

A Song For Elodie

Chapter One

“Darling, you’re my, my, my lover.”

“Yes Elodie, perfect.” Alexis, her singing teacher, clapped enthusiastically. “You’re so ready for the end of year concert.”

“Thanks!” Elodie swung her luscious chocolate locks around and packed away her sheet music. Suddenly she remembered the important thing her mother had reminded her to do. “Oh, Alexis, remember this is my last singing lesson with you? I’m moving to Melbourne early next week.”

“Oh heavens, I knew I’d forgotten something,” sighed Alexis, clapping her hand to her head in exasperation. “Well, I hope you have a safe trip!” She hugged Elodie tightly.

Elodie returned the hug enthusiastically. “Thanks for everything.”

Alexis laughed. “It was my pleasure. I wanted to give you something.” She pulled out a small oval necklace outlined in a swirly border. A pair of tiny red shoes was attached to the top and inscribed inside the necklace were the words *You’ve always had the power.*

“I love it! Thank you so much, Alexis!” squealed Elodie; *The Wizard of Oz* was one of her favourite old movies. She picked up her satchel and made her way to the door.

“Bye Elodie, have a safe trip!” called Alexis.

“See you soon Alexis,” waved Elodie.

Elodie stepped out into the cool autumn evening. Her best friend Mannix was, as always, waiting on the bench outside the studio, reading a paperback novel. He slammed the book shut when he heard her footsteps and leapt up.

“Thank goodness, you took AGES,” stated Mannix, throwing his arms into the air dramatically.

Elodie laughed her twinkly fairy laugh. “You know it was only half an hour, it’s never that long when you’re doing something.”

Mannix grinned from ear to ear, teeth revealing metal braces. “Yes, that’s why I’m your best friend. To make unnecessary jokes whenever there’s a gap in the conversation.”

They giggled for a while together. “You know we’ll always be best friends, right?” asked Elodie warily.

Mannix gave her a ‘look’. “Um, I think you must be halfway to Planet Duh. Of course, we’ll always be best mates!”

“No, but seriously? Even when we move?” repeated Elodie. “I heard that long distance relationships never work.”

Mannix looked deep into her eyes and with obvious sincerity, he said clearly, “Yes Ellie, I will always be your best friend. What would this friendship bracelet be for?” He fingered the brown and orange woven piece of jewellery around his wrist. It had a charm reading Pals4Life in the shape of a triangle. “Plus, that’s only romantic ones.”

Elodie smiled. She held up her bracelet, which she never took off, and now in the dusky evening air, it appeared quite worn. “We’ll definitely keep in touch?”

“Yes, we will text every day and Facetime every Friday night. It’ll be like what we used to do after your singing lessons,” pondered Mannix, staring up at the sky. “And you know what, it doesn’t just have to be on Fridays.”

As the pair walked along the busy main road, the lights of the city twinkled in the distance. The sky was fading to a rich navy blue, dotted by the stars a million miles away. Purple clouds dispersed to reveal the moon, basking in an elegant light. Elodie sighed, keeping in time with Mannix’s footsteps beside her, something they’d always done.

###

Friday 12 April 2019

Dear Diary,

Today was my last singing lesson with Alexis. I don’t think there will be quite another like her. I’m going to miss her, sure as two and two make four.

I’m super excited about the move to Melbourne. My new school is Kilbreda College, and it sounds great. I visited the website and they even have a choir. I hope I can join.

Everyone is so sad that I'm going, even though I told them like three weeks ago. Especially Mrs Beckman. She told me she's going to miss my knowledge in Art class, and honestly, I'll miss her too.

Lady, our new puppy, seems to know that a change is coming, as she pattered into my room and clambered onto my bed, long fluffy caramel ears drooped over my leg. I stroked her soft back and told her that everything would be the same, it's just a new place, and you'll keep your old bed and toys. She seemed to perk up at that and jumped down to chew on her favourite rainbow hedgehog. I can hear Abyan and Savannah-May quarrelling with Mum in the next room because they need to take down all their pictures and certificates. They were asked to do that last week. The only person who isn't that stressed out about this move is myself and Ryker, my brother, but well, he's only seven and couldn't care for anything else but playing Explorers with Daisy, Mannix's younger sister. My dad Sebastijan, comes from Croatia. He's already in Melbourne. He's lucky he can't see all this last-minute chaos. Abyan and Savannah-May are twelve and complete opposites. Abby loves anything to do with dance and is the girly twin, while Savvy is such a tomboy, always climbing trees and playing soccer. She never EVER wears skirts or dresses, whereas Abby's wardrobe is packed to bursting point with them. My mum Teresa loves to paint, so our house is full of her artworks and now there are three huge boxes full of them.

Well, I think that's everything. Note to self: finish algebra homework to hand in on the last day of school otherwise Mr Girth will be on the warpath!

Lots of love

Ellie x

Chapter Two

The plane jolted as the wheels scraped the runway. Elodie zipped her phone in her pocket and peered eagerly out the window. It had been just over two hours since they said goodbye to Brisbane and boarded the plane, and the midday sun was gleaming brightly. As the announcement came stating they could start disembarking the plane, Elodie stood up and nearly fell over; her legs were so numb that with every step felt as though she was stepping deeper and deeper

into icy water, and her feet were tingling with the horrid sensation of pins and needles.

“Mum, wake up,” whispered Elodie, gently shaking her mother.

Teresa Moreno stirred feebly. “Hello darling.” She cupped her daughter’s cheek tenderly. “Are we here?”

“Yuh-huh. I really need a drink but my water bottle’s empty.”

“Okay, you can buy a bottle of water at the newsagent’s in the airport. We need to get moving.” Teresa adjusted herself so the man next to her could get past.

“Ryker, Abyan, could you please wake up your sister?” she added, speaking across the aisle. In response to this, Abyan and Ryker began poking Savannah-May and shaking her violently. Elodie rolled her eyes.

