

**Changeling Press Presents
Hot Toddy #11
The Ex-Files: Maddie Got Run Over by a Reindeer
Dakota Cassidy**

All rights reserved.

Copyright ©2004 by Dakota Cassidy

No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file sharing, and email, without prior written permission from Changeling Press LLC.

ISBN 1-59596-107-0

Formats Available:

HTML, Adobe PDF,

MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:

Changeling Press LLC

PO Box 1561

Shepherdstown, WV 25443-1561

www.ChangelingPress.com

Editor: *Sheri Ross Carucci*

Cover Artist: *Bryan Keller*



This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

Chapter One

Well for fuck's sake.

"Cole..." Maddie Blake stumbled over her words as she tried to tell the man that she loved more than anything she couldn't marry him.

Cole raised an eyebrow. "Is it the ring? I mean look at the size of it, Mad. It's like the Rock of Gibraltar," he tried to joke, but failed miserably as his shoulders sagged and he toyed with the sparkling diamond. It was so beautiful.

"I love you -- you know that, Cole. I just -- well, I just -- am --"

"-- Chicken shit. You know, Maddie, we've been together close to six months. If I haven't proven to you that I'm your man, then there's nothing left to say, is there?"

Maddie fought back tears. "Can't we talk about this later? I mean it's Christmas Eve, Cole. The girls will be here soon."

"Maxie, Katy and Victoria all want you to marry me, Maddie."

Maddie couldn't deny that. Her friends from Divorcée's Anonymous loved Cole almost as much as she did.

Her Ex-Files friends. That's what Maddie jokingly called the group of friends who'd begun as a support group for divorce and now were all the best of friends.

Cole's face was solemn. "Maddie, I love you. Your divorce was final months ago. I'm not Albert and I never will be."

Cole referred to her ex-husband *Albert, The Asshole*. No, he wasn't Albert, but he could be in ten years when he tired of her and she wasn't ready to take a chance he would. Maddie couldn't fight the tears that slid unwillingly down her cheeks. "I c-can't," she sobbed. Cole grabbed her hand, but she pulled it away and fumbled toward her apartment door, flinging it open as Cole called after her.

She just couldn't commit to him. Not now. Not so soon. She'd only just begun to

heal and *trust*... Why couldn't they just go on living together? But then why couldn't they do that married?

Panic set in as Maddie flew down the stairs in the hall and out into the snowy night. Her heart raced as the cold snow pegged her cheeks, but she ran anyway. From the demon that was once her marriage to Albert and the fear that held her captive to remaining uncommitted.

* * *

OMIGOD, OMIGOD, OMIGOD!

He'd hit a freakin' human! Oh, sleigh bells and mistletoe, he was in deep reindeer shit now. What the hell was he going to do? Santa would have his hide if he found out he'd taken the team of reindeer out for a joyride.

A joyride in America no less. Darwin examined the sleigh carefully, running his hands over the shiny red surface. Oh, Christmas tree, was he in for it if he'd hurt the damn sleigh.

Darwin peered at the massive lump of human lying on the deserted sidewalk. Man, humans were *way* tall.

Well, the choice was obvious. He'd just take her to the Pole. He couldn't leave her here in the snow. She'd freeze to death for sure, then his elf goose would be cooked. It wasn't like he could call 911.

"Hello, I'm Darwin, and I'm an elf. You know, one of those little people with the pointy ears who work for Santa, making toys all year long. Seems I've run down some poor lady with Santa's sleigh. Could you send an ambulance?" They'd have a field day with him. He could take her home but she had no identification on her. Yup, she was coming to the Pole like it or not. Al would figure out who she was.

Darwin tugged at the slender blonde's body, pulling her toward the infamous sleigh. Rudolph's nose glowed brightly in the foggy mist.

Fat lot a good that did him now.

"And where the hell in all of toy land was that nose when I needed it, Rudolph? You can't see the forest for the trees out here and now you turn that thing on?"

Rudolph cocked his head to the left as Darwin deposited the pretty blonde into the sleigh, covering her with a warm blanket. Darwin ran an affectionate hand over Rudolph's head before he jumped into the driver's seat. "It's okay, Rudy. It's my own fault. I'll sneak her in the back door and bring her to Aloysius. He'll know what to do. He'd better or I'm in for a real elf whoopin'."

Darwin settled himself in for the long ride back to the North Pole. Glancing at his watch, he realized he might just make it back for cookies and milk. That was his favorite time of day.

With one last look over his shoulder at the human, he called out, "On Dasher, on Dancer, on Prancer and... and..." Darwin scratched his head in confusion. He could never remember roll call. All those names, they were stupid. "Yada, yada, yada. Jeez, you guys know what I mean. Bust a move before I get caught red-handed with this outdated piece of machinery, would ya?"

As the sleigh lifted off into the black of night, Darwin held the reins tightly and said a quick prayer that his elf butt wouldn't be knee deep in doll making by this time tomorrow.

* * *

Aloysius Elf sat by his window enjoying the quiet of the tranquil evening alone in his apartment. It was going to be cold tonight. He'd better check to be sure all the elves had blankets. Raucous music cut into his peaceful retreat, making him cringe with distaste. Jumping up from his chair, he flung open the door and yelled down the long corridor decorated with silver garland and snowflakes. "Guys, I swear if I hear that chipmunk song again, I'm gonna hurt somebody!" Nobody wanted a hula-hoop for Christmas anymore, especially from a chipmunk that had a name like Alvin.

