

Only, Always, Forever

A Hard Ink Bonus Story

By

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Nick Rixey walked into his bedroom and saw something that would never get old—
Becca Merritt in his bed.

In the dim glow of the bedside lamp, she lay curled on her side on top of the covers, her wavy blond hair sliding over her cheek and neck. One of his old gray Army t-shirts draped loosely over her upper body and hips, but her legs were bare.

He'd never seen anything sexier. And he'd never been more in love.

Hell, he'd never been in love before *at all*.

But since they'd met almost a month before, Becca had stood up for him, put herself in harm's way for him, and devoted herself to clearing his name. And along the way, she'd stolen his heart. Right after she'd put it back together again.

Nick hadn't thought any of that possible. Not given the anger he'd carried around since a roadside ambush in Afghanistan had killed half of Special Forces teammates, torn apart his own body, and ultimately resulted in his other-than-honorable discharge from the Army. He'd felt cold and hard and dark inside for so long. Until he'd found his Sunshine.

Standing in front of his closet, he took off his boots and stowed his gun in the safe. It was fucking crazy that he had to remain armed within his own home, but given the attack on their building early yesterday morning, they all had to be prepared for absofreakinglutely anything.

Which was why Nick needed Becca to know exactly where he was where she was concerned. He'd made the mistake of withholding information from her once before, and he'd never do it again. And, truth be told, yesterday's attack had put things in all kinds of perspective for Nick. A rocket launcher had taken out most of the roof on which he and his team had been

standing, and that near-miss had filled him with a big-time sense of urgency. No way was he taking the chance that something might happen to him without having said what needed to be said.

He'd told her he'd loved her before, of course, but tonight he really needed her to know just how much.

Crossing the room to the bed, Nick flexed his arms, feeling the sting of the new ink he'd gotten this afternoon. Since then, he'd been wound up like a top with the anticipation of surprising Becca with it, but he'd been so bogged down in securing the location around Hard Ink and managing a thousand other mission needs that he hadn't yet had the chance.

Nick sat on the edge of the bed and stroked his hand down Becca's thigh. Soft and smooth and warm. Part of him hated to wake her. It was after midnight and they'd all been going at full fucking tilt for weeks, so he knew she was exhausted.

She stirred before he had the chance to second-guess himself. "Hey, you" she said, her voice raspy and sexy as all hell. She stretched and shifted onto her back, and those beautiful blue eyes shined up at him with so much love that it reached inside his chest and just...owned him.

"Hey," he said, his gaze raking over her. If he'd thought her *voice* had been sexy, it held nothing compared to seeing her half-naked body sprawled out on his bed. Her movements had tugged up his shirt, exposing a pair of silky black panties. Nick shifted his position to accommodate his growing erection.

First things first, Rixey. Right.

"Sorry to wake you," he said.

Becca smiled, and it lit him up inside. His Sunshine.

“I’m glad you did. I didn’t mean to fall asleep. I was trying to wait up for you.” Becca grasped his hand and threaded her fingers between his. Her warm, sleepy eyes skated over him, making his blood run hot. “You coming to bed?” she asked. And damn if her desire wasn’t clear in her voice.

Nick nodded. “Yeah, but I want to show you something first.” His gut clenched in anticipation and, if he was being honest, nervousness, too. It wasn’t every day you declared your intentions to the woman you loved. Permanently. And on your very skin.

“Okay,” she said, pushing herself into a sitting position close to him. She leaned in and kissed him, and for a long moment, Nick lost himself in her softness, her heat, the utter fucking perfection of her love for him.

He was a lucky sonofabitch. And he knew it. Until the day he died, Nick would never know exactly what he’d done to deserve someone like Becca. All he knew was that he’d be grateful for it ‘til the very end. Because she’d saved him from a cold life of angry, bitter loneliness. He was sure of that down deep.

“Is everything all right?” she asked, pulling back from the kiss.

