

NICK AND QUINN'S WEDDING

THE BONUS NOVELLA

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It's a silent sort of island.

Lush and mountainous, with cliffs that tower over the sea beneath. The kind of place you'd expect to find very few people, even fewer homes—and absolutely no churches like the one that sits on its shores, its stone facade wind-blown until it's nearly as white as the sand it overlooks.

I stare at the picture on my laptop, the one that's popped up unannounced while my mother yammers at me by phone. I never believed in anything even vaguely magical or supernatural before the past few months, but the more I open myself up to the possibility, the more I see it around me, in the smallest things I'd have called coincidence before—and there's a hum in my blood as I look at the photo that tells me I can't call this a coincidence either.

“I just don't know what people are going to think,” my mother is saying. She's used this phrase no fewer than twenty times since I told her we are getting married. She thinks it's “unseemly” to get married so soon after I've called off my engagement to someone else, and that it's even *more* unseemly to be visibly pregnant

during my wedding. “I can’t go telling everyone that you’re marrying someone new so soon after you broke up with Jeff. But if you wait any longer everyone will know you’re pregnant, and that’s almost worse.”

I wasn’t listening all that carefully in the first place, but now with this photo staring back at me, I barely hear her at all. The church—how the hell did they build it? It’s surrounded by cliffs and water for miles. There is absolutely no way they could have gotten limestone there in the quantity necessary except by ship, and no ship could have docked anywhere in the vicinity of that cove without crashing into the cliffs.

Nick, sitting across the room, is watching my face. His eyes sharpen as they flicker from me to the phone in my hand, and he rises. He was protective before. Now that I’m pregnant he treats me like Murano glass. If he could bubble wrap me, he absolutely would.

My mother is saying something about Abby and Jeff—no doubt about how insensitive I’m being, but I’m not really listening closely enough to be certain. “Mom, I have to go. I’ll call you back.”

Nick runs a hand through his hair as I hang up, trying to mute his frustration. “I know she’s your mom and I’m trying not to get involved, but I’m getting pretty sick of her upsetting you,” he says.

I bite my lip. “For once it wasn’t her,” I reply. “But come look at this.”

He walks over and leans down from behind me.

“Wow,” he says. “That’s amazing. Where is it?”

“The Isle of Eder. It’s somewhere to the north of Saint Lucia.”

Nick rests his hands on my shoulders. “I wish we had a church like that around here,” he says. “That looks like the perfect place to get married.”

He says the words and something begins to seep into my blood—contentment and certainty. The same things I felt when I

ended up with him—as if some piece of me floating in space had finally found its way home. I reach back and cover his hands, still resting on my shoulders, with mine. “Yes,” I reply. “It does.”

I glance away from my laptop to look out the plane's window again. All I can see is water in every direction. Nick's eyes follow mine.

"You see anything yet?" he asks.

"Nothing." There are storm clouds ahead, the kind a little plane like this one shouldn't be flying through. I bite my lip. We are traveling to an island neither of us have ever heard of, a place we could barely find on a map, to see if it's a good spot to hold a wedding. Any by the look of those clouds in the distance, we won't even make it there without taking our lives in our hands. "Was this insane?" I ask.

He grins. "I'm just happy you didn't break up with me at the airport."

I raise a brow at him. "That joke will never grow old for you, will it?"

"It's one of the best things that ever happened to me. You can't expect me just to forget." He presses his lips to my brow. "But are you okay with this? Obviously it's going to have to be a very small wedding if we do it here."

That part doesn't bother me at all, actually. It was just the two

of us when we married before, and really, the journey that got us to this point was ours alone. No one outside could possibly understand what we've gone through to make this happen.

"Oddly enough the only person I'd actually want here is Sarah." My throat swells a little at the thought of her. My biological mother gave up so much for this wedding—and our entire lives—to be possible. My memories of her are filmy, scattered, but love for her sits inside me as solidly as it must have in other lives. I've always missed her, I think, the same way I always missed Nick. I just never knew what to blame for that sense of loss, so I blamed myself. "Are *you* okay with the fact that it'd be a small wedding?"

"If it were up to me there'd be no one there but us. I could do without an entire evening spent with your mother comparing me unfavorably to Jeff, among other things."

I smile at him and lean my head on his shoulder. "She never compared you unfavorably to Jeff."

"No, she just brought up the fact that he's your hometown hero *ten times* during a one-hour dinner and said something about football being more *manly* than swimming."

