



saving his
forever

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LeAnn Ashers

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forever

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CHAPTER

ONE

EMILY

I can see bright lights through my eyelids. I can feel the sharp pain in my back. My eyes snap open and the nurse's face is in front of mine.

I look around the room, the light blinding me, but the panic to figure out where I am is killing me, overwhelming me.

She touches my arm and I scream loudly not wanting this person to touch me.

She snaps her hand back and she is replaced with a huge, imposing man. I gasp when the memories of everything return. He reaches out and touches my face. I can see his mouth moving and I know he is trying to talk to me, but my brain is lost in the memories.

A few days ago

I laugh at the sight of this dog with the zoomies running through the park. I look down at the reader in my lap enjoying my book.

It's a beautiful fall evening. The air is cool and the leaves are falling around me every time the wind blows.

There isn't anyone here. I yawn and pick up my blanket and tablet stuffing them under my arm. I need to go home.

I live right down the block. I hear the small dog bark and I look back smiling one last time but the owner with the dog is

gone and two men are standing on the edge of the woods, staring in my direction.

Okay, this is weird.

I turn around and look away from them so they don't get the idea that I want to talk to them.

I turn the corner feeling relief when I see my apartment complex. I push my hair behind my shoulder hurrying myself along.

The streetlights are coming on in sync in front of me. I push in the code to get into my building when an arm bands around my waist, lifting me off the ground.

My blanket hits the sidewalk and my reader cracks in front of me. I scream and try to spin around to see who has me in their arms.

It's one of the men from the park. I push at his face trying to pry him away from me and drop me.

"Stop! What are you doing?" I scream, hoping that I can get someone's attention to help me.

"Shut the fuck up, bitch," he hisses in my ear and another man comes in front of me, slapping his hand over my mouth, hard.

My eyes widened at the hard slap he just gave me. I kick my legs out and push him away from me, his hand slipping off my mouth. I scream once more and fight with everything in me to get away from them.

In the distance I see a woman holding the dog I was staring at earlier. I scream for her to help but she smiles and walks away.

With the distraction, I'm thrown into the van and we are speeding away. I look at my kidnappers, screaming and trying to fight my way to the door, wanting to jump out of it even if it's moving.

"Why are you doing this?" I ask them.

“Why the fuck do you think we have you?” he fires back and grips the belt buckle on his pants, starting to pull them off.

My whole entire body freezes to my core at the terrifying and the sinking realization. They lunge for me and everything goes dark.

~*~

I shift my wrists of where I am hanging from the ceiling of a building, my toes barely touching the floor.

I gather myself, not wanting to make a sound to give them the satisfaction of knowing they have hurt me in ways that I can't even think about right now.

But they haven't broken me.

That is why I'm here, stripped bare, waiting for them to break me, to give in to them and let them traffic me.

It won't happen.

I'd rather be fucking dead than give into these men.

I clench my jaw when the door opens and I hear the sound of a whip smacking into the wall to scare me, taunt me, and torture me.

He walks around in front of me, looking into my eyes and I don't blink, staring them down.

“Ready to give in yet?” he asks me.

“Never.”

His face changes from smugness to full anger. I look at the ceiling of the basement of whatever building I'm in.

He smacks the whip once again into the wall. I flinch slightly and close my eyes praying to God that I can get out of this.

That I'm strong enough to make it through.

~*~

Hours later

The door opens and my ex-boyfriend Cameron walks into the basement and the shock of this hurts more than anything.

We broke up because I found him doing shady things and I didn't want any part of it. I threatened to call the police to get him to stop, but he freaked out and I ran away from him.

I moved away from him, changed everything so he wouldn't find me.

He laughs when he sees me. "Not such a tough bitch now are you, cunt?" he taunts me, but I don't let my face show my true feelings.

The pain in my back is overwhelming me. I can feel the blood running down my back, to the back of my legs and dripping onto the floor.

He tries to get me to talk to him, to make me beg him to save me from this but I'm so far out of my mind that it doesn't even faze me.

I want to die; I want my life to end so I can have some peace.

He leaves, screaming at me as he goes out of the door, slamming it shut behind him and leaving me in the dark and the silence. It's peaceful.

I hope when I do go, it's filled with peace. Right now, I crave the silence and the freedom to let go.

I know my thoughts are incoherent, but the pain is so bad. I'm not sure I can hold on much longer to get through this.

I'm not sure how much time has passed when the door opens again. I lift my head just slightly to see who is coming in through the door.

One of the men who had kidnapped me is dragging a woman through the door. My heart lurches when she is hung up beside me.

Everything turns dark as they have shut the door leaving us alone and I can hear her breathing.

I try to shift and my shoulders scream at me in pain. I'm honestly not sure how I'm alive at this point.

I want this to end, but no matter how much I want that, I won't let them win.

I won't.

My face falls, not able to hold the weight up anymore. I haven't eaten since I arrived here and I am not sure how long that even is. They have force fed me water, but I can feel myself deteriorating.

~*~

I wake up to chaos. I try to open my eyes and I can hear men yelling all around me, gunshots going off and lots of screaming.

I manage to lift my head and see the girl that was in here with me is being taken down from the chain holding her off the ground.

I can tell the guy holding her cares for her very much.

Good, maybe this is the end of the pain for me.

A man walks in front of me. I can see the fury on his face as he looks at me. "Can I take you down?" he asks me in a soothing tone.

"Yeah," I manage to say, my voice rough from not using it for so long.

He raises his arms to my chain. He lets one of my arms loose and I scream at the pain from all the blood rushing down suddenly. He moves to the other arm and the pain is too much and I start to fall the second I'm free.

"I'm so fucking sorry," he tells me. He holds me with one arm and with his free hand, takes off his shirt.

He slips it over my head and I close my eye at the feeling of being covered. The fabric touching the whip marks on my back is uncomfortable but bearable.

"Can I carry you out of here?"

I nod. I must put my trust in him, nothing can be worse than this. He reaches down and gently picks me up and I can't even hold my head up, it falls to his chest, his grip tightening on me.

CHAPTER

TWO

EMILY

I snap back to myself, the memories hitting me hard. All the things I endured hitting me even harder.

The nurse tries to touch me again and I flinch back not wanting her to touch me. The guy who got me down for the chains walks over and takes her place.

“Are you in pain?” he asks me. His tone is soft which is a wonder because he doesn’t look soft in the least.

If I didn’t know how gentle he was with getting me down, covering my naked, broken body then I would be terrified.

I nod and look at the table beside me seeing a cup of water. He reaches over and takes the cup, holding the straw for me so I can take a sip.

The first feel of the cool water touching my tongue has me wanting to weep. With shaky hands, I take the cup from him wanting to chug it.

He lets me take it but holds the bottom so I don’t drop it. I can feel him staring at me. I hand it back to him, my head collapsing back into the pillow.

Why is he still here?

I’m rubbing my face when the door opens and the nurse comes back with a shot. “This is for pain,” she tells me and pushes it into the IV.

She walks back out, leaving me alone in the room with him. “What is your name?” I ask, not even recognizing my voice.

“Isaac.” He sits down beside me in a chair.

“How did you find me?” I ask, trying to lift the blanket further under my neck. I feel more secure and love that I’m covered. I’m dressed in a hospital gown and my hair feels clean so they must have washed me.

“Sydney, my friend’s girl, was the other girl that was down in the basement with you.”

I try to sit up in bed, concerned about her. “Is she okay?” I ask.

He nods. “She is a little banged up, but she is fine and worried about you.” He reaches for the little remote and pushes the button to call for the nurse. “Can you bring some warm blankets please?” he asks them.

“I found out my boyfriend was doing shady things, including trafficking women. He got pissed when I threatened to call the cops, so I decided to try and hide from him. He somehow found me and you can guess the rest.”

He looks down at the floor and I can see his body shaking. Is he angry at me or for me?

There is a knock at the door and he gets up to meet the person. He comes back from around the corner holding a few blankets.

He pulls off the current blanket on me and places a new warm one over me. “Oh my god, this is amazing.” He smiles and tucks it around me.

“Thank you for helping me.” I need him to understand how grateful I am that he’s here, helping me and that I’m not alone right now.

