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**Delirium**

by NanasTeaParty

**Summary**

Lorna loses the baby and what's left of her sanity. Nicky tries to protect her, but some things are too big for these caged walls to contain.
Chapter Summary

Nicky is forced to play kickball, unaware that Lorna is in even more danger.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Something was wrong.

Every cell in Lorna’s body was screaming it. A strange pressure built in her abdomen, different to the baby’s kicks or the heartburn she’d been suffering the past month. It wasn’t exactly painful but everything about it was wrong, wrong, wrong.

“How you holding up, kid?” Nicky asked. She was watching as Lorna tried to rub away the wrong feeling in her stomach.

She wanted to tell her. To have Nicky make sure nothing was wrong, to tell her it was all in her head again. But what if it wasn’t? She couldn’t admit it, not to Nicky, not to herself. It’s just the baby kicking, she told herself. If she pretended hard enough, maybe the wrong feeling would go away. And everything would be okay.

Nicky’s wide eyes were still watching her.

“With all the running and hiding in small spaces, little Carmine’s going crazy,” Lorna tried to reason with a laugh.

But she was leaning onto the sink for support, her heart racing. She was really regretting that running now. And getting herself involved in the C block vs D block kickball massacre they were trying to avoid. Nicky was right to warn her. Lorna was always fucking wrong. She never realised until it was too late.

“Carmine, huh?” Nicky’s warm voice distracted her.

Lorna smiled. The name she’d been deliberating for months sounded even more perfect when Nicky said it. “Yeah.”

“Just tell Carmine to chill. We’re hanging tight, it’s all good.”

Lorna nodded. You hear that, Carmine? Everything is going to be alright.

A thud came from outside the closet door. A flicker of panic registered in Nicky’s eyes, but she quickly pasted on a smile to soothe Lorna. “Be cool.” Nicky tiptoed towards the closet door and inched it closed.
Lorna leaned over to check, keeping her grip on the sink. Maybe this wrong feeling was stress-related because it was only getting worse. She tried to support herself by grabbing the wall with her other hand. As she did, her arm gently knocked over a broomstick, sending a loud clatter through the closet.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.” She mouthed to Nicky. *Fuck! Why did she have to fuck things up all the time?*

“Who’s there?” A voice called from the laundry room. Lorna recognised it immediately – one of the D-block girls, the thin, blonde one who was always ready for a fight. Annalisa. *Fuck, why her?*

Nicky looked at Lorna sadly, then plastered a reassuring smile on her face. Then she started walking towards the door. Towards her death.

No no no.

“Don’t go.” Lorna whispered, but she was sure the voice in her head was screaming. The pressure in her belly was threatening to explode. Nicky flashed a final grin and slipped out the door. “No, Nicky… Fuck!”

“Hey, Annalisa. Fancy meeting you here. Ain’t you supposed to be at the kickball field?”

“Picking up a weapon I stashed.” Lorna watched through a crack in the door as Annalisa pulled out a shiv. *Fuck fuck fuck.* “What the fuck were you doing in there?”

“Would you believe, I was doing the exact same thing,” laughed Nicky. “Hey, great minds, huh?”

Annalisa grabbed Nicky by the hair and pinned her against the washing machine. The shiv glinted against her neck. Lorna’s stomach twisted. Maybe if she wasn’t so pregnant, maybe if she didn’t feel like she was being torn in two, she would have jumped out of the closet and battered Annalisa. She better not hurt a fucking hair on her head.

“I’m sick of your shit, Nichols,” Annalisa growled. “If you were picking up a weapon, where the fuck is it?”

“Wanna see a proof of purchase?” Nicky produced a shiv from her trouser pockets – the repurposed toothbrush Lorna had made as a wedding gift for Piper and Alex. Oh, thank God Nicky had taken it from her. But was it enough?

Annalisa looked at the shiv. It was measly compared to the razor blade drawn to Nicky’s throat. Slowly, she let go of Nicky’s hair. “We should get going.”

“Yeah, big time. You wouldn’t wanna be tardy to the murdering.”

“Let’s go.” Annalisa began to exit. Nicky looked back helplessly towards the closet where Lorna was hiding, but she had no choice but to follow. And then she was gone.

Almost as soon as the coast was clear, the feeling in Lorna’s abdomen turned to pain. She grabbed onto the laundry cart to stop herself falling. “Fuck! No. No, no, no, baby, not now.”

Oh God, was this it? Was she actually going into early labour? The baby books she borrowed from the prison library had said it would start off less strong, like period cramps or something. Not this blinding, knock-the-breath-from-your-lungs kind of pain. Something was *wrong*.

In her delirious state, she deliberated getting out of the closet and seeking help. But what if one of the
D-block bitches saw her? Would they make her go to the game? Surely they would see she was in pain, real pain, and let her go. On the other hand, distracting the guards with labour pains was the plan all along, right?

When she finally decided to go get help, she realised she couldn’t. She could barely stand up from hurting, let alone walk. She sunk to the floor, holding her belly and hyperventilating. Nobody was coming for her. The only person in this prison who cared about her was Nicky, and Lorna’s carelessness just sent her to her death.

It could have been minutes or hours before CO Blake found Lorna lying in a heap in the utility closet. She'd stopped caring about anyone finding her and dragging her to the game and she was screaming now. No shiv could be as painful as this.

“What the heck?”

Lorna barely registered him through the haze of tears, but she prayed it was one of the nicer COs.

“Inmate, what are you doing in here? … Inmate?”

Lorna tried to explain, but she couldn’t catch her breath. He noticed her hands gripping her swollen stomach, the sheen of sweat on her brow.

“Inmate, are you in labour?”

“I’m only seven months,” Lorna choked out.

It hit her. He was still so small. Why is this happening? What did I do wrong?

“We need to get you to medical.” Blake lifted Lorna up by her armpits and set her on her feet. She grabbed hold of his torso, sobbing and shaking. “Alright, alright.”

He put Lorna’s arm around his shoulder and wrapped his around her waist. Slowly, they stepped out of the closet.

“Just hold onto me, okay?”

He steered her into the hallway when Lorna screamed out. The crotch of her khakis felt wet. Her water broke? No, no, baby. It’s too early. She reached down – and when she looked her hand was stained red. Her entire world tilted.

“Dear God!” Blake caught her before she hit the ground. With one arm, he reached for the walkie-talkie on his belt. “Hello, is anyone there? We have a medical emergency in D-block, east corridor. Hello? Anyone?”

“No, not my baby.” Lorna’s cries echoed down the hall, unheard. Why is this happening? If she was bleeding like this, then... she couldn't even finish the thought.

“Typical,” muttered Blake, clipping the walkie-talkie back on his belt. He pulled Lorna to her feet and looked at her name tag. “Listen, Morello. Sorry, what’s your name?”

"L-Lorna."

"It’s going to be okay, Lorna. The doctor will be able to help you. But we have to keep moving.”

He hooked her arm around his shoulder again and walked Lorna to medical, keeping his grip as her legs threatened to give out with every step, as her body racked with pain and sobs. The doctor must
have heard them coming. He opened the door and lifted Lorna out of Blake’s arms and onto the bed like a child.

She wanted someone, Vinnie – Nicky – to be here, to hold her, to tell her it was going to be alright. But everything was so wrong.

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Nicky

Everything was alright.

Call it divine intervention, call it luck, call it the inability of brain-damaged junkies to stick to a plan, but the kickball bloodbath never happened. They were actually playing kickball. Even Nicky, who hadn’t exercised in – hm, let’s see, never – had scored two points for the D-block team.

There were only two people not having fun on the field – Badison, who was sitting on the frozen grass in a sulk, and Alex. Nicky jogged over to Alex, fighting to keep the smile off her face. It would seem obnoxious to a woman who had just lost her wife to the outside world. Some fucking honeymoon.

“Hey, Vause. How you holding up?”

“Fine. Nobody got murdered. It would kinda suck if the next time Piper saw me was at my funeral.”

“You’re allowed to be pissed off, you know.”

“No, I'm not. Because Piper is free and I should be happy about that. And because the more I think about it, the more I don't know how to handle the next four years I won't get to see her everyday.”

Nicky sighed and patted Alex on the shoulder. "How the fuck did Piper get early release anyway?"

“Good behaviour.”

“Good behaviour? Are they forgetting the time she beat the shit out of Pennsatucky? Or when she got sent to the SHU? Or when she started a Nazi gang? Or the riot?”

“Yeah, well, blonde hair will get you far.”

Nicky scoffed. “They should have let Lorna go. What has she done besides let Miss Rosa escape?”

Alex stared at her incredulously. “You’d be happy for Lorna to get out?”

Since when did Nicky’s happiness matter when it came to Lorna? “She’s having a baby. I think she still believes she’s going to be able to bond and paint the nursery and listen to its first words and shit.”

“Lorna living in a fantasy world? That’s a first.” Alex rolled her eyes far back into her skull.

Shit, she was having so much fun that she didn't realise Lorna would probably be worried sick that Nicky was being stabbed to death.
“Come on, we should go and check on her.” Nicky shuffled her feet towards the prison. “I left her in the closet.”

“You just said a mouthful there, sister.”

Minutes later, Nicky swaggered into the laundry room, Alex trudging along in tow. There were so little guards around that nobody gave a shit she was in the wrong block.

“Lorna! The coast is clear. You can come out now.”

Nicky had expected Lorna to burst out of the closet, overjoyed that she wasn’t hurt. And maybe a little gratitude that Nicky had basically given herself up to save her life. But – nothing. Mmph. Nicky’s ego took a hit.

“Lorna?”

Nicky opened the closet door. Lorna was nowhere to be found.

“Maybe she went back to her bunk,” Alex offered.

“Why would she risk it?”

“We’re talking about Lorna here. Common sense is not one of her strong suits.”

Nicky was about to defend her when she remembered Lorna waving around that shiv like a magic wand just hours ago. Okay, maybe Alex was right but...

“She was scared shitless.”

“Nicky, she’s safe. All the murdering was meant to happen at the kickball game, and that didn’t even happen. I have to go, I’m not allowed in D-block.”

Nicky grabbed Alex’s arm. “Come with me.”

“Where?”

“Somewhere I really hope I’m wrong...”

Nicky heard Lorna before she could see her. Terrible screams pitched down the halls coming from the prison infirmary. Screams of pain and fear mixed together.

One of the COs – Blake – stood outside the door. His hands were clasped together and he was looking at the floor. Only as Nicky ran towards him did she realise he was praying. What the fuck happened?

She swung the door open, afraid of what she was about to see. An image of Lorna, shanked, bleeding profusely from the neck, flitted in her mind. Please be okay.

When her eyes finally rested on Lorna in the chaos – a panicked doctor, trays of medication, stained scrubs lying on a heap in the floor – she was almost relieved that she didn’t seem injured. But then she saw the blood dripping down her legs under the hospital gown. Fuck. What the fuck?

“Lorna!”

She raced towards her. Lorna was curled up on her side, her arms clutched around her belly. Whenever she could catch a breath, it came out as a ragged cry.
"What happened?"

Jesus Christ, she was gone for what, an hour? How long had Lorna been like this, bleeding and in so much pain? When did she go into labour? All this time, she thought she'd left her in safety.

“Inmate, you can’t be in here.” Blake was marching inside to retrieve Nicky. Alex stood at the door, looking more pale than usual.

“No, I have to be with her.”

Blake grabbed Nicky by the elbow. “Out, inmate!”

“She needs me!”

“Nicky?” Lorna had finally registered her presence in the room.

Nicky wriggled out of Blake’s grip. “Hey. It’s me. I'm here.” She squeezed Lorna’s hand and stroked her hair in a vain attempt to comfort her.

“Nicky, I’m so scared,” Lorna sobbed.

“Okay, okay, just breathe. Breathe, baby. You're okay.”

“It hurts too much. Something’s wrong. I think I’m dying.” She drew a shaky breath. "If-if they have to choose between me and the baby, tell them to save him.”

“Don’t be stupid. You’re in good hands, eh?” Nicky turned to the doctor. “Why the fuck aren’t you helping her?”

The doctor looked up from his tray of medications, his face flushed. “I need to give her something to stop the bleeding.”

“Well, what are you waiting for?”

“I need to get the dosage right. If I don’t, it could harm the baby.”

The baby. This little life Lorna was so excited to meet. These past months, Nicky had watched her smile through morning sickness, shriek in excitement from the first kicks, pick out the colours for the nursery (blue for a boy, of course). Nicky had never seen her so happy, and this time it was all for real.

“Fuck!” Alex yelled, her eyes fixed on the dark spreading stain on the bed. Blood was now flowing down Lorna’s legs. She had closed her eyes, silent.

“Shit. Lorna, wake up! Don’t do this.” Nicky tapped Lorna’s cheeks, shook her shoulders. “Whatever, you have to do, just do it,” she shouted at the doctor. Sorry Lorna, but I can't lose you.

He panicked and plunged a syringe of clear fluid into Lorna’s arm. “Where the fuck is that ambulance?”

By the time the paramedics arrived, the bleeding had stopped. But Lorna was still unconscious, her face pale against the white sheets.

They placed an oxygen mask on her and strapped her to a gurney. Blake handcuffed her arm to the railing.
“I don’t make the rules,” he said, noticing Nicky’s look.

She followed helplessly as they wheeled her out, stroking Lorna’s hair.

“You need to call her husband,” she pled. “Vinnie, uh, Vincent Muccio. She needs somebody to be there when she wakes up.” Her voice was so cracked she could barely recognise it.

“I’ll try,” said Blake. He walked alongside the paramedics. And just like that, they were gone. Alex, who Nicky had forgotten was even there, placed a hand on her shoulder.

Nicky shrugged away. “I should have been there.”

“You were!”

“No, I was playing kickball. I was getting my fucking jollies while she was – shit, I should have known something was wrong. Carmine's going crazy, that's what she said. All the running. I made her, I made her fucking hide, I left her –”

“Nicky, you were trying to save her life and her baby.”

“Fuck. What’s going to happen to her?”

Alex couldn’t answer. She pulled Nicky into a hug as she started to cry in shock. She could swear Alex was crying too. They stayed like that until CO McCullough came along to separate them and sent them back to their blocks, alone.

Chapter End Notes

Spoilers for Season 7! Avert your eyes if you haven't finished!

If you're here after finishing S7, welcome new reader. Nice to have you. Yes, weirdly this did cover a lot of the same things. Never actually thought they’d go there and outdo me in my own angst lol. But I can say there's more hope to be found here than what we were left with in the finale. :)
Tell My Baby When He Wakes Up

Chapter Summary

Lorna wakes up in hospital, while Nicky worries what has happened.

Lorna

When Lorna woke up, she was surprised to see her husband looking back at her. The only time she saw Vinnie these days was behind a pane of plexiglass, and even then he hadn't visited in weeks.

"Lorna," he whispered. "Hello, my love."

He gently kissed her hand. When she looked down, there were tubes sticking out of it. It took some moments in her haze to realise – there were tubes sticking out of everywhere, her nostrils, between her legs. She took in the room... closed blinds, a bunch of white lilies on a bedside table, CO Blake asleep on a chair in the corner. One of her hands was cuffed to the bed. But this wasn't prison. Where was she?

She tried to remember what happened. She remembered running, her heart pounding out of her chest. She remembered hiding in a closet. She remembered being in so much pain it was like it happened to somebody else.

"You're in hospital." Vinnie stroked her cheek. He looked weird – his face was puffy and cast in shadows. He didn't look good at all. "You lost a lot of blood. They had to do a C-section."

Lorna's hands clamped down on her belly. She immediately regretted it, as pain shot up even through the drugs. Her stomach was still swollen but it lost its firmness. "I had the baby?"

"Yeah, you did." A tear slipped down Vinnie's chin. Happy tears? "It was a boy."

She gave a drowsy smile. "A boy. I knew it. Can I see him?"

"Lorna..."

"Where is he?" She tried to sit up to find him but her incision was too painful. Why didn't the room have a crib?

"Lorna." Vinnie guided her face towards his own. "Lorna... He was too early. His heart wasn't working. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. They did everything they could but he – he was born sleeping."

He buried his face in Lorna's blankets and started to sob. She let her hand rest on his shuddering head, ran his fingers through his thick wavy hair. Would her boy have hair like this?

Eventually one of the nurses came to check on Lorna, swabbed her stitches with stinging ointment, topped up the painkillers in her drip so everyone was speaking in slow motion. He moved quietly, as if sensing his intrusion on their personal space.
"Did your husband explain everything to you, what's happened?" The nurse asked gently.

"I want to see my son," said Lorna.

"Of course."

When the nurse returned, he was carrying a tiny bundle of blue blankets. Blake uncuffed her hand so they could carefully place the baby in her arms. Her son fit so perfectly, as though he was the missing piece Lorna was waiting for all her life. Finally somebody who was completely hers. Somebody to give all her love to.

"He's so beautiful, Vinnie. I can't believe we made him." He was small but perfect. The baby had a thick head of dark hair, puckered lips and curled eyelashes. She traced over the baby's eyelids, still fused shut. She gave him a kiss on each eye.

"I know. I know." Vinnie could barely speak he was so overwhelmed.

"He looks just like you. My little Carmine."

After an hour, the nurse returned to take Carmine. It wasn't nearly enough time, not to hold him and take in his little features and love him. Lorna kissed Carmine's forehead and bawled as the soft weight was released from her arms. Vinnie lay down next to her on the bed, crying his eyes out.

"You make sure you look after him. Make sure he's not alone," she wept.

He nodded. Eventually tucked his head under her arm and cried himself to sleep. But Lorna couldn't. She didn't want to miss another moment, even as the drugs started to drag her under.

"I'll be coming home soon. Tell my baby when he wakes up."

Nicky

The calm of the kickball match was too good to be true. Rumours swirled that Carol and Barb had killed each other, leaving both blocks without a leader.

In the chaos, nobody had noticed Lorna was missing or heard about her medical emergency. Nicky wanted everyone to care, to be crying and fucking shit up until Lorna was safely returned. But that was never going to happen. She ignored everyone at dinner and went to bed angry and hungry.

She could barely sleep that night. Every time she closed her eyes, she saw Lorna bleeding on that bed. The sound of her screams was still ringing in her ears. Nicky considered herself a Jewish atheist, but she was praying Lorna would survive this. She was safer in a real hospital than the prison infirmary, so she would be okay, right? She had to be.

The next morning, Nicky felt ready to face the truth. When the COs refused to give her any answers, she went to Lorna's bunk and started rifling through her belongings.

"Eh, what are you doing?" Adeola stirred in the top bunk.

"Got it." Nicky held up a piece of paper. "Vinnie's phone number. I can tell it's his because it's written in a fucking love heart."
"Where is crazy pregnant girl? She didn't come back last night."

"Who fucking knows, some fucking hospital. Nobody will tell me shit."

Adeola's face fell. "I am sorry. I like her. She was always nice to my rats. She will be a good mother. The Cult of the Holy Virgin will pray for her."

"Thanks."

Nicky pushed past the queue waiting to use the phones and punched in Vinnie's number. It rang for two long minutes and Nicky was about to give up when she heard a feeble: "Hello?"

"Uh, hey Vinnie. It's Nicky."

"Who?"

Shit, of course he had no clue who she was. Never mind the fact she knew his favourite song, choice of drink and candy, affinity for Brazilian jiu-jitsu, thanks to Lorna's gushing rambles. Guess she never mentioned Nicky in all those letters, visits and phone calls.

She pulled herself together. Why was she thinking about this shit now, when Lorna was lying in a fucking hospital bed?

"Uh, Lorna's friend from prison. How's she doing, huh? We're all worried about her." Well, at least she was. And Alex, she supposed. Jesus Christ, what she wouldn't give to talk to Red. She would make it okay.

Vinnie sighed long and hard. For a moment, Nicky thought he might just hang up instead of explaining his wife's condition to a random prisoner. Or maybe – fuck, maybe Lorna was...? She couldn't even bring herself to think the D word. Her stomach fell through to the floor and she broke out in a sweat, but eventually he answered.

"Not too good. She lost a lot of blood. They had to give her two transfusions. I don't know what that is but it sounds bad, to need two? She's awake now, but she's still pretty out of it."

Nicky bit down so hard on her bottom lip she could taste blood. Two transfusions? Unlike Vinnie, Nicky knew what that meant from her time in hospital. They'd nearly lost her.

The oxygen drained from Nicky's lungs and she was seeing spots, when she reminded herself. Lorna was... alive. She pulled through. That was something. She had to hold onto that one ray of light, even as she forced herself to ask the next question.

"And... and the baby?"

"No..." Nicky could hear Vinnie sobbing through the receiver. "He didn't make it."

He didn't make it.

Hope slipped through her fingers. All light went out. She was aware she was meant to say sorry, express her sympathies, give some heartfelt message of condolence to pass on to Lorna. But she felt her hand slam the phone down, hanging up on this man who'd just lost his child.

She ran back to Lorna's bunk, her world a blur. She realised after some time the blur was because she was crying. Her body was numb. She couldn't remember the last time she had cried like this. Probably when she was getting sober. At the time, it felt like the agony in her veins would never
pass. And she was sure this never would.

What would Lorna do now? Nicky could barely think of her, cuffed and screaming in a hospital bed for her lost baby. Maybe she was alive, but she wasn't ever coming back the same. Her Lorna was gone.

Nicky wiped her face in Lorna's blankets, inhaling the smell of her shampoo. She opened the cabinet to put back Vinnie's phone number. She pushed it past a collection of baby things – a names book, cloth doll made of prison uniforms, a sonogram. Each one a token of happiness and love cruelly snuffed out. Should she take these away before Lorna gets back?

She felt so fucking dirty. When Lorna first found out she was pregnant, her first response was anger. She didn't want her to have another tie to Vince. It was just another reminder that some things in this world, she would never have – a good home, a real family with little brats running around the yard, the woman she loved. And that woman would be loving someone else and smothering that kid with more love than she could ever imagine. In those moments Nicky was jealous of that baby growing in Lorna's belly. Sometimes she wished it didn't exist.

But she never wanted this, would never wish this. If she could take all Lorna's pain on herself, she would. That was all she wanted, to make this okay. Why the fuck had she left her in that closet?

Her hand fell on two boxes of pills – folic and paroxetine. Nicky was surprised. The girl was always full of secrets but Lorna had expressed some very strong opinions about hating antidepressants or 'happy pills'. A Big Pharma conspiracy, she said. Plus, taking mental health medication would require her to actually admit she had a problem. Nicky fought tears again as she realised, that problem was only about to get much worse.

Nicky opened the box and took out the medication leaflet. She knew all about paroxetine – a smile flickered when she remembered Lorna dubbing her Dr Nicky – but something was compelling her to read it. Side effects include vomiting, tiredness, unusual dreams... yadda yadda. Do not take it you are pregnant as it can affect an unborn baby.

As her fingers stopped over the words, so did her heart. She read over the sentence again. Her sadness hardened into anger. Holy shit. This was the prison's fault.
Lorna's old coping methods come to the fore.

Lorna woke up to another visitor. It was Francine. Again it was so disorienting to see a loved one outside of prison. Who was next, her abusive father? Her crippled mother?

Franny was wide-eyed and unusually without makeup. She rushed to Lorna's bedside and wrapped her in a stifling hug that hurt her stitches.

"Lorna, I'm so sorry," she wept. Lorna couldn't remember the last time she had seen her older sister cry. She was the tough one, the protector, the one who held the family together while Lorna fell apart. But now Lorna was stroking her hair, and making cooing sounds in an attempt to comfort her.

"Don't you start. I've had Vinnie crying in my lap for hours." Lorna nodded at Vinnie, who had finally dozed off in a stiff-looking hospital chair. "I don't know why you guys are so upset. I'm the one who's gonna be away from my baby."

All she wanted was to hold him again. An hour was not enough. She knew there were rules, but she was sure she wasn't meant to be spending all this with Vinnie and Franny, so couldn't they relax them a little for her baby?

"Of course we're upset." Franny looked at Lorna like she was crazy, that fucking familiar look. "We both are. It's Vinnie's baby too, Lorn. When he called me, I could barely make out he was saying he was crying so hard."

"He called you?"

"Yes! We're family. Of course he called me."

Lorna felt spike of pain. She realised she was sitting up now, upsetting the fresh wound across her belly.

"Oh, that's nice! You two are real close. But where was he when I couldn't keep water down from morning sickness? Or when I had my first scan? Or when I was lying there bleeding, Franny?"

Maybe it was the drugs, or the trauma of what she'd just been through, but it felt like a betrayal. Like they were connected and she was on the outside. No, the inside, stuck in prison. Something... she was so confused.

"You know he couldn't be there. You knew that would happen when you got knocked up in prison. That's just living in a fantasy, hun."

Lorna turned her head onto her pillow. Of course Francine didn't understand, even as she started to
apologise and stroke her hair. Lorna tuned her sister out. Franny had her kids, they were safe and looked after. Their births were as normal as anyone could hope for. Flashes of being in that closet, helpless and alone – without Nicky - tormented her every time she let herself think about it.

So she would try not to. Instead she closed her eyes and focused, focused on the positive, like she'd learnt to. Things were going to be okay. Carmine would wake up soon enough and Vinnie would take him home. And although she wouldn't be there, that baby would be so loved and cherished by the Morello-Muccios it wouldn't even matter that she wasn't there to hug and kiss him, too. If she could just hold tight until then, and get through her sentence, Carmine would be waiting for her on the other side.

She repeated this to herself over and over again in her head, until she believed it.

**Nicky**

Days passed. By this time, people had started to notice Lorna was missing and assumed the worst. Nicky didn't have the heart to tell them they were right.

The rumour mill was in overdrive since Barb and Carol died, so she knew that the gossip had reached the rest of the prison. As she miserably mopped the floors in C-block, she half-expected Red to bolt down from her cell and wrap her arms around her. But the gossip also reached her that Red was in the SHU. What the fuck had she done? Honestly, sometimes Nicky felt like she had to mother her mother.

Alex was the only C-blocker to talk to her about what happened. She listened in shock as Nicky confirmed that Lorna lost the baby. Her voice was shaking with held tears, but she managed to keep a lid on. Couldn't have a full meltdown when she was supposed to be on custodial duty.

Alex turned a whiter shade of pale."Holy fucking shit, that is..."

"Yeah."

Alex pushed up her glasses and scratched at the inner corner of her eye. "What's Lorna gonna do?"

"Well, this is a woman who had a full mental breakdown over the loss of an imaginary relationship, let alone a very real baby. So all bets are off."

She sighed. "I mean, fuck. I thought she was hysterical when you left. This is going to be a whole other level."

"What do you mean, when I left?"

Nicky didn't like to talk about her other trip down to max, what with the torturous conditions and relapse into drug dependency and all. Lorna had never really spoken about what happened in the days following her transfer either.

What she did know was Lorna said "I love you" in tears when Nicky was taken away. But when she came back, Lorna was married to someone completely new.

"She cried for days on end. She stopped eating properly. She even stopped wearing makeup, which is how you knew something was wrong." Alex smirked at that last part. "I missed you too and
everything, but it was a little overboard if I'm being honest."

Nicky swallowed hard. Lorna voluntarily not wearing makeup did sound like she was affected by her absence.

"Yeah, but, uh, that's just what Lorna does," she tried to reason. "She's unstable, we all know that."

Alex raised a perfectly arched eyebrow. "Well, she only started being herself again after she started the whole pen pal thing. She said it was for money but I knew she was trying to find someone. Someone to replace you."

"How do you know so much, Vause?" Alex and Lorna were friends, but it was more like Alex putting up with Lorna's kookiness than a real connection.

"I'm an observer," Alex said. "I like to watch from the sidelines."

After a long moment, Nicky drew up the courage to ask: "Well, tell me as an impartial bystander, do... do you think she's gonna survive this?"

Alex paused thoughtfully. "If I know Lorna, she'll find a way. Although this time getting married might not be an option."

Nicky nodded. However Lorna was coping, she hoped it was in a healthy way. The hospital would help her, the prison would help her. And failing all of that, she was going to make sure of it.
That Really ... Sucks

Chapter Summary

Nicky makes a horrifying discovery.

Lorna

Everyone treated Lorna like she was made of glass. Nurses took turns fussing over her stitches, checking her blood counts and making sure she drank enough water. Vinnie squeezed and squeezed her hand until it was numb. Franny kept her distracted with idle gossip about people in their hometown. Even Blake pressed the call button to get her morphine drip topped up when the waves of pain came again. At some level, she had always wanted to be taken care of – but not like this.

Eventually the nurses decided she was strong enough to take a walk around the hospital, to minimise risk of blood clots. Blake objected, eyeing the exit sign just down the corridor of the maternity ward.

"Whaddya think, she's gonna escape, in her condition?" Franny bit back.

And then she was uncuffed and they were helping Lorna to her feet, Franny and Vinnie flanking each side, with Blake following close behind. Lorna tried to ignore the feeling of the stitches tugging at her raw skin with every step.

"They say you can leave tomorrow," said Franny after some time. "How do you feel about that?"

"How do I feel about leaving my baby here and going back to a prison cell?" Lorna snapped. "Uh, let me think, Franny."

"Sorry. Sorry."

"Sorry, is that all anyone can say anymore?"

They turned a corner. The sound of tiny but strident cries filled the corridor. A woman was pacing back and forth, attempting to soothe her newborn.

"Oh, sorry. He's such a squawker," the woman laughed feebly. "Takes after his dad, don't ya?"

Vinnie let go of her arm. His eyes were fixed on the small, squalling thing.

"Does yours cry all through the night, too?" The woman asked.

"I... I..."

Lorna felt Franny pushing them out of the corridor, a little too roughly, and back towards their room. The only room in the entire ward that was child-free.

She climbed back into bed, crying. Something wasn't right, she wasn't supposed to spend her first days of motherhood like this. "Will I ever be able to do that, Franny?"
"What, hun?"

"Be a mother." She started to sob, she missed her baby so much. She wanted to see him but he was so far away.

"Lorna!" Franny wrapped her arms around her. "Yes, of course. There will be plenty of chances, won't there, Vinnie?"

"Huh?" He looked up blearily.

"I was just saying, once Lorna is out of prison, you two can try again. Properly, this time."

Vinnie's eyes darkened. "Fuck off, Francine." He charged out of the room, the door slamming behind him. Franny blushed.

"Oh, shit. I shouldn't have said that."

Hot tears rolled down Lorna's cheeks. "No... We don't need to try again. Carmine is perfect just the way he is."

"Oh my God, of course he is, Lorna! I didn't mean anything like that. Please don't cry." Franny was in tears now. Look at them, they were all such a mess. What a family Carmine had been born into.

Her mood started to lift when she thought about it – Carmine growing up, roughhousing with his cousins, while she cleaned up after him. He was going to be such a little handful once he was strong enough, when he got out of intensive care. Until then, he just needed a little more loving.

"Will you promise me something, Franny?" Lorna whispered, leaning back as she was cuffed again.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Please look after my boys."

"I will. Of course."

Nicky

Nicky forced forkfuls of bland prison food down her throat. Even though she didn't have a shred of appetite, she knew she had to keep healthy... well, as healthy as she could be on prison slop. Since being in max, her wellbeing had weirdly reached a personal best – staying away from drugs, even though the place was crawling with them, had given her a strength she didn't know she had.

She couldn't escape the irony that whenever she was doing well, Lorna was deteriorating, and vice versa. When she was relapsing, Lorna got married. And now she was better than ever, Lorna was – well, fuck knows how Lorna was. Vinnie now wasn't answering her calls. The COs didn't give a shit. All she knew was that she was alive and her baby wasn't.

Cindy and Flaca plonked themselves down next to Nicky, in the heat of a very loud argument that she wanted absolutely no part of.

"Nichols, you can settle this for us," said Cindy.

"Not fair. You people have weird tastebuds," Flaca replied.
"Oh, hell no with that anti-Semitic bullshit."

"It's a fact. You never had matzo? That shit has no flavour."

"Well, we don't need to go putting cilantro on everything! Shit tastes like shit."

"Guys, guys." Nicky raised her hands. "You're giving my migraine a migraine."

"Nicky, what's your opinion on cilantro?" Flaca asked, pointing her fork with a flourish.

"Is this for your radio show? Because you need to get better material."

Cindy's face fell. "Oh, my God. Holy shit."

That was a slight overreaction. "Yeah, okay, calm down. I was joking."

She didn't seem to hear. She just pointed. "It's your girl."

The block fell into a hush. Like in slow motion, Nicky turned around and saw Lorna being wheeled in by CO Blake. Even though Nicky knew she wouldn't be heavily pregnant anymore, nothing could prepare her for how small Lorna looked in that chair.

She stood up before her legs were ready to carry her, jelly-like as she cut through the whispering crowds. One foot in front of the other, reminding herself to breathe, until she was in front of Lorna, until she was wrapped in her arms.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered into Lorna's hair. It smelled weird, like hospital disinfectant. She'd gotten so used to her scent of shampoo that it was almost like hugging a stranger.

"Don't be sorry, hun."

The words came out different to how Nicky expected. She thought Lorna's voice would be hoarse, or shaky. But it was still doing that happy-go-lucky sing-song. Nicky pulled away and tucked Lorna's hair behind her ear, getting a close look at her face. She was pale, and tired, but she still looked like Lorna.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Cindy and Flaca approach tentatively. Nicky bit back the urge to tell them to fuck off. She didn't want anybody else to talk to her, to touch her, to even look at her. Lorna's pain was not public property.

"Hey, Morello. We heard what happened," said Cindy.

"That really ... sucks," said Flaca, unhelpfully.

"You don't have to talk about it," said Nicky, resting a hand on Lorna's shoulder. Maybe she should wheel her away to her cell, get her away from these pitying looks and platitudes which would only be rubbing it in.

"Why wouldn't I wanna talk about it?" Lorna asked. Genuinely.

"Lorna?" Nicky turned to look at her again. Why wasn't the woman crying? Why was her face so light and open?

"Oh, you should see my little Carmine, Nicky," said Lorna, breaking out into a grin. An actual grin. "He's got his father's hair, but my lips, and I think my nonno's nose, which is unfortunate, but he's so perfect anyway it don't matter. And Vinnie is so happy, he can't stop crying. He's gonna be the best
father."

Nicky's blood froze.

"No, Lorna. Fuck, not this." Anything but this. She'd feel better if she was in tears, if she was wailing in her arms, if she was showing any sign that she knew her son was dead.

"I'm confused," said Cindy.

Flaca leant over and whispered: "Lorna La Loca."

Nicky wanted nothing more than to tackle Flaca to the ground and smack the purple lipstick off her face. But getting sent to SHU wasn't going to help the situation. She had to try a different approach.

This wasn't going to be another Christopher situation. As she took the wheelchair in her hands and pushed Lorna towards her cell, she mustered up the strength to tell Lorna she knew the truth. And she was going to make her see it, too.
"I can take it from here." Lorna stood up from her wheelchair when she reached her cell. Nicky tried to steady her, but she shrugged her off. She hurt all over, but she wasn't that helpless.

Slowly, she lowered herself onto the bottom bunk, taking care not to sit in any way that would upset her stitches.

"Does it hurt?" Nicky asked, still standing at the door.

Lorna pulled down the waistband of her trousers, revealing the dark purple-blotted skin peeking out from behind her bandages. "It looks worse than it is. I've always bruised like a summer fruit. Guess that's why my father focused most of his attention on Franny."

The blonde was looking at her strangely. The painkillers must have been messing with Lorna's head still if she was spilling secrets about her home life like that.

Nicky sat down at the foot of the bed, sighing deeply. "Lorna... I know what really happened."

"What do you mean?"

Nicky traced circles on the inside of Lorna's hand. "I called Vinnie."

A strange feeling settled in Lorna's stomach. Not quite anger, not quite jealousy or betrayal – but like something deeply personal had been taken from her. "You called Vinnie? Why would you do that?"

"Uh, I was worried about you. I saw you get taken out of here in an ambulance."

"You... you shouldn't have gone through my things."

Nicky grabbed Lorna's shoulders. "Lorna, are you even listening to me? Vinnie told me what happened. There's no use pretending."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Do I have to say it out loud?"

"I don't know!"

"Lorna, I know the baby was stillborn."

"What?"
"I know that Carmine passed away."

"No, you're mistaken. That's not true. I held him in my arms, Nicky. He is perfect. He's fine. Vinnie himself said he was just born sleeping, but he's okay now."

"No, Lorna. Born sleeping, that's just a nicer way of saying stillborn."

Lorna's chest swelled with rage. Why the hell would Nicky say something so horrible? Why would she lie about something like that? Why is she trying to hurt me? She thought back to the last time she purposefully tried to hurt someone, when she sent Vinnie to take care of that good-for-nothing Christopher.

"I know what's really going on here."

Nicky's eyes widened. "You do?"

"And I understand. I know it has to be hard for you, Nicky. I have a husband and a baby now, and you got no one. You don't got any family left. Red's in SHU and your parents hate you. But hun, you know, jealousy is not a good look."

She expected Nicky to lash out, call her a psycho or a whore like she always did when she was angry. But tears just silently rolled down Nicky's face. Lorna leaned in for a hug.

"It's okay, don't cry. Now, ain't it better to just tell the truth?"

Nicky

She's crazy. She's fucking crazy. And she can't helped. She won't let me. What do I do? What the fuck do I do?

Nicky didn't sleep. She lay awake in bed, replaying their conversation over and over in her head. Her world falling in on itself. She knew Lorna was insane ever since she found out she had stolen the van to visit her stalking victim, poor old Christopher. But what kind of woman could hold her dead baby in her arms and choose to believe he was just sleeping?

It all felt so hopeless. The urge to use struck Nicky so hard and so fast that she was holding onto her sobriety by the skin of her fingernails. She lay in bed breathing, counting to ten and doing all the other stupid exercises the prison therapist taught her when she got overwhelmed. No, Nicky. Heroin is not going to make this go away. You can't do this now. She needs you to stay clean.

She needed to talk to Red. But Lorna was right – her only family was gone. She could be so fucking cruel when she wanted to be.

Finally CO McCullough let her out of her cell for morning custodial duties. She resolved that she would mop and scrub and wipe as quickly as she could, so that Lorna wasn't alone for too long after she woke up.

When she got to C-block, Alex dumped her breakfast tray and came up to her immediately.

"Is it true?" She asked.

"Wow, shitty news travels fast."
Alex shook her head. "I don't understand. She knows that we know, it's not a Christopher situation. So why is she lying?"

"I don't think she's in a place to know anything right now. But all I know is, I have to get her to see the truth or it will turn into a Christopher situation. So now I have to bring her out of her happy fantasy land by telling her her baby is dead every day until she believes me. That's what I have to do."

"Maybe that's a job for the prison therapist." Alex looked concerned.

"Are you kidding? They'll take one look at her, send her to psych, and I'll never see her again."

"Speaking of which, Piper sends her condolences."

"Ah, how is the outside world treating her?" Nicky was both resentful and relieved by the subject change.

"She's spending all her dead grandma's money on some legal eagle fantasy. She wants to use the footage of Piscatella breaking my arm to reduce my sentence."

"No, no, no. She can't do that. That's just going to piss them off."

"Believe me, I know!"

"Well, did you tell her?"

"Yes."

"And did she listen?"

"Have you met Piper? She won't be happy until I have ten more years added to my sentence."

Nicky knocked Alex's shoulder. "Well, at least I'll have someone to talk to."

Nicky wondered: would she ever be able to talk to Lorna like that again? Even in happier days, their conversations had mainly consisted of Nicky laughing at Lorna's warped and somewhat ignorant view of the world. Other days, she was barely lucid enough to make any sense to Nicky or herself. Now she was so deep into her delusions it was like talking to a stranger. Or maybe this was the real Lorna. Maybe her mental health problems had always been this serious but nobody had cared to help her, or to ask. Perhaps she had always been this fragile and this was just the final, fatal crack in the porcelain.
Lorna

When Lorna woke up, Nicky was sitting on the concrete floor next to her bed.

"Morning," she croaked.

Nicky chuckled. "Afternoon. It's four o'clock."

"I missed breakfast?"

"You're going to miss dinner if you don't get up soon."

Lorna raised herself on her elbows. "Shit. I was meant to call Vinnie."

"You can call him after you get some food down ya."

Lorna reached over to her bedside cabinet, shook out a large pink pill from a container and dry-swallowed it. "It's these painkillers. They really knock me out."

Nicky inspected the label. Her eyes bugged out. "Shit, this is strong stuff. Don't let any of the junkies know you're taking this." She put the container in the back of the cabinet. Out of sight, out of mind.

"I'm proud of you, Nicky."

"Haha, what?"

"I know it's gotta be hard in here to stay clean. And I don't know if it's the hormones or the drugs, but I just wanted to say I feel really proud of you for doing it."

Nicky jumped onto the bed and hugged Lorna. "Thanks, kid. I don't remember the last time anyone said that." Suddenly Nicky pulled away. "What the fuck?"

Lorna looked down. There were two soaking wet patches on either side of her chest. She felt her face grow hot. "Ugh. Sorry."

Nicky, sensing her embarrassment, rubbed her arm. "Hey, it's okay. Isn't there something they can give you to stop that?"

Lorna wrapped a pillow around herself to try and ease the discomfort. "Maybe. But it would feel wrong. It's Carmine's."

"... Lorna, you know he isn't here anymore."
"But he's here." Lorna grabbed Nicky's hands and held them to her heart. "Oh, Nicky. I didn't even get to feed him!" She burst into tears.

Nicky squeezed her hands. "I know, babe. I know." She looked straight into Lorna's eyes. There was a softness, a sense of relief to her that Lorna couldn't place.

"He was just too small."

Nicky held Lorna's face in her hands. "I know. I'm so sorry."

"Do... do you think he'll be okay on formula? I was reading in one of those baby books that breast is best but Franny never breastfed and Tommy didn't turn out retarded or anything. Do you think Vinnie will know what formula to buy, or when to feed him, or how much?"

Nicky looked around helplessly, but she couldn't escape Lorna's watery stare. "I... uh, sure kid."

Nicky

Nicky watched as Lorna crammed prison mac n cheese down her throat like it was going out of fashion. Like she wasn't in pain, or swollen, or denying the fact that her baby son was dead. It would have been mesmerising if it wasn't so fucked up.

"I always knew it was gonna be a boy," she was telling a sullen-looking Daya through mouthfuls of pasta. "Thank God I made Vinnie paint the nursery blue. Blue with white clouds and yellow ducks. He moved out of his parent's house for me and the baby, you know. And my sister Franny is gonna move in and help him, you know, 'cause she's going through the divorce. I know what you're thinking, it's weird that my husband and my sister will be living together, but don't worry. I totally trust them."

"I need more drugs to be listening to this bullshit," Daya grumbled. Nicky recognised the look of someone coming down – hard. At any second, she could turn violent.

"Nichols." McCullough was suddenly standing over them. "Emergency custodial. Someone shat all over the floors in C-block."

"Ah, man. I'm eating my dinner. Can't someone else go?" Nicky silently tried to appeal to McCullough, glancing over at Lorna.

"Now, Nichols."

Nicky patted Lorna's head, shot a warning look at Daya, and was on her way with a mop and bucket.

As she went to wash her hands after cleaning the disgusting mess, she rolled her head back and sighed, catching a glimpse of a familiar figure on the second level. She felt her feet carry her up the stairs, hoping to God that McCullough didn't notice her abandoning her duties.

"Mom!"

Red turned around. Her tired face illuminated at the sight of Nicky. "My daughter!"

She ushered Nicky into her cell and wrapped her in a constricting hug. She was wearing an orange
uniform, signalling that she had just returned.

"Red, where the hell have you been? What the fuck did you do to get put in SHU, huh?"

Red rolled her eyes. "It was that viper, Frieda. She made me do it."

"Well, are you okay?"

"My child, I grew up in Soviet Russia. I can handle a little solitary confinement. But how are you doing, Nicky?"

Nicky flopped onto the bed. "I have a problem."

"Not drugs," Red hissed.

"No, not drugs. It's Lorna."

"Ah, your other addiction," Red scoffed. "Well, I don't want to hear about it."

"Come on, Red."

"That one hasn't said so much as privyet to me since we got here. After all I ever did for her." Her face was slowly growing the colour of the tips of her hair.

"You're one to talk about getting caught up in gang shit."

"It's about loyalty. But what can you expect from Lorna? She's selfish, always has been. That girl's got you wrapped around her little ring finger, and you let her do it! She did far more damage in that pharmacy than you ever did, Nicky, and you took all the blame."

_Ah. So Red still resents me selling her down the river._ "I made her surrender, Red. She was pregnant."

"And now she gets the fairytale ending she always wanted while the rest of us rot in here! So what is her problem, Nicky? Is she too happy? Is she too excited about the baby? She must be due any day now, does she have too much to look forward to?"

"She lost the baby, Red," Nicky said quietly.

Red grew pale and silent. She sat next to Nicky on the bed. "What can I do?"

"Excuse me? Five seconds ago she was a selfish traitor."

"Yes. But she's still family."

"I don't know what to do, Red." Nicky's voice cracked without warning, and she was on the verge of tears again. She seemed to do that a lot these days. _"She's in complete denial that it happened. But I'm afraid that if she comes back to reality, it's going to kill her._"

Red swiped away a tear from Nicky's cheek. Her own eyes were glistening. _"You bring her to me, my little babushka. I'll talk to her._"
Babe, You're Burning Up

Chapter Summary

Lorna's denial starts to affect her physical health.

Lorna

Time stretched on so slowly that Lorna could barely tell if days or weeks had passed. She counted time in the number of pills she had to take, the dull pulsing in her abdomen where doctors had ripped Carmine out of her, the long hours in which Nicky stood at her door or sat on the foot of her bed, wearing a mask of worry. Lorna started to desire her own mask of ground coffee eyeshadow and contraband red lipstick – she might get a shot but at least Nicky would stop telling her how pale and tired she looked.

The only part of the day she looked forward to was talking to Vinnie. She wanted to know how the baby was doing, but every time she brought it up she could hear Vinnie start crying down the phone. And she thought she was feeling hormonal.

"I know, Vinnie. It's hard for me, too. I just want to see his little face again," she had said, before asking to speak to Franny so she could tell her to take better care of Vinnie.

The past couple of days, he failed to pick up the phone at all. He must just be busy with Carmine, Lorna reasoned, pushing down the lump in her throat.

She didn't want to give Nicky another cause to worry, so she didn't bring up Vinnie's weird behaviour at breakfast.

"How's it going, kid?" Nicky watched as Lorna crammed in slices of cold, unbuttered toast.

"Vinnie says Carmine's getting bigger everyday. He's going to bring him in to see me when he's strong enough," Lorna said. It's not exactly a lie. He will bring him in soon.

Nicky nodded, but her eyes were fixed downwards. "Hey, come with me to custodial today."

"Okay."

When breakfast finished, Nicky led Lorna by the hand to C-block. She looked around, then pulled Lorna up swiftly the stairs.

"Ow, Nicky. Where are we going?" Lorna wasn't ready to move so quickly and found herself quite out of breath.
"To see an old friend." Nicky pushed Lorna into a cell. When Lorna straightened up, she saw Red standing by the bunk.

"Red!" She gasped, hurling herself into a hug with the older woman. Stitches be damned.

"Thank you," Red said to Nicky. She patted the lower bunk. "Sit down, Lorna, you must be tired." Lorna did as she was told. "So, I hear I have a grandson?"

Lorna giggled. "Yes! His name is Carmine."

"Nicky was telling me how much you've been missing him."

Lorna nodded, her eyes pooling with tears. "It's so hard. But I gotta stay strong, for Vinnie and the baby."

Red reached up onto the top bunk and clutched two neatly folded tea towels. "I have something to make it easier. I had to bribe Luschek to let me into the kitchen to make these."

She passed one of the parcels to Lorna, who unwrapped it gleefully. She could recognise that smell anywhere. "Your famous butter cookies! Thank you, Red." She stuffed two into her mouth at once.

"What! You never make cookies for me." Nicky tried to grab one, but Red swatted her hand away.

"No, they are for Lorna." Red gave her the second parcel. "And this will also help."

Again, Lorna wrapped it, but her reaction was far from joyful. Inside were a pile of cold cabbage leaves. "Uh, thanks Red, but cabbage makes me kinda gassy."

"It's not for eating," Red said. "Put these in your bra and it will help stop the milk."

Lorna wrapped her arms around her chest, trying not to think about the uncomfortable swelling. She had no intention of interrupting nature's purpose. "Thanks for the cookies, Red."

"Nicky, can I talk to Lorna alone please?" Red asked. Nicky shrugged and left the room, trying to grab a cookie as she left (Red smacking her hand twice as hard). Red sat down on the bed next to Lorna, turning so that they were face to face. "Now, it's time to cut the bullshit."

Lorna nearly choked on her cookie. "What?"

"I know what you've been doing, how you've been telling everyone your baby is alive when he isn't. And it stops here, you hear me?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Red!"

"Yes, you do. You do know and let me tell you, the lies, the games, this little fantasy doesn't just hurt you. It's hurting Nicky, too."

Angry tears flowed down Lorna's face. Finally, she understood. Nicky had betrayed her. "Nicky... she told you to say this."

"She's worried for you. We all are."

Lorna leapt up, ignoring the explosion of pain as she did. The cookies fell to the floor, breaking into pieces. "You're not worried about me. You've never cared about me."

Red looked dismayed. "How can you say that, Lorna? I witnessed your wedding. We're family."
She let it all come out now. "No, Nicky's your family. The only reason you let me into your little group is because of Nicky. I spent months alone in that prison until she found me, I was thinking all kinds of horrible things. Where were you then, Red? Where were you when Christopher left me? Or when Nicky was gone and I had nobody else? Or when Mendez nearly raped me because of the shit you were smuggling into prison?"

"W-what?"

"Don't act like you care about me now, Red. The only family I have is Franny and Vinnie ... and Carmine." Lorna stomped out, crushing the cookies under her boots as she left.

Nicky

Whatever Red had said must have worked, Nicky thought. Lorna had finally stopped telling people about the baby, but she had pretty much stopped talking altogether. She kept mainly to her bed, facing the wall, only coming out to pick over breakfast and dinner. She wouldn't even talk to Nicky, only mustering a faint "go away" when Nicky started to rub her back or play with her hair. Nicky wanted to stay, but she knew that this was better. Perhaps being alone was how Lorna needed to grieve.

After several days, Nicky couldn't stay away any longer. She popped her head around before breakfast, seeing Lorna fully dressed but curled up into a tight ball on the bed. Still staring at the wall. "Hey, kid."

Lorna said nothing. Nicky shrugged at Adeola, who was sitting on the top bunk reading a magazine, and sat down on the bed. "I haven't talked to you in ages. You still in there?"

She brushed a sweaty curl away from Lorna's face. As she did, she felt intense heat radiating. She pressed a hand on Lorna's forehead. "Babe, you're burning up!"

Finally, Lorna spoke. "Are you stupid? It's freezing in here."

"Hey." Nicky grabbed Lorna's shoulders and tried to roll her over so she could get a proper look at her. Lorna yelped, her arms crossed protectively over her torso. "What's wrong? Does it hurt here?" She laid a hand on Lorna's chest, and the small woman flinched.

Slowly and gently, Nicky slid her hand under Lorna's top. She felt hot, angry skin. "Lorna, your tits are on fire! I mean, I think you have an infection."

"What would you know?"

"You need to go to medical. Have you been using that stuff Red gave you?"

The red in Lorna's cheeks deepened. "I'm not gonna smell like cabbage all day, Nicky, you fucking idiot."

Clearly, the pain is affecting her mood. Nicky tried again. "After breakfast, I'm taking you to see the doctor."

Lorna shook her head. "No, I've gotta call Vinnie. I ain't spoken to him in days. I need to know how Carmine is."
FUCK. Nicky felt like she had swallowed a rock. The conversation with Red hadn't helped at all. Lorna was so deep in her delusions she was actually making herself sick.

She watched as Lorna got up gingerly and headed towards the dining hall without saying a word.

"Don't give up, lion one," said Adeola, jumping down from the top bunk.

"Huh?" Nicky rubbed her eyes.

"She knows what happened in her soul. Every night I hear her cry in her sleep for her lost baby."

"Okay," Nicky gulped hard. "... And, uh, why lion one?"

"You are protective of your cub. Also, your hair."

Nicky followed Adeola out of the cell and found Lorna sitting at a table with Cindy and Flaca. She grabbed a tray and joined them.

"Vinnie says Carmine sleeps right through the night," Lorna was saying to a not-so-captive audience. Her cheeks burned brightly and she was shivering. "We are so lucky Carmine's not a crier like other babies. And he really likes baths. Vinnie says he's going to sign him up for swimming lessons when he's old enough."

"Do you know what the fuck is going on?" Cindy asked Nicky.

Nicky breathed in and drew all her strength based on what Adeola had just told her. "Lorna, Carmine is dead."

Lorna turned around, her teeth gritted into a snarl. "No, he's not."

Another deep breath. "He is, Lorna. He was stillborn."

"No, he's not! Stop saying that."

"He is. I know it, Vinnie knows it, somewhere deep down I know you know it, too. I'm sorry but he's gone."

"You evil junkie bitch." Lorna was visibly shaking now. "You're a fucking liar."

"He's dead and he's not coming back."

"Stop saying that. Stop trying to hurt me. I'm not listening to you."

"He's dead, Lorna."

"SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!" Suddenly Lorna was on her feet. With every bit of strength in her body, she pushed Nicky clean off her seat and onto the cold hard ground. Then she jumped onto Nicky, her knee digging into her ribs, punching Nicky in the face as hard as she could. "SHUT UP! SHUT UP!"

Nicky tried to wriggle free but Lorna was really going for it. Inmates started to circle around, shouting and cheering: "Fight, fight, fight, fight!"

"Fuck, stop, Lorna!"

As her fists came down again and again, Lorna looked like a total stranger, her face cast in maroon
blotches and her eyes black and fiery. For the first time ever, Nicky was afraid of the woman.

Suddenly Lorna was lifted off Nicky, kicking and screaming like a banshee. CO Blake had grabbed her roughly around the waist and started dragging her away from Nicky. She jumped to her feet.

"Put her down," she shouted at Blake.

Blake set Lorna down but she immediately fell to the floor, like a puppet with cut strings. Her hands clutched her belly, where there was a spreading stain of red. The force of Blake lifting her caused her stitches to burst at the seams.

"Fuck." Nicky ran to her. Lorna's eyes rolled into the back of her head and she was unconscious.

"Alright, nothing to see here!" McCullough broke her way through the crowd. "Oh, great. You crash-tackled the wounded one?"

"She was beating the shit out of another inmate! I didn't even know it was her."

Together McCullough and Blake lifted Lorna up and started to carry her out of D-block.

"Can I go with her? To medical? I'm injured, too." Nicky's face was aching where bruises were surely starting to spring up.

"She's going to need an ambulance," McCullough replied, and then they were gone.
Fucked-Up Imagination

Chapter Summary

When Lorna is taken to hospital, Nicky tries to get help from unlikely source.

Lorna

Lorna ran down the black corridor, searching every doorway for her baby. Her legs pushed against the darkness like a current of water, trying to drag her back to a place she couldn't return.

When she thought she couldn't run any further, the tiniest light shone at the end of the hall. She raced towards it, the light getting stronger and brighter until –

She was in the harsh, chemical light of the prison laundry. Her ears rung with the mechanical churning of the dryers. She looked in each one, but Carmine was nowhere to be found.

Suddenly she heard the sound of a baby's cry. It was coming from the utility closet. She inched towards the door, her hand shaking violently as she turned the handle and swung it open.

"I should have known you'd be here." That unmistakable voice, the looming height, the handsome face right out of a catalogue.

"Christopher?"

Christopher took a step forward, his eyes glinting as they found the light. She wanted to run, but her feet were planted to the ground.

"Didn't I say I'd kill you if you did this again?"

"Where's Carmine?" She hissed.

He folded his large hands around her throat. "You're not listening, are you? You psycho bitch. I told you to stop."

Lorna tried to squirm away. "I left you alone. After you broke my heart, Christopher. I found somebody who really loves me."

Christopher laughed. "You really think somebody's gonna love you?"

He grabbed Lorna's head and twisted it into the light. Vinnie was standing in the laundry room, holding the baby in a bundle of blankets.

"Vinnie! Vinnie, help me!" But he didn't react. His face was blank and unmoved. "Vinnie? What are you doing? Christopher's trying to kill me!"

Suddenly, Vinnie's head turned towards the door. A woman entered the room, her silhouette becoming clearer until Lorna saw it was Nicky.
"Nicky, help!"

Nicky rolled her eyes. "You're beyond help, doll." And she grinned and leaned in to Vinnie. Lorna watched in horror as her husband and her best friend started to kiss, fiercely, passionately. The baby fit perfectly between them, like a little family.

"I told you nobody loves you," growled Christopher and dropped her to the floor.

She lay there sobbing for a moment, until her eyes caught something bright and blue in the blur of her tears. She picked up the shiv she'd made for Piper and Alex's wedding, and jumped to her feet. Screaming, she threw her weight at Nicky, letting the sharpened plastic pierce deep into Nicky's flesh.

"Fuck!" Nicky collapsed, blood gushing from her stomach. Her eyelashes flickered shut.

"What have you done?" Vinnie gasped.

Lorna looked down at her blood-stained hands and ran out of the laundry, down the corridors, as fast as she could. The halls, which were empty before, now filled with inmates who stared at her and whispered as she passed.

Turning a corner, she collided head-first with a familiar body.

"Hey, kid. What's up?" The woman tossed her unruly mop of hair and grinned. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

It didn't make sense. Nicky was lying dead on the laundry floor, but she was here – unharmed and raising her eyebrows in concern. Who the fuck had Lorna stabbed?

That's when Lorna looked down and saw the blood spreading from her own stomach. She fell into Nicky's arms.

Lorna woke up drenched in cold sweat, her stomach burning. She tried to call out, but her throat was dried up. Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted Blake get up from a chair and walk to her bedside. He pressed the call button and held a cup of water with a straw to her lips.

"Thank God. You've been out of it for hours," he said.

The dream disappeared and details came rushing back – how sick she felt, how evil Nicky was to her. She vaguely recalled her and Nicky wrestling on the floor before it all went black.

After twenty minutes, a doctor came to check on her, checking on her wounds and administering more painkillers into the drip.

"Your fever broke, that's good," he remarked. "But you're going to have to take it easy or these stitches could burst again. No more prison fights, if you can help it. And next time you have an infection, see your prison doctor quickly. You had terrible mastitis in both breasts. I've given you some medications, the milk should dry up in a day or two."

Lorna buried her head in her blankets. It was becoming clear to her now, how much of this was Nicky's fault. How if she hadn't said such awful lies, they wouldn't have been fighting. If she hadn't made Lorna run and hide in that closet, maybe Carmine wouldn't have come early. And if she hadn't been taken to max and left her alone... she couldn't bring herself to finish the thought. She closed her
eyes and waited for another nightmare.

Nicky

Lorna La Loca was becoming somewhat of an urban legend around the prison. Nobody could have expected the tiny, injured woman to have started a brawl, or give Nicky two black eyes and a split lip. Whenever Nicky caught sight of herself in a reflective surface, a strange laughter bubbled inside her because it was just so ridiculous.

But the reality was no laughing matter. As Daya plainly put it: "She's got a one-way ticket to psych when she comes back." And it was true. Once the COs paid any attention to the fact she was pretending her baby was alive, they would have no choice but to send her to that terrifying place.

"I really thought she was getting better, Mom," Nicky told Red on her daily trip to swab the floors at C-block.

"I still can't believe little Lorna did this to you." Red rubbed a cold cream onto Nicky's bruises. "I had no idea she was this bad, Nicky. I think it has been building for a long time. The things she told me. Did you know Mendez tried to assault her?"

Nicky felt dizzy. "No, what the fuck?"

"It's my fault," Red said gravely. "I should have known she was hiding something behind that smile."

"I did know. She told me she stole the van and drove to Christopher's house to stalk him. Took a little dip in his bathtub while Miss Rosa was getting chemo."

Red looked appalled. "Are you serious?"

"I should have done something then but I didn't. I didn't want to think about it."

"No, Nicky, she's insane. You wouldn't have gotten through to her anyway."

"No, but there's one more person that might."

The next day, Nicky stood in the queue for visitation. She knew that Vinnie was scheduled for visitation today, so she put his name on her visitors list and waited for him to show up. After four hours, he finally did.

"What the fuck?" He said as Nicky sat down behind the glass window. "Who – who the fuck are you? Where's Lorna?"

"Calm down, it's Nicky. Lorna's friend."

"I didn't come to talk to Lorna's friend, I came to talk to Lorna."

"Well, you're going to have to settle for me. Lorna's in hospital."

"What!" Vinnie's hand was white-knuckled around the telephone. "Why didn't anybody call me?"
"I tried so many times. You didn't pick up."

Vinnie rubbed his bloodshot eyes. "Oh, fuck. I had my phone off. It... was the funeral yesterday."

"Fuck. Sorry."

"What the hell happened to her?"

"Long story short, we got in a fight." Nicky pointed at her bruises.

"So what, you put her in hospital?" Vinnie shouted.

"No, shut the fuck up and listen. She was attacking me, I didn't lay a finger on her. One of the COs tried to drag her off me and he accidentally ripped her stitches open."

"Jesus Christ." Vinnie's face was white. "What the fuck was she fighting you for?"

Nicky took a breath. "She's not well. She's been telling everyone her baby survived. And the scary thing is, she believes it."

Vinnie shook his head. "No... no, that's crazy."

"Well, I hate to break it to you, but she is. You think it's normal that she married her prison pen pal after a couple of months? Let me ask you this, Vince: do you even know what she did to get locked up? Why don't ya google it when you have some spare time, unless you want to stay married to a total stranger?"

Vinnie covered his face with his hands. Nicky knew she took it too far. Like Lorna, he seemed to ignore the harshness of reality for his own happiness; maybe that's why they were a perfect match.

"Alright, don't worry about that." Nicky softened her voice. "The point is, you've got a wife you need to take care of. She needs to hear it from you."

"I don't understand." Vinnie was crying now. "She held Carmine in her arms, I cried with her when they took him away. Oh God, I should have known when I was talking to her on the phone. She kept saying the strangest things but I never thought she would... How could she do this?"

"She's not doing it on purpose. When she can't cope with a situation, she makes up an imaginary world to deal with it. That's just how her fucked-up brain works."

A hint of a smile grew on Vinnie's face. "That fucked-up imagination is the reason I fell in love with her."

Me too, you lucky asshole. Me too.
Are You Happy Now?

Chapter Summary

Vinnie reaches breaking point – and of course it's Nicky who gets the blame.

Lorna

For the second time in weeks, Lorna woke up to Vinnie holding her hand.

"If I knew this is what it takes to get you to visit me, I'd get hospitalised more often," she murmured.

"Lorna," he scolded, lacing their fingers tighter together. "You fucking scared me."

"I'm sorry."

He welled up. "No, sweetheart, I'm sorry I haven't visited. Or answered your calls. I've been so depressed, I ain't thought about how you must be feeling. Are you okay?"

"Better now you're here."

"I love you, my little ravioli." He rested his head on her lap.

"Ouch. Not there."

He lifted his head, and shook it a bit. "Jesus, Lorna. I'm worried enough about you in prison without you getting in a fight. They could snap you like a breadstick, what the hell were you thinking?"

"I don't know. It's all blurry."

He stroked her cheek and smiled. "Here I was freaking out, after what your friend said. But the doctor explained, a high fever can make you start seeing things that aren't there."

Lorna felt a chill that wasn't fever. "What do you mean, what my friend said?"

"That woman, Nicky. She said you were going around talking about the baby like he's still here. But you were just delirious from the fever, weren't you? Next time see a doctor before it gets that bad, huh?"

A cloud of confusion came over her. "I don't understand. Why was Nicky talking to you?"

"Babe, she was just worried about you. She thought you really believed Carmine was... was alive."

What the fuck did he just say? For a moment, she seemed to float above her own body, watching as Vinnie told her the most terrible, unspeakable lie. "He is alive, Vinnie."

His mouth dropped open. Heavy tears fell from his eyes as if on command, staining her white bedsheets. "Oh, fuck."
"Vinnie, what's wrong?"

"She was right. You are fucking crazy."

Her body trembled with anger. **How dare Nicky do this?** She grabbed Vinnie's face with both hands. "Don't listen to a word that bitch says, okay? She wants to poison your mind, make you doubt what's real. She's always hated us being together and now that we're a family she just wants to tear us apart."

"We're not a family, Lorna!" Vinnie wrenched her hands away. "The baby is dead."

"How – how can you say that?" She gasped.

"How can you say anything else? You held him in your arms. There was no life in him."

"No life? I felt him grow inside me for seven months, I felt him kick when you called and I held the phone to my stomach. Life like that doesn't just go away, Vinnie. He was just sleeping, Vinnie, you said."

Sobbing, he took a piece of paper out of his pocket. "I went to the funeral yesterday, Lorna." He unfolded it and placed it in Lorna's shaking hand.

> In loving memory of
> 
> Carmine Morello Muccio
> 
> **Taken too soon**
> 
> "Those we have held in our arms for a little while, we hold in our hearts forever."

And there was a photo of Carmine, grainy like it was taken with a smartphone, of him sleeping peacefully in a plastic crib.

"What the fuck is this? Is this some kind of joke?" She ripped the paper in two, ignoring Vinnie's flinching. "My baby is not dead."

"Yes, he is, he's – " Vinnie stopped, sobbing. "I can't. I can't do this. Lorna, I ... I really wanted this baby, too. I did. I never thought I'd say that. All my life I've been running away from responsibility, but this was my chance to get out of my parent's house and do something. Be important to somebody. A life that we made. And we only did it the once, I mean, that's gotta be a miracle, right? Thinking of all the things I'd teach my son and how lucky I was to raise him with you, it was the happiest time of my life. When he died, I never thought I could feel that much pain. But I'm accepting it because I need to honour our son. You... what you're doing just makes it worse. Every time I look at you, and I see how full of false fucking hope you are, it's like he dies all over again."

He dropped something cold and metal into Lorna's hand, closing her fingers as he kissed it. "I'm sorry but I just can't do it again."

He kissed her on the forehead and on the lips. She could taste the salt of his tears. Then he apologised again, and left.

She opened her hand to see his wedding band glistening on her palm.

**Nicky**
When Nicky heard Lorna had been transferred back to D-block, she was a little surprised. With all that had happened, she assumed she'd at least be taken to Florida. It struck her that Lorna must have committed a much worse crime than she admitted to if she was permanently stuck on custodial duty with junkies and lowlives, herself included.

Lorna lay face up on her bed, her arms stiff by her side. Her blank stare didn't waver when Nicky walked in bearing gifts (smuggled leftover frozen waffles and orange slices from breakfast).

"She lives!" Nicky joked, setting the food on the bedside cabinet. Lorna didn't reply. "You had us scared for a second there. Did the doctors patch you all up?"

Still, nothing. Nicky crouched down beside the bed. "Hey, I kind of feel like I'm making all the conversation here."

Slowly, Lorna turned her head. "Go fuck yourself, Nicky. If I could move at all right now, I'd knock you out."

Nicky was shocked, but she laughed. "You already gave me a pretty good shiner. Didn't know you had it in you, slugger. Maybe I've been fighting your battles too long."

"I never asked you to do that."

"I think what you meant to say is thank you. And sorry." Lorna turned her head away again. She patted her shoulder. "Hey, I know you weren't feeling well. You need to tell me next time, okay?" She tucked Lorna's hair behind her ear. "Hey?"

"FUCK OFF, NICKY!" Lorna sat up, biting away the obvious pain it caused her.

"What the fuck is your problem?" Nicky shouted.

"My problem? I'm not the one interfering with other people's marriages!"

Oh. It made sense now. Lorna always was obsessively possessive over Vinnie. "Lorna, I only spoke to him because he came to visitation and didn't know where you were. He didn't even know you were in hospital."

"Oh, he came to visit me in hospital," Lorna spat. "He had lots to say. You told him I was so fucking crazy he doesn't want to be with me anymore!" Lorna threw a small metal object to the ground. Nicky picked it up, her stomach sinking as she knew immediately it was Vinnie's wedding band.

"That fucking asshole! Lorna, I'm so sorry."

"No, you're not! You've hated us being together ever since the beginning. Are you happy now? Are you happy?"

"Of course not."

"I have no one now. Vinnie's gone, just like –" Lorna froze. It was almost like someone flicked a switch in her brain. For a moment, she sat unmoving, unbreathing. Her eyes grew wide and glassy. She whispered: "Get out."

It was such a quiet, grave instruction that Nicky obeyed immediately. And she agreed. She had tried to help, but she had only made it worse. Every time she got close to Lorna, she ended up hurting her
and herself. She made a decision there and then to leave her alone for good.
Nicky decides to stay away from Lorna for her own good.

Lorna

Lorna Morello was seven years old when she learned how to lie to herself.

It was around the time her mother started to experience bouts of sickness, and nobody knew what caused it yet. Stansie could be fine for several months, then take a downward turn that would leave her in hospital, tube-fed and peeing into a bag. During these episodes, Lorna and her siblings were looked after by her father Giuseppe, but "looked after" was a generous term.

As the oldest girl, Franny took on the role of Mom, making sure that meals were cooked, classes were attended and baths were taken. She got Lorna to help out too, making sandwiches for school lunches and cleaning up after Mikey's mess. But Lorna tried to get out of it whenever she could, retreating upstairs to play with her dolls or read her fairytales.

Some nights Giuseppe came home from the hospital with the smell of whiskey in his beard and a stagger in his step. Frustrated with losing the woman he made a life with, he was looking for anyone to blame. And Franny the eldest was the easiest target.

The first time it happened, Lorna cried all night as she listened to her sister's screams. She considered calling 911, but even at her age she knew that if her dad was a violent drunk and her mother an invalid, the police would take the children into welfare. Maybe they would be split up and she would never see Franny again.

One time, she tried to stop it herself, but that just earned her a black eye so swollen she couldn't see straight for a week. When the teachers at school and even some of her extended family members didn't do anything about the bruises on Franny's arms, legs, chin, back, that's when she knew that it wasn't going to stop.

So she found a way to cope. Whenever those drunken footsteps echoed through the house and Franny began to cry for help, Lorna locked herself in her room. She opened up the dollhouse and began to imagine a better family, with a mother and father never got sick or poor or angry. And the children always had the finest clothes and never had to go to school and ate waffles for dinner.

Eventually, she visited the doll family so often that they began to take on lives of their own. When Lorna played with them, their voices were so loud she almost didn't hear her father striking her sister on the other side of the wall.

She couldn't silence it. This intrusive, invading thought on her happiness. It had bubbled up from the depths of her subconscious without warning, pushing past layer after layer of protection. A solitary
thought that could dismantle everything she thought she believed in.

*I have no one now. Vinnie's gone, just like Carmine.*

Lorna lay awake in bed, her lungs taking in shallow breaths. Even though her milk had now dried up, her chest was heavy as lead. Another reminder that Carmine existed – gone. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to picture his face, but the features wouldn't piece together. Why did she tear up the picture Vinnie gave her? From the funeral...

*You are fucking crazy. The baby is dead.*

Would it be easier to believe that Vinnie and Nicky had conspired to convince her of something so horrible, in their secret phone calls and prison visits? Tears rolled down the sides of Lorna's face when she thought of the two them scheming behind her back. But it was better than the other option.

Because – it couldn't be real. The thought had surfaced, but only because Nicky had made her question her reality. The last time she did that, Lorna had doubted herself to the point that she thought she was seeing things – and in the end, she turned out to be right. She was pregnant. And Carmine was alive.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed, opening the cabinet. Inside was the cloth doll she had made out of a prison uniform. She held it to her chest, rocking gently backwards and forwards, singing above the loud voices in her mind.

"Hush, little baby, don't say a word. Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird. And if that mockingbird won't sing, mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring..."

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**Nicky**

A brand new day for Nicky. A million chances not to ruin anyone's life, except maybe her own. After custodial duty, she would lock herself in the library until count. That way she couldn't hurt anyone. She would sit and read books, maybe actually find out what happened in the case of Bottoms v. Bottoms. Fill her head with knowledge that could one day actually be useful. Although there probably wouldn't be a book on what to do when the woman you love is a raving lunatic.

At breakfast, she sat with Cindy and Flaca and ate her prison slop diligently. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Lorna sit down next to Annalisa. She fought the urge to steer her away from that shiv-happy psycho.

"You look like shit," Flaca said. Nicky's face was still bruised from the fight.

"Cheers."

"Hey, leave her alone. Not all of us can get away with purple lipstick in here," said Cindy.

"It's Kool-aid. Technically, it's not breaking the rules."

"Well, you might wanna give some to Morello. I miss the retro thing she had going on. Always made me feel like I was in a black and white movie or something." She cast her eyes over to where Lorna was sitting. "Though it wouldn't hurt to run a brush through that hair, damn!"
Nicky stared down, just focusing on eating. *Food to mouth. Swallow. Get out of here.*

"Why is she sitting over there with that junkie anorexic?" Flaca pressed.

"Did you guys have a fight?" Cindy asked.

"Duh, she's the one who gave her a black eye."

"I know, I'm talking about after that!"

"I don't blame you, Nichols." Flaca pursed her purple lips. "If someone did that to me, I wouldn't be friends with them either."

"But she looks so..." Cindy trailed off. "I mean, why the fuck she carrying that doll with her? Shit's scary."

At this point, Nicky couldn't help but look around. Lorna was holding a doll, the same one Nicky found in her cabinet, to her chest. Chunks of breakfast threatened to come back up her throat. *Fucking hell.* She was reminded of when Lorna used to carry around that stupid Valentine's bear, saying that it was a gift from Christopher, when in reality it was a souvenir from her secret felony escape.

"I can't get involved," Nicky said aloud to herself.

"You know, forgiveness is a powerful thing," said Cindy.

"I don't care about that! I just have to stay away. For her own good."

"Are you tripping? Look, I'm not caught up on your soap opera but from the episodes I've watched, it seems like you are the only one keeping that bitch together. You left her alone for like, five minutes, during the riot and she took the entire prison off their meds. She's the one that made Suzanne lose her shit."

Nicky raised her eyebrows. "I seem to remember you had a hand in that, too."

"But I was there for her, wasn't I? You need to be there for your girl."

Nicky stood up and emptied her tray. Cindy didn't understand. Everything she had done to try and help Lorna had only made her fall back deeper into her delusions. Now she was carrying around a fucking doll and pretending it was her dead baby, probably.

Part of her knew this all had to be her fault. Fuck, why hadn't she checked her medications, noticed how unusually mellow Lorna had been over the past few months? Why had she made her run all through the prison when she was heavily pregnant, even though that kickball match turned out to be fun and games?

Nicky was no good. And she could forgive Lorna for anything, but she couldn't forgive herself.

She just wanted to go to a place nobody could find her, where she was high enough that she wouldn't dirty the ground with her footprints. Slowly, she found herself walking over to Daya.
Chapter Summary

Nicky gives into her demons, while Lorna fights another kind of monster – the truth.

Lorna

For once, Nicky wasn't hovering by Lorna's bed when she woke up. Well, she didn't wake up exactly. Her mind ran in circles all night, all she could do was close her eyes and wait until the cell doors opened so she could run away from them.

She levered herself off the mattress, swallowed down a cocktail of painkillers and antidepressants and changed into her uniform. A shower would have to wait – she felt too weak and tired to stand under the hot water, and she was scared of getting soap in her wounds.

"Sad girl," said Adeola, watching her from the top bunk.

Lorna smiled in defiance, picked up the cloth doll and headed to breakfast.

Nicky was already sitting down with Cindy and Flaca, plowing through a bowl of anaemic oatmeal. Good. She can stay the fuck away, too. Lorna picked up a tray and sat in a vacant spot opposite Annalisa, holding the doll close to her chest.

"You pretending that's your baby now?" Annalisa sneered.

"No," Lorna scoffed as if it was the craziest thing in the world. "I made this for my baby."

"Shame you'll never get to give it to him."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Whatever, psycho."

Lorna gritted her teeth. "Don't call me that."

"I'll do what I want, psycho. Psycho, psycho, psycho. What, are you going to hit me, too? You might have everyone else worried 'bout you, but I see you for what you really are. A violent psycho bitch." Annalisa stood up and silently poured the contents of her milk carton down Lorna's front. "Aw, baby needs to get fed."

Lorna got up and ran – past her cell, past the entrance to D-block where McCullough was standing, half-asleep. Her body ached and burned as she teared into the laundry room, stripping off her soaking uniform. She threw it into the washing machine, along with the doll which was also drenched, and found a dry uniform to change into.

It took her a moment to realise exactly where she was. It was the laundry room, yes, but it was also the playground of her nightmares, the focus of her flashbacks. Her eyes tunnelled in on the utility
closet where Nicky had left her. She slowly walked towards the cramped, lightless space where she had lay alone and bleeding. Her hand fell to the tender, bandaged area of her stomach, that constant reminder of a pain she was trying – needed – to forget.

But she couldn't escape it. Not now she was at the very site of her trauma. The last place she had actually felt Carmine moving, writhing inside her belly as if to warn her that something was wrong and she needed to get help. But she didn't. All because she wanted to pretend everything was okay.

It wasn't okay. Carmine came early and now he wasn't with her. She thought he was with Vinnie, but he said the baby was born dead. Just like Nicky did. How could they say that, when she could so vividly remember holding him, remembered his warm body and perfect face as Vinnie wept tears of joy?

Another version of events surfaced in her mind, like remembering a dream. A dream where Carmine wasn't really sleeping and Vinnie's tears were devastating.

She tried to push it down, but it had already flooded her mind, fighting against what she knew to be the truth. Her head spinning and lungs screaming for air, she stepped inside the closet and closed the door.

**Nicky**

“Hey, you got any smack?” Nicky sidled up to Daya, growling under her breath. Her heart was racing, brain hazy. *A high before the high.*

Daya scowled. “I thought you were clean.”

*Jesus fucking Christ, even Queen of the junkies is trying to stop me.* But even though every brain cell was screaming this was a bad idea, she had already passed the point of no return. “Can you hook me up or not?”

Daddy, aka King of the junkies, overheard the conversation and cut in. “What are you gonna do for it?”

“I got money. What do you want from commissary? I’ll get it.”

Daya perked up. “They just got in Pop-Tarts.”

“You’re gonna give away our prime stash for breakfast candy? You have a lot to learn.” Daddy smirked.

Daya shrugged. “They have S’mores flavour.”

“Look, whatever you want, I’ll get it for you. Fuck, when did it get so difficult to get high?”

“I’ve heard about you, Nichols. This is your second trip down the hill, right? Apparently you were quite the regular customer.”

Daddy looked around, then reached into the waistband of her trousers. She slapped a packet of white powder into Nicky’s hand, but didn’t let go.

“I’ll tell you what. You seem like you know your way around here. I’ll hook you up if you bring in
some new clientele. What about Sybil over there?”

Her eyes traveled to where Lorna was sitting, hugging the doll to her body, so hopelessly unaware.

“No, not her.” Nicky’s voice climbed too high. She changed tactics. “Uh, she’s not the type. Good Catholic girl and that.”

“ Seems pretty fucked up to me.”

Nicky squared her shoulders, fixed eye contact with Daddy. “I’ll find someone else. Trust me.”

Daddy let go of the packet. Quickly, Nicky stashed it in her shoe. She turned around to check that Lorna hadn’t seen her – but she was already gone.

Nicky felt the weight of the heroin against her foot as she trudged down the corridors. *Fuck custodial.* All she wanted to do was get high and get the hell out of her own head.

She followed Daya and Daddy to the laundry room, where piles of dirty sheets were waiting to be sorted. Daya sighed extravagantly and threw herself onto a washing machine. Poor idiot was only just realising she’d be spending the rest of her life in prison, probably on custodial duty.

Nicky eyed off the utility closet. She wondered if she could slip inside and take it when nobody was looking. McCullough was standing by the door, but her eyes were distant. Now was her chance.

Nicky let her arm knock over a bottle of laundry fluid. Yellow, lemon-scented goo splattered on the floor.

“Oh, man. What a klutz. Uh, let me get a mop.”

She walked over to the closet, her heart thumping as she was closer and closer to her goal.

When she opened the door, what she expected to find was – nothing. A black hole that she could stop feeling in for a while. She wasn’t prepared to be met with the sound of wheezy, rapid breaths, or a tiny body curled up under the sink.

“Lorna?”

The woman was hugging her knees to her chest, hyperventilating. She didn’t register Nicky, just stared straight ahead through a screen of tears. Nicky crouched down to meet her gaze.

“What’s happened?”

She tried to loosen Lorna’s grip on her knees to get a proper look at her, worried that she was hurt or sick again. She lay a hand on her forehead. It was clammy but she didn’t have a fever.

“Lorna, calm down. Just breathe.”


The commotion alerted Daya and Daddy, who were standing by the door.

“What the fuck is this?” Daddy asked.

“Panic attack, I think.” Nicky was unfortunately way too familiar. She remembered the first time she
got clean in prison, feeling like she was dying in a bathroom stall until Red came to soothe her.

“Oh, she should do jumping jacks,” said Daya. “Worked for me.”

“I don’t think she’s really in the condition for that, but thanks,” Nicky scoffed.

“She’s not supposed to be in here. She’s going to get us in trouble. I don’t need any extra attention, Nichols,” Daddy threatened.

“I’ll handle it, okay?” Nicky closed the door between them. The darkened room only made Lorna’s breaths shorter and louder. “Okay, take it easy. I’ve got you. Deep breaths.”

“I – can’t.”

Nicky cupped Lorna’s white face in her hands. “Babe, you gotta calm down or you’re gonna make yourself faint. Look, do it with me okay? Breathe in and hold.” One two three four. “And out.” One two three four.

They repeated this, Nicky gently putting her hand on Lorna’s belly to encourage her to breathe deeper, feeling the heavy wad of bandages whenever she inhaled. Eventually her breaths began to slow, but they were still ragged and thick with tears.

“I’m so sorry, Nicky,” Lorna choked out.

Nicky steadied her. “Okay. It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not. I promised myself I would never be like my father, after what he did to Franny. But I did it to you.”

“Is that what you’re upset about?” Nicky kissed her forehead. “Look at me. I’m fine. I know you didn’t really wanna hurt me.”

Lorna’s eyes darkened. “I did, though. I wanted you to pay for what you said. But…” She started to shake.

“But what?”

“Vinnie said the same thing. Why would he do that? He was there, with me, in hospital. He actually saw Carmine, he held him.”

“And so did you.”

“Yes… yes, I did. I can still remember the weight in my arms, the way he smelled, his little sleeping face. How can that not be real, Nicky?” She searched Nicky’s eyes, wanting an answer she could never give her.

"I – I think your brain is trying to protect you. You know, I get it. Heroin is also a great escape from reality. But you have to comedown sometime." The heroin in her shoe was long forgotten – she couldn't slip now, not when Lorna was grabbing onto her so tightly.

"I'm so confused!" Lorna wept. "It's like there's two versions of what happened. I feel so fucking crazy, I don't even know what's real anymore. Who do I trust when I can't even trust myself?"

Nicky tilted Lorna's chin up so that their eyes were fixed. "You can trust me."

"... Is he really dead?"
Nicky nodded, and Lorna slumped over, retching. She shuddered and sobbed so hard Nicky feared she would burst her stitches again. The only thing she could do was hold her and let her cry. As horrible as it was to see Lorna like this, it was necessary. Now she could start to heal.
Not Crazy, Just Grieving

Chapter Summary

Lorna's grief bursts through the floodgates.

Lorna

There was nothing Lorna could do but cry. Until McCullough found them huddled together in the closet and marched her back to her cell. Until Nicky came with a cup of water and a bread roll from dinner she couldn't eat. Until Adeola returned to her bunk and asked if she could do anything, but in a way that meant she was annoyed she was losing sleep. Until the sun rose and she had to face another impossible day without him.

Nicky was there, of course. What could ever make her leave? Not two black eyes, apparently. She was too good, much better than Lorna. She wrapped her arms around her and cried too, and said things like "I heard you crying from my bed all night, you should get some sleep" and "You need to eat something" and "I'm so sorry". Sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry.

Eventually Nicky would have to go to custodial, apologise again, and leave her to be alone. So Lorna would wrap the blankets tight around herself so that it felt like a hug. And cry and cry and cry. How much could one person cry until there are no tears left? She cried until her head throbbed and her throat was raw and she could hardly see.

Nicky came back with gifts. A moisturiser that smelled of coconuts ("like Bora Bora Bora" joked Nicky). Plastic bottles of Diet Coke that had been left outside and were actually cold. Cheetos. Lorna had no interest in eating them, but Nicky wouldn't leave her alone until she did, so she opened her mouth and let Nicky feed her, Cheeto by Cheeto. Then Nicky smoothed some of the cream on her tear-chapped skin and let her pretend to go to sleep.

Drifting in, drifting out. The nightmares returning every time she dared close her eyes. Running down that corridor, screaming for Carmine. Being trapped in the laundry room with Christopher. Waking up with the searing pain in her stomach. She picked up the container of painkillers, half-hoping she could take enough to not wake up – but there were only a few left in her prescription. She would just have to stay awake.

Eventually the stupid sun rose again. Nicky slipped away from breakfast to force a waffle down her throat. It tasted of nothing. "Did you sleep at all?" Apparently, the nightmares were making her scream in her sleep. Other inmates had complained, asked for her to go to psych or SHU. "Don't worry, the COs know you're not crazy, just grieving." Then Nicky had asked McCullough if she could swap bunks to stay with Lorna, but with their now-violent history it was out of the question. Lorna was secretly relieved. She was already such a burden.

Nicky picked something out of her trash. A crumpled ball of paper, ripped into pieces. Nicky smoothed it out. It was the service sheet from Carmine's funeral. The guilt flooded her body so fast it took her breath away. She tore up the only picture she had of her son because she couldn't see the truth. Because of her self-deception, she never had a chance to say goodbye to her baby. She sobbed.
into Nicky's lap until she had to leave for custodial. Turns out there were plenty more tears left in her.

Nicky

Three days in bed crying her eyes out was enough, decided Nicky. The longer Lorna stayed like this, the harder it would be to stop, let alone the fact that she couldn't survive on Cheetos and bites of stolen waffles. Nicky marched into her room as soon as the doors unlocked, finding Lorna wide awake. She never slept these days.

"Right, you need to take a shower."

Lorna looked up through puffy red eyes. "I don't feel like it."

Nicky laughed. "Babe, I didn't want to say it but you really need to take a shower. Alright? Ya stink."

"Who cares?"

She crouched down to meet her level. "It's not optional. You need to keep that wound clean. I won't let you end up with another infection."

Lorna groaned and kicked her blankets off, which Nicky saw as a sign of giving in. She helped her out of bed and led her to the showers, linking her arm under hers for support. Luckily it was early and the stalls were mostly empty. Lorna rolled her eyes and walked into one, throwing her nightgown over the other side and turning on the hot water.

But after just a minute, Nicky heard a cry and a thump. She found Lorna leaning heavily against the wall, her head hanging down. Nicky rushed in fully-clothed.

"You feel faint?" Lorna gave a tiny nod. "Alright, I've got you. Just hold on to me."

Lorna gripped Nicky's arms tightly as she lathered shampoo into her hair and gently washed the bandaged area of her stomach. It was weird; she hadn't seen Lorna so naked since pre-Vinnie days. She sensed a deep shame from Lorna that she should need help doing such an everyday task.

Nicky wrapped Lorna in two towels and sat her on the bench.

"I feel like my mother." Lorna gave a weak smile. That was something Nicky hadn't seen in a while. She missed it.

"Does she know... about...?"

Her face dropped. "She doesn't know much about anything these days. Franny's the only one who cares."

Nicky squeezed her shoulder. "Hey, I know something about being the black sheep in a dysfunctional family."

Suddenly Lorna welled up. "Me and Vinnie... we woulda been a dysfunctional family, too."

"Hey, hey." Nicky sat down on the bench and let Lorna fall into her lap. "You're right. You would have been nuts and Vinnie would probably leave every week, 'cause apparently that's his thing, but
there's one thing that makes you two different from our shitty parents. You would have actually loved that kid. You do."

Lorna's sobs turned to snifflies, but she didn't let go of Nicky until Flaca walked in.

"Are you guys ready?" Flaca was holding a bag of toiletries.

"What for?" Lorna asked innocently.

Nicky grinned. "You'll see."
Chapter Summary

Nicky organises something special for Lorna, but her good intentions backfire.

Lorna

Flaca brushed out the tangles in Lorna's hair, pinning it so that it dried in curls. She then applied a red gloss to her lips that was a mixture of Vaseline and cherry Kool-Aid.

Standing in front of the mirror, Lorna felt more like herself than she had in not just weeks, but months. Flaca smiled, dusting her hands.

"And that's why they call me DIY Fly."

"You're the only one who says that," said Nicky, popping back into the bathroom. She had changed into a dry uniform, but her hair was still damp. Lorna felt her face grow hot again. The shower had always been a somewhat erotic symbol of their relationship. Now she was so weak and ruined Nicky wouldn't be the least attracted to her.

Why do I care so much?

"But, yeah, Lorna, you look beautiful." Nicky chucked her under the chin.

"What are you dolling me up for anyway?"

"Come on." Nicky looped her arm under Lorna's and led her out of the bathroom and down the corridor. Passing the laundry room, she had another flashback, pain spiking up through her scar. But she managed to not let Nicky notice. She worried enough.

As they reached the prison chapel, Luschek stood guarding the door. He mimed tipping his hat.

"You owe me big time for this, Nichols," he said. "First the wedding, now this. What next, a baptism? A bat mitzvah?"

"You do not want to go there," she warned.

The doors opened. Lorna's confusion deepened as she saw a row of familiar faces. Red, Alex, Cindy, even Doggett and Suzanne in their Florida-pink scrubs.

"I know you didn't get to go to Carmine's funeral so I thought we'd do our own here," said Nicky, taking her by the hand and walking her to a makeshift altar. On it was the picture of Carmine, carefully sellotaped back together. Lorna wept. "Hey, hey. If it's too much, we don't have to do it."

Lorna squeezed Nicky's hand back. "No... it's perfect."

She greeted each person and thanked them for coming.

Red pressed a parcel of butter cookies into her hands. "Anything you need, just come to me, okay,
Alex gave her a card enveloped in Chapman family stationery. Of course the Chapmans would have their own stationery. "Piper says to pass on her condolences. She's devastated for you. So am I, of course. Uh, shit. I'm really bad at funerals. Fuck, sorry."

Not letting Alex flounder any longer, Lorna moved on to Suzanne, who was looking down and shuffling her feet. She wrapped her in a warm hug. "Suzanne, its real good to see you."

