

better love n x time

Written by

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FADE IN

EXT. SCOTTISH GLEN - MORNING

Frost steams off the glade as two horses run toward one another from opposite directions.

On one, NORA BARNHART (late 20's, dashing red hair, flowing white gown) with steeled determination as she approaches...

On the other, DENIS (late 20's, black, tartan kilt, straight out of Outlander), in full stride, yanks the reins and brings the horse to a full stop.

He jumps off in one fluid, almost stunt-double motion, landing square, arms out...

...as Nora jumps from her horse into his arms.

They embrace in an overly dramatic hug.

DENIS

My darling, I cannot leave you.

NORA

Then don't, my sweet love.

They kiss. *Hard.*

He swirls her into a dip, never breaking the kiss. The melted mist rises up from the ground beneath them.

He brings her back up from the dip, stares into her eyes.

DENIS

I'll never leave your side again.

(off her look)

They're coming for you.

In the distance, an ARMY ON HORSEBACK in hot pursuit.

NORA

I love you.

She closes her eyes for another kiss.

Denis opens his mouth to speak and the EXPLOSIVE sound of a JACKHAMMER fills the air.

Opens it again. The JACKHAMMER starts. His eyes widen. Panic.

Nora opens her eyes, perplexed...wtf?

INT. NORA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Nora stirs in bed, tousled red hair across her pillow, as an obnoxious jackhammer ROARS just outside her window.

Nora pulls the covers over her head as both sunlight and noise pollution blast into her bedroom.

More JACKHAMMER outside as she opens her eyes.

NORA (O.C.)

It was just getting good.

She sighs and throws off the covers, then grabs her phone next to the novel with kilt-wearing Denis on the cover.

ON PHONE

7:28 AM FEB 14

BACK TO SCENE

The noise BLASTS again and she's shocked back to reality.

NORA

I'm awake!

She glares out the window at JACKHAMMER GUY, banging away on that contraption just outside her window, then disappears into the bathroom.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - LATER

Nora hurries down the hallway to the second floor stairway, holding the door open for JOYCE CLEMENS (80's, fiesty, independent), back from her daily morning bodega run.

NORA

Morning Ms. Clemens! See you later!

JOYCE

(out of breath)

Good...morning...dear.

Joyce shuffles slowly down the hallway, as Nora disappears through the doorway and down the stairs.

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - LATER

DENIS (late 20's, black, could be on the cover of a romance novel) works on a crossword puzzle and checks his watch as the train slows toward a station.

Train comes to a stop, and he gets up and leaves the car.

EXT. NORA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Nora emerges from the lobby and out to the beautiful, crisp winter day in New York City. Sunshine on blue sky.

She closes her eyes and inhales. Smiles wide.

Then STARTLES as the ROAR of that damn jackhammer scares the shit out of her.

She GLARES at the job site, then walks the opposite way, rounds the corner, and disappears into a subway entrance.

INT. SUBWAY STATION- LATER

Nora swipes the Metrocard to enter and rushes toward the platform, barely catching the train, smiling at her luck.

A digital clock on the wall reads 8:22 as the train leaves.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - LATER

Denis walks past a BODEGA holding a coffee just as--

--Nora exits the subway staircase in front of same BODEGA with a neon \$918 Million Powerball Jackpot sign lit up.

They walk in opposite directions into busy pedestrian traffic as we follow Nora down the block until she disappears into a BAKERY.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - LATER

Nora walks with coffee and purse in one hand, large bag from the bakery in her other. She adjusts her grip on the bag and rounds the corner of her office building...

...and just misses BUSINESS GUY with earbuds in. They're so close, they both jump back, Business Guy spilling his coffee all over himself.

NORA
Oops! Sorry!

BUSINESS GUY
Hey...watch it!

Annoyed, Business Guy spins around and flips her off.

NORA
Geez, I said I was sorry!

Nora frowns, turns and walks toward the building entrance.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LATER

Nora steps out of an elevator and into the lobby of "In Any Event", greeted by LISA (20's, chirpy receptionist), buried behind vases of delivered roses and floral bouquets.

LISA
Good morning, Miss Barnhart! Crazy busy up here. Guess there's lots of making up to do since last year!

