



Home the Hard Way

Z.A. Maxfield

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Dare Buckley has come home—or at least, he's come back to Palladian, the small town he left as a teenager. After a major lapse in judgment forced him to resign from the Seattle PD, Palladian is the only place that'll hire him. There's one benefit to hitting rock bottom, though: the chance to investigate the mystery of his father's suicide.

Dare also gets to reacquaint himself with Finn Fowler, whose childhood hero worship ended in uncomfortable silence when Dare moved away. But Finn isn't the same little kid Dare once protected. He's grown into an attractive, enigmatic stranger who neither wants nor needs what Dare has to offer.

In fact, Dare soon realizes that Finn's keeping secrets—his own and the town's. And he doesn't seem to care that Dare needs answers. The atmosphere in Palladian, like its namesake river, appears placid, but dark currents churn underneath. When danger closes in, Dare must pit his ingenuity against his heart, and find his way home the hard way.

Home the Hard Way Details

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Author : Z.A. Maxfield

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From Reader Review Home the Hard Way for online ebook

Rhys Ford says

Not your grandma's ZA Maxfield.

Okay now to be fair, my grandmother read old school Harlequins. And there's nothing wrong with that. If that's what you're into.

That however, is SO not this book.

Dare and Finn are—complicated. Their relationship has secrets and folds without ending. Theirs is a multi-layered, deeply constructed romance.

ZA Maxfield brings home possibly the greatest book she's ever written with this tale of lovers, desires and secrets. She goes to dark places and layered mysteries. I can't laud this book enough. Truly.

Best damned book she's written. Damn. Fricking brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.

Tina says

“You are my beginning and my end. You are my journey and my destination.”

Barely having a social life and managing two different jobs and additionally a leather fetish workshop Finn is living with his deathly ill aunt Lyddie in Palladian, a little hick town. Everything he craves is to belong, to belong to a family, to belong to his childhood hero Dare, who left 15 years ago and never looked behind.

Finn is a handsome guy, with his dark curls and his different coloured eyes. Nostalgic, melancholy, mournful he captivated me immediately, I really enjoyed his point of view. He is such a beautiful soul and has to deal with tons of shit the whole freaking town seems to blame him for. Despite being judged his entire life, he judges no one and doesn't hesitate to help where help is needed. The way he deals with everything that life throws his way is simply amazing and heart-warming. Loved him to bits.

Dare has fucked up his career as a detective in Seattle, only family friendship and old ties have gotten him hired in Palladian, his old hometown. 15 years he's been away but not that people in Palladian have been waiting for him to come back, not even Finn, who remembers his letters Dare never had answered or calls he'd never returned. Maybe he could do better than be friends with a guy who'd returned to town not because he'd wanted to, but because he had nowhere else to go.

When they meet for the first time after 15 years you immediately feel the tension between Finn and Dare. On the one hand Finn has longed to see his childhood hero again, on the other hand there's the secret of Dare's dad's suicide looming between them, and some things better remain unsaid...

“I have loved your eyes for my whole lifetime.”

Finn and Dare are just perfect for each other but getting that into their stubborn heads seems to be impossible. The way they switch from flirting to hostility and back again, the way they constantly get on each others nerves was simultaneously annoying and entertaining.

The supporting characters are very unique and strong and easy to become fond of. I loved Finn's weed smoking aunt Lyddie. She's just awesome, her warmness and her love for her nephew touched me deeply, she cares so much for Finn

“Happiness doesn’t just come up to you and call out, Finn. You have to be prepared sometimes to just grab it as it goes by. I may be an old woman, but know what I’m talking about. Love makes your heart soar.”

“Why on earth would anyone want a sore heart?”

“Soar, baby. S-O-A-R.”

She gave his thigh a light slap.

“It feels like your heart has wings or it’s on fire or something. Sometimes you fly so high it hurts, even when it’s good. You ever feel that for one of your young men?”

