

Maddie's Fight

Prologue

Maddie Sanderson didn't like herself. She thought she was ugly. Her very dark brown hair stopped at the bottom of her neck, brushing against her shoulders. She did not like her blue eyes. She thought her complexion was too pale and her lips too red. She thought the shape of her face was too square. She didn't like her body, either, because apparently her breasts had grown before any other part of her body, making her unproportional a funny-looking. Her classmates appeared to agree. She was often the victim of school pranks: signs taped to the back of her shirt, mean jokes, or even verbal bullying. She didn't like it. High school was difficult emotionally for her. Some days she didn't know how she would pass and receive a diploma without leaving because of her depression. She was also struggling with her grades in classes. One day three other girls cornered her. All three of them had this teased, long, blonde hair wearing heather gray t-shirts. Their jeans also were the same style of light blue skinny jeans. They wore different yet similar shades of red lipstick and had silver hoop earrings and studs in second pierced holes jutting out of their ears.

"Hey Maddie, wanna know what's dumb? *You!* You're an ugly, stupid, unpopular loser."

"Hey, that's not nice," she said to them.

One of the blonde bad girls shoved her right index finger into her left shoulder. "But it's true," the second girl said. "You're just a little wimp. Let me take that backpack."

"No!" But one of them grabbed by the arms, another one grabbed her by the legs, and the third one grabbed her backpack. They laughed at her. Maddie was going to have to report the theft, but she was also afraid it was going to happen again. She knew their names, which were Angie, Rebecca, and Missy. This sort of thing happened to her all the time. She wished it would stop. She didn't like to cry. She didn't do it often, because she intentionally kept them back. But today little beads of tears dotted her eyelashes. She took her fingers and touched them. *I can't do this, I can't do this.*

Chapter One

Maddie did have one friend. His name was Jeffrey Richardson. He had dirty blonde hair, with a tall, bony frame.

His aqua eyes displayed a friendly, outgoing kindness. He was like a loyal dog who followed her everywhere she went and adored her. She was relieved and grateful for that. He often chatted with her at her locker and had lunch with her, because they had the same lunch period. Sometimes they would hang out after school.

But today they were fighting. Her one happiness, which was her friendship with Jeffrey, was being threatened, and she was afraid.

His final words to her remained in her mind. *Why don't you ever talk to me about your parents?* It's not as though he meant to upset her; no, that was probably the furthest thing from his mind at that point. But Maddie, her name short for Madeleine, had avoided the subject of her mother and father since the first day she and Jeffrey had met. She could still picture the night when Dad and Mom's screams tore across the quiet night in their sheltered Ohio neighborhood. Maddie couldn't remember what they were fighting about this time. Dad shouted at her mother as she huddled on the stairs, listening. There was silence and then he stomped out, tearing the blonde oak back door almost from its hinges, and never came back again. He had probably kicked her, as he was often prone to use violence to strike fear in their hearts.

Jeffrey had left earlier after helping her with her homework. She had been delicately eating the second half of the turkey and cheese sandwich she hadn't finished during their lunch period while studying with him. They'd used flash cards to memorize facts for an upcoming test. He showed her each flash card with a smile, and she remembered each one by the end of the night. It was for a history class. When they were finished studying, Jeffrey asked, "What's bothering you, Maddie? You have a frown on your face."

"Jeffrey, there's nothing bothering me." Although she knew her frown deepened and her forehead creased, a reflection of the anger she felt.

"That's not true. I think it's your parents. Maddie, I overheard them fighting on my way to your house. It sounded... abnormal. I think that's why you've been struggling in school. I think that's also one reason why you have so many bullies. I think you need to open up. Why don't you ever talk to me about your parents?"

But Maddie was silent. Jeffrey looked into her eyes, but didn't say anything more. He got up, picked up his books and notebook, put them into his bookbag, and left.

Now alone, after her parents' argument, Maddie reflected again about the fight downstairs.

Maddie was glad that her father had left, but she was also angry that he had abandoned them.

Maddie loved her mother, but from that point on their relationship changed. They hardly ever spoke, except to argue. Her mother made her lunches in the morning to take with her to school, but never did she ask her how her day went when she returned home each day. She decided not to talk to Jeffrey anymore. But he was still as friendly as could be. Instead of saying, "hi," to her when he passed her, though, he smiled.

High school was a strange experience. "Hi," classmates would say, but never want to spend time with her. They greeted her with a sort of airy, condescending way. Maddie hated herself from the first day of the ninth grade. She felt harassed not only by her family, her father who had bullied her around and sometimes shoved her, her mother who was passive-aggressive and whiny, and her brother who often teased her about every little

thing he found out about her, including what he read in her diary.

