

# A Friedman New Year

## New Year Goals

- Kiss someone
- Pick where I want to study
- Make more dresses
- Visit Adrian and Olivie
- more often
- Become independent!!!

**Ellie Owen**



# A Friedman New Year





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To whoever has been here since the  
beginning.  
Happy New Year.

# A FRIEDMAN NEW YEAR

Fluffy white sand slips between large fingers, blowing softly in the wind, but the grains don't fall too far away. Pooling around his feet, Adrian watches Cove run back from the ocean with a tiny yellow bucket filled with water.

"It's so embarrassing to be in public with you."

"The three of us know you want to build a sandcastle."

Adrian glances over his shoulder at Olivie, who just pulls the brim of her straw hat further over her eyes.

"I'm not a child, thank you very much."

"But it's so much fun, Lolie."

Olivie ignores him, peeling her eyes away from the colorful buckets and palette knives her siblings bought to carve out details into their castle, dedicating hours to something just to later stomp over their creations as their mother taught them to do.

Starting a tradition where they would imbue a negative emotion into each building block of the sandcastle before destroying it in a symbolic way to show those emotions were no longer a part of them.

That had always been the one aspect Olivie didn't enjoy. If she knew her siblings wouldn't destroy the sandcastle, she would giddily join them in its construction.

"I'm back," Cove declares as if they couldn't see her.

There is a little mischievous grin on her lips when Cove plops down in front of Adrian, raising a fine cloud of sand that sticks to her wet skin as she adds scoops of water into a bucket of sand.



A frown begins to form between Cove's blonde brows as she mixes the water and sand, knowing too well that if it's not wet enough, then their castle will crumble and fall.

The shape given by their kiddie buckets would fade as soon as she lifts the bucket away, and the pretty castle becomes nothing but a useless beige pile.

"Don't add too much," Adrian warns. "I don't want to have to let it drain for too long."

Cove just nods at him, pressing down the sand into a molded bucket before she carefully chooses where to build the first block of it.

"What will the base be about, Coco?"

"Fear? This New Year I won't be afraid of change," She says. "I'll graduate from school, and I won't be afraid of moving away from home."

"That's a good thing to let go."

"Have you decided if you'll go to New York, London, or Milan?" Olivie asks, lifting the glass of caipirinha toward her lips. "We could explore Europe on the weekends."

"Stop trying to bribe her. Cove will make her choice when she's ready, and that choice will be New York, because it is so much better to be around me."

Olivie snorts a laugh, not bothering to remind Adrian of how Cove will go to New York whenever Olivie visits the Big Apple—nor how Olivie has shown Cove all the places that can't be found with a quick search, while Adrian is painfully oblivious to those places.

"I'll see where I get into," Cove appeases them, pretending she's a regular student and not someone who has enough money to buy access to anything she wanted. "Ready, Didi?"

“Yes.”

Cove pats the bottom and sides of the bucket, being so surgical that when removing the yellow plastic encasing the sand, Adrian wonders if Medical school would be a better option over Fashion school.

Arms raised in victory, Cove shimmies in place when the first block demolds perfectly, giving the damp sand the impression of the brick pattern and towers in the bucket.

“I’ll be right back,” Cove declares, running back toward the ocean, seeming oblivious to the wandering eyes of boys and men who bask in the beauty of her teenage body.

“It’s disgusting, isn’t it?” Olivie asks, eyes raking over Sancho Beach, where tourists leisure over the shore. “The boys I could excuse, but grown men ogling at Coco makes my skin crawl. She still looks like the teenager she is.”

“I wish Athena had come to Fernando de Noronha.”

“Why?”

“She can beat people up in a way I can’t,” Adrian sighs, picking up a palette knife to accentuate the brick pattern. “And she can spot danger in a way we can’t.”

“When I was younger, I told mom I’d be a super-spy because I just wanted to be Athena.”

“I thought you had a crush on her?”

“I did. Have you seen her body?” Olivie whistles in awe. “She’s a work of art, but I did want to be her.”