"You should have reminded her that you're the one who knocked me up with twins the first time we slept together. That's fairly manly."

He flashes me a brief, all-too-cocky smile. "I thought about it. Speaking of which, have you found anything?" he asks, nodding at the laptop in front of me, where I've been combing over the files I downloaded from Sarah's hard drive. In a little over eight months, I will give birth to twins who will eventually be able to disappear at will. If there's a way to control them, to keep them safe, I feel certain Sarah would have let me know, but after hours of searching, I'm beginning to have my doubts. "All garbage so far. It's bizarre—mostly term papers, really badly written ones with no names or dates." I turn the open laptop toward him.

"A history of the liberation of Paris at the end of World War

2,” he reads. “She had a home there. Maybe it was just idle curiosity.”

My lips press together. I didn't give it too much thought before but now that I am, it's not adding up. “Why save all of it though? I wonder if maybe she was there?”

“She told you she wasn't good at traveling from place to place. France during the mid 1940s seems like a bad place to visit if you can't really control where you're going to end up.”

He's right, and while I don't remember everything about her, I know she was never reckless. “I just don't know why she'd save all this crap and not leave a single word behind to help us out. Maybe she thought I'd just travel back in time to see her.”

His jaw shifts. I feel dread at the prospect, but I know he feels something ten times that. “She must have known you'd have babies at home. And that you'd refuse.”

My nod is small, symbolizing my desire to agree with him and my inability to do so. Because the truth is that if we don't find something soon, if I don't figure out how to protect our daughters, there won't be any other option. I push the laptop toward him. “Feel free to take a look if you'd like. This stuff is all blurring together.”

“What I'd like to find out is some information about your dad,” he says. “You had to have inherited a mutated gene from him too, so it's possible he still has family who time travels.”

I push a hand through my hair. “I haven't really been looking. There's only one reason that palm reader would have been reluctant to tell me who he was.”

Nick frowns. “What are you talking about? I can think of a thousand reasons she wouldn't want to tell you.”

Nick wants to see the best in me. He's incapable of believing anything bad—even telling him I played a role in his brother's death didn't make a dent. I'm less able to see things that way. “Come on. He had to have done something bad. And I mean

really bad. She probably thought I'd be better off not knowing that's half of my DNA."

He laughs. "Don't you think you're sort of jumping to conclusions? Maybe it's because he died tragically, and you'd already been through too much. Or maybe his family doesn't know about you and she needs to prepare them first. Your mother loved him. How bad could he have been?"

I exhale slowly. "Well there's nothing in my mother's files so far and I have no idea where I'd even start looking for him."

Mostly, the issue is that I haven't even tried to think of how I'd look for him, and Nick calls me on it. "Quinn, you haven't looked at marriage records, at birth records, at *anything*. Sarah said he died in that house, and that he died before you were born. So I'd say we start by looking up the address of her house in Paris and see if anyone died there around that time."

I guess he's right. And maybe it's better to just know outright whatever terrible thing my father did than to sit here stewing about it. Until I know for certain, all the worst things are possible, and perhaps the truth is only moderately terrible—maybe he was just a petty criminal or went to jail for tax evasion. "I'll look it up when we land." I glance out the window. "*If* we land." The clouds ahead of us are a charcoal so heavy, so dense, they look drawn into the sky with a heavy hand, and we're heading straight for them. I don't know a lot about planes, but I know this tiny eight-seater was not cut out for conditions like the ones we're heading toward.

Nick's hand tightens around mine. "Why the fuck isn't he trying to go around the storm?" he asks. "I'm going to go talk to him."

He reaches for his seatbelt just as we hit our first bump and I grab his hand. "Don't," I beg. "It's too late. You need to stay belted in."

"It'll just take a second, hon," he argues, but before I can even reply we hit a bigger bump, and then another, and finally knock

into a wall of clouds so hard that I can feel the plane shudder and slow in response. Nick's arms encircle me like a vise, though there's nothing he could do to protect me at this point. My head is pressed to his chest and I can feel his heart hammering just as hard as mine. We bounce again and the plane wobbles and seems to still. For one breathless moment I wait, ready to feel us freefall from the sky. But instead we bounce again and then leave the clouds entirely.

The island appears just ahead of us, bathed in sunlight, even more beautiful than in the photos we saw. There is not a cloud in the sky.

Nick and I exchange a look. Nothing about our desire to get married here has been normal. But what just happened seals it. Something has driven us to come to this island. Something unnatural.