"You too," said Suzanne meekly. Lorna knew she always had a hard time dealing with death. "You were always nice to me. My mom says that bad things happen to good people. So you must be really, really, really, really good. Because this is terrible, awful, just unimaginably dreadful – "

Doggett elbowed Suzanne in the ribs. "Tone it down, she feels bad enough as it is!" She turned to Lorna. "But actually, I think she's right. You were the only one who was happy for me when I got my teeth fixed. Shit, I know it sucks to lose a baby and think about what could have been. But this helped me, maybe it will help you." She gave Lorna a cross made of popsicle sticks.

Finally, Cindy. "Morello, I know you're Catholic but would it be alright if I sang the Kaddish, you know, the Jewish song for the dead?"

"I think that would be alright."

They all gathered around the altar and Cindy sang an enchanting hymn, her rich and powerful voice ringing out in the chapel.

"I didn't understand what any of that meant, but it was beautiful," said Lorna, her eyes streaming.

"Uh, thanks all for coming," Nicky stepped forward, clearing her throat, as if she was going to say something important. "This whole situation is really fucked."

Red chuckled. "Always sentimental, this one."

"No, but it is. We all know how excited Lorna was for this baby and how great she would have been as a mom. It's really just fucked and we should be angry. We can sit here talking about God and bad things happening to good people and all that shit but she didn't deserve this, it's fucking unfa-"

She took a deep breath, noting Red's glare. "But what's important now is that we remember Carmine Morello Muccio. Because he isn't forgotten, Lorna. You know, he's part of our family."

Lorna nodded, weeping uncontrollably.

"Would you like to say something, sweetheart?" Red asked.

She stepped forward, almost afraid of the words that would come tumbling out of her mouth. Making it all more real.

"My perfect baby. All my life I've been searching for a guy to love me. When I found out I was pregnant with you, I knew I didn't have to search no longer. I don't know how I would have survived in here without you. You saved me."

Lorna dropped to her knees, holding the photo in front of her. Deep sobs erupted from her chest. "Why couldn't I save you? I'm your mother, that's what I'm supposed to do. I failed you, baby. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."
All things considered, that was about as well as Nicky expected the funeral could go.

After she picked Lorna up off the floor, they passed around candles (but weren't allowed to light them) and Cindy sang a stirring rendition of "One Hand, One Heart" from West Side Story, Lorna wailing at the "even death won't part us now" lyric. Then Red passed around some pastry called angel wings (there was a Russian name for them that Nicky couldn't pronounce) and they all sat down to eat in sniffly silence.

Eventually everyone started making small talk, except for Lorna. A troubled look had settled on her face and she wasn't paying any attention to the people or the food. Nicky said thanks to everyone and escorted her back to her bunk.

Lorna climbed under the covers, only her head peeking out. She looked so beautiful with her signature curls and red lips that Nicky fought the urge to kiss her there and then.

"Cool off, Nichols. She just attended her kid's funeral, not that she's interested anyway."

"I'm sorry," Lorna said. "It was a lovely service. I'm just tired."

"That tends to happen when you when you don't sleep."

"No, Nicky, I'm really tired." Lorna's voice was feeble and thready. "I've never felt like this before. It's such a gnawing pain, all the time, like someone is chewing on my insides. Sometimes I've felt like that but I get over it. But no matter what I do or how I look at it, this is not gonna get better."

Nicky patted the covers. "It will get better."

Lorna's face crumpled. "I just wish I knew why! What did I do wrong?"

"Nothing!"

"Was it playing with the rats? Did I eat too much junk? When I had morning sickness all I could keep down was Cheetos, there has to be some kind of chemical shit in them. I shouldn't have got involved in that gang shit, I wouldn't have had to run, I wouldn't have been so stressed – "

"Baby, baby." Nicky curled her body around Lorna's, hugging her tight to suppress the building panic. "You are not to blame. If anything, it's this shithole prison for not looking after you."

Lorna stopped crying. "What do you mean? They did scans, they gave me pre-natals. I probably got better healthcare here than out there and I didn't have to pay for it."

"Well, the American healthcare system is fucked." Nicky sat up, and leaned over to grab something from the cabinet. It was the box of paroxetine. "I found these. You know, when I was looking for Vince's phone number to make sure you weren't dead. I gotta say I was surprised. The last time I heard, you were pretty anti-antidepressants. Took the entire prison off them, in fact."

Lorna looked sheepish. "I know. It's just, after the riot I felt so guilty about leaving you ... and everyone else. I didn't even know if you were alive, there was such horrible rumours. And I just couldn't stop crying. I guess the hormones didn't help. But everyone was so mean, Nicky, telling me to shut up and calling me those names. So when I went to the doctor to tell him I was pregnant, he
said I was clearly depressed, and he gave me these. To be honest, they did help a little."

Nicky was stricken. She had no idea how much the riot had affected her. But she hid her shock because it was so rare for Lorna to be so open about her mental health.

"So, you did tell them you were pregnant straight away?"

"Yeah, Nicky. How else were they gonna give me my pre-natals?"

"Those incompetent pricks," Nicky growled. She softened her expression when she saw Lorna's concerned one. "Look, babe, it's nothing on you. But you shouldn't have been taking that type of antidepressant while you were pregnant."

Lorna sat up, her brow furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"It says it in the box."

"What?" Lorna tore open the box, unfolding the warnings leaflet. Her eyes growing wider and wilder as she read. "Oh ... my God."

"I know. They should fucking check these things."

The tears started to fall. "You think this is what killed Carmine?"

Nicky caressed her cheek. "Honestly, I don't know. I'm not a doctor, but they are. They should know better."

Lorna's hands were shaking so hard that the paper began to tear. "This is all my fault."

"No, it isn't! For the last time, you are not a medical professional."

"How hard is it to read a fucking piece of paper?" Lorna bawled angrily. "What kind of person just takes something without reading the warnings? If I wasn't so fucking stupid, he would still be here."

"You don't know that for sure! Forget I even said it."

An eerie, frozen look came over Lorna's face. When she spoke her voice was very quiet. "Oh my God. It's me. I've been so selfish. I couldn't just get by like everyone else, I had to take those things because of my fucked-up brain and now... I... I did this. It's me. My crazy killed my baby."
Food is Not a Reward, Especially Here

Chapter Summary

A guilt-ridden Lorna sinks into a deep depression.

Lorna

The nightmares got worse. Except this time, in the dream, it wasn't Christopher waiting for Lorna in the utility closet. Stepping out of the dark, the petite woman had vintage curls and a red mouth, twisted into a selfish smile. The enemy, the one who had destroyed everything, was herself.

Every time her exhausted body finally got to sleep, the visions shook her awake, gasping for breath. How many days had it been since she had an unbroken night's sleep? She lost count. But it didn't matter anyway. She didn't deserve a single second of rest. Carmine never got to sleep.

She didn't deserve anything. She flushed the antidepressants down the toilet, not angry at what they had done, but what she had allowed herself to expect – to be happy. Her happiness was worthless, and yet it was the price she bargained for Carmine's life. What did it matter if she cried all day? She should have felt horrible for leaving Nicky behind, for being a pathetic, selfish excuse for a human being.

Nicky was too forgiving. Every time she tiptoed into her cell, carrying a bag of Cheetos or a gossip magazine, Lorna wanted to scream out of her skin. It made her sick to see someone be so kind, so generous to her. A junkie's judgement is never the best, after all.

Nicky crouched by her bunk and stroked Lorna's hair, each tiny act of comfort bringing up waves of anger. Lorna realised her hands were balled up so tightly that her fingernails cut into the flesh of her palms.

"Hey, feeling better? You've stopped crying at least."

It wasn't that her tears had dried up. She was just so disgusted by how sorry she had been feeling for herself over the past few days. "Carmine never got to cry."

Nicky crushed her bottom lip between her teeth. Still stroking. Stop trying to make me feel better.

"What about we hit breakfast, huh? Today they have those mini pancakes."

No, food is nourishment. Something you should never have. "Carmine never got to eat."

Nicky banged her head against the mattress, exhaling. "You need to eat."

Why? What for? "I don't deserve it."

She rolled her eyes at that. "Food is not a reward, especially here. You need it to, ya know, stay alive."
"Why should I live if I killed my baby?"

Nicky's eyes swivelled towards the door and back. "Lorna, listen to me. You can't talk like that. They'll put you in psych."

Lorna's head lolled forwards, holding Nicky's nervous gaze. "Maybe they should. I mean, that's the only reason why I took those pills, right? I'm crazy."

She tried to touch her face, but Lorna pulled away.

"You're not crazy."

"Yes, I am. Everyone says it. You say it all the time."

Nicky paused, her eyes on the floor. "I'm sorry. That's a shitty thing to say."

"But it's true."

"... You just need help."

"Help is what did this to him."

"You need to stop blaming yourself."

"Maybe all this happened for a reason." Lorna's voice was low and empty.

"What do you mean?"

"I can't even look after myself. I'm selfish and weak and stupid. This is God's way of telling me, I would have been a terrible mother. I would have ruined Carmine's life, just like I ruin everyone else's."

Nicky was at a loss for words. A single tear sliding down her face, she got up and went to breakfast, leaving Lorna to fill her conscience with the emptiness in her stomach.

**Nicky**

Lorna had never been like this before. She stayed all day in bed, but rarely slept. Didn't shower. Didn't eat. Even when Franny came to visit, she left her sister waiting there all day. And now the COs were starting to notice that she was missing meals.

Nicky at least dragged her out of bed and sat her down at breakfast, a full tray of food in front of her. She needed to appear she was eating to the COs, or she'd end up in psych with a tube down her throat. Nicky waved food in front of her face, begging her to eat something, but Lorna didn't even blink.

It had been a long week of starving. And that didn't factor the days before that, when she could only stomach the occasional bite. On her tiny frame, the weight loss was obvious. Her cheeks were sunken and her uniform was even baggier than usual. If she kept this up much longer, she would be in an ambulance for the third time that month.

At rec time, Nicky dragged Lorna to the yard for some much-needed fresh air and sunshine. At least
she was so low on energy, she didn't put up a fight. It was like towing around a lifesize ragdoll.

Red and Alex immediately flocked to their side. The shock was written all over their faces.

"Lorna." Red held the pale, blank face in her hands. "Nicky, what the hell has been happening?"

"I thought you said the whole funeral thing was going to help," said Alex.

"Can I talk to you for a second?" Red led Nicky a few metres away. Alex stayed with Lorna, putting a steadying hand on her shoulder, as if she could collapse any second.

"It looks that bad, huh?"

Red was appalled. "When was the last time she ate?"

Nicky shrugged in defeat. "I don't know, a week, maybe longer? If you don't count me force-feeding her Cheetos."

She cursed in Russian. "Why didn't you bring this to me sooner?"

"I'm handling it."

"Handling it? She can barely stand! She seemed much better at the funeral, what happened?"

Red's accusing stare was too much to bear. "I told her something."

"Oh, dear God. What?"

"I found a box of antidepressants in her belongings. And the warnings said not to take them while pregnant. She didn't know, those asshole doctors didn't even think to check."

Red slapped the back of Nicky's head. "And you told her?"

"I thought it would give her closure if she knew the truth."

"You fool!" Red slapped her again.

"Ow! What the fuck?"

"This is Lorna. She doesn't want to know the truth!"

For maybe the millionth time that week, Nicky felt sick to her stomach. "I don't know what to do, Mom. I thought I was helping her. Now she's just punishing herself and I can't stop her."

Red drew her in for a hug. "It's not your fault. But we need to fix it, before it gets any worse. You have the loser husband's phone number, yes? Call him and get him to come back and honour his vows. Maybe that will give her something to live for."

Nicky sighed, and nodded. Vinnie was an unreliable asshat, but he was Lorna's unreliable asshat. For the second time, she went to get him back, sacrificing her own happiness in the process. But what did her happiness matter?
All I Wanted Was a Head Job

Chapter Summary

Nicky remembers when she and Lorna first met.

Chapter Notes

TW: Eating disorders

Lorna

To Lorna's surprise, she wasn't feeling as nearly bad as she thought she would. Hunger pangs eventually went away. Dizzy spells passed as long as she didn't stand up for too long. If her hands started to shake, she simply sat on them so nobody could see.

The combination of sleep and food deprivation made her feel like she was floating. This was her penance: she had to give up the sins of the body and become pure. A small thought occurred: if she became weightless enough, she could float up to Heaven and be with her son. Don't be unrealistic, Lorna. You are clearly going to Hell.

The voices in her head telling her to keep going were so loud, Nicky's protests became like white noise. She was only vaguely aware of her putting the food tray in front of her during meal times, waving tater tots in front of her nose. Nicky dragged her up to the yard every chance she got, so that Red could fuss and guilt-trip. But it was all in vain. Lorna always walked away, sitting against the wall and putting her head between her knees so she wouldn't pass out.

One day, she was called over the prison PA system for visitation. Probably Franny, again. After Lorna stood her up last time, she had no idea why her sister even bothered coming back. She was not in any kind of mood to talk to her.

"It's Vinnie," said Nicky. The first words of Nicky's that Lorna had paid attention to in a long time.

"How do you know?" she grizzled.

"Call it a hunch."

"Me and Vinnie are over. He gave me his ring."

Nicky threw up her hands. "Alright! I called him. He wants to talk to you, doll. Maybe you two can, uh, work things out. Wouldn't that be nice?"

Lorna got up shakily and headed towards visitation. If she wasn't so light-headed, she would tell Nicky off. When was she going to let her live her own life?
Vinnie's mouth dropped when she sat down in front of him. "Oh my God."

Lorna just glared, picking up the phone. "Hello, husband. Or should that be, ex-husband?"

"Lorna... are you... you're so thin! Are they not feeding you in there?"

She leaned her head against the partition, not bothering to answer.

"Please tell me you're not doing this to yourself. God, I should have come for you sooner."

Lorna spiked up. "You left me, Vincent Muccio."

He flushed. "I'm sorry, alright? The last time I saw you, you were pretty happy pretending. I had no idea you were gonna do this. You look sick."

"Is that why Nicky called you? To get you to feel sorry for me? I don't need your sympathy."

"Baby, I know." He put his hand up to the glass. "We're both going through it together. I'm never going to leave you again."

She held his gaze. "You don't understand. I'm the reason this happened. I'm the reason Carmine is dead."

"No, you're not. You did nothing wrong."

"I took pills that hurt the baby," she said flatly.

He shook his head, wildly, as if to shake the words she'd just said out of his ears. "No, no. You didn't."

"I did. I bet your good pal Nicky left out that little detail, right?"

"Lorna, I swear to God, if you're lying –"

"Why would I lie about something like that?"

"To make me leave? To punish yourself?"

"Vince, I am telling the truth."

His eyes widened. Suddenly his first came down on the glass. "Why the hell would you do that, Lorna? Why would you do that to us?"

Her control broke. She just wanted him to hold her, to tell her it was okay. Tears rose up through her throat like sick. "I'm so sorry, Vinnie. I didn't mean to. I'm so sorry I hurt you. I'm a terrible person."

And he didn't say anything, just stared at her and let the tears fall.

"Please say something."

For a moment he looked like he might reach out to her, but instead he stood up and turned to leave. She rapped on the glass with both hands.

"Vinnie, please! Please forgive me. I know it's all my fault. I love you! Please don't leave me again!"

A CO pulled her away from the glass, threatening to give her a shot.
His silence had confirmed it all. It didn't matter what Nicky or anyone else said, she was dangerous. After what she'd done, she didn't deserve to be loved, especially not by Vinnie who she'd hurt the most. How could she be so weak? Her emotions spun and spiralled out of the tight control she'd been holding onto. The moment she asked to be forgiven, she undid everything she'd done to repent.

She floated to dinner, feeling alien from her own body, desperate for something to push down the building chaos in her head. When Nicky sat down opposite her with two full trays, she grabbed a bread roll and shoved it down her throat so fast she bit her own fingers.

"Oh, thank fuck!" Nicky was overjoyed. "I knew Vinnie would make you see sense."

Lorna finished everything on her tray in a couple of minutes. When Nicky came back with seconds, she finished that, too.

"You really had me scared for a moment there." Nicky squeezed her hand, her eyes misty.

After so many days of starvation, Lorna felt like she was going to explode. The food sat in her chest, rising through her ribcage. She was so undisciplined, so greedy, so unclean.

"I think I need a shower," she said, getting up.

"Oh, you definitely do," Cindy piped up.

"I'll come with you," said Nicky, standing.

"No, Nicky. I can do it myself."

Nicky shrugged and sat down. Nothing could wipe the smile off her face now that her damsel in distress had finally eaten.

Lorna picked up her towel and toiletries as expected and headed to the showers. The minute she'd determined the coast was clear, she got slipped into a stall and turned on the water. Then she knelt down and opened her bag.

An old habit she'd picked up, in times where even her own imagination couldn't escape her pain. Times when everything seemed out of her grasp – when she was first brought to prison, when Mendez tried to attack her, when Nicky was taken to max.

She took out her toothbrush and jammed it down her throat. She wanted to empty herself of everything.

Nicky

Lorna Morello arrived at Litchfield almost three years after Nicky did. Nicky was always on the lookout for fresh meat to fuck, but she was even more intrigued by the tiny, cute woman who had walked in with bright red lipstick and her short hair in curls. Where the hell did she think she was?

But her interest was immediately dampened when she asked the other inmates about her.

"Don't bother," said Boo. "Betty Boop is engaged. All I wanted was a head job and I got trapped in an hour-long conversation about her cute little hetero wedding."
"She won't be able to talk if I sit on her face."

"Nichols, I rarely say this, but you can do better."

Boo might have been right. As the weeks wore on, the number of people willing to talk to Morello dwindled. Even Yoga Jones excused herself to "meditate" whenever she entered a room.

When the van driver got sent to SHU, it was happy, harmless Morello that Healey chose as the replacement. It was the perfect set-up, because Morello could talk the ear off the new inmates about "Christopher" and they couldn't do anything about it. But eventually, they stopped feeling lucky that someone so nice and cheerful was talking to them, and sought company in other tribes.

Morello didn't seem to be phased – she walked around with her nose in a bridal magazine and wolfed down food during meal times from her empty table. In fact, she practically inhaled it. Nicky guessed the thought of her fiancé on the other side was enough to keep her going, so why should she care about the friendships of a bunch of criminals?

And after a few months, Nicky didn't care either. She found other newbies to knock boots with. One morning, after breakfast, she took one of them back to the bathroom. She was going down on her, when she heard a loud retching.

"Why'd you stop?" The inmate asked, slightly panting.

"Do you hear that?"

"Yeah... probably someone going through withdrawal." She grabbed Nicky's hand towards her crotch, but Nicky pulled away. The sound of someone puking wasn't exactly putting her in the mood.

"I'm gonna go check it out."

It wasn't a junkie going cold turkey. As Nicky drew back the shower curtain, she recognised the dark, curled hair of Morello. She was kneeling over a pool of vomit, heaving.

"Oh... uh, are you okay?"

Morello looked up, mascara streaming down her cheeks. "Uh, prison food."

Nicky looked behind her shoulder. "Don't you ever let Red hear you say that, okay? Not unless you wanna be a couple of dress sizes smaller for your wedding."

She cocked her head. "You know about my wedding?"

"The entire prison knows about your wedding. I'm sure there are inmates in SHU who know about it. It's basically all you ever talk about, right?"

Morello looked at the ground. "I didn't think anyone was listening."

It was the first time Morello had shown any sign of sadness or vulnerability since she arrived. Maybe she had been like this all along, but was just scarily good at hiding it. Nicky couldn't help but take pity, taking Morello's hand and pulling her out of the shower. She ran the water so the vomit washed down the drain.

"Hey, you know they're just jealous, right? Some people in here would kill to have a short sentence and a hubby waiting for them on the other side. I mean, they'll literally kill you so try not to rub it in
everyone's faces."

Morello burst into tears. "It wasn't supposed to be like this. I'm meant to be with Christopher, not here. I hate it. Every time I wake up and realise where I am, I feel sick to my stomach."

Nicky tucked Morello's hair behind her ear. "Yeah, it's not exactly summer camp. Look, you gotta stop stressing. That's what's making you sick."

"I've let everyone down. My family, Christopher. If I died in here, they'd probably be relieved I was gone."

She collapsed into sobs again. Nicky had no choice but to hold her.

"Ssh, stop. Saying suicidal shit like that will get you put in psych. Hey, I said stop. You have a lot to live for. That guy Christopher, he's crazy about you. You have a wedding to plan, right? What kind of dress are you thinking of?"

Morello straightened up, her eyes glittering. "I – I was thinking... maybe fairytale style, with the big skirt."

*Of course.* "Well, you'd look hot in that. You'll have to show me the designs."

She smiled. "Really?"

"Yeah, why not?"

"This ain't some kind of prank, right?"

Nicky rolled her eyes. "Come on, I'll introduce you to the gang. I'm Nichols, by the way. Nicky."

"So, your name is... Nicole Nichols? Did your parents hate you or something?"

Nicky laughed. Morello was actually adorable, in an oblivious kind of way. "As a matter of fact, yes."

"Morello, Lorna. And don't worry, so do mine."

"So, Morello. What did you do to end up in here, pretty girl like you?"

Morello was silent for a long moment, before she admitted: "Mail fraud."

"Nice. Me, I took drugs. A fuck-ton of drugs. And I did a lot of crazy shit to get them."

"You... you ain't on drugs no more, right?"

"Nah, kid. Love is my drug now."

Morello smiled, and Nicky led her by the hand to meet the rest of the family.
No Takie-Backsies

Chapter Summary

Nicky's past mistakes catch up with her.

Chapter Notes

TW: Eating disorders

Lorna

It was easy for Lorna to lie. After all, she had a lot of practice. Even Nicky could be fooled if she was careful about it. She waited a reasonable amount of time after meal times to excuse herself, to empty herself. If the coast was clear, she'd purge in her cell toilet, but the showers were the best spot because she could run the water to mask the sound of her retching. Afterwards, she felt so much better, like it wasn't just her food swirling down the drain, but small pieces of her shame.

As the weeks passed, she began to make conversation with the other inmates – not because she was getting over her grief, but because she wanted to keep under the guise that she was getting better. There was no way in hell she was about to let them take away her only bit of control, the only thing that was calming the manic voices in her head.

"How did your doctor's appointment go?" Nicky asked over dinner. Doctor, doctor, doctor. She never stopped nagging Lorna, because although she was "eating", the weight was still dropping off. Finally, Lorna agreed to go, just to get her off her back.

Lorna answered through a mouthful of potato: "Got my stitches out. Says I can go back to custodial tomorrow."

Nicky raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure?"

"Nicky, I'm fine," Lorna sighed. "Besides, aren't you the one who always says I have to get out of bed and do something?"

"Hey, I'm just glad to have my mop buddy back. Diaz is such a bore, drugs this, drugs that. Tell me I wasn't like that when I was using."

"Honey, you were worse."

Lorna never told Nicky how hurtful her comments had been to her, or how shaken-up she was by their row just before the riot. If she thought about it, she could still feel Nicky pinning her up against the shed, fighting her hands down her pants, pushing her into the fence, smacking her around the head.
But Nicky had changed. She was a completely different person since the riot, since Lorna got pregnant – so kind and protective. She would literally lay down her life for Lorna, she had already proven it.

The difference between them, was Lorna hadn't changed at all. She was still lying, broken and brainsick. She didn't deserve the woman that Nicky had become.

She excused herself from dinner and threw up in the shower until there was nothing but bile.

The next morning, Lorna put on her baggiest pair of grey prison sweats to hide her shrinking body. After breakfast, she completed her ritual but it felt wrong. Her head pounded and she felt hot and nauseous, even though there was no food left in her.

Nicky – and Daya, Daddy, Adeola and Annalisa – were waiting for her to join the custodial team. McCullough unlocked the corridor and they headed towards the laundry. *Fuck.* The walls tilted and closed in around her.

"Hey, you okay?" Nicky noticed her shallow breathing.

"Mm-hm."

Nicky looped her hand in hers. "It's the laundry room, isn't it?"

"Mm-hm."

"We can still turn back, babe. It's okay if you're not ready."

"Don't be stupid, it's just a room. I gotta get over it."

Nicky sighed. "Did I ever tell you how sorry I am for leaving you there? When I think of you, all alone in that closet, in pain –"

She broke off. Lorna stared in awe. "It wasn't your fault, hun. Besides, it's not like it would have changed anything."

Nicky shook her head, messy blonde curls tumbling. "I could have been there for you."

"You always are."

**Nicky**

Nicky knew Lorna wasn't ready to be on custodial duty. As much as she tried to hide it, her whole body was tremoring as she walked into the laundry room. She squeezed her eyes shut over and over again, as if to blank out the horrible memories there.

"Nichols, come help me get clean towels," Daddy called, standing by the utility closet with Daya.

"Uh, pretty sure you can do that yourself, actually."

"She said, come help," Daya grunted, clearly trying to act tough. "Or don't you remember how we
helped you?"

"What does he or she want?" Lorna asked, leaning against the washer.

"Nothing. Just stay here."

Nicky nodded at Adeola, as if to say take care of my girl, and followed Daddy and Daya into the closet.

"What the fuck, Nichols?" Daddy snapped.

"What the fuck to you too!"

"You promised to bring me a new customer. That was weeks ago! Where is my cookie?"

Nicky groaned. "Oh, fuck, I totally forgot. Look, I didn't even take it. I'll give it back and we can call it even."

"That wasn't the deal," said Daya.

"What's the big problem? It's still good shit. I'll give it back and you two can go prey on someone else."

"No!" Daddy pushed her against the wall. "What the fuck do you think this is, kindergarten? There's no takie-backsies. Daddy does not play like that."

"Daddy really should stop referring to herself in the third person." Nicky felt Daddy's grip on her arm tighten.

"Either you find someone or we will. What about your crazy little friend?"

Nicky scoffed. "Lorna would never."

"I don't know. What if I told her she could get so high she could see her baby again? Do you think she'd believe it? Would you risk her?"

Daya stepped in, shocked. "Dude."

Daddy let go. "You have 24 hours, Nichols. Or we take it into our own hands."

Nicky slid back against the wall, feeling familiar shame wash over her. She took a minute to calm down before entering the laundry again.

Lorna was still resting against the washing machine. God, even though she was eating now, she looked tinier than ever.

"You okay?" She asked.

"Yeah, you?"

Lorna nodded, but her face was washed out.

"Hey, McCullough." Nicky waved at the CO by the door. "You mind if we get started on the hallway? I don't think we need six people to fold towels."

McCullough shrugged and Nicky gathered up Lorna and the mops and buckets, ignoring Daddy's
"I'm gonna be a fully qualified cleaner when I get out of here," Lorna mumbled, leaning on the mop handle.


Lorna waved her hand. "It's alright. I probably would have laughed at that. I'm never gonna laugh again."

Nicky put her hand on her shoulder. "Yeah, you will. Hey, I have a really good joke that will cheer you up. So, a penguin and a farmer walk into a bar – "

She started telling the joke, but Lorna's eyes just glazed over. *Talk about a tough crowd.* Nicky got to the "he's not an eggplant, he's retarded" punchline, when all the colour drained from Lorna's face and she collapsed in a heap.

"Lorna!" She knelt down, turning her over. As quickly as it had happened, Lorna's eyes flickered open and she tried to sit up.

"Huh?"

"You just blacked out. We need to get you to medical."

Lorna stood up, wobbling a bit. "No, I'm fine." She swooned a little, falling backwards into Nicky's arms. She was so light.

"You are not fine."

Lorna turned around, her eyes wide and watery. "Please, Nicky. No more doctors. You were right, it's too soon for custodial. I just need to take it easy."

Nicky sighed, and with McCullough's approval, took Lorna back to her bunk.

When Nicky came back carrying half the food from commissary, Lorna was sitting on her bed with something white in her hand. A plastic sachet of white powder, to be exact.

*Fucking fuck fuck shitty fuckity fuck fuck.*

"Oh, Nicky," she cried. "How long?"

Nicky grabbed the packet out of Lorna's hands. "It's not what you think."

Lorna pressed her knuckles into her skull. "How could I be so blind? I've been so caught up in my own shit. No, Nicky, not again!"

Nicky wrestled Lorna's arms to the bed. "Lorna, I was never going to take it. Okay, I was when I got it, but I never did. That was weeks ago. Honestly, I forgot it was even here."

Lorna sneered. "You really expect me to believe you *forgot* you were in possession of heroin?"

"I know it sounds ridiculous, but, hey, you love ridiculous."

"You... you really had drugs in your cell for weeks and you never took them?"
"Believe it or not, but I've been kind of distracted by other things, doll. Maybe you should have had more mental breakdowns, I could have stayed sober my entire sentence." Lorna's mouth dropped. "That was a joke."

"But if you ain't using, why not just flush it down the toilet?"

Nicky sighed long and hard. "I promised Daddy I would find her a new customer. This is my collateral until I do."

Lorna connected the dots. "Is that what you were talking to them about? But, isn't that kind of immoral, to get someone else hooked on this shit?"

There it was. The disappointment Nicky had been trying to avoid – from Red, and especially from Lorna.

"Yep, I'm a terrible person."

To her surprise, Lorna tucked Nicky's hair behind her ear. "You're not a terrible person. You're the best person I know."

"Really?"

"Would I lie to you?"

Nicky fought off a smile. "I really don't wanna answer that."

Lorna was now holding her hands. "You gotta get out of this mindset that you're still the same person that walked in this prison."

"As Marka says, once a junkie, always a junkie."

"Fuck that CUNT!"

"Whoa!" Nicky laughed in shock.

"I mean it, Nicky. Do you ever stop to think that maybe your mother is the reason for your addiction? If you had any love or happiness, maybe you wouldn't have tried to find it in drugs?"

"I –"

Lorna's face had finally taken on some colour. "If I ever meet that woman, I going to let her know exactly what I think of her. That she should be lucky to have someone as kind and smart and loyal as a daughter, and she's a fucking idiot for not seeing it."

Nicky bounced a little on the bed. "Oh, my God. Please can you meet my parents?"

But Lorna was tearing up. "Some people would give anything for a child, and she just threw it away."

Nicky rested her head on Lorna's shoulder. "I know."

They stayed like that for while, leaning on each other, finding comfort in each other's bodies.

"So... if I'm the best person you know, does that include Vinnie?"

"Shut up. Don't ruin the moment."
Lorna was surprised to wake up in Nicky's arms. In fact, she was surprised she was even asleep at all. It wasn't sleep as she knew it – no nightmares, no cold sweats. It was the first time she'd slept like this in weeks.

"Afternoon, sleeping beauty," Nicky murmured. "You must have really needed that nap. It's almost time for dinner."

"I slept the whole day? But what about custodial, won't you be in trouble?"

Nicky kissed her on the forehead. "Baby, haven't you noticed the COs are extra nice about you? I think they feel bad, you know, about what happened."

And it all rushed back. Her baby was dead. For a few hours, she had forgotten it. Actually slept easy, snuggled happily in Nicky's warm arms like nothing had happened, like she didn't kill the one good thing she'd ever made. The kiss on her forehead burned like a brand. What a fucking insult.

She extricated herself from Nicky's grasp, jumping out of the bed.

"What's wrong, baby?"

"Don't call me baby."

"Okay, dollface."

"No, no. Nicky, we should never have done this."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "We didn't have sex. We didn't even have sex-adjacent."

"I don't care. It's not fair to Vinnie."

"Fine, fine. I didn't realise you snoring on me was so erotic. Would have saved me a lot of foreplay when we were together."
"Whatever, I'm going to dinner."

Lorna couldn't bring herself to talk to anyone, even just for pretend. Dark thoughts swirled in her brain and churned her stomach. She tried to push them down with second helpings of mac and cheese, but nothing could bring her comfort. How could she forget, even just for a minute? How could she live with herself if she wasn't feeling that pain every second of the day?

"I need to shower," she said, standing up abruptly.

"You had one this morning," said Nicky.

"What are you, the shower police?"

Lorna stormed off, picking up her towel, toiletries and toothbrush as she passed her bunk. She couldn't get to the bathroom quickly enough. She didn't even check if someone else was in there, all that mattered was emptying herself of the poison inside.

She turned on the shower and crouched by the drain, not caring if she got wet. She stuck the handle of the toothbrush as far as she could down her throat.

And pushed and pushed and pushed.

A little too hard.

The plastic scraped the back of her throat, instantly drawing the taste of blood. She stumbled out of the stall, coughing uncontrollably.

Nicky

"I don't get it," Cindy remarked as Lorna rushed off. "First she won't take a shower for days, now she practically lives there. The fuck is going on?"

"La Locaaa," said Flaca.

Nicky's hands balled into fists. "Say that again and I'll give you some bruises to match your lipstick."

Flaca raised her hands in protest. "It's not just me who says it."

"Not the point." Cindy waved her finger. "We don't go calling Suzanne 'Crazy Eyes' no more. If you call someone crazy, it's not going to fix their crazy, it's just going to make them stop taking their meds until they start pulling down the ceiling."

"Thank you, Cindy." Nicky set down her tray, and went to find Lorna.

As she turned into the bathroom, she could hear loud, painful coughing. Surely enough, it was Lorna, kneeling over and hacking into a white towel. She wrapped her arms around her, rubbing her back.

"Lorna, what's wrong? Are you sick?"

Lorna drew a shaky breath, clearing her throat. As she did, she lowered the towel from her face. It was spattered in pink and crimson flecks.
"Oh... my God. Is that blood?"

Lorna wiped her mouth, her eyes bleary. "I'm fine."

"Fine? First you faint and now you're coughing up blood. I'm taking you to medical right now."

She tried to lift Lorna, but she resisted. "No, Nicky."

And that's when Nicky noticed the toothbrush in Lorna's hand, handle side up. All at once, the dots connected. Why she took so many trips to the bathroom. Why she was still losing weight, even though she was eating like a horse. Why she wasn't perturbed by blacking out or blood in her cough, because it was all self-inflicted.

"Fuck. You're doing this to yourself, aren't you?"

Lorna hid the toothbrush behind her back. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You're making yourself throw up." Things began to make sense. Offhand comments Boo made about her sticking her toothbrush down her throat. Their first fucking meeting, Lorna crouched over her own vomit in a shower stall, weakly blaming it on "prison food".

"How the fuck did I not see it? How long have you been doing this to yourself? Have you been doing this the whole time?"

Lorna rolled her eyes. "Ugh, Nicky. I only do it when I need to."

Nicky held Lorna's face, perhaps a little too hard but she didn't care. "You don't ever need to. You're tiny. Lorna, you are not fat."

Lorna ripped her hands away. "It's not about being fat! You wouldn't understand."

"Try me."

She paused and sighed. "It's the only thing I got to make me feel better."

"And how does forcing yourself to puke make you feel better?"

She looked up with glassy, imploring eyes. "When I was pregnant with Carmine, I was sick all of the time. But it was the happiest I've ever been in my life."

"Oh, kid." Nicky's heart broke again, if that was even possible. "Making yourself sick isn't going to bring him back."

Lorna sniffed. "It's all I have."

"Well, it stops here. You could really hurt yourself. I still think you should go to medical."

Lorna got to her feet. "No, no, you're right. I won't do it again, I promise."

Nicky recognised that all-too-chipper tone. "That was a quick change of heart."

"Are you saying you don't believe me?" Lorna's hands flew to her hips.

"Give me one good reason why I should! I never know what to fucking believe with you. Every second thing out of your mouth is a lie."
Angry tears spilled from Lorna's eyes. "I'm telling the truth!"

"Good. Well, in that case you won't mind me following you after meal times just to make sure. And I'm sure you wouldn't object to me telling the COs if you do it again."

Lorna's expression turned to panic. "You can't do this! You hypocrite. I never snitched on you when you were on drugs."

When anger didn't work, Lorna tried another tactic. She grabbed Nicky by the arms, beseeching her with round, pitiful eyes. "Please, Nicky. It's not a big deal. I just need to do this to feel safe. You don't know what it's like inside my head. I need to get rid of it, get rid of it all."

Nicky swallowed hard. She stood her ground. "I can't stand by and watch you kill yourself."

Lorna let go of Nicky's arms, her teeth gritted into a snarl. She ran out of the bathroom in a rage.
She's Not Back for Count?

Chapter Summary

Lorna takes extreme measures to escape reality.

Chapter Notes

TW: Eating disorders, attempted suicide

Lorna

Breakfast was a standoff. Whenever Lorna raised the fork to her lips, she felt Nicky's eyes on her from across the table. Watching her. Challenging her. Go on, do it. I dare you. See what happens. She knew that whatever she ate, Nicky would make sure stayed in her body, whether she used force or reported her to a CO. Tears pricked her eyes, threatening to come out. She had lost everything, and now she had lost her control, too.

She put the fork down.

Nicky nodded at the food.

Lorna shook her head.

Nicky nodded again.

"What the fuck is happening?" Cindy whispered to Flaca.

"I think they spend so much time together they can speak with their minds and shit, like the Olsen twins," said Flaca.

Cindy shivered. "White people are scary."

Finally, the tears burst free in unbridled sobs. Lorna threw her fork down and ran back to her bunk, her heart pounding. Physical pain she could deal with. But this was unbearable. She flung herself onto the bed and screamed into the pillow. This is how she would exist now, as an empty scream into the dark.

All her life, her emotions had always been too big. So pain could be dealt with by entering another avenue. An altered place so vivid it became more real than life. For the first time, she was feeling the full crushing weight of her soul. And it hurt so much she couldn't breathe, except she did.

She had tried to be strong, to bear this cross for Carmine. Tried to take the punishment uncomplainingly, to say sorry to Vinnie, poor Vinnie. But still, she was alive. And that wasn't fair. Not when her baby was dead, because of her.
There was one other way, and the more she thought about it, it was the only way. When Nicky left for custodial, she crept into her cell and found her final escape.

Nicky completed her custodial duties double-time to make up for the day she missed. As she mopped C-block, she tried to ignore the scowls of Daddy and Daya. There were bigger fish to fry – but she guessed it would be a good idea to leave Lorna alone for a bit while she calmed down. Another skipped meal wouldn't be as harmful as a toothbrush down her throat. But she couldn't let her go down the other road again, either.

"Hey," Daddy sauntered up to Nicky. "You found me a new customer yet?"

"I'm working on it," Nicky lied.

"We've given you plenty of time," said Daya.

"If you haven't noticed, I've been pretty preoccupied?"

"Listen, if your little friend has a mental breakdown, that's none of my problem." Daddy poked Nicky in the chest, right on the scar.

"Daya, you're a mom," Nicky tried to appeal. "Imagine what she's going through."

Daya's face softened, but then she looked at Daddy and squared her shoulders. "You have until tomorrow."

"End of the day," Daddy butted in.

"Tomorrow. And that's all, Nichols." Daya marched off, Daddy following behind her.

At dinner, Nicky looked around for targets. *Flaca, isn't she in here for some drug-related shit? Cindy could possibly, if you broke her down enough.*

Nicky felt sick to her stomach with shame. For once, she was glad Lorna hadn't joined them for dinner because she wouldn't be able to look her in the eye.

Count took way longer than usual. After Blake came by with his clicker, Nicky (and all the rest of the inmates) stood by the bunks for twenty minutes. She could hear the low voices of the guards having an argument.

Nicky stood in the doorway. "Hey, what the hell's going on?"

"Back to your bunk, inmate," said Blake.

Nicky shrugged, but suddenly McCullough locked eyes with her. "Nichols! Do you know where Morello is?"

Her stomach flipped. "She's not back for count?"
"No. Have you seen her today?"

"Only at breakfast... I thought she would be in her cell."

McCullough rolled her eyes. "We have to do a search. Come on, Blake." She started to walk away, Blake following behind.

"Wait!" Nicky shouted. "Let me help you."

"We'll be fine," said Blake.

But McCullough waved him off. "No, she can help. She knows her. Well? Hurry up, Nichols."

They searched every room, every corridor, shouting Lorna's name, but she wasn't anywhere. Not the rec room, the chapel, the laundry, the showers (Nicky had pretty much banked on her being there). They even started to search different blocks, before returning back to D-block.

"We're going to have to put the prison on lockdown," sighed McCullough. "This could possibly be an escape."

Nicky was about to scoff, that Lorna would never be the kind of prisoner to escape, but then she remembered the van and Miss Rosa's chemo appointments and her rogue trip to visit Christopher in Albany, and her blood ran cold.

"There must be somewhere we haven't looked," said Nicky, trying to blot that possibility out of her mind. If Lorna had escaped, they would triple her sentence, let alone possibly even use brute force or a gun if she didn't give herself up willingly.

"We've looked everywhere," said Blake.

And that's when Nicky remembered. The place that haunted Lorna, the one she could never escape. "Not everywhere."

She ran off down the corridor, ignoring McCullough and Blake's protests. She raced into the laundry room, dodging the machines, gaining on the utility closet and swinging open the door.

Nicky's worst nightmare came true.

Lorna was unconscious on the floor. Her skin was white and her lips were blue. As Nicky bent down, she unthinkingly held Lorna's hand and found a piece of plastic. A tiny packet, with just a smudge of white powder remaining inside.

"No, no – "

Nicky pressed her head against Lorna's chest. It was wet from sweat and vomit. Her pulse was weak, and if she was breathing, it wasn't often. Nicky tried to prop her up, but Lorna's body was totally limp.

"Fuck, Lorna, no. Lorna! Wake up." She smacked Lorna's cheeks, shook her shoulders. When that didn't wake her, she tried to prise her eyes open. Her pupils were pinpricks. "Fuck! Don't do this, kid. Stay with me, baby. Somebody help! Help!"

McCullough and Blake arrived at the door, blanching at the site of Lorna lifeless in Nicky's arms.
"Heroin overdose," Nicky gasped, not even believing the words coming out of her mouth. "You need to take her to medical and tell them to give her naxolone. Now!"

Blake nodded, and lifted Lorna's tiny body out of the closet, her head lolling back. He ran out of the room.

"Come on." McCullough offered a hand to help Nicky up. Only then did she realise her entire body was shaking.

"What the hell has she done?"
The Perfect Junkie

Chapter Summary

After Lorna's attempt, Nicky tries to keep her safe.

Lorna

"Well, if it isn't the luckiest girl in Litchfield."

Lorna's eyes opened to blinding, sterile light. It took a moment to focus: a bed, several people sleeping in beds around her, a man in white scrubs shining a torch into her face. She tried to speak, but her mouth was bone dry.

"Who knows what would have happened if your friend hadn't found you? You're lucky we're used to people overdosing here."

Lucky wasn't the word. She sat up to say that, but something else came rushing out. He quickly held a bowl under her chin while she vomited.

"Yeah, you're going to feel like shit for a while. That's what happens when you take heroin like it's Fun Dip."

Lorna fell back into the bed, waiting for sleep to take her. She was so sure she wouldn't wake up.

The next day, nurses started asking questions. She could hear them whispering about Carmine. A sympathetic nod or two. The doctor lead Lorna to a scale, and made a note when she stepped on it.

"You're a little underweight," he remarked. "Heroin can suppress your appetite."

"I'm not a junkie."

He made another note and gave her Advil for her headache.

Yesterday, for a short period of time before she crashed, everything was good. No wonder Nicky gave up everything for drugs – it was the closest thing to happiness. Reality was coming down hard now. Her baby was dead. It was her fault. All she wanted to do was escape this feeling. She wanted to die wanted to die wanted to die.

But nobody would let her.

She was busy ignoring the pudding cup in front of her when Nicky rushed in. Lorna almost laughed. This wasn't a hospital where you could take visitors, but somehow she was here, looking pale and concerned and, actually, really fucking angry.
"Lorna." She bent over the bed, hugging her fiercely. Then she pulled away. "What the fuck! Don't you ever fucking do that again!"

She had shouted at the top of her voice, bringing the entire medical ward into a hush. Nicky twisted her expression into a smile. "I mean, kid, you gotta ease into the strong stuff. You could have at least asked me for pointers."

Lorna just blinked. Nicky would always try and find the funny side of the situation, even if there wasn't one. The same way Lorna used to be Litchfield's resident optimist, back when there were actually things to be happy about.

Nicky half-sat on the bed, absent-mindedly opening the pudding cup. "You really fucking scared me. If I didn't know where to find you ... you would have died."

"I know," Lorna whispered. "You shouldn't have stopped me."

Nicky's eyes grew wide. For a moment she just trembled. "You don't mean that."

Tears streamed down Lorna's face. "I'm so tired, Nicky. I'm not like you, I can't just shut off my feelings. Everything hurts. I just want to go to sleep."

Nicky started to cry. "But if you die, you'll break my heart."

"No... you'll be fine. Everyone I love either hates me or has to take care of me. I'm a burden. I should have done this long ago, before I met Vinnie and fucked him up, even Christopher said I ruin people's lives and he's right. I can't even kill myself right. It would be better for everyone if I wasn't here."

When time was up, Nicky left medical, rubbing away the tears from her eyes. Everything Lorna had just said was ringing in her ears. You shouldn't have stopped me. I just want to go to sleep.

McCullough gave her a sympathetic look. "Goodbyes are hard."

"Yeah..." Nicky agreed absentmindedly. "Do you think it will be long till she comes back to D-block?"

"She's not coming back to D-block," McCullough half-laughed.

Nicky stopped in her tracks. "What do you mean?"

"It's the whole reason I let you come here, to say goodbye before she gets shipped off to the SHU."

"The SHU?!"

McCullough stopped as well, an incredulous look on her face. "You didn't think we were going to let her get away with that? Look, I know she's having a hard time, but she was out of bounds, missing count, overdosed on heroin. Of course we have to take her to the SHU."

Nicky's heart leapt out of her chest. "You – you can't. She won't survive the SHU. It will literally kill her."
McCullough rolled her eyes. "Hey, she can't get heroin in there."

"You don't get it, do you? She was trying to overdose. She wants to die. She's been slowly killing herself for weeks, starving and making herself sick, and I took that away from her so she stole a shitload of heroin and locked herself in a fucking closet and waited to die. She's sick and fucked up and solitary confinement is going to break whatever's left of her."

It had all spilled out at once, and when Nicky was finished, she realised she was gripping McCullough's arm, way too hard. She let go. "Please."

McCullough sighed. "Okay, I'll see what I can do." She smoothed out her sleeve. "Back to custodial, inmate."

Daddy and Daya were waiting for Nicky in the laundry room. It was strange, only last night this had been the site of an attempted suicide, now they were separating whites from colours.

"Fuck me," Nicky grunted as they frogmarched her out of earshot of McCullough.

"I think we've given you enough time now," said Daddy.

"Believe me, I'm blown away by your generosity. But there's been, uh, developments out of my control, extenuating circumstances—"

"Spit it out, Nichols!"

"The heroin's gone," Nicky sighed.

"So, you managed to sell it?" Daya asked.

"Nope... Fuck, it was stolen, okay?"

"Are you fucking serious?" Daddy took on an aggressive stance, that, combined with her stature, reminded Nicky of an overly confident chihuahua. "Well, do you know who fucking took it?"

"I don't fucking know, it could be anybody."

"But everyone knows you're clean. It's probably someone you know," Daya offered.

It clicked in Daddy's head. "The pretty little liar."

"I already told you, Lorna's not a junkie."

"She didn't come back last night, they called a search. You found her, but you haven't told anyone what actually happened. She was smacked out of her brain, wasn't she?"

"Alright!" Nicky hissed. "Keep it down, will ya?"

"So, the COs confiscated it. Fuck," groaned Daya.

"Actually, there wasn't any left to confiscate."

Daddy raised her eyebrows. "She took that entire packet? Holy shit. I knew she'd make the perfect junkie."
"She's not a junkie!" Nicky's felt the blood rise to her cheeks. "It was a cry for help, Jesus Christ."

Daya pouted. "Shit, that fucking sucks."

"We can't let her off the hook just because her girlfriend wanted to take the coward's way out."

"Are you serious?" Daya folded her arms. "She lost her fucking baby. If that happened to me, maybe I would have tried it, too. You calling me a coward?"

She walked away, rolling her eyes. Daddy looked at Nicky as if to say *this isn't over*, and went to go smooth things out with Daya, finally leaving Nicky alone – at least for now.

The next day, Nicky was mopping the corridors when she saw a familiar figure, flanked by McCullough and Blake. But Lorna wasn't wearing her khaki uniform – it was a light-blue, papery jumpsuit.

"Hey!" Nicky sprinted towards them. Lorna looked up at her helplessly. "Where the hell are you taking her?"

"Step back, inmate," warned Blake.

Nicky directed her anger towards McCullough. "I thought you listened to me!"

"I did!" McCullough looked confused. "After what you told me, I realised the best place wasn't the SHU, it was psych."

"Psych?!" Nicky nearly fell over. "Oh fuck, no. Please don't take her there. Please don't take her away from me. She needs me!"

"It's already done."

Lorna started to sob. "What are they going to do to me?"

Nicky held her face, ignoring Blake's increasingly annoyed expression. "It's okay, baby. Don't freak out. Just listen to what they tell you, okay? Do what they say and you can get out of there. You have to do that, for me, okay? Just hold on."

"Let her go, inmate."

They had come to the gate separating D-block from psych. Lorna looked back one last time, disappeared down the corridor.
More You Resist, More it Will Hurt

Chapter Summary

Lorna is taken to psych, while Nicky admits her near-relapse to Red.

Lorna

Everything happened all at once, and then not at all.

Being pulled down the corridor away from D-block. Nicky's comforting words trying to conceal her distress. Through the caged doors, into a room with rows of inmates, all dressed in blue jumpsuits. And, then, into a much smaller room – one bed, a toilet, four grey walls.

A thing snapped inside Lorna. She couldn't be locked in here alone. She resisted, trying to squirm out of the grip of the COs. A strange sound escaping from her throat. But she was easily overcome. The COs carried her inside, pinning her down on the bed and strapping her arms and legs to the frame with leather belts. After an indeterminate amount of time, they left, closing the door on her cell.

When it was time for bed, screams of other inmates echoed down the halls. A nurse came and placed a pill on Lorna's tongue to sedate her.

"First night is the hardest. You'll get used to the sound," she said, as if that was a comfort.

"Can I have a blanket?" Lorna asked with the pill still on her tongue.

"Sorry, it's not allowed in case you try and hang yourself," said the nurse, and she left without even turning the lights off.

Lorna spit the pill down the side of the bed. She barely slept, her body shaking with tears and cold.

In the morning (or at least it seemed to be morning, because the fluorescent lights never changed) a different nurse came. He took some blood samples, popped a pill into Lorna's mouth, and loosened the restraints.

"If you start to make trouble, these go straight back on."

He set down a tray of food next to the bed.

"Can I get some cutlery?" Lorna asked when she noticed there wasn't any.

"Sorry. Too many cases of self-harm, you know. You'll have to eat it with your hands."

He left, shutting the door behind him.

It wasn't a protest. Lord knows table manners were not something Lorna cared about. But she didn't touch the tray. There was no point in eating. She spat the pill into her hand and stuffed it down the
side of the bed.


Six days, maybe.

Bright lights and solitude made time stretch endlessly. The missed meals were the only markers of whether it was really morning or night. Her mood swung rapidly between panic and a flatline. Sometimes it felt as though the white walls were closing in and her breath was stolen from her lungs, at which point the nurses would enter with another pill that she hid under her tongue while she tried to calm herself with the breathing exercise Nicky taught her.

One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

Things started to blur again. Sometimes she heard voices on the other side of the wall. They could be the other inmates ranting to themselves, but they often sounded like people she knew – her mother and father, Franny, Christopher, Vinnie, Nicky. She imagined that for Nicky, it could be true. That maybe she'd hurt herself or put on a raving fit just be put in the psych cell next to her. That would be romantic.

One morning, or at least it seemed like morning, the door swung open and four nurses walked in. They brought in a chair with restraints on the arms and legs.

"This is the one."

"Can you stand, inmate?"

Lorna didn't move. Two of the nurses lifted her under the armpits and forced her into the chair. She tried to struggle, but her muscles were so weak.

"Hold her down."

Once again, she was strapped in. They approached with a length of tubing and a plastic bag of what looked like milkshake. Immediately her body tensed away, pressed into the cold metal spine of the chair.

"You can't do this."

"We have legal consent."

"Not from me!"

"You're not in the state of mind to make your own decisions. We have legal permission from your spouse."

"Vinnie?" Lorna was devastated that he knew she was in here. That now, he probably knew everything.

"More you resist, more it will hurt," said the nurse, pushing the tube towards her face.
"No-no-no-no-no-no-"

Lorna screamed and then gagged as the tube was forced down her nostril, through her throat, deep into her chest. She could barely breathe, or at least it felt that way. They poured the mixture down the tube, its horrible coldness so unnatural as it hit her stomach. It continued for an interminable twenty minutes, until the bag was empty and Lorna felt like she was drowning.

Nicky

Nicky knew what depression was. Living in a house with her mother for twenty years had given her lots of experience in it. And she'd watched Tricia slip into depression after Mercy left and witnessed the fucking shitshow of Lorna's ordeal. Feelings of hopelessness, irritability, shame. Hell, sometimes no feelings at all. The urge to use to make it all go away, even if for a second.

Now Nicky was depressed again, but the only difference was she didn't have drugs to turn to this time. Every time she even thought of using, the image of Lorna overdosed in that closet shook her sober. Was that what Marka had to see, all the times I overdosed? Would she have been as scared?

Strange guilt settled in her stomach. Marka was a fucking asshole, that could be scientifically documented, but was there a small part of her that lashed out in anger to protect Nicky – and her own heart, too? For fuck's sake, Nicky could have slapped Lorna silly after her attempt. Don't you ever fucking do that again!

These weird feelings about her mother made her realise she needed to see Red. And so, when it was time for recreation, she dragged herself out of her cell and forced herself to face the music.

Red was waiting, too. As soon as she saw Nicky, she pulled her into a corner, by one of the cages.

"Nicky, is what they are saying true?"

"You'll have to be more specific," Nicky joked, even though she plainly knew what Red was talking about.

"There are rumours that Lorna overdosed on heroin?"

"Ah. Yep. She did try to self checkout."

Red's expression contorted into shock and hurt. "Oh my God. That poor child... But Nicky, where the hell did she get it from?"

Nicky could do nothing but stare as Red worked it out. "Oh, Nicky. No. No!"

"I was fucked up over Lorna. I started to feel like everything ... the baby ... was all my fault. And I got desperate. Okay? I needed a way out. But I ... I fucking stopped myself. I should have got rid of it straight away, but those assholes kept me at ransom–"

"What assholes?" Red growled.

"Ugh, Daya and her new pimp."

"Tweedle-Dum and Tweedle-Dumber?" Red slapped Nicky's shoulder. "Why didn't you tell me? They're nothing. I could have stopped them with a single look."
"I know. But they started threatening Lorna... and, I mean, Jesus Christ, it's my mess. I should be able to clean it up myself."

"Fine job you did of that!"

"I had no, no idea she would do something like this! In my mind, she's still sweet happy Lorna with red lipstick and scrapbooks of wedding dresses. And now ... she's in psych."

"Psych?!"

"It was either that or the SHU."

Red leaned against the wall. "Well, I guess it is for the best."

Nicky was slightly nauseous. "You can't mean that. Red, if that was me in there – "

"But it isn't, Nicky. This is a woman who lost her baby, who probably should have been in the loony bin years ago –"

"Do you know what they do to people in there? Once they go in, they never come out the same!"

"Maybe change is a good thing if she is trying to kill herself. Come on, Nicky. This is too much of a burden for any of us now."

"Lorna is not a burden."

"You know what I mean! You've been trying so hard to keep her out of psych that you've made her even worse. Maybe if you'd been honest to the COs from the start, we could have tried to fix it but now it's got so bad, she's trying to overdose on drugs, drugs that you left lying around!"

Nicky slid down the wall, her head in her hands. "You're right. I'm the reason she OD'd."

Red knelt down, placing her hands on Nicky's knees. "No, you're not. She's very sick. She would have found another way if she really wanted."

Nicky shivered. "All I wanted to do was protect her, you know? I can't protect her if she's in psych."

Red leaned her head against Nicky's shoulder. "Nicky, have you ever heard of the phrase: 'Put your own oxygen mask first before helping your child'?"

"Lorna's not my child," she half-laughed.

"What it means is, you can't help others if you're struggling to breathe. Do I need to be worried?"

Nicky rubbed Red's hand. "No, no. I'm really turned off drugs right now. Heroin is like broccoli. Yuck."

"Okay. Just let me know if you get any sudden urges to eat your vegetables."

"You really think she'll be better off in psych?"

"Think of it this way – it can't get much worse."
A Category 5 Shitstorm

Chapter Summary

False realities and false relationships are dug into once more.

Lorna

Another week, Lorna guessed. The trauma of getting tubed was not something she was ready to experience again. So she emptied her food tray as soon as they brought it to her, and when they were gone, she emptied herself into the toilet, just like she got rid of the paroxetine pills down the side of her bed. That was all she could control anymore.

Sometimes she was tempted to take it, just to make things go fuzzy again. Sticking her in a room like this was like sticking her inside her own head – she couldn't get out. She found herself crying without even thinking of Carmine. It was almost like a muscle memory kicked in, reminding her that she should be in pain because that was what she deserved.

Sleep didn't come easy with the bright lights, but when it did she often found herself lurching awake and gasping, being pulled back into the bed by her wrists and ankles. It felt like being dragging back underwater. More pills, more flavourless meals, more good riddance.

How she longed for someone to talk to. Lorna was always someone who needed people around her. She only had herself for company, and that was dangerous. Her thoughts raced, building to panic attacks so bad she was certain she was going to die, but she just kept on living.

Finally she stopped fighting her madness and gave in to the voices that were plaguing her. Even if she knew that they weren't really there, at least she wasn't alone.

"I tried to go, Vinnie. You shouldn't have to be weighed down by me no more."

"You broke us, Lorna." His voice came in like a ghost.

"I can't stop breaking things."

"You ruined my fucking life." That voice was deeper; it was Christopher's.

"I don't know what's real, I never know what's real."

"I am." She couldn't mistake that husky yet warm tone.

"Nicky..."

"This, us. That's real."

"But don't you hate me by now? I broke you, too... Nicky? Nicky?"

"Lorna?" The voice that cut through the silence wasn't Nicky's. It was clearer and louder. "Lorna
Lorna opened her eyes and turned her head towards the door. There was a thin woman standing there, dressed in green scrubs and a lab coat.

"Hello. My name is Doctor Chen. I'm sorry I couldn't see you sooner. Were you talking to someone just now?"

"No, nobody."

"Oh, I thought I heard you say something." The doctor knelt down at the bed and loosened the restraints. The skin around them was bruised and chafed.

"There, that should be more comfortable. Now we can go somewhere and have a little chat."

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**Nicky**

When Nicky got off custodial, she went to the phones and punched in a number that was both familiar and unfamiliar. It rang and rang until Nicky was just about to hang up, when a wary voice crackled on the other end.

"Nicole?"

She exhaled. "Hi, Mom."

There was a deep sigh from the other end. "I knew it was you."

"Do you know anyone else who's incarcerated?"

Nicky could practically hear her mother grinding her teeth. "What is it? What have you done now?"

"Wow, that's trusting."

Marka snorted. "You gave up any right to be trusted years ago."

Nicky leaned her head against the wall. "I know."

"What... what have you called me for? You know that if it's legal issues again you need to contact your father."

"I haven't done anything. I just wanted to talk to you."

A long silence. Nicky could just picture her playing with the pearls around her neck, like she always did when she was uncomfortable.

"Well... I... you know, I am rather busy. Is it that boring in prison?"

"Actually, it's been pretty eventful recently. Some crazy shit went down... it just made me think about how fucked-up everything was. For you, I mean."

"For me?"
"Uh, I know our relationship was never sunshine and roses. And I wasn't exactly in my right mind when I was on drugs, ya know. I needed help. But still, I never thought about what it was really like for you. When I was in hospital and everything."

"Do you know how many times I found you, Nicky? Overdosed on my bathroom floor!" Marka snapped.

"Did it scare you?"

"What kind of question is that? I'd be scared to find anyone passed out in their own vomit. Barely even breathing."

Nicky's hand was slightly shaking. "$I'm sorry. I'm sorry you went through that because of me."

Another long silence. "$Nicky, is there something you want? Do you need more money?"

"No, Mom. I just wanted to say I'm fucking sorry. I've never said I'm sorry and I wanted to say it, okay?"

"Well..." Marka sniffed. "$Something must have really happened to you."

She nodded. "$Yep, it's been a Category 5 shitstorm. And it wasn't happening to me this time. That's why I'm calling. I've been sober for ten months now, Mom. Even in max, and this place is a junkie's paradise."

"That has to be some kind of record for you."

Nicky waited for another kind of response, but there were only crackles down the line. "$Is that all you have to say? What about, 'well done'? 'I'm proud of you, Nicky'?"

"You understand I can't get my hopes up."

"Right... right. I shouldn't have either."

"Nicky, I have to go. I have to get ready for a function."

"Okay, Mom..." Nicky took a deep breath. "$You should come visit soon."

"Nicky..."

"I want you to meet someone."

Marka gave a sharp little laugh. "$Please tell me you don't have a prison girlfriend."

"Trust me, I don't."

"Good. I can't imagine the kinds of undesirables in that place."

"Including me."

"Don't put words in my mouth, Nicole."

"You know what? It's fine. You don't have to visit. I wouldn't want to take more time out of your busy schedule schmoozing to every snobby socialite in Manhattan."

Nicky hung up before she could hear any excuses.
A small part of her was expecting, not exactly a reconciliation, but a ceasefire. That if she were the bigger person for once, perhaps her mother would understand that Junkie Nicky and Real Nicky were different people, and that she never meant to do those terrible things but she was sorry nonetheless.

The damage had been done and it would take a thousand apologies before Marka would even consider forgiving her. And Nicky wondered if it was even worth the trouble. She remembered what Lorna said.

*Do you ever stop to think that maybe your mother is the reason for your addiction? If you had any love or happiness, maybe you wouldn't have tried to find it in drugs?*

Who knew if that was really true or not. Nicky realised, her hands till holding the phone to her chest, that she wasn't really ready to forgive her mother for her childhood either. And there was a chance she never would be.

It was a strangely liberating feeling to understand that no matter what she did, that relationship might never be mended. It was probably broken from the beginning. She made the conscious decision to let it go. She would put energy into the real relationships she had instead.

Putting the phone back on the hook, she went to find her family.

"Hey, Mom."

Red was pacing the courtyard, trying to shake the cold out of her bones.

"Nicky. Are you feeling better?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I am."
You'd Think I Would Have Learned

Chapter Summary

Nicky opens up, while Lorna closes off.

Lorna

Dr Chen led Lorna out of the cell. It was like being able to breathe again. Even the narrow corridors and concrete walls seemed spacious. Lorna had a sudden urge to run up and down, but she fought it. They would think she was going crazy and strap her to the bed again.

The room was large and surrounded by wire fencing. There was a large whiteboard on the wall and a table. Dr Chen unlocked the gate and ushered Lorna inside.

"Please take a seat, Ms Morello."

Lorna did and was relieved to see this seat didn't have straps.

Dr Chen sat down, opening a large folder of files and taking a pen out of her coat pocket.

"Like I said, I'm sorry I couldn't see you as soon as you were brought in. I've been sick all week."

All week? Lorna could have sworn it had been longer.

The doctor leaned in. "Just between you and me, I'm expecting. I've been having the most awful morning sickness 24/7. Whoever called it morning sickness was clearly a man."

Lorna didn't respond. It just made her remember how sick she was after the two month mark, the days when Nicky would creep into her cell and hold her hair and force her to drink tiny sips of water. Her mind drifted out of the room for a moment.

"I'm sorry. I know you recently lost a baby. That must have been incredibly hard for you, especially in prison." She flipped through her files. "But according to my records, you haven't seen the prison therapist since the stillbirth, have you? And this is your first time in psych care? But you do have a prescription for paroxetine. Is that correct?"

No answer.

"Ms Morello, I need you to confirm your details for me." She cocked her head. "Are you aware of what is happening right now? Do you know where you are? Can you tell me what day it is?"

"I don't know," Lorna whispered. Dr Chen scribbled something down. "How am I supposed to know when you lock me up for days and keep the lights on?" She started to cry.

Dr Chen shot her a sympathetic look. "We felt you weren't ready to mix with the others. And I think we were right. You've been refusing food, shouting at night. Of course some loss of appetite and emotional stress is expected in grief. But we need to rule out deeper psychiatric issues."
Lorna was silent, her head bowed and tears sliding off the end of her nose. Of course, they would think she was crazy.

"Do you have a history of mental illness, besides the depression? Is there a history of mental illness in your family?"

Lorna thought of her mother but she said nothing.

"Ms Morello, it's just going to take longer to get you back into gen pop if you don't co-operate."

"I – I can go back?"

Dr Chen shrugged. "If you show enough signs of progress, I don't see why not."

Lorna straightened up and looked the doctor in the eyes. "I'll tell you everything."

Nicky

"I haven't been completely honest."

Nicky was sitting on the cold concrete outside, facing Red and Alex. Alex looked pale and miserable, her eyebrows even more arched than usual.

"What do you mean?"

Nicky took a deep breath. "I've been struggling to stay clean for a while. Uh, if I didn't have to keep Lorna together I probably would have given in ages ago. I even got heroin but I didn't take it. I was this close, though."

"Well, shit." Alex looked dazed. Red just gave a supportive nod.

"I didn't want to tell anyone because I thought I could deal with it on my own. That's classic me – I only realise I need help when it's too late. You'd think I would have learned by now."

"But you are learning, Nicky," said Red. "I've never seen you go through anything like this and stay clean. I'm proud of you. That said, if you pull anything like that again, I will kill you."

Nicky laughed. "Now that's the response I was hoping for."

Alex pulled her knees to her chest. "So what does this mean? Do you need to go back to NA?"

"I was thinking more like the prison therapist. After what happened to Lorna, I think it's probably a good idea to not to let that shit fester."

Red squinted. "You aren't hoping they'll put you in psych with her, are you?"

"Come on, Red. Give me a little credit. Nobody in their right mind would choose to go to psych."

"Which is kinda the point," said Alex.

"Listen. Am I worried as fuck? Yes. But I need to be here and sane and not pumped full of drugs when she comes back."
Alex smirked. "Me and Piper have a similar deal. I can't get into trouble or, you know, die before my sentence is finished."

"How is Piper?" Red asked.

"Well, she's white and middle-class, so transitioning to the outside world wasn't that hard. Although she does miss the prison gossip. You should put her on your visitors lists. Most of her country club asshole friends ditched her so she doesn't have many friends to talk to."

"Is she still trying to spring you out of here?" Nicky asked.

Alex rolled her eyes. "Oh, yeah. She started a Change.org petition for my release. It's got 12,000 signatures."

"Holy shit, that's massive! Hey, maybe she could do something like that for Lorna. She deserves early release after they fucked up her meds."

"It's not worth it. Not unless you want the administration to give her hell, too. She's only got a year left, right?"

"If she hasn't lied about her sentence," said Red.

Nicky glared at the older woman. "Yes, that's right. We're actually meant to get out the same month. I always joked if her and Christopher didn't work out, we should get a flat together."

Alex gave a rare smile. "Oh my God. You two are so going to be roomies. You're going to buy a dog and get married and have a million babies."

Now it was time for Nicky to roll her eyes. "Yeah, slow down. In case you forgot, she's already married."

"Like that stopped you before."

Red stood up, grabbing the wall for support. "As much as I'd like to talk girl troubles with you two, I'm freezing my pirozhki off. See you inside."

Alex watched her leave, then turned to Nicky. "Fuck. I thought she was never gonna leave."

"Hey, Red's not that bad."

She shook her head. "It's not Red. Nicky, can I talk to you somewhere? In private?"
Gold Chains and Smoking Cubans

Chapter Summary

Alex makes a stunning confession to Nicky. Lorna is still Lorna.

Lorna

"You were right, doctor. I ain't been doing so good. Ever since I got back from hospital, I feel sad all of the time. And I never felt like that before. That's why I didn't know what else to do."

Dr Chen was scrawling notes as Lorna spoke. "Do you mean when you attempted suicide?"

Lorna took a deep breath. "Yes."

"And I need to you to completely honest with me, are you still experiencing suicidal thoughts now?"

"No," Lorna lied. "To be honest, I'm not sure I wanted to die. When I woke up, I was so relieved that it didn't work."

"So why do you think you did it?"

"Um, I think I just wanted help."

"Well, you got it."

Fuck. Lorna gave a weak smile.

"And have you ever tried to attempt suicide before this?"

"No, that's the thing. I never been to psych before, I never even seen the prison therapist. I never caused no trouble. I've been fine, normal. You can ask anyone."

The doctor twirled her pen in her fingers. "You were diagnosed with depression shortly after arriving here, were you not?"

Lorna felt frustration bubble in her belly. "Yes, but that's only because of everything that happened. I had no idea what was going on, coming to max after those riots, you have no idea what it was like —"

"Tell me."

"It was terrifying. Someone got shot. There was blood. And in the middle of it all I found out I was pregnant. That's also got something to do with it, hormones. I'm not normally like this."

She reached out and touched the doctor's hand, forcing her to look eyes. Feel for me. Believe me.

"I know I have been struggling to ... cope. My son, my baby, Carmine – died. Anyone would be sad. But I'm not crazy."
Dr Chen finally looked up. "Ms Morello, I'm not doubting that grief has had a large part in your mental breakdown. And you're right – any person might have done what you did. Suicidal thoughts, night terrors – it's within the realm of expected reactions to such a massive trauma. But that doesn't mean we should just accept them and not get better. Tell me, do you want to stop feeling like this?"

Lorna wasn't sure. She couldn't bear the pain she was in and wanted relief. But if she stopped hurting, it would be like Carmine never existed.

"Yes. Of course."

"Well, that's a good first step. I'm going to get you to answer some mental health questionnaires for me. The sooner we know what we're dealing with, the sooner we'll be able to treat you properly."

"You mean you ain't letting me go back?"

Dr Chen smiled. "Ms Morello, you do realise you tried to kill yourself."

"But that wasn't me!"

"All the same..." She laid out sheets of paper and a pen. "If you want to go back to gen pop, I need to be completely satisfied that you are mentally stable. Can you fill these out as honestly as you can?"

"Sure." Lorna gritted her teeth into a smile.

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Nicky

"It was me."

Alex was sitting on the concrete floor, her knees tucked under her chin. She squinted; it was like it was almost painful for her to look at Nicky.

"Come again?"

"It was my heroin that Lorna took."

Nicky laughed. "Um, no. It was definitely mine. She found it in my dirty underwear. Oh fuck, now you know my hiding place, too."

Alex didn't smile. "I was the one who brought it in."

Nicky felt her stomach swoop. "What do you mean?"

Alex rocked a little. "I've been smuggling heroin into prison."

"Are... are you serious?"

She nodded.

"Are you FUCKING serious, Alex? What the fuck!"

"I know, I know."

"I don't, I don't even know what to say."
"That's fine -"

"Actually, I do. Fuck you.Fuck you, Alex."

Alex breathed in. "Okay, I deserved that."

Nicky grabbed her by the shoulder. "Why would you do this? Why would you be so fucking shit-brained idiotic? Alex, you're actually smart."

Alex loosened Nicky's grip on her arm.

"I have five years left here. I already have a fucking target on my back. I know you haven't noticed anything around here since... well, Lorna... but it's been reaching boiling point ever since Carol and Barb died. People are looking for a new leader. I thought if I took charge of something, then you know, people will respect me. If I'm giving them something they want, maybe they'll try not to shank me. The last thing Piper said to me before she left, was to not get killed."

Nicky rolled her eyes so hard she could have detached a retina. "Oh yeah, and getting involved in a prison drug gang surely won't lead to violence at all."

"Will you please keep it down?" Alex hissed. Nicky didn't even realise she was shouting. "Red doesn't know about any of this."

"Won't she realise when you start wearing gold chains and smoking Cubans?"

"This isn't Scarface--"

"You need to tell Red. She's the only person who can get you out of this. Before you go and add five more years to your sentence."

Alex grew quiet. "You're really worried about my sentence?"

"Well, yeah."

"But I--" Alex fought back tears. "I was the one who brought heroin into the prison. I'm the reason it ended up in Lorna's hands."

Nicky hugged her. "I know. Thank you."

Alex pushed back. Her face pure confusion and a hint of mirth. "Excuse me?"

"Looking back, I think she would have tried it anyway. So thank you that it was heroin, something that I know how to deal with, and not a noose or slitting her fucking wrists. You really saved her."

Alex wiped away her tears, laughing. "You have the weirdest fucking ways of seeing things."

"This drug shit stops now though, you hear me? Lorna's safe, but I'm sure as hell not. I should have known that shit was too good for that dumbass Daya to be bringing in."

Alex nodded. "Okay. I'll tell Red."

"Good. And then, what I think we need to do, is get ourselves a hobby."

"A hobby?" Alex raised an eyebrow.

"Keep busy. Keep you out of trouble and, most importantly, alive. Piper will probably kill you if you
die. And keep me sober."

"Alright. But I am not playing kickball."
It's This or Bible Study

Chapter Summary

Nicky finds a new interest. Lorna tests the waters in psych.

Lorna

After Lorna had filled out the questionnaire forms, Dr. Chen said she would need to take time to look over them.

"How much time? When will I see you next?" Lorna asked impatiently.

"I have lots of patients to do psych evals on, Miss Morello. You must know of the overcrowding problem in this prison."

"If you let me go, I can free up some space," Lorna tried. She had suddenly realised that they might have already filled her bunk. Even if she did get out of psych, maybe she wouldn't be able to go back to D-block, back to Nicky.

Dr. Chen tapped the papers. "Let's see what these say first."

Lorna felt her calmness and forced sunny demeanour start to crumble. "Please don't lock me in that room again. I can't do it."

"Ms. Morello -"

"Muccio! It's Mrs Muccio now." She was trying so hard to suppress her frustration that it came out in a weird protest about her married name. She didn't really care. As far as she knew, Vinnie was filing for divorce as they spoke.

"Is that what you'd like me to call you?"

"No..." She took a deep breath. "Just call me Lorna."

The doctor pursed her lips. "Lorna, there are no shared cells in psych. But if you feel ready, you can join the rest of the group during the day. And I'll ask them to let you sleep without the restraints."

"Thank you." It was better than nothing.

"But if you try anything, the restraints will go back on and you will be kept in solitary confinement. Is that clear?"

Lorna nodded, painting on a smile.

"Thanks for listening, doctor. I'm feeling better already," she said as a nurse led her out of the cage and into the communal area.

The communal area was a depressing place, with grey chairs and a bookcase with no magazines.
Nevertheless, she walked up to it and picked through the selection, before stumbling on a copy of *Twilight*. She always fancied herself as a Bella, but she was starting to think maybe she had more in common with Edward Cullen.

"I knowwwww you."

Lorna looked up. It was a small woman with short white hair and black glasses. It took a second for her to remember the name.

"Oh, yeah. Lolly, right?"

Lolly's face lit up. "You remember me?"

"Oh, sure."

Lolly scratched her head. "And you're ... eenie meenie miney mo mo mo... Morello!"

"Actually, it's Muccio now. Whatever, just call me Lorna."

"Why?"

"... It's my name."

"Oh, right!" She laughed maniacally. Lorna started to sidle away, but thought better.

"Hey Lolly, can I ask you a serious question?"

Lolly nodded soberly. "It's true. 9/11 was an inside job."

"What? No. How long do people usually stay here, in psych?"

"Uhhhhh, well sometimes a couple of days. Sometimes weeks. Sometimes they never leave."

"Never leave?"

"But that's only crazy people, not like you and me."

"Oh, that's real comforting." It was anything but.

Lolly put a hand on her shoulder, like she was about to say something meaningful. "Hey, did you know Avril Lavigne died in 2003 and was replaced by a clone called Melissa?"

Lorna looked around. There were women twitching, rocking in corners. Lolly was staring at her with glassy, medicated eyes, now muttering something about lizard people and Hillary Clinton.

She did not belong here, that was for sure now. She would do anything to get out.

Nicky

Nicky led Alex into the recreation room. There was already a scattering of people inside, standing in front of paint-splashed easels. Alex backed away, an expression of *nope* written all over her face.

"Arts and crafts? Really?"
Nicky threw up her arms. "What's wrong with arts and crafts?"

"It's a bit lame for a hobby, isn't it?"

"We're in prison. What were you expecting, roller derby? It's this or Bible study."

Alex rolled her eyes. "Fine."

"Don't loiter in the doorway," called McCullough, who was supervising. "If you're coming to join, get an easel, otherwise leave."

Nicky and Alex took places next to each other.

"Right." McCullough placed a bowl of fruit on a chair in the middle of the room. "Draw that."

"Can we eat the fruit after we're finished?" Alex asked.

"It's plastic," said McCullough.

"So, the answer is no?"

Nicky grinned wildly at Alex. "Stop. You're gonna get us kicked out."

"Hey, can we do life drawing?" Alex yelled at McCullough.

Cindy poked her head out from behind an easel. "Is that the one that's naked?"

"You wanna be the model?"

"Hell yeah! I don't care. I'm proud of all my curves and swerves." Cindy did a little dance across the room.

"Nobody is getting naked," said McCullough.

Alex shrugged. Nicky shook her head. She picked up a piece of charcoal and started to draw.

"Hey, that's actually pretty good." Alex peered over at Nicky's drawing, having given up roughly three minutes into the exercise.

"Eh, the banana's kinda wonky."

"You're kinda wonky." She moved in to get a better look. "This is great."

"Wait, lemme see." Cindy stuck her head around. "Damn, Nichols! How did you do that?"

Nicky nearly blushed. "I mean, it's fine, but it's not hard to draw a bowl of fruit."

"Mine looks like a penis." She showed them.

"Wow, it really does." Alex grimaced.

"But it was meant to be a bowl of fruit. Yours has shadows and details and texture and shit. Although the banana's a bit wonky."

"Told you," Nicky said to Alex.
"Still, I'd hang that on my wall."

"Well, you can have it."

"Really!" Cindy tore the paper off the easel. "Thanks. Hell, I'd love to be able to draw like this. Do you think you could teach the class?"

"What? I'm not a teacher, I'm barely even good at art."

"Pleaaase?"

"What is going on here?" McCullough strode up to them.

"Look at Nichols' drawing." Cindy shook the paper in McCullough's face.

McCullough raised her eyebrows. "That's actually not shit."

"You've gotta let Nichols teach the next class. Please, please, please," Cindy begged.

"Well..." McCullough looked at Nicky's confused, bewildered expression. "Alright. But no life drawing. Oh my God, Hayes, is that a penis?"

"I love arts and crafts," said Alex.
That's Your Happy Memory?

Chapter Summary

Lorna is given an ultimatum. Nicky reluctantly leads a class.

Lorna

Lorna was the best patient the Litchfield prison psych ward had ever seen. She obeyed instructions without question, cried at all the right parts when she had to talk about Carmine in group therapy, went to sleep when she was told and made friendly, chipper conversation with the nurses whenever they passed to hand out her meds.

It didn't matter that she hid the pills down the side of her bed, or that she bit on her hand to keep them from hearing her cry. That was besides the point. In her mind, she was doing what they wanted anyway. She was trying to get better, but that couldn't be here in this cold, isolated cell. She needed to get back to her safety net.

In the silent moments she heard Nicky's voice. Her last words, like a mantra.

*Just listen to what they tell you, okay? Do what they say and you can get out of there. You have to do that, for me, okay?*

Nicky always knew best.

And to be honest, the more she convinced others that she was doing better, the more she believed it herself. And felt better. And if she felt it, that made it real, right? She didn't need pills or counselling to get there, just the will of her own mind.

It was a week until Dr. Chen saw her again. As Lorna was led into the caged room, she noticed the doctor looked tired and drawn. She looked up and greeted Lorna without a smile.

"Take a seat, Lorna. How are you today?"

"I'm doing a lot better," said Lorna.

The doctor raised her eyebrows. "Oh? How so?"

Lorna rattled off her rehearsed speech. "I can admit now that it probably was the best thing to bring me here. I've finally been able to get help and talk about what happened to me. And now I feel like myself again."

She smiled humourlessly. "I must say, I'm surprised. Before I met with you today, every single one of my nurses recommended that I release you back to gen pop."

"I can go back?" Lorna said gleefully.

Dr. Chen held the pen to her lips. "Miraculous, isn't it? Even though it wasn't that long ago they had
to feed you with a tube. It didn't really make sense until I read your self-eval. Tell me, Lorna, do you lie often?

The air left her lungs. "No... no. I don't lie."

"I think you do. I think you have gotten away with lying for a long time. I have to give it to you – you're good. A lesser doctor would have believed every word you wrote. But I've been doing this for long enough to know when you're just telling me what you think I want to hear."

Lorna felt sick. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Let's get one thing straight. It's not going to work on me. I know every trick in the book. I can't help you if you lie, and what's more, I won't tolerate it. Do you know that if I let you go to gen pop and you hurt or killed yourself, I could lose my job? I could go to prison."

"Why are you yelling at me? I didn't do anything." Lorna wept.

"The waterworks won't work on me. And if you're going to continue to be non-compliant, I have no choice but to isolate you. Your behaviour could impact the progress of the group."

"But I didn't do anything!"

Dr. Chen beckoned the nurse. "Please take the inmate back to her cell and place her under solitary watch."

"What? No!" Lorna shrugged off the nurse's hands.

"We can talk again when you decide to be honest."

"But I am. I'm not a liar, you gotta believe me."

The doctor waved her hand. "Take her. Restrain her if you need to."

The nurse pulled Lorna to her cell. She didn't put up a fight. She couldn't bear being strapped to the bed again.

But once the metal door slammed shut, her body was so full of grief and rage that she didn't know what to do with it. She saw Nicky punch a wall once, after Red was attacked by Vee. There was still a shimmer of scars on her knuckles.

She sat on the bed and let the mattress absorb some of the shaking. How could the doctor do this to her? And why? She was co-operating, she was "showing progress", and all for nothing. Only to be punished. Wasn't she already punished enough?

She lay down crying, letting her hand fall between the mattress and the wall. Her fingers fell upon the pills she'd discarded there. There had to be at least forty of them.

_It's okay, baby. Don't freak out._

---

Nicky

"This is the stupidest thing ever."
Nicky was standing at the door of the rec room, watching the inmates file in.

Alex leaned against the doorframe, smiling wickedly. "Oh, suck it up. Didn't they say if you ran the class well you could finally get off custodial duty?"

"I like custodial duty."

"No, you only like hanging out with Lorna, and since she's not here let's cut the bullshit."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "What the fuck am I supposed to do then? I'm not a teacher. I flunked all of my classes at school. Except art..."

Alex made an *a-ha!* face. "Just say anything. Do literally anything. Everyone has extremely low expectations."

"Thanks for the pep talk."

Nicky walked unsurely into the centre of the room. Bored eyes watched her from behind their easels.

"Uh, hi. I'm Nicky, for those who don't know me, I guess. I'm supposed to be running this art class, uhhh.

"Are you even good at art?" It was Annalisa.

"Hell yeah," said Cindy. "She's got mad skills. Come on, show us how to draw that fruit."

"We're not drawing fruit."

Cindy looked confused. "But we always draw the fruit."

Alex gave Nicky an encouraging look.

"Well, uh, I thought we could do something a little more interpretative, that way it doesn't have to be perfect. Let's say, draw a happy memory that's happened to you."

Alex's face fell. "A happy memory? Seriously?"

Nicky took turns going around to everyone's easels and offering the kind of clichéd advice her middle school art teacher told her. But to her surprise, they lapped it up. She had to remember that even though she rebelled against it, she actually had a very privileged education that most of the prisoners would not have had access to.

"Good work, Cindy." She took in the scribbly mess of blue pencil. There were two figures in the water (Nicky guessed). "What is it?"

Cindy beamed. "It's when I got converted to Judaism. That's Ginsberg holding me under the lake."

Nicky moved along to Annalisa. She was standing in front of a collection of neat, if simplistic sketches.

"These is all my favourite drugs. Heroin, cocaine, ketamine, bath salts, weed, mushrooms, crystal meth."

"I thought I told you draw your favourite memories."
"I did."

Nicky rolled her eyes and progressed to Alex.

"This is a picture of me when Piper locked me in a dryer."

"That's your happy memory? You guys got married. It was fucking magical."

"Oh yeah. Well, fuck it. Where's your happy fucking memory? You can't make us do this lame-ass exercise and not join in."

"Yeah!" Cindy chimed in. "It's the only reason I'm taking this stupid class. Show us how it's done, Picasso."

"I would, but I don't have happy memories. At least not ones I haven't repressed."

Alex handed her a pencil. "No more custodial. Just think about it."

Nicky sighed and took the pencil.

Nicky thought long and hard about what to draw. Oh, relapses, SHU, riots, Piscatella. Life wasn't exactly a tea party. Why had she even suggested this?

When it came down to it, there was only ever one person who brightened her day in this miserable place. Even she darkened it just as often.

Her pencil started to fly across the easel. Within ten minutes she was finished. Alex and Cindy crowded around, curious.

"Uh, so this is me in the cafeteria back at minimum. And I'm laughing because Lorna's saying something extremely racist and she has no idea why it's offensive and Soso is trying to 'educate' her on being woke, but it's totally backfiring, and now Piper is getting involved because it's Piper, and we're all having an argument about West Side Story, and I'm just wondering how a 30-something-year-old woman in can basically have the views of a child, and it's all so absurd that I'm just laughing my ass off."

"You have a weird sense of humour." Cindy walked back to her easel.

"That's your happy memory?" Alex mocked.

"Well, to be honest, my happiest memory is kind of X-rated."

"I don't want to know. Spare me the mental images."

"Which is exactly why I didn't draw it! Shit, maybe we should have just drawn fruit again."

Alex paused. "No, I liked it."

Nicky did not believe that for a second. "Really?"

"Yeah. Maybe I'll draw all of me and Piper's memories and send them to her. Well, not all of them. Maybe I'll skip over when I betrayed her at the trial and when she turned me in to my probation officer. And when she ditched me at my mother's death and I named her as an accomplice for revenge. And when she was too busy being a Nazi to notice I literally murdered a guard."
"Fuck, if you two can make it work, anyone can."
"You proved me wrong. I said I knew every trick in the book."

Dr. Chen was sitting at the foot of Lorna's bed, her arms crossed stiff against her chest. As she forced her eyes open, Lorna took in her surroundings. She was relieved that it wasn't the tiny psych cell. There were beds with inmates lying in them around her. She looked down and her ankles and wrists were strapped to the bed frame, but there was an IV in her right arm.

"But I've never had a patient hoard their medication so they could try and overdose. That was creative."

Bits of memory came back, like after a long night out. Spontaneously taking every pill that she'd hidden. Then lying down and waiting to fall asleep, but just getting really shivery and sweaty. Crazy heart palpitations. She wasn't sure how long it was until a nurse came to check on her, then realised, then shouted "what did you take" a million times over.

"You're lucky we were able to pump your stomach before it was too late."

That she also remembered, although it was patchy and out-of-order, like someone hitting the fast-forward button through her brain. She was forced to swallow a plastic tube while the nurses pressed a little pump until they stopped seeing little fragments of pills coming up.

"A woman of your size, that amount, it could have led to seizures, coma, death. But that was your intention, wasn't it? You must have been planning it from day one."

Finally, Lorna spoke, groggily. "No." That was the truth. She never wanted to take paroxetine again. It had been pure impulse after she was locked in her cell again.

The doctor uncrossed her arms. "We also found scratch marks in your mouth and throat consistent with bulimia. But I suppose you didn't do that either."

"I'm not," she mumbled.

"Where do you think the lies are going to get you, Lorna? Because you are running out of options here."

"I'm not lying."

Dr. Chen read from a sheet of paper. "'I feel like I am getting in control of my emotions again. I feel ready to try and move on with support from my friends and family.' This is what you wrote on your self-eval."
"I was feeling better."

"You just overdosed for the second time. Lying to me right now is pointless."

Tears of frustration pricked her eyes. "Stop calling me a liar. I'm not a liar."

Dr. Chen sighed deeply. "I'm not calling you a liar. But you did lie."

"Everyone always calls me a liar but I'm not."

"Everyone? And why do you think they call you a liar?"

Lorna sniffed. "I don't know. Maybe they hate me, maybe they want me to doubt myself, what's real. I read about that, in Marie Claire, it's called gaslighting."

The doctor seemed to stifle a smile. "Lorna, I am a medical professional. I am not gaslighting you. That sounds paranoid. Do you really think your family and friends would want to hurt you?"

The Morello family, maybe except for Franny, probably couldn't care less if she died. Vinnie hated her. But then, there was Nicky, who always contradicted her, and she was caring and protective.

"... I... I don't know."

"Then why do you think they called you a liar?"

Tears forced their way out. "I just wish they could see what it was like for me. I want to show them what I mean, but they can never see it from my side."

Dr. Chen leaned in. "What do you mean, your side?"

She couldn't answer. No matter what she said, she was never going to believe her. Sobs got caught in her throat.

"Lorna. Can you think of a time when someone called you a liar and they were right?"

"Yes..." Tears flowed down now. "I thought my baby was alive but he wasn't."

The doctor paused, a little shocked. She touched Lorna's hand. "Okay. I think I understand now."

"Y-you do?"

"Lorna, how often are you unsure of what's real and what isn't?"

"... More and more all the time."

"And how does that feel?"

"It's the scariest thing in the world."

Nicky

Nicky didn't want to admit it but she was enjoying art more than she thought she could. It was strange the places you'd go when you were running away from drugs.
Not one to ever half-ass an addiction, she poured all of her free time into her drawings. At first she was sure the COs wouldn't let her bring paper and pencils and charcoal into her cell, but nobody gave a shit. Guess they were just happy she was staying out of trouble after the recent craziness.

There was the sketch of Alex and Piper's wedding (because Alex refused to draw it in class, and fuck it, it was probably one of the most beautiful moments she'd seen in prison, and maybe would ever see).

The one of Red's family dinner in the greenhouse. She often wondered what happened to Gina after the riots.

Poussey Washington lying on the floor of the cafeteria, because that was a sight she still couldn't get out of her head.

Helping inseminate Flores. She hoped, now she was on the outside, she had managed to get knocked up.

Piscatella taking them hostage during the riots.

Getting sober, relapsing. Getting sober, getting sent to max. Relapsing.

Norma singing in the nativity play.

Miss Rosa running over Vee (she had to imagine that, but made good use of a red pencil).

"It's nice to see someone doing something productive in here."

Nicky looked up from her drawings, which were spread haphazardly all over the floor. It was CO McCullough, leaned against the doorway.

"Usually when I do my checks, it's people doing drugs, or withdrawing from drugs, or having lesbian sex. So this is nice."

