



colin's proposal

A BONUS EPILOGUE

# Mr. Wrong Number

## *the proposal*

Olivia

*Colin: Listen, don't go home after work.*

I smiled as I rode the elevator and read the message, my body full of wild butterflies over the promise of the night ahead. I hadn't mentioned to Colin that I was leaving work early to get a blowout and my makeup done, so he assumed I was still at the office.

I texted: *Why?*

*Colin: It's a whole thing, but the bottom line is that I trashed the place and didn't have time to clean up before I left.*

I was the worst roommate *ever*, so it was comical that he was saying this to *me*. I texted:

*Me: Hi, my name is Olivia. Apparently you've never met me.*

Hmmm...maybe there was some sort of surprise in the condo that he didn't want me to see.

I smiled and waited for his response as I got off the elevator and walked over to our door.

*Colin: I know, but this is BEYOND a normal mess, even for you.*

I put my key in the lock and texted: *I literally just got off the elevator and want to change before dinner.*

*I don't care about a mess, Beck.*

*Colin: PLEASE. Also...about dinner.*

It was the one-year anniversary of our first date, and he was taking me to Flemings. I bought a new dress for the occasion, and though I wasn't *expecting* some grand romantic gesture, I wouldn't hate it if something next-level was afoot. I texted: *What ABOUT dinner?*

I unlocked the door, but when I pushed it open, there were no candles or flower petals in the shape of a heart.

*Oh, my God.*

“What the hell?” My mouth fell wide open as I turned in a slow circle, taking it all in without even bothering to close the door behind me. The knocked-over coffee table, the upended trash can with literal garbage strewn *everywhere*, a hot glue gun on the arm of the leather sofa, a shattered vase (in a pool of water and flowers) on the kitchen floor--

I punched-out *I'm calling you* before dialing his number, but as soon as it went straight to voice mail, Colin texted: *My phone is broken. I can text, but it won't let me answer calls.*

I looked at the empty bag of microwaved butter peas, upended on the rug, and texted:  
*WHAT IN THE HELL HAPPENED HERE???*

A knot of stress formed in my stomach as I took in the scene before me, because this was beyond weird. And Colin didn't break *anything...ever.*

Now his phone was broken?

*Colin: I don't want to talk about it.*

Was he serious with that? He didn't want to talk about it?! My thumbs clicked out: *I'm sorry, what???!!!!!!!*

I squinted as I noticed what appeared to be a potato underneath the sofa.

*Colin: FFS I'm begging, Marshall – can't you pretend you didn't see it? I'll clean when I get home and we can proceed as if it never happened.*

I trusted Colin a hundred percent, but I had a weird feeling in my gut as I tried to formulate any sort of a rational explanation for what I was seeing.

*Me: Where are you, btw?*

*Colin: No comment.*

*Me: Are you kidding me right now?* The worry was getting worse as another thought hit me. I texted: *Have you been kidnapped?? Is this actually NOT Colin at all but someone who has his phone? You better give me something, Beck, some proof that this is you, or I'm calling the police.*

A solid thirty seconds went by before another text came through.

*Colin: Hey, Misdial. It's MWN.*

I sat down, next to the hot glue gun that appeared to be permanently affixed to the leather arm of the couch, and I replied: *What in God's name are you up to today, Wrong Number?*

*Colin: You wouldn't BELIEVE the day I've had.*

His text made me relax just a little. I sent: *Tell me everything.*

*Colin: So today is the one-year anniversary of my gf and I's first date, right?*

I thought back to the sexual tension in the elevator that night and smiled.

Texted: *Right. Also – she sounds FABULOUS.*

*Colin: She's okay, I guess, but kind of a wise ass.*

*Me: Wise woman with a great ass. Got it.*

*Colin: I'll give you the great ass, but "wise woman" is NOT how I would describe her.*

I giggled, all by myself in the trashed apartment as I prompted: *How WOULD you describe her?*

*Colin: Gorgeous, knows her way around a mattress, terrible cook.*

I'd take it. I replied: *So your basic dream girl.*

*Colin: Pretty much. Can I get back to my story, or would you like to ramble all night about my girlfriend's ASSets?*

*Me: I see what you did there. Carry-on, sir.*

*Colin: So we planned a dinner date, but I had a better idea. I was going to next-level the shit out of the occasion, right?*

*Me: Oooh. What was your plan?*

*Colin: The PLAN was to surprise her with a Bernese Mountain puppy...*

I squealed, which made me realize the door was still open so I got up and slammed it shut.

