back.

"Jesus Christ, Maddie..."

Indeed.

There'd been a moment or two when calling the Lord's name in vain seemed most appropriate. She just couldn't speak.

Good gravy. As reality settled in, Maddie's face flushed. She felt the heat rise to her cheeks.

"Maddie, don't freak on me," Cole warned from behind her.

Right, don't freak. I have just had sex with a man I met at a furry-*whatever* and

talked with for like a New York minute. Proceeded to sprawl out on a countertop, just because he asked nicely, slapped my buck-naked ass high in the air for all the world to see, rode him like a stud mare, but I should avoid the freaking out thing?

Naturally, she was a tart.

“Maddie, turn around and look at me.”

It had to be crack he was smokin’, cuz she was *not* turning around.

Now, Maddie, face your fellow boinker. There’s absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. You had sex. No big deal. Now act like an experienced single-white-female and turn-around!

I most certainly will not.

Cole bent behind her and as she peeked out from beneath her arms, he picked up her panties. “Maddie, turn around and look at me.” His tone was no longer hushed, but firm.

She pulled at her blouse, fumbling with the buttons. Cole grabbed her by the shoulders and turned her to face him. Her eyes remained at lip level, the top of her head just meeting his broad shoulder. “You know,” she offered dryly, “it just occurred to me that I don’t even know what you look like without a bunny suit on.”

He laughed, pulling her to his chest. She felt the rumble as it vibrated against her breasts. “Look at me, Maddie. Don’t be ashamed because there is nothing to be ashamed of.”

Oh, no. No shame in having sex with a bunny, not to mention a bunny she’d known all of twenty freakin’ minutes!

Cole tilted her head upward, but she closed her eyes. “Open your eyes, Maddie, and look at me. I’ve been thinking about you since that night at the fur thing and I couldn’t stop. When I got here tonight and you were bent over the counter, well... you know. You’re an incredibly sexy woman and you have one hell of a set of legs.”

That explained it all. Hot legs got you laid in vacant houses by complete strangers. So here she stood in the arms of a man, bare ass naked in a pair of heels, unable to look at the man she’d just allowed to fuck the life out of her.

“Maddie...”

“Um, if I said this was *not* how I thought my first post-divorce schtupp would occur, would you call me crazy?”

He kissed the top of her head. “If I told you I’m glad I was your first post-divorce schtupp, would you call *me* crazy?”

Maddie burst out in tears, hot, fat drops that rolled down her cheeks and soaked the front of his nice linen shirt. She shook her head. What the hell was the matter with her? She was not cut out for this one night stand thing, that’s what was the matter.

Cole cradled her close and Maddie breathed deeply as he stroked her hair.

Okay, enough, you big honkin’ girl.

“Can I have my panties, please?”

He held them out to her and she bent, sliding them up over her thighs, dragging her skirt along with them. She left her shirt hanging out. She looked like a slob. Maddie figured a fashion faux pas was the least of her worries. “I guess you don’t want to buy the house, huh?”

Good deduction, Columbo.

“Nope, I just wanted to see you again. I figured you wouldn’t come if you knew it was me.”

He was right. But she had, *come* that is, in flashes of brilliant light and earth shattering shudders. Maddie cringed.

For crap’s sake.

Chapter 4

Cole walked her to her car, offering to take her out for coffee. Was that what single girls did when they finished boinking? Drink coffee with their lovers, then go home and get up the next morning to do it all again?

She declined, giving him some excuse about getting home to feed the cat that she didn't really have, but he'd never know she didn't.

Throwing her purse on the end table, she kicked off her shoes and went straight to the kitchen. Yanking open the fridge, she realized she was actually hungry and of course, there was *nothing* in the fridge.

Finding her take-out menus, she flipped through them and decided on Chinese. When she went to grab the phone, the red light of her answering machine blinked at her. Pressing play, she listened as Corrine's voice filled the air. "Hey, sweet cheeks, my friends tell me you didn't show up tonight at the meeting. How come? Look, Maddie, I know you're feeling alone, but --"

Beep... Maddie pressed the erase button. Next?

"Maddie? It's Albert, I was wondering... well, I was wondering if you'd give me a call. I'd like to talk to you if I could. You know the number."

Maddie gripped the edge of the counter for support. What could he possibly want? To apologize for not sending the alimony check? All this time had passed between them and now he was calling her? Her stomach clenched into a knot.

What to do?

Deep cleansing breaths only served to make her dizzy. Her fingers shook as she dialed the phone, then clicked the off button.

Oh, this was silly.

Call THE ASSHOLE and tell him you just had the most fabulous sex of your life.

It isn't nice to brag... and it was silly. She was a mature adult who could handle talking to a man who now used mousse to make himself feel younger.

Confidently she picked up the phone and punched in his number. He picked up on the third ring. "Albert, it's Maddie. What do you want?" Crossing the room, she sat down in her favorite chair.

"I just called to see how you were."

Maddie fought back a snort. Bet he was wondering how the hand vac was too. "I'm fine." She let the silence stretch out between them. Making no effort to create conversation.

"Good. I'm glad, I'm fine too."

And I give a flying fuck? Maddie waited, listening to him breathe on the other end. Oddly, his voice wasn't making her stomach clench anymore.

"Maddie, I... I... Where were you tonight when I called?"

Ahah! Stupid Maddie wasn't sitting around waiting for you to call, that's where she *wasn't*. "Out," she replied stiffly. *Having sex.*

"Maddie... could we have coffee sometime? Ya know, like we used to?"

"We don't do anything that we used to do anymore, Albert."

He huffed, that huff that was all too familiar and never failed to grate on her nerves. Tonight, she didn't even flinch. "I know, Maddie. I'm sorry. I think, well... I..."

Think? Albert didn't *think* about anything but himself. "Spit it out, Albert. I'm tired and I want to go to bed."

"I think I made a mistake, Maddie. I miss you."

The moment she'd waited for since he'd asked her for a divorce was happening and she found herself not giving a rat's fuzzy ass. All of her heartache, all of her fears, the rejection that was raw and palpable, every single tear she'd shed until now boiled to the surface. "Maybe you should have thought of that before you divorced me, Albert. I don't miss you. As a matter of fact, I'm seeing someone and I really have to go because *he's* waiting. Goodbye, Albert." She clicked off the phone triumphantly.

Way to go! Look at you. Have a little sex and the world is your oyster!

Oh my God, she'd had sex.

Maddie curled up on her favorite chair and dragged the blanket from the back of it over her. Hunkering down, she repeated the phrase again.

I had sex.

A small smile lifted her lips.

Sex, sex, sex.

* * *

Maddie stretched and rolled her neck on her shoulders. She'd fallen asleep with the newly found thrill of a clandestine sexual experience in her thoughts and the rejection of Albert still feeling pretty damn good. Refusing to let go of the warm fuzzy it gave her, she went to find the shower and a cup of coffee.

Freshly showered and dressed in sweats and a T-shirt, she perused the morning paper. Her eye caught a crack in the wall she really should paint.

The thought caught her off guard. It was called motivation and she couldn't remember the last time she'd had even a glimmer of some.

The phone ringing kept her from doing anything drastic like actually going out and buying the paint. "Maddie, honey, it's Corrine."

Maddie smiled. Should she tell Corrine she'd had sex? Nah. "Hey, Corrine, what's up?"

Corrine laughed that deep husky laugh that made men insane. "Wow, you sound just like the old Maddie. Remember her? The one who used to actually be glad to hear from me?"

Maddie sipped her coffee. "I remember. Are you calling to give me hell about not going to that meeting last night? I had a late showing and I missed it."

"Yeah, I was, but seeing as you were working, I'll forgive you. But there's another one tonight and I really don't think it would hurt to go, Maddie."

