



## Through Fire

*Freya Barker*

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**Through Fire** Freya Barker

Violence corroded her...

Obedience defiled her...

Fear kept her chained...

Freedom is hard to embrace when she's never learned to trust. Yet in the span of a second, she grabs a single opportunity and runs toward it. Straight into the sanctuary of a pub at the end of a wharf.

She doesn't understand the concept of friendship. She's never felt the connection of a relationship. She's as innocent as the driven snow and yet tainted with corruption. Still, she finds herself surrounded by people who accept her, without even knowing the first thing about her. But one of them is determined to dig deeper.

He treasures his friends, yet he's steered clear of committed relationships. He likes his life comfortably predictable and entirely controlled. Until it isn't. For months he's avoided interacting with The Skipper's newest addition. Perhaps realizing that once he looked deeply into those liquid brown eyes, he wouldn't be able to turn away.

When his present and her past puts them both on the brink of change, they are forged through fire as one.

## Through Fire Details

Date :

ISBN :

Author : Freya Barker

Format :

Genre : Romance, Contemporary, Contemporary Romance, Suspense, Romantic Suspense

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## From Reader Review Through Fire for online ebook

### Mindy Lou's Book Review says

Beautiful. That's the one word that immediately comes to mind everytime I finish a Freya Barker novel. I have never read an author who writes about the abuse woman suffer in such a real and raw way and still be so beautifully written. I usually steer clear of tragic stories. I much prefer the fun and happy love stories. There are few authors that I change that rule for and Freya Barker is on the top of that list. I dive head first at any opportunity to read her stories knowing she will make me cry and want to fight for the injustice of the evil these women endure in their lives. I don't know how she does it, but I feel so much lighter after reading one of her books. She takes these tragic lives and has them fight their way to the top and gives them the Hero they deserve that replaces all the pain they had to endure. I honestly can't say enough about her books.

ARC provided by NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

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### Kim says

**"Sometimes you have to struggle through the bad before you can truly enjoy the good stuff."**

Through Fire is the 3rd book in the Portland, ME series which I have come to associate with a few specific characteristics: fierce women who have a core of pure steel to survive some pretty ferocious trials in life, alpha males with hearts of gold providing their safe port in the storm, and a group of friends who leave judgment at the door and provide cheerleading support, a shoulder to cry on, a quiet partner to share a drink, or a combination of the above.

She may not realize it yet, but Ruby Soto needs a little bit of everything I just mentioned. After witnessing her parents' murder, she was forcibly taken from her home at the age of 14, relocated to a training brothel and imprisoned in a sex trafficking ring for almost 30 years. Her escape eventually brought her to the doorstep of the amazingly supportive counselor Pam at Florence House in Portland which in turn leads her to the crew at The Skipper.

Tim Veldman has spent his 43 years happily flowing through life as a bachelor but one curvy Latina suddenly has him sitting up and taking notice, a fact that has not escaped the notice of his friends. He knows endless patience is needed to show Ruby that he is different from the men she has been exposed to, and he has a feeling gaining her trust will be the best gift he has ever received. Then his own life is turned upside down and they find themselves unexpectedly leaning on each other.

Despite the undeniable 7th circle of hell Ruby has lived through, she still has a beautiful heart with fire and passion hidden behind the protective walls she has built. With each new painful layer of her history that is peeled back and revealed, she braces for the censure and judgment only to find it distinctly non-existent. Just when it feels like she is ready to embrace the good and move forward, a major speed bump throws her off balance and derails her hope for the future, but she once again digs deep and finds the strength to persevere.

There is no shortage of soul searching and emotional upheaval in this story. Ruby has to learn how to trust and accept that friendship and love do exist for her despite her past. Tim has to face his fears after losing some of the stability in his life too. Together they build a loving relationship surrounded by a diverse and somewhat kooky family comprised of blood relations and supportive friends alike.

Through Fire was well written, displaying the depth and quality I have come to expect from this author. Yet for some reason, Tim and Ruby just didn't resonate with me as strongly as the first two couples in this series. It could have been that Tim didn't appeal to me quite as strongly as Gunnar and Ike did. Or it could have been that Tim's mother and brother reminded me a little too much of people in the real world that grate on my nerves more often than not. Occasionally life gets in the way of my enjoyment of a story, and this was one of those times when the external noise drowned out portions of the words on paper. Don't let that deter you from experiencing an emotional and enjoyable read though- get your 1-click on for Through Fire today!

