

# To New Beginnings



A SWEET SHORT

ALYSSA SCHWARZ

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# To New Beginnings

BY ALYSSA SCHWARZ

To the Resident of Ivy Hills Retirement Center, room #207,

I suppose I should start off by welcoming you to the building. Despite recent days, Ivy Hills is usually a peaceful place to live. Between the amenities and different weekly activities, including a Thanksgiving meal this coming Thursday, I'm sure you'll find it a perfectly suitable residence, as do most of us here.

On to my other reason for writing. It's a matter of the barking. I realize you have only just arrived and there is a lot to get used to, but ever since you moved into the corner apartment above mine, I haven't managed a single decent night's sleep. Is it possible to convince your dog to bark a little quieter?

Signed,

Your sleep-deprived neighbor

Dear neighbor,

First off, let me apologize for Penny's barking. It's the poodle in her. Drove my Henry crazy sometimes, but he was all bark and no bite (maybe not the best choice in words, come to think of it, but you get the idea). Anyway, she really is a sweetheart once you get to know her, but I will try to reason with her not to bark between the hours of eight and six.

Between the move and all the unpacking, I seem to have misplaced my hearing aids, which explains why I haven't noticed her very vocal welcome to the neighborhood. But no matter, I'm sure I'll find them sooner or later.

Your new neighbor

P.S. The Thanksgiving meal sounds lovely, but I'll have to decline as my daughter is coming into town.

P. P.S. By the way, I'm Evelyn, but you can call me Evie.

Dear Evelyn,

It would appear Penny didn't listen to your instructions. All last night, she howled at the moon. I'm assuming you haven't found your hearing aids yet, or else you would have surely heard her as well.

I've taken the liberty of checking a book out from the library for you. Please see that it's returned within three weeks. I really don't want to be fined for a book on dog training.

Thomas

Dear Tom,

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I apologize yet again for Penny's barking. How considerate of you to think of me when you were at the library. I promise to give your book a read once I've thoroughly unpacked. In the meantime, please accept this box of earplugs as a peace offering.

Sincerely, Evie

Evelyn,

Thank you for the earplugs. They did the trick. I slept through the entire night without so much as stirring.

Thomas

P.S. How is the training coming along?

Dear Tom,

I didn't know you played the piano. You're very talented. I was hanging the last of my picture frames the other night, old family vacations and such, when I heard the music. Did you know Blue Danube is one of my favorites? Henry and I danced to it at our wedding nearly sixty years ago this Christmas, and it still manages to make me feel like a young woman again whenever I hear it.

By the way, I found my hearing aids. Or rather, Penny found them for me. Somehow, they'd rolled under the couch, and I never would have found them without her help. Now that I can finally hear her, I see what you were talking about. No worries, though. We're making our way through the book nicely. And Penny is loving all the extra treats during training.

Sincerely, Evie

Dear Evie,

I'm glad you found your hearing aids and am equally pleased to hear you enjoyed the music. These old hands don't move the way they used to, but I'm grateful to still be able to play every now and again. What other songs do you enjoy? A new piece would be a welcome distraction as the days grow shorter.

Respectfully, Thomas

Dear Tom,

What it must be like to make music sound so lovely. I tried it once, you know, but better for me to leave it to professionals like yourself. If Penny's barking didn't scare you away, my singing surely would.

You asked about other favorite songs. Would it be cheesy of me to say I adore Moon River? Maybe it is, but there's just something so beautifully romantic about it all—the moonlight, adventures, following your dreams. Whenever I need a little escape, I turn on Breakfast at Tiffany's, pull out a box of French chocolates, and all seems right in the world again.

There. Now you know just how much of a softie I truly am. Please don't hold that against me.

Sincerely, Evie

Dear Evie,

I'm sure you have a lovely voice. I once played accompaniment to a jazz singer who couldn't find a single note on the page. Now that was bad. Luckily, I haven't performed in years, so there's little risk of running into her again.

And there's nothing wrong with being sentimental. I'm afraid to say I still have a small box with my children's baby teeth packed away somewhere. Though I'll admit, I probably should have tossed that ages ago. Please don't tell anyone about that, especially if you ever meet my kids.

Sincerely, Tom

Dear Tom,

Your children's teeth? Oh, Tom, we must find you a hobby. How do you feel about origami?  
Or amateur birdwatching?

I suppose I shouldn't joke, though. I'm sure your kids will be very grateful one day to have those early childhood memories. But teeth? Really, Tom. Must I stage an intervention for you?

Your friend, Evie

Evie,

It's been quiet the past week without Penny barking. Either you've done a wonderful job training her, or you went out of town. But I'm sure I heard footsteps and a door closing the other night. Just checking in.

Your friend, Tom

Dear Tom,

Sorry, I should have mentioned that Penny and I were going out of town for a few days to visit my daughter for an early Christmas. One of her friends agreed to check on the apartment while I was away.

Merry (early) Christmas.

Evie

Dear Evie,

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas. My son and his family drove up for the day today, and then we went to my daughter's house for dinner and Christmas Eve service. It's been a while since we've all been together, and I'll have to admit it felt nice.

When they were children, my wife and I had this tradition of giving each other books on Christmas Eve. The kids always seemed to enjoy it, and it touched me to see them carry on the tradition with their own families.

You'll never guess what book I got: *The Complete Book of North American Birds*. Looks like you were right. I apologize in advance for what will surely be some terrible bird calls in the near future.