"And by people, you mean me."

"No, you don't have the best track record, Nichols." She strode into the cell, boots clomping. "So, what are these? Memories from Litchfield?"

"Yeah. I was thinking of turning them into postcards, ya know. Wish you were here, that sort of thing."

McCullough crouched down to get a better look. "These really are good, you know. My brother-in-law is an art collector. The stuff he collects is all post-modern shit though. This is much better."

For once, Nicky didn't know what to say.

The CO gently leafed through the papers. "Aren't there some memories missing though?"

"Whaddya mean?"

"Morello, the one who got taken to psych."

Nicky stiffened. "Yeah, thanks to you."

"You rather she got locked in the SHU?"
"I'd rather she was here with me, actually."

"Between you and me, she needed to go. She's giving the psychiatrists a run for their money."

She almost smiled at that. "That's my girl."

"So why isn't she in any of these?"

Nicky self-consciously piled up the papers. "Uhhh. Well, you know."

"No, it's okay. I get it. Some memories hurt too much to touch."

Nicky just sat there, frozen with the papers half falling out of her hands.

"Can I take these?" McCullough asked.

Nicky shrugged. "Uh, sure. I mean, I knew you had to confiscate them anyway."

"No, I'm not confiscating. I'm going to show them to my brother-in-law." McCullough took the papers and neatly reshuffled them.

"Oh. Okay. Whatever."

McCullough gave a half-smile and walked out of the cell, holding the drawings to her chest.

Drawing those memories was cathartic, a way to process her feelings. But McCullough was right. Thinking too much about Lorna was like picking a scab, no, like sticking her hand into a fresh wound. She could still feel it in her side, like someone was shanking her all the time.

She drummed the pencil against her hand. And against her will, she began to draw.

The next morning, she cornered McCullough and thrust a scroll of paper in her hand. "Here. For your collection."

McCullough unrolled it. It was a charcoal drawing of Lorna. But on one side, it was when she was first taken to prison – hair set in curls, lipstick fixed in an optimistic smile. On the other side, it was Lorna the last Nicky saw her – scared, sick, exhausted, broken by the system.

She rolled it back up. "Thanks. I'll show this to him as well."

Nicky doubted she would ever see the drawing again. She was pretty certain McCullough didn't even have a brother-in-law (the CO was actually pretty weird after the riots, people had noticed). Maybe her sketches were hanging on her wall like a creepy prison souvenir.

Not that it mattered; their work was done. Just like heroin, she was getting everything out of her system.
Lorna and Nicky learn of each other's circumstances in prison.

Lorna

Maybe it was the remnants of antidepressants in her system or her talk with Dr. Chen, but Lorna felt different. It wasn't like last time, when she woke up so angry to be alive. Actually, she felt more regret that she'd tried it. Which was confusing, because she still needed to punish herself. New feelings trickled in and coloured her a different shade of blue.

Dr. Chen said she would wait until the next morning to speak to Lorna again. Every so often the nurses would come around and check her blood pressure and temperature, or top up the fluids being pumped into her arm.

She was drifting asleep –

"Morello?"

Lorna turned her head towards the familiar voice. She had assumed all the other inmates were sleeping. Slowly, she made out Daya's face in the half-light.

"Diaz? Is that you?"

"Yep."

"What are you doing here?"

Daya pointed to a deep gash on the side of her face. "You should have seen the other guy."

"Guy? You mean a CO?"

"What other guys are there in this prison?"

Lorna bit her lip. "Over Humps? I thought they would have let that go already."

"Chapman's been telling the press all about how they treat us here. So they are taking it out on all of us. Thanks, Chapman."

"All of you? Is Nicky okay?"

Daya rolled her eyes. "She's too busy drawing to get in trouble."

"Drawing? What is that, like, drug lingo for what?"

"No, she's actually drawing. Pictures and shit. She's running the art class."
Lorna raised her eyebrows. "Wow. Well... I'm glad she's doing well."

Daya stretched a little in her bed. "So what are you doing here? I thought they took you to psych."

She swallowed hard. Of course it was now common knowledge. "It is not a nice place."

"No shit. Is that why you tried to, you know? I heard the doctor say overdose."

"Please don't tell anyone," Lorna pleaded. "It was stupid, I just saw the pills there and I--"

"Yeah, yeah," Daya shushed. "How you even get your hands on that many pills in there? You know they are gonna keep you in psych for the rest of your sentence."

"Do you think so?" Lorna thumped her head back on the pillow. "I guess you're right. I really fucked it up, didn't I?"

"Hey, at least you have a short sentence. I'm gonna be beat up for the rest of my life."

Lorna turned over to look at Daya. "That's so sad. I'm sorry."

She shrugged back. "Same."

"So, Nicky's really teaching an art class? That's crazy. I remember when you was the artist around here. For the prison newsletter. Another one of Chapman's bright ideas. I loved writing my beauty column though."

"I guess things have changed."

"Maybe they have."

Lorna stared up at the ceiling. Running the art class? Clearly Nicky was moving on. A tiny, betraying seed of a thought told her that maybe it was time for her to do the same.

**Nicky**

Now that McCullough had opened the floodgates, Nicky couldn't stop drawing pictures of Lorna.

Portraits carpeted her floor. She was aware it made her seem like a crazy person, but maybe that's what she really was without heroin. Whatever. She drew all the memories they had, including some of the more X-rated. She took some artistic license and drew some of the memories she missed, like Lorna's wedding and escaping with the van to Christopher's house. Crazy angel.

When she was finished, she stacked them up and piled them away. All she cared about was getting the memory out of her head, then it was just another drawing.

She tried to invest herself elsewhere. Red and Alex both had their own problems. Alex especially was getting no end of shit from the COs. Piper had given some interviews to press about life in Litchfield and the portrayal was not exactly positive.

"And now she wants to write a book," said Alex as they walked the prison courtyard one day.

Red groaned. "Does she want to get us all killed?"
"Oh, she thinks she's helping. It's like she doesn't remember what it's like in here."

"I should have left that swastika on her arm as a reminder. Why does anyone care what she has to say?"

"Because she's hot and blonde and rich," Nicky finally piped up. "She's perfect television."

Alex rolled her eyes in response.

"Oh, hey, Nichols."

Nicky looked up and saw Daya. Her face was pretty battered; Nicky had heard through the grapevine that one of the COs had kicked Daya down the stairs and passed it off as an accident. Piper had been defending Daya's actions during the riot, and she was the COs' favourite punching bag again.

"What?" Even if Nicky felt sorry for her, she had no time for whatever drugs-related bullshit Daya was about to bring up.

"I saw Morello."

"What?" Her stomach dropped. "How?"

"She was in medical. She took a bunch of pills."

Red put a calming hand on her shoulder. For a moment Nicky couldn't say anything.

"Oh my God," said Alex.

"Is she okay?" Red asked steadily.

Daya shrugged. "She just tried to kill herself, but she seemed alright."

Finally the words formed in Nicky's throat. "How the fuck did she even get pills in psych? What the fuck happened in there?"

"I don't know, man. She said it was scary."

Red turned Nicky to look at her. "She'll be fine. She has people looking after her now."

"I looked after her."

She rubbed her arm. "They'll be watching. She can't do anything now."

"Damn right," said Daya. "She's gonna be strapped to a bed for the rest of her sentence."

Nicky wanted to give Daya a bruise on the other cheek to match. But in the pit of her stomach, she knew she was right. There was no way Lorna would be transferred back to D-block. She would be in psych until the end of their sentences, a year's time. She decided, then and there, that she would just have to wait for her.
Chapter Summary

Lorna delves into the root of her issues. Plus a cute flashback because I am angst-ed out (for now).

Lorna

"Do you remember the first time you felt like there was maybe a disconnect in your reality?"

Dr. Chen had led Lorna into a small medical room just outside the main ward. She was taking notes and had a tape recorder switched on the table.

"I don't know... ever since I was a kid, people always said I away with the fairies. I had a big imagination, you know. But there's nothing wrong with that."

"Did you have a happy childhood, Lorna?"

"... It was fine." And she did have happy memories, that wasn't untrue. When her mother was well. "What, are you going to say all my crazy is because of child abuse or something? That's very cliché."

"I didn't mention child abuse, Lorna. You did."

Suddenly she came over all clammy. She had never discussed this with anyone, except when trading commiserations with Nicky about her handsy Uncle Pete. But even then, there was an unspoken mutual agreement to never go too deep.

"Well, it's not true. It's not my story to tell, anyway."

The doctor put her pen down for a second. "You mean something happened to someone in your household?"

"I mean, really, if anything Franny should be the one in here. She should have been the one to grow up all fucked up. Nothing bad even happened to me."

"Is Franny your sister? Older or younger?"

"Older. She protected us, see. When our mother got sick, she did everything for us. And when my father got in his moods, she -"

Dr. Chen was now leaned in close. "Did your father hit your sister? What did you do while this was happening?"

Lorna picked at the raw skin where the bed restraints had pressed against her wrists.

"Lorna?"

"I don't know. I used to play with dolls. That sounds terrible, don't it? I couldn't even help my own
sister. I used to go to my room and pretend it wasn't happening. For the longest time, I really forgot. Then one day, when I was in my twenties, I found the old dollhouse in our attic and it just came back to me like a dream. And I was scared that my brain could hide something like that from me, you know? But now I'm thinking... what if that's not even real either?"

Dr. Chen touched her hand. Lorna realised it was shaking.

"I believe you. As clichéd as you think it sounds, childhood trauma is strongly linked to mental health issues. And your brain can certainly repress traumatic events. Where was your mother when all this was happening?"

"She was in hospital. In and out. My father just called them 'episodes'. Sometimes she was fine. She's a mess now though. Barely speaks, barely moves. It's like she's not even there."

"Does your mother have a mental illness, Lorna?"

Lorna nodded silently.

"And you're scared of becoming like her."

She nodded again.

"All your life you've felt different, had people tell you you're crazy, but you push it down, you lash out, because you saw what happened to your mother, you saw what happened to your family. So you never got help, you just tried to carry on as normal, pretend you were fine, even though deep down you were struggling."

"I don't want to feel like this. I just want to be normal," Lorna cried.

Dr. Chen smiled. "There's no such thing. But I can help you manage. If you let me?"

"Okay."

---

Nicky

"You're gonna catch your death out here. Mind if I join you?"

It was Christmas day. Snow blanketed the grounds of Litchfield minimum security prison and was still falling. But it didn't stop Morello from standing outside, staring out towards the gates meaningfully with her big purple scarfed knotted vainly against the cold.

Morello nodded mirthlessly and Nicky stood next to her, huddled up like two penguins.

"Your first Christmas here is hard, huh?"

"I miss Christopher," she replied. "I had all these plans for our first Christmas as a married couple. We was gonna do carolling and ice-skating and the Feast of the Seven Fishes. I make a really good puttanesca, that means 'whore spaghetti' in Italian, you know."

"Well, no wonder you're so good at it," Nicky joked. "Romeo hasn't visited in a while, has he?"

Nicky was trying to commiserate, but Morello's stare turned icy.
"He's busy. Besides, I never see you get any visitors."

Nicky snorted. "You're right. I haven't had a single visitor in months."

Morello blushed – or maybe it was just the wind smarting her cheeks. "Sorry. Franny's coming to say merry Christmas later. You could meet her if you like."

"Thanks but... you know, I probably shouldn't even be celebrating Christmas on account of being Jewish and all."

Morello smiled and reached under her scarf. In a moment she had unclasped the silver cross necklace around her neck and placed it on Nicky's. "There. I've converted you."

"That's not how it works, you loon. And I can't take your necklace."

She shrugged. "Meh, I've got another one. I once shoplifted a whole bunch from Claire's."

"You never fail to surprise me," Nicky laughed. "Now, can we please go inside? Your sister won't be happy if you give her the flu."

"Just give me five minutes. Just five more minutes." Morello knocked her head against Nicky's shoulder. "Do you think Christopher is missing me right now?"

"Yeah. I bet he's standing out in the snow, his tears freezing to his face because he can't eat your slutty pasta," said Nicky sarcastically.

"I think so too," said Morello, without a hint of irony.

It started as a scratchy throat and a steady throb on either side of her temples. Nicky excused herself from playing cards with Red, Tricia and Mercy to have a shower. When her head was still stuffy even after the hot steam, she retreated to bed, her wet hair soaking the pillow.

She didn't know how long it was before a small voice prodded her awake. It was Morello, sitting on the edge of her bed.

"Nicky? You're missing Christmas dinner. Red made a glazed ham and everything."

"I don't eat ham. I'm Jewish," she said in a vain attempt to make Morello leave. She just wanted to sleep it off.

"I've seen you eat bacon every morning. What's going on? You don't look so good."

"I'm fine." Suddenly she sat up and had a coughing fit.

"Oh, no. You're really sick, aren't you?"

"I don't get sick," Nicky croaked.

"Lie down." Morello eased her back into the bed. "You shouldn't be lying here with wet hair, Nicky. That's what's made you sick."

"No, what made me sick was standing outside with you all morning in a fucking blizzard because you think it's like a scene in a romance movie."
Morello rolled her eyes. She dug a comb out of her pocket (did she always just keep beauty supplies on hand?) and began to detangle Nicky's hair. "You have terrible knots. Would it kill you to use conditioner once in a while?"

"Ow, fuck!"

She smiled obliviously. "You know, my mother used to do this for me before she got sick. I used to hate it, too. But now I miss it."

"At least your mom did stuff like that. I don't even remember the last time mine touched me."

Morello stopped combing and wriggled under the covers. Her skin was warm and soft. "Well, that's no good. Does this feel better, Nichols?"

"You're gonna catch my germs," Nicky laughed wheezily.

Morello wrapped her arms around her in response. As if by reflex, Nicky turned her face and kissed her.

"... Nicky." She pulled away. "I'm engaged."

"I know. Fuck. I know. Sorry. But hey, a beautiful woman climbs into bed with you, what am I supposed to think?"

"You think I'm beautiful?"

Nicky raised an eyebrow. "Come on, you know."

"Christopher said it once."

"Well... someone needs to slap some sense into that fiancé of yours. Hell, if I was engaged to you, I'd never stop telling you. And I'd visit more than once."

"I told you, he's —"

"Busy, I know." She slipped her hand in Morello's. "But you deserve better. You know that, don't you?"

Morello was silent for a bit. She leaned her head against Nicky's shoulder. "If you promise there's no funny business, can I stay here? Just until this stupid Christmas is over."

"Sure, kid."

Nicky rolled over and they spooned until Morello was gently snoring. But Nicky couldn't fall asleep. Maybe the fever was affecting her brain, but she was sure that for a second, just a split second, Lorna Morello had kissed her back.
I Didn't Escape

Chapter Summary

Lorna and Nicky both get shocks.

**Lorna**

Lorna told the doctor everything. Her chaotic home life which she always tried to escape. Meeting Christopher and falling in love instantly. The muddled events that happened after that. Coping with prison the only way she knew how. And then – Vinnie. And Carmine. That was the hardest part.

"I thought I was supposed to feel better," she said when she was finished, wiping her eyes on her sleeve.

"Therapy isn't supposed to be easy, Lorna," replied Dr. Chen.

"I think I feel too much sometimes."

The doctor put down her clipboard and held Lorna's gaze. "This could be premature to diagnose, but based on my conversations with you, I think you could have something called borderline personality disorder. It fits with your intense emotions, your impulsive behaviour, paranoia, dissociation."

"You think I have a disorder?"

"Like I said, it's early days. And you have some other symptoms, like your delusions, which I believe are more complex. Look, I know it's scary. But now we have somewhere to work from."

Lorna paused. She was trying with all her strength to keep calm. "I guess I've always known there was something wrong with me. And... if it is that? Can you fix me?"

"Well, after we've done more diagnostics, we can have a look at a treatment plan. But this probably won't ever fully go away, Lorna. Especially after being untreated so long. We can only help you manage and take care of yourself."

Lorna nodded but she couldn't fight the tears coming up. To be told she was incurable made her feel so hopeless.

Dr. Chen looked at her sympathetically. "In the meantime, I think it's a good idea to keep you on antidepressants."

"No, no." She shook her head, blood rising to her temples. "I can't."

"What's the problem? You've been on them for months."

"No, no. I had to stop. Not after what happened to Carmine."

"I don't understand, what do you mean?"
"The pills I was taking – you ain't meant to take when you're pregnant. That's why he died." The tears she'd been fighting back erupted into sobs.

"Who told you that?"

"It was in the instructions in the box. I didn't know. That's why it's so hard to accept help. Because I did and it killed him. I just feel so guilty."

She put a hand on her shoulder. "Lorna, I'm sure the prison wouldn't prescribe anything without knowing the risks. Whatever happened, it's in the past now. The right medication could really help you. You are worthy of help."

Lorna just shook her head and the doctor ended the session.

Days later, Lorna was back in that room. Dr. Chen dropped a thick folder on the table.

"Do you know what this is? This is your medical file," she said. "I paid a visit to the hospital that treated you."

Lorna looked at it in confusion.

"How much do you remember about what they told you, Lorna?"

She thought hard. It was like a shadow on her brain.

"Um, I don't know. Nothing? I think I blacked out. I didn't believe it happened. Even now, there's a version of events which Carmine's alive that feels just as real to me. I have to keep convincing myself."

Dr. Chen opened the folder. "It says here, 'mother admitted with severe placental abruption'. Do you know what that is? It's when the placenta separates from the uterus. It's what caused your bleeding and early labour. It's what caused your baby to be stillborn."

Lorna looked at the pages that seemed to confirm this.

"We don't know what causes this. It just happens sometimes. But it has nothing to do with your medication. Do you understand what I'm saying? Lorna, it wasn't your fault."

She looked up, her eyes streaming. "Are you sure?"

"It wasn't your fault," said Dr. Chen firmly. "Say it. It wasn't my fault."

"It... it wasn't my fault." A weight the size of a life lifted off her chest. "It wasn't my fault."

The doctor smiled. "Now, do you think can accept some help? But first, I think we need to move you somewhere that can do that."

Lorna sighed. "Ugh, back to psych. I knew that was coming."

Nicky
When Nicky was called to visitation for the first time in her sentence, she wondered who could possibly want to visit her. Her parents were out of the running, clearly. Perhaps it was Vinnie, trying to get more information (not that she could give him any). She finally settled on Piper. Maybe she needed quotes for her book.

As she sat down in front of the glass, nothing could have prepared her for the face behind it. Dark round eyes, pale skin, gently waved hair. Lorna waved at her and gave a small smile.

Nicky couldn't speak. She was winded. Her lungs forgot how to breathe. She stared ahead, trying to piece the information together.

Lorna picked up the phone and pointed for Nicky to the do the same.

"Hi," she said.

"Lorna - I don't – is that really you?"

"It's good to see you," said Lorna. "I wanted to see you before I left but they wouldn't let me."

"Left... They - they let you go?" Nicky stuttered.

"Well, I didn't escape Nicky," Lorna half-laughed. "It's called compassionate release. Apparently they think I've suffered enough."

"When did this happen?"

"A week ago. After I told them about everything that happened with Carmine. They were real nice about it."

Oh. Now it was starting to make sense. "Lorna, don't you see? They're just trying to get rid of you so they don't have to take responsibility for what they did to you. You could sue."

Lorna shook her head. "No. It wasn't like that. And besides, I'm starting to think that maybe it wasn't my fault –"

"– I never said it was your fault."

"I think I'll always feel guilty, in some way. But I'm trying to get better. Everything you said about me being sick in the head turned out to be true. How about that?"

Nicky swallowed hard. "I've been so fucking worried about you. I heard what you did."

"I know. I'm okay, though. I gotta see a therapist twice a week now, it's part of my probation. I'll be fine, Nicky." Lorna picked at her pale pink sweater. It was so weird to see her in normal clothes. "You ain't mad at me, are you?"

"Mad, why would I be mad?" Although Nicky realised as she said this that her hands were balled into fists and she hadn't even cracked a smile.

"I know we was supposed to released together. I just, I don't know, I feel bad about leaving you in here. It feels wrong."

"Don't be stupid," Nicky forced the words out. "I'm happy for you. This is good, yeah? Don't worry about me."

"I wish I could touch you," Lorna whispered, her hand reaching out to Nicky against the glass.
Nicky didn't return the gesture. She couldn't let herself, not just yet. "I suppose you've moved in with Vinnie now..."

Lorna shook her head sadly. "No. He knows I'm out but he hasn't even called. I guess he really does hate me."

"Fuck Vinnie." Nicky finally smiled, a tiny bit. "You don't need him. He's an idiot. If I was out there, I'd take so much care of you. I don't care how crazy you are. You drive me crazy but I love you so much, Lorna."

"You're always too good to me, Nicky," said Lorna, welling up.

She drew in as much courage as she had. Knowing that her heart would be stomped on any second. "Will you wait for me? Will you wait until I get out? We can start a new life together."

After a long pause, Lorna nodded. "I will."

Nicky pressed her hand against Lorna's, separated by a glass wall the length of a year.
If I Brought a Girl Home One Day

Chapter Summary

Lorna adjusts to her freedom, while Nicky tries to come to terms with it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lorna

Lorna hopped into the car where her sister was waiting in the prison carpark.

"You okay?" Franny asked.

She nodded. It was a total lie, which went against what Dr. Chen had told her just before she was released. *You need to be honest with people if you want to heal.* But how could Franny understand how much Nicky meant to her? She could barely understand it herself.

"Beats me why you wanna come back here so soon. Thought you'd never want to see the place again. But as long as you're happy."

Franny started up the car and began to drive away from Litchfield. A week after being released, Lorna still hadn't gotten used to her freedom. Her lungs couldn't take in enough air as Franny's car sped down the wide, tree-lined streets of Upstate New York.

It was the small, everyday things she realised she missed most, like being able to take a bath or eating food that wasn't prison slop. She actually cried the first time she tasted a home-cooked meal.

"You want manicotti for dinner?"

"Sure," said Lorna. Ever since she got home, Franny did nothing but force Italian food down her throat. She understood why she was doing it, but her sister constantly watching her eating habits wasn't exactly helping either.

Franny drummed her fingers on the steering wheel. She turned on the car radio, listened to some techno trash for a minute, then turned it off.

"You know who lives on our way home? Vince. We could visit him, you know."

Lorna shook her head, her stomach turning. "He don't wanna see me, Fran."

"He's got a goddamn obligation, Lorn. He's your husband. He's half the reason you're in this mess."

"Well, that's not true," Lorna said in a low voice. Because it wasn't – her problems started far before Carmine.

"I think we should pay him a visit and remind him of his priorities."
"No, Franny." Lorna tried to steady her voice. "He don't love me anymore. And I can't make him. I don't wanna go through that again."

The mere mention of Christopher made Franny give way. "Alright. As long as you're happy."

When they got home, Giuseppe and Mikey were watching a game. She remembered coming back the day of her release and finding them there, as if they had stayed in the same position the entirety of her sentence, like the dolls in her dollshouse. Maybe she should have stuck Sellotape on them like Miss Rosa said.

"What's for dinner, Francine?" Giuseppe called out over the television.

"Manicotti," Franny replied, scooping Tommy off the floor and wiping some (hopefully) dirt off his face. Tommy was so much bigger than when Lorna was imprisoned. And of course he was so little then, but she was still perturbed when he didn't recognise her.

If Carmine went home with Vinnie, that's what would have happened to her. She would have been a stranger to her own baby.

She waited for her father to acknowledge her, but he was back to watching TV again. It was clear he was ashamed of her criminal past. Even Nicky was happier to see her out of prison than her father. She wasn't exactly expecting a 'welcome home' party, but still.

Lorna climbed upstairs and went to her room. Like her father and brother, it was almost exactly how she'd left it. She had opened her wardrobe and been taken aback by the sheer amount of designer clothes and shoes she had scammed. It felt like another person. It was certainly the dress sense of another person. One day, she'd have to throw everything in a bag and give it to Goodwill.

The only thing that was missing was her vision board. Franny must have disposed of anything she had that was remotely related to Christopher before the police could get their hands on it for evidence. Was it crazy that she wanted it back, in a small, sort of nostalgic way? She missed having something to believe in.

The bell rang down the hall. Lorna got up and slowly made her way to her mother's room.

Stansie was in a much worse state than when Lorna left, if that was even possible. She was covered in bedsores and almost entirely unresponsive. Like Tommy, she barely seemed to recognise Lorna when she returned. It hurt to even look at her, but Dr. Chen's words echoed in her ears. Don't run away from things that are hard, it only makes it worse.

She filled a cup of water and held it to her mother's lips with a straw.

"Hi, Ma. How you feeling?"

She looked at Lorna, but there was nothing behind her eyes.

"I was just back at prison. Not, like, in prison. I went to visit someone. You know I've been in prison, right, Ma? I got in trouble. I'm still trying to find out why. They think I might be sick. You were the same age as me, I think, when everything started to go wrong."

She laced their fingers together, playing with her mother's wedding ring.

"Did you know I got married, Ma? His name is Vinnie. I don't know if he ever met you. I hope not. I
screwed it up anyway. Did you know we had a baby? We called him Carmine. He died, Mama. I wish you were there. I needed you to tell me what to do. Tell me it's okay."

Nothing. She kissed her on the cheek and brushed her hair away from her face.

"Ma, what would you think if I brought a girl home one day? Say, in a year? If you think it's okay, don't say a thing."

Stansie remained in her silent stupor. Lorna smiled, inhaling the aroma of fresh manicotti baking downstairs.

**Nicky**

Okay. Okay. This was good. Yeah. It was the best possible scenario. Lorna was out of prison. She was being looked after. Nicky couldn't be happier.

So why did she feel so shit?

Telling Red and Alex was like pulling teeth. They were so happy and excited, almost as if to fill the role that Nicky wasn't playing. Alex was the worst, because she kept relating back to her experience with Piper leaving early. It was easy enough for her. Piper wasn't married to anyone on the outside and she wasn't batshit crazy.

Nicky left before she could say anything unfair. She had enough regrets.

A year. A *fucking* year. Lorna said she would visit as much as she could, so that was a small comfort. But even when she was doomed to spend the better part of a year in psych, at least Nicky knew she was a block away from her. Now she just felt so far. Nicky selfishly wanted her back.

She trudged into her cell. To her dismay, it wasn't empty. CO McCullough was sitting on the bottom bunk.

"What are you doing in here?" Nicky asked bluntly. She could not be bothered to turn on the charm. If she got a shot, she couldn't care less.

McCullough scuffed her boots against the floor. "You must be pretty shocked about Morello."

Nicky crossed her arms. "It's a good thing. I'm happy for her."

"Don't think they did it out of kindness. She was giving them too much work to do in psych. With everything with the baby and some medication mix-up and the overcrowding, they decided it would be easier if she was someone else's problem."

"I don't understanding why you're telling me this."

McCullough sighed. "I get pretty sick of this place, too, you know. I used to be in the army, you know that? I never wanted to work for a soulless corporation. You should hear the things that PolyCon tell us. It's like you're barely human."

"I don't want to know. I just want to get through my sentence."

The CO stood up. She towered over Nicky. "Don't you feel like the world has a right to know?"
Nicky brushed past her. "Look, if you want to do an exposé, talk to Piper. I hear she's writing a book."

"But you have a gift."

"Not interested."

"It might be too late for that."

"What?" Nicky turned around.

"I gave your drawings to my brother-in-law," McCullough started to explain. "He passed them on to a curator and ... he wants to exhibit them. He thinks the public will be really interested in artwork from a prisoner."

"Are you insane?" Nicky yelled. "I can't have my name on that! I drew everything. I'll get beat up worse than Diaz."

"It would be anonymous," said McCullough plainly. "He actually prefers it that way. It's mysterious, like Banksy."

Nicky sunk down on the bed. "This is going to bite me in the ass so hard.... Does he really think they’re good?"

"Yeah. But he wants more. He wants to round out the collection."

Nicky shook her head, laughing. "I don't have any more memories left."

McCullough leaned in, lowering her voice. "I can give you more material. Starting with what really goes down in psych. You have to use that anger while it's still fresh."

She sighed and dug out a pencil and paper from her cabinet. "Tell me everything." She already had so many regrets, what was one more?

Chapter End Notes

30 chapters? What?! If you're still reading, thank you :)


Talk About Rose-Coloured Glasses

Chapter Summary

Past issues are worked out (AKA I have an assignment due so I decided to update because procrastination).

Lorna

If she didn't have the literal scars to prove it, Lorna would have wondered if she had ever been to Litchfield. Her absence from home had clearly made no difference to the family. Franny was still running around picking up after everyone while her father barked orders and her mother rang that damn bell every five minutes.

It was all too easy to stay in her room and tune it out.

"I want to talk more about Christopher."

Lorna's new assigned therapist was an older man with a quiet voice who insisted she call him by his first name, George. She had to repeat the process all over again. Telling him everything, even though it was all in her case file. Getting a second opinion on a diagnosis. Receiving yet another prescription for antidepressants, this time Prozac, which Franny guarded in a locked cabinet. The message was clear, when it came to her pills or food or herself – she couldn't be trusted.

"I don't wanna talk about the past no more," said Lorna. She was sitting on a lumpy couch holding a cushion in her lap. Maybe because it was part of her probation, George spent a lot of time talking about her crime. It was like the months before her trial, being told that she had done something wrong and being asked to explain when she didn't feel she had to explain herself in the first place.

"Is that because you still believe that you had a relationship with this man?"

She rubbed her eyes. "Don't say it like that."

"Like what?"

"Look, I admit it I went overboard sometimes. But it's not like we never had a relationship."

"No," said George, his voice deepening. "You stalked him. You threatened him and his family. You placed a bomb under his car. Do you remember doing any of this?"

"I remember how I felt. In love."

"Your emotions are distorting your memories. Christopher didn't want a second date. Maybe that rejection was so painful that you couldn't process it, so you created a false memory. But there are multiple police reports, testimonies and CCTV footage that prove you wrong. I can show you again –"

"No, please –"
"What's the issue, Lorna? Why don't you want to believe me?"

"Because... if I believe that, how do I know anything's real?"

He held out a tissue box. Lorna always cried in therapy.

"You need to trust what people are saying to you. Until you're strong enough in your treatment to recognise it yourself, you need to trust in others."

---

Nicky

Nicky was relieved when Lorna showed up to visitation as promised, albeit a month later. Over the years of lies, she found it difficult to fully trust her, even when she wanted to.

"You look well," she said through the plexiglass. Maybe it was that Lorna was dolled-up but she appeared much healthier.

"I'm sorry I can't come more often. Franny still won't let me drive myself," said Lorna with an eye roll.

"Yeah, she probably thinks you'll drive straight to ol' Christopher's house," Nicky joked.

Lorna didn't laugh. "Don't. I don't wanna think about it."

"It wouldn't be the first time you took a road trip to Albany."

"If I go within 100 yards of him, they'll put me back in here."

"We wouldn't want that," said Nicky with a smirk. "It would be terrible if you had to come back and keep me company."

"Sometimes I think about it."

"Lorna, I was joking."

She twisted her fingers around the phone cord. "I thought being out would be different. I'd have Vinnie and Car—... It's just so weird being at home, Nicky. And they make me go to this therapy, it's so hard. I miss being here with you."

Nicky gathered her strength to talk her down. "No, you don't. I mean, shit, talk about rose-coloured glasses. Prison is the fucking worst. It's dirty and cold and don't get me started on the food."

"The food is better at home," she admitted with a smile.

"I'll be out in less than a year. That's something to look forward to. Just think about that. Please, for the love of God, don't do anything stupid."

"It's just – you never called. I was worried that maybe you'd moved on to someone else."

"Lorna, why the hell would I do that?"

"I did it to you, didn't I? And you're always on the prowl."
Nicky shouted with laughter. "Trust me! It's been, what? A month? I'm sorry I didn't call, okay? I mean, I just thought, you'd be catching up on a lot. Living your life."

"I wouldn't blame you if you did." Lorna's eyes filled with tears. "My therapist says, because of this thing, I've probably hurt a lot of people. That I've done some horrible things I just can't see."

"Babe..."

"Please..." She looked up pleadingly. "He said I have to trust you. Tell me."

Nicky sighed. "Well. I mean, it's not always easy. Fuck. You snap sometimes. Sometimes I don't even know why but it's usually when I'm trying to help you. You've called me a junkie, a liar. That one stung a bit. And if I try to reason with you, you never listen. Or you cut me out. Or you cry and then I'm the bad guy. And you never say sorry."

"I'm sorry," said Lorna.

"I know it wasn't you."

"It was, really. But I'm trying to get better. And that means even if I can't connect with what you're saying right now, I have to trust it."

"You know it won't always be this hard, right?"

"What do you mean?"

She shrugged. "Take it from someone who's been in a lot of therapy. You've spent your whole life living like this. They have to break you down to build you back up. That takes time."

"And what about you?"

"It's a work-in-progress."

The buzzer went off to signal visiting hours were over. Nicky's mood, as well as her stomach, dropped.

"I have to go, kid."

Lorna motioned to the phone. "Call me?" She leaned forward and left a lipstick print on the glass. Nicky got up. "Great. You know I'm the one who's gonna have to clean that."
The Shrink Ain't Helped

Chapter Summary

Lorna confronts a problem at home. Nicky starts to plan her future.

Lorna

It was a wet, grey, quiet day, the kind of day where nothing happens. As it wasn't a therapy day, it was a perfect excuse to stay in bed and hide away from the world. After she'd completely worn herself out on Julia Roberts movies, Lorna padded downstairs in her pyjamas.

"Francine?" Giuseppe called from his wheelchair without looking up. He was watching a boxing match on TV.

"No, just me," she called back. "I think Franny's gone to work."

He groaned. "Did she leave anything for us to eat? Check the fridge, I think there was lasagna leftover."

She checked. "No. Maybe I can make us something."

A chuckle came from the living room. "That's okay."

"I can cook. I even had lessons in prison, from Judy King, you know the lady from the Food Network?" Lorna started to dig out ingredients from the fridge.

Giuseppe rolled into the kitchen. He stared her down firmly. "No. Francine can do it."

She was quickly getting annoyed. "Franny shouldn't have to do everything. Now that I'm back, I can help."

He laughed. "What do you mean, now you're back? It's not like you ever lifted a finger to help before."

Anger started stirring in her chest, but she deflected. "Well, I'm trying to change. Someone has to."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I'm just saying, you and Mikey don't exactly do anything."

"Is that right, princess?" He poked a finger at her face. "You ain't worked a day in your life. You're the one who left this family in our hour of need. If there's anyone who's to blame for Francine working two jobs, it's you."

Real anger flooded her brain now. Coping strategies, breathing exercises, all went out the window. She looked him directly in the eyes. "Don't act like you care about Franny. Not after what you did to her."
"What are you talking about?"

"You hit her!" She screamed.

"What?!" He reacted differently to how she expected. It was shock and anger, but not that she'd brought it up. More that she'd even accuse him of doing it.

Still, she stood her ground, though her eyes were stinging with tears. "I remember everything. Whenever Ma was sick, you took it out on Franny. It was child abuse."

He started to visibly shake. "How can you say that? How dare you!"

At that moment, Franny entered, weighed down by grocery bags and slightly damp. "Sorry I'm late, it's raining cats and dogs out there." Immediately she sensed the tension. "What happened?"

"You won't believe what lies Lorna's making up now," Giuseppe growled. "All that time at the shrink ain't helped."

"What's he talking about, Lorna?"

"She just said that I abused you," he spat. "Me!"

"Franny, it's true, isn't it?" Lorna pleaded.

Franny simply shook her head, her eyes wide. Lorna grabbed her by the shoulders.

"No, Franny. Because I remember. He hit you, night after night. I could hear you through my walls, you were begging him to stop –"

"Don't be so ridiculous, why would Francine stay here if I hurt her?"

"Franny, tell the truth!"

Franny's eyes flitted between the two of them. Finally, she spoke. "It's ... not true."

"What?" Lorna whispered. "But I remember –"

"Your brain's just making shit up again. Listen to me. It never happened."

She took in both their confused, hurt expressions. It felt like the ground had been pulled out from under her. A memory that vivid, she'd let it colour her life, her relationship with her father, her sanity. The idea that it wasn't real... but she had to trust. No. Franny wouldn't lie to her.

Suddenly the accusation hung heavily in the air. What kind of person could make something like that up, about their own father? The shame was crushing and it was all around her, in the house, in the air, she could taste it. Too much. She had to escape.

Her feet carried her out of the kitchen, towards the door, outside. Into the cleansing rain. The downpour drowned out the sound of Franny shouting after her. All she could focus on was moving and the shock of the cold against her skin.

And then –

She was in a warm, bright room. Someone had wrapped a blanket around her and put a mug of coffee in her hands. They were asking her name. People in uniforms. In police uniforms. She couldn't remember how she got there or what she'd done. Oh God, what had she done?
She looked up and saw a frighteningly familiar face, one she hadn't seen for a long time. A shiver coursed through her body like lightning. She knew that if he was really here, she must have done something bad.

Nicky

Time dribbled by so slowly that Nicky could barely remember each day from the next.

She could make casual conversation with the likes of Cindy and Flaca, but she was starting to understand how much Lorna had impacted her prison time. Although she should have been in Florida, it was a blessing they'd been stuck in D-block together. Even when Lorna's antics went from entertaining to dangerous, at least Nicky had some purpose protecting her. Now she just had to trust someone was protecting her on the outside.

A heavy thunderstorm meant that outside time was cancelled, so she couldn't even talk to Red or Alex to pass the time. Back at minimum, the COs would have let the inmates watch a movie from the selection of about four scratched DVDs. Here they didn't even have a single television. World War Three could have started and nobody would be the wiser.

After custodial duty, she decided to go back to bed and sleep the day away. At least she couldn't get into any trouble if she was unconscious.

Unfortunately, McCullough was waiting for her by her cell. Nicky sighed. She had done more drawings than she could count for the woman. Listened to stories about psych and AdSeg and some new immigration unit she'd rather forget. She knew the place was fucked up, but she didn't know it was "Fantasy Inmate" fucked up.

They slipped into the cell. McCullough was different; she seemed energised, even happy.

"You're smiling," said Nicky. "You don't smile. That's weird. Stop that."

"Last night was the exhibition," said McCullough a little breathlessly.

"Oh fuck." A feeling of dread settled in Nicky's gut.

McCullough paced around. "The response was great. There was a massive curator who really liked your work. He wants to show it in his gallery in Manhattan, create an event around it, hire a promoter.–"

"Wait, wait, wait, wait." Nicky stood firmly in front of McCullough. "Are you serious? Look, it was fine when it was a small gallery, whatever, but Manhattan? Promoter? Are you crazy? We're going to get caught."

"You should have heard people talking last night. We're finally opening their eyes to what's going on, we have to do this."

"It's easy enough for you to say. You're not the one who'll get extra time or raped by a guard if they find out."

McCullough hesitated for a moment, then looked towards the door. "I'm going to show you something nobody has seen." She quickly unbuckled her belt and dropped her trousers to the floor.
"Whoa, whoa! Trust me, I've seen plenty of those before. Listen, you're a nice girl but –"

The CO rolled her eyes. "Look." She pointed emphatically at her thigh. Nicky bent down and peered it at. The skin was mottled in circular scars, some fresh, some older, Nicky could only recognise as cigarette burns.

"Holy fuck," she breathed.

McCullough swiftly pulled her trousers back on. "This place destroys people. You've seen that first-hand. I know it's a long shot, but if you had a chance to expose it, to force them to change, wouldn't you?"

Nicky rubbed her face. This was too much. "Well, I'm going to need some kind of protection."

"Of course. You'll still be completely anonymous. And I'll set up a bank account for you, under another name."

"Bank account?"

"Well, yes. Generally art that is exhibited is auctioned off, too. That's why the bigger the hype, the more money you could get. Thousands, maybe tens of thousands. Enough to restart your life once you get out of here."

The realisation hit Nicky hard. She hadn't even thought about it before. When she left prison, she wouldn't have a penny to her name. Of course, she could always get money off her parents, but she'd rather eat a live rat than crawl back to them. Or live with Marka. All her old friends, they were junkies, she couldn't stay with them. And who would give her a job with her record?

This was her only chance. She could get enough money to find a small place, nothing special. Then she and Lorna could live together and be there for each other. Maybe, for once, she could be the one to believe in the fantasy.
Like Thelma and Louise

Chapter Summary

Where does impulsiveness lead to?

Lorna

"Vinnie?"
The fog lifted and her world sharpened as the dark-haired man stepped closer. He looked tired, damp and annoyed. But it really was Vinnie.

"What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same," he sighed. "It looks like I'm still your emergency contact. They called me to come get you."

"I'm not under arrest?"

He rubbed his eyes. "You might've freaked out half of Long Island but it's not exactly a crime. Come on."

She followed him out of the police station. It was still pouring down rain. He silently walked to his car. She hopped into the passenger seat, shivering violently. Whether it was from the cold, or losing her memory, or being in a police station, or finally seeing her estranged husband, it was impossible to tell.

"I can't believe you came for me," Lorna said shakily. Her heart fluttered; this was the first time she'd seen Vinnie on the outside. It was almost like meeting him for the first time. Why did she have to be in soaking wet pyjamas?

He jammed his key into the ignition. "Don't think nothing of it. Your sister is coming to get you from my flat."

He pulled out onto the road. She couldn't remember what time it was when she left the house, but it was now pitch black, the only light coming from the street lamps and other cars skidding past on the wet concrete. She tried to piece together how long she was out and how much she couldn't remember.

"Christ, what were you doing?" asked Vinnie quietly.

"I don't know."

"What, you got amnesia now?"

"My therapist calls it dissociation or something," she explained. "I was fighting with my father and the next thing I knew, I was at the police station with you."
He exhaled sharply. "They found you walking around in the rain, in your pyjamas? You basically walked into traffic, they thought you were trying to..."

He stopped as she tried to digest that information. All this time she thought therapy was helping her, but clearly she was just as crazy as ever, maybe even worse. She started to tear up. Vinnie kept his eyes on the road, clearly uncomfortable.

"The same thing happened when Carmine was born," she cried. "I'm so disconnected from that day. Every time someone says he's dead, it feels like it happened to somebody else."

They drove on for a moment, the silence only broken by the windscreen wipers.

"What happened, what I told you, I got it wrong. It wasn't my fault. Not like that."

"I know," said Vinnie finally. "The prison told me everything."

The car slowed to a halt. Immediately Lorna locked eyes with Franny waiting next to a block of flats.

As she got out of the car, Franny ran to her and hugged her tight. "Lorna! Oh my God. Are you alright?"

"I'm okay, really." Lorna tried to comfort her, even though she was anything but alright. She'd never seen Franny in such a state, sobbing and shaking and clinging to her.

"I'm so sorry. I had no idea you'd react like that. I'm so sorry. It's all my fault."

"What does that mean?" Vinnie said.

"Everything you said was true, all of it."

"What!" Lorna broke free of Franny's grasp. "You're saying it was real?"

"Yes."

"Franny!" She nearly sank to the ground in shock. "You can't do that to me! I have to trust you. I thought I was losing my mind."

"I'm sorry, alright?" Franny shouted. "Do you think I want to bring up all that stuff? I have to live with what our father did, under the same roof as him. I can't let myself think about it. You of all people can't judge me for that!"

"Tell me it's not what it sounds like," said Vinnie.

Franny ignored him. "Let's just go home and forget it ever happened." She started to lead her to her car.

"Wait!" Vinnie ran up behind them. "This ain't right. If what you're saying is true, she can't live there."

"Oh, like suddenly you care?" Franny rolled her eyes. "You don't get to have an opinion. Come on, Lorna."

"She's my wife!"

"Are you shitting me? You haven't even tried to contact her."
"We've both done shit," said Vinnie. "But that doesn't mean I want her living in a fucked-up house like that. You should have seen the state she was in, thanks to you."

"I'm the only one helping her, where the hell were you!"

"Would both of you please shut the fuck up?" Lorna yelled at the top of her voice. "Franny's right. I don't got nowhere else to go."

She opened the car door, but felt his hand on her arm. It was the first time he'd touched her since giving back his ring. "Vinnie?"

He gritted his teeth, as if stop to the words coming up. "Okay. Fuck. You can stay with me. At least until we find a better option."

"Really?" It felt like a lie, but his eyes were so sincere.

"I mean, you can stay on the couch. That's all."

"Lorna, honestly! After everything?" Franny threw up her arms.

She knew Franny was right. But the way her father looked at her... "I ... I just can't go back there, to that house. Not tonight."

Franny held her stare for a long moment, then broke. "Fine. Fine. But Vinnie, you better take care of her or I'll cut your balls off."

"She's serious, you know."

Vinnie nodded, gulping a little.

Franny wrapped her arms around Lorna. "I'm sorry."

"Me too."

With that, she watched her sister drive away into the dark, back to their home with all its secrets and lies. It wasn't fair. She could have stood there all night in the rain crushed by that guilt, but slowly Vinnie turned her around and led her into the warmth of his flat.

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**Nicky**

Time seemed to never end when Litchfield was in lockdown. Nicky lay on the cold floor next to Boo, her head no more than a foot away from where a stash of Vee’s heroin was stuffed in an air vent. All a CO had to do was bend down and they would see it there, and she and Boo would be in max for the rest of their sentence.

Thankfully, after what seemed like forever, they were called back to their bunks, where the guards were frantically doing counts. Although they weren't saying anything, she could easily guess that an inmate was missing. Her eyes drifted to Lorna's empty bunk. But she was on van duty... she tried not to imagine her escaping with the van to Christopher's house. Again.

After hours, Lorna returned with Caputo. She cowered as he said something to her in a low voice and pointed her to her bunk. As she walked past, Nicky could see her face was red and her eyes
were watering. But she couldn't say anything as they were still confined to their bunks. Whatever had happened was major. Even dinner was cancelled, and the guards gave them packets of Cheetos and chocolate bars from commissary to compensate.

Once it had gone dark, and the coast was clear, Nicky crept into Lorna's bunk. She was lying wide awake, staring at the ceiling. When Nicky sat on the edge of the bed, she bolted upright.

"Nicky," she hissed. "You can't be in here. I'm going to be in more trouble."

"More trouble? What the hell happened?" Nicky whispered.

"It was an accident. You know I'd never do anything bad on purpose, right?"

"Kid, you're starting to freak me the fuck out."

Lorna took a deep breath. "When we got back to camp, it was lockdown. We couldn't go in. And I wanted to see what the problem was. I only left the van for less than a minute, I swear. Miss Rosa must have seen the keys—"

"Oh my God."

"I tried to get her to stop, we was all running after her, but she was going so fast. She wouldn't stop."

"Well holy shit." She rubbed Lorna's arm. "But wait... the prison was already on lockdown when this happened?"

She nodded, her eyes round and full of an excitement Nicky couldn't place. "Yes. But I didn't that find out till later. Vee escaped."

Nicky exhaled. "Well. They'll put her in the SHU or max, right? Good riddance."

"No..." Lorna gripped Nicky's hands so tightly it hurt. "Something bad happened, something really, really bad."

"What?"

"When Miss Rosa was driving, she must have seen Vee on the road. She ran her over. Oh my God, she killed her. And then she killed herself."

She clapped her hands to her mouth and started to panic. Nicky was speechless, but she shook herself out of it. The guards were only metres away, and Lorna freaking out was only going to bring attention to them.

"Sssh. Sssh. Are you sure you've got this right?"

"It's not in my imagination, Nicky. Caputo was so angry. He's taken me off van duty," she wept.

Nicky stifled a laugh. "Babe, you're lucky you're not in SHU – or worse. I mean, you basically killed two people – " Lorna's eyes popped "– I mean, accidentally. And Vee, you saw what she did to Red, it's not like it's a loss to the world. Miss Rosa, she was great, but she didn't have much time left, right?"

"A few more weeks," Lorna said, a little too matter-of-factly.

"Shit."
She grabbed Nicky's hands again. "This is better, right? To go out all like Thelma and Louise, not in this dirty prison? She woulda been happier that way?"

The realisation dawned on Nicky. "Hoooly fuck. It wasn't an accident, was it? Don't even think about lying to me, Lorna!"

It was Lorna's turn to shush her. "Please don't say anything. That's the only reason they let me off, because they think it was all Miss Rosa's idea. And I cried, a lot."

Nicky buried her head into the mattress. "Argh. You're fucking crazy, you know that?"

"But you didn't see her, Nicky. She just looked so sad." She began to cry again. Nicky couldn't help but feel pity. Somehow in Lorna's twisted mind, it was the right thing to do.

"I'm not even mad at what you did. I'm mad that you didn't even think about the consequences. It's not exactly your strong suit, is it?"

Lorna rested her head in Nicky's lap, nodding. "I know. Now I have to work in custodial. I don't wanna scrub toilets. My nails..."

"You have some fucked-up priorities, kid."
When Lorna woke up, it took a while to remember she was in Vinnie's flat. Everything about the night before seemed so unreal. But he really was there, drinking filtered coffee in the kitchen when she found him. It was midday – she'd slept in hard.

"Your sister dropped off some clothes," he said, spooning more sugar into his cup.

She looked down at the grey sweats he'd lent her, practically identical to the ones she'd worn in prison. Hardly the picture of femininity. It wasn't perfect circumstances when she first met Vinnie, but at least she was somewhat presentable. She remembered his grim expression in the police station. 

_You should have seen the state she was in._

He gestured at a bag from Denny's on the counter. "She said I have to make you eat. Oh, and take these." He took out medications from the fridge.

"Thanks." She made a start on the pancakes, which by now were stone cold and greasy. She choked down a couple of bites.

"Do those work?" Vinnie asked, raising a skeptical eyebrow.

"Yeah. They stop me feeling sad all the time."

"I heard you crying in your sleep."

"Well, it's an upgrade from screaming," she half-joked.

He didn't return her smile. "I can't stop thinking about you in there. They said you tried to kill yourself."

She took a deep breath. "Losing Carmine broke me. I don't think I was that together in the first place."

He rested his elbows on the counter and rubbed his temples. Whatever he was about to say was clearly difficult.

"You need to understand, Lorna, you were never honest with me about your problems when we got together. I'm not saying you meant to trick me. But I wonder ... if the woman I fell in love with ever really existed... I'm going to look into places you can stay. There might be services for people, you
She nodded, trying desperately to seem fine. This was usually when she got angry or defensive, but his words crushed her self-worth in the ground. When he left for work she got rid of the pancakes and the pills. He didn't love her anymore so she was unlovable. Worthless. Nothing.

For next few days Lorna moved around Vinnie's flat like a ghost. When he was at work she cried and when he came home she pretended to sleep. Maybe if she got out of his way, he wouldn't hate her so much.

He didn't talk, only to wake her for more takeaway food and medications. She didn't have an appetite and he didn't care to notice. He kept promising to sort out a place at a women's refuge, but spent most of his free time playing video games. A fantasy world. Lorna could see he was trying to escape.

Early on a Tuesday morning, she woke up to Franny's text reminder of her therapy appointment. She didn't trust herself to not get lost again, so she softly knocked on Vinnie's bedroom door. He didn't answer, so she opened it. She gasped at the state of his room. The rest of the house was pretty messy, but this was a bomb site. There wasn't an inch of floor not covered in dirty clothes, beer cans, moving boxes.

Vinnie was snoring. Carefully she approached the boxes and opened one. At first she thought it was just linen he hadn't unpacked. But as she dug beneath a white fluffy blanket, her hand brushed over tiny sleeves, tiny buttons. Baby clothes. She took out a bright yellow romper, held it to her face and breathed deeply.

"Lorna?"

"Vinnie!" She jumped. He was sitting up in bed watching her. She'd been so entranced she didn't realise he stopped snoring.

"What are doing?" He rubbed his eyes.

She threw the romper back in the box and closed it. "I'm sorry. I have a therapy appointment in an hour. If I miss it, I'll violate my probation."

He groaned and threw back the covers. She blushed – he was only wearing boxers.

Vinnie waited in the car park during therapy. He watched carefully as she got back in the passenger seat. It had been a tough session. She checked her reflection in the rearview mirror and wiped away tear tracks.

"Is everything... okay?" he asked awkwardly.

"I had to tell him what happened with Franny. She was one of the last people I could trust."

"I still don't understand how your brain can just make up memories."

"Me neither." She locked eyes with him. "Sometimes I used to wonder if you were real. Because it seemed too good to be true that someone would love me. I guess it was."

He sighed and started up the car. "You're making me feel like a real asshole, you know that?"
"I'm sorry?"

"Do you think I like seeing you mope around the house all day, crying in corners? It's fucking killing me."

He turned to face the windscreen and drove out. Lorna swore she could see a glint in his eyes.

There was a splinter of hope that maybe if she was good enough, Vinnie wouldn't make her leave. She cleaned his flat from top to bottom. Not even being on custodial duty for so long had prepared her for that mess. She counted nine empty pizza boxes in the trash.

Franny left her some money, so she went to grocery store. When Vinnie got home from work, she was dressed and made up, stirring a pot of pasta putanesca. He stood at the door in bewilderment.

"I thought you might want some real Italian food," she said. "Oh, I washed, ironed and folded your clothes. They're in that chest of drawers in your bedroom... I also put those, uh, boxes away in the cupboard."

He approached the counter warily. "Lorna, what is this all about?"

"Nothing. Sit." She ladled a pile of spaghetti onto a plate and pushed it in front of him.

Reluctantly, Vinnie picked up a fork. "I don't want you to think that – holy shit, this is good –"

"Is it? It's my mother's recipe."

He shovelled mouthfuls in. "I can't tell you the last time had a homecooked meal. But Lorna... All this, it's not going to change my mind. I'm still finding you another place to live."

"I know." She fixed herself a plate. "This is just to say thank you, for everything. You didn't have to take me in at all."

"I couldn't just leave you in that house," he said through a mouthful of food. "I'm not a complete dick."

She speared an olive with her fork, twirling it back and forth. "No. You saved me. Not just the other night. I was so alone in prison. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't met you."

"Married one of the other guys you were scamming?"

"I'd never scam you, Vinnie."

He laughed. "I must be special."

It started to get easier. Well, at least, Vinnie started to make conversation in more than just grunts and sighs. He stopped mentioning alternative accommodation, but she couldn't rest. She kept herself busy with housework and cooking. She made baked ziti, lasagna, risotto, chicken parmesan, homemade pizza.

"You're going to make me fat," he said one night, sitting down to watch Real Housewives with a plate of cannoli and his fifth beer of the night. She sat on the far end of the couch, hugging her knees to her chest, watching him eat.
"You know, in a stupid way, this how I always pictured my life. Going out to make a living while my wife takes care of the house."

"Me too," she said softly. "Except there'd be a baby as well."

He put down the plate and looked at her unflinchingly for the first time since they'd reunited. "I'm sorry. I know I left you, but you left me when I needed you. You weren't there, it was just this illness. We never got to grieve."

A tear glided down his cheek. She inched closer to him. "I miss him, too. Everyone keeps saying it's gonna get better but I'm in pain all the time. It's like living with a knife in your chest and nobody else sees it."

"I feel it," he said, placing his hand over her heart. "There's some things, Lorna, that nobody will know or understand but us."

He leaned forward to kiss her. He pressed her body into the couch, running his hands through her hair, under her shirt, skimming past her scar towards the waistband of her trousers –

"Stop!" She wriggled away.

Vinnie was baffled. "What's wrong? Isn't this what you want?"

She nodded. "Yes... but not like this. Not when you don't love me."

He touched her cheek, tears rolling onto his hand. "I do love you."

"You do?"

"Of course I love you."

She felt a rush of adrenaline take over her body. She was so despicable and depressed ever since he'd made that comment that the words were like a drug hit.

"I'm sorry I said I didn't. I tried to put my feelings for you in a box, but it's like the baby stuff, I can't throw what we had away. I love you so much. I'm just scared of you sometimes. I don't know how to deal with you when this thing takes over, it's like you're possessed. Lorna, if you promised never to let it get like that again, you could –"

"What?"

"Stay. Not on the couch... but as my wife."

He kissed her again, but she broke away. "Vinnie, I can't!"

He almost laughed. "What, there's not another man, is there?"

"No." It was technically true. God, she had such a laser focus on Vinnie that Nicky practically ceased to exist. How could she do that? It was like with Christopher, when she was so obsessed the world fell out of focus. Except Vinnie wasn't running away. He loved her... at least he said so...

"So what's the problem?" Vinnie pressed on. "Baby, are you saying you don't love me no more?"

"I do love you... But I'm scared." That I'll fuck things up. That you'll leave me again. That you'll break my heart.
"Tell me what to do."

"Promise me something impossible."

Nicky

"Hey kid. How's the outside world?"

Nicky watched as Lorna fidgeted on the other side of the glass, twisting a curl of hair between her fingers. She wore a yellow dress that she kept readjusting. Either she was still getting used to civilian clothes or she was nervous as fuck.


Nicky knew that tone too well. It was the sound of lies and secrets, all dressed up in a lipsticked smile. Apart from some Hebrew she learnt for her bat mitzvah, Nicky was never good at languages. But she was fluent in Lorna.

"Well, you missed visitation last month and you haven't been answering my calls. Has something happened?"

Lorna's eyes widened. "No, honey." Nicky just raised her eyebrows. "Okay. There was an incident. But everything is fine now, I didn't wanna worry you about it."

"What kind of incident, Lorna?"

"I... Me and my father got in a fight, that's all ... and I ran away. The police got involved, it was a whole thing."

Nicky's throat closed up. Her fears about Lorna on the outside were coming true. Psych was terrible, but at least she couldn't do anything dangerous while she was locked up - for the most part. She wondered if there was some kind of rehab programme for Lorna's problems, although rehab had never helped Nicky.

"The police? Shit, what the hell did you do?"

"See, I knew you was gonna worry!"

"I do worry about you staying in a place like that."

Lorna twisted her hair tighter. "Well, you don't have to. I couldn't stay there, not after what happened. The police called Vinnie and he came for me. He's ... he's been letting me stay with him."

"Oh." Nicky felt like she had been kicked in the gut. Was that why Lorna had been giving her radio silence, because the world's biggest flake had finally come to his senses? Surely, not after everything...

Lorna took a deep breath. "He wants us to try again. Properly, this time. Out of prison."

Nicky gripped the telephone so tight her hand hurt. Her first instinct was to rage, but she knew Lorna. She was never less than a moment way from a fit of rage herself, especially when provoked. If they started screaming at each other, visitation would be over, and that couldn't happen until Nicky
had talked Lorna out of even the idea of getting back together with that scumbag.

"Lorna, don't you remember how he treated you? He left you when you were going through the hardest time of your life."

"The thing is, he explained it and I wasn't there for him either, Nicky," Lorna was trying to reason. "I've been so selfish."

"No. You've been sick."

"He promises that if I get better, he'll never leave me again."

"And what if you don't? What if you have another breakdown? Is he just going to leave you high and dry?"

"You don't think I'll ever get better?" Lorna's eyes were shining.

"That's not what I'm saying... Babe, don't you see how fucked up it is what he's asking of you?"

She shook her head. "He made me realise – there's things we've shared that nobody else will."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "As opposed to you and I, who've shared nothing?"

"We got married. We had a baby!"

There it was. The sad truth that Nicky could no longer avoid. All Lorna’s most prized values, the objects of her fantasies - traditional marriage, kids - were things Nicky could never give her. But Vinnie could.

Straight girls. They'll fuck you up every time.

"I see." The calm left Nicky's voice. "You'd rather build a life with an asshole you barely know, who has abandoned you multiple times, just so you can fulfil some kind of Stepford-wife, white picket fence bullshit, fucking fantasy fairy-tale bullshit."

Lorna looked stricken. "See, this is why I couldn't tell you. You're making me confused, you always make me confused –"

"You're confused?" Nicky scoffed. "What about the plans we made? What about waiting for me? Did you mean any of that, or were you just waiting for the next fuckboy to come along?"

"No! I did mean it. I swear, I did. I still do." Lorna buried her head in her hands. "I don't know what to do. Nicky, tell me what to do. Just tell me what to do and I'll do it."

She sounded so sincere that Nicky was certain she'd obey anything she said. Leave Vinnie. Wait for me. Face reality for once in your life and see what's in front of you.

But she didn't say any of that. Instead she rose from her seat. "If I have to tell you that Lorna, then there's nothing more to talk about."

"Wait!" Lorna tapped on the glass. "Nicky, don't go!"

One question forced Nicky back down. She looked Lorna straight in the eyes. "Just answer me one question, kid. Do you love him?"

She could hear her ragged breaths through the phone line. It was a moment before Lorna could
answer. "Yes. But... I love you, too."

The pain in Nicky's gut radiated to her chest. She wanted to be sick. The words she'd been fighting surged to her throat in a breathless rant.

"You know what the fucking sad thing is? I know you're telling the truth. You fall in love easy. Hell, you think you're marrying a guy after one date. Me, I started to think my heart was so f*cked up from my parents and the drugs and shit that I couldn't love. Shit, I would always think how lucky we were to find each other in this hell hole. To have someone that makes you laugh and gives you a reason to get through the goddamn day. I actually started to feel special. What an idiot, right? I knew it. I knew it when you got married months after I went to max, just down the fucking road, Lorna. I tried to blame it on insanity, hey, it happens. But now it's clear. I'm not special at all. I'm just another person you fell in love with. But baby, I only loved one."

"Nicky..."

"And I can't do it anymore. The lies, the empty promises. You can't just do whatever the f*ck you want and think it's going to be okay, that I'll forgive you. Lorna, I put you back together so many times. I gave you everything in my f*cked-up heart and you broke it and you don't even seem to care. Well, this is the last time. I won't be here to pick up the pieces when Vinnie leaves you for being a psycho. I never want to see you again."

"Nicky!"

Nicky stood up, ignoring Lorna's tear-streaked face, walking away from visitation as she made frenzied raps on the plexiglass. Whatever patience, whatever pity she had left was gone. If Lorna could hurt her and feel nothing, so could she. *Two can play at that game.*

Chapter End Notes

This HURT to write lol. If you're still here on this emotional rollercoaster of angst please comment below!
Lorna tries to make amends, but has the damage been done?

Lorna

Nobody could deny being with Vinnie was everything she ever wanted. He made her happy. And somehow, although it was almost unbelievable, she was making him happy, too. The light was back in his eyes. He was right – they could help each other heal. They fit. She gave him a real home and he gave her real love. Even if he did have to reassure her of that every day.

Because they'd never known each other out of prison, it was like a brand new relationship. Date nights, romantic movies on the couch, meeting his friends. Even sleeping together was like the first time. After everything that happened, it didn't seem right for it to be so easy.

She couldn't suppress the gnawing feeling in her stomach. That queasy ache, like she'd swallowed a rock. It had been growing ever since she last saw Nicky.

Nicky was sticking to her guns. All their previous fights had been resolved in a few days. The worst was when Nicky called her a "fickle-hearted whore" and Lorna froze her out until Nicky was clean again. Maybe Nicky was right to call her that. What kind of person deserts their best friend in their hour of need?

At the next visitation day, Nicky wasn't there. In fact, she'd taken Lorna off her list. She was slowly realising this wasn't going to be one of those fights that would get brushed over. Maybe if she was still in prison, but not while she was out here. Not while she was with Vinnie.

Every time she thought of Nicky she felt a pang in her stomach. She kept picturing her face, crushed as she told her I only loved one. It wasn't fair. Nothing about this was fair. Lorna didn't know how she expected Nicky to react, but not like that, never like that. She was always so tough.

The sick feeling started to affect her appetite. She did everything she could to hide it from Vinnie. They were going so well, she couldn't ruin it with her crazy. She had to be the perfect housewife and clean and cook nice meals, even if she couldn't stomach them.

Vinnie surprised her one evening. When she came home from therapy, he'd decorated the table with candles, roses and a spread of Italian food.

"Happy one year anniversary," he said, pecking her on the cheek.

"Oh my God... Vinnie." She wanted to die, just drop to the floor and disappear. "I totally forgot."
He squeezed her arm. "Don't sweat it. Prison probably screws with your timings, right?"

"Sure." *Or the fact that you destroyed Nicky is the only thing you can think of right now.*

They sat down and he piled her plate high with carbonara. She spun the strands of spaghetti around her fork about a hundred times. It smelted horribly of eggs.

"Aren't you hungry?"

"Sorry, I was just distracted by how handsome you look in the candlelight. This is so romantic." It was a lame lie, but hopefully he'd buy it. Lorna had learnt that a way to a man's heart is through his ego.

"It would be more romantic if you tried my food. C'mon, I bought a Guy Fieri cookbook just for this."

 Damn. She shovelled down the pasta, washed with white wine and prayed it stayed down as Vinnie prattled on.

"You know, I've been thinking. We never had a honeymoon. Maybe we could go somewhere when I have work off. Somewhere hot and tropical."

"Oh, like Bora Bora Bora?"

"Yeah, sounds great!"

*You mean Bora Bora?* The memory flooded in so fast she could almost picture Nicky across the table. Talking shit about honeymoons and fucking Christopher before it all descended into another fight. Another fight.

The spaghetti surged up her throat and before she could say anything she was running to the bathroom and heaving into the toilet bowl. Vinnie followed close behind and held her hair back.

"I didn't think my food was that bad," he said as she sat in a heap on the tiles.

"Oh, Vinnie. It's not your food."

He crouched down next to her. "I know. What, you think I don't notice? I never see you eat a fucking thing. You're going back to your old ways."

"I'm not trying to. I just feel so guilty," she sobbed.

"What do you have to feel guilty for?"

She wanted to tell him about Nicky but he wouldn't understand. "It's just... everything. Leaving my friends in prison, leaving Franny with my father in that horrible house and... now it's bringing up old stuff about Carmine and I don't know what to do."

He hugged her. "Sssh. All this stress is making you sick, huh? You need to tell the therapist before you hurt yourself. Remember our deal."

She nodded. "I'm sorry I'm so fucked up."

"It's alright," he sighed. "You know, it fucked me up a lot too. I only started to feel okay since you've been back. So don't leave me now, okay?"
The therapist, George, was just as concerned. No matter how much she protested she wasn't doing it on purpose it was all "past history" blah blah blah and "comorbidity" blah blah blah. He then suggested something that terrified her: that she was subconsciously trying to cope with her emotions through her eating. It wouldn't be the first time she didn't know her own mind.

She told him all about the shame that had been building over the past couple of months, about how she'd damaged all the people she loved most. He recommended that she write a letter to each person she'd hurt apologising for her actions and asking for forgiveness. If she did that, perhaps the guilt would ease off. She would try it – anything to feel better.

She sat down with Vinnie and gave him a handwritten note.

"I need to clear my conscience."

He raised his eyebrows as he read. "I'm sorry for pretending I liked jiu-jitsu. I'm sorry for lying about Christopher and making you beat him up. I'm sorry for calling you a cheater, especially with my sister." He paused. "Wait, you lied about Christopher? Who was that guy?"

"Let's just say, he's the reason I got sent to prison. Do you really wanna know? Because I'll tell you everything."

He raised his hand. "No... no. That's in the past. This is in your past, Lorna. All I care about is that you're honest with me now. So you can stop beating yourself up, yeah?"

She nodded. "There's just a few people I need to make amends with first."

Weeks passed since she sent off all the letters. Franny was the only one who responded, taking her out for coffee as a peace offering. The smell of bitter coffee and fatty milk twisted her stomach. She was meant to be getting better... Maybe deep down she didn't believe she was forgivable.

Vinnie was beginning to lose his patience, which terrified her. They had an agreement but she couldn't stop herself from slipping. She couldn't fight being sick and twisted, and he was going to leave her because of it. She already felt the distance – he spent more and more nights out with his friends.

This was one night he'd decided to spend at the sports bar instead of with her. She was too weak to argue against it. She lay on the sofa watching reruns of Will & Grace until she decided to try and eat something. She heated up some leftover lasagna. She took a small bite but the waves of nausea forced it back up. Lying down on the soothing cold floor, she waited for it to pass.

She woke up to the sound of banging. It was someone knocking on the door, rather loudly. Who the hell could that be, at this time of night? Probably Vinnie coming come drunk, perhaps he'd lost his keys. She got up dizzily and made her way to the door, opening it without checking first. She really should have checked.

Even in the darkened hall way, she knew that tall silhouette. As he stepped into the light, she started to shake. This was wrong. He shouldn't be here. She needed Vinnie.

"Christopher," she whispered. "What are you doing here?"

There was a mad glint in his blue eyes as he held up a worn piece of paper. "I got your letter. Nice to
know you still can't follow a restraining order."

"It was just an apology, to say sorry for everything," she said breathlessly. She was going to be sick, any second –

"You know what I think of that?" He crumpled the paper into a ball and threw it at her face. "I can't believe you got out early. How did you do that, huh? What lies did you tell this time?"

She took a step backwards, reaching for the doorknob. "I think you should go."

He forced his way onto the threshold. "Why? You're the one who initiated contact. You're the one who won't leave me or my family alone, no matter how many times I beg you or threaten you, you just keep doing it."

"Christopher, you're scaring me now." Her eyes darted towards the exit.

He laughed. "I'm scaring you! You fucking terrorised me for years!"

"I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry for all that stuff, I was messed up, I didn't know what I was doing. I can't believe I did that to you, I feel terrible –"

"SHUT UP!"

He struck her so hard that she fell to the floor. Before she could crawl away, he dug his boot into her ribcage and the pain was so blinding she couldn't scream. Suddenly he was forcing his weight on top of her, unflinching as she tried to fight him off with all her strength.

"Please don't do this."

"What? Isn't this what you wanted? You asked for it."

Nicky

Shock and anger gave way to sadness pretty easily. Lorna wasn’t the only one with abandonment issues after all. The definitive answer that Lorna was staying Vinnie was just another rejection, another piece of evidence that Nicky was unworthy of love. So when she woke up the next morning feeling depressed, she just didn’t see the point in staying sober anymore. Who was she doing it for? It certainly wasn’t for herself.

Finding heroin was easy in max. Even after Alex cut off her supply, there were always other inroads - corrupt COs, sachets of white powder hidden expertly in the cleaning supplies. All she had to do was ask Daya when she was alone. She did not have the time or temperament to deal with Daddy.

Daya pursed her lips. “No. You caused enough trouble last time. COs were crawling the place after that.”

“Well, that won’t happen again.”

”Ain’t you getting out in a few months anyway? I thought you wanted to stay clean.”

It was a sign, from God or the Universe or whatever. You can still back out, Nicky. You don’t need to do this.
"Are you going to give me life advice, Dr Phil, or are you going to sell me some heroin?"

Daya wasn’t wrong about the place crawling with guards. So Nicky waited until she was on custodial duty and slipped into the utility closet in the laundry. After all, it was the choice location for attempted suicide by overdose. She figured nobody would miss her if she disappeared for a few hours or a few hundred.

She opened the packet of white powder and sniffed at it, rubbing a small amount between her fingers. She could tell just by the consistency that it was the good shit. She stifled a laugh at that. *Junkie: expert level.*

She was so transfixed that she mustn’t have heard the closet door open. So when McCullough cleared her throat sharply she jumped and nearly spilt the powder everywhere.

“Fuck!”

McCullough just looked at the packet and raised an eyebrow.

"Well, shit. Caught me, er, white-handed. But at least let me get a little high before you strip me of my basic rights and stick me in the SHU."

"I think we’re past that, don’t you?" McCullough closed the door behind her.

“You’re not going to get me in trouble?”

"You seem to be doing a pretty good job of that yourself."

Nicky knocked her head back against the wall. “Alright, if you’re going to lecture me, I’d rather you put me in the SHU. Let’s just get it over with.”

McCullough crouched down so they were at eye level. “I’m not going to lecture you. I’m just wondering what could have happened that you would throw away your entire future for one stupid hit.”

“What future?” Nicky spat. “This art sh*t is just a fucking fantasy. It all was. I was stupid to let myself believe I could have a normal life.”

The guard rolled her eyes to heaven. "Has this got to do this your girlfriend? Morello?"

"Ohoho. Trust me. She is *not* my girlfriend."

McCullough shrugged. “Marriage does tend to complicate things. Especially when she’s married to somebody else.”

"They barely even know each other!” Nicky felt the pain radiate white-hot through her chest again. “He doesn’t love her like I do.”

"Maybe that’s not for you to decide.” McCullough reached into her pocket, pulling out an envelope. “This came through the mail today. It’s from her.”

"You went through my mail?"

“Don’t worry, you’re not special. We have orders to filter all the mail to block any correspondence from Chapman. She’s on a real crusade out there.”
Nicky blew out her cheeks. “Wow. Poor Alex.”

“So... do you want to read it?”

She handed the envelope to Nicky. Although it was small, it felt heavy, like there was a lot of paper stuffed inside. With a deep breath, Nicky broke the seal and unfolded the first sheet.

"Dear Nicky. I don’t know where to begin, except to say how sorry I am. It hurts me so much to think about what I’ve done and believe me I never ever wanted to do that. I feel so guilty and although I know I probably don’t deserve forgiveness -“

Nicky stopped reading.

"What’s wrong?”

"It’s ... it's all crap,” Nicky laughed. “Read this shit. I, I, I, I, I. It's all about her. She’s not sorry at all. She just wants me to soothe her conscience. Well, fuck that.”

“Fuck that!” McCullough grinned.

"I was ready to relapse into an oblivion because of her. Can you believe that? I thought my life wasn’t worth living without her. Meanwhile, she’s out there, playing house with some random guy, expecting me to forgive her. Fuck that.”

"Fuck that!”

Nicky ripped the envelope into pieces. “Well, I am not spending another second worrying about her. She can fuck up her own life for all I care. I have to worry about mine.”

She stood up and tipped the powder down the sink. She watched as hundreds of dollars literally went down the drain and gave a shaky smile.

McCullough put a hand on her shoulder. “It’s your future. The choice has always been yours.”

Nicky turned around to face her. “It’s my choice.”

And then she was kissing the CO and running her hands through her long blonde hair and unbuttoning her stiff ironed shirt. McCullough wasn’t fighting her off, she was going for it, pawing under Nicky’s prison-issue hoodie. It was all so easy. And Nicky didn’t feel bad about it one bit.
Nicky and Lorna find their pasts catching up with them.

Lorna

Lorna was watching what was happening to her and she couldn't stop it.

Christopher was just too strong and too angry. She tried to think. How do you fight off an attacker? She recalled a lesson from prison safety class: find their weak spot. She jabbed her fingernails into his eyes.

"Argh!"

Quickly he grabbed her hand and twisted it back. There was a sickening snap. She fell back in shock. There was nothing she could do to fight him off. Her dress tore like tissue paper in his hands. And then his hands were around her neck.

_I swear to God if you come near me, or my family, or my wife again, ever, I will kill you. With my bare fucking hands, I will choke you until you are dead._

She squeezed her eyes shut –

"Get the fuck off her."

Christopher's weight was still pressing on top of her, but he'd stopped moving. She looked up. Vinnie was standing behind Christopher. He had a gun pointed to his head.

"Move or I'll shoot!"

Where the _fuck_ did he get a gun? Before she could think about it, Vinnie reached back and thwacked Christopher in the head with the magazine grip. He keeled to the side, and they finally recognised each other.

"It's you," said Vinnie.

"It's you..." Christopher clambered backwards as Vinnie raised the gun again. "What the fuck –"

"Give me one reason why I shouldn't shoot you!"

"Vinnie, no," Lorna gasped. She tried to sit up but pain spiked through her arm. "Just let him go!"

Vinnie kept the gun raised at Christopher's head. "You're going to regret the day you laid a finger on my wife."
"Your wife?" Christopher stared at both of them in horror. "Oh my God, you're in it together. It all makes sense. You sent him to do your dirty work."

"You started it."

"No, I didn't. You're just as psychotic as her..." Christopher seemed to take in Vinnie's baffled expression. "Fuck. You really don't know, do you?"

"Know what? Know what?!"

"Let me give you some advice, man to man. Cut your losses. Run for the hills. Before it's too late."

Vinnie lowered his gun in confusion, giving Christopher the opportunity to dart towards the open door. For a moment, Vinnie seemed to debate going after him, but knelt down next to Lorna instead.

"Hey, you okay?"

"Yeah," she said as she passed out.

Lorna woke up in a small bright room. She first saw Vinnie sitting in a chair next to her bed, his head lowered. She tried reaching out but one of her arms was attached to a drip; the other was in a cardboard splint.

He noticed her waking up and pressed the call button. "Hey. Don't move."

"What happened?" Suddenly it all rushed back. "Oh my God. Christopher. Oh my God. You had a gun!"

Vinnie gently pushed her hair out of her face. "It's lucky I did. But don't worry. The police are coming. He's never gonna hurt you again."

"No!" She flew forward, pain flaring in her chest. "Ow. No, you can't let them know it was Christopher."

"Look at what he's done. That animal needs to be locked up."

She grabbed Vinnie's arm with her good hand. "You don't understand. I'm the one who's gonna be locked up. Again."

He smiled reassuringly. "Why would you be locked up?"

"I broke the restraining order."

He loosened her grip on his arm. "Restraining order?"

"I know I shouldn't have wrote to him but I was just trying to say sorry. I never thought he'd act like that. I guess I really don't know him."

"Hold up. I still don't understand. Why was he in our home? Why was he attacking you? Who is he?"

"He was my fiancé." She stopped herself. "No... He... He wasn't. I thought he was but... I got it fucked up in my head, somehow. The truth is he never wanted me." She exhaled long and deep. "Wow. It's taken years of prison time and months of therapy to say that."
Vinnie wasn't impressed. Maybe Nicky would have felt proud of her breakthrough, but there was so much that Vinnie didn't know. So much he wasn't there for.

But now, he seemed to be piecing things together. "You said he was the reason you went to jail... I'm guessing that wasn't mail fraud."

"Aggravated stalking."

He got up and started pacing around the room. His face went from ashen to bright red. "But you... He... I went to his house! We beat him up."

"I didn't ask you to do that-""

"Bullshit!" He spat. "That's bullshit and you know it. You made me your accomplice. You're just a goddamn criminal."

The way he said it and the way he looked at her, it was as if he'd never before realised that's what she was until this moment. Like when Nicky found out the truth about Christopher. There was nowhere to hide; he was looking through her skin and bones and into the mire of her soul.

"I'm sorry," she sobbed.

At that moment, the doctor walked in. Lorna quickly wiped her face. She was looking at her and Vinnie strangely.

"Hello, Mrs Muccio. How are you feeling?"

"Okay. A little sore." She tried to catch Vinnie's eye, to will him to just act normal, but Vinnie was looking everywhere else but her. What if he told them about Christopher, just to get revenge?

"Your husband says you were attacked in your home."

"Yes. But I didn't see who it was. He hit me from behind."

"Right." She looked over at Vinnie again. "Would you like me to examine you alone?"

"No, that's okay. Vinnie can stay... if he wants."

He didn't move, but it seemed like he was just too emotional to process anything that was happening. The doctor lifted her hospital gown and pressed where dark purple bruises had sprung up like flowers.

"OW! Fuck."

"As I suspected, fractured ribs. There's not much we can do for that, but we'll get your wrist fitted for a cast."

"And then I can go home?"

She lowered the gown. "After a couple more checks. You were quite dehydrated when you came in. Have you been sick?"

"That's one word for it," Vinnie scoffed.

The doctor scowled. "Mr. Muccio, why don't you go and get yourself a coffee? It's been a long night."
Vinnie shrugged and left without protest, the door slamming behind him. Lorna wouldn't be surprised if he never came back.

"Now we can talk with just the two of us," said the doctor with a smile. "It must be scary to be attacked in your home like that. You say you didn't see who did it?"

Lorna shook her head.

"You know, if something like that happened to me, my husband would be worried sick. Forgive me if this is intrusive, but yours seems quite hostile."

She sighed. "I probably deserve it."

"No, you don't. And you don't have to cover for him either."

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs Muccio, I see a lot of women come here in the same condition, after 'falling down the stairs' or a 'home invasion'. And they all have one thing in common: partners they're afraid of."

"What?" She laughed. "I'm not afraid of Vinnie. Wait, you think he had something to do with this? He would never hurt me."

"So there's nothing you need to tell us? Nothing you're afraid to tell your husband?"

"No!" Lorna was getting frustrated.

The doctor looked at her clipboard. "We did a blood test when you were admitted, standard procedure... We know you're pregnant."

"But I'm not."

"Oh." She sat down in the chair next to the bed. "So you don't know?"

She shook her head wildly. "But that's not possible. We haven't been trying – I can't be. Do the test again."

"I'm sorry, but it's a definite positive. If you've been throwing up, it's probably due to morning sickness. When was your last cycle?"

She couldn't answer. She didn't know. The past months were such a blur. Maybe if she missed a period it was just because she was so riddled with anxiety since her fight with Nicky. The thought never even crossed her mind. There was no way... no way she could carry a baby through that. And yet the doctor was showing her the evidence in hard copy. Pregnant.

The panic built in her chest, pushing against her broken ribs. She didn't know what to do. All she knew was that she couldn't do it again.

Hours later, Vinnie returned with a paper cup of coffee and a Snickers. The police had already interviewed her (she stuck to her story and prayed they wouldn't check CCTV). The doctors had finished their checks and wrapped her arm in stiff plaster. The mild painkiller they'd given her was not doing its job.

"Don't think because I came back that I'm not mad at you. I don't know what to do with you, Lorna."
I think I should just call your sister and let her deal with it."

Finally he noticed her shaking. "What is it? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Even though her mind was screaming, she must have stopped talking because Vinnie gave a half-annoyed, half-worried sigh. "Well? Tell me. I'm not in the mood for this, Lorna."

"We're in trouble," she whispered.

"What? If this is to do with Christopher, I had no idea what I was getting into –"

"I'm pregnant."

He started turning pink again. "Seriously. After everything we've been through, you're really gonna lie about that?"

For the first time in a long time, she was angry at Vinnie. "After everything we've been through, how could you think I'd lie about that?"

"I got no idea what to think!"

"It don't matter what you think anyway 'cause I'm getting rid of it."

He froze. "Wait. You're really serious, aren't you? You – you can't get rid of it."

"I can do what I want. It's my body."

"I get a say too! No, I won't let you."

"Why would you wanna have a baby with me, Vinnie? You hate me."

He sighed, sinking down on the mattress. "I don't hate you, Lorna. I'm just pissed at you. You know there's a difference, right?"

In her world, there wasn't. Love or hate. Infatuation or abandonment. Blessing or tragedy.

"But Vinnie, I can't. I can't do this again. This can't be happening." She doubled over crying, her ribs aching. "I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't--"

"Okay, calm down. Breathe, will you?" He placed a steadying hand on her chest. "Okay, so this is unexpected. But maybe it's a good thing. Maybe this is like our second chance?"

As he pulled her into an embrace that hurt her chest, he didn't know the dark thoughts that were spiralling out of control in her head.

Nicky

Flaca and Cindy stared at Nicky as she plonked down her breakfast tray in front of them. She gave them a wary smile, as if to say, what?

"Hey guys."
"She can talk. Baruch Hashem! It's a miracle," exclaimed Cindy. She emphatically raised her spoon, splattering powdered eggs on the table.

"What are you talking about?"

"Um, duh." Flaca pursed her lips. "You ain't said a word to us in weeks. Everyone says you're on drugs again."

Nicky twinged at that. Of course they would think so. She just hoped the rumour hadn't spread to Red, but who was she kidding. Red knows all.

"I'm not on drugs. Not unless you count the amount of sugar in this imitation maple syrup."

"Well, whatever you were on, it made you an asshole to be around."

She sighed. "I'm sorry, okay. I don't mean to be an asshole, it just comes naturally."

Cindy pointed a fork at her. "So, what's changed?"

"I guess I just realised that I've got six months left in here and I'm gonna make it count."

"Ohhh. I get it. You can't wait to see your prison boo," she replied with a wink.

Nicky remembered why she was an asshole. "I don't have a 'boo'. Is that all anyone thinks about? I'm happy for me. Just me."

Flaca gave a nod of appreciation. "Bitch is right. This is our future. When I get out, I'm gonna find Maritza and start our channel again. We gonna get that Youtube money."

"I'm going to find me a nice synagogue and join a choir," said Cindy. "What about you, Nichols?"

The truth was, Nicky didn't really know. But what she did know was that once she walked out of those prison doors, she would leave a part of her behind forever. No more drugs, no more loveless parents, nothing to remind her of her old life.

That was the only way she could find freedom.

Unfortunately, while she was still in prison, she was constantly reminded of past pain. She got through it by doing more drawings for McCullough, who she also enjoyed a casual sex thing with. But she couldn't avoid Red and Alex when they walked up to her in the courtyard, brandishing letters in familiar cursive.

"Did you get one too?" asked Red.

Nicky's eyes rolled to the heavens and they took that as a yes.

"I didn't even know she did half the shit she's apologising for," said Alex.

Red nodded, frowning. "I should have known she took my lipstick."

"So?" Alex nudged Nicky. "What did yours say?"

"I don't know."
"Spill, Nichols."

"I don't know because it's in the trash."

Alex groaned. "Don't tell me you two are fighting again. You're worse than me and Piper."

Red shook her head, because nobody bickered more than Alex and Piper, even when one of them was on the outside.

"Nope," said Nicky. "You have to have a relationship with someone to fight with them."

She locked eyes with Red, who gave her a sympathetic head tilt. But Alex was still banging on.

"Come on. It's only a matter of time before she needs a shoulder to cry on and you're so blinded by lust that you forget everything she's done."

"Not this time. I've taken her off my visitor's list."

"Shit. It's that bad?"

Nicky took a cleansing breath. "It's not bad, Alex. It's like they say in NA. I'm removing all toxins from my life."

Alex was stunned silent. Red hooked Nicky under the elbow and pulled her to a quiet corner.

"Nicky, are you okay?"

"I'm great!" She plastered on a smile. "I just wish people would stop asking that."

The older woman frowned. "What happened? The last time we spoke, you and Lorna were, well, speaking."

"Can I ask you one question? When Lorna asked you to witness her wedding, why did you say yes?"

"My daughter, is that what this is all about? Is she back with Vince?"

"Answer the goddamn question."

"What do you want me to say? She was happy. It was a relief after how miserable she'd been. You don't know because you weren't there."

"You're right, I wasn't there. Apparently nobody else was either. I mean, where the fuck was everyone? Nobody in our so-called family thought to step in and say, hey Lorna, maybe don't marry a stranger?"

"She can make her own decisions, she's a grown woman."

"No, she's not. No sane person does that!"

Red leaned in to stroke her face. "Nicky, you know as well as I do that I could be the most powerful person in this prison and I'm still not going to change that girl's mind."

Nicky shrugged her off. She knew what Red was saying was true, but it still hurt. "You could have at least tried. Did you even think about me?"
At that, Red straightened up and gave Nicky a fierce look. "Yes, I thought about you. Every day I thought about you in max, wondering how you would survive. And I promised myself that if you ever came back, I would save you from yourself this time. Maybe that means helping you let go of a crush on a woman who'd sooner marry a stranger than be with you, Nicky. It's time to find somebody who loves you back."

Right again. Red was so annoying that way. Nicky knew at once that her anger was misplaced.

"You know what? I don’t want to spend any more energy on this. I keep trying to escape Lorna but she’s everywhere in here, like she’s haunting me beyond the grave."

“She’s not dead.”

“She is to me.” She could almost taste acid venom on her tongue. “Red, I want to spend the next six months getting ready for my release. Will you help me?”

“Of course, Nicky. It’s just a shame we can’t spend more time together.”

Nicky had a lightbulb moment. “Hold that thought.”

Nicky waited until the coast was clear to approach McCullough. “Hey, I think I heard rats in the utility closet.”

“Rats, you say?” McCullough smiled. “We can’t have that. Show me, inmate.”

They barely waited until the door was closed before kissing each other. You could almost forget they were crammed in a dark, musty closet that smelled like cleaning chemicals and rat droppings.

“Say my name,” sighed McCullough.

Nicky laughed. “I don’t know it!”

She blushed. “Oh. It’s Artesian. My parents named me after a well. Strangely, that's not the biggest reason why I hate them.”

“Hey, it couldn’t be worse than Nicole Nichols.” Nicky stroked the CO’s thigh. “I like Artesian.”

“I like you. Sorry, that was really forward. I just see you, Nicky. You have a big heart.”

“Well, my heart is slightly bigger from scar tissue,” Nicky joked.

“I mean it. I didn’t think I’d ever find a decent human being in this prison after the riots. I saw how you helped your friend and it gave me hope that maybe I could rise above my anger, too.”

Nicky raised her hands. “Could we not talk about, you know –“

“Oh! Of course. You got it.” She mimed zipping her lips.

“McCullough – I mean, Artesian. There’s something I need to ask you. A favour.”

“What?”
Nicky swung the net bag containing her pillow, pyjamas and toiletries onto her new bunk. She had only a minute to survey her new surroundings before she was interrupted by a presence at the cell door.

"Nicky? What the hell are you doing in here?" Red adjusted her glasses.

"That's no way to talk to your new bunkie," said Nicky, gesturing at her new blue uniform.

"What?" Red grabbed her round the shoulders. "How can you change blocks? What did you do?"

"Stop worrying! You're not the only one who knows how to pull strings."

"So you bribed Luschek, did you?" Nicky didn't correct her. Red would box her around the ears if she knew she was fooling around with a guard. "My Nicky, are you really staying with me?"

"For the next six months, I am all yours."

Red hugged her tight. Nicky grinned big, her first authentic smile in a long time.

Chapter End Notes

I did it. I finally gave Nicky a break. But I had to destroy Lorna to create balance in the universe. LOL but really, I need to bring them back together. I'm just trying to figure it out.
Chapter Summary

Nicky gets much-needed time with Red. Lorna meanwhile isn't excited about her situation.

Lorna

Lorna was so numb she barely registered the cold ultrasound gel on her belly. She was vaguely aware of Vinnie holding her hand as the fuzzy image came onscreen. Words danced around her ears... "completely normal"... "ten weeks"... They sent her home with a prescription for an anti-nausea drug and prenatal vitamins.

The flat was still in disarray when they returned. There were smudges of blood on the ground from the fight. Somewhere, hidden in one of these rooms, was a gun Vinnie had never told her about. She would instantly violate her probation if the police found it.

Still, she wasn't in the position to be asking questions.

"We still need to talk about what happened," Vinnie sighed. "When were you going to tell me about Christopher?"

She shuffled her feet. "You said you didn't wanna know."

"That was before I found out you got me involved in your crimes. I mean, stalking?"

She was too tired, too shocked to deflect.

"If you're really curious, I threatened him, too. And his family. I put a bomb under his girlfriend's car. Lucky I'm not great at science or I would've been in prison way longer."

Vinnie's mouth fell open. He didn't speak. Maybe she'd finally succeeded in pushing him away, just like everyone else.

She gingerly began to move. "I'm tired." She grabbed a throw blanket with her good arm and set it on the couch.