Doors opened and shut as elves peeked out from behind their apartment doors. Looks of concern marred their wee little elf faces.

"Sorry, Al, we'll turn it down," an elf yelled from apartment Twelve-B.

Al opened up the fridge and looked inside with disgust. Eggnog, he was sick and tired of flippin' eggnog. Especially the candy cane flavored eggnog. Couldn't a guy get

a beer around here? He gripped the handle of the appliance, trying to get a hold on his anger.

Al knew he was behaving like a first class jerk but the closer Christmas got, the crankier he became. He couldn't quite put his finger on it. He'd even sought therapy over it, did the couch thing with the doc for an entire month to no avail. He just wasn't feeling this spirit everyone talked about or anything else for that matter. Not a damn warm fuzzy to be found.

The elves didn't make it any easier on him. In their excitement, they became a rambunctious bunch of mischief-makers as Christmas drew near. It was getting harder and harder to keep track of all of them with all of this holiday cheer. They sort of got off on this kind of thing and now, he felt like a world-class chump for yelling at them over it.

Al heaved a sigh of regret. The Doc said maybe it was time to find an elf-mate, but no one interested him in all of the North Pole. Well, not "no one" exactly, there had been that brief fling with Eldora Elf, but she'd broken up with him. She was very happy now... with someone of her *stature*. She'd handed him some lame excuse about being friends. He knew *why* she didn't want to forge a relationship with him. It was because he was so tall... and big. It could be a bit awkward to say the least.

Okay, so he was a *big* elf. A six foot three *big* elf... big deal.

No one knew why and no one seemed to care unless it came down to doing the naughty... then all the elf chicks scattered like buckshot in reindeer hunting season. He frightened them. He wasn't abnormally well endowed for his size but to someone who was three feet tall he figured the old tallywhacker might be kinda freaky.

Maybe he should just order a pizza and stay in tonight. His foul mood would only worsen and he would end up upsetting the little buggers. Morale would plummet and that wasn't good especially the day before Christmas.

He was in the middle of sifting through his takeout menus, when an urgent thump on his door made him drop the phone. Shoot, if that little pain in the ass Elroy had gotten into the automatic wrapping machine again, he was going to kick his little

butt from here to Candy Cane Woods.

"What?" he barked, flinging open the door.

A very edgy Darwin jumped, wincing at the scowl on Al's face. "Sorry, boss. Didn't mean to disturb you but... um... I..."

Al leaned against the doorframe and folded his arms over his chest, eyeing Darwin suspiciously. He smelled trouble. "Spit it out, Darwin, *NOW*."

"IranoverahumanwithSanta'ssleighandIwasafraildIkilledhersolbroughtherheresh e'satthePole." He flung the words out quickly at Al, like snowballs, while he hopped nervously from foot to foot.

Huh? Human?

Al rested a reassuring hand on Darwin's shoulder. "Slow down, Darwin, relax would ya? It can't be that bad. I promise not to get mad. Now, take a deep breath and speak *slowly*."

"Um, well, boss, it's like this. See, I was kinda bored today and seeing as Ralph had doll-making duty and I had some free time, well... well, I figured I'd just slip off for some fun, ya know?" Al nodded his head, but a frown began to form on his brow as Darwin continued. "Okay, so I grabbed Santa's sleigh --"

Al felt his temperature soar off the scale. "*You grabbed what?*" he roared.

Darwin backed away, cringing. "You said you wouldn't get mad..." he whined.

Al picked Darwin up by the back of his teeny, tiny green and red elf suit and carried him inside, plunking him down on the kitchen chair. "Hookay, Darwin, gimme the skinny. *ALL* of it or you're going to be on doll-making duty 'til Christmas past catches up with you."

Darwin's shoulders slumped. "I know I shouldn't have done it, but I was like soooo bored. So I borrowed the sleigh."

"But it's back now, right?"

Darwin bit his lip and gave Al a sheepish grin. "Well, yeah... it's back right where it belongs. Not a scratch on it, boss. I swear." Darwin held up his right hand in a solemn oath of promise.

Al pulled out a chair and sat down next to Darwin. "So if it's back where it belongs and there's not a scratch on it, what's the problem, little man?"

Darwin shifted in his chair, letting his legs swing freely. The small bells at the end of his pointed shoes jingled. "Well, it's not really a problem as far as problems go. It's just that I sort of had an accident."

Al was losing his patience rapidly. "Get to the point, short stuff," he growled.

Darwin took a fresh gulp of air. "I ran over some broad with the sleigh. She's in it now at the launching pad... unconscious."

Al shot out of his chair and began to pace his small kitchen. "How many times do I have to tell you not to take the sleigh, Darwin? And you didn't *borrow* it, you *stole* it," he said through clenched teeth. Santa would have his ass in a sling now. "Get your butt in gear, buddy, you've got some serious splainin' to do."

Darwin slid off the chair, his head hanging low while he scuffed his little feet deep into the carpet. "I'm sorry, Al. I swear on my cookies and milk for the next year, I won't *ever* do something like this again if you don't tell Santa."

Al grabbed his coat off the hook with haste as he shouted at Darwin in exasperation. "Well how am I going to explain this 'broad,' as you call her, to Santa, Darwin? Humans don't just drop out of the sky here at the North Pole."

Darwin shrugged his shoulders. "I dunno. I thought we could bring her back here, patch her up, send her home and never say jack to Santa."

