

One Night Only

Bonus Epilogue

By: Lynsey M. Stewart

One Night Only
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Three years later

Matt

“You look amazing,” Stacey said as she adjusted my tie.

“So do you.” I leant in and smelt her perfume, feeling her red hair on my face. I threaded my hand through the waves and kissed her. Man, I loved kissing her. “Always.”

“I’m not so sure.” She glanced down at her bump, the tiny bump she saw as the size of a beach ball that had been overinflated by more than a smidge. I put my hand on that little bump. I loved holding her there, needed to. Ever since she walked into our bedroom with a lip bite and a positive pregnancy test, I had an overwhelming urge to keep her and our bump in my hands.

Safe. Protected. Loved.

“Stace, you look beautiful,” I replied. “You’d even look good in this.”

I glanced down at the black gown before pointing to the mortarboard. She curled her fingers over her nose as she laughed, that bright smile breaking through. I didn’t think it was possible, but I was more in love with Stacey now than I was at the start. That whole romance waffle about finding the better half of you, someone to make you whole—every fucker who ever said that was right. Not waffle. Straight talk. Truth. Stacey filtered through my heart with ease. It all started with a snort.

“Wait, I need a picture.” Stace took her phone from her bra as Skye groaned.

“How many more pictures do you need?”

“This is a huge day in the life of the Shaws,” Stacey replied. “We need to document it. Owen, get in.”

She motioned with her hands, wanting us to squeeze together. Dad threw his arm over my shoulder at the same time, shaking his head, as if this day was overwhelming him with a pride he couldn’t handle.

“Bloody hell, son,” he said. “Look at you.”

He flicked the tassel with his finger and covered his mouth. He didn’t often get emotional, finding it hard to find the right words most of the time, but the few words he said and the arm around my shoulder spoke everything for him.

“Took quite a journey to get here, Dad,” I said.

“Yeah.” He nodded, his chin shaking. “It did.”

“Say, ‘I passed my degree with first class honours!’” Stacey said, her rose gold wedding band catching the light.

“Don’t give him a big head, Stace!” Dad smiled, tapping me on the shoulder. “Bloody hell!”

“He can show off all he wants, Uncle Owen,” Beth said. “He’s worked hard for it.”

Oh, Christ, in more ways than one.

I thought about my life in sections now. The child who had to grow up too soon. The escort who wanted to make more of himself, and...Stacey. Two of those sections I would gladly erase from my history, because only one seemed important now. She could have fallen for anyone. Someone less complicated. Someone she could be proud to bring home to her parents. But she chose me. Accepted my past. Loved me despite it.

“He should be basking in the glory of today,” Stacey’s mum said as she stood beside her. Their red hair was unmistakable in making them mother and daughter, their shining personalities more so. She had welcomed me into the family, knowing about my past, but made it clear none of that mattered. Only Stace’s happiness.

I watched as she beamed at her mum, her hand subconsciously stroking her belly. Her father had been just as accepting. I met him for the first time as we volunteered at a homeless shelter one Sunday lunchtime. Standing next to him as I served the mash and he poured the gravy gave us plenty of time to bond. He was a man of few words but when he said we complemented each other like pickle complemented cheese, I took that as his blessing and started shopping for her engagement ring the next day.

“Proud of you, sweetheart,” she added.

“Family photo,” Will said as he took Stacey’s phone. Stacey, her parents, and my dad stood around us and I had a moment. You know *the moment*, the one where your breath hitched and you caught the sob before it escaped your mouth. A deep breath and a shoulder pull was needed to hold it all together. Stacey threaded her hand around my back, stroking her fingers along my waist, and I wondered what I had done to deserve this?

Passing my Psychology degree was one thing. Blood, sweat, and tears mixed daily, particularly in the final stretch. I didn’t sleep for a week, donuts became my staple diet, and Stacey’s smiles as she poked her head around our bedroom door were like rocket fuel propelling me to the finish line of my dissertation. When I finally completed it, I searched for her, hunted around the flat like a madman. I found her in the kitchen, and I fucked her so hard against the fridge, we had to have the wall re-plastered.

