

FALA-LA-LA-LA

A 2025 CHRISTMAS BONUS SCENE

FEATURING:

THEA SCRIVEN, THE BEST SELLING
AUTHOR

ADRIAN FRIEDMAN, THE
GREENEST OF FLAGS

& LALA, THE CUTEST BABY IN
THEIR FIRST EVER CHRISTMAS IN
WARWICK, NEW YORK

ELLIE OWEN

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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Fala-la-la-la



BOOKS BY ELLIE OWEN



Ellipsis: A Love Story

Thea Scriven, a romance author struggling to have her breakthrough might have a change of luck in love and business when she meets Adrian Friedman, a Fantasy Editor and Heir to major publishing house.

Three Weeks To Fall in Love

In the novella companion to “Ellipsis: A Love Story,” Adrian juggles work, friendship, and the blooming romance with Thea as he forges connections to help the romance writer achieve her dreams.

Curse of Death

400 years after the death of her sister, Reghen Nehtvallan seeks vengeance against the man responsible for her sister’s murder.

To everyone who's been a reader of mine before it was
cool.

Thank you!

SHOPPING FOR A TREE

The sun had begun to go down, lending a rosy flush of color over the world as a smattering of snow fell over their beanies, perching itself on their lashes as it did on the branches of fir trees.

Adrian Friedman knew their Christmas tree would come from somewhere; perhaps, they'd make an evening out of visiting a family-owned shop in Manhattan that worked closely with farmers before visiting Central Park's Christmas market on their way back.

It would their first Christmas at home.

His plans had been to buy three matching pajamas, mugs, and stocking with their names for the fireplace in the living room with the shearling coach preferred to watch movies in.

It would be a lie to pretend he didn't consider hiring an interior designer to turn their home into one of Santa's workshops after they decided traveling abroad with a one-year-old was far more work than they believed Christmas was worth.

Not once had he expected both sides of the family to cancel their plans—the Friedmans to go to Gstaad, and the Scrivens to stay in Seattle—to join them in New York.

He wanted Thea to feel the magic of Christmas without the brunt of being their family's Santa, yet the sergeant-like glint in his wife's eyes seemed to tell a different story as she marched between young families like theirs with dads drinking hot cider while mothers held their babies—the reverse of themselves.

“Look, Lala,” Adrian whispered, peppering kisses on her winter-ruddy cheeks. “Everyone is looking at you.”

Thea snorted a bitter laugh at that, easing her step to glance at him sideways as she took a sip of her cider. “Do you really think moms are looking at Lala?”

“Why else? She’s the cutest baby, aren’t you?”

Alara laughed and clapped, raising her hands covered by mittens toward her face as she swayed toward the safest place she’d ever find, wrapped around his arms with her cheek pressed on her daddy’s chest.

“It is always a dangerous thing when you seem to forget you haven’t shaven and that you’re wearing glasses while carrying our child.”

“What does that have to do with Lala?”

“Nothing.”

Thea could see his confusion thicken as he glanced around once more, slowly pulling her closer to bring their woven fingers into the pocket of his pastel yellow wool coat, as his fashion had become highly influenced by Lala’s favorite colors.

Though he had worn a light green cotton poplin shirt with a contrasting beige collar that morning for her.

“Just don’t stray too far from me.” Thea squeezed his hand, rolling onto the tips of her wellies to kiss him with the wrath of a thousand eyes laid on her.

“I never stray from you.”

“Good, or you’ll get coal in your stocking.”

Gasping mockingly, Adrian let his wife take the lead down that snowy path with a little smile that seemed to have gotten superglued onto his face for the past year.

It mattered little that, to Zoe, his health must seem to have taken a plunge with how often he called in sick or asked to work from home with a headache or stomach bug as an excuse.

Thea needed time to write, and Adrian needed time for cuddles. Between getting them from Lala and Thea, he was a busy man whose life revolved around her sleep and feeding schedule.

On the bright side, he had gotten awfully good at highlighting manuscripts while lying in bed with Lala asleep on his chest. There had been a time when it would’ve been impossible for him to hold a stack of paper, an assembly of pens, and lie on his back.

