



The Love Game (The Anderson Family)

By Regina Hart

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His game. Her rules.

Tyler Anderson is poised to take over the reins of his family-owned computer gaming company. But first he has to launch his latest invention. That means teaming up with self-made marketing consultant Iris Beharie, whose brash confidence and sizzling beauty are throwing the reserved computer designer off his game.

Landing the plum Anderson Adventures account could save Iris's fledgling PR firm and prove to her skeptical siblings that she has what it takes to succeed. Too bad Tyler doesn't play well with others...except when he and Iris are alone. As the gorgeous gaming genius sheds his introverted image in the bedroom, things are heating up in the boardroom in the cutthroat fight for CEO. Amid distrust and treachery, is Ty ready to gamble everything on a love that's as real as it gets?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Regina Hart is the contemporary romance pseudonym of award-winning author Patricia Sargeant. Her various pastimes and hobbies, include sports—both college and pros—movies, music and, of course, reading. She loves chatting with readers. Contact her at BooksbyPatricia@yahoo.com.

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"You're not ready to take charge."

Tyler Anderson had heard those words from his father before. In the past, he'd been disappointed and hurt. But this time, Foster Anderson's certainty that Tyler wasn't ready to lead their family-owned computer gaming company fired him up.

"I disagree." He locked gazes with his father, who was also his boss.

"All right." Foster settled back on his chair. A spark of interest brightened the ebony eyes Tyler had inherited. "Convince me."

"I've worked at Anderson Adventures for more than twenty years, since I was fifteen." Tyler straightened, laying out his case with confidence. "I've been around these offices, watching and learning what everyone does since I was eight. I know this company from the bottom up."

"That's true." Foster nodded. "You know the company's operations."

"I've shadowed key people in every department—finance, sales, human resources, information technology, customer service."

His father was aware of the finance classes Tyler had taken. But no one could see the numbers as clearly as his cousin, Xavier Anderson, the company's vice president of finance. Foster also knew Tyler had made sales calls with Donovan Carroll, his college classmate and Anderson Adventures' vice president of sales.

"I don't dispute that you know this company almost as well as I do." Foster balanced his elbows on the arms of his black leather chair, locking his fingers together in front of his pale gray shirt. "Son, you know how proud I've always been of your interest in the company. But Anderson Adventures is more than its departments."

"As vice president of product development, I'm aware of that." Tyler leaned forward as he rushed to reassure his father. "I've designed several of our most successful games."

"You've designed all of them. You have a keen imagination, as well as great creative talent and programming skills. You've built a very fine product-development department."

"Then why don't you think I'm ready to lead the company?" Tyler's head was spinning. *What am I missing?*

Foster's sigh came from deep inside. "I've explained this to you before. Anderson Adventures is more than the computer games we develop. I don't question that you know enough about the operation to run the business. What I question is whether you have the people skills to lead the company."

Foster rose from his chair and strolled to the window, sliding his hands into the front pockets of his slate-gray suit pants. Tyler's father was a tall, lean, charismatic figure. Despite his quiet demeanor, people knew when he entered a room. Foster's sepia-brown chiseled face was smooth and clean shaven. His tight curls were still dark brown with barely a hint of gray. Physically fit, Foster exercised at least five days a week. Tyler often jogged with him on the weekends and was sore by Monday morning, just as he was today.

"I don't understand." Tyler stared at his father, trying to read the older man's mind. "If you think I can run the business, why don't you think I can lead the company?"

Foster turned from his fifth-floor view of downtown Columbus, Ohio. It was the first Monday of March. Still, the threat of snow hung heavy in the clouds. "Did you know Jonas in accounting has a son who earned his master's from Clemson University last semester?"

"No, I didn't."

"The company sent his son a gift card as a graduation present."

"That's nice." *But what does it have to do with my running the company?* "Last month, Trudy in purchasing became a grandmother for the third time. Her daughter delivered a healthy baby boy."

"That's wonderful." *Why are you telling me this?*

"The company sent flowers to her daughter's hospital room." Foster cocked his head. "You didn't know that, either, did you?"

"No, I didn't." *And your point is... ?*

Foster crossed back to his desk, past the row of photos on his wall. Here, images of holiday potlucks, birthday festivities, engagement parties and baby showers memorialized Anderson Adventures' celebrations. His father settled back onto his chair. "When was the last time you spoke to your coworkers, other than Xavier and Donovan?"

Does saying hello when I pass people in the hallway, cafeteria or restroom count? Probably not.

"I..." Tyler's gaze shifted to the family photos lining the credenza behind his father's desk. There was one of him and his father with Tyler's mother, taken the last year of her life.