A large part of my enjoyment of this book was my surprise regarding the BDSM aspect of the story and Finn's character development. He isn't the boy anymore he once has been and no one.... holy moly, no one knows who Finn really is! A special scene involving Finn and Bill Fraser, the seemingly homophobic police officer, left me speechless, I think my mouth hit the floor, I just couldn't believe my eyes!

The mystery part of the novel was fun to get into, it kept me guessing until the end. I had a hard time trying to find out who the murderer was.

As always, Zam's writing is nothing but masterful, each scene is carefully worded to bring every emotion to life, the humour, the loneliness, the happiness, the heartbreak, the love. Overall, I couldn't ask for more because this book covered it all for me, it left me shaking my head with a smile on my face. It was a hell of a ride! Highly recommended!

Fani *loves angst* says

DNF at 60%

What started as an emotional, sweet & loving story about two childhood friends who reconnect after years apart, turned into a rhapsody on the magical powers of D/S relationships.

It might be the fact that I'm currently reading yet another book that shows how a D/S relationship can help people who suffer from severe OCD (that's Dirty Laundry for those who are interested) but if I read one more romance about the "healing" powers of BDSM or D/S relationships, I swear I'm gonna scream! If these stories are true, doctors are soon going to prescribe BDSM instead of medicine to mental patients. I can't rule out that it does help some people, but with the regularity that I come upon it in romances nowadays (I blame Fifty Shades for showing the way) you'd think BDSM is the panacea for all mental diseases.

Plus, Finn turned out not to be who I thought he was. I'm probably going to be considered narrow minded but (view spoiler) So even the D/S part, rather than hot, felt fake and not really consistent with the heroes or their

personalities (a problem other readers mentioned as well) which is the final reason I couldn't bother reading any more of this.

Julie (*Happily Ever Chapter*) says

When Dare and Finn were kids, Finn used to follow Dare around with hero worship in his eyes. Finn was an outcast even as a child, as the newcomer to a small close knit town, and also as the son of the town prostitute. One day on the playground, Dare defends Finn from a bully and they were inseparable from that moment on. When Dare's father shocks the town and commits suicide, his mother moves them away and he cuts all ties with Finn and doesn't respond to any of his letters or phone calls. Years later Dare comes back into town with his tail between his legs because he messed up at his job in the city and now his old home town is the only place he can find work. He faces a lot of animosity inside the department because he didn't move up the ranks like the other officers. He avoids Finn in town but ends up finally seeing him at a crime scene in Finn's aunt's salon. He tries to reconnect with him and pick up their friendship where it left off but Finn is a different person than the boy he left all those years ago. He has secrets and he's much more closed off.

I really expected to love this one way more than I did. It started off great and I was really enjoying it then all of a sudden there was a BIG change in one of the characters and I felt blindsided. It was really hard for me to get back into the story after that. I thought I was really going to love Finn because I love rooting for the character that always had feelings, but Finn was so "blah". He had little to no emotion in the entire book. I feel like some of it was a defense mechanism but I wanted more out of him, and we never really got it.

Dare is the typical fallen hero type. He left his last job in disgrace, and I wanted him to find redemption in his home town. What we end up seeing from him is him repeatedly drinking himself into a stupor and ignoring everyone's pleas for him to get help, which he never does by the way! I really wanted to see him grovel a bit to Finn. The guy was Finn's hero when they were kids and he cut him off without ever answering his letters/calls, even when he knows how Finn is going to be isolated and bullied when he goes?? Not cool. And Finn doesn't even really hold it against him!

While I didn't "get" the romance between the two of them, I was actually surprised when we find out what was going on with all the secrets and when we find out who "the bad guy" is. I definitely didn't see any of that coming.

I was left wanting a bit more out of the ending. The mystery was wrapped up tight but I thought there was more that need to be said/done in Finn and Dare's relationship. I think it would have been more satisfying if there was an epilogue included that showed them working thru some of their issues for a more HEA ending. I would call this one HFN at best.

* I received a copy of this title via Riptide Publishing in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own. *

Erika says

I've been a fan of Z.A. Maxfield's work since I stumbled upon her books a few years ago ~~but had been underwhelmed with her past few efforts~~ and I'm happy to say that I really enjoyed Home The Hard Way

(Edit: after looking at my past ratings I realized I was thinking of a certain other author. My bad).

