

2ND PROOF

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She's the mother of six children and is currently surviving the teenage years with two of her four hockey-playing sons. When she's not writing, you can find her at the hockey rink or sneaking in some guitar time while guzzling coffee. She and her family live in Colorado with their stubborn English bulldogs, two feisty chinchillas and a Maine Coon cat named Artemis, who rules them all.

Having fostered then adopted their youngest daughter, Rebecca is passionate about helping children in the foster system through her nonprofit, One October, which she co-founded with her husband in 2019. To learn more about their mission to better the lives of kids in foster care, visit www.oneoctober.org.

Also by Rebecca Yarros

Empyrean

Fourth Wing

Iron Flame

Flight & Glory

Full Measures

Eyes Turned Skyward

Beyond What Is Given

Hallowed Ground

The Reality of Everything

Renegades

Wilder

Nova

Rebel

Legacy

Point of Origin (Novella)

Ignite (Novella)

Reason to Believe

Muses and Melodies

A Little Too Close

**BEYOND
WHAT
IS GIVEN**

REBECCA

NO.1 SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

YARROS



PIATKUS

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*To Brody, my wild one.
You are the icing on my cupcake and my quiet
snuffle at the end of the day.
Our most precious treasure from Fort Rucker isn't
a pair of silver aviation wings,
it's you—our little gray-eyed wonder.*

Beyond What Is Given is an intense romance with a happy ending for Sam and Grayson. However, the story includes elements that might not be suitable for all readers. Sexual harassment, blackmail, drowning, car accidents, hospitalizations, medical treatment and procedures, paralysis, military service and deployment, and depictions of severe weather and disasters are all shown on the page or in flashbacks. Readers who may be sensitive to these elements, please take note.

CHAPTER ONE

SAM

What exactly was the protocol for leaving tampons in a guy's bathroom? A guy's freakishly neat bathroom, at that? Well, it was half mine now, so the pristine state wasn't going to last for long.

I opened and shut the cabinet door a few times, but the pink box stuck out like...well, a bright freaking pink box. Maybe I should have gotten a different box to put them in? *Are you seriously debating tampon placement?* I let the door stay shut and backed away from the cabinet slowly, like I'd planted evidence or something.

My makeup bag rested on the left side of the sink, but my lotions and army of haircare products I'd need to tame my unruly curls in the southern humidity consumed more than my allotted counter space and one of the newly emptied drawers. Yeah, it practically screamed *girl* in here.

Screw it, I lived here now, too, and so did my tampons...for all of twelve hours. I walked down the hall to my room, careful to tiptoe past my new roommate's door, and made it through mine, directly across from it. Just because I was up at six forty-five a.m. didn't mean he needed to be, and a rude wake-up wasn't the first impression I wanted to make.

"Time to get up!" Ember sang before she swung into my room, one hand behind her back. Best friend or not, she looked

way too happy for this early, glowing from the Alabama sun and things I didn't want to know about with her boyfriend, Josh. The boyfriend I now quasi-lived with, along with his best friend, Jagger, and the other guy, whose name I could never remember. Three boys. One girl. Well, there were awkward situations and there was *me*. Ember glanced around at the half-unpacked boxes. "Whoa. Did you sleep at all?"

"A few hours." *Barely at all*. "You're going to wake those guys if you're not quiet."

"Please. Grayson got home sometime last night and all three of them went running a half hour ago. Why do you think I'm already so perky?" Her smile gave far more information than I wanted.

Grayson. That's right. "They left already? They must be part ninja, because I didn't hear a thing. And as for you two, ugh. I swear. Ridiculous." *And enviable*.

She laughed in response and handed me the bag she'd kept behind her back. "Welcome to Alabama!"

"You live in Tennessee."

"Hey, as a part-time Alabamian...or whatever, I'm allowed to say welcome. Now take your present." She shook the silver gift bag.

I took it, tossing the crimson tissue paper onto a discarded pile of boxes, then holding up the maroon V-neck tee that spelled out TROY across the chest. A smile erupted on my face. "It's perfect, and I love it!" It had been so long since I'd felt happy that I almost didn't recognize the emotion.

"New start. New school. New shirt." She grinned and pulled me into a hug. "I know you don't start summer classes for another few weeks, but it seemed like a good day to give that to you."