"No..." He stopped her. "You take the bed. I'll take the couch."

She would have stayed in bed all day, slept forever, if nausea didn't send her running for the bathroom. The realisation came flooding back – there was a baby holding her body hostage.

Vinnie found her retching miserably into the toilet bowl, each wave stabbing her ribcage. He passed her a glass of water.
"Here, you need to stay hydrated for the baby," he said as she took the smallest sip. His tone towards her had done a 180 since the night before. "Were you this sick last time?"

She'd saved most of her complaining for Nicky. After he left her the first time, she actively tried to keep things light and uncomplicated. It seemed like a cruel joke now.

"It's even worse than last time. I don't know how I didn't spot it... guess I've been distracted. Oh God..."

He held her hair back as she was sick again and handed her a tablet. It took all her willpower to swallow it down.

"Gee, now I know why you're not excited," he remarked.

She looked at him incredulously. He didn't know. He couldn't be further from the truth.

"What are we doing, Vinnie? You really wanna do this? With me?"

He leant against the sink. "I was up all night thinking... Only a crazy person would stick around. I guess that makes me crazy."

"That makes two of us."

Vinnie knelt down to her level. "I'm not saying what you did was okay. But I know you're never gonna do it again. You ain't a criminal no more. You're a wife and a mother. We have a family to think about."

She forced a smile as he helped her up. "Vinnie, can you do something for me?"

"What?"

"You gotta stop wearing that cologne. It's making you repulsive."

He sniffed himself self-consciously. "If it helps?"

Vinnie was actually more than helpful. He'd finally found his motivation. Every moment he was home he was preparing balanced meals and tracking every symptom. It was sweet, if slightly suffocating. When the morning sickness finally wore off, he still encouraged her to take it easy. Unlike prison, she could actually spend all day resting instead of mopping floors.

He was eager to announce it to their families but she begged him to wait. She wasn't sure how much longer she could put it off, but every time he tried to argue, she brought up her stress levels and he backed down. She wished she felt bad manipulating her husband, but she just didn't.

He was at work when the door bell rang. Immediately her heart started thumping. Any unexpected visitor left her terrified after Christopher. She pulled the duvet over her head as they rang and rang.

"Lorna? Vince? It's Francine."

Lorna threw back the blankets and went to open the door, trying to stop her hands shaking. "Sorry, Franny. Come in."

"Were you asleep?" Franny eyed her baggy pyjamas. "It's the middle of the day."
"What are you doing here?" Lorna deflected, taking a seat on the couch.

Franny joined her. "I ain't seen you in forever. Seriously, when was the last time you left the house?"

She didn't want to explain that the reason she'd been putting off any visits was because her arm had been in a cast. She didn't want Franny to worry but more importantly she couldn't face the lecture about breaking the restraining order.

"Lorn, I know you. There's something you ain't telling me."

She couldn't keep it up. Lorna grabbed Franny's hand and laid it on her small but unmistakable three-month bump.

"You're not?"

"Yup."

"Oh my God!" Franny's eyes widened and for a moment she didn't know how to react. "That was quick?"

"It wasn't planned," said Lorna flatly.

"Still... That's great news. Is Vinnie happy?"

"Yes, he's very excited."

"But you're not."

Lorna burst into tears. Of course her sister could see right through her, see what a wretched person she was. She cried in shame as Franny held her close.

"Sssh. It's okay. You can tell me. Don't you wanna have a baby with Vinnie? Because there are things you can do, there are options."

Lorna pulled away, tears still streaming. "It's – it's not that I don't want it. It's that I can't want it."

"I don't understand."

"I can't want it because it's all gonna go wrong."

"How do you know?"

"It's me, Franny. It always goes wrong."

Franny pulled her into her arms again. "Sweetheart, you're just scared because of what happened last time. I can understand that. But this time is totally different. You're here. You got everyone looking after you."

"But what if I can't be happy? What if I jinx it?"

Franny smiled. "Lorna, you ain't that powerful. If that's the only reason you're not happy, you gotta stop thinking like that. I know you're just trying to protect yourself but... A life afraid to love ain't much of a life."

Lorna straightened up. Somehow her sister's words had snuck through the iron gates she'd built around herself.
"So you gotta give yourself – and Vinnie – a break. Hey, what do you say we go clothes shopping in Manhattan, like old times? That always cheers you up."

"I don't know, Franny... Subways and thugs and sewer rats everywhere. It's not safe."

"Neither is shutting yourself in and lying in bed all day. Stressing ain't good for you or the baby. Come on, you'll be needing new clothes soon, right?"

Franny grinned at her expectantly.

"Only if it's a short trip..."

In twenty minutes, she'd showered and dressed and had left a note for Vinnie saying she was going shopping with her sister.

Nicky

Nicky couldn't have been more grateful to McCullough (or should she call her Artesian now?). The CO had stuck her neck out for her and now Nicky could spend precious time with her family. It was still prison, still max, but being able to talk to Red whenever she wanted was so cherished, so what she needed after the past year of hell.

She could tell it was helping Red as well. The woman had lost her kitchen, lost her garden, and now she had an extra ten years added to her sentence. If it wasn't for the riots, she would be getting out at roughly the same time as Nicky. That guilt was hard to live with.

When Red's birthday rolled around, Nicky got her a gift (again, another favour from Artesian). Red didn't like to celebrate her birthday ("just a reminder of another year in this snake pit") and without her scarlet hair dye she was actually looking her age. So the reaction was less than happy when Nicky presented her with a parcel wrapped in brown paper.

"How many times have I told you, I want nothing that reminds me of how much I've aged in here," Red growled.

"Okay, fine." Nicky rolled her eyes. "Happy belated Hanukkah."

Red grumbled and picked apart the paper. Soon she was holding a small potted cactus in her palm.

"It's a cactus."

"I tried getting them to let us plant the garden again, but strangely they weren't interested after they found chopped up bits of guard fertilising the other one. So this is the next best thing."

Red just looked at the plant, gobsmacked.

"Plus, it will remind you of me. It's prickly but it doesn't need a lot of love to survive," Nicky joked.

Suddenly Red pulled her into a tight hug. "The past few weeks have made me so happy. What am I going to do when you're gone, Nicky?"

Nicky tried to stay strong, steer it positive. "You'll have Alex."
"Oh, come on," Red sneered. "I lost my family the moment we left that pool. You're the only one I have left."

Nicky sat down and patted the bunk for Red to join her. "Red, I'm gonna say something hard but it comes from a place of love and fear, so don't get angry, okay?"

Red nodded. "I can take it."

"The only person to blame for you being alone is yourself."

Nicky took a deep breath. Red looked stony-faced, but she wasn't screaming, so she kept going. "And it's because you care more about these stupid vendettas than you care about people."

"Nicky, that's --"

"Think back, Red. Think of how you treated Tricia after she got two strikes. Or when Gina got burned because you wanted to get back at Gloria. Or when you lured fucking Piscatella into the prison, Red?"

Red was silent.

"You're not happy unless you're seeking revenge on someone. Now it's Frieda. You never even told me what you did to her to get put in the SHU."

"I was meant to see my grandchildren," said Red quietly. "They were waiting for me, all my babies. But I didn't care. All I wanted to do was wring my hands around her neck."

Nicky stroked the older woman's hand. "You're going to lose a lot more than just your prison family if you keep acting this way."

"I know! I fucked up. Now my own sons won't even answer my calls!" Red sniffed back tears.

"Well, maybe there's another way you can reach out to them? Like send a letter?"

Red mulled it over for a second. "That's not a terrible idea."

For the rest of Red's birthday, Nicky helped Red write the letters to her sons. She kept Red on the subject of apology and edited out any bitter statements. By that evening, they were in the post with express stamps.

"It's interesting," remarked Red.

"What?"

"You hated Lorna for sending you an apology letter. Yet you had me doing the exact same thing."

Nicky became flustered. "It – it's not the same, Red. Anyway, you said not to forgive her."

"But I'm a vengeful old crow, remember," Red mused. "Well, I just hope my sons read my heartfelt apologies before they throw them in the bin."

Of course Lorna's letter hadn't actually been thrown in the bin. Nicky had kept the shredded pieces, despite herself. And the next day, as Red went to shower, she had an overwhelming urge of *fuck it* and laid them all out on the floor, attempting to jigsaw the message back together.
When she looked up, Artesian was watching her with a twisted smile.

"That's not what I think it is?"

Nicky shrugged. "Don't judge me."

Artesian nudged a scrap of paper with her boot. "Funny, the last time I remembered, you were done with this unrequited love story."

"I'm not thinking I have a chance," Nicky sighed. "I was helping Red write apologies to her sons yesterday, and it got me thinking, I should have heard out Lorna's side of the story, I mean, she's had a hard fucking time as it is."

"Do you want to know what I think, Nicky Nichols?" The guard crouched down so Nicky could see her piercing blue eyes. "You spend so much time helping others. But you never help yourself."

Nicky laughed her off, but she knew it was the truth.

"This isn't helping."

"I just want to see what she wrote. Then I'll let it go."

"Okay," said Artesian, sounding not at all convinced. "By the way, there's someone waiting for you at visitation."

"It's not...?" Nicky gestured at the letters.

"No, you took her off your list, remember?"

Nicky racked her brain for anyone else who would want to pay her a visit. "Is it... Red's family? Fuck, that was quick."

"You should go and find out," said Artesian, nodding towards the door.

Nicky gathered up all the paper fragments and stashed them under her pillow. She went to visitation, half-wary, half-excited about who was waiting for her.

But when she sat down and saw who was behind the glass, every emotion darkened to a red-black furnace of hatred in her gut. Suddenly Red's idea of revenge wasn't so bad.
You Want to Pull a Piper

Chapter Summary

Will Nicky take an opportunity to get back at Lorna?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Lorna chewed the inside of her cheek as Franny thumbed through a rack of cheap dresses. It's just shopping with your sister. What's the problem? She was pressed to remember a time when her mind wasn't clouded with anxiety and... wrongness. Even her good memories were greying round the edges.

"What about this?" Franny held up a frock.

"Yeah, sure," she replied absently.

"You didn't even look at it. What's the problem?"

"I just remembered." Lorna looked around the shop. "I've been here before. Me and the gang, we used to always steal stuff here."

"Oh my God, yeah!" Franny's eyes lit up. "Didn't they get a picture of you from the security camera and put it on the till?"

Lorna's eyes widened. "You don't think they still have it, do you?"

"Don't worry, you look way older now."

"Thanks."

"Plus your hair was real big back then. Hey, do you remember when you hid all those necklaces in your hair and they were gonna arrest you so you faked appendicitis?"

"I was a dumb kid."

"You were in your twenties," Franny laughed. "God, I should have known you'd get into shady shit. Ain't so way you could afford Dolce and Gabbana."

"Well, I'm glad you can see the funny side." Lorna moved away to another rack.

Franny grabbed her gently by the arm. "Hey, what's with you? You're kinda being a bitch."

"Um, morning sickness?" Lorna lied.

"Still? Hey, I know what will make you feel better. What do you say we go check out the designer
stores? Let's go try on some $15,000 dresses!

"I don't think so..."

"Come on, we used to have a good time together. You used to be fun."

"Well, I've changed."

Franny's face fell. "But last time I checked you were still my sister."

Fuck. Franny knew how to poke at the soft parts of her. She taught her well. "Okay but we need to be home before dark. Vinnie will be waiting."

Lorna sat down on a stool inside the dressing room and watched as Franny twirled in a sequinned designer dress worth more than both their lives.

"You should try one on too," Franny giggled, admiring her trim figure in the mirror.

"I'm pretty sure I'll fit into none of these dresses." Lorna gestured at her bump.

Franny shrugged and sat down next to her. She reached into her handbag and pulled out a box of two cinnamon rolls.

"Look what I got us. Your favourite."

"Franny, you can't eat Cinnabon dressed in Prada. Do you know what will happen if you mess up that dress?"

She waved the treat in front of her face. "Live a little."

Lorna reached out, but stopped herself. "No, I shouldn't. It's not good for the baby."

Franny rolled her eyes. "I know the only foods you can't have is sushi and soft cheese. And I ate plenty of brie before I had Tommy and he turned out fine. I mean he's a little shit, but he's healthy."

"But I have to be as healthy as possible."

"Sweetie, that's controlling talk. You are eating, aren't you?"

"Yes!" Lorna pushed her sister away. "Trust me, if you could see how much spinach Vinnie makes me eat, you wouldn't be asking me that."

"God, you two need to realise you can't do everything right. One bit of sugar ain't gonna hurt. You're freaking me out. Where's my Lorna, the one who acts first, thinks later? The one who would be excited about a new baby, not scared and sad? Is she still in there?"

Franny held the bun under Lorna's nose so she could smell the sweet cinnamon.

"Oh my God, fine." She grabbed it and bit into the soft roll. "Fuck, this is so much better than spinach."

Franny laughed and started eating. "That's more like my sister," she said through a mouthful of glaze. "You see, you got a loving husband and a baby on the way, there's no reason for you not to be happy, right?"
"Yeah... yeah." Maybe if she could convince Franny, she could convince herself, too.

There was finally some silence while they both ate and Lorna tuned in to an argument that was happening in one of the other changing rooms.

"No, no – I said a size six. Honestly, you'd think if you worked in a shop you could at least get that right," said the disembodied female.

"What a bitch," said Franny.

"Listen, do you know who I am?" The voice continued. "Do you know how much money I've spent here? And you treat me like some Long Island trash that just walked off the street."

"I'm sorry," said another voice, presumably the shop assistant. "I'll get you another one, Ms Nichols."

Nichols? It couldn't be. Before Franny could say anything, Lorna passed her the cinnamon roll and exited the changing room. Outside was an older blonde woman in a Chanel suit brandishing her finger at a shop assistant.

"Make it quick. I don't have all the time in the world."

Lorna approached the woman, her blood pumping pure adrenaline. "I'm sorry... um, are you Marka Nichols?"

The blonde looked down her nose at her. "Do I know you?"

"No. I ... I know Nicky."

She sighed. "Oh, joy, a friend of Nicole's. If you're thinking of thieving this place, I wouldn't bother. The security is tighter than it is at Walmart."

Lorna looked down at her cheap dress, now covered in crumbs. Marka turned away.

"Hey! I wasn't done talking to you." Lorna grabbed her arm.

"What do you think you're doing?" Marka looked down at Lorna's hand in disgust.

"Lorna, what's going on?" Franny was outside the dressing room, still in the designer gown. "Do you know this woman?"

If Franny wanted the old Lorna back, she was going to get her. Because there was no stopping what she was about to do.

Lorna looked Marka dead in the eyes. "I'm just passing on a message from your daughter."

Nicky

"No fucking way."

Nicky got off her seat as quickly as she had sat down, slamming the phone on the hook. He had some fucking nerve to show up here. He was practically rubbing it in her face.
"Please? Please!" Vinnie knocked on the glass, his eyes desperate.

What the hell could he want? If he was here on behalf of Lorna, to try and make amends, she was going to shut that down real quick. She slowly sat down, but only to give him an earful.

She picked up the phone. "Did Lorna send you? Because you can tell her, whatever the fuck it is you want, whatever you have to say, I could not give a flying fuck. Leave me alone."

He looked confused. "What are you mad at me for? Oh, is this because I left? Get over it, I came back and, trust me, I've put up with more than you can imagine. I'm at the end of my rope."

Vinnie had it upside down. She was mad at him for coming back. For sweeping in at the last minute after flaking out every time the going got tough. Some fucking hero.

"So, what? You've had enough? You're here to pass on the problem? I don't want her either."

He shot her another weird look. "No... I... uh, I just want you to talk to your mother."

*Huh?* "Are you on drugs?" Judging by the redness of his eyes, probably.

"Please just talk to her. If you do, maybe she'll drop the charges, please?" Vinnie pleaded.

"Vince, I have no idea what the fuck you're talking about." Some of her anger had dissipated into confusion.

He raised his eyebrows. "I thought you would have spoken to her..."

"Marka?" She spat. "We don't talk."

"Oh... well, you wouldn't know then." He let out a deep sigh. "Lorna attacked her."

"Okay, now I know you're on drugs."

But there was something honest about the way he was sitting, shaking his own head in disbelief.

"You mean to say that Lorna, as in *Lorna*, attacked *my* mother?"

"She punched her in the face. Yesterday, in some fucking store in Manhattan."

He put his head in his hands while she gaped in awe. Now that was some mental image.

"You have got to be kidding. Why would she do that?"

"You tell me! I mean you didn't...?"

"What? Ask her to? Did I put a hit out on my mother?"

"I just don't understand," Vinnie groaned. "I don't know what to do. I let her out of my sight for a minute."

For a moment, she felt almost sorry for him. Clearly he wasn't prepared for the level of batshit that came with Lorna. She wondered if he would have jumped headfirst into a relationship if he knew from the beginning. And would she have let herself get so attached?

"Please will you talk to your mother? The probation officer says if she doesn't drop the charges, they'll have to send Lorna back."
"To Litchfield?" Nicky's heart jumped.

Vinnie nodded. "You have to explain that she didn't mean it. Tell her what she's gone through, that she's –"

"– A deranged psychopath?" She took a deep breath and looked at him straight on. "Look, Vince. Trust me, Marka isn't gonna listen to anything I say. And besides, I've already spent way too much energy keeping Lorna out of trouble. It's not my problem."

She started to get up again.

"You have to try!" Vinnie yelled down the phone line. "If not for her, think of the baby."

"Baby?" What the hell did Carmine have to do with any of this? God, if he was pulling out the dead baby card just to guilt trip her...

"Lorna's pregnant," he said.

*What?* Bile lapped at the back of her throat. Nicky wanted to scream. Of course, of course she was. She couldn't wait to start a family with this nobody. She'd been planning it the second she left Litchfield, all the while lying about waiting for Nicky. She had no troubles committing to *him*.

"What the fuck?" Nicky snarled.

"I know, it was a surprise." He smiled, as if expecting congratulations.

"Jesus Christ. Do you people even know what a condom is?" She'd said that a little too loudly, because now the visitation room had fallen into a hush.

"So you'll do it?" He looked up earnestly.

Nicky slammed down the phone and stormed off, making a mental note to take him off her visitation list.

Nicky walked around the prison for a good half hour. It wasn't simply that she was propelled by her rage, she needed to talk to Red. After searching their cells, the courtyard and the showers, she finally found her in the library. Which was probably the worst location for all the swearing that was about happen, but fuck it.

"Red, you're gonna to want to sit down for this."

"I am sitting," replied Red, looking up over her glasses. "What's wrong?"

"Lorna might be coming back."

"What?" The older woman dropped her book. "Here? To Litchfield? What the fuck did she do? She didn't go after Christopher again?"

"Ha, I'd believe that more. She attacked Marka."

"What?" Red shook her head so violently her glasses fell off.

"*Lorna punched my mother in the face.*" God, the more she said it, the more absurd it sounded. But the mental image was still so good.
"I... I..." Red stuttered. "I don't understand. Why? How?"

"I think we all know why," said Nicky. "I don't know if they ran into each other or she planned it... I wouldn't put Lorna past stalking. I didn't get to ask Vince, not that it matters."

"You spoke to the husband?"

"Oh, yeah." She laughed. "Came here begging me to ask Marka to drop the charges."

"And...?" Red studied her. "Will you?"

"This is Marka we're talking about! She's not going to let this go easy. I would have to get on my hands and knees and grovel. It would be like selling my soul to the devil."

"So you want to pull a Piper," said Red, the corners of her lips twisting upwards. "Force her to come back, after she left you, betrayed you. Ah, this kind of revenge is almost poetic."

"Yeah, I was afraid you'd say that." Nicky sat down. "Here's where it gets complicated. She wouldn't be coming back alone, per se. Lorna's pregnant, Red."

Her mouth dropped open. "Again? Have those two heard of a condom?"

"That's what I said! The point is, no matter what fucked-up shit she's done, I couldn't force her to go through that in prison again. Could I?"

"This is one you have to decide on your own." Red got up, rubbing Nicky's shoulder. "But you need to be quick."

"Fuck, thanks."

Red moved off, but stopped at the doorway. "I was wrong, by the way."

Nicky turned around. "You, wrong?"

"I said that Lorna didn't love you. But you wouldn't punch someone's mother if you didn't love them."

She walked away, leaving Nicky to try and process everything that had just happened. Honestly, it was so tempting to just let Lorna lie in her own mess. That would make them even. This was her one chance to work through what the fuck had happened without Vinnie in the way. It was manipulative and mean, but she had done far worse for a far smaller high.

Chapter End Notes

Did anyone see that coming? Lol. Anyway I'm interested: what do you think Nicky would/should do?
Okay, Hitler

Chapter Summary

Nicky looks for signs to influence her decision.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lorna

Lorna sat in a cold, tiny cell in police lock-up. It was all too close for comfort. It was drawing on 24 hours since she'd been arrested, so she knew they had to make a decision soon. To let her go... or charge her. And that would mean instantly violating her probation. Back to Litchfield.

Her first reaction when her probation officer told her strangely wasn't one of fear. She instantly thought of Nicky. How would Nicky react if she got sent back? What would she think when she found out what Lorna had done? Would she forgive her?

Then she remembered the baby and it pulled her out of her haze into laser-sharp panic. She couldn't be pregnant in prison again. There was no way she could survive it.

Thank God for Franny. She was the one to call the therapist and he sat with her while she was questioned, explaining to the police about her disorder. She nodded along, as if she wouldn't have punched Marka a second time before security escorted her out of the building, crazy or not.

But all that wouldn't matter if Marka was bent on pressing charges. Where the hell was Vinnie? He had to know something had happened when she didn't come home last night, but he wasn't there when she was questioned. Maybe, said a voice that was getting louder and louder, he'd cut his losses and run. Why did that almost feel like a relief? She needed to keep Vinnie, the thought of him leaving was terrifying. And yet –

She spent so much energy hiding her true feelings from him. And it wasn't even like when she was telling everyone she was engaged to Christopher, because she believed that. Now she knew she was losing it when it was supposed to be the happiest time of her life. He couldn't understand that. He'd hate her for it.

Churning with anxiety, she didn't notice when a police officer came to unlock the gates. She looked up as the bars noisily scraped open.

"You're free to go," he said impatiently.

"Huh?" It took a second to collect her thoughts, her breaths. "Am I being charged?"

He ushered her out of the cell. "Thank your lucky stars, miss."

Lorna walked tentatively through the police station. Surely enough, at the front desk was Vinnie. She could barely look him in the eye. He looked so angry, so stressed. He unfolded his arms and pulled...
her by the elbow outside.

He waited until they were out of earshot, in the carpark, to let it all out.

"What the fuck were you thinking!" His shout echoed across the asphalt.

"I don't know – " Any excuse wouldn't be good enough.

"You're weren't thinking, were you? You just do whatever the hell you want and hope someone cleans up the mess for you."

"I'm sorry –"

"I mean, am I the only one who cares about this baby? Do you want to have it in prison because we all know how well that turned out!"

That hurt, physically. But he wasn't noticing, he was so wrapped up in his frustration.

"All I asked, all I ever asked was that you stay out of trouble," he continued, gesturing wildly. "Is that so hard? Here I am making a living, making the meals, looking after the house, sorting out doctors appointments – "

"Well, you do too much," she said quietly.

"What?"

"You do too much!" Lorna yelled. And suddenly all her pent-up frustration was pouring out, too. "All of this, it's too much. You're putting me under too much pressure."

Confusion bled into his anger. "All - all I'm doing is trying to help us have a healthy baby."

"Maybe you're right, if I'd done all this before, if I'd ate better, if I'd not been in prison – "

Vinnie softened, just a little. "Lorna, that's not what I meant. You know I'd never blame you for that, ever."

"I think you do." She started to cry. "You make me feel like if it goes wrong this time, it's proof there's something wrong with me. That it was my fault."

He took a step towards her, wary. "You're sounding paranoid."

"Maybe I am. I can't shake this feeling that something bad is going to happen." She paced around the carpark, trying to wring out the panic. "Maybe that's why I do stupid dangerous shit, so I'm not disappointed when it all goes wrong. You can't hurt me if I've already hurt myself!"

"I don't know what this is," he said in a low voice. "But it needs to stop."

"It needs to stop," she repeated. "It's too much. I want to go back. I'm not ready."

"Well, you're gonna have to be ready, because in six months time we're going to parents."

"We are parents." Her voice shook. "We had a child, Vinnie. You ain't even said Carmine's name ever since we found out."

For a moment he balled up his fists like he might explode in anger, but then he just pointed. "Get in the car."
"What? Why? Where are we going?"

"Just get in," he said firmly.

Nicky couldn't stop thinking about what Red said. Finally she'd got her feelings straight, in no small part thanks to Red's tough love, and suddenly she was back at square one again. Ugh. If God was real, he was laughing right now.

Was Red right? Were Lorna's actions a gesture of something more? More than indignation on behalf of an old friend? God knows if she ran into Lorna's father she might have a few choice words for him, too.

Still, she wouldn't risk more jail time. Did Lorna think about that or was she just acting impulsively as usual? Vinnie said he was at the end of his rope. Maybe they weren't as happy as she imagined them to be.

If only she could have some sort of sign. Don't be so stupid, Nicky, she reprimanded herself. Now you sound like Lorna.

And that's when it hit her – if anyone was going to believe in romantic signs and hidden meanings, it was going to be Lorna. Like hiding a love note between the lines of an apology letter.

She raced back to her cell to retrieve the letter. She would have to be quick piecing it back together – the police had a narrow window before pressing charges, if they hadn't already.

But when she looked under her pillow, the letter wasn't there. Surely... that was where she last put it? She checked under the blankets, under the bed, in her cabinet. Nothing.

Artesian came in as she was crawling on the floor like some kind of meth head. "Are you looking for something?"

"Not a good time," said Nicky. There was no time to explain. Where fuck did she put it?

"What did hubby want?" Artesian prodded. "It must have been serious."

Nicky ignored her, not wanting to be rude but just baffled that she had somehow lost the note in the space of an hour.

"He must have left her," Artesian continued. "That's the only reason I can see for you obsessing over that letter. That you think you have a chance."

"I just want to know what it said," Nicky huffed. "But I can't fucking find it."

"You're not going to find it. I flushed it down the toilet."

"What!" Nicky got to her feet. "Why the fuck did you do that!"

"To stop you getting your hopes up. I'm trying to help you."

"I don't want your help! Why do people think they can do whatever the fuck they want just because
they think it's right?"

Artesian rolled her eyes, unfazed by Nicky's anger. "Wow, angry. You really are still pining over her."

"Get out." Nicky pointed at the door.

"Well, did he leave her? Do you have anything besides delusion to make you think that she will leave him for you?"

Of course she was right. Even if there was a tiny chance before... they were married. They were having a baby together. It wouldn't make any sense for them to separate. She was holding on to a fantasy. It was like Lorna and Christopher, except without the dangerous stalking.

Artesian noticed Nicky's face fall and put her hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry. But you needed to see what's real."

Nicky felt her blood grow hot. She shook off Artesian's hand. "Like this? This isn't real. This isn't a relationship. It's fucked up. I feel sorry for you. Can't you see I'm just using you? You think I'm lonely and pathetic? What kind of guard fucks an inmate?"

Artesian didn't say a thing. Nicky knew she'd done it now. The CO turned on her heel and left the cell in silence.

Nicky was relieved. She didn't have time to deal with any more bullshit. Let it bite her on the ass later. Now she had to deal with what to do with Lorna. And she didn't have the help of any letter, she had to trust her gut.

As if on autopilot, she found herself at the phones. She punched in her mother's cell number. For once, Marka picked up immediately.

"Nicole, you have a lot of explaining to do," Marka snarled, her voice strange and nasally.

"Hi, Mom. How's it going?" Nicky replied, faux-chipper.

"How's it going? How's it going? I have been assaulted. My nose is broken."

"Well, you can just get it fixed. Again."

"I don't find this funny, Nicole." Even though she wasn't yelling, every word was sharp and clipped and punctuated. Nicky recognised that tone, this was Marka at her most infuriated. She needed to tread carefully.

"Sorry, sorry," Nicky offered, not meaning it one bit.

"This Muccio woman claims to know you. Did you send her to attack me?"

"If I wanted someone to beat you up I wouldn't send a five-foot pregnant woman." Nicky took a deep, deep breath. "Mom, you need to ask the police to drop the charges."

"I will do no such thing," Marka seethed. "I was assaulted. That woman deserves to be put behind bars."

Maybe," Nicky conceded. "But it's not gonna help anything. I know even you wouldn't feel good about sending a pregnant woman to prison."
"She should have thought of that before she assaulted me. That child will end up taken by CPS anyway, no doubt. People like that should be sterilised."

"Okay, Hitler." She bit her tongue. As much as she wanted to cuss out Marka, there were more important things to hand.

"Mom, I do know Lorna. She just lost a child and it fucked her up like you wouldn't imagine. I don't know if she'd even survive prison again. Please, Mom."

Marka didn't answer. Maybe Nicky had finally ice-picked that cold, dead heart. She needed to keep chipping away.

"I know she hurt you and you deserve to be angry, but this isn't the way. Could you really live with yourself? Do the right thing."

She was saying it to herself as much as to her mother. Revenge was a tantalising thought. Separating Lorna from Vinnie was maybe her only chance at driving a wedge between them. But she also didn't want to do that because it would hurt Lorna. Just like getting sent back to prison would destroy Lorna. And call her pathetic, but she still cared enough to try and stop that from happening. Just like Lorna obviously still cared – even just a little – to attack Marka. God, this just gets more and more fucked up.

"Please, Mom. I'm begging you. I won't ask you for anything ever again."

The silence on the end of the line was replaced by the disconnect tone. Nicky sighed and put the phone back on the hook. Whatever Marka decided to do, at least she knew she had done the right thing, even if it cost her dignity. If Lorna did end up back in Litchfield, at least she would be able to look her in the eye.

And as much as Nicky hoped that wouldn't be the case, a small part of her reasoned that she could probably protect Lorna and the baby from danger. What the hell was happening on the outside? Why did it feel so unsafe?

Chapter End Notes

Post season 7 note: I can't believe inappropriately jealous McCullough was an actual thing (in a very different way of course lol).
Chapter Summary

Like ships in the night. Time jump because they have to be reunited soon right?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

She knew where he'd taken her the moment they arrived. After parking the car, he pulled her by the hand through pebble pathways and clusters of trees until finally coming to rest at a single headstone in the graveyard.

Lorna gasped. "Is this really him?"

Vinnie bent down to rearrange the synthetic flowers laid there, his eyes distant. "You know I spent hours arguing with the prison trying to get you furlough, or whatever it's called, for the funeral?"

"Really?" She was still straightening out her own memories after Carmine died, but she hadn't even thought about what Vinnie had really been doing in the days after.

He nodded, still fussing with the flowers. "Saying goodbye is important. It didn't even hit me until I saw his little coffin. Like, I can even get it, how you denied it at first."

He didn't know how important that was for her to hear. Of all things she'd gotten fucked up and twisted in her head, Carmine's death was the worst. He was right: she never got to say goodbye.

"I should have taken you here sooner," he continued, standing up and facing her. "The truth is, I've felt too guilty. It seems fucked up to be happy about a new baby, like a betrayal or something."

She looked at him in shock. "But... you never told me any of this."

Vinnie shrugged. "You never told me you were going off the deep end."

"But Vinnie, that's how I feel, too. I was going crazy because I thought you'd never understand."

"Oh." He looked sheepish. "We have got to start communicating better, huh."

"Can I be really honest with you?" She waited for him to nod. "I've been trying so hard to be happy for you. But the truth is I'm scared of it, I'm scared of being happy. Nobody knows what it's like to grow this love inside you and have it all ripped away."

"That's not going to happen again. I won't let it."

She sighed, some of the anxiety melting away. It struck her as they watched the sun setting over the graveyard that maybe all of this could have been avoided if they talked to each other. Despite their history, something still hadn't clicked. It was like they were just missing each other.
"I'm sorry for being crazy," she said. "How did you get Marka to drop the charges? She was really mad."

"Don't worry about that. Let's just go home. Are you hungry? I'll make dinner." He started leading her down the path back towards the car.

"It's been a long day. Why don't we just get takeout and watch TV?"

"Takeout? It's so unhealth–" He noticed her look. "Fuck, one night of takeout can't hurt. As long as it's pizza."

She grinned. "Oh, I want Hawaiian!"

He curled his lip in disgust. "You're Italian, you can't have pineapple on pizza."

"I don't care. I like it."

"Yeah, you really are crazy."

It was like a huge tension had been lifted. Now Lorna was really starting to feel bad about endangering herself. Perhaps it was a good idea Nicky didn't know about it; it wasn't some selfless act of friendship that would bring them together, it was just stupid and careless.

The whole incident was as good as forgotten anyway, thank God for Marka dropping the charges. Now she and Vinnie could get on with their lives as best they could. The more the weeks wore on, the faster it seemed to get. It seemed like they'd never really have enough time to get ready for a baby.

She really had been living in a fantasy land in prison, thinking that everything would just be sorted once the baby arrived. There was all the shopping, doctors appointments, Lamaze, babyproofing, name searching...

"Franny wants to throw a shower," she said to Vinnie one night over dinner. "But who would I invite? I don't really know anyone here anymore."

He shrugged, working his way through a plate of gnocchi. "Maybe you need to make some friends."

"Why didn't I think of that?" she joked. The people she was closest with, who had shared her highs and lows for the past couple of years were all in prison. If she was honest, she missed them. It wasn't much of a support system but it was better than any she'd had in her life.

Suddenly her hand flew down to her stomach. "Fuck!"

Vinnie lowered his fork, his face paling. "What? What's wrong?"

She grabbed his hand and pressed it to the spot on her belly. "Do you feel that?"

"Yeah!" He grinned. "Damn, he's kicking the shit out of you. Does that hurt?"

"No..." Lorna trailed off. "... There's really a baby in there."

Vinnie laughed. "Well, yeah. What did you think it was, a lasagna?"

"No, but..." She started to tear up. "It just hit me that we're going to be parents."
"Well, I'm glad you finally figured that out."

"It's going to be different this time, isn't it?"

He slipped his hand between her fingers. "Yeah. Can't you feel how strong he is?"

She nodded and made up her mind in that moment to stay strong for him, too. There was nobody else who was going to do that for her now.

**Nicky**

Weeks passed and Lorna didn’t come back to Litchfield which was as good a sign as any to Nicky that the charges had been dropped.

Which, she had the peace of mind to say, was the right thing. But that also meant that Marka did the right thing, which was a mindfuck of its own. It would have taken a lot to swallow down what was admittedly quite righteous anger. Did she not give her mother enough credit?

It was all too much to process. Red's words were still weighing on her mind. She could probably ignore anyone else but Red was always honest to a fault. She found herself at visitation putting Lorna back on her list. If she wanted to come and talk things out, she could. Plus, she’d know that Nicky was at least partially responsible for her not being in prison.

Time went by and nothing. She supposed she could call... but that would mean making the first move. No, she wasn't just going to put herself on the line like that. The ball was in Lorna's court now. Was it so much to expect a thank you?

She walked into the rec room relieved that at least she could take her mind off everything for a couple of hours. But as she did, Artesian pulled her to the side. They hadn't spoken in ages, with the CO assigned to D-block and Nicky no longer on custodial duty. She braced herself for an awkward and uncomfortable conversation.

"I don’t think you can teach the art class anymore," said Artesian."

"Oh." That made sense. After their fight, she couldn't expect Artesian to pull any more favours. "Uh, well I guess I had that coming."

Artesian shook her head. "No, Nicky, it’s not a punishment. They’re getting ready to launch the exhibit in Manhattan. Soon this art class is going to get a lot of attention from PolyCon. I don't want you anywhere near that, it could affect your release date."

"Fuck, I forgot all about that. Are you going to get in trouble?"

"I’ve been careful to cover my tracks. And if they do anything I’ll just say I’ll sue for the riots.”

Nicky crossed her arms. “You really think that’s gonna work?”

"I can look after myself." She bit her lip. "Look, Nicky. I’m sorry for what I did. I was out of line."

"Me too. I didn’t mean what I said. That was a fucked up day."

"I can just tell you what the letter said," offered Artesian. "Remember, we screen everything."
Nicky considered it, but really she didn't want to hear it from anyone but Lorna at this point. She still hadn't reached out.

"Thanks... but she's married with a kid on the way. It's best for both of us if we just let it go." Nicky knew that was the truth, even though her gut instincts told her the opposite.

"I'm not saying anything," said Artesian in a way that said everything.

"So, no more art class and no custodial? What the hell am I meant to do for the next few months? I'm gonna go insane."

"I can think of some things."

The less time you have, the slower it goes. That's what Lorna always said and she was right, for once. Nicky spent most of her time with Red and Alex but even they were running out of things to talk about. Card games were about the only thing keeping C-block from shanking each other.

It was becoming more and more real that she was going to get out, now in just a matter of weeks. What she was going to do on the outside was a complete mystery. There was nobody she could stay with that wouldn't make her want to relapse within five minutes.

She was explaining her predicament to Red over breakfast when Alex slid her a piece of paper.

"What's this?"

"A list of things I need you to ask Piper when you get out," said Alex. "You need to find out if Kubra knows where I am now. Or if any of them have recognised her or tried to contact her."

Nicky folded up the paper gingerly. She felt sorry for Alex, she had so much time left while Piper was running around on the outside trying to be a social justice warrior. And yet...

"I don't know, Vause."

Alex raised an eyebrow. "What's the problem?"

"The thing is..." Nicky drew a deep breath. "I don't know if I'm going to see Piper on the outside."

"What? Why? She's your friend, I'm your friend."

"I know, you are. But I think that my best shot at sobriety is if I avoid anything that reminds me of how I got here in the first place. Anything Litchfield."

"But, but... " Alex puffed out her cheeks. "So, that means you'll never visit, never take a phone call? I mean, what about Red? Obviously you're going to keep in touch with Red."

Red, who had been tuning into the conversation quietly, paused between bites of porridge. "It's okay, Nicky."

"What, really?" Nicky breathed.

"All I want for you is to stay clean. If you need to leave us behind to do that, I understand. But on one condition."

"What?"
"You're never going to end up in here again, you hear me?"

"Yes, Mom." Nicky reached across the table and held Red's hand. "Sorry, Alex."

She felt bad, but finally she was starting to realise that she was no good to anyone if she wasn't good to herself. Maybe if she focused solely on staying clean, there was a chance for her on the outside to do something good with her life. Starting over again.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for keeping y'all waiting, I'm writing this as I go and I actually had bad writers block. I'm back at school so updates will probably not be as frequent but I'll try to make them long-ish at least :)}
Lorna lived by the numbers in her calendar, counting each day until she could breathe again (quite literally, the baby was squishing up her lungs). Time edged closer to the seven month mark in her pregnancy, when it all went wrong before. She stored a little hope that if that the month passed smoothly, everything would be just perfect.

There was one more date she was looking forward to. As Vinnie sat down in front of the TV to watch some kind of sports game, she decided to broach the subject.

She lowered herself into the chair opposite him. "Can I talk to you about something?"

"It's the Knicks versus the Celtics, Lorna."

"Yeah, I got no idea what any of that means. Come on, this is important. Please?"

He looked up with a sigh. "What's up?"

She took a deep breath. "You remember my friend Nicky, right? She's getting out of prison real soon. I don't think she has anywhere to go."

"What about her mother? The one you punched in the face?"

"Vinnie, she'd be better off in prison." She petted his knee, trying to take his eyes off the TV. "I was thinking, maybe she could stay with us for a while."

He stopped watching TV and burst into laughter. "Lorna, we're about to have a baby. You do realise that, right?"

"It wouldn't be for long!" She pleaded. "Just until she can find a place. She can stay on the couch."

"That's what you said and look where we are now."

"That was a very different situation. Please, Vinnie?"

"Look, it's nothing personal," he said with shrug. "I just don't want a criminal in my house. I don't even know what she did to end up in prison."

"She's not a criminal, she's my best friend. And I did a lot worse, trust me."
He pursed his lips. She could tell she was getting through. "The thing is, I get the feeling that Nicky doesn't like me."

"That's crazy!" Lorna exclaimed, maybe overcompensating a little. Vinnie was more perceptive than she gave him credit for. "Who wouldn't like you?"

Vinnie paused. "I guess she has helped you out a lot."

"So much, Vinnie. So much. I wouldn't even be here –"

"– Yeah, yeah, alright." He raised his hands. "It can't be longer than a couple of weeks, okay?"

Lorna jumped into his lap. "Thank you! Thank you. So can you drive me to Litchfield on Saturday so I can pick her up?"

"Yeah, yeah." He nudged her onto the couch. "Can I watch my game now?"

"Are you sure you don't want me to come in with you?" Vinnie asked as he parked the car.

"This is something I gotta do on my own," said Lorna, kissing him on the cheek. "I won't be long, okay?"

She hopped out, closed the door behind her and began walking towards the looming grey building. Litchfield looked so different from the outside. It was so much bigger, like the opposite of Mary Poppins' bag, it shrunk the moment you were inside. It was weird to think she'd been a prisoner here; it was like a dream from another life.

Lorna walked inside and sat down in reception, in the same squeaky plastic chairs that she'd seen Franny waiting in to pick her up. She fixed her eyes on the door that separated prison from the real world, bristling with excitement that so little time and space now separated her from Nicky.

After some time (she got through two outdated People magazines), she approached the CO at the desk.

"Sorry, I'm waiting to pick someone up. Has Nicky Nichols been released yet?"

The CO frowned. "Are you immediate family?"

"No –"

"I can't release information about inmates. But everyone who was scheduled for release today has already been released this morning."

"Oh." Lorna looked around. There was no way she missed Nicky on her way in? "But she's not here."

"I don't know what to tell you, ma'am."

Lorna turned back, confused. Suddenly she had an idea. She knocked on the glass at the CO's desk.

"Sorry. It's visitation today, right?"

The CO nodded.
"Can you check if I'm on someone's list, please? My name's Lorna Muccio but it could be under Morello. Can you check if I'm on the visitation list for Alex Vause?"

He picked up a big folder and flipped through it. "Sorry, ma'am."

Ouch. She was about to walk away but there was one last ditch effort to be made. "Can you check for someone else?"

Red looked like a shadow of what Lorna remembered. Hair grey, skin pale, drawn, tired. Not like her Red at all.

"Lorna, what are you doing here?" Red snapped. Lorna smiled. At least Red's fiery temper was still intact.

"I guess you weren't expecting me, Red."

"I thought it might be my sons," she replied distantly. "Really, why are you here? Is something wrong?"

"I know Nicky was supposed to be released today. Did she get out, Red?"

Red raised an eyebrow. "Why do you want to know?"

"Well, I know she doesn't have many people on the outside. I was thinking she could stay with me and Vinnie until she finds her feet."

The older woman laughed uproariously. "Lorna, what goes on in that pretty little head of yours? What on earth makes you think Nicky would want to live with you and your husband?"

"I know we had our troubles in the past --"

"Nicky told me herself. She doesn't want anything to do with you." Red softened. "Or with any of us. She doesn't want to be reminded of prison or drugs or her old life. I don't like it either but if it helps her stay sober we have to respect it."

"But I was gonna help her. Where's she gonna go?"

"I don't know. But we have to trust Nicky knows what's best for herself."

Lorna couldn't stop the tears dropping down her cheeks. The thought of never seeing Nicky again was unbearable. That couldn't be possible.

"Listen. You have everything you want, right? Maybe it's time to let her go. Move on."

Lorna started to get up. She just needed to get out of this place, back to this morning when everything was full of hope and certainty.

"Lorna?" Red smiled in a way that was meant to comfort her, maybe. "Good luck with the baby, really. You're looking a lot better. Stay safe."

"Hey, I'm sure you two will find each other," said Vinnie as they walked into their flat. He'd watched her carefully the whole ride home. As much as she wanted to talk to him, he would never
understand why she was so upset about losing Nicky. "New York's not that big, right? And there's always Facebook."

"Uh, yeah. Sure."

"Chill, alright?" He squeezed her shoulder. "Why don't I run you a bath?"

Lorna slipped into the hot water, questions fogging her mind. If she really wanted to find Nicky, she probably could. God knows Christopher changed addresses so many times.

But clearly she didn't want to be found. If there was even the smallest chance that Lorna reappearing in her life would trigger a relapse, could she risk it? Red basically cut off ties with her own daughter. Was it down to who she cared about more, Nicky or herself?

She got out of the bath, wrapping herself in a towel and drying herself off. Something was still dripping. She looked down and saw blood running down her legs.

**Nicky**

It didn't feel like the day of release. Nicky didn't know what she was expecting – some kind of feeling? It was just a shitty normal day in shitty normal prison. But it was her last day.

"I'm sorry we couldn't do a party, Nicky," said Red, picking over the mush on her breakfast tray. Red's release parties used to be legendary, but max barely let the inmates celebrate Christmas, let alone getting out. It was hard to see Red so powerless.

"Don't sweat it, Red. I'm just happy I got to spend my last couple of months with you."

Red teared up. "Nicky, I've never been so happy and so sad in my life."

"Me too, Mom."

"Be excited. This is the next chapter. You can do anything."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "Come on, Red. I've got a record, I'll be lucky if Walmart wants to hire me –"

"Don't say that!" Red stabbed her plastic fork in the air. "Don't you dare accept no for an answer. This is your life. Not everybody gets a second chance."

When Nicky thought about her future, she'd always imagined Red being there, somehow. Lorna flitted in and out of the picture depending on how loyal she was to her imaginary soulmates on the day, but Red was always in it. It saddened her to think of how long Red had stayed in Litchfield and how much longer she still had left. And it was partially due to Nicky's testimony. Maybe she would die in prison. That was a reality she had to face.

As she got up from her table, suddenly it hit her all at once and she burst into tears, hugging Red. She didn't even try to pretend she wasn't crying. For the past five years of her life, this had been her home, her family. She was stepping into the wild without a safety net.

"I don't know if I can do this," she said in Red's ear.

"Sssh. You go out there and none of this ever happened."
Alex was the next to give her a hug. "You made prison a hell of a lot more tolerable, you know that?"

"Hey, the feeling's mutual."

"If you end up back in here, I'll kill you," Alex laughed.

"Same," said Red, "but I'm not joking."

CO Blake cleared his throat. "It's time to move, inmate."

Nicky had kind of assumed that Artesian would be the one to see her off but there you go. Expectations are dangerous.

She threw her arms around Red for one last hug. It went on forever but there would never be enough time to say goodbye. Her heart thumped in her stomach.

"I'm doing this for you, Mom."

"No, Nicky." Red let go and smiled. "Do it for yourself."

And then Blake was leading her away from the tables, out of the gates of C-Block, down grey corridors, out a door she'd never seen before. A haze of paperwork, signing things without asking questions. She changed out of her uniform into an equally scratchy maroon sweater and grey sweatpants. They explained that the personal effects she'd handed in at the beginning of her sentence had been lost in the riot. She didn't care. She was leaving it all behind.

She was pushed through another door and into a waiting room lined with plastic chairs. It was early and visitors hadn't arrived yet. But she wasn't expecting anyone anyway. She shoved the tokens for the bus into her pocket and went for the exit.

Taking a deep breath before her foot stepped over the threshold. And – she was outside! She looked out into the vast expanse and inhaled the crisp air. It was like being in another country. She marched purposefully across the gravel, not looking back at the grey, fenced-off building. Only seeing big roads, big trees, big sky. All the terror and grief melted away. She was free.

She guessed she would walk along the highway until she found a bus stop or a plan, whichever came first. After being cooped up so long, she didn't care if she had to walk for days – at least she could do so without being stopped by an iron gate or a getting a shot from a CO for being out of bounds.

After half an hour or so, she noticed a car slow down and pull up beside her.

"Hey, I'm not hitchhiking –"

The window rolled down. Nicky was surprised to see Artesian.

"What are you doing here?"

"I was about to ask the same of you."

"I'm free," said Nicky. "I can do what I want."

"You're going to be abducted if you're not careful."

Nicky rolled her eyes.
"Get in," said Artesian.

"Thanks, but I can make it on my own."

"At least let me give you a lift to the bus station."

Nicky could tell this argument was going to keep on going, and anyway it was getting cold. She hopped into the passenger seat. She now saw clearly that Artesian was out of uniform, dressed in a black sweater and jeans.

"What are you doing driving around here on your day off?"

"Believe it or not, I live around here, Nicky." Artesian started the car up again and pulled into the road. Suddenly they were flying down the road at 40 miles per hour.

"Whoa." Her stomach churned and she grabbed onto the seat.

"Everything good?"

"Yeah. It's just been a long time since I've been in a car, in the front seat I mean."

"If you're gonna puke, I'd rather you do it out the window."

"Nah, I'm good." Nicky reeled herself in. Once upon a time this was perfectly normal. Although she wouldn't have been driving with her correctional officer.

"So what are your plans?" Artesian asked casually.

"Plans?" Nicky scoffed.

"Well, who are you staying with? What are you planning to do?"

She shrugged. "I was planning to wing it."

"Nicky!" Artesian scolded. "Do you have any money?"

"Enough to get me through the month."

"And then what? Will you stay with your parents?"

"Trust me, I'd be better off in prison. And before you ask, no I can't stay with my friends on the account of them all being junkies."

"Oh." Artesian paused thoughtfully. "Well, I mean, you could always stay on my couch if you wanted to."

Nicky chuckled. "That's real nice, but I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Uh, that's fucking weird. I shouldn't be in your car right now."

"Why, because you're an inmate and I'm a guard? If there's one thing I've learnt from working for PolyCon, it's that people are just people. Nobody is better or worse than anyone else, just more powerful."

She had a point. "I just don't know."
"Look, why don't I just drive you to mine, I'll show you round, and if you still want to go couch-surfing with a bunch of strangers, I'll drop you off at the bus stop. Plus, I have bananas."

"Okay, you had me at real fruit."

The guard continued down the road into an area that seemed familiar to Nicky.

"Hey, isn't this where minimum used to be?"

Artesian turned into a narrower, tree-lined road. "Yeah, if you keep going down here you end up at the lake."

"But I thought you were taking me to your house."

She slowed to a halt outside a small box of a house. "I am. PolyCon wasn't going to build new houses near max so we got to stay here." She opened the door and hopped out of the car, leaving Nicky dumbfounded.

"But I couldn't stay here," said Nicky, getting out of the car.

"You think PolyCon checks anything?" Artesian rolled her eyes. "You should have seen the shit Humps got away with up here. Actually, don't ask me about it."

"But I'm meant to be leaving all that behind. I can't live next door to Litchfield."

"Suit yourself, I guess," Artesian shrugged and disappeared into the house.

Nicky stood outside, thinking hard. Her hand fell upon the bus tokens in her pocket. That was all she had to her name, some bus tokens, a couple of hundred dollars and a criminal record. What she needed was to stay away from her family and former friends who triggered her. But after all that fuss about leaving the past in the past – yep, Red was definitely gonna kill her.

Chapter End Notes

Reunion is on the horizon.
I Told You to Chill

Chapter Summary

Nicky and Lorna find themselves in prisons of their own making.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

If she was honest with herself, Lorna was really only Catholic in passing. She went to mass as a kid when her parents made her, celebrated the holidays and wore a cross around her neck. But really, it was more of an identity to hold on to, fit in with. For the first time in a long time she was praying and actually meaning it.

*Please let it be okay.*

"It's going to be okay," said Franny, almost telepathically. She was sitting at her bedside, rubbing her arm. She would rub it raw if they didn't get answers soon. "If they thought it was urgent, they'd be with you by now."

*Or it's already too late and they can't do anything.* She tried to push the thought out of her mind. Things were only ever perfect or catastrophic. A world in black and white, just like an old movie.

Vinnie sat on the other side of the bed, pale as milk. His reaction, after he'd run to the bathroom to see what the commotion was, had been to slump down the side of the wall at the sight of blood. She had to call Franny herself to take them to the hospital.

The men in her life had a habit of disappointing her.

Finally the obstetrician entered the room and greeted her. She took a good look at the chart on the end of the bed and squeezed the cold ultrasound gel on Lorna's stomach.

"Does that hurt at all?"

"A little." The pain and bleeding was nothing like last time. Maybe there was hope. That hurt more than an ultrasound wand.

"You don't think this is the same as last time, do you?" Franny asked.

"If you had this complication before, the risk of it happening again is higher." The doctor stopped moving the wand and pointed to a shadow on the screen.

So this was it. She was being punished, this is what she deserved for the bad she'd done, the lies, the broken people in her wake, the death-crush of guilt. She couldn't even hear what the doctor was saying. The world was going black.
"Lorna." She felt Franny shaking her shoulder. "Are you listening?"

She forced her eyes to focus. *What? What could you possibly have to say that will make this better?*

The doctor gave a tight smile. "I said, the good news is we caught it early. The bleeding has stopped and the baby seems healthy."

She flipped a switch on the monitor and the sound of a regular heartbeat flooded the room.

"But what does that mean?" Vinnie finally spoke.

"Well, we could deliver the baby early but premature –"

"No." Lorna cut her off. "That's not happening."

"Are there any other options?" Franny asked softly.

"Yes, you can try to carry to term. But that could put you both at risk."

There was no question in Lorna's mind. Her mother instincts took over. "We have to try."

"You're the doctor. What do you recommend?" Vinnie asked.

The doctor paused thoughtfully. "Given your history, I think you should stay monitored here. We'll give you some medications to speed up the baby's development. As soon as it's safe, we'll perform a C-section."

"I have to stay in hospital?"

"You'll need to be on strict bed rest. No unnecessary movement and definitely no unnecessary stress."

Vinnie squeezed her hand. "See, I told you to chill. It's going to be fine."

What, it was her fault for going back to Litchfield and getting so worked up? Telling her to stop worrying was like telling her to stop breathing. The only comfort was if anything went wrong now, help would only be footsteps away.

"Can Vinnie stay with me?"

"Unfortunately, we don't have the beds but he can see you any time within visiting hours."

So she had to stay confined to one building, barely able to do anything, and isolated from her family except for a couple of hours a day. Why did that sound familiar?

Nicky

So... freedom was fucking weird. Just like everything, even if you told yourself not to expect anything, still life had a way of catching you off-guard. Or, rather, with a guard.

Nicky spent most of the daylight hours making the most of her newfound bodily autonomy. The woods were actually beautiful and kind of peaceful if you didn't imagine all the prisoners who'd
managed to escape through them over the years. She wondered if she could find the end of Red's tunnel.

It sucked that they were so close to it but all she'd looked at for the past five years were grey walls and barbed wire. If she got enough altitude and looked back, she could even see the old prison peeking through the trees. It was almost like if she looked hard enough, she could see their group, Red's family, running around on the yard searching for that damn chicken.

It was funny how some memories of Litchfield made her whole body rise with warmth and some made her want to rip her brain out and chuck it in the lake.

She wasn't the only one failing to suppress memories of Litchfield. As she found out pretty soon after moving in, Artesian was afflicted with night terrors.

"Sorry, did I wake you?" Artesian mumbled as she waded through the dark kitchen and filled a glass of water.

"You're not the only one with sleeping troubles," Nicky called from her spot on the couch. And she was fairly used to being woken by inmates having nightmares. "What's up?"

Artesian rolled her eyes, leaning on the countertop. "It's so stupid. I used to be in the fucking army. I've seen people get blown up and the thing that gets me most is a riot in a women's minimum security prison."

"Hey, it was fucked up. It fucked me up. I don't think I slept a wink when I was in AdSeg."

"Really? What happened?"

"Oh, the usual. Fighting with Lorna. Saving Lorna's ass. Getting abducted and terrorised by a seven-foot sociopathic guard. Stuff like that."

Artesian laughed. "Well, you didn't have to go through Litchfield Idol. I wish I could forget that ever happened."

"I think we all do," Nicky muttered. "Hey, maybe I should have done more to stop that shit. I guess we were all just trying to not get shot."

"Tell me about it."

"I didn't wanna say it but you should really get help. You can get treatments for PTSD –"

"No, I can't."

Nicky kicked off her blanket in frustration. "Yes, you can. Jesus, what does everybody have against self-care?"

"It's not that I don't want it, PolyCon's insurance doesn't cover it." Artesian took a few steps closer, shaking her head. "God, Nicky. You think they care? They want to close down psych, too."

"But how can they do that? I mean, where are all the crazies gonna go?"

"The SHU if they can't integrate with the rest of them. Apparently hiring shrinks was too expensive."

"Fuck." Nicky's stomach sunk. Even through she was no longer in Litchfield, she still cared about the people she left behind.
Artesian went to bed, leaving Nicky alone and wide awake with her thoughts.

Nicky was smart. A smart-ass, sure, but smart nonetheless. She couldn't escape the irony now. The books in the prison library spoke a lot about recidivism, how inmates with long sentences would repeat past crimes, perhaps even unconsciously. To get back to their "family", their "normal". Because prison was their home.

Going back to Litchfield wasn't an option but that didn't mean she wasn't creating a prison around herself. The woods were like a shroud, a security blanket that kept her from the past so long as she didn't look back. Was it better to keep looking the other way? It struck her how, in the blue moonlight, the shadows of the trees were like iron bars.

Chapter End Notes

My plan was to reunite them this chapter but it was going to take foreverrrr to write. I guessed it would be better to update this week with a shorter chapter rather than not at all. I hope it's enjoyable nonetheless!
Lorna

Patience was not Lorna's virtue. She never could understand how some of the older ladies in Litchfield dealt with being cooped up for decades. Even her relatively short sentence would have been excruciating if she didn't distract herself with Christopher, Nicky, Vinnie. Being patient meant accepting her situation, reality, and she couldn't do that.

There wasn't much room to fantasise being confined to a hospital bed 24/7. She was only allowed to shower and use the bathroom, and though those moments of freedom were a relief, she was also terrified. Vinnie and Franny did what they could to reassure her, but there was always that time when visiting hours ended, the lights half-dimmed and nurses strapped monitors to her body that she felt like she was back in the psych ward. Trapped. Sleepless. Not knowing what would happen next.

Six weeks after being admitted and she was really going out of her mind. And starting to feel very uncomfortable. Pregnancy was not the glowing experience she'd imagined. On this particular morning, her back was aching and breakfast was repeating on her. As she was trying to get comfortable, there was a knock at the door. Nurses were always coming in and out, so she called out to say come in.

But the person who entered wasn't in a nurse's uniform. The sight of that familiar blonde head in unfamiliar clothing sent a shockwave through her entire body. It was lucky she was lying down. "Lorna!"

Piper Chapman shrieked and flew into a hug so tight Lorna struggled to keep down her breakfast. Though that could have also been the shock. For a moment, Lorna didn't even know how to react. It was so hard to reconcile Piper in plain clothes, or the fact that she was there, in her hospital room.

Maybe her mind was playing tricks on her. "Chapman? Am I hallucinating or are you really here?"
Piper laughed. “You’ve still got that old Lorna sense of humour.”

Suddenly it was all too real to be a dream. That was the Litchfield routine, right? Lorna says something loopy and everyone laughs or rolls their eyes like it's not a problem. Their problem. She never let it concern her, but things were so different now.

She became aware that she had drifted off and Piper was smiling at her expectantly.

"How did you know I was here?" Lorna asked.
"Oh, it's a long story." Piper set a bouquet of pink roses on the side table. "I knew you got out early but I realised I have no idea where you're actually from? Then I remembered that you have a sister. Francine, right?"

"Yeah, Franny."

"Well, I did some digging and eventually I found a Francine Morello on Facebook. She told me you were here."

Lorna frowned through her smile. The least her sister could have done was tell her. Then she shook herself out of it. What a mood she was in today. Piper Chapman is here, in your room, breaking up months of monotony. Cheer up.

"It's so great to see you!" Lorna beamed, patting a spare spot on the bed for Piper to sit. "How are you? What you been up to? Tell me everything."

Piper smiled and brushed Lorna's arm. "I'm fine. You must have heard about the campaign I've been driving. Of course, PolyCon is fighting it hard but they can't silence me. Have you heard about these new immigration camps? It's barbaric. How's Alex? I mean, did she seem okay when you were there?"

"I left Litchfield ages ago —"

"No, you're right. It could have changed completely." Piper wrinkled her nose. "God, and how are you feeling? You poor thing."

Lorna shrugged. She didn't want to go into the pain and boredom, especially when Piper was looking at her with such pitying eyes. "I'm just ready to meet the baby now."

Piper cocked her head. "I'm so happy you're getting a second chance. I was heartbroken to hear what happened to you, and on such a happy day, it was the wedding —"

"Yeah. We're just thinking about the future," Lorna interrupted her before she could go on. She'd forgotten how easily Piper could make a bad situation about herself. Right now the last thing she needed was to relive that.

"But you've been through so much," Piper continued obliviously. "We all have. That's why I'm writing this book, to get the word out there about Litchfield and what they did to us."

Lorna raised an eyebrow. "Oh. I see why you're here. You can't fool me, Chapman. I know you want material for your book."

Piper raised her hands. "Got me."

"I'm not sure I wanna bring up old stuff, not with the baby coming. I have to keep my stress levels low."

"Actually, it's not you I want to interview. I was wondering if you could put me in touch with Nicky. I can't seem to track her down and she's out now, right?"

"Yeah, she is. Piper, I can't put you in touch with Nicky."

Piper pouted. "Please, Lorna?"

"No, I literally can't. I got no clue where she is."
"But surely she's visited you?"

"She doesn't know I'm here. I ain't spoken to Nicky in months."

She waited for Piper's mouth to fall open. "But... what happened! I don't understand. You two were so close."

"I couldn't give up on my marriage," she said quietly. "I took a vow."

The blonde gave a sad smile. "I can understand that."

"Well, Nicky couldn't. And she's punishing me for it."

Piper nodded, then shook her head. "But she would have at least talked to you before the exhibition went up."

"What exhibition? I don't know what you mean."

"You don't know?"

"Piper, I'm tired and I have a baby sticking his foot into my spine, can we please get to the point?" Lorna finally snapped. Piper blushed a little. "Sorry, hormones."

"Okay." Piper shuffled forward on the bed and lowered her voice. Always a flair for the dramatic. "I heard about an art exhibition that was supposedly done by an anonymous inmate from Litchfield. So obviously I went and... well, the second I saw them, I knew who the artist is. It's Nicky."

"Come on. How can you know that?"

Piper blushed again. "There's lots of pictures of you. And some of them, let's just say, require an intimate knowledge of the subject."

She passed her phone to Lorna. It was a website – behindthebars.com. As she flicked through the images, it was like flip book of her memories. Good ones, like Norma singing in the nativity. Bad ones, really bad ones, like Washington dying. And then – good God. Explicit ones. And explicitly correct, down to the weird birthmark on her inner thigh.

"Oh, my God."

"They're pretty good, right?"

"That bitch!"

"P-pardon?"

"So much for leaving Litchfield behind! Apparently not if she can make a profit from it. I've been going out of my mind worrying about her. She seems pretty fine, don't you think?"

Piper looked like she had awakened a monster. "Lorna, I think you should calm down."

"But the exhibitors must know where the art is coming from? That will tell us where Nicky is."

"I tried that. They said it gets posted anonymously, either that or they just wouldn't tell me."

"No. Whenever you make a website, you have to register it with your address." Lorna started typing into the phone's search engine. "All you gotta do is look it up... Got it."
"Holy shit." Piper's eyes widened. "It took me like a year to find your sister's Facebook. You're a bit scary, you know that?"

She sunk back into the bed. "Fuck. No, it's just the address to Litchfield."

Piper delicately took her phone back. "Well, don't worry about it, Lorna. I'm sure we'll find her eventually."

Before Lorna could ask her more questions about the exhibition, a nurse came in and reprimanded them for visiting outside of hours. Piper looked mildly relieved. She hopped off the bed and passed her a business card.

"It really was good to see you. All the best, okay? Call me when the baby's born... and if Nicky gets in touch."

And just like that, Piper was gone again, leaving Lorna wondering if she'd imagined the whole thing. She picked up her own phone and looked at the website, getting more and more heated with each picture. Anger wasn't an emotion she'd felt in a while; it was almost a nice change from tiredness and discomfort.

She searched the address again. She didn't expect Nicky was that good at covering her tracks. There was something off about the whole thing. She entered the zip code into her maps app. Surprisingly, it wasn't bringing up the location of Max. It was closer to old Litchfield, but not exactly. Down a little road into the woods, near the lake. When she switched the map to satellite view, she could see, partially hidden by trees, tiny box houses. She recognised them from when she used to drive the van – they were, or at least used to be, where the COs lived.

If she was being reasonable, she knew Nicky would not be living there. If she listened to logic, it was probably just a glitch in the map that centred it right over the COs' houses. If she was patient, she'd never risk leaving hospital to stalk her ex-best friend halfway across the state of New York. But Lorna was all out of patience.

Nicky

Perhaps it was the fresh air but Nicky felt like a new person. For a moment, she flirted with the idea that if she was brought up in a rural, wholesome setting she might have turned out different. Then she remembered her fucked-up family and how Tucky and Leanne disproved the point completely.

Nicky was also coming to the conclusion that maybe she felt better not just because of detoxing from drugs or stress or pollution or prison food or caged walls. Ever since she'd left Litchfield, she'd heard nothing of Lorna Morello, quite by design. By now, she'd probably had the baby and was playing happy families with Vince, so that was that. Close chapter.

She decided to distract herself by trying to pull her weight around the house, and was subsequently struggling through a beef stroganoff recipe Red had taught her (or tried to). She had a maid who cooked for her growing up and basically lived on ramen and drugs once she left home. The sauce had split somehow and was filling the tiny kitchen with a sour odour.

Artesian got home and Nicky could tell by the look on her face that it wasn't just the smell that was perturbing her.
"We might be a little bit fucked," she said, throwing her bag onto the bench.

"Why? What's wrong?"

She breathed sharply. "I popped my head into the exhibition and you'll never guess who was there. Piper Chapman."

"Shit!" Really, she should have seen it coming a mile off. Piper never could stop herself from getting involved.

"I got out of there before she saw me," Artesian said reassuringly, before the anxious expression took over her face again. "You don't think she'd know it was you?"

"If she hasn't figured it out, she will."

She thought of the picture she'd drawn of herself, Alex and Piper in the cornfield. Unless Alex suddenly developed artistic inclinations, Piper could only come to one conclusion.

"Fucking Chapman!" Nicky exhaled. "We should end it early. Just auction everything off before they can trace it back to us."

"Hm, it's a shame," sighed Artesian. "She has a huge platform. If we got her on our side, maybe we could really change things."

"Hey, I'm all for prison reform but we also don't wanna get sued."

"Yeah, you're right. Don't worry. Tomorrow after work I'll fix it."

The next day was unseasonably hot. Nicky got dressed in a black t-shirt and jeans as she heard Artesian's car roll away. After a late, leisurely breakfast she decided to take her daily walk through the woods. She'd begun to find her favourite places in the endless green; a leafy patch of ferns, a foxes' den. Spotted toadstools straight out of a fairytale book. She wondered if there were magic mushrooms in these woods. Not that she'd take them.

Once she'd had enough of the heat, she started to make her way back down to the path. The woods were practically vibrating with sounds today, the trills of overheated birds and cicadas. As she was walking, there was a faint rustling behind her but she thought nothing of it. Probably just dead leaves... or foxes.

But then there was a snap, like a branch breaking under someone's foot. Adrenaline took over and she darted behind a tree. It was probably just a birdwatcher or something... but she couldn't help, now, but feel like she was being followed. Maybe Piper had opened her big mouth and somehow PolyCon had tracked her here.

Nicky pressed her body against the bark. It was now silent, too silent. She couldn't stay there forever. She had to know what she was dealing with. Slowly, she bent down and picked up the biggest stick she could find. In 3, 2, 1...

She jumped out. "Argh!"

And her heart stopped and sped up at the same time. She nearly fell to the ground. She couldn't process what she was seeing. If she wasn't clean, she'd swear she was tripping. This was some magic mushrooms shit.

Lorna was standing in front of her in a white dress, her arms crossed and red lips pursed. She looked
very angry and very pregnant. Staring in derision at the stick that Nicky still had raised over her head. She was sweating, red-faced and a little out of breath, presumably down to following Nicky in this heat. Fuck, how long had she been following her for?

"Lorna." Nicky was so winded she could barely make out the words. "What the fuck?"

"Really? Is that really how you wanna greet me?" Lorna yelled shrilly.

"Fuck! What the fuck are you doing here?" Nicky matched her in volume.

"I could ask you the same fucking question!"

The trees were spinning. She tried to ground herself. "How the fuck did you even find me? Nobody knows I'm here."

"Oh, please. I can track down anyone."

Nicky's blood ran cold. Suddenly she was shivering on this hot day. "Jesus Christ."

"I spoke to Red," said Lorna, shaking her head. In fact, her whole body was shaking. "Yeah, she said you were so traumatised by Litchfield that you had to cut yourself off from anyone and anything that reminded you of it. How's that going for you, huh, Nicky?"

"It's not what you think. It wasn't planned. Artesian let me stay –"

"Who the fuck is Artesian?"

"McCullough. You know the blonde CO, the one that wasn't evil –"

Her mouth dropped. "You're living with a guard?"

"Shit got complicated after you left, okay? Like you can fucking judge who I live with!"

"So is she the one who's been helping you with your new business? Yes, Nicky, I know about the art. Chapman figured it out. How could you do that to me?"

Nicky blushed down to her roots. That was one source of Lorna's anger that couldn't disagree with. "It just kinda happened," she said softly. "Trust me, I never thought anyone would see it, least of all you."

Lorna started to calm down, too. "I was worried sick about you. I was gonna let you come live with us."

She had to smile at that. The fucking sincerity in Lorna's watering eyes. The Olympic level of mental gymnastics she must be doing to convince herself that Nicky would ever, ever, want to be a full-time third wheel in that relationship.

"Oh no, what a missed opportunity," Nicky mocked.

"Really?" Lorna sounded hopeful.

"No! Are you fucking insane? Of course I don't want to live with you and daddy dearest. I can't believe we're having this conversation. I can't believe you're here!"

"At least we're talking!" Lorna was back to yelling again. "You shut me out. I didn't know if you were okay –"
Nicky rolled her eyes. "Oh, like you care about me, Lorna."

"Don't you dare!" Her cheeks flashed crimson.

"Calm down –"

"But don't you dare say I don't care about you. When you got sent to max I was in pieces."

"Yeah, and after a few a days of boohooing, you got over it and moved on to another one, just like you always do."

The words fell out of Nicky's mouth before she could reconsider. Lorna's eyes fell to her stomach and immediately started to cry. She turned around and began walking away from Nicky as fast as she could. Which, granted, wasn't very fast.

"Wait, Lorna," Nicky called after her. "I didn't mean it like that."

But it was already too late. She watched at a loss for words as Lorna struggled stubbornly up the side of an incline, disappearing more and more into the trees just to get her message across. Nicky sighed and gave chase. Lorna was back in her life for five minutes and already her nerves were shot. This mad woman would be the end of her.

Chapter End Notes

Post season 7 note: I stand by my assessment that Nicky can't cook.
Don't Touch Me, Why'd You Stop?

Chapter Summary

Lorna is angry. Nicky is angry. But they may have to put that aside, at least for now.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Whenever things went wrong, Lorna made a choice deep down. Anger or pain.

Anger was always easier. In a world where everything was dark and broken, somebody had to take the blame and it was usually the people closest to her. If you play with fire, you're gonna get burned. But ever since she'd left Nicky for Vinnie, she'd done nothing but blame herself. Her last memory of Nicky was so heartbroken and the painful guilt weighed like a stone in Lorna's stomach for the past year.

Well, not anymore. Clearly Nicky had moved on and abandoned her out of revenge. She had lied and betrayed and hurt her on purpose. It was all her fault. The tiny crack in her defence gave way to the fire and fury of a thousand suns. Hell, it was hot.

Lorna wiped the sweat off her legs and continued to stomp away from Nicky, who was protesting in the distance. She didn't know how much further she could go with her back aching but she had to make a statement. Show Nicky how much she'd hurt her.

"Hey, stop!" She could hear Nicky beginning to follow after her now. "You're walking into the middle of nowhere, Lorna."

She didn't care. She pushed on. After so long on bed rest, her centre of gravity was off and she stumbled a bit. It was like the baby was dragging her down, dragging cramps down her legs. Mind over matter, that was her mantra. She wasn't stopping now.

"Slow down! You're going to hurt yourself."

Suddenly her back flared with a pain she'd never felt before and she grabbed onto a tree to keep from falling.

Nicky's footsteps pounded behind her. She touched her shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"Leave me alone!" Lorna wrenched Nicky's hand away. Pain or anger, she could only choose one. But God, she was in a lot of pain.

Nicky looked at her searchingly. "I didn't mean it like that. I know you didn't just get over Carmine."

"You were probably happy Carmine died," she spat back. She knew it wasn't true, but her anger wanted to hurt Nicky. In this moment, she couldn't fathom ever having warm feelings towards her.
She hated her.

Surely enough, Nicky looked hurt. "How can you say that?"

"You've never wanted me to be happy. You hated that I was with Vinnie and you hated that I was having his child."

Nicky groaned, tipping her head to the sky. "Lorna, all I ever wanted was for you to be happy."

"Only if I'm happy with you! Do you remember when you came back from max, huh? You made me think Vinnie was cheating –"

"That was like 500 years ago!" Nicky threw up her arms. "Look, if you wanna be angry, if that's what you need to do, then fine. But I'm the one who should be pissed at you."

"I'm married to Vinnie. I love him. We're soulmates." Lorna relished the words, watching Nicky squirm underneath them like an ant under a magnifying glass. "You need to get over it."

"I was over it!" Nicky shouted. She'd successfully hit a raw nerve. "Why do you think I made him come back every time you lost your damn marbles? I accepted it. You're the one who led me on."

She could hear what Nicky was saying but she couldn't listen. She could feel her fire extinguishing and then what? Back to ice, back to tears. Her stomach started to hurt. No, damn it. Nicky was not going to be right this time.

"I didn't fucking plan it, did I? I told you me and Vinnie were over. It's not my fault he changed his mind."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "You still don't fucking get it, do you? You never changed your mind. You said you'd wait for me but really you just wanted to keep me around as a fucking security blanket until your precious Vinnie came back."

Lorna was running out of defences. "We shared stuff you will never understand. He is my husband. He loves me. He wants a family with me. What, do you want me to be sad and lonely?"

"You'll never be lonely, Lorna." Nicky smirked, as if she knew she shouldn't say what was coming next. "If a guy smiles at you in a post office, you're getting married."

"FUCK YOU!" God, she knew all along she was wrong to trust Nicky with her secrets. Just one more reason why she was wrong to trust in anyone, let alone the person she thought was her best friend.

"The feeling's mutual, babe," said Nicky coldly, now facing away. She was getting the upper hand, withdrawing. Lorna needed to pull her back.

"Tell me something, if I didn't find you would you have ever looked for me?"

"No." Nicky's reply was instant, unfeeling. It cut right through Lorna. Ice into fire.

"Thank you." Lorna tried to match Nicky's stoicism, but her voice was shaking. "It's nice to know how much our friendship means to you if you can't get in my pants."

Nicky turned around, looking Lorna dead in the eyes. Dead serious. "My sobriety means more."

"Please, you're practically still living in prison –"
"It's not the prison. I get that now. Every time I've relapsed – or wanted to – it was when I felt far away from you, Lorna. You make me feel like shit. You just use me and spit me out when something better comes along. Fuck, if wanted to feel unloved, I'd just live with my parents."

"You don't mean that." Nicky's parents deserted her. They were horrible, heartless people that caused her to turn to drugs to fill the void they'd carved out. Nicky couldn't possibly compare her to them.

She seemed to sense the chaos unfurling in Lorna's head and took a step closer. Her face was open, but it wasn't friendly at all.

"Look, kid. Being with you is great. It's the best high in the world. But it took going through withdrawal to realise that you're not good for me."

Never was it easy for Lorna to hear another side of an argument, especially when she was emotional. But she knew Nicky so well. She wasn't lying. And really, when all was said and done, when did Nicky ever lie?

No. No. This wasn't how she fantasised their argument on the bus ride here. She was meant to win the blame game. She was meant to be angry. Nicky was meant to feel her pain. She realised, with a jolt, that she did. Lorna had hurt her. Oh God, how much had she hurt her?

She started to walk away from Nicky, only to stop her seeing her cry. Even looking at her was painful. Everything was.

"Don't walk away. Let's just talk about it," Nicky called.

She let herself fog out Nicky's voice. She didn't want any of it anymore. She was too ashamed and worthless. There was no way her brain could bend to make this anyone else's fault but her own.

Lorna forced herself to the top of the incline. Looking out through the trees, she could see old Litchfield in miniature. She flashbacked to a time when she was happier, despite being locked up against her will. All she wanted was to be back there, before any of this ever happened, sitting in the prison cafeteria, playing MASH, planning a campaign, laughing at Vause and Chapman's endless drama, eating crappy frozen waffles with her head against Nicky's shoulder. A pang ripped through her that wasn't just her heart breaking.

She didn't know she'd screamed until the woods echoed it back to her. She'd tried to fight back the pain but she couldn't ignore the rush of water cascading down her legs.

Nicky

Her legs carried her to Lorna faster than she could even register the woman had screamed. A cold feeling of danger rushed over Nicky. She hoped Lorna was just being over-dramatic or saw a spider or something. She didn't want to think about any other reasons why she would have cried out like that.

When she got to the top of the slope, Lorna was frozen. Her eyes were wide and glassy and she was murmuring under her breath. Nicky knew instantly that she wasn't in reality.

"Lorna? What happened?"
She didn't respond. Whatever was going on, her brain was working hard to protect her from it. She was staring out towards the prison. Something, a memory, must have triggered this state.

Nicky shook her shoulders a bit, tapped her lightly on the cheek. She was pissed at the woman – and still digesting all the toxic words they'd just exchanged – but she wasn't about to leave her having a breakdown in these woods. Fuck, they really needed to get out of here.

"Lorna, it's Nicky. Can you hear me? Come back. Lorna?"

Now Nicky was getting worried. She'd seen Lorna break from reality before, sometimes deceptively so, but she'd never been this unresponsive.

"LORNA!"

Lorna blinked hard; it seemed like she was coming back. Suddenly she doubled over, clutching her back.

"What's happening? What's wrong?" Nicky tried to straighten her up so she could look her in the eye. She looked around in confusion for a second before her eyes widened.

"I ... I think my water broke," she choked.

"Fuck. No. Are you sure?" Please let it be in her head this time.

Lorna didn't answer as she doubled over again. Nicky grabbed hold of her arms. This was real, this was really happening.

"Uh, fuck. Shit. Uh, don't freak out." Nicky was on the verge of panic herself. Fuck fuck fuck fuck.

The contraction eased off and Lorna was back to regular crying. "No, no. This is all wrong. I'm not due yet. I'm meant to have a C-section."

Nicky racked her brain. What the fuck do you do in this situation? "Just ... stay calm. My place isn't far from here. Did you drive?"

"No, I got the bus."

The bus? Trust Lorna to get on the bus from Brooklyn or wherever the hell he lived just to have an argument.

"Alright, don't worry. We'll get you an ambulance —"

"Oh God," Lorna whimpered. "I should have never left the hospital."

"Hospital?" Nicky felt a sharp pang herself. She'd always assumed Lorna was living the life of marital bliss. The thought of her or her baby being in danger brought her back to a very scary place.

"They've been keeping me there. On bed rest. Oh, oww."

"You idiot. Can you walk?"

Lorna nodded sheepishly. Nicky looped their arms together and helped her down the slope. She dragged her along as fast as Lorna could walk. Nicky knew next to nothing about childbirth (she'd actively changed the subject when Lorna was pregnant in prison) but she knew they had to get to a hospital fast.
The walk back to the house was gruelling. Every time she thought they were getting somewhere, Lorna was wracked with another contraction and had to stop.

"I can't, I can't. I need to rest." Lorna sat down on a tree stump, slumping over. Nicky wished she was strong enough to carry her.

"You can't stop now. We're almost there," Nicky lied.

"Just leave me here."

Yeah, like I'm gonna do that, Nicky thought as she hooked her arm around Lorna's waist.

"Come on, think of the baby."

With some effort, Lorna got back on her feet. It felt like an eternity had passed by the time they got through the front door of the house. She lowered her to the couch but Lorna sunk to her knees instead and dug her face into the cushion. Her brow was dripping with sweat.

"I'm going to call an ambulance now. Just hang in there, okay?"

She grabbed her phone off the kitchen counter and dialled 911. In a minute, she was explaining the situation she could hardly believe herself to an operator.

"How far apart are the contractions?" The man on the phone asked.

"Uh, I'm not sure." Was she supposed to time those?

"How far advanced is the pregnancy?"

"Uhhhh..." Nicky rushed back to Lorna. "How far along are you, kid?"

"Thirty five weeks," she cried. Was that normal? What was that in months?

Nicky put the phone back to her ear. "You get that?"

"Yes, it's a little early but the most important thing is to keep her calm. An ambulance has been dispatched to your location. I'll stay on the line just in case."

Just hurry the fuck up. Lorna was on her hands and knees, slowly rocking back and forth through the pain.

"Hey, they're on their way." She reached out a hand and rubbed her lower back where it seemed to be hurting her most.

"Don't touch me!" Lorna screamed. Nicky yanked her hand away. Lorna turned angrily to Nicky. "Why'd you stop?"

Nicky couldn't help but roll her eyes as she massaged her back until the contraction subsided. "Can I get you an aspirin? Hot water bottle? A shot? I don't know what to do, Lorna. What can I do?"

"I need Vinnie," Lorna wept.

"It's gonna take him hours to get here, babe."

She buried her head in the cushion and sobbed. "This is all my fault."
"Why'd you leave the hospital, kid? What's been going on? Are you sick?"

"The same thing that happened to ..."

She broke off mid-sentence, her eyes as wide as saucers, the breath catching in her throat.

"No ... no ..."

Shit, a panic attack was the last thing they needed right now. "Lorna, breathe. Your baby needs you to breathe. Damn it."

Another wave of pain hit her and her breaths got even more out of control.

"Do you remember what I taught you?" Nicky placed a hand on her belly. She could actually feel her muscles tightening, which made her feel sick. She focused. "Hey, breathe in for four seconds. Breathe out for four."

Lorna continued to wheeze. Nicky was terrified she'd pass out, and then what would happen? Quickly she moved her so she was half-lying on her back.

"Don't go ... it hurts ... I'm ... bleeding ... it's too early ... where's Nicky ..."

"I'm here." Nicky waved a hand in front of Lorna's face, but her eyes were elsewhere.

"It's all my fault ... stupid D-block ... she's dead ... it hurts ... I'm ... bleeding ... Vinnie ... a boy ... where is he ... no ... bring me my son ... no ... he's ... no no no ..."

Suddenly it all made sense. If anything was going to trigger those memories.

"Lorna, it's just a flashback. It's over. You're with me, Nicky. You're safe."

She remembered what Artesian said, that strong sensations could sometimes help pull her back into the present (unfortunately, it was usually a lit cigarette to the thigh). Nicky had a better idea. She ran to the kitchen and filled a tea towel with ice cubes.

"I'm ... bleeding ... " Lorna was beginning to fade.

Nicky pressed the ice to her forehead and tried to encourage her breathing again.

"No, you're not. Trust me. Listen to my voice. It's not happening again. I'm not going to let anything bad happen to you or your baby. I promise."

That finally calmed Lorna down to a sob. Her breathing slowed and she seemed to be in the room again.

"Welcome back." Nicky smiled.

She looked down in bewilderment at Nicky's hand on her belly. They were so close. Closer than they had been since Lorna was taken to psych. That felt like so long ago.

"I'm so sorry, Nicky," she whispered. "I'm such a stupid piece of shit. I didn't realise −"

"Don't think about that right now." Her health was much more important than an apology.

"I missed you so much," Lorna snivelled. "Everything is so scary without you. I got no idea what the fuck I'm doing."
"Well, seems to me like you're about to be a mom. That's a hell of a lot more than I've got planned."

A strange look came over her face. "It's not what I wanted, Nicky."

"What did you want?"

"I don't know. That's kinda the problem."

Nicky sighed and pulled back her hand. It rested on the rug, the ... soaked rug. She looked down. Bright red blood seeped between her fingers. *Fuck.*

"Oh fuck, it's coming again."

Lorna curled into another contraction. She was in too much pain to realise that the skirt of her dress was getting more and more stained. What did the operator say? The most important thing is to keep her calm.

"Kid, I'm just going to find out where that ambulance is." Nicky started to get up.

"No! Don't leave me. Please don't leave me." Lorna grabbed her hand, thankfully it wasn't the bloody one.

"I won't, I promise. So you can stop squeezing the life out of my hand. Ow, Jesus! Lorna, I swear I'll be one minute."

Nicky pulled herself away and dashed to the bathroom, running her hand under the faucet and watching blood, Lorna's blood, swirl down the drain. For a second she was paralysed. Wait. What the fuck was she doing?

"Is anyone still there?" She waited for the call operator to confirm. "Where is the fucking ambulance? My friend is bleeding. I don't know what to do."

"Just stay calm. The ambulance is on its way. Don't give her anything to eat or drink."

"That's it? I'm kinda freaking the fuck out here."

"There's not much you can do except be there. Don't try to force or stop anything. If the time comes, her body will know what to do."

Nicky doubted it, but she listened anyway, feeling quite outside of herself, as he explained what to do in a worst-case scenario. This was way too much responsibility. Lorna already lost a baby and she wasn't there. If she couldn't save her this time...

"NICKY!"

"Shit." Nicky grabbed all the clean towels she could find and ran back to where Lorna was bent forward, swearing her head off. She lay one of the towels down. The amount of blood pooled on the floor chilled her to the bone.

"Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck!"

"Yeah, my thoughts exactly. Just try to relax, you're doing great."

"No, I don't want to do this!"

"Believe me, there's about a million things I'd rather being doing right now. Just hold on, the
ambulance will be here soon."

Lorna wasn't listening. Something had changed. "Oh God, I can feel it coming. I need to push."

"No, no, don't do that. I can't deliver a fucking baby, Lorna."

"Argh! Help me!"

"Okay, okay. I'm here. Just breathe."

"What the fuck do you think I'm doing!" Lorna screamed.

"Fuck, sorry."

It hurt to see her in so much pain, the contractions were constant now. Nicky started to feel lightheaded herself. *No, pull it together. If Lorna's doing what she's doing, you can at least fucking help her.* She lifted Lorna's dress to see what was going on.

"Holy fucking shit."

"What is it?" Lorna locked eyes with her in panic. "What's wrong?"

"No, you're really doing it, kid. I see the head. Whatever you're doing, just keep doing it."

"I can feel it. Oh fuck, it hurts – just get it out, get it out! ARGH!" She pushed hard and suddenly the head was born.

"Jesus fuck!" Nicky tried not to let her see the horror on her face. "I mean, good job. Just a bit more and it will all be over."

She nodded, gathering up her strength. With the next contraction, she screamed and pushed as hard as she could. Nicky quickly grabbed a clean towel and caught the baby in her arms. It was so tiny. She rubbed it all over with the towel. *Wake up, little baby.*

Lorna sunk backwards, her breathing still heavy but full of relief. It took her a moment to even realise she'd had a baby. But now she was hearing the silence. She looked to Nicky for a reaction, some reassurance.

"Is he okay?"

Chapter End Notes

We are past the 70,000 word mark! Please comment if you're still with me lol. I need to lie down after writing that. Isn't Nicky a hero?
That Is Not Reassuring

Chapter Summary

Are Lorna and the baby going to be okay?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

It all happened so fast. One moment she was in the most unbelievable agony she couldn't bear another second of it; the next, she felt an instant release of pain and pressure.

Lorna lay back against the couch, taking long, restorative breaths. Her other senses started to come back to her. Eyes taking in the strangely domestic surroundings, skin feeling a strange dampness where she was sitting, ears zeroing in on a deafening silence.

The baby wasn't crying.

"Is he okay?" She pushed herself back up, searching Nicky's eyes for some kind of positive response. A nod, a smile? Please look at me, Nicky.

She didn't look up. She had the baby in her arms and was rubbing him with a towel. Oh God. Oh no no no no...

Suddenly the baby startled and the room filled with shrill, sharp little cries. Lorna never heard a better sound in her life.

Nicky gave a weary smile. "Well, first things first. It's not a he, it's a she."

"It's a girl?" Just when she thought she couldn't handle another shock. No, but this was a nice shock. A little girl.

The tiny towelled bundle was placed in her arms. The baby was covered in gross stuff and screaming bloody murder, but she was Lorna's and that made her perfect. Lorna crashed into tears of relief. "I have a daughter, Nicky."

Nicky kissed her forehead. "Yeah, you did it. I'm proud of you, kid." She shakily got to her feet. "Back in a sec."

Lorna watched as Nicky walked out of earshot, putting the phone to her ear. It was all starting to sink in now. Nicky Nichols delivered her baby. She didn't know whether to laugh or cry. She did both.

"You okay, doll?" Nicky came back carrying a thick duvet. "Here. Gotta keep you and kitten warm till the ambulance gets here."

She wrapped it around her and the baby, burrito-style. Lorna hadn't realised she was shivering. She
didn't feel cold, though. In fact, she was sweating. But that wasn't unusual, after what she'd just been through. It was fine. Everything was good.

Nicky pushed the couch back and made her lie down flat. She grabbed a few couch cushions and stacked them up, raising Lorna's feet above her head. Then she covered her with another blanket. Weird, but she didn't question it. The baby's crying had calmed to a whimper. She could feel the warmth of her tiny body, her amazing, regular little heartbeat, matching her own. All she wanted was to stay in this perfect moment.

Then she remembered. "Oh God. I gotta call Vinnie."

"Don't worry." Nicky patted the pile of blankets, easing her back down into a lying position. "I gave them his number, he's gonna meet you at the hospital."

She dissolved into tears again. "Oh, Nicky! I – I don't know how I survived without y-you!"

Nicky shot her a look. "Lorna, you just pushed an actual human being out of your cunt. I think you're a bit stronger than you know." Then she smiled. "I missed you, too."

The paramedics arrived about 10 minutes after the main event. They dealt with all the messy stuff like cutting the cord and delivering the afterbirth, which was more painful and disgusting than anyone had prepared her for. Nicky held her hand through all of it.

When they lifted her onto the stretcher, only then Lorna saw how much blood she'd lost. She gasped. Nicky hadn't let on at all.

"Try to relax, ma'am." One of the paramedics started to lift the baby out of her arms as the other tightened the straps.

"No, I ... wanna hold her."

"It's just a precaution, in case you pass out. You don't want to drop her, do you?"

She felt Nicky squeeze her shoulder and reluctantly she passed her daughter to the paramedic. He put one of those weird foil blankets on her and slipped an oxygen mask over her face.

