

BETHANY TURNER



WES AND  
ADDIE  
HAD THEIR  
CHANCE

*a  
love  
story*

## PRAISE FOR BETHANY TURNER

### *Wes and Addie Had Their Chance*

“Another laugh out loud, pitch perfect romance from Bethany Turner.”

—Annabel Monaghan, bestselling author of *Same Time Next Summer*

### *Cole and Laila Are Just Friends*

“Deliciously romantic and laugh out loud funny, this one had me in its grip until the very end. Cole and Laila are meant-to-be perfection. I loved it!”

—Annabel Monaghan, bestselling author of *Same Time Next Summer*

“*Cole and Laila Are Just Friends* is a glorious ode to '90s romcoms, lifelong friendships, and all the many twists of life that drop us right where we need to be. Full of warmth and witticisms galore, this will-they-or-won't-they love story will capture readers from the first page and spin them capably through the landmarks of New York alongside the most rootable duo I've ever encountered. Sweet and swoony, yet always rooted in human struggles (and stubbornness!), *Cole and Laila Are Just Friends* is the tight, affirming hug we all need right now.”

—Nora Nguyen, author of *Adam & Evie's Matchmaking Tour*

“Hands down THE BEST pairing of first-love flutters and soul-deep friendship a romance reader could ask for—a new fan favorite! Funny, moving, and achingly adorable, Cole + Laila = relationship goals.”

—Nicole Deese, Christy award-winning author

“Small town romance? Check. Friends-to-lovers? Double check. Enough romantic tension to keep you turning pages well into the night? That's a big check! I couldn't put down Cole and Laila's love story.”

—Erin La Rosa, author of *Plot Twist*

“Bethany Turner has taken my favorite trope, friends-to-more, and created the most heartwarming, joy-filled, tender story. It’s absolutely wonderful! Their love for each other brews from the first page all the way through to the beautiful finale. Why it takes them so long to realize how made for each other they are, well . . . sometimes falling in love with your best friends is complicated. With all sorts of pop culture references and a first ‘fake’ date to beat all first ‘fake’ dates, this book is Turner at the very top of her game. Do yourself a favor and pick up this gem of a story.”

—Pepper Basham, bestselling author of *Authentically*, *Izzy* and *The Mistletoe Countess*

“I always thought, Once you’re in love, the only place you ever fall in love again is the movies. But you can fall in love again reading this book.”

—Delia Ephron, bestselling author, screenwriter, and playwright

### *Brynn and Sebastian Hate Each Other*

“Set in a charming small town and populated by well-developed, believable characters, *Brynn and Sebastian Hate Each Other* is a thoughtful and often tender exploration of two wounded souls seeking redemption and learning to trust again. I couldn’t get enough of Bethany Turner’s witty banter or the loyal found-family and sweet nostalgia threaded throughout this delightful story. A must-read for lovers of romantic comedy with healthy doses of pop culture, humor, and depth . . .”

—Julie Christianson, author of *The Mostly Real McCoy* and *That Time I Kissed The Groomsman Grump*

“From the moment I heard the title and saw the cover, I knew I NEEDED to read this book. And if you are someone who loves quirky small town settings, enemies to lovers, and crisp, delightful prose, you do too! You’ll be rooting for Brynn and Sebastian, not just as a couple, but as two people in need of a little redemption and maybe a life reset. This is a rom-com that brings some real depth and development but will also leave you smiling. Longtime fans of Bethany Turner and new readers alike will love this one!”

—Emma St. Clair, *USA TODAY* bestselling author

“Bethany Turner has a magical, effortless way with words, and *Brynn and Sebastian Hate Each Other* showcases this perfectly! You also get an adorable small town, enemies-to-lovers vibes, and all the feels you expect when two protagonists figure out themselves as they figure out each other. Add in a cast of unique and delightful secondary characters, and you get a feel-good story sure to delight and entertain.”

—Jenny Proctor, author of *How to Kiss Your Best Friend*

### *The Do-Over*

“Turner’s (*The Do-Over*) latest is fun, fast, and heartwarming. This book will appeal to anyone who loves enemies-to-lovers romance and to readers who appreciate when a community plays a central role in the story.”

—*Library Journal*

“Turner (*The Do-Over*) charms in a squeaky clean contemporary driven by a battle of wits between journalists . . . In addition to the appealing and endearingly flawed protagonists, Turner delivers a strong supporting cast, especially cameraman Orly Hill and generous town mayor Doc Atwater. Readers will long for a quick return to Adelaide Springs and its salt-of-the-earth citizens.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Readers who haven’t yet discovered the savvy, comedic rom-coms of award-winning author Bethany Turner are in for a treat with her latest second chance romance, *The Do-Over* . . . While romantic comedy may not be the genre for every reader, many will enjoy this light-hearted escape, especially anyone looking to drift away with a well-paced, feel-good story.”

—*New York Journal of Books*

“Pitch-perfect comedic timing, a relatable heroine, and a refreshing sweetness elevate this novel above the sea of modern rom-coms. The rare author who can make me laugh out loud, *The Do-Over* is Bethany Turner at her best.”

—Lauren Layne, *New York Times* bestselling author

## *Plot Twist*

“Turner crafts an entertaining rom-com that spans ten years and keeps the reader guessing who will claim the heroine’s heart . . . As the slow-burn romantic mystery of who Olivia will end up with builds to an amusing and satisfying conclusion, Olivia’s witty narration will hold readers’ attention. This is a treat.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Turner’s humorous latest has an enjoyable New Adult vibe . . . There is a happily ever after, but not the one most readers will be expecting.”

—*Library Journal*

“*Plot Twist* gave my rom-com loving heart everything it could hope for: pop-culture references, frequent laugh-out-loud lines, an enduring friendship, a determined heroine to root for, and (of course) a love story with plenty of twists and turns. Bethany Turner’s voice is fresh and fun, and it’s a joy to read about Olivia as she grows and changes over the course of ten years. A sweet, funny read about the many kinds of love in our lives, perfect for anyone who loves love or dreams about meeting George Clooney.”

