

Little M

A Hard Ink Short Story



By Laura Kaye

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“How the hell is this my life, Little M?” Beckett Murda whispered into the darkness, his face pressed to his wife’s impressively huge belly, his hand holding one of hers as she slept. Not even a year ago, Beckett had expected solitude, loneliness, the low hum of dissatisfaction, and anger – *always* anger – to be his constant companions. He *never* would’ve expected all this—a girlfriend, a baby coming any second now, being reunited with his teammates, working with them every day – again – in a new security company they ran together.

Love. Love, he never expected at all. Some days, he still struggled to believe he deserved it. But he was working on it, that was for damn sure. Because Katherine Rixey and this kid sure as hell deserved the best he could give them, and so much more.

He stroked his thumb over Kat’s bare knuckles. No matter how much he hated to wake her, he couldn’t wait even another second.

Moving as quietly as he could, he retrieved the ring he’d bought months ago out of his nightstand drawer. It had been burning a hole in his pocket every day since, and he’d only held back because Kat had said she didn’t want to get married *just because* she’d gotten pregnant.

As if that would ever have been the reason for him. He fucking *bled* for her.

Exactly what a man did for the woman who’d given him a life worth living.

He gently slipped the diamond on Kat’s ring finger and grinned when she shifted onto her back. If he had to wake her up, he figured she deserved to find his face between her legs when he did it...

She was wearing one of his T-shirts, and he pushed it over the mountain of her stomach. Dropping kisses against her belly as he got himself into position, he finally placed one against

her mound before pulling the satiny fabric of her panties aside and kissing her skin to skin. And tongue to skin. And teeth to skin.

Kat came awake on a gasp. “Oh, God, Beckett,” she rasped, her voice roughened by sleep and arousal. “Take them off.” She tugged at the band of satin on her hip.

Once he did, he settled himself between her spread thighs and absolutely feasted on her. Licking, sucking, penetrating her with his tongue until she was writhing and holding the back of his head with her hands and coming apart in his. He didn’t stop. He eased two fingers inside her and sucked her clit into his mouth, teasing it with suction and flicks of his tongue. She rode his hand and his face, her moans echoing against the midnight darkness of their room and making him almost painfully hard.

Goddamn, he loved eating her. Nothing gave him more pleasure than Kat finding hers because of him.

“Beck, oh shit, a-again, I’m...” Her release squeezed his fingers where they moved inside her, and he lapped up everything she gave him, satisfaction a stalking beast inside him. Finally, she lay limp on the bed.

Well, he was almost satisfied, anyway.

He knelt between her knees and rubbed his hands over her soft, bare thighs.

“Hi, there,” she said, humor and affection plain in her voice.

“Hi,” he said, nerves suddenly sending his pulse into a sprint. It was possible that he’d been less nervous facing down warlords, ambushes, high-ranking Army brass investigators who erroneously thought he was corrupt, and his own abusive father. For fuck’s sake.

“What was that for?” she asked.

“Since when do I need a reason to make you feel good, Angel?” he asked. It was a good question, but not the one he needed to be asking. “Kat, I—”

A sudden gasp. “Beckett. Beckett, what— Turn on the light.”

He reached over her to the lamp, and a golden glow suddenly flooded the room.

Kat burst into tears. She was staring at the ring, her hand right in front of her face.

Crying.

His stomach dropped. Damn it all to hell. She wasn't ready. He'd pushed, and she wasn't. He ignored like a *motherfuck* the little voice that said maybe she didn't want him. Because he knew that voice was a liar. He knew Kat, and he believed in her like he'd never believed in anyone. Maybe not even his brothers-in-arms, and that was saying something because he trusted those assholes with his life. “Kat—”

With surprising strength, she grasped him by the face and pulled him down for a kiss that stole whatever minute piece of his heart she hadn't already owned. Because that kiss wasn't a *no*.

“Marry me,” he managed around the kiss. “Please marry me.” His hands tangled in the long waves of her dark brown hair as he pulled back enough to peer into her brilliant green eyes. “I loved you before I even knew I was capable of the emotion, Kat. Building a life with you is the only thing I want, and Little M is a part of that. But I don't want you because of the baby, I want you because you're smart and feisty and compassionate and brave and beautiful. And because you gave back to me pieces of myself I thought were lost. So, marry me.”

