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Hayley B. James

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Albuquerque police officer Benji Miller made the choice to hide his sexuality and devote his life to his career. He guards his secret carefully, believing he is protecting his job and happiness. Then, during a routine traffic stop gone awry, he shoots a suspect to protect a young girl, and his life spins out of control. A department-mandated paid leave rips away the only distraction he had, and he has to deal with the unsympathetic media who criticize the police department's every move.

One day, needing to get out of the house, Benji walks into a café, where he meets Neal McCoy—a gay man living without shame, unafraid to speak his mind or stand up against prejudice. Benji quickly falls for Neal but struggles to combine his new love interest and his career. With the media threatening the careful illusion he's built around himself, Benji can't stand the pressure.

Benji has to decide: sacrifice his happiness in the name of his career and an easy life, or find the courage to give up the lonely existence he knows and take a step into the unknown.

Paid Leave Details

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From Reader Review Paid Leave for online ebook

Charlie Cochet says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book! As someone with several family members in law enforcement, and whose experienced a ride-along first hand, I really appreciated the amount of research and care that went into this story. Benji was so very real to me, and could have been any of the numerous police officers I have met over the years. I also love when characters draw me into their world, their heartache, their relationships, and friendships.

I understood Benji's attitude and conflicted emotions, why he felt so scared and lost. When things started to change for him, it was believable, and his reactions fit with his character. There was so much at risk for him, so much newness entering his life he had never faced, and didn't know how to face. I enjoyed watching Benji slowly growing in his own skin, how he was scared to make even the most minimal of changes, but with the love and the support of a very patient and supportive man, Benji started realizing what he was willing to sacrifice to keep that love. I respected Benji, even when he made mistakes, when he didn't know whether he was coming or going, because I can relate to that. I think most of us can.

I loved Neal and Kyle, who were just what Benji needed in his life, even if he didn't realize it at first. Overall, this is a story about a police officer in a very non-glamorous job filled with hardships and terrible situations, heartache, and hope. I laughed out loud at some moments, and I was hoping all the way through that Benji would find the love he deserved.

JustJen "Miss Conduct" says

Review written for Hearts On Fire Reviews - **3.5 stars**

When I began this story, I had a hard time figuring out what was going on. For starters, the blurb is very misleading. Often, I found myself going back to it to see if I was reading things correctly. For starters, it starts out with Benji and the reporter, Charles, getting together. I had to keep questioning why I cared about Charles knowing all along he wasn't the other main character. The answer, of course, was that I didn't. I suppose it solidified the kind of life Benji was living, but I'm not sure this was the best way to go about it, as many seem to have been scared away at this point. Eventually, the blurb does match up, but it takes a while.

At the point when Benji meets Neal at the coffee shop, this story did a complete turnaround for me. It finally felt like the story I wanted to read about. Neal is wonderful, and I fell in love with him from the start. He is sweet and funny and sexy. He's out and proud but doesn't really flaunt it (total opposite from his bestie, Kyle). He has been cheated on by his previous three boyfriends and was about ready to leave town when things fell in place for the coffee shop. He falls for Benji, knowing he probably shouldn't, given Benji's closet status. Things just sort of move along with them though, and while Neal doesn't just take what he can get from Benji, he is extremely patient and tolerant.

Benji, on the other hand, is a bit frustrating. We sort of learn that his upbringing and family life was not the greatest and played a huge role in why he chooses to remain closeted, not to mention the restrictions of his job/career. It is easy to see why he has made the decisions he has concerning being out to the public, but that doesn't make it any less frustrating. When a few close people do learn, they basically shun him, but that

doesn't last for very long. Through everything, Neal is by his side, giving whatever support he can for every little baby step Benji takes. The biggest hurdle seems to be Benji's inability to accept being gay himself. All big hurdles, but I enjoyed seeing Benji overcome them a little at a time.

In the end, Benji's feelings for Neal are what give him the extra courage to make changes in his life. There were niggling little inconsistencies throughout. There were a few things in the blurb that didn't seem to match up to the actual story, but I ended up enjoying this by the end. Unfortunately, many have not made it past the beginning to get to the good stuff. My rating is, therefore, an average of how I felt reading the first four chapters and the rest of the story.