—Kerry Winfrey, author of *Waiting for Tom Hanks*

“With a decade-long span of pop-culture fun, playful romantic possibilities, and the soul-deep friendships that push us to be real, *Plot Twist* is everything a reader has come to adore from Bethany Turner . . . plus so much more!”

—Nicole Deese, award-winning author of *Before I Called You Mine*

“Funny, clever, and sweet, *Plot Twist* reminds us that sometimes love doesn’t look just like the movies—and that it can be so, so much better than we ever dreamed. Bethany Turner has gifted us all with another winning story with her trademark wit, wisdom, and charm!”

—Melissa Ferguson, bestselling author of *The Cul-de-Sac War*

“Bethany Turner just keeps getting better! *Plot Twist* is like experiencing the best parts of all my favorite rom-coms, tied together with Turner’s pitch-perfect comedic timing, an achingly sweet ‘will they or won’t they?’ romance, and the BFF relationship most girls dream of. Add in some Gen-X nostalgia, and you have a book you’ll want to wrap yourself up in and never leave.”

—Carla Laureano, RITA Award–winning author of *The Saturday Night Supper Club* and *Provenance*

“With a sassy Hallmark-on-speed hook and a winning leading lady, Turner loans her fresh, inimitable voice to her strongest offering yet: a treatise on how love (and the hope for love) paints across a canvas of fate and happenstance, and how life undercuts our expectations only to give us the biggest romantic adventures. Winsome and wise, Turner draws on beloved romantic tropes and zesty pop-culture references to provide a surprising comedy that is the sweet equivalent of Beth O’ Leary and Emily Henry.”

—Rachel McMillan, author of the Three-Quarter Time series and *The London Restoration*

**ALSO BY BETHANY TURNER**

*Cole and Laila Are Just Friends*

*Brynn and Sebastian Hate Each Other*

*The Do-Over*

*Plot Twist*

*Hadley Beckett's Next Dish*

*Wooing Cadie McCaffrey*

*The Secret Life of Sarah Hollenbeck*

# WES AND ADDIE HAD THEIR CHANCE

*A Love Story*

BETHANY TURNER



THOMAS NELSON  
Since 1798

*Wes and Addie Had Their Chance*

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# ADDIE

If a guy breaks your heart, it seems only right that he should go on to be unhappy and unsuccessful. That's fair, right? And you know what? It wouldn't hurt if he were also ugly. Prematurely bald. Maybe required the application of some prescription ointment to keep his skin condition in check.

Now, if the guy breaks your heart by leaving you at the altar—humiliating you in front of everyone you know, scarring you for life, and causing you to question and doubt everything you thought you knew about love—shouldn't he also be unable to leave his house without the assistance of some sort of crane? I don't consider myself a vindictive person, but I really don't think that's unreasonable.

I'm forty years old, and my heart has been broken three times. And I guess that's not so bad if we're grading based on quantity alone.

Of course, I'm not talking about the emotional devastations of youth that we think are heartbreak at the time but are, in actuality, disappointments at worst or hormonal fluctuations at best. Getting socks for Christmas. Snagging the hem of your prom dress. Planning for months to go to Denver to see The Verve only to discover at the very end of the concert, when they sing "Bittersweet Symphony" (the only song you've recognized all night), that you had them confused with The Verve Pipe.

Or is it the other way around? Honest to goodness, I still don't

know the difference.

My first true heartbreak was when my mom died. I was eleven, and I didn't understand why everyone was acting like life was just going to go on. Like the sun was going to come up the next day and the world was going to keep on spinning. But, of course, it did. Even if my life—and every aspect of the whole wide world—felt like something was missing, from sunrise to sunset of every single day, from that point on.

But you know . . . most of us outlive our parents. We're simply not, however, hardwired to be widowed at thirty-eight. That was the third heartbreak. The clock is not supposed to be ticking down while our toothbrush is hanging out of our mouth. We're not supposed to be running so late for work that when our husband FaceTimes us for what will be the very last time, and we have one more chance to tell him how much we love him, we accidentally spit toothpaste on the camera and end the call in a flurry of foam and minty-fresh aroma and never-to-be-fulfilled promises to call back in a few.

So, yeah. It was that third heartbreak—losing my husband, Joel, almost two years ago—that hurt the most. That was the one that almost did me in. But here lately, it's the unavoidable reminders of heartbreak number two that are really starting to stick in my craw.

When I was eighteen, I was left at the altar. Literally left at the altar. I think a lot of people use that expression too liberally when they're talking about a breakup after the invitations have already gone out, or the night before the wedding when you still have time to call everyone and tell them not to show up. I think those of us who were really and truly left at the altar—hair and makeup done, dress zipped up, long train perfectly placed on the grass behind us in preparation of our walk through a meadow to the only boy we thought we'd ever love—should file a class-action suit against the women who carelessly throw around the phrase. Calling off a wedding would always be hard, I'm sure, but those of us who had it called off for us, once it had already begun? We alone have earned that particular badge.

Wes Hobbes didn't just break my heart that day twenty-two years

ago. He ripped it out of my chest and ran it through a meat grinder. Then, in case there hadn't been enough damage done, he stomped on it a few times and fed it to the wolves—and left me behind to try to salvage the digested remains as they were pooped out in the forest.

Whatever. I got over it. It took a long time, but I really did get over it. I met Joel, I fell in love again, and I got to spend nearly ten years married to the love of my life. Joel Elwyn. A man who never did anything to hurt me. You know, except die. Meanwhile, Wes Hobbes couldn't even do me the simple courtesy of going on to become severely pockmarked and unemployable.

The man who left me at the altar when we were eighteen years old had become Senator Wesley Hobbes, the beloved front-runner for president of the United States. And he was handsome and had all his hair, and his skin was flawless, and if the nightly news and *People* magazine and all the thirsty fan forums online were to be believed, he was perfectly capable of squeezing through doorways without any sort of lever-and-pulley system whatsoever.

Such a bummer.

