

# AN INDULGENT MOMENT

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A SHORT STORY IN THE  
EXTRAVAGANT SERIES

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## ABOUT

I've been longing for the man for years.  
Wanting him in my private thoughts. Wishing  
we could be together.

But we're too forbidden.

So I'll take what I can get — one delicious  
night. One indulgent moment.

Then I'll let him go.

But fate has other plans for me.

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## AN INDULGENT MOMENT

*Eliza*

The dazzling thing about Las Vegas is that no matter where you look, somehow the light is always in your eyes.

In the morning, the sun is either bouncing off buildings or the desert. At night, the whole moon pales behind our glitz. The only stars you'll see are the endless celebrities at every hot new club on the Strip. I love this shining city of mine, where anything can happen.

And tonight, I'm hoping the dress I've chosen will make me the brightest light at the masquerade.

I'm hoping something magical will happen.

I stand in front of the full-length mirror in my walk-in closet and gauge the effect of my

gown. It's a pale gold silk column that skims my curves and makes my skin shine. At the vanity, I dust gold shimmer across my shoulders and décolletage to amplify the effect.

Tonight's ball is themed "Cosmos," and I want to look like a sun goddess.

I finish glossing my lips and add the final touch—a small crown of golden spikes that perches atop my waves of chestnut hair. Perfect.

I try not to place any expectations on the evening as I wrap the straps of my Grecian-style sandals up my calves. I've never seen him at any previous masquerade. Only his best friend, the one who's our *cover*, who gives us the chance to chat and talk, sometimes to all grab a drink together.

I can't help but wonder—if Xavier saw me now, would he like what he saw?

I'm made up as a fantasy—a reverse image of my usual self. During the workweek, Nadia and I both favor simple, elegant blouses and slacks. Except on Fridays, of course, when we proudly wear our custom team jerseys. Go, Hawks.

The one I sleep in at night is different. That one has *his* name on the back. His number. Forty-four.

I allow myself the briefest moment to imagine that if he saw me tonight, we could pretend. Pretend I'm not one of the women who holds the stakes in his team. Pretend it wouldn't be the

scandal of the year if we indulged, just once, in the promises our eyes have been making for the past two years while our lips have stuck to pleasantries and observations. Promises our voices have been making in secret phone calls, furtive stolen moments with his friend having our backs.

We've never touched.

Touch is too risky.

I dream of his touch though. I long for it. My body craves it madly.

But could it ever happen?

I hope, then I tuck that hope away.

My phone alerts me to Sage's message.

*Your carriage awaits.*

I smile, feeling a little like Cinderella.

Slipping my mask into my clutch, I allow myself one final glance in the mirror, and then head outside to find Carlos holding open the limo door for me. Inside, Sage waits for me with a glass of champagne.

"You look absolutely incredible," I tell her, my jaw dropping at the dress she's chosen. It covers her completely. Floor-length, long sleeves, high neck—but it's made from a frothy midnight-blue tulle, so only the silver embroidered stars scattered across her torso prevent it from being entirely transparent.

"Speak for yourself," she says, handing me the flute of bubbles that nearly matches my own gown. We touch the rims together as Carlos

pulls off, whisking us toward *The Invitation*.  
“Cheers to an unforgettable evening.”

I can feel my smile mirroring hers, secretive and knowing all at once.

Neither of us are shy about our desires, or our cravings to be desired. The difference is that she knows exactly who she'll be leaving with this evening, and I haven't met my Prince Wicked quite yet.

Seeing as the one I want is off-limits.

But I'm an optimist. To work in sports, it's a good attitude to cultivate. My inner bright side tells me that tonight could be a special night. Maybe the kind where I go home with a man I can be deliciously unguarded with. One who wouldn't mind exploring the naughtier sides of my fantasies.

One who I don't have to hide my feelings for.

The champagne slides down my throat, crisp and dry.

“Cheers,” I say, and she repeats it.

We gossip for a bit, trading tidbits about who might be there tonight, and whether we'd even be certain if they were. The masks are the allure of these parties. They're our freedom from our daily lives. From our reputations.

Ironic, isn't it? Only by hiding our faces can we reveal our true selves.