“Concolor fir should be this way.” Thea slipped back into that sergeant-like demeanor, tilting her chin back up as her eyes scanned the forest of fir trees, a white cloud rolling from her lips.

They had already seen the Fraser, Douglas, and Korean fir sections with the little guide she had gotten after scanning a QR code and muttering about how inconvenient it was to not have a memento to bring home from their short trip.

Adrian thought the Christmas tree was the memento, earning an eye roll from Thea that morphed into a glare when he suggested they get something from the farm's decor shop, which apparently had never not been part of her plan.

The path dusted in snow split into a crossroad, with wooden signs carved into arrows pointing to the different kinds of fir and spruce trees that had clusters of people venturing down the paths for a leisurely stroll, while others were inspecting the trees as if they'd somehow have the same one for every Christmas, passing it down as an heirloom.

“Whose room do you think the color fir will—”

“Concolor.”

“What?”

“Concolor,” Thea said without looking at him, slipping her hand from his to pick Lala from his arms in a silent dispatch to have Adrian venture into the maze of needles and trees. “It’s concolor. Not color fir.”

“Pardon me, milady,” he jested, heart skipping a beat as she rolled her eyes. “Whose bedroom are we picking this for?”

This had been part of the reason Adrian would suggest hiring an interior designer every so often to Thea, who'd gone from wanting one big tree for the living room, to slowly feeling the entirety of their home ought to feel Christmassy.

Somehow, since then, she had decided every single one of their guest rooms that would be occupied needed to have its own tree, and it should reflect their guest's personality through not only the bubbles and ornaments, but also through the tree itself.

His leather-gloved hand reached for the fullest tree as Adrian bent his back, stretching to turn the tree around for Thea to see while she rocked Lala, holding their daughter's hand to her lips.

“Aaron.”

“What?” Adrian shrieked a little. “Why does he get a tree?”

“Because he’s a guest.”

“He lives in New York, Thea Tea; he doesn’t need to spend the night. The city will have public transportation available.”

“And have my parents leave with him? Because they will, and it will be another reason for my mom to be reminded of her dislike for you. You know she loves Aaron almost as much as she loves my dad.”

“We should get a Blue Spruce for him then.”

Letting the concolor fir rest against the others of its kind, Adrian’s face betrayed nothing. Raising the suspicion enough for Thea to reach for her phone in the pocket of her leather coat.

He could see the briefest of smiles tug on her lips when the screen lit up to reveal a photo of Adrian cradling Lala on his chest, his lids closed from lack of sleep, face unshaven, hair tousled and messy as Thea ran her fingers through it while sneakily taking the photo.

It must have been during Lala’s sleep regression at four months old, when Zoe had begun texting him to ask if he would come back to work anytime soon, and he once more contemplated quitting until his dad retired and he took over the family company.

If it hadn’t been for Thea’s wistful remembrance about when he’d come home from work with small little surprises for her, and how it didn’t feel the same when he got those little surprises with her present, Adrian might have never gone back to work.

Margo had nearly destroyed his will—and heart—by claiming Thea was tired of having him at home all day, wanting a few hours with Lala to miss him enough.

“Adrian!” Thea squealed, startling Lala into a fit of giggles. “Their needles are sharp enough to have to wear gloves and long-sleeves. You can’t pretend to hate him forever.”

“I don’t. Pretend, I mean. I hate him forever. He made you cry.”

“Years ago, when he thought he and I would have what you and I do. I thought the same thing as he did until you showed me that a man who makes you feel cared for is so wildly different from a man who makes you feel loved—from a man who wanted a girlfriend when you wanted me, when you wanted to be a boyfriend.”

“Husband.”

Adrian fought against his urge to close the distance between the sun and moon of his life, between the two heartbeats that made him believe the Big Bang or God created life and the universe just so he’d

have the honor of loving them.

“Husband,” he said again. “I wanted to be your husband. I got power tools because of you; my drunk self didn’t want to call a handyman when you need a light bulb changed.”

“You thought lightbulbs require power tools to be changed?”

Heat kissed his cheeks, reminding Thea of the first time she made him blush and how strangely powerful it had made her feel. Little had she known, marrying him came with making Adrian blush a few times a day, each time making her heart flutter and herself to feel all the more powerful for picking a man so enamored by her that he couldn’t help but blush with her attention and teasing.

