

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

By : Marzy Dotes

Takes place before "What to Do about Ethan" and "What to Do about Max" when JD and Kylie head off with friends to a strip club and Ethan goes looking for JD.

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What to Do about the Exotic Dancer : Chapter 1

Kylie sighed as she waited at the table for the rest of the women to join her. Donna had called saying that she would finish up with the last medical cases of the day before being able to head there for the first round of margaritas.

Lace had to stay at police headquarters until later in the evening to finish up a case that she and her partner Rich had been working on for weeks. Kylie bristled at the news because of course; she had been going with Rich for over three months. The rest of the Crew had just learned about it and of course they had congratulated her for finally landing a guy and the round of drinks had been on Lace.

The ballsy sergeant hadn't been all that enthused at first because despite her engagement with federal agent Kurt, she had the hots for her partner. Donna just shook her head at her long-time friend and had told her to get with the program, and that was that Kylie who supposedly was her friend had found a guy who made her toes curl and Lace as her friend should be overjoyed, not cranky jealous.

Kylie had arrived first having just finishing a report she got stuck writing since Max and Ethan had told her they didn't trust anyone else to get it right. She had told them both to hell with that and had picked up her purse, gotten into her car and continued onward to the restaurant.

On her way, Gemma, a prosecutor had called her on her cell and told her to save a table and to just chill out already about Lace harping on her happiness with Rich. If Rich's police partner couldn't keep her feelings for Rich under control despite having the most gorgeous guy in the FBI getting set to marry her, then she needed to go see a shrink.

The bored looking waitress came to their table and Kylie ordered another drink, figuring that she needed to be good and sauced before Lace arrived if she came armed for bear to go another round about Rich.

"I'll take another margarita with extra tequila," Kylie said, "and tell my friends when they get here that I'm starting on dinner without them."

Just then Donna came waltzing through the door, dressed in some comfortable clothes which was all she wanted touching her skin after spending a day working at the public health clinic running an immunization unit on top of the rest of her caseload.

"What you want to drink," Kylie asked her friend.

Donna just dropped into her seat.

"I can't drink anything hard core until I'm good and ready."

Kylie nodded, thinking that sounded good enough. There would be enough time for Donna to change her mind.

"I'll take a ginger ale with a slice of lime," she told the waitress.

The waitress looked at her as if not believing it but jotted it down and scurried off to the kitchen, passing Gemma by as the prosecutor headed towards her friends' table. She had a svelte looking woman with shoulder length wavy brown hair with her.

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"Who's that, I think I know her..." Kylie asked, while idly eating some tortilla chips.

Gemma smiled.

"That's just J.D.," she said, "We were in some of the same classes while we both went to college and law school only she never finished."

Kylie looked her over and raised her brows.

"Hi J.D. I saw you at the office earlier. You still look like a lawyer," she said, "but nice to meet you again anyway."

J.D. chuckled at them.

"Gemma's right," she said, "You are a lively crowd."

"Our fourth's not even here yet," Kylie said, "Wait until you meet her."

J.D. sat down next to Gemma in the booth and ordered a Scotch on the rocks.

"Are you from here," Kylie asked.

J.D. shook her head.

"I'm here on business and I just got a job offer from an old friend," she said, "and I ran into Gemma in the courthouse."

Gemma grimaced.

"She kicked my ass at an evidentiary hearing and she just clerked for some three piece suit."

J.D. shrugged.

"I'm getting paid good money to do that," she said, "And I'm visiting a good friend of mine."

Donna grabbed some chips before anyone else had the chance.

"How long are you in town?"

J.D. looked at her Scotch.

"Until tomorrow afternoon," she said, "then it's back to the grind."

The three women looked at each other.

"Then we got to go out and have us some fun," Kylie declared.

Gemma looked doubtful.

"I've got a big trial tomorrow."

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Kylie flicked a chip at her.

"Party pooper."

Gemma folded her arms.

"Okay, what do you think we should do then?"

Kylie gave it some serious thought. She really wanted them to paint the bay area town red but how could they do that...in a brand new way?

"Let's go take her to see the dancing," she said.

Donna and Gemma looked at each other. J.D. thought she saw some flush in the prosecutor's cheeks but she couldn't be absolutely sure.

"Dancing," J.D. said, nodding, "I love to do that to unwind."

Kylie burst out laughing.

"I don't mean we do the dancing...."

Gemma rolled her eyes.

"She means that we watch them dance."

J.D. understood or so she thought.

"I really don't know..."

Kylie smiled widely.

"Oh come on," she cajoled, "Let's finish up this round and head on over to the Blue Room."

J.D.'s brow rose at the name.

"The Blue Room," she said, "Sounds like..."

Gemma broke in.

"It's called exotic dancing," she explained, "but it's really a bunch of men..."

"Hot looking men," Kylie broke in.

"Okay whatever," Gemma said, "but they prance around in costumes and then take them off."

J.D.'s eyes widened.

"Oh."

Kylie eyed her carefully.

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"J.D., do you have a boyfriend?"

She just looked at them.

"Well...no not at the moment."

Kylie nodded.

"Okay then what's the problem," she said, "Because I do have one and he doesn't care as long as I behave myself."

Donna nodded.

"And I have a husband and I never behave myself..."

Gemma looked at them as if they were crazy.

"What about Lace?"

Kylie rolled her eyes.

"Oh she's too busy tonight to hang out with us," she said, "but just in case we'll leave her a note."

The four of them finished their drinks and they took off in their cars for the Blue Room after J.D. had received directions. She had checked her cell phone and had two messages from Ethan back in L.A. but didn't answer them. If he thought she would change her mind to work with him, he was just crazy. And she would probably see him tomorrow and would have to give him her decision then. But tonight, she was footloose and fancy-free.

Ethan drove through traffic that inched down one of the main thoroughfares before halting again. He looked out the window and saw that both directions on the street were packed with vehicles and he couldn't figure out where all of them were heading. All he had wanted to do was to find one woman in a city of hundreds of thousands of people. He had just left his place where he had spent all of about an hour deciding what to try next. He had a full caseload of clients waiting his that he'd just dropped the ball on. But...he had to get this done first. He had to find her and persuade her to listen to reason. After all, she was an almost trained attorney and surely, she had the ability to do that quite well.

