

An Unplanned Wedding



by Chantal Bellehumeur



nineteen year old Emily Jacobson and her twenty two year old fiancé William Mancini didn't have money for a wedding. They had started a family early, which had not been planned, and their priority was to care for their six month old daughter Nadia. That did not stop their parents from getting together and offering the young couple a kind of honeymoon type vacation, which included spending money. The gift had been a very nice surprise, and although Emily was still a bit reluctant to leave Nadia behind, she was really looking forward to the Mediterranean cruise.

As Emily was revising her packing list for the second time and making double sure that her and William had not forgotten to pack anything important in their big suitcases or small carry-on bags, the apartment buzzer rang. William was busy changing Nadia's dirty diaper so Emily went to answer the door. It was her mother coming to take Nadia for the week.

Mrs. Jacobson came in and asked Emily if she was all ready to go. "Almost," she responded. Her packing list was still in her right hand. "I still have a few things to add to Nadia's bag." After a short pause, she rapidly spoke her next sentences one after the other. "I made some formula. There are a few bottles in the fridge. She didn't eat all her dinner so I will give you the leftovers. I made you a list of her routine. She still needs her favourite blanket to sleep. And the teddy bear you made her. Oh! And don't give Nadia her pacifier unless it is really necessary..."

William walked down the hallway with a smiling Nadia in his arms and interrupted Emily. "I think your mother knows what to do," he laughed. Emily laughed too, and apologized. "It's okay," her mother answered. "I remember the first time your father and I went away on vacation without you."

Mrs. Jacobson quickly explained that while her and Mr. Jacobson were packing to go to Paris together, Emily had looked at them as though they were abandoning her forever. "You were almost three years old and we had already explained that you would be staying with your grandparents just for a few days. That day, you actually looked at us with sad puppy dog eyes and said: don't you love me anymore?" Emily could imagine what those words had done to her mother. She was kind of glad that Nadia could not speak yet. There was nothing she could say to make Emily feel guiltier about leaving her behind.

Emily took Nadia from William and hugged her tight. "Mommy will miss you soooooo much!" Nadia simply smiled in return, clearly not understanding what was going on. "I love you," Emily said before giving her daughter an exaggerated kiss on her soft cheek.

William came back from collecting Nadia's little pink suitcase, cute diaper bag with teddy bears on them, and items Emily had left in the fridge.

Mrs. Jacobson almost had to pry Nadia away from Emily. "She'll be fine," William reassured her. "I know she will," Emily confidently responded. "I might not be though," she continued. Emily felt a few tears starting to form in her eyes and quickly wiped them away.

William opened the front door to let Mrs. Jacobson out. He then picked up Nadia's luggage to bring them to the cab that was waiting outside for Mrs. Jacobson.

Just as Emily thought she could manage the separation, she saw Nadia's happy expression change. As Mrs. Jacobson was walking out of the apartment with her granddaughter, Emily waved her hand and said "bye." It made Nadia realise that her mother was staying behind. The baby stretched her small arms towards her and began to cry. Emily wanted nothing more than to take Nadia back in her arms, but she knew that she had to close the door.

Emily heard Nadia's piercing and echoing scream in the hallway and it broke her heart. She had to fight really hard not to go after her. "What am I going to do when she starts daycare?" she whispered to herself.

By the time William came back, Emily was still standing right in front of the door. He gave her a tight hug

to comfort her and started caressing her curly auburn hair. “Nadia is in good hands,” he told her. “We are both going to have a great time on this trip.”

Emily knew that William was right. She remembered the Caribbean cruise she had gone on with her father about two years ago and deep down she was pretty excited about going on another cruise ship and staying in Rome for two days beforehand. She had already made an itinerary of places they should visit in the capital of Italy and purchased online tickets for popular attractions to avoid major lineups.

Gently pulling herself away from William, Emily gave her best smile and told him that they should finish getting ready. She felt the need to check one last time if they both had their passports, reservation papers, plane tickets, European currency, snacks, juice boxes...

Their flight was only at eleven thirty at night so they had time to take a well-needed nap before going to the airport, even if they had to be there three hours in advance. Emily set up the alarm on the bedroom digital clock for exactly seven fifty. She had already arranged for a taxi to pick them up at eight o'clock.

By the time William and Emily's taxi showed up, Emily was very eager to arrive in Italy and spend some well-needed quality time with William. She couldn't remember the last time they had done something romantic together; it was sometime before Nadia's birth.

Although it had been a normal hot and humid July day, the outside air was now a bit chilly. Emily had a sweater handy because she knew from experience that she would need it on the plane. She had packed a pair of socks to keep her feet warm later. Part of her travel pack also included a neck pillow and a thin blanket.

Emily asked William if he had everything before getting into the taxi. “Yes,” William answered laughing at Emily.

During the ride to the airport, Emily pulled out some pictures of Nadia from her wallet. She and William had gotten new ones done each month. Their baby grew so fast.

Emily was still holding on to Nadia's pictures when they arrived. She quickly put them back inside her wallet, gave the driver his fee with a little extra for tip, and jumped out of the taxi. William went to get a rolling cart to make it easier to transport their luggage.

William had never flown anywhere before. He followed Emily's lead to the check in line, security, and proper gate number. Emily knew that William was really nervous to fly so she did her best to put him more at ease while they waited to board the plane. She explained that it was normal for the aircraft to shake during takeoff and that turbulence could often occur but that it did not mean something was wrong. She even told him that it was normal for the wings to move, as she remembered being scared of that sight the first time she flew.

The seven and a half hours direct flight to Rome went very well, although neither Emily nor William slept as much as they had hoped because of all the interruptions. Emergency procedures had been explained right before takeoff. Announcements for possible duty free purchases as well as drinks or food servings were made. Not everything was complimentary; two light meals with a small glass of juice or pop were included, but not snacks or any additional beverages. Alcohol was extra too, but this was expected.

Smiling female flight attendants wearing navy blue uniforms and nametag pins would pass in the narrow aisles with their rolling carts of merchandise, cold refreshments, snacks, or warm meals. The rare time that turbulence occurred, the captain would use the intercom to politely tell everyone to go to their seats and fasten their seat belts.

They arrived at their destination at one thirty in the afternoon. A time difference of six hours applied, so Emily adjusted her delicate watch accordingly. She saw William do the same with his sports watch.

After going through customs inside the Leonardo da Vinci International airport, Emily and William

searched in the crowd of rushed people for the travel guide who would take them directly to their hotel. Emily spotted a tall and slender woman who was holding a large cardboard sign with her and William's full names on it. The sign had a few other names on it too, which meant that they would have to wait for others before leaving. They still had to get their suitcases anyways. Emily's was the last one to come out onto the conveyor belt so it took a while.

Once reunited with their guide as well as the rest of their group, they were all escorted to a waiting area. The guide received a call on her cell phone. Speaking in Italian, she said a few things in between pauses and hung up. She then informed everyone in English that the driver was going to be late because of an accident on the highway. Emily was happy to have packed plenty of snacks and drinks for herself and William, as they were starting to get hungry but could not roam around to get food. They didn't end up leaving the airport until over an hour and a half after the plane had landed.

Not everyone who had gotten into the minivan were staying at the same hotel; none of which were located near the downtown area. It did not help that the driver had gotten a little lost in the outskirts of Rome. It took over an hour to get to the hotel that Emily and William had reservations for since they were the last ones to get dropped off. When Emily walked inside, she was surprised to see a set of spiralling stairs rather than the usual front desk. There were no elevators. The only other things around were a small couch and an arrangement of business cards for various local boutiques and restaurants.

Emily and William gave each other a confused look, then walked up the staircase with all their luggage. It was not an easy task. They were at least given a friendly welcome by the well-dressed man standing behind the front desk, who came to their aid.

After checking in and being given their room keys, which hung on massive metal key chains with their room number on it, they were given a brief tour of the cozy four-story hotel's main floor. Afterwards, they were personally taken to their third floor room. Again, there were no elevators, but their luggage was brought upstairs for them. Emily gave the bulky Italian man a tip, although she felt kind of robbed because she and William would not have needed his services if there would have been at least one elevator in the building. It was an old one though, and clearly not many renovations had been done. Emily would not have been surprised if there had been no electricity. Luxurious gold coloured ceiling chandeliers with lit light bulbs confirmed otherwise.