"Santa eventually finds out about everything and you know it, pal. Christmas is almost tomorrow by human time. In our time that's two days. We can't take the team out now. They need to rest, Darwin. You know the sleigh is the only way in or outta here. You also know it's dangerous for humans here. They can't survive the cold temperatures."

"Maybe we could just hide her and tell her to jump when Santa gets to where she comes from?" Darwin said hopefully. His plan was so feeble it almost made Al laugh.

Almost.

Al tugged Darwin along behind him out the door and down the hall. "Show me

this 'broad,' Darwin. And while you're at it, on our way back, I think some dolls with your name on them are waiting to have their hair braided."

Chapter Two

Holy human... The broad was... well she was... Madison Blake was who she was. He'd seen Maddie in his "human looking glass" quite by mistake, but since then he'd been glued to the looking glass whenever he could find the time and Santa wasn't watching.

Al couldn't believe she was here in the *flesh*.

He couldn't believe there was another soul on earth who was close to his own height. Except maybe Santa and he didn't count because he was, well he just *was*. Madison and her group of friends represented people of Al's stature. He'd questioned that because sometimes in the looking glass things seemed larger than they appeared. But, here she was, all tall-like.

Absently he remembered something about Cole and a nice jewelry store clerk. Al sighed. He'd bet his last candy cane that Cole had proposed and Maddie had freaked out.

"See, boss?" Darwin said, interrupting his replay of the looking glass. "She's okay, just knocked out."

"Darwin," Al hissed. "This is *not* okay. You ran her over with the *sleigh*, you knucklehead!" Al leaned in closer to check her pulse as she stirred. Oh silver bells, she was going to wake up! Al scooped her up and hoisted her over his shoulder. Her warm, slender body pressed against his shoulder like dead weight.

"You," he pointed at Darwin and whispered fiercely, "cover me, cause if I get caught with this chick, we are a la mode, buddy."

"Okay, boss, I got your back." Darwin peeked around the corner of the launch pad door and waved Al through frantically.

Al made a run for it, over Peppermint Ridge, across Gingerbread Lane, through

the freshly fallen snow and right back to the elf complex, with Maddie slapping against his back. Darwin ran ahead of him checking to see if the coast was clear. He scurried down the now quiet hallway and popped Al's apartment door open. Al made a break for it and flew in right behind him.

He let Maddie slide down the front of his chest gently, checking to see if she was still breathing. Her head flopped to the side then bobbed forward. She hung against him limply as she snored softly.

"What did you slip her, Darwin? She's out cold. Did you use the insomnia buster? You know that's not tested yet. It's meant for elves, Darwin, to help them with the stress in preparing for the holiday, *NOT* for humans."

"I only sprinkled a little over her, just enough to keep her quiet on the trip here, so she wouldn't freak out if she woke up," Darwin called over his shoulder as he headed to Al's bed to pull back the thick blankets.

Al laid her gently on the bed, unbuttoning her coat so she would be more comfortable.

"She's pretty, huh, Al?" Darwin commented.

"Pretty out of it I'd say, thanks to you, shrimp."

Darwin smiled sheepishly. "Hey! Isn't she that lady you're always spying on? She has that friend..." Darwin snapped his fingers. "Ya know, the one who's always like picking lint up that isn't really there or something?"

"Yes, Darwin, this is Maddie Blake and her friend is Victoria Rawlings."

Darwin rocked back on his heels. "Riiight. The lady who doesn't want to get married. You know, Al. You better quit sneaking peeks at the 'looking glass' or Santa's going to be really upset. Cuz I could tell Santa ya know..." he said on a high-pitched giggle.

Al grabbed Darwin by the scruff of his neck and sent him in the direction of the door. "Shhh, Darwin. Shut your big yap! Do you wanna get caught? Now get out of here and go finish that last batch of dolls."

"But, Allllllll, I don't wanna braid doll hair."

"It's either that, or I tell Santa what you've been up to."

Darwin slunk toward the door with a whimper of protest.

"And make sure they're all finished by tomorrow, Darwin. You owe me *big* for this," Al called after him.

Al rubbed his hands together briskly. He'd better throw another log on the fire, he thought as he took one last glance at Maddie lying on his bed.

Madison Blake. Divorced and commitment shy. Personally, Al thought humans were just stupid sometimes. This chick didn't know a good thing when she saw it. That was for sure. He'd watched her through Santa's looking glass more than once, like a soap opera he couldn't turn off, refusing to marry that guy Cole. The guy was obviously head over heels for her. Al shook his head as he gazed at the sleeping Maddie. How could she not believe the guy didn't want to get married and *stay* married? Especially the way he was always chasing after her lookin' to get some...

Al blushed. The looking glass faded to black come hanky-panky time, but Al knew lust when he saw it and Cole didn't just lust for Maddie. He loved her and if Santa knew he'd been messing with the looking glass, Al would be in deep shit.

But jeez, what else did a girl need?

Cut it out, Al. Or it'll be your chestnuts roasting on an open fire.

Al sighed. It was time to make Maddie the human see how damn lucky she was.

* * *

Maddie groaned, fighting to clear the distorted image before her. Where the hell was she? Her head was swimming and her thoughts were scattered like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Her vision was whacked too, cause that sure as hell couldn't be an elf she saw standing at the foot of her bed. A really big elf. What the...?

"Who are you?" She struggled to form the words, concentrating on making complete sentences. Maddie scrunched her eyes shut tightly and then opened them again, trying to focus.

Cole's. She must be at Cole's and he'd dressed up as an elf to amuse her and the

girls before he proposed.