We land in the middle of nowhere, on a tiny landing strip surrounded by trees. If I hadn't already decided as we plowed through that storm that we couldn't hold our wedding here, I'd know it for certain now.

"There's not even an airport," Nick says, quietly astonished.

I tuck my passports back into my purse. "There's no way we can hold a wedding here."

He wraps an arm around me and sighs. "Yeah, I guess we're back to the drawing board, but I'm not going to complain about two days alone on a tropical island with my gorgeous fiancé."

I smile up at him. "I'm not complaining either. Although I *am* wondering how the hell we get to our hotel. I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that Uber doesn't have a strong presence on this island."

He tips his chin at the Range Rover sitting in the grass beside the tarmac. "I think that's probably ours. The hotel set it up."

"They sent a Range Rover?" I ask. "Good grief. How expensive is this place?"

He picks up our bags and starts toward the car, grinning at me

over his shoulder. "I thought we agreed it was best that I leave you in the dark about the cost of this trip."

It's exactly what we agreed, because while I have a great deal of money coming in and am about to marry a guy who makes a very good living, I still have a hard time stomaching the kind of prices Nick doesn't blink an eye at. "You can tell me."

He shakes his head and leans down to press a quick kiss on my mouth. "Not a chance. We've got two nights here and I'm not spending them camping on the beach because you think the hotel room is unreasonably priced."

He puts our bags in the back and we climb in. The hotel has already programmed their address into the GPS, so we follow its commands, heading down one long road and up another, toward the cliffs on the island's eastern side.

Our hotel is built into the cliffs, impossibly chic even from the outside. Staff members step forward before I have time to gawk or—again—ask Nick how much it cost. We are hustled forward to the check-in desk, where a girl stands—smiling at us so broadly I actually look back over my shoulder to see if she's looking at someone else. There is no one there.

"Welcome, Dr and Mrs. Reilly," she says. "This is a great honor."

Nick's gaze flickers to mine—a *great honor?*—and then he smiles a little awkwardly. "Uh, thank you. We're excited to be here."

He tries to hand her a credit card and she waves him off. "That won't be necessary. Your trip has been paid in full."

Both of us still. What she's saying just isn't possible. We didn't tell a soul about this trip. Not our friends, not our parents. "Paid in full by *whom?*" I ask.

She glances at her computer. "Cecelia Boudon? She's upgraded you to the presidential suite as well."

"Are you sure?" Nick asks. "I don't think we know anyone by that name."

She nods. "That's what it says here. There's a gift bag for you as well," she says. "Let me get it from the office. I'll be right back."

The second she's out of sight I turn to him. "Did you tell someone?"

He shakes his head. "Not a soul. And I definitely don't know anyone who could have afforded the presidential suite. That room costs fifty grand a night."

My jaw drops. "Fifty *grand*? For one night? My God that's..."

"Insane," he agrees. "For once I agree with you on that. Do you know anyone named Cecelia? The only person I can even think of is that palm reader in France, but obviously it couldn't be her."

The girl emerges and hands me a gift bag full to bursting, and introduces us to a bellman who will take us to our room. We follow him from one hall to the next, until he at last opens the door.

We step in after him and stop, staring in shock. The room looks like a celebrity's vacation home straight out of *Architectural Digest*—fluffy white linen couches and glass tables, and the entire seaward wall is missing so when you face forward all you can see is water and the green peaks of Mount Leon. Outside there's a huge deck with lounge chairs and a fire pit. But it's missing one very critical item.

"Where's the bed?" Nick asks, just as my mouth opens to ask the same question. Not that we're above having sex on the couch. God knows it's happened enough times back home.

The bellman opens what I assumed was a closet door and nods. "Right this way sir," he says.

We follow him into what turns out to be an elevator, and then emerge into a room even more astonishing than the one we came from. A huge bed, gleaming ebony hardwood floors, another open wall looking on to the mountains, but this time the deck ends with a private infinity pool at its edge.

"This..." I begin and then trail off, looking at Nick to complete the sentence.

"Is unbelievable," he concludes.

The bellman hangs his head with a bashful smile. I realize only now that he seems to be struggling to make eye contact. Nick tries to tip him, and he waves his hands. "I could not accept," he says. "It's an honor to have met you." And with that he turns and gets onto the elevator, closing the door behind him.

"That was strange," I whisper. "But at least it was the good kind of strange?"