New tears leaked from the corners of her eyes. “I will,” she said. “Nothing would make me happier than being yours. And having you as mine.”

“Say it again,” he said, elation making him a little light-headed. “Say it again, Angel.”

She cupped the back of his head in her hand. “I will marry you, Beckett Murda. Because I’m so in love with you I can’t imagine any other life than being at your side forever.”

“Fuck, I love you, too.” He rested his forehead against hers and chuckled, though the words that followed were maybe more true than he should admit. “You scared the shit out of me.”

“Hey,” she said, nailing him with a serious stare. “You never have to fear me not wanting you. We’re family, Beckett.”

“Family,” he whispered, the word lodging a knot of emotion in his throat. He gave a single nod and found himself having to blink a little.

As if she knew he needed a breather from having bared his insecurities, she smiled. “And this ring is amazing, Beckett. I love it so much.”

He smiled. “I wanted it to be perfect for you.”

“Well, it is. Though what makes it perfect is that you picked it out for me.” She looked at it again, her smile pleased and so damn pretty that it hit him right in the center of the chest. “The only thing that would make it better—” Her hand snaked between them and palmed his half-hard erection over his boxers. “—was if this was inside me. Like, now.”

He was hard again in an instant, his hips giving a thrust against the friction her palm provided. “Is that right?”

She smirked, and even that was sexy. Always had been. Even when he still thought all the tension between them was actual fighting and irritation, not the soul-deep, bone-bending sexual attraction it truly was. “When am I not right, Murda? Now, how do you want to fuck your wife-to-be? Should I ride you or bend over?”

“Jesus,” he muttered. And he thought he’d been hard before. Never let it be said that Kat Rixey beat around the bush, and he loved that about her. Loved *so many* things. “You being my wife can’t happen soon enough.” He shoved off his boxers and lay on his back. “Get your sexy ass up here.”

Grinning, she shifted onto her knees. She had her shirt nearly over her head, revealing breasts that pregnancy had turned absolutely luscious, when she yelped.

“What?” he asked, shooting up.

Her expression was a mask of surprise and shock as she peered down herself. “Um. I think my water just broke.”

Their gazes collided, and then Beckett’s brain clicked into total operations mode.

He was off the bed in a second. Dressed within another thirty seconds. And helping Kat to the bathroom immediately after that. Then he called the doctor, whose number he had programmed into his phone. Given the gunshot wound she’d suffered last year and the repair to her heart that had been required because of it, they were taking special precautions during the delivery to ensure that her heart rate stayed controlled.

Phone pressed to his ear, he brought Kat the going-to-the-hospital outfit she’d set out. He found her bent over, hands braced against the counter, a low moan spilling from her mouth.

Their gazes met in the mirror.

“Contraction. I guess. Holy shit, Beckett. Little M’s coming tonight.”

Beckett grinned, even though on some level he was freaking the fuck out. Kat and this baby meant everything to him, and the possibility – however tiny it might’ve been – that anything could happen to either of them threatened to rip him up inside. But he couldn’t let that

show. So he covered the phone receiver, winked, and joked. “He is. And he totally cock-blocked me.”

She guffawed and then her eyes went wide. “Oh, my God. We can never tell anyone that we were about to have sex when my water broke! Promise you’ll never tell that story.”

“Aw, Angel, come on—”

“I will *kill* you dead, Murda. I swear. This kid can never know that. Oh, my God. My brothers...” She shook her head. “Kill. You. Dead.”

He answered the last of the doc’s questions and hung up. “Well, I’m sure as shit not telling Nick. Now, Jeremy...” Beckett shrugged. “He’d be cool.”

“Yeah, except freaking Jeremy would spill to Nick and then another Rixey would be killing you dead. See the problem?” She gave him a look.

He kissed her cheek. “You do realize that Nick might’ve guessed that we had sex already, right?” That he could be so blasé about it showed just how far they’d come. Once he’d nearly swallowed his tongue just asking his former teammate for the guy’s blessing to date his sister. It was a catastrophically botched conversation that their other teammates, Marz and Shane, had witnessed—and neither one of those assholes ever let Beckett forget what a mess he’d made of it.

Nick said yes in the end, though, so that was all that mattered to Beckett.

