

Hope
EVEN
After

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“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

Psalm 147:3

To those struggling with addiction, there is help and hope. You are created in God's image and are worth the battle for sobriety.

To those with loved ones mired in addiction or on the recovery journey, you are not alone. Find others to support you as you help your loved one through the dark valley.

Chapter One



With a deep inhale to fortify her patience, Daisy Taylor slammed the door of her Ford F-150. This was not the way she planned to spend her Sunday night. She wrapped the loose end of her scarf around her neck as she stalked across the grass. Frosted blades crunched under the hard soles of her cowboy boots as she moved toward the mass of rumped flesh and cloth in the middle of the otherwise tidy lawn.

“Lord, please.” Daisy blew out the prayer on a frustrated breath. “Help me.”

The acrid stench of alcohol and bile burned. Daisy swallowed hard against the assault on her own stomach. The last thing she needed was to add to the putrid mix. Breathing as shallowly as possible, she grasped what she thought was an arm and tugged until the figure sat somewhat upright.

“Luke Masters, what have you gone and done now?” She threw his muscled arm over her shoulder, put her own around his trim middle. She was a fit and active twenty-seven-year-old, but Luke had the extra bulk of a man who spent time at the gym. Bracing herself, Daisy lifted with her legs. Though his move-

ments lacked control, Luke wasn't completely dead weight. Good thing. He might have had to lie there in the cold.

Once he was standing, or rather leaning against her, she took a deep breath, instantly regretting it. How was it possible to taste a smell? When, in all of human history, would such a feat have been practical?

Never mind. There were more pressing matters. "What does 'last time' mean to you?"

"Daisy?" Luke squinted at her as his head swayed back unnaturally. "When did you get here?"

Those answers didn't matter either. He wouldn't pay attention in his current state, and he wouldn't remember later. He lifted fingers to her cheek in an awkward pat. She jerked away from his touch.

"What is the matter with you?" She struggled to direct their cumbersome steps toward the plain, little ranch-style house. "You could have frozen to death."

Alcohol and extreme cold did not play well with each other. And though spring was around the corner, early February in southern Illinois was temperamental enough to drop from sixty degrees to thirty in the time it took to take a breath. Luke wasn't even wearing a decent coat, just his stupid plaid jacket, which fit more like a heavy shirt.

What if he hadn't called?

His grin was mischievous. "You could always warm me up, darlin'."

Daisy fought the urge to drop him right there on the steps and march back to her truck even as her eyes burned with a sudden urge to cry. Thinking about all the drunken words he had spewed when he called brought heat to her cheeks despite the cold. These new ones added to the insult.

He didn't understand. Not even in his inebriated state would Luke have been so careless if he knew the truth.

"That's enough of that, fool boy."

“Not boy.” His jaw tightened as she opened the door and pulled him through. “Man. How long’s it been if you can’t tell the difference?”

She sucked in a deep breath and swallowed hard. The need to escape pressed in on her, and she nearly dragged him through the living room and down the hall to his bedroom. It was just the alcohol talking, but it still sliced deep. She’d have to bluff her way through this if she wanted to keep her emotions intact.

“You might look like a man, but you’ve got all the common sense of a toddler.” She plopped him unceremoniously onto the bed. “Pardon me for being confused.”

His hand tangled in her scarf, pulling it from her neck before he patted the mattress. “Join me? We can clear up your confusion.”

She leveled him with a glare before dropping to the carpet in front of him. *Get his shoes off and get him in bed.* She could accomplish the simple task. But a string of inappropriate comments about her proximity and what they might do brought her to her feet and sent her flying out of the room, his calls trailing her like the tail of a kite.

As the front door slammed behind her, Daisy sucked in a ragged breath and gave in to the sob she’d fought since she arrived. As if her emotional pain weren’t enough, the cold sent shards of ice into her lungs, releasing a cough that shook her to her core. Each cough allowed another gulp of freezing air to pierce her lungs. Crying and coughing her way to her truck, Daisy climbed in and turned the key. Warmth flooded the cab. Her head dropped to the steering wheel. The coughing eased. The sobbing continued.

“God, why?” She whispered. She refused to breathe the full question into existence as if it would change the truth. It didn’t matter. Spoken or not, it screamed in the silence. Why did she have to love someone she could never have a future with? And why couldn’t she extricate him from her life once and for all?



LUKE TIGHTENED his eyes against the onslaught of light streaming through his bedroom window. At least, he thought it was his bedroom. He cracked one eye open, just enough to see his dresser on the wall across from his bed. Mistake.

The slight movement added an extra row of percussionists to the band rocking out in his head. He shifted his gaze from the window bathed in daylight. Mistake number two.

He wasn't sure what he'd eaten the evening before, but any more movement and he'd get a clearer picture than he wanted.

A groan escaped. Thoughts whirled, but none long enough to grab hold of, and each one added to the nausea. The shrill ring of his cell phone made him forget the drummers in his head. Of course, they were replaced with a searing knife slicing through his gray matter. If any brain cells remained after the previous night.

He dug the phone from his pocket with as little jostling as possible. The small movement made his body hurt worse than an arthritic octogenarian on a rainy day. Squinting, he concentrated on the lit-up numbers and letters on the screen until they formed an all too familiar number. Dread joined the sea already churning in his gut.

Focusing on the time in the corner of the screen, Luke groaned. He should answer. But the Sahara had taken up residence in his mouth and throat. His boss could wait—or not. At the moment, he didn't care. Death was the only visitor he'd currently welcome. Considering how his body ached and the room tilted at the slightest provocation, death might have already come for him. He couldn't be sure.

With slow, deep breaths, Luke forced himself up to sitting on the mattress edge. A few more long inhales, and he was steady enough, he hoped, to open his eyes. Pain begged him to reconsider, but the sooner he made himself move, the sooner he would

reach the end of this misery. He needed a glass of water and a few ibuprofen, a shower, and a trip to the local drive-thru for a burger and fries or whatever greasy offerings filled the menu.

What was sticking out from under his bed? He reached down, fighting the room's sudden sway, and pulled Daisy's favorite scarf from its hiding place. Daisy. Now he understood how he got to his room. But why would she leave her scarf behind? He was the incapacitated one last night. Why didn't she look for it when it fell?

Unless ...

Another groan, this one brimming with frustration. What could he have said to run her off? Daisy had seemingly infinite patience, but he knew the truth. There were ways to push her to the breaking point. He could be ugly when he'd been drinking. Most people around him at those times didn't care and were just as mouthy. But considering the discarded scarf and the fact that he was fully dressed on top of the covers, including his shoes, whatever had taken place was far from good.

He'd need to deal with the fallout. But first, his anti-hang-over regimen. He needed clarity to figure out what he'd done and how to apologize this time. With answers and a ready defense, he'd call Daisy. No. Wait. He'd return his boss's call first. Beg forgiveness for his unexplained absence this morning. After smoothing things over at work, he'd deal with Daisy.