

Maddie Gets Motivated

By

Lynn Forest

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CHAPTER 1

Madeleine Howard danced as much as walked her daily route to the Jazz House. It was not possible for Madeleine to go down the street unnoticed. She did not necessarily intend to sway so dramatically as she made her way down the sidewalk in her formfitting black dress. Madeleine was just over five feet three inches in height and simply built in a way that men who had already been captivated by her lovely face would stop on the sidewalk with no attempt to be subtle and look back and watch the jiggle of her shapely and ample backside and the stride of her incredibly sculpted legs.

In spite of her youth, she was the premier singer at the nightclub, a venue sought out by those wishing to appreciate the finer decor and avoid the occasional muggings that took place around some of the less reputable establishments in the town. It was those other clubs that watered down the drinks a tad more and where the female patrons were less secure. Of course, the Jazz House did indeed sell the finest alcoholic drinks that Prohibition had banned, to say nothing of hosting the large, illegal gambling room in the back from which gunshots would be heard on only the rarest of occasions.

She always felt upbeat on her way to work at the club. Half a block away, she could faintly hear the music, and there was suddenly more of a spring to her step, making the view from behind even more enticing. As she approached the Jazz House she was nearly bouncing to the rhythm of the madcap drummer, whose bass drum seemed to be directly wired to her hips and backside.

The Jazz House was a little higher class joint than its rival nightclubs doing all kinds of similar illicit things. And everyone said that the entertainment there was better: a good band, sexy dancers in flapper dresses and a couple of pretty good singers, the best being Madeleine Howard. The fact that you could get a beer and a hotdog smothered in sauerkraut and mustard for a nickel did not hurt business.

She walked to the back door of the club where a bouncer always stood guard, protecting the female staff and keeping out those who would try to enter without paying the modest cover charge. He was turned the other way this time, and she gave him a smart slap on the behind while greeting him. "Hi, Casey."

He turned around and retaliated with a whack to her own backside. "Hey there, Maddie. I like that dress, it shows off those great curves of yours."

She placed one hand on a hip and raised the other one as if modeling. "Thanks, Casey. I thought it was just the bee's knees when I bought it. Guess I had better get a wiggle on, or I won't earn enough dough this week to pay my keep."

Casey laughed. "Don't worry, doll. Because when it comes to wiggles... you can't miss with a wiggle like yours." She gave him a shake of appreciation as she walked to the door.

Casey tapped her on the shoulder as she opened the door. "Couple of guys getting a little blotto in there. They seem to have a thing for women with the good gams, and you have the best, so watch out. The boss may give the guys the bum's rush before the night is out." She stepped toward him and planted a kiss on his cheek. "Thanks, Casey... always watching out for me."

Madeleine walked into the dimly lit back room where another singer was resting on a chair. “Hey Maddie. That guy is back; the one who walked up to you last week with his fly open.”

Madeleine put on her headband while looking in a mirror. “Thanks for the warning Maureen. Is he the one they call Fat Eddie? The one with those grease spots all over his tie and that unlit cigar in his mouth?”

Maureen laughed. “You’re thinking of the one they call Fast Eddie. The one with the grabby hands?”

“Oh, okay. Yeah, he’s fast all right. Last Wednesday night he had both his hands on my behind before I knew it.”

Maureen giggled. “Anyone else getting his hands on your behind... that you want him to, I mean?”

Madeleine saw herself blush in the mirror. “Not yet, sorry to say.” She reached back and tapped Maureen on the shoulder. “Not giving up yet.” *Well, almost.*

Now it was time for her usual routine. Once more, she checked her appearance in the mirror of the small room the women performers were given as a poor excuse for a dressing room. Then she began to put on her makeup and bide her time until the bandleader would announce her entrance. No one ever bothered to check to see if she was even there on time. She just always was, because she wanted the meager pay.

When it was her turn to come out and perform, the drumbeat would pick up with a faster pace, and the bandleader would lean into his microphone, “And now, sit back and enjoy the singing of our own Sassy Scottish Lassie, Maddie Howard.” The description was almost true – Madeleine did have a slight touch of a Scottish brogue as a result of the time spent around her family during her childhood, her late maternal grandparents having come to America from Glasgow long before she was born.

Madeleine would prance out onto the stage, her arms at her side and her hands straight out and palms down, kicking her feet high behind her as she looked sharply left then sharply right, over and over until she came to the edge of the stage and would dive into a jazz ballad. By then, she had the rapt attention of every male present.

But next she would find her own realm, a sultry song of the pain of yearning for someone out of reach, or perhaps a tale of love lost, never to be found again. That was when she was mesmerizing, her persona on stage a total fabrication by a young woman whose innocence offstage would have confounded the men watching her, listening to her and fantasizing about the onstage vixen and real-life virgin. She was not that far removed in time from her days as the lead singer for the glee club at Montford Central High School where she had long since gotten past stage fright.

