

## BONUS EPILOGUE 1

Denny and Rosie from *Full-On Clinger*

### ROSIE

“You’re beautiful.”

I glance over my shoulder to see my new husband—husband!—where he leans on the door frame to my childhood bedroom. My belly swoops, just like it has every time I’ve laid eyes on Denver Brooks since I was old enough to know what a crush was.

“You’re not so bad yourself,” I respond, turning to face him. I don’t miss how his eyes trail down my body. It makes me want to laugh because he looks at me the same way whether I’m wearing a swimsuit, a wedding gown, or a pair of yoga pants like right now. Mamá was appalled I changed into such casual clothes after the reception, but comfort is critical for our drive to the hotel in Charlotte. We’re catching a flight to Costa Rica in the morning, and I can’t wait to lie on the beach and go exploring with my husband.

Denny runs a hand through his light brown locks, returning them to the tousled look that’s a personal favorite of mine. He tamed them for the ceremony, making Mamá and Ginny fawn all over him, but this is the Denny I know and love.

He steps from the doorway, closing the distance between us and taking my hips in his hands before dropping the sweetest of kisses on my lips. Before I can get any ideas, though, he whispers, “We have a tiny problem.”

I pull my head back to look up at him. “Please don’t tell me Mamá booked herself on our flight.” For a woman demanding grandchildren at a speed defying the laws of nature, she sure does love to get all up in our space. We’ve been sharing an apartment for a couple years now, and I swear she’s there enough to be on the lease.

“Bite your tongue.” Denny looks terrified at the notion. “That would classify as a catastrophe, not a tiny problem.”

“Phew. Okay, then, what’s this problem?”

He gives my hips a squeeze and lays it out, “Your dad has a wedding gift for us.”

Half the blood drains from my face, and I grip Denny’s arms to keep me steady.

“No.”

Denny winces. “Yes.” But is that a hint of a smile I spot there? Dammit.

“Don’t you dare smile! I thought we’d dodged this bullet.”

He merely rolls his lips between his teeth to keep his smile at bay while he shakes his head.

“Bird?” I ask, going for optimism.

My husband shakes his head again, eyes starting to twinkle with mirth.

“Chipmunk?” Again, probably aiming way too high.

Another shake, and then he decides to put me out of my misery. “Racoons.”

I gasp.

“Two,” he continues in a rush, getting it over with. “Wedding gown, veil, tuxedo, top hat. The works.”

I plonk my forehead into Denny’s firm, T-shirt-covered chest. “Oh my god.”

“Yeah.” Denny is laughing outright now, the shaking of his chest making my head vibrate.

“Look at it this way; it’ll be a conversation piece.”

I only groan in response. My father has a batshit crazy taxidermy hobby and thinks it’s “charming” to anthropomorphize dead animals into quaint little slice-of-life scenes to give as gifts. Gifts he expects to be displayed in spots of prominence in the recipient’s home. Which means Denny and I will come home from our honeymoon to a pair of giant frozen raccoons mounted on our coffee table, exchanging wedding vows in perpetuity.

“But I told him the reception was gift enough!” I plead although it will do no good.

“Yeah, well, he loves you.”

This has me squinting up at my groom. I’m about to make another snarky comment when I catch the smallest hint of an expression I recognize. It doesn’t show up as often as it used to, but it still has new words springing to my tongue as I cast aside all thoughts of gross raccoons.

“Yeah, he does.” I don’t have to say more because he knows what I mean. His dad couldn’t be here today to see us married, something Denny would have given anything for.

So, instead, I ask, “What would your dad have said to you today?”

This has Denny’s lips quirking again. “He would have said, ‘Treat her right or I’ll have your ass.’”

I bark out a laugh at that and then wrap Denny in my arms with a big squeeze. I love how solid and warm he is. I love how he always has one eye on me, making sure I'm good. And I love how he looks at me like he can't believe he wasted so much time pushing me away.

"Well, then he can rest easy because I know without a doubt that you'll always treat me right, Mr. Brooks," I murmur into his shoulder.

"I love you so damn much, Rosie Brooks, and don't you ever forget it."

"I love you too, and I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you... and those damn raccoons."

Denny laughs and then captures my lips in a kiss full of promises for our future.

## BONUS EPILOGUE 2

Cash and Hollis from *Ale's Fair in Love and War*

### CASH

"It's a party. What in the world has you frowning so hard?"

I don't answer Hollis; instead, I ask my own question. "Who is that guy?"

Her eyes follow the direction of mine to where Mama stands beside an older man across the lawn. She's turned to him, talking a mile a minute as usual, and he's laughing at whatever she's saying.

