



The Book of Songs

ZamaTeeShares



A Song for You

↓ Donny Hathaway • Donny Hatha...



Like Real People Do

↓ Hozier • Hozier (Special Edition)



Summer Daze

↓ Nick Holder • Underground Alter...



When U Loved Me

↓ Hether • When U Loved Me



Sebenzela nina

↓ Samthing Soweto • Isphithiphithi



Trouble

↓ Omar Apollo • Friends



Nomvula (After the Rain)

↓ Freshlyground • Nomvula



Everything Stays

↓ Adventure Time, Olivia Olson • A...



I Want To Thank You

↓ Alicia Myers • The Best Of One ...

Prologue: *A Song for You* – Donny Hathaway

This is a bit unconventional for me. Outside of questionable poetry and novels that no one ever reads, I've never done something like this. I wrote this because I think songs are some of the best poems out there. They are the soundtracks to our lives (and movies), they make people feel less alone in a world of like 7 billion people and put words to the feelings some of us cannot articulate. We attach music to memories, people and feelings. Playlists are thoughtful gifts and letters. There are endless genres to choose from. I'm geeking out, I'm sorry.

This is a compilation of stories that are inspired by the lyrics of songs I really enjoy. They're mostly interpretive stories, some take the lyrics and bring them to life with a similar story line and others are just what the song reminded me of. The stories are all fictional. Well technically fictional, I won't disclose which ones are more real than others.

I hope these songs make you feel something too. I hope you see yourself in these stories. And, most importantly, I hope I don't bore you.

In the words of Mr Hathaway, “*And I’m singing this song for you.*”

Chapter I: *Like Real People Do* – Hozier

I've been going to see Dr Winston for a little over two years now. Every Monday afternoon and Thursday morning. She was recommended to me by my GP when he started prescribing depression medicine to me. It was a good pairing; Dr Winston was kind and understanding of my issues. She never made me feel like my feelings were invalid. I liked going to her.

A month ago, after our Thursday morning session, I saw this man sitting in her waiting room. He was wearing a tan coat, tightly buttoned up, black slacks and black shoes. It was 27 degrees outside. I smiled his way, but he didn't see it because he was focused on his phone. He caught my attention because I had never seen him before. Thursdays were the appointment day for Mrs Old Leather Boots. We never spoke, hence the nickname, so I thought it was merely a scheduling change. The following Thursday Mr Tan Coat was back. Still wearing that coat, different shoes and different slacks.

Every time I saw Dr Winston's patients, as they left her office or were waiting by reception, I tried to guess what they were there for. Mrs Old Leather Boots always looked quarter to crying and

had a large purse, probably struggling from the pressures of her job and being a full-time mother. There was a young teen girl, Lip-gloss Lady, who had her appointment before my Monday session; clearly assigned by her parents to deal with their divorce. Dr Winston would never confirm nor deny my theories, nor did I ask her to. There was just something attractive about Mr Tan Coat. Mental health issues didn't have a certain look, but they had an energy. He didn't give off that energy.

Last Thursday, as I walked out the room, he wasn't sitting in his usual seat. I found myself looking for him. He was standing by the coffee station sipping on his hot mix. We locked eyes. He gave me a polite grin. It was so new for me, I panicked. Instead of reciprocating the smile I fast walked out. What are you doing? Why are you running from an innocent gesture? I can hear Dr Winston saying, "You need to work on trusting people's intentions", but I couldn't tell her that I had a semi-crush on one of her patients. I knew it was a crush because my outfits for Thursdays became a lot fancier than what I normally wear.

‘That’s a beautiful dress.’ The receptionist had commented that week.

It made me smile because if she noticed, then Mr Tan Coat would notice. I'd ruined any chance at talking to him when I ran out.

Dr Winston's task for me that week was to go out in public and try to enjoy myself without relying on my friends. I promised her that I would, but ten minutes into my solo outing on Saturday night it felt like I was torturing myself. I'd only ordered a drink so there was still time to ditch myself. She wouldn't be upset at me; we'd just have to unpack why I couldn't do it.