The first thing Emily did upon entering the cute hotel room was open the two large screenless windows behind two sets of long curtains; a thick blue one, and a light see-through white one. It made the sun shine right into the room and also warmed Emily's face. She could see the small hotel courtyard below as well as the back and sides of other hotels that shared the outside space.

The outer walls of each old building were made of large uneven light grey stones. Healthy dark green leaf vines had grown on parts of them. The courtyard ground had the same stones as the surrounding walls. Big clay pots with fancy designs on them surrounded the yard. Beautiful big red flowers filled each one. Cute black iron chairs beside matching round tables were set up in each corner. The space was currently empty, but the sounds of pigeons, seagulls, and women conversing loudly in Italian could be heard.

When Emily turned back towards the inside of the room, she noticed the lovely cherub oil painting hanging on the beige wall above the double bed. It reminded her of her precious little angel back home. On the wall by the entrance, there was a small crucifix made of wood. The rest of the room was furnished with simple wooden furniture.

There was a bidet in the bathroom. Emily had seen one for the first time in Cuba, and had wondered the same thing William was now asking. "What is that?" he said. Emily had a good laugh at his question, and

even more so from the look on his face when she explained what the high porcelain basin was really for. “It’s to wash your behind,” she said before kicking him out of the small space and closing the door behind her.

Neither Emily nor William wanted to waste too much time in their room. Although they were tired, they were also very eager to go explore. Soon after freshening up, they headed out to visit the Baths of Caracalla; the remains of them anyways. They knew that Operas were performed there at night now because they had seen pictures of the outdoor theatre on a website.

Crossing the busy streets in Rome was a challenge since people seemed to just get off the sidewalks whenever they wanted and hoped that approaching vehicles would actually stop for them. When there were streetlights, a still picture of a lit red man meant stop, a green one meant go, and a flashing yellow one meant walk whenever; at least, that’s what Emily came to understand.

Emily did not feel that Rome was a tourist friendly place. She didn’t know where to buy metro tickets, and after being pointed to one of the self-serve ticket machines along the metro station wall she had trouble getting it to take her money. William tried to insert his own coins in another machine but had the same problem as Emily. The random male passer byer that ended up helping them decided to tip himself. He walked away with one of Emily’s euros. It upset her, but she was too tired to go running after the young man she considered a thief.

Both Emily and William got disoriented and confused about the directions of the metros. “It’s a good thing I printed out a colour map of the metro system before leaving Canada,” she told William. They could not find any inside the metro station. They half knew where they were going at least.

It did not take too long for the metro to arrive. However, when the doors slid open everyone pushed and shoved each other to get in or out. With the kind of day Emily was having, she would not have been surprised if one of her flip-flops had fallen in the large gap between the platform and the train. But, she managed to keep both of her shoes on her feet.

There were absolutely no indications to the historical site they wanted to visit once they found themselves outside the metro station, so Emily politely stopped one of the many pedestrians for directions. The man only spoke Italian, so that was no help. Emily only knew a few words. William came from an Italian family yet did not speak much of the language either. He had been stubborn about learning Italian when his parents had wanted him to.

The lost couple managed to get help from someone else, but were led to a very big detour. Neither Emily nor William were impressed by the long walk they were taking around the gated site, but they finally found the entrance to the ruins of the baths and were able to go explore at their own pace.

Emily and William practically had the peaceful sight to themselves since not many other tourists were present. Aside from birds chirping, it was pretty quiet. It was a nice change from the previous traffic of people and vehicles.

There were many remains of large stone walls and tall archways to see. A few flat broken stones had dark mythological pictures on them. Emily took a lot of pictures with her digital camera. A man offered to snap a quick picture of her and William. However, after the picture was taken he would not give the camera back until Emily gave him some money. Emily could not believe it. She was about to start an argument but William just handed the man some change and took the camera back. “I can’t believe the nerve of this guy!” Emily said as she walked away with William.

Their trip back towards the hotel was yet another adventure. They got in the metro station on the wrong side and had to pay again just to get onto the other side. Emily thought it was ridiculous, and hoped that nothing else would go wrong. She was really tired now, her feet hurt, and she was hungry.

For their first meal in Italy, Emily and William ate at a little pizzeria near their hotel. The big wall menu behind the food counter was written completely in Italian, but Emily and William managed to order without any problems because they could just point at what they wanted. Their meals were handed to them on paper plates, which they put on red plastic trays. They grabbed themselves some disposable cutlery as well as white paper napkins with the restaurant's name and tomato logo printed on them in red, and headed outside on the small terrace. It was enclosed with a short wooden gate that had rectangular flower pots hanging from the exterior edges. All the tables had red and white checkered tablecloths as well as tomato shaped salt and pepper shakers.

Emily ate her delicious plate of spaghetti. She had been craving pasta and savoured every single bite. The simple tomato based sauce had fresh herbs and tender chunks of roast beef rather than ground meat. As for William, he had two pieces of square pizza with fresh slices of pepperoni on them.

After dinner, they took a pleasant walk hand in hand. They passed by a kid's park, right by one of the many sidewalk flower shops and food stands. Emily looked at all the young children playing in the structures and tried not to think of Nadia. The baby loved going on swing rides and Emily adored her daughter's laugh when she caught her small feet mid-air. Sometimes, Emily would put Nadia on her lap and go down a slide with her.

Emily and William decided to relax on a wooden bench under some very tall palm trees. The sun had set by then, but the air was still warm.

Emily heard meowling. When she turned her head to the faint sound, she saw a large woman feeding a black cat. A skinny caramel coloured feline soon appeared out of some nearby bushes.

"I really enjoyed myself today," William said. "Me too," Emily responded as she placed her head on her fiancé's right shoulder. She remained that way until they both decided to leave.

They heard loud fireworks as soon as they got back to their hotel room, but could not see them from their window. If they had not been so exhausted, they might have ventured outside again for the unexpected sky show. Instead, they took their showers and went to bed. They both fell asleep as soon as their heads hit their fluffy pillows.

Breakfast was included in the price of their room, so Emily and William headed to the small dining area of the hotel early in the morning. Every table had two dinner rolls on each plate and the small buffet consisted of croissants, long buns, bread shaped crackers, and various spreads. "They sure love their bread here!" Emily pointed out once she was seated with her selected food. William nodded in agreement.

After their light meal, they headed out to visit the Vatican Museum and Sistine Chapel. Once again, they needed to ask for directions since there were no indications as to where the museum was once they were out of the necessary metro station. They managed to easily find it once they got help, and cut through the very big line up by presenting their pre-paid tickets.

Emily and William liked seeing the numerous ancient sculptures of Roman Gods and historical figures as well as animals, beautiful ceiling paintings, floor mosaics, columns, and Catholic artwork within the museum. Emily took a lot of pictures again but did not lend her camera to anyone this time. She did not want to risk losing her captured images, even if William was taking similar ones. They ended up taking some shots of each other in front of different displays.

They had to walk down a wide hallway to get to the main attraction. Several long tables were set up with souvenirs for sale. The line up of art books, posters, postcards, bags, scarves, pens, notepads, notebooks, pins, magnets, umbrellas, and other random items with popular works of art printed on them seemed to go on forever.

The Sistine Chapel was impressive, but Emily found being inside it very odd since nobody was allowed to talk. The four serious male security guards kept shushing everyone, which made Emily want to laugh. Stuck close together like sardines in a tin can, the only thing the tourists were allowed to do was stare at the famous ceiling painting done by Michelangelo without taking a single picture.

The exit led them onto a large stone balcony that had a great view of the Piazza S. Pietro, where there were two large water fountains, as well as a massive portrait of the pope hanging from one of the old buildings. Emily and William walked down one of the sets of massive stairs and found a store. It was run by nuns and sold a lot of crucifixes, glass bottles of holy water, rosaries, as well as framed pictures, posters, postcards, greeting cards and even playing cards with religious images on them.

William had grown up in a strict Catholic home, and although he stopped attending church a long time ago him and Emily had gotten Nadia baptized for the Mancini's peace of mind. They now found themselves purchasing a small bottle of holy water that had been blessed by the Pope. They figured that Mr. and Mrs. Mancini would appreciate it.

After exiting the store, the couple made their way across the Piazza. They briefly stopped at one of the two fountains because Emily wanted to throw a eurocent into the water and make a wish. Many other coins were in the water.