I gave her a squeeze before I let go. "Thank you. Seriously. If it wasn't for you telling me to apply to Troy, or for Jagger offering to let me live here, or Josh helping me pack all that furniture..."

"That's what we're here for. Oh! I almost forgot." She pulled

a piece of paper from her pajama pants pocket. “Wi-Fi password. I know you have a Skype date with your mom. You ready for coffee?”

“Hell, yes. Is that even a question?”

“Never,” she answered, already headed down the hallway.

The apple reflected in my dresser mirror as I fired up my laptop. I connected to the Wi-Fi. “Flyboys. Of course,” I muttered with a laugh, and signed into Skype three minutes early.

She was already on.

The computer rang and I answered, Mom’s face coming into focus a few seconds later. She looked tired as she unzipped her multicam top and hung it over the back of her chair, leaving her in a tan T-shirt.

“Samantha, baby. How are you?” she asked with a wan smile. Her walls in Afghanistan were bare except for a framed picture of my high-school graduation.

“I’m good.” I propped my laptop against the dresser. “Halfway unpacked. How are you?”

“Long day here, but holding up just— What on earth are you wearing?”

I glanced down and back up at her. “Um...pajamas?” I had outfits that made these boxers and tank top look downright prudish.

“You cannot wear pajamas like that now that you live with men. Go buy some proper pajamas.”

“Or I could skip right to a bundling bag or a chastity belt, Mom.”

She gave me the *look*. “Don’t get smart. I’m only suggesting that you show a little less skin and a little more common sense.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I answered in song.

“Samantha.”

I sighed. “I’ll go today, Mom, but your whole theory is hugely antiquated.”

“Just make me feel better, okay? I’m already not too keen on

the boy roommates, or you shipping off to the middle of nowhere Alabama to go to college.”

“Well, this college said yes, unlike the other twenty I’ve applied to.” My fingers stroked across the silver lettering on my new shirt.

“And whose fault is that?” she barked.

My eyes snapped to hers. “You don’t think I know? I’m doing everything I can to make up for what happened. I got into a *real* college like you demanded, I’m on my own, and I’m looking for a job today. I can’t go back and change last year.” *I would if I could.* Regret was a nauseating constant in my life. “If I pull good grades, I might have a chance of getting back into Colorado for spring term.” *If I can face them.*

Her hands covered her face as she sighed. “I’m sorry. I hate you going through this when I’m not there.”

“I don’t need you to save me, Mom. I only need you to cut me a little slack.” An inch would be nice. Just once.

“Maybe I gave you too much slack to start with.” A knock sounded at her door. “Come in,” she answered, immediately straightening in her chair. I’d learned a long time ago that she was really two women, my mom and—

“Colonel Fitzgerald?” A nondescript head popped through her door.

Yup, *her*, Colonel Fitzgerald, my mother’s alter-ego.

“Captain, I’m talking to my daughter, can this wait?” Her tone implied so.

“No, ma’am, I’m sorry, but it can’t.”

“Then I’ll be right there.”

My shoulders dropped a little bit.

She turned back to me with her I’m-sorry-Sam smile. “Samantha, I’m—”

“Sorry,” I completed with a forced smile. “I know, Mom. Duty calls. Same time tomorrow? Maybe you want to chat about my class options?”

“That should work, baby. I’m so proud of you for pulling yourself back up. I have to go.”

“Bye.” I waved and clicked the little red button that ended our conversation. She drove me nuts, but it had always been just the two of us. She’d put herself through hell raising me while climbing ranks in the military, always looking up to Marcelite Harris, the first Black woman Major General. I had the distinct feeling she’d top her as the first Lieutenant General.

As long as I didn’t stand in her way.

My email *dinged*, updating from the last twenty-four hours I’d been offline. I passed over sale alerts and a couple personal items before I saw one with How Was Your Move as the subject line from Apoole@gmail.com. I clicked in curiosity and gasped.

*IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT STATE YOU MOVE TO. YOU’RE STILL
A WHORE.*

I deleted the email and slammed the screen to close the laptop, my pulse leaping. How far did I have to go to get away? You’d think after the last nineteen times this happened, I’d stop opening unknown emails. I’d even created a new email address, but then they started showing up in that one, too.