Then I saw him. It was like a dream. At first I didn't think it was him at first because he wasn't wearing the tan coat. But it was definitely him. And he saw me too. I saw the wheels turning in his head as he walked towards me.

'Hi.' He said.

'Hello.' I said.

'I'm sorry if this is forward but, are you one of- '

'Dr Winston's clients, yes.'

He laughed in relief. He was starting to think I was a figment of his imagination. I asked if he wanted to take a seat. Then we

took off from there. I confessed that I was at this bar because it was my homework. He explained that his friend owned the bar and coming here was his guilty pleasure. We talked about a lot of things. His job in marketing for the SAB, my beef with beer ads, the tiny mole above his left brow, my obsession with fantasy books when I was a teenager and how he owned all seven books of the Crimson King series. It was refreshing. At my fourth drink and his third, I admitted that I'd tried to catch his eyes sometimes at therapy. He was blushing, can you imagine! Unfortunately, I wouldn't stop talking.

When I went to see Dr Winston, I was going to sort out the things I couldn't mention to anyone else, things I was battling with and needed help with. Never did I think those sessions would lead me to meeting him. The honesty took him back a bit. His hands covered mine and he gave me that look again. His eyes mirrored mine in the most miserable way. I knew why his eyes were like that. No wonder he was seeing Dr Winston. We promised to do this again some other time. He kissed my cheek goodbye. I was excited at the prospect of learning more about him. It had been so long since I was excited about someone.

My boss rescheduled our meeting with investors to Monday, so I had to make a different appointment for my session. Dr Winston said that she would fit me in for Tuesday afternoon. I couldn't wait to tell her that her task went better than expected. The door opened while I was busy scrolling through another blog post. Dr Winston escorted a beautiful woman out. I was thinking about a possible nickname for her when Mr Tan Coat came out behind her. She coiled her arm around his while Dr Winston said goodbye.

‘I'll see you both next week.’ She said.

He paused slightly when he saw me. I tried to conceal the bone crushing pain I was feeling. They walked past me, hand in hand, and left me with the debris.

I went back to the bar that day, with nothing but hope that he would be there. He was. Same spot, same coat. As soon as I sat down he tried to explain himself. I didn't hear much of what he said; I heard the words “couple counselling” and “separation”. He was nervous and apologetic, but I stopped before he could say more.

‘We don’t know each other. You don’t know about my shit, and I don’t know about yours. But I like you. I like spending time with you. Whatever this is, I want it to go on. I won’t bring up your business and you won’t ask about mine. Deal?’

And that was it. We’d talk for hours, try out his favourite meals, laugh at silly memories and then go our separate ways. And it was good. Against my better judgment and Dr Winston’s advice, it worked for me.

Chapter II: *Summer Daze* – Nick Holder

I rolled over to the other side of the bed. Khanyisa was sleeping at the foot of the bed, her pyjama top rolled up halfway revealing her stomach. I used my foot to nudge her awake. The limp clown flopped off the bed. I wish I had recorded it because the sound was hilarious.

‘Whore.’ She grumbled at me.

I didn’t regret it because it was my duty as her best friend to mess with her. We were brushing our teeth, mumbling the song from the musical we loved. While making breakfast I had to clear up the empty wine bottles on the counters. We had gone a little overboard last night pregaming. Khanyisa was helping me out while simultaneously seeing if there was anything left inside of them.

‘I called Cici and Noncebo, they said they’re coming over with strawberries for the pancakes.’ Khanyisa laughed mischievously.

She laughed because they brought strawberries and champagne. The girls said it wasn’t brunch without mimosas. I thought we

couldn't surpass the fun we had the night before, but brunch was a good contender. Noncebo was, badly, teaching us how to put on lashes with one hand. Cici was telling us a story about this date she had where the man was scoping out the restaurant for his anniversary dinner next week. I got into a very intense dirty whining contest with Noncebo. Someone had a great idea to re-watch all the snaps and stories from last night. There was a video of Khanyisa rapping along to a trap song with the attitude of the person who wrote it, sending us into further hysterics.