"But I feel fine ..." Lorna sighed. "Because of Nicky ... she's so good ... I love her so much ... "

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Nicky

Nicky waited.

Her body was so full of adrenaline that being confined to a shitty plastic chair in a waiting room was damn near impossible. She got up, paced, sat back down, jiggled her legs, got up again. She must have looked like she was on something. That was a tempting thought after a day like this, she couldn't deny.

She, Lorna and the baby each went separate ways once they reached the hospital. Lorna was wheeled into a room that, as someone who wasn't family, Nicky couldn't follow. As if privacy mattered when she'd literally just delivered her fucking baby! She tried to appeal to them, pleading that Lorna needed at least someone with her. But no dice. Maybe she should have just lied and
pretended Lorna was her wife. Vince would have loved that.

She'd seen him sprint down the corridor towards her room a couple of hours after they arrived. He didn't even notice Nicky in the waiting room. Then again, why would he? Some time later, a woman with dark hair rushed by who Nicky recognised from photos as Lorna's sister. At least she wasn't alone.

All she wanted was to know if Lorna was okay. She was pretty out of it in the ambulance, making love declarations through an oxygen mask. It would have been funny if she wasn't so cold and pale. The paramedics didn't seem alarmed as they gave Lorna drip fluids and checked on the baby, but she wouldn't rest until someone had given her the all-clear. Lorna wasn't the only one with Carmine-related post-traumatic stress.

She sat down and put her head in her hands. When she looked up, Vince was standing in front of her. She scrambled to her feet.

"Hey. How is she?" Her attempt at not sounding completely, desperately concerned was a fail.

"Awesome," he grinned. Wow, she'd never seen him before without that mopey look on his face. "Ten fingers and ten toes, and she weighs five pounds six ounces."

"I meant Lorna."

"Oh." His face fell a little. "She's fine, she lost some blood but she's okay. She's sleeping now. It's been a rough day on all of us."

She stopped herself rolling her eyes. You didn't do shit, Vincent Muccio! "Yeah, uh, tell me about it."

To her surprise, his eyes filled with tears. "Nicky, I don't know how to thank you."

Oh. This was a new emotion: sincere gratitude. She didn't really know what to do with that, especially when she was so primed for a showdown.

"Hey, Lorna did all the work. I was just there."

"No, she told me. You kept her calm, you got the baby breathing, you made sure they were safe until the ambulance got there. You're a hero."

Suddenly he embraced her in warm, tearful hug. Again, Nicky was at a complete loss for words. She had spent so much energy hating the guy, but here he was being vulnerable... and nice? She had to maybe admit that he wasn't the devil incarnate just because he got between them. Ugh.

She slowly peeled herself away, patting him awkwardly on the back. "Uh, well, I just wasn't about to let Lorna lose this baby."

He sunk down in one of the plastic chairs, exhausted. "How was she? I mean, before all the drama happened – did she seem okay to you?"

"She... was the same old Lorna." It was technically the truth. Lorna had always been a few meatballs short of a spaghetti.

"I'm just trying to figure out what the hell she was thinking. When the hospital called and said she was missing... I don't understand why she would risk it. What if you weren't there? What if the baby –"
Look, she knew exactly where he was coming from, but fuck if he was gonna give Lorna a hard time after all she'd been through...

"But all's well that ends well, eh? Come on, this a day of celebration. Let's focus on the positive. You have a beautiful wife and a healthy daughter."

"I know," he conceded. "I don't wanna fight with her right now. But it drives me crazy. I can't seem to control her at all."

"Stop trying to control her and help her to control herself." She'd said that a little too loudly, a little too firmly. Luckily, he didn't seem to notice, as he was still shaking his head in disbelief.

"Yeah... yeah..."

"Uh, Vince? Do you think I could see her now?"

He looked up blearily. "Well, she's sleeping so..."

"Oh. Sure. Yeah." Her stomach fell. After all that waiting...

"But I'm sure she'd love to see you in the morning." He smiled. "You're always welcome with us, Nicky."

She gave him two thumbs up, because she didn't know what else to do, and started on the long journey home.

By the time she got through her front door that night, her legs were lead and her brain was jell-O. So when Artesian launched at her screaming, she barely blinked.

"Hey."

"Hey?! HEY?!" The blonde practically strangled her in an angry hug. "Do you ever answer your fucking phone?"

"Shit, I left it here." She must have forgotten it in all the chaos. She wondered if the 911 operator was still waiting on the line.

"I thought you were dead! There's blood everywhere –"

Nicky waved a hand. "Don't worry, it's not my blood."

"That is not reassuring!"

_Fuck._ Clearly this day was not about to end any time soon. If there was ever a time for a hit, it was now – but she had to settle for the next best thing.

"Make coffee. It's a long and fucked-up story."

Chapter End Notes

Of course they're okay! I'm not *that* evil.

P.S. Thanks for the lovely comments last chapter. It's nice to be on this rollercoaster together :)
Qué Sera, Sera

Chapter Summary

Nicky gets literally overwhelmed by happiness.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

The ambulance ride was a complete haze. Lorna couldn't remember a single word exchanged, only that Nicky was stroking her hand and it felt nice. She was always better at remember feelings than details. But now she was feeling panic. Where was her baby? Was she okay?

Bright hospital lights shocked her enough that she was aware of doctors sticking needles in her and stitching her and doing other painful things. Why were they all here and not looking after her daughter? She asked again and again but nobody would give her a straight answer. She just wanted her back in her arms. She wanted Nicky. Where did she go?

She was starting to lose trust in herself, her memories, those precious first cries. Her mind played tricks on her before. The reality of losing Carmine had finally surfaced at the worst possible time, making her relive everything her brain suppressed for so long. The pain, the blood, being separated from Nicky, Vinnie's tears, holding a tiny baby that wouldn't wake up. It felt like she could have stayed in that memory forever if Nicky hadn't pulled her back.

She was alone in her room, her mind going down all those dark avenues, when Vinnie burst in the door. His eyes were manic. He rushed to her, nearly tripping over the bed. She must have looked a complete wreck as he took in the bleeping monitor, the IV line in her arm.

"Lorna! Oh my God!"

He squeezed her tight. It hurt but she didn't care. She buried her face into his neck and sobbed.

"Vinnie..."

"Are you okay, sweetheart? Let me look at you." He took Lorna's nodding head in his hands.

"They... they took the baby for tests. I – I don't know ... nobody will tell me where she is."

His expression brightened. "She? It's a girl? I have a daughter?"

"She's so tiny, Vinnie," she wept. "She wasn't breathing."

All trace of a smile left his face. "Oh God."

"Nicky made her start crying. Did you see her? Maybe she knows what happened."

"Nicky? Nicky was there?"
She gulped. "I went to her house. I just wanted to see her. I didn't think... I'm not due for weeks –"

"Is that why you left the hospital? You were on bed rest, Lorna." Vinnie huffed. "Jesus. What were you thinking? What the hell is it with you and Nicky?"

Lorna couldn't answer that without breaking her marriage. Her heart was so guilty and so divided. "I'm sorry!"

He pulled her in again, sighing. "Okay, shush, shush. It just kills me I wasn't there. Did it hurt?"

Lorna stopped sobbing and pulled away. She gave him a withering look. "We are never having sex again."

"If I had a dollar for how many times I've heard that," said the doctor, walking into the room. She wheeled in a clear plastic crib on a trolley. Inside was a baby swaddled in pink blankets. "Ah, so you must be Mr Muccio."

Vinnie left Lorna's bedside and rushed to the baby. "Is this her? Is she okay?"

The doctor smiled. "You two are very lucky. She's a very strong, healthy baby for 35 weeks. She doesn't even need to stay in the NICU."

"Oh, thank God!" Lorna and Vinnie cried in unison.

"Can I hold her?" Lorna wished she could get up and run over too. She felt so far away.

With a nod from the doctor, Vinnie lifted the baby and slowly walked back to the bed. Gently, he placed their daughter in Lorna's arms. She was all cleaned up and Lorna finally got a good look at her. She had lots of shiny dark hair and delicate features with flushed cheeks. The baby looked up at her with curious grey eyes. Yes, she was small but she was healthy. This was nothing like last time. Those black memories faded away into light.

"Hello, angel. Oh, she's perfect." She cried happy tears for a change.

Vinnie was also in tears. "She's so beautiful, Lorna. I can't believe she's ours."

"Tell me this ain't a dream."

He kissed her on the forehead. "It's real, my love."

"I'll leave you three to it," said the doctor, moving to leave. "Once you've got your fluids up, you can try nursing. Your wife suffered a little shock, Mr Muccio."

"That ain't surprising with all she's been through," he said flippantly.

"No, that just means the blood loss from the abruption caused what we call shock. Her heart wasn't pumping enough blood to her body." She noticed Vinnie's paling complexion. "Don't worry, we got it early. You're just lucky your friend was there to give first aid."

Oh. Now it all made sense why Nicky kept wrapping her in blankets even though she was dripping sweat. Now she didn't just owe Nicky her daughter's life. She was so grateful she could barely process it. For Nicky to come through for her in such a big way, despite that horrific fight, despite how much she hurt her...

Vinnie edged his way onto the bed and wrapped both of them in his arms. "You okay?"
"Yeah." She barely realised she was crying again, there were so many emotions going on. "Did you ever see such a beautiful sight in your entire life?"

"Not since I met you." He stroked her cheek, then the baby's. "Thank you for doing this with me. I know we had our ups and downs but I love you so much, Lorna. You changed my life forever. My little macaroni."

It was the first time in so long that she felt at home with her husband. Maybe now it would all stop being so hard.

She took a deep breath. "There's just one thing I gotta tell you."

"What?" He pulled away, concerned.

"What we gonna do with all the blue baby clothes we bought?"

"Obviously we have to buy new ones. A baby girl can't wear blue." He shook his head at the notion.

"I know! That would be insanity!"

---

Lorna looked tired, but she was in far better shape than the last time she saw her. Even her eyes were sparkling.

Vince got out of his seat and thrust a bunch of flowers and a card at Nicky. "For the kind doctor."

"Thank–"

Before she could react, he came back with a box of chocolates, a hamper of soap, a bottle of alcohol-free champagne, a helium balloon, and topped off with a teddy bigger than Lorna herself. Nicky stared at them both in bewilderment.

"Yay, she loves it!" Lorna squealed, clapping her hands. The baby grizzled again.

"Uh, I'm pretty sure I'm supposed to be the one giving you presents."

He beamed. "We wanted to thank you for you all did."

Nicky awkwardly put the pile of gifts down and reached into her tote bag. "Well, uh, I did get you a present. It's kind of a joke."

She gave Lorna the hastily wrapped parcel. She tore it at with glee. "Oh my God!" She held up the tiny orange romper bearing the slogan 'I just did 9 months on the inside'.

"That is sooo cute! Vinnie, look how funny this is! Ain't that just the best?"

Vince laughed in agreement. "Oh... because prison. Haha, I get it."
Lorna patted the hospital bed, beckoning Nicky towards her. She wrapped her in a tight hug. When was the last time they'd hugged like this? It felt so normal and so strange at the same time.

"Thank you for saving us. You're our hero," she gushed, still not letting go. "You're the best, the best, the best, the best..."

It was safe to say Lorna had forgotten how angry she was just yesterday. But Nicky knew her well enough to know she wasn't thinking straight when she got in a mood like that.

She pulled herself out of Lorna's arms. "Well, I'm just glad you're both okay."

"Come see the baby." Lorna pulled the covers back and gingerly started to get out of bed.

"Oh no, Lorna, you don't have to –"

Too late, Lorna was already standing up and carefully lifting the lump of pink blankets out of the crib.

An untameable smile broke out across her face. "Meet Serafina Stansie Francine Nicole Patricia Galina Rosa Maria Morello Muccio."

"Jesus, kid. Do you think that's enough names?"

Lorna didn't react; clearly she didn't think so. Well, at least she hadn't called it Kitten or Nutella.

"Serafina means angel and she's our angel. But we was thinking like Sera for short."

"Oh, like qué sera, sera."

"Huh?" Vince and Lorna both looked up blankly.

"Whatever will be, will be..." No response. "You know what, never mind. It's a pretty name."

Lorna bounced a little in validation. "You wanna hold her?"

"Oh no, I'm not really a baby person –"

Too late, Lorna was already passing her the baby. She was staggered a bit by the warm weight in her arms.

Lorna lowered herself back on the bed. "So, whaddya think?"

Nicky looked down at the sleeping infant. It had dark hair (partially hidden under a ridiculous rosette-covered beanie) and a scrunched up little face with rosy lips. Definitely took after Lorna, thank God. It let out a little sigh and buried its head into the crook of her elbow. Despite being so small, it was strong and healthy and perfect. After everything Lorna had been through, she was finally getting the happy ending she deserved.

She felt Lorna's hand on her leg. "Are you crying, hun?"

"Ah, fuck you for having such an adorable baby. I'm gonna lose all my street cred."

Nicky watched Lorna and Vinnie interact. It was, she realised, the first time she'd actually seen them together in the same room. She'd always worried that he didn't really love Lorna, that he was taking
advantage of a lonely, loony girl in prison. But she could see the full picture now, in the way he
kissed her on the cheek or tucked her hair behind her ear or gently wiped away her tears when the
baby wouldn't nurse. It was all the things she wanted to do, but couldn't.

The pair of them were obnoxiously happy. A little family. Two effusive Italian-Americans with a
matching daughter – fuck, if that baby didn't know how to cry. It was uncanny. The way they shared
such traditional views (the poor child was already signed up for ballet and cooking lessons), how
they kept calling each other pet names that were just variations of pasta, the extremely off-key
version of 'Waiting for a Girl Like You' by Foreigner they spontaneously sung at the baby.

She waited until Vinnie left to get food (Lorna insisted even prison food was better than hospital
food, and Nicky couldn't disagree by the looks of it). Lorna was busy rocking Sera in her arms,
trying to get her settled.

"What's the matter, my little tortellini? What do you want?" She looked up at Nicky. "She cries a
lot."

_Better than not crying at all_, Nicky wanted to say, but she quickly locked that joke far back in the
dark recesses of her mind. "Hey, that's what babies do."

"I guess," Lorna mumbled. It had been a long, social day. The nurses had told Nicky to get out no
less than three times. Clearly tiredness was starting to take its toll.

Nicky stroked Lorna's hand, expecting and fearing the imminent hormone-spiked meltdown.

"Lorna, uh, I think I need to give you and Vinnie some space."

She shook her head, smiling. "No, you don't. We love it when you're here." To their credit, Lorna
and Vinnie had both actively included Nicky in their joy. And that was what was making it so hard.
In some ways, it was easier when she hated the pair.

"Let me rephrase that. I think I need some space."

Surely enough, now there were two crying in the room. Lorna looked panicked. "Why? What's
wrong? Did I do something wrong? Did I say something stupid? 'Cause I been so out of it, there's
parts of yesterday I don't hardly remember –"

"You did nothing wrong, kid. Uh, I just need some time to get my head straight. That's all."

Lorna whimpered and looked up at her with those big brown eyes. For a moment, Nicky was
reminded of her childhood puppy, who she loved to pieces before Marka got rid of it for being too
yappy and clingy. _Sent to a farm, my ass._

"I'm not abandoning you," she said firmly. "It's just a temporary break, that's all. You and Vinnie
need that too, uh, to get used to being a family. Look, here's my number. If you need anything at all,
call me. Please for the love of fuck, don't get on a bus."

Nicky scrawled her number on a piece of paper and tucked it inside Lorna's trembling hand.

"Will you be okay, kid?"

"Yeah." Lorna sniffed, trying to be strong. "What about you?"

"What about me?"
"Will you be okay?" Nicky's heart heaved in her chest. The kid was worried about her. It probably had everything to do with yesterday's argument. All those awful jabs were true, at least on some level. But she didn't want Lorna carrying that guilt into her new life.

"Yeah. Don't worry about me."

Nicky kissed Lorna on the cheek and tucked her hair behind her ear and gently wiped away her tears. Then she left. Vinnie would look after her fine, she knew that now.

Artesian watched, open-mouthed, as Nicky struggled through the front door carrying the mountain of pink ribbon-embellished presents.

"Uhhh... so how was the hospital?"

Nicky rolled her eyes and set the gifts on the floor. "I think they're grateful. Can you tell?"

Artesian picked up the alcohol-free champagne, made a disgusted face, then shrugged. She went to the kitchen and poured out two glasses. Nicky took a glass and threw it back. It tasted like... fizzy grape juice. But it was sweet of Lorna to remember her sobriety.

"I'm not surprised. I still can't believe you delivered her baby, here. Well, I can believe it because I had to throw out my rug. But I would have had no idea what to do. I would have been freaking the fuck out. You're a hero."

"I had no idea what to do and I was freaking the fuck out. I just did what I had to do, what anyone would do. I wish people would stop calling me a fucking hero."

For all she knew, Lorna's stalking escapade and their subsequent fight was what sent her into early labour. And, yeah, everything turned out well in the end, but she still wished she'd swallowed her pride and not put that distance between them in the first place.

"Well, that's what makes you a fucking hero," Artesian continued, raising a glass. "Being scared and doing it anyway."

Nicky wanted to to change the subject. She took out her phone and showed Artesian a picture she'd taken of Lorna holding the baby.

"Aw, cute," Artesian cooed.

"Yeah, she's gonna be a great mom."

"I was talking about the baby," said Artesian flatly. "You're still not over her, are you?"

Nicky sighed and flopped onto the couch. Maybe Lorna had to pop out a few more kids before her brain could get it through to her heart it was not going to happen.

"You know, I actually finally get it. They're perfect for each other. Uh, I don't know how Lorna did it but she somehow found a male, slightly less crazy version of herself. And the guy's not even that much of an asshole, which is so annoying."

Artesian kicked at the floor. "That's rough."

"No, no, it's okay." Nicky gave a slight smile. "I'm happy for her. I thought that if I ever saw her again, I'd get so low only drugs could get me above water. But I'm fine. I'm really fine."
"The strength was in you all along." She patted Nicky's thigh.

Nicky turned to her. "Artesian, I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful."

The blonde sighed. "You're leaving, aren't you?"

"I'm just done hiding. Now I know I can stay clean, I need to go out there and find out who I am or some shit. Without a safety net."

"What are you gonna do?"

"Hey, qué sera, sera."

Artesian nodded and gave her a hug. "Yep. Whatever will be, will be."

"Finally, someone fucking knows that song!"

Chapter End Notes

As much as I'm Nichorello endgame forever, I must admit Lorna/Vinnie were fun to write this chapter. Especially through Nicky's eyes haha... she's like WTFFF. Where do we think Nicky's headed? :)
Asking Very Fucking Politely

Chapter Summary

Lorna and Nicky reunite with some estranged faces.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

After a week in hospital, Vinnie and Lorna went home with their new baby. Of course, nothing was ready. They weren't expecting a baby for another month. But they decided not set up a separate nursery anyway; they barely had room and wanted Sera where they could see her, at all times.

Lorna was still recovering, so Franny came over to help out whenever she could. She was amazing, giving them tons of baby clothes and frozen meals. Lorna never had a lot of faith in people but she was starting to realise how much Franny had supported her over the years. Maybe her family weren't all bad.

"Do you like that? Do you?" Franny bounced Sera in her arms. For once, she wasn't crying. "Oh Lorn, she is so beautiful. You guys are so lucky. I know you ain't supposed to say it, but Tommy was such an ugly baby."

Lorna looked up from where she was boiling bottles in the kitchen and smiled. "You only say that 'cause she behaves for you. She ain't so pretty when she's screaming through the night."

Vinnie groaned in agreement. He was lying prostrate on the couch, happy for Franny to take Sera off their hands for a bit.

"You'll get used to it. Just wait till she hits the terrible twos." Franny studied the bottles. "And is she feeding and everything?"

"She's still struggling but the doctors said that's normal," said Lorna with an air of false confidence. The truth was, it was really starting to bother her. She'd tried everything but nothing worked. Why did the baby want a piece of plastic and not her?

Franny seemed to register her doubts. "It's no big deal. I only gave Tommy formula. I mean as long as you keep the baby alive, that's the main thing, right?"

Lorna suddenly needed Sera in her arms. She put down the bottles and took her off Franny. Immediately the baby started to grizzle.

"Oh, look at that! She likes me better. Guess she'll have to come home with me."

"She's mine," Lorna snapped.

"Hun, I was joking," Franny laughed. "But speaking of, dontcha think it's time you took her to see
"Maybe that's a good idea," said Vinnie, his face muffled by the cushions.

Lorna felt her head shaking. It was fine when they took Sera to meet Vinnie's parents. They were so grateful for Lorna finally getting Vinnie out of their house that they practically worshipped the ground she walked on. She had zero desire to see her father. The last time was that horrible fight, that made her dissociate all the way to the police station.

"No. Pa hates me."

"He don't hate you, Lorn. You think that great big lump has the energy in him to hate?"

_He had it in him to hit you for years, Fran._ Lorna bit her tongue. She didn't want to bring any of that ugly history around her baby. She had to protect her.

Franny twisted her mouth. "Anyways, he really wants to meet her. He told me himself."

"He did?"

"And Ma, I know she ain't all there, but she should meet your daughter. She's already growing so fast. Please, Lorn. Do it for Mama. We don't know how much time she's got left."

Lorna put on her best mask. She'd had about two hours sleep with Sera's feeding and screaming, but that was nothing a little mascara, concealer and lipstick couldn't fix. Of course, Vinnie slept through the night. He said it wasn't his fault, that women's ears were naturally better at picking up babies' cries. She said that men were naturally better at being lazy oafs.

She left all that tension and tiredness behind as she got in the car. She was dressed in a neat pink dress that matched her daughter's. Sera looked like such a little doll. She really was so beautiful. Lorna could completely lose track of time just staring at her.

"Please be a good girl today." She tickled Sera under the chin. "We gotta make your grandparents think I'm a good mama."

Vinnie looked back from the front seat. "Don't sweat it, babe. It's all gonna be fine."

Lorna hated those words. Nothing good ever happened after them. "I gotta warn you. My parents are kinda crazy."

"You think I don't know what Italian parents are like? I can handle it. I mean, they're not in the Mafia or nothing, right?"

She giggled. "Oh yeah, we're all about that mob life."

The car eventually rolled to a stop. She breathed a sigh of relief. Vinnie was a fine enough driver, but she hated Sera being in the car. Anything could happen.

She lifted Sera out of the car seat and they slowly walked up to the front door. Vinnie put his hand on her shoulder, then pressed the doorbell.

It was Franny that bounded to the door, her face lit up like Christmas. "You made it! Hi, little princess! Don'tcha look cute in your pink dress?" She squeezed Sera's cheek.
She ran to the kitchen and presented them with a tray of homemade rainbow cookies.

Vinnie shook his head. "Oh, we just had lunch –"

Lorna kicked him in the shin. Italians *never* refuse food, but especially not the Morellos. She picked up a cookie to demonstrate.

"But, uh, these look too good to pass up!" He begrudgingly took a cookie and shoved it in his mouth, then took another for good measure.

Giuseppe turned the corner into the kitchen. There was a strained silence between him and Lorna – then he beckoned them forward. He kissed her and Vinnie on both cheeks.

"You must be the famous Vince!" They shook hands. "Welcome to the family."

"It's great to finally meet you, Giuseppe," replied Vinnie, his mouth still full of cookies.

"Same here. I gotta say I was surprised when you never asked for my daughter's hand in marriage."

"Sorry, sir." Vinnie corrected himself, blushing a little. "It was actually Lorna that proposed."

"Bucking the tradition, huh?" Giuseppe shook his head. "Alright, give us a look at her."

Lorna passed the baby to her father, even though she didn't want to. The energy was off. Maybe Sera could feel it, the vibrations in the air.

"She's beautiful, Lorna," Giuseppe grinned, rocking Sera from side to side. Maybe it was okay. He seemed okay. "The spit of you when you were born. She's got your beauty so let's just hope she gets Vince's brains, huh?"

That hit her like a punch to the gut. The past two weeks, things felt so complete and perfect, she'd forgotten she was fucked-up. She looked at Vinnie for support but he didn't say anything. He was probably still flustered from the "hand in marriage" comment.

Lorna took the baby back. Giuseppe was stunned.

"I - uh – I gotta see Ma. That's what I came here for, anyway." And she rushed up the stairs, Vinnie following closely behind.

"Lorna, what was that about?"

"Do you fucking listen? ... I need to see my mother."

She turned the door handle to her mothers room and went in. The air was thick and fetid. She motioned for Vinnie to open a window. He was staring, but trying not to, at her mother. She didn't think it were possible for her to look any worse. But if she'd learned anything in the past five years, it was that rock bottom had a basement.

Lorna sat down on the bed. "Hi, Mama. It's Lorna. I got someone here that really wants to meet you."

Stansie was unresponsive. Lorna squeezed her hand, balancing the baby with the other.

"This is your granddaughter, Serafina. Do you wanna say hello to her?"

She lay her daughter next to her mother. Perhaps Stansie could feel her presence even if she couldn't
communicate it. She missed the days when the woman never shut the fuck up, when she was screeching and ringing that damn bell incessantly.

"Is she okay?" Vinnie asked. "Should we get help?"

She shot him a look. "You said you wanted to meet my family. Well, this is it."

"I'm sorry... I know you said, but I never thought... She's a vegetable."

"She can still hear you." She sidled Sera closer to Stansie. "Ma, I missed you. But Sera, you know, I think she's got your eyes. So I always got a piece of you with me."

Stansie stared straight ahead, her eyes liquid. Suddenly she let out a croak.

"What's that, Ma? You trying to say something? What is it? You can tell me."

"Shit!" Vinnie pointed at the bed. There was a spreading stain of yellow under where her mother lay. Lorna ripped Sera off the sheets. The baby started to howl.

"Oh God!"

She burst out of that foul room, running down the stairs towards the front door. Franny looked up in alarm, holding another tray of cookies.

"That was quick. Lorn – hey, what happened –"

Lorna didn't want to explain. She just needed to get out of that house, away from its poisonous energy. She was sorry for ever bringing Sera there. Opened the car door and strapped her into the baby seat.

"Baby?" Vinnie peered in through the window.

"Let's just go. Just go!"

He didn't want to refuse her manic, tear-filled demand, so he got in the front seat and started to drive.

"I'm so sorry, my baby," Lorna wept. "We're going home now. No more. You'll be safe."

Vinnie thumped his head on the steering wheel. "That was... fuck. I get what you mean now. Crazy. How the hell did you survive that long in a house like that?"

But it was barely surviving. And every bit of it had left a scar under her skin.

She touched her daughter's perfect, porcelain cheek. "That's what happens. Parents fuck up their kids."

Nicky

Nicky left the next day. She felt bad about leaving Artesian, but she'd made up her mind. Living in the woods was nice, and maybe she could even be a park ranger like that stupid aptitude test said, but
it just didn't feel like her.

Well, that was the point, she'd been running away from herself. Fleeing anything that might make Old Nicky climb out of her little cave. Because, God, now she was on the outside there was no limit to how many drugs she could get her hands on. And she didn't have Red to stop her. Who would have thought being outside of prison could be scarier than being in it?

It took Lorna coming back into her life to realise that she could deal with stress and heartache without reaching for a needle. Old Nicky certainly couldn't have delivered a baby. Old Nicky couldn't have forgiven Lorna for being happy with someone else. As far as she was concerned, that Nicky was dead. No need to send flowers for that bitch.

So New Nicky moved on with a tote bag holding just a couple of outfits, some paperwork and the chocolates and card Lorna and Vinnie had given her (the soap basket, balloon and bear would have to be left behind). Artesian tried to give her some money but she told her to save it. Use it towards getting help for her PTSD. Besides, she had another plan.

It was night when she finally got to the gallery. She scoped the place first – no, there didn't seem to be any PolyCon moles about. She took it all in. Everything seemed so... professional. She wanted to laugh. Her little drawings, framed with those pretentious description cards underneath. "Anon, 'Riot Anarchy'. Graphite on cellulose". That was a pretty roundabout way of saying paper and pencil.

To her relief, Artesian had taken down the ones of Lorna and anything too personal. But she noticed one that PolyCon could probably trace back to her, if they really wanted to, if they asked the right questions of the right people. A blonde woman was staring at it intently; the drawing called 'Prison Wedding'.

"You can have that one for free if you want it," said Nicky.

Piper turned around immediately at the sound of Nicky's voice. "Nicky?" She shrieked and pulled her into a strong, long embrace. "Oh my God! It's really you!"

Nicky wriggled out of it. "Yeah, a little birdie said you were looking for me."

"Wait, a little birdie?" Piper immediately twigged. "Do you mean Lorna? How did she find you?"

"Here's a tip. Don't give a stalker a challenge. Especially not one that's eight months pregnant."

The tall blonde's face fell. "She didn't do anything, did she? Is everything okay?"

"Nothing that a little bleach in my eyeballs can't fix. She's fine. She had the baby. It's all very cute, like rip-out-your-brain-and-puke-your-guts-out cute."

Nicky took out her phone and showed Piper the photo.

"Oh my God! You're right, that is sickeningly sweet," she gushed.

"Yeah, and if you didn't guess from the fucking giant pink bow on that tiny infant's head, it's a girl."

"Lorna has a daughter! What did she name her?"

"Something too fucking long and Italian."

"Aw, I should visit her soon. I'm so happy for her. She's been through so much with the stillbirth and —"
"Let's not fucking go there." God, she hoped Piper didn't bring that up when she went to visit Lorna. She was silent for a moment, a little chastened. "Well, I'm glad you two are friends again. You are, right?"

"Yeah, me and Lorna are like bagels and cream cheese, you know, if that cream cheese is fucking crazy. Point is, you can't keep us apart."

Piper smiled. "Well, whatever happened, she brought you to me. Nicky, this artwork is incredible. You're really gifted, I mean, it's like being there again —"

Nicky grabbed her by the arm. "Shush. Shut the fuck up. Are you trying to blow my cover? Let's talk about it outside, okay?"

She led Piper outside, until they were completely out of earshot.

"But really Nicky, do you know how huge this could be? We could expose PolyCon on a national level."

"Yeah, I know!" Nicky exclaimed. "It's already way too out of hand. That's why we're waiting until the contract is over and then we're auctioning off every piece. We were never here."

"But what did you do it for if you didn't want to expose PolyCon? I mean, isn't that what it's all about? Behind The Bars."

"It kinda defeats the purpose if I'm behind the bars, Chapman."

Piper waved her hand. "They couldn't do that. It's free speech."

"I'm not taking any chances, okay? I mean, what if I become a target? What if they plant drugs on me to violate my probation?" She was aware she was sounding paranoid, sounding, well, like Lorna. But then again, she'd been framed by Luschek, and he was meant to be her friend. "And you need to keep your nose out of it, Chapman."

"And what if I think it could change things?" Piper wasn't budging. Oh, once the woman got an idea in her head...

"It won't. You're living in fairyland if you think it will. I'll tell you how it all goes down. The media makes a big fuss for about, I don't know, five minutes, some social justice warriors tweet about it until something else starts trending, and absolutely nothing changes."

"Has anyone told you you're very cynical, Nicky?"

"Me, cynical? Never. But Piper, I'm asking very fucking politely. Let it go."

Piper sighed thoughtfully. "Can I at least interview you for my book?"

"No."

"Well, that's not fair!" Piper sulked.

Nicky breathed in deep. "I need a favour from you, Chapman."

She laughed. "Oh, you can forget it!"

"You're still not allowed to see wifey, are you? Well, what if I could check on her for you? Let you
know how she's doing. I need to see Red anyway."

Piper raised an eyebrow. "And what do you get out of it?"

"I need somewhere to stay, at least until this money comes through." Why did this feel like a bad idea already?

"Don't you have rich parents?"

"You mean Lilith and Lucifer? Yeah, uh, I'd rather live on the streets than crawl back to them."

Piper's eyes widened. Clearly her experience of family dysfunction was limited to arguing about which brand of toilet paper to buy.

"Well, I wouldn't mind if you stayed with me. I could use the company. To be honest, it's kind of lonely after Litchfield. I got used to sleeping to the sound of night terrors."

Nicky gave a sad little nod. That was exactly what she and Lorna both said about leaving prison. It was funny how these things got under your skin, how it could scar you from the inside out, how you could adapt to something shitty and not good for you, how you could even miss it.

Chapter End Notes

I had to bring back Piper. She and Nicky are one of my favourite friendships!
Lorna watched the rhythmic rise and fall of her daughter’s chest. She rested her hand on her warm cheek. It wasn’t too warm, right? She loosened one of the buttons on her tiny collar. Babies couldn’t keep warm by themselves, but was it really safe to keep her all wrapped up like that? It’s not like she could ask Sera herself. *Is everything fine, baby girl? Am I doing a good job?* So much of it was guesswork.

"Lorna? What are you doing?" Vinnie stirred, squinting at her through the darkness.

She was so focused on Sera’s breaths that she jumped a little. "Hm?!"

"She's asleep, for once," he mumbled. "Come back to bed."

She looked at the glowing alarm clock display. It was 3:46 AM. "I will in a minute."

A minute later, someone was nudging her awake. It was Vinnie, standing over her with a bemused look on his face.

"You slept on the floor? You crazy thing. You’ll throw your back out."

He extended a hand and helped her up. She must have nodded off while watching Sera. She looked inside the bassinet; the baby wasn’t there.

"Where is she?"

"On the bed. She woke up crying so I gave her a bottle."

Lorna clambered over to where Sera was lying, so comically small on the king-sized mattress. She was sound asleep and content. Vinnie did that? She couldn’t believe she slept through her cries.

She didn’t realise he’d left the room until he came back with a cream cheese bagel. "Here, eat this. You must be wiped."

She stuffed it in her mouth on autopilot. Bits of bread got wedged in her throat. "Vinnie, what if she gets used to only having the bottle?"

"Don’t matter as long as she eats, right?"
Practically, yes. But emotionally...

"Hey, you ain't crying about that again, are you?"

She shook her head. "It's the hormones."

"Scooch." He sat down on the bed and put his arm around her. "I know something's wrong. I can feel it in my elbow."

That made her smile. Those were simpler times, when they pretended to know everything about each other. She wished she could go back to that, before he actually knew her, when he looked at her like a person instead of a problem.

"I'm sorry, Vinnie. I'm trying."

He gave her a squeeze. "I know what it is. You've been bummed out ever since we saw your parents. Your father's an asshole. I knew that, I shoulda put a stop to it. Don't let him bring you down, Lorn. You're a lot better now, right?"

"Yeah. Sure." It had to be hormones and tiredness. She had everything she wanted so there was no reason to be unhappy.

"Well, he did get something right."

"What?"

"You're beautiful." He leaned forward and kissed her neck. She liked that. Slowly his hands started to wander.

"Uh-uh." She batted him away. "She ain't even a month old."

He didn't need to be told twice. She couldn't fault him for not being a gentleman, no matter what her father thought.

"That's okay. We waited way longer before."

Except that she didn't. She cheated, just gave in after weeks of fighting off Nicky's advances, even after she accused him of messing around. Lorna still had no idea why she did that. But she knew she couldn't actually blame it on hormones. More like being a self-destructive bitch with less stability than a two-legged chair.

For once, she was glad the baby started crying because she could think about something else.

"What do you want? Why can't I give it to you? What's wrong with me?"

"That's a big question for a baby, Lorna." She heard Vinnie chuckle. He poked his head into the room where she was trying to feed the crying baby. It was midday and nearly pitch black – the doctor had recommended trying to nurse in a dark, quiet room. "I'm just going to the store, do you need anything?"

"The store?" She didn't want him to leave. What if he never came back?

"Yes. Those clean diapers don't magically appear out of thin air." He took a step into the room. "Maybe you should come with me."
"But who's gonna look after the baby?"

"She can come too. It'll be like a family outing. Come on, Lorn. She wants to see what the world looks like."

Lorna held her closer. "No, no. What if she gets a chill? What if someone sneezes on her? She's too little – she ain't had all her shots yet."

Even the idea was sending her into a panic. Nothing good ever happened on the outside. She didn't trust other people and she didn't trust herself.

Vinnie rubbed her back. "You're just tired. Tell you what, give her a bottle and get her to sleep. Then take a shower and a nap. You'll feel better."

She nodded as if she was going to do any of those things and he left her alone in the dark.

Lorna dreaded night time. When both Vinnie and Sera were asleep, her mind filled the silence. She got up every few minutes to check on the baby. Vinnie now slept straight through the disturbances. She couldn't blame him – she now made more than Sera herself.

If she could just get rid of the memories, would she? He kept telling her to enjoy the experience but being ignorant of risks hadn't helped Carmine. At one point, in sleep-deprived delirium, she'd called Sera his name. Vinnie just looked at her sadly. She knew he was disappointed. Maybe Sera felt it too, the lack of joy. Franny warned her about the baby blues, that it was normal, but this was something different. A deep wrongness inside.

She stared at her daughter in the bassinet, trying to feel something other than guilt and fear. Yes, she was beautiful, but like a doll she didn't want to play with. So perfect and still.

Suddenly she was lying too still and all the bad memories surged to her head at once and oh God and she grabbed the baby out of the bed. Sera woke up with a start and began to wail.

Lorna slid down the wall in relief, holding the baby to her chest. "I'm sorry, sweetheart." She deserved better, so much better than this.

Nicky

"Here is a list of questions I need you to ask Alex."

Piper handed Nicky a thick wad of papers, her other hand on the steering wheel. She flipped through them, her eyes bulging at the many lines of tiny handwriting.

"Uh, you know we get like an hour for visitation, if that, and I have to see Red, too. Also, what the fuck is this?"

Piper took her eyes off the road and peered at the offending passage. "It's just some things I've been wanting to say to her for the past eighteen months."

"I'm not doing dirty talk for you, Chapman."
"It's not dirty talk! It's romantic."

"That makes it even worse somehow."

"Fine. Just... make sure she's safe and not mixed up in anything, okay?"

Nicky wondered if she should tell her she knew Alex did get mixed up in dealing again. But that would mean going into everything – her own near-relapse, Lorna's attempt. And the last she knew, Alex was out of the woods. She didn't want to get Piper freaked out for nothing.

Living with Piper was an experience to say the least. Every morning by the time Nicky pried her eyes open, Piper had already showered, had breakfast, run around Central Park, meditated and updated her blog. While Nicky was glad to be out of the strict prison routine, it seemed to have only strengthened Piper's need for organisation.

That morning, Piper had dragged her out of unconsciousness at 6AM with a chirpy 'rise and shine', passing her a Starbucks venti vanilla something. She reminded her every five minutes that they needed to be on the road to beat traffic, her nose wrinkling at the sight of Nicky's unmade bed. Finally she just made the bed herself, as if a CO was going to turn the corner any second and give them both a shot.

Piper pulled in to prison carpark and looked at the building in resignation. This was as far as she could go. It was a special kind of torture, making her drive out here only to not go in, but Nicky didn't have a license. The only car she'd been behind the wheel of was that taxi she crashed.

"Alex will be fine, yeah? I'll make sure of it."

Piper nodded and Nicky got out of the car. Walking back towards that grey building was ominous, like she was literally going back into her past. It all looked exactly the same – of course it did, she'd only been out a couple of months. But everything on the outside was so different. She was so different.

And this was the first time she'd been a visitor. She signed in, showed her ID, waited to be called, got one of those visitors stickers slapped on her chest. After going through the metal detector, she was ushered to the tiny cubicle with its perspex window and phone. And she waited.

For a moment, she had this fleeting moment of dread. What if Red wasn't coming? What if she had gotten herself locked in the SHU again – or worse? Nobody even had her number, so if anything happened, she'd have no way of knowing about it.

Her fears melted away when a familiar grey-haired woman sat down in front of her. A shocked smile lit up her lined face.

"Nicky!" Red grabbed the phone and yelled into the receiver. "Oh my God! I'm so happy to see your face!"

"Yeah, I can tell." Nicky pulled it away from her ear slightly. "It's good to see you too, Red."

Suddenly Red's face fell. "Wait, what's wrong? You said you'd never come back here."

"Turns out I might have overestimated my triggers on the outside. I'm still clean. Scout's honour."

Nicky gave a little salute. Red smiled.

"What are you doing now? Do you have a job? Where do you live?" She had all the excitement of a mother welcoming her kid back from college.
"I'm working on it," Nicky deflected, not wanting to share too much in case she worried the woman. "And, uh, I'm living with Piper."

"Chapman?" Red frowned.

"Of course Chapman. What is that face for? You shared a bunk with Piper."

"Exactly! I hope you know what you're doing, Nicky. That girl is a clean freak and she's so possessive about her things."

"Right..." Red didn't realise she was describing herself. "And she's not the only person I, uh, reunited with on the outside. Lorna had a healthy little girl."

Red smiled again. It was such a rare thing to see. "Oh, that's wonderful news. I'm happy for her."

"Well, she's happy too. Which is probably why I haven't heard from her in weeks."

Lorna had called once to say they were getting out of hospital, but it had been silence since then. It made sense – aside from being stupidly happy, she would now be stupidly busy. Even the thought of all the feeding and diaper changes exhausted Nicky. Thank God she would never have kids.

"Hey, maybe once things calm down a bit she'll bring her to meet you."

"Hm." Red nodded, her eyes darting sideways. Nicky knew her well enough to know Red was hiding something.

"What? What did you do, Red?"

She sighed. "She came looking for you the day you were released, Nicky."

Nicky was taken aback a bit. She knew Lorna had spoken to Red at some point, but she never expected her to actually turn up on her release day.

"Seriously? What did you tell her?"

"Nothing! I was friendly." Red got defensive, then shrugged. "I just told her to stop bothering you and get a life."

"Red!"

"What? I was just going off what you said."

"I was angry, okay? It stops you seeing shit clearly – you of all people should know that."

She rolled her eyes. Nicky appreciated that she was just looking out for her. But poor Lorna – she probably expected to be comforted by a familiar face, not the ire of a crazy Russian mama bear.

"Her kid just died –"

"Nicky, she can't just string along –"

"You're not listening. Lorna literally just got out of psych after losing her baby and I was asking her to wait for me. I'm not fucking surprised she freaked out when her husband came back."

Red raised her eyebrows in that incredulous Red way. "You've changed your tune."
"I'm trying this new thing called self-awareness. You should try it, Red." Nicky sighed. "I have to talk to Alex now. Or Piper really will kill me."

Red put the smile back on her face. "Okay. But now you're still clean, you better visit your mother more fucking often."

Nicky wanted nothing more than to smash down the partition and give her a hug. If there was one thing she struggled with most at Narcotics Anonymous, besides getting over her pathological desire to self-destruct using recreational drugs, it was this. Accepting the things you cannot change.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the lovely comments on the previous chapter. :)
Chapter Summary

Nicky finds out how much Lorna is not coping. TW.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

It was becoming clearer by the minute that Lorna wasn't meant for this. She had no clue what she was doing. Serafina cried and cried. What was she meant to do? She fed her, changed her, bathed her, put her to bed, repeated the entire process over and over until her bones ached and her nerves frayed. Searching her daughter's eyes for something other than this overwhelming uncertainty.

Maybe if she just kept up the appearance, it would become her reality. Lorna always made sure the house was clean and dinner was ready when Vinnie got home. And if she put on enough makeup, perhaps he wouldn't notice she'd been crying all day too.

It couldn't last. The mask she'd kept so well in prison simply didn't work anymore. She didn't have the energy. Housework started to pile up around her. The tiredness wasn't just in her bones anymore, it was in her head. Getting out of bed was a marathon. Showering was too much effort. Food tasted of nothing so she stopped bothering with it. The day Vinnie got home and had to order pizza was the day she knew she'd given up. So she just gave up.

"Lorna?" Vinnie's voice sounded like it was at the edge of a dream. She didn't want to come back just yet. There was nothing left to fantasise but reality was too cold. "Lorna?"

She forced herself to pull him into focus. He was standing over the bassinet. She was sitting on the bed, dressed in baby puke-stained pyjamas.

He looked at her strangely. "You've been sitting there for hours. What are you doing?"

Hours? She was losing her mind and now losing time, too. "What?"

"Can't you hear her crying?" Vinnie scooped the baby out of the bed and tried to comfort her.

"She's always crying."

"That makes two of you." He sat down on the bed so he was facing her. "Look, I know you're tired, but can't you pull it together?"

Tears silently streamed down her face. If it only it was that easy. But it was like gluing a porcelain vase back together or something. It would always be broken, there would always be cracks.
"I can't handle two of you in tears. What's the matter? Just tell me so I can help."

"I feel like I'm dead."

His eyes widened. "What does that mean? I don't understand, Lorna. For a couple of weeks, it felt like I'd got the old you back."

*There is no old me. You just fell in love with the girl I was pretending to be, remember?*

"I mean, you were so happy. Isn't this what we always wanted?"

*Nothing I "want" ever turns out how I imagine it. Not Christopher, not you. Or Carmine.*

"Look, maybe I can talk to my boss about changing my hours so I can be here for you."

*You think I'm a bad mother.*

"No, I don't."

*What? Had she had that out loud? How much else had he heard?*

"You're a good mother, Lorna," he continued.

"Stop lying!" She suddenly got a burst of frantic energy. "You wish anybody else was her mother. That's the only reason you're still with me is because of her."

He stood up, lowering the now-calm baby into the cot. Then he turned to Lorna, angry and confused. "What the fuck has got into you?"

"That's why you're probably out screwing someone else!"

She heard the accusation fly out of her mouth. She didn't even believe it herself, but it was how she felt. He hated her, he wanted to leave but he couldn't, he didn't find her attractive anymore, he was trapped with this terrible pathetic human being, only pretending to love her out of sheer pity. Maybe she had to give him a way out.

"Right, Lorna. This again!" He scoffed. "When would I have time to have an affair? Between the diaper changes and the night feeds?"

Well, if he hadn't left her, maybe he should. Clearly Sera liked him better. She cried less when he was around. He found it so easy to love and care for her. They had a bond and she was just getting between it with her poison.

"You don't love me. You two, you're both against me." She pointed wildly at him and the crib.

"Do you hear yourself? She's a baby!"

There. He thought she was fucking crazy. *Lorna La Loca*. The batshit girl couldn't take care of herself, let alone a baby, a poor helpless baby. She was fucking everything up again and she couldn't stop herself. Nicky was right – she was a psycho.

"I'm tired!" She hit her head with her knuckles. "If you're gonna leave, just do it. Put me out of my misery, just take her! Give her a better chance, I can't do it! I can't do it!"

"Whoa, calm down." He grabbed her by the elbows, trying to pin her arms down. "Lorna, you're scaring me –"
"Just let me go! Please let me go, Vinnie! Let me go, let go, fucking let go of me –"

"Stop it!"

She felt the heat against her face before she knew what had happened. It wasn't a particularly hard slap but that didn't stop her knees from caving under her. Vinnie looked at his own hand in terror, as if it didn't belong to him.

"Lorna, I'm sorry –"

"Get out." Her voice trembled as much as the hand she brought up to her face, feeling where he'd left his sting.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to –" He was near tears.

"GET OUT! GET OUT!" She screamed, sending the baby up in wails. He ran out of the bedroom, his head hung low, and she heard the front door slam closed. Then, the starting of a car motor.

She got up and walked to the front door. "Vinnie? Come back."

He didn't come back.

She waited as night turned to day turned to night again. She'd finally done it. She'd finally pushed him too far. He escaped. Gone to find a normal girl without any baggage, start over again.

Lorna searched Vinnie's drawers. She didn't know what she was looking for; a clue, maybe? Something to bring him back or to prove her worst fears. What if she found love letters or naked photos or women's underwear? She didn't find any of those things. As she rummaged under boxer shorts and mismatched socks, her hand fell on something cold and heavy. She knew exactly what it was.

Sera cried endlessly. Lorna didn't know what to do. She willed her to take the bottle, not even bothering to try nursing anymore. It was clear the baby didn't want her. She was poison. She put her to bed and sat staring at the front door as the cries went on and on.

She'd never done it before but it suddenly felt right to drag a knife up her arm, scratching just deep enough to draw blood, to draw out some feeling that wasn't this throbbing numbness. And it wasn't like anyone was going to love her anyway so it didn't matter what she looked like now.

The dark hours were spent watching Sera sleep. When she blinked, she saw Carmine's face. She was being punished for losing him. Everyone said it wasn't her fault, but she was his mother. It was her body that failed. That day, running around the prison in a panic because of some shit her brain had decided was important. He could have been loved, warm and safe like Sera. He never got a chance.

He didn't come back.

It hit her like a sign. She knew what she had to do next. With resolution she pulled Vinnie's gun out of the drawer. Carmine couldn't come back to her, but she could come to him.

Nicky
"I think I finally got it. Homemade beef stroganoff."

Nicky presented the dish on the table. Piper raised her eyebrows in approval. Unlike Nicky's previous attempts at cooking, this one actually looked like food. She even sprinkled it with fresh parsley. *Judy King, eat your heart out.*

"It looks good," said Piper, a little hopeful. Nicky was hopeful, too. It wasn't just that she needed to pull her weight around the house. She was sick to the back teeth of Piper's quinoa and kale salads. She almost preferred prison food.

She served up a bowl. "Have a bite."

Piper put a small forkful in her mouth. She squinted a little. "That's... interesting. What is that?"

"The smoked paprika?"

"The beef is ... on the rare side." Piper said, chewing and chewing. "It's, um, raw."

"It's supposed to be like that, it's Russian. They eat soup cold." Nicky rolled her eyes and took a spoon from the pot. "Here, princess. Let me try."

She put the spoon in her mouth. It took about 0.4 seconds to register with her tastebuds and she spat it out. "Fuck! Why are you still eating that!"

"Oh thank God!" Piper gulped down a glass of water. "I was trying to be polite. Now I know why Red never had you in the kitchen."

"Shit, that repeats on you." Nicky rubbed her tongue with a napkin. "And I've eaten a lot of questionable things in my lifetime. Fuck it. Let's order in?"

Piper nodded (thankfully, no quinoa tonight) and leapt up, emptying the entire pot into the trash. She was *already* starting on the dishes. "Make it Mexican or something, I need that taste out of my mouth."

Nicky dug her phone out of her pocket, but at that moment it had started vibrating. "Hold that thought, Lorna's calling."

"Tell her I said hi!" Piper waved, her hands full of suds.

She put the phone to her ear. "Hey, kid. How's the rug rat?"

There was no reply. Nicky could only hear the baby's crying in the background. She shrugged at Piper. "I think she butt-dialled me."

She was just about to hang up when Lorna's voice came through quiet.

"Nicky."

Bad connection or... Nicky knew at once something was wrong.

"Hey, what's up?" Again she didn't answer, just breathed heavy down the line. "Lorna, what's going on? Is Vinnie with you?"

"He's gone," she said finally. It was matter-of-fact, way too matter-of-fact for Lorna.

"What do you mean, he's gone? Gone where?"
Piper took a step closer, mirroring the growing concern on Nicky's face. "Is everything okay?"

"Nicky, promise me you'll look after her?" Lorna asked.

"Look after who?"

"Sera. Please don't let her get taken away. You have to love her and hold her."

_Taken?_ Why was she asking her to look after her baby?

"Lorna, where is Vince? You're starting to freak me out."

"It's okay, Nicky," she said calmly. "I'll be gone soon. I won't bother you anymore. I think it will be pretty painless. It only takes a second for a gun to work."

"Gun?!"

The word snapped in Nicky's throat. _What the fuck, what the fuck?_ Please let this be one of her delusions, she silently pleaded. Where in the hell would she even get a gun? But then -- it wasn't like she was a stranger to dangerous criminal behaviour. It really wouldn't even shock Nicky if she ordered a gun off eBay and scammed the money back.

"Jesus Christ! Just -- stay on the line, okay, I'm coming to you --"

"I'm only calling to say goodbye." Still with that eerie calm in her voice. Like she'd decided, _fuck_, she'd made up her mind. Nicky had to change it back.

"No. What's your address? Lorna! Shit! Lorna, tell me your fucking address."

Each second of silence sent a wave of panic through her. What if she couldn't get through to her? What if this was one of those times Lorna had made up her mind and nobody could make her see sense?

"Please, kid. Don't do this. I love you."

That broke Lorna's calm. Nicky could hear her sobbing. For some reason, that made her feel a fraction better. Like maybe Lorna was still fighting.

"I don't want you to stop me. I just want it to stop."

"Baby, I don't know what's happened but I promise you this isn't the answer. Just please tell me your address, Lorna."

Slowly, Lorna began to tell Nicky her address. She repeated it aloud, motioning frantically for Piper to write it down.

"I'm coming. I'll be there as soon as I can. I'm going to stay on the line, okay? Just don't do anything. Hold on."

But Lorna hung up without saying goodbye.

"Fuck!" Nicky tore at her hair, paralysed for a moment before she burst into action. "Uh, I need to borrow your car. Quickly, quickly!"

"Was that what it sounded like?" Piper's eyes widened. "Where is her husband? We should really
The blonde reached for her phone, but Nicky stopped her.

"Piper, she's got a gun. You know what happens when felons on probation get found with guns."

"But you can't just go there. It's dangerous!"

"Piper, give me your fucking car keys!"

"You can't drive! You don't even have a license!"

Nicky ignored her. She picked up Lorna's address and raced across to the front door, where Piper kept her car keys in a clay bowl. She grabbed them and flew out the door, running downstairs towards the car.

"Nicky, wait!"

She slid into the front seat and slammed her foot on the accelerator. The car lurched forward, narrowly missing a fire hydrant. *Fuck.* She pulled into the road and started to drive shakily, swerving over the lines. She prayed to whatever God was up there that she wouldn't be stopped, that she would get there in one piece. She needed to get there in time.

Chapter End Notes

"And can Vinnie please get rid of the gun? At the danger of speaking shit into existence, I don't want it there."

Thanks Lutefiskfisk for giving me this idea all the way back in chapter 37.
Lorna

Lorna felt the handle of the gun sweaty and stiff against her fingers.

Every impulse was telling her to pull the trigger. It wasn't ever going to stop. She was stupid to think that these things she'd dreamed of – marriage, a baby – could fix her. She was broken. How was it possible to feel so much and so empty at the same time? Why couldn't she just do it? One squeeze of the hand and all this pain would be over.

*BANG!*

There was a sudden thump at the door and she jumped – her hands balled up as a reflex. The gun went off, sending a bullet straight into the floor. Her heart hammered so violently for a second she thought she'd actually shot herself. That made her even more scared. She was so sure before, but now it was real. She could really do it. The power was really in her hands.

Her ears stopped ringing from the gunshot and she could hear shouting on the other side of the door.

"Lorna! Lorna! Fuck no, please, Lorna."

It was Nicky. Of course. How many times was she going to try and save her before she realised it was a lost cause? Nicky's life was going to be so much easier, so much better without her around.

"Fuck. Oh God. Lorna, please let me know you're still there. Please. Not you, please not you."

She could hear the other woman crying. Nicky never cried. Not like Lorna, who was always a mess. She'd infected everyone. She could still hear the baby screaming at the top of her lungs. No wonder she cried so incessantly, with Lorna as a mother. She was doomed from the very start.

"I'm sorry," Lorna said, pressing her head against the door.

"Lorna?" Nicky stopped sobbing. "Say something."

"I'm sorry."

"You're there. I thought – thank God. Oh fuck. Don't fucking scare me like that, Lorna!" She softened her tone. "It's so good to hear your voice. Now can I see your face?"

Why would she want to do that? One glimpse at the mess and she'd bolt. "No."
"I need to see you, Lorna. Are you hurt?"

"I don't want you to see me like this."

"Come on, you've seen me fucked up before. Nothing can shock me. Open the door, Lorna."

"What are you gonna do?"

"Nothing. I just want to see you, I promise."

She sounded so convincing. The only reason she called her and told her address was so someone could take Serafina, but maybe she could see Nicky one last time, just to say goodbye. She slowly opened the latch and pulled the door open. Surely enough, Nicky was on the other side. In the flesh, a mess of smudged eyeliner and tangled hair.

She burst into the flat. Lorna took a giant step backwards.

"Hey." Nicky gave a nervous smile, her eyes jumping wildly from Lorna's face to the gun. "Why don't you give me the gun, Lorna?"

Lorna shook her head. "No."

"Lorna, give me the gun."

Nicky reached forward, raising her hand too quickly. The last time someone raised their hand at her like that –

"Don't! Don't touch me!" Lorna drew up the gun.

"Whoa, whoa. Okay." Nicky put up her hands in defence. "Can you stop pointing that at me?"

What was she doing? Nicky was the last person she wanted to hurt. She lowered the gun, but kept her grip tight.

"Just... stand back. I mean it. Just let me do this."

Nicky's eyes grew even wider. "You don't want to do this, Lorna. Your baby needs you."

Lies. "No, she's better off without me."

"That's not true. And I need you."

Now she knew Nicky was lying. "No. You said I broke your heart."

Nicky stepped towards her. "Look at me. I don't regret anything that happened 'cause I got to meet you. My biggest regret will be if I can't stop you now 'cause I can't imagine you not in my life."

What was she saying? Lorna had made the act so convincing she'd even fooled clever Nicky. She didn't know how poison she was. But that was the thing about junkies – they always wanted what wasn't good for them.

"It's not your fault, Nicky," she whispered. "Remember that. Move on with your life, don't blame yourself. You always blame yourself."

She never wanted Nicky to witness this. Just another haunting image to add to her collection.
"It's gonna hurt. But you can't go back to drugs. Promise me?"

It wouldn't – couldn't – be as painful as these breakdowns, again and again and again. Empty, full, hurting and hiding, pushing away the only people she loved. Never, ever, ever getting better. No, no, no. She had one shot – and they'd both be free.

"Please look after my baby."

She pointed the gun at her chin, her finger tensing on the trigger.

At that moment, Nicky barrelled towards her, wrenching her arm away. The bullet went into the ceiling, so close to her ear that she was disoriented. Nicky took the opportunity to wrestle the gun out of her grip. Lorna fell forward. Nicky grabbed her under the arms, trying to calm her down. Her one chance at salvation, gone.

"It's okay, it's okay. It's over." They slid to the floor in shock. Nicky switched the gun's safety on and emptied the bullets into her hand. For a long moment, they said nothing.

"Fucking hell," Nicky finally gasped. "Where the fuck did you get a gun?"

"I don't know... it's Vinnie's... to get rid of Christopher –"

"Christopher?" Nicky gave her a pitying look. "My sweet girl, you're really cracking up, aren't you? You haven't seen Christopher in years."

"He was here!" Lorna insisted.

Nicky lowered her voice. "And is he here now?"

What? Of course he wasn't. Surely Nicky could see that with her own eyes. "No! I told you, Vinnie got rid of him!"

"Sure. And where the fuck is Vinnie in all this?"

"I'm gonna kill him," Nicky growled. Lorna's eyes fell to the gun. "Not literally, Lorna. Hey, you know you'd get sent straight to prison if they found you with this?"

She lowered her head in her hands. "Maybe that's where I belong. Or the loony bin."

"Oh, kid." Nicky wiped away a fresh wave of tears. "You were so happy. What happened?"

"I fucked up everything as usual. Sera won't stop crying. She won't feed or sleep. And I can't do it. That's why Vinnie left, I let him down. I let them both down."

Another look of concern washed over Nicky's face. "Where's the baby, Lorna? Can you show her to me?"

Lorna nodded. Nicky helped her up and she led her into the bedroom. Sera was lying in the bassinet, screaming. The sound hurt to hear.

"See, she just cries and cries." Lorna pointed. "I don't know what's wrong with her."

Nicky scooped the baby up. "Hey, kitten. What's the big fuss about, eh? You're giving your mom a headache. Shushhh."
Nicky bounced her a little. Sera calmed down and her screams faded into snuffles.

"How did you do that?" Lorna gasped.

Nicky shrugged. "She just wants a cuddle. Takes after your mom, don't you?"

Lorna sat down in a heap on the floor. "That proves it. There's nothing wrong with her. It's me that's wrong."

Nicky crouched to her level, still bouncing Sera on her shoulder. "You're just stressed out. Maybe if fucking Vince was here to support you –"

"No, I'm not meant to be a mother." The panic in her head was building again. "She can sense it. That's why she don't want me. I'm poison. I think Carmine left me because he knew that. Please just take her, Nicky. I want her to have a better life."

Nicky gently put Sera back in her crib and pulled Lorna to her feet. "You're not thinking straight. Come on."

She led Lorna by the hand to the bathroom and started running a bath.

"Get in. You'll feel a lot better."

Nicky went out of the room as she pulled off her filthy pyjamas and got in. She hugged her knees to her chest and cried. She was so ashamed. All she wanted to do was wash away everything that just happened.

"Can I come in?" Nicky knocked softly at the door. She took Lorna's silence as a yes, kneeling down next to the tub. She zoned out as Nicky softly asked questions, rubbed shampoo into her hair. At some point, she started stroking her hand, the way she always used to to calm her down. History repeating itself again. The cycle never ends.

She stroked higher up Lorna's arm and stopped dead, her fingers tracing over the shallow cuts and scratches.

"What's this, Lorna?"

"I didn't want to feel it anymore."

Nicky

Lorna slept like a baby. Like an actual baby, not the mythical peaceful one that bullshit phrase was based on. Curled up in a ball and crying through the night. Nicky watched her when she wasn't tending to Sera. Even if she wanted to sleep, she couldn't.

She couldn't believe how quickly downhill Lorna had fallen since she'd last seen her. She tried to hide her shock last night but it was still giving her full-body shivers. Lorna was the last person in the fucking world she wanted to see holding a gun.

Even more unbelievable was that Vince wasn't there. Something big had definitely happened. When Lorna was feeling less fragile, she would get the truth out of her, whatever Lorna's version of the truth was. Maybe she could find him and convince him to come back – again. That had to be better
than raising this baby without him, right?

Lorna was waking up and squinting in confusion at her on the end of the bed.

"Hey, dollface."

"Nicky? You're here."

"Course I am. I'm not going anywhere."

"I thought it was a dream. I can't believe I slept the whole night." Suddenly she shot upright. "Where's Sera?"

"Don't worry, she's fast asleep." Nicky pointed to the bassinet. "I fed her a bottle earlier, I hope that's okay." She'd found an elaborate feeding schedule tacked to the fridge that the baby evidently took no notice of.

Lorna got out of bed and picked up the sleeping baby, painstakingly, as though she was made of glass. Thankfully this time the baby didn't cry. Maybe she had the face and namesake of an angel, but that child had a pair of lungs on her.

"I guess Vinnie didn't come back," Lorna just sighed, almost as if she'd accepted it. Maybe she was too emotionally exhausted, which wouldn't be surprising.

Nicky exhaled. "Lorna, you really fucking scared me last night. I almost called 911."

"No, Nicky, you can't! Vinnie's gone, they'll take Sera away from me --" She started to panic; maybe she wasn't that emotionally exhausted after all.

"I know, that's why I didn't do it," said Nicky quickly. "How did it get this bad? Are you taking your meds?"

She shook her head. "Me and Vinnie decided to stop, for the baby."

"You and Vinnie? Jesus, haven't you learned anything about playing doctors?" Lorna flinched. "Sorry. But you need help. I booked you in with your therapist."

She'd also found his card, shuffled between a stack of papers when she'd been looking for clues about where Vince could have fucked off to.

"No, I can't, he's gonna think I'm a bad mother --"

"No, he won't."

"You don't understand!" Lorna cracked open like a shell, as hysterical as last night. "When Carmine was born, I loved him so much. Even though he wasn't really there, I felt him. But when I hold her, I don't feel anything. It's like she's not even mine. Sometimes I wish I could trade her to get him back. And she knows, that's why she won't love me."

She sighed and pulled her close. In one way, they were the same – the high Lorna was chasing was chemical, it just didn't come in a needle or plastic baggie. Nicky wanted to tell her she was loved - no, that she loved her – but time had proven that wasn't a big enough hit. She was always looking for more, something out of fairytales and there were no lesbian fairytales. Now she wanted it from a baby that couldn't articulate whether it wanted food, sleep or a shit, let alone the concept of love.

Lorna continued to sob. "You must think I'm the worst mother in the world."
Nicky pulled away and looked her in the eyes. "Not unless your name is Marka Nichols. Trust me. I have some experience with bad mothers. When I got here you were so messed up, but that baby was clean, fed and safe. That's love, kid."

"Then why don't I feel it?" Lorna pleaded. Even Nicky didn't know how to answer that one.

"Come on, get dressed and we'll get some breakfast before we see the therapist." She nudged Lorna toward the wardrobe. "You feel up to driving?"

"Vinnie took the car."

"I borrowed one from a friend." Nicky didn't have the energy to explain about Piper right now. She'd already spent a whole hour that morning trying to convince a worried Piper over the phone that everything was fine, despite the fact it really wasn't. Anything to prevent her calling emergency services. "It's outside."

Lorna looked confused. "You don't drive, Nicky. You said you crashed the first car you ever drove."

"I don't and I did." Nicky shrugged. "I guess someone must have been watching over me last night. Thank fuck everyone else in New York drives like a maniac, I practically blended in."

"But..." Lorna gasped. "You shouldn't have done that! That was dangerous, Nicky. You could have been hurt or killed or sent back to prison."

"Yeah. Does that sound fucking familiar to you?"

Things had changed so much. Once upon a time Lorna wouldn't even admit she had a problem, now Nicky was forced to witness her pouring her heart out to the therapist. All her defences had been stripped away and the truth laid bare. No wonder she used to escape to her fantasies. It hurt to hear, let alone live.

"Thank you for bringing Lorna here," said the therapist, once the hard part was over. "Although I'd be a lot happier if you called 911 last night. Both of you could have been seriously hurt."

"I'm sorry," said Lorna. "I wasn't thinking straight. I'm such an idiot."

He shook his head. "Lorna, it's nothing to be ashamed of. Many women experience postpartum depression, and with your history I can't say I'm surprised. It doesn't make you a bad mother to need extra support. Like your medication."

"But what about the baby?" Lorna asked, holding onto Sera tightly.

"It's perfectly safe. It is dangerous if you abruptly stop taking them and don't tell anyone you're struggling for nine months."

"See?" Nicky rubbed her arm. She was feeling a little guilty; Lorna's anti-antidepressant stance could have only got worse since Nicky accidentally suggested they killed Carmine.

"From what you've told me and your current mental state, I think the best course of action is to admit you to a psychiatric unit," he continued.

"What, like a hospital?" Nicky felt Lorna's body tense. "But what will happen to Sera?"

"I'll have to inform CPS and she'll be taken into temporary foster care until you recover."
"No, no –"

"A relative can also be her legal guardian," he offered. "Your sister, perhaps?"

"No, she can't. I will not let my daughter live in that house!" Lorna shouted, waking the baby.

"Alright, just stay calm –"

"Isn't there something else we can try?" Nicky made Lorna see this therapist. She'd never forgive her if her baby was taken into care while she languished in some awful psych ward.

"You have to understand the seriousness of this." He looked Nicky in the eyes. "Lorna had a suicidal crisis and the father is nowhere to be found. I have to think of the child's welfare as well."

"But the baby is fine," she pleaded. "She's perfectly healthy. Lorna looked after her great, she's way more capable than she thinks she is. Please. If you do this, it will just ruin two lives."

"I'm sorry. I just can't in good conscience send her home alone with a newborn baby."

"What if she's not alone? I can stay with her."

Lorna stopped crying and stared at Nicky. "Really?"

"I'll stay with her as long as she needs. I swear I won't let anything happen, to either of them."

He paused. He sighed. "You have to call 911 the second it gets bad again."

"So you won't call social services?"

"Here's what's going to happen," he said firmly. "Lorna, I know your probation officer allowed our sessions to stop after you went to hospital, but I want you to see me twice a week again. Nicky, make sure she takes her medication and looks after herself. If you don't show improvement in the next few days, I may have to admit you. Is everybody understood?"

Lorna nodded. "I'll be so good, I swear."

He frowned. "I don't want you to be good. I want you to be okay with that."

She just glazed over, confused. Nicky locked eyes with the therapist. "Don't worry. We got this."

He smiled in defeat. "Lorna, you've got a guardian angel here."

Nicky felt Lorna's fingers twist tightly between hers. The woman's body so close to her, needing her, would melt warmth in her chest in any other situation, would make it almost feel like the 'good' times, whatever they were. Curled up together in their bunks or hiding in the chapel like the world couldn't touch them.

But things had changed so much. They were so far from home. She couldn't let herself go there, not even for a second. Right now, Lorna needed a friend.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 50! I hope it's a good one. Thanks for sticking around this long :(
What Harm Can a Women's Magazine Do

Chapter Summary

The situation makes Nicky dwell on past events.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Nicky threw a couple of pizza boxes on the table, then took the new prescription out of its bag. She passed Lorna the little green and white pill with a glass of water. Here she was again, needing meds and shrinks and Nicky to keep it all together. Any progress she'd made in the past year was undone the second she picked up that gun.

"Come on," said Nicky, opening up the boxes. "If you had a headache, you'd take an aspirin."

She sighed and swallowed the pill. Maybe it would help. Even she scared herself last night. Her head was so unsafe.


Lorna fetched a bottle from the fridge and sat down at the table, trying to soothe the baby.

"Hawaiian, it's your favourite." Nicky pushed the pizza box towards her. "No fucking clue why. They might take away your Italian card for that."

"I'm not really hungry." She had zero appetite, especially not for greasy junk like that.

"Lorna, if your baby needs food then so do you."

Stupid Nicky making sense all the time. Lorna picked up a slice. She got no joy out of eating it.

"I still can't believe Vince fucked off and left you like this," Nicky shook her head. Clearly she had been waiting to say this. "Just when I think the guy's halfway decent, he shows his true asshole colours again."

"It wasn't his fault," said Lorna quietly. "I was acting crazy, even by my standards."

"I don't care what you were doing. He's your husband and the father of your child. I would never, ever leave you like that."

Lorna wanted to believe that. But she knew the truth – eventually she would fuck everything up and Nicky would leave her too.

"I'm putting her to bed."

She walked into her lonely bedroom, all of a sudden realising she had another dark night ahead of
her, of not sleeping and having to watch Sera breathe. She sidestepped the bassinet and put the baby down on the king-sized mattress, curling around her.

Nicky must have heard her sobbing and came in, sitting down on the side of the bed and tracing circles on her back.

"What's wrong with me?" Lorna could barely get the words out.

"You're just sick."

She said it like Lorna had a cold. She remembered that one freezing Christmas when Nicky got a chill and she sat on her bed feeding her commissary chicken noodle and detangling her hair. But she was a lot sicker than that. This wasn't going to go away with soup and a good sleep.

She grabbed a pillow and hugged it her body. "It didn't work, Nicky. I had everything, I was going to be happy this time. But I can't even do that."

"You're being too hard on yourself." Nicky started stroking her hair. "Look, your coping mechanisms are fucking shit. But if you'd gotten over Carmine by now I'd worry you weren't you. Hell, I'd worry you weren't human."

It was good to hear someone say his name, to acknowledge his existence. Like it hadn't all been one horrible dream that people were urging her to wake up from. She opened up a little more.

"Why do I get to keep her and not him?" Lorna cried. "Why did I have to leave him alone in that cold place?"

"I don't know."

"I miss him."

"It's okay. You're allowed to be sad."

Nobody had ever told Lorna that before. Ever since childhood, they were always telling her to calm down, cheer up, push her emotions below the surface. So she painted on a smile and tried to stay in control as she grappled with the voices in her head.

Now Nicky was giving her permission to feel everything she'd been trying to hide. She cried her eyes out for everything she'd lost, her baby, her sanity, innocence. As she let go, she felt a pair of arms wrap tightly around her and the world felt a little bit safer than it did before.

Nicky

Nicky spread out Lorna's piles of baby magazines on the living room floor. No wonder she was driving herself crazy reading at articles like: 'Why breast is always best', 'My crib death horror', 'Bye bye baby weight'. What the fuck?

She had half a mind to throw them all out but she could see Lorna had put Post-Its and circled some pages. So she just took the staples out instead. Maybe she'd try to explain why they were all bullshit in the morning.

There was a quiet shuffling and she looked up. Lorna was standing there puffy-eyed, holding the
baby. Didn't her arms ever get tired?

"You know, you should probably sleep when she's sleeping."

Lorna shook her head and sat down on the couch, swiping a limp strand of hair away from her face. She looked so pale. You could always tell Lorna was despondent when she let her appearance go. Nicky remembered what Alex told her, that Lorna was a makeup-free mess after she got sent to max. At least, until she started her penpal scheme.

"I can't sleep. I have to keep checking she's..." Lorna trailed off, stifling a yawn.

"Well, luckily I'm a night owl," said Nicky. And she was, but even she was exhausted after the last 24 hours. But still – Lorna needed it more. "Go get some sleep, kid. I'll check on her for ya."

Another shake of the head. "If something happened and I was asleep, I'd never forgive myself."

"And what if something happened because you were so sleep-deprived you couldn't function?"

"Is this your way of trying to make me feel better?" Lorna glanced at the magazines on the ground, changing the subject. "What you doing up anyway?"

Nicky waggled a staple between her fingers. "Sharp objects."

Lorna rubbed her eyes. "I was wondering where all my knives went. You don't trust me a lot, do you?"

"Nope." Lorna had far too long of a history with self-harm. Maybe not with a blade, but the impulsive behaviour, weird eating habits, reckless spending, refusing help – Nicky didn't know if she could ever trust her alone again. If something happened, she'd never forgive herself.

"But I'm hardly gonna staple myself to death," Lorna continued with a flick of the hand.

Nicky raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, I didn't think it was possible either."

"What do you mean?"

"No, Lorna, it's just gonna bring you down." The comment had slid off her tongue naturally, but she wasn't about to tell freaking Lorna about Burset of all things.

"I can tell it's bringing you down. Tell me?"

Lorna pouted and patted the cushion next to her. Nicky sighed and heaved herself onto the couch. She was starting to get tired, too. It was messing with her self-restraint.

"Please tell me," said Lorna again, her voice full of warmth. Nicky paused. She hadn't told anyone about this before. Not even Red. She'd lived with it on her back for so long.

"When I was in max... the first time, I mean," she began. "Burset was there. They kept her in the SHU, she was all messed up, you know? I should have known... she kept asking for another blanket."

"Oh..." Lorna twigged. "They don't let you have blankets in psych either." She mimed a sleepy little hanging movement.

"Don't get any ideas." Lorna rolled her eyes into her skull, but Nicky was already regretting bringing it up. Not now she was thinking about Lorna alone in psych without a blanket and sharp objects.
piercing soft skin and that fucking gun.

"Fuck, no. I really shouldn't tell you this –"

"Nicky –"

"Go back to bed, Lorna."

"I'm not a baby, just tell me," Lorna snapped, welling up with angry tears. Fuck, they both needed sleep so badly.

"I was just trying to cheer her up," Nicky said quietly, deliberately. "I gave her a magazine. I mean, what harm can a women's magazine do, besides give you an inferiority complex? But later, they had me clean her cell. There was blood everywhere. She slit her fucking wrists with the staples."

Lorna gasped. "Why didn't you tell me this?"

"When, between hearing about your wedding and getting high?" Nicky scoffed. "Actually, that was probably what kicked me off the wagon."

"But it wasn't your fault. It wasn't." She touched Nicky's hand, so tenderly. "And Burset's fine. Maybe you did her a favour, making her Florida-crazy. They got that cute pink uniform."

Nicky laughed. What she wouldn't give to rummage around inside Lorna's head for a day.

"Is this your way of trying to make me feel better?" Nicky teased. She did feel a bit better, though. Even just telling someone about Burset took a weight off. She barely realised she'd been carrying it around until the cuts on Lorna's wrist brought everything flooding back.

Lorna rested her head on Nicky's shoulder. "You take too much responsibility on yourself, Nichols."

"I guess I should just run around doing whatever the fuck I want and not think about the consequences, hey Morello?"

"Hmm, Nicky, I promise I won't staple myself to death," she mumbled.

"Okay, now I'm reassured."

"Yeah, so don't... mhm..."

She looked over and Lorna had dozed off mid-sentence. She carefully lifted Sera off her and put her back to bed. Then she came back and put a blanket over Lorna. Nicky sat back down on the floor to finish her job and within minutes she was crashing, too.

Chapter End Notes

This is my version of sweet and cute... ok it's still pretty sad. But we're getting there lol.
Thanks for your comments on the previous chapter! :)
Fuhgeddaboutit

Chapter Summary

10 days in the life of Nicky trying to get Lorna back on her feet.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Lorna woke up on the couch. It took a minute to register the situation – it was morning, it was quiet, Nicky Nichols was out cold on her living room floor, surrounded by magazines. And her arms were empty. Sera wasn't with them.

She ran into the bedroom, her heartbeat in her ears. Needing to lay her eyes on her baby. She bent over the bassinet – Sera was lying inside, still. Asleep. She was asleep and warm.

"Baby?" Nicky stood at the doorway, rubbing her eyes.

"You said you'd watch her," said Lorna, lifting the baby up. Sera wriggled her legs in protest.

"Sorry," said Nicky. "But hey, would you look at that? We were all asleep and nothing bad happened."

Nicky was talking to her like a child, the same tone she always used when she was spinning out. Equal parts comfort and condescension, with a sprinkle of impatience. She couldn't blame her – she had been acting like a lunatic. She remembered what Vinnie said before he left. Do you hear yourself? She's a baby! You're scaring me.

No wonder he was never coming back.

It hit her. Her baby was going to grow up without a father and it was all her fault. She knew it would take weeks for the pills to effect her mood but things were unbearable. Nicky practically had to drag her to therapy. She wasn't trying to be difficult. Everything was just so hard.

Later Nicky was setting up an expensive baby monitor with a motion sensor she'd ordered off Amazon (Lorna offered to pay her back but she flat-out refused: "Fuhgeddaboutit").

"This thing will tell you if she stops breathing," said Nicky. "Not that that's gonna happen, but now you can get some shuteye."

"Do you think I'm useless?"

"'Course I don't, kid."

But there she was calling her kid. And Lorna did sometimes feel like the world had grown up and
left her behind. She was meant to be a mother, not have people mothering her. She still felt like if she was gone, the baby would do just fine without her. Maybe even better.

Nicky was the only one could comfort her. She even talked her down from a panic attack when they went shopping with Sera and the lights and sounds and people were all too much. Vinnie could never do that. Was that his shortcoming or hers?

The blonde was in the middle of some lecture about magazines, holding up the glossy pages of one Lorna just bought. She had some weird notion that they were all lies. Why would the media write lies? It didn't make sense and made her sound paranoid.

"... feed off insecurities to sell you shit you don't need," Nicky was saying. She noticed Lorna not listening. "What's wrong?"

Lorna's head snapped up. "Nothing. I'm fine."

"You know I don't believe that, right?"

She picked at her nails. "I was just thinking how I'm always falling apart. And it's you, you're the one always putting me back together."

Nicky put down the magazine and leaned in. "Hey..."

"Sometimes I think you're the only one who can. And I want you to – I want you to hold me and tell me things are okay even though it tears you apart. Nicky, what kinda friend does that make me?"

As if on cue, Nicky was holding her. "A good friend. You proved that when you gave Marka a knuckle sandwich."

"She had it coming," said Lorna, quoting Chicago (ironically one of her favourite musicals). She paused. "Wait, you knew about that? I guess she told you."

Nicky frowned. "No, it was Vince. You know, when he came to prison begging me to get Marka to drop the charges."

Lorna straightened up. "He did? Why wouldn't Vinnie tell me?" That was so weird. And he knew she was missing Nicky, too.

"I don't fucking know. Yeah, I'm the reason you didn't go back to that shithole." She smiled. "I did wonder why you never thanked me."

She looked up at Nicky, slightly in awe and unsure what to think. "Thank you...?"

"Fuğgeddaboutit," was the predictable reply.

Sometimes Nicky's presence just felt like being at Litchfield. Until she caught herself and remembered how different things were, that there was now a baby and a missing husband, and that she was somehow looking back at prison as the good times, and who the fuck does that? Can't you pull it together?

Maybe it was the fact that Nicky was stuck to her hip, watching her more intently than any of the COs had (really, the shit she got away with was unbelievable). Nicky was never going to leave her
alone after the gun incident. But that wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

"Pizza again? Someday I'm gonna teach you how to cook."

She'd just emerged from the dark bedroom where she had been feeding the baby and was met with the smell of pepperoni. Their takeaway diet was born of two factors: Lorna's near-inability to leave the house and Nicky's complete inability in the kitchen. But it was getting tedious. Lorna felt she might be up to cooking after all.

"If Red couldn't manage it, you're not gonna make a dent, kid," Nicky quipped, opening up the greasy boxes.

"Hey, I got magic fingers in the kitchen," Lorna replied with a smile.

"Not just in the kitchen, from what I remember." Nicky raised an eyebrow. "Are you alright? You're not crying or having a panic attack, I'm getting worried."

She couldn't hold back her grin. "She just nursed for the first time."

Nicky put a supportive hand on her shoulder. "That's great! See, I told you the baby doesn't hate you. Babies are just dumb."

Her face grew hot. She looked down at innocent little Sera in her arms, feeling rather stupid. "I wasn't making a whole lot of sense, was I? Guess my father was right about something."

"What's that?"

"He said, hopefully she gets Vinnie's brains, not mine."

"What an asshole."

"But he's right. And then I got to thinking how I'm just gonna fuck her up like my parents fucked me up and I don't want her to have that kind of life, Nicky. I just want her to be normal."

She was on the brink of tears again. Now with only her for a parent, what chance did that kid have?

"That's how this all started?" Nicky scoffed. "Lorna, it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world for your daughter to take after you."

"You only say that 'cause you ain't in my head."

"Come on." She waved a slice of pizza in her face. "Honestly, it's parents' jobs to fuck up their kids. But the important thing is you love her, yeah?"

Lorna slowly nodded. Maybe this constant anxiety was just what motherly love felt like.

Having Sera almost taken away from her made her realise how much she cared for her daughter. That, and the intensive therapy sessions where they told her how common these feelings were. She was suddenly overwhelmed with gratitude for her friend who had prevented her family tearing apart even further.

On the tenth day, marking twelve since Vinnie left, Lorna crept behind Nicky as she put down bags of McDonald's and gave her a long hug.
"Careful, I could get used to all this human affection," said Nicky, shrugging out of the embrace.

Lorna gazed at her seriously. "Thank you, Nicky."

"It's just McDonald's, kid. Also, I'm pretty sure you're the only person on earth who would willingly order the fish sandwich."

She crossed her arms. Why did Nicky have to turn everything into a joke? And what was wrong with Filet-O-Fish?

"I'm trying to thank you. I know you'll say it was nothing but... you didn't have to stay here with me. I mean, you hate babies."

"Hey, I never said I hated babies," said Nicky.

"You called them parasitic little snot-gremlins."

"Yeah, but yours is actually annoyingly cute."

"Thank you anyway."

"Fuhg--"

"I swear to God, if you fucking say 'fuhgeddaboutit' one more time!" Lorna flung her arm in frustration, knocking over the bag of McDonalds. She cursed as French fries spilled out over the table and onto the floor.

As she bent down to pick them up, she noticed Nicky standing over her, grinning.

"Why are you smiling? It's not funny."

"I'm not," said Nicky, smiling. "It's just – you're getting your temper back. That's good. Now just say something racist and I'll know you're yourself again."

Lorna lightly kicked her from where she was sitting. She would never forget all that Nicky did for her, or how she felt in this moment.

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Nicky

Nicky enjoyed a rare moment of peace. For the sake of everyone's mental health, she was relieved Lorna was now taking the opportunity to sleep whenever the baby did. She fell back onto her makeshift bed on the couch, feeling like she deserved a rest too.

She was exhausted after the past ten days, though she'd never show it. Suddenly plunged into a world she knew nothing about – motherhood. Hell, she barely had a mother for most of her life, so this was completely new territory. Babies, ugh. They were constantly needy, volatile and you could never know what they wanted. She already had enough of that on her plate looking after Lorna.

Still, she wasn't going to let Lorna continue to drown. And so there she was, changing diapers and boiling bottles while her friend tried to sleep off the sadness. And Lorna seemed to be slowly getting
better – well, nothing could be worse than that night with the gun – so Nicky didn't complain. Sometimes, when Sera wasn't screaming her lungs out, she could look down on this miracle child she'd helped bring into the world and feel, well – a feeling she never expected she would ever feel in her life.

But right now she was just tired.

As she closed her eyes and started to sink into unconsciousness, she heard a jangling sound. Damn it, was Lorna up already?

She prised her eyes open as the front door squeaked, and she was met with the ungainly sight of Vince ambling into the flat. Her veins ignited with adrenaline, no longer tired at all. What did he think was doing, just walking back into the fray without so much as a phone call? He always managed to swan in when the worst is over.

He didn't seem to notice her on the couch. She got up and pulled him by the scruff of the neck, far away from the bedroom door.

"If Lorna wasn't sleeping in the other room, I'd rip your balls out through your eyelids," she hissed.

He squinted through the dim light. "Nicky. What are you doing here?"

"Uh, I think the real question what are you not doing here? Where the fuck have you been?"

She was struggling so badly to keep her voice down. She realised she still had a firm grip on his shirt. He reeked of liquor – figures, he needed Dutch courage before showing his face here.

"Oh, I get it." He shrugged out of Nicky's grasp. "Clearly you've heard Lorna's side of the story. Where is she?"

"What do you fucking care?"

"I'm her husband –"

"Then fucking act like one!" She shoved him a little and he stumbled back. "What kind of man abandons his wife with a newborn baby, huh? Do you even know the state she was in?"

Vince regained his footing. "Yeah, overreacting as always –"

"She called me to leave her fucking suicide note," Nicky spat.

He paused, a little shocked, then recovered. "Lorna would never."

"Why not? She's tried it before."

"That's different," he fumbled, visibly trying to block the notion from his mind. "You think I didn't think about it after we lost our son? But now we have a beautiful, healthy daughter. That's why I keep telling her to get it together, this is meant to be a happy time."

"Which is probably why I found her hysterical, with cuts all up and down her arm, holding your fucking gun." His eyes opened wide. "You really are that stupid, aren't you?"

"Hey, fuck you!" Vince was shouting now. They were going to wake Lorna and the baby any second.

"Do you fucking realise what happened? Yeah, social services don't seem to like when a father
ditches his newborn daughter with his severely depressed wife."

His jaw went slack. He lurched towards the bedroom and swung open the door. Great, he was definitely going to wake them up. After a few seconds, he reappeared, holding the sleeping baby tightly, gasping in relief.

"You called social services?" Vince growled through gritted teeth.

Nicky rolled her eyes. He really was that stupid. "Vince, I'm the only reason social services weren't called. If I didn't come here, Lorna would be dead and the baby would be in care." It sounded even more awful when she said it out loud, but that was the reality.

He looked down at his daughter. "It was really that bad?"

"You heard me say she had your gun, right? Also, what the fuck are you thinking? You know what would happen if she was found with that?"

"Well, it came in handy stopping Christopher." His voice spiked up, on the defensive again.

"Wait, that really happened?"

"She wrote him a letter, broke the restraining order, which I didn't even fucking know about or I wouldn't have beat him up for her. I thought it was him writing creepy letters."

What? Before she could even think about Lorna commissioning assault on her victim from inside fucking prison, he continued.

"That's how we found out she was pregnant, because he put her in the fucking hospital."

Her anger cooled into dread. She felt like shit for not believing her, even though she'd be an idiot to believe anything Lorna said about Christopher.

He seemed to register her shock. "Yeah. You have no idea the shit I've been dealing with."

"That's not a fucking excuse to walk out," she said, heating up again. "Look, I get that she didn't tell you the extent of her problems when you got married, but this time you knew and you chose to do it all again. And if you're just playing with her heart —"

"If you'd let me get a word in edgeways, you'd know she told me to leave. She was flipping the fuck out, accused me of cheating on her and screaming at me to leave. Tell me, what was I supposed to do?" Vince yelled out desperately.

"You stay! If there's one thing Lorna doesn't want, it's for people to leave her. Ya know? That's just what Lorna does. She'll push you away with one hand and cling on to you with the other."

"Well, fuck! I can't read her mind!" He sat down heavily on the couch, his head in his free hand, defeated.

Things were starting to click into place now. She knew he had to have left for a reason, and being scared away by paranoid delusions was as good as any guess. She softened her voice. Maybe she could help him understand.

"You just have to learn her language. 'Leave' means 'stay', 'I'm fine' means 'help me' and 'I'm engaged to Christopher' means 'they really shouldn't have let me drive the prison van'."

Vince raised his eyebrows. "And what does 'I love you' mean?"
"She loves you." He had to know that.

He looked at Nicky for a long moment, his head tilted. "You're in love with her, aren't you? I can see the way you look at her."

What? She tried to choke out an answer but the words got stuck. How did he know? Maybe Vince wasn't as stupid as he looked. She was grasping for words, any words, even one word – NO – when he just nodded to himself. Fuck, her cover was completely blown. He knew and there was nothing she could do to deny it. Pretending she wasn't hopelessly in love with Lorna was a fruitless exercise, even when the only person she was pretending to was herself.

"Did you two ever..." Vince trailed off, his eyes round as the silence filled all the possibilities.

"You got nothing to worry about Vince," Nicky finally spoke, the words grinding in her throat. "We're friends, that's all. She's made it pretty fucking clear that's what she wants."

He gave her a strange look, then sighed. "Thanks for helping her, Nicky. You can go home and get some rest now."

He was back five minutes and already pushing her out? She didn't think so. "No, I think I should stay, to make sure she's okay."

"How do I say this?" He searched for the words. "I think we're going to need some time to work things out... as husband and wife. I'll get her to call you."

She let out a long breath of air, one that had been trapped in her lungs since he walked in the door. Of course he wasn't trying to 'get rid' of her. Hello, paranoid delusions. Vince needed to fix his marriage and mistakes. Lorna needed her husband. Sera needed her father. Nicky needed sleep.

"If I don't hear from her, I'm raising the fucking alarm," she said firmly. Maybe now he knew the severity of the situation, he'd take threats like that seriously.

He nodded dutifully. Nicky rolled her eyes and waved him over to the kitchen. She took a key out of her pocket and opened a small cabinet, showing him where she'd hidden the gun, knives and medications.

"Make sure she takes these," she said, shaking the pills in his face. "She should have never been off them in the first place. Get her to therapy. And for the love of fuck, get rid of the gun."

He gulped. "I'll take care of them, I swear."

"Good. Because the ripping your balls out through your eyelids offer still stands."

She didn't wait for a touchy-feely goodbye before she left the flat. She knew Lorna would be shaken to find her gone in the morning, but she would hopefully find comfort in her husband's return. Now she just had one question – how the hell was she going to get the car back to Piper's place without dying?

