

Bonus Epilogue

Ruby

I'm usually in the mood to hang with my girls all night, drink these youngins under the table (the pool table, that is), but tonight I'm just not feeling it. I left Poppy and Em at the bar, which is kinda crazy. I'm always the last to leave. Partly because I'm busy collecting the night's winnings (old habits die hard), and partly because I wanna spend every second I can with Knox.

Ever since Jemma started back at nursing school, he's been pulling more hours. I'm still working full time at the vineyard and freelancing a little on the side. We both work too much. And (don't tell anyone I actually admitted this), but I miss him when he's not right next to me. I guess, since we're married, I should drop the ruse that he's not my best friend (it's not like anyone believes my denials anyway), but like I said— old habits die hard.

As I walk the block and a half from Depot, I send a text to Knox that I'm going home early. He'd gone out to stock up on a few things they'd run out of, and a

wave of tiredness just hit me. The house will be finished in a month, and we'll be moving out of this beautiful loft. It sits on twenty acres halfway between his work and mine, the perfect compromise. That's Knox for you though. He's generous and caring and I love him more every day. After all the men and heartache I went through, it's hard to believe if I'd just stuck with my first love, I could've been living this happily-ever-after a whole lot sooner. I'm hard on myself about it. I could've done so much differently. But he could have too. We both made mistakes. And we're still working through some things, but we're in this together now.

I guess everything works out in it's own time. Not that I could tell Em that. I know she's been hanging out with Graham a lot lately. With them being neighbors, and their pets being friendly and all. But she's in denial. She's letting him back in again, I know it. I also know that he still holds a candle for her (really, it's more like an entire power grid— everyone can see it except Em). But he crushed her. Systematically changed who she was as a person. Changed the way she believed about love and relationships. How she treats the opposite sex altogether. I know he was hurting when he did it and didn't know how to handle his emotions. But he took all that anger and hurt and dumped it out all over her. she may have forgiven him for it, but I haven't yet. I know he's Knox's best friend and if Em gives him another shot, which will take a miracle, I guess I'll have to let bygones be bygones. Graham isn't exactly my biggest fan either. He

blames me as much as I blame myself for Knox and I's fucked up relationship. Just thinking about all those wasted years is making me nauseous.

I barely make it to the bathroom before I empty the contents of my stomach. Three tacos and two Dos EXX do not taste as good coming up as they did going down. Shit. I need to lie down. I'm even more tired than I was a minute ago. I hope I'm not coming down with something.



“Baby, are you okay?” Knox is rubbing my back, between my shoulder blades. I'm halfway under the covers, one arm hanging over the edge of the bed. Which instantly gives me the willies. I've seen enough horror films to know that you never sleep with any appendage dangling off the side of the bed— that's how *they* get you. I jerk my arm back, jarring my whole body. Ugh, I feel sick again. I rush to the bathroom, emptying what's left in my stomach (water, Tylenol and a couple saltines).

“No, I am not okay. I think I caught a stomach bug. I started feeling tired earlier at the bar. It just kinda hit me out of nowhere. And when I got here, I threw up; I tried to get some water and crackers down, but I must've passed out half-way through the process. Which was pointless, seeing as they are now in the toilet.” I'm a total grump when I'm sick. It's really the only time it's completely acceptable behavior.

“Sorry Shorty. Here, have some water. Do you think Tums or some Pepto would help?”

“I’ll try anything right now.” I hate throwing up. It’s the absolute worst. Your throat feels like it received multiple uppercuts from Conor McGregor (from the inside), there’s a weird acidic fuzz on your tongue and teeth, and your stomach acts like a ball on the court, being dribbled from one end to the other.

Knox comes back into the bedroom with a tray. On it is a glass of water, bottle of Gatorade, new pack of crackers and several upset stomach aids. He really is the freaking best. “You should try to eat at least one cracker with the medicine, so it doesn’t upset your stomach even more. Have you also been having diarrhea?” Not a question I thought I’d be asked by my new husband in the first year of marriage, but I guess nothing’s off the table now.

“No, I just have a headache; I feel nauseous and lethargic.” I’m proud that my brain is working well enough to find words to describe my symptoms.

“Has anyone around you been sick? Em or Poppy; anyone at work?”

“No, not that I know of. The girls wouldn’t have come tonight if they were sick. We all love a good night out, but not at the expense of endangering our health, or each other’s.” I haven’t been near anyone at work this week. Joshua and Viv were doing their own thing, Em’s been at her house, the only person I’ve been in close contact with every day is Knox. “You’re feeling

alright, aren't you?" I'd hate for him to feel like this too.

"I'm fine." He reaches down to the tray and pulls up a thermometer, then scans my forehead. "98.9. Not exactly a fever. Huh." He gets this weird look on his face. What's he thinking?