"Well, no, it won't hurt *you* at all. What makes you think I want to spill my guts to a bunch of strange women?"

"Because all of those strange women have hurt just like you. I told you, it helps

to know you're not alone."

Hello, my name is Madison Blake. I was dumped, ditched, divorced. So I hear you have a twelve-step program for that!

"Where is the meeting, Corrine? Give me the address and I'll consider it. I'm making no promises."

Corrine rambled off the address and Maddie dutifully wrote it down. What could it hurt? She'd already begun to heal because she'd hung up on Albert like he was some nobody. And she didn't feel the least bit guilty over it. Nor did she feel the empty hollow ache as sharply as she had for months. Time healed all wounds Corrine would tell her.

So did sex.

* * *

Maddie hesitantly stepped into the church where the meeting of Divorcée's Anonymous was held. It seemed like sacrilege to have a meeting with a bunch of divorced women in a church. She took the long hallway to room three-twenty-two, and looked in through the square glass of the door. Well, no one was performing any exorcisms, so it looked okay.

Maddie turned the doorknob and entered the room. Three women sat in a circle of chairs, softly talking, not even noticing Maddie's entry.

She slipped into a nearby chair and folded her hands on the desk in front of her. Where was the guide to all things divorced?

"Hi." The small blonde from the circle waved. "I'm Katy. You are?"

"Madison Blake." She smiled. Should she give her stats? Divorced six months, just told the ex-asshole to piss off, oh, and I had sex.

No, maybe that wouldn't be good.

"Hi, Madison, nice to meet you. I'm Victoria." Pretty and reed thin, the auburn haired, green-eyed woman smiled broadly.

"And I'm Maxine. I'm glad you could join us." Maxine looked the most tired of the three. Her hair gleamed, thick and black under the harsh lighting.

“Okay, girls,” Katy called, “why don’t we each tell Madison about ourselves and then we’ll get started. I’ll start. My name is Katy Jennings and I’m forty-two, divorced for just a little over a year.”

“I’m Maxine Rodriguez, thirty-six, divorced,” her voice hitched, but she caught herself nicely, “divorced three months.”

Ah, a newbie.

“And I’m Victoria Rawlings, thirty-nine and divorced from the shithead for six years now. Best damn six years of my life,” she proclaimed proudly.

“Victoria, I thought we’d graduated from calling Tom a shithead?” Katy chided.

“Well, I wouldn’t call him a shithead if he wasn’t one. But today he is, so that’s what I’ll call him.”

Katy chuckled. “Sometimes it’s okay to get it out of your system, Madison, so we indulge Victoria from time to time.”

Maddie could identify. “Um, well like I said, I’m Madison, but you can call me Maddie, I’m thirty-five, divorced six months.”

“What brought you here to us, Maddie?”

Duh, divorce. “I guess I’m having trouble adjusting and my friend Corrine said you guys were experts.”

Katy clapped her hands. “Oh, you’re Corrine’s friend! She’s a lifesaver. I’d have nothing in the way of investments if it weren’t for Corrine.”

“I’m having trouble adjusting too, Maddie. I hate being single. I miss Juan,” Maxine croaked. Her Spanish accent was light, but evident.

“Well, did ya miss him when he was batting your head around like a friggin’ golf ball?” Victoria interjected.

Fat tears swelled in Maxine’s big, brown eyes.

“Victoria! It’s okay for Maxie to miss Juan. It’s natural, even if he was a hand happy swine.” Katy patted Maxine’s hand consolingly.

Victoria snickered. “Yeah, well Maxie, now he’s off boffing some other poor fool and soon he’ll be whaling on her just like he did you.”

Whew, talk about bitter. This was divorce six years *after* the fact?

"I'm sorry, Maxine." Maddie felt her heart tug that Maxine shed tears over a man who beat her.

Maxine's eyes narrowed. "The *puta*, she stole my Juan! I'll see her dead!"

Katy clucked her tongue. "Better her than you, Maxie, and that's exactly what would have happened if you didn't leave Juan when you did."

"You're right, Katy. I know you are, but sometimes..." Maxie shook her head.

Sometimes what? The freak beat you, what else is there? Maybe this wasn't the place for her. Albert never beat her, he just -- well, he was just an asshole who wanted a divorce.

"So what happened to you, Maddie?" Victoria cocked her head and gazed intently at her.

Shrugging her shoulders, she looked at each of them. "I just got divorced. He didn't beat me, or anything like that. He just decided that ten years of my fucking life was old and tired and he asked for a divorce. Then he took whatever he could get his hands on, started using mousse, got a cool sports car, and an apartment in the city. Pretty cut and dried." Oh, she was using dirty words. *Potty mouth*.

Katy smiled softly, her pretty, cornflower blue eyes crinkled at the corners. "I sense bitterness there, Maddie."

Victoria snorted. "Well, of course you do, darling. It's why we're here isn't it? To," she swiped her fingers in the air, making mock quotation marks, "share. Unleash all this bitterness. Bond."

Ooh, talk about sarcastic, Maddie thought.

"Yes, Victoria, that's *exactly* why we're here, except you've been here for like EVER. I mean, get a grip, you've been divorced SIX years! SIX years!" Maxine yelled, "Get over it already. If I'm still as bitter as you in six years, I swear, I'll move to Tibet and live with a herd of goats before I'll act like you do!" Maxie took a deep breath, resting her hand on her chest and making the sign of the cross. Obviously praying for patience. "I'm sorry, Katy. I just couldn't help it. Sometimes I just... snap."

“Oh shut up, Maxie!” Victoria yelled back. “As if you should talk, always wringing your hands over Mr. Puerto Rico. He beat you, Maxie, within an inch of your life and left you for some hoochie. That’s what he did. But here you are every week crying over that pig. It may have taken me six years to get this far, but I sure as hell ain’t crying over not getting the crap kicked outta me anymore!”

“Ladies!” Katy shouted, “I’m going to ask you to go to your *special thinking spots* and take a moment to gather yourselves. *NOW.*” Her tone brooked no discussion.

Now it was Katy’s turn to take a deep breath. She closed her eyes and rolled her head on her neck. Any minute now, she was going to chant...

Maxine and Victoria sat in chairs that were a fair distance apart and eyeballed each other with seething venom.

Was the special thinking spot like time-out for divorced adult women who couldn’t control their impulse to rip each other to shreds? As Maddie watched this unfold, she couldn’t help thinking they needed Valium or at the very least, carefully monitored anger management courses.

“I’m sorry, Maddie,” Katy apologized. “Certainly, this isn’t what you expected when you joined us. We’re usually much more productive.”

Wasn’t there like therapeutic basket weaving? How to exorcise your ex in ten days or less classes? Making ends meet without the 401-K you were gypped out of in the divorce settlement? How to be naked with a new man every week program? Lookin’ for love on a shoestring budget?

When were they going to get to the good shit, cuz this sucked.

“Well, truthfully, I came for the ring-side seats to Rawlings versus Rodriguez,” Maddie joked.

Maxine snickered and then so did Victoria. Maddie laughed too and soon the tension broke and they were all laughing.

Well, it beat watching the Discovery channel’s Guide to Ancient Egypt.

* * *

Good gravy, how had they ended up here? Maddie twirled the straw in her

drink and squinted into the dark of the bar. Maxine said that once a month they made an effort to get out together as a group. Socialize, meet new people.

Sing karaoke.

Maddie groaned. She was not singing karaoke. This would be where her line was firmly drawn in the sand. There would be no smooth sounds of Motown coming from her lips.