"Oh. That's Desmond."

I shift my gaze to my girlfriend and get momentarily distracted by the plunging neckline of her bridesmaid's getup. Damn, can she fill out a dress. Her neck practically begs me to bury my face in it with her hair pulled up in that fancy updo like that. Maybe we should ditch the reception and head back to her apartment. The dogs are probably missing us anyway.

But I still want to find out who this guy is. "Desmond who?"

Hollis shrugs. "I don't know his last name, but he's the fire chief. Denny knows him from work."

I take another look, still not recognizing the man. But I suppose that's not surprising since I rarely hang out with Denny's Water Rescue crew. Mama drops her napkin to the lawn, and

the Desmond guy retrieves it like some Victorian gentleman rescuing a damsel's dropped hanky. Jesus.

"I think somebody's got a crush," Hollis says in a sing-song tone that has my brows tightening.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Hollis moves in closer like she's sharing a secret. "See the way Ginny is turned into him. That's a clear sign that she's open to flirting. And there! See how Desmond is looking her right in the eye while she talks? That's showing more than a passing interest."

"He's way too old for her!" I practically shout, forcing Hollis to yank me by the arm all the way over to Mama's back porch. Miller shakes his head at me as we pass, so I glare at him.

Hollis makes no secret of either her exasperation or her amusement at my freakout. "Do you want to talk about this?" Oh, she's enjoying my pain.

"No. I want to drink a beer and stare at your boobs for the rest of the night until we can get out of here."

Hollis snorts. "Okay, but you know your mom is still a living, breathing woman, right?"

I might growl a little at that, but she's undeterred.

"And there will probably come a time—maybe very soon—when she might want to explore a new relationship."

I definitely growl that time, and it has Hollis perching her hands on her hips.

"Do you really want her to be alone for the next thirty years, Cash?"

I look over at Mama and this Desmond guy again. Now they're both laughing. Damn. "No," I admit with some reluctance. "But she has us."

Hollis blinks at me. "Do you actually hear yourself right now?"

Unfortunately, I do. So, I sling an arm around my girlfriend's shoulder and sigh in resignation. "I'm an idiot."

"But you're my idiot." She grins at me and goes up on her toes to drop a kiss on my cheek. She smells like sweet fruit and vanilla, as always.

"Thank God for that. Can we at least do a background check on this Desmond guy, though?"

“Sure. No problem.” She gives me a squeeze and we release each other so she’s facing me again. “Besides, it’s always smart to do background checks on anyone who will be around your kid regularly.”

I choke out a laugh at that one. “I think we’re all old enough to take care of ourselves, Peach, but I appreciate the support. Now that you mention it, though, we can never be too careful with Betty—or Marco and Polo.”

“I wasn’t talking about the dogs—or *you*—you big doofus.”

I wait for her to explain, which she doesn’t. Then it hits me. “Holy shit! Is Rosie knocked up already? I *knew* they were rushing this wedding!” Well, that last part is bullshit; those two should have gotten hitched ages ago. I turn to try and pick Denny out of the crowd. I’m gonna wring his neck for not telling me I’m gonna be an uncle!

Hollis sighs, her voice coming from behind me. “I honestly don’t know what to do with you sometimes, but at least I know our baby will always be safe with you at the helm.”

My head goes light at her words before all the blood in my body rushes to my chest. I spin around on my heel. “*Our?*”

She bites her lip as she nods.

“*Baby?*” I’m reduced to one-word sentences.

A brilliant smile curves Hollis’s lips, and my jaw drops as I close the distance between us and pull her into my chest. Fuck, she’s beautiful.

“But... *how?*” Yeah, I hope our kid gets Hollis’s brains. “I mean... I know how. But... *how?*” She’s on the pill—although we do fuck like rabbits, so I suppose the odds were stacked against us in the end.

She shrugs in my arms, looking up at me. “Your swimmers must be Olympic-level.”

When my smile turns smug, she smacks my chest.

“I’ve heard pregnancy hormones make some women violent,” I murmur like I’m whispering sweet nothings.

“I guess you’ll find out, won’t you?”

I drop my head back and laugh before straightening and pressing my forehead against Hollis’s. “We’re having a baby.”

Her smile is everything sweet and perfect when she responds, “Yeah.”

“Let’s go home and tell Betty she’s gonna be an aunt.”

“Right after you kiss me,” Hollis demands with a laugh.

And I’m only too happy to comply.