As if she’d ever tire of him.

As if there would ever be a life where Thea wouldn’t love him.

“I called Antony whenever something broke, but after I met you, I called him to teach me how to do those things.”

“You took the poor man’s job?” Thea teased him, gasping in a way that made Lala widen her grey eyes.

“Mama,” she babbled, toothy grin melting over chubby cheeks as Adrian stumbled forward, nearly slipping on the slouchy path. “Dada!”

“I paid the remainder of his mortgage to teach me. I got to be my future wife’s handyman, and he got the debt taken care of?”

“Adrian Salvatore Friedman, I fear for your family’s company when you take it over.”

Bending his knees to lay a kiss on their daughter’s cheek, his glasses slid down the bridge of his nose. A wandering hand found the curve of Thea’s waist, slipping toward her back as he brought her to him, letting his other hand find the tip of Lala’s dry wellies.

“Cause I didn’t know how to change a lightbulb?”

“No, because you spend money so freely.”

“Well, Anthony was my handyman for a decade. I didn’t pay him that much just because. I liked him, and I knew afterwards I wouldn’t see him. I wanted to give him something nice.”

Adrian tilted his head to the left, satisfied with the laugh he stole from Thea and the clapping they got from Lala as she was squeezed between the two of them.

“Its rich coming from you, little miss everyone-needs-a-christmas-tree-in-their-bedroom.”

“Twelve trees isn’t a mortgage; it’s festive!”

“Festive is every day with you, my love.”

“I’m still getting those trees.”

“Anything you want, Thea Tea, and I’ll get it for you.”

“Just not a concolor tree for Aaron?”

“If you want.”

The laughter between them carried a sound that was so opposite of rare. It was the sound of Sunday mornings when the buttery sunlight of summer—or the overcast snow of winter—filtered through the gaps on their bedroom curtains, shifting as the door swung open and one of them carried Lala into their bed.

It was the sound of her crawling in their mattress, being so very happy in the arms of a couple who loved her even more than they loved each other. Who’d kiss the soles of her feet, who’d tickle her belly, and who’d make silly faces, just for that sound to echo again.

Never until she was breathless with joy. Just until they were.

It was the sound that resounded across their home after five p.m on a weekday, when the elevator chimed with the arrival of a content heart that missed his girls. The sound of dropping bags, letting go of the treats bought when thinking of them, to pick up the little girl whose wobbly steps brought joy to their lungs and tears to their eyes as they spoke of how quickly she was growing.

It was the sound that accompanied them in the car when they drove anywhere and everywhere, with children’s songs replacing their playlist, and chatter about books and life was woven with pointing things out to Lala, or reacting to what she pointed out, as if seeing a truck was the most wonderful of sights.

It was the sound that still felt so miraculous to Thea when her life was grim for so long, when all she had wanted was for people to read the stories she wrote in hope it was a beacon of light for them.

It was the sound of them.



Thea decided she had made a mistake.

Hot cider was not a better pick than hot chocolate. The suspicion had niggled at her when his eyes widened with the first sip he took,

growing a little when Adrian offered her his paper cup while asking to try her cider. What a mistake it had been to indulge him a little when she would have preferred to not know of her mistakes.

She knew Adrian would give his beverage to her if she asked, but how could she ask to trade when he shimmied a little with each sip, nearly awakening Lala, who'd fallen asleep despite the murmuring and Bobby Helm playing loudly on the speakers.

“Are you sure you don’t want to trade?” Adrian asked for the third time, head tilted as he looked at Thea from above, squeezing between a hallway formed by people walking in opposite directions.

“I like my cider very much.”

“But are you sure? I don’t mind.”

Thea knew he didn’t mind. She had long learned that somewhere in that brilliant, kind brain of his, there was a section to remember everything she loved and cared for.

At times, she felt as if Adrian knew her better than she did when no one in her life had ever remembered her so much.

It was only him who remembered her seasonal orders at coffee shop, who’d know which sandwiches she’d order when she wanted something safe, and the ones she should try when feeling adventurous.