“Now you get to be a thousand different people.”

“Only if I get casted. Oh, here she comes.”

The eldest Friedman can’t help but smile as Cove kicks up sand with each step of hers, spilling some water down her defined stomach and toned legs—a body sculpted from hours

upon hours of training with her horse, preparing herself for horse riding competitions.

Cove waves at them, golden hair coming to life under the summer sun of Brazil, where they would always spend the end of year Holidays, visiting family before retreating to one of the many beautiful beaches that exist in the country.

In a few moments, the youngest of them is mixing water and sand once more, preparing her concoction with the mastery of a childhood building sandcastles with Adrian.

The base gains three companions before Cove turns her gaze toward Olivie, puckering her lips as she asks, "Lolie, will you do me a favor?"

"Do you want some ice cream?"

"No, my legs are tired from running back and forth from the ocean. Will you get us some water?"

"No."

"Lolie," Cove bemoans, scooting closer to where her sister is lounging. She rests her chin on Olivie's knees, batting her lashes and mustering her most pup-like eyes. "Pretty please?"

"No, I told you. I'm not building a sandcastle."

"But, you would only be getting water. That's not the same as building a sandcastle. Please, please, please..."

Taking Olivie's hand on her own, Cove continues to plea with her sister, managing to get teary-eyed and make her voice heavy with sadness as she slowly breaks down on Olivie's strong will.

"I promise to not ask you anything all year, Lolie."

"Today is the last day of the year, Coco. That promise means nothing to me."

"Lolie," She whimpers. "Please?"

"Fine. Just this one time, okay?"

Cove grins, lurching into Olivie's lap as she wraps her arms around her sister's neck, peppering kisses over Olivie's beautiful face like she used to do when she was a little girl when her siblings would return home from school.

"I can't get water with you on my lap, Coco."

"Sorry." Cove slides away, plopping down beside Adrian, looping her arm through his while pretending not to notice his amused smile. "Thank you."

Olivie just waves her hand dismissively, taking the tiny bucket Cove had been using to collect water before she wanders down toward the turquoise waters.

"You have her wrapped around your fingers like she has me wrapped around hers," Adrian mutters, flicking the tip of Cove's nose.

"She just loves me."

"I do too, but I wouldn't let you work me like that."

A laugh bubbles past her lips, but Cove doesn't say anything as she rests her head against his shoulder, smiling when Adrian freezes half of his body while working on sculpting the sandcastle.

Cove keeps her attention on Olivie, waiting until her sister is making her way back to them for her to sigh loudly and wistfully.

"What is it, Coco?"

"I'd kill for ice cream. Oh, and pineapple juice with mint sounds delightful too."

"No, I just got back from the kiosk," Adrian shoots her down quickly, not even glancing over his shoulder to look at Cove.

“That’s fine. I’ll go on my own. Promise you’ll keep an eye on me?” Cove pulls away from Adrian, pouting and frowning as she pokes his ribs.

“Why?”

Adrian tosses the palette knife into the sand, swiveling around to face her. Gray eyes darken with worry as he sees Cove biting down on her lips, gazing at the kiosk.

“Well, if someone follows me or tries talking to me, I’ll scream for you.”

“You stay here. I’ll go to the kiosk. Wait for Olivie to come back, okay?”

*I wouldn’t let you work me like that,* Cove muses as she picks up the palette knife her brother had dropped.

Focusing on continuing what Adrian left unfinished, Cove doesn’t notice when Olivie’s shadows reach her before Olivie does, kneeling near the sandcastle to settle the little bucket without spilling any water.

“Where is Adrian?”

“Kiosk.”

“Do you need anything else?” Olivie asks, dipping her finger into the still water as she watches the ripples spreading over it.

“Will you mix the sand for me? I don’t want to stay here all day. We need to go back home to get ready for midnight.”

“How many more things do you want to add to it?”

“Just two more towers. I’ll even let you put your emotions into one?”

Cove offers with a smile that always made her siblings fold to her will, fooling them into thinking she’s still the baby of the family—in many ways, she still is.