Our intentions were to go out again after brunch. We didn't account for the fact that "itis" made us too lazy to move. We loaned Noncebo and Cici our pyjamas. My vest looked like a crop top on Cici thanks to her blessed chest. It took nearly thirty minutes to choose a movie to watch, do we watch something new or a beloved classic? It didn't matter what we watched; our side commentary made every movie enjoyable. Khanyisa had a specific request for anything with filth. Her vote won because deep down we're all filthy.

I had known everyone in that room for over six years, it was never a dull moment when they were around. Whether we were

indoors or out in the world. And we had years of outings ahead of us.

Chapter III: *When U Loved Me* – Hether

My phone is ringing. I look at it once then let it ring until it stopped.

How many times could I legally play a song before someone killed me? The concept of time was lost on me. It was suggested to me by Spotify and was only 3 minutes and 11 seconds long. On loop, it felt like the soundtrack to my tragic romance movie. I only knew I've been playing it for a long time when my phone started ringing again. He would call in thirty minute intervals. It was a cycle: He'd call, I'd ignore him, he'd send a text, I'd text him to leave me alone, he'd call after thirty minutes.

This was the worst fight we'd had. By eight o'clock we'd resolve everything and go back to normal. Another cycle. I broke that cycle already. There would be no resolving this.

My sister came over at night. She knew what I was like when I was going through something heart breaking. She was there to make sure I ate something, which is why she came with a box of my favourite chocolate cake. Her heart was in the right place.

'I stopped buying this.' I muttered to her.

‘Pardon?’

‘I stopped buying this cake, the ice cream with the macadamia nuts and the donuts from Main Street Market.’ My eyes began to water. ‘I stopped having my favourite things because he said my face was getting round.’

My sister nestled me in her arms, my tears ruining her button down shirt.

‘Is that why you’re fighting?’ She asked.

I wish that the case. The truth was he said that after our fourth month together. We laughed it off on the phone, but to me the memories of years of fat shaming and bullying came flooding in. After that, I subconsciously stopped buying sweets and treats I enjoyed. That should have been the final straw, but it wasn’t. He didn’t like the dresses I wore out, I bought longer ones. Then he had a problem when I suggested cutting my hair shorter, I kept it long. Then he wanted me to spend less time with “bad people”, I blocked my oldest friend. It was always something else until I had almost completely remodelled myself. And I didn’t realise it until it was a year down the line. A year of living that was lost forever.

The following morning, I took a minute to look at my reflection. Taking note of every dent, scratch and crinkle. There were puffy bags under my eyes. Dark concaves. God, I was so tired. This is who I was now. I required serious renovations.

My house scissors were protruding out of my Superman pencil case. I ran them under some hot water along with my afro comb. One last look into the mirror.

An hour later my sister came over with an actual meal this time and the razor machine I had asked for. Her girlfriend was a buzzcut babe and was kind enough to let me borrow them.

‘Hey sis, I didn’t know if you wanted a burger or a... oh.’ She gasped when she saw me.

‘Is it bad?’ I asked.

‘No, no it’s lovely.’ She chuckles. ‘You look like mama.’

We started laughing at that. Mama refused to grow her hair out, she was a buzzcut babe for life.

After helping me shave it all off and brushing off the excess, my sister asked me what inspired the look. I told her the truth. It was over with him. It was over when I stopped seeing myself in

the mirror. Aside from doing it because it's what I wanted, I had to get away from the girl that he created.

‘I’ll kill him.’ She said.

‘Please don’t.’ I failed to say it with a straight face.

‘I’m going to.’ She muttered it a bit quieter this time. ‘I know people.’

She was only half joking.

Chapter IV: *Sebenzela Nina* – Samthing Soweto

‘Mommy, did you go fetch the shoes?’ I ask.

I’m afraid of moving too much in case I poke myself in the eye with the tweezers. Another person is styling my hair, the blistering heat of the straightener heating the tips of my ears. We’re trying to rush before we’re late.

‘Yes, they’re next to your suitcase.’ My mother responds.