Becky Condit says

This story tells us about Benji, a closeted police officer whose life is turned upside down first with a series of tragic events from work, then when he falls in love with Neal, a coffee shop owner. This book was well written and the dialog was really good. The events, while not always exciting or pretty, paints a pretty accurate picture of what occurs on the job as a law enforcement officer. It also shows how difficult the job can be for a gay cop. Although I really liked this story, I will admit that Benji character was not likeable. Not even at the end. He was closeted to the point of being a coward. I can understand him being in the closet, but there comes a time when a person has to man up. And he never really did. It's one thing to be in the closet, but when you enter into a relationship with someone, you can't make that decision for them. And that is exactly what he did with Neal. Neal was out and accepted by his family and friends; the people that mattered. Neal offered that same warmth and acceptance to Benji, but Benji just wouldn't reach out and take it. Not only that, I felt that he was forcing Neal back into the closet with him. I was irritated at Neal's character because he was willing to go into that closet just to keep Benji; he became pathetic and needy at one point. The scene where Benji was rude to Neal's mother made my blood simmer and when Neal apologized for his mother made my blood boil. I felt that Benji did not deserve Neal's mother's forgiveness and his (Neal's) family's acceptance. I actually liked Benji's friends better: his sometimes inappropriate, sometimes crude, and all times idiotic friend Matthews and his enlightened friend Cazé. In the end, it was rumor and speculation that brought Benji 's sexuality to the forefront. Even though he had support from some of his colleagues, Benji still chose to remain closeted, which was certainly his right, but it eventually led to Neal removing himself from the relationship. This is when Benji decides that maybe Neal had a point and begins to really take a hard look at himself. In the end, Benji never really comes fully out of the closet, but he opens the door to it. If an author's writing is able to make you feel anything for the characters, good or bad, then you know that they did a great job. This author did exactly that. The story doesn't have a HEA ending, but the HFN ending that it did have was more realistic. Despite my dislike for the lead character, I truly enjoyed this story and would definitely recommend it.

Please leave comments on Kiwi's 4 sweet pea review at Mrs Condit & Friends Read Books

Catherine says

***** 2.5 Stars *****

Keeping it brief today:

- the first 30% of the novel had Benji in a fuck buddy relationship with another closeted man. As a general rule, I'm not a fan of wasting that much page time on someone who isn't critical to the story's central

romance. Then, when we eventually meet Neal, he turns out to be a warm, fun, caring person that you can't help but respond to (which only made me further resent the time we, the readers, were without him).

- I hated the constant "gay men aren't normal"/"gay men aren't real men," rhetoric. If it had only been coming from outside forces, it could have been acknowledged as bigoted statements by small-minded people, but when the same statements come just as often from an MC, I expect this sort of internalized homophobia to be better addressed by the end of the novel (and it most certainly wasn't).

- while I appreciated that Neal wasn't trying to push Benji out of the closet, I resented the table scraps of affection and commitment that Neal, this out and proud man, was willing to accept in order to be with Benji. I have to say, if the person that I was growing to care for told me flat-out that they (view spoiler)

Nic says

I enjoyed this story although found it very frustrating at times - Neal, what were you thinking?! **"I don't want him to run," Neal whispered. "For once in my life I want to roll over and accept anything the other guy wants just to keep him. I'm that guy now. I've never been that guy before."**

Benji is police officer and dedicated to his career. This means he is very much in the closet with no intention of coming out. However meeting Neal leads him in an unexpected direction. **"His relationship with Neal was definitely bittersweet. He had heaven with Neal but hell because of it."** Benji is a difficult character to get to like. His behaviour and some of his actions are questionable.

Neal runs a cafe and doesn't hide his sexuality from anyone. His character is wonderful and I almost didn't want him to enter into a relationship with Benji and risk his heart.....**"He had known what he wanted with Benji wasn't what Benji wanted with anyone, but he had still let himself believe in fairy tales."**

Luckily the fairy tale did come true for both men.

Mandapanda says

3.25 stars. Unusual story about a closeted cop, Gabe, who is going through an inquiry after he kills someone in the course of duty. Added to the stress is the attitude of the local press who are making out the local cops to be irresponsible killers. When he's on leave he meets a cafe owner, Neal, who shows him how free it feels to be out in the open.

I liked Gabe but he was a dour person. Hard to get to know and really love as a character. What worked for me in this story was Neal and his friend Kyle. Their openness and love of life was really refreshing when contrasted to the intense heavy pressure surrounding Gabe. Gabe's coming out was well handled, as were the reactions of his colleagues. There is a sense of realism in the story. For some reason I really thought this was written by a male author.

What didn't work so well was the character of Clark, a reporter with whom Gabe initially has a brief fling

and who keeps cropping up in Gabe's life despite the terrible articles he is writing about Gabe's case. Frankly He was weird and I couldn't understand why Gabe was with him nor why he even interacted with him afterwards. He was the villain of the book... and yet... he wasn't. It was just a dissatisfying plot thread.

I would certainly be interested in reading more by this author. Especially a book about Kyle.