William splashed some water on himself. He then cupped some of the cold liquid with his hands and dumping it on Emily's head. That took her completely by surprise. Normally, she would have gotten upset, but the water was very refreshing. She still got William back for his action by doing the same to him. They started a mini water fight, being careful not to splash anyone else, and both ran away from the fountain laughing.

Emily and William could not go back to the metro station the same way they had come and were a little bit disoriented, but soon found out in which direction to go.

On the way, they passed by several souvenir shops and kiosks. Most of them had religious items for sale, but also the typical handbags, scarves, flags, key chains, postcards, books, and little knick-knacks representing Italy, including a globe with the Colosseum inside; rather than having fake snow fall when you turned it upside down and right side up again, it had silver sparkles.

Emily felt the need to get something for Nadia. She found a cute baby camisole with the words "Somebody who loves me went to Rome and got me this shirt" printed on it. When Emily got to the cash, she grabbed a silk scarf with the words Roma and Italia written all over the green, white and red fabric that matched the Italian flag. "For my mom," she told William as the middle-aged cashier was totalling up her purchase.

Emily and William stopped at a diner for a quick bite to eat. It was so hot out that they decided to have lunch indoors rather than on the patio. They had to order their food before being seated even if a waiter was going to serve them. Emily attempted to place her order in Italian by reading the mini labels in front of the various food items and adding simple Italian words she knew to form a sentence, but the impatient man behind the food counter did not comprehend what she was trying to tell him. He asked her if she was speaking Spanish. Emily got the hint and switched to English, but the man still had difficulty understanding what she wanted. Emily finally gave up on verbal communication and simply pointed to what her and William wanted like she had done the night before at the other restaurant. The man placed the requested items on white ceramic plates and pointed Emily and William to a small table set for two. A young waitress came by to quickly pass a wet cloth on its surface as the couple sat down.

Their order was soon brought to them. A handful of plain potato chips as well as a few pieces of green and red lettuce had been added to both of their plates.

Emily and William's bill came after. They discovered that eating in the city is not cheap. All they had

ordered was a simple salami panini and a slice of plain cheese pizza for the both of them plus a cold soda to share, and it ended up costing them almost twenty five euros. Emily made the mental calculation and realised that it was more than fifty Canadian dollars. Their food was good, but it wasn't exceptional. Plus, they had to rush to eat because the place was very busy and other customers soon needed their table.

It took the couple twenty minutes to walk to the metro station from the diner. They saw many people with bright coloured parasols as well as a few locals who had placed some merchandise for sale on the sidewalk grounds.

Their next attraction was the Colosseum. They had pre-paid tickets for that too, which was a good thing because the line up was even bigger than the one to enter the Vatican museum. Their unguided visit was pretty short, about fifteen minutes. All they could do was circle the first floor of the site. They could not go on any other levels, not even the arena, because renovations were being done. They were still glad they went though.

On their way out, Emily ended up buying a small red parasol from an outside vendor because the heat was unbearable and she wanted to shade herself from the fiery sun.

William and Emily saw the Arch of Constantine and passed by more souvenir kiosks on their way to their next tourist attraction. Emily couldn't stop herself from purchasing a nice handmade theatrical mask. She let William choose one, as she could not decide which colour combination she wanted. He picked one with various shades of greens in it. "To match your pretty eyes," he explained. Emily shyly thanked him for the compliment and gave him a kiss.

The happy couple continued walking towards their destination.

Their tickets to the Colosseum gave them entrance to the grand site of Palatine Hill and The Roman Forum, so they avoided another line up. It was a short one this time, but a lineup nonetheless.

Before really visiting the ancient ruins, William found a nice shaded spot in the grass filled with small wild flowers. He suggested they sit down underneath the tall leafy tree that provided the shade and just relax for a little bit. Emily accepted. They both admired the nice historic scenery ahead of them for a good half hour, then got up from the hard ground to explore again.

They walked on uneven grounds and climbed numerous stairs as well as hills under the boiling sun for most of the afternoon. Emily wondered where the exit was and every time she thought they were near the end there was more ruins to see. There was also a small museum with statues and pottery inside, a botanical garden, and even a spot where they could get a nice view of the city. They did not stay there too long though because it was in direct sunlight and they felt like their skin was going to bake.

Emily had noticed that there were several continuously flowing fountains in Rome, where people could stop to refill their bottles or just have a quick drink of refreshing cold water. There did not seem to be enough water fountains within Palatine Hill. Emily and William were constantly thirsty and had run out of their packed supply of juice boxes.

When they got back to their hotel late that afternoon, they immediately lied down on the made up double bed and didn't want to move. Emily originally wanted to go see the popular Trevi Fountain, but when she mentioned it to William he looked at her like she was completely crazy. "You want to walk all the way back to the metro station and venture in that heat of people just to see a fountain?" To Emily, it wasn't just a fountain; it was a beautiful historical site that she had seen in travel books. She didn't blame William for not wanting to go though. She wasn't so sure that she really had the energy herself. Emily realised that she had a slight headache, but could do nothing about it.

After a short nap, Emily and William eventually made an effort to go back out to find a good yet inexpen-

sive restaurant. They didn't want to go to the same one as the night before. They wanted something different.

On the way, their tourist side kicked in again so they stopped by some shops. Emily ended up buying a short olive coloured summer dress that William helped her pick out. He told her that he liked the way it looked on her because it showed off her nice curves. Such compliments always made Emily blush. Her face had turned almost as red as the plastic shopping bag she was now holding.

William took the bag from Emily as they were leaving the store. He liked carrying Emily's things for a reason Emily never understood; not that she had any complaints.

They discovered a nice nature park. Emily admired the old structures, dry fountain, healthy and colourful flowers, as well as trees. She saw a stray black and white cat hiding in some healthy green plants. The path her and William followed soon led them toward the kid's park, so they sat on the same bench as the previous night for a few minutes.

Emily and William ended up having dinner on a shaded sidewalk terrace. The black leather-bound table menus were primarily written in Italian but there was English fine print underneath all the selections so it was easy for the couple to place their orders. Emily figured that she would have been able to guess what most words were since she had come to realise that the Italian language was similar to French, and she spoke it well. In fact, she was perfectly bilingual. The waiter ended up speaking and understanding English, even though he had a heavy Italian accent, so Emily and William did not end up having any communication problems.

The couple munched on long sesame bread sticks and sipped on bubbly ice water while they waited for their food. Their plates were served in no time, and very nicely presented. Fresh Parsley leaves with two cherry tomato halves sat on top of their food.

After treating themselves to a glass of good red wine each, the young couple headed back towards the park. They soon got kicked out since the tall metal gates surrounding the entire public area got locked at nine thirty every night. They had no choice but to head to their hotel for the night. Everything else was closing too. Some of the food places staid open, but the couple was not hungry and they were too tired to linger somewhere for another drink. Emily was actually still a bit tipsy from her previous glass of wine. It had been her first alcoholic beverage in over a year.

The following day, Emily and William had time to go for a short leisurely walk before checking out of their hotel. The fresh air felt very nice. Without discussing it, they returned to their little bench by the park. It seemed to be a very popular spot for lovers. Emily and William had noticed that the bench was full of carved hearts with initials inside them or names of people coupled together with a plus sign, and what Emily presumed was lovey-dovey messages. Emily usually disapproved of public vandalism or graffiti, but she found herself taking out a pen from her purse to add her and William's names to the collection right before leaving.

They had to wait over an hour in the hotel lobby for their shuttle to the port later on. They heard ongoing church bells. That got replaced by the faint sound of people singing. Emily kept herself busy doing numerous Sudoku puzzles while William took advantage of the free internet in the lobby to write personal e-mails. Emily took her turn using the computer to quickly write a general message to her friends and family. She wanted to let them all know that both her and William had arrived in Rome safe and sound, and that they were having an amazing time.

A few minutes before their scheduled pick up at the airport, Emily and William went downstairs to wait for their shuttle. Minutes went by and they were starting to wonder if they had either missed it or had been forgotten. Emily was afraid to miss their boat. She sent William back upstairs to ask the man at the front desk

to call the travel company. When William returned, he told Emily that the shuttle was on its way.

The bus driver arrived half an hour later. Apparently, he had other people to pick up at different hotels and everyone's tickets said noon. It took them about an hour to get to the port of Civitavecchia. On the way, they passed by many old buildings, fountains, and healthy greenery; most of which they had already seen on the way to the hotel from the airport, but some new as well.