Understanding that his best singer would have been vulnerable to some of the patrons who made assumptions about her based upon her stage presence and state of dress, the manager and bouncers at the Jazz House kept a close eye on Madeleine, treating her almost as if she was a little sister. There was even the occasional interception of a patron too aggressive or too intoxicated to know that it was best to leave the sweet young woman alone.

After her second set of songs was finished, Madeleine sat perched on a barstool, casually watching the crowd in the nightclub in the downtown of the small city of Montford, Illinois. It was her last break of the evening, and after the band performed a couple of more instrumental pieces, she would return to the stage and finish with a couple of sultry torch songs. She watched with amusement as people darted in and out the door in the back of the room, the door that led to

the speakeasy where the illegal whiskey and gin were dispersed, while others simply sat down at the bar and casually ordered the beer that was readily available there. Prohibition may as well have been a figment of their imaginations, as even the local police would come to the bar to have the illicit drinks and listen to and watch singers like Madeleine perform in their short flapper dresses and sequined feathered headbands and their long fluttering eyelashes.

She slowly sipped at her own beer, facing the bar and trying to pretend she did not see the many sets of male eyes transfixed upon her. She was well aware of her own good looks, the shapeliness of her legs and her apparent youth. She knew the snug black dress with the high fringed hem and scooped neckline did nothing to discourage their attention.

Madeleine was lost in thought and at first, did not notice a man approaching the empty barstool next to her. In the mirror behind the bar, she saw him just as he took his final steps before sitting down, and she detected he was walking with a slight limp. *Fine, fine looking man.*

In mere seconds, she had noticed that, while he was dressed in a gray wool suit, he seemed to have a formal bearing about his presence. She was also immediately admonishing herself for being so taken by the physique on his six-foot frame, the way that his shoulders looked so much wider than his waist. He had dark brown hair brushed back just so that outlined the face that was probably that of a fortysomething man. His eyes seemed so piercing that he looked as if he could see through walls. He was unlike so many in that place, and in that time, when faces were worn and weary beyond the actual age. The recent war and fear on a constant basis did that to people.

That was why people flocked to places like the Jazz House. Society was taking a breather from the loss, the separation and the horror, the constant fear of a telegram announcing the loss of a loved one in a faraway place. It was a place to have fun, a place to enjoy a drink that was forbidden and the women seemed wanton and willing, even if it was just an act as was the case with Madeleine.

She attempted to ignore the approaching man, but she was simply too intrigued by his image. She could not help but detect a sigh as he rested upon the stool. The bartender approached him and he muttered something that Madeleine could not understand, but within seconds a glass of beer had been placed on the bar in front of him.

Madeleine was annoyed with herself that she did not know if she wished for him to initiate a conversation, or for him to simply remain silent and enjoy his drink. She had no previous experience at instant attraction, and she was flustered by it. She found herself tensing as she realized she was unwilling to avert her gaze from the mirror, so she would not miss any movements of his eyes toward her. *Hey! Talk to me and make the decision for me.*

They sat side-by-side for a minute in silence, the background noise of a large crowd providing sufficient cover for their own lack of conversation. Finally her heart began to race as she watched in the mirror over the rim of her glass to see that he was turning toward her. "Excuse me, miss. I did not wish to miss the opportunity to tell you that you have an absolutely wonderful voice. You are quite talented. I especially enjoyed hearing you sing Alice Blue Gown."

Madeleine felt her face begin to flush. "Thank you. I sang a lot in high school. That was kind of my favorite thing." *So far.*

The unfamiliar man nodded and smiled, "And that certainly could not have been very long ago. You can barely be eighteen years old." That was when she noticed a narrow but long scar just below his hairline.

Madeleine begin to stutter, "Actually, nineteen years and two months. I just started working here a few months ago."

The man looked around. "I suppose that if I were your parents, I would be concerned about you working in a place like this."

She looked down and her expression darkened. "Actually, both of my parents are gone. I live with an older cousin and her family, and work here to pay my share of expenses for their apartment."

The stranger lowered his head and shook it. "My apologies, and my sympathy to you." He seemed to shift uncomfortably on his stool, admonishing himself for his comment. "And I believe that they call you, Maddie?"

She nodded and smiled. "Madeleine... Maddie Howard."

"Once again, Maddie my apologies. Sometimes I am too quick to make assumptions."

There was something about the way his demeanor changed when some emotion finally came to the surface that made Madeleine more interested in speaking with him. Now she turned slightly toward him. "And as for you, Mr...?"

