

Epilogue

“Rise and shine, gorgeous.”

Quinn’s sleep-husky voice seeped into my ears, making my brain fuzzy. My body was still loose from the workout the rest of him had given me in the limo. And the private plane. Twice.

I smiled into his thin t-shirt, loving the soft brush of the fabric against my cheek and the way his salty sweetness mingled with the combined scent of our bodies. “I used to hate it when my mother said that in the morning.”

He chuckled. It spilled warmth into my heart until I thought it would burst. I never thought I would feel this way. Never really believed it was possible to be so perfectly happy in someone’s arms.

“Do I get a pass if I promise to never say it again?”

I raised my head and met his bright blue eyes, drinking him in a moment before pressing my lips to his. Moments later, our tongues tangled, hands wandered, and neither of us could breathe. Our chemistry wouldn’t stay like this forever, I didn’t think, so it made sense to make the most of it while it lasted.

Quinn pulled away, lust hot in his eyes, and ran long fingers through my hair. “What have you done to me, Emilie Swanson?”

“Maybe I’m a witch,” I whispered.

Quinn was serious now, though, and didn’t joke back like I expected. His gaze remained a mixture of awe and raw love. It would always be raw with him, always stay a little rough around the edges. But that was okay. That was us.

“It’s not a spell. I...I know I said I love you, but words feel worthless in the face of what I’m actually feeling. I’ll never be worthy. I’m a jerk, and you’re beautiful and strong and smart and deserve so much better than me.” An unfamiliar earnestness shone bright in his eyes.

The rough stubble on his cheeks and chin scraped my palms. I tried to pour out my soul into his so he could understand, because he was right that words weren't adequate measures of the feelings tumbling through me at breakneck speed.

"You're not a jerk, Quinn. You *acted* like a jerk for a long time, but that doesn't mean you *are* one. And I won't have you talking that way about the man I love. I'm too smart to fall for a jerk. The man I love has a good heart, even though no one ever showed him how to use it. He has the courage to sink his inheritance into a brilliant company. I don't know why you fell in love with me, or the reason I've always felt so at peace in the knowledge that we're a perfect match. Maybe neither of us *should* feel worthy. That means we'll always work hard."

He pulled my face gently to his, kissing me lazily, as though we had a million days ahead of us to do only that. My bare toes curled, and heat dripped into my center.

"I'll never stop working hard. I want this to work more than I've ever wanted anything. I can't imagine ever waking up without you curled up beside me." He smiled, the playfulness returning to his face. "Plus, you're right. We are both pretty awesome."

"That's it. Take off your pants," I demanded.

"We're landing in less than twenty minutes."

"Quinn, I swear, I'm going to die if you don't get inside me right now. It'll be quick, but you can make it up to me later."

He crushed my lips with his before the sentence finished, hands pushing my dress to my hips and roaming higher, around my back to unhook my bra with practiced fingers. My breasts fell free, heavy with the need for him, and his expert attention had me soaking wet and groaning into his mouth within seconds.

My own hands yanked at his buttons and zipper, shoving his shorts to the floor. Neither of us had bothered with underwear again after the airplane bathroom sex a couple of hours ago—which, incidentally, was doable but hilarious. We laughed through half of it.

The straps on my dress fell down my arms and Quinn tugged it to my waist, then pulled me onto his lap. I sat down fast, letting the hard length of him fill me in a single motion the same moment his mouth found my breast. I came in that instant, a scream that tapered off to a whimper as waves of pleasure crashed over me. Quinn inside me, his hands and lips singeing the nerves in my skin, it all combined into an orgasm that lasted for what felt like an eternity.

I sat still, shaking against him and unable to move, when his strong hands slid to my hips. “I adore you, *mi sopresita*, and there are going to be days when all I want is to make love to you for long, slow, lazy hours. But right now you feel too good, and the look on your face is making me ache to just fuck the shit out of you.”