Tugging on a pair of stretchy pants, Kat glared.

He bit back the smile that threatened, and held up his hands. “Don’t worry. We’ll say we were having a great philosophical debate. Or reading *War and Peace* together. Or doing...something else totally respectable that doesn’t involve my cock and your vagina.”

“You’re ridiculous,” she said, putting on a big, soft sweater.

Beckett pulled her into his arms. “That’s your fucking fault, Angel.”

Her expression softened. “How you figure that?”

“Because that’s what love freaking does to a man.” He feigned the annoyance in his tone.

Truth was, he didn’t mind. Not one bit.

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “I really do love you.”

“I love you, too.” He sealed the declaration with a long, slow kiss that belied the way his heart was going all jumping-jack in his chest. Because he was about to become someone’s father. And that thought was more than a little terrifying, starting with Kat having to push a human being out of her body and ending with eighteen years of being something to someone for which he’d had the worst possible role model ever. “Now, I gotta call your brothers and we gotta go.”

She waved him out of the bathroom, and he collected their respective go-bags and threw them over his shoulder, and then he pressed the cell to his ear again.

A sleepy growl of a voice came down the line. “Rixey here.”

“Nick. How’d you like to become an uncle tonight?” Beckett asked, grinning like an idiot, especially when he was a hundred percent certain he’d just heard Nick jump out of bed.

“Shit. Kat’s in labor?”

“The baby’s coming?” came a woman’s voice from the background of the call. Nick’s wife, Becca Merritt Rixey, a nurse and the reason their whole Army Special Forces team had reunited almost a year ago. “Is she okay?” Nick relayed the question, concern clear in his tone. They were all worried about Kat’s heart, even though the doc had reassured them a hundred times.

“Her water broke about ten minutes ago. So far, so good. I called the doc. We’re about to fly, so I’ll see you there?” When Nick agreed, Beckett hung up and dialed Jeremy.

“Talk to me, Baby Daddy,” Jeremy said by way of answering.

“I would except this baby’s about to make me a daddy,” Beckett said. “We’re leaving now.”

“Dude! That means I’m about to become the world’s best uncle.” He laughed. “Charlie and I are right behind you,” Jer said, referring to Becca’s brother, who also happened to be the love of Jeremy’s life. Anyone could see that. “Tell Kat I love her. I’ll let everyone else know.”

Together, the calls had taken less than a minute, so Beckett turned to find Kat coming out of the bathroom, all ready to go. And damn if she wasn’t sexy as all hell, strong and fierce and fearless, and about to bring their baby into the world. He helped her on with her coat and then they were on their way. Out their apartment door in the newly reconstructed part of the Hard Ink building, down the elevator, and out into the cold March night and Beckett’s truck. He helped her up and then got behind the wheel, and then he had one last call to make.

To his best friend, Derek DiMarzio. Marz, for short.

“B? You okay?” the guy answered groggily.

Marz had been the one to lose his leg in the ambush that had made all of their lives go sideways, yet the guy never stopped worrying about Beckett. “On the way to the hospital,” he said, knowing Marz would hear everything he *wasn’t* saying—the worries, the fears. “Kat’s water broke.” He pulled out of the lot and drove through the largely abandoned industrial neighborhood where Jeremy’s Hard Ink Tattoo—and now their security business—was located. When he hit the straightaway, he floored it.

“Little Murda is about to rock your world, hoss! You ready?” Marz asked.

“Guess we’re about to find out,” Beckett said, shaking his head at the enthusiasm in his friend’s voice. The guy was set on happy-happy-joy-joy a good ninety percent of the time. Not that Beckett complained when the fucker once saved his life.

“Em and I are on the way. And B? You got this.”

They hung up, and Beckett appreciated the sentiment. He really did.

“You doing okay?” he asked Kat, taking her hand.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry,” she said, suddenly blowing out through her mouth.

“Worrying is *literally* part of the parent job description.” Like what he was doing just then as another contraction hit her. Her being in pain was going to kill him. That it was natural didn’t matter, not when he loved her, and not when he’d once nearly lost her. He’d already seen Kat in the hospital enough to last a lifetime, thank you very much. “I would fucking do this for you if I could.”

