



# Beyond the Blues

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**Category:** Romance, Lesbian Romance

**Description:** Ophelia, an aspiring writer stuck in the monotony of her coffee shop job, is drowning in grief after the sudden loss of her best friend, Coco. After months of isolating herself in her room, she finally decides to break free from her sorrow and embarks on a journey to Santorini in Coco's memory. On the flight, Ophelia unexpectedly reunites with Nora, a former university acquaintance. Nora, a guitarist in a rising rock band, is taking one last trip before her U.S. tour begins. Beneath her confident exterior, Nora grapples with the loneliness of being estranged from her family, who have rejected her for her sexuality. What starts as a chance encounter soon blossoms into a passionate holiday romance. As Ophelia and Nora grow closer, each day deepening their connection, the impending tour casts a shadow over their newfound love. Will Ophelia find the strength to hold on, or is she destined to lose another piece of her heart?

**Total Pages (Source):** 47

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Susan, my heart shattering just a little more. But it won't be as much as I'm about to feel walking into Coco's room for the first time since she passed. I stand outside her bedroom door, white with blue seashell stickers on, slightly lifting now. Shakily placing my hand on the doorknob, and it feels a lot colder than I remember, but that is probably just the coldness I feel without Coco's presence. I twist the doorknob and swing the door open, revealing her bedroom. I cover my mouth to suppress my cry as I see that the room remains, as if she just left it this morning. The duvet is messy, clothes scattered on the floor, and her art book is still open on her desk. I step inside and the scent of Coco's smell hits my nostrils. One step at a time, Ophelia. Her room represented everything she was, bright, chaotic and homely. I look around slowly, my feet moving at a snail's pace. Something feels like it's missing, and I wish it was just a t-shirt or a picture, but it's not. It's Coco that's missing. She should be here, sprawled out on her bed, laughing at some stupid video. Or scribbling in her art book and showing me the most beautiful artwork, which she'd always describe as 'not her best'. I sit down at her desk and just take in my surroundings, crying a river.

After half an hour of just sitting here, staring at everything in her room, Susan and my mum come upstairs. Susan seems a lot calmer than when we arrived.

"Picked some bits of hers, love?" I shake my head.

"I don't know what to pick, because... because it's hers, it's not mine to take." My voice breaks again. It breaks so much at the moment, I sound like 'Wheezy' from Toy Story.

“Shall we help?” My mum asks. I nod.

We pack up a little cardboard box and fill it with a few bits, which means a lot to our friendship. A hoodie we got on our first theme park trip. The photos of us that were on her wall. One of her gold rings she always used to wear, with a quartz crystal in the middle. Lastly, her stuffed animal ‘Kitty’, because I know she’d feel so sad knowing he’s sitting here alone with no one to have at night. In all honesty, I wish I could just stay here, surrounded by the scent and feeling of Coco, so I’ll close my eyes at night and imagine she’s right next to me.

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“Right, love, you can pop by whenever you want. You’re always welcome.” Susan says.

“Thank you.” I go to walk away, but like a rope, I’m pulled back straight into

Susan’s arms.

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I decide to move to the window seat. To make sure I’m not stealing someone’s window seat, I take another look around. I shuffle my bum over awkwardly and drag my hand luggage underneath the seat, finally resting my head back.

“Sorry, excuse me.” An Irish accent says, I shoot my head round to a person standing by my row, smiling at me. Oh fuck.

“I’m sorry, I’ll move. I just assumed and tha-” The stranger interrupts me. The more I

look at this woman, the more I recognise her freckled face and perfect eyebrows.

“No, it’s grand. Stay there. Would you just mind moving your pretty pink purse?” The woman says, a smirk falling onto her lips. I grab my handbag off the seat and apologise again. I glance over at her. She has a low fade haircut with curtains, dark blue eyes and a recognisable cluster of freckles on her cheek. That’s when I clock her and realise it’s Nora from university. Nora studied a different course to me, we still managed to bump into each other a few times because of our group of friends, not a lot, but occasionally. She was more feminine in university, but that cluster of freckles I would always recognise, and the fact she’s incredibly attractive. Of course, it’s just my luck to be sitting here wearing an old bobbly hoodie, no makeup, and my curls piled on top of my head in a bun.

“You know I’m actually glad you sat there, one less person to climb over awkwardly to get to the toilet.” She interrupts my thoughts, showing her pearly straight whites off.

“Yeah, just let the pro make a fool of herself,” I reply, pointing my fingers at myself.

“It’s alright, I’ll stand up and make your life easier.” She winks at me subtly, causing a flush to my cheeks.

“Not so sure about that guy, though.” I point my head at the guy next to

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her, his glasses down his nose and mouth open, snoring. She laughs out loud, her nose scrunching.

“This may sound odd, but do I know you from somewhere?” she asks. “Funnily enough, yes, from university?”

“Of course you were friends with Coco and James!” Nora exclaims. ‘Was’ friends with Coco.

“Remind me of your name?” Nora questions.

“Ophelia, yours?” Even though I already know, I try to play it cool.” “Nora, look at us with both old people’s names.”

“Hey! My name is young and hip.” I argue, pulling out a peace sign, making me internally cringe. I shake my head and wait for Nora to fill the awkward silence so I don’t embarrass myself further.

“So Ophelia, what takes you to Greece?” Nora asks. I try to think of a quick answer which isn’t ‘well you know Coco, she died and I will break down further if I stay at home.’

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“Just a self care holiday, I guess.” I shrug.

“You?” I ask.

“Same I guess, I finally finished university, so I thought why not?” Nora answers, pulling out a bag of skittles from her rucksack and chucking a red one into her mouth.

“Do you still live here, in London?” I ask, feeling slightly nosy.

“Yeah, I moved from Carricklea but I hated it, so as you know, I studied in London, mostly to get away from my hometown, you know?”

I guess I understand what it feels like to want to get away from your hometown, away from everyone you know. At home, I know everyone is just staring at me with sympathy for ‘the girl with the dead best friend.’ I stare at Nora, wondering if the look in her eyes means she sees me as the girl with the dead best friend.

“I get you” smiling at Nora, the conversation coming to an abrupt ending. I sit without my headphones for twenty minutes in case Nora carries on the conversation, but she doesn’t. Instead, she opens Netflix on her phone and watches a film. I’m glad something distracted me as we were taking off though. I put my headphones over my ears and shut my eyes, imagining I

was not on this plane. Closing my eyes used to be so calming, but ever since Coco left, it's harder. I close my eyes and she pops up in my thoughts, our memories, our last day together, her funeral. I shoot my eyes open and decide to distract myself with a cheap magazine I bought at the airport instead. The type of magazine with the insane four paged long stories in them, which make you wonder if they're real or not. I feel my eyelids heavy with tiredness. Getting up at 4am for a flight was a battle for me, someone who usually wakes up at 10am. I take my hoodie off, trying to avoid elbowing Nora in the face. Once the hoodie is over my head, I come to the horrible realisation that I didn't just lift my hoodie up, but also my shirt, revealing my bra. I frantically pull my top down and look to my side to see if anyone was looking, and of course Nora was. She looks away quickly, keeping up with her nonchalant act, or maybe she genuinely was this chill and calm.

"Sorry" I whisper, even though I doubt she can even hear me through her headphones.

"No complaints" Nora replies, not looking away from her phone. My cheeks burn with a hot flush, which I know looks like blood on snow, noticeable from miles away.

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The plane lands on the runway abruptly, shaking me awake in a slight panic. I grab my arm rest and clench it, turning my knuckles white. As soon as the plane stops moving, everyone bounces up from their seat, hectically pulling their bags down from the overhead lockers. As Coco always said, we'd all eventually get off the plane no matter who got off first. I sit there, waiting for everyone to leave the plane, leaving me alone. The well put together stewardesses wave me goodbye, their ruby lips

showing off their very white teeth. I drag my small suitcase through the airport, making my way straight to the taxi rank. The perks of only bringing hand luggage are not waiting round for my bag. As I leave the airport doors, the warm air hits me and the sun falls on my face. I turn to the taxi rank to see Nora standing there, sunglasses on and cigarette balancing on her lips, laughing along with the taxi driver. From what I've seen of this woman, I wish I had the confidence to just talk to any and every stranger. Nora looks over to me, notices me staring, and waves her hand just a little. I wave mine back and smile before being interrupted by the taxi driver.

"Taxi?" the man in a blue polo shirt, hanging out the driver's window, says. "Yes please, Sunset Hotel?" The driver nods, getting out of the car and putting my bags in the boot. I get in the back and admire the views as we drive to the hotel. The rugged cliffs and wild nature surrounding the rocky

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roads until we reach the shoreline. Then there it is. The beautiful white buildings, contrasting with the deep blue glimmering sea, peacefully singing as the waves crash against the beach. I can see why Coco always wanted to visit this place. She always loved blue, and it seems here, there's a bit of blue dotted everywhere. I remember in her light blonde hair there were blue streaks highlighted throughout, matching her blue shell necklace she always kept on. I fiddle with my matching pink shell necklace, heart heavy with grief. A tear falls down my cheek slowly, and I try to hold back my emotions. I'm doing this for Coco. Coco would want me to be happy.

Before I know it, I'm flooding this poor man's taxi with my tears, his confused eyes looking at me through the rear-view mirror.

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Aged 16

Coco lies on my lap whilst I braid her hair, and she speaks about a new film she thinks we should watch.

“I just think you’ll really like it, Ophelia!”

“I’ll never like the films you like, you see. I like dramas and romances and you like nerdy stuff.” Coco sits up jokingly offended and throws a pillow from the bed at me. We fall into a pit of laughter, stomach cramping from how hard I’m laughing. As she lays her head back down on my lap, a sense of calm washes over us both. Her big green eyes stare up at me. Coco was the real life Rapunzel look alike.

“You know what film we will both agree on, though?” We smile at each other.

“Mamma Mia” we say in unison. We both sing loudly, out of tune, of course, to every song that comes on. Coco and I have watched this film well over 100 times. When it first came out, we begged our parents to take us to the cinema three times during the release week. We knew every line, we laughed and cried every time we watched the film. ‘Slipping through our fingers’ plays and Coco shoots up off the bed, lip syncing a dramatic adaptation of it. The further along the song gets, the more passionate she gets. She prances around the room, picking up a hairbrush as a microphone. Her face radiating pure happiness, her cheeks flushed from laughing. When Sophie’s part starts, I

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join in, hand in hand, with Coco dancing in the middle of my room, now singing in unison. As the song ends, we stand there, out of breath in the middle of the room and chuckle to ourselves.

“I love you.” Coco says.

“I love you more.” I reply.

“We’ll go to Greece one day together, live out our Mamma Mia fantasy, yeah?” Coco holds out her pinky.

“Pinky promise.”

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The driver subtly places a pack of tissues on the back seat, and I take a couple, patting my wet eyes dry and thanking him. We pull into the hotel’s car park. The hotel has classical white Greek buildings dotted around, fairy lights dangling all over the place and fuschia flowers blooming from the bushes. I check in at reception, petting the cheeky cat that has sneaked into the building. A little grey cat with white markings purring against my hand, making little happy chirping noises.

“Well, you’re a cutie, aren’t you?” I say to the cat, the cat looks up at me with its big green eyes. Green eyes like Coco’s; which I know she’d be up in heaven laughing at me for even having a small inkling that this cat is her. I let out a small chuckle, the cat meowing at me in response. The receptionist hands over my room keys and guides me to my room. I walk into the fresh room overlooking the pool and the beach

in the distance and decide I should head down to the pool since it's only midday. I put on a bikini and grab the necessities, sunscreen and a book. After all, I am simply just a book nerd who burns way too easily. I lay down my towel on a sunbed and apply sunscreen in a thick layer all over, trying to get it on my back, but clearly missing the mid section.

"Need some help?" A familiar Irish accent says, I turn around and see Nora there wearing a black scoop neck bikini and green palm tree swimming shorts.

"Wait, are you staying here?!" My mouth falls into an O in shock.

"No, I just thought I'd stalk you for a day and then go back home to London." Nora remarks, that same smirk appearing on her lips. I roll my eyes, smiling,

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and hand her over the sunscreen. She rubs it into her hands and then puts her warm, firm hands on my back, rubbing the cream in. Then it slowly turns into a shoulder massage, seeming to get every knot in my shoulder just perfectly. A small hum falls from my lips.

"Nice?" Nora says, and I realise that sound should've stayed in my head. I pull away from her hands and turn to face her again.

"Lovely, thank you!" I blurt. Nora leans her head to the side and smiles. "What? Is there something on my face or something?" Nora nods and places her thumb on my nose.

"Forgot to rub that bit on your nose." She rubs her thumb gently on my nose.

“I think it’s been a few too many times of embarrassing myself in front of you and you only bumped into me, What, about 6 hours ago?”

“No, no, don’t worry, it’s grand. I’m enjoying it.” Nora states.

“So, you’re enjoying my downfall?” I joke, hand to my chest as if I’m offended.

“No, it adds a bit of character.” Nora smiles.

“Can I lie on this sunbed?” Nora points to the sunbed next to mine. I nod. She lies down, spreading her arms above her head, hands veiny over the top of the sunbed. The freckles don’t just stop on her face, they trickle down her body. I take a deep breath and turn my vision to something else, ignoring the small flutters I’m feeling. Where they are, I’m not entirely sure.

“Why’d you get that tattoo?” Nora rolls onto her side, reaching her hand out and tapping my exposed wrist. The tattoo of a wave sits there. For Coco, of course.

“It’s for Coco. She loved the sea.”

“Loved?” Nora questions, eyebrows furrowed then dropping with realisation.

“Oh, shit, I’m sorry. I always speak before I think.”

“No, it’s fine.” I wave my hand elusively in front of my face.

“I heard she passed, It just crossed my mind how close you guys were” Nora adds. I nod, unable to form words. How could she not remember we were close, we were attached by the hip? But I guess we were in university, things

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change. Nora notices my awkwardness and jumps to a distraction.

“At least you don’t have this bad boy.” Nora pulls down her swimming shorts slightly, revealing her bare hip. My breath hitches. I look at Nora’s tattoo of a badly tattooed smiley face, one eye bigger than the other and the smile lopsided.

“It looks like you!” I say.

“What?!” Nora laughs, pulling up her shorts again.

“It’s smirking, like you always do.”

“I do not.” Nora responds, sitting up on the sunbed, crossing her arms over her chest like a child having a tantrum.

“Sure” I nod slowly, eyes wide. We both erupt into a fit of laughter, the families around the pool looking over, confused. I cover my hand over my mouth, trying to hold back my cackle.

“You’re easygoing. You know Ophelia?” I clear my throat and smile gently.

“Thanks, you too.” My thumb strokes my tattoo on my wrist.

“I can’t believe we didn’t speak more at university!” Nora adds.

“I think we only spoke like once, but somehow we were always in the same room a lot.” I remind Nora.

“Always noticed me, did ya?” Nora smirks.

“You could say that, I guess.” I shrug. But yes, I always noticed the attractive female in the same room as me.

“Dinner later?” Nora asks confidently “Is that a date?”

“It’s whatever you want it to be.” Nora says deadpan.

\*3 years ago\*

Coco and I go to a freshers party. We walk in and already the room smells like drugs, sex and vodka. I scrunch my nose in disgust. Is this what university is going to be for me?

“I met a couple of people earlier today. Let me introduce them to you!” Coco shouts over the music.

“You’ve literally just started uni? How have you already met people?” I ask.

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“It’s my magic.” Coco winks and then pulls me through the crowds of people. When we arrive at this group of people, Coco hugs them as if she’s known them for years.

“Guys, this is Ophelia, my best friend!” They all say hello in unison.

“Hi, my name’s James.” A tall guy, with beautiful dark eyes and shoulder length curls. He shakes my hand politely.

“And my name is Eva!” a short, blonde girl with micro bangs and piercings all over her face interrupts. Similarly to Coco, she pulls me into a tight squeeze.

“Coco, I haven’t introduced you to Nora yet!” Eva exclaims, dragging a blonde girl towards us. When she stands in front of us, I’m taken aback by her freckle-covered skin, long and healthy blonde hair, and wearing a button-up shirt and jean shorts that fall just above her knees.

“Hi Nora, I’m Coco!” Coco pulls her into a hug, and her blue eyes land on me.

“Nice to meet ya, Coco, and you are?” Nora scoots her way around Coco, standing by me.

“I’m Ophelia. Is that accent of yours Irish?” I ask, feeling stupid as soon as it came out of my mouth.

“It indeed is.” Nora smiles. We hold eye contact for a few seconds before she turns to look away, flexing her incredible jawline.



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“Nice to meet you, Ophelia.” Nora adds, taking one more look at me before approaching a different group. I watch her walk away, even her walk is hot. Coco leans into my ear and whispers,

“Best wipe that dribble from your mouth before she notices.”

“Shut up Coco!” I laugh out loud, feeling embarrassed that Coco caught me, but not too embarrassed because it was only Coco who caught me.

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I tear through my hand luggage, which I had previously packed neatly, now scattered all over the hotel floor. The tiny hotel towel barely covers my ass, my soaking hair dripping onto the floor. Deciding on an outfit was difficult, so I pick out a baby blue dress, showing off my milk bottle legs flawlessly. Some days, despite the nicely falling curls, it's hard to tame the frizz, so I chuck what feels like fifteen hair products in my hair to make it at least presentable. Tapping my phone for the time and realise I am already running five minutes late. I shove my feet into sandals, grab a tote bag, and run out the door. I speed walk through the hotel grounds, attempting to find the restaurant. The calm air of the hotel in the evening is an odd feeling. It reminds me of when I was a child and all I could think about was getting into the pool the next day. I

walk up the stairs to the restaurant, the lack of exercise catching up to me. Once I reach the top, breathing like a dehydrated dog, I see Nora. Fuck me. The beige linen shirt and short set hung off her figure so effortlessly, with a plain white t-shirt underneath contrasting her summer glow, and her highlighted hair styled perfectly. Hereyes look me up and down before that same old smile falls on her lips.

“Hello there,” she says, stepping towards me slowly.

“Hello you” Nora reaches her hand out and holds one of my curls in her hand.

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“Where have these curls been hiding?” she asks, staring at my hair intensely. “They usually hide on top of my head in a nest, like you’ve probably seen every time you’ve seen me.” Nora snickers. I mean it’s true, I was a university student with deadlines left, right and centre. I didn’t have time to style my hair every day. We walk into the restaurant and sit down out on the balcony,

the sun setting perfectly.

“Wow, the sky looks beautiful.” Nora looks out at the sky in awe. I thank Coco silently for painting the sky for me.

“I agree.”

Nora and I share a tapas of Greek food, olives, feta and all that goodness piled up on a charcuterie board.

“Have you been to Greece before Ophelia?” The way Nora says my name does

something to me.

“Nope, first time travelling alone, actually.” “Really?” Nora exclaims, taking a sip of her wine.

“Yes, I used to either travel with my family or Coco, but it’s difficult now to get her on a plane,” I joke. Nora laughs, almost spitting the wine out of her mouth.

“I like it.” Nora nods, pointing her finger at me.

“You like what?”

“Making light of a hard situation.”

“Well, otherwise I’d be crying all the time and I don’t drink enough water for that.” Nora laughs again, I feel stunned that someone else in this life finds me as funny as Coco once did. I feel like with everyone else, it’s a sympathy laugh. No one quite got my humour like Coco. The creases by the eyes and scrunch in the nose always told me when it was a real genuine laugh.

“You’re funny, Ophelia... What’s your surname?”

“Greene, yours?”

“O’ Connell.”

“Nora O’ Connell has a nice ring to it.”

“Ophelia Greene is a lovely name. How did your parents come up with that?”

“Well, funnily enough my mum just found it in a ‘500 top girl names’ book,

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and picked the first one both my mum and dad could agree on, thank the Lord I wasn't a boy otherwise my name would've been Ophelio." I chuckle, picking at the olives in front of me, avoiding the brown ones and scavenging for the bright green ones in the bowl.

"You know I hate olives."

"You hate olives? I'm afraid Nora, you're going to have to sit over there" I point to the bin almost overflowing with napkins.

"Away from me because we can't be friends anymore." We laugh in unison. Nora stands up, sighing, jokingly about to walk away. I grab her wrist and pull her back to me. Nora holds her hand out to me.

"Care to join me for a beach walk?" I put my hand into hers and walk towards the beach, the sky getting darker with each step. The beach is sandy, laced with volcanic rocks throughout, blue and white striped umbrellas shoved into the ground. We walk over to a sunbed and sit on the same one, our legs touching.

"Can I ask you something?" Nora asks. I nod.

"Do you like women?" I nod again. The moment I realised I liked women is still fresh in my memory. I saw two of my female friends kiss in front of me, and then it

hit me. I didn't need to like men, and there was a reason it made me so uncomfortable to be intimate with men. Then after that, I never looked back. Women are a lot more enjoyable to be with. I mean, I've not really dated a woman, sure I've had the occasional fling, but nothing really impactful to me.

"You?"

"You can't tell by this haircut?" Nora jokes.

"It'd be wrong for me to assume." I defensively put my hands up.

"Just like when people assume I'm straight because of my 'feminine' persona" I add.

"Fair enough, very true." Nora responds.

We sit in a comfortable silence, watching the stars fill the night sky, the waves filling the beach with its vibrations. Nora stands up and pulls another sun bed next to the one I'm on. We lay back on our sun beds, our legs still grazing each other.

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"You can put your legs on me if it's comfier?" Nora offers. I place my legs over her thighs, and she places her hands on top.

I look at the stars, the sky clearer than in England, and a lot more beautiful. "There's Mars." Nora points up to what looks like a star, but on closer

inspection has a red aura to it.

“Do you know a lot about the sky map?”

“No, I just always look for the reddish looking one and know it is Mars. The rest are just stars with a secret I have no clue about,” Nora says, turning her focus onto me. The moonlight faintly gives me a glimpse of her face. Who’d of thought my first day on holiday and I bump into the girl I always had an underlying crush on at university? Nora digs her hand in her shorts, pulling out a pack of cigarettes, placing one in her mouth and offering me one, which I accept. Nora sits up, leaning over to me, lighting my cigarette for me before lighting her own.