Soon enough, Carlos pulls up in front of *The Invitation*, and we barely have time to slip our

false faces on before he opens the door and we're ushered in toward the ballroom. Attendants in livery are waiting to check our phones, and then finally we're here.

The lighting prisms around the ceiling and walls like stars. A string quartet plays on a small stage flanked by heavy velvet curtains.

Possibility awaits.

Sage squeezes my hand, and I follow her gaze toward Cole. I'm not jealous of her, but I would love to have someone gaze at me with the same hungry look he has.

I would love to have someone in particular gaze at me that way.

"Go!" I tell her.

"We just got here. I won't abandon you so soon." She's the best friend.

"But no one's going to ask me to dance with you here, cramping my style. Go let your man get an eyeful." I shoo her away.

With an air kiss, she obeys.

A waiter circulates with more champagne, and I catch his eye. He makes his way over to me as I sway to the music, enjoying the sensual feel of the silk on my bare skin. Rather than ruin the silhouette with a panty line, I've gone without. It feels a little dangerous, and a lot good.

I accept the glass the waiter hands me and close my eyes to enjoy the sensation, adding a little more spice to the motion of my hips.

I open my eyes again at the feel of a body moving against mine from behind. A large hand settles on my waist, and the man behind me matches my rhythm perfectly. I smile, pressing my ass back against him just a little.

And I hope he's the one I want.

He's tall, I can tell that much, and from the feeling of him, he's also muscular.

I allow myself a moment to simply dance with this mystery man. After a few more slow measures, I slide my free hand down over his. It's massive, resting possessively on my hip. I like it.

Then I slide my fingers into his and use them to push off, cuing him to send me into a spin, one that ends with us face-to-face.

I gasp quietly.

I swallow, and hope fills me, like bubbles rising to the surface.

This risk. This man.

His body fills every inch of what must be a custom tux—nothing off-the-rack is made to fit a man this big.

His mask is painted to look like a galaxy.

Beneath it, his eyes say all the things we've whispered to each other in our secret calls.

My stomach does a slow roll. My impossible dream has come true. Xavier is here tonight, and magic must be real after all. I allow my lips to curve, not too much, not wanting to seem too eager. Though, of course, I am.

He doesn't hold back. He treats me to all thousand watts of that famous smile.

He may be our second-string quarterback, but his looks and gentle-giant personality have made him beloved around town. His face graces one billboard for a jewelry store, another for a family steakhouse.

Graces all of my fantasies too.

"Hi, beautiful," he whispers, his deep baritone sending sparks over my skin.

"Hi, Forty-Four."

His lips curve into a grin. "I was hoping you'd be here."

"You were?"

His hands slide down my sides. "I've been wanting to see you. Wanting to talk to you. Wanting to put my hands on you."

I shiver. "I want all that too."

"You feel incredible, my beautiful goddess."

I try to rein in a grin, but it's futile.

I simply hope our desire isn't evident to all.

But I bet it is.

The sparks we're giving off must be able to be seen from space.

"I can't stop thinking about you. I had to steal a dance with you," he says as we move.

"Steal me," I whisper, as I roam my eyes over him.

The way his tux hugs and tucks in all the right places, the way it encases his broad shoulders and makes him look like a towering god

carved in onyx—I'm intoxicated just looking at him. This beautiful man does it for me. I've never been more attracted to anyone in my life, and I hope he feels the same for me – that we can have this honest, passionate connection the way I want.

“How about I steal you away at last?” he asks.

I don't think. I don't weigh. I don't worry.

*I do.*

He tilts his head toward the door. I nod my yes, a wicked thrill racing through my body as I shift from my swaying dance to walking at his side.

I catch Sage's eye as I go, her mouth falling open as she realizes what's happening. She gives a fist pump before I'm out of the ballroom, collecting my phone, darting across the road to The Extravagant, and waiting at the elevator bank.

Once the doors open, Xavier punches in the five-digit code, then cages my body with his as the doors close and we begin our ascent. He takes off his mask. I remove mine.

Then, and only then, do I get the prize I've wanted ever since the first time I saw him.

I get to kiss the football player.

It starts slow, just the pressure and warmth of his lips on mine. Then neither of us can hold back, engulfing each other with lips and tongues and nips. Finally, our mouths are saying all the things we've longed for.



This man is my champagne. My medium-rare steak. I want to devour him.