Suddenly, a red and blue flashing light appeared ahead at the intersection. And then Beckett recognized the car. It belonged to Detective Kyler Vance, a friend of Nick’s with whom the whole team had gotten tight after he’d joined the fight to clear their names last year.

A text popped up on his phone. *One police escort, at your service. Tell Kat to hang in there.*

Beckett flashed his headlights, appreciating the hell out of whoever called the guy. Because they absolutely flew through the city. The minute the hospital came into view, Beckett’s stress ratcheted down a notch or two. “Almost there, Angel.”

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They were just getting to the hospital, and the night had already been utterly mind-blowing. Kat was engaged to be married. Her water had broken. And she was in labor.

And that was to say nothing of the amazing orgasms Beckett had given her! The thought might've made her laugh if another contraction hadn't picked that moment to grip her belly.

Beckett pulled into the brightly lit carport of the emergency department, then ran around to her door to help her out. The expression on his handsome face was equal parts in-control soldier man and about-to-lose-his-shit Beckett, and she adored both sides. Because both were born of his protectiveness, his concern, his loyalty. His love, for her and this baby.

She braced her hands on his massive shoulders until her feet were safely planted on the pavement—something she had to be careful of because she couldn't actually see her feet these days. Startlingly blue eyes looked at her, and she could tell he was trying to figure out if she was really okay. And she was. She really, really was. Because this life she had—with Beckett, but also the new best friends she'd found in Becca, Emilie, Sara, and Jenna, and the whole huge family she now had in the whole Hard Ink team—it was so much more than she ever would've hoped for. “Let's go have us a baby, Beckett.”

He nodded, a little smile playing around his mouth. When they'd first met, he rarely smiled. Now, he did it more and more, and she adored every one, especially when he said sweet things like what came out of his mouth next. “Can't wait to meet him. Or her,” he said.

She didn't doubt he meant it, either, despite the fact that the pregnancy hadn't been planned. But Beckett had never been anything but awed and ecstatic about the baby. And both reactions had allowed the big lug of a man to own her even more than he already had.

It didn't take too long until Kat found herself in a mint-green labor and delivery room, storks and baby animals on the walls. They had a fetal monitor strapped to her watermelon of a belly, heart monitors stuck on her chest, and an epidural administered to control pain—and thereby maintain a more even heart rate.

After spending the better part of a week in the hospital last spring, Kat hadn't been in any rush to return. But of all the reasons that could've brought her back, this was the absolute best.

She couldn't wait to meet Little M. Would the baby be a boy or a girl? Would he have Beckett's incredible blue eyes or her bright green? His dark blond hair or her chocolate brown? Kat couldn't decide which would melt her heart more—seeing Beckett meet his son or hold his little daughter. Actually, both were likely to bring tears to her eyes.

Kat was going to be entirely happy no matter who this little baby was. Because she would be a part of them both.

“I suppose we need to nail down the boy names now. We're almost out of time,” Kat said between contractions. They'd narrowed it down to two – both names Beckett liked because they honored some of the most important men his life. But they hadn't gotten any further than that – and none of the others knew what they were considering. They wanted it to be a surprise whichever way they went. “Derek or Merritt? Which will it be?”

Sitting at her bedside, both of his big hands holding one of hers, Beckett shook his head. “I'm torn. Derek saved my life, but Frank Merritt—and his daughter, Becca—are what brought us all together. We would never have met if it weren't for the Merritts.”

She loved both names equally for the exact same reasons, though, of course, she had a giant soft spot for Marz. Because, who *couldn't* love Marz? “Maybe we should wait until the baby's born. If it's a boy, we might know which is right when we meet him.”

He pressed a kiss to her knuckles. “Whatever this kid is, I hope it gets your brains. That's a plan.”

If it was a girl, it was easy. They were honoring Kat's mother, who'd died in a car accident a few years ago, with an updated version of her name, Adele. The baby would be called Addison. Addie for short, just like her mom.

Hours passed. She dozed. Family and friends came and went, allowing them to share the news of their engagement, too.

Nick and Becca brought flowers. And watching Nick and Beckett embrace when Nick learned that Beckett had proposed—like the brothers they were now truly going to be—had brought tears to Kat's eyes. Becca's, too, who'd once seen the two men come to blows in Nick's apartment back at the very beginning. The guys had come a long way. They all had.