Talk her out of leaving L.A. and getting her to take the position. Tell her how much he needed her working with him at the firm. That he needed someone with her acumen and skills to move the company into the next level.

But she hadn't appeared happy the last time they had spoke, not long after he broke it off with Pearl his girlfriend at the time...at the altar. He had been all gussied up in a tux and set to walk down that aisle with her waiting at the end of it, dressed up in white and he had to push himself into taking those steps towards her and his new life. But somehow, he had battled to even do that before Pearl herself had broken off the engagement with him just like Lucinda had before her. She had cited the fact that his dangerous work intruded in their personal life and with a crazed psychopath on the loose disrupting the ceremony, he couldn't really argue against her logic.

And when he thought about it, after the shock and dismay of the broken engagement receded, he had been relieved that the wedding had never taken place. Oh how guilty he had felt about that until he realized that it

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never would have worked between them. He needed a woman who would be much more understanding about the reality that investigation was one of his greatest passions and to not view his vocation in life as an intrusive mistress. Not to mention that she had to be gorgeous, intelligent, able to hold her own against him and be funnier than hell. None of the women he dated scored very highly in all of these categories and he didn't know who did. His entire office staff had joked about his bad luck and said that maybe he should sign him up for a round on some crazy reality show called *Bachelor* but he nipped that idea to the bud quickly. No, old Ethan would find his true love on his own...in due time. In the meanwhile, he had work to do, investigations to complete and beautiful socialites to take to charity benefits and other social galas.

But the last part didn't satisfy him for as long as he might have thought. He wasn't quite the young buck he used to be but all his parts still worked. It's just that he wanted much more from women than he had been satisfied with in the past while out sowing his oats around the globe.

Max had watched him with these personal struggles and had just shaken his head at amusement with them, poking fun at him on more than one night at their favorite restaurant. But underneath his smile, Ethan had bristled a bit. He had also looked around him and noticed that J.D. had made herself scarce again after he had made his job proposal.

"Where's J.D.?"

Max had been sipping his juice after returning from a vigorous run.

"Out."

Ethan scratched his head.

"I can see that," he said, "Out where?"

"Didn't say. She's got a life of her own you know and it's not here."

That had been true enough, Ethan knew but that would be about to change if he had anything to say about it. He usually got what he wanted in the business world. He would get his way with her to bring her on board which would make their business all the more formidable to its competition.

But no problem seriously, once he looked at her and plead his case, she would certainly weaken. After all, they had been close friends nearly their entire lives, that would definitely work in his favor.

Suddenly, however he heard a disturbing noise and his car began to list on one side. Damn rental, he should have shipped up one of his sports cars but remembered that hadn't seemed practical at the time. He reluctantly navigated his way out of the gridlock and tried to find a place to pull over.

J.D. drove her car into the parking lot of the Blue Room and saw that the other three women had arrived.

"I texted Lace on where she could find us," Kylie said as they walked towards the crew.

A bouncer greeted them with a grim expression.

"Hey Bo, drop us a smile," Kylie said, patting his hefty shoulder, "We're here to liven up things a bit."

He did what she wanted and then checked out her friends.

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"Party of four," he said, "Your regular table waits..."

The other women looked at her.

"Regular table," Gemma asked.

Kylie didn't even look embarrassed but amusement showed in her eyes.

"I come here...sometimes after a really hard work day," she said, "Oh come off of your high horses, we all think about the same thing when we're stressed."

"I think about food," Donna said, "not semi-naked men...not most of the time anyway."

J.D. entered with the others and checked the place out. Far from being seedy, the *dîç*^{1/2}cor appeared quite stylish if a bit retro and the waiters that carried drinks around appeared well...mostly dressed. One of them looked their way and brought a tray of martinis over to them. They all grabbed one and Kylie plopped the olive off the toothpick into her mouth.

"Oh, I love this," she said, "Come on, let's sit down and check them out!"

Gemma glowered.

"This is exploitation," she said, "at least that's what you would be saying if they were women."

Kylie shrugged.

"If it's good enough for us," she said, "It's more than good enough for them."

Some men stood on a stage and were surrounded by women with what looked like dollar bills in their hand. Gemma watched them in distaste.

"Just look at what they're doing."

Donna cast an analytical eye.

"Looks like everyone's having a good time."

J.D. knew from experience that there was a lot of exploitation in this business as well as others and that women were ripe to be mistreated, a lesson she learned when she'd been growing up.

"There's one coming this way," Kylie reported.

She reached into her wallet. Gemma rolled her eyes and Kylie looked at her, laughing.

"Girl, you need to take a chill pill," she said, "Are you like this around your boyfriends?"

Gemma harrumphed.

"Of course not," she said, "Not that I have one at the moment."

Kylie snorted.

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"I can see why."

Gemma sighed.

"I need to spend time by myself."

Kylie just folded her arms.

"That's what you've been saying for months now," she said, "You need to live a little."

"I'm doing just fine..."

J.D. watched the banter and she knew that Kylie genuinely cared for her. From what she'd heard about Kylie from Ethan, she felt very loyal to those she cared about and god help anyone who crossed any of her friends.

Kylie poked J.D.

"Hey, why are you off looking lost when these hot men are in our midst, here to make us happy?"

J.D. looked up at the male stripper who had well, removed all of his construction style clothing down to his rather skimpy underclothes. He flexed his pectorals and flashed them all a grin as the women around them began reaching for their wallets.

But J.D. didn't really see him at all. She saw someone else.

Ethan looked at his watch as he waited for the triple A man to come change the tire on his car. He could have deftly handled the task himself...if the car had a spare which it did not. So he had to sit on his hands when he needed to be out finding J.D. while he awaited assistance. He had called the friend that J.D. had been staying with to ask where she might be and the woman had told her that J.D. had planned to spend the evening with the prosecutor who had gone up against her during her court hearing that day.

That narrowed it down a bit but not a whole lot because after all, L.A. looked like a huge city, on the ground. But Ethan knew his investigative skills and determination to find her would bear fruit probably before the night ended.

Suddenly, he looked up and saw a blue car with a siren light attached to it pull up behind him. He didn't know if that were good news or bad but the woman with the long brunette hair who got out of the car didn't appear hostile. She appeared to be sizing him up as she approached, wearing slacks and a print blouse and of course, a badge.