If it's like this before we even get naked, I'm done for. I'll die from the first orgasm. I just know it.

"You taste better than I've dreamed," he murmurs.

"Do you dream of me?"

"You know I do, my beautiful goddess. I dream of you so much it hurts."

"I don't want you to hurt," I say with a playful pout. "Let's ease that hurt."

"I've got some ideas on how to do that."

"Can't wait." I grin.

He toys with the back of my dress inside the world's slowest elevator, his fingers igniting nerve endings I'd forgotten existed. Everything about him is strong and powerful. Godlike. All I want to do is hike my dress over my head and let him take me in this tiny elevator car, but he knows what he's doing.

Toying with me.

Teasing me.

Turning me into mush before we even reach the room.

It's so hard to stay focused when his fingers along my spine promise euphoria in other, more sensitive, parts of my body.

*Oh, yes.* He knows what he's doing.

When the doors open, we break for air, both of us breathing heavily as we walk into a

gorgeously appointed suite. Then there's that first moment of uncertainty that rises up, hot and full of promise. It twists into something more primal, more desperate, because he frames me against the wall with those long arms made for swallowing a woman whole.

His lips are fire on mine, liquid magma in my veins. Nothing could get this dress off faster than another one of his kisses. His tongue gently probes against mine, assertive and exploratory, while one hand cups my ass and the other fumbles with the straps on my shoulders. I try to pull them off, but he stops me with a firm hand.

"This is for me." He growls against my lips. "I undress you. I've wanted this so much it's like breathing."

I barely repress the shivers erupting across my skin.

He takes my hand and leads me to the center of the room, his eyes twinkling with naughty mischief. He grabs a remote from the desk, and then moody, sensual music fills the room from a small speaker in the corner. From the music to the sizzling in my body, I want to remember every detail of tonight, as I step into my fantasies—enjoying my carnal, delicious fill of this man.

He encircles me slowly, the heat of his gaze dragging across my exposed skin. "You are so

beautiful." He breathes the words out like an exhale. "Stunning."

There are no words for the swirl of emotions boiling in my veins. Just carnal heat.

"Take me," I whisper, in a little tease.

He tilts my face up to his with one finger. "Only if you want me to."

"I very much do."

\* \* \*

### ***Xavier***

It's all the permission I need.

We're separated by a fitted suit and the tightest silk dress I've ever seen. She takes my hands and cups her swollen breasts. The hard points of her nipples catch my fingertips, and I watch the breath slip away from between her lips.

Her dress, for all its tight hugging of her luscious curves, drops easily to the floor. Fuck, she's beautiful. Delicate, smooth, and luxurious. I bury my face in her bare shoulder as I scoop her up and carry her to bed.

She smells like champagne and sunshine and forbidden pleasures. My mouth waters at the thought of her other flavors.

"Your clothes." She tugs at my jacket. "They're in the way."

“No one has ever fucked you good, have they, Eliza?” I tsk, and lower her onto the soft blankets. She’s like an angel surrounded by pillows. An angel I’m about to coax many an orgasm from. “I’ll remedy this. Just be warned—tonight I’m going to ruin you for every other man.”

I’m not foolish enough to think I’ll get a second chance. She’s in charge of my team—she’s as off-limits as it gets. But I can damn sure make this a night neither of us will forget.

“Maybe I want to be ruined.”

“You’ll get nothing less.”

She’s sprawled out, spread-eagle. Her sensual scent and the way she curves in the lamplight let me know she is more than ready. I grab the tender spot under each of her knees and pull her to me as I fall to my own knees beside the bed. She gasps loudly, but louder than her need is how swollen her beautiful clit is. I can taste her even before my tongue gently spreads apart her lips.

Her hips press against my chin, eager and desperate, but she’s not getting what she wants just yet. I place a line of soft kisses against her inner thighs, and she groans and thrusts up at me once again. I still her with a firm hand on her lower belly. “Patience, my beautiful goddess.”

“Tease. How can you be such a tease after all this time?” she mutters.

“That’s how. Because all good things take time.”

“That’s what someone says when they don’t know what they’re doing,” she says, full of sass.

“There’s the woman I’ve gotten to know all those nights.” The one with the fiery mouth, who loves to give as good as she gets. “Let’s see if you think I know what I’m doing with your gorgeous body.”