“Yeah,” he said. “Just, uh... Well, let me just show you.” He leaned back so that he didn’t hit her as he removed the long-sleeved shirt he’d worn all day to hide the ink.

He pulled his right arm out first, leaving the black cotton to cover most of his left arm, for now. Shifting toward her, Nick looked down at the tattoo that ringed his right biceps. The black silhouettes of seven men walking on the ground that connected them. Before today, there’d only

been six figures on that piece, but earlier he'd asked his brother Jeremy to add the seventh. "This was long overdue," Nick said in a quiet voice.

Confused, Becca's gaze scanned the tattoo, and Nick knew the moment she realized what he'd done. She gasped and her eyes went wide, then glassy. "Oh, Nick," she said. And hell if the thickness of her voice didn't make his eyes sting. Just a little. "You...added my father." Her fingers reached out toward the tattoo, but stopped just shy of touching.

"I'm only sorry I ever doubted him," Nick said. Her deceased father had been the commander of his Special Forces team, and for over a year, Nick had suspected him of being dirty. Believing Frank Merritt had betrayed him and the rest of their team had absolutely gutted Nick, because he'd admired the older man possibly more than anyone else in his life. All of that changed early this morning when they'd discovered new evidence that proved the colonel hadn't been corrupt. Instead, he'd been a double agent investigating the corruption that had crashed down on their team and taken them all out. For whom Frank had been working, they didn't yet know. What Nick *did* know was that his commander had been honorable until the end. "He deserved better than that. From me, of all people."

"Don't beat yourself up," Becca said, brushing her fingers through the side of his hair. A single tear ran down the side of her face. "It looked exactly like you thought it looked. What matters is that we now know the truth. And this—" She glanced down at the tattoo again. "—this is such a beautiful gesture, Nick. It means a lot to me that you even thought to do it given everything that's going on."

"It was important to me. From the moment we learned the truth, I'd just been..." He shook his head, his thoughts all tangled up with the guilt that had been dogging him all day.

“Jesus, Becca, he died trying to protect me and the guys. And I didn’t do anything to honor his sacrifice.”

“You’re doing it right now,” she said, scooting closer. “Clearing your name and nailing whoever was responsible for Dad’s death *is* honoring him. He’d be so proud of everything you’re doing.”

Aw, hell. Her words made his eyes sting even more. He blinked against the sensation.

“You really think that?”

“I know it,” she said with a fierce look. “Because I’m so proud of you that sometimes the size of it makes my chest ache.”

And that right there was one of the reasons he loved Becca so much. She always built him up, even when he couldn’t do it for himself, and it was *everything* to find that in another person. “Thank you,” he said.

She smiled. “Of course. I mean it, Nick.” She shifted onto her knees and wound her arms around his neck. “I love you,” she whispered as she leaned in for a kiss. Her lips were soft and warm against his. He cupped the back of her head and pulled her in tighter, taking control of the kiss and pouring everything he felt for Becca into it. Their tongues stroked and their lips pulled and tugged. Nick’s arousal came roaring back to life, his cock rock hard with desire and need.

But he had something else to do before he lost himself in her. “Wait,” he said, pulling away.

Becca grinned, her bottom lip almost pouty. “What for?”

He chuckled. “I have something else to show you.”

“Oh, God, there’s more?” She sat back on her heels.

“Yeah,” he said. “For you, always.” He yanked the shirt the rest of the way off his left arm, revealing a brand new tattoo on the inside of his forearm. A black tribal sun with jagged rays all around. An ornate letter *B* filled the center. For his Sunshine. Slowly, Nick raised his gaze to meet Becca’s.

She’d lifted a hand to her mouth, and it was shaking. Her wide blue eyes swam with tears as she stared at the sun. “I...I can’t believe... Nick, it’s...” She shook her head and looked at him. “You...did you do this for me?” she asked. The first tears spilled down her cheeks. Her brother Charlie had been in the room when Nick had the tattoo done, and he’d jokingly said to bring along a box of Kleenex when Nick showed it to Becca.