## CHAPTER 1

# ADDIE

### 330 Days Since She Returned to Adelaide Springs

“Have you guys looked outside?” I called over the bells that jingled as I opened the door to the Bean Franklin. “Don’t hold me to it, but I’m almost certain I saw some sunlight peeking through.”

“Just a trick of the mind.” Fenton Norris pulled his eyes away from the television on the counter just long enough to survey the gray skies through the glass behind me. “This one’s set in good.”

He was right. Truth be told, I hadn’t even looked up from underneath my coat’s hood as I jogged from my parking spot on Main Street, but I knew there had been no sun. I didn’t have to look up at the sky to understand how foreign a concept sunlight was going to be for the next few days, just like it had been for the past several. In Adelaide Springs you could just feel it. These late-January storms made your bones feel wet and cold. And if you could stand the blowing of thirty-miles-per-hour winds (and the snow those winds blew directly into your eyes and up your nostrils) long enough to look around, you’d notice that every bit of scenery that made Adelaide Springs beautiful was missing. The storm was so set in that the twelve- and fourteen-thousand-foot peaks surrounding the town’s elevation—at just over nine thousand—were gone, like they’d been part of a movie set that

had been torn down prematurely. The bark of the aspens was nearly indecipherable against the pure-white ground and the slightly darker backdrop of the sky. And the people, whose folksy Main Street presence usually made you feel as if the movie set you were on was constructed by Hallmark, were inside, for the most part. Even the hearty, acclimated citizens of a rugged Colorado mountain town knew when to brew their own coffee and fry their own eggs rather than brave the elements.

Not that mornings at the Bean Franklin were ever really about coffee or eggs.

“Oh, come on, Fenton. Don’t be so glass-half-empty.” I smiled as he sipped his coffee and rolled his eyes at my ironic positivity. Having only been back in the land of snowblowers, hand warmers, and avalanches for eleven months, my acclimation had been slow, and my complaining had been vocal.

I’d known Fenton Norris—or, more accurately, Fenton Norris had known me—since I was born. Like so many of the citizens of Adelaide Springs, he was a fixture. Almost part of the furniture. And no matter how much had changed about the town—and about me—in my years away, some things would always remain. Fenton Norris would always have his eyes on the television and his mind on the weather. The local diner—the Bean Franklin, it was now called—would always play host to a few stalwart regulars in the morning, even when the rest of the town was taking advantage of a well-deserved snow day. And Adelaide Springs would always operate at its own pace.

Slowly.

It wasn’t that there weren’t things to do, but in Adelaide Springs, people understood there wasn’t any real rush to get them done. Most of the town got up with the sun and began thinking about the day. But the best thinking came a little later, over that second or third leisurely cup of coffee. Most mornings you’d find my childhood friend Laila Kimball expertly managing the relaxed chaos that defined breakfast time at the Bean Franklin on nonblizzard days. Roland and Paula Cross’s oldest, Dustin, was turning out to be a natural in the kitchen

(having learned under the expert tutelage of Laila's husband, Cole). And Laila may not have known how to boil water, but she could serve the seven or eight tables of two to four people more efficiently than an entire waitstaff at any given chain restaurant in any given city. Not that most of the patrons would have noticed if she'd ignored them altogether. Like I said, mornings at the Bean Franklin weren't really about breakfast.

On a morning like this one, when a lot more of the population enjoyed their coffee at home, it was quiet. Quiet enough to make those of us who had spent the majority of our lives in much noisier environments uneasy. Uncomfortable. Nervous, even.

How long would I have to be back home before the nervousness went away? How many conversations would I have to sit through, with these people who had cared about me my entire life, before I finally stopped waiting for the dreaded end of superficiality? Before I finally stopped worrying that the next time they opened their mouths, it would be to ask a question I didn't want to answer?

I reached one of three occupied tables and threw my arms around my dad's shoulders from behind. "Morning."

"Hi, sweets." He patted my hands and leaned into the kiss I was planting on his cheek.

As was my covert habit when I hugged my dad, I held him just tightly enough—just long enough—to check his pulse and perform a general welfare check. No matter how much his energy level and abilities seemed to indicate he was fine—*better* than fine for his age, maybe—he always looked frail to me. I'd stayed away so long that he'd gotten old in my absence, and it wasn't easy to reconcile it all in my mind.

Most difficult of all to reconcile was the fear that frailty hadn't been a companion of age but rather of concern and endless worry about his wayward only child who hadn't managed life so well in the months leading to her return to Colorado.

"What's on the menu today? I'm starving."

Josephine Stoddard spoke up from the seat on the other side of

my dad. “There’s a new one today.” She raised her eyes above my head and called to the kitchen behind me. “What are you calling it again, Laila?”

Laila laughed before answering. “The Battle of Goudas-Burg Quiche.” She came around the corner and joined us at our table while my dad was still midchuckle. “I know. It’s a bit of a stretch. Not to mention off brand. But I swear, Andi—and Marietta before her—already mined all viable punny American Revolution food ideas. I want to honor the legacy of this place, but I just *can’t* with the John Hancock-a-Doodle-Do Frittatas or Alexander Ham-and-Cheese Omelets or whatever. There’s seriously nothing left.”

Andi Franklin, the owner of the Bean Franklin, had still been going by Andrea Franklin when I last lived in town. Well, Andrea Gardner, actually, since I left before she married her first husband. She was several years older than us—my school class of five: Brynn, Cole, Laila, Wes, and me—and had always been Andrea when she babysat us. Somewhere along the line, she had become known as Andi, which I couldn’t help but think might not have happened if I hadn’t moved away. When you only had a few hundred people in your town, there was no need for confusion over names, and Andi was just a little too similar to Addie. There were plenty of names to go around, so it was usually just a matter of letting the small town do its thing and determine who would be known by what moniker. We couldn’t have two Mikes, so one had to go by Michael. One of the Roberts became Bob. There was a Katherine, and there was a Kate.

(And for some inexplicable reason, when Thomas and Tallulah McAfee named their newborn son after his father, we all started calling the baby BooBoo, when really Tom or Tommy probably would have sufficed. That baby was now a minor-league baseball pitching coach for the Pensacola Blue Wahoos, because, really, what else was the poor kid going to do with a name like BooBoo McAfee?)