NORA
For some, yes. Any messages?

LISA
A ton of calls already.
(hands her a stack)
Warning...Charles is losing his mind about the party tonight.

NORA
He always does.

The phone rings and Lisa takes it as Nora heads down the...

HALLWAY

...and greets everyone by name as she passes out Valentines Cookies along the way.

NORA (cont'd)
Morning, Amy. Love the flowers.
Follow up on the Adler party and let me know if they change dates?
(to the left)
Love the outfit, Carlo. Can't wait to see what you bring tonight! Send me the Cassidy file, please?
(to the right)
Hey Brianne. You're so festive! How are we looking for tonight? Send me the updated report? Thanks.

(MORE)

NORA (cont'd)
 (turns, holds up the bag)
 Happy Valentine's Day, everyone!
 Eat these cookies so I don't!

She hands the bag to LEXI POOLE (28, black, spiked red tips as bright as her nails), waiting just outside her office.

LEXI
 Gimme some of that sugar.

Lexi grabs two big red heart cookies and sets the bag on a nearby table, then wipes her lips with a long fingernail.

INT. NORA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Lexi nibbles on a cookie anxiously, then hands Nora the other one as she takes off her coat.

Nora takes the heart-shaped cookie.

LEXI
 How you doin' today?

NORA
 Good, I guess.

Nora breaks the cookie in half then sets it on the desk.

LEXI
 It's just...you know, Valentine's
 Day and I worry about you, is all.

Nora doesn't look up as she empties her purse next to the cookie: phone, note book, this week's romance novel.

NORA
 My only worry is the Gala. If it's
 not perfect...or if I forgot
 something, then no promotion.

LEXI
 You've put your whole heart into
 it. We all have. I'm more concerned
 about you. Today has to hurt.

Nora takes a moment, collects herself. Looks at Lexi, eyes stung by a distant sadness.

NORA
 What happened with Chad is in the
 past. He broke off the engagement.
 I don't think about him anymore.

(MORE)

NORA (cont'd)
 (taps book)
 I've moved on to Denis. And Ramon.
 And Juan. And--

LEXI
 --Yeah, well, now that COVID's over
 and we can all get back out there
 again for real, maybe it's time for
 you to get back out there, too? Get
 out from behind those books and
 maybe find love again. Real love?

NORA
 Get real. I have as much chance as
 finding real love as I do winning
 Powerball tonight.

LEXI
 Gotta be in it to win it, girl.

Lexi takes a bite of cookie, wipes frosting off her lips.

LEXI (cont'd)
 (chewing)
 By the way, you see Charles yet? I
 think he's finally lost his mind.

Lexi makes an explosion motion over her head.

NORA
 I'm sure he'll find me when-

CHARLES (O.S.)
 Thank God in Heaven, you're here.

Enter CHARLES NIEMAN (late 50's, gray hair, permanent stress wrinkles on forehead), rushing through the door and interrupting Lexi's sugar cookie and coffee breakfast.

He looks at Lexi...still chewing...then turns back to Nora.

CHARLES
 (to Lexi)
 Excuse me, Lexi...
 (to Nora)
 Please tell me we are all set for
 tonight. I can't express the
 importance of everything going-

Nora is way ahead of him, as she circles around the other side of Lexi...who's still chewing...toward the door.

NORA
 Charles, take a breath.

She steps just outside her office and grabs a frosted Cupid cookie, still talking.

NORA (cont'd)
 (re-enters office)
 It's all set. I'm heading to the hotel soon to check on the final touches.

CHARLES
 Yes, but the fundraiser is critical to all the families in need, not to mention there might be a promotion, and this--

She hands the cookie to Charles.

NORA
 --and this is the first big post-COVID party for everyone. The fundraiser will be gigantic. So, take a deep breath, relax and have a cookie.

He takes the cookie.

CHARLES
 Call me after the sign off?

NORA
 Of course. See you tonight.

Charles takes a bite and smiles. Then heads back out.

LEXI
 Girl, you need to teach a Masterclass in that calming shit. You would make bank.

NORA
 He just needed some sugar.

LEXI
 Don't we all.

Lexi takes another bite.