Proposed... the word made her stomach clench.

Maddie tried to focus. Cute, very cute pointy ears, at least they looked pointy from her blurry vantage point. She wasn't up to playing reindeer games today. Her head hurt.

"Cole," she whispered weakly. "I'm sorry. I just don't know why we can't..." Maddie's words tapered off as Cole tucked her into their bed and whispered, "You rest now, Maddie. Dream sweet dreams of Cole and tomorrow we'll talk."

Maddie cocked her head at the sound of Cole's voice, which didn't really sound like him, but what the hell. At least he didn't sound angry at her for turning his proposal down. Maddie let the heavy weight of sleep drag her downward as strong hands tucked a thick comforter around her.

Images of Cole flashed in her mind's eye. Warm, soothing, sexy...

* * *

"I love you, Maddie..."

Cole's voice... it sent shivers zinging up her spine. Her nipples zinged in tune with her spine. His warm breath grazed her ear as he moved her hair aside and pressed his lips to her neck.

Oh, oh my. Maddie arched into his lips, savoring the slight pressure.

"I was thinking about you today." His silky voice washed over her like warm bathwater. Maddie found herself arching upward toward the gentle vibration Cole's lips made against her skin.

"Hmmm," Maddie moaned. "And what were you thinking?"

"I was thinking that I couldn't wait to do this." Cole's heated hand pushed her blouse aside and ran a tentative finger over her collarbone, dragging it across the lacy top of her bra. The beaded point strained against the filmy material, scraping it.

Maddie pressed the flat of her hands against the bed, pushing upward toward his finger. "Well, then... what are you waiting for, stud?"

Cole tugged her bra upward and wrapped his hot lips around her tight nipple. He swiped his tongue over it, latching on and suckling the tight bud.

Maddie's hands reached wildly for the first thing they came in contact with. She tunneled her fingers through his hair, thick and silky. Groaning, she pushed her flesh toward his greedy mouth and thrust her hips toward his muscled thigh, now between her legs. Cole chuckled against her breast, licking a path to the hollow of her neck and nipping at the tender flesh.

When Cole's mouth found hers, she whimpered against it, luxuriating in his tongue's masterful strokes. Familiar, yet exciting no matter how often it happened. His firm lips crushed hers as his hand found the edge of her skirt and tugged it upward, roaming the edges of her panties.

Maddie inhaled sharply when Cole pushed his way under the scrap of panty and through her smooth pussy, sliding into the needy folds of her flesh.

His fingers were delicious as he spread the lips of her pussy and thumbed her swollen clit. Her arms wound around his broad back, kneading the firm muscles as he explored her.

Maddie tore her mouth from his and gasped for air when he inserted a finger in her slick passage. Her muscles contracted clenching the digit tightly within her, riding it for all she was worth. His lips wove a path of moisture and heat over her breasts, laving her tender nipples before he swept over her belly.

Maddie's legs spread, ready and willing for the invasion of his tongue. Cole laid it flat against her open flesh, unmoving as she squirmed beneath him. She drove her hips at his mouth silently begging him to satisfy the burning need that settled in the pit of her belly. When he swiped her clit, she bucked wildly, wrapping her legs around his shoulders to pull him as close as possible. His hair brushed her thighs while his tongue danced over her pussy, lapping at her with firm strokes. She rolled toward his mouth when his hands slipped under her massaging her ass, holding her firmly in place beneath his lips.

A scream rose and lodged in her throat when she came, a violent shudder of needy flesh and wave after wave of heat.

"Cole!" Maddie reached blindly for him as she screamed his name. She felt his solid length hover over hers and she tugged him down, to lie on top of her. The hard press of his cock was urgent and hot at the apex of her thighs. Maddie reached between them to encourage his entry.

Cole moaned sharply when her nail grazed the outline of the bulge. He was brilliantly hard and marvelously long. His chest was rippled with muscle and broad beneath the material of his shirt. She slid her hand inside his pants, surrounding his thick shaft with her fingers, caressing the smooth length. He thrust forward into the soft tunnel she made, circling his hips and burying his face in her neck. Maddie pushed his trousers off and wrapped her legs around his waist, encouraging him to finish what he'd started. She felt his hips lift, then settle between her thighs again as he sunk balls deep into her tight depths.

Cole hissed a 'yes' in her ear. Her heart stopped after the first slippery thrust as he filled her, stretching her with his hot, silken cock. She twisted beneath him as he held himself above her and began to stroke. Their hips crashed together, rocking and grinding in a frantic drive for release. Maddie felt the walls of her pussy clench around him, milking his length with fierce desperation. She clung to him tightly ready to ride the impending orgasm that was threatening to steal the breath from her lungs.

A sharp tug of heat sent her tumbling over the edge, clawing at his back as she came with the force of a tidal wave. His muscles flexed as he drove into her wet depths one last time and came with a hoarse groan in her ear.

Cole's chest rose and fell in rapid succession against her own as he gently brushed the hair from her face. Maddie smiled up at him and kissed the lips of the man who told her he loved her every day. She felt secure... safe... loved.

* * *

From the chair beside the bed, Al watched Maddie sleep, calling Cole's name. His hands folded under his chin as he pondered just what a total fool this woman was. She stirred slowly, stretching with catlike grace, opening her eyes in increments. When she focused Al knew he was in for it.

"Who -- the -- fuck -- are -- you?"

Ah, the predictable disbelief, accompanied by the potty mouth syndrome. Al sighed and began what he knew would be a long wordy match of persuasiveness with the smart-mouthed Madison Blake. "Aloysius, you can call me Al."

