

Remember, It's You I Love

Mairsile

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Acknowledgements

This is the second in the Aidan and Vicky series. There will be plenty more adventures for the two lovers. Visit me on [Facebook](#) for the latest, or you can find me on www.Mairsile.com.

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And last but never least, may the glory go to God.

Mairsile

Chapter 1

Thirteen months ago, somewhere in Syria...

Fear was all she felt, and all she needed, to make her run faster, dig her feet in deeper, in order to propel herself further. Her chest was on fire, her legs were rubber, but she kept running. Even at night, the desert was a blazing inferno, creating a sweltering heat under the hijab. She feared taking it off, in case someone saw her. It was a sin for a woman to be out in public, without her face covered. So she ran, as the sweat stung her eyes and blurred her vision. Frantically, she searched for an answer along the way. The desert was vast, scorching hot and barren. The sand, deep and unrelenting. That was not the answer she was looking for. She knew she couldn't keep going on like this, but there was nothing, and no one on the horizon to help her. Her mind ran ahead of her, twisted in a helter-skelter burst of chaos, that left her confused and disillusioned. She was completely alone, in a country where she didn't speak the language, and they didn't care, or understand, that she was an American.

How did she come to be there? All she remembered was waking up with a terrific headache, her hands tied behind her back, and shackles on her legs. She sensed that she wasn't in Iraq any more. But before she could get her bearings, armed men came in and put a thick, woolen hood over her head. She choked from the stench of the dirty rag, and fought to escape, but to no avail. When the hood finally came off a day later, along with the shackles, she realized she was in a small house, in the middle of a barren desert. She opened her mouth to protest, but was immediately beat into submission. She learned quickly that the only way to survive was to cook and clean for the two men that lived there. One was older, and she thought most likely the father of the household. But it was the younger man who caused her to run away at every chance she got, in spite of the beatings she knew she would receive if caught.

She veered off the road, and hid behind some shrubs, her lungs screaming for air, her face sweating profusely. She was only going to rest for a moment, but, it was a moment too long.

She heard his heavy breathing, before she saw him. Pulling herself backwards across the sand, she tried to crawl away from him, but her legs couldn't move fast enough, and he was too close for her to stand up. He raised his leg up, his heavy boot lingered for a moment above her head. She put her hands up to stave off his assault, as he slammed his boot into her shoulder. The

sickening sound of bones breaking, reached his ears, and he stopped, satisfied that he had her attention now.

He barked at her in a language she didn't understand, but he had made his point, just the same. He would have Samantha's obedience, or else.

The pain was too intense, and she lost consciousness in mid scream. But the nightmare followed her into her unconscious, causing Samantha to cry out in agony, "Oh, Aidan. Where are you?"

Today in Little Rock, Arkansas

The room was dark, save for the luminous particles of light, dancing on the waft of a soft breeze, inviting its self in through the opened window. Incandescent light that the full moon bestowed upon the darkness, revealing its secrets. And as the silver disc became fuller, its beacon of light swathed the soft white linen, encircling the slumbering, nude figure, that lay upon it.

In the shadows, beyond the reach of the moonbeams, stood another figure, whose eyes pierced the darkness. Eyes that caressed the shapely legs, and the soft thighs of the sleeping form. Eyes that grew as large as the moon its self, when those legs parted, to reveal curls of blonde hair, nested between them. Lingering for a moment longer, those same eyes then dipped over the pelvis, and up to the muscular abs, running vertically along the abdomen, admiring their tautness and strength. But those eyes, hiding behind that gleam of moonlight, glazed over with hunger, when the breath of a cool breeze, sighed across the round orbs of velvety flesh, causing the rose tips to harden erect, searching for warmth. Those eyes, those intense, green eyes, that lingered yet again, to watch the alluring mounds, rhythmically, rise and fall with each breath, finally continued on, past the milk soft shoulders, to the curve of the jawline, up to the lips, that puckered with each respire. But it wasn't until those eyes traveled along the ridge of the soft-edged nose, that they were brought into the light, and revealed.

"Are you just going to stand there, ogling me with those big, beautiful green eyes of yours? Or are you going to join me here in bed?" Vicky grinned, and patted the mattress.

Aidan, her emerald eyes dancing with a mixture of lust and love, came out of the shadows, and jumped into bed, beside her lover. Rubbing her fingers up Vicky's forearm, and across the hollow of her collar bone, she asked, "I thought you were asleep?"

"I was. I was dreaming about today, and how perfect it was. You proposed to me today."

Aidan grinned, and slid her hand under Vicky's breast. Using her thumb to warm the cold, puckered tip, she replied, "And you said yes."

*

Jerry, dressed in his formal, Army blues uniform, lifted the flap on his right side coat pocket, and pulled out a small item. He held it out for Aidan, also dressed in her formal Army blues, and she put both of her gloved hands over his, and accepted the item.

She brought it close to her coat, and commanded in an even tone, "You are relieved."

"I stand relieved." Jerry replied. He took three steps backwards, and stopped.

Aidan pivoted, on the ball of her left foot, and knelt down on one knee. She opened the lid on the small box, revealing a diamond ring.

She held it up, and with a large smile, asked, "Will you marry me?"

"Oh yes, darling, I will marry—"

"What? Wait, no..., you're not Vicky? You're..., you're Sam!"

"Of course I'm Sam, and just who the hell is Vicky?"

Aidan woke with a jolt. "Fuck me!"