"Huh, what?"

"When was your last period?" Also, another question I didn't think I'd be asked by my new husband. Shit, he might have a point. We stopped using condoms before we got married, and I've been off birth control for a little over two months. My gynecologist told me that it takes some couples a while to conceive if you've been on the pill for a long time. I'd say thirteen years is a long time. We both wanted kids, but I honestly didn't think it'd happen this fast.

"Six weeks ago." I wasn't sure how I'd feel when this moment came, but looking into Knox's happy face, I know true joy. We're going to be a family. And Knox is going to be the best dad. "Is Carleton's still open?" I check the clock on the wall, 10:05. They just closed. "Shit, we'll have to go to Walmart."

"Baby, I'd drive to Charleston right now if it meant giving me the best news in the world. But as it turns out, we don't have to go anywhere." He hops off the bed and goes to the bathroom, digs around for point two seconds and returns holding two small white boxes. His grin is infectious. "I bought these a while ago. I knew when it happened, we'd want to know

right away.” He pushes both boxes into my hands, giddy as a schoolboy. “What are you waiting for? Go pee.” And for the third time tonight he says something newlyweds aren’t supposed to say to one another. So far, we’ve talked about poop, pee and periods. Is the romance dead already?

“Fine, I’ll pee on your stick, but I’m not making any promises. Don’t get your hopes up.” Really, I want to be pregnant. I’m trying not to get *my* hopes up. Knox knows it too. It’s why he doesn’t have a snarky comeback. He knows me so well. Gah, I love him.

Okay, I shut the bathroom door as Knox furrows his brows at me. I refuse to have all these conversations and use the restroom in front of him. I’ll be damned if I let all the romance go just yet. We’ll get to that level of comfortability one day I’m sure, but I’m not peeing on a stick in front of him tonight. Maybe by the time we have kid #2. Huh, I’m already planning on having more. I don’t even know if #1 is on the way yet. God, please let this be real.

I rip the packaging off two tests, uncap them and pee on both tips at the same time. I’m not great at stopping the flow once it’s started. Plus, I’ve got very few liquids left in me after my earlier shenanigans; I’m hoping this trickle is enough. That Gatorade is looking pretty good right now. I place them on the counter and wait, per the instructions. By the time I’ve counted to 120, I’m losing my mind. Five minutes seems like a lifetime.

I guess Knox can't stand the suspense either; he bursts through the door, without knocking, "well?"

"It takes a few minutes."

"What's it supposed to look like if it's positive?"

"One of the sticks will have two blue lines and the other will have a blue positive sign."

"Baby," Knox whispers in awe, looking at the counter behind me. I spin around searching the little windows that decide our future. When I turn back to Knox, he's crying. "We're gonna have a baby." Now I'm crying too.

"Oh my God, I drank tonight! I've been drinking for weeks. I've been Em's taste tester. I'm a horrible mother. Getting my baby drunk."

"Ruby, you didn't know. You're not a horrible mom. Besides, it probably has very little effect on a baby at this stage."

"You don't know that." I'm full-on sobbing right now. If motherhood is already this much of an emotional journey, I'm not sure I'm fully on board.

"You've had a couple beers here and there, a few glasses of wine. You haven't drank liquor in months."

"That's because I'm happy. I only drink tequila when I'm angry or sad or feeling wild. I've been happy with you Knox; I haven't needed Señor Patrón to get me through a funk." My words are garbled, but I see his smile through my tears.

“I think that may be the sweetest thing you’ve ever said to me.” Knox snorts a laugh while he says it, but he knows I’m not joking. He has made me happier than I’ve ever been. And right now, knowing we’ve created a new life, I’m the happiest I’ve ever been. We’re going to be a family. “We’ll make an appointment with your doctor and make sure everything checks out fine. We can do this Ruby.”

I know we can. We’re going to parent the fuck out of this kid. I should probably not say that out loud. I should also probably start cussing less. I can now appreciate the level of self-control Poppy has around Harp. “We can do this Knox. Together.”

“Always, Shorty.” He bends down and kisses me sweetly. “I love you.”

“Love you too. Now take me back to bed.” He gets a wicked glint in his eye and waggles his brows when he sweeps me into his arms. “I didn’t mean it like that,” I say, yawning aggressively. “I’m so tired I could sleep for a week.” He presses another kiss to my forehead as he lays me in bed.

“Get some rest. I’ll have breakfast ready for you in the morning, mama.” He’s never called me that before, but I love it. I’m picturing a little boy with Knox’s dark hair and eyes calling me that, and I’m on the verge of tears again. However, sleep captures me quickly, and I dream of our family. I can’t wait to wake one day soon to its reality.

THE END