Maddie sat up quickly and grabbed for the edge of the bed. "I'm so dizzy..."

That's because you were whacked by Santa's sleigh and eight tiny reindeer. That might not be the answer she'd get a warm fuzzy from, he reminded himself. Al jumped up to help Maddie, gripping her shoulders lightly to steady her.

She looked up at him, her blue eyes widening as her focus seemed to adjust. "I want to know who the hell you are and I want to know *now!*"

Now came the part where she got demanding. Al sighed and nudged her over, sitting beside her on the bed. "I can do that. Just relax. I bet you want to know why I'm wearing green tights and pointy slippers."

Maddie's eyes took in Al's elf suit in a sweeping gaze of bewildered shock. "Because you're Santa's little helper," she said snidely, backing away from him and squishing her body against the headboard of the bed.

"Yep. You got it in a nutshell."

Maddie's eyes widened in terror. "You're a serial killer, aren't you? Like some crazed loon who gets his jollies off by whacking people around the holidays because he didn't get a G.I. Joe doll or something, right?"

There was the Maddie Al knew from the looking glass. "I always thought G.I. Joe was overrated myself. I liked Stretch Armstrong, personally."

Maddie gasped.

"Oh, get a grip. I was kidding," Al assured her. "Look, I have to explain a couple of things and then I'm ditching you back where you came from."

Maddie cocked her head as Al watched her mental wheels peel out, and then she blew her freakin' cork.

"Ditch," she screeched with obvious alarm. Maddie moved back farther on the bed, scooting as far away from him as she could. "Listen, you oversized, green elf wannabe, I don't know if you think this is funny but I'm not laughing. You abducted me. You kidnapper!" she hollered.

"Well, I guess you ought to be thankful, huh? I mean, you ran away from Cole so where else did you have to go on Christmas Eve, but to a crazed serial killer's house?"

Chapter Three

Hookay, how did he know about Cole?

All of a sudden, Maddie relaxed and felt relief flood her ice cold veins. This was a joke. The girls and Cole were messin' with her head. "I get it."

"Do you?" Al asked.

Maddie snorted. "Yeah, I do. The girls hired you, didn't they?"

"You mean Maxie, Katie and that snob Victoria?"

If he knew Victoria was a snob, then he had to be some kind of joke the girls were playing. "Yep, that's who I mean."

"Trust me, they didn't hire me. But, you did have a little accident..."

"Accident?"

"Well, not one you can claim on your insurance, but yes, an accident."

Oh, good. That explained everything. She'd had an accident and the nice man in the weird elf costume was *not* the insurance adjuster. Perfect. "Okay, look, elf-boy. You go ahead and tell me your story while I just dial 911 or something."

Al laughed, it was hearty and mocking all at the same time. "No, you look, Madison Blake. You need a good dose of *shut up*. So take some while I tell you what *the deal* is. You could also use a head examination because you're stupid if you think that Cole doesn't love you enough to commit to *death do you part*."

"So he got you to put on this silly costume to convince me of that?"

"Maddie, Maddie, Maddie." He put a finger to his lips. "Shhh. Now here's the gig. After replaying the looking glass --"

"The *what*?"

Al held up his hand. "Remember the quiet thing?"

Maddie nodded, probably in shock, but silenced for the moment.

"Good, do it. I replayed the *looking glass* and it seems Cole proposed marriage last night and you freaked out. Typical, Maddie, *very* typical. Anyway, you flew off in a hissy fit and got yourself run over by Santa's sleigh."

Well, naturally. How logical to be run over by Santa's sleigh on Christmas Eve by a serial killer. Time to get the fuck outta Candyland... "Well, of course I did, *Al*. It's the only explanation for -- for -- *you*."

Al smiled knowingly. "Exactly. Anyway, here you are and we've got some stuff to take care of before you go back and screw your life up some more."

Where was *here*?

"Where are we?" Maddie heard the squeak in her tone and chose to ignore it.

His grin was sheepish, might even be cute if he wasn't a fruitcake with a capital 'F'. "The North Pole."

Oh, yes indeed. He was a flake. "Funny, very funny, elf man, now tell me where I am and while you're at it, grab me a taxi."

He shifted closer to her again. Maddie cringed. "No, you don't understand, I can't grab you *anything*. You really are at the North Pole. Ya know, where Santa lives with his elves."

She groaned loudly. Why did she always find the whack jobs? Wasn't meeting Cole at a fur-con enough in this lifetime? She'd met him at what she thought was a costume party. She ended up sadly mistaken, but left with a boyfriend... "Yeah, I know where you think we are. Where all the toys are made, right? The North Pole... All right then, enough of the games. Call me some form of transportation and take me home. Maybe Santa's sleigh if it's available so close to Christmas?" she halfheartedly joked.

He held out his hand to her. "Take my hand, Maddie."

Maddie shook her head no.

"Take my hand, Maddie, *now*, please," Al insisted through clenched teeth.

Maddie, play nice with the loon. He could be dangerous.

She hesitated but a moment then placed her hand in his. His big fingers wrapped around hers and drew her toward the window on the far side of the room.

"Look outside and tell me what you see."

She peeked out the window, keeping half an eye on him, fully prepared to appease the nice nut job. Oh! Well, would ya look at that? "I see a lot of little people in green and red suits running all over the place. Ooh, they have pointy ears too. Wow, there's a lot of snow here. Are we in the country? Oh, and look, reindeer! Aren't they pretty? What's that over there? It's the biggest pair of candy canes I've ever seen." Maddie squinted, reading the sign attached to the biggest pair of candy canes she'd ever seen. "Welcome to the North Pole," she read aloud.

