



a RH College  
Hockey Romance

NOT YOUR  
PUCKING BUNNY

# THE AUCTION

BOOK ONE

USA Today Bestselling Author

Melissa Adams

# Table of Contents

[Dedication](#)

[The Auction](#)

[1. | The Highest Bidder](#)

[2. | Wallowing Wallflower](#)

[3. | The Solution](#)

[4. | The Rebounds](#)

[5. | Sexy Getting Ready Routine](#)

[7. | Pucks And Balls](#)

[8. | The Mouth Of Truth](#)

[9. | Funnel Cake](#)

[10. | Breakfast At Lakyn's](#)

[11. | Cockblockers](#)

[12. | The Bunnies](#)

[13. | The Dick Pic](#)

[14. | Victory Rush](#)

[15. | The Perfect Ride](#)

[16. | Party Games](#)

[17. | Chivalry](#)

[18. | Prince Charming](#)

[19. | Third Date](#)

[20. | Paparazzi](#)

[21. | Royal Stalkers](#)

[22. | Prince Of Hearts](#)

[23. | Some Like It Hot](#)

[24. | Walk Of Shame](#)

[25. | Chances](#)

[26. | A Hollow Victory](#)

[27. | Tonight's The Night](#)

[28. | Teammates](#)

[29. | The Bet](#)

[The Heartbreakers | 1. | No Peace In Hell](#)

To all my readers.

This is for you.



# The Auction

Copyright © 2023 Melissa Adams  
Published by Melissa Adams



ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this publication may be reproduced/transmitted/distributed in any form. No part of this publication shall be shared by any means including photocopying, recording, or any electronic/mechanical method, or the Internet, without prior written consent of the author. Cases of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law are the exception. The unauthorized reproduction/transmitting of this work is illegal. This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are products of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

No part of this book may be used to create, feed, or refine artificial intelligence models, for any purpose, without written permission from the author.



# 1.

## The Highest Bidder



Luca



“ITEM NUMBER THIRTEEN, Cash Hanbury,” the dean announces with a proud smile.

I see my teammate walking forward onto the stage, and as expected, the girls in the audience go crazy.

Catcalls and a resounding round of applause almost cover the dean’s voice despite the fact that he has a microphone.

I can barely contain a chuckle at the sight of how Cash rubs the back of his neck, obviously embarrassed by the rowdiness of the audience.

“Cash is a junior, member of Gamma Delta Tau since his freshman year, and starting goaltender of our Division One hockey team. He was born and bred in Star Cove, and he’s here at Star Cove College on a hockey scholarship. The lucky lady with the highest bid on Cash will be taken on a date down to the pier to enjoy all the amenities our town can offer to tourists and locals alike. Bids start at two hundred and fifty dollars.”

I’m not surprised in the slightest when one of the girls immediately raises her hockey stick shaped paddle with her bidding number and yells, “Two fifty!”

What part of silent auction doesn’t she get? I bet my trust fund that she’s a Zeta.

Tonight’s auction is open to any students and doesn’t see just the hockey team being auctioned for a date, but also the



football team and the swim team too. There are also a few of the guys from the collegiate skydiving team.

Star Cove is an Ivy League school, and the level of Fortune 500 heirs, celebrity nepo babies, and students that come from old money rival schools like Yale and Harvard, so the dean's idea of getting some of the funds for the new athletic center by doing an auction for the student population isn't as dumb as it could look.

Opulence surrounds us even tonight, as most of the outfits on the women in the room have five figure price tags.

Of course the hottest and rowdiest in the audience are the girls in Zeta Theta Beta.

They get extremely territorial when it comes to the hockey team. The official excuse is that most of us are also members of Gamma Kappa Tau, their affiliate fraternity, and I'll be surprised if they let anyone else win one single bid on one of us.

I'm okay going out with a Zeta, since they are mostly hot and I'm new here. I transferred from Yale. The Connecticut winters were too depressing after growing up in Italy for most of my life.

I wanted to come back to my native US for college, since playing hockey in Italy isn't really a thing.

Hockey is a recent love for me. I picked it up in my senior year of high school when I was an exchange student in Seattle. I took to it like a duck to water, and I never looked back. Since the first time I played on a rink, I've been eating, sleeping, and breathing hockey with the occasional hookup to take the edge off.

Joining the Star Cove Knights was easy. The coaching team jumped at the opportunity to recruit me when they heard I was unhappy in New Haven.

Gamma Delta Tau was a given since I was a member of the Yale chapter and a legacy.

"Three hundred!" another girl yells.

I let out that chuckle when the bidding heats up and the girls become more and more vicious. So much for them being “sisters.”

My attention is attracted by the only girl who doesn't look interested in joining the bidding war.

I don't know her that well, but everyone on campus knows who she is because she's the president of Zeta Theta Beta.

Bay Woods is sitting smack in the middle of the front row, with her paddle on her lap and a serene expression on her pretty face.

I noticed her immediately because she's smoking hot, but she's taken. She's dating a brother and teammate, so she's totally off-limits.

Our eyes meet, and I smile when her lips curl up as I'm caught staring.

That's when she suddenly lifts her paddle. “Three grand.”

Huh. Weird.

What's Topher going to say, seeing his girlfriend bid on another guy? He's standing right next to me, and Bay has already secured a date with him for the minimum bid. Obviously no one on campus, and especially in the Zeta house, would dare bid on a date with the president's boyfriend.

Another girl bids an extra five hundred, and that's when Bay shoots her “sister” a death glare.

“Five grand.”

The dean taps the gavel to award her a date with Cash after offering the audience the opportunity to beat Bay's bid.

Two more of my teammates and brothers are “bought” by two more Zetas.

I can't take my eyes off Bay, who remains calm in her seat until it's time for Blaze, our enforcer, to step forward.

“Item number sixteen, Blaze Dunn, junior from the great state of Michigan. Fierce on the ice, Blaze is the life of the party when he takes off his skates. Master of ceremonies of his

fraternity, our player number forty-two enjoys the outdoors and walks on the beach...”

I almost snort at the description of Blaze’s hobbies. The guy is a jokester, and I’m sure he gave the dean’s office those lame hobbies ironically. Aside from a good fight on the ice, I know for a fact that he enjoys pussy. We have that in common, and I respect a guy who gets around as much as I do.

My attention is again on the audience when history repeats itself and the same bidding war that happened with Cash transpires in the auditorium.

What is Bay Woods playing at? She bids another five grand on a date with Blaze.

I look at Topher, and he shakes his head with a soft chuckle.

Well fuck, if the guy isn’t jealous from seeing his girlfriend bid on his teammates and brothers, then who am I to judge?

My attention is back on the auction when the dean calls my name. “Item number seventeen. Our hockey team left winger Luca Leighton-Rossi. Luca is a transfer from Yale, where he won the national championship last year. Aside from his love of hockey and parties with his Gamma brothers, he’s a film and astronomy double major. The bids start at two hundred and fifty dollars for the privilege to go on a date with Luca to the upcoming Movies Under the Stars festival organized by the Star Cove Country Club. Do we have a bid for two-fifty?”

Don’t get me wrong, I totally expected a bidding war. I just started here at Star Cove in the summer, coming to the preseason training camp, and what can I say?

The ladies both on and off campus love me. I’m not trying to be a douche, I just believe in honesty.

What I didn’t expect was a repeat of the situation with Cash and Blaze.

Bay Woods wins a date with me for another five grand, and when I look at Topher, he chuckles as if we were on this stage to do stand-up comedy.

I look at Blaze and Cash, and they look as confused as I feel.

Bay gets up and throws a satisfied smile in the direction of the stage before walking out of the auditorium on her sky-high heels.

The auction isn't even over, and I know without a doubt that my two teammates and brothers must be having my same thought right now.

What the fuck?



## 2.

# Wallowing Wallflower



Lakyn



THE LIBRARY IS DESERTED on a Friday night.

Classes have just started, and I bet everyone is at some kind of party tonight. Not that I'm much of a party girl, but right now, I'm just not in the mood to be around too many people.

I count the fact that I'm alone in here as a small blessing.

My shift will be over in about twenty minutes, and all I have waiting for me is a good book and my bed.

It sounds like the perfect weekend plan, if you ask me. The only downside of being alone is that I'll have nothing keeping me from checking my phone and his social media.

As a matter of fact, I'm fighting the urge to check on them right now.

I open Instagram on my phone, and the first thing I see is Jonathan's smiling face and his arm around a hot-looking girl with shiny dark red hair. They are at a party, and they are both holding Solo cups and standing too close for being just friends. She looks vaguely familiar, but it must be my overactive imagination, because if Jon had introduced me to any girls, I would remember.

I close my eyes in the futile attempt to stop the tears that are welling in my eyes from burning hot tracks down my face.

They can't be more than friends, right? Jon ended things with me two weeks ago, and we've been together since our

senior year in high school.

I know long distance relationships aren't easy, but we were each other's best friends. I can't believe he would move on so quickly.

I know for sure I haven't moved on. Not even close.

Since he called me to tell me it was over the night I came back to campus after summer break, I've barely been able to function. All I've been able to do is drag myself to class and come to work. I've barely even seen Bay.

The second I'm free of any obligation these days, I walk to my apartment just off campus and lock myself in my room.

Jon's face gets blurry as I stare at the photo through teary eyes, tracing the contour of his face on the screen with trembling fingers. I miss him so much—fuck!

No, no, no, no.

I liked the photo by accident. I'm such an idiot.

I touch the little heart icon and unlike the photo, willing my heart to stop pounding in my chest as if I'd been running the New York marathon. I'm not the running type, Jon does that.

*Okay, this isn't the end of the world, calm down Lakyn.*

What are the chances that he'll have seen my like in the two seconds it was there?

I exhale a shuddering breath. He's at a party with another girl. I'm sure he isn't checking his Instagram like some pathetic stalker who volunteered to take the closing shift tonight, so I wouldn't have to go out with my sister and her "sisters."

I relax just a smidge.

Crisis averted.

It's almost time to close down here, and to be honest, I can't wait to take a hot shower, make myself a grilled cheese sandwich, and crawl into bed with my e-book reader.

I unlock my phone screen to double-check that there are no repercussions from my fat fingers, and I immediately frown.

I had my app open on Jon's profile, and now I can't see it anymore.

Did he just block me?

Oh no, it can't be. What the fuck am I going to do?

Maybe I should text him and make up some excuse that doesn't imply that I was stalking his profile.

I know he said it was better if we didn't talk for a while, just to get used to being broken up, but I think it's the right thing to do.

The three dots that mean that someone is composing a text appear the second I open our message thread.

Shit.

That can only mean that he did see it, and he really blocked me.

What should I do?

I could text him to explain that it was an accident, and I didn't intend to like that photo—it would be the truth, because there's absolutely nothing I like about seeing him out having fun with another girl—or I could wait and see what he says first. Maybe that's better.

I don't even finish the thought before the three dots disappear.

My throat bobs as I swallow the lump of cold dread that's lodged in it.

I think I should text him and explain.

**Me:** *I'm sorry, ~~babe~~ Jon, I was just—*

“What the fuck do you think you're doing, Lake? You better not be messaging or stalking whom I think you're about to message or stalk.”

The phone lands on the library's front desk with a noise that does nothing to reassure me that the screen didn't just



shatter.

“Bay, what the fuck? You scared me to death. What are you doing here? I thought you were at a party anyway.”

My twin sister shakes her head, her hands on her hips. “I was at an event you were invited to, but you didn’t bother to show up,” she says, her tone full of displeasure.

I swear to God she sounds just like Mom when something doesn’t go her way.

“I’m sorry, Bay, but I told you I had to work, and as you can see—” I stand up to collect my purse and keys as I watch the computer power off.

“What the fuck are you wearing?” Bay asks, her eyes widening in horror. “Oh my fucking God. You didn’t come to work in sweatpants, Lake. Tell me I’m actually drunk and I’m having a hallucination.”

I roll my eyes at my sister’s dramatic flair. “I did. It was laundry day, and I didn’t have anything else to wear.”

“Bullshit,” she bites out. “Lake, how are you ever going to get another boyfriend if you go out looking like a homeless person? No offense to homeless people but—” Her voice softens as she looks at me.

Sometimes we can feel each other’s emotions, and she probably knows how sad I am right now.

“Maybe it doesn’t matter, because I’m not looking for a new boyfriend.” I sound defensive even to my own ears.

Bay crosses her arms over her chest. “You should. Jon is a loser, and you know I never liked him. Next time you’re out of clothes, you can borrow something from my closet.”

I snort. “Yeah, right.”

She looks offended. “What? We’re the same size, and you know that what’s mine is yours, Lakyn.”

I look at my sister. Sure, we’re identical twins, but we couldn’t be any more different.

Bay's face is perfectly made up, her hair in a high ponytail that highlights our dainty neck and high cheekbones.

My twin sister looks stunning in a sequined mini dress and matching high heels.

It's a far cry from my sweatpants and oversized hoodie.

As I torment the ends of my hair, I can't help but notice how my limp, slightly frizzy locks are a far cry from Bay's polished look.

Her gaze softens, and I'm sure she knows exactly what I'm thinking. "Lakey-Lake," she coaxes, using the name she made up for me when we were kids. "I got you dinner. Boneless wings and a boatload of fries from your favorite place in town. Come on, I got enough for both of us to gorge on."

I eye her outstretched hand suspiciously. "I don't mean to sound ungrateful, but I don't think I can handle the Zeta house right now. I know you're going to disapprove, but there's been an incident with Jon on Instagram and—"

Her smile doesn't falter, and it fills my heart with the warmth I desperately need. "I'm sure whatever happened with dipshit isn't as bad as you think, Lakyn. I wasn't planning on taking you to the Zeta house. I know you're wallowing right now, and that's why I got us some greasy food, so we can do it together."

Her offer is incredibly sweet, especially considering how much she's always hated Jonathan. "I wouldn't want you to drop buffalo sauce all over your pretty dress."

Bay shrugs, nodding toward the library door. "I'm sure there are more sweats and hoodies at your place. Come on, did I mention that I got us cheese fries, with *bacon*?"

I laugh for the first time in over two weeks as my stomach lets out a growl of approval. "Gee, thanks. I know I look as awful as I feel, but you don't need to remind me."

She grabs my hand and walks me to the door. "Let's go, Lakyn. We'll eat our weight in wings and fries and you can tell me everything about your Instagram drama with dipshit while we watch rom-coms."

I follow her, stopping to lock the main door to the library.  
“I’m not in the mood for rom-coms tonight,” I inform her.  
“The asshole was at a party with his arm around another girl. I need blood and gore and shit, so tonight we’re wallowing in front of *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill*.”



### 3.

## The Solution



Lakyn



“OMFG, I LOVE BONELESS wings.” My sister moans, biting into a crispy nugget of delicious fried chicken, causing buffalo sauce to rain down her chin and eventually hit the sweatshirt she changed into.

Bay doesn’t even stop eating, continuing with the slightly obscene moans as she chews. “What?” She eventually stops with another wing midair, headed to her open mouth.

I smile. “Nothing. Thank you for doing this, Bay.”

Her response is a shrug that makes the oversized sweatshirt fall off one of her shoulders. “Don’t mention it. This is what sisters are for, right? You know it goes beyond having your back. You’re my other half, Lakyn.”

She is.

Bay is my older sister. Seven whole minutes older than me. When we were kids, she used to make those seven minutes sound like seven years.

I might sound like a broken record when I say that we’re identical but different, but it’s the truth.

Our styles aren’t just different when it comes to clothes. Take our wing sauce preferences for example.

We agree wholeheartedly on preferring boneless wings, but our similarities end there. Bay loves buffalo sauce because she loves spicy food. If she’s feeling adventurous, she’ll even

order habanero sauce, and once she even tried to dip her wings in a ghost pepper mayo.

I'm a garlic and Parmesan kind of girl, and my sauce of choice is ranch.

Bay called me a chicken a few times—ha-ha—but I don't plan on obliterating my taste buds with the hottest sauce in the world.

“So, do you want to tell me what happened with dipshit this time?”

I roll my eyes. “I wish you'd stop calling him dipshit.”

She hits pause on *Kill Bill* on the frame of the “blood splattered bride,” and I have to admit that with all the buffalo sauce that ended on my white Star Cove College sweatshirt, she isn't far off from the bride on the screen.

“I... uhm...” I hesitate, reluctant to tell her because I don't want to make her opinion of Jon any worse.

You know, just in case we get back together.

Actually no, *when* he sees the error of his ways and returns, begging me to take him back.

Just so we make this clear, between me and Bay, I'm the patient twin.

“Lake!” she barks out. “I couldn't despise that loser any more than I already do. Spill the beans, sis.”

“Right, since you spilled all the sauce.” I snort.

Bay flips me off. “Because of your irreverence, I'm finishing the fries while I listen to what higher peaks of douche-baggery your ex managed to reach.”

Since we were talking about bones earlier, Bay is like the proverbial dog with a bone.

There's no use trying to distract her now that she sensed that something happened.

I tell her about the photo and my accidental “like.”

She scoots forward on the couch, grabbing my wrist with greasy fingers. “He blocked you? When will you understand that Jonathan is an asshole? Rather than crying about how much you miss him, you should count your blessings. Now that you’re free from that boring long-distance relationship, you can have some fun. Go on the rebound, get your freak on.”

I wipe my mouth with a paper towel after polishing off the last wing. There are still carrots and celery sticks in the basket, but I eye them suspiciously and wish Bay had brought some rocky road ice cream.

The first words on the tip of my tongue are that if Jon is an asshole, she should look at her own boyfriend, because Topher’s face should appear in the dictionary under the definition of “douche canoe.”

“I don’t want to go on the rebound, Bay,” I argue. “I’m still in love with Jon. I—”

“Puh-lease!” she scoffs. “How can you be in love with a guy who hasn’t even fucked you?”

I feel heat rise to my face, and I wish I could say it was the habanero sauce, but I haven’t had any. “I should have never told you that.”

Bay rolls her eyes. “You fucking didn’t! Remember? I *sensed* it.”

She totally did.

It’s that twin sixth sense. We both have it, but in Bay, it’s beyond powerful, like psychic level.

“Right, but you know Jon doesn’t believe in sex before marriage.”

That makes her furious. “Bullshit.” She opens her Instagram on Jon’s profile, shoving the phone in my face like a weapon. “The dipshit hasn’t blocked me. He’s totally fucking that girl, take it from me.”

I don’t want to believe her. “You don’t know that.”

She sighs. “Believe me, my sixth sense doesn’t end with our twin connection. He’s fucking that girl. I can feel it.”

I might want to bury my head in the sand, but deep down, I know Bay is right. “I miss him so much. He’s my best friend. I —”

“Take that back right now,” Bay snaps. “I am your best friend. Come here, Lakey-Lake.”

She pulls me into her arms, and I don’t even care that she smells like buffalo sauce. My eyes fill with tears, and I cry on her shoulder.

“You’re just in shock, sweetie,” she soothes. “You don’t miss him that much, at least as a boyfriend. Come on, you can’t miss someone you don’t even like kissing.”

I instantly regret letting that tidbit of information slip out last week. “He wasn’t that bad,” I say weakly.

It’s Bay’s turn to snort. “If I recall correctly, you felt like you needed to keep a towel at the ready to wipe your face every time he kissed you. That you felt like when his tongue entered your mouth, it expanded into this gigantic, slimy substance. Like when I dared you to touch a slug in the backyard when we were seven. Didn’t you say that?”

I did say that, and there’s no way Bay will forget it. “But kissing and sex isn’t everything. I—”

I know I said the wrong thing when she pulls me out of her hug and narrows her eyes. “Believe me, sex is very important in a relationship, and if dipshit is a terrible kisser, I can only imagine how bad he’s going to be when he has to use what I’m pretty sure is a small dick.”

Not that I would know anything about the size of his dick. I’m proud of myself when I manage not to say that out loud, but Bay is too perceptive to miss it.

“Shut the front door!” she exclaims, looking at me as if I were the one covered in buffalo sauce. “You didn’t even see mini-dipshit?”

I can’t deny it at this point. “No, I haven’t, but I’m sure his dick is just fine.”



“Yeah, fat chance.” Bay snorts. “Look, Lakyn, I’m being serious right now. That relationship was doomed from the beginning, and if you ask me, you dodged a bullet. How in the world were you going to buy a car without test driving it first?”

She’s referring to my five-year plan that included getting married after graduation. I have nothing to say in response, because now it isn’t going to happen anyway.

“Trust me, Lakyn, by ending things with you, he saved you from a lifetime of bad sex.”

I exhale, considering her words. “I just wish it didn’t hurt so much.”

Bay is the stubborn twin for sure, and tonight she’s on a mission to help me get over my heartache. “You’ve been long distance for over two years now. It’s not like you’ve spent a lot of time together since we started college. You don’t miss him, you miss the memory of him.”

She sounds so sure that I’m starting to think that she isn’t totally wrong. “Maybe. But I can’t think about anything else right now, everything reminds me of him. How do I forget the only boy I’ve ever loved?”

I should have known that Bay would have an answer. She always does.

“There’s only one way to forget a guy,” she declares.

I tilt my head to the side, curious to hear the solution to my problems. “What is it?”

“The only way to get over a guy is to get under another one.”

I blink a couple of times, because I’m not sure I get what she means. “How—”

“Go on dates, Lakyn. Play the field and find someone hotter—not that it’s hard to find someone hotter than dipshit—to help you forget your ex.”

Right, it’s easier said than done. “I don’t know, Bay. You’re the outgoing twin. I’m awkward, and I don’t even

know how to flirt. You know I hadn't even been on a date until Jon asked me to homecoming our senior year. Between my course load and my job, I have very little free time, so don't even suggest online dating."

I should know that something is going on when she offers me her innocent smile.

There's nothing innocent in it anyway, but she looks the picture of sisterly support. "I think you're right. Online dating isn't the way to go. You need someone faster, and you need someone hot so that Jon will eat his heart out, and I've got just the thing."

I brace myself for one of Bay's crazy ideas, but I admit that even I never could have predicted what she says next.

"Go out with a hockey player."

I roll my eyes. "I know your boyfriend is on the hockey team, but I don't think—"

She doesn't even listen to my objections, rifling into her bag and pulling out an envelope. "Here. Open it. You're welcome by the way."

I look inside, and there are three sheets of paper. Each one has a photo of a hot guy in a hockey jersey. They all look familiar. I've seen them around campus and at the library. I don't *know them*, know them, but everyone at Star Cove College knows *of* them.

"I don't understand, Bay. I don't know these guys. If you expect me to ask one of them on a date, you aren't only the outgoing twin, you're also the crazy one. These guys are popular, and I bet they are also either in Gamma Kappa Tau or another fraternity. Hot jocks and frat boys aren't my scene."

In typical Bay fashion, she ignores all my valid objections and chooses to hear what she wants. "So you agree they are hot."

I roll my eyes. "Duh. I'm not blind, of course they are hot, but there's no way popular guys like these three will even notice me, so thank you for your help, but—"

Her smile widens, and I should know I'm in trouble when she chuckles. "Lake, Lake, Lake. You don't have to worry about that because you're going on a date with each of them, starting tomorrow night."

Wait, what?

"Please, Bay." I groan as dread fills the pit of my stomach, making its contents roll around in a nauseating way. "Don't tell me you begged them or tricked them into going on a blind date with me."

She has the nerve to act outraged. "What? Of course not. I didn't need to beg or trick anyone. I bought you three dates at tonight's charity auction. And technically it isn't a blind date since they know what I look like, and you happened to have inherited your dazzling good looks from your older sister."

I look at her, too stunned to say anything for a long moment. "You did what? You *bought* me a date?"

She shakes her head. "Not one, three. You and dipshit have been together for a long time, and he's all you know, so I'm sure you don't even know what your type is. You can sample and choose the one you like best."

This is so crazy, I can't even wrap my head around it. "You *bought* me a date?" I repeat, sounding like a broken record.

"You're going on the first one tomorrow night with Cash Hanbury. It's a fun night at the pier."

It's official, my sister has lost her mind.

"I'm not going on a date with Cash Hanbury!" I snap.

Predictably, Bay misunderstands my words. "Oh, okay, so big and broody isn't your type? Fine, you have two more choices. That's why I bid on three different guys."

"No, I'm not going on any of those dates!" I stand up from the couch, raising my voice and thanking God that my roommate isn't home tonight. I don't want anyone witnessing my humiliation.

"Why the fuck not?" Bay bites out. "I spent fifteen grand to buy you those dates!"

Oh my fucking God. “You did what? Are you crazy? Why did you spend your hard-earned money on something so stupid?”

I feel partially furious and partially moved to the point of tears that my sister would spend five figures to help me get over being dumped.

Unlike many of the students here at Star Cove, we don’t come from money. The only reason Bay has that kind of cash flow is because her makeup and beauty channel is extremely popular, and she’s making so much money as an influencer that she’s paying for both our tuitions.

That’s why I took that job at the library. She says I don’t ever need to worry about paying her back. Whenever I argue with her about it, she reminds me that I’m the person she loves the most in the entire world and that I would do the same for her if roles were reversed.

Bay’s answer shouldn’t surprise me. “First off, Lakyn, I spend my money however I see fit. Besides, you’ve been so sad since that douche dumped you that I’ve been worried about you, so something needed to be done to shake things up.”

I know her heart is in the right place, but I think she went too far this time. “And your solution was to pay someone—three someones—to go out with me?”

She doesn’t look repentant, she’s actually proud of herself. “I didn’t pay them to go out with you. Their time was for sale—for an excellent cause, may I add—and I took advantage. It’s not like you would have found the courage to talk to any of them anyway, right? And I chose the best of the best for you.”

I’m starting to feel frustrated. “I think you should ask for a refund.”

She shakes her head. “Nope, no refunds. And you have a month to go on those dates. Use them or lose them, I’m afraid.”

God, this is a nightmare. “Then surprise three of your Zeta sisters with a date. I’m sure any girl without a boyfriend in

your sorority would be thrilled to date a hockey player.”

It sounds like I keep saying the wrong thing tonight.

Bay’s smile is triumphant. “You’re right. Any girl without a relationship would pay to go out with the three hotties I chose for you, and you get to do it courtesy of your favorite twin sister.”

Why is she so stubborn?

I thread my fingers through my admittedly greasy hair. “How do I have to tell you that I’m not going out with three jocks you *paid* to date me. Even if I didn’t feel so shitty about the breakup, I’m not going to—”

The notes of “Before He Cheats” by Carrie Underwood cause my heart rate to kick up a notch. I assigned it to Jonathan after he facetimed me to tell me that his feelings for me had changed, and he wanted to see other people.

I never thought he meant so soon.

I swipe at the screen with trembling fingers. It’s not a video call. By the background noise and music that assault my ears, I can tell that he’s still at whatever party that photo was taken at earlier.

“Hey, babe,” I say, trying to sound happy. Okay, not happy, that isn’t possible right now, but at least not as sad as I’ve been feeling lately.

Not like someone who has just eaten several pounds of boneless wings and fries and was arguing with her sister about the “dates” she bought at a charity auction.

If I was hoping that Jon called because he missed me, then I’m more of a fool than I thought I was.

“Don’t ‘babe’ me, Lakyn!”

I recoil at his tone.

He sounds furious and a little drunk. “Why the fuck did you like Ann’s photo? Were you stalking me?”

I shake my head even though he can’t see me. “No, I just opened the app, and it was the first photo that came on.” I was

totally stalking him, but the “like” was accidental. I had no intention of contacting him. Jon was clear when he said he didn’t want to talk for a while, and I had every intention of honoring his request.

“Cut the bullshit, Lakyn!” he bites out. “You were probably all alone in your room, creeping on my social media like a pathetic loser.”

A tear slides down my face, but it isn’t from sadness—I’m sure that will come later—it’s from red-hot indignation. “Actually, Jon, you couldn’t be more wrong. I was out on a date, and the phone was in my hands, but I wasn’t even looking at it. It was the equivalent of a butt dial.”

His voice goes down by an octave, and the surprise in his tone is more offensive than I care to admit. “You were out on a date?”

“Yes, Jon. Technically, I’m still on a date, which you’re very rudely interrupting. I thought we agreed not to talk for a while so we could move on and see other people.”

He stutters, “I... I...”

“Can I go back to my date or is there anything else you need?”

I’m proud of myself for how cold my tone is.

“Are you sure you’re telling me the truth, Lake? Are you really on a date, or are you in your apartment with your sister?”

Oh no he didn’t. “Bay is out with Topher, and I’m in my apartment with one of the guys on the hockey team. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’d love to go back to him. You know how much I hate being rude. Good night.”

I don’t give him the opportunity to say anything else and disconnect the call.

My shoulders sag as adrenaline leaves my body, and I’m literally shaking.

“Wow, Lakyn,” Bay says with awe in her voice. “I didn’t think you had it in you, but I’ve never been so proud of my

little sister in my entire life. What happened? You were crying that you missed him five minutes ago.”

I exhale a shuddering breath. “I just realized something. That girl in the photo with him? I knew she looked familiar, and I was right. She called and texted him constantly during summer break. I asked him about her, and he said she was just a friend, but when he called me just now, I saw that he changed his profile pic to the same photo I liked by accident. I know Jon better than I know myself. He wouldn’t have done that unless they were dating, and it just hit me that while I was freaking out about liking that photo, I caught the one straight underneath it with the corner of my eye. It was a photo of them kissing, and Jon was wearing the white yearbook club T-shirt his mom ruined by washing it with something red just before I left to come back to school, so that photo is from before summer break.”

Bay looks disgusted. “That motherfucker! I hate cheaters. What are you going to do?”

I can’t believe my own words. “I guess I’m going on those three dates my evil twin spent an outrageous amount of money on.”





## 4.

# The Rebounds



Cash



### WHY IS MY ALARM MOANING?

It's a Saturday morning, and on Saturdays, we have practice a little later than usual.

The offending noise rings in my ears again, and I roll out of bed with a groan.

It obviously isn't my alarm, since the moaning is coming from another room, which can only mean that one of my brothers got lucky last night after the charity auction.

I'm pretty sure I won't be able to go back to sleep, as the girl's moaning escalates to screaming—whoever that is, they must be getting pounded really good.

I absentmindedly run my hand over my hard shaft, yawning as I debate if I should take care of my morning wood or just go down to the kitchen for something to eat.

My stomach wins over my cock, and I head downstairs without even bothering to put on a T-shirt.

It isn't like most of my frat brothers haven't seen everything I have to offer in the locker room. Gamma Delta Tau isn't just made up by the hockey team, we have a fair share of football players, a couple of swimmers and windsurfers, and even a few skydivers.

Most of us play some kind of collegiate sport, so we're used to seeing other naked athletes on the regular.

There's always the chance of an encounter with a puck bunny or some other kind of jersey chaser as I make my way downstairs, but I'm not worried about offending them with my partial nudity.

Puck bunnies dig a naked athlete no matter what.

The heavenly smell of bacon reaches me even before the kitchen door comes into view, and I quicken my pace, hoping that whoever cooked breakfast is willing to share.

I can't suppress a chuckle at the scene of domestic bliss that greets me in the kitchen.

Our frat president, Topher, is sitting at the table with his girlfriend on his lap.

The smell of bacon didn't come from the stove but from a large take-out bag in the middle of the table.

"Hey, Cash." Bay smiles. "There's breakfast in that bag, and I also got coffee. Help yourself and join us. You're one of the guys I came here to see."

I don't let her tell me twice. I drag a chair from the table and lower myself onto it as I dip my hand inside the bag to grab a sausage, bacon and egg sandwich and a bag of mini hash browns.

"Aww, babe!" Topher complains, nuzzling her neck. "That wounds me. I thought you came here to see me."

I've always liked Bay, even if I can't say that I know her all that well. Of course she's fucking hot, and that was the first thing that made me notice her, but our acquaintance is mostly due to the fact that her sorority, Zeta Theta Beta, and our fraternity have always been paired, and we're invited to each other's events all the time.

Bay giggles at Topher's flirting, and it isn't the first time that I wonder if she knows that my teammate and frat brother steps out on her on the regular.

I observe them with a touch of envy as they kiss, and I think that maybe they have an open relationship. That would

explain why Bay bid on Luca, Blaze and me last night as well as bidding for her own boyfriend.

It would also explain the constant string of puck bunnies that Topher hooks up with every time Bay isn't in his vicinity.

I'm about to ask her about last night's auction, but we're all distracted by a high-pitched giggle.

"Thank you for last night, Joanna. I'll see you out."

Blaze stops by the kitchen door in sweats and no shirt—it seems to be today's unofficial uniform in the house, since Topher is in the exact same state of partial undress—with a skinny redhead in a skimpy dress by his side.

"Are you sure you don't want me to make you breakfast, pookie bear?" she whines in a fake baby voice that grates on my ears even worse than her squeal when he swats her butt.

"Nah, I've got a busy day ahead of me." He practically pushes her toward the front door, walking out of our view. "I'll see you around. Don't get into too much trouble out there."

We hear the front door close, and Blaze reappears a moment later sans puck bunny.

"Goddam, Blaze." Topher laughs. "That girl has the most annoying voice I've ever heard. How could you put up with her for an entire night?"

Our team's enforcer grins, stepping closer to the table. "Her voice wasn't a problem as long as I kept her mouth stuffed with cock. Sorry, Bay," he mutters, rubbing the back of his neck when he notices that we have female company this morning.

"No problem, Blaze. I don't blame you for wanting to shut her up. I got breakfast. Why don't you join us?"

Blaze takes a seat next to me. "Thank you, Bay. You're the best."

She really is, and she's been a regular presence in the Gamma house for the past year and a half.

I'm not going to lie, most of us love to hook up, and there's an incessant stream of girls passing through the house.

They are transitory though, and the unspoken rule is that we don't let puck bunnies or jersey chasers stay for breakfast.

Bay is different. She's a girlfriend, and Gammas value and respect girlfriends, especially when they are also Greek like Bay.

Her girlfriend status makes her like a little sister to the rest of us, also making her absolutely off-limits to any Gamma brother, even if her relationship with Topher was to come to an end.

This is why I don't understand why Bay bid on Blaze, Luca, and me last night. She could never go on those dates with us, unless Topher openly said that he was cool with it.

I'm trying to find a way to ask what's up without sounding like a total asshat, but when I finally know what I want to say, more girlie laughs and giggles erupt from the same spot where Blaze was standing not too long ago.

"You're the best sex I've ever had!" gushes a feminine voice.

"I can't get enough of your cock, it's so freaking huge!" a different girl purrs.

I crane my neck to see who the two girls are gushing on—no pun intended—my curiosity piqued because I recognize the voice of the girl who just praised the size of her hookup's dick. It's the same moan that interrupted my sleep not so long ago.

"Are you going to take us out for breakfast?" the voice whines again.

I must admit that the moan was way less annoying.

"Sorry, girls, no can do." Luca's back comes into my view as he blocks the kitchen door with his tall frame. "I'm totally swamped today, or I'd love to take you out. However, I've already opened a tab at the yacht club's restaurant and made a reservation for the two of you. They have a delicious bottomless brunch, *fantastico*."

I roll my eyes at how smooth the guy is.

Luca is my exact opposite. He's richer than Midas and has so much swagger that when I met him when we reported to start training, I wanted to hate him more than I care to admit.

However, I realized pretty quickly that the suave and pretentious veneer he shows the world is just a decoy to keep undesired people at arm's length.

Once you get past the annoying and super douchey first impression, Luca is a solid guy on and off the ice.

He accompanies the two girls to the front door, entering the kitchen a few moments later.

"Phew," he sighs, blowing a strand of hair off his forehead. "I thought that doubling up on a hookup was a sure-fire way to avoid stage-five clingers, but I guess I hadn't met those two. Now I can't even go to breakfast at the yacht club. They have the best buffet."

Must be nice to be able to have breakfast at a place where a burger costs forty bucks.

I immediately regret my jealous thoughts. It isn't Luca's fault if he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Actually, scratch that. In Luca's case, it's a platinum spoon encrusted with diamonds.

"If you're hungry, this is your lucky day." Bay smiles. "I got you guys breakfast. Help yourself, *Mr. Huge*."

We all chuckle at Bay's little dig, Luca included.

"I don't know what the fuck you have done to deserve the perfect girlfriend, Topher, but I'm not going to question it if that means free breakfast."

Luca takes a seat between me and Bay, digging into the breakfast sandwich as if he hasn't eaten in days.

There's a beat of silence at the table as we all eat, but it isn't uncomfortable.

I'm the first to finish, and I kick back the chair, standing up as I grab the empty take-out bag to start collecting all our

trash.

We might be frat brothers, and Gamma is a generous organization that pays for a housekeeper, but we all like living in a clean house, and except for very few exceptions—like Topher—we all do our part to keep the house presentable between weekly cleanings.

“Cash, are you in a hurry?”

Bay’s question stops me in my tracks. “Not really. We don’t have practice until noon, but I was thinking about throwing in some extra stretching and seeing our physical therapist. My muscles have been feeling tighter than I’d like lately. Why?”

Bay’s eyes go from me, to Blaze, to Luca. “The reason why I brought breakfast is because I was hoping to talk to the three of you.”

I sit my ass back down, giving Bay my full attention, and my two teammates do the same. Luca puts his phone down, and Blaze crosses his arms over his chest.

“How can we help you?” Blaze asks.

Bay takes a sip of her coffee before beginning. “As you know, I bought dates with all three of you last night.”

Blaze and I nod, and Luca winks at her. “Yeah, I was surprised that good ole Topher would let you play the field. At first, I was a little unsure if I could go out with a teammate and brother’s girl, but if he agrees—”

Topher barks out a laugh. “Shut the fuck up, Prince.” He flips him off, using his nickname on the ice. “You ain’t going on a date with my girl.”

I’d be lying if I said that I’m not a little disappointed. “No?” I ask.

Bay shakes her head, her long blonde hair catching a ray of sunshine and looking like spun gold. “No. I bought those dates with the intention of gifting them.”

Blaze groans. “That sucks. Do we get a say on who you gift them to? I mean, it’s one thing to go out with you, because

you're hot, but—”

“Yeah, I'm with Blaze on this one,” Luca chimes in.

I share their sentiment for sure, but I keep my mouth shut, predicting exactly what Bay is going to say next.

Call it goalie's sixth sense, but it's like on the ice, where I always know which direction the puck is coming at me from.

“Oh really?” Bay smirks, showing her sassy side. “That's interesting, since I don't recall any of you having veto power on who was allowed to bid on you last night.”

I chuckle. “I hate to say this to you, guys, but Bay is right. Anyone with an invitation to yesterday's auction could have placed a winning bid.”

“Suck up.” They both snort, but they know I'm right.

“Okay, so if it isn't you, who are we going out with?” I ask, since my first available day for that date was tonight, and this must be why Bay is here.

The answer shocks me. “My twin sister.”

“You have a twin sister?” I ask, because this is news to me. I mean, if there was a carbon copy of Bay on campus, I would have noticed. We're always doing events with the Zetas, and I would have seen that there were two hot blondes in the sorority house.