She’s dressed now and wearing the outfit I got to pick out for her. My mother wasn’t the type to don extravagant clothes and waste her money on makeup. We were the same person in that regard. Today was an exception for both of us. I was finally graduating today. For her, that meant her first born child was graduating, an equally exciting achievement. We both deserved to be spoiled today.

We managed to get dressed on time, making it to my school’s Great Hall with five minutes to spare. The rest of the ceremony went smoothly. We were halfway the graduating class list.

Thanks to me being Nomvete I was in the lower half of the list. I nervously glanced over to the guest seating. My friends were easy to spot in the crowd. Jack was craning his long neck to see the people he knew walk up on stage. Nandi was taking lots of pictures and ululating when one of her friends got cum laude. My support system. My eyes travelled downwards to see my mother and baby brother sitting together. Mom couldn't sit still in her seat, rearranging herself every few seconds. I thought it was because of the dress – she hasn't worn something that tight fitting in a long time – then my eyes started to water.

This had been happening the whole week leading up to this. We would be at the kitchen table discussing where we to buy my grad shoes while chopping veggies, then her voice would shake, and I would start crying. Even when they killed someone on our favourite soapie. The first time I put on my dress the designer had to hand me some tissues.

The announcer snapped me out of my thoughts.

‘Unathi Nomvete!’

My friends and family turned the hall into a stadium. My ears were ringing from the applause and ululations. I can't recall

what I said to the lady that handed me my scroll. Everything felt more real now.

When we were planning this day, the plan was to have a small, intimate family gathering to celebrate the following day. My family didn't understand the words "small" and "intimate". They had invited anyone who knew who I was. If it weren't for my uncle's butchery-owning friend there wouldn't be enough food for everyone. My mother was playing hostess, greeting and hugging every new person she saw, grinning from ear to ear. It was nice to see her back in her normal apron and jeans look. I caught her applying mascara earlier on. She secretly enjoyed being glamorous.

My uncle called everyone into the lounge area. Little children crowded the adults' laps while the elders were given the fancy chairs from the dining room table. I was called to stand in front of the TV unit where everyone could see me.

uMakazi – my mother's younger sister – welcomed everyone to our home, thanking them for taking some time to come and celebrate my achievements. It wasn't a family function until someone constructed a makeshift programme for us to follow. The speeches were all sweet and not incredibly long. My little

brother had written his speech on a card that he was going to give me, the sweetest gift ever. My mother spoke about how proud she was of me, making jokes about us going from having to take me to hockey tournaments to watching me walk on that stage. She wrapped it up quickly because the tears were threatening to make an appearance.

Then it was my turn. I started off by thanking everyone for their presence today. Including the people who brought food, gifts and helped when we needed it. It was time for me to talk about the real star of my life.

‘As many of you know, mommy doesn’t like it when we give her a lot of attention. She has always been a woman who works behind the scenes.’ I said.

Everyone nodded, thinking about all the times Mom refused to accept the praise for her work.

‘When I was born it was just me and her. Our family was there, and they were very supportive, but at the end of the day we were the perfect team. There are so many things she did to make today possible for me. She worked hard, saved up, made

me focus on my studies and woke up at 5 a.m. to help me with my school concert costume. I was Fairy number 3.'

The audience laughed, but my mother had her hand over her mouth. I knew what that meant.

'There's nothing my mother wouldn't give to make us happy. And I was always telling her to relax or take a break.' I took a deep breath. 'When I said that she would reply by saying "I'll take a break when I give you everything I never had.", and she meant it. We're here now because my mother wouldn't rest. Now that I'm here I want to do the same for her. I'm going to take care of you.'

Silent tears of gratitude were streaming down her face. She could rest now.

Chapter V: *Trouble* – Omar Apollo

My tweet about the movie *Bad Bones & Brains* was how this all started.

The movie was, in my opinion, an underrated classic that more nerds should pay attention to. Not even my regular nerdy mutuals liked it. Then one day I saw “@BlueMoonBeauty: No lies detected. People need to talk about that movie more”. We went on to talk about our favourite parts. Mine being the fight between the protagonist and the mad trucker, theirs being when the protagonist wins a fight by running away from the guards and they fall into a pit trap. We followed each other shortly after.