Lovely. Fab-u-lous.

Welcome to the North Pole. Welcome to... the... the *NORTH FREAKIN' POLE?*

As Al rambled on about someone named Darwin and being run over by Santa's sleigh Maddie's head spun. She snatched her hand from him and found the comfort of the bed, only to jump off it as though it had bitten her.

"Look, Al. This is just a bit much for a simple girl like me. I mean, you can't really expect me to believe I'm at the North Pole." However, if she weren't, someone had gone to a lot of trouble to make her believe she was. Maddie stopped for a moment to catch her breath and shot him a confused look. "Why are you so big. Aren't you *too big* to be an elf?"

Al cast her a sidelong look. "No one knows why I'm this big, I just am. I'm sorry about the mix-up. Darwin should have never taken Santa's sleigh. He'll be punished for what he's done. I can promise you that."

"Who's Darwin again?"

Al pointed out the window. "That's him, right there. The little guy next to the pond of floating gummy drops."

Maddie's heart clenched, he was so cute. "Don't punish him, Al, please. He's just mischievous, I'm sure."

Al came to stand behind her. "Yeah, he's cute. Cute and a pain in the ass. So, do you believe me?"

"Of course I don't, you nut! You didn't think some cute little people in costumes

and floating gummy drops --" Maddie stopped. *Floating gummy drops, Madd's. The world has gone mad and taken you with it.*

Al shook his head, "Yep. You're at the North Pole at Santa's pad."

Jesus Christ in a mini-skirt. Maddie's heart raced. What other explanation could there be? Yes, it was improbable, but what in her life for the past six months had clearly added up anyway? She didn't feel a lick of fear of this -- this elf on steroids.

OMIGOD! She was in the North Pole. And so? What next?

"You want to know what's next, right?"

Wait a minute. Why couldn't she just stay here? It beat going back and facing Cole and if Santa was real, then he was a nice guy. Surely he'd offer her safe harbor? She could make toys -- or cookies! Yes, cookies! Did they have the kind you whacked out of a tube and sliced up here at the North Pole?

"No, Maddie, you can't make cookies. You have to go home and face Cole. Santa would encourage it."

Fine, just fine.

"But before you do," Al said, "I'm going to show you a little something and you'd better keep that wise cracking mouth of yours shut, got it?"

"Okay, but hey, could you ask Santa why waaay back in nineteen-seventy he didn't cough up the Partridge family lunch box? I mean, of all the things I got that year it still didn't make up --"

"Maddie?"

"What?"

"Go to your thinking spot."

Maddie sighed and zipped her lip. She wasn't even safe from therapy at the friggin' North Pole. Taking Al's hand and grabbing her coat on the way she followed behind a quick moving Al the elf.

Chapter Four

Al held up the big glass ball to show Maddie. "See? This is the looking glass."

They'd snuck over Cinnamon Stick Creek and whizzed past Lollipop Lane to end up here. In the *big guy's* house.

Maddie's lips were blue and she was shaking from the cold. Maddie could only nod her head, still not completely convinced, but wavering after entering Santa's house. It was like a kid's dream come true. Maddie felt tears sting her eyes. Nostalgia for a simpler time, no doubt. A time when big, pushy hot guys named Cole weren't pressuring you to marry them.

"Now," Al said. "Be very quiet and come take a look. You can see what I see every day and understand why maybe you've gone just a little overboard with your desire to remain unhitched."

Rolling her eyes, Maddie tiptoed over to Al and took the looking glass. Peering into it she saw... nothing. Maddie shook it.

"Be careful!" Al hissed. "Just give it a second, would you? Silver bells! You are the most impatient woman I know!"

Maddie stuck her tongue out at him and kept watching. A flash of color swirled in the dome shape and then she saw Maxie. As the picture cleared and panned out, Maddie saw Katy, Victoria and Cole too. Cole sat on his favorite chair, a chair where much boinking occurred and held the box that had the ring he'd offered her last night. Maddie's heart clenched. He looked so lost...

"Oh, wait," Al whispered, "lemme turn up the sound." Al fidgeted with the base of the globe and Maddie smiled at the sound of Katy's calm, soothing voice.

"Okay, so Maddie took off because Cole proposed? Her fear of marriage has gone around the bend. Do we have any idea where she might be?"

Maddie snickered. If they only knew.

"Darling," Victoria drawled, "if we knew, would we be here right now, playing this stupid game of shit or get off the marriage pot?"

"Shut up, Victoria!" Maxie swatted at Victoria's shoulder. "Maddie is afraid, but what she can't seem to realize is that Cole is nothing like Albert was. And look at him, would you? He's pitiful."

All eyes turned to Cole who sat quietly in the corner, looking out the window. Maddie's throat grew tight.

"You know what Maddie's problem is?" Katy asked.

"Do tell, darling. If you have an answer I'd love to hear it because really, I don't know about you? But I can't wait to dig into these weenies in a blanket." Victoria held up a now limp hot dog.

"Shut up, Victoria!" both Katy and Maxie yelled in unison. "Listen," Katy said. "Maddie is afraid to marry Cole because if she does, she'll be his *wife* not his girlfriend."

Victoria slapped her forehead with her perfectly manicured hand. "Brilliant! You know, Katy, you just astound me with your genius. Please, keep going. I can't wait to hear more of the *obvious*."

