



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

*E*lena, 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.

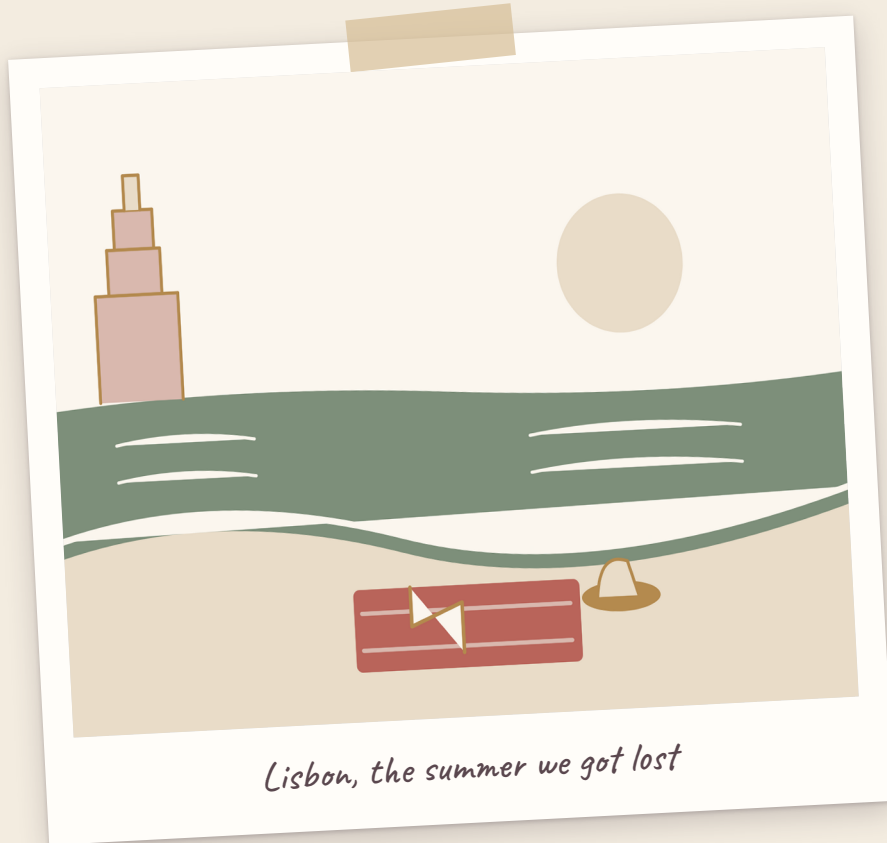
Sofia DAUGHTER



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

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

*D*ear 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

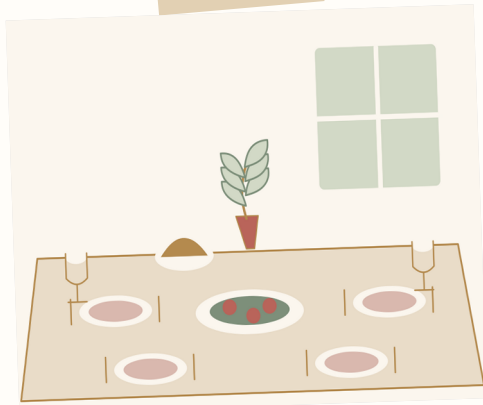


I was terrified of everything at nineteen. You were the one who said, "Come on, it'll be a story." It always was.

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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