

Chapter 59

Chapter 59 takes the reader through an emotional journey of healing, reconnection, and a bittersweet realization of love and time lost. Connor found her way back to life on the rocky shores of Aldiz, her recovery a slow but steady process, like a flower slowly blooming after a long winter. She enjoyed the simple pleasures of playing Scrabble with Celia and, as promised, joined Evelyn for dinner every evening. Sometimes, she even arrived early to help in the kitchen, rolling out tortillas from scratch or stirring a pot of caldo gallego, a traditional Galician broth passed down from Evelyn's mother. Each of these small actions symbolized her gradual reawakening, a return to something more stable, more whole.

Surprisingly, the person Connor gravitated toward the most was Robert, the easygoing, silver-haired man with a broad frame and a gentle nature. At first, Robert had no idea how to interact with a teenage girl—he was hesitant, even a bit intimidated, unsure of what to say or how to connect. But rather than letting the silence stretch between them, it was Connor who reached out first, asking him to teach her how to play poker, to share insights about finance, or even to take her fishing. Slowly, a bond formed between them, one that neither of them had anticipated. Robert never replaced Harry in Connor's life—no one ever could—but in his own way, he offered a quiet stability, a sense of comfort that helped ease her grief. She sought out his advice, bought him a sweater for his birthday, and let him into her life in small but meaningful ways.

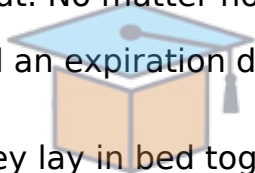
Robert, in turn, showed his care through actions rather than words—painting her bedroom, preparing her favorite barbecue ribs on weekends, and offering support without ever demanding it. With time, Connor began to rebuild her trust in the world, allowing herself to believe that opening her heart again was not a mistake. Her teenage years, marked by the deep wounds of losing her father, had left scars that

would never fully fade. But Evelyn saw the changes—Connor stopped reckless partying, began focusing on school, and started achieving A's and B's. When she received her acceptance letter to Stanford, Evelyn looked at her daughter and realized that she had raised a young woman who was grounded, strong, and ready to take on the world.

The night before Evelyn and Connor left for the United States to move her into college, Celia, Robert, and Evelyn took her out for dinner by the water. The small seaside restaurant was cozy and intimate, the air filled with the scent of salt and grilled seafood. Robert handed Connor a neatly wrapped gift, a poker set, and grinned as he told her, "Take everybody's money, like you've been taking mine with all those flushes." Connor, with a mischievous glint in her eye, quipped, "And then you can help me invest it." The exchange was simple, but it encapsulated the warmth and connection they had built over time. Though Robert always insisted he married Evelyn for Celia, Evelyn suspected that, deep down, he had also done it to be part of a family, to experience a kind of stability that had always eluded him. While he was never meant to settle down with one woman, this unconventional arrangement had given him something meaningful, something he may not have realized he wanted until he had it.

With Connor off at Stanford and returning only for breaks, Evelyn and Celia finally had the chance to experience the life they had always dreamed of—free from scrutiny, free from the pressures of Hollywood. Without the prying eyes of the media, their days in Spain were peaceful, spent walking along the beach, reading newspapers on their balcony, and savoring the simple joy of just being together. For the first time in decades, they were able to love each other openly, without fear of judgment or scandal. Evelyn felt an overwhelming sense of peace waking up beside Celia every morning, watching the sunrise illuminate her golden hair as it fanned across the pillow. These were the moments she had longed for, the ones she had fought so hard to reach.

As the years passed, Evelyn found herself reconnecting with the language of her youth, embracing Spanish once more—at first out of necessity, but eventually out of pride. She enjoyed challenging Celia and Robert to piece together what she was saying with their limited Spanish skills, laughing as they tried to keep up. It felt like rediscovering a part of herself she had buried long ago, a part that had been waiting patiently to be revived. But even in the beauty of these moments, there was an unspoken truth hanging over them like a dark cloud—Celia's health was failing, and time was running out. No matter how perfect their days seemed, Evelyn knew that their happiness had an expiration date.



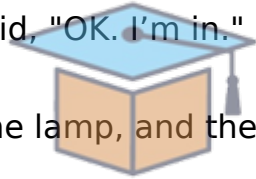
One evening, as they lay in bed together in the darkness, Celia whispered a painful confession. "I know I shouldn't," she said, voice thick with regret, "but sometimes I get so mad at us for all the years we lost." The weight of missed time, of love wasted on fear and circumstance, settled over them like a heavy fog. Evelyn reached for her hand, squeezing it tightly. "I know," she whispered back, feeling the same ache deep in her bones. Celia's voice cracked as she asked, "If we loved each other this much, why couldn't we have made it work sooner?"

Evelyn thought for a moment before answering. "We did," she said softly. "We're here now." But Celia shook her head. "But all the years, Evelyn. All the years we wasted." They both knew the truth—they had fought so hard against themselves, against the world, against the expectations placed upon them. The world had made their love difficult, forcing them into silence, into separations that had cost them so much. Celia sighed. "Being yourself—your true, entire self—will always feel like swimming upstream." But even then, she admitted, "The last few years with you have felt like taking your bra off at the end of the day." Evelyn laughed at the comparison, even as her heart ached.

At that moment, the fear of losing Celia again, this time permanently, was unbearable. The thought of a world without Celia in it was a nightmare Evelyn couldn't face. She had lost her before, but this time, there would be no chance to get her back. And so, without hesitation, Evelyn blurted out the only thing that made sense. "Will you marry

me?" Celia laughed at first, assuming she was joking, but Evelyn stopped her. "I'm serious. I want to marry you. Seven marriages in, shouldn't I finally get to marry the love of my life?"

Celia shook her head, her voice tinged with sadness. "We both know that's not possible." But Evelyn wouldn't accept that. "Marriage is just a promise," she insisted. "Who needs legal documents or witnesses? All we need is each other." Celia was quiet for a long time, considering the weight of what Evelyn was saying. And then, at last, she exhaled and said, "OK. I'm in."



Summary

Evelyn turned on the lamp, and they sat up in bed, facing each other, holding hands as they performed their own private wedding ceremony. In that moment, there were no tabloids, no agents, no judgmental whispers—just the two of them, promising each other forever. Evelyn looked into Celia's eyes and asked, "Do you, Celia, take me, Evelyn, to be your wife? In sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, till death do us part?" Celia's lips curled into a small smile, her eyes glassy with emotion. "I do." Evelyn repeated the words back to her, sealing the moment with a quiet but powerful "I do."

Then Evelyn frowned. "Wait—we don't have rings."