Nick nods, looking around us. "Definitely the good kind of strange." His gaze reverts to me, and he tips my chin up to plant a light kiss on my mouth. The sun bursts out from the clouds all of a sudden, and we stand in a beam of light. Something about all of this—the weather, the island, the church, the room—feels preordained. It's possible I'm reading into things too much, but whether it's something supernatural or not, I plan to enjoy every moment of it. "We need to figure out who the hell got us this room," he says.

I nod, reaching for my phone. As amazing as all this is, it just makes no sense...and I'm tired of things making no sense. I type the name Cecilia Boudon into the search engine—and the palm reader's face is the first thing I see. Except it's an entirely different version than the one we met—almost unrecognizably so, with salon-perfect hair and jewels and a Chanel suit that fits her trim figure in a way that only comes with tailoring. "It's her," I gasp.

Nick pulls my back to his chest and looks at her over my shoulder. "What the hell?" he whispers. "She looks completely different." I click on the image and her Wikipedia page opens, proving that this situation is even weirder than we thought:

Cecelia Boudon, widow of philosopher Jean Marc Boudon, is reputed to be among the wealthiest women in France. She is the founder of HSD, one of the country's largest purveyors of electronics, and the first company to bring televisions and

microwaves to France. Boudon used her earnings to become one of the country's most successful investors, recognizing the value of stock in Microsoft and Sony long before those companies became household names. Her mansion, on Rue d'Exupery, is considered one of Paris's most magnificent homes.

"So it was all an act," I say quietly. "The house, the palm-reading thing. It was all an act. But why?"

"Maybe there are details about her she didn't want us to know," Nick suggests.

I scroll down to the next paragraph. **Born Cecelia Bertrand, the daughter of a stage actress and a farmer...**

"Bertrand," Nick says. "That's the name your mother was using in France. I assumed it was just a pseudonym...but maybe not. Do you think you might be related?"

I look at the woman in the picture. I see nothing in her face that reminds me of my own, but she's over seventy. I'm not sure I'd recognize much with that kind of age difference. I guess she'd be the right age to be my grandmother, but a quick glance back at the article—which mostly focuses on her investing prowess—rules that out. "It says here she had no children." I put the phone down.

"Maybe your father was illegitimate. It would have been a bigger deal back then than it is now."

I turn toward him. "Or maybe he did something terrible and she didn't want to be associated with him."

He laughs again, tipping my chin up to find my mouth. "Hon," he says quietly, "there is no way your father was evil. I know you, and I'm telling you it's not possible. The only reason you think that is because of the way your parents reacted to you when you were growing up."

I close my eyes and press my face to his chest. He's probably right. I just wish I knew for sure. "I don't want to think about this right now," I tell him. "Let's just enjoy this trip."

Nick's hands curve around my neck, thumbs pressed to the

corners of my jaw. "Are you tired? Do you want to lie down for a while?"

I go on my toes to pull his mouth back to mine. "I tell you I want to enjoy our trip and you ask me if I need to rest?"

I get a flash of his smile. "It seemed more considerate than immediately suggesting you take off your clothes."

I tug at the button on his shorts. "You're pretty considerate when our clothes are off too."

He pulls my shirt over my head. "I'm going to be especially considerate today."



WE'D INTENDED to explore the island on our first day, but we never make it out of the room. Between school and Nick's job, time like this—time where we have no responsibilities and can just enjoy each other—has been rare. And as it turns out, there's nowhere to go really, anyhow. No restaurants, no stores. It's bizarre—you'd think on an island this size there'd be some kind of tourist industry—but I sort of prefer it this way. This room, this view and Nick are pretty much all I require to be 100% content.

We swim and lie in the sun, gorging on the fruit the hotel sent up. We've both agreed that the island is too hard to get to for a destination wedding. But it's a shame, because with every moment I spend here, I just want more.

I emerge from the bathroom at dusk but stop for a minute and just watch him. He's on the balcony staring at the ocean, clad only in swim trunks. I take in his broad, tan back, his narrow hips, the long, lean line of him. We were supposed to drive down the mountain to go see the church, but the church is the last thing on my mind at present.

I walk up behind him, press my palms and my mouth to his sun-warmed back. He shudders. The good kind of shudder, his body tensing slightly as if preparing to pounce. I go on my toes to

kiss his ear and the soft skin below it, pull at the lobe and feel that delicious tension in him grow. He turns and pulls me to him, the palm of his hand beneath my jaw, soft mouth pressed to mine. A small groan, low in his throat.