“Lakyn is my identical twin,” she explains, “but we don't run in the same circles. She didn't even want to rush Zeta Theta Beta, and we have different styles too. She doesn't go out much, since she was always in her room, waiting for dipshit—her loser ex—to call. He cheated and dumped her, and she has been super depressed about it. That's why I bought her the dates. I need you guys to show her a good time, make her see that there are better options than her ex, and that she can have a good time without commitment for a while.”

The last thing she says kind of rubs me wrong. Does Bay think we're party boys who are incapable of commitment? Sure, we do party, and we are always surrounded by all sorts of puck bunnies and jersey chasers. We aren't shy about

enjoying the perks of our star athlete status, but there's more to each of us than parties and hookups. It takes a special kind of commitment and dedication to play hockey at our level. We're a Division One college, and the selection to get a spot in the Star Cove Knights—especially a starting spot—was almost as hard as entering the draft.

However, I don't let her words offend me. I really appreciate her desire to help her sister. That's something that I understand very well, because there's nothing I wouldn't do for my two little siblings and my mom.

That's why I'm here, and that's why I'm going to go all the way to the NHL. Once I make pro, I'll make sure my family is taken care of.

"I'm in," I say, clenching my fist on the kitchen table. "I put myself down as available this weekend. Do you have a way I could contact her to make plans?"

Bay smiles. "She's expecting you to pick her up tonight at seven. I'm going to text you her address. She's renting a place just off campus."

Damn, Bay works fast. She's a real go-getter. That's why she's such a great president for the Zetas.

"Cool." I rise from my chair. "I'm going to go squeeze in some extra cardio and PT before practice. Thank you for breakfast, Bay."

Luca's question stops me from leaving. "So how is this supposed to work? Do we all take her out?"

Bay giggles. "That's the idea. I want her to *play the field* like you said earlier. I'm well aware that I bought just one date with each of you, so I don't expect anything after that and neither does Lakyn. She hasn't ever known anything different than her ex, though, and I want her to live a little. It's up to you guys if you even want to see her again. All I ask you is that whatever happens, you're honest with her."

We look at each other.

"That's fair." Blaze is the first to agree. "Can I get her number so I can make plans with her?"



Luca nods. “Yeah, I need her number too. Training is going to ramp up soon, and I’m always busy. I still can’t believe you have a twin and I’ve never noticed her.”

Bay sends us all a text with her sister’s contact. “She works at the library, you might have seen her there.”

Luca rubs his chin, deep in thought. “I still don’t remember seeing anyone who looks like you at the library, and I’ve been there a lot since I arrived on campus.”

Bay tilts her head. “Have you? I didn’t think you were the hard studying type. Classes just started.”

Luca’s chuckle is full of mischief, but he lowers his gaze, obviously embarrassed. “I don’t always go there to study.”

We all laugh. He’s been bragging that he’s had several hookups in the library since he got on campus. He called it a foolproof way to keep your hookup from trying to stick around.

*Don’t take ‘em to your room unless it’s more than one girl at once* is his rule.

I leave them deep in debate about hookup etiquette.

As I put on my earbuds and jog out of the frat house, I wonder what Bay meant when she said that her and her twin are totally different.



## 5.

# Sexy Getting Ready Routine



Lakyn



CLASSES OFFICIALLY started a couple of weeks ago, but my schedule is grueling, and it's five in the evening when I return to my apartment on Saturday afternoon.

I had an orientation class with my European literature professor.

I've been delaying this class until now because I was hoping to get into a different course with a different professor.

European lit is famous for being one of the hardest classes at Star Cove College, and it's all because of Professor Federica Mass.

Case in point, she's the only teacher who required a pre-course meeting on a Saturday afternoon to go over the syllabus and the expectations she has for this class. Most teachers do that on the first official class of the academic year, but Professor Mass is adamant that the coursework is so extensive, that every minute of every class is essential if we want a chance in hell to pass our finals.

That's why her class was the one literature class that didn't close immediately—people avoid her like the plague.

She even takes attendance, and if you miss more than two classes during the semester, she isn't going to allow you to sit for the finals.

I drop my key in the catch-all bowl at the entrance and sigh as I look at my reflection in the mirror that's hanging

above the little table right by our front door.

I look like someone who hasn't slept in days.

Maybe that's because I haven't slept in days. Since Jon broke up with me the second I arrived back on campus after summer break, sleep hasn't been an easy feat.

I spend most of my nights tossing and turning, thinking about how much I miss Jon. When I finally manage to close my eyes, I'm plagued by dreams of him.

I always wake up drenched in sweat and with an even bigger sense of loss than when I initially went to bed.

I'm feeling sad and drained, and the last thing I want to do is get ready for a date with a guy I don't even know.

I mean, I know of him. Who doesn't know Cash Hanbury? The Star Cove Knights goalie is a campus celebrity and a god among the student body like most of the hockey team.

I'm having buyer's remorse. Not that I bought this date, just the thought of it wouldn't have crossed my mind in a million years.

I know Bay's heart is in the right place, but I wish she hadn't tried to help.

Heartbreak is a complicated matter, and healing takes a different amount of time for different people.

She can't measure things with her parameters. I wish I was like her and I could bounce back from a breakup in one week, like she did when she broke up with her high school boyfriend, our school quarterback.

Last night, I agreed to go on three dates because I was pissed. Realizing that Jon had been cheating on me for months and that he called to cuss me out about liking that photo made me want revenge.

I'm not the revenge type, and maybe I'm just not ready to move on.

Can I get out of tonight's date?

I exhale, feeling defeated.

Bay said that Cash will pick me up here at seven, but she didn't give me a contact number or anything.

That means that I'm screwed, and I have no way of getting out of this. I'm not the type who would ever stand someone up either, so I guess I'm going on a date to the pier with a complete stranger.

"Hey, babe." Tasha comes out of our tiny kitchen. "Are you going to get ready for your date?"

I told her everything this morning, and surprisingly, she didn't think that Bay's idea was that bad.

"No."

She tilts her head to the side, pulling on one of the strings of her hoodie. "Oh, come on. Just live a little. Your ex obviously hasn't wasted his time, and he's moved on. Let's go find you something cool to wear."

I look down at my oversized denim skirt and worn sneakers and flatten out the creases on my button-down shirt. "I was thinking of going like this."

Tasha's mouth opens in a little surprised O. "You can't be serious. You can't go on a date dressed like my grandma."

"Hey!" I exclaim, a little offended. "This is one of my favorite shirts. It even has little roses all over it. Floral patterns are great for a date."

Right?

I know before she answers that I'm wrong. "You aren't going on a date with a total hottie in that shirt. Your skirt is even worse. It's too big and totally hides your ass. Come on, let's go find something for you to wear tonight," she says, grabbing my hand and dragging me deeper into the hallway. "I'm sure you own something better than this. If not, you can borrow from my closet if you want."

I totally drag my feet. "Oh, come on, Tash. It's not like Cash Hanbury is going to ask me on a second date. I wouldn't even want him to. Hockey players are Bay's type, not mine. I —"

As if summoned by me saying her name—at least with Beetlejuice you had to say it three times—my twin sister bursts into my apartment, followed by Liv and Viv, two of her favorite Zeta sisters.

“Hey, Lakey-Lake,” she chirps, sounding way too happy for my liking. “Ready to get ready for your date?”

I take an instinctive step back, stopping only when my back crashes against Tasha’s front.

“Bay, how did you get inside? Did I not lock the door?”

My question sounds harsher than I intended, but I’m serious. Tasha and I shared a room in a dorm until last year. We saved to rent a place of our own and moved into our apartment a couple of weeks ago. I had the intention to give Bay a spare key just in case of emergencies, but I haven’t had the chance yet.

My twin sister smiles like the picture of innocence. “I saw that you had two identical copies on your key ring last night when you opened the door while I was carrying the food. I took it while you were in the bathroom. Wasn’t that meant for me anyway?”

I roll my eyes. I swear to God if Bay wasn’t the other half of me, I’d tell her exactly where to put that spare key. “The key was meant for you,” I admit reluctantly. “But next time, it would be nice to ask instead of just stealing it.”

She shakes her head. “Can’t steal something that was meant for me all along. Anyway, time’s a wasting. I’m here to help you get ready for your date with Cash. Girls,” she says, pointing toward my room, “let’s set everything up.”

I watch with wide eyes as Liv and Viv come inside the house, carrying several tote bags and a few suit bags.

“Wha—what the fuck do you think you’re doing? I was about to get ready, and Tasha was going to help me. I don’t need you here, and I especially don’t need your minions. No offense.”

“None taken,” either Liv or Viv chirps from the threshold of my room.

I don't hate Bay's sorority sisters, but they aren't my type of friends, just like hockey players aren't the kind of guys I date.

Most of the Zetas are too concerned with owning the latest "it bag" and dating the latest "it guy," especially if he's an athlete and a Gamma.

I'm here to learn and get a degree in library sciences with a minor in foreign literature, not to date and party, so the Zetas aren't my kind of crowd.

The thing is though, while I can avoid the Zetas, I can't and wouldn't even want to avoid Bay.

Except for when she marches in my direction with a clear target in mind. "Come with me, Lakyn." Her manicured fingers close around my forearm, and I have no choice but to follow her into my room.

Bay looks awfully proud of herself as she shows me a selection of outfits and shoes and enough makeup to take care of an entire Hollywood movie cast. "Let's choose the right outfit, and then we'll decide on hair and makeup to match."

My head is shaking on its own. "Bay, seriously, thanks but no thanks. I was going to get ready with Tasha's help and—"

"Nonsense!" Bay smiles. "I make six annual figures with my hair and makeup channel and blogs. It would be like being related to an airline captain and traveling by boat."

I look at my roommate, pleading for her help. "But Tasha and I were—"

"Actually, you should let Bay help you, Lakyn. She's way better at this than I could ever be."

Traitor.

I'm going to remember this the next time she eyes my home-made lasagna or tiramisu.

"Awesome, we're in agreement then. Let's begin. We don't have much time, and we have a lot of work to do."

I should probably be offended by her words, but I can't totally fault her. Even I admit that since Jon broke up with me, I've let myself go and I look... neglected.

However, if you knew my sister, you'd also know that there is no middle ground with her.

"What are you doing?" I ask as she touches her phone screen and my room fills with an upbeat pop song.

"Duh." She rolls her eyes with a mischievous smile on her face. "That's why you don't put enough effort in your appearance, sis. Everyone knows that to get ready for a date, you need a sexy soundtrack."

Seriously. "Does everyone know that?" I ask, arching a brow.

"Totally," Liv or Viv confirms. "A sexy getting ready song."

The next hour is pure torture.

If my life were an 80s movie, the music would be accompanied by a montage of me trying on every outfit Bay brought with her.

The girls, including Tasha, are all like the panel of judges in a beauty pageant.

Thankfully we discard a pair of jeans so tight that I couldn't even breathe or move and settle on a short, flirty summer dress that feels sexy and romantic at the same time. I absolutely refuse to wear the matching stiletto heels in the same floral pattern of the dress. None of the options Bay brought over here are what I would wear, and they all say a firm no to my old pink Converse.

We end up compromising on a pair of wedge sandals so high that I'm sure I'm going to break my neck. Bay's reassurance that wedges are much easier to walk in compared to heels doesn't do much to make me feel more excited. I do have to admit that my sister is right, though, and that my legs look incredible in the sandals.



Just when I thought that the annoying part was over and I could get dressed and then send them on their way, I'm caught by Liv and Viv in a viselike grip, and some unspeakable stuff happens to me.

I'll spare you the gruesome details of wax being applied to my eyebrows, armpits, legs, and some other places that I've frankly never thought needed waxing. *Ouch.*

Bay swears that what her sorority sisters are giving me is called a Brazilian wax. Do they really wax their butthole in Brazil? I'm going to google it, and I hope for her sake that she isn't making this up.

My hair is straightened first, and then the ends are curled into soft waves. My fingernails and toenails are painted a baby pink, but I put my foot down—no pun intended—when they come at me with foundation and fake lashes.

I know Bay wears a lot of makeup, and she's as good as a professional makeup artist at applying it, so she looks like a Hollywood movie star, but it just isn't me.

We compromise on a tinted lip gloss and a swipe of mascara, and I'm finally ready.

I hate to admit that when I look at myself in the full-length mirror in my bedroom, I still look like myself, just a million times better than usual.

"I—" The words "thank you" are on the tip of my tongue, but Bay interrupts me.

"You look gorgeous. Cash won't know what hit him when he sees you."

I blush at her praise and bite my tongue, because I don't think Cash Hanbury will be very impressed, since he could have any girl on this campus and in town, like most of his teammates.

The doorbell rings.

"It must be Cash!"

"Go, go. Don't make him wait."

The girls are all screaming and giggling in an excited frenzy, and that doesn't do anything to calm my nerves.

I walk out of the front door of our ground floor apartment and head toward the tall, breathtakingly handsome guy standing by an old but clean truck.

Bay was probably right, walking in these wedges isn't as bad as I thought.

"Have fun, kids!" my sister yells from the threshold of my apartment. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

Her recommendation almost causes me to stumble and fall like a sack of potatoes.

Thankfully, I catch my footing before making a complete fool of myself.



## 7.

# Pucks And Balls



Cash



DAMN.

And believe me, I mean no disrespect by it, but holy shit.

How could I not notice that Bay had a twin sister before? I go study at the library before every exam, but I must have been too tired from practice or too distracted by my studying material, or maybe I need a fucking eye exam, because believe me, Lakyn Woods is a total knockout.

I can't take my eyes off her as she closes the door to her apartment and starts walking toward me on perfect, shapely legs.

She isn't tall, but those legs are long for her height, and the rest of her is total perfection.

I don't even try to hide the fact that I'm checking her out. After all, we're going on a date tonight.

Her long, blonde hair makes my fingers itch to touch it and find out if it's as silky as it looks.

High cheekbones and a dainty nose make her face look movie star perfect. Her soft, pillowy lips immediately make me decide that I'm going to kiss her tonight.

I don't even know her, but unless she's a shallow person or a raging bitch, she looks like the perfect mixture between a blonde bombshell and a sweet, girl next door type.

Her little floral dress floats around her in a flirty way with every step she takes toward me, and while it isn't too

revealing, the light fabric does nothing to hide Lakyn's gorgeous curves.

As I watch her walk toward me, I realize that she looks identical to Bay, but her appearance is softer, less intimidating than her twin sister's.

Don't get me wrong, I'm surrounded by beautiful women all the time—not just the Zetas, but as a hockey player, there's a constant stream of girls who float around the team. It's easy to notice the perfect makeup and skimpy dresses, but deep down, they aren't my type.

I'm totally digging Lakyn's minimal makeup and more natural look. There's something to be said about a girl who doesn't look like she's so made up that you wouldn't recognize her in the morning if you happened to wake up next to her.

My mouth curves into a smile at the thought.

I mean, fuck, I know I'm getting totally ahead of myself, since I haven't even met her yet, but sue me if I can't help but imagine her out of that little dress and with those long, shapely legs wrapped around me. What's so different than picking up a girl at a bar or at a frat party?

Bay told us she wants her sister to rebound from a bad breakup and what better way than a hot date? The possibilities are endless, and if she needs a rebound, I volunteer.

"Are you alright?" I jump toward her as she stumbles slightly on her feet, but she straightens herself without my help.

"Yeah, sorry," she says softly. "New shoes and all."

I offer her my arm, walking her to the passenger side of my truck. "You look beautiful," I say, and I immediately wonder if I said too much when she blushes.

She looks adorable because the redness that rises to her face doesn't look fake or rehearsed.

"Thanks. My name is Lakyn, by the way."

"I'm Cash." I smile.

“I know.” She giggles nervously.

I roll my eyes. “Duh.” I chuckle self-deprecatingly. “Your sister told me your name, so she must have told you mine.”

Lakyn’s smile lights up her whole face, making her look even more beautiful. “She did, but I already knew who you were. I don’t think there’s anyone on campus who doesn’t know your name.”

Fair enough.

I’m glad she doesn’t say it with a starstruck tone, but more as a fact. It’s refreshing to go out with someone who doesn’t immediately ask for a selfie or if you’re thinking about entering the draft this year or next year. That’s the trouble with most of the puck bunnies. They are interested in fame and in a player’s earning potential more than in getting to know the man beneath the jersey.

I turn the key into the ignition and leave Lakyn’s road, merging onto the main coastal road that surrounds most of Star Cove.

The Saturday night traffic isn’t as bad as it is during the high season, but the road is still busy because most of the places to eat and go out in town gravitate around the beach and the marina.

The silence in my truck isn’t uncomfortable, but I’d be lying if I said that I’m not a little nervous. I debate if I should turn the radio on, and I’m about to reach out to the dashboard when she turns a little to the side to look at me and asks a question.

“So, Cash, Bay said that each guy could offer their preferred type of date for the auction, and I’m curious, why did you choose to go to the pier?”

I give an involuntary shrug. “Why not the pier? I was born and raised in Star Cove, and I have some great memories there. My parents took me as a kid when the town was even smaller and there wasn’t a lot going on. Plus, you can get some of the best food in town at the pier, and I figured that if

the person I ended up taking on this date was boring, at least the food would be great.”

The look on her face is hard to read, and I wonder if I said something wrong.

“Ha.” She laughs. “I like the way you think. Great food saves the worst situations. If you were so worried about who would buy a date with you, why did you participate in the auction?”

There’s a beat of silence as I park the truck in a fairly busy parking lot right at the beginning of the marina. The summer is about to end, but the Northern California weather is still nice. Even though there aren’t a lot of tourists left, the pier is still one of the main attractions with the locals and the student population throughout the winter.

“To be honest, I wasn’t really given a choice,” I admit, finally turning fully to look at her. “Coach told us we all needed to participate. Our college has grown very quickly in the last few years, and the current athletic facilities are inadequate. We’re in dire need of funding, especially because the administration wants to build a new hockey arena. Since we became a D-1 school, the demand for tickets for our home games has grown exponentially, and more tickets means more revenue, so here we are.”

Lakyn considers my words. “It’s hard to believe that they need funding. The amount of rich people who attend our school is impressive, so I’m surprised they don’t ask the alumni for donations. Tuition is so expensive, you’d think they’d be swimming in money. When I saw how much a year here costs, I almost didn’t apply.”

My curiosity is piqued. “Really?”

She must hear the incredulity in my tone, so she sets the record straight. “I know it must sound weird, since Bay paid a small fortune for this date, but I’m not a trust fund baby. Our parents are both high school teachers.”

That’s definitely a surprise. “Are you here on a scholarship? But even with that, buying three dates for five

grand a pop—”

Lakyn exhales, but she doesn't look mad at me for what I just said. “I have a partial scholarship. The reason why I could afford to come here is because Bay makes an outrageous amount of money with her streaming channel and beauty blogs. It really took off sophomore year in high school, and she insisted on paying for school and housing for both of us. She knew I wanted to go here, and she made it happen. She keeps telling me she's happy to do it, and that I don't need to have a job, but I want to try to pay back at least some of it. Without her, I would have had to work full time and get huge student loans to be able to attend, and I hate the idea of getting a free ride, even from my twin sister.”

Shit.

I had no idea that Bay and Lakyn didn't come from money. Even before Bay paid all that money for the dates, I assumed she was a trust fund baby just from looking at the expensive clothes she wears and the car she drives.

This new information that the Woods sisters aren't the typical rich, spoiled sorority girls makes me like them even more.

In a way, not having to impress someone who's used to all the finest things is liberating, but it also makes me more nervous than I was a second ago. Now I like Lakyn even more than just because she's pretty. She's more relatable than I thought, and I don't even know why that changes the way I feel about tonight.

I can't look away from her bright blue eyes, and I'm suddenly hyper-aware of her subtle, floral scent in the confines of my truck.

I need to shake this off. This year is pivotal for my future, and I don't have time for dating beyond some casual fun. “Shall we?” I ask, forcing myself to stop devouring her with my eyes.

My five-year plan doesn't include a relationship, and I need to remember that before I fuck this all up.





Lakyn



I ACCEPT THE HAND CASH offers me to help me out of his truck, and I immediately miss the contact when he lets go, even though I can't help but notice that he holds onto it for a beat more than necessary.

We don't talk as we stroll toward the entrance of the pier, and it doesn't bother me.

Cash is a huge guy, about six-five, and while there isn't an ounce of fat on his sculpted body, he's a wall of big, hard muscle. I really don't follow hockey, I know nothing about it, but I assume his large frame would make it harder to get the puck past him.

He's also handsome to the point where I have to force myself not to stare. I already feel awkward that this date didn't happen the normal way where one of us—him, because the idea of asking a guy out makes me feel too anxious to ever consider it—asked the other one out. The fact that my sister purchased the date for me at an auction is already a little weird and pathetic, and I don't want to add creepy to the first impression of me this guy must have.

Especially because he's truly hot.

I know from Bay that every guy on the hockey team gets ridiculous amounts of attention from the women—and men—on campus, but in Cash's case, I'm willing to bet it isn't just because he's a star athlete.

His perfect body is just one of the things that contribute to Cash's good looks. He has dirty blond hair that's cut short on the sides and has just a little length on top. I'm glad he doesn't know the thought that comes to my mind as I take advantage of the silence to sneak a couple of looks at him. How would it feel to run my fingers through his hair while we're kissing?

I suppress a snort at the thought. Cash is here because he was forced to participate in that charity auction, not because he's interested in me. It would serve me right to remember it.

A girl can dream though, right?

Those lips of his look so soft, and the way they curl up just a second before he's about to smile is sexy as hell.

His smile is another thing that I immediately noticed. Cash is already handsome, but when he smiles, his whole face lights up, and my pulse quickens. I've been trying to work out what color his eyes are. They aren't blue and definitely not green. I'd say they are a light gray, and I bet that if I got to look into them a little closer, I would find blue and green flecks that give him a more mysterious appearance.

"So, Lakyn," he says. "I didn't really make a definite plan for tonight, but I was thinking we could go to the arcade if you're game and work up an appetite. Then I promise we're going to have dinner. But if you're hungry now, we can reverse the order."

I don't think I could eat a thing right now, but I don't say that. "The arcade sounds fun. I haven't been to one in ages."

He nods. "Let's go then." He places a hand on the small of my back.

I suppress a shudder, grateful that he's looking ahead, pointing toward the arcade, and doesn't notice the full body reaction I have to his casual touch.

My skin breaks out in goosebumps, and my nipples harden in my bra. My entire body is practically vibrating as he walks close enough for me to feel the heat radiating from his body, but not so close that he's actually touching me other than with his hand at the base of my spine.

*Jon never made me feel this way in the three years we dated.*

I feel a pang of guilt as the thought crosses my mind, but it's true. My relationship with Jon was a lot about friendship and common goals rather than based on physical attraction.

Maybe Bay has a point, and I was missing out by dating someone who didn't make my heart pick up its pace and my knees feel weak.

I'm not going to admit that to her though. She already bought me three dates, so if she knew that I'm not actually hating this so far, then there's no telling what she'd do next.

Another thing I realize is that knowing someone really well, like I knew Jon, doesn't have anything to do with feeling attracted to them.

The arcade is bigger than it looks from the outside, and my senses are captured by all the lights and noises of the games on offer.

There's a great selection, from slots and video games to pinball machines and more traditional games like pool, table soccer, and air hockey.

"What about an air hockey game?" Cash asks.

"Hmm, why did I know you were going to say that?" I say, narrowing my eyes on him.

"Why?" He looks the picture of innocence, his eyes wide as he smiles that smile that makes me want to trust him with my life.

"You're a hockey player and you want to play air hockey. Surprise, surprise."

Cash shakes his head. "Air hockey has absolutely nothing to do with actual hockey, Lakyn. I mean, aside from the objective being to score more goals than your opponent, the two things have nothing in common."

I guess he's right. "That's true enough, but I bet you're great at it."

He chuckles. "I'm not bad at it, but I wouldn't say I'm great. I just think it's a fun game. We can play something else if you want."

Oh my god, what's wrong with me? I'm making this awkward, and we haven't even started our date. "I was just

messing with you, Cash. I haven't played in years though, so I'm going to be a little rusty."

"I can give you a little head start if you want. Three points advantage—"

"Oh hell no," I interrupt him. "I'm not a sore loser. I was just warning you in case I suck and you think playing against me is boring."

He offers me one of those little smiles that are starting to become one of my favorite things about him. "I promise I won't be bored. Just have fun. It's not like we're betting on something, right?"

Right.

"Ladies first," he encourages me, handing me the paddle and the puck.

"Okay, ready?"

I shoot the puck toward his goal at the opposite side of the table, and the little disk flies past Cash's paddle, causing the game to flash with the number one to signal that I just scored.

"What the..." Cash's eyes widen in surprise.

"Sorry, did I start when you weren't ready?"

"No, no." He chuckles. "But I'm definitely ready now."

The game goes fast, or at least it feels fast because we have a total blast.

Cash has quick reaction times and offers me a real challenge, but I end up winning by a point.

"This was awesome!" I beam, placing the paddle back on the table.

His eyes search my face, as if he is trying to figure something out. "It was fun, but I don't know whether or not I've just been played. You're really good at it, and pretty violent too."

There's no heat in his tone, and he doesn't look mad that he lost. The teasing note in his deep voice causes a rush of

warmth to rise to my face and neck. “I used to be good at it, but seriously, I haven’t played since I was in middle school.”

“I guess air hockey must be like riding a bike then, huh?” he teases, guiding me deeper into the arcade. “I’m glad I didn’t make a fool of myself by insisting on a bet.”

I look at him as we stop by one of those basketball games, where you have to throw the ball into various holes with different score values. “What could we have possibly bet?”

There’s a beat of silence between us, and his eyes darken as he looks at me. His expression is hard to decipher, as if he’s debating if he wants to tell me what’s really on his mind or not.

He finally lowers his head to whisper into my ear. “I was thinking about betting that if I won, I’d get a kiss. I’m glad I didn’t because you kicked my ass.”

I don’t know what to say to that. My eyes are captured in the gray depths of his gaze, and my tongue suddenly feels glued to the roof of my mouth.

It’s like all of a sudden, the air between us is crackling with electricity, and now I wish we had made that bet. I would have totally lost on purpose if we had, because I don’t hate the idea of kissing Cash Hanbury. I’ve thought about it every time my eyes have gone to his lips.

I’m just surprised that he’s been thinking about kissing me too though, or is he just teasing me?

I decide that it must be the case because he doesn’t try to make that bet now. “Come on then,” I say with more enthusiasm than I really feel. “Let’s see if you’re as good at playing with balls.”

I don’t realize how that might sound until Cash bursts into laughter. “Oh, baby, I guarantee I’m excellent at playing with balls, but I was hoping we’d get that kiss out of the way before I let *you* play with them.”

Shit.

This time I know the heat that rushes to my face isn't a cute blush. I'm so embarrassed that I must be purple rather than just red. "I—that isn't what I meant."

Cash pulls me closer, squeezing me to his side in a comforting side hug. "I know what you meant. I'm sorry, it was too funny to resist. Come on, let's see how good you are with a ball, and then we'll decide if it's safe to start betting on kisses."

His eyes skim down to my lips as if he was really thinking about kissing me, but it's just for a second. His own lips quirk up in that hint of a smile that I'm starting to really look forward to.

I don't know if he's serious when he talks about kissing me, and I'm too nervous to ask. If he was just joking, I'd feel really stupid.

The thing is though, kissing him is now all I can think about.



## 8.

# The Mouth Of Truth

Cash



WHEN I WAS TOLD BY Coach that participation in that charity auction was mandatory, I never thought that the actual date I had to go on was going to be so much fun.

It isn't just because Lakyn is hot, she's also funny, loves a challenge, and plays fair. We have a blast at the arcade, and while she makes me work hard for every point I score, the vibe between us is lighthearted and the competition is friendly. I lose at some games and I win at others, and by the time we leave, I have a huge smile on my face.

It's all down to my date because, take it from me, I never smile when I lose. At least, not on the ice.

As if reading my mind, she beams at me. "That was fun. Thank you, Cash."

My eyes descend on her smile. Those pink lips are so inviting that I have to focus on something other than the urge to kiss her.

I really want to kiss her, and I hope I planted the seed earlier when I cracked that joke about betting on it.

She didn't say that she'd be up for it, but she didn't say she wouldn't be, and the way she blushed makes me hopeful.

The feeling I have with her is totally new. While I don't have a lot of experience with dating, I'm more than versed in hooking up, and with hookups, there's never a doubt about how the night is going to end.

I find the term "puck bunny" derogatory, but with the girls who gravitate around the hockey team, the situation is crystal



clear. They are usually all over me, and if anything, I have to slow things down.

Tonight is different.

Lakyn is different. She wasn't the one who bought this date, and before Bay mentioned a twin sister, I had no idea she even existed, so she's as far from a puck bunny as humanly possible. I know for a fact that she's never even been to a hockey game. If she had, there's no way I wouldn't have noticed her.

"I don't know about you," I say, walking as close to her as socially acceptable without holding her hand, "but I'm starving. What about getting something to eat?"

Her smile widens. "Me too. I could eat a horse."

"I wouldn't know where to get you a horse, but a cow can be arranged," I tease.

"Cash!" she exclaims. "I didn't mean it literally. I could never eat a horse. They are too beautiful."

I don't know what it is with her, but I love provoking her. "Aww, are you saying that you'll only eat animals that look ugly?"

She shakes her head, the light of dusk giving the blonde of her hair an orange hue. "No, and look, I don't want to start a debate about eating meat or not. My ex is a vegetarian, and we fought about it all the time. From an ethical point of view, I'm not opposed to not eating another living creature, but we were biologically made to eat meat, and mankind started as hunters and gatherers. If cows had been made to eat people, don't you think they would? It's the way nature made us. Do I believe that we could make the decision to stop eating meat? Yes, I do, but I tried to please my ex for about a year, and I had countless health issues. My doctor told me I had to eat everything in moderation, so I started eating meat again."

I consider her words. "I don't know if I could ever be a vegetarian or a vegan. I like steaks and bacon too much."

"Me too." She sighs. "I'm not going to lie, I really missed eating meat during my senior year of high school."

We walk deeper down the pier where most of the restaurants are located. “So what are you in the mood for? There’s a great BBQ place, or there’s Joe’s Shack. They have the best burgers in town and award-winning fried pickles.”

She gains some points with me by not taking too long to make up her mind. “I love fried pickles. Let’s go to Joe’s. I’ve never been.”

I don’t hide my surprise. “For real? You’ve been going to school in Star Cove for two years and you’ve never been to Joe’s?”

“I’ve never been to the pier,” she says.

“How is that possible?”

She shrugs, and I fight the urge to let my eyes follow the movement toward the swell of her tits.

“My ex and I were doing the long-distance thing. I have a heavy course load and a part-time job, and I had to study every waking moment to make time to see him.”

I chuckle. “I’m guessing you guys never left your room when he visited then, huh? Or you would have definitely come to the pier for a date.” I’m half teasing her, half thinking about how hard it would be to leave my room if Lakyn was my girl and I only got to see her a few times a year.

Something passes in her eyes, and I sense that there’s a story there, but I don’t press her because her demeanor changed the moment she mentioned her ex.

“No, it wasn’t like that. It was mostly me going to see him. I didn’t get why he never wanted to come here, until he admitted that he was hoping to convince me to transfer to Princeton. But enough about my ex. I’m dying to try those fried pickles.”

This date gets even better when Lakyn looks briefly at the menu and makes her choice—a cheeseburger with bacon, french fries, and an order of Joe’s famous fried pickles with a side of ranch.

“What?” she asks as she catches me grinning in her direction.

“Nothing, I’m just having fun.”

Lakyn narrows her eyes. “Is having fun code for judging me for the amount of food I just ordered?”

I set her straight. “Yup, I did judge you, but it’s the opposite of what you might think. It’s awesome to go out with a girl who doesn’t order a salad with dressing on the side.”

Another one of those little shrugs that make her tits move ever so slightly in her strapless dress. “Nothing wrong with salad.”

“You’re right, unless you then look at my dinner for the entire night with jealousy in your eyes. If you want a burger, order one.”

She laughs. “Good to know that you wouldn’t share your burger with me.”

Our conversation is interrupted when our food arrives.

“Just so you know, Lakyn, I’d have no problem sharing my food with you. I just like it when people are genuine and straight forward, you know? And it’s more fun to be with someone who can eat, so I don’t feel self-conscious for how much I eat.”

Her eyes rove over me. “You’re an athlete, I would find it weird if you didn’t eat a lot. It must take a ton of calories to keep up all that muscle.”

The way she’s looking at me and the slightly breathy quality of her tone when she mentioned my muscles gives me hope.

I think the immediate attraction I felt to Lakyn might not be one-sided after all. I’m definitely going to kiss her tonight, and I have a plan on where and how I’m going to do it.



Lakyn



## DINNER IS DELICIOUS.

I'd feel a little self-conscious for the way Cash keeps looking at me while I eat, but he made it clear that he likes girls who eat, so fuck it. I might as well enjoy it.

The food isn't the only thing I enjoy though. I've never followed hockey too much, but if you go to Star Cove College, it's impossible not to know the hockey team to some degree.

The fact that my sister is dating a player, and that most of the players are in Gamma Delta Tau, also means that she talks a lot about all the guys.

According to her intel and to what Cash's profile on the team's social media says—yes, I did stalk my date. Can you blame me?—Cash is known as a quiet, slightly distant type.

He could have definitely fooled me.

I wasn't nervous about tonight just because of the way this date was arranged. I expected someone who might be attractive and popular but didn't have much of a personality. I'm pleasantly surprised that Cash is nothing like I expected. The Star Cove Knights goaltender is down-to-earth, easy to talk to, and really funny.

He's also chivalrous without being pretentious, as I learn when it's time to pay for dinner.

"I got it," he says, snatching the check with a sexy scowl on his face when I try to take out my wallet.

"Thank you," I say as my mind immediately goes to Jon and how much of a big deal he made every time he got the check.

It's probably unfair to compare Cash to Jonathan, but my ex is the only man I've ever dated.

*He's also the only man you've ever kissed. You should change that tonight.*

The little voice in my head sounds suspiciously like Bay, but for once, I actually agree with my sister.

Didn't I agree to this date because Jon has already moved on?

It wouldn't be so bad to take advantage of this experience. If anything, I can use it to prove to Bay that a solid friendship is the most important thing in a relationship.

All this talk about kisses that make your knees buckle sounds made up to me. What's so sexy about a swap of saliva? Kisses are overrated and a little unsanitary if you ask me, and tonight I'll put my theory to the ultimate test.

If a hunk like Cash Hanbury can't make me feel fireworks with just one kiss, Bay will have to admit that she's been lying about all the stuff she's been telling me for years about relationships and sex in particular. She'll have to concede that the reality of relationships isn't worth the hype.

*Right. Tell yourself that you wanting to kiss Cash Hanbury is a sociological experiment and that it has nothing to do with the fact that the guy looks like Magic Mike and Thor had a baby.*

I shake my head to make Bay's voice in my head shut up. If I didn't know that it was impossible, I'd think that this is some kind of mumbo-jumbo twin connection, and not my subconscious that sounds uncannily like my twin sister.

"You alright?" Cash asks as we walk out of the restaurant and into the bright lights of the pier.

Shit. I need to think less about Bay and my ex and concentrate on my fun date.

"I'm okay. I was just thinking about how much fun I'm having. Thank you, Cash."

The corners of his eyes crease slightly when he smiles. "Good, because I'm having fun too. Can I be honest with you, Lakyn?"

Oh, boy.

Is this when he tells me that he's done enough to fulfill the auction's requirements and he's ditching me for some frat party?

"Sure, lay it on me."

He gives me a strange look, the beginning of that teasing smile making an appearance before he turns serious. "I'm glad Bay bought this date for you. I was really dreading this from the second Coach told us that participation in the auction was mandatory. I definitely lucked out on my date, and I hope you want to stay and hang out a little longer."

I can't help but smile at him. "I'd love to."

"Let's go explore the rest of the pier then," he says, offering me his hand.

I don't know if it's because it felt like Cash just asked me out for real, or the fact that we're holding hands, but now this feels more like a real date.

We try some of the fair-style games the pier has to offer, from the ducks you have to "fish," to the classic cans you have to hit with a ball.

"Here you go, my lady." Cash offers me a small stuffed teddy bear dangling from a keychain. "Times have changed since I came here as a kid. With the amount of tickets I won, I would have been able to get you one of those giant teddy bears."

"I'm not disappointed," I say, loving the memento of a fun night. "The giant teddy bear would have been a pain in the ass to carry around the pier."

He laughs. "You're pretty, you love to eat, and you're practical. This date just keeps getting better."

He just called me pretty.

He's also absolutely right about that. I can't remember the last time I had so much fun, with Jon or in general.

"I know we just had dinner, but how full are you?" Cash asks, eyeing me up and down as if that could help him assess if I still have room for dessert.

“Pretty full, but I could eat dessert if they have—”

“The best funnel cake you’ve ever had?” he offers.

“I could never say no to funnel cake,” I inform him. “It doesn’t matter how full I am. Maybe we should share one, though, because those fried pickles were too good, and I finished the whole order.”

“Sure.” He winks. “After all, I need to prove to you that I can share my food after the conversation we had before.”

I’m glad he’s still holding my hand, because the way that wink makes his gray eyes glimmer under the bright lights of the pier makes my knees feel weak.

“Can I at least pay for dessert?” I offer when we reach the little shop that sells the funnel cakes.

That hint of a smile appears on Cash’s face again. “You can buy dessert next time. Let me get this one, okay?”

“Thank you, Cash,” I murmur, feeling like I’ve been rewarded when that smile widens and reaches his eyes.

“So?” he asks expectantly as he watches me take the first bite.

“Oh my god, Cash. You weren’t exaggerating. This is the best funnel cake I’ve ever had, hands down.”

That gets me another one of those smiles, and my stomach fills with butterflies at the way Cash’s eyes descend to my mouth.

The air between us is charged with something heady and intense. I’m surprised by the thought that not only would I accept him if he tried to kiss me now, but I actually hope he does.

“Do you think you can eat and walk? The view from the end of the pier is breathtaking. On a clear night like tonight, you can see the lights of Coral Cove in the distance. If you’re up for it, we could look at the entire bay from the top of the Ferris wheel.”

I agree to get to the end of the pier, and we start walking while we eat the cake, passing the paper plate between us.

The sweet fried dough is delicious, but I'd be lying if I said that I don't miss feeling Cash's slightly rough hand closed around mine.

Jon was never a very affectionate boyfriend, and he wasn't big on holding hands or PDA. It never occurred to me to mind that, but now I decide that if I ever get another boyfriend, I'd like someone warmer than my ex.

*Someone like Cash.*

I suppress a snort at that thought. This date is going well, but I'm under no illusion that someone like Cash Hanbury, who could have any woman on campus, would even consider dating someone like me.

Maybe he could go for someone like Bay, if she wasn't hellbent on dating a total douche like Topher.

I'm surprised when the thought of Cash with my sister makes me nauseous to the point of putting me off eating more cake.

There's never been any jealousy between me and Bay. We might be different, but we're like two faces of the same coin. She's a part of me, and there's nothing I wouldn't do for her or share with her.