Candice says

Why is it that so many service jobs (police officers, EMT/paramedic's, firefighters, etc.) are so damn homophobic? Is it because of having to be in a locker room with each other? Oh my fault, I didn't realize EVERY guy turns a gay guy on and is constantly checking out what's underneath that uniform. Do they think that a gay man can't protect them like a straight man can? Oh wait, wasn't that gay guy doing a damn good job before you even found out???? I don't understand. It hurts so much that people we are supposed to trust have protect us--be our "hero" so to speak are homophobic. It's seriously making me look twice at all of these people I see on the streets daily. No matter how many books I read about this subject it still gets to me.

So this is a story about Benji and Neal. Neal is an out and proud coffee shop owner and Benji is a deeply closeted police officer. I am talking so deep he can't even find the door to find his way out.

After a shooting gone bad and the media all over Benji he's forced on a paid leave. On his "vacation" he walks into a coffee shop called Beans. Benji is immediately taken with Neal and vice versa.

Neal doesn't normally date closeted people (which I really don't blame him!) but he decides he likes his little storm cloud. The things Neal would say crushed me. He's out and is willing to sacrifice a lot just to be with Benji. Benji is still so confused and doesn't want to lose his career, but also wants Neal. Can't have your cake and eat it too in this case, Benji.

Mad love for Caze! His advice was spot on.

Neal's family...SWOOOOON! LOVE them :) I even loved Kyle! Actually, I REALLY loved Kyle. I want to be besties with Kyle.

(view spoiler)

Overall, good book that really pissed me off at the homophobia, but I should be used that. Can't say that I am though.

Cindi says

Full review **with A LOT of spoilers** can be found at On Top Down Under Book Reviews.

This book was provided by Dreamspinner Press in exchange for a fair and honest review.

Susan65 says

Probably ranks way up there with one of the books I've had the most difficult time rating and reviewing.

What I didn't like:

I will say that had the first four chapters not happened the rating would have easily been 4 stars. I also firmly believe that the number of DNF's associated with this story would have declined as well. There is also some confusion over the shooting that I still don't understand but I chose to ignore it move on.

I just didn't see the purpose of those first four chapters. Charles was not one of the main characters and he did not deserve so much of this story devoted to him. No one cares about prior relationships between their main characters and surely most do not want read about them having sex. I almost joined the ranks of those who dnf'd this book....but with all that being said, I am glad I forced myself to read on.

What I did like:

Once we meet Neal the story starts to pick up. It was almost as if it was written by a different person. Benji was difficult to love and you know that his past is the reason for his issues, but those issues are all off page and not enough information is given to totally grasp why he hates himself for being gay, and why he has no plans of ever outing himself. Neal is out and proud, but not in your face, and he just can't understand why anyone would choose to live a lie. However, he likes Benji a lot and is willing to be his secret...for a while.

Neal has the most accepting and loving family on the planet, so he really can't understand what Benji has experienced...but since Benji's past is not completely explained (only that he doesn't speak to his parents and they don't try to contact him) and only alluded to. His past and experiences do make him a complete asshole though...he doesn't want to be one but he just can't fathom any way to be gay and a cop.

It doesn't help matters when he loses his best friend on the force when the rumors of him being gay start. All it does is prove to Benji that being gay is not an option for him. Sadly, the only thing that helps him and keeps him grounded is his relationship with Neal, but he won't allow himself to keep him and Neal won't stay with him if he doesn't see a future for them.

It takes a short term break-up and Neal becoming a victim before Benji decides that he can't live without Neal and wants to try again. Neal sees the potential future in Benji, he is very understanding and knows what Benji has been going through, and since he does love him he chooses to give Benji another chance. Once Benji makes the choice to stop hiding who he is with his closest friends and co-workers he realizes that he is not completely shunned. His best friend was not mad that he was gay, he was pissed that he lived a lie. Benji had to learn to love and accept himself as a gay man before he could expect anyone else to accept him. Fortunately, he has Neal to help him.

Danyelee Johnson says

Very sweet and *good* read, I'm glad I picked it up :) Other reviewers may be a bit miffed that an author

strayed from the typical the first boy we are introduced to is "the one" and they end up together and it's all sunshine and customary plot, but I love that Hayley James' spiced it up. Books like these are why I enjoy reading, I'm finding that there is this standard plot out on the market now that has several different titles and unique character names and combos, and I'm glad it wasn't the story for this one (pun intended lol).

multitaskingmomma says

Correction and Note: This should be a 4.5 stars but I still don't know how to do it.

The unusual approach of Paid Leave kept me reading and I never regretted picking it up. This is a must read for all lovers of the MM genre and closeted individuals out there for this book holds insights that are almost always never written about.