###

The Uber pulled up at a gorgeous modern house, with a perfectly manicured garden and wide clear windows. Savannah-May exploded out of the car, raced up to the front door and tugged at the door handle.

“Hang on Sav, you don’t have a key!” laughed Abyan. “Mum, could we have the key please?”

“Of course, darling,” replied Teresa, passing the key over to Abyan, who in turn bounded out of the Uber and handed Savannah-May the key. She turned it in the shiny silver keyhole and the huge white door clicked open.

“Woah look at this house,” marvelled Elodie in complete awe. Glossy white walls surrounded her as she stood in the entrance hall and dark European oak floors were smooth under her feet. An archway showed her a glimpse of a wide open-plan kitchen and living room, while a staircase on the left matching the floors would surely take her to her new room and all the kids’ rooms.

“Oh, my goodness,” stated Teresa in awe. She had just hauled all the suitcases into the hall. “This is amazing.” She peered into a door on the right and gasped at a huge master bedroom, complete with lush grey carpet and vast walk-in wardrobe.

“I dibs on the biggest room!” yelled Abyan, rushing up the stairs.

“No way, Abyan, I’m having it! As the eldest in the family, I lay claim to it!” shouted Elodie. She whipped around to her mother. “Please Mum?”

Teresa let out a laugh like her daughter’s. “Yes, you can sweetheart. As long as it’s not my master bedroom!”

Elodie seized her suitcase and backpack and darted up the stairs, hot on the heels of her younger sibling.

Her new room was blanketed in the same lavish grey threads on the floor as her parent’s room. It was accompanied by a floor-to-ceiling wardrobe on one whole side, and another wall was occupied by a huge modern window seat. Once the furniture arrived it would be magnificent. Slightly marring the look was the large mountains of cardboard boxes containing her possessions.

Elodie sat crossed-legged on the floor and took out her phone. She disabled airplane mode and flicked through her emails. To her surprise, there was a new one in her inbox. It read, ‘Welcome to your new school! From your student ambassador.’ Intrigued, Elodie clicked on the message. This is what it stated:

‘Hi Elodie! My name is Layla Jackson and I am going to be your student ambassador once you arrive at Kilbreda. I’m excited for it and I hope you are too! Basically, what I will do is help you get settled into your new school. I also invite you to hang out with my group of friends once you gain more confidence and comfort here.

See you soon! Layla Jackson.’

Elodie pursed her lips in a strange look of satisfaction. She placed her phone on top of one of the boxes and pulled her diary out of her backpack. She needed to find a hiding place, one that not even her mum would discover. While Elodie was wandering around the room, she tripped on something hidden. She bent down to investigate. The hidden something was a tiny wooden knob. Elodie tugged at it and it opened to reveal a square hole surrounded by a dusty pale pink blanket. The previous occupant of the room must have installed it here. Elodie smiled. This was the perfect place to hide her diary.

Chapter Three

Elodie jumped off the school bus, thanking the bus driver as she went. The gates of the school were big, and beyond them she could see a grand old building, whose grounds were filled with students and staff going about their business. Suddenly a blonde whirlwind came and attack-hugged Elodie, who was knocked over in the process.

“SQUEEE! I’m so excited to meet you!” shrieked the whirlwind. Elodie picked herself up off the paved ground and saw a short, fair-headed girl dressed in a grey blazer and ruby-and white checked school dress.

“Um hi,” muttered Elodie, still a little shocked by the over-enthusiastic greeting. “My name is Elodie Moreno.”

“I know, because I’m Layla Jackson, and I’m your student ambassador!” squealed Layla. “I’m here to take you on a tour of the school! Are you ready?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” said Elodie softly, following Layla into the main building.

###

Half an hour later, Elodie was finally shown to her homeroom. On the door it was labelled: Year 9 Classroom 17. It was full of students listening intently. A tall male teacher looked up from his desk, where he was marking the roll.

“Hello, Elodie, my name is Mr Bullock. I’m your homeroom teacher for the rest of the year,” said the teacher.

“Hi nice to meet you, sir,” replied Elodie, shaking his hand.

“Your locker is just in the corner over there and I’ve seated you next to Layla, who is of course your student ambassador,” explained Mr Bullock, pointing in the direction.

“Okay thanks,” said Elodie, moving quickly over to the locker and placing her bag in there. She then walked to the empty desk and sat down. Layla herself came over a few seconds later. Just then there was the sound of a phone ringing, as an announcement came over the loudspeaker.

‘Could all students willing to join the school choir please come to the auditorium at recess? Thank you.’

Elodie's eyes lit up. This was her big moment, to show the school what she had to offer.

"Are you going to try out for the choir?" whispered Layla.

"Yes I am," muttered Elodie happily.

"Well I hope you get in!" murmured Layla softly. "Honestly, I'm more of a theatre girl myself."

"Quiet please girls," called Mr Bullock. "And Elodie," he added, "welcome to the school."

###

"Hi Mannix!" said Elodie cheerily through the computer.

"Hey Elodie, how was your first day at school?" asked Mannix.

"Yeah pretty good, this girl named Layla is, like, my student ambassador. She took me on a tour of the school."

"Cool! What's it like? As small as ours back here in Brisbane?"

Elodie laughed. "No, it's huge. I'm already lost." She paused. "How's Sophie and Jake? Managing with three instead of four?"

Now it was Mannix's turn to laugh. "Yep, Sophie misses having a girl around, but you know how spontaneous she is."

"Yeah, touché."

"Elodie, sweetie! Dinner's ready!" called Teresa faintly from the kitchen.

"I'll be there in twenty nanoseconds! Mannix," she added, directing this at her best friend, "I need to go. Say hi to Mrs Beckman for me, and Sophie and Jake!"

"Okay, sure! Talk soon?"

"Yeah, how about next week?"

"Let's do it! See you then."

"Bye Elodie!"

"See ya later potata." With that, Elodie shut her laptop lid and headed downstairs.

