



NICOLA MARSH
What the Paparazzi Didn't See

THE MODERN
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Nicola Marsh

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Аннотация

The secrets behind Australia's most famous smile...Liza Lithgow has her reasons for living her life in the spotlight, and they're all to do with protecting her little sister. Now she's finally saved enough money to leave the red carpet behind, what better way to celebrate than with a martini and a man? The only problem is, the man in question turns out to be the publisher wanting her kiss & tell autobiography! Wade Urquart's company wants a story? Fine. If scandal will sell more copies, she'll give them exactly what they want! But what will Wade see – the glossy façade or maybe at last, the real Liza?

The secrets behind Australia's most famous smile

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What the Papparazzi Didn't See

“Why did you agree to have a drink with me?”

The waitress deposited their drinks and he raised a martini glass in her direction. “You seemed to be in your element at that party.”

“Haven't you ever faked it?” She clinked her glass to his. “What you see isn't always what you get.”

He stared at her over the rim of his glass, a slight groove between his brows. “Have to say, you're an intriguing woman and I can't figure you out.”

She shrugged. “What's there to know? We're two people who wanted to escape that party. We're having a drink. End of story.”

“Is it?”

His gaze locked on hers, potent and smoldering, and her

breath hitched.

She took a sip of her martini, needing the alcohol to loosen her tightened vocal cords. “You’re expecting an epilogue?”

“A guy can always live in hope,” he said.

Dear Reader,

I admit it. The glamorous celebrity lifestyle intrigues me.

As a young woman, I had the opportunity to be a part of this world via my love for the North Melbourne Football Club. It was fun and frivolous and fabulous!

Then recently, I watched WAG Nation and it got me thinking... What happens behind the scenes in the lives of sportsmen’s wives and girlfriends?

How difficult is it to constantly be under public scrutiny?

My heroine, Liza Lithgow, knows firsthand what it’s like to put on a front while hiding her real motivation.

Will she be able to reveal her true self to publishing powerhouse Wade Urquart and find love in the process?

I loved writing a book with publishing as its theme. It’s a world I live in daily!

I hope you have as much fun reading Liza and Wade’s romance as I did creating it.

Happy reading,

Nicola

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What the Papparazzi

Didn’t See

Nicola Marsh



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ABOUT NICOLA MARSH

Nicola Marsh has always had a passion for writing and reading. As a young girl she devoured books when she should have been sleeping, and later kept a diary whose contents could be an epic in itself!

These days, when she's not enjoying life with her husband and sons in her home city of Melbourne, she's at her computer, creating the romances she loves in her dream job.

Visit Nicola's website at www.nicolamarsh.com for the latest news of her books.

Contents

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Excerpt](#)

ONE

LIZA LITHGOW'S STYLE TIPS

FOR MAXIMUM WAG WOW IMPACT

The Lashes

The eyes have it. Whether attending a grand final at a stadium packed with one hundred thousand people, a glamorous nightclub opening or a BBQ with the team and their partners, bold eyes make a statement.

- 1 Prep with a hydrating cream.
- 2 Apply foundation over your lids.
- 3 Draw the perfect line with pencil then trace with liquid

eyeliner.

4 Apply shadow of choice. Go for sparkle at night.

5 Finish with lashings of mascara.

If you need a little help in the lash department, extensions are the way to go. Individual fake lashes are pasted to your own, giving you a lush look that turns heads.

A full set of extensions takes about an hour. They last 3-6 weeks and will require refills at this time. Refills take 30 minutes.

The great thing about lash extensions is you choose whether you want natural or glamour. Though be warned: the longer-length 'glamour' lashes may result in questions like, 'Have you been to a fancy dress party?' or, 'Is there a Priscilla: Queen of the Desert revival at the local theatre?'

If you prefer au naturel, the key to luscious lashes is prepping with a good serum. Many cosmetic companies have them.

To open up the eye in preparation for mascara, eyelash curlers are essential. Best to heat them up slightly before applying pressure to the lashes for thirty seconds.

For more dramatic impact with mascara, wiggle the wand from side to side as you apply, ensuring good coverage at the base of the lashes. It's the density and darkness of mascara at the roots that gives the illusion of length.

And always, always, opt for waterproof. (You never know when your sport star 'other half' may shoot the winning hoop to win the national championship or kick the goal to break a nil-all draw in the World Cup.)

For a real wow factor with mascara, the darker the better. Black is best unless you have a very fair complexion, in which case brown is better.

Similarly with eyeliner. Stick to black at night and softer, smudged brown during the day.

For eyeshadow shades, stick to neutrals or soft pinks. Let your lashes do the talking!

If Liza Lithgow had to attend one more freaking party, she'd go insane.

Her curves resisted the control-top underwear constriction, her feet pinched from the requisite stilettos and her face ached from the perpetual smile.

The joys of being a WAG.

Technically, an ex-WAG. And loving the ex bit.

The reportedly glamorous lives of sportsmen's Wives And Girlfriends were grossly exaggerated. She should know. She'd lived the lie for longer than she cared to admit.

'One more pic, Liza?'

Yeah, that was what they all said. Not that she had anything against the paparazzi per se, but their idea of one last photo op usually conflicted with hers.

Assuming her game face, the one she'd used to great effect over the years, she glanced over her shoulder and smiled.

A plethora of flashes blinded her but her smile didn't slip. She turned slowly, giving them time to snap her side profile before she cocked a hip, placing a hand on it and revealing an expanse

of leg guaranteed to land her in the gossip columns tomorrow.

Hopefully for the last time.

Being a WAG had suited her purposes but she was done.

Let some other poor sap take her place, primping for the cameras, grinning inanely, starving herself so she wouldn't be labelled pregnant by the media.

With a final wave at the photographers she strutted into the function room, pausing to grab a champagne from a passing waiter before heading to her usual spot at any function: front and centre.

If this was her last hurrah, she was determined to go out in style.

She waited for the party peeps and hangers-on to flock, steeled her nerve to face the inevitable inquisition: who was she dating, where was she holidaying, when would she grant the tell-all the publishers had been hounding her for?

Her answer to the last question hadn't changed in twelve months: 'When hell freezes over.'

It had been a year since international soccer sensation Henri Jaillet had dumped her in spectacular orchestrated fashion, three years since basketball superstar Jimmy Ro had broken her heart.

Reportedly.

The truth? She'd known Jimmy since high school and they were the quintessential golden couple: king and queen of the graduation dance who morphed into media darlings once he hit the big time.

He'd launched her as a WAG and she'd lapped it up, happy to accept endorsements of clothes, shoes and jewellery.

For Cindy. Always for Cindy.

Everything she did was for her baby sister, which was why a tell-all was not on the cards.

She'd grown apart from Jimmy and when reports of his philandering continued to dog her, she'd quit the relationship when he wanted out.

The media had a field day, making her out to be a saint, a very patient saint, and the jobs had flooded in. From modelling gigs to hosting charity events, she became Melbourne's latest 'it' girl.

And when her star had waned, she'd agreed to be Henri's date for a specified time in exchange for a cash sum that had paid Cindy's carer bills for a year.

Being tagged a serial WAG had stung, as people who didn't know her labelled her money-hungry and a camera whore.

She tried not to care, though.

