

*Vexing
Happiness*
by Lexi Yang

SCENE ONE - OUTSIDE

We begin...

NOVA sits on a bench. She is wearing a party hat and a big pin that says "17". She writes in a green journal.

NOVA. Dear Journal, happy birthday. This has been an... interesting few years together. I remember getting you. I had on that hideous pink polka dot dress that I was convinced was the peak of fashion. And you were wrapped in that awful galaxy paper that looked like it was made straight off someone's home printer, and then you were given to me by my— by Xander. The thought of him here, at my home, it's— it's unthinkable. So I'm sure you're not surprised to hear that he didn't even show up today. We were supposed to talk it out, all of this shit that went down between us. And I remember that last time we spoke, I remember the day exactly. It was dark out, cold, the stars were muted. Xander made me go to this party with him, he always wanted me to go with him. But I'm not really a party girl so we spent most of the night talking and laughing, and just being ourselves all on our own. And he told me we'd always be friends and then— then he left. He didn't even give me a ride home. George did. It was the first time I'd ever really spoken to George. But I just— I don't get it. Xander said he was leaving for drinks, said he'd be back. But he didn't come back. And he never spoke to me again. Not until yesterday at least, when I finally said "Look, let's just settle this." And he agreed. We were supposed to fix everything, but no, he didn't even show up. We've been through so much together. We were besties in kindergarten, we were in that fairytale play in 8th grade, and he made me join that *stupid* club in high school. He talked me through every bad boy decision I made, even— He's helped me through the worst parts of my life. That's why he gave me, well, you. I loved him with my whole heart, but did he—

GEORGE enters. He is holding a small gift bag.

NOVA stands and they embrace. She removes her Birthday hat.

GEORGE. Happy Birthday Nova, am I early?

NOVA. Oh George, you're here! Everyone is inside, I just needed a breather. Thank you for coming.

GEORGE. Xander didn't show, did he?

NOVA sits down, she places her journal beside her.

NOVA. He did not. God, I really got my hopes up for nothing. I thought— I hoped— Well, I thought maybe this time it would be different.

GEORGE. I'm sorry, I don't understand that guy. I never have. I can't even imagine doing that.

NOVA. God, I just— I don't know.

NOVA begins to cry. GEORGE sits next to her. He places a hand on her shoulder and sets her present down.

GEORGE. Oh no— don't cry for him. He doesn't deserve your tears. You're too good for him.

NOVA. Somehow I don't think that will make them go away.

GEORGE. I wish Xander did show up so I could kick his ass. He really did a number on you, huh? Come on, wipe those tears away. I miss hearing you laugh, after one chuckle I'm fucked for the whole night. It's such a great sound and I miss it.

NOVA. I miss... him.

GEORGE. Come on, what can I do to make you laugh?

NOVA. I dunno.

GEORGE hands her the present he brought.

GEORGE. Open it.

NOVA. Right now?

GEORGE nods. NOVA grabs the bag and takes out the tissue paper inside it. After digging around in the bag for a moment, NOVA gasps. She pulls out a small, pink journal.

NOVA. George, this is so cool!

GEORGE. I thought you might be running out of space in that old one. Plus, this one suits you better.

NOVA. It's really nice. Thank you.

GEORGE. Are you excited to start using it?

NOVA. Well, I have to finish up the other one first.

GEORGE. Oh, I thought maybe you could go straight to this one. Why would you *choose* to use Xander's?

NOVA. I don't wanna be wasteful, and it is a nice journal. I've just had it for so long. It's *my* journal, you know?

GEORGE. Right.

NOVA. I guess you have a point though. It's another part of Xander that's stuck in my life.

GEORGE. Let's forget about him, he doesn't deserve your thoughts.

NOVA. Yeah.

GEORGE. You know, you deserve relationships with people who actually want to talk to you. I want to talk to you. I'm right here, always.

NOVA. Thanks George.

GEORGE. It sucks, but you have to accept the fact that he's not coming back for you.

NOVA. I know.

GEORGE. I think your love for him blinds you sometimes.

NOVA. I do not—

GEORGE. Still, Nova, I don't understand him. I never have.

NOVA. Honestly, I don't either. I thought I did. I thought I knew everything about him, but I didn't. I don't know him at all.

GEORGE. Exactly, that's why I don't understand why you want him.

NOVA. Well I don't *want* him, I just want to—

GEORGE. Nova, I'm sorry he left you. I'd never even dream of doing that. I waited years to even be your friend. I won't give that up for anything.

GEORGE grabs NOVA's hand gently.

NOVA. George—

GEORGE. Unlike him, I was actually thinking of you earlier. I think about you all the time. I think about the first time we hung out, and you helped me with my math, I think? You're like my personal tutor. I love remembering that sort of thing. Like those moments where I catch you looking at me, and then when I look at you, you turn away. But I see you. I always see you.

NOVA tries to move GEORGE'S hand, but he just takes both of her hands in his instead.