###

Tuesday 16th April 2019

Dear Diary,

Layla seems nice. She introduced me to her group of friends. They are Emma, Sarah, Gabriella, Josephine, Khloe, Charlie, Teagan, Peyton, Genevieve, McKenna and Audrina. I'm worried that I might get them all mixed up, because I'm used to just the four of us. It used to be Elodie, Sophie, Mannix, Jake. A perfect quartet. So, you can see why I'm concerned. I guess I just don't hang around with boys anymore.

The school is really lijepo. That's a word that Dad taught me in Croatian, it means nice. The auditorium is amazing. I went there for the choir auditions. The music teacher, Ms Heikkila, is so kind. She said I have an incredible voice and is getting a solo for sure if I get in.

Abyan and Savannah-May are going to Mentone Primary, as is Ryker. They say their teachers are great, but the twins have been split up. Honestly that was smart of whoever organizes the classes, because back in Brisbane they got in quite a few arguments during class. Mum also went to her new office as a graphic designer. She showed them a few of her paintings and all her colleagues adored them. Her new boss even asked for one to hang in her office.

I think that's all. Note to self: your locker number is 45.17 and your classroom is the one with the red stairs next it.

Lots of love

Ellie x

Chapter Four

“YES!” screamed Elodie in her head, as Ms Heikkila read out the list of who made it into the choir. Her name was one of the first.

“Thank you, children,” concluded Ms Heikkila. “Can I ask that all students who did not make it into the choir this season, to not give up because there is always next season. Work hard, stay positive and make it happen.”

The rejected students left the auditorium as the choir stayed behind.

“Okay choir.” Ms Heikkila clapped her hands. She was a young, energetic lady of twenty-five, with a powerful strong voice and dancing blue eyes.

“Rehearsals are twice a week on Monday and Thursday recess. Please make sure you come to at least one per week, as any failures to meet that expectation will

be asked to leave.” She passed around a sheet of paper with the lyrics for Kelly Clarkson’s ‘Stronger (What Doesn’t Kill You).’ “Please learn these lyrics off by heart, practice at home and I will see you on Thursday!”

Elodie stood up and began to make her way towards the exit, until she heard Ms Heikkila call her name. “Elodie, sweetie, could you please stay behind for a moment?”

“Sure.” Elodie walked over to her teacher.

“Honey, you have probably the best voice here. I’ve never seen such a dazzling talent before,” said Ms Heikkila softly. “As a result of that, I’m going to give you the solo.”

Elodie gasped, speechless. “Really?”

“Yes, really,” nodded Ms Heikkila. “I only give solos to Year Tens and up, but you’re so much more talented and passionate than them. You can do better, I have faith in you.”

“Thank you so much, miss,” exclaimed Elodie. “I promise I will not let you down.”

Ms Heikkila winked. “I hope not. Now go and enjoy your recess.”

Elodie grabbed her satchel and sprinted out of the auditorium, eager to tell Layla and her friends.

###

“I got in!” yelled Elodie, unable to contain her excitement as she slid onto the picnic table next to Khloe.

“Yay, good for you Elodie!” replied Layla.

“Oh my gosh Elodie, that’s fantastic!” declared Emma.

“Great job,” gushed Peyton. Khloe flung her arms around Elodie.

“I have a great idea,” stated McKenna. “Let’s go to the smoothie place after school to celebrate Elodie’s success!”

There were cries of agreement around the table.

“Okay that sounds fun, I’ve never been there,” said Elodie.

“You’re going to love it Elodie,” sighed Audrina. “Their Tropical Tango is the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“No way Jose, the Strawberry Slide is the one to catch,” argued Genevieve.

“Excuse me? Wait till you try the Pineapple Punch!” insisted Sarah.

Elodie giggled. “Don’t worry. I’ll try them all.”

###

They walked together as a group, taking up most of the footpath in a blob. Gabriella showed Elodie pictures of her baby brother, Charlie babbled away about her new budgie, while Teagan walked arm-in-arm with her.

Elodie spied a massive smoothie cup balanced on a roof in neon colours. “Isn’t that a safety precaution?” she said pointing to it.

“Yep!” shouted Josephine from the back of the group. “When they were building it a LOT of people were against it because they thought it would fall down.”

They entered the smoothie bar and Elodie was immediately drawn to the bright coloured stools, the neon lighted menu and the cool low hanging pendant lights. Elodie examined the menu curiously, trying to decide which one to have. She didn’t notice Sarah bending down to her feet, untying her shoelaces.

“So, are you still going to get all of them, Elodie?” asked Layla mischievously.

“No, I think I’ll get the Passionfruit Plop.” Elodie pulled out her purse.

“I’ll pay,” said Layla, getting out her own wallet. “Put it away. My treat for your success.”

“Oh, Layla, really?” hesitated Elodie.

“Yes, and don’t even think about paying me back,” laughed Layla.

Once the girl at the counter called out their order, Elodie offered to go up and get the drinks. As she was walking back with the tray, she tripped over her own feet and the trays went flying.

A great peal of mirth echoed through the smoothie bar, and Elodie lay on the floor covered in coloured, scented gloop. The tray was somehow on the other side of the cafe. She looked up and saw Teagan with her phone, obviously snapping photos of the disaster. The rest of the girls were falling over each other, laughing hysterically. Audrina came over and held out her pale hand to help Elodie. She was the only one not laughing, and Elodie could feel her cheeks

going crimson red. People were staring at them, some murmuring behind their hands.

“Thanks,” she mumbled. She didn’t feel like sitting with the girls anymore.

“No problem,” whispered Audrina. She walked at Elodie’s side to a different table, and even helped her remove most of the smoothies from her face.

Layla looked so angry she seemed like she would spit at Audrina any second.

Chapter Five

Elodie ran as fast as a cheetah. It was only her third week at her new school, and she was already late. She had to catch the bus before it left. Unfortunately, she couldn’t quite make it, and got there only to see the bus pull away, loaded with students. Elodie groaned. This left her walking the two kilometres to school.