She had an English teacher in the twelfth grade who put her on the spot one day. This was after she had met Jeffrey.

"Maddie!" she said with her finger pointed in the air. "I see you have not done your homework!" Some of the other students laughed. "How selfish and irresponsible is that? Can you not understand one sentence of *The Scarlet Letter*?"

So, she was happy to leave the high school and become legally an adult around the time of graduation. She would miss Jeffrey. But it was a sacrifice she needed to make to leave the home. Somehow, her mother was going to pay for her college education, despite her disagreements with her, and she was so happy that she'd have some kind of educated future. She loved Jeffrey. She hoped that she would see him again when she came home.

Chapter Two

St. Michael's University. She was a freshman in college now in the state of Illinois. All the fears of the past were gone.

She was sitting at the desk in her dormitory. She stared at the computer screen. There, in front of her, were a multitude of words which had come from somewhere inside of that plain, uninteresting ego. *Peril's Wish*, was the title of her partially completed novel manuscript. Peril, being herself, was a girl whose name was how others characterized her. Peril's wish was to be thought of as a pretty neat girl. Peril agonized over her appearance but could never seem to like her attributes. Peril was put down but wanted to express her view of herself, which was in conflict with how others perceived her, to not just be seen as not a terror but as a strong, beautiful young woman.

She spent too much time with her creative writing. She knew that she should be spending more time with her studies. On top of that, she also had a boyfriend. His name was Drake. He had dirty blond hair and looked at her with desire.

Drake came in, looking tired.

"Drake," she said.

"Hi, Maddie. It's great to see you after a long day of classes and studying."

But she knew that he was half lying. He was a college bad boy, a slack-off drinker. She didn't know why she liked him. He

had too much lack of seriousness about college. He was a bit of a jerk.

The previous night she had lost her virginity to him.
"Drake, I had a good time last night."

"That's cool with me," he said. "Hey, there's this party going on tonight. Do you want to come?"

She looked back at her manuscript on the computer screen and hesitated. She was on a roll. She wanted to write more. But the urge to socialize trumped her creativity. "Alright," she said.

So, they walked across the campus together and went to the party. Maddie saw her roommate, Tiffany there. She said, "Hi!"

Tiffany waved at her and continued drinking her punch. Perhaps it had liquor in it, but Maddie didn't want to take the risk of trying it. Tiffany didn't look interested in talking to her, so Maddie walked away and tried to find something interesting to do. Maybe she would try to meet people.

But people were lost in conversation with each other. She couldn't find someone to talk to. The music was so loud. She was dizzy even though she hadn't had anything to drink. She thought

it was hunger and dehydration. She didn't like how she felt. Finally she saw Drake and Tiffany leave with each other, but she didn't think anything of it. She wanted to go back to her dorm, eat some potato chips, and go to sleep.

But when she got there and opened the door, there were Drake and Tiffany in her bed, both under the covers.

"Oh, shit Maddie!"

"Drake, you jerk!"

"Oh, hell Maddie, I hope you're not upset with this. You do realize it was just casual college sex."

"Well, I was not under that impression, but fine. I don't care about you anymore. Tiffany, I need to get to sleep. Can he please just leave?"

So, a few minutes later he left. Maddie tried to eat potato chips, but was nauseated, so she was only able to eat a few crumbs. Then she went to bed in her clothes and fell asleep.

The next morning she was tired, but she went to her classes, anyway.

At twilight that evening, she was walking across the campus back towards her dormitory from the dining hall. The paved walkway looked purple from the varying colors of the sunset. The temperature was a little cool and the air was moist. She looked at her feet as she walked, brooding about Drake and Tiffany. She carried her textbooks in one arm and her tan, burlap purse on the opposite shoulder. She kept her dorm key on a chain around her neck. She heard the distant squawks of some crows somewhere nearby, and the rushing sound of wind. The clouds were streaks of gray and white.

A girl began to walk past her. She didn't recognize her. She had a small head of light blonde hair which was in a low ponytail. She was wearing exercise clothes, but was walking and also carried purse and a key was around her neck. Maybe she was on her way to the gym.

Maddie began to wave but the girl did not see her. Then, from a dark covering of bushes, a man leaped out and ran quickly towards her. He was so quick that Maddie could not distinguish his facial features or really anything about him. He shoved a hand over the girl's mouth; she struggled; but her captor was too strong.

She saw him pull out the blade. She saw him slit her throat. She then barely saw in the light of twilight that he was wearing a mask, hood, gloves, and dark clothing.

The man pulled the girl's body back into the dark bushes. She saw him look at her. She screamed. She was afraid, so she started running. She knew she needed to get out of the area. But she wanted to find a campus police intercom. She knew where many of them were.

