**Bonus Epilogue**

**Addie**

“Now, that’s my girl. Orchid, sweetheart you make a beautiful bride.”

I look over to see Ida Sue coming in the room carrying my bouquet.  Petal, Kayla, and CC just left.  I’ve become good friends with all of them. I couldn’t decide, so I asked them all to be my bridesmaids.

“Orchid? Not Adelle? Does that mean I’m your girl again, Ida Sue?” I laugh, as she sits down on the bed beside of me.

I’m getting ready in Black’s room, which I love because I can smell hints of his aftershave everywhere. If I can’t have him with me, at least I get this.  He asked me where I wanted to get married, and it just felt right to have it at the Lucas Farm.  It feels more like home than anywhere—especially without my mom being around.

“Pfft. Stop that. You know you’ve always been my girl.  Your mother would have been proud as a peacock today.”

“You sound like you know her.”

“I know mothers and a mother’s love. I may not have given birth to you, but I couldn’t have handpicked a better woman for my Black.”

Her words cause joy to surge through me. I manage to fight off the tears, but it’s a close call.

“I love you, Ida Sue.”

“I love you, too, child. You know people like to say I’m nuttier than squirrel poop, but it doesn’t bother me.”

“I don’t think that, well this whole family is a little nutty, but not in a bad way,” I laugh.

“Look in the mirror, Orchid.  Hate to break it to you, child, but you don’t have to hang from the tree to be a nut.”

“Hah! I know. That’s why you all feel like…”

“Like?” Ida Sue prompts.

“Like home, Ida Sue. You all feel like I’m finally home again. I haven’t felt that since I lost my mom.”

“And again, that’s part of how I know how proud your Mom would be. You haven’t closed yourself off, even after knowing the pain love can cause. Instead, you love freely.  My boy made some stupid decisions—”

“Ugh, let’s not talk about her today. It’s my wedding day,” I joke.

“But I’m glad he finally got his head out of his ass and seen what I did immediately.”

 “What’s that?”

“That you’re both made for each other.”

“I like that,” I whisper.

“It’s true. Don’t tell my kids, but I’m not going to rest until each of them have managed to meet their soulmates.”

“You’re not?” I laugh.

“Nope. I wasted most of my life before I found Jansen.  Life’s too short not to have true love in your life. That’s why I want more for my kids. That’s what you and Black have. It’s what Gray and CC have, White and Kayla and Luka and Petal finally grabbed. Even my little Faith found hers with CT, but just between you and me, if I had been a little younger, I’d have given her a run for her money for that fine specimen of a man.”

“It’ll be our secret,” I laugh.

Ida Sue doesn’t respond to that; she just gives me a wink.

“You look beautiful, Princess.”

“Daddy,” I look up and smile as he walks in.

“I’ll let you talk to your Dad,” Ida Sue says, kissing my cheek.  Her and Dad hug as she walks by him.

“Ida Sue?”

“Yeah, Orchid?”

“Who’s next?”

“Next?” she asks.

“Your next child that you’re going to help nudge into finding his or her soulmate,” I explain and I almost giggle when I see this twinkle enter her eyes.

“I guess we’ll see who catches the bouquet or garter, won’t we?”

I laugh as she leaves. I can’t help but like her more and more every time I talk with her.

“What was that about?” Dad asks.

“My future mother-in-law was just telling me that my mom would be proud,” I tell him.

“She’s right about that, Princess. Your mother would be so proud of you.”

“I wish she could be here,” I whisper, allowing the one dark spot on the day to creep in. I’ve missed her all day.

That’s when he places a dark blue, velvet case on the bed. My eyes instantly go to it. He opens it and I don’t think I’m imagining the fact that his hands are shaking.

“What’s that saying? Something old, something new, something borrowed and…”

“Something blue,” I whisper, my eyes going wide as I see this exquisite silver chain that contains a pendant that is clearly made from a broach my mother used to wear all the time. It’s a crystal blue, that kind of reminds me of Black’s eyes—although I never made that connection until this moment, when I see the broach again. It’s in the shape of a star and Mom used to say it was her wishing star, that her grandmother gave her. She told me of the first time she met my father and how she’d hold her grandmother’s broach in her hands at night and pray the good-looking boy from down the street would call her and ask her out.  I smile through tears, and hold my hair up, turning so Dad can latch the chain and put the necklace on me.

