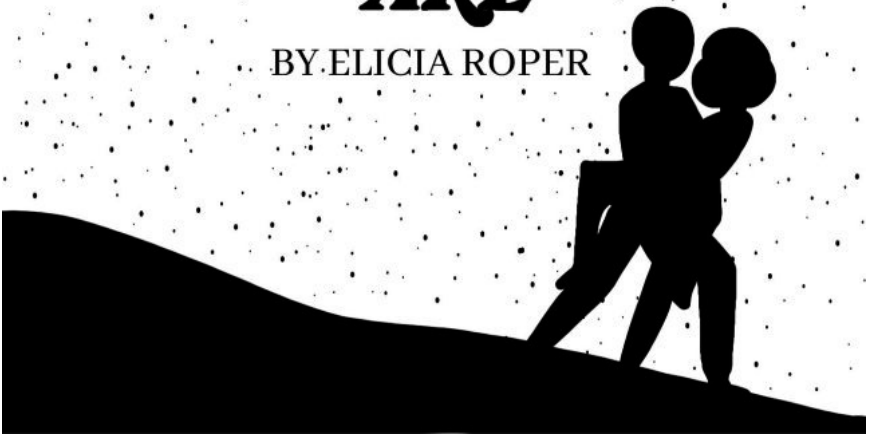




All That We Are Book One

*All  
THAT  
YOU  
ARE*

BY ELICIA ROPER



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**Trigger Warnings:  
Death, illness and abandonment.**



**Age Rating:**

**12 and up**



## **Dedication:**

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED to anyone who has ever felt that they are not good enough. I want you to know that you *are* enough. A thousand times enough, and you will find someone who will love you, all of you, for all that you are.

-E.R.



## Playlist:

- “Minefields” - Faouzia, John Legend
  - “Dream” - Shawn Mendes
  - “The Few Things” - JP Saxe
  - “It’s You” - ZAYN
  - “Used To This” - Camila Cabello
  - “Anyway” - Noah Kahan
  - “If You Want Love” - NF
  - “Angel” - The Weeknd
  - “Exit Wounds” - The Script
  - “Half A Man” - Dean Lewis
  - “Falling” - Harry Styles
  - “There You Are” - ZAYN
  - “Losing Me” - Gabrielle Aplin, JP Cooper
  - “Standing With You” - Guy Sebastian
  - “Easy” - Camila Cabello
  - “Fix Me Up” - Fin Argus, Sabrina Carpenter
  - “Trade Hearts” - Jason Derulo, Julia Michaels
  - “Fix You” - Coldplay
  - “Like That” - JP Saxe
  - “I Feel Your Pain” - Famba, David Aubrey
- To listen on Spotify, [CLICK HERE](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7JyohE7FWTRjAvMtCz9m2e)<sup>1</sup>.

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1. <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7JyohE7FWTRjAvMtCz9m2e>





## Prologue:

BATTLE FACE ON, ATHENA pulls her hair into a ponytail, carefully selecting her weapon of destruction. Crowbar in hand, she pulverizes her unsuspecting victim. Violet steps in tow beside her as she grasps a firm grip on the baseball bat, taking a swing.

The glass pops as it shatters, exploding like fireworks throughout the dimly lit room. The thunderous bass of the music pulsed through their veins like bursts of epinephrine.

It's invigorating-she feels vibrant and alive as she continues to mercilessly destroy everything in sight. From TVs to Printers, everything is smashed to smithereens, wires and cords dangling lifelessly.

Athena takes a deep breath, completely satisfied.

She welcomes a release from the troublesome thoughts weighing on her mind. She smiles at her partner in crime, Violet, who smiles back valiantly.

Violet is her ride-or-die. Through thick and thin, she is always by her side. The two have been inseparable ever since they met in kindergarten.

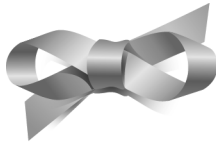
Proud of their work, Violet puts an arm around Athena's shoulder. "All that angst and anger worked up my appetite. I'm starving; let's go eat."

"Yes, ma'am." She salutes her like a soldier getting ready for battle.

The two zip down their white hazmat suits and return their safety gear to the front desk. "Wreck-It-Ralph" is the ultimate stress reliever, where you can wipe away all your pain and anxieties in a single blow. For about six years now, this has become a go-to place for when they need to take the edge off.