## BONUS EPILOGUE 3

### Carter and Sunny from *Smooth Hoperator*

#### **SUNNY**

“I’m thinking of taking over the *Dear Mona* column again,” I announce to the entire living room. It’s only Carter, Duke, and my gnome collection, but my voice rings loud and true, nonetheless.

“Uh...” is Carter’s only reply.

“Okay, I’ll do it if you insist,” Duke volunteers from his recliner. “But you’ll have to wrestle it from Ginny and that Madam Regina woman for me. She doesn’t care for me, that one,” he finishes with a grumble.

“No offense, Duke, but I don’t think the people of Black Mountain want relationship advice from a guy who considers showering before a date optional,” Carter tells my grandfather, who frowns over at him where he sits on the couch.

“It’s a waste of water! You young people think you’re snakes, trying to shed a new layer of skin every time you get in the bathtub.”

I ignore Duke’s ensuing monologue on water consumption and the wayward habits of today’s youth as I clamp my thumbnail between my teeth. I’m afraid to acknowledge the true source of his irritation, and it’s not Carter’s skincare regimen. I’ve done my best to avoid thinking about it, but the truth is that Duke has been feeling a little crowded in by Carter and me lately.

It’s always been Duke and Sunny against the world, and now... I’ve got this new life with Carter. And with us splitting time between Carter’s apartment and Duke’s house, it’s a lot of upheaval. Which, understandably, makes Duke cranky. Well, more cranky than usual.

I know we can’t live like this forever, especially if Carter and I want a future together. But I can’t just move out. I could never do that to Duke. Even when he loses it because Carter ate

the last English muffin or he caught us making out on the couch and almost saw my boob. But Carter moving in here isn't the solution either, which means I've been biting my nails a lot.

This is all beside the point, though, because we're supposed to be discussing *Dear Mona*. I was talking to my bestie, Mia, at work today about Carter's and my fabulous sex life—thank you very much—and it hit me. I am more than qualified to dish out relationship and sex advice as *Dear Mona* now.

Back before Carter and I became a thing, maybe not, but now? I'm pretty much an expert. Plus, I've been doing a lot of reading on the subject, which garners Carter's full support since it involves trying out new activities in the bedroom. I always did love homework.

I feel fully confident that I could advise someone needing advice on intimacy issues or fights over bathroom counter space. And if they have questions about nipple rings or possible red flags indicating their partner might be a furry, there's always Google.

"Serpents aside, I think I'm going to do it," I declare, interrupting Duke as he theorizes about millennials' shrinking skull sizes. Carter grins at me this time, and I can read his mind perfectly. He's thinking about that thing I did with my tongue this morning that made him howl like a New Guinea singing dog (it's a thing). It is not, however, a thing that can be done under Duke's roof. Disappointing, I know.

"Well, I guess having a boyfriend will help," Duke allows. "Even if he refuses to egg Marion Browning's house for me."

Carter throws his arms out. "The woman is eighty-four, Duke. And, for the last time, she didn't plant a nanny cam in your ficus tree."

"Bah!" Duke shoos Carter's comment aside before pushing himself to a standing position in front of the recliner. His hip is doing so well these days, he doesn't even use his cane anymore. He glances at me and then Carter again before sighing. "As long as we're making announcements, I have a couple too."

My eyes widen, although it's probably just him announcing he's going on his nightly perimeter check. It turns out I'm wrong.

"Knuckles is comin' to visit. And Patty and I are moving in together," he declares with a firm nod of his head. "Now, I'm going on my perimeter check. Be back in twenty."

It seems Carter is just as speechless as I am because neither of us utters a word until the front door closes behind my grandfather.

"Did... he just say he's moving in with... *Patty*?" I stare at my boyfriend.

“I thought he hated Patty,” Carter muses.

“It’s difficult to draw the line between love and hate in Duke’s world, I guess.” I mean, he and Patty have been spending a lot of time together at the senior center this past year, but it’s never been clear if they’re dating or fighting. Probably both, it turns out.

Carter pats the couch cushion next to him and I sink down onto it, letting him pull me into his side.

“Is Duke kicking me out?” I send wide eyes to Carter, and he bites back a smile.

“I highly doubt that. You’ll always be his Sunshine, right?”

My nose stings with threatening tears at Carter’s sweet comment.

I pull in a sharp breath. “You don’t think he’s doing this because of us, do you?”

Carter’s head bobs back and forth a few times. He’s too practical to discount such a possibility. Still, I hope it’s not true. “We may have something to do with it, but when has Duke ever done anything he didn’t want to do?”

“You do have a point,” I concede before yet another thought occurs to me. “Surely, he’s asked Patty, right? He’s not just going to show up at her place with boxes or move her into his house while she’s at Silver Sneakers, right?”

