

Phoenix always knew she was special. They were one of the select few people who were lucky (or unlucky, depending on how you looked at it) enough to have been born without a timer on their left wrist. To her, it never changed anything, except they were the only person they knew who didn't have a soulmate.

But that was just the way she liked it.

On her way to art class early on Monday, their best friend Gabe juttled himself into their path. "Hey, Nyx!" he greeted her. The two of them did their top-secret handshake, the one they'd kept since they were five.

"How's your grandma?" Nyx asked him once it was over, picking back up on the subjects of last night's conversation.

"Good. She's been really happy lately, her roses are bound to bloom any day now."

"Awesome! You seem hyper after last night, what's up?"

"I'm just really excited for today," Gabe whispered energetically to his pink-haired pal.

"Oh, yeah? And, uh, what's going on today?" they wondered.

"I'm meeting my soulmate, you wacko! Earth to Nyx, come on! Even Becca remembered!"

How Nyx longed to be at a concert right now. She'd settle for class, though, even if that meant schoolwork. Anything to avoid the *love* talk. But they'd keep it together for Gabe. "Cool, what'd she say?"

He shrugged. "She just told me not to worry and that things would be okay. Are you listening to me?"

"Right. Sorry, my mind was on the concert."

"CRisis? That's on Saturday! I barely have an hour left, and you're talking about this weekend?" Gabe readjusted his letterman jacket, combing his fingers through his hair nervously. Clearly, he was panicking.

Nyx rolled her eyes, sticking her tongue out. "Yeppers. We should get to class, actually. Wonder what we'll learn today."

“Please be a free period, please be a free period.” Gabe crossed his fingers, slumping into the first chair he saw. Although art class could be fun, it also had its boring moments.

Nyx made their way to the table opposite his, getting out her pencil case and two sheets of paper. Deep down, they hoped Gabe’s finger-crossing worked. They’d both been working on their essay drafts for English earlier. The two of them had been up all last night, so Nyx felt that she and her best friend deserved a break from such hard work.

“Alright, students!” Their art teacher clapped her hands once to get everyone’s attention, before picking up her see-through mug of green tea. “Since I know we’re all tired from the past few weeks, and some of us still seem to be recovering from March break, even if it was two months ago—” A few boys in the front rows snickered, causing Nyx to roll her eyes. “—so we’re going to have a free period. On one condition, though. If you shout, break anything, or don’t clean up after yourself, it’s straight to the office for you. Understood?”

A collective mutter of understoods flitted over the otherwise silent classroom.

Nyx turned to face Gabe, who checked his wrist and mouthed the words “Thirty minutes.” She nodded in reply.

Their teacher left them all to their own devices, scrolling through Twitter on her phone as she sat at her desk.

Gabe then stood up, walking over to Nyx. “Can I have those?” he asked, pointing to the two sheets of paper she’d grabbed earlier. “I’ve got an idea.”

“Knock yourself out,” they replied coolly. “So do I. I’ll need a canvas, though.”

Gabe snatched up the papers with a Cheshire-like grin, walking back over to his chair as Nyx took a deep breath, making her way over to the closet full of art supplies in search for a canvas big enough for their plan.

There! Right next to paints in every colour you could imagine while on a school budget. How perfectly convenient.

Nyx pulled down a canvas, along with green, grey, black, and red jars of paint. They almost couldn’t keep their balance, nearly toppling over before thinking to

stack the paint on top of the canvas. After all, the one she'd chosen was definitely big enough.

They plopped all the stuff down after spreading newspaper all over the table to prevent stains. Her plan was to create a piece inspired by CRisis, her favourite musician. Hence the colours she'd chosen.

He always wears that beanie onstage, they thought with glee, streaking the canvas with a single line of grey. Black and green, with the platinum stripe.

Next, green and black zigzags, taking up most of the canvas and dripping onto the newspapers below. *Thank goodness for thinking ahead.*

Finally, after a quick and effective blow-dry, she used an old toothbrush she'd found with the other paintbrushes to speckle the canvas with red, like the young singer's hair.

Before she could set it aside, Nyx was struck with an even better idea. *CRisis'll be eighteen on June 19th*, she remembered. *His new album, One, will be released then.* They recalled the album cover contest on the artist's many social media accounts. If Nyx played their cards carefully, maybe she could win!

They hurried carefully to put her painting on the drying rack. Afterwards, she cleaned up the rest of her space.

Excited, Nyx turned around to face Gabe. "Dude, guess what!" they hissed.

"Let me guess," he muttered, concentrated on whatever he was drawing. "CRisis won the lottery."

"You're hilarious. But no. Remember when I told you about the album cover contest he's having for *One*?"