“Can I ask another question? If it’s not too intruding?” Nora asks. “What is this? Twenty-one questions?” “If you wish.”

“No, no, it’s fine, just ask me.”

“How long ago did Coco pass?” The question hits me like a ton of bricks, unexpected. I sit up on my sunbed, crossing my legs, trying to find the words to the simple yet heartbreaking question.

“She passed six months ago in February.” And I still remember the moment so vividly, finding out my best friend died. The shock of it all made my heart heavy, and it felt like the world stopped for me, but everyone else just kept living the same. It almost felt surreal, like she’d walk in through my bedroom door and tell me it was all just one big joke. Instead, it was my mum walking through the door, tears streaming down her face, unable to form words. I feel my eyes swell up, so I stand up off the sunbed, brushing the sand off my dress.

“Do you mind if we go back to the hotel?”

“Oh Ophelia, I’m sorry if I intruded too much. I didn’t mean to upset you.” “No, no, you haven’t upset me.” Tears are still in my eyes.

“I just woke up at 4am, I’m exhausted.”I lie.Nora nods, a silent

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understanding. We walk the short distance back to the hotel, in silence making the journey feel much longer than it is. We reach the pool, a midpoint to each other's rooms. Nora stands in front of me, only slightly taller than me.

"I'll see you tomorrow?" Nora asks, voice filled with worry.

"Sure." I reply, forcing a small smile onto my face, feeling my lip quiver slightly. Nora takes a couple of steps backwards before turning and walking toward, I assume, her room. I speed walk back to my room, the emotions overwhelming me. Will this ever get easier to talk about? I step into my hotel room, letting the feelings crash over me, feeling pathetic and embarrassed. I cry so hard, it's hard to breathe and my chest feels tight. Placing my hands on the sink, and try to take a second to calm myself down, although the anxiety and grief were kicking my butt. If Coco were here, she'd have encouraged me to go have fun with the hot girl. If Coco were here, I wouldn't be in this situation in the first place.

\*16 years ago\*

Today is my first day of school. I am a little scared I won't make any friends, but mummy promises I will. I hope she's right. We stand outside these grand metal gates, other school children flooding in and kissing goodbye to their parents. I grab my mummy's hand harder, never wanting to leave her side. She bends down to my level and rubs her thumb over my cheek.

"You've got this, flower," she says, her glowing smile filling me with the boost of



confidence I need.

She hands me my bag, and I strut through the gates with my head held high. I wave bye to my mum, and she gets into her little yellow car we call Bert. When she drives off, I suddenly remember where I am and how scary this new environment is.

Walking into the classroom, there are colourful paintings all around, and the teacher is scribbling on the whiteboard. Wow, her writing is good! I hope I can write that well, mummy says my handwriting is very neat for my age. As the class fills with other kids, my teacher turns around, her enormous

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tortoise-shell glasses sitting on the tip of her nose.

“Right, class, please find the table with your name on it and sit down.”

I scan all the names on the tables: Noah, Harry, Katie, Beth, Coco, and Ophelia. I sit down at the table and fiddle with the pencils on my desk. A blonde girl comes into the room, her hair with beautiful plaits and little flower clips hanging on. I want her to be my friend. She studies the names on the tables, and just my luck, she is Coco and sits down beside me.

“Hello, I’m Coco!” she says enthusiastically, her smile spreading from ear to ear.

“Hi, I’m Ophelia.”

“Ophelia,” Coco repeats.

“Nice to meet you, Ophelia. Do you want to be my best friend, please?” Mummy really was right about making friends.

“Yes, please!” I say, and Coco hugs me immediately, letting out a little squeal of excitement.

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## Chapter 4

The headache I wake up with consumes my temples, whether it’s from the glasses of wine last night or crying myself to sleep, I’m not sure. I feel a sense of guilt for making last night awkward between Nora and I. I know she didn’t ask to hurt me. She asked because she also knew Coco. Not as well as I did, but there must’ve been some shock factor for her too. I toss and turn in bed until I finally decide to get up and out and enjoy the resort. If I wanted to rot in bed, I may as well have saved all the money I spent on this holiday and stayed at home. I pop a couple of painkillers out of the metallic packaging and grab water out of the mini fridge, forcing the oddly large pills down my throat. I’ll thank myself later.

I walk over to the now busy pool filled with families, and towels neatly placed on the sun beds to ‘reserve’ them. I find a sunbed and lay my towel down, removing my cover up. The heat hits me, sweat forming on my upper lip already, and the pool is suddenly calling my name. Dipping my toes in, the coldwater sends shivers up my body, I consider getting out, but the memories of Coco begging me to get in the pool with her seem to push me further in. I swim around the pool aimlessly, trying not to splash people with my terrible swimming. Floating on my back, I dip my ears

underneath the pool, the world going quieter, the voices and music turning into just muffles.

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I notice the hotel entertainers circling the pool for participants for their fun new activity, like seagulls searching for leftover chips. I decide to make an escape for it, because I can't play water polo to save my life. People enter the pool rapidly, the dads ready to win their certificate printed just twenty minutes prior to the game. As I go to leave the pool, someone shouts.

"Heads!" Before I know it, a ball hits the back of my head full speed, knocking me over, my leg hitting the stairs and face on the edge of the pool. I lift my head up, cheekbone stinging from the impact and leg pulsing. I look down and my leg has a cut, a lot of blood leaking out of it.

"Fuck." I say, pulling myself from the steps to sit on the edge and see the damage. It's a slight cut, just one that bleeds an embarrassing amount. The holiday rep and a middle-aged bald man come over to me quickly.

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“Miss, are you okay?!” the rep panics.

“I’m sorry about my poor aim. Are you okay?” The bald man, with a heavy northern accent, says. I nod frantically.

“Yes, I’ll be fine, a plaster will do” I feel my cheeks flush from the attention I’m getting. I stand up and my head feels fuzzy, I stand still for a second, getting my balance and begin walking back to my sunbed.

“I am going to run and get the first aid kit!” The rep runs off towards reception, quickly, for just a minor cut on my leg. I place my fingers on my cheekbone and pull away, noticing the crimson red blood on my fingertips. Not just a cut on my leg then. I look up to see Nora, eyes filled with concern, jogging over to me.

“What the fuck happened here? Did someone do this to you?” She sits next to me on my sunbed, pulls off her fresh white t-shirt over her head and dabs my cheekbone.

“I just fell. It’s okay.” I mutter, feeling everyone around the pool eyes on me, whispering to each other. As if Nora hears my thoughts.

“Don’t worry about them. They’re just concerned and nosy.” Nora places her hand on my thigh, brushing her thumb softly against it. Returning to me shortly, the holiday rep with a first aid kit in hand, and a stern-looking woman in a business suit behind him. The holiday rep cleans the cut on my cheekbone, the alcohol stinging, making me wince. The grip of Nora’s hand

## CHAPTER 4

on my thigh gets firmer.

“Miss, I am very sorry this incident happened. As an apology from the Sunset Hotel, we would like to upgrade your room for the rest of your trip.” The woman in the suit says, and before I can answer.

“That will be grand. Her surname is O’Greene, Ophelia O’Greene.” Nora says. The woman nods and uses her walkie talkie to speak to someone in Greek. I look back at Nora and she winks at me, taking the edge of the situation off my mind for just a moment. After a moment or two, the rep finishes cleaning my wounds, profusely apologising to me as I reassure him it’s all okay. The woman hands me the keys to my new room. I look at the keyring attached, and it says:

‘Premium Sunset Hotel Room 101’

“See? Some bad things happen, so good things can come pouring into your life.” Nora smiles at me.

I think about the hassle of moving all my clothes out of my current room and into my new one. Of course, my room is already a mess. I’m an indecisive dresser.

“I’ll help you move over.” Nora interrupts my thoughts.

“No, honestly you don’t have to-”

“I insist”

We walk to my room, well I hobble a little, the bruise growing on my shin.

I put the key in the door and turn around to Nora before I open the door.

“I’m warning you, it’s messy, I’m messy.”

I then open the door, revealing everything I packed splayed out across the floor and tables.

“Sorry.” I bite my bottom lip, picking up my clothes and shoving them in my already open suitcase.

“Nice” Nora says. I turn around and she’s holding one of my red lace thongs. I go over and take it out of her hand, laughing nervously. At least it wasn’t one of my comfy granny pants I wear at night.

“It’s like someone raided you. How can one person make such a mess in one night?” Nora laughs out loud, picking up handfuls of my clothes. I playfully hit her arm.

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## BEYOND THE BLUES

“Shut up!” Nora grabs me by the waist, picking me up with just one arm and lays me down on the bed.

“You stay there, watching you pack your stuff so slowly is killing me.” I sit up on my elbows and watch her speed round the room, grabbing everything and carefully placing it in my suitcase. After ten minutes, she was done.

“Done.” Nora pushes her hair curtains back and wipes the sweat on her forehead with her t-shirt with my blood on it.

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“I’m sorry about your top. I’ll buy you a new one.”

“Leave off, will you? It’s just a cheap basic one. It’s fine, honestly.” I twist my face into a ‘are you sure?’ look.

“If it were my brand new Nike one, then I might’ve made you buy me a new one.” Nora smirks at me before picking up my suitcase and walking towards the door.

“Let’s go see your new suite, then.” Nora wiggles her eyebrows and I let out a chuckle, edging myself off the bed.

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### Chapter 5

The room is beautiful and immaculate, with crisp white bed sheets and the sun pouring in through the balcony door. The view shows an unbelievable landscape of Santorini, in all its glory. Nora wolf whistles.

“This room is sweet” Nora says, elongating ‘sweet’.

“Tell me about it. I mean, look at that view. It’s almost worth it for this ugly cut on my face.” I walk over to the mirror opposite my bed and stare at the raised red bump around the white bandage plastered on my face.

“Doesn’t change the fact you’re still beautiful.” I turn and face Nora, who is not looking at the view but me.

“You’re intense, you know that, right?” I ask, tilting my head. Nora walks a couple steps towards me, breaking the gap between us.

“Is that a bad thing?” Shaking my head, Nora holds eye contact, her frost kissed eyes making me nervous. I feel the tension between us grow. Is she flirting with me? I mean, during university, all she’d ever do was say hello, and that was it. She probably just feels bad for me and wants to make this trip more enjoyable. I clear my throat.

“I might have a sleep. Try to distract myself from the throbbing of my cheek.” And throbbing elsewhere.

“No, sure, do you need anything? Medicine? Water?”

“No, I’ll be okay.” Nora walks towards the door and I follow, waving her goodbye as she walks down the steps from my door. I get into an oversized

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t-shirt and my comfy pants, tie my hair up and lie down in bed browsing through the channels till I find one I can understand. Finally I find an episode of ‘Friends’ where all the pitches of the voices are ridiculously high. My thoughts drifting between Coco, like usual and then to Nora and the moment between us earlier, my eyes feeling heavy. The voices on the TV get quieter, and I feel myself drifting out of consciousness. I hear a subtle knock on my door, unsure if it’s a dream or not. I continue to lie there, then the knock is louder, waking me up. The room has fallen dark. How long have I been asleep for? I stand up out of bed, the cold tiles cooling



my feet after a sweaty sleep. I open the door and Nora is standing there, carrier bag in hand. I pull my shirt down, attempting to cover my horrendous underwear.

“I just came to drop these bits round. You missed dinner, so I got a bit worried.” Nora lifts the carrier bag and hands it to me. I peek inside and see crisps, ibuprofen, antiseptic cream, two bottles of water and a pot of noodles.

“You didn’t have to. What even is the time?”

“It’s 9pm.” Wow, I must’ve really needed that sleep. To be fair, the pain of my injuries has really mellowed out. Nora stands there, shifting between her feet.

“Do you want to come in? It’s not much fun but, you’re free to” I offer. “Your company is fun enough for me.” Nora smiles and walks past me into

the room. I close the door and follow her in. I open the carrier bag before opening the cold bottle of water, gulping it, soothing my dry mouth. Sitting back on my bed, I lean up against the headboard. I pat my side, inviting Nora to lie back with me rather than perch on the edge of the bed.

“Mind if I check your cheek?” Nora asks.

“Sure. Are you a doctor today?” I joke. Nora carefully removes the bandage from my face, the air hitting the wound.

“No, just making sure you don’t need stitches, but I think...” Nora grabs my chin with her thumb and index finger and moves my head slightly to the side, inspecting it further. Her eyebrows furrowed with concentration.

“I think you are all good. I’ll just put some cream on it and you should be good to go.” Nora leans to the edge of the bed where the carrier bag was, her shorts slightly

revealing her Calvin Klein boxers. She leans back and gets a

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## CHAPTER 5

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smudge of cream on her finger and carefully pats it on my cut. I wince loudly.

“You okay?” Nora pulls her hand away quickly. I smile.

“Just kidding.” I chuckle, Nora rolls her eyes and continues to rub it on my cut. We lay down on the bed together, Nora rolling over to face me and me to face her.

“So...” I say.

“So, how’s your life?”

“I’m in Greece, so it’s pretty alright.”

“And at home?”

“Apart from my dead best friend, overbearing parents and dead-end job, not too bad, you?” I answer bluntly. I can’t tell if she keeps digging to find out more about Coco or if she’s genuinely interested in my life.

“Well, after this trip, I’m flying out to America and supporting a band over there for the year.” I also knew Nora was musical. Even during university, most student nights would start off with watching her and her band play. She plays guitar, and very well, watching her is like watching Bob Ross with a paintbrush, effortless.

“What’s your band called again?”

“Lez be honest.”

“Of course it is,” I snicker. Nora prods my leg playfully.

“But back to your ‘dead-end job’” Nora puts into quotation marks.

“I mean, I work at a cafe, wiping tables and making coffees all day. Nothing special.”

“But is that what you want to do?” I shake my head at her. Nora stares at me, waiting for more of an answer, but people always doubt me when I mention being a writer and wanting to be an author.

“I want to be an author.”

“And what do you write?”

“Anything.”

“Anything?”

“I love all forms of literature. usually spending my days cuddled up with a book, forgetting about reality.” I get flustered, fidgeting a bit, laying down on my pillow.

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“It’s a silly dream, but-”

“I don’t believe in silly dreams. If you want it hard enough, it will happen.” Nora says with confidence, before propping herself up on her elbow, looking down at me. She looks at my lips, her tongue gliding over her bottom lip before she looks at me with intense eye contact. We remain looking at each other in silence for a moment.

“Why are you hanging out with me?” I blurt out.

“Huh?”

“Are you doing it because you feel bad? Because I don’t need someone to do that. I’ve already had enough of that for the past six months.”

“I know Ophelia.”

“You know what, Nora?”

“I know you don’t need that, that’s not why I’m here, I’m here because until I sat on the plane next to you I didn’t realise how easy to talk to and funny you were.” Nora sighs.

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“I also feel a bit like a dick for not talking to you sooner, especially since I always thought you were gorgeous.”

“You thought I was gorgeous?” I question. I feel my cheeks tug my mouth into a smile.

“Always. It’s hard to deny, really.” Nora lifts her spare hand and tucks a small curl behind my ear, sliding her hand through to the back of my head before leaning in and placing her soft lips gently on mine. At first it’s hesitant, the kisses small, but the more heat I feel from her lips, the more I lean into it. I feel Nora grin in the kiss. I pull away.

“What, am I worse than you imagined?” I breathlessly mutter.

“Better.” Nora crashes her lips back onto mine, this time with much more lust. I grab the collar of her shirt and pull her closer to me. First year university student me is screaming with excitement right now, running to tell Coco about me kissing the hot girl in that band. Coco. I try to push the thoughts to the back of my mind, but the heaviness of the absence snatches the enjoyment right from my hands. I pull away abruptly.

“Sorry.”

“Did I do something wrong?”

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“No, it’s just, I would’ve loved to tell Coco this.” “What? That we kissed?”

“Yeah, I used to have a small crush on you at university.” I blush, pinching my fingers together.

“I see... well.” Nora stands up and walks over to the balcony door, sliding it open. She waves me over. I limp over to the door. Nora stood confidently on the balcony, chest puffed out.

“You see that Coco! I just kissed your best friend! Fuck yeah!” Nora shouts up at the sky. I laugh out loud and put my hand over Nora’s mouth as she muffles more words in my hand.

“An-d she was gr-eat”

“Stop!” I say through fits of laughter. Nora turns to me and pulls me in by my waist.

“Now she knows.” I look up at the sky, and as if she did, the moon gets brighter. I look back at Nora and admire her features before our lips meet again.

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Chapter 6

Chapter 6

We sit on the balcony with only the moon lighting drinking cheap white wine. I take

a sip from my glass, squinting my eyes at the bitterness. I look over at Nora, appreciating her whilst she appreciates the sunset. The blonde hair highlights her face just perfectly, almost contrasting the freckles on her face. Her eyes are a light blue, even lighter with sun reflecting off them, specks of green popped into the mixture. Her lips don't even need to be looked at, knowing they're good. I have already tasted how nice they are. I place my legs up on the railing and sip on the wine, trying to get used to the taste.

"Not enjoying that wine?"

"No, it's lovely!" I insist.

"Your face doesn't hide that love very well." She takes a sip of the wine and mimics a scrunched-up face.

"I guess I'm more of a cocktail girl." I shrug.

"What's your favourite cocktail? As an ex barmaid, this tells me a lot about you." Nora turns to face me more.

"Probably sex on the beach?" Nora licks her lips and looks me up and down, nodding slowly.

"Yeah, I can see you're that type of girl."



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“Hey! What’s that supposed to mean?!” I grin.

“No, you just seem like that type of girl, especially with those bad boys.” Nora nods her head towards my underwear. I bring my legs down off the railing quickly, crossing my legs and hiding them. I take a slow sip of my wine, avoiding eye contact.

“Only joking. I don’t care about that, only what’s underneath.” I spit out the wine and cover my mouth with my hand. Nora burst into laughter, almost as if she enjoys seeing me flustered. She folds over on the chair holding her stomach, still laughing just as hard. I think of a way to get back at her, make her feel flustered. Standing up, I go over to her. She sits back and I straddle her lap. I lick my lips, hopefully sensually and not like I’ve just had some crisps.

“Then do something about it.” I say bluntly, keeping eye contact although it’s killing me to be this nonchalant. Nora tries to say something but appears to be tongue-tied.

“Ophelia I-” I put my hands on her shoulders and leaned into her face.

“I’m kidding, just wanted to see you flustered.” I smirk.

Nora shakes her head in disbelief and lifts me up, my legs wrapped around her waist. I giggle like a schoolgirl, demanding she puts me down. She lays me down on the bed and lies on top of me.

“You.” She kisses me.

“Need” Again.

“Sleep” This kiss lasts longer.

She pulls away and stands up, popping on her shoes. She scribbles something on the hotel notepad and passes it to me. It’s her number.

“Let’s do something fun tomorrow?” Nora questions.

“Definitely”

Nora walks out of the room and leaves me laying on my bed, giddy. I feel that knot in my stomach again, knowing I can’t tell Coco about this.

\*

Aged 18

Coco squeals and pulls me to the bathroom door by my hand, frantically locking it behind us. The party outside was booming with drinks and bad

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dance music.

“Tell me everything!” She yells.

“So, she came over to me and was being all flirty like, ‘you look pretty’ all that stuff, and then she just kissed me!”

“And then...” Coco flaps her hands about, waving me to get on with the story.

“Then she...” I motion my hand to my vagina.

“She what?!” Coco’s face filled with confusion.

“Then she fingered me in the room upstairs!” I say, immediately covering my mouth with embarrassment. Coco screams and jumps around the bathroom with excitement before returning to face me.

“And how was it?”

“I’d say it was questionable?” I say, unsure.

“She was kind of just playing with my labia more than anything, and I was too awkward to say anything, so I just faked it after a couple of minutes.” Coco’s eyes open wide and her jaw drops open, before slowly turning into a chuckle.

“You idiot!”

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“What?!” I exclaim.

“All I’m gonna say is, you got to communicate what you like or you’ll never enjoy it fully, and instead you’ll just be doing it for the sake of it.”

“But besides that, my best friend is a player!” Coco pulls me into an embrace. “I wouldn’t say one sexual interaction is me being a player.” I scoff, folding

my arms tighter around Coco.

“You’re gonna win all those hearts.”

“Of course you’d say that, Coco.” She pulls away from me and looks me in the eye.

“I mean it, you’re amazing... with a great rack, too.” We burst into fits of laughter.

\*

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## Chapter 7

I wake up earlier than usual. Tapping my phone screen to see it’s 7:37am. The sun is up already, the sea smoothly waved from the beach, the birds singing cheerfully. I open up the balcony door, letting the breeze stroke my face. Rather than getting back

into bed, I decide to get on with my day, chucking on a vest top and shorts and strolling down to the bar to grab a coffee. Waving to the resort staff who are preparing the breakfast tables, disappointment hits me as I see the closed sign hanging from the bar, realising I've woken up too early to even grab a coffee. Guess I'll see what places are nearby my resort to grab some breakfast. Just a short walk along the beach there's a little cafe. As I walk along the beach and decide to take off my sandals, embracing the feeling of the sand between my toes, the salty smell of the water hitting my nose. Cats scattered out along the sunbeds, snoozing in the morning air. After ten minutes I reach the cafe. Flowers are dangling from the sign, white chairs and tables with the classic meander pattern along it. I walk up the stairs and am greeted by an older woman, her face radiant and wrinkles that tell a thousand stories.

"Morning" she says, standing up from her seat behind the bar.

"Good morning!" I stare up at the chalkboard menu, trying to decide what I'd like to drink. I bite my cheek nervously.

"Oat milk?" I ask. The lady opens the fridge below and pulls out a carton, writing in Greek but a photo of oats on the front.

