



*Strip, Please*

Jena Wade



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# Love Has No Boundaries

*An M/M Romance series*

## STRIP, PLEASE

**By Jena Wade**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

### What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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# STRIP, PLEASE

By Jena Wade

## Photo Description

Man with a buzz cut, dressed in jeans and a SWAT team vest, has another man, face not shown, in handcuffs.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*What happens when this cop falls for the man he just arrested? And is the guy as innocent as he seems?*

*Sincerely,*

*Holly*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** law enforcement, stripper, undercover, booklovers, poledancing

**Word count:** 13,667

# STRIP, PLEASE

By Jena Wade

## CHAPTER ONE

Matt Hayes stomped through the crowded streets, boots clapping against the pavement as he weaved around the mess of people. *Doesn't anyone fucking work?* Matt clenched his jaw as a random person stopped right in front of him, forcing him to halt abruptly.

Out of the corner of his eye, Matt saw another man come out of the *Fun N' Fantasy* adult store headed right for him, not paying any attention. He couldn't move out of the way fast enough and the brunet ran right into him, almost knocking him to the ground.

“Watch where you're goin'!” Matt held the man at arm's length and righted both of them.

Soft doe-eyes met Matt's hard glare. An inch or two shorter than Matt's six-foot frame, the man wore a button-up black shirt with jeans that clung to his body in all the right places. Matt's anger dissipated as a grin split across the smaller man's face. Then he spoke.

“Hey, baby, don't be like that. I can put a smile on that face. Just say the word.” The man practically purred as he spoke, running his hand over Matt's biceps, outlining the tattoo he had there. His eyes held all sorts of suggestions as to the meaning of his words.

Matt tensed under the caress. *You've got to be kidding me.* “Come again?”

“You looking for a good time? Name your price. For a hot piece like you, I'd offer a discount.” The man looked Matt up and down, undressing him with his eyes.

For a moment Matt was tempted, but he shook that away. Disappointment and anger fueled his actions. *Disappointment? Why do I care if the man is a prostitute?* Reaching behind him, he located the cuffs attached to his belt. He

had one cuff on the man's wrist and was twisting his arms around his back before the man had time to react.

"What the hell?" Panic filled the smaller man's voice.

"You're under arrest for solicitation." The cuffs snapped into place. "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law." Grasping the man's shoulder, Matt stood him upright and started walking towards his car. "You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you." Matt paused. Usually at this point his perp would be spouting off obscenities or pleading for a break. *Pretty eyes has nothing to say?* He shook his head. *You can't be attracted to a man you're arresting.* Matt's cock didn't seem to agree, though. He discreetly adjusted himself as he pushed the man along. "Do you understand these rights?"

"Yes, sir."

*Sir? What kind of criminal is this?*

Approaching his car Matt said, "Stop. Don't move."

The man did as he was told. Matt clicked the button on his key fob, unlocking the car. He opened the back door of his unmarked police car and checked to make sure the seat was empty. It had been a long time since he'd arrested anyone.

Grabbing his catch by the arm he steered him toward the door. *Holy muscles.* Heat radiated under his fingertips where his skin touched the thin material of the other man's shirt. He placed his hand on the man's head and gently pushed him into the backseat.

Matt walked to the driver's side and slid inside. He met the perp's eyes in the rear view mirror. They were masked, with an indecipherable expression. *What's your story?*

"What's your name?" He turned to look at the man sitting comfortably in the backseat.

"Lucky Johnson."



“Johnson?” Matt raised his brow.

Lucky winked at him and flashed a sexy smile. “It’s a stage name. I work at *The Topless Bottom*.”

Ignoring the lust heating his skin, Matt turned and started driving. A *stripper. Should’ve known*.

The ride to the police station was quiet. Matt glanced in the rear view mirror every so often to see Lucky staring out the window, admiring the scenery as if he was on an adventure. He didn’t beg, he didn’t plead. He didn’t offer any “favors” to get out of the charges. *Good thing. I probably would’ve taken him up on that*. Lucky had a confidence about him that Matt couldn’t help but admire.

Pulling into the police station, Matt flipped off the car and exited the vehicle. He opened the back door and motioned for Lucky to get out. When Lucky stood up, Matt grasped his shoulder and directed him to the precinct entrance. Once inside, he set him on the chair in the bullpen and started filling out paperwork.

“Who’s this?” Brad Donovan, one of the detectives, asked.

Matt didn’t look up from his paperwork. “A prostitute. Caught him for solicitation outside of *Fun N’ Fantasy*.”

Brad placed his hands on his hips and looked pointedly at Matt. “Hayes, you haven’t filled out all of your HR paperwork. You can’t go around arresting people without being a full employee.”

Matt tossed the pen on the form he was filling out and narrowed his eyes at Brad. “I’m not going to ignore law-breaking when I see it.” He went back to his paperwork.

Brad sighed, but didn’t argue further. “Did you interview him yet?”

“No, we just got here. I haven’t even run his name yet.”

“You won’t find anything. This is my first arrest.” Lucky joined the conversation.

Both officers turned to look at him. Matt couldn't hide his surprise.

"Have you ever been paid for sex or sexual favors?" Brad asked.

Lucky shook his head. "No, sir. I made the mistake of hitting on a good-looking man and found myself in handcuffs."

*You manipulative little fuck.*

Before Matt could argue, Brad started talking. "You arrested him for hitting on you?" Brad rolled his eyes. "You might find it offensive that he'd mistake you for a gay man, but it's not against the law."

"Fuck off, Donovan. I didn't arrest the guy for having accurate gaydar." *Chew on that, asshole.* "I arrested him because he told me to 'name my price' and since I was hot enough, I could get a discount. That's grounds for arrest."

"Is that true?" Brad looked at Lucky.

Lucky leaned back and shrugged. "I think it's open for interpretation."

*Cheeky little bastard.* Matt continued to fill out the paperwork, pen pressed against the paper harder than necessary.

"C'mon, I'll take you to the interrogation room." Brad pulled Lucky to his feet and led him across the room.

Matt didn't check out his ass as he walked away. He didn't.

\*\*\*\*

Jordan took a deep breath as his cousin Brad closed the door to the cold, concrete room. Once inside he leaned against the wall, resting his head against the hard surface. He breathed heavily.

Brad laughed and shook his head. "Lucky, huh? First day as my planted informant and you end up arrested?" He spun Jordan around and unlocked the cuffs.

Rubbing his wrists, Jordan looked at Brad. "Fuck you! I was trying to get into character. How was I supposed to know he was a cop? With an uncle and cousin on the force I kind of assumed I knew all the cops." Jordan scrubbed

his face with his hands. “Christ. I can’t stop shaking. Is this going to mess things up for you and Uncle Rick?”

Brad waved his hand in the air. “It’s all good. You aren’t going to be booked for this. It’s too flimsy and Hayes is just in a pissy mood.”

Jordan let out a sigh. *Thank God.* “Who the hell is he, anyway?” *Besides drop dead gorgeous.* He met Brad’s eyes.

“Oh, no. No. No. No. I’ve seen that look before. You cannot be interested in Matt Hayes. First of all, he’s a cop—a detective. He was just hired last week. Apparently he’s waiting for some job to open up in Texas, so he’s here temporarily or some shit. We needed the extra help with the drug and prostitution ring run out of *The Topless Bottom.*”

“Why can’t we just tell him that I’m... not a criminal?” *Then he’ll know I’m not actually a whore.*

Brad sighed. “I talked with Dad about that. Apparently there’s a rumor that Hayes is dirty. I don’t get that vibe. I think it’s just a disgruntled co-worker making trouble. Hayes is good at what he does and he exposed some police corruption out in California. Apparently some people didn’t take too kindly to that. But, we can’t take chances with your safety, Jordan.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“You need to be focused on the task at hand. You’re undercover. Your job is to gather intel and get out.” Brad ran his fingers through his hair. “Maybe this isn’t the best idea. You aren’t a cop, Jordan. I worry about you working at that club.”

Jordan stood up straight. “No. I can do it. We’ve been over this before. You and Uncle Rick agreed to let me try.”

“If I had anyone else who was capable, you wouldn’t be in there. You’re a business major. You work at a bookstore. You haven’t been trained for this sort of thing. You’re a bookworm, for Christ’s sake.”

Jordan rolled his eyes. “But you don’t have anyone else. And if I want to buy the bookstore, I need the extra money. This is a win-win for both of us. I

get some intel for you and some cash for me. And I know how to take care of myself. You and your dad made sure of that when I moved in with you.” *So I could protect myself the next time someone beat me to a bloody pulp.*

Brad nodded and sighed. “Okay. Okay. I just worry about you.” He patted Jordan’s shoulder. “You’re doing great. I barely recognized you.”