And I had always been Addie. Rarely Adelaide. As a child I had often complained about being named after the place where I was born, and Cole had once said, “Just be glad you’re not from Booger

Hole, West Virginia.” From that point on, as teenagers, he’d occasionally called me “Boog” with mischievous affection. Other than that, just Addie.

Ah, well. Names change. For all sorts of reasons, but I’m pretty sure always for a reason that changes you in other ways too.

There’d sure been a lot of life changes for Andrea recently. Over the past few years, she’d lost her younger sister, Wray, to cancer, met some environmental lobbyist guy in DC when she was there sorting out Wray’s personal affairs, and moved there full time when she married the guy, whom no one in town had even met.

(Speaking of names changing, Wray had been Wray Gardner-Hobbes ever since she left town—oh, nearly a couple of decades ago now—and at some point along the line married Wes. As in the guy who left me at the altar.)

In any case, the Bean Franklin—one of three restaurants in town and the only coffeehouse—had been left high and dry with Andrea’s abrupt departure, but Laila had refused to let the beloved Adelaide Springs institution die.

“I like it,” my dad finally contributed after more concentrated thought than most town mayors likely believed the naming of a daily breakfast special deserved. “We couldn’t stay Revolutionary forever. It’s good that you’ve brought our quirky little idiosyncrasies into the nineteenth century. You’ll be naming some waffles after Archduke Franz Ferdinand before you know it. You’re doing great, kiddo.”

Laila laughed and wrapped her arm around my dad’s shoulder and briefly rested her head on his. “Thanks, Doc.”

Eighteenth-century American history—now nineteenth as well?—and breakfast foods. It was impossible to say which my odd little hometown took more seriously.

“So, what will it be, Addie?” Laila stood straight again and adjusted her apron.

“Well . . . why not? Let’s go with the Battle of Goudas-Burg.” *No matter how morbid it feels to say it.* It still definitely beat the occasional Boston Massa-Curry Chicken lunch special.

Laila smiled at me and nodded. “Coming right up.”

Her smile was warm—everything about Laila was always warm—but we hadn’t quite settled into any sort of comfortable groove since I’d returned to town. That wasn’t Laila’s fault, I knew. I’d been back for nearly a year, and in that time my childhood friend had asked me to join her for dinner or coffee or shopping probably a dozen times. All in the first few months. Even the kindest and most loyal of old friends gives up after a while, I guess.

My dad turned his attention back to his crossword puzzle, and Mrs. Stoddard studied her coffee cup. I looked behind me to see Fenton staring at the television and Roland Cross looking up at the ceiling. There were only four or five other people in the entire place, and not a single set of eyes met mine as I surveyed the dining room.

Clearly, my presence had interrupted a conversation I wasn’t meant to be a part of.

Since returning to Adelaide Springs, that had become a frequent occurrence. I tried not to take it personally. I’d been gone a long time, after all, and many discussions had been had without me. I couldn’t expect to be instantly included in everything, all the time. That sounded horrible, truthfully. As the daughter of Doc Atwater—the doctor who had delivered pretty much all of us under the age of fifty and who knew every citizen in our tiny town (literally inside and out)—I had grown up feeling a bit like the unofficial town mascot.

As a child, I’d eaten at every dinner table within a five-mile radius. I’d opened the door or answered the phone in the middle of the night and overheard my dad walk people through treating infections and getting bleeding / vomiting / panic attacks under control more times than I could count. As a teenager I’d served as an unofficial nurse and been made privy to babies being born and broken arms being set—and no one had ever seemed to mind that I was there. I don’t remember ever being told I needed to keep things confidential, and I can’t think of one single time that anyone apart from my dad asked me to leave the room, or even hinted that my dad should remove me. The sensitivity . . . the importance . . . the privilege of being welcomed

into the most private details of our neighbors' lives . . . it was just understood. Though it wasn't so much that it didn't have to be taught as it was that my dad had been teaching me by his own example since the day I was born.

But since returning to Adelaide Springs, it had become very clear that I was no longer the town mascot. If anything, I was the town project. The town sob story, maybe. It felt, sometimes, like they wanted to make me the town charity case, so I worked very hard at making sure they knew I was fine. Totally fine. *Perfectly* fine. And fine felt nothing short of miraculous to me. Why wasn't it good enough for them?

"What did I miss?" I asked of the room at large, and only my dad's eyes flickered to mine before returning to his paper.

"Think it will snow tonight?" Fenton Norris asked.

The thought of having to plaster on the smile and play the role of the happy and well-adjusted widow to appease them was exhausting, but not as exhausting as this game of avoidance they seemed determined to play.

"It's snowing now, Fenton. It's *been* snowing. You literally told me the storm is 'set in for days' five minutes ago." I sighed. "So, allow me to ask again: What did I miss?"

"It's nothing, sweets."

"You just missed one of Wes's campaign ads on TV." Laila slid a warmed slice of quiche in front of me and then looked around the room with what appeared to be frustration on her face. Maybe disappointment. And no one seemed too eager to meet her eyes either. "Everyone is afraid to mention his name around you, like he's Voldemort—"

"It's been twenty-two years!" I exclaimed as laughter exploded out of me.

The passing of time. *That* was funny. *That* I could laugh at. So we'd just focus on that rather than the fact that falling in love with Joel Elwyn had long ago ensured the pain I felt at the mention of the name *Wes Hobbes* was no more significant than vapor.

And that the loss of Joel Elwyn had ensured I felt nothing at all.

“And it’s an election year. If you guys really intend to clam up every time a campaign ad comes on, I guess let’s just plan on reconnecting in December.”

Laila shrugged. “That’s what I said.”

“You guys, I don’t care about Wes Hobbes one way or the other. I really don’t. The name *Wes Hobbes* has no power over me anymore. Wes Hobbes, Wes Hobbes, Wes Hobbes. Say it with me. It’s therapeutic.” Everyone was looking at me now, that was for sure, so I raised my arms and dramatically gestured as if I were a conductor leading them all in the world-premiere performance of a new symphony. “Wes. Hobbes.”