Paid Leave by Hayley B. James is about Albuquerque police officer Benji Miller who has made the conscious choice to hide his sexuality and devote his life to his career. He guards his secret carefully, believing he is protecting his job and happiness. Then, during a routine traffic stop gone awry, he shoots a suspect to protect a young girl, and his life spins out of control. A department-mandated paid leave rips away the only distraction he had, and he has to deal with the unsympathetic media who criticize the police department's every move.

One day, needing to get out of the house, Benji walks into a café, where he meets Neal McCoy—a gay man living without shame, unafraid to speak his mind or stand up against prejudice. Benji quickly falls for Neal but struggles to combine his new love interest and his career. With the media threatening the careful illusion he's built around himself, Benji can't stand the pressure.

Benji has to decide: sacrifice his happiness in the name of his career and an easy life, or find the courage to give up the lonely existence he knows and take a step into the unknown.

I always hesitate to read about closeted anything MM stories. These types of plots usually leave me frustrated, ready to pull out my hair, and simply want to throw away my Kindle for the frustration of it.

Okay, let us be clear first, I had this in my Kindle for a few days along with other new titles so I had no idea what I was going to read. So no, I was not prepared to read about closeted cops as unfortunately, I had no blurb to rely on. It did not help that it was late and I was sleepy. Needless to say, I did not sleep early as planned, instead I kept on reading well into 1 a.m. This is how interesting this story is.

Hayley B. James' approach to writing this story was unusual. At first I was kind of frustrated why Benji would go into a relationship with a man who was obviously not good for him. Truth is, this confused me a bit and I was frustrated that Benji was frustrated. And then a few chapters later, he walks into Beans, a café owned by out and proud Neal, and here the story takes a beautiful turn.

As the relationship develops between Neal and Benji, the reader is taken on a scenic tour as witness of their growing love for each other. Not to mention a few tips on how to make that perfect cup of coffee.

Although scenic tours of developing relationships usually bore me to tears and flipping to fast forward, I found myself savoring each and every word as the events unfolded.

Yes, there were the usual angsts, the usual miscommunication, blah blah blah, but it was not boring. It was not frustrating. It was, instead, a mind opener. There are so many issues about the pros and cons of being a

closeted cop the author touches on.

The reader takes a backseat ride as witness to the turn of events that ultimately leads to Benji's and Neal's happily ever after. It was refreshing, to be placed in that position. Reading this was like watching a full length movie unfolding before my eyes.

Mind you, I began this book at around 10 p.m. and usually my eyes are closed deep in sleep by 10:30 p.m. time, at the very least, they would be crossing. But Paid Leave caught and trapped me in the best way possible.

For all those who usually do not go for closeted main character plots, take a chance on Paid Leave by Hayley B. James. This is a story that shouldn't be missed out on and I highly recommend it.

Gigi says

[Story begins with MC Benji starting a "fuck buddy" relationship with a guy he doesn't even want to consider a friend. It creeped me out too much. I doubted Benji could be redeemed enough for me to enjoy his romance with the second MC, Neal, who he hadn't met yet. Then Benji kills a child accidentally while on duty. The way he handles it just sealed the deal. (hide spoiler)]

Thomaidha Papa says

4 Hearts

Review written for MM Good Book Reviews

<http://mmgoodbookreviews.wordpress.com/>

What an interesting book this one was, I quite loved it and enjoyed every aspect and turn this story took.

Benji is a closeted cop with no intention of ever coming out. His job doesn't permit it, his experience forbids it and his family life has left him believing that not only he's not normal, but that if he could not be gay, he would. Nothing in his future includes a family or even the possibility of a normalcy for his love life. His only consolation is his love for his job. Until he shoots a suspect on duty and everything changes. He's forced to a paid leave, his sex-buddy who is also a very cruel reporter is one of the first to leak the story and participate on the Media twisting every fact into making cops look like criminals, and he stumbles into Beans where he meets Neal.

Neal is the exact opposite of Benji. He is out, he is proud, he has a loving and supportive family and he's looking to settle in a permanent relationship, something Benji can't even contemplate. He is also a man Benji can't seem to stay away from even knowing that he should do just that. But Neal has a lovely smile and an attitude to life that is almost compelling and in the torrent of everything coming crashing in Benji's life, Neal is the only person to make him smile and lift the weight from his shoulders.

This is how a very lovely story starts with a great touch in the human soul and fears that overwhelm us. The parts of life that Benji kept separated all his life will start colliding and Benji seems almost reluctant to prevent it. As much as he wants things hidden and apart he comes to understand that would not be fair for the man he comes home to and while trying baby-steps in something he has never done, the enormity of his slowly coming to terms with being gay and in a relationship is not lost on this character. We get to feel that pressure acutely in every line and every new change.