Every once in a while it strikes me all over again: *I* am marrying Nick Reilly. *Me*. I've been blessed in so many ways, but sometimes it seems like winning him is too good, too much luck, for any one person.

And I suppose I'm pushing it, but I really wish I was marrying him *here*.



THE NEXT DAY we force ourselves from the room to go explore the island. It's mostly wild, and half the roads consist of only gravel or sand. We follow the GPS mile after mile down a sand road, under the impression that it is leading us to the beach. It leads, instead, to a forest.

Nick wants to return to the room, but I object. "It's right on the other side of these trees," I insist. "I mean, look at the map. There's absolutely no way that the beach isn't right there."

"I'm not walking my *pregnant* fiancé through a fucking forest in the middle of nowhere in search of a beach. Didn't you ever watch *Lost*? Do you how much awful shit can live in a forest?"

"The beach is right there," I reply, hopping out of the car. "What could possibly go wrong?"

Nick follows. "On a weirdly uninhabited island that is shielded from bad weather and has absolutely no infrastructure but somehow supports a hotel worth *millions*?" he grumbles. "Yes, it sounds like a completely legit place where *nothing* weird happens."

We find a sand path so narrow and overgrown we have to walk single file. He insists, naturally, on going in first. After five minutes, the path widens and then suddenly stops at a wide

beach with powder-fine sand and water so clear and calm you can see to the bottom.

"Quinn," I say aloud to myself, imitating Nick's voice, "you were completely right about this place. I'm sorry I was being such a pussy."

He turns back to me with an incredulous look. "Did you seriously just call me a pussy because I was worried about protecting my pregnant wife?"

"Fiancé," I correct. "And technically, I didn't call you a pussy, because *I* would never use that word. I pretended you were calling yourself one."

"That does it," he says, swinging me over his shoulder. "You're going in."

I squirm. "Don't you dare throw me in! I'm pregnant! I'm fragile."

His laugh is low and slightly sinister. "Too late to play that card." He plows forward until we are waist-deep and pretends he's going to throw me but then, at the last minute, sets me gently down in the water instead.

"Thought you were going to throw me?" I tease, wrapping my arms around his neck as he sinks lower into the water. He grabs my ass and pulls me tight against him.

"I had second thoughts at the last moment."

I wrap my legs around him and feel something rigid pressing against my abdomen. "Did those second thoughts involve your penis?"

He laughs, his mouth moving over my neck. "Pretty much all my thoughts involve my penis to one extent or another. But yeah," he says, sliding my bikini bottoms to the side. "This one was particularly penis-oriented."



WE STAY on the beach longer than we probably should, but given

that we no longer need to check out the church, it probably doesn't matter. We exit the water and stand side-by-side, staring out at the view. It was a hard trip to get here. I can't imagine we'll ever come back, especially given that we'll have twins eight months from now. My throat tightens at the thought. "I wish I knew we'd be coming back here some day."

He wraps an arm around me. "We will. As soon as the twins are old enough to be left at home, we'll plan another trip."

I hear a noise in the distance. It sounds like the giggle of a small child. We both look back toward the woods.

"It sounded like a kid," I whisper.

"Great," says Nick. "Mysterious giggling ghost children who live in the forest."

He swings me back over his shoulder and heads for the woods.

"Are you serious right now?" I demand. "I'm pretty sure I can handle a child on my own."

"What if it's some crazy supernatural ghost child, like in *The Shining*?" he counters.

I seriously doubt a crazy supernatural ghost child is going to be so intimidated by Nick's size that it would really make much of a difference, but I love that his first thought is about protecting me at all costs. I can't wait to see him as a father.

Nick sets me down when we finally get to the car and opens my door, where we find a bouquet of flowers resting on my seat. Calla lilies and peonies, my favorites, tied in a thick satin bow, like a bridal bouquet. It's the kind of thing Nick would do, but I can't imagine how he'd have pulled it off here, and the astonished look on his face suggests he's as in the dark as I am. "What the hell?" he breathes. "We're in the middle of nowhere."

"This just gets weirder and weirder," I say, climbing into the car with the bouquet in my lap. It's as if someone around us knows more about our future than we do and wants to help us along.

Or as if someone wants us to choose this place for our future wedding despite the difficulties involved.

“Let’s go look at the church after all,” I tell Nick when he climbs in.