This book captured my attention right from the beginning and I ended up staying awake all hours of the night, unwilling to put my reader down to go to sleep. It had me energized and wanting to know more, which made me equal parts happy that the book was so good and relieved to be off today so that I could get some extra sleep.

I was instantly drawn in to this book as I read about Finn, who had come back to live in his small and hostile home town to care for his aunt as she dealt with the ravages of cancer. Finn who, seen through the eyes of his long lost friend Dare, seemed at first to be a sensitive soul that needed saving and protection. Then there was big bad cop Dare, who'd left town as a popular and well liked boy but ended up having to slink back with his tail between his legs, not quite so popular anymore.

I was expecting the usual storyline, where Dare's love would help Finn break out of his woobie prison to become a confident butterfly while Finn's love would help Dare overcome his adversities, so call me very pleasantly surprised when popular conventions were thrown on their ear and this story morphed into something totally different. This book is not for everyone. There's very little sex and certain aspects that will surprise you about said sex. There is no insta love or a fluffy HEA. There's a mystery, but one that keeps you guessing until the end. I won't say anymore about the plot or storyline. A large part of my enjoyment of this book was my surprise at certain aspects, so I'll leave you to be surprised too (*Fyi: some other reviewers have included minor spoilers in their reviews without a spoiler tag, so beware if you like surprises.*)

The town and its denizens are a major part of this story, and Maxfield does an excellent job of setting the suspenseful tone. You learn pretty soon that this normal small town has some deep dark secrets but they are not revealed right away. You have to read on to find out the circumstances behind Dare's return to town (and boy was that a doozy!) and why Finn is not exactly who he seems (or is he?).

The side characters were also well written, especially the asshole cop Ben and Finn's aunt Lyddie who felt very real to me. I was shocked, titillated and saddened in turn by Ben's story and I think other readers will feel the same way.

There were a few things that bothered me while reading this book, but they were minor niggles with poor (and oft used) word choice at certain times. I also found the formatting of the ARC copy to be very off-putting, so I'm glad that Maxfield's excellent writing made me look past that.

This book was provided by Netgalley in return for an honest review.

Karen says

Who says you can't go home?

Ok we're going to see how short and sweet I can keep this because I'm revisiting a few favorites on audio at the moment. So here goes...

I first read this book back in May of 2016 and I really, really enjoyed it. Here's the link to my original review because hey, who needs to reinvent the wheel right? Original Review: [Home the Hard Way](#)

All that I'm going to add here is that the narrator for this audio book was Shannon Gunn, who happens to be a new to me narrator. If this is any indication of his work and I'm assuming it is, I'm looking forward to enjoying more audio books by this narrator and there are more than a couple of audio books narrated by Shannon Gunn that I'm definitely looking forward to.

So to keep it short and sweet this one was a definitely success, I enjoyed revisiting 'Home the Hard Way' by Z. A. Maxfield and I have found another narrator to add to my list of 'narrators I like' which in turn means...you guessed it my audio book list has magically increased.

Rosa, really says

Home the Hard Way started out so well. I was reading along enjoying the novel with that *oooh, this one's gonna be good* feeling when suddenly I hit a wall. There was a major change in one of the characters and after that I was so blindsided I spent the rest of the book wondering what the hell happened instead of involving myself in the story. Frankly, I'm not quite sure if the problem is me or the book. Probably it's me. Possibly it's both. I still can't decide.

The plot of the book is practically a cliché, but one I very much enjoy. A cop, once the hometown hero, returns in disgrace only to take up with the man he left behind. The cop, Dare, is supposed to be the macho character while Flynn is supposed to be smaller and more delicate. There's a mystery that brings them together and eventually everything is resolved and our two heroes live happily ever after. That's basically the plot of and yet it isn't. Maxfield takes our expectations, adds some major twists in the characters and completely turns the whole thing around. It's pretty impressive writing.