Then I texted:

*Me: Ohmigod – that’s the same kind of dog as the Fleming’s parking lot dog!!!!*

*Colin: Yeah, it wasn’t a coincidence, bud.*

*Me: LOL bud.*

*Colin: I was going to surprise her with a puppy and a present, followed by the perfect date.*

I read the text and then read it again.

*I was going to surprise her – oh, God. I was melting in spite of our living room disaster because it was so incredibly thoughtful.*

*I texted: Puppy, present, Prosecco – triple threat night. I LOOOOVE IT. Your girlfriend is losing her shit right now, ICYWW.*

*Colin: How would YOU know about my girlfriend?*

*Me: I just know. She thinks it sounds PERFECT.*

*Colin: It might’ve been, but sadly, the dog ruined everything.*

I looked at the trash on the floor and texted: *He was a handful, huh?*

*Colin: He was, but I could’ve managed just that. May I paint the picture for you?*

*Me: Paint away.*

*Colin: I brought the dog home and gave him the requisite canine attention. Petting, tousling, that sort of thing. Doggo seemed happy, all was well. I put him in the kennel, as per the shelter’s directions, and got to work. Plugged in hot glue gun, put the flowers in a vase, and sat down to make my gf a little homemade project.*

The idea of Colin using a hot glue gun to make me something was absolutely *too* endearing. Infinite swoon level. I was giddy as I texted: *What did you make her????*

*Colin: Quit jumping ahead in the story.*

I grinned and sent: *But this part hardly sounds traumatic. Give me the BIG DRAMA.*

*Colin: WAIT FOR IT. As I started gathering supplies, I rubbed my eyes. Multiple times. I thought they were just dry so I didn’t think before I rubbed the hell out of them.*

Uh-oh. I wondered if he'd had something spicy on his hands; that happened to me once with wing sauce. I texted: *Uh-oh.*

*Colin: After a few minutes, it felt like there was fucking glass in my eyes, but I powered through. Started my project, but as my eyes burned and watered, I also developed a nasty little cough-and-whoop combo.*

Wait, what? I replied: *Ohmigod are you okay???*

*Colin: I'm fine so just enjoy the ridiculous story.*

*Me: Putting feet back up.*

*Colin: Good girl.*

*Me: You know I love it when you call me that, W/N.*

*Colin: Oh, I fucking know.*

*Me: (fans self) Please continue.*

*Colin: Now at this point, I'm thinking what the fuck, right? Then the dog – as I'm backing and my eyes are full-on watering - comes RUNNING INTO THE LIVING ROOM. Somehow he escaped from the kennel and proceeded to lose his shit. Ran under coffee table, got stuck, then knocked it over trying to get out. Tackled the trash can and started growling and tossing trash everywhere. I got up to restrain the puppy and tripped over the cord of the glue gun, which led to me falling and dropping said gun directly onto the leather sofa.*

I looked at the melted leather. Texted: *Dear God.*

*Colin: At that moment I realized that my peripheral vision was fucked because OH YEAH – I couldn't see out of my left eye. AT ALL.*

*Me: COLIN!!!!!!!*

*Colin: I called my gf's brother to come help with the dog, because the cough was starting to get to me and I could barely see.*

I wanted to laugh, but the cough part wasn't funny.

*Me: This is unbelievable.*

*Colin: Isn't it, though? As it turns out, I am "wildly" allergic to dogs.*

*Me: You're allergic to dogs????*

*Colin: So it would seem.*

*Me: How did you not know that? You're knocking on thirty, bud.*

*Colin: Bud LOL. Regarding the dog allergy, my mother was very anti-dog because DIRTY, so I guess I never had the chance to be around one long enough to discover.*

Why did that make me sad for little Colin?

