

**Seneca**

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**By**

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*December 2022*

**Expected Date of Graduation**

*May 2022*

**Abstract:**

Eris Lane is a young woman with many dreams and a determined spirit but is closed off to love and the world. Eris lands herself in a precarious situation as a personal assistant for Jake Grantly and soon realizes that her safety may be in danger. Will she open up to Isaac Oaks, a popular actor, and seemingly kind-hearted person, or will she close herself off to the idea of love? Isaac is a man with a passion for acting and a big heart – though his ex-wife would claim the opposite. Will Isaac open himself up to love again after a messy divorce with his wife years prior, or will he push her away like he always seems to do? Ari is a proud dad of two little girls and is also an actor, though he tends to do much more abstract projects. When he finds Eris at her lowest, he will try everything in his power to help her. Will Eris find it in her heart to love Ari after so many things have gone wrong in her life?

**Acknowledgments:**

I would like to thank Dr. Jason Powell, who helped me tremendously with this project and the edits required.

I would like to thank my family for encouraging me during this daunting project.

I would also like to thank Archana Sathyamurthy, Cole Schoen, Sam Norman, and Alex Marshall for encouraging my crazy plot ideas and always encouraging me to work on my thesis.

### **Process Analysis:**

I have always felt drawn to the art of writing, having been told I was a decent writer as a child and finding joy in creating stories of my own. When I decided to tackle a project of this scale, I was both excited and intimidated, as this would be the biggest writing project I'd undertaken. I have started previous attempts at a novel and made it about 10,000 words before I lost my passion for it. I knew that I wanted to try to start a novel again for my thesis, to see if I could get farther than my previous attempt. I wanted to write a story that I would be interested in reading, something that would keep me turning the pages always wanting more, and that is why I decided on writing a romance novel. I love all kinds of books, fantasy, sci-fi, and young adult, but I love some of those stories even more because of the romance element to them. My favorite author, Sarah J. Maas, created a very detailed fantasy world, but what I loved most about her books is the way she's able to weave romance seamlessly into her plot lines. While my novel is not fantasy, I wanted to portray romance the way she does – almost subliminally, and always in the background. I believe that our emotions influence a lot of the way we think and act, and it's behind a lot of the decisions we make, and I wanted to portray that in my novel. Our feelings for people can change the way we interact with them, and I was hoping to capture that in my novel.

I first started with the idea of *Seneca* back in the spring of 2022, and it came to me slowly, in bits and pieces. The two love interests are both actors and are reminiscent of actors I find interesting in real life. I thought about what those actors would be like in different situations and how they would react to the main character being hurt or in danger. While Isaac and Ari are based on real-life actors, much of their character traits and the way they interact with Eris is of my own creation, as I wanted to create a story I would want to read. From there, a story started to develop from a fledging idea into something tangible. The story started off small at first, I would often think of different plot points to fall asleep at night, as I always create stories in my head to drift off. I thought through several different possible storylines, first with just Isaac as a love interest, but then thinking about what would happen if Eris fell for Isaac and then is later spurned by him. That's when Ari came into the picture. From that moment on, I knew Eris was never meant to end up with Isaac, and the whole time she had been running she was really running to Ari.

Eris is a strong character, but that is not obvious at first. When the audience is introduced to her, she seems weak and willing to take the abuse that is thrown at her, but it is more like self-flagellation, as she thinks she deserves it. I really wanted to explore the idea that Eris thinks that she deserves this and see how long it would take Eris to learn how to fight back. Eris has a long way to go in this novel and I wanted to explore different aspects such as finding oneself, learning to fight back, and self-love. It sounds cheesy, but these are things a lot of people go through and struggle to learn, and I wanted Eris to feel relatable. Eris's journey is a long one, and it takes her a while to find something worth fighting for. While I have never experienced what Eris goes through, I see a lot of myself in her, as I've had to go through journeys of self-discovery myself and wanted to see how I think Eris would try to find herself. Eris has always seen herself through the lens of other people, and she accepts what she thinks she deserves. Eris is someone whose worth is based on other people, but she has to learn how she wants to see herself, and in turn, how she wants other people to see her. We see Eris's true self when she lets go of her preconceived notions of what she thinks other people want to see, and when she meets Ari for the first time, Eris feels as though she doesn't have to hide from him. This is seen in her telling him things she hadn't even told Isaac yet, and she's inexplicably drawn to him. In turn, Ari is drawn to her, this woman, who despite everything that had happened to her still was full of light and hope

When that was decided, I then needed to figure out a way for Eris to be spurned by Isaac. After all, I set it up so that the reader thinks that Eris and Isaac are always going to be together. This is when the idea of an evil ex-wife came into play. Natalie is not based on a real person, and she is a truly horrific woman. We don't know why Isaac and Natalie ever got married in the first place, Isaac doesn't seem to want to talk about it. They have a daughter, Melanie, who spends most of the time with her mom, and only sees her dad occasionally. I decided that this would be the point of strife that causes Isaac to first push Eris away. The seeds are planted very early on, Natalie texts Isaac rude things and some are seen in the text, and some are not. He tries to push those thoughts away, but they really start to get to him when he goes to host SNL and takes Eris with him. I wanted Isaac to feel discord between his desire for Eris

and his desire to have a relationship with his daughter, and this tension between the two wants is what ultimately causes him to act rashly and decide to leave Eris.

I like to believe that Eris and Isaac's love was always going to be doomed, that they were never meant to be together – two stars that passed each other in orbit but never truly felt each other's warmth. Ari and Eris's relationship is like when two stars collide - forever imprinted on each other permanently. When Ari and Eris first meet, it's like a meeting of two like souls, how the sun always chases the moon, how a coin has two sides to it. I am regretful that I never got to write Ari and Eris's first meeting but hope that I will finish the novel in the future and fully explore their dynamic as well.

I decided to have Eris rekindle her relationship with her mother because it was something that felt important for her character. Eris has a really big heart, and though she seems closed off at first, she has so much love to give to the people she feels close to. Having Eris cut off from her mom at the beginning of the story is a way to make her feel more isolated and more desperate to have a connection with someone she's currently around, and that just so happens to be Isaac. I wanted Eris to reconnect with her mom because she's in the process of becoming a mom and feels as though she needs her mom's guidance, no matter what they've said to each other in the past. I had Eris's mom agree to have a relationship again because I wanted to show that even though some families have rocky histories, all parties can learn from the past and work towards a better future.

I'm not going to lie and say that this project was a breeze – it was in fact a struggle some days to work on my thesis. Even though one of my passions is writing, once I decided to write for my thesis it felt more like work than fun, but I did still have fun in the process. I would often write in spurts, working when I had the motivation. The playlist I made to go along with *Seneca* has had a huge impact on my writing, as I found songs that connected to specific moments and used those feelings to write the chapters and the outline. The song playlist is linked in the Digital Supplements and the explanation of when each song happens in the story is located in the Appendix. The songs allowed me to fully immerse myself in the world I had created, and they made writing a lot easier. It also allowed me to fully explore the characters I was creating and try to understand their motives and emotions.

I am immensely proud of myself for the effort I put into my thesis, it was a trying process, and I learned a lot about myself in the process. My writing process since starting this project has changed and the most challenging part of my thesis was creating an outline. My original outline process was very detailed but unsustainable as the deadline closed in. Instead of creating a very detailed outline like I had been doing, I decided to try writing my outline just in paragraph form and was able to complete it in a couple of hours doing it that way. The actual process of writing the excerpt for my thesis was easy with the outline I had created, and I hope that now that I have a completed outline, I'll feel inspired to finish the book on my own time.

*Content Warning: This work of fiction contains themes of abuse of power, abuse, and aggravated assault.*

*Please proceed with caution.*

*If you or a loved one is experiencing abuse, please call 800-799-7233.*

## Chapter One: Eris

### Song of the Day: Fourth of July by Sufjan Stevens

When I come to, it was not in the warmth of the sunny beach I had just been dreaming about. No, here there are no waves, no brine in the wind that whips around my face - we're too far inland for that. Here, there are only cold mornings, so cold and damp I can feel it in my bones. Here, I am alone.

Well, not entirely. I have Lily, but she's busy filming every day. She always goes out of her way to talk to me though, which I appreciate. It's isolating staying here on set, in a trailer so decrepit that I don't think it's legal.

It's almost the end of July in California, but this morning the cold seeps in through the crack in the door as I turned my alarm off with practiced haste - 4:30 AM. Groaning, I rub my eyes. It's too early for this shit. I lay there for a few seconds, collecting my thoughts and steeling myself for the day. We didn't stop filming until 11:00 last night, and I didn't make it back to the trailer until midnight. *Four and a half hours of sleep...lovely.* I slowly make my way out of bed. "Bed" is a generous term for my sleeping arrangement, it's a pullout couch with the world's lumpiest mattress, but I'm so tired at night that I don't care. Walking into the small bathroom, I stretch out my back and shoulders. In the mirror I give my arms a once over - there's only one bruise today, but it's on my forearm, so long sleeves it is again today. After brushing my teeth, I dig around in the small wardrobe, pulling out a pair of jeans, and a black long-sleeve shirt. I got dressed quickly, grab a granola bar from the tiny kitchen, and head out the door. I have to get to

the closest Starbucks before 4:50, or else I won't beat the 5:00 AM rush. Luckily, it's a short walk from set, and I make it with two minutes to spare.

One black coffee and a brisk walk later, I'm handing the coffee off to Jake, who just grabs it and hands me a list in response. I glance at it, and it's more pointless errands that have nothing to do with being a production assistant. Folding the list gently I put it in my pocket and turn to leave, almost slamming into someone. I don't even look to see who it was; way too much to do today. I hear him apologize to me, but I'm still moving until I hear Lily yell at me.

"Hey! How is my favorite PA this morning?" Lily grins and grabs my arm.

Wincing, I grumble, "Oh, it's totally fine." Lily's eyes narrow.

"Did he hurt you again?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Lily gives me a look, one that says she's not dealing with the bullshit today.

"I'm not an idiot, Eris. If you want to report him, I'll help you. No questions asked."

"I don't want to talk about it today." The tears well in my eyes, and Lily notices, dropping the subject immediately.

"What's he got you doing today?" Lily says mischievously.

"Oh, wait until you hear this shit!" I pull the list out of my pocket and read it to her.

"You know I'll hire you. Just say the word!" Lily says, making me chuckle. I know Lily's trying to come across as joking but we both know the offer is serious.

"Yeah, yeah. I've got to go or else I won't finish all this in time." I bid Lily goodbye and run off to take care of the errands.

It feels like no time has passed since running errands this morning. After grocery shopping, picking up the dry cleaning, the packages, and making sure everything got safely to Jake's home and put away in the appropriate places, I'm exhausted, but I need to get Jake's lunch. I take an Uber to the seafood place that Jake likes, putting in an order for steak and shrimp, with extra shrimp and vegetables. It takes longer than usual, and I don't check the take-out box before taking an Uber back to set. I set the box on a small table at the back of set and open it. My stomach sinks to my feet - there's no shrimp.

"Oh shit," I whisper. I close the box quickly, hoping I can get out of set discretely and back to the restaurant to get the right order in the next hour.

I get no chance to do so, as Jake comes from behind and grabs the box out of my hand. He opens it up and I'm panicking. He sees that his order is wrong, looks up and me, and grabs my wrist, pulling me out of a side door where no one is watching.

"Really, Eris? You got my order wrong?" Jake hisses. "I ask you to do things, simple things, if I may add, and you can't even do it right? You're so pathetic."

I don't say anything, knowing that talking back will only make it worse.

"And now she doesn't have anything to say." When I don't look up at him, he strikes me across the face, hitting my cheekbone the hardest. I gasp as my hand flies up to my face. "You'll never learn, Eris, not unless I teach you." He walks back into set and I'm holding back tears so hard I think my head is going to explode.

This isn't the first time he's hit me, and I don't think it'll be the last.

I want to think that I'm strong enough to hit back, to stop the abuse, but deep down I know I deserve it. What I said to my parents, how I treated them...it's inexcusable. *But what*

*about the way they treated you?* Maybe I deserved it. Maybe I deserve everything that's coming my way.

*You can do this. Don't listen to him. You're strong, you can fight back! Don't give up. If you give up, you're letting him win.* I take a deep breath and steady myself. It's time to start fighting back.

I pull myself together and turn to walk back into set, this time, actually slamming into someone.

"Oh my god, I am so sorry!" I say, pushing away from the person in front of me. It's Isaac, the lead actor.

"Hey, it's no problem! I just need to watch where I'm going." He pauses, looking at me. "Are you okay? You seem a little upset?"

"I'm...fine. It's nothing." I say, looking over his shoulder at Jake's retreating back, he's talking to Amanda, laughing, acting as if nothing had just happened. I see Isaac's head whip around and he follows my line of sight. *Oh god, oh no, this is bad, really bad.* "I really have to go, sorry." And with that, I push past him and run back into set.

## Chapter Two: Isaac

"Lily! Wait up!" I say, jogging over to my costar, and friend. "Want to go over tomorrow's lines with me?"

"Of course, Isaac!" We walk to my trailer together and settle in on the couch. We start running lines, but I'm distracted - I'm still thinking about that girl I ran into on set. I tried to talk

to her later, but she skillfully avoided me. We have to start and stop several times because I keep losing my place. Lily lets out a frustrated noise and says,

“What is up with you today? You’re so distracted?”

“It’s...well. Do you know who Jake’s assistant is?” Lily freezes, visibly surprised as she stares me down, clearly at war with herself.

“Yeah, I know Eris. Why?”

*Eris. That’s her name.* “I’m just curious, that’s all.” Lily stares at me, and the awkward silence stretches out. She clears her throat.

“Anyway, back to the script.” She says holding the papers up, her eyes clearly saying that’s all she’s going to say on the subject.

A few hours later as I’m getting ready for bed, my mind wanders back to Eris - the fear in her eyes when she slammed into me, the hesitation to talk as if she was afraid someone was going to hurt her, the tears barely held back in her eyes. *Something is going on here, something is wrong.* As I lay in bed, I find it nearly impossible to sleep. I want to help Eris, but I don’t know how. My ex-wife always said I lacked tact. My phone chimes - it’s midnight and my ex-wife has decided to grace me with her presence in the form of a text. I read it quickly, yet another nasty message about how I’m a horrible person and I’ve abandoned my daughter to work when we both know that’s not true. I delete it, and roll over, finally falling asleep.