"You know the business side of Anderson Adventures but you don't know its people." Foster took a drink of coffee from the World's Greatest Dad mug Tyler had given him when he was nine years old. "And the fact is, it's the people behind the company who've made it a success."

"I know."

Foster gave him a dubious look. "You need to work harder to show it, son."

"I will."

"Good, because I've decided to retire at the end of this year."

"What?" Shock and apprehension sent a chill through Tyler's nervous system. "Why?"

Foster chuckled. "I'm sixty-eight years old, Ty. This company has consumed more than half of my life. It's been fun, exciting, frustrating and challenging. Now I'm tired. It's time for me to move aside and let younger people—you, Xavier and Donovan—take the reins."

Now Tyler was apprehensive for another reason. "Xavier and Van aren't interested in running the company. They've said as much."

"I know. But your taking over as CEO is not guaranteed, son." Foster leveled a look at him.

"If not me, then who?"

"I'd have to go outside of the company." Foster's eyes were troubled.

Silence crashed into his father's office. Tyler took a moment to pull his thoughts together. "Anderson Adventures is a family-owned company. You'd hire an outsider to lead it?"

"I don't want to but I will if I have to."

Tyler rubbed his eyes with his thumb and two fingers. "Dad, I've got to tell you, I'm not happy with the idea of a stranger taking over our company. Xavier and Van won't be, either."

"Then don't let it happen." Foster brooked no argument. "Step away from your computer. Prove you can run this business *and* lead its people."

"How am I supposed to do that?" Frustration tightened the muscles in Tyler's neck and shoulders even as he strained to keep it from his voice.

"We're releasing your latest computer game in July."

"Right." Tyler nodded. "'Osiris's Journey.' We're dropping it simultaneously online and through brick-and-mortar stores the weekend after Independence Day."

"You're going to hire a marketing consultant and be the point person for our product launch. You'll have to work with our accountants to manage the budget, our sales team to come up with the list of key accounts, and our IT team for testing and talking points."

"I'm vice president of a department." Tyler struggled to mask his horror. "I can't tie up my time on a product launch." Not to mention the fact he didn't want to interact with that many people.

"Learn to delegate." Foster lifted a business card from his desk. "And I want you to interview The Behavior Agency."

"I've never heard of them." Tyler took the card from his father.

"It's an up-and-coming firm. I know the family and I have it on good authority that the agency is creative, professional and customer focused."

"I'll give them a call." Tyler rose to leave.

"I want you to succeed, son." Foster's words stopped him. "But if you don't have loyalty from the people in the company, the company won't succeed."

Tyler nodded, then exited his father's office. He felt the weight of Foster's words—as well as incredible pressure. He had less than four months to gain the loyalty of Anderson Adventures' seventy employees—not including himself, and his father, aunt, cousin and college classmate.

What if I fail?

Then the forty-three-year-old company founded by his father and uncle would be turned over to a stranger. He couldn't let that happen.

Tyler glanced at the business card in his hand: Iris Beharie, President, The Beharie Agency.

Can you help me with the most important product launch of my life?

Tuesday morning, Iris Beharie pushed through the glass doors leading to the fifth-floor reception area of Anderson Adventures. She scanned the room, half expecting to be pounced on by a television crew, telling her she'd been punked. How would a multimillion-dollar company know about her little firm and why would they invite her to submit a bid for their product launch? If they didn't have their own in-house marketing and public relations department, then surely they had a much larger marketing consultant company on retainer.

The friendly woman at the modern and modular front reception desk who'd buzzed her in regarded her with a curious smile. "Good morning. May I help you?"

Iris surreptitiously wiped her sweaty palm on the skirt of her cream business suit. She stepped forward. "Good morning. I'm Iris Beharie. I have a nine o'clock appointment with Tyler Anderson."

With her pretty, wholesome looks; neat, blond bob; and twinkling, cornflower-blue eyes, the receptionist reminded Iris of an older Doris Day. Her nameplate read Sherry Parks.

"Just a moment." Sherry picked up the telephone receiver and selected a few buttons. "Ty, Iris Beharie is here to see you." Pause. "All right." She stood as she replaced the phone, then gestured toward the crimson leather guest chairs beside her desk. "He'll be with you in a few minutes. Please make yourself comfortable. May I take your coat?"

"Thank you." Iris handed over her periwinkle wool coat. She kept her briefcase with her.

Sherry walked to a section of the cherrywood wall and slid it open to reveal a closet. The receptionist hung Iris's coat, then slid the door closed again. "Would you like some coffee?"

"I'd love some, if it isn't any trouble."

Sherry waved a dismissive hand. "It's no trouble at all. Cream and sugar?"

"Just cream. Thank you."

Sherry's brisk pace carried her past other administrative desks and into a back room.