Starting from her soft opening, I trace my tongue along the ridges of her sweet pussy until her clit is captured between my teeth. Her cries are music to my ears and heat to my cock. It strains against the thick fabric of my trousers.

I pull back, glancing up. “How’s that for my first time?”

“Again,” she demands.

I oblige and relish the way her body shivers under mine. There’s nothing I like more than a woman who knows what she wants. Powerful women who own their desires—why would anyone want to waste his time on any other kind of female?

The sweet tang of her softness pulls me back to her. I can only tease so much myself before I’m the one feeling needy and desperate.

Her hands grab at my head, and she presses my face into the spot she wants me most. I oblige again. And again. The ridges and valleys, the curves and the straights—I lick them all. I tease her opening and run her clit between my

teeth, nibbling softly. Her breaths quicken, and her pussy flushes deep red, juicy as a peach. I lick her opening, and she cries out, just shy of her first orgasm.

Stretching an arm toward her face, I slip two of my fingers into her mouth. She sucks on them, hard, and I can feel how close she is. My damn cock is about to rip through these ridiculous pants. I want to do this to her every night. I want all night with Eliza. But first, there is *this* night. I press my freshly lubricated fingers into her and hook them just so.

Then all I have to do is suck on her clit and she comes loudly.

Fuck, I could fall in love with this woman.

Ripples of pleasure continue to rack her as I gently lick her through it. Every time she tries to move away, I hold her tighter. I'm going to push her to the limits of what she can take tonight. The flat of my tongue makes long, hot strokes across her swollen pussy and into the middle of her pleasure center. I swear, I've never enjoyed myself this much in bed.

"Not bad for a first timer," she teases breathlessly, and I chuckle as I move up her body.

My hands skate along her skin and settle on her breasts. I thumb her nipples, rolling and pinching them in gentle tandem. I grab her hand and pull us to our feet. The scratchy fabric of my tux against her naked and aroused body

seems to affect her. She shivers down to her toes.

In my arms like this, wearing nothing but a pair of gold goddess sandals, she seems so small. On the field, when Eliza and Nadia occasionally show up to make a speech and survey the troops, she's unknowable. Larger than life.

Here, she is fragile and real.

I kiss her again, to remind myself that she is still a woman under all the money and power and that family name.

A woman who's mine for the night.

She sucks on my tongue, stealing the taste of herself, and I groan deep in the back of my throat. It's intoxicating and sexy as hell that she keeps surprising me. I press my erection against her belly, showing her how much I want her, how much this affects me too.

Suddenly, I need more. I want to cover every inch of her bare skin with mine.

"Undress me," I order her, relishing the opportunity to be in charge. Her eyes drop immediately, submissive and obedient, and I know she relishes it too, this chance to let go.

I suck in a breath and let my hands fall to my sides as her capable fingers begin to work. First, my expensive jacket falls to a heap on the floor. I don't care, because next is my cummerbund. Then comes my button-down. Finally, my pants and shoes, and then I'm not the masked gentleman who seduced her at one of this

town's infamous masquerades. I'm just a man, standing in nothing but a plain white T-shirt and blue boxer-briefs. They're the same shade she has woven through a strand of her hair, making us look like we belong together.

One beautiful smile later, the kind that stops my heart, she tugs at my shirt until I take pity and pull it over my head for her. Then it's her turn to take a breath as she trips her fingertips down over my abs. It was worth every single five a.m. workout to see her enjoying the results of my time in the gym. Finally, her fingers trail down to rest at the base of my cock.

And I'm done for.

Because when she glances up at me shyly from under those beautiful long lashes, I know I never want to see anyone but her in this position in front of me ever again.

\* \* \*

### *Eliza*

I should have guessed—any man who stands six feet five would be proportional all over. His cock is magnificent. Long enough, thick enough to make my insides quiver and my mouth wince. Will I be able to take it? I can't wait to try.

I blow slow and hot on the tip of his length



and let my breasts run across it as I stand. His eyes are greedy and eager. It's a feeling I'm well acquainted with. I lie faceup on the bed, with my head hanging off the mattress, and lick my lips in a slow, fluid motion.

"Come here."