“I believe that covers your something old, and blue.  The chain is new, so…”

“It’s beautiful, Daddy. But how? I thought most everything was destroyed in the fire?”

“My safe there at least was fireproof. So, this little beauty survived. I would have told you, but I wanted to update it for you, because I know you don’t really wear broaches.  When I got it back you were talking marriage. I figured it’d be best to give it to you as a wedding gift.”

I look down at the pendant, clasp it in my hand and close my eyes. For a moment, I can feel my mother with me—urging me to make a wish. So I do.

*I wish that mine and Black’s life together will always be as happy as the last few days.*

It’s a wish I make, knowing that it will come true. I’m that sure of our love.

I spin around and hug my dad close, holding him so tight that it almost hurts.

“I love you, Daddy. Thank you so much.”

“I love you too, Princess,” he whispers and for a moment he squeezes me just as tight.  “I’m afraid I don’t have anything borrowed,” he says gruffly, his eyes shining with tears.

“I got that taken care of. Ida Sue gave me a penny to borrow. I thought it was weird, but I put it in my shoe.”

“Then we’re set,” he says smiling down at me.

“We’re set.” I agree.

“You still want to marry this Lucas boy, Princess?”

“With all my heart,” I tell him, meaning every word.

“Then take my arm,” he says holding his arm out for me and I wrap mine around it. “Let’s get this show on the road.”

We walk out of the room together and as I stand on the porch about to walk down the steps and along the makeshift aisle highlighted with white silk material, I feel my mother again. When the music starts to announce my march and Black turns around at me, it feels like the sun shines down directly on me.

*I’m getting married to my soulmate.*

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**Black**

The wedding ceremony is a blur. All I know is that I have the most beautiful bride ever to walk down an aisle.  Even now, as we’re all standing out in the Texas heat, waiting for Addie to throw the bouquet I’ve never been happier.

“Well, if you don’t look like the canary that ate the cat.”

I laugh, shaking my head. “I think it’s the cat that ate the canary, Mom.”

“Considering what I figure will be going on at your wedding night, my phrase fits better.”

“Lord, help me,” I moan.

“Pfft.  I helped you. Aren’t you glad you stopped dragging your dick in the dirt? And to think I haven’t gotten one thank you from you.”

I look up as Addie is laughing loudly. I freeze her face in my memory, her smile huge, her eyes shining and the sound of her laughter… it’s all perfection and I never want to forget it.

“I’m more than glad, Mom,” I tell her hugging her to me. “Thank you for always being you. I know we didn’t always give you the easiest of times growing up and you had to be both Mom and Dad to all of us, but we couldn’t have asked for better.  You’re the strongest person I know. I’m proud you’re my mom.”

Mom’s quiet and when I look down at her, I’m pretty sure she’s wiping tears away.

“Damn Texas wind. Blew dirt in my eyes,” she mutters, and I kiss the top of her head, giving her a squeeze.

“Look at that,” she says, sounding way too happy. I look over to see Meadow capturing the thrown bouquet as it practically falls on top of her. She gets it and I can see her blushing from here.  I also don’t miss the nervous look that she casts over at Blue. He frowns and she jerks her head back around, giving him her back.

“Mom—”

“My damn boys. You’re all bound and determined to keep your head up your ass and not see what’s right in front of you,” she sighs.

“Gray didn’t,” I remind her, though I can’t deny that White and I both almost fucked up.

“Gray, unfortunately, is the exception, not the rule,” she mutters.

“I better go throw the garter,” I tell her, kissing her cheek.

“Throw it at Blue!”

“Mom, I think that’s one hornet’s nest you should steer away from,” I warn her.

“Are you doubting your mother?” she asks, looking shocked.

I just shake my head. I don’t know what to say to that. I don’t doubt her, but at least with me and even White and Gray, we loved the women involved. Blue looks like he hates Meadow and that feeling only intensifies the more he sees her.

