

A close-up portrait of a young man with dark, wavy hair and striking blue eyes. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. The background is a blurred interior setting with warm lighting.

NICOLA
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ROSETTE

A circular logo containing the letters 'WJR' in a stylized, serif font. The logo is white with a dark border and is set against a dark background.

WJR

A dark, ornate banner with decorative scrollwork and floral patterns. The text 'Forever from Paris' is written in a white, elegant script font across the center of the banner.

Forever from Paris

Forever from
Paris

by

Nicola Beaumont

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Forever from Paris

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Contact Information: info@thewildrosepress.com

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

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PO Box 708

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Dedication

To JC, my heart.
Without you, I have nothing.

Praise for Nicola Beaumont's Work

The Resurrection of Lady Somerset:

4-Stars: Beaumont weaves a devious and tangled plot in this intriguing Regency romance... the outcome will keep readers on the edge of their seats.

—Romantic Times Magazine

An elegant regency mystery with a delicious romance, the Resurrection of Lady Somerset will keep you up all night."

—Linda Lea Castle,
Award-winning, best-selling author

The Lighthouse

Night Owl Romance Reviewer's Top Pick!

Five Books: Compelling. Intense. Heart wrenching. Warm. Dynamic. Gripping. Moving. Powerful. I would use all these words to describe Nicola Beaumont's The Lighthouse. This is an incredible, emotional tale of love, fear and friendship.

Ms. Beaumont writes with such dynamic force that I found my heart actually aching for Malachi and Rachel. The depth of their friendship, their caring and concern for each other and their secret pain held me captive from the first paragraph to the final sentence.

—Lily, Long and Short of It Reviews

Five Angels: ...I adored The Lighthouse...Nicola Beaumont crafts a believable story that shows a wide range of emotions..

—Linda L, Fallen Angel Reviews

Martin McAdams handed his wife a Chlorambucil tablet and a small glass of water.

She shifted against the pillows that propped her up in the hotel room's queen-size bed. "I'm so sorry, Martin. Really, I am." She took the pills and water from him. Swallowing the medicine, she looked at him with brown eyes filled with sorrow.

It tore him up inside. "Don't even worry about it."

"But, The Louvre. You've wanted to see it your whole life."

"Yeah, and so have you. We can see it tomorrow. You'll feel better then." He perched himself on the edge of the bed at her side.

She didn't speak, but her sad eyes told him she was losing hope. He'd never let her know it, but he was losing hope as well. It had been a long five years since her terminal diagnosis, and each day that drew her closer to death added to the emotional strain. He needed to keep up her spirits, but didn't always know how, when his own were riding an unceasing roller coaster of highs and lows.

He gazed at her pallid complexion. The natural tint across her cheekbones had faded with the myriad of medicines, and although her hair was now almost completely re-grown, it was still thin from the chemo' regimen. None of that mattered, though.

He loved her—had since they'd shared the common tragedy of performing in the Xavier and Brophy Theatre Department's rendition of *Romeo and Juliet*. The play was written as a tragedy, but that high school production was beyond sad.

The fond memory warmed him inside. She'd made a gorgeous Juliet with her flowing dark hair ribboned into a single plait. She didn't fake dying very well, but being with her had tolled the death knell for anyone but her in his life.

He took the small glass from her and squeezed her hand. Her fragile fingers were cold as he brought them to his lips. "Tomorrow."

He lowered his gaze, unable to meet her eyes for fear she'd see that his enthusiasm lacked authenticity.

They were only twenty-two years old. Life was supposed to be beginning, not ending. Leukemia was a cruel thief. It stole hope and stamina long before it stole that final breath.

"Martin, look at me." Her voice was low, almost sad.

Reluctantly, he complied, lifting his gaze from the patterned carpet to her pleading brown eyes.

"You know this medicine makes me sleepy. I'll be fine here. You go. Enjoy the day."

"How can I enjoy the day?" He dropped her hand as his words came out harsher than he intended. He swallowed hard; it wasn't her fault. "I'm so sorry, Anna." He took up her fingers again and rested them against his lips.

"You have nothing to be sorry for. You're my knight in shining armour. You are everything to me, and I want you to be happy."

He didn't want her to put him on a pedestal, not when he was feeling so low inside. "I've done nothing special."

She smiled, but it was sloppy and lopsided. The

drugs were already having an effect. Maybe this bout of pain would soon abate.

He held onto a tiny shred of hope, anyway.