*Colin: Do you think my girlfriend will give me a re-do tomorrow? I don't want to disappoint her but I'm not sure I'm up for a night out.*

*Me: OF COURSE she will! Where are you? She wants to see you.*

*Colin: I'd rather not say. She sees me as this sexy, sophisticated, perfect guy, and I'd prefer to delay our meeting until I'm less of a shitslow. I don't want to ruin the image.*

*Me: COME ON, COLIN. And trust me – she knows you're not perfect.*

*Colin: A. She does not. B. I have to go – I'll text you later.*

I sent a few more messages, but he stopped responding entirely. *Completely.* I knew it was likely no big deal, but I'd be damned if I was going to just sit around, wringing my hands and waiting.

No.

I dialed Jack's number and raised my phone to my ear.

If anyone knew where to find Colin, it would be my brother.

## **Colin**

The beeping was driving me fucking crazy.

I was lying back on the bed, my arm over my eyes in a pointless attempt to shield them from light, and the beeping from the machine behind me was wreaking havoc on my brain.

The nurse had finally taken the pulse oximeter off my finger since I was being discharged (after a shot in the ass and two breathing treatments), but the machine didn't know that and was screaming for someone to take note of the zero percent oxygen that it thought was pulsing through my veins.

“Colin.”

*Shit, shit, shit.* I dropped my arm at the sound of Liv's voice from the doorway, but I didn't open my eyes. I asked, “How the fuck did you find me?”

“Nice.” I heard her step inside and pull the door closed behind her. “I bribed Jack, you ass.”

“That traitor,” I groaned, torn between being relieved she was there – because I always wanted her around - and wishing she wasn't because I didn't particularly want her to witness Weak Colin in all his pathetic glory.

“Open your eyes,” she said, and I could feel how close she was. The smell of Livvie wafted around me, hovering just in front of my face, tempting me to take a peek.

“I don't want to,” I said, sounding like a pouty child because I felt like a pouty child.

Everything was supposed to be perfect. It should have been perfect. I took the afternoon off to get her dog, make him a collar that had a ring box attached, and arrange a vase full of her favorite flowers. I was going to deliver the PERFECT proposal for Olivia Marshall because it was what she fucking deserved.

Yet somehow here I was, in ER Room #6, with an inhaler prescription in my pocket and an eye that wouldn't open.

“Col,” she said, and I could hear the smile in her voice. “Look at me.”

I opened my eyes – well, my *eye* – and felt a burning sensation in my chest. Livvie was pretty all the time, but she looked *incredible*. I gritted my teeth – partially because the light hurt my eye but mostly because of the way she made me feel – and said, “Fuck, you are stunning, Marshall.”

That made her mouth slide into a slow, wide grin and her green eyes squinted. “Same, Beck.”

“My left eye is swollen shut and my right eye is a halfer,” I said, shaking my head. “Quit lying to the cyclops.”

“I’m not,” she argued around a laugh, but then her smile softened into seriousness. She put her hands on the front of my shirt – I loved how grabby she was – and said in a soft voice, “You went to war trying to give me the perfect night. Your poor, ruined eyeballs are stunningly beautiful because of your intentions.”

“Are you pitying me?” I asked, putting my hands over hers, trapping her palms against me.

“I am *obsessed* with you, actually,” she confessed, her eyes on mine as she said, “Because you pulled a Liv for me.”

I leaned a little closer, gravitating toward her the way I always had as her words settled into my chest.

Holy shit, I *had* pulled a Liv for her.

She made a self-deprecating noise and said, “Are you terrified that I’m rubbing off on you?”

I stared at her freckles and stubborn chin and swallowed hard as emotion tightened my throat. What if she *was* rubbing off on me? God, the beautiful, glorious mess. Liv’s passion for living was almost a tangible thing, so alive and loud that it nearly had its own identity.

To have that rub off on me, even a little? Fuck. That would make me the luckiest man on the planet, wouldn’t it?

Holy shit, I needed to do it. Now.

## Olivia

He hadn’t responded, which answered my question.

He *was* terrified of me rubbing off on him.

Which, honestly, I kind of understood.

He reached over and pushed the call button on the side of the bed. Three times. His eyes – well, *eye* – grew intense as he repeatedly pushed the button.

