



Lucky Enough

A Tiny Treat
from Natalie J. Damschroder

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Kyna strolled through the echoing Prudential Center in Boston. It was late, and she should be home in the tiny apartment she shared with three college students. But she was enjoying the solitude, something that had been nonexistent over the last two years. Plus, it was cold outside. Maybe fifty-five degrees wasn't bad for the middle of March, but she'd been in unending heat for months and was having a hard time adjusting.

She tucked her hands into the pockets of her denim jacket and eyed dresses in a boutique window. Sheer watercolor patterns on drapery material. Completely impractical, but the green-and-white one might be fun for Tuesday night, her first St. Patrick's Day pub crawl. The store was closed, though, being well after eleven p.m. She'd come back this weekend.

A sigh lifted her shoulders. No more stalling. Time to brave the lion outside and the roommates who never seemed to go to bed. And then she saw it. Through a restaurant window, on the TV over the bar. Oakland. Kansas City.

Football.

She plopped down on the bench in the center of the mall and leaned forward, bracing her elbows on her knees. There were about two minutes left in the game. Her blood hummed and she grinned. Kansas City was up by three. Oakland had the ball. The quarterback threw. Incomplete. But a flag went down, and the ref signaled pass interference. Man, she wished she could hear!

The emptiness around her disappeared, and she forgot about the echo that mocked her solitude. The game was at a minute forty-six, and Oakland was inside the red zone. The QB fell back to pass...

And the bartender reached up and snapped off the TV.

"Wha— *Noooooo!*" Kyna didn't stop to think. She launched herself off the bench and through the restaurant's doors, flinging them behind her and striding up to the bartender, who had halted in surprise, keys in hand, clearly about to lock up.

"Turn it back on!" She pointed at the TV.

"What?"

"The game. Turn it back on! They were about to score!"

He glanced at the dark television, and when he looked back at her, a scowl had taken over his face. His tired face, she noted. Lines around his well-formed mouth and circles under his bright blue eyes told her he'd probably been on his feet for a very long day. His nearly black hair was a tousled mess. It looked soft. She swallowed hard.

"It's March," he said, the slightest lilt of Ireland in his voice.

"Yeah, so?"

"That game was played in October."

She slapped her hands over her ears. "Don't tell me! Just please, turn it on so I can watch!"

The man eyed her and spun the key ring around his forefinger, catching the keys with a slap into his palm. Once. Twice.

"All right then."

It took him forever to get back to the TV to switch it back on. Kyna settled on a barstool, eyes locked on the screen but the rest of her locked on him.

"Thank you. It's only a minute and a half left. It won't be long."

He snorted, bending to pull a bottle out from under the bar. He placed two shot glasses on the polished wood and poured. The sharp sting of whiskey made her grin again. "American football. It'll take another hour."

"I haven't had whiskey in over two years." Never mind that she'd barely been old enough to drink it then. She reached toward her back pocket for her wallet, but he waved her off.

"A woman that determined to watch a *rerun* of a football game deserves a free shot. Go ahead."

"Thank you." She sipped it, wanting to savor rather than sling it. The Raiders had scored and Kansas City had the ball again. Another flag lay on the field.

She expected the guy to watch the game with her, or at least putter around, but he leaned on the bar and watched her watch the game.

"What's your name?"

She winced when the call went against Oakland. "Kyna." Out of the corner of her eye, she saw his eyebrows go up.

"That's a proper Irish name, as my ma would say. I'm Shane."

"Just as proper. Nice to meet you." She clinked glasses and flushed when he smiled right into her eyes.

"So tell me how a lass—"

"Oh, now you're laying it on," she protested. "You're not *that* Irish."

He laughed, a rumbly, warm sound. "Tell me how someone passionate enough to care about *Oakland*—they were winless up to this game, you know—hasn't seen it."

She smacked his hand. "Thanks for spoiling. So Kansas City doesn't score?" On the screen, the KC quarterback was sacked. "Never mind." Shane's arm on the bar next to hers seeped warmth. She had an urge to move closer.

"So?"

Oh. He'd asked her a question. "I've been in Africa for two years. Peace Corps. No football."

He laughed. "You're an Oakland Raiders fan and a Peace Corps volunteer?"

"God, no!" She made a face, and he laughed again, actually tapping the tip of her nose. Tingles ran down her body. She had to wait for them to pass before her brain was clear enough to answer. "I'm a Patriots fan." She held up her hand. "I know they won

the Super Bowl. My mom preordered the Three Games to Glory DVD for me." He chuckled, and damned if she didn't want to sit here all night, making him do it over and over. "But I've been a fanatic about football since I was a kid. I was walking through, enjoying the solitude but...I guess..." The realization came to her only as she said it. "I guess feeling a little lonely, too. So thanks for letting me in."

"I'm so glad I did." He shifted, the move closing the distance between them even more. "Not every day I meet a passionate sports fanatic do-gooder."

She sipped her whiskey. "Not every day I meet an appreciative Irishman who actually likes American football."

