

A close-up photograph of a man's torso, wearing a dark tuxedo jacket, a white dress shirt with visible studs, and a dark bow tie. He is using both hands to adjust the bow tie. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green. The entire image has a slightly distressed, hand-drawn border.

*Pickup  
Lines*

*By Kathleen Hayes*

# Love Has No Boundaries

*An M/M Romance series*

## PICKUP LINES

By Kathleen Hayes

### 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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## Photo Description

Photo 1: A youngish man is dressed to the nines in a black tux and bow tie. His light brown hair is styled to perfection with just a flip of it falling onto his forehead. His blue eyes are staring into the distance and he has a slight quirk to his lips.

Photo 2: A man with red hair and a fierce red beard is grinning a little mischievously as he lifts his pint of beer in a toast. He is wearing jeans and a black T-shirt. His arms are covered in colorful tattoos.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*Hi!*

*This is me:*

*[PHOTO 1]*

*And you see this guy (he is adorable, right?):*

*[PHOTO 2]*

*He is The One!*

*Meeting him and falling in love was the biggest surprise of my life, I had everything figured out and one day I saw him and my life was turned upside-down.*

*The problem is that he doesn't know and I don't know what I can do to make him realize...*

*(HEA needed, no cheating, no gay-for-you or in the closet)*

*Sincerely,*

*Adriana*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** man in a kilt, sweet no sex, friends to lovers, tattoos, family issues

**Word count:** 5,784

# PICKUP LINES

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As I saw Mack squatting down to wipe up splatter from a fallen tray, I was instantly, almost violently, reminded of the first time I had met him.

Back then the bar had been a dive—dark booths, dark corners, dark alley behind. I had stumbled in after storming angrily out of a family function a few blocks away. The rain outside had just started coming down hard. I had been nursing a pout and a beer at the bar when the sound of the side door slamming open drew my attention. It was almost like one of those horror movie scenes—lightning flashed, rain streamed down in heavy sheets, and a huge dark shadow centered itself in the doorway. An instant later, the shadow had crumpled to the floor, the door had slammed shut and I had shot out of my seat.

In the dark of the bar, it was hard to make out details, but the large shadow was sitting, collapsed in the corner next to the door. As I approached I was able to make out wild red hair and an untamed red beard. Almost before that registered, I saw a different red staining most of one side of his head and seeping onto the collar of his shirt. He was bleeding from cuts on his cheek and forehead, and had a few choice bruises starting to form across his face and neck.

I hesitated for a moment—after all, I didn't know this man—but my eyes met his, and any indecision fled my mind in the wake of the pain I saw in those blue depths. I held out my hand.

“Need a hand?”

He looked at me a little funny, then cracked a hesitant smile. “You trying to pick me up?”

I marveled that he could crack a joke while bleeding on the floor, but beyond the lighthearted words, I could hear the wavering fear, the panic held at bay, and the need to pretend everything was normal.

I smiled back at him, and gamely pretended he hadn't just had the bloody crap beaten out of him. "Yup. My place or yours?" I winked.

He reached up and grabbed my hand.

I took him to the emergency room that night, and it came out that his brother had gotten in with an unsavory crowd. He owed money and refused to pay, so they had taken it out on Mack, hoping to convince Andy that dodging them would be a bad idea. He had three broken ribs, a broken nose and more bruises than I had ever seen on a dozen people, much less all on one person.

That first year, we had gotten to know each other as I randomly showed up at his job site—back then he still worked construction—to walk him home anytime it was after dark. I know, I couldn't have stopped a flea from biting someone, but that first year after the attack, Mack did better when he wasn't alone outside after dark. Despite his size, he never did feel safe.

The first night, I walked up to him, tapped him on the shoulder and with my best come hither face said, "Hey Mr. Construction Worker, can I feel your hard... hat?"

I had managed to maintain a straight face until he responded with the same "You trying to pick me up?" as the first time, but with an added wagging eyebrow. We both burst out laughing. The other guys, just out of hearing range, gave us funny looks, but it was the beginning of a tradition.

