



Liberty (A Redemption Novel)

By Ginger Jamison

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When Ryan Beecher returns home after a long deployment overseas, Lexy barely recognizes her husband. The man who left Texas for Afghanistan was cruel and abusive. The man who comes back to her is a badly injured stranger with amnesia—and no memory of their life together.

Lexy can't believe how much Ryan has changed. The wounded marine is now gentle, caring and tender. And his touch awakens yearnings she's never felt before. As he takes them both to the point of no return, can Lexy trust this lover who seems to live only for her pleasure...as he seeks his salvation in her healing embrace?

A poignant and erotic story of longing, secrets and second chances, *Liberty* explores the limits of desire and the boundaries of love.

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Liberty (A Redemption Novel) By Ginger Jamison Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2472878 in Books
- Published on: 2014-02-25
- Released on: 2014-02-25
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.28" h x .80" w x 5.44" l, .58 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Dangerous Curves Ahead is laugh out loud funny and super sexy, with unique characters you can't help but love!"

-New York Times bestselling author Lori Foster

"... complex, engrossing novel..."

-RT Book Reviews on LIBERTY

About the Author

Growing up with four rowdy brothers and a cop father added to the spice in Ginger Jamison's life. It was her mother who placed a novel in her hands and turned up the heat for her love of romance. Spicy or sweet, Ginger learned that a good romance can take you completely away from the world. She now writes contemporary romances, filled with real people, real life, and true love. When she's not lost in a book, you'll find her shoe shopping or writing sassy romances under the name of Sugar Jamison.

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It almost awed him. Almost. And only because *awe* was not the proper way to describe what he was feeling. He knew something big was going to happen. Something huge. Something that was going to rock his world, that was going to change the course of his life. And that made him restless.

All week he had been on alert, the tiny hairs on the back of his neck standing at attention, almost as if they were on the lookout for the same unknown element. It was a part of his job to be on alert. Awareness seemed to be his constant companion for the past year.

He signed up for this.

Willingly.

And just maybe that deep, empty feeling came with the territory, along with the sand and the oppressive heat.

"What you thinkin' 'bout?" Terrell Ramon asked him as he switched his assault rifle from one shoulder to the other. Terrell was the youngest man in their squad. He had dark brown skin and big doe eyes that made him look like one of those Precious Moments figurines. He was a baby compared to most of them but he was there because he was smart, a whiz with his hands and all things technical. Terrell could dismember a computer in thirty seconds and put it back together in twenty-five.

"Looks like you thinkin' about a woman? *Goo-wee!*" The kid slapped his thigh. "I love thinkin' 'bout women," he drawled in his thick Mississippi accent. "My woman's waiting for me at home and she's bangin'-thick booty, pouty lips and the prettiest damn smile you've ever seen." He grew wistful. "She wants to get married. I think I might have to."

He smiled. Terrell couldn't have been more than twenty-two. "You don't sound too sure. Do you want to get married so young?" Normally they wouldn't be having this type of conversation while on duty, or at all, but

they had been stuck on this detail for too long and he needed something to take his mind from the constant niggling feeling in the back of his mind. "What's she like?"

"Sandra?" Terrell grinned widely for a moment as if remembering something funny. His eyes softened, taking on a look not often seen in this place. "She's always on my ass, since we were babies. But she's good for me, you know? Don't take none of my bullshit. Funny as hell." He sobered a bit. "I guess I love her. Being here makes me realize that."

He nodded. This conversation had taken a more serious turn than he had intended, but he knew how the kid felt. It was hard being in a foreign country, thousands of miles from your homeland, your comforts, the people who made life bearable.

But they'd signed up for this. They fought this war even if they didn't understand the politics behind it.

"What about you, T-dog? You got a girl waiting for you?"

He shrugged. "I've got a girl but I don't know if she's still waiting."

"She's cheating?" Terrell raised a brow. "Fuck her. You're here busting your balls while she's banging some other dude. Forget about her. Women love a war hero. Once we get home you'll be swimming in panties."

He let out a rusty chuckle. "It's not like that, Terrell. She just wasn't happy with me when I left. I don't blame her. I wasn't the best man when I was with her."

Terrell nodded sympathetically as if he knew the complexities of an adult relationship. "What's her name?"

He shook his head remembering the beautiful woman he'd left behind. "Her name is-" Then it happened.

It.