NORA
 Do me a favor? Send me the final RSVP's and client lists? I'll review when I'm there. In fact...

Nora grabs her coat and puts it back on. Lexi follows with her eyes as she keeps eating.

NORA (cont'd)
 ...I might as well just go now.
 He'll never leave me alone if I
 stay here. Email me that info?

LEXI
 I got you.

Nora re-packs her purse and heads out.

LEXI (cont'd)
 Hey, stop by early and we'll all go
 together. Jim got us a limo!

NORA
 Be there at six! Text you later!

And she's gone.

Lexi stays right where she's been sitting all along, then
 takes another big bite of that heart shaped cookie.

LEXI
 So good.

Cleans the frosting off her lips.

EXT. NORA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

She rounds the corner with a garment bag over her shoulder
 and shopping bag in hand as the construction crew packs up
 for the day. Jackhammer Guy loads the tools on the truck.

She catches his eye...his muscles...and he catches hers.

She stops in her tracks.

Points at her watch. Points at her window just above where
 he is standing. Then puts her hands together, closes her
 eyes and rests her head on them like a little pillow.

Opens her eyes...pleading. Hands together in prayer.

He chuckles. Points at his watch. Then the city truck.
 Shrugs his shoulders.

She laughs and heads inside.

NORA
 Had to try!

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Holding one bag in her mouth, she opens her mailbox.

Pulls out a SINGLE RED ENVELOPE. She flips it over. Blank.

NORA

Hmmm.

She closes the box, re-distributes the bags, and disappears up the stairway.

INT. NORA'S APARTMENT - LATER

She swings the door open and places the bags down on the nearest chair, while fishing out the envelope.

She flips it around, curious as she walks into the kitchen and opens the envelope, pulls out a Glittery Red Heart card.

NORA

Aww, so cute.

She opens the card and...BAM!!

A CLOUD of RED GLITTER explodes in her face. Her hair. Over her shoulder. On the counter. On the floor. Everywhere.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NORA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The obnoxious jackhammer ROARS from outside the window.

Nora looks toward the noise pollution blasting into her bedroom. Irritated...and a bit confused.

NORA

What the...

She sits up in bed. Looks toward the noise. Then picks up her phone and looks at it.

ON PHONE

7:28 AM FEB 14

BACK TO SCENE

Now very, definitely confused.

NORA
 ...fuuuu--

The NOISE blasts again outside, shakes her from thought.

NORA (cont'd)
 Alright! Alright!

She gets out of bed and disappears into the bathroom.

INT. LOBBY - LATER

As Nora enters from the stairwell, she passes Joyce, grocery bag in hand, headed right for her.

Same outfit as yesterday.

JOYCE
 Good morning, dear.

Nora pauses a moment...looks to the top of the stairwell, and then back at Joyce. *Deja vu?*

NORA
 Morning Ms. Clemens. See you later.

JOYCE
 You too.

Nora stops to watch Joyce pass into the stairwell, then spies over at the mailboxes. *I wonder...*

She walks over to the mailbox, takes out her key. Opens it.

Pulls out a single RED ENVELOPE.

NORA
 No way!

She RIPS open the envelope and--

BAM!! GLITTER BOMB!

Red glitter explodes from the envelope all over her face and hair and shoulders and--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NORA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The obnoxious jackhammer ROARS from outside the window.

Nora sits up in a panic.

NORA
Holy shit.

Reaches over and grabs her phone. Stares at it.

The NOISE from outside JARS her back to reality.

NORA (cont'd)
Holy shit.

She jumps out of bed, grabs some clothes, then disappears into the bathroom.

INT. NORA'S APARTMENT - LATER

She rushes past the art deco wall clock in the kitchen which reads 7:50 and out the door.

INT. LOBBY - LATER

Nora speeds out the stairwell and rushes to the mailbox.

Opens the mailbox. The RED ENVELOPE.

NORA
Holy shit.

She stuffs it in her purse, slams the door shut, heads out.

EXT. NORA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Nora hurries around the corner toward the subway entrance, and spies Joyce walking toward her way down the street.

NORA
Morning Ms. Clemens! See you later!

Joyce barely notices as she waves from afar.