Obviously, Maxine didn't feel the same. She sat on a barstool up on the stage, her head flung back, eyes closed, microphone in hand, singing Diana Ross' part in "Endless Love". Victoria joined her as Lionel Ritchie, her auburn hair almost pink under the lights, swaying to the ballad, more than just a little off key.

It would be rude to put her fingers in her ears, wouldn't it?

Katy sat quietly beside her, lost in the music and her rum and coke.

So, this was single. Wow, what fun.

The bar was rather empty, with the exception of a few stray men along the far wall. Slim pickins indeed.

"Are you having fun, Maddie?" Katy asked.

Oodles.

"Yeah, this is nice. I haven't been in a bar in eons." Like probably as far back as this stupid song goes.

"I'm sorry if the girls upset you. Sometimes all of my training goes to waste when they go at each other."

"Training?" Did one train to be divorced?

"I'm a counselor. I specialize in obsessive compulsive disorders."

Well, of course she did. It explained the thinking chair or spot or whatever the hell it was. "Well, they seem to be getting along just fine now."

Maxie and Victoria had their arms wrapped around one another, gazing deeply into each other's eyes as they came to a rousing "Endless Love" finish.

"I think they've had too much to drink," Katy giggled.

Maddie smiled. "I think you're right. Did Maxine's husband really beat her?"

Katy nodded. "Yeah, he was a first class asshole. The last time he nearly killed her. She's come a long way since he left her. But the pain is sometimes still fresh."

Maddie shook her head. She'd taken a lot of crap from Albert, but if he'd ever hit her she'd have left him slicker than snot. Sometimes, toward the end, she almost wished he had hit her; it might have been more honest than the covert beating she took.

"What about Victoria? She's been divorced six years. That's a long time to hold a grudge."

Katy sipped her drink. "Victoria's husband left her because she's a control freak. It's not something easily lived with and dating for her has been sporadic since the divorce. When we come here, it's one of the few times I see her really let go."

Maddie didn't know what to say. "And you? What happened with you?"

Katy sighed. Her slight shoulders sagged. She looked fragile and even a bit broken. "I married young and we drifted apart I guess. We were married for twenty-one years."

Holy matrimony. "I'm sorry, that's a long time to call it quits."

"Yes, yes it was. We drifted and just couldn't find our way back to each other. It was all very amicable, if you can believe that actually happens."

Maddie gulped. It was so much worse when it was amicable. How could you hate the guy if he let you have the toaster? It didn't give you a lot of excess change to put in your bitter cup.

"Do you have children?"

"Two boys, eighteen and nineteen. Off in college now."

"I don't know what to say. I'm really sorry."

Katy gave her a bright smile. "I'm okay. I have my practice and the girls. My life is full."

Another divorced phrase. My life is full. As opposed to empty when I was living with someone who was supposed to make it full. So I live alone and now I'm fuller.

She needed another drink.

Chapter 5

“Reeeuunited and it feels sooo goooood... Reeeuunited cuz it’s under... good.” No, not *good*, it was something else, but she couldn’t remember. Undergood wasn’t a word, was it? No, that wasn’t right. Ah, well, it didn’t matter. She was a *SUPERSTAR*.

Maddie was officially six sheets to the wind and loving every minute. Opting to karaoke via her chair, head thrown back, loud and frighteningly off key, she sang her heart out.

“Bartender...” Maddie slapped the table with the palm of her hand, “I need another drink. A big, big, big one.” Maddie’s head fell forward on her arms. She laid her cheek against her wrist and closed her eyes.

Maxine leaned over toward Maddie and brushed the hair from her eyes. “No, *mi amiga*, you don’t need another drink. You need to go home and get some sleep.”

Maddie lifted her head from the table and tried to focus on Maxine. “No, I want another drink. I want one with the pretty pink umbrella like Victoria has.” Was that *her* with the slurred speech?

“Darling, you’re smashed,” Victoria informed her, “and I think they only give you a pink umbrella if you have what I’m drinking and you can’t do that, Maddie because then you’re mixing your alcohol, which leads to puking and puffy eyes and all sorts of things that are ugly for your skin.”

Maddie pounded her hand on the table again. “I want another drink.” Pushing the hair out of her eyes, she waved her arm in the air, pointing her finger at the poor bartender. “You, bring me another drink and put an umbrella in it. Humor me.”

“Hookay, Maddie, it’s time to go home. I’m calling Corrine so we can get your address.” Katy rubbed her back in soothing circles while she called Corrine on her cell phone.

“Okay, Corrine,” she heard Katy say somewhere far off in the distance, “I will, I promise. Bye.”

Maddie felt her head bobbing, but she couldn't seem to get control of the up and down motion. “Is Corrine going to get me another drink?”

Katy chuckled. “No, but she said you're missing the Home and Garden channel's spring extravaganza...”

Maddie sat upright. Ooh, a spring extrava... ex... extra... Oh, whatever. She loved their fall bonanza. Was it fall? Yes, it would have had to be, because there were no winter flowers and that was the last one she could recall watching. Were there flowers in the winter? No, certainly not. It was too cold. Brrr, cold.

“Okay, Kaky,” Maddie said popping up, “I have to go. The Home and Garden channel has a special tonight.”

“I've called you a cab. C'mon, we'll wait outside with you. I think a little air would be a good thing.”

Maddie let Katy lead her through the bar and out the door. “You are really nice, Kaky. I like you and I think your husband was a stupid head for drifting away... Or whatever he did.”

Victoria let her perfect nails rest under her nose to mask the smell of Maddie's breath. “Whew, Maddie, you are snockered.”

Maddie threw her arms around Victoria, knocking her slight frame backward. “Oh, Victoriaaaa, Vic... turia... Vick-EEE, maybe you should get snockered too, an then you won't be a CON-TROL freak.”

Victoria patted her back and stepped away from Maddie. “Right, darling and you're the perfect example of what I want to be when I finally run amok. Thanks for showing me the way.”

“Uurre welcome.” Maddie smiled, her lips curling awkwardly.

Maxine giggled when Maddie wrapped her arm around her shoulders and gazed deeply into her eyes. “Maxie, did Mr. Puerto Rico do that to you?” She referred to the small, white scar by Maxine's lip. Maxine's hand flew to her mouth, but Maddie pushed

it away. "He's a mean jerk and if he ever touches you again, I'll... I'll... well, I dunno what I'll do. But it'll be *really* bad. So there." Maxine hugged her hard and Maddie sniffed the warm cinnamon and vanilla flavor of her coat.

"Okay, Maddie. We'll see you next week, I guess, right?" Maxine asked.

"Are we gonna get snockered and sing karaoke again?"

Katy took Maddie by the hand and opened the cab door for her. "We'll see what happens then, okay? For now you go home and get a good night's rest."

"K... Kaky, bye."

Maddie watched as the three women turned into a blur of color that made holding her head upright difficult. She liked them and she wanted to go back to see them again, but not before she had more sex.

Cole would want to have sex. She'd call Cole.

* * *

Stumbling into her apartment, she kicked off her shoes and held the doorframe to get the room to stop doing that moving thing.

Cole. Sex.

In that order, please.

Digging around in her purse, she found his card and grabbed the phone. Punching in the number, she smiled when he answered. He sounded like he was asleep. "Hello," his husky voice rumbled across the line.

"Cole? It's Maddie."

"Er, hey, how are you?"

"I'm fine, how are you?"

"Okay. Maddie, do you realize what time it is?"

She frowned. "Is it too late to have sex?"

He chuckled. "Have you been drinking, Maddie?"

"What does drinking have to do with sex?"

"It could be why you're calling me so late asking about sex."

"So, do you wanna have sex?"

"Now?"

"No, next year. Yeah, now."

"Maddie, you're drunk..."

"Oh, I am not. And even if I was, I would still want to have sex."