I asked, “Do you need someth--”

“My backpack,” he said, staring at the door with his eyebrows down, looking agitated. “I need my backpack.”

I wondered if they’d given him meds. I touched his arm and said, “I’m sure--”

“I need it *now*,” he said through a clenched jaw, letting out an exasperated sigh as he continued hitting the button.

“Mr. Beck, honey,” said the tall nurse who strode into the room, assessing the situation with her eyebrows raised in a question. She looked like someone who didn’t have time for nonsense as she cleared the call button and asked him, “What’s up?”

“Can I please get my backpack?” Colin straightened his loosened tie and ran a hand over his messy hair. “I just need my bag.”

“I told you no laptop,” the woman said, giving him a glare. “You’re just going to have to wait to work until--”

“I don’t *want* the laptop,” he interrupted, sounding like a total grump. “I just need the bag.”

I said, “Colin, I’m sure--”

“*Please*,” he said to the nurse, his voice thick with a seriousness that made us both look at him a little more closely. He sounded *desperate* for that bag, and the knot in my stomach returned because *what the hell was up with Colin?*

“Okay, babe,” she said, patting his shoulder and giving me a look before walking around him and approaching a locked cabinet beside the sink.

As she pulled the key from her pocket, I stole a glance at Colin and found it remarkable that even at this moment, in the ER with a bonkers allergic reaction, he still managed to look like he belonged in GQ.

His hair was tousled, but it somehow looked on purpose, as if a stylist had employed product specifically to project *rough day* hair. His dress shirt still looked starched and crisp, even though the top three buttons were undone, exposing an equally crisp and clean white undershirt. His suit pants remained perfectly pressed, and if it weren't for the absurdly swollen eyes, he appeared ready for a "messy CEO" photoshoot.

The nurse pulled his work bag out of the cupboard, and when she handed it to him, he gave her a sweet *Thank you, Gloria* and immediately started unzipping the side pouch, oblivious to her *you're welcome* and subsequent exit from the exam room.

I watched from beside the bed as he tore into the bag's interior like a kid searching for money under their pillow after losing a tooth.

"Liv," Colin said, finally looking away from his bag to smile up at me.

He was smiling now?

"Col...?" I replied, narrowing my eyes as his grin grew even bigger.

He'd definitely been medicated.

He grabbed the front of my sweater with one hand and tugged, pulling me so I had no choice but to fall onto the hospital bed beside him. I caught myself on my arms, so I was sitting and leaning over him, laughing, when it happened.

His hot blue eyes were on mine as he pulled a black velvet box from his bag.

"This was supposed to be attached to the collar of your new puppy," he said, his voice gravelly. "This was supposed to happen with dinner, wine, and two working eyes, but suddenly I feel like I can't wait another minute."

*Is that a ring box?* Tears filled my eyes as the gravity of the moment filled my soul, almost as if future me was looking back fondly at this magical memory.

*How could this be happening?*

I blinked fast, trying to shed my tears as he opened the box because I needed to see that ridiculous ring with clear vision.

And DEAR LORD, it was *ridiculous*.

A green sapphire, round and huge, surrounded by twinkling diamonds.

Holy *shit*.

“I know you hate cheese, Marshall,” Colin said, “But that ring is the color of your eyes so I had to buy it.”

I tore my eyes from the ring and raised them to his face, where he was giving me so much heat that I felt dizzy with it.

“That is good cheese, actually,” I managed, my voice breathy. “Love that cheese.”

“Your favorite cheese?” he asked, his lips sliding a little higher, his eyes twinkling in the very best way.

“Cheese perfection,” I breathed, enunciation no longer possible as I looked down at that ridiculously gorgeous green jewel and the shimmering diamonds that encircled it.

“I didn’t start living until I lived with *you*, Liv,” he said, taking the ring out of the box and holding it out to me.

I felt like I was going to pass out as the tears came back. I nodded emphatically, unable to formulate words as emotion took over, and Colin slid the ring onto my finger, smiling like I amused him.

“No comment?” he purred, not letting go of my hand. He kissed the top of my head, slid his fingers between mine and said, “At all? From the mouthiest little shit I know?”

