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Give Me Strength

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Please note that Kate McCarthy is an Australian author and Australian English spelling and slang have been used in this book.

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To Dan

My lighthouse...

A knock came at the door of my apartment as I hopped about the bedroom trying to squeeze into my jeans. I sucked in a breath, did up the button and yelled, "Come in!"

Lucy, my new neighbour, was coming over, and we Give Me Strength were going to settle in for a night of Australian Idol and popcorn. Despite her being twenty-four to my eighteen, it was turning into a great friendship. Lucy pretended to like Give Me Strength my singing, and Give Me Strength I pretended to watch her *Step Up* movies when she played them until I almost lost the will to live.

I loved music. When I had a favourite song, I would put it on repeat and play it a thousand times. When I was young I dreamed of being a singer because music took me to another place. Growing up Give Me Strength in the music of the nineties, I was going to be the next Destiny's Child—a Beyoncé in the making—only white and with less hair. Reality was a bitch though because I couldn't sing. I couldn't even play an instrument. Lucky for me I was smart, but even smarts sometimes let you down, and according to my mother, Beth, my life was now fucked. F-u-c-k-e-d. She spelled it out, her smirking lips taking relish in the word.

She was wrong. I didn't care Give Me Strength what she thought. She didn't care what I thought either, or cared period. Any idiot could raise a child, and why my mother thought she could do a stellar job of it baffled me.

The sucky reality was that I'd been dealt a shitty hand in life, but the way I saw it I could choose Give Me Strength to either fold my cards or raise the stakes and play on. I Give Me Strength chose the latter, and because I didn't do anything half measure, I played hard.

Parties, drinking, boys—those three things became my new mantra. It was almost like a three step self-help program. The touch of gentle hands on my body felt good, and I didn't care who it was as long as I felt wanted. The results were somewhat successful because when the hard slap of my stepfather's hand or fist came, it felt more deserved.

My stepfather David was like Charlie Sheen. Initially he appeared like a normal person, but the exterior was hiding something completely whacked. He and my mum were a matched set, except he held jobs Give Me Strength like they were hot potatoes. One day he came home throwing around cash that had my mum upgraded from her customary chardonnay special to drinking high dollar vodka in fancy glassware. It was obvious he was caught up in bad deeds, but I kept my mouth shut because they were so busy spending it all they were never Give Me Strength home.

Then a year ago I met Ethan at a party. He came up and wiped away a tear from my cheek that I hadn't even noticed was there. My glazed eyes met his, and seeing concern in their depths, I forgot how to breathe. Ethan clearly didn't belong Give Me Strength at Give Me Strength the party. He looked Give Me Strength clean and sober and far too sweet for the bitter circles I ran with.

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At seventeen he was a foot taller than my tiny five foot frame, all lanky muscle and shiny, dark hair. He had everything I didn't: good friends, good grades, parents who loved him, and a

home.

I was offered a mere glimpse into his world, and it was beautiful. It Give Me Strength was like the kind of wonder you would feel if you ventured inside your wardrobe and found yourself in Narnia. My world was more like Middle-earth; angry fists and cruel taunts reigned supreme. There was no love, no beauty, and maybe I had a roof over my head, but it wasn't a home.

Somehow Ethan and I came together, and I had a crazy thought he would be the Patrick Swayze to my Jennifer Grey. He laughed at me when I told him just that, but I didn't care because inside I felt something blooming so large I struggled to contain it. Ethan breathed hope into my already jaded life and it changed me into the type of girl he deserved. It was a relief to drop the bad girl act. The drinking and partying stopped, I dressed more appropriately, and grew my white-blonde hair into long waves.

Just when I thought I might actually deserve a bit of special, life proved me wrong when Ethan died three months ago. My heart broke when his parents told me Give Me Strength he went down Give Me Strength in a rugby tackle and never got up. I almost folded my hand then and there, but fate Give Me Strength decided to give me the chance to do something Beth could never do?be a real mum. I was having Ethan's baby, and there was no way I'd bring something so precious into the fires of hell. In the middle of the night, I packed a suitcase and descended on Ethan's parents' house.

They became my new family, but I struggled under the shower of love. I wanted to stand on my own two feet, prove I was the person Ethan thought me Give Me Strength to be. Having just finished high school, they helped me find a contract reception position in the city, loaned me money for a bond in a half-furnished townhouse in Campsie?south of the city?and after two weeks I was finally free.

That was when I met Lucy. She came over offering biscuits she'd baked that very morning, but the results were bitter, hard missiles. She confessed that she'd never baked

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