The only people that mattered—her and Cindy—knew the truth.

And it would stay that way, despite the ludicrous sums of money being dangled in front of her for a juicy tell-all.

Yeah, real juicy. Readers would be distinctly disappointed to learn of her penchant for flannel PJs, hot chocolate and a tatty patchwork quilt.

As opposed to the rumoured lack of sleepwear, martinis before bed and thousand-thread sheets she slept on.

She had no idea why the paparazzi made up stuff like that, but people lapped it up, and judged her because of it.

What would they think if they knew the truth?

That she loved spending a Saturday night curled up on the couch with Cindy under the old patchwork quilt their mum had made—and one of the few things Louisa had left behind when she'd abandoned them—watching the teen flicks her sister adored?

That she'd prefer to spend time with her disabled sister than any of the able-bodied men she'd dated?

That every word and every smile at events like this were part of a carefully constructed, elaborate mask to ensure her popularity and continued work that would set up Cindy's care for life?

Being a WAG meant she could spend most of her time caring for Cindy; a part-time gig as opposed to a full-time job that would've taken her away from her sister.

It had suited their lifestyle, putting in infrequent appearances at galas or launches or openings in exchange for days spent attending Cindy's physiotherapy and occupational therapy sessions, ensuring the spasticity in Cindy's contracted muscles didn't debilitate her limited mobility completely.

She'd sat through Cindy's Botox injections into specific muscles to ease the pain and stiffness and deformity around joints, followed by extensive splinting to maintain movement.

She'd supported Cindy through intrathecal baclofen therapy, where a pump had been inserted into her sister's abdomen to

deliver doses of baclofen—a muscle relaxer—into her spinal fluid to ease the spasticity and relieve muscle spasms in her legs.

She'd been there for every session of speech therapy, muscle lengthening and strengthening, splinting, orthotics, mobility training and activities of daily living management.

Putting on a façade for the cameras might have been a pain in the butt but it had been a small price to pay for the time she'd been able to spend supporting Cindy every step of the way. The financial security? An added bonus.

Cindy's care hadn't come cheap and if a magazine wanted to pay her to put in an appearance at some B-list function, who was she to knock it back?

She almost had enough money saved... After tonight she could hang up her sparkly stilettos and leave her WAG reputation behind. Start working at something worthwhile. Something in promotions maybe? Put her marketing degree to use.

Cindy had progressed amazingly well over the years and Liza could now pursue full-time work in the knowledge she'd put in the hard yards with her sister's therapy when it counted.

Cerebral palsy might be an incurable lifelong condition but, with Cindy's determination, her amazing sis had reached a stage in her management plan where the spasticity affecting the left side of her body was under control and she maintained a certain amount of independence.

Liza couldn't be prouder and could now spend more hours away from Cindy pursuing some of her own goals.

Though she wondered how many interviews ‘serial WAG’ would garner from her sketchy CV.

A local TV host laid a hand on her arm and she faked a smile, gushing over his recent award win, inwardly counting down the minutes until she could escape.

Think of the appearance money, she mentally recited, while nodding and agreeing in all the right places.

Another thirty minutes and she could leave her old life behind. She could hardly wait.

* * *

Wade Urquart couldn’t take his eyes off the dazzling blonde.

She stood in the middle of the room, her shimmery bronze dress reflecting light onto the rapt faces of the guys crowding her.

With every fake smile she bestowed upon her subjects, he gritted his teeth.

She was exactly the type of woman he despised.

Too harsh? Try the type of woman he didn’t trust.

The same type of woman as Babs, his stepmother. Who at this very minute was doing the rounds of the room, doing what she did best: schmoozing.

Quentin had been dead less than six months and Babs had ditched the black for dazzling emerald. Guess he should respect her for not pretending. As she had for every moment of her ten-year marriage to his father.

A marriage that had driven the family business into the ground. And an irreversible wedge between him and his dad. A

wedge that had resulted in the truth being kept from him on all fronts, both personally and professionally.

He'd never forgive her for it.

Though deep down he knew who should shoulder the blame for the estrangement with his dad. And he looked at that guy every morning in the mirror.

He needed to make amends, needed to ease the guilt that wouldn't quit. Ensuring his dad's business didn't go bankrupt would be a step in the right direction.

Qu Publishing currently stood on the brink of disaster and it was up to him to save it. One book at a time.

If he could ever get a meeting with that WAG every publishing house in Melbourne was clamouring to sign up to a tell-all biography, he might have a chance. Her name escaped him and, having been overseas for the best part of a decade, he had no idea what this woman even looked like, but he could imagine that every one of her assets would be fake. However, it seemed Australia couldn't get enough of their home-grown darling. He'd been assured by his team that a book by this woman would be a guaranteed best-seller—just what the business needed.

But the woman wouldn't return his assistant's international calls and emails. Not that it mattered. He knew her type. Now he'd landed in Melbourne he'd take over the pursuit, demand a face-to-face meeting, up the ante and she'd be begging to sign on the dotted line.

At times like this he wished his father had moved with the

times and published children's fiction. Would've made Wade's life a lot easier, signing the next J.K. Rowling.

But biographies were Qu Publishing's signature, a powerhouse in the industry.

Until Babs had entered the picture, when Quentin's business sense had fled alongside his common sense, and he had hidden the disastrous truth.

Wade hated that his dad hadn't trusted him.

He hated the knowledge that he'd caused the rift more.

It was why he was here, doing anything and everything to save his father's legacy.

He owed it to him.

Wade should've been there for his dad when he was alive. He hadn't been and it was time to make amends.

The bronzed blonde laughed, a surprisingly soft, happy sound at odds with the tension emanating from her like a warning beacon.

Even at this distance he could see her rigid back, the defensive way she half turned away from the guys vying for her attention.

Interesting. Maybe she was nothing like Babs after all. Babs, who was currently engaged in deep conversation with a seventy-year-old mining magnate who had as many billions as chins.

Yeah, some people never changed.

He needed a change. Needed to escape the expectations of a hundred workers who couldn't afford to lose their jobs. Needed to forget how his father had landed his business in this

predicament and focus on the future. Needed to sign that WAG to solve his problems.

And there were many. So many problems that the more he thought about it, the more his head pounded.

What he needed right now? A bar, a bourbon and a blonde.

Startled by his latter wish, he gazed at her again and his groin tightened in appreciation.

She might not be his type but for a wild, wistful second he wished she could be.

Eight years of setting up his own publishing business in London had sapped him, sucking every last ounce of energy as he'd worked his butt off. When he'd initially started he'd wanted a company to rival his father's but had chosen to focus on the e-market rather than paper, trade and hardbacks. Considering how dire things were with Qu Publishing, his company now surpassed the one-time powerhouse of the book industry.

He rarely dated, socialised less. Building a booming digital publishing business had been his number-one priority. Ironic, he was now here to save the business he could've been in competition with if his dad had ever moved into the twenty-first century. And if he'd been entrusted with the truth.

Not that saving Qu mattered if Babs had her way.

The muscles in his neck spasmed with tension and he spun away, needing air before he did something he'd regret, like marching over to stepmommy dearest and strangling her.

