



## Seeking Sarah: A Novel

By ReShonda Tate Billingsley

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From the national bestselling and award-winning ReShonda Tate Billingsley comes this gripping and emotional exploration of the complex bond between mother and daughter.

From the time Brooke Green was seven years old, she has lived with the pain of losing her mother. Her father has done the best job he could in raising her, but a piece of her always felt empty. On the day of her father's funeral, her grandmother breaks the shocking news: her mother, Sarah, is very much alive. She abandoned her family because she claimed she wasn't fit for motherhood. After doing some research, Brooke discovers her mother is living in Atlanta, enjoying a great career...and a brand new family. Stunned, Brooke doesn't know if she wants answers or revenge against the mother who abandoned her. When she meets Sarah's husband, Tony, Brooke sees the perfect way to make her mother pay. But her plan for revenge just may leave everyone in danger, and end up costing Brooke more than she ever bargained for.

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## **Seeking Sarah: A Novel** By ReShonda Tate Billingsley **Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

### About the Author

ReShonda Tate Billingsley's #1 national bestselling novels include *Let the Church Say Amen, I Know I've Been Changed*, and *Say Amen, Again*, winner of the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work. Her collaboration with Victoria Christopher Murray has produced three hit novels, *Sinners & Saints*, *Friends & Foes*, and *Fortune & Fame*. Visit [ReShondaTateBillingsley.com](http://ReShondaTateBillingsley.com), meet the author on Facebook at [ReShondaTateBillingsley](https://www.facebook.com/ReShondaTateBillingsley), or follow her on Twitter @Reshondat.

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Seeking Sarah

## CHAPTER 1

Yes! Yes, I'll marry you!

The words swirled around in my head, dancing with excitement at the prospect of marrying the man I love. The perfect proposal. The perfect man. All the ingredients for a dream come true.

But for some reason, while the words were vibrant in my mind, they wouldn't come out of my mouth.

Good grief, woman, just say yes!

That little voice that had planned my proposal and subsequent wedding when I was only ten years old and marrying my imaginary boyfriend was in full what-the-hell-is-wrong-with-you mode.

Just say yes.

Still nothing.

I don't know what was wrong with me. If you asked most women to draft a list of the qualities they wanted in their dream man, Trent Grant would probably meet 99 percent of the requirements on their list. Trent had dabbled in modeling in college and despite an offer from a New York modeling agency, he had opted to go into the Navy instead. He'd served eight years as a sergeant and returned to Raleigh as one of the most sought-after bachelors in town. And he wanted a life with me. And I wanted a life with him. Only my mouth wouldn't open to say yes.

I knew my fear was based on the fact that Trent wanted forever and I'd learned long ago that forever didn't exist. And committing to a lifetime was only setting myself up for heartbreak, something I'd vowed I would never let happen again.

"Wow, soooo, is that a no?" Trent asked, as he knelt in front of me. Just the thought seemed to crush his spirit. His thousand-watt smile had morphed into a frown. "You don't want to be Mrs. Grant?"

The piercing gaze of all of our family and friends reminded me that we weren't alone. There had to be

twenty-five people in the private dining room at Ruth's Chris Steak House, all of them waiting on my answer. The room had grown deathly silent. The only noise was the slow trickle of the April showers beating down on the roof. The smiles that just seconds ago were beaming now bore hints of nervousness.

I snapped my attention back to the man in front of me. I did want marriage. I did want happily ever after. I just didn't believe that such a thing was possible.

Still, I managed a smile and said, "O-of course. Of course, I'll marry you."

A relieved applause erupted in the room as Trent slid the three-carat ring onto my finger. It was beautiful and I hated that this experience had been marred by my hesitation. If Trent was upset by my delayed response, he didn't let on. Instead, he stood, then pulled me into him with a force that told everyone just how happy he was.

Trent wrapped his muscular arms tighter around me. Over his shoulder, I saw my father beaming with pride. I thought we'd gathered at this dinner party to celebrate Trent being awarded the North Carolina Man of the Year by the League of Distinguished Men. This proposal was a complete surprise. We'd talked about getting married—one day. I had no idea that day would happen so soon. But apparently Trent and my cousin April had been working overtime to plan a surprise engagement party.