He reaches out and takes hold of my hand, squeezing gently. “Do you need me to call anyone? I will be here for you until a friend or family member arrives. I’m not leaving you alone.”

I shake my head no. “I don’t have any family and no friends to turn to so I appreciate this.” My bottom lip trembles, the tears I have held back through all this are threatening to burst free.

“It’s okay to cry. You’ve been through a lot.”

His kindness is my undoing. I cover my face and cry for the girl who was just reading in the park; for the woman who let a man take advantage of her and for the woman who has been hurt in ways no one should ever be hurt.

I can feel him hovering over me and every sob has my back hurting, pulling at the stitched-up wounds all over it. “Can I hold you?” he asks me.

I hesitate a minute, unsure if I’m ready for someone to touch me. But I so need to be held right now, to feel safe.

I nod, tears rolling down my face. My heart feels like it’s going to burst out of my chest. The pain in my heart is worse than my wounds.

He sits on the edge of the bed, making sure not to jostle me. He pulls me to him, holding my face gently and scoots towards me until my face is pressed against his chest.

“You’re safe; I have you,” he whispers to me softly. My whole body is shaking from the power of my sobs.

I grieve some more for the girl who has been through so much trauma; for the woman I used to be and the possibility of the woman I could have become.

I don’t know who I am anymore, but I know I want to live more than anything. I fought with everything in me so I can make it out of there.

That is one thing I do know. I will live and I will live for the person who made it out of hell.

He pulls back slightly and wipes away my tears. Why is he so nice to me? “Thank you for being here but you don’t have to be here. I’ll be okay,” I tell him even if my heart is twisting at the idea of being alone.

I’m so scared of the thought.

The door opens and a nurse walks in pushing a cart filled with gauze pads. Isaac scoots away from me, but doesn't let go of my hand.

"I need to clean your wounds," the nurse tells me. She has a sympathetic look on her face. I dry my face and wipe away the rest of my tears.

"If you don't mind, can you set your legs off the side of the bed?" she asks me and moves behind the bed.

Isaac takes my hand and helps me turn in the bed very slowly, my back screaming at me the whole time.

I take the pillow from the head of the bed, putting it under my stomach and leaning over. Isaac sits in front of me, holding my hands.

My eyes connect with his, so thankful he is here with me, but so confused as to why at the same time. Does he pity me?

Right now, I can't bring myself to care about that.

I can feel her untying my hospital gown, exposing my back. I can hear her sharp inhale as she looks at my wounds.

I know it's horrible because I felt every whip & mark across my skin as it happened to me. All because I wouldn't give in.

They wanted women who would bend to the will of their buyers. They tried to force me anyway they knew how and this was one of the things they used against me.

Nothing would be as horrible as losing myself. I'd rather die.

"I am so sorry. This is going to hurt."

I let out a deep breath, bracing myself. "I know," I tell her honestly.

I don't flinch at the first touch of her dabbing my wound. Isaac turns his head to the side, looking at the wall like he can't bare to look at me.

I lean my head forward not thinking nor caring that he might not want me touching him. I rest my head on his shoulder, breathing in his scent.

He feels safe.

Isaac

It's extremely difficult to sit and watch her try to hide the pain she's feeling as they clean her wounds. She's trying so hard to be strong and put on a neutral face but I know how deep those wounds are; how gruesome and painful they are.

I saw what they did her when she was hanging from the ceiling. The paramedics had to put her shoulder back in place because it was out of socket from the way she was hanging for so long.

She tightens her grip in my hands. I clench my jaw and look over her shoulder at the nurse who's in tears.

"Can you increase her pain medicine or something?" I ask the nurse, hating this shit more than anything.

The nurse stops what she's doing and pushes the button on the wall asking for another nurse to bring some more pain medicine for her.

Emily takes a deep breath once she stops touching her back. I cup her face in awe of how tough she is.

"You're so strong."

She smiles for the first time and I feel like she just fucking gave me the moon to see that smile on her face. I would do anything to see that again, over and over.

From the shit that was handed to her, seeing her smile proves that they didn't take away her spirit completely.

Another nurse walks to her IV giving her more meds and soon Emily relaxes, her eyes drooping.

The other times she got her wounds cleaned she was completely out of it and had been asleep for days.

One of the reasons I'm here is because I want to protect her and make sure nothing ever happens to her again. I can't explain why I feel this way towards her, but it's almost like a natural instinct or reaction to her.

Secondly, we saw papers when we tore that fucking building apart. She was sold to this man in Mexico.

When I was shown that shit, I wanted to fucking murder everyone involved. The ones who had died in that building where she was, isn't enough. Nothing is enough for the way she had been brutally treated.

I don't want her to know that she had been sold nor of the danger lurking around all because money exchanged hands.

I pray to fucking God that he comes after her. I want to hurt them a million times worse than what they did to her.

Emily doesn't move while her wounds are cleaned. "Can you come over here so I can show you how to clean these when she is released tomorrow?"

Emily looks up at that and I can see she is frightened at the thought of leaving. I keep her hand in mine, walking to the side of her, letting the nurse walk me through everything.

The hospital staff believes that I am her fiancé. It's why they have not questioned my presence here and make sure that I'm aware of everything pertaining to her.

The nurse leaves, taking all of the supplies with her. I make a note for Chase, one of my friends, to pick up everything for me and take it to my house.

Emily

I try not to panic when the nurse mentioned I could go home soon. I don't want to go back to my apartment.

They found me there.

It feels like everything that I had doesn't belong to me anymore. Life is so different now and I feel like I need a new start; all new things, new place to live, just a completely fresh start.

All I want is to feel safe and have peace in my life.

But I'm scared. I would be stupid to admit that I wasn't terrified of something like this happening again.

"I want to talk to you about something." Isaac brings me out of my panicking thoughts.

I turn my attention to him. He's sitting on the edge of the bed at my feet. "I want to know if you want to come stay with me? I have a ton of room. I can stay hidden if it'll make you feel better. I just don't want you to go home alone. Plus, I want to make sure you're safe, considering everything that has happened."

I ponder his words as I try to remain calm and not blurt out a million times over, yes. "I would really like that, Isaac. I'm thankful you're helping me." Tears fill my eyes, emotional over everything.

His face shows anguish. "Don't cry." His voice is almost pleading with me, but I held it all in for so long in that basement. It's as if I can no longer control them.

He moves closer to me and takes my hand, squeezing gently. "I'm sorry I'm a mess." I rub my eyes. They burn from all of the crying I have been doing.

"You're not a mess. You're the strongest person I have met, Emily," he says to me and that causes another set of tears for me. I laugh and rub my cheeks dry. "I think I'm going to take a nap."

I lay back gently on the bed and this time I can't stop the cry from my lips at the feeling of the pressure on my back.

I sit back up. "Do you think lying on your belly would help?" he asks.

"That may be better."

He helps me turn around on my stomach, adjusting the bed down so I can lay flat. I take the pillow, stuffing it under my face.

He lifts the blanket and tucks me in. He starts to walk away and I take his hand. "Thank you for this Isaac."

“I want to be here, Emily. You don’t have to thank me.” He smooths my hair out of my face and turns off the light, settling down in the recliner next to me.

“I’m sorry that you’re having to sleep in the recliner. I can trade you,” I tell him.

He shakes his head smiling at me like he’s in disbelief. “Don’t worry about me. I have slept in way worse places than this, being a SEAL. I slept on a rock before and this is heaven.”

“You were a Navy SEAL?” I ask him, tucking my hand under my chin, looking at him.

He nods, “Yeah, I was. I retired last year. I have a few businesses and now I just take care of my farm.”

I smile. “I always wanted ducks and chickens. What kind of animals do you have?”

He pulls a blanket over his legs, crossing his huge arms across his chest. “I have horses, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats and goats.”

“I can’t wait to see them,” I confess. It sounds amazing and so peaceful. “Do you have any family close by?”

He shakes his head. “I was in foster care until I aged out.”

“I was too.” My heart aches for him because I understand. There is nothing worse than feeling like you will never have a place to actually call home.

We share a look. We both understand.

My eyes start to grow heavy. I yawn and close my eyes. “Goodnight, Isaac.”

