

BUCKLIN FAMILY REUNION SERIES

OUT OF POCKET

*a novel by*

Debby Mayne

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**Bucklin Family Reunion series**

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# OUT OF POCKET



Bucklin Family Reunion series

Book 3

*a novel by Debby Mayne*

*Out of Pocket*, book #3 in the Bucklin Family Reunion series  
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*Marge Bucklin*



My husband Jay is one of the sweetest men east of the Mississippi River and south of the Mason-Dixon Line—and he always has been. Back when we first got married, he told me he'd get me anything I wanted, until we ran out of money.

I used to laugh, thinking that meant I'd have all the ham I could cure and eggs I could fry since we have lived on a farm from day one. He used to grow sugar cane, butter beans, collards, and corn to sell. On my little plot of land, I have a garden for personal use, with tomatoes, okra, watermelon, and whatever else I'm in the mood for when I'm looking at the seed packets at the end of winter.

Striking oil came as a complete shock to both of us. We were delighted when the oil company offered us a few thousand dollars to erect a few oil rigs. That meant we could relax a little and not have to worry about every dime we spent.

"Hey, Margie, did you see the latest email?" The voice snaps me out of my memories.

I spin around to face the only man I've ever kissed. "Email?"

He chuckles as he pulls his cell phone out of his pocket and taps the screen. "Yeah, looks like the young'uns are at it again." He pauses to meet my gaze. "We're havin' another reunion."

I let out a groan. "What on earth for? Didn't we just have one?"

He shrugs. "Yeah, we did, but it looks like there's another one comin' up, and guess who's hosting it."

I lift an eyebrow. "Bucky and Marybeth?"

"Nope." He drops down into his rocker-recliner that's identical to the

one I'm sitting in, only it has a few stains from the red clay from our property. "We are."

"What?"

"Yup. Looks like everyone thinks it's our turn again." He wiggles his eyebrows. "Better pull out your tomato aspic recipe and make a double batch while you're at it."

I feel the blood rise to my head as I ponder all the things I'll have to do to get ready. Jay and I are in our mid-80s so you'd think folks would spare us the trouble and take the reins. Folks tell me it's my fault on account of I don't act my age. Maybe so, but as long as I can get around, I don't let my years stop me.

Having our last reunion during the Thanksgiving weekend might not have been such a great idea, but at least it wasn't blazing hot. Mississippi summers can be scorchers.

Jay gets one of his goofy expressions. "Maybe we should have this one on the hospital lawn to save time and free up an ambulance."

In spite of my frustration, I laugh. "It does seem like something happens at most of the reunions. We've had Puddin' going into labor, Missy getting hurt when the barn blew up, and Sheila getting run over by a boxcar." My laughter fades. "I sure hope nothing happens at this one."

Jay shakes his head. "If there was something I could do to prevent it, I would, but even having the police there didn't stop it last time."

"Speaking of police, how are Coralee and Trace getting along?"

"Pretty good, if their cuddlin' at the Blossom Diner last week is any indication."

"Aw," I say. "I think it's sweet that she's finally found someone. I was startin' to worry about that girl."

Jay makes a face and shakes his head. "It might be sweet if they kept all that kissy-face stuff to themselves, but you know how I feel about public affection."

I nod. I do know. Even when the pastor told him to kiss the bride at our wedding, he wanted to wait until later—when all those folks in the church weren't staring at us.

He shrugs. "But I reckon I'm just an old fogey for thinkin' that way on account of it didn't seem to bother anyone else."

“When are we having the reunion?”

“Midsummer. I sure hope it’s not raining so we can keep everyone outdoors. We’ve been pretty lucky so far.”

“Jay! I can’t believe you said ‘lucky.’ You know it has nothing to do with luck.” I give him an exaggerated stern look. “You always said people who trust God didn’t have to worry about luck.”

He gives me one of his silly grins. “Then we best start prayin’ for good weather.”

After Jay leaves to go hang out and have coffee with some of his buddies at the Blossom Diner, I change into my gardening clothes. It’s not quite time to plant tomatoes yet, but I like to enrich the soil with my little compost pile.

I’ve barely gotten outdoors when I hear a car coming up the road. I stand up straight and shield my eyes from the eastern sun to get a better look. When I realize it’s Coralee’s little car, I put down my shovel and walk toward the driveway. That girl hasn’t been out to see us since the last reunion, so I suspect she either has something important to tell me or she needs something.