"My car broke down," Ethan said, "Tire's flat and I don't have a spare."

She just nodded.

"That's a tough break," she said, "It'll take hours to get help for it. Lots of cars broke down on the bridges tonight."

Ethan didn't really like the sound of that. He wanted to get going quickly so he could continue his search.

"I can't stay here then," he said, "I've been looking for someone."

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She flashed her eyes at him.

"Your wife?"

He shook his head.

"No my best friend," he said, "She came up here on a job proposal that I offered and we didn't part on the best of terms so..."

The officer folded her arms.

"You wanted to check up on her to find out why she didn't accept it."

"I need to talk to her," he said, "I don't want her to leave town due to some misunderstanding."

She sighed.

"Why is it that the men always think that it's the woman who doesn't understand correctly?"

He looked up at her.

"What did you say?"

Then she realized she had said her thoughts out loud.

"Nothing," she said, all business again, "I can give you a lift somewhere if you'd like and call in for your car to be towed back to wherever."

He brightened.

"That would be great," he said, "as for the ride, I'm not sure where I'm heading."

"I'm off-duty until tomorrow," she said, "So I could drive you around to a couple places but I do have a situation I have to check out at one of our crews."

"And you're..."

She smiled for the first time.

"I'm Lt. Lace Maxwell with LAPD."

"Ethan, private investigator. I live here."

She nodded.

"Okay get in the car and we'll get going," she said, "I've been invited by my friends to join them at a club but the club has been a source of police complaints for quite a while. Not surprising considering its nature."

"It's what?"

She turned to face him.

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"It's a crew with exotic dancers," she explained, "Male dancers."

His brows rose.

"I imagine that your vice squad might be checking in from time to time."

"Them and Narcotics," she said, "We busted some dealers in the back room just last month."

"Haven't you thought of shutting the place down?"

She sighed.

"There's a whole process with that," she said, "and as soon as the owner got wind of it, he had some of the more...loyal customers sign petitions and send them straight to City Hall."

Ethan nodded, understanding or so he thought.

"Anyway, my friends are right in the middle of it," Lace said, "but it's their choice of entertainment not mine."

"Why did they go tonight?"

"Oh Kylie got transferred to writing feel-good features and she needed to blow off some steam," Lace said, "Donna and Gemma are just along for the ride and Gemma brought the lawyer who went up against her in court this morning...makes for a lively evening out."

Ethan didn't doubt that especially knowing Kylie and maybe J.D. had told her something about where she'd been going. They didn't know each other well but the two had gotten along. He supposed he had some time to ride with Lace while thinking of the different places he could look for J.D. He wondered idly what kind of friends Lace had while they drove to the crew.

J.D. took her second round of drinks as the other women gathered around one of the male dancers who smiled at them.

"Anyone want to dance," he drawled.

He had been the one dressed up like a cowboy complete with hat, boots and lariat. One who reminded her a little of...never mind.

"What about you," he said, looking at her.

She stared up at him.

"I don't think so," she said, "I've had a long day and wouldn't be much fun."

"All the better," he said, reaching his hand down.

"Oh go on," Kylie said, "It will be fun."

J.D. wasn't so sure of that but she thought back to that last conversation she had about her social life. and felt emboldened so she let him take her hand and pull her up on the stage. Then the dancing began and she had to say, it felt nice to have a man pay attention to her. One who hadn't felt threatened by her or didn't cheat on her.

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All of her men appeared to fall into those two categories these days and she had begun to feel burned out by the whole dating scene. He grabbed her waist and pulled her closer as the music slowed down. She closed her eyes against his shoulder and just went with it.

Ethan and Lace pulled up at the Blue Room and Lace pointed out some familiar looking cars.

"They're here," she said, "We'll just walk inside."

A man dressed in faded jeans and a tank shirt walked up to them.

"The bouncer," Ethan asked.

"No, one of the vice detectives," Lace said, "What's up Vic?"

He looked Ethan over and shrugged.

"There's some dancing going on inside there with some rowdy women," he said, "I believe you know them and they've got some sexy brunette spitfire with them."

Lace shook her head.

"Anything happening besides that?"

"Narcotics shut down some drug dealing in the corner lot," he said, "and there's been some underage patronage."

Lace took a deep breath.

"Is Rich around?"

Vic nodded.

"He's working the bar," he said, "but you won't be able to see through his disguise."

"I know my own partner..."

Ethan and Lace walked away from Vic and headed into the joint.

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Chapter 2

J.D. enjoyed dancing with the man and had gone through a couple numbers with him already. She felt the buzz of a couple of shots of tequila and felt the events of the past few days fade from her memory, as she enjoyed herself. Kylie had gotten on the stage with another dancer.

Gemma looked at Donna.

"Have they gone crazy or what?"

Donna nibbled on some pretzels.

"It's normal for Kylie but J.D.â well I couldn't say cause she never was like that in college."

Gemma eyed the bar.

"That weirdo bartender is eying them again," she said, "What's his problem?"

Kylie looked at the doorway.

"Look there's Lace and who's that guy with her?"

Donna checked him out.

"Doesn't look like Kurt," she said, "Maybe it's another cop."

Kylie shrugged.

"Could be," she said, "Look they're coming our way."

Lace and Ethan had entered the bar and right away, Ethan's observation skills had led him quickly in J.D.'s direction. His eyes widened as he watched her dancing on the stage with some strange man wearing not very much. He closed his eyes for a second, waiting for his mind to catch up with what he had just witnessed.

"Oh my god," he said, simply.

Lace gave him a funny look.

"What's the matter," she said, "It's just my friends having a good time."

"The woman on the stage," he said, "That's my friend."

Lace watched her dance.

"She's pretty good," she said, "Kylie's in fine form as usual."

They walked over to where Gemma and Donna sat, watching all the activity. The two women looked up at them.

"Hi Lace, took you forever to get here," Donna noted.

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Gemma just crossed her arms.

"You should have seen them earlierâ!"

Ethan watched the woman that he had spent most of his life with and realized that just when he thought he had known everything to know about her, she had knocked him through a loop once again.

"What's J.D. doing?"

Gemma just stared at him.

"I think it's obvious," she said, "It's called dancing."