They think of her as a defenseless child who needs their protection and guidance in the world for a reason, and while Cove enjoys using that naivety to her favor, she still yearns to be recognized as someone capable of standing on her own two feet.

At least, Cove wants to try standing on her own, to experience her life away from New York and London, away from home, to know who she is without external expectations.

Olivie splatters water on Cove's face, laughing when the gilded child reels away from the castle with a gasp. "Wanna see something funny?" Olivie asks.

"What?"

Olivie jerks her chin toward the kiosk, where Adrian is doubled over the bar. Fingers woven into the dark strands of a clerk as he kisses her, moving his head from left to right very slowly as if savoring every second of it.

"Credo.<sup>1</sup>"

"I didn't know he had enough game for someone to risk their job just to make out with him."

"Again, credo."

"You're still averse to kissing someone?"

Heat spreads over Cove's cheeks, her heart slowing down as she wishes she could bury her head in the sand. "I'm not averse," she murmurs quietly. "I just don't think there is anyone I'd like to kiss, and I won't do something just because others deem it to be normal. Being stupid is normal, but that doesn't mean I need to be an imbecile."

"There is nothing wrong with kissing people just because."

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: "Gross."

“I know there isn’t, but I don’t want to kiss anyone, even if it’s just because. I’m not broken because of it, Olivie.”

“I didn’t say you were.”

“You don’t need to say anything for me to know what you’re thinking. Everyone who knows I haven’t kissed someone seems to think there is something fundamentally wrong with me, but there isn’t. I would know if there is.”

“All I’m saying is you could try. Maybe getting it over—”

“Will you stop? You hate when people say you aren’t a lesbian when they claim that you just haven’t been fucked good enough by a man. There is nothing wrong with me, and there is nothing wrong with you, so please stop trying to fix what isn’t broken.”

Olivie peels her gaze toward the sandcastle as a fiery pit of shame sears a path to her stomach over the tears lining Cove’s gray eyes.

They work in a frail silence built on discomfort, imbuing the last parts of the sandcastle with tension and sadness. Something that rarely existed between the sisters when they much preferred to join forces to pester Adrian.



Perfume permeates the air around Cove, but she keeps her eyes closed for Aria to blend her eyeshadow while Adrian explores the small collection Cove brought with her.

He hums and groans while sniffing them, baring to the world what he thinks of each fragrance.

“Oh, I want my wife to smell like this,” He murmurs, thinking the girls won’t hear him when they are both so focused on what they are doing.

“Like what?” Giulia asks, eyes focused on smoothing down the white silk dress Cove made for the New Year with a wilted, long sleeve pushed off her shoulders.

Cove had told Adrian about how she’d darted the bust to control the fullness of the criss-cross draping that runs from across the low back to the chest—all he knew is that it added a fluid shape to the dress, while the boned bustier accentuated the curves of her waist and hips.

“*Bitter Peach* by Tom Ford.”

“Why?”

“It smells, well, peachy,” Adrian fumbles his explanation while sniffing the spritz bottle. “It’s juicy but also smoky with some rum to it? It smells good. I like it.”

“That’s an odd requirement for a wife,” Giulia chimes in. “Most guys want a girl to cook and clean for them.”

Adrian chuckles humorlessly, dragging the tip of his white Havaianas against the dark wood flooring as he wishes he hadn’t heard similar comments from men his whole life.

That was something Adrian never quite understood, wondering why men want their wives to be akin to an employee while showing them less gratitude for something they do out of love than they would show for someone charging them for those important tasks.

“I can take care of my house and my stomach. I just want someone whose mind I can love as much as I’m attracted to her. It’s a lot harder to find someone whose morals align with yours than to find someone who can fry an egg.”

“Is that what you’re hoping to bring into the New Year? Are you wearing red underwear?” Cove raises her hand to stop Aria from doing her makeup as she turns her head toward Adrian.