Jordan’s face flushed and he laughed. “Shit. I’m freaking out.” He rubbed his hands across his face. “I was hoping I was putting on a good show. But I wasn’t sure.”

“Hell, I nearly blew your cover when I saw you sitting there. Jesus. What the hell were you doing at that store, anyway?”

Jordan smiled. “Getting an outfit for my first performance tonight.”

Confusion flashed across Brad’s face. “You’re a stripper. Why do you need an outfit?”

“Perhaps outfit isn’t the best term. I bought a G-string... well, three of them. I’m wearing one right now.”

Brad shook his head and walked toward the door. “Don’t fucking tell me those things, dude. That’s gross.” Brad turned. “Where are the other two?”

“In my back pocket. I didn’t think a bag was necessary. They’re so tiny. Hardly anything—”

Brad covered his ears. “Okay. I get it. You can shut up.”

Jordan’s smile faltered. “So, what do we do now?”

“Well, I have to put the cuffs back on. Then we’re going back to the bullpen and I’m telling Hayes that we’re letting you go.”

“I don’t think he’ll like that.”

“No, probably not. This should be fun. C’mon.”

Jordan turned around and placed his hands behind his back. He chuckled. “This remind you of when we stole Uncle Rick’s handcuffs and got them taken away at school?”

“Yeah, Dad got so mad he took us to the jail and pretended to book us.” Brad laughed. “He even called your dad to come get you.”

“When your dad left us in that cell, I nearly puked. I was more scared of my dad coming to get me than I was of going to jail.” Jordan sobered at the thought. That day had been the first of many times his father’d beaten him.

“Let’s get this over with, cuz.” Brad placed his hand on his shoulder and directed him out of the interrogation room.

They walked over to where Hayes was sitting at his desk, reading glasses over his deep chocolate eyes as they roved over a sheet of paper. *Gorgeous*. It had been Matt’s glare flashing with anger that had made Jordan want to erase that look from his face and kiss him senseless until his eyes showed arousal and nothing else. *Fuck, I’m in trouble*.

Looking up, Matt removed his glasses and rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand. Something in the motion made Jordan’s cock twitch. He looked at the floor, the wall, the chairs, anything except for the sexy cop who probably thought he was some sort of junkie-whore-stripper. *Great first impression*.

“What are you doing?” Matt’s commanding voice did nothing to quell Jordan’s arousal.

“I’m letting him go.” Brad unlocked the cuffs and set them on the corner of Matt’s desk.

Matt narrowed his eyes and tossed the glasses on his desk. “Oh, you are?”

Brad wasn’t intimidated. “Yeah, your grounds for arrest were flimsy at best. Lucky is a stripper, not a whore. And that isn’t against the law.”

Matt stood up and faced Brad. Jordan held his breath while the two macho men sized each other up.

“I’m a detective, just like you, Donovan. Isn’t it about time you started playing nice?” Matt’s voice was quiet but firm.

Brad crossed his arms over his chest. “You can be a detective and arrest whoever you want once you get your paperwork done. You can’t go around arresting every twink who hits on you, just because you had a shitty day.”

Matt snorted and rolled his eyes. “He’s hardly a twink.”

Jordan shifted his feet. His eyes flicked to the clock on the wall. “Am I free to go? I have to be at work in an hour.”

Both men looked his way. Matt gave him a hard stare. “Yeah, but rest assured we’ll be seeing you again.”

*I look forward to it.* “Well, officers, it’s been a pleasure.” He looked at Matt. “If you really would like to see me again, you can see all you want of me at the club any day of the week.” He winked and walked away.

Once outside he leaned against the building, catching his breath. *Holy shit.* Jordan shook his head at himself. Never in his *real life* would he have approached a man like Matt Hayes. *And never in my real life would a man like Matt Hayes want a bookworm like me.* Straightening up, he began his walk back to the apartment he lived in above the bookstore. He needed to get back into character before his first performance tonight.

*Think of the money, and the people you’re helping. That’ll get you through the night.*

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## CHAPTER TWO

Matt exited his car, and Brad got out of the passenger's side. It had been a week since he'd arrested Lucky Johnson and he hadn't stopped thinking about him. *I'll probably see him tonight.* Matt's pace quickened at the thought, forcing Brad to jog to catch up.

"Where's the fire?"

Matt ignored him. "Tell me about the club."

They walked side by side. The club was a two block walk from their parking spot. The lull of the afternoon traffic rush lingered in the background. Shops and restaurants lined the streets and people crowded the sidewalks.

"It's a clean place. We're far enough outside of Chicago to attract a wealthier clientele rather than the typical 'hood rats. But we're also close to the highway, so a lot of truckers frequent the place. Both men and women dance there. There are three stages, numerous backrooms, and an upstairs, which is where we suspect most of the prostitution takes place."

Matt's stomach tightened. *Does Lucky use the upstairs?* He mentally kicked himself. *Why do I even care? He's just a stripper, possibly a whore. Not someone I should be interested in.* Not that he was interested, because he wasn't. He'd spent the last week thinking of Lucky at random times, but that didn't mean anything. *Right?*

Brad continued, "There's no nudity on the main stages. Just men and women dancing in... outfits. The backrooms are another story. Pay enough money and you can get pretty much anything, or so I've been told."

"What made you suspect this place to begin with?"

"Couple of months ago a young man was found dead not far from here. His body had been dumped. He had a lot of drugs in his system and had been raped. Our investigation led us here. One of the female strippers told us she suspected the owner was pimping out the workers and selling drugs to the customers, but she couldn't prove it. She left town soon after. Case is still open."

Matt shook his head. “After ten years of this work you’d think I’d be used to hearing things like that. Still makes me sick.”

Brad nodded and met his eyes. “Probably why you’re good at what you do. It’s hard to solve crimes when you’re too jaded to care.”

Matt nodded in return. They approached the building. Brad had been right, it looked clean. A bouncer stood outside checking IDs and letting people inside, turning away the few that tried to get in underage. The two story brick building had no windows, just a neon sign reading *The Topless Bottom*.

“What’s the game plan?” Brad asked.

Matt shrugged. “Just two guys visiting a club after a long day at work. Have a beer, watch some of the entertainment. See what we can see.”

“Let’s do it.”

\*\*\*\*

Inside the club Matt waited for his eyes to adjust to the dark. There was a smoky haze, caused by the fog machines, and it was loud. The smell of liquor and sweat hung in the air. Strobe lights flashed and moved across the stage, following dancers as they tantalized and teased the customers.

Matt’s eyes were immediately drawn to a man dressed in a pair of tight whitebriefs, which showed off his luscious bubble butt. He had on a white shirt, unbuttoned, flowing behind him as he moved. He made his way across the stage in perfect beat with the pounding music. *Lucky*. Matt’s heart rate quickened, and his cock stood at attention as Lucky gyrated to the rhythm of the music. As the tempo increased, Lucky gripped the stripper pole at the end of the stage and spun around. His muscles flexed and rippled as he flipped himself upside down and wrapped his legs around the pole. The artful display of his movements surprised Matt and he couldn’t look away. As far as he was concerned, he and Lucky were the only ones in the room, and Lucky was dancing for him and him alone.

Lucky spun and flipped, and flipped again, bending and twisting his body into impossible contortions. At one point he held himself upside down and



gripped the pole with both hands. While spinning around, he extended his legs into a full split. After a moment, he bent one knee and wrapped it around the pole, then let go with both hands and arched his back. The flowing white of his shirt took the form of angel wings as he circled the pole in slow motion.

Matt held his breath at the sight. The beauty and grace of Lucky's movements seemed out of place in a strip club. *That body should be worshiped and cherished.*

The music stopped, and Lucky let go of the pole. Sweat glistened on his chest, and blue and red strobe lights followed him down the stairs off the stage. Men and women alike tucked bills into his briefs. Matt let out a ragged breath and turned toward the bar. *Fuck*

A hand clapped on his shoulder startled him. "See anything you like?" Brad asked.

"Nope. Not a thing. Wouldn't mind a drink, though." *And a cold shower.*

Brad and Matt sat at the bar, facing the stage for a while, sipping their beers slowly.

Lucky took the stage again with a group of dancers and did a quick dance routine, clad only in a G-string and combat boots. The moves were nothing like what he had done on the stripper pole, but still sexy as hell. Matt looked away and watched a different stage for a while.