The words made me whimper again, which earned a groan from Quinn as he ground into me, using his hands to move me faster against him. Our movements grew frantic as our skin heated up and slicked with sweat, until another orgasm started in my belly and I started to shake. As it exploded out of me, making the room hazy on the edges and my throat raw from begging him not to stop, I thought I would die. I wanted Quinn to be as crazy with passion as he’d made me, to hear him call my name, and a moment later he did, holding me tight as he shuddered against my bare skin, gasping my name over and over.

He leaned back into the leather chair, struggling to breathe but refusing to let my eyes wander from his. His fingers brushed the hair out of my face, tucking pieces behind my ears. “I guess quick isn’t always bad.”

“Neither is fucking.” I winked and started to pull my dress back into place, but he stopped me.

“Wait,” he commanded, his voice as hoarse as mine. “I just want to look at you. I want to remember this moment, when the most beautiful, classy girl I’ve ever met is also the most uninhibited, sexy tigress in the sack, and she cares about me despite every single one of my fuckups.”

Real tears rimmed his eyes, then, and I reached out to touch him. “Quinn. You are all of those things that you’ve done, and all of the mistakes that you’ve made. But you’re beautiful. I love everything that made you who you are.”

He tuned his head and kissed my palm. “It’s just, everything I ever wanted is literally wrapped around me. It’s the best feeling in the world, but I’m scared shitless at the same time. What if I lose you?”

I shook my head, leaning forward on trembling thighs. “You couldn’t even lose me when you were trying your best. It’s always scary to fall in love, Quinn. Hearts are fragile things, and now that mine is in your hands, you could crush it to pieces. If it weren’t scary, we wouldn’t be doing it right. It wouldn’t be real.”

“I’ve never fallen in love before, with anyone. Ever.”

“You’ve never trusted anyone enough to give them your heart. To let them hurt you. I’ll take care of yours, Quinn. I’ll probably piss you off sometimes and when we fight it’s going to be epic, but I’ll never hurt you on purpose.”

“I’m going to have a hard enough time forgiving myself for all of the times I already hurt you on purpose.” Quinn ran his hands down my arms, slipping the straps of my sundress back into place on the way back up. “If we fight, can we have makeup sex?”

“I was thinking angry sex would be more fun.”

“Maybe both, then,” he mused.

We laughed, and it felt so good to be together, and to be happy.

“It’s beautiful here,” I commented during the final changeover.

London had never been a favorite city, but England I enjoyed. The French Open had always been a favorite of mine, mostly because I adored Paris and visited whenever the opportunity arose, but Wimbledon had charmed me from the moment we’d stepped on the grounds. The grasses were vibrant green, though the baselines were worn after over a week of steady play. An air of austerity and class embedded in the air. Years of history

and love of tennis swept over this place and through my blood, and it was immediately easy to see what the players all coveted this title more than the rest.

“It’s my favorite tennis major,” Quinn whispered. “The one I really wanted to win.”

The umpire shushed the crowd as Quinn’s friend, rising U.S. star Sam Bradford, prepared to serve for a spot in the quarterfinals. He had taken Quinn’s place in the areas of both talent and popularity with the ladies. Sam was older than us, probably twenty or twenty-one, and his sandy hair and warm chocolate eyes had earned him a place in many young hearts.

An ace and three points later, Sam had held his service at love, and we were all celebrating his first quarterfinal birth at Wimbledon. Quinn took my hand as the crowd continued to roar their approval, even though Sam had taken out a very popular Spaniard, and led me from Sam’s box and into a waiting area.

“So we’re going to dinner?”

“Yes. A fancy fundraising thing Sam put together. There are several people I’d like to talk to about potential U.S. media coverage next season.”

I squeezed his hand. “I’m so proud of you.”

Quinn leaned down and gave me a quick kiss. “That’s a big reason I want to succeed.”

