

Bonus Content

BLUEPRINT  
FOR  
FALLING  
IN LOVE



CARRIE CLARKE

Wanna make a bet?

Copyright © 2023 by Carrie Clarke. The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, transmitted, copied, stored, distributed or otherwise made available by any person or entity, in any form, without prior written permission from the publisher or author.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to real places or people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

This book is written using Australian English. So you might find unfamiliar spelling or phrases. There is also a liberal scattering of Scottish words, which are explained in a glossary at the end. If anything in particular perplexes or interests you, please contact me at [hello@carriecclarkeauthor.com.au](mailto:hello@carriecclarkeauthor.com.au). I'd love to hear from you.

# JOSH

The problem with an awesome grand gesture is that one day, when you want to make an arguably grander gesture, you have to beat it. I've been wracking my brain and I've got nothing.

People still talk about the #joshlovesgreer campaign. My boss had me do a case study on it for clients, which I ended up presenting at an Advertising conference in France.

This is the dilemma. How do I come up with a proposal that beats #joshlovesgreer?

Firstly, I promised I wouldn't propose until after Jessie and Ethan had their big day. They left on their honeymoon this morning. Tick.

Second, I need to get permission. Which is where I'm headed now. It might be an old-fashioned notion, but at heart, Harry is a traditional kind of guy. And keeping in good with the in-laws is highly recommended I hear. I also think Greer will get a kick out of it when she hears. Because despite being a strong, independent woman, there's a little bit of old-fashioned sentimentality in her too.

There's a flurry of high-pitched barking as I let myself into the backyard. A ball of yellow fur comes flying across the patio and attaches itself to the bottom of my shorts, it's plump little body swinging in midair.

"Gertie. Down," Harry shouts from a sunlounge positioned in the deep shade of an umbrella, and then drops his head

back with a groan. “Bloody dog. No idea when to keep quiet.” He makes out like their new puppy annoys him, but Harry is besotted with the little terror.

Clearly, even though it’s two in the afternoon, Harry is still suffering. And well he might. I’ve never seen him put away quite so much alcohol. But if you can’t get drunk at your son’s wedding, when can you?

I disengage the puppy teeth and settle onto the spare lounge next to Harry. He lifts one lid, giving me the side eye.

“Guess you’d better go and get Stella.” He mutters. Not much gets past Harry. I imagine he’s got an inkling as to why I’m here. It’s ridiculous to be nervous, but I can feel cold sweat running down my back. Once Stella is sitting I waste no time.

“So. Harry. Stella. I imagine you’re wondering what I’m doing here without—”

And Harry’s phone starts to ring on the table beside us. It’s Ben.

“I’m just on my way over. Do you want me to pick you up anything for the hangover, Dad?” The sniggering on the other end comes through clearly.

Jesus. I don’t want to do this in front of Ben.

“No. Your mother was well prepared. We’ll see you soon.” Harry stabs irritably at the disconnect button. We’re off to a great start.

Maybe I can get this done before Ben actually arrives.

“You were saying?” Harry takes a big swig of water from the glass beside him.

“Would you like a drink?” Stella pipes up. Bloody hell.

“No, thank you, Stella. I’m good.” Apart from the buckets I’m sweating.

“Tea, then?”

“No. Really.”

“Let the boy get it out, Stella.”

“Sorry. Go on, Josh.”

I take a deep breath.

“Right. Well. You might—”

“Hey. Where is everyone?” Will shouts from inside the house. Fucking hell.

“We’re out here. With Josh.” Stella calls.

Will appears on the patio with a giant white paper bag balanced on his outstretched hand. I can tell by the smell wafting towards me it’s one of our tried-and-true hangover cures. Hot chips from the local fish and chip shop. With extra chicken salt.

“Will, you know your father’s not supposed to eat those.” Stella scolds, slapping Harry’s hand as he reaches for the golden temptations as soon as Will has torn the bag open.

“Leave off, woman,” grumbles Harry at the same time as Will rolls his eyes.

“Give him a break, Mum, he’s hung over.” I need to take control here so I pitch my voice a bit louder.

“Look, could I just—” I start. I’m trying not to lose it, but I need to get this out. I know they won’t say no. I know they’ll be thrilled, but it’s nerve wracking, nonetheless.

“Is that Hangover Cure Number Two I smell?” Oh for fuck’s sake. “Did I miss Cure Number One?” Hangover Cure Number One is a steak sandwich and a Bloody Mary, which Harry has no doubt already consumed.

“Yes and yes,” Will calls around a mouthful of piping hot carbs and grease.

Ben comes down the side path, looking slightly worse for wear. And bloody hell. He’s got Nick and Lulu and Rosanna—even Isla—in tow.

“Look who I found lurking out the front.” Ben says as he pushes me over in an attempt to fit us all side by side on the lounge. Irritated, I shove him off and he lands on his arse on the ground. Good. I hope it hurt. Fucker.

Great. Now I have the whole extended family, minus the honeymooners, witnessing this conversation.

There’s silence as everyone tucks into the chips. Ben looks at Will. Will looks at Nick. Nick looks at Stella, who looks at

Harry. And then they all look at me. Trying, and failing, to keep the smirks off their faces.

“You bastards. You knew. You knew I’d be here today.” And they all crack up laughing. Even Harry, who has to hold his head at the same time. This damn family.

“Who won?” I ask, knowing exactly what’s gone on.

“Ben.” Will grumbles, pulling his wallet from his back pocket and handing over a crisp hundred-dollar bill. “I didn’t think you’d be able to hold out this long.”

Nick hands over a fifty.