After a few minutes Brad nudged his shoulder. "Take a look to your right. We might have trouble."

Matt turned slowly to see a large man handling one of the male dancers roughly. He held a tight grip on the smaller man's slender shoulders, hard enough to leave bruises. The smaller man cowered next to the meaty jackass, who was trying to force him into one of the backrooms. The dancer tried to twist out of the man's grip, but that only angered the larger man. Just as Matt and Brad were about to interrupt, Lucky came in and pushed on the big man. The smaller man ducked behind Lucky.

Matt and Brad approached to hear Lucky yell, “He said *no*, asshole. Back off.”

The big man shoved Lucky and lunged for the other dancer. Lucky recovered and threw a hard punch, which connected with a resounding crack, knocking the big man on his ass. “I said back off.” Lucky quivered with anger. Matt stood and stared. He was sure his eyes must have been as big as saucers watching Lucky nearly knockout a man twice his size. *So he knows a little self defense.* The realization was oddly comforting.

Lucky took the smaller man into his arms. “Are you okay, Gavin?”

Gavin nodded and leaned into Lucky.

Matt seethed with jealousy. “This happen here often?”

Lucky met his eyes, but said nothing. He kissed Gavin’s forehead and let him go. “C’mon, go get cleaned up behind stage. You’re on soon.”

Gavin nodded and walked away.

Lucky looked past Matt. “Nate. Take care of this trash, please,” he told the bouncer as he approached.

Lucky turned to Matt and Brad. “What are you two doing here?”

“Just watching the show,” Brad said.

Lucky nodded, and then turned away. “Well, enjoy your evening, gentlemen,” he said over his shoulder, as he waltzed back behind the stage.

“Your boy is a little spitfire.” Brad clapped Matt on his back.

“He’s not *my boy*.” *Though I wouldn’t be opposed to that.* Matt walked toward the bar and tossed a few bills down. “You ready to go?”

Brad nodded. “Yeah, we’ve seen all that there is to see tonight.”

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Jordan scuffed his shoes across the pavement as he walked. The pole-dance fitness classes he taught did not prepare him for the physical challenge of

dancing for horny men and grabby women all night. *Quick ten-minute walk and I'll be in my bed for the next twelve hours.*

It was two in the morning, but the streets were well lit and Jordan had a tight grip on his pepperspray. He'd made the walk numerous times before.

Headlights flashed behind him, and he turned around. A blue impala drove up beside him and stopped. The window was rolled down, and Matt Hayes rested his arm on the window ledge.

Exhaustion coursed through Jordan. "I'm not looking for any action tonight, Officer. I'm just walking home."

Matt gripped the steering wheel, but he didn't look at Jordan. "Get in the car, Lucky. You shouldn't be walking around this late at night."

Jordan's heart raced. "Th-That's okay. I only live about ten minutes away."

"Well, then it's only a few minutes by car. Get in, Lucky. Please."

Jordan's resolve melted. His shoulders slumped in defeat. "Okay." He started to open the back door.

"In the front seat." Annoyance filled Matt's voice.

*Duh.* Jordan jogged around to the passenger side of the car and slipped inside.

The car didn't move. Jordan looked at Matt, who turned to him with a raised brow. "You going to tell me where you live?"

*Could I be any more of an idiot in front of him?* Jordan schooled his features. *Lie.* He thought quickly. *Where would a stripper and possibly prostitute live?* "Um... Do you know that apartment complex on the south side? Just off of Cranson Street?"

Matt took a deep breath. "That shithole place?" He put the car in gear and pressed the gas. "You live there?"

Jordan nodded. "Yeah."

The car lurched forward, and Matt turned out of the strip-club parking lot. Confusion filled Jordan. "Um, you turned the wrong way."

Jordan could barely make out Matt's features in the dark car, lit only by the light of the clock radio. "I'm not taking you to that place. I'm taking you to my apartment."

*I don't have time for this, or the energy.* "I'm really not looking for—"

"Because it's safe, Lucky. Not for anything else. I'm not going to leave you at some seedy shithole in the middle of the night."

Jordan sighed. "Okay." He fished his phone out of his pocket and sent Brad a text to let him know that he was done at the club and fine. It was the same text he sent every night that he worked at *The Topless Bottom*.

The rest of the ride was made in silence. Jordan looked out the window at the lights as Matt maneuvered through the empty streets. The radio played quietly in the background. Jordan rested his head against the window and almost fell asleep, feeling oddly comfortable with this cop he barely knew.

Matt pulled into a small apartment complex—the exact opposite of the trashy one Jordan pretended to live at. He parked in an empty spot and turned off the car.

Matt opened the door and exited. Jordan followed. Apprehension filled Jordan as they walked to the entrance, and Matt pulled a card out of his wallet and swiped it on the door. A light flashed green, and the soft click of the locks sounded. Matt opened the door and motioned for Jordan to go ahead of him.

Inside the hallway Jordan followed Matt to his apartment door, where he swiped the same card.

"High tech around here, huh?" Jordan broke the silence.

Matt pushed open the door and nodded. "I miss keys."

Matt's apartment was plain and drab. The walls were white, the furniture was straight out of the 70s. No photos hung on the wall. No decorations cluttered the space. Jordan recalled seeing a similar apartment when picking out places for Brad to live after college. The complexes all had one apartment that was their "tour" area. It was furnished, but its only purpose was to show off the space. *How can he live like this?*

“Do you want something to drink?” Matt shucked off his jacket and hung it on a hook, then toed off his shoes and kicked them against the wall. Jordan took off his shoes as well, and placed them side by side on the doormat.

“Yeah, I could use some water.” *Stripping makes a man thirsty.*

Matt walked deeper into the apartment, and Jordan followed. Matt’s jeans clung to the curve of his ass perfectly, and Jordan couldn’t help but admire it. His white T-shirt accentuated his back muscles. He looked positively delicious with his empty gun holster still around his shoulders. Jordan’s cock swelled in his jeans. *This is a hell of a time to get a hard-on for a cop.*

The kitchen was clean and organized. A loaf of bread and a toaster sat out on the counter, and there were a few dishes in the sink. Jordan’s stomach growled.

Matt turned to him. “You hungry?”

Jordan shifted his weight. “Well, I won’t say no to food. But I really don’t want to be any trouble.”

“Cereal okay?” Matt opened the fridge and pulled out a pitcher of water.

Jordan smiled. Cereal was what he would be having if he were at home right now, anyway. “Yeah, that’s great.”

Matt opened the cupboard and pulled out a glass and two bowls. He poured Jordan a glass of water and handed it to him. Jordan gulped it down with one pull and set the empty glass in the sink.

“It’s in the pantry.” Matt pointed to the door to Jordan’s left.

He opened it. “Cheerios or Lucky Charms?” he asked.

Matt smiled. “You pick.”

Jordan’s heart flip-flopped. Matt’s wide smile and easy demeanor made him forget for a moment why he was there, and what Matt thought he was. He ducked his head and pulled the Lucky Charms from the shelf.

“Good choice.” Matt opened the fridge and pulled out the milk.

Jordan poured his bowl, and then grabbed the milk from Matt while handing him the cereal. Once Matt poured his bowl, they switched again. Matt returned the milk to the fridge, and Jordan put the cereal back in the pantry.

They stood in the kitchen and shoveled spoonfuls of milk-soaked marshmallows into their mouths. *Like this is an everyday occurrence.* Jordan smiled at the thought. In his *real life* he was alone every night. He couldn't help but think that having someone to come home to at night like this would be nice.

Towards the end of his cereal Jordan tipped the bowl back and drank the milk. A trickle dripped down his chin. Matt reached his hand out and used his thumb to clean the mess off Jordan's face. Heat shot through Jordan at the touch, and he met Matt's gaze.

Matt narrowed his eyes. "What made you become a stripper? Why... Why not something else?"

Jordan set his bowl on the counter and ran his hand through his hair. *More lies. Kinda.* "My dad found out I was gay and he... didn't approve." *Truth.* Jordan sighed. Matt's eyes begged him to continue. "He found me looking at online porn. Gay porn. When I was sixteen." Jordan shrugged. "I was a curious teenager, and I'd already figured out I was gay. He beat me. Pretty bad. I had broken ribs, a busted jaw, black eye, boot-print bruises in my back." *Truth.* "My uncle, on my dad's side, let me stay with his wife and their son while I recovered." *Truth.* "But when I was well enough to be on my own they kicked me out, too." *Lie.*

In reality, Uncle Rick and Aunt Lily had taken him in with open arms, and they never spoke to his father again, since he had rejected his only son for being gay. Brad had been ecstatic to have his best friend and cousin move in. Every night was like a sleepover. Jordan had been lucky.

