

Redemption

Lizzy Lee (2012)

Her heart began racing faster as the phone rang. She was tempted to hang up quickly, but it was a rainy night in March, and she couldn't spend the night outside a closed McDonald's in the middle of almost nowhere.

"Hello?" He picked up on the fourth ring, and she almost couldn't breathe. It had been months since they've spoken a word to each other, although the small campus forced them to see each other every day. She almost hung up, but a violent shiver ran up her spine. Things couldn't get worse than they already were.

"Justin, it's Elena. Please don't hang up, it's an emergency," she rushed, knowing that once he heard her voice, he'd disconnect the call.

"What?" His voice was colder than the wind chilling her bones, darker than the night surrounding her.

"I'm in Richfield Springs at the McDonald's, alone in the pouring rain. I can't get a hold of anyone else in my contacts."

A long sigh came from the other end. "Are you fucking kidding me?" This isn't the Justin she remembered, and it broke her heart that he was so harsh. What had she done to him?

"I'm cold and scared, Justin. Please... I'll pay you, just name a price. I'll do anything."

"How the fuck did you get there?" Was he under the impression that this was a set-up of some sort? "It's three in the fucking morning."

It took her a minute to reply. "It's a long story." The pain of earlier that night flooded back into her mind, and tears began to well in her eyes. She choked them back.

There was a long silence while she let him soak up the information and hopefully decide to have a heart. She wanted to give him time, but she was desperately impatient. She couldn't see into the darkness, and after having her security shattered in one horrific night, she was terrified to be out here alone.

"Please, Justin... I'm so scared."

Another sigh, but this time, he spoke. "You'll pay me for the gas, and you won't say a single word the entire ride."

Did he actually just agree to get her? There was a tiny bit of relief that lit up inside her. "Okay," she accepted quickly.

"The McDonald's on 28 in Richfield Springs?"

"Yes."

"I'll be there in about twenty minutes." And the line went dead.

She sighed, leaning against the building. Twenty minutes wasn't too long of a time, but it seemed to go by painfully slow. She was left to wallow in the depths of her mind, a place that had never been so scary before. She tried to focus on the night around her, but her mind was stronger and swallowed her whole.

The night replayed in her mind. She was on a date with Ray, her boyfriend of three weeks. She knew from the instance he picked her up that there was something different about him. The brightness in his eyes was gone, as if the lights were shut off upstairs. The darkness ran through his blood, dulling his skin and taking away from his natural beauty.

He had taken her to his place, a small house in Richfield Springs that he shared with a friend from high school. The two were alone, though, and he took advantage of the seclusion. For the first time since meeting Ray a couple months ago, she felt afraid to be alone with him.

"Sit," he ordered once inside his room.

"Ray—"

"Shh, Elena," he whispered, his tone softening a little. He sat next to her, and pushed her down onto her back. He tried to kiss her, but she looked away. "What's the matter?" he asked, angry again.

"Ray, I don't want to do this."

"Yes, you do. C'mon." He unbuttoned his jeans and kneeled in front of her. "You've done this part before."

Hoping that after this he'd be satisfied, she complied. She noticed, for the first time, how horrible oral sex actually tasted. As he thrust his cock deeper down her throat, she held back the tears, praying he'd stop at this. Ray was a great guy; how could he be capable of rape?

After he came in her mouth, the saltiness made her want to puke. She swallowed, though, hoping it would all just end. It didn't, though, as he pushed her back down and pulled her jeans down. "I have been waiting too long for this," he cooed as he slipped her panties down.

"Please, Ray. Don't."

The smile he gave her made her want to cry, and as he forced himself into her, she let the tears go.

"Aw, baby, don't cry," he whispered through kisses, though didn't stop. He started gently, but quickly picked up speed. Each time he withdrew and rammed it back in, she felt like her self-worth decreased.

The night lasted for hours, and for a while, Elena didn't think it would ever end. She didn't think it was possible to go for so long, and guessed there was some kind of cream or pill, or possibly a drug, he used.

He fell asleep holding her around two, finally having had enough. She wasn't planning on waking next to him, though, and risking another round of this. She snuck out, and though it was pouring and darker than black outside, she managed to find her way to the McDonald's.

The twenty minutes between hanging up with Justin and his car pulling up to the curb seemed to last forever, but she couldn't believe he came. She hurried through the rain and slid into the passenger's seat.

"Thanks," she whispered, buckling herself in.

He responded with silence as he put the car in drive and sped away. She was thankful to get away from there so quickly.

"I'm sorry," she tried to say, but he cut her off.

"You weren't going to say a single word."

The rode in silence for a while, even as he glanced over at her. She was still trembling slightly, her hair was in a disheveled ponytail, and there were tears streaming down her cheeks. It didn't take a genius to figure out she'd just gone through hell.

She noticed him looking at her, and shifted in her seat. She wondered what was going through his mind. Maybe he thought she deserved whatever happened tonight, if he even suspected anything. She felt as if it was written all over her, but she knew it couldn't be that obvious.