Chapter End Notes

Idk how this chapter got so long, the next will be shorter I swear. I'm determined to finish this before S7 because judging by The Leak I might be too broken to continue
after that LOL
I KNOW ugh @ Vinnie but to me he doesn't seem like a Bennett type who would just leave and never come back. Trust me hehe. It's all leading to something.
Oh and I did change all the chapter titles. They were bugging me for ages. Sorry if that's confusing!
A feeling of dread stirred Lorna from her deep slumber; a feeling she was being watched. Her eyes snapped open and she saw a male figure standing at the end of her bed. She would have screamed if her eyes didn't focus through the darkness and reveal who it was. She fumbled for the lamp on her bedside table. And then, as light confirmed it was really was him, she gasped again.

"Vinnie? Oh my God, you scared me... You're back."

"Hi, honey." He sat down on the bed. The mattress sunk under his weight, pressing that it wasn't some hallucination. He'd returned, just when she'd given up all hope. Vinnie had a habit of doing that.

But she wasn't feeling any of the relief or joy she'd imagined. She could barely look at him. If she did, maybe all her hurt and anger would come flooding out.

Instead, she asked: "Does Nicky know you're here?"

"Actually, she just left," he sighed. "She needed to go home and get some rest. You really wore her out."

"Nicky said that?" Of course. She knew that she was burdening her, despite how many times Nicky said 'fuhgeddaboutit'. Still, it stung that she didn't say goodbye.

"Nicky said you were hysterical," Vinnie continued. "What you doing, Lorna, making threats like that? Don't you know they could take Sera away?"

"You left us," she said through gritted teeth. "I didn't know if you were coming back."

"You told me to leave, remember? If I'd known you'd do that, I never would have fucking listened, would I? ... Look, the important thing is I'm here now, I'm not going anywhere, I promise. I missed you and Sera so much."

He reached out to touch her face. She flinched involuntarily, burying her head down.

"Look, I don't expect you to run into my arms but can you at least look at me?"

She forced herself to meet his eyes, tears immediately escaping. To her surprise, he was also on the verge.
"I'm sorry, okay?" Vinnie said, his head hanging down. "I'm really sorry. It's been tearing me up inside. You know I never wanted to hurt you like that. God, can you ever forgive me, Lorna?"

She didn't want him to keep crying so she nodded. He wrapped his arms around her waist and folded into her lap. Dazedly, she ran her fingers through his hair. She wanted to say something but her brain couldn't land on an emotion. Relief that Vinnie returned, against the odds. Anger that he'd left her and their baby in the first place. Shame that he knew what a mess she'd been. Sadness that Nicky was gone again – yes, her husband was back and holding her so tightly but it was this that gnawed at her.

The baby started to cry, giving her an excuse to peel out of Vinnie's arms. He watched as she started to nurse.

"Look at that. Maybe I just needed to get out the way for you two to start bonding."

To her, that sounded like a threat he would leave again. Shame took over. "I'm sorry I was acting so fucking crazy. All that shit I said, I was wrong, I love her so much, but I'm so scared – "

"Hey, hey. Take a deep breath. It ain't your fault, alright? Look, Nicky told me everything. She said you got that postpartum thing, but you know what I think? We just rushed into everything so quick, you know? Especially having her so soon after Carmine. I get it. Of course you're strung out, baby. I shoulda seen it coming."

He held her and the baby close as she calmed down. She hadn't felt like this in a few days now, the fear of fucking up her daughter's life started to fade in.

"I've had a lot of time to think, Lorn. Maybe what we need is a break. I wanna take you away somewhere, out of this city. Fresh air and sunshine, it will do us all good, huh?"

She pulled away. "We can't afford that. And you already used your vacation days."

"Don't worry about it. The good thing about living with your parents until you're thirty is you have some money put away. What do you say? Come on, let me take care of you. Like a husband should."

Lorna sat down on the bed. A chance at fixing her marriage and a vacation to boot? The answer was obvious. Wasn't it? Wasn't it?

Nicky

"Florida?"

As Vinnie promised, Lorna called the next day. After getting through the bullshit (Lorna was annoyed at Nicky for leaving but wouldn't say it, Nicky was annoyed at Lorna for not saying it), came the announcement.

"It won't be forever," Lorna reassured upon hearing her stunned silence. "Vinnie thinks some time away will help us. Well, me. Hey, look at that – I'm officially Florida-crazy."

She was trying to make a joke out of it. It struck Nicky that it was literally first joke she'd heard Lorna make since she lost Carmine, and normally she'd encourage it if it didn't come from such a shitty place of self-loathing.
"A vacation isn't a replacement for therapy, Lorna."

"My therapist is gonna refer me to one in Florida."

Well, shit. It was good that Vinnie was finally manning up, but Florida? She couldn't imagine Lorna there, so far away. Plus, the girl complained whenever humidity made her hair frizz up, how was she gonna handle swampland?

"Is that what you want?"

Lorna paused a moment. "I want... to be happy."

"Me too," Nicky sighed. "But you can't force it, babe. And you can't bottle shit up to keep other people happy either. It's like, you ever put a Mentos in a Diet Coke? One day the lid is gonna fucking blow off and your emotions are gonna explode everywhere."

"Okay, Doctor Nichols." Again, these deflecting jokes didn't sit well with her. Maybe she was just that happy Vinnie was back, in which case Nicky wasn't going to ruin it. But still...

"Lorna, you'd tell me if there was something else going on, right?"

"Sure," Lorna chirped. "Listen, I gotta go. We need to get Sera her passport."

"Lorna?"

"Yeah, hun?"

Something was telling Nicky to stay on the line. "Uh, you're still gonna call me and everything, yeah? And I, uh, want you to send me a postcard. Keep me updated on how you and the bub are doing."

"Oh my God, we could be pen pals!" Lorna exclaimed.

Nicky held back asking if that meant Lorna might marry her, too. She shook her head and started telling Lorna her address. She felt she had to. They said their goodbyes and only then Nicky realised how hard she'd been gripping the phone. She heaved a sigh, taking out a cigarette from her pocket and lighting it. Chapman, who seemed to have the nose of a fucking sniffer dog, was immediately in her face.

"Can you not smoke in here? It gets in the furniture."

She rolled her eyes and took a drag. "Well, maybe I'm sick of living in a fucking Pottery Barn display window. Ugh, sorry Piper. I'm shocked you haven't kicked me out yet. I mean, first I steal your car – "

Piper pursed her lips. "Is everything okay?" She squinted as Nicky explained. "Oh. That's good, right? Sounds like they're patching things up."

"Yeah." Nicky sucked her cigarette down to the filter. "Yeah."

"What?"

"It's just so fucking far away. Literally ten days ago I had to drive like Mad Max to get to her and – "

"But it's just a vacation, right? And her husband is with her now. And she's getting help, the professional kind. And it's not really your place to do anything but be a supportive friend."
Night lit another cigarette. "Right, so you think I'm being crazy for nothing then."

"You're not crazy, Nicky. You're just crazy about her." Piper patted her on the shoulder. "Now take that cigarette outside before I put it out in your eye."

Chapter End Notes

I know it seems like I'm doing literally everything in my power to keep Nicky and Lorna apart but hold out till the next chapter! I promise. :)
Wish You Were Here

Chapter Summary

Stuck without her safety net, Lorna finally kind of figures shit out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

The plane trip was fine. Lorna was nervous because she hadn't flown before, but it was surprisingly boring (maybe prison life had dulled her to these things) and she even managed to get a nap in before landing. It was as soon as Lorna got off the plane that she felt the need to escape. The Florida air was close and thick, like it would solidify in your lungs and trap you where you stood.

She suddenly felt very far away from New York. What did that matter? She never belonged anywhere, and certainly not to that dirty city. She could adapt to any place after Litchfield. It didn't make sense now to be unnerved by drawling Florida accents instead of New York ones. It didn't make sense that she felt herself pulled back even as Vinnie took her to the nicest hotel on the beachfront and showered her with kisses.

If she put in the bare minimum and nodded and smiled in the right places, he wouldn't notice something was wrong. Or maybe he didn't want to notice. Because what could possibly be wrong? Well, she knew the answer to that. It was her.

A week into her stay, it struck her that Nicky could help calm the turbulence in her head. It was Nicky's New York-accented voice she missed. She wanted to call her and have her fix everything but what would she say? Something she didn't want to admit.

She sat on the sand writing postcards (at least that looked like a normal holiday activity). What the fuck was she going to write? Dear Nicky, why can't I keep my head straight for more than five minutes?

She groaned and scrawled something down. Dear Nicky, Wish you were here. Love, Lorna xoxo.

She folded the postcard in half and stuffed it into her purse. Nicky wasn't one to read into hidden messages, especially ones even Lorna herself didn't know the meaning of.

This could have been her dream Honeymoon once upon a time, something she would have pinned her hopes onto a vision board to escape her shitty life. But now she was joylessly going through the motions of sightseeing, beaches, fucking Disneyland, all spent on autopilot. Her husband was meant to be the source of her happiness. So how could it be that he felt like the barrier to it?

If she wasn't happy with a husband and a baby, who was she? She couldn't just give up on that. Her whole life had been built upon these values. Hell, she even went to prison for these values. She always believed that if she clung onto them like a rock, maybe her life would have stability, and she wouldn't be washed away by her mind's endless riptides.
But Lorna could feel herself being pulled back. She felt it the moment she woke up and found Nicky
gone with Vinnie in her place, an almost physical backslide to a place of sleepless fear and
shame. She never wanted to feel the way she did that night with the gun. She couldn't go there again.

It was late at night. She was listening to the ocean, rocking the baby in time with the waves crashing
again and again onto the sand. Everything was so fucking repetitive. If she wanted to escape, she
was going to have to swim against the tide.

Nicky

It was lucky Nicky was a night person. Otherwise, she might not have been lying wide-awake in bed
to hear her apartment buzzer go off at 1:36 AM. She ignored it, thinking it was dumb kids, but then it
went off again. She kicked off the covers, dragged herself into the hallway and pressed the intercom.

"Who the fuck is there? I'm calling the cops."

"Don't call the cops." Nicky couldn't mistake that voice, even through the crackling speaker. Wasn't
she meant to be in Florida, for fuck's sake?

"Lorna? What the fuck? It's late... Uh, shit, let me buzz you in."

In a minute, Lorna was standing at her door, shivering in a summer dress and holding the baby.
Nicky ushered her inside, instantly preparing herself for another sleepless night.

"Jesus... How did you get here? Are you okay? Is something wrong? Where's Vince? He hasn't
fucking left you again, has he?"

Lorna just looked overwhelmed by all the questions. Nicky guided her to sit down on the couch.

"Just breathe," Nicky said, saying it as much to herself. "Tell me what happened."

Lorna stared at her, glassy-eyed. "I left him."

Of all the things Nicky expected Lorna to say, it wasn't that. Lorna would never give up on her
marriage, it was too important to her. She would never choose to be alone. And besides, it sounded
like they were having a great time because she'd received seven postcards in the past three weeks all
with the same message in heart-dotted cursive: Wish you were here.

"You want me to take you back to Vince, kid? We'll take my flatmate's car and –"

"No... I just, I had to get outta there. I didn't plan nothing. I got on a Greyhound and I – I woke up in
Manhattan. And I had your postcard in my purse. I'm sorry, I don't wanna be a burden but I don't
know nobody else who lives here."

She nodded as if she knew what the fuck Lorna was talking about. For all she knew, Vinnie smiled
at a female housekeeper wrong and was now being punished for "cheating". She wanted to know
what Lorna was playing at, but realised suddenly she was yawning. She didn't have a baby carrier –
or any bags for that matter – so she must have been carrying the baby like that for the last 20 hours.
Interrogation would have to wait.

Nicky led her to the bedroom, feeling only a little embarrassed about how messy it was with several
makeshift ash trays filled with cigarette butts (it had been a long month, okay?). Lorna finally put the baby down on the mattress and climbed under the covers fully clothed, closing her eyes immediately, as if she hadn't slept in days. Nicky tucked the blankets and headed out to sleep on the couch once again.

Nicky wasn't a morning person. But she crept out at 6AM that morning to buy the baby things she knew Lorna needed. It was daft of her to turn up without so much as a diaper, but Nicky guessed she'd left mid-argument. Today, she would try and sort things out between them again, like some kind of unpaid marriage counsellor. Next time she was going to bill them.

She realised she might have gone slightly overboard as she was carrying the bags up the stairs to her flat. As she got to her door, Piper opened it, heading out for her morning run, and in her surprise dropped everything. Piper looked at it all in confusion. She was about to get a whole lot more confused.

"We have an unexpected visitor," said Nicky.

"Unexpected? Are you pregnant?"

"Yeah." Piper's eyes widened. "No, Chapman! What the fuck? Have you met me?"

Piper crossed her arms. Her patience for Nicky's sarcasm was in short supply this early in the morning. "Explain."

"It's Lorna. Obviously. She turned up here last night."

"With the baby?"

Nicky gestured towards the mess of wipes and baby powder. "My God, you've cracked it."

"And she wants to stay here?" Piper folded her arms tighter. "With a baby?"

"She doesn't have anywhere else to go."

"I don't have an extra bed or a crib or anything –"

"Come on, you know it's only a matter of time before she goes back to Vince."

Nicky heard Lorna clear her throat; she was standing in the living room, still in last night's clothes, holding the baby. Lorna squinted at both of them, as though she wasn't sure if she was still dreaming.

"Sorry, we didn't mean to wake you," said Nicky.

"Hi, Lorna." Piper waved.

"Chapman?" Lorna squinted harder. "What are you doing here?"

"Sorry, I forgot to mention last night. This is Piper's place. We're all here by her good graces, isn't that right, Piper?" Nicky nudged Piper, hoping that if she buttered her up it would make the whole situation less awkward.

It worked. "Don't worry about it. It's good to see you. Although my apartment is not exactly baby-proof."
"Nah, we'll be fine." Nicky gestured again to the overspill of baby paraphernalia.

"I'll pay you back for everything, I swear."

"Fuhgeddaboutit," Nicky said, sharing a look with Lorna.

"Well..." Piper interrupted the moment. "As long as I get lots of cuddles with this little one."

Piper turned her attention to the baby. Lorna shrugged happily and offloaded Sera into Piper’s arms.

"Hello, Serafina! We haven’t met yet. I'm your Aunty Piper."

Nicky rolled her eyes. It hadn't been five minutes and Piper had already christened herself an aunt. She was holding the baby so awkwardly; Sera made some disgruntled noises. Nicky plugged her ears. She knew what was coming next.

"Did I do something wrong?" Piper passed the screaming infant back to Lorna. "Oh no, she doesn't like me!"

Lorna patted the baby on the back to calm her. "You'll learn not to take that personally."

She turned to Nicky and smiled. Normally, Nicky would be happy to see Lorna smile, would move mountains just to see her face brighten. But this smile was making her uneasy. She’d seen it before; it was an engaged-to-Christopher smile. She was now convinced Lorna was hiding something.

Chapter End Notes

Idk how Piper of all people became this story's comic relief lol. I needed it after the angst. Also because shit's going down in the next few chapters. In a good way, I think! :)

Lorna grunted as she worked detergent into her ruined uniform. Her lipstick had accidentally slipped in with her laundry bag, and now all of her clothes were smudged pink.

"Feeling frustrated, Morello?"

Lorna looked up to find Nichols, smirking as she leaned against the washing machines. She seemed to always have that look on her face these days, now they were hanging out more.

"I'm gonna be in so much trouble," Lorna groaned. "And that was my last lipstick."

"Shame. I liked the slutty Snow White look. Here, let me help."

She picked up Lorna's prison-issue panties and started trying to rub away a stain on the crotch. But she was just rubbing it in.

"Stop!" Lorna rolled her eyes and snatched them back. "You're making it worse. Ain't you ever done laundry before?"

"You know I like it dirty."

That wasn't one of Nichols' most creative pick-up lines. She'd heard them all. As the van driver, Lorna always took the pretty newbies straight to Nichols. Call it an act of friendship.

They were friends - and nothing more. She loved to talk to Nichols; she was one of only people who'd put up with her long wedding chats. Unless, she worried, Nichols was only putting up with her because she wanted more.

"You ever sat on top of that washing machine, Morello?" Nichols continued to smirk. "If you put the spin cycle on high, you'll have the most powerful orgasm of your life."

Lorna crossed her arms. She'd got her answer. The truth was, Nichols' reputation preceded her – it was only the first week in prison that an inmate called Big Boo warned her about the notches on Nichols' bunk-post. For some lonely months nothing happened, but then out of nowhere, Nichols introduced her to Red's family. Did she only do it in hopes of getting laid? Lorna resisted all those increasingly dirty come-ons, making her want it even more. A junkie daughter of millionaires, Nicky Nichols was used to getting what she wanted.
But she was only obsessing over a fantasy. Lorna was engaged, that was real. 100%, totally, really real.

"When was the last time you had an orgasm?" She leaned in, her wild hair brushing the back of Lorna's neck. "... Have you ever had one?"

"Yes!" Lorna pushed her away lightly.

She continued to lean forward. "I could make you cum so hard you forget you're even engaged."

"I won't be unfaithful to Christopher," Lorna said firmly. "So if that's the only reason you made friends with me, you might as well leave me alone now."

Nichols grinned. "It's not the only reason."

She turned away, stuffing her soiled clothes back into the laundry bag. She'd have to take the shot.

"Lorna," Nichols sighed, using her first name so she knew it was serious. "I'm just worried about you, kid. I mean, you got needs. I can tell. It's driving you crazy."

She wished Nichols was wrong. She wished she didn't lie awake at night fidgeting or that she didn't have sex dreams so wild she wondered if she cried out in her sleep for everyone to hear.

Nichols took her hesitation as an invitation, pressing her arms against the washing machine so that Lorna's body was sandwiched between.

"No, don't."

She snaked her right hand down, slipping under Lorna's trousers and past the elastic of her underwear. Immediately, her nerves sparked and an ache started deep in her belly – she really hadn't been touched in so long.

"This is wrong." She didn't just mean cheating on Christopher. Being with a girl...

Nichols' hand went deeper, clamping down gently. Her body weighed against Lorna's, breath hot in her ear. Lorna felt her nipples harden as the blonde's ribcage brushed up against her breasts.

"Hey, that's not what your body is telling me. Holy shit, you're so wet."

Her own body was betraying her, blood rushing and skin flushing. Nichols' fingers worked in tiny, tingling circles, getting faster. Faster. No, damn it! What the fuck was she doing?

"Ah, ah. Oh, my God. Fuck."

She yelped, the sound escaping her lips without her permission. Now Nichols' fingers were inside her, one finger, two, Jesus Christ, three fingers? What was she trying to do, rip her in half? But then she began to pump, pushing up against her walls, her thumb still pressing her throbbing clit. Her hips jerked forward. Yes. She needed this. She was no longer fighting it.

"Please!"

She came fast, every cell in her body surging with electricity. Her knees caved beneath her, sliding to the floor. Nichols, satisfied with a good job done, sucked on her fingers. She turned to leave, as if to show that she'd made her point.

"Nicky," Lorna gasped.
"Yes?" Nichols turned expectantly.

"No... No kissing," said Lorna, and then Nichols turned on her heel, nodding and laughing to herself.

Once she was alone, a familiar shame trickled over her. She'd lost control. She was having a bad week and her laundry mishap just pushed her over the edge. In a moment of weakness, she just wanted to feel good and forget. Forget that she was in prison, forget that people knew Christopher hadn't visited. And fuck, for a second, Nichols did that. Even her engagement faded away like it wasn't even real. She was still a shivering, sweaty mess. Maybe she really hadn't had a real orgasm before.

The more she thought about it, the more of her resolve melted away. It wasn't really cheating if it was with a woman. It wasn't really cheating if there was no kissing. If she could box what she and Nicky had – whatever it was – into a neat set of rules, it was okay. It wasn't like she was gay or anything. It was just a physical thing. Just like Nichols, she wouldn't let emotions get involved. This was just about getting through her sentence without going crazy. Survival, that was all.

But later that afternoon, as dinner was being prepared, Lorna crept into Red's cube. She knew it was wrong, it was probably going to get her in trouble, even make the whole prison suffer the consequences of Red's wrath. But she was already on a roll with stupid behaviour today so what was one more?

To her surprise, she was worried that since Nichols had succeeded her conquest, she'd move on to pursuing some newbie with long legs and great tits. Nichols had given her a hit so now she knew what she was missing when those aching cravings came again. She couldn't help herself stealing the tube of lipstick on Red's desk. After all, Nicky liked the look.

Nicky

The early trip to Target took a lot out of Nicky. As Piper went out to save the world and Lorna put the baby down for a nap, she crawled onto the couch and closed her eyes. Just for a second.

She woke up five hours later. The apartment smelled like garlic. She followed the aroma into the kitchen, where Lorna was rolling out dough on the bench. She was wearing Nicky's clothes because she hadn't brought any of her own, and it was throwing Nicky how fucking cute she looked in an oversized flannel and ripped jeans. She looked up, completely unaware that she was a living, breathing dyke fantasy.

"Ravioli!" Lorna said in an exaggerated Italian accent that wasn't that different from her own. "Piper's mad."

"Ah, forget Chapman. She just likes to be in control of everything."

"Well, the way to your heart is through your stomach. That's how I got Vinnie to let me stay. I stuffed him so full of cheese and dough that he couldn't kick me out."

"I'm pretty sure he let you stay because he loves you," Nicky offered.

Lorna wrinkled her nose. "Can I tell you the truth?"
Nicky hoped it was a clue to why she was here. "Yes, please."

"I don't even like cooking. I hate all that domestic stuff. Just reminds me of looking after my mother. All I wanted was somebody to come and take me away from it all. That's probably why Christopher..." – to Nicky's surprise, she actually corrected herself – "...I mean my cuckoo version of Christopher, was always the cook of the house."

"Well, sorry Cinderella, but I can't boil an egg." Nicky steered the subject back to the husband. "But can't Vince cook? He's Italian."

Lorna shook her head gravely. "No, no. You shoulda seen when I was pregnant with her. He fed me so much spinach that when I got morning sickness it was like that scene from The Exorcist."

Nicky burst out laughing. She hadn't cackled like that in... she didn't remember how long. Lorna's offended little frown was only setting her off more.

"It's not funny! I hate spinach. I felt like fucking Popeye."

"Oh yeah?" Nicky taunted. "Are you strong to the finish? You wanna fight? Show me them muscles."

She took a playful swipe at Lorna. Suddenly, the brunette flinched away and backed into the cupboards, alarmed.

"Hey, I was only teasing."

Lorna seemed to realise her reaction and sunk to the floor, burying her head. Nicky knelt down and peeled Lorna's hands away from her face, not least because she was getting flour in her hair.

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing."

"Really, we're gonna play that again?"

"If I tell you... you gotta promise you won't freak out."

Nicky wasn't sure she wanted to hear this. "Okay. I promise."

"You know when Vinnie left me?"

"Which time? Sorry, sorry. Go on."

She breathed in deep. "There's something I didn't tell you. He hit me."

"What?"

"It all happened so fast," Lorna tried to explain – or she was trying to find an explanation. "I was freaking out and it was freaking him out and I don't know what happened but he was trying to stop me and he – he slapped me."

Nicky was on her feet before her brain could even send the signals to her legs. She started immediately pacing the room, prowling its edges like a caged animal, her body shivering heat. She was beyond anger. And to think she believed his side of the story, left Lorna with him –

"I'm gonna fucking kill him. I'm gonna make him regret the day he ever hurt you, that fucking
asshole." She grabbed the car keys, moving towards the front door. "Why don't I pay him a visit, huh? He likes to beat on defenceless women? Let's see if he can handle me."

Lorna jumped up. "You said you wouldn't freak out!"

Nicky looked at her as if she was crazy. "I won't let him get away with this. He should be fucking locked up."

"He didn't mean it, Nicky. Please, just drop it."

"Seriously? Shit, kid. I knew you had low self-esteem but I didn't think you would defend that."

"I'm not!" Lorna yelled. "God, it's just... it's not like it's the first time someone's tried to slap some sense into me."

"You mean your father?"

Her brow knitted, perplexed. "Nicky, it's just like Jesus said: don't throw stones at glass houses."

"Yeah, I'm Jewish and even I know that's not right... Wait, are you calling me a hypocrite?"

Lorna walked back behind the kitchen island, hiding. She distractedly stuck her hands in the dough.

"You can't just drop a bombshell like that and go back to making fucking ravioli. What's the truth?"

Nicky raised her voice but sometimes it was the only way to get through to her. These mind games could go on forever.

"When the black French died..." Lorna trailed off. "Everything got so fucked up after that."

"Well, yeah. I seem to remember a shooting, a riot, maximum-security nightmare bullshit."

"Do you remember when we was behind the sheds? Makeout alley." The last two words were sharp on her tongue. Nicky suddenly knew what she was getting at.

The morning after Washington was killed right in front of them, Red sent Nicky and Lorna to find a new spot for a garden. Maybe that was the matriarch's way of keeping her kids calm and out of trouble, because there was no way Caputo was letting them plant another garden after they found the buried remains of a guard.

Or maybe Red had something else in mind. Ever since that day in the cafeteria, when Lorna publicly called Nicky out on her relapse, their relationship was strained. But now she was clean, maybe Lorna would give her another chance. Those words still echoed: *You love heroin more than you loved me.*

She was watching as Lorna mused about the "black French" in her oblivious way when she lost all her defences.

"What?" Lorna noticed the look on her face. "What?"

*As if she didn't know.* Nicky was over this cat-and-mouse game. She pushed her body against Lorna's and the shed wall, so close she could feel the heat of her breath. It was like when she tried to seduce Lorna in the bathroom just weeks ago, except this time she wasn't letting her squirm away. Her patience was shot as she felt the shorter woman tense up, rejecting her advances.

Nicky was officially clean but still climbing out of her skin. She was desperate to feel good again.
And if she couldn't have heroin, she would just... she forced her hand down Lorna's pants. Her other hand locked onto her jaw, and she sealed their one-sided embrace with a kiss. Lorna had a rule about no kissing but Nicky had waited for so long. She survived every day in max with the hope she would one day see Lorna again and tell her she loved her. So she wasn't taking no for an answer.

Lorna said no. She said it several times. And finally pushed her off with a strength Nicky didn't know she had in her.

"I'm clean," Nicky said, casually, belying the desperation in her blood, her childish need for Lorna to be proud of her like it was an achievement to not take heroin. And where the fuck was she when she was detoxing, anyway? She could feel all her burning resentments bubble to the surface. All she needed was Lorna to push her buttons and it would all come out.

Nicky tried to lean in again but Lorna slipped away. "How many fucking times do I have to tell you? I am married. We're having a baby!"

She stared at her incredulously. Anybody with two brain cells to rub together knew this shotgun marriage was doomed to fail. Even yesterday, Nicky overheard the Latinas giggling about La Loca's latest phone call. She was yelling at her husband for... something about caramels? But when Nicky brought it up later, Lorna insisted they were trying for a baby, somehow. It was so fucking sad that she couldn't do anything but nod and smile.

But she was done enabling the bullshit. She wouldn't let her take comfort in fantasy when she had to live in cold, drugless reality. "No, you're not."

"Yes, I am! You junkie addict liar." Lorna bit off the words, her eyes pooling with angry tears. Nicky had never seen her this mad – fucking mad. She was taunting her, going in for the kill. *How long's it gonna last? This time?* At this point, Nicky was shaking. Every word cut her to the bone. She wanted to cry, but fuck that. Lorna was the one who betrayed her. She was the liar in this relationship.

"You psycho!" Nicky shoved her, then again until she was pinned against the fence with one hand pressed on her chest. She could feel her heart racing. "What's the truth?"

She asked Lorna again, demanded it. When she got nothing back but that unyielding stare, she snapped out of it. And finally admitted that she was fucking everything up and it wasn't really happy families with Vince.

Nicky leaned against the fence, sad that Lorna was stuck in this cycle, but relieved that she could at least kind of see it. Just as she wondered if this fight had finally put too much distance between them, Lorna looped her arm around hers and they were close again.

"That wasn't the same," said Nicky, trying to tear Lorna's eyes away from cooking.

"No, you're right as always. So let's just drop it."

"I don't want to drop it."

"Well, I do!" She pounded the dough with her fist. "You're making me think about things I just wanna forget. Forget that and Vinnie and just... make dinner. Watch, I'll teach you."

"You can't, like, just ignore everything that makes you uncomfortable."
"Shit, now the garlic is burnt." Lorna took the pan off the hob, as if to say, yes, she could. She was going to act like this conversation wasn't even happening. Nicky groaned. When Lorna got like this, it was like talking to a brick wall. With steel reinforcements.

"Hey, I know I was heavy-handed getting my point across, but I did have a point, didn't I? I mean, like two days later you were begging me to fuck you."

Their fight in makeout alley had dissipated just as quickly (to be fair, an actual riot started soon after and their goal became getting as far away from that Spanish girl with the gun as possible). And she knew it was over when it was Lorna who initiated doctor-nurse roleplay. Naturally, only an hour later she claimed it was due to pregnancy hormones. The girl was queen of mixed messages. Nicky remembered literally having her hands inside her while she protested about staying true to Christopher.

Christopher, this man she'd met once and literally stalked until she was thrown in prison – and even while she was in prison. Nicky suddenly realised who she was talking to. Of all people, Lorna's relationship with consent was muddied.

"Oh, my God. I'm an asshole."

She finally looked up. "No, no. You're not. You're wonderful. And anyway, there's stuff I did in prison I ain't proud of. I mean, I was acting pretty fucking crazy."

"That doesn't make it okay. And what Vince did was not okay." Nicky's grip was still tight around the keys, she still wanted to find him and make him pay.

Lorna shook her head, teary-eyed. "No, Nicky, look at me. What's in the past, it don't matter. I'm here, you're clean. We don't have to worry about nothing else. Okay? We can just forget it ever happened. We can start from scratch, leave it all behind. Please, Nicky? Please don't go back there. You can't go forward if you keep looking back."

She looked down at the woman who now had her arms wrapped around her waist, getting flour on her shirt. Lorna made it sound so easy to just move on. But Nicky was the kind to stew in her regrets, obsess over her mistakes until she was so convinced she was an inevitable fuck-up so why not repeat them again?

She was so lost in her thoughts and Lorna's arms that she barely noticed Piper come home. "Hey, what's burning? Oh, sorry, I'm interrupting a moment."

"I used to share a dorm with you, Lorna." Piper saw the keys in Nicky's hand. "You going somewhere? I'd like some warning before you steal my car again."

"No." She threw the keys onto the bench and put her arm around Lorna's shoulder. "I'm staying here... Lorna's gonna teach me how to make ravioli."

"Good luck with that," said Piper, going off to take a shower.

She watched Lorna pull herself together and continue rolling out dough, as if nothing happened. "Uh, we never had a pasta machine growing up. All you need is patience and some elbow grease. You can tell it's ready when you can see through it. See?"
I had some unresolved feelings about S4, could you tell?
And yeah, I suck at writing sex scenes (but they are important to this relationship) so if that was terrible I do apologise.
This is Horribly Familiar

Chapter Summary

Well, Nicky suspected Lorna was hiding something.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Lorna blocked all thoughts of Vinnie from her mind. Granted, it was difficult when she was looking after his offspring (why did Sera have to remind her so much of him?) but it wasn't impossible. She just wouldn't let her brain venture anywhere near him. Now that Nicky stopped bugging her about him, she could go whole hours completely forgetting his existence.

When she did remember, she pushed the thoughts back down into darkness. Often with cooking and food. As long as she was forcing food down she didn't have to deal with the things coming back up.

She was up early nursing Sera when she heard the delivery man drop off Piper's newspaper at the door. Trying to keep herself awake, Lorna collected it and sat in the kitchen to read. Disaster, war, politics, boring, boring, boring. She was flipping through the pages, trying to find the engagement announcements or the funnies, when she froze.

She slowly closed the newspaper and her eyes. She walked over to Piper's elaborate bin system and shoved it in the garbage, deep down.

Down, down. Her efforts became more desperate as the thoughts, memories got harder to suppress. That's how Piper and Nicky came to find her sitting in the kitchen that morning, eating spoonful after spoonful of Nutella out of the 13 oz jar.

"Want me to take that off you?" Nicky approached her.

"No... yes." She relinquished the nearly-empty jar. The sticky sweetness was starting to make her feel sick anyway. She really just wanted to go to the bathroom and throw it all back up, but not with them watching her now.

"I guess I'll have peanut butter on my toast this morning," said Piper. She frowned and left the room.

"Everything okay?" Nicky asked.

"Oh, sure. Just fine. I'm tired from this one keeping me up all night, that's all."

Nicky rubbed her shoulders. "You're all in knots, babe. Maybe it's time to see the therapist again before stress gets the better of you."

Piper came back, her face turning sour at the massage going on. "Has anyone seen my newspaper? I want to know what's going on in the world."
They both shrugged. Piper passive-aggressively made toast. Nicky worked her fingers into a particularly tense knot.

"Oh my God, yes. Right there."

"Hey, you're gonna turn me on if you're not careful," Nicky joked.

"What's going on?" Piper finally snapped, turning to aggressive-aggression. She was brandishing a butter knife at the pair of them in an almost comical way.

"What do you mean?" Nicky asked.

"Lorna, you've been here for three weeks. Are you going back to Vince or what? I just want to know, I think Nicky and I deserve that much."

"Leave it, Chapman. You don't know what you're talking about."

"You're right, I don't know what I'm talking about," said Piper seriously. "Because she just showed up here without any explanation. I mean, I think it's pretty strange that he hasn't called to check up on his child, don't you?"

Lorna got to her feet and walked into the bathroom. Piper was forcing shit back up and this time it wouldn't stay down. The room was spinning hard. She sat down on the tiles before she could drop the baby. Nicky was at her side immediately.

"Hey, easy. Take a breath."

Guilt settled in her gut. She didn't deserve to be treated so nicely. If only Nicky knew..."I know what this is all about."

Lorna's stomach turned. "You – you do?"

"Yeah. Chapman's missing her wife. Seeing us together again, even if we're not together together, must be hard. It's not an excuse to be an asshole though. Let me talk to her."

"She's got a point." Lorna could no longer ignore it. "Vinnie's her father."

"That doesn't mean you have to stay with the bastard."

"I don't hate him, Nicky. I hate how I feel when I'm with him. It's like, I can see him trying to help when I get all crazy. But then he gets impatient and thinks I'm doing this on purpose so I try to pretend that everything is fine because I get scared he'll leave me again."

"Yeah, that doesn't sound healthy."

A husband was only meant to bring her safety and security. But with Vinnie she somehow felt more out of control; she contacted Christopher, assaulted Marka, escaped hospital, held a gun to her own head. Maybe her old therapist was right, that for everything you repress there was a price to pay.

"I feel sick." She quickly passed Sera to Nicky and leaned over the toilet. She didn't have to use her fingers for thousands of calories of Nutella to come surging out.

"Oh, shit." Nicky fumbled to hold her hair back. "There, get it all out."

Lorna eventually stopped and leaned back against the wall, her eyes streaming.
Alright, this is horribly familiar. I'm taking you to the therapist today and that's final.

No, I can't," she sobbed. "Nicky, I did something bad. Really bad."

What? Just tell me.

"I threw my phone my in the ocean."

Nicky laughed, almost in relief. "Um, okay? Well, don't worry, we'll get you a new one. Phones aren't expensive."

She didn't understand. Lorna had fucked up so badly. And there was such a big price to pay.

"Lorna." Piper stood at the door, flushed. "You didn't tell Vince you were leaving, did you?"

Piper was holding the crumbled newspaper, slightly smeared with food scraps from the bin. She pushed it in front of Lorna's face, so she couldn't escape her own picture staring back at her.

Search widens for missing mother and baby: Police are appealing for public assistance to help locate a missing NY woman and her 10-week-old baby. Lorna Muccio was reported missing three weeks ago from a family holiday at St Augustine Beach, Florida, along with infant daughter Serafina Muccio. Her husband and father of the child, Vincent Muccio, told police that his wife, who is a convicted felon, was acting paranoid before the disappearance. Anyone with information is urged to contact the NYPD.

Nicky was reading over her shoulder. Her eyes widened with each damning word. "Fucking hell. Lorna, what have you done?"

Nicky shook her head so hard her brain felt like a rattle. She was kicking herself for not asking more questions when Lorna showed up on her doorstep. Of course she didn't tell the whole story. Of course she was running away from reality. The whole thing was such a big of course.

As far as she'd figured out, it went like this: Lorna suddenly had a magical epiphany that she was better off without Vince. But Lorna being herself, instead of addressing the situation like an adult, stole away into the night with their daughter, threw her phone into the water so she couldn't be found and somehow got on a Greyhound, whereupon arriving in New York realised she had Nicky's address in her purse. Unbeknownst to Piper and herself, the two ex-felons were harbouring a missing person. Great.

She did the right thing and took Lorna straight to the nearest precinct. Even though the police were annoyed at the wasted resources, it wasn't a crime to go missing or even take your child with you. But they did have to call Vince to let him know his family were in fact alive, so they were waiting anxiously in the foyer for him to arrive. Lorna was shaking like a crackhead in the seat next to her. As much as it was her fault, Nicky hated seeing her this way.

"Chill, alright? It's going to be okay."

"How do you know?"
"Uhhh. Fuck it, I don't. You have to face the music on this one." She had to take responsibility for her actions. Now she had support, being sick and scared just wasn't an excuse anymore. "Vince, as much as I still want to rip his balls out through his eyelids, has a right to be pissed off. What were you gonna do if we didn't find out, fake your death?"

"I didn't think that far ahead." Of course.

"Well, you realise you just made it, like, a million times worse for yourself."

"I know. I mean, I know. Why do I do these things?"

"You tell me." She looked her in the eyes. "Seriously. What were you thinking?"

"I –"

Lorna was cut off by Vince bursting in the doors. He had a wild look in his eyes, well, the look of a man whose wife and child had been missing for three weeks. Nicky knew all hell was about to break loose. Brace yourself.

"Lorna!" He raced over and before they could do anything but stand up, he had his arms around Lorna and the baby. "Oh my God, Sera! Thank God she's alright."

Lorna managed to escape the embrace. He flipped from shocked relief to shocked anger in a second flat.

"Do you know how fucking scared I've been?" Vince yelled. "I filed a missing persons report, the police had helicopters searching the beach. They thought you could have drowned, or taken your own – fuck, I didn't know if you were even alive. I didn't know if Sera was alive. How could you do that to me?"

"I'm sorry –"

"Where the fuck have you been!"

"I had to get away," said Lorna quietly.

"That's why we went to fucking Florida!"

"I had to get away from you," she said even quieter.

"Get away from me?" He backed away in confusion. "What did I do now? I mean, please, tell me, Lorna. What have I ever done but love you? Let's not forget that when you were so lonely in prison I was there. I gave you a marriage, a home, a family, a future when you had nothing. What the fuck more do you want from me?"

Lorna shook her head. The internal struggle was written all over her face, her expression changing with each word he shouted at her.

"This is why I couldn't tell you I was going. I didn't want you to change my mind."

"What's that supposed to mean? That you're leaving me? No way. If anyone's calling quits on this relationship, it's gonna be me, especially after that shit you just pulled. Get in the car. We'll talk about this at home."

People in the foyer were starting to notice the argument. He pulled her by the arm but Lorna dug in her heels. "No. I'm not going back."
"I said, get in the car. I'm not playing, Lorna."

He pulled her harder and she inched closer to the doors. Nicky had enough, and tugged her back. "Hey, asshole! She said no."

Up until that point, Vince had barely recognised Nicky was there. But now he directed his fury towards her. "What the fuck is it to you? She's my wife."

"Then listen to what your wife is telling you. She's not going."

He loosened his grip, staring Lorna in the face. "So, what? Are you fucking her?"

Lorna shook her head, bewildered about where the accusation had come from.

"No –"

"What did she tell you? That she loves you?" Holy shit. Vince turned on Nicky again. "This is what you wanted, isn't it? To take her away from me?"

"I think you did a good job of that yourself," Nicky scoffed. He was an idiot if he thought she was a threat to his marriage. He had a Y chromosome – literally all he had to do was the bare minimum to keep Lorna around.

"I don't have to listen to this shit." He grabbed Lorna by the arm again, ignoring her protests.

"Don't fucking touch her!" Nicky tried to pull her back. Sera started to scream from being jostled around.

"Stop!" Lorna yelled. It was a dangerous tug of war with a baby in the middle. By now, police officers were alert to the situation and split them up.

"What's going on here?" One cop asked.

Vince pointed at Lorna, stabbing his finger in the air. "You don't just get to walk away from this. I won't let you take my daughter away from me, you hear? Over my dead body!"

The cop tried leading him away. "Sir, you need to calm down."

"Calm down? Am I the only one who sees what's going on here? She's a fucking psycho! She disappeared for three weeks and I'm the one who needs to calm down?" He was shouting at the top of his lungs, the cop now restraining him. "You're a crazy bitch, you know that? A fucking wolf in sheep's clothing. I wish I never met you!"

"Alright, that's enough." Vince was suddenly put into handcuffs. "You're under arrest for disorderly conduct."

He didn't stop yelling even as he was dragged into the station. "I want a divorce, Lorna! And I'm gonna get full custody! I'll see you in court!"

Once the commotion had stopped, Lorna knelt to the ground. Nicky crouched down.

"Are you okay?"

Clearly she wasn't. "Did he say divorce?"

"Yeah. That did just happen."
She waited for her to scramble to her feet and run through the station, begging him to take her back. Instead she sat there in floods of tears, but silent. Maybe she was in shock or out of it, because this was not how Nicky expected her to react to the D-word.

"Can you take me home, Nicky?" Lorna whispered. People were still watching and whispering and who knows how long it would be before Vince was in this foyer again.

She pulled her up. "Sure, kid. Just to be clear, where is home for you exactly?"

"Wherever you're going."

Nicky nodded and led her out of the station, hailing a taxi. At this point, she wasn't sure if she had a home with Piper after all the drama that morning. She made a mental note to stop at a bodega to buy a new jar of Nutella.

Chapter End Notes

100k words! The only way to celebrate this milestone is with a super dramatic showdown.
The Fucked-Up Childhood Club

Chapter Summary

Nicky sees her family for the first time on the outside.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

It didn't take long for Vinnie to serve the divorce papers. Lorna was quietly having an identity crisis. This wasn't how she'd imagined her life, living with two criminals while she divorced a man who was, for all intents and purposes, perfect for her. The father of her child.

As promised, he was fighting for full custody. That was giving her the most anxiety. A judge had several good reasons to give custody to Vinnie. She was an unemployed, mentally ill felon. It was going to take a brilliant lawyer to win her case, which was why Nicky was sitting on the couch next to her, holding her hands as she offered a terrible sacrifice.

"No, Nicky." Lorna shook her head hard. "No way. I can't make you do that."

"Les is different to Marka. It's mostly just banter and abandonment issues, and who doesn't have those?"

"He left you with her, Nicky. And he never did nothing about your uncle."

"Kid, let me do this for you. His new slut also happens to be a damn good lawyer. You'd go back to your father if you knew it would help me, right?"

Piper came into the room. She put down two cups of weird-looking tea on the coffee table, wrinkling her nose because that was also where Nicky was resting her feet. "What are you two talking about?"

"Daddy issues," said Nicky bluntly.

"Oh?" Piper perked up. "I know all about that."

Nicky exchanged a wicked glance with Lorna. "My dad's a serial philanderer who left me with an egomaniac so obsessed with her social status she didn't give a shit I was being molested."

She played along. "And my father's an abuser who gaslighted me for years."

"Dads are the worst," Piper said solemnly. "Mine still won't refer to Alex as my wife. He just calls her my 'special friend'."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "You can't join the fucked-up childhood club, Chapman."

Lorna shook her head a little at Nicky. "You should be free to love whoever you want, Piper."
"Thank you, Lorna."

Nicky picked up a cup of tea. No sooner did she take a sip than she spit it back in the cup. "What is this shit?"

"It's lavender," said Piper. "It's calming."

"It tastes like fucking soap!"

Piper snatched the cup away. "Forgive me for trying to help." And like that, she was gone.

"She is like one rejected cup of tea away from kicking us both out of here," said Lorna, sampling the offending beverage. It did taste like soap.

"I can’t help it, alright?" Nicky laughed. "Trolling Chapman is my favourite pastime. And now I have a partner in crime it’s twice the fun."

Nicky's way of dealing with a tough situation had always been to crack a joke. With the house so tense, she was trying her damn hardest to lighten the mood, often at Piper's expense. Lorna tried to hide how much she liked it.

She turned back to the subject at hand. "Your father never visited you once in prison. What makes you think he'd wanna help now?"

"I don't. But it might be your best shot."

What if seeing her father pushed Nicky back to a dark place? A relapse was the last thing they needed, she couldn't lose Nicky now. But this was about her daughter. Everything was so complicated she could barely wrap her brain around it.

Nicky sighed, leaned back and lit a stress-cigarette. Lorna picked up Sera, who was having tummy time on the floor, and covered her mouth.

"Uh, Nicky? I'm real grateful to you and all but can you not do that?"

Nicky realised and put it out immediately. "Fuck me, between your kid and Chapman's complaining, I might as well quit."

"Maybe you should. Smoking ain't good for you."

"Oh my God, really? Relax, I started smoking when I was twelve. And if you think my parents would have wondered why their little girl stunk like an ashtray, you'd be wrong. The point is, if it was gonna kill me, it would have by now. And I hate to break it to you, but I've dabbled in worse substances than just tobacco."

"That's what I mean." She had the same concerns about Piper's fully stocked wine cabinet. "It's a slippery slide, Nicky."

"Uh, I think you mean slippery slope and that's very cute of you to care, honestly, but I'm fine. I'm great. I'm not the one who was a missing person for three weeks."

She was never going to let that go.

Piper returned with a glass of wine, apparently also feeling the stress. "Has someone been smoking in here?"
"It was Sera." Nicky pointed at the baby. "Yeah, I know she looks like all innocent and can barely hold her head up but she's on a pack a day, I've seen it."

"Now you're just being ridiculous."

"Yeah? Is it more or less ridiculous than buying a ninety-dollar cushion that nobody is allowed to sit on?"

"I like nice things," Piper sniffed. "Nicky, you didn't exactly grow up in the ghetto either."

It was easy to forget Nicky's upbringing. Only Red's family knew she was wealthy. Lorna once thought she kept it quiet so she wouldn't be a target, but it eventually became clear her home life was nothing to be proud of.

"This is really where your father lives?"

After taking five minutes for Nicky to convince the housekeeper (housekeeper!) she was really Les' daughter, they were standing in the shiny foyer of an Upper East Side townhouse.

"There's no place like home," Nicky said, eyeing Lorna's blue dress. "Come on Dorothy, let's go find the man without a heart."

She started walking through increasingly opulent rooms, Lorna following close behind with the stroller. How many rooms could there be?

"Hey, if you think this is grand, you should see my mother's penthouse. Marka sucked him dry in the divorce. Maybe we should give her a call and ask what demon she worshipped to make that happen."

Lorna didn't answer, still taking in the view. If Nicky thought this was nothing special, she was never taking her to the Morello family house. Not that she had any desire to. Even Franny was livid after she "came back from the dead". When she came to drop off her belongings, she urged her to reconcile with Vinnie. She always knew her sister was on his side. Not like Nicky – she was loyal. Devoted. Selfless. Perfect.

The blonde passed over a grand piano. "Shall I serenade you?"

"You play?"

"Sure, Marka signed me up for anything that got me out of her well-coiffed hair. Swimming, track, Girl Guides, debate team, French, ballet."

"I'd like to see that."

Nicky played a clumsy rendition of some classical song Lorna couldn't place. "I didn't last long in any of them before I got kicked out. My rebellious phase never really ended."

This was a Nicky she'd never seen before. Piano-playing, Park Avenue Nicky. It struck her that if it weren't for prison and all they'd been through, they never would have crossed paths. Their worlds were so different.

Nicky
Les Nichols stood in the doorway of the parlour room, clearing his throat and interrupting Nicky’s performance of Clair de Lune. She stood up. Fuck, this was weird. The last time she’d seen her father was when he was trying to convince her to betray Red. He looked exactly the same, even down to the suit.

“Nicky.” He stepped forward. "I knew when Juana was shrieking about a beggar at the door that it had to be you. It's good to see you out of orange, kid."

And then he did something she didn't expect – embraced her in an awkward approximation of a hug. This was just about as affectionate as the Nichols family got and it was both what she craved and totally freaking her out.

"Uh, thanks," she muttered, shrugging out of his way.

"Now, don't tell me you're in trouble again," said Les.

"Why would I be in trouble?"

"Why else would you be here?"

There it was – that was the Les Nichols she was accustomed to. She knew she was wise to keep her walls up.

"I'm clean and doing great, thanks for asking. I'm only here for my friend, Lorna."

He regarded the nicely put-together woman with the baby. "She doesn’t look like a friend of yours."

"She's just hiding the track marks under her cardigan."

"Enchanté.” He leaned over and kissed Lorna's hand. Nicky rolled her eyes. Some things never changed.

Lorna came over all giddy. ”Nicky, you never told me your father was Spanish!”

Les and Nicky shared a glance, as if to say, is she for real?

"Wait, Lorna?” He seemed to twig. "Not Lorna Muccio?"

"Yeah... well, not for much longer," Lorna mumbled. "How’d you know?"

"I seem to recall my ex screeching down the phone about one Lorna Muccio."

"Oh, my God!” Lorna blushed brighter than her lipstick. "I'm so sorry. That was a real stressful time for me, I swear I've changed -“

"Why are you apologising? Anyone who punches that ice queen in the face is a friend of mine.”

"Happy families!” Nicky clapped. "So, you think you could help her? She’s got a custody hearing coming up -“

"Michelle is pretty above the family court, Nick."

"But this one is pretty fucking complicated, alright? Trust me, it’s a saga.”
"I suppose I could ask Michelle to meet with you. It can’t be worse than what she got you out of."
He shook his head. “Seventy years for distributing drugs out of the prison pharmacy. That was a
doozy.”

"What? But I -“ Lorna started to interrupt, but Nicky elbowed her in the ribs. She didn't tell Les the
full story about the riot and wasn't about to complicate things now.

"Through his way." Les signalled them through the door. But before Nicky could follow, he stopped
her, talking under his breath as he passed Nicky a stack of hundred-dollar bills. It had to be ten
grand. "Here, kid."

"What the hell? Do you just keep wads of Ben Franklins in your suit jacket?" Nicky pushed the
money back at him. "No, I don't want your money. I told you, I only came here for Lorna."

"Then take it for her, if it makes you feel better about it. She really isn't like your other friends, is
she? Something more?"

She shook her head.

"Come on, Nick. I know you. You wouldn't go to all this trouble, especially with a baby onboard, if
you weren't getting something out of it. The sex must be great, that's all I can say. I guess you are my
daughter. Now take the money. Just don't spend it all on drugs."

She was rattled enough by that remark for Les to close the money in her hand as he followed Lorna
into the next room.

It took Michelle some convincing to take on Lorna's case (only when she heard how messy it was
did she entertain it: "I like a challenge"). Once they'd gone over the details of the divorce, Nicky got
out of there before "Atticus" and "Sammi" could come home. She already felt nauseous at Les and
Michelle's little touches. She'd never seen him affectionate with Marka, and though she understood
why, it was unfair that her step-siblings got to live in an unbroken home while she was thrown back
and forth like a live grenade.

Lorna was not talkative as she drove home. Maybe the reality of getting divorced hit her. Nicky
didn't feel like making it better as her father's guilt offering weighed heavy in her pocket. As much as
she'd tried to brush it off, seeing him brought her back to a bad headspace.

Or a headache... There was a loud pounding noise and it wasn't just coming from her head, it was
coming from the kitchen. She trudged in and raised her eyebrows at Lorna, who was hitting a raw
chicken breast with some kind of mallet.

“you know, it only took us two hours to get Sera down, but by all means, hammer away.” Lorna
ignored her, or didn't hear. "Uh, you know that chicken’s already dead. You don’t have to kill it
twice."

Lorna gave her a withering look. "It’s called piccata, Nicky. I do know that much."

"Okayyy." She fought the urge to just turn around and go to bed. She wasn't in the mood for Lorna
to split on her right now. God, she needed a smoke. Maybe even something harder. "... Is something
wrong?"

"Seventy years!" Lorna bashed the chicken.
"Ah."

"Why didn’t you tell me? You coulda got seventy years? What the fuck, Nicky!”

She shrugged. "But I didn’t, so, you know. No big whoop."

"I gave out way more drugs than you did. Why didn’t you tell them that?"

"And, what, get your sentence extended with a baby on the way? That’s besides the fucking point. They only wanted to pin the riot on us."

"You never tell me anything. You keep all this shit to yourself, it’s not good for you."

She had to smile. Lorna fucking Morello dishing out mental health advice.

"I think I was too busy hearing about your pet rats and your helipad nipples. No offence babe, but you can talk about yourself for miles."

"But you don't talk! What we gotta do, sit there in silence!” She was waving around that hammer wildly with every gesture.

"Okay. Honestly? You were already so stressed out from the baby and fucking gang wars and barfing 500 times a day. I didn't want to upset you."

"Don't I get a choice? I'm not a 'kid', Nicky, I'm a grown woman. And you know, I'm aware I'm not the smartest tool in the shed, but some of us had to miss school to take care of our sick mothers!"

"Okay, just calm down." Nicky prised the hammer out of her hand. She would put it with the other 'smart' tools. "Did you take your meds today?"

"No, no." Lorna waved her finger. "Do not turn this around like that. I'm allowed to be angry, not everything is fucking BPD."

"What the hell do you want me to do, Lorna? You know, I'm sorry for trying to protect you. Fucking sue me."

She burst into tears. Up until now she had been handling the divorce uncharacteristically well, so Nicky saw this coming a mile off.

"Nicky, I – I don't wanna fight with you. What am I doing? I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Please don't be mad at me."

"I'm not mad at you, kid," Nicky sighed. "Ah, fuck. I'll try and cool off on the pet names. Would that make you happy?"

"No, I only said that to make a point." Lorna moved in for a hug, clinging tightly. "Just please, don't ever hide the truth from me again. I need you to tell me the truth when I can't see it."

"Alright. That's a promise."

"Can we start now? Tell me honestly: even with the best lawyer, do you think with my record, they'll give me custody?"

"No, the odds aren't great." Nicky ran her fingers through her hair. "But whatever happens, we're gonna fight, okay? We'll get through this."
She wasn't sure if she even believed that, but she had to at least sound convincing. That was the burden of being the strong one. She didn't feel too strong right now.

"Nicky, as long as we're being honest, you can stop hiding." Lorna pulled away and looked her in the eyes. "I know something's wrong. I'm empathetic that way."

"Don't start on the knowing elbow shit again."

"Hey, don't doubt the elbow! It knows what it knows."

"Yeah, Lorna, you're so perceptive so you can actually read into things that aren't there. That's quite the talent."

She pointed. "See! There. You always turn mean when you're upset. What is it? Was it seeing your father?"

The only thing more frustrating than Lorna's paranoid delusions was when they turned out to be 100% correct. Nicky's silence confirmed it all.

"Aha! I knew it," Lorna said triumphantly, before realising what that meant. "Oh, no. See, I knew it was a bad idea. This is all my fault. I'm sorry. Are you okay? You can tell me. Let it all out."

Nicky gave her a heavy side-eye. "If you're waiting for me to break down in front of you, we'll be here forever. You wouldn't understand, Lorna."

"Hey, I'm a member of the fucked-up childhood club too, remember? Try me."

It couldn't hurt. Actually, it could and it would and that was exactly what Nicky was afraid of. Picking a scab and it turning into an open wound. But the woman was not letting it go. Nicky had taught her that.

"It's like..." – she fumbled for the words – "...being back in that big empty house, all I remember is how lonely it was. But now he's got a family with this woman and I'm – I'm just like the junkie beggar he gives money to... to salve his fucking conscience. Why couldn't I have a real relationship? What was so wrong with me?"

"Nothing! You know, for someone who acts like such a smartypants, he's pretty fucking stupid. Why else would he walk out on you?"

"I can think of a few reasons –"

"Stop. Okay? Stop. You wanna know a little something I learned from my problem with Christopher?"

"The range on long-distance binoculars?"

She ignored that, or didn't hear. "It's a waste of time giving all your love to somebody who ain't gonna give it back."

"... You're making a lot of sense right now and it's kinda freaking me out."

Lorna hugged her again. "Don't worry about them. You got me, don't you?"

"And I suppose that's meant to make up for years of neglect and emotional unavailability?"

"Of course." She was totally for real.
"Okay. Great. Well, if you're all I've got then I guess you have to show me how to make this chicken." Lorna instructed her to pound the chicken breast with the hammer until it was flat and tenderised. It was cathartic. "This is like free therapy."

"Aw, you feel better?"

"Oh, yeah. Childhood trauma, gone. Addiction, over. Prison, never happened. Who are you again?"

Lorna smiled. "I'm your special friend."

"Oh, you are, are you? And what exactly does that mean?"

"That... you're my favourite."

"I'm your favourite?" She laughed. "What, like your favourite colour? Your favourite food? Chicken piccata?"

"Oh, you never take me seriously."

No. But she wouldn't trade this warm silliness for the cool acceptance of serious society her father occupied. Nicky had spent her whole life being restless, chasing higher highs, but maybe this really was enough.

With Lorna's help (a lot of help) that night she made her first meal that was actually edible.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the comments on the previous chapter! I hear your calls for more fluffy moments, the next chapter will definitely be fluffy as hell. But I hope you enjoyed this angsty adventure into childhood abandonment all the same :)


Lorna

Something very strange was happening. Lorna had left Sera with Nicky while she took a bath, and when she returned to the living room the baby was propped up sitting on the couch. Sera was watching in wide-eyed fascination as Nicky held up a blanket in front of her face, then popped out behind it.

"Peekaboo! Peekaboo! Where'd I go? Where'd I go?"

Lorna stood in the doorway, watching the scene with her hand on her hip. Nicky was so engrossed in her game she didn't notice.

"I need to film this. Nicky Nichols playing peekaboo," Lorna finally interrupted.

Nicky froze, her face twisting into an embarrassed smirk. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Long enough."

"I'm trying to get her to laugh!"

"She's too little. She don't understand."

Taking that as challenge, Nicky tried it again. But Sera didn't even crack a smile. "Nah, I'm just freaking her out. Maybe I should talk to her in a silly, high-pitched made-up voice."

"I wish I could do that."

Nicky rolled her eyes, getting up off the ground. "Okay, I'm out of here."

"Where you going?" Lorna asked immediately.

She waved her hand. "I'm just getting some stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

"I don't know, groceries. I'll decide what I feel like when I get there."

She moved towards the door but Lorna blocked her. "I'll come with you."

"It'll take forever to pack up Sera's shit. I won't be long."
"How long?"

"Jesus, Lorna!" Nicky groaned. "I think I should play peekaboo with you. Ya know, just because you can't see me doesn't mean I'm gone forever."

That wasn't how it felt. It all spiralled that morning Nicky and Piper had gone out to get coffee when she was asleep. Within forty-seven minutes, Lorna had jumped from worrying Nicky needed a break from her to accusing Piper of taking Nicky away to knowing Nicky had left her forever to doubting if Nicky (or at least her version of Nicky) even existed in the first place. Needless to say, they returned to an ugly scene.

After that, Lorna's new therapist started working on her "separation anxiety", especially with the upcoming custody hearing. She knew she had to fix the problem. Her kid would be all kinds of fucked-up if she didn't. But the moment she felt that chill of rejection, her thoughts started to snowball and before she knew it, she'd sent Nicky an avalanche of text messages (and if she was late... God forbid).

The irony was, if anything was going to push Nicky away, it was this. It was a miracle she hadn't left already.

"I am coming back," said Nicky, very seriously. "Look, watch this."

The blonde ducked behind the couch. Lorna rolled her eyes. She wasn't a baby.

"Nicky. Nicky."

She popped up, just quickly enough for Lorna to see a flash of eyes and hair.

"Nicky, stop!"

But she was gone again. "Oh my God, where the fuck did I go?"

Lorna shook her head. It was clear she had no choice but to play along. "Oh, mercy me. Where oh where did my Nicky go?"

"Peekaboo!" Nicky teased, disappearing once more.

"I'm gonna get you." She walked over to the couch. But when she looked behind it, there was nobody there. She looked around the apartment – Nicky was gone. Did Piper have a trapdoor she didn't tell her about?

"N-Nicky? Nicky?"

"Boo!" Nicky burst out behind her, launching into what should have been a hug but Lorna shrieked and fell backwards and suddenly they were a tangled mess of limbs on the living room floor.

"Oh shit, are you okay?"

Lorna ignored her – because something even stranger was happening. There was a high-pitched gurgling sound coming from the couch.

"Oh my God, she laughed!" She pushed Nicky off and scrambled to the giggling baby. "Did you think that was funny, my little kitten? Are mommy's abandonment issues funny to you? Yes they are, yes they are!"

"Now we really should have filmed that," Nicky remarked.
Sera was growing up so quick it was like sand slipping through her fingers. Only a second ago, she was that tiny premature baby. Now she was five months and actively interacting with people, smiling and sleeping longer (thank God).

"Hey, what's wrong now?" Nicky noticed her face fall.

"Vinnie should have been here to see it. He's missing all her first moments. I'm such a bitch."

Every time something like this happened the guilt kicked in. The idea of being separated from Sera was excruciating, and yet she was doing it to Vinnie. No wonder he was angry.

"Maybe it would be easier to beg him to take me back than to go through all this. She needs two parents, Nicky. I don't want her to end up like –"

"Like me?" Shit. Lorna didn't mean it to come out that way. But Nicky didn't seem offended. "That will never happen. When my parents divorced, they were fighting over who was stuck with me less. You and Vince love that kid too much for her to turn into a junkie, okay?"

Lorna nodded, wringing her hands. "You think I'm doing the right thing?"

"Hey, I've made my feelings about the guy pretty clear. Does it feel like the right thing to you?"

"Leaving Vinnie was one of the hardest things I ever did. It was like going against everything I ever believed in."

"But you did it. And why? Look at me. You did it because your baby is better off with a mom who isn't constantly at the edge of a nervous breakdown being married to a guy who thinks mental illness is a choice. I'll support you no matter what you do. But I have to say as a friend with absolutely no vested interests, that in your own weird fucked-up way you did the right thing."

"Why do you always know what to say?"

"A childhood of silent family dinners gave me telepathic abilities. Speaking of, let's go get some before my stomach eats itself."

"Together?"

"Yeah yeah, just hurry the fuck up, okay?"

The routine continued for another couple of weeks whenever Nicky tried to leave the house. Until one day when Lorna woke up from her nap (it was one of the healthier ways to check out from the impending custody battle for a few hours). Her first instinct was to check on Sera. She was fast asleep in the crib, but she had a yellow Post-It note tacked to her front, written in Nicky's scrawl. Gone shoppin'.

She stifled a laugh, only slightly annoyed that Nicky had stuck a Post-It on her baby. She wandered into the kitchen, questioning what could have been so important that Nicky had to buy. She spotted another bright yellow message on the fridge. Because we need food, Lorna.

She opened the fridge. It was empty, save for a Post-It.
Yes, really.

Lorna closed it, shaking her head. She looked at the wall clock, lost for the time, and there was another Post-It. It was so high up she couldn't see so she had to climb on a chair.

*I'll be back by 5. Get down before you hurt yourself.*

She got down, amused by Nicky's game but still anxious she was gone. She found herself by the front door, itching to go out and find her, and sure enough, there was a new reassurance.

*I'm coming back, OK?*

She smiled. Starting to relax, she moved into the living room. Another note on the TV.

*Calm down and watch Bravo.*

She flopped onto the couch, switching on the remote. Nicky had taped a marathon of The Real Housewives of New Jersey, perfect for switching your brain off. Maybe she really was telepathic, she knew her so well.

**Nicky**

"It's creepy to watch me sleep."

Lorna mumbled with her eyes still closed. Nicky was caught: she'd come home to find Lorna napping as she often did, with the baby curled up on her chest. It was a stark contrast from the nightmare-ridden days after Carmine. A picture so perfect, with the afternoon light streaming in the window, that she found herself staring.

"You thought it was romantic when it was fucking Edward Cullen," Nicky deflected. In the past months living with Lorna, she'd had an education in chick flicks with heavily problematic male leads: Twilight, The Notebook, Pretty Woman, et al.

Lorna prised an eye open. "Whatcha looking at?"

"I was just thinking. You're a natural, kid." Nicky sunk onto the mattress. Tomorrow's custody hearing weighed on her. If only the judge could see this image, this side of Lorna, they wouldn't think of tearing her child away.

"You really think so? I love her so much, Nicky. Do you think she'll remember how I acted when she was born?"

"No. Babies don't know shit. But I'm sure, when she's old enough, we'll have a good conversation about mental health, like the one your parents never had with you."

"My arm is falling asleep."

Nicky took the hint and lifted Sera up, putting her in the crib they'd managed to squeeze into the corner of the room. She snored happily. Nicky had never imagined her life with a baby, but more and more she was feeling she would go back to Litchfield in a heartbeat if it meant keeping that cute little fucking cherub out of harm's way.

Lorna stretched on the bed. She was wearing pyjamas with bright yellow ducks. Nicky smiled because, sure, why wouldn't you wear that?
"You're staring again."

"I can't help it, pretty woman."

"Please, I'm a mess," she said mid-yawn. "I'm not even wearing makeup."

"You don't need it."

"I have scars."

Nicky pointed at her chest. "So do I."

"My tits are huge."

"Lorna, that's not a negative."

She reached up and pulled Nicky down to the bed. Lorna started to slowly unbutton her pyjamas but it was coming off more funny than sexy because of what she was wearing.

"Lorna, what are you doing?" Nicky laughed.

"Special friends get special privileges."

And then Lorna was leaning into her, sweet breath tingling the back of her neck. She kissed Nicky's jaw and ran her hands under her shirt. This was no joke. And Nicky was kind of dumbstruck. Lorna hadn't been this physical in years, not since the riot. She hadn't intimated at wanting anything like that. So having Lorna push her palm up to her breasts – and yes, they did feel huge – was spinning her out. She had to steady herself.

"Wait, wait. Stop." Nicky fought every urge and gently nudged her away.

Lorna stopped, sitting back on her heels. "What's wrong? Isn't this what you want?"

"No."

"Oh." Lorna blushed furiously and threw a blanket over herself.

"Lorna." Nicky poked the embarrassed lump. "Lorna. Lorna, I'm not Sera. I know you're still there."

She pulled down the blankets. Lorna was fighting tears, her ego bruised.

"What I meant was, I want you as a friend. I don’t need anything else."

Lorna hid under the blankets. "It's okay, Nicky. I understand if you don't like me like that anymore."

Nicky sighed. Of course it was normal for new moms to feel self-conscious – especially when covered in baby sick half the time – but could Lorna really not see how beautiful she was?

"I do. Trust me, you're definitely a MILF."

She tilted her head in confusion. "Then I don't understand."

They had a good thing going now. The last thing Nicky wanted – even though she wanted it so bad – was to complicate things with sex. The days of blurred lines were over.

"I'm trying to stop you doing something you're gonna regret."
"But I want you."

Those words were just about enough to melt Nicky’s resolve. How long she had waited to hear them. But she stood her ground. She was the one cursed with foresight, and this was only going to lead to them both getting hurt.

"Really? You’re not just feeling lonely? Or flattered that I said you were pretty? Or needing a distraction about tomorrow? Or because you’re scared I'm gonna leave and this is what you think would make me stay?"

"Gosh, honey. I didn't know there was so many reasons for wanting to have sex."

"With you, there's always a reason." Nicky had heard enough of them over the years.

Lorna sighed in defeat. "Can you at least lie here with me?"

She curled onto the mattress, pulling Nicky down with her. They were spooning so close that with anyone else Nicky would find it claustrophobic. But actually, it was comforting. Maybe inside she was still that poor little rich girl who longed to be held.

They lay like that for hours. Nicky was called back to that moment in the peak of the riot, when Lorna begged her to stay and sit, even as danger encroached from every corner. There was something coming around the corner now, and it was easier to close your eyes and pretend it wasn’t happening.

"I don't want anything to change," Lorna whispered, pulling Nicky’s arm tighter around herself.

For the first time in her life, Nicky could honestly say the same.

Chapter End Notes

For those who wanted more fluffy 'awww' moments, how'd I do?
Final Nail in the Crazy Coffin

Chapter Summary

The custody hearing begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Lorna stood outside the courtroom, her breathing shallow. After so many meetings and sleepless nights going over documents, they were as ready as they'd ever be. Still, she felt utterly unprepared.

"Do I look like an adult?" She was wearing a too-big borrowed black suit that made her feel like playing dress-up in her mother's clothes. And even Stansie never wore anything as boring as this.

"You are an adult, Lorna," Nicky said, squeezing her shoulder.

Vinnie arrived, flanked by a silver-haired lawyer who reminded her of Billy Flynn from Chicago. She couldn't meet his eyes. Luckily, he was only looking at the baby. The last time he'd seen Sera was that awful mediation meeting with Michelle and Billy Flynn. He'd stated the only thing he wanted from their marriage was full custody of her. Lorna and her team tried to settle with a shared custody agreement, but he was adamant. So here they were.

She felt a hand on her other shoulder and looked up to see a familiar brunette holding a toddler in her arms.

"Franny? You're here."

"Course I am." Franny seemed surprised at Lorna's surprise.

"For me?"

"Well, yeah. Who else for? I'm your sister, aren't I?"

"Good, you finally made it," said Michelle to Franny. They must have organised this without her—Lorna had vehemently warned that Franny was on Vinnie's side. Maybe Nicky was right about imaginary enemies.

"We're about to go in," Michelle continued. "Lorna, remember. Confidence is key. You know what's best for your child. They rarely ever give custody to the father."

Lorna nodded. The doors opened. They were ushered inside, but not before a court officer asked to hold the baby for her. She would have much rather left Sera with Nicky or Franny or even Piper, but apparently it was protocol.

Sitting at the counsel table, as Michelle spread out notes, gave her a chill. She'd sat in a chair just like
this, in a bigger courtroom, watching Christopher give his testimony. For the life of her, she couldn't remember a single thing he'd said, but looking back – there was so much fear in his eyes as he tried to avoid hers.

Vinnie was the first to plead his case to the judge. He still didn't look at her from the witness stand.

"Mr Muccio, you filed for divorce from Mrs Muccio three months ago," said Billy Flynn. "Can you tell the court why you decided to end the marriage?"

He took a deep breath. "I didn't end the marriage. That was all my wife's doing. She disappeared without telling me for three weeks and kidnapped our child –"

"Objection," said Michelle. "A parent cannot kidnap a child without an official ruling in place."

"Sustained," said the judge.

"The point is," Vinnie pressed on, "I tried to make our marriage work. But you can't fix crazy. My wife has some severe psychological issues that make her a danger to herself and others. The safest place for our daughter is with me."

It was soon Michelle's turn to cross-examine him. She brought up how he'd abandoned her after Carmine, but his argument was well-prepared for every barb she threw. His goal was to make Lorna look like a criminal too crazy to look after a child, and he wasn't holding back.

"I'd like to call on a witness," said Billy Flynn, once Vinnie got down from the stand. Still not looking at her.

The judge nodded. She heard the doors at the back of the courtroom open. She tried to mentally prepare herself for who was next going to lay into her – probably one of Vinnie's parents. Heavy steps came down the wooden floorboards. Then she heard Franny gasp. She could have sworn she heard Nicky curse.

She turned around. The oxygen left her body. She watched, the room tilting around her, as Christopher MacLaren passed the bar, swore on the Bible and sat in the witness stand. Suddenly, she remembered where she'd seen Billy Flynn before. It wasn't from Chicago. He was Christopher's lawyer.

"Mr MacLaren, how do you know Mrs Lorna Muccio?"

This time he looked her dead in the eyes. There was no more fear, only cold fury.

"I had the misfortune of meeting her once. She proceeded to stalk me, harass me, threaten my family and put a homemade explosive device under my wife's car. I don't know how she tricked someone into marrying her but I do know that if this court has a shred of integrity, you should keep that innocent child out of her hands."

Nicky

Nicky watched as Lorna got up, pushed open the gate and ran out of the courtroom, paying no attention to Michelle's protests. Vince's grey-haired lawyer shared a smug smile with Christopher. Obviously their goal was to make Lorna look as erratic as possible, and she fell right into the trap.
The judge rolled her eyes. "Ms Goldstein, can you please try to control your client?"

"I'll go get her," said Michelle.

"We'll have a fifteen minute recess while you do," huffed the judge.

Michelle exited the courtroom, Nicky following close. Lorna couldn't have got far, but the building was big and full of doors and endless corridors. It was just her luck that she thought to check the restroom first. She couldn't mistake the sound of Lorna crying and knocked on the cubicle door.

"Lorna, open up." The latch clicked and Lorna fell into Nicky's arms.

"I can't believe Vinnie would do this to me," she shuddered. "He contacted Christopher! He's... he's really trying to hurt me."

"He's trying to win," said Michelle. "You're only helping him by running out of there. Come on, you have to pull yourself together. We knew this would come up, his lawyer would have had access to your record anyway."

"Yeah, you need to show that you've changed," said Nicky, trying to muster false confidence. "It's not over yet."

"We need to fight fire with fire now. Is there anything else we can use against him?" Lorna shook her head. "Alright, get yourself cleaned up. I want you outside that courtroom in five minutes."

Michelle sighed and left them alone. Lorna washed her face in the basin. All the while, the cogs in Nicky's head were churning. There was something Michelle didn't bring up when she was questioning Vince. Hadn't Lorna told her about it?

"Lorna, what about after Sera was born? Vince left you and the baby for, like, two weeks when you were sick."

She turned around. "We can't talk about that."

"Why the fuck not? This could be what puts the judge in your favour."

"No, Nicky," Lorna said firmly. "Don't you remember why he ran out? It's like the final nail in the crazy coffin. Now, do I look okay?"

"Great."

Nicky followed her back to the courtroom, taking her seat beside Piper. Something was uneasy about all of this. It wasn't fair that Vince got to use Christopher against her while the worst thing he ever did was going unheard.

"Is she okay?" Piper whispered. "That was insane. I mean, I knew Lorna was a little, you know, but I never expected it went that far. How did Alex get a shorter sentence?"

She ignored her, but Nicky was secretly thinking the same. Lorna was forced to get honest about the stalking a long time ago, but a homemade bomb? How does someone even learn to do that? It was a good thing she never got assigned to electrical.

Christopher got to finish his character assassination, going into sickening detail. Unsurprisingly, when it was Lorna's turn to take the stand, she was wearing none of the confidence Michelle had tried to instil in her. To Michelle's credit, she tried to get it back up by asking about the past few
months, reminding her of what a good job she'd done caring for the baby on her own.

Of course, Grey Hair had to ruin it. He attacked her with everything he could – her criminal record, mental illnesses, the half-truths she'd told Vince before marriage, running away with Sera.

"I know I've had some issues in the past," said Lorna, trying to keep composure. "And I'm so sorry for anyone that I hurt. I really never meant to. I'm trying to change. I'm going to a therapist and I feel better all the time. I... I don't think I should be punished because I was I sick."

"Mrs Muccio, would you agree that the sole responsibility of a mother is to take care of her child?" Grey Hair asked, eliciting a nod from her. "But it sounds like you have a lot of people taking care of you. Can you honestly say that your child would have a safer, happier quality of life living with you, an unemployed criminal with a severe mental disorder, than with her father, who has a home, an income and no illnesses?"

"I love her. I'd never do anything to hurt her."

Grey Hair dismissed her, smug as ever. It was time for witnesses. Franny passionately defended her sister and pointed to Vince's negligence, but she was forced to acknowledge all the times she'd spun out of control. With the way things were going, this hearing would finish on the note that Lorna was mad and incompetent.

As Nicky sat in the box and told Michelle how great Lorna was as a mother as they'd rehearsed, the unease continued to rumble away. They were losing. Something big had to happen now or they didn't stand a chance.

"Ms Nichols, you've lived with Lorna Muccio before, isn't that correct? Tell me, where did you meet?" Grey Hair was going in for the kill already.

Nicky sighed inwardly. "Litchfield Penitentiary."

"Our records show you were serving five years for breaking and entering, and possession of heroin. And you and Mrs Muccio also share an apartment with another former inmate, Ms Piper Chapman, who was charged with money laundering for an international drug cartel. Forgive me, but doesn't sound like the best environment for raising a child."

"I've been clean for years," she said through gritted teeth. "Ya know, Vince may not have a criminal record but that doesn't mean he hasn't done shit."

"Language," said the judge.

"Sorry, sorry. The fact is, Lorna loves that kid more than anything. And she's never abandoned her daughter."

"But she did abandon her marriage and take their child away into a household of felons. What did you expect him to do, use force to get his daughter back?"

"I wasn't talking about that." She was going to wipe that smug look off his face once and for all. "I'm talking about how when Sera was a month old, he left them both for twelve days."

He looked blindsided; obviously Vince hadn't told him either. Michelle flipped through her notes in confusion. Lorna mouthed 'no' but she'd taken the lid off now. It was too late to go back.

"Oh, you didn't know about that? Yeah, good old Vince has a habit of taking off whenever the going gets tough."
"Even if that were true, he must have had a reason for leaving, allegedly. Would you care to share with us, Ms Nichols?"

"She was depressed. But instead of getting her help, he hit her and he left. When I got there she was fucking suicidal –" 

The judge interrupted. "If you curse again in my court, I will hold you in contempt."

Grey Hair took a step towards her. "If this is true, you're saying that Mrs Muccio was planning to take her own life while the child was in her care. That sounds highly irresponsible."

"It was irresponsible for him to leave her like that in the first place. You all want to blame Lorna for leaving and whatever else but Vince needs to take the blame too. I mean, what kind of father hits his wife and leaves her alone with a newborn baby? If we're gonna sit here and dredge up the past and worry about Lorna's future maybe, then it has to be fair, right? Because who's to say that if he left his kid once he wouldn't do it again?"

The lawyer fumbled a response, looking to Vince. His slouched posture and bright red cheeks were enough confirmation to everyone that he'd done it. Nicky was called down, ignoring Michelle's glare. But Lorna wouldn't even look at her.

The judge called another recess while she made up her mind. There was a charged atmosphere outside the courtroom. Lorna and Vince were both completely silent as their lawyers barrelled questions at them. Words like suicide and domestic violence stuck in the air. Nicky was suddenly thankful Sera was too young to understand any of this. What a fucked-up world she'd been born into.

Finally, they were called back in. They took their spots. As the judged entered, her heart dropped to her feet. Hopefully, hopefully, she'd done enough.

"This was a complex case," said the judge. "After carefully considering both sides, I have to go by what's best for the child. I've made a decision."

Chapter End Notes

We're back in drama city. Sorry to leave on a cliffhanger. What can I say, I watch a lot of soap operas.
Lorna stood to hear the verdict, hoping nobody else would notice her knees trembling under the table. She locked eyes with the judge, to wring out some last-minute sympathy. Of course, the decision had already been made and there was nothing she could do about it now.

"Mrs Muccio," the judge started to address her. "I appreciate your honesty about your past and your mental health. I also appreciate your efforts to recover. And it's evident that you have given your daughter more than adequate care in the past three months."

Everything sounded so positive. Was it really going her way, after all that?

"However, I'm concerned to hear you were suicidal only months ago. As of now, I don't believe you have the support in place to ensure your own stability. And what a child needs, especially in their formative years, is stability. Judging by the behaviour reported and displayed here in this courtroom, a joint custody agreement was never going to work between the two of you."

She turned to Vince. "Mr Muccio, I think if you were going to abandon your daughter, you wouldn't be fighting so hard to gain custody. You have a home and a steady income and it's for these reasons I'm awarding you sole custody of Serafina Muccio."

Her knees gave way and she sunk into her seat. The world collapsed around her.

"... therapeutic supervised visitation every two weeks ..."

She was only vaguely aware of everyone else, of Vince at the next table. He'd won but the tone was less than celebratory. It was the final blow tearing their family apart. She put her head down on the table, wishing this was all just a dream, that they'd be back at this morning, Nicky stirring her awake with a well-meaning offering of burnt toast while Sera babbled away in her crib.

Now Sera was crying. Her ears were trained on that sound and she could hear it, as the court officer brought her forward and gave her to Vince. The baby struggled a bit. Was Lorna seeing things or did she reach out to her?

"Vince, please," she pleaded, even though she knew it wasn't his choice now. "She needs me. You can't take her."

He didn't say anything, perhaps couldn't, and started to leave with her baby. And nobody was doing anything!
"Vinnie, I'm sorry. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it. Just please don't take my baby away."

He started to turn around, but his lawyer placed a hand on his back and steered him towards the exit. She was helpless to watch as her daughter disappeared through swinging wooden doors, like a ghost.

Someone put their arm around her waist. It was Franny, leading her out of the courtroom. Her child was still attached to her hip. Lorna tore away; that was the last thing she needed to see right now. Her negligent sister had never appreciated her kids. It just wasn't fair.

More arms pulled at her. Piper and Nicky – she recognised their voices through the hum in her head. Whatever they were saying wasn't important. She'd lost her daughter. With every second, every step, the pain became real. Somebody was slicing her from throat to navel and in a moment her black insides would spill out onto these shiny courthouse floors.

She didn't remember getting into Piper's car, only that she looked up and suddenly the city was racing by. People all around, fixed to their phones, walking through each other, walking into traffic, completely empty, completely selfish, so unaware the sky was falling. She would scream but it kept getting stuck. It was hard to breathe.

"Breathe, baby."

Nicky was stroking her hand. Lorna snatched it away, letting it fall on the empty baby seat next to her. She was boiling up. She might explode. Why are the lights so loud? When Nicky moved in again, she flinched away like it hurt to touch. The rage was blinding.

"Why did you do that?" Her voice came out in a low growl; she couldn't recognise herself. "I told you not to talk about that night."

"I'm sorry," Nicky said softly. "I was trying to help."

Lorna warned this would happen. Nicky did it anyway because she always thought she knew better than her. Stupid, crazy Lorna. Like anyone actually believed she could be a good parent. Liars. Deep down, they all hated her. She hated them.

"You did this. You made this happen. This is all your fault."

"Come on, Lorna, that's not fair." It was Piper's voice, fuzzy from the front seat of the car. She was probably glad she no longer had to deal with a screaming baby in her flat. She never liked Sera, never liked Lorna, this was what she wanted.

Lorna's hands were balled into fists, her body shaking, heart racing. She knew the anger she'd just unleashed on Nicky was just the onset. She was going to hurt her, with her words, with her hands, her heart, she was going to make her feel all the pain she was too afraid to feel and she wouldn't want to stop.

"Stop the car," she gasped.

Piper didn't. "It's a green light, Lorna –"

"Stop the car, I need to get out of this fucking car!" She screamed and opened the door anyway, nearly taking out a passing cyclist. She unbuckled her seatbelt, Piper's complaints fading into white noise.

"Lorna, please." Nicky grabbed her hand and caught her eyes, making it feel for a second like she could just collapse into her arms and have her tell her it was okay.
Not this time. She was on fire and everyone was going to get burned. The only option was escape.

Maybe she heard them calling after her. Maybe she narrowly missed running into the path of a van. Maybe it was raining and she slipped, leaving her heel in a grate like some kind of fucked-up Cinderella. Maybe none of that mattered anymore. The only certainty was she couldn't be without her baby.

**Nicky**

"She'll come back, you know." Piper gave a sympathetic nod and passed Nicky a glass of wine.

She grabbed it without thinking. Screw sobriety. It was a long fucking day made even longer by searching the streets for hours after Lorna didn't come home. She really knew how to disappear when she wanted to.

"Oh yeah, it's not like Lorna's ever done anything stupid or fucking dangerous before."

"We could always call the police."

Why was that Chapman's answer to everything? "Don't you think she's had enough trouble with the cops? Sure, let's just give Vince another reason to take her visitation rights away."

Piper filled up Nicky's glass. She didn't even realise she'd finished it. "At the end of the day, she always comes back to you. Besides, it's not like she has anywhere else to go."

Eventually Chapman ran out of platitudes and went to bed. Nicky had grown accustomed to the baby crying for no apparent reason and Lorna singing off-key lullabies, getting all the words wrong. The silence was so loud. She could hear all her thoughts.

The one that kept repeating was that she'd fucked it up. **Again.**

She'd lost the only person who kind of understood her and forgave all her flaws and didn't care about her shitty past. Piper was no comfort, as patient and well-intentioned as she was. Red was in fucking prison, would probably die there because of *her.* Her parents thought she was a waste of space. Nicky was always a logical person and she couldn't ignore a pattern forming, with her at the centre of it.

She gulped wine as if it was water and crawled back to her spot on the couch.

Nicky woke up to the mother of all hangovers. And no Lorna. Piper made her a fried breakfast (she *must* feel bad) and hair of the dog. Whoever thought to mix vodka and orange juice together was a genius.

Alcohol wasn't Nicky's drug of choice. Sure, she never said no to it. She was memorably chucked out of one prep school for smuggling martini mix in her water bottle. Her teens and early twenties were peppered with tequila blackouts, but whose weren't? NA always warned against other toxins. But it wasn't like she had an alcohol problem. She didn't *need* it.

Honestly, the last time she'd had anything alcoholic was after Tricia died. And Jesus, the way Lorna
followed her like a shadow for days after that, like she was worried she was going to go down the same path. Okay, so where the fuck was she now?

No, no... she wasn't. It wasn't. This wasn't about her. A child was ripped away from her mother, for fuck's sake. Bigger problems.

Had she contributed to them? Sure, people say shit they don't mean when they're angry, but Lorna did try to warn her. Nicky thought she was just ashamed to admit the whole ordeal. Little did she know, she just loaded the gun for Vinnie's lawyer to pull the trigger.

She made herself another vodka and orange juice, hold the OJ.

On Nicky's first trip to max, the darkness in her head was full-time. The sun never rose over that place.

But she stayed clean because of two people, seared bright into her brain as she was led away. Disappointed, horrified Red – she would fix her mistake and show her mom she could do it.

And Lorna, who shocked her by saying "I love you, too", partially because Nicky had actually said it to Red but mostly because it was Christopher-obsessed Lorna Morello saying "I love you". It just came out of nowhere. On the off-chance she got out of there and made a go of it with Lorna, she would be her best self possible.

Luschek's visit shook her into reality. No, people would always treat her like a piece of shit because deep down, she couldn't fight it. She would always be this self-destructive force of anger and pain, hurting the only people she cared about. *I have no family, I have no friends, I am completely alone.*

It was selfish. Nicky knew that, but after all, that's what she was. She stole a car and let her friends take the fall, because of drugs. She broke in and ransacked her neighbour's flat, because of drugs. She practically violated Lorna, because of drugs. Nicky was logical. She could see a pattern.

Whether drugs ruined her or just revealed her, she couldn't deny they made life so much easier. When nobody else was there for her, heroin was. Heroin promised to make the pain go away. She needed it.

Maybe she always knew it would come to this. That's why she hid her father's guilt money so carefully, didn't tell Lorna about it. It was a fucking miracle that paranoid woman never found it. Ten thousand in cash, to think what she could get for that!

She still remembered the number of her old dealer, and was told to meet him at a public park in Brooklyn. For fifteen minutes she waited, Dutch courage starting to wear off, wondering if his lateness was a sign she should get out of there, just run and pretend it never happened. Be an upstanding member of society. Take up knitting.

But then he arrived. "Nicky. How is my most loyal customer?" Paul moved in for a hug, but it was all part of a casual move to drop the plastic baggie into her hand.

She reached into her jacket for the money but he stopped her. "What? I told you, I'm good for it."

"First one's on me. Like old times' sake. And I appreciate you never giving me up to the cops. What did I say? Loyal."
Yeah, or she didn't want fucking goons harassing her inside and out of prison, like what happened to Alex.

She folded her hand around the baggie and watched as Paul walked away. This packet had a real weight to it and she could feel the fine consistency through the plastic. She wondered if she could find a secluded place right here in the park to shoot up.

Her eyes fell upon a row of bushes between the park fence and the main area. She moved towards it, adrenaline already coursing in her veins, preparing her for the big hit. But fuck – maybe someone had the same idea, because the bushes were rustling. There was someone standing among the leaves, a dark-haired woman.

It took her eyes a minute to take in that long dark hair, short stature, bare feet, the same coat she was wearing when she ran out of the car three days ago.

"Lorna?"

Lorna jumped out of her skin, her eyes wide and darting everywhere. Looking a mess. And guilty as hell. "Nicky! W-what are you... what are you doing here?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing." She breathed a sigh of relief that she'd found her, albeit accidentally. "Where the hell have you been? We've been looking everywhere for you."

Of course, she and Piper had spent all their energy searching Manhattan when Lorna's stomping ground was actually this seedy neck of Brooklyn. Come to think of it, Vince would live around here, too. Nicky looked towards where she had been gazing. She could see now, through the haze of leaves, a short man with dark hair sitting on a bench, gently rocking a stroller.

"Lorna, are you stalking Vince?"

"No!" Lorna denied it vehemently. "I just wanted to see her."

Nicky shook her head, pulling Lorna away from the bushes, well out of Vince's eyeshot. "You can't do that shit, you hear me? He'll get a restraining order against you and then you'll really never see her again."

She burst into tears. "But I'm her mother."

"I know." Nicky wrapped her arms around Lorna. She suddenly realised that for the first time in three days, she wasn't thinking of taking heroin. She stepped outside her body. The packet in her hand felt like an anvil. What was she thinking? Why would she give away years of hard-won sobriety, just like that? What the fuck was wrong with her?

Lorna noticed her eyes were elsewhere. "Are you mad at me?"

She blinked. "Actually, I think you just saved my life."

Lorna looked up in confusion, finally noticing the state Nicky was in. "Nicky, you're shaking." She sniffed. "You smell like my father on a bad night."

"Yeah, you don't exactly smell like a rose garden either." Tears broke through her laughter, spilling shamefully down her cheeks.

"Oh my God!" Lorna wasn't used to Nicky crying. "Baby, what's wrong?"
She slipped her hand in Nicky's to comfort her, her eyes widening when she didn't find it empty. She knew exactly what that little plastic pillow was without even looking at it.

"Come on." Nicky took Lorna's hand as an opportunity to get out of there. She pulled her away, far away from Vince and Paul. If only she could run away from herself. "I'll explain when we get home. We have a lot to talk about."

Chapter End Notes

I'm having one hell of a week so these characters get to share my pain lol. Sorry bout it.