Iris turned toward the crimson guest chairs. The two-inch heels of her cream pumps were silent on the thick silver-and-black carpet. Despite its cool glass-and-metal decor, the reception area gave the impression of warmth and welcome. It also was well-maintained. Her eyes skimmed the covers of the industry magazines neatly spread across the tempered glass Caravan desk in the far corner.

The walls showcased their most successful games, as well as candid metal-framed photos of employees smiling or laughing into the camera. Iris found herself smiling back. Some of the photos had been taken decades earlier, judging by the hair and clothing of the people in the pictures, including a much younger Sherry Parks.

Were Anderson Adventures employees really that happy? Perhaps if she'd worked for a company like this one, she wouldn't have left her job to start her own firm on a leap of faith.

"I'm sorry I took so long." Sherry reappeared with what looked to be a twenty-ounce mug of coffee.

"Not at all. I appreciate your trouble." Iris took the hot drink from the receptionist. "This is one big mug."

"The Andersons love their coffee. And they assume everyone else does, too." Sherry returned to her desk.

The fondness in the woman's voice implied a positive employee morale. A good sign.

Iris settled onto one of the guest chairs. "That's a lot of pressure on whoever makes the coffee."

"Whoever gets here first makes it. That's usually Foster, Tyler, Xavier or Donovan." Sherry settled onto her chair, pulling it under the desk. "After that, whoever pours the last cup makes the next pot."

Very egalitarian. It was a credit to these high-powered executives that they didn't wait for the staff to make the coffee. And the fact that Tyler Anderson—the vice president of product development—regularly arrived at work early enough to make the first pot explained how he could have responded so early Monday morning to the proposal she'd submitted Sunday night.

Iris took a sip. "This is delicious. Who made it?"

"If it's good, it wasn't Van. Everyone complains his coffee tastes like antifreeze. He says, if they don't like it, they should get in earlier." Sherry paused as they both laughed. "But the coffee goes pretty quickly. It's nine o'clock. That's probably the third pot."

Iris's eyes widened. "You weren't kidding about their coffee addiction."

"Sorry to keep you waiting." A strong baritone resonated throughout Iris's nervous system. "Ty Anderson."

Iris looked up—way up—to the tall, dark, handsome man who'd stopped in front of her. *This* was the vice president of product development? She was definitely being played. The only way a desk jockey would look like Idris Elba was if he came from central casting.

His features were silver-screen perfect. His high forehead and bright ebony eyes indicated a keen intelligence that one shouldn't underestimate. His squared jaw signaled a stubbornness that would be a challenge. His full, well-shaped lips implied a subtle sensuality she shouldn't even think about.

Iris stood, taking his large, outstretched hand. His warm skin sent a shock up her arm. "It's nice to meet you, Mr. Anderson. I'm Iris Beharie."

"Ty. This way, please." He stepped aside, releasing her hand to gesture in the direction from which he'd come. "Sherry, thank you."

"You're welcome, Ty." The Doris Day double gave him a fond look.

Iris settled the strap of her black briefcase onto her left shoulder and hoisted the mammoth coffee mug with her right hand. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Sherry lifted her hands, crossing her fingers. "Good luck."

Iris tossed Sherry a grateful smile before following Tyler down the hall. His broad shoulders were wrapped in a white jersey. His long legs were covered in chocolate suit pants. She jerked her gaze from his butt and looked around the office suite. Tyler stopped beside a frosted glass door and waved her inside. She glimpsed his name and title on the silver frame beside the threshold.

"Have a seat." He closed his door, then waited for Iris to claim a chair at the small glass conversation table.

"Thank you." Her palms were sweating again.

His office was big, bright and painfully neat. Project folders were staggered in a metal filing system on his silver-and-glass L-shaped desk. His black leather chair was tucked under his table. One of the twenty-ounce silver-and-black coffee mugs stood beside his computer mouse.

Her office would drive him nuts.

Tyler also seemed obsessed with time. His large desk calendar was covered with notes. Dates were crossed off the wall calendar opposite his desk. Project timelines were pinned to a board behind his chair.

Frightening.

Iris noted his minifridge, microwave and radio. Was he preparing for a lockdown?

Tyler came around to join her at the conversation table. Rather than watch him fold his long, lean body onto the smoke-gray padded seat opposite her, Iris distracted herself by pulling a writing tablet and pen from her briefcase.

"Your proposal is impressive." Tyler tapped the electronic tablet in front of him.

"Thank you." So far, so good.

"I've also reviewed your firm's website. The two seem to be in contradiction."

"How so?" Iris gripped her ballpoint pen as she forced herself to hold Tyler's penetrating gaze. She really wanted this account.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shane Bodine:

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