A delicate throat clear interrupted the moment, and we both turned to find Alexandria Ikanova staring, her perfectly shaped eyebrows raised in an unasked question. Her pink lips twitched as though restraining a smile. The rest of her was as perfect as she appeared on television, maybe even more so, and in her stilettos and slinky gold evening gown, I felt like a plain Jane. And a shrimp.

I wished we had gone back to the hotel to change into our formalwear before now.

Quinn smiled at her, but not the warm one that weakened my knees. This was his business smile. Quick but perfunctory. “Alex. How nice to see you.”

“I heard you were in town.” She eyed me, but not in a rude way. “Don’t be rude, Q. Introduce me to your friend.”

His arm tightened around my back, snuggling me against his hip. “Alex, this is Emilie Swanson, my girlfriend. Emilie, Alexandria Ikanova.”

I nodded. “A pleasure to meet you. I’m a big fan.”

That made her chuckle. “Oh, you are, are you?”

“Alex.” Quinn’s voice took on a warning edge that most heeded.

She waved a careless hand, dismissing him. “I’m not being catty, I swear. Only surprised that your new girlfriend would be a fan of your last.”

“You’ve got a great game, and a smartass mouth, both of which I appreciate. And I’m not threatened by you.”

“You have no reason to be.” She grinned at Quinn. “I like her, Q.”

“I love her.”

My cheeks warmed and my heart did that thing again where it felt as though it would explode. Alexandria’s eyebrows went up even higher, and her mouth fell open for a second before she contained her surprise.

“So you’re the one,” she murmured. “I’d heard rumors that even though Quinn Rowland was back in the game on the broadcasting side, that he seemed, well, not as prone to distractions. No one really believed it was a woman.”

I shrugged, still too hot and unable to wipe the shit-eating grin off my face. “I only love him. I didn’t change him. He changed himself.”

She nodded slowly, as though trying to work something out in her mind. “You two will be at the party tonight?”

“For a little while,” Quinn replied, a detectable relief in the tone of his voice.

Had he worried that I wouldn’t be able to hold my own? Or had he simply been nervous about running into Alexandria for the first time, period? She had a reputation for possessing a mean streak that both endeared and alienated her from the fans and press depending on the day.

“Well, I certainly hope to see you there. I’d love to get Emilie drunk and have my way with her.” She winked. “Not in the way Q does, but I’m quite curious about you, Shorty.”

“Maybe we’ll have a chat, Jolly Green Giant.”

Alexandria turned and left, her tinkling laughter ringing off the walls.

“I swear to God, I love you more every day.”

“Aw, that’s sweet, Q, but I’m not really ready for a commitment,” a teasing baritone interrupted.

We’d been staring at each other and hadn’t noticed Sam. He was fresh from the shower, his brown hair curling at the nape of his neck and the fresh scent of soap and good humor rolling off him.

Sam grabbed Quinn into a guy hug, which involved a lot of chest bumping and back slapping, before turning his attention to me. It was easy to see how girls fell all over themselves for those chocolate brown eyes, and he had an engaging, infectious happiness about him.

“Who is this gorgeous creature? Where did you find her? The girls around here are all Amazonian women, this one is adorable and tiny.” He grabbed my hand, an impish sparkle in his gaze. “What’s your name, pixie? Can I have three wishes? I warn you, the first will be that you’ll run away with me.”

“What are the other two?”

“Do not answer that, Samuel, or I’ll have to kick your ass. Now, let go of my girlfriend’s hand.” Quinn was clearly teasing, but not one-hundred percent. His body language turned protective and he took my hand from Sam’s, threading our fingers together.

He didn’t need to worry; Sam’s good nature and roguish talk charmed me, but Quinn quite literally had rocked the foundation of my soul. No competition.

Even this staking his claim kind of turned me on. I’d never had any patience for controlling, obsessive guys, but this was different. Quinn wanted everyone to know I was his girlfriend. Not that I belonged to him, but that we were together and happy about it.