She shook the thoughts out of her head. That was assuming he gave two shits about what happened to her. He made it obvious, even now, that she was nothing more than a mistake of his past. She had accepted him as her own mistake, but suddenly, she wished she could go back to what they had. If she was still his, then Ray would have never entered her life.

She looked out the window, forcing herself to stop thinking about what her life would have been like if she hadn't done whatever she did to ruin the relationship with Justin. They were coming up to where the state highway crossed County Road 18. She thought she saw something coming up the road on Justin's side, but she decided it was just her mind playing tricks on her; there were no headlights of a car. But the headlights of Justin's car gave away a large truck that gave no appearance of stopping. Justin apparently saw it, too, because he tried to speed up, trying to get past the rogue truck.

The last thing that went through Elena's mind before everything went black was Justin cursing.

Elena woke hours later in a hospital bed to the sounds of beeps and alarms all over. Everything was either white or metallic, and the air smelled of disinfectant. She knew instantly where she was, but the reasoning behind her being here weren't as obvious.

As soon as she started blinking, her mother was at her side, holding her hand. She was going on about how she was so happy she was okay, but Elena couldn't focus on the words.

The only thing she could think about was, "What happened?"

"The police said you and Justin were in an accident..." her mother explained slowly, not wanting to startle Elena.

"Justin," she remembered. The only other person in the room was her father, who looked just as relieved. "Where is he? Is he okay?"

Her mother looked over to her husband, and the lack of an answer bothered Elena. "Oh, God, no..."

Having heard the voices from out in the hall, a man Elena assumed was the doctor walked in. "It's good to see that you're awake." He quickly checked her over, inspecting the bandage on her head she barely realized was there. She assumed she passed the physical exam, because he then asked, "How much of the night do you remember?"

These words unlocked the gate holding the memories back, and they all flooded back into her mind. Ray, his force, McDonald's, calling Justin, getting into his car, the truck without headlights...

Tears welled in her eyes, but she didn't want to answer the question. "The last thing I remember was a truck with no headlights..." The doctor nodded. "How is he?"

The doctor inhaled deeply, and she could tell he wasn't as fortunate as her. But she just needed to know *how* unfortunate he was. "Well, the truck hit his side of the car. He's banged up pretty well, but he's still holding on."

This came as a relief to her. She wanted to see him, but they told her she'd have to wait until she was released. Since she was unconscious for almost twelve hours, they wanted to keep her overnight as precaution.

By noon the next day, though, she was out of the hospital gown and in her regular clothes, and heading to Justin's room, just a few down from hers in the ICU.

As Elena entered the room, she almost regretted it, seeing his roommate lounging next to the bed, watching Spike TV. "Oh, look who it is." She could hear the disdain in his voice.

"How is he?"

"Well, he's not up and walking."

"Look, it's not my fault what happened."

He shook his head. "Then why exactly did he make a three A.M. call to Richfield Springs?"

The guilt stabbed into Elena with more pain than the accident that brought stitches to her head. "It was a drunk driver, Mike. You act like I planned it," she was barely able to say. She stood at the other side of Justin's bed, staring at his unmoving face. It looked so pale, but she was hoping it was just the lighting.

"It just seems like whenever you're involved, he ends up the one shit out of luck."

She knew this was true, however hard she tried to not believe it. It was obvious, though, that Mike wasn't going to let her off the hook. She knew this was all her fault, but he didn't need to be so cold about it.

"You have a cell phone-full of contacts. Justin was the only one you could call?"

"It was three in the morning, Mike. I couldn't get a hold of anyone else." She held the tears back, knowing it was only going to give him more to use against her.

He laughed a little, a harsh sound. "Now how the hell did you end up in Richfield Springs at that ungodly hour? Don't you live on campus?"

"It was a bad night, okay?"

"So because you're in pain, and he's finally pushed the pain you caused into the past, you need to bring him down along with you? God, Elena, you're fucking pathetic," he complained as he stood and walked out.

"Just leave me alone," she muttered as he left. She then looked down at Justin, still holding the tears back. He was here, unconscious with a grim chance of waking, because of her. "I'm sorry, Justin." This time, unlike before in the car, he couldn't silence her. "I know I hurt you. My friends say it was because you were an asshole, but I think it was because I was happy for once in life, and that terrified me. I was so high on love, and it could have been a long fall, so I eased myself down by hurting you. I didn't realize I was doing it until you were gone and it was too late... I tried to tell you this in the car, but you wouldn't hear it. I can't say I really blame you... It just sounds like a huge excuse to make me look better. But that's not what I'm trying to do. I just want you to know that I'll always love you, even if you hate me. We'll both move on and live happy lives, and we'll probably forget about each other. But I'll always love you."

With nothing more to say to him, and having a feeling like he'll never actually hear the words, she left. As she wandered down the hall, she felt the eyes of the nurses and visitors, though she didn't care. Her head was still throbbing, but she had gotten used to it. About half-way towards the hospital entrance, where her parents were waiting for her, she felt someone or something brush against her arm. She looked around, but there was nothing near her that could have done it.

She stared at the wall, lost in thought, when it finally dawned on her. It was Justin.