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## **DJ Sakata says**

Favorite Quotes:

Whatever shape or size you come in doesn't change all the beauty that's you.

Sometimes I don't like Pam, particularly when her arguments start to make sense. But most of the time I appreciate her brutal honesty - I just prefer it directed at someone else.

I will spend the rest of my life erasing every single mark, every single touch, every single gaze any other man has ever left on you, until all you can remember is me.

...the strongest bonds are forged by fire. You have my heart, Ruby, and I'd gladly walk through the fires of hell, if it meant I could walk with you.

My Review:

Freya Barker excels at writing compelling, relevant, and life-affirming stories that give me pause while also summoning a desire to hold my loved ones close, give thanks for what I have, and to let go of the nominal complaints of my daily life. Her emotive and thoughtful stories have never failed to squeeze my cold heart or remind me that there are far worse things occurring in this world than my petty nonsense. Through Fire, like all her other works, was expertly crafted, well plotted and detailed, deeply moving, highly intriguing, and totally consuming. Ms. Barker has a special gift for providing endearingly flawed characters that feel inadequate and weak in themselves, yet are undeniably strong in that they were capable of coming out of the worst types of devastation and tragedy that would have ruined even the best of us. In addition to that awe-inspiring ability, she also magically conjures the perfect swoon-worthy partner to support, heal, and complete their recovery and transformation from fractured to whole. And along the way - she tosses in lots of sensual sizzle, a tender romance, and a bickering pair or two for periodic comedic relief. Impressive and highly addicting - to say the least!

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## **~Steph K~ says**

I have to say that this is definitely one of my favorite series. I was wondering who might be next to be written about and Tim and Ruby did not disappoint. While I wasn't sure that Tim would be the right person to see Ruby through what she was going through, that feeling didn't last very long, as I learned how caring and compassionate Tim really was.

What do I love most about this book and series? Well for me, it always feel like I get a story, with real people, who react like most people would in the situations that they are in. I love that most of the characters are older - and all are truly caring, good people - who might have a hard life, or going through their own stuff - but are still available for their friends and family. I'm seriously thinking about a road trip to Portland, ME in the near future!

Freya Barker's books will always be an automatic read for me!

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### **Sheri Bishop says**

Bravo, Freya Barker, bravo!! I can't believe this book. I've read every book you've written and I can honestly say no other heroine and hero has touched my heart like Ruby and Tim. With all Ruby has been through, she is a brave and resilient woman who is afraid to open her heart and trust but does it anyway. She realizes she can't become mired in the past but she needs to move forward and not paint everyone with the same brush. Ruby has become my favorite heroine from your Portland ME series and I hope we see more of her in coming books.

Tim, well, what can we say about Tim. He's a typical guy. He sees Ruby several times a week but he never SEES her until that fateful evening when he finds her on the floor and his attention is caught by her booty. And then as he gets to know her, he finds himself falling under the spell, the spell that we all fell under, too, and realizes that she is his ONE. And he is willing to go through whatever he has to to make her his. And we all know, he went through it all and in the end, well, we all know how it ends.

Freya, just when I think you can't top your previous book, you prove me wrong. You make us sympathize with all your characters and identify with each one. You help us feel and understand what the characters are feeling and why. Your writing talent is truly a gift and I look forward to reading many more of your books.

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### **? Jeri's Book Attic ? the Romance Bibliophile ? says**

I am not sure how Freya Barker is developing her plot ideas but they seem to get more and more intense ( if that is even possible).

The "Portland ME" series is now launching its third book with "Through Fire" and it seems that it will only be getting "worse"

And with worse I do not mean the "bad kind" of worse – I know I am not making much sense #believe me I know. But its really difficult to explain the concept of this series.

Even though they are all standalones and could be read alone – I can only advise to read them in the right order to grasp the way they are developing from intense to more intense to bordering dark (which is where we are now) and I am kind of afraid what the next step will be.