He grabbed a whisky from a passing waiter and downed

half of it, hoping to eradicate the bitterness clogging his throat. Needing a breather, he made his way to the terrace that wrapped across the front of the function room in wrought-iron splendour.

Melbourne might not have the historical architecture of London but the city's beautiful hotels, like the Westin, could hold their own around the world.

He paced the marble pavers in a vain attempt to quell the urge to march back into that packed function room and blast Babs in front of everyone, media be damned.

Wouldn't that go down a treat in tomorrow's papers? publishing ceo bails up socialite stepmother, a real page-turner.

He wouldn't do it, of course. Commit corporate suicide. Qu Publishing meant too much to him. Correction, his dad had meant everything to him, and Wade would do whatever it took, including spending however long in Melbourne to stop Babs selling his legacy.

Qu Publishing needed a saviour. He intended to walk on water to do it.

He cursed and downed the rest of his whisky, knowing he should head back inside and make nice with the publishing crowd.

'Whatever's biting your butt, that won't help.'

Startled, he glanced to his right, where the bronze-clad blonde rested her forearms on the balcony, staring at him with amusement in her eyes.

Blue. With tiny flecks of green and gold highlighted by the

shimmery dress. A slinky, provocative dress that accentuated her assets.

The whisky he'd sculled burned his gut. His excuse for the twisty tension tying it into knots.

Her voice surprised him as much as her guileless expression. Women who dressed like that usually wore calculating expressions to match their deliberately sexy garb and spoke with fake deference.

She sounded...amused. Concerned. Normal.

It threw him.

He prided himself on being a good judge of character. Hadn't he picked Babs for a gold-digging tart the moment his dad had introduced her ten years ago?

His people radar had served him well in business too, but something about this woman made him feel off-kilter. A feeling he wouldn't tolerate.

He needed to stay focused, remain in charge, to ensure he didn't lose the one thing that meant anything to him these days.

And as long as she was staring at him with that beguiling mix of fascination and curiosity, he couldn't concentrate on anything.

'Can't a guy have a drink in peace without being accused of drowning his sorrows?'

He sounded abrupt and uptight and rude. Good. She would raise her perfect pert nose in the air and stride inside on those impossibly high heels that glittered with enough sparkle to match her dress.

To his surprise she laughed; a soft, sexy sound that made his fingers curl around the glass as she held up her hands in a back-off gesture.

‘Hey, no accusations here. Merely an observation.’

A host of smartass retorts sprang to his lips and he planned on using them too. Until he glimpsed something that made him pause.

She was nervous.

He saw it in the way her fingertips drummed delicately on the stem of the champagne flute she clutched. Saw it in her quick look-away when he held her gaze a fraction too long.

And that contradiction—her siren vamp appearance contrasting with her uncertainty—was incredibly fascinating and he found himself nodding instead.

‘You’re right. I was trying to take my mind off stuff.’

The corners of her mouth curved upward, the groove in her right cheek hinting at an adorable dimple. ‘Stuff?’

‘Trust me, you don’t want to know.’

‘I used to worry about stuff once.’

Intrigued by the weariness in her voice, he said, ‘Not anymore?’

‘Not after today,’ she said, hiding the rest of what she was about to say behind her raised glass as she took a sip.

‘What happened today?’

Her wistful sigh hit him where he least expected it. Somewhere in the vicinity of his heart.

‘Today I secured a future for someone very important to me.’

He didn’t understand her grimness or defensive posture, but he could relate to her relief. When he secured the future of Qu Publishing in memory of all his dad’s hard work, he’d be pretty damn relieved too.

‘Good for you.’

‘Thanks.’ She smiled again, sweet and genuine, and he couldn’t fathom the bizarre urge to linger, chat and get to know her.

She wasn’t in his plans for this evening. Then again, what did he have to look forward to? Putting on a front for a bunch of back-slapping phoneyys and gritting his teeth to stop from calling his stepmother a few unsavoury names?

He knew what he’d rather be doing.

And he was looking straight at her.

‘Do you want to get out of here?’

Her eyes widened in surprise before a disapproving frown slashed between them. ‘You’ve got to be kidding me? I make polite small talk for two seconds and you’re propositioning me?’

She shook her head, her disgust palpable.

‘Let me rephrase that.’ He tried his best smile, the one he used to win friends and influence colleagues. Her frown deepened. ‘What I meant was that I’ve had a long day. Landed in Melbourne this morning, had to attend this shindig for work tonight and I’m tired of the schmoozing.’

He waved towards the balcony. ‘Considering you’re out here to get away from the crowd, I assume you’ve probably had a gutful

too?’

Her wary nod encouraged him to continue when he should cut his losses and run.

‘The way I see it, we have two choices. Head back in there and bore ourselves silly for the next hour or we can head down to The Martini Bar in the lobby and unwind before we head home—I mean, before we go our separate ways.’

The corners of her mouth twitched at his correction.

‘What do you say? Take pity on a guy and put him out of his misery by saving him from another interminable stint in there?’

Damn, he’d made a fool of himself, blathering like an idiot. What was it about this cool, classy blonde that had him rattled?

He’d had her pegged wrong and he, better than anyone, should know never to judge the proverbial book by its cover.

‘So you weren’t propositioning me?’

Was that a hint of disappointment? Mentally chastising himself for wishful thinking, he mimicked her frown. ‘Sadly, no. I’m too jet-lagged to—’

He bit off the rest of what he was about to say when her eyebrow arched.

Yep, he was stuffing this up royally.

‘To what?’

At last, she smiled and it made him feel oddly excited, as if he wanted to see her do it again.

‘To muster up enough charm to ensure you couldn’t say no.’

She chuckled and he joined in.

‘I like a guy with confidence.’ She laid her champagne glass on the ledge. ‘Let’s go get that martini.’

He didn’t have to be asked twice. ‘You really made me work for that acceptance.’

As he gestured for her to take the stairs ahead of him she cast him a coy glance from beneath her lashes. ‘Didn’t you know? You need to work your butt off for anything worth having.’

‘Is that right?’

‘Absolutely.’ She nodded, strands of artfully curled golden silk falling around her face in gorgeous disarray. ‘Nothing better than nailing a challenge.’

He bit the inside of his cheek to prevent laughing out loud, finding her utterly beguiling. In contrast to her sex-kitten persona, she was forthright and rather innocent if she hadn’t picked up on that nailing remark.

Then he made the mistake of glancing at her and saw the moment her faux pas registered.

She winced and a faint pink stained her cheeks, making him want to ravish her on the spot.

‘That didn’t sound too good,’ she said, wrinkling her nose.

‘Now we’re even,’ he said, wondering what they’d come out with after a few drinks under their belts. ‘My mistaken proposition, your nailing suggestion.’

‘Guess we are.’ She eyed him speculatively, as if not sure what he’d say next.

That made two of them.

‘Maybe we should stick to coffee tonight?’

‘Why’s that?’

That dimple flashed adoringly again. ‘Because with our strike rate, who knows what’ll happen if we have a martini or two?’

He laughed. ‘I was thinking the same thing.’

‘Coffees it is.’ She nodded, expecting him to agree.

But there was a part of him that delighted in flustering this woman and he couldn’t help but wonder how she’d loosen up with a few drinks inside her.

He leaned in close, expecting her to retreat a little, his admiration increasing, along with his libido, when she didn’t.