"Why?" Matt's body was rigid and he had a white-knuckled grip on the counter.

"They didn't approve, I guess. I didn't ask." *I should've thought of a backstory before now.* "I stayed at a few shelters, but those are hard to get into.

After a year or so I got a job at a club, cleaning during the day. One thing led to another, and once I was old enough, I started dancing. I'm good at it."

"And the other? The prostitution?" Matt's Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed.

Jordan met his eyes. "Are we on the record here, Officer? Or am I speaking freely?"

"Detective Hayes is off duty right now." Matt unclipped his badge from his belt and tossed it on the counter.

"That just... happened." *Someone get me a shovel—the shit's getting deep.*

"Just another thing you're good at?"

Jordan bit his lip. "I suppose so." *That's laughable, considering the amount of experience I have.*

"You can get out of this. You don't have to go back there, Lucky."

Jordan ached for Matt to use his real name. The truth lingered on the tip of his tongue. *I'm not a whore! I'm about to be a bookstore owner. The most exciting thing I do at night is read! I'm only trying to help.* He shook his head and laughed. "Oh, that's cute, Officer. But I can take care of myself. I promise." *Once this is over, I want an Oscar.*

Matt nodded. "Okay." He walked out of the kitchen and opened a closet in the hallway. He pulled out a blanket and a pillow. "You can go ahead and sleep on the couch. In the morning, when it's light out, I'll take you wherever you want to go."

In the living room, Matt tossed the bedding on the couch. Jordan leaned against the back of the gaudy plaid furniture and met Matt's eyes. "Thanks." He reached out and squeezed Matt's hand. "For everything. I appreciate your concern. I really do."

Electricity zinged between the two of them where their skin met, startling Jordan. He dropped Matt's hand and walked around the couch to sit down. Matt turned and retreated down the hallway.

A maroon and gold book caught Jordan's eye. He walked to the shelf to get a better look. His eyes widened when he read the title. "Detective?" he called out down the hallway.

"You can call me Matt." Slow footsteps approached and stopped behind Jordan.

Jordan felt the heat of Matt's body, just inches away from his back "What's this?" Jordan pointed to the spine of the book.

Matt pulled the book cautiously off the shelf, holding it in his hands like it was priceless china. "*The Princess Bride* by William Goldman. First Edition."

Jordan held his breath. "Can I... Can I touch it?"

Matt chuckled, and placed the book carefully into Jordan's hands. "So, you're a fan of *S. Morgenstern's Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure*?"

"S. Morgenstern doesn't actually exist." Jordan ran his fingertips down the cover of the book, skin barely grazing the slipcover.

"Non-believer." Matt scoffed.

"I have a signed copy of the hardcover twenty-fifth anniversary edition." Jordan met Matt's eyes. Matt's wide smile nearly knocked the wind out of him. Jordan's eyes returned to the book, holding it in his hands like it was the lost treasure of the Sierra Madre. "I own every version of the cover, including this one. But I don't have the first edition."

Matt eyes widened. "Really?"

*Idiot! Your bookworm is showing.* Do strippers own signed copies of popular fiction? "Well, I mean, I did. I sold it. Them. 'Cause I needed the money." *Might as well have said "for drugs."*

Matt nodded and closed the space between them. He reached up and cupped Jordan's cheek. "What is it about you," Matt asked, "that I can't seem to stay away from?"



Jordan's breath hitched. "What is it about you that makes me wish things were different?" *I wish I really was this interesting. You'd never be drawn to a nerd like me.*

Matt stepped closer to Jordan and then stopped, as if asking for permission. Impatience overcame Jordan, and he lurched forward and pressed his lips to Matt's.

Heat soared through Jordan as Matt leaned into the kiss. Matt grasped the book from his hands and set it back on the shelf. He wrapped his arms around Jordan's waist and tugged at his shirt.

Jordan thrust his tongue into Matt's mouth. A tinge of sugary Lucky Charms lingered there. *So sweet.* Matt pushed at Jordan's chest, forcing him to break the kiss. Jordan's eyes met Matt's. Arousal and hunger pooled in their depths. Matt led him down the hallway.

Inside the bedroom, Matt yanked at Jordan's shirt. Jordan lifted his arms and let Matt undress him. Once the clothing was thrown carelessly to the floor, Matt's hands flew to the button of Jordan's jeans. Jordan thrust his hips forward. *Yes, please.* His cock ached for Matt's touch. Matt dropped to his knees, flicked the jeans open, and jerked them down Jordan's legs.

"Oh, fuck me." Matt leaned his forehead against Jordan's groin, nuzzling his face against the silk material of the bright red G-string. Jordan's cock twitched at the sensation. Matt palmed Jordan's hips and mouthed his cock through the thin material.

Jordan nearly fell backward as Matt licked his cock from base to tip through the cloth. "Off, take them off," Jordan bit out through clenched teeth.

"No way. Been thinking about doing this since I saw you on stage. Gonna torture you like you tortured me." Matt stood up. "Stay right there." He walked over to the nightstand.

Jordan whimpered when he left. "What are you doing? Come back here."

Matt turned and smiled. "Anxious?" he asked as he walked back over to Jordan, condom and lube in hand.

*More than you know.* Jordan nodded.

Matt dropped to his knees in front of Jordan and resumed his tortuous assault on Jordan's cock. Jordan barely noticed the click of the lube bottle opening as he moaned and caressed Matt's head. Matt wound his hands around Jordan's hips and slipped his hand between Jordan's cheeks. His lube-slicked fingers pressed against Jordan's opening.

*Fuck, yes.* "Matt." Jordan couldn't decide between thrusting forward into Matt's mouth or impaling himself on Matt's fingers. "Please, Matt."

Finally, Matt tugged at the G-string with one hand and Jordan's cock sprang free. Matt closed his mouth around Jordan's prick as he pressed one finger inside Jordan.

Jordan's knees wobbled. "Oh, my God."

Matt inserted another finger and Jordan had to grasp the wall for support. Matt's mouth worked his cock with expert precision. *Never been like this before.* His balls drew tight to his body, his orgasm within reach. Matt's movements slowed and Jordan moaned. "Don't stop." He thrust his cock into Matt's mouth. *More.* Matt laid a hand on his hip, halting him.

"No. You don't get to come until I'm inside you." Matt licked at Jordan's balls.

"Then do it. Stop teasing me." Jordan surprised himself with his command. *When did I become so assertive?* He looked down at the man who was driving him insane with his mouth.

Matt met his eyes and flicked his tongue up the length of Jordan's shaft.

Jordan shuddered. "Please. Please, just fuck me already."

Springing to his feet, Matt guided Jordan to the bed and laid him gently down on the mattress. He covered Jordan with his body. Grazing his fingers over Jordan's forehead and through his hair, he asked, "What was it you wanted?"

Jordan held his breath, mesmerized by Matt's chocolate-brown eyes. "I forgot."

Matt chuckled and kissed Jordan softly. Jordan tugged at Matt's shirt, wanting to feel his warm skin. They broke the kiss long enough to slip Matt's shirt over his head. Their lips met again, harder this time. Jordan fumbled with Matt's jeans. He reached his hand inside to grasp Matt's cock. Jordan stroked Matt and felt him tense under his lips.

Matt pushed off of Jordan quickly and shucked off the jeans. He picked up the condom and ripped it open. "Sorry, Lucky. I can't wait any longer," Matt said as he put the condom on.

Pre-cum leaked from Jordan's cock at the thought of being filled by Matt. "Thank God." He spread his legs on the bed and his hand drifted down his chest to stroke himself. Matt climbed between Jordan's thighs and pressed his cock to Jordan's puckered hole. He pushed Jordan's knees closer to his chest as he thrust inside slowly.

Jordan clenched his jaw at the intrusion. It had been a long time for him, and he could've used a bit more stretching. But he couldn't tell Matt that. *He thinks you're a whore.* Up until now Jordan had let himself forget that fact.

The burn subsided as Matt's cock grazed Jordan's prostate and filled him completely. Pleasurable shocks ripped through Jordan's limbs, and he drew his legs closer to his chest. He moaned as Matt arched his back and changed the angle of his thrust.