Vicky mumbled groggily, "Oh honey, you're insatiable. Maybe later, okay?" Then she rolled over on her side, and went back to sleep.

"Shh, it's okay kid, go back to sleep." Aidan whispered nervously, combing her tangled auburn hair from her eyes. She checked Vicky's finger, just to make sure that the engagement ring was still there, and the bad dream was over with. Then she laid back down, and stared at the ceiling for a few minutes, trying to discern what the dream meant. Finally she fell asleep, her face still creased with worry.

The next morning, found the two lovers, sated, revitalized, still in bed, and deep in conversation.

“Oh, Aidan. You’re not serious?”

“Yes ma’am, I am.”

“My engagement ring was your mother’s?”

“Yep. And not just any ring, either. It’s an eighteen caret, three stone, Celtic diamond ring, with trinity knot mounts on white gold. At least that’s what an old Army buddy of mine, told me. I just thought it looked special. That’s why I knew it was meant for you.”

“You say the sweetest things, thank you. I’m surprised Mr. Cassidy even let you touch it.”

“He didn’t. When I was very young, even before I met you in grade school, my father caught me playing with that ring and went ballistic. He told me it was my mother’s ring, and had been in her family a long time. I was never to touch it again, or else. According to him, it meant a lot to her, and she had rather die, than take it off. So I thought it odd that when she did die, giving birth to me, he kept the ring, instead of burying it with her.”

Vicky shivered at the mere mention of Aidan’s father. A vile man, with cruel intentions, of which she had been deeply afraid of, even before she was raped by him, at age thirteen. She would say it had no effect on her decision making as an adult, but she was only misleading herself.

She glanced over at Aidan, trying to find any traits she might have inherited from her father. Aidan was tall, muscularly thin, with strong facial features and soft emerald eyes, enhanced by her untamed auburn hair. She also had that edge of unrestraint, that Vicky appreciated, both in the bed, and out of . To those that didn’t know her, Aidan was skittish, on guard, aloof. But what they couldn’t know, but Vicky cherished, was that Aidan was just protecting, not only herself, but those she loved, which was Vicky. In contrast, Aidan’s father, who died years ago, was of medium height, stocky, pasty looking, and callous. And he was always angry, usually at Aidan. It was well known that the only thing he cared about was money. Vicky came to the same conclusion, that she always does. Aidan was nothing like her father, physically or mentally.

“Oh sweetheart! How did you end up with it?”

“I stole it when the bastard wasn’t looking. Don’t worry, he never even noticed. I’ve kept it hidden all these years, knowing I wanted to slide it on your finger, one day.”

“So why do you suppose he kept it? I mean, it sounds like it didn’t matter to him that much.”

“I’m not really sure. He sold everything else of hers. Stuff that wasn’t nearly as valuable.”

“Maybe he really did love her, and just wanted a keepsake.”

“Nah, he never loved her, but I did, and now, what meant the most to my mother, is on your finger, because you are what means the most to me.”

Vicky leaned in and kissed Aidan deeply, “I love you, Aidan.”

Aidan looked at Vicky, and froze in mid breath. She always had to remind herself to breathe, when she looked at her lover, for Vicky took her breath away. Luscious blond hair, that she delighted in sliding her fingers through. Twinkling blue eyes, that lit up the night sky, and just the hint of freckles, that Aidan knew, lay hidden under her makeup. Vicky was a business woman to be sure, running a multi-million dollar healthcare system, but to Aidan, she was the best friend next door, who begged to be pushed higher on the swing. But with all that beauty, the thing Aidan loved most about Vicky, was her huge, benevolent heart.

“I love you too baby, please don’t ever doubt that” Aidan shifted nervously, and asked, “Can you get off work early this afternoon? I.., uh, need to show you something.”

“Um..., sure, I guess so.” That was not what she thought would happen next, so with as much innuendo as she could imply, she asked, “Can’t you show me now?”

“No, sorry. I have an appointment with Dr. Kline that I’d better keep. Dib’s on the shower.”

*

It seemed to Vicky, that Aidan was in an unusual hurry to get to the hospital. She didn’t even want to play in the shower together, which left Vicky completely dissatisfied with this new day. Mumbling to herself, Vicky entered the hospital just as the Priest began praying over the loud speaker. Every day at 8 a.m., Chaplaincy Services says a prayer of blessing for the patients and staff. And every morning at that time, Vicky stops what she’s doing, which is usually getting a cup of coffee, and bows her head in prayer. But this morning, she was so distracted by Aidan sudden rush to get to work, that she didn’t hear the prayer until the Priest said amen.

After dropping Vicky off at the front door, Aidan drove around back and parked her car. Walking back to the hospital, her mind was as revved up as her Mustang gets, except her mind was going in every direction.

“Doc, the girl I was in love with, when I was in the Army, but thought was dead, may still be alive, and held captive in Iraq or Afghanistan, and—”

“Whoa, slow down.”

Chief Hospital Psychologist, Dr. Richard Kline, was having trouble keeping up with her rapid fire exchange. Aidan had been his patient, since she returned home, when the Army asked him to continue her medical treatment after being wounded in Iraq. Aidan was suffering from amnesia, and while most of her memories had returned, she still had some lapses, especially regarding the war. So even though she had since been discharged from the military, she continues to see him for his advice, and his friendship.

He waved his arm at the chair, “Let me close the door while you take a seat.”

Aidan sat down where she always sat, and took a deep breath. Then she told him about regaining her memories of a woman she thought had been killed in the insurgent attack, the same attack that wounded her. But now she believes that she was captured instead, and still alive.