He glances at me. “I thought you said it was too hard to get to.”

I shrug. “It is. I just...I don’t know. I feel like we’re supposed to go see it.”



THE CHURCH IS BACK on the other side of the island, not far from our hotel. Because it’s built at the base of a cliff, we can’t drive there and instead need to park on the top of a scenic overlook and walk down the steep stair case built into the cliff wall. Aside from the presence of the church it appears every bit as wild and uninhabited as the beach we just left, but to our surprise, the doors are wide open.

I hesitate before we walk in. I’m a little more scared of angry priests than I am supernatural ghost children. Nick takes my hand and we step tentatively over the threshold. The church is even more massive inside than it appeared, airy and light. It seems less a temple to God than it does a temple to nature, to the beauty of the limestone that crafted it, the bare stone floors, the roar of the ocean, dust motes in a stream of sunlight. We seem so small within it, and yet it feels right, as if we belong here, as if we too are part of what makes this place alive. The breeze whips around us, and I picture it, marrying him here. I’d want it to be exactly like this—just us and the sunlight and the ocean behind us. Not my mother clucking her tongue about what people will think, not the few people who choose to weather the long trip while talking behind their hands about how unseemly it all is. Even Caroline and George, my closest friends...they aren’t a part of this really. I’m not sure I believe in God, necessarily, but there

is something holy in this place, something bigger than the two of us, and yet exclusive to us in the same moment.

A side door opens and a small man walks into the room. He looks nearly as old as this church, his body wizened, his skin darkened by years under the sun. He moves toward us with surprising speed, given his age. "I'm so happy you've finally come," he says, beaming at us like a grandparent might. It's as if he was expecting us. "It's a marvelous place for a wedding, is it not?"

Nick's hand tightens in mine. I know his thoughts are along the same lines: *how did this guy know that's why we were here? Was it our age? A lucky guess?*

"We'd love to get married here," says Nick. "But I think logistically it might be difficult."

"What logistics?" the priest asks. "You're already here. We have no licensing requirements on the island."

"It was a long trip too," I explain. "I'm not sure we can ask everyone to travel that distance, and there'd be no place to hold the reception."

"And you very badly want this reception?" the priest asks. Again he asks in a way that implies he already knows the answer and he is correct: I *don't* want a reception. No one alive really understands what we've gone through to get to this point, and in an ideal world, it would just be the two of us. We'd marry here and spend the afternoon back on the deck of our hotel room, blissfully naked, the balmy breeze swaying our hammock to and fro. I suspect Nick would be okay with that too, but his mother and mine would not be. "Our families would be very upset if they weren't invited," I explain.

"Well, I'll let you think about it," the priest says, clasping each of our hands in turn. "I'm here if you change your mind. And if nothing else, you must come back to baptize the twins."

My jaw drops. He is already walking away. "How did you know about the twins?" I call after him.

He turns back to me with a smile. "Quinn Stewart Bertrand, I know more than you can begin to imagine."

He walks into his office and closes the door while Nick and I stand there, speechless. Nick runs his hands through his hair.

"He called me Bertrand," I whisper.

"And he knew about the twins," Nick says. "We've only told a few people. And certainly no one here."

I bite my lip. "I know we should be weirded out, but I'm sort of...not?"

"Yeah," he says, clasping my hand. "Me neither. And that's probably the weirdest thing of all."



We spend our last night in Eader out on our deck. We order room service and dine under the moonlight, watching as the waves crash against the cliffs across from us. We swim and lie in the hammock together in a blanket. He rolls me on top of him. “We can’t possibly have sex in a hammock,” I argue.

He puts one foot on the floor to brace us. “Watch and learn, Mrs. Reilly.”

Eventually we rouse ourselves just enough to shower and go to bed. When I wake in the morning Nick is sound asleep, flat on his back, one arm stretched over his head. And completely naked. It’s extremely hard not to wake him up, but in an act of supreme selflessness I instead climb from the bed and go to our deck, leaning against the railing to watch the night sky give way to morning, the sun bursting out over the peaks to the east like a ripe peach begging to be pulled loose.

I love my life with Nick back in D.C. but there is something about this place—it feels like home in a way nothing else ever has. I picture a different kind of life here with Nick, one I spend

barefoot and free, one where our daughters tumble out onto a wide white beach each morning and run wild.

Nick comes up behind me, clad only in boxers, and rests his hands on my shoulders, pushing my hair aside to press his lips to the side of my neck. I lean back against his chest. "Do we have to leave?"