I know he is watching me but I feel safe. It only takes a few seconds for me to fall asleep.

CHAPTER

THREE

EMILY

I've been in the hospital for a week now. The nurse hands me my papers with discharge orders and instructions on how to care for my wounds.

I When I was assaulted, they wore protection. But it makes me sick to think of what happened to me. I try to push it the back of my mind. They did a rape kit on me and had me tested for any possible STDs. My results came back clean.

But I know I need to come to terms with it. I'm thankful that I'm clean and that is one less thing for me to worry about.

Isaac walks into my room, holding a bag of supplies they gave me to take home. "Ready?" he asks me.

I am more than ready to get out of here. I'm over the nurses walking in every hour or so waking me up.

He helps me into the wheelchair. I sit as far forward as I can so my back isn't touching the back of the wheelchair.

"I'm more than ready." The nurse pushes me to the front of the hospital where a huge truck is waiting at the front.

Oh shit! How am I going to get in?

Isaac gently lifts me out of the wheelchair, making sure not to hurt my back and sets me gently in the seat.

"Okay?" he asks me.

I nod and he sets my blanket in my lap. The air has a slight chill to it. He shuts my door and I can't help but admire how great he looks with his hat low on his head, his t-shirt hugging his arms.

He gets in and smiles at me. "Ready to go home?"

My heart beats a little harder at him calling it home. "Yeah, let's go."

He reaches over and tucks the blanket over me tighter, then reaches around taking my seat belt and buckling me in.

I fight the urge again to thank him for everything. I sit forward so my back doesn't rub against the seat.

I'm much better than when I first got here but if I move a certain way, it pulls on the scabs and the stitches. They mentioned a plastic surgeon to help with the scarring. A part of me doesn't want the help because it's reminder of what I did to keep myself alive and what I had suffered.

It wouldn't be for my benefit anyway. It would be for others around me to be more comfortable and I don't have it in me to really care about that.

We leave town and my eyes glued on the area I have never been to before. "Chase went and got the things you requested from your apartment. It's already unpacked for you," he tells me.

I reach over and squeeze his forearm. "I am so thankful for you Isaac. I don't think I could have done this without you."

He looks over at me, his face soft, staring at me. "You could have, Emily. You made it through fucking hell and you're still here. You could have done it. But you don't have to."

I fight the urge to lean over and rest my head on him. Every night he hasn't left me. I tried to get him to go home and get some good rest besides lying on the recliner.

He wouldn't leave me. He made sure I had everything I needed.

I had been alone, even with my ex-boyfriend who I only dated for a month before I found out his shadiness and I left. He wasn't ever there for me like Isaac has been.

I grew up in foster care and I never once had someone care if I was dead or alive until now.

The town melts away and the countryside comes into view. Wow, it's beautiful. The houses are large and you can see children running around in front yards with dogs.

This is the life I have dreamed of having; an amazing home, a family and just a simple, peaceful life.

He slows down and stops outside of a gate. He enters a code and it swings open.

I hold my breath when I see the horses running alone side us. A huge white, three-story house and a matching barn comes into view at the end of the long driveway.

"Wow, Isaac, it's beautiful," I tell him as I roll down the window so I can get a better view of the animals.

I giggle when I see a fuzzy headed chicken that looks ridiculous and so stinking cute. "I want to hold that chicken." I point to it when he stops in front of the house.

He laughs. "That chicken is a fucking menace."

I laugh seeing it run after one of the ducks who looks petrified. Isaac slides out of the truck and walks over to me. He gently slides his arm under my knees and the small of my back where I'm not injured, setting me on the ground.

He takes my hand to steady me. I let my body adjust and slowly make my way to the front door. I love how the house has rocking chairs and a bed porch swing that is begging for me to read in it.

My mind wonders to my reader that is probably broken or stolen at this point because it landed on the ground outside of my apartment.

He pushes open the door for me and I take in the beautiful living room. The black leather couch with the white accents and a huge flat screen hanging on the wall in front of the couches.

“Want me to show you your room?” he asks me, shutting the door behind him.

I nod, “Yes please.” My back is killing me and I need to lay down. I haven’t regained all of my strength; I was so malnourished after going so long without food.

He leads me to a room on the first floor past the kitchen, which I’m in love with. I can’t wait to cook there.

He pushes open a door and shows me a large, beautiful room and a four-poster bed settled in the center of the room. “Wow, this is beautiful,” I walk into the room. I can see some of my personal items spread throughout the room to make it more comfortable for me.

Settled on the center of the bed is a kindle I have been eyeing for a long time. With shaky hands, I turn around and look at Isaac. I don’t want to ask, almost afraid.

“Isaac...” I start and he smiles as slips past me. “Chase found your reader and it was broken, so I got you another one.”

I walk over to the bed, next to where he’s standing. He hands me the reader and also hands me a gift card. “I could tell you love to read.”

I stare at the reader and I try to push back the tears that are threatening to fall. “This is the first gift I have ever gotten. This is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me,” I whisper, shocked.

I set the kindle on the bed and I split the short distance between us, hugging him tightly.

“Thank you so much, Isaac,” I whisper, my head pressed against his chest. I’m shaking from nerves and emotions of everything happening.

He pulls back, cupping my face with both hands. “You’re more than welcome, darlin.” I smile at the name he gave me. He pulls me back into his arms and presses a small kiss to the top of my head.

I close my eyes at the feel of his lips touching me and let out a rattled breath. “Get some sleep,” he encourages me, but he doesn’t make a move to let me go and I can’t bring myself to move either.

“Want to watch a movie with me?” I suggest and he relaxes like he has been waiting for me to ask him.

“Your bathroom is over there.” He points to a closed door. “If you want to shower, your clothes are in the closet and all your personal items are in the bathroom.

. I make my way to the closet slowly and find a pair of sweatpants and a soft, comfy flannel shirt.

When I walk out, Isaac isn’t in the room. I shut the door behind me in the bathroom, leaving me alone for the first time.

The nurses wouldn’t leave me alone because they were afraid I would fall. God, I needed this.

I turn on the shower as warm as I can stand it. I place my back to the wall so the shower spray doesn’t get on my back because of the stitches.

The warm water sprays onto my face and I close my eyes, letting the tears roll down my cheeks.

I can’t believe how much my life has changed. I can’t even bare to go back to my apartment because I’m afraid it’ll trigger flashbacks.

I put my hand on the wall sobbing, feeling this pain with every part of my body. But I am so thankful to God that I am still here, there is hope at the end of this.

I can live a normal life one day.

Right now, I’m going to enjoy the things that I promised myself in that basement that I won’t take advantage of ever again.

So, I smile and wipe away the tears, encouraging myself to pull my shit together. I have to feel what I have to feel so I can move on.

I turn off the water being careful not to get my back wet. I stare at myself in the mirror and touch the bruises on my face. They are healing; they aren't dark and purple anymore, but more yellowing and not as sore.

I take my hair down and gently brush through the strands, trying not to tug on my scalp because it's painful where they used my hair as a means to drag me around.

My hands hit the counter and I close my eyes, everything hitting me once again.

God, I went through so much. It's like a nightmare and hard to believe that it happened. Am I still in the nightmare?

I slip on my soft and comfy clothes, braid my hair and throw it over my shoulder. There is a knock at the door causing me to jump. "Come in," I tell Isaac.

The door is pushed open and he's standing there holding a bag with my medications. "Here is your medicine. It's time for your pain meds." He opens the bag and takes out one of my pills then hands me a bottle of water.

"Thank you, Isaac." I take the pill and swallow it down. "I also brought some snacks," he tells me and I smile around the water bottle.

"What did you bring me?" I ask as he backs up and motions to the bed. Popcorn and other random snacks are thrown onto the bed with some sodas.

"Oh, I have been craving popcorn." I slowly walk to the bed and grip the comforter, trying to ease onto the bed so I don't hurt myself.

Isaac is hovering and I know that he's trying to stop himself from helping me. He moves to sit in the chair across the room.

"Isaac, you can sit up here with me," I tell him.

He studies my face like he's making sure I'm sure about it and I am. I want him to sit up in the bed and be comfortable with me.