I was snapped out of my reverie when Mack yelled across the bar that he now owned, "Hey, is Edmund Chauncey Roth the third too fancy to help out with cleanup now? Get your butt over here."

I made a show of groaning in complaint and slowly getting up off my stool. As I grabbed a rag from behind the bar, I shot back, "You know I hate it when you call me that."

After we finished cleaning up the spill, Mack went back to work, and I spent the rest of the evening sipping beers and watching him. He poured drinks, called orders, laughed with customers, and generally kept all his employees focused. Every once in a while he would catch my eye and send me



a smile, or stop by and say hi, but he had taken that crappy dive and turned it into a busy and successful pub, so he didn't have much spare time.

I loved watching Mack in his element. All his fear and uncertainty was gone in the face of his accomplishments. My heart tightened, and I was almost overwhelmed by longing. It had taken me almost a year to recognize what those pangs in my stomach were every time I saw him, but back then he was still on such shaky ground that it was never the right time to mention anything.

And then four years passed.

I startled a bit when my phone vibrated in my pocket. I took it out and groaned audibly when I saw "Mother" blinking across the screen. Mack turned my way at just that moment so I waved my phone at him and nodded my head towards the front door.

I said, "Hello, Mother," into the phone as soon I was safely out of the din of the pub.

"Edmund, dearest, where are you that it took you so long to answer the phone?"

I stifled a sigh and answered vaguely, "Nowhere, Mother. What can I do for you tonight?"

"I was just calling to remind you of your father's fundraiser this weekend. It is important that we all show up and support him. Now, I have taken the liberty to arrange for Kitty's boy, Arthur, to go with you. You know how he has been dying to meet you."

I gritted my teeth. "Of course I remembered, Mother. Which is why I already have a date. You will just have to give my regrets to Arthur."

After a few protests and stern reminders of how important it was that my date be suitable, she finally allowed me to hang up. Father was Edmund Chauncey Roth II, and he had been head of the Helping Hands charity since he took it over from his father. It was all about allowing the upper crust of society to look down their nose at "those poor people" and pretend they were doing something helpful. Father had no illusions about my willingness to take over after him and it is the main reason he rarely speaks to me anymore.

I hated going to these events and I usually ended up seething in silent anger, or storming out before the end.

Also, I had purposely forgotten the event, and now I had to find a date before Friday. Preferably someone who would make Father roll in his future grave.

Glumly, I walked back into the pub and my solution smacked me in the face. There Mack was—the light shining off his red hair and beard, his smile broad and friendly. He was in the informal uniform of his staff, jeans and a black T-shirt. It showed off his heavily tattooed arms. Mack saw me as I walked in, and lifted the large pint glass in his hand in salute before he downed half of it. He was wonderful—all the more so because Mother and Father would hate him at first glance.

I realized it must be later than I thought because Mack would never drink until it was near closing time. I spent the next half hour or so helping Mack get through his closing process and then cornered him in his office as he was putting the money in the safe.

I waited until he had closed the safe door and spun the lock before I began my attack.

“So, you’re my best friend, right?”

He had sat down at his desk, and looked up sharply with a wary glance. “Yes. But I don’t think I’m going to like where this is going.”

I smiled sweetly.

“Yeah, I know I’m not going to like it.”

“Mother called. She was reminding me about Father’s fundraiser on Saturday night. And to tell me about the guy she set me up to attend with. I told her I already had a date. But the thing is, I don’t.”

He started to look a little panicky. “No, no, no. I refuse.”

“Please. I’ll do anything.” I batted my eyelashes at him ridiculously, and held my hands up in a pleading gesture.

Mack let out a groan and finally said, “Fine, anything to get you to stop making that face.”

I paused, then replied with, “Baby, you’re like a student and I am like a math book, you solve all my problems.”

He shook his head and threw his pen at me with a smile, “Get out of here. You’re not allowed to use pickup lines on me when I’m doing you a favor.”

I bowed gallantly with a smirk on my face and backed out of his door. “As you wish.”