"Sex."

Maddie sighed in exasperation. What did a girl have to do to get laid? "Yes, sex, Cole. Sex, sex, sex."

"Where?"

"Where what?"

"Where do you want to have sex, Maddie?"

"Here."

"Where is *here*, Maddie?"

Stomping her foot she repeated herself for the apparently deaf, dumb, and blind. "Here."

"Are you home, Maddie?"

Duh! "Yes!"

"Where is home, Maddie?"

"What?"

"Where-do-you-live? Like an address."

"If I tell you, can we have sex?"

"Yes, Maddie. We can have sex."

Finally! She gave him her address and hung up.

Stripping her clothes off, she wobbled to the couch and waited. She was going to have sex. Did she shave her legs? Running a hand over her legs, she decided, yes, she'd definitely shaved her legs.

Ooh, maybe she should brush her teeth. Fresh breath would be important if she was going to have sex. She padded to the bathroom to do just that.

Ugh, the lighting was so harsh in here. She really should have someone come and take a look at it, maybe put a dimmer switch in. But not before she brushed her

teeth and had sex.

Just as she was finishing up, the doorbell rang.

Cole and sex. Her stomach did a little dance as she made her way back to the front door. Maddie flung the door open. Cole stood with a smile of amusement on his yummy lips. Maddie took his hand and pulled him inside. "C'mon, let's go have sex." She tugged him down the hallway to her bedroom.

"Maddie, I don't think this is a good idea."

"If you didn't think it was a good idea, then you wouldn't have come over."

Maddie lay down on her bed amid her pillows.

Cole grinned and crossed his arms over his chest. "Actually, I was sort of afraid you'd just have sex with anyone if I didn't come over."

"That's a terrible thing to say. I'm not some slut who has sex with just anyone, you know. I have class and good breeding. So take off your clothes and let's go."

"You've had a lot to drink, Maddie. It would be taking advantage and I just don't do stuff like that. Why don't I cover you up and you can sleep it off. If you still want to have sex tomorrow, then you can call me."

Maddie jumped up off the bed and stood in front of him. She unzipped his jeans, popping the button with more ease than she might have given herself credit for had she been sober. Cole's hands found her shoulders, caressing them, sending shivers along her spine. Pulling his pants down, she took his underwear with them.

His cock spilled forward, hard, thicker than the average Joe and lightly veined. Wow, he was beautiful. "Now, look at that," she said as she wrapped her hand around him. "You can't tell me *that* doesn't mean you don't want to have sex."

Kissing the tip of her nose, he caressed her cheek with his thumb. "Oh, I very much want to have sex with you, Maddie. You're all I've thought about since the other night, but you've had too much to drink and I don't have sex with women who might have regrets. Especially ones that I really like and want to get to know better."

Maddie melted into his hand, as he trailed it down over her neck. "Well, I've been thinking about you too, Cole, and not just because I'm drunk, so you can get to

know me better afterwards. But first, we're going to have sex, wild, uninhibited, totally naked sex."

No longer feeling quite as tipsy, but free enough to let go of her inhibitions, she decided that she didn't care about anything else but right here and now. Kneeling before him, she clutched his thighs, letting the crisp hair on them scrape her palms. She leaned her forehead against one, thickly muscled and hard, and nudged his swelled cock with her nose. Adjusting to the unfamiliar, yet arousing scent of him, she tentatively swiped at his cock with her tongue.

Cole rocked back on his heels and moaned when she ran her hands between his legs, cupping the tight sacks of his balls.

She grazed him again, lightly, placing her lips over the stiff flesh. His hands clutched her hair, sliding into it and clenching her head. Empowered, Maddie licked him in long, slow strokes, from the base of his cock to the head. "Jesus, Maddie..." she heard from above her. In small increments, she encircled him, swallowing the heated length inch by inch.

Resting with him fully encompassed by her lips, she swished her tongue at the base of his shaft, then dragged her mouth back up again. "Hmm," she groaned as she made another pass. His balls tightened in her hands as she gently kneaded them. Cole tasted like nothing she'd ever known, nor savored as she did now. The continuous glide of lips and tongue made her nipples hard and her cunt slick.

Cole gasped, stopping her from taking him into her mouth fully again. Pulling her upward, he gripped her shoulders tightly and searched her blue eyes. "You are an amazing woman, Maddie," he said, as he brought her lips to his.

Maddie's breath quickened as his tongue thrust into her mouth. White-hot shafts of heat pricked her nipples and electricity shot between her legs. Her arms wrapped around his neck, pulling him tighter to her, pressing his lips as hard as she could to her own. Maddie clung to him, nearly hanging on the bulk of his body, letting the rasp of his tongue become her focus, driving between her lips.

Walking her to the bed, he seated her at the edge and moved away momentarily

to remove his shirt. His chest was broad, thick, and lightly tanned. Maddie reached upward letting her hands roam over the wide expanse, gripping the flesh in her fingers.

Cole knelt before her, nibbling her neck, nipping the hollow with teeth and tongue. He trailed wet kisses along her collarbone, over her shoulder, and then his lips found a nipple, puckered and tight. Maddie cried out when he licked it gently. She wanted more. Arching into his mouth, she braced her hands on the bed on either side of her, encouraging him. Yet he hesitated. Looking up he caught her eyes with his. "Maddie, you're so beautiful."

She whimpered at his words. "Cole, please, please don't make me wait anymore."

Cupping her breasts, he licked each nipple once. Maddie shifted restlessly against his mouth, straining against him. "Again, Maddie?"

"Yesss." She hissed the word at him on an urgent sigh, yanking his head tighter to her and pressing her nipples to his mouth. And then he devoured them, suckling them hard, tugging at them with his lips as he tongued them, rolling them between his fingers with a force that made her hips jut forward and her ass grind into the bed.

She grabbed wildly for his hair, latching onto his ears and thrusting her breasts at him. Her legs went around his waist. Hooking her ankles at the small of his back she slid toward him. As he kneaded her breasts, his lips left them and found her mouth again. His belly made contact with the heat of her cunt and she rocked against him, rubbing her swollen clit frantically over the hard surface.

Cole's hand wedged between them, and he cupped her, running his thumb over the swollen outer lips of her pussy. "You're wet, Maddie, wet and swollen. Is that for me? Do you want me to touch you, Maddie?" he asked against her lips.

She was dizzy from the ache of it. "Yes, yes. I want you to touch me."

His forefinger grazed her clit, and her eyes clenched shut tightly as a wave of need swept through her. "Like that, Maddie?"

Oh, God, his words made her blood simmer and her heart hammer against her ribs. "Yes," she nearly sobbed, "yes, like that."

He spread her flesh with two fingers and caressed her clit. Raising her hips she rolled against his fingers. She widened her legs, letting him explore her, and suddenly those fingers were inside her, hard and slick with her desire. "Ahhh..." A hoarse scream ripped from her throat.

"So tight," he murmured. "Look at me, Maddie." Maddie pried her eyes open to see his blue eyes, intense and pinning her to the bed. "I'm going to lick you now, because I have to taste you again. I'm going to put my face between your legs and lick your luscious cunt until you come. I haven't stopped thinking about it since the first time I tasted you." He twisted his fingers in her and she clenched them, rode them as he spoke.

"Have you thought about that too, Maddie? Thought about my head buried between your thighs as you rode my tongue?"

Maddie's head fell back and she arched her spine, pushing at his shoulders until his head was between her legs. "Yes, I've thought about it. No one has ever made me feel like that." Cole kissed the soft skin of her inner thigh, as he continued to fuck her with his fingers.

"I'm glad to hear that, Maddie, because no one has ever tasted like you." Removing his finger, he used both hands to open her to him. Hot breath lingered over her exposed flesh. She would die if he didn't put his mouth on her.