*Except Cash, apparently.*

I groan at the stupid thoughts that are swirling around in my head. I can't be jealous about a guy who went out with me purely because he was forced to participate in a charity auction, and my crazy sister bought him for me. Even though this date has been awesome, Cash and I live in such different worlds that we might as well go to different schools. He's a campus god, and I'm a nerdy aspiring librarian who doesn't even know how long a hockey game really is.

Thankfully Cash doesn't hear my groan, his attention attracted by something he notices along the pier.

"Huh, this is new."



He's pointing to a stone sculpture that resembles a rather monstrous face with its mouth gaping open.

I don't know why, but it looks sort of familiar.

"Welcome!" an older gentleman greets us, appearing literally out of nowhere and causing us both to jump. "Do you want to try your luck with the Mouth of Truth?"

"The mouth of what?" Cash asks.

Ah, now I know where I've seen this sculpture before. "This is a reproduction of an ancient monument from Rome, Italy," the old man explains. "The legend says that the sculpture can recognize a liar. If you put your hand in its mouth and you tell a lie—or if you're a liar in general—you'll get your hand bitten off. Do you care to try?"

Cash eyes the fake statue suspiciously. "Hmm, I don't know if I believe it. Besides, even if there was some truth to the legend, I'm sure that would just work for the original statue in Rome. I doubt this reproduction would have the same powers."

I'm about to agree with Cash, but his diffidence offends the old man. "Nonsense! This is a faithful reproduction of the original. You should try it."

"Ha, no thanks." Cash chuckles.

"Only the purest souls are brave enough to face the Mouth of Truth," the old man taunts him.

Cash takes offense to the implication that he might not have a pure soul. "Right," he says, narrowing his eyes at the guy. "I'm going to show you that your Mouth of Truth isn't the real thing. I'm going to blatantly lie with my hand in its mouth, and I bet you five bucks that nothing will happen to me."

There's a glint of satisfaction in the old man's eyes. "Deal. Go ahead."

Cash rolls his eyes, passing me the paper plate with the rest of our funnel cake.

He inserts his hand in the statue's mouth up to his knuckles. "Here it goes," he says, looking at me and the old man. "I'm going to tell a lie, and I'm betting I'm going to be just fine. Ready? I'm not having fun tonight, and I don't want to ask Lakyn out on a second date."

If that's his lie, does that mean that he's planning to ask me out again?

I don't have time to dwell on that, though, because something happens.

Cash lurches forward as if his hand was being sucked into the open mouth.

"Ah, let me go! Let me go!" he yells.

I throw the paper plate into the trash can by the wall the statue is pinned to, ready to come to his aid.

"Ha-ha." Cash takes his hand out of the statue's mouth. "As you can see, I lied and I didn't get bitten. You owe me five bucks."

To my surprise, the old man isn't angry at Cash's joke. "Oh, my bad," he says, touching something behind the raised edges of the side of the statue. "It was switched off, that's why you got away with your lie."

Lights come to life all around the circular edges of the fake stone as a carnival-style music jingle greets us. There are even lights in the hollow eyes of the giant face of the statue.

"Right." Cash snorts. "Great excuse not to pay your bet, but I don't want to waste all night here. I have a fun date to go back to."

"Wait," the old man calls out as Cash is about to turn on his heel. "That's just an act to attract the customers. This version of the Mouth of Truth doesn't detect lies, it predicts the future. As an apology for my ruse and because we just opened our attraction, you and your date can have your prediction free of charge. It's worth way more than the five dollars we wagered."

Cash looks at me. “What do you think, Lakyn? Do you want to try?”

I shake my head on pure instinct. “No, thank you. I don’t believe in horoscopes and shit like that. I believe we forge our own destiny, so horoscopes are a bunch of bullshit.”

I say it with conviction, and I think I do such a good job that if I didn’t know that I’m lying, I’d totally believe myself.

The reality is that I always believe what horoscopes say, and I’m too scared of getting some kind of bad prediction.

Bay would say that I get so worried about a bad horoscope that I end up making it come true by acting different than usual. She might be right, but I still don’t want to know if there’s something bad lurking around the corner.



## 9.

# Funnel Cake

Cash



LAKYN LOOKS NERVOUS, and I thank the old man but refuse his offer. “Thank you, sir, but my date isn’t into it.”

“What a shame,” the man says with an ominous tone that might be part of his act, but it’s starting to grate on my nerves. “The Mouth of Truth is extremely accurate in its predictions.”

I roll my eyes, partly annoyed and slightly amused by how in character he is to sell horoscopes. The fortune teller who used to be here in his place wasn’t quite as dedicated to her craft. “Thank you, but Lakyn isn’t wrong. There’s no scientific foundation in horoscopes, especially if they come from a cheap, standard software like the one I’m sure is inside this attraction.”

My words clearly offend him, and I finally realize who the man reminds me of. He has the same crazy-looking white hair and wide, dark eyes as Doc Brown from *Back to the Future*.

“I’ll have you know that this ‘attraction,’ as you call it, comes directly from Rome, and it’s famed to have given predictions that have come true, even to the Pope.”

I stifle a snort. “I doubt the Pope would believe in horoscopes.”

The guy stiffens. “You have no idea what the Pope believes in. Why don’t you try it for yourself? You have nothing to lose. It’s free of charge.”

“Sure,” I say for the sake of walking away without being rude to him in front of Lakyn. I already have a reputation as cold and standoffish at school, and I don’t want her to believe it if she hears it around campus. “What’s the worst that can

happen? It's going to be some generic nonsense that could apply to anyone."

There's a gleam in the old guy's eyes. He definitely lays it on thick with his act. "Dare to get a prediction if you will, and then you'll come to find me when it comes true, as so many people have before you."

Yeah, yeah. "Okay, deal. If whatever this thing spews happens to become reality, I'll come and pay for the horoscope after all. How is that?"

Doc Brown—this is how I've named him in my head—nods solemnly. "We have a deal."

I look around the large stone face. "How do I get this horoscope? I don't see any buttons I can push or any coin slots."

Doc points toward the open mouth of the giant face. "Insert your hand in the mouth, like you just did a few moments ago."

Lakyn giggles. "It makes sense."

I do as I'm instructed, and like before, Doc Brown presses some kind of button behind the large stone circle, and the same lights we saw earlier flash on and off.

The same short jingle is played and then a deep, robotic voice says, "*Receive your future.*"

Seconds later, a piece of white paper similar to the receipt you get with your purchases in most stores comes out of a second, almost invisible opening right under the one I have my hand in.

I look at the four short sentences printed on it.

*Success is imminent, your hard work will pay off.*

*Family isn't necessarily dictated by blood.*

*Who dares wins.*

*Sharing is caring.*

I show it to Lakyn. “What did I just say? Generic enough that it could apply to anyone, even though the first prediction isn’t too bad. Hopefully it means I’ll get drafted this year.”

Lakyn smiles. “I don’t really follow hockey, but everyone on campus says you’re the best goalie our school has ever had, and you’ll take our team to the Frozen Four.”

I don’t know why her admission that she doesn’t follow hockey makes me want to change that. I barely know her.

She looks at the gaping mouth of the statue my hand was just in, and she decides to try it on a whim. “I still don’t believe in this stuff, but now I’m curious. Is it still okay to try it?” she asks, looking at Doc.

“Go ahead, young lady.”

Lakyn seems a little hesitant at first, as if she is about to change her mind, but she eventually puts her hand inside the open mouth of the statue.

I look at the slip of paper with her prediction.

*A midnight kiss will change everything.*

*Royal pain, royal gain.*

*Fire doesn’t always burn in a bad way.*

*Sharing is caring.*

“Huh.” I chuckle. “See? This thing doesn’t even have that many standard predictions. We even got the same one.”

Doc takes offense again. “I’ve never seen two people get the same prediction,” he lies.

Whatever. I’m done arguing with him, I’d rather get back to my date. “Thank you for the entertainment,” I say, taking out my wallet.

To my surprise, he shakes his head. “We had a deal. Just remember to come and see me when what the Mouth of Truth said will come to pass.”

I chuckle as I take Lakyn’s hand into mine again and lead her away from the Mouth of Truth.

We walk toward the end of the pier, where the sea laps lazily at the thick pillars the whole thing is built on now that the tide is in.

Neither of us says anything for a long moment as we lean on the railing, looking at the dark water.

“Thank you for bringing me here, Cash,” she says softly. “Tonight has been great. I can’t remember the last time I had so much fun.”

Her words make me happy, but I’m not ready for the night to be over yet. “Do you feel up for a ride on the Ferris wheel?” I point toward it. It’s just a few feet behind us.

“Sure.” She smiles. “Usually I’m scared of heights, but those pods have a floor and a ceiling, so I should be fine. Let’s go.”

For the umpteenth time tonight, my eyes land on her lips.

I don’t even think about it and reach out to touch the corner of her mouth with my fingers. “You have something on you. Powdered sugar from the funnel cake,” I inform her.

“Oh no, have I walked around like this for the last twenty minutes? I can’t even imagine what the horoscope guy must have thought. Let me look at myself with the camera on my phone and—”

She begins fumbling with her bag, but I stop her.

“Don’t worry, let me.”

I run my finger over the white powder, and most of it goes away, but then I realize this might be my chance to do what I’ve been dying to since I met her.

“Hmm, let me make sure you’re all cleaned up.”

I take her top lip into my mouth, nibbling gently on it as I use my tongue to lick off any remnants of powdered sugar.

Lakyn lets out a soft gasp, but she doesn’t move away.

Emboldened, I repeat the gesture with her plump bottom lip. “You taste so sweet,” I murmur, abandoning any pretense



of “cleaning her” and pressing my lips more firmly against hers.

There’s a second of hesitation that makes my heart beat faster than when I see my adversaries skating toward me at breakneck speed with the puck glued to their sticks.

I brace myself for her to pull away, but she doesn’t.

The second she starts kissing me back, I know I want more.

My tongue runs over the seam of her lips, coaxing them to open for me.

I can taste the sugar from the funnel cake on her tongue and a hint of something fruity, probably the lip gloss she reapplied before leaving the restaurant.

Whatever that is, Lakyn’s taste is sweet and addictive, and I deepen the kiss.

I thread my fingers through her hair, finding it even softer than I’ve been imagining all night.

I don’t hold back as I explore her mouth, but I give her space to do the same with me. Lakyn gives as good as she gets, tangling her tongue with mine. Our lips are fused together as her soft chest is smashed against my hard one.

We kiss against the railing until her lips look swollen from my relentless attack and my chest isn’t the only thing in my body that’s hard.

“You taste so fucking good,” I murmur against her lips.

“You too.” Her fingers play with the short hair at the nape of my neck.

Lakyn’s voice is slightly breathless, and she’s so beautiful with her blue eyes darkened by the same desire that’s making me want to hoist her over my shoulder and take her back to my truck. I’m not even sure I can make it all the way back to her apartment before I act on all the hot things I’m dying to do to her.

Fuck.

I need to slow down. It doesn't take knowing Lakyn for a long time to realize that she's as far from a puck bunny as humanly possible. Both she and Bay hinted at the fact that she's coming out of a long-term relationship that ended up in a bad breakup, so I can't just take her to my truck to see if I can get lucky and then tell her that I'll see her around.

That's not what I want anyway. I want to see Lakyn again. I knew that before I even kissed her.

I don't have time for a serious relationship though. All my time and energy are spent on playing my best and keeping my grades up to keep my scholarship.

That's why I don't date, and I make it clear to my hookups that all I can offer is a good time with absolutely no strings attached.

I've never met anyone like Lakyn though. She's fun, smart, and so beautiful that right now, I don't trust myself alone with her.

The Ferris wheel.

I promised her a ride on it, and that's perfect. I can kiss her again, and I can ask her for a second date.

If anything happens between us once we're alone, she'll know I'm not just trying to get laid to then pretend I don't even know her.

"Let's go on the Ferris wheel."

The words die in my mouth when I turn to look at it and notice that the bright lights that beckoned people to it have been turned off.

"Shit, I'm sorry. I just realized that the wheel closes at midnight. We must have been standing here longer than I thought."

Lakyn shrugs. "Don't worry, we can come back another time. I've had a long week with classes and a few shifts at the library, so I'm starting to feel the week."

I nod. "Yeah, me too. I don't have practice tomorrow, but between classes, that auction, and training, I'm beat. Do you

want to start walking back to my truck?”



Lakyn



A PART OF ME IS DISAPPOINTED that we didn't get to go on the Ferris wheel, and I don't really want the night to be over, but I'm genuinely tired.

I'm equally looking forward to Cash driving me home and dreading it.

I hope he kisses me again on my doorstep, but I'm also going to be gutted if he doesn't ask me out again. He did hint at wanting a second date when he tried to prove that the Mouth of Truth couldn't recognize a lie, right?

“Let's go.”

He closes his hand around mine, and I can't help but notice how huge his hand is.

My ex wasn't particularly tall nor broad, so Cash is a giant compared to him.

I might know nothing about hockey, but while I was snooping around on the team's social media, I learned that Cash is six foot five and weighs two hundred and twenty-five pounds. The nickname his teammates gave him is “The Wall.”

It isn't a particularly imaginative nickname, since he's a goalie, but it's definitely fitting because of his sheer size.

Our fingers are twined together, and I really love the sense of strength I get from his touch. I'm so excited by his nearness that I'm not paying attention to where I'm going, and Bay's ridiculously high wedge sandals strike again.

“Oh shit!”

My ankle twists, and I lose my footing. I would have fallen face-first on the planks of the boardwalk if it wasn't for Cash's

quick reaction.

“Lakyn.” He lets go of my hand to catch me, keeping me from crashing down. “Are you alright?”

I’m not. My right ankle throbs with searing hot pain, and I didn’t even realize that tears are streaming down my face. “I—it really hurts.”

One of his strong arms is wrapped around my waist to support me. “Do you think you can walk on it? I’m going to hold onto you, so you’re not going to fall. Try to put your weight on it and let’s see how it feels.”

The second I try to take a step, pain shoots from my ankle up to my knee and my entire leg.

I wobble as my ankle gives in, and I owe it to Cash’s hold that I don’t crumble to the ground.

“Nope,” he says. “You can’t walk on it.”

I don’t even realize what’s happening as Cash lifts me into his arms as if I weigh nothing.

“Let’s go,” he says more calmly than I feel right now. “Hopefully it’s just a sprain, but I would feel better if we got this checked out at the ER.”

I open my mouth to protest, but he shakes his blond head. “Trust me, Lakyn. If it’s broken, you want to make sure it’s seen by a doctor sooner rather than later. You might need surgery, and I don’t want you to be in a lot of pain tomorrow. I’m taking you to the ER.”

I don’t say anything the entire way to his truck, a mixture of emotions warring in my chest. I’m embarrassed by my klutziness, worried about the possibility of it being broken, and strangely elated by the feeling of Cash’s hard chest against my body.

I’m surprised that Cash doesn’t look mad at me for ruining the end of our date, just concerned about my well-being.

My ankle really hurts, but my date’s calm and caring attitude gives me the strange feeling that everything will be all right.

“Can I put you down for a sec to open the passenger door?” he asks when we get to the parking lot. “Lean against the truck and make sure you don’t put any weight on that foot.”

He picks me back up once the truck door is open and fusses around me to make sure I’m sitting comfortably. He even buckles my seatbelt.

I watch him run around the front of his truck to get into the driver’s seat. “Is there anyone you want me to call? Maybe your parents or Bay?” he asks before putting the key into the ignition.

I look at his handsome face, and I see nothing but genuine care in his gray eyes.

That’s the last straw, and I burst into tears.

“Lakyn, does it hurt that much? Do you want me to call an ambulance? I can—”

I shake my head. “No,” I manage to choke out. “I’m so sorry, Cash. I’m an idiot, and I’ve totally ruined our night. I don’t think it’s serious enough to need an ambulance, but if you want to go home, I can get a cab to the hospital. Bay and Topher were going to a party, so I can try her, but I doubt she’ll even hear her phone. I’ll be okay though, I’m just so sorry.”

He looks confused. “Why would you get a cab? I said I’m going to take you.”

I fight to keep my voice from trembling. “You said you were tired, and since you want me to call Bay—”

He takes my hand, lacing his fingers through mine like he’s been doing from the first time he held my hand earlier on. “The reason why I mentioned Bay is because you look so upset, I thought you’d want your sister by your side. That’s in addition to me though, because I’m not leaving you.”

The kindness of his tone makes my tears fall faster. “But you said you were tired,” I repeat, wanting to give him a way out if he’s planning to stay out of some sense of duty.

“No,” he says softly. “*You* said you were tired when I realized that the Ferris wheel was closed, so I went along with it. I thought you had enough of my company, but I’m not going to leave you until I know you’re safe and sound.”

Oh.

“Really? You aren’t mad at me for ruining our date?”

He scoots closer to me, reaching out with his free hand to tuck a lock of hair behind my ear. “Why the fuck would I be mad at you?”

I hesitate to tell him. I was reading a couple of articles Bay sent me about how to have a great first date, and they all said that mentioning your ex too much is a turn off, however, I can’t help but tell him how I feel when I see the look of genuine concern in the depths of his gray eyes. “My ex would have been furious about having to drive me to the ER,” I finally admit when his gray gaze doesn’t waver from my eyes. “He used to get annoyed when I wasn’t paying attention or—”

“Your ex sounds like an asshole,” he grumbles. “No offense.”

“None taken.” I sigh.

I always get really upset when Bay calls Jon a dipshit—which is all the time—but deep down I know my sister isn’t totally wrong.

Jonathan is everything I’ve ever known when it comes to dating, and it’s never occurred to me that it could be better.

This night with Cash has been a real eye-opener, even if it was a date bought at an auction.

I never knew that dating could be so fun and exciting at the same time.

Sure, I was nervous because Cash is one of the most eligible men on campus, and he’s even hotter in person than in the many photos of him I see everywhere I go.

By the end of the night, though, I was enjoying every second of this date without worrying about acting a certain way so I didn’t disappoint my date’s expectations.

I was myself, and Cash seemed to like it enough to kiss me.

I steal a glance at his perfect profile as he turns the key in the ignition.

The memory of his lips on mine causes heat to rise to my face, and I'm grateful that his attention is focused on the road.

Wait until Bay hears about our kiss. I don't even care that she's going to gloat about being right that kissing is awesome.





## 10.

### Breakfast At Lakyn's



Cash



WHEN I WAS HOPING THAT Lakyn would invite me to come into her apartment at the end of the night, I never anticipated it would be like this.

That's the thought that hits me as I unlock her door and sweep her into my arms, stepping inside her place.

Okay, technically she didn't invite me in. At the hospital, they diagnosed a minor sprain and recommended that she avoids putting too much weight on the injured ankle.

They gave her a pair of crutches, which fell to the paved ground by her front door as I decided to carry her inside.

"You know you don't have to carry me around, right?" she says softly. "They gave me those crutches for a reason."

I offer her my most reassuring smile. "I know, but you're still shaken, and you got hurt while you were out with me, so you're my responsibility."

That must have been the wrong thing to say, because Lakyn's eyes drift away from mine.

"I'm sorry. I totally ruined our date, and you don't have to worry about me, Cash. Tasha, my roommate, must be out, but she's going to be around to help me in the morning, and I'll call Bay too. You don't have to feel responsible—"

"I didn't mean it that way," I force out in a rush because this is starting to go wrong.

This is why I don't fucking date. Hockey and my family are my whole life, and I don't have time for anything else.

Which translates into, "I have zero game with chicks," at least if you listen to Topher and most of my teammates and frat brothers.

"Where's your room?"

I carry her down the short hallway to the door she points out, and I barely notice the tidy room, decorated in soft pastel colors, as I march toward the queen-sized bed that takes most of the space.

"Lakyn," I say honestly after I lower her against her pillows, "I'm not still here just because you got hurt on my watch. You aren't a child, and I know I'm not responsible for you. That isn't what I meant."

Her eyes are fixed somewhere on her light blue comforter, as if she is too embarrassed to look at me. "I—"

"I'm sorry you got hurt, but at the same time, that gave me an excuse to see your room," I admit, unable to stifle a smile when her eyes widen at my words. "Do you know why I was distracted when we were walking back to my truck? I was looking for a way to get invited in here after I kissed you on your doorstep."

Her soft lips form a surprised O. She's fucking adorable. "Really?"

I nod. "Really."

What I don't tell her is that girls usually can't wait to drag me into their rooms. The problem is leaving without sounding like an asshole the second I dispose of the condom.

Hookups are easy, and puck bunnies know the drill for the most part. If that makes me sound like a piece of shit, ask each of my teammates who aren't in a relationship.

"I usually don't date, Lakyn," I say instead, deciding that honesty is the best policy after all. "I wasn't planning on changing that when I came to pick you up earlier, but I had fun tonight, and I'd like to see you again if you want."

“I had fun too,” she says, her eyes drifting back up to meet mine. “I’d love to see you again, Cash.”

My lips crush hers, and I don’t hesitate to trace the seam of her mouth with my tongue the second she kisses me back.

I’ve never gotten hard with one kiss, but this girl has the power to get all my blood to flow south in seconds.

“Hmm,” she murmurs against my mouth. “Bay was right. I didn’t like kissing because I never had a good kiss.”

Lakyn’s words cause a strange sense of pride to invade my chest. I’m ready for another searing hot kiss, but I stop in my tracks at her next words.

“I wonder if what I read about getting an idea about the size of a guy’s dick from the size of his hands and feet is true,” she says, covering my hand on her jaw with her own. “You have huge hands.”

A giggle escapes her, and that’s when I notice how her blue gaze is slightly unfocused. “Lakyn, are you okay?” I can’t help but ask as her finger trails down my chest.

“I’m peachy,” she says with a wide yawn. “Can I look at it?”

That hand traveling down my chest is distracting, and I close my fingers around her wrist. I need to focus because it doesn’t look like Lakyn is right now. “Can you look at what?”

Another one of those cute giggles. “Your dick, silly! I bet it’s huge, like your hands. I’ve never seen a dick in real life, you know?”

Fuck.

I mean that quite literally.

“Lakyn, did you take any more of the painkillers they gave you at the ER?”

It’s the only explanation, because the sweet, slightly shy girl I got to know tonight never would have admitted the stuff Lakyn just did—not that there’s any shame in not having seen a dick in real life.

“I did while you left with the nurse to get my crutches. My ankle was hurting too much, and I thought—” Another yawn cuts off her words and her eyes close of their own accord.

“Maybe you took too much?” I offer.

“Maybe,” she says, relaxing against the pillows. “But I want to see if your dick is as big as your hands. Bay says that you should never date a guy with a tiny dick.”

I’m saved by the painkillers as a soft snore comes out of Lakyn’s slightly parted lips.

Not that I’d have any problems showing Lakyn that I have nothing to fear when it comes to the size of my dick, but the second she started talking about it, I knew she wasn’t all there.

“You’re going to have to wait to find out.” I smile, ignoring the way my dick is screaming at me. “I might not have a ton of experience with dating, but I’m pretty sure that doing anything with someone who’s high on medication is a big no.”

*Maybe this is for the best*, I think as I brush a lock of blonde hair away from her forehead.

I have no idea what the fuck I’m doing. I don’t have time for a girlfriend. My plan for tonight was to do the bare minimum to justify the money Bay donated to buy a date with me and then go back to the Gamma house for an early night.

What I never could have anticipated was that I actually really like Bay’s twin sister. It isn’t just because of how obviously gorgeous she is. There’s something about this girl that I can never have enough of, and despite my best intentions to focus on my degree and my game, I want to see her again.

I should probably go, but I talk myself into staying to watch over her. What if she has an adverse reaction to the painkillers? Granted, she took them a while ago, but she obviously overdid it.

What if she wakes up and forgets about using the crutches and falls over, injuring herself even further?

I remember that I left the crutches by the door and dash to get them, propping them on the wall by Lakyn's nightstand.

My eyes rove over her cute sundress, and I don't even think about what I'm doing as I pull back the covers, tucking her in.

Her shoes are in my truck, but I can get them tomorrow. It's not like she's going to wear high heels anytime soon.

"You're all set," I say more to myself than to her. "I'm going to go sleep on the couch. I'll be there if you need me."

That's what I should do, but my feet carry me around the bed rather than out of her room.

I take my shoes off and decide to keep my clothes on as I climb into bed and snuggle up to her.

I'd never take advantage of a girl who's passed out, but staying dressed and staying on top of the covers is my extra insurance.



Lakyn



EVERYTHING HURTS.

That's the awareness that hits me the second I open my eyes. I whimper as just a simple yawn makes my head throb with pain.

I would understand the headache and the metallic taste on my tongue if I had overdone it with drinks last night, but unless someone roofied my milkshake at dinner, there's no reason why my mouth should feel like it's full of cotton.

My head isn't the only thing that hurts though, there's a dull but persistent pain in my ankle too.

The memory of almost falling to my death because of Bay's sky-high wedge sandals hits me as I realize that

someone must have put a pillow under my injured ankle to keep it elevated.

*Cash.*

My date with the Star Cove Knights' goalie rushes back to my memory.

Before I fucked everything up by twisting my ankle, I was having the best date of my life.

My mind goes back to the way Cash kissed me at the pier and how he carried me to his truck and stayed with me at the ER.

He took me home and carried me into my room.

Did I dream that he kissed me again and we made out on my bed?

*I want to see if your dick is as big as your hands.*

My own voice echoes in my ears, and I groan. I didn't really say that last night. Right?

Shit, shit, shit.

I think I really said that, and I might have also told him that I've never seen a dick in real life.

Kill me now.

I shouldn't be surprised that I'm alone in my room this morning. Cash probably couldn't get out of here fast enough, despite being a gentleman and making sure that I was okay.

Feeling his strong arms around me must be a fabrication of my dreams.

And yet... is that the indentation of someone's head on the pillow next to mine?

Please tell me I didn't snore or worse in my sleep and make things even more embarrassing.

I cover my face with my hands, thinking about all the possibilities. There are a number of embarrassing things I could have done that would make any guy run for the hills. I could have talked in my sleep, even though I don't think that

asleep Lakyn could top the request of comparing the size of his dick to his hand. There's always the chance that I could have farted after all that fried food, and if that's the case, I couldn't even blame Cash for making himself scarce.

Wait a minute though. The guy might have had enough of me, but he's a real gentleman because he left me a bottle of water and the bottle of painkillers I got at the hospital on my nightstand.

Is that a note?

I take the yellow sticky note stuck to the screen of my cell phone with trembling fingers.

*Hey sleepyhead,*

*I didn't have the heart to wake you, but I was starving, so I thought I'd go get us some breakfast. If you wake up in the meantime, I left you some water and your painkillers within reach. Just make sure you don't take more than two, especially on an empty stomach, you were a little out of it last night.*

*If you need to get up for any reason, be careful and use the crutches. I won't be long.*

*Cash*

Aww. He's so considerate, he went to get me breakfast.

But also, fuck. Cash is too nice to say that I was a total train wreck. His recommendation to take it easy with the painkillers can only mean that my blabbering about the size of his dick wasn't just some painkiller-induced dream.

I'm going to have to apologize when he comes back. I also have to hurry to use the bathroom and brush my teeth. I don't know how long he's been gone, and there's no way I can let him anywhere near me before toothpaste and mouthwash take care of this awful taste in my mouth.

*It definitely must be the painkillers,* I think as my head spins the second I sit up straighter.

My ankle doesn't hurt as badly as it did last night when I get up, but the doctor told me to keep my weight off it for at

least forty-eight hours, so I use the crutches to get to my bathroom.

I get done just in the nick of time as I hear the front door close and Cash's deep voice coming from my bedroom.

"Hey," I greet him, avoiding his gaze.

"Hey, glad to see you're up. Sorry I left, but I was hungry, and I thought I'd change into clean clothes while I was out."

I take in his dark gray T-shirt and black athletic shorts and holy fuck. If I thought Cash Hanbury was smoking hot in a button-down shirt and jeans, this simpler outfit makes him totally mouthwatering.

The cotton of his T-shirt stretches over his broad chest, doing nothing to hide how ripped he must be underneath it.

Cash looked sexy in jeans, but his long, muscular legs covered in a light dusting of blond hair are so perfect that I have to force my eyes away.

If he notices the way I'm checking him out, Cash is too nice to call me out on it. "I got us some sausage and egg sandwiches. I put them on your coffee table, unless you want to have breakfast in bed..."

Is he hinting at the fact that he wants to go back to bed? His open smile doesn't give me any indication, so I opt for the relative safety of the living room. If I did something embarrassing last night, then the last thing I want is to remind him by going back to the scene of the crime. Not that we must have done much more than kiss, since I'm still in last night's clothes.

"Let's go eat on the couch," I say. If Cash wanted to have breakfast in bed, he would have brought the food here.

"How's your ankle?" he asks.

"Not as bad as last night, but I'm not used to crutches," I offer. "It's hard to move around with them."

Exactly like last night, I'm swept off my feet before I have the chance to take one more step.



“Then don’t use them for now. I can help.”

Cash carries me to the living room as if I weigh nothing, and I have no complaints aside from a little surprised squeal when he lifts me into his arms.

I can’t help but bask in his solid warmth and notice how good he smells. He has a clean scent, like cotton and a hint of sunscreen, and the skin at the nape of his neck is smooth and silky.

“Oh my god.” I groan, sinking my teeth into the warm breakfast sandwich. “How did you know that Jack in the Box is my favorite for breakfast?”

“I didn’t.” He smiles. “It’s my favorite too.”

Could this guy be any sexier?

“Sorry, I didn’t know what you like to drink in the morning, so I got you a coffee and also a soda,” he says, drinking from the straw on one of the two fountain drinks on the table.

“You don’t like coffee?” I ask.

He scrunches his nose when he answers. “Yuck, I can’t stand it, but I didn’t want to assume and got you some.”

I’d usually drink the coffee, and I know Bay will laugh at me for drinking the soda instead in the hopes of being kissed again by Cash.

We eat in silence for a while, or at least Cash eats and I mostly watch him.

It’s not like I didn’t know what he looked like before last night. Our hockey team is extremely popular, and there are posters of the players all over campus.

I just never stopped to really look at him and how hot he is. I’m not in the popular circles like Bay, so I never thought I’d get to know any of the guys. There’s also the fact that up until a couple of weeks ago, I had a boyfriend.

“Lakyn.” Cash’s deep voice pulls me out of my reveries. “Are you okay?”

Fuck.

He caught me staring like a lovestruck fan girl or worse, like one of those puck bunnies Bay keeps talking about.

“I’m fine,” I offer.

“Is there anything wrong with your sandwich?”

I realize that Cash is looking at my barely touched breakfast.

“No, it’s delicious. Thank you. I just—I’m not very hungry.”

If he knows that that’s code for, “I’m too busy ogling you to eat,” he’s nice enough not to say anything.

“If you aren’t going to eat it, do you mind if I finish it?”

I nod, mesmerized by the way he wolfs the whole thing down in three bites.

I like it. My ex always used to comment on the amount of carbs I ate. I always justified his judgmental speeches with the fact that Jon is studying chemistry with an emphasis on food and nutrition, but I hated how self-conscious I always felt eating in front of him.

“Now I feel better.” Cash smiles, patting his flat stomach. “What do you want to do with the rest of the morning? I don’t have practice today and I thought I’d hang around and make sure you’re okay on those crutches.”

I lower my gaze, staring at my own hands in my lap as if they were the most interesting thing I’ve ever seen. “I—”

I don’t want him to stay out of some sense of obligation, but how do I say that without sounding rude? I can’t say I have to work, he knows that the library is closed on Sundays.

“You don’t have to stay if you don’t want to.”

Lame, I know. Cut me some slack though, it’s the best and least pathetic thing I can come up with right now.

Cash takes my hand into his, and every time that happens, I can’t help but marvel at how big his hands are.

“I know I don’t have to.” The corners of his lips quirk up in that hint of a smile I kept admiring last night.

It’s unfair, but that barely there smile looks even sexier in the daylight.

He pulls me closer until our knees are touching on the two-seater couch, and I can feel the warmth radiating from his tall, perfect body. “I stayed last night because I was genuinely concerned about you, but my reasons weren’t exactly selfless,” he says, threading his fingers through mine. “I had a really good time on our date, and I was hoping it wouldn’t be over once I took you home.”

Oh.

“I had a great time too,” I say, totally lost in the gray depths of his eyes. “I’m sorry I ruined everything—”

He silences me with a finger over my lips. “That’s the second time you’ve said that, Lakyn. You didn’t ruin our date, and as far as I’m concerned, we’re still on it.”

His eyes descend to my lips, and I don’t even know who closes the distance between us.

Cash’s lips are as soft as I remember, and the kiss starts soft and sweet like last night by the pier.

Things change, though, the second I feel the tip of his tongue teasing me to open for him.

Once our kiss deepens, Cash is relentless. Every lash of his tongue against mine causes heat to travel down my body, pooling in the space between my thighs.

His big hands cup my face, our chests touching, and it’s not enough.

I need more contact, more of his mouth, of his hands. I need more.

I practically climb onto his lap, the feeling of his muscular thighs doing nothing to improve the situation in my panties.

I’m hot and wet, and I’m pretty sure he can feel it, but I’m beyond caring.

“Oh,” I say against his mouth when his hands cup my breasts.

“This okay?” he murmurs, leaving my lips and trailing open-mouthed kisses down the column of my neck.

First base is the furthest Jon and I ever got to. His family is very religious, and he had a promise ring and everything.

I thought that was why I never felt the need to do more, because he considered it a sin and never tried to get closer.

Now I realize that I wasn't that attracted to him after all.

I know Bay will say “I told you so,” but this isn't the time to think about my ex or my sister.

I answer Cash's question with a breathy, “Yes,” that turns into a moan when his soft lips glide down my shoulder and collarbone, reaching the swell of my breasts.

“Fuck, Lakyn,” he murmurs, kissing every inch of exposed skin. “You have the most perfect tits I've ever seen. I've been thinking about doing this since the second you walked toward my truck last night.”

He lowers one of the spaghetti straps of my sundress, his gray eyes fixed on mine in a silent plea for permission.

I don't trust my own voice at this point, so all I can do is nod.

“Oh God,” I murmur when he closes his mouth over one of my pebbled nipples.

Cash licks, sucks, and grazes my aching point, and I'm on fire.

I want more, I want everything.

“Baby,” he says, pushing me down on the couch with his weight. “Please tell me if you want me to stop.”

Do I want him to stop?

The answer is no. I'm attracted to Cash, and we had a great time last night. The reason I haven't had sex before isn't that I was saving myself for any special reason. I just had a

boyfriend who was, and I accepted that our physical relationship would have to wait until marriage. Now that I'm single and Jon has clearly moved on, there's no reason not to explore things, especially with a hottie like Cash.

I shake my head. "Don't stop, Cash."

He doesn't hesitate, taking my lips again in a hot, frantic kiss.

I almost cry out when his hands leave my tits, missing his warm, slightly rough hands on me.

Thankfully his hands just left my breasts to trace my rib cage through the thin fabric of my dress.

He gathers the skirt, bunching it up around my waist with deft fingers, skimming his way down my hips.

"You're so fucking beautiful, Lakyn," he says, torturing my bottom lip between his teeth.

His hot, hard body covers mine, but he's holding himself on his elbows, careful not to crush me with his weight.

I'm so excited and nervous that I don't even try to put into words how sexy he is. Instead, I show him.

My heart is beating so hard and fast that I'm surprised it isn't leaping out of my mouth when I dare lift his T-shirt, pushing it over his head.

Holy shit.

Nothing could have prepared me for the sight of a shirtless Cash Hanbury.



# 11.

## Cockblockers



Lakyn



DON'T GET ME WRONG, I've admired the occasional Hollywood actor if I'm watching a movie like *Magic Mike*—Bay and I are huge Channing Tatum fans.

I might have stared at a few underwear models in magazines longer than necessary at the hair salon while waiting to get a haircut.

I appreciate a six pack and defined pecs like the next girl, but Cash is unreal.

He has an eight—no, hold on, maybe a twelve pack. I stopped counting at ten.

His chest and abs are carved in stone, all hard, perfect lines encased by fair, smooth skin.

My first touch is hesitant as I trace his collarbone, marveling when a few goosebumps appear in the wake of my touch.

That must mean that he likes this, and I gather the courage to follow my fingers with my lips.

Cash's skin is as soft as it looks, and his low moan of approval encourages me to travel down his chest, flicking my tongue down the straight line in the center of his abs.

I have a clear target in mind—the V that's carved on his hips and disappears into the low waistband of his black athletic shorts.

Cash isn't idle while he lets me explore his upper body. His big hands have been massaging my hips, teasing the skin under the lace of my panties.

I yelp in protest when I'm almost at his belly button and he pushes me down on the couch, interrupting my journey toward his Adonis belt.

"Was I doing something wrong?" I can't help but ask as he stops to stare at me with those intense gray eyes of his. "I'm sorry if I—"

He sucks my bottom lip into his mouth before putting me out of my misery. "Fuck no, baby. You were doing everything right, too right if you ask me."

As if to prove his point, he grinds his hips against me, letting me feel the effect my kisses have on him.

He's hard in his shorts, and the contact with his erection causes a delicious, almost painful throb between my legs.

That can't possibly be his dick. I mean, I know it is, but it feels huge. Are cocks supposed to be that big?

"Can you feel how fucking hard you make me?" he murmurs, giving my lips another passionate nip.

There's no way in hell I wouldn't be able to feel it. It's so hard and big that right now it's definitely the elephant in the room.

I snort at the thought. Sorry, but I love my puns, and elephants have those big trunks, so the comparison feels very fitting. "Then why did you stop me?"

His lips tilt up in that hint of a smile that I'm starting to recognize as typical of Cash, and his eyes darken as he grinds against me, harder this time.

"Because if that hot little mouth of yours gets anywhere near my cock right now, I'm going to blow my load."

I thought that was the whole point. "Yeah, I thought that was what you wanted."



“I do.” He chuckles. “I have no idea what you heard about me around campus, Lakyn, but I’m a gentleman. I always make sure that the ladies come first. Then I can fuck that gorgeous mouth of yours and your tits before sinking deep into your little pussy.”

Okay then.

I don’t even stop to consider the fact that he used the plural when he said “ladies.”

The idea of him fucking my mouth and tits and then—

I squirm as a gush of liquid heat floods me to the point that I feel the dampness trickle down my thighs.

Cash wants to make me come. I don’t know if that’s even possible. With Jon, that was obviously out of the question.

*If you aren’t going to drive the car, then what’s the point of putting the key into the ignition to begin with? You shouldn’t even get in the car.* That was what he said to explain why he wouldn’t even try to go further than a chaste kiss.

I tried by myself once or twice, especially when Bay gave me this magic wand thing last year for our birthday, but I didn’t get anywhere the few times I took it out of the box.

Some of it was guilt—I almost felt like I was cheating on Jon by trying to give myself an orgasm—and I couldn’t relax enough for it to feel good. In the end I concluded that, like kisses, orgasms weren’t all that they were made out to be.

“Lakyn, baby,” Cash says softly. “Do you want me to make you come?”

Fuck yeah.

I don’t say that of course. I’m a little nervous that it might end up like my failed solo sessions, but Cash already proved me wrong when it comes to kissing.