### Chapter 3: Eris

It’s yet again another early morning, this time without the pleasant beach dreams but instead with nightmares filled with pain. I get up and start moving around. My cheekbone smart and I glance in the mirror. A two-inch bruise accents my cheekbone.

I panic and dig around in my makeup bag for something to cover it up. I try everything, but nothing's working. Frustrated, I wipe off my attempt to hide it and rush over to the makeup trailer, still in my pajamas. Hopefully, Janine will be able to help me.

I open the door quickly and rush in, "Janine?"

"Is that Eris, I hear?"

I let out a huff of laughter, "Yeah. You alone?"

"Yep, just me until my minions get here." Janine smiles at me and I give her a small smile in return. "What can I help you with this morning, honey?"

I slowly shift my hair away from my face.

Janine tuts, and says, "Of course, have a seat. Let me grab my kit." I hastily take a seat as Janine grabs whatever it is she needs and then quickly goes to work.

A few minutes later the trailer door swings open, and I start, turning quickly to see who it is. I let out a sigh of relief as Lily looks between me, Janine, and the makeup brush Janine is holding. I watch as her eyes narrow in displeasure.

"I don't know why you just don't report him." She says to me.

"I need this job."

"I literally told you I would hire you." She says, frustrated.

"You're my friend, and I'd feel awkward working for you. Besides, I have a plan, okay? Don't worry about me," I say.

"Don't worry about who?" A voice says, before popping his head through the door that Lily was still holding open - it's Isaac. I look at Lily, eyes wide and panicked. I'm afraid he already suspects something about the situation and now he's here. I blink at Lily, trying to signal her to get him to leave. She looks between Isaac and me, and I watch her silently decide.

“Don’t mind him, he’s nosy as hell,” Lily says, shooting me a wicked smile, as Isaac makes his way into the trailer, grabbing the seat to the left of me. Lily walks in too, closing the door behind her and leaning against the wall. I keep staring at her.

“He’s safe,” she mouths to me when he isn’t looking.

“Eris, right?” Isaac says to me. “You’re up early.”

H. was nice yesterday but aren’t they all nice in the beginning? I glance over at Lily again, and she nods at me.

“Well, doesn’t the early bird get the worm?”

There’s a pause and then Isaac laughs.

“Indeed, she does.” I glance at him, and he smiles at me. I’m flustered by the sudden attention of this man and look down at my hands that are folded in my lap.

At that moment Janine says, “Okay, Eris, you’re good to go. Lily, you’re next, then Isaac.”

“Thank you, Janine,” I say, rushing out of the trailer as fast as I can.

#### Chapter Four: Isaac

“And no questions from you, understand?” Janine says after Eris leaves, pointing a makeup brush at me threateningly. I hold my hands up in mock surrender as Janine stares me down and Lily takes the seat that Eris was just in.

I get lost in my thoughts, wondering about Eris and what’s going on with her and Jake. She looks so timid every time he talks to her, and I feel like I can’t make any sudden movements, or else she’ll actually bolt. I know Jake has something to do with the way she’s responding to me, everyone’s noticed how much he yells at her. I’m not sure what she was doing visiting

Janine so early in the morning, but I'm determined to figure it out. If she needs help, I'm going to help her in any way I can.

"Whatever you're thinking, either say it or forget about it," Lily says side-eyeing me.

"Is she in danger?" Lily is quiet which is confirmation enough. "Should we say something?"

"She says she has it under control."

"And do you believe that?" I search Lily's face, looking for an answer and not finding one. "The bruises on her wrist looked suspiciously like fingerprints. Do you really think she has it under control?"

"She has it under control. I trust her. And don't go poking your nose where it doesn't belong, Isaac." Lily says through gritted teeth.

*Like hell I'm going to stop now.*

## Chapter Five: Eris

*Shit. This is bad. This is really bad. He definitely knows. Dammit, Eris, you couldn't just fly under the radar just once?*

I sprint back to my trailer. I pull on a pair of jeans but as I put on another long sleeve shirt, I realize the finger-shaped bruises were on display in my pajamas – he saw that.

The little voice in my head speaks up and it sounds suspiciously like my mother when it says, "You're more trouble than you're worth."

"Please, get out of my head, mom. Now's not the best time."

"Pathetic." The little voice whispers again.

I'm about to respond to it when my phone vibrates, and the little voice disappears. It's my sister.

**Laila: hey, any more trouble with him?**

There's a text from my mom too.

**Mom: Please call us sweetie, we're so sorry. We miss you!**

"I don't have time for this," I say, shoving my phone into my back pocket and rushing to set - I'm already running late because of my appointment with Janine. It's lightly raining, and as thunder cracks overhead I flinch, running even faster to set.

Jake has decided not to torment me with useless chores today, just asking me to always make sure his coffee is full. I'm grateful for the unexpected reprieve but I dread what comes next. I noticed him scanning my face a couple of times. I'm confused at first, but then it hits me - he's looking for a bruise.

I'm close to his chair all day, keeping his coffee full to keep his attention off me. I watch the scenes we're doing today, trying to learn from Lily and Isaac. I always wanted to be an actress when I was younger, and I thought that this job might help me to get my foot in the door. I'm envious of how they interact, both on and off set, it seems so easy for them, and I'm jealous that at the flip of a switch, they transform themselves into entirely different people.

As I'm refilling Jake's coffee for what feels like the thousandth time, I can feel someone looking at me. I finish with the coffee, set it down next to his chair, and turn around.

It's Isaac - he's watching me curiously, no malintent in his gaze. When he meets my eyes, he blushes slightly, and mouths, "Sorry." I give him a small smile and shrug, then look around to make sure Jake doesn't need me before making my way over to Isaac.

"You know it's rude to stare," I say, looking down at my feet.

“Yeah, sorry, just kind of got lost in thought.” It’s a lie, and we both know it. “Are you busy tonight?”

“Are you asking me out?” I ask, finally looking up at him in amusement.

“OH! No! It’s just...uh...” he rubs the back of his neck awkwardly, “Lily and I and some of the cast members are going out to dinner. Would you like to join us?”

I narrow my eyes at him, this has to be some sort of joke, right? He just simply looks at me, patiently waiting for my response, and then I realize it isn’t a joke. He’s actually being genuine.

“Um...yes. That would be nice actually.” I finally mumble, avoiding his eyes again.

“Oh! Cool! Meet outside my trailer at 7:00, you can ride with me and Lily!” I look up at him and he’s beaming at me - now it’s my turn to blush.

“ERIS!” Jake’s voice bellows from across the set.

“Sorry, I have to go,” I say, hastily walking back toward Jake’s chair.

## Chapter Six: Isaac

I watch as Jake talks to her. He’s smiling at her but there’s nothing kind about it, it’s all teeth – aggressive and dominant. Eris’s shoulders slouch as Jake continues to talk to her, and he grabs her shoulder after asking a question, his knuckles turning white from the force of his grip. My blood begins to boil and I’m about to walk over when Jake suddenly turns and walks away, and Eris runs off to do whatever it is he asked of her.

I find myself watching Eris throughout the day and take notice of how she shrinks into herself whenever she’s close to Jake, and she seems to always be on the defensive, poised, ready to run at the slightest hint of danger. *It must be exhausting to live like that.* Jake barely gives Eris

his attention, but when it's on her, it's abrasive. I can feel her watching me when we're doing scenes. It's not unpleasant, but I notice it, nonetheless. We're on a break when I first notice it – the storm. I'm watching Eris as a loud crack of thunder sounds through set, the lights flicker, and she flinches. It looks like she's holding back tears and she's wringing her hands together. I tuck the thought away for later as we dive back into shooting.

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It had finally stopped raining as I change into normal clothes at a quarter to seven. The clouds are still dark and heavy – it's going to storm again before the night is finished. I'm almost ready when the door of my trailer opens.

“Lily?” I call out

“Yeah, just me. Are you changing?” She asks as I hear her flop down on the couch.

“Yep,” I pause, “I invited Eris to come with us tonight.”

Lily is silent for a moment and then says, “Oh, I see, you guys are buddy-buddy now? Trying to steal my friend Isaac?” I can hear the amusement in her voice despite the not-so-nice words.

“Just worried about her, Lily,” I say back simply.

“Yeah, okay, Romeo.” At that, I walk out of the bedroom, dressed in a plain black t-shirt and jean shorts. Lily peels herself off the couch, having made herself very at home in my space. I open the door to the trailer and Eris is standing there, hand raised as if she's about to knock on the door.

“Oh! Sorry.” She says sheepishly. She has changed as well – a dark green long-sleeve blouse with embroidered flowers and a pair of flare jeans. I stare at her a moment – she looks nice.

“Eris! You look amazing!” Lily says, elbowing her way past me and glaring at me. *Shit. I should have complimented her.* I scold myself.

Lily links arms with Eris and they whisper conspiratorially as we make our way to my car that’s parked at the edge of set. Eris is here and she’s not with Jake, and that’s what matters. When we get to the car, they both climb in the back, and I’m relegated to driving.

A couple of minutes in I look in the rearview mirror and remark, “I feel like an Uber driver up here.” They both laugh at that, and Eris’s laugh is a bright sound, full of amusement and hope.

We arrive at the small restaurant, Casa del Playa, and head inside to meet up with a few other cast and crew members who always join us for dinner. Eris is re-introduced to them, having already met some of them due to her position, but despite this she greets them all shyly, half hiding behind Lily.

## Chapter Seven: Eris

I forget almost all of their names immediately, too overwhelmed by the number of people and the storms that happened today. The only one I remember is Amanda – Jake talks about her a lot, and I think he likes her. Better her than me anyways. She shoots me a dirty look when we go to sit down. *Great.*

I end up sandwiched between Lily and Isaac, and when the server takes our order, I get the safest thing on the menu – arroz con pollo. It’s impossible to not like chicken and rice smothered in queso.

“I almost ordered that,” Isaac whispers to me after the server leaves, “But the burritos seem to be calling my name tonight.” His eyes crinkle when he smiles at me. I give him a smile back, and he is pulled into a conversation with someone next to him.

He seems nice, at least in the few interactions we’ve had he’s always been respectful. He has a soft but firm voice, and kind eyes, and he seems very keen. It’s almost as if he’s picked up on what’s going on but just hasn’t asked me about it yet. I like that he hasn’t pushed me about it, it makes me want to talk to him more.

I’m making my way through the chips and salsa on the table when I hear my name called. It’s Bruce (I think), and he says, “So what do you do for Jake?”

My cheeks flush as all the attention turns on me. “Um, well, mostly just errands and stuff, nothing too crazy.”

“Really? I’ve heard he has quite the reputation. Rumor has it that he’s fired six PAs in the last year.”

“Don’t believe everything you hear, he’s really such a nice guy.” Amanda cuts in, glaring at me and smiling at Bruce, “You just have to get to know him, that’s all.”

Bruce laughs, “That’s like trying to get to know a shark, Amanda. That man screams predator – I’d stay away if I were you,” he says, raising his eyebrows at her. She scowls, looking away. *If only Bruce knew how right he is.*

I pull back into myself a little bit, letting those at the table resume their happy chattering. I laugh at their occasional jokes, and after a while, I feel myself start to warm up to them. They all seem genuinely nice, except for Amanda, and they try to include me in their conversations. I crack a couple of jokes of my own, one of which caused Bruce to cry from laughing so hard. At

that, Lily grabs my hand and squeezes it – a silent nod of support and friendship. I am grateful for her.

As dinner wanes, it starts to rain again, and we only stay another hour before calling it a night. Isaac drives me and Lily back to set, and I bid him goodnight, giving him a small smile.

Lily and I walk the rest of the way back to my trailer, which is situated on the far end of set. I can feel her glancing at me, and when we get back to my trailer I ask.

“What?”

“Nothing. It’s just – I’ve never seen you...engage like that.” Lily says quietly. I bristle.

“Oh, so now I’m disengaged from the world?” There’s no reason for me to get mad, but I do anyway.

“No! Eris, that’s not what I’m saying. It’s just, that, I like it when you feel like you can be yourself. That’s all.” She pauses before adding, “Are you going to be okay alone tonight? I know with the storms and all-.”

“I’ll be fine,” I cut her off. “You’re such a momma bear. God, you’re worse than my actual mo-” The last word gets stuck in my throat. Lily just gives me a hug and tells me goodnight, before turning and walking away.

When she’s gone, I collapse on the pull-out couch with a sigh – to say it’s been a long day is an extreme understatement. A couple of minutes later, the storm starts to pick up, thunder cracks loudly and I flinch. I take a deep breath – I can do this. I wait a few minutes. The thunder gets worse.

“Yeah, nope, can’t do it.” I jump up from the couch and start digging around in the various piles left in my apartment. “Where the hell is my umbrella?” I can’t find it anywhere. I swear I placed it by the door just a few days ago. A few more minutes of searching go by.

“Screw it – I’ll just run.” I tuck my phone into my pocket, trade my sandals for a pair of rain boots, and practically trip over my own feet as I sprint out the door.

I run through the mud and rain to Lily’s trailer, but when I bang on the door there’s no answer. I knock again, this time shouting Lily’s name. Again, no answer.

I lean against the trailer, “Come on, Eris, think, think.” That’s when it hits me. I push myself away from the trailer and hightail it to Isaac’s trailer. I pound on the door and shout, “Isaac? Please it’s Eris.” I’m still pounding on the door as it flings open and Isaac stands in front of me, bewildered.

“Eris? What the hell? Get inside!” He barks at me, and I don’t need more encouragement. I bolt inside, shivering and dripping on the linoleum floor of his trailer.

## Chapter Eight: Isaac

“Jesus Christ, Eris!” I stare at her for a second before starting, “Shower. You need a hot shower. Come on.” I lead her to the bathroom. “I’ll get some dry clothes, take as long as you need.” She just nods and stares at her feet. Thunder cracks and she flinches again. I can’t help it as the question slips out, “Are you scared of thunderstorms?”

“Something like that.” She finally looks up at me and there’s no warmth in her eyes, just sadness. I’ll get an answer on a different day, then. I walk to my bedroom and dig out a pair of sweats and a flannel. I hear the shower start. I set the clothes outside the bathroom door and tell her as such. She doesn’t respond, only the shower water hitting the tile floor answers.