“Pleasure doing business with you.” Ben tucks the money into his pocket. “You have my bank details, Dad. Don’t be tardy.”

“Yeah, yeah. You know I’m good for it.” Harry grumbles. “So, are we going to let the boy get on with it?”

There are general noises of assent, but nobody makes a move to leave. An audience it is.

“Well, since you all clearly know why I’m here, I wanted to ask you, Harry and Stella, if you would allow me the honour of marrying—” Greer’s disembodied voice floats out to us from somewhere in the house.

“Hey, am I late? What did I miss?”

“—your daughter.” I rush out on a defeated sigh. Because unless I get the words out right now, it’s never going to happen. I’m not sure if Harry hears me over the raucous laughter of the buffoons sitting around me.

Buffoons that couldn’t be any more perfect a family for me if I had written the script myself.

“What’s so funny? Josh? What are you doing here? I thought you said you had to call into the office for a crisis meeting.” Greer appears in the doorway.

Harry pats my shoulder. “It would be our pleasure,” he mutters as Greer comes to stand behind us.

“What would be your pleasure?”

I look over my shoulder at her beautiful face. A beautiful face full of knowing.

“You knew too. How the bloody hell did you know?”

Greer laughs.

“Patience is not your strong suit. But you did promise to wait until after Jessie and Ethan’s wedding, so ...” My gorgeous, funny and way-too-smart-for-my-own-good girlfriend shrugs. “Also, Will called and said I should come over.”

I can’t help shaking my head. And thanking my lucky stars I had thought to put the ring I bought months ago in my pocket. In case Stella wanted to see it.

So much for a grand gesture. Looks like this will be the most family-friendly un-romantic proposal in the history of proposals. I stand and turn, dropping to one knee in front of Greer.

“Greer—”

“Did I miss it? I missed it, didn’t I?” My younger brother, Ty, who has finally earned his car back after his probation, races down the side path, coming to a screeching halt as he sees my position. I can’t deal with any more of this shit. So I tune it out. Tune them all out. And focus on Greer.

“Greer, falling in love with you has been the best thing I’ve ever done in my life. I can’t imagine a moment, let alone a life, without you in it. Please, for the love of God, put me out of my misery and say you’ll marry me.”

Her lips twitch. “Was that a question?”

My sigh comes from the depths of my soul. She’s right. Patience is not my strong suit. And in this family, it will be tested on the regular, for the rest of my life. “Yes. It was. But to clarify; Greer, will you marry me?” And with that I pull the diamond solitaire ring I searched high and low for from my pocket, hovering it over the end of her finger.

“Yes, Josh. I will absolutely marry you. Every day and twice on Sundays.”

The cheering is deafening. Greer hurls herself at me, careless of my kneeling position, and we fall the ground. Gertie thinks

it's play time and jumps into the fray. But none of it distracts me from kissing the woman who has turned my life into a romantic comedy.

"Ty, grab that case of champagne out of the wine fridge," Harry gives my brother a slight shove towards the house. And we celebrate with hot chips and very expensive champagne. Perfect.

An hour later I head inside to the bathroom and find Ben and Will in a huddle in the hallway. I sneak up behind them.

"Fifty. Fuck off. I'm not taking anything under a hundred," Will whispers.

"A hundred for what?" I know exactly what they're doing.

Two sets of wide not-so-innocent blue eyes turn on me.

"Your ears are pink." Which is a dead giveaway they're up to no good. "Wedding or babies?"

"Babies." They chorus before they've thought it through. "Shit. We totally forgot the wedding."

"I'd go short if I was you." And I saunter away to collect my new fiancée and get out of this circus.

## GREER

Poor Josh. It was so sweet of him to want to ask my parents for permission. How did a guy so dead set against happily ever after turn into such a romantic?

My family—our family—being what they are, he should definitely have expected something like today's shenanigans.

There was lots of laughing and joking and teasing, but I could see from Dad's face he was delighted Josh had gone old-school. And judging by Mum's tears she was too.

I can't take my eyes off this ring. It's huge. And so beautiful. Exactly what I would have chosen. A single perfect diamond in a wide yellow gold band. And did I mention it's embarrassingly huge?

"You're going to wear that out." Josh notices me staring at my finger again as he climbs into bed beside me.

"It's just so preeeety." I sigh.

Josh smiles. "Not as pretty as you."

And we both crack up laughing at his cheesy retort.

"Seriously though, it's perfect. It's exactly what I would have chosen."

Pulling me close, Josh threads our fingers together and lifts them to look at the ring on my finger, bracketed by his.

"I'm glad. I knew exactly what I wanted." He twists the ring gently, and we watch the colours and light leap out of it.

"You did? But we never talked about a ring."

“We didn’t have to. I wanted a diamond. To reflect how clear and honest and bright you are. It had to be brilliant cut, so it would sparkle almost as much as you. And it had to have perfect clarity, because of the clarity you’ve brought to my life. The yellow gold is for your warmth, and the wide band is for your strength.”

By the time he’s finished, his cheeks are pink and tears are pouring down mine.

“Oh you beautiful man,” I sob. “How did I ever get this lucky?”

This man was built to love. And be loved. The idea he ever thought otherwise seems ludicrous now. And I’m so happy it’s me he chose to love. Or maybe it’s me who chose to be loved by him. Either way, I can’t conceive of a future without him.

“Well, Flo, you never gave up on me. Thank God. That’s how we both got lucky.”

And as we sink down into the pillows, our mouths far too busy to talk any more, I spare a second to make a mental note that @joshlovesgreer needs an update.