On the upside, new OITNB promo! What does it all mean? I'm scurred. I have a feeling they'll do Nichorello dirty as per usual :( (I'm going to wrap up this story soon... I have an ending sorta kinda in mind but no idea how to get there lol. So if there's anything you really want to see let me know.)
The Whole Box of Cookies

Chapter Summary

They had a lot to talk about. TW for addiction, depression...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Lorna tipped the heroin in the sink and washed it away with the open bottle of vodka. She was watching as Nicky paced the apartment, occasionally kicking a piece of furniture or cursing. She had listened to the whole story in complete silence.

It wasn't that she didn't have anything to say – it was that she was terrified of it all coming out. She was shocked Nicky could come so close to using within three days. And what about Sera? Lorna couldn't have drugs anywhere near her child. They could even take her visitation rights away. Did Nicky even think of that?

"You can say it, you know," said Nicky. "I know you want to."

"I told Piper not to keep alcohol in the flat," Lorna stammered out.

Nicky's eyes bulged. "That's what you have to say? I just told you I went out and deliberately procured actual heroin with the intention of getting high as hell and you're concerned about Chapman's chardonnay habit?"

She rammed her Converse-clad foot into the wall. "Alright, fine. Maybe you're not even surprised. I wouldn't blame you. And, uh, maybe you're right about the fucking slippery slide, yeah? Because I clearly have no self-control. I'm just a disaster waiting to happen, ain't that right? Thanks, Lorna."

She sighed and fell onto the couch, burying her head in her hands. "The sad thing is, I actually thought I was stronger than this. Like this is something Old Nicky would do when shit hit the fan. Uh, turns out New Nicky is just as fucking stupid as Old Nicky."

Lorna moved closer, tentatively. "But you didn't take it. You're still sober. That's gotta count for something."

"You don't get it, Lorna. I would be fucking high right now."

She sat down next to her. "So what stopped you?"

"I guess my junkie brain got distracted by you hiding in the bushes like some fucking horror movie. Seriously, one of the twelve steps should be getting a batshit crazy friend to take care of."

Well, at least someone was benefitting from her breakdowns.
"I just wanted to feel like not a piece of shit for a second, you know? So I don't have to think about prison or Piscatella in that closet or my uncle's wandering hands or open heart surgery or fucking up your hearing."

Lorna listened, her stomach sinking. There was so much pain in Nicky's life she couldn't fix or even understand. Piscatella in a closet? And now she'd added to it, by blaming her for the custody result. More tears of frustration leaked out. Lorna didn't know what to do except hold her hand, the same one that had carried the plastic baggie. She hated seeing Nicky like this; she was so good and kind and patient and didn't deserve any of it. She searched for something to say to make it better.

"The problem is," Nicky continued, "... when you come down, you just feel a million times more like a piece of shit than you did before. I was so ready to throw my life away. Shit! It's like, I fuck up one thing and that means I might as well obliterate myself and everyone around me."

"Well... that's just like when you go on a diet and eat nothing but cucumbers and hot sauce for three weeks and then someone offers you a cookie and you snap and you think you've already failed your diet so why not eat the whole box of cookies and a pizza and twelve Snickers bars and a jar of peanut butter."

Nicky stopped crying and raised her eyebrows. "That is a weirdly specific but perfect analogy."

"Hun, I do understand something about heroin. You told me it was an escape from reality. I know about that. I get it, I really do. I mean, why do you think I took it that one time? I can see why you like it so much, it makes you feel... like you're in love."

She cleared her throat. "You're not exactly helping my sobriety there, kid."

Lorna was trying to empathise but she'd just made it worse – again. The guilt from the last three days boiled over.

"I'm so sorry, Nicky! I didn't mean what I said. I know it wasn't your fault. I shouldn't have blamed you, there was just so much going on in my head I needed to get it out. If I knew you'd do this... oh God, this is all my fault."

To her shame, now Nicky was comforting her. "Hey, hey. It's not your fault. Even if I wasn't acquainted with your particular style of emotional terrorism, I'm an addict. I've been this way far longer than I've known you." She sighed. "And it kinda looks like I'll always be this way."

"If it makes you feel any better, it's looks like I'll always be a... what did you call me? An emotional terrorist?"

"Well, you can make bombs apparently, so."

"It was one bomb and it didn't even work."

Nicky laughed. "You're such a psycho."

She nodded sadly. "I know."

Nicky nudged her. "Hey, maybe it's time you tell me what you've been up to for the past three days?"

"Trust me, you don't wanna know."

"It can't be worse than almost relapsing. I also threw up vodka and orange juice into Chapman's ficus
plant. You should have seen the look on her face."

She crudely imitated it, but Lorna wasn't in a laughing mood. "I don't wanna make you upset again."

"And I don't want you to hide your feelings either. We learned from that man you were married to that doesn't work, right? Come on. I can handle it, as long as you don't run off again. Promise?"

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**Nicky**

Lorna absently played with her wedding band as she spoke. Nicky wondered if she even realised she was doing it, or that she still had this symbol of Vince around her finger after he'd all but destroyed her sanity, her self-esteem and now her family.

"Some of it's a blur," she was saying. "I slept in the subway. With all the rats, it kinda felt like home."

She had a habit of calling Litchfield home. *Where is home for you exactly?* Clearly, incarceration had fucked them up if you could find comfort somewhere dark, cold and vermin-infested.

"Um... the next bit is bad. You sure you wanna hear this?"

Nicky nodded, although she was dreading it. Somehow she thought sleeping in the subway and stalking her ex-husband was the worst of it.

Lorna exhaled. "I started to think that I'd lost her and it's all my fault, I've been so selfish, and now my daughter's gonna grow up hardly knowing me and Vince is gonna poison her against me and I can't bear it. I wanted it all to stop. If... if I stepped in front of a train it would just be so easy. And nobody would miss me."

This was Nicky's greatest fear. She hated herself for falling back to drugs instead of searching harder. "That's not true. I would miss you."

She gave her a strange look. "You're the reason I didn't do it. I was standing on the edge of the platform, on the yellow line, and I could feel the train coming, it was so close. But for some reason, I kept thinking, if I do this, Nicky will go back on drugs. Hm, I didn't know how right I was."

"Are you still... thinking about it?"

"I... I don't know what to do," she sobbed. "When I followed Vince I was almost hoping something was wrong with her so I could prove she was meant to be with me. What kind of mother does that make me? But she looked so healthy and happy, Nicky. Maybe everyone was right, she's better off without me."

"No, no. You're a great mom."

"Everyone I love I lose. I'm so alone."

"You've got me."

She looked at her in confusion. Sure, that was definitely not enough.

"Why?" Lorna asked. "I'm going to hurt you, Nicky. Over and over again. I don't know how to stop
myself and you just take it. Why do you just stand there and let me throw my pain at you? I mean, why the hell would you want to deal with this? What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Nicky brushed away her tears. "I think we just established there's plenty of things fucking wrong with me. But loving you isn't one of them."

Her eyes hardened. "You don't love me."

She was lost for words. How many times did she have to say it? What more did she have to do to prove it?

"How could you? There's nothing good in me. I hate it." She pointed at her head. "Most of the time I don't even know who I am and then when the real part of me comes out it's so ugly. I'm a bad seed. There's a reason why everyone leaves. I don't deserve love."

Nicky then realised it wasn't really about herself. She'd read up a lot since reconnecting with Lorna, trying to understand these unpredictable shifts. One thing she'd learned was Lorna found it almost impossible to see grey areas – she was either your best friend or worst enemy, euphoric or devastated, a good person or the worst, most unworthy human to walk the earth.

"Kid, that's just your disorder talking."

"What's the difference? I've been like this for as long as I can remember. Even if I could be fixed, who would I be without it? What would be left? I don't know that person."

"I do." Nicky tilted her chin up. "She's a sweet, funny, beautiful girl. The same one who'd talk the ears off the new inmates and give Miss Rosa lollipops when she was sick. That's who you are, not this illness."

Lorna lay her head down in her lap. "I want to believe you."

"Don't worry, I'll write it on a Post-It."

"You're not gonna leave me?" She tightened her arms around Nicky's waist, making it near impossible to leave even if she wanted to.

"Nah, you can't get rid of me that easy."

"You're all I've got left, Nicky. Please don't let me push you away too."

"I won't but... we both need to shower, especially before Chapman gets home. You first."

She bumped Lorna off her lap. Lorna lingered in the doorway. "Nicky, I'm gonna see the therapist tomorrow. Will you come with me?"

"You don't even have to ask that. I'm here for you, babe."

"No, I mean I think you should get help. I can't lose you to heroin again."

She nodded slowly. "Okay."

It was a tough pill to swallow but maybe Lorna was right. Her addiction wasn't just chemical, it was emotional. She would always be on the path to self-destruction if she didn't address these old wounds. They were the same that way – hopefully that meant they could help each other through it.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for your lovely comments on the last chapter :) I am feeling a lot less emo lol so hopefully the next chapter will be too.
Chapter Summary

Moving forward... or just plain moving.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

"There's my beautiful little girl!"

Lorna gathered her daughter out of Vince's arms, not even looking him in the eyes. Was she imagining it, or did she look so much bigger, so different from two weeks ago? She held her tightly. The thought of seeing her again, even for a couple of hours, was what had kept her going.

Vince stood awkwardly in the doorway. "I'll come get her at five."

She slammed the door in his face. She led the assigned therapist/supervisor into the living room, resentful that they thought she needed someone to monitor her. All she wanted was quality time with her baby, not someone constantly watching and asking questions.

When the session came to an end, the supervisor started writing down notes.

"What's that? Did I do something wrong?" Lorna asked.

She smiled and shook her head. "Just ticking boxes. Trust me, I've been doing this for years. You have nothing to worry about, you're bonding very well."

That was reassuring. Lorna was terrified the baby would forget her now she wasn't there to feed her or hold her. Giving her back to Vince was excruciating. She already knew the next two weeks would be hell.

Nicky narrowly missed Vince on her way home (thankfully, the last thing Lorna needed was a confrontation). She hovered in the doorway to the bedroom, where Lorna was lying on the mattress, trying not to feel all of the things.

"Hey, how did it go?"

"It was wonderful." She patted the bedspread, beckoning Nicky to sit down. "Nicky, can I ask you something?"

"As long as it's not about the meaning of life because even I haven't cracked that one."

"Will you sleep with me?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Uh, wow. You can't fuck the pain away, kid."
"No, I mean, can you just sleep in here with me? It gets so lonely at night."

"That's all it is?" Nicky surveyed the queen-sized bed, as if trying to figure out how that would work. "Well, the couch is giving me the beginnings of sciatica, so I can't say no."

"How did you sleep?" Nicky asked with a yawn the next day. She was struggling to prop herself up on the kitchen counter, and patted Lorna on the head as she walked past.

"Fine," Lorna replied. Nodding off had been a lot easier with someone next to her. She constantly craved human touch. That was part of what made isolation in psych so unbearable.

"Oh, really? That's good. Good for you."

Nicky yawned again. She was so not a morning person. Lorna poured her a coffee from the French press. "Here, it's Italian roast. That will put some pep in your step."

"Seriously, Lorna? You're offering me drugs? What if I get hooked on the stuff?" She laughed at Lorna's expression. "I'm messing with you."

Lorna gasped. She took one of the Eggos she'd just toasted and shoved it right in Nicky's grinning mouth.

"Thanks," she said through a mouthful of waffle.

"How sweet." Piper was suddenly standing in the kitchen – or had she been there the whole time? "You two are very cosy. Anything I should know?"

"No idea what you're talking about."

"Yeah. We're just good friends," said Lorna.

Piper crossed her arms. "Good friends don't usually share a bed together. I think I have a right to know if you're, you know, doing it."

"Firstly, you don't," Nicky scoffed. "Secondly, who says friends can't platonically share a bed?"

"That hasn't been my experience."

"Well, I would have loved to go to your fifth-grade sleepovers. Get your mind out of the gutter, Chapman."

"You can't fool me. I have eyes."

"Do you have ears? Nothing's going on!" Nicky threw up her arms as Piper disappeared again with the day's newspaper. "Can you believe that? Some people, all they think about is sex, sex, sex."

Nicky grinned again, shaking her wild mane of hair - even messier from bedhead - and Lorna suddenly felt every cell in her body tugged towards her. Like it was all she could do not to push her onto the countertop and run her fingers through that hair and bury her head in her neck and hold on so tightly and never let go.

"Yeah," said Lorna, choking down her coffee. "Weird."
Nicky

Nicky had a proposition to make. She'd been thinking about it for the past month, and now approached Lorna as she was in the kitchen, tidying up.

"Hey, wanna go somewhere?" She leaned over the counter.

"Oh hun, Burger King again?" Lorna tutted, kicking open the corner cupboard to reveal a stash of Little Debbie snack cakes. "I think you might have a problem, you know, swapping one addiction for another? I saw that on Dr. Oz. Let me help you. We can do a detox!"

"Uh, I don't think a scientifically unfounded crash diet is really the best idea for you either. Anyway, I wasn't talking about Burger King. What about you, me, somewhere that isn't this fucking piss-soaked concrete hellhole?"

"Ah, the Big Apple," Lorna mused.

"Come on, it'll be fun. We can go somewhere with grass. Remember that, grass?"

"I remember you smoking it. This wouldn't happen to have anything to do with your druggie dealer friends?"

Sometimes Lorna was more observant than Nicky gave her credit for.

"They're not my friends, Lorna. Which is why, when I don't return with interest as expected, they are going to fucking track me down and hound me and threaten me and anyone who's close to me, including you. I can't let that happen."

"Well, you did." She bit her tongue. "Nicky, I can't just skip town. I have to be close to Sera, you know that."

"I'm not saying we'd have to go far. Like an hour away, tops."

The more she'd thought about it, the more it made sense. It wasn't just about Paul and his goons, although that was a big part of it (and if anything happened to Lorna she couldn't live with herself). Nicky's therapist was always telling her to remove herself from environments where she was at risk of relapsing. The time she felt most in control of her addiction was when she lived in the woods.

Plus, Lorna's lack of a permanent home worked against her in the hearing. Though she was rightfully hesitant about moving further away from her baby, she could only see her for two hours every two weeks. If anything, this could help prevent off-the-rails stalking situations.

"Just come and look at places with me. That's all. Come on, it'll be an adventure."

Lorna, ever the romantic, couldn't help but agree to that.

Having borrowed Piper's car, they set off. House hunting was fun at first, but soon dispiriting. Homes that looked nothing like advertised, landlords that were clearly unhinged... suddenly being squished in Chapman's flat seemed a lot more comfortable.

By the last place, she'd almost given up hope. They eventually came to a tiny cottage a couple of miles inland from the main town, tucked in an enclave of maple trees. What they hadn't seen from the
Craigslist ad was that the property was surrounded by a fence, of the white picket variety.

"You gotta be kidding me," Nicky groaned.

Lorna was oblivious. "Hm, it's kinda cute."

She parked the car and the landlord showed them the property. Despite the connotations of the fence which were still making Nicky cringe, it was far from domestic bliss. The garden was infested with weeds, paint was peeling off everywhere. The wiring was shot, as the landlord demonstrated when she flipped the light switch and the bulb exploded right in front of them.

"Nicky can fix that. Nicky's an electrician," Lorna said proudly.

"That's a grandiose term for fixing a few lamps, Lorna."

"Well, if you're looking for work there's plenty of folks in town who need stuff fixing," said the landlord. "These old houses are pretty rundown."

"You don't say."

Really, Nicky hadn't the chance to think about getting a job. The money she had would cover some months of bills and rent (especially this place, which was extraordinarily cheap for now obvious reasons) but it would run out some time. Crawling back to her parents was the last thing she wanted to do.

The landlord led them round the back. The garden led straight into the woods without a trail – open, wild, untouched space. The still quiet almost made up for the shabbiness inside.

Lorna suddenly shrieked as something ran out of the thicket in a flash of red feathers. It was a hen.

"The ad didn't say you had a chicken," said Nicky.

The landlord curled her lip. "That's not my chicken. It just turned up here, two months ago, eating all my flowers. It's a pest. You can make it into chicken soup for all I care."

"Oh my God!" Lorna's eyes lit up. "It's Red's chicken."

Nicky stared at the girl, who was now bent down talking to the hen in the same babyish tone she used to reserve for those disgusting rats.

"It's not Red's chicken," she said flatly. "That was nothing but a fucking figment of her imagination. Besides, Litchfield is like four hours away by car. Chickens can't travel that far."

"How do you know? Are you a chicken expert? Oh Nicky, this is a sign. Can we keep her? Can we?"

She rolled her eyes, simultaneously annoyed and relieved by Lorna's refreshed optimism. She looked around. It was small, but it was just the two of them, plus the baby when she came to visit. Before prison, she never could have seen herself living in a place like this. Litchfield had definitely lowered her standards - but she could live anywhere as long as it was with Lorna.

That night, they told Chapman they were moving out. To their surprise, the blonde actually teared up.
"But I love having you two around!" Piper despaired.

Lorna frowned. "Really?"

"Of course! What would make you think otherwise?"

"It's the little things you say," said Nicky. "Like 'I wish I lived alone'. That sort of thing."

"It was nice to have company, now I'll be all on my own again. God, I miss Alex. You two better come visit."

"Of course." Lorna rubbed her arm. "And you can come visit us too!"

Piper smirked. "Well, I guess it's true what they say about lesbians and U-Hauls."

"I don't get it," said Lorna.

"Ugh, she's trying to make it seem like we're a couple - again. In case you haven't realised, Chapman, me and Lorna have known each other for years, and most of that time we were technically living together."

"I'm just saying. Next thing you'll go the full cliché and get a pet."

"Oh! I forgot to tell you. We have a chicken!" Lorna exclaimed.

Piper shared a look with Nicky. "Wow, let me know when you two form a women's softball team. I might want to join."

"But I don't like sports." Lorna was still oblivious.

"You're only familiar with racial stereotypes, huh? Good to know." Nicky nudged her into the bedroom. "Come on, we have to pack up all this shit."

Lorna quickly filled a suitcase with her belongings; most of it was baby stuff. She sighed. "Nicky? Thanks for keeping me sane these past couple of months."

"Hey, I can't take credit for dialectical behaviour therapy."

"It's been hard. But you do more to help than you know."

"Aw, don't turn into a sap on me now... But as long as we're doing this whole feelings thing, you're helping me too, kid. I mean, you didn't have to pour Chapman's vintage wine down the sink, but I appreciate it. Even if I am gasping for a cigarette. Or an oatmeal pie."

Lorna slowly opened her bedside drawer and dug something out. It was the verboten snack cake.

"What! Hey, I thought you said those were sooo fucking unhealthy! You had a secret stash while I've been surviving on rabbit food?"

It was an exaggeration because they usually ate pasta every night. But that didn't stop Lorna giggling guiltily.

"I can't help it, Nicky. They're so good. Oh, I think I have an addiction!"

"Well, the first step is admitting you have a problem. The second step is admitting you're a fucking bitch, give me those pies!"
"You have to catch me first!" Lorna squealed and grabbed the box, running out of the room.

For a moment, Nicky hesitated to give chase. If she caught Lorna in her arms, there was no guarantee she'd be able to let her go.

Chapter End Notes

Help me name the chicken? Lol.
A Literal Garbage Fire

Chapter Summary

Domestic life isn't without its hitches. Spoilers for Toy Story 3 - that movie was messed up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Who knew custodial duty would actually come in handy? It took a week of thorough cleaning before the cottage looked good as new. Nicky fixed the lights, Lorna polished the floors, they both fought over paint colours (Nicky wanted grey - "You wanna live in prison again?" - and Lorna wanted pink - "This isn't Barbie's fucking dreamhouse!" - so eventually they settled on yellow).

The supervisor actually seemed impressed on Sera's next visit. This was the image Lorna wanted to project - safe, domestic, motherly. Maybe she overdid it by having cookies baking in the oven, but for those two short hours every two weeks, everything was going to be perfect.

The other 334 hours was where the struggle kicked in. Nicky actually got a job fixing up an old house, which was great because they needed the money. Lorna, being bored and lonely, proposed she should get one too. She'd never worked before prison (scamming didn't count) but even shitty custodial had given her some purpose. Nicky dismissed her - "Looking after your mental health is a full time job, babe." She was taking this protective provider role to another level.

So she distracted herself by weeding the garden, cooking, taking their new rustbucket out for a spin. When Nicky got home she pounced on her, but she was often too wiped to fully engage in Lorna's hyperactive conversations, and they ended up watching movies instead.

Tonight they were watching Toy Story 3, a sequel Lorna was very excited about. But the movie was an emotional rollercoaster, complete with a toy prison, toy abandonment issues, systematic toy abuse and a climax where the toys joined hands as they resigned to a fiery toy death. She was subsequently curled up on the couch, crying her eyes out.

"What's wrong with people? Kids movies are supposed to be happy."

Nicky patted her foot. "Remind me to never let you watch Up. Maybe next time I should choose the movie for once."

"No, you only like movies with guns and blood and loud noises." It reminded her too much of the riot. "I didn't even understand that last one you made me watch. You know, the one where Leo DiCaprio takes a nap and then gravity stops working for some reason?"

"What? You mean Inception? Nobody understands that. I only put it on because Ellen Page is a babe." She kicked Lorna off the couch. "Ugh, bedtime. Hopefully you won't have any nightmares about Buzz Lightyear."
That set her off again. "They could have been burned alive, Nicky!"

The next day, Lorna was enthusiastically eating breakfast - fresh eggs, courtesy of Piccata the chicken (or Pic, for short). Nicky picked over hers listlessly, resting her head in her hand. That wasn't like her. Lorna had even arranged the bacon into a smiley face and it got no response.

"What's the matter, Nicky? You ain't hungry?"

"Uh, I guess I'm not in the mood for sunny side up. More like gloomy side down." She registered Lorna's worried look. "I'm fine. This manual labour just takes it out of you."

"Aw, that's my breadwinner." She pushed a piece of toast towards Nicky, rubbing her arm. Her fingers brushed over a purple bruise right above the crook of her elbow. "What's this?"

"Nothing." Nicky pulled down her sleeve.

"Nicky?"

She got up and started washing dishes. Nicky never washed dishes. "It's nothing. I must have bumped it or something."

"Oh, my God." Lorna put two and two together and immediately burst into tears. "But I thought I put it all down the sink. Where are you getting it? In town? You don't even have a job, do you? That's why you won't let me come with you, because you're shooting up!"

"Ah, fuck." Nicky turned around and grabbed her by the shoulders. "It's not heroin."

"You're tired and you have no appetite and you have bruises on your arm. I've seen this before. Don't you dare lie to me, Nicky!"

"I'm not lying. I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die, of old age or a car crash or something, not an overdose. I'm clean. Swear on my life. Swear on Sera's life."

"Good God, Nicky, if I find out you're lying -"

"Jesus Christ, you don't trust me at all, do you?" Nicky rolled up her sleeve again. "You want the truth? You did this, Lorna."

Lorna stopped crying, but only because she was confused. Was Nicky trying to gaslight her? Or was she losing the plot again, forgetting shit? "No, I didn't..."

Nicky sighed. "Lorna, you don't remember anything when you're asleep, do you?"

"No... because I'm asleep."

"You're not always the most comfortable bedfellow, let's just say that."

"I don't understand."

"Argh... Well, sometimes you yell shit. Sometimes you just sit up, frozen. Sometimes you kick and thrash about. If I try and calm you down, I end up with these." She pointed at the bruise.

Lorna sunk in a chair. "Oh, my God."
Nicky tried to give her a smile. "You also steal the blankets."

"And you put up with this every night and you didn't tell me?"

"Fuck no. I'm not a martyr. It's usually only after something's upset you, like giving Sera back to Vince or Toy Story fucking 3."

Lorna just stared in a daze, her eyes clouding over. There was a part of her, a dangerous part, that she didn't even know about?

Nicky pulled up a chair. "And this is exactly why I didn't tell you. I was relieved you don't remember, because, to be honest, whatever you were dreaming up sounded fucking terrifying."

Losing Sera must have triggered it... "No. This is psych all over again."

"What do you mean?"

They'd never really discussed psych. Even Lorna knew she lost her grip on reality in there and she was ashamed.

"They strap you to the bed. In the morning, there's bruises on your arms and legs because you were kicking and screaming all night."

"Shit. So the rumours are true about that place."

"It's awful. You get locked in a cell by yourself. The lights are on even at night. Nobody talks to you. You stop seeing time. They give you pills. You won't take anything, not even water. It's the only thing you can control, until they put a tube down your throat."

She held Lorna's hand, stroking it with her thumb. "And they think treating you like that is going to fix you. I swear to God, psych's the only place where you come out crazier than you went in."

Lorna nodded. She remembered how Pennsatucky just came back twice as murderous.

"I know. I really lost my shit in there. I starting hearing voices. You were there a lot. You told me to keep going, so I could come back to you. Well, you also told me to kill myself, but in a nice way. I was hurting and you couldn't see another way."

Nicky looked horrified. "You know I'd never tell you to do that."

"I know it wasn't really you, Nicky. I'm not that crazy." She sighed. "When you went to the SHU, did you ever...?"

"What, hear voices? Nah, I just talked to myself. Turns out I'm pretty good company."

And yet, Lorna had waited with bated breath for an entire week, resenting that Nicky had told Mendez to kiss her ass and got herself in more trouble. In her defence, he was being an asshole to Red as usual, but that didn't make driving her down the hill any easier. Retreating to her fantasy wedding plans was all that helped...

"God, Nicky. I really thought I was getting better!"

"You are. I mean, you're not hearing voices anymore, right?"

"Not hearing voices is a pretty low bar."
"Hey, buck up. For the past couple of years your life has been a literal garbage fire. That shit takes time to come back from. But I've noticed a difference, alright? Your bad days are a lot less frequent. And you know I'm the first person to call you out on your crazy."

Lorna squeezed her hand back. "I still feel bad about hurting you."

"I think I'll survive. If I'm lucky, I'll keep the arm."

"I'll just have to kiss it better then." Lorna softly pressed her lips to where the skin was stained purple. To her surprise, Nicky writhed away.

"Stop! That fucking tickles!"

Nicky Nichols was ticklish? She stored away that information. It could come in handy later.

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**Nicky**

To the outside world, it probably looked like Nicky and Lorna were terrible housemates. They argued about *everything*. What to have for dinner, whose turn it was to feed the chicken, which movies to watch, where to go on weekends, why Fox News was fucking evil.

But their relationship was founded on many healthy arguments (and a few unhealthy ones). Sure, they were often one-sided. Lorna's obstinate, weird views on the world were as frustrating as they were entertaining. What was the other option? They were living a life of such traditional, storybooked domesticity that Nicky could vomit at herself. She needed fireworks.

On this night, the friendly fire started over stale bread. Nicky, thinking she was being a normal human person, threw away half a loaf of bread that had gone hard and was now being subjected to a lecture.

"You're just throwing money away," said Lorna, fetching the thankfully plastic-wrapped loaf out of the bin and setting it back on the table.

"For the last time! It. Was. Stale."

"So make French toast! Or panzanella or ribollita or bread pudding." She cracked a couple of eggs into a bowl and started whisking them with milk.

Nicky shrugged. "Alright. So we already know I'm not the best in the kitchen. I honestly didn't know people ate stale bread, okay? I mean, what is this, fucking *Oliver Twist*?"

Lorna smiled, dunking the bread slices in the egg mixture. "That's your problem. You've never been poor."

"Uh, I lived in fucking prison for five years. It wasn't exactly The Ritz, Lorna."

"Yes, but I had to work my butt off to scrape together enough cash to buy one thing from commissary. You could just walk in there like and be like, 'I'll take the lot!'"

Nicky was about to point out that she'd happily shared her commissary riches, but she knew Lorna wasn't talking about that. Honestly, Nicky couldn't have cared less about the 20 cents an hour she was paid in electrical and custodial. Those jobs were more about keeping her distracted from using.
Lorna threw the eggy bread in a pan. "I'm just saying, there's a lot of stuff you haven't learned."

She crossed her arms. It was fun to hear that from Lorna, who thought prayer was a valid method of birth control. "Oh yeah, like what?"

Sitting down at the kitchen table, she pulled out a shoebox of receipts. "You ever done a budget before?"

Nicky sat down sheepishly. Of course she hadn't.

Lorna opened the box and stuck a pencil behind her ear. "See, when my mother got sick we didn't have the insurance, you realise. Times were real hard for a while. Some days you came home from school and there just wasn't any dinner. I remember, we figured out which stores didn't have CCTV and Franny used to distract the owner while me and Mikey stuffed our pockets with candy."

"Right, so we have Franny to thank for introducing you to a life of crime."

"Honey, we have Franny to thank that I didn't starve to death."

She was laughing over the memory, but it was a depressing story to Nicky, who had never known real hunger. It was completely illogical, but she wanted to travel back in time and give the Morelos all the money Marka wasted on designer clothes and jewellery. It might have even prevented Lorna from the scamming and Cinderella complex that got her sent to the big house.

Lorna stood up and set the French toast on the table. Nicky tucked in and she had to concede that the bread tasted perfectly fine. Great, in fact. Maybe it was motherhood, but something really had changed in Lorna. She was finally organising her own treatment, eating like a normal human being and not clinging or pushing Nicky away every second of the day.

"It's really sexy when you take charge, you know."

"Oh, yeah?" Lorna stopped filing the receipts and raised her eyebrows. "In that case, you may call me mistress."

Nicky choked on her toast. For a good Catholic girl, Lorna was into some kinky shit.

"If you’re trying to seduce me, yeah, that might actually work."

"Then just let it happen." Lorna shrugged her sleeve off her shoulder. "Come on, Nicky. You take such good care of me. Let me take care of you for once."

How the tables had turned. Once upon a time it had been Nicky doing all the seducing while Lorna resisted because of Vince. But he was out of the picture now. And Lorna seemed more sound of mind than she ever was. Why was Nicky still resisting?

"Are you sure this is what you want? Really, 100 percent sure?"

Lorna straddled Nicky’s lap. "Is this sure enough for you?"

"Actually, I’m still gonna need verbal consent."

"Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Yes!"

"Okay, calm down, Meg Ryan."

Lorna reached her hands under Nicky’s shirt. "I want you so bad I can't stand it. It's been too long."
"Tell me about it. I feel like a fucking nun."

She leaned forward, breathing in her ear. Long hair tickling the back of her neck. "What do you wanna do to me?"

Fuck, this was turning her on. "Whatever you want, mistress."

"We can start here."

Lorna grabbed Nicky's hand and slid it under her dress, finding the thin cotton of her underpants. Nicky followed, pushing her fingers underneath the fabric, then yanking off the garment entirely. Even though it had been years, it was like muscle memory - she knew all the intimate avenues of Lorna's body and how to drive her wild.

Maybe they spent too long on foreplay. Just as she was getting started, there was a knock at the door. Lorna was too horny to even notice.

"Did you hear that?"

"Don't stop now," she gasped. But the door knocked again and she heard it that time. "What the hell?"

Nicky looked at the clock; it was past nine. "Who the fuck could be calling us this late?" They never got visitors.

"Maybe if we ignore them they'll go away?"

Another knock; this time it sounded urgent. Nicky got up and started to move towards the front door. Lorna caught her by the fingers.

"Nicky, no," she hissed. "What if it's a burglar?"

"Burglars don't knock."

She pried herself away and went to open the door. To her surprise, Lorna was right. It was a burglar. He'd stolen the love of her life for years.

"What the fuck do you want?" Nicky spat at Vince.

She didn't know whether to punch him for the clitoference or for everything else. But he was holding the baby so beating him up would have to wait.

Lorna stepped forward. "Vince. What are you doing here?"

He looked at Lorna, his brow furrowed and sweaty. "I need your help."

Chapter End Notes

Ugh, blue balls! Please read the amazing Insights by Lutefiskfisk if you haven't already. Somehow we keep overlapping on themes and plots without knowing it. It's spooky.

The next chapter is a big one (plotwise and probably in word count too). So apologies in advance if I don't update for a bit.
Chapter Summary

Vince forces Lorna to reconsider what she really wants. Grab a refreshment, this is a long one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Lorna had no choice but to usher in her ex-husband from the cold, ignoring Nicky's aggressive stance behind her. She couldn't deal with that right now. All she wanted to know was if her baby was okay. Vince looked so worried and pale.

"I didn't know what to do," he said. "She's sick, this rash just came up overnight."

To Lorna's surprise, he readily passed the bundle of blankets into her arms. Her heart stopped threatening to explode once she saw what was causing all the fuss.

"Did you think about, I don't know, taking her to a fucking doctor?" Nicky shouted.

"Nicky, calm down," said Lorna. "I know what it is."

"Hey, you know your job in the pharmacy wasn't real, right?"

She rolled her eyes. Nicky could be so dismissive sometimes. "It's the chickenpox. I know, all of Franny's kids had it. That was a rough week in the Morello house."

"Is that... is that serious?" Vince asked, rubbing the back of his neck.

"No, it just looks gross."

"So you can fix it?"

"There ain't nothing you can do except wait for it to pass. She's just gonna be real itchy for a few days, poor little thing. An oatmeal bath will help the itch."

He exhaled. "Okay... okay. Can we stay with you until she gets better? You seem to know about this shit."

Nicky raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Hang on. If it is chickenpox, then that's like, super contagious, right?"

"Oh, yeah. Nicky, you should stay with Piper until this is over."

"No way. What about you?"
"You can't get it twice. Please, go. I don't wanna deal with you being sick as well."

"And what about him?"

Lorna turned Vince around and pointed at the unsightly rash beginning to sprout on his neck. "Just as I thought. He's a big walking germ."

"I can't disagree with that. But Lorna, I'm not just fucking leaving you with him."

Lorna glanced at the shivering man now leaning against the wall. "I really don't think he's gonna try anything, Nicky. You have to go. Save yourself."

Nicky scoffed at her melodramatic tone. But eventually she conceded that her getting sick was just going to get in Lorna's way. Piper kindly agreed to drive up in the middle of the night to collect her. Nicky hung in the doorway as they parted ways.

"Hey, Nurse Morello? If she gets any worse or anything, you take her to a real doctor."

"Of course, honey. What kind of mother do you think I am?"

Lorna gave her a long hug goodbye. It was sweet how much Nicky cared for her daughter. She missed her as soon as she went back into the house, finding Vince in the kitchen trying to soothe Sera. He was staring at the panties discarded on the floor. Mortified, she picked them up and pushed the bra strap back on her shoulder.

"Did I interrupt something?" Vince asked.

*Yeah, my entire life.*

She didn't say anything, just scooped the baby out of his arms and went to find the oatmeal.

Her first night back with Sera wasn't the stuff of maternal dreams. Poor kitten was so uncomfortable. Lorna had to put socks on her hands to stop her trying to scratch.

Vince, on the other hand, ignored her warnings. He was wrapped up on the couch, clawing at his skin. Let him scar.

"My head hurts," he moaned.

"Men are such babies." She knew from experience that chickenpox was worse in adulthood, but it served him right.

She stood in the kitchen making formula, resenting the open plan layout of their house that meant Vince could see everything she was doing. She gave Sera the bottle, holding her close to her chest. How she wished it could always be like this, sans the chickenpox and her mortal enemy in the next room.

"She said her first word the other day," said Vince.

"How nice for you."

"Don't you want to know what it was?"

She turned around and nodded, actually looking him in the eye for once.
"Mama." He shook his head, smiling a bit. "I was so pissed. I mean, excited, but she barely sees you. I should be her favourite."

"I'm sure it was just gibberish."

A sober look crossed his face. "No. She misses you. I know I always told you to stop treating her like she's got feelings, but I can tell. She's always crying after your visits end."

He was twisting the knife in her heart. "That makes two of us."

"Now you know how I felt for months. You took her away and you shut me out. What was I supposed to do? She's my daughter too. I wanted her safe."

"I'd never hurt her."

"I know. But you have to admit you were acting like a lunatic. You basically handed me custody in the end."

"You didn't have to contact Christopher."

Vince exhaled. "He offered to get me a lawyer and everything. And I needed to save money for Sera, so I took it. Jeez, what you did to him, Lorn... you got yourself an enemy for life."

"So it's all my fault then? Everything I get I deserve, I brought it on myself -"

"Lorna. -"

"Why are you torturing me, Vince? You won. You got my baby, isn't it enough?"

His mouth dropped open as she took Sera into the bedroom and closed the door. Selfishly, she wished she didn't ask Nicky to leave. She didn't know how much of Vince she could take before he started pulling her back.

Lorna held back the tears, her eyes falling on the Post-It Nicky had stuck on her mirror. *Breathe. It helps if you breathe.*

She got up early the next morning to complete her routine before she had to be on nurse duty. Even still, Nicky "Sleep In Till Noon" Nichols had sent her several texts wanting an update. Lorna painted on a brave face and sent a selfie with an enthusiastic thumbs up.

By the time Vince awoke, she was already feeding the baby on her lap, trying in vain not to get pumpkin purée on her dress.

"Here comes the aeroplane!" She aimed the spoon towards Sera's mouth but her lips stayed shut. "Oh, is the airport closed? Come on, Serafina. I lived on mush for years, you can handle one little bite."

She tickled her under the chin, and when she opened her mouth to laugh, gave her the spoon. Only half the food dribbled onto her pink romper.

Vince shuffled into the kitchen, pouring himself a coffee. "God, I feel like I've been run over by a truck."

"Yeah, you look it." He was crumpled, unshaven, with heavy bags under his eyes and chickenpox
sores. Nicky really had nothing to worry about.

"Well, I gotta say. You look good, Lorna."

She stopped feeding Sera and glared at him. "You think after everything you can just come in my house and flirt with me? No, sir."

"No, shit, that wasn't what I meant. Although you are pretty, that's never changed. You just seem well, that's all."

"It's no thanks to you."

He rolled his eyes. "So, what? Now I'm to blame for your mental problems?"

"No. But you always blamed me. You made me feel like it was all my fault. You told me I shouldn't need help. You got so annoyed with me that I just pretended I was fine even though I was barely breathing. Being married to you was one of the loneliest times of my life."

It all poured out at once. Vince sighed and pulled up a chair. "Shit, Lorna. I'm sorry. In my own way, I always thought I was helping you. I didn't understand... I guess I'm still trying to wrap my head around it all."

In a swoop of awareness, she stopped seeing him as the knight in shining armour or the evil villain in her story, but for what he really was. Just an immature, inexperienced man completely out of his depth. Was this that grey area Nicky was always talking about?

"Vince, it wasn't all your fault. I know you tried. I didn't know how to help myself either."

He touched her arm, tracing over the faint silver scars.

"It fucking cuts me up to think if Nicky didn't stop you that night... She was right, you know, everything she said at the hearing. What kind of husband does that? It's not the kind of man I wanted to be. Loma, you have to know you were never the reason I left. I was just so ashamed I couldn't face it. There ain't nothing I hate more than men who beat on women but I hurt you, I did that, and you nearly died because of me -"

And for once he was the one freaking out while she tried to hold them both together.

"Hey, hey, hey. Vinnie, stop. Stop. It's over, okay? It happened. We can't change the past. But we're different people now. We have to move on - at least, for Sera."

He sniffed. "You really are a lot better, aren't you?"

"Yeah, I'm getting there."

"Nicky, I'm telling you she's fine. She's currently rolling around on the floor eating her toes. But the rash is still contagious so... Fine, I'll send you a video... I gotta go make dinner now... Chicken alfredo... No, you hang up first... You hang up!"

She gasped, frowning at Vinnie as he walked in the room. "I can't believe she hung up on me!"

"She's still worried about Sera?"

"Heavens above, you'd think she had the plague!"
He lifted the baby off the ground as she set dinner on the table. After a few days, they were both looking more robust. Vinnie even went home to shave and pick up fresh clothes.

Lorna put Sera on her lap, feeding her first. She was still avoiding the spoon.

"Open up! Open wide for Mama."

Sera opened her mouth, a squeaky sound escaping her lips. "Ma...ma."

Lorna shrieked, causing the baby to flinch. "Oh my God! Did you hear that?!"

"I told you," Vinnie laughed.

She smothered Sera in kisses. "You love your mama, my little linguine? That's right? Mama loves you. More than anything. More than the whole world."

After dinner, she sat on the couch and let Sera fall asleep on her chest. It had been a week and she knew she was no longer contagious. She felt bad keeping Nicky away, but the second she gave the all-clear, Vinnie would take her baby away again. No reassuring Post-It could make that bearable.

Vinnie was looking at her strangely. Why did it remind her of when she was living with him after her release? With Nicky so far away...

"This is how I imagined our family. You and the baby, a nice house, Italian food," he said, sitting on the armrest. "We really ballsed that up, didn't we?"

What was he getting at? He brushed her hair out of her face and stared at her.

"Is there no way we can work this out? I never stopped loving you, Lorna."

He leaned down and kissed her. For a moment she was so stunned that she froze, letting it happen. Then she remembered. She pulled away.

"No, Vinnie."

He actually stopped. But he stayed uncomfortably close. "Why not? It's like you say, the past is past. We could be a real family. Don't you want Sera to have a stable home?"

"I do." She'd be lying if that didn't tempt her. "But as long as I'm with you, I'm gonna be unstable."

"But you're better now, right?"

Oh, he still didn't get it.

"Because I got away from you and got myself help. You love me if I do all the right things and say the right words and you don't have to see that I'm still sick. But this ain't the chickenpox, it doesn't just go away. I'm still gonna have bad days, maybe even bad weeks, bad months. You can't fix me and you can't accept that."

"I'll do better. Okay? I made a vow, in sickness and in health. I'll come with you to therapy. Come on baby, let me try."

"I tried, Vinnie! I tried everything until I was so lost I couldn't see a way out. I'm sorry, I can't go back there again. I love Sera, but I want to live, too."
He hung his head in his hands. "Fuck. Is that all our marriage was? You trying not to kill yourself
and me not even noticing."

"Of course not. You were very sweet to me. When Nicky got taken to max and I was so lonely and
nobody else cared, you did. I'll never forget that."

"You changed my life, too. I was just mooching off my parents, doing nothing, before I met you. We
had some good times, huh?" He sighed. "I guess I just thought you weren't ready to let go of them,
seeing as you're still wearing your ring."

She fiddled with the metal band. "Actually, I wear it to remind me of Sera. Sometimes that's the only
thing that keeps me going."

"Right, fuck. I won't lie, I was kinda expecting you to jump at my offer. But, yeah, it makes sense.
There was always three in the bed anyway."

"Don't blame this on Sera, it's nothing to do with her."

"Not Sera, you nut. Nicky."

"Nicky?" What did she have to do with their divorce?

"She loves you," he said, shaking his head.

"Yeah, that's what she says. But I think it's like *My Fair Lady*, you know. She's grown accustomed
to my face, that's all."

*Her smiles, her frowns, her ups, her downs, are second nature to me now, like breathing out and
breathing in.*

"You made me watch that damn movie, Lorn. Doesn't the rich asshole fall in love with the girl with
the weird accent by the end?"

"Yeah, but -"

"She's in love with you. I know. I sorta twigged it when she rang me from prison, y'know during the
riot?"

"She called you during the riot?"

"Yeah, babe. 'Cause I thought you was lying about being knocked up, remember? She convinced me
to come back."

Her head was spinning. But Nicky didn't even like Vinnie. And they'd just had that big fight. She
thought he came back because he loved her... Not because... Nicky loved her? Enough to find his
number and call her husband from prison?

No, she couldn't... Through all the times she rejected Nicky she found comfort in the fact that she
would get over it. Because, at the end of the day, Nicky couldn't love her. She knew her too well,
saw all her flaws. There was no way she could love that.

"Shit, the way she was going on," Vinnie continued. "'Some people would give anything to be loved
like that'. Now I've met her, I'm surprised she was acting like such a sap."

Now breathing was getting difficult. If all that talk was true... She had to face up to the fact that
Nicky sacrificed everything for her. Her happiness, to Vinnie, her safety, in that utility closet. You
wouldn't do that if you didn't love someone. Not friendship love, Love with a capital L. LOVE.

"If only she knew, huh?"

"W-what? I, I don't understand."

"Why else do you think I tried so hard to keep you two apart?"

"You did?"

His eyes widened. "Wow, you only see what you wanna see sometimes. Of course I did. You never shut up about her when we were together. When you stopped being friends, you jumped off the deep end. Even when I took you to Florida, you always tried to find your way back to her, not me. I mean, it's obvious, isn't it? You're madly in love with her. Like, super madly."

She sat dazed, his words swimming in front of her eyes, unable to think. There was so much. Keep apart? Find her way back? In Love? Her confusion climbed higher and higher until he held her hand and pulled her down like an anchor.

"Hey, Lorna?" He waved a hand in front of her face. "Look, I don't want her growing up with her parents fighting and supervised visits every fucking two weeks."

"Huh? Who?"

"Serafina? Our daughter?" She looked down, almost having forgotten the child sleeping against her chest. "The past few days - well, few months, really - I realised how much she needs her mother. Let's forget the custody agreement, okay? We'll work it out."

"What?" Lorna choked out. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah. You take her for a week, then I'll take her for week, and see how it goes from there. Lorn, are you okay? You've gone all white."

Her heart was in her ears, fingers cold and tingling, a vice squeezed the breaths from her body. "I-I'm fine, I'm just having a p-panic attack."

"Shit. Uh, what can I do?" He lifted the baby off her while she tried to slow her breathing down. It was a lucky thing she remembered the exercise before her vision went. Vinnie might rethink his decision if she just went and fainted.

"I'm-I'm okay. Just... warn me next time you wanna drop a bombshell like that."

He smiled. "So I take it you wanna do it then?"

"I do." She slipped the ring off her finger and put it in his hand. She didn't need the reminder anymore. "Thank you, Vinnie. I know it wasn't what we dreamed of but in the end, we made something perfect, didn't we?"

He sat down on the couch, the baby resting between them. "No matter what happens, I'll always love you for giving me her."

"Me too. And for Carmine."

"Him too."
Nicky

Red was going to kill Nicky and serve her up in cafeteria slop. But ever since she walked back in Litchfield minimum, there was one person she was dying to see first and it wasn’t the matriarch.

Lorna was sitting in her cube, apparently enjoying some rare time off from custodial. She looked exactly the same, hair longer perhaps, but somehow even more beautiful. And even more crazy.

Nicky watched in morbid fascination as she peeled apart off-brand Oreos from commissary, stuck potato chips between the layers of cookies and creme, and stuffed the entire concoction in her mouth. She was so fixed on the task that she didn’t notice Nicky standing there.

"Now that is disgusting," said Nicky loudly.

"I'm having the weirdest cravings," said Lorna, not looking up. "Besides, don't knock it till you tried it, Nicky."

Nicky waited for her to realise. Like clockwork, her eyes widened and her head snapped up. And then she did something Nicky didn't expect. She screamed.

The shrill sound was still ringing in Nicky's ears as Lorna scrambled to her feet and practically crash-tackled her in a hug. She grabbed fistfuls of her shirt and even her hair, as if she might disappear completely if she even thought about letting go.

"What the hell is going on in here?" CO Dixon ran into the dorms. "Jesus, I thought someone got shanked! Break it up, inmates. Morello! Break it up before I send you both down the hill."

Nicky tore away. "Alright, alright. I mean, that would be a new kind of record, wouldn't it?"

Lorna grabbed Nicky's hand and pulled her into her cube, sitting down on the bed. "Nicky! God, am I glad to see you. Oh Nicky, are you really back?"

"In the flesh, baby."

Lorna hugged her around the waist, risking Dixon coming around the corner any second. "I was so fucking worried. How did you get back? Are you okay? Is max awful?"

Nicky ran her fingers through her dark curls. She didn't want to go into it. All she wanted was Lorna's company.

"Uh, it's a soul-sucking hellhole but luckily I've had years of practice with that. What about you? You been doing good?"

Her last image of Lorna was crying hysterically, telling Nicky she loved her. She was crying again now but they were happy tears. She was okay. Nicky knew Red and the family would look after her, not let her get lonely and lost and desperate in this place.

Lorna straightened up and smiled. "Yeah. Actually, there's something I gotta tell you. I got married."

She extended her left hand to show her wedding band. Nicky's stomach dropped. Wow. So her delusions came with props now.

"Uh, okay? To Christopher?"
"No, silly!" Lorna chuckled as if that was totally ridiculous. "His name is Vinnie. Vincent Muccio. I'm Mrs Muccio now."

She suppressed a laugh. Vincent Muccio was straight out of a generic Italian name generator. But how did she manage to pilfer a ring?

"Sure, kid. That's great. Uh, congratulations. Where are you registered at, commissary?"

"Aw, thank you, Nicky! See, I knew you'd be happy for me."

Nicky nodded. She really didn't have the patience to either indulge nor refute her fantasies. Not least because she could feel herself coming down with every passing second.

"Let's go find the others."

*And let's go find someone who will sell me drugs so I can cope with the bullshit you're throwing at me right now.*

Lorna pulled her to the communal area, practically hanging off her shoulder as she gushed about her wedding. She held her hand and Nicky could feel the cold metal of the ring against her skin.

Nicky was going crazy. She was constantly thinking about Lorna and fucking Vince alone in that house. If she could get 24-hour surveillance on them, she would. She called Lorna and sent countless texts every day, under the guise of checking up on Sera. Not wanting to ask if anything was going on but reading into everything Lorna said and the tone she said it like it was the fucking Da Vinci Code.

Was this how Lorna felt all the time? Paranoid and on the edge of doing something totally deranged? How the fuck did she deal with it? For once, she actually felt bad about planting those seeds of doubt in Lorna's mind when she came back from max. What if this was some kind of revenge? Lorna cheated on Vince with Nicky, so Vince was going to...

*Settle down, Nichols. It's not cheating if you're not even together.*

That's how Lorna had defended it when Nicky's frustration about her quickie marriage boiled over. They were never *official*. They weren't even fucking. Nicky had to admit that if she did expect Lorna to stay faithful through her indefinite stint at max, she was also guilty of fucking Stella the bush kangaroo. If only she hadn't hid that heroin. Things could have stayed the same - and would be so different.

Piper watched from the sidelines with a permanent smirk. "Oh, Nicky. You're in deep."

"Shut the fuck up, Chapman."

"Ooh, touchy. So you two aren't *companions*?"

"Trust me, there's been no companion-ing going on."

It almost did, before Vince interrupted. And then she knew she was falling to Lorna levels of crazy when she thought, just for a second, that he got Sera infected with the chickenpox to get back with his wife. Just call her *Nicky La Loca.*
It was an entire week before Lorna let Nicky leave quarantine. She ran out of Piper's house without saying goodbye, showering or grabbing her wallet. This turned out to be rash on second thoughts, because it was the middle of the night and she had no way of getting there. Piper begrudgingly played personal chauffeur again.

When she finally got home, Lorna was holding a much happier-looking baby. Which meant Vince wouldn't be far away.

"Is she better now?" Nicky picked up Sera. The spots had faded and scabbed over.

"Fit as a fiddle." Lorna jumped up and kissed Nicky on the cheek. She must have been relieved because she never did that.

"Where's Daddy Daycare?" He was nowhere to be seen. Shopping, perhaps? At this hour?

"Oh, he went back to his place," said Lorna suspiciously. Nicky studied her face. There were telltale smudges of mascara under her eyes, but a hint of a smile shimmered on her lips.

"Right..." Something was happening and Nicky wasn't sure she wanted to find out what. "So, when's he coming to pick her up?"

She gave a coy shrug. "Hm, I don't know. I guess, in a week or something."

"A week?"

Lorna couldn't hold back her smile now. "Oh, Nicky! You'll never believe what happened. Vinnie wants to just forget the custody order. He says we can just figure it out, I'll take her for a week and then he'll take her and then me again. Isn't that wonderful?"

"He actually said that?" Nicky shot her a wary look.

"Yes! He said he realised that Sera needs her mother." Lorna took the baby back in her arms and danced with her across the living room.

"It sounds like he realised how much work it is to raise a kid and wants to dump her with you until it suits him."

"It ain't like that."

"I don’t trust him. What if he changes his mind? If he really wants this, we need to go back to the court and get it in writing."

She stopped spinning. "Nicky, can you stop being all practical for a minute and just be happy for me?"

"I am. I'm happy for us." She hugged both of them. It would be nice to have Sera around again. Crap, Nicky was getting soft.

Lorna put the kid down on the rug, watching happily as Sera attempted to army-crawl her way around. Nicky realised she still had her arms crossed. What had prompted this about-face? The schmuck never cared before.

She cleared her throat. "So, uh, is that all you and Vince talked about?"

"What do you mean, hun?" Lorna said airily.
"Do I really have to spell it out for you?" Nicky's teeth were gritted so tightly they might snap off and she'd have to get them fixed again.

"I think you do. You know how ditsy I am sometimes."

Big sigh. "Well, it just seems like you two kind of magically figured shit out while I was gone."

"Yes, I suppose we did figure a lot out." Lorna got up, flouncing towards the kitchen.

"Meaning what? What exactly?"

She turned around, grinning. "You are so cute when you're jealous."

"Jealous?" Nicky sputtered. "Ha ha, yeah. Lorna fucking Morello is calling me jealous."

Lorna booped her on the nose. "You are. You're practically green."

Nicky felt red, not green. "I'm not fucking jealous! But if I was jealous, would I have anything to be jealous about?"

She hummed. "Well, Vinnie did say he still loved me and wanted to be a family again. He even kissed me."

"Ugh! I fucking knew it. So that's what you've been doing, huh? Swapping chickenpox germs? Fuck! After everything, you wanna go back to that fuckwit? I mean, I get that he's the father of your child, but shit, Lorna."

"Nicky-

"You are really a weak, shallow, faithless fucking moron, you know that? Screw it, you two fucking deserve each other."

"Nicky, I told him no!"

"You...?"

"I told him no." Lorna raised her eyebrows. "I didn't kiss him back."

"Oh." She wanted to douse herself in acid and disintegrate. "Ah. Hm."

"Yeah. For a weak, shallow, faithless fucking moron, I do have some morals."

"Of course you do, yeah. Even morons have morals," Nicky tried to joke but Lorna looked offended. "Shit, sorry. Tell me what happened."

She took a breath. "Well, we got to talking. He was real sorry for everything that happened. And he said I could come home and we'd be a real family. And I knew it might be my only chance at being with Sera but I couldn't do it. Because I'd be living a lie. I've done enough of that to know it never works."

Well, shit. Nicky didn't know Lorna had the strength in her.

"And even though you rejected him he still wants to share custody with you?"

"He's not a bad guy, Nicky. I wouldn't marry a bad guy."
Lorna grabbed Nicky's hand and led her to the couch. There was something different about her grip – there was no cold sting of metallic. She'd finally taken off her wedding ring.

"Sit down. I wanna talk to you about something." Nicky sat while Lorna stood, pacing a bit, the colour draining from her face. "You know how I've been on this journey of figuring out why I'm so fucked up in the head?"

"I prefer disordered, but go on."

"I realised every time I'm getting too close to anyone, I push them away. It's like I get so scared of people leaving me that I have to leave them first. And maybe that's why I went after Christopher, because I knew deep down I couldn't have him."

Nicky nodded. "Story checks out. Is that why you couldn't wait to get away from me as soon you orgasmed? I used to call it the 'clit and run'."

Lorna burst into giggles that melted into tears.

"Hey, maybe this a conversation you should have with your therapist. Or at least, in the morning when you're not over-excited." Nicky started to get up.

"No, Nicky. Please sit down. I need to say this."

She was so firm that Nicky sunk back into the chair.

"Um, the truth is, there is one person who I need more than anything. The only person who makes me feel like I'm not just a million broken little pieces. This person is so special to me. I couldn't live without them."

Yeah, yeah, I get it, you love your daughter.

"I've been so scared to give my heart to this person because if they rejected me I couldn't take it. But it's like Franny told me. A life afraid to love ain't much of a life. Nicky, can I ask you something? You'll tell me the truth?"

"Don't I always?"

"Do you love me?"

Nicky stared at Lorna, at the tears running down her silly face. "Yeah. I love you. I love you like an idiot. To levels, which, fucking frankly, are probably damaging to my mental health."

"I didn't believe it until tonight. Vinnie told me you called him during the riot."

Fuck, she should have known that would come out eventually. "Shit, you got me. Yeah, I'd do anything for you, kid."

"You have. I-I think you love me the way I always dreamed of being loved. And, I think, I'm not too scared to say it now. To myself or to you or to anyone."

"Say what?"

"I love you," Lorna sobbed.

Nicky laughed and stood up. "Well, thanks, doll. That's sweet."
"Nicky, aren't you listening? I love you. I'm in love with you. I think you're the love of my life."

She put a hand on Lorna's forehead. "Are you sure you didn't catch something? You sound delirious."

"I'm not sick!" Lorna grabbed Nicky by the arms. "Oh God, you don't believe me, do you?"

Sure, it would be nice to believe that flighty, fickle Lorna was hopelessly in love with her and ready to commit. But if the girl had trust issues, imagine actually being led on and rejected, over and over and over.

"It's just, that's the third time I've heard you say that about three different people in like three years. I mean, how many loves of your life can you have?"

"Just one. It's you, it's always been you. You are the only one who knows me and sees me for who I really am and loves me anyway."

"I do but... babe, you don't have to, like, return the favour. I know you see us as more of a best friend, roommate, sometimes fuck-buddy arrangement."

Lorna looked desperate. "No, I want you to be my girlfriend. No, my lover. No, my soulmate. Okay, I don't really know what to call us, but I just know I want to be with you forever. I want to share my life with you. I want to be yours and you be mine. And I'm sorry it took me so long to see it. I'm so sorry. I will spend the rest of my life making it up to you and loving you like you deserve. Please, please, believe me, Nicky. How can I prove it to you?"

Nicky froze. All these sugared words sounded too good to be true. She gave up on hoping Lorna could love her the same way a long time ago. It was when she went back to Vinnie, when her dreams and Lorna's apology got flushed down the can.

"You remember when you wrote me a letter in prison?" Lorna nodded. "What did it say?"

"What, you never read it?"

"I would but it's currently circulating the New York sewerage system."

"Oh." Lorna gulped. "I guess I deserved that. So you never knew?"

"What?"

"What I was trying to tell you."

"So tell me. Not word for word, I can get the gist of -"

Nicky didn't get to finish her sentence. Lorna kissed her. Lorna Morello, who had a rule about not kissing, was kissing her. And not in a foreplay, fuck me sort of way. Slowly, her hands cradling Nicky's jaw, she kissed her so close she could taste the happy tears still flowing down her cheeks. Nicky's heart was in her head and her body tingled with tiny fireworks and she wasn't breathing. This was a romance movie kiss. A kiss that said I love you. Nobody had ever kissed Nicky like this before.

Lorna pulled away softly and looked at Nicky as if to say, well?

"Shit," Nicky gasped. "I really should have read that letter."
Bam.
Hope I didn’t scare anyone too much with Vinnie’s reappearance.
This entire fic has pretty much been leading up to this moment (so I hope it was worth it haha). Thus I don’t have a lot planned for the next chapters, if they take a while I’m sorry!
Chapter Summary

Snapshots of Lorna and Nicky's new life together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Lorna woke up smiling. She had her baby sleeping soundly next to her and Nicky sprawled out on her other side. Lorna gently draped the blankets she'd stolen in the night over the woman. Selfishly, she wanted to wake her up so she could look into those big dark eyes and get confirmation that, no, it wasn't a dream. They were in love.

"I love you." Now that she knew it, accepted it, freed it, those three words escaped her as easy as breathing. And then she actually couldn't help but lean down and kiss Nicky, like sealing a promise.

Nicky scrunched her face, keeping her eyes closed. "What time is it?"

"Six-oh-four."

Nicky groaned and buried her face in the blankets. "Baby, I love you too but I'd love you more if you let me sleep."

And she was out like a light again. Lorna smiled and got up, lingering in the doorway to look at her girls. Happy tears traced down her cheeks as she went to shower. It was going to be a good day. The dark, lonely times seemed so small and in the distance.

Nicky was the last to get up, shooting a look at Sera rolling around on the floor. She plonked down at the table, laughing and shaking her head when Lorna presented breakfast – pancakes in the shape of love hearts.

"Good morning," Lorna sang. "I love you."

"So this is what it's like to be loved by Lorna Morello? Every day is fucking Valentine's Day." She cut straight down the middle of the heart and laughed again.

"What?"

"No, it's just... If I didn't know any better, I'd think I was tripping. It just doesn't seem real."

"It is real. I love you."

"Yeah, it's still a bit of a mindfuck to hear you say that. Especially because it was fucking Vinnie of all people who made you realise it."

It was weird circumstances to say the least. Lorna could barely believe her luck to be surrounded by
the two people she loved most. But the way Nicky was talking suggested some part of her still didn't trust Lorna's version of "real".

She moved into the living room, scribbling something down. When she came back, she slapped the Post-It on the table.

*I love you.*

"There, now you have to believe it."

Nicky's eyes trailed from the Post-It to Lorna's, crinkling with an oncoming grin as she launched into a kiss that tasted like maple syrup.

*Lorna couldn't help but scream when she stepped outside, her voice echoing far in the faded quiet. Overnight, everything was quilted in thick, pure white snow.*

Nicky was at her side almost immediately. "What the fuck?"

"Look! It's snowing! Isn't it magical?"

She trudged back indoors. "If by magical you mean definitely a side effect of global climate change caused by humans ravaging the Earth, then yeah."

"And we can build a snowman!"

Nicky wasn't getting out of it that easy. They never had much fun when snow hit Litchfield because the grounds closed if it got too heavy (something about preventing pneumonia... whatever). Once they rugged up, she led her on a walk through the woods and they built a snowman. When Nicky gave it a pinecone moustache Lorna said it reminded her of Mendez and they both kicked it down to the ground.

"Hey, Morello." Lorna turned around and was hit by a snowball to the face, knocking her hat off.

"Oh my God. Nichols, you are so dead!"

Lorna pelted Nicky with snow as she disappeared into the trees, only given up by the crunching sounds of her footsteps. She tackled her into the soft snow, pressing kisses onto her cold cheeks. She fell back, dizzied by love and the depthless white of the sky.

"Come on, snow angel." Nicky got to her feet and helped Lorna up. "We're gonna catch our deaths out here."

The wind had picked up, cutting right to the bone. By the time they got back to the house, it was positively howling and they couldn't see more than a few yards in front of them. Nicky checked the weather report and confirmed it was a freak storm.

She was on the phone to Vinnie checking Sera was okay when everything cut out. The phone network, wireless, electricity, even the heating.

Lorna looked at Nicky. "You're the electrician. What do we do?"

Nicky shuddered. "I'm not going down to the cellar if that's what you're asking."

They gathered all Lorna's scented candles into the living room, along with a dinner of leftover
Halloween candy and pots of water in case the pipes froze. Nicky pulled the duvet onto the couch and Lorna curled up next to her.

"What if we get snowed in? We're in the middle of nowhere, Nicky – what if nobody can find us? What if we freeze to death? What if you're right about climate change and the rising sea levels cover the Earth in water?"

"Then we should get Sera in swimming lessons. Chill the fuck out. No storm goes on forever."

She must have been right because the next thing Lorna knew she was waking up in Nicky's warm arms. The world was still again. But when she opened the door the snow was at her waist.

Nicky passed her a shovel. "You still think this is fucking magical?"

As Nicky started to dig their way out, cursing every time she nearly slipped, until they unearthed their car and drove into town to buy emergency supplies and hot chocolate, Lorna had to say yes. It was pretty fucking magical.

* *

"You really are a fucking weirdo, you know that?"

Lorna pursed her lips. What was so weird about taking cute photos of her baby? Sera was growing up so fast and she already wished she had more pictures, especially from her bad days.

"She's gonna grow up with a real potty mouth if you don't watch it."

Nicky snaked an arm around her. "Hey, you've already kept me off drugs, got me to quit smoking and become a contributing member of society. But I'll be fucking damned if you change the way I talk. Anyway, swearing builds character."

Lorna ignored her. "Serafina, stop eating your props!"

The baby was sitting restlessly in a giant bowl of spaghetti while Lorna tried to balance a meatball on her head long enough to take a photo.

Nicky facepalmed. "I can't believe you were serious about that."

"I'm always serious."

"I know, baby. And that is what's so fucking amazing and terrifying about you."

"Got it!" Lorna showed Nicky the photo in the viewfinder. "Look at her, ain't she sweet?"

"No, she looks more savoury."

Lorna flipped the camera up, taking a picture of Nicky. She ducked out of frame, almost hiding behind her hair.

"Hey, Anne Geddes. I'm not your next subject, okay?"

She pouted. "Why not? I don't got any pictures of you."

"You already have to look at my face everyday, do you really need a reminder?"

To be honest, it could help. Lorna was a lot better – she could hardly recognise herself sometimes –
but there were still days when her fears and doubts got the better of her and she miserably counted down the seconds until Nicky was home and reassuring her: *I'm still here.* A photo would be something to hold onto.

"It's a beautiful face," said Lorna, snapping again.

"Stop! Flattery will get you nowhere, kid."

But it wasn't flattery. Lorna couldn't get over Nicky's sun-golden hair, expressive eyes, her cheeky grin. She was gorgeous and she didn't even have to try.

"You are so, so beautiful," she said, reaching out to touch Nicky's face.

"Come on, Lorna. Be serious."

"I'm always serious."

Nicky flashed a disarmed smile, giving Lorna the opportunity to get the perfect shot.

* Any doubt about Vinnie having hard feelings went away when he invited both of them for Thanksgiving dinner at his parents' house.

"I don't know," Lorna vented. "They all blame me for the divorce and it's gonna be real awkward."

Nicky petted her knee. "Aren't awkward family reunions what Thanksgiving's all about?"

So they packed up the car with enough food to feed a small army or one Italian family and set off for New Jersey. Predictably, it was awkward when Vinnie opened the door and immediately noticed them holding hands. She hugged him and went to find her baby (someone had dressed her up as a pumpkin).

To her surprise, Vinnie's parents were friendly enough – though his kid brother Gino threw sarcastic remarks her way. Even Franny showed up with all her annoying children in tow. She asked Lorna to swing by the Morello house later, but she wasn't falling for that again. Family didn't treat each other like their father did.

"... I'm just saying, Americans are the only people who'd think to add fucking marshmallows to sweet potatoes and call it dinner," Nicky said as food was served, clearly trying to compensate any discomfort with humour.

"*Your friend* here is so funny, Lorn," said Franny.

Lorna wanted to tell her that she was more than just a friend but it surely wasn't the right time with Vinnie's parents around and what would Franny think anyway? She'd been supportive but Lorna wasn't sure how her sister would react to her liking girls. Or rather, a girl.

It came time to say what they were thankful for. Lorna didn't even have to think. "This year I'm thankful for family."

She slipped her hand under the table and held Nicky's. The blonde sputtered a response: "A-and I'm thankful for all this fucking food. Especially pie, you know I love cherry pie."

Later they were driving home, content and full, with Lorna singing Christmas carols ("It's officially Christmas now, Nicky") and Nicky's face catching the orange light of the street lamps.
"I lied before," she said. "I mean I do fucking love pie, but, uh, I'm thankful for family too. And I think that's the only time I've unironically said that. Because of you."

"Aw, you think of me as family?"

"And Sera. I mean, if you let me... Fuck, you're more family to me than anyone I share genetic material with."

"Of course you're my family. And my best friend. You are my sunshine and my guiding star. You're my missing piece."

"Shit, Lorna. Do people really say shit like that or do you actually live in a romance movie?" Nicky scratched at her eye. "It's like... you don't even know the void my parents left in me. But you fill it without even thinking... with your warmth and your light and your fucking love. Like you're changing me from the inside out."

Nicky was being so beautifully vulnerable for her. The world was so enchanted they could drive right into the night sky. Lorna loved being in love.

Nicky

"Wake up, wake up!

Nicky felt Lorna shaking her awake and a Rolodex of emergency scenarios flickered through her brain. "Shit. What's wrong?"

"It's Christmas!"

"Jesus Lorna, it's not even five AM. We're not kids, we don't need to check if Santa's visited."

"But Sera is a kid and I've only got her till lunchtime so hurry up. Move!"

Nicky swung her legs over the side of the bed, shivering and exhausted from midnight mass. She actually felt sorry for Vince – by the time he came to collect Sera she was going to be wiped.

"Fucking Gentiles," she muttered, shuffling into the living room. As predicted, the baby was half-asleep and not nearly as excited as the woman pointing at the presents under the tree.

Nicky dutifully filmed the whole thing, laughing at Sera's stone-faced reactions to new toys, books and clothes (she'd swear the kid was related to her sometimes). Then Lorna fetched a big present from under the tree and threw it at Nicky.

"Merry Christmas!"

Nicky groaned. "I thought we said we weren't gonna do presents. The only thing you've really given me is feeling like an asshole the whole day."

"Just open it, Mrs Grinch."

She started unpicking the neat wrapping (sh*t, how many layers of Sellotape do you need?) and a multicoloured crochet blanket fell into her lap.
"Did you make this?"

Lorna nodded. "I figured since I keep stealing the blankets I'd better make one of your own."

She remembered Lorna making stuff out of yarn in prison – her scarf, Boo's slippers, a hat for Miss Rosa. But this looked like it took fucking forever. Nobody had ever given her such a thoughtful gift before.

"... Who am I kidding? I'll probably steal that one too," Lorna was going on, "I got the klepto in me..."

Nicky interrupted her by grabbing her face and kissing her fiercely.

Lorna gave a stunned smile. "So you like it?"

"I love it. And I fucking love you."

"Then that's all the Christmas present I need. Besides, what you were gonna give me, a box of Milky Way again?"

It hadn't been Nicky's proudest moment to give Lorna last-minute commissary chocolates for Secret Santa. "Do you want to know what I really got you that year?"

"What do you mean, really got me?"

"Well, I know how you love your vision boards. So I made one with wedding and honeymoon shit all over it."

She gasped. "I love that! But why didn't you give it to me?"

"Alex didn't think you'd like the choice of groom." When Lorna didn't get it, Nicky pointed to herself.

"Oh honey," Lorna sighed, nestling into her arms. "You're my number one choice."

If Nicky had believed she could still win Lorna's heart after her engagement to Christopher (which turned out to be fantasy) and her marriage to Vinnie (which turned out to be real) she would have been just as crazy as her. That was the thing – it was less her helping Lorna make sense of the world than Lorna dragging Nicky into her alternate universe. But who the fuck would choose reality over this?

※

Once Lorna got an idea in her head, she wouldn't let go. This time it was Nicky learning to how drive. The reasoning was actually sound ("What if there's an emergency and I can't drive?") but the method perhaps not so much. Lorna was adamant she could teach Nicky how to drive herself.

"Don't worry, I am an excellent driver."

"Well, you drive me fucking crazy." But maybe she was right. If Lorna could wrangle that giant prison van, she could teach Nicky how to handle a little automatic car.

"Now, first you gotta check everyone is wearing their seatbelts."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "We're only driving around here, Lorna. It's deserted."
"Safety first!" Lorna reached over and fastened Nicky's belt. "You can release the handbrake now. Nicky, that's the seat adjuster..."

"I'm trying to put the seat back because you're so fucking short!" Nicky covered her mistake. "Uh, right. Let's roll."

They were rolling. Backwards. There was an incline leading up to the house which didn't seem so steep but now they were sliding down it could have been fucking Mount Everest.

"Shit, what do I do?"

"Just stay calm and gently put your foot on the brake."

Nicky put her foot down, but instead of the car slowing down, it sped up, still in reverse.

"Not the gas. The brake, the brake!"

Nicky thought maybe she could save this, by grabbing hold of the steering wheel and turning them into a forward position. She underestimated how sensitive the steering wheel was, and suddenly the car was spinning out of control, backwards, down a hill, towards the icy open road.

"Fuck!"

"Oh Lord!" Lorna reached for the handbrake but before she could use it the car slammed into a tree with a crunch of metal and shattering glass.

Nicky was dazed for a moment before her senses spiked with pain – her knees crushed into the dashboard on impact. The airbag had failed. It was a good thing Lorna made her wear a seatbelt...

"Lorna! Fuck, are you okay?"

She was on the side that crashed into the tree. Lorna winced, rolling her neck. A trickle of blood dripped down her head from hitting the window.

"Ow."

"How many fingers am I holding up?"

"Eleven."

Nicky helped her climb out through the driver's seat and they both surveyed the damage. The car was a wreck and Nicky hadn't even managed to get out of the driveway. Her Mad Max rescue mission now seemed all the more miraculous.

"You killed Anita!" Lorna wailed.

"Jesus, I think you're concussed. We need to get you to a doctor." But how would they get there?

"Anita's the name of the car, duh." Lorna shook her head, wincing again. "I changed my mind, Nicky. You don't need to know how to drive."

It finally took a mild concussion, badly bruised knees and a bill for a new car before Lorna let Nicky take the wheel. The only problem was, now she had less confidence in her own ability to steer.
Sometimes it was like Lorna was making up for lost time. She peppered her daughter in endless
kisses, and now Nicky was being bombarded too. And because Lorna always wore lipstick, even in
the house with just the two of them, Nicky's face and neck always looked covered in a weird rash.

So it came that even when they went to visit Piper for New Year's, the moment the blonde stepped
out of the room, Lorna planted one on Nicky's cheek.

"Aw shit, Lorna." Nicky rubbed her skin, sighing at the pink residue on her fingers.

"I can fix that." Lorna jumped on her tiptoes and licked Nicky's face, like she was trying to mark her
territory. Nicky squirmed away, yelping because it tickled.

"Ugh, who knows where that tongue's been!"

"You know exactly where it's been." And then she pushed her tongue into Nicky's mouth.

Really, Nicky didn't know how long she'd been kissing Lorna for – the world was still so surreal
now Lorna loved her – before Piper came back in the room. But suddenly she was screaming and
pointing.

"Aha! I knew it! I fucking knew it!"

Nicky blushed – Nicky Nichols actually blushed – and hoped the lipstick stains would cover it.
"Alright, keep your panties on, Chapman."

"I knew you were more than just friends!"

"Hey, who says friends can't platonically make out?"

"We can tell her, Nicky." Lorna held her hand. "It's true. Me and Nicky are going steady."

"Going steady? What the fuck is this, the 1950s? Hang on, let me give you my class ring and I'll take
you to the drive-in."

Lorna pouted. "Well, what do you wanna call it then?"

"Fucking."

"Aw! You two!" Piper interrupted their squabble. "Nicky and Lorna sitting in a tree, F-U-C-K-I-N-G!
First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a baby in a baby carriage!"

"Ugh, that is so heteronormative. It's more like, first comes love, then comes marriage to some guy
she's just met, then comes baby, then comes divorce, then comes a mutually respectful relationship
between two consenting adult women who also like to roleplay."

"You see how she destroys the romance in everything? This is what I gotta deal with, Piper."

"You two already fight like an old married couple."

Later on that night, Lorna balanced Sera on her hip while showing her the fireworks. Nicky
swooped in, not giving a shit about Chapman watching, and kissed her brains out.

"It's not midnight yet," Lorna murmured. "I got lipstick on your chin."

Nicky didn't care. It had suddenly hit her how much had changed in a year. From getting out of
prison to helping Lorna through the birth of her child and her divorce, to now having everything she
could have dared to hope for and more. Fireworks went off in the distance and lighted their embrace with colour.

Nicky wasn't a romantic – the kind of person who ever went on dates or received flowers or liked pina coladas or getting caught in the rain. Making love at midnight was okay though... But if Lorna was into that mushy stuff maybe she should make an effort. She didn't want her getting dissatisfied and how many fucking John Hughes movies could fill that void?

Valentine's Day was perfect timing. Nicky got everything ready, watching the clock. Lorna was late coming home from therapy. She just began to worry when she stepped in the door.

"Honey, is the power out again?" Lorna called, coming into the kitchen and looking at all the candles. "What's going on?"

"You said you wanted romance. Happy Valentine's Day and shit."

"You did all this for me?" Lorna held Nicky's face. She wondered if she could feel it grow hot beneath her fingers.

"Well, uh, I just wanted to make you fucking happy. Return the favour."

"I am happy." Lorna's eyes widened. "... I am. I really am."

They sat at the table while Nicky served up dinner.

"Mac and cheese, my favourite!" Lorna clapped. "Where'd you get it?"

"I made it."

"You did?" Lorna froze with her fork in mid-air. "Really?"

"Yeah. I've been practicing. Aren't you gonna try it?"

"I'm still recovering from the beef stroganoff you made, sweetie."

"Don't worry, I've got poison control on speed dial. Just try it."

Lorna reluctantly ate a mouthful. Suddenly she ducked her head under the table.

"Lorna, what are you doing?"

"Looking for the takeaway bag, it must be here somewhere!"

Nicky sighed and pulled her back up. "Really? It's that bad?"

"No, it's that good." She started shovelling pasta into her mouth. "I just can't believe you made it. But if you're good at cooking now, what's the point of me? I'm supposed to be the homemaker."

"I cooked one thing that was edible. Also, homemaker? You really do think it's the fucking Fifties, don't you? We don't have to fit into these perfect little roles."

"That's a shame 'cause I got us a treat for after dinner." Lorna reached into a bag and pulled out a French maid costume, complete with a feather duster. "This house is so, so dirty and I need to be punished."
Was there no end to Lorna's fantasies? They'd already played doctor and nurse, handywoman and housewife, teacher and student. Nicky drew the line at guard and prisoner – that was too real.

"Fuck me," Nicky breathed.

"I intend to. Happy Valentine's Day, honey."

Lorna perched on Nicky's lap and leaned down to kiss her. Then she playfully poked the feather duster at Nicky's exposed neck, forcing her to shriek with laughter.

"No, no! Stop! Icarus! Icarus!" She yelled her safe word. She could get into a lot of things but not tickle torture.

Mercifully, Lorna stopped. She looked down at her, playing with her hair. Nicky sighed. Every day she felt herself growing more stupidly in love with Lorna, if that was even possible. Her heart was just laying out in the open.

She noticed. "Is something wrong, baby?"

"What if, for tonight, I'm just Nicky and you're just Lorna?"

"But where's the fun in that?"

"What, that's not enough for you? Babe, sometimes you make me feel like you need me to pretend to be someone else to have sex with me."

Lorna gasped. "No, that's not how it is at all! It's just, you've had so many... partners and I don't want you to get bored of me."

Nicky snorted. "Lorna, I could never get bored of you. In fact, I think it would be good for my cardiac health if you were a bit more boring."

"Oh. Well, I guess I'll take this costume back then –"

"You don't have to do that," Nicky growled, taking back control. "After all, it can get pretty dirty in here."

She hoisted her up and carried her bridal-style towards the bedroom. Every day really was Valentine's Day when you were loved by Lorna Morello.

Chapter End Notes

Instead of 1 chapter of tooth-rotting fluff, here's 8 chapters in one. Y'all deserve it.
Btw I am actually Nicky driving lol
"You know what? You are not a good father. Go to hell, Vincent Muccio!"

Lorna threw her phone to the ground. The entire scene had attracted Nicky, who appeared at the door wearing gardening gloves.

"Uh... And why are we condemning Vinnie to eternal suffering this time?"

"Nicky, he's leaving her at daycare all day!" Lorna yelled.

In her mind's eye, she could see the face of her therapist, telling her to self-soothe, meditate, practice radical acceptance and all that other mindfulness claptrap that she just didn't care about right now. Not when it was about her baby.

"Well, he does have a job, Lorna. What did you think was happening?"

"I thought he'd leave her with his parents or something. Not with a bunch of strangers I haven't even met!"

Nicky put her hands on Lorna's shoulders, getting dirt all over her dress. "Alright, calm down. I'm sure he chose a good daycare. And anyway, in my experience, it's the family you gotta watch out for."

Lorna's eyes widened and she clapped a hand to her mouth. "Oh, God!"

Nicky looked as if she immediately regretted saying that. "Jesus Christ. Here we go."

Lorna rushed to the front door and picked up her car keys. She was in such a state of panic that when Nicky grabbed her hand to pull her back, she almost whipped around and hit her.

"Let me go! I have to get her. She's not safe."

"Yes, she is. I mean, we're talking about trained professionals here, not fucking pedo uncles with whiskey breath."

That conjured such an awful image that Lorna sunk to the ground sobbing. "But h-how can someone do that to a baby?"

"They're not." Nicky sat down next to her. "Nothing bad is happening to your baby."
But she wasn't thinking about Sera now. "You were just a child, Nicky! Nobody should think about a child like that."

When Nicky had referenced her uncle's 'bad touching' in prison, Lorna felt squeamish and wanted to change the subject. But now she was a mother, the realisation of what that really meant hit her tenfold. She wanted to vomit.

"Yeah, there are some fucked-up motherfuckers in the world, doll. But I know you and Vinnie will do everything to protect Sera from that shit."

"But how? If there are fucked-up motherfuckers out there?"

"You love her. You look after her. You listen to her. Unlike my mother who told me I was slandering an honourable man and making up stories for attention. I mean, that kind of seven-year-old even thinks of shit like that?"

This brought a fresh rain of tears down Lorna's cheeks. "That's so horrible."

"Come here." Nicky wrapped her arms around her.

It just made Lorna more inconsolable. Why was this woman hugging her when she was the victim of such a heinous act? "Stop comforting me!"

Nicky smiled a bit. "No can do. I hate seeing you cry."

"I should be the one comforting you!" Lorna wriggled out of the embrace. "Do you wanna talk about it?"

"Fuck no."

That stung a little. Did Nicky not trust her? Lorna ran to Nicky with all her problems, big and small. Maybe she wasn't the most emotionally mature person alive but she could at least listen.

Nicky cocked her head, as if she was looking right through Lorna's skull to the building turmoil. "I mean, thanks doll, but I already get to relive that trauma enough at the therapist. Like I said, some things should be left to trained professionals."

"Is the therapy helping?"

"Uh, yeah, I think so. I mean, even though it fucking hurts like a bitch and I hate every minute of it."

Lorna got that. Therapy was not like the movies, where you lay down on a couch and all your problems were solved a scene later. It was opening old wounds, being honest (always a struggle) and challenging behaviours and thought patterns built up over a lifetime. It was difficult and painful.

The fact that Nicky could have easily avoided the trauma that drove her to drugs and now difficult, painful therapy, if it weren't for her disgusting family, made Lorna tremble with anger.

"Your uncle is a monster, Nicky," she said through gritted teeth. "He's the one who deserved to be in prison, not you! He should be punished. I want to track him down and break into his house and leave him scary letters and phone calls in the middle of the night and make sure he never has a moment of peace."

Nicky raised an eyebrow. "Well, lucky for you and your criminal record, he died in 2009."

"Well... at least I broke Marka's nose."
"Yeah, kid. You really balanced out the universe. And now you know why I am the way I am."

Lorna nodded. "Why you don't like men."

"What?" Nicky slapped a hand to her forehead. "No, and that's an offensive stereotype but I'll let it go this time because you don't know any better. I was more talking about, you know, this caustic, overly defensive, impenetrable iron shell that I've built around myself to protect from any real human connection. Oh shit, that sounds like my mother."

"Excuse me? Is it Opposite Day?" Lorna grabbed her hand, the gardening gloves in the way again. "You're nothing like her, Nicky. I mean, if anything you take after your real mom, Red. You're protective and caring and you'd be a million times the mother that bitch Marka ever was."

"Come on, I get you're trying to make me feel better but let's be real. I don't have a maternal bone in my body and that's just the way I like it."

"That's not true. You just stopped me doing something stupid and you dried my tears and told me off for saying something wrong. Sounds like a good mother to me."

"Except that you're not my kid and we should really stop this train of thought before shit gets weird in bed."

"Well... I see how you is with Sera. You really love her. And she loves her Aunty Nicky too."

Nicky seemed to almost blush. "She's the fucking exception to the rule, okay!"

"Face it, Nicky. You're totally mother material. And you'll never admit it but I think you'd be happy to make more exceptions."

She smiled, her brain flashing with images of a house full of little Nickys.

"What is that?" Nicky pointed at her expression. "Don't you dare get all fucking clucky on me, you have enough mental breakdowns looking after one."

She shrugged. She could see, sitting on the floor with her keys in her hand, that Nicky had a point. And anyway, how would that even work? Alex was right – penis in vagina did need to happen.

On that note, she had to call Vinnie and apologise. She picked up her phone, but when she turned it over, the screen was black and shattered. At least the one good thing about prison phones was you could take your anger out on them without really damaging anything (except maybe your good behaviour record).

"Oh, no!"

"Babe, that's the third one," Nicky griped. "You gotta stop taking it out on the phone, okay? Here, call him on mine."

Lorna took Nicky's phone, already dreading the day's diary entry and subsequent conversation with her therapist. Sometimes being delusional was so much easier.

Nicky
All this talk of motherhood made Nicky realise that she had completely forgotten Red. She hadn't visited since Lorna's chickenpox epiphany, months ago. And even before then, she hadn't exactly been a regular visitor in the midst of the divorce drama. In other words, she was in big trouble.

When it came Lorna's turn to look after Sera, she got them all to drive down to Litchfield max. She hoped that despite the radio silence, Red would be happy to see them.

"I don't believe it." She heard a familiar voice in the visitation waiting room and turned around to see Artesian, her arms crossed.

Nicky walked up to her, Lorna following behind. "Oh, hey. How's Hades treating you?"

"Yeah, I'm still here, thanks for the reminder." She looked at the pair of them. "Are you two...?"

"Going steady," said Nicky. Damn Lorna, but she still hadn't found a phrase that suited them better.

Artesian smiled and shook her head. "Well, shit. I guess miracles do happen."

Nicky leaned in. "We wanted to surprise Red. I don't suppose you could let us visit her together?"

"You know I'm not meant to do that, Nicky. But I suppose, if once you go through security, you both went in at the same time while I was looking the other way, there's not really much I can do about it."

"You're right, Nicky. She is one of the not-evil ones," Lorna piped up. "Sorry about your rug."

"Don't worry about it. I'm just glad to see that everything worked out."

Artesian looked a lot less tormented and PTSD-y to Nicky. For once, it felt like the universe was working in everyone's favour. She just hoped the same applied to Red.

Of course, as soon as she sat down in front of the glass, she was met with a face that could scare away a grizzly bear.

"What time do you call this, Nicky?" Red seethed, baring her teeth with every word. "You haven't visited me in months. Is that what I get for all these years of caring for you?"

She stopped ranting as Lorna squeezed into the booth with Sera, nearly knocking Nicky off the chair they had to share.

"Hi, Red!" Lorna chirped into the mouthpiece of the phone Nicky was holding. She kissed Nicky on the cheek as usual, prompting a scowl from the older woman.

"Ah. Finally, it makes sense. So this is what you betray me for. A snowball's chance in hell with a woman who changes her mind more than I change my sheets. I should have known, you're always thinking with your libido. Little girl, big dick."

"What's she saying?" Lorna asked, trying to get the baby settled.

"Uhhhhh –"

"In Russia, we have a saying. You're a fool, Nicky."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "That's a fucking specific proverb. Hey Red, I'm sorry I haven't visited, ya know? Uh, shit's been crazy. But I have missed you. Not so much this torrent of verbal abuse but..."
"What exactly have you been doing that could be so important?" Nicky looked at Lorna. Red glared again. "That's what you've been doing."

"She doesn't look that happy to see us," said Lorna.

Nicky covered the mouthpiece. "She's getting old. It makes you crabby. Get off my prison lawn..."

"Gosh, and Red wasn't exactly a ray of sunshine before. Let me talk to her, I'll cheer her up."

"I don't know if that's a great idea—"

Too late, Lorna was already leaning into the phone. "Chin up, Red! Frowning gives you wrinkles. Well, more wrinkles..."

"Oh, jeez," Nicky groaned.

"We travelled hours just to see you, so don't be such a downer!"

Red didn't say anything, just widened her eyes at Nicky. Either Lorna didn't know what she was doing or she just didn't care.

"There's a lot to be happy about. Our garden is starting to bloom. Oh, and we found your chicken!" Sera grumbled in Lorna's arms. "Sorry baby, I haven't introduced you. Red, this is Serafina Maria Stansie Francine Nicole Patricia Galina Rosa Morello Muccio."

Finally, the woman stopped frowning. "Did I hear you say Galina?"

"Of course. She gotta know who her family is, don't you?" She lifted up Sera to the glass and made her wave at the older woman.

"Uh, yes... I didn't think... Well, that's nice of you." Red cleared her throat. "So you three are living together?"

Lorna nodded. "Uh-huh. A little cottage near the woods. I'd show you pictures but we ain't allowed phones in here. At first I didn't know if I wanted to move so far from the city but you know we had to for Nicky's sobriety and so we didn't get whacked by her dealer... oh, I don't think I was meant to mention that, everything's fine now Red, forget I said it—"

"Lorna," Red interrupted. "I need to know. What exactly are your intentions for my Nicky?"

"What?"

Nicky mimed zipping her lips at Red, but she continued, like some kind of father showing off his rifle to his teenage daughter's prom date.

"You know I think of you as one of my own. That's why I know you. I know what you're like, how featherbrained you can be without much care for other's feelings. And I know I'm stuck here in prison but I can't have you breaking Nicky's heart again. It's not a toy."

"Oh... um..." Lorna shifted uncomfortably. "You know what, I think Sera needs changing, I gotta go—"

Before Nicky could do anything, Lorna got up and left with the baby. Nicky rapped on the plexiglass window.

"Did you have to be so fucking rude? That's my girlfriend you're speaking to."
"Girlfriend!" Red laughed. "So I suppose the husband dumped her and you rushed to pick up the pieces."

"No, Red. Lorna left him. Look, it was a fucking shitshow but they are now happily divorced."

"And you are the rebound until her next dream man comes along."

"Hey! I get you're being all protective mama bear with the claws out but it's not like that. Lorna loves me. I know, it's pretty fucking hard to believe that she would, but against all odds, she does. Maybe it's all the fucking feathers in her brain."

"Nicky, that's not what I –"

"She's a lot better, Red. This isn't the same Lorna who stalked Christopher and pretended her baby was alive. She's happy. We're happy. And I kinda thought you'd be fucking happy for us too."

Red sighed. "You really do love her, don't you?"

"Yes, Mom." Nicky took a deep breath. There was another reason she wanted to see Red. "I think I'm going to ask Lorna to marry me."

Red cursed something in Russian. "Marriage! Nicky, you've been hanging out with Lorna too much. You're not the marriage type."

"Nah, but Lorna is. I want to do something to show her that I'm never leaving, y'know, I'm in this, forever. I think I know her better than anyone and I can't fucking imagine being with anyone else."

She smiled. "Little girl, big heart."

"Does that mean we have your blessing?"

Red paused thoughtfully. "You will visit me, won't you? Promise you won't disappear off into the sunset and leave your poor old mother behind."

"I promise."

"Then marry away, fool." Her expression twisted into a scowl again. "Now, what is this I hear about getting whacked by your dealer?"