The memory made Nick smile. “Yes, this is for you, Sunshine,” he said, cupping the side of her pretty face in his hand and swiping at the tears with his thumb.

“But, it’s...you put my initial on your arm,” she said, her tone awed. Her gaze dropped to the ink again, and this time, her fingers did trace over the design. The tattoo was only half a day old, so her touch stung a little, but Nick wouldn’t have asked her to stop for the world. The tattoo was hers, after all. *He* was hers. “Permanently.”

“That’s exactly what I did,” he said. “Look at me, Sunshine.” Her gaze lifted to him. The love shining from her eyes made his heart feel too big for his chest. “The day you walked through the door to Hard Ink was the day I started coming back to life again. It was one of the best days of my life, even if I didn’t know it then. But I do now. Without you, I wouldn’t have found a way back to myself. I wouldn’t have let go of the anger that was eating me up inside. I might never have reunited with the guys. And I sure as hell wouldn’t have had the chance to

clear my name.” He swallowed around a lump in his throat. “But more than that, without you, I never would’ve known that the most meaningful thing you can do in this life is love someone. That realization was worthy of being remembered on my skin. Permanently. Because I already know I’ll love you forever.”

Becca had never been more overwhelmed in her entire life. Nor had she ever felt more loved. Nick had marked his body for her, and it was the most beautiful thing she’d ever seen. But it was his words that really did her in, because she felt the same exact way.

“I know I’ll love you forever, too, Nick,” Becca managed around her tears.

“Aw, don’t cry,” Nick whispered, his thumb swiping at her cheek. His pale green eyes were bright and open, and filled with so much love. For her.

She shook her head and wiped at her face with her hands. “They’re happy tears,” she said, shrugging and losing the battle to stop them from falling. “It’s just that no one has ever done anything this special for me. And no one has ever made me feel as special as you do. I was so lonely and alone after my father died and Charlie started to shut down. You not only rescued my brother, but you gave me a second chance to have a relationship with him. You gave me my family back, and you gave me a whole new family, too,” she said, thinking of Nick’s brother Jeremy, who Becca adored—and she suspected Charlie did as well.

But Nick had given her more than Charlie and Jeremy. He’d also given her the friendship of all his Special Forces teammates, men who’d known and fought beside her father. Each man represented a new link to her dad and everything he’d held dear. And that meant the world to Becca. Her life was fuller now than it had *ever* been. All because of Nick.

“Thank you for this,” Becca said, placing her hand on his arm and looking at the tattoo again. “And thank you for loving me.”

Nick pulled her into his arms. “Aw, Sunshine, it’s the best thing I’ve ever done.”

“Me, too,” Becca said, pressing a kiss against his ear. She melted against all his hard heat, loving the feel of his strong muscles holding her tight. Suddenly, an idea came to mind and Becca pulled away, leaned over to the nightstand, and opened the drawer. She grabbed a handful of the skin markers Nick had left there after drawing a guitar on her a few weeks before, then grasped his hand. “Come with me.”

His brow was arched in question, but he followed her across the room and into the adjoining bathroom. Becca turned on the light, dropped the markers on the counter, and shed her T-shirt and panties.

“I am fully on board with whatever’s happening right now,” Nick said, smirking as his hands settled on her naked hips.

God, she found that smug smile of his sexy. “Glad to hear it,” she said, running her gaze over his gorgeous body.

In addition to the two tattoos he’d revealed tonight, he had a large tribal covering his left shoulder, a Special Forces tattoo on his other biceps, and a series of words—a list of the core values of the U.S. Army—down the side of his ribs. In the reflection of the mirror, the dragon he wore on his back was visible. As was a big mass of scars. Becca forced her gaze away from him and her focus onto why she’d brought them in here.

Grabbing one of the markers, she turned to face the mirror, putting her back to Nick. “At some point, I’m going to have you do a real tattoo for me, but for tonight, I want to do this.” Nick had learned to do tattoos from his brother, but he didn’t work doing it often. He’d promised he’d do one for her sometime, though.