I sit on the couch and pull out my phone, frantically texting Lily. She finally responds after the thirteenth text.

**Lily: Shit. I asked her if she was gonna be okay alone. I should have known better. I'm at David's right now going over the scenes for Tuesday. Do you need me to come and get her?**

**Isaac: No. I can handle it. Why is she scared of thunderstorms?**

**Lily: I don't know. I think something happened in her past during a thunderstorm. She'll probably ask to crash on your couch. She doesn't like to be alone during storms. Are you sure you got this?**

**Isaac: Yes, I'm fine. She's in the shower and I got her some dry clothes. I'll text you later, the shower just turned off.**

**Lily: Keep me updated. Talk to you later.**

I put my phone down and the door opens a crack as Eris grabs the dry clothes I left her. The door shuts swiftly. My phone chimes again, and I pick it up, not expecting Lily to text me back so soon. It's not Lily – it's my ex. Again. I really should block her number. I rub my eyes, open the message, read the scathing words, and delete it. My head snaps up as the bathroom door opens and Eris steps out. My clothes swamp her, and she's rolled up the ends of the sweats so they don't drag on the ground.

“Hi.” She says shyly, but he can see it written all over her – she isn't just tired, she's exhausted, physically, mentally, and emotionally. I see the bruise Janine covered up this morning. A deep shade of purple stands out against her pale skin. “Can I crash here tonight? If it's no trouble, of course.”

“Eris, it's no trouble at all. You take the bed; I'll take the couch.”

She starts, “Oh, no, I couldn't do that. That's too much. You've already done enough.”

“And I’m going to do more. Take the bed, I can deal with the couch for one night,” I say, firmly. She opens her mouth to argue some more but I just raise my eyebrows.

“Fine.” She sighs and turns towards the bedroom. She stops and says, “Thank you,” with her back still to me.

“Don’t worry about it. Goodnight, Eris.”

“Good night, Isaac.”

## Chapter Nine: Eris

### Song of the Day: Cora by Kyle McEvoy and Sunshine Recorder

His trailer is much larger than mine. There’s no pullout sofa but an actual bedroom towards the back with a bed – I think it’s queen-sized? As guilty as I am about him sleeping on the couch, it’ll be nice to sleep in a normal bed for once. I try not to pry into his personal belongings as I undo the neatly made bed. There’s a picture on the nightstand – it’s a little girl, no more than twelve. She looks just like him, so I assume this must be his daughter. She’s got his wavy black hair and dark eyes. I smile to myself and get into the bed, settling under the covers and pulling my phone out of the waistband of the borrowed sweatpants. The first order of business is texting back my sister.

**Eris: Sorry, bad storms here today. I’m fine.**

Three dots pop up immediately.

**Laila: Thought you were dead, thanks for finally deciding to respond to my messages XD**

**Eris: I know. Sorry. It gets busy around here.**

**Laila: So, are you gonna ignore my question about you know who?**

**Eris: Yes.**

**Laila: That bad still??**

I don't respond.

**Laila: Okay, jeez, I get it. You don't want to talk about it. Have you made friends at least?**

**Eris: Yes.**

**Laila: More than one?**

My mind drifts to Isaac as I reply.

**Eris: ...Yes. I think so.**

**Laila: That's cryptic. Oh shit, I have to go. Show business never stops. Facetime soon?**

**Eris: Of course. Love you, Laila.**

**Laila: Love you more<3**

I sigh, rubbing my eyes, and open the text from my parents, leaving them on read as I shut my phone off, roll over, and finally, go to sleep.

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*Where the fuck am I?* I panic as I wake up, scrambling around on the bed before I remember the events of last night. I take a few deep breaths to steady myself and shuffle out of Isaac's bed. I grab my phone and make my way quietly through the trailer. He's still passed out on the couch, we have a day off today, which is few and far between, so it seems neither of us set an alarm. I'm still exhausted though, and I rub my eyes as I grab my still-damp clothes slung over the shower rod. I write a quick message on a sticky notepad on the counter: *I'll wash the clothes and return them. Thank you. -E*

I slip on my rain boots, which look comical with the sweatpants and flannel, and slip out the door. I don't see anyone as I walk slowly back to my trailer, avoiding the small puddles that litter the gravel road. I let myself into the trailer and collapsed on the bed after I lock the door. I pull out my phone – 10:05 AM and still plenty of charge. I scroll aimlessly on Instagram for a while, not wanting to really do anything on my day off when a message pops up.

**Lily: I'm outside your door. Open up!**

I crack a smile at the message and scramble up from the pullout, hastily open the door, and let Lily in. She looks over my outfit, and my cheeks start to heat up.

“Nice clothes.” Lily winks at me.

“Don't say anything. Mind you, it was your trailer I went to first. Where were you?” Lily winces at that.

“Yeah, I'm sorry about that. David and I were going over some scenes for Tuesday.

“It's fine...He refused to let me sleep on the couch. Insisted that I take the bed.”

“Well, that's Isaac for you,” Lily says with a soft smile. My phone vibrates and I check it.

“Oh, come on.”

“Jake?”

“Yes. He said I bought the wrong eggs. I have to run to the store. I'm sorry.” I start to grab some decent clothes, as Lily says,

“I'll come with you?”

“Are you sure? It's your day off.”

“And it's supposed to be *your* day off too. Come on, I'll get us a car.”

When I wake up in the morning, Eris is long gone. I find the note and tuck it away in a drawer. I'm aimless as I wander the length of the trailer. I have nothing to do, and everything is telling me that I should go check on her. As a friend, of course, strictly as a friend. I finally mustered up the courage to text Lily and ask her where Eris's trailer is when she texts me first.

**Lily: Sleep okay on the couch, old man?**

**Isaac: Slept like a baby, thank you for asking. Is she with you?**

**Lily: Yeah, Jake's got her on some bullshit errand. He's been yelling at her through the phone for a good three minutes now. Something about his eggs not being organic enough?**

**Isaac: Jesus.**

**Lily: She looked cute in your clothes though;)**

I don't respond.

**Lily: Oh, lighten up. Just trying to make small talk and like I'm listening intently to Jake's garbled voice yelling at her. I think she's embarrassed.**

**Isaac: I've never wanted to punch someone in the face more and I don't even know what the whole situation is.**

**Lily: Trust me, it's better if you don't know. She told me her plan. I think she's insane, but she insists on doing this. And before you ask, I'm not telling you. Gotta go, she's off the phone.**

I sigh and set my phone face down on the counter. I have to find something to do to get my mind off Eris, so I pull out my script and start working on the lines for tomorrow.

Song of the Day: On the Nature of Daylight by Max Richter

“Sorry about that.” I saw awkwardly when Jake finally lets me off the phone.

“Eris, it’s fine,” Lily says, as I grab the correct eggs this time and make my way to the self-checkout lane.

“You think he’d prefer it if I just gave him a live chicken instead? That’s certainly organic.” Lily snorts at the joke. We leave Whole Foods and wait under the awning as Lily calls an Uber.

“Your plan is good, you’re insane and I hope you know that, but it’s good,” Lily says, side-eying me.

“I know. I just need to have enough evidence for a case. I know how this goes; it won’t go in my favor if I don’t have proof. He’s well known. A few bruises and no one will blink. But if I get enough bruises? Maybe that will be enough to convince someone.”

“I don’t want him to hurt you anymore,” Lily says quietly.

“And I want him to pay,” I say meeting her eyes. “So? Are you going to let me do this or not?”

Lily stares at me for a couple of minutes, and seemingly satisfied with what she finds in her assessment she says, “We’ll do it your way. But I’m not going to like it.”

“You don’t have to.” With that, the car arrives, and Lily and I pile into the backseat. The car starts and we are quiet on the way to Jake’s house that he rents off-set. I pull out my phone when the car is parked and set the camera to record, putting it in my back pocket. I look at Lily, I hope my glance comes off as grim determination, but my stomach rolls. I grab the eggs and make my way toward the front door, knocking on it. I shift my weight uneasily from one foot to the other as I hear footsteps pound towards the door. He flings it open and spits out, “Fucking

finally. Took you forever. You'd think there'd actually be something useful in that pretty little head of yours, hmm?" He snatches the eggs from my hands and my hair shifts – away from my face leaving the uncovered bruise in plain sight. Something twists in his gaze – I don't recognize the emotion. "I ask you to do one thing. One small, infinitesimal task and you get that wrong. Jesus." He huffs, "What are you still standing there for? Get out you worthless bitch. No wonder you have no friends – no one can stomach being around you for long." He slams the door in my face at that. I blink a couple of times, mostly trying to hold back the tears, but also to collect myself. A few moments later I bolt back to the car and pull my phone out, stopping the video. The car backs out and starts to make its way back to set.

"I've been trying to do this whenever I can. He's unpredictable though, I'm never sure when he's going to do something or say something. But I try to record it. Even if it's just the sound." I say to Lily quietly.

"Where are you keeping the...evidence?" Lily asks.

"Google Photos. It's hidden in a folder on my phone... He hasn't seen it. If he had I'd be..." I don't finish that sentence, nor do I want to.

"Yeah, no, we're changing that right now. You're gonna send it all to me and I'm going to keep them. Okay? No proof on your phone. Zero. I'm not going to risk him finding it." Lily says.

"Okay," I agree, then say, "Take a picture of my face."

"What?"

"I haven't gotten a picture of the bruise yet. I document those too." Lily just looks at me and the overwhelming sadness in her eyes makes me drop her gaze. I hear the camera shutter click on her phone.

The driver drops us off and we go to Lily's trailer and start transferring the evidence. When it was all said and done, I say, "Just...don't listen to the videos. Please. That's all I ask." Lily just nods, and then she watches me as I delete the evidence from my phone – almost thirty photos and videos.

"I still don't like this, Eris," Lily says.

"I know, I know. Just...let me do this. I *need* to do this." *Let me save myself. I couldn't do it the first time; I won't make the same mistake twice.*

Lily and I spend most of the day together and I help her memorize her lines for tomorrow.

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Tomorrow comes much faster than I would like. The clouds are low and heavy again today like they were the day it stormed. I'm in a foul mood because of it, and breeze by Isaac when he says hello to me, sparing him little more than a small wave.

I seem to not be the only one in rare form, as Jake is currently yelling at someone who's not me for once. I'm lost in my own dismal thoughts when Jake notices and says, "Eris. With me. Now." I follow him out of set, not having time to record it as I'm barely around the corner when his fist connects with my stomach. I double over coughing.

"Thanks for the little stress relief, Eris. Hopefully, *that* bruise will be easier to hide than the other one. I'll stop by your trailer later. I need to let off some steam." He heads into set, and I slide down the wall. There are no tears threatening to spill over this time I just feel...empty. Like I deserve this somehow. I collect myself for a couple of minutes, before getting up and going back to set. Amanda stops me when I walk in and says,

“I’m sure whatever it was that he did to you – you deserved it.” She smiles at me sweetly; it contradicts the words that just slipped out of her mouth. I avert my eyes, saying nothing to her, making my way back to Jake’s chair.

#### Chapter Twelve: Isaac

She hasn’t come back yet. Jake’s come back, but she still hasn’t. He looked smug and whispered something to Amanda, and she nodded at whatever he had said. I stare at the door, begging it to open. I’m about to go after her when the door opens, and she slips in. She closes it gingerly, an arm clasped over her stomach, and she winces as she slowly makes her way back to Jake’s chair. I watch as Amanda stops her, saying something that she doesn’t even react to. She looks lifeless. A storm starts up outside, thunder cracking loudly through the large space, but she doesn’t even flinch when it sounds. She looks empty. Her eyes meet his and it’s just a blank stare. They’re pulled into another scene before I can go to her.

#### Chapter Thirteen: Eris

##### Song of the Day: When by Dodie

They finished filming twenty minutes ago, and almost everyone had gone back to their trailers, but I lingered on set. Mostly because I was trying to avoid Jake, but also because I was avoiding facing what had happened today. I want to ask Isaac if I can crash at his place again – I can’t put my finger on why, but I felt safe there. *Just ask him, you can do it, come on.* I urge myself. I take a deep breath and walk over to where Isaac is having a conversation with the director. It appears to be a heated conversation from what I can tell – angry gestures and raised voices – but I don’t overhear much. Isaac locks eyes with me and the director, Angelina, glances at me.

“We’ll talk about this later,” Angelina says, giving Isaac a look. At that, he makes his way over to me.

“Everything okay? That seemed like an intense conversation.” I say, nodding my head at Angelina.

“Yeah, yeah. Everything’s fine. Are you okay?”

“Can I crash on your couch tonight please?” I can’t bring myself to meet his eyes when I ask. I don’t answer his question, because if I’m honest, I don’t really know the answer.

“Of course, Eris. Can I ask why?”

“I...I don’t feel safe in my trailer.” I admit quietly. I hadn’t felt safe there since the beginning but with Jake’s threat, the question of my safety yet again hangs in the balance.

“Then my door is always open to you.” He states.

“Thank you. Really. Thank you. I need to grab a few things from my trailer, will you come with me?” At this, I finally meet his gaze. He’s regarding me with a sad look in his eyes and I almost feel smothered by his sympathy.

We walk in silence to my trailer – the rain had abated for the time being, but the sky is still dark with the threat of more storms. I open the door and peer inside – it is empty. For now. I walk inside and Isaac follows me.

“Oh, uh, sorry for the mess. I don’t get much time to clean.” I say, scratching the back of my neck. It honestly looks like a pig sty in here and I’m kind of embarrassed. I dig around in the small wardrobe and grab a pair of pajamas and some clothes for the next day.

He clears his throat and says, “It’s, um, quaint?” I can’t help the huff of laughter that escapes me. I shove the clothes and some toiletries in my overnight bag that was wedged under the pull-out and tell Isaac I’m ready.

As we make our way to his trailer I say, "Thank you again, I really appreciate it."

"It's not a problem. I get kind of lonely in there anyway." He opens the door for me and I set my bag by the door. "Hungry?"

"Sorry?"

"Hungry. Are you hungry? Do you want food?" He says, cheeks flushing.

"Oh, I don't want to impose."