How difficult can life really get ... how much hurt can one person carry ... you really do not want to know what Ruby went through ... and Freya Barker really drains everything out of her story there is no escaping

the hurt .

Tim felt shallow in the beginning where the other male leads from the first two books were strong and solid he was a blank page to me – but during the story that changed.

Still I kind of question myself and the author how far she will continue this series. I see potential in some of the secondary characters we already met in the past stories. But I honestly can not come up with any idea that could keep up with the plotlines that have already been told around the skipper.

And this is what also intrigues me. It should feel too much – because no pub can really be such a pool for those almost horror stories, yet it works the way this author brings to the readers.

Please let me recommend this intense romance series to readers that like to challenge themselves by reading the “Not-so-fluffy-love-stories”

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## **Renee Entress says**

4.5 star

I was pulled right into this story. The story has laughs, twists & turns, secrets, betrayal, abuse, and heartbreak.

If you have not read the below I would recommend reading those books(s) first  
From Dust (Portland ME #1)  
Cruel Water (Portland ME #2)

This is Ruby and Tim’s story. Ruby has a horrible past and is keeping secrets as she is ashamed. Now her secrets might save another. Can she let the secret out? Will she trust the person reaching out for her? Or will the past make her even more leery? When all the secrets come out will she have support? Or will she wish for a way out? When a girl needs help will Ruby be able to help her out? Or will she be taken away from them before they can reach out? Tim is trying to get Ruby to open up. His work is crazy and he might need to change what he wants out of his job. Will he get the support from his family or will they not understand?

I felt I was able to connect with the characters and the story was a great read.

I highly recommend this book.

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## **Shannon says**

This is the first book I have read by Ms. Barker, and it was such a beautiful and compelling introduction to her work. TF is completely enthralling and held me in its grip from start to finish. It's a story of hope, of redemption, of survival...it's a story of love, of overcoming your circumstances, and building a life you deserve.

Although Through Fire is the 3rd book in Freya Barker's Portland ME series, it can be read as a standalone. I

have not read the first 2, From Dust and Cruel Water, but didn't feel like I was really missing out anything. I definitely want to go back and read them now, though- I want to get to know the rest of this cast of characters.

*"The black paint is me, and the last thing I wanted to do was turn your white world grey."*

Ruby is such a strong character. She's gone through so many unspeakable things in her life, things that a weaker person could never have survived. She's understandably leery, and very cautious, about letting anyone get too close. But she has an amazing group of people surrounding her, and one incredible man willing to put it all out there for her, if only she'd take a chance. Tim is protective and caring, he's fiercely loyal, and with Ruby so patient and kind.

There was so much depth to this story, so much emotion and heart, I was truly captivated by it. I love a book that makes me think, one that makes me appreciate the life I live.

\*\*\*Arc received and reviewed for The Book Enthusiast.

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## **Rebecca says**

Well I'm here again Mrs Late as Usual, middle name procrastination.

So late that many reviews have been written for the books in the Portland ME series, some beautifully eloquent and many emotional and descriptive. There is very little I can add, nothing I will say better but here's the thing, when it's an author who has given me the hours of pleasure that Freya Barker has, then I kind of have to get the fuck over myself and make an effort (eventually!) whether eloquent or not because reviews help the authors to get better seen on Amazon, and as a reader help sometimes if on the fence whether to one click or not, they are a personal opinion and whether rambling and nonsensical, eloquent with beauty or somewhere in between with a colourful vocabulary (just the odd fuck or two!) worth writing.

Freya Barker has fast become a favourite of mine and her first book Slim to None in the Cedar Tree series is one of my go to books to reread when I have a book hangover or I'm in a funk and nothing new is grabbing my attention, both the other two on that go to list are by Kristen Ashley (Lady Luck and Motorcycle Man). Both authors, for me, write the best Alpha male book boyfriends, strong and sexy with a side of protective and yet a vulnerability that draws you, the warmth and affection between couple, friends and family shines through and the cast of secondary characters is always outstanding. What I also love is that different series have different feels yet the core ingredients are the same, so I know chances are I will like anything new either one writes and the quality is consistent and high.

