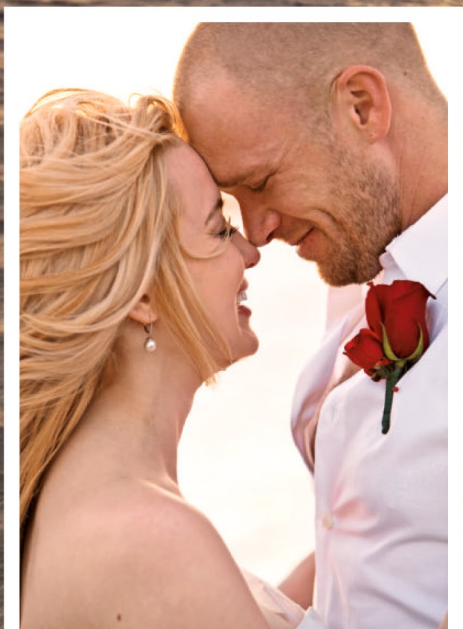


"I'm overwhelmed with joy," says Pickler (in a Badgley Mischka gown, just after she and Jacobs were married by an Antiguan minister). "It's a happiness I've never known."



***Kellie Pickler's***

# SUNSET 'I DO'

WITH JUST THE SEA AND THE SAND AROUND THEM, THE COUNTRY STAR AND KYLE JACOBS ELOPE IN THE CARIBBEAN **PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOE BUISSINK**

**A**s the sun went down over the Caribbean on New Year's Day, Kellie Pickler stepped out of her beachside villa and waved to her waiting groom, Kyle Jacobs, who was standing on a sandbar ankle-deep in the sea beyond. But when her bare feet hit the sand, she began running "as fast as a girl in a wedding dress can go," recalls Jacobs, 37, who met her halfway. "She was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen—I gave her a big kiss before I was supposed to!"

Why not cast aside wedding convention? The country star and her songwriter beau had already ditched their plans for a big Nashville ceremony to elope to the private Jumby Bay resort in Antigua, surprising even those closest to them. "We were in the middle of planning and realized, 'This is not us,'" says Pickler, 24. "Our wedding was just us and God, and it was the most beautiful, sacred day of my life."

With a first dance to a recording of Vince Gill's "Look at Us" and a seaside dinner for two, it was a storybook wedding day for a bride who comes from a broken home. "Until Kyle came along, I didn't know if I believed in marriage, but he's showed me what love is supposed to be," says Pickler. "Now when someone calls me Mrs. Jacobs, I feel like my soul is on fire. It's just glowing."

By Eileen Finan