I didn’t expect anyone to say it with me, of course, but Laila actually did, our lifelong (if woefully neglected) friendship and solidarity on brazen display. I smiled up at her, and she winked before heading back to the kitchen.

“You know he’s running for president, right?” I asked, quite rhetorically, as I stuffed the first bite of loosely-inspired-by-the-Civil-War creaminess into my mouth. “And as of now, odds are he’s going to win. There’s a chance—a *chance*—I might see his name here and there between now and November, and then maybe even more over the course of the next four years while he’s, you know, leader of the free world. What’s the plan, you guys? Are you going to hide all the TVs and newspapers? Can I expect a redacted ballot when the time comes?”

I took another bite of quiche and this time chewed and swallowed in silence, savoring the way the crust quite literally melted in my mouth. “This is delicious, Dustin!” I called to the kitchen.

“Thank you!” he yelled back. Laila peeked her head around the wall just long enough to add, “The Civil War has opened up a whole new world of possibilities!”

I chuckled and took another bite before looking up at those around me. Jo Stoddard attempting to bore holes into my soul. Fenton Norris shaking his head sadly and looking at me like I was seven and he’d just learned he’d mistakenly killed my pet hedgehog thinking

it was the rabid raccoon he'd been hunting for years but that no one else in town had ever seen evidence of. (True story.) My dad once again pretending to study his crossword puzzle.

"I'm serious. His name means nothing to me. *He* means nothing to me. I mean it."

"Maybe you do." Dad began folding his newspaper. He got it back into its original form, pulled it tightly through his fingers to solidify the creases, and removed the napkin from his lap and placed it on the table in front of him.

"Of course I do."

"Then good for you, sweets." His eyes finally met mine—did he always look so tired, or only when he was worried about me?—as he sighed. "Maybe someday you can tell us how you did it."

It was a rare, insensitive misstep from Doc Atwater, and he knew it. His eyes immediately softened, and he cleared his throat as he placed his hand on mine on the table. He knew exactly how I had done it. He'd been there through the months of despair followed by the months of wandering and then by the years of anger and denial. By the time Joel came into my life, I'd fought battle after battle to free myself from the power the name *Wes Hobbes* had once held over me.

"Robert E. Leek Soup!" Laila shouted from the kitchen to the world at large, and only my dad seemed to hear her.

He smiled and patted my hand. "I'd eat that." Then he stood to go and pushed his chair in before leaning over to kiss the top of my head. "Love you."

"Love you, too, Dad."

He grabbed his coat from the back of his chair, slipped it on, and walked out to greet the gray, snowy day, looking older than I'd ever imagined he would.

## CHAPTER 2

# ADDIE

### 8,203 Days Since Wes Left

The rabbit ears on the ancient relic of a television sitting on the counter of the Valet Forge Car Service office only picked up six or seven channels. On a cloudy day like this one, I was lucky to get four. My shift at Valet Forge had been going since noon with nary a customer. Now, as the sun began to set, was it too much to ask that one of those TV channels air a hockey game or an episode of *The Simpsons*, or really anything other than shots of my ex-fiancé shaking hands and kissing babies?

I'd meant what I'd said. Every single word. His name had no power over me, and neither did his face. But my brain hadn't yet gotten the hang of not comparing and contrasting the boy I'd known with the most beloved man of Every. Single. News cycle.

I was an analyst. I *had* been an analyst, anyway. A good one. I might have left the agency a year ago, but that didn't mean my brain just suddenly stopped analyzing. So, yeah. Each time I saw Senator Wesley Garrett Hobbes of the great state of Connecticut, my brain automatically tried to make sense of it. My job had been all about getting from point A to point B. I hadn't been a spy or anything exciting

like that, though I knew a lot of spies (and truly, being a spy wasn't usually as exciting as movies and TV shows made most people believe it was). But I had no doubt most people would view even the real-world version of being a spy as much more exciting than being a CIA analytic methodologist such as yours truly. Keri Russell and Matthew Rhys were way too sexy to ever be cast as analytic methodologists.

So, yeah. I was a highly trained expert at collecting data and figuring out what it all meant. What did it mean, for instance, that the young man who had very nearly talked me into wearing cargo pants and Converse, Avril Lavigne-style, to our wedding (with maybe a Britney newsboy hat up top, to make it dressy) was now a style and fashion icon who seemed to be included on every Best Dressed list in existence? We'd seriously come *this* close to an early aughts grunge wedding (in the end, almost as close as we came to actually getting married) just so he could get away with wearing jeans, a Hollister shirt, and his frayed canvas flip-flops. Therefore, my brain found it odd to see him in tailored suits on TV all the time. He gave speeches in suits. He walked and waved in suits. When a not-at-all-prearranged (um . . . *okay*) opportunity arose to kick a soccer ball around with the UConn collegiate team, he did it without even breaking a sweat. In a suit.

That's like point A to point W for my brain, and it can't help but feel compelled to connect the dots. So forgive me for wishing *anything* else was on TV. These days, I found connecting dots to be exhausting.

Wes Hobbes. A lock for the nomination. Well on his way to being elected president of the United States before he turned forty-two years old. The same Wes Hobbes who struggled with reading and spent years trying to claw his way to the back of the pack to prove he was a follower rather than a leader and who had once claimed, "Everything I know about geography I learned from *Carmen Sandiego*." My brain would never be able to make sense of that one.

Of course, that was the problem, right? There was no journey that made any sense at all in which *that* Wes Hobbes—*my* Wes Hobbes—should have become *this* Wes Hobbes.

No one ever broached the subject of Wes with me, but at least Laila, Cole, and Brynn didn't awkwardly avoid it like everyone else. The four of us hadn't spent a whole lot of time together since I'd been back, but once in a while, when there was a mention on the news of the long-missing fifth member of our graduating class, or when a campaign ad came on, one of them would say something to the effect of, "It's just so weird to imagine our Wes ever *wanting* to be president." They were right. It was. And I would nod along with everyone else, and then we'd change the subject.