INT. SUBWAY STATION - LATER

She waits on the platform, anxious. Looks around, notices the digital clock. It reads 8:08.

The train rushes in, comes to a stop, and she gets in.

Moments later, the doors close and the subway heads out.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - LATER

Nora walks with purpose as she rounds the corner of her office building...

...and plows SMACK into Denis. Coffee spills down the front of his coat, as Nora falls backwards. Denis drops his papers and reaches out for her instead...

DENIS
Ooh, careful...

NORA
I'm so sorry-

...catching her before she falls down.

DENIS
So sorry...you okay?

NORA
Oh, no, my fault. Really.

Denis helps her up and they collect themselves.

NORA (cont'd)
I've ruined your coat.

DENIS
No, not at all. I'll clean it up at the bakery-

NORA
(points)
-right down there.

DENIS
(points)
-right down there.

DENIS (cont'd)
That's the one. I'm Denis.

NORA
Nora.

They shake hands, eyes never leaving each other.

DENIS
Like I said, the bakery. Can I get you a coffee?

NORA
A coffee?

DENIS
You know, hot morning beverage? Sometimes we wear it?

He points toward his coat...then the bakery.

Suddenly remembers where she was headed. What's going on.

NORA

Oh..um..coffee. Yeah, thanks, can't right now. Sorry about your coat!

DENIS

It's fine. Happy Valentine's Day.

NORA

Bye!

Nora hurries off toward the office building as Denis checks his watch and looks over his shoulder at Nora as he does.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LATER

Nora steps out of the elevator and zips past Lisa, buried behind the growing wall of flowers.

LISA

Good morning, Miss Barnhart! Crazy busy up here. Guess there's lots of making up to do since last year!

She holds up the messages but Nora is already down the-

HALLWAY

- heading toward her office.

Nora rushes over to Lexi's cubicle and startles her.

NORA

Lex...I need you.

LEXI

Oh sugar, I need you too. Where are the cookies?

NORA

(pulls out envelope)
You won't believe what's happening.
Open this.

LEXI

You shouldn't have!

Lexi takes the envelope and opens it up.

Nora flinches as she does.

Lexi notices Nora's flinch.

LEXI (cont'd)
What? What happens?

NORA
Nothing. Go on. Open it.

Lexi pulls out the card...the red glittery heart.

LEXI
You know I love sparkles.

Lexi opens it.

Nora flinches again.

Lexi notices Nora's flinch again.

LEXI (cont'd)
What is it?!

Nora waves her off.

LEXI (cont'd)
Aww babe...I love you too. You got
true love right here. You know it.

She stands and hugs her. Nora is stiff as a board. Totally confused. *Where's the glitter?*

They separate and Nora takes the card from her.

LEXI (cont'd)
Is everything okay? Is it Chad?

NORA
Chad? No. It's-

Curious, Nora opens it and...

BAM!! GLITTER BOMB!

The red GLITTER BOMB explodes in Nora's face.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NORA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The obnoxious jackhammer ROARS from outside the window.

Nora sits up, slamming her fists on the bed.

NORA

Oh, c'mon!

Reaches for her phone, jumps out of bed, and hustles into the bathroom while the NOISE chatters on outside.

MONTAGE OF MORNING ROUTINE

- Nora stops at mailbox. Pulls out the RED ENVELOPE. Stuffs it in her purse and rushes out.
- Nora waves at Joyce as she heads down the subway entrance.
- Sits anxious on the subway, trying to avoid the PERFORMER magician on the car.
- Exits the subway entrance outside the bodega and rushes down the crowded pedestrian walkway.
- She passes the bakery full speed, eyes forward.
- We stay at the bakery door for a moment as--
- Denis walks out with a coffee. Looks down at his watch, confused. Then walks the opposite direction from Nora.

END MONTAGE

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LATER

Nora steps out of the elevator and zips past Lisa, buried behind the growing wall of flowers.

LISA

Good morning, Miss Barnhart! Cra--

She holds up the stack of messages but Nora is already--

HALLWAY

-- heading toward her office.

Nora rushes over to Lexi's cubicle, startles her when she grabs her hand and drags her into-

NORA'S OFFICE

- then turns and stares into Lexi's eyes. Panic.