I nod, and that’s all the permission he needs to move my panties to the side, brushing against my bare skin.

I’m grateful to Bay for torturing me with that ungodly Brazilian wax last night when Cash smiles.

“Your skin is so soft, baby. I love how wet you are for me.”

Maybe I should feel embarrassed about it, but he seems pleased by it.

I gasp when he rubs two thick fingers at the apex of my thighs, sneaking just the tip of his digits inside me to gather my wetness.

Cash’s fingers glide up my slit, parting my skin as he travels toward the spot that’s throbbing with need.

His first touch is a light, almost casual brush against my clit that causes a ripple of hot sensation to travel to all my nerve endings.

I don’t even realize that I’m tensing up until his warm breath tickles my ear.

“Does this feel good, baby?”

Another touch, this time with more pressure.

A spasm courses through my entire body, and I cry out. “Yes!”

I’m rewarded with another touch. This time, the tips of his fingers trace the sensitive edges of my slit before rubbing a tight circle on the upper part of my little bundle of nerves.

Cash swallows my moan with a kiss, rubbing that spot again and again.

My hips move of their own accord to get more of his touch as my body is invaded by the strangest feeling.

It’s pleasure and pain at the same time. It’s tension and need, and it’s similar to climbing a hill as my heart rate skyrockets with each circle of Cash’s fingers.

It feels so good that I want to keep climbing, desperate for the next touch of his skilled fingers, desperate for more.

Then I snap.

Just when I thought this couldn’t feel any better, my entire world explodes. I lose control of my body as waves of the

most intense sensation ripple through me.

He keeps working me with his fingers as his mouth devours mine, until I become too sensitive, and the pleasure begins turning into pain.

“I got you, baby,” Cash murmurs, moving the soft fabric of my panties back into place. “Are you okay?”

I’m a mess but in the best way possible. I don’t even need to look at myself to know that I’m blushing. My face feels hot, my nipples are hard and sensitive, and my entire body is still tingling as my pussy spasms with tiny aftershocks from the orgasm I just had.

“I’m more than okay.” I can’t help but smile, reaching down between his legs to find that he’s even bigger and harder than before. “I believe that you’re going to fuck my mouth now? Or my tits?”

Yeah, I just said that.

Don’t even ask me where that came from. I officially don’t know anything, not even who I am.

Cash nods, his eyes full of dark promises. “You can bet your cute little ass I am, but first, I need to taste you.”

I watch, mesmerized, as he brings the two fingers he’s been touching me with to his face. They are coated in something clear and shiny.

I think that came from me, and I have the confirmation of it when Cash sticks both fingers into his mouth.

“Fuck, you taste even sweeter than I expected. I think I’m going to eat you out before I fuck your mouth. Do you want to come again, baby?”

“Yes.” The word leaves my mouth before I can even think about it.

He bites my bottom lip harder than before, but it doesn’t hurt. Another wave of sensation travels down to my clit, and I’m up for anything he wants to do.

He can touch me, eat me, fuck me.

Cash can have anything he wants if he can make me feel the way he just did again.

The thought crosses my mind that my sister was right, again.

She said kisses are awesome, and I didn't think so just because I hadn't kissed someone who knew what they were doing. Bay also said that orgasms are the best feeling ever and that the only people who say they are overrated are the ones who never had one.

She won't let me live it down when I tell her that she had it right all this time.

Talking to my sister will have to wait, though, as Cash slides down on the couch, wedging his broad shoulders between my thighs.

"Breakfast at your place was nice, but I left some room for dessert." He chuckles, lowering his face toward my aching center.

Oh boy.

Cash is known as a quiet, reserved type all over campus. Wait until I tell Bay that he has a dirty mouth.

"Honey, we're home!"

As if summoned by my thoughts, my sister barges into my living room like the biggest cockblocker in history, followed by my roommate.

We all freeze like the proverbial deer caught in the headlights.

Bay and Tasha gasp, their eyes wide at the scene in front of them.

I groan, partially embarrassed about being caught in a compromising position and annoyed about being interrupted.

Cash remains calm—a great characteristic for a goalie, if you ask me—but lowers my thighs from his shoulders, straightens up, and discreetly adjusts himself in his shorts.

“I guess our date is officially over,” he says. “I’m going to go, Lakyn. Can I call you later?”

I nod, speechless as he places a soft peck on my lips before shoving his arms into his T-shirt and offering me another one of those barely there smiles of his. “See you later, Lakyn. Let me know if you need anything. Ladies...”

The second he’s out of the door, my twin sister and roommate attack me with a steady stream of questions.

This is going to be a long day.



Lakyn



“NOT TO TELL YOU I TOLD you so, but...”

My sister’s smug expression is irritating. “You told me so?” I finish her sentence for her, crossing my arms over my chest and throwing a glare in her direction for good measure.

“Yup.” She nods.

I swear, sometimes Bay is the worst. “Fine,” I bite out. “You were right that maybe Jon wasn’t the right guy for me, but that doesn’t mean you’re always right. Tell her, Tasha.”

My roommate opens her mouth to say something, but Bay cuts her off. “I don’t even know why you’re arguing with me right now. Did you or did you not have the best date ever with Cash?”

I don’t look her in the eyes. “Yeah,” I grumble.

“Did you or did you not enjoy kissing him?”

I roll my eyes but concede. “I did.”

“Then why the fuck are you mad at me?”

I swear to God, for someone super smart, sometimes my sister is a real idiot. “Maybe because I was about to experience

Cash's mouth on me, and you barged in here with the worst timing in history?"

She has the decency to blush. "Oh, right. I'm sorry about that, but I had just turned my phone back on after last night, and I saw a slightly incoherent text from you saying you were at the ER and another one from Cash saying you slipped on the boardwalk and twisted your ankle. He mentioned crutches and I got worried, so I practically ran here from the Gamma house. I bumped into Tasha in front of that bakery right outside campus, and we thought we'd get you some bagels to make you feel better." She lifts a brown bag as if to prove that she's telling the truth.

"We got you your favorite, Parmesan and Asiago. It's still warm," Tasha says, backing Bay.

What do you know? When Cash was here, I was too excited to eat, and now I'm starving.

"Not so fast," Bay says, moving the bag out of my reach. "So Cash made you come? I want all the details."

I try to pounce for the bag, but I land back on my ass on the couch when my ankle reminds me that it might feel better than last night, but it isn't totally healed. "You're so mean." I pout. "Okay, we're identical twins, but that doesn't mean I have to tell you everything."

That was the wrong thing to say. There's nothing worse than telling Bay that she can't have something to make her even more determined to have it.

"Ha. She doesn't have to tell me everything. Did you hear that, Tasha? We should make sure to enroll Lake in the next talent show sponsored by the Greek Council as a stand-up comedian."

God, she's so dramatic. "Whatever. I'm serious. I don't have to tell you every tiniest detail of my life, Bay."

She sets her gaze on me, ready to argue her point, but her next words are out there, even for her. "That would be true if I didn't know you better than you know yourself, sis. I know exactly how good Cash made you feel."

She must be playing dirty to get me to tell her what she wants to know. “That’s a little arrogant, even for you,” I react. “Yeah, you bought me the date with Cash, and sure, you were right about Jon being a lousy kisser and that orgasms are amazing, but you can’t tell me that you know how I felt—”

“Lakey-Lake,” she says, looking straight into my eyes. “Not only do I know how good you felt, *I know*. I know because I felt it too.”

What the actual fuck?

“Bullshit,” I bite out.

Again, Bay speaks to Tasha rather than to me. “She doesn’t want to believe that our connection goes beyond what’s humanly comprehensible. Am I right, Tasha?”

My traitor of a roommate sides with her again. “She did, Lake. It was the weirdest thing. We were just turning the corner onto our street and Bay stopped and visibly shuddered. I asked her if she was okay, and she said she was more than okay.”

I cover my face with my hands. “Oh, for fuck’s sake.” I groan. “Don’t tell me that now I can’t even come without you knowing.”

Bay’s smile widens. “That’s exactly what I’m telling you. I felt your pleasure and—”

“And you thought it was a good idea to come home to interrupt me?”

She has the decency to apologize. “You’re right, on second thought, I probably should have waited, but I mean, you came, so I thought you were done. How could I know that Cash was so generous?”

Bay has a point. “You’re right. He was incredible, and he was going to go down on me before he fucked my mouth, my tits, and my—”

I stop in my tracks when I notice the horrified looks on Bay’s and Tasha’s faces. “What? I thought you wanted to know details.”

I think I can count the number of times I've seen my sister blush on one hand, and I don't even need all five fingers.

"I did, but Lakyn, were you seriously going to let him fuck you?"

Is she for real right now? "Would that be wrong if I did? Cash and I really hit it off."

My sister surprises me for the second time today. "But it would have been your first time. Don't you want it to be special?"

I'll never understand Bay, I swear. "I just—you kept going on about how I was wasting my time with Jon, how ridiculous you thought it was to wait for marriage to have sex, and now you judge me for wanting to do it with Cash?"

This is the thing about my twin sister and me, we're different and we clash more often than not, but we love each other fiercely. "Lake, I'm sorry. I would never judge you. My problem wasn't that you were waiting for marriage. My problem was that waiting wasn't really your choice. Dipshit imposed his choices on you regarding your sex life, the same way he was trying to bully you into giving up eating meat. You know that as long as you choose something out of your own free will, I'll always support you. Whether it is to become a vegan, to join a nunnery, or to fuck the entire hockey team, I'm in your corner. What I can't support is someone else telling you how to live your life."

I feel immediately guilty. "I know," I whisper, embarrassed that I questioned her motives. "I've never thought much about my first time to be honest. First because I was too shy, and then because Jon made it clear that anything more than kissing was off the table. I didn't think I even liked kissing, so sex wasn't even on my radar until..."

Bay's smile reaches her eyes. "Until Cash."

I nod, feeling heat rise to my face at the thought of the Star Cove Knights' goalie. "Shit!" I groan when a thought hits me for the first time since Cash left in a flurry of embarrassment.

"What?" Bay and Tasha ask in unison.



“Cash said he wanted to see me again and that he would call me, but I never gave him my phone number, and I never got his.”

Bay doesn't seem worried about my predicament. “It's fine. He knows where you live, and I have his number. Besides, you're going on two more dates, so you're going to be busy in the next couple of weeks.”

I begin shaking my head while she's still talking. “I don't need to. Cash asked me out again, and I like him, and I—”

“And you have no experience with men, Lake. May I remind you that you just admitted that until last night you didn't even think you liked kissing? There's a whole world out there full of so many interesting people, and this is what rebounds are all about. I bought you three dates, so you'd get to try a few different people and find out who's your type. College is the time to discover who you are and experiment a little. You're going on the other two dates and then, if Cash is who you still want, I have no objections.”

She's so stubborn. “Tasha, can you help me get Bay to understand that I—”

Didn't I already say that my roommate is a traitor?

She sides with Bay. Again. “Sorry, babe, I think your sister is right. Play the field.” She snickers. “No pun intended.”

I roll my eyes, annoyed that those two are ganging up on me. “Technically they don't play on a field. They play ice hockey.”

Tasha shrugs. “Potayto, potahto. You know what I mean.”

They are impossible. “But what will I say to Cash? I really want to see him again and—”

“He knows I bought three dates for you at the auction,” Bay informs me. “He was there too, and before you keep arguing with me, making out on the couch and asking you for a second date doesn't mean you're exclusive. Did he ask you to be his girlfriend?”

Her words have a sobering effect. “No, he didn't.”

Bay wraps her arm around my shoulders, pulling me into her side. She used to do that a lot as kids whenever I was frightened about something new. She's always been the one to try things first. "Until he does, you aren't doing anything wrong by going on two more first dates. He might hook up with someone else too, after all."

Just the idea of Cash with someone else makes me feel like I want to cry and also track that bitch down and fill her dorm room with glitter, or something equally horrible to get rid of. I know Bay is right though. Unless there's a talk about exclusivity, usually one is considered free to see other people.

"Fine," I bite out, annoyed that she's always right. "But I doubt I'm going to find someone I like as much as Cash."

Bay's smirk puts me immediately on high alert. "I bet you will. After the success of your date with Cash, I thought you'd realize that I know you like I know myself and that I chose the right dates for you."

Humility isn't one of my sister's best qualities, obviously. "Shut up." I snort with a half amused, half annoyed eye roll. "You don't know everything about me."

She's so big-headed. "I knew you and Cash would hit it off, didn't I?"

Fair enough. "Yeah, but—"

"I even knew you came," she teases, wiggling her perfectly groomed eyebrows.

"Whatever." I push her away, unable to stay serious when she's so goofy. "If you know and can sense everything about me, how come you didn't sense that I got hurt last night?"

If I thought that would help deflate her ego, I was totally wrong.

"It doesn't work when I'm drunk," she informs me.

I shake my head at her serious tone. Bay is certain of our twin connection, and she doesn't care that there's no scientific evidence to prove that it's even a thing. "Bay," I scold her.

“You know I hate when you get drunk and drive the morning after. You could still be over the limit.”

It’s her turn to roll her eyes. “I know, and I didn’t drive. When I said I ran here, I meant it literally. I left my car at the Gamma house.”

I feel better at the thought. “So is Topher bringing it back to the Zeta house or here?” I ask.

Her douche of a boyfriend is the last person I want to see this morning.

“No, Cole and I are hanging out later, and he’s bringing me the car. Before you ask, no, he didn’t drink last night.”

I’m surprised Bay is spending the night with her bestie. “Is Topher busy on your date night?”

She sighs. “No. I don’t know, but it doesn’t matter. I’m not going out with him tonight. We had a fight last night. Something must have happened at practice, and Topher was in a foul mood. He had a problem with everything I did. He hated my outfit, he said it was too slutty. Then he was convinced that I was flirting with every single one of his frat brothers. I got sick of his shit and went to hang out with Cole instead. I drank tequila, and we watched girly movies on Netflix until we passed out.”

I look at my sister, and it isn’t the first time I wonder what she finds attractive in a douche like Topher. Cole would be such a better choice as a boyfriend. Despite his man-whore reputation, he never hesitates to drop everything for Bay, but she doesn’t seem to see it and treats him like one of the girls instead.

Of course I know better than to tell Bay any of that. She’s convinced that I don’t like Topher just as retaliation because she couldn’t stand Jon.

Right now, my focus is on something other than my twin sister’s love life. “Okay, you might be right that Cash didn’t say anything about being exclusive. You never told me who’s my next date anyway.”

She offers me a sheepish shrug. “You’ll like him. Trust me.”

Oh hell no. “Bay.” I look at her with the sternest expression I can muster. “I’m not going on a blind date, and this is my final answer. I’m already nervous about going out with someone else you chose for me. You either tell me who the lucky guy is, or he’ll get stood up.”

Bay has the nerve to look offended. “First off, you should have more faith in me. Did I or did I not interrupt Cash Hanbury about to bury his face in your—”

“Yeah, you did,” I interrupt, feeling a new wave of embarrassment at the memory of being caught in such an intimate situation. “But I’m not going unless I know who this date is with.”

Bay throws her hands up in utter frustration. “Did anyone ever tell you that you’re the most stubborn person in the fucking world?”

I snort. “Takes one to know one. Tell me, or you’ll have wasted five grand.”

“But technically it’ll be a double date because I’ll be there too. We’re going to the Knights game on Thursday night, and then Blaze is going to be your date at the party at the Gamma house.”

She must still be drunk. “Blaze? As in Blaze Dunne?”

“The one and only,” my sister says, looking very happy with herself.

“Are you insane? I’m not going out with Blaze Dunne.”

Insane and unreasonable. “Why not? Isn’t he handsome enough for you?”

I shake my head, covering my face with both hands. “That’s not the point. Blaze Dunne is hot, but how could you ever think he would be someone I’d go out with?”

Bay is using every trick in her arsenal to get me to do her bidding. “You just admitted he’s hot. What’s your problem?”

I decide to go on the offensive. “My problem is that Blaze Dunne is scary. You can’t expect me to go out with the enforcer of the team. His job is literally to pick fights with the Knights’ opponents. I’ve seen him punch one of Bridgeport’s defensemen in the face. The guy was bleeding, and Blaze had a crazy smile on his face, like he was satisfied with his actions.”

She focuses on the wrong thing. “I thought you didn’t follow hockey.”

“I don’t,” I snap. “But everyone on campus saw that particular fight. The video went viral, and Blaze got suspended from the team for two games after spending five whole minutes in the penalty box. The dean wanted to expel him for unsportsmanlike conduct. That fight was totally unprovoked.”

I’m not surprised that she disagrees with me.

“Bullshit. If that were true, Blaze would have been disciplined. I was at that game, and that player had been taunting Blaze the entire game. That asshole had just grabbed Topher’s shirt while he was skating toward the Bridgeport’s goalie with the puck glued to his stick. It’s so unfair that Blaze got all the blame. He was just protecting his teammate.”

I groan. “Bay, Blaze isn’t the type of guy I’d even ever be friends with.”

Tasha plays devil’s advocate. “Why, was Cash your type? You never go for quiet and brooding, and you definitely don’t like athletes.”

I watch in disbelief as my twin sister and roommate high-five each other.

“But Cash was nothing like people say he is!” I object. “I think he’s quiet to keep people at a distance, but when you get to know him, he’s funny, smart, and caring.”

I realize that I shouldn’t have said that when Bay nods along, pleased with my words.

“So you admit that you had the wrong impression about Cash before you got to spend time with him?”

I feel like I'm about to walk straight into an ambush.  
"Yeah?" It comes out more like a question than an answer.

"Then why can't you give Blaze a chance?" Bay says, crossing her arms over her chest. "He might fight on the ice, but I guarantee that the rest of the time he's a real riot. He's hilarious and the life of every party. Last year he was voted Mr. Congeniality by the entire Greek Council."

"Great." I snort. "Violent on the ice and a party boy when he takes off his skates. Just the opposite of anyone I would even consider as a friend."

It's ironic that I'm complaining about Blaze's fighting and I'm looking for a fight with my sister to get out of this date.

Bay sees through me, though, and fights fire with fire. "Don't judge a book by its cover, Lakyn. As a future librarian, you should know that. Listen, did I steer you wrong when I chose Cash for you?"

She got me there.

"No," I admit reluctantly.

"Then trust me when I promise that you and Blaze will hit it off. You'll get on like a house on fire." She snorts.

"Dork." I laugh, unable to resist a pun, no matter how lame.

"Trust me, Lakey-Lake. There's more to the eye than what people see when they look at Blaze Dunne. I chose three guys who are wildly different, so you'd get to experience everything you missed out on so far to do that disastrous long-distance relationship with dipshit. Take this as a crash course in dating. Dating 101. You'll thank me later."



## 12.

# The Bunnies



Blaze



I SKATE RIGHT INTO Topher, sending him flying into the boards. On purpose.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” he growls, getting back onto his skates and throwing his stick and gloves to charge me fists first.

I have three inches and a couple dozen pounds on him, so I don’t budge when he collides with me. “If you have to ask me, we have a problem,” I bite out, looking at Cash as he takes off his helmet to rub one of his eyes.

He tries to grab my jersey, the fucking amateur. I dodge him, but I push him back against the boards with a deafening *thud*.

Our teammates surround us in seconds, ready to join the fight.

“Guys, cut it out!” Cole attempts to wedge himself between Topher and me, but I stand my ground, pressing harder against his body to the point where the boards are shaking.

“Yeah, come on. We’re fucking teammates, so keep the aggression for our opponents on Thursday night,” Tucker, one of our defensemen, says.

“That’s exactly the problem,” I growl.

Cole and Tucker were hanging back and didn’t see what happened to Cash, but Luca arrives after helping Cash back



onto his feet to set them straight. “Blaze is right, T. Your shot hit Cash so hard that he lost one of his contact lenses.” He points toward Cash who’s on his knees, rubbing one of his eyes with his gloved hand. His helmet lies discarded on the ice next to him.

Coach and one of the medics reach him, and once I’m satisfied he’s being taken care of, I turn back to the man I still have pinned against the boards. “The season is about to start, and we need our starting goalie in one piece.” My tone is hard, but it doesn’t have the intended effect on my teammate and frat president.

Rather than apologizing, Topher snarls back at me. “Yeah, and he’s been slacking all day. I’ve scored ten fucking goals against him today. If this is how he plans to play all season, Tucker better be ready to suit up and play. I’m not missing the Frozen Four because of Cash.”

I take a step back. Topher might be harsh at times, but he isn’t totally wrong. “We all have off days, dude. This is why we practice. There’s no need to aim at people’s faces,” I say, fighting to calm down my flaring temper.

Topher is a decent player and a great frat brother, God knows a party isn’t a party without him, but he doesn’t know when to fucking quit.

“That’s exactly the point of practice, to get us all ready to fight it out on the ice when it counts. Or do you think the Oregon Ducks will take it easy on him on Thursday?”

Luca is on my side, and I’m not surprised. He and Topher have big personalities, and I was sure they’d clash sooner rather than later. “You aren’t wrong, but you’ve been a little too excited today. I saw the way you checked Cole earlier too. It’s fine to give one hundred percent when we practice, but there’s no need to risk injuring each other. It’s a fine balance, so I suggest you calm down. *Calmati* (calm down), okay?”

“Stay out of it, *Prince*,” Topher snaps. “You’ve been here five minutes, and being royalty means shit in this country. We’re a fucking democracy, and until you’ve proven yourself on the ice, shut the fuck up.”

Luca is better at staying calm than I am, because his glare turns icy but he keeps his hands to himself. “I intend to prove myself, don’t you worry, but Blaze is right. We’re a team, and if you have any problems, you should leave them outside the rink.”

Luca isn’t wrong, but that’s easier said than done. I definitely don’t mind using the games to get rid of some pent-up frustration.

“Fuck off, Prince!” Topher snarls. “You haven’t earned the right to tell me what to do. You aren’t in your castle here.”

Cole intervenes. “Dude, seriously. Luca is right. If you’ve had a fight with your girlfriend, it isn’t our fault. I’d get my shit together before Coach—”

As if summoned by Cole’s words, Coach Harrison approaches us, and his expression doesn’t promise anything good.

“Mumford, Dunne, Rossi, Marshall, and Connelly in my office. Now!”

Coach might be new to our team this year, but we all know better than to test his patience. He came into coaching our team straight after retiring from an impressive NHL career. He was known for being tough on and off the ice even as a player, so we have no reason to believe that his coaching style will be any different.

“See? Now we’re going to get our heads chewed off by Coach. I bet the first round of drinks next time we’re out that he isn’t pissed at my shot.”

We all file off the ice, and I hold the laces of my skates with white-knuckle force to keep myself from resuming the fight off the ice.

“Gentlemen,” Coach bites out in a tone that signifies that to him we’re anything but. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

I turn to glare at Topher. “I’m sorry, sir.”

I'm not sorry. Not one bit. I know what I have to say to smooth things over though.

"I might have overreacted, but I was just trying to convey to our forward center that we might have been playing a game but we're all in the same team, and taking out our goalie isn't a smart move."

Coach's smile doesn't reach his eyes, giving him a facial expression that would terrify me if I wasn't his same size. "You don't say, Dunne. And your answer to the problem was to slam him against the boards and express your disapproval with your fists?"

Topher crosses his arms over his chest. "It's fine, sir." He smirks. "Dunne is our enforcer, that's how he's wired. He has always punched first and asked questions later. What's the point in training if I took it easy on Hanbury?"

I open my mouth to argue, but Coach does it for me.

"That would be true if I hadn't seen you take a few dangerous shots today and not just toward Hanbury. You bodychecked a few of your teammates with a little too much enthusiasm, Mumford. I appreciate the effort you showed today, but let's keep the hard checks under control during practice. We can't afford to have our starting goalie and our first string defense line out with injuries before the season even starts. Am I clear?"

We all answer in unison. "Yes, Coach!"

A knock on the office door interrupts us. "Come in, Hanbury."

Cash enters the room in a white T-shirt and gray athletic shorts, his hair damp. He's obviously the only one who had a chance to take a shower.

"Did you want to see me, sir?"

Coach Harrison nods. "How's your eye, son?"

His tone softens just a smidge. If Cash finds it weird to be called "son" by a man who isn't even forty, he doesn't show it.

“I’m okay,” he offers, touching the bruise that’s starting to form on one of his cheekbones. “My eye hurts like a bitch and I’m going to see the doctor in a sec, but our medical team says it just looks like it’s a bruise.”

I look at the bloodshot eye right above that bruise and fury starts coursing through my body all over again.

“Yeah, you make sure you get that eye checked and get cleared to play on Thursday. Let me know as soon as you get the all clear so I can give Prescott the heads-up if he’s starting.”

Cash’s answer is curt. “Yes, Coach.”

There’s a beat of silence as our new coach looks at all of us crowding his spacious office to the point that the room looks much smaller than it is.

“I’m going to say this just once, so make sure you listen good.” His eyes go around the room, stopping on each of us. “I’m not fucking impressed with what I just saw on that ice. Mumford, you’ve been playing like a jackass today. Save it for game night.”

Now, I might have a temper, but I fucking know when to keep my pie hole shut. The same can’t be said about our frat president.

“But Coach, I—”

The withering look he gives Topher has the rare effect to shut him up. I think I like our new coach, because take this from me, Topher Mumford is a fine hockey player and a popular frat president, but he could teach a master class in arrogance.

“As for you, Hanbury,” Coach says. “I guess if you have to have a bad day, it’s better to have it now rather than when it counts, but whatever is going on in your head, snap out of it. You’re one of the finest goalies in our division, and I know you’re hoping to be drafted, but I guarantee that it won’t happen if you perform like you did today.”

Cash nods, but it’s impossible to miss the tick in his jaw. “You got it, Coach. Am I excused? I have somewhere I have to

be.”

Cash’s tone is the direct opposite of Topher’s, but it’s met with the same stony expression by our new coach. “There’s something I have to say to you, gentlemen,” Coach Harrison says after looking at each of us again. “When I took over this team from your previous coach, he told me you had potential to go all the way and dominate the Frozen Four. I believe he’s right. To do that, however, you need the right guidance, especially since your captain from last year is now playing for the Toronto Maple Leaves. We’re going to need a new captain, and before the embarrassing scene I witnessed during today’s practice, I was convinced that the man I’m looking for was one of you.”

Fuck.

I’d be lying if I said that the idea of being captain of the Star Cove Knights isn’t stoking my competitive nature.

“I trust you won’t prove me wrong,” Coach continues. “I’ll be watching each of you closely and make my decision soon.”

Cole clears his throat. “With all due respect, Coach, I don’t think I’m the right candidate to lead this team.”

Harrison’s expression is surprised. “Are you sure, Marshall?”

He nods. “Positive. The right person should lead the team with dedication and without any bias, and I don’t think I can be that man for personal reasons. I’m flattered you thought about me though. Thank you.”

Coach levels us all with another hard stare. “Anyone else who doesn’t feel up to the task?”

There’s silence in the room.

“Great. Hit the showers, gentlemen. You’re dismissed,” Coach barks.

No one says a word until we get in front of the locker room door.

Cash is the only one who has had a chance to shower, and he makes a beeline for his locker.

I'm intent on shedding all my padding, so I'm not paying attention until Topher's snort causes me to look his way.

"You've never been the happy-go-lucky type, Cash, but I've never seen you so fucking grouchy. That's why I kept targeting you during practice, so you'd either tell us what crawled up your ass or snap the fuck out of it."

Cash shakes his head. "I've got enough on my plate without your stupid games, Mumford. Now get out of my way and mind your own fucking business if you don't want me to show you how I feel about the way you played today."

I take a step toward them when Topher takes a step closer to him rather than heed Cash's warning. I spot Luca doing the same thing on the other side with the corner of my eye.

"Really? How do you feel about getting your ass handed to you?" our frat president scoffs. "Because if you keep playing the way you did today, I guarantee that you're going to lose your starting spot, and with that, you can say goodbye to your athletic scholarship."

Cash shoulder checks him as he storms out of the locker room without another word.

"Fuck, dude!" Luca says, shaking his head. "That was a little harsh, don't you think?"

Topher chuckles, satisfied from having gotten a rise out of Cash. "Harsh but needed. As his teammate, frat president, and future captain, I'm not afraid to tell a harsh truth if it's for the greater good."

I look at Topher, narrowing my eyes. Usually his boisterous attitude and constant ribbing doesn't bother me, and I actually find him funny, especially after a few drinks. Today, though, he's being a real asshole. "Who said you're going to be captain? Coach is considering all of us, and aside from Cole, I haven't heard anyone else say that they aren't interested."

He barks out a laugh, as if I had told him the funniest joke. "I'm the natural choice, Fire," he says, using my nickname on the ice. "The team captain needs to be a leader, and I've

already been Gamma's president for a whole year. I was the first sophomore to be elected president in fifty years, and if memory serves, you voted for me too."

Ah yeah, that I did. We all know that he ran unopposed. Like I said, I don't mind Topher's arrogance most days, especially since he knows his job on the ice, and he's got our backs as teammates and frat brothers. Today, however, he's rubbing me the wrong way. "Well fuck, too bad it's Coach's choice. You'll have to work hard to impress him, especially after acting like a total jackass today."

He throws his head back, amused by a joke no one else seems to be in on. "And who else would be a decent choice, huh? Cole has the decency to know that he doesn't have what it takes. Besides, he's too busy nailing every hot girl on campus. Cash doesn't have the it factor either. Can you see him giving anyone a pep talk? I can count the words I heard the dude say in two years as teammates. Jagger doesn't take anything seriously enough, no offense."

I'm not surprised when Jagger shrugs. "None taken, Toph, but Blaze is right, it isn't up to us. I don't particularly care about being captain, but I'm not going to pass on the opportunity if Coach offers me the spot."

Topher nods. "Fair enough. Luca might be an instant hit with the women on campus with his royal pedigree, but let's face it, he's been going here for about five fucking minutes."

I don't give Luca the chance to react. "I'd like to remind you that Luca is the only player in this room who can say that he's won the championship, so he has a claim to lead the team in Coach's eyes."

Topher's smile widens, as if what I just said didn't matter. "That leaves you, Fire. If I was looking for someone to walk with me into a fight or throw a memorable kegger, I'd tell Coach that you're the best choice, but we both know that you don't have the chops to lead a team under pressure. So yeah, I think I'm the obvious choice."

I fucking disagree. "Fuck you, Topher!" I snarl, still furious at him for the way he aimed right for Cash's face

earlier.



Luca



I CLAP BLAZE ON THE shoulder, holding him back from hitting our frat president.

I'm also incensed by Topher's behavior on the ice today and all the shit he just said about us, but getting into a fight isn't the way to convince Coach that he's captain material.

It's kind of ironic that I'm the one keeping my cool when provoked, and I smile at the idea that it would piss off my father to no end.

*Papà* always complains that I didn't inherit anything from my Italian ancestors—not my looks, since I have Mom's blond, blue-eyed coloring, and not the classic Italian temper.

The only thing that makes him proud is my success with the ladies. In his eyes, that at least wouldn't make his grandfather, the last reigning king of the small kingdom of Montebello, roll in his grave.

I guess I don't entirely blame my *papà* for being disappointed. I've never had any interest in my blue blood and my heritage. The only reason I don't mind everyone knowing that I'm technically a prince is because girls eat that shit right up.

My hot-blooded Italian ancestors should know, though, that keeping your cool is good, especially in situations like this one.

I have no personal beef with Topher, I don't even know him well enough to decide if I really like him or not. All I know is that he's fun to party with and he's fast and accurate on the ice. However, I didn't like the reckless way he played during today's practice. Don't get me wrong, I'm all about giving one hundred percent during training, but a lot of us are



hoping to go pro after college and none of us want a career-ending injury because a teammate can't dial it down during practice.

"Blaze," I warn him, putting pressure on his shoulder to stop him from restarting the fight he began on the ice.

"Back off, Luca!" he snaps. "Being frat president doesn't mean he's automatically team captain, and I'm not going to stay here and listen to him badmouth all of us."

The smirk on Topher's face tells me that I was right and he's baiting us. "Let people talk all they want. Believe me, I know it's fucking annoying. Gossip and stupid rumors have been following me my entire life. None of it matters though. Let people open their mouths and show them who you are when it counts. There are still going to be motherfuckers who prefer to believe lies and vicious fabrications, but that's not all bad. That's how you separate the assholes from your real friends. Now go shower and cool off. Don't prove Topher right by giving him the fight he's looking for."

Our frat president barks out a laugh. "Yeah, Blaze. You should listen to His Highness and cool off. While you're at it, I'd start beating one off in that shower and keep it up until after the game."

What the fuck is he talking about now?

Blaze asks him exactly that, and the answer is interesting.

"I heard from Bay that she's cashing in on the auction date, and you're taking Lakyn out on Thursday night after the game."

Blaze's frown doesn't disappear. "So? What does that have to do with rubbing one out in the fucking shower? Unless you want to watch."

Topher doesn't rise to the provocation, and his smile widens. "You should have told Bay you'd take her sister out another night."

"Whatever you're trying to say, T, fucking say it. I'm not following."

The glint in Topher's eyes turns malicious. "Why do you think Cash was so grouchy today?"

Blaze shrugs. "I don't know, maybe because you kept aiming at his head every time you shot that puck into the goal? And he wasn't much different than usual anyway. Cash isn't exactly all sunshine and unicorns."

"Ha," Topher titters. "That's true, but today he was in a really bad mood, and I happen to know why."

I'm sick of this cat and mouse game, so I give him what he wants and ask him what he means. "Why is that, T?"

"You'll find out when you both take out Lakyn Woods."

Blaze and I look at each other. "If you're trying to say something, Topher, just fucking say it," he bites out, done with this conversation just as much as I am.

"I'm just trying to be helpful and manage your expectations. I know y'all think you're taking out a hottie because Bay and Lakyn are identical twins, but if you think Lakyn is fun and hot like Bay, you're in for a nasty surprise."

His words annoy me and pique my interest at the same time. "What the fuck do you mean? *Parla*. (Speak up)."

Topher takes great pleasure in telling us what he thinks about Bay's sister, and I find that interesting. "Lakyn is a boring, nerdy, goody-two-shoes who doesn't put out. That's why Cash was so grouchy today, an obvious case of blue balls, so get it on before Thursday, because you're going to go without then."

Blaze shrugs. "Whatever. It's just a fucking date, and I'm taking her to the party after the game. I don't even have to make conversation with her if she's as boring as you say."

I agree with Blaze. "True. It's just one date. It's not like one of us has to marry her. I can resist a couple of hours, no problem. No one says that I can't find a bunny or two after the date to take the edge off."

I mean, right? Not to sound like a douche, but I don't do relationships.

I don't have time for a girlfriend, and quite frankly, why should I tie myself down to just one woman when my needs are met by the countless puck bunnies who want nothing but to make me and my teammates happy?

Before anyone judges me, I'm not hurting anyone. The bunnies know the score. All that's on offer is a great time in bed—or in the shower, or in the backseat of my car, or anywhere the urge strikes me—and the chance to be seen with one of the star players of the Star Cove Knights.

The way I see it, it's a total *quid pro quo*.

As long as I don't have a girlfriend I'm cheating on or I don't promise stuff I don't intend to deliver, what's the harm in having some fun?

Give me a puck bunny—or two—any day. Life really doesn't get any better than this.

As if summoned by my thoughts, there's a knock on the door and a bunch of girls enter the locker room in a fit of giggles.

I recognize a couple of them from a few parties at the Gamma house and the bar off campus we go to on a regular basis.

These girls seem to have the ability to be anywhere we're at. It's uncanny.

"Hey, guys." The pretty redhead in the shortest skirt I've ever seen beams. "The girls and I just thought you'd be hungry after practice and baked you some cookies." She takes the lid off a big plastic container full of delicious smelling baked goods.

"That's awesome, I love cookies!" Jagger immediately grabs one, shoving the entire thing in his mouth.

"Luca, do you want one?" The redhead wiggles the box in front of me.

She looks familiar. Isn't she one of the girls I took to my room last Friday night, after the auction? The one with the really annoying, shrill voice?

“Thank you, girls.” I offer them my most charming smile. “The guys and I were just about to hit the showers. Do you mind waiting outside? You don’t want to get in trouble with Coach for being here and get banned from the training center.”

The girl doesn’t take no for an answer. “Oh, we’re fine. I’m sure your coach won’t mind us coming in here to... *boost your morale*. If he has any problems with it, I’m pretty sure he can clear things up with my daddy.”

I look at my teammates for help. Should I know who this girl is?

Topher comes to my aid. “Ah, yeah, Bianca. How’s Dean Williams? Does he know you’re here?”

So I fucked the dean’s daughter. Fucking awesome.

“Of course he does!” Bianca beams. “I told him about my idea to do little things to boost the team’s morale, and he was thrilled with my school spirit.”

I snort at her fake innocent expression. I’m pretty sure her father doesn’t mind her baking a few dozen cookies, but I doubt he’d be “thrilled” with his daughter being in the locker room with a bunch of hockey players in various states of undress. I also very much doubt that her father knows that Bianca and her friend Kylie love to entertain hockey players *together*.

I heard from Cole that I wasn’t the first guy they tag teamed.

Now don’t get me wrong, I’m in no way judging them. I can totally get behind—or in front of—a girl who knows how to have a good time. What I have a problem with is her coming into the locker room uninvited, obviously fishing for some kind of date.

I’m not trying to be an asshole, but I was clear with Bianca and her friend that I don’t date.

I mean, fuck. There’s this thing with Bay’s sister, but that was a charity event that was mandatory for the entire team. Maybe Blaze has the right idea to have his date at one of our frat parties, in case this girl really is as dull as Topher says.

On the other hand, I'm going to take her to the country club, and if she's boring, at least there's going to be excellent food and wine to help pass the time quicker.

"Luca, are you listening to me?" Bianca whines in her shrill voice.

I swear to God, the only way to tolerate her presence is to shut her mouth by stuffing it with cock. "No, sorry, I spaced out for a sec. I'm beat. I just want to hit the shower and go home. What were you saying?" I ask, not even trying to stifle a huge yawn.

Her pretty face twists in a displeased expression, but it only lasts a split second, returning to her usual seductive smile. "I was saying that if you have a jersey you no longer wear, I'd be happy to—"

Fuck no. If she thinks I'm falling for it, she's even stupider than she wants to appear. Giving a girl your jersey means you're together. Everyone knows that.

I frown, about to tell her to go find someone else to bother, but I catch the way Blaze and Topher are subtly shaking their heads.

I get it. She's the dean's daughter, and we need the dean's support and the funding to build the new arena for our team, so telling the dean's daughter to fuck off probably isn't the best way to stay in his good graces.

That must be why Coach turned a blind eye to these two sneaking into the locker room.

If I want to be team captain—and I love the idea—I need to keep a good relationship with anyone who can help our team, even the bunnies if they have good connections.

My *papà's* voice rings in my ear about being diplomatic. *Devi saper vestire i panni dell'altro senza spogliarti dei tuoi.* You need to know how to wear your opponent's shoes without taking yours off.

He's been raising me as he was raised by my grandfather and the same way he had been raised by his own father, my great-grandfather, the last of our family who actually reigned.