I don't have to tell him twice. Xavier moves toward me with the same grace he has on the field. He should be a star. But our starting quarterback has that role filled . . . And then Xavier's on me, and all thoughts of football fly right out of my head.

His cock slides right into my mouth and nudges the back wall of my throat. His groan sends another pang of desire straight to my core. It doesn't take much coaxing to get him to thrust deep into my mouth. His groans steadily climb, deep and carnal. With my hands free, I can't help but touch myself through each grunt.

I run my fingers gently over my wet folds, remembering the feel of his tongue there as I relinquish all control. As he fucks my mouth, I writhe and moan at the behest of my own fingers. I'm infatuated with the way we move together. It's as good as the dancing, our bodies working in perfect tandem, both chasing the pleasure we find in this moment.

His length grows thicker in my mouth. I moan, sending the vibrations through him, loving the way he answers in kind.

“I can’t hold back anymore,” he tells me, and I’m right there with him. “I’m going to—”

And he does, hips bucking, pulsing his release into my mouth. The way he loses control is all I need for the second orgasm to take hold of me. I rock my hips one final time, and I follow him straight off the ledge, my vision going fuzzy around the edges as I soar into the stratosphere.

When I can see straight again, he’s looking at me with something like worship in his gaze. Another wish granted—the one I made earlier seeing the way Cole watched Sage.

I thank my lucky stars, and all the rest of them as well.

This may be the only time I’ll ever be with my quarterback, but it’s already better than anything I’d ever imagined.

“You taste delicious,” I tell him, wiping the corners of my mouth with one gold-tipped finger.

“Likewise.” His voice rumbles through me, and I’m ready again. I shouldn’t be surprised. How could I ever get enough of him?

Xavier gently rolls me to the side to evict all the unnecessary throw pillows. I enjoy the show, a club-level seat to his sculpted muscles flexing with each motion. Except no sculptor could do this justice. I could watch him unmake the bed forever.

But those are dangerous thoughts to have

even in passing. This is a stolen night. A secret tryst.

I refocus on memorizing the shape of his body as he lies next to me and slides his hand between his legs, where his dick is already hardening again. He gives it a few lazy strokes, his eyes on me the whole time, leaving no doubt as to what he's thinking about.

"Look at you," I say, savoring the sight.

"It's because I'm with you," he whispers.

I lick my lips. I can't help it. This is the most delicious sight. The most decadent words.

I crawl across the bed and kiss him hard. His kisses are the flame to my match. It's almost dizzying, this rush of feelings, and the longer this goes on, the more delicious they become. I try to kiss him deeper, but he stills my body with a heavy hand to my chest.

His kisses unlock something deep inside me.

His kisses steal my breath and my mind and leave me in this blissful silence.

He stops stroking himself and instead strokes my hair. We turn to each other, and our kisses deepen. He lets my tongue into his silky mouth, which still tastes like me, and a moan escapes my lips. He pulls my hair in response, and I moan again, louder and deeper. Following my lead, he yanks my head back and kisses my neck.

Little explosions erupt across my skin. It's hard to breathe, hard to focus, because I'm lost

in a haze of pure intoxication. He kisses across my collarbone and up to my right ear, where he resumes making promises I'm certain he can keep.

"I'm going to fuck you so . . . very . . . slowly," he says.

Goosebumps cover my body. I kiss his Adam's apple and work my way up to his right ear. As I suck on his earlobe, he sighs heavily, his hands cupping my breasts while I lean over him to challenge, "I am going to fuck you however I want."

A beautiful smile breaks out across his face. "I guess we'll see who wins, then."

He pins me down to the bed and uses his legs to part mine. I want to fight back, but the intensity in his gaze stops me and steals my breath. I want to follow him. I want to let him fuck me how he wants . . . before I finish him how I want.

Leaving me there, exposed and wanting, he reaches with a long arm to retrieve a condom from the nightstand. Watching his enormous hands rip open the foil so delicately is a touchingly sexy sight. Watching them roll it down his rock-hard shaft is mesmerizing.

And then I'm not watching his cock anymore, because he's looming over me, and I'm giddy. Everything that's happened up until now has been incredible, but this—*this* is what I've dreamed about for two years.

Through all my fantasies.

Then through the realities of our late-night talks, our stolen moments.

He pushes gently into me, allowing my body to accept him. His girth strokes my clit from this angle.

