A BOOK OF MESSAGES

50

Elena

from everyone who loves you

HER FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY · JUNE

THIS BOOK IS FOR

Elena Marlowe

◆

Nine people who love you were asked for one thing:
say what you never quite manage to say out loud.

These are their answers.

WHERE IT STARTED

A note from Daniel

Elena, I asked everyone who knows you to write down what they could never fit into a birthday card. I expected five replies. I got nine, and two of them made me cry at my desk.

I have spent twenty-three years watching you make other people feel like the most interesting person in the room. Tonight, for once, the room is looking at you.

Read this slowly. Read it on a day when you doubt yourself, too. Every word here is true, and every word is for you.

Happy fiftieth, my love. Best decision I ever made.

Daniel

YOUR HUSBAND, AND THE ONE WHO STARTED THIS

FROM THE KIDS

Sofia & Theo

Mum, you taught me to ride a bike by running behind me the whole summer, pretending to hold on long after you'd let go. I only found out last year.

That is you, entirely. Always letting go quietly, always right behind. Happy birthday. Please never stop calling to tell me what you cooked.

Sofia DAUGHTER

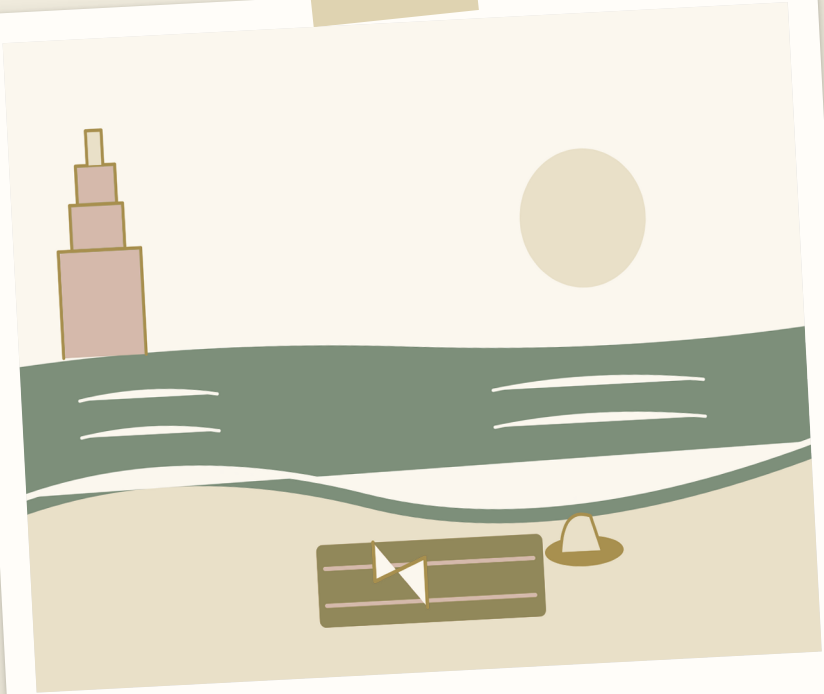
◆

Fifty is a lot of candles. The fire department is on standby. Love you, Mum. Thanks for every 2am pick-up, and for never saying "I told you so" out loud.

Theo SON

THROUGH THE YEARS

Elena, in the places she loved



Lisbon, the summer we got lost

Forty-ninth. The cake caught fire.

Her garden, always a little wild

FROM HER BEST FRIEND

Nadia

Dear Elena, we met in the queue for a photocopier in 1998. You were loudly telling the machine what you thought of it, and I decided on the spot that I wanted you on my side.

Twenty-six years later you have been there for the wedding, the divorce, the move, the second wedding (mine, but you cried more), and every Sunday phone call in between. You are the one who remembers the name of my dentist's dog. You are the one who says the true thing, kindly, at exactly the moment I can hear it.

I turned fifty in January, and I am here to report back: it is wonderful. You stop apologising. You start saying yes to the right things. You will be extremely good at it.

Bring the good wine. I'll bring the photocopier jokes.

With all my love, Nadia

FRIEND SINCE 1998

FROM FAMILY, WORK AND NEXT DOOR

Kind words

Little sister, you were annoying for about eleven years and wonderful for the other thirty-nine. Happy birthday. I still have your half of the Lego.

Clara SISTER

◆

Fourteen years on the same team and I have never once seen you rattled. You turn deadlines into dinner plans. The office is quieter when you're out, and the spelling is worse. Happy fiftieth, boss.

Marcus COLLEAGUE

◆

Thank you for the tomatoes over the fence, the borrowed ladder, and for waving every single morning. Our street is kinder because you live on it.

Grace NEIGHBOUR

A VOICE MESSAGE

Mum

> *"My darling girl, I wanted you to hear this in my own voice, because some things sound different out loud..."*

Rosalind Marlowe

VOICE MESSAGE · 1:12

Scan with your phone camera to hear Mum's message.

Plays in your browser. No app needed.

Rosalind

YOUR MOTHER

Her fortieth, the long walk up. She beat us all to the top.

“You make people braver.”

LEILA, ON KNOWING ELENA

FROM COLLEGE

Ravi & Leila

Fifty reasons Elena is great. The editor says I am only allowed five.

1. She laughs first, and loudest.
2. She has never been late to help.
3. She will argue for an hour about the best route, then take yours.
4. Every mixtape she ever made is still in my car.
5. She makes everyone feel like they were invited on purpose.

Ravi COLLEGE FRIEND

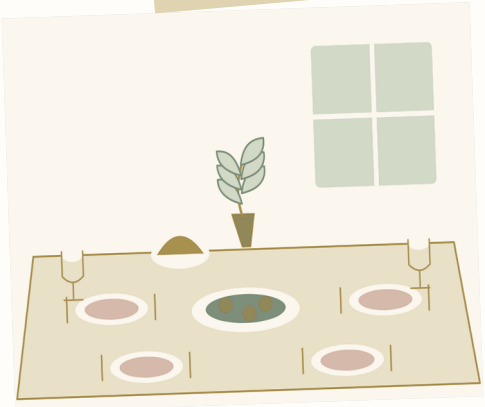
◆

I was terrified of everything at nineteen. You were the one who said, "Come on, it'll be a story." It always was.

Thirty years later I still hear it every time I'm about to talk myself out of something. You make people braver, Elena. I hope you know that.

Leila COLLEGE FRIEND

Small moments, kept



Sunday lunch

The long way home

Every birthday, a table full

Still climbing

Add as many photos as you like.
Every contributor can upload their own.

WORDS THEY USED FOR YOU

brave *kind* *funny* *steady*

generous *calm* *home*

loyal *warm* *fearless*

patient *first to laugh*

◆

Nine messages. One person.

WRITTEN WITH LOVE BY

Daniel
HUSBAND

Sofia
DAUGHTER

Theo
SON

Nadia
BEST FRIEND

Clara
SISTER

Marcus
COLLEAGUE

Grace
NEIGHBOUR

Ravi
COLLEGE FRIEND

Leila
COLLEGE FRIEND

Rosalind
MOTHER

Happy fiftieth, Elena.

Keep this somewhere you can find it
on the days you need to be reminded.

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Make a book like this for someone you love.

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