"It's not imposing. I'm making dinner, is pasta okay?" He says moving towards the small kitchen.

"Can I help?" I say quickly, afraid he's going to say no. He pauses in his ministrations, looking me over. "I mean, it's only fair since you're letting me spend the night here. Unless you'd like cash instead?" I mean it as a joke, but it doesn't sound like one. He smiles, nonetheless.

"Yeah, you can help." I make my way into the kitchen and it's a bit awkward at first. His kitchen isn't like mine and we bump into each other several times. Once a rhythm had been established, I say,

"My mom used to let me help in the kitchen. I liked it. I may not be much of a homemaker, but I loved getting to learn from her." I don't know why I'm telling him this, I rarely speak of my mom anymore.

"She sounds lovely." I get strangely choked up at his words.

"Yeah, she used to be." I clear my throat to get rid of the tears and stir the noodles. When I'm satisfied with how they're cooking, I pull my phone out and check my messages. I worry my lip in between my teeth at what I find waiting for me.

**Jake: Where the hell are you? You're going to regret this.**

**Kathy: Hey sweetie, I hope you had a good day. Can you please call us?**

**Lily: Where the hell did you disappear to today? And why is Jake banging on your trailer door?**

I rub the back of my neck and sigh – I don't have the energy to respond to any of them.

"Everything okay?" Isaac asks. To tell or not to tell?

"Not really. But I can handle it later." I'm about to shove my phone back in my pocket when it starts ringing – it's my sister.

"Oh, this is my sister. Do you mind if I take this?"

"Not at all, go ahead." I walk into the bathroom and answer the call.

#### Chapter Fourteen: Isaac

##### Song of the Day: Je te laisserai de mots by Patrick Watson

I try not to listen to her talk on the phone, I really do, but even with the door shut to the bathroom, it's thin enough that I can make out almost every word. At some point, I just give up and listen anyway.

"I keep ignoring Mom, why does she keep texting me?... Okay well, she should have thought of that before she kicked me out on my ass...What? Dad's a pushover. He does whatever mom says." There's a pause and a sharp intake of breath. "I'm sorry, she said WHAT to you? Oh, hell no! Laila, no, it's not your fault. It's mine...No, don't say anything. I'll...I'll handle it...Yeah. No, I'm fine. He...yeah. Yeah, I know. It's being handled. Lily's helping me. Yeah. No, not at all. Okay, I love you too. I gotta go now. I'm staying with a...friend. Yeah, I'll keep you updated. Bye." I hear Eris sigh heavily and then she slowly slides the door open.

When she walks out, I try to look preoccupied with dinner, but to be fair there's not much to do.

"You heard everything, didn't you?" She mutters, crossing her arms and leaning against the counter.

"Maybe. But I'm not going to pry, it's your life." She looks at me, and I stare back, letting myself get a really good look at her for the first time. She's determined as hell, her jaw clenched as she regards me. It's as if she's still trying to figure out if she wants to trust me. She averts her eyes first and motions me to get out of the way so that she can stir the pasta. I let her, continuing to study her she's seemingly distracted. She's wearing a t-shirt today, something very much outside of her usual attire. The fingerprint-shaped bruises on her wrist have almost faded. The bruise on her cheek is covered up again. The timer goes off and she jumps, then laughs at herself, as she drains the pasta and mixes it in with the sauce. I can't help but stare, there's something about her, something that's so captivating. She's like a puzzle I desperately want to figure out.

## Chapter Fifteen: Eris

### Song of the Day: Lonely by Noah Cyrus

"Please stop staring at me," I say quietly, looking up at him. He blinks a few times as if he didn't realize he was staring at me.

"Sorry. I didn't...um, sorry." I look away and ask,

"Where are the plates?"

“Top left-hand shelf.” I struggle to reach them, and I suddenly feel a warm body pressed against me as his hand shoots out to grab two plates. I’m trapped between him and the counter, his chest pressed against my back, and I inhale sharply at the sudden intrusion of personal space.

“Oh, shit, sorry. I didn’t even think...” He steps away from me quickly. I take a few breaths to steady myself and ball my hands into fists as they’re shaking.

“It’s fine.” I turn around and take a plate from him and put some pasta on my plate. He follows suit and we sit on the couch and eat in silence, save for my phone vibrating every couple of minutes. I try to eat slowly, but the day is catching up to me and the one muffin I had at 10:00 AM has completely left my system at this point. Isaac does the dishes and I ask him if I can take a shower. He tells me I can, and I grab my bag and slip into the bathroom. I try to take my shirt off three times, panting after each attempt as it makes my abdomen stretch in a weird way since Jake punched me there. I finally get it off and inspect my stomach – there’s no bruise, thank god, but it still hurts like hell. I get in the shower and hum quietly to myself, various bits of songs woven together to distract me.

## Chapter Sixteen: Isaac

### Song of the Day: Mia and Sebastian’s Theme by Justin Hurwitz

I’m torn as I do the dishes. I want to ask her about Jake, but I don’t think it’s my place to do so. I feel like if there’s a chance I can help her, I should take that chance. If she needs help, I’ll give it to her without a second thought. *That’s sexist. She can help herself!* The devil on my shoulder whispers, and the angel shouts back – *Everyone needs help now and then!* They go back and forth like this for a little bit and then I realize I’ve washed the same plate thrice now. I shake my head to clear it a little bit and when I tune back into the real world, I realize I can her humming

in the shower. It's just loud enough to be heard over the constant stream of water and I can tell just by her humming that she has a beautiful singing voice. Some of the songs I recognize, but most of them are new to me. It's nice, it's like there's someone actually living in the trailer, not just me showing up to sleep and eat.

The water turns off a few minutes later and she walks out, hair dry and braided down her back and in a pair of silk pajama pants and a Christmas tree patterned shirt.

"Christmas in July?" I ask, and she rolls her eyes at me. It's the most normal gesture I've seen from her. I watch her as she digs around in her bag and pulls out a laptop.

"I'm going to watch a movie; do you want to watch it with me?" *Well, she's certainly making herself at home.* I don't mind it though, as I watch her settle down on the couch. It's nice having a companion, even if it's just for a short time.

"Depends on the movie," I say, as I dry off the last plate and put it back in the cabinet.

"Well, what kind of movies do you like?"

"Action, fantasy, the usual." I shrug. I typically don't like to watch TV in my free time.

"Well, I like rom-com's and I don't like to compromise so..." She looks at him from her spot on the couch with mischief in her eyes.

"Rom-com it is then," I say and laugh. I walk back to the bedroom and change into my pajamas, just a t-shirt and shorts and I join Eris on the couch. She sets the laptop down in between us and pulls up a movie called *27 Dresses*. "I haven't seen this one before," I tell her.

"Then you're in for a treat, it doesn't get much better than this one."

The movie starts and I can't lie, I'm actually enjoying it. I feel for Jane, I can't imagine being the bridesmaid in twenty-seven weddings, let alone one. When it was revealed that the little

sister cut up the mom's wedding dress, I actually gasp. Eris laughs at me. The credits start rolling, I say,

“That was really good – I need to watch more rom-com's.”

“They're so underrated – it's honestly the best genre of film.” She pauses before saying, “I want to do that someday.”

“What, fall in love?”

She laughs, “Well, yeah. But I want to be in a movie. Lots of movies hopefully.”

“Oh! I didn't realize you want to be an actress.” I'm genuinely surprised, she seems so shy at first that I wouldn't peg her as the actress type.

“Yeah, that's why I took this job. My sister, Laila, is a stage manager for Saturday Night Live and she's the one who got me this gig. I'm trying to learn as much as I can before I can start auditioning for projects.”

“That's really cool!”

“I help Lily with her lines a lot, she thinks I've got potential so that's reassuring.”

“Who would be your dream actor to work with?” I ask, genuinely interested in the answer.

“Ari Thomson, his work is just so cool and diverse. It would be so fun to work with him!”

She's smiling a little as she says it.

“If you ever want to-” Her phone interrupts me and I catch the caller ID – it's someone named Kathy. She pales and says,

“I'm so sorry, but I need to take this.” She steps outside to answer the call so I won't overhear this time.

Songs of the Day: MEAN! By Madeline the Person and The Wisp Sings by Winter Aid

“Hello?” I say quietly, but not weakly as I pick up the phone.

“Well, look who finally decided to answer us. You should get an award!”

“What do you want, Kathy?” I sigh.

“What, you can’t even call me mom anymore?” She spits out.

“Not after what you did, and especially not after what you said to Laila today. That’s just inexcusable and plain rude. But I can’t say that I’m surprised.” I say back angrily.

“You’re twisting things as per usual Eris, *you’re* the one who fucked up this family, but you just can’t admit that to yourself, can you? You’re so pathetic turning everything into our fault.”

“Then stop calling me. Stop texting me if you think that.” I shout.

“How about you block my number? I know you won’t because you secretly agree with me. You’re a sorry excuse for a person, Eris I-” I hang up on her and stare at the phone in my hand. I feel like I can’t breathe. The world is a vast space and yet it has narrowed down to just this moment. I need to get out, I need to scream, I need to not feel for just one goddamn moment. My breathing is ragged, forcing its way out of me. *You can’t do this right now. You need to pull it together. Get it together, suck it up. You’re a big girl.* I scream in my head. I take a breath in, hold it, then let it out. I do this a couple more times until I feel calm enough to return to the trailer. I don’t look Isaac in the eyes as I tell him I want to go to bed. He refuses to let me take the couch and I’m relegated to the bed once again. When I climb under the covers, I pull them tight around me, longing to feel something, anything other than sadness. It takes me forever to fall asleep, and when I finally do, I dream.

I'm caught, trapped in a corner as Jake and my mother advance toward me, yelling and screaming horrible things at me. I'm sobbing trying to get away, but they keep getting closer and closer. I awake with a sob that's more like a scream, panting and grasping the sheets as I sit up. The door bangs open a second later.

"Eris? Are you okay?" He sounds positively panicked.

"Nightmare," I gasp out.

"Can I do anything for you?" Why would he want to do anything for me, he barely knows me. Still, it doesn't stop me from asking,

"I...can you just sit with me for a little bit." He pauses before getting into bed on the opposite side of me, giving me a wide berth.

"Do you want to talk ab-" He starts.

"No." I cut him off then wince. "Sorry, that was rude." I let out a shaky breath and rub my hands together. I lean back against the pillow and ask, "Do you ever feel like the whole world is against you sometimes?"

"Yeah, sometimes." He answers. He leans back too, angling his body so that he's facing me. "But I don't let it get me down, I know that someday I'll come out of it a better person."

"Right, right." We talk late into the night before both of us fell asleep. When I wake up the next morning, I find his arms wrapped around me, my body pressed into him, and I can't help the small smile that forms on my face.

#### Chapter Eighteen: Isaac

When I awake in the morning, I'm surprised to find that Eris hasn't left yet. She's just scrolling on her phone, propped up on her elbow and I shift a little, moving the arm that is slung around her waist. She startles at the movement.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you,” I say retreating my arm completely, giving her room to move away from me if she needs to, she doesn’t though, just stays curled into my body. We lay like that for a few minutes until she moves to sit up.

“Sleep okay?” I ask as she rubs the sleep from her eyes.

“Better than I have in the last week. Thank you.” She points at the photo on my side table. “Is that your daughter?” She asks, looking back at me.

“Yeah, that’s Melanie.” I say with a soft smile on my face.

“She looks just like you.”

“Thank you. She’s the light of my life. I don’t get to see her much with the current custody arrangement.” I look away feeling a sudden lump in my throat. I try not to talk about Melanie too much, sometimes it’s too painful.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you.” Eris says hurriedly. I can hear the panic in her voice, and I glance back at her.

“Don’t worry about it. She’s coming to visit at the end of September, the week before shooting ends.”

“Oh, that’s so exciting! I bet you’re looking forward to that.” I open my mouth to answer her, but her phone chimes. “I have to go,” she says, as she gets out of bed, grabs her bag, and shuts herself in the bathroom.

Now it’s my turn to rub my eyes and I stay in bed a few more moments, gathering my thoughts and trying to wrap my head around the fact that I like having Eris in my trailer. It feels more like a home with her here. Eris is a lovely girl, shy, but she warms up quickly. I have this intense urge to stay by her side, weather every storm with her, and help her when she’s fallen

down. I shake my head – I can't think of this now. As I'm getting dressed the bathroom door slides open, Eris shouts a goodbye, and I hear the trailer door shut behind her.

Without her here to keep my company, my mind wanders yet again, but this time to my daughter. I think they would get along well, Melanie is the sweetest child, which is a surprise given that her mother is a vapid, life-sucking bitch. It was a pain trying to get her to agree to let Melanie come to set. When we were still together, Melanie was always on set with me. Until Natalie and I split when she was seven, Melanie was always helping me with my lines, terrorizing her private tutor, and always making friends with everyone else on set. She's such a friendly little girl, always giving strangers a smile and a nice word. My chest hurts sometimes when I think about her. God knows what Natalie is poisoning her mind with.

As I make my way to wardrobe, and then set, my mind feels a thousand miles away. Lily stops me and says,

“You seem like you're in another world today.”

“Just lost in thought, that's all,” I say simply, not wanting to have to explain myself to her.

“I'm pretty sure I know whom you're lost in thought about,” Lily says with a smile.

“That obvious, huh?” I feel my cheeks heat up.

“Yeah, you're as transparent as they come.” After that, we fall into an easy silence and get ready for shooting.

## Chapter Nineteen: Eris

Song of the Day: Lights Are On by Tom Rosenthal

I'm on the verge of a panic attack as I make my way to set. Avoiding Jake is one thing, flat out disappearing is another thing entirely. My stomach is in knots as I get Jake's coffee, making it to his exact specifications. My mind is going a thousand miles a minute, but I remember to set my phone to record and put it in my pocket. Twelve minutes into me wringing my hands and trying to breathe evenly, Jake appears. He's surprisingly calm which makes me even more nervous. He stalks over to me, takes the coffee from my hand, and says, "I'll find out where you're staying eventually. Don't think you can run from me forever." And with that, he turns and walks away. If I wasn't fearing for my safety before, I definitely will be now. A few slaps and punches I can take, but if he decides to take it to the next level...I don't know if I'd be able to fight back, or if I'd be stuck in fear. When he's far enough away, I pull the phone out of my pocket, end the video, and send it to Lily before deleting it from my phone.