He heard it first—a blast, an explosion—that momentarily caused him to lose his precious hearing and then he felt it. Heat, blistering heat, that burned and twisted and melted his skin. And then he saw *it* in slow motion, like some scene from a movie, like he was some actor playing a role. But he wasn't. This wasn't a movie. This is what he had been waiting for. He was flying through the air for what seemed like hours but must have only been seconds. When he landed, the air rushed out of him. Everything went black. And when he opened his eyes again things weren't in the vivid color he was used to, but sepia-muted colors of tan and beige, of sand.

Reality came rushing back to him all too quickly. There was yelling behind him. No. Screaming. Screams of pain. Of terror. Of disorientation. Someone was yelling orders. Someone else was yelling names. There was all of this noise around him, deafening him. He looked around, sending a silent prayer of thanks that he was able to look around, and saw images that would reduce a normal man to tears.

His unit had been hit hard. It must have been a rocket attack. Only something powerful could reduce the men he had known as brothers to shreds. He could no longer tell who was who, the dust was too thick. The men were covered with sand, with blood. Their cries of pain were indistinguishable from one another. This was almost too much to bear, and even though he had seen a lot in his time in the service, the sight of his fallen men made him want to cry. "Tex!" somebody called.

Get up, he told himself. *It's time for you to take action. You are a marine. You were trained for this. Your life was leading up to this moment.* Attempting to stand, he put one leg in front of him but it didn't want to hold his weight. Sharp, breath-snatching pain shot up his leg and into his body. It was like somebody was grinding broken shards of sharp glass into his muscles. He couldn't walk, so he crawled on his hands and knees, scraping them, causing the skin on them to grow raw and red and bloody. There was a man down not far from him who he didn't know. No. That wasn't right. There were only sixteen of them. He had to know who the man was. But he couldn't tell.

The soldier was unrecognizable. Dirt. Blood. Open flesh. That was all he saw, along with the dark grit that decorated his face.

"I'm dying, man," the unrecognizable soldier told him. There was a slight twang to his voice. He knew him.

"Try not to," he said sincerely. "You owe me fifty bucks."

"It's my time, brother." He grinned, but the smile was mixed with blood, dirt and pain. "At least I can say I died for my country."

"Don't say corny shit like that right now. I'm going to help you."

"You can't help this-" He motioned to his torso, which was no longer covered with skin. "You look like shit, brother. Go help yourself."

"I'm fine," he said, even though his vision started to blur and his head began to throb with a pain that was almost indescribable.

"Do me a favor..." His voice started to fade. "Tell my wife-"

"Tell her yourself," he barked.

"Tell Lexy I'm sorry, and give these to my mother." The dying soldier began to hand over his dog tags. *No.* He shook his head. He didn't want to honor anybody's last wishes. But he would. He had to. He'd signed up for this.

And so he grasped the man's hand, the dog tags between them, and felt the life drain away. He felt his own life about to go with it. The spinning in his head grew out of control, his body began to seize and he slumped over in the sand as he succumbed to a world of foggy pain and darkness.

Chapter Two

"Mrs. Beecher, he's right in here."

When Lexy Beecher learned her husband was in a rocket attack and survived...she sighed. That probably wasn't the usual response of the wife of a marine who hadn't seen her husband in almost two years. But then again she wasn't the usual wife.

When the officer phoned to tell her the news, she couldn't bring herself to cry or laugh or even breathe a sigh of relief. She didn't like her husband and while she hadn't wished him dead she never wanted to lay eyes on him again. Her husband was a horrible man. An awful man. "A piece of no good, low-down stinky shit," as

her best friend and Ryan's cousin, Di, called him. It wasn't a harsh description.

It was truth.

"He was hurt very badly."

She nodded slowly, trying to take in all the information that was being thrown at her. The doctor thought she was in shock, but she wasn't in shock. She was numb. She didn't love him. She was going to leave him. The divorce papers sat in her nightstand just waiting for him to come home. She should have served them to him years ago but she wasn't able to. She had been stuck. Everybody, including Ryan, thought they had her pegged. They thought she was weak, that she lacked the backbone, the confidence to make it in the world without him. They were wrong.

Ryan's mother was the only one who got it right. She thought Lexy stayed for love. Lexy had stayed in a marriage to a man she felt nothing for because she did love somebody. However, that person was not her husband.