Boarding the cruise ship took a while because they had to hand in their suitcases, fill in some paperwork, go through security, officially check in after waiting in one of the two zig-zagging lineups, and then hand in their passports. Also, a professional photographer insisted on getting Emily and William's picture taken in front of the ship as a souvenir. They were given a coded piece of paper to pick it up at the photo shop later if they desired to purchase it.

Their stateroom was on deck six, so they took one of the elevators up and found their temporary home. It was a bit small and had no windows since it was located in the centre of the ship, but they did not mind. The large closet at the right of the entrance and the bathroom that was located to the left, the two-seater couch, glass oval coffee table, and horizontal dresser with rectangular mirror that was in the first section of the room, as well as the double bed and small bedside tables that snugly fit in the sleeping area was actually perfect for them. Two thick blue curtains could be drawn towards the middle, between the sleeping area and the little living room. For the time being, they were nicely tied up on each side of the cabin.

Before exploring the massive ship, which had a total of twelve full decks as well as two partial ones, they had to make their way to one of the restaurants and see the Maitre D about changing their dinnertime. Somehow, they ended up with an eight thirty reservation for each night even though their original paperwork said six. Emily was used to preparing dinner for six o'clock and didn't want to eat late, even on vacation.

Emily's first impression of the cruise was not a good one. Aside from the dinnertime glitch, she and William thought that they would have to pay for all their snacks and non-alcoholic drinks during the trip because all the food places they saw were not free. By the time they finally discovered a free snack bar, it was closing because of a mandatory emergency drill.

They had time to kill before the drill, but not enough to go swimming in one of the pools like Emily would have liked so they went in and out of some of the ship's stores instead. The main souvenir shop was very odd. It had discounted postcards, shot glasses, magnets and other little trinkets unrelated to any of the places they would be visiting; such as the Cayman Islands, Florida and Mexico. Emily had gone to all those places in the past. William had not done much traveling. The only related items to their current trip were merchandise with the ship's name or logo on them and were overpriced in Emily's opinion. As for the other shops, they sold bottles of alcohol, fancy chocolates, candies, expensive jewellery, clothing, purses, and other accessories. A small flower kiosk was set up in front of a hair and nail salon. There was nothing of interest to either Emily or William, so they went back to their room to wait for the drill signal.

Emily and William's suitcases were waiting in front of their cabin door, so they were able to get some unpacking done and start settling in. Emily had packed two framed five by seven sized pictures of Nadia. She used them to decorate their room by placing them on a tiny wooden wall shelf hanging right underneath the big circular mirror above their double bed.

Emily opened her mouth to say something but William cut her off right away. "She's fine," he said. "I just miss her," Emily responded. She could feel her swollen breasts lactating and it bothered her.

William turned the small television on. Explanations for the drill was being shown. Emily simply read the detailed letter that had been left on their bed.

The official announcement for the drill was suddenly heard on the intercom. Emily and William took life jackets from their closet and continued to follow instructions by slowly walking towards the nearest staircase, indicated by arrows on the floor, and going down to deck four. They found their meeting station and waited

for everyone in their group to be present. Kids under the age of twelve were given a special sticker bracelet with the meeting station number written on it. Then a crewmember showed everyone how to put on their life jackets properly and indicated where to find the small whistle on their vests. They were also explained the emergency procedures and shown which evacuation boat to embark on if necessary. The whole thing lasted about fifteen minutes, and then everyone was free to do whatever they wanted.

Emily changed into her pink flowery swimsuit and slipped on a white transparent beach dress. Although she had lost her pregnancy fat in the record time of a week and had a perfectly flat belly, she started feeling self-conscious because of her annoying breast milk leakage. So, she didn't end up swimming with William. She sat on a plastic lounge chair and relaxed instead. She had to scold herself for feeling slightly guilty about liking the fact that she did not have to supervise Nadia. "I deserve this break," she told herself. Doing absolutely nothing felt great.

There was a live band playing along the main poolside. A female organizer enthusiastically invited people to join her on the dance floor in front of the small stage and mimic her simple moves. It didn't take long for a crowd of semi-coordinated dancers of all ages to form. Emily joined.

It was soon time for dinner, so William got out of the pool and went to change into some dry clothing. Emily slipped out of her beachwear and put on a nice summer dress with tropical flowers on it. She also took the time to apply a bit of fresh makeup. She did not wear much; just cinnamon coloured gloss on her lips and a bit of black eyeliner.

Emily had to consult the ship's map to find their assigned restaurant; it was located on the fifth deck, at the opposite end of where her and William's room was located. It took them about five minutes to get there.

They were brought to a nicely set round table close to the windows looking out the walls of the ship. This gave them a splendid view of the deep blue water, the island they were currently passing by, and other ships. Emily counted herself very lucky because this was the second time she had such an amazing seating arrangement on a cruise ship. People sitting at the middle tables were missing out.

Two couples, a middle-aged one from New York City and an active looking elderly pair from London, England soon joined them at their table. Everyone introduced themselves, and were comfortably chatting away together in no time.

Emily opened her menu and pondered on what to order. She could choose an entrée, an appetizer, and a meal. Usually, when she had trouble deciding what she wanted to order she looked at prices. Everything was included as part of the cruise package so there were no prices on the menu. She finally decided to start with a shrimp cocktail, followed by a traditional Greek salad. She eventually saw that gnocchi was on the list and became excited. William's mother had introduced her to the Italian dish, dumplings made with potatoes and served with tomato sauce. She loved it.

The food was excellent, as expected. Desert selections were made. Emily chose a peach flavoured gelato. William had chosen the raspberry flavoured one, so halfway through they switched. They could have ordered a second desert for themselves at no charge, but did not want to appear greedy. "I am only still eating because it is really good," Emily admitted. She was actually quite full and could tell that everyone else was just stuffing their faces for the fun of it too.

The Turkish Maitre D came to speak to everyone at the table as they were finishing their deserts and hot beverages. He came to ask if everything had been to their liking, and give everyone some information on the cities they would be visiting.

Soon after leaving the restaurant, Emily started looking into the land excursions with William. There were several interesting ones to choose from for each port. They booked their choices early, to make sure there would be space for them.

It had gotten a bit chilly on deck by the time the sun came down. Emily and William cuddled together on

the same lounge chair with a fresh pool towel from the ship's towel station, and listened to the nineties dance music playing. Part of Emily wanted to get up and dance to the tunes that made her nostalgic, but she would have been the only one so she remained in her seat and simply moved her bare feet to the rhythm.

Despite the loud music, Emily and William both slowly started dozing off. Just before falling into a light sleep, Emily heard William whisper something strange in her ear about a wedding. She dreamt about herself walking down an isle wearing a white dress.

Emily woke up in a state of panic, remembering the stage show the cruise was putting on in the two-floor theatre. It was starting late, at ten forty five, so she wasn't sure if she would manage to stay awake for the entire production. It was way past her usual bedtime. She didn't want to miss the free show though.

Neither William nor Emily fell asleep during the variety show consisting of talented singers, lively music by an orchestra, ballroom dancing, body acrobatics, a funny comedy act as well as a clown routine in which Emily was forced to participate by holding a spinning plate on a long stick. She and William went straight to bed after the entertaining show.

With no window to see the sun and no flashing clock to tell the time, Emily relied on the sound of people walking and talking in the hallway to figure out that it was probably a good time to get up. She turned her bedside lamp on and consulted her watch, just to make sure. It was almost seven.

Emily and William got ready for the day and headed out to the eleventh floor restaurant for breakfast, where there was a buffet of breads, fresh fruits, cheeses, yogurts, meats, pastries, cereals... They ate very well.

After their meal, they headed outside to briefly admire the green hills of Messina, Sicily. The sky was clear blue. "It looks like it is going to be a perfect day," Emily said with a radiant smile. William took Emily's hands in his and looked at her in an odd way. Emily could tell that he wanted to say something important but that he could not find the right words. They stood in silence for a while. "We should get going," he finally said. "Strange," Emily thought.

Before their day's planned excursion, Emily and William had to meet their group fifteen minutes before their ten thirty departure time. The meeting place for this particular excursion was inside the ice skating arena, so it was rather cold. After being dictated the rules about not being able to bring any food items with them, each person was given a circular red sticker with the number two written on it in black. They had to wear it on their shirts. Then, like ducklings, they followed a guide holding up a big sign with their number on it.