"Mhm, the 'share a picture of your entry for the chance to win' one?"

"Exactly. Can I show you what I did?" Nyx fiddled with some of her bracelets. They would be proud to show Gabe the painting. Plus, his honest opinion was always appreciated.

The teen's eyes widened almost comically. "Ooh, sorry. I can't come see it right now. I actually have the perfect angle on my pencil, I'd hate to ruin that. Can I have a few more minutes?"

He was a committed artist, they'd give him that. "Gabriel, you have no idea how lucky you are. Just finish up quickly, I'm really pumped about this."

"Yep! Wait for me, okay?"

"That's the plan," came Marguerite's soft voice from behind Nyx. "Come on, you can show me your art, if you want."

"Awesome! Thanks so much, Maggie. Follow me."

Once the two were back at the table, the blonde girl took in a sharp breath at the sight of Nyx's creation. "Whoa, that's...I don't even know what word to use. Incredible, maybe, but, like, more so than average?" She phrased it like a question, using her hands to add to her point.

Nyx took a step back, folding in on themselves and looking at her shoes. "It's not really that good, I think, but thanks."

"No, no, no, it definitely is. You absolutely *have* to submit that for the contest, I swear! Here, I'll get Gabe. Just give me a second to physically pry that pencil from his hands, he needs to see this!"

"Sure," Nyx agreed, stepping in front of the canvas to shield it before the big reveal.

Two minutes later, around the time when Gabe's soulmate should have showed up, the boy in question appeared in front of his best friend, Marguerite in tow. "Okay, let me see yours first, then I'll show you what I drew. Deal?"

"Deal." With that, Nyx moved away from her canvas, looking at Marguerite for reassurance.

The girl flashed them two enthusiastic thumbs up from behind Gabe as the boy's jaw metaphorically hit the floor. "Wow, I—I mean, that's amazing. I don't know if I can show you my drawing now, though, because your masterpiece outshone it so easily."

"Shut up with the excuses, we had a deal!" they hissed in return.

Marguerite, ever the observant one, took this as a sign to leave.

Gabe huffed, grinning tiredly all the same. "Fine. Here, take it." He handed Nyx the two sheets of paper.

One bore the image of a calico cat resting in the sun atop a warm rock. It was surprisingly detailed, seeing as Nyx was able to pick out a single leaf on one of the trees and easily distinguish it from the others. Gabe was getting good at depicting leaves, something he'd been practicing.

"Nice," she muttered approvingly. "And the next one?" She waited for his permission before looking at it.

"Yeah, check it out."

It was a collection of a dozen decent-sized sketches of Nyx, the only trace of colour among them being her hot-pink, shoulder-length hair. They were pretty cool, but one in particular stood out. The one in the top right corner was of the two best friends skating at the hockey rink in the winter, twin smiles adorning their faces. It was Nyx's favourite memory.

And it seemed to be Gabe's, too. He readjusted his letterman jacket yet again, awaiting their reaction. "What do you think?" he asked gently. "Do you like it?"

"It's pretty cool, actually." They glanced up at him, concerned grey eyes locking with his anxious blue ones. "Gabe, are you okay?"

"Uh, yeah, I'm just—I'm fine, I'm fine."

"You're thinking about your soulmate," she accused him. "You didn't find them, did you?"

"No, I did."

Nyx hadn't seen anybody talk to Gabe all period, and nobody in the classroom had arrived late. It made no sense whatsoever. "Explain."

"You're my soulmate, Nyx. And I know you only see me as a best friend, I'm fine with that, but we can't just ignore fate, right? Even if you don't have a timer."

Even if you don't have a timer was usually what came after *I love you*. In her Mom's case, anyways. It sounded better from Gabe, though. "Right. So we're, what, platonic soulmates?"

The brunet seemed way more relaxed than he had been a couple seconds ago, clearly because of the lack of miscommunications. "Or just best friends forever, if that's okay with you."

Nyx grinned. "Sure, mister two-year-old."

“You suck. I thought you would have friendzoned me straight to oblivion.”

“Aw, come on, Gabe, I’m not *that* cruel. By the way, I’m keeping these drawings.” She waved them in front of his face.

“Only if you enter the *One* album cover contest.”

“Fine. You’re a pain,” they teased.

“You’re a jerk,” he countered, using Nyx’s phone to take a picture of the canvas and sending it to CRisis via Instagram. “The deal has been struck,” Gabe announced in a mock-fancy tone.

“Finally. I’m keeping my painting, by the way.”

“No, come on!”

“No, come on!” she repeated, making fun of him. “I made this thing with my own two hands and a ton of school-borrowed materials. It’s mine, unless you wanna buy it from me!”

“Maybe I will!”