"Fuck. Right there. Don't fucking stop!" Jordan screamed. His hands left Matt's hips, and he grabbed his own ankles and pulled his legs into a full split. *Being flexible is good for something.*

Matt's eyes went wide and he plunged harder, the new position allowing him to sink deeper into Jordan. "So hot, Lucky. Not gonna last."

Jordan's cock ached for release as Matt fucked him into oblivion.

Jordan let go of his ankles, but left his legs spread. He cupped Matt's face and held his gaze. "Let go, baby." He pressed his lips to Matt's and thrust his tongue into Matt's mouth.

Matt's body tensed under Jordan's fingertips and he moaned against Jordan's mouth. He drove into Jordan one more time as he released deep inside Jordan. Matt pulled his lips from Jordan's and met his gaze.

The heat in Matt's eyes spurred Jordan's orgasm, and he splashed warm cum between their stomachs.

Together they lay breathing hard. Matt laid his forehead against Jordan's, still holding his gaze. "That was... something else." He laughed. "I'm anxious to see what other sort of positions you can manage."

Jordan laughed as well. "I'm glad you liked it." He kissed Matt slowly and relaxed his cramping legs.

Matt slipped from Jordan's body and rolled over. He leaned on his side and started kneading Jordan's hips, as if he knew that Jordan was sore from holding the position for so long.

Jordan moaned and closed his eyes. *Should I move to the couch?* He wasn't sure. He knew he didn't want to. He turned his head, eyes roving Matt's features. *I'd rather wake up to this sight.*

The bed moved and shook as Matt stood. Exhaustion returned to Jordan and his eyes fluttered closed. He didn't open them when Matt came back with a warm wash cloth and cleaned the cum from his stomach. After a moment Matt climbed into the bed and wrapped his arm around Jordan, spooning against his body. He kissed Jordan's shoulder softly and said, "Good night, Lucky."

Jordan smiled and nestled into the embrace. "G'night, Matt."

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## CHAPTER THREE

The sunlight shone through the open curtains and hit Matt's closed eyes. He winced as he awoke, and tried to bring his arm over his head to cover his face. His arm wouldn't move. He opened one eye and looked over to the chestnut-haired man using his biceps as a pillow.

*Lucky.* The stripper who's read *The Princess Bride*. Matt smiled to himself, remembering the awe in Lucky's eyes as he held the first edition. It'd been a while since Matt had met anyone who shared his love of the written word.

He stared at the soft features of the sleeping Lucky. His lips turned upward in a slight smile. He looked so innocent and pure in his sleep. Did Matt regret sleeping with Lucky, the stripper and possible prostitute who worked at the club he was investigating? *No.* He brushed a wayward strand of Lucky's hair behind his ear. There was no way he would ever regret his night with Lucky, and if it were up to him, it would be the first of many nights. And Lucky would be with him and only him.

Matt sighed and cupped Lucky's head with his hand as he slipped his arm from underneath it. He gently laid Lucky's head back onto the mattress.

Slowly, Matt stood and stretched. He located his jeans on the floor and dug in the pocket to find his wallet. He pulled it out and flipped it open.

"If you're looking for money to pay me, I'm going to be pissed." Lucky's groggy voice caused Matt's cock to stir.

Matt turned to look at him. Lucky had rolled to his side and was facing Matt. He rested his head in his hand, propped up by his elbow. The sunlight illuminated his bronze skin and a smile crept across his face.

Matt returned the smile. "I was looking for another condom. We used the last one last night." He lay back down and scooted closer to Lucky, resting his hand on Lucky's hip.

"How do you feel?" Matt asked.

Lucky rubbed his eyes. "Tired." He yawned. "I usually sleep in a little later than this after a night at the club."

Matt rolled to his back and opened his arms. Lucky curled up next to him and nestled his head on Matt's chest. Matt sighed. *Heaven*. "Go back to sleep."

Lucky's breath tickled Matt's bare chest and he bit back a laugh. Lucky kissed his nipple softly and licked.

Matt hissed. "Hey! I thought you were tired?"

Lucky moaned and nuzzled into Matt's chest. "I'm waking up." He sighed. "I should sleep, though. I have to work tonight."

Matt went cold. "Don't go," he said.

Lucky sat up and met his eyes. "Don't go? I have to. I gotta work."

"You could do so much more with your life, Lucky." Matt put more heart into the words than he knew he had in him. "I can help you." He cupped Lucky's cheek and caressed the skin with the pad of his thumb.

"I don't need help." Lucky pulled Matt's hand from his face and held it.

"You could get your GED. Go to college." Matt narrowed his eyes. "You can't honestly want to be a stripper forever, right?"

Lucky slid away from Matt and huffed out a breath. "You can't honestly be having this conversation with me right now." He shook his head and sat on the edge of the bed, his back to Matt. "Why do you care?"

Matt sat up and put his hand on Lucky's shoulder. "I care. Last night wasn't just a convenient fuck. I care about you." Matt's heart ached. *Didn't Lucky feel the same?* He shook his head. *Why would he? It was only one night.*

Lucky snorted. "This isn't Cinder-fucking-rella, Matt. This isn't a fairy tale. It's real life. And in real life, I'm a stripper and you're a cop." He turned. "If you care about me, then you'll be fine with that. You'll accept me for who I am and what I do."

Anger coursed through Matt. *Why doesn't he understand?* "In real life, people don't strip as a long-term career." He bit the words out.

Lucky stood and looked at him, placing his hands on his hips. “Well, it’s my career right now.” He pointed his finger at him. “You know, I didn’t ask you to pick me up last night. I didn’t ask for you to care.”

*Fuck. This is not going the way I wanted.* Matt sighed and said nothing.

“Would you be able to introduce me to your friends? Your co-workers?” Lucky asked. “Right now, as a stripper. Would you be able to tell them that’s what I did for a living?”

Matt shook his head and smiled sadly. “I don’t know, Lucky.”

Lucky nodded. “When you can answer that with a ‘yes,’ then we can talk.”

Matt pinched his eyes closed. “It’s dangerous. I’m worried about you.”

“I appreciate your concern. But as you saw last night, I can take care of myself. I’ve been doing it for quite a long time now.”

Scrubbing his hands over his face, Matt stood. *I’m not giving up.* He pulled Lucky close to him. “I want to see you again. Not at the club.”

Lucky kissed him on the mouth and then said, “I’d like that.” He leaned in for a real kiss. He pressed his lips to Matt’s and wrapped his hand around the back of his neck. Matt moaned and opened his mouth. Their tongues met in hot abandon. *Never letting go.* Matt framed Lucky’s face with his hands and kissed him hard.

A knock at the door had them scrambling apart. Lucky’s face flushed crimson and he covered his groin with his hands, as if someone would see him.

Matt jerked on his jeans. “I’ll be right back.” He walked toward the door. “Stay here.”

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Jordan looked around the room after Matt left. He located his pants and carefully pulled them on over his aching erection. *I’m in so much trouble.*

He clicked on his cellphone. Three missed calls. All from Brad. *Shit.*

He tiptoed around the room and looked for his shirt. He found it near the door and slipped it over his head. Pieces of Matt's conversation with his unknown guest sifted through the closed space.

"We're moving tonight."

The familiar voice stopped Jordan in his tracks. *What's Uncle Rick doing here?*

"Tonight? Why so soon?" Matt asked.

"We have some reliable intel that there's a meeting tonight between Schmoeller and a potential buyer. It's supposed to be a big drug deal, and I want to catch them in the act. The warrant's been issued. We just need to put a plan in place."

Jordan's breath hitched. *So soon?* He had sent the information to Brad just last night in a text message. He'd overheard Schmoeller on the phone while he changed. *Gavin's working tonight.*

Panic shot through him and spurred him into action. He had to talk to Brad. Now. He needed to warn Gavin that he should stay away from the club tonight. Over the past week Gavin had become a friend. Like Jordan, he had been kicked out of his home when he came out as gay. But unlike Jordan, he didn't have a loving aunt and uncle willing to take him in. Because of that, Jordan felt he owed Gavin something. Gavin was a sweetheart, a victim of circumstance, and it wasn't fair that Jordan had been more fortunate than him just because he happened to have supportive family members.

Jordan flew across the room. He eyed the fire escape outside the window. *That could work.* He slid the window open and climbed outside. The cold, harsh metal hit his bare feet and he winced. He shivered in the chilly morning air as he scrambled down the rickety stairs.

Hitting the pavement, he peered around the alleyway. He fished his cell phone out of his pocket and pulled up the navigation app.

A familiar car turned down the street and pulled up next to him. "Get in the car, Jordan." *Brad.*



Jordan climbed into the passenger seat and wiped his feet on the floor mat. He flipped on the heat and held his hands up to the vent.