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"Perfect!" I say enthusiastically

"Iced coffee with oat milk, please." The woman nods and gets to work, fiddling with the coffee handles, the smell of the roasting coffee reminding me of home. She signals me to sit down, so I sit outside, placing the book I brought with me on the table in front of me. She places a coaster down on the table in front of me, with the iced coffee dripping with condensation on top.

“You’re very...” She clicks her fingers, as if trying to think of the word.

“Beautiful,” she says to me, flashing a warming smile.

“You’re even more beautiful!” I compliment, causing her to smile even harder before placing a kiss onto my cheek. She points to herself.

“Althea”

“Ophelia” I point to myself. She gives me a soft rub on the shoulder and walks back into the cafe. That’s the beautiful thing, you don’t need to speak the same language to understand another person, actions and expressions explain everything. I open my book and read. Enjoying the sounds of everything around me, deciding not to block everything out with my headphones. I sip on the iced coffee, the sweetness combined with richness pleasuring my taste buds perfectly. Althea knows how to make a wonderful coffee. I decide this will be my daily ritual’ till I go home, to make this my morning trip. After reading fifty pages of the book, I pick up my coffee glass and coaster and bring it inside, handing it to Althea and waving goodbye. I walk a little further down the beach and come across a supermarket. Glancing over at the cats on the beach, I think of a brilliant idea. I grab a couple bags of cat treats, and some kitten milk, because every cat loves kitten milk. Walking out of the shop, hands filled with cat treats. I sit on the beach, and shake the bag, the cats trotting over to me. The purring noises as they eat fill me with warmth, as if a cat whisperer, more cats appear. They rub their heads against my knees, their sandy fur scratching my knees slightly. I notice a couple black and white kittens, their fur patterns varying behind I assume their mum, wary of my treats. I place the treats down in front of the mum, smiling at her.

“It’s okay, I’m a kind lady.” I whisper to the cat. She gnaws down on the

## CHAPTER 7

treats whilst her babies crunch down on the rest, showing off their little teeth. I feel my eyes well up, worried about them not having a home to go to, but I guess as long as they have their mum, they'll be okay. Home is a feeling, not a place I always think. I stand up, scattering more treats on the floor and saying goodbye to the cats. As I walk back, my phone buzzes with a video call from my mum. I answer it, the video lagging a bit but showing my mum sitting in the living room.

“Hi Mum”

“Hello darling, how is it so far?”

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“It’s been good so far. I just grabbed a coffee and now I’m walking back to the resort.” My mum’s face seems to be laced with concern.

“What?!” I question

“I’m just saying, if you want to come home early, me and Dad will help pay.” I scoff. The fire in my stomach sets alight, the frustration fuelling me.

“I can go on a trip alone, Mum!”

“I know it’s just...” She sighs.

“You used to do it with Coco. It’s just not your forte being alone.” Her words feel like a punch to the gut. I have been alone. This entire morning I’ve spent alone, doing things for myself. I mean, I have been hanging out with Nora, but that’s not my entire trip. Maybe I need to do things alone.

“Think I’m going to go now.” I say bluntly, and before my mum can respond, I hang up the call feeling bad, but I’d feel worse if I said something I don’t mean. I contemplate back and forth whether to stop this thing going on between me and Nora before it’s too late.

“Hello trouble.” I look up and see Nora at the entrance of the resort, cigarette in hand, bed head on.

“Hey.” I mumble, unsure of what to do with this situation.



“What’s up?”

“I think this thing we have going on needs to stop.” Nora shakes her head in disbelief, stubbing out her cigarette underneath her foot.

“May I ask why?”

“Well, I came to Greece not only for Coco but to gain more independence and my mum thinks I can’t do it and basically-”

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“Ophelia.” Nora interrupts my rambling.

“You can still be independent and hang out with people, you know that, right?”

“But being independent is about being alone?”

“No, independence is about having the freedom to do what you want, not what your mum wants, or what I want, or what anyone wants. It’s about what you want.”

I take in what Nora says, and really consider it. Most of my life, I just go with what other people say about me and not what I want to do.

Ophelia, you want to go to university! So I go.

Ophelia, let’s go here. It’ll be fun! So I go. Most of my life, I have followed what others want from me, to make them happy and not necessarily myself. Especially since Coco has passed, the people around me have been telling me what’s ‘right’ for

me and the best way to ‘get over this’, but the only person who truly knows what’s best for me is me.

“You’re right.” I lean into Nora for a hug, her arms cocooning me into her chest.

“Had a tough morning?” I nod into her chest.

“I fed some cats, though.” I mutter.

“Of course you did” Nora chuckles, stroking my hair.

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## Chapter 8

Nora and I are sitting by the pool, talking about our mornings over frozen cocktails. Mine is a strawberry daiquiri and Nora’s a pina colada.

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“Taste mine” Nora holds the straw up to my mouth, the powerful smell of the sickly coconut hitting me.

“I hate coconut.”

“Well, you’re missing out.” Nora takes a long sip of her drink, sighing with enjoyment.

“I hired a car, by the way,” Nora adds. Not only is this girl a musician, but she drives as well? Can this get much better?

“You drive?”

“You don’t?”

“Well, I was learning to but then all the money I saved up I put towards Coco’s funeral.”

“You really have a heart of gold, Ophelia.” I shrug.

“Not really, just would I have preferred learning to drive, which I was awful at anyway, or guaranteeing that Coco was put to rest in the way she would have wanted?”

“You still don’t give yourself enough credit for the kind things you do.” Nora says. It’s true, I don’t really even think about it, it comes naturally to me. You treat others how you want to be treated, although an overused saying it’s

## BEYOND THE BLUES

one I live by.

“I’m thinking about driving to a restaurant. It’s by the cliffs, if you fancy joining me?” Nora asks.

“I think I’ll just stay here, read my book, if that’s okay?” I wave my book around, although my heart is telling me to go with her.

“Sure, no worries. I’ll see you later?”

“Yup, see ya!” I say and watch Nora walk away. What would Coco say I should do? No, what do I want to do? I stand up and run over, calling her name. I can read another day.

“Nora, wait up!” She shoots round to look at me, a smug look on her face. “Am I that hard to resist?” Nora remarks. I roll my eyes and link my arm

through hers.

“Let’s go before I change my mind, but first let me change.” “I like what you’re wearing.”

“Nora, I can’t go to a restaurant in a skimpy bikini. I doubt they’d even let me sit down!” I laugh.

“I’ll just imagine you’re wearing that.” Nora closes her eyes, fingers to her temples.

“Oh, I seem to have lost the bikini.” prodding Nora in the ribs, she grabs my hand and merges oursttogether. We walk to my hotel room quickly, and I open the door to my freshly made bed. A swan made of blankets was sitting on the bed. I smile to myself. I open my suitcase, pulling the first dress that I see.

“Turn around.” I say to Nora, suddenly more aware of my half naked body.

“I’ll wait outside.” Nora walks out the door and closes it gently behind her. I put on the dress quickly, leaving my damp bikini on the towel rails. I shove my purse, room key and phone into my bag and go out the door. Nora is sitting on the steps to my room smoking a cigarette, scrolling through her phone. She stands up and turns to face me.

“Wow, red is your colour.” Nora looks me up and down before she holds her cigarette in her mouth and points her phone to me.

“What are you doing?” The camera clicks, and I realise she took a photo of me.

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## CHAPTER 8

“Oh god no, I wasn’t even ready!” I put my hand up to the phone, attempting to cover the camera. Nora bats my hand away.

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“Then smile.” I smile, feeling like a student on picture day. Nora’s thumb slam’s the phone screen, taking far too many photos.

“That’s enough.” I pull her phone down and look her in the eyes.

“I don’t think any amount of photos of you could be enough.” I step down onto the same step as her, leaning in for a soft kiss. She leans me against the stair’s railing, her hand tracing its way up my thigh, sending chills through my body. I put my hand through her hair, pulling the back slightly, Nora letting loose a pleased hum.

“If we don’t go now, we’ll never make it.” Nora says, lips just a breath away from mine.

We get into the car, a tiny little car which even Nora looks too big for. I try to hold back my laughter, but fail.

“Look, this was the cheapest option, okay?!” Nora insists.

“No, no, it really suits you!”

“Hey, what are you trying to say?” Nora chuckles. I laugh so hard, I snort slightly, I immediately cover my mouth and Nora joins in the laughter, making fun of the noise that just left my mouth. Eventually our laughs ease into a comfortable silence, just the sound of the Greek wind and other cars passing by. We drive up the hill, lots of sharp turns where you can’t see around them. That’s when I look out my window and realise a very steep drop next to us. My anxiety spiralling through thoughts in my brain. What if a wheel slips and we go down? What if a car comes round and hits us?

My breathing gets heavier and my chest gets tighter.

“Hey, are you okay?” Nora asks, panicked. “Just, just the drop, just I feel anxious, that’s all.” “Play music on your phone.” “Huh?”

“Trust me”

I open up my phone and search through the songs landing on Bohemian Rhapsody. I connect it to the car speaker. Nora breaks into singing loudly to every part of the song. I stare at her in awe, because although she’s joking,

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she’s singing it pretty well. Her calmness at the situation radiates into me, and I can’t keep my eyes off her. Her hands are drumming to the beat on the steering wheel. Nora darts a look at me and then nods her head towards the road. Then I realised she distracted me, just like she did on the takeoff on the plane. We drive down a much less scary road. The sea stretches out for miles in front of us, with the sun setting perfectly on top of it. The restaurant is small, the car park even smaller, but somehow Nora parks perfectly. We walk into a restaurant and a band is playing romantic songs. The room has dim lighting and smells of warm pitta bread. As I walk over to a table, Nora follows behind and holds out a chair for me.

“Thank you.” I sit down, and Nora sits opposite me. She orders a jug of water to share.

“Pitta, tzatziki and wine?”

“Yes, please.”

The tzatziki is fresh, pitta bread still warm, wine perfectly chilled and the person sitting in front of me is gorgeous. She's watching the band play romantic songs, her fingers delicately tapping the table.

"You should go up there." I say, leaning my chin on my hand.

"You think?" And for the first time on this trip, this is the first time I've seen an ounce of fear on Nora's face.

"Definitely"

"If you insist." Nora stands up and speaks to the guitarist of the group. He nods enthusiastically and hands over his guitar to her. The music comes to a stop, and the guitarist whispers something into the lead singer's ear. He nods. He counts down the rest of the band and the music starts. 'Your Song' by Elton John plays from the band. Nora strums her fingers over the strings, focused on what her hands are playing. The guitarist brings a mic over to Nora, propping it in front of her. At the chorus, Nora joins the band in harmonising with each other. The music sounds so euphonious, and emotionally rich. I don't know whether it's the wine, but it brings tears to my eyes. Nora glances up to me, giving me a wink and smiling whilst continuing to play the guitar perfectly. The song comes to a finish and the other restaurant goes clap. I stand up and cheer loudly, clapping excitedly.

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Nora thanks the band members and comes over to me, lifting me off my feet in an embrace and spinning me round before placing me back down on my feet. She stares at me, her eyes softening but not leaving mine.



“You want to get out of here?” I offer. She nods. Nora grabs euros out of her pocket and leaves them on the table, we run out of the restaurant like two school kids who’ve done something bad.

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We walk into my room, our lips locked together and hands not leaving each other’s bodies. Nora walks me over to bed, I sit down and Nora steps back, looking at me intensely. She kneels down and takes off my shoes, slowly placing them behind her. Her hands work her way up my legs and she kisses the inside of my legs lightly.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“May I?” Nora places her hand on my dress. I nod. Nora lifts the dress over my head, revealing my naked chest. Nora takes a step back and stares at my body, her eyes studying every inch of me. I feel self conscious and cross my arms over my chest.

“What?” I awkwardly chuckle.

“You are so beautiful, Ophelia.” Nora falls on top of me and kisses me more, her tongue finding her way into my mouth. She kisses me with the hunger of someone who has been starved for my touch. Pulling her shirt over her head, she reveals her sports bra and sun kissed skin. As if it’s been too long away from her, I drag her back to my face. The kiss is messy, but filled with need and desire. Her lips meet my neck, then my breasts, suckling on the skin, making me lift in pleasure. Then her tongue traces my stomach, so softly it’s almost ticklish.

“Can I take these off?” Nora pulls on the band of my thong.

“Please.” Nora pulls the pants off me, edging kisses around my vagina.

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Kisses on my lower stomach, on my inner thigh, any place but there. The teasing makes me wriggle more, my body begging for her to do more. Then she does.

We lay in bed, both naked, sweaty skin glued to each other. I lay on her chest and she strokes my curls as I watch the moon outside the balcony window. Tracing my

fingers along her skin, connecting my finger between each freckle.

“I’m not used to a cuddle after sex.” I say.

“Really?!”

“No, usually it’s just something quick, then we go our separate ways.”

“I hope this feels better than that.” Much better, I think to myself. The skin to skin contact makes the experience a lot more intimate. I don’t think I’ve ever been naked around someone for any other purpose except sex, and then usually it’s a race to put some clothes back on. But not this time. This time, we exposed ourselves to the world, lying on top of the sheets and caressing each other’s bare skin.

I turn over to face Nora and place kisses over her face, slowly. “I love your freckles.”

“That’s the Irish gene in me, covered in them.”

“I know.” I giggle, eyeing her body. Nora grabs my face with her hands and places another kiss on my lips. For the past hour, it’s as if we’re addicted to each other’s touch, constantly kissing. I’m glad the world reunited us together again. Last time we saw each other, it was just acquaintances who only said a couple of words to each other. This time it was more, and although fast, my heart is exploding with all these new feelings I’ve never experienced before. Usually I’d run away, especially with things moving at a rapid pace, but I think I deserve this love and happiness after the year I’ve had.

“I’ve never met anyone like you, Ophelia.” “You’ve only known me for a few days.”

“I know, it sounds silly, but talking to you is so easy. Being around you just relaxes me.” Her thumb brushes over my temple. I feel the same. At least we both aren’t used

to this sudden, deep connection we've somehow got after a

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short amount of time getting to know each other.

“Usually I’m constantly on the go, can’t stop, but with you it’s different. I want to devour every minute I get to spend with you.” Everything she’s saying, its like she’s reading my mind. Before I can answer, she carries on.

“And I’ll be honest, I was expecting this to just be a quick ‘fling’ you know, then I’d carry on with my holiday, ignore you like other girls, but with you I can’t. I won’t,” Nora says seriously, her eyes trailing over my face with sincerity.

“I want to know you, Ophelia, every inch of you, physically and emotionally. That’s if you’ll let me.” I consider her offer. Can I tell her about the ins and outs of my life? It’s only been a few days but I still haven’t had quite a connection with someone like this, well, since Coco. But romantically? Never. I feel like the world made us meet by chance again for a reason, and I can’t ignore that.

“Me too. I know there’s more behind that confident and cool facade.” We move to the balcony, covering myself with just a bed sheet. Smoking cigarettes on the balcony, the rest of Greece asleep whilst I’ve just had one of the best nights of my life.

“Coco would’ve loved Greece. That’s why I actually came here.” I say, avoiding eye contact.

“We promised each other one day, we’d be here living out our Mamma Mia fantasy.”

“What happened?” Nora asks.

“Well, she died.”

“You know that’s not what I mean,” Nora says, knowing she wants to know how she died. The nature of the subject always causes my eyes to well up.

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*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“She... she took her own life.” The silence is deafening. Nora sits there in silence, staring at me.

“I guess. I just didn’t expect it, really. She was happy, or so I thought.” A tear falls down my cheek and I wipe it away quickly using the sheet.

“I think the worst part of it all is that she didn’t leave me a note.” My voice cracks, trying to hold back from sobbing.

“Cry Ophelia, it’s okay to cry.”

“I’m just tired of crying.” It’s been almost every day since she’s been gone

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that I’ve cried. I become overcome with emotion, my breaths heavy and my cheeks flooded with tears. Nora walks over to me, lifting me up and placing me onto her lap. I cry into her chest.

“I guess I feel guilty for not noticing she was so sad, and for not stopping her.”

“You couldn’t have stopped it, Ophelia. She knew you loved her, but sometimes the monsters in people’s heads are too much.”

“I just wish I could’ve stopped it. I just wish I could have made her my maid of

honour, the aunt to my future kids. In this life, I thought she'd be by my side."

"But know this Ophelia, the ones that loved us will never leave us. Coco is sending you a sign she's here with you. Whether they seem silly, she's there." Nora pulls my head back to her chest, comforting my cries, my whole body shaking.

"In university, when I first met Coco, she never stopped talking about you. I barely knew her, and I knew she loved you. I went home and thought how amazing it must be to have a friendship like that."

"Why, why didn't you tell me that earlier?"

"Because telling you in a moment like now would mean a lot more."

\*

Six Months Prior.

I lay in bed, drifting in and out of sleep whilst I watch cheesy rom coms to keep me occupied. While waiting for Coco to answer about our plans tomorrow, I check my phone, even though she's probably asleep. I hear a gentle knock on my bedroom door and my mum walks in, tears streaming down her face and eyes blotchy and swollen. I sit up, sleepily.

"What's happened?" My mum continues crying, almost to the point of wailing.

"Mum, what's wrong?!" I yell, panicked.

"It's Coco." My mum whispers, the words barely escaping her mouth. My heart drops to my stomach.

“She’s passed love.” Nausea hits me like a ton of bricks. I shake my head repeatedly. I sit up further.

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“What? How? When?”

My mum stares at me, sympathy crawling from her eyes.

“She took her own life.” I shake my head more.

“No, no, where is she?” I stand up and run down the stairs, my dad meeting me at the bottom. I try to shove my shoes on but give up, kicking them across the hallway.

“Don’t lie to me!” I scream. My dad tries to grab my shoulders, but I shrug them away.

“Darling, she’s gone.” My dad says. I open the front door, the cold air hits me, knocking the truth into me. As if everything changed, the world went silent. I collapse to the floor, and cry harder and scream louder than I’ve ever done in my life. My throat feels like it’s shut, and I can’t swallow. My dad joins me and tries to put his arms around my body, but I drag myself away, and lay on my front doorstep in the fetal position. Nothing matters. Why didn’t she tell me? Why would she leave me? I feel as if my heart was being torn to shreds, and I can’t imagine it ever recovering from the biggest loss of my life. \*



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After twenty minutes I calm down, Nora holding me the entire time, I take a big breath as if my first breath the whole time I'd been crying.

"I'm proud of you, Ophelia."

"Why?"

"For speaking about it so openly with me."

"Why don't you tell me something about you now?"

"Well, I actually moved to London because my family didn't accept me and my sexuality. They kicked me out." I pull away to face Nora.

"They said that I'd grow out of it, but then when I cut my hair that pushed them over the edge. They said they could never accept me as their daughter, and from now on they only have one child, that being my brother." My heart aches for Nora. That's one thing I've always been grateful for as a queer woman is the fact my family has always been accepting. I remember when I came out and my mum bought me a bunch of rainbow items. The glee on her face was lovely. Although I thought it was cringe, I was lucky to be loved no matter my sexuality. I hold Nora's hand and squeeze it ever

so slightly.

“People always say, well, they’re your family. Don’t you want them in your life? I always think, well no, if they don’t love me for something I can’t help, why would I?”

“Family isn’t always blood, it’s the ones that accept and love you for who you are.” I add.

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“Exactly.” Nora offers a soft smile, and I kiss her forehead.

“I’ve not told anyone that, Ophelia.”

“Same goes here. I don’t talk about Coco to anyone.”

“Our little secrets?” Nora asks, holding up her pinky. I connect my pinky to hers.

“Our little secret.”

\*5 years ago\*

Nora

I’ve always come to Streedagh Beach when I feel overwhelmed with life. Today, Sinead at school caught me necking it with Aine in the changing rooms, and now I really have to tell my parents that I like girls before the whole town spreads the news and it makes it back to them. I place my hands in the sand, letting the grains stick to

my fingers. Nora, you've got to do it now or you never will. As I walk back to my house, sweat is dripping down my face. It's bloody freezing, but my nerves are overpowering me. My mammy probably doesn't suspect this coming. Without fail, I go to mass every Sunday and my prayers at the dinner table. I walk into my house, and my mam is sitting at her usual spot on the kitchen table, my daddysitting opposite drinking a large cup of tea. I take one more deep breath before walking into the kitchen.

"Hello." I say, walking into the kitchen and sitting down on the seat between them both.

"Hello love." My mam says, drawing her attention onto me.

"Jesus, Nora, you're sweating a lot, considering it's raining cats out there." "Mammy and Daddy, I need to talk to you..."

"Oh Jesus, what is it? You're worrying me." Mam says, staring at me, concerned.

I swallow the lump in my throat.

"I've wanted to tell you this for a while..." I stutter. Now both of my parents' eyes are on me, their faces clearly showing them trying to figure what it is

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before I can speak.

“You’re not pregnant, are ya?” my dad interrupts.

“Jesus, no daddy, I... I like girls, which means I’m gay. I’m a lesbian.” The room is so silent you could hear a pin drop. Without further reaction, dad pushes back his chair and walks out the room, slamming the kitchen door behind him. Mam has her head in her hands.

“Mammy, please say something.”

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, what are you saying, Nora O’Connell?” She lifts her head from her hands, and before I can say another word, she continues.

“Jesus, how can you be gay? You’ve been going to mass all your life? No, we’re not having it. Why would you say that you’re a good Catholic girl!”

“Mammy, I can’t help it.” I cry out.

“What will the neighbours say? How could you be such an eejit?” At this point she’s shouting, her face red and filled with fury.

“Mam please.” I plead, the sobs tearing through me. I try to edge my way closer to her, but she flinches, holding up her hand to stop me.

“No, it is against God and I can’t have this in my house.”

“Mam! No one needs to know!” I plead with her. I can’t finish my education on the streets.

“But I know!” she screams at me.

“And your daddy knows he won’t speak to you after this.” Her eyes stare at me like lasers cutting through me, any sign of my mam having disappeared.

“You’re a heathen, and you’re no longer welcome in this house.” The words come out of her mouth like venom, heading straight into my heart.

“Mam, please.” My words are barely audible and covered by the tears pouring outta me.