One time, Thea asked him if he kept secret notes on his phone, filing away any new dessert they try at Ina’s, and keeping at hand the size of her clothes and ring size.

He hadn’t.

Adrian shrugged it off as being the same as how most men will remember trivia about their favorite sports, remember the name and position of every player and the ones on the bench, to know endless rules about endless sports and stats.

I just don’t care about other men that much, Adrian had told her, thumb gliding against her knuckles as they sat across each other at Ina’s. *I find you more thrilling the World Cup finals or the Super Bowl. Why would I not remember you and the little things that make up you?*

And he did remember her mannerisms just as well, knowing when she liked something before she even had to say it—though he did always let her say it.

“I’m sure ... We can get a cup for the drive home.”

“If you—”

“Oh! Look,” she spoke over him, a hand raised close to her chest as she pointed to the decor shop—or the bubble shop, as Adrian had called it before.

Hurrying her steps as much as the slow walkers in front of her allowed her to. Few of the hundreds of people shopping for a Christmas tree seemed interested in the little shop, yet even before entering, Thea could see it was full of people.

“It’s too full, isn’t it?”

“I can offer a hundred bucks for each person to leave the store?”

“I know you can—”

The words hung between them as Adrian walked away, trudging toward the little shop with the determination of a man who’d find a way to get the store a little less clustered for Thea.

His destiny was not a direct beeline to the shop, but rather toward an older gentleman that somehow carried the demeanor of owning the farm, or at the very least, being more important than anyone else they had interacted with.

“My child in his arms, nonetheless,” she mumbled, begrudgingly drinking her apple cider and wondering about Alara growing up to bribe teachers for better grades because she remembers her dad paying to have a Christmas market shop emptied out for her mother.

Some part of her, the mundane side of her who’d grown up being denied things because her family didn’t get blessed with an infinite money glitch, would never not feel unsettled by how quickly Adrian would spend money for her.

It was a hesitation that wouldn’t go away, no matter how well she knew that, for him, money wasn’t something that set him apart from others, that made his life more valuable. If anything, because he had more than others, he felt obliged to give it more freely.

The smile he offered her when looking back at her, the obvious joy and pride in his eyes, was a beacon for Thea long before he waved her over, bouncing on the balls of his leather boots until she’d gotten close enough for the man he’d been talking to to pivot, marching away from the christmasy shop.

“Where is he—”

“Come. He’ll take us to their stock.”

“Why?” She slipped a free hand into the pocket of his yellow coat.

“He wouldn’t kick everyone off the store for you, but they have another shop they use as stock, opening only on busier nights.”

Glancing around at the families that seemed to be everywhere her eyes could see, and where they couldn’t, Thea could hear their voices lost in the organized maze of fir and spruce trees.

“And today isn’t a busy night?”

Adrian shrugged, guiding Thea to walk in front of him as they followed the farm owner toward a quieter part of the plot, where another little cabin was cloaked in shadow with its curtain of fairy lights swaying in the nippy wind.

“Did you pay him?” She lowered her voice, knowing how the question could be offensive to some.

“No, I told Richard about you, and how we met in that dinky bar in Brooklyn, and how I called my mom while drunk, and the wonderful torture of thinking about you and seeing you in the smallest of things—I did tell him about how I can’t see anything red velvet flavor without thinking of you—and then I told him about how you just want Lala to have the best Christmas, but how she has fallen asleep and the store might wak—”

“You told him this much in that short amount of time?”

“It’s a rehearsed speech. What do you think I say when strangers comment ‘who’s the lady you’re buying...’” Adrian paused, spreading a hand out as if to allow Thea to insert whatever it is that he’d gone out to buy for her. “It for, I always tell them.”

The list was too long, ranging from pads, to breastfeeding bras, to the flowers he bought her often enough for the florist to know they were never apology flowers.

“You tell strangers about our entire relationship?”

“They asked! They wouldn’t ask if they didn’t want to know who it was for.”

“Wouldn’t ‘*my wife*’ be enough information?”

“Of course they know its for my wife. Who else would it be for? Our downstairs neighbor? I’m not a monster; I would buy things if asked, but I don’t think they’d expect that.”

“You know our downstairs neighbor?”