"Alright." He walks to the other side of the bed climbing in next to me. I pull the blanket back and cover my legs.

I take a handful of popcorn and take a bite, the saltiness hitting the spot. "What kind of movie do you want to watch?" I ask him.

"Something funny?" he suggests.

"That is perfect." Sad movies are definitely the last thing I need right now.

I sit back in bed, snuggled up under the thick blanket and warm pajamas. My eyes grow heavier by the minute.

Isaac

I don't move, I don't even breath when her head rests on my shoulder. Her eyes are closed and her breathing is even.

I sigh, reaching around her. I lift the blanket higher so she doesn't get cold. She lost a lot of body fat during... FUCK. I can't even think about it without getting fucking murderous.

She is beautiful, so fucking kind and when her smile reaches her eyes, she is dangerous.

The things that happened to her shouldn't have happened. She needs to be protected and fucking cherished above all else.

It's fucking insane to say, but I know she is mine.

I just wish that I could have kept her safe from all of the bad shit in her life.

I'm going to make it my mission to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

I would bet everyone's fucking life on it.

I turn down the TV so a loud noise doesn't wake her. I use my phone to turn down the smart lights so she can rest.

I would rather cut off my fucking arm than move and wake her. Sleep is easy for her but peaceful sleep is rare.

The atrocities she has suffered haunt her dreams. Hell, they haunt me and I didn't endure it. I would give everything to take it from her and let it happen to me

It fucking kills me that I can't fix it for her or take it from her.

But I can make sure it doesn't happen again and make sure that the rest of her life is a happy one.

She sighs and scoots closer to me until she is lying against my chest. Should I wake her, just in case she doesn't want me to be here?

I growl under my breath. I gently touch her shoulder and wake her up. She slowly opens her eyes and looks at me. Fuck, she is beautiful

How can someone hurt an angel like this? She is looking at me with so much trust and I'm in awe that she has given it to me.

Her eyes widen when she notices that she is lying on me. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay sleeping with me here, holding you." I hesitate stating the last part in case she isn't comfortable with It.

She studies me for a minute before slowly smiling. "I would love if you held me, Isaac. You make me feel safe."

I can hear the sincerity in her voice. I feel like I'm fucking floating with the trust she has in me.

I shift us until we are both lying on the pillow. She moves closer and snuggles into my chest. I settle my hand on the back of her neck, not touching her back where she's hurt.

"Goodnight," I whisper to her, staring at the ceiling and I smile. Through all of this shit, this right here is the fucking best.

CHAPTER

FOUR

EMILY

THE NEXT DAY

I slept all day and night. I was exhausted. It was the best sleep I have ever had even before all of this happened.

I woke up to see Isaac still beside me in the bed.

It's eight o'clock in the morning and I'm wide awake. I yawn and Isaac looks over at me, smiling.

"Good morning." He reaches over and pushes a hair out of my face. I reach up and I feel my hair sticking up on the top of my head.

I burst out laughing. "God, I was so out of it." I rub my face and sit up, letting out a hiss from the pain in my back.

"Fuck, I should have woke you up for your pain meds." Isaac hisses and slides out of bed walking to the bathroom where my medicine is.

My back is screaming at me and I try hold back my tears from the excruciating pain. He hands me my bottle of pills and I take one of them, downing it with water.

"I'm okay Isaac," I tell him. He sighs, setting the water down beside me.

"Once your pain has settled, I need to clean your back, if that's okay?" he asks me and I nod. "That is fine. Thank you for taking such good care of me Isaac. It means so

much to me,” I tell him, emotional about him holding me all night long.

God, I didn’t know how much I needed that.

“I didn’t have any nightmares,” I think out loud and smile.

Isaac’s face settles and softens at my admission. “That makes me so fucking happy.” He touches my cheek. I lean into his hand without thinking about how intimate that is.

“What do you want for breakfast?” he asks me.

“French toast?”

“Done. You sit back and relax. I will bring it to you,” he tells me and I do as he asks. I open the kindle that he bought me.

I am dying to read some new books and relax. I log in and add the gift card to my kindle so I can buy new books.

My nose is burning from unshed tears again because this is beyond the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me.

I download a book I have been dying to read. However, I feel bad that he is cooking breakfast without me.

I slide out of bed slowly, trying not to hurt my back anymore. The pain medicine is starting to kick in.

The closer I get to the kitchen, the smell of bacon hits me and my stomach instantly growls. He turns to look at me when he hears my bare feet on the floor.

“I guess you’re feeling up to eating at the table?” he asks me, motioning to a bar stool that doesn’t have a back.

“I am kind of tired of being in bed. I want something to be a little normal,” I confess.

He smiles. “Whatever you want.”

I walk over and try not to cringe at having to push myself up onto the seat. I try not to look at Isaac as I don’t want him to see my struggle.

A thought hits me, one I've tried not to think about. During my week stuck in the basement, there were women that were brought in and soon they were taken somewhere else.

I wish I knew what happened to them.

"Isaac, do you know if they found any of the women that were sold?" I ask him

His back stiffens and he sets down the spatula. "We did find a notebook and we have someone trying to trace down the women currently."

My heart hurts at the thought of what they are going through. How can someone be so evil to do this?

I rub my face, sighing to myself. I felt so helpless watching these women break in front of me and then be removed so quickly.

I tried to get them to hold on. I tried to speak to them in the darkness of the room but I was always met with silence.

"It's not your fault," he tells me.

I nod but I am not sure even if I believe it at this point. I just don't know how to feel right now.

He plates the food and slides it in front of me, then sits next to me. "It's not, you don't control other's actions."

I know that he is speaking the truth but it doesn't discount the fact that we all feel like we could have done more, been better, something.

"How is Sydney?"

He smiles. "She's good. She's home with her kids and Kane."

I'm forever grateful that she had someone who loved her enough to find her and protect her before anything bad happened to her.

She came to visit me at the hospital. I can tell she is a genuine soul and she just happened to get messed up in all of this like I was.

“Kane told me that she wants to come visit you when you’re feeling up to it.”

I smile at that. “I would love that.”

I take a bite of the French toast and chew, trying not to make a face at the crunchiness of the egg shell that I just ate.

“How is it?” he asks me, taking a bite of his bacon.

I school my features. “It’s great. Thanks for the breakfast.” I force down every bite, some parts are not even cooked.

He eats his and then eats what’s left of mine.

“Are you ready for me to clean your back?” he asks me.

I don’t want to do it but it has to be done. “Yeah, let’s get it over with.” I walk back into the bedroom very slowly and take off my shirt, turning my flannel around, sliding my arms through the sleeves in front, leaving my back exposed.

He walks into the bedroom carrying a bag. I can see through the opening and it’s full of supplies.

I scoot up the bed so he can sit behind me. I take the remote turning on the TV to distract myself.

“Here is a pillow if you want to lean forward on it.” Isaac hands me the pillow, placing it on my lap.

I bend over making it easier for Isaac to treat everything. He pushes down my sweatpants just slightly, taking off the bandages. The tape is slightly pulling on my wounds and I close my eyes to keep the tears at bay.

“You, okay?” he asks me.

“Yeah.”

I’m not though. None of this is okay but I will be okay one day. I can feel his hand shaking when he touches my shoulder trying to steady me, gently taping the first wound.

I grip the pillow harder, biting my lip, my eyes now open and glued to the TV. “Do they look okay?” I ask.

“They’re healing okay. I’m not hurting you, am I?” he asks.

I shake my head. “No, you’re being really gentle.”

He lets out a deep breath. I hate that he has to do this. “I can get someone else if you’re not comfortable with it, Isaac.” I don’t want to cause him stress.

He stops his movements. “Do you feel comfortable with me?” He moves away from me to look at my face.

I search his face with my eyes. “With my life,” I say honestly. I do trust him. I trust him more than anyone that’s been in my life.

He takes my chin gently between his fingers, settling his hand on my face. “Then no one else is going to touch you.”

I smile and my heart does that little flip. “Okay, Isaac.” I agree with him and he winks before moving behind me to finish. This time I can barely feel anything, my mind so wrapped up in Isaac and his words.

CHAPTER

FIVE

EMILY

TWO WEEKS LATER

The last two weeks have flown by. My back is almost completely healed and I can move freely without hurting.