She slowly gets out of her car and closes the door. I know she sees me, but she doesn’t look directly at me. Looks like I’ll have to make the first move.

“Hey, Coralee. For land’s sake, girl, what brings you all the way out here?”

Her hangdog look makes my heart sink. When she lifts her gaze to mine, I see a hint of a smile on her lips, so I let out a sigh of relief.

“Hey, Granny Marge.” She takes a couple of steps closer and then stops. “Mama said I needed to come out here and tell you something.”

“Must be pretty important to use up all that gas when you could’ve just called.”

She nods. “Yes, I reckon it’s pretty important.” She lifts her left hand in front of her face and makes a fake gesture of pushing her hair back. That’s when I see the sunlight reflecting off one of her fingers.

“Get over here, girl. Let me see that ring.”

She extends her hand toward me as we both walk toward each other. Once I’m close enough, I take her hand in mine and study the precious

little stone sitting up in some rather feeble looking prongs. It takes everything I have to keep from telling her she needs to be careful on account of the fact that prongs bend, and she's likely to lose her diamond.

"Well, I'll be dipped and rolled in cracker crumbs." I pull her in for a hug. "I take it you and Trace are gettin' along just fine."

Coralee gives me a shy nod as her face flames bright red. "We are."

"So when's the big day?"

She shrugs. "We haven't decided yet. He just proposed last night."

I gesture toward the double-wide I call home. "Then come on inside and tell me all about it."

"I don't want to bother you." She gives me another shy look. "I mean, I know you're busy and all—"

I swat the air with my hand. "I was just fixin' to do a little gardening. It can wait. Come on, girl, I wanna hear every last detail."

She nods and follows me inside. It's been a long month of Sundays since one of my grand-young'uns came out to see me when there wasn't a reunion going on.

"Tea or lemonade?"

"Tea."

"Hot or cold?"

She shrugs. "Whatever's easy."

I pour both of us some cold sweet tea and place hers down in front of her. She takes a sip, grimaces, and puts it down. I suspect it's too sweet for her taste, but that's how Jay and I have always liked it.

After I lower myself into the chair adjacent to hers, I lean forward on my elbows. "Okay, so tell me all about it."

"Well . . ." She tightens her lips and looks down at her hands that have already started fidgeting with her napkin. "We've been going out ever since that last reunion. He felt terrible about gettin' into that altercation with Kyle, but Grandpa Jay told him not to worry about it."

I nod. "So did you fall in love right away, or did it take a while?" As soon as those words leave my mouth, I realize it hasn't even been six months since the last reunion, so it couldn't have taken too long.

"I knew by our third date." She smiles and takes another sip of her tea. "He says he knew the second he pulled me over for speeding."



“There’s something about fast women—” The male voice in the doorway stops. “Hey there, Coralee. You here to tell your granny the news?”

I glance over at him and give him one of my wifely looks. “Do you know the news?”

“Dern tootin’, I do. I helped the boy pick out the ring.”

I smack my palm to my forehead. “Don’t that just beat all. He can’t keep his mouth shut when he needs to stop talkin’, and he doesn’t tell me stuff I need to know.”

Jay pulls a glass from the counter and fills it with tap water. “I figured you’d find out when Coralee wanted you to know.”

I let out a breath of exasperation as I turn back to face Coralee. I’ll deal with him later. “Do go on.”

As she talks, I have flashbacks of my own romance with Jay. Some of their dates even sound suspiciously similar to ours—all the way down to the freezing cold picnic when he just happened to have a large stash of blankets in his trunk.

Jay remains standing in front of the sink, chuckling periodically and making comments beneath his breath. There’s no doubt in my mind that Trace got some coaching from my husband.

Finally, Coralee gets a dreamy look in her eyes and sighs. “I knew he was thinking about proposing, but I didn’t expect it to happen when it did.”

I glance over my shoulder at Jay and see the suspicious look on his face. He shrugs and smiles.

I turn back to Coralee and tilt my head. “Did he, by any chance, take you to the river at sunset?”

Her eyes grow big as saucers. “How did you know?”

“Little Jay bird can’t keep his beak shut.”

Jay snorts as he puts his water glass in the sink and heads toward the door. “I reckon I best be leavin’ now. You ladies have fun.”

Coralee tells me all the details about Trace’s proposal, and in spite of the fact that I’m annoyed by Jay’s keeping it a secret from me, I’m able to relive my own marriage proposal. To hear Coralee tell it, I have a feeling Trace spent some time rehearsing it with Jay.

