

ONE

DAVINA

“You can’t say he isn’t fine, Vina.” Tish turned the screen of her phone my way to show me a picture of Declan Bishop.

Leaning forward, I studied the photo and cracked a smile to indulge her. “He *is* really cute, but I feel like you say that about every man.”

She shrugged, setting her phone down on my desk to pick up her nail file. “Well, I mean it about this one. I’d have all his babies.”

I laughed right along with her.

Tish and I arrived at work early so she could fill me in about our eleven o’clock meeting with the famous Declan Bishop, an NBA player *many* people obsessed over and one of the most popular athletes on the East Coast. The ladies loved him, and based on all the pictures Tish presented, I understood why.

He was one of the biggest faces in sports at the moment, and that’s what made it so shocking that *he* agreed to meet with us. A fuzzy feeling stirred in the pit of my stomach from the reminder that I’d be speaking one on one with him soon.

“Think I have time to stretch my legs and take a walk before he gets here?” I rose from my chair, pressing my palms into my back and pushing my hips forward. It felt good but did absolutely nothing to calm my nerves.

“You can stretch all you want, but I don’t suggest leaving the building.” Tish glanced at me as she blew dust from her filed nails. “I know how you get when you start walking outside and reach Confetti’s. We can’t afford you being late because you can’t decide on which donut flavor you wanna try.”

“Hey.” I threw both hands in the air in a guiltless gesture. “It’s not my fault their donuts are good.”

“The meeting is”—she flipped her wrist—“forty-five-ish minutes from now. Promise you won’t drift too far.”

“I won’t,” I assured her, already making my way to the door. “I’ll be right back, I promise. Want anything from the break room?”

She looked at me from beneath her brows. “Only if there’s wine.”

I huffed a laugh, waving a hand at her.

Most of our days started like this, but on this particular morning we were trying our hardest not to be frazzled. Though Tisha Cole was my secretary and best friend of thirteen years and we’d conquered a lot of achievements together, we had no idea what to expect from this meeting with the NBA star.

Still, we’d prepped as much as possible, and if Tish hadn’t been by my side, I wouldn’t have felt confident enough to go through with it. In fact, I wouldn’t have had *half* the success that I did if it weren’t for her.

She was part of the reason I became CEO of a skin care company—one that went viral on social media, thanks to an actress named Atish Monoi.

Atish tried our products on a whim, and she loved them so much she gave them a shout-out. Since then, Golden Oil Co. had skyrocketed.

Our company now had over fifteen employees, who all seemed to love their jobs and were paid well. Our goal was to keep the GOC ship steady for them.

Tish had reached out to Declan's manager several weeks ago, when a video of him putting lotion on in the middle of one of his games went viral. Afterward, one of the reporters asked him why he was applying the lotion, and he told them he forgot to moisturize before the game and didn't want his ashy elbows caught on camera.

Gotta admit, that was funny to me.

Tish was watching the game with her boyfriend when she saw the interview, and she immediately claimed Declan's response as an opportunity for us.

To our surprise (and after *many* emails with his manager), Declan had agreed to test our products. He liked them so much, he agreed to meet us to discuss an endorsement.

After making a cup of tea in the break room and snagging a muffin, I took the route back to my office. My heels clicked on the marble floor as I walked past a wall of mirrors.

I shot a glance at my reflection, and my outfit was on point—a chic ivory blouse tucked into peach-colored high-waisted suit pants. However, one of the curls on my head was astray.

I smacked my teeth when I saw it was the curl closest to my right temple. No matter what style I rocked with my hair, whether it was a twist-out, Bantu knot-out, or braid-out, that curl always pointed the opposite way.

I smoothed it down with my free hand as best I could before pushing my office door open. Tish had disappeared, but a partial view of the Charlotte skyline was there to greet me instead.

The sky was nearly aqua, not a cloud in sight. I soaked in my workspace—gold and black decor, black vegan-leather furniture, and floor-to-ceiling windows.

I placed my tea and muffin down, then picked up the manila folder Tish left behind. The name **DEKE** was written in bold permanent marker on top of it. I opened it and studied the details, printed interviews, and even his career stats.

Declan Bishop was thirty-three years old, was shooting guard for the Atlanta Ravens, and had a Doberman named Zeke that he loved showing off on his Instagram. His favorite color was orange. He'd formerly played for two other teams, but his jersey number remained the same. Seventeen.

There was a sheet of paper attached about rumors of him dating a model named Giselle Grace. A lot of people said they were in a committed relationship, while other people thought they had an open relationship. Neither had been confirmed or denied by them.

I wasn't sure why that mattered, but Tish highlighted it as if it were an important detail. Knowing her, she was just trying to be funny.

Sunlight filtered into my office and bounced off the glass surfaces as I nestled into the chair behind my desk. My eyes wandered from the steaming cup of tea to the picture frame next to my computer.

A black-and-white photo of a familiar couple smiled at me. The woman wore an ivory A-line dress, her hair braided into a halo, while the man wore an all-black tux, even down to the tie. My chest tightened, while my throat thickened with emotion.

Me and my husband Lewis. We'd eloped in Hawaii. I found the courage to smile back at the photo, which was progress, seeing as it'd been seven months since he died.

I reached for my chest, digging beneath my collar until I felt the dragonfly pendant attached to my necklace. The metal and colored gems were warm, the wings pressing into the pads of my fingers.

Lew had given it to me on our second anniversary. He had said dragonflies brought love and promising changes. I thought how he had it all wrong, because our change wasn't promising. It was *damaging*.

Sniffing, I tucked the pendant back into place, blinked my tears away, then picked up my tea to take a much-needed sip.

This meeting with Declan was important, and I couldn't let my emotions screw it up.