“Well, that is quite a development. So you’re not sure of what?” He deliberately left the question open, so that she could tell it in her own words.

“I love Vicky, Doc, don’t get me wrong. I meant it when I put my mother’s ring on her finger.”

He waited, knowing that something was bothering her, to the point of distraction, because she had never sat there, with such a panic look in her eyes before.

Finally, she just blurted it out. “Doc, my gut is telling me to go and find Sam, that’s her name, Staff Sergeant Samantha Jane Vincent, and bring her home. You see, I’m sort of, uh... engaged to Sam..., also.”

Though Dr. Kline had trained himself not to show emotion during a patients session, he could not contain his surprise this time. He had been there, when Aidan proposed to Vicky. He knew the struggles they both went through to be together. “So, um..., is this out of love for her, Aidan, or a since of duty, or both?”

She thought for a moment and replied, “Both I guess. I’m not sure how I feel about the love part, not anymore. It’s all suddenly, very confusing, but I do know I left her behind, and that is unacceptable to me.”

“You say you just got your memory of her back, Aidan, of course it’s confusing. The last thing you remembered about her, was how much you loved her. You need to take some time to figure out what exactly, it is you feel for her.”

Aidan pulled out a blurred picture of Samantha, from her back pocket, and showed it to him, “I don’t have time Doc, she’s being held captive in a war zone.”

Looking at the picture closely, he asked, “Are you sure she’s even alive, Aidan?”

“Yes, I’m pretty sure she is.”

He pointed to the picture, “Do you realize how much she resembles Victoria?”

She looked down at the photo, “What? No, I hadn’t notice.”

“Tell me what was it about Samantha that you loved?”

Aidan thought for a moment and said, “Well, her personality, for one thing. She’s outgoing, very professional, and very generous, not just to me, but to others. She’s brave, and—”

Dr. Kline was a trusted friend of Victoria’s, and he believe that the person Aidan was describing was exactly how he would describe Vicky. “Aidan, here’s something for you to consider, you fell in love with Samantha, because she was so much like Victoria.”

She stared at him skeptically. “Do you really think that’s what happened Doc? That’s just weird.” She darted her eyes back and forth, trying to grasp the significance of what he was saying.

“Just hear me out. You were completely cut off from Victoria, when you both were teenagers, so your subconscious worked around that, by finding someone just like her. It’s the same concept of a son, unconsciously seeking out a woman like his mother. There’s just one thing that puzzles me though, Aidan.”

“Yeah Doc, just one thing?”

“You say you were engaged to marry Samantha but yet, you put your mother’s engagement ring on Victoria’s finger. I find that very significant.”

“How so?”

“Why didn’t you give the ring to Samantha, when you proposed to her?”

She looked at him, confused, “What?”

“Let me spell it out for you. You joined the Army, and a few years later, you fell in love with Samantha. As I understand it, in all that time, you had no contact with Victoria. And in fact, you proposed to Samantha *before* the attack that cost you your memories of Victoria. So..., why isn't Samantha wearing that ring, right now, instead of Victoria?”

Aidan couldn't answer him. She didn't honestly know for sure. “Uh, I don't guess I know, Doc. I hadn't really thought about it.” *But he's right. Why didn't I?*

Dr. Kline did not try to hide the fact that he didn't believe her, as he went on to his next point, “So, what are you afraid of, Aidan, that you will find Samantha, or that you won't?”

She didn't see that coming, and her face showed a mirror of emotions, until she finally said, “Oh, I'll find her doc, but I'm afraid of losing Vicky.”

“Because you love Samantha?”

“No! That's bullshit! Why do you keep saying that? I don't think that's it at all. Certainly not after all Vicky and I have been through together.”

He glanced up from his notes, and said, “You can't love someone out of gratitude, Aidan, it's not sustainable.”

She looked at him as if he were crazy, then realized what he was saying, “Oh no doc, you got it all wrong. I love Vicky with all my heart because she completes me, she makes me want to be a better person. A person she can trust and always rely on. I can't go five minutes without thinking about her, texting her, or calling her.”

“Then why not let the government go after Samantha?”

“Because they've had a fucking year, and she's still over there.”

“So then, it's all up to you?”

“Yeah,” she replied with false bravado, “yes it is.”

“Then tell Victoria.” To him it was as simple as black and white, but to Aidan it was more frightening than war. She stood up and began to pace.

“I..., I don't think I can. I'm afraid she won't understand, and she won't support me in this, or maybe she'll forbid me to go? Will she hate me, if I go? Will I hate myself, if I go?”

Aidan finally took a breath, and raked her fingers through her hair.

He watched her struggle with her concerns for a moment, and then asked, “And will you hate yourself, if you don't go? Listen, Aidan, for one thing, you are deciding how Victoria feels,

without asking her first. That's not fair to her. And you're not allowing yourself to consider that you might still have feelings for Samantha. That's not fair to any of you."

She shifted nervously in her chair, the realization flashing across her face. *He's right, I can't live with the thought of leaving Sam there with those bastards, but I can't do this without Vicky's support.*

Dr. Kline recognized the relax posture Aidan had taken, and knew she had made her decision.

"Aidan, keep me in the loop on this, and let me know if I can be of any help to you. And please, please be careful. This is a very thin tightrope you're balancing yourself on. Understand?"

He's referring to Vicky, "Understood."

*

"SPC Williams, are your DD214 documents in order?"