"I know that," he said, "It's just that this is a side of her I've never seen."

"She's been dancing with that guy for about 30 minutes," Donna explained, "Kylie joined her soon after."

"What are you doing up here anyway," Gemma said, "You are the man she works with aren't you?"

"Yes I am," he said, "I'm up here because I need to talk with her. We had a bit of a disagreement."

"A fight," Gemma corrected.

"She told you about it?"

Gemma nodded.

"You know you can be a jerk Ethan," she said, "and I always heard about you being a nice guy."

Now Ethan felt lost and a bit taken aback at her criticism.

"What is going on here," he said, "We just had a disagreementâ! about business."

Gemma shook her head.

"You know it was more than that," she said, "J.D. really felt that you were pushing her to take this job. To do what you wanted."

Ethan guessed the rest of it.

"All I did was offer her a position in my firm."

"That's why she came to town to do some paralegal for the opposing counsel on my case," Gemma said, "and she's dropped her card and resume off at some law firms."

So she really hadn't come to L.A. just because he had offered her a job. And now she danced on a stage looking like she was having a great time, not giving any thought to what she had said to him.

"I don't want her to leave without clearing the air between us," he said, suddenly feeling helpless.

"Then why you don't just tell her that," Gemma said, "Make her happy and get yourself out of the doghouse."

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Ethan pondered that. Lace flashed a look at Rich and he left his gig at the bar and walked on over.

"What's up partner," he asked.

Lace gestured up to the stage.

"Your girlfriend's up on that stage."

Rich shook his head.

"She's got this wild side to her," he said, "I just can't tame and who's that other chick up there?"

"This here is Ethan and that's his business partner J.D. up there."

Rich watched the women dancing, unaware of their presence.

"She's pretty hot," he said, "You're a lucky man but clearly not a smart one."

Ethan studied the bartender cop.

"Say again?"

"How could you ever let a woman like that go," he said, "Some other guy's going to win her away from you."

Ethan rubbed his head.

"It's not like that between us."

Now Rich cast him a critical eye.

"Then you're more stupid than I even thought," he said, "I mean if I weren't with Kylie, I would be a idiot."

Lace put up her hand.

"Richâlater," she said, "We've got to decide what to do with this joint."

He looked disinterested.

"It's got borderline criminal element and you know what happened last time," he reminded her.

Oh yes, the crates filled with petitions by angry and distraught customers to protest the closing of the Blue Room. Letters filled with testimony of how this club had changed their lives, had allowed the women of West L.A. to cut loose and enjoy themselves. The mayor eyeing a reelection bid just couldn't commit political suicide by shutting the place down.

He just shook his head.

"My girl's one hell of a dancerâ!"

Ethan looked at him.

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"You mean it doesn't bother you that she's up there dancing withâ!"

"A semi-naked guy," Donna chimed in helpfully.

Rich chuckled.

"She might be up on the stage with Mr. GQ now but later on, she'll be coming home to me."

With that, he sauntered back to the bar, leaving Ethan and Lace to handle the situation. Ethan looked at J.D. dancing on the stage, totally at a loss of what to do. He wondered what Max would do if he knew his business partner Kylie had taken up dancing with some stripper. Best he not know, Ethan decided quickly.

J.D. closed her eyes and her body did her dancing for her, following the beat of the music where it led and she thoroughly enjoyed the feeling of a man's arms around her holding her closely. Damn, she hadn't had enough of that in a long time. Not well, since that last loser she'd walked out on last week. The silver tongued, stylishly dressed cad who had returned to her life, well really he had dropped in her city for a job offer at an internet radio station but their paths had crossed and va-voom!

While in college, he had seemed like just another friend of Ethan's and she hadn't understood his appeal, the charisma that the other women felt whenever in their vicinity. He had been in the school's journalism program after spending two years at the university, mostly chomping at the bit while working at the college's two-bit newspaper. He had always been attracted to seeing his face on live television, reporting the news and moving up through the ranks. Working his way across the United States, J.D. hadn't seen or even heard from him for a long time until he had flown out for a round of interviews with the different stations across the country. before getting hired. She had fallen into his arms and then his bed in short order and for the first time since her previous boyfriend had dumped her to go into the Peace Corps, she had envisioned a future with a steady boyfriend.

But all that had ended when she found out he'd been two-timing her with an intern at the radio station. Just like that, he soon became history.

J.D. had grabbed any opportunity that she could to find new challenges in her life and so when an old pal who was an attorney had hit her up with another one of his last minute favors, she had jumped at it and had jumped on the first plane, heading off to L.A. At the same time Ethan had offered her that job.

And going up against one of L.A.'s best prosecutors in a hearing had been so exhilarating in ways she hadn't expected. It had been better than sex. Well, okay maybe not but the next best thing, definitely and that's when she began to think that she wanted to be a kickass criminal defense attorney like she had been dreamed about earlier in her life. She dropped off her card and resume at some firms that she had researched on the internet and they had definitely seemed interested. And it felt nice to be appreciated for her legal skills. Maybe she'd get some gigs at some firms and then go back to law school at nightâ!

"J.D.â!"

She could see her new life unfolding ahead of her. She would build her reputation as a tough trial attorney, buy a house on a bluff overlooking the bay and maybe she'd get somewhere datingâ!

"J.D.â!"

Wait, a familiar voice she thought, opening her eyes and the man she danced with hadn't been the one talking.

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"What's the matter babe," he asked.

Damn, something was intruding on her reverie about looking into the most amazing pair of blue and brown eyes she had ever seen and wavy dark hair and wait a minute, the guy standing in front of her in a business suit and slick boots with his arms folded looked awfully familiar.

"J.D.?"

She blinked her eyes.

"Ethan?"

She kept dancing with the exotic dancer and the tempo of the music started to slow down again and their movements changed along with it. Gemma turned to Ethan.

"I can see that got her attention," she said, "Well, she did have a couple of shots of tequila."

Now Ethan's eyes blinked. J.D. hadn't been much of a drinker since he had known her. But things could have changed since they'd last spent time together.

"J.D. honey now I know you're having fun but?"

She finally let the man go and turned to face him.

"Ethan, what the hell are you doing here," she asked.

"I was looking for you actually," he said, "and I ran into Lace and she had to check on this place."

J.D. tilted her face.