‘Actually, I prefer to live on the edge tonight. Why don’t we have a martini or two and see what other verbal gaffes we can make?’

‘As long as we stop at the verbal stuff,’ she said so softly he barely heard her.

‘Any other mistakes we make? Not our fault.’

‘Oh?’ He loved how she did the imperious eyebrow quirk.

‘Haven’t you heard?’ He lowered his voice. ‘What happens in The Martini Bar stays in The Martini Bar?’

With a surprisingly wicked twinkle in her eye, she nodded. ‘That’s if we stay in the bar.’

With that, she took to the steps, leaving him trailing after her, more than a little captivated by this woman of contrasts.

A woman whose name he didn’t know.

Ah well, he’d have all night to discover it if he was lucky.

TWO

LIZA LITHGOW'S STYLE TIPS FOR MAXIMUM WAG WOW IMPACT

The Lips

For the height of sophistication and glam wow, the perfect pout is where it's at.

Having a palette of colours for various looks is essential.

Co-ordinate colour with outfits.

Go bold with fire engine red for an awards ceremony or pastel pink for the season opener.

Keep lips soft; that means no lip liner!

For a fabulous femme fatale pout, preparation is key.

- 1 Gently exfoliate lips with a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- 2 Moisturize with a specialized lip balm.
- 3 Use a lip-fix cream which prevents colour bleeding.
- 4 Apply lipstick once. Blot with tissue. Re-apply.

For a subtle look, pat lipstick on with a fingertip.

For bold lips, apply with a lip brush.

Blot.

Reapply.

If you want a plump pout without the injections, try lipsticks with inbuilt 'plumpers'. These innovative ingredients are proven to increase lip volume by forty percent. Amazing! They also hydrate and restore collagen over time.

A dab of gloss in the middle of the lower lip is a subtle touch

that adds real wow!

Liza couldn't remember the last time she'd been out on a date.

One that hadn't been orchestrated as some huge PR stunt, that was. She'd attended the Logies, Arias and Brownlow Medal galas on the arms of a TV personality, a rock star and an up-and-coming footballer respectively. And on each occasion had been bored witless within the first ten minutes.

So what was it about this guy that had her laughing and fluffing her words and interested in spending some one-on-one time with him?

She'd made her required appearance at the book launch; she should head home, get out of this designer dress she'd been begged to wear and curl up with her e-reader and the latest juicy romance.

Instead, she watched him place their martini orders, shocked she didn't know his name, thrilled she didn't particularly care.

She never had fun or did anything on a whim. Ever.

Her life for the last ten years since her mum had absconded when she was eighteen and left Cindy in her care had been about weighing decisions carefully to see how they would affect her younger sister.

Everything revolved around Cindy and while Liza never begrudged her sis anything, knowing tonight would be the last time she'd have to put on her fake face had lifted a weight from her shoulders.

She could be herself from now on and Mr Martini had been

in the right place at the right time. More than that, he'd intrigued her, and she couldn't say that about many men.

She'd watched him morph from uptight and judgemental to cool and a little goofy, with a hint of underlying sexiness that made her long-neglected hormones sit up and howl.

When was the last time she'd had sex? Probably not since she was with Jimmy, because while Henri had paid for her arm-candy status for a year, she wouldn't go that far as part of their deal.

And if she couldn't remember exactly, it meant it had probably been during the good period with Jimmy, which hadn't been the last year of their relationship. The year he'd progressively withdrawn, establishing emotional distance before the final break.

Her mum had done the same over the years. In both cases, their abandonment hadn't come as any great surprise but had hurt all the same. Hurt deeply.

But tonight wasn't the time to dwell on her issues. Tonight was perfect for something else entirely.

She did a quick mental calculation.... Could it really have been four years since she'd been with a guy?

Maybe that explained her irrational urge to push the limits with Mr Martini. He'd be ideal for a celebratory fling, a little fun on a night where she felt like dancing down Swanston Street with her arms in the air.

Not that she'd had a one-night stand before but the way she

was feeling right now? Edgy. Dangerous. A little outrageous. It could very well be a first tonight.

He stalked towards her, his ebony suit highlighting lean legs, broad shoulders, impressive chest, and she squirmed a little.

What would it be like to explore beneath that suit? To feel the warmth of a man's skin next to hers? The heat of passion? The yearning to lose herself in pleasure?

Cindy was her world and Liza never regretted assuming responsibility for full-time care, but it was at times like this she wished deep down for something she'd never have: a guy to come home to, a guy to warm her bed, a guy who wouldn't abandon her when the going got tough.

'You must really have a hankering for a martini,' he said, taking a seat next to her, far too close as a few synapses zinged with the need to touch him.

'Why?'

'Because you have an odd look on your face, like you want it real bad.'

Uh-oh. He could see her desperation? Not good.

'I'm thirsty,' she blurted, wishing the waitress would hurry up and deliver their damn drinks so she wouldn't have to stare into his knowing dark eyes.

'And I'm curious.'

That made two of them. She was curious as to why she'd agreed to this and why the hell she wanted him to be part of her freedom celebration tonight.

‘How could two intelligent people like us, about to having a scintillating conversation, still be strangers?’

‘Not anymore.’ She stuck out her hand. ‘Liza Lithgow.’

‘Wade Urquart. Pleased to meet you.’

As his palm touched hers and his fingers curled around her hand, Liza could’ve sworn every sane reason why she shouldn’t indulge in a night of incredible sex with this guy melted clean away.

‘Your name sounds familiar.’ He frowned, releasing her hand after lingering too long. She wasn’t complaining.

‘I’m hoping the next words out of your mouth aren’t, “Haven’t we met some place before?”’

He laughed. ‘No need for glib lines. You’re here, aren’t you?’

‘True.’

And with the dim lighting, the smooth jazz spilling softly from discreet speakers behind them and a gorgeous guy eyeing her speculatively, she was right where she wanted to be.

For tonight. Tonight, she was in the mood for celebrating. Shedding her old life felt amazing.

‘Why did you agree to have a drink with me?’ The waitress deposited their drinks and he raised a martini glass in her direction. ‘You seemed to be in your element at that party.’

‘Haven’t you ever faked it?’ She clinked her glass to his. ‘What you see isn’t always what you get.’

He stared at her over the rim of his glass, a slight groove between his brows. ‘Have to say, you’re an intriguing woman, and

I can't figure you out.'

She shrugged. 'What's to figure out? We're two people who wanted to escape that party; we're having a drink, end of story.'

'Is it?'

His gaze locked on hers, potent and smouldering, and her breath hitched.

She took a sip of her martini, needing the alcohol to loosen her tightened vocal cords. 'You're expecting an epilogue?'

'A guy can always live in hope,' he said, downing his martini and placing the glass on the table in front of them. 'Honestly? I've had a crappy six months, my dad's business is under threat and I haven't met anyone as captivating as you in a long time. So excuse me if I don't BS you.'

Liza valued honesty. Most people didn't know the meaning of the word. How many times had friends, who'd hung around under the misguidance she'd take them places because of her lifestyle, vanished when they'd learned she had a disabled sister?

Stupid morons acted as if cerebral palsy were catchy. And they didn't stay to be educated either.