But the truth was, I had long ago figured out something very important that hadn't yet clicked for them. It wasn't that *our* Wes had somehow become *that* Wes. It was that *that* Wes had *always* been *that* Wes. And we hadn't known him at all. There was no other explanation that made sense.

The guy we'd thought we'd known probably wouldn't have wanted to be president, but at the same time, that was just a job. A path. No one, myself included, would have believed in our childhood that I would go on to become an air force pilot and a CIA analyst. Trauma changes you. And maybe whatever happened in Wes's life after he left Adelaide Springs on August 9, 2003, changed him. Made him shoot higher. Turned him into someone who would excel at leading the entire free world. Maybe he could even be trusted not to accidentally start a ground war in Newfoundland without consulting dispatches from the chief at ACME Detective Agency while chasing down a criminal mastermind in a red hat and trench coat. I couldn't claim to know anything about any of that. But I knew one thing for sure: our Wes—*my* Wes—would never have left us. Would never have left *me*. So he must have actually been *that* Wes all along.

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The gentle *ding* of the door opening pulled my eyes away from the television for the first time in ten minutes or so, and I reflexively hit the power button, causing the image of Adelaide Springs's lost son to

fade from the screen.

“Hey, boss.” I smiled at Neil Pinkton as his cheeks turned pink at the greeting.

He sighed and shook his head. “Addie, I told you, I’m not your boss.”

I hopped off the stool and leaned across the counter to good-naturedly goad him further—one of my favorite pastimes in recent days. “Let’s see . . . you make the schedule, you sign my checks, you know where we keep the good coffee. If that doesn’t make you the boss, I don’t know what does.” Neil rolled his eyes, and the pink went all the way up to his ears, giving me the opportunity to add, “And you roll your eyes at me. My last boss rolled his eyes at me constantly, so there’s proof.”

“I’m guessing your last boss wasn’t a twenty-two-year-old with no idea what he was doing?”

My last boss had been a major general who threatened to court-martial us if we didn’t turn off the lights over the sink in the break room, but I didn’t figure mentioning that would do any favors for Neil’s impostor syndrome.

“No. He wasn’t. But neither are you. Twenty-two, yes. But you’re doing a great job around here. Andrea knew what she was doing, leaving Valet Forge in your hands.”

“Thanks, Addie.” He paused for just a second and grinned at me before shutting the door behind him. “I don’t know what I’d do if you weren’t here, that’s for sure.”

Adelaide Springs didn’t have Ubers or Lyfts or busses or taxis. We just had Valet Forge—another essential small-town business abandoned by Andrea Franklin. Laila had stepped in at the Bean without so much as a note of instruction, but Neil had actually gotten a phone call. From what I understood, he and Brynn’s husband, Sebastian Sudworth, had been the only ones who had. Neither one of them had shared many details of what was discussed, but just like that, Neil’s desire to finish business school online and then find a good job had been put on the fast track.

Well, no, that wasn't true. School was going to take longer to get through now, since I was his only other driver most of the time. Sebastian, who had returned to journalism full time, rarely had time to tinker with vehicles or serve on city council or tend bar and sing karaoke, as town chatter informed me he had in the years before I arrived back home (in what I could only imagine must have been his midlife crisis years). Now he and Brynn were in New York more than they were in Colorado. Add to that that Fenton Norris had lost his license months ago after, in his words of defense, mistaking a fallen boulder for a garbage can (and still plowing into it for some inexplicable reason), and only young Neil and I were eligible to transport the tourists and can't-drive-after-dark locals.

"Happy to do it, boss."

I liked working with Neil. He had no memories of me. As far as Neil was concerned, I was just Doc's daughter who had come back to town, and who happened to be a former CIA analyst, which he thought was pretty cool. He was one of the few in whom I didn't discourage the CIA-equals-spy delusions. It made the boring afternoons when he was tired of studying and no one needed a ride much more interesting.

"What's on the docket for tonight?" I asked. "Do you have a lot of homework?"

He shook his head, fulfilling the dual purpose of answering my question and shaking the snow out of his shaggy strawberry-blond hair. "No, I don't have any, if you can believe it. But I do have a hot date with QuickBooks."

I used my hands to push myself back up onto the stool. "Oh. Well, that's boring."

He shrugged. "I like it." He placed his laptop on the counter in front of us and typed in his password.

Neil, by living in Adelaide Springs since birth, had now been a full-time part of the town longer than I had, but I was only a couple of years behind him if we combined my original residency with my current one. I certainly knew what it was like to grow up in a town whose

median age seemed to skew a decade older every time you bothered to check. Young couples tended to leave for better opportunities, taking what could have been the town's next generation with them. The kids who made it all the way through school here—like Neil and like me—tended to choose one of two well-worn paths after graduation. Either they got out the first chance they got, or they settled in and became members of the ever-dwindling population.

Of course, things didn't play out exactly like that for Neil or for me. And, truth be told, a weird thing had begun happening in Adelaide Springs over the past few years. New life had been breathed into its rigid, geriatric ways. Having two international celebrities call the tiny mountain town home—even if those two celebrities (*Do we call journalists celebrities?*), Brynn and Sebastian, only lived here part time now—had brought with it a lot of new attention. Combine that with the return of Township Days—a quirky little festival with absurd origins that dated back to the seventies—and Adelaide Springs was actually growing for the first time this century.

“There aren't a lot of girls your age around here, are there?” I asked the direct question with the obvious answer, causing Neil's sly grin to fade quickly.

“No.” He sighed and turned back to the counter. “In fact, there are exactly none.”

I studied him as he slipped the week's fuel receipts from the spindle on which they were stored and straightened them into a neat pile before locking them together with a staple.

“What's the plan, kiddo?”

The final syllable caught in my throat as I said the word. *Kiddo*. I'd heard my dad call members of my generation *kiddo* my entire life. I'd heard him refer to Laila—forty-year-old Laila—as *kiddo* that very morning. Was this how it happened? One day were you the kiddo, and the next you were the matriarchs and patriarchs of an entire community, trading in your snowmobile weekends and ability to rap all the words of Eminem's “Lose Yourself” for achy knees and crossword puzzles and never-ending debates over the virtues of Barbara Mandrell

versus Crystal Gayle?

