



Hideaway Bonus Epilogue

By Rachel Lacey

One Year Later

Phoebe

The air smelled like roses. I looked down at the bouquet in my hands, colorful blooms Taylor and I had trimmed from my grandma's rosebushes—*our* rosebushes—yesterday. One perk of getting married in June was that we hadn't needed to hire a florist, not for our simple backyard wedding. Tomorrow, we'd drive to Boston, where my parents were throwing us a fancy reception in the city, and from there, we'd leave for our honeymoon at my dad's new condo in the Bahamas.

But today, everything was simple and homegrown, just the way we'd wanted it. I sat on the bed, staring at my shoes, which were sparkly and pink. On the other side of the bedroom door, the cabin bustled with people. I heard the muffled murmur of conversation and the click of Violet's toenails on the laminate floor as she came down the hall to check on me. I smiled, swinging my feet back and forth to admire my shoes. It was quiet here in the bedroom, at least for a few more minutes.

Violet's paw swiped at the door, followed by a whine. Of course, she didn't want to be out there with my friends and family, not when she could be in the bedroom with me. I stood, loving the way the chiffon felt against my legs as I walked to the door and cracked it so she could sneak in with me.

I wasn't trying to be antisocial, especially not on my wedding day, but I'd promised my mom she'd be the first to see me in my dress, and she was currently in the backyard, fussing with the roses on the arbor we'd set up by the stream. "Hey, Vi," I said as she shuffled into the room, tail wagging. "Ready to be my assistant Maid of Honor?"

She looked up at me, her whole body swaying from side to side from the momentum of her tail. I rubbed her under her chin, and then I walked to the window overlooking the backyard and tapped the glass, hoping to catch my mom's attention, because I was bursting to get out there and join the celebration.

Taylor and her family would be here soon and...*gah*. I could hardly wait to see her. She'd gotten dressed at her parents' house so we wouldn't see each other until we met at the arbor.

I watched as my mom hurried toward the house. The back door shut, and then I heard her heels in the hallway. A few moments later, she knocked on the bedroom door.

“Come in,” I said, and she stepped into the room, wearing a periwinkle blue dress that shimmered with sequins in the afternoon light.

“Oh, Phoebe.” She clapped a hand against her mouth, her eyes welling with tears. “Look at you.”

“You like it?” I spun for her so the skirt flared around me. I felt light on my feet, like I might float away if a stiff breeze caught me on my way to the arbor, the perfect mixture of happiness and excitement fizzing in my blood.

“It’s stunning. You look so beautiful...and so happy.” Mom pulled me in for a hug, and I heard the click of a camera shutter from the doorway as our photographer captured the moment.

“Oh, honey,” my dad said from behind us, and I turned just as he came into the bedroom. “You’re a gorgeous bride.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

There was a whole lot of hugging, and both of my parents had tears in their eyes. I’d expected that I would cry too, but right now, I just couldn’t stop smiling. The photographer caught everything, and I even crouched for a few photos with Violet.

“I can’t believe how calm you are,” my mom commented.

“What is there to be nervous about?” I asked with a shrug. “I can’t freaking wait to marry my best friend and celebrate with all my favorite people. This is my dream come true.”

“And that’s exactly what a wedding should be,” my dad said, looking as happy as I could ever remember seeing him.

A high-pitched squeal cut through the air as Courtney and Emily came bursting into the bedroom, followed by more hugs and even more tears, although my eyes were still dry. My friends wore matching pink dresses to serve as my bridal party, and they would each escort a pup for the ceremony. Courtney would walk with Violet, and Emily had brought her own dog, a toy poodle named Jack.

We laughed and hugged and posed for more photos. My stepmom and stepdad joined the celebration, and the bedroom was getting pretty crowded at this point. Courtney ushered us into the living room to get ready for the ceremony. We fastened rose-covered collars onto the dogs and reapplied lipstick while more friends and family gathered around, wishing me well.

Emily kept me away from the windows now, because Taylor and her family had arrived. A tingly sensation filled my stomach in anticipation of seeing her. *We’re getting married today*. While Courtney and Emily fussed over me, everyone but the wedding party made their way into the backyard to take their seats.

“Ready?” Courtney asked, straightening one of the flowers in my hair.

I nodded, but as I faced the back door—knowing my bride waited on the other side—my throat went dry, and my heart started to pound. I coughed, pressing a hand against my chest as everything went a little fuzzy around me.

“I think it just hit her,” Emily whispered, giving my arm a squeeze.

Courtney brought me a glass of water, and I took several grateful sips before we touched up my lipstick yet again. “I’m ready,” I said, shifting restlessly on my heels. I was fairly bursting with anticipation now. My hands shook, and that tingling feeling spread from my stomach to encompass my whole body.

Mom and Dad took their places on either side of me, holding my elbows as I clutched my bouquet of roses. I glanced at the shelf by the couch, my gaze easily finding the photo of me and my grandma, and I smiled, so grateful that this cabin that had once been my refuge had become my home.

My dad’s wife, Vivian, opened the back door, giving me a reassuring smile as the cabin filled with gentle strains of music. Courtney walked out first, leading Violet, and Emily followed with Jack trotting at her side.

Mom, Dad, and I stood off to the side to keep us from seeing the people waiting outside. An instrumental version of Alicia Keys’s “No One” started to play...mine and Taylor’s song.