“You said Liv three times in one sentence,” I blurted out, crying and laughing as he laughed with me. “But it was an amazing sentence and I loved it. I love you.”

“So you’ll marry me?” he asked, leaning close enough to rest his forehead against mine.

I nodded again, still crying. “Absolutely I will.”

“And Liv,” he said, sounding incredibly serious as he let go of my hand to reach up and push back a piece of hair that’d fallen out of my ponytail. “I promise we’ll get a dog as soon as I can set up allergy shots, okay?”

I leaned back a little so I could focus on his face, and Colin was gorgeously solemn as he stared at me as if he thought the dog allergy was a deal-breaker or something.

“I don’t care about a dog,” I said, so filled with love for this man who had once called me *a cross between a human tornado and a gnat* that it was a bit overwhelming. I said, “You are all I want, Beck, and we can just live happily ever after with a pet mouse or something.”

“Veto,” he said, his eyes – well, *eye* – getting that mischievous glint that I adored. “No mouse.”

“How about a snake, then?” I asked, knowing he hated snakes.

“Only if I can feed it your pet mouse,” he teased, pulling me down so I was basically lying on top of him on the hospital bed. “And then hide it in Jack’s apartment.”

“Ooh, I like that part,” I said, remembering how pissed my brother had been an hour ago, when I hid his remote and wouldn’t tell him where it was until he told me where to find Colin. “But maybe we just get a cat. I’ll even let you name it.”

“A cat.” He narrowed his eyes – well, *eye* – and pretended to entertain the idea. “I don’t hate that idea. And I’ve always wanted to name an animal Olivia Marshall.”

“You want to name our cat *Olivia Marshall*?” I asked, giggling a little.

“Think about it,” he said, turning onto his side to fully face me as he grinned. “If we give our cat that name, I can yell things like *Olivia Marshall just coughed up a hairball* and it’s totally allowed.”

I snorted as his absurd sense of humor – my favorite part of him – latched onto this idea.

“*Oh, God, Olivia is hissing at her own reflection again because she thinks it’s someone else,*” he said in a horrified voice.

“*Or Olivia Marshall is the sweetest girl,*” I suggested, burrowing into his chest as he pulled me closer.

“*Olivia Marshall has fleas,*” he said, lowering his head to nip at my neck. “*Or Olivia Marshall got a fungus from eating bird droppings.*”

I started laughing – no, cackling - just as the nurse came back into the room. Her eyebrows scrunched together, like she’d never seen two people snuggling and cackling on the bed in ER Room #6 before, and I held up my hand.

“We’re engaged,” I shared, punch-drunk with happiness when I wiggled my fingers and said, “See?”

She just stood there, staring at us as if we were the most annoying creatures she’d ever laid eyes on.

“Come on, Gloria,” Colin said, lifting his head to glare and bark out, “You can at least say congratulations after all we’ve been through together.”

Her mouth twitched like she wanted to smile, but she obviously wasn’t one to cave. Instead, she said to me, “I thought this one was going to cry when I gave him a shot in his backside. Are you sure about this, hon?”

“He *is* a baby about needles, but did you happen to get a look at that backside?” I wagged my eyebrows and said, “I mean...”

“It won’t always be high and tight like that, though,” she warned.

“True,” I agreed.

“I’m not a piece of meat,” Colin interjected, “And you weren’t supposed to *look* at my ass, Gloria – come on.”

She gave in to the laughter then, because it truly was impossible to resist a teasing Colin.

When we got home, he insisted I change into my new dress so he could take me to the roof for an official engagement toast.

And who was I to argue with that?

But when we walked onto the rooftop patio with a bottle of wine and two glasses, magic awaited.

A table was set with white linen, candles, and two Flemings takeout containers. The sounds of Vitamin String Quartet were coming from...somewhere, and I turned to Colin, completely awestruck.

“How?” I asked, absolutely in shock for the second time that day. He hadn’t known I was coming to the ER so it couldn’t have been planned ahead, but I hadn’t left him alone since my arrival, either, so... “How is this possible?”

“For you and me, Misdial,” he said, wrapping his arms around my waist and pulling me close, “Everything is possible.”

And as I looked into his twinkling blue eyes – well, *eye* – I knew he was right.

**The End**