When she got through the gates, recess was already in session. On her way to the office, she could see groups of students huddling and snickering together. They seemed to be looking at a video. Elodie decided to ignore it, it wasn’t her concern, and headed to the office to sign a late arrival form.

When she came out, a year eight girl noticed her and gave her friend a nudge. She pointed at her and they fell over each other in a series of guffaws.

Suddenly it hit Elodie as sudden and swift as a cyclone.

They haven’t.

She charged over to Layla and the other girls, who were also giggling furiously.

“Did you...?” stammered Elodie.

Layla was too busy ridiculing the video of Elodie at the smoothie bar to immediately answer her question. When she finally calmed down, she said, “Of course we did. How could we resist?” Her face was suddenly sneering.

“Where did you post it?” demanded Elodie, shaking with rage.

“It’s everywhere!” chimed in Emma. “Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok. You’re going viral!” Then she collapsed into cackles again.

Elodie was quivering with anger. She looked Layla hard in the face.

“You’re going to regret the day you chose to cross Elodie Moreno’s path, Layla,” snapped Elodie. “Just remember that.”

Layla stood up, smirking now. "Really? Because I know you thought we were friends. Obviously, you were wrong about that."

Elodie felt like she'd been slapped hard across the face. She stormed off.

"See ya, Slop Girl!" shouted Peyton, much to the amusement of the girls.

The only thing Elodie didn't notice was Audrina, standing at the back of the group, clearly not happy with what had been done.

###

All day, Elodie endured the taunts and comments about the video. Everyone, even the teachers, though they didn't show it, seemed to have seen the video. Indeed, in class Elodie wasn't free of it. In French, Layla, who sat next to her in all her classes, whispered jeering comments in her ear all day. Elodie shrugged it off, deciding to keep her head down and silently tolerate it all.

Once she got home, she threw her bag in the cupboard and headed upstairs to the sanctuary of her bedroom.

###

Wednesday 7th May 2019

Dear Diary,

Today was terrible. I got to school late and everyone had seen the video of me tripping over at the smoothie bar and ending up with gloop all over me. I heard my phone ping in my pocket on the bus home from school and saw on Instagram a horrible cartoon of me with juice all over my face, obviously drawn by my so-called 'friends.' It had received more than fifty comments and likes, and way more views. The whole school had seen it.

I haven't told my mum or dad though. They are so busy, and I don't want to bother them. They haven't even realised or noticed anything, even at dinner tonight. I'm trying to disguise it. Honestly, this isn't that bad, and I can manage it. We'll just have to wait and see.

Lots of love

Ellie x

###

31/4/19 8:23pm

MannixK: hi

EllieMoreno: hi

MannixK: how's it going??

EllieMoreno: fine. how is evry1?

MannixK: sophie 'n' jake say hey

EllieMoreno: cool. how r ur parents?

MannixK: yeah, they miss u being around evry other day.

EllieMoreno: so do mine. U no those girls im hanging out with?

MannixK: yah? What about them?

EllieMoreno: actually, dont worry. 4get i said it.

MannixK: said WHAAAT??!!

EllieMoreno: lol. facetime tmrw?

MannixK: sure why?

EllieMoreno: my sister who is at this moment infringing my private space and reading my text ova my shoulder says my parents say i need 2 get ready 4 bed so i g2g! Gnight!

MannixK: Yas, talk tmrw! see ya!

EllieMoreno: bye bye bye.

Elodie switched off her phone and placed it on her bedside table, newly installed in her room. Then she heard another ping, so she flicked the screen open and saw her inbox full. Full of horrible messages from Layla.

'You're ugly!'

'No one likes you anymore'

'Why don't you just go back to where you came from, Slop Girl'

'You can't sing to save your life.'

Elodie deleted them all and turned her phone off. A single tear ran down her cheek. She heard a tap on her door and quickly wiped it away. Teresa entered, wrapped in a flamingo-patterned dressing gown.

"You alright sweetie?" she asked, sitting down on the bed and stroking her daughter's hair. "Maybe go to sleep now. You seem tired."

"Yeah, I'm just adjusting to a new school." Elodie snuggled down into her quilt.

“Honey, I’m so proud of you for being so great with your sisters and your brother. I know it was hard moving to a completely different place, but you’re being so good about this.”

“Thanks Mum.”

Teresa planted a small kiss on her daughter’s forehead. “Sweet dreams.”

“Goodnight, Mum.”

Elodie rolled over. Suddenly she didn’t feel so great about this new arrangement.

Chapter Six

“Okay, children, that’s a wrap for today. Make sure to practice those last few bars for the chorus at home. See you next week!”

Elodie stashed her music in her bag and headed out the door, ‘Stronger (What Doesn’t Kill You)’ stuck in her head. Humming softly, she looked up and found her path blocked by Layla and her gang.

One whole term had passed since the video had been posted on social media, and still Layla and the girls had not moved on. The rest of the school couldn’t care less, because things like that were old news.

“Hey Elodie, or should I say The Screeching Cat!” Layla burst into cackles, as did the rest of her posse.

“Leave me alone, Layla,” whispered Elodie, trying to edge past her.

“You know what, I don’t think I want to,” sneered Layla, menacingly taking another step towards her. “You think you’re so perfect.” She shoved Elodie to the ground, scraping her elbow on the hard asphalt. Elodie tried to get away but Khloe pulled her satchel off her shoulder forcefully.

“Oh, Little Miss Popstar’s been doing her homework has she? Learning a new song,” smirked Josephine. “Whoops-a-daisy!” The sheet fluttered to the ground in pieces.

Elodie started hyperventilating, and her palms began to sweat. She didn’t know how to get out of this. They were surrounding her now.

Layla stared her down. “I suggest you run. We’re going to bash you till you’re just a pile of slop...oh wait, you already are!” She threw her head back and laughed, as did the other girls.