Squirring beneath him, growing impatient, she grabbed at his hair, tugging his head up as she raised hers to look him directly in the eye. "Then lick me, Cole," she demanded hoarsely, "lick me until I come. Please... Cole... put your tongue in me." Lifting her hips, she thrust his head at her cunt and felt the hot, hard impact of his lips as he opened his mouth wide and enveloped her, swirling his tongue over her clit.

Maddie screamed with pent up tension, bowing her back and pressing his face so tightly to her he grunted. She didn't care. He was hers to direct now, and she reveled in her power, pushing him to lick her hard and fast. She tugged his hair harder as his hands came underneath her and cupped her ass. She let her legs dangle over his forearms, completely exposed to him, as the pressure built. Cole kneaded her ass,

grinding her to his face, flattening his tongue in her, sucking hard at her clit. His hands squeezed her ass, pinching the flesh, creating a pleasurable pain that made her cry out for more.

The sharp prick of orgasm came fast and furious, overwhelming her, sucking the breath from her body as she ground his face into her. It was hard and sweet, spiraling out and dragging the tension from her pussy as she exploded. Cole did as he'd promised, riding her pleasure out, licking her until her breathing slowed.

He let her legs drop as he slid up her body. They dangled off the edge of the bed, shaking and weak.

Plunging his tongue in her mouth, he slid it out slowly. "Can you taste that, Maddie?" Moving her head up and down, she nodded, beyond words. "That's you on my tongue. Taste it again," he whispered, stabbing his tongue back between her lips as he rolled her nipple between his fingers. Maddie suckled it, licking at the pungent taste of her body. "I need to make love to you, Maddie. I need to slide my cock into you, fuck you until there's no one else but me. Until the only cock you'll ever want is mine."

She could weep from his words. Erotic, alluring, they made her squirm with a pleasure unknown and forbidden.

A condom, they needed a condom.

Cole was two steps ahead of her, digging through her nightstand drawer. "In the bathroom, in the medicine cabinet," she said. Leftover from her days with Albert. She watched as he walked into the bathroom, the muscles of his ass tight and wickedly sexy. His broad back tapered to a slender waist. His cock was thick and long and hard for *her*. The thought made her nipples bead painfully.

He slipped the condom over his erection and was between her legs again in mere moments, lifting her leg, bent at the knee, high beside her body. The delicious weight of him seeped into her. Slipping her arms under his, she held him tight. Rolling her hips at him, she felt the head of his cock just graze her entrance.

"Ah, Maddie, you're impatient. I am too." He prodded her with his shaft, "Do you feel that? Christ, I've never been so hard for any woman."

Oh, God... She didn't even care if these were words he'd spoken to a hundred other women. Maddie could only think of his cock in her, hot and slick from her juice. Reaching between them, she held him firmly as he slid into the cavern her hand made.

"You do it, Maddie." His words were thick, husky, urgent. "Hold my cock, rub it over your clit, I know you like that... Then help me fuck you, slide me into your cunt."

Maddie did as he instructed, gliding his thick shaft over her clit, letting it slip between the lips of her pussy. Cole swirled his tongue over the shell of her ear, groaning as she explored the most intimate part of herself with him. Holding him firmly, she hovered by the entrance to her warmth. Cole nudged her. "Say when, Maddie." Her hand shook as she guided him into her. His plunge was slow, slick, agonizingly tender. His grunt was of pleasure as he whispered, "Christ, you're tight and wet. So wet..." He lay still. "Just say *when*, Maddie."

Maddie's muscles clenched around him, milking his thick length, savoring the stretch it took to accept all of him. Reaching around him, she clutched his ass, grinding her hips into his. Everything welled up in her all at once, the incredible sexual freedom Cole allowed, pent up need she didn't know existed. The desire to have this man pump into her until she begged for mercy was more than she could bear. "When, Cole," she pleaded with him, saying the magic word. "Now, fuck me hard and fast, now, because if you don't ram into me, I'll scream." She hissed each word at him, emphasizing the command.

Cole's hips pulled back, preparing to plunge into her. Quickly he slid out and rammed back in, sinking balls deep into her cunt. Maddie gripped his shoulders, yelping from the force of his thrust. Lights flashed behind her closed eyes and lightning sizzled in sharp waves to her pussy. "Again, Cole, do it again, until I beg you to stop," she demanded, rocking her hips.

Again, he sank into her, pushing into her hard, laying his mouth over hers, licking her lips. She lifted her leg higher on his back and he slipped his arm around it, pinning it to the bed, gaining leverage. He plunged into her over and over.

Maddie clung to him, open and slick, her cunt contracted, sucking him into her.

She kissed him back hard, biting his lower lips as he crashed against her.

Their tongues tangled as he rode her fiercely. Maddie's ears caught the soft suction of their joined bodies, the slurp of each kiss, the thick, hard cock in her, driving her to madness and she tensed, tearing at his shoulders, rising up hard, forcing him to push her over the edge.

"Come, Maddie," he urged, "come on my cock. I need to feel you come."

"Oh, God," she screamed as the rush of orgasm ripped through her, a violent assault of delicious heat. Cole responded to her insistent thrusts, driving his cock hard until it twitched, jerking roughly. He arched upward, his jaw clenched tightly and the muscles of his neck strained.

Maddie sank back onto the bed, depleted. Cole let her leg go and settled on her, his breathing choppy and rough. Gathering her shaking body to his, he cradled her close.

Maddie snuggled deeper into him, feeling vulnerable and small beneath him.

He tipped her chin up. "You are the most incredible woman, Madison Blake."

"I'd wager you say that often, Cole Ashton."

He chuckled, his white teeth flashing against his lightly tanned skin. "No, Maddie, I don't." His blue eyes were intense and serious.

Smiling back at him, she decided this single thing had its perks. "I think we had some serious sex."

His response was to slip out of her and lick each of her nipples. "No, Maddie, that wasn't just sex and you know it. If you don't yet, you will in time, because you won't be doing that with anyone else, *ever*."

Groaning, she mourned the loss of his cock within her, shivering at his words. No one had ever spoken to her like that, not even Albert. "We hardly know each other, Cole. You just had sex. It makes the lips loose and the mind a smidge fuddled."

Pulling her up, he looked her in the eye. "I've had plenty of sex in my time. That was like no sex I've ever had before and it was the same for you. So don't try to deny it. When you come to grips with that, you know my number." With that, he stood and

grabbed his clothes, leaving her to stare after him as he went into the bathroom.

Dressed and so handsome he took her breath away, Cole crossed the room and pulled her off the bed. Standing in front of him, she realized how tall he was for the first time. He kissed her once more, taking a last exploration of her body with his hands. "This wasn't just sex, Maddie. This was more than fucking, more than anything you ever had with your ex. When you come to that conclusion and you're ready to admit that, call me. I'll be waiting." Pulling away abruptly, he left, closing her bedroom door behind him.

A multitude of emotions hit her all at once. She felt alone, abandoned, sexually empowered, complete for the first time in her life, afraid of the power that she'd been given and struggled to comprehend. Free of the constraints of a relationship, yet missing those very confines, at loose ends, unsure of where to go next.

Running her hands through her hair, she crawled under her blankets and pulled them tight up under her chin. This was too much introspection for one night. She put Cole's words in a mental box and decided to take them out and play with them tomorrow, when she was completely sober.

As the cool sheets enveloped her, Maddie replayed the memory of Cole's lips on her, his cock in her and she smiled.

She'd just had round two of a one night stand.

Yahoo!

Chapter 6

"I had sex."

Maxine snickered and Victoria rolled her eyes.