“What do you have to say for yourself?” Brad backed out of the alleyway.

*Here we go.* “Umm. Whoops?”

Brad slammed his palm on the steering wheels. “Dammit, Jordan! This is serious.”

Jordan flinched. It was rare for Brad to lose his cool.

“I’m not mad at you. I’m not mad that you went home with Matt. It’s not ideal, but you’re a grown man. You can fuck whoever you want. But dammit, he’s supposed to be a good cop. He thinks you’re a prostitute, for Christ’s sake.” Brad shook his head. “Those rumors about him are obviously true. He sure had me fooled.”

Jordan folded his hands in his lap and dipped his head, feeling like a scolded child. “It wasn’t like that, Brad. He’s a good guy.” *Matt likes me. As a stripper.* “He never treated me like a whore.”

“I’m sure he didn’t.” Brad gave a wry laugh. “Jordan, he’s a cop. A fucking dirty cop. No wonder he’s never stayed in one place too long. I thought he was a good guy, but then he takes home a stripper and suspected prostitute from the damn club we’re investigating. How many times has he done this? Can I trust the work he’s done in the past week?”

Jordan’s skin itched with the need to shower. He felt dirty. With every word, Brad cheapened Jordan’s night with Matt.

“It wasn’t like that.” The argument felt weak, even to Jordan’s ears. *I hope.* “He said he wanted to help me. Get me out of stripping.” His gut told him that Matt was genuine and Brad was wrong.

Brad laid his hand on Jordan’s shoulder and squeezed. “I’m sorry, Jordan. I never should’ve put you through this. For your sake, I hope you’re right.” He dropped his hand. “After tonight this will all be over, and you can go back to your normal life.”

*My boring life. Without Matt.*

“Why can’t we just tell him I’m not a stripper?”

Brad rolled his eyes. “Really, Jordan? You want me to tell a suspected dirty cop that he’s been duped by a soon-to-be bookstore owner?” Brad shook his head. “No, you stay away from him and the club. I mean it.”

Jordan crossed his arms. Brad must be wrong about Matt, Jordan’s heart told him so, but he didn’t have any proof. “How did you know where I was?” Jordan asked.

“Uh.” Brad buried his hand in his hair. “*Find My Friend* app. I put it on your phone and activated it. There’s no way I was going to let you work at that club without some sort of way to track where you were.” Brad looked at him, concern etched on his face. “You mad?”

*Too numb to be mad.* “No.”

“I’m dropping you off at your apartment. Stay there. Do not go to the club. Based on the information you gave me, we’re moving tonight. I don’t want you there.”

“What about Gavin?”

Brad placed his hand on Jordan’s shoulder again. “Don’t even think about it. He’s not innocent in all of this, Jordan.”

“He did it to survive!” Jordan’s voice rose. “Let me talk to him! I can get him to roll over on the whole prostitution ring. I know I can.”

“No. I don’t want you anywhere near that place ever again.”

Frustration had Jordan pleading with Brad. “If it weren’t for Uncle Rick and Aunt Lily, and you, I would be just like him! You have to give him a chance.”

Brad shook his head. “He broke the law, Jordan. My hands are tied.”

Jordan clenched his fists. Anger at Brad pulsed through him. Brad stopped the car as they arrived outside the bookstore. Jordan could see some of the regulars inside, and the current owner, Mr. Walton, behind the counter. He wasn’t in the mood to chit-chat with his friends. He wanted to pick up his

favorite book and lose himself in the pages for a while, and forget he was ever involved in this operation and met Matthew Hayes.

Jordan reached for the door handle, but he was stopped when Brad grasped his forearm. “Don’t go to the club. I mean it. Gavin will be arrested, along with some of the other names you’ve given us. He’ll be offered a plea bargain. It won’t be the end of the world for him.” He let go of Jordan’s arm.

Nodding, Jordan opened the door and stepped onto the cold pavement. Still barefoot, with no jacket. *Walk of shame.*

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Matt closed the apartment door, finally saying goodbye to the police chief. He jogged back to his bedroom. “Lucky?” He looked around the room and frowned. *Where did he go?* His gaze landed on the partially open window. *Motherfucker.*

Pulling open his nightstand drawer, Matt entered the combination to his gun safe and it clicked open. He drew out his pistol and shells and set them on the bed.

He sighed and searched for his holster. Finding it on the floor next to his shirt, he put it on and placed his gun in the slot. He scrubbed his hands over his face. *Would Lucky go to work tonight? Probably. Fuck.* He shook his head. How was he going to focus on the operation when Lucky would be in danger?

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The club was busier than normal for a Saturday night. Jordan stepped in the door and waited for his eyes to adjust. Through the fog, he located the stage Gavin was on and walked over. He casually looked around at the other customers. *How many of these people are undercover cops?*

The music changed, and Gavin twirled toward the stage stairs. Jordan hustled over to catch him before he started passing out drinks. “Gavin!”

Gavin’s blue eyes flooded with concern. “Lucky! You’re late and Joe’s already noticed. You better have a good excuse.”

Jordan grabbed Gavin's arm and pulled him to the side, away from the crowds. "Gavin, I don't have time to explain, but we have to get out of here."

Gavin's eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about?"

"Listen, don't you want a chance to turn your life around? Stop stripping? Stop... the other thing?"

"Lucky, you're being crazy. C'mon, I don't have time for games. Go get changed." He tried to move away, but Jordan held him still.

"Gavin, I'm not a stripper." He ran his hand through his hair. *This is harder than I thought.* "I'm working undercover with the police. They're going to be here any minute to bust this place. We need to go!"

Gavin's eyes widened and he tried to bolt away. "Let go of me, Lucky!"

"Please, just listen to me. If you cooperate, we can get you a deal. You won't go to jail. Just come with me." He held Gavin's hand. "Please."

"How can you promise me that? After the things I've done?" Gavin's voice was quiet as he stared intently at the floor.

"My uncle is the police chief. He'll help. I know he will. They only care about taking down Joe. If you give them information, they'll cut you a deal. Let me help you, Gavin."

"Why should I trust you? Why would you want to help me?" Tears gathered at the corner of Gavin's eyes, and he wiped them away.

"Because once upon a time, I was you. I was kicked out of my house when I was just a teen. If I hadn't had other family members to take me in, I would be in your situation. I want help you."

Gavin nodded. "Okay... let's go."

Jordan wrapped his arm around Gavin's shoulders and pulled him along. Facing the crowd again, the room felt stuffy, like there wasn't any clean air left. With the exit in sight, Jordan breathed a sigh of relief that they would soon be safe.

Suddenly, a loud cry silenced the room. "Everyone get down!"

*Too late. Shit.*

Officers dressed in SWAT uniforms invaded the club. Customers, servers, and dancers all rushed to comply.

Jordan stood frozen. He searched the faces of the officers. *Where's Matt? Where's Brad?* Gavin's nails bit into his skin as he stood behind Jordan. Jordan gripped Gavin's hip and held him close. "Don't move," he whispered.

Many of the officers crowded close to where Jordan stood. *Fuck.* Just then he realized where he had stopped. Directly outside of Joe Schmoeller's office.

The door creaked open and Jordan quickly turned to Gavin, shoving him to the floor. A large arm snaked its way around Jordan's neck and he was hauled violently against a man's chest. *Joe.* Cold metal pressed against Jordan's temple, biting into the skin as sweat broke out on his forehead. He swallowed and grasped the arm holding him captive.

"Drop your weapon, Schmoeller!" Matt stepped forward, pistol drawn.

Jordan avoided his eyes. *Don't do anything stupid.* He wasn't sure if he was more worried for himself, or for Matt.

"Not happening." Joe pulled Jordan even tighter. Jordan winced as pain shot down his spine.

Matt's steps faltered, and his voice rose. "Damn it, Schmoeller. Drop your weapon!"

"You're surrounded, Schmoeller. Give it up." Brad appeared on the other side of Matt.

Matt took one more step, and Joe turned the gun away from Jordan to Matt and said, "Don't even think about it. You aren't fast enough."

"Even if you shoot me, you won't get away."

Jordan's breath hitched and his eyes widened. *No! Not Matt.* He squirmed, moving just a fraction of an inch, and Joe put the gun back to his temple. "Quit moving, pretty boy. No one's gonna miss you."

Jordan met Matt's eyes. His expression was unreadable. *I'm sorry*. Jordan pushed the thought out and hoped it was visible in his eyes.