Shooting goes by fairly quickly today, but I can feel Jake looking at me for most of the day. Sometimes he's glaring at me, and sometimes he just stares, which is even creepier. It's like he's trying to read my mind, dig into my psyche, and hit me where it hurts the most. I'm on edge all day, unable to let my guard down, my body feels like it's permanently stuck in fight-or-flight mode. I didn't realize Isaac and Lily were keeping an eye on me until Lily cornered me at lunch.

"Why was Jake at your trailer last night?" She hisses, low enough that only I can hear it.

"He...he didn't blatantly threaten me, but his intention was clear enough," I say quietly, unable to meet her eyes.

"Eris, why didn't you call me?"

"I went to Isaac's trailer first. He knows you and I are friends, but he doesn't know about Isaac. It was the safest place I could think of. That or New Zealand." I laugh nervously, but Lily does not indulge me.

“Eris. If you are in real danger you need to report him. I know he’s hitting you and it won’t take him much encouragement to do worse. This is enough, report him.”

I chew on my lip as I think it over – report him and risk a trial not going in my favor or get more evidence and take him down for good.

“I’ll think about it,” I finally say, and Lily groans.

“You have one more week. Then I’m going to report him for you, and you can play a part in that or not. It’s up to you.” Lily says.

“Fine. One more week. Then I’ll report him.” I concede.

#### Chapter Twenty: Isaac

I don’t know what they’re talking about, but I have a pretty good idea of what it’s about. It’s a heated discussion, Lily whispering furiously and Eris looking anywhere but at Lily. When Lily walks back over to me, she’s clearly unhappy.

“One more week,” she says, “One more week of her plan, and then she’s reporting him. Or I will. Either way, this is over in a week.” She glances at me. “But you didn’t hear this from me.” I nod. “And thank you.” She adds.

“What?”

“For making her feel safe,” Lily says quietly. My heart warms at the thought that Eris might find safety and refuge in me.

When lunch is over, we start shooting again, but I keep getting distracted by Eris. After Lily’s remark, I started thinking. What if Eris stayed with me until Jake was handled? She certainly feels comfortable in my trailer, and I came to the realization that Jake knows Eris and Lily are friends, but he doesn’t know that we’ve become friends. I hope Eris thinks of me as a

friend. I'm trying to figure out how to word the offer in a way that wouldn't scare Eris off. I get my chance to speak to her after we're done for the day.

"Eris, I wanted to ask you something," I ask, her back turned to me.

"Shoot." She's distracted, picking up discarded coffee cups.

"I want you to stay with me." She freezes. "No, not like that! I just, I would feel better if you stay with me. That way I know you're safe. I know Jake's an issue, and if you want, my place is open to you." The words come out awkwardly, and she's beet red, staring at her shoes. She mumbles something. "What?"

She clears her throat, and says barely above a whisper, "I said, I'd like that very much." We plan to go to her trailer and grab everything she needs. We make sure we aren't seen by anyone as we enact our plan, sneaking around the backs of trailers and half-sprinting to her trailer on the far edge of set. She fills her bag up quickly and efficiently when we get to her trailer. All of the clothes she owns fit into the large duffel bag, and there's a little bit of room on the top. I watch as she places a few photos face down in the bag and zips the whole thing up.

"Okay, I'm ready," she says as she slips the bag over her shoulder. We furtively make our way back to my trailer, and when I get there, I tell her I'll clear out a drawer for her in my dresser. She protests at first but relents when I'm persistent.

"Do you want to get Chinese food?" I ask when she's put the last of her clothes in the drawer.

"Really?" She lights up at the question, "I love Chinese food!" I smile at her, and we pore over the menu trying to decide what to order. We order more food than we could possibly eat and wait not very patiently while the food is cooked and delivered. Eris absolutely devours a

thing of orange chicken by herself and polishes off half a carton of fried rice before stating that she's "absolutely stuffed." She sighs and lays down on the couch.

"I think I'm going into a food coma," she states, and I laugh.

"I've never seen anyone eat orange chicken that fast in my entire life. I honestly think you set a world record." She laughs.

We stay up late into the night just chatting about whatever crosses our minds. I find out that her favorite colors are grey and green, she hates red onion, but any other kind of onion is fine, and she gags every time she eats mushrooms. She tells me of her childhood pets, and school horror stories, but I notice she never talks of her parents. She talks of her sister, Laila, often, but I haven't heard a peep about her parents. When I ask her about it, she seems to sober up, and says, "Some things are best left unsaid." With that, she excuses herself to the bathroom and gets ready for bed. A few minutes later she comes out and asks, "I assume you're forcing me to take your bed again?"

"That is correct."

"You're impossible." She huffs but bids me goodnight. After putting the leftover food in the fridge, I lay on the couch, finding it nearly impossible to sleep.

## Chapter Twenty-One: Eris

I didn't expect him to ask me to stay with him. I'm turning over the conversation in my head as I'm lying in his bed tonight. I replay so much that I feel like a broken record. *Don't read into it, he's just being friendly.* But what if he's not just "being friendly"? I shoot back to the voice in my head. *Just don't fall in love with him.*

This would be the worst possible time to fall in love. I am not going to fall in love with him. Sure, he's being really nice to me, and I miss the companionship that comes with a partner, but I am **not** falling in love with him. We're just friends.

A few hours later I'm still struggling to fall asleep, and I finally give up, get out of bed, and walk to the kitchen to get a glass of water.

"Couldn't sleep?" I hear from behind me.

"SHIT!" I gasp and almost drop the full glass of water. "Don't do that!"

"What, talk to you when it's pitch black in here and you thought I was asleep? Duly noted." I can hear the smile in his voice when he talks.

"Jesus, you almost gave me a heart attack...and to answer your question, yes, sleep seems to be escaping me."

"Do you want me to sit with you again?"

I pause for a long moment.

"Yes." The word slips out of me, I wasn't sure if I was going to say it, but it slips out regardless. There's some shuffling and I hear him get up from the couch. He leads the way back to the bedroom and I follow him, set the glass of water down on the table after having taken a few sips, and get into bed. I sit so my back is against the wall. My phone goes off – it's Laila.

"Who's texting you at this hour?" Isaac asks.

"My sister. She keeps odd hours. She lives in New York, though she usually never texts me this late. It's like 4:00 AM for her right now." I check the message and it's just a picture of her and her boyfriend, Carlos, outside of a sushi restaurant. I quickly respond back with a few heart emojis and put my phone down.

"Are you and your sister close?"

“Yes, she showed me how to live life to the fullest. She’s the closest friend I have.” I smile. “Do you want to see a picture of her?” Isaac says he does, and I pull up the most recent picture I have of both of us – a selfie we took the last time I was in New York visiting her.

“You guys look very similar.”

“We get that a lot. Some people even think we’re twins, but she’s three years older than me.”

“What does your sister do in New York?”

“She’s a writer for Saturday Night Live. She’s always been the funniest of the family, and that’s been her dream job ever since she was twelve. She’s been there for two years now, and she loves it.”

“That sounds really cool! I’ve hosted SNL before.”

“Yeah, I know,” I say, and then immediately cringe. God, how embarrassing.

“*Oh?*” I can hear the gears turning in his head when he says it.

“Nothing. Moving on.”

“No, we’re not gonna just move past that. Are you a fan of mine?”

I’m cringing even harder now if that’s even possible, and he’s having way too much fun with this for my liking.

“If you want, I can get you a signed photo.”

“Shut up. I’m going to sleep now.” As he laughs, I furiously push the covers down and climb under them.

“I’m done, I’m done.” He chuckles, but I turn so my back is facing him and sigh heavily, not answering him.

“Message received, goodnight, Eris.”

After that, sleep claims me quickly and when I wake up the next morning, I find myself in the same position I was in yesterday morning – in Isaac’s arms.

### **One Week Later**

#### Chapter Twenty-Two: Eris

##### Song of the Day: In this Shirt by The Irrepressibles

Things have been surprisingly quiet for a week. Almost too quiet. Jake seems to actually be avoiding me rather than antagonizing me, which is very unlike him. I’m suspicious of it. I know that he’s up to something because there’s no reason he would just leave me alone out of the blue. I always keep one eye on Jake and the other on set, and I find myself looking over my shoulder frequently.

I’ve been staying with Isaac for a week now, and every night we’ve shared the bed so I can sleep without nightmares. It’s helped and I’m feeling better rested now despite being constantly on edge because of Jake.

As I’m walking to set this morning, I feel as though someone is watching me. I turn around quickly, but I see no one. I can’t shake the feeling though as I hurriedly make my way to set.

I feel weird all day, it feels like the other shoe is about to drop and I can’t figure out if I’m actually in danger or if my brain is just trying to trick me into thinking I am. I pull Lily aside and tell her how I’m feeling. Lily grows more concerned as I tell her. She says she’ll keep a close eye on me today and asks if she can relay the news to Isaac since he and I don’t talk much outside of his trailer. I tell her she can and go back to work, keeping close to Jake in case he needs me.

When shooting is over, Isaac has to stay back and talk with the director about the logistics of one of the action scenes tomorrow. I leave set and make my way back to Isaac's trailer, almost tripping over my own feet from how fast I'm walking.

We're having leftover Thai food for dinner tonight, and I pull it out of the fridge to start plating it. Before I heat the food up, I grab my phone and set it to take a video. Laila has been super busy getting ready for the start of the new season of SNL and we haven't actually been able to talk on the phone for a little bit. She had the idea of doing these little video diaries we can send to each other, so it's like we're on FaceTime, but not really. I start talking to the camera, telling her about my day and how I'm feeling as I plate up the Thai food. I hear the door open, and hear Isaac come in, shouting hi with my back still to the door.

"So, this is where you've been hiding." I hear Jake say from behind me. I freeze, slowly setting down the food containers and turning around slowly. There's a knife block directly behind me and I block it out of view from Jake, and slowly creep my hand behind my back toward the big butcher knife. "You know, I could have found you faster if I had just been paying attention, but I have to admit, you're just a waste of space so why should I bother?"

He's very calm, speaking to me as if I'm a cornered, injured animal in the woods. The warning sirens are going off in my head, this is very bad. My hand closes around the handle of the knife as he stalks closer.

"I don't understand, why me?"

"Why you? Oh, Eris. Why are you hiding from me? I can see right through you. You come off as some sweet, shy, innocent girl, but I know deep down you're not the prey – you're the predator. I'm just trying to get the real Eris to come out. I know you're in there."

“Jake, I don’t understand, I’m not who you think I am. I don’t want any trouble.” I plead to him as he gets closer and closer.

“You know, I thought you’d be smarter than this. Why didn’t you report me the first time it happened hmm? If I can get away with pushing you around, surely, I can get away with this. You didn’t report me because you agree with me – you deserve this. And you deserve everything that’s coming your way.” He pulls something out of his pocket – it’s a large pocketknife and he flicks the very sharp blade open. “I don’t think anyone would miss you, do you? I mean, Isaac here seems to be your friend, but he’ll leave in the end. They always do. And you’ll be left alone. Because no one cares about you, Eris. No one loves you, and no one ever will.” With the last word, he lunges suddenly, and the knife slices over my thigh deeply. I shout in pain, twisting around and yanking the butcher knife out of the knife block. He chuckles, my blood dripping from his knife as I limp back towards the wall, brandishing my knife in front of me.

*I am not dying today.* “Leave, Jake. I’m not your punching bag anymore.” I say firmly, surprised that my voice isn’t shaking.

“You think you’re getting out of this alive? That’s cute.” He lunges at me again, and I expect him to go for my legs again, but instead, he goes for the wrist of the hand holding the knife. I try to thrust my hand but he’s gripping it so hard that I gasp and the knife I’m holding clatters to the floor. He doesn’t move to pick it up though, just shoves me against the wall, hard, and the wind is knocked out of me. In my stunned state, he grabs my other wrist and presses his body against mine. I writhe and struggle but he’s stronger than me. He tuts at my struggle and runs the knife along my collarbone lightly, not puncturing the skin. My breath comes in gasps, but in my panic, it hits me that I should scream like hell. I open my mouth and start screaming as loud as my lungs will allow.

“Shut up you worthless bitch!” He says slicing the skin under my collarbone open, but with the movement, I’m able to drive my knee up between his legs, and I drive it up, hard. It’s his turn to shout now, and he staggers backward. I shove him to the ground, one knee on his chest, the other on the floor and at that moment, I feel everything inside me break, every dam cracks, and nothing can hold me back.

I start punching his face, screaming, and crying at him. I feel a slight pinch in my leg but with the adrenaline and hatred running through my veins I barely register it. I pick up the butcher knife I had dropped and point it in his face.

“Don’t you EVER lay your hands on me again. Do you understand?” I scream in his face, but to no response. His face is bloody, and he seems to be on the verge of losing consciousness. “I said, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?” And with that, the door of the trailer bursts open, and Isaac rushes in.

### Chapter Twenty-Three: Isaac

#### Song of the Day: Repeat Until Death by Novo Amor

She’s on top of him in the kitchen, a knife in his face. He doesn’t look alive and she’s crying. There’s blood all over the kitchen floor and I don’t know if it’s hers or his.

“ERIS! Are you okay?” I say running over to her. She’s breathing heavily, and now that I’m closer, I can see that Jake is breathing too. She just stares at me. I soften my voice and say, “Eris, I called the cops, they’re on their way. Are you okay?”

She mumbles something and stands up quickly, putting the knife on the counter. She doesn’t wince but when I stand up and quickly run my eyes over her, her clothes are torn and bloody. She reaches down and pulls a pocket knife out of her leg and doesn’t even flinch.

“Oh my god. Eris. Eris. Look at me, are you okay?” I grab her shoulder and she flinches. I pull my hand away and when I look at it, it’s painted crimson. As I look back up, I’m given just seconds to react as she passes out. By some miracle, I catch her, swing her up into my arms, and carry her out of the trailer. As I’m walking out the paramedics pull up and jump out of the ambulance. “She’s hurt, definitely her shoulder and leg,” I say as I hand her over to the paramedics. “Don’t leave without me!” I shout and run back to take the paramedics to Jake. “He needs to be taken into custody; I think he tried to murder her.” The paramedics pause for a split second then continues to take Jake out of the trailer. I glance to the counter where the Thai food was still sitting out and see Eris’s phone propped up on the counter. I pick it up and see that it’s recording. “Oh my god,” I whisper to myself as I stop the video and shove her phone in my back pocket.