As I walked out to my car, I ignored the twinge in my heart at the fact that I had to beg Mack to go out with me—and that wasn’t even for a real date. I sighed, and not for the first time, called myself hopeless.

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I stood outside Mack’s front door and took a moment to try and calm the rampaging elephants that had taken up residence in my stomach. This isn’t a real date. This isn’t a real date. I figured if I told myself that enough, then maybe my heart might actually believe it.

Finally, I gathered my courage and knocked.

I heard Mack’s voice, muffled through the door. “It’s unlocked.”

I took a deep breath and walked in. It was kind of a letdown when it was the same apartment I’d hung out in multiple times a week—the same messy tables, the same rumped couch, the same ratty carpet, the same...

My breath caught in my throat as my eyes passed over the same weirdly painted bedroom door, because Mack was stepping out of that door right then.

My brain boggled and my heart skipped a beat. About ninety percent of the time, Mack wears jeans and a black T-shirt. The other ten percent, he wears sweats. I don’t know what I thought he would wear to a formal event, but I hadn’t wanted to make him feel awkward about his wardrobe, so I hadn’t asked him about it.

Mack was wearing a deep teal-blue kilt with aged silver studs and buckles, a white shirt, an open black leather vest with matching aged silver fasteners,

and black boots that laced up to a couple inches above his ankles. He had the sleeves of the shirt rolled up to just below his elbows and the tattoos on his forearms were displayed to perfection. The shirt and vest fit snugly around his barrel chest. Finally, my eyes reached his face—he had washed, combed and possibly oiled his beard with something that made it look positively silky. His eyes sparkled and some undefined emotion lurked in them.

I felt my mouth hanging open and tried to shake myself out of my speechless shock when I saw a measure of uncertainty enter Mack's eyes.

“Is it okay?” he asked, more tentatively than I would have expected.

“It's perfect,” I replied, a little breathless.

“I knew I couldn't pull off the whole monkey suit thing like you,” he said with a vague wave towards the extremely conservative, completely traditional tuxedo I was wearing. I knew I rocked a tuxedo, and I also thought he would look fantastic in one. But this was so much better.

He looked to be taking another breath to begin explaining himself, so I walked up to him and put my finger against his lips. “No. You look wonderful. I will have the best looking date at the whole fundraiser.”

I felt his lips curve up into a smile under my finger and it sent a jolt all the way down my arm. I looked up and caught his eye. We seemed to stay locked in each other's gaze for a small eternity before I stepped back and broke eye contact.

The tension was so thick I wasn't sure I could move any further. I cast around my brain for a way to break it, to move back to where it was safe, comfortable.

I jerked my head up when Mack spoke. He had a smirk on his face as he said, “Do you have any overdue library books?” Pause. “No? 'Cause you've got fine written all over you.”

I burst out laughing, and the tautness of the moment before was broken. I groaned and shook my head. “That was horrible.”

We arrived at the convention center twenty minutes later, and I took advantage of the situation to grab Mack's hand and lead him towards the

entrance. He looked a little startled at first, but didn't force our hands apart. I firmly pushed the voice inside my head into a box and allowed myself to pretend for just this one night.

As we entered the ballroom, I glanced over at Mack. His eyes were wide with wonder as he took in the surroundings. I had been to so many of these that I had become a bit blasé about it all. But seeing Mack's reaction made me take a second look.

A huge chandelier hung over the center of the space—it was probably twenty feet in diameter. White fairy lights on the potted plants along the walls added a romantic glow to everything, and each table had candles floating in varying-sized vases surrounding a single orchid as the centerpiece. Off to one side, taking up an entire corner, was a twenty-piece orchestral ensemble. A huge set of double doors on one wall led to a second, lavishly decorated room hosting the silent auction.

We both paused, lost in the grandeur of it all for a few moments more before I shook myself, smiled up at Mack, and led him towards our table.

The evening flew by in a swirl of bright lights, soft music, and fantastic food. We spent the first half of the evening exploring the silent auction and laughing as much as possible. After dinner was served, the dancing began.

It took me a few songs to work up the courage to ask Mack to dance, but I finally managed.