My problem is Flynn. On one hand he seems to want love even though he's scared of it. On the other hand he states quite firmly that he doesn't have relationships, he fucks people. It's like he's the clichéd cop character and the sweeter character combined. It's an interesting mash up but it never rang true for me. Instead of feeling like Flynn is conflicted, I felt like I was reading about two different people. His attitude changed from scene to scene and I never knew which personality was going to show up. Perhaps Maxfield did this to create more suspense and a more complicated character but I just felt confused. I had a hard time liking him as a result.

I did like Dare, though. His character is also quite different than what you'd expect. He's supposed to be the macho cop who denies any softer emotions. But instead Dare fairly quickly realizes his feelings for Flynn. The change in his character happened gradually and felt natural. Yet Flynn appears to be interested in nothing but sex. That's fine, but it's like this between them throughout the majority of the novel. Things only change towards the end and I just wasn't convinced by that change. It felt way too sudden. I wish there had been more sex – and not just because I enjoy some nice fornication – but because it would've shown how their feelings toward each developed. Flynn's sudden change in attitude would have felt less abrupt. The ending was very sweet but I found myself thinking *what, that's it? We're just supposed accept it's an HEA? No further discussions?*

In spite of my complaints, I can see that a lot of people will enjoy this novel. The town of Palladian and its inhabitants felt real to me. The characters of Aunt Lyddie and Bill Fraser were especially fantastic. I'd like to say the mystery kept me guessing but like I said, Flynn's character had me so confused I didn't pay much attention to it. But I think others may not share my complaints or problems.

Debra says

4.5 stars

Dare and Finn are two complex and struggling characters who haven't seen each other in years. When Dare returns to town the two old friends struggle to reconnect as adults. Dare is trying to restart his career as a cop in his old hometown, determined to find out what was behind his father's suicide 15 years before, while Finn is caring for his dying aunt in a town that holds a grudge stemming from the behavior of his long dead mother.

ZAM's writing, as always, was very good. The relationship and the mystery both took some unexpected turns and the men did not have it easy at all when it came to navigating their feelings for each other. The BDSM aspects are not heavy but there is some D/s, humiliation and rope play.

Jenni Lea says

Okay, so I really liked this book. I liked Finn and Dare. I got lotsa good feels outta this one.

But all of this was overshadowed by my **desperate** need for Bill's story.

So, Z.A. Maxfield, this is a plea. Won't you pretty please with sugar on top write Bill's story? It really needs to be told.

Please.

I'm begging here.

Please?

Karen says

I think I'd forgotten how much I enjoy reading Z.A. Maxfield...

It's been a long time since I've read a book by this author. So when I stumbled across this one sitting on my e-reader I couldn't resist the temptation.

'Home the Hard Way' is a mystery with a definite romance thrown in and I love this combination. The story is set in a small town called Palladian. Small towns are another weakness of mine. I grew up in the country

and lived about 5 miles outside of a small town and have spent much of my life living in small towns and anyone who's ever spent any amount of time in one knows that the expression 'if you can't remember what you did yesterday, just ask your neighbour' had to of been created by someone who lived in a small town. Truer words were never spoken. Palladian personifies that phrase. Everyone is in everyone else's business. There are secrets and lies, deceptions, affairs all the stuff that small town life is made of.

Dare Buckley left Palladian as a teenager shortly after his father committed suicide, but now he's back. For Dare, Palladian has become his last chance at redemption. He messed up big time in Seattle and it seems that in order to fix things he needs to go back to the beginning.

Being back in Palladian means a chance not only to fix his professional life but it's also his opportunity to try and find out what drove his father to commit suicide and it means a seeing Finn Fowler again. Finn was just a young kid with a serious case of hero worship when Dare last saw him. Finn's all grown up now and he doesn't need a knight in shining armor to ride to his rescue...Finn has taken control of his own life...total control.