"Lace isn't she Gemma's cop friend?"

Ethan nodded.

"She's right here," he said, "She came to check up on her friends."

J.D. tripped and the dancer caught her swooping her in his arms again.

"That's nice of her," she said, "We've been having ourselves a real good time with these nice guys."

Ethan turned to Donna.

"How many shots did she have anyway?"

Donna shrugged.

"I don't think she's drunk but she's sure emboldened."

Ethan couldn't disagree, not recognizing the woman in front of him. Damn, she looked beautiful as she always did but when had she learned to dance like *that*?

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Donna followed his glance.

"She had a couple wild times in college but not manyâ!"

Kylie wobbled off the stage.

"I think I need another drink," she said.

Donna pulled on her arm.

"Maybe you'd better sit down and take a break for a while."

Kylie frowned at her.

"You're not much fun," she said, "What did you do with Donna?"

Gemma just shook her head.

"Don't you know Rich is tending bar?"

Kylie looked around, squinting her eyes to see better. Then those eyes widened.

"Damn, he looks hot in that getup," she said, "And that earring looks better on him than it did on me."

Donna just looked at Lace.

"I think they both had too much stress to burn off tonight."

Ethan studied J.D. who had started wrapping her arms around the dancer's neck drawing him closer. That rankled him and he reproached himself for that but seriously how well did she know the guy that she had done some of what had been called back in the dayâdirty dancing?

"She just met him an hour ago," Gemma said reading his thoughts.

"I've got to get her out of her especially if they raid this place."

Kylie's brows shot up and the other women looked at him.

"You've got to be kidding me," Kylie said, "I signed that damned petition the last time they did it. They wouldn't take it at the daily newspaper but I gathered signatures and just put them online."

All Ethan could think of was getting J.D. off of that stage and out of the club, but that meant extricating herself from her current dance partner. Lace had gone to confer to Rich to see if there had been any more signs of drug dealing and other illicit activity in the joint. He watched J.D. dance with the man, her body pressed against his for a moment and then stepped up onto the stage.

"What's he doing," Kylie asked.

Gemma sighed.

"Getting her away from that sleaze."

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

Kylie put her hands on her hips.

"He's really too hot to be slime," she said, "and she doesn't seem to mind where he's putting his hands."

Then she looked over at the doorway and her eyes narrowed in curiosity before widening in what looked to the others like horror.

"What's wrong Kylie," Gemma asked.

She just pointed to the doorway where another woman stood next to a guy with a camera around his neck.

"It's the traitorous reporter who wrote that hit piece on us and her lecherous cameraman," she said.

The pair walked into the club looking around at the crowd of people while they headed to the bar.

"What are they doing here," Gemma said.

"They must have gotten some tip from a source that something's going down here like some police action."

Gemma groaned.

"Damn, I got to get the hell out of her before I wind up on the front page of the newspaper and my trial ends before it begins."

Kylie's nostrils flared.

"Why are you so concerned about yourself," she said, "Those creeps have stolen my beat. I should be the one getting sent to cover whatever's going to happen next."

Gemma smirked.

"You can't," she said, "You're too busy gyrating with the hired help in front of everyone here."

Kylie smiled.

"I guess that's some consolation," she said, "I've still got it after all."

She started to get back on the stage but wobbled.

"Better slow down Kylie," Gemma said.

Ethan had stepped up on the stage which had been steadier than it appeared but J.D. appeared not to notice. She still had her attention on the dancer. Ethan tapped on his shoulder.

"Mind if I cut in?"

The dancer looked at him.

"Are you the guy they hired as the CEO themed stripper?"

Ethan looked confused.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"No, I just need to talk to my friend there."

The dancer threw him a disinterested look.

"She's already got a partner."

J.D. looked at Ethan.

"What are you doing here," she said, "Why aren't you out solving cases and meeting with clients?"

He rubbed the back of his neck.

"I was worried about you."

She softened and she let go of the dancer.

"You don't have to be," she said, "I'm up here doing a case and I'll be flying back home tomorrow."

He nodded.

"We can go back together," he said.

"Oh that's really sweet Ethan," she said, "but it's not necessary."

"Come on, let's go back to my place and you can call your friendâ"

She wouldn't budge.

"I'm having fun here and I can handle myself."

He folded his arms, matching her stubbornness.

"You can't drive back."

"Okay, I'll get a ride back," she said.

He sighed.

"Come back with me," he said, "We need to talk."

She chuckled.

"We talked all the time," she said, "or at least we used toâuntil I came back to L.A."

"So have you," he countered, "And you didn't want to take my job offer."

She waved her hand.

"I was just thinking about it. I don't know what I'm going to do," she said, "I'm going to make some change in my life."

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"It's nice here in L.A."

She just shook her head at him.

"Excuse me, I'm busy dancing," she said, "You can get back to me later through my secretary."

She returned to dancing with her partner and Ethan got off of the stage. Kylie looked at him.

"She doesn't look too happy with you."

Ethan knew that and wondered what to do next. He couldn't lose her to this disagreement they had earlier, not like this. Rich wandered over to talk to Lace.

"There's some guys packing some serious heat who just walked in," he said, "I don't know how they got past Bo."

Lace sighed.

"They're called hormones," she said, "and Bo is chocked full of them. He wouldn't see an army of Mafia hit men if they marched right in."

"What are we going to do?"

Lace hated saying the next words. They were the type that could end more than one career here.

"We need to raid this place before someone gets killed," she said, "They came here looking for a fight."

Lace looked around the room that was packed with women having a good time ogling men and stuffing money in their skimpy outfits while they danced.

"This isn't going to go well with the mayor," he said, "You know he's up for reelection and shut down this place and there will be a mob at his office in the morning."

"Screw the mayor."

He gave her a double take.

"Lace!"

She put her hands on her hips.

"No I mean it," she said, "Not literally but it's our job to keep peace and to keep the public safe."

"They're going to be putting us all on riot duty tomorrow," he reminded her.

She shrugged.

"That's then and this is now," she said, "Call in the troops pronto and we'll get started."

Chapter 3

Rich went to phone headquarters for permission to utilize the SWAT team while Lace knew she had to tell her friends. If only they would listen to her. She decided to start with the easier ones.

