



## *The Wedding Box Preview*

### **An expert from Chapter 1**

“Oh, there you two are!”

We both turn to find Aunt Nan, decked out in all her wedding finery, tips of silvery hair peeking out from beneath that periwinkle hat. I instinctively go to hug her, but realize her hands are full—she’s holding a beautifully wrapped gift.

“I wanted to give you my wedding present before you leave.”

I smile, then glance toward the pile of gifts near the back door, which Mom and Dad will deliver to our apartment while we’re honeymooning in Hawaii. “Oh, they go on that table,” I tell her, “and we’ll open them when we get back.

“I know that, dear, but I need to give you this one personally. And you won’t open it when you get back because it comes with special instructions not to, so you’ll need to set it aside, apart from the rest.”

Ben and I exchange glances. “You’re giving us a gift we can’t open?” he asks.

“Exactly.” She adds a succinct nod.

I purse my lips in confusion. “If we can’t open it, then why...or what...is the point?”

I don’t mean that snidely, and the rich sound of her laughter reassures me she knows that. “You can open it eventually,” she explains. “But you’re to save it until you have your first big disagreement.”

Another quick tossing of looks takes place between Ben and me, her words opening a floodgate of thoughts. Maybe we won’t have disagreements. And even if we do—everyone does, right?—I don’t necessarily want to think about that now, on our special day. And leave it to Aunt Nan to give us the most unique of gifts, one we can’t open until something goes wrong.

Though I keep all this to myself, it must be written all over my face, since she answers me anyway. “No marriage is trouble-free. If it is, then someone’s holding something back. No two people see the world exactly the same, but marriage isn’t supposed to be perfect. We grow through conflict and adversity.”

At this, my eyes bolt open wider. “Conflict and adversity? This is my wedding day, Aunt Nan!” I can’t believe she’s raining on my perfect blue-sky day with conflict and adversity! “I always thought you and Uncle Philip were happy together,” I go on, incredulous.

“Oh, we were, my dear, we were,” she says on a carefree laugh. Even though I’m not finding any of this very funny. “But again, no marriage is without its troubles. And this box will make that easier when the time comes.”

And then the gift is in my hands. About a foot square, it’s wrapped in lovely, patterned, cream-colored paper and tied with an elaborate lace ribbon, sprigs of off-white silk roses tucked in around the bow. “It’s...beautiful, Aunt Nan,” I have to admit, though I’m suddenly wary of it somehow.

“Well, I thought since it might stay wrapped a while,” she says on a wink, “it should be pleasant to look at.”

Then she tells us she loves us both and wishes us all the happiness in the world. “And I’ll see you after you get back. You’ll call me first thing, right? I want to hear you went surfing and learned to hula dance.”

But my mind is still on the emotionally-heavy gift I’m holding, even as we all laugh at her last words. “I’m pretty sure we’ll keep it simpler,” I tell her, trying to focus on the conversation, “spending days on the beach or exploring the island, and spending nights...well, honeymooning.” More light laughter fills the air, but it hits me just then that if Aunt Nan ever went to Hawaii, she would totally take surfing lessons and hula classes.

My thoughts continue to swirl, even after she turns to go. And when Ben takes the box from me a moment later, carrying it toward the gift table anyway, I touch his arm. “Shouldn’t we hang on to it, keep it apart from the others?”

He stops, looks uncertain. “I could put it in the car trunk—that way we’ll remember not to open it.” Then he casts a speculative glance down. “Or...we could just open it now.”

I raise my eyebrows, aghast. “Why would we do that?”

“Well, aren’t you curious what’s inside? I mean, what on earth could she think is going to solve any potential problem that ever crops up between us?”

I release a melancholy sigh. “I know she meant well, but it’s horrible to have to think about that on our wedding day.”

“Right. And if we don’t open it now, don’t you think it’ll sort of...hang over our heads? We’ll be waiting for this big, awful moment of deciding to open it?”

I see why he’s tempted, and yet... “What if the mystery gift in this box is the perfect thing to make everything better whenever we have that first big fight? And if we don’t have it to open, it can’t fix whatever the problem is.”

He tilts his head, then continues trying to justify opening it. “Well, after we see what it is, we can tuck it away and save it for that moment.”

I shake my head, though. “What if it doesn’t work that way? What if it only solves the problem if you open it when it’s happening? Otherwise, she wouldn’t have told us to wait.”

“I’m not sure that makes sense,” he argues. “If we see it’s something that solves a problem, won’t it solve it just as well when we actually have one?”

This is getting a little too complicated for the moment, so I insist, “We should honor the intention of the gift and wait.”

But Ben isn’t convinced. “I’m afraid just knowing it’s sitting there, unopened, could drive us crazy.” Though he challenges me with raised eyebrows. “Are you saying the anticipation, the mystery of it, isn’t killing you already?”

I look at the box in his hands. He’s right, it is. “But we still can’t.”

A cute, crafty smile unfurls across his handsome face before he suggests, “Hey, maybe this qualifies as our first disagreement. Instant permission to open.”

Maybe I should just give in, end the suspense. But again, I’m a little afraid of it now.

Aunt Nan would hate me feeling this way about her gift, but even as we both stare down at it, I can't help wondering: Is marriage going to be as hard as Aunt Nan just said? Is this box a warning about bad times to come?

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