I sprint back outside and climb in the back of the ambulance that Eris is in. They’ve started an IV and blood transfusion. They tell me they aren’t sure how much blood she lost, so I relayed to them the size of the blood puddles on the floor. They pale and hang another bag. I hold her hand, it’s limp in mine but the pulse is still there and that gives me hope. We twist and turn and run red lights and my mind is so quiet, there’s nothing in it except for her. I squeeze her hand and to my surprise, she squeezes back. I look up with a gasp and see that she’s conscious.

“Eris, you’re safe now. I’m never going to let anyone hurt you ever again.” She just smiles at me through the oxygen mask. Then she says, so quiet I almost can’t hear her,

“Did you get my phone? The video? I didn’t stop filming.”

“Yes, yes, I got the video. Don’t worry. He’ll never hurt you again.” She nods and slips back into unconsciousness as we near the hospital.

When we finally get to the hospital, it turns into a blur. They won't let me in as they assess the damage and then stitch her up. I sit in the waiting room, my leg bouncing like crazy. Eventually, they come out and tell me that she is stable and asleep and that I'm allowed to go in and sit with her.

I almost cry when I see her. She looks so frail and pale against the stark white of the hospital. There are more bruises around her wrists, and they put her in a gown. They wrapped her leg in two spots and there is some white gauze poking out of the neck of her gown. I pull up a chair, grab her hand, and wait for her to wake up.

#### Chapter Twenty-Four: Eris

I know I'm dreaming, but this is a dream I don't want to wake up from. I'm warm and safe. There's someone here with me, I can't see his face, but I think it's Isaac. He's holding my hand and we're walking along a beach. I can hear children laughing in the background, but I can't see them. I talk to the man holding my hand, tell him about my past, my hopes, dreams, and fears, and whom I want to be and he just listens, never saying a word. Sometimes he taps the back of my hand with his thumb, and I take that as a sign that he's listening to me. He turns to me, says my name, and I bolt awake in a hospital bed.

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## Appendix – Complementary Materials:

### **Character Breakdown:**

Isaac Oaks: Isaac is a famous Hollywood actor, who became famous in his late twenties. His current role is in a show about Egyptian mythology. The show is in its third season when this story begins. He went through a messy divorce two years ago, and his ex-wife destroyed him emotionally. He tries to escape by throwing everything into his work. He's closed himself off to love, but has a big heart, he can also have a short temper at times. He's Latino with dark eyes and dark curly hair. He's slightly muscular and 5'11. He's in his early forties and has one child with his ex-wife.

Ari Thomson: Ari is from New Zealand and resides there most of the year with his two children, Hana, and Kaia. He's an actor and director and does many different projects. He likes to do smaller indie films that allow him a lot of creativity and freedom. He and his ex-wife had an amicable split five years ago, and he and his wife share time with their kids. They're on very good terms. He's taking a break from work when this story starts, wanting to spend time with his kids and brainstorm new projects. His most famous project is *Anchor's Away*, a show about pirate shenanigans. He's in his mid-40s. He's 6'2, with salt and pepper hair that's in wild curls. He has olive-colored skin and a perpetual five o'clock shadow. He is kind-hearted and loves everyone he meets. He's very lanky, mostly just arms and legs, and is kind of clumsy. He has expressive brown eyes, he's not able to hide his emotions very easily.

Eris Lane: Eris is the main character of our story. She has a bad relationship with her parents that haunts her. She ran away from them after the relationship started to south, but the absence of parental relationships has left a gaping hole in her heart. She's in her mid-20s. She's bright and talented but no one has noticed it yet. She's currently working as a personal assistant (PA) to the assistant director (Jake Grantly) of the show Isaac is starring in. She is tentative to open up to people, always expecting the worst out of people. She's 5'7 with dark brown hair that falls right to her hips. It's often in a French braid or a ponytail. She is of average build and has green eyes.

Lily Markett – Isaac’s costar and friend. She was there for him when he went through his divorce. She’s free-spirited and quick to joke and takes an easy liking to Eris. She often jokes that she wants to hire Eris to be her personal assistant. She knows that there’s something wrong going on between Eris and Jake and supports Eris throughout it. She’s slight, about 5’4, and has dark curly hair that brushes her shoulders.

Tessa Thomson: Ari’s ex-wife. She’s dating a woman named Rena Gold. She and Ari are on very good terms, and she lives in New Zealand so they can co-parent. She’s an actress turned director and at the time of this story, she’s getting ready to direct a movie in the States. She is African American and has a shaved head. She is very open to meeting new people and is really good at making people feel at ease.

Hana Thomson: Hana is 9 and is fun-loving and a little rambunctious – always on the move and making memories. She is open-hearted like her parents and charms everyone she meets.

Kaia Thomson: Kaia is 11 and a little more reserved than her younger sister, but she’s just as loving. She’s an avid reader and wants to follow in her mom’s footsteps and be a director. She won’t tell anyone but she’s a huge nerd. She loves fantasy novels and Star Wars.

Melanie Oaks-Bentley: Melanie is 10. She was in the middle of a nasty custody battle and her mom made her fight dirty against her dad. Because of that, her mom has main custody over her and is with her 75% of the time. She’s confused and hurt and misses her dad.

Natalie Bentley: Isaac’s ex-wife. For lack of better phrasing, she’s a grade-A asshole. She doesn’t care about anyone except herself and her image. She’s a supermodel who cares more about her looks than her daughter. She’s constantly bothering Isaac, telling him horrible things about himself.

Laila Lane: Laila is Eris’s sister and her best friend. She was the only one in the family to help Eris when she ran away from her parents. Laila lives in New York and is a stage manager for Saturday Night Live. She’s the one who helped Eris get the PA job. She cares for her sister

deeply and resents their parents for what they said to Eris. She's a year and a half younger than Laila, also has brown hair, and is around 5'5. Her hair falls to her chin and the ends are constantly being dyed in different bright colors.

Kathy and Kyle Lane: Laila and Eris's parents. How exactly they hurt Eris is revealed later on in the story. Kathy is constantly texting Eris and calling her, begging for a response and when she doesn't get one, she resorts to insults and yelling, leaving horrible voicemails that Eris tries not to listen to. Kyle lets Kathy push him around. He misses Eris.

Jake Grantly: A textbook narcissist and abuser. He uses his position to make life miserable for Eris and likes seeing her scared and in pain. He'll get what's coming to him, trust me.

### **Rest of Novel Outline:**

Natalie questions why he didn't decide to bring his daughter with him on his trip and this is the first time that Isaac truly questions his decisions about Eris. Despite this, he pushes the thoughts away, for the time being, focusing on hosting SNL, and Eris is free to roam the city. She finds herself falling in love with it, and one day when she's in a little bookshop, she bumps into someone – it's Ari. She's flustered and bewildered as she's loved Ari's work and wants to work with him someday. He's amused by her scrambling for words and tells her that Isaac told him she would be her. She regains her composure quickly and they hit it off instantly. Ari laughs at all her jokes, making a few of his own in the process, and she finds herself enjoying his company immensely. They make plans to get coffee the next day and go shopping, as Eris wants to find a nice outfit for the SNL premiere in a few days. They exchange numbers and text for the rest of the day. They get coffee together the next day and Eris finds herself telling him all about Jake and what she went through. She shows him the healing stitches and he tells her that he thinks she's brave. Eris does not think so and tells him such. She doesn't know why she feels like she can tell Ari anything. When they're shopping for an outfit, Eris is struggling to find something that covers the stitches, and she starts to get frustrated. Seeing this, Ari tells her that if she's ashamed of them,

she's letting Jake win, and he knows she doesn't want Jake to win. Eris is stunned for a few moments, but then realizes he's right. She gets a short dress that doesn't hide the stitches in her thigh.

At the premiere, Eris invites Ari to come with her, as they've been talking constantly, and she wants to get to know him more. She's gotten over the star-struck awe she first felt meeting him, and now feels inexplicably drawn to him. She also feels guilty about how she feels drawn to Ari, knowing that she still has feelings for Isaac. Little does she know that Ari is enamored by her, and he wants nothing more than to be near her for the rest of his life. He feels drawn to her too, but he respects her and Isaac's relationship, whatever it may be. At the premiere, Isaac finds himself watching them whisper to each other and how comfortable they seem in each other's space, and he gets jealous. They all go out for drinks after the show and Isaac finally makes his move on Eris, and to him, it's seen more as staking his claim – he was there for her first. This is the first time we see Isaac's true colors – he wants to be the one to save Eris. Despite her conflicted feelings, Eris kisses Isaac back and they sleep together that very same night.

They fly back to set the next day, seemingly closer than ever, but Isaac finds another predicament in his hands. When Melanie comes to visit the week after, he finds himself pushing away Eris more and more, realizing that his daughter needs him. Eris is made aware that Jake is going to trial, and that she should testify against Jake. Eris is worried about the trial not going in her favor, and because of Jake's attitude, Eris feels spurned. The nature of the case being so public makes the court move quicker than normal and by the end of the week, Eris takes the stand and testifies. She waits anxiously for the jury to make their decision, and soon it is announced by the judge that the jury unanimously found Jake guilty of attempted first-degree murder and that he is sentenced to life in prison. Eris sobs at the news, and calls Ari to tell him. She tells Isaac later when she gets home from court. He hadn't attended with her as he wanted to spend time with Melanie before she left in the evening. After Melanie leaves things are awkward for the last week and a half of shooting. During the last couple of days of shooting, Eris starts to feel sick, and this is when the accidental pregnancy plotline comes into play. Eris finds out she's pregnant a few days before shooting ends, after remarking to Ari that she's been feeling sick in the mornings lately. He waits on the phone with her as she takes the test, and he is the first to know that Eris is pregnant. Eris

then pulls Lily aside and tells her, and then tells her sister. Everyone is wondering if Eris is going to tell Isaac, and Eris decides to tell him on the last day of shooting, not wanting him to be distracted while he's working. I wanted something to make the break-up between Eris and Isaac more dramatic, and I thought that Eris being pregnant and Isaac breaking up with her before she can tell him would really do the trick. On the last day of shooting, Isaac has come to the grim decision that in order to do what's best for his daughter, he needs to end things with Eris, and he does just this. Eris is in shock at first. She's blindsided by the fact that Isaac dumped her. She had felt him pulling away when Melanie was here and then tried to act like he did nothing wrong the week following. She didn't think he would dump her though, rather he would work through his problems with her. She sees this as him taking the coward's way out. She packs up her things and calls Ari, telling him what had happened. He drops everything and buys her a plane ticket to New Zealand, saying that she can stay with him until she figures out what to do. Eris knows that this is not her only option, but she sees it as the best option because it's far away from Isaac and she's not putting undue stress on those she loves. She accepts and in less than 12 hours she's on a plane to New Zealand. When she finally gets there, Ari picks her up from the airport. He doesn't ask how she's feeling, just lets her do what she needs to do in order to get through. It is a silent ride from the airport to his house, and Eris is lost in her thoughts and her despair. She doesn't know what she's going to do, if she's going to keep the baby, and what she would tell Isaac if she does keep the baby. She does note the beautiful scenery and Ari's picturesque, yet homey house. Ari shows her to the guest bedroom, and she immediately goes to take a nap. Ari is beside himself; he doesn't know how to help Eris and doesn't know what she needs, but he does know that he needs to give her space and time and that when she needs something she'll come to him about it. He has already briefed Kaia and Hana on their new guest, and that she's staying with them until she decides she wants to leave. Hana is excited at the prospect of having another person in the home, while Kaia seems more on the fence about the idea. He's told them to give her space, that she's not ready to be bombarded with questions. He also explained to them that she's most likely going to be very sad, that something bad has happened to her, and that she's trying to heal from it. When Eris wakes up a few hours later, she just feels empty. She feels as if there's no light or warmth

inside her, like how she felt when Jake was abusing her. She's aimless for a couple of days, sleeping whenever she can, and eating only when Ari brings her various snacks to find out what she likes. After a few nights of this, Eris just feels lonely, so she ventures out of her room for the first time to explore the house. It's a beautiful house, with lots of light wood finishes and a stunning kitchen. There are toys and coloring books scattered everywhere, and Eris remarks how this home feels lived in and loved, not like Isaac's clinical-like trailer. She's wandering around just looking at everything when she hears rustling behind her. Eris turns around quickly, her heart in her throat, but realizes it's just one of Ari's kids. The little girl introduces herself as Hana, and Eris introduces herself. Despite the late hour, Hana seems full of energy and is talking to Eris in a rushed whisper. Hana asks her why she's up so late, and Eris remarks that she could say the same about Hana. Hana asks if she wants to watch a movie with her, and Eris is a little surprised but agrees. She thinks that it would be nice to do something that isn't wallowing in her self-pity. They settle on the couch, and Hana hands her one headphone. They sit on the couch and watch *Encanto*, Eris is in tears by the end, and when Hana notices she grabs her hand and tells her that she's sorry she's sad. Eris gives her a small smile and thanks her for the company. Ari, who had gotten up ten minutes prior to getting a glass of water was watching them from the kitchen and he got a little choked up watching Hana interact with Eris. He also feels proud of his daughter, knowing that he raised her to be considerate like that. The credits start to roll, and they both pull their headphones out. Hana bids Eris good night, and goes back to her room, smiling at her dad as she does so. Eris sits on the couch for a few moments longer, and when she gets up, she sees Ari leaning against the counter, a soft smile on his face. She shyly greets him and then finds that she wants to tell him everything she's feeling. He seems to pick up on this and invites her into his room, she sits on his bed and starts sobbing, trying to get out all the emotions she had tried so hard to hold back. He sits next to her, never touching her, giving her space until she reaches for his hand and grips it tightly. He taps the back of her hand with his thumb as a silent show of support that he's there for her.