NOVA. I think you might be misunderstanding what—

GEORGE. You don't need to deny it. I want you to be happy, and I know you'll be happy with me. God, I can't hold it in any longer. I admit it, I think you're just so cute. Beautiful, pretty, hot, even foxy. I could go on.

NOVA tries to move away from him, and he stops her.

GEORGE (CONT.) Oh, um, was that weird? Sorry, I wasn't planning to admit this today, on your birthday, but I like you, Nova. I just want... you. I want you. I'm sorry if I sound crazy, I just admire you so much. Everytime I see you I wish I knew what to do to make this all better. I'd do anything for you. You make me so happy, god, you make me *nervous*.

NOVA. George, really, I—

GEORGE. I just want you.

GEORGE attempts to kiss NOVA. She pulls away quickly and stands up. GEORGE does not seem to realize how strange his actions have been. He stands up.

GEORGE (*CONT.*) Nova—

She puts her hand out in between them.

NOVA. I wasn't— This isn't—I... appreciate you feeling comfortable enough to share your feelings with me, but I don't reciprocate them. I only see you as a friend, a good friend. We're *friends*.

GEORGE. (*pause*) I see I may have misread some signs. Maybe I was just hopeful.

NOVA. Oh, George. It's alright, I guess. It's just how you feel, there's nothing wrong with that.

GEORGE. Yeah, but I thought we were hitting it off. I know we were. From the day we became friends, you *liked* me. Why else would you be so nice to me? You defended me, you respected me. You can't seriously expect me to believe you didn't love me from the beginning? I want us to be honest with each other. Is that so wrong? Am I a terrible person for that?

GEORGE takes a step forward, walking into her hand for a second. She quickly removes it from his chest.

GEORGE (*CONT.*) Or are you joking around? Come on, don't play with my feelings like that.

He smirks, trying to be playful.

GEORGE (*CONT.*) Don't pull a Xander on me.

NOVA. How dare you say that? This is nothing like what happened between me and Xander. I *don't* have romantic feelings for you. What about that is hard to grasp? I'm done with this, and I'm done with you.

She starts to walk away.

NOVA (*CONT.*) I'm going inside, and I'd appreciate it if you kept your hands to yourself.

GEORGE grabs her arm as she walks past him. His grip is tight, too tight.

NOVA (CONT.) Let go. Now. This isn't funny George.

NOVA tries to pull her arm away from him.

GEORGE. I can't believe this. You're serious? You want to just, what, leave me? You're saying I messed it all up. But no, you were supposed to be excited about this! God, this is a hell of my own design.

NOVA. Let go of my arm.

GEORGE pulls her closer to him, wrapping her in his arms. Her back is touching his chest, and her arms are trapped at her sides.

GEORGE. How is it that I'm always alone? Xander doesn't deserve you.

NOVA. Xander has nothing to do with this. Please, just let me go.

GEORGE. I wish we could start all over.

He lays his head on top of hers. He smells her hair. NOVA begins to cry.

NOVA. George, stop. Please.

GEORGE. How did this start and end all at the same time? Nova, I just want you. You're all I ever wanted. I want you to be mine. You... You're mine.

GEORGE kisses NOVA's cheek. He lifts one hand off of her to stroke her hair. NOVA sees this as an opportunity to escape, and she tries to run from him.

GEORGE. (CONT.) Get back here!

He pulls her back in by her arm, but she punches him. He stumbles backwards, and she falls to the ground, hitting her head on the bench. She tries to get up, but her head is bleeding. She falls back down. She can't speak. She can't run.

GEORGE (*CONT.*) Nova... I just want you. I love you.

GEORGE gets on top of NOVA. He strokes her hair. When his hand leaves her head it is covered in blood. He smiles.

GEORGE (*CONT.*) Well, I've waited this long.

He leans down to kiss her, but XANDER enters.

XANDER. Nova, I'm here— What the— Get off of her!

XANDER pulls GEORGE off of NOVA.

GEORGE shoves XANDER away from her.

GEORGE. Xander, you've got a lot of nerve showing your face around here. What, you finally decided she's good enough for you?

XANDER. Shut up.

XANDER shoves him.

XANDER (*CONT.*) What did you do to her? I swear to god, you better run George. I'll kill you, I will.

GEORGE. As if.

GEORGE shoves him back.

GEORGE (*CONT.*) You've always been all talk. You're just mad I got her first.

XANDER. Shut the fuck up.

GEORGE. How about you get on your way so I can go back to having some fun—

XANDER punches GEORGE. GEORGE tries to hit him back, but XANDER throws him to the ground.

XANDER. Nova is mine.

With GEORGE down, XANDER runs to NOVA.

XANDER (*CONT.*) Nova!

NOVA. Xander—

*NOVA tries to reach for XANDER, and he takes
her hand. GEORGE slowly stands, disoriented.
He limps away from them slowly.*

XANDER. No, don't speak! Just hold on. Please!

He tries to stop the bleeding on her head.

XANDER (*CONT.*) Don't worry. You'll be fine. God, Nova.

*NOVA closes her eyes. GEORGE turns back to
look at them.*

NOVA. Xander—

XANDER. Nova? Nova!

Blackout.