Isaac has become my best friend, spending every single waking moment together. He has taken such good care of me and I have to admit, it's amazing being here with him.

He bursts out laughing at me getting angry that I'm losing over our current card game. One thing I have learned over the last week is that I'm a terrible sore loser.

I glare at him and put a card down. He tries to control his emotions but I know he is amused.

I love to see that smile on his face because I have learned that Isaac might have demons bigger than mine.

It started with the nightmares; he would wake up screaming. We've gotten into the habit of falling asleep together watching movies.

Both of us dread the idea of going to sleep because some of the things in our dreams haunt us. I've learned that something terrible haunts him.

I have to bite my tongue and refrain from asking him if he's okay or if he wants to talk about it. Sometimes talking

about it seems to make some things more real.

So, I try to make him laugh and take the darkness out of his eyes. “Well looks like I’m a winner,” he says smugly.

I throw the pillow at him and it hits him in the face. He pulls it from his face, glaring at me. “Oh, is that how you want to do this, loser?” he jokes with me.

I nod. “Oh yeah, bring it on.” I wiggle my finger at him, kicking my foot out and push his leg off the couch like I’m trying to push him off the couch.

He smirks at me for a second before he charges me. I laugh and try to kick him off but he grabs me before I can slide off the back of the arm.

His fingers dig into my sides and I burst out laughing, trying to push his hands away. He laughs with me, digging them in deeper.

“Isaac!” I scream, wiggling trying to get away, laughing so hard tears are rolling down my face.

He falls to the side and I try to catch him but he hits the floor. He must have forgotten that there wasn’t anything on the couch beside him.

“Oh my God, are you okay?” Once I see that he’s okay, I cover my face laughing. I reach my hand out for him to take to help him up.

He takes it and gives me a wicked grin. Uh oh. He pulls me off the couch on top of him.

I giggle and rest my head on his chest without thinking and his arms wrap around me. I don’t speak or move, just taking in the moment of him holding me.

It’s been around a month since he rescued me from my nightmare. I’ve started therapy and I’m making progress.

Mentally, I know I’ll have hard days and I’ll struggle but I’ll make it through. The crazy thing is I’m really happy.

Isaac kisses the top of my head. I snuggle deeper into his chest. I can hear his heart beating fast.

I lean up, looking at him. His eyes are happy and I hope that I'm a part of that the reason. I scoot up further, resting my forehead on his chin. No words are spoken between us but there doesn't have to be.

I'm not sure how long we lay there until Isaac decides to sit up with me in his arms and sit on the couch. "How do you feel about going out for dinner tonight? Or do you think you're not ready?" he asks me.

"I would love too." He'll be with me and I'll feel completely safe with him around.

He smiles at me like I just gave him the world. "I'm going to go get the eggs and then I will get ready." I slide out of his lap and grab the basket by the door.

Walking out the door, I peek back at him one last time seeing him watch me. I'm trying not to catch feelings for him because honestly, I'm not sure why anyone would want me.

I know that's my depression talking but I'm scarred physically and that isn't very attractive. Plus, I'm not sure I can even be intimate with a man ever again without panicking.

But I want to live.

I'm not ready for that part of life again but I do want kids someday, get married, and just be so happy and content.

A vision flashes through my mind of Isaac holding a little girl that is a mixture between the two of us.

I try to shake the thought but I would be lying to myself if I didn't admit that I think about him a lot, especially lately.

I move to the closet that is now well stocked. A lady from a shop in town came here with a huge collection of clothes. Isaac made me restock my whole wardrobe.

I tried to fight him on the cost of everything but he insisted on doing this for me. He found out about my issues

with my old clothing, honestly my old life in general.

I'm not that person anymore; I don't even recognize her.

I decide on one of my dresses then stop when I see it's kind of low in the back and my scars would be exposed.

I hesitate on what to do. It's a beautiful orange, long sleeve dress that cinches at my waist, showing off my curves. The dress is perfect for fall but the back is lower than I'd like, extending below my bra strap.

You know what? Fuck it.

I slip the dress on and sit down at the vanity turning on some music and doing my makeup.

I've forgotten how great it feels to be able to dress up and feel pretty. I missed this. I can hear Isaac in the bedroom and I know he's getting dressed.

I would be lying to myself if I didn't admit I was nervous to be going out for the first time since everything happened to me.

It's been a month and some days it feels like it was years ago and others days feels like it happened yesterday.

I spray my face with some setting spray and sit back to admire myself. I look alive; I have color in my cheeks and I have gained a lot of my weight back.

This is as good as it's going to get. I smile at myself in the mirror, feeling nervous about seeing Isaac.

Wait, is this a date or just dinner?

I suck in my lips thinking on it and decide to push it out of my mind. This is just dinner.

I walk down the hall to the living room where he's sitting, looking way too hot to be fair. He's wearing jeans, a long sleeve, white button up that is rolled up to his elbows, showing his beautiful tattoos lining his forearms. His jeans are a light blue, hugging his thighs.

I'm in so much trouble.

He turns to look at me and I try to control my features when his mouth opens in shock, like this is the first time he has seen me.

I smile seeing him look me up and down from the tips of my sandals to the top of my head. He stands up and walks to me.

I look down at his chest, his gaze making me nervous. He places one finger under my chin, lifting my head so I'm looking at him. "I have never seen a more beautiful woman in my life. God, Emily." His voice is raw and ragged. It's like he can't believe I'm real and right in front of him.

I smile wider, my face burning from his compliments. "Thank you, Isaac. You look amazing. I might have to fight off some women tonight if they try to steal you," I joke.

He laughs and I watch his movements, feeling like I'm floating. "There is no chance in hell someone is stealing you from me."

Oh shit.

"Yeah?" I ask. I put my hand shakily on his arms. I'm scared but this is the only time in my life where I'm thrilled to be scared.

His face softens. "Yeah, angel." He slides my hand down his arm taking my hand in his, intertwining our fingers. "Ready for our date?"

I almost hit the floor at his admission. "Yeah." He studies me for a moment and leads me to the front door. My whole body screaming 'holy shit' at the same time.

CHAPTER

SIX

EMILY

We pull up in front of an Italian restaurant and there is a huge line in the front waiting to get in.

“Wait for me to come get you,” he tells me. I sit, watching him walk around the front of the truck looking at the parking lot like he is making sure that it’s safe.

He pulls open my door, takes my hand and fixes my dress on the way down to keep it from bunching up when I slide out.

He is just amazing with this thoughtfulness. He puts his hand on the small of my back, right over my scars. I eye him to see if it bothers him but he’s unfazed.

He has seen me at my absolute worse and is still here.

He gives his name at the front of the line and we’re led into the building. I hear a few people yell at us in anger as we’re led in.

I’m nervous that someone is angry with me. “How come we’ve been let in before the others?” I ask him.

He smiles at me, tucking me closer into his side as we’re led upstairs to a private room. “I own this place.”

My mouth opens in shock. I was not expecting that. The waitress shows us a table that is overlooking the restaurant and the other side is overlooking the city. It’s beautiful.

“We can watch the sunset.” I eye the sky that is just now turning orange and pink, sliding behind mountains in the distance.

“That was the idea.” He pulls out a seat for me. I sit down and he scoots it in behind me. He sits directly beside of me, both of us facing the window so we can watch the sunset.

“Thank you for this.” I know that he has put a lot of effort into this. He made sure we’d have a private room so that I could feel safer.

“When did you plan this?” A female waiter walks into the room sliding two menus in front of me and a basket of rolls.

I take one and dip it into the oil. “Holy hell this is good.” I take another huge bite. Isaac is watching me eat with a huge smile.

“I wanted to make sure you were comfortable when you decided to come out for the first time.”

My heart warms. I reach over and take his hand resting on the table. “I really appreciate everything you do for me.” I know he’s probably over me thanking him so much, but I can’t help it.

“You know you don’t have to thank me,” he tells me and runs his thumb over the back of my hand soothingly.

“Since this is your restaurant, why don’t you order for me?” I slide the menu away from me.

His eyes light up. “Deal.” He lifts his free hand and motions for the waiter. She sees him through the window and walks to us. He tells her what we want to eat.