"Victoria! *Te juro por cada cabra en el Tibet, por lo mas santo, que si no te callas, Victoria yo --*" Maxie took to her native tongue when she was angry. Something about a goat was all Maddie caught.

Katy grabbed them both and stood between them. "Both of you shut up and listen to me! Look, Maddie is *afraid* to be Cole's wife. In her mind, because of that cheating slug Albert, girlfriends are forever a good time. A wife is a nagging, whiny pain in the ass that someday you might have to share your 401(k) with. If you're someone's girlfriend, you can't be divorced and your boyfriend can't take everything with him when you get dumped! That's the lesson she learned from Albert and we all know what divorce court can be like. Albert didn't care in the end that she'd been a good wife. To him she was dollars and cents and *possessions*. If you don't get married you can't be boring and you can't be taken for everything you thought was yours. It

might seem irrational, but it makes perfect sense to Maddie.”

A car vac... That’s what it had all boiled down to. After ten years of marriage, she got a car vac. Maddie clung to the looking glass as a tear escaped her eye. That was exactly right. If she married Cole her things would become “his” things too. All of the mundane stuff that married life entailed. The stuff that drove Albert out the door would eventually drive Cole out too. She couldn’t bear losing Cole... he meant far more than Albert ever had to her.

Cole jumped up from the chair and stomped toward them. His big body loomed over the girls, strong and tense. His eyes were on fire and his hard jaw clenched. “You know what, ladies?”

The girls turned to look at Cole. “What?” they asked, looking shocked.

“Albert is a puke and I’m sick to death of being compared to him. I’ve never been married so I don’t know what this fear of Maddie’s is, irrational or justified. I love Maddie like no one I’ve ever loved before and I want to get married for the very reasons she doesn’t, damnit.”

Victoria cocked her head at him. “Um, darling, speak English to us.”

Cole gritted his teeth and said, “I don’t want her to be able to just up and ditch my ass. If we’re married it’s a whole lot harder, isn’t it? To get unmarried? We’d have to at least try counseling or some crap before I’d let her kick my ass out. I want that bond between us. A *permanent* bond. Something that says Maddie isn’t going to just run scared at the first sign of trouble. Something that says I won’t either!” he yelled.

Katy hugged Cole then and Maxie and Victoria joined her, but Cole remained stiff and Maddie couldn’t watch anymore. She handed the looking glass back to Al.

“Do you get the big picture now, Maddie? Do you see what you might miss if you don’t take one last leap of faith?”

Maddie’s knees shook, but her *heart* heard Al... and Cole. For the first time she *heard* Cole. “Yes, I see, Al,” Maddie answered quietly. “I *have* to go now, Al.”

Al squeezed Maddie’s shoulder. “Yep, you do. And while you do it, I hope you go back and do the smart thing, Maddie. Don’t waste a shot like this. Not many of us

get them. Look at *me*. I'm a six foot tall elf, for Christmas sake. I scare the crap out of all the little elf chicks. If I had someone who loved me as much as Cole loves you I wouldn't take it for granted."

"Aloysius!" a booming voice with just a tinge of jolly in it yelled.

Al blanched. "Well, that's it. I'm Christmas goose. The Big Kahuna knows about you."

"Can I help? I mean we could just explain. Ya know like, hey Santa, this was all an accident..."

Al shook his head. "You keep your big mouth shut, Maddie. I'll take care of this." Maddie was about to protest just as Santa rounded the corner.

Holy jingle bells! It was *him* -- it was Santa! Maddie stood rooted to the spot, unable to speak. He walked toward Maddie, looking just like she'd always imagined he would. Like -- well, like Santa!

"Madison Blake, nice to meet you. I'm Santa." He gave Maddie a warm hug. "And you have to go, I assume?"

Maddie nodded her head, too stunned to speak.

"I'm glad to hear that, Maddie. It's my one and only Christmas wish for you -- that you find happiness." Santa looked at Al. "Al, you have some explaining to do and I have a funny feeling it has to do with that rascal Darwin."

Al began to protest, but Santa held his hand up with a knowing look. "No, don't bother, Al. I understand. Now send Maddie on her way with some amnesia dust and when you get back I have a little surprise for you."

A tall woman with pointy ears and a kick-ass bod peeked around the corner at both Al and Maddie.

"Karen," Santa laughed as only Santa could and turned to the woman. "This is Al. Al, meet Karen, your new elf-mate. Now hurry up so you two can get to know one another."

Al's face turned red as he grabbed Maddie's arm and pulled her toward the door. "C'mon, I don't have a lot of time."

Maddie giggled at Al. "Wow, that's some broad there, huh, Al. A real statuesque she-elf, if you ask me."

Al nodded and smiled as his eyes glowed brightly. "We have to go, Maddie -- like *now* if you want to catch Cole. And I have to get the amnesia dust."

"Yeah, and what the hell is that anyway?"

"It'll make you forget this happened. I'm sorry, that's just how it is. But the good stuff you learned will stay here." Al pointed to her heart.

"I'm ready, Al. I wouldn't want ya to miss out on some elf boinking."

"Okay then, here we go." Al dug in his pocket and pulled out a small bag of sparkly stuff that looked more like glitter to Maddie than anything else.

"So do I click my heels three times?"

Al sighed. "No, nothing that dramatic. You'll end up right back outside of your apartment." Al smiled warmly at her. "Bye, Maddie. Good luck."