Carter laughs, meeting my smile as I envision Patty’s shocked face at coming home to Duke on her couch. “Even Duke knows you can’t *force* a woman to love you, no matter how stubborn you are.”

“Well, you would know, being the second most stubborn man I know.” I poke him in his firm stomach, getting momentarily distracted as my fingers start to wander.

“I’m not stubborn. I just know what I want.” He squeezes me, and I laugh.

“Ha!”

“And I know exactly how to get it.” His thumb drags slow circles on my bare shoulder, making goosebumps spring to my skin.

“We’ll see about that.” Oh, who am I kidding? I’m putty in this man’s hands, and we both know it.

“Speaking of knowing what I want, Carter whispers into my hair as his fingers drop to my collarbone. “There’s nothing I want more than to wake up with you every morning, Sunny Underwood.”



I look up at him with a lazy smile. “Geez Louise, you’re a smooth talker.”

His lips quirk and he repositions us so he’s facing me. “What do you say? You up for it? I don’t care where—my apartment in Asheville, this house here, or anywhere else you choose. I just want to be with you.”

I try not to swoon right here in my living room. “Well, then, that’s convenient, because I just want to be with you too, Carter Lucien Brooks.” I grin at him.

“You just had to go there didn’t you?”

Instead of answering, I pull his head down for a kiss to seal the deal.

## BONUS EPILOGUE 4

Miller and Maisy from *Deja Brew All Over Again*

### MILLER

“No cap, man, I swear,” Bear insists, his chest heaving with exertion.

“What do you swear?” Maisy approaches, finally having caught up with us on the trail. We’re on one of our regular Bigfoot hunting hikes while Bear is visiting for the weekend. He shot ahead twenty minutes ago, and Maisy sent me to find him while she fished a rock out of her shoe.

Her brother spins around on the dirt path to face her. “I saw Bigfoot!” The words are barely out before he takes off again.

“Don’t scare him away!” Maisy whisper-yells down the trail.

“Funny how people have searched for decades, and Bigfoot was living half a mile from my mama’s house the whole time,” I deadpan as we start walking again.

Maisy feigns a thoughtful expression. “Ginny will probably invite him to dinner.”

“We’ll have to ask if he’s a vegetarian. Don’t want to be rude.”

“Certainly not.” Maisy snorts, and it says a lot about how hot she is that even a snort from her is attractive.

“Hey, why are you limping?” I ask when I notice her favoring her right foot.

She waves me off and keeps walking. “I tripped over a log back there and turned my ankle.”

I come to an abrupt halt in the middle of the path, stopping Maisy with a hand on her elbow. “You’re gonna make it worse walking on it, woman.” I turn my back to her and crouch down. “Hop on.”

“You’re not giving me a piggyback ride through the woods, Miller.”

“Sure I am.” I glance over my shoulder. “You’re not calling me a weakling, are you?”

Maisy rolls her eyes and laughs, climbing onto my back. I hoist her up and start walking again. Carting her around can substitute for leg day tomorrow.

“Oh, hey, did I tell you I got a new student?” she asks from my shoulder where her chin rests.

“I thought your waitlist was fifty people long.”

“I made an exception in this case since it’s your mom.”

I choke on my own saliva. “Babe, please. Don’t torture yourself.” I’ve heard Mama sing, and while she may be good at a lot of things, music ain’t one of them.

“What? I think it’s great she wants to learn. Especially in her fifties.”

“You teach prodigies and people who’ve been playing for years. You don’t need to teach Mama how to play ‘Heart and Soul.’”

Maisy reaches overhead and pushes a leafy branch out of our way as we keep trekking after Bear. “It’ll be fun. You know I love hanging out with Ginny.” That is true. Mama is more of a mother to Maisy than her own mom ever was. And as long as Mama doesn’t convince Maisy to get a skunk, I’m all for them hanging out.

“Okay, but don’t let her take the slot of a paying client. The sooner we save up, the sooner we can get a nicer place.” Our apartment is cool—better than mooching off Mama, that’s for sure. But I want us to have a place to call home. And one that gives Bear an actual room instead of an alcove.

“I like our place.”

“That’s because you’re a kickass girlfriend and you don’t have a high-maintenance bone in your body.”

She squeezes me and drops a kiss on my cheek. “Aw, shucks.”

“You deserve the best of everything, Maisy.” I hope she knows that.

“I already have everything I need. I’ve got you, Bear, your whole family. And I’ve got Mason as a new part of the family—plus Jameson, Jade, Pete, Grady. I could go on. I’m all set, Miller.”