Katy's eyes widened, but then she smiled complacently at Maddie. "How do you feel about that?"

This was her second Divorcée's Anonymous meeting, held informally in the bar they'd been in the week before and already Maddie was growing attached to each quirky member. She had fondly relayed her experience with them to Corrine, dubbing it a meeting of the Ex-Files.

"Well, let me see if I can sum it up in one sentence that doesn't make me froth at the mouth over the memory." Maddie paused. "It was the most liberating, freeing, gratifying, scintillating, uninhibited, sexually satisfying moment of my adult life."

All three of her newfound friends leaned forward in their chairs eagerly. "In short, I want to keep doing it until I shake this thing."

Maxine took the napkin from under her drink and fanned herself. "*Anda pa'l cara!* I think I'm happy for you. I mean it's wonderful, but, well, were you nervous?"

Maddie smiled at the memory of just how *not* nervous she'd been. "You know what's funny? I wasn't thinking about the extra flab on my ass or how my boobs are in a southerly state of mind. None of that. It was *that* good."

Victoria blew out a breath of air she'd been holding. "Oh, my. Did you... you know, have an..."

"Orgasm," Katy offered, as though she'd just asked for ketchup with her fries. The counselor in her wasn't afraid to share "enlightened women's words".

"Yes, an *orgasm*. I'm sorry. Sometimes I have trouble with stuff like that." Victoria drummed her perfectly manicured nails on the table and bowed her head.

Maddie smiled broadly. "In spades. I mean like more than one too. I've never had more than one, *never*."

Maxine sighed wistfully. "What do you mean by 'shake this thing', Maddie?"

Maddie shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. I mean I want to keep having all this sex until I get bored." She liked how liberated and "now" that sounded. Hip and cool, really new millennium.

"Is it *just sex*, Maddie?" Katy questioned. "I mean, are you getting any emotional fulfillment out of it. Is this going anywhere?"

Very counselor like question. "I'm not sure where it's going. We've only had sex twice and the last time, he told me that this was more than sex and when I came to that conclusion, I could call *him* and then he left."

Maxine's big brown eyes got bigger. "Oooh, that's so romantic, Maddie."

"So the slug left it up to you to call? What do you want to bet, if and when you finally do call him, he tells you something lame like he got tired of waiting for you and he's got a new little chippie?" Victoria was obviously skeptical.

Katy wrinkled her nose at Victoria. "I don't know, Maddie. I think it says something about his character -- that he would ask you to call him when *you* were ready."

Maddie nibbled on the peanuts in the bowl. "I don't know if I have feelings for him. I don't know if I believe his parting shot meant anything. I don't know if I want to get into a relationship, because of course, I'm afraid it will go sour and I'll end up right back where I was with Albert. Besides, I did call him and ask him to have sex. How many guys turn that down?"

Victoria's eyebrows shot up on her forehead, the fine arch of them buried beneath her wispy bangs. "You what?"

Maddie leaned back all confident and smiled smugly. "Yep, I called him up on the phone and said, 'Wanna have sex?' At least that's what I think I said. I can't really remember."

"Jeez, Maddie, you're a lot braver than I am, that's for sure." Maxine cupped her

chin and leaned forward on her arm. "Is this what I have to do to get a date? I was married to Juan for fifteen years. I don't think I ever asked him if he wanted to have sex, let alone a perfect stranger."

"He wasn't a complete stranger, Maxie. I met him a week ago at a convention." She wouldn't even try to explain that one to them. "And then he came to see a house I was showing."

Victoria bristled. "You only knew him a week? God, Maddie, that doesn't seem like very long before you boffed him."

"Oh, shut up, Vic! Don't be so judgmental. It has to be better than waiting six years to get some."

Victoria's eyes flashed at Maxie. "Well, forgive me if I don't just jump into the sack with any old guy I meet at some convention."

"You couldn't do that, Victoria. It would require being out of control. Getting all hot and sweaty, maybe breaking a nail or two!" Maxie said through clenched teeth.

Maddie leaned over the table and put her arms out between the two women. "Ladies, stop right now. I don't think they have *thinking corners* in a bar. Cut it out!"

Katy chuckled softly. "You're learning, Maddie. So, tell me, do you think you'll try to begin a relationship with this guy? Maybe get back on the old couple horse?"

Maddie sighed. "I don't know. I do know -- I think about him all the time and mostly I think about how good the sex was and how I'd really like to do it again. If I'm honest, I don't even care if he takes me to dinner or out at all. I just want to have --"

"-- SEX," they said simultaneously.

Yes, sex.

* * *

Should she or shouldn't she? The ever burning question rolled around her brain all day long. Cole was incredibly attractive there was no denying that. Her nipples would confirm it, even if she wouldn't. But she'd never entered a relationship that began solely on a physical level. There'd always been food and conversation involved.

There was something so completely forbidden about merely having sex for the

sake of just having it. She didn't have to cook anyone dinner for it, she didn't have to feel guilty if she didn't want to have it, she didn't have to worry that she might not be having it because there was some issue that needed to be worked out *before* she could have it.

Maddie liked that a lot. She finally got the meaning of no strings attached sex. But the traditional half of her thought it might be nice to be a part of a couple again.

Then the freaked out half of her was too afraid to try again only to find herself left with nothing but a hand vac.

Crap.

Cole seemed rather determined to begin a relationship. Of course he did, he'd never been mutilated in one before.

Would he be willing to just have sex? Had he shared this kind of physical reaction with anyone before? He claimed not. But that didn't make it true. Men said all kinds of things when they wanted to get laid. Even afterwards they said all kinds of things.

Just not the kinds of things Cole said.

Maddie really wanted to call him.

Hello, Cole, it's Maddie. Remember me? I'm the divorcée who calls you in a drunken stupor and asks you to have sex with her. You know, the one who's short on conversation, long on libido? Wanna have sex?

Maddie unbuttoned her shirt and slipped her shoes off, catching a glimpse of herself in the full-length mirror. Hell's bells, he'd seen her naked.

Ugh.

Oh, how could she have forgotten that part? In fact, she couldn't even remember when she'd become naked. That's what she got for having drunk sex. Funny, she could remember every part of the sex in vivid detail. Drunk or not.

Somehow, being naked didn't seem at all as intimidating as it once had. Not after all the things they'd done while naked.

A shower would clear this all up. Maybe she'd find an answer if she were clean.

And maybe she should just call Cole and get this over with.

Yep, that was the answer. She'd given it too much thought and now she'd decided calling him was the answer. He didn't say she couldn't call him even if she didn't want to admit that she'd never have sex with someone else. So that meant she could call him, right?

Grabbing the phone, she dug up his card and dialed his number.

"Hello." His voice, husky and serene, sent a chill up her spine, giving her pause. "Hello?"

Taking a deep breath, she whispered, "Cole?"

"Maddie," he answered calmly.

"You have ten minutes to get here," she said and then she hung up.

* * *

"I'm guessing this is a booty-call," Cole said, when she opened the door. His smile was playful as he closed the door behind him.

Maddie smiled back at him. "Yeah, is that a problem?"

"I don't have a problem with it at all. I can be used."

"Used? I'm not using you, Cole. I'm simply indulging in something we *both* enjoy."

Who are you? Since when do you wear the title vixen? Wanton, wicked woman.

"Then we have to make a deal."

Maddie dropped her robe at her feet and kissed his cheek. "Deal?"

Cole slid a hand between her thighs, caressing the smooth skin. Maddie instinctively arched into it. "Yeah, a deal. For every booty-call you make, you have to have a meal with me."

Okay, could we do like the Happy Meal Express, so we can get on with this? Maddie trailed kisses along his hard jaw, unzipping his pants. "So does that mean we have to eat first for *this* booty-call? Because I'm not sure I can wait and," she freed his cock, "I don't know if this can either."