She stepped outside and let the fresh air fill her lungs, feeling refreshed and calm. High sunlit clouds drifted across a clear blue sky. Lifting her face skyward, she closes her eyes.

Ah, this is nice.



## CHAPTER 1

### Athena:

SOME LIKE A BRIGHT and sunny day, the streets bustling with laughter and excitement. Yet, I find that comfort and solace lie in the tranquil sound of the rain. The world outside is at a standstill, eerily peaceful and quiet. The cold streak from the rain blows in, so I wrap my blanket tighter around my shoulders. The hot steam from the mug warms my face as I take a sip from it.

The words are forever ingrained in my mind, but each time I read them, it still feels so fresh and raw, like an open wound that has not had enough time to heal. Putting the letters away, I pack them neatly, closing the ivory felt box and storing it back in its place—the dresser drawer beside the white canopy bed.

My phone buzzes on the nightstand. I smile when I see a text from my best friend Violet, also known as V. Violet, who has always been spontaneous. The type to randomly plan trips and excursions and make spur-of-the-moment decisions.

Violet: Girl, clear your calendar for tomorrow. We are going to Wonderland! The first one to throw up buys the funnel cakes.

Athena: Challenge accepted. I'll bring the barf bag, but don't be fooled; I'm bringing it for you.

Violet: Oh, you've got jokes. It's on.

Violet tells me to make sure that I do not dress like a homeless person. Clearly, she has every intention of setting me up. I can already picture the cheeky look on Violet's face, but that doesn't mean I'm caving in to her latest attempt at matchmaking.

Athena: I'm just going to pretend you didn't say that.

The following day, the sun slices through my window, casting a warm glow throughout the room. Jumping out of bed, I head to my closet to decide what to wear to wonderland today.

Opening the grey metal doors of the closet, I scan my wardrobe, debating for a bit on what to wear. Fine, I will put a little effort into what I wear today. Not because Violet asked me to, but because *I* want to. I slip into a boat-neck mustard-yellow tee that goes great with my rich hazelnut complexion. I tuck the tee into a brand-new pair of dark blue high-waisted jeans. Pulling my hair out of a ponytail, letting the chocolate brown curls fall, cascading over my shoulders.

I bound down the stairs and pranced down the hallway to grab a pair of sneakers from the closet at the front door.

Just as I say my goodbyes to mom who is watching tv in the livingroom and walk outside the front door, Violet's black Audi pulls up the driveway. Violet is smiling from ear to ear. Clear evidence that something is up.

Seeing right through her façade, I give Violet my most menacing stare. "What are you up to?" I ask, hopping inside and buckling the seat belt.

"Nothing! Nothing at all." Violet insists, her voice a few octaves higher than normal—a telltale sign that she is lying.

Violet's blue eyes glisten, and she gives me a teasing smile. I can't help but crack a tiny smile as she turns on the radio, cranking it up to full volume. We belt out the words to every song, dancing along like nobody's watching.

Except they *are*. A curly-haired lady in a red convertible gives us a questioning look as she passes by. She probably thinks we look like fools, but who cares?

The parking lot is abuzz with people shuffling in and out. We arrive at the front entrance and waltz over to stand in line. Violet keeps glancing over my shoulder as if she's looking for someone.

"V, you did not." I turn to face her.

“What?” Violet asks all innocently.

“I thought it was supposed to be just us!” Although 11 years of friendship have taught me that Violet would be the type to surprise me with something like this, since she keeps trying to break me out of my shell, I hoped she didn’t.

“Relax,” Violet says, reading my thoughts. “Don’t worry your pretty little head about it. It’ll be just fine.”

I’m not so convinced.

“You just might have some fun,” Violet sings.

Feeling my resolve slipping away, I give up the fight.

That’s when I see him—standing a little farther off from the rest of them, his chest shaking with laughter.

Snap out of it.

I tell myself to stop staring like a creep before he catches me, or worse, before Violet sees. She would never let me live it down. Looking away, I peer over in V’s direction, but it is far too late. Violet is staring back with a sly smirk on her face.

Busted.

“Don’t you dare,” I warn, knowing full well Violet will immediately overreact and start planning our wedding the second she gets it into her head I might be interested in him.

Violet backs away, putting her hands up in surrender. “My lips are sealed.”

After waiting in the long line, Violet & I link arms, skipping toward the lines for the rollercoaster rides. The rest of the people Violet invited to tag along to join us.