“I hope that I haven’t kept you from your work this last month.”

He shakes his head chuckling. “Darlin, I wanted to be with you. I have a manager who handles the day to day so I don’t need to be here much.”

I smile, putting my hand under my cheek, staring at him. He really is beautiful. I’m not just talking about his looks

either. His physical appearance should be illegal but his heart is even more lethal.

A few minutes later the waitress comes and slides two salads in front of us. She smiles at me and walks through the door.

“Look how beautiful,” I say breathlessly. The sky is a beautiful deep, orange with some red mixed in.

“Stunning,” Isaac says softly. I turn to look at him and to my surprise he’s not looking at the sky, but at me.

“Isaac.” I blush and touch my warm cheeks.

He laughs and pushes my hair over my shoulder, staring at me. “Well, you are beautiful.”

I blush even deeper at all of his compliments. “You are so kind to me Isaac.” I don’t speak the last part out loud but I think it - *I don’t deserve it. I don’t deserve any of it but I couldn’t leave or stay away if I wanted to.*

Soon our food arrives and it’s absolutely mouthwatering. “You have a really amazing place; the food is out of this world,” I praise.

We finish our food and evening has settled outside. Isaac pulls my chair out for me. “Want to go dancing?” he asks me and my eyes light up at that. “Yes! I would love too.”

We walk down the short steps out of our private room. I can feel eyes on us but I ignore them.

“Did you see her back?” I hear someone whisper and I look straight ahead pretending that I didn’t hear them.

But I know Isaac did with his jaw set and the tightening of his grip on me. I pass one of the men that yelled at us in front when we walked ahead. “Hey bitch, want me to add more to those marks?”

I die inside and curl into myself as everything turns black.

Isaac

I don't think, I just move. I grip the fucker by the back of his head, slamming him face down into his plate of food.

The woman with him screams at the top of her lungs but all I can see is her horrified face, the fear.

Fuck.

"You will not fucking disrespect her again. You're lucky we are in a room filled with women and children or I would fucking kill you," I roar at him not even caring who will hear me.

I push his face down hard one last time and he pushes at the table trying to get away. I stand back, fighting myself not to tear him limb for limb for hurting her like that.

He grabs a napkin off the table and wipes at his face, horrified. I wave at the security. "Take this fucker out of here before I kill him," I tell them and they lift him by his arms carrying him out with his woman following behind.

Emily is looking at the ground. It's like she's a ghost of the person she just was, she was just smiling and having fun

But this fucker had ruined all of that.

I bend over and lift her gently off the ground, carrying her bridal style out of the restaurant.

I'm sick to my stomach that someone had the audacity to do something like this to her. To open the wounds, to hurt her because we got into a restaurant before them, a restaurant I own.

Some people deserve to fucking die. I will hurt him for hurting her.

I watch my security throw him in his vehicle, vowing to myself to not show mercy next time, no matter the cost.

I open the truck door with one hand, setting her inside. "Emily," I say softly wanting her out of her head. I want those beautiful eyes on me.

She slowly blinks and looks at me, tears in her eyes. I fight myself from going ballistic, but she needs me right now.

“I am so sorry,” I tell her. I don’t know what else to say to her but I’m so fucking angry that a grown fucking man would say something like that.

Her lips tremble. “It caught me off guard. I got lost in the memories for a moment. I’m ashamed that I let it get to me like I did.”

Anger burns through me that she is blaming herself for feeling. “Fuck, don’t be ashamed. He did it to hurt you. You are human, baby. You have been through so much but you are here and you are so fucking strong. I am so proud of you.” I cup her face wanting my words to take root.

She sighs, a tear rolling down her face. I catch it with the tips of my fingers and press my forehead against hers.

We stand there breathing and taking in the moment together. Every second feels like hours until she stops trembling and the fear leaves her body.

I’m fucking heart broken.

“Want to go home?” I ask.

She shakes her head no, surprising me. “We wanted to go dancing and we are going to go dance.”

I shake my head in disbelief that she is even up for that after what just happened. If that isn’t a testament for how strong she is, then nothing is.

“Are you sure?” I have to ask again to make sure she is really okay with it and not trying to push herself into something she really doesn’t want to do.

She nods. “Yeah, I want to do this. We can’t let people like that ruin our night.” My heart burns with anger once again thinking about what he said.

“Okay baby.” I take her hand and help her back out of the truck. She fixes her dress and smiles at me.

God, she is so fucking strong.

We walk the short distance to the bar that is right down the street from my restaurant. The owners of the bar are good friends of mine.

I look over at her and she smiles at me, the tears in her eyes long gone.

Emily

I was shocked at what happened in the restaurant, but it just sealed the fact that there are horrible people everywhere in this world.

No one has the right to ruin a second of my life anymore. I am going to live and those people can fuck right off.

I'm proud of myself in this moment. Proud of the way that I pushed through it and didn't let it affect me too deeply.

Isaac stood up for me. The anger that rolled off him was shocking. It's hard to believe that the moment prior to that he was touching me so gently and then he was slamming someone's face into their plate.

But he did it for me.

I think I may be falling in love with him. The way he makes me feel safe and takes care of me, I'm so gone for him.

He holds the door open for me and the first thing that hits me is the strong smell of beer. It's dark inside the bar, neon lights everywhere and you can see people dancing on the dance floor to the left of the room.

He pulls me along to the dance floor. I laugh seeing a couple almost falling over someone else.

They look at me and laugh with me.

A slow song comes on over the speakers at the perfect time. Nerves hit me and I stand in front of him like a loser, unsure of what to do.

He smiles. "May I have this dance, beautiful?" he asks me and I giggle at his formal tone.

“Why sure, handsome,” I say with a country accent.

He laughs and pulls me to him. I lift my arms resting them on his arms. I’m flush against him. He has one hand on my side and the other on the small of my back.

He’s so handsome. Most of the women in the room are staring at him and I can’t blame them. But I’m relishing in the fact that he’s here with me.

He stares at me like he can’t believe I’m here with him. “What?” I ask him, wanting to know what he’s thinking.

“You’re so fucking beautiful, sometimes it takes my breath away.” He shakes his head, smiling at me.

“Isaac,” I say breathlessly, my eyes burning from the emotions of it all.

He undoes me.

He cups my face so I can’t look away from him. “It’s true. You are so fucking beautiful I can’t breathe sometimes and I have to fight myself on telling you that you are *mine* because I don’t want to scare you.”

I stop breathing. All the fear of him not feeling the same for me goes out the window at his admission.

“I’m yours?” I ask, moving closer to him.

His eyes darken. “You are mine.”

I want to kiss him. I look at his lips for a second before pushing up on the tips of my toes, lifting myself up so I can reach him.

He doesn’t move. I swear he doesn’t even breathe. Everything around us slips away and it’s just us in this moment.

My heart is beating so fast, I feel like I’m going to pass out from the power of it. I lift my hand, pressing it against his cheek, loving the feel of his warm skin.

“I’m going to kiss you,” I tell him.

“Please.”

I smile at his plea and split the very short distance between us. Gently, almost like a whisper, I touch my lips against his.

He's shaking and I know he's fighting himself not to take control. "It's okay." I pull back and tell him, giving him permission to kiss me.

That's all he needs as he presses his lips harder against me and lifts me off the ground with his arms banded across my back. I stand on the top of his feet giving me a few extra inches.

This kiss is soul altering. I feel it in every part of my body. We are one in soul, body and mind. It's just us right now, nothing else matters.

Isaac is the one. In this kiss, I know wholeheartedly he is it for me.

His hands bury into my hair, tilting my head back so he can kiss me deeper. I sigh, tightening my arms around his neck, wanting to be closer to him.

Someone bumps into us and I laugh, breaking the kiss and he laughs with me. His eyes take my breath away. I can see full happiness in them.

I put that there. "You make me happy," I tell him softly. I run my thumb across his bottom lip.

He presses his forehead against mine. "You make me happy."

I feel on top of the world. We stand there, forehead to forehead, people dancing all around us. The music is no longer slow but pounding, yet we are so wrapped up in each other, we don't notice anything.