Just like at the airport as well as when they boarded the ship, everyone had to get in line for a security check. All the bags and purses were quickly passed through a metal detector. Each individual was subjected to a metal detector test as well. A lot of woman had forgotten to take off their jewellery so it made the machines beep. William's belt made the alarm go off.

Their magnetized cabin key cards needed to be swiped to exit the ship, and they were all told that they would need them to board again. They had to be careful not to lose them. Emily couldn't help but wonder what would happen if somebody accidentally got left behind since their passports had not been returned to them yet. It happened on the last cruise she went on. The people in question were able to board the ship at the next port, but without a passport she was not sure how getting to another country would work.

They took an air-conditioned shuttle bus from the port of Messina all the way to Mount Etna, an active volcano. It took them about two hours, during which their proud Sicilian male tour guide entertained them with a bit of history and cultural facts about Sicily as well as Mount Etna. He even pointed out where the movie "The Godfather" had been filmed. They passed by several vineyards and orchards as well as patches of dry lava flow. They could also see the volcano smoking.

The guide casually informed everyone that locals usually only got a few hours warning before an eruption, and that one had actually occurred just a few months ago. Emily and William looked at each other fearfully. The guide saw their reaction and laughed. "Don't worry, we will have plenty of time to get back to the ship in case of an emergency," he said. He had a very good sense of humour and cracked a lot of funny jokes.

The group stopped for a quick bite to eat and honey tasting before the really fun part of their little excursion started. There were liquor samples as well, but Emily could not bring herself to try any of them. A single whiff of the local specialty made her believe that she would most likely be knocked out if she had any. William took a shot. After a small coughing fit, he confirmed that the alcohol level was pretty strong. "My throat feels like it is on fire," he told Emily. "It's very good though." Emily could tell that others had enjoyed their samples as well.

"Okay. Time to explore!" the guide happily announced.

It was too dangerous to go near the opening of the volcano, so they simply walked around a large crater and collected some hardened lava rocks. Some of them were black while others were maroon coloured. It was quite chilly and windy at the high altitude they were at. Emily and William were some of the few people who had brought sweaters with them, and they were both glad to have them.

The second part of their excursion consisted of visiting a canyon, Alcantara Gorge, created by an old lava flow. A peaceful current of clean water ran right through it. It was freezing cold. Emily felt that dipping her feet and splashing herself a little bit was actually quite refreshing after getting over the initial shock of the water's temperature. William and others soon did the same. Emily eventually ventured further into the water until she was knee deep. It felt very nice, but was such a major contrast to the blazing sun. She could not believe that about an hour ago she needed her sweater. They were at a much lower altitude now.

On the beautiful site, there were several olive trees, prickly pear cactuses, and orange trees. They tried some free samples of spreads and oils made from the fresh fruits. Their tastes convinced Emily to buy a few things to bring home. She tried various fruit liquors as well and loved them too.

After a long afternoon, both Emily and William dozed off in the bus on the way back to the ship. After boarding, they had to rush and get ready for the formal dinner. William put on his elegant black suit, white dress shirt and red tie. Emily wore a long black evening gown that once belonged to her mother as well as black high heel shoes, and accessorized herself with silver and diamond jewellery. She even put on some lipstick and eye shadow, which is something she rarely did. Emily took a small black purse with her to the restaurant. Inside was her digital camera, so she and William took pictures together before and after their meal. She trusted the people on the ship with her camera.

Later on, they had the opportunity to take their picture with the ship's captain. William asked to have a private conversation with the captain and Emily wondered what that was all about. She soon found out.

William took Emily to a quiet area of the ship. She could tell that William was nervous, but did not understand why. He then got down on one knee, took Emily's right hand in his, and pronounced the words "Emily Jacobson. Will you marry me?" Emily didn't know how to respond. Of course she wanted to marry William, but they were already engaged. She wondered why he was proposing again. "We can get married on the ship," William explained. "The captain has already agreed to marry us. He can do it during our next full day at sea."

It took a moment for Emily to understand that William had started making arrangements for a private wedding on the ship. "Yes!!!" Emily finally exclaimed as she jumped into William's strong arms. Tears of joy were forming.

A couple was passing by and Emily shouted out "We're getting married!" Emily and William were con-

gratulated. They then ignored the fact that they were not alone and kissed each other passionately. Emily wanted to do much more, but controlled herself.

Emily had trouble containing her excitement for the rest of the day.

The evening's show was at a more reasonable time than the previous night. In fact, there were two show times; one at seven and another at nine. Emily and William were able to catch the nine o'clock show. Without realizing it, they sat right beside one of the previous night's performer. It was actually Emily's favourite artist. Once she realized who he was, she told him that she had really enjoyed his show. "Thanks. I will be performing again later in the week," he politely responded. Emily was happy by the news, and felt the need to share the fact that she and William were going to get married on the cruise. The performer gave his congratulations.

Emily was a bit disappointed by the show since the advertisement described that it would have excerpts from popular broadways and the only music she recognized was a mix of songs from «Mama Mia», which was only done at the very end as a kind of finale. From the comments she overheard around her, she wasn't the only one who didn't find the show as interesting as it could have been. That did not ruin her night though. She still had the happy butterfly flutters in her stomach from the excitement of her future wedding. She was singing songs inside her head.

When Emily and William got to their room, there were two tickets to an excursion they had originally been told was fully booked. They had been placed on a waiting list for the Blue Grotto boat trip, and as it turned out another group was organized by popular demand. After making love to William, Emily set up a wakeup call for seven o'clock to make sure that they would be ready on time to meet their excursion group in the morning.

The ship sailed to Malta. Emily had never heard of the country before, but when she saw the islands of Malta from just a distance it took her breath away. Medieval architecture filled the lands. They soon docked at the port of Valetta.

On the way to their excursion, Emily and William found out that several popular movies such as "Troy" and "Gladiator" had been filmed in Malta. A zombie movie starring famous Hollywood actors was currently in production. Several well-known singers would be in town the following evening for an outdoor concert. "And to think that I never even heard of the islands of Malta before going on this cruise!" Emily told William. "You learn new things every day," he responded. "That's for sure!"

The Maltese tour guide robotically informed his group that all the buildings in Malta were made of limestone. They passed by the place where the brownish orange stones were cut. They then made a quick stop to take panoramic pictures of the Blue Grotto, which they were about to visit more closely. The rocky land they walked on was full of capper bushes and prickly pear cactuses, along with other random vegetation. There were limestones as well. Emily picked up a few of the stones before getting back on the bus.

Fifteen minutes later, the group was gathered near the water. Wearing orange life jackets, Emily and William got on a small motorboat that fit ten people and headed towards the Blue Grotto and other breath-taking caves. The boat slowly went in and out of the openings.

The aqua water they moved on was very clean. A couple of people were standing on high rocks fishing. Others were swimming near the shore.

After getting off the boat, the group was given some time to shop and eat before getting back on the bus. Emily and William bought some souvenirs. Emily found a nice white knit purse and a lace parasol for herself. "To be used for the wedding," she thought to herself. She figured it would go nicely with the white summer dress she had randomly packed for the trip. A nice hand sewn dress was found for Nadia. Emily

somewhat wished that her daughter could be present at the wedding and wear the pretty dress. "Maybe we should wait," she thought for a moment. "No," she argued with herself. "This is the perfect opportunity." Emily waited as William bought a brown leather wallet with the Malta cross on it. His previous wallet was falling apart. They both treated themselves to some gelato after, even if it was still morning.

Their next stop was in the fishing village of Marsaxlokk, where some outdoor shopping was done. They tasted some delicious samples of jams and candies in between merchandise browsing. Emily bought a model ship within a small glass bottle for her father. Everyone's thank you gifts were taken care of now.

They made it back to the ship for lunch. Emily and William were able to grab a plate and select things from a large buffet of various pastas, pizzas, meats, sandwiches, cooked vegetables, salads, and all sorts of other foods. There was even a desert bar and a self-serve ice cream machine.

After eating a big meal, Emily and William headed back out. Rather than walking around the unknown site like most other tourists, they took a one-hour horse carriage ride around Valletta. Their guide stopped in front of a small botanical garden and waited for them while they explored the beautiful grounds. Emily saw that he took the time to give his hardworking brown horse some water.