The next few days go by in a blur as Eris tries to get out of her room more. She is introduced to Kaia, who is very shy with her, but once Eris makes a comment about a book she's reading, Ari finds

them conversing over different novels. Kaia is still shy around Eris but is opening up to her the more they interact. She schedules an appointment with a local OBGYN to confirm the pregnancy, and she asks Ari to go with her, so she doesn't have to go alone. He readily agrees and they go off to the appointment while the girls are at school. The doctor is very nice, and a blood test confirms Eris's pregnancy. Eris doesn't know how to respond and just kind of spaces out, Ari says something to the doctor and the doctor leaves. Ari tells Eris that whatever she wants to do, it's her choice and her choice alone and that he will be there for her every step of the way. Eris thinks it over for a week, before telling him that she wants to keep the baby. Ari never acts surprised, just takes it in stride, giving her the space to work out what she needs. She is torn on if she should tell Isaac or not, but she frankly doesn't want to hear his voice at the moment, or she'll break down. During the next two weeks, she has more appointments with the OBGYN, and Ari accompanies her to every single one. She notices her starting to get a bump, which she thinks is strange because it's really early in her pregnancy, only about five weeks. The next week Eris gets her first ultrasound and the tech gasps at the monitor, spinning it around to show them that Eris is having twins. Eris's first reaction is to dryly comment on the fact that that's why she's showing already and Ari and the tech laugh. She's a little scared, two babies are definitely a lot more daunting than one, but she thinks she can handle it.

The next day Ari says that his ex, Tessa, is coming over to pick the girls up and that she has them for the next two weeks. Eris is scared to meet Tessa, as she's starting to develop feelings for Ari. Ari can see the fear in her eyes, and he rushes to tell her that they happily co-parent and that she and her girlfriend switch off with him every two weeks with the girls. Ari says that this is the last two weeks she'll have with them in a while, as right after that she's going to the US to direct a movie for the next four months. Tessa breezes in later that day with a boisterous laugh and contagious smile, and she automatically makes Eris feel at ease. Tessa introduces herself to Eris and congratulates her on her pregnancy. Eris is taken by Tessa – she's just as electric and eclectic as Ari. They make small talk as Kaia and Hana pack their bags, and Eris is surprised when they leave, as Hana rushes over to Eris and gives her a tight hug, telling her she's going to miss her while she's gone. Tessa says that Eris can come and visit anytime. Eris is almost

moved to tears by the obvious show of affection and acceptance, and she hugs Hana back. Eris is struck with the thought that she hopes her children love her like that.

The next two weeks are quiet, as Ari is working on scripts for a show that he's directing and starring in at the beginning of March. Eris talks to her therapist every day and steals books from Kaia's bookshelf to read when it's quiet. She finds herself going to Ari more, and even spending the night in his room a few times when nightmares chase her awake. She opens up to Ari and tells him how she's feeling that day and what she wants to do. One day she tells him she wants to go to the beach, as it's right down the road from Ari's house and she hadn't gone yet. The weather is balmy in November, most days averaging 60 degrees Fahrenheit, and they make their way to the beach. It's beautiful and there are several albatrosses on the shore. The cool salty air makes Eris feel invigorated and rested, and Ari lays out a blanket he'd grabbed from the house. They talk for hours that day, about their childhoods, their hopes, their dreams, and what's on their minds. Eris makes a remark about how she feels at home here. Ari responds by telling her she's welcome to stay for as long as she wants, even after the babies are born. Eris turns shy after that, once again smacked in the face with her feelings towards Ari. She pushes them away though as she doesn't want to address them yet.

The girls come home and they're in a flurry about Christmas coming up in two weeks. Hana is overly excited and asks Eris to help them decorate the house. Eris confides in Hana that Christmas is her favorite holiday, and she would love to decorate the house with them. Eris's bump is showing more now, and she's thankful that it hasn't really slowed her down yet. Ari is at the store grocery shopping, and Hana, Kaia, and Eris carry the tree down from the upstairs closet and are putting it together in the living room while listening to Christmas music when Ari comes home. He watches them all for a few seconds, hidden by the corner of the wall, and snaps a quick picture of them while they're distracted. His heart warms as he watches them, and he notes how Eris is looking. She looks less drawn and fuller of life, her cheeks are flushed pink, and she's got a small smile on her face. Kaia asks her something. Then she sees Ari and shoots him a bigger smile that almost stops his heart. The feelings that he felt the first time he met Eris come flooding back at that moment after trying to hold them back for months. He knows he's in deep

shit now, and he never wants to push her and make her uncomfortable, so he tries again to keep those feelings at bay. He joins in on their Christmas decorating fun after putting the groceries away. Later that night Eris corners him, asking if she could start to help pay for things as she feels like a freeloader, Ari is unsure at first but then realizes how much this means to Eris and he concedes. She's elated and thanks him with a giant hug, one that takes him by surprise. Later that night, Eris is up late in her room reading when Kaia comes in tentatively. Eris asks what she needs, and Kaia tells her that she had a nightmare and wanted someone to sit with. Eris invites her in and Kaia beams at her as she gets into the bed and burrows under the covers. Eris tells Kaia that she gets nightmares too and that she always likes to have company after having one. Kaia asks Eris to read to her and she does, until both of them are fast asleep. The next morning Ari can't find Kaia to wake her up for school and is frantic, as the last resort he tries Eris's room and finds them cuddled up under the covers asleep. Again, those strong feelings rise in him. He quietly wakes Kaia up, trying not to wake Eris up in the process.

The weeks leading up to Christmas go by in a flash, and Eris is beside herself trying to find gifts for Kaia and Hana. She ventures into the city with Ari and finds herself in a family-owned bookshop. There she purchases a copy of her favorite book for Kaia, and she found a set of cat-themed coloring books for Hana. She's relieved to have found their gifts, as the girls have started to mean a lot to her. Ari is touched that Eris wants to get them presents. Eris doesn't have a present for Ari yet and worries that she won't find the right gift in time. She wants to get him something from the heart, something that shows how much she appreciates him, but she just doesn't know what. She's mulling it over and can't sleep on Christmas Eve because of it. Finally, she gives up and goes and knocks on his door, he's still awake, wrapping the last of the presents for Kaia and Hana. She explains to him that she hasn't found him a gift yet and that she's really sorry about it. He tells her that he doesn't need a gift, that having her here at the company is more than a gift that he could ever hope for. She gets choked up and starts crying and he panics thinking that he upset her. She laughs it off and chalks it up to pregnancy hormones, stating the twins are making her lose her mind. She then gets quiet and thanks Ari for letting her stay here, she tells him that she didn't know where to go or what to do and that because of him, she's started to heal. Now

it's Ari's turn to get choked up and he asks her if he can hug her. They hug and then Eris notices the poorly wrapped gifts behind them. She laughs and rewraps the gifts for Ari and in the soft light of the lamp in Ari's room, she starts to let herself feel her emotions, especially the ones toward Ari.

Christmas morning goes by in a blur and Kaia and Hana are thrilled by their gifts. When the girls are playing with their new things, Eris helps Ari in the kitchen, scrambling eggs and cooking sausage. He tells her he has a gift for her, a rather unconventional gift, and one she doesn't have to accept if she doesn't want to. Eris is wary and he then explains that in February, *Anchor's Away* is going to start shooting their fourth season and that they're looking for a pregnant person to join the cast as part of the storyline. He says that the part is hers if she wants it. She doesn't know what to say at first, she's always wanted to be an actress, and this could be her first big break. She tells him that she wants it, and he gets so excited telling her how he can't wait for her to meet the rest of the cast and how much fun she's going to have. She's infected by his enthusiasm and is grinning from ear to ear.

January seems to fly by with doctor's appointments, school recitals, grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning. Ari jokes that Eris has an early nesting instinct and every time he brings it up she glares at him. She's feeling better now than she has in weeks and has been talking to her sister and Lily frequently, giving them pregnancy updates. Oscar nominations came out and a film that Ari directed is nominated for one. He asked her to come with him, and she told him that she'd be thrilled to go with him. She gets fitted for a dress within the week, something loose in the stomach so she has room to grow. Eris has been talking to her therapist about her parents and has decided she wants to reconnect, but only if she can tell her mom what needs to be said to her. Eris wants a relationship with her parents on her own term and doesn't want to feel like her mom is pushing her around anymore. One day out of the blue, she decides to call her mom and her mom picks up on the first ring. Eris had been ignoring her parents for almost five months at this point and she was surprised that her mom picked up so fast. Eris stops her mom from talking and tells her that there are some things she needs to get off her chest and that if they're going to fix their relationship there need to be some boundaries and hard conversations. To her surprise, her mom agrees and apologizes for how she'd been behaving. She tells Eris that she's started going to therapy and

wants to work with Eris with the help of a therapist to fix their relationship. Eris and her mom cry on the phone together and make plans to video chat soon. Eris runs and tells Ari, as she had told him about her issues with her family. Ari is thrilled for her and picks her up and spins her around without realizing what he's doing. She's looking up at him and he's about to tell her how he feels when the door opens and Tessa's voice travels through the house. She's come to pick up the girls for a girl's day while she's in New Zealand for a few days taking a break from filming. Eris goes and greets her, and Tessa exclaims that Eris is positively glowing. She asks if she can feel the bump and Eris obliges her. Tessa tells her that a girl's day means her too, Eris protests saying she doesn't want to infringe but Tessa insists and says that her girlfriend, Rena, wants to meet her. Eris reluctantly agrees and they go to a local ice cream place. Eris is nervous at first, especially because she's never met Rena, but Rena takes an immediate liking to Eris, and the three women gossip like mother hens as the girls put as many toppings as possible on their sundaes. They all then go shopping, and Rena finds Eris in the corner of one of the shops and asks if she and Ari are dating. Eris stutters her way through a response, and Rena tells her that Tessa didn't put her up to this, just that she's curious. Rena says that Tessa has a high opinion of Eris and that she's said she hopes that Eris and Ari are dating. Rena says that this is the happiest Ari has ever been, according to Tessa. Eris doesn't know what to do with that information, so she tucks it away for later.

They get home that night and the adults grab a drink, minus Eris, of course, and the kids go off to their rooms. Eris is a little shy despite having spent the day with Rena and Tessa, but she opens up quickly and even cracks a couple of jokes. She's nestled next to Ari, and he has his arm around her, not in a proprietary way, but in a comforting way. Eris falls asleep as the night wanes on and is awoken by Ari right as Rena and Tessa leave. He helps her to bed and right as he's about to leave, she asks him to stay with her. She says she always sleeps better when he's here. He concedes and from that moment on they always share a bed.

A week later filming starts, and Eris is a flutter of nerves. She's introduced to a lot of people in a short amount of time, but there is one familiar face in the crowd – Janine, the makeup artist from her previous set. Eris is overjoyed to see her and gives her a big hug; Janine makes a comment on how

healthy she looks and Eris says she looks like a healthy elephant. Janine congratulates her on the pregnancy and Eris accepts her well wishes happily.

Filming feels like a whirlwind to Eris, but she's having the time of her life. The show is filmed in New Zealand, close to Ari's house so she doesn't have to live in a trailer this time around, and she's very thankful for that. She becomes close friends with a cast member named Jon. Jon is middle-aged and has a very dry sense of humor, something that Eris finds very amusing. When Eris isn't filming or with Ari, she's with Jon, as her character's plotline is a part of his plotline. Ari is glad that she's making friends, even if she does tend to gravitate toward middle-aged men. As shooting goes on, Eris and Ari make a lot of happy memories together and seem to enjoy each other's company immensely. As the Oscars date draws closer, Eris starts to get more and more nervous. The dress came in a few days ago and she tried it on and felt so beautiful. It's a loose-fitting deep green gown with long sleeves and it's made of satin. It perfectly accentuates her figure, and it frames her ever-growing bump nicely. They wrap up the first month of filming and prepare for a two-week break to give everyone time to rest and for Ari and Eris to attend the Oscars.

The night before they leave for the Oscars Ari gets some bad news and pulls Eris aside to tell her about it. He informs her that Isaac will be in attendance...with his new girlfriend. Eris blinks a few times in surprise, then says that she doesn't care, she just wants him to be happy. She truly means it, Eris knows now that she and Isaac never would have worked out, and instead of dwelling on the past, she wants to move towards the future.

The flight to LA is a long one and Eris sleeps for a lot of it when she isn't talking to Ari. When they land a car takes them to the Beverly Hills Hotel. As they're checking into the hotel, Eris hears her name being called – it's Isaac. She panics, looking at Ari with wide eyes and she holds a bag over her bump to try and hide it. Isaac comes up to her and pretends that nothing had happened between them, asking how she's been doing. He eyes Ari suspiciously but doesn't say anything about it. Finally, he says that he needs to go pick up his girlfriend from the spa and moves on. Eris lets out a breath and turns to Ari. She waits until they get into their room to ask Ari why Isaac pretended as though nothing had

happened. Ari says he doesn't know and that if she wants an answer, she should ask him. She mulls it over and the next day she and Ari explore LA. What she doesn't realize is that the paparazzi are out in droves and soon, a picture of her and her baby bump with Ari gets splashed on a gossip website and sets the internet ablaze. Soon her phone starts blowing up, and texts from Lily, her sister, and her mom are all pouring in. Then her phone starts ringing – it's Isaac. Eris is confused, she doesn't know what's going on but picks up the phone anyway. Isaac asks her if the baby is his the moment she picks up the phone. She's in shock and doesn't answer. He tells her he knows the baby is his and accuses her of lying to him and trying to take his baby away from him. Eris snaps and tells him that he has no right to tell her how to live her life and what to do with *her* baby. She reminds him that he's the one who called it quits and he doesn't get to come crawling back now. She hangs up on him, enraged, and reads her messages. Lily sent her a link to the website, and she clicks it, groaning when she realizes what had happened. She shows Ari and he pales, and they hurry back to the hotel, trying to avoid as many people as they can.