I looked at him shyly. "Would you like to dance?"

"Me?! Ummm, I'm not sure I really know this kind of dancing," he hedged nervously.

"It's all right. I'll lead."

"Okay." We both seemed a little stunned by his answer, but I wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth and all that, so I took his hand and led him out to the dance floor. About half the couples out there actually knew how to dance, and the other half just sort of swayed around trying not to run into the other dancers. I firmly fell into the latter category, but I could not pass up the opportunity to hold Mack close like that.

I put my right hand on his waist, used my left hand to take his right, and drew us together as the music began. As I moved my feet, long-ago cotillion lessons seemed to come back to me, and I managed a little better than a simple box step. Despite being larger and taller than me, Mack followed wonderfully. As the music slowed, so did my steps. I drew him closer until I could feel his chest against mine. It might have been my imagination, but I thought I could feel his heart beating in time with mine.

The music spun out around us and gave me courage. I leaned my head in against his shoulder and breathed deeply of his scent—unlike anything else I had ever smelled. My head spun from the dancing, from the headiness of the moment, and from the champagne that had been flowing freely all night long. Somehow, without my realizing it, our hands had shifted and no longer rested on each other hips but were wrapped around each other's backs.

It was a perfect moment. I sighed and said Mack's name against his throat, and almost unconsciously leaned a little closer to press my lips against his neck.

“Edmund, dearest.” Mother's voice interrupted me before I could take that final irreversible step. I didn't know if I was relieved or disappointed. We had moved to the edge of the dance floor as we danced, and Mother was standing just off the dance floor with Father and another couple—I thought they might be Arthur's parents.

I went from utterly content to thoroughly annoyed in no time flat. I had brought Mack, both so I wouldn't have to come with one of her cronies' bratty children, and because I knew Mother would not approve of Mack. I planned to milk it for all it was worth. I shocked myself with how quickly I switched gears.

I pulled Mack towards the small group of people and plastered myself against his side.

“Edmund, you remember Kitty and James. Why don't you introduce us to your date?”

“This is Mack Ferguson. Mack, this is my mother, Elizabeth Beauregard Roth, and my father, Edmund Chauncey Roth the second. And as Mother said, this is Kitty Allen Spencer and James Frances Spencer.”

After a round of “*pleasure to meet yous*” Kitty turned politely to us and asked, “So how did you two meet? It must have been recent because just last week your mother was bemoaning your single state.”

Definitely Arthur’s parents. Mack had begun to speak but I cut him off, and replied in the most aristocratic tone I could manage, “I picked him up in a bar.” It wasn’t a lie, and it would serve my purpose of embarrassing my parents.

I saw Mack’s face turn hard as he looked at me, and Mother appeared to be thinking on all cylinders.

She was the first to speak. Her voice was strained with control and fake jocularity. “Edmund, honey. You mustn’t joke so. This must be your friend I hear so much about who owns that pub you are always hanging out at.”

Ignoring Mack’s look and trying to get every dig in I could, I leered slightly. “More than a friend, Mother.”

It almost felt like I was not in control of my body or my mouth. I grabbed Mack’s face and shoved my tongue in his mouth. There was about a split second in which I was overwhelmed by the fact that I was kissing my best friend, I was kissing Mack. But Mack held completely and totally rigid against me. His jaw was set and even with only a glimpse of his face, I could see that he was furious.

He mechanically disengaged himself from my grasp, turned towards the rest of the group and, with a barely constrained temper, said, “Please excuse me.” Then he whirled in the opposite direction and stalked towards the exit.

All at once, the magnitude of what I had done hit me like a two by four between the eyes. I had been so concentrated on embarrassing my parents that I treated Mack, my best friend, the man I was pretty sure I was in love with, like garbage.

I ran after him.

I caught up with him at the coat check as he was waiting for the attendant to bring him his leather jacket.

I touched his arm to get his attention, and he jerked instinctively out of my reach. He was angrier than I had ever seen him and behind that anger lurked a hurt I had no idea I was capable of inflicting.