U.S. Army Specialist Gerald Williams, Jerry to his friends, smiled at the Sergeant, which was not the proper response, but he just couldn't resist it on his last day in the military.

"Yes, Staff Sergeant."

He smoothed his coat down, and adjusted his medals, including the Purple Heart, awarded to him when he was injured in an attack, on his unit in Iraq. The same attack where Aidan saved his life. It was his wound from that attack, that got him transferred to a desk job. He hated it, and since his tour was up, he opted not to re-enlist.

"SPC Williams, you are officially, honorably, discharged from the United States Army."

The two men snapped to attention, and saluted.

"Could I buy you a beer, Staff Sergeant?"

"An excellent way to start your new life, Mr. Williams." He slapped Jerry on the back, and the two walked out the door together, "So what are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to propose to my girl, and get a job to support her."

"You have a girlfriend? You've never spoken of her, so I just assumed..."

"Now that I'm officially a civilian again, I can confess, I have a girlfriend, and she's a real looker too."

It was later, after the two men, joined by several of Jerry's buddies, had a boilermaker contest, that Jerry let slip he was only getting married because of an arranged marriage by his mother. It wasn't something he was happy about, but he had no choice in the matter. He passed out before he could explain why.

*

That afternoon, as Aidan and Vicky drove back to Vicky's house, Aidan was unusually quiet. After talking with Dr. Kline, she was even more nervous than before, because she was afraid of how Vicky would react to learning that she already had a fiancée. It was not something she had ever contemplated before now, but then, she never expected to see Vicky again, when she asked Samantha to marry her.

As soon as they arrived back at Vicky's house, Aidan went into the bedroom, and brought out the shoebox full of letters, that she had written to Vicky over the years. They had read most of them, but Aidan had a particular one in mind that she wanted to share with Vicky.

Vicky called to her from the kitchen, "Honey, want a beer?"

"That would be great, thanks."

Aidan pulled off her boots and sat on the couch, her long legs folded under her. She sat the box in front of her, just as Vicky handed her the beer, then sat her glass of wine on the ottoman, and kicked her shoes off as well. She sat facing Aidan, but looking at the box.

"You don't know how bad I wish your mother had given these letters to you when I wrote them, instead of hiding them from you." Aidan reached into the shoebox full of letters, and pulled out an unopened letter. "And you don't know how bad I wish I hadn't lost my memory in Iraq. I mean, if I had known you were waiting for me all this time, I, uh..."

Aidan and Vicky had been neighbors since elementary school, but when Aidan was fourteen, she ran away from home the night of Vicky's thirteenth birthday. She was trying to shield Vicky from her mother's wrath, when the two were caught necking by her, in the backyard treehouse. Though Aidan wrote to her best friend every chance she got, Vicky's mother interceded them, leaving Vicky to wonder what had happened to Aidan, and Aidan to wonder why Vicky wouldn't write back. It was only a few months ago, as fate would have it, that they found each other again.

“Aidan?”

“This was the last letter I wrote to you.” Aidan’s hands shook as she began to read:

Dear Vicky,

Since I haven’t heard from you in all these years, this probably won’t matter to you anyway. But, I felt obligated to write one last time and tell you, that you will always be my best friend, and my first love, but it’s time for me to let you go.

It took me a lot of years, mostly because the Army kept us apart for so much of our relationship, but I have finally asked Sam to marry me and she said yes! So I guess..., this is goodbye. Please take care of yourself, kid.

Aidan

Aidan looked at Vicky, hoping to see that she comprehended what she was saying, but Vicky’s face was creased in pain, her eyes switched back and forth, as her brain tried hard not to go where her heart had just leaped.

“What... what does this mean, Aidan? I don’t understand, I...” Vicky moved away from her, trying to make sense of what her lover wasn’t saying. They had read most of the letters over the past few weeks, but Aidan had skipped to the last one. *What is she trying to say? That she loves that person? That she wants to marry her, instead of me? Oh God, no, this can’t be happening!*

Had it just been yesterday, that Aidan proposed to Vicky? A stylish, valiant proposal in front of family and friends, in the same room where Aidan had just been presented with two of the highest honors the United States can bestow on a person. The Medal of Freedom and the Medal of Honor, for bravery above and beyond the call of duty. Still dressed in full uniform, wearing those shiny new medals, Aidan got down on one knee, and proposed to Vicky, and Vicky said yes, to her best friend, her lover, the other half of her soul. The half that had just been ripped from her arms.

Vicky began to tear up, fear choking her ability to reason. “Why did you propose to me yesterday if...”

“Vicky..., baby, please look at me.”

But she couldn't bring herself to look at Aidan. She was dizzy with shock, and needed all her concentration to keep her stomach from betraying her. "I think I'm going to be sick." She clasped her mouth, as if to stop that from happening.

"Please, baby?"

Vicky stood up, and walked to the window to calm her nerves, but it wasn't the view she was looking at, it was her engagement ring, "Why did you choose that particular letter, Aidan?"

"Because I need to tell you something."

Oh God, here it is. Just tell me damn it!

Chapter 2

The early evening dinner rush was winding down. Patrons had cleaned their plates of their overpriced dinners, and now sat chattering away, over the din of the restaurant noise. Outside, on the veranda, enjoying the cool evening breeze, were more patrons, having appetizers and after work cocktails.

“I’m too old.”

“Oh for God’s sake, you are not. What makes you say that?”

“Because I can’t see the forest anymore.”