We've both been groomed to be king one day, even if our small kingdom has been a republic for eighty years now, and our family has been exiled to France after my *bisnonno* (great-grandfather) was deposed.

I've resented the strict upbringing and the endless time spent learning history and foreign languages, but some of the things I learned are useful in all circumstances. Like now.

"Bianca, darling." I smile, wrapping my sweaty arm around her shoulders. "That's such a sweet idea. However, I know a lot of guys on the team have crushes on you. Wearing my jersey would break too many hearts."

I've been walking toward the door while I butter her up. "Really?" She beams.

"*Assolutamente* (Absolutely). Listen, I'd love to tell you all about it, but I'm seriously exhausted, and I stink."

She doesn't flinch, her eyes shining as she lowers her voice, but not enough not to be heard by my teammates. "I could help you get clean in the shower and then take you to my place and—"

I've never regretted fucking someone as much as I do right now. I hate people who can't take no for an answer. "That sounds great, but I'm seriously too tired. How about a rain check? I'm sure I'll see you around at the party after the game."

I'm giving her an out by not committing to anything, but she isn't losing face in front of the guys.

"Of course." She giggles. "It's a date."

No, definitely not a date. "I'll see you around," I repeat. "It's going to be crowded being the first post-game party of the season. I don't want you to spend your night looking for me rather than having fun." I let go of her for good measure.

She doesn't get the message. "Oh, but I want to party with you. We had so much fun last week—"

Sometimes diplomacy isn't enough, but I make one last-ditch attempt to let her down gently. "Yeah, we did, but the

point of those parties is to make friends, and I'm new here, so don't get offended if I hang out with my teammates."

Unexpected help comes from Topher, who comes to stand on the other side of Bianca, placing his hand on the small of her back, dangerously close to her ass. "Yeah, Luca is right, sweetheart. We need to build team spirit with all the new players we have this year." He smiles. "You're going to be busy pledging Zeta Theta Beta, right? My girlfriend is the president, and I can put in a good word for you."

I don't hear her answer as Topher thankfully manages to walk her out of the locker room with Kylie hot on their heels.

"*Cazzo* (literally 'dick,' here used more like 'fuck'). Had I known how much of a clinger she is, I would have stayed away."

Cole chuckles. "Had you asked, I'd have told you to avoid her. Bianca and Kylie are sophomores, and they spent their entire freshman year trying to bag a boyfriend on the hockey team."

Jagger nods. "I think if you ask anyone, including the brothers who graduated or were drafted last year, pretty much everyone who isn't in a relationship has had a turn with them."

I shrug. "Hey, I don't judge them. They were fun, but I was clear that I don't go back for seconds. Ever."

Blaze barks out a laugh. "Well, good fucking luck shaking them now. I had one hell of a time trying to get them to understand that I didn't want to turn a one-night stand into more."

I sense more of a story there. "How did you manage? They barely looked at you."

Blaze's smile widens. "I told them that I didn't have time for a girlfriend and that my goal was to fuck every puck bunny on campus."

Ballsy, I like it. "And they left you alone?"

"They want a boyfriend, and I wasn't it," he offers.

Point taken. "I might have to do the same thing."

Cole claps me on the back. “I think you wouldn’t be too far from the truth, huh? You’ve been pretty busy since you arrived on campus.”

His tone isn’t mean, so I don’t take offense. “True that. What can I say? I love women.”

Cole nods. “Me too. Star Cove campus has the most beautiful girls on the West Coast. Luckily, puck bunnies or not, they are all into athletes, and as the star team on campus, we get first dibs.”

I’m all for that. All I want this year is to play the best hockey of my life, get drafted, and get laid as much as I can.

Fuck everything else, especially whatever plans my *papà* has for me.





## 13.

# The Dick Pic

Lakyn



STAR COVE COLLEGE TAKES hockey very seriously.

Every year for the first home game of the season, all classes are canceled so that the students and faculty can enjoy a long weekend of celebrations.

It's absolutely crazy. The entire campus turns into one giant party, and things get especially rowdy if our team wins.

Or that's what I'm told. I've been able to avoid that mayhem for two years by taking advantage of the four-day weekend to go to Princeton to hang out with Jon.

I never thought that things would be any different this year, but here I am.

Not only am I going to my first hockey game of my college career, I'm also going to the after-party the team is throwing at the Gamma house, with a guy on the team as my date.

If anyone had told me that a month ago, I would have laughed.

"Hey, Lakyn." Liv—or is it Viv? Those two aren't twins, but I've never managed to tell which one is which—opens the door of the Zeta house, inviting me and Tasha in.

"Come in, we're all getting ready together." She invites me in after I introduce her to Tasha.

I'm still a little embarrassed at the thought that she and her friend saw me in all my naked glory last week when they gave me a Brazilian wax.

Liv, however, looks perfectly at ease as she ushers us into the huge living room where all the sisters are doing their hair and makeup, helped by a handful of pledges.

“Holy shit.” Tasha giggles. “If I hadn’t seen their setup when they gave you that makeover last week, I’d be shocked, but I must admit that this is still impressive.”

I roll my eyes at the sight of a lash bar, where one Zeta I don’t know is applying fake lashes to whoever wants them.

I look around the room, feeling dizzy from the pungent smell of hairspray mixed with a lot of different perfumes and the harsh scent of nail polish remover. I’m about to ask Liv where my sister is, but I’m approached by a tall redhead in a pair of jeans so tight that they look painted on her slight body.

“Bay, do you want any help doing your hair? Kylie and I can come to your suite and—”

I have been wearing glasses since senior year in high school, while Bay has perfect vision, so it has been a while since someone thought I was her. I open my mouth to tell her that she’s mistaken, but Liv precedes me.

“Ha, good try, pledge. The presidential suite is reserved for the Zeta president and her inner circle, including her twin sister, Lakyn. You need to stay here and help any other sisters who need assistance.”

The pledge frowns, but it’s fleeting as she schools her expression into a smile. “Yes, Liv. I just think it’s a little unfair that two girls who aren’t in the sorority and aren’t pledges get to—”

Liv nips the protest in the bud. “Know your place, pledge!” she snaps. “This is our president’s twin sister and her roommate, and they are Bay’s special guests. Now, go help someone before I decide that the entire house needs cleaning tonight, during the game *and* the after-party.”

This time the pledge does a poor job of hiding her displeasure. “You can’t do that! Everyone on campus will party tonight. You can’t make me miss it to clean the house.”

Remind me never to cross Liv, because she's almost scarier than Bay when she's mad. Almost.

"Pledge, is there a problem here?" Bay comes down from the grand staircase that leads to the second floor of the Zeta mansion in a super short silk kimono, her blonde hair wrapped up in giant plastic rollers.

Again, this pledge must have a death wish, because she doesn't detect the edge in Bay's tone. "I was just telling Liv that I'm not impressed that two people who aren't even sisters are invited to get ready with you, while I—"

My sister's eyes narrow into two slits, and if I were the redhead pledge, I'd find something to do stat. Anything to get me out of Bay's sight. "Bianca," my sister says with a smile that promises nothing but retaliation, "whoever I invite to join me is up to me. You forget that I'm this sorority's president, and you're the pledge. Your father might be the new dean of students, and we agreed to let you pledge because he asked so kindly, but that doesn't make you a legacy though, and that doesn't give you a free pass. If you want to become a Zeta, you have to learn your place like every sister before you."

"But I—"

Bay shakes her head, and the pledge's fate is sealed. "That's it. You talk too much, pledge. From now until the sun is up tomorrow morning, you aren't allowed to speak unless someone speaks to you first. When you respond, you may do so with a yes or no answer, and only in direct response to what has been said to you. Liv, let the other sisters and all the pledges know that none of us are to speak to Bianca today unless we need something from her. Don't think you can disappear at the party and get around this punishment. I'm texting Topher, and I'm going to make sure he lets all the Gammas know what's up. Come on, Lake, Tasha. We need to get ready."

We follow Bay to the presidential suite. It consists of lavish quarters that take up almost the entire top floor of the house.

Viv and two more girls are there in super short silk kimonos that are extremely similar to the one Bay is wearing, just in different colors.

That's another one of the many reasons why I had no interest in joining Zeta Theta Beta. All this constant pressure to conform is not for me.

Bay introduces us to the two Zeta sisters I haven't met. "This is Tami and Madison. We pledged together."

Tami is a pretty brunette with a friendly smile. "Would you like a margarita?" she offers, lifting the salt rimmed glass she's sipping from.

I shake my head. "No, thanks. It's a little early for me, even though maybe I should. I'm a little nervous about tonight. Hockey games and huge parties aren't exactly my scene, but maybe some liquid courage isn't the worst idea."

Tami fills a new glass from a big pitcher on the dresser. "It's just a party, why are you so nervous?" She smiles, passing one cocktail to me and one to Tasha.

Madison chimes in. "Remember? Bay bought her dates with some of the guys on the team. She's Blaze's date tonight."

"Oh, right. I forgot about that. Blaze is super nice, I promise." Tami smiles. "The only ones who should be scared are the players on the other team."

I sigh, her words doing nothing to settle my nerves. "That's what Bay keeps saying," I murmur.

My sister rolls her eyes as she walks into her closet. "Thanks, Tami. I've been telling her all week that she has nothing to worry about. It's not like Blaze is going to pick a fight with her at the party, right?"

There's agreement among the Zetas, and maybe for once, Bay isn't totally wrong. I must admit that she was right about Cash and me hitting it off.

"Lakey-Lake, what's wrong?" Bay asks softly, bringing a few clothes hangers covered by one of those fancy suit bags.

“Nothing.” I shrug. “I was just thinking that Cash hasn’t called or texted. Maybe he didn’t mean it when he said that he wanted to see me again. He didn’t even get my number.”

I hate the insecurity in my tone. I blame it on my ex. Being dumped and discovering that he was cheating on me didn’t do anything for my self-confidence.

“Ah, but you don’t have to worry about that.” Bay smiles. “The guys have been extremely busy with the first game of the season around the corner. The new coach is working them to the bone. I’m sure Cash will get in touch though.”

It’s my turn to roll my eyes. “How can you be so sure?”

Bay passes the hangers to Tami, coming to wrap one arm around my shoulders. I’m not ashamed to admit that I draw comfort from her proximity.

“You should have a little more faith, sis.” She smiles. “The reason I know is because Cash asked me for your number two days ago when I dropped by the Gamma house to make up with Topher after our fight.”

The news cheers me up. “Really?”

Bay beams at me. “Yup, and Cash isn’t the only one I gave your number to.”

Her tone causes my hackles to rise. When Bay sounds too pleased with herself, it’s a sure sign of trouble. “Who else did you give my number to?”

My sister looks at me as if I were particularly dense. “Duh. Obviously to Blaze and Luca.”

I nod, distracted by the vibration of my phone in my jeans pocket. “To Blaze and—wait a second. Did you just say Luca?”

Bay nods. “I sure did.”

“Luca, as in Luca Leighton-Rossi, the new guy on the team? The prince?”

I drop the phone I just took out of my pocket.

“The very one.” Bay beams, more pleased with herself than I have seen her in a while.

“Why in the world would you give my phone number to—wait.” My eyes widen when the realization dawns on me. “Please tell me that Luca isn’t my third date.”

Bay nods. “If you don’t want me to tell you that, I won’t, but Luca *is* the third date I bought for you,” she adds, looking like the cat who got the canary.

“You’re crazy,” I whine. “What the hell were you thinking? I can’t go out with Luca Leighton-Rossi.”

She offers me a sheepish look. “Why not?”

I look at Tasha for help. “Because he’s only been on campus for a couple of weeks and his fame precedes him. He’s known as a playboy who already has every girl on campus in a frenzy. He’s the opposite of my type, even worse than Blaze.”

I’m not surprised when Bay doesn’t look concerned by my impending panic attack. “I’m sorry, Lake, but at the risk of sounding like a broken record, you said the same thing about Cash, and last I checked, Tasha and I interrupted you and our goalie—who you didn’t want to go out with—in the throes of passion while he—”

I close my eyes. “Yeah, yeah. Please spare us the story. I’m humiliated enough.”

“But we want to hear the story,” Tami intervenes, refilling her margarita.

“I caught them hooking up on the couch the morning after their date,” she tells her friends with a proud smile, as if she caught me accepting a Nobel Prize rather than with a guy’s head between my legs.

Tami and Madison squeal, excited by the unexpected tasty piece of gossip.

“Oh, tell us everything. How is Cash as a date? We only know him as a player and from the frat parties,” Madison says. “He doesn’t say much, and he’s always so quiet. I mean, not

that he even needs to open his mouth. Girls literally flock to him.”

I don't want to talk about Cash with two strangers, no matter how nice they've been to me so far.

“Bay, you can't make me go out with Luca,” I plead. “We'll have absolutely nothing in common, and he always has a gaggle of adoring bunnies following him everywhere.”

I know I lost the argument when my sister shakes her blonde head. “There's more to Luca than meets the eye. Don't make me remind you how I was right about Cash. You promised to give this rebound thing a fair try.”

She's right. “I know I did, but it was just in the heat of the moment, because I wanted to stick it to Jon. He hasn't unblocked me, and Luca is seriously even less my type than Cash and Blaze.”

I swear that when God doled out stubbornness, he gave my sister a triple helping, and I'm not even sure I'm totally sold on the existence of a higher entity, but you get the gist.

“First off.” Bay checks off the tips of her manicured fingers. “You might not know it, because I haven't told you, but guess who's been stalking my social media since you told him that you were on a date when he called to yell at you for liking his pathetic Instagram photo?”

No fucking way. “Really? Did Jon say anything?”

Bay sighs. “No, he wouldn't. He knows I totally despise him, but he's been viewing all my posts and stories, obviously trying to get secondhand information about you.”

I'm not sure I believe her. “If he hasn't liked or commented, how do you know—”

“Lakyn.” This time it's Tasha who explains. “There are apps you can download that tell you who's viewing your social media, even if they don't interact with your posts.”

Bay nods. “Yup. So I say get seen as much as you can with the hottest guys on campus. That's the best way to send your ex the message that he's a giant dickwad. Besides, don't tell



me that Luca isn't your type when it comes to his looks. You always had a thing for blond hair and blue eyes on guys, and with that Italian, sun-kissed complexion, Luca is one of the best-looking guys on campus."

She's right. I've only seen Luca in person once at the library, but I don't want to give Bay the satisfaction. "If you think he's so hot, why don't *you* go out with him?"

"Ha." Bay snorts. "You're funny. I totally would if I were single, but I have a serious boyfriend, so I'll have to live vicariously through you."

A serious boyfriend, she says. More like a serious douche if you ask me. "Bay, seriously, I—"

"You agreed to go out with Blaze tonight, and it's too late to back out now. He might not have had time to text you, but I saw him earlier this morning, and he confirmed that he'll drive you to the party from the game. As for Luca, he said he'd text you to make plans for next week. It would be rude to say no now, and let me remind you that I paid five grand for each of those dates."

I know Bay means well, and without her meddling, I never would have even talked to Cash. "I know your heart was in the right place, but seriously, you could have asked before dropping me headfirst into this mess," I grumble.

My sister knows me too well, and she immediately senses that my resolve is starting to crumble. "I'll tell you what," she says. "If you have a horrible time with Blaze tonight, I'll tell Luca that he's off the hook for the date. I've already paid the money for it, but it doesn't matter. The new athletic center is a worthy cause, and it's a tax write off. But if you have a good time, you'll see this thing through and go out with Luca too."

I know there's no way I'm going to win this, and I open my mouth to capitulate, but I'm interrupted by my phone as it buzzes again with an incoming text message.

"Are you going to get that? It might be Blaze," Bay says. "It would be rude not to answer."

“You never quit, do you?” I snort, opening the text app and freezing when I see a message from an anonymous number.

My hands tremble, and I can’t stop staring at the photo that just came through. “What the fuck?” I gasp.

“Who is it?” Bay and Tasha ask.

“Fuck if I know. But I—I think this is a photo of someone’s dick.”

Bay snatches my phone out of my hands. “No fucking way! Oh my god.” She snorts. “Who the heck sent you this? I mean, no offense, but if I were the owner of that dick, I would steal a dick pic off the internet. That isn’t something I’d be proud to show off. It’s tiny. That dude needs to learn about manscaping too, because I’m sure that bush of unruly brown hair doesn’t do any favors for his already less than impressive size.”

Bay shows my phone to the other girls, and a few seconds later, they are all laughing at the expense of whoever sent the pic.

“Whose dick is that?” I ask my sister.

“Why are you asking me?” She giggles. “Someone sent it to *you*.”

“But I have no clue who this is from. Do you think it could be Blaze?”

Silence descends in the room as we all stare at the photo. The only things in the photo are the erect cock and the pubic hair around it.

“I don’t think it’s Blaze,” Madison says. “The hair is too fair. Blaze’s hair is a much darker brown.”

“That doesn’t mean anything,” Tami argues. “Sometimes beards and body hair can be a different color than your hair, even naturally.”

Bay agrees. “Yeah, that’s true. Remember when Topher tried to grow a mustache last year?”

I snort. “How could I forget? He looked ridiculous.”

“Yeah, but my point is that Topher has really dark brown hair and his mustache came out almost ginger.”

She’s right. Our hair is a light, honey blonde and our body hair for the most part matches, except for our eyebrows that are a light brown.

“So you’re saying that this isn’t Blaze?” I ask.

My sister shrugs. “How am I supposed to know?”

I look at the other two girls in the room. “The Zetas are practically married to the Gammas. Are you telling me that none of you have seen Blaze naked?”

That was the wrong thing to say.

“Hey,” Tami reacts, setting down her empty glass. “None of us are puck bunnies. I have a serious boyfriend, and he isn’t even on the hockey team. He’s one of the Gammas who play football.”

Madison agrees. “I have no idea who that could be. My boyfriend is pre-med, and he goes to Stanford a couple hours away.”

I look at Bay. “So you’re telling me you’re positive that this isn’t Topher?”

“Hey!” She scowls. “Why would he send you a dick pic?”

I shrug. “I don’t know. You said it yourself that this is something a douche would do and—”

“Lakyn.” My sister’s tone is full of warning. “I know you and Topher will never be besties, but he would never do something like that. Also, that isn’t his dick. My boyfriend might not have the biggest dick I’ve ever seen, but it’s definitely bigger than the one in that photo. Also, can I ask you why you think it’s Blaze?”

I shrug. “I don’t know. You just said that you gave him and Luca my phone number, and we were literally talking about it when the text came through.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s Blaze,” Tasha muses. “How about Luca? He has your number too. It must be someone who has

your number because it came through to your regular message app.”

Tami nods. “Yeah, probably. Even though I wouldn’t rule out a weirdo punching in random numbers. Maybe someone from one of your classes? Any male friend who might have a crush on you?”

I feel a little pathetic compared to these popular girls who are constantly surrounded by men. There’s no point in faking it for Tami and Madison’s benefit though. Bay and Tasha know exactly how lame my life is. That’s why Bay took matters into her own hands and bought me those dates.

“I’m trying to graduate early,” I admit, trying to hide how much of a loser I really feel like. “That means that I have an extremely full course load, and with my job at the library, I don’t have a lot of time to socialize. Tasha and Bay are the only people I’m close to on campus, if you don’t count acquaintances from my classes.”

Bay rolls her eyes. “True. I have to drag her out kicking and screaming every time there’s something fun going on. At least this year she isn’t going to Princeton every time she can to hang out with dipshit, so there’s a chance I’ll get to spend some time with my sister.”

I feel guilty because Bay is right. Between classes, work, and Jon, we’ve hardly hung out the past two years.

“What about Jon?” Tasha asks. “Could it be him? Maybe he regrets dumping you and this is an attempt to say sorry?”

Bay and I snort in unison.

“It’s obvious you haven’t met dipshit.” Bay giggles. “I doubt Lakyn’s ex even has a dick, and if he does, believe me, he isn’t the type to show it off. I’d bet every cent in my bank account that he has an even smaller dick than our weirdo.”

I glare at my twin sister, but I can’t disagree with the first part of her assessment. “I have no idea what Jon’s dick looks like, but Bay is right. Jon is too religious and straightlaced in general to do something like sending a dick pic.”

Bay agrees. “Totally. Stalking my social media to see if Lakyn moved on is more his style. I bet he’s fuming that you told him you were on a date last week. The asshole was probably hoping to keep you on the back burner, pining for him for when his new squeeze decides to dump his lame ass.”

It hurts to admit that Bay nailed it. “True. Sexting is the furthest thing from Jon’s MO I can imagine. It’s more in Topher’s wheelhouse.”

Bay takes offense. “Knock it off, Lake. It isn’t Topher. I told you that isn’t his dick. What about Cash?”

My mouth forms a surprised O at the thought. “No way! Why would he do that?”

Bay shrugs. “Look, if you think it could be Blaze or Luca, because I gave them your number, then we need to add Cash to our list of suspects. After all, he’s the only guy you ever went to second base with.”

I swear to God, sometimes I wish my sister didn’t have such a big mouth.

Madison and Tami stare at me as if I were some strange, exotic animal, and when they start asking questions, I cross my arms over my chest, refusing to talk about my lack of sexual experience with two strangers.

“I don’t think it’s Cash,” I say with more certainty than I feel.

“Did you see his dick on Sunday? Before Tasha and I came home?” Bay asks.

“No, I didn’t, but before you start with your crazy theories, I felt his dick. I touched it through his jeans, and it felt absolutely huge. Definitely bigger than the one in the photo.”

Tami is immediately on my side. “I can’t speak from experience, but Cash has a reputation for having a really big dick, so we can probably rule him out if Lakyn *felt* the goods.”

I blush at the way Tami wiggles her perfectly shaped eyebrows. “Right.”

Bay won't let this go. "I'm sorry, but unless you see it, I'm not taking your word for it. You admitted the other night that you have no experience at all in that department. Besides, I really don't think Blaze would do something like that."

Madison nods. "Yeah, I don't know Blaze too well, but he's so personable and friendly, I can't really see him sending dick pics to random chicks. If we have to look at the three dates Bay bought you as possible suspects, then I'd say Luca is the one who makes more sense. His reputation preceded him way before he arrived on campus, and he took two girls to his room last weekend after the auction."

I glare at Bay. "Charming. And you expect me to go out with him?"

My sister wraps one arm around my shoulders again. "Reputations can be deceiving. I was assigned to show Luca around by the Greek Council when he arrived on campus, and I got to hang out with him a few times when I was at the Gamma house waiting for Topher. There's more to Luca than the rich, spoiled playboy everyone thinks he is. He's super smart and funny. Plus, I really don't think he needs to send a dick pic to be noticed. He could have any girl he wants on campus, in town or anywhere he goes."

She isn't wrong. I've seen Luca around campus a couple of times, and he's always surrounded by adoring girls. That doesn't mean he isn't secretly a weirdo though, right?

"Can't you show that dick to Topher and see if he recognizes it?" I ask as the idea hits me. "He must have seen most of his teammates naked in the locker room."

Bay begins shaking her head before I've even finished the sentence. "No way. First off, there's a locker room etiquette. The guys aren't out there measuring each other's dicks after practice."

I roll my eyes. "Right. As if frat brothers and jocks in general aren't known for pranks and shit like that."

Bay won't budge. "Not on this campus. There's zero tolerance about any forms of harassment and hazing. Honestly,

I doubt Topher even looks at his teammates' junk. If it was a locker room full of women, it would probably be a different matter," she says bitterly.

Topher's wandering eye has been the cause of countless fights between him and my sister. "Okay, if you say so," I relent. "But on the off chance that he might have seen them naked—"

"I can't show him that photo without causing another huge argument," she admits. "That's one of the reasons why we've been fighting lately. Topher has a total double standard when it comes to looking at other people. He thinks that I should turn a blind eye if he ogles another woman when I'm standing right next to him, while he'll fly off the handle if he catches me even looking in another guy's direction."

I'm not surprised. I seriously don't understand what my sister sees in a douche like Topher. Aside from being on the hockey team and the president of the most popular fraternity on campus, he's a complete douche canoe. "That's bullshit," I say.

Bay won't discuss her relationship with me after I admitted that I don't like her boyfriend. Of course the problem was mutual because she absolutely despised Jon. Last year we agreed to leave Topher and Jonathan out of our conversations for the sake of our sisterly bond.

"It is what it is, Lakyn," Bay says in that stern tone that brooks no argument. "If you want to rule out Blaze and Luca, you'll have to do the work yourself."

I don't understand. "What do you mean?"

She shrugs. "Get them to take their dicks out and see if one of them matches the photo you just got."

"Oh, sure." I snort. "When he asks me if I'd like a drink later at the party, I can say 'yes, please, a vodka and cranberry juice, and I'll also take a look at your cock.' I could even take my phone out and compare it to be sure."

They must all be drunk. I wonder how much tequila Tami put into those margaritas. "That isn't the worst idea." Tasha

nods.

I put my foot down. “I’m not going to ask Blaze and Luca to show me their dicks.”

“Don’t forget Cash.” Bay giggles. “Micro dick could still be him until we prove it isn’t.”

I exhale, certain that Bay can’t be serious. “Bay, I’m not going to do it.”

Her smile widens. “Look, I bet it isn’t any of them. I chose your dates carefully. There are a few guys on the team who would probably do something like send unsolicited dick pics, but there’s no way they have your number. I chose three great guys for you, and you must admit that Cash is great, so the least you can do is go out with the other two and find out if any of them have a tiny cock.”

She isn’t wrong. “But I can’t just ask them to show me their dicks.”

“The way I see it,” Bay says, “if you think things are going well enough to grant a second date, like with Cash, then do your best to see what they are packing. I don’t think they are weirdos, but if they are, I’ll kick their asses on your behalf. If you don’t like them, who cares if one of them has a small dick and he’s a weirdo?”

God, I hate it when she’s right.

I feel heat rise to my face at the idea of purposely getting close to Blaze and Luca to get to see them sans pants.

This isn’t me, or is it? I’d be lying if I said that the entire time I was with my ex, I didn’t feel like I was missing out by being stuck in a sexless relationship.

I’m a sensual person, I’ve always known this much, and my date with Cash has only confirmed it.

I suspect that this is why Bay got me these dates—not just to help me rebound, but to help me explore myself and what I want. I’m never going to admit it out loud because my sister is already a pain in my ass with her twin sixth sense bullshit, but her heart is in the right place.



She wants me to catch up with all the dating and exploring I missed out on while clinging to a relationship that never fulfilled me, just because it was familiar and comfortable.

“Okay.” I sigh.

Bay and Tasha squeal, jumping up and down as if I told them they just won a million dollars.

“Wait,” I say, trying to get them to rein in their enthusiasm. “I’m not saying I’m going to jump their bones. If one of them is weird or we don’t click, there’s no way I’ll do anything.”

Bay has an objection. Of course she does. “But we just said that the chances that the photo is from a random weirdo are tiny—like the cock in the photo. Don’t you want to know if one of them sent you that photo?”

I nod. “I want to know, but if things are weird or awkward with either of them, does it really matter? And by the way, it’s not like this is anything more than them making good on a charity donation. They could have any woman they want on campus, they are going out with me because you paid them to.”

Bay shakes her head, unzipping the suit bag she brought out from her closet. “Semantics. Cash wants to see you again, right? You never know with the other two.”

I stifle an eye roll at her assumptions that two hot, popular jocks will have anything in common with me, but I’m distracted by the items in the suit bag.

“You got us Star Cove Knights jerseys?” I ask, eyeing the garments inside.

My sister frees the items from the bag, holding them up for my inspection. “They aren’t jerseys. Tami is majoring in fashion, and she made these mini dresses out of official Cove Knights jerseys.”

I blink, sure I must have misheard her. “Dresses?”

Bay nods, full of enthusiasm. “Yeah. This is what the five of us are going to wear tonight. I have one for you and Tasha too.”

I take the dress she hands me. “It’s a little tight, but I guess it’ll be okay over my jeans.”

The smirk on Bay’s face is pure evil. “The fuck you will. These are hot, and they are worn as dresses. No jeans, no pantyhose, no leggings.”

Hell no. “No way. This is barely going to cover my ass.”

Bay’s smile widens. “They are sexy. We’re going to the biggest party of the year on campus. We’re only going to see another party like this if our team wins the Frozen Four, so we need to look the part and support our team.”

I try to give her the hanger back, but she won’t take it. “By flashing my ass to everyone?”

She shrugs. “Tami measured yours on me. Our asses are covered. Besides, we have really nice asses, sis. If you’ve got it, it would be a shame not to flaunt it.”



# 14.

## Victory Rush

Blaze



MY BLOOD STARTS ROARING in my ears the second my skates touch the ice. The drop in temperature awakens me and sharpens my senses as I skate a slow circle around the rink, looking around and soaking it all in.

The atmosphere at the Star Cove Knights Arena is buzzing with excitement. Every seat is taken, and the crowd roars when we take the ice for our warm-up.

This is why I play hockey, this feeling of being a part of something bigger than just myself. My performance tonight matters, and if I win, all these people will go home to celebrate.

Okay, maybe not all these people. The small section occupied by the Oregon Ducks fans looks less than thrilled at our entrance, but it's okay. It comes with the territory, and I accept it.

I tighten and release my grip on my stick three times in quick succession. It's one of my good luck rituals, and I do it before every game.

Call me superstitious, but who am I to mess with Lady Luck? This kind of stuff is tried and true, and things go wrong every time something messes with my good luck routine.

For example, I always put on my right glove before my left and feel the spot where I repaired the stitching last year when it got damaged during the game that took us into the playoffs. I didn't have a spare pair, and my glove got damaged when I grabbed the blade of our opponent's stick and pulled him down to stop him from chasing Topher. I play offense, but I'll help anywhere I'm needed.

I also have on my lucky underwear, and I have my bike parked outside. On home games, I ride to the arena and ride back to the Gamma house after.

Everything looks perfect tonight, and nothing messed with my rituals, except...

I've never had a date to a game's after-party. First off because I don't date, and second because I have no problem finding a girl to hang out with after a game, and that's whether we win or lose.

I scan the crowds behind our bench, and I immediately spot her. Or at least, I'm fairly sure it's my date because she's next to Bay and she looks almost identical.

I don't know if they look exactly the same close up, but it's hard to spot Bay out of the two right now. She has number five, Topher's number, painted on her cheeks, and I'm pretty sure his number must also be on the back of the jersey I can see peeking through her open jacket.

There's an almost exact carbon copy right next to her, but the second Bay doesn't have any number painted on her, and her long blonde hair is flowing in soft waves down her back rather than being styled into a high ponytail like her sister.

I hope having a date doesn't mess with my luck tonight, but I don't feel a bad vibe as I keep my eyes on Lakyn.

I've always thought that Bay is hot, but she's dating a teammate and brother, so she's completely off-limits. I'd be lying if I said that I'm not intrigued at the thought of going out with her twin sister.

I meet her eyes as I skate closer, and the corner of my mouth quirks up in a smile at the way she immediately averts her gaze. Lakyn must be the shy twin. That's why she isn't a Zeta, and I've never seen her at one of our parties. Interesting.

My focus, however, veers off the Woods sisters as I catch our new coach looking at me.

I skate past our bench, increasing my pace to warm my muscles as I concentrate on showing Coach Harrison that I'm captain material.

Truth be told, I didn't think this was so important to me until Topher pissed me off a few days ago.

My goal is obviously the draft. I don't have an agent yet—even though I've been approached by a few—and the idea of not being picked by an NHL team and having to find a spot as a free agent after graduation scares the fuck out of me.

This is why I have to play this season as if it were my last. I mean, it is the last season I'm eligible to be drafted before I turn twenty-one and age out, so every game and every shot counts. Being captain could only be the icing on the cake, something to help put a spotlight on me.

“Hey, Blaze, a word?” Topher skates by my side, pulling me out of my thoughts.

I slow down, schooling my face into a neutral expression. I've been giving him a wide berth since our near fight the other day. I don't buy that he was targeting Cash to get him to focus, I think he was just being a grade A asshole for whatever reason. However, we have a game to play, and if I want to be a professional player, I need to learn to leave personal differences off the ice, at least with my teammates. I'm more than happy to settle personal differences with opponents with my fists.

“What's up?” I bite out.

Topher lowers his gaze, fidgeting with the puck at the end of his stick. “I just wanted to say, you know, this captain thing? I want Coach to choose me, but I hope you know that there aren't going to be any hard feelings if you or one of the others are chosen. I want what's best for the team.”

Could have fooled me. The words are on the tip of my tongue, but I swallow them back, nodding at him instead. “Fine.”

He holds my gaze. “I hope you know that I was genuinely trying to help Cash shake off whatever was distracting him the other day. I—”

“I said fine,” I cut him off. “We aired our differences enough. We're brothers and teammates, and you're right, we

need to do what's best for the team, so let's focus on showing the Ducks who owns this ice."

He claps me on the back. "Fuck yeah. Let's destroy them."

We do destroy them.

We're on fucking fire tonight, that much is clear from the first face-off when Luca gets the puck and takes off like lightning, dodging everyone in his way.

He looks around, and while I have a defenseman hot on my heels, Topher manages to lose his shadow.

The assist is perfect, and Topher doesn't hesitate to take off, the puck glued to his stick. He fires a violent slap shot that flies past the goalie's head and curves into the right corner of the goal.

What does it say about me that when Topher shot the puck the same way toward Cash, I was ready to break his nose, but tonight, I skate toward him and pile on him followed by Luca and Cole to celebrate?

"Knights-1, Ducks-0, baby!" I yell, but my voice is drowned out by the deafening roar of our supporters as almost the entire arena jumps up and down, chanting, "Knights, Knights, Knights!"

My eyes go straight to our bench where Coach looks pleased, nodding and clapping his assistants' backs.

I catch a flash of blonde hair as I spot the twins not far behind them as they hug, jumping and chanting like the rest of our supporters.

The game shapes up to be a great one, and we end the first period up by two goals.

We dominate the ice to the point that Cash doesn't see much action on his side of the crease, only coming out to celebrate our goals with us.

To my surprise, Coach doesn't seem totally pleased with our performance. He stares at each of us for a long moment in the locker room. "Keep your focus," he bites out. "Don't get cocky."

His gaze is mostly directed at Topher and Luca who scored the two goals that put us in the lead.

The thought hits me all of a sudden. Is he going to choose the player who scores the most goals as team captain?

It doesn't make sense, because he's pretty much considering our entire first line. Going by goals would also exclude Cash, and he's in the running too.

Scoring a goal in our opening game can't hurt my chances though, and I decide that I can't let Topher and Luca look better than me.

I skate back into the arena, determined to shine tonight, but I think the Ducks' defense must be able to read minds or something because they are on my ass the entire time.

Their defense is always on me, they are my shadows, and we immediately begin to suffer as Topher's supply of assists from my side is completely cut off.

Old habits die hard, however, and rather than passing the puck to Luca, who is wide open while the Ducks' defensemen concentrate on me, Topher insists on trying to serve me over and over.

That results in his passes being intercepted a few times, and there's only so much Cole and Jagger can do to protect Cash.

Or goalie fights valiantly and blocks a few well-aimed shots, but eventually one of those pucks makes it behind Cash, and the Ducks reopen the game. We're 2-1, and I'll be fucking damned if I'm going to let them tie the score tonight.

"Pass to Luca," I tell Topher during an interruption due to Cole pushing our adversaries' center against the boards to stop his advance. "For some reason, these assholes have it out for me. I know he isn't on your preferred side, but they are leaving him wide open."

He nods. "Okay."

However, knowing something and applying it during the game are two different things, because Topher passes the puck



to me on instinct.

For the umpteenth time this period, I get targeted by our adversaries' defensemen. One of them grabs my jersey from behind to stop me from taking off with the puck, and when his teammate turns around to send it away from their blue line and toward ours, the asshole charges me, smashing me against the boards.

Even with the pads we wear, the impact is hard enough to make the boards shake, and I feel it on my entire left side.

The crowd clamors, displeased with the action, but my opponent's wide grin is filled with satisfaction.

"You're the famous Blaze Dunne?" He snickers, keeping me pinned with his body. "I expected you'd be way harder to stop. You better take a good look at these boards, because this is where you're going to spend the rest of this game. I'm not going to let you touch that puck, you got it?"

Who the fuck does this guy think he is? He must be a new recruit or a freshman, because I don't remember playing against him last year. It doesn't matter though, because this is the last time he'll stop me.

The second he lets go of my jersey and starts skating away, I grab him, spinning three hundred and sixty degrees with a move that would be the envy of our school's figure skating team.

I take great pleasure in slamming him against the boards right where I was a second ago, but rather than trying to pin him there, I let go of him and throw a hard punch to his side in the same spot where I'm still feeling the impact against the boards.

"Stay the fuck away from me," I growl. "Got it?"

I give him my toughest glare, the one that earned me my nickname, Fire.

He isn't intimidated though, and rather than cowering or trying to skate away from me, he shoves his helmet off his head, throwing it on the ice. "Do you want to go, asshole?" he barks.

What can I say? Of course I want to go. My helmet is the next one to hit the ice.

I'm still pissed as hell by the way he grabbed me, so I'm more than ready to teach him to keep his hands off me next time.

My response is a punch right to his jaw, and I smile at the blood that colors the motherfucker's teeth.

He has a quick reaction time, and I respect that, but I'm way quicker. I dodge his left hook, and he gets the side of my cheekbone rather than my eye.

I'm ready with another hit to his face before I get pulled away by strong arms.

The referee is telling us that this is enough and we both get two minutes in the penalty box.

I take this opportunity to catch my breath. There's nothing like a good fight to get the blood pumping.

The third period finally sees me scoring a goal thanks to a pass from Prince. The action is so fast that it takes seconds as I fly down the right wing faster than lightning and shoot the puck right past the goalie who is still wondering where the fuck I came from.

My teammates hit me harder than any opponents, piling on me to celebrate the goal that solidifies our victory.

I hit the shower on a high, adrenaline still coursing through my body. There's nothing like a wild night of partying with a pretty girl on my arm to start off the season with a bang.

I smile at the thought. Who knows, maybe if we hit it off, it could be a real bang. Bay's sister looks plenty bang-able if you ask me.

I remember that Bay gave me her number, and even though I passed on the message that I would meet her by the locker room's entrance, I shoot her a text.

**Me:** *Meet you outside in fifteen minutes, by the exit next to the locker room. This is Blaze, by the way.*



Lakyn



**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** *Meet you outside in fifteen minutes, by the exit next to the locker room. This is Blaze, by the way.*

I look at my phone as we watch the thousands of people in the arena start to file out at the end of the game.

Bay elbows me to get my attention while trying to crane her neck to read the text over my shoulder. “What’s that? Another micro dick pic?” She giggles.

I don’t blame her for being giddy after tonight’s game. I had never seen a hockey game before tonight, maybe partially because hockey is all Topher talks about and I can’t stand the asshole, but now I get it.

I get why so many people follow our team and enjoy watching the games.

It’s... exciting.

The fast action, the breakneck speed, the skill these men have on their skates, and the violence.

I found myself cheering for our team, jumping up and down like a maniac and yelling at the referee when he sent Blaze to the sin bin.

See? I even picked up some of the lingo in just one game.