Becca uncapped the black marker and brought its tip to the pale skin over her heart. Glancing between her chest and the mirror, she carefully wrote five capital letters.

YOURS

A shiver ran through her as she lowered the pen and turned to Nick, and her pulse spiked at the heat absolutely blazing from those pale green eyes.

“You better believe it, Sunshine,” he rasped, lowering his head to capture her lips in a searing kiss. His hands burrowed into her hair, tugging her closer. Her naked breasts crushed against the taut muscle of his chest as his tongue swept deep into her mouth. His erection was obvious through his jeans, and desire lanced through her, making her wet and achy. “That’s the fucking sexiest thing I’ve ever seen.”

For just a moment, his gaze narrowed. Suddenly, he lifted her to sit on the bathroom counter.

“Actually, I just thought of something else,” he said, going to his knees. Nailing her with a hot stare, he put his hands on her thighs. “Spread for me.”

Those three words nearly had her panting, not to mention the image of him on his knees before her. Slowly, she opened herself as wide as her thighs could go.

Nick nodded and his gaze raked down over her breasts, her belly, her core. He grabbed her hips and slid her butt toward the edge, then pushed against her chest, forcing her to lean back against the mirror.

He grabbed the marker she'd dropped to the counter and scooted closer, bringing those broad shoulders between her thighs. Resting his arm on her leg, he leaned in close with the marker and started writing high, *high* up on her inner right thigh.

Her muscles braced against the dragging sensation, and she bit back laughter.

“Be still,” he said, gaze trained on whatever he was drawing. And *damn* was he sexy whenever he drew. Focused and serious, with his tongue occasionally flicking out against his bottom lip.

“It tickles,” she said, trying really damn hard to remain still. She leaned up a little and tried to see around his hand.

“*Becca,*” he said, voice deep and intense. The warning made her grin, despite the fact that she was so freaking turned on that he could probably see her wetness if he drew his gaze a few inches to the right. After a few torturous minutes, he sat back and studied his handiwork.

What he'd written sent her pulse racing even harder. In all block letters, three words marked her skin in black up near where her inner thigh met her core.

ONLY

ALWAYS

FOREVER

“Yeah,” he said to himself, and then he leaned in over her left thigh.

This time, it didn't take him as long. When he leaned back, he looked from one thigh to the other. Much bigger than the grouping of three words, he'd written,

MINE

Becca gasped and heat rushed over her skin. "Only, always, forever, Nick." She held out her hand, silently asking for the pen. When he gave it to her, she placed its tip against her lower belly, just above the blonde hair there, and wrote the same word again.

YOURS

When she was done, she tossed the pen to the counter.

"Fuck, yeah," he growled. Without another word, without any warning, without *mercy*, his hand came down on top the word she'd written and his mouth came down on her pussy. Using his fingers to open her core to his lips and tongue, he licked and sucked her with a ferocity that had her shaking and moaning and panting.

One of her hands fisted in his longish chocolate brown hair, pushing his mouth more firmly against her wetness. He groaned his approval.

"Oh, my God, Nick," she rasped, arousal and need winding tighter and tighter inside her body. But before she lost herself, there was one more thing she really wanted to do. With a shaky hand, she found another marker, the red one this time, and wrote her claiming of him against the bare skin of his right shoulder.

MINE

The way he was eating her made it impossible to be careful, of course, but the writing made up for in size what it lacked in neatness. The letters were big enough that they filled the space between his shoulder bone and his neck. And, *fuck*, the word looked so freaking hot marking his skin.

“You’re mine, too,” she said, dropping the marker into the sink.

He didn’t let up to respond. Instead, he pressed his face in tighter and sucked her clit into his mouth, and then he quickly flicked his tongue against it until she was screaming and pulling his hair and bowing against the mirror. Even then, he didn’t let up. He made her come three times like that. The room spun around her and she saw fuzzy stars around the edge of her vision.

“Holy shit, Nick,” she whispered. It was all she was capable of. She released her grip on his hair and stroked at it as he finally lifted his mouth from her.