“You have done everything a man can do for a woman, and I love you. There aren’t many who would have put off college, taken a job they hate, and married a woman they knew was going to die. I love you more than anything. Don’t ever forget it.” Her voice was weak, but her conviction reverberated through the room, a small hint of the vital woman she used to be.

He swallowed the raw emotion that balled in his throat. “I won’t.”

A cough wracked her body before she could speak again. “Promise me something.”

“Anything, sweetheart. Just name it.”

“I want you to promise me that you’ll find someone to marry. Someone exciting and unpredictable. A woman who loves life and will do for you all the things I’ll never be able to.”

“Anna, not again.”

She shook her head. “The Lord has a forever-someone for you, Martin. I know He does. You’ve selflessly taken care of me. He’ll take care of you.”

Shame and doubt twisted in his gut. He was so tired and ready for the pain to end—her pain and his pain—but, as much as he adored her, he had to admit that he did long for the happiness she was constantly pushing him towards—a normal life and marriage the two of them had never experienced.

He’d put his life’s dreams on hold in order to marry her, and even though he’d always had the support and help of his family, he sometimes questioned the wisdom of that decision. This life was hard—so much harder than he imagined when he’d made the commitment—and regardless of the love he still held for her, he sometimes ached for those carefree experiences that life was supposed to bring

at his young age.

Guilt stabbed him in the heart. How could he want that? How could he even consider it while she was still here, suffering and struggling to hold onto each day? No matter how difficult the past five years had been, he shouldn't think of anything but her. He was such a jerk, and she didn't even see it.

"Don't go there again," he pleaded. "Don't ask that. You're here; I'm here. Can't we just enjoy each other while we still can?"

"Of course we can, but we can't ignore the inevitable. I want to know you're going to be taken care of."

"I keep telling you; I'll be fine."

"I don't believe it. You never think of yourself. Promise me."

"Do we have to constantly go through this? Anna, let it go. I can't promise you this. I can't." He lifted himself off the bed and put some distance between them. He needed her to understand that this scheme of hers would never work. "You are the only woman I want to think about."

"Marty, I cherish every minute we've spent together, and I can't tell you how much it means that you never abandoned me when the easy thing would have been to forget all about me and go on with your life. But I need this. I need to know you *will* go on once I'm gone."

She choked on a sob that shredded his heart. "I can't stand the thought of you mourning and pining for me, and being miserable. You have to find someone, Marty. If not for you, then for me. *Please.*"

He raked his hand through his hair, and then went back to her side and sank onto the edge of the bed once again. He drew her into his arms. "Shh, baby. Don't cry, but please understand; I can't have this conversation right now."

She rested her head on his shoulder, and he felt

her smile. "OK, but only on one condition."

"What's that?"

"That you'll go to The Louvre without me."

He gently set her away from him so he could look her in the face, and she leaned back against the pillows. "Why don't I just hang around here and see if you feel up to going later?"

She closed her eyes. "How about you go without me, and if I feel up to it, I'll hop on the Metro and meet you there?"

He let out a sigh, and she looked at him through one raised eyelid.

There was going to be no arguing with her. He wasn't good at it, anyway. He hated the thought of causing her strife. "All right," he said. "I'll go, but I won't be gone long. And, you'll come, if you feel better?"

She nodded. "I'll come."

She wouldn't come. She wouldn't feel better. He knew that, but he had to behave as if it were a possibility. Believing the medicine would work, that she'd go into a permanent remission—that God would perform some healing miracle—was the only way he could keep his sanity.

He lifted himself off the edge of the mattress and helped her further down into the bed. Then, he drew her into his arms. "I love you," he whispered into her ear. "I always will."

He felt her smile against his cheek. "I know it."

He adjusted her pillows and then rearranged the covers around her. He didn't want to leave her alone. "We can go tomorrow," he said again.

She shook her head weakly. "Today, Martin. Live today."

Shades of sun-kissed mauves and grays blended into an exquisite display on the marble floor, the likes of which Marie Wu had never seen. But the

ceiling...the ceiling was magnificent! She tilted her head and ignored the ache that had formed in her neck an hour ago. Gilt mouldings framed elegant paintings. Vibrant variations of blues and pinks, golds and reds. Heavenly creatures and larger-than-life people gazed down through the ages in painted splendor. The talent it took to create such works of art would never be hers. There was something inherent in these creations which she lacked—an effervescence and realism which could not be taught, no matter how many years she remained in art school.

She slowly turned in a circle taking in the entire expanse of awe-inspiring ceiling. “Oh, wow!” The exclamation breathed out of her mouth in a whisper as she twirled.