If you have read any of the Cedar Tree series then you already know that Ms Barker is happy to go where many authors fear to tread, real, disabilities, warts, issues and all the ugly of life, she does it incredibly well and you get the Happy Ever After but it doesn't feel Disney unattainable, it's real and in your grasp. Seamless, effortless, flawless writing. I wrote in a review for one of Ms Barker's books and end up repeating it now every time because it's just so true;

She dares to go where few authors will risk, writing older characters with health issues, disabilities, the reality and the fantasy seamlessly intertwined and breathtakingly beautiful.

With the Portland Me series Freya Barker has stepped up the 'Real', the issues dealt with are horrific, the type many people skirt around, don't talk about, read about, or watch any media about, the shit in the world

that people know happens but avoid because it makes them uncomfortable. The subtle sensitivity of Freya Barker's writing means the emotional response hits with a visceral impact however never feels too much, too real. She tackles these subjects many will not and wraps them up in a romance that satisfies the sweet and the hot we love while bringing an awareness of horrors that happen. She has given us an absolutely beautiful raw series that celebrates the strength of the human spirit and our ability to overcome.

#### From Dust

Sydney is lost, after a tragic event which would change and define anyone's life she is homeless, jobless and adrift with no support system to help.

Gunnar is doing his best to be a single parent, run a business and deal with life's day to day battles.

Their story is not an easy read, their path is difficult, full of drama and issues, the tragedy in Syd's past has broken her and forgiveness is not easy but when I finished this story it was with respect for the human spirit, a belief in the power of second chances and I'm not even going to apologise for lowering the tone but a total lady boner for Gunnar. That man is magnificent!

#### Cruel Water

Cruel Water is not an easy read, has some sensitive triggers and drew an extremely emotional response from me which is not easy, I can name on one hand the books I have shed a tear over in the last five years. There was one point in this story where I had to put it down, refused to press for the next page, lump in my throat and tears threatening, I knew what was waiting for me, knew the horror about to be confirmed and was so invested that I just couldn't, for characters to be this alive, the story to have grabbed me so completely I am gutted, is special. Whether in book, song or film form the written word when wielded well is powerful, in content, in message, it can be thought provoking, raw, sometimes brutal, but also emotional, beautiful and in the same way that certain songs resonant with us, haunting, played time after time because something, be it the melody, lyrics, the voice, something hits us deep inside and demands a response Cruel Water is such a book. In much the same way that Hello by Adele, Clown by Emeli Sande, Thinking Out Loud by Ed Sheeran, Desperado by the Eagles, Somewhere Over The Rainbow by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole feed my soul and when in a funk I return to them on a frequent basis because they have the power to change my mood and perspective, Cruel Water does the same. Ike and Viv's story is powerful, harsh, uplifting and emotional, it's raw, unapologetic but subtly and sensitively handled. If only every Viv in this world could find her Ike and if only those who should protect, nurture and love us unconditionally always did.

#### Through Fire

Ruby is one of the strongest females it's been my pleasure to read, her story will break your heart, to even contemplate the horror of what happens to her and the age at which her life becomes unravelled is shocking and traumatic. Flawed, real, ugly at times yet compelling and riveting Ruby's story had me rooting for her HEA, for her to see the strength and beauty of her soul not the broken and battered person circumstances made her. Tim redeemed himself completely with his handling and support for her, after Cruel Water I had him down as a bit of a selfish douche, how wrong was I and I'm happy for that!

I have been very deliberately vague with specifics because all three of these books have such impact I don't want to give spoilers, you can see the blurb, you can see the reviews and you will make a decision on whether to one click and buy, all I've tried to do - no doubt ineloquently and rambling as usual - is express my feelings and emotional response to them. As I've said already we all ignore the uncomfortable shit sometimes, things that happen in this fucked up world that we feel if we can't influence or are not personally affected by, move along, nothing to see here, as you were but that solves nothing and is insulting to those going through these horrors, so Bravo to Ms Barker for taking on these stories, for handling them the way

she does and for raising awareness, to say “yes shit happens but how we handle it is important”, for those who inflict it, for those supporting and loving the victims and for those it happens to with the courage to overcome, stand strong and be a victim no longer. Every story in this series is inspirational, shows just how strong the human spirit can be, how, if you are truly lucky and find your “PERSON”, then the sky is the limit for new starts and a life full of love, hope, possibilities and happiness. Isn't that what we all search and hope for? That's a life worth living.