“You don’t know Reginald and Bertrude?”

“Bertrude? Not Gertrude?”

“With a B, yes, that’s her name. She’s a lovely Chinese lady.”

“Bertrude is a lovely Chinese lady?”

Thea had heard Josh greeting a lady called Bertrude before, when there were rolls of gaze wrapped around her head, eyes swollen as if she’d just left surgery.

“It’s weird because I’ve never seen her without contact lenses, so she always has blue eyes.”

“Huh, that is odd,” Thea agreed, biting on her lips to keep herself from smiling at the walking contradiction her husband could be.

On one hand, Adrian easily took the spot of being one of the smartest people she had ever met. There was a quality to him that never grew tired of questioning the world around him, and even more questioning the intention behind every word written in the books he worked on.

There’d been countless nights where time slipped away as they talked for hours before realizing it was three a.m and neither of them wanted to stop their conversation—wanted to stop thinking deeply about every little thing.

Somehow, the man who’d team up with Margo to scold editors on etymology was the same man who didn’t question how strange it would be to have a Chinese lady named Bertrude whose eyes were blue.

Thea prayed there’d never come a day when Adrian didn’t walk on the tenuous line between never outgrowing the ‘why’ stage children go through and never questioning the most mundane of things.

It wouldn’t be him if it did.

“You have a half-hour, not one second longer,” the farm owner, Richard, spoke for the first time since they began to follow him.

Warm light flooded into the cabin, decorated in the way Thea remembered her grandmother’s house to have been, filled with plaid pillows, fairy lights, Santa mugs, and little statues that ranged in skin color as she wanted all of her grandchildren to feel seen.

Any and every thought of wishing Thea had been drinking his hot chocolate, and that maybe if she loved him less, she would’ve accepted the offer of taking it from him, faded into nothing as she stepped inside the cabin, breathing the strange concoction of minty candy cane and the sharp smell of the decorated pine tree, along with the sweet aroma permeating from the milk chocolate shaped like Santa.

It was strange how the shop felt so magical when it looked like every other Christmas shop Thea had ever visited in her childhood, and even the ones in Gstaad.

Warwick, as quaint and homey as the city had been, planting a little seed of moving there as they grew tired of the city, didn't evoke the same wonder Gstaad did, yet the bestselling author would gladly never visit the Swiss Alps if every Christmas felt like this for her.

She couldn't say much had changed.

The Christmas past still had Adrian in her life, along with every Friedman that came with him. She had had family, and she had had Lala already last Christmas, and still, she had never felt so much joy in her heart—never felt so loved.

“Oh, look!” Thea squealed, drifting toward a wall bedecked with tiny crochet stockings fashioned into tree decorations. “L … L, where are you?”

“They have reindeers too.”

Glancing up to the sound of his voice, Thea followed the line of his sight, where an assembly of little reindeer wearing sweaters in forest green, orange, soft yellow, bright red, and baby blue had the alphabet written in white yarn.

Mischief twinkled in her eyes as Thea reached for a reindeer in a baby blue sweater with the letter L, then one yellow with A, another red with another L, and a green one with another A.

“Lala in reindeer?”

“No, it’s for Lala, Alara, Adrian—”

“The other L?”

“I’m thinking…”

“We can arrange them next to each other and act surprised it spells out her name,” Adrian suggested, willing to buy every variant for the endless names and nicknames their future child might have.

“It’s really not for her.”

“Sure.”

“It’s not,” Thea argued, picking the mini stocking in the same array of letters, though for those she picked an extra A and a T for herself. “Should we get one for everyone?”

Without waiting for an answer, a wandering hand reached for a C, J, G, O … assembling enough letters, Adrian felt certain they wouldn’t

need any more decorations, even as Thea reached for a felt jam heart biscuit with a little mumble about Lala loving those cookies.

None of the glass bubbles captured her attention, though through their wandering through the store, Alara woke up, reaching for the bubbles without lifting her sleepy head off Adrian's shoulders.

Abandoning his hot chocolate near the register, Adrian followed after Thea with a basket in hand, holding it up for her as she reached for a retro TV bubble, a set of tiny silver bells, felt dancing cats.