His first real thrust feels like coming home. A celebration of everything perfect. He fills me without hurting, he hits deep without breaking. We fall into a rhythm quickly, and slowly—just like he promised.

Each long, slow push and pull satisfies everything inside me, something I've never felt before.

Every thrust feels like music, and our sensual noises are the chorus. I was right about not needing a drink with him. The way he moves, the way he nuzzles into my neck, the faint lingering scent of his aftershave all make me dizzy and silly. He's a whole bottle of champagne. Every thrust he sends into me feels like a love letter from his cock to my pussy.

He pushes up to his elbows so we can watch each other's faces as he fucks me. On deep thrusts, his eyes flutter a little, and I can feel my lips making an O that shapes the moans I couldn't stifle if I tried. I *really* like those deep thrusts.

He stares right into my eyes, right into my soul, and there's a fire there I hadn't seen before. I feel it down in the deepest part of me.

It's simultaneously amazing and terrifying. I need to take control again. I need some power back before I drown in him.

I flip us over so I'm on top, my breasts rocking in front of his eyes. As his irises widen, I can tell I'm now on top in more ways than one. It's a relief. I try to move my hips faster, to ride him toward that explosion, but he stills me with his hands. He's so strong, but I would comply anyway. I'm incapable of denying him anything. His eyes lift back to mine, and I'm struck all over again.

This feels like more than one night.

This feels like more than sex.

This feels like something I don't know if I'm strong enough to let go of and survive.

I need him to fuck this feeling right out of me, need to remember what this is. It's amazing, intense, earth-shattering sex. And sex is all it's going to be. I climb off him and turn around, offering myself on all fours.

He's inside me again in seconds, and in this position, he fills me even more than before, stretching me in new ways. He grabs a fistful of my hair and pulls. I squeal in delight.

I focus on the pleasure, and oh, is he giving that to me more than I dreamed, and I had bold, dirty dreams. He puts one large hand on my back and presses me down onto my stomach, letting me conserve my strength for what's to come.

He snakes his hand around and under me, playing my clit as he pushes in and out, as slowly as he'd promised earlier, showing me that he's a man of his word.

And a man not *of* this world, judging from the otherworldly shudders that wrack my body from head to toe.

He smacks my ass hard. Once, twice.

I scream, the approaching orgasm like a rocket ship, preparing to launch me into orbit.

"Come for me," he says, and that's all it takes. I can't even see Earth anymore, as high as I am, and I'm only vaguely aware of his final thrusts as he follows me.

It takes a few minutes for us to uncouple, him slowly sliding out of me, planting little kisses all along my shoulder and the back of my neck as he does. He gets rid of the condom then returns to me. We lie there, spooning, for another few minutes.

Then, I tell him I'm going to use the little girls' room.

"Come back soon," he whispers.

I pad away. I need to break this spell I'm under.

Door closed, I turn on the faucet and stare at myself in the mirror. I look as freshly fucked as I am. I allow myself one silent scream—because *OMG, I banged Number Forty-Four!*—before cleaning myself up.

It's quiet when I reenter the bedroom. He's

fallen asleep while he waited for me, his perfect body in perfect repose. One arm is slung around a pillow. I could slide right under it and drift off alongside him.

But I can't.

My heart aches.

My head pounds with the knowledge that my one secret night must end.

This is a blessing in disguise. I slip my dress back on, the silk whispering over my skin, cooling it. I gather my clutch and take a deep breath. This is the hardest thing I will ever do, but it's also the most necessary. I don't even chance kissing his chiseled jaw. I simply open the door and walk out of the best night of my life.

And I try to move on.

\* \* \*

But that's impossible.

For the next week, memories of our time together pop into my mind's eye at the most inopportune moments, and I make every excuse I can to work from home. I can't avoid Xavier forever, but I can avoid him until catching his eye won't give the whole team an electric shock when the current between us snaps into place.

*Maybe.*

I tell Sage and Nadia everything one night over wine at Speakeasy.



“Isn’t there a way you can be together?” Nadia, the problem solver, asks. She’s been that way since I’ve known her. We’ve been friends since we were kids.

I meet her gaze, her smart, caring eyes as thoughtful as they’ve ever been. But I’m not sure even she can see a way through this predicament.