"Donna, you're going to have to leave," she said, "There's going to be some police action and I don't want you caught in the middle of it."

Her friend nodded.

"That's great," she said, "Well be sure to keep them on the other side of the room."

Lace felt like throwing up her arms. Donna patted her shoulder.

"Just kidding," she said, "I'll help round up the others and herd them on out."

Ethan looked up.

"I'll handle J.D."

Lace's brow rose.

"Need any help there?"

He shook his hand.

"I can handle it."

He stepped up on the stage and touched her shoulder. She spun around and stared at gun.

"What's up?"

He took a deep breath.

"We have to leave now."

She looked at him as if he were crazy.

"Why," she said, "We didn't come together and I'm having a great time with Jack hereâ !"

"Joe," the dancer corrected.

"Whatever...Ethan, why don't you get yourself a drink before heading back home.,," she said, "Put it on my tab."

The dancer looked at the both of them.

"Maybe I'd better leave you alone to work this out," he said, "But I get off at 2."

She nodded as he walked off. Then she turned to look at Ethan.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"I was having a good time."

"I know."

She folded her arms at him.

"So now that you've got my attention," she said, "Where are we going."

"Back to the office or my place."

She smiled then and nodded.

"Okay either will work," she said, "You're kind of cute for an alpha male."

"An alpha what?"

She shook her head impatiently.

"Never mind," she said, "So do you want to dance?"

He felt rest her hands on his shoulders.

"J.D.!"

She smiled again.

"Come on, let's dance unless you're too shy or something!"

Damn, the situation was spinning out of control quickly. Here he was trying to get her out of an establishment before it was going to get raided and she had her mind on other things. He couldn't believe that she was coming onto him.

"J.D. we need to get out of here."

"Later! let's do some dancing first, and then I'll leave with you!"

She moved her arms down to his hips and pulled him closer to her. He sighed because he couldn't believe how good it felt for her to be that close to him. Her fingers enticed him, her cologne intoxicated him and

Her lips brushed against him even before he saw that coming and before he knew it, she had deepened her kiss. And damn, it felt good so before he realized it himself, he had responded, drawing her closer this time.

Gemma rolled her eyes at the sight.

"I guess they've worked it all out."

Kylie beamed.

"Bravo, way to go."

Gemma threw her a pithy glance.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"She won't remember it when she wakes up in the morning with a hangover."

Kylie threw her a face back.

"Gemma, when did you get to be such a wet blanket?"

Gemma just turned and showed her friend her back. Donna walked up to both of them.

"We're going to have to get our butts out of here," she said, "They're bringing in the big guns to clear it out."

Kylie shook her head.

"So that's why that reporter is here right now."

The reporter and the photographer were walking around talking to people but not having much luck. Kylie hoped they wouldn't come near because she felt like clobbering both of them with the camera.

Lace and Rich met up with some other police officers outside the joint. They had decked themselves out in riot gear prepared for the task at hand.

"When do we go in," the squad leader asked.

"When I say you do," Lace said, "I'll call you on the radio."

He nodded and they gathered in formation and headed to the other side of the parking lot.

Rich looked towards the club.

"Kylie's plastered," he said, "I don't want her in the middle of all this."

Lace sighed.

"We'll do the best we can to get them out of there," she said, "but all bets are off if those bad guys in there start waving their firepower."

Ethan enjoyed the feel of his best friend's body against his own and her mouth on his, drawing him even closer. But then the more rational side of him spoke up and he realized that he had to exercise some restraint here because for her, it was the liquor speaking. So he did the difficult thing which was to try to extricate himself from her embrace.

"J.D. I don't think."

"That's great because I'm not thinking right now either."

He sighed, as her fingers ran through his hair sending tingles down his spine. This wasn't proving to be easy not when his own body refused to cooperate.

"We can't do this."

She broke her kiss and looked around her.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"You're right," she said, "Come on; let's go back to your place."

He looked at her, shocked.

"I don't think so."

She frowned at him.

"Why not," she said, "I'm kissing you, you're kissing me and I really want to see what you've been hiding underneath those clothes all these years."

His face flushed as a wave of heat ran through him.

"We need to get you sobered up here," he said, "You don't even know what you're saying."

Irritation prickled through her, joining the more pleasant sensations.

"Of course I do," she said, "You know those times when you were getting dressed and I told you I never watchedâyou know back in college."

"Yeah I guess I do."

She winked at him.

"Well I lied," she said, "But come on, there's only so much a woman can take when a guy's as hot as youâ!"

Hot?

He liked the sound of that but clearer heads had to prevail here.

"Okay well that'sâokay," he said, "but we'll talk about it back at the hotel."

Now she scrutinized him.

"For a man of action, you sure want to do a lot of talking right now," she said, "Now hush and take me back to that hotel of yours and show me what made you such a stud."

Oh, Ethan's mind told him this wasn't going well but his bodyâwell it didn't exactly agree. He took a deep breath.

"Okayâwe can go back to my suite andâtalk this overâbut we need to get out of here because things might get a little chaotic in here pretty soon."

She nodded.

"Okay because then I can tell you about the time that we were flying to back from Hawaii, you know before we gotâinterrupted."

Oh, she meant the plane got hijacked by a man who was upset that his frequent flier miles hadn't survived the airline's merger.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"I remember that quite vividly."

She brightened.

"Before we gotâdiverted by that horrible hijacking, I had plans on well, seducing you at the resort. I mean we really couldn't let our time spent in such a gorgeous romantic spot go to waste."

His eyes widened.

"You did?"

She nodded again.

"So I packed some really sexy lingerieâbut it's back home and not here..and not on me."

He didn't know how to respond to that at least not with words. What the hell was she saying, he'd never seen this side of her. It had to be the booze.

She sighed.

"The best laid plansâwell anyway we can go back to your place and make up for lost time?"

Ethan decided he had to go along with itâfor now because he really had to get her out of this place.

"Come on; let's get off of this stage."

He helped her step down and she wrapped her arm around his waist and they walked back to the others.

"Ready to leave," he asked the others.

Gemma shook her head.

"Kylie's going to kill that reporter for that story on Max," she said, "We got to get out of here before blood is shed or hair's pulled."

J.D. nodded and stroked Ethan's face with her fingers.

"I'm all for that," she said, "Come on cowboy, let's go for a rideâ!"