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### **~Nichole~ Sizzling Pages Romance Reviews says**

Diving back into this series always makes me feel like I'm visiting friends. The characters are vibrant and full of life. Tim was a character that bugged me a little in the previous story because he was a day late and a dollar short and found himself trying to cause drama with Viv and Ike. So that all worked out and it's his turn for a HEA. It took me probably 30% to warm up to Tim since I don't really care for comparisons to my heroines to other women. I had to sort of shake off my own personal pet peeves and try to see Tim through Ruby's eyes instead of my own biased memories of him before. Once he stopped referencing the past I really started warming up to him. I think it needs to be addressed that this has a dark element with triggers of abuse and it had me feeling very emotional throughout. I really adore how these people are so supportive and non-judgemental. The love they all share for each other whether family or deep friendship is felt on every page. I really loved the sweet way Tim helped give Ruby a family and the epilogue made my heart smile. Now.. My Dino.. Please let his story be healing and I hope that he can find real love and not have to feel like he failed. I love that big guy always have.

4 solid soulful stars.

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### **JG ~ Jezabell Girl & Friends says**

**Once again a beautifully told story by Freya Barker which will tear you up inside as we meet another amazingly strong woman with a cruel and painful past.**

This story is yet another difficult but rewarding read as we witness the pain and suffering Ruby has experienced over 30 years at the hands of traffickers. After witnessing the death of her parents at the age of 14, Ruby is taken to be “trained” and prepared for the prostitution rings run by gangs. From there her life ends as she knows it. No longer protected by her parents and her quietly lived life on a farm in Mexico long lost, she services men and in doing so becomes indoctrinated to the lifestyle. That is until she witnesses a murder and flees to the relative safety of Florence House and into Pam's protection.

Now working at The Skipper, Ruby is still on the run and keen to avoid being found. With corruption within law enforcement, Ruby can't trust anyone with her secrets that is until she catches Tim's eye. A friend of Ike's, Tim initially doesn't notice Ruby and only sees her as a quiet and unsociable waitress. That soon changes though when Ruby is thrust into Dino's kitchen and without any cooking skills flounders. In steps Tim to save the day and offers to teach her to cook and to “safely” cover for Dino.

Ruby soon warms to Tim's easygoing personality. Despite his initial cool manner, she soon finds him comfortable to be around but with her past she I doesn't know how to act around him. This was really poignant and emotive to witness as a reader, and for Tim, as Ruby's only life references to date are to

pleasure men and as a result, she doesn't expect kindness in return. After a few misunderstandings, Ruby starts to slowly trust Tim and in doing so opens up to her friends at The Skipper. Pam knows some of her story and has worked with her to escape the torments of her past but it's not long before Ruby is recognised and her past raises its ugly head once again. This time, however, Ruby has strong support network around her and is able to face her demons in order to be once and for all free of her past.

In helping Ruby, her friends are also drawn in to save another child who is living the life Ruby was once tethered to. Knowing that she may be able to reach the child, in her fearful state, Ruby forms a bond with her and sets about ensuring her future is a positive one. I loved the connection Nina formed with Ruby and in the end with Tim as well. Despite the sadness, the story was a rewarding one and one with a powerful message.

All of the characters in the book were loveable and aside from the usual crowd at The Skipper, we get to spend time with Tim's family as well who are perfectly written into this story. The sporting references, I'm ashamed to say, were lost on me and even now I'm still not sure what sport Tim and Mark were referring to but that aside, I really loved this book. I needed to translate some of the foreign terminology but that was minor and didn't detract from the story, it just added to the overall feel of the book. Dino is my favourite character in the series so far, which is unusual for someone with a relatively small part but I really would love to see him find his HEA. He has stood tall and supported all of the women so far and in opening up his heart has revealed a truly special person within.

Freya Barker is an exceptional writer and one that I would highly recommend if you haven't reached out to her books to date.

Order it now:

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## **Drue DePompei-Hoffman says**

I officially have a new author to stalk. The blurb of this book had my inner reader perked right from the get go and the book did not disappoint.

I found my heart breaking and soaring for Ruby. And I really loved the group of friends who stick it out with each other through thick and thin.