Tom

Dear Tom,

That sounds lovely! My daughter and I have a similar tradition, although instead of books, we each get to open a gift of our choosing the night before Christmas. Diane painted me the most beautiful portrait of Penny. She's a professional artist, by the way—my daughter, not the dog.

After that, we spent the day baking our favorite cookies: peanut butter blossoms for me, chocolate crinkle cookies for Diane, and snickerdoodles for Henry. I now have more cookies than I can ever eat, so I hope you'll enjoy the assorted dessert tray. I didn't know if you were more a peppermint sort of man or chocolate, so I included some candy canes and fudge squares to be sure.

Aside from that, we had a nice quiet weekend, just the two of us.

Sincerely, Evie

Dear Evie,

Thank you for the cookies. It was a welcome surprise to find them on my doorstep yesterday morning. They are all delicious, but I have to say the peanut butter ones are by far my favorite. And where in the world did you find star-shaped chocolate drops? They are absolute magic.

And good that you had that time with your daughter. Time spent with family is a gift. I know we've only known each other a short while, but I can easily say your Henry was lucky to have you.

Your friend, Tom

Dear Evie,

When I heard you crying last night, I felt utterly helpless. Would you have appreciated my company if I'd asked? I recall you mentioning your sixtieth anniversary would have been around this time, and I couldn't help but be reminded of those dark days after my own loss. Yet I cling to the hope that we'll one day see them again.

My late wife used to tell me that a little chocolate could solve any problem. I realize the numerous flaws in that logic, but on the off chance she was right, I hope these help. They're not the fancy French ones you said you liked, but I hope they'll suffice.

Your concerned friend, Tom

Dear Tom,

Isn't it strange how time moves on? It's been two years since I lost my Henry, and when I remembered what day it was, it hit me all over again. I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised. Grief does that—comes in waves when you least expect it. But so does joy. And hope.

Thank you for the chocolates. They were divine. Although I never met your wife, I think we would have gotten along splendidly.

With appreciation, Evie

Dear Evie,

I understand what you mean. As I get older, I find it ever more important to thank God for the blessings He has given us. Like your friendship.

Fondly, Tom

Dear Evie,

They've asked me to play for the New Year's Eve party. Someone must have told them my little secret. Perhaps it was you?

Anyway, I'm still deciding. Outside my little apartment, I haven't played in years, but I'll admit it's been a pleasure learning those new songs you gave me last month. I hope you've enjoyed listening to them, too. After all, it is your music selection.

Warm wishes, Tom

P.S. Perhaps I'll tell them yes, with the one caveat that I get to select a few of the songs.

My Dear Tom,

I may or may not have let something slip while talking with some of the nurses, but I hope you can forgive me. Your music, as well as your letters, have meant so much to me these past couple of months. Was it selfish of me for wanting others to hear it, too?

Warmest regards, Evie

My Dearest Evie,

There is nothing to forgive. I'm actually enjoying the practices, and I've even picked a few songs I know you'll appreciate. Maybe I can convince you to sing with me tomorrow night. And if not, I'll settle for a dance, if you're willing.

Anyway, I hope you'll be there. And if your daughter is in town, she and Penny are more than welcome to join us as well. It might not be the moonlight and magic you mentioned, but it could be an adventure for both of us.

I'm leaving you this letter, as I have to be downstairs in a few minutes for another last-minute practice. I didn't know what flower was your favorite, but I hope you like roses.

You won't be able to miss me. Just look for the funny-looking fellow sitting behind the piano with a matching rose.

Yours truly,

Tom

My Dear Tom,

I can't remember the last time I had so much fun. My face still aches from all the smiling, but I'd do it all over just to recreate that magical evening.

I'll admit, I was in a bit of a state before the party began. I won't even tell you how many dresses I tried on before settling on the midnight blue. I hope you didn't find it corny, but I felt proud wearing your rose pinned to my dress to match yours. Our little secret in a room full of people.

And the dancing ... If I'd known you danced as well as you played piano, I'd have jumped out there sooner and dragged you onto the dancefloor myself. As it stands, I thoroughly enjoyed staring starry-eyed at you and the band as you played Moon River. I know that was all you.

So thank you. For the music, the dancing, the invitation ... It was an evening I won't soon forget (my hearing may be bad but my memory is still as sharp as a tack).

And above all, thank you for the letters. As simple as they are, they have been a lifeline in a season of change. As is your friendship. The past two years haven't been easy, but meeting you is something I'll forever be grateful for.

You see, Tom. The way I see it, you asked a girl to dance for an evening, and now I'm asking you to keep dancing. Not literally, although that would surely be an adventure. I was hoping you'd agree to have lunch with me tomorrow. It is a new year, after all, and my resolution is to better get to know the resident of Ivy Hills room#107 (that would be you, of course). I'd say I'm being bold in asking, but you did take the first step with your letters and then your kind invitation. I'm merely choosing to follow you and my heart and keep on stepping.

To new beginnings.

Evie

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# *About the Author*



Alyssa is a Colorado native who attended the Colorado School of Mines, got her masters in Geological Engineering, and promptly became a watercolor artist and author (as one does). She loves writing heartfelt romances with happy endings, a bit of mystery, faith, humor, and second chances. When she's not writing, you can find her cooking, quilting, painting, or doing any number of crafty activities. Visit her website to learn more and receive a free novella when you subscribe to her newsletter.

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