Alongside all the good Stacey had brought to my life just by being her, there were also the friendships. Skye moved out of the flat above Turnip The Beet, leaving Stacey and I to make our home there. She and Will were in this bizarre we-can’t-stand-each-other-but-there-are-times-we-fuck relationship and we were happy to keep those shenanigans at arm’s length. They worked it out eventually, and now they’re in a we-still-pretend-we-can’t-stand-each-other-but-really-we-fell-in-love-years-ago relationship just a few doors down from our flat in

Brighton. Skye is living in unwedded bliss, completely unaware that Will and I went ring shopping in the Old Laines last weekend. An antique green diamond meant business.

“I got you a little gift,” Stacey’s mum said, passing me a box. I opened it up and started to laugh.

“Trust me, I’m a psychologist’ cufflinks! Amazing.”

She started putting them on for me as Stacey smiled. “You have to wear them on the first day of your new job.”

I nodded, appreciating another aspect Stacey had brought into my life. A family. A fully functioning one at that. A mother-in-law who loved me. A father-in-law who respected me. A new life growing inside her, one I didn’t realise I was longing for until she uttered the words, “You’re going to be a daddy.”

“There,” she said, standing back. “You’re all set.”

“Thank you,” I replied, pulling her into a hug. “Thanks for everything.”

“Isn’t it time we went in, son?” Dad said as he took Mel’s hand. Things had changed hugely for him during the last year. His heart scare led to a complete lifestyle overhaul. He hadn’t touched alcohol since leaving Merryweather. He got himself a dog from Battersea Dogs Home and on his walks, he met Mel, a fellow Battersea dog owner and widower who loves football. A friendship started, developing into more, and I hadn’t seen him happier. He’d even treated himself to a new pair of glasses.

“We don’t want to miss your big moment,” Mel said.

“Yeah, go in, but I want this one for a few minutes longer.” I caught Stacey’s wrist and pulled her to me. She was chatting with other families who were also waiting to go in before the graduation ceremony started. Wherever we went, we made new friends. It was something that came naturally to Stacey. She was a people person, genuinely interested in their stories. Sometimes I felt jealous because I wanted her all to myself. Going anywhere usually meant sharing her at some point, and I didn’t want to do that. A few years on and I’ve lost that jealous streak. Instead, I smile at Stacey’s spark and feel proud I’m the one who gets to take her home at night.

“What’s going on, Mr Shaw?” she asked as I kissed her closed hand.

“Sit with me.” I chose a bench overlooking the university, the same bench I’d sit at every lunch break and give her a call because I simply missed hearing her voice. The Essex twang that encased me with love on every giddy word. I waited until she was seated, helping her, holding her hands.

She laughed. “The baby is the size of a peanut, what will you be like when I’m almost ready to burst?”

“Probably worse,” I replied honestly because I knew I would be. I didn’t want to think about her getting the train to London every morning. Riding the tube, working until she couldn’t focus anymore. She’d done it without growing a human inside her, there would be no way I’d let her do it now. “I’m going to drive you to the doors of *Upfront* every morning, and I’ll be waiting there when you leave at a reasonable hour.”

“Oh yeah?” she replied. “And what about your new job? Are you just going to forget about that?”

I’d managed to secure an interview with a private counselling service based in Brighton. My classes on sex and relationships flourished and although I questioned if my past as an escort would impact being able to find a job once I qualified, that wasn’t the case. The board knew about my classes, were intrigued about my experiences,

and after interviewing me, they offered me a role providing sex and relationship therapy. I couldn't believe my dream was finally coming true.

"They'll understand," I replied as Stacey shook her head.

"We should go in."

"Give me a minute," I replied. "A minute with you is all I need."

"Do you know how proud I am of you today?"

Nope. No. This wasn't about me, not anymore. This was a moment for us. A life we were planning together even when we didn't know we were. From the moment we met. The date. The article. I shook my head, still clinging onto her hand. "Stace, we've done this together."

"I can't take the credit," she replied.