A muscle ticked in Matt's jaw. "This is your last warning, Joe. Drop the weapon."

Joe waved his gun toward Matt. "Fuck you!"

Jordan's eyes never left Matt's face. Matt was looking just behind Jordan and he gave a slight nod of his head. *What the—*A shot rang out right next to his ear and Jordan was jerked to the ground by a tumbling Joe.

The room spun and blood thundered in Jordan's ears. The gun clattered to the floor and slid out of Joe's reach. Jordan seized the opportunity to maneuver himself onto Joe, digging his knee into the man's back. Another officer pushed him out of the way and subdued Joe.

Jordan stood and found himself face to face with Gavin, holding a fire extinguisher in his shaking hand. "Did you—?" Jordan gestured to Joe.

Gavin nodded, eyes wide.

"Nice work." Jordan surveyed the room. Officers were moving quickly, arresting the bartender and some of the other employees. Others took pictures of the scene, while some raided Joe's office and began their search. Jordan looked frantically for Matt.

Brad blocked Jordan's movement. "Jordan." He spoke quietly. "I have to arrest you. These people can't know you were involved."

Jordan pushed at his chest to move him out of the way. *Matt*. He had to get to Matt.

"Where are the paramedics?" An officer kneeling on the floor called out to the others, his hands covered in blood.

*No. No. No!*

"Matt!" Jordan lunged forward, but Brad was too quick. Jordan was handcuffed and being directed the opposite way before he even knew what was happening. "No! I have see Matt! Let me go!" He tried to break free of

Brad's grasp, but it was no use. Years of training had Brad prepared for any fight Jordan was able to give.

"Calm down, Jordan." Brad spoke close to Jordan's ear. "Matt's going to be fine. I promise."

Tears threatened to fall from Jordan's eyes. "No! Matt. I need to see Matt."

Brad ushered Jordan out the door and forced him into the back of a cop car. The door closed and Jordan smashed his face against the window. "Please! Brad! Please!" He thrashed in the backseat, kicking at the door.

Another officer slid into the driver's seat and started the car. Jordan begged and pleaded with him all the way to the station, but his arguments fell on deaf ears. Finally, his voice gave out and he could beg no more.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

“The bullet just grazed the outside of your shoulder. Change the bandages regularly and take it easy, and you’ll recover just fine.” The doctor finished wrapping the wound and began to write on his prescription pad. “I’m giving you some painkillers and antibiotics. Come back in two weeks and we’ll take the stitches out.”

*Fat chance. I’ll do it myself.* Matt just nodded and stared at the floor. He hadn’t spoken to Brad or the chief yet about how the operation ended. He’d been rushed to the hospital, despite his protests that he was fine.

“Hey. There’s the man of the hour.” Chief Donovan peeked through the curtain of the bay where Matt had been stitched up. “Is he free to go?” Rick asked the doctor.

“Yes. He can go anytime.”

“Thanks, doc.” Matt reached for his shirt and winced as he tried to carefully pull it on. The buttons were going to be impossible without help, and there was no way he was asking the chief to dress him. “How did everything go?”

“Fine. Everything is shipshape. Bad guys are put away. Good guys prevailed.”

Matt knew he wasn’t telling him something, but he couldn’t fathom what it could be. *Lucky.* He itched to ask, but that would give too much away about his relationship with the man.

Rick cleared his throat. “There’s, uh... someone I brought to see you. Brad tells me you two already know each other. Not sure how I feel about that, but that’s a discussion for another time.” He paused, and placed his hand on Matt’s uninjured shoulder. “You’re a good man, Matt. I’d be lucky to have an officer like you on the force.”

“Just doing my job.” *A bang-up job.*

Rick walked to the door and stopped. “Just... hear him out, okay?”



Matt just nodded. He was too tired to ask questions. He stood and looked around the room for the rest of his stuff so he could get the hell out of there. *Find Brad, figure out what the hell he did with Lucky.* He was probably sitting in a jail cell right now. Matt's chest tightened at the thought.

"Matt?" Lucky's quiet voice made Matt's spine straighten. He winced as the movement pulled at his injury.

"Oh my God, Matt!" Lucky was at his side, running his hands carefully over the sling that held Matt's wounded arm.

"Lucky? What are you doing here?" Matt cupped his cheek and forced him to meet his eyes. "Are you okay?"

Lucky bit his lip and looked away. He took a step back from Matt. "It's Jordan."

"What?" Confusion clouded Matt's already befuddled mind.

"My name is Jordan Donovan. Not Lucky." Jordan continued to worry his bottom lip.

Matt sat back on the hospital bed. He narrowed his eyes. "Donovan?"

Jordan avoided his eyes and nodded. "Yeah. Uncle Rick—"

"Uncle?" *I've been played for a fool.* Anger radiated through Matt, but he schooled his features. Jordan didn't need to know how much he affected him.

Jordan nodded again. "Uncle Rick and Brad agreed to let me work at the club undercover. It was approved by whoever the hell approves that shit. They needed someone on the inside to gather information, and you know as well as I do that there aren't extra cops running around. So, I went in."

Matt breathed deeply through his nose, causing his nostrils to flare. "What the fuck made you qualified for that? What the hell were they thinking?"

Jordan took a step forward and reached out to touch Matt, but he flinched and moved away. Jordan dropped his hand back to his side. "I know how to take care of myself. And I..." He took a deep breath. "I teach a pole-dance

fitness class. They needed someone who could dance.” His cheeks reddened at the confession.

Normally Matt might think it was adorable, but he was too angry at being lied to. “Why wasn’t I told?” He closed his mouth and ground his teeth so hard that his jaw ached.

“We thought it was best to keep it quiet. We weren’t sure who we could trust.” Jordan fidgeted with his hands. “Brad... Brad thought you might be a corrupt cop. I’m sorry, Matt.”

Matt’s blood boiled with anger. His shoulder throbbed as he took deep breaths and clenched his jaw. He nodded and looked hard at Jordan, who finally raised his eyes. *Fuck this.* “I understand. I would’ve done the same in your situation.”

“Really?” Jordan’s eyes brightened and a small smile spread across his lips.

“Corrupt cop? That’s fucking ridiculous.” Matt stood and fumbled with the bottom buttons of his shirt. “You’re a good liar. You sure had me fooled. I felt sorry for you, for Christ’s sake. If whatever it is you do when you’re not acting as a prostitute doesn’t work out, you could have a career in espionage.” Matt’s anger seeped into his voice as he bit out the words. *I gotta get out of here.*

He didn’t know what was real and what was a lie anymore. *How did Luck—Jordan feel?* He shook away the thought. Now was not the time to borrow trouble.

Jordan lost his smile and looked away again. “I work at a bookstore.”

Matt gave a wry laugh. “A bookstore? You’re much more interesting as a stripper.” He picked up the prescription the doc had given him. “Well, I’ll see you around, Lucky-Jordan. Whatever.”

He walked away from Jordan’s hurt look, pulled the curtain aside with a jerk, and stomped out of the ER. Putting distance between him and the man he thought he knew—thought he cared about. *Thought he cared about me.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

Jordan stood at the counter in the bookstore, looking over the final papers that would be signed on Monday. *Mine. The bookstore is going to be mine.* A few weeks ago this would've been the happiest day of his life, his long-time goal finally achieved. But instead, it felt empty. *Me and my bookstore. That's my life.* No one to share it with.

It had been a week since the incident at the club, and Jordan had been going through the motions of life, not enjoying anything as he normally did.

The bell above the door chimed, interrupting Jordan's lonesome thoughts. "Sorry, we're closed," he said, without looking away from his paperwork.

Footsteps sounded in the background. "I'm sorry. We're clos—" Jordan lifted his eyes and met Matt's gaze. Jordan's breath hitched in his throat. "Matt."

Matt walked forward and leaned against the counter, resting his injured arm. "Hello, Jordan." He looked him up and down. "You look... tired."

Jordan rolled his eyes and started packing up his paperwork. "Thanks." He clutched his papers to his chest, ready to retreat to his apartment. "Can I help you with something? I'm rather busy at the moment, perhaps you can come back later." *Or never.*

"I've been working with your uncle and cousin for the past week closing up the case." He paused. "They're worried about you. Said you've been quieter than usual and you didn't show up for dinner the other night."

Jordan shrugged. "I've been busy. I close on the shop on Monday. There's been a lot of work to do."

"Congratulations. Guess being a stripper paid off, huh?" Matt gave him a forced smile.

*No.* Jordan remained silent, not taking the bait.