“I don’t know why you bothered coming to this school, Elodie,” grimaced Sarah. “No one likes you. You’re just an ignored pile of slop on the ground.” She grabbed Elodie’s shoulders, just as Genevieve seized her wrist roughly. Layla punched Elodie in the nose and blood poured down her face. The rest of the girls circled her cackling like a coven of witches.

“LEAVE ME ALONE, LAYLA!!” screamed Elodie. She wrestled herself out of and ran past Peyton, past McKenna, and to the sanctuary of the girl’s bathroom.

“Elodie!” yelled Audrina, and began to follow her, ignoring Layla’s screeches of “Don’t follow her Audrina! You know the consequences.”

###

Audrina entered the bathroom to the sound of loud, gulping sobs. A couple of drops of blood stained the floor. She looked in each of the stalls until she found Elodie in the last one, mopping her nose with a long stream of toilet paper.

“Are you okay?” asked Audrina cautiously, kneeling in front of her.

Elodie raised her head out of her hands, face and eyes blotchy and red. “What do you think?”

“I-i...” hesitated Audrina.

“You hang out with them every day, and see them bullying me, and what do you do?” demanded Elodie.

“I’m sorry, I know it’s wrong...” began Audrina.

“Audrina, hanging around with them is just as bad!” yelled Elodie. “Why do you still mix with them, if you know it’s bad?”

Audrina hesitated.

“Don’t answer, I know it’s for your own popularity,” snapped Elodie. “Just leave me alone. I don’t need your false apologies right now.”

“But Elodie...” stammered Audrina.

“LEAVE ME ALONE!” screamed Elodie, the bathroom ringing with the shrillness of her shriek.

“I’m sorry,” whispered Audrina, covering her mouth with her hands.

“It’s not enough,” was all Elodie could say. She hurried out of the stall and ran to class.

Audrina slowly leant against the wall and sank down to the ground, ashamed of herself. How was she going to get out of this mess?

Chapter Seven

Meanwhile, Elodie had made it to class delayed, earning her a quizzical look from the teacher. She slid into her seat and took out her books. Then she felt her phone vibrate in her pocket. She stealthily peeked at it and at the top of the screen it noted there were twenty-four new messages.

Every single one of them was from Layla.

‘You’re so annoying!’

‘I h@ u!’

‘Get out of my school, loser!’

‘Why don’t you do everybody a favour and leave?’

‘You’re so fat!’

‘Why do you even bother?’

Elodie shook them off, deleting them so she would never have to read them again. But deep down, her heart was aching with the pain of it all.

The final bell rang a few minutes later. As Elodie headed to the gate was surprised to see her mum, sisters and brother waiting there. Nose bruised and aching, she stumbled over to her family.

“Hi, sweetheart!” cried Teresa, planting a compassionate kiss on her daughter’s head.

‘Hey, Mum,’ whispered Elodie. Abyan hugged her tightly but Elodie couldn’t be bothered, nor had she the energy to return the hug.

“Hey Elodie, guess what?” exclaimed Ryker as they walked to the car. “I got an award at school today!”

“Good job, little bro,” murmured Elodie, stumbling along the pavement.

“Elodie, honey what happened to your nose?” concerned Teresa, trying to look at her daughter’s face.

“It’s just my normal nose,” shrugged Elodie, but her mother still managed to lift her chin up.

“Elodie, you’ve been very moody lately, and you’re distancing yourself from us. Is there anything happening at school?” asked Teresa. “Something you haven’t told us?”

“Mum, I’m fine!” yelled Elodie aggressively. She raced ahead to walk by herself, but not before she heard Savannah-May wonder, “Is she still hanging out with those girls, Mum?”

Elodie stared at herself in the mirror. Her face and skin, usually a healthy olive-oil brown, had faded so it was now pale and wan. There were huge bags under her eyes, which had lost their forest-green sparkle. Her rich chocolate brown locks were knotted and untidy. A series of pings exploded from her phone. She picked it up and swiped it open. It was Layla.

‘You’re worthless’

‘Get out of here!’

‘When you sing, even the nerds block their ears. That’s how much you suck.’

‘You think you’re so cool. You really just give everyone an excuse to pretend to like someone.’

‘Just go and kill yourself, why don’t you?!’

Now more messages were coming through. Not just from Layla, but from Khloe, Emma, Peyton and all the rest of Layla’s minions.

‘The world would be better off without you!’

‘Loser.’

‘Why don’t you just go and die in a hole, where you belong.’

Elodie threw the phone onto the tiled floor, cracking the screen. She didn’t even care anymore. If only she’d never come here, and just stayed in Brisbane with Mannix, Sophie and Jake. She was starting to believe that what Layla and the

other girls were saying was true. Everyone just ignored her, like she was invisible.

This is bad, and I can't do anything about it.

Elodie considered telling her mum and dad the truth about Layla, but quickly erased that thought from her mind. She had to figure this out herself, and she didn't want to bother them with teenage nonsense. Her thoughts were rushing around in her head and making it ache.

Suddenly she felt a rage of distress and anger rolled into one, and she tore at her hair. Then she attacked her arms, scratching them until they were a mass of crimson. Elodie didn't care that they stung and hurt, she just had to rid herself of the pain in her head.

Chapter Eight

21/8/19 5:43pm

MannixK: Hey elodie r u there?

EllieMoreno: yeah i am.

MannixK: lets facetime.

Two minutes later, a request to Facetime popped up on Elodie's cracked phone screen. She clicked on it and Mannix's friendly face appeared.

"Hi Elodie!"

"Hello Mannix."

He peered at her sickly face worriedly. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, haven't been very well these past weeks." Elodie tucked her hair behind her ear. "What's up in Brisbane?"

"Jake has a girlfriend!"

"Oh my gosh, who?"

"Remember Rosalie? Yeah, they started going out about a week ago."

"Rosalie?!" She and Elodie were family friends. "Didn't they hate each other back in year three?"

"I know! Sophie and I are so confused. Anyway, now it's down to the two of us."