CHAPTER

SEVEN

EMILY

A WEEK LATER

“Are you sure he won’t buck me off, Isaac?” I stare at the horse scared but excited at the thought of finally riding.

I got cleared by my doctor because I’m fully healed. He offered once again to refer me to a plastic surgeon, the best in the country.

I’m still not sure I want to do that as I’m just getting to the point of where I’m not ashamed of my scars.

“I will be right beside you,” he encourages me and I nod. I put my foot in the stirrups and Isaac pushes my butt giving me a boost onto the horse.

I laugh and turn around to look at him. “Why Isaac, are you just using this as excuse to just touch my ass?” I arch an eyebrow at him.

He laughs, tapping my hip. “Do you want me to?” He wiggles his eyebrows.

I smack the hand that is on my hip playfully. “Maybe I do.” I smirk and he puts his foot in the stirrups and climbs on behind me, shocking me.

I tilt my neck back and look at him. “I can’t stand being that far away from you,” he confesses and I press a kiss to his cheek.

He wraps his arm around me taking the reins. “I never want you to be away from me.”

He kisses my forehead. “You will never be away from me if I can help it, baby.”

The kiss we had last week has changed everything. We’re closer and it’s because we both know where we stand with each other.

We have gotten closer and the feelings I have for him have grown. I lean back against him and he leads us through the field. The leaves are falling all around us; fall is such a beautiful time of the year.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he asks me. He was with me today at the doctor.

I sigh. “They keep pushing plastic surgery. I know my back is hideous but I just can’t bring myself to do it,” I tell Isaac and he tightens his arms around me. “It took so long for my back to heal and I just don’t want to go through anything like that again.”

He kisses my cheek. “Baby, you do what you want. It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks. This decision is yours and yours alone.” He grips my face gently in his hand, turning me to look at him. “No matter what, you will be the most beautiful and selfless person in the world.”

I could die every time he says all of these words to me. It’s like they touch every part of my soul. It heals a broken part of me, soothing the hurts.

“Isaac, the way you talk to me makes me feel special.”

“It’s because you are special.”

I grip his thigh, needing to touch him. “You are special to me, Isaac.” He presses his forehead to the back of my head, sighing.

We ride to the edge of the mountain looking at the sky. The sun is starting to fall and the sky is turning beautiful colors.

“Do you want kids someday?” I ask him.

“I do.”

My mind wanders to a little boy running around looking like Isaac. “Do you want boys or girls?”

He takes my hips, lifts me up and turns me around so I’m facing him. “I want a little girl.” I smile thinking of how great Isaac would be with a little girl.

“I know you’d be an amazing dad.”

“What do you want?” he asks me.

I smile wistfully. “I want a family, call it cheesy,” I laugh. “I want to be a stay-at-home mom and have a soccer mom van filled with kids. I want to sit on the porch and watch them play in the yard with their animals. That is the dream life for me. It seems like heaven.”

He pushes my hair away from my cheek so he can run his finger along the back of my cheek. “You’d be the best mom, angel.”

I bite my lip trying not to blurt out I want to have his kids, but he would probably think I was mentally ill.

“Ready to go home?” he asks me and I scoot closer, lifting my legs over his thighs. “Ready.”

He laughs and puts one arm around my back, holding me to him. “I think I’ll stay right here,” I tell him, trusting him to keep me from falling.

I rest my head on his chest, snuggling in close. Every night no matter what, we always seem to end up in bed together. I love waking up and him holding me all night long. The nightmares seeming to be further and further away.

He still has them sometimes and it hurts me a million times worse than mine do. To see the pain in his eyes once he escapes them. No, he doesn’t escape them, he feels them for hours after.

Last night I found him on the floor in the bathroom asleep where he woke from one and I didn’t hear him.

It's heart breaking and I wish I can take it from him.

The house comes into view and Isaac helps me slide off the horse. "I'm going to go put him away."

"I will make some dinner." I walk into the house, not able to resist looking out of the window at him brushing his horse.

I add the ground beef to the pan to start the tacos. I pick up my phone to start a new book, waiting for the meat to brown.

I try to read but I can't take my eyes off his body, the way his body flexes with every movement. The way his hat is turned backwards, his shirt tight around his biceps, his jeans hugging his thighs.

I squeeze my legs together trying to control what I'm feeling. I want him and it's scary for me to admit that.

What if he thinks I'm disgusting from the abuse I suffered? I can't not think of that. Maybe my trauma is too much for someone to handle?

I rub my eyes, my heart heavy at my depressing thoughts.

I'm clean, all of my test results came back a few weeks ago. I never thought I would even want to be with a man again, but Isaac isn't every man.

He is everything.

He walks towards the house and I hurry to plate everything so it'll be ready for him when he comes in.

I set the food on the coffee table and I walk back to the kitchen grabbing a beer for him and wine for me.

He sets his boots by the door and his eyes immediately search me out. "Dinner is ready."

He walks to me and sits down. "This smells amazing, baby."

My stomach flips at him calling me baby. I will never get used to that. I hand him the sauce and take a bite of

the taco turning on Criminal Minds - he is obsessed with it.

I can feel him staring at me. I peek over and give him a confused look. "You don't have to take care of me, baby."

"I love taking care of things like this. It's my love language," I say easily not even thinking of what I'm saying until I hear his sharp intake of breath.

I peek back at him, but did I not mean it?

No, I do love him. I think I fell in love with him when he never once left me in the hospital. Held my hand all night long so I wouldn't be afraid. Held me when I cried, cleaned my wounds that were so gruesome, nurses ran out of the room. Held me all night trying to fight the nightmares for me.

I do love him.

I'm not exactly sure when it happened but it happened. Isaac sets his plate in front of us on the table and lifts me onto his lap. "I love you too, baby."

I close my eyes letting his words wash over me like a balm, healing parts of me I didn't know was fractured.

When I open my eyes, a tear rolls down my face. "I love you too, Isaac, more than anything."

I kiss him hard, needing to be close to him, pouring everything I have into this kiss. He stands with me in his arms, walking with me to the bedroom.

I tighten my legs around him, his body holding mine up. I'm set gently onto the bed, with me looking up at him.

I want to be with him more than anything. "I want to try," I tell him. I know he's nervous.

He cups my cheek. "Are you sure?"

I nod, putting my hand on top of his. "I have never been more sure of anything," I tell him honestly.

He pushes my hair over my shoulder. "We will take it as slow as you want. This is about you."

“I know I am safe with you.” I know my words touch him.

He grips the bottom of my shirt and I lift my arms so he can pull it over my head leaving me in my bra.

He has seen me shirtless before, but this time this isn't about him cleaning my wounds. There is heat in his eyes this time.

He runs his fingers down the side of my neck gently, running the tip of his finger down the center of my chest, down my sides until he grips the shorts I'm wearing.

I lift my hips and he slips them down my legs, leaving me in my bra and underwear.

I wait for the fear but it doesn't come. The way he is looking at me, I don't think I could fear him even if I wanted.

I know he loves me and that he would never hurt me.

I have a scar on my hip where the whip missed my back and wrapped around my hip and his eyes are on it.

“Lay back, angel, on your belly.”

I hesitate because my back will be exposed to him and he will be seeing all of it. I have some on the back of my legs in random parts where their aim wasn't true.

But I do as he asks.

I lay down with my arms tucked under my face so I can stare at him.

He climbs onto the bed next to me, studying me. “I know it's ugly.” Feeling really vulnerable right now.

He looks shocked, almost hurt by my words.

He shakes his head no. “No, you're so fucking beautiful, I can't help but look at you.”

“My scars.”

“No.” He puts a finger to my lips stopping me from speaking, “No, you are beautiful. I'm going to kiss every scar,

every little freckle, every mark on your body until you know how beautiful you are.”

My eyes burn, but the tears don't fall. I let go of the emotional pain my scars have created, how they make me feel unworthy. He pushes my hair over my shoulder, off my back.

“Beautiful.” He leans down and I close my eyes at the first feel of his lips pressed against the largest, jagged scar.

I grip the sheets, my heart aching from the intimacy of it all.

He pulls my hands loose from the sheets, intertwining our fingers, lifting them above my head. “Don't hurt yourself,” he whispers in my ear.