“Why’s that?”

“The damn trees keep getting in the way.”

“Is everything a joke to you?”

“You’re the shrink, you tell me.”

Sally straightened up in her chair, pushed her empty bowl of tortilla chips to the side, took another sip of her whisky sour, and then quipped, “All right, but you asked for it.”

“Uh, remember, I haven’t paid you for this session yet, so be gentle.”

“Ruth, you have never paid me for my time, in the thirty years we’ve been friends, so shut up and listen. I’m going in with both barrels blazing. You feel old because you’re lonely. You’re lonely because you hide behind your weird sense of humor. You hide because you’re afraid. You’re afraid because you don’t know who you are. You don’t know who you are because...?”

“Because what? Go on, you’re on a role.”

“Ruth. Do you find men attractive?”

“Sure, some of them can be really gorgeous.”

“You mean like my husband, George. A gorgeous hunk of a man, who swept me off my feet, nearly thirty years ago, and—”

“Yeah—yeah. I’ve heard this story a thousand times already. Come up with something new, for a change.”

Undaunted, Sally did as she was asked. “Okay then. What about women? Do you find them attractive?”

“I guess so. I mean, you’re attractive.”

“Well thank you, but that’s not what I meant. Do you find them physically appealing? Do you catch yourself wanting to run your fingers through their hair, or up their arm, or under their breast?”

“Whoa now!”

“Look, it’s just you and me here. It’s about damn time you face yourself in that mirror, and admit it. I’ve known since the minute I met you.”

“You... you have? Uh, I mean, known what?”

“You were brought up by parents who didn’t even know what a lesbian was. But society at that time, dictated that it was unacceptable, and so your parents put that fear in you. You worked for twenty years in a place that would fire you the second you came out, so you stayed hidden in the closet, in order to stay employed. Then for your next career, you worked from home, where you made your fortune sure, but I was the only one you socialized with. And no, you can’t count socializing with your two husbands. They were worthless human beings.”

“You’re right about that. Both of them put together couldn’t match up to your husband of thirty years.”

“I can’t decide if you’re complimenting me or trying to be funny again. Anyway, your niece is the CEO of the largest health system around here, for God’s sake, and she has never hidden the fact she’s a lesbian. Look around you, Ruth. Even Arkansas is coming around. Albeit, slow as molasses in winter, but we may see same sex marriages in our life time. Now is the perfect time to come out of that closet.”

“Sally, I ain’t got a lifetime left. Even if I were to admit to anything, it’s too late for me. I’m too old.”

“Is that why you keep saying that? You’re wrong, Ruth, it’s never too late for love. You’ve been successful in everything you’ve done in your life, except one. Love. You’ve tried doing it your parents way and it was a dismal failure, both times. Now do it your way. For God’s sake, you’re fifty–six, soon to be fifty–seven years old. You deserve to be loved.”

“One question. Why didn’t you tell me back then. Why now?”

“Why now? Because you’re old and you haven’t got a lot of time left.”

Ruth’s jaw dropped open.

“Gotcha! Seriously, I’m tired of you being lonely when you don’t have to be. You’re so busy, hiding who you are inside, that you don’t see that beautiful woman’s eyes light up, when she looks at you. You don’t see her head turn, as you walk by. I’ve seen it happen more than once. Damn it, I want you to see that too. I want you to be that woman!”

“Okay, okay. I hear you.”

“And?”

“And I’ll give it some thought.”

“Good. Now, it’s your turn to pay the check.”

“There’s always a catch with you, isn’t there?”

“Yep, that’s why they pay me the big bucks. Well, everyone except you, that is.”

“So you’re saying I’m the smartest one of them all?”

Sally laughed and smacked her best friend on the arm.

Aidan walked over, and stood in front of Vicky, holding her at arm’s length. “It is not what you think, Vicky. Do you hear me? It is not what you think!” Vicky looked up at Aidan with eyes so sad, that Aidan gasped, “Oh God, no baby! I am not choosing her over you. Oh God, what a fucking idiot I am..., SHIT!” Aidan was so mad at herself, that she had to walked away in order to get control of her emotions.

“Damn it, Aidan, just spit it out, and get it over with.”

“Baby, I’m not in love with her, anymore.”

“Anymore? How do you know Aidan? How could you possibly know that for sure?”

Aidan looked at her fragile lover, and said with all sincerity, “Because my memories of her came back the day Jerry first came here.” Aidan flashed back to the day she walked into Vicky’s office, and was introduced to then SPC Gerald Williams. At first, Aidan didn’t remember Jerry, that memory came later. But when he mentioned Sam, those memories of her came flooding back, almost instantly.

“I’ve known all this time, but I wanted to wait until I could propose to you, so you’d know how much I love you, how much I wanted you.” She waited, hoping for some

understanding, but when Vicky didn't say anything, Aidan resorted to begging, "Please, Vicky..., please...?"

"Why? Why read the letter now? What aren't you saying, Aidan?"

Aidan led her back to the couch, where they sat apart, facing each other, "Okay, first I know I've handled this whole thing really badly. I'm a stupid ass, and I'm so sorry. I read the letter, because I wanted you to know about Sam, about what she meant to me."

Vicky's eyes welled up again, "This is not helping, Aidan."

Aidan ran her hand through her tangled bangs, and chastised herself again, "Ah shit! God, why can't this be easy."

Vicky was getting frustrated with Aidan's frustration, "Aidan, answer me one question."