"Wow, is Jake hanging out with Rosalie every day?"

“Yuh-huh.” Mannix lowered his voice to a whisper. “You know, I’m actually thinking of asking Sophie out.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, what do you think?”

Elodie hesitated. “Well you have been friends for ages, almost as long as you’ve known me. Then again, I’d think you’d make it work, since you know each other so well.”

“You think?” Mannix’s eyes lit up.

“Yeah go for it. Listen, I gotta go. Call you soon? Maybe next week?”

“Sure, see ya later potata.”

“In a while crocodile.”

Elodie hung up. She went over to her secret hiding place and extracted her diary out of it.

Wednesday 21st August 2019

Dear Diary,

Every day I go to school, and Layla and the girls I thought were my friends tease me and hurt me. Not just emotionally, but physically too. I grazed my elbow today and the scab on my knee has only just fallen off. No one likes me, and they walk past as if I don’t even exist. I’m a ghost at school, whom no one cares about. I’m so alone. I have no future, and everyone is against me. I don’t know what Layla has against me, but it’s never going to stop. Maybe she’s right. Maybe I am worthless. Maybe the world will be better off without me. No one will miss me if I’m gone. I just wish I was dead. I already feel like it anyway.

This is horrible. I just got more messages, telling me to kill myself. Now more are coming through, multiplying before my eyes.

That’s it. I’m truly sorry, but I can’t take this anymore. I have to stop this pain.

Chapter Nine

Teresa Moreno walked up the stairs, thoughts buzzing with the event of this afternoon. There was something wrong with Elodie

“Elodie, honey? Time for dinner.”

She knocked on her daughter’s door. When there was no reply, she opened it.

The scene inside the room hit her like a bolt of lightning.

She collapsed to the ground in slow, heaving sobs. ‘No, please, NO!’

###

Mannix stared out the window as Nicole, his mother, steered the rental car into the Moreno’s driveway. His girlfriend Sophie reached for his hand and squeezed it gently. A huge knot of words was in his throat, but he couldn’t bring himself to say them.

The door flew open and Teresa ran out, still in her pyjamas. Nicole hurried out of the car and flung her arms around Teresa’s neck, rubbing her back affectionately. Teresa squeezed her tighter, sobbing into her neck. Mannix emerged from the car, hand in hand with Sophie. Teresa noticed him, released Nicole and hugged him and Sophie tightly. Mannix felt like he could burst into tears, but he knew he had to stay strong for the sake of Teresa and the rest of the family.

“Thank you, Nic, for coming,” stammered Teresa, wiping her eyes with a yellow handkerchief. Her hair was a mess and she had dark circles as big as a panda’s around her swollen eyes. It looked like she hadn’t slept in a week.

“Teresa, you need us, and we would never stand by and let you struggle on your own, with no one else to help you,” explained Nicole.

“Sebastijan’s parents are arriving tomorrow, and my mum is already here,” hiccoughed Teresa. “We have little plans for-for the funeral, a-and we just-” She exploded into wails again.

“Mannix, honey, and you too Soph, could you please get the bags inside?” whispered Nicole.

“Sure Mum,” replied Mannix. He led Sophie to the back of the car and began hauling the bags out of the boot and dragging them to the door, careful to hide his expression from her.

Sebastijan, Ryker, Savannah-May, and an elderly woman whom Mannix recognized as Teresa’s mother Kathleen stood in the doorway. They each

grabbed a bag and carried them to the spare room. Teresa and Nicole followed them to the living room once the bags were shoved in the spare wardrobe. The coffee table was strewn with forms, reports, and empty mugs.

Everyone sat down wherever there was space. Mannix took a seat next to Ryker, who put his head on his shoulder. Sophie put her arm around Abyan, who was already sitting in the large white armchair next to the fireplace. No one spoke until Teresa opened her mouth, tear tracks etched on her pale face “I found her in her room. That moment will be forever plastered in my head, I’ll never forget it,” explained Teresa softly. “I think the worst thing in the world is to find your own child dead.” She sniffled, and a single tear emerged from her eye. “I was just laying with her, I didn’t want to leave her.”

Ryker started to cry. Mannix hugged him tightly.

“I’ve never seen Dad cry like he did that evening,” whispered Savannah-May, her arm around her mother.

“Everything was so slow-moving, we couldn’t do much,” added Abyan, “us kids didn’t know what had happened.”

“I - we - had no idea what was going on,” said Sebastijan, whose eyes were also swollen. “The only thing that seemed suspicious was that Elodie was so withdrawn from all of us. But she kept it to herself.”

“She was going to be sweet sixteen next year, and now I’ll never take her to Europe like I did for Teresa,” blubbered Kathleen.

At this moment Teresa herself completely broke down. “Every day since she died, I have felt so angry and guilty with myself because I never asked her what was wrong,” she wailed. “I feel like I’ve failed as a mother because I was so oblivious to her pain, and now she’s gone, and I’m never ever going to get her back!” She collapsed in Nicole’s arms, her whole body shaking with sobs.

Mannix couldn’t take it anymore. He stood up and ran up the stairs to Elodie’s room. As he shut the door, he found he couldn’t hold in his grief any longer and succumbed to his tears. It was a painful scraping sob that stung his throat and took the breath out of him. Once the tears slowed down, Mannix wiped his eyes and took in his surroundings.

Elodie's room looked untouched since her death, save for a collection of items arranged in a large memorial on her bed. Photos, keepsakes, lit candles and awards stood grouped around a main framed photo on a soft yellow tray. Inside the frame was a picture of Elodie resting her hands on her chin, laying on the grass smiling mischievously at the camera. Mannix smiled at the photo and stroked the frame.

"I miss you, Ellie," he whispered.

A small book he hadn't noticed when he first saw the memorial. It was leather bound and engraved with the letters EM. Curious, he opened it. It was Elodie's diary.

