

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF DEEP DISH

# MARY KAY ANDREWS

## *The Fixer Upper*



# **The Fixer Upper**

**Mary Kay Andrews**

 HarperCollins e-books

*Dedicated with love to my favorite aunt,  
Alice Barchie, from her favorite niece*

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# 1

At the end of the very worst day in my life up until that point, my roommates and I sat in a back booth at the Filibuster, a crappy bar on a crappy street on the outskirts of Georgetown, as the endless news footage of my public demise played itself out again and again on the television set mounted on the wall directly in front of us.

I'd commandeered the remote control for the television as soon as we'd scurried into the Filibuster's darkened back room, but it seemed that every broadcast outlet in D.C. had decided to lead the day's newscasts with the story they'd already dubbed Hoddergate.

Stephanie and Lindsay stared, goggle-eyed, at the television as I poured my first beer of the day.

"God, Dempsey," Stephanie said. "You never told me your boss was an *old man*."

I glanced up at the television. They were showing the footage of us leaving our office for a business meeting earlier that day. My boss, Alexander Hodder, strode forcefully down the sidewalk, the vents of his charcoal gray suit jacket flapping in the stiff March breeze, his head up, eyes directed straight ahead, resolutely ignoring the dozen or so reporters and cameramen who'd been lying in wait for us. Alex hadn't even bothered to give them a "no comment" as we ran the gauntlet of reporters waving mikes in our faces and shouting questions about bribes and junkets. Meanwhile, I trailed a few yards behind, clomping clumsily along in my too-high black suede pumps, my steps constrained by the pencil skirt I'd stupidly chosen to wear to work that day.

"Alex isn't old," I snapped. "He's just fifty. Anyway, nobody would ever guess he's not in his early thirties."

"Fifty!" shrieked Lindsay, putting down the beer pitcher in midpour. "Jesus, Dempsey. The way you always talk about him, I just assumed he *was* in his midthirties."

"Fifty's, like, prehistoric," Stephanie agreed, gazing at the screen. "Although, yeah, I see what you mean about his looks. He's got the whole chiseled chin, high cheekbones, broad shoulders thing going on. Is that his own hair? Or do you think it's a weave or something?"

"Would you all stop?" I begged. "My life is going down the toilet--even as we speak--and all you guys can think about is how old Alex Hodder is."

Stephanie, always the analytical one, sat back in the booth and tapped her fingertips on the scarred wooden tabletop. "You don't think they'll really indict him, do you? And anyway, it seems to me that his life is the one going down the toilet, not yours."

"They've already indicted Congressman Licata," I pointed out. "And now they're after Alex. And me. All because of that damned trip we took Licata on in the Bahamas. You guys just heard what those reporters are saying--'Unnamed sources claim that prominent Washington lobbyist Alexander Hodder is under investigation for bribing a congressman.'"

I nodded in the direction of the television, and the girls swiveled their heads to watch. Now CNN was showing grainy footage of Representative Licata, Alex, and me, all of us dressed in formal wear, for a thousand-dollar-a-plate charity benefit headed by Licata's wife, Arlene. Our firm, Hodder and Associates, had bought a table for ten at the dinner, and all the young associates had been instructed to attend.

"Nice dress, Demps," Lindsay murmured.

I blushed. "I would have asked to borrow it, but you were out of town."

A gleeful-looking CNN reporter was declaring Hoddergate "the biggest influence-peddling scandal of the decade," adding that "unnamed sources report that Hodder's firm, which represents major petroleum interests, among other things, entertained Representative Licata with a golf outing to the exclusive Lyford Cay resort in the Bahamas, where Licata and Hodder were allegedly spotted romping with call girls on the resort's nude beach."

"Eeeww," Stephanie said, shuddering and wrinkling her nose. "A nude beach? With those two old men? That Licata dude must weigh three hundred pounds. And he's as old as my grandpa!"

"Forget the nude-beach part. What about the call girls!" Lindsay said, her eyes widening again. "Demps, did you actually hire prostitutes for a congressman?"

"No!" I protested. "Alex asked me to have the hotel arrange for a wakeboard instructor for Congressman Licata. Nobody ever said anything about prostitutes. I would never--"

"Isn't Licata, like, sixty or something?" Lindsay persisted. "Why would an old geezer like that want wakeboard lessons?"

"I don't know," I said, moaning. "I'm an idiot. It never occurred to me that there was anything like that going on."

"What about the condo in South Beach they say your boss bought

Licata?" Stephanie asked. "That's not true, right?"

"It wasn't Alex's money," I said, slumping down in the booth. "Alex told me it was supposed to be some kind of loan thing. The condo belongs to one of the senior executives at Peninsula Petroleum and Licata was supposed to be making payments--"

"Ooh, look," Lindsay interrupted, pointing at the television.

CNN was showing the footage of us fleeing from the reporters earlier that morning. "Sources within the Justice Department say they expect more indictments as the investigation continues," the reporter said solemnly.

"Shit," Stephanie said.

"Yeah," Lindsay agreed, nodding her head sadly.