Rubbing a finger along the lips of her cunt, he suckled her lower lip. "I can't wait

either, Maddie, not this time. But the next time you pick up the phone, think about the price you have to pay. If you want me, you'll share a meal with me first."

"Do I have to cook it?"

He cupped her breast and thrust his cock into her hand, chuckling. "I have to be the booty-call *and* pay for the meal? That doesn't seem fair."

Maddie groaned as the now familiar feel of his hands on her breast elicited a moan. "Unless you can cook, then you don't have to pay for anything."

As he licked her neck, she felt him smile against it and her heart lurched. "Soon enough it won't matter whether I can cook or not, Maddie, I can promise you that. Soon, you won't remember what it was like *not* to have a meal with me. I know that scares you right now, but it won't always."

Maddie's stomach knotted at his words. They made her heart feel something other than dead and she wasn't entirely sure that was what she wanted. But then he was kissing his way over her chest and skimming her breasts lightly and it didn't matter.

She sighed, cradling his head to her chest. "Okay, Cole, you have a deal."

Cole licked her nipple. "Good. Now we can have that booty-call."

"Take your clothes off, Cole," she said as she sat on her favorite chair, "and then come over here." She pointed to the spot between her legs. "I want you to stand right here."

Cole did as she asked, his cock thick, hard, and directly in front of her lips. "Are you in charge tonight, Maddie?"

She ran her hands over his thighs and decided, yes, she was in charge. A delicious ripple of anticipation shot to her cunt. "Yes, tonight I want to be in charge. Tonight I want you to hear the words I've heard. I want you to come like I did the other night."

He bracketed her cheeks, swiping his finger over her lips. Maddie licked it as she cupped his balls and reveled in his deep groan. Dipping her head, she licked the length of his shaft. "Is this what you want, Cole? Do you want me to lick your cock? Suck

you?"

He jerked forward when her tongue made contact and his hands clenched her hair. "Yesss... yes, Maddie. Take all of me in your mouth, lick me, suck me hard."

Maddie heard him gasp when she did as she was asked and encircled him with her lips, hard and swift, then drew back upward, scraping her teeth along the stiff flesh, letting her tongue glide over the silky surface. "Like that, Cole? Is that how you want me to suck your cock?"

Cole's back bowed and his hands clenched into tight fists in her hair. "Just like that, Maddie. Do it again, baby, don't stop." His voice was a deep rumble, thick with desire.

Maddie swooped down again, taking him as far as she could into her mouth, licking and sucking him with force, kneading his balls as they tightened in her hands. A surge of sexual energy rushed through her. She was loving the act of pleasuring him, savoring each stroke of her tongue, taking each plunge he made with a thrill of power. The salty taste of him beaded at the head of his cock and she lapped at it.

Moaning, he pulled away from her, leaving her feeling momentarily empty. Kneeling, he kissed her deeply. "I had to stop you. Your mouth is so incredible I would have come."

Maddie thought fleetingly that it had never appealed to her before, but somehow with Cole, it seemed right. Boldly she assured him, "I would have licked you while you came, Cole, while my mouth was on your cock and you were buried deep in my mouth."

He kissed her again. "Christ, Maddie, you're killing me... turn about is fair play, huh?"

She giggled, brushing the hair from his eyes. "I can't tell you how free I feel with you. I don't feel ashamed for wanting you, for telling you what *I* want."

His fingers slipped between her thighs and she opened them, sliding into his hand. "You should never be ashamed, Maddie. Not with me."

Wrapping her arms around his neck, she made her demands. "Then touch me,

Cole. I want your fingers in my cunt... your tongue." Thrusting her hips at him, she took his hand and held it over her pussy. "Now, Cole, it's all I've thought of for the past three days." Cole slipped his fingers into the wet folds, caressing her clit until it throbbed. Her breathing became rapid as he spread her wider and brought his other hand to her breast, tweaking the stiffened peak. "Oh, God... Jesus, Cole." He laughed against her mouth, then dipped his head to her breast and stroked her tight nipple with a rasp of his tongue.

Maddie arched into the hot cavern of his mouth, sliding down on the chair, pushing into his mouth and his hand all at once. Gripping the arms of the chair, she pressed into him, circling her hips, spreading her legs wider.

She needed him between her thighs. She couldn't wait to feel his hair brush her skin. Letting her hips fall back, she gripped his shoulders, bringing him back to her lips. "I want to be licked, Cole, like the other night at the house. Fuck me with your tongue like you did then."

Cole dragged her forward and let his cock caress the folds of her slick cunt. "Will you come for me, Maddie, like you did the other night?"

Whimpering at the memory, she moaned on a sigh, "Yes, yes, yes." Slipping away from him, she turned and leaned over the edge of the chair, lifting her ass high. Cole's hand immediately gripped her ass, his hot tongue skating between the cheeks as his other hand reached under her and fondled her clit.

Maddie bit the edge of the chair to keep from screaming as he licked his way down. He twisted, sliding under her, pulling her to him so she rested on his mouth. When his tongue made contact with her clit, she cried out. She let her cunt glide over his tongue, rocking back and forth, increasing the pace as heat burned in the pit of her belly. When Cole slid his finger into her, she cracked, letting the smooth, hot glide of his tongue bring her to orgasm. "Do you taste that, Cole?" she gasped at him, riding the wave of electricity. "I'm coming on your tongue..." were her last words before she shuddered with wave after wave of satisfaction.

Cole lapped at her gently as she shivered with the aftershock of climax and then

he was behind her, kissing his way back up the backs of her thighs. "Condoms," she gasped, "on the table." Reaching over her, he grabbed one and slid it on. Her hands reached behind her and Cole lay over her, pressing his cock to her ass. Maddie pulled his head down and twisted her neck around to capture his lips. He groaned into her mouth. "I can taste myself on your tongue, Cole."

He moaned again. "You are so sweet. I could lie between your legs and lick you forever."

Now, it was Maddie's turn to moan and command him once more to finish her off before she lost it. "Your cock is so hard, Cole. I want you to slide it into my cunt. Fuck me, hard..."

No other words were spoken as he did just that, plunging into her from behind, filling her with a completion she might try to fight in the days to come, but she couldn't resist right now. His balls slapped against her as he wedged his hands under her upper body and tugged her nipples, fingering the hardened nubs. She needed more and she wasn't afraid to tell him. "Harder, Cole, fuck me harder... I need to come... I want you to come too."

Cole increased the rhythm of his thrusts, driving into her until her body slammed against the chair and her cunt clenched him tightly. Maddie was vaguely surprised when her own hand found her clit. She fingered the swollen flesh, biting her lip at the sharp stab of heat it created. Her hand wandered further until she found the base of his shaft. Feeling the place where their bodies joined together made her head spin and her cunt ache.

She came with a sweetness she'd never experienced, hard and soft all at the same time. Cole came shortly thereafter, jerking inside of her, rocking with her until their breathing slowed.

Maddie was exhausted, from the thrill of conquering this new sexual awakening to the anticipation of sharing a meal with Cole.

Maybe he wasn't just a booty-call after all. Maybe if she let him into her life, this time she wouldn't regret it.

Cole pulled out of her and gathered her in his arms. The gesture was tender and Maddie let it happen, let the hard, secure feel of his body sweep her away. Scooping her up, he carried her to her bedroom, pulled back the covers and laid her down.

As he turned to go into the bathroom, she whispered into the dark room, "Will you come and lay with me for awhile, Cole?"

He flipped on the bathroom light, his silhouette a hard line against the doorframe. "Yes, if you want me to."