I brushed it off, or at least tried to. New day. New start. New School. Like Ember said. Would she feel the same way if she’d known what I’d done? I hadn’t even told my mother, just glazed it all over as bad grades and moved on. Some things were too ugly to let out into the light.

The hardwood floor was cool beneath my feet as I headed down the stairs to the kitchen. The morning looked nice and cool through the sliding glass door, but I’d already learned that there wasn’t much cool about southern Alabama in May. It was already hot, and about to get hotter.

There was no sign of coffee, or Ember, but there was a note: *Looks like the guys are out of coffee, go figure. I’ll grab some and come right back. I hope you had a good convo with your mom.*

As if on cue, my head started to pound, like it knew I'd denied it the caffeine it was sorely addicted to. I rubbed my temples and opened the cabinets slowly, taking stock of where everything was.

It was as neat as my bathroom had been before I moved in, everything in precise, spotless order. I couldn't remember Josh or Jagger ever being this clean. I opened the second top cabinet after the sink and glimpsed the coffee cups, and two shelves higher, a box of K-cups.

"Sweet salvation," I muttered, reaching on tiptoes but barely grazing the bottom of the shelf. Crap. I couldn't reach it. I dragged a chair across the tile and braced the back against the cabinets. Why the hell did they go all the way to the ceiling? Who were they expecting to put away the dishes? LeBron James?

Okay, this wasn't too high. I could do this. One knee at a time, I kneeled up onto the granite and reached with my fingers but still couldn't touch the coffee. I moved the drainer, where a few cups were drying, and gingerly stood up on the counter, grasping the center support of the cabinets so hard that the edges of the wood left imprints on my skin.

Keeping my death grip on the cabinet with one hand, I reached with the other until I had hold of the box. "Got it!" *Ha! Take that, LeBron.*

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

I jumped, but maintained my balance. *Good girl.* "Reaching for the coffee, what does it look like?" He stood to the side of me, dripping sweat, his massive, bare arms crossed over his even bigger chest. Holy shit. What did this guy do? Bench cows before breakfast and then eat them? By the time my eyes dragged themselves up the cut lines of his shiny muscles to his face, I was lightheaded. Breathing might have helped.

His jaw was cut and as strong as the rest of him, and those lips...well, if they weren't pursed together like he'd tasted something sour, I'm sure I would have been just as enthralled. His nose was as straight as the stick up his ass, but it was his

eyes... They were narrowed in suspicion, and the slate gray color cut straight through me. I'd never seen eyes that color before, that hypnotizing, or that serious.

He waved his hand in front of his face and shook his head. Crap. He'd been talking while I was ogling. "I'm going to crush his skull, I swear. Look, I don't know who you are, but I know you don't belong here."

"What?" I stepped back toward the dish drainer.

"Which one is it? Because they *both* have girlfriends. Great girls who don't deserve the shit storm you just dumped on them, so *which one is it?*"

The veins in his huge neck stood out.

"I have no clue what you're talking about." He was hot, but maybe a touch unstable?

"Jagger or Josh? Which one brought you home with them?"

My eyebrows puckered. "Both, I guess?" Something was way off.

"You're sleeping with both of them?" His voice echoed off the tile and ricocheted through my heart.

My head snapped back like he'd struck me. "What the hell gave you that idea?" I hugged the coffee to my chest in case the word *whore* had been tattooed across my boobs or something.

"You're barely dressed in my kitchen at seven in the morning." *My kitchen*, the eyes...this had to be Grayson. Holy hell, couldn't Josh have any ugly friends? My skin tingled where his eyes raked over my flesh, but he squeezed his eyes shut and took a deep breath. "You could at least put on some clothes. People live here."

Blood heated my face. Thank God my complexion didn't show the blush easily. "Yeah. People like me!" My chest tightened.

"What—"

"Why do you jump to the conclusion that I'm sleeping with them? Because I'm a girl in your kitchen on a Sunday morning? Let me tell you something, I don't care how hot you think you are—" I shook my finger and let go of the cabinet in the process,

taking another step away from him. “You don’t get to make assumptions about me!”

“Hey, Grayson—” Jagger called out, and I turned to look as he walked into the kitchen.

I squawked as my foot slipped in a puddle of water and I pitched forward. My knee slammed into the granite, and my balance shifted over the side of the counter...and into Grayson. He caught me without complaint, rolling me into his chest with one arm tucked securely under my knees and the other behind my back. We locked eyes, and something in me shifted from hot and angry to hot and...not so angry. *No. Don't you dare.*

He arched one dark, perfect eyebrow.