"Anything, Vick," *Please, please let me say the right thing now!*

"Do you still love me enough to want to marry me?"

"Oh, hell yeah, baby. There was never any doubt in my mind, please believe that."

Vicky could finally pull air back into her lungs, as the thousand pound weight lifted from her chest, "Then tell me what you want to tell me, please. Before my dream proposal becomes my worst nightmare."

"Okay, here goes...", Aidan tried to swallow, but her mouth was too dry. "I found out Sam is still alive, and is being held captive, I think in Iraq, or Afghanistan. I want to go get her."

"You? You want to go over there and..., you're not serious?" But Vicky knew Aidan was completely serious, before she asked her. "Okay, you're serious, but why you, Aidan?"

"Because I left her behind, and that goes against the soldier's code, against everything I stand for. Plus it's been over a year, and they have not, or will not get her out of there, so it's up to me."

"What do you mean, soldier's code?"

Aidan thought for a moment, and decided to explain it in a language Vicky would understand easier. "Remember when you helped out that nurse and her husband? Their insurance had ran out, so you paid for his surgery, but you did it anonymously? Why did you do that, I mean she was just an employee, right?"

"Yes, but she was part of my team, she needed help, and I couldn't not help her..., oh...,", she looked up at Aidan, "Okay, I think I understand."

"And she was just an acquaintance, imagine if she were your lover, and—"

“Okay, I get it!” Vicky didn’t care to hear any more about her lover’s lover, not now anyway, “So how would you do it?”

“Well, when we were on the Maggie O’Hare show, President Trenton said to call him anytime, if I needed help. At first I blew it off. I mean, me, calling the President?”

President Jackson Trenton already had a long history with Victoria Ann Montgomery. His mother had a heart attack, when Trenton was in his second term in office, and Vicky was a young nurse fresh out of college, who cared for her. Perhaps it was her youth that made her so brash, because even the President’s secret service men, took orders from her. Then just last month, Trenton himself, was the patient, after he had a heart attack. It was during Trenton’s hospital stay, that an assassination attempt was made on his life. It was part of the terrorist plot to hold the hospital hostage, that Vicky and Aidan help thwart, but at great personal costs to them, both emotionally and physically. Trenton personally pinned the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Aidan, for taking a bullet while stopping the would be assassin.

“But then, I talked to him yesterday, right before the ceremony.

“Really? You were so nervous, that I’m surprised you had the ability to speak to anyone.” Vicky teased Aidan, remembering how special that moment was. “What did he say?”

“He put me in touch with some people who will train me and my team.”

“Your team?”

“Yeah, I can’t do it alone. I need a couple of people to help me, so I have to put a team together. It’ll be strictly volunteers, since the government will deny any knowledge of it. Anyway, these people that Trenton hooked me up with—”

Vicky interrupted again, “I’m assuming you’re talking about the CIA, right?”

“Yes. They have all the intel I need to find Sam. I’m talking with them tomorrow.”

Vicky gasped, “So soon?”

“I’m just going to talk with them and see if I can even pull this off, Vick. I promise, I’m not going to do anything without talking to you first. And I won’t go if you don’t want me too.” She held her breath, waiting on Vicky’s answer.

I don’t want you to go! “Aidan, I need some time to sort this whole thing out. I mean, not only do I just find out you were engaged before, but now you want to go get her? And on the very day you proposed to me, you were talking to the President of the United States about her. It doesn’t do a whole lot for my self-esteem, you know.”

“I understand, baby, and I am so sorry I fucked all this up. I never wanted to hurt you, you know that right? I love you so much.”

“Just keep reminding me how much, okay?”

Aidan smiled, greatly relieved, “With pleasure.”

Vicky walked into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of whisky, straight. She stood by the bar, and gulped it down. *Lord give me strength to understand this and wisdom to accept it.* Then she poured herself another drink, got out a beer for Aidan, and walked back into the living room. Handing Aidan the beer, she sat back down on the couch and looked at her intently.

“Okay, tell me again, from the beginning,” she patted the cushion, and Aidan sat down beside her, happy for the second chance to tell it the right way.

“The day I was hurt in the attack in Iraq, I was catching a ride to my unit. As you know, I was to be their photographer in the field. It was Sam’s truck convoy that I was riding with. Sam, her full name is Samantha Jane Vincent, anyway she was a Staff Sergeant. She was in charge of the guys driving the transport trucks. So, I was in the Stryker, and she was two trucks behind us. When we got hit, I went crazy looking for her, but then this kid, I’m pretty sure it was Jerry, kept screaming in pain. All hell was breaking loose. Gunfire, explosions from the grenades, people screaming for help. I just sort of went into rescue mode without thinking about it. I pulled Jerry to safety, and then I went to help someone else. That’s when I heard her screaming...,”

Aidan stopped, choking on the words. Moved by her obvious pain, Vicky put her soft hand on Aidan’s arm. “I tried to find her, but, after a few minutes I couldn’t hear her anymore, and then I guess I got hit by shrapnel. The next thing I remember was waking up in the hospital.”

“Oh, honey, I’m so sorry.”

Surprised, Aidan looked at her, “You really are, aren’t you.” Squeezing her hand, Aidan continued, “Anyway, I found out from Jerry, that they had captured her, and the truck she was driving. Because I lost my memory, I thought she had died.”

“And now?” Vicky asked, while another question formed in her mind.

“Now I have to help her. I can’t stand the thought of leaving someone behind, while I’m given medals for courage. And..., and I can’t stand the thought of her being at the mercy of those bastards.”