Masculine satisfaction rolled off him as he licked his lips. “Not even close to being finished,” he said, voice full of gravel.

Slowly, he rose to his feet and shucked off his jeans and boxers. His cock jutted out toward her, hard and thick and veined. He turned to stand between her thighs and took himself in hand, nailing her with a hard, sexy, needful stare.

Becca nodded, answering his unasked question. “Just like this, skin on skin.” She was on birth control, and she didn’t want anything between them. Not tonight. Not ever again.

He lined his cock up at her center and slid home.

“*Fuuck*,” he bit out, his gaze trained on where he penetrated her. His hands grasped under her knees, lifting and spreading her legs for his invasion. “Aw, yeah. That looks fucking good.”

She followed his gaze, looking from his cock to the words he'd written on her inner thighs to the word she'd written just above her pussy. "Yes, it does," she whispered, watching him slide out and sink deep again. Again and again. "So good." The angle had the head of his cock hitting a sensitive spot inside her that had her moaning and sent her soaring. She just might die if he made her come again. Scratch that, *when* he made her come.

So worth it.

Nick shifted his stance, closing the space between them even more. He let one of her legs drop and braced his free hand on the mirror over her shoulder. The position forced him to lean over her and caused his hips to grind into her clit every time he sank deep.

Becca cried out, and Nick claimed her mouth in a hot, aggressive kiss. He hammered into her, his hips snapping on punctuated thrusts that shoved her closer and closer to blissful oblivion. Even when their lips parted, Nick stayed close, his forehead against hers, their rasping breaths mingled. His eyes bored into hers, and it was possibly the most intimate moment of her life.

"I'm gonna come in you," he gritted out.

"Yes," Becca said.

"Make you mine inside and out," he said, the angles of his face sharpening as his release closed in on him. His hips moved faster.

"I already am," Becca said.

Nick's expression went tense, and then he groaned, "Fuck, coming." He moved through the orgasm, and the pulsing of his cock inside her was one of the sexiest things she'd ever felt.

Seeing his pleasure was her undoing, despite the fact that he'd already made her come so many times. "Don't stop," she cried, her release bearing down on her but still just out of reach.

He fucked her harder and grinded his hips against hers on every thrust.

Becca hung on the edge for a long moment, and then her body detonated, flinging her higher and higher until all she felt, all she saw, and all she *knew* was Nick.

When they finally stilled, she wrapped her arms around his neck and held him to her, not wanting him to pull away, not wanting even an inch of space to ever separate them.

She wasn't sure how long they stood that way, but after a while, her skin cooled and she shivered.

Nick leaned back and slipped free of her. He cupped her face in his hand and looked deep into her eyes. "Fucking love you," he said, a small smile playing around his lips.

She grinned. "Fucking love you, too."

Nick threw back his head and barked out a laugh. Laughter always made his face look younger and carefree, so she adored giving him a reason to do it—especially given the mountain of stress he carried around with him about their investigation. He felt personally responsible for every person living at Hard Ink right now, and it was one of the things she loved about him.

Someday, he's going to make an amazing father.

The thought was so unexpected, it nearly made Becca gasp. But the truth of it settled deep down into her soul. Because he totally would.

The smile faded from his lips and his expression went serious and intent. So much love radiated from his pale eyes that it made her heart pang with the beauty of it. "The ink on my arm

isn't the only thing I want to make permanent, Becca. When all of this is over," he said quietly, "I'm gonna do right by you. By us. But when we start making plans for the future, I don't want all this hanging over our heads. You know?"

Her belly flip-flopped at the promise of his words. She brushed her hands against both sides of his head, stroking at his hair just like he liked. "Yeah," she said. "But you already do right by me, Nick. Don't ever doubt it."

His jaw ticked and he finally nodded. "You're the best part of me, Sunshine. Never gonna let you go."

Becca kissed him once, twice. "You won't ever have to. I'm yours, remember? Only, always, and forever."