Even Jimmy had been awkward and stilted around Cindy, despite Liza explaining cerebral palsy was a physical disability caused by injury to the brain before birth.

Cindy had a milder form, with only the left side of her body affected by the debilitating spasticity that left her hand, elbow, hip and knee clawed, and some speech problems. She had been lucky in escaping ataxic—uncontrolled—movements and

athetosis, the writhing movements.

Sure, the spasticity in Cindy's elbow, wrist and fingers made daily tasks like eating, dressing, writing and manipulating objects difficult, but they'd learned to cope best they could. Countless occupational therapy sessions had seen to that. And the ongoing physiotherapy to prevent deforming contractures made Liza eternally grateful for the job she'd had for the last few years.

After tonight, not anymore.

Having Wade clearly articulate what he wanted impressed her. Scared the bejeebies out of her, but definitely impressed her.

'Want to talk about the crappy six months or the business?'

'Hell no,' he said, loosening the knot on his tie and unbuttoning the top button of his shirt to reveal a hint of deliciously tempting tanned skin. 'The only reason I'm in Melbourne is to sort all that stuff out, but considering I arrived this morning it can wait 'til tomorrow.'

'Then why show up at the party at all?'

'Because sometimes we have to do things we don't want to.'

His frown reappeared and she had a feeling he did a lot of that. He'd been frowning when she'd first seen him on the balcony, deep in thought, incredibly serious. It was what had made her approach him. Because she used to look like that all the time when she didn't have her game face on, the one she donned along with her make-up before a public appearance.

She'd frowned a lot over the years, worrying about Cindy. About her care long term should anything happen to her, about

her sister's health, about her financial security.

The latter had driven her to go to great lengths. Heck, she'd tolerated posing as Henri Jaillet's girlfriend for twelve months when most people couldn't stand longer than a few minutes in the egotistical soccer star's presence.

But those days were over. She'd invested wisely over the years and tomorrow, when her investment matured, financial security would give her the peace of mind she needed to get more carer help, leaving her more time to sort out her own future.

Why wait until tomorrow?

The thought wasn't exactly out of left field. She wouldn't be sitting here if she hadn't already contemplated celebrating her newfound freedom tonight.

But how did this work? She couldn't take Wade home; she'd never expose Cindy to that unless the guy meant something to her. Even Jimmy had hardly visited and she'd known him since high school.

Though that had been more due to Jimmy's unease around Cindy than not wanting to see her. She hadn't pushed the issue with him, content to protect Cindy from any vibes she might pick up from Jimmy. But it had hurt, deep down, that her boyfriend wasn't more open-minded and didn't care enough about her to accept Cindy as part of the package while they dated.

'Another drink?'

She shook her head. 'No thanks. After the champers I had upstairs, any more of this and who knows what I'll do?'

‘In that case, maybe I should insist you try every martini mixer on the menu?’

She smiled, glad his frown had disappeared, but a little intimidated by his stare, the probing stare that insisted there was intention behind his teasing quips.

‘You could try, but you’d have to carry me out of here.’

‘Not a problem. I have a suite upstairs.’ He winked. ‘You could recover up there.’

Guess that answered Liza’s question about how she’d go about celebrating with Wade.

The old Liza would’ve laughed off his flirtation and changed the subject.

The new Liza who wanted to kick up her heels for the first time in for ever? Surely she couldn’t pass up an opportunity like this?

‘Is that an invitation or a proposition?’

‘Both,’ he said, capturing her hand between his, the unexpected contact sending a buzz shooting up her arm. ‘Am I in the habit of picking up women I barely know at parties? No. Do I invite them back to my place? Rarely.’

He raised her hand to his lips and brushed a soft kiss across her knuckles, making her yearn for more. ‘Am I hoping you’ll say yes to spending the night with me? Absolutely.’

Liza had a decision to make.

Do the sensible thing, the responsible thing, as she’d done her whole life.

Or celebrate her new life, starting now.

‘Do I accept offers to spend the night from guys? No.’ She squeezed his hand. ‘Have I had a one-night stand before? Never.’ She slid her hand out of his. ‘Do I want to spend tonight with you?’

She took a steadying breath and laid her hand on his thigh. ‘Absolutely.’

THREE

LIZA LITHGOW’S STYLE TIPS

FOR MAXIMUM WAG WOW IMPACT

The Shape

The key to WAG wow is making the most of what you have.

Learn how to show off your best assets and how to visually change the body parts you’d rather hide.

Always, always, dress to suit your shape.

PEAR

1 Wear dark colours on the lower half of your body.

2 A-line skirts that skim the hips and bottom are flattering.

3 Accessorise with scarves, necklaces and earrings to draw attention to the upper half of your body.

4 Avoid light coloured trousers or anything too tight on your bottom half.

BUSTY

1 Go for flattering necklines with tops and dresses:

turtlenecks, shirt collars, boat necks, V necks.

2 Go for high-sitting necklaces as they draw the gaze up.

3 Avoid baggy tops with no shape as they can make you look heavier and avoid anything too tight across the chest.

SHORT

1 Dresses ending above the knee are best.

2 Wear fitted tops and trousers (straight or bootleg).

3 Avoid cropped length pants as they make legs look shorter.

TALL

1 Wear different colours top and bottom to break up the illusion of length.

2 Wear horizontal stripes.

3 Wear well-fitted layers that skim the body.

4 Adding a wide belt can help create a nice shape.

5 Avoid wearing pants that are the incorrect length.

Remember, the key to appearing confident in the clothes you wear is to be comfortable.

How many times have we seen women tugging up their strapless bodices or tugging down their micro-minis? It's not a good look.

When you strut into a room, being confident in your body and the look you've created is half the battle!

As Liza stared out over the lights of Melbourne glittering below, she had second thoughts about her decision.

Was she really in Wade's suite, about to indulge in her first

one-night stand at the ripe old age of twenty-eight?

She still had time to bolt. She'd thought it rather cute when he'd mentioned making a quick trip to the convenience store across the road, and it reinforced his assertion that he wasn't in the habit of picking up women or expecting to have sex his first night in Melbourne.

But while he was buying condoms, she was mulling over reasons why this might not be such a good idea after all.

She maintained strict independence for a reason. Depending on anyone for anything inevitably led to heartache.

Not that she'd be depending on Wade for anything, but letting her guard down came with a price. It left her vulnerable to feeling, and having her defences weakened, even for a short time, made her skittish.

She'd loved her dad. He'd abandoned her without a backward glance.

She'd depended on her mum. She'd eventually left too.

She'd thought sweet, easygoing Jimmy would always be there for her. He'd done a runner too.

No, it was easier maintaining aloofness, not letting anyone get too close. And that was exactly what Wade would be doing shortly...getting exceptionally close.

Ironic, it wasn't the prospect of some stranger seeing her naked that had her half as anxious as the thought of being intimate with him and enjoying it too much.

She'd never been a needy female and had tried to instil the

same independence into Cindy despite her physical limitations, yet there was something about how much she wanted to be close to Wade tonight that terrified her.

She could blame it on her impulsive need to celebrate and do something completely out of character.

Or she could admit the truth, albeit to herself. That she craved a connection, even if only physical, for just one night.

The soft swoosh of the key card in the lock had her fingers clenching on the windowsill.