"Waaalll." He straightened and shook his head. "It's no substitute for *real* football, mind. But I'm obligated to say that." He leaned in again. "I do like it better."

She asked about his teams, and they talked sports for a while. She learned he was getting his master's in health communication. Since she was about to start in the med program at Tufts, that kept the discussion going. She forgot about solitude and the cold outside, and was only vaguely aware that Oakland won the game.

Something was happening here. Shane didn't look worn out anymore. Kyna lost track of what he was describing and just enjoyed his animation, the wild gestures as he acted out a scene from his classroom. Then he asked a question about water quality in Africa, and it was her turn to tell stories. Not all of them were funny. When she told about a young boy dying of a treatable illness, and how she played a role in saving him, she couldn't help tearing up. Shane cleared his throat and turned away to turn off the television, and she swore he swiped a finger under his eye.

"Holy crap!" She'd accidentally glanced at her watch and was appalled that it was nearly three in the morning. "Shane, I am *so* sorry."

"Uh-uh." He settled his elbows on the bar and tugged her hand, flipping it over so she couldn't see the watch anymore. His fingers traced her palm, causing more shivers, but he held her gaze. From mere inches away.

"Uh-uh?" she whispered, her eyelids suddenly heavy. "It's not three?" All she could see now was his mouth. One side kicked up, cutting a bracket into his cheek. His lips were smooth and delicious-looking.

"I'm sure it's three," he murmured. His head angled to one side. "But you're not allowed to apologize for it." He slowly tilted forward. A hint of whiskey brushed her nostrils right before his mouth pressed to hers.

Her eyes closed. She held perfectly still, savoring the pressure, the perfection. They were sealed to each other, heat-fused, and her chest filled. Two heartbeats later he parted his lips, just a little, and moved deeper into the kiss. She might have whimpered. Shane half-groaned in response and opened his mouth wider. She tasted hunger now, and answered it. The rail dug into her ribcage. Shane's hand tightened around hers and dragged it forward, as if trying to pull her into his arms. She opened further, feeling empty and incomplete, and his tongue filled her mouth, stroking eagerly. His free hand

cupped the back of her head, and she nearly came apart. Would have totally jumped him if they hadn't had two feet of wood—ha!—separating them.

Slowly, she eased back. Shane pressed his hands flat on the bar, leveraging himself up to follow her and clinging to her mouth until the last possible second.

When he dropped back his eyes glowed. "Wow."

"Yeah." She swept a thumb across her tingling lips. "Wow works."

He turned to his left, swept his hand through his hair—damn, she should have touched it while she had the chance—and turned right for half a second before making an obvious effort to stand still. "I really hope you don't have to work in the morning. I mean, this morning." He cringed. "I can't apologize, though."

"I'm working afternoons the rest of this week. So I can sleep in." Her noisy roommate had an early class and usually made it impossible to go back to sleep after she left, but Kyna didn't care. The only important thing right now was that she'd see Shane again. But how did she ask without looking needy?

"Good, good." He looked down the bar, then out through the glass, and back into the shadows of the empty restaurant. "So, listen. This weekend—well, every weekend—I work nights. And Monday and Tuesday are going to be insane with the holiday."

"Right." She slid off her stool, grabbing her jacket from the one beside her and slurping up the last of the cola he'd poured her a couple of hours ago. "And you've got classes and stuff. I get it." Situational romance. She saw it all the time. Hookups overseas between people who never saw each other again. It wasn't his fault she liked him so damned much. "Maybe I'll—"

"No, that's not—I mean, dating's hard, that's all. Timewise."

She nodded and kept her head down while she shoved her arms into the sleeves. Getting out of here *now* was imperative if her memory of this night was going to stay sweet.

"Kyna." He reached over and caught her elbow. "What I'm trying to say, *badly*, is...would you like to come over and watch football with me on Sunday? iTunes has a lot of the games. I can make brunch and we'll catch you up on all the ones you missed while you were gone."

A grin slowly took over her face as sunshine filled her body. It had to be seeping out her ears, but she laughed a little. "Are you sure? You don't know what you're in for. I'm kind of a nut."

He released her and hopped over the bar—*hella* sexy move—to stand in front of her. "I know exactly what I'm in for, and it's going to be brilliant. Now hang on while I lock up, and I'll walk you home."

She did as he asked and stepped outside, glancing at the bench where she'd sat, completely alone, thinking that was how she wanted it to be, not recognizing the loneliness that came from being away from the people who got you.

Something told her she was never going to be lonely again.

Award-winning author Natalie J. Damschroder writes high-stakes romantic adventure, including her two paranormal series, [The Soul Series](#) and [Goddesses Rising](#). If you liked this story you'll probably like her reunion Christmas novella, *If You Believe in Me*, and the sequel now available as a free read [on her website](#). If you prefer romantic adventure without the paranormal, check out her [stand-alone romantic adventures here](#). Learn more about her at her website, www.nataliedamschroder.com, follow her on Twitter [@NJDamschroder](#), or like her Facebook page at [/NJDamschroder](#).