“You’re to get out now and don’t come back, you hear me?” I nod, knowing this is my life now. There’s no changing her mind. I’ve betrayed her and dad. They’d rather disown me than be the disgrace of my family, the disgrace of Sligo.

\*

“Shall we go to bed?” Nora asks.

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“Will you stay with me?”

“Of course.” We both stand up and go into the bathroom. I turn on the shower.

“I’m going to shower. Care to join me?” Nora nods. We both unravel ourselves from

the bed sheets we've dragged from the bedroom. We both step in the shower, letting the water fall on us, switching sides every minute so we get an equal amount of water. Nora pours the body wash on her hands and rubs it on my body, not sexually, but as an act of care. Before she puts it on my chest, she looks me in the eye, water droplets on her eyelashes.

"Is this okay?"

"Yes." Nora continues to wash my body considerately. She then washes my hair, scrubbing the shampoo into my scalp and raking the conditioner through my ends. Apologising every time she goes through a knot in my hair. I rinse off all the bubbles, feeling softer than I've ever done in my life. Then we swap. I carefully wash Nora, moving my hands over her smooth skin. I shampoo her hair and spike it up, chuckling to myself.

"I think this should be your next look." I say. Nora grabs my hair and places it all on top of my head.

"This should be yours." Nora's smile was like a beam of sunlight illuminating the room. We step out of the bathroom, wrapping towels around ourselves, and look in the mirror. I offer my mouth wash to Nora.

"That'll have to do." She pours a cap full and swishes it round her mouth, some of it dripping down the corners of her mouth. I brush my teeth and we both steal glances at each other in the mirror. I spit the toothpaste into the sink, but it hangs from my mouth a lot longer than usual.

"Hot stuff, that is." I playfully nudge Nora away, the frothy toothpaste leaving my mouth as I laugh. We finish our nightly routines separately. This includes Nora weeing about four times before she's finally settled in bed. We lay in bed, spooning, and at this moment I've never felt such a sense of peace. Usually hearing someone

breathe infuriates me, but with Nora, it's comforting.

We wake up in the morning tangled in each other's arms. Nora's still peacefully asleep, her lips parted just slightly. Instead of disturbing her, I grab

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my book and read till she wakes up. I flick through the pages of the book, leaving reality and entering the book's universe. Reading has always been my escape.

"Good morning." I hear a husky Nora say, coming up behind me and placing gentle kisses on my neck.

I close my book, using a coaster from the bedside table as a bookmark. I turn and face Nora, her eyes still sleepy.

"What are you doing today?" I ask a lot more perky, considering I've been up reading for the past hour.

"Got to join a meeting with my band mates about America, but that's about all." I then remember that Nora isn't coming back to London. She's leaving to go to America for a year. This won't last forever, but why would she say she wants to get to know me more if she knew she was running off to America still? I suddenly become cold and stand up, walking to the balcony and sitting on the chair, lighting a cigarette to calm my anger. Before Coco passed, I never had to deal with these intense emotions with people leaving me, but once she died, these feelings skyrocketed. My brain instantly goes into panic mode, and once that switch turns on, it takes a while to turn it off again.

"Have I said something?" Nora asks hesitantly by the balcony door. I shake my head,



not looking at her. Ophelia, keep your head on, please.

“Well, you’re being weird with me...” Fuck.

“What’s weird is you said you wanted to get to know me more, and that I was ‘different’, yet forgot to remind me your fucking off to America for a year?!” I say, facing Nora, who’s shocked about where this has come from.

“I told you I was going to America?”

“And you’re still going after all of this.” I point my fingers between us. “Of course it’s my dream?”

“What will happen to us then, once this holiday is over?”

“I’m not sure. That hasn’t crossed my mind yet. I just know I like you a lot more than I expected.” I scoff.

“Where has this come from?” Nora asks.

“I knew I shouldn’t have told you about Coco.” I say under my breath. “I haven’t done anything wrong, Ophelia!”

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“Well, you’re leaving me! And now you don’t even know if we can continue this, actually I don’t know if I want to continue whatever this is.”

“What the fuck? I never said I didn’t want to continue this, you’ve jumped to this

conclusion. All I know was that I was grateful to have met you and whether this continued or not, I was glad I met you. Not whatever this ending is.”

“You can leave now.” I say bluntly.

“Are you serious?” Nora remarks. I nod. She stutters, wanting to say something, but changes her mind, grabbing her stuff and pacing out of the room. The door slams, making me jump a little. I take a deep breath. Trying to acknowledge what had just happened.

I couldn’t let another person leave my life. It was better this happened before I got too attached and actually began to really like her. I feel so angry at myself, at Nora for letting me sleep with her, for letting me open up about Coco. Careless about my appearance, I put on the first bikini I see and grab my book and towel, leaving my hotel room. I walk down to the beach, my sandals slapping the floor with each step. I chuck my belongings on a free sun bed and walk up to the edge of the sea. The waves tickling my feet; I sit on the edge, letting the water trickle underneath me. I draw lines into the sand and then watch the wave wash it away. As the water carries away my words, I feel a profound serenity and sense of freedom. I scribble out my anger and upset in the sand. Coco. Nora. My mum. My job. Myself. The way I’ve left myself to fall into such a deep hole of grief, where nothing feels like it matters to me anymore, nothing lasts forever. Every good thing that comes into my life, I feel like it will leave me eventually, heartbroken and alone, again. I rest my head on my chin, taking in the sea in front of me, children splashing each other, couples hugging, boats speeding past. With my eyes closed, I imagine a life where Coco was still by my side. I imagine a life where I didn’t have to grieve my best friend. Grief is a funny thing really, you have all these people around, loving and supporting you, but the only person you want is the one that’s gone, the heart wants what it can’t have. I should appreciate the ones with me now, because they aren’t gone yet. Overcoming the fear of people leaving me is difficult. It opens me to

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vulnerability. I guess I don't want to hurt again as much as I have the past six months. But then again, what's worse? Something bad happening to you or regret? Nora didn't intend to hurt me. I jumped through hoops and ended in this horrible conclusion, leaving us in a rough patch. Could I allow myself to have this summer of love? Leaving me with bittersweet memories of her, no bad energy or horrible endings? Just a mutual ending? I doubt she'd even speak to me again after how I acted. Choosing to lie on my front, I keep reading my book. I flip through the pages for what feels like only an hour, but the sun is setting and the book finishes. I guess I should grab some food. Maybe I'll go to Althea's place?

I get into a sundress, and head on down to Althea's place, in hopes it's still open. I walk up the stairs. The lights are dim and it seems quiet compared to the other places nearby. The 'closed' sign hangs from the door, the metal clattering against the door. Nevermind, resort food it is. As I walk away, the door unlocks and someone calls my name.

"Ophelia?" I turn around and Althea is by the door, smiling down at me. "Sorry Althea, didn't realise you were closed." Instead of shutting the door in my face, she waves me over, welcoming me in. I walk into the cafe, the lighting much dimmer, and the soft buzz of the coffee machine still going. On one table is a pastry filled with green and white goodness. The smell of the buttery pastry made me even hungrier. I sit down by the table, and Althea brings over a slice of the pastry, placing it down in front of me alongside

some cutlery and a glass of ice cold water.

"Spanakopita." Althea says, pointing towards the plate, sitting opposite me with her

plate. I take a bite of the pastry and the feta cheese inside melts in my mouth. This is the best thing I have ever tried.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“Delicious!” I say, mouth still full. Althea chuckles and tucks into hers. I look around the closed cafe and realise Althea is alone.

“Are you alone?” I ask. She nods and stands up, walking behind the counter, grabbing a frame. She places it down in front of me and shows a photo of younger Althea and a man next to her, kissing her cheek. She must be around my age in this photo.

“My husband, he passed.” The soft smile on her lips remained. I pull out

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my phone and get a photo of me and Coco.

“My best friend, she passed.” I return the smile. Althea comes over to me hugging my head. The comfort of her touch is like a cup of tea after a long day. We stay like that for a minute, in silence, appreciating each other in this moment.

“She is proud,” Althea says, cupping my face in her fragile hands, showing off her gaped teeth.

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## Chapter 11

### Althea

Forty four years ago today, I opened my dream cafe, with Nicholas, the love of my life, right by my side. I gripped onto his hand, squeezing it with excitement, looking at the bare building in front of me, a blank slate.

“This is exciting, isn’t it?!” I said, turning to face Nic. He cupped my face, towering over me.

“I’m so proud of you, Althea,agápi mou.” He placed a kiss on my forehead, making me giddy, just like every time he kissed me. I took the keys out of my pocket and jammed them into the dodgy door. The door swung open, the wood on the floor was rough, the wallpaper ripped, and the smell was musty. To most, this would’ve been a waste of a space, to me it was a bargain I couldn’t pass on. Nicholas helped me find this place and pursue my dreams, since fear was holding me back. What if I couldn’t make money? What if I’m unsuccessful? and Nic always met me with ‘what if it works?’. Nic even invested his money into this, to show me how much he believes in my vision. This part of the beach lacked cafes, and every time I walked past this empty building, I always imagined my little cafe, with delicious coffee and Greek cuisine.

As we began the work inside, we already had locals and tourists peeking their head through the window, curious to what was happening. Each time

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Nicholas went out there and spoke to them, explaining my vision, he had a way with

words. Nic taught me basic English, as he speaks it perfectly. He studied in England, so I guess that helped him out, but it also helps me out with my business. I was so grateful for him. Blessed to live out this dream of mine, with my soulmate right by my side.

But now I'm here, next to Nicholas, in a bleak white hospital room. In one hand was a handkerchief I hadn't let go of all day, and my other hand was on Nicholas's. His eyes were losing the light I was used to seeing. Now they were grey and tired, leaving my heart feeling heavy. I knew today was his last day, but I didn't want to accept the fact. Returning alone back to our home, the cafe wouldn't feel real without him by my side. Despite the state Nic was in, he still grazed his thumb over mine.

"I love you Nicholas." I say, holding back my tears. Nic shows me a weak smile, and I know he's saying it back to me. He lets out a heavy sigh and closes his eyes. Please God, spare me more time with him. I begged the man in the sky every day for more and more time with Nic, but I know there's only so much time a person can have.

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## Chapter 12

We finish dinner and wave each other goodbye as Althea stands by the door. I walk over to the beach where I last saw the cats and see if any of them are here. Then cats come running over, probably expecting more treats. They purr all over me, loving every scratch and stroke I give them. The kittens come bounding over and climb all over me, the mum clearly still wary but keeping a close eye. I decide I probably shouldn't stay out too long in the dark, alone, so head back after a little of the cat fix I needed.

Back at the hotel, I can hear the blaring music from the entertainment stage, alongside some out of tune singing. Karaoke night, of course. I check it out, feeling like I haven't seen much of the hotel since being here. A very drunk woman is on stage singing 'Toxic' by Britney Spears. Her face is red from laughing, and she's dancing around the stage without a care in the world. As I find a seat to watch the other karaoke performances, a man comes up and offers for me to sing a karaoke song. My usual response is to say no as my anxiety can't take it, but then I remember I probably won't see any of these people ever again, giving me a bit of reassurance. I grab the clipboard out of his hand, scribbling my name and song of choice. I clap and cheer loudly as each singer comes offstage, and then my turn seems to come way too quickly. My stomach has nervous butterflies, but I push them down, just for this song. I stand on the stage, the brightly coloured disco lighting directly in my eyes. I wait a second, awkwardly waiting for the music to start and then the backing

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track for 'Dancing Queen' by ABBA comes on. The drunk lady from earlier is at the front of the crowd cheering and singing along, making me smile. I look around the place and notice Nora in the corner, the same old smirk on her face. I stumble a bit on my words but look away and continue with my performance, not a very good one, of the Dancing Queen. As it finishes, the room fills with claps and I come off stage. That's one thing I never thought I'd do, get up on stage in front of an unfamiliar crowd and sing karaoke. I get a few friendly pats on the back and compliments on my performance, although I'm sure they're just being kind. Before I leave, I look around for the one familiar face. And there she is, already looking right at me. She puts her thumb up and smiles approvingly. Her face making me melt and regret every spiteful word I said to her. It was irrational. I knew she was going to America. Just the fear of being left hurt again made me want to run and escape the situation, be the person on top. Before I know it, I feel my feet dragging me towards Nora, stopping right in



front of her. How do I make this up to her? My mind searches for a good way to make it up, all while Nora is staring at me, waiting for me to say something. Say something, for Christ sakes say anything!

“Hello.” I say, my voice a little croaky and quiet.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“Hello trouble,” Nora responds. “Tomorrow morning. Can you be free?” “For what?” Nora questions.

“For me to make it up to you for being an asshole earlier.”

“Sure,” Nora says, not as bubbly as usual, but I understand I wouldn’t be happy if someone spoke to me how I spoke to Nora.

“The beach, by the sunbeds we went to, 10am” I put my hand out, and Nora shakes it in agreement. I walk away slowly, my head feeling slightly fuzzy from the wine. What am I gonna do? I’m not satisfied with simply saying sorry and leaving it at that. I want to show her I am sorry. It’s making me wonder if I’ll regret this in the morning. You know, allowing this situation to happen, but fuck it. Rather than having nothing at all, I prefer liking Nora far too much for a short amount of time.

My alarm wakes me up, slamming on my phone to save me from the further

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## CHAPTER 12

headache. No more wine for me. After struggling to sleep, once I got back to my room, I sat there and planned what I was going to do for Nora. I settled on a breakfast on the beach with flowers to really seal the apology. Down at the grocery store, I grab a yellow and orange bouquet, as well as a couple of pastries for both of us to try. I consider grabbing a bottle of wine, but my head was screaming for me to put it down. Instead, I opt for a bottle of peach iced tea. I take all of this to the tills and start

packing it into a plastic bag and notice a little key ring of a guitar by the checkout, so I pick that up and add it to the rest of my items.

Setting up this ‘picnic’ on the beach was a lot more difficult than the books make it seem. Sand kept getting in my hair, then my hair in my mouth, and it seemed the pastries wanted to run off into the sea. After a while of struggling, I set up the picnic on the beach and, to be honest, I was impressed with what I had created with such little time and resources. The flowers laid in the middle of a towel, because a picnic blanket was not easy to find. Then there was a plate I asked to borrow from the restaurant, filled with pastries and then two plastic cups at the ready for the peach iced tea.

“What’s all this?” I turn around and Nora is standing behind me, staring down at what I’ve done.

“It’s for you, obviously, to say I’m sorry”

Nora sits down, crossed leg on the other end of the towel and stares at me.

Whether it’s a look of anger, disappointment or care, I couldn’t quite tell.

“Why did you act that way?” Nora asks.

“I felt scared.”

“Why?”

“I was scared you’d leave me hurt, but I realised it doesn’t have to be that way, even if it is just a summer of love.” I affirm, and Nora reaches over and holds my hands in hers.

“I would never want to hurt you, and I thought about it. We could still talk and see each other, just not as often.” Nora says. I shake my head.

“No, this is your dream. I want you to be free, but all I ask for is to be with you for this trip. No arguments. Not upset. Just spending time together, and

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more sex.” I laugh softly.

“I think we could do that.”

“So, I’m sorry Nora, and here is me showing you that.” I point to the layout in front of us.

“No one’s ever got me flowers before” Nora picks them up, bringing them to her nose and takes a deep inhale.

“Most girls I’ve been with just seem to treat me like a man, just because I ‘look’ like one” Nora seems on edge a little, hurt.

“They just expect me to be their boyfriend and as if they suddenly realise I am, in fact, a girl, they leave.”

“Well, if it reassures you, I know you’re a woman, and I still want to be all over you.” I add, smiling and leaning my way over to her.

“And I don’t want to leave.” I whisper before Nora leans over and kisses me intensely. Even if it has just been a day, I’ve missed kissing these lips. Nora pulls me

on top of her, making me squash the flowers underneath my legs.

“The flowers!” I shriek.

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*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“But your lips,” Nora laughs, kissing my lips and face repeatedly. I pull away from her kisses and look her in the eyes.

“One more thing.” I reach down into my bra and pull out the key ring, letting the guitar dangle in front of her face. Nora looks at me as if I have just given her the most expensive gift in the world. She gives me a tender kiss, her tongue immediately finding its way into my mouth and her hands gripping my hair.

“We can’t be here,” Nora says roughly.

“Why?” I ask, confused

“Because I need to touch you right now.” “I must be in your good books.” I chuckle.  
“The best.”

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### Chapter 13

Once we got back to the hotel room, we had a shower, drank some wine and then we...

“Do you reckon there’s a way I can keep those flowers forever?” Nora asks, staring at the flowers I got her sat in a mug filled with water, the best solution to not having a vase.

“I’m sure you could save a couple of petals, put it in a scrapbook or something.”

“Good idea.” Nora shoots out of bed, completely naked, her bum peachy, making me a little jealous. The only time we seem to have clothes on round each other is when we’re outside of this hotel room, but I like it this way. It feels natural. She picks a couple of petals from the flowers. She finds a notebook in her suitcase and shoves the petals in between the pages.

“If I were a flower, what flower do you think I’d be?” Nora asks, finding her way back into the bed snuggled up into my side.

“I’d say you were a sunflower, because you’re just a bright person.” I answer. Nora is the personification of the sun. Brightens up your day every time you see it and feels great to be touched by.

“What about me?” I return the question.

“You remind me of a hibiscus flower.” Nora says confidently. “It seems you’ve already thought about that answer.”

“I have, you see, flowers all have different meanings. I only know a couple,

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one of them being hibiscus. Hibiscus’s meaning is ‘delicate beauty’, and that you most certainly are Ophelia.”

I don’t know how to explain it, but Nora has such a way with words; it makes me weak at the knees. You know, when someone says something so beautiful, you’re

taken aback. I also just find it fascinating that I am actually perceived. Of course, I know people see me and they know me, but it's when I hear their thoughts about my looks, the things I do, all those little things. It's silly, I know, because here I am thinking about how wonderful Nora is and all the little things about her, but for someone else to think those things about me, it's odd. I'm not sure if that's a confidence thing, just hoping I blend into the background and no one really bats an eyelid or what.

After sharing some more kisses, I pull away, realising my stomach is growling at me angrily. We kiss so much I think it might be easier to sew our lips together.

“Are you hungry?” I ask

“I ate recently, actually.” Nora smirks, her eyes darting down to her. I go closer to her lips, and stare into her eyes, although they've kind of blended into one.

“Okay, are you hungry for some proper food?” I whisper. She nods. We order some room service to the room, which the worker brings up on a little wheelie table. We ordered whatever was available on the night menu, which ended up being plaintomato pasta and crusty bread. Food is food, I guess. Nora twists her fork into the spaghetti and shoves it into her mouth.

“Mmm.” Nora hums with pleasure.

“Come on, it can't be that good.”

“Any dinner with you immediately makes it a five star meal.” My cheeks flush with heat, as they do most of the time I'm with Nora. I don't quite understand how she's so smooth. Whenever I attempt to say something flirty, I sound like it's my first day on earth.



“Oh my god, can we do the lady and the tramp kiss?!” Nora’s eyes fill with light as she tells me this bright idea. I pick up a singular spaghetti and place

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the end on my lips, guiding the other side into Nora's mouth. I can't stop laughing as we edge our lips closer together. Eventually, our lips meet, but now we both just have spaghetti in our mouth. I bite down on the spaghetti and pull away, the food almost slipping out of my mouth. I lift my hand to my mouth to avoid any humiliation of me spitting my pasta out.

"You're so cute." Nora says.

"Me almost spitting out my spaghetti is cute?" "Adorable." Nora smiles.

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### Chapter 14

#### WEEK 2

We lay in bed, kissing each other softly, our naked bodies tangled together. We got back from a dinner and like magnets we latched onto each other, as we have done most nights. Nora's hand finds its way up and down my lower back, sending shivers through my body.

"Are you trying to go for round two?" I chuckle, her touch turning me on immediately again.

“Wouldn’t say no.”

“You’ve got to let me recover after that.” Nora places delicate kisses on my jaw and neck, like a butterfly. The breath from her nose tickles me just slightly. I look at her eyes, falling into her deep blue currents, her eyelashes dark and long. I trace my fingers along her face, past every freckle dotted along her sun kissed skin. Being with Nora compared to my past ‘flings’ is a fresh experience. I’ve never truly felt a connection like this. Usually I’d get up and immediately put on my clothes, hiding my naked self as quickly as possible. But not with Nora. Nora made me feel comfortable, asking me every step of the way if what she was doing was okay. The praise she gave me as well, as if my body was a temple that she treated with the utmost respect and love. I’d always been so afraid for people to look at me during sex, but with Nora, I wanted to be seen. I allowed Nora to see me. She knew her way around my body, reading my body language, the sounds I made, making sure

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she hit every right spot. Not only that, but she got off on my pleasure too. She enjoyed touching me and she showed it. She made me feel beautiful even if it was just for a moment.

“Fancy going out?” Nora says.

“Always, where?” I reply.

“It’s a surprise. Dress nice.” Nora insists and it’s kind of sexy being told what to do, no ifs or buts.

I get up and look through my suitcase again, knowing exactly what dress I’m looking

for, perfect for the occasion. I pull out a midi baby pink satin dress and pull it up over my body. Nora wolf whistles at me.

“That looks stunning on you, Ophelia.”

“I don’t know. It feels like it fits me weird.” I’ve always been insecure about my appearance, constantly comparing myself to every other person. Am I too flat? Am I too big? Am I too tall? Are my eye bags too dark? Every single detail I pick apart, and I wish I could help it, but since Coco’s gone, it’s gotten worse. I think because I don’t have my best friend to lift me up anytime I judge myself. I play around with the dress, trying to flatten out any crease. Nora walks over and places her hand on my hips, turning me to face her. She lowers herself, kissing my chest, my stomach, my hips, my legs, her hands remaining on my hips. She comes back up to my face , squishing my cheeks together with one hand.

“If I could make you see yourself through my eyes, you’d realise you are the most beautiful person.” Norasays, pulling me in for a kiss, holding my head and deepening the kiss further. Her hand edges to my ass, giving it a firm squeeze.