"Yeah, I want you to." She found that right now, it *was* what she really wanted, to feel secure, to fall asleep knowing she wasn't facing the world alone at this particular moment.

She heard the water run as she began to drift and then Cole's hard body pressed against hers. Maddie snuggled into him, wrapping his arm around her waist. She drifted off, content when he whispered, "G'night, Maddie."

* * *

Waking to the sound of the front door of her apartment closing, Maddie rolled over and stretched, feeling the spot beside her, still warm.

Cole.

His name brought a smile to her lips, a warm rush of something she shouldn't be feeling but was anyway. He'd made his intent clear and now she wanted to explore what her intent was. As she rolled over, a piece of paper caught her eye on her nightstand. She snatched it up and read the words.

I wish I could have stayed, but I had an early appointment. I loved sleeping with you, Maddie. You know my number. Cole.

Her heart did that warm fuzzy thing she vowed it never would again. Sighing she clutched the paper to her chest like some lovesick teenager.

The phone rang, bringing her upright. Grabbing it she yawned. "Hello."

"Maddie, honey, it's Corrine. How are ya, sugar lips?"

Maddie's hand went instantly to her mouth in guilt. Corrine couldn't know about the carnal happenings of Maddie Blake. Her face flushed. "I'm good, Corrine.

Actually, I'm really good. I've been meaning to call you and thank you for sending me to that meeting. I really like the group of women."

"Oh, honeybunch, that's why I'm calling."

A frown creased Maddie's forehead. "What's wrong? I thought you'd be happy that I was going."

"Oh, I am, but Katy called me. Apparently, one of the girls from your group was hurt last night. Katy said she didn't have your home number only your cell, and she wanted to be sure you got the message before tonight's meeting. She had to cancel it."

Hurt? Oh, God, no. "What happened? Who was hurt?" Maddie's stomach clenched into a tight knot. She knew almost before the words were out of Corrine's mouth.

"Maxie, I think she said. She gave me the name of the hospital if you needed to reach her."

Maddie was flying off the bed and stumbling around to find some clothes with the phone on her shoulder. "Did she say what happened?" Oh, God, please, please don't let it have been Juan.

Corrine sighed into the phone. "I'm sorry, sweetie, I don't know much. I think Katy said something about her being beaten pretty badly, that's all I know."

Fury rose, filling her head with thoughts of twisting the asshole's balls off. "Give me the name of the hospital, Corrine."

Maddie got the name and hung up quickly. Running into the bathroom she splashed water on her face and ran the toothbrush over her teeth.

Damn him, damn him, damn him! She cursed the bastard who'd abused Maxie, yet she loved Juan anyway.

Maxie, with the big brown eyes and the love of karaoke.

Juan would rot in hell for this.

Maddie would repeat that epithet over and over on her drive to the hospital.

* * *

Maddie hit the ground running and located Maxie's room in no time flat. Katy

and Victoria sat side-by-side, heads bent.

“Victoria, Katy, what the hell happened?”

“Oh, Maddie...” Tears filled Katy’s blue eyes. “It was Juan, he beat her. Jesus Christ, Maddie, he beat her so badly.” Katy shook her head and put her face in her hands.

“I told her not to see him, Maddie. I warned her, but she wouldn’t listen. He owed her alimony and she was determined to have it. She said that ‘*puta*’ of his wouldn’t use her alimony money. She’d see her dead first. Maxie met with Juan and now look. God damn him for hurting her.” Victoria held the arms of the chair and clamped her jaw shut.

Maddie walked over to Maxie’s room and looked in the square glass. Her heart sank.

Oh, Hell.

Maxie’s face was swollen beyond recognition. Even from the window Maddie could see the distortion. She was hooked up to a monitor and tubes ran in and out of her arms. A cast adorned her leg. Her thick dark hair was matted and clumped against the white of the pillow. A doctor, as dark as she was, held her wrist, taking her pulse.

In that moment, Maddie felt rage swell in her, rising up in her throat, choking her enough to make her gasp.

“Fucking puke, bastard,” she whispered.

“What do the doctors say?” Maddie asked the question almost absently, her eyes glued to Maxie and the rough rise and fall of her chest.

Katy’s words were choked. “That she’ll survive, but she’ll need a lot of physical therapy. Her ribs are broken and her leg. She’s got all sorts of stuff wrong with her, things I can’t even pronounce.”

Tears ran down Maddie’s face for her new friend. “What about Juan? He’ll go to jail, won’t he?”

“That bastard can’t be found. The police are looking for him, but no luck yet,” Victoria said.

Maddie went to sit with them. They all held hands and stared silently off into the four corners of the room, lost in their thoughts.

Maddie's thoughts were of how lucky she was. Yeah, she was divorced, but it was okay now. She knew now it was okay to be alone. It fit more comfortably than it ever had. Albert hadn't beat her. He was just an asshole who wanted a divorce. An asshole who ended up wishing he didn't have one now.

Maddie also knew she didn't have to be alone if she chose not to.

Later in the evening, she went to the chapel. Before she went in to say a prayer for Maxie, she flipped open her cell phone and dialed it.

"Hello."

Maddie's heart skipped a beat. "Cole?"

"Are you hungry, Maddie?"

She smiled into the phone. "Yes, Cole, yes I am."

"Do you like Happy Meals?"

Maddie laughed. "Especially the chicken nugget ones. They're my fav."

"Chicken nuggets it is."

"And a shake?"

"Shakes are expensive, it'll cost ya."

She laughed again. "I think I can afford to pay the price."

"Be ready in a half an hour and it's a deal."

Her heart swelled. "Half an hour," she agreed.

"Oh, and Maddie?"

"What?"

"Don't wear any panties."

"Deal," she whispered and hung up the phone.

Epilogue

Maxine Rodriguez stirred, moaning at the incessant pounding in her head. She heard the beep of something in the far off distance and couldn't quite place the familiar, yet disturbing sound.

A hand held hers. Fingers rubbed slow circles in her palm. Comforting, easing the fear she knew was there, but couldn't quite indulge in due to the pounding in her head.

It was dark and cool where she was, drifting in and out of the pain.

"Maxie, listen to me." A voice, deep and rumbling curled its way to her ear.

"He'll pay, Maxie. No one hurts what's mine. No one." The voice rasped with a mixture of soothing assurances and controlled fury.

"You are *mine*, Maxine. You'll know that soon enough. For now, you need to rest, but I promise you, you need never feel fear again. I will *always* protect you."

Maxie drifted again, pulling away from the low tones of the voice. Oddly comforted, she let the fleeting fingers of fear subside and allowed herself to succumb to the black void that tugged her downward.

A feather light kiss from lips that were firm and soft on the palm of her hand was the last thing she remembered.

A tall, dark shadow rose from beside Maxie's bed and flung open the windows of the hospital room. The cool spring breeze rushed in, bringing with it the smell of revenge, sweet and rich. Swooping into the star filled night, the shadow disappeared, leaving behind it a wisp of black smoke as the windows slowly closed behind it...

The End

To be continued

Coming soon: The Ex-Files 2: Maxie's Man

Maxine Rodriguez, critically injured after a severe beating from her ex-husband, must find a way to heal her body and mind. Especially her mind... which she's certain she's losing when night after night she experiences sinfully, delicious sex with a man she's positive she's created in her imagination.

Dakota Cassidy

Dakota Cassidy found writing quite by accident and it's been madness ever since. Who knew writing the grocery list would turn into this?

Dakota loves anything funny and nothing pleases her more than to hear she's made someone laugh. She loves to write in many genres with a contemporary flair.

Dakota lives with her two handsome sons, a dog, and a cat. She'd love to hear from you. She always answers her e-mail! dakota@dakotacassidy.com