

## *Bonus Epilogue for Recipe for Second Chances*

"I'm a little afraid I've had too many spritzes and I'm going to send this out to every random elderly family friend and cousin and suddenly get a barrage of texts about how bad it is," I say, squinting at my computer like maybe if I look at it from another angle it'll contain some kernel of truth.

"It's a wedding website," Samuel calls out from the kitchen. "How much do people actually read it?"

I always cook us dinner on Sunday nights and Samuel does the dishes. It's a little branch of domesticity whose perch I never want to leave. It makes the whole week ahead seem less daunting, burrowed into a nest of stability. There's something about routine and the intentional grounding effect of a simple consistent time for ourselves that gets everything on the right foot. (Also, am I like a therapy and anxiety pro now? I'm not going to brag, but maybe I should.)

I'm satiated down to my toes and I know it's not just because of the lemony risotto I made tonight.

"I always read them!" I retort, as he walks back into the room, dish towel slung casually over his shoulder in a way that I shouldn't find as distractingly sexy as I do.

"I usually just use them to figure out what time a ceremony is when I've inevitably misplaced the invitation," he says, sitting next to me at the table and pulling my laptop over to have a better look at it. He scans what we've written while I watch, still fizzing with energy.

"So why did you go along so enthusiastically with this activity?" I ask, poking him in the ribs to try and distract him from reading.

"Because I like getting you riled up about how we met."

"I do not get *riled up*."

"Yeah, you do," he says, leaning over and kissing my forehead before standing up again. "Send it to your friends, see what they think."

He walks back into the kitchen to keep tidying up my whirlwind of cooking detritus and I wonder for the hundredth time this week how I was lucky enough to get a second chance at letting this man love me.

I try to wipe off the sappy expression I know must be stamped across my face and pick up my phone, pressing the group call button. I love how everyone picks up immediately.

Subrata's lounging on a couch, feet up and balancing her phone with a passed out newborn on her chest. Elena answers from what seems to be her laptop, apparently already getting a jump on work for the week. And Cat's face is viewed from below as she walks through an airport, clearly unable to resist the urge of picking up the call even if she's halfway to a gate at this point.

"I just emailed you guys my wedding website—will you look it over before I send it out to make sure it isn't horrible?" I say, and I can already see Elena's eyes shift on her screen, dutifully opening her email.

"Aw, that's so sweet!" Subrata coos.

"No, but read it," I say, knowing Subrata is probably more distracted by the design than actually reading anything.

"Ok, this 'About Us' section is hilarious," Elena says, cutting me off. "Who actually wrote it?"

"Well, I wrote all the useful logistical details on the site, but Samuel took over my laptop when I started the 'About Us' section. I tried to dictate, but he was typing whatever he wanted and pretty much changed the entire thing."

"It's exactly what I would write if I wanted to fully troll you," Elena says with a laugh while I roll my eyes.

"But in a fun way or an 'Oh my god, why do I have to attend these morons' wedding' kind of way?" I ask.

"Wait, I can't open it up, please do a dramatic reading for me," Cat says, only her chin visible at this point, but keeping pace on the audio portion of the call via her wireless headphones.

Before I can protest, Elena is already clearing her throat.

“Samuel and Stella met more than 10 years ago when Samuel was late to a dinner but redeemed himself by gallantly walking Stella home later in the evening. Samuel remembers those early days as being filled with banter, theater, ice cream, and a distinct sense of fashion. Stella admits she had self-sabotaging blinders on and pleads the fifth about everything else. Despite a few months of Samuel’s roommates wondering why he was so diligent about his email, the timing wasn’t meant to be, and these lovebirds went their separate ways. But *then*, fate, Italy, and a poppy field intervened—”

“Aww, Italy,” Subrata says wistfully.

“Shhh,” Cat scolds playfully. “No reminiscing about your wedding when we’re talking about someone else’s.”

But Elena keeps talking loudly enough to drown them both out. “Through reconnecting, Samuel and Stella realized their love had never gone away.”

Subrata audibly sighs and wipes a tear, but Elena shoots her a look that stops any more interruption.

“For the last year, the two have been blissfully cohabitating in New York, surrounded by friends, family, and all the many delicious leftovers that come with Stella’s job. And recently, in a high-impact moment for the history books, Stella proposed to Samuel at the spot of their first date all those years ago (yes, it was a date). He enthusiastically said yes and led the entire restaurant in an inexplicable round of a song he dubbed ‘Happy Engagement to You’ to the tune of ‘Happy Birthday,’ mortifying Stella but making her realize once again that no ridiculousness on Samuel’s part could ever make her reconsider this union. As such, we cordially invite you to celebrate our wedding with us next year on May the 7th. Please save the date.”

Subrata is full-on crying now and Cat is laughing. Elena looks up from reading and a goofy smile is stretched across her face.

“I think it’s perfect,” she says succinctly.

“Really?” I ask. “What about the rest of the website?”

“I double-checked that all dates, times, and locations are right,” Subrata notes. “But I agree with Elena. It’s so delightfully the two of you. It’s happy, it’s hopeful, and it

has just enough ribbing that it reminds me of why you need someone like Samuel to keep you in check.”

“What about me for him?” I exclaim.

“Oh, I don’t think anyone’s ever doubted that for a second,” Subrata winks.

I feel Samuel come up behind me, wrapping me in his arms and putting his head on my shoulder. “I certainly never did,” he says, waving to all my friends as they beam back at him.

“Just send it out and get back to your Sunday dinner,” Elena says, already blowing a kiss in an effort to get me moving.

“Thank you. Love you guys,” I say.

We all wave and say our goodbyes, and then when I hang up I turn around to give Samuel a full-scale hug.

“What was that for?” he whispers into my hair, both of us still holding on, as though neither is ready for this tactile affection to end.

“I’m just so grateful we found each other again,” I say, the sentiment choking me up a little.

“Me too, Stel. Me too.”

And I hold him just a little bit longer, soaking up the knowledge that for us, this is only the beginning.