Gray eyes rake over his linen pants and white dress shirt with suspicion. A smirk crooks her lips when Adrian gingerly moves his hand toward his groin as if his sister has X-ray vision.

“Of course not. It’s just a Brazilian superstition.”

Adrian doesn’t know where the superstition first began, but Brazilians believe that the colors they wear for the New Year influence what they’ll experience the most in the upcoming year.

White for peace and harmony, gold for wealth and prosperity, and orange for strength and energy. Yellow is meant to bring prosperity but also joy, and then there is pink for love and romance, while red is for lust and passion.

Adrian most definitely wasn’t wearing pink and red striped briefs.

“What about you?” Aria asks, gently laying a finger under Cove’s chin to make the girl look forward. “Are you wearing red?”

“Blue, it’s for harmony and maturity.”

“You’re turning eighteen in the upcoming year. I don’t think we are meant to be mature at our age.”

“I definitely wasn’t,” Giulia chimes, likely thinking about the little boy she has back home under the care of her parents whenever she needs to travel for work.

Adrian settles the orange perfume bottle when Giulia forces a grunt, trying to lift the clothing rack despite the wheels attached to the bottom.

“Let me help you,” He offers, oblivious to the slight flush of color that fans over Giulia’s rounded cheeks.

“You wouldn’t mind helping me take these to Olivia’s bedroom, would you?”

Cove tilts her head toward Aria, arching a brow in question when the girl only shrugs before picking up more eyeshadow on her brush.

Gnawing on her lips, Cove manages not to ask any questions as she closes her eyes once more. Focusing on the sweeping motion of the fluffy brush against her lids to Aria tapping liquid blush over her cheeks.

Although she much preferred to do her own makeup, getting her makeup done has always been something Cove enjoyed, finding those few minutes where she sits alone in her bathroom with her favorite products spread out in front of her to be almost peaceful.

Maybe that love began when she was still a baby and would watch with her big gray eyes as her mom got her makeup done, or the love truly flourished when Cove grew to love fashion, learning a runaway wasn't made by just beautiful clothes on beautiful women.

Makeup was a crucial part of the artistry, allowing designers to control every aspect of presenting their creations to the most influential people in the fashion world.

"Does she like him?" Cove asks, heart beating faster over the idea of teasing Adrian about something he'd be oblivious to otherwise.

"I don't think she does."

"But Giulia is interested in him?"

"It's hard not to be attracted to a Friedman," Aria explains with a sigh, "Have you ever seen yourself and your siblings?"

Cove nods only once, tracking as Aria saunters toward her bed, lying down on the buttery blankets with another deep sigh.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

“You are three of the best-looking people I’ve ever seen, and to make matters worse, you all have the kind of personality that makes you even more beautiful.”

“Olivie is kinda mean.” Cove wanders toward Aria, taking up the space beside her with a frown between gilded brows. “All of my friends are scared of her.”

“She’s intimidating, but she’s really kind when you get to know her, at least when you’re related to her by blood.”

“That makes more sense.”

“She’s very nice, and she’s beautiful,” Aria speaks in near whispers, eyes raking over Cove’s face. “But you’re more my style. And age appropriate.”

“Oh.”

Cove tilts her chin ever so slightly as she beholds Aria with a newfound interest, wondering if her heart is beating faster because of what her words entitle and confessions always made her nervous or if maybe she had never found a boy whom she wanted to kiss because boys might have never been whom she was supposed to kiss.

“What are you thinking about?” Aria scoots a little closer, laying her hand over on Cove’s.

“About kissing you.”

“Do you want to kiss me?”

“Maybe? Yes? No? I don’t know. I’m nervous.”

“How about I kiss you, and if you don’t want me to keep kissing you, then you can tap my hand and we never speak of it?”

Aria weaves her fingers through Cove’s long hair, thumb caressing her jaw as she leans into Cove. Their soft lips brush lightly, breath entangling into one, but Aria doesn’t kiss her yet, watching for any sign of hesitation or regret.