“Obbie!” Lala babbled, head rising as she stretched toward an English telephone box.

“Auntie Olivie, you’re right, my love.” Adrian kissed her cheek, letting her pick the bubble and drop—though not gently—it in the basket. “How did you know that?”

“Obbie!”

“We’ll work on your L’s.”

Pivoting on the balls of her heels, Thea beamed at Lala, whose tiny nose was still red like a reindeer’s, and whose cheeks were ruddy and filled with joy as she smiled at her daddy.

“She’s my clever girl. She’ll get the hang of her L’s all on her own. Won’t you, my love?”

A high-pitched laugh echoed within the cabin, loud enough for them to feel the familiar urge to glance around with apologies in their eyes. Save for Richard, who watched them as if they were a movie familiar to himself, they were alone to bask in that sound.

To soak in the little hands that reached for Thea as she peppered kisses on ruddy cheeks with a smile of her own, feeling the weight of Adrian’s gaze.

“Should we find one for Auntie Coco?”

“We’ll have to tell Olivie she found her a bubble first.”

“I know. Christmas can’t be about who is Lala’s favorite. It’s always going to be Aaron.”

“Aaron?”

Lala tilted her head up, looking at Adrian in a way that forced him to smooth the disgust out of the planes of his face. “A-won?”

“Aaron is her favorite?”

“We don’t count.”

“Of course we count. I count, don’t I?” He used the voice that made Lala beam brighter than the sun, and that reminded Thea she married the right man. “Daddy’s your favorite, aren’t I?”

Thea left him be, knowing Aaron would still be the one person who didn’t live in their home that would make Lala squeal and bounce whenever he went to visit.

One day, her aunts and uncle would realize video calls may steal smiles and giggles from Lala, but it was Aaron’s hour-long visit and him playing with her for most of those hours that made him her favorite person.

“Who is your favorite person?”

“*A-won.*”

“No, it’s Daddy!”

“*A-won.*”

“Between Aaron and Mommy?”

“*A-won.*”

“Maybe favorite to her means who she wishes would D-I-E?”

Laughing as she always did with her family, Thea wandered through the store, picking every ornament that brought her joy or made her think of their family.

They’d gotten enough Christmas trees to have one filled with mismatched ornaments, lacking any of the beauty and curated quality Christmas trees in malls and movies would have.

Out of the twelve trees, one could be filled with lights and ornaments that felt like home, that carried the imprint each and every member of their family had to themselves: a gavel for Jules, the English telephone box for Olivie, a pile of books for Nathaniel, an old sewing machine ornament for Cove...

“It’s our favorite,” Thea whispered to herself, stealing a glance at where Adrian still tried to convince Lala that he was her favorite person.

She watched them for a few moments, fingers gripping the slice of red velvet. The very first cake they ever shared with one another, the cake that had been in their wedding and every anniversary of theirs, the one Adrian would bring home on a whim whenever he craved the memories of that night.

To some, it wasn’t anything special.

To others, it would likely be a night they wished to forget.

For them, it was the beginning of everything. It was the birth of a star, the beginning of a life together, the genesis of a happiness unlike any Thea had ever imagined possible.

“Thea, look,” Adrian called for her, jutting his chin toward a little cotton canvas banner adorned by colorful felt letters spelling fala-la-la-la, with a wooden dowel threaded through the top of the banner, where string were attached, making it ready to hang. “Fala-la-la-la.”

He singsonged, shimmying as if dancing with Lala.

Past and future blend into the present, allowing her a glimpse of that slice of red velvet in Ina's, of them feeding Lala cake at their wedding in Italy, of Adrian and Lala dancing in a Christmas shop, and of every day in the future when they'd dance and laugh together.

None of this would've been hers to love without the dreams that pulsed so strongly in her heart, that lived in her mind as she thought of stories to write.

Thea always thought love divided itself, giving a piece of her heart to different people, and to her, writing had always held the entirety of her soul and being.

How very strange, Thea thought to herself, feeling that her heart had not been severed in small pieces, but rather had grown to accommodate Adrian along with her love for writing, growing even larger to have room for Lala.

Love pouring through every breath, through every beat of her heart, Thea was certain this was the best story she would ever write.