Finally, she leans back in her chair, a faraway expression taking over her face. “Isn’t that the most romantic proposal ever?”

I nod. “Yes, it absolutely is.” I truly feel that way now, just as I did sixty-six years ago when Jay proposed to me. We have little squabbles every now and then, but the man still makes me giddy, knowing he’s all mine.

“Life is gonna be so perfect once we’re married.”

Her comment almost makes me choke. “Um, Coralee, you do realize that life is never perfect, right?”

She gives me an odd look, like I’ve just said the stupidest thing. “When we’re married—”

I hold up my hand to stop her. “Now listen to me, girl. A good marriage is a wonderful blessing that can’t be matched by anything else in this earthly life. But there will be struggles, and the key to keeping your marriage healthy is to learn to deal with the ups and downs.”

“But you and Grandpa Jay have a perfect marriage.”

I give her what I hope is a reassuring smile as I pop another hole in her bubble. “Oh, honey, it’s far from perfect. But we still have to remind ourselves each and every solitary day that we love each other.”

She squints her eyes. “Do y’all ever fight?”

“I wouldn’t call it fighting, but we do have disagreements. Sometimes we have long talks to hash things out, but other times, we just go off in our corner, get over whatever is botherin’ us, then come together and pray for God’s mercy.”

Coralee squirms around in her chair as her shoulders start to sag. “I never realized anything was wrong with your marriage.”

“No marriage is perfect. We’ve learned how to find common ground, knowing that we love each other with all our hearts.” I pause. “I just want to make sure you understand—and that you’re prepared for the times that . . . well, the times that aren’t so perfect.”

She glances at her still almost full glass of tea before standing. “I need to get back to campus. We’re having finals next week, and I need to be there for the recap.”

“Thanks for coming all the way out here to tell me, Coralee. And don’t be a stranger. I’d love to see you more often.”

“Oh, I’ll be here for the reunion.” Her face lights up even brighter. “And so will Trace.” She gives me an apologetic look. “But he won’t be dressed in uniform this time.”

“Of course he won’t.”

“I keep havin’ to pinch myself to make sure I’m not dreaming.”

I follow her out to her car and hold the door as she starts to get in. “I’m truly happy for you, Coralee. And I’m thankful Trace sees how wonderful you are.”

She grins back at me. “I remember you tellin’ a bunch of us something when we were young’uns, and now it all makes sense.”

I’ve said a lot of things to all the young’uns in my family. “Which one of the things I said finally makes sense?”

“You used to say, ‘Can’t never could, so start believin’ you can.’” She pauses. “Remember?”

“I do remember, and I’m delighted that you do too.” I lean over and give her a kiss on the cheek, leaving a hint of my Cherries in the Snow lipstick that’ll embarrass her to no end when she realizes she’s been out and about in public lookin’ like she just got a kiss from her granny. “Drive carefully, sweetie.”

“I will.”

After she closes her car door, I stand and watch until her car disappears around the bend on the other side of the thick stand of pine trees Jay lined our property with. When I turn back around, I stare at the double-wide Jay bought for me right after we struck oil.

He was proud as punch that he was able to give me what I always said I wanted. Back when I was newly married, I had a friend who lived in the first double-wide mobile home I ever saw. It was beautiful, with wall-to-wall carpet, a big old kitchen, and two full bathrooms. Jay and I lived in a two-bedroom, one-bath concrete block house that he and his brothers painted a cold shade of gray. It made me shiver every time I came home.

Now that house still stands about a football field’s distance from our mobile home, and it’s a pretty buttery shade of yellow that is much more welcoming. Jay offered to tear it down, but I want to keep it on account of all the wonderful memories I have of raisin’ our young’uns in it.

The phone in my pocket starts chirping, making me jump. I’m still

not used to having a phone on me at all times, but our young'uns insist on it since we're not getting any younger.

I glance at the screen and see that it's Puddin'. "We just got some new twirly dresses in the shop, and I thought you might want one for your ballroom dancing class."

I think about the wedding that's coming up. "Yeah, I reckon I'll need a new one soon, so I'll come into town sometime this week."

"Wonderful. I'll pull a few and set them aside. Just give me a call before you come so I can set you up in a room."

After I hang up, I roll my head from side to side, hoping to work out the kinks. Everyday life shouldn't be stressing me out at my age, but it still does. Maybe I need to go to yoga with my longest-living best friend, Sadie. She's been trying to talk me into it for near 'bout twenty years.