



A Beautiful Wedding: A Beautiful Disaster Novella (Beautiful Disaster Series)

By Jamie McGuire

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Why did Abby pop the question?

What secrets were shared before the ceremony?

Where did they spend their wedding night?

Who else knew about it . . . and didn't tell?

Everything about Abby and Travis's elopement was top-secret . . . until now. Fans of *Beautiful Disaster* and *Walking Disaster* will get all of their questions answered in this whirlwind tale of the wedding day (and night!)—and as with all good stories, this one will definitely have been worth the wait.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jamie McGuire is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Beautiful Sacrifice*, *Beautiful Redemption*, *Beautiful Oblivion*, *A Beautiful Wedding*, *Red Hill*, *Walking Disaster*, and *Beautiful Disaster*. She and her husband Jeff live with their children just outside Enid, Oklahoma, with three dogs, six horses, and a cat named Rooster. Please visit JamieMcGuire.com.

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A Beautiful Wedding

CHAPTER ONE

Alibi

Abby

I could feel it coming: a growing, persistent unease that crept just beneath my skin. The more I tried to ignore it, the more unbearable it became: an itch that needed to be scratched, a scream bubbling to the surface. My father said that the urgent need to run when things were about to go wrong was a like a tic, a defense mechanism inherent in the Abernathys. I'd felt it moments before the fire, and I was feeling it now.

Sitting in Travis's bedroom, just hours after the fire, my heart raced and my muscles twitched. My gut pulled me toward the door. Told me to leave; to get away, anywhere but here. But for the first time in my life, I didn't want to go alone. I could barely focus on that voice I loved so much describing how afraid he was of losing me, and how he was close to escaping when he ran in the opposite direction, toward me. So many people died, some of them strangers from State but some were people I'd seen in the cafeteria, in class, at other fights.

We somehow survived and were sitting alone in his apartment, trying to process it all. Feeling afraid, feeling guilty . . . about those who died, and that we had lived. My lungs felt like they were full of cobwebs and flames, and I couldn't get the rancid smell of charred skin out of my nose. It was overpowering, and even though I'd taken a shower, it was still there, mixed in with the mint and lavender scent of the soap I used to scrub it away. Equally unforgettable were the sounds. The sirens, the wailing, the worried and panicked chatter, and the screams of people arriving on the scene to discover that a friend was still inside. Everyone looked the same, covered in soot, with identical expressions of bewilderment and despair. It was a nightmare.

Despite my struggle to focus, I did hear him say this: "The only thing I'm afraid of is a life without you, Pigeon."

We had been too lucky. Even in a dark corner of Vegas, being attacked by Benny's goons, we somehow still had the advantage. Travis was invincible. But being a part of the Circle, and helping to organize a fight in unsafe conditions that resulted in the deaths of countless college kids . . . that was a fight not even Travis

Maddox could win. Our relationship had withstood so many things, but Travis was in real danger of going to prison. Even if he didn't know it yet, it was the one obstacle that could keep us apart. The one obstacle that we had no control over.

"Then you have nothing to be afraid of," I said. "We're forever."

He sighed, and then pressed his lips against my hair. I didn't think it was possible to feel so much for one person. He had protected me. It was my turn to protect him.

"This is it," he said.

"What?"

"I knew the second I met you that there was something about you I needed. Turns out it wasn't something about you at all. It was just you."

My insides melted. I loved him. I loved him, and I had to do whatever I could to keep him safe. Whatever it took—no matter how crazy. All I had to do was talk him into it.

I leaned against him, pressing my cheek against his chest. "It's us, Trav. Nothing makes sense unless we're together. Have you noticed that?"

"Noticed? I've been telling you that all year! It's official. Bimbos, fights, leaving, Parker, Vegas . . . even fires. Our relationship can withstand anything."

"Vegas?" I asked.

In that moment, the most insane plan formed in my mind, but the idea made sense as I stared into his warm, brown eyes. Those eyes made everything make sense. His face and neck were still covered in soot mixed with sweat, a reminder of how close we had come to losing everything.

My mind was racing. We would only need necessities and we could be out the door in five minutes. We could buy clothes there. The sooner we left the better. No one would believe two people would get on a plane right after such an enormous tragedy. It didn't make sense, which was exactly why we had to do it.

I had to take Travis far enough away, for a specific reason. Something believable, even if it was crazy. Luckily, crazy wasn't that far a leap for Travis and me, and it was possible the investigators would second-guess the dozens of witnesses who saw Travis fighting in the basement of Keaton Hall that night—if they had proof that we were in Vegas hours later getting married. It was absolutely insane, but I didn't know what else to do. I didn't have time to come up with a better plan. We should already be gone.

Travis was staring back at me expectantly, waiting to unconditionally accept whatever came out of my crazy mouth. Goddammit, I couldn't lose him now, not after everything we'd fought through to get to this moment. By anyone's standards, we were too young to get married, too unpredictable. How many times had we hurt one another along the way, screamed at each other one minute and fallen into bed together the next? But we'd just seen how fragile life was. Who knew when the end would come along and sweep one of us away? I looked at him, resolute. He was mine, and I was his. If I knew anything at all, it was that only those two things mattered.

