



# BUNNY CALL

The sun erupted from behind low-hanging gray clouds and nearly blinded Bob. He squinted, glowered, and flipped down the visor as he slowed to maneuver his anemic minivan around the millionth sharp curve on this seemingly endless winding road carving its way through thickly forested mountains.

*That's . . . just . . . great,* Bob thought.

The only thing he'd been looking forward to about this trip was the predicted rainy weather. His family was "bummed" about it, but he was secretly gleeful. Rain meant the flurry of activities would be canceled and he'd be left in peace to do a little fishing, take naps, and read a book.

"Honey, look at that!" Bob's wife, Wanda, sang out. "Sun!"

"Oh, is that what that is?"

She playfully smacked his shoulder.

“Hand me my sunglasses,” Bob said.

Bob took his eyes from the road for a couple seconds and watched Wanda lean forward to dig the sunglasses out of the glove box. He admired her shiny auburn curls and the soft contours of her profile. Wanda was petite, pale, and freckled, with small features. Even after twelve years of marriage and three kids, she was still the pretty, perky cheerleader he’d fallen for when they were seniors in high school. The only noticeable difference was her clothes, having traded her pom-poms and pleated skirts for the latest fashion. Today, she was wearing high-waist short black shorts and a netted lavender top over a black tank. The top fell off one shoulder. It looked great.

Eyes back on the road, Bob put on his sunglasses. Then he took a couple seconds to check himself out in the rearview mirror. A couple seconds was all it took to confirm that he *didn’t* look like the jock he’d been in high school.

Gone were the long thick black hair, the sharp jawline, the mischievous dark brown eyes, and the wide, carefree grin. In their place were thinning, graying short hair, soft jowls, tired eyes, and lips clamped into a downward curve. Most of his muscles had gone wherever too much of his hair had gone. He didn't have enough time to work out . . . and it showed.

Bob quickly shifted his attention to the drive. He pulled the minivan into the right lane as the road starting climbing upward, and the two lanes turned into three, creating a passing lane. Two sporty sedans pulled out from behind Bob to zip right by.

Bob sighed. "I miss my MG."

Wanda glanced at him but wouldn't take the bait. She never did. She'd talked him into selling his beloved MG when they had their second child. He'd regretted it ever since. He missed everything about that car, even its smell—the distinct motor oil/leather seat smell that always made him feel manly . . . and young.

Bob shook his head and tried not to inhale the scents of the minivan: peanut butter, dirty socks, and grape juice.

"Guess what, everyone?" Wanda called out.

"What?" the kids chorused.

"They've changed the forecast!" Wanda did a little happy dance in her seat as she looked at her phone's screen.

Bob was surprised the phone still had service. It felt like they were thousands of miles from civilization.

"Instead of eighty percent chance of steady rain," Wanda

said, “it now says twenty percent. We’re going to have sun!”

“*Happy sun, smiling sun, sun come out to play,*” Bob’s three-year-old daughter, Cindy, began singing off-key.

“*Bright sun, friendly sun, it’s a beautiful day,*” Wanda joined in with Cindy.

Cindy giggled and started in on the grating melody again. Her curly auburn pigtails bounced as she bopped through the song. What Cindy lacked in singing talent she made up for in cuteness and enthusiasm. Freckles and a happy grin won over everyone who met her.

“Come on, let’s all sing!” Wanda called out.

Seven-year-old Aaron sat next to Cindy, in the car seat he was excited to be growing out of soon. He shared his sister’s freckles and auburn hair as well as her energy, and predictably, joined in the singing. Tyler, ten, lanky and dark with broad shoulders that telegraphed the athletic build he’d have soon, lounged in his own space in the third row of seats. Tyler liked to set himself apart because he was the oldest, but he was still young enough to want to be included in family “fun.” He still loved game night, movie night, Sunday picnics, and sing-alongs. Now he did his part by providing a beatbox backup.

“*Happy sun, smiling sun, sun come out to play,*” Bob’s family sang.