Ethan blanched. For being such a player with the women, he felt very much out of his league with this one. Whoever would have guessed?

Gemma looked at the two of them.

"You've got your hands full with her."

Ethan couldn't disagree but when he got J.D. back to the suite, he would make enough coffee to sober her up quickly. Hopefully leaving her with little memory of what was unfolding. J.D. however made it clear that she had other plans.

"I've always wanted to do this," she said, "Remember the day of the rodeo?"

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"Yes," Ethan said, weakly.

"You know when you kissed me and then pretended it was because you hit your head too hard falling off the bronco?"

Ethan nodded.

"Well let's just say that if those two rodeo judges hadn't been there," she said, poking him in the chest, "I would have shown you a thing or two."

He didn't doubt that now.

"I mean that Ethan," she said, "Just like the time we wereâ"

"J.D. I don't think we really need to go there."

She frowned at him.

"But you know how romantic Connecticut is in the Spring," she said, "You know we could have done all those dull seminar classes we needed to graduate from college and then filled the rest of our time thereâ doing other things much less boring."

Oh boy, J.D. had really gone on a tear here. He felt at a loss for words and truth be told, he had some confessions to make of his own but now wasn't the time or place. He just had to get her out of there.

Lace walked up to all of them.

"Are you ready to leave?"

They all nodded but one of them was missing.

"Where's Kylie," Lace asked.

None of them knew until Gemma looked across the room and saw her squaring off with the reporter.

"Uh oh, there's trouble," Donna said.

Lace sighed.

"I'll handle it."

She walked off, shaking her head.

J.D. turned back to more important things.

"Ethan, when I got dumped by the quarterback and went to Vegas to recover, why didn't you join me?"

He looked surprised.

"Join you?"

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

She nodded.

"It would have been great if you would have just come with me," she said, "I mean I had a great time but think about what kind of fun we could have had."

He sighed. Gemma shook her head.

"She's going to be so embarrassed in the morning."

Ethan knew that might indeed be the case if she remembered this night at all. Which he really hoped she wouldn't, didn't he? He ran his hand through his hair, wondering what to do or say next. Talk about navigating through a series of minefields here and he had never even seen the ones in front of him coming.

J.D. put her hand on his chest.

"Let's go take this somewhere else."

He nodded, just wanting to get out of there before the police raided and the others seemed willing to leave but not without Kylie. Speaking of which, they all heard a crash and looked over to see Kylie and the reporter pushing and shoving each other with Rich rushing in to break up the fight.

"Oh lord," Donna said, going over to help.

Ethan's attention focused elsewhere when he saw two men clearly packing move towards a man that Ethan presumed managed the club. He looked around the room for Lace but she had seen them too. Rich had been busy pulling off a flailing Kylie off of the reporter and making sure they both moved to their separate corners. J.D. followed Ethan and he turned around to stop her.

"J.D. stay back with the others."

She rolled her eyes.

"I'm just fine Ethan," she said, "and I'm not drunk but I loved the expression on your face back there."

He looked shocked.

"You meanâ!"

She nodded.

"You have your gun with you right?"

He looked at her warily.

"I always carry it," he said, "What about you?"

"In my ankle holsterâ!"

"Your what?"

She smiled.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"When I dated a cop a while back, he got it for me retail."

Ethan's stomach flipped and as he looked at her again, she winked.

"Come on," she said, "Lace might need our help."

They walked over to where Lace and Rich had turned over the handling of Kylie to both Donna and Gemma. The sergeant turned to Ethan and J.D.

"You'd better leave," she said, "Things could get rough."

"Do you need our help," Ethan asked.

"No, we're fine," Lace said, "The police can handle it."

Suddenly, some shouts broke through the music and everyone stopped talking and the exotic dancers froze in their positions. The mobster types that had alerted them to their presence earlier began pushing and threatening the manager of the club. One of them had a gun that he held to his side.

"It's all a misunderstanding," the manager said, "Why don't you come back tomorrow and we'll clear this up?"

The mobster men just pressed him further.

"Our boss has given you enough extensions on his generous loan to you," one of them said, "He's ready to get the deed now."

"Butâ !" !"

One man jammed a gun in his waist.

"Now, go to the safe and get the deed to this establishment and we'll handle the transaction right now."

The manager in the face of some impressive firepower didn't know what else to do so he obeyed. Lace sighed and got on her radio telling the team to move in.

She and Rich rushed over with their guns on the mobster men and after taking the stance, yelled orders.

"Freeze right now."

Ethan and J.D. looked over at them.

"Where are the rest of the police," she asked.

He didn't know so they kept an eye on what was going on. Donna tried to get Kylie to leave but in true journalistic style, the reporter had taken out her notepad and began taking jotting in it. The cameraman came up to her.

"Go get some front page shots," she barked at him.

He meekly obeyed.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

Lace stared dead on at the mobster men.

"There's no other option for you but to surrender," she said, "so drop the weapons."

They just looked at her mutely.

"Right now would work well for me, how about you?"

They looked at each other and one of them began to lower his gun. The other turned and scowled at him.

"Don't be a wimp," he said, "What will your father think?"

The other man turned to him.

"I don't want to go out in a blaze of bullets," he said, "I'll get out of prison eventually."

Lace nodded.

"Wise choice," she said, "What about you bucko?"

The other man just glared and aimed his gun and took a shot. It went wild and missed everyone. But Ethan took no chances and went to force J.D. on the ground to take cover. But she beat him to it and pushed him down first. The woman always had tripwire reflexes in dangerous situations.

"Hey this is kind of nice," she murmured, as they waited for the man to either surrender or keep firing.

He kept firing and everyone had to duck but he was such a bad shot that Lace and Rich just stood to the side, then Lace aimed her gun and fired once hitting him deftly in the shoulder and he dropped on the ground.

Both J.D. and Ethan looked up from where they lay on the ground with him naturally shielding her body with his own. He looked around as the dust cleared and put his own gun away. Everyone began to get up again and talk excitedly until the doors opened and a flood of armed troops swept through the building and everyone had to lie down on the ground again while they cleared away the dangerous men. Lace handed off the wounded one to them and Rich had handcuffed the other. But everyone remained on the ground until the SWAT team could make sure there were no other mobster men hiding among them.

