

## Soul to Keep

**Garrett Leigh**

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Jamie is an ex-junkie whose return from California back to England is his one true hope for salvation. Marc is a veteran whose life as a doctor is haunted by the things he's seen and experienced in Iraq. When the two have a chance encounter on a shared flight, their lives become entwined, and their individual demons keep bringing them back to each other again.

The novel secures immediate immersion into the characters and their world. Emotions come alive on the page from the beginning. Both of the men's heavy pasts bring considerable baggage and dark memories. Alternating between Jamie's story and Marc's, the book moves from Jamie's heartfelt goodbyes in California across the pond to Marc's post-surgery recovery.

The story follows romance formulas just enough, with heartfelt, cute moments that make it appealing. Jamie and Marc feel an instant connection that quickly blooms into a full-blown romance. Marc is a conventionally masculine man who sets out to protect Jamie, who fills a more passive role. However, both characters take care of each other, and while both deal with mental illness—PTSD for Marc, and OCD, anxiety, and addiction for Jamie—their challenges are treated with respect. They give each other needed support, though their relationship doesn't amount to a cure, and neither puts weight on the other to change.

The text is insensitive at points, with incorrect terminology around disabilities and a sexual lens regarding Marc's amputation, but the story still works to cultivate a healthy relationship between the men. While they both feel sympathy toward the other's suffering, they come to learn from each other and respect each other's pasts without infantilizing either's experience.

*Soul to Keep* is a haunting romantic narrative with some unique takes on disability and recovery.

TIA SMITH (LGBTQ+ 2018)

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