I swallow hard, feeling his lips so close to me. His breath on my neck sending goosebumps down my body.

He kisses the scar where my neck meets my shoulder and I let out a deep breath. I'm wet instantly just from the small touch of his lips.

I tilt my head to the side so he has better access. I close my eyes and I'm going to just enjoy this, enjoy being worshiped.

I tighten my hands in his, loving the feel of his large hands in mine, the callouses from the hard labor he does around the farm.

With his free hand, he runs his finger down the center of my spine causing me to arch my back.

I'm soaked from these small little touches as his lips touch another part of me. Every little scar on my back is touched and kissed, showing me that he isn't disgusted by me in any manner.

The fear I have is slowly melting away with every touch and kiss.

He reaches the back of my thighs, where a knife was used to mark me. “I could kill them all over again for what they have done to you, angel.”

I can feel his hand shaking from anger. I tilt my head back to look at him. He turns me around so I'm facing him, leaving myself exposed to him, my underwear not leaving anything to the imagination.

He grips the edge of my panties, my insides shake from the nerves but I don't give in to them

I sit up and unsnap my bra throwing it off the bed and onto the floor. He takes that as his cue to slip my underwear down my legs, his eyes on mine the whole time.

I lay back onto the bed and I fight the urge to cover myself. "Fuck, it's hard to believe you are mine, baby," he growls, eyeing me fully for the first time.

He grips my thigh, spreading them gently. "Can I touch you, baby?" he asks me.

I nod.

I feel like I'm going to pass out from how nervous I am right now. But it's like the best torture. I'm so turned on I think I could combust.

He smiles, licking his lips seductively, before he falls to his elbows with his face right above where I'm dying for him the most.

He spreads me open and I arch off the bed trying to push myself closer to him. He chuckles at me before sliding his tongue along my clit.

"Oh fuck," I hiss, my hands flailing at the sudden intense pleasure, something I have never experienced before.

His eyes are on me the whole entire time, watching my every move, every shake of my legs.

I reach down and dig my fingers into his hair, loving the feel of his head moving. He makes me break into a million pieces just from the feeling of his tongue alone.

His hands tighten on my thighs when I try to squeeze his head in between my legs. He holds them still so he can continue to leisurely lick and nip.

He shifts below me, letting go one of my thighs, pushing a finger gently inside me. I can feel him watching me as my eyes roll into the back of my head. He adds another finger, curling them inside me and that's all it takes for me to all apart.

I bite my hand trying not to scream. I milk his fingers as he slowly slides them in and out of me, drawing out my orgasm.

I let out a deep breath and open my eyes, staring at Isaac who is watching me. I reach out and take his hand, pulling him to me. "That was amazing," my throat thick with emotion.

He kisses my cheek. "I want you to make love to me, Isaac," I tell him, my voice cracking.

"Darlin, are you sure you're ready for that?" he asks me. His eyes soft and his hand rubbing my side gently.

I grip his face in my hand, running my thumb across his cheek bone. "I never thought I would want to be with another man again. But with you Isaac, I have no doubts about anything."

He presses his forehead against mine, before sliding off the bed and taking off his clothes. My eyes glued to every part of him, seeing him fully naked for the first time.

He is beautiful.

I can see a bullet wound on the right side of his chest. Once he climbs back onto the bed, I touch the wound hating that someone tried to hurt or possibly kill him.

I stop breathing in fear at the thought of losing him. I'm not sure I would survive it. I lift my legs, throwing them over the back of his thighs, loving the feel of him between my legs.

I curl my fingers into his hair, taking in the moment of us together before everything changes between us.

"I do love you, Isaac." I have to say it again.

He rests his forehead against mine, smiling. “And I love you my angel, more than anything.”

I reach between us and grip him in my hand, putting him at my entrance letting him know that I’m wanting him to move.

He lifts my hands, intertwining our fingers together on either side of my face. He starts pressing slowly inside me, our eyes staring into each other’s.

Little by little, he slowly fills me until he is fully seated inside of me. I gasp feeling how full I am, how amazing he feels inside me. “God, I feel so full,” I moan, lifting my legs higher and bringing him impossibly deeper inside me.

“Fucking heaven,” he moans and starts to move, slowly, deeply and full of passion. We are both lost in the feeling of each other. I have never felt closer to someone than I have in this moment. It’s like every part of me with him is one.

I run my hands down his back, closer to falling over the edge. I squeeze him hard. He lets go of one of my hands, reaching between us, rubbing my clit.

“UHH.” I come so hard everything around me blackens out and I feel him shaking hard, coming with me.

Both of our breathing is ragged, rough.

He lifts his head and kisses me so sweetly. Tears fall and I’m powerless to stop them.

I’m not sad because of what we just done. No, I feel free. This is something that has been a burden on me as I didn’t know if I could be with someone again.

I didn’t know someone could love me the way that he does. He came into my life when I needed him the most.

He brought me through the worst time of my life. Every step of the way when most people would have ran with their lives trying not to deal with the baggage I brought.

Not Isaac.

He loves every part of me, every single scar, every imperfection on my body. But he makes me feel like those aren't imperfections but a beautiful piece of art. He makes me feel so loved.

He looks at me horrified by my crying and I laugh. "I'm just so happy, Isaac." I dry my eyes, smiling at him.

"I'm happy too."

Both of us were broken, but somehow, somehow we have fixed each other's wounds, healed all of the hurts.

We saved our forever's.

EPILOGUE

EMILY

FIVE YEARS LATER

I smile seeing Isaac and our little girl, Morgan playing together in the yard. He's lying on his back, lifting her above his head like she's an airplane.

She giggles and lifts her arms higher. "Look mommy, I'm flying," she squeals with laughter when he pretends to drop her, catching her last minute.

I walk over and lie down beside Isaac, my head on his shoulder. Morgan is the best thing that ever happened to us. We weren't trying but we weren't preventing it either.

She just turned three years old.

"Mommy, hold my hand." She lifts her little chubby fingers out for me to hold. I take them and she grins at me. "I am the best flyer around," she says and I laugh.

She has my hair coloring, but she looks just like her dad and he is her favorite person on earth.

She kicks her legs and he sets her down. She plops down on the center of his stomach looking at the both of us. “Can I have a cookie?” She flashes me her grin, that’s when I see the cookie crumbs on the corner of her mouth.

Isaac is looking at everything but her mouth letting me know that he is the culprit. “Sure, go on baby.” I lean up and kiss her chubby cheek, her little chunky legs moving as fast as she can into the house.

I eye Isaac, “So what happened to no cookies?” I ask.

He laughs and turns me over onto my back with him above me. “She said please.” I laugh. “You’re such a goner for her.”

Over the years, the light has grown lighter and lighter and my heart has done the same.

The past has become just that, the past.

He kisses me and I smile against his lips. He laughs and shakes his head. “I’m a goner for the both of you baby. You both are my world.”

I fall a little deeper in love with him every day. “We love you, with our whole hearts.”

He rests his forehead against mine. This is something we do, we just take in the moment together, taking a second to breathe and just feel.

“I love you, too,” he tells me and I hear laughter. Morgan jumps onto his back, her little chocolate fingers digging into his neck. “Hey now!” he laughs and twists her around into my arms and then tickles us both.

“Escape!” I scream and we try to run away from him.

He gives us a second reprieve and we take that moment to run. She’s laughing so hard she can barely run.

We hide behind a bush. She covers her little mouth grinning at me and trying not to make a noise when Isaac makes a big show like he can’t find us.

As Isaac makes his way over to us, she covers her eyes and I try not to laugh. Isaac puts his finger to his mouth, seeing her eyes are hidden.

Suddenly he reaches down and lifts her off the ground and into the air. She screams and laughs, "Daddy, you got me."

Just when you think you can't love anyone anymore, it hits me like a wave.

This is everything I dreamed of; this is my heaven.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LeAnn Ashers

USA Today Bestselling Author LeAnn Ashers is a blogger-turned-author who spends her days reading and writing.

She released her debut novel early 2016, and can't wait to see where this adventure continues to take her.

LeAnn enjoys writing about strong-minded females and swoon-worthy, protective alpha males who love their women unconditionally.

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