I put the problem behind me. I’ve learned you can’t fight my mother. She’s going to do what she wants, hopefully she sees it won’t work before she makes things worse. Blue could and probably will chew up Meadow and spit her out. I don’t think the poor girl could handle it. She seems way too delicate.

“Hi there, handsome,” Addie says wrapping her arms around me. We kiss right there in front of everyone and yet somehow they all disappear when she’s near.

“I missed you, Mrs. Lucas.”

“I missed you, too, Mr. Lucas,” she giggles.

“How soon do you think we can blow this joint and get on with the honeymoon?” I ask her.  We’ve booked a hotel in Dallas for the night and then we’re hopping a plane and going to Cabo for a week.  The idea of having Addie in a bikini all week long is one I’ve not stopped thinking about.

“I don’t know, but it will go a lot quicker if you hurry up and get this garter off of my leg,” she whispers.

I pick her up in my arms and sit her on the chair someone slid behind her. Before I let her go completely, I steal one more kiss—ignoring all the shouts from around us. They’re not important right now—only Addie.

“I love you,” I tell her.

“I love you, too.”

I go down on my knees, my eyes locked on hers as my hands move under her dress.

“Hey you’re supposed to raise the dress as you do that!” Green yells and I take one hand out from under her dress and flip him off.

“In your dreams!” I yell and Addie cackles. I wink at her.

“You’re supposed to take it out with your teeth!” Gray yells.

I ignore him—mostly because I’ve moved passed the garter and let my hand brush against her center, my fingers pressing against the silky fabric I find there.

“Black,” she whispers, shocked—her face deep red. The fabric is wet to the touch and I know she reads the hunger in my eyes.

“Soon,” I whisper for her ears only.

“Soon.”

“Hurry up, Black!  I’m turning old and gray waiting!” White yells.

“You are old and gray!” Luka hollers back.

“Screw you, *Orange*!” White laughs.

I slowly take the garter off of Addie, but our eyes are locked on each other and I know we’re both thinking about being alone.

*Soon can’t be soon enough.*

I stand up holding the garter in my fingers looking out at all the single men standing in front of me.  Green, Cyan, Danny from the police department, Homer, and several others are all gathered around. Blue is ruining Mom’s plan because he’s standing at the back, away from the group. River and a couple of my other nephews are standing at the front. I know I’m supposed to turn around. Lord knows that Petal drilled that into my head enough. But, I ignore it and slingshot the garter out into the crowd aiming for Green.

*The quicker I can get that bastard married the better.*

Just as it’s about to reach him, Blue comes through the crowd and pushes Green out of the way in a block, that White—or any pro footballer would be proud of and snatches the garter out of the air. He grabs it without even looking. His eyes are on Meadow.

She goes pale.

*Damn.*

I immediately look at my mom and she’s grinning at me and gives me a wink.

*Double damn.*

“Well, that was interesting,” Addie says, coming to stand beside me.

“That it was,” I tell her, wondering just how all of that will play out. I put it in the back of my mind. I got more important things to think of—*like my bride*. “Are you ready to get out of here?” I ask her.

“I think we’re expected to stay around until after the dinner,” she murmurs.

“The only thing I want to eat is you, Princess.”

“Well, I’ve been meaning to ask you,” she says, her eyes full of mischief.

“What’s that?”

“I can’t help but notice that Luka and Petal came out of this playhouse earlier and Petal seemed… awfully happy.”

“She did, did she?” I laugh.

“I hear it’s a Lucas family tradition to enjoy that playhouse,” she says, avoiding my eyes, and messing around with the collar on my tux instead.

“That it is,” I tell her, not bothering to deny it.

My family is… *special.*

“Well, I *am* a Lucas now,” she says, finally looking up at me. I pick her up in my arms almost immediately.

“Far be it from me to mess with tradition,” I tell her, as she burrows her head into my neck. I ignore everything else, the shouts and the catcalls—all of it. Right now I have the world in my hands and I prove that to Addie when we close the doors to that old playhouse.

We’re completely absorbed in each other—so much so that we have no idea that outside big Kong and little Kong are chasing a cow.  A cow who just knocked over the wedding cake and caused a disaster.

None of that’s important. We have each other.

*And that’s all that matters.*