“Hello, thank you all for joining.” Violet turns her attention to all of us. “This beautiful brunette here is my best friend, Athena. And yes, lucky for you, she is also single.”

Violet grins at me. Wishing the ground would just open and swallow me, I try to laugh off the embarrassment.

“Hello, please disregard everything my friend says. As you all probably already know, she is a little crazy,” I say awkwardly.

“Whatever.” Violet rolls her eyes but still chuckles at the implication. “Athena, meet Vanessa, Melody, Jake, Damon, and Caiden.”

Violet, Melody, Vanessa, and I run up to grab front row seats, and after squeezing in, pull the padded arm down over our heads. Melody pulls out her camera to record the ride.

I absolutely love rollercoasters. I go for the thrill: it is simply exhilarating! My stomach fills with butterflies as I brace myself for the steep 80-degree drop. Then, the ride takes off with rushing intensity, and my stomach drops with every sharp turn. Every twist sends my head spinning. The rushing adrenaline feels near to bursting out of my veins.

This high is the best part of roller coaster rides.



## **Caiden:**

ATHENA IS ABSOLUTELY stunning.

When she smiles, there is this glow about her. Looking for a chance to talk to her, I stick around when the others leave to grab lunch.

“That’s okay, you guys. Go ahead; I’ll meet you back here.” Athena shoos them off. Going ahead to the Leviathan line, she smiles that radiant smile of hers to tell them she will be fine.

I offer to stick around with her. She shrugs. “Okay, if it’s okay with you, it’s fine by me.” Athena glances at me for a moment, then asks, “So how do you know V?”

“We were in the same pottery class.”

“Oh cool, I’ve never tried pottery before. What’s it like?” She asks curiously.

“Brilliant. Astonishingly, we can create beautiful, sculptural, and functional pieces with our own hands.” I assume I must have a look on my face as I described it because a slow smile spreads across her face.

“Wow, that sounds fantastic.”

With a wide grin, I invite her to join me. “I’ll have to show you sometime.”

Athena opens her mouth to reply and then closes it shut when her stomach grumbles. She laughs in an attempt to cover it up.

“I’m starved! I’m going to grab some food. Do you want anything?” I offer, so she’ll feel less embarrassed.

“Um, sure. I’ll have whatever you’re having.”

Athena opens her bag to get her wallet; I wave it off. “Don’t sweat it. I’ll be right back.”

Running off to buy food, I rack my brain, trying to figure out what she would like to eat. There are rows and rows of food carts, ranging from burgers, sushi, Thai, pizza, and New York Fries. Sushi and Thai would have been okay if that is your taste, but just in case, let's pick something safe. Everyone loves pizza. Perfect. Settling on pizza, I go ahead to order.

Walking over to her, I take note of a guy in a striped shirt talking to her. He is clearly flirting with her, and Athena looks like she wants to bite off his head.

Putting an arm around her shoulder, flashing him a smile, I ask, "Is this jerk bothering you?"

"Not anymore. He was just leaving." Athena narrows her eyes.

The guy mutters something under his breath and walks away.

The minute he leaves, I move my arm. "Sorry. I-"

She smiles. "Don't sweat it. I'm glad you came. That guy refused to take no for an answer. Super irritating."

"I wonder if I saved you or him because you looked like you were ready to kill the guy."

"Well, I guess we will never know," Athena says with a smirk.

The rest of the gang swarm in, and we all hover around the table to eat lunch, exchange phone numbers, and say our goodbyes.

Back at home, as soon as I walk through the front door, Luna's sitting on her favorite yellow couch by the window. She is wagging her tail with her tongue hanging out, happy to see me. "Come here, girl." I pat my legs to get her to come over. Luna pounces on me, tackling me to the floor. "I missed you too." Laughing, she licks my face.

With a smile, I walk into the kitchen where Mom is cooking. Coming up behind her, I wrap my arms around her, planting a kiss on her cheek.

"You look like you're in a good mood," Ashley says as she cuts up the green onions. "Did you have fun with your friends today?"

"Yeah, it was great."



It looks like Mom is making one of my favorites- “Firecracker Chicken.” This recipe consists of crispy breaded chicken tossed in a sweet and spicy sauce served over a bed of rice. Mom usually pairs it with “Spinach and Feta Cheese Borek,” which has delicious layers of phyllo sheets smothered in spinach and feta cheese.