Eris is ranting about Isaac and his audacity and Ari lets her rant, knowing that she just needs to get her feelings out all at once, and then she'll be rational about it. Eris finally finishes ranting and says that she's not going to let him ruin her weekend. Ari says that he supports whatever decision Eris wants to make. He also drily comments that he's not above fist-fighting either. This makes Eris laugh and snaps her out of her bad mood. The next day the beauty team comes in to help get Eris ready, and Eris loves feeling this pampered. She opts to wear her hair down and curl it, with two pearl bobby pins to hold it back from her face. She steps into the dress and the little flats she picked out – heels while pregnant was a death wish, she had declared. Finally, she's ready and they let Ari back in the room. He's blown away – he's always thought she was stunning but tonight she feels her best and it shows. He tells her that he thinks she's the most beautiful person on the planet and she blushes and tells him that he cleans up well too. They take a car to the Dolby Theatre and Eris is nervous the entire car ride there. Ari does his best to calm her nerves, taking her hand and tapping it with her thumb. When he does that, she stops and stares at him and asks him why he did that. He said his mom used to do it to him when he got nervous. She swallows hard and looks at him, her eyes far away as if she's remembering something. The car pulls up

and he gets out first, and then helps her out. He keeps his hand on the small of her back as they walk the red carpet and have their picture taken by dozens of photographers. Ari is surprised at how Eris takes all the commotion in stride, and she even gets interviewed by *Vanity Fair* and talks about her first role on *Anchor's Away*. Ari feels so proud watching her, she's grown so much in the past few months, emotionally and mentally, and her smile is genuine as she talks to the reporter. He realizes as he watches her talk to the reporter that he's fallen in love with her, but it is not an unwelcome realization. He cares for her deeply and wants the best for her, and he knows that sooner or later he's going to have to tell her. Eris finishes up her interview and turns to Ari, offering him her hand. He takes it and they make their way through the rest of the carpet. Ari introduces her to a lot of people, but when he leads her over to where Harry Styles is standing, she resists. She panics and tells Ari that she's been a fan of Harry Styles forever and that she's going to vomit on his shoes if she talks to him. Ari counters with the fact that she'd been a fan of his and that turned out fine. It's too late for them to turn away though because Harry has seen Ari and makes his way over to them. Harry wraps Ari in a hug asking how he and the girls are doing, Ari then turns and introduces Eris. She's bright red but greets Harry, a hand resting on her bump. Harry and Eris chat for a few minutes and he congratulates her on the pregnancy. After a few minutes, Harry is called away by someone and Eris turns to Ari and says that she's going to murder him and that she was the most embarrassed she had ever been in her life at that moment. Ari laughs and assures her that she did fine. She then tells him that his song "Matilda" helped her through her darkest moments after her family kicked her out. Ari tucks that piece of information in the back of his mind.

The rest of the red carpet almost goes off without a hitch, but as they near the doors, Eris sees Isaac and stops dead in her tracks. He's with his new girlfriend, a young blonde woman who is very pretty. Eris's breathing starts to get irregular, and Ari moves her to the side just out of view. He reassures her that he's not going to let anything happen to her and that if she doesn't want to talk to him, he'll do it for her. She takes a few deep breaths and with a look of grim determination she sets off towards the door, Ari right in step with her. Isaac is furious when he sees her approaching, and mutters something to his girlfriend and she scurries inside without him. Eris stands in front of Isaac and stares him down. Isaac

starts to say something but Eris cuts him off, telling him that he had his chance to play the hero and he lost it the moment he pushed her away. At this, Isaac's face falls, and he said very quietly that he did what he thought was best for Melanie. Eris answers him and asks him if he thought about what would be best for her. He has no response to that, and Eris tells him to never contact her again and that she hopes he's happy.

The Oscars go off without a hitch after that, and Ari wins an Oscar for "Best Story". He's exuberant but turns down every party invitation. Eris questions him on it and he tells her that he knows she's getting tired and would rather have a quiet night in with her than get drunk with a bunch of celebrities. Eris beams at him, and they go back to the hotel. Eris asks Ari to unzip her dress for her as she cannot do it herself, and he does it with such reverence that she gets choked up. She turns around and looks up at him glassy-eyed. He asks her what's wrong and she asks if she can be honest with him. He says she can always tell him anything. Eris lets the shoe drop and tells him that she thinks she's fallen in love with him. Ari blinks at her for a few seconds before telling her that he's so relieved to hear that because he's in love with her too. Eris is confused and asks if he's serious. Ari laughs and grabs her hands, telling her that he's never been so serious about anything in his life. Eris tells him that she's messed up and not easy to love, Ari says that he's never loved anyone as fast in his entire life and that every day he wakes up and he's with her, he thanks God that she's with him. Eris is crying now and so is he and they share their first kiss together.

They fly back to New Zealand the next day and when they land, Eris's phone lights up with a text – it's a long apology from Isaac. Eris reads it aloud to Ari, and it's a really nice apology. He ends it by saying he hopes she's happy too, and that's all he's ever wanted for her. Eris cries a little and Ari holds her. Filming resumes for *Anchor's Away*, and Eris is busy until she hits 30 weeks and the end of filming. She's teary-eyed as the cast party goes on and everyone starts to turn in for their early flights the next morning. Eris and Jon have a long goodbye and he promises to visit after the babies are born. Eris turns in for the night and takes a picture of her bump to send to her mom. They've been healing their relationship, and there have been some bumps in the road, but they're both willing to adapt and talk about things so it's

been a real positive in Eris's life. Her mom and dad are coming to New Zealand at the end of June in anticipation of the babies' birth. Her head is full of thoughts, so she walks to the beach to get some fresh sea air and clear her head. She's sitting in the sand, the wind whipping through her hair when she feels someone behind her. She turns around and it's Ari, hands in his pockets, walking towards her. He gives her a big smile and settles down beside her, asking if everything's okay. She says she's more than okay and rests her head on his shoulder. They sit in silence for a while before Ari shifts and asks if he can ask her something. She says sure and shifts her body towards him. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small box. Eris's heart is in her throat. Ari gives a beautiful little speech about his love for her and asks if he would do him the greatest honor of his life and be his wife. Sobbing she says yes, and he puts the ring on her finger. She hears cheering and turns and sees Kaia and Hana standing a way back. She laughs and gets up to go hug them.

The wedding is planned for the end of June, so her family will be there. Lily and Eris's sister are invited as well as a few of Ari's close friends. As the date for the wedding draws closer, and subsequently Eris's due date of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, Eris starts to get more nervous. She tells Ari to pick the first song because she has six options, and she can't make a choice at the moment. She has a wedding dress made of champagne-colored fabric and lace, it's loose like her Oscar dress but has short sleeves. She feels beautiful in it and her mom cried when she face-timed her in it. The end of June arrives before Eris and Ari know it, and Ari and Eris pick up her parents and her sister from the airport. Her parents are in tears when they hug her, and her mom squeezes her so tight. Eris cries too and then hugs her sister. They drive back to the Airbnb her family is staying in and they hang out for a few hours, swapping stories and childhood memories.

The day of the wedding is perfect – clear blue skies and slightly on the cold side but not too bad. Their venue is a local barn, one that had heating in it as per Eris's request. The ceremony is beautiful, Eris and Ari each write their own vows and neither of them makes it their vows without crying. They kiss and everyone cheers, Eris's mom the loudest of all. They take pictures and then step outside as the venue transforms into a reception-ready area. Eris and Ari make their grand entrance and dance their first dance.

Ari tells Eris to close her eyes and open them when she hears the music start. The opening chords play and her heart stutters in her chest, she opens her eyes, and Ari is smiling, telling her that he chose the song that got her through her hardest times to remind her of all the good times that are ahead. He chose “Matilda”, and when he spins her around, she sees that not only did he pick that song he actually somehow convinced Harry Styles to come and sing it live. She looks at him with widened eyes and he laughs as she mouths that she’s going to kill him. The rest of the night is beautiful, and Eris feels so lucky and loved.

Eris’s due date draws closer, and then she passes it. Her belly looks like a watermelon that’s about to burst, and she tells Ari she’s over this whole pregnancy thing. He laughs and offers to rub her feet, which she happily accepts. She’s getting ready for bed on July sixth when her water breaks. She shouts for Ari, and he rushes in, seeing her standing, pants soaked in a puddle. His eyes widen, he grabs her go bag, helps her get into a new pair of pants, calls Tessa and has her come over and stay with the girls, and rushes Eris off to the hospital. Eris is in a lot of pain as the contractions start and Eris is gripping Ari’s hand like a vice. Between contractions, Eris calls her mom and tells her the news. Ari can hear her mom shouting on the phone and sees Eris smile.

Eris is in labor for 12 hours before it’s time to push. Ari is there for her every step of the way encouraging her, putting her hair in a braid, wiping down her sweaty face with a damp cloth, and feeding her ice chips. Baby A is born, and it’s a girl. Eris starts pushing again and a few minutes later, Baby B is born and it’s a girl as well. Eris is relieved for it to be done but then panics and tells the nurse she feels like she needs to push again. The nurse is confused, saying that the placenta shouldn’t be ready just yet, but Eris starts pushing regardless the doctor shouts something about a third baby, and Eris and Ari yell. A few minutes later, Baby C is born and is also a girl. Eris is sobbing in excitement and confusion at how they missed an entire third baby during her entire pregnancy. Ari kisses her, telling her she did such a good job, and soon they’re laying all three babies on Eris’s chest. She looks down at the three babies, and then looks up at Ari, smiling at him with tears in her eyes.

The epilogue takes place five years after the last chapter. Eris calls out for her children (named Honey, Clover, and Matilda), as well as Hana and Kaia, telling them that dinner is almost ready. Ari comes in and kisses her on the cheek, helping her set the table as she's 28 weeks pregnant with their child. Ari's secretly hoping for a boy but will be happy regardless of the outcome, Eris found out the gender without him and knows that it's a boy, but she's keeping it a secret from him. All the girls run in and take their seats. Eris dishes out the triplet's food and they thank her. When she's done, she passes a basket of rolls to Hana and Kaia, they thank her, calling her mom, and Eris's heart does a little dance as it does every time they call her that. It is comical when Tessa comes over though, as Hana and Kaia call them both mom and it has caused some hysterical confusion in some instances. Eris looks over her family as they eat and tears spring into her eyes. She doesn't know how she got this lucky.

**Playlist Outline:**

In This Shirt by The Irrepressibles - Eris's point of view (POV): Eris takes in New York as they drive closer and closer.

Coup d'état by Alyssa Lazar – Eris's POV: When Eris meets Ari for the first time.

“Do You Wanna Be Friends?” – Ari's POV: When Ari meets Eris for the first time.

Dance The Night Away by Andrew Shubin – Isaac's POV: Isaac after watching Ari and Eris together and decides to make the first move.

golden hour by JVKE – Isaac's POV: Isaac confesses his feelings to Eris, and they spend the night together.

Romeo by Bryce Xavier – Eris's POV: Eris watches Isaac with Melanie and she starts to feel him pull away, but she desperately wants him to stay.

Getting Older by Emma Oliver – Eris's POV: Eris gives her testimony and later hears the verdict.

Astronomy by Conan Gray – Isaac's POV: The pivotal moment when Isaac realizes to keep Melanie and be in her life would require him to lose Eris.

doomsday by Lizzy McAlpine – Eris's POV: The breakup.

Cleopatra by The Lumineers – Isaac’s POV: The breakup.

right where you left me by Taylor Swift – Eris’s POV: Eris mulls over everything that had happened between her and Isaac for the first week she’s at Ari’s. She wonders if any of it was real.

. by Dodie – Eris’ POV: Eris watches a movie with Hana and then later breaks down in front of Ari.

Atom 4 by Sleeping At Last – Eris’s POV: Eris’s first ultrasound and the news she’s having twins.

Someone To Stay by Vancouver Sleep Clinic – Ari’s POV: Ari tells Eris that she’s welcome in his home for however long she wants to stay.

I know The End by Phoebe Bridgers – Eris’s POV: The first time Eris goes to the beach with Ari and she’s starting to let go of Isaac and realize that he did what he thought he had to do.

Apple Pie by Lizzy McAlpine – Eris’s POV: Eris decorating the tree with the girls and she’s trying to decide what she wants her future to look like. She wouldn’t be too upset if Ari was there with her.

Air So Sweet by Dodie – Ari’s POV: Ari watches Eris decorate with the girls, and he feels the same rush of emotion he felt the first time he met Eris.

Ready Now by Dodie – Eris’s POV: Eris’s first realization that she might have feelings for Ari.

Same Boat by Lizzy McAlpine – Eris’s POV: Ari reveals his Christmas gift for Eris and by his gift, she’s starting to realize that she might mean something to him too.

In Agreement by Lizzy McAlpine – Eris’s POV: After Eris has rekindled her relationship with her mom, she finds herself telling her mom about Ari all the time.

September Song by Agnes Obel – Ari’s POV: Eris asks him to keep her company while he sleeps, and he agrees. They never sleep separately again.

Sweet Nothing by Taylor Swift – Eris’s POV: Eris realizes that her feelings for Ari are real and that she can’t ignore them for much longer.

Metamorphosis by Emiliano Blangero – Eris’s POV: Isaac calls Eris after he realizes that she’s most likely pregnant with his baby.

the 1 by Taylor Swift – Eris’s POV: Eris’s confrontation of Isaac at the Oscars.

In Case You don't Live Forever by Ben Platt – Ari's POV: Ari's confession to Eris of his feelings and how he's in love with her.

I hear a Symphony by Cody Fry – Eris's POV: Eris tells Ari she's in love with him too.

CHICKEN TENDIES by Clinton Kane – Isaac's POV: The last chapter from Isaac's point of view. Isaac drafts up and sends the text to Eris, finally letting her go, and telling her that he wants her to be happy no matter what. He realizes what he lost and what he'll never regain but he's decided to let go.

Let's Get Married by Bleachers – Ari's POV: Ari proposes to Eris.

Turning Page by Sleeping At Last – Eris's POV: Ari and Eris exchange their wedding vows.

Matilda by Harry Styles – Eris's POV: The first dance.

Intertwined by Dodie – Eris's POV: The first night of the honeymoon when Ari tells Eris that he's not a religious man, but he thanks God every time he sees her.

Photograph by Cody Fry – Ari's POV: The morning after the wedding when Ari wakes to find Eris already awake, wrapped in a blanket, reading a book on the balcony.

Sweetest Devotion by Adele – Eris's POV: Eris is in the last few days of the pregnancy and Hana and Kaia ask her if they can call her mom as they do for Tessa. Eris happily obliges.

Bundle of Joy by Michael Giacchino – Eris's POV: The birth of Eris's triplets.

Seneca by Novo Amor – Eris's POV: The epilogue.

**Digital Supplements:**

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2S6gEYSYLMW04HKt24Ziob?si=c1d811e1246a4a07>