So where do I begin explaining how much I loved this book...let's start with Dare. Dare was the golden child, Finn worshiped him, he was Finn's friend, his confidant, his protector, in a way his everything but that was then and now Dare and Finn have both grown up. Dare's a bit of a mess, he spends a lot of time seeking comfort and answers in a bottle where they can't be found and he's slowly beginning to realize that the Finn he left behind doesn't exist anymore and he just doesn't know the Finn that he's come back to. Which brings us to Finn. Yep, Finn grew up and it wasn't an easy thing but he learned the hard way that the person who was going to take care of Finn...was Finn and no one else. He's got secrets that he guards tenaciously but most of them aren't his, they just seem to revolve around him.

There was host of secondary characters who added to this small town's character. Each one of them somehow connected to the MCs and each other as is often the case in small towns. People such as Finn's Aunt Lyddie, Bill Fraser who is a story unto himself, Denise, Tony, Trent and so many others.

There were just so many pieces to this puzzle. I loved working them in my mind and sliding one piece up against the other to see which ones fit only to discover that there was yet another piece hiding somewhere. I love a good mystery and this one worked for me I was fascinated to see how everything would come together and at the same time seeing Dare and Finn's relationship reshape and reform itself to fit the men they have become instead of the boys they were, was almost another mystery all it's own.

My only disappointment was at the end I would have liked just a little more, I'd love even a story to let me know what happens next with Finn and Dare...that'd be really awesome.

I love a book that pulls me in and makes me want to be involved, has me waking up in the middle of the night so I can read a few more pages or getting up early so I can finish it and this book had me doing all of that.

Kaje Harper says

This book has a different feel from most of this author's other stories - more complex, darker, and full of flawed characters. There are no knights in shining armor here (other than perhaps Finn's Aunt Lyddie.) Every character has made major mistakes in their life. Every one has dark places inside them, regrets, blind spots

about themselves, others, and the past. I loved that about this book - I enjoy heroes, but I often identify most with the flawed main character who has to fight himself as well as life for his HEA.

Finn is the small, odd-looking, bullied home-town boy who appears trapped in his fishbowl oppressive town by the needs of his dying aunt. But as the story goes on, you find out that that's far too simple a view of such a complex character. Finn has resources that are unexpected, and the factors that hold him in his current life are as much about the past as the present.

Dare was Finn's older best friend as kids, until Dare's father's suicide drove his mother to move them out of the state. In that move, Dare deliberately let go of his friendship with Finn, which had been vitally important and yet strained by ill-defined hero worship and the deaths of Finn's mother and Dare's father. It was easier to walk away.

When Dare messed up on the job as a Seattle detective, in a moment of drink-clouded misjudgment, he needed a sponsor to find a new position. A hometown friend of his father's stepped up for him and he has come home to work for the local police force. Inevitably, he has to meet Finn again. In that first meeting, there is an echo of the older protector and worshipful follower they once were, but it is immediately clear that their current status is a long, long way from those childhood roles.

Death and vandalism in town force Dare to investigate crime in Finn's aunt's hair salon, tangling the personal with the professional. Dare feels obsessed with Finn, but he quickly discovers that the boy he remembers has gone through a lot, and taken paths to adulthood he'd never have envisioned. The BDSM in this story isn't heavy but plays a vital role in the confusion and the complexity of relationships, and not just between Dare and Finn.

This was close to a five-star story for me, but I felt like things moved too fast between the MCs somewhere in the middle. I loved some of the twists and turns, loved that the secondary characters also turned out to be living in the shades of grey, but was unconvinced that all the whiplashes of emotion, need and understanding could have happened quite at the speed with which they did. Still this is one I'll reread to see the story from the beginning, colored with the knowledge from the end.

If you like a mystery, complex and deeply flawed heroes with weaknesses, emotional BDSM relationships, and second chances, give this book a try.

Christelle says

First, I want to thank Shari-Amor for this gift !!

3.5 stars.

Dare and Finn were good friends during their childhood but Dare left town after Finn's mom was found drown in a river and Dare's father committed suicide.