For dessert, I will make my little sister Isabella’s favorite dish— “Tulumba.” It’s a special type of dough that’s deep-fried and soaked in sweet syrup. Crunchy on the outside, soft and juicy on the inside.

I roll up my sleeves so I can wash my hands and help.

Drawn in by the sweet aroma of the food, Isabella comes bouncing down the hardwood stairs. Mom tells her to stop running down the stairs, or she will slip and fall.

“No, I won’t,” Isabella says confidently. “I’m not clumsy like Caiden. Unlike him, I know how to keep my balance.”

I playfully hit her behind the head with the oven mitt.

“Hey!” Isabella rubs the back of her head.



## CHAPTER 2

### Caiden:

THE POTENT SCENT OF motor oil and gasoline lingers in the air, but I'm no longer fazed by it. After working here for almost five years, I have become immune to the smell.

Taking a walk around the shop, I quietly observe to see what the others are working on. They are hard at work right now, fixing up old vehicles and resurrecting them back to life so that they are as good as new. There is something so gratifying and satisfying about working with your hands and accomplishing a task.

The day has gone by surprisingly fast. Looking down at my watch, I can see it is already 2 o'clock. We have worked through lunchtime. "It's time for a break," I call out to everyone.

"Finally!" Jake hangs his head back with an exhausted expression on his face. Jake didn't get in until 10 a.m., so he hasn't even worked as long as the rest of us. He tends to be a tad bit melodramatic at times.

"Oh, please don't be so dramatic. You barely even lifted a finger all this time." Drew wrings his wet towel, slapping Jake on the back of his neck. Drew, Jake, and I started working at the "Mint Auto Repair" together, so we have gotten pretty used to each other. Granted, Jake gets picked on the most, but we do it with love.

"Where should we go out for lunch? I'm craving BBQ," Damon says, scrolling through his phone for places to eat. Damon always comes up with the best places to eat, so of course, we trust his decision. "Let's head to Daryll's Steakhouse," he suggests.

Everyone nods in agreement and shuffles out of the garage.

“Hey man, are you coming?” Drew stays back to ask me before walking out with the others.

“Yeah, I’m just going to finish up here first,” I tell him.

Drew gives me his all-time favourite, ‘Are you for real’ look.

Okay, to be fair, I do tend to drag my feet sometimes, but that’s only because I like to complete a task once I’ve started working on it. I’m not a fan of stopping right in the middle of a task. I doubt that I have all that much to do. The car I’m working on looks like it just needs a few finishing touches, and then it will be all done.

Laughing, I promise I’ll catch up with them. “It’ll be quick, promise. I’ll meet you guys there.”

As soon as I pop open the hood of the car, thick black smoke comes pouring out. Shielding my face with my arm, I try to break up the smoke. I have my work laid out for me with this one, but it will be more than worth it. A 1960s Jaguar—she is a beauty. Not only does this car have an impeccably styled auto body, but it is also extremely comfortable. The Jaguar brand is all about style and speed; it is truly a high-performance vehicle at its best, a luxury brand that is well worth every penny invested.

Reaching into the toolbox on the floor, I sift through the pile of tools for the pliers. After working on the car for a bit, my left hand starts to cramp. Flexing my fingers, I try to alleviate the tension and get the blood flowing again. Right now, my hands feel like they are being stabbed with pins and needles. It’s only momentary discomfort, though; it will pass. It always does.

In the quietness of the room, I’m all alone with nothing but my thoughts.

There is not a day that goes by that I do not think of *him*.

My phone rings, snapping me out of the trance—

“Bro, are you coming?” I can practically hear the agitation in Jake’s voice over the phone for having them waiting so long.

“Sorry, man, I’ll be right out,” I say, hoping he is not too mad. Thankful for the distraction, I head outside.

After lunch, the guys head back to the shop to finish up what they were working on. Xavier, the owner of the Jaguar, is already on his way. Wiping the beads of sweat covering my forehead, I get straight to work. After a few hours, the car engine starts up, and it looks all ready to go.

A man with dark sunglasses dressed in a black suit walks up to the garage door.

Xavier is here.

I throw the keys to Jake so he can take Xavier with him for a test drive. "Here are the keys. Go take it out for a spin."

"Who, me? Why don't *you* take it for the test drive since you're the one that fixed it?" Jake asks before Damon pulls him aside, pushing him out the door.

"But there's just one thing I don't get, though," Jake says, scratching his head.