A shaky hand flutters toward Aria's waist, tugging her closer as Cove is the one to kiss her, parting her lips just enough for Cove to taste the cherry cola on Aria's tongue.

There aren't any fireworks or toe-curling. No fire spreads through Cove's veins like she thought kissing someone would have.

It's nice, but it's not great, yet, she doesn't stop the kiss, allowing Aria to gently nudge her into the mattress, for her hands to move from the nape of her neck down to her collarbone.

"Is this fine?" Aria whispers against the shell of her ear, planting kisses down Cove's throat when she nods, keeping her hands stiff around Aria's waist.

And it is fine, but it's not great, and Cove wants to see if things can get to be great; if maybe she'd been wrong to say that there was nothing wrong with her, that she just needs to get used to tasting someone else's on her tongue.

Aria straddles Cove being gentle with everything she does, with the kisses she peppers across Cove's chest, keeping her fingers feathery as they wander further south of Cove's lithe body.

Cove spreads her legs a little bit, welcoming Aria's finger against her core, which feels a lot better than the kiss, yet it's nothing she couldn't feel on her own.

"Should I stop?" Aria asks, noticing how tight Cove's body has become, pulling away when she nods with tears lining her eyes—not because of anything Aria did, but because of how indifferent she feels about the whole experience.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't, you have nothing to apologize for."

But Cove can read the disappointment on Aria's face, even if she couldn't hear it in the slight quiver in her voice. It strikes her harder than Olivie's words had, making her feel so utterly incompatible with being human and how everyone else seems to be.

"I'll go get Olivie ready."

"Okay. I'm sorry," Cove repeats, bringing her knees toward her chest as Aria leaves her alone. "I'm such a fuck up. What is wrong with me?"

She curls up in bed, trying to fight against the tears lining her eyes as she waits for the pain in her chest to ease a little, for her to be able to take a deep breath without her body shuddering with unshed tears.

The room becomes blurry through the tears lining her eyes, making the white walls blend into the colorful paintings, leaving everything to be murky and lifeless as Cove wonders why she feels the way she does.

Wondering if she won't ever experience the joy of a relationship that isn't platonic or if she just needs to know someone for her to be drawn to them, and maybe she hasn't met the right person.

Her loud thoughts overpower the music reverberating across the sound, silencing the conversation whispers as family and friends wait for midnight's approach.

*Maybe I'm too young to know who I am and what I want, Cove muses without noticing that her tears have dried. I'm not broken, just too young to have such a clear idea of why my life looks different from the life of others.*

Cove doesn't hear the knock on her door, doesn't hear the soft footsteps as Adrian slips into her room. "Coco, why are you still in your robe?"

She murmurs, wanting Adrian to leave despite knowing her brother has a supernatural ability to know when she needs comfort the most.

"What is it? Do you have cramps? Want me to go get you some painkillers?"

"I'm fine," She complains, wishing she'd never shared that she'll get her period on the cusp between the end of a month and the beginning of another.

The mattress sinks a little when Adrian perches himself on it, dropping a hand to her knee as he waits for her to sit up beside him, not daring to glance at her until she wants to be seen.

"Olivie was asking about you. That's why I came to look for you."

"I don't want to see her."

"Why? Did you have a fight?"

"No."

"So, you did. What did you fight about?" Adrian pulls down on the hem of her robe, covering her legs as if they weren't alone in the room. "You know Olivie doesn't like building sandcastles."

"That's not what happened."

"Then what did happen, cocôzinha<sup>2</sup>?"

There is only silence between the siblings, only the sound of Cove's breath that lingers closer to being a sigh with each huff and puff as she fights against tears.

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<sup>2</sup> Translation: "Coconut/little shit." Coconut/little shit is a word play on Coco, to mean the coconut fruit, and cocô, to mean feces, as both words are pronounced similarly.

“I wish I was like everyone else in the world.”

“Poor? Why do you want to be poor? Or do you just wish you were middle class?” Adrian asks, poking her knees as his brows knit closer together, wondering why anyone would want to be poor in this economy.

“No, I want to be normal.”