Her husband had gone out of his way to make it impossible to leave him, to keep her down, to keep her bonded to him. Hell, he had almost succeeded once, but she wouldn't ever be stuck again. It took her two years to rebuild, but she regained everything-including her self-respect.

"He wasn't stable enough to move until this week," the doctor continued, but Lexy barely heard him.

After he had left for Iraq, Lexy had taken steps to reclaim her life. She began to once again save every penny she could spare. She had researched different towns and the services they had to offer. She found a cute little place where she could live for cheap, and some jobs that would pay the bills. She wouldn't need anything from him. Nothing except what she prized most.

Her freedom.

And all he had to do was sign. All she had to do was get him to sign. That task would be difficult, almost Herculean, because the one thing her husband took pride in was his power over her. He wanted to keep her shackled to him like a dog and it wasn't out of love or friendship or simple companionship. He did it because he thought he could, because once upon a time she had been stupid enough to let it happen. To him she was his property, and when he was drunk she turned into his punching bag. How could she be so blind to not realize that he never loved her? She never loved him, either; for ten years they had existed on sick codependence.

Lexy had married Ryan when she was just seventeen years old-when she had been beautiful and naive and filled with hope. Ryan had been twenty-two, devastatingly handsome and deceptively sweet. He was everything an innocent girl thought she wanted in a husband.

"You may not recognize him," the doctor continued, pulling her out of her deep thoughts. "He has a lot of contusions, a broken leg, rib fractures, burns over twenty percent of his body and a broken nose. In addition to that he took a nasty blow to the head. He's been in and out of consciousness for over a month."

She took it all in. He had been through all of that and didn't even have the decency to die. "Has he said anything?"

"I'm sorry, Lexy."

She looked up at the handsome military doctor. "Why are you sorry, Doctor? He couldn't have said anything he hasn't said before."

"No, Mrs. Beecher-" The doctor shook his head. "He said, 'I'm sorry Lexy.' Those are the only words he has spoken since he's been here."

Lexy suppressed the urge to roll her eyes. Of course Ryan would wait until he was half blown-up to repent for his years of bad behavior. But that was Ryan. He always had a knack for apologizing. She had spent the first half of their marriage forgiving him, too. But now she was too smart to ever believe those words again. She wasn't a teenager anymore and she was all out of forgiveness.

"I know this is a lot for you, Mrs. Beecher." Dr. Andreas placed his hand on her arm. "You need time to absorb it."

She nodded once, still numb to it all.

Lexy had met Ryan the year her grandmother, the woman who raised her, died. He promised her all the things she craved. A family. A support system. He promised to take care of her. She never had that. She had come into this world an orphan. Her mother was a free spirit who died in childbirth. Her father didn't bother to stick around. She had never known them. Not the way they looked or smelled or smiled. She didn't know where her slanted dark eyes came from or the kink of her unruly hair or even the color of her skin.

She was neither white nor black but some sort of indistinguishable brown that made her ethnic identity a mystery. Rumors swirled that she was Native American, some people told her that she was interracial-part black, part white and a bit Hispanic. She was her own version of the Small World ride.

Ryan didn't see it that way. He called her half-breed or mutt or whatever derogatory name rolled off his tongue.

"He was found lying unconscious next to another soldier. His dog tags were in his hand. It was a good thing they weren't lost. We would have had a hard time identifying him. His condition was more critical than the soldier found lying next to him and yet your husband was the one to survive. This was a miracle."

Miracle.

Ha! Lexy scoffed at the idea. God didn't save Ryan. The God she knew didn't save anyone-not her parents, not her grandmother and certainly not her. Why would he start with Ryan?

She thought about her grandmother, Maybell, who wasn't really her grandmother at all, just some woman who had loved and cared for her since she was an infant. The people of her small town rejoiced in telling her that Maybell had just showed up one day with a squirmy wild-haired baby. When asked where she had gotten the child, she'd replied with a succinct, "None of your damn business."

Lexy loved that cranky old woman dearly but she was as old as an oak tree when Lexy was a child and her love of deep-fried, gravy-covered, barbecue-smothered delicacies didn't help her diabetes or high cholesterol. She died when Lexy was sixteen, leaving her devastated and a little more than brokenhearted.

"You should prepare yourself, Mrs. Beecher. He's stable now but that can change at any moment."

"Please call me Lexy," she said, attending to the man. "Ryan won't die. He's not the type of man to let go."

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