“What do you mean?” Neil kept his eyes on his receipts, but his fingers seemed to forget they were supposed to be inputting numbers.

I took a deep breath and stepped down from the stool again to stand beside him. “If you hadn’t been handed Valet Forge on a silver platter, what would you be doing? What *was* the plan for the next few years?”

He spent the next couple of minutes talking about business plans and getting his MBA and sustainability and initiatives and statistics, and I think there was a mention in there of geospatial data, and all I could think about was how I’d never seen someone’s face light up so much when they were talking about such boring stuff.

“But I was always going to come back to Adelaide Springs anyway,” he concluded with a shrug.

My eyebrows raised. “You were?”

“Sure.” He took in a deep breath and released it in the form of a gentle raspberry at his lips. “I think Adelaide Springs is the most wonderful place in the world, and I want to do what Sebastian and Brynn and Cole and Laila and everybody are doing now. Making sure it survives and thrives and doesn’t get turned into something it’s not. You know?” He cleared his throat and chuckled. “That sounds so stupid.”

“No. It doesn’t.” I smiled at him and swallowed down all of the advice I wanted to give. Advice about seeing what the rest of the world had to offer before locking in those thoughts about Adelaide Springs being the most wonderful place. Advice about how difficult it is to forge your own identity in a community that believes it knows you better than you know yourself. Maybe even a little advice about how, much like Valet Forge’s long overdue conversion to QuickBooks, his life in Adelaide Springs might always feel like it was running several decades behind. “Those are some noble and important dreams you’ve got. Good for you.” I touched his arm again, this time a gentle, maternal pat. “Whatever you do, you’re going to be a superstar at it. I hope you know that.”

Who was I to give advice about dreams anyway? As has oft been

said, kill my dreams once, shame on you. Kill my dreams twice, move back in with my dad, work a minimum-wage job, and don't waste any more time on dreams.

"Thanks, Addie." He smiled at me as the phone rang. He grabbed the receiver. "Valet Forge Car Service. Where can we take you?"

I kept trying to convince Neil we needed to answer the phones with something snappier. Something more befitting our Revolutionary War namesake. Thus far, however, neither of us had been able to come up with anything that didn't use the words *hypothermia* or *dysentery*.

"Got it. Thanks," Neil was saying on the phone. "I'll head out now." He grabbed the keys to the classic 1974 orange-and-white Ford Bronco from the hook behind him.

"What's up?"

"Roland, calling from the airport. Steve radioed ahead for a passenger arriving at about five forty-five."

I glanced at my watch. Twenty minutes. I stepped down from the stool before placing my open palm in front of Neil so he could hand me the keys. "Let me get it. QuickBooks is waiting for you to show her a good time."

## CHAPTER 3

# WES

### Six Weeks until the California Primary

“Yes, Phil, I remember.”

Wes was pretty sure that someday, when the time came to write his memoir, they would be published under the title *Yes, Phil, I Remember: One Politician’s Futile Quest Not to Be Treated Like a Four-Year-Old*.

“And don’t forget you need to get scheduled for a sit-down with Ambassador Harlington the second you’re back in DC. In fact, let’s go ahead and set that up. You’re in Sacramento how long? You’ll be back in time to commemorate the anniversary, won’t you?” Phil took a deep breath, muttered something, and then exhaled loudly into the receiver, necessitating Wes’s removal of the phone from his ear. Sadly, he was back before he could miss a word. “What am I saying? Of course you will. That’s Tuesday. You won’t be in Sacramento longer than a day or two.”

*Right?*

That was the point in the conversation where, if it were like normal conversations and Philip Brewster and Wesley Hobbes were like normal men, he would have asked for confirmation of that assertion. If Wesley Hobbes was a normal man, his life would be his own.

Right?

“What if I stayed a little longer?”

Silence emanated. For a long time after leaving Adelaide Springs, the silence had bothered him. Actually, on some level silence had *always* bothered him. He’d never really had those natural instincts that seemed for so many to accompany a quiet life and a slower pace. He’d always felt the need to try to fill the gaps. Depending upon which of his former therapists you asked, he’d either been afraid he was in trouble or afraid of no longer being someone’s focus. Either way, the silence triggered fear, and fear triggered his need to hop up on an apple cart, grab a megaphone, and sing “Yankee Doodle Dandy” to try to please someone or other.

“Why would you stay longer? The anniversary is—”

“Tuesday. Yes, Phil, I know.”

“Well, then, surely you know that it’s not an option for a United States senator from Connecticut, two months out from the Connecticut primary, to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the death of the most beloved governor in Connecticut history with a visit to Harry Potter Land when he should be in Connecticut.”

“Could you please remind me which state I represent? It’s so hard to keep track. Connecticut, is it?” Wes sighed in response to the tense silence on Phil’s end of the line. Except, he didn’t. He’d gotten pretty good at only sighing internally. It was a useful trick that he figured was either going to save his sanity or result in an ulcer. Only time would tell. “And it’s *Harry Potter World*.” *Nope, that wasn’t right either.* “Which is in Hollywood. Allow me to remind you one more time that I’m in—”

“You used to be able to take a joke, Senator. I know. You’re in Sacramento.”

Except, he wasn’t.

Wes looked out the window and, though it was getting dark, knew that the geography within view confirmed just how far he’d taken his own joke. Not that it was a joke at all, of course. Nor a prank. A mid-life crisis? Maybe. The only thing he knew for sure was that he and

Phil were never going to share a laugh over it. There was never going to come a day when Phil would good-naturedly tell the story of that time his presidential front-runner ditched his aides and ignored the schedule and claimed he was valiantly fighting for California's fifty-four electoral votes when, in reality, he had donned a baseball cap, flown coach completely incognito, and smuggled himself back to his Colorado hometown.

"Yeah. Sacramento. And the only magic that's going to be happening here over the course of the next few days will involve sealing up undecideds and bringing in massive campaign contributions."