I loved the fact that both characters here were not mindless creatures, victims of their lust. They were intelligent and each had a unique personality and while everything starts and ends with sex, that doesn't take priority in this story. We rather get to experience a wholesome change in two people's life with all the good and bad parts such a change brings. We get to see Neal relinquishing some of his own wants in order to maintain Benji, we get to see him settle for things he never even thought of doing and even contemplating staying hidden for Benji's sake, and we get to see the beauty of a man facing all his fears one at a time for the sake of a dimple showing in the face of a man that won his heart. The relationship between them two was wonderfully written and it made me slowly but steadily to fall for them and wish they get the normalcy they both so much craved.

We also get to see the hardship of being a Police Officer. The deaths they witness, the pieces of soul they lose every time an innocent is killed and their feelings of helplessness and not being there to prevent the evils people are capable of doing. We get to see how their world interacts with minorities in the force as well and all in all makes for a very solid and enjoyable read.

I might have had some trouble with understanding one particular character in this book, and that would be Neal's mom. She was quite disturbing at some point and I simply didn't get her actions. Hence when the ending came I felt it was a bit rushed and left some holes and gaps there. Yes, it was quite romantic, yes it was not cheesy or over sweet as most HEA's tend to be, yes Benji takes a 180 turn and shocks us all. But even though his reasoning seemed logical, it was almost too much to believe it happened in such a fast succession.

However it didn't throw me much and my enjoyment of this story didn't change at all. This is definitely one of those books I wouldn't hesitate to recommend even if you're not fans of closeted cases. If you love romance, cops and realistic plots then this is a book you don't want to miss.

Thommie

GayListBookReviews says

B+

This book surprised me. I usually get frustrated at closeted characters, but Benji was different. He accepted his life as one of a lonely cop. I grieved for him and the sadness that he believed to be his fate. He found his only outlet in meaningless hookups, but each one caused him to retreat further into himself. Believing that they were all he would ever be allowed to have, he took what little pleasure he could get from those secret, sad moments and stored it away to get him through the aching loneliness. Instead of getting frustrated with him, I found myself wanting to sit with him, have a cup of coffee, talk with him, hold him, rail against everyone who brought this man such pain.

Enter Neal and everything changes. Neal is vibrant and alive. His openness, with not just who he is, but with everything from the mistake of his coffee shop to seeing into the pain Benji wears around him is refreshing. He knows more than he lets on and his compassion is wonderful. He fights being "that guy" caught up in a

man who can't acknowledge their relationship. But Neal also knows that Benji is worth fighting for and I loved the tug of war the two of them had.

I enjoyed the depth of this book. The author gave realistic and inspiring emotions to these men. The side characters brought out the humanity in the story and created a connection between the main characters, that made the story feel real. Even Benji's partner and Neal's family caused me to be drawn in, frustrated, excited, angry, and joyous.

It was a well written and beautiful story. If you think you won't enjoy this book because of it's trope, or that closet case stories feel like a dime a dozen, I encourage you to think again and give this book a try.

Reviewed by Beans

Macky says

I was supplied a complimentary copy to review for my fair and honest opinion.

What a fantastic read! I knew from the very start that I was going to thoroughly enjoy this story. I was excited to start it and really sad to finish. I have a soft spot for opposites attract books, they tend to push my buttons so that was a plus to start with and I also like cop stories so thats another tick.

Benji Miller is a cop and he loves his job. He's gay but deeply closeted and he's happy to keep it that way, working hard to keep it hidden from his colleagues, who like all guys in 'macho' jobs are quick to throw snide jokes and comments about homosexuality around when its brought to their attention. At the beginning of the book there's tension between the police and the press because of a spate of cops shooting perps and unfortunately for Benji he becomes the publics next target when a routine traffic stop turns nasty and he has to shoot a man to protect a child. There's an uproar once again because of the press' negative handling of the situation and Benji is put on mandatory paid leave, whilst the department investigates.

Angry and feeling at odds with his life Benji has to accept the fact that he's stuck at home, laying low until the media coverage dies down. One morning he takes a chance on leaving the house to go out for breakfast and buy some paint because now he's got some free time he can carry on with some home renovations. When he gets to the store he notices a cafe called Beans that normally wouldn't be his scene but he's hungry and its the nearest food place, so he goes in and within seconds his life is changed forever.....to read rest of my 5 star review on "Paid Leave" please read it here and pre order from <http://sidlove.wordpress.com/2013/05/...>