The carriage driver dropped them back off near the port. Emily and William did a bit of shopping on the way back to the ship. Malta is known for its glass items. So, Emily felt the need to buy something made of glass as a souvenir. She found a nice white heart shaped pendant she liked, at a reasonable price. It hung on a strong white cord with a little metal clip. William ended up buying it for her. "Consider it a wedding present," he said. Emily thanked him and asked him to help her put it on. He did.

Back on the ship, Emily and William took care of a few simple wedding arrangements. Emily booked an appointment at the salon for her hair and nails. She asked the florist from the kiosk if she could prepare a nice bouquet of white roses. "Anything for a bride to be," the petite woman kindly replied with a nice smile. William ordered a single white rose to pin on the pocket of his suit jacket. They then walked into the jewellery store and purchased simple silver wedding bands. They could not afford anything too pricey.

During dinner, they cheerfully announced their wedding plans and asked the two couples at their table, whom they were now friends with, if they would act as witnesses. They happily accepted.

Soon it was time for the evening cruise show. Emily and William sat in the front row. An excellent Italian born performer entertained them with his humour, songs, and electric guitar. They ended up buying his CD afterwards. The artist signed the case with a silver coloured permanent marker, and took individual pictures with Emily and William like he had done with other cruise ship vacationers. They had a nice conversation together, during which Emily shared her wedding plans. She had the biggest smile on her face when she spoke.

The singer offered to sing a romantic song at the ceremony and Emily was thrilled. He even taught them how to say the words I love you in Italian. Emily and William looked into each other's eyes. "Ti amo," they both said to each other.

"It's going to be the best wedding ever!" Emily told William on their way to their room.

They had to move the hands of their watches an hour ahead before going to bed since they were about to change time zones again.

Emily woke up on her wedding day, feeling very excited. The ceremony would only take place later in the afternoon though. She took the time to go eat breakfast with William, but could barely eat anything. William treated her to some freshly squeezed orange juice, which was not included in the cruise package. Emily did her best to relax on the ship with William after, but was much too anxious to be able to stay still.

They saw an excellent skating show right after lunch. One of the woman impressed Emily by twirling sev-

eral glow in the dark hoola-hoops on her hips while skating. Emily had never been able to twirl a single hoola-hoop on her hips. She had been very good with skipping ropes and gymnastic ribbons though.

The time finally came for William and Emily to get prepared for their wedding. William quickly changed into his black suit and left the room to allow Emily to get ready. "It's bad luck for a groom to see his bride with her wedding dress on before the wedding," Emily had said.

With William completely out of sight, Emily put on her white dress and matching high heel sandals, applied some makeup, grabbed her new purse and parasol from Malta, and rapidly headed to the salon. She got her hair done up nicely and the outgoing female hairdresser put some small white flowers in her tide-up hair. Loose strands of her curls fell on each side of her face.

For the final touch, a small silver coloured tiara with white cubic zirconias on it was placed on Emily's head. She looked and felt like a princess. That got her thinking about her dad, who still called her his princess from time to time. Emily knew that her father would have liked to walk her down the isle and she started feeling bad about him not being present for the wedding. Her mother surely would of liked to be there too. The Mancinis would want to be present as well. "We can always renew our vows," Emily told herself to feel less guilty.

Emily got a French manicure done and picked up her flower bouquet. William had already gotten his rose pin. Emily met him inside the ship's small chapel, where their guests were patiently waiting.

"Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue," Emily suddenly remembered. "My dress is technically old," she thought. She fiddled with the glass heart pendant William had bought her in Malta. "That is something new," she whispered to herself. She started to worry that it wasn't new enough since she had already worn it. "My purse and parasol fit the requirement," she realised. The elderly British woman that had come as a witness came towards Emily. "Do you want to borrow my pin?" she said with an accent. "It has always brought me luck." Emily saw that it was a nice blue flower. "Something borrowed AND blue! Perfect!" "And a silver sixpence in her shoe," the woman continued. Emily had never heard of that one. "They stopped making that coin a long time ago," the woman said. "But I have six pence you can use." She opened her small coin purse and pulled out some loose change. "Here you go love." Emily put the six black coins in her right white sandal and saw that it was not going to work out. The woman had the idea to tape three pence on the inside of each shoe. It was better, but not very comfortable. Emily did not want to insult the woman so she said nothing. She was now ready.

Emily walked down the short isle, which had a red carpet covered with fresh white rose petals, to the sound of the classical bridal song. As Emily walked by each row, she saw that the end of each long wooden bench was decorated with two silver bells tied to a big white bow.

When Emily reached William, she could see that happy tears had formed in his eyes. "You look amazing," he whispered. Emily was about to let a few joyful tears out but managed to control herself.

The captain of the ship said a few romantic words, the Italian signer sang a song called "Ti Amo", Emily and William whispered the Italian love words to each other, basic vows were exchanged, rings were given... The next thing Emily knew, she was kissing her husband. She knew that her and William would have to sign some papers back home to legalize their bond in Canada, but they were still considered husband and wife wherever in the world they currently were and she was ecstatic.

One of the ship's photographers had been hired by William. He took several pictures during the wedding, and was now taking more of the happy couple and their guests. The newlyweds thanked everyone for taking the time to share their special day with them and for the unexpected gifts before they all left.

Emily and William dropped off their unwrapped gifts in their room and took the time to write up thank you

notes before heading out to dinner.

William had made reservations at a more secluded restaurant on the ship. They would have to pay for their food, but it was a special day. William didn't need any justification, but Emily still liked hearing him say "I wanted a private table with my wife." The sound of the combined words my and wife together as they left William's mouth gave Emily a warm feeling inside.

They ended up having the restaurant almost to themselves. Their table was nicely decorated with a lit tea light candle within a crystal jar as well as a single white rose within an elegant thin and tall glass vase. Small white lights that strung along the walls with fake grape vines slightly lit the place. It was very romantic.

Emily and William placed their orders; they were both in the mood for spaghetti and meatballs. They sipped on some red wine and ate some fresh buns dipped in balsamic vinegar and olive oil while they waited for their food.

They were first served Italian wedding soup. When their plates of pasta arrived, freshly ground parmesan cheese was added on top of their food. For desert, the cook personally came to the table to proudly present a small wedding cake he had baked especially for Emily and William. "On the house!" he said. The newly-weds cut a piece of vanilla cake each, and asked that the rest be brought to their room for later.

After their delicious meal, they went to their room to change into something more casual and headed to see another show. This time, singers did a compilation of songs from the seventies and eighties while they also danced on stage.

When they returned to their cabin, Emily and William saw that somebody had put up a just married sign on their door. People had left congratulation messages on a separate piece of white paper that was also stuck to their door. The rest of their wedding cake waited for them inside, along with a card from the ship's staff.

Although they knew they had to get up early the following day, Emily and William did not go to bed at a reasonable time. They acted like any normal couple would on their wedding night.

The phone rang at six in the morning since Emily had set up a wakeup call. It felt like they had just gone to sleep.

Now in Kusudasi, Turkey, Emily and William got ready for another excursion.

They each received a little gift bag on the tour bus. Inside each bag was a postcard, a souvenir necklace made with a flat stone as well as a brown string, and a small safety pin with beards of the blue and white Turkish good luck symbol attached to it. They were also given a complimentary bottle of cold water each.

They visited the ruins of Ephesos, which had the remains of an ancient Greek bath, a library, and multiple columns. They walked where Alexander the Great had once set foot, and saw where Cleopatra had been murdered and buried years ago. There were several stray cats around. They also saw a Greek Theatre. Close by, a short gladiator performance took place by local actors in costumes.

Emily and William had to pass by little shops to get to their bus afterwards and all the sellers were annoyingly persistent. Emily ended up buying a short spaghetti strap dress, but not because she was pressured into it. She got it because she found it very original; the Egyptian design on the white cotton material caught her eyes right away. Emily knew that she would think of her trip and her new findings on Cleopatra every time she would wear it.

There was a domesticated camel lying down on the ground with a bowl of food in front of him. With the owner's permission, Emily asked William to take a picture of her in front of the desert animal. The camel looked like it was smiling with Emily.

Their Turkish tour guide brought them to a carpet shop for a carpet making demonstration. A dry white caterpillar cocoon with the dead bug still inside it was passed along to show everyone what the tread was

made off. They then witnessed the threading and also saw a woman working on a carpet. The group was told that it takes several months, sometime even years, to make a single carpet, hence the high price of them. Most women worked from their homes.