“You seem pretty normal to me, Coco.”

“You don’t understand.”

Adrian reaches for her hand, pulling Cove toward him as he wraps his arms around her, planting kisses on the crown of her head while pretending he can’t feel the tears wetting his arm.

“In what way you aren’t normal, *cocôzinha*?” He murmurs, thumb moving back and forth over her skin.

“Like you and Olivie, like everyone else who kisses people without it feeling like it’s a chore.”

“You don’t have to kiss anyone if you don’t want to.”

“But I want to want to kiss someone.”

“So you’re sad because you haven’t had your first kiss?”

Adrian pulls away just a little, cradling Cove’s face between the palm of his hands.

“I just had my first kiss.”

“Wasn’t Aria with—Oh, I didn’t know you liked girls.”

“I don’t know if I do. I didn’t feel anything but a slight discomfort and boredom.”

“It wasn’t a good kiss then?”

“It’s not like I have any parameters to compare.”

“Wanna hear about my first kiss? Well, about my first french kiss?” Adrian offers, knowing she’d enjoy the story. “Do you

remember when mom took us to Orcas Island because Lolie wanted to see the Orcas?”

Cove doesn't remember anything but seeing a single orca during that trip. She'd been too little and attached to her mother's hips, much preferring the company of her parents over her siblings.

“I was fifteen during that trip, and I'd gotten close to this group of cousins who were there visiting. It was during peak puberty for me, and I was...overly excited to kiss someone if you know what I mean.”

“You didn't?”

“Yes, I did. It was deeply embarrassing. The next time I kissed someone I was almost your age. It's better to be a little bored than to be more eager than a golden retriever.”

“Then why do I feel so broken?”

“Because society was built to shun those who diverge from a so imposed norm, Coco. There are many people who feel the same way you do. The difference is most people don't have the courage to protect themselves, to live authentically, so they'll go out and kiss people while feeling nothing because they are waiting for someone to say it's okay.”

Her lips quiver slightly, hands clinging to Adrian as she wishes she had the words to express how much she loves him for always knowing what to say.

“If that's what you need to hear, then Coco, it's okay to not kiss and get intimate with someone. There is no right way to be human. As long as you're a good person that's all that matters. And you're the best of us all.”

“So, I'm not broken?”



“No, the only thing broken about you is the bones in your foot. Remember when that happened?”

“It was two years ago, Adrian. I do remember how you cried because I had to go into surgery and you weren’t home.”

“Mom told you that?”

Cove nods while Adrian taps his ring finger over the tears that’d fallen down her cheeks, trying to dry them without disrupting her makeup.

“You were still crying when I came out of surgery and you miraculously got home.”

“Helicopters are a wonderful thing. I’ll always be there for my first baby,” Adrian jests, planting a kiss on her forehead before standing up. “I’ll wait for you outside, okay? Go get your party dress on. Midnight is nearly upon us.”

Planting another kiss on the crown of her head, Adrian saunters out of her room, closing the door behind himself, but Cove can hear when he leans his back onto it.

Dropping the robe around her feet, Cove ambles toward her perfumes. Fingers brush against the caps of different bottles as she thinks of what she wants to smell like for the New Year.

“I can never use this again,” Cove murmurs as she skips over *Bitter Peach* before settling on *Néroli d’Ispahan* by Boucheron.

A scent she wears daily, even if she should wear something different for special occasions, but she enjoys the elegant freshness and velvety softness.

Spritzing perfume on the hollow part at the base of her throat, behind her ear, elbow, and behind her knees, Cove paces back and forth in her room, waiting for the perfume to dry on her skin before she dares to approach her dress, knowing the white silk could get stained by the oils within the fragrance.

Everything she does is a bit mechanical, moving through the steps of getting ready without much thought as she slips into her dress with ease, managing to pull the zipper all on her own.

Within minutes, Cove has her high heels on and all of her jewelry taken from the safe in her room, adorning her neck, ears, and fingers. She lingers in front of the full-length mirror, assessing her outfit, but the only thing hindering the outfit from being perfect is how disingenuous her smile is.