He finally relented and let a meek smile appear as he put his hand out, "Brian McGraw. And my only family remaining is an older brother who lives over in Chicago. The station nearest his home is just an hour from here by train. I'm here in town right now just to secure a rental to live in, and I will start teaching at the college shortly. I have really liked the short periods of time I have been able to spend in Chicago, but none of the universities there had an opening that suited me." *I'm out of his league.*

She leaned toward him and smiled. "A college professor. But you don't come across as such a high hat."

Brian laughed. "Thank you, and I take that as a compliment because I come from a poor family, actually. When I was a kid, I was quite a ragamuffin."

"But with all of your schooling, you still seem like a regular. I think that's just the cat's pajamas."

Brian shrugged and took a sip of his beer. "I have never been one to put on the Ritz. I have no need for such a lifestyle."

Madeleine laughed softly. "Lots of times when a man comes here dressed in a get-up like you are, he's looking for somebody vamping to find a sugar daddy."

He glanced down at his clothing. "I simply always believe that when you're looking for a place to rent, you want to make a good impression, almost like applying for a job."

Madeleine found herself warming to this Brian McGraw. "You mentioned Chicago... I must say, Mr. McGraw, I'm confused by that twinge of a Scottish accent, if you are an American..." He shook his head. "Actually, I lived with my family in Scotland until I was ten, then we moved to the States for several years while my father worked in Detroit in the farming equipment plant. He died when I was twenty, and my brother and I moved to London with our mother because that was her wish."

Madeleine smiled. "So, we are indeed both of Scottish ancestry. What did you do in England?"

"Well, these days I actually consider myself to be a Brit. I already had two years of university in Chicago under my belt, so I finished up in London. I got an advanced degree, and my brother asked me to return to Chicago with him. I taught history at a small university there for a year, but our mother began to struggle with her health, so I went back to London to live with her until she died.

“Back in Britain I took a teaching position in a private academy for far too many wealthy, unmotivated and ungrateful brats, all the while working on my doctorate. I was then promoted and had just spent my second year as headmaster when the war situation started getting perilous, and I decided I had to do something for our cause.

“I think now I’m back in the States for good. I really enjoyed teaching college history in America, and now I’m going to be teaching at Bradmore.” He arched an eyebrow in a manner that startled but pleased Madeleine, and continued, “This isn’t a very large city. Perhaps we will cross paths someday again.” *Accidentally on purpose.*

Madeleine felt her mouth turning dry as she attempted to speak. “Well, I have... I really have no plans to go anywhere else. I really don’t have anything holding me here in Montford. The thing about moving on and finding other work is... I don’t have much to offer. But I would be satisfied to just get an office job somewhere.”

“Please, miss... Madeleine... Maddie. Don’t demean yourself, no organization or corporation can function without good people working in their offices. Since the end of the war, more companies are opening up. Even back in England, serving in the military taught some people skills they never had before.”

Madeleine nodded slowly. “Too late for me to help out in the war effort, but saving Britain from the Germans was a noble cause, something that had to be done I suppose.” She glanced up to see that Brian was looking at her with arched eyebrows, and his expression was one that conveyed a bit of disapproval. *Oooops!*

He leaned slightly closer to her. “I believe it was a case of Britain and the United States fighting side by side to vanquish a deadly threat to all civilization. If you recall, Miss Howard...”

Madeleine held up an index finger, “Call me Maddie.”

Brian bit his lower lip for a moment, before continuing, “Well, then... Maddie, valor was what saved our nation. It’s not that myself and my countrymen have nothing but gratitude and affection for the Yanks, but we defended ourselves quite nobly, thank you.” And then, there were those arched eyebrows again.

Madeleine was not aware that a quite pronounced smirk was now on prominent display within her own expression. “But certainly, you must admit that knowing that the greatest industrial nation in the world was gearing up to help out gave your forces the freedom to expend resources beyond your own production capacity.”

He rested his elbows on the bar and looked at her intently. “Even if you are incorrect in your conclusions, I am impressed that you have formed such thoughtful opinions on such a major subject.” *Such arrogance!*

She turned to look directly in his gaze. “Because I’m a girl?”

Once again, she saw a raised eyebrow of disapproval. “No, because you have such interests at your age.”

Madeleine shrugged and took a sip of beer. “I can also spell big words and count to one hundred.”

Brian sat up stiffly, his eyes narrow and piercing. “Quite the cheeky young lady, are we not? At least you’re not trying to charm me, so I know you’re not a gold digger.”

Madeleine’s eyes were suddenly glaring. “I do not have your education, sir, but I do make it a point to acquaint myself with learned ladies for regular discussions and I try to stay in touch with the latest news. Perhaps you feel that all things intellectual should be left to men.”