Decades after, Dare comes back in town as a police officer. Some things haven't changed, like the gossips, the unanswered questions about Dare's father suicide, the bullying Finn has to endure. But Dare and Finn have now men and Dare realizes that he can't anymore take anything at face value. And with death, disappearances and blackmail wrecking the small town, Dare has to decide what to do with his feelings for Finn.

It's a very good mix of romance and mystery : the plot is solid and the truth unravels nicely. My only niggle was the BDSM part. As I'm not a huge fan, it spoiled my enjoyment as I felt that it didn't add anything to Dare and Finn's relationship, quite the contrary.

Ami says

I've come to realize that sometimes Z.A. Maxfield's version of flawed men just speaks to me; like they have an express tunnel to my heart. They can go straight there and squeeze the hell out of it. This is one of those times. I'm not saying that I don't have issues about this book – let me get to that later – but overall, it is another story coming from Z.A. Maxfield that I ended up loving.

Dare touched my heart because of his struggle with alcoholism and his realization that the kid that used to look up at him with childhood hero worship no longer was there and he didn't know how to deal with this. I found Dare's stumbling to find a way back to Finn's life compelling. It pulled me right in – especially because Dare also had a way with words that just broke me (one of my favorites: "*I have loved your eyes for my whole lifetime*").

While Finn ... ah, Finn, how could I not love this strong man that emerged from ashes of his past like a phoenix? Finn's mother was known as playing around with a lot of men (married or not) when she was alive. Then after she was dead and Dare left, Finn became an object of bullying with one incident so bad it put a mark on him. But despite the town still not accepting Finn fully, he was able to hold his head high. He had a side-business, albeit a bit secretive, in which the town's people were willing to spend their money. He took care of his beloved aunt. He was just amazing.

The chemistry and history that pulled these two men in was strong. I had no trouble believing that each was essential for the other's life. While the mystery that surrounded Dare's father's suicide and present deaths was well-written too. Even if the reveal of Dare's father's case was by way of Finn 'telling' it to us readers rather than Dare finding out by himself, but it was still a good mystery.

Now here comes my biggest issue...

I am going to start with a disclaimer. I'm NOT against BDSM or D/s tones in my books. I just don't prefer it. I can enjoy it but at the same time I also need a strong *motivation* for it, if a romance story wants to introduce this in the middle. For me, D/s doesn't always fit with the story. And the D/s tone here is one example.

I could make a guess of what the author was trying to present here with the D/s sub-plot (yes, I'm NOT calling it BDSM). Dare always found himself as some kind of protector – to the kid that Finn was and then later as a cop. However, that life took a toll on him somewhat, which pushed alcohol his way which contributed to his error of judgment back in Seattle. For Dare, submitting to Finn was a way to give control to someone he knew wouldn't hurt him. Meanwhile for Finn, who had been left behind to defend himself, who suffered from bashing when he was teenager, who gave up his dream to leave Palladian to take care of his sick aunt, being dominant was Finn's way of taking control. He didn't need emotional connection to do it.

Unfortunately, I just didn't think it fit the story. Or maybe I was expecting something different. The kind of hurt/comfort healing that came from sweet romance, probably. From the beginning, I felt that Dare didn't exactly dream or secretly yearn for D/s kink. Even near the end, Dare said, "*You can do whatever you want*

with me, if every so often you let me love you like that," which somehow for me it meant that Dare cherished an emotional sexual connection with Finn more than being controlled. So what was the D/s sub plot for? I couldn't help but think it was presented here because the sub-genre was popular. But this story would work just as well without it.

However, as you could see, despite my biggest issue, I still gave it 4 stars. It was because the D/s sub-plot did not dominate the story. There were more scenes of Dare and Finn reconnecting outside the scene, as well as those wonderful sessions of Dare and his aunt, Lyddie. Then there was the other sub-plot of Finn and Bill Fraser, one of the seemingly homophobic cops who turned out having a much more complicated relationship with Finn. That one sub-plot was as interesting. I definitely would love to read more about Bill if ZAM plans to write a sequel.

So all in all, this is a mesmerizing, rich, and complex story. And guess what, it fits my taste very, very well.