I snatch the phone away from my sister’s prying eyes. “No, it isn’t another disgusting dick pic,” I inform her. “It’s actually Blaze. He texted me to meet him by the locker room exit in fifteen.”

That does nothing to get Bay off my back. “Let me see. Have you checked if it’s the same number that sent you the dick pic?”

I quickly save Blaze's number and put my phone back inside my purse. "The dick pic came from an anonymous number," I inform her.

"I'm not surprised." She snickers. "If I had a small dick like that, I'd definitely keep it anonymous too."

I can't help but laugh at her dorky humor. "If you had a dick in general, I'd beg you to only send pics upon request. Getting an unexpected dick pic is kind of horrible."

Bay nods in agreement. "Especially when it's a horrible dick, tiny and surrounded by so much hair. Yuck."

I roll my eyes. As if getting an unsolicited dick pic could be okay if the dick is big.

"Let's go, I don't want to keep Blaze waiting."

Bay's knowing smile irks me. "So you *are* excited about tonight's date."

It isn't a question, and I don't give her the satisfaction of admitting that I am actually a little excited about tonight's date.

Blaze is the epitome of dark and handsome with his dark brown hair and chiseled jaw. While I usually hate every kind of violence, I don't blame him at all for his reaction tonight on the ice. That guy started the fight, and Blaze finished it by not allowing his opponent to push him around.

I liked the fierce way he played and admired his power and speed on his skates. I don't say any of that to my sister as I get out of our row of seats right behind our team's bench and start climbing the stairs to make my way out of the arena.

"Good luck, Lakey-Lake." Bay beams, giving me—I shit you not—a tiny push toward the exit door of our team's locker room. "See you at the party, and don't do anything I wouldn't do."

She's so ridiculous sometimes, I can't even. How we're the carbon copy of each other is beyond me, because we couldn't be any different when it comes to our personalities. "What's that supposed to mean? We're driving to the Gamma house."

It's a ten-minute drive at best. What do you expect me to do in ten minutes in a car with a guy I've never really met in person?"

The problem is that although as different as we may be, Bay knows me like the back of her own hand. "Don't tell me that seeing Blaze play and score that awesome goal tonight didn't make you a little wet, sis," she whispers in my ear.

I give her a little push of my own. "Eww, you're gross. Shut up and go away. Or are you waiting for Topher here?"

Bay shrugs. "Nah. We're meeting at the house. I'm going to grab a bite with Cole before the party. He texted me that he's already in the parking lot. Girls, are you coming?"

Just like that, she walks away, followed by Tasha and her Zeta sisters, leaving me by the locker room door in a super short dress that rides up with every step I take.



## 15.

# The Perfect Ride

Blaze



I'M FUCKING STARVING.

This is the thought that gets me to hurry up in the shower. I'm sure the guys are going to order some pizza to carb up before the party starts, but I have a date with Bay's sister, so I decided to go grab a bite with her instead.

Planning to have my auction date at a party was a strategic move. There was no way to know who would place the winning bid on me, so I thought that seeking safety in a crowd was the best form of insurance. Think about it. If the girl who won the bid wasn't attractive, I could hang out in a group long enough not to look rude before I eventually got lost in the crowd of partygoers.

If she was boring, same thing.

The situation works to my advantage even with an attractive and fun date. She gets to hang out with me at my best, after a winning game and at a huge party I organized. It's a win-win situation.

"You must be Lakyn," I greet her as I exit the locker room.

"What gives that away?" She snorts, blushing immediately after. "Sorry, I didn't mean that to sound bitchy."

I chuckle, taking in the thin jacket that covers her shoulders and what looks like one of our jerseys that has been fashioned into a tight, short mini dress. "Nah, you're right. It's pretty obvious you're Lakyn since I asked you to meet me here and you're supposed to be Bay's twin. Where did your sister keep you hidden all this time? I don't mean that in a douchey way."

Okay, maybe just a little because... holy shit.

I try my best to be subtle as I check her out, but if possible, Lakyn is even hotter than Bay.

It probably sounds stupid because they are identical, but there's something about Lakyn that immediately caught my eye when I looked up at the bleachers earlier on.

Bay is gorgeous, always so perfectly put together, while her sister gives off a more easygoing vibe.

I don't know if it's the blonde hair that's flowing down her back rather than being tied up, or the way she keeps pulling at the hem of her short dress rather than showing off in it.

I also immediately dig the fact that her softer exterior doesn't mean meekness because she immediately put me in my place for the lame line I just greeted her with.

"I'm Blaze, by the way," I add when she doesn't answer my rhetorical question about how it's possible that we haven't met in two years of us going to the same school when I hang with her sister pretty regularly.

The glint in her blue eyes tells me that I did it again. "Can I sound more fucking obvious tonight?" I laugh self-deprecatingly. "You know who I am."

She smiles, that glint telling me that I'm seriously off my game tonight. "Yeah, I know who you are."

Fuck.

I thought this date would be easy and that even though I don't date, I could handle one night, and I'd be a natural at this whole thing. I mean, hooking up is easy, right? It's a game of looks and suggestive smiles until a girl comes over and drapes herself all over me. That's the way it always works with the puck bunnies.

With any other girls on campus, I usually just smile and say, "Hey," and it's pretty much the same from that point. We end up in a bathroom or in my room. The best hookups are the ones when she doesn't linger, and we part ways with a, "See you around."



This is completely uncharted territory, because I doubt Lakyn would react the way I'm used to if she was invited to my room right now, or even worse, the arena's bathrooms.

The difference between a hookup and a date is that I have to make actual conversation tonight.

And it seems that I actually suck at it.

I'm not the only one who's nervous though, at least judging by the way Lakyn fidgets with her hands when she isn't trying to pull her dress down to cover more of her creamy skin.

"Good game tonight. I really enjoyed it," she offers.

I can't help but smile at the praise. "Thank you. Do you come to watch our home games often?"

I realize that it was a stupid question even before she shakes her head. If she had been at our games before, there's no way in hell I wouldn't have noticed her.

"No, it was my first time, but it was fun. I might not complain too much next time Bay invites me to come to a game."

The idea comes to my mind that if this date goes well, maybe I can be the one who invites her to come to our next game.

And when I say "if this date goes well," what I really mean is if I can manage to find my usual swagger and stop sounding like a total moron who got punched in the head a few too many times on the ice.

"Glad you had fun." I smile. "What do you say we get out of here and stop somewhere for a bite to eat before the party?"

Lakyn nods, her lips opening in a pretty smile. "That would be great. I had a snack earlier, but I must admit that I'm pretty hungry."

I have to make a conscious effort to stop staring at her pink lips, wondering if they are as soft as they look.

“Let’s go then, I’m starving.” I grab her hand, and something weird happens.

It’s like a rush of heat starts where our skin touches and travels up my arm and down the rest of my body, settling right at the base of my spine and making my balls tingle.

I quicken my pace, worried that I have a half-mast boner in the making and if that graduates to a full hard-on, I’d rather be on my bike with Lakyn safely behind me where she can’t see it.

“Here we are,” I say, stopping by my bike and letting go of her hand to get my spare helmet.

*Calm down, motherfucker, I tell myself. It isn’t the first time you’ve been near a hot girl, for fuck’s sake. We aren’t fifteen, and we don’t get a boner just by touching a girl’s hand.*

“Put this on, Lakyn.” I offer her the helmet, but she doesn’t move, staring at me with wide, blue eyes like a deer in the headlights. “Let me help you.”

I place the helmet on her head, and when I brush her jaw to grab one half of the strap to fasten it under her chin, it happens again.

The contact with her skin heats up mine, and I’m held captive by her light blue eyes, the gentle slope of her pretty nose, and the way her throat moves when she swallows.

I fight the urge to trace the movement of her throat with my fingers and crush my mouth to hers.

My eyes return to hers, and fuck me, at least there’s some justice in this world, because she looks as affected by my closeness as I am by hers. She swallows again, her breathing shallow, and I swear there’s something palpable in the air, like a crackle of electricity.

That has nothing to do with the weather though, because there isn’t one single cloud in the sky on this late summer night.



Lakyn



BLAZE DUNNE IS FUCKING hot.

That's the first thought that comes to my mind when he comes out of the locker room in dark jeans that hug his long legs and muscular thighs and a black leather jacket that gives him a dangerous, bad boy vibe.

I immediately like the way he looks into my eyes when he's speaking to me. It isn't a creepy stare, and instead, it makes him look engaged in the conversation, like his whole attention is focused on me.

His eyes aren't brown like I thought from looking at all the photos of him I've seen on social media and on the team's promotional posters scattered around campus. Blaze's eyes are a dark green, with golden flecks sprinkled around the pupils.

And he smells good.

Fuck, I know he just came out of the shower, since his hair is still a little damp, but when his fresh, citrusy scent envelops me, my brain begins to short-circuit to the point that I forget we've just met, and I make a snarky comment to his greeting.

"You must be Lakyn."

I snort. I mean, is there a more unsexy, unfeminine sound? My ex used to say that my sarcasm was a turnoff, and that it made me sound like a bitch.

Shit, shit, shit. I don't even know if Blaze and I will have a decent date, but I'm definitely starting on a wrong note.

I immediately apologize, and he's gracious enough not to take offense.

We make small talk for a few moments as he asks me if I enjoyed the game.

I'm so enthralled by his deep, sexy voice that I go on a rant about how it was my first game and let it slip that I complained at first when Bay invited me. Thank fuck I shut

my big mouth before I also volunteer the information that part of my complaint was about having to go on a date with him.

Bay promised that there's more to Blaze than the team's enforcer, and I want to keep my promise to my sister to give this date a chance.

Not that this is much of a travesty since Blaze is extremely easy on the eyes.

His rugged good looks become downright stunning when he smiles a bright, open smile that reaches his green eyes and makes the cutest dimple appear on one of his cheeks.

Out of his hockey jersey and without all the pads, Blaze is still a tall, big guy, but that scary persona he portrays on the ice disappears.

His friendly demeanor oozes charm, and I tell myself that maybe Bay is right that fighting during a hockey game doesn't mean the man is a brute in real life.

“What do you say we get out of here and stop somewhere for a bite to eat before the party?”

Food sounds like a great idea, I was too nervous to eat earlier, and the two sips of the extra strong margarita Tami offered me went straight to my head.

That must be it, I decide. The way my heart is hammering against my rib cage and the way I feel a little lightheaded must be because of that bit of tequila I had a few hours ago. I'm not having a full body reaction to Blaze.

I know it's total bullshit when my date grabs my hand to walk me to his car.

When his skin touches mine, it's as if I had stuck my fingers into an electrical socket. The contact goes straight to my nipples, making them harden under the thin fabric of my jersey.

The fact that Blaze is looking ahead as we're walking is a small blessing as I pull down on the super short hem of my dress that keeps riding up with every step.

I swear to God, this is the last time I'll let my sister dress me. Last week I almost broke my ankle thanks to her sky-high wedge sandals, and today I feel like I'm constantly one step away from flashing my ass to anyone in the vicinity.

I like walking with Blaze's warm, solid body by my side, and I can't stop sneaking glances at him. He has a perfect, sharp jaw with just the slightest hint of stubble. His shoulders are as wide as Cash's and—

“Here we are,” he says, and I almost look around in confusion when I don't see a car or a truck.

Fuck me, I should have known. Blaze rides a motorcycle. It isn't even one of those cruisers with a comfortable backseat. It's something sleek and aggressive looking in all black. I'm not an expert on motorcycles, but it must be Italian because it says Ducati on one side.

I can't possibly ride on that. First off because I'm terrified of it, and besides, wasn't I just thinking about avoiding flashing my ass to anyone around me? My stupid jersey dress is way too short for this.

I'm so busy panicking about the bike and my modesty that I don't react when Blaze passes me his spare helmet.

“Let me help you,” he offers when I don't move to take it from him.

Before I know, the helmet is placed on my head, and Blaze fastens the strap under my chin with deft fingers.

His touch has a comforting and exciting effect on me at the same time. It affects me way more than any stranger's touch has any business doing.

I can't deny the fact that there seems to be some kind of strong chemistry between us, and I swallow to try and calm my erratic heartbeat.

His green eyes track the movement before trailing back up to my eyes.

“Here you go, all ready,” he murmurs.

Blaze's deep voice reverberates through me, and I can't help but notice the way his eyes keep descending to my lips. Cash did it a few times the other night and then he ended up kissing me.

A crazy thought makes its way into my head. If Blaze tried to kiss me right here and now, would I let him?

I don't have the chance to find out because just the thought of his lips on mine causes me to tremble, and he notices.

Thank fuck he thinks I'm cold.

My eyes follow the movement of his broad shoulders as he shrugs off his leather jacket.

The view of Blaze's chest and stomach hugged by a white T-shirt that clings to his chiseled muscles does nothing to calm my already erratic heartbeat.

"Here, put this on," he says, coming to stand behind me and helping me into his jacket. "It isn't a long ride to dinner and the Gamma house, but you're going to be cold in that dress and that thin jacket you have on."

I murmur, "Thank you," my senses confused and heightened by his hands on me as he fixes the collar of the jacket. The clean, citrusy scent that engulfs me and the warmth from Blaze's body that's still trapped into the garment are comforting and exciting at the same time.

For the first time tonight, I'm not mad at Bay for practically dressing me like Puck Bunny Barbie. Without the tiny tight dress and the flimsy jacket she allowed me to put on after arguing with me the entire way to the ice rink, I wouldn't have gotten the chance to wear Blaze's jacket.

Blaze climbs onto the bike, inviting me to climb behind him, and I thank all the gods that he isn't staring while my dress practically exposes my ass to anyone who happens to pass by. Luckily the parking lot is almost empty, and my modesty can make it out of here unscathed.

"Hold onto me, Lakyn," Blaze instructs me before kicking the bike on and practically peeling off the ice hockey arena parking lot.

I'm starting to think that confusion will be the theme of the night as I feel terrified and elated at the same time by riding on a bike with Blaze.

It's my first time riding on a motorcycle, and the speed is scary. The feeling of being out of control every time Blaze leans into a corner makes me feel like I'm about to pass out.

At the same time, though, the wind whipping around us and the world rushing by in a blur give me a sense of freedom I never thought possible.

Then there's Blaze.

The fact that I'm hugging his trim waist is not lost on me as I lean against his solid back in what feels like an intimate hug with a guy I've barely met.

Riding is a very physical affair and quite a workout, at least judging by the way the hard, sculpted muscles of Blaze's stomach twitch under my fingers with every movement.

The ride is over before I know it. We're in Star Cove's public park in an area where a bunch of food trucks are dotted in a semicircle with a few picnic tables to provide a place to sit and enjoy your food.

"Let me help you." I accept the hand Blaze offers me as he dismounts the bike after leaning it on its stand.

I don't even know how I manage to climb off while pulling my dress down my ass, but somehow, I make it.

He doesn't let go of my hand, guiding me toward one of the trucks. "I hope you don't mind eating here." He smiles. "This place has the most delicious tacos in town. It's Star Cove's best kept secret."

I shrug, my mouth watering at the scent of toasted tortillas and grilled meat. "I don't mind at all."

We look at the menu on a blackboard right outside the truck in silence for a few moments.

"What can I get you?" A small, older woman smiles from the food truck's window.

“Lakyn?” Blaze asks.

I hate it when people take forever to order their food but...

“I don’t know,” I admit, looking at the mouthwatering alternatives on offer. “I can’t decide between shrimp tacos and barbacoa.”

My date has a solution. “How about we get both and share it?”

I nod. “That sounds great.”

Blaze addresses the woman waiting at the food truck window. “Rocio, could we have one order of shrimp tacos and one of barbacoa? I would also love some chiles rellenos and some of your special nachos.”

“Coming right up.” The woman smiles.

I open the purse I put across my body to be able to ride, but Blaze begins shaking his head. “Dinner is on me.”

I argue that I’m perfectly capable of pitching in, but he insists. “Let me buy you dinner. After all, this is a date.”

“How about neither of you pays for it?” Rocio intervenes, not giving me the chance to argue that he’s on this date because of that charity auction, not because he wanted to go out with me.

“Absolutely not, Rocio,” Blaze argues.

The older woman’s smile widens. “Didn’t you play a game tonight?” she asks.

Blaze sighs. “You know damn well I did, but—”

“Didn’t you win?” she insists.

He laughs. “Okay then. *Gracias*, Rocio.”

I look at the two of them, a little confused until Rocio explains, “It’s our tradition. Dinner’s on me on game nights.”

“Only if I win,” Blaze adds. “If I lose, she has to let me pay.”

I look at them with wide eyes. “You do this every time you guys have a home game?”



They both laugh.

“I guess you could say it’s part of my good luck ritual.”

Rocio nods. “I’m a Cove Knights fan. My eldest son, Juan, used to play. He’s a Star Cove graduate. I asked Blaze for his autograph the first time he came here, and I guess we evolved from there. Now, go sit. I’ll bring you the food as soon as it’s ready.”

Blaze guides me toward one of the picnic tables.

I feel stupid to admit it, but I miss holding his hand when he lets go to sit across from me.

“So, Blaze,” I say, my attention attracted by the colorful tiki girl tattooed on the inside of his forearm, “where did you grow up? You aren’t from Star Cove like Cash, right?”

He chuckles. “Does my accent give it away? I grew up in Michigan, ma’am.”

“I thought so, but I didn’t want to assume.”

“Since we’re asking questions,” he says, running a hand through the slightly longer strands on the top of his faux-hawk, “you don’t sound like a local either.”

I nod. “Well spotted. I’m from New York, and my parents still live there. I always wanted to study in California though, and Star Cove was my dream school.”

He considers my words. “Did you and Bay both dream of coming here?”

I don’t mind telling him how we ended up here together. “Bay decided to come along. She wanted to study pharmaceutical science. She wants to become a cosmetic chemist and make her own line of makeup to sell on her blogs and channels.”

He smiles. “Your sister is a force to be reckoned with. Really driven. We’ve worked together on a few joint events organized by the Gammas and Zetas, and I’ve never met anyone more organized and efficient. I like that about her. But what about you, Lakyn? What are you studying?”

I lower my gaze, feeling heat rise to my face. My ex tried to convince me to switch my major to something “more exciting,” and I know a lot of people think I’m boring. “Library science,” I say, meeting his gaze. If he thinks I’m boring, I guess that will say more about him than myself.

“That’s fucking awesome.” He beams.

For a second, I wonder if he’s making fun of me, but the smile that reaches his green eyes looks totally genuine.

“I’m majoring in English literature. Reading has always been my favorite thing in the world.”

My interest is immediately piqued. “Really?”

He looks at me with a new intensity in his eyes, as if what he’s about to say next is going to be important. “Why, is it so hard to believe?”

I begin shaking my head before he’s even done asking the question. “No, I—”

“I’m sorry, Lakyn.” He sighs. “I didn’t mean to get defensive, but when they look at me, a lot of people judge me from what they see on the outside. I’m a jock, and I play a violent sport. Even more so, I’m my team’s enforcer. I’m fucking encouraged to fight. A ton of people, even some of my teammates, stop at the surface and find it really hard to believe that reading is my favorite thing in the world when I’m not skating.”

If I was blushing before, I feel even worse now. I did exactly the same thing, to the point that I didn’t want to come on this date, convinced that Blaze would be some kind of violent thug. “I love reading too. That’s why I want to be a librarian. And I get it, people judge. They think I’m a nerd, which I am, I guess.”

He agrees. “I wish people weren’t so quick at judging by appearances.”

Now I understand why Bay thinks so highly of Blaze. They are both judged by what’s on the surface and misunderstood. If you look at my sister, you’d think she’s the classic pretty queen bee. She’s blonde and athletic, and she

used to be a cheerleader in high school. Bay has always been extremely personable and made friends easily, and she's thriving as a sorority president. People stop at that, though, and think she's shallow and possibly even dumb and a little mean, but there couldn't be anything further from the truth.

"I know what you mean," I admit, feeling guilty that I did just that with him. "So what do you like reading?"

Blaze's eyes flash with interest. "Dickens is my favorite when it comes to the classics. I also read a lot of poetry, and I don't mind a good thriller."

I nod along at his response. "Sounds like you have varied interests."

His smile widens before he continues telling me his reading preferences. "But my favorite thing is romance. I read a ton of it."

A giggle escapes my lips without me even realizing it. "Stop it." I laugh, giving his arm a little slap. "Now you're messing with me."

We both turn serious—Blaze because I probably offended him, and myself because his skin is really soft and the tips of my fingers are tingling at the contact with his corded, muscular forearm.

"I promise I'm not messing with you, Lakyn," he says, his eyes focused on mine so I know he means it. "I usually don't tell people because they judge, but since we were talking about how there's often more than what meets the eye..."

I feel like a bit of an asshole right now. "You're right, I'm sorry," I murmur, lowering my gaze.

"Hey." He stands up, coming to sit by my side. "Lakyn, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound like I'm scolding you. You're right that not many guys like to read romance."

His tone is kind, and I feel encouraged to ask him more questions. I'm curious about what other unexpected traits Blaze Dunne hides from the world. "So what kind of romance?"

He shrugs. “You name it. I’ll read anything with decent writing and an interesting plot. Even though I admit that I prefer my romances as smutty as possible. I’ve read some excellent historical romances, and some taboo and some contemporary dark romances. Right now I’m obsessed with sports romance. I just finished reading a series that’s based in Star Cove.”

“Really?”

He sounds really excited as he takes out his phone and shows me his reading app. “Yeah, it’s about skydiving. The series is called *The Heartbreakers*, by Melissa Adams. I recommend it.”

I look at the pretty covers and decide to download them later, curious to see what Blaze enjoys reading. “It looks interesting.”

Blaze traces the cuff of his leather jacket that I’m still wearing. It’s a casual, almost absentminded touch, but it leaves a trail of fire in its wake on the sensitive skin of my wrist.

How did Bay know that I would feel insanely attracted to this man? Despite being obviously hot, he isn’t my usual type, and yet my entire body is buzzing with unmistakable need.

I’m curious if he’s a good kisser like Cash or if he sucks at it like my ex. I’m especially curious about something else too. Did he send me that dick pic?

The thought is almost ridiculous. Blaze doesn’t strike me as someone with a small dick. He exudes big dick energy from every pore.

“Penny for your thoughts?” he suddenly asks, taking my hand into his.

Shit.

I blush again. I hate that I have no poker face to speak of, and my emotions are usually there for everyone to see.

I’ve just been caught staring at him like a creep, and I frantically look for something to say. “I was thinking that I love romance too. Especially contemporary.”

He tilts his head, looking at me as if I were an interesting riddle to decipher. “When did you find out that you liked it?”

I smile at the memory.

“It was the summer after we graduated middle school. Bay wanted to go to cheerleading summer camp, and she kept begging me to go with her. I like to dance, but I lack the coordination required for cheer stunts. They had tryouts at camp to establish what levels people were in so they could group them together. I knew there was no way I’d perform at Bay’s level, and I really didn’t want to be stuck with strangers rather than hanging out with my sister.”

Blaze looks genuinely interested in my story. “Did you go?”

I shake my head. “No. Bay had me practice with her. She wanted to teach me some stunts and how to tumble, but she must have got all the athletic talent, because I landed on my arm and broke it.”

He rubs the skin between my thumb and index finger, probably unaware of the effect his touch is having on me. I’m glad I’m sitting down, because my pulse has gone straight between my thighs, and I don’t know how steady I’d be on my legs if I tried to walk.

“I’m sorry, Lakyn.”

“I’m not,” I say honestly. “My parents had to work all summer, and with Bay gone at camp, I was sent to spend the entire summer break with my nana. She was my favorite person in the entire world, but that summer, she was busy with a lot of new hobbies that took her out of the house. I spent all the time she wasn’t home lying on the carpet of her living room and reading every book in her collection, and the majority of her collection was...”

“Romance,” he finishes for me.

“Bingo.” I smile.

“So was there anything that stood out in your summer reads?”

If he hadn't just admitted that he loves smut, I'd be embarrassed, but I feel safe enough to be honest. "I read a lot of stuff that I'm sure wasn't appropriate for a thirteen-year-old. One book that stuck with me was *The Thorn Birds*."

Blaze doesn't look shocked by my choice of reading. "I read that too."

Interesting. "Did you like it?"

"It was a good story. I've read way smuttier though. I guess what made that book so scandalous was the forbidden nature of the romance, with him being a Catholic priest."

I agree with him. "So how did you discover your love for reading and romance?"

He smiles. "I'm a military brat. I had trouble making friends because we moved all the time. My mom tried to make sure I occupied my time with activities so I wouldn't get bored. One year, when we were stationed in Germany, Dad got deployed, and Mom had gotten herself a job at the library on post to avoid having too much time to feel lonely. I tagged along most days once we were out of school, and I ended up becoming a volunteer at the library. I used to love reshelving books, and I borrowed all the stuff that attracted my attention. I read so fast that I often read even the stuff Mom borrowed."

"This is how you came across romance?" I guess.

"Yup." He smirks. "That stuff was interesting, and it gave me a lot of tips on how to talk to girls."

I burst out laughing. "Ah, that's why you liked it. It helped you pick up girls."

He doesn't look offended by my good-natured ribbing. "Hey, a guy has to do what he can. Girls can be fucking scary."

I roll my eyes. "Right. As if you have any trouble finding girls who want to go out with you."

Blaze definitely doesn't sugarcoat the truth. "Not since I started playing hockey in high school, but reading romance helped me understand how women think. Plus I'm a sucker for a good love story."

The question of why he doesn't have a girlfriend is on the tip of my tongue, but I never get to ask him because our food arrives in that exact moment.

"Here we go, guys." Rocio smiles. "Enjoy."

"Oh my god," I exclaim. "You ordered enough food for the entire hockey team."

Blaze chuckles. "Ha, Rocio loves to make sure I'm well fed, and I burn a lot of calories, so I eat a lot. I could finish all this by myself."

I grab a shrimp taco, and the intention would be to take a dainty bite, but let's face it, there's no way to eat tacos without making a mess.

The food is too delicious to care about the way I look as shrimp, lettuce, and guac come raining down on me with every bite.

Blaze watches me with a little amused smile on his face for a second. "Good, huh?"

I nod, finishing the first taco and ready to grab a barbacoa one.

That's when Blaze begins to eat, and it doesn't take us long before the food is all gone.





## 16.

# Party Games

Lakyn



I’VE MADE UP MY MIND, I love riding on a motorcycle.

If I ever get another boyfriend, him having a bike is definitely a plus.

“Come on, pretty girl,” Blaze says, helping me take off my helmet and taking my hand as we park in front of the Gamma house. “Let’s party until the sun comes up.”

He called me pretty.

My stomach is in knots as I follow him up the driveway and into the mansion that houses the upperclassmen and governing body of Gamma Delta Tau.

I don’t know if it’s the bike ride that has adrenaline coursing through my system, Blaze’s touch that makes me incapable of breathing normally, or the fact that I ate too many tacos, but I feel a little dizzy by the time we cross the threshold.

Absolute full disclosure, if you haven’t worked it out yet, I’m not exactly a party animal.

It’s not that I have never been to a college party—I’ve been to exactly one, when Bay was trying to convince me to rush Zeta Theta Beta—but this is as far from my scene as humanly possible.

It might be the low lighting, the loud music, the throng of bodies packed on the makeshift dance floor, or the awareness that by the time we show up, alcohol has been flowing freely and everyone is buzzing.

All I know is that I feel like the proverbial fish out of water, and I stiffen as I follow Blaze inside.

We're immediately greeted by a Gamma brother I don't recognize, who takes Blaze's leather jacket from me.

He thanks him with a smile, walking through the crowded living room and into the kitchen at the back of the house.

It takes us a good few minutes to navigate through the house as Blaze is stopped by virtually everyone who wants to congratulate him on tonight's victory.

I see again what Bay means when she says that Blaze is one of the most popular guys on campus.

He has a smile for everyone, and he calls a lot of people by name, making everyone feel like they matter and they are welcome at the party he had a hand in organizing.

There are a lot of back slaps and handshakes, but Blaze never lets go of my hand, making me feel like *I* matter.

"Pick your poison." He smiles as we stop near a table laden with every kind of liquor and mixer you can imagine. "There's also a keg outside, and we have wine coolers too."

Truth be told, I'd rather keep my wits about me tonight and order a soda, but I don't want to look like the stick in the mud Topher always accuses me of being. "What are you drinking?" I ask.

"I think I'm going to start with a beer."

I nod. "I'll take one too."

A beer is probably my best bet because I can nurse it for a while and it has lower alcohol content than a lot of other stuff.

"Can I have two beers, one for me and one for my date?" he asks the guys in charge of the keg that has been set up outside.

The two guys engage him in a conversation about tonight's game, and I space out for a second, taking this opportunity to look around at the spacious backyard of the Gamma house.

There's garden furniture everywhere, occupied by people drinking for the most part, a beer pong table, a limbo station, and a slip and slide point not far from the glimmering turquoise pool.

"Here you go, Bay." One of the guys passes me a red Solo cup.

"Not Bay." Blaze beats me to it. "This is Lakyn, Bay's twin sister."

"Cool." The guy winks at me. "It's great that a hot girl like Bay has a double. Hooking up with twins has always been on my bucket list—"

Blaze cuts him off. "Yours and a million other guys', Ralph. I wouldn't say that out loud though. If Topher hears you, you'll be sorry."

The guy's face turns beet red. "Fuck, you're right. I'm sorry, Lakyn. I didn't mean anything by it, it's just that if you were both single—"

It's my turn to interrupt him. "I'm afraid if we were both single, it wouldn't make a difference because Bay and I have totally different types."

Blaze gets his drink, and we walk deeper into the backyard, toward the pool. "Lakyn, I'm sorry for what Ralph said. It was fucking rude."

I appreciate his apology, but I'm not really mad. "It's okay. I think the guy had quite a few beers and that probably loosened his inhibitions."

What I don't say is that even though what Ralph said was pretty crass, it's kind of nice being considered as attractive as my sister for once.

"What would you like to do?" he asks me, gesturing to encompass the whole backyard. "Shall we play a game, go find your sister and Topher and hang out with them, or do you want to dance?"

I look around, and I'm kind of glad I can't spot Bay anywhere. I would have no problem hanging out with her, but

I'd rather not spend any time with that douchebag, unless I have no choice.

“I'm not the best at party games, but if you don't mind dancing...”

Blaze chuckles, downing his beer and taking my still full Solo cup to deposit them on a table. “I thought you'd never ask.”

He guides me to the outdoor dance floor that has been arranged under a pergola decorated with fairy lights, pulling me closer to his body just as the disco music turns into a slow country song.

I'm really confused right now.

I thought I really liked Cash—and I do, I'm disappointed that I haven't spotted him anywhere yet—but if that's the case, then I shouldn't love it so much when Blaze closes his arms around me, practically erasing any distance between our bodies.

If I thought that the solid muscles of his back felt good when I rode on his bike, nothing could have prepared me for feeling his ripped body against me as we sway slowly to the rhythm of the song that's playing. Don't even ask me what it is, because I don't know. It's like the second Blaze touches me, everything else around me fades into the background.

Do I sound like one of those sappy heroines in those cheap romance novels that lined the shelves of my nana's house? I know I do, but right now, I couldn't care less.

Blaze's hands give my back a gentle massage as they travel down my spine, settling on the small of it right by my tailbone. He's so close to my ass, and I'm shocked by the fact that I wish his hands would cup it, pressing me tighter against him.

What does that say about me, since I barely know the guy?

Bay would say that it means that my type isn't just broody and silent like Cash, but also funny and sexy, with a bike and bad boy tattoos like Blaze. A bad boy who loves reading, just

in case anyone thought that my interest in Blaze was purely physical.

As one song slips into another, we dance closer and closer and my arms are slung around Blaze's neck, my hands playing with the short hair at his nape.

My head has been on his shoulder this entire time, but I lift my face to meet his gaze when he whispers my name.

"Lakyn." His green eyes descend to my lips again, like he was doing earlier. "I hope what I'm about to say doesn't ruin everything or make me sound totally uncool, but... I wasn't too excited about our date."

Fuck, I didn't see this coming. I stop dancing, trying to pull away from him as heat rises to my face. "I—"

He tightens his grip on me. "Wait, I'm sorry, I'm fucking this up. I don't mean it the way you think."

I look away from him, hating the way his words are making me feel.

"Lakyn, seriously, look at me. The reason why I wasn't excited is because I agreed to the auction because it was mandatory, not because I wanted to go on any dates. Then when Bay told me it was with her twin sister, I was curious because Bay is gorgeous, but I still wasn't that convinced that I would have a good time. Mostly because while I think your sister is beautiful and we work really well together on Greek events, there's absolutely no spark with her, which is good since she's dating a brother, but you know what I mean. This is why I decided to take you to this party, so we could hang out in a crowded place and I didn't have to make an effort."

I look away again. "If you want to enjoy the party and find a hookup, I can go home. I'm tired anyway, I can call an Uber."

He sighs, shaking his head. "Please, let me finish. After I've said what I want to say, if you still want to go, then I'll take you home."

I don't want him to take me home, I don't want to listen to whatever explanation he has as to why he doesn't want to hang

out with me. “Seriously, Blaze, you don’t have to hang out with me. I’m a big girl, and I can find my own way home. You can enjoy your party. I’m sure there are plenty of girls who are just waiting for an opportunity to get closer to you, and I’m totally cockblocking them.”

He chuckles. “Yeah, I saw a few girls who love to hang around the team on a regular basis giving you the stink eye.”

Whatever. “This isn’t funny,” I bite out, pushing against his chest to get him to release me. I let out a frustrated huff when he doesn’t budge.

“Isn’t it funny? I actually think it’s hilarious how much of an idiot I am.”

“On that we can agree.” I glare at him.

“I think I’m still fucking this up,” he says. “The reason why I’m an idiot is because the second I saw you—I don’t fucking know, but that spark I just said I don’t feel with your sister? The second I saw you it was like the fucking Fourth of July.”

His words make me look at him again. “Really?”

“Really.” He nods. “It’s fucking crazy. I’ve never felt like this before. I kept telling myself that once we got talking, I’d lose interest, but I actually like talking to you. You’re funny, and I love that I can talk about books with you and you don’t get bored or think I’m a dork. I brought you here because that was what I put down as the date activity for the auction, but I immediately regretted it. I would have rather gone somewhere where we could keep talking and getting to know each other without all these people.”

I can’t help the smile I feel creeping onto my face. “So you don’t want me to go home so you can look for a hookup?”

“Fuck no.” He chuckles. “I wish we could tell everyone here to go home so I could find a way to convince you to be my hookup.”

The way he’s looking at me takes my breath away, and for a second, I can’t find the words to tell him that I’m game, whatever he means with “hooking up.”

“Blaze.” The sound comes out raspy and breathy as he traces my bottom lip with the pad of his thumb.

His eyes are fixed on my mouth, and I think he’s about to kiss me, completely forgetting that we are at a crowded party.

“It’s time for body shots!” someone yells when the music stops.

I realize it’s Topher, who’s standing on the beer pong table with a bottle of tequila held high over his head.

“This is the first of our games tonight. It’s a series of tests carefully designed to identify the brothers who will have to complete the ultimate dare at the end of the night. Choose your partner carefully, because once your choice is made, you aren’t permitted to change until the end.”

My anxiety skyrockets as I see most of the hockey team and some of the football players who belong to Gamma line up, ready to play whatever idiotic games Topher has dreamed up.

I recognize Cole, Bay’s bestie, with a girl I don’t know, and Jagger, one of his friends, with a pretty brunette.

Tucker, the second string goalie, is with Viv, and Marcus, one of the freshmen players, is with Liv.

Luca, the star new recruit I’m supposed to have my last date with, is also selected to play with a girl who’s on the dance team with Tasha.

“Come on, Blaze,” Topher calls out. “You’re our master of ceremonies and technically in charge of every party. Let’s start the season with a bang, and show everyone how a real Gamma and Cove Knight parties.”

I don’t know why I expected Blaze to decline, but he surprises me again by grabbing my hand and coming forward. “I’m in.” He smirks.

I pull on his hand, reluctant to get involved. I know from Bay that these games can get pretty wild, and I don’t think I’m up for whatever Topher has cooked up.

The motherfucker knows me way too well, though, and spots my hesitation. “What’s wrong, Lake? Are you going to turn into a pumpkin at midnight and you have to go home? Blaze, I’d choose one of the Zetas or anyone else in here if you don’t want to lose. Lake is too straightlaced for our games.”

Blaze looks at me with a silent question in his green eyes.

I’m conflicted because Topher is right, this isn’t my scene, and the wild antics Bay always tells me about after these parties are as far as humanly possible from my comfort zone.

“Come on, Lake,” Topher chides me with a smug grin. “We both know you don’t want to play. Step aside and let a grown-up be Blaze’s partner. This stuff isn’t for kids.”

Bay reacts before I have the chance to tell Topher where to stick his bottle of tequila.

“Toph, cut it out. Stop being an asshole!” she seethes.

“Aww,” the asshole in question coos. “Baby Lake needs her older sis to fight her battles. How cute.”

God, the only thing that stops me from climbing on that table and inserting that bottle up Topher’s ass is Blaze’s hand, which is still closed over mine.

“Lakyn, if you don’t want to play, I can sit this one out.”

There’s no scorn in his voice, and I’d be lying if I said that I’m not tempted to bow out and maybe find a quiet corner where Blaze and I could resume the conversation Topher so rudely interrupted.

All it takes to make up my mind is a look at my sister’s boyfriend’s cocky smile, and the urge to teach him a lesson is too strong to resist.

Bay knows me too well, and she giggles, nodding and winking at me.

“First off,” I sneer, “Bay is only seven minutes older than me, and she’s the only one who’s allowed to call herself my older sister. Secondly, only my friends call me Lake, to you, Topher, I’m Lakyn.”



Something flashes in the Gamma president's eyes. He isn't used to being challenged, and he's furious at the way I just spoke to him in front of his peers. "Oh, the little kitty has claws. Go ahead then, *Lakyn*, but don't expect any favors just because I'm dating your sister."

I bite my tongue at the thought that the only favor I would like from him is that he'd stop dating my sister, but for some reason Bay is infatuated with him. I think Topher isn't worthy of her, but Bay and I had this conversation countless times and we agree to disagree.

"I don't expect any favors," I say with a confidence I don't really feel.

His smile widens as he jumps off the table more gracefully than I could ever manage. Topher isn't as big as Cash, Blaze, and Luca, but he's still six feet tall and in top physical shape.

"Right then," he says arrogantly, opening the bottle of tequila in his hands. "First game of the night, body shots. Girls, let your man drink from you. Let's start by pouring some liquor in your mouth. The couples who'll make it to the next round won't waste any booze. Open up, *Lakyn*," he orders, coming to stand behind me.

I notice a few more Gamma brothers who haven't been selected to play do the same with each participant in the game.

"Don't spill one drop, or you'll be out," Topher sneers, pouring a copious amount of tequila into my mouth. "Go on, give Blaze a drink."

Blaze advances toward me, pulling me to him with a gentle hand on my waist.

He slants his mouth over mine, encouraging me to pour the tequila from my mouth to his.

At first, I don't even think about the fact that his lips are practically fused with mine, concentrating on the task. Once he swallows the tequila, though, our mouth-to-mouth contact turns into a kiss.