"I wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't for you." Memories clung to us. Brought us together, fused us like glue. "I need to say this before we go in. I'll never forgive myself if I don't *use* this moment."

Christ, she was beautiful. She had a face I would never grow tired of looking at. I noticed something new every day. Another new perfection. "You've given me so much. *So much*. When I go up there and get my degree, I'm accepting it for us both. You made me believe in myself. You were the first person I told because I was worried that I'd be laughed at, or if I spoke it out loud, I'd fail. You kept me going. You told me to stop listening to the voice that said I wasn't good enough." I laughed. "You distracted me from Psychology books by flashing your boobs. You ran me a bath when my back was hurting from crouching over the laptop." I lowered my voice, whispering in her ear. "You got in and sat on my cock."

"I'm pretty sure that's how I ended up in this predicament." She circled her hand across her stomach, and the tiny bump I loved already.

"Fuck, I love you, Stace. You and this gorgeous little thing." I put my hand on top of hers and the feeling of happiness threatened to burst through my chest. We'd made it. We'd come through. Life was ahead of us, a new one, full of promise and hope. "You've brought my family back to life and now we're adding to it."

She held my face in her hands and our kiss was a reflection of all those feelings—the good, the beautiful, the overwhelming. She tipped her head back and bit her lip, then took a breath and I felt the gravity of it too. I looked down at our hands, our little fingers joined together, and the image of the invisible red thread tying us together came into my mind.

"I wonder if our baby will be tied to their love when they're born too?"

"Like us?" she asked.

"Like us."

"I hope so," she replied. "I want them to find a love like this."

"You've given me everything."

"You've given me more."

I heard an exaggerated cough. “Excuse me for interrupting this beautiful little thing you have going on,” Will said, “but you’ve worked too hard not to go and pick up that fucking degree.”

“I know, I know. We’re coming,” I replied. “Will, before we do, I need your help. I have two people now who mean the world to me—”

“That’s beautiful, Matt, but there’s no need. I know you love me and Skye, mate, we don’t need the big declaration.” The guy had humour dryer than the desert and sometimes it was better to ignore him. Stacey hid her smile behind her hand.

“I don’t want her getting on the train at stupid times. I’m not even thinking about the tube because that will make me twitchy.”

“I’m perfectly capable—”

“No, Stace.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t have the superpower ability of getting to London without the aid of public transport,” Will deadpanned. “*But* I’m happy to travel together when you’re not able to wrap her up in cotton wool and or bubble wrap for the journey home.”

“OK. I’m here and I’m pregnant, not ill,” Stacey replied. “And we have a degree to collect.”

She stood up and held out her hand, and I had no idea how she did that. Took control, brushing off my need to look after her. But I should know by now that underneath the *woman doing good* persona was the woman who was happy to hand over control. I’d lost count of the times she’d said no to me running a bath for her at the end of a busy day, but then gasping out as I peeled off her panties and bra, my tongue getting lost in her pussy.

“Sweetheart, I’m going to pretend you didn’t ignore my need to take care of you and the little bump you’re growing but later...*later*”—she giggled—“I’m going to carry you home, cook you a meal, rub your feet, strip you naked, and fuck you.” I kissed my way along her neck, in all the spaces I knew made her legs shake. “*Slowly*.”

“Guys, I’m going to go on ahead and pretend I didn’t hear any of that.” Will circled his pointed fingers to the entrance of the university and made a sharp exit.

“Do you even understand how much I love you,” she said. “Can you even *fathom* it?”

“Yes,” I replied, knowing exactly what she meant because I felt it too. A love so big you couldn’t begin to explain it. Didn’t need to because we both shared it. “I can.”

She looked up to the doors and from the look on her face, it was a moment where all those invisible red threads were pulling together, making a picture, a staggering realisation that this had been worth waiting for.

“Ready?” she asked.

“What for?”

She smiled, one of those smiles that danced down my spine, whirled through my brain, and tingled through my cock. “Our life together.”

I held up my little finger. She held up hers and we linked them together. “I was ready from the moment I was born.”