“I cannot believe you did that to me,” he hissed. “I do not want to see you right now. I’ll catch a cab home. Please leave me alone.”

I stepped back from him, and just nodded like a mute bobblehead doll, trying to get an apology, a plea, anything to cross my lips, but by the time I unstuck my brain enough to whisper, “I’m sorry,” he was already out the door.

I stumbled around the corner beside the coat check, into a mostly deserted service corridor, and collapsed on the floor against the wall. My chest felt so tight it was difficult to breathe and I tried to wrap my head around what I had just lost. I felt like I should be crying but no tears came.

Eventually, I looked up to see Mother coming down the corridor towards me. She came to a stop in front of me and glared down at me. “Edmund Chauncey Roth, what in the name of everything on God’s green earth do you think you were doing out there?” She took a deep breath, and I assumed she would continue her lecture as per the usual. But after a few beats of silence I looked up at her. She was just staring down at me. As I met her eyes, she kept staring, hard and piercing. Something of her usual mask slipped, and some new emotion flashed through her eyes.

It seemed as if she was trying to read me like a book, trying to open up my head and figure out what was going on in there. It was the most attention she had ever paid to me as just myself, and not as an extension of her or Father.

After another moment of silent staring she finally spoke. “You really love him, don’t you?”

I don’t think anything she could have said would have shocked me more. Without really thinking, I just answered, “Yes.”

“Then I say again, what in the hell were you doing out there?”



“I don’t know. I just got so caught up in hating all the family drama and embarrassing you that I lost my head a bit.”

Then Mother shocked me for the second time that night. She sat down on the floor with me and leaned against the wall—her shoulder touching mine. This time tears did slip out of the edges of my eyes.

She took my hand and sighed deeply. “Sometimes I get so caught up in being good enough, appearing perfect to all these people, that I forget who I am, forget that the whole world doesn’t live in masks.”

We sat there, truly together for the first time, I think, in our entire lives.

A time later, she spoke again. “I wasn’t always like this. I started out like your friend Mack. My parents died when I was nineteen, as you know, and I was on my own for three years before I met your father. I worked at a deli below the firm where he was interning. His parents were so mad. But we loved each other and I vowed I would change, I would become good enough for the world he came from. And now, I don’t even recognize either of us anymore.”

“I never knew that.” There had been so many shocks this evening that I think I had stopped feeling them at that point.

“So, hear me when I tell you this. Don’t let him change for you. If you really love him, go apologize and do whatever you need to do to make him understand how you feel.”

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The next day was a Sunday so I knew the pub wouldn’t be opening until one p.m. I headed over around eleven a.m. to try to catch Mack before any of his employees showed up.

I knocked on the side door and when he opened it, his eyes were granite-hard and his jaw was set.

I gathered my courage. “Can I come in?”

He didn’t say anything. He just opened the door a little wider. He walked over to the bar, stepped behind it, and began methodically cleaning all the glasses. The glasses were all cleaned at night before closing.

I went up to the bar, in front of where he was standing, and figured this was as good as I was going to get.

“Mack, I’m sorry. There is no excuse for how I acted last night. I treated you horribly and I used you to get back at my parents. I shouldn’t have treated a stranger that way, much less...” I paused, debating if I should declare myself quite yet, and settled on, “my best friend. Please forgive me.”

He just kept washing the clean glasses.

I cautiously reached my hand over the bar and rested it on his moving arm. “Mack, please.”

He finally looked up at me and the pain in his eyes physically knocked me back. My hand fell off his arm and I almost stumbled over one of the bar stools. He began to speak in a low, taut voice.

“I can’t believe you used me like that. You treated me like I was some whore you picked up on your way to the party—like I wasn’t worthy to be the dirt scraped off the bottom of your shoe. I have never felt so low in my whole life. After all we’ve been through together, I never would have expected that from you. And to think, I actually thought that... never mind.” He sighed, “I was obviously wrong.”

He turned his back and began placing the twice-cleaned glasses back on their shelves.

I was pretty sure I knew what he meant with those last words, but I decided to set that aside for now. I needed to make things right between us before anything else could happen. I walked around behind the bar and stood in front of Mack, forcing him to look at me.