“You’re squeezing nothing, Nora.” I laugh.

“If I can squeeze something, it’s enough.” Nora winks at me and walks into the bathroom. I pair the dress with a kitten heel, letting my voluminous curls move freely. Nora comes out looking better than ever, although she’s wearing the same set from earlier since we’ve been stuck to each other’s side the whole day. She has wet hair that dangles down her face, making her skin seem more radiant. It’s weird how the world works and somehow we’ve ended up here, in Greece, together.

We walk on through the hotel. I'm still oblivious to where we're going, but I'm not too bothered as long as it's with Nora. We walk up to where the karaoke was, but the room had completely changed. They have made it a lot more fancy, with white cloths on the tables, flowers for centrepieces, and everyone here dressed up. The drunk woman from karaoke is now in a little summer dress, a lot more tame. I hold on to Nora's hand tightly and pull her arm closer to me.

"What is this, Nora?"

"It's drinks and slow dancing." I laugh out loud, thinking she's joking, but her face remains collected.

"Oh, you're being serious?" I ask, before realising the cheesy love songs playing on the speakers, and the middle-aged couples dancing closely to their partners on the dance floor. Nora walks onto the dance floor and pulls my hand over.

“Nora, I can’t dance.”

“Everyone can dance if they act like no one in the room.” Nora says, pulling me into her chest, her hands around my waist and mine wrapped around her neck, our bodies as close as possible together. We look into each other’s eyes, our bodies somehow swaying perfectly in time to the music. When I look into Nora’s eyes, there’s a reassuring look in those eyes that everything will be okay. The entire room could be staring at me right now, but I wouldn’t care because all I can focus on is Nora. All I can focus on is how I am well and truly fucked, and have fallen for her a lot quicker than I thought was possible. I know they say lesbians move quickly, but I didn’t think it was possible because it hadn’t happened to me till now.

“What are you thinking?” Nora asks, face intrigued. I fluster, trying to find an answer other than ‘I think I am falling for you’.

“Nothing.” I shrug it off, breaking eye contact, trying to hide the fact I’m lying. I am an awful liar, my face sweats profusely and I almost always bite my lips, as if the truth is trying to escape my mouth. We continue to dance, and Nora’s eyes never leave me once.

“You look at me a lot.” I remark.

“Well, I don’t need to look at anyone else when I have just what I want in

front of me.” I feel my cheeks flush and I place a kiss on the corner of her lips. When I pull away, a man, around our age, barges into the back of Nora, knocking her into me. I trip backwards and fall onto the floor, the guests’ attention suddenly going onto us. Nora shoots round and shoves the guy backwards. As if a switch flipped, her eyebrows furrow and her fists clench.

“Are you fucking alright?” Nora raises her voice, her Irish accent really packing a punch. Nora turns back around, grabbing my hands and pulling me up.

“Are you okay?!” Nora asks, voice laced with concern. I nod. Without thought, Nora stands in front of me, using her body to guard me.

The smug look on the man’s face tells me he meant to barge into Nora. My anxiety spikes, my heart beating faster and my hands clammy.

“I just don’t feel comfortable being around you people.” The man’s voice is slurred.

“Around us people?” Nora asks, her stance getting more protective. I think she knows what this man is talking about now.

“LEZZAS” He shouts in Nora’s face. I can smell the vodka on his breath even from behind Nora. Nora turns back around to me and walks me away, to get out of the situation. Before I know it, the man has pulled Nora backward by the collar of her shirt. She falls into the table, knocking several glasses over and she hits her head hard. Nora falls down, body limp on the floor covered in broken glass. He spits on her and stares at me like a predator who’s just seen his prey. He wipes the spit on the side of his mouth away and licks his lips. I want to go over to Nora and check if she’s okay, but as the man edges closer towards me, I’m frozen in fear.

“Sure I can’t turn you, love?” His face disgusts me. He looks like he’s enjoying this. I debate on what to do in this situation. I look behind the man and see people around

Nora making sure she's okay. Without a second thought, my fist meets his cheekbone, and I hear a crack. The pain from my knuckle makes me wince, and wonder whether the crack was from his face or my knuckle. The punch stunts the man, sending him a couple feet backwards. He shouts every curse word under the sun at me, mixed with many misogynistic and homophobic comments. I stare at him in disbelief.

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How can one human hate another person so much for something they can't help? The workers come rushing over and pull the guy away outside the hotel, the other guests in shock at the situation. What was once a beautiful moment is now smashed glasses, spilt drinks and bloodied knuckles. I run over to Nora falling down onto my knees beside her, not worried about the shattered glass, just her. She's laying on the floor unconscious. I sit by her side holding onto her hand, my eyes welled up with tears. This can't be happening. Her eyes flutter open slowly.

"Oh fuck Nora, you scared me." I let out a sob and kiss her head.

She comes to consciousness slowly sitting up, whilst everyone around her carefully guides her. Nora rubs the back of her head and looks at me, suddenly realising my eyes are soaking with tears.

"Are you okay?" Nora asks.

"I'm fine." Her eyes clock my swollen, sore knuckle, her eyebrows furrowed and her jaw tensing. She sits up quicker, trying to get to her feet, but her steps are wobbly.

"Nora, sit down!" I raise my voice, panicked that she will fall again. She stops in her



tracks. I can see her considering her options, but she listens, and sits down onto a chair. After an hour of medical attention, making sure Nora didn't get too much of a concussion, we walk back to our hotel room, escorted by some hotel workers a couple of feet behind us. They reassured us that they had arrested the man and would never allow him back to the hotel. We walk into my room, and Nora lays down on the bed, her head clearly hurting but she's trying to hide it. I sit on the edge of the bed, stroking her hair.

"Can I get you anything?" Nora shakes her head.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

"I'm sorry I couldn't protect you." Nora says quietly, embarrassed. "You don't need to be sorry. It's not your fault." "I know, but you could've got hurt..."

"But I didn't Nora, I got a pretty good punch in." A soft smile erupts from her lips.

"How is your knuckle?" Nora asks, looking down at my hand. I can't lie

### CHAPTER 14

to her. My hand is already swollen and bruised. I try to wiggle my fingers, but my pinky is stiff with pain. Thankfully, my mum forced me to get travel insurance.

“It’s sore, but I’ll get it checked out tomorrow.” I shrug, keeping my focus on Nora. Reading her face, trying to figure out what she’s thinking and feeling. I can see tears in her eyes. She’s biting her thumbnail, trying to repress crying in front of me. I debated telling her ‘it’s okay to cry’, but she knew that. She told me that, so instead I wriggle onto the bed and pull her head into my chest. I feel her cry into me, her body shaking and my skin becoming damp with tears. Her breath hitches and then she looks up at me. Her bloodshot eyes match the tint of red on her cheeks.

“I just wish this didn’t happen to me,” Nora cries. Hearing her so hurt and vulnerable made me want to hurt any person who has ever hurt her.

“Has this happened before, Nora?”

“Last year, in Ireland, when I was visiting home.” Nora stops for a minute, trying to find the words to continue the story.

“I was walking home from seeing a friend, and a group of guys followed me, and before I knew it, they bloodied and beat me, leaving me on the pavement.” It’s how I got this scar.” Nora lifts her hair off her forehead, revealing a faint white scar on the edge of her hairline. I stroked it gently, showing the thing that was produced by so much hatred, love. She closes her eyes at my touch, her breaths deepen.

“I know I shouldn’t, but sometimes I wish I were different, I didn’t choose to be this way. I just hate dressing feminine. When I wear those clothes, I feel like I’m in someone else’s skin, not mine.” Nora sits up a bit on the bed off my chest.

“I can’t help that I like women, I can’t and it’s just hard when my home, my hometown doesn’t accept me. Not even my fucking family.” Before I know it, Nora falls into a deeper cry. Her hands covering her eyes like she’s trying to push the tears back in. I lift her head to face me and I look at her, trying to think of the right words to say. I haven’t been in this situation.

“Blood doesn’t mean family. There are people out there who will accept every single part of you, the good and bad. Those horrible people who did

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that to you that night, and that man tonight, they live their life full of hatred. They must be miserable. Not you though, you’re off to America. You’re off to be the best guitarist the world has seen.” Nora scoffs at my words. Although she thinks I’m just hyping her, I’m being serious. Not only are her guitar skills godly, she, as a person, is the kindest thing to have graced my life since Coco left. I just can’t wrap my head around the fact that this has only happened now. We met once and barely spoke, somehow bumping into each other on the morning flight to Santorini, and sat right next to each other. I feel as if there were an invisible string pulling us together, whether it was to be together or to just teach each other a lesson. I am grateful. For the rest of the night, me and Nora lay together in a comfortable silence, occasionally sharing a kiss, drifting in and out of sleep.

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I spent the morning getting my knuckle checked out by the doctors. I left Nora in bed to sleep, especially after the night she had yesterday. The doctors said that my knuckle was fractured and applied a big embarrassing blue splint to it. This is the second injury of the holiday and I've only been here for a week. I walk back to the hotel, petting every stray cat I see, making my quick journey about fifteen minutes longer. I would be riddled with guilt if I didn't pet every cat I saw, thinking if I didn't pet them, who will?

I walk in the door and Nora is on the balcony smoking her morning cigarette, wearing just her sports bra and shorts. Her back is broad and smooth, making me want to jump on her immediately and spend the entire day in bed. I walk on out to the balcony and kiss her cheek, making her jump a little.

"Where have you been?" Nora asks, before noticing the big splint on my hand.

"Oh, Christ Ophelia."

"It's fine, just a minor fracture. I've got to ice it and relax it." I reassure her.

Nora pats her lap, inviting me to come sit on it.

"How's your head?" I ask.

"No complaints." Nora winks at me with her cheeky smile back on her face. I'm glad to see her happier this morning. I knew that laying in would do her good. I roll my eyes.

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“No, no, it’s grand. That medication they gave me knocked me right out,” Nora says, tucking my hair behind my ears. Her other hand on my bare thigh. Whenever this woman touches me, I just want to lie down and let her do whatever she wants.

“I like this.” Nora pulls on the hem of my skirt. Nora compliments me so often I feel like a schoolgirl with her first crush. I kiss Nora, for which it feels like the first time in ages. Her breath is warm and minty. Her hand wraps around my waist, pulling me in closer, and all I can think about is how I never want this to end. I never want us to end, but there’s a tender ache in my heart knowing this has to. I mean it when I say I feel ridiculous falling for Nora so quickly, but I truly think this invisible string tied us together. We are supposed to be here together, falling for each other. Or at least me falling for her, even if this meant I’d be leaving my heart here in Greece. I may have come here because of losing the best connection I’ve ever had in my life with Coco, but I’m leaving with a new connection, one to remember for a lifetime. One to remind me there are plenty of good people to meet out there, just you may not have met them yet.

We decide to head on down to the markets; the stalls filled with handmade jewellery and a range of delicacies. We walk side by side, hands occasionally grazing past each other. I come across a stall run by a mother currently yelling something at her two children running around. The market is full of evil eye jewellery, with the blue colour pouring out over the table. I pick one up. It has a silver-plated evil eye with baby blue and pink thread wrapped around. Reminding me of Coco, I give the woman five euros and continue walking along.

“I’ve noticed you like blue quite a bit.” Nora points out, pointing to the bracelet I just bought, my blue tote bag slung on my shoulder and blue socks poking out my

trainers.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“It was Coco’s favourite colour, and I guess I’ve just grown to love it.” I shrug, fiddling with my shell necklace again. I remember Coco saying if she ever passed away, she’d have to have a very blue funeral, flowers, invites, dress code, the lot.

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### CHAPTER 15

#### Five Months Ago

I flatten down my baby blue dress and sit down at the front of the pews, staring at the array of blue flowers at the front. Alongside a collage of photos of Coco, in particular, I notice the one with me and her laughing very hard at something. If I remember right, it was because we witnessed someone falling over in front of us. I know it shouldn’t be funny, but being with Coco made everything funny, even when it wasn’t meant to be. One look at each other and it would be over. We’d be cackling in a room of silence. My eyes well up, knowing she was so happy there and now I’m here at her funeral, because she was so unhappy she took her own life. The music for her funeral begins, ‘Forever Young’ by Alphaville plays, and the entire room seems to burst into tears. She made such a difference to every person she met, whether she played a big role in their life or not. I try to keep my eyes to the front, because if I see her coffin too soon, I fear I won’t make it out of here alive. I’m afraid I’ll cry so hard I’ll stop breathing. Then it appears in my direct eyesight, the coffin holding my best friend. It’s smaller than I expected. Surely she can’t fit in there. She’s in there. The gates open and tears stream down my face, my breath barely there and my eyesight

blurry. The music muffles in and out, but all I can think about is that my best friend is dead. I feel my mum beside me pulling me into her side, and I fall into her effortlessly. I have no more strength to comfort myself. The funeral goes past in a blur, I barely lift my head from my mothers chest, until Coco's mum, Susan, comes up to me. I look up at her, her eyes puffy and that gentle smile that's so familiar to Coco's.

"She loved you so much darling." Susan says, clasping my hand. If she loved me so much, why'd she leaveme? Losing someone in such a way leaves you feeling all kinds of emotions, anger, guilt, confusion, the list goes on. I'll feel angry for a moment, wondering why she did it and didn't reach out but then I remember it's not that easy. Then I'm angry at myself for not noticing, for remembering all the times she wanted to speak to me about something but changed her mind and I just let her. If I could, I'd grab her shoulders and shake her, begging her to talk to me.

"I know it's difficult, but if you want to share a couple words, we'd really

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appreciate it." Susan says, and although my anxiety wants to stay here and just cry, I will do it for Coco's parents. I drag my feet up to the front, the other people staring at me. A sea of tears, tissues and black clothing. Coco wanted blue, but it seems to have been forgotten about. I feel out of place wearing blue and feel the need to address it.

"Hi, so, I'm wearing blue because that was Coco's favourite colour." The silence is overwhelming and I'm unsure what to say. There's no words to describe my best friend. There's no words to describe how beautiful, caring and kind she was. There are definitely no words to describe how much I miss her.



“I met Coco on my first ever day of school, I was alone and she was the only person to come over to me. Then since that day it was as if we were bonded together, inseparable. It was always ‘where’s Coco?’, ‘How’s Coco?’, and it feels funny that I haven’t been asked that question since she’s been gone. I don’t really know what to say, other than-” my voice breaks and I look over to her coffin.

“I miss you, and I don’t know how I’ll do life without you.” That’s all I can muster up before I start sobbing again. My cries are loud in the silent room. I walk over to her coffin and lay my upper body on top, imagining I’m hugging Coco and not a wooden box. My tears puddle on top of it, and I want to stay here forever, let myself rot away just so I can be with my best friend.

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We finish our shopping trip with a walk along the beach. The sun is setting perfectly, pink and orange hues spreading across the sky.

“The view is so beautiful, I can’t believe I’m here,” I say staring out at the sea.

“It really is beautiful.” Nora says. When I turn to look at her and she’s already looking at me. I love you. I think. My heart is telling me I love her, but my head is telling me to be rational. You barely know this person. But I feel like I know her. You know that feeling where you’ve not known someone for that long but it feels like it’s been years? That’s me with Nora.

“I know this is last minute, but I’ve got a surprise for you.” Nora admits.

“What is it?” I ask, narrowing my eyes at Nora.

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“I don’t think you understand the concept of a surprise.” Nora laughs and holds out her hand for me to take. I take her hand and we walk further along the beach before she stops me.

“I need you to cover your eyes.” Nora says.

“Are you going to throw me into the sea?” I laugh, totally clueless about what she’s doing.

“No, that’s after the date, silly.”

“So it’s a date?”

“When’s it not a date with you, Ophelia.” Nora places one hand on my eyes, the warming musky vanilla scent wafting to my nose already. Her other hand wrapped around my waist, guiding me carefully. I attempt to listen out for clues, but all I can hear are the waves crashing and the local nightlife.

“You ready?” Nora’s voice sounds giddy. I nod. Nora takes her hand off my eyes, revealing a boat on the edge of the deck. A well-dressed man is standing at the edge, smiling at me with a bottle of wine ready to welcome me.

“Shut up!” I squeal, turning to face Nora. Nora nods her chin back to the boat.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“I think you missed something” I look back to the boat and walk a couple steps closer, and then I see it. I place my hand over my mouth, in shock and trying not to cry. The word ‘Coco’ is painted on the side of the boat.

“This is a Coco Viente yacht.” I stand there in disbelief that Nora went through all this effort to find a boat with Coco on it. I know Coco is somewhere extremely jealous that she doesn’t get to ride the yacht with her name on.

“Now let’s get on before they leave without us.” “Were going on it?” I exclaim.

“What did you think we were doing, baby?” The way Nora says baby makes my chest feel warm, and my heart flutters.

“Baby?” I ask playfully.

“Is that ok?” Nora says nervously, scratching the back of her head. “More than okay.” Nora’s smile spreads across her face, and her blue eyes

light up. We walk onto the boat, the deckhand passing us a glass of wine each, before the captain greets us, all dressed up in his immaculate white uniform.

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### BEYOND THE BLUES

“Good evening ladies, I am Sergio. I’ll be driving Coco today. If you have questions, please feel free to find me or one of my deckhands.” We thank him and then walk

around to the front of the boat. I may know nothing about boats, but I can tell this is nice. When we get to the front, it's decorated beautifully. There are rose petals dotted around the floor, and tea lights placed carefully. In the middle of all this seems to be an array of foods, but the one that catches my eye is the vast bowl of olives. I smile to myself.

"You hate olives." I say.

"But I like you." Nora responds. We sit down on the deck, and I take in the view and what Nora has done for me. The picnic I laid out for her doesn't even come close to this. I lean in close to Nora's side and lay my head on her shoulder. She presses a kiss on my head.

"Thank you so much, Nora." Without saying a word, Nora pulls me in for a kiss. Each kiss with Nora feels like our first one, special.

"Why'd you do this?" I question.

"Because I wanted to show you how special you are." I feel my cheeks flush, and I lower my chin into my chest, looking up at Nora.

"And-" And?

"I love you." The words take the breath out of my lungs and my lips fall open slightly.

"You don't have to say it back, but I just wanted you to know, just in case." Nora adds. I feel stunned, unsure what to say because I know those thoughts have passed through my brain too, but I just didn't know if I was ready to say them. But staring at her face, itching to hear any words from me. The effort she's put into this evening, for me, despite how I've been. Despite the wild journey of what was to be a relaxing

holiday, she stayed by me and accepted me for who I am.

“I love you too.” I respond, as if a weight has been lifted off of Nora’s shoulders, they lower and a smile breaks out on her face. She leans in to hug me and nuzzles her face into my chest, her arms wrapped around my waist.

“I don’t want this to end.” Nora says muffled in my chest. It doesn’t have to, I want to say. Stay here with me, don’t worry about America, just please stay with me.

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## CHAPTER 15

“Me neither.” I opt for instead, stroking her hair gently. Nora pulls away and holds eye contact.

“I think every person that I’ll meet from now on, I’ll always look for you in them.” Nora whispers to me. Both of our eyes are watery, but I can’t tell whether they’re happy or sad tears. Happy that we got to experience this connection or sad that we won’t be able to for much longer. I know I can’t go to America, it’s not what I want for myself. I want to be an author and after this trip, I truly believe I can. I want to have a writing desk in London, facing the street and write till my heart’s content. I can’t sit back watching Nora live out her dream, wishing I had lived out mine. In the words of Nora, if you want it hard enough it will happen. I realise at this point, neither of us know how long each other is here in Greece for.

“When are you leaving?” I ask out of the blue.

“One more week.” Nora said in a broken whisper, her voice etched with sadness.

“Me too.” I press my lips together. One last week of this.

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Chapter 16

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

We lay on the bow of the boat, staring up at the clear night sky, stars flickering above us. The waves are making a low rumble, relaxing enough I could close my eyes and fall asleep.

“This holiday has been a dream.” Nora says quietly. It truly has. I haven’t felt quite this happy since Coco passed. It’s like a taking a gulp of air after being held down underwater for so long. I know Nora has helped with this, and I’m sure my heightened emotions made me fall even harder for Nora than I thought was possible, but I also feel like I’ve found myself out here. During my time in Greece, I had the chance to see the sights. I’ve met a lovely lady named Althea. I’ve danced when I never thought I’d dance again. Life has been so dreamy.

“Right? Wish I could stay here forever.” “So do I.” Nora replies.

“It would be a dream for us to just live how we’ve been living forever, lots of sex, sun, wine and happiness,” I add.

“If only life could work that way.” Nora sighed, turning her body on top of mine. Even at nighttime, I could still see the blue popping in her eyes. She tucks a curl behind my ear, kissing the tip of my nose, making me blush. I look back up at her like a puppy in love.

“How’d you get so pretty?” Nora asks.

“I dont know, was just born this way.” I shrug playfully.

## CHAPTER 16

“You been taking pretty pills?” If anyone else were to of said that to me, I would’ve cringed out and ran away as fast as possible. But this time, with her, it was endearing.

“Nope!”

“Wow, so you’re are just this beautiful, naturally.” I pull Nora’s head towards me and place a kiss on her plump lips. My lips have never been so swollen and soft. All this kissing has given me temporary lip filler.

“Shall we head back now?” Nora asks.

“Can we just do one little thing?” I pinch my fingers together.

“I feel like I’m going to not like this.” Nora adds. We stand up and I take her to the railing at the end of the boat.

“Ah, I see what you’re doing.” Nora smirks before turning me to face the ocean. I climb up onto the ledge, and Nora grips my waist, making me feel safe. I lift my arms out to the side, letting the wind engulf me, my hair flying everywhere.

“I’m flying Jack!” I shout. Eleven-year-old me is screaming with excitement right now. True love is recreating scenes from your favourite romance films.

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Chapter 17



## WEEK 2 + 2 DAYS

I draw a flower on Nora's back with my finger, softly, giving her goose-bumps.

"Is it a tree?" Nora asks.

"Close!"