So much for escaping.

He entered and her tummy fell away in that uncharacteristic swoop that signalled she really wanted this guy.

She tingled all over from it, her nerve endings prickling and putting her body on notice, a heightened awareness that made her want to rub against him, skin to skin.

Then it hit her.

She'd never been so attracted to any guy before. Not even Jimmy, whose body she'd known in intimate detail from the time they'd lost their virginity together in the back seat of his car at seventeen.

Because of the clothes she wore and the persona she presented to the world, guys assumed she was an easy mark. Even while she'd been dating Jimmy and Henri—albeit platonically in his case—guys had hit on her.

Fellow soccer and basketball stars who assumed WAGs were up for anything. Commentators and managers and agents who

thought WAGs would do anything for stardom and recognition, including accept outlandish proposals.

The whole scene had sickened her and, while she'd seen enough hook-ups at parties in her time, she'd never been remotely interested.

What made Wade Urquart so special that she wanted to rip her clothes off the moment his sizzling-hot gaze connected with hers?

'Glad you're still here.'

He closed the door and slid off his jacket, where she caught sight of a tell-tale box bulging from the inside pocket. What looked like a surprisingly large box for what she'd envisioned as a brief interlude.

Her skin tingled again.

'I contemplated making a run for it.'

'What stopped you?'

He stalked towards her, stopped less than two feet away.

'This.'

She laid a hand on his chest, felt the heat from his skin brand her through the expensive cotton of his shirt.

He didn't move as her palm slid upward. Slowly. Leisurely, as she savoured the contours of hard muscle, desperate to feel his skin.

He watched her, his gaze smouldering as her fingertips traced around his nipples, his breathing quickening as her fingers skated across his pecs, along his collarbone and higher.

When her hand reached his neck, she stepped closer, bringing their bodies less than an inch apart.

She could feel his heat. She could smell his expensive citrus aftershave. She could hear his ragged breathing.

She'd never wanted anything as badly as she wanted Wade at that moment.

With a boldness she'd had no idea she possessed, she tugged his head down towards her and kissed him.

The moment their lips touched Liza forgot her doubts, forgot her past, forgot her own damn name.

She couldn't think beyond their frantic hands and loud moans. Couldn't get enough of his long, deep, skilled kisses.

Her body ignited in a fireball of passion and she clung to him, eagerly taking the initiative, pushing him down on the bed so he lay sprawled beneath her like a fallen angel.

His lips curved into a wicked grin as she shimmied out of her dress.

Another first. Letting a guy see her naked with the lights on.

She didn't like being seen during intimate moments. She spent enough of her life in the spotlight, being scrutinised and evaluated, she didn't need it in the bedroom too.

But this was a new Liza, a new life.

Time to shed her old habits and take what she wanted.

Starting with the sexy guy beckoning her with a crook of his finger.

'Bronze is your colour,' he said, propping on his elbows when

she straddled him.

‘I like to colour coordinate my outfit and underwear.’

‘While I appreciate the effort—’ he snagged a bra strap and tugged it down, trailing a fingertip across her collarbones and doing the same on the other side ‘—I’d prefer to see you naked.’

He surged upward so fast she almost toppled off, but he wrapped his strong arms around her waist, anchoring her, holding her deliciously close. ‘Now.’

She cupped his face between her hands and stared into his beautiful brown eyes. Eyes that held shadows lurking behind desire. Eyes that intrigued.

She briefly wondered if they were doing the right thing. Before ignoring that thought.

She wanted to celebrate her new life tonight. Having an exciting, impulsive fling with a hot guy who made her pulse race with the barest touch?

What a way to do it.

She inched towards him and murmured against his mouth, ‘What are you waiting for?’

* * *

Wade knew Liza had vanished when he woke.

It didn’t surprise him. He’d half expected her to disappear when he’d gone condom shopping.

Even now, after six hours of sensational sex and a much-needed two hours’ sleep, he couldn’t quite believe she’d stayed.

He’d known the moment they’d started flirting she wasn’t the

type to deliberately reel a guy in with the intention of a one-night stand.

She hadn't toyed with her hair or used fake coy smiles or accidentally on purpose touched him as so many women who came on to him did.

She hadn't pumped up his ego or been impressed by his trappings. How many times had women made a comment on his expensive watch, thinking he'd be flattered? Hell, even Babs couldn't go past a thirty-thousand-dollar watch without making some remark.

How wrong he'd been about Liza.

He'd likened her to his stepmother when he'd first seen her surrounded by lackeys at that party. The two women couldn't be more different.

Thoughts of Babs had him glancing at his watch and leaping out of bed.

He had a board meeting scheduled for ten this morning. A meeting he couldn't miss. The future of Qu Publishing depended on it.

While one-night stands weren't his usual style, Wade knew better than to search for a note or a business card or a scrawled phone number on the hotel notepad.

But that was exactly what he found himself doing as he glanced around the room, hoping for some snippet that indicated Liza wouldn't mind seeing him again.

He might not be in the market for a relationship but his time

in Melbourne would be tension-filled enough without adding frustration to his woes.

He'd been lucky enough to meet an intriguing woman who made his body harden despite the marathon session they'd had. Why not stay in touch, date, whatever, while he was in town?

He might not know how long that would be, or how long it would take to ensure the publishing business that had been in his family for centuries was saved, but having someone like Liza to distract him from the corporate stress would be a bonus.

A quick reconnaissance yielded nothing. No contact details.

Disappointment pierced his hope. By her eagerness and wanton responses he'd assumed she'd had a good time too. And if she wasn't the one-night-stand type, why didn't she leave something? A note? A number?

Ironic, for a guy who didn't trust easily, he'd pinned his hopes on a virtual stranger trusting him enough to leave her contact details?

Then again, she'd trusted him with her body. A stupid thought, considering he wasn't naïve enough to assume sensational sex equated with anything beyond the heat of the moment.

A glance at the alarm clock beside the bed had him frowning and making a beeline for the bathroom.

He had a boardroom to convince.

Time enough later to use his considerable resources to discover the luscious Liza's contact details.

* * *

In all the years Shar, Cindy's caregiver, had stayed over, Liza had never needed to sneak past her 'the morning after'.

By Shar's raised eyebrows and smug smile as Liza eased off her sandals and tiptoed across the kitchen, only to be caught out when Shar stepped out of the pantry, the time for sneaking was long past.

Liza had been sprung.

'Good morning.' Shar held up a coffee plunger in one hand, a tin of Earl Grey in the other. 'Which would you prefer?'

'Actually, I think I'll hit the shower—'

'Your usual, then.' Shar grabbed Liza's favourite mug and measured leaves into a teapot. 'Nothing like a cuppa to lubricate the vocal cords first thing in the morning.'

'My vocal cords are fine.'

Liza cleared her throat anyway, knowing the huskiness came from too much moaning over the hours that Wade had pleased her. Repeatedly.

Shar grinned. 'Good. Then you can tell me who put that blush in your cheeks.'

Liza darted a quick glance at Cindy's door.

'She's fine. Still asleep.'

One of the many things Liza loved about Shar was Cindy was the carer's priority. Liza had seen it instantly when she'd interviewed Shar for the job after her mum had left.