*Im not broken*, Cove repeats in a near mantra, wishing she believed a truth that might take her a bit longer to fully believe.

The thought echoes in tandem with her high heels, peeling against the wood flooring with the slow steps she takes, trying to push the doubt distant from the surface of her mind.

Adrian nearly topples into her when Cove opens the door on him. She crooks a brow as he adjusts his clothing, trying to act as if his cheeks and the tips of his ears aren't ruddy with embarrassment.

“Ready?” She asks.

“You look too grown up. I hate it.”

“Why is that a bad thing?”

“When I tell people I have sisters, they'll ask me what they look like, and I still think of you as a two-year-old who'd giggle while climbing into my bed to wake me up while hitting my head with your bottle.”

“Why is that a bad thing?” Cove repeats herself, slipping her arm through his.

“It's much easier to protect toddler Coco than it is to protect young adult Coco.”

“Do you feel like that about Olivie?”

Adrian hums, pushing Cove's head toward his shoulder as they amble down the hallway, following the fluttering song of a violin and an opera singer—a peculiar choice of soundtrack for New Year on a beach, but the siblings always knew that when their dad was responsible for the music as he'd pick something that would unsettle people.

“I do, I want to protect both of you from everything, but Olivie is much closer to my age than you're. We used to fight enough as children that I know she can protect herself as much as she can protect me. We have each other, and you have us.”

Cove doesn't say anything when Adrian leads her away from the party, giving her just a few short moments to inspect the dresses her cousins and family friends are wearing for the evening before they venture out under the black night.

Nor does she probe him as to why his eyes flutter toward the sky rich with tiny little stars, flickering in and out of sight as if any clouds were passing before them when the sky was clear.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Nothing important,” He mutters, attention lingering on the sky in a way Cove had never seen focusing on anything before. “Do you believe in fate, Coco?”

“Why?”

“I have this nagging feeling this is the year I'll meet the girl of my dreams.”

“And who is she?” Cove wonders if someone at work has caught his attention, maybe someone special enough for him not to mention anything to even her.

“I'm not sure, but she smells of peaches.”

The corner of his lips curls into a smile, giving him a barely visible dimple that only appears when Adrian tries to contain his smile.

“Just that? I can buy you a can of peaches and take you to city hall.”

“I’ll meet her, and she’ll change my life with her laugh. She’ll leave me speechless with her intelligence, and she’ll make me feel as if my head has been underwater all my life, and her smile will be like a gasp of air.”

“Are you drunk?”

“A little, but mark my words, Cove Elizabeth Friedman, she’ll waltz into my life ,and I’ll just know. Somehow I’ll know she’s the one, and I’ll call mom as soon as I meet her.”

“Very attractive behavior.”

Adrian laughs.

Planting a grin on his sister’s face as she always felt oddly proud in making her older siblings laugh, feeling as if she’d finally managed to be smart and witty enough for them.

“I won’t call mom in front of her. That’s just—Oh look,” he points out as the first firework flies into the night sky before exploding into red stars.

They watch as more and more fireworks adorn the night sky, marking the beginning of a few years for that side of the world. There is a bubbly feeling nestled in their chest, akin to excitement and fear for what is to come, but also a bit of sadness for what they’ll leave behind.

“Happy New Year, Coco. May this year bring you happiness, good fortune, and trust in who you’re and who you’re meant to be.”

“Happy New Year, Didi,” she mutters, not bothering to tell him how scared she is of growing up.

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

Happy New Year!!

I hope 2022 has been kinder to you than it ever was to me, I hope you accomplished your goals and grew closer to those you love, but now, the year comes to a closure, and with it, you have the opportunity to achieve new goals, to find new and better friends, to create new lovely memories, with any luck, 2023 will be a happier year for you and me.

I have a lot of things planned for 2023, and I cannot wait to share them all with you. Thank you for being here since the beginning, and thank you for allowing dreams to come true.

Love, Ellie Owen.