"A flower." I turn her back round to me and kiss her lips.

"Ding, ding, ding, you got it right!" Nora fist bumps the air and we laugh, the laughs almost harmonising together. Nora's face drops again. It's as if the realisation we don't have more time together keeps hitting her.

"Shower?" I ask. Nora nods, offering a small, shy smile. Ever since our first shower together, most of our showers have been together. Nora's learnt my hair care routine and insists she does it. To be fair, my curls look better, but maybe it's just because she's helped. We get in the shower and are drawn together likemagnets, our hands exploring each other, our lips craving more kisses, and our tongues finding places they should or shouldn't be. When we get out, Nora applies the handful of hair products to my hair. Individually twirling each strand of curl with the hairbrush, her face fuelled with so much concentration. Then she scrunches my curls into her hands, taking such caution with how and what she's doing. I bring my hand up to my mouth, trying to stifle my giggles.

"You look almost scared." I laugh harder.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“I just don’t want to do anything wrong, especially with this beautiful load of hair.” Nora’s hand came over my neck, pulling me backwards towards her. I lean back onto her, closing my eyes and letting out a sigh of relief.

Here with Nora, I feel safe. I feel cared for. When I open my eyes again, I stare at her in the mirror, appreciating her beauty. There seems to be both delicacy and strength on her face. Her faintly rose mouth, slightly wet from before, was so tempting. It was her hair I was obsessed with and never quite knew why, wisps of hair framing her face. Nora peering at me intently. Although we just had sex, a sense of urgency drove me to want to do it again. The touch of her hand on my throat was suddenly unbearable in tenderness. I turn to face Nora and kiss her, the kiss singing through my veins. Although my head and heart wanted to go again, my body was begging me to go to sleep. Fatigue settling in the pockets of my eyes.

“I think we best go to sleep.”

“I agree,” Nora replies in a silky voice, tucking a loose strand of my hair behind my ear.

We wake up in the morning to Nora’s phone ringing loudly. I squint my face over to the bright light of her phone screen. Nora rubs her eyes and picks it up.

“Hello?” Her voice is husky and then she jolts up with concern. My once tired self is now awake and anxious, wondering what’s happening. Nora strokes my hair.

“Go to sleep, baby.” She whispers softly, going onto the balcony and closing the door behind her. Nora’s face was screwed up, and it seemed like she was giving an earful

to whoever was on the other end. Nora hangs up the phone and leans her muscular arms on the railing, clearly stressed. I get up out of bed, wrapping the bed sheet around me. I open the door gently and Nora shoots round to turn to me. A glazed look of despair spread over her face.

“What is it?” My voice is still scratchy and tired.

“I have to leave tomorrow.” A tear rolled down her cheek. Suddenly, all the calmness about this situation left my body. The only thing left was the raw sores of my aching heart.

“What? Why?” I stutter.

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## BEYOND THE BLUES

“Our manager wants us out on tour earlier. I tried to negotiate, but they weren’t budging.” Nora gulped hard, biting her lips, trying to control her emotions. The silence between us grew with tension. I am okay for this to end in a week, but not tomorrow. Tomorrow is too soon. I can’t quite bear the fact we have more to do, more planned, and now she’s leaving. Suddenly, the upset was stronger. This hurts a lot more than I was planning.

“I’m not ready for you to go.” A hot tear rolling down my cheek. I wipe the back of my hand on my face, trying to remain cool.

“I know. I don’t want to go, but I have to.” Nora’s voice breaks miserably. We stand opposite each other, unsure where we stand. Like a magnetic force, I fall into her

chest, letting the tears pour out. All I keep thinking about is the what ifs. What if we spoke sooner? What if I go with Nora? What if we never meet again? Nora clings to my body, holding me like she'll never let go, but I know she will. She'll have to. The world seems silent, and all I can hear is our tears and hitched breathing.

"I hate seeing you cry," Nora says, lifting my chin to look at her. The bloodshot whites of her eyes bringing out the icy blue colour.

"You've seen it enough times. I'm surprised you're not used to it." I smile through the pain, but Nora's face remains saddened.

"It's like the world wants us to be apart." Nora says. In a way it feels true, there have been plenty of chances we could've met, had the chance to be in love for longer, but the world gave us a short amount of time together. But there must be a reason. These things don't happen for no reason. People that come into your life are always there for a reason.

"If it's meant to be, it will be." I whisper to Nora. Our lips were just a breath apart, grazing gently.

"If I have to search for you in every lifetime, I will, happily." Nora laces a hand into my hair. I place my lips on Nora's, a kiss as tender and light as Santorini's breeze. If I can make the ending of us sweet and dreamy, I will. I don't want to leave this behind feeling regretful that we didn't do more. Because I feel that way with Coco. If only we did more. I wish we did so much more, but unfortunately that was all the time we had, although it was cruel and unfair. I am determined to make this the best last night together by doing

everything in my power. Whether it's laying in bed all night, interrupted by regular sex, or exploring a bit more of Greece. As long as we're together.

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## Chapter 18

We lay together on the same sunbed we were on the first night. I'm in between Nora's legs, snapping photos of the sunset to add to the album of the rest of my sunset photos. Nora's fingers delicately stroke up and down my bare arms, sending tingles down my spine.

"What song reminds you of me?" I ask Nora, continuing to look out at the waves gently crawling up on the shore. Nora hums, questioning her answer.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“Angel by Finneas” Nora decides on. I smile to myself, because it’s sweet, but I never have seen myself as a very angelic person.

“What about me?” Nora responds.

“First Day of My Life by Bright Eyes” I respond, the answer almost coming to me immediately. After Coco passed, I thought I’d go be with her, because what was the point of living withouthier? Then I figured it out after meeting Nora, and I am so glad I didn’t die before I met her. Not only did meeting Nora teach me what love is like, I found my happiness on this trip. Despite my family not thinking I’ll be able to do this trip, here I am, doing it perfectly. A lady interrupts us on the beach holding a basket filled with cups of fruit. Nora hands the lady a few euros and takes out a cup of mango for herself and me a cup of watermelon. I sit up and face Nora as we devour the fresh fruit. Nora has mango juice dripping from her lips, a couple drops landing

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on her shorts. I lean over to Nora and lick the juice off her lips, dragging my tongue slowly. The sweet taste of mango making her lips even sweeter than they already are, almost sickly. Nora buries her head in the crook of my neck, breathing a kiss there. Once we can pull ourselves away from each other, I continue crunching on my watermelon. I finish the pot, wiping my mouth on my shirt. Weirdly enough, spending the day in the room sharing intimate moments and silent looks of appreciation was the best way to spend our last day together.

“Fancy a swim?” Nora asks.

“I don’t have a swimsuit.” I remind her, sitting in a plain sundress. “Don’t need one.” Nora smirks, giving me that wink of hers. Nora strips

from her clothes, leaving her bare to the world. She runs towards the sea, the sports bra tan line really showing on her back. I glance around before pulling my dress over my head and running towards the sea towards Nora. I am really hoping no family takes an evening stroll right now. The warm water swallows my body and I’m face to face with Nora. Her hair dripping with the salty water. I dunk my hair under the water, leaning my head back. There’s something so soothing about having your ears under the water, the surrounding sounds become muffles, and the only thing you can hear clearly is your heart beating. I am still living. When I lift my head back up, I’m face to face with Nora. She lifts me up, wrapping my legs around her waist and my arms around her neck. The sea is glistening, similar to Nora’s eyes.

“I love you Ophelia.”

“I love you Nora.”

“I like to imagine if things were different with us.” Nora’s voice was fragile.

“What do you mean?” I tilt my head like a confused dog.

“Like, if I didn’t go to America, or you wanted to come with me. I imagine us living together, waking up next to each other most mornings. Maybe even waking up with a couple of cats by our feet.” I smile, my heart warm.

“And I’d bring you coffee in bed. Then we’d go off to work, me doing music somewhere and you writing something beautiful.” Nora lets out a deep sigh.

“I don’t know. I can just imagine all of it with you.” Nora mutters sadly. I push back Nora’s wet hair off her forehead, revealing more of her face.

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## BEYOND THE BLUES

“If it’s meant to be, it will be. Whether it be in a year or twenty. We will find each other again, just like we did this holiday.” I reassure Nora. Even if I’m not one hundred percent sure we will see each other again, I’m hoping we do when the time is right. Nora pulls me closer, hugging me tighter.

Back at the hotel room, we are doing a deep dive in each other’s photo galleries on our phones. I scroll through many band photos and videos, mesmerised by Nora’s guitar playing. But also her face, how concentrated she is on her hands with the strings. That’s mostly her gallery, to be honest, just a lot of her band and her friends. Her confident, chatty self radiates even through the screen. I’m glad I got to witness the more chilled out, emotional Nora, too. When I get further to the bottom of her camera rolls, I notice an array of photos of me. Mostly candid and all hideous.

“Oh god Nora! Ew, what are these?” I laugh out loud, my finger hovering over the delete button. Nora snatches the phone out of my hand, bringing it to her chest protecting it from me.

“I think you look beautiful in every single one.” Nora said firmly, continuing to scroll through the photos of me. Then she stops on the one she took on the stairs, me laughing at her, cheeks reddened from embarrassment, but my eyes filled with a look of happiness. Nora really looks at this one, a little smile landing on her lips before changing the conversation.

“Your turn.” I hand my phone over to Nora and she scrolls through my messy camera



roll. Photos of me and Coco fill the first half. Nora zooms in on a photo of me and Coco at a house party, and in the background is Nora with her friends, but her attention is on me. It slowly slips into less exciting photos of Coco's grave, flowers, sunsets and my writing. She pauses, reading each poem and story.

"I know they're not great but-"

"They're brilliant, Ophelia." Nora interrupts me. It's hard to be a writer and be able to tell if your work is actually good or not. But then again, writing is art, and art is subjective. Nora shuts my phone off and places it on the bedside table, turning her body to face me. I turn my body to face hers as well and it's not long till we devour each other's lips for the last night. Nora

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makes my body feel things I don't think it will feel again for a while. All whilst making me feel like the most beautiful girl in the world. I remember Coco and I talking about how we want our future partner to be, and it hurts me to say mine is Nora.

\*4 years ago \*

Coco and I lay in the middle of Hyde Park, a bottle of cheap rose and an enormous pack of tortilla chips in between us. Coco stuffs a handful of tortillas in her mouth.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“When I get married, I hope the man cries when I walk down the aisle.” Coco says, mouth full.

“If he doesn’t, I certainly will be.” I chuckle, taking a gulp of the now lukewarm rose.

“I think I’d choose a guy like that, someone who is emotionally aware and completely infatuated with me.” It’s hard not to be completely infatuated with Coco. She’s beautiful inside and out.

“I think I’d like to date a woman who’s creative, is affectionate but also independent, has aspirations, you know?” I say, Coco humming in agreement. The sun is setting across the park, the trees lit with a golden lighting and the sky perfectly blue.

“They’ve also got to accept our friendship, because we can be a bit mad sometimes.” Coco turns her head to face me, smiling ear to ear.

“A bit mad?” I question, turning to face Coco, too.

“Alright, pretty mad.” We both laugh hard. It’s funny because one time one of Coco’s ex boyfriends broke up with her because he said we were ‘too close’. But I just think that’s female friendships. There’s something about girls coming together and being able to relate and understand the ins and outs of each others life. It’s even better when you find that one friendship with someone who never competes with you, always supports you and celebrates your achievements as if they’re their own. The type of person who’s there when you’re inconsolable and still manages to make you laugh. The one who just seems to look at you and without any words knows what you’re going through. That for me is Coco.

## BEYOND THE BLUES

“I can’t wait to be your maid of honour.” Coco says, a grin on her face.

“Who says you’re gonna be my maid of honour?” I joke about.

“Uhm, our wedding scrapbooks we made when we were ten?!” Those silly little scrapbooks, filled with cutouts from magazines. Looking back more recently, unfortunately my choice of wedding dress is not a fuchsia pink one and the flowers would not be daisies. But Coco’s right, that stays the same. She will always be my number one option for maid of honour.

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“What’s the first thing you’re gonna do when you land in America?” I ask Nora.

“Get the largest Coke physically possible.” Nora answers almost too quickly.

“Seems you planned that already.”

“What about you, if you were to go?”

“Get the subway, see if it’s just the tube, basically.” Boring, but for some reason, I like to test out all the different transport options in the different places I visit. The only transport I’ve done this holiday is get into Nora’s rental car or walk to Althea’s cafe. Nora should meet Althea before she goes, actually. I sit upright and turn my head to Nora.

“One more place I need to take you.”

Nora raises one eyebrow at me.

“Trust me.” I say.

“I may need some bribing to get out of bed,” Nora says, cuddled up in the sheets.

“I’m literally naked.” Without a second thought, Nora shoots out of bed, gives my ass a little slap and goes to put on clothes. I chuck on what I wore earlier and we leave. I’m hoping we make it early enough that she’s not asleep. As we walk along the beach, the cats I fed before come trotting over, meowing loudly at Nora and I.

“My god, you guys are loud.” Nora says, stroking the chin of the black and white cat. They purr all over Nora, and although it’s the cutest thing, we have to get Althea’s.

“We will come back in a bit, kitties.” I pull Nora up and drag her along, speed walking. Then we arrive and Althea’s fairy lights outside are still on. I

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## CHAPTER 18

jog up the stairs and peer through the window, and to my delight, Althea is sitting there with a glass of wine, reading the newspaper. I knock gently on the window, trying not to startle her.

“Ophelia, we can’t just intrude on random old ladies.” Nora says, panicked. Althea’s face lights up when she sees me, and she opens the door, pulling me into a hug. She’s shorter than me, so I have to lean down quite a bit.

“Althea, this is Nora.” I introduce them to each other, and Nora also leans in to give Althea a hug, towering over her.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“Althea makes the best Spanakopita. Have you got any to try?” Althea nods and walks behind the counter, opening the fridge. I don’t follow, as I don’t want to interrupt her at night again. Althea wraps it up in some baking paper and hands it to Nora. Nora goes to pull out her wallet, and Althea puts her hand over Nora’s and shakes her head.

“Goodnight Althea.” I whisper.

“Goodnight and thank you,” Nora says afterwards, and we walk back along the beach. Nora opens the baking paper and takes a bite out of the pastry.

“This is divine.” Nora continues munching down on it. Then we approach the cats again, and as if on schedule, they come running back towards us. I kneel in the sand, open my bag and pull out the rest of the cat treats from before.

“Do you always keep cat treats in your bag?” Nora jokes.

“Only the essentials.” I reply, feeding all the cats equal amount of treats.

Nora rubs her eyes roughly, making them red and patchy.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

“Yeah, I’m just allergic to cats,” Nora adds, brushing it off as if she said nothing.

“What the fuck, Nora? Why’d you not tell me sooner?”

“Because I know you love cats, and you seem so happy feeding them.” I pull Nora to hug me and walk her backwards away from the many cats.

“You are so silly.” I laugh a lot louder than intended. Nora just casually let me hang out with the cats, whilst her allergies were flaring up by the second. We walk back to the hotel room and I immediately start searching for some medicine. I pull out some antihistamines and give Nora a couple with a cold

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flannel to cool down her irritated eyes.

“I think this is very romantic.” Nora says, laid back on the bed, the cold flannel over her eyes.

“Stupid, but romantic.” I add. Nora yawns. I’m not surprised since it’s midnight and we’ve filled this day with activities.

“You should go to sleep. Your flights in the morning.” I say softly. Nora pulls the flannel off her eyes and looks at me.

“I don’t want to sleep, I just want to look at you every second till I go.” Nora’s face was sad again, eyes heavy, but I wasn’t sure if that was from the allergies or not.

“I’ll still be right here next to you, and-” I take a deep breath. I debated taking Nora to the airport or not, wondering if it would hurt too much to see walk away, but either way she’s leaving me, whether it’s here or the airport.

“I’ll go to the airport with you.” Nora’s eyes light up with a gleam.

“Really?!” she asks. I nod.

That’s that. This is our last night next to each other. I hope not forever, but for a while.

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## Chapter 19

It’s early in the morning, and the sun is only just beginning to rise. Nora is still peacefully dozing in the back of the taxi, her mouth ajar. We pull up to the terminal, crowds of people entering the airport, the chaos of it all making me feel more awake. I could barely sleep last night, waking up every hour, just to look at Nora. When we stopped at the drop off, the taxi man alerts us loudly we’re here, jolting Nora awake. We get out of the taxi and stand outside the airport, unsure of what to do or say.

“How long have you got before you have to go through security?” I ask.

Nora looks down at her watch and her face crumbles a little.

“Thirty minutes.” Nora says sadly.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“Coffee?” I ask, pointing my head towards the little coffee shop, quietly waiting for customers. We walk over and I order an iced coffee and Nora a cappuccino. We sit down at the little coffee table in the corner, away from everyone else. The energy between us is gloomy, as if we haven’t spent this entire holiday loving every inch of each other.

“What was your favourite memory of this entire trip?” I break the silence. “The picnic you did for me, even if it was an apology one.” Nora smirks at

me, sipping from her drink.

“I wouldn’t really count a couple snacks as a picnic.” I laugh, thinking about the shitty set up I did last minute.

“How about yours?” I think about all the things we’ve done together.

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### BEYOND THE BLUES

Dancing together. Laughing and chatting over our favourite cocktails. Showering together every day. Spending hours having the best sex I’ve ever had. There’s so many memories we’ve made in such a short amount of time it’s hard to pick.

“When you sang on that stage with the band in the restaurant.” I twirl my straw in the iced coffee, the ice rattling together. Nora leans her arm over the table and holds my hand in hers. I look at her once more, really taking her in. With every emotion she



feels, her ocean blue eyes sparkle and darken. Her rosy lips which always have a soft smirk on them. Her sun kissed hair that falls down on her forehead. I really won the lottery with her, but unfortunately, that lottery ticket is going to fly away.

“You ready?” I ask.

“I don’t think I could ever be ready to leave you.” Nora frowns, her bottom lip trembling just a little. I place my hand on her cheeks and stroke it with my thumb.

“But are you ready to be a rock star?” I smile. Nora nods.

“I guess.” Nora shrugs, a tear rolling down her cheeks and onto my hand.

“I watch you every step of the way, like a fan girl.” I joke.

“I’ll even brag I slept with a rock star.” I wink, and Nora lets out a soft laugh. We both stand up and Nora pulls me into her chest, wrapping her arms around my head. I take a deep breath in, enjoying the smell of the fresh aftershave she put on this morning.

“I best get going.” Nora’s voice breaks. I cry a little, holding back my bigger emotions for when I’m alone. I’m not losing her. She is just starting her dream, and I’ll start mine. Nora places her lips down on mine and we kiss, holding onto every second we have together. Nora’s hands hold my face, the warmth of her palms soaking up any tears I had. She pulls away but stays close to my face.

“I love you, Ophelia.”

“I love you, Nora.” Nora pulls away and takes a deep breath, wiping her tears away with her arm.

“I’ll be seeing you, baby.” Nora says, walking a couple of steps backwards. “I’ll be seeing you, rock star.” And then Nora turns and leaves. Nora shows

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## CHAPTER 19

the staff her passport and boarding pass and goes through the corridor. She turns around one last time, blows me a kiss, and waves. I walk away, quietly sobbing to myself. It’s weird, you always see in books and movies the shift between friends to lovers, or enemies to lovers, but with Nora and I, there seemed to be no shift, it’s as if we bumped into each other by chance and it knocked something in our brain. I didn’t realise a love so beautiful could happen so quickly. It’s strange, isn’t it? And now I have to leave that behind, for now at least.

“Ophelia!” I hear a familiar voice shout. I shoot around and see Nora jogging over to me.

“What, what are you doing?” I ask.

“I said I forgot something.”

“What did you forget?”

“This...” Nora lifts me by the waist, planting one more deep, passionate kiss on my lips, spinning me around. Every time I read romance books, I never truly thought this love existed. But it can. People who love you will show it in their actions, whether it be leaving little love notes or lying to airport staff to kiss you one last time.

“Go, go, you’ll miss your flight!” I laugh as Nora places me back on the floor, and she leaves this time. I even wait a couple minutes in hopes she’ll run back to me just

one more time, but she doesn't.

I hail a taxi and sit in the back, similar to when I arrived, crying in the backseat, looking out at the view. But something good came from that. I met Nora, so I am certain something good will happen now.

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### Chapter 20

At the hotel pool, I'm laying on my sunbed, my towel draped over me to prevent the breeze stroking my bare skin. All I can think about is how Nora has gone to live up to her dream, and how maybe I should be too. Maybe that can be my good thing after Nora? I decide to scroll through the documents on my phone and read my work, then I find one poem about Coco. The hurt is fresh, and it shows in my writing. It's raw and emotional, and I can remember exactly how I felt six months ago. I decide to add a follow up line below it, showing things don't stay so sore forever. It tells the roller coaster of feelings when dealing with grief. This is it, this is the one. I open up the internet and search for a local poetry magazine in London and send this poem out to every email that pops up.

A couple hours later, my phone pings, I open it up and a magazine has already emailed back. I sit up and read it carefully.

From - londonpoetsmagazine

Dear Ophelia,

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### CHAPTER 20

Thank you for kindly sending us your work. I can tell this poem means a lot to you,

and it is indeed beautiful and well written. We would love to include this on our 'Upcoming Poets' spread. If you are happy to please send us your full name and the name of the poem.

Kind regards

London Poets Magazine.

I sit there in shock. Although this is just an independent magazine, it's still out in the world. These people liked my poem so much that they want to put it in their magazine. I frantically type back, expressing my gratitude, but I freeze when it comes to the title. The poem was about losing Coco but now it's about how things get better after all this pain.

Dear London Poets Magazine

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BEYOND THE BLUES

Thank you for your speedy response! I'd be delighted to be included in your magazine. My name is Ophelia Greene, and the poem is called 'Beyond the Blues'.

Many thanks

Ophelia.