He furrowed his brow. “Yeah?”

“Have you thought about going back?”

His eyebrows shot up. “I don’t think that’s a good idea for me.”

Weeks ago, I’d broken his heart. Travis chasing America’s car when he realized it was over was still fresh in my mind. He was going to fight for Benny in Vegas, and I wouldn’t go back there. Not even for him. He had gone through hell while we were apart. He’d begged me back on his knees, and I was so set on never returning to my life in Nevada, I’d walked away. I’d be a complete asshole if I asked him to go back. I half expected him to tell me to get the hell out for even mentioning it, but this was the only plan I had, and I was desperate.

“What if we just went for a night?” A night was all I needed. We just needed to be somewhere else.

He looked around his bedroom, searching the darkness for what he thought I wanted to hear. I didn’t want to be that girl, the one who wasn’t forthcoming and caused a huge, stupid misunderstanding. But I couldn’t tell Travis the truth about what I’d just proposed to him. He would never agree to go.

“A night?” He clearly had no clue how to respond. He probably thought it was a test, but the only thing I wanted was for him to say yes.

“Marry me,” I blurted out.

His mouth parted, forming a silent gasp. I waited lifetimes until his lips curved upward, and he sealed his mouth on mine. His kiss screamed a thousand different emotions. My brain felt swollen with warring thoughts of relief and panic. This was going to work. We would get married, Travis would have an alibi, and everything would be okay.

Oh, hell.

Damn. Shit. Fuck.

I was getting married.

Travis

Abby Abernathy was famous for one thing: having no Tell. She could commit a crime and smile like it was any other day, lie without a twitch in her eye. Only one person in the world had any chance of learning her Tell, and that one person had to figure it out if he wanted to have any chance with her.

Me.

Abby had lost her childhood, and I’d lost my mom, so for two people who struggled to get on the same page, we were the same story. That gave me an edge, and after making this my goal over the past months, I’d arrived at an answer:

Abby’s Tell was not having one. It might not make sense to most people, but it made perfect sense to me. It was the absence of that Tell that gave her away. The peace in her eyes, the softness in her smile, the

relaxation of her shoulders alerted me that something was wrong.

If I didn't know her better, I might have thought this was just our happy ending, but she was up to something. Sitting in the terminal, waiting to board a plane to Vegas, with Abby snuggled into the curve of my body, I knew it was easy to try to ignore. She kept lifting her hand, staring at the ring I'd bought her, and sighing. The middle-aged woman across from us was watching my new fiancée and smiled, probably fantasizing about a time when she had her whole life ahead of her. She didn't know what those sighs really meant, but I had an idea.

It was hard to be happy about what we were about to do with the cloud of so many deaths hanging above our heads. No, really, it was literally above our heads. A television on the wall displayed the local news. Footage of the fire and the latest updates scrolled across the screen. They interviewed Josh Farney. He was covered in soot and he looked horrible, but I was glad to see he'd made it. He was fairly hammered when I saw him before the fight. Most of the people who came to the Circle either came drunk or worked their way up to a buzz while they waited for me and my opponent to trade blows. When the flames began to crawl across the room, adrenaline pumped into everyone's veins—enough to sober up even the most intoxicated.

I wished it hadn't happened. We'd lost so many, and this wasn't exactly something you'd want your wedding to follow. From experience, I knew that the memory of a tragedy could be misplaced. Attaching this date to something we would celebrate year after year would keep it front and center in our minds. Damn, they were still bringing out bodies, and I was acting like this was an annoyance. There were parents out there who had no idea they'd never see their kids again.

That selfish thought led to guilt, and that guilt led to a lie. It was a sheer miracle that we were getting married right now, anyway. But I didn't want Abby thinking I was anything but super fucking pumped about getting married. Knowing her, she'd misread it and then change her mind. So I focused on her, and what we were about to do. I wanted to be a normal, so-excited-I-might-puke groom-to-be, and she deserved nothing less. It wouldn't be the first time I'd pretended not to care about something I couldn't get out of my head. The living proof was snuggled up next to me.

On the television screen, the anchorwoman standing outside Keaton Hall held the microphone with both hands, a frown line between her eyebrows. "... what the families of the victims will be asking: who is to blame? Back to you, Kent."

Suddenly the nausea became real. So many had died, of course they were going to hold someone accountable. Was it Adam's fault? Would he go to prison? Would I? I hugged Abby to me and kissed her hair. A woman behind a desk picked up a mic and began to speak, and my knee started to bounce uncontrollably. If we weren't going to board soon, I might pick up Abby and run to Vegas. I felt like I could have made it there before the plane. The airline agent instructed us about boarding the flight, her voice rising and falling with the scripted announcement she'd probably read a million times. She sounded like the teacher in those Peanuts cartoons: bored, monotone, and impossible to understand.

The only thing that made sense were the thoughts on repeat inside my head: I was about to become the husband of the second woman I'd ever loved.

It was almost time. Damn. Shit, yeah! Fuck, yes!

I was getting married!

Users Review

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