Damon laughs at him, with Shawn and the others joining in. "Only one?"

"Ha-ha, funny." Jake laughs it off, not caring that he is being teased, but then his face is more serious when he asks Drew, "Why is it he works at a mechanic shop and fixes cars but doesn't drive one?"

"What do you mean?" Shawn asks, confused. Shawn has not worked at the shop as long as the others and hasn't had an opportunity to notice that I don't drive any of the cars that we work on.

Drew shuts Jake up, clamping a hand over his mouth. "Don't mind him. He... he doesn't know what he's talking about."



## CHAPTER 3

### Athena:

“OKAY, BEFORE WE GO in, let’s go over some ground rules.” Violet narrows her eyes at me. “So, what are we going to do?”

“Stop scowling, or you’ll get a permanent frown on your face,” I say with a teasing smile.

Violet squeezes her eyes shut in response and pinches the bridge of her nose. “Don’t make me put a leash on you.”

“Alright, alright. Somebody’s a bit testy this morning. Clearly, you haven’t had your morning coffee.” I smile for good measure before adding, “Look, but don’t touch. I got it.”

“Good. Good. Glad we are on the same page here.”

“C’mon, guys, let’s go!” Sky yells to us from the other side of the water fountain. My sister can be so bossy at times.

We stroll through the mall, Sky tugging on my arm, dragging me into all the stores she wants to go to, which leads us to an arts and crafts store similar to Michael’s. Sky insists that we go in to look for the art set that her friend Isabella is crazy about.

Running my hand along the multicoloured fabrics, I am fascinated by the wide array of colors. I have always admired anyone that can bring out the beauty of art, mostly because it’s not my area of expertise.

It takes me no more than a millisecond to spot the bookstore behind the store. The shiny new books are sparkly and gleaming. I long for them as I stare through the store’s glass window. When no one’s looking, I sneak off, my eyes on the prize.



## **Violet & Sky:**

VIOLET FRANTICALLY looks around the store, seeing no sign of Athena. “Where is she?”

“How am I supposed to know?” Sky says.

Violet peers over Sky’s shoulders and notices the bookstore next door. She starts marching out of the store, motioning for Sky to help look for Athena.

“Why should I?” Sky groans in protest, not seeing how or why she should care enough to help look for Athena.

“Maybe because you weren’t watching her like you were supposed to?” Violet says.

“Excuse me, last time I checked, I wasn’t my sister’s keeper. She is *your* responsibility. Not mine.”



## Athena:

I'M CRADLING BOOKS upon books in my arms, along with a shopping cart I filled to the brim with even *more* books.

Okay, so I might have a teensy-weensy problem. I wouldn't go so far as to say I'm a book hoarder... but I do *love* books.

Unfortunately, it does not take Violet long to find me. "Drop it," Violet says, stepping toward me. I pretend not to hear her and instead start rapidly putting the books on the counter, waiting for the cashier to scan them.

Violet does not step down, though. "Step away from the cart." It is now a power play as the two of us lock eyes in a staring competition.

The first one to blink or look away loses.

The cashier attempts to speak to us, but she is ignored since neither of us is ready to back down. This charade earns some intense stares as people scoot around us to stand in line. I'm the first one to give up.

Man, I always lose in staring competitions.

I follow Violet out of the store, my lips pressed together, unimpressed, without uttering another word.

We continue walking around the mall for a little more, our next stop, Bubble Tea. Bubble Tea comes in so many varieties. There is something for everyone here. Whether you like fruit, black tea, or a sweet treat, there are a plethora of options to choose from. We collect our drinks from the counter and take a seat. Sky chose the Winter Melon Infusion; Violet and I both got the Coffee Supreme.

When I come back from the washroom, at the corner of my eye, I could have sworn I saw the flash of someone half-speed walking, half-sprinting just across from us on the opposite side of the Bubble Tea Shop.

That's when I notice someone's missing. Violet's seat is now empty, although I could've sworn she was sitting right across from me 5 minutes earlier.

"Where is V?" I turn to Sky, who shrugs, staring at her phone, obviously having no idea Violet even left.

I shake my head, knowing full well *exactly* where Violet would go without telling me. "Come on, Sky, let's go."

'Play Pen,' you could say, was Violet's guilty pleasure. She knew better than to go into that store because whenever she did, it never ended well. It only made her wish for something she could never have—a pet.