Jeremy and Charlie brought a stuffed dog and a stuffed cat for the baby—ones they'd doctored such that the dog had a missing leg and the cat had a missing eye. They said the baby needed stuffed versions of Eileen and Cy, the stray animals the team had adopted back in the middle of the investigation. Leave it to Jeremy to actually cut up and re-sew stuffed animals!

But it made Kat laugh, something that Jeremy absolutely excelled at doing. His T-shirt was more proof of that. On the front, it read, *This is what a BADASS uncle looks like* with a skull and crossbones in the middle. And on the back, in what Jeremy said was a twofer of awesomness, it read, *FUNCLE! The fun relative!*

He'd been collecting uncle-inspired T-shirts for months. *Unclesaurus Rex. I'm the crazy uncle everyone warned you about. Uncle: Like a dad, only cooler.* He said that her getting pregnant had opened up a whole new T-shirt avenue for him.

For his part, Charlie's T-shirt reflected his killer deadpan humor. It read, *World's Okayest Uncle.* Kat loved what an amazing match Jeremy and Charlie were, and she'd adored watching

them get closer and closer and make plans for a life together. And the fact that both of her brothers had found love with a Merritt was yet another argument for *that* name.

Marz and Emilie had been the last of the visitors—Marz carrying a three-foot tall stuffed teddy bear, because he said if having a baby wasn't an occasion for such a thing, he didn't know what was. The couple joked maybe they'd all make Marz and Emilie's wedding, planned for June, a double, now that Kat and Beckett were finally engaged. And then Kat's heart had started doing a bit more of a jig than the doctor was happy with, so he upped her meds and suggested no more visitors until the baby was born.

Kat had agreed right away, because the more her heart stayed under control, the less chance they'd end up in an operating room to bring Little M into the world. And Kat really didn't want that. Not if they could avoid it. So she worked on breathing. And meditating. And listening to the deep rumble of Beckett's voice.

And then, finally, it was time.

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Beckett had only witnessed such strength one other time in his life—when Marz had cracked jokes as he lay on a desert floor bleeding out from the stump of a blown-off limb. And Kat was giving the guy a run for the money as she breathed her way through labor. Never complaining. Never giving up. Staying as calm as she could to keep her heart rate down.

Meanwhile, on the inside, Beckett was a fucking nervous wreck. Every groan, every bead of sweat on her face, every time her knuckles went white, he felt like he was going to come out of his skin for the want of making this better for her. But this wasn't about him, and so he did the one thing he could do—support Kat.

“You got this, Angel. Doing so good. Little M is going to be such a lucky kid getting you for a mother.”

She gave him a smile as she sagged back against the bed.

“Remember what you told me? About how your mom had the tradition of having the ice cream parties? I want us to do that, too. I want us to have so many things for our kids like your mom did for you and your brothers.”

She nodded. “You remember that?”

“Aw, hell, Kat. I remember everything.”

“Okay,” the doctor said. “I see the head. One more push, Kat, and the baby will be here.”

Beckett’s gut squeezed with anticipation and fear for her. This moment was the most dangerous for her heart.

“Let’s just take it real slow,” the doc said.

Kat nodded, and then the contraction hit. She bore down, grit and determination on her beautiful face.

The heart monitor spiked. As did Beckett’s pulse.

And then the doctor grinned. “Baby’s out. Ten fingers and toes.”

An infant’s cry filled the room, and they all laughed and cried and celebrated as they weighed and took care of the baby—all eight pounds, eight ounces.

Kat collapsed back onto the bed and Beckett kissed her sweaty forehead. “You did it, Angel.”

As they looked on in wonder, the doctor placed the baby on Kat’s belly and rubbed him down. Him.

He had a son.

“Oh, Beckett. It’s a boy,” she said, awe plain in her voice.

He could barely utter a word. The nurse wrapped the baby in a blanket and helped Kat put him to her breast. Him.

He had a son. With blue eyes and a shock of chocolate brown hair.

“Derek,” he whispered, his soul already knowing who this little man was. “Derek Rixey Murda.” His gaze collided with Kat’s.

Her eyes glassy with tears of joy, she nodded. “Derek Rixey Murda is perfect.” Stroking the baby’s face, she peered down at him with so much love. “Hi, Derek. We love you so much.”