She lost her balance, stumbled backwards trying to right herself, and crashed into something solid.

“Whoa! Steady there. Are you OK?”

Physically yes, but could she be more embarrassed? She didn’t think so as a firm grip helped her to regain her balance. “I’m so sorry.” She turned to meet the bluest eyes she had ever seen. Her jaw dropped open, and she snapped it closed again.

“Not a big deal,” he said, and smiled.

His entire face lit up, and the most adorable dimples formed in his cheeks. She’d always been a sucker for dimples. She stared at him helplessly, wanting to look away but not being able to. Black hair and ebony lashes made the blue of his eyes pop with brilliance and clarity, a mixture of royal and violet with tiny flecks of gold dusted in for good measure. A strong and angled jaw line brought a quiet emphasis to full, naturally-rosy lips. His nose, while not perfectly straight, was perfect. What a portrait he would make, framed in gilt.

Her gaze dropped to the strong arms and rugged

hands that had helped to steady her—no wedding ring. Nice—and then she realized he'd actually spoken. She set her attention on his face as heat crept up her cheeks. "W-well, thanks for making sure I didn't hit the floor."

He chuckled. "I was just thinking of the floor. I'm not sure blood-red mixes very well with marble."

She grinned at his joke, hoping she looked more charming than stupid. Although, she was sure she looked pretty stupid. She had never been adept at talking to handsome men. "So, uh, do you come here often?"

He laughed outright, drenching her in a warm, melodious sound that would have put butterflies in her stomach if the humiliation hadn't already taken over.

"First time," he said.

"I didn't mean that—I mean, not the way it—Oh, never mind." She gave him a slight nod. "Thanks again for catching me. I'll leave you alone now." She turned from him, her embarrassed pulse pounding in her ears.

"Wait."

She kept walking.

"Really, wait." His hand brushed her arm.

She stopped and slowly turned to find him smiling at her. Butterflies battled humiliation and won. She didn't think she'd ever set eyes on anyone so good-looking.

"I didn't mean to make you feel bad. It just struck me as funny. You OK?"

Good-looking and sensitive. There must be something in the Parisian water because men didn't come like this in the good ol' U.S. of A.

"Are you French?"

His brow furrowed a bit. "Uh, no. Do I sound French?"

She'd done it again. He thought she was a real

fool. And she was. Of course, he didn't sound French. Or German. Or Japanese, for that matter. She studied her hands. "No, I just thought—it doesn't matter what I thought—so where are you from?" She shot her gaze to his. "Oh, my! It—it's none of my business. I'm not trying to be forward. I'm just—" She let out a deep sigh and started to turn away. "I'm so much better with art than I am with handsome men," she mumbled to herself. It really wasn't fair. The Lord had placed it in her heart to yearn for a husband, and yet, she'd never been able to find a man she could talk to without babbling like an idiot.

"So, you think I'm handsome?"

She froze to the floor in mid-spin. Had she spoken, that loud? She glanced at the passing crowds. A distinct and less-than-quiet din buzzed all around them. He must have bat-hearing, or something.

And, she had the worst luck in the world. "I, um, I—"

"Sorry, but I couldn't resist. The way you so easily get embarrassed, it reminds me of—" His abrupt cut-off and knitted brow took her by surprise.

"Reminds you of what?"

"Nothing. Um, well, I'm glad you're in one piece. I'll be seeing you." He ducked past her and hurried away.

"See, Lord. What is it about me?" She watched him slip between a group of tourists and into the next salon.

Martin sank onto a vinyl bench and pictured his wife's face. He couldn't believe himself. She was lying in a bed fighting a losing battle, and he was on vacation, talking to some exotic stranger as if his life were normal.

He buried his face in his hands and rubbed his

eyes. *Oh, God, please help me.* There was something seriously wrong with him.

He just hadn't been able to help himself. Maybe it was the stress. Maybe it was Anna's incessant pressure for him to seek her replacement now so that she could pass in peace. Whatever it was, it was no excuse.

And the fact that his clumsy stranger reminded him of his wife was even more disturbing. Oh, she didn't look anything like Anna, but the appealing way in which she couldn't finish a sentence reminded him so much of Anna when they had first met.

He mentally shook himself. He was progressively losing his mind. *His clumsy stranger?* He needed therapy.

"I didn't mean to scare you off."

He looked up into the dark almond-shaped eyes of said clumsy stranger.