###

Friday 31st August 2019

Dear Diary,

My name is Mannix Keeton, and last week my best friend Elodie Moreno took her own life. I never knew how much pain she was suffering, because she never told me.

I found her diary lying on her bed after she wrote in it for the last time. I read every single entry twice, because I wanted to know why. What drove her to commit suicide? Who was responsible for this? And why did she never tell me?

I couldn't believe what I was hearing when Teresa's heaving voice told me down the phone line. My mum took the phone from me, her face turning white. Tears started running down my cheeks like a waterfall, and I felt wobbly and nauseous. My palms started to sweat, and my throat felt numb. I threw up a trickle of bitter green bile, coughing it out, as I knew I would never see my best friend, my kindred spirit, ever again.

In three days, I have to face Elodie's farewell, which I didn't think I would ever be doing until I was old.

See you on the other side,

Mannix

Chapter Ten

A weak winter sun emerged on the day of Elodie's goodbye. The preparations had been complicated, Mannix knew, since he had been a part of them. Her

family had never known what she would have wanted. But another thing Mannix knew was that she would've loved whatever they prepared.

Orange, curled-up leaves crunched under Mannix's new sneakers. Sophie walked beside him, in a halter neck pale pink dress. She reached for his hand and smiled at him, not a happy one, but accepting.

Sebastijan, Teresa and the children were standing at the entrance to the chapel, she in a floral dress teamed with gold heels, he in navy chinos and checked green shirt. Abyan wore a lacy baby-blue dress, and Savannah-May sported a flared off-the-shoulder dress patterned with palm leaves. Ryker donned an outfit similar to his father's. Mannix gave him a tight bear hug and ruffled his hair. He seemed too confused and sad to even shed a tear.

As the grieving group headed inside, Mannix knew that if Elodie were here, she would have loved it.

The ceiling of the chapel was high and strung with rainbow fairy lights, just like Elodie's laugh. Bunches of hyacinths lit up the aisles with explosions of pink, and the casket was light-coloured wood with a small plaque reading, *Elodie Grace Moreno. We love you so much and won't soon forget you.* Behind it was a large screen with a photo of Elodie on the beach, facing the camera, smiling and dancing.

Mannix raised a hand to his mouth. "It's amazing," he choked. He had never seen or been told the plans for the funeral decorations.

Sophie placed her own hand on his shoulder. "It's what she'd have wanted. She always said funerals are like parties, celebrating the only person who wasn't there."

Mannix couldn't say a word, he was too emotional. His throat was tight, so he nodded.

Sophie pointed to the entrance. Mannix whipped around and saw Jake leading Rosalie by the hand, his parents behind him. He waved at him and Jake saluted as he sat down.

As they took their seats at the front of the chapel, Mannix noticed a pale girl with short red hair sit down next to the celebrant, dressed in a simple white skater dress. He nudged Sophie. "Who's that?"

“I have no idea, I’ve never seen her before,” shrugged Sophie. “Ssh.”

The celebrant, an older woman with shoulder length brown hair gently curled, stood up and spoke into the microphone.

‘Welcome, friends and family. I’m Beatrice Nanson, and I will be the celebrant of today. All of us are here to celebrate the life of a beautiful young girl, taken from this world too soon. Elodie Grace Moreno.’ Beatrice paused to wipe her eyes with a lace edged handkerchief. “She was a daughter, a sister, a niece, and of course a friend to all she met.”

Teresa started sobbing into Sebastijan’s shoulder, who was white-faced yet calm. Mannix smiled at Beatrice, who he recognized as Elodie’s Aunt Bea. She nodded and returned the smile sadly at him. “To start our ceremony, could you please welcome Mannix Keeton, the one who knew Elodie the best of all of us.”

Mannix hesitated. He didn’t know he was going to speak. But Elodie’s spirit was by his side, inspiring him.

Mannix took a deep breath and walked up to the microphone. “She was my best friend. Always there for me. I never knew the pain and heartbreak she went through, because she never told me.” He looked at Sebastijan, who nodded. “She never spoke up to anyone.

Savannah-May sniffled, and Sophie put her arm around her.

“She laughed like a fairy, twinkly and bright. Whenever I needed her help, whatever she was doing, she would assist me. I knew that she would always be there for me.” Mannix pulled out a copy of the final diary entry. “In her diary, just before she committed suicide, she wrote, “Maybe I am worthless. Maybe the world will be better off without me. No one will miss me if I’m gone.” He looked around at all the grieving people. “We have to prove her wrong. We must make sure she will never be forgotten, and that will truly be our song, our message, to stand against bullying. The song for Elodie.”

Mannix stepped down and headed back to his seat. Everyone around him was patting him on the back. The rest of the chapel were smiling through a flow of tears. He could even hear Elodie, laughing her fairy giggle, applauding him enthusiastically.

Mannix couldn't stop blushing.

Chapter Eleven

After Mannix, a lot of Elodie's friends, and family spoke about the one they had lost. There were giggles as Teresa recounted Elodie's birth tale, Abyan and Savannah-May spoke about how Elodie would always play mermaid-fairy-princesses with them, and there were tears and sniffles as Beatrice told them about Elodie's short life.

Just before the end of the ceremony, the red-haired girl Mannix had noticed at the beginning stood up, a folded piece of paper in her left hand. Beatrice didn't introduce her, just nodded for her to go up to the microphone. She placed a pair of black-rimmed glasses on her face and cleared her throat nervously.

"My name is Audrina Hanson. I am here on behalf of my entire friendship group, who -" she paused anxiously, as if the whole audience would judge her for what she said next - "bullied Elodie into suicide."

Silence from the crowd.

"I know you are all judging me, even hating me for what I did. But honestly, I never wanted Elodie to suffer. Yet I still mixed with the culprits," continued Audrina. "I do know now that it was wrong. I stood there and watched my so-called 'friends' bully Elodie into sadness."

Sophie's hand found Mannix's and seized it. Audrina noticed her, and Sophie nodded, signalling for her to go on.