That was fine. I’d be putting a similar vibe out there if a cute girl, even a friend, flirted with him. Kind of like an invisible neon sign that said *back off, bitches*.

I rolled my eyes and smiled at Sam. "I'm Emilie Swanson."

"Q's told me a lot about you, Emilie. In all seriousness, I'm glad to meet you." He clapped his hands together. "So, the party? I'm running back to the hotel to change, we could share my car?"

We agreed and stepped outside behind Sam, who paused along a line of fans to sign a bunch of autographs. A few shrieked at the sight of Quinn but he declined to sign, holding tight to my hand while reminding everyone it was Sam's big day.

The spotlight might not belong to Quinn anymore, but tennis fans hadn't forgotten him. Camera flashes went off as we continued the autograph gauntlet, then slid into the waiting Town Car.

"Emilie, it's a good thing you're stunning. You're going to look amazing in the tabloids under the headline "Who is Quinn Rowland's New Mystery Woman."

"Thank you for the mountain of compliments, Sam Bradford."

"Yes, you could ease off on those, I think," Quinn added dryly.

The ride to the hotel was fun with Sam popping a bottle of champagne, and the guys catching up on each other's lives and the tour gossip. Apparently, Alexandria had met and was dating a professional basketball player that she actually seemed to like. The news put me at ease further, even though after meeting her, I didn't think she had any lingering regret over how things had ended with Quinn.

We parted company in the impressive lobby. A while later I emerged from the huge bathroom, already casting longing looks at the giant Jacuzzi tub, and found Quinn tying his bow tie in front of the mirror.

The sight of him made me stare dumbly like the night we met. The cut on the tux accentuated every gorgeous line of his body, and between the black material and his black hair, the blue of his eyes could have been seen from space with a telescope.

He turned and the appreciation in his gaze when he took in my red, floor length formal heated my cheeks with pleasure.

I executed a quick twirl, glad I'd pinned up my hair so he could see the back. "What do you think?"

"I think it would look damn marvelous on the floor."

When I turned all the way back around, he had moved closer. Breath caught in my chest as his steady fingers trailed down my cheeks, along my jaw, over the jumping pulse in my neck, and finally swept over the swell of each breast where they peered out of my dress.

All he'd done was touch me lightly, but I wanted him. Again. For the fourth time today. The look in his eyes said he felt the same way, and as I stared up, lust bared in my eyes, he swallowed hard.

"What time does the party start," I asked, a little shocked at the throatiness of my voice.

This was ridiculous. Now that we were finally together, it made sense that we would be able to control this outrageous sex drive. It seemed to be the opposite.

"In an hour."

I pushed his jacket off his shoulders and undid his tie, taking care to drape both over a chair so they would be wearable later. Quinn's fingers found the pins in my hair and pulled them free one at a time, laying them on the mini bar until all of the curls tumbled against my bare back. I started with the buttons on his shirt, tipping my chin up for a kiss in the process.

"An hour is good," I breathed into him.

His hands tugged at my zipper, pulling it down agonizingly slow, touching each new piece of exposed skin with a reverence that formed a lump in my throat. "Oh, no. I'm afraid that an hour is not going to be nearly enough time for what I have planned for you, *mi sopresita*. The party will have to wait."

"But your business contacts...oh, God." I gasped as his lips pressed against my neck, nipping lightly.

“Trust me. No one arrives on time and nothing gets accomplished until at least two rounds of cocktails have been consumed. I plan to get good and drunk on you before we leave.”

I stepped out of my dress and panties, letting Quinn lay it flat across the desk in the room and then discard the rest of his clothes. He tugged me down onto the bed, kissing me like he wanted to memorize every single moment.

When the need for oxygen broke us apart, I felt dazed. “You’re right. An hour isn’t going to do it this time.”

“Emilie, my love, a lifetime isn’t going to do it. But it’s a start.”

It was the start. It felt like the start of everything, with nothing ahead but vast potential and days filled with adventure.