The ARC is provided by the publisher for an exchange of fair and honest review. No high rating is required for any ARC received.

Josy says

~ 4.5 stars ~

This was a great story and I enjoyed it immensely!! So why not 5 stars? Well... The end was a bit disappointing. One more chapter or an epilogue would have been great! I needed a tiny bit more to see how Dare and Finn make a life together.

I enjoyed Shannon Gunn's narration. He's a new-to-me narrator and I think he did a really good job! Sometimes he sounded a bit too forceful or aggressive during the sex scenes but overall, he put a lot of emotions into his voice to portray what the characters were feeling.

Sadie Forsythe says

3.5

I'm having a hard time deciding how I feel about this book. I finished it last night, with time to review it, but waited until today in order to consider my own response to it. You see, I can't decide if I didn't like certain aspects of the story full stop or if I just didn't like that it wasn't the story I wanted it to be (if that distinction makes any sense outside of my head).

Before I talk more about that let me add here that I like erotica. Not that I would qualify this as erotica, there isn't that much sex in it. But my point is that I have no problem with sex in books. I like a lot of m/m romances. I also like finding a little surprise kink thrown into either one. So, my complaint isn't based just on not liking D/s, BDSM, rope and/or pain play in the book. (Though, I have to admit, anytime a character

refers to something by its name, like 'pain play,' it feels too proper to be realistic to me. It rings the same cringe-bell as stiff dialogue in my head. But that's a whole 'nother matter altogether.)

Having said all that, I didn't like the BDSM, etc. aspect of this book. I think it was probably well written; that's not my complaint. And it was kinda hot; that's not my beef either. It just didn't feel natural in the story. This is the first Z. A. Maxfield book I've ever read, so I'm not coming from a place of comparative knowledge. But to me it FELT like it was all thrown in just to catch readers from the current D/s popularity wave. I don't know if it really was, but that's how it felt to me.

You see, Dare comes home to Palladian with no discernible interest in being dominated in any fashion. Doesn't even seem to be consciously aware of the lifestyle. But on meeting up with Finn he immediately starts wanting things he's never wanted before. He allows Finn control he'd never previously even considered giving up and he does it with no discussion, explanation or even verbal request (from either party). Now, consent is very clearly established, as are stop words and such. I don't mean anything like that. I just mean there must have been some psychic communication going on for Finn to know what Dare wanted and for Dare to know Finn could/would provide it, especially on Dare's part.

I did like Dare and Finn. Don't get me wrong. I liked them. I just kept thinking that the things they were doing didn't fit the otherwise sweet romance that was trying desperately to establish itself. This is also were my 'did I just not like it' or 'did I not like that the blurb sent me in expecting something else' internal debate comes in. Either way, it was jarring to me.

Then there was the whole Fraser twist. Surprisingly, I also like Fraser. I had fewer problems with he and Finn's activities than Finn and Dare's. It felt more natural there, maybe because it had had years to develop. However, unless there is going to be a sequel that deals with Fraser and his issues I'd have to call it a giant loose end.

I also liked the, I believe the phrase is penetration politics. Dare is your average hulking police alpha (as is Fraser), Finn is as you would expect. He's smaller, finer boned, prettier, gayer (or at least more openly so). Based on m/m norms you would expect Dare & Fraser to top almost exclusively. It was nice to see this trope played with.

The mystery was a good one. It wasn't too hard to figure the historic aspect of it out. It was pretty obvious, actually. But that obviousness just made the part happening in 'real-time' more interesting because you had this tantalising part of the puzzle that Dare didn't.

The writing and editing were both pretty good. I was a bit bothered by all the full names. Palladian is meant to be a pretty small town and everyone's supposed to have known each other since childhood. So I can't imagine they'd so often need a full name to identify someone. I also thought the author had a few catchall phrases she repeated (the plug & socket comparison, for example). But really these are minuscule complaints in the grand scheme of things.

I'm feeling fairly torn about how I feel or how I want to rate this book. So, I'm splitting the difference with a 3 and a bit.