He increases the pressure on my lips as his tongue slips into my mouth, and I'm on fire.

His kiss is hungry and passionate, and I have no hesitation to kiss him back.

The attraction that has been simmering between us since the moment we met turns into something tangible as we explore each other's mouths, forgetting that we're not alone.

The reminder comes in the form of Topher's irritating laugh. "Get a room, you two," he barks. "Who knew that little Lakyn was a puck bunny in training?"

Topher's tone is malicious, and for the first time, I understand why these parties often end in a huge fight between him and Bay.

My sister glares at him, ready to scold him for what he just said, but Blaze reacts faster.

"Hey, brother," he says, his jaw ticking as his eyes land on his frat president. "Do I have to make sure you get cut off from drinking?"

Topher's scowl matches Blaze's. "What the fuck are you talking about, Fire?"

Blaze isn't mollified by the use of his nickname. "I'm talking about the fact that you're being rude to my date for the second time tonight. We've been frat brothers and teammates for over two years now, and it's no secret that you're a mean drunk. I can only assume that's the problem here."

I don't miss the way Blaze clenches his fist, and I'm proud of him for not trying to solve this situation with a fight, like he would do on the ice.

Topher, however, must pick up on Blaze's body language, because he changes his tune. "Nah, I'm good. Thank you for looking out for me. I meant nothing by it, just some good-natured teasing. Lakyn and I have got this thing going on between us. It looks like we're fighting, but it's all in good fun."

The fuck it is.

I shake my head, wondering for the umpteenth time what Topher's problem with me is, but for once, I take his lead and

give up on starting a fight. This isn't the time or place to resolve whatever issues we have with each other.

Blaze must pick up on my tense demeanor. "Is that right, pretty girl?"

I nod, not wanting to cause a fight, but I throw a warning glare in Topher's direction. If he calls me a puck bunny again, we'll really have a problem.

"Time for the second shot!" Topher announces. "Ready? Three, two, one... go!"

I squeal as he pours the cold tequila on my chest, letting the liquor pool between my breasts.

Blaze lowers his head, and his mouth chases the booze, slurping and licking the sensitive skin of my chest.

Thank goodness for bras, because my body reacts to the warmth of Blaze's mouth and the feeling of his tongue. If the next game was cutting glass with my nipples, I'd have no rivals.

I hate Topher, but right now, I'm strangely grateful to him for choosing this game as Blaze keeps lapping on my breasts until there isn't a drop of tequila in sight.

"Very good effort, everyone," Topher says. "The people who are through to the next round are Blaze and Lakyn, Luca and Paige, Cole and partner, Tucker and Viv, and Jagger and Candace. Everyone else, stay tuned because you'll be up for the penalty later on."

The losing guys step aside with several groans and protests, but Topher dismisses them by announcing that it's time for the next game.

"Beer pong, everyone! A party classic."

I'm a little nervous because I've never played, but I follow Blaze to the table. I'm eager to do as well as I can since Blaze is the one who's risking having to pay whatever penalty Topher has in mind.



Blaze



“YES!” I FIST PUMP AS Lakyn takes the winning shot in the final game of beer pong. I pick her up, swinging her around in my arms. “Are you sure you’ve never played beer pong before? You’re a natural,” I say, putting her down but keeping my arm around her waist.

She’s smiling from ear to ear, elated by our victory. “I swear I’ve never played before today. I’ve only ever seen Bay play, and she sucks.”

Her giggle is contagious, and I have to tell myself to slow the fuck down, fighting the urge to take that mouth again and celebrate our win with another kiss.

“Well, well, well.” Topher grins. “We have our two final couples from our two separate beer pong heats. Blaze and Lakyn, and Luca and Paige. Only one of you gentlemen will be crowned tonight’s winner of party games, and the other one will have to join the other losers and pay a penalty for everyone’s entertainment.”

I roll my eyes. Topher is laying it on really thick tonight. I’ve always thought he was a little bit of a douche but totally harmless, but since training last week, I’m starting to rethink my opinion of our frat president. Maybe power has gone to his head. That thought makes me even more determined to make sure that Topher isn’t Coach’s choice for team captain. I think being both Gamma president and captain of the Cove Knights would only make him more obnoxious.

“So,” I bite out, not even trying to hide my annoyance, “what is it, Topher? Let’s get this over with, it’s getting late.”

The party is still going strong, with most of the people having congregated out here to watch this stupid challenge. I

can't wait to be done with whatever the final game is so I can find a quiet place to talk to Lakyn.

I didn't get a chance to ask her for another date because our dance was interrupted. I'm also dying to kiss her again, but this time without an audience.

Topher's smile widens. "Another party classic. Seven minutes in heaven."

Fuck. That's awesome and not so cool at the same time. I definitely want to kiss Lakyn again, but I don't want her to do it because it's a game and she feels obligated.

There's also another question on the tip of my tongue. "That doesn't make sense, Topher. How do you win at seven minutes?" I wouldn't put it past him to choose a game where there can't be a winner on purpose, so we all have to participate in whatever ridiculous prank he has devised as a penalty.

"Very good question." Topher nods. "This is seven minutes in heaven with a twist. The winner will have to demonstrate he embodies the qualities of a Gamma Delta Tau. The way to do that is to obtain his partner's panties as evidence that they used their seven minutes in a way that would make me and the rest of our fraternity proud."

That sounds stupid. "How are you going to know that we didn't just ask our dates for their panties so we don't have to pay the penalty?"

Luca agrees with me. "Yeah, Blaze is right. How are you going to know that we earned those panties?"

Good question. I wouldn't be surprised if Topher asked us to film ourselves.

Topher opens his arms in a nonchalant gesture. "We won't know, but you will. One of the qualities that makes our fraternity the most coveted on campus is our sense of honor. It's one of the core values in our founding charter, so the worthy Gamma brother would never cheat. Plus, we're going to listen. You know that part of the fun is that the people outside try to eavesdrop."

Luca still isn't totally convinced. "That's fine, but what happens if we both get the panties?"

"Then you both get to avoid the penalty," Topher says. "We already have a few losers to punish. Come on, guys, less talking, more playing. Your seven minutes in heaven will be spent in one of the changing rooms in our pool house. Follow me."

Lakyn accepts the hand I offer. "We don't have to do this if you don't want to," I whisper as we walk toward the pool house. "I can take whatever penalty Topher has cooked up."

Lakyn shakes her head. "No, Blaze. Let's do it. You're so close to winning."

I'd be lying if I said that just the idea of being locked in a tiny room with her, having to "earn her panties," doesn't make me rock hard.

The problem will probably be stopping at seven minutes.

Pool house is a ridiculous embellishment to describe the two small changing rooms at one end of the backyard of the Gamma house.

All there is in addition to the changing rooms is an indoor shower and a small closet where we keep towels and spare cushions for the loungers.

I guide Lakyn into one of the two "rooms," while Luca and Paige take the other one.

"All right, all right, all right," Topher yells, sounding like a side character from *Magic Mike*. "Remember you have to earn those panties, and we'll be listening. Close the doors and get to work, your seven minutes start... now!"

I close the door behind us, and the noise of the lock sliding into place is almost deafening in the small wooden shack.

"Lakyn," I say, turning to look at my date. "We don't have to do anything, I mean it."

She's so sexy in the low-cut, super short dress that has been fashioned from one of our jerseys that I have to look

down to the tiles of the changing rooms or it'll be obvious that I'm lying.

If she doesn't want to do anything, I'm not going to push her, but my cock is already straining against my jeans.

I swear I'm trying to treat Lakyn right, both because otherwise Bay will cut my balls off with a super sharp skate blade and wear them as a necklace and also because, to my own surprise, I really like this girl.

I like her more than I've ever liked anyone in a long time.

"Kiss me, Blaze," she says, her voice husky and her cheeks tinted with a soft pink hue.

I don't let her tell me twice, I'm on her in seconds.

"Fuck," I murmur, nipping her bottom lip. "You have no idea how much I wanted to kiss you again without a hundred people watching."

"Me too," she agrees, pulling me closer to her and opening her mouth to my exploration.

Her lips are the softest I've ever kissed, and our kiss deepens the second she allows my tongue into her mouth.

She gives as good as she gets, and without even knowing, I advance until her back hits the wooden wall of the shack.

I press my body against hers, leaving her lips to trail kisses down the delicate column of her neck.

"I wanted to do this out there," I pant, cupping her tits with both hands and massaging them while I close my mouth over a tender spot at the base of her neck.

I'm kissing and nipping her soft skin, not caring that I'll probably leave a mark. If they want proof that we used our seven minutes right, I guess they can look for evidence.

My mouth follows my fingers, and she doesn't stop me when I lower the fabric of her dress to take out one of her breasts.

Her tits are a work of art, round and big but still perky. I've been with girls who go under the knife to achieve this look,

but I have no doubt that these are real.

Lakyn's dark pink nipples are already pebbled, aching for my mouth, and I want nothing but to give her what she wants.

Her soft moan tells me that the swirl of my tongue feels good, and I can't resist the urge to graze her with my teeth.

She throws her head back, arching her back to give me more access, and I lave both her nipples with attention, licking, sucking and biting one while I tease the other by rubbing it against the slightly rough palm of my hand.

I leave her chest to go back to her mouth. I kiss her hard, flattening her against the wall and pushing my hips forward to make her feel what she does to me.

“Blaze.”

It's a sound dripping with desire, laced with pleasure.

Her hands travel down my chest, reaching under the hem of my T-shirt, and I help her lift the offending garment over my head.

I can't help a little satisfied smirk when her eyes widen at the sight of my chest. I know I'm big and ripped, I'm not trying to be arrogant, it's a fact.

“Do you like what you see, pretty girl?” I practically growl into her ear, lifting her by grabbing under her buttocks and pinning her to the wall with my body.

She takes the hint and wraps her creamy thighs around my hips. “Yeah,” she says, and I reward her with another searing hot kiss.

“Do you have any fucking clue how much I like you?” I ask her with my mouth still covering her, breathing her in. “And it's not because you're hot, Lakyn. I enjoy talking to you, and the way you stood up to Topher earlier on made me so fucking hard.”

She giggles, feeling her way down my torso, her fingertips tracing my abs, making me ache to feel those fingers wrapped around my cock.



“Are you sure you want to talk about Topher right now?” she teases.

“Not really.” I laugh. “But I’m trying to slow down because there’s something I want to ask you. I was about to ask you earlier, but Topher interrupted me.”

“What is it?”

I feel a kernel of anxiety at the thought that maybe this attraction I’ve been feeling since I saw her outside the locker room is one-sided, or maybe to her it’s only physical.

Before tonight, with any other girl, the thought would have just brought relief. I’d know that we’d have fun, and she wouldn’t cling. It’s always been enough. I’m a busy guy, and I like women. Why should I be tied down to just one when I can have my pick of the hottest girls on campus?

Maybe this is what it is for her too. Maybe Bay bought her three dates at that auction because Lakyn wanted some no string attached fun.

I take the risk anyway and tell her how I feel. “I want to see you again, Lake.”

I don’t even realize that I used the short version of her name, which made her tell Topher to fuck off. I’m still pressed up against her, our foreheads touching as I wait for her to decide my destiny.

“I would love to see you again,” she says softly.

Thank fuck. “I promise our next date will be somewhere better, without Topher in sight.”

She giggles again, placing a hot but shallow kiss on my lips. “Stop talking about Topher and kiss me, Blaze. We only have seven minutes.”

The sound of my name on her lips makes me surge forward, and I take her mouth in a kiss I feel all the way down to my cock. I own her mouth in the same way I’m dying to own the rest of her body.

Her hands leave my stomach to find the buckle of my belt.

I swear to God, my cock is practically screaming at me when I cover her hand with mine.

“What?” Her eyes are wide, her pupils blown huge as her chest heaves with labored breaths.

I struggle to articulate what’s going on in my head—probably because all my blood has migrated south, or maybe because I’m the biggest moron who ever lived and I’m about to cockblock myself. “I, uh—I don’t...”

“You don’t have a condom?” she asks, and I swear she looks as disappointed as I feel.

Maybe I should lie to her. Luca and Cole have been telling me that sometimes I’m too honest for my own good. “No, I do. The condom I mean. I have one. It’s just—”

She undoes the button of my jeans and lowers the zipper in the time it takes me to mutter those nonsensical words.

I groan when she closes her fingers around the base of my erection. “We have seven minutes. Actually, a lot less than that.”



## 17.

# Chivalry



Lakyn



“WE HAVE SEVEN MINUTES. Actually, a lot less than that.”

I stop in my tracks as I was about to pull Blaze’s cock out of his pants.

“You don’t want me?” Disappointment makes heat rise to my face, and I feel the unwanted burn of tears pooling at the corners of my eyes. “I thought you—”

Maybe he was asking me out just as a friend? I hate the insecurity that twists my insides.

*I thought I was in love with you, but maybe we were just friends. I think we need to take a break, see other people, and experience what else is out there.*

Jonathan’s parting words ring in my ears, and I almost miss Blaze’s response.

“Of course I fucking want you, Lake,” he says, cupping my face to force me to look at him. “I want nothing more than to feel how wet you are for me. I want to fuck you and make you come until you beg me to stop.”

He’s right that I’m soaking wet. His words do nothing to improve the situation as a rush of heat makes me throb for him. “I don’t understand. If you want me and you have a condom—”

“We have seven minutes, Lake. Definitely way less than that now. If this was just a casual hookup, I’d already be balls

deep inside you, pretty girl. I'd get what I want and win this stupid game, but I like you, and I don't want our first time to be a quickie with all my teammates and your sister outside."

Fuck. Just when I thought I couldn't like him any more than I already do.

"When I fuck you, I want to take my time with you, Lake," he murmurs, trailing kisses down my shoulder. "Or am I not allowed to call you that? Since it's just for your friends?"

It takes me a second to realize that he's talking about what I said to Topher earlier.

"I think you can call me Lake," I whisper, loving every second of his hot mouth on my body. "You and I are going to be friends, right, Blaze?"

He chuckles, sinking onto his knees in front of me. "Fuck yeah. The best of friends, Lake. With lots and lots of benefits, from borrowing each other's books to..."

His voice fades as his hands lift the hem of my dress up my thighs and hips and his face follows that trajectory, stopping short of the apex of my thighs.

His open mouth lands on the inside of my thigh, and I swear the shudder that wracks my body is totally involuntary.

"Brace yourself against the wall, pretty girl," Blaze demands. "We might not have long enough for me to fuck you, but that doesn't mean I'm not going to make you come tonight."

He slides my panties off my hips with deft fingers as he lifts that same thigh over his shoulder, opening me up to him.

The first lash of his tongue comes before I realize what he's planning to do.

"Oh God." I moan as he licks me from entrance to clit, repeating the movement twice in rapid succession.

"You taste even sweeter than I thought," he rumbles against the sensitive skin of my bare pussy.

“Blaze.” I sound needy to my own ears, but he doesn’t make me beg for long.

He licks his way up again, but this time it’s a slower, more deliberate movement as he parts my slit with his tongue.

A throaty gasp escapes me when Blaze reaches the spot that’s throbbing with a need so intense that it almost hurts.

The first contact is light, almost tentative, but it’s followed by another lick with a little more pressure.

I cry out when he flicks the tip of his tongue against the tight bundle of nerves that sends electricity everywhere in my body.

“Hmm.” Blaze chuckles. “Sounds like someone likes being my dessert tonight.”

“Fuck yeah,” I say. “I love it.”

“Good,” he says, tightening his hold on the leg he’s keeping perched over his shoulder. “Because you’re the most delicious dessert I’ve ever had.”

As if to confirm what he just said, he closes his mouth over my clit, and I lose my shit.

It’s an overwhelming sensation of lips, tongue, and the slightest hint of Blaze’s teeth.

It feels like the most intimate, obscene, open-mouthed kiss as he works me with his mouth.

He licks, sucks, and grazes relentlessly, renewing his efforts with every moan I let out.

I have no choice but to succumb to his onslaught, and I want nothing more as the first wave of pleasure crashes over me, taking me under.

I’m grateful for the support of Blaze’s hands and shoulders, or my knees would give in as I ride a high that doesn’t want to end.

He stops just when a pained whimper tells him that it’s too much and I’m becoming too sensitive.

Blaze stands up, careful to place my leg on the ground and supporting my weight as he takes me into his arms.

I crash against the smooth skin of his chest, and for a long moment, neither of us speaks.

His heart is galloping as fast as mine, and I know he enjoyed what just happened because I feel his hard-on against my hip.

A thought crosses my mind then. I haven't seen Blaze's cock, but I'm pretty sure he isn't the guy who sent me that dick pic. I touched him, and I'm feeling him, and in all honesty, he feels way bigger than the dick in the photo.

After hanging out with him all night, I also don't think Blaze is the type who would send an unsolicited dick pic.



Blaze



MY COCK IS SCREAMING at me.

If he could talk, I'm pretty sure the word would be *moron*. Or maybe *dickhead*.

Definitely dickhead.

I suppress a chuckle as I stroke Lakyn's long silky hair, giving her a second to come down from her high.

I have no regrets. I want to see her again, and she said yes, so I know I'm going to have another chance at sinking balls deep into her hot, sweet pussy.

I wasn't lying when I told her that usually, I wouldn't have missed an opportunity to get my rocks off.

Seven minutes is more than plenty for a hard fuck against the wall, and usually I'm not too bothered about anything but getting mine.

Sure, I do my best to give my hookups as good a time as possible, but I've never had any doubt about looking after number one first and foremost.

Parties like this one always end up in more than a hookup. Puck bunnies are called that for a reason. They don't care how many players have them in one night, and we aren't picky about partying to the max.

I even shared two girls with our team captain last year. It was a little weird at first, but in the end, having a foursome was fun.

For some crazy reason, with Lakyn it's different.

This time I can't suppress my chuckle at the idea that I was paid to take her out.

I mean, sure, I didn't get to keep the money, but it doesn't matter. I don't date, and I only did it because helping with the auction was mandatory.

I'm glad I did it though, because I'm intrigued by Lakyn, and I want to get to know her better.

The door of the changing room suddenly opens.

"Your seven minutes are up!" Topher yells.

Maybe it's because I didn't drink anything except that first cup of beer and the two body shots, but the volume of his voice and the noise from the party bother me.

Is it always this fucking loud?

"Come on, pretty girl." I take Lakyn's hand, guiding her outside where everyone is waiting for us.

"Well, well, well," Topher says with an irritating smile on his face. "Let's see if we have a winner or if it's a tie. Gentlemen, show me those panties!"

Luca doesn't hesitate to produce a tiny red thong, holding it up for everyone to see it.

Cheers erupt from the crowd that's assembled to see who's going to be crowned king of the first party of the year.



The irony isn't lost on me that Luca is actual royalty, and that's the moment my decision is made.

Don't ask me what the fuck is wrong with me tonight, because I don't even know what's going on in my head.

Usually at this point of the night, I'm six sheets to the wind and nothing touches my beer buzz.

Tonight, I find my frat brothers' antics more annoying than fun.

"Blaze, did you succeed in your mission?" Tophers asks.

I look at Lakyn, and that's where I hesitate.

The lace of her panties is peeking out from the front pocket of my jeans. When my hand finds the delicate fabric, my fingers press it deeper down into my pocket rather than pulling it out to show proof that I got Lakyn to take her panties off for me.

She tracks my movement, and I see the question in her eyes before she voices it in a whisper. "Blaze, what are you doing? Give him the panties, or you'll lose."

I wink at her. "Nah, these are for my eyes only. I don't care about losing, I'll pay whatever penalty he has in mind."

"So?" Tophers asks. "No panties?"

I shrug. "Not this time."

There's a flash of triumph in my frat president's eyes. "Okay then. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a winner. Luca Leighton-Rossi is our champion tonight," he declares, lifting Luca's hand above his head in victory. "That means that all the losers will have to pay the penalty. Tonight we decided to issue a punishment that will entertain us all. The losers have to streak from the back door of the Gamma house all the way into the pool."

Lakyn gasps. "Streaking? Does he mean..."

I nod. "Yup, we have to run into the pool naked."

"Blaze, but you didn't lose," she objects. "Are you sure—"

A weird, possessive feeling invades my chest. “Positive,” I bite out, undoing the button of my jeans and sliding them down my legs. “Your panties are for my eyes only.”

I line up with the other guys by the threshold of the backdoor.

“Okay, guys.” Topher grins. “On three, drop your underwear and start running. One, two, three!”

I take my boxers off and run with a bunch of my teammates. The cold water of the pool is invigorating when I jump in like a cannonball.

Everyone around me is hollering and cheering, filming the scene for all posterity.

I only have eyes for Lakyn, who I caught staring at me when I took my underwear off.

By the look on her face, I think she liked what she saw, and I’m already planning our second date.

No frat parties next time. I can’t wait to get Lakyn Woods alone.



## 18.

# Prince Charming

Luca



**ME:** *Hey, Lakyn, hi. It's Luca Rossi. I believe you and I have a date tonight. We're going to dinner at the country club in town, and then we'll be staying for this week's Movies Under the Stars feature. They'll be showing Some Like It Hot. Is it okay if I come to pucker you up at seven?*

The three dots appear, indicating that she's replying.

**Lakyn:** *Seven is fine. I'm glad you're planning on buying me dinner before you "pucker me up."*

For a second, I wonder what she is talking about, and then I notice the typo in my message.

I can't help the smile that creeps up on my face. I know my date is hot as fuck, and I have no problem admitting that I was jealous of Blaze getting to spend seven minutes making out with her at last week's party. She's definitely feisty, judging by the way she put our frat president in his place when he was a douche to her. Now that I see that she also possesses a sense of humor, I'm even more intrigued at the thought of going out with her.

**Me:** *Pick you up\* Sorry. I text my teammates a lot, and I guess my predictive text thought you were one of them. Smiley face.*

**Lakyn:** *No worries. Do you need my address?*

**Me:** *No, thank you. I had class with your sister this morning, and she made sure I had it.*

**Lakyn:** *Great. See you later. Waving hand.*

I'm about to store my phone in my bag, ready to leave the ice rink after practice, but then I think about something and unlock the screen again.

**Me:** *Hey, Bay, sorry to bother you, but I was thinking of buying flowers for your sister. What's her favorite?*

The three dots appear and disappear a couple of times, but no text comes through.

Maybe Bay is busy. If she doesn't get back to me, I'll go for roses. You can never go wrong with roses, at least according to my mom. I wouldn't know much about dating, because I haven't taken a girl on an actual date since junior year in high school, before I moved back to the US for senior year. Back then, I didn't worry much about flowers or anything like that. I attended an international boarding school for sons of royals and diplomats in Switzerland, and my biggest concern at the time was to get back to my dorm in time for curfew after a hookup in the bathroom of a club.

I haven't dated at all since I came back to my native country, too busy getting into Yale first and then more focused on hockey and all the perks that come with being a star athlete.

I'm pulled out of my thoughts by a loud feminine voice right outside the locker room.

For a second, I think it might be Bianca and her friend Kylie. I swear to God those two are legit stalkers. They seem to always know where I will be and show up without fail. They are as persistent as they are tone deaf. They aren't getting the hint that I'm not interested in a repeat performance after our only night together.

I strain to listen, resigned to wait in here if it's those two, since I'm the last one left in the locker room, and I know for sure that if they catch me alone, they'll be even harder to shake.

*"Who the fuck are you texting?"*

That's a male voice. Maybe I'm not the only one left in here after all.

*“I was texting you. I just came to pick you up, hoping to talk to you. I didn’t like the way we left things last night.”*

Hmm, it sounds like one of my teammates has girl trouble.

The guy sounds angrier with every word. *“I don’t believe you. I bet you’re texting your best friend.”*

She sounds defensive. *“I wasn’t texting Cole, and even if I was, for the zillionth time, Cole and I are just friends.”*

Cole? Then that must be Bay.

I lower the door handle to the locker room just as the guy—who’s obviously Topher—seethes, “Then if it’s true, show me your phone. If you were about to text me, the text app should be opened on my name.”

I open the door just in time to see Topher extend his hand, demanding that Bay give him her phone.

They obviously haven’t noticed me yet, and I wonder if I can just walk past them without looking like I’m spying on them.

Then it happens.

Topher grabs Bay’s forearm, causing her to cry out.

“Let go, Topher, you’re hurting me!” she yells.

“I’ll let go once you show me that you weren’t bad-mouthing me to my teammate and frat brother. Just so you know, Bay, Cole isn’t the knight in shining armor you think he is. He’s nice to you because you’re the only Zeta he hasn’t fucked.”

She shoves, trying to get him to let go of her but to no avail. “I don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about. Cole is my best friend. It isn’t like that between us.”

“Bull-fucking-shit!” he yells. “I hope for your sake that I don’t see Cole’s name on that message app, or I’ll make you regret it.”

I usually wouldn’t get involved in someone else’s relationship trouble, but Topher makes the one mistake that makes me change my mind.

He pushes Bay against the wall, getting in her face.

A flashback of my *papà* yelling at my mom the same way before they finally got a divorce makes me stalk toward them without even thinking. “Is there a problem here?” I ask, walking up to them and staring Topher right in the eyes.

His gaze is glazed over as if he wasn’t even seeing me, but his words tell me that he did see me. “Stay out of it, Luca. It’s just a discussion between me and my girlfriend, nothing you should be concerned about.”

I clench my fists, resisting the urge to get between them. “That would be true if you hadn’t put your hands on Bay. She asked you to let go of her, and unless you do it right now, you and I are going to have a problem.”

Sometimes I wonder if Topher is on something. Like drugs, I mean. He’s mostly okay, if a little too cocky for his own good, but if being cocky was a crime, then I’d be just as guilty, so I don’t judge him for that. What I’m talking about is that sometimes he acts so reckless that it makes me wonder what’s wrong with him. I thought about it last week, when he almost got into a fight with me and Blaze after shooting his puck in Cash’s face and hitting the cage on his helmet so hard that Cash lost one of his contacts. Blaze and I both reacted to his behavior by challenging him, and he looked like he *wanted* a fight.

Now it’s the same as he gives me a dead stare that’s nothing but a challenge to pick a fight.

If the problem was with just one of our teammates, I’d wash my hands of it and walk away, because we’re all grown-ass men and we can all fight our own fights on or off the ice.

Bay, however, is way smaller than him, and I’m not going to wait until the situation escalates before intervening.

Despite the fact that *Papà’s* jealousy never turned too violent—the most he did was grab Mom like Topher is doing now with his girlfriend—and that he realized he had a problem and got professional help, witnessing a man turning physical with a woman is still triggering for me.

“Topher, I fucking mean it,” I growl, taking another step toward them. “Let her go right now, or I’m going to make you.”

My words have the desired effect, and Topher lets go of Bay’s forearm, giving her a rough shove.

I’m about to go check on her, but I should have known this wasn’t over.

He advances on me, and I’ve been in enough fights to be able to recognize the signs when someone is ready to attack. “I was just trying to have a conversation with my girlfriend before you rudely interrupted. I have no idea how they roll in Italy, but here you don’t get between a man and his girl.”

I don’t even bother to correct him that I’m from Montebello, not Italy. It’s a common misconception due to the fact that my kingdom is nestled in the Alps, just on the border between Italy, Austria, and Switzerland and that our official language is Italian. It confuses most people, especially overseas.

“Regardless of where I grew up,” I bite out. “I’m always going to get involved if someone is being bullied.”

That seems to have an effect on my frat president. He calms down, even if it’s just a little bit. Tension eases from his shoulders, but his tone is still clipped, and he’s still scowling at me and Bay. “Bullied? Dude, what the fuck are you talking about? I was just trying to have a conversation with my girlfriend.”

I do my best to stay calm. “It didn’t look like that. You were yelling and you grabbed her. She asked you to let her go but you kept getting in her face.”

Topher has the decency to look embarrassed. “I was just trying to get her to answer my question. Bay knows that I would never hit her. I just didn’t want her to walk away like she does every time Cole is mentioned.”

I’m not convinced. “I didn’t like the way you grabbed her. It didn’t look right to me.”



He doesn't look at me, talking to his girlfriend. "Babe, was I hurting you?"

Bay sighs. "A little."

His face falls, and he approaches his girlfriend, but this time his body language is more peaceful. "I'm so sorry, Bay. Please forgive me. I didn't mean to hurt you. It's no justification, but you know that I hate the way Cole is always sniffing around you, trying to cause trouble between us. I—"

Bay lets him take her hand, but she doesn't let him off easily. "I know how you feel about Cole. I just wish you believed me when I tell you that I'm with you, and Cole and I are just friends. I promise there's nothing going on."

Topher's scowl returns. "Maybe for you, but trust me, Bay, he's just trying to get between us."

She rolls her eyes. "He isn't, but that's beside the point, Toph. We've been together for almost two years, you should trust me if I tell you that you're the only one I want."

He mellows down. "You're right. I'm sorry, Bay. Can you forgive me?"

I've always liked Bay Woods, and I must admit that I'm a little disappointed that she doesn't dump Topher's sorry ass, but I'm also proud of her at the same time for not giving in.

"You know I love you, but I'm getting tired of our constant fights. You need to decide if you trust me or not. If you don't, maybe we shouldn't be together."

There's legit terror in Topher's eyes. "I do, I trust you. It's Cole I don't trust. Are you breaking up with me?"

*Say yes. He doesn't deserve you.*

That's the thought that crosses my mind when I think about the way Topher always flirts with other women the second Bay is out of sight.

"No," she says. "Yes. I don't know, maybe."

He pulls her closer, and she goes willingly. "Please don't break up with me, babe. I love you."

Bay sounds a little sad. “I love you too. I believe you when you say that you would never hit me, but Luca is right, you were manhandling me pretty roughly, and I don’t like that. You’ve always made me feel safe, but lately you’ve been so angry. I don’t know if it’s just the pressure of the draft and the presidency getting to you, but I don’t care. You shouldn’t take it out on me, I’m your biggest supporter.”

He nods. “You’re right. I have no justification other than the crushing amount of pressure I’ve been under, but I need to do better by you. I’m going to get help. Some counseling on anger management and coping with stress.”

Bay’s gaze softens. “Are you?”

“I promise I will.”

Coach’s voice comes from behind us. “Yeah you will, Mr. Mumford. If you don’t, I’m afraid there isn’t going to be a starting spot for you on my offensive line. I was coming to talk to you about something, and I just saw your behavior. Not only isn’t that fitting behavior for a team captain, but it also isn’t Cove Knight behavior.”

Topher hangs his head. “Are you telling me that I’m out of the running for captain?”

Coach Harrison is new to coaching, but so far, he’s been tough but fair.

He earns more of my respect when he nods. “That’s exactly what I’m telling you, son. Follow me to my office, I have some brochures about the counseling services offered to students both on and off campus.”

Topher throws a glance at me and Bay. “I’ll call you later, babe. I’m sorry, seriously.”



Luca



I WAIT UNTIL TOPHER and Coach are out of sight to ask Bay if she's okay.

"I don't know." She sighs. "I feel bad for what happened with Topher. Being team captain was really important to him."

I shake my head. "None of what happened is your fault, Bay. He should have kept his cool and let you explain rather than grabbing you like a fucking Neanderthal."

Bay sighs. "I know, and I hope you believe me that this is the first time he ever put his hands on me in any way that isn't wanted and encouraged by me."

I believe her. "Sure. I'm glad you aren't just forgiving him and letting him get away with it. Dude needs help if a little bit of pressure makes him flip his lid that way."

She nods. "Yeah, and I don't know. I trust that he'll never grab me that way again, but maybe we do need a break."

I can't bite my tongue. I had to do it when I was a kid and witnessed the marital problems between my parents. Mostly down to *Papà* being jealous of Mom's past career as a model. He couldn't handle that his wife had posed in a bikini.

I was glad when Mom decided to leave him. My father isn't a bad man, but their relationship was toxic. Maybe this is what's going on between Bay and Topher. "I know it's none of my business, but for what it's worth, I think you should dump him."

I don't tell her that during my short time on campus, I've seen Topher behaving inappropriately for a guy with a girlfriend.

It's in the Gammas code of conduct never to tell on a brother to someone outside the fraternity. I don't exactly like this rule, but all I've seen is some heavy flirting after he had a few drinks, so I decide to stay out of it.

She looks conflicted. "I'm in love with him, and he's been a great boyfriend until we came back to campus from summer break a month ago. Besides, he was kind of right that I was lying to him. Even though that doesn't justify how he acted."

I'm curious about it. I could have sworn that Bay and Cole were just friends. "Were you really texting Cole? I mean, I've seen him flirt with you, but Cole flirts with anyone who happens to be female."

Bay smiles. "Yeah, Cole is a huge flirt. I wasn't texting him though, I was here to pick Topher up to try and make up after our latest fight, and I got your text. I was just texting you back."

Fuck, now I feel responsible. "*Merda*. Shit, I'm sorry, Bay."

She shrugs. "You have nothing to be sorry about. I love my boyfriend, but what's the point of being together if he doesn't trust me? He doesn't tell me everything he does and that's okay, it's healthy. He should trust that I would never cheat on him, especially not with someone on the team or a Gamma."

She looks sad, and I crack a joke to break the tension. "Not a puck bunny, huh?"

Bay laughs. "Definitely not. I do like fit guys though. My ex-boyfriend in high school was a football player. I knew nothing about hockey until I started school here."

I know a ton of jokes about jersey chasers, but I decide to spare Bay. My father always said I should be a court jester rather than the crown prince.

I decide on a more diplomatic response. "Nothing wrong with that. God knows I like my women beautiful but also smart, like my mom."

Bay's gaze turns soft. "I love that you feel that way about your mother. I find that men who dote on their mothers make the best boyfriends, and you're half Italian."

I don't correct her that I'm technically not Italian, and that Mom is the American half of the parental unit. "Yeah, well, not that I have much experience at being a boyfriend."

Her smile turns cryptic. "You'd be surprised. By the way, Luca, thank you for stepping in before with Topher. It wasn't needed, but I appreciate the sentiment. And it's tulips and roses."

I blink, confused about what she's talking about. "What?"

"Lakyn's favorite flowers," she explains. "I never got the chance to text you. She prefers tulips and roses."



## 19.

### Third Date



Lakyn



I OPEN THE DOOR TO my apartment without even looking through the peephole.

It's three hours before the final date Bay purchased for me at that charity auction, and I could have bet my head on the fact that she'd be here to boss her way into my choice of outfit, hair, and makeup.

"Let's get to work, Lakey-Lake." She claps her hands, excitement practically seeping from every pore of her perfect complexion. "We don't have much time and a lot of work to do."

I shake my head. "What the fuck are you talking about? It's four, and Luca isn't picking me up until seven. You're here ridiculously early."

Bay's smile is sweet, her tone a little patronizing. "You're going to dinner at the country club, sis. They have an extremely strict dress code, and I'm here to make sure that your outfit is in compliance, or they won't even let you set foot in there."

I roll my eyes, a little offended that she doesn't think I'd be able to dress the part without her help. "Whatever, Bay!" I huff. "I have the perfect dress for tonight."

The skepticism in her tone matches the look in her eyes. "I doubt it. Show me."

She follows me to my room, her posture rigid, her arms crossed over her chest.

“What’s going on, Bay?” I ask, closing the door behind me despite the fact that Tasha is out of town for a dance competition.

“Nothing,” she says, but I see right through it.

“No, there must be something wrong. You can’t fool me.”

Bay deflates a little bit, her shoulders sagging. “There’s no escaping our twin connection, you’re right.”

I fight the urge to laugh at her dramatic antics. “I hate to disappoint you, sis, but it doesn’t take a supernatural twin connection to see that something is wrong. I’ve known you my whole life, and you carry your tension in your shoulders. When you’re worried or angry, you walk stiffly and briskly, and you become more impatient than usual.” I point at the way she’s tapping her foot on the wooden floor of my bedroom.

“Go figure.” She sounds frustrated. “You’re always so perceptive, but that stops you from connecting with me at a deeper level.”

I bite my tongue.

Bay and I have had this argument countless times. She is convinced that there’s some kind of special twin bond between us. She’s been obsessed with books and TV shows about ESP twin connections since I can remember.

“What’s wrong, Bay?” I ask, encouraging her to sit on my bed and taking her hand into mine.

“Nothing.” She sighs. “Toph and I had another fight, but what’s new?”

I don’t even have to say that I’m not surprised. Bay knows there’s no love lost between me and her boyfriend. “What did he do?” I refrain from adding “this time.”

Bay’s frown deepens. “I didn’t like the way he talked to you on Thursday night at the party.”



I pull her closer, squeezing her hard. “I appreciate it, Bay, but I told him to fuck off, remember? You don’t need to fight with your boyfriend on my account.”

She hugs me back. “I know, but it pisses me off that he can’t be nice to my sister.”

I can’t believe I’m speaking in Topher’s defense, but what’s fair is fair. “Look, I make it no mystery that I think Topher is a grade A douche, but it’s not like I’m nice to him.”

Bay snorts. “I know that, but he was the one who started this bad blood between the two of you freshman year.”

I remember that. We met Topher at the rush week party Bay dragged me to. Topher was there to rush Gamma Delta Tau, and the first thing he said to me was a dirty line about fucking twins being the first item on his sexual bucket list. There was no getting back into my good graces after that first impression. “You know I think he doesn’t deserve you and I don’t get what you see in him.”

She sighs. “Look, Topher can be a real asshole when he wants, especially if he’s had a few too many drinks. He knows he screwed up with you, so he hides behind his cocky persona when you’re around.”

It’s no secret that I think Bay justifies everything that douche does and looks at Topher through some kind of rose-tinted glasses. “If you say so.”

Case in point, Bay defends him. “You don’t know him like I do, Lake. You know that at first, I didn’t like Topher either. I thought he was sexy but bought into his cockiness too, until he caught someone trying to put a roofie in my drink at my first official party as a full-fledged Zeta.”

I know. I heard the story a million times. “Yeah, yeah. He kicked the guy’s ass for you.”

Bay’s expression softens. “Not only that. He took me home and stayed with me to make sure that none of my drinks had been roofied. He didn’t even try to kiss me or do anything, and he came over the morning after with breakfast. No one sees his

sweet side, but Topher is a nice guy. Besides, he's fun to be with, and we're—"

"The power couple of our school," I finish for her with another eye roll. "You must admit that he keeps that nice side very well hidden."

Bay doesn't argue with that. "It's true. And since he became frat president, he's been way more... intense."

I can't stifle a laugh. "I believe the word you're looking for is *asshole*. Look, we agreed to stay out of each other's relationships when it was clear that you despised Jon as much as I did Topher. The only thing I can say is that if you're fighting so much, maybe you need space to figure out if you're right for each other. You can say whatever you want about Jon, but we never had one fight in the three years we dated."

It's Bay's turn to roll her eyes. "Right. The only reason why you didn't fight is because you hardly saw each other, and you were the one who made all the effort in that relationship. You made the trip to Princeton every time you got together, and when you were together, you did everything he said. You changed into the person he wanted you to be."

I lower my gaze because Bay isn't wrong. I even avoided eating meat when he was around because I knew he disapproved of anyone who didn't embrace his lifestyle.