I'm headed off now to grab the other books in this series and read them. While this is a series I didn't have a problem reading it as a stand alone at all.

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## **Joanne T says**

Holy mother of God! Seriously, there is no way to sum up this story otherwise. Freya Barker has done it once again – I am completely blown away! I seriously bow down to her superior storytelling and writing skills.

Ruby, our heroine, is broken. There is no other way to describe her, or what she's endured for nearly thirty years. After months of seeing her at the Skipper, Tim finally opens his eyes and takes notice of the short curvy bartender. He sees through that broken shell to discover a real pearl inside.

I absolutely adored Tim. I loved his patience, and his morals. His struggles are real. But the way he taught Ruby to love both emotionally and physically, makes him even more endearing. And Ruby, though she is damaged, she has easily become one of the strongest heroines I think I've ever read. Watching her evolve throughout this story was breathtaking. There were times where I could sense her pain as she stumbled back, but a huge smile would quickly return to my face as she worked through those speed bumps.

Diving into this third installment of the Portland ME series brought back many of my favorite couples from the previous books, like Gunnar and Syd, Viv and Ike. But it also peaked my interest when it came to other secondary characters that I've previously met. Freya throws the reader a few bones, making me want to know more about them – Pam and Dino especially – I need their stories. I need to see their very own HEA!

And then there's Tim's family – I just want them to adopt me. Freya's secondary characters create a perfect balance, a synergy if you will, that offsets the dour yet realistic subject matter that is brought to light in her book.

Freya, you astound me. Every. Single. Book.

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## **Michelle says**

Throughout the entire Portland, ME series, I've found myself completely captivated by the stories that Freya Barker has shared with all of us. Through Fire is an exceptional tale of overcoming the worst circumstances and believing that you are truly worthy of having something beautiful, even if all you've ever known is ugly.

We've gotten to know Tim now fairly well over the last few books – I sort of already knew he'd be this

perfect, protective alpha man who would fall fast and love hard.

Ruby has escaped her past and found herself in Portland, ME – after finding Pam and getting a job at the Skipper, she still hasn't fully settled. With a past like hers, she knows that part of her will never be truly free and although she has found herself surrounded by new friends, trusting them with her story isn't easy.

Freya Barker has done it again. This story was not pretty to read at times, but it made my heart soar. Although I tend to love my rich CEOs more than the average working man romances – there is just something about a story like this that makes you feel better about the world you live in, even if it is brief escape from reality. And although Ruby's story is not easy to read at times, boy was it powerful.

Through Fire was an emotionally gripping tale of hope, love and overcoming the worst of circumstances. It was about finding beauty in what life gives you even when fear of the past is enough to leave you paralyzed. Bravo, Ms. Barker for another exceptional story of life, love, hurt and healing.

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### **Cathy Geha says**

Wow! Intense, emotional and at times heartbreaking this is a book you will not be able to put down once you pick it up. I should also add that it is heartwarming and provides some smiles in spite of dealing with a disturbing issue the world needs to address – seeing it through Ruby's eyes is difficult but definitely worth doing.

The Skipper is a pub that has seen at least three women in need come through the doors – and – it has managed to provide support, friendship and love while seeing these women through difficult times. In this book Ruby Soto, an employee that came to her job through a women's shelter, finds herself trying to handle the kitchen without the skill set to do so. Tim Veldman steps in to help out and as he does so sees Ruby in a new light. With an offer to teach her to cook, something she mentions she has always wanted to learn how to do, the basis for a friendship is laid.

Ruby's past must be dealt with before she can be truly free. And, with 30 of her 44 years on earth horrific and out of her control that is not an easy task to accomplish. It requires the support of Tim, his brother, the FBI, Pam from the shelter and those she works with at the pub.

I loved the Veldman family dynamics – the parents of Tim and Mark were oh so special! Tim and his brother, Mark, were keepers and had their own set of difficulties to contend with. Ruby was a survivor with so much to give in spite of all she has endured. The Skipper team is one that I want to hear more about and hope that Dino and Matt will get stories, too. The plot at times was a bit predictable and I have doubts that the Nina subplot is realistic but otherwise this was brilliant.

Thank you to NetGalley and the author for the copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

4.5 Stars

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