Vicky got up and paced, while Aidan waited. Finally she stopped and turned to her, “What happens after you rescue her?”

She looked at Vicky curiously. She hadn't thought that far ahead. *What will happen, after she comes back?* "Well I guess she goes back to her family, or back to the Army, or whatever she wants."

"And if she wants you, Aidan?"

"That is not an option, Vicky. I love you."

"Aidan, look at it from my perspective. If the attack had never happened, you would be sitting with Samantha right now, instead of me."

"I know, baby, but I need you to trust me on this. It's you I love."

Vicky shook her head, "I trust you. I have always trusted you, even when you didn't know who I was, I trusted you. I always knew we'd find each other again, and I trusted in that. All my life, I have trusted in us. It's not a matter of my trusting you, sweetheart, it's a matter of you, trusting yourself."

"What can I do to convince you that I am coming back to you?"

Vicky stood up. Her face drained of all emotion. She crossed her arms, and struck a pose of determination, before she said, "By taking me with you."

Aidan's mouth hung open, but as the shock wore off, she realized that Vicky was being serious. "Oh hell no! It's war over there, Vicky, people are dying there. No, I can't risk losing you."

"And I can risk losing you?"

"Baby, please be reasonable. I've been to war. I've been shot at, blown up and watched my friends die. It's not a dinner party, over there."

Vicky put her small hands on her hips, and angrily responded, "Aidan, for your information, just this past month, I've been shot at, blown up, and watched my friends die too. So how is that different? You're the one who needs to be reasonable!"

Aidan's logic was quickly being disarmed, and she was desperately trying to think of something to come back with.

But Vicky wouldn't let it go. "I am a quick learner, and you have to admit we make a great team together. Plus I'm a nurse, and Samantha may need medical attention. Oh, and by the way, that 'dinner party' quip, was uncalled for. You should know by now, that I am more than that."

Aidan did know that, but she was desperate. She stood up also, and began to pace, as she made one last appeal before her resolve evaporated completely. “You’re right, and I apologize for the remark. But, Vicky, have you ever killed anyone before? Are you capable of killing?” Aidan already knew the answer. She knew that Vicky was super sensitive when it came to killing. When they were children, Vicky stopped her from killing a mouse that had gotten into the treehouse. Aidan knew she wouldn’t be able to kill a person, even if they were the enemy. She also knew it wasn’t a fair question, because even though she had killed several insurgents during the attack on her Stryker, she didn’t know for sure, until she faced death, whether she could kill someone or not. Over a year later, when Vicky was held hostage by the terrorist in the hospital, Aidan had no qualms about killing him, with a bullet through his brain.

Vicky had not considered that she might have to kill someone, and she honestly wasn’t sure whether she could or not. As a nurse, she had taken an oath to do no harm, and she lived by that oath. She had never been put into a position of needing to kill, to save herself, or someone else.

Aidan could see her hesitation, and she took advantage of it. “If things get hairy over there, I have to know that you can protect yourself. I have to know that you’ve got my back.”

Of that, Vicky had no doubt, “No one lays a hand on my woman, and lives to tell about it.”

Loving the bravado, Aidan couldn’t hold back a smile, but then she quickly became serious again, “Don’t get me wrong, I know you would jump in front of a bullet to protect me.” With one finger, she gently traced the ridge of the scar on Vicky’s chest. When the terrorist attempted for the second time to take the hospital hostage, it came down to a gun pointing at Aidan’s heart. Vicky jumped in front of the bullet, to save Aidan, and almost lost her own life. A bloody sight that still haunts Aidan’s every thought. “I know you are brave beyond measure, that’s not it.”

“Then what is it, Aidan?”

“Can you shoot someone to protect yourself?”

*

“I’m bored.”

“Bored? How can you be bored, you just got to work.”

“It’s not work I’m bored with.”

“Oh? Do tell?”

Kate Moore, Executive Assistant to the Finance Director, waved her arm at the employees coming through the front door, on their way to start their morning shift. “Let’s see. I’ve had her. Had him. Had her and him together. Would like to have her again. I mean look at them, there’s no new toys to play with in kitty’s sandbox.”

“Did anyone ever tell you that you’re vulgar?”

“Oh yes, I’ve been complimented many, many times.”

Kate’s friend shook her head, and chuckled, “You’re hopeless.”

It was then that the glass doors slide open again, and Kate gasped at the sight of the woman walking in. Medium height, short brown hair with a hint of gray, muscular body, and blue eyes that sparkled all the way across the room at Kate. “Oh! I haven’t had that yet. I think I just found a new toy to play with.” She stood, cuffed her hair up, and walked over to the woman.

“You’re a new employee, right? I don’t think we’ve met? I’d remember a beautiful face like yours.”

Ruth’s eyes dilated. *My God. Sally was right.., I walk out of that closet, and mentally announce that I’m a lesbian, and bam. I’m a chick magnet.* Ruth didn’t really believe that she was that irresistible, but she did walk in with a new found energy, and her chest swelled with encouragement, at Kate’s approach. “You’re sweet. Do you know a woman named Sally? Oh, um, never mind. I was looking for the administration office.”

“Oh yes, I know those offices well. Would you like a personal tour?”

“My niece is—”

“That’s not the kind of tour I had in mind.”

“What? Oh, um..”

Kate walked around Ruth, taking inventory. She liked what she saw. “I’ve always wanted to make out in the CEO’s office, haven’t you?”