J.D. looked at Ethan from where they lay.

"We could be here for awhile," she said, "How about a little pillow talk to pass the time?"

"What?"

She smiled.

"You know, I loved how you looked when I was talking to you back thereâ!"

He appeared skeptical.

"I thought you were saying all that because you're drunk," he said, "but clearly you're not."

She smiled wider.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"You blush nicely when you're bashful."

"I wasn't bashful, I wasâ!"

"Confused," she filled in.

"Hopefulâ!"

She looked him over.

"Say again?"

He sighed.

"Part of me reallyâ I appreciated your candorâ but I couldn't do what you thought you wantedâ!"

"But I have a clear head and I know what I want," she said, "and I meant what I said, every word."

Now he blushed again and she stroked his face.

"You did?"

She nodded.

"I did a lot of thinking when Iâ I ran away," she said, "There are so many things I wanted to say for so longâ I you know I almost did that day years ago."

"J.D., I never meant to shut you out and push you on the edge of my life," he said, "I think I just needed to do some thinking of my own. Then we just went off in two different directions."

They heard some yelling and saw that Kylie had been pulled to her feet to be frisked by the SWAT team before being led outside, but not before she asked the photographer if he got any good shots.

He answered from his position prone on the ground.

"I'll email them to you," he said.

"Later," she said and walked on out of there.

Ethan turned back to J.D.

"I definitely don't want you on the fringes of my life," he said, "I want you as my partnerâ in every sense of the wordâ so we can push this business forward in a better direction."

Her heart jumped at that but she remained calm.

"Okay, I think I can work with that," she said, "if I move to L.A."

Ethan hoped that she would rethink her decision not to go back home and he would do anything necessary to persuade her that her home remained in L.A. with him. And he had quite an arsenal to work with, he thought with a smile.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

The SWAT men grabbed them to be frisked and they stood still, allowing them to do that eager to be out of the club and on their way. Finally they walked out into the darkness of the parking lot which was crowded with confused and more than a few intoxicated people milling around. Some nuns had shown up with plenty of hot coffee, warm food and some coats for the exotic dancers.

Ethan got some coffee and handed a cup to J.D.

"What a night," he said.

She winked at him.

"It's still young and I still haven't seen the inside of your suite."

Excitement filled him but he kept it in check. He rubbed her arms, looking at her.

"Okay we'll go back thereâ but only to talk," he said, "It's been a long day."

Donna wondered over.

"Well Gemma's filling Kylie up with coffee until Rich gets off and can take her home," she said, "I like to say it's been nice but I think I'll just say never a dull moment in San Fran."

"I can see that."

Lace walked up to them.

"The place has been cleared out, the perps taken to jail andâ I probably will not have a job tomorrow."

J.D. folded her arms.

"They can't do that," she said, "You just did your job."

Lace eyed her critically.

"You sure sobered up quickly."

Ethan and J.D. just looked at each other and smiled.

"We'll get out of your hair now," he said.

J.D. nodded.

"Yeah we got other things to do," she said, smiling, "Other sights to see."

"His car broke down," Lace said, "I gave him a lift over here."

J.D. shrugged.

"I'll give him a ride back to his place."

Ethan looked over at J.D.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

"I'll drive."

J.D. just threw her hands up in the air.

"See, he always wants to take control," she said, "Do all the driving andâ!"

They both walked to the car and she handed him the keys quietly as they both got inside the car and drove away from the club.

They headed back to the office and after getting off at the top floor, stopped in front of the business suite. And indeed when J.D. saw the inside of it, she believed it to be as impressive as she had remembered from the morning. At that point however, she was only interested in one room of it. Rumor was he had socked away an impressive place for guestsâ!

She looped her arm in his and started leading him towards the main bedroom.

"Come on," she said, "Show me those fabulous moves of yoursâ!"

"J.D. I don't thinkâ!"

"Relax, I'm just kidding," she said, "When did you get so uptight anyway?"

That left him speechless. She headed to the generous couch and sat on it, patting the spot next to her.

"Come here," she said, "So we can have this discussion you wanted."

He sat down on the couch and she sidled on closer, not that he minded.

"So what did you have to say?"

"Well, you look very beautifulâ!"

She smiled at that.

"Thanks, that's very sweet," she said, "You always look great."

He sighed, feeling suddenly flustered.

"I meant what I said," he said, "I want you in my life. I want to work with you like we used to do and thenâ!"

"You want us to have fun in other ways?"

She began stroking his hand in ways that heated his blood. But he really had to control himself here because after all, this wasn't one of his casual flings here; this was the woman that meant more to him than anyone ever had. And somewhere along the way, he had realized that.

"Well, I want to do what do they call it?"

"Date?"

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

He looked at her and he'd been sorely tempted but he didn't want to mess up their friendship now that it might get back on track.

Her fingers moved to his chest. He didn't know whether it was here or the liquor making her behave this way so he had to slow things down before his libido kicked into gear and did what it had wanted to do for so long.

"I want to start off slowly with thisâ€" "

She looked at him incredulous.

"Why," she asked, "I mean youâ€" 'you're L.A.'s biggest studâ€" 'well one of the biggestâ€" 'And I've seen you, you're like a runaway locomotive."

This time he touched her, gently brushing the hair off of her face with his fingers. She closed her eyes in response.

"J.D. I don't think I can do that," he said, "We've been good friends and we'll be even better business partners butâ€" 'I think we should just stick to that."

She felt as if her face had been splashed with ice water but she recovered quickly enough.

"You mean butâ€" ' "

"I knowâ€" 'but that's how I feel about you," he admitted, "I really want to enjoy the whole experience of wellâ€" 'moving our friendship to the next level meaning being business partners."

That sobered her up at first and then she realized he was probably rightâ€" 'at least for now. One step at a time and they'd just taken a major one if she agreed to his job offer.

"Ohâ€" 'okay well I was thinking that L.A. might not be a bad place to liveâ€" 'and work."

He smiled back and they sealed the deal with a handshake. He lingered, not willing to let go of the contact. He'd pushed back an impulse to take her face gently in his hands and worship her gorgeous lips with his own mouth and some tongue beforeâ€" ' "

But he shook it off and went to pour themselves some champagne to celebrate.

What to Do about the Exotic Dancer

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