8 AM

Grace Bay, from our balcony, is one of the most beautiful things I’ve ever seen. Aside from the position of the sun, the view is almost identical to the one I had as I walked down the aisle at Olivia’s wedding, but this time Brendan isn’t in front of me. He’s beside me, in nothing but a pair of pajama bottoms, and no matter how good he looks in a suit, Brendan still looks a thousand times better out of one.

His fingers twine through mine. “Well, today’s the day. You’re sure you want to go through with it?”

“Are you serious right now?”

My heart would probably stop beating entirely, except he’s already struggling to mask his smile.

 “Just making sure,” he says. “I thought you might want to drag everything out another year, since that’s what you’re known for.”

“It’s a little unfair to claim I’m *known* for that.”

“It’s in Urban Dictionary,” says Brendan. “Dragging out an engagement forever is called ‘pulling an Erin.’”

He grabs his phone and shows it to me. It’s really there. I don’t know why I’m surprised.

 “I can’t believe you did that.”

“You did go to some serious lengths to delay this wedding,” he says with a grin.

“The way I recall it, you had a pretty significant role in those delays as well.”

He turns, pulling me into him, and raises a brow. “Speaking of *lengths*, it’s pretty quiet right now,” he says, looking back toward the bed. His hands slide from my waist to my hips.

“You’re not even supposed to be here, Brendan. What if your mother comes by?”

“I’m pretty sure my mother expects no less of me.”

He does have a point. Last night at the rehearsal dinner she sighed and asked if there was any point in reminding him he couldn’t stay in my room overnight. And he’d just laughed at her.

His mouth moves over mine and descends to my neck, and I fold like a deck of cards. I’ve never been much good at turning Brendan down, so why start now?

5:00 PM

If it were up to me, we’d probably have done this wedding out on the beach in shorts and flip flops, my hair stiff from saltwater and sun. But it was not up to me, it was up to Harper, who has made every single decision I didn’t care to make...basically all of them.

I spent the day being shuffled from one locale to the next for various forms of pampering that seemed completely unnecessary, before finally donning my dress and waiting for Harper to do my makeup.

“I don’t know why you needed me here so early,” I tell her. “I want to go for the natural look anyway.”

“Exactly. Natural takes even longer,” she says. “Where’s my fellow bridesmaid? I need her to run out and get some stuff.”

I laugh under my breath. “Olivia’s on kid duty. And good luck ordering her around.”

“Fine,” she grumbles. “But if I run out of this Laura Mercier primer, we’re in a world of hurt.”

Only Harper would think Laura Mercier primer was life-or-death. Or assume that it could be easily acquired on a small Caribbean island. But I’ll admit that when she’s done 40 minutes later, I’m transformed—I look like I’m barely wearing makeup, but a thousand times better than I do when I’m really not wearing makeup.

Dorothy pops her head in and stops short, her eyes tearing immediately. “Oh, Erin...you look so beautiful.”

“All the credit is Harper’s.”

“Right,” says Harper. “Because you were such a troll before.”

“How are my parents?” I ask. Everyone has their role this weekend. Dorothy’s is to babysit my parents as much as possible because I’m worried I’ll commit homicide if I have to hear even once more that this wedding isn’t “real” because it’s not in a church.

“Your dad’s on the way back and your mom’s seated. She’s going to help me watch the kids.” She approaches, and her eyes well again. “I spent 22 years of my life regretting that I didn’t have a daughter and now I’m about to have two. I can’t begin to tell you how much that means to me, and how glad I am that it’s you.”

 “I’m glad it’s me too. I’m going to try to make him happy.”

“You already have,” she says brushing at her eyes. “I haven’t seen him this happy since he was a little boy.”

Harper lunges at me with a tissue, promptly dabbing the inside corners of my eyes before a single, treacherous tear can fall. “Cut it out you two. I already told you that tears are going to ruin your wedding photos. And no crying during the ceremony either.”

I laugh. “Harper, there’s not a chance I can avoid crying during the ceremony.”

“Just pretend you’re not there. Think about feces. Or vomit.”

 “Miss my wedding while thinking about vomit? I can’t wait until you’re getting married so I can return this very excellent advice to you.”

There’s a small knock and then Olivia and my father walk in together.

 “Nice of you to show up,” I tease her.

“Sorry,” Olivia says drily. “Did I miss lots of giggling & other girl shit? What a shame. Brendan sent me to tell you guys to hurry up. He also said he was worried you were ‘pulling an Erin’, whatever that means.”

6:15 PM

The day moved at a snail’s pace for so long, but suddenly it seems to go at warp speed. The mothers are seated. Harper heads down the aisle, followed by Olivia. It feels as if it happened in seconds, and before I know it, I find myself in the exact spot where I stood five years earlier. Back then I was desperately trying not to look at the man I’m about to marry. I like it better this way, where I can ignore everyone else in the crowd and so can he. Of course, as he’s pointed out, he ignored everyone but me the last time too.

I lift my head and my eyes meet Brendan’s. For the first time in his life he doesn’t look cocky and infallible—he looks pleased, and almost shy, like a little boy who’s just won his school’s biggest award and can’t quite believe it.

The wedding march begins, and on my father’s arm I move toward the only person I’ve truly ever wanted.

 “Hey,” he says quietly, taking my hand as I reach the altar.

“Hey yourself.”

He swallows. “You look beautiful.”

“You waited long enough to get me down here,” I say with a smile. “I figured I ought to make an effort.”

The officiant clears his throat and we turn toward him, but his opening words are drowned out by a sudden burst of wailing from from the front row.

Brendan and I look at each other and laugh. “She didn’t want to be left out of the party,” Brendan says. He takes a quick step toward the noise and tucks our daughter against his chest. She stops crying immediately.

Dorothy Grace, named after her grandmother, looks very much like her cousin Caroline— both of them perfect female versions of their fathers. Fortunately for us she does not share Caroline’s often cranky temperament, only crying when she’s hungry, or when she hears our voices and wants to be held, like now.

The pregnancy was unplanned, to say the least, particularly given that the baby was due two days before our non-refundable wedding in the Caribbean. Because I wasn’t allowed to fly that late in my pregnancy, it meant delaying things a few months, which turned out for the best. We managed to get Grace through the early sleepless nights, and it also gave me some time to get back into the size two wedding dress I’d already purchased.

It also meant moving. I loved our dilapidated little apartment, but the lack of an extra bedroom was going to be an issue. The house we bought on the lake still needs a ton of work, but neither of us mind a project. Brendan still likes to text me that “the walls need some work”, and yes, he’s usually talking about his dick.

I look over at him and Grace, marveling at how lucky I am. And how easily it could have gone another way—I can’t help but picture what this moment would have been like with Rob, how empty it might have been. I never even knew it was *possible* to feel as full as I do now.

We say our vows, and it’s one of maybe five times in his life that Brendan’s ever been earnest. Though he’ll deny it later, his eyes glisten and his voice grows raspy as he promises to love and cherish me. Despite Harper’s warnings, I’m flat-out sobbing as I say mine.

We are pronounced man and wife, and I go on tiptoe to kiss my husband without crushing our daughter, who is now sound asleep.

And then we turn, as a family, to head back down the aisle. For just a moment I picture myself standing there again, five years earlier. I think of that girl and all the things she wanted, all the things she wouldn’t allow herself to hope for.

My smile widens as I realize she has every last one of them now.