"Well, I do like the sound of that." Phil laughed. "Okay, so tell me: Why the need for extra days? If I know you, you'll have this all sewn up by noon tomorrow."

"Noon?" Wes chuckled. "There's going to be a ticker-tape parade in my honor before the lieutenant governor has gotten the parsley from breakfast out of his teeth." (The average taxpayer would be shocked to learn the number of people kept on government payrolls for the sole purpose of notifying elected officials when they have something green and stringy hanging from their gums.) "Nevertheless, I want to really stick it to them while I'm here. I don't just want them to vote for me. I want them to love me. I want them eating out of the palm of my hand. I want to remind them—"

"Who's 'them,' specifically? Or do you just mean the entire state of California?"

"Yes. All of them. I want to remind every single one of them that I don't like them any more than they like me, but that doesn't change the fact that I'm going to be their president soon. It would serve them well not only to remember that but to start thanking me for even gracing them with my presence. Even if we only have a couple days together, it's on them. They can let bygones be bygones, or they can grovel and bow and scrape, and we'll all get to be part of a little feel-good piece on the nightly news. The choice is theirs."

Wes's campaign manager cackled on the other end of the call like the heartless, maniacal supervillain that he was, and Wes thought he

might be sick. Not that Phil was the cause of the nausea. Not this time.

“Well, if that’s the case, go get ’em. I have to say, it’s nice to hear you focused again. Ever since Wray passed, I’ve been wondering if you even had it in you—”

“You don’t need to worry about that.” *There we go.* Nausea. Phil’s fault. Order was restored.

Being revolted by much of what came out of Phil’s mouth was nothing new, of course. But something about hearing him say the name of his late wife caused Wes to feel so much more than just queasiness. The nausea was easy. The sadness and regret were something else entirely.

“Well, I’m going to go ahead and reach out to Harlington’s office, and then when you—”

Wes was startled out of listening to the rest of Phil’s patronizing instructions about how he should hold his scissors and always remember to put the lid back on the glue stick by a sound akin to that of a 747 idling nearby. He turned to face the bellow and discovered the revving engine seemingly belonged to a normal—if not somewhat massive and ancient—vehicle parked just outside the glass doors of the airport lobby. The headlights were shining directly into his eyes, so he was rendered blind as he raised his hand and waved. The sharp honk of the horn that followed didn’t exactly bode well for the service he expected he was about to receive, but there was no one else waiting around. The ride had to be his.

“I’m gonna cut you off there, Phil. My car’s here.” He’d really hoped to have a few moments of solitude to think about all that was to come without Phil blabbering into his ear, but some dreams were not meant to be. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Call me when you—”

Wes ended the call and stuffed his phone into the inside pocket of his suit jacket, then reached down and hoisted up his suitcase and his trusty Tumi leather backpack that rarely left his side. He would never stop being grateful that at least he was the young and “hip” politician

who could get away with carrying a backpack rather than a briefcase. It was a small consolation that, on certain days, provided the only fuel in his tank.

“Thank you!” He was pretty sure someone was in that back room behind the counter. He could hear sports announcers effusing from a television, and every so often he heard a desk chair creaking loudly, but he’d witnessed no other signs of life. “Have a nice evening!” Wes’s voice cracked, and he took a deep breath and smiled at the sound.

“Signs of life,” he whispered to himself encouragingly.

He was actually grateful for the squeaky voice and the moisture on his palms and the way his heart seemed to be attempting to keep pace with a group of sprinting track-and-field athletes only it could see. He wasn’t sure whether to attribute the rush of adrenaline to all the lies he had told in order to break free—to *be* free, even if just for a little while—or to finally being back home, but the signs of life were a welcome reminder that he was doing the right thing.

*Home?*

Yes. Home.

“Good evening,” he said, waving again and greeting the driver through the old orange-and-white Ford Bronco’s slightly cracked-open window. The brunette in the driver’s seat stared at him with wide eyes as he passed. “I hope I didn’t keep you waiting,” he prepared to say as he began to climb in, reacting to the death glare she was giving him—which he initially processed as clear communication that he had, in fact, kept her waiting. But then, quickly, but still just a little too slowly, his brain remembered he wasn’t in Sacramento or Hollywood or Hartford or even one of his off-the-beaten-path campaign stops in far-flung corners of the rural heartland. No, he was in Adelaide Springs, and it was possible he would encounter many, *many* sets of glaring eyes during his visit. Some of them would probably even be familiar to him.

But no set of eyes across the entire nation would ever be as familiar to him as the ones glaring at him now.

Wes lowered his foot from the running board and took a step

back to stand beside the driver's door again. "Addie?" he attempted to say into the cold, dark air, but found the two syllables hesitant to move past his lips.

The wide-eyed glare fell for just a moment at the sound of her name and morphed into something softer. But in an instant the transition was gone, and narrow-eyed skepticism and mistrust seemed to take its place. Maybe he was attempting to read too much into a nearly imperceptible gamut of expressions that danced across her face for a second, maybe two, but skepticism and mistrust had been what he expected from every set of eyes from his past. He hadn't been expecting Addie's eyes at all, but how much truer must the feelings be for her?

She cleared her throat and turned away to face front, adjusting the rearview mirror before placing her hands on the steering wheel. "Better climb in, Senator. The meter's running."

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo by Emilie Haney of EAH Creative

Bethany Turner has been writing since the second grade, when she won her first writing award for explaining why, if she could have lunch with any person throughout history, she would choose John Stamos. She stands by this decision. Bethany now writes pop culture–infused rom-coms for a new generation of readers who crave fiction that tackles the thorny issues of life with humor and insight. She lives in Southwest Colorado with her husband, whom she met in the nineties in a chat room called Disco Inferno. As sketchy as it sounds, it worked out pretty well in this case, and they are the proud parents of two grown sons. Connect with Bethany at [bethanyturnerbooks.com](http://bethanyturnerbooks.com) or across social media @seebethanywrite, where she clings to the eternal dream that John Stamos will someday send her a friend request. You can also text her at +1 (970) 387-7811. Texting with readers is her favorite.

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