Liza had been a hapless eighteen-year-old, used to looking out for her younger sister but shocked to find herself a full-time

carer overnight.

She'd needed help and the cerebral palsy association had come through for her in a big way. Organised respite care, assisted with ongoing physio and occupational therapy and sent part-time carers to help.

Liza had known Shar was the best when Cindy took an instant liking to her and the older woman didn't patronise either of them.

At that time Liza hadn't needed a mother—she'd had one and look how that had turned out—she'd needed a friend, and Shar had been all that and more over the years.

Liza couldn't have attended functions and cultivated her WAG image without Shar's help and they'd eased into a workable schedule over the years. Liza spent all day with Cindy and Shar came in several evenings a week, more if Liza's WAG duties had demanded it.

Liza had been lucky, being able to devote so much time to Cindy and support them financially. And when her investment matured today she'd be sure to give Shar a massive wage increase for her dedication, loyalty and friendship. And increase her hours to include days so Liza could find a job in marketing. One that didn't involve marketing herself in front of the cameras.

'Sit.' Shar pointed at the kitchen table, covered in Cindy's scrapbooking. 'Start talking.'

'Damn, you're bossy,' Liza said, not surprised to find a few muscles twanging as she slid onto the wooden chair.

She hadn't had a workout like that in...for ever.

Though labelling what she'd done with Wade a workout seemed rather crass and casual.

The passion they'd shared—the caresses, the strokes, the exploration of each other's bodies. She'd never been so uninhibited, so curious.

She knew the transient nature of their encounter had a lot to do with her wanton playfulness—easy to be bold with a guy she'd never see again.

So why did that thought leave her cold?

On waking, she'd spent an inordinate amount of time studying his features. The proud, straight nose with a tiny bump near the bridge, the dark stubble peppering his cheeks, the tiny scar near his right temple, the sensuous lips.

Those lips and what they'd done to her...oh boy.

'On second thought, I need more than a caffeine shot to hear this story.' Shar stood on tiptoe and grabbed the tin box storing their emergency brownie stash.

While Shar prepared the tea and chocolate fix, Liza wondered if she'd done the right thing in bolting. She had no clue about morning-after etiquette. Should she have left a thank-you note?

When she'd slid out of bed and done her best not to wake him, she'd dressed in record time yet spent another ten minutes dithering over a note. She'd even picked up a pen, only to let it fall from her fingers when she'd stared at the blank hotel paper with fear gripping her heart.

As she'd looked at that paper, she'd been tempted to leave her

number. Before reality had set in. Wade hadn't questioned her or made polite small talk. He hadn't been interested in anything beyond the obvious. And that was enough of a wake-up call for her to grab her bag and get the hell out of that hotel room.

One-night stands were called that for a reason. That was all they were. One night.

The uncharacteristic yearning to see him again? To have a repeat performance of how incredible he made her feel? Not. Happening.

'Right, here we go.' Shar placed a steaming cup of Earl Grey in front of her along with two double-choc-fudge brownies on a side plate. 'Get that into you, then start talking.'

Liza cupped her hands around the hot cup and lifted it to her lips, inhaling the fragrant bergamot steam. Earl Grey was her comfort drink, guaranteed to make her relax.

She'd drunk two pots of the stuff the morning she'd woken to find her mum gone.

It hadn't been a shock. Louisa had been an emotionally absent mother for years before she'd left. Guess Liza should be grateful her mum had waited until Liza had turned eighteen before she'd done a runner, leaving her the legal guardian of Cindy.

Crazy thing was Liza had long forgiven her father for running out on them after Cindy's birth. Men were fickle and couldn't stand a little hardship. She'd come home from her first day of school to find her dad shoving belongings into his car in front of a stoic mum.

Louisa had cried silent tears, holding a twelve-month-old Cindy in her arms, while her dad had picked Liza up, hugged her tight, and told her to take good care of her sister.

And she'd been doing it ever since.

While Liza might have forgiven—and forgotten—her dad, she couldn't forgive her mum as easily. Louisa had watched Cindy grow. Had been a good mum in her own way. But Liza had seen the signs. The subtle withdrawing of affection, longer respite visits away from the girls, the scrimping and saving of every cent.

Her mum hadn't left a note either. She'd just walked out of the door one morning with her suitcases and never looked back.

If Louisa expected Liza to be grateful for the birthday cards stacked with hundred-dollar bills that arrived every year on Cindy's birthday, she could think again.

Cindy needed love and caring, not guilt money.

Thankfully, with what Liza had done over the last decade, Cindy's financial future was secure and they no longer needed her mum's money.

Now she needed to start doing stuff for her and first item on the agenda involved finding her dream job. One that didn't involve schmoozing or showing her best angle to the cameras.

She sipped at the tea, savouring the warmth.

'Could you drink that any slower?' Shar wiped brownie crumbs off her fingers and mimicked talking with her hand.

Liza placed a cup on the saucer and reached for a brownie, when Shar slapped her wrist. 'You can eat later. I want details,

girlie.’

Liza chuckled. ‘Better tell you something before you break a bone.’

Shar’s hand continued to open and shut, miming chatter. ‘Still not enough of this.’

‘Okay, okay.’ Liza leaned back and sighed. ‘Henri’s book launch was every bit as boring and pompous as him. I was doing the rounds, talking to the regular people. I got bored as usual.’

Then she’d stepped out onto that balcony and her life had changed in an instant.

Melodramatic? Hell yeah, but no matter where her future led she’d never forget that one incredible night with Wade at the Westin.

‘And?’ Shar leaned forward and rubbed her hands together.

‘I needed some fresh air, headed outside, met someone.’

‘Now you’re talking.’

Liza sighed. How to articulate the rest without sounding like a floozy?

‘Shar, you know Cindy is my world, right?’

Shar’s eyes lost their playful sparkle and she nodded, sombre.

‘Never seen anyone as dedicated as you.’

‘Everything I’ve done is for my little sis and I’d do it again in a heartbeat, but last night signalled a new beginning for me and when the opportunity to celebrate presented itself? Well, let’s just say I grabbed it with both hands.’

Shar let out a soft whoop and glanced at Cindy’s door. ‘Good

for you.’ She leaned forward and wiggled her eyebrows. ‘So how was he?’

Liza made a zipping motion across her lips. ‘No kissing and telling here.’

Shar reached across and patted her forearm. ‘All I can say is about time, love. You’re a good girl, dating those dweebs to secure your financial future, making the most of your assets. About time you had a little fun.’

‘There was nothing little about it,’ Liza deadpanned, joining in Shar’s laughter a second later.

‘Hey, Liza, is it Coco Pops time?’

Liza’s heart squished as it always did at the sound of Cindy’s voice from behind her bedroom door. There was nothing she wouldn’t do for her baby sister.

‘You know the drill. Weet-Bix as usual,’ Liza called out, draining the rest of her tea before heading to the bedroom to help Cindy dress.

‘Are you going to see him again?’ Shar asked as Liza paused with her hand on the doorknob.

Liza shook her head, the disappointment in Shar’s expression matching hers.

Silly, as Liza didn’t have time for disappointments. She had a secure investment about to mature, a new career in marketing to embark on and an easier life ahead.

No time at all to reminisce about the hottest night of her life and what might have been if she’d had the courage to leave her

details.