"Oh, shit..."

A lengthy conversation of Nicky trying to convince Red of her sobriety was mercifully cut short by visitation ending. Lorna never returned and Nicky couldn't exactly blame her.

She walked back into the waiting room and was met with a scene. Lorna was sitting on the ground, against the wall, silent. Artesian was next to her, holding the baby. Nicky immediately gathered Sera into her arms and crouched to Lorna's level.

"Lorna?" When she didn't respond, Nicky looked at Artesian. "What happened?"

The CO shrugged. "I don't know, she came out to change her baby. I gave her bag back to her. Then she took a call and she's been like that ever since."

Nicky stroked Lorna's face. "What's wrong, baby? Did something happen?"

Lorna looked up with wide eyes. "I'm sorry."
"Kid, don't be upset about what Red said."

"I didn't mean to."

"It's Red, she's not happy unless she's angry."

Lorna opened her fist, revealing her new phone broken into pieces. "I just dropped it. It fell outta my hand."

"That's what you're upset about? The phone?" Nicky laughed and kissed her on the forehead. Even though she was stronger now, the woman could still overreact about the smallest things. "Shit, I thought someone died!"

"My mother," Lorna said in a low, serious voice. "Franny called. It happened this morning. Or last night, they don't know. It was in her sleep. They think it was a heart attack."

It took a minute before Nicky fully registered what Lorna said. And even then, she almost couldn't believe it. Lorna wasn't crying, she wasn't acting at all like Lorna would act from hearing her mother had died.

She pulled her up off the ground and tried to mentally prepare herself for the inevitable break. Lorna was going to be harder to put back together than a cheap phone.

Chapter End Notes

I'm evil. Trust me when I say there's a good reason for it. :)
chapter summary

there's never a perfect time to come out, but...

chapter notes

see the end of the chapter for notes

lorna

they said hardly a word the whole drive. even nicky, who you could count on for reassuring advice or a mood-lightening quip, seemed lost for words. it was only when lorna pulled up to the house that reality crashed down on her.

"the last time i was here, it was after serafina was born," she broke the silence. "i couldn't get out fast enough."

thinking back on that awful day, knowing it was the last time her mother would see her, finally made her crumble. she pulled her knees up to her chest and sobbed.

"i don't know how to go back in there."

"i'll come with you if you want," said nicky, rubbing her back.

lorna pulled herself together as best she could and stepped out of the car with sera, nicky close behind. she would have to eventually and it wouldn't be long before the undertakers collected the body. oh, god. body. that's what stansie was now.

franny opened the door. her poor sister was the one who made the discovery. it was hours before she could get through to lorna because of the cell coverage on the highway.

"don't be upset. at least ma ain't suffering no more," said franny, hugging her. lorna had to agree; it was a half-life when you were so ill. they lost their mother twice.

looking behind lorna, franny frowned at nicky. "you brought company?"

"nicky was with me when you called. we drove straight here. we was visiting prison, that's what took us so long."

"oh. well, come through. everyone is waiting on you."

that was what lorna dreaded. the living room chairs were arranged into a circle with lots of food in the middle of it. franny's kids were all piled around, surprisingly well-behaved. mikey was sitting on the couch and one of the chairs was their father's wheelchair.

"there's my lorna," said giuseppe, his arms outstretched. lorna bent down to hug him. what else could she do? "and the little princess."
Clearly, he wanted to hold Sera and she didn't have much choice but to put her daughter in his arms. He had just lost his wife. Maybe new life was taking his mind off death.

"How old is she now?"

"Nearly one."

"Practically an old timer already. Cherish every moment of this, princess. Blink and you'll miss it." He reached up and squeezed her hand. "She looks just like you at that age. Lucky you girls both got your mother's looks. I see a lot of her in you especially, Lorna. Stansie always was a colourful personality. With the makeup to match."

"Thanks," said Lorna, because she didn't know what else to say. Why was her father being so nice to her? It was putting a dent in her 'Giuseppe Morello is evil' worldview. She sat down, Nicky next to her, Franny on the other side.

"Mikey, come here," Giuseppe called to an unmoving Mikey. "Don't you wanna meet your niece? Mikey's been away studying business, you know. My son, a scholar."

"We know," said Franny flatly. "You only say it a million times to anyone who comes in this house."

"Hey Francine, what crawled up your ass and died?"

The weirdness of them sitting there, bickering like old times, her father treating her like he did when she was little, all while their mother lay upstairs dead, was too much for Lorna. She burst into tears.

"I don't understand what's happening."

"What's to understand?" Mikey finally spoke. "Ma was sick. Ma was old. You do the maths."

"Do... do you think she felt any pain when it happened?"

"We're hoping it was quick," said Franny.

"Your mother was a good, God-fearing woman," Giuseppe said. "She's in a better place now."

If that was meant to be comforting, it wasn't working. Lorna couldn't control the sobs that kept catching in her throat. She felt Nicky reach over to hold her hand.

"I wish I could have said goodbye."

"We all do. You ain't the only one who's sad about Ma, princess," said Mikey.

"Be nice to your sister." Did Giuseppe just tell off Mikey, the golden child? Mikey definitely noticed, getting angrier. "I'm just saying, you don't gotta rub your grief in everyone's faces. This ain't all about you, sissy."

"Hey, we all express shit differently," said Nicky and everyone looked at her. It was almost as if she had been invisible until then.

"There ain't no point drama-queening when it's not like she's even been here for Ma lately. And who the fuck are you anyway?"

"That's Nicky," said Franny, her eyes fixed on their interlocked hands. "Lorna's friend. She just
happened to be with her when I called."

_Happened to?_ Franny knew their living situation, even if she didn't know the rest of it.

"Well, you can leave now," Mikey continued. "She don't need a babysitter."

Lorna was used to Mikey being a jerk but she wasn't having him be rude to Nicky. "Don't speak to her like that!"

"Lorna?" Franny interrupted. "Can you help me in the kitchen please?"

"Do it yourself, Francine. Don't bother your sister, she just sat down —"

"It's fine." Lorna got up and followed Franny into the kitchen, grateful to be out of that room. "But I don't think anybody's hungry, Fran."

Franny wasn't cooking. She just stood here, her arms folded. "Mikey's being an asshole but he's got a point. This is family time."

"Nicky is family."

"No. She's not. Look, I'm glad you found some friends in there but you been out for almost two years now, Lorn. Make some new ones."

"Are you serious?" She stared at her sister. "Do you know how many times Nicky saved my life?"

"Maybe you shouldn't always need saving," Franny snapped. "We ain't kids no more. We've all gone through shit so stop playing the fucking victim."

They'd had their fights in the past but never had Franny spoken to her like this. So full of venom. And _blame_.

"Franny... Where did this come from? I don't understand."

"No, you fucking don't understand because you live in la la land while I'm trying to hold our family together, Lorna. Like I always do. And what do I get for it? Nothing but shit."

"It's been a hard day —"

Franny laughed. "Yeah. And it's hard enough without you parading your shitty life choices like its something to be proud of. Like your friend in there."

Lorna squared her shoulders. "She's not just a friend."

"You're right," said Franny. "She's a criminal."

"You know that's not what I meant. And if you didn't realise, I'm a criminal too."

"And it broke Ma's heart!"

Franny turned her back to Lorna and held a tea towel to her face. When she turned around again, her eyes were watering.

"Lorna, I'm begging you. Just fight the crazy needy voices in your head and have some decency for once. Think about someone besides yourself. Please. I'm so tired. I can't protect you now."
Francine picked up a tray of biscotti and walked back into the living room. Lorna didn't know how to process what just happened. She couldn't even cry.

Nicky

Lorna came back and quietly announced she was going upstairs to see her mother. Nicky, wanting to make sure she was okay and also not wanting to spend another minute with her asshole brother, followed.

"I feel like I'm in the Twilight Zone," said Lorna.

"Yeah, it's a shock. Grief will do that."

"No, my father is being so nice to me. And Franny's... well, it don't matter." She stopped at a door. "Nicky, it's okay. You don't have to be here for this."

"I know. But I will, if you want me to."

Lorna gave a tiny nod. "You ever saw a dead body?"

"One. Washington."

"Oh, yeah. Me, I've seen loads. You know how Italians love an open casket. So I guess I should get this over with."

She took a deep breath and opened the door. It was a tiny bedroom, smelling of antiseptic and lavender. On the bedside table were stacks of medications. Then there was a bed – and, as expected, a woman lying on that bed. Looking pale as her sheets.

Lorna held her mother's hand and sunk to her knees, speaking under her breath. It took a moment before Nicky realised she was praying, which made her uncomfortable until she realised she was in a room with an actual dead body.

At some point, Lorna stopped. "She looks peaceful, don't you think?"

No. "Yeah."

"Do you think she'll be with Carmine in Heaven?"

I don't believe in that crap. "I'm sure of it, kid."

Nicky prided herself on being no-bullshit, but Lorna was her one weakness. Sometimes you just had to tell her what she wanted to hear.

"That's all I can take. Let's go." Lorna kissed her mother and left. She stood in the hallway, her expression shifting. "My room's just there. You wanna see?"

"Fuck yeah."

And so Nicky was led into another small room, which was dark and musty from nobody having lived in it for months.
"This is quaint." What the fuck? quaint?

"Come on, Nicky. Even I know that's rich people speak for a dump. Actually, the place we lived in Boston was a dump. I know it's not Park Avenue, but this one ain't so bad."

Lorna threw open the curtains and the room revealed itself. It was obviously girly, more like a teen's room than a grown woman's, with beauty products everywhere, clippings from fashion magazines, loads of cheap jewellery. A fucking West Side Story poster, because of course. And a crucifix. It was like being inside Lorna's head.

Nicky opened one of the shoeboxes against the wall, lifting out a staggering pair of platforms. "Whoa. These aren't shoes, they're fucking stilts."

Lorna shrugged and sat on the bed, leaving Nicky to go through her closet. She let out a low whistle as she found a tiny denim minidress. "Yowza. You actually wore this stuff? Wait, don't talk, I'm trying to form a mental picture."

"I was going through my Jersey phase. I've had a lot of phases. Trying to find the version of Lorna that was okay."

"Current Lorna is pretty great," said Nicky.

"I'm a terrible daughter."

Nicky stopped playing with the clothes and turned around. "What? Shit, no you're not, okay? Look, if this is about what your brother said, don't listen to him. I know I've only just met the guy, but he's a total d-bag."

"Mikey's right though. I was never there for Ma, even before prison I did everything I could to get away from her, movies and shopping. I couldn't deal with it, seeing her like that. I was a lazy, selfish coward and now she died all alone, thinking I didn't love her."

She said all this in a low, tearless voice that worried Nicky. She was bottling up and it would be the Mentos in Diet Coke situation again. Fuck, if Mikey undid all her hard work. Five minutes with her family and Nicky could see all the scars – the burden of her sick mother, her father's scapegoating, the invalidation of any negative emotion. Could one shitty reunion make her regress, like coming back to this childish room?

"That's not true," Nicky said firmly. "She knew how much you loved her."

"You never even met her, Nicky. How can you know that?"

"Because... when you love someone you can't help but show it. It's obvious. Come here."

Nicky tried to hug her but Lorna shrugged away, which worried her more.

"Is it okay if I have some time alone? I just wanna lie here in my old room and try to feel close to her."

"Okay," Nicky said reluctantly. "I'll be downstairs if you need me. Don't do anything dumb, okay?"

"No. I shouldn't always need saving."

That was also a weird thing for Lorna to say, but Nicky had to respect her boundaries. But there were three others downstairs wanting their boundaries respected. Nicky hung around in the foyer,
looking at the cute baby photos on the wall.

When she turned around, Lorna's father was right behind her. Or rather, beneath her.

"Jesus fucking Christ!"

He looked pointedly at another, larger, crucifix on the wall. It was any wonder she hadn't turned to ash upon crossing the threshold.

"Sorry," she mumbled. "I mean, uh, I'm really sorry. About your wife and everything. Shit sucks."

He sighed. "We've been waiting for this for a long time. But it's still a blow. Especially Lorna, she's always been so touchy-feely. Could cry over the idea of spilled milk. I think it's a middle child thing."

More of a long-untreated personality disorder thing, but Nicky wasn't about to fight with a grieving man. "I'll look after her."

"You're a good friend, huh? How long you two know each other?"

"A few years."

He smirked. "So you met in prison then. It's like Mikey says, do the maths. What did you do to get locked up?"

"Heroin." There was no point lying.

"Oh, sure. Heroin, there's gotta be a lot of money in that?"

"I guess." Nicky shrugged. She'd paid enough for it.

"I see, I see. So, you two close?"

"Yeah. Actually, we live together." Shit, she didn't know if she should have said that.

"You must be real close then." He pointed at her. "I know. And look, me and Lorna ain't always seen eye to eye, but I had time to think, especially since she took my granddaughter away. And I want you both to know, I accept her for who she is."

"What?" Was he really saying what she thought he was saying, right in front of this statuette of Jesus nailed to a cross?

"In some ways, I've always known. Since she was a teenager, I got the feeling she was never gonna walk the straight and narrow, if you get what I'm saying."

"I think I do." Nicky bent more to his level. "And you're okay with that?"

"Sure, it was hard to come to terms with at first, especially because Lorna's so pretty, I hoped more for her. A nice husband, maybe a secretary job or something. But your kids are your kids. Love is love. You ain't gonna drop them just because they break a few commandments."

"Wow, I did not expect that." Nicky expected Lorna's father to be a fire-and-brimstone Catholic. He was still an asshole who hit Franny and lied about it, but apparently a progressive one.

"Anyway, it ain't like she can help it. It's how her brain is wired. She still deserves to be happy. Only God can judge us, right?"
"Right! Uh, Giuseppe –"

"Please, call me Big Joe."

"Uh, okay. Big Joe, I wanted to ask you something. About Lorna."

"Fire away."

It was probably the worst time and place to do this, but they wanted the same thing – for Lorna to be happy.

"The thing is, uh, I love her. I know she feels the same about me. I'd do anything to protect her and provide for her – and Sera, obviously. And I normally think asking a man for his daughter's hand in marriage is grade-A patriarchal bullshit, but I know that means a lot to Lorna. And to you. So yeah. I guess I'm asking for your blessing."

Nicky waited for an answer, but in the course of her little speech Giuseppe's face had petrified into a glare.

"No."

"What?"

He inched closer and jabbed his finger in her face, his voice a growl. "I don't know who you think you are but my Lorna is a good Catholic girl."

"But you just said you were fine with it –"

"I thought you were her partner in crime, not her –"

"Partner?" It all shifted in place. "Oh, fuck. And I guess the thought of your daughter dealing fucking heroin is better than her being gay, right? Shit!"

"Listen to me. Lorna's got enough crazy ideas in her head without thinking she can get married to a woman. She's not gay. She just gets attached to people real easy, like that Christopher."

"With all due respect, which is honestly going down by the second, the only reason Christopher happened is because she was sick and none of you got her help."

"Are you blaming me?"

"Yeah, yeah, I am."

"And if she's so sick, then what are you doing, huh? Taking advantage? Filling her mind with fantasies? You think you could just step in and fill the void after that stuned Vince divorced her? You want to get her while she's weak?"

"No –"

"You're not taking my daughter away again. Whatever you think this is, it's a phase. One day she'll wake up and realise what she's missing. And when she does, her family will be waiting for her."

He wheeled away and she could hear him playing with Sera in the next room. She was in complete shock. Lorna was upstairs grieving for her mother, unaware Nicky had probably just made this family reunion a million times worse.
Nicky slipped outside to wait in the car. If she wasn't going to total it, maybe she would have just driven away. It was now clear what they were up against – hundreds of years of ingrained stubborn, God-fearing, small-minded tradition. Maybe it was a miracle they got this far, if Nicky believed in miracles.

Maybe it was a phase... no, if Lorna had to trust Nicky loved her then she had to trust her back. They would fight this. But later – grief made everything too fragile. Until then, she needed to give it space.

Chapter End Notes

There's just 3 chapters left! What will happen! (Honestly I don't even know)
Like Pods in a Pea

Chapter Summary

Nicky tries not to make things worse with Lorna’s family.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Nicky was gone when she went downstairs. How long had she been up there? Time didn't have meaning anymore; it could have been midday or midnight. Visiting Red felt like it happened in another lifetime.

She found Nicky outside in the car, listening to the radio. She wound down the window when Lorna knocked on it.

"Hey sorry, uh, your family needed space. How you feeling?"

"I don't know." Sadness, anger, guilt, shock. They all seemed to compete and cancel each other out so she was left feeling nothing. "I think I have to stay here, Nicky."

Nicky nodded. "If that's what you want."

"What I want is to go home and be with you and pretend none of this ever happened. I want my mother to be alive."

She sighed. What she wanted didn't matter at this moment. Franny was right, she had to think about someone other than herself. That meant at least shielding Nicky from her hostile, crazy family.

"Listen, it's not about what Mikey said but I think you should go. My family needs me right now."

"As long as you don't ignore what you need, babe." She hopped out of the car and gave Lorna a tight hug, knowing that was exactly what she needed.

"Will you get home okay?"

"Course, I'll get a bus or something. Seriously, call me if you need anything. Don't be a hero."

A few days without Nicky was manageable, she reminded herself. She'd done it before, and this time she knew where Nicky was, could call her whenever. But Franny's words kept replaying in her head.

Lorna couldn't sleep that night. She could feel the emptiness of the house even though it was full of people, people who were distant and suffocating at the same time. She really did hope her mother was in a better place.
The next few days were a blur of endless relatives bearing food and flowers, which Lorna suspected was really an excuse to spy. No prizes for guessing gossip target number one.

Franny was busy making funeral arrangements, per their father's wishes. Lorna offered to help but she was brushed off, told she was just getting in the way. All she could do was look after the kids so she didn't feel completely useless.

When the day of the funeral arrived it was almost a relief, probably not an appropriate emotional response to burying her mother. As soon as she saw Nicky, she tore away from her greeting duties and hurried to her as fast as she could while holding the baby.

"Thank God you're here. I missed you so much."

She went to hold her hand but Nicky loosely hugged her shoulder instead. She seemed distracted, looking toward Lorna's family. Or maybe she just noticed another familiar face emerging from the crowd of mourners.

"Vinnie? You're here." Lorna's tone came out sharper than intended.

"Oh, I don't have to be if you don't want me --"

"No, no. I'm just surprised."

"Well, you're still family. I'm sorry about your mom, Lorna. How are you feeling?"

"Like I might go crazy if one more person asks me that today."

He gave a sympathetic nod. "You want me to take Sera off your hands? Take as long as you need, we can make up the time later."

She thanked Vinnie and passed him the baby. Her hand found Nicky's, wanting a reassuring squeeze but again Nicky moved her arm to her upper back. Now she was sure she wasn't imagining it. For some reason, Nicky didn't want to hold her hand.

"Come on, it's time to take our seats," Lorna prodded.

"I'll hang back here," said Nicky. "You have to sit with your family."

"I want you to sit with me."

She gave an uneasy smile. "I'll be right here, doll. You'll be okay."

A sound of an organ playing forced Lorna to take her seat up the front. When the hymns started, she sang them on autopilot. She couldn't focus on the prayers or the Eucharist; even the eulogy spoken by some random priest was like white noise. All she could think about was how weird Nicky was acting, why she was putting distance between them on a day when she really needed to be held.

After the service, she wanted to talk to Nicky, but family responsibility reared again. She found herself holding a plate of bruschetta while a group of her cousins lobbed questions at her. As if the perpetual smell of lilies wasn't already giving her a headache.

"So what was it really like in prison? Do they really strip search you and all that?"

"Did you join a gang? You ever see someone get killed?"

"Yeah, like that girl who got killed by a guard a couple of years ago? It was all on the news."

"You knew her? Did you see it happen? I read that the blacks started the fight and then tried to turn it into a Black Lives Matter thing."

"That's not true. We was all protesting because the COs treated us like animals."

"Is that why two of them got shot? For revenge? Did you see who did it?"

"Lorna?" She turned around to see Franny standing there. "I need your help in the kitchen."

Lorna sighed in relief and followed her sister. "What can I do?"

"I don't really need your help," Franny snapped. "I'm just getting you away from those vultures. I guess I still can't help protecting you."

"Thank you."

She poured herself a glass of wine and downed it in one. "Look, I'm sorry for being such a bitch. I didn't mean any of what I said. None of it was your fault, Lorna."

"It wasn't yours either." She stroked her sister's arm. "It's normal to be angry when you lose someone."

Franny blinked back tears. "How did you get through it? The pain?"

"I think I just had to feel it. The longer you hold it in, the worse it's gonna get. Nicky once said you can't cheat grief and annoyingly she was right as usual."

"Nicky's a good friend," Franny sniffed. "You're lucky to have her."

"Franny, you know, me and Nicky are not just friends –"

"Hey, what you do at home is your business." Franny lowered her voice. "It's like they say, don't ask, don't tell. Just don't let our father find out. I'm not sure his blood pressure could take it."

"We don't have to put up with that anymore, Franny. You don't. Now that Ma's gone, you don't have to be here all the time to wait on him hand and foot."

She rolled her eyes. "And if I don't do it, who will?"

"Let his favourite Mikey take care of him. You deserve to have a life. It's what Mama would've wanted."

Franny hugged her and dissolved into tears. Maybe, for once, Lorna was doing the protecting. She never would have imagined this was how the day of her mother's funeral would go.

Once she was sure her sister was okay, she decided to leave before the vultures could swoop in. She found Nicky, who still wouldn't hold her hand, who actually ducked out of the way when Lorna tried to kiss her on the cheek. Driving back home, she couldn't shake the feeling that Nicky had somehow changed in the space of a few days.

It had to be in her head. Because the only thing scarier than her fears was the possibility they were true. That she was wrong to trust Nicky when she said just because you can't see me doesn't mean I'm gone forever. She couldn't lose trust in Nicky now. She couldn't lose her.
Whatever was going on, she had to deal with it the way she knew how.

Nicky

Nicky was glad to have Lorna back. The house was so empty without her, although Nicky was
doing a bad job at filling the silences now. What do you even say to someone whose mother has just
died? She imagined getting that news about Marka and wondering what she'd feel – if she'd feel
anything. And Red... she couldn't even bring herself to imagine that.

Lorna said she was taking a bath and left the room. She did the mental maths – how soon after her
mother's funeral do you tell your girlfriend that you fucked things up with her father? Lorna seemed
to be holding it together now but the extra stress could break her. Nicky decided to wait.

And wait she did. She realised that after more than an hour, Lorna was still in the bath.

"Lorna?" She knocked on the door. "What are you doing in there, babe?"

There was no answer. Maybe she was just washing her hair?

"Lorna, can you answer me?" Nicky said louder, trying to open the door but it was locked. "Can you
open this door?"

Still, silence. "Lorna, if you don't say something in the next ten seconds, I'm breaking it down."

Of course, she couldn't actually break the door down but she remembered a trick Lorna showed her
with a hairpin. After what seemed like endless fiddling with the lock, Nicky heard the latch click and
she burst in.

Lorna looked up from beneath a mountain of bubbles in the tub. "It's occupied."

Nicky was about to cuss her out but then she noticed her wearing earphones, like that fucking scene
from *Pretty Woman* except without the singing or the sexual tension.

"What the hell are you doing in here for so long?"

"I'm trying to relax," said Lorna in a voice that suggested it wasn't working. She took out her
earphones. "What did you think I was doing?"

Nicky didn't want to entertain any of the nightmare scenarios that flashed through her mind. "I just
wanted to check you're okay. I'll leave you to it."

"Come here."

Lorna reached out her hand and she walked over bathtub. She held Nicky's hand with her wrinkled,
waterlogged fingers and smiled. Then with a sharp tug she made Nicky lose her balance and fall
fully clothed into the water.

"What the fuck, Lorna!"

"I'm mad at you," she said simply.

"Yeah, I fucking got that!" Nicky wiped bubbles off her face. "What I don't get is why! What did I
"Today was my mother's funeral but all I could think about is why you won't hold my hand," she said, her voice trembling at the edge of tears.

Shit. Nicky really hoped she wouldn't notice with everything else going on. But of course she did, it was Lorna. Sometimes she forgot what it meant to be her favourite – a lot of fucking reassurance.

"I'm trying so hard not let my thoughts run away from me. Did I do something wrong? Did I push you away? Did my family freak you out? Are you leaving me?"

"I'm not leaving you." Nicky held her hand. "I promise, I wasn't avoiding you because of anything you did."

"So I wasn't imagining things, you were avoiding me? Why! I needed you today, Nicky."

"Fuck. Shit, I'm sorry. I just didn't want to make things harder with your family today."

"What do you mean?"

She groaned. Obviously, she wasn't going to be able to find the right time. "When I was at your house, I got into an argument."

"Oh God, you ripped Mikey a new one, didn't you? He's not worth it, Nicky."

"It wasn't Mikey, although I would love to kick his ass. It was your dad."

"My father? But he was actually not treating me like shit that day. What's that got to do with you not holding my hand?"

This wasn't the way she wanted to approach the subject of marriage, straight after a funeral, sitting in a bathtub. "Can we talk about this later? It's been a long fucking day. I don't want to stress you out."

"You not telling me is stressing me out."

"It's just... I did something really fucking stupid and impulsive and I feel like an idiot."

"What?" Lorna splashed her lightly. "Come on, Nicky. Whatever you did I'm sure it's not that bad. Look at who you're talking to. I drove to Christopher's house, remember? The night before I went to prison I cut all my hair with kitchen scissors. One time, I lifted nine blue mascaras from Sephora. I mean, blue mascara -- "

"Alright, I'll tell you, fuck." If only because the water was getting cold and they would be here all night if Lorna went through her catalogue of crazy stories. "I asked your father for your hand in marriage."

Lorna laughed. "Very funny. What did you really do?"

She just stared.

"Stop it. I'm not in the joking mood."

"I'm not joking. Trust me, I wish your dad had found it funny instead of launching into a homophobic tirade about me corrupting his innocent little girl."

"Nicky, my father's an old-school Italian Catholic who wants a million grandchildren. He doesn't
even know I've been with a woman."

She clapped her hands to her face. "Oh fuck, I outed you! Lorna, I'm so sorry. I was just... I don't know. I'm a fucking idiot."

Lorna frowned. "I don't understand. Why would you ask him that?"

"Well... generally, it's because people want to get married."

"No, but... that still don't make sense because you hate all that traditional stuff. You said marriage is nothing but an outdated sexist institution that either ends in divorce or traps you in boredom and slow-burning resentment forever."

"Hey, that's a bit of an exaggeration."

"No, that's what you said when I got married to Vinnie, I remember."

"Great, suddenly you have a photographic memory? Look, maybe I got turned off the whole thing because my parents' marriage crashed and burned. Maybe I just didn't see any future where marriage was possible for someone like me and maybe I was just jealous."

Lorna's eyes widened. "You... you really wanna get married? To me?"

"I mean, I know it's not exactly what you had on your vision board – "

Nicky was interrupted by Lorna leaning forward to kiss her. Her face was wet and she smelled like shampoo and it was perfect.

"I love you so much. But if you ever scare me like that again, I will kill you."

"I'm sorry. Let's just say I won't be invited to the next Morello family tailgate."

She giggled and shook her head. "I can't believe you asked my father. Vinnie didn't even do that."

"Well, I understand, you know. I won't be offended if you rather not rock the boat and keep things on the down-low between us."

"Wait, wait, wait. You think I wouldn't want to get married to you? Are you crazy? Of course I want to marry you." She was crying now. "I thought you'd never ask."

"But your dad – "

"Nicky, can I tell you a story? It's about a fifteen year old girl, not that academic, not that sporty, but the only class in school she liked was drama. And there was another girl in that class who was her best friend. They were real close, like pods in a pea. And one day, when they were watching Hamlet at her house for homework, the best friend started to kiss her."

"What did you do?" Nicky was hoping for a Catholic schoolgirls gone wild kind of story.

"How did you know it was me?" Lorna looked annoyed her shock twist was spoiled. "I didn't know what to do. But I kind of liked it. A lot. I didn't even hear my mother come down from her bed to get a glass of water."

"Busted."

"I was so ashamed. I even started packing my bags, I was sure I was getting kicked out. But that
night Ma sat down with me and said she wouldn't tell anyone if I didn't want to, but she'd love me no matter what I decided to do. Well, I stopped talking to my friend and started dating a boy from my church."

"Wow. That is not the uplifting ending I was hoping for."

"Nicky, the point of the story is I care a lot more about her blessing than what my father thinks. I know it's taken me a while to... get comfortable. But if think if my mother was still here, I think she'd be happy that I found someone as true as you."

"I... uh, so, is that a yes?"

"That depends." She smiled, sliding forward. "Are you gonna get down on one knee? I still got a little tradition left in me."

Chapter End Notes

Oh my days. After 67 chapters, idk why this one broke my brain so hard. Every sentence was a struggle so I hope reading isn't the same haha. Also the S7 trailer is released tomorrow so if I never update this safely assume I'm dead thanks.
Chapter Summary

Nichorello wedding planning, need I say more?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna

Romance had to wait. They both agreed it was wrong to plan a wedding so soon after a funeral. You can't cheat grief and all that. Nicky said that when the time was right, they'd just know. Lorna couldn't argue with that logic.

A month crawled by. Lorna was surprised by how okay she felt. She wasn't denying it hurt to lose her mother but it was manageable. Nicky kept saying how proud she was, and while it shouldn't be an achievement to not breakdown after every life event, she was happy with her progress too. Being with someone so patient and accepting had made all the difference.

Lorna picked up her daughter and sat her in the high-chair for dinner. Mealtimes were the only responsibility Nicky didn't help with ever since Lorna caught her feeding Sera a slice of lemon and sending the video to Chapman. (She must admit her scrunched-up little face was hilarious, but her mama instincts shut it down real quick.)

Sera's fist was curled around a small object. She had a habit of grabbing onto things and not letting go ("She's definitely yours," Nicky joked). Whether it was a toy or someone's hair, it was difficult getting anything out of her vice-like grip. She had strong hands for a baby.

"Whatcha got there, bub?" Lorna prised the box – she could see that was what it was now – out of her tight little fingers. She knew exactly what it was but it didn't stop her gasping when she flipped open the velvet lid to see a simple, perfect diamond ring inside.

"Well?" She turned around and found Nicky bent down on one knee. "You wanna marry me or what?"

"Yes!" This had to be the most romantic thing that ever happened to her. Immediately she burst into tears. "Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yes a million times."

"Okay, just checking." Nicky gave a wry smile and stood up. "You're really sure you want to be married to a wiseass junkie for the rest of your life?"

"Only if you're sure you wanna marry this nutcase."

"Well, alright then. It's settled." Nicky took the ring out of the box and slipped it on Lorna's finger.

"It's beautiful! How did you afford it?"
"Hey, you're not the only one who can budget. Besides, you need a real ring after wearing that cheap bit of tin the prison gave you. I've seen better jewellery come out of vending machines."

"Wait, how does it work with two girls? Do you need a ring too?"

"Lorna, it's a Jewish-Catholic lesbian felon wedding. I'm pretty sure there's no rulebook for this shit."

"I still think you should have a ring."

She grinned. "I have a better idea."

A week later, they were sitting in a tattoo parlour, Lorna holding Nicky’s hand as the other one was being inked.

"Ow, fuck," Nicky hissed through gritted teeth. "You sure you don't want a tattoo, kid? I'm thinking a full sleeve, maybe a lip ring, it'll be hot."

"I'm okay, thanks." Watching the needle jabbing her skin was making her feel slightly green.

When the artist was done, Nicky held up her hand to show a band of black ink tattooed around her wedding finger. "If that ain't a promise, I don't know what it is."

Sera's first birthday fell on one of Vinnie's weeks, so he invited them for a small family party. Maybe he was making up for the divorce hearing or just wanted the best for their kid, but Lorna was surprised by his decency. She didn't know if she would have been so gracious.

When they arrived, she scanned the room for Sera and found her in arms of some brunette she didn't recognise. Another cousin, perhaps?

"There's a stranger holding my baby."

"That's Giulia." Vinnie waved the woman over.

"You must be Lorna," said Giulia. "I've heard so much about you."

"Really?" She couldn't imagine it was all good.

"Giulia's my girlfriend," said Vinnie, shuffling his feet a little.

"Oh. Right." Lorna really couldn't find anything else to say. Giulia awkwardly made an excuse to use the bathroom and passed her the baby.

Vinnie shrugged. "It was about time I moved on. She's real nice, you'd like her. Sera does."

"She spends a lot of time with Sera?" She wasn't jealous over Vinnie, she'd decided, but when it came to another woman spending time with her daughter? She wanted to key that bitch's car.

"Sure. But, you know, you're her mother," said Vinnie quickly, like he was too familiar with her jealousy. "She knows that."

She breathed out and let the toxins leave her body. "It's fine, Vinnie." He deserved to be happy with someone else, someone who wasn't too crazy for him to handle.

"Speaking of moving on." Lorna flashed her ring finger.
His eyes widened as he looked at the pair. "You're engaged? That was fucking fast."

"Are you kidding?" Nicky scoffed. "You guys married after, what, a month?"

"Yeah, and look how that turned out."

"We know what we're doing," said Lorna firmly, wrapping her arm around Nicky's shoulder.

"Okay. Well, I hope it makes you happy." He turned to Nicky. "I'd give you some advice on marriage but clearly I f**ked that up."

"Now I know what not to do," Nicky joked, but his expression turned sour.

"Let's talk about something else," Lorna interrupted. "It's Sera's birthday. What's it like to be one year old, my big girl?"

Instead, Sera reached up towards Nicky, her hands grabbing like she was going for her hair again. "Mama!"

Nicky's eyes widened. "I swear I didn't teach her that."

Lorna and Vinnie burst out laughing. They shared a look. As dysfunctional as it was, Sera was always going to be surrounded by family who loved her. The more the merrier. But she was still going to run a full background check on this 'Giulia' when she got home.

Nicky set down five slices of cake on the kitchen table, pointing at each one. "Right. There's chocolate mud, vanilla, strawberries and cream, salted caramel and red velvet. I don't know about you, but my money's on the chocolate."

She tasted it and gave a thumbs up. "Don't let me go into a sugar coma alone."

"Maybe later," said Lorna.

Nicky's brow furrowed. "You just said no to cake. Okay, all pre-wedding dieting is officially banned. I won't let you starve to fit in a f**king dress."

She rolled her eyes and opened her mouth for Nicky to shove a forkful of cake in. "You're right. Chocolate is good."

"That's one decision taken care of. Hit me with ideas, kid. What's it gonna be, pink and yellow decorations? The biggest church in Brooklyn to fit all your thousands of Italian cousins? Hey, if our first dance is gonna go on Youtube, you need to let me know so I can practice my moves."

Lorna was flattered Nicky remembered the wedding plans from Christopher. She never thought she was actually listening to them. But she heard those empty dreams echoed back and suddenly nothing was more off-putting.

"I was thinking maybe we could get married at City Hall. Just the two of us. Nothing fancy."

"Nothing fancy?" Nicky's frown deepened. "Hey, did you fall down and hit your head?"

"No."

"What's going on? I mean, what happened to scrapbooking and vision boards and come to think of
it, I haven't seen you open a bridal magazine since we got engaged. You talked to me more about marrying fucking Christopher. But suddenly you don't want a big fantasy wedding?"

"Because it's a fantasy, Nicky! Think about it. We're spending money we don't have on things we don't need to invite people we don't even like."

Nicky looked confused and a little crestfallen. Lorna quickly reassured her. "Hun, I spent my whole life dreaming about the perfect wedding and ended up marrying Vinnie wearing toilet paper. It's actually not about the dress. I really just want to marry you as soon as possible. I'd marry you right now if we could."

"Me too," Nicky sighed. "Look at you being all fucking practical. Who the hell am I marrying?"

"Maybe now reality is so good I don't need the fantasy anymore."

Nicky leaned in and kissed her on the forehead. "But we can still have a cake, right?"

Lorna smiled. Nicky's enthusiasm about wedding stuff was too cute. She'd forgotten that while this was kind of the third wedding she'd planned, it was all new to her fiancée.

"Deal. And can I have a real dress this time? Look, I saved a bunch of ideas on Pinterest."

She scrolled through her phone, showing Nicky the designs. "I like this one. You'll look fuckable in lace."

"I don't want to look fuckable, I want to look like a bride. Romantic, elegant, virginal."

"You have a child, Mother Mary. You're not fooling anyone."

"I just had a thought! Sera can't witness for us. Who are we gonna ask? Our families ain't supportive and all our friends are in prison."

"Not all of them."

Nicky and Lorna knocked on Piper's door in unison. From inside, she could hear the vague sound of voices, which shut up immediately when Nicky knocked again.

"Maybe she's busy," Lorna shrugged.

"More like getting busy. You didn't hear the other woman?"

Nicky knocked again. And again. Finally, Piper slivered open the door, peeking between the gap.

"Oh, it's you two." Piper sounded annoyed. "Now is not really a good time –"

"Do you have someone in there?" Nicky grabbed the door and held it open. Piper was wearing a silk dressing gown, and by the way she fumbled to tie it closed, nothing much underneath.

"No, and it's also none of your business!"
"Bullshit. I know sex flush when I see it." She pointed at Piper's pink cheeks, which only blushed brighter. "You're hooking up with someone."

"But what about Alex?" Lorna piped up.

"What about me?" There was a deep, feminine voice and they turned around to see The Alex Vause standing there in jeans and a black top. Nicky blinked, as if she was suffering some kind of mirage that made the tall, raven-haired woman materialise in Piper's kitchen.

Lorna's scream of joy confirmed it wasn't an illusion and they ran and embraced her in a dizzying group hug.

Nicky finally found her voice. "You got out, fuck yeah! Why didn't you tell us?"

"Well, we were hoping for some time alone," Piper snipped.

"How did you get out so early?" Lorna asked.

"Piper never stopped fighting for me. Honestly, I think they reduced my sentence just to get rid of her." Alex gave a little laugh of relief, but it was clear the last two years had been tough on her.

"I'm so happy for you!" Lorna beamed and pulled Piper into the group hug this time. "Together at last!"

"You two can talk," said Alex, pulling away. "Is it true? Pipes keeps going on about you two shacking up in some cottage with a kid and a pet chicken and I thought she must have lost her damn mind in my absense."

"That is the least insane thing that's happened, trust me," muttered Nicky.

"Jesus. So after all that, you two actually sorted things out."

"Well, I told you. Love will find a way," said Lorna, holding Nicky's hand. She could feel the engagement ring against her knuckles.

"Actually, that's kind of why we're here," said Nicky. "We're getting married. Surprise."

"Holy shit. Are you serious?" Alex turned to Lorna for confirmation.

"Yes!" She shrieked in reply.

"Okay, no need to wake the neighbours." Now Nicky was feeling a little flushed. "Yeah, actually we were gonna ask Chapman to witness but now it'd be cool if you could both come."

Lorna gasped. "You can be bridesmaids!"

"Hey, what happened to small and untraditional?"

"It's gonna be so good! I'm thinking baby pink dresses and, oh, bouquets of roses. Definitely roses."

"I am not wearing pastels," said Alex flatly.

"Hey, we helped with your wedding, didn't we?"

"That's my bridezilla."
Nicky slung an arm around her and Lorna rested her head on her shoulder. It hit her, as Lorna shamelessly annoyed Piper with wedding questions and Alex admired her tattoo ring, that this was really happening. She let her guard down a little more and felt the excitement. She didn't think she'd get married to anyone, but Lorna wasn't anyone. She was The One. How the hell did she get so lucky?

Nicky had another favour to ask of them. Lorna could say she wasn't interested in the whole bridal fantasy anymore, but there were still things Nicky could do to make it feel like a wedding. Like a bachelorette party. Lorna wouldn't have had a night out since before prison, and with the baby and Nicky's sobriety her partying days were so over.

Piper and Alex were tasked with taking Lorna out the night before the wedding and "showing her a good time" (Nicky left that open to interpretation, but if there were strippers she wanted pictures). Lorna left Piper and Alex's flat wearing one of those lame 'Bride to Be' sashes.

Nicky was happy to order in pizza and put the baby to bed. It was lucky Sera was fast asleep when they returned. No child should have to see their mother in that state.

"Jesus, how much booze did you give her?" Nicky exclaimed at a swaying Lorna being propped up between Piper and Alex.

"It's not our fault your fiancée's a lightweight," said Alex, passing Lorna into Nicky's arms. "Now excuse me while I wash the vomit off my shoes."

"She had like two piña coladas and was trying to dance on the bar. We didn't even make it to the strip club," said Piper, sounding disappointed as she followed her wife into the bathroom.

"Aw kid, did you get white girl wasted?" Maybe alcohol and meds weren't such a good mix.

"Please don't arrest me, officer," Lorna slurred. "I have a baby and a chicken to put through college."

"Okay, I think it's time for bed," Nicky laughed, steering her towards the spare room.

"Hey! Keep your pants on. I'm staaaarving." She stumbled into the kitchen and started going through Piper's fridge. "There's just fucking vegetables! What the fuck is kom-bu-cha? Motherfucking Chapman."

Nicky picked up the pizza box off the table and handed her the leftovers. "Here, get some bread in ya."

Lorna flipped from anger to tears in a second. "Thank you. Thank you so much. This means so much to me."

"God, you are so drunk."

"I'm not drunk," said Lorna, trying to eat the pizza and missing her mouth. "I'm happy. I have a home and a family and the love of my life and I also have a pizzaaa. It's like for once everything is so perfect! Perfect perfect perfect!"

She grabbed Nicky by the hands and tried to jump up and down. Bad idea. She hiccuped and Nicky bent her over the sink before she could throw up on the floor.

"You really need to lie down," said Nicky, dragging her off to the bedroom.
"Why? You're the one who's spinning." But as soon as she saw the bed she collapsed face-down on top of it.

"Ugh, Lorna. Don't sleep in your clothes."

"Help me," she mumbled into the mattress. Nicky sighed and helped her change into pyjamas. Lorna stared at her intently. "Hey. I need to ask you a real important question so tell me honest."

"What?" Nerves washed over her. What if Lorna was having cold feet?

"What's your favourite colour?"

Nicky snorted. "That's your important question?"

"I need to know who I'm marrying this time."

"Sure, uh, makes sense. It's red, I guess."

"Red... I wish she could be there tomorrow."

"Me too, kid."

Lorna closed her eyes. Nicky got her into the recovery position, draped a blanket over her and turned off the light, getting into bed and putting her arm around her.

"Ma?" Lorna murmured. Clearly she was drunk and dreaming so Nicky ignored it. "Don't tell Nicky I got so drunk before the wedding... I don't want her to think I don't care. This time it's for real, I know it. We're gonna be together forever and ever and..."

She started to snore. Nicky tightened her arm around her and kissed her on the neck, ignoring that she smelled like rum and puke and pizza. Tomorrow, when they went to bed, they would be married. She could hardly sleep just thinking about it.

She nudged her fiancée awake the next morning. Before she even opened her bloodshot eyes, Lorna was groaning.

"Ohhh, fuck. Ow, my head. I think I'm dying."

Nicky handed her a glass of water. "Morning, party animal. Have fun last night?"

"I don't... remember." Suddenly she sat up in bed, clasping her head. "Oh Lord, I didn't do anything stupid, did I?"

"Don't worry, it was very entertaining for me. I got to find out what kind of drunk you are. You know how you have happy drunks, sad drunks, angry, sleepy, flirty."

"Which one am I?"

"Yes."

Lorna flopped back and buried her head in the pillow. "We're supposed to be getting married today and now I'm gonna look disgusting!"

"You look fucking hot," said Nicky, gazing at her smeared makeup and tangled hair and meaning
"Take a shower and an Advil and you'll feel better."

It didn't take Nicky long to get ready. She didn't have to be squeezed into a dress; she'd opted for a ladies tuxedo. She swiped on her eyeliner and briefly considered taming her hair, but went against it. This was the version of herself Lorna fell in love with, after all.

Lorna was taking a considerably longer time, obviously. "Hurry up in there," Nicky called out. Sera grizzled in agreement; she was crawling around on the floor getting her ridiculous pink tutu dress dirty.

The door opened and Alex came out in a baby pink dress. "Your bride-to-be is a piece of work."

Nicky struggled to contain herself. Only Lorna could strong-arm Alex Vause into wearing ruffles. "That's why I love her."

"Mama!" Sera babbled.

Nicky picked her up and tried to make her somewhat presentable. "I know, where is your mama? You tell her she's gonna make us late, Sera."

Alex arched an eyebrow. "God, you guys are so domestic I'm gonna hurl."

"It won't get you out of wearing that dress."

"She's so fucking cute. It almost makes me want one."

"Uh, please have kids immediately. I need to see Piper as a mom. Could you fucking imagine? 'Excuse me baby, but I just feel like I'm giving so much to this relationship and I need to know where we stand.'"

Alex joined in. "'Baby, I know you're crying and I hear you. But there are times when I've been upset, too. I think in the interests of equality we should acknowledge that.'"

Their laughter was cut short by Piper appearing in the doorway, her arms crossed. "Are you two finished?"

"Is Lorna? We were meant to be at the church twenty minutes ago." In the end, they had settled on the church where Serafina was christened, but they might have to go to City Hall after all if they didn't leave soon.

Finally Lorna came out and Nicky nearly fell over. She wore a vintage-style white lace gown that hugged her curves. Her long dark hair was set in soft curls and her makeup, completed with a red lip of course, made her never look prettier.

She looked down, blushing a little. "You know, it's bad luck to see the bride before the wedding."

"Seeing as we're both brides, I guess we're doomed."

Lorna picked up the baby and held onto Nicky with her free arm. "Are you ready for this?"

"Oh, I've been ready." It felt like her entire life was leading to this moment.

"All right. Let's go get married!"

Chapter End Notes
Can you believe the next chapter is the last one?! I haven't planned or written a word so if it takes forever I apologise. It will probably be a long chapter to wrap up everything I want to wrap up :)

Friends, Family and Felons

Chapter Summary

The end is where we start from.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorna and Nicky

Don't go.

Standing on the outside, it was just a church. To Nicky, it was even less than that – some old building made of brick and stained glass. But inside, the future was waiting.

"Once we go through that door, everything will change," said Lorna.

"There's still time to be runaway bride," Nicky joked, but she wanted to give her the opportunity to change her mind. Better now than in years' time.

Lorna was having none of it. "In these shoes? I don't think so. I didn't get all dolled up like this to not get married today, trust me."

Who do I trust when I can't even trust myself?

You can trust me.

Piper and Alex came out and confirmed everything was ready. Nicky had to laugh as Lorna just wordlessly passed Sera to Alex – by her reaction, she might as well have been holding an alien.

"Let's go in together," said Lorna, grabbing Nicky's hand. They were going to start this new life as one, each step of the way.

I've got you. Just hold on to me.

Nicky hoped Lorna wasn't paying too much attention to how sweaty her hand was as they entered the church. Every step forward cemented the fact that she wasn't going to be the eternally single girl. The chase was over. Finally, the restlessness, that addict's need to escape, wasn't coursing through her veins.

If you had any love or happiness, maybe you wouldn't have tried to find it in drugs.

Lorna smiled at how clammy Nicky's hand was. It felt like a rare reversal of power for Nicky to be the nervous one. She kept their pace steady, in control. For the first time in years she wasn't anxious at all. Everything felt right in her universe with Nicky holding her hand.

I wish I could touch you.
It didn't escape either of them, as they made the final few steps of this journey, how long the road had been and how many lifetimes they'd had in the years of knowing each other. The chances of two girls from opposite worlds to meet in prison and instantly connect, like electricity. And then as quickly as it sparked, ended. The new girl Chapman's talk of her fiancé made Lorna guilty about cheating on Christopher and Nicky had to pretend she was just missing the sex. Really, she was hurt and fucking literally anyone to forget her.

*You don't need him.*

Christopher wasn't real. Nicky would be lying if she said Lorna's inability to see the truth when it was literally staring her in the face, threatening to kill her in the visitation room, didn't shake her. Didn't make her feel like the world was just a little more broken and hopeless. Didn't edge her towards keeping that stash. And she could say she'd never take it, but Nicky was just as good at lying to herself. Drugs were her downfall again and she was sent to max. In those unbearable first days, Lorna couldn't cope with the sudden Nicky-sized hole in her life. She'd lost her best friend, confidant, her favourite. And Nicky was completely alone without her ray of sunshine to pull her out of the dark.

*Will you wait for me?*

Nicky filled the emptiness with drugs. Lorna filled Nicky's space with the first man who made her feel wanted. And maybe they barely knew each other and maybe he missed visits but Nicky had left and where did she fit now? She'd been dreaming of marriage since she was a little girl. It felt like marrying Vinnie was the one thing in life she'd done right and she was desperate not to ruin it. Even if Nicky's return made her more confused.

*Do you love him?*

*I love you, too.*

*Baby, I only loved one.*

Once it was clear Lorna committed to her fantasy, Nicky let herself slip all the way into her relapse. Two could play the escape game. In the bleakest moments of Suicide Sunday, she wondered if she would even care, even notice if she OD'd. Of course, Lorna noticed. She'd only just got Nicky back and she was leaving again. But what was she to do? How could she help? It was like her mother's illness – easier to stay away until someone else took care. Or it was over.

*Would you have ever looked for me?*

*My sobriety means more.*

Getting clean was not enough. Apparently it took a prison riot and a sideways love confession and a whole lot of confused, horny feelings. For that one time, it was like before everything got complicated. It couldn't last. When it randomly occurred to Lorna she might be pregnant, it became the perfect excuse. God forbid she cheated with Nicky on purpose and the weight of what that meant.

*It took going through withdrawal to realise you're not good for me.*

A cold shower wouldn't wash away Nicky's shame at letting herself be fucked with again. She gave Lorna an equally cold shoulder. It couldn't last. Piscatella sent her straight back to Lorna's comforting presence, but she wasn't doing too hot either. Without someone to ground her, she was losing control. Were those Spanish girls right about her being loco? Nicky told her she was, but she wasn't
hallucinating positive pregnancy tests. Now it was real, having a baby alone in prison was terrifying.

*I'm here. Just breathe.*

Nicky had to do the right thing. She called Vinnie and told him to man up. She made Lorna surrender when she saw things turning violent. When it became clear she was being charged for distributing drugs out of the pharmacy, she didn't snitch that it was Lorna handing out medications like Tic Tacs. Maybe at least one of them could go on to have a happy, normal life.

*You're our hero.*

It was sheer luck they ended up in the same prison, let alone the same block. Lorna was so relieved she didn't have to go through pregnancy alone. Nicky was busy enough keeping Lorna and the foetus safe that her sobriety was never stronger. Maybe she thrived with someone to think of other than herself. But there were some things neither could prepare for.

*Not you, please not you.*

The day Lorna lost Carmine all the fractures in her mind broke open. This time there was nothing Nicky could do to fix it. If she tried to get her to face the truth, she was pushed away. All her efforts to help her grieve just made her more guilty. She did everything to keep her out of psych without realising Lorna was already so far beyond the help she could give her.

*It's me that's wrong.*

Psych seemed to last forever, a haze of fluorescent lights and medications and voices. In reality, Litchfield waited only until Lorna was stable enough to say they'd done their job before they released her into the wild. Nicky, who'd been doing everything to stay clean, took a chance to put her heart on the line. If Lorna just waited for her like she promised, they could start a new life on the outside. Just hold on for a year.

*I would never, ever leave you.*

Lorna wasn't trying to find Vinnie. Their reunion was accidental and awkward but also her ticket out of her traumatic home. And he was there. She could touch him and talk to him. He was her husband and he said he loved her. It was a second chance not to fuck it up. But when she saw Nicky there on the other side of the glass, everything shifted again. Nicky made the decision for her. If Lorna wanted to be some guy's fool she could have him, but Nicky would never be fooled again.

*Tell me things are okay even though it tears you apart.*

It was the longest they'd gone without contact. Lorna realised all the things she'd pinned her hopes on, even a new baby, weren't making her happy. Something was so wrong with her. She missed Nicky so much it was literally driving her crazy. But Nicky got out and isolated herself. It left her empty and alone, but wasn't that better than relapsing?

*It's going to be okay.*

Call her a fool – Nicky put aside her grudge the moment Lorna came to her needing help. She couldn't stay bitter at her friend finally getting a happy family. It's just that it wasn't. After what happened to Carmine, Lorna was a wreck looking after the baby. Vinnie's idea of help was telling her she shouldn't need it. If Nicky didn't stop her, she would have ended it all. It was a miracle she managed to drag her out of the dark.

*Going against everything I ever believed in.*
Holding a gun against her head scared some sense into Lorna. She was utterly miserable with Vinnie but Nicky made her feel safe. Still, she knew if she tried to break up with Vinnie he would make her confused again. She took the baby and ran for her life. Nicky stayed by her side through the inevitable divorce and custody battle. Never once pressuring anything, even when they moved in together. Though she wanted a relationship, she'd given up hope Lorna would ever see her as more than a friend with benefits. She'd accepted it.

_Tell me the truth?_

_Don't I always?_

_Do you love me?_

_Like an idiot._

That's why it was so hard to believe a truce-seeking Vince could make Lorna realise she was in love with Nicky all along. She was too scared to admit it to herself, not just because it wasn't traditional, but because she was scared of getting hurt by someone she truly loved. Love! She loved Nicky and somehow Nicky loved her back. She'd proven she wasn't ever leaving. It was real. Waking up every day in a dream because they were in love. Raising a family together, even coming out of the tough shit stronger. Everything at last caught up to the truth in their hearts.

_It's you, it's always been you._

Tears welled in Lorna's eyes as they reached the altar. "Oh shit, I'm gonna ruin my makeup. I promised myself I wouldn't cry."

"Yeah, we both know that wasn't gonna happen." Nicky brushed away a tear running down Lorna's face, trying to keep hold of her own emotions. "Pull it together, kid. We haven't even got to the mushy part."

"It's just, we've come so far to get here."

"Yeah, tell me about it. I feel like I've aged about twenty years."

"Well, I'll grow old with you." She could already see herself becoming the stereotypical nonna who kept caramels for the grandkids in her purse while Nicky would be the kind of old lady who yelled at youths on the bus.

"Let's try and survive our thirties first."

"We'll survive anything as long as we're together."

"Hey, lovebirds," Alex interrupted. "Wait for us."

"We're ready! Who's running this thing?" They all turned expectantly to Piper, who said she'd make arrangements for the officiation as return for Nicky's help with their wedding.

"I have a surprise," said Piper. She turned and someone who looked very much like Sister Ingalls appeared behind the lectern.

"Sister!" Nicky was first to run up to her. "Fuck, it's good to see you not dead!"

"Clearly God had other plans for me," said Sister Ingalls, smiling. "Judging by what Chapman told me, you two would know all about that."
Lorna stared at Piper, impressed she tracked down another former prisoner. "How did you...?"

"I have connections," said Piper.

Nicky scoffed. "Of course you do. Sister, you're cool with marrying two chicks?"

"I don't see gender. Are you two ready?" They both nodded. Lorna passed her bouquet to Piper. "Normally, this would be when I'd ask who gives this bride to be married, but seeing as you're both brides and already holding hands, I'll skip straight to the ceremony. Friends, family and felons, we are gathered here today to witness the joining of Nicky Nichols and Lorna Morello in marriage..."

"Pinch me, I need to know this is real," Lorna whispered.

"I'm not gonna pinch you, Lorna."

Sister Ingalls had started reciting some Bible verse about love. Nicky actually needed someone to pinch her. In what universe was she being married by a Catholic nun she'd met in prison?

"... 'love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.' It is love that brought these two souls together and love that will continue to strengthen them as wife and, uh, wife. Now if anyone here knows a reason why this couple cannot lawfully be joined together in matrimony, speak now or forever hold your peace."

Piper cleared her throat and they all turned to her.

"I swear to God, I will murder you, Chapman," said Nicky.

"I'm joking," laughed Piper. Nobody found it funny.

"Moving on, then," said Sister Ingalls. "You've chosen to write your own vows?"

Obviously. Nicky wasn't going to be stuck with that boring script. She'd spent sleepless nights trying to get the words perfect in her head, but as she looked at Lorna smiling up at her, she was suddenly overwhelmed and every thought drained from her head.

"Fuck."

"Aw, so romantic," Lorna teased.

She found her footing – fuck, she almost felt dizzy. "Lorna, is this really happening? I thought about what it would be like to marry you for so long, I'm terrified that any second now I'm gonna wake up in my prison bunk and it was all a really elaborate dream. But that's just what life with you is like. You've sucked me into this fairytale world... and there's nothing more I want than to give you happily ever fucking after. You've been through so much shit but you let it make you a better person and I think you're brave as fuck and I couldn't be more proud of you. You're a kind, beautiful girl and a great mom and you punched Marka in the face, which I'm pretty sure qualifies you for a humanitarian award. You're fucking crazy in all the best ways. And you've given me something I never thought I could have – a family. So thank you. I think I could die pretty damn happy now –"

"Don't jinx it!" Lorna burst out. "We're in God's house, what if He's listening?"

"It's okay, I don't think He heard," Sister Ingalls winked. "Lorna, it's your turn."

She was in floods of tears all through Nicky's vows and took a moment to compose herself. She didn't have a speech prepared; she wanted to speak directly from the heart. It was a far cry from
when she'd spent all night trying to think of vows for Vinnie, finally copping out with lyrics from an 80s power ballad. This time everything felt so right and real.

"Nicky. All my life I've been waiting for true love to find me. I was starting to think that maybe it didn't really exist, or maybe it was for other people, and I didn't deserve it. I didn't see it was right in front of me. I love you so, so much, Nicky. You are so kind and patient and loyal. Every day I thank my lucky stars I got incarcerated so I could meet you. I don't think I could have survived prison without you by my side. You're the only person who makes feel safe and like I'm not crazy. You'll never know how much your love saved me. There's been times I didn't know how to keep going and you loved me back to life. And I know that I'm going to be a nightmare sometimes but just know it's because I love you so much. I miss you even when you're here and I just want to hold onto you forever and make you feel as loved as you make me feel. I can't wait to be your wife."

"I won't make you wait any longer," said Sister Ingalls. "Do you Nicky, take Lorna to be your lawfully wedded wife, promising to love and cherish, through joy and sorrow, sickness and health, for as long as you both shall live?"

"Fuck yeah."

"Loving the enthusiasm but I will need to hear you officially say 'I do'."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "I do. Obviously."

"Do you Lorna, take Nicky to be your lawfully wedded wife, promising to love and cherish, through joy and sorrow, sickness and health, for as long as you both shall live?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who has the rings?" Piper stepped forward and gave them to Sister Ingalls, who passed one to Nicky.

Nicky slid the wedding band onto Lorna's finger. "Lorna, I give you this ring as a symbol that I will always be there for you. For that reason, I had it fitted smaller so you can never get it off."

Lorna giggled and gave Nicky her ring. "Nicky, my love for you is like this ring – it has no end."

"Jesus, what Julia Roberts movie did you get that from? That was corny as hell."

"Oh come on, you love it."

"If I may interrupt," Sister Ingalls piped up, "Now by the power vested in me by the State of New York, I hereby pronounce you married. You may kiss your bride."

They didn't need to be told twice. It was like worlds colliding, sending up stardust everywhere, as Nicky and Lorna kissed for the first time as a married couple. The universe was swimming around them as they held onto each other like they couldn't get close enough. Who knew how much time had passed before the room started to fade in with the sounds of Alex clapping and Piper taking photos.

"Save some for the honeymoon," said Alex.

Lorna finally took Sera off her, noting long strands of jet-black hair between the infant's fingers. "Were you watching, baby? Mama got married to Nicky, yes she did. You know what that means?"

Nicky shook her head. "Lorna, she doesn't know what anything means. She's an actual baby."
"She knows what this means." And she wrapped her free arm around Nicky so Sera was between their embrace, officially a family at last.

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"So Lorna, how does it feel to be Mrs Nichols?" Piper asked, tipsy on champagne. They'd booked a private reception room and the restaurant seemed to have forgotten their request for no alcohol, but it was no big deal. Nicky couldn't be less tempted to relapse right now.

Lorna turned to her wife. "Oh, actually I was thinking of keeping my name. If that's okay, hun? For once in my life Lorna Morello doesn't seem so bad."

Nicky stopped eating chocolate cake and smiled at her wife. "I wouldn't want to be with anyone else."

"What about you, Nicky? Gonna go fully traditional on us?" Alex teased.

"What, Mrs Nicky Morello? It's tempting but no, I've grown into this fucking name. It builds character."

"What about going hyphenated, like Morello-Nichols?" Piper continued to slur. "No, no, the Nichols-Morellos. Or, oh my God, you can get one of those names like all the power couples have... Brangelina, Kimye. I've got it – Nichorello."

"No," said Lorna and Nicky in unison.

"I think that's time for bed," said Alex. She pulled Piper up out of her seat.

Lorna reluctantly gave her the carrier holding the sleeping baby. "Vinnie will pick her up first thing tomorrow morning. You'll be alright until then? Everything she needs is in her bag, but you can call me –"

"Lorna, we can look after a baby for one night. Unless you want to spend your honeymoon changing diapers."

Nicky gave her a reassuring nod and they left with Sera. Lorna called a taxi to their first stop, the hotel where their luggage was waiting. On any other day she would have collapsed onto the freshly made bed, especially after the night before, but she was buzzing. Maybe it was all the chocolate cake.

"Hey, wife." She pulled Nicky's hips towards her. "You wanna see my something blue?"

"Please God, let it be lingerie." Lorna let her dress fall to reveal she'd guessed right. "Is that a fucking garter? You are something else, kid."

She slowly unbuttoned Nicky's clothes and led her to the bed. "I love you."

"Yeah, I think I got the message today." She touched her hand. "I love you, too."

"I didn't think I could be this happy."

"Hey, you're stealing my line."

Lorna leaned into kiss Nicky for maybe the thousandth time that day, letting her fingers lace in her curls, trail down to her bare chest, dancing over her scar. Nicky pushed her onto the bed, stripping off her pantyhose and underwear until she was also completely exposed, scars and all.
"You are so fucking beautiful," said Nicky.

"Now you're stealing my line."

Bora Bora was even better than how it looked in pictures, despite Lorna having to admit she'd invented the third Bora. Nicky, being the travelled of the two, took it upon herself to organise a real honeymoon with sunset hikes, snorkelling, whale watching. But most of the time they ended up in the hotel room having sex. It would be ages before they'd have this much alone time.

One night, they were a little – a lot – sunburnt so they ended up at the bar instead. They were talking and drinking (a Coke for Nicky) when some guy in a Hawaiian shirt approached.

"Hey, ladies. Do you party?"

"Party?" Lorna perked up. "I was gonna check out the fire show but she said it would be lame."

Nicky heaved a sigh, saying in a low voice: "Lorna, he's asking if you do drugs."

"What?" Anger washed over her with the realisation. "What's the big idea, huh? You think you can just come and prey on women? Get them hooked on drugs and ruin their lives? How would you like it if I did that to you? If I hit you when you were down and took away everything you love? You don't know who you're dealing with, mister. Me and my wife here just got out of prison. We were the top most wanted murderers in Appleton, Wisconsin. So I'd suggest you turn around and walk away before you make me really mad."

He blanched. "Geez, lady. It's just dope."

"What did you call me?"

"Nothing, nothing!" He backed away. "I'll leave you alone, I swear."

Once he was gone, Lorna casually sipped on her drink. "It's scary how easy that comes to you," said Nicky.

"Got rid of him, didn't I?"

"I should have hired you as my bodyguard in prison. You could have kept all the junkies and their dealers away."

"Well, that place had actual murderers. But whenever you need me to be your human shield you just let me know."

"Let's go back to the room." Nicky didn't care about the sunburn anymore.

"Oh no, did that guy really get to you?"

"No," she laughed. "But I think the other customers at the bar might have a problem if I have sex with you right here."

Lorna grinned, draining the last of her piña colada. "Right behind you."

Lorna had a tray of homemade honey buns ready for Nicky when she got home. It was a gift for
passing her driving test, which was obviously going to be a piece of cake (or honey bun). Driving wasn't hard.

"Congratulations!" She jumped up as she entered the door. "How does it feel to be a licensed driver?"

"I wouldn't know." Nicky felt her embarrassment multiply, waving the slip of paper with the word 'FAIL' stamped on it.

"Oh." Lorna struggled for the right thing to say. "Well, don't worry about it. Franny failed her first time too. I mean, she was sixteen and using the rear mirror to put on lipgloss, but... I'm sure it was just a technicality. Did they say what you did wrong?"

"I ran through a stop sign."

"That's... not great but it happens to the best of us."

"No, Lorna. I literally ran through a stop sign. The car had to be towed."

Her eyes widened. "Oh my God, are you okay?"

Nicky blushed so hot her face was melting. "Yeah. Yeah. The only things wounded are my pride, the car and a stop sign property of the state of New York."

Lorna pushed a pastry toward her. "Here. That's like 800 calories of pure trans fats and sugar."

"You're sweet." Nicky took a bite, hoping it would take the bitter taste of failure away.

* Vinnie practically invited himself in for coffee when he dropped off Sera. The 18-month-old toddled off as he sat down, sighing.

"Lorna, we need to talk about this custody arrangement."

She was so shaken that she stopped looking at what she was doing and poured coffee all over the table. Fuck, Nicky was right about going back to the court and making it official.

"What? Vince, no. I'm not spending no less time with her. Fifty-fifty is fair, you said! She needs me."

"Calm down, will you?" He wiped up the mess. "I was going to ask if you'd be happy to look after her more."

Lorna sat down. "Really? Why?"

"It's not that I don't want to. But working full-time, it's hard, and she spends all day in daycare anyway, which is fucking expensive. I just think it would be better for all of us if she spent the week with you and I could have actual time with her on the weekends."

"Well... that would be fine by me."

He seemed a bit solemn about the decision so she kept a lid on her excitement. But when Nicky came home she happily relayed the news. To her surprise, Nicky went off.

"Typical fucking man," she spat. "Two days a week is all he can handle?" A part of Nicky still didn't trust him from the time he ran out on Lorna during the riot. He was shirking responsibility again, she
could feel it. Sera didn't deserve that.

"Wait, I'm confused. Why are you angry?"

"This is how it starts, Lorna. First, he wants her on weekends, then it's every two weeks, then he only sees her on birthdays and Hannukah, if she's lucky."

"No, Vinnie's not like that. Besides, more time with my baby is always a good thing."

"Yeah, until the kid grows up and starts to question why her dad wants nothing to do with her and he blames it on her mom's cheating ass. And who am I in this situation, the asshole pool cleaner she shacked up with?"

"Whoa, hey." She grasped Nicky's shoulders. "Vinnie is not your father and I am not your mother. And if I remember correctly, we didn't even 'shack up' until after the divorce."

Nicky kicked at the floor. "I just don't want her to feel rejected, that's all."

"You think I do? We're just trying to do our best to make it work. All we want is for Sera to grow up feeling safe and loved."

She realised she'd badly overreacted. "Yeah, and she will. Sorry for flipping out."

"Don't worry about it. I love how much you care about my daughter. Well, our daughter."

"You're her mother, I'm just the sidekick."

"She calls you mama all the time, Nicky."

"Yeah, but I didn't push her out of my cunt."

"Red didn't give birth to you and she's still your mom."

She had some logic there. "Fuck, this kid is gonna be confused as hell growing up."

"Hey, don't count your eggs before they crack."

"What? That's not the saying —" But Lorna was already going outside to show Sera how to feed the chicken.

* * *

Take two. Nicky would definitely get her license this time. Lorna even tested her at home. She laid out the honey buns on the table and hoped they were celebratory, not commiserative.

But she knew by Nicky's dejected face when she walked in that it was a fail. "Honey, what happened?"

"I don't fucking know! I really thought I had it this time."

"Aw, love. It's okay."

"No, it's not!" Nicky was getting frustrated. "I mean, how can you drive and I can't?"

Lorna put her hands on her hips. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing," she quickly back-pedalled. "Uh, I guess a fucking prep school education doesn't mean
shit if you don't know basic life skills. This is all my parents' fault. I would have learned to cook if we didn't have a chef, I'd have to learned to drive if we didn't take the limo everywhere."

"Limo?" Lorna raised her eyebrows. "You had a limo?"

"Don't look at me like that, it's only fun when we do it to Chapman."

By the time they got married, Nicky and Lorna had already fought about everything. Marriage was a clean slate. That's why their first real fight came as such a shock. Lorna was constantly dropping hints she wanted to expand their family, which Nicky constantly ignored. One day, it boiled over.

After they put Sera to bed, Lorna just outright said it. She always felt the most broody watching her angel sleep. "Nicky, I want another one."

Nicky refrained from facepalming. "Lorna, it's a baby, not a pair of shoes."

"But why not?"

"It's expensive, we don't have the room and what kind of shady fucking adoption agency is gonna give two ex-cons a baby?"

"Oh, we'll just get a sperm donor," said Lorna, as if it was the easiest thing in the world.

Just the thought made Nicky shiver. "No fucking way. No. Give me the wounded puppy eyes all you want. It's not happening. I don't want another baby."

"You won't even talk about it!"

"No, because your version of talking about it is whining and wailing and wearing me down until I give in and suddenly I'm stuck with some other guy's baby."

"Stuck with?"

Shit. Nicky didn't mean it to come out like that but Lorna was already storming off, slamming the bedroom door behind her and latching the lock.

"Come on, open the door."

"Go away!"

Nicky groaned and left her to cool off. After an hour passed, she crawled onto the couch to get comfortable for the night. Maybe she could have worded it better, but Lorna was being totally unreasonable. They didn't need another baby when there were already two in the house.

"Married couples fight, Lorna. Al and I fight all the time. It's no big deal."

A cup of lavender tea was pushed into Lorna's hands. She'd finished outpouring her version of events to an uncomfortable-looking Piper. The blonde was never someone she sought comfort in at prison because though she was nice enough, she tended to make everything about herself.

But Lorna had no choice; her therapist was away and it wasn't a visitation day with Red, although she'd just take Nicky's side anyway. She cried herself to sleep last night worrying that she'd fucked
things up, yet continuing to fuck things up by pushing Nicky away. It was the binge mentality.

"I just wish she could see it from my side. I ain't getting any younger and Sera, she should have a brother to play with."

Piper cocked an eyebrow. "A brother?"

She smiled. "I always wanted a boy. I was so sure Serafina was gonna be one, not that I'm complaining."

"Lorna, just make sure you want a baby for the right reasons. Even if you have a son he won't replace the one you lost. You need to let him go."

What? That's not what she was thinking at all, at least not consciously. Was that what everyone thought she was doing? Before she could even react, Piper had changed the subject.

When Nicky got home, Lorna was reading Sera a bedtime story. She watched, a smile creeping. Damn, if the kid almost made her want to bow to Lorna's whims and get another one. Don't even think about it, Nichols.

She cornered Lorna as she was coming out of the bedroom. "Hey, I'm sorry about yesterday."

Lorna continued to be evasive. "Let's just drop it."

"No, obviously this is something we need to talk about."

"There's nothing else to talk about." Lorna pushed past, tidying up the living room. "You were right, it's a bad idea."

"How can you change your mind just like that?" Something was going on. They both knew it. Lorna was only just managing to keep the tears in. "Hey, what's wrong? I'm fucking sorry, okay? My words came out wrong. I'm not 'stuck with' Sera, I'm lucky to have her —"

"I'm not mad at you, Nicky. Well, not anymore. I went to see Piper. I wanted to bitch to someone," she admitted, before bursting into tears. "She – she said I need to stop trying to replace Carmine but that's not what I wanted, Nicky."

"Oh, shit." Nicky pulled her close, feeling every sob shake her body. "Of course you're not. He's always gonna be your baby. Don't listen to Chapman, she's out of touch. And way out of line."

"I'm s-sorry."

Nicky wanted to say she had nothing to apologise for but she realised it wasn't her she was apologising to.

"Hey, Nicky. What brings you here?" Alex asked, standing at the door to the Vause-Chapman apartment. That morning, Nicky got a train all the way to Manhattan just so she could kick Piper's ass.

"I'm gonna kick your wife's ass."

Alex made a welcoming gesture. "Come in."
"Hey Chapman, I'm gonna make you regret upsetting Lorna."

Piper looked up from her lunch. "What did I do?"

Alex stepped in. "Yeah, as much as an ass-kicking would be entertaining, are you sure Piper deserves it? It doesn't take much to upset Lorna."

"You told her to stop trying to replace her dead baby."

"Pipes," Alex scolded.

"That's not how I said it," said Piper defensively. "I was just trying to help her. She can't get back the son she lost."

"Yeah, and nobody knows that better than Lorna. Do you even know how much fucking therapy it's taken for her to not feel guilty about moving on? She cried herself to sleep last night."

Piper was dumbstruck. Of course, she hadn't really been there for the ordeal. "I'm so sorry."

"Apologise to Lorna. Go." Alex shook her head as Piper picked up her phone and went into the bedroom. She turned to Nicky. "You look like you could use a drink."

Even if it wasn't the afternoon, Nicky would've declined. "You got any chocolate?"

Alex put a bowl of M&M's on the table and sat down. "I know it's none of my business but you must have known when you married Lorna she'd want kids up to her eyeballs."

"And she must have known that I don't like kids."

"Bullshit," Alex scoffed. "I've seen you with Sera, you love that little girl."

"That's different, I didn't exactly get a choice in the matter. And yeah, now she's awesome, but it was a fucking nightmare. I have no idea how Lorna's gonna cope with another baby, physically or mentally. For once, things are good just the way they are. I don't want to ruin it."

"It sounds to me like you'd want another kid but you're too scared." She looked at her in that all-knowing Alex way. "Have you told Lorna that's how you feel?"

"No but... she should know."

Another shake of the head. "You know her knowing elbow isn't real, right? She can't read your mind, you need to tell her."

"Did you talk to Piper?" Lorna asked Nicky the second she walked through the door that evening.

"How'd you know?"

She pointed to an abundance of roses, carnations and tulips crowding the kitchen table. "I think she sent me all the flowers in the tri-state area."

"Yeah, well she didn't mean it. People say stupid shit. Myself included."

Lorna cocked her head. "What's that supposed to mean?"
Nicky mumbled. "That maybe I don't not want to possibly try having another kid with you."

"Huh?"

"It just freaks me the fuck out, okay? I don't want to lose you again."

"Oh honey, you're being so dramatic. You don't gotta worry about me."

"Uh, I'm sorry if the image of you nearly bleeding to death is seared into my cerebellum. That shit sticks with you."

"Hey, look at me." Lorna touched her cheek. "It scares me, too. But you know, I was scared of leaving Vinnie and it turned out to be the best thing I ever did. So we can be scared together."

Nicky sighed. "This is what I mean. I knew you'd wear me down."

"Guess who is legally allowed to drive a car!" Nicky ran into the house, brandishing her new license. She was expecting to be met with fanfare and the smell of honey buns, but nothing. "Lorna, where are you?"

"In the bathroom," Lorna called. She was sitting on the edge on the bath, looking at twelve different pregnancy tests lying result-down. "I missed a period. I think."

"Fuck. Okay. Wow." Nicky crouched to her level. After magically getting knocked up twice without trying, the last two inseminations didn't take. On a practical level, they needed this one to work because they were running out of money.

"Will you look at them for me?" Lorna pleaded. It was driving her crazy waiting for Nicky to get home so they could find out.

"Why don't you look at one and I'll look at one? Together."

"Together."

Nicky lifted up a pee stick and turned it over. "... Positive."

Lorna smiled. "This one says positive too." She turned the rest over, reading positive sign after positive sign (and one negative, but that test was from the dollar store). "We're gonna have a baby!"

Nicky kissed her on the forehead, her stomach fluttering. "Well, that's a different kind of bun in the oven than I was expecting today."

Lorna realised. "Oh, sorry. I completely forgot it was your test. How did it go?"

She waved the shiny license in her face. "You're not the only one who got a positive."

"Yes! Two miracles in one day!"

Suddenly they were wrapped in the tightest, warmest hug ever. There was so much love between them and it was only about to multiply.

Nerves ran high in the OB-GYN's office for Lorna's 12 week scan. If everything was fine, they
could start telling people. Something going wrong was always a possibility. Lorna didn't even want to think about it, but it was hard with Nicky fussing all the time.

"How have you been feeling?" The doctor asked, positioning the ultrasound wand.

"Fine," Lorna replied.

"Bullshit," Nicky interjected. "She's been sick as a dog. She passed out from throwing up so much."

"But then I had a Gatorade and I was fine, Nicky." Lorna waved her hand. "She worries too much."

"We can give you something to help the morning sickness," said the doctor, smiling at their squabble. "It's not surprising because you have double the hormones. Are you ready to see your babies?"

Lorna must have heard that wrong. "Babies?"

Nicky chuckled nervously. "Uh, doctor, you just added a plural to that."

The doctor turned the monitor around to show them. "It's twins, congratulations."

"But... we only asked for one!" Nicky sputtered.

"You're lucky. It's like buy one, get one free."

Lorna watched the colour slowly drain from her wife's face. "Do you need a Gatorade, Nicky?"

The OB-GYN excused herself to let them freak out in privacy.

"Say something," Lorna whispered.

"Fuck."

"Something else!"

Unfortunately the only thought in Nicky's brain was one long scream. "Holy shit. That's... Jesus Christ. I, uh..."

"Are you mad at me?"

She stopped imploding enough to put her hand on Lorna's shoulder. "I can't get mad at your ovaries, Lorna."

"But I talked you into this."

"Lorna, you know I'm stubborn as hell," she sighed. "You didn't make me do anything I didn't want to. But fuck. Fuuuck. Fucking twins?"

"Oh God, Nicky." Lorna started to hyperventilate. Yes, she wanted another baby, perhaps a third somewhere down the line, but two at a time? "What are we gonna do? We won't be able to manage. This is too much. How are they gonna fit?"

"We'll have to rearrange some furniture."

"I meant in me!"

"Hey, it's gonna be okay. I'll help you." Nicky put an arm around her panicking wife, resting her
other hand on her bare stomach that was already curving outwards. What in heaven and hell had they got themselves in for?

The first weekend Lorna wasn't plagued with morning sickness Nicky drove to Litchfield and see Red. They'd already announced what was surreal news to Piper and Alex, and Franny and Vinnie, but it wasn't something she could tell her mother over the phone.

"Where's Lorna?" Red asked almost immediately after they'd settled in the visitation cubicle.

Nicky scoffed a little. Red really changed her tune since Lorna put a ring on it. "Asleep."

"Is she sick?"

"Not exactly." Nicky took the sonogram out of her pocket and pressed it to the glass. "Meet Baby A and Baby B. Names are a work in progress."

Red was speechless so Nicky kept going. "One of the conditions of this whole sperm donor thing was I got to name the baby this time, which she fucking regrets. I'm thinking Ren and Stimpy, Hall and Oates, Jekyll and Hyde. What do you think?"

"Twins?" She shook her head. "My God, you girls will be the death of me. You didn't even tell me you were trying for another baby."

"You know how it is. Lorna begged me not to jinx it."

"This is a good thing, right? You're happy?"

"Honestly, I couldn't be fucking happier."

Red smiled, her fingers tracing the sonogram through the glass. "Then I am happy. That's what will get me through."

Maybe Nicky was too happy. She was driving far less anxiously than usual when a car illegally overtook her and she didn't break in time. Within seconds, there was a crunch of glass and bone. She managed to stay conscious long enough to tell the paramedics to call her wife.

When she woke up, it wasn't Lorna sitting next to her. Her eyes focused on the formidable figure of Marka Nichols. "Holy shit, what meds am I on right now?"

"None, I told them not to give you any," was her clipped response. Nicky flashed to all the times she'd woken up in hospital to that disappointed glare. "You only have a broken collarbone and a concussion."

"That explains this fucking headache." She was relieved not to be pumped with opiates, but couldn't someone get her a fucking Advil? "How did you know I was here?"

"Lots of strange activity charged to my health insurance. Doctors appointments, vaccinations, therapy. You haven't seen me since you left prison but you're happy to keep taking my money."

_Busted._ "It's not my fault America doesn't have universal healthcare."

Marka scowled. "Are you sick?"
"No, no. It's not for me."

"Who?"

At that moment, Lorna burst in the room, crying hysterically. She didn't even notice Marka. "Nicky! Nicky, oh my God, are you okay? They tried to call but I was asleep, they said you got in a car wreck! Are you badly hurt?"

"Calm down, everything's fine." Lorna held her tightly, painfully. "But you are hugging my broken collarbone, babe." Nicky coughed, her throat dry.

Lorna held a cup of water with a straw to her mouth. "I'm sorry. Oh, God. My poor baby. You gotta be more careful!"

"It wasn't my fault, the guy came out of nowhere."

Someone else in the room cleared their throat. Lorna turned as Marka Nichols came out of nowhere.

"What is she doing here?"

"What is she doing here?"

Nicky steeled herself. This wasn't how she wanted to meet her biological mother for the first time on the outside, if at all. "Lorna's my wife. Meet your daughter-in-law."

Her eyes turned an even colder shade of blue. "You married the woman who assaulted me?"

"To be fair, that's not the only reason why I married her."

"Ugh, Nicole. Is this seriously what you're doing now?"

"We're in love. Maybe you heard of it," Lorna practically yelled.

"Okay, human shield. I don't need your services right now." She would have gladly watched Lorna lay into Marka if she wasn't pregnant. "Yes, we're married. And we have a kid and more on the way. I finally have the family you never gave me. And if you don't like it, guess what, I don't give a shit. I found a way to be happy without you."

Marka made a strange, strangled noise, turned on her heel and left. Lorna stroked Nicky's arm comfortingly, before resuming her freakout.

Weeks later, Nicky was almost recovered. It was annoying because she was meant to be looking after Lorna, but her collarbone rendered her useless. Plus, she couldn't work until it was healed. Lorna tasked herself with tightening the purse strings. She was going through the household finances when she stumbled upon an unexpected envelope.

"Heavens above. It's a letter from the health insurance company."

"Shit, I knew Marka would cut us off." Nicky's stomach dropped. Without health insurance, they were fucked. "How big is that nest egg now? Or should we move to Canada?"

Lorna shook her head. "It says they're upgrading our plan. Is it a mistake?"

Nicky took the letter. "No... it's the Nichols way of saying sorry without having to actually say it.
With money."

"You okay, love?"

She nodded. Maybe this was as much of a reconciliation as she could hope for. "Yeah, you? How are Mario and Luigi?"

"Please, please don't call them that," Lorna begged. "They're kicking the crap out of me." She grabbed Nicky's hand and laid it on her sizeable bump.

"I don't feel anything."

"That's because you're on the outside! Ah, you don't feel that?"

No, something was definitely poking at Nicky's hand through the walls of Lorna's stomach. "Jesus Christ! That's so weird. Holy shit. That was definitely a foot. A tiny foot. Inside you."

"Ain't it crazy?"

"It's fucking amazing."

Lorna leaned in to kiss her. "I'm so happy I got to do this with you."

* * *

Once Nicky was asleep she was out like a light, which was a problem when Lorna woke up in the wee hours feeling familiar cramps squeezing her swollen midsection.

"Nicky, wake up." She shook her lightly, then vigorously. When she still didn't awaken, she had no choice but to slap her.

"Ow!" Nicky woke up to mild pain and Lorna sitting over her. "What the fuck?"

"We need to go to the hospital."

That woke her all the way up. "Now? Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure," Lorna snapped, riding another pain. "What kind of fucking question is that?"

Nicky rolled out of bed and ran around like a nutter. They were prepared for weeks since twins usually come early, but it was still hard to believe it was really happening. They were going to be parents again, probably by the end of the day.

In record time, Lorna and a sleeping Sera were bundled into the backseat and Nicky was driving.

"How you holding up, kid?" Nicky looked back, concerned as Lorna breathed through contractions.

She kept a level head, not wanting to distract Nicky from driving. If she could drive herself to hospital, she would. Most of her deep breathing was combatting her anxiety at Nicky's driving skills.

"I'm fine, just please keep your eye on the road."

"We'll get there in thirty minutes, just hang tight."

A cramp suddenly intensified into blinding, rip-your-body-in-half pain. "Fuck! I forgot how much this hurts!"
"Are you okay?" Nicky put her foot on the gas, turning all the way round in her seat to check on Lorna. The car swerved a little.

"Oh God, we're not gonna make it," Lorna panted.

"What?" Nicky panicked. The last thing she wanted was to play midwife.

"Because your fucking driving is gonna get us all killed! Slow down and keep your fucking eyes on the fucking road!"

Nicky sheepishly turned back around and drove the rest of the way to the hospital at a sensible speed. Miraculously, they got there in one piece with time to spare. Vinnie met them to take Sera and Lorna was calm once she had an epidural. It was just a matter of watching and waiting.

After an eternity, the doctor said it was time. By this point, painkillers were starting to wear off and Lorna was a struggling, sweaty mess. Nicky tried to massage her back but she didn't even want to be touched. She had to focus.

"Push," said the doctor, counting with the contraction. "You're almost there, keep going."

Nicky squeezed her hand so tightly she was cutting off circulation. "Holy shit, you're really doing it. How are you doing that? What the fuck! We're about to be parents. Fucking hell! This is crazy!"

Lorna shot her a withering look, even through the building pain. "Breathe, Nicky."

A couple more pushes and the room filled with little cries. "It's a girl," the doctor announced. The cord was cut and the baby laid on her chest.

"She's amazing," Nicky gasped, marvelling at the tiny human. "And she's a blonde."

"She takes after you," said Lorna tearily.

"Lorna, that's not how it –" She stopped herself, not wanting to ruin things with her logic. "Yeah, that's some strong family resemblance."

It wasn't long before Lorna had to do it all again. This time it was harder with the pain fresh in her mind.

"I'm so tired," Lorna sobbed.

"You can do it," said Nicky, holding the first twin. Truly, she was in awe of Lorna powering through. It was exhausting just watching. "I love you."

Those words were the strength she needed. Lorna gritted her teeth, leaned forward and pushed the second baby out. She collapsed back onto the bed as the doctor said, finally: "It's a boy."

He was tiny and dark-haired and crying and perfect. Lorna wept as she got to hold him, her little boy.

"We have a son." Nicky was getting choked up. "Oh, he's gonna be so outnumbered."

"Okay, a promise is a promise I guess. What are their names? Bonnie and Clyde? Sonny and Cher? Mulder and Scully?"

"What about Ava and Eli?"
Lorna blinked. Suddenly Nicky was feeling defensive over her choices she'd debated for months.

"What? My one criteria was it could fit on the fucking birth certificate. It's not Scrabble, you don't get points for using all the fucking letters."

"No, I think that sounds perfect. Completely perfect."

***

Perfect didn't exist. On a cellular level, addiction never went away and Lorna had to prise that pain out of Nicky's shell all too often. And Nicky's love and attention didn't cure Lorna's mental illness, because that just wasn't how it worked. There were still bad days and hard times. Scars don't fade just because you kiss them.

But they could survive anything as long they were together. It was a different experience in a relationship that was supportive and equal. God only knows they managed with newborn twins and one child going through the terrible twos, but they did. Lorna worked on self-care and Nicky made sure she never felt overwhelmed or alone.

"I love you," said Lorna, cradling baby Eli.

Nicky balanced Ava on her shoulder. "No, I love you."

Alex interrupted their kiss. "You guys are so gross."

She and Piper, plus Franny, were at the house to meet the new additions. But the first person they'd introduced the twins to was their grandmother. Red did something Lorna never thought she'd see – cried happy tears.

"*My family is complete.*"

Silently, they both agreed. It was like a hole in their hearts had finally filled.

"Yeah, do we gotta see you two kiss all the time?" Franny was coming around to having a sister in a lesbian marriage, but sometimes that old Catholic discomfort bled through.

Lorna answered by sticking her tongue down Nicky's throat. She'd have to get used to it.

"I ship it," said Piper.

Alex groaned. "What the hell does that mean?"

"It's like, the new slang. It's not my fault you're not woke."

By the time Piper had uttered the phrase 'Netflix and chill', Nicky was kicking them all out. She and Lorna were exhausted anyway. They started to put all the kids to bed, even though it wouldn't be long before they woke up screaming for milk again.

"Mama, I want story," said Sera, as was the nightly routine. "Peppa Pig!"

Nicky thought she could listen to Lorna read the phone book but she was actually going to go crazy if she heard Peppa Pig one more time.

"Not that fucking pig brat again," Nicky blurted out, ignoring Lorna's scowl. "Oops, mom said a bad word. Uh, why don't I make up a story?"
"You can do that?" Lorna gasped.

She shot her a look that said 'anything for no more Peppa Pig'. "Uh, sure. Mommy's very creative. She was an artist in another life."

Sera settled in, but Nicky had a feeling Lorna was her more captive audience.

"Once upon a time, there was a beautiful princess. But she was locked in a tower by an evil monster. She waited and waited for a prince to come save her. But all the men who came to her tower couldn't get up the stairs. Just when she'd given up hope, she discovered she'd had the key all along."

Lorna pouted. "So she wasted her whole life trapped for no reason?"

"Yeah, but she got out and she married a swashbuckling piratess and they lived happily ever after with their three, uh, hobbits. It's a fucking metaphor, Lorna."

She nestled her head in Nicky's lap. Sera had already dozed off. "What happens next?"

"What happens after happily ever after?" They were interrupted by a baby crying, which set off the other one.

Lorna sighed and got up. "Looks like we'll never find out the ending."

Nicky followed to help her. "Isn't the surprise half the fun?"

Chapter End Notes

That's all, folks! I 1000% got carried away with this epilogue. Just consider it like a feature-length series finale or something.

I'm sad to finish this tbh. I started it after S6 and the story was meant to be like, 10 chapters of angst during an angsty time in my life. I think I was going to end it with the funeral in chapter 13. But then I wanted a happy ending and apparently it took 70 chapters to do so (if I ever write again I will actually plan it out lol). I'm glad though as has been a nice distraction. One of the main themes of this story was escape and trust me it came from a real place haha. Oh how I will miss trolling Piper, that was way more fun than it should have been.

Thanks to everyone who read this story and especially those who commented and patiently asked me to give them a fucking break week after week lol. Let me know what your favourite moment was :)

I'm looking forward to S7 now. I doubt they'll put them through as much suffering as I did, but how about that happy ending?*** IMO, there's no chance Nichorello endgame will happen at this point but I'm ready to be pleasantly surprised lol. Honestly I just want some closure and strong storylines for both characters. Pls? Otherwise I'll have to resort to fan fiction ;)

*** Edit: Just finished S7 and it ACTUALLY outdid me in the angst front. What in the hell!
Works inspired by this one: Retrieving the Compass by Lutefiskfisk, Over The Wall by NanasTeaParty

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!