Everyone was offered some complimentary drinks while men unrolled various carpets of various sizes on the floor for people to see and feel. Emily tried some hot apple tea, which she found very good. She loved the carpets on display and wanted to show her support towards the female artisans, but didn't buy anything. The shipping was free, but all the carpets were way over her and William's budget. She felt that they had already spent a lot of money during their trip.

Emily and William tried to stay away from the little shops on the way to the ship but ended up going inside them anyways. It was more out of curiosity than anything at this point.

They got back to the ship on time for lunch and went right back out after their quick meal. Emily saw a little castle and headed straight for it. She and William longed the coast, where many souvenir kiosks were set up, and then walked around the castle grounds populated by flowers, palm trees, and olive trees. Brave cliff divers jumped into the clear blue water.

Emily would have loved to visit the interior of the castle, but unfortunately the historical site was closed. She could see that other tourists were as disappointed as she was.

On the way back towards the ship, a local man wearing only shorts randomly called out to them as he fished something out of the water with his bare hands. Emily soon recognised it as a sea urchin. She watched the tanned man place the black coloured sea creature with round spikes all around it on the ground. Emily could see it breathing and moving very slowly. She then noticed several sea urchins, some black and others dark purple, on the big rocks within the shallow water; clearly not a good place to walk around barefoot. The creature was soon thrown back into the Aegean Sea. Emily and William continued on their way.

Emily took a good look at all the crafty souvenirs on display along the coast and debated on whether or not she should buy a handmade picture frame. "We're probably never going to have the chance to come back here, so you might as well splurge," William advised her. Emily ended up buying it. She was tempted to get a temporary Henna tattoo done as well but changed her mind. She could not decide what design she preferred for herself.

During their pleasant walk, Emily eventually spotted a bench in the shade so she and William decided to hang out there for a while. After noticing all the pigeons, two pigeon houses, and fountain dedicated to the bird, Emily remembered that the name of the city, Kusadasi, meant island of bird in Turkish. She had read it in one of the ship's newsletters.

As an afternoon snack, Emily and William treated themselves to some Turkish delights, bought on the island right before boarding the ship. They washed the sweet candies down with a cold beverage each.

Because of the heat, they talked about going swimming. However, the ship started moving forward to head to their next destination and the wind quickly picked up. It became cool very fast, so they went to get sweaters instead of going into one of the pools.

They had considered getting into one of the hot tubs, but both areas were much too crowded for their liking. Emily and William preferred to relax quietly together on a lounge chair instead. They remained cuddled together until it was time to go to the restaurant.

For dinner, Emily enjoyed black olives and pieces of sliced feta cheese to start and some cut cantaloupe pieces wrapped with prosciutto. She indulged in a medium rare steak served with the biggest baked potato she had ever seen in her life. She filled it with a lot of sour cream, chopped up baby onions, and fresh pieces of bacon bits. She ate light chocolate mousse for desert.

Emily had been feeling very spoiled during her trip. She definitely did not have the time to cook extravagant meals at home, much less afford to eat so many courses. The only times she and William ever ate anything so elaborate lately was when they were invited to dinner and either Mrs. Jacobson or Mrs. Mancini prepared the food. They were both excellent cooks.

They had to rush to make it to this evening's show since the only performance was scheduled at seven forty five. It seemed very disorganized to Emily. As she predicted, some people from the six o'clock dinner came running into the theatre after the show had already started, and others left before it finished to make their eight thirty dinner. It was too bad because the show was a really good one. There were acrobatics acts and the comedian Emily liked from a previous night got on stage too. He actually dedicated the show to Emily and William. "Is the happy couple in the audience?" the comedian asked. Emily and William shyly lifted up their hands. They were asked to stand up from their seats, but neither Emily nor William wanted to. Everyone in the crowd gave a loud round of applause to encourage the couple, so they finally stood. "To the newlyweds!" the comedian said.

After the show was done, the couple received a lot of congratulations from many strangers.

Emily realised that the souvenir boutique took out relevant souvenirs every evening, but she found nothing of interest. She much preferred to buy things on location. She and William walked right on by and headed straight for their room. They took advantage of the energy they had left to make love and then ventured back out of their cabin.

It was Latino night, so a buffet of various snacks, hot meals, and deserts was set up on the poolside deck. Carved melons, ice sculptures, and breads placed together to form the shapes of large anchors decorated the tables. After a bit of dancing, Emily and William completely pigged out.

The following day, Emily and William disembarked the ship in the port of Chania, Crete (Greece) and headed to the village of AgioiAposlolo by shuttle bus. There wasn't anything interesting to see on the way there aside from Greek letters on signs and billboards. Emily could not even try figuring out what any of the words were like she had done in other countries, so she got bored pretty quickly.

The sandy beach they went to was beautiful. There were a few visible seaweeds, but the water was still nice and clean. On one side of the water there were large protruding rocks, and small islands could be seen in the distance. Emily didn't go swimming because she found the water much too cold. William only walked into the sea until the water reached his waist, and that took him a while to do. He actually only did it because Emily had dared him to. After, he headed towards her looking like he was up to no good, picked her up, and ran towards the water like he was about to throw her in. Emily screamed and laughed at the same time.

They spent most of their time on the crowded beach trying to find seashells, but mostly collected small white rocks since they were everywhere. The few seashells they found were tiny. When they were lucky to find a decent sized shell, it was broken or had a hole in it.

Their stay on Iguana beach was short. Before leaving, they used the public restrooms. Emily found it strange that there was no toilet; just a stall with a low ceramic basin that had a hole in the centre. Emily had to squat. There had been the same type of female urinal in one of the woman's bathrooms in Rome. According to William, the men's bathrooms in both locations had normal toilets.

Everyone had to be back on the ship before the two thirty departure. Most passengers came back at the exact same time because there was nothing to do at this port unless you went on an excursion. There was absolutely nothing interesting to see or visit within a walking distance. So, there was a big line up to get back onboard and no available tables at the restaurant because everyone decided to go eat lunch at the same time. Emily and William ended up sitting down with two other people, who turned out to be deeply anti-social.

After eating, they picked up their passports at their designated place. After that, Emily and William just sat outside under the rays of the sun. They eventually left the deck to get themselves a snack, and when they came back it was so windy that they felt like they were going to blow away. They held on to each other laughing and went back indoors.

Emily and William went to the photo studio to take a look at their wedding pictures. They all turned out very nice. The photographer made them a good offer for digital copies. They took a look at the picture they had taken together before boarding the ship but did not like it. They only purchased the wedding photos, along with a nice souvenir album that was on discount. They got their names along with their wedding date engraved on the shiny silver cover.

The newlyweds ordered some custom made postcards with a picture of themselves on their wedding day. The message on the back simply said: "We eloped." Emily had brought her address book on the trip because she had planned on sending people postcards for fun, so she and William took the time to address the cards to close friends and family. They bought stamps at the customer service desk and dropped all the stamped postcards in the ship's mailbox.

It was another formal night for dinner. William wore the same suit and tie whereas Emily put on a new royal blue evening dress with a long matching scarf. Her jewellery was gold with diamonds this time, to match the accessories on her dress straps.

The two friendly couples at their table felt the need to toast them with some champagne, as they had been unable to do so on the night of the wedding, nor the previous night because the couple from New York had not been present for dinner. "I wasn't feeling well so we just ended up ordering room service", the woman explained. "I hope you feel better now," Emily said with concern in her voice. The woman confirmed that she did.

Emily and William went to the regular evening show. It was very entertaining to the point where most of the audience, including Emily, got up to sing and dance to the popular tunes along with the four male performers. Somehow, William managed to fall asleep. Emily laughed at him after she woke him up.

Neither Emily nor William had trouble sleeping once they got inside the blankets of their bed.

The timepieces had to be turned one hour behind the previous night, so Emily and William really slept in. It did them both some good.

After a late breakfast, it was time to do some packing.

Emily and William went to a towel folding demonstration after lunch to see how the cleaning staff turned the cruise ship's white towels into animal shapes. They were shown how to make a rabbit, a dog, a monkey, a bat, a stingray, and love swans, all of which they had seen in their room throughout the course of the week.