@BlueMoonBeauty: Hey, did you know that there's rumours of a spin off movie about Hill Hunter? It's about his life before they meet.

@LastAirVenda: Hill Hunter! I need to see that

We spent hours talking about that and other movies we liked. Turns out we had lots of things in common. She was also really

kind and funny on the timeline. She would tag me in anything she knew I'd enjoy.

I started smiling at my phone when I saw her handle in my notifications bar. My parents made backhand remarks about me always laughing at my phone, an exaggeration. Though I found myself smiling when she showed up on the timeline. Friday night, my peers are making plans to become one with the streets and I'm in bed waiting for a stranger to reply to me.

When I was telling my best friend about a joke she said, I realised that I kept calling her Blue. My best friend gave me those weird eyes.

‘You’re going on about this girl like you know her.’

‘I do know her.’ She narrowed her eyes at me.

‘Obviously not *know her* know her. I can’t help it. She’s pretty perfect.’

‘And two provinces away.’

That was the painful part. I was falling for someone who lived one flight away. This, and having no idea what Blue looked like, should have been discouraged me. Yet there I was, having my internal organs twirl whenever she sent me a message. It got to

the point where I stopped telling my friend about it because this was ridiculous. My affections were based on a few interactions between us, but I haven't found anyone who likes these things the way I liked them. The logical part of my brain was constantly reminding me that I shouldn't like her. The not so logical part of my brain was assuring me that I would be doing myself a great injustice if I didn't at least try. Which was true, the least I could do was tell her how I'm feeling.

It took me a week to work up the courage. In that time, she kept saying things that made the crush worse. Have you ever wished that someone would stop being wonderful? Be careful what you wish for.

After a few practice runs in my head I typed out the message.

@LastAirVenda: Hey 😊 not to make this weird or anything, but I think you're really cute. And I enjoy talking to you

@BlueMoonBeauty: Aaaaw well thank you so much

@LastAirVenda: And I thought we should hang out sometime

In a good story, this would end well, and my feelings reciprocated. That was wishful thinking. It was radio silence from then onwards. A dark part of me thought that maybe something happened to her, but after two days her account was active again.

Classic Naledi. I received a little kindness and attention, then fell face first into something I imagined. No one forced me to tell her and now I'd lost a valuable internet friend.

Six months post my embarrassment, I found myself in a place where it didn't even cross my mind. Sometimes someone posted a meme about *Bad Bones & Brain* and it hurt that there was no one to tag on it. Then I'd get over that too. Crushes came and went, there was even someone who came close to being my girlfriend and she lived an Uber trip away. I was proud of myself because I stopped falling for people immediately. I still fell hard every time, but I'd bounce back faster. There was no use denying it: I was always going to be a hopeless romantic. Love was my kryptonite. Even things that only resembled love. I thought my self-actualisation meant that from that day on I'd be smarter. Then one day I talked about how silly the main

character from the show *Kinfolk* was being. I scrolled up past the likes and one retweet to see a special reply.

@BlueMoonBeauty replying to @LastAirVenda: Right! You'd think that he learned his lesson from the first season.

Maybe I hadn't fully learned my lesson.

Chapter VI: Nomvula – Freshlyground

We were in the middle of Woolies looking for black dresses with flattering cuts when I started crying. Like real, choking on my spit crying. If we were in a big city people wouldn't give us another moment of their time. Here they were staring.

‘It's okay my baby.’ My mother said, cradling my head and brushing my hair back.

She was wrong. It wasn't okay. I don't think it will ever be okay ever again. How can things be okay when Tumi was gone. I didn't want to say that out loud because the adults were still trying to process everything too. There was no need to be strong on my behalf, they're allowed to miss her as much as I did. I guess that was what you had to do as an adult.