“I have actually kissed the CEO before, right there in her office.” *I know I wanted to test my wings, but this is crazy. I do believe she would bed me right here in the lobby, if she could.*

“Oh my God! Tell me everything!”

Kate grabbed Ruth's arm, and pulled her towards the cappuccino bar, tucked away in a corner of the front lobby. Her coffee still sat on the table, though her friend had left. They set down, and Kate moved the coffee to the side, and leaned in, her eyes filled with a different kind of lust.

"How was it?"

"Isn't she your boss? I don't want to get anyone in trouble."

"Well yeah, she's everyone's boss here, but I won't tell her, if you won't."

"Okay, but let me grab some coffee first."

Kate acted dejected, which almost made Ruth laugh. As she waited in line to place her order, Ruth tried to analyze what just happened. After thinking long and hard about what Sally said, and realizing she was completely right, Ruth decided it was time. She always thought of herself as an academy award winning actress, because she could put on quite a show, when a good looking man walked by, or a good looking woman. If it were a man, she pointed out how stacked he was. If it were a woman, she pointed out her shoes. In both cases, that's not what she was really thinking of at all. With the man, she was thinking of how she would look in a shirt like that, or his suit or boots. With a woman, it was kissing her lips, or touching her breasts.

Sally was right. It's time to come out of that closet, and throw caution to the wind.

*

Looking out the window once again, Vicky watched as the sun crested the city's skyline. A view she never tired of, but this morning, she could not appreciate it. They had talked, and not talked, throughout the night, and there was still much that needed to be said, but she was tired of talking

"Okay. You win."

"I don't want to win, damn it. I may not be able to protect you over there, and I just need to know if you can look a man in the eye and shoot him dead?"

In a defeatist tone, Vicky confessed, "I can't answer that, Aidan. I don't know what I'll do, in the heat of the moment."

"And that's a risk I cannot take, Vicky."

“Yet again, you ask me to risk you, as if it were that easy. Well it’s not. I can’t *risk* losing you again, Aidan. Never again.”

Aidan felt she had said all there was to say, and still, they were at an impasse. She slumped to the couch, too weary to continue the fight. Vicky sat beside her on the couch, and patted her leg. Aidan lifted Vicky’s hand in hers, and examined each finger. Moving her focus down to Vicky’s palm, she began rubbing it with her thumb, as if it were her good luck charm, hoping that it would give her the answers she was looking for.

“Aidan, look at me.” Vicky shook Aidan’s hand to get her attention. “You have this idea that I’m some kind of fragile debutante, up on a pedestal, that needs protecting. I’m not that person, Aid. I’m pretty damn tough, when I need to be, and I’m not just talking about in the board room. Honey, you know I’ve been raped, held hostage twice, and shot in the chest. Yet I’m still here, sitting beside you, loving you. Please, sweetheart, take me off that pedestal, and see me for who I really am. I can help you. I want to help you.”

Aidan knew Vicky’s love was absolute, but she feared that stubborn resolve would get her killed. She had to find a way to rationalize it in her head, that Vicky was coming with her, and she could protect her. *Another words I’m going to lie to myself.* She reluctantly gave in, “Okay baby, I’ll try, but I’ve had you up on that pedestal, since you were six years old. It won’t be easy.”

Vicky smiled. It was true, Aidan had always gone to extraordinary lengths to safeguard her. And while Vicky loved her for it, this was the first time her over protectiveness, had ever been tested. Vicky was fiercely independent. She had to be in order to reach the lofty goals she had set for herself. But when it came to her best friend and lover, there was a connection beyond independence. A need, a yearning to be protected, and a need to protect. It was Dr. Kline, who explained to them, the reasons why each woman aggressively guarded the other from perceived peril, and in both cases, it was because of Aidan’s abusive father.

“Just meet with them tomorrow, they may not even be able to help you. We can figure out the rest after that. It’s going to be okay, Aidan, everything is going to be all right.”

“And what about us, kid, are we okay? Tell me what I can do to fix this?”

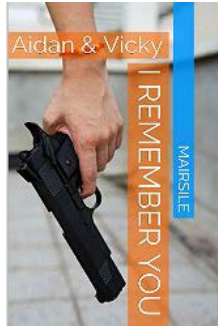
“Nothing,” Vicky said, as Aidan drew in a sharp breath, “because we’re better than okay. We’re engaged to be married, it doesn’t get much more okay than that. So you see, there’s nothing to fix. Like my mom always said, if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it.”

“Uh, kid, is this the same mother who kept my letter’s from you for fifteen years?”

“Oh..., you have a point. Okay, well how about this? You can’t fix perfection.”

“God, I love you so much, kid.”

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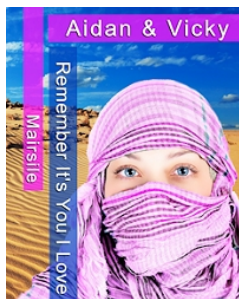


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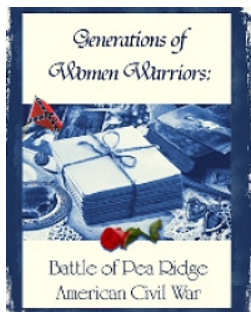
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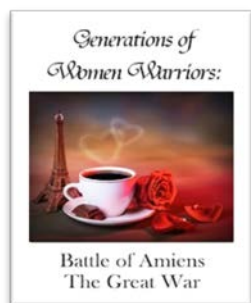
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