God, Beckett did. He loved this baby in an instant. “We do,” he said, his throat thick with emotion. “We love you, Derek. And we’re going to take such good care of you.”

A few moments later, he texted Nick and Jeremy. *It’s a boy and mom and baby are great*

He was leaving the name for a surprise.

After that, the three of them stayed close for a long while, just sharing the first moments of being a family, and it was the first time in maybe his whole life that Beckett really felt like he belonged somewhere. But he knew into his very marrow that he did. He would always love them, and always protect them, and he’d sure as hell give them the life his own father never gave to him and his mother.

That was a promise he’d take to the grave.

Finally, the nurse needed to take Derek away for some tests, and Beckett went with him. But before he left, he gave Kat a kiss he hoped expressed how grateful he was to her—for loving him, for giving him a son, for giving him a *life*. “Be right back, Angel. Rest up. You earned it. I love you.”

“I love you, too, Beckett,” she said with a smile. “Take good care of him.”

“With my life, Kat. Never doubt it.”

When they returned from the tests, Beckett found Kat dozing off, so he took the opportunity to slip out into the waiting room to share the news in person.

The whole group rose to its feet when Beckett entered the room, congratulations rising up all around—both for the baby and the engagement—and everyone hugging him.

“You have a son, man, congratulations,” Nick said.

“What’s his name?” Jeremy asked.

“Dude, your someone’s *dad*,” Derek said, passing out cigars.

“But what’s his name?” Jeremy asked again.

“Congratulations, B,” Easy said. “You’re gonna be great.”

Shane stepped up next. “With you as a dad and all of us as uncles, this kid’s set for life.” They clasped hands, and Beckett appreciated the hell out of the idea that the baby would have all of these fine people on his side.

“Damn, bro, you’re killing me. What’s his freaking name?” Jeremy asked again, making everyone laugh.

Beckett grinned. “Little M’s name...” His gaze scanned the room, and settled finally on his best friend. “...is Derek Rixey Murda.”

Marz’s face froze in a grin, and then it slowly slid off his face. And damn if the guy’s eyes didn’t get glassy. Smiling up at him, Emilie rubbed his back until Marz could finally speak. “Shit, B. Seriously?”

Beckett walked up to him and nailed him with a stare. “A hundred percent. Without what you did, I wouldn’t have been here to meet Kat or start this family. And Little D will always know what you did for me.”

Marz swallowed hard and blinked a lot, and then they shook hands and ended up hugging it out. Then Marz chuckled. “Little D is my new favorite person.”

Tears filling more than a few eyes, everyone laughed.

“Mine, too,” Beckett said, making another round to shake hands again.

And then he found himself anxious to get back to Kat and Derek’s sides. They were both awake and staring at one another when he returned to the room. The bond between them already so apparent.

Kat smiled his way when he walked in, and damn if that didn’t light him up inside.

“What did they say?”

“Everyone sends their love. The name was a big hit. Marz...well, it meant a lot to him,” Beckett said, pressing a kiss to Kat’s head. “Do you think...would it be okay if I held him?”

“He’s your son, Beckett. He would love nothing more.”

Heart kicking up in his chest a little, he rounded the bed to the little bassinet and lifted the little bundle into his big arms. *God*, he was tiny. He weighed nothing at all. But he was so perfect. With a dimpled chin and apple cheeks and crazy brown hair sticking up.

He was going to be a handful. A little terror, just like Beckett had been. And smart as a whip like Kat, which probably just meant more trouble.

And that was all perfect.

A pair of little blue eyes peered up at him.

And, shit, he was owned. Completely and utterly.

“Hey, Little D. I’m your dad.” Bouncing him gently, he walked back to the chair next to Kat’s bed. “I promise I’ll try not to be a hard ass. But if I screw up, you have about a hundred uncles who will keep me in line.”

“You’re going to be great, Beckett,” Kat whispered, such love in her eyes as she watched them together. “We’re going to screw up. Both of us. But we’re going to love him, and we’ll fix our mistakes. And it’ll all be okay.”

He nodded. “So much more than okay, Kat. With you.”

“The three of us...we’re everything now,” she said.

“Yes, we are,” he said, looking down at Derek again. “And I’m never letting go.”

The End

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