I push open the wooden doors to the store, scanning for any signs of my blonde friend. Aha found her. Violet is happily playing peekaboo with a bunny rabbit.

"Nuh-uh." I shake my head.

Violet's lower lip starts to tremble. "But..."

"No buts."

"But look at that face!" Violet pleads, trying to persuade me. "How can you say *no* to that face?"

"I can't." By now, I have placed a hand over my eyes. It's the only way because otherwise, we would end up bringing home *all* the animals in here, then we would have to find *another* home to live in, for pulling a stunt like that. Needless to say, we have a no-pet rule at our house. "That's why I'm refusing to look."

"But A..." Violet whimpers.

"But nothing. You know better than me that your Mom would have your head served on a silver platter if you ever brought a pet home."

Violet does not budge, so I wrap my arm around her shoulders as I lead her out of the pet store. "I know, sweetie, I know," I soothe, knowing how much it hurts to have to say no.

That evening, the moon lit up the sky like a night light beaming a luminous glow. Upon hearing a knock on the door, I wonder, in surprise, who it could be since I wasn't expecting anyone tonight.



Our neighbor, Evan, is standing outside of the front door. "I'm so sorry to bother you with this so last minute. My wife's working late, and you guys were the only ones I could think of to ask," he rambles.

Evan and April have been tremendously kind neighbors for the past 15 years. They have become like family. Evan is the kind of person you could say wore his heart on his sleeve. He was never one to hide how he feels—it shows on his face.

I can tell that we really were his last resort, which is okay with me because I love kids, and Starr is simply adorable.

Evan furrows his brow in a mix of anxiety and frustration as he tells me that his mom, Iris, is getting discharged from the hospital today. He doesn't think it would be a good idea to bring Starr along. With her having such a weak immune system, it would be too much of a risk.

Starr tugs on his hand, trying to get her dad's attention, but he's too distracted to notice.

He must have a lot on his plate.

"No, no, that's perfectly okay. I adore Starr, and I would love to watch her." Starr is wide-eyed as she observes the conversation between us. "I'm glad Iris is doing better; that's fantastic news. Say hi to her for me, please," I say, hoping to reassure him we will be fine.

"Right, Starr? We're going to watch movies, eat popcorn, and have a great time." I lean down, smiling at her.

"Daddy, you're leaving me?" Starr asks in disbelief.

Evan crouches down on one knee to meet Starr at eye level. "Yes, sweetie, but Daddy's coming right back, okay?"

Starr shakes her head as she starts to cry. "No! No! Don't leave me!" she says frantically.

"Baby, I'll be right back. I promise." Evan assures her with a kiss on the cheek.

Evan blows her kisses as he walks out the door.

Starr latches onto his leg as she breaks out in sobs. "Please don't leave me," she pleads, tears streaming down her face.

There's a sinking feeling in my stomach as I watch Starr cling to her father's leg. I find myself fighting the lump forming in my throat. My voice is dry and chalky as I try to speak, but no words come out.

I need to breathe.

I squeeze my eyes shut to shake off the horrid memory I would love nothing more than to forget.

I awaken to the sound of someone frantically rummaging through drawers. I blink away the sleep from my eyes to follow the sound. Pulling the blanket around my bare shoulders, I cradle the teddy bear in my arms.

I walk ever so slowly down the hall, taking small quiet steps to not wake anyone. The door creaks as it opens. In the shadows of the darkness, Dad's there amidst the mess and clutter surrounding the floor. He hurriedly throws more clothes into the suitcase.

For a moment, he glances up at me, revealing the tears welling up in his eyes. Looking away, he wipes the tears from his eyes.

I pretend not to see it.

"Daddy?" I call out in a nervous quiver.

Dad doesn't respond.

He continues packing and closes the suitcase. When Dad gets up to leave the room, I latch onto his leg. "Daddy," I cry in between sobs. "Why are you leaving me? What about Alex? And Mom? Don't you... don't you love us anymore?"

My teddy bear falls to the floor.

I squeeze his leg even tighter now, willing him not to let me go, to let *us* go.

"Athena? Are you okay?" Evan touches my arm.

I blink; my focus is blurry. All I can see is the hazy image in front of me of my dad's car driving away. "Yeah... yeah, I'm fine," I tell Evan, forcing a smile.

Starr grabs my hand.

**ALL THAT YOU ARE: A HEART-WARMING AND  
EMOTIONAL NOVEL**

23

END OF SAMPLE