“If there is, I can’t think of it,” I say. “It would be almost as scandalous as if you were involved with . . .”

I pause, searching for options, when Sage wiggles her brows and jumps in. “As if Nadia fell for Wilder?”

Nadia scoffs, shakes her head, and laughs like that’s the craziest idea ever. “That would never happen. Wilder is . . . impossible.”

“And Xavier and I are impossible too,” I say.

Sage hums. “But are you?”

“Are they?” Nadia asks, her eyes twinkling, and I wonder if the two of them are up to something.

But I can’t fathom what it could be.

And so I trudge on.

Perhaps I’m in mourning. Or depressed. Or heartbroken.

I’m also busy and tired and behind. My lack of focus leads me to work longer hours, trying to catch up. Which is why I’m startled half to death when there’s a sharp rap at my office door one night around eight.

Both Nadia and my assistant left hours ago. My stomach flutters a little at the idea that maybe—

But when the door opens, it's Cole.

Sage's Cole.

"Come in," I say curiously. "Is everything okay?"

He strides in, confident, determined, as he always is. He stops at a chair in front of my desk and looks at me steadily until my cheeks warm beneath his stare.

"Doesn't seem everything is okay, does it?" he asks.

"I . . . I'm not sure what you mean."

He flicks me a knowing stare. "I'm familiar with all the symptoms. Wanting someone you *think* you can't have is an illness that I contracted somewhere along the way too."

My inner defensive lineman gets into position, ready to protect my heart at all costs. "If Sage sent you for a round of talk therapy and ice cream together, I appreciate the gesture, but I'm pretty busy." I gesture to the mound of paperwork in front of me as proof.

"Then I'm afraid you'll be even more disappointed to hear I've brought you more paperwork," he says, dipping a hand into an inside jacket pocket and retrieving a folded stack of papers. "It seems to me that there's more than one disservice being done by keeping your secret love on the team. Not only does it

prevent you from following your heart, it keeps him from living up to his potential as well. We both know your starting quarterback has years of his best playing ahead of him. Number Forty-Four will stay in his shadow for *his* entire career. He'll never get to show the world what he can do. The Hawks are keeping him on ice simply so that no one else can have him, but you're stifling his career by doing so."

My heart sinks. He's right, of course. "And what would you suggest I do?"

Our strategic decisions are hurting the man I lo—I mean, care about. But I'm only one voice in the team's decision-making process. And if I stand up for him too vocally, I risk exposing my feelings.

Cole smiles devilishly. "You don't need to do anything. I took care of it. The Renegades want him. I made a few calls, pulled a few strings. A trade to California takes him off your team, out of your conference, and therefore, right back into your bed, if you'll have him. It's all here. It just needs your signature." He offers me the papers.

My heart, which had been rising, drops again just as swiftly. "No one's going to agree to this, but thank you. It's a lovely gesture."

His eyes frost, and I'm reminded he's a shark in the business world. "Everyone *has* agreed. Making deals is what I do. I found something

for everyone here. Don't underestimate my abilities."

\* \* \*

I take the papers and look.

It's true. Everyone *has* signed. The space for my signature is the last. I can't sign fast enough, but even though it's now possible, how can I know that Xavier will even want me again? With the way I walked out on him, haven't even laid eyes on him since, he'd be forgiven for thinking I got what I wanted and moved on.

I may, in my haste to protect my heart, have fumbled his. "But, Cole . . ."

"It's done!" he calls to the darkened hallway, and then my door is filled with a six-foot-five god, his thousand-watt smile lighting me up from the inside out. I hardly hear my best friend's man say his goodbye before I'm in my player's arms, his lips crashing down on mine.

During the season, he'll be in California and I'll be here, but there are planes to see us through.

At last, I can have the man I've longed for.

This time, I'm not worried about being too overcome by him. This time, the magic of the light is shining *from* us. Let everyone else be dazzled. We'll be too busy to notice.

\* \* \*

Stay tuned for more sexy love stories in THE EXTRAVAGANT SERIES! Daniel's love story with Scarlett will be told in ONE ALLURING CHANCE, coming soon! Stone and Jackson's love story is coming in ONE TIME ONLY. And Nadia and Wilder's romance comes in ONE SHAMELESS SECRET.



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