‘Trade you a pancake stack for the Weet-Bix,’ Cindy said as Liza eased open the bedroom door.

The moment she saw Cindy’s beaming, lopsided smile, Liza wiped memories of Wade and focused on the number-one person in her life and her sole motivation.

Life was good.

She didn’t have room in it for commanding, sexy guys, no matter how unforgettable.

FOUR

LIZA LITHGOW’S STYLE TIPS

FOR MAXIMUM WAG WOW IMPACT

The Classics

You don’t need money to create a WAG wow look. Designer bargains, vintage chic and good accessories can create an outfit that will have the paparazzi snap-happy.

To create a timeless, elegant look consistently, it’s worthwhile investing in a few classic pieces, the items in any WAG’s wardrobe that will always be in style.

Little black dress. (A staple. Buy several: different lengths, necklines, fitting. The classic LBD is a lifesaver and can be combined with various jacket/shoe combinations to give the illusion of many different looks.)

Jacket. (Make sure it’s expensive and tailored. It will last for ever.)

Heels. (Black patent leather stilettos will never go out of style.)

Sunglasses. (Brand names are classy. Enlist the help of an honest shop assistant to ensure the shape/size suits your face.)

Boots. (Black and brown leather boots can be worn with anything and everything. High heels and flats in both recommended.)

Striped top. (Black and white stripes are a staple. Dress up or down.)

Ballet flats. (Perfect to pop into your bag to use at the end of a long day at the Spring Racing Carnival or a long night of dancing.)

Trousers. (Tailored black and beige will go with almost anything. Wide leg is elegant. Bootleg flattering.)

Belt. (Thin, black leather. Classic.)

Cardigan. (Cream cashmere, can't go wrong.)

Clutch. (Smaller than a handbag yet makes a bigger statement.)

Handbag. (Must carry everything including the kitchen sink but bigger isn't always better. Co-ordinate handbag to your outfit and shoes. Choose neutral colours: black, tan, brown. Mid-size with handles and shoulder strap best.)

Jeans. (Discover which style suits you best and stick with it. But for maximum WAG wow, have denim in various cuts: skinny, bootleg, boyfriend, etc.)

Trenchcoat. (Double-breasted, belted, beige. Classic.)

Watch. (For timeless elegance, invest in an expensive watch. People notice.)

Bling. (Take the ‘less is best’ approach. Diamond stud earrings. Thin white gold necklace. Unless your sports star partner wins the World Cup or Olympics for his team, then get him to buy you a diamond mine and then some.)

With Cindy engrossed in her electronic tablet, Liza ducked into the shower, something she should’ve done the moment she’d arrived home to scrub off the lingering smell of Wade’s aftershave.

Maybe that was why she hadn’t? For the moment she towelled off, slipped on her skinny jeans and a turquoise long-sleeved T-shirt, and padded into the kitchen to say bye to Shar, she missed it—his evocative crisp citrus scent.

Irrational? Absolutely, but it wasn’t every day an amazingly hot guy left his designer aftershave imprinted on her skin.

The perky hum died in her throat as she caught sight of Shar waving a stack of messages at her.

‘These are for you.’

Liza raised an eyebrow. ‘All of them?’

Shar nodded. ‘I didn’t want to bombard you when you first came in.’

‘More like you wanted the goss and knew those would distract me.’

‘That too.’ Shar grinned and handed them over. ‘Looks like some editor from Qu Publishing is mighty persistent.’

Liza groaned. ‘Can’t those morons get a clue and stop badgering me?’

‘Doesn’t look like it.’ Shar pointed to the message slips in her hand. ‘All those are from her.’

‘No way.’

Liza flicked through the lot, twelve in all. Nine yesterday when she’d been out in the afternoon and later at the party, three while she’d been in the shower this morning.

‘She said she’d call back in ten minutes.’

‘Like hell.’ Liza stomped over to the bin and dumped the lot. ‘I’m sick to death of being pestered by this mob and I’m going to put a stop to it.’

Shar punched the air. ‘You go, girl.’

Liza grinned. ‘While I’m kicking some publisher butt, maybe you should stop watching daytime TV?’

‘Careful, cheeky.’ Shar shooed her away. ‘You’ve got an hour before I need to leave, so hop to it.’

Liza didn’t need to be told twice.

No way, no how, would she ever sell her story. Cindy needed to be protected at all costs and the last thing she wanted was a bunch of strangers reading about their lives and intruding.

For they would, she had no doubt. There’d be book tours and blog tours and a social media explosion if she told all. It was why these Qu Publishing vultures were hounding her. They knew a best-seller when they saw it.

Laughable, really. What would they say if they knew the truth? That she’d invented a fake life to protect her real one?

That every event, every lash extension, every designer gown,

had fitted a deliberate persona she'd cultivated to get what she wanted.

Lifelong security for her little sis.

And when her financial adviser rang today and gave her the good news about her investments maturing, she could put away her lash curler and hair straightener for ever.

Yeah, the sooner she set this publisher straight, the better.

She yanked on black knee-high boots and shrugged into a sable leather vest with fake fur collar. While being a WAG had been a pain, some of the perks, like the gorgeous designer clothes she'd got to keep on occasion, had been great.

She'd miss the clothes. She wouldn't miss the rest.

Time to hang up her stilettos and set the record straight.

* * *

Wade strode into the boardroom with five minutes to spare then spent the next thirty listening to a bunch of boring agenda items that could've been wrapped up in half that time.

He wished they'd cut to the chase.

The future of Qu Publishing depended on a bunch of old fuddy-dufs that wouldn't know a profit margin if it jumped up and bit them on the ass.

The members of the board were old school, had been best buddies with his dad and, in turn, were rather fond of his delightful wife Babs.

When the chairman had articulated that little gem at the party last night, he'd wanted to hurl.

Was Wade the only guy who could see through her fake wives?

By the board's decision to back Babs in her quest to sell Qu Publishing? Hell yeah.

He knew it would take a monumental effort to save this company. From the accounts down to the staff, Qu needed a major overhaul. And to do that they needed a cash injection, in the form of a mega best-seller.

Which reminded him. He needed to sign that WAG to a contract today. He'd up the ante with a massive cash injection from his own pocket, a hefty six-figure sum she couldn't refuse. From what he'd heard in snippets from memos, her sordid tale would be a blockbuster. Serial WAG, dated an international soccer star and a basketball player, a media darling from magazines to TV, a practised socialite who'd appeared everywhere in Australia from all reports.

He couldn't care less if she'd dated the entire Socceroos team and what she'd worn to do it but that kind of gossip drivel made the average reader drool. And sold books.

Thankfully his company had branched out into the lucrative young adult market and were making a killing but Qu readers expected factual biographies, so no use getting too radical when he'd probably only have a few months tops to save the joint.

Yeah, he needed to get that WAG to sign ASAP. He'd get straight onto it, once this meeting wound up.

'And now, gentlemen, we come to the last item on the agenda.' The chairman cleared his throat and glared at Wade as if he'd

proposed they collectively run down Bourke Street naked. ‘As you’ve seen from the proposal Mr Urquart Junior emailed us yesterday, he wants to give the company three months to see if it can turn a healthy profit.’

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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