“That’s our cue,” Dad said, and together, the three of us walked out the door. Neat rows of white chairs lined the yard, filled now with our guests, but I hardly saw them because there was Taylor, standing in front of the arbor in a white pants suit. Her hair was down, and a single pink rose was pinned to the lapel of her jacket.

And *oh*, there were my tears. Taylor’s image blurred before me as my eyes filled. Happy tears splashed over my cheeks as I walked toward her. I was grinning, laughing through my tears, because she was about to be my wife, and I was the luckiest woman in the world.

Taylor’s sister Kelly stood beside her with Minnie, followed by Holly with Cherry, who was all grown up now, almost as big—and enthusiastic—as Minnie. She tugged at the leash as she caught sight of me, trying to bound over and say hello.

I arrived at the arbor, and my parents kissed my cheeks before leaving me there with Taylor. She took my hands, her own cheeks as tear-streaked as my own, and *click-click-click*, the photographer captured every moment. For a few seconds, we just grinned at each other, and the rest of the world seemed to fade away the way it had a tendency to do when I looked at Taylor.

When I blinked, I saw us as little girls, wading in the stream that splashed by on the other side of the arbor. I saw a moonlit night as two teenagers snuck to this very spot for a stolen kiss. And now, we would be married here.

“Welcome, loved ones,” the officiant said, reminding me of her presence. “We’re gathered here today to witness and celebrate the marriage of Phoebe and Taylor.”

Taylor

“Hey, Mrs. Donovan,” Phoebe whispered in my ear as her arms came around me, drawing me against the warmth of her body.

“Hey back, Mrs. Donovan.” I still couldn’t believe she’d wanted to take my name. I’d assumed we’d do the modern thing and keep our maiden names, or maybe even hyphenate, but Phoebe had confessed one night, snuggled beside me in bed, that she’d wanted to be a Donovan ever since she was a little girl.

“Your parents were my role models for what a happy marriage looked like,” she’d told me. “I couldn’t imagine anything more wonderful than being part of your family, and now, I will be.”

I clasped her hands in mine, still not over the sight of her in that dress. It was strapless, with a bodice embroidered with little pink roses, and the skirt swirled to her ankles in layers that billowed in the summer breeze. Her hair was pulled back in a slightly more sophisticated version of her usual messy bun, with roses woven through it and loose curls spilling around her face.

“Have I told you how beautiful you look today?” I asked, wrapping one of her curls around my finger.

“A few times,” she answered with a smile, leaning in for a kiss.

The sun hung low in the sky now, bathing the yard in its amber glow. Soft music played, and our friend and family filled the yard, some dancing, some chatting, everyone looking relaxed and happy.

“I’m so happy,” Phoebe whispered, settling closer against me.

I wrapped my arms around her, holding her close as we began to sway to the music. “Me too. I have absolutely everything I ever wanted, right here in this yard.”

“Everything?” Phoebe asked, cocking an eyebrow as she looked up at me. “Because I thought we were going to start talking about babies soon.”

“Oh, we are,” I agreed, imagining Phoebe carrying our child. She would be a radiant pregnant woman. “But even if that doesn’t happen, I wouldn’t be missing anything as long as I get to spend the rest of my life here with you in this cabin with our dogs.”

“We really are lucky.” She rested her head on my shoulder, closing her eyes.

“We are.” I laced my fingers behind her back, loving the feel of her in my arms.

With a bark, Minnie bounded over to join us, pressing a stick against Phoebe’s thigh, and we both burst out laughing.

“Some things never change,” Phoebe said, reaching down to take the stick. “But no ripping my dress today, okay, Minnie? This one’s important.”

“Do you mind?” the photographer asked, gesturing for us to pose with Minnie.

“One second,” Phoebe said, and she dashed over to get Violet from her dad, who stood by the patio, holding her leash. She brought Violet over, and we posed for several photos with our dogs. “Our first family portrait,” Phoebe said before she bent to place a kiss on Violet’s forehead, leaving behind a red imprint of her lips.

Click.

Without seeing it, I knew that would be one of my favorite photos from our wedding day, Phoebe kissing Violet while I watched, no doubt with hearts in my eyes. And there was Minnie, dashing around us with her stick.

In a way, Minnie had brought us back together, befriending Phoebe that afternoon when I might have otherwise gone straight to my car. And then Violet had sealed the deal for us, giving me a reason to visit Phoebe, a reason for us to reconnect. Maybe we would have found our way back to each other regardless, or maybe we owed this day to our dogs.

Maybe a little of both.

The sun had set now, and our guests began to say goodbye and head for their cars. We'd see almost everyone again tomorrow at the reception in Boston, but tonight, I couldn't wait to celebrate with my wife. Between my parents and Phoebe's, the food had already been cleared away, leftover cake in the fridge for us to feast on later.

Finally, it was just the two of us. Well, us and our dogs. The music was still playing, and Phoebe went over to her phone, which was running the playlist. She tapped the screen, and our song started to play. She held me close in our semi-dark backyard, singing along with Alicia as we swayed to the music, and this was the best, most perfect way to end the night.

"I can't believe we're married," she said when the song ended, her cheek pressed against mine. "I love you so much, Mrs. Donovan."

"Love you even more, Mrs. Donovan." I pulled her flush against my body. "You know, I'm a little surprised you didn't want to stay somewhere fancy for our wedding night."

"Well, we have a fancy hotel room in Boston for tomorrow night." Phoebe shrieked with laughter as I swept her off her feet and carried her over the threshold into our cabin. "And you know what they say...there's no place like home."

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