I press send, and for once, it feels like I'm not behind in life. Whenever I saw people my age, I couldn't help but feel I was behind in life. I didn't have my dream job, a partner, and I still lived with my parents. But when you realise everyone's life is different, there's a weight lifted off your shoulders. Some people have simpler paths

than others, and that's okay. Everything works out in the end.

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## Chapter 21

Getting back from Greece was difficult for me. Going from a sunny country, hopelessly in love, back to London, where reality hits me like a ton of bricks. On my bed is a pile of mail I've received since I've been gone. I skim read most of them and then I get one from London Poets Magazine; I open it up to the most recent edition of their magazine. I skip through the pages and get onto the 'Upcoming Poets' spread, moving my finger down the page, and then I see mine. There's my poem, with my name. I smile to myself, and cut out the poem carefully. I stick it up carefully above my desk, and stare at it for a little. The little compliments on your work always give you hope your writing could be good. My mum gently knocks on the door, popping her head around.

"Hi darling, you okay?"

I nod, waving at her to come over to me.

"Look, I got my poem in a magazine." I point to my poem on the wall, and my mum reads it, hand on her chest.

"That is so beautiful Ophelia, I wish you'd write more." Maybe this was the push I needed. I have written so many poems it could probably fill up ten books. Sure, some aren't the greatest, but some are okay, some just need some editing. My mum places a kiss on my head and rubs my back, her hand warm and comforting. She walks out, leaving the door ajar. I open up my laptop, opening a blank document and stare at it,

my fingers hovering over

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## BEYOND THE BLUES

the keyboard. Then I write, I write everything that comes to my mind and after a few hours I have poems. Certainly rough, and some, if not most, won't make the cut, but it's a start.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

Every time my imposter syndrome came creeping up behind me telling me I can't do it or my writing sucks, I looked up my poem in the magazine. If they liked it enough to put it in their magazine, one day someone else will like it enough to buy my book.

The sky darkens, and my room is only lit by my laptop screen. I don't think I've ever written so much. I shut my laptop and move over to my bed, spreading out across it.

"Dinner!" my mum shouts from downstairs. Exhausted, I crawl out of my bed with a huff. I skip down the stairs, the smell of mum's lasagna wafting up the stairs. I've missed my mum's food. Althea's food was almost as good as my mum's. I sit down at the table, my dad filling out a crossword in a newspaper, shovelling the lasagna in his mouth. My mum sits by her plate, patiently waiting for me to sit down so she can start eating.

"It's so lovely to have you back home, Ophelia." Mum says, tucking into her dish.

"It's good to be home. I wrote a lot today!"

"That's amazing! That's good, isn't it, love!?" My mum nudges my dad, disrupting his concentration.

"Yeah, that's great!" My dad looks up for one second before looking down at his paper again. Me and mum chuckle with each other at my dad, because we both know he has no clue what we were talking about. We finish dinner, catching up on our time again and all the town gossip. I finish up my dinner, placing my plate into the dishwasher, grabbing my nightly iced water and go to walk upstairs.



“Ophelia.” My dad says, still sitting at the table doing his crossword. “Yeah?”

“Finish that book for Coco.” he says, smiling at me.

I nod and head upstairs, closing my bedroom door behind me, flipping off

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## CHAPTER 21

my switch and taking my laptop with me into bed. I keep writing more and more, my fingers turning into a blur as I’m typing frantically. My eyes feel heavy and the screen is just turning into a fog.

“Darling?” My mum comes into my room, jolting me awake. My laptop screen turned off, and I had scattered all my notes all over the place.

“Oh, I must’ve fallen asleep.” I go to get up and my mum comes hurrying over.

“You stay there. Let me tuck you in.”

“But Mum, I’m an adult. I don’t need tucking in.” I argue.

“I want to. I miss it.” And so I let her. She takes off my laptop from my lap, and places it on my desk, shutting down the laptop properly. My mum always insisted on closing down my laptop properly, or I’d break it. She collects my notes, placing them on top of my laptop, more neatly than I would.

“Head up.” My mum says. I lift my head, and she takes the pillow from beneath my head and fluffs it up like a cloud. It makes all the difference, and I can never fluff a pillow quite like her. I lie down and my head sinks into it. Then she tucks the duvet

into my sides, and the warm feeling of safety fills me, just like when I was younger. My mum sits on the edge of my bed and strokes my face gently.

“I love you, my baby.” Her voice is soft.

“I love you mama.”

“I love you more.” She adds.

“I love you most.”

“Never.” She smiles at me, placing a kiss on my forehead. As if a sleeping pill, I fall to sleep almost instantly, my head for once not running around with thoughts and instead I’m thinking about my book, my wonderful family, the good things in life.

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II

PART TWO

Five Months Later

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Chapter 22

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

I open up my email to see my editor had responded with the final edits for my poetry book. With a smile from ear to ear, I read through each poem, ecstatic with the final product. I still can't believe having my little poem in a local magazine led to my getting noticed by agents and publishers. I didn't think I'd be able to finish this, really. But as I was writing it, alongside dealing with the never-ending feelings of grief, I remembered my dad's words 'finish that book for Coco'. Now here I am. My first poetry book is being produced, and it's all about the journey of grief. The book takes you on a journey from when I found out, to now, I guess. I asked about the possibility of releasing it on the day Coco passed, and it was approved. I'm convinced that she is watching over me, pleased that my work is finally being read by someone other than her. I've updated Nora every step of the way, although it takes days for her to reply, but I guess she is busy.

I've watched pretty much every show she's done. Her band has only gotten bigger. The arenas are full, and girls are throwing themselves at the band. I offered to visit Nora for a couple of days whilst we were both free, but once again, I've heard nothing for a while. I watched her live show last night, and she looks tired. But I know they have a week without touring in a couple of days. I open up my calendar and conveniently; I don't have loads of meetings. Maybe I could surprise her? I reach out to the lead singer of her band, Scarlett. All her band mates followed me almost instantly after she'd touched down in

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### BEYOND THE BLUES

America. As soon as it's sent, she's already seen it.

I think she'd love that! We're staying at the Caesars Palace then

I look up the flights and debate doing it. Does she even want to see me? I mean, it has been five months, but in all honesty I just want to have a catch up with her. My finger clicks down and somehow I've magically booked it. I cover my mouth with my hand. Did I really just spend hundreds of pounds on a flight to see a girl who barely answers me anymore? Fuck. Well, I've always wanted to visit America, so I guess this will be interesting either way. My phone pings and I look down.

Nora - sorry for not answering, been busy, super tired, miss you.

I smile down at my phone. At least that's a little reassurance she'll be happy to see me. I walk downstairs to the living room and find my mum and dad cuddled up on the sofa, watching some dramatic soap.

"You okay, darling?" My mum asks, a glass of wine in her hand. My mum's not necessarily strict, but she worries a lot about me since Coco passed. Even after my work being published.

"So, I have some news." I say awkwardly, picking my nails.

"Pause the show." My mum says to my dad. They both look at me, my mum's face filled with concern whereas my dad says 'hurry, so I can finish the show.'

"I'm going to Las Vegas."

"What?"

"In two days."

"What?!" my mum shrieks, standing up.

“Mum, please, it’s fine!” I raise my voice a little.

“To do what?” Hopefully Nora.

“To see Nora.” My mum rolls her eyes. My mum wasn’t very impressed when I told her about Nora, not because she’s a woman, but because it hadn’t been long since we’d known each other for. I had come home head over

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## CHAPTER 22

heels, blabbering on about Nora. Then came the week where I was a little heartbroken to say. Soaking my pillows with tears and snot, barely eating and binge watching ‘Friends.’ She didn’t understand how I’d fallen so quickly, but then again, she wasn’t in my position.

“Do whatever, Ophelia, because no matter what I say, you never listen.” Mum angrily wanders around the kitchen, doing ‘chores’ although I know it’s just a distraction.

“Fine.” I say bluntly, walking out the kitchen.

“Fine!” my mum yells back, clattering about the kitchen. I just wish she’d realised I’m not that vulnerable, grief-stricken girl I was almost a year ago. I’ve grown, and I’m not a risk to myself anymore. Living is something I truly love. I love seeing the things I’ve accomplished when I put my mind to it. If only she could see that.

As I lay on my bed, doom scrolling through my phone, someone gently knocks at my door.

“What?” I say muffled, my mouth slightly covered by the pillow. My mum walks in,

like a cat with a tail between its legs.

“I’m sorry, Ophelia.” She says, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

“I just... after you lost Coco, I was so scared for you. I thought I was going to lose my daughter.” Mum’s voice is shaky.

“But, I get it now. I realise I’ve been overbearing, constantly worried, and watching you, so I owe you an apology.” I’m glad she’s come to the realisation of how she’s been for the past year.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“But there’s something else I must confess.” My mum says so quietly it’s almost inaudible. She pulls a creased letter out of her trouser pockets and hands it to me. When I look at the front, my heart instantly drops. It’s my name... in Coco’s handwriting.

“Wh- what is this?” I stutter.

“It’s the letter Coco wrote to you before she passed.” I feel anger bubble up inside me. How dare she keep this hidden from me for months? I would spend hours crying, wishing she left me a letter, and she did. My eyes instantly well up, making everything around me blurry.

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### BEYOND THE BLUES

“Get out.” I say, not looking at my mum.

“Please, let me explain.”

“Explain what? Explain how you kept my best friend’s suicide note TO ME, hidden?” I yell, feeling as if I’m spitting out venom.

“I didn’t think you could take it back then!” My mum yells louder.

“So you do it now? Get out.” I try to keep my voice lower, because I currently feel like a ticking time bomb ready to explode.

“Ophelia.” My mum says, before her words blur out into just sound, no words, just noise. I’m so angry at her, and so scared to read this. My heart is beating so fast, I fear it will explode out of my chest any second. I feel sick.

“FUCK OFF!” I scream, louder than I’ve ever done before. My mum jumps and stares at me blankly. I hear my dad run up the stairs and stomp towards my door. Before he even has time to speak, my mum ushers him out, not saying another word to me. The door clicks, and I let myself collapse into a puddle of tears. I stare down at the letter in between my fingers, my name in my best friend’s handwriting. I put the paper to my nose and smell, and instantly all the memories of her room come running back to me. The paper has a soft scent of coconut and vanilla, just like Coco’s room. She always picked coconut scented things to ‘match’ her name. She thought it was funny. I open the envelope carefully, trying not to rip any part. I pull the piece of paper out and unfold it. There it is.

To Ophelia.

I don’t think you’ll ever know how sorry I am. I know this is going to hurt, and I wish I could spare you from the pain. The day I met you, I knew you’d be my best friend and oh boy, was I right. You have been my rock through everything, never leaving my side and always making me laugh until I can’t breathe. I thank you for that.

I don’t want you to think this was your fault or you could’ve stopped this, because you couldn’t. I’ve been hiding this for years because I never wanted to weigh you down with my struggles. I can’t keep fighting these battles in my head, day in, day out. It’s sucking the life out of me. I didn’t do this because I had nothing to live for.



I did this because I couldn't keep living in this pain. Please remember, you were the best thing in my life and without you; I don't know if I would've made it this far.

Please keep living freely and wildly, because you deserve all the happiness and love the world can offer you.

Don't let this lead you to the same darkness that took me. Find peace in knowing

I'm in a better place now, and I'll always be by your side every step of the way.

Never stop watching Mamma Mia. Sing those songs for me. Live for both of us.

I'm sorry.

I love you

Coco x

I stare down at the piece of paper in front of me. My emotions are circling my mind frantically. I thought Coco had never written me a letter. I spent this year devastated by the fact she didn't say goodbye to me, when in fact she did. My mum hid it all this time, without telling me. The thought of even speaking to my parents right now is boiling my blood. I don't even know if I can stay in the house with them right now. Impulsive, I grab my phone and look at how much it would be to change my flight to this evening, and surprisingly, the fee is low. So I do it. I drag my suitcase out of my closet and shove a load of clothes in there. I don't really have time to stop and think about what my outfit plans are. Once I've shoved everything I can think of into my suitcase, I zip it up and get into a tracksuit. I've got to be comfy if I am about to be on a ten-hour flight.

I drag my suitcase down the stairs and my mum is sitting on the sofa blubbering to

my dad, who's reassuringly stroking her back. They both look up as my suitcase hits the floor.

"And where are you going?" My dad asks, standing up and crossing his arms over his chest.

"Las Vegas, flights in four hours." I say bluntly, pushing all my emotions down just till I leave.

"What? You said it was in two days." Mum says, panicked.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“I changed it. I can’t stay here right now.”

“Sweetheart, please, can we just talk?” My mum tries to grab my hand and

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### BEYOND THE BLUES

I shake her off, pulling my hand away.

“Mum, I can’t right now. I don’t want to say any more hurtful things to you.” Mum chews on her bottom lip and nods. I leave, without saying anything else.

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### Chapter 23

Now I’m sitting on the plane on my way to Las Vegas processing everything that’s happened today. I messaged Scarlett explaining how I’m coming early, and just my luck I get to watch their last show tonight. I close my eyes and remember the first time I properly spoke to Nora on a plane like I am now. I smile at the thought of our first interaction. When I open my eyes, I feel like I’m thrown back into reality, of what I’ve just received and what has happened. I take Coco’s letter out of my handbag and read it again until the words just become letters, making no sense. I hold it to my chest and squeeze my eyes shut, trying to suppress more tears. I don’t think

my head can take anymore tears.

Live for both of us.

Reading this letter, I can hear Coco's voice so clearly. The gentleness her voice always had, even when she was upset or annoyed. In a weird way, although this is sad, there's a sense of relief being lifted off my shoulders. It's reassuring to see her last words to me, that in fact it wasn't my fault and I couldn't help her. Although I'll always have a sense of guilt, it's less than it was before. I am looking forward to a hug from Nora, to tell her everything that has happened since I last saw her.

I spend the rest of the plane ride asleep, the abrupt landing shaking me awake. When I glance outside the window, I can already see the flood of buildings and bright lights. I can't believe I'm really here. Luckily, I don't

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## BEYOND THE BLUES

have to spend a fortune on a taxi to the venue. Scarlett offered to come pick me up as she's driving past the airport already. I collect my bag and speed walk outside, searching for Scarlett. She shouldn't be too hard to miss. She has flaming ginger hair, and a fabulous sense of fashion. Everything is always matching, and looking as if she's going out somewhere fancy, every day. Of course, I haven't met her in person, but from her Instagram, I can tell she is confident and bubbly.

"Ophelia!" a loud voice echoes. I shoot round and there Scarlett is. Her hair in Hollywood waves, a bright red lip and a skin tight matching glittery red set. She really looks like a rockstar. I walk over, and she immediately embraces me in a hug, her skin smelling like caramel.

“I’m so happy you’re here! I’ve heard so many things about you.” She says ecstatically.

“All good things, I hope.” She pulls away, holding onto my shoulder, and smiles.

“The best things.” Suddenly I see flashes in the corner of my eyes, and there are paparazzi calling Scarlett’s name. I don’t look my best to be getting photographed right now.

We get into the back of this fancy black car, a bunch of refreshments on offer, and the driver in a suit. Maybe I didn’t realise just how big their band had got recently.

“So the drive is about thirty minutes from here, so if you want to touch up your makeup or whatever, do it now!” Scarlett says, scrolling through her phone. I decide to follow her advice since I don’t want to be photographed again looking the way I do now. I frustratingly untangle my curls from my scrunchie, unsure of what to do with it.

“Want some help?” Scarlett asks.

“Please.” I plead. Scarlett scoots over to me and looks at my curls. She grabs a spray of water from the door. She is truly prepared.

“Wet hair is always the way to go when your hair is not working.” She laughs, and spritzes my hair, scrunching and twirling my hair into the perfect curls. I know she has a similar hair type to me considering all her photos flaunt her big mane of ginger hair. Before I know it my curls are falling

perfectly.

“How did you do that so quickly?”

“I’ll teach you at some point.” She winks and returns to her phone. I look down at my outfit and, of course, I’m still wearing my tracksuit with some ketchup on the leg.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“Do you mind if I grab something from my suitcase in the back?” I ask Scarlett.

“Nigel, can you pull over for two secs?” She says to the driver. She jumps out of the car and slams the door. Oh god, I hope I didn’t upset her. Before I know it, she’s back in the car, a dress in her hand. She hands it to me and I stare at it.

“This isn’t mine?”

“Yeah, it’s mine. I thought you’d suit it.” Scarlett says, not looking up from her phone. It is a nice dress, a maxi bodycon black dress. At least it will hide my trainers. Scarlett presses a button and the window between the driver and us darkens. I slip the dress on. Getting dressed in a car is another level of difficult.

“Just in time, you look gorgeous.” She says.

“Right, when we leave the car, it’s gonna be a lot. Just hold my hand, smile and wave.” Scarlett warns me. I nod and latch my hand onto hers like a scared child. The door opens and there is a crowd of screaming people and flashing cameras. Scarlett weaves through the crowd, waving, bouncing with energy. I attempt to seem less awkward by waving a little to the crowd, but their faces display confusion as they try to figure out who I am.

We walk into the back rooms of this arena, filled with music equipment and tech guys. Even from here, I can hear people cheering in the arena.

“Right, I’ll take you to the VIP and then after the show I will come get you!” Scarlett says, she drags me into this booth on the side of the stage, giving me a perfect view of

the side of the stage. Scarlett waves goodbye and runs out of the booth. Then the music starts, pounding drums and fans even louder than before. The band walks on stage and there she is. Nora. Her hair is a bit longer, and she's wearing baggy jeans with a cropped racer vest. If

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## BEYOND THE BLUES

anything, she's just gotten more attractive. I want to run onto the stage and plant my lips onto hers. She picks up her guitar and picks the strings, her hand effortlessly moving. Scarlett sings and her heavenly voice fills the arena, almost silencing the cheers. The other band mates are just as well, although I don't remember their names. The show goes on and I can't stop grinning. Everything is so perfectly done. After a couple of hours, they're all sweaty and bowing to the crowd. The roars of the crowd are deafening.

I'm too eager to wait for Scarlett, so I leave VIP, weaving through people to find Nora. I see the band huddled together, minus Nora. Where is she? I reach the band and they all face me, their faces a little awkward, as if I've interrupted something. I have. Nora has a blonde girl pushed up against a railing, her lips all over her like she did with me. The girl is laughing, flaunting her perfect teeth. My Nora has another girl laughing, just like I did with her. My stomach drops and I feel sick. I face Scarlett. Why would she bring me out here knowing Nora is seeing other girls? I know we aren't official, but we still loved each other. Well, at least I do. I love her. Rather than questioning it, I walk away. I lightly jog, getting hotter by the second, desperate for fresh air.

"Ophelia!" I hear Scarlett yell out to me, her chunky boots clunking on the floor behind me. I try to ignore her. I can't do this right now. I feel her hand grasp my wrist and pull me towards her.



“Please let me explain. I’m so sorry.” “Why would you humiliate me like this?”

“I thought if Nora saw you, she’d change her mind over this fame whore out there.”  
She waves her hand around.

“She hasn’t been the same ever since she’s been back. I know she misses you.”  
Scarlett says, as if it’s reassuring. If she missed me, why would she do this? She didn’t even tell me she was seeing someone new. I can’t stay here.

“Sorry Scarlett, I have to go.” I storm out into the fresh air, the loud chaos of Las Vegas filling my ears.

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## Chapter 24

12 hours earlier

Nora

I feel like I’ve been on this tour for years now, and all I can think about is Ophelia. I have never ached to be with someone as much as I do with her. If I close my eyes, I can just about smell her sweet scent. I keep opening up my phone to text her, but every time I go to do it I feel like I’m boring her. How many times can someone hear ‘I miss you’ till it becomes annoying? I just resort to short messages, to hold myself back from professing my love repeatedly. To distract myself, I usually just go out, get completely black out, and sleep with the first girl that throws themselves at me. I feel disgusting. The next morning, when I wake up with that sickening headache, I sit down in the shower for at least an hour, trying to get rid of the night before. But it’s

another day on tour, and I must get through it the same way I have for the past couple of months. I can tell everyone is worried about me, but I just can't stop. Even when I got so drunk, I fell asleep behind some trash cans outside a club. Luckily, Scarlett got to me before the paparazzi. She was crying and begging me to get help, trying to lift me up from the ground. Eventually, she had to get our driver to help me back. Scarlett got so concerned she spoke to my parents. I was angry at first, but I understood her point of view. She thought maybe they weren't such cruel people that they'd want to help their daughter through this, but nope. They told her to never phone them back

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## BEYOND THE BLUES

again and hung up. No concern, nothing. Ah well, fuck em.

I crawl out of bed, looking over to my side to see a blonde girl naked and spread out in my bed. I tap her shoulder and her eyes flutter open.

"Sorry, love, but you've got to go." Her face screws up in annoyance, and she huffs, getting dressed quickly and heading out the door. I sit in the shower for a while before I hear Scarlett's voice outside the bathroom.

"Nora darling, are you almost ready?"

"Yeah, give me a second." I yell. I get dressed quickly and unlock the bathroom door, to reveal all my bandmates. Scarlett, my best friend and the lead singer, her ginger flaming curls and contagious smile. Alora, our bassist in the band, her electric bohemian braids and unbelievable fashion sense. Then Avery, our drummer, they have an even better mullet than me and almost always wear sunglasses.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“You okay?” Alora asks, her face furrowed with worry.

“Yup, is there coffee anywhere?” I ask. Avery holds up a takeaway cup towards me, and I turn to the minibar and pour a heavy-handed shot of vodka in it. I can feel all their eyes on me, judging me. But I ignore it and continue to do it, anyway.

“I’m sorry. I can’t watch this anymore.” Scarlett storms out of the room, slamming the hotel door behind her. Alora and Avery awkwardly stand up and walk towards me, saying their goodbye and leaving as well. Alone, again. When I feel lonely, I just close my eyes and think of the times me and Ophelia spent together, and that if she were here, things could be different. In fact, if my family didn’t disown me, I feel like I’d be better for it, too. Not having anyone to phone home to and tell them how great the tour is, how surreal it is to basically be famous is just horrible.