We left the store with one dress and a skirt that I'd wear with a long sleeve top from my closet. I was sorting through my folded clothes looking for it when I stumbled upon a red scarf. It was long and woollen, bought at the local school market last year. Tumi was there because she had to watch over me and make sure I didn't spend my float money in one day. She was also the only adult in the house who could make it because she was still

studying. One of the students was a big knitting fan and Tumi thought the scarf was cute. I thought it was ugly, I still do. Despite my comment, she was kind enough to lend it to me when I had a netball game during the winter season. Every few weeks she'd ask for it back, I'd say I'll give it to her later, forget about it and have the same conversation weeks later. She was so patient with me. From the moments when I had my childish meltdowns to when I borrowed clothes that I never gave back.

The morning of her funeral was a cold one. It was only fitting for the day I say goodbye to the best person I knew. Our extended family had arrived the day before to help out.

Everyone was making the best of a bad situation; this was the first time we'd come together since Christmas. There was a lot less drinking than other functions. Or more, I was too naïve to notice. The skirt was surprisingly warm, but mom still insisted that I wear stockings. Just in case it wasn't enough, Tumi's scarf was draped around my neck. The red wool overshadowing the rest of my outfit. If we were going to church my mother would scold me for ruining my outfit, but she knew why I was wearing it and decided to be peaceful.

‘Let’s go. We don’t want to be caught in the rain.’ My dad said.

We walked down to the site, my parents hand in hand. They were concealing my father’s shaking hands. Tumi’s mother was front and centre with her other children. Her head was hanging low. I wanted to hug her tightly, to comfort her and remind myself what hugs from Tumi felt like.

At that age, no one told me how painful sudden death was. I knew that my grandparents would one day leave us because they can’t live forever. No one told me that sometimes you could say goodbye to someone, then the next day get a call that they were dead now. The worst part is that maybe if she got into the car five minutes later then she’d be here. She’d be asking me how my Geography project was going. She’d be asking me what happened to my school shirt. She’d laugh until she cried because she tripped and broke her ass in the kitchen. The only person who made me feel less weird and alone was sealed under the earth and wood. I’d never see her again. I’d never hear her voice again.

How cruel life was.

After she was laid to rest, the grief was unpredictable. There were days where I'd be fine and days where I got sad when I made myself tea the way Tumi used to. It was horrible. I didn't know how I was going to carry on. But I did. Against the pain of it all, I found a way to carry on. I'd set a reminder for her birthday every time I got a new phone. Sometimes a whole week would pass without me thinking about her and I'd feel guilty. I shouldn't have, because I know Tumi and Tumi would tell me to focus on living. She was always with me, that would never change, and the best way to remember her would be to live as she did. Fully.

I love you Tumi.

Chapter VII: *Everything Stays* – Adventure Time

‘When’s the last time you went to the beach?’ My partner asked me.

‘I’m not sure. A month? Three?’ I used the pen in my hand to scratch my head. ‘It was the beginning of the year though.’

‘Babe, it’s August now.’

‘Oh. It’s August? Wild.’

Lu put the frying pan he was scraping clean down in the sink. He quickly dried his soapy hands on the dish cloth and came to my workstation. “Workstation” was a sweet word to describe the mess of loose paper, sticky notes and assorted pens I’d left on the dining room table. It was the only place where I could type out work on my laptop without jeopardising my spine and battery life. Lu slowly pulled my laptop away from me.

‘No wait, I need to press save.’ I cried.

‘We are going to the beach. Like in ten minutes. You have two minutes to change.’ He said calmly.

‘I can’t go. My main character needs to resolve this conflict, if I leave now I’ll never figure out what to say next.’ I said desperately.

‘You’ve been saying that for five days.’ He cupped my cheek in his hand, warm from the dish water. ‘We’ll only be out for a little bit. Maybe the fresh air will inspire you.’

My natural instinct was to argue, but Lu was right. He’d seen me hit a hundred creative blocks before and knew that I could be stuck for weeks. Normally he’d help me out with small gestures, like buying my favourite ice cream, watching sports games in the bedroom to give me peace or brewing fresh coffee when I was working into the night. We had never gotten to the point where I needed a field trip. This was the first time I was writing a book with the chance of being published. Also, it was hard to say no to him and his little cute face.

‘I shall take five minutes. And you’re driving.’ He planted a triumphant kiss on my forehead.