He wraps his arms around me. "Unless you want to give birth to the twins on an island which appears to have no medical care, I think we do. But I had a thought—how do you feel about eloping?"

I turn to face him and wrap my arms around his neck. "With you? The sooner the better."



WE WEAR the clothes we brought to go to dinner, before we discovered there were no restaurants. Nick is in a white button down and suit pants, I'm in a white sundress. I bring the bouquet that was left on my seat yesterday. The flowers, which I placed in water last night, still look as fresh as they did when I received them.

I emerge from the bathroom in my dress, no make-up but the tan I've gotten since we arrived and a touch of lip gloss. Nick walks toward me slowly, placing his hands on my arms. "You have no idea how lucky I feel right now."

I have some idea. I go on my toes to kiss him. "I just need to put my hair up and we can go."

Nick runs a hand through it. "Leave it down. I want you to look exactly the way you do at this moment." He pulls my hands to his mouth and kisses both. "This, just as you are right now, is who I want to marry."



THE PRIEST DOES NOT SEEM at all surprised to find us at his doorstep at 8 AM on a Monday morning, but why would he be? He seems to know everything before we do. He throws the massive doors of the church wide, securing them with bolts so they remain open during the ceremony. It's odd, but this feels right too. The beach and the sea behind us feel, to me, every bit as holy as the inside of this church.

He brings us to the altar. I set the flowers on the pew behind me and join hands with Nick. He's smiling at me in that way of his—shy and pleased, unable to keep that dimple of his in check. He is so unspeakably beautiful. I swallow down the lump in my throat.

The priest clears his throat and begins. "Will you, Quinn Stewart Bertrand, take this man to be your wedded husband? Will you love him, comfort him, honor him and keep him, in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, so long as you both shall live?"

"I will," I whisper. My voice is slightly hoarse. It's a struggle not to cry.

"And will you, Nicholas James Reilly, take this woman to be your wedded wife? Will you love her, comfort her, honor her and keep her, in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, so long as you both shall live?"

Nick's eyes hold mine. "I will."

The priest gazes at us both. "By the power vested in me by this church, I now pronounce you man and wife."

Nick's mouth twitches upward. "Where's the part where I get to kiss the bride?"

The priest laughs. "She's your wife now. You are free to do as you wish."

Nick cradles my face in his hands. "I'm going to make you the happiest woman alive, Quinn. I swear it."

"You already have," I whisper. He leans down and when our lips meet, there is only him. There is no priest, no roof over our

heads, nothing but him and the wide, wild world around us, a breeze—fragrant with sea myrtle and sandalwood—drifts around us like a blessing.

Finally I drop back to my feet. The priest waits, marriage decree and pen in hand, at the altar. I take the pen and sign, and then hand it off to Nick just as something at the back of the church catches the light.

A long blonde braid swaying as a woman exits through the wide doors. I know her. I know her in my soul before I even put it together, but then she turns and smiles at me over her shoulder. Sarah, my mother, younger than she was when I last saw her. Two small girls—one blonde, one brunette—are on either side of her, grasping her hands. The brunette turns back and gives me a big, cheeky smile just before she's pulled away. I get just enough of a glimpse to see that her eyes are an astonishing gray. *Rose*. Or the twin who told us her name was Rose, anyway.

They are gone before I can even utter a word. And a wiser part of me knows that I am not meant to meet them just yet. I can't imagine how the twins were able to time travel here at such a young age. I can't imagine how my mother managed to be here when I saw her die with my own eyes. But I suspect it means our lives are about to get far more bizarre than they've already been.

Nick finishes signing and the priest hands us the certificate. "In this marriage, you will be blessed beyond measure, and you will produce daughters who will be a blessing to the world. Protect them. Protect each other. Go forth," he says, "and begin the life you were meant for."

The life we were meant for. A life that will involve time traveling twins, a dead mother stopping by for surprise visits.

"You ready, Mrs. Reilly?" Nick asks.

I look up at him. At the pleased, sheepish smile, his heart in his eyes, and I know that as long as I have him by my side, we can handle whatever our lives throw at us.

"Yes," I reply, taking his hand. "I'm ready."

The End

I hope you enjoyed Nick and Quinn's wedding! I'll send updates about upcoming stories in this universe. Next up: *The Moon We Share*, the story of Quinn's parents.
Go to Goodreads to learn more!

