Yes, But No

“First of all,” I said, “we are not going to tell anyone.”

I said it out loud before I had even finished thinking it. That’s how it is with April and me. My mouth makes the plan, and my brain catches up later and signs off on it.

Then I looked at her. Really looked at her, standing there in the back bedroom of that ridiculous plane with one hand on her stomach, and the anger came up in me so fast it surprised me.

“How could you?” I said. “You told me you were getting him out of your system.”

“That,” April said, “makes it very hard to do at times.”

I didn’t have to ask who. I knew exactly who. He’s a lucky football player, a rookie who has made a name for himself, and he happens to be her husband’s dearest and closest friend. The same one I had watched grinning at the crowd that day in the cathedral like the crowd had come for him.

“So I’m still blaming you, April,” I said. “For this whole affair. I’m blaming you.”

“Don’t you dare come at me.” Her chin came up. “Have you forgotten about Daniel’s twins in Dubai? The two girls?”

I opened my mouth and shut it again. I didn’t know what the twins had to do with anything.

“Thank God they’re not boys,” she said, mostly to herself. “This week, of all weeks. Thank God they’re not boys.”

I didn’t understand that then. I would.

“This is a big mess,” I said, “that we’ve gotten ourselves into.”

“No.” April shook her head. “I did this. And I will fix it.”

“Fix it how? Getting an abortion?”

“It’s out of the question.”

I had turned away from her, toward the little window and all that dark sky, and now I turned back around and faced her square.

“So you are going to allow Daniel to believe the child is his.”

She held my eyes. April never could stand to look away first.

“I slept with them both that week.”

“*What?*”

“You know me,” she said, and she almost smiled, the way she used to smile before she jumped off something high. “I’m always doing crazy things. I wanted to see if I could get pregnant by the both of them.”

For a second the engines were the only sound in the world.

“You’re sick,” I said. “Sick. You are *late*, April. You are playing with these lives like they’re cards in your hand, and the whole time you’re thinking you’ve done nothing wrong. That’s what gets me. It’s really frightening.”

“Don’t say that.” Her voice cracked a little at the edge. “I know this isn’t right. But this is the hand that I have been dealt.”

“No, ma’am.” I shook my head. “This is a hand you had up your sleeve, and you swapped it in for the one you were dealt. Big difference.”

She was quiet. Then she let her breath out, and her shoulders came down maybe half an inch.

“Okay,” April said. “You’re right. So what, you’re going to tell me you’re walking away from me now?”

“Do you really think I’d do something like that?” I said. “That doesn’t mean I can’t stay on your ass about this. The first thing we need to do when we get to Dubai—”

“No.” She cut me off flat. “We are not taking any test in Dubai. Nothing gets done in Dubai. Nothing. His family is too well connected over there. Those people are practically royalty.” She ticked it off like a list she’d already written. “We are going to have this reception. We are going to fly back to Dallas. And we are going to take care of it there.”

“And Daniel?”

“Daniel is staying back three weeks.” She waved a hand at the whole sky. “Getting some things off the ground. Hotels, or something his father is working on. They really thought once he finished playing football he’d come home to the business, and he hasn’t, and his dad is not taking it well. So he’s staying to smooth some things over.”

Three weeks. Her new husband half a world away building hotels for his daddy, and his best friend loose in Dallas.

“Two football players,” I said. “Two jocks. April. How do you even—”

“All through high school,” she said, “and all through college, I had one man. One. You know that.”

I did know that.

“Okay, then,” April said, and she turned it right around on me, the way she always does. “But you really can’t say too much. You were getting more than any of the guys at school. At college the girls were just falling at your feet.”

Oh. Yeah.

I'm a lesbian, by the way. I forgot to tell you. And yes, I did try with April, one time. She shot me down very, very swiftly, and we never brought it up again.

Well. Swiftly is the short version. Here is the long one.



It was sophomore year of college, and it was one of those nights.

The kind where the music was too loud downstairs and the party had stopped being any fun about an hour before anybody admitted it, so we'd climbed the stairs to April's room with a bottle of cheap wine and two plastic cups, and shut the door, and let the bass come up through the floor like a heartbeat that belonged to somebody else.

Up there it was quiet. Just us, and the wine, and the whole history between us, stretching all the way back to a desk in the third grade.

April was on her bed with her legs crossed, laughing about something stupid one of the football boys had said at the party. Her hair was down. She never wore it down unless she was trying to get somebody's attention, and I remember wondering, with that wine in me, whose.

I sat on the edge of the bed. Closer than I needed to. She didn't move over.

"You remember Walgreens?" I said.