“What?” I fired out of self-preservation. “I’m not going to say thank you, if that’s what you’re waiting for. Not when you all but called me a whore.”

“I did not use that word!” His mouth dropped open. Yep. I was right. Those lips were full, soft, and way too close to mine.

Jagger laughed. “Well, I’m glad you two are getting acquainted.”

“What are you talking about?” Grayson fired back, his voice vibrating through my body.

“He’d like to know what the hell I’m doing in your house and which one of you I’m sleeping with,” I growled.

Jagger bit into an apple and swallowed, then let out an impossibly impish grin. “Sleeping with? Holy shit. No. Grayson, meet Sam, our new roommate.”

Thank God my feet were ready, because Grayson all but dropped me.

“Sam is a guy,” he said slowly.

“I most certainly am not.” He steadied me, his hands on my hips, and then nearly ran behind the breakfast table like he needed to fend me off with a chair. What. The. Hell.

“Obviously,” he replied, those silver eyes huge like I’d scared him.

“Why are you so surprised?” I blew an errant curl out of my eyes. *Oh God*. What if he didn’t want me here? Would Jagger let me stay?

“You never said Sam was a girl,” he accused Jagger.

Jagger chewed another bite. “Dude, Sam has always been a girl. You said you were cool with this.”

Grayson flipped out his phone and flicked through screens. “No. Let me read these. *‘Hey man, is it cool if our friend Sam takes the other bedroom? We’re old friends from Colorado, and Josh is cool with it.’*”

I took my prized K-cups to the machine. If I was putting up with this bullshit, I was sure as hell going to need coffee. “Yep, I’m Sam, short for *Samantha*, a.k.a. the friend from Colorado.”

“And you’re a girl.”

I tilted my head and smirked. “Apparently.”

“You’re not sleeping with either of them.”

“Nope.”

“And I just...” He squeezed those amazing eyes shut and took a breath before opening them again. “Samantha, I’m incredibly sorry for what I implied.”

Oh, look, he can apolo—

“But if you could put some clothes on, that’d be great.”

So much for him removing the stick from his ass. He nodded his head, pursed those beautiful lips, and retreated toward the front door, muttering something about the gym.

“What the hell is his deal?”

Jagger’s grin was a step past shit-eating to downright comical. “No clue, but that’s the most worked up I’ve ever seen the guy, and I’ve lived with him for almost a year. Way to go, Sam.”

“That’s not a compliment.” I spooned sugar into my steaming cup of coffee. “I really need to pick up honey, and please tell me you have creamer.”

“Ember lives here every other weekend,” he replied, moving past me to the fridge, then handed me a bottle of Amaretto creamer.

“Thank God for little things.”

“Sweet and blonde,” he commented with a wink. “Just like I like my women. Oh, a letter came for you yesterday. I left it on the entry table. Make yourself at home, and welcome to Alabama, Sam.”

He patted me on the back and left me sipping my coffee as I headed toward the front door. Sure enough, a letter addressed to Samantha Fitzgerald from Troy University sat on the polished wood.

I balanced my cup as I opened the letter, hissing as the skin of my thumb split. I popped it into my mouth and set my coffee down, opening the letter with my empty hand. The sweetest pressure settled in my chest as I unfolded it. This was my fresh start. This was my hope.

“Dear Ms. Fitzgerald,” I started to read along. Then stopped.
No. No. No.

How? They’d admitted me. They’d promised me a clean slate, that my grades from last semester wouldn’t matter. They would start me on academic probation and then let up when I did well this first semester.

“Sam?” Ember asked, balancing two cups of coffee as she stood in front of me. I hadn’t even registered her coming in. “Are you okay?”

Failure stung like a bitch. Oh wait, that was my thumb. “Shit.” I squeezed the skin, opening the paper cut, and almost laughed when I saw it wasn’t bleeding. Anything that hurt that badly should at least give you something to show for it.

Kind of like the last two and a half years I’d wasted in college.

My voice didn’t shake, or hold any tone. It was as numb as I was. “Upon further review of your transcript, we regret to inform you that we cannot accept you into Troy University.”

It doesn’t matter what state you move to. You’re still a whore.