Gasping, she saw one and ran to it. It was underneath a street light. She punched the button and waited for someone to answer her. "Campus police."

"Please, I need you to help me. I just witnessed a girl being stabbed on the path from the southern part of the campus to the northern. I'm close to the dormitories right now. I'm near the outdoor restrooms. Please, come quickly to help her and help me."

So, she waited. They came so quickly she could hardly believe it. It must have only been five minutes. "It's okay," they said. "What's your name?"

So, she told them her name. "Is she alright?"

"We're looking for her right now. Can you tell me anything about his appearance and the specific location you witnessed this crime? Which way was he headed? Who was the girl?"

She answered all their questions, but she did not know the girl and she did not know her name. She was now so cold. The temperature had dropped five degrees during that time.

In the morning the news broke that the girl's body had been found over at the lake. She had not survived. There was a stunned air all over the campus. Last night Maddie had been interviewed by the city police after they had found Samantha Higgins.

The next day, the school paper was all over it. One story detailed Samantha's death. It was probably not supposed to be an opinion piece, but Maddie could intone its meaning.

"...The campus police and the city police advise all students to be accompanied after dark and to lock their dormitories both while inside and also while away. Carry a flashlight with you if you are able. If you see something, say something. Unfortunately, the student who witnessed the attack could have followed a different safety procedure; and, as a result,

Samantha Higgins died. Do not make the same mistake. Carry your cell phones with you at all times."

Maddie sobbed for days. She was not in any trouble with the law enforcement, but just the stabs of people's eyes were painful enough punishment that she lowered her head in shame for the next few weeks.

She could not concentrate in school. She stopped going to classes. She was able to work on her manuscript a little bit, but she made a character close to Peril die. She insisted she was writing self-indulgent, depressing material. Her life had become just as it was when she was in high school, in which she was a hated outcast, insulted and bullied, shamed and punished. It seemed to be a pattern and theme to her life. *Always the underdog*, she thought. And she could not stay at St. Michael's University. She was double-majoring in English and History and had a promising future. But she had been ostracized.

Tiffany, her roommate, had done the same thing. One night she told Tiffany she was leaving the school.

"Good," Tiffany said. "You're nothing but a psycho serial killer who's bad in bed and I know because Drake told me so. So go home to your wimpy family. Go home to hang your head and

shame and judge yourself. You're a selfish brat and I'm glad that you're going home."

Had Tiffany been telling the truth? Or was it just the opposite? Was Tiffany the spoiled brat?

Chapter Three

Maddie thought about guilt on the train trip home. She watched nature and houses rush by outside her window and hated herself. She had always hated herself and always would, she thought. What would she say to her mother? How would she explain how she had wasted all of that tuition money simply because she was not able to make it through school?

But she didn't care, did she? She didn't love her mother anymore. But she was concerned that there would be a problem between the two of them, that her mother would punish her. She tried to come up with a plan for hours, listening to the methodical thump, thump of the train moving.

She decided to go home only long enough to gather a few belongings and leave again.

"What are you going here?" her mother asked sternly.

"Why? Is it wrong to come home from college?"

"It's not winter break! You should be at the school right now going to classes and studying!"

"I couldn't stay there," she admitted. "I want to tell you the whole story, but maybe you wouldn't understand."

"Try me. Are you dropping out?"

Maddie thought for a second, calculated what she would say. "I can't do this college thing. I'm not intelligent enough. I cannot understand what the professors are teaching. I do not like the other students. You can't make me go back."

"Oh, yes I can!"

"No!" Maddie yelled. "I will not go back. I will not try anymore. It is impossible. I'm done. But don't worry; I won't be here long, only long enough to pack my things and leave."

Her mother didn't argue with that. She would not try to convince her to stay: Maddie knew that. She would not even ask where she was going, because she could care less about her welfare. She would watch Maddie leave and write her out of her book, for good.

That night Maddie prayed she would be safe. She packed her huge, camping backpack with underwear, clothes, a rain jacket, travel-sized shampoo and conditioner, a toothbrush and toothpaste, a sleeping bag, her wallet, her cell phone, and little cans of tuna and chicken she stole from the pantry. That was all.

She planned to find shelter anywhere she could, inside or outside. She would take a train one more time, this time to the state of Michigan. And there she would wander the streets with nowhere to go. She had never been homeless before, but she was desperate to leave her mother.

She could not sleep when it was time to go to bed, so she decided to leave in the middle of the night. With seventy bucks in her wallet, not much food, and nowhere to go, she was frightened, but she saw no other choice. She walked to the train station in the dark, and it was a long walk. It was a five-mile walk. She could have taken the bus, but she decided to save money. Anyone could have been lurking in the dark streets, like the man who had killed Samantha Higgins, but she ignored the fear.

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