“Come on, Bob,” Wanda cajoled, “sing!”

Bob grunted, then ground his teeth while his family went through the two lines at least half a dozen times. *Give me some classic rock and I’d belt out with the best of them,* Bob

thought. But he wasn't going to sing about the stinking sun.

Bob kept his lips pressed together and his eyes on the road, where the still-wet pavement was glistening in the newly shining sun. The double yellow line was a tether pulling the minivan inexorably toward its destination. Bob might be driving, but he had no control. Not really.

When was the last time he'd had control? Before Tyler was born? When he and Wanda married? Before they met? Since he was born? Was control an illusion?

Finally the song wound down, and Aaron asked the age-old question, "Are we there yet?"

"Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" Cindy parroted.

"How much farther? Are we there yet?" Wanda asked Bob.

"Not you, too," Bob said with a sigh.

Wanda laughed. She looked at the map she had unfolded, and answered her own question. "Twenty-seven more miles," she said.

Bob found it endearing how Wanda insisted map-reading was more fun than using a GPS. It was one of the many quirks he loved about her. Making up songs—like the dumb sun song—was one of the many quirks he *wasn't* so crazy about. Harping continually on family togetherness was one of the quirks he truly hated.

When Tyler had been young, it wasn't so bad. Taking his son on fishing trips and to ball games was no trouble at all. Even the hikes Wanda had planned were fun. When Aaron was born, the family activities had gotten more

complicated, but they had still been doable. Adding Cindy to the mix had raised the chaos factor tenfold. Cindy wasn't a brat or anything; she was actually a very sweet child. But her energy level was through the roof, and for some reason, all that did was amp up the boys. Lately, it seemed like Bob never got any peace or quiet, even at night. He could be sure that one or more of his kids would end up diving into bed with Wanda and him at some point, every night, without fail.

Where Bob used to have time to himself, now his time belonged to everyone *except* him. His work took a slice. His kids took a slice. Wanda took a slice. He never used to begrudge the time Wanda took, but that was because she wanted his time for fun things. Now all she wanted was for him to put on one of his many "family-man" hats: coach, teacher, playmate, cook, handyman, driver, shopper, janitor, money earner.

A couple months before, Wanda's best friend had told Wanda about Camp Etenia. "*Etenia* is a Native American name that means 'rich,'" Wanda read from the nearly magazine-thick brochure describing the place. "We named our family-inclusive camp Etenia because a man who has family is indeed rich," she kept reading. "Isn't that beautiful, Bob?"

"Mm," he'd said absently.

Bob had thought Wanda was just reading about the place the same way she read about Greenland and Norway and Albania. Wanda wanted to travel, and she loved to

research destinations. But it turned out Wanda was serious about Camp Etenia.

“Why don’t we just send the kids to camp, and we can stay home and hang out in the hammock?” Bob asked when Wanda kept talking about it. He grabbed her and nuzzled her neck. “Just the two of us.”

Wanda wasn’t buying it. Neither did she approve of his idea that they go to a nice hotel and plop the kids by the pool so they could have time alone together. He finally pulled out all the stops and suggested a high-priced resort that promised to entertain the kids while the parents lounged under big umbrellas on white sandy beaches. Bob wanted to *relax*. Wanda wanted something else.

So here he was . . . on his way to Camp Etenia.

Bob glanced in his rearview mirror to find out why it was suddenly so noisy in the minivan. Now all three of his kids were engaged in some elaborate hand-clapping game.

Wanda leaned toward Bob. “Zoie and I used to love camp when we were little girls,” she told him for the tenth time. “The only downside was that we had to be away from Momma and Daddy. Isn’t it awesome we don’t have to put the kids through that? We’ll all be together for a full week!”

“Awesome.”

If Wanda noticed his sarcasm, she ignored it.

A deer ran across the road in front of the minivan, and Bob hit the brakes. Thankfully, the minivan hadn’t been going very fast. It couldn’t. It had no pick-me-up for steep