“You are the best person in my life. You have been through more, and created more out of a shit lot, than anyone I have ever heard of. If you let me, I will do everything in my power to earn your trust again, because I know right now I don’t deserve it. Please give me a chance.”

He was silent for a long time. His eventual nod was barely perceptible, but my heart leapt to see it.

I grabbed an apron, tossed it over my head and asked him, “Where do you need me?” just like I did every Sunday morning. I wasn’t technically an employee but I would rather be here, with Mack, helping out, than pretty much anywhere else. So this is where I spent all my spare time.

There was a long pause and then he said, “Check the setups.” I kept the grin on my face in check as I grabbed the crate with the salt, pepper and various sweeteners needed to refill the setups on each table.

Over the next six weeks, our relationship slowly regained its footing. Mother came to eat at the pub multiple times, and the three of us even had one completely awkward and stilted dinner together.

The day I knew everything would be all right between us was the day I was greeted by Mack’s booming voice yelling across the bar, “Would you grab my arm so I can tell my friends I’ve been touched by an angel?” I had never been so happy to hear a cheesy pickup line in all my life.

I yelled back, “I’ll grab something—might not be your arm.” Mack and the few people sitting at the bar all burst out laughing.

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Three days later, I walked into the bar wearing my tuxedo. I had gone all out, used my best cuff links and done my hair. Mack wasn’t in the front so I sat down at the bar and ordered a beer from Aaron, one of the regular bartenders.

I waited a few minutes, and before I had finished my beer, Mack came out of his office dressed in his typical jeans and black T-shirt. He did a double take when he saw me all dressed up, sitting at the bar.

He approached me and asked, “What’s the occasion?”

I smiled and said, “I’ve got a really important date.”

About a million emotions flashed through Mack’s eyes before he squeezed them briefly shut and then plastered a smile on his face. That’s when I knew he was just as into this as I was.

He managed to grate out a “congratulations” and started to turn away when I reached out, grabbed his hand and waited until he was looking at me again.

“Mack Ferguson, will you go out with me?” My heartbeat raced in my chest as I waited for his answer.

A small smile began to spread across his face, and the hope in his eyes was brilliant. He spoke in an almost whisper. “No games?”

I shook my head. “No games.”

His smile turned full-blown and he whooped, “Of course!”

He grabbed me off my bar stool and spun me once. I didn’t even know that was possible, but I didn’t have time to think about it, because as soon as he set me down, he was kissing me.

His lips were pressed against mine and I thought my heart might burst from joy. He grabbed my head, threaded his fingers through my hair, and pulled me in tighter. I could feel his beard scraping against my face and neck. I let him deepen the kiss, and melted into him as he joyfully took my mouth.

It was hot, and wet, and wonderful, and I don’t think I had ever had a kiss quite like it. Eventually we had to separate, because it is really hard to kiss around two huge grins.

My cheeks hurt, I was smiling so hard, as Mack pulled me into a hug. Amidst the catcalls and shouts of the customers, he whispered in my ear, “Why’d you dress up?”

I leaned back and looked him in the eyes before I responded, “I wanted you to know how important this moment is to me, how important you are to me.”

Joy practically shone out of his whole face. “Thanks. You’re pretty important too.”

I smiled and kissed him again.

## **THE BEGINNING**

## Author Bio

*Kathleen Hayes is a bit of an all-around geek. She has mastered the art of procrastination, is owned by two crazy cats and is excited to have just added a fellow super geek to her clan. Kathleen loves to explore worlds—whether in her head or on page. She welcomes you into her worlds and hopes you have as much fun there as she does!*

*She writes M/M Romance short stories and poetry. Other works by Kathleen include Broken, Life in Chaos, Like So Much Hot Air, Christmas Tradition, and Perfect. You can also follow her serial, True Love's Kiss, on her blog and find a selection of shorter ficbits [here](#).*

*She loves to hear from y'all so if you have questions/comments/feedback comment on her blog, message her on Goodreads, or email her.*

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