By the time it hits the evening, I’ve drunk enough drinks to knock out a horse and my vision is blurry and my legs are wobbly. Playing the set was difficult enough, and I know I made a couple mistakes from the looks my bandmates shot me during the songs. When I walk offstage, one of my ‘flings’, Jessica, who I’ve slept with a couple times, comes strolling over, her heels clicking on the floor.

“Hello you.” Her American accent is strong.

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## CHAPTER 24

“Enjoy the show?” I ask. Jessica places her hand on my chest, and her touch feels like

she's left a residue on me.

"Always babe." She leans in and places a kiss on my lips. She pulls away and laughs and wipes her finger along my lips. Of course, she's got her lipstick all over me, like a wolf protecting its territory. But I'm not hers. The only person I'd ever be for was Ophelia. My Ophelia.

"Nora, for fuck's sakes!" Scarlett yells at me. For a second, it feels like it's not even her speaking to me.

"What?" I am confused.

"Ophelia is here!" My heart drops and I instantly move Jessica to the side, scanning the room for Ophelia.

"Where?! Where is she, Scarlett?!" I ask

"She left, she saw you and this." Scarlett points her finger to Jessica. "Excuse me, my name's Jes-"

"I don't care, and I never will, you fame whore." Scarlett interrupts her. My hearts racing. Ophelia came all this way to see me, and without even speaking to her or seeing her, I've messed it all up.

"She's staying at our hotel, go, I'll text you the details." Scarlett says, and without another word, I'm running to my driver as if my life depends on it. I need to see her. I need to explain. Losing her again is not an option for me.

## Chapter 25

I sit in my hotel room feeling sorry for myself, a sad lukewarm glass of wine on the side, with a random reality show blaring on the TV. Scarlett has flooded my phone with messages, and a couple from Nora. Clearly she found out I saw her. I just can't get over how different the girl was to me. She was blonde, short and dressed so glamorously, and then there's me. I want Coco. She'd know what to do. She'd know how to comfort me.

\*3 years ago\*

I cry in my bed, tissues scattered around me. I can't believe I'm sitting here crying so much over someone ghosting me. My door pings open and Coco is standing there, chocolates and Mamma Mia in her hand.

"Oh, come here." She says, falling into my bed next to me. I cuddle up to her and she holds me to her side, stroking my hair. We rarely hug, or have any physical contact, only when either of us really needs it. Coco just knows when I need it.

"You know your mother-fucking Ophelia Greene, right?" Coco whispers to me. I look up to her, and her emerald eyes look down at me, the glint in them sparkling.

"Any person would be lucky to have you, Ophelia. You're gorgeous, hilarious, kind, clever, the list goes on. I don't pick friends easily, and yet you made the list. The top of the list even. Whoever gets to experience you and

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the love you give is the luckiest person, right? So fuck this girl for ghosting you. She

doesn't know what she's lost yet."

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I can feel my eyes getting heavy. Clearly the jetlag is catching up to me. I hear a knock at the door and get up swinging the door open. Nora is standing there, breath stinking of vodka, her eyes bloodshot and her hair a mess.

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*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“Ophelia, baby.” She walks into the room, falling into my arms. This is not the Nora I’m used to.

“You can’t call me baby anymore, Nora.” I sniff, trying to hold back tears.

She falls to her knees and wraps her arms around my waist.

“I’m sorry.” She cries into my stomach.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I didn’t want to hurt you.”

“I think this hurt me a lot more, Nora.” My words silence her, and she just continues to sob into my stomach. She then stumbles backwards onto the floor and puts her head on her knees. I’ve never seen her so sad.

“I just can’t do the loneliness of it all, Ophelia, all my bandmates’ phone home and I’m stuck there, with no one to phone. My family hates me.”

“You could’ve phoned me.” I say.

“I didn’t want to disappoint you. I am different now. Look at me, I’m a complete mess.” She’s swaying all over the place and I’m pretty sure she has vomited on her clothes. But she could never disappoint me. I’d never want anyone to go through something alone. I can’t lose another person I love. Lowering myself to her level, I gently lift her face to meet my gaze.

“Nora, I just want you to be okay. You wouldn’t have disappointed me. I love you too much.”

“You still love me?” She cries harder, her eyes filled with sadness. “Always.” Then Nora falls into me again, and we stay there on the hotel

room floor for a good ten minutes, Nora letting out every emotion she’s probably held in for the past five months. The stench of vomit and vodka filling my nostrils. I drag her up, flinging her arm over my shoulder. Taking off her clothes and placing them in the basket behind me, I get her in the bath.

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Turning on the shower head, making sure it’s warm enough, and I slowly place it over her body and hair. Her crystal like eyes stare up at me through her eyelashes, water droplets clinging onto them.

“You’re so beautiful, Ophelia.” I smile, but don’t answer. Despite still being hurt, my priority is to make sure Nora is safe. I wrap a towel around her, and she shivers dramatically, her teeth chattering. Rummaging through my suitcase, I find a random over sized t-shirt and shorts and get her dressed. Her legs struggled to find the holes and almost fell over multiple times. I finally get her into bed and help her sip a glass of water. Before I know it, she’s passed out on the bed, mouth peeking open. I open my phone and text Scarlett.

Nora’s with me. She’s okay.

I wake up to an already awake Nora staring at me from the chair opposite the bed.



“What are you doing?” I sit up, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes.

“I’m so, so sorry, Ophelia.” I shrug, unsure of what to say.

“Lately, I’ve been finding it really difficult to come to terms with the reality of it all. I feel really lonelybeing out here, no one to speak to back at home. I’ve tried to rekindle with my family, despite the things they’ve said and done, but they just blocked me. So I get really drunk and sleep around, trying to find any lousy connection I can. ”

“And I wanted to reach out to you more, but I was so scared you’d reject me because of my drinking and my antics. So I found Katie, the blonde girl you saw, but as soon as I heard you were her yesterday, I left her. Got the details of your hotel and paid the receptionist a lot of money to tell me your room number. I want you Ophelia, I need you with me. Please come out here with me,” Nora begs. I want her too. I want to run over there, jump into her lap and make love to her. But I have my life back home. I can’t just follow her around.

“I have to think about it.” I say.

“But first you need to sort out this drinking before it’s too late.” Nora nods.

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## CHAPTER 25

“Can I please kiss you?” Nora asks. I nod. Nora shoots up from the chair and comes over to me, crashing her lips onto me, starved from each other.

“No one is quite like you, Ophelia.”

“I know, a certain someone told me that before.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

We sit in bed discussing our options on how Nora should get help, and we settle on therapy. Even if we leave this situation, not together, I'll be happy knowing she's okay.

"How have you been, though?" Nora asks me.

"My mum hid Coco's suicide letter from me." Nora's jaw falls open.

"What?!" Nora says, shocked.

"And I feel so many mixed emotions about it. One part of me is so angry and upset she hid it from me, but the other part gets it. She didn't want me to be sadder, she was just trying to protect me, I guess."

"You can't be angry at her forever. You need your family." Nora smiles softly at me. She's right. She's shown me the effects of not being able to speak to her family. It hurts her. Although sometimes, it's for the best that people don't speak to your family, especially if they serve no goodness, but my family does. This was out of care, not spitefulness or cruelty. My mum cares about me so much. There's been countless times she's slept in my bed with me after Coco's death, just waiting for me to stop crying and fall asleep. My dad as well, although he's not as open with his emotions, he's done little things to show me he cares. Like when he funded my many therapy trips, because in his words 'he couldn't watch his little girl in this much pain.'

## Chapter 26

Nora takes me out for the day, the paparazzi finding us at every stop we go to. We spend the day together, secretly exchanging kisses every moment we get, just like in Santorini. Spending these moments with her reminds me just how much I love her. Our two souls fit together perfectly, like a puzzle, although I think this puzzle is missing one piece. Nora's here, living it up as a famous rockstar and I'm in London, publishing my poetry book. I'm finally living my dream, a quiet little life, reading and writing. I'd love to be made for this life Nora is living, but I'm just not. That's why we're just not quite right for each other.

"Nora." I say, my voice echoing in the closed off exhibit in an art gallery Nora thought I'd like. I do.

"Yeah?" Nora's hand clasping onto mine.

"You know I care so deeply about you and I love you, but I don't think we can be together after this trip." Nora's face saddens.

"You see, our lives and dreams right now are so different, and although it may work for a bit, in the long run we will clash. I love how well you're doing, but it's not the life I want to lead. I'm finally getting my work published, and I'm happy with my life back at home. Which feels so good after feeling stuck for so long there. I don't want to start a new life all over again, not yet."

"I understand." Nora says.

"Maybe another time, or another life?" Nora adds.

## CHAPTER 26

“Another time, another life, Nora, for sure.”

“Just for the last couple days you’re here, can we act like we’re never letting each other go?” Nora asks.

“I’ll never let you go Nora, I’ve just got to let both of us flourish.” Then I kiss her, inhaling every part of her, addicted to her taste. We continue to sit silently, hand intertwined and grazing my thumb on top of hers.

“That tickles.” Nora gently pulls her hand away, itching the ticklish sensation away.

“Sorry. My mum used to do it to me when I was younger. I always found it soothing.” I place my hands together and begin stroking my thumb. When I was younger, I was an anxious child, especially before meeting Coco. Always avoiding school, meeting new people and any social interaction, really. No matter the crowd, the place or time, I’d always be searching for my mum’s hand, latching onto it and not letting it go until my heartbeat went slower. No questions asked. My mum would stroke my thumb, giving me something to focus on other than the world around me. Nora pulls my hand back to hers and strokes her thumb in circular motions on the back of my hand.

“I’ve got something for you.” I say, rummaging through my handbag. Pulling out a badly wrapped present. Nora takes it and shakes it next to her ear.

“Is it a car?” Nora asks. I roll my eyes. She carefully unwraps the paper, gently peeling the tape away. Inside is my poetry book, of course, signed. That was more for my enjoyment. Once Nora opens it, her face fills with glee and she skims the pages.

“You even signed it? Boy, am I going to sell that for a lot of money when you are a famous author.” Nora winks at me.

“But really, thank you, Ophelia. This is amazing.” “You haven’t even read any yet?!” I chuckle.

“I don’t need to read any of the words to know how amazing it is to get your book published.”

We spend the rest of the day cozying up in Nora’s hotel room before her last gig in Las Vegas. Nora reads every poem in my book. We share tears and laughter as we read through it. It feels like a whole healing process going through my book, but that’s exactly how I wanted it to feel for the readers.

### BEYOND THE BLUES

At the end of my book is, of course, the acknowledgements, it includes my agent, family, and all that. But little does Nora know I wrote a little about her.

Nora, a little thanks to you. Falling in love with you by chance on our holiday made me realise there is so much more to life. I felt grief had stolen everything I had, and you helped me realise I am still me. Without you, this book probably wouldn't have made it into the world for many more years to come.

“Ophelia this is-”

I interrupt.

“You don't need to say anything. It's the truth.” Without another word, Nora burrows into my chest, her breathing heavy.

“I best get ready for the show.” Nora says, pulling away from me, her cheeks flushed.

“Me too.”

“Wear something bright so I can spot you in the crowd.” I stand up and pick out a red dress. I once read that wearing red makes people fall in love with you. Although I already know Nora is, I want tonight to be unforgettable for her. Nora wearing a white shirt, buttons undone at the top, black trousers and Doc Martens. She really knows how to dress, even without a stylist guiding her. I put on my red lipstick, carefully lining my lips. Nora walks over to me and taps a finger on her cheek.

“I’ll get lipstick on your face.”

“Exactly.”

I place my lips on her cheek, firm, pulling away and leaving a perfect lip print on her cheek, the red contrasting with her skin.

“Perfect, I think I’m ready” Nora stares at herself in the mirror. We head down in the elevator, being stopped every minute for a photo. I think they only include me because one, they don’t know who I am, meaning I could be famous one day and two, they feel bad for me. Watching Nora take these photos, her face immediately drops into a photo ready pose. She’s clearly practised it many times. When we arrive at the stadium, it’s even more wild, more screaming people and a lot more flashing cameras.

“Nora, who’s the lovely lady in red?” A paparazzi man asks, completely

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ignoring me. Nora pauses in her step and turns to face him.

“Maybe if you asked her instead, she could tell you she is an upcoming author, Ophelia Greene, pre order her book.” Nora winks at the camera, clasping onto my hand and dragging me into the arena. We see Scarlett in the distance, pulling off a fantastic sparkly catsuit, her hair once again perfect. Scarlett notices us and comes over, energy clearly pouring out of her.

“You’re here Ophelia!” She yells, embracing me in a tight hug.



“Thank you, Nora needs it.” Scarlett continues to whisper in my ear. I get to meet the rest of the bandmates, a lot more laid back compared to Scarlett.

“Ten minutes to show time.” A voice of the intercom calls.

“Right baby,” Nora turns to face me.

“Brian here, my security guard, will take you to the front section. You’ll be fine. I’ll see you after the show.” Nora places a kiss on my lips. When she pulls away, my lipstick has smudged. I lick the tip of my thumb and wipe it up, giggling. Nora runs off, guitar pick in her mouth. I walk through the darkened halls and then into the totally opposite, a crowded, loud arena filled with people. I wait at the front, the VIP section filled with a few familiar faces. Natasha Goodman, a famous actress. Kian Brown, a folk singer. So many influencers I could barely count all of them. I feel a bit out of place, but I’m here for Nora. The music starts and the crowd screams electrify. I feel like any second the roof could raise. Everyone walks on and my eyes only focus on Nora. I look at the crowd and see the many signs directed towards the band, some inappropriate and making me cringe. Don’t people realise they are still humans? Once the music starts, I dance along, ignoring everyone and everything around me, letting the music take me away.

“Hello you lovely people!” Scarlett shouts into the mic.

“Our guitarist, Nora, has a little something to say.” Scarlett glances over at me and gives me a subtle wink.

“Hiya everyone, so the next song is a new song, unreleased. It’s about a girl I met on holiday and fell hopelessly in love with, but unfortunately we can’t work. But my heart is off the market, because no one will ever compare to her. This is called ‘Uncomparable’” Nora makes eye contact with me and begins strumming on her guitar. This song is a lot gentler than their other

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ones. Scarlett sings, and the lyrics already cause an automatic tear to fall down my cheek. I look around the crowd, and it's clearly not just me who finds this song beautiful.

I don't know if I can stay the rest of my days here in Las Vegas. I'm scared I won't be able to leave. Now I feel okay too, but will I after a couple of days? I'm so in love with her, but I feel with Nora I'll never stop falling. At this point my eyes are pouring with tears, everyone else in VIP is definitely noticing that this song is about me. Despite knowing that what I'm about to do is awful and a rash decision, I have to do it for myself. I navigate the crowd, pushing past the people in my path. I turn around once more to the stage and see Nora furrowing her eyebrows. She pulls away from the mic and mouths at me, "Where are you going?" I turn back forward and keep going. I run out into the street, the cars beeping and the air smelling of money and fame.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

“Taxi!” I stick out my hand, and a yellow cab pulls up next to me. I get in the taxi and start scrolling through the next flights back to London. There is one in four hours and I know I can do that. My finger hovers over the book button. My mind is arguing whether to just stay, let yourself fall or to go home, make up with my parents and continue my dream of being an author. Could I do both? I hate to say it, but I don’t think I’m strong enough to see the hurt in Nora’s eyes again, leaving to get on that plane. If I do this now, it will be easier for Nora. If anything, she might resent me a little, which will make it easier for her to move on. My finger pushes down and I make my decision.

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### Chapter 27

I get back to the hotel room and rush around, placing all my belongings in my suitcase. Within half an hour, I’m done, my stomach filled with guilt. I run to the bathroom and spew up the drink I had an hour ago. This is for me, this is for myself. Do things for yourself, Ophelia. I drag my over packed suitcase into the elevator and stand there, barely able to stand still, my feet constantly shifting. The elevator doors open and Nora is standing there, clearly panicking. Fuck.

“Ophelia? Where’d you go?”

“I’m, I’m going home Nora.”

“But you have a couple of days left?” The elevator door begins shutting and Nora places her hand on it, the door sliding open again. I step out so the elevator door doesn’t keep interrupting this moment.

“I have to go, because if I don’t go now, I don’t think I ever will.” I stutter. Nora pushes her hands through her hair. I look down at my phone and realise the show shouldn’t even be done by now.

“Nora, the show is not even done?!”

“I couldn’t stop thinking about where you’d gone. I thought I wouldn’t see you again, and I guess I was right.” Nora gets emotional, tears filling her eyes.

“Fuck, I thought this would be easier. I knew we weren’t staying like this forever.” Nora adds, a tear finally escaping. As soon as that tear falls, mine follows. I stand there, unsure of what to say, the reality of it hitting me all.

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This truly is the last time we will see each other, at least for now.

“I’ve got to get my flight.” I walk past Nora, avoiding this situation as much as I can.

“Please Ophelia.” Nora’s voice breaks. I keep walking, trying to avoid seeing how heartbroken the love of my life is. As I reach outside and hail a taxi, Nora grabs my hand.

“Ophelia, please no, stay with me. I’ll come back to London with you.” A sob escapes Nora, and before I know it, she’s crumbling to the floor, into a puddle of hurt.

I bend down to her level.

“Another time, another life, Nora, I promise.” I hold her face in my hands for a minute, the taxi driver clearly confused by what’s happening right now.

“Okay.” Nora whispers and stands up abruptly, taking a deep breath. “Goodbye Nora, I love you.” I go to pull her in for a hug, and Nora pulls

away, not even looking at me. Fuck, I’ve ruined it.

“Yep, Goodbye Ophelia.” I understand where she’s coming from, so I don’t argue it. I get in the taxi and drive away, my heart shattering even if it is my choice. Nora’s outside the hotel, hands in her hair, staring blankly at the pavement below her. A part of me wants to run back and hold her, make sure she’s okay, and change my mind and stay here forever and ever. But I know why I’m doing, sure it may not of been the best way to of done it, but we both needed this so we both could grow.

I can’t get the look in her eyes when she said goodbye to me out of my head. Her eyes went from filled with emotion and upset, to blank, as if she didn’t even recognise me. She didn’t even say she loved me back. Ouch.

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## Chapter 28

The rain falls on the car windows, the sound of the windscreen wipers squeaking frantically filling my ears. I open up my phone and scroll through my contacts, holding it up to my ear.

“Hello?!” My mum’s panicked voice echoes through the phone.

“I’m coming home Mama.” I cry.

“Okay baby, I’ll pick you up.” The sound of my mum’s voice is so soothing to me, not long till I can give her a hug.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:29 pm*

After the plane ride, which felt ten times longer with my constant thoughts and occasionally crying, I'm finally home. Home. Even from thousands of feet high, I love being able to look out the window and spot the familiar places in London I know. I almost ran through the airport, and for once I stood up in the plane before everyone had left the plane. I walk through the arrival gates and my mum is standing there. In her usual outfit of a jumper and leggings, her hair tied up in a bun and glasses sitting on the tip of her nose. She smiles at me and opens her arms up, ready for me to land right into them. I press myself into her and for the first time in hours, I finally feel like I can breathe.

"I'm sorry Mum."

"I'm sorry too, baby." She presses a firm kiss on top of my head, and I soak up the smell of her clothes. You know how everyone's house has their own smell that they can't really smell? Well every time I'm away from home for

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a while and reunite with my family, I smell that heart-warming scent ten times stronger. As we walk up to the car, I notice my dad in the front seat. Of course, getting out to greet me at arrivals would be too much for him. He looks up from his lap and notices me pushing open the car door and embracing me into a hug. He's taller than me and makes me feel like a child every time he holds me. Despite how hard this day has been, this has all made it worth it.

Home. My bed freshly made, my desk the same as I left it. The desk was covered in my spread out papers, with pens scattered about the place. Photos of people I love fill my walls, constantly reminding me why I'm here. Before I sleep, I open up my emails and check for any new ones since I've been gone. There's a email from my agent, the subject titled 'Congratulations'.

Dear Ophelia

I hope you can soak in this massive achievement. We've received some incredible news - your book has already received hundreds of pre orders, making you a best-seller before you have even hit the shelves!

It's not every day we see a pre launch performance like this, so massive congratulations. Celebrate with a glass of prosecco!

Here's to celebrating many more milestones together!

Kind Regards.

I let out a little squeal and covered my mouth. Did I really do this? Then I remember the brief shout out Nora did for me. I search on YouTube to find it. I watch the video and smile, a bittersweet feeling. Although we didn't end on the greatest terms, sadly, we are both smashing our careers. Realistically, we wouldn't have been able to do it together. But our love taught me a lot and I hope it taught Nora some things too. I thank her for taking me out of a dark place, for making me realise I can do whatever I put my mind to. Now I'm here, a writer, which a year ago was an unrealistic dream. I hope that Coco is proud as she looks down at me. I miss her. I miss Nora. But I'll be okay, always okay.



## EPILOGUE

Nora

\*6 months later\*

Sitting in my therapist's office, I observe everything around me like I do every therapy session. The rows of books about psychology were on her shelf, the box of tissues next to my side, and the whiteboard where I've written out my emotions many times. My therapist, Emily, walks in sitting down on the chair opposite me. She has a scarf tucked round her neck, and a knitted jumper hugging her torso.

"Hello Nora, how are you doing?" Emily asks. Sometimes I come to these sessions, especially when I feel low, feeling like there's a tape over my mouth. I can't speak, I can't cry for help, all I can do is sit there and grunt. The countless conversation we have that I'm wasting my money to just sit here. I get it, I pay lots of money for these sessions, and although to Emily it may look like I'm not improving, I am. A month after Ophelia left me stranded in Las Vegas, I finally came to therapy. I was so angry at Ophelia, annoyed she left so abruptly. It hurt more than anything ever has. Some days, I'm okay and I understand why she did it, rationally I know why she did it. But some days I wake up and this cloud hangs over my head, raining down with fury and sadness. I haven't messaged her since she left, and the guilt eats me up. "Is something bothering you, Nora?" Emily asks, her clipboard sitting on