Brian whistled softly and shook his head. “To the contrary, I think it is a great waste that so few women attend the university. After all, it is 1920 and we should be farther along than

that.” He leaned a bit closer to Madeleine. “So please understand, Miss Howard... Maddie... I respect your mind, because it is obviously well formed. I only take exception to your obvious difficulty in conducting civil discourse. In other words, your manners leave something to be desired.” He smiled at the look of shock on her face before he continued, “But while I see that you have some work to do when it comes to polite conversation, from the short amount of time I have spent with you it is obvious to me that you are a person with great potential.” *Does he like me or not?*

Madeleine shook her head and squinted at him. “I think I have been simultaneously scolded and complimented. But I have learned from my discussion group that it is time for women to establish their place in society. We must be free to assert ourselves and express our opinions. Even if men such as yourself don’t like it.” *But I think I like him.*

Brian sighed deeply. “But for men or women... I know that an unnecessarily sharp tongue discourages open and free communication.” *Scolding.*

Madeleine tilted her head and looked at him with unabashed surprise. “Perhaps women did not speak so frankly in whatever little, backward corner of Scotland you came from.”

Brian stood up and placed some money on the bar and took one step away. “And sometimes when one got a little too cheeky for her own good, such as you just did, around a man who truly cared for her, she could find herself unable to sit down for a while.” *He did not say that. I imagined it.*

Madeleine began to chew on her lower lip for a moment, confused by her immediate reaction of wanting to push the subject. “I take it, Mr. McGraw, that what you are saying is that a woman who does not, in your opinion, know her place would need a spanking?”

His expression was a combination of a steely gaze and sly smile. “Not at all, Maddie. I am not referring to differences of opinion.” He stood closer and leaned toward her. “However, such an abrasive attitude combined with a lack of manners such as is the case with you, could indeed justify just such an event.” *Ouch!*

She peered at him through narrow eyes. “Mr. McGraw, I believe we have a case here of mistaken identity.”

“I don’t think I understand what you mean... mistaken identity?”

Madeleine turned around and away from him. “Apparently, Mr. McGraw, you have mistaken me for someone who cares what you have to say about anything.”

He laughed heartily. “And you are quite witty. I do think it would be a momentous occasion to spank you.” He laughed and leaned closer and whispered in the ear of the young beauty who sat stunned by his comment, “Hope to see you again. I will be living here for quite some time, I suppose. Maybe you should keep looking for an office job here in Montford.” And if his words did not sufficiently startle Madeleine into silence, the kiss that he placed on her cheek certainly did. *Do that again, please.*

She sat frozen as she watched him walk away with his slight limp, weaving his way through the crowd to a free table. For a moment, she felt faint then realized she had been holding her breath since his lips had touched her cheek. She was so carried away and distracted she did not even realize that the manager was tapping her on the shoulder to remind her it was almost time for her to return to the stage and sing.

All through her final three songs, she had to concentrate on not fixing her gaze on the rugged war veteran professor sitting leisurely at his table and watching her. It seemed to make it more difficult to remember the lyrics. She nearly lost her place when singing *It’s Right Here for*

You, and by the time she was done for the night she felt nervous and exhausted. *Okay, so he rattled me.*

When she went offstage, she skipped going to the dressing room to see if any of the other female performers were sitting there chatting. Instead she just rushed out the back door, slapped the bouncer on the shoulder and said goodbye, and began her short walk home.

As her heels clicked along the sidewalk, she chastised herself for forgetting to bring the secondhand, long overcoat she typically wore home. That part of the town was relatively safe, but as she walked along in the short dress she seemed to feel every set of eyes of every man she met focused on her.

Suddenly, she stopped walking half a block from home. It had happened to her before, more frequently as of late as she made her way home after a night at the club in contrast to her typical upbeat mood on her way there. She was angry at herself once again for being so blasé about everything from her personal safety to working toward some type of security in her life.

She resumed walking, this time much more slowly as she pondered her state of existence. She had now been living with her older cousin for five years since her mother had died. The only initiative she had shown since graduating from high school was to be certain she earned just enough to feel she was contributing adequately to the household budget.

In a very short time she had gone from being a very good and popular student with a host of friends to being an aimless and lonely young adult. No longer regulated by the schedule of the high school classes, there was no external motivations for her aside from the household chores and being at the Jazz House on time each day.

As she strolled along even more slowly the closer she got to the apartment building, the more sadness and depression she felt at her lack of direction, and the more angry and impatient with herself for doing nothing more than was needed to just get by. *Something has to give!*

Her dilemma had been haunting her for months, seeing her former high school classmates go off into marriages or jobs one by one. She did not understand that about herself... she had the intellectual capabilities, but not the will to do anything more than to work part-time and otherwise occupy herself with her interests in things important, but beyond her realm of responsibility.