For Trent, we might as well have been the only two people in the room. He lifted my chin and the love I saw in his eyes made any reservations I might have been feeling evaporate instantly.

"I swear, Brooke, I want to spend a lifetime making you the happiest woman in the world," he whispered.

I smiled, but didn't reply. Don't get me wrong, I was happy. Very. I loved Trent. But as I fingered the two rings on my necklace, I remembered the two loves I'd lost, and fear suffocated my excitement.

As Trent basked in congratulatory greetings, I continued fingering the rings—my mother's wedding ring, which my dad had presented to me on my sixteenth birthday, and an engagement ring from Jared, the only other man I'd ever loved. I wore both faithfully on a small gold chain around my neck.

Several people came over to congratulate me: my friends, my coworkers from the public-relations agency where I worked as a publicist for celebrity clients, and a few of Trent's family members.

My father approached us, the pride on his face his stamp of approval. "You know I'm expecting you to take good care of my baby girl," he said to Trent.

I couldn't help but marvel at how handsome my father was. His silver hair was a stark contrast to his smooth, dark skin. It was hard to believe he hadn't remarried after all these years, but it wasn't for a lack of offers. Like me, he had never completely healed from my mother's death.

"Awww, Mr. Hayes, you don't have to worry," Trent said, taking my hand until we were fully intertwined. "I promise you, she's in good hands."

"I know that, son." My dad patted Trent on his back. "And you come from good stock, so I know you understand that marriage is supposed to be forever."

I forced a smile at my father. He was always talking about how life had robbed him of his forever. My

mother had died when I was seven, so my father harbored some bitterness that kept him from finding love again. I guess losing her had tainted me, too. Because growing up, while I dreamed of my wedding, I hadn't been too psyched about marriage. Then my heart betrayed me and let Jared in.

We'd met at freshman orientation at North Carolina A&T University. Though we'd dated all four years of college, I wasn't one of those girls who were planning their happily-ever-afters. Then, on my twenty-second birthday, I'd let Jared convince me in forever. I agreed to marry him. And three weeks before our wedding, Jared was killed by a carjacker.

The therapist that I'd started seeing after Jared's death eventually helped me to heal my heart, but it hadn't destroyed the belief that the people you love most always leave.

Trent's mother tapped her fork against her champagne glass, snapping my attention to the front of the room, where she was standing.

"May I have your attention please?" The chatter that filled the air slowly trickled down as we turned our attention to the poised, bubbly, petite woman at the front of the room. "For those of you who don't know me, I'm Loretha Grant, Trent's mother. I have known Brooke for four years, since my son came over, marveling about the woman he met at Outback Steakhouse." She turned to smile my way. "I don't think you know this, but my son was actually on a date with some scallywag."

"Mama!" Trent admonished.

Mrs. Grant waved him off. "I didn't like that girl, but Trent was always hardheaded."

"Is there a point to this story, Mama?" Trent's brother, Clark, called out as the room erupted in laughter.

"Hush, boy, and let me finish," she said. She turned her attention back to me. "Anyway, he told me that night that he tore up the scallywag's number because he'd met his wife. Of course, I didn't believe him, but I know my son, when he wants something, he goes after it. And he wanted you, Brooke Hayes."

Trent pulled me closer to him. "And I got her," he mumbled.

"And I'm so glad you did." Mrs. Grant raised her glass in a toast. "Brooke, I can't wait for you to become my daughter-in-law," she said. "I know you lost your mother when you were just a little girl, but I hope that you will see me as a second mother. To the happy couple."

I struggled to keep my smile as everyone raised their glasses in celebration. I liked Mrs. Grant, I really did. But she would never understand the depth of the love I had for my mother. And no one, not even her, would ever be able to replace that.

Trent pulled me to him and called out to his mother. "Don't worry about that, Ma. I got her. And I have enough love that she won't miss a thing."

That made his mother smile even wider, and though I felt a piercing knot in my stomach, I smiled, too, and snuggled closer to my soon-to-be husband, hoping that he was right.

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