"Don't look at me like that. I promise I'm not stalking you." She gave him a tentative smile that warmed him and brought on a fresh wave of guilt.

He got to his feet. "I didn't think that."

"So, why'd you run off?"

Because you're beautiful. Because I'm confused. Because I'm married. Because I'm a jerk. "It's complicated."

She laughed at him. "Sounds like a line from a movie."

Her eyes sparkled, and her whole face glowed when she grinned like that. *Get a grip, man,* he silently chastised himself. "Well then, I guess we're even. Right, Miss Do-you-come-here-often?"

"Marie. Marie Wu. Art student ordinaire." She offered her hand.

"Don't you mean 'extraordinaire'?"

"Nah. I'm not that good yet."

He grinned and took her hand, bowing over it.

"Nice to meet you, Marie Wu."

She blushed. "Are you sure you're not French?"

He let go of her hand. "I'm from Phoenix. How about you?"

"We're neighbours." She pointed to herself. "Tucson."

"Small world."

She let out a spontaneous giggle, and then clamped her lips together, managing to look adorably innocent. "OK, so we've gone from me falling into your arms, to sticking my foot in my mouth, to you running away as if I had really bad halitosis..." She clapped her hand over her mouth. "I don't, do I?"

He shook his head and stifled a grin. "No."

She lowered her hand. "Good...to old clichés about it being a small world. What's next, the weather?"

"How about the Mona Lisa?"

She gave him a puzzled glance.

"She's around the corner in the *Salle des Etats*. What's say we go look at her?"

"Together?"

"I'm just suggesting we walk down the corridor. I'm not planning to steal your virtue." He'd made her feel bad by running off. The least he could do was show her she'd done nothing wrong.

A beautiful blush tinged her face again as she gazed down the length of the *Grande Galerie*, and he mentally kicked himself for noticing.

Promise me that you'll find someone to marry. Anna's words echoed in his mind. He didn't know what to do—Give in to viewing another woman as a woman, and somehow fulfill his wife's wishes, or remain focused entirely on Anna.

The prospect of spending time with Marie felt both wrong and right.

And that didn't make sense.

The Lord has a forever-someone for you, Martin. I know He does. He tried to ignore Anna's words bouncing through his head, but they remained, steering him in courses he wasn't sure he wanted to go. *Lord, if you would just heal Anna...*

"OK." Marie started walking and broke into his thoughts.

He fell in step beside her as they navigated their way through the throng. "So, 'Wu,' is that a Chinese name?"

"Would you look at that? That's incredible."

He moved his attention to where her outstretched arm directed. An artist sat in front of an easel reproducing one of the pieces which hung on the wall. The original was fantastic, although Martin didn't recognize it, and the reproduction-in-progress was amazingly accurate.

"Yeah, my grandfather on my father's side is Chinese. So have you been here before?"

He raised an eyebrow at her.

"Not be confused with 'do you come here often,' 'have you ever been here before' is a legitimate question."

She'd relaxed a little, wasn't acting so nervous or stumbling over her words. The shy, unsure person she had been reminded him of Anna, but the easy, witty comfortable woman she was now was completely different—and that appealed to him, too.

What if Anna were right about...?

He pushed away the thought. *Anna* was his forever-someone. She just didn't understand that, but he wouldn't forget it. "Ah, yes, but it evokes the same response," he told Marie. "This is my first time here."

A horrified look skittered across her face. "I really am an idiot, aren't I?"

"So far, I haven't seen any sign of idiocy. Just clumsy and forgetful."

“Oh, thanks!” She playfully slapped him in the arm as they rounded the corner into the salon which housed DaVinci’s famous painting.

She stopped cold, forcing him to wrench back so as not to crash into her.

“Oh my! That’s magnificent.” She moved towards a huge gold-framed painting which extended almost the entire height and breadth of the wall. Moving closer, she inched her way around passersby, politely excusing herself in the process.

She reached out as if to touch the paint, but drew back. Appreciation danced across her face, animating her eyes and lips as it would a child with a new toy.

She glanced back at him. “Do you see the vibrancy of the colours?”

He nodded. “What’s it called?”

“The Wedding Feast at Cana. Look at the detail in the balcony.”

He didn’t really see the detail in the balcony, but he did notice the detail in Marie. The light spattering of freckles which dusted one cheek. The soft glisten of her lips as she moistened them. The wisp of hair resting comfortably across her olive skin, having escaped the trappings of the clip which held the rest tucked safely behind her ear.