"I tried to be an ally in her suffering," said Audrina, looking up. "But it wasn't enough, and every day since her death I have felt so guilty that I stood and watched it all play out. I chose my own popularity and friendships over the one thing that I can't stand to watch. It was so selfish."

Tears were pouring down Mannix's face. He glanced at Sophie, also crying a river.

"Once our principal announced the news to the whole school, I burst into tears. The girl who led the group, Layla Jackson, merely sat there in her seat. At lunchtime I heard her laughing. But three other girls, who I believe are here

today, were the only ones who felt remorse and came to the office to meet with the principal. Khloe Rivera, Charlie Woods, and Teagan Diaz, thank you.”

The three girls, who were sitting near the back, smiled through blotchy eyes and tear-tracked faces while everyone turned and looked at them.

“We are working on establishing a trust, alongside our parents and teachers, called Elodie’s Melody, and your support will mean the world to us. We hope you can all help us to take a stand against bullying. Thank you for your time.”

Everyone was so emotional after Audrina’s speech, that out of respect for her, there was silence.

###

“But your book ran outta pages, and I wish I never waited to tell you out of all the moments in my life, the ones I got to share with you were probably my favourite...”

The voice of Scarlet Nanson, Bea’s daughter, rang out beautifully in the song ‘Choir’ by Guy Sebastian. Mannix had picked it himself because if he could sing, that was the song he would sing right here, right now.

The casket was lowered into the grave slowly and reverently. At the top of the empty hole, a headstone read:

*In Loving Memory of
Elodie Grace Moreno
19.01.04 - 21.8.19*

*We love you, sweetie, and we hope you’re at peace.
Never Forget*

Mannix placed his friendship bracelet into the time capsule, which was a small decorated box, and sat on top of the coffin. Inside it were other things like a pair of baby booties, photos of her playing Pictionary with her siblings, hugging her father, and painting with her mum, and copies of the lyrics for her favourite songs.

Teresa sobbed as everyone began scooping handfuls of dirt and placing them softly over the casket. Ryker stood back and hugged her, looking at the grave with an expression of finality, like he had realised that his sister was never coming back. Mannix’s heart gave a burst of compassion. To lose someone so looked up to at such a young age was unimaginable.

###

The reception for the funeral was held at the Moreno household. Everyone who attended it was invited. The lounge room was decorated in the same fairy lights as the chapel ceiling had been. On a lacy covered table were Elodie's favourite foods: passion fruit meringues, zucchini fritters, pink lemonade, mini sausage rolls, and chocolate-chunk laden brownie, as well as home-made sandwiches, tea and coffee.

As he poured himself a glass of lemonade, Mannix noticed Audrina, the girl who made the final speech before the burial. He was curious to know if she had anything else to say, so he excused himself from where he was talking with Sophie, Jake and Rosalie, and headed over to Audrina.

"Hey," he said, holding out his hand. "I'm Mannix, you know, Elodie's best mate."

"Oh, hi Mannix," she replied, shaking his hand.

"I just wanted to say that I was so moved by what you said, that I was wondering if there was anything else in your story?"

Audrina sighed and put her plate down on the coffee table. "Honestly, there's not really much more to say. I never knew that my friend's actions could take such a horrible toll on Elodie."

"Are they really still your friends?"

"Oh no, they 'kicked me out of the group' since I tried to help Elodie. Anyway, I decided I needed better, I'd been having thoughts about it ever since they started being rude. I am still friends with Khloe, Charlie and Teagan though."

"The other girls, they got in trouble, right?"

"Yeah, they were a hair's breadth away from expulsion, but Ms Lincoln, the principal, decided they could get off with several weeks' suspension. No one really acknowledges them anymore, because they're afraid of the same thing happening."

"I'm looking forward to the trust, Elodie's Melody. I hope I can be a part of it somehow,"
wondered
Mannix.

“We’d love you to. I think it’ll only be about a couple of months until it is fully ready, and we can tell Australia about it,” smiled Audrina.

They were silent for a few minutes. “You know, I never knew what Elodie was going through. She never told me or her parents,” explained Mannix. “I can’t possibly imagine what made her keep it a secret. It must have been so terrible.” Audrina looked up at Mannix. “Do you think she would have forgiven me?”

Mannix paused. Audrina’s face fell.

“You know,” said Mannix softly, “I think she would have.”

Author’s Notes

This book is a work of fiction. Some things in it are true, like the shocking reality of youth suicide due to bullying. Like Elodie, young men and women have gone through the same ordeal.

Bullying affects one in four students. Every fifteen minutes, a child is bullied. Imagine your son, daughter, niece or nephew suffering in silence. But not every bullied child keeps it a secret, about 20% to 30% speak up.

There are four types of bullying: physical (such as hitting, kicking, punching, or breaking someone’s personal belongings) verbal (such as name calling, teasing, putting someone down consistently) social (lying, spreading rumours, playing mean tricks, leaving someone out on purpose) and cyberbullying (using technology to hurt someone by sending hurtful messages, pictures or comments). These are all wrong and if anything like this is happening to you, speak up.

Elodie’s story is based on that of Dolly Everett. Dolly was fourteen when she took her own life after months of relentless bullying. I was so moved by Dolly’s story that I decided to do my own spin on it, and *A Song for Elodie* was born.

Before Dolly’s death, she drew a haunting sketch, which showed a dancer in a gymnast pose. In the background are the words, ‘Speak even if your voice

shakes.’ As I wrote this book, that image was etched in my mind and that’s one of the things that kept me going.

The high school Elodie attends, Kilbreda College, is a real school and located in Mentone, VIC. None of the teachers or students are real (except for the principal, who is no longer the principal anymore) but in fact it is the high school I am going to attend.

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Without this I would never have got over my writer’s block, and still be chewing my fingernails over Chapter Seven.

Alongside this, thanks to all those random articles I read helping me with scenes that were beyond my skill. They really helped, so thanks to whoever wrote them.