"Do you miss it?" Matt asked.

“What do you care? You’re going off to a new job, new city soon anyway, right?” Anger laced Jordan’s voice. He hugged the papers tighter to his chest and stared at Matt.

“Just thought I could help.” Matt pushed off the counter with his good arm and turned to leave.

Panic gripped Jordan and had him stepping forward. *This might be the last time I see him. The last chance I have.*

Matt almost made it to the door before Jordan cried out, “You’re the only person I’ve ever told about my dad beating me.” The words rushed out of him before he could stop them. “I told Uncle Rick and Brad that I was mugged. They don’t believe the story, but I could never bring myself to admit to them what really happened.” He set the papers on the counter and held on to the edge. “I-I wanted you to know that it wasn’t all lies. That I didn’t sleep with you as part of the act. That was real.”

Matt turned and met his eyes, but didn’t move.

“You were right. I’m more interesting as a stripper.” He gestured at the bookcases in the shop. “This is who I really am. I live upstairs. I read a lot. My life revolves around this shop. It’s how I escaped reality when I was younger. I would come here, crawl up on one of the chairs, and read. Owning this place has been my goal since Mr. Watson told me he was interested in retiring.” He ran his hands through his hair. “The bank wouldn’t loan me the money to buy the place without a bigger down payment. So, yes, I stripped for the money. But I also did it for kids like Gavin. If I hadn’t had my family, I would’ve been just like him. I would’ve been a whore for real or worse, instead of a nerdy bookworm who stays home on Friday nights—alone, reading one of his fifteen copies of *The Princess Bride*.” He jerked his thumb at the bookshelf behind him, which held each and every one of his prized books.

Matt walked over to the counter. “I lied, too.” He reached out and cupped Jordan’s cheek. “You aren’t more interesting as a stripper. I shouldn’t have said that, and I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Jordan pulled away from Matt’s touch and flicked at the papers on the counter. “I just wanted you to know all that before you left.”

Matt took a deep breath. “Well, I’ve been offered a job. It’s a slight pay cut from what I’m used to, but the guy I’m seeing and I are going to be looking for a house soon, so a double income will help. Plus, it’s about time I stayed in one place, put down some roots.”

*He’s seeing someone.* Tears stung Jordan’s eyes, but he blinked them away. *Don’t cry.* “That’s great. I’m happy for you.” He sounded convincing even to his own ears, but inside he was dying. His stomach flip-flopped and threatened to lose its contents.

“Happy for us.”

Jordan’s brow furrowed, and he narrowed his eyes. “Huh?”

Matt walked around the counter and stood next to Jordan. “You should be happy for us. Now, I’ve already got a few houses picked out for us to look at. I wasn’t sure what your schedule was like, so I haven’t made any appointments. Personally, I think it would be fun to get an older house, a fixer-upper, and work on it together. But I’m open to whatever you want.”

Jordan’s mind reeled. “Huh?” *Not my day for witty repartee.*

Matt kissed Jordan’s lips. “I’ve accepted a job as a detective here for Lakeside PD. Turns out I like working with Rick and Brad. They’re good people, once they figured out I wasn’t a dirty cop. And there’s this really cute bookstore owner who stole my heart, straight off a stripper pole.”

Jordan blinked rapidly, processing the information. “I’m the guy you’re seeing?”

Matt laughed deep in his belly. “Yes. If you’re interested.”

Jordan threw his arms around Matt’s neck and kissed him. He smashed their lips together roughly and hugged Matt to him.

Matt pushed at his chest and tore his mouth from Jordan’s. “Easy, Jordan. I’m still on the mend here.” He put his hand over his bullet wound.

*Oh shit.* Jordan's eyes widened and he jumped back. "I'm sorry!" He stuck his hands into his pockets to keep them from attacking Matt again.

"It's okay," Matt laughed. "So, would you like to go out sometime?"

Jordan nodded enthusiastically and smiled wide. "I think it's worth a shot." He winced at his choice of words, causing Matt to laugh harder.

"No more shots." Matt cupped Jordan's cheek and stepped closer to him. He reached around to grasp the back of his neck and pressed their foreheads together. "Also, I think we should make sure to get a bedroom large enough to install a stripper pole." He shrugged one shoulder. "Just for the fun of it."

Jordan laughed and kissed Matt softly. "I'd like that."

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## EPILOGUE

*Three months later*

Jordan sat on a bench outside the courthouse. He checked the time on his cell phone. Jordan was waiting on the verdict for the case against Joe Schmoeller. Matt was in court today to hear the ruling. And Jordan would finally be able to see Gavin, who had been kept in a safe house for the duration of the trial.

Matt emerged from the building. A bright smile lit up his face when he saw Jordan. "How'd it go?" Jordan asked, as he stood.

Matt kissed him hard. Their lips pressed together hard and tongues danced. Heat infused Jordan's limbs at the contact and he grasped Matt's shoulders.

Suddenly, Matt let go and Jordan stumbled back, holding onto the bench to keep from falling. "That good, huh?"

"I love you."

The words sent tingles down Jordan's spine, just like they always did. "I love you, too. I take it Joe's guilty?"

"Yes. Joe's been found guilty. He's going to jail for a long, long time." He paused. "You want to go see Gavin?"

Jordan nodded.

Matt placed his hand in Jordan's and tugged him toward the courthouse. He stopped and smiled, then twisted the ring on Jordan's finger with his fingertips. Jordan's heart warmed, and he smiled back. Matt had given him the ring just last week, when they closed on their house. They were set to move in over the weekend.

Jordan nudged Matt's shoulder, forcing him to start walking again. "C'mon, let's visit with Gavin. Then we have some packing to do."

Matt wagged his eyebrows. "I think we have other things to attend to first."

Before Jordan could reply, Gavin came out of the doors of the courthouse and paused at the steps. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

“Gavin!” Jordan jogged up the steps and wrapped him in a tight hug.

“Jordan! It’s so good to see you!” Gavin hugged him back.

Matt came up and shook Gavin’s hand. “Good work in there, Gavin.”

“Thanks. I couldn’t have done it without you, and Mr. Stone, of course.”

Jordan’s brow furrowed. “Mr. Stone?” He hadn’t been able to talk with Matt about the trial.

“Yeah.” Gavin looked behind him as a handsome man, dressed in an Armani suit, came out of the courthouse. “My lawyer.” Gavin’s shoulders slumped and the energy left his body as the taller man approached. “Um, Jordan, this is Mr. Stone. Mr. Stone, this is my friend Jordan.”

“Please, call me Lawrence,” he said, as he reached out to shake Jordan’s hand. He nodded at Matt and smiled. “Detective, good to see you outside the courtroom.”

“Gavin.” Jordan turned to his friend. “What are your plans now? Do you have someplace to stay?”

Gavin shook his head and shuffled his feet. “Um, I’m not sure.” He looked from Matt to Lawrence and then back to Jordan. “I haven’t given it much thought.”

A plan jumped into Jordan’s mind. “You know, I’m crazy busy at the store these days. I could use a good employee to open and close when I’m not available. Pay won’t be great, but it would come with the apartment above the store.” He smiled, and snuck a glance at Matt. “I won’t be needing it anymore.”

Gavin’s eyes grew wide. “Are you sure?”

“Of course.” Matt clapped Gavin on the shoulder and gave him an encouraging squeeze. “We’d be happy to have you. Jordan’s been looking for a person he can trust at the store for a while now.”



“That would be great.” Gavin turned to Lawrence. “After a few paychecks I can start paying you, Mr. Stone. It won’t be much to start with, but I’ll pay you back as soon as I can.”

Lawrence shook his head. “I’ve told you that isn’t necessary.” He waved his hand dismissively. “I have to go. Lots of paperwork to file after a day like today. Matt, it’s always a pleasure. Jordan, it was nice to meet you.” He jogged down the steps and left without a backwards glance.

Gavin stared after him longingly.

Jordan narrowed his eyes at the man running away. A pinch to his side had him turning to look at Matt, who stared at him with a raised brow. Jordan just winked.

“C’mon, Gavin. We’ll take you to the store and get you settled.” Matt laced his fingers into Jordan’s again and pulled him toward the parking lot.

Jordan squeezed Matt’s hand and smiled at him. Lucky me.

**THE END**

## **Author Bio**

*Jena Wade is new to this writing business. She's an avid reader. By day she is a web developer. She overuses smiley faces in everyday emails.*

*Most of her evenings are spent typing away on her laptop, with her beagle and basset hound curled up at her feet.*

*Yup, that about sums up her life.*

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