She smiled at him, and he looked away. Had to look away. Attraction and guilt and love for his wife pretzeled in his stomach, twisting it. *I want to know you’re going to be taken care of.* Anna’s words played on his subconscious, and he pushed away all the conflicting feelings swirling inside.

“Look at the Mona Lisa,” he said pointing to the opposite wall.

The most recognizable face in the world was barely visible through the crowd that surrounded her.

Marie came to stand at his side. “Should we

press in, or wait until the herd thins?”

He shrugged and started walking. “I’m thinking we take our chances.”

“You know what I just realized?”

“What?” He halted his steps and turned towards her.

“You never told me your name.”

He smiled. “Martin McAdams, at your service.”

She placed a hand on one hip and tilted her head to one side, studying him as if he were one of the paintings on the wall. “You don’t look like a Martin. Seems like you should have a more romantic name than that.”

He raised his eyebrows at her, and that familiar reddened hue tinged her complexion.

“Oh, that sounded terrible,” she said. “I am so sorry. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the name Martin.”

“Well, if you must know, that’s my middle name. My first name is *so* romantic that it should have never been given to me in the first place.”

Her eyes danced with interest and anticipation. “Oh, you have to tell me what it is.”

“OK, but you have to promise never to reveal it.”

“Who am I going to tell? We’re probably never going to see each other again after today.”

The sting of her words both took him by surprise, and bothered him. The thought of never seeing her again was troubling, but the fact that the thought even disturbed him was infinitely worse. What did that say about his character, about the love he felt for his wife?

He closed his eyes and sent up a quick and silent plea for guidance before focusing on her face once again. “Well, my mother’s favourite mythological story is Helen of Troy, and so she named me Paris. The guy who lured Helen from Sparta?”

Marie nodded. "The face that launched a thousand ships. Trojan horse. I know the story. Could be worse. You could be named Achilles." She closed the distance between them and glanced around at the crowd before speaking. "So, do I get to call you Paris?"

"No."

"But it *is* kind of romantic, if you forget the whole adultery issue...and the betrayal...and the cowardice." She furrowed her brow. "Come to think of it, Paris was a little weak. I mean, he shot Achilles from behind." She shook her head. "Nah. You don't seem like coward material to me. More like a knight in shining armour. After all, you saved me from hitting the ground, didn't you?" She stepped past him and moved down the salon to towards the Mona Lisa.

Knight in shining armour. Marie's voice melded with Anna's in his head. He was no knight.

Not even close.

Marie smiled at him as he fell in step beside her. He was so charming and didn't seem to mind that she fumbled over herself. She had never felt this comfortable with anyone so quickly. It was a little disconcerting, but wonderful just the same. Being in his presence touched something within her in that same inexplicable way a beautiful piece of art did. Goodness emanated from him, and she felt connected—as though she could be herself, which was odd, because she didn't know anything about him. For all she knew, he was married with fifteen kids at home...Nah! She'd checked his ring finger.

Hadn't she?

Maybe she hadn't. Now, she couldn't remember. She glanced at his left hand. No ring.

Good. Because, God, that would be really cruel for you to bring someone into my life, and then make

him off-limits.

“It’s smaller than I thought.”

She glanced at him, and then focused on a sliver of the Mona Lisa’s face visible through a tiny break in the gathered crowd. “Me, too.”

Touching his arm, she drew his attention. “So, are you into art or are you just here because it’s the thing to do when in Paris?”

“I’ve always wanted to come here. Not into art so much as history. The concept of legacy interests me.”

“So, are you a genealogist, or something?”

He shook his head. “Right now, I’m a mechanic.” He showed her his palms. “Which is the reason it looks like I never wash my hands. But, I’m planning to get my theology degree.”

She glanced at the light grease stains on his fingers, but focused more on his words. “So, you’re a Christian?”

“Yeah, why?”

“No reason.” She flipped an internal somersault. Maybe he was the one she’d been praying for. The chance meeting, the connection between them, the fact that he was a Christian—and evidently a devout one if he was planning to earn a degree in theology—it was all too much of a coincidence to ignore.

Thank you, God. Happy anticipation bubbled inside her at the prospect of Martin being the one. She had always known that if she remained faithful, the Lord would bring the right man to her—give her the desire of her heart—but she’d never expected to find him on a foreign shore.

The crowd in front of them morphed into different individuals, but remained just as thick. “I don’t think we’re going to get any closer. You want to move on?” she asked.

“Sure.”

As they joined the crowd and shuffled into the next salon, Marie found herself ignoring the