An ice sculpting demonstration took place on the pool deck. The sculptor took a three hundred pound block of ice and hacked away with his sharp tools until it was in the shape of a tropical fish with seaweed behind it. The job was done in about eight minutes, while the ice was starting to melt in the hot sun. Emily thought it was quite impressive.

William looked like he was about to fall asleep so Emily suggested they take a little nap together. Emily couldn't sleep though. Once William started snoring, she kissed him on the head, got out of bed, and wrote him a note to tell him where to find her. She signed it, your wife, and added OXO.

The wind had picked up by the time Emily returned outdoors. Her thin Sudoku book went flying underneath somebody's chair when she put it down for a second. She also almost lost the two flip-flops she had taken off her feet. It wasn't cold like the other days though, so she remained outside after collecting her fly-away belongings.

The ship passed by Stromboli, another active volcano. William didn't get the chance to see it because he was still indoors. Emily saw it though. It wasn't smoking like Mount Etna had. It just looked like a giant mountain, similar to all the islands they had recently seen. She would have never known it to be a volcano had it not been pointed out by the captain on the ship's intercom.

Emily ended up deciding to pamper herself by going to the spa for a half hour aromatherapy back massage. At the end of the session, the therapist recommended she get massages done every two weeks because she had such big knots. "I will follow her tempting advice as soon as I win the lottery," she first thought. Then she realised that she could just ask William to give her bi-weekly massages. He was actually pretty good with his hands.

The massage therapist tried to sell Emily some expensive tubes of therapeutic gel and overpriced scented bubble bath. Emily politely refused to buy any spa merchandise. She was fully content with the dollar store bath products she had at home.

Emily went to find William in the room. He was reading the second note Emily had left him, where she mentioned going to the spa. "Did you enjoy your massage?" he asked yawning. "It was very relaxing. How was your nap?" William admitted that he could use another one. Emily laughed and lied down beside him. She rested her head on his chest and listened to the soothing beat of his heart. She eventually fell asleep.

Everyone ate their last dinner on the cruise. Emily and William said their farewells to their table friends. The New York couple would be extending their trip by exploring more of Italy. Hearing them talk about the places they planned on visiting made Emily want to prolong her stay in Europe as well. There were so many sites she wanted to see; not just in Italy, but all over Europe.

After dragging out their dinnertime, knowing that they would never see their new friends or the nice restaurant staff again, Emily and William went to the theatre to see one last show. As usual right before a performance, their cruise director and his multilingual assistant talked to the audience. On this particular night, they made fun of some of the questions first time cruisers had asked them. One of the questions was "do these stairs go up or down?" Everyone had a good laugh at that.

After the show, Emily and William headed to their room to finish packing. Their suitcases had to be tagged with special stickers previously given to them, and left outside their door before eleven if they wanted the staff to take them outside the ship the following day. This was meant to avoid having to transport their luggage out themselves. They kept their carry on bags with them.

The following morning, the restaurant opened earlier than usual for people who had to leave the ship early. Emily and William were scheduled to disembark the ship at eight fifteen, so they were able to take their time to eat their last big breakfast. Emily savoured her piece of smoked salmon on a cream cheese bagel half, fried egg, piece of white toast dipped in runny yellow yolk, two breakfast sausages with ketchup, three pieces of crispy bacon, a thin blueberry pancake drained in maple syrup and whipped cream, and slices of fresh fruits, knowing that she would not eat like that every morning once she got home. William had some thick slices of cooked ham and a mix of various small pastries along with a bowl of sugary cereal. He usually just had a cup of sweetened coffee back home. It was rare for him to take the time to eat breakfast.

Emily and William were able to leave the ship at eight, but had to wait for their shuttle to arrive. It was scheduled to pick them up at nine o'clock. They collected their luggage within a big white tent and waited outside with many other people. It was nice and sunny; not too warm. There was a pleasant breeze. Emily put on some sunscreen since she didn't want to burn. Her skin had not turned tomato red during this vacation, and she planned on keeping it that way.

Emily eventually saw their guide holding up a sign with her and William's name on it. She pointed him

out to William as she got up. They walked towards the man, and then followed him to their bus.

At the Leonardo da Vinci International airport, they had to wait before checking in since they were a bit early. It didn't take too long before their particular airline company set up lineup posts and the check in desks opened up.

Before going through security, Emily and William had a quick bite to eat at a deli and went to all the airport shops. Emily bought a little Pinocchio puppet for Nadia. She had seen them here and there while walking around in Rome and felt the need to bring one home. The simple wooden toy ended up entertaining a cranky baby girl later on in the plane. Emily hoped that it would please Nadia just as much. She could not wait to see her again.

Their return flight was a painful eight and a half hours long. Emily was starting to feel claustrophobic, strapped down with her seat belt and between two people. On the last plane they were on, the side seats only had two spaces per row so William sat in the window seat and Emily sat in the aisle one. It was so much better than sharing their space with a complete stranger; especially when she had to get up to use the bathroom because the teenaged boy always had his headphones on his ears and his food tray down.

Emily and William changed the time on their watches for the fourth time during their trip. The plane landed at five thirty Montreal time, but they were still wired to the time in Rome so for them it was eleven thirty at night and they were both very eager to get home to their comfortable queen size bed.

They had to take a weird shuttle from the plane to the airport rather than walk out of the plane into a short tunnel attached to the airport building. So, even though they were one of the firsts to get off the plane they ended up being one of the lasts to go through customs. They had to wait around for their suitcases, then get in line for a taxi in the heat. It was hotter in Montreal than in Rome!

By the time they got home it was close to seven o'clock. Emily was so tired that she had trouble unlocking the lobby door, but finally managed. William held the door open for her like he always did. When Emily entered her own apartment, she spoke out the words "Home Sweet Home."

William mentioned that his body was slightly swaying left and right. Emily remembered having the same dizzy sensation after her first cruise, and realised that she felt the same now. "It's perfectly normal," she said. The waves had always looked rather calm during their trip, but they had been able to feel the ship vibrate at times. Now that they were on steady land, their bodies had to get used to it.

Emily originally planned on going straight to bed but suddenly had an inexplicable boost of energy. She ended up doing laundry and most of the unpacking while calling family and friends on her cordless phone to let them all know that she and William were back home and had a wonderful trip. She really wanted to tell everyone about her and William's wedding, but decided to let people receive their postcards in the mail before talking about it.

Although Emily was eager to see her daughter and hold her in her arms, she told her mother to bring Nadia back home the next day like they had discussed before the trip. Emily and William needed time to recuperate from their vacation.

They finally went to bed, but both woke up at around four thirty in the morning and could not get back to sleep. It took them a few days to get used to the time difference.

During those tiresome days, they had to get back to reality and start making their own bed again, do housework, cooking, dishes, run errands... bills had come in and rent would soon be due. Emily and William resumed their routine with Nadia. Also, they eventually had to start paying attention to what day of the week it was since William had to get back to work a week after returning from Rome. Emily continued staying home with Nadia, which in a way was her job. Nadia did not always give her mother an easy time.

Emily and William found the time to look at all the digital pictures they took during their trip, while listening to their new Italian CD. They printed over a hundred photos. Emily used most of them for her travel scrapbook, but also put some in simple frames from the dollar store. She placed them on display in the living room, along with the lava rocks and limestones she had collected. She filled her Turkish frame with the picture of herself beside the camel. The white rocks and few seashells collected in Greece went in the bathroom with more of Emily's sea themed souvenirs from previous trips.

Eventually, people started receiving the post cards with the news that Emily and William had gotten married. They received a lot of calls. Emily was finally able to put a nice picture of their wedding as well as her wedding album in the living room for guests to see. Being a bride had been the best day of her life, aside from Nadia's birth.



(Thanks to everyone who keep encouraging me to write. Chantal Bellehumeur 2013)
If you enjoyed this short story, please post a review on Goodreads. See reviews by others.
http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/4538804.Chantal_Bellehumeur

Follow Chantal on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Chantal-Bellehumeur-public-author-page/347446362035640>

Find Chantal Bellehumeur's novels on Amazon:

http://www.amazon.ca/Books/s?ie=UTF8&field-author=Chantal%20Bellehumeur&page=1&rd=1&rh=n%3A916520%2Cp_27%3AChantal%20Bellehumeur

Whether you own any of Chantal's books or not, you can request a personalized **digital autograph** from her.

http://www.authorgraph.com/authors/c_bellehumeur