Our house was a long ride away from the beach front. Thanks to terrible town planning, we lived on quite a slope that allowed us to see the horizon from the living room window. As a young girl

I always wanted a house near the ocean. As a grown woman I now knew that it wasn't something my budget allowed. I settled for the view, hoping that I would make regular trips down there. That became impossible with me being too busy to go as often as I'd like. Lu, who had spent his whole life with easy access to the ocean, wasn't a big fan of the beach.

'It doesn't mean much to me. It was always there for me when I was young. What I really wanted was a fun park with rollercoasters.' He admitted earlier on in our relationship.

This fact made this spontaneous trip even better, any other person would have stayed home and waited for me to come back. I had been gazing out my window, watching assorted houses flash past until they formed one long stroke of colour, when I turned to look at him. He was focused on the road. When he was trying to concentrate he would squint his eyes a little. It didn't matter that he was wearing his prescription glasses. I reached out to graze the back of his head, my fingers getting lost in the soft curls of his hair. He grinned.

'Hey, don't distract the driver.' He used his shoulder to nudge me away.

The beach was fairly empty by the time we got there. It was three o'clock on a Wednesday, it was a surprise to see anyone there. We had picked the not so popular spot for surfers and swimmers. I saw little children splashing around. Birds flying against the force of the wind. A group of beach babes posing for pictures by the rocks. Man, I loved the beach.

Lu got out and started undoing the laces of his sneakers. I had bought this man perfectly good flip flops for our trips, but he insisted on wearing sneakers every time. Three years of dating and it was the hill he was willing to die on.

We waded through the sand, feeling the soles of my feet go from scolding hot to ice cold. My sundress tickled my knees. Lu's hand was tightly clasping mine. We stopped right at the spot where the waves brushed our toes. I took a deep breath.

That's it, I thought. That's exactly what I needed to clear my head.

His arms wrapped around my waist, the hairs on his forearms brushing against mine, and leaned over until our faces were level. I'd give him a minute before he referred to our height difference. For now, everything was peaceful.

‘Tell me why the beach is so important to you.’ He whispered in my ear.

‘Such deep questions. At least take me out on a date first.’

He laughed into the side of my neck. His laugh was hideous.

‘It’s more about the ocean than the beach itself. I like that it’s always here. The sun sets, the moon disappears, people leave, plans fall apart, and we lose ourselves in this weird life cycle. Things change, but the ocean will always be right here. Constantly moving every day.’ I said.

‘And...’ He prompted.

‘*And* I need that. I need to be reminded that no matter what’s happening in my world, there’s this huge body of water I can go to and feel better.’ My eyes grew big. ‘Which is why I need to stop freaking out about doing something on my own.’

As soon as the words left my mouth I realised what Lu was doing. I had never told him that before and yet, somehow, he figured out that it was the only solution for this particular block. The fucking Sherlock thing he loves doing.

‘Does someone pay you to be good at this boyfriend thing?’ I asked sarcastically.

‘Not a cent. I’m doing this out of the goodness of my heart.’ He bombarded me with more kisses. ‘You’re worth it though.’

We stayed like that for a while. Just silently watching the waves crash. I was lucky to have Lu. He was my ocean.

Epilogue: *Thank You* – Alicia Meyers

Listen, this quarantine life has been difficult. For different reasons. I'm so lucky that I get to do this during these uncertain times. So, first things first, thanks to me for finding a way get through this.

I am grateful for everyone who has made this easier for me. Not just the people who check up on me, people that have made me laugh, entertained me, put me on to cool movies and shows. Everything.

I am also grateful for everyone who reads over my work for me, my unpaid and amateur editors. You soothe my anxiety and aren't afraid to tell me that my work sucks (I think).

On a slightly unrelated note: I have trouble admitting that I can do things. It's either I cannot do it at all, or I downplay my abilities by adding words like "sorta" before my abilities. I don't know if it's a humility or insecurity thing, I am simply trying to fix it. So, I'm not saying that I'm very good, but I'm a writer.

That's what I am.

And thank you for supporting that.