She smirked. "You storming out, your mama yelling, me telling my mama you were something to be reckoned with? Girl, I remember."

“I meant it,” I said. “What I said back. I meant everything.”

“I know you did.”

“I meant it about you, too.”

The room went still. April set her cup down on the nightstand, slowly, like it might spill something besides wine. For a second I saw something move across her face. Surprise, maybe. Curiosity. Something that wasn’t no.

I leaned in. Close enough to see the gold flecks in her eyes, close enough to smell the wine on her and the perfume she’d put on for somebody downstairs. My heart was going so hard I could feel it in my teeth.

“What if we tried it?” I said. “Us. Not just best friends. More.”

She didn’t pull back. She didn’t laugh. She looked at my mouth for a long moment, and then she looked back up into my eyes, and her lips parted, and she said it.

“Yes.”

My whole body heard that word. My heart hit my ribs. I reached for her hand.

And April took her hand away.

Not hard. Not mean. Just enough.

“Yes,” she said again, softer this time. “But no.”

I froze right there, leaned in, half of me already gone across the space between us.

“I love you, Tonii,” she said. “You know I do. You’re my person. But not like that. I can’t.”

And that was it. The word landed between us and didn’t move. April didn’t cry. I didn’t either. We finished the wine, and we talked about finals, and somebody downstairs turned the music up even louder, and we never, ever brought it up again.

Not once. Not through the rest of college. Not through Daniel. Not through any of it.

Until that plane.



“I need you to lie for me,” April said.

She had hold of my wrist. I don’t think she knew she’d grabbed it. She held it the way her daddy had held her arm on the first day of third grade, tight, like she was afraid I would get away from her.

“Let me think,” I said.

But letting me think was just stalling, and we both knew it. I always knew the answer when it came to April. I had known it since we were eight.

“Okay,” I said finally. “Okay. But we do this my way.”

“What’s your way?”

“First. No tests in Dubai, like you said. We land, we smile, we throw your sickeningly expensive reception, and we get back on this plane to Dallas.”

She nodded.

“Daniel stays his three weeks. Hotels. His daddy. Whatever. And you don’t touch the rookie. Not once while Daniel’s gone. Not a text, not a call, nothing. You want this to be Daniel’s baby, then you act like it.”

April opened her mouth. Closed it. Nodded again.

“Second. When we get back to Dallas, you tell me the truth. All of it. Who you think it is, and when, and how many times. I’m not walking into this blind. You know I can’t fix what I can’t see.”

“And third?” she whispered.

I pulled my wrist out of her hand.

“Third, you stop acting like this is something that happened *to* you. You said it yourself. This is the hand you had up your sleeve. Own it. Because if this blows up, April, it is not just your life. It’s Daniel’s. It’s those twins in Dubai. It’s me.”

The intercom crackled over our heads. “Ladies and gentlemen, we’ll be beginning our descent into Dubai in about twenty minutes.”

April reached out and fixed my collar. She didn’t even think about it. She has done that before every room we have ever walked into together, since the third grade. Old habit.

“We’ve always managed to come back together,” she said.

“Yeah.” I let her finish fixing it. “But this time, April, you’re going to have to tell me *why* you did it. And it had better be a damn good reason.”

Her hand stayed on my collar a second too long. I let it. Then I moved it.

“You remember college?” I said. Not angry. Just remembering.

Her face changed. “Tonii...”

“Yes, but no,” I said. “That’s what you told me that night. Yes, but no.”

April looked away, toward the window. The lights of the city were starting to come up through the dark below us, gold on gold. “I meant it then, too.”

“I know you did,” I said. “And I never brought it up again. Not once. Not through college, not through Daniel, not through any of it. Because I respected the no.”

She turned back to me. Her eyes were wet. It was the first time all day.

“But you need to respect something now,” I said. “That yes-but-no you just did with these two men? You can’t do that with a baby. You can’t do that with Daniel’s life.”

The pilot came on again. “Ten minutes to landing. Please return to your seats.”

April grabbed my hand. Tight again, but different this time. Not control. Fear.

“When we land,” she whispered, “you’re standing next to me. I don’t care what he says. I don’t care what that rookie does. You’re next to me.”

“Always next to you,” I said, and I squeezed back. “But after Dubai, we’re done lying. You hear me?”

She nodded.

“After Dubai.”

We opened the door and walked back up the aisle to the main cabin, past the glasses and the laughing and the guests who didn’t know a thing, two best friends since the third grade heading into a reception that was already a lie, on a plane bigger than the President’s.

Below us, Dubai was blinding.