How the fuck did I get so lucky?

“Well, I’m going to make sure you’re more than all set. In fact, I have a little bit of news I was going to save for later, but you may as well know now.”

“You bought Bear his own motorcycle?” she guesses.

I turn my head to frown at her. “I know you’re joking, but that kid is getting a dirt bike—soon.” When she doesn’t protest, I continue, “Cash and Carter are letting me in on the Blue Bigfoot partnership.”

Maisy bounces on my back, and I have to brace so we don’t fall over. “No way! That’s amazing!”

“It’s not an equal split, of course, but it’s partial ownership, so that’s something.” Two years ago, my brothers never would have let me near the cash register at Blue Bigfoot, much less become an owner. I guess I’ve come further than I realized.

“Not just something—it’s a whole lot! Congrats.” She kisses my cheek again, giving me an extra energy boost to pick up speed.

“Thanks.”

“Hey.” Maisy points ahead. “There’s Bear.”

I look where she’s pointing and see her little brother through some trees around the bend. I’m about to call out to him when I notice movement just past him. My feet freeze in place on the trail.

“Is that—?” Maisy gasps at the exact same moment.

We both stare, and as hard as I try, I can’t make sense of what I’m seeing. A large, dark figure lumbers through the trees, heading away from where Bear stands. It’s too big to be a wolf or a bear, and it’s... standing upright.

“Holy—” I start, just as Bear comes racing toward us.

“See! I told you so!” He shouts. “Time for a side quest, bruh.”

And, honestly, who are we to argue?

## BONUS EPILOGUE 5

Lynn and Joey from *Stout of My League*

**LYNN and JOEY**

*Lynn: I'm thinking of going gumshoeing again.*

*Joey: Please don't.*

*Lynn: You're supposed to say, "Get on with your bad self, Nancy Drew."*

*Joey: Okay, Nancy. What's up this time?*

*Lynn: Somebody keeps letting ferrets into our dorm.*

*Joey: You have got to be shitting me. Ferrets?*

*Lynn: Yes. I went to transfer my clothes to the dryer last night and one jumped out and scared the bejesus out of me. You know I can't take jump scares.*

*Joey: Why would someone do that?*

*Lynn: That's what I was asking myself. By the way, ferrets really stink. Never get one. My neighbor found one napping on her pillow. Ew.*

*Joey: It's got to be a prank. Do you have a rival dorm or something?*

*Lynn: No. That's the thing. It's weird, right?*

*Joey: Ferrets in dryers and beds? Yes. So, do you have any idea who it is?*

*Lynn: I've narrowed it down to the security guard or a girl on the seventh floor who eats cheese paper and sings power ballads in the shower.*

*Joey: What is cheese paper?*

*Lynn: The little papers they use to separate cheese slices.*

*Joey: So, wait. Does she eat the cheese too or just the paper?*

*Lynn: Both. In sandwiches.*

*Joey: Ah. And does she eat this cheese and paper in the shower too or just sing in the shower?*

*Lynn: Both.*

**Joey:** Concerning.

**Lynn:** Right?

**Joey:** What makes you think she's got anything to do with the ferrets? Sounds to me like she's already got a full plate with all the showers and cheese.

**Lynn:** She also has a ferret tattoo on her neck.

**Joey:** Bold statement.

**Lynn:** So, what do you say?

**Joey:** I don't have enough info.

**Lynn:** No, I mean what do you say about coming up to go gumshoeing with me?

**Joey:** I'm touched you thought of me.

**Lynn:** Yeah, well, it doesn't feel right doing it without you.

**Joey:** So... if I come, are we staking out the women's bathroom? Cuz I gotta say that's not going to be a good look for me.

**Lynn:** You can pump the security guard for information while I trail Moira.

**Joey:** Who's Moira?

**Lynn:** Duh. Cheese paper power ballad shower girl.

**Joey:** Oh, right. Of course. And when is this happening? I'll need to clear my schedule. Coach Gibbs will surely understand if I need to skip a game to go ferret hunting with my girlfriend.

**Lynn:** I've heard he's cool like that.

**Joey:** Lynn?

**Lynn:** Joey?

**Joey:** Tell me the truth. Are there really ferrets in your dorm?

**Lynn:** Um...

**Joey:** You know, you can just tell me you miss me.

**Lynn:** I miss you, Ace.

**Joey:** I miss you too. I'll see you this weekend, as planned, yeah?

**Lynn:** Yeah. See you then. Love you.

**Joey:** Love you more.

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