Maddie gave Al a quick hug and thanked him.

Al shook some of the glitter into his hand and sprinkled it on Maddie.

And then as quickly as it began, it ended in a kaleidoscope of color fading to a pinpoint of black.

Chapter Five

Maddie woke up with a start. Freshly fallen snow covered her face in chilly splotches.

Oh God, what had she done now? Had she gotten drunk and passed out? No, she hadn't even touched the eggnog.

And then in a flash of mental pictures she remembered. Cole. He'd proposed and she'd taken off like a bat out of hell. Maddie pushed her way up off the pavement.

For God's sake, she was sitting in her alleyway like some drunk. Cole... she had to find Cole. Scrambling to stand, Maddie sprinted around the corner and ran up the stairs to her apartment, thinking about how she was going to tell Cole she loved him and she'd marry him whether he liked it or not.

Well, for crap's sake. Where had that come from?

What difference did it make? She didn't care. Maddie only knew she had to get to Cole. Bursting through her apartment door, she ran smack into Maxie.

"*Carajo!* Maddie, where have you been? We've been worried sick about you. Could we all for *once* just stay in the same damn place?"

Maddie hugged Maxie fiercely "I'm sorry, Max. I'll explain later. Where's Cole?"

"Darling," Victoria drawled, "thank goodness you made it. I'm afraid the weenies are rather limp and cold now. *Your* weenie is in your bedroom."

Maddie gave Victoria a sloppy kiss on the cheek and caught sight of Katy who came to give her arm a supportive squeeze. "Guys, I have to cancel tonight. I have some proposing to do."

Each looked surprised, but refrained from saying anything, except Victoria. "Darling, I really --"

"Victoria!" both Katy and Maxie squealed.

Victoria held up her hand. "Never mind, ladies, I know. Shut up, right?"

They all giggled as they headed out the door and Maddie, stomach in a knot, headed down the hall to her bedroom.

Cole was by the window, gazing out at the rapidly falling snow. Maddie wasted no time. She lunged for him, throwing her arms around his neck and wrapping her legs around his waist. Cole tilted his head back, but said nothing. His gaze pierced hers.

Maddie kissed him hard. "I'm sorry."

"And?"

"And I love you."

"Sooo?"

"So, gimme my damn ring."

"Whatever do you mean, ring?"

"The big sparkly thing that I sorta refused."

"Aha! *That* ring."

"Cole... give it to *me*."

"Why?"

"Because."

"Because what?"

"Because I love you."

"I dunno. Maybe I don't want to give it to you now."

"Yes you do."

"Maybe..."

Maddie fished in Cole's shirt pocket and dug out the ring. She slid it on her finger and smiled. "K, now tell me you love me."

"Maddie, what is this about?"

"I don't honestly know, Cole. I only know I love you and I'll marry you if you'll still have me."

"Like I could get that piece of *bling* off your finger now even if I wanted to."

"Do you want to?"

Cole shrugged. "Nah, I guess you can keep it. It cost the earth, so you can't *ever* give it back."

Maddie kissed him then, with all the love she had and Cole kissed her back.

"I love you, Madison Blake."

"Ya do?"

"I do indeed. Now I think we have some celebrating to do." Cole ran his finger enticingly over the underside of her breast.

Maddie's nipples beaded into tight knots of anticipation. God, he was perfect and now, so was her life. Thanks to whatever force of the unknown had knocked some sense into her.

Cole licked her lips and Maddie groaned as he covered her breast with his hand, searing her through her sweater. Maddie ground her hips against his, sliding her hands into Cole's jeans, running her fingers over the rigid length of his cock. She nipped at his ears as he pulled up her sweater, pushed aside her bra and thumbed a swollen nipple. Tugging her lips from his, Maddie smiled wickedly and slid down his hard body, taking his jeans off as she went.

Her lips found his silken cock and engulfed him with a swift motion of lips and tongue as she caressed the hard ridges of his belly. Cole tunneled his hands in her hair, thrusting into her mouth. She slid her tongue over the thick surface, cupping his balls. Cole hissed his pleasure above her, gripping her shoulders to drag her upward and haul her to the bed. Cole tore off his clothes and lay down beside Maddie.

Maddie stripped off her clothes and straddled him, teasing the head of his cock with the wet folds of her pussy.

"Do me, woman, now," he commanded huskily, smiling at her.

Maddie lifted her hips and allowed him entry one slow inch at a time. As he filled her completely she circled him, rubbing her clit along the hard surface of his belly while she rested her palms on his chest. His hands caressed her breasts, pressing them together while he suckled each nipple.

Maddie shuddered from the hot rasp of his tongue and rocked forward. Her hips

swayed in what had become a familiar rhythm as Cole thrust into her with deep strokes. Heat assaulted her pussy and her nipples tingled as she came on a hoarse cry. Cole followed shortly thereafter, filling her with his hot seed.

Maddie fell on top of him, gasping for air as he folded his arms around her and held her tightly.

“Hey.” He nudged her head with his nose. “Ya love me?”

She smiled against his chest. “Well what’s not to love? All this,” she pinched his chest playfully, “and a big fat rock too.”

Cole twirled a strand of her hair, holding it up to the light. “You have glitter in your hair. Were you out partying while I sat here moping?”

Maddie frowned. She had no clue where she’d been, but she couldn’t get the name *Darwin* out of her head. Maddie laughed at Cole. “No, I wasn’t partying. Hey, how do you feel about naming our firstborn, if it’s a boy -- *Darwin*...”

The End

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