What I don't say to her is that I think that she's doing the same thing with Topher. "Yeah, we all know how my relationship ended. Look, Bay, I'm not trying to judge here. All I'm saying is that having a boyfriend should mean that you're happier with him than you'd be if you were single. How happy can you really say you are if you fight constantly?"

Her stubborn streak makes an appearance. "We don't fight all the time."

I'm not letting this go. "The last few times you guys were together, you ended up fighting. I promise I'm not trying to get involved in your relationship, I'm just saying that I appreciate

you standing up for me, but I can look after myself. I don't want you to fight with him because of me."

I know there's more to the story by the way she averts her gaze.

"It wasn't just how he talked to you," she finally admits. "I caught him staring at your ass and tits, and when I called him out on that, his justification was that we look identical, so it was no big deal if he was practically undressing you with his eyes."

Eww.

That's icky, but I don't need to tell Bay. She knows, or she wouldn't have had a fight with him about it.

I'm about to say that I think she should really consider a break to figure out if being with Topher is what she really wants, but she stands up, shaking her head.

"Anyway, I'm not here to discuss my relationship problems. I'm here to make sure that you look like a princess tonight, since you're going out with a real-life prince. I brought you some options from my closet."

I eye the suit bag she placed down on my bed warily. "Bay," I begin, trying to keep my tone as nonconfrontational as possible. "Thank you for bringing me some of your clothes, but I have this handled. I have the perfect dress for tonight."

My reasonable tone could probably convince anyone in the world—anyone but my twin sister, obviously.

"I'm going to be the judge of that," she bites out, her eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Show me this dress. But unless you went shopping at a designer store without me knowing, I don't think—is that the dress you wore to dipshit's great-aunt's funeral?"

Fuck.

I swear to God, my sister has the memory of an elephant when it comes to clothes and makeup. I don't think there's one outfit either of us or Mom has ever worn that she doesn't remember in painstaking detail.

“I don’t see what’s wrong with it. It’s a little black dress.”

If I thought that mentioning Bay’s favorite item in the fashion world—the LBD—would help me convince her that my choice of outfit is appropriate, I’m sorely wrong.

“If you were an orphan in a Dickens’ novel, who got a hand-me-down from the lady you were the servant of, maybe yes.”

I swear she’s the most dramatic person I’ve ever met, and the fact that she’s quoting one of the great English writers isn’t lost on me.

“Look,” I say, knowing that I’m fighting a lost battle but not wanting to declare defeat just yet. “It’s a black dress, I’ve only worn it once, and if Luca is so shallow that he wouldn’t be seen with someone in a department store dress—”

She gets straight to the point. “Lake, why are you trying to get out of this date?”

At the risk of repeating myself, fuck.

Even without going as far as some kind of supernatural twin connection, my sister knows me too well.

“I just don’t think Luca and I are a good match,” I admit.

Of course that doesn’t go down well with Bay. “Right. Like Cash wasn’t a good match? Like Blaze wasn’t right for you? Or do you think I didn’t see the lace of your panties in his pocket the other night?”

Judging by the heat that suddenly rises to my face, I’m sure I’m bright red, probably crimson. “I—”

I hate when Bay is right. I know I keep saying it, but it’s true.

“Come on, Lake, admit it! You had a great time with Blaze, and I’m not even talking about the seven minutes in that changing room.”

Yeah, I hate her sometimes. “I did have a good time. We have a lot in common, I didn’t expect it,” I concede.

She nods, extremely pleased with herself. “Did he ask to see you again?”

“He did. I really want to get to know him better.”

She pulls me into her arms. “See? I knew that! You need to have a little more faith in me. No one in the world knows you better than I do, Lakey-Lake.”

I’m trying hard to stifle a giggle and fail, so the sound that comes out is more similar to a snort. “But he didn’t make any definite plans. He said he would text me—”

“Did he text you?”

Bay is more invested in my dating life than she is in her own, at least judging by the eagerness in her tone.

“Yeah, he texted, but it was more stuff like ‘how are you today?’ or ‘I bought a new book I think you might like too.’ He didn’t ask to see me again, and there’s been total radio silence from Cash.”

Bay doesn’t look worried. “Hockey season just started,” she explains. “They are busy as hell, and they have a new coach who is watching them, Topher, and Jagger, hoping to select one of them as team captain. It’s the last year they’ll be eligible for the draft, so they have a lot on their plates.”

I understand that. “I get it, but at least Blaze is talking to me. Cash has totally disappeared. Maybe he just wanted to get laid.”

My sister’s expression turns pensive. “It’s always a possibility, even though Cash is the least man-whore-ish guy in the team.”

I wince at her choice of words. “Can you even hear yourself? If you think they are man-whores, then why did you pay money to have them take me out on dates?”

It’s a legit question, right? Unless that was the thought behind the whole thing, that you pay whores, so...

“They aren’t ‘whores’ as such, Lake!” Bay rolls her eyes. “They are popular star athletes, and they enjoy a lot of attention from the female population on campus. It’s just a

silly label that everyone uses to describe a guy who gets around.”

I blink sheepishly. “That doesn’t sound any better.”

Bay slices the air in some sort of karate chop to put an end to the argument. “It’s just a name to call men who are popular with the ladies. I call Cole a man-whore all the time, and he’s my best friend.”

I laugh. “Yeah, right. I mean, Cole *is known* for being the biggest player on the team, and I’m not talking about hockey here.”

Bay sighs. “We aren’t talking about Cole here either. The guys are busy, and now that you mention it, I haven’t seen Cash outside of the game on Thursday since the morning in your apartment. I’ve been to the Gamma house a few times, and he was nowhere in sight, so he must be busy with classes and practice, that’s all.”

I’m not convinced, but I set aside the lump of disappointment that lodges in my throat every time I think about the Star Cove Knights’ goalie.

“I guess if he changed his mind about wanting to see me again, it’s his loss. I wish dating wasn’t so hard.”

Bay nods. “Dating is hard. This is why I bought you three dates, so you can see for yourself and have all the tools to find the right guy. I didn’t know if any of the guys would ask you out on more dates, but so far, you’re two for two, and I bet every cent in my bank account that Luca is going to be no different.”

“Whatever.” I snort. “I don’t even know why you chose him for me. The guy is so flashy and pretentious. He’s a prince, so what? We’re in the twenty-first century, so this stuff no longer matters.”

My sister shakes her head. “Give Luca a chance. I don’t know him as well as the others because he hasn’t been here that long, but I spoke to him plenty of times. We have a few classes together, and I was asked to mentor him by their new

coach to make his transfer to Star Cove as smooth as possible when he arrived. He's super smart and so charming."

I don't want to burst Bay's bubble, but I seriously doubt that Luca is as charming as she thinks.

I never told Bay that I saw Luca the first day we got back to campus from summer break.

Let's just say that I didn't have a great first impression.



Lakyn



*STAR COVE COLLEGE LIBRARY, a month ago.*



*BEING BACK ON CAMPUS is a blessing. I can't wait for classes to start, because keeping busy is the best way to get over a broken heart.*

*Whenever I'm here or once classes start, I'll be able to lose myself in working and studying and that will hopefully take my mind off getting dumped by my first boyfriend.*

*I bite back the tears that fight their way to the surface. What did I just say? A blessing. If I wasn't in public right now, I'd be ugly crying and probably binge eating ice cream, taking perverse satisfaction in the fact that Jon doesn't like ice cream.*

*I mean, fuck. That should have told me everything I needed to know when it came to my ex-boyfriend. People who don't like ice cream—or pizza—shouldn't be trusted.*

*I log into the PC at the reception desk. I also don't mind being the only one on reception today. Everyone else is busy doing inventory on a ton of new stock, but the library is open to the general student population, even though campus is just starting to repopulate after the summer break.*

*Mostly right now, it's students who work here and anyone who's involved in collegiate sports—most of those students have been here for a month to start training early. There are a ton of summer camp sports programs that are mandatory here for collegiate athletes. Our school prides itself on having one of the best athletic departments in the country, and they take sports extremely seriously.*

*Regardless, it's peaceful in here for now. Things will change once everyone moves back into the dorms, including the freshman class in a couple of weeks.*

*I fight the urge to take my phone out and snoop on Jon's social media. Bay is right that I shouldn't, it'll only make moving on a lot harder, but I miss him. I can't believe he's having doubts about his feelings for me after three years together.*

*"Excuse me." A feminine voice pulls me out of my spiraling thoughts. "Who do we have to talk to for us to get a library card?"*

*I lift my eyes from my phone screen.*

*The voice belongs to a rail thin, platinum blonde who's looking at me as if I were the scum stuck to the bottom of her shoe.*

*She isn't the only one standing on the other side of the reception desk though. She's accompanied by three more girls all dressed and made up as if they were ready for a party. But my attention is attracted by the guy they are with.*

*They are all touching him. He has his arms around two of them, and the other one is practically fluttering around, begging for his attention.*

*A part of me immediately dislikes the girls, since they act like groupies, but I sort of understand the appeal because the guy is definitely hot.*

*He's taller than average, at least six foot four, with broad shoulders, and it doesn't take a genius to see that he isn't a stranger to working out.*



*But what's striking are his ocean blue eyes and his perfect, masculine features. He has golden blond hair, short on the sides with a lock that keeps falling defiantly on his forehead.*

*"Hello?" the girl almost screams at me. "Did you hear my question?"*

*I plaster a fake smile on my face as I think of a polite reply. It's not often students are rude to the staff here. "You don't need a library card. Your student ID is valid to access the library. You can just scan it here." I point to the card reader on my desk.*

*The girl acts as if I hadn't even spoken to her, turning to the handsome guy. "Oh, that's perfect, Luca. Luckily you got your ID. Let's get in here."*

*They all scan their student IDs like I showed them, but I keep looking at them, a little perplexed. It strikes me as odd that those girls have been students here—I recognize one from one of my classes last year—and they had no idea how to access the library.*

*I temporarily forget about them as the head librarian asks me to go get some new books that were just input into the library's stock and need shelving.*

*This is why I love my job here. Aside from any kind of textbooks you can imagine, Star Cove College library has an enviable catalog of fiction, courtesy of the contemporary literature department.*

*There's a bunch of new releases both in romance and thrillers that I've been wanting to read, and since they just arrived and no one has booked them during summer break, I get first dibs.*

*I'm making a neat little pile of books I'm going to borrow and take home with me at the end of my shift. Reading is one of the few things that helps me take my mind off Jon and the breakup.*

*One of the few challenges in my job is that I'm only five foot three, but thankfully there are a few ladders and step stools I can use.*

*“Fuck,” I mutter under my breath when I realize that I forgot to drag one back with me from the last aisle I was in.*

*I have the last couple of books, and I’m too lazy to go back to fetch it. I look up, assessing the height of the shelf the next book belongs in. I can totally make it if I stand on my tiptoes.*

*It’s a bit of a stretch, but I manage.*

*I exhale, relieved and ready to move on, but something catches my attention. What is a volume of chemistry doing in the fiction section? It’s impossible not to spot it, since it’s much bigger and thicker than the average fiction paperback.*

*“It’s either one of those grad students who started early classes last week or this thing has been in the wrong place since before summer break,” I murmur to myself, extracting the heavy tome from its spot.*

*That’s when I see it.*

*I know I should walk away, maybe even call security, but I’m rooted to my spot, unable to take my eyes off the scene that’s unfolding in front of me through the gap in the bookshelf.*

*It’s that guy. Luca, I think the rude girl called him.*

*The blond hottie is standing with his back against one of the bookshelves, and one of the girls who was glued to his arm is mauling him—there’s no other way to describe the sloppy, noisy kiss she’s giving him.*

*His huge hands are splayed on the girl’s ass, kneading her buttocks which are barely covered by a teeny skirt.*

*I watch, mesmerized by the way the corded muscles in his forearms twitch with the movement.*

*“Luca,” one of the other girls who are watching them intently whines. “When is it my turn?”*

*His eyes shift to look at her, but she’s right in my trajectory, so they land on me instead, or at least on the part of my face that’s visible through the gap in the bookshelf.*

*I swear that in that moment, my heart stops beating. What they are doing is wrong, they should find a different place to hook up than the library, but I know full well that I shouldn't be standing here watching them.*

*He breaks the kiss, keeping his ocean blue eyes on me. For a second, I half expect him to call me out, even if he's more in the wrong than I am, at least technically.*

*Instead, Luca's lips curve into a wicked smile, his eyes glimmering with mischief. "Come here, Kerry." He beckons the girl who just complained as he pushes on the shoulder of the one he was just kissing, sending her down to her knees.*

*He lets out a soft groan when the girl kneeling in front of him presses her face to his crotch.*

*"Hmm, His Majesty." She giggles.*

*Her head is in the way, so I can't see what she's doing from my position, but what's happening becomes more than obvious when the girl's head starts bobbing up and down.*

*The second girl moves in for a kiss on Luca's swollen lips, but he moves away, directing her to his neck.*

*If it wasn't impossible, I'd think that he doesn't want her in the way, that he wants to keep looking at me while he gets a blow job.*

*My hunch is confirmed by the fact that his eyes return to mine as Luca's teeth sink into his bottom lip. In a soft sounding, musical foreign language, he murmurs, "Sì, tesoro. Così, non smettere (Yes, sweetie. Just like this, don't stop)." I'm not entirely sure what it is, but I think it sounds like Italian or Spanish.*

*All I know it's that it sounds incredibly hot, and together with that blue gaze, it causes my quickened pulse to settle between my thighs. I clench my inner muscles, aware that I'm wet and throbbing at the sight of what the hot stranger is doing.*

*I don't even realize that my whole body has tensed up, that I'm holding onto the edge of the shelf in front of me with white-knuckle force.*

*Luca's moans are getting more frequent as he grabs the hair on top of the girl's head, guiding her back and forth on his cock, fucking her mouth at a quicker pace.*

*His blue eyes don't leave mine for a second, and I stand there, watching him, the throbbing between my legs so intense, it's become painful.*

*For some fucked up reason, I know the exact moment he comes. The blue in his eyes darkens, and the air between us is crackling with electricity.*

*My heart is beating so hard and fast that I've forgotten where we are, and a wave of shame crashes over me when the thought crosses my mind that I wish it was me. I wish it was me making him bite his lips and making him feel good.*

*I'm so caught in this weirdly hot, stolen moment and so captivated by that blue gaze that I don't realize that I'm leaning against the shelf until it's too late and the whole thing wobbles.*

*A few books come crashing down on me, landing on the floor with loud thuds.*

*"What's that? Is anyone there?" a feminine voice asks.*

*I'm not entirely sure who says that, because I drop down to my own knees, hiding from them and scrambling to collect the books that have fallen on the floor.*

*I dump the lot on my cart and run for my life, finding shelter two rows of shelves down from them.*

*I hear footsteps coming in my direction, but they stop before they get to me, probably in the section where I was a second ago.*

*"Was someone watching us?" one of the women says.  
"There's a library cart here."*

*Luca's deep voice replies, "Nah, no one. Library staff leaves these around all the time."*

*I don't stay to hear whatever objections Luca's friends have because I quickly return to the reception desk, planning to go back to finish my work after they leave.*

*My heart is still hammering in my chest, and my face is on fire. There's a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach. I'm still turned on and upset by what I saw.*

*I don't even know why I'm upset—because they were violating all sorts of library rules, or because I couldn't stop from imagining being with him instead of those girls? Maybe I'm upset because I felt used in a way, and I fucking liked it. Most probably because he said, "No one."*

*That's how I've been feeling after Jon admitted that he didn't know if he ever really loved me. Like I'm no one, like I don't matter.*

*I know this Luca is a total stranger, and I shouldn't place the feelings of inadequacy my ex caused on him, but the way he was staring at me the whole time created some kind of strange intimacy between us and I know it's irrational, but I feel betrayed by him saying that I was "no one."*



## PRESENT DAY

I can't believe I just told Bay about my first encounter with Luca Leighton-Rossi.

She's my twin sister, and I've never kept any secrets from her, but right now I feel so embarrassed, I wish the floor would open and swallow me. That would be good, because it would even get me out of my impending date with Luca.

Bay looks at me for a second, considering my story before she smiles. "You know that Luca had no idea who you were, right? That's what he meant with 'no one.' I don't think you should take it personally. Or are you upset because he was hooking up in the library? You consider that place almost sacred."

She's right. I love libraries, and they are like a sanctuary to me. Our school library was the first place I ever felt at home when we first moved on campus.

“Yeah, getting blown in the fiction section definitely didn’t earn him any brownie points, but it isn’t just that, Bay. Luca is always surrounded by gaggles of adoring girls. I would understand something like that if he was a rock star, but I don’t get it. When I saw him for the first time, I had no idea who he was, even after I saw all the gossip websites announcing that the ‘playboy prince of Italy’ was coming to play hockey and finish his degree in Star Cove.”

Bay doesn’t look concerned. “Yeah, in a way, though, isn’t it natural? He’s a smoking hot guy, an elite athlete, and a legit crown prince. Why wouldn’t he enjoy being adored by every woman who crosses his path? It’s not like he has a girlfriend he’s cheating on.”

I understand being single and ready to mingle, but Luca takes his Casanova ways to the extremes. “If you like him this much,” I bite out, “why don’t you go out with him?”

She glares at me. “Because I do have a boyfriend. Anyway, Lake,” she says after a beat of silence, “I think we know without a shadow of a doubt that Blaze isn’t the owner of the tiny dick in that anonymous text message you got. I’m not going to lie, I was hoping Luca would decide to take his clothes off and jump in the pool at that party too.”

She looks genuinely disappointed.

“What a travesty the prince didn’t grace half the college population with his cock.” I snort.

“For what it’s worth” —Bay shrugs— “I don’t think Luca is the guy in that dick pic.”

I roll my eyes. “Why is that? I swear to God, Bay, you should be the president of Luca’s fan club.”

She ignores my jab. “I don’t know firsthand obviously, but from what I’ve heard, the size of his dick is the stuff of legends.”

I snort. “The stuff or the *staff* of legends?”

Bay pulls me into her arms, squeezing me tight. “You and your puns. But seriously, Bay. He hooked up with a couple of Zetas, and they were all talking about how big it was.”

I'm a little skeptical. "Whatever. The guy looks so arrogant, I wouldn't be surprised if he paid them to say that."

She takes offense. "Believe me, once you get to know him, Luca is really nice."

I'm done arguing with her, and I don't tell her what's on my mind. I doubt she knows Luca that well after barely a month on campus, mentoring or not.





20.

## Paparazzi

Luca



I HAVEN'T DATED IN a while, and I'd be lying if I said that I'm not a little nervous.

*I membri della famiglia reale non soffrono di nervi in nessuna circostanza* (The Royal family isn't nervous, no matter the occasion).

The words of my *bisnonna*, Queen Margherita, the last reigning queen of Montebello, ring in my ears.

She didn't get to be queen for very long, but she put her royal training to good use, preparing me to sit on the throne if our little kingdom had decided to welcome us back into its midst one day.

Sometimes her wisdom serves me in the most unexpected situations, like right now.

To be sure that this date goes well, I'm pulling out all the stops.

Private car with driver? Check.

Best table at Star Cove Country and Yacht Club? Check.

Discreet private security to keep away crazy fans and paparazzi? Check and check.

I also personally chose a bouquet of roses and tulips as per Bay's advice.

I'm strangely excited about going out with Bay's twin sister. Of course I knew she'd be pretty because Bay is stunning, but maybe I'm so intrigued by Lakyn because I come from a family of strong women—both my *nonna* and my

mom have that trait in common, even though they couldn't see life more differently from one another.

All I know is that I found myself jealous of Blaze at the party on Thursday night and didn't even accept the invite to go to the room of the girl I was planning to hook up with that night.

Don't tell anyone, because I'll deny this with my dying breath, but I totally cheated and just asked her to give me her panties.

She wanted to get busy during those seven minutes in that changing room, but I wasn't in the mood. All I could think about was what Blaze and Lakyn were doing right next door to us.

"We're here, Your Royal Highness."

I smile at my driver, Luigi. He's been with me since I came back to the US, and even though I suspect *Papà* insisted on sending him with me to keep an eye on me, I'm fond of the guy. "I thought we agreed that you would call me Luca." I smile, meeting his eyes in the rearview mirror.

"I never agreed to such a thing, Prince Luca."

His tone is slightly outraged, but there's an amused glint in his brown eyes.

"Please, at least for tonight?" I plead. "I don't want to come off too pretentious... yet."

He nods. "I think I can manage one night, Your High—Luca."

I choose my battles with him, so I don't argue when he runs out to open the door of my Lincoln Continental SUV for me.

I ring the doorbell to her apartment, and I'm glad I bite my tongue before I let out the string of curses—in Italian of course—that come to my mind when I catch sight of Lakyn. I hope she doesn't speak Italian, because if I said *porca vacca* (holy cow), I'm definitely not referring to her appearance.

She's a vision in a midnight blue dress that hugs her curves to perfection.

Her outfit is sexy and yet demure as the neckline of the silky fabric exposes just enough of her generous cleavage to come off as sexy. Any less, and it would look too conservative, any more, and it would look too revealing.

The dress is floor length, and again, it would look too formal if not for the deep slit that exposes one of Lakyn's shapely legs.

Four-inch heels make her petite figure stand taller. "*Buona sera* (good evening), Lakyn. You look beautiful," I greet her, noticing the subtle makeup and the tasteful way her blonde hair is pinned to one side in soft waves.

"Luca." She nods, a little rigid.

If I didn't know it was impossible, I'd think she isn't thrilled to go out with me. I mean, how is that possible? Aside from a couple of text messages, we haven't really met, and I know I'm not ugly. I'm not trying to be arrogant, I'm just stating the obvious.

"These are for you." I offer her the flowers, and I'm glad I chose pale pink roses and baby blue tulips, because they complement the color of her dress.

She looks surprised and a little taken aback as she accepts my gift. "Thank you, you didn't have to."

"I wanted to. I'm looking forward to tonight," I say as I offer her my arm to walk her to our waiting car.

Again, she's rigid on my arm, and I wonder why. She looked like she was having a good time with Blaze last week.

Is it possible that she likes Blaze and is going out with me just because her sister bought her this date?

She barely makes eye contact with me, and I'm positive this must be the case.

Fuck it. I'm an elite athlete, and I'm as competitive as they come. I'm determined to show her a better time than Blaze did.

You can't compare fine dining at the country club and a classic movie under the stars with a trashy frat party.

"*Signorina* (My lady)." Luigi offers her his hand, helping her into the car, and I climb in after her.

Lakyn accepts with a nod when I offer her a glass of champagne and sips it quietly for the entire fifteen-minute ride to the country club. My questions get monosyllabic answers at best, and as we enter the country club property, I'm determined to turn this date around by the time dinner is over.

What I hadn't anticipated is the crowd of paparazzi and adoring fan girls gathered by the gates of the country club.



Lakyn



HE HASN'T RECOGNIZED me.

Luca hasn't realized that I'm the library employee his fans were rude to, and most importantly, I'm the one he locked eyes with while he was...

Yeah, we all know what he was doing.

I don't know if I should feel relieved that with my huge glasses, no makeup, and my naturally frizzy hair—I'll never admit that my hair is frizzy unless I style it in front of Bay—he didn't mistake me for my sister or make the connection when he saw me at the party last week.

A part of me is definitely relieved, but there's also a little disappointment at the thought that I need straighteners, mascara, and contacts to get noticed.

Relief, though, is the main emotion every time those unnerving blue eyes look into mine.

Luca's hair is a lighter blond than Cash's, and yet Luca's complexion is more sun-kissed—probably thanks to his Italian

blood—and his slightly more olive skin makes the blue of his eyes pop.

Every time he looks at me, I feel heat rise to my face, and my heartbeat heads down, down, down between my thighs.

The drive to the country club isn't long, and to my surprise, Luca is really making an effort to talk to me. It's like he's really trying, and this isn't a date he was paid to go on.

The whole situation is even more surreal if I compare this friendly, open version of him with the cold, snobby heartthrob I've encountered so far.

Could it be that my sister is right yet again and there's more to Luca Leighton-Rossi than what meets the eye?

And believe me, what meets the eye is definitely memorable. There isn't one part of this man that isn't almost too perfect to be real.

“Lakyn?” Luca is looking at me with a half amused, half concerned smile.

He must have asked me something, and I was too busy ogling him to hear him. “Sorry, did you say something?” I ask sheepishly, clenching my hands on my lap to hide how nervous I feel.

His smile widens. “I was just asking you how you like Star Cove.”

All I can offer him is a lame, “It's nice here,” too tongue-tied by those baby blues fixed on me.

He nods. “I love it here too, so far. Yale was cool and had a great hockey team, but let's be honest, California is way nicer than New Haven. I've seen enough snow during my childhood to last me for a lifetime.”

I'm about to ask him what he's going to do if he gets drafted somewhere cold, like Canada or New York, but we're both distracted by some noise coming from outside as the car slows down in front of the magnificent gates of Star Cove Country and Yacht Club.

It's hard to see through the tinted windows of Luca's luxury car, but there's some kind of commotion happening, and I see a couple of flashing lights as I undo my seatbelt to crane my neck and spot a few people running toward our vehicle.

"*Sono paparazzi, Vostra Altezza* (They are paparazzi, Your Highness)."

I don't need to know Italian to understand what the driver is saying, since the word *paparazzi* is easy to recognize.

Luigi presses a button on the dashboard. "I'm going to call the manager. I have his private number."

I turn to look at Luca as the noise outside increases with every passing second.

"This isn't what I expected," Luca complains. "They reassured me when I joined that they would make sure to keep the paps under control as long as I let them know in advance when I would be here."

I'm intent on trying to listen to what Luigi is saying on the phone, but I'm distracted by a jerk of the vehicle, followed shortly by a second and a third one.

"Prince Luca, just a photo!" someone yells from outside as the car is shaken to the point that it feels more like a boat.

"Are you on a date?" another voice shouts.

Luigi revs the car engine, briefly turning to look at us before grabbing the steering wheel with both hands. "The manager said that security is at the gate and to drive forward. Brace yourselves, this could get a little bumpy." He revs again. "Move away from the vehicle. I'm not going to stop!" he yells, hitting the gas pedal with all he's got.

The car jerks forward while the small mob outside is still shaking it in the futile attempt to flush us out.

"What—you can't drive! Are you going to mow down—"

My protest dies in my mouth as we move forward with a jolt.

I see Luca opening his mouth to warn me to be careful before I hear him.

My body moves sideways as we receive one last push from outside.

“Oof!” I land face-first on Luca’s lap as the wind is knocked out of me.

What does it say about me that in such an embarrassing situation, my first thought is that the contrast between the hard muscles of his thighs and the buttery soft feel of the fabric of his dark slacks is quite pleasant?

His hand comes down to keep me in place when I attempt to straighten up. “Wait until we’re through the gate, just in case.”

I notice that he’s ducking too, his other arm raised to shield his face, probably to avoid having his photo taken.

“We’re through, Your High—Luca,” Luigi informs us.

I’m oddly comfortable with my head on his lap, but I go easily when he helps me sit up. “What?” I ask.

He’s looking at me with a cocky little smirk, his lips quirked up as if he were trying not to laugh. “Nothing.” He chuckles.

“No, seriously, what? Did I smear my lipstick or—”

He reaches out to tuck a wayward curl behind my ear, the little smirk graduating to a full-fledged smile. “Seriously, nothing.”

I cross my arms over my chest as the car comes to a complete stop. “Luca, what?”

He runs a big hand through his blond hair with another low chuckle. “Nothing, I’m just being an idiot.”

There’s no doubt about that. “I still want to know what’s so funny. Did my mascara run? If I look like a raccoon, I need to fix it.”

He shakes his head. “No, you look beautiful. I just thought that it’s a little funny how you landed face-first in my lap. You

know, I was hoping that if I played my cards right, we could get closer by the end of the night, but I never thought it would be so easy.”

He’s now laughing, his eyes shining with glee at his irreverent words.

I’m conflicted between two knee-jerk reactions. A part of me wants to smack that cocky smile off his ridiculously handsome face, while the other...

I throw my head back, laughing harder than I have in a while. “Ha. You wish. I guarantee that getting a repeat performance of what just happened isn’t as easy as you think, Your Majesty.”

Amusement dances in the depths of his blue eyes. “Are you challenging me, Lakyn? Because if you are, I’m totally up for it.”

God, he’s so cocky, and usually, that would be a huge turnoff, but it isn’t. There’s an ironic glint in his eyes that tells me that despite appearances, he doesn’t take himself too seriously.

I smile too, unable to stop myself from teasing him. “Oh, I don’t know if you’re that good at poker. For my face to get that close to your lap again, you need to have one hell of a hand, Your Majesty.”

He lets out a dark chuckle. “My father taught me how to play poker. Our kingdom is known for one of Europe’s biggest casinos, and my family gets a special high rollers royal room. And by the way, God knows I don’t care about all this royal bullshit, but if you really have to do it, the proper way to address me is Your Highness. Majesty would be more appropriate for my *papà*, the king. Even though, of course, Montebello has been a republic now for almost eighty years.”

His words pique my curiosity. I thought Luca was the prince of Italy.

I’m about to ask him about it, but that’s when Luigi opens the door of the SUV, offering me his hand just like he did when they picked me up. “*Signorina.*”



“Thank you, Luigi. Let’s go, *bella* (beautiful).” Luca guides me through the doors of the country club restaurant with a gentle hand on the small of my back.

His touch warms me from the inside, even through the thin fabric of my gown, and I’m more confused than anything else right now.

I left my apartment convinced that Luca would be insufferable, and while I’m not completely sure he’s not the snobbish playboy the press describes him as, I must admit that I’m intrigued.

He obviously has a sense of humor, and I like the kind way he speaks to his driver. Every time he smiles at him, the smile reaches his eyes as if he’s fond of the older Italian man.

Obviously my curiosity is helped by the fact that Luca is drop-dead gorgeous, and no one should have any right to smell this good—something spicy and masculine, and probably outrageously expensive.

He made light of an embarrassing moment, teasing me about how I face-planted straight into his crotch.

An idea makes its way into my head. I wouldn’t mind taking a look at that royal dick. Of course it’s purely for investigative reasons, since that would mean that I could establish if he was the one who sent me that dick pic.

Luca doesn’t seem like the type who even needs to send unsolicited dick pics to random women, but you never know, right?

I decide that I’m going to use this evening like Bay intended when she bought me this date. I’m going to get to know Luca and see if there’s really more behind that royal playboy façade.

I’m not going to exclude taking a look at his royal... hardness, if he plays his cards right like he’s so sure he can.

After all, Bay wants me to get some much needed experience, using college to explore who I am, since my only relationship so far was totally sexless.

The thought hits me that so far, my first two dates ended up being quite pleasurable, but I never got to see Cash's dick, and the only reason I saw Blaze's is because he was too much of a gentleman to show my panties to half our school.

“Your Majesty, I'm Paul, the country club manager. First of all, I'd like to welcome you tonight. I also offer you my deepest apologies about the unfortunate, deplorable situation you had to deal with upon your arrival,” a man in an expensive-looking suit greets us.

I almost snort at his wrong use of “Your Majesty,” and it becomes harder to contain my amusement when Luca offers me a cheeky little smirk as he turns to reassure the manager.

“It's all right. You had the situation handled once we got inside. You can't control who's loitering outside the property.”

The man is overjoyed by Luca's reaction. “Nevertheless, allow me to offer my apologies with a bottle of our vintage champagne on the house. This isn't the way I wanted your evening to begin on the first time you dine here with a date, Your Majesty.”

Luca tries to object to the need of a freebie, but the manager insists, and he personally ushers us to our table.



## 21.

# Royal Stalkers

Luca



THE MANAGER INSISTS on personally walking us to our table, and I'm a little embarrassed by the way he curtsies as he gestures to it with a flourish.

I'm used to red carpets being rolled out everywhere I go, it has been happening my entire life. I usually act a little distant and entitled, offering cocky smiles left and right because this is what people expect from me, and it has become a habit.

The manager's fussing is just the opposite of what he should do. All I want is to dine with my date and enjoy the fine food and company without everyone looking at us. The curtsying and all that pompous shit draws attention.

The first excited whispers reach my ears even before my hands move the chair for Lakyn.

"Is he who I think he is?" a woman whispers-yells to someone at a table close to ours.

"Yes, that's Prince Luca Rossi. I heard he came to Star Cove to go to school and play hockey. He's better looking in person than in photographs."

I avoid eye contact with the two ladies who are whispering about me and make my way to my own chair.

Hopefully they'll talk about me for a couple of minutes and then return to their evenings.

I'm almost regretting not booking a private room to have my dinner, but it's a first date, and I didn't want to make things awkward, especially if we don't hit it off.

Believe me, not hitting it off is a real possibility, despite the hint of flirting that happened between me and Lakyn in the car.

I can see that she's on the fence about even being here, and I wonder why that is. She seemed totally comfortable with Blaze at that party. The thought hits me for the second time tonight. Is it really possible that she likes him more than she likes me? I mean fuck, if she does, whatever. I don't even know Bay's sister, so it's not like her not being into me would break my heart.

I'm competitive by nature though, and I know she's been out with two of my teammates. If she likes Cash and Blaze better than me, that would be unacceptable.

I'm better looking and heaps more charming than those two.

“Prince Luca, ma'am, welcome to Star Cove Marina Lido Country and Yacht Club. My name is Laura, and I'm the maître d' of this restaurant. Your bottle of vintage champagne is going to be served shortly. In the meantime, I have our menu here, and I would also like to inform you that tonight we have a special twelve course tasting menu that showcases seasonal ingredients almost entirely sourced in the area. The chef highly recommends it. Do you need a minute to look at the menu, or will you be trying the tasting menu?”

I'm pretty adventurous with my food—and not just with that—so I know that I don't mind being surprised by whatever the Michelin star chef of this restaurant has created. “I'd love a tasting menu. What about you, Lakyn?”

She's been reading the menu with a small frown on her pretty face. “I—yeah, me too. I'm going to try the tasting menu, thank you.”

I smile at her, ready to ask her to tell me more about herself, but I stop in my tracks when the manager returns with the champagne. I appreciate his effort in making me feel welcome, but serving the champagne personally is overkill, if you ask me.

I should have known that the manager wasn't just being attentive, and I brace myself when he clears his throat. "Your Majesty, I apologize for the interruption, but we have a bit of a situation."

I take a sip of my champagne, taking a second to make sure my tone is as devoid of annoyance as possible. "How can I help you?"

The manager lowers his gaze for a second before nodding toward a point behind his back. "There are two young ladies who claim they are here as your guests tonight. They demanded to be shown to your table, but since your reservation was for two, I—"

I don't even have the chance to confirm that I'm not expecting anyone else before I catch sight of a redhead marching toward my table, followed by two horrified waiters and another girl.

I recognize her even before she manages to elude the waiters' attempts to stop her. It's Bianca, the annoying puck bunny who also happens to be the dean's daughter.

She's obviously taking advantage of the fact that the staff wants to avoid making a scene.

"Luca," she gushes as she stops right by the manager's side. "Babe, I'm so sorry I'm late."

I bite my tongue at the first words that want to bubble to the surface, but I doubt that *che cazzo vuoi* (what the fuck do you want) would make the situation any better.

"Barbara," I greet her without smiling, getting her name wrong on purpose to convey how unwelcome she is. "What are you doing here?"

Her brown eyes narrow into a furious glare as redness rises to her face even through what looks like several layers of foundation. "It's *Bianca*," she snarls. "And I'm here to have dinner with you."

I school my expression into a mask of boredom in a futile attempt to avoid a scene. God knows if this ends up all over

the papers and social media, I'm going to have my father's press office making my life hell.

I don't talk to her directly, addressing the manager instead. "I think there must have been a mix-up," I inform him with a subtle nod that signifies that this is bullshit, and I hope he takes care of it. "My reservation was definitely for two."

Bianca doesn't even give the manager the opportunity to say anything as she charges on. "You heard the prince, waiter! Add two seats to this table."

The manager shoots me an interrogative look and thankfully doesn't miss the subtle shake of my head. "I'm so sorry, miss," he says, taking a step toward her to put his body between Bianca and the table. "I'm afraid that's impossible. Our restaurant is at capacity tonight. Let me escort you out."

I've had the feeling that my hookup with Bianca and Kylie was a mistake since they tried to cling to me the morning after. I'm not trying to blame my errors in judgment on someone else, but I wish one of my teammates or frat brothers would have warned me about these two.

It's a basic bro code requirement to warn each other off bunnies like them. I don't want my brothers to stick their dicks in crazy just as much as I want to avoid it myself.

These two in particular are either slow at picking up on social cues or so brazen in their chase of a hockey player boyfriend that they would do anything to attract attention and get what they want.

"But I was invited," Bianca bites out with a commendable poker face.

"I don't recall inviting anyone but Lakyn." I finally address her directly. "You heard the manager, now if you'll excuse me—"

This girl is shameless, I must give her that, but knowing when to walk away is a sign of intelligence, and she obviously lacks that. "Well, you didn't invite me in so many words, but I thought you'd appreciate being rescued from a date with a

pathetic loser who needs her sister to pay someone to take her out.”

Oh no she fucking didn't. I can tolerate a lot, but cattiness is the one thing that instantly turns me off in a woman—that and being a stage-five clinger.

I catch the way Lakyn's lips are pressed together, and I know she's probably ready to tell Bianca to fuck off the same way she stood up to Topher at the party.

A part of me would love to see Lakyn put Bianca in her place—she's even hotter when she's angry—but this is all my fault. Not so much for inviting Bianca, because I definitely didn't, but because if I hadn't made the mistake of hooking up with her, we wouldn't be in this situation.

“I'm looking forward to having dinner with Lakyn,” I say, looking straight into Bianca's brown eyes. “Let me also remind you that the auction she won this at was your father's idea to help fund the new athletic center. I'm sure the dean wouldn't be impressed to hear what you think of his initiative. Now, if you'd be so kind as to leave me and my date to our dinner, I'd appreciate it, Baylee.”

“It's Bianca!” she yells. “And I'm going. I know when I'm not wanted.”

I exhale a sigh of relief when she finally follows the manager away from the table and out of the restaurant.

“Lakyn, I'm sorry about that. We hung out at a party a couple of weeks ago, and since then she's been showing up everywhere. I barely know her, and I've been trying to get her to take the hint that I'm not interested in whatever she thinks is going on between us.”



Lakyn



I'M IMPRESSED BY THE way Luca handled the situation.



I'd be lying if I said that I wasn't about to get up and help the manager haul her out of here.

First off, because she was being a total bitch to Bay and me last week before the party.

Also because I know her type. My high school was full of girls like her, and I've been on the receiving end of their mean comments so many times, I've lost count.

I think women should help build each other up rather than tear other women down, and I have no problem standing my ground.

However, I can't say that the way Luca came to my defense was lost on me.

Another thing I couldn't help but notice is how he said he "hung out" with Bianca and her friend. I'm pretty sure that was code for he slept with them.

That bothers me a little, but just on the account that I don't like that bitch. I don't even know Luca, so I can't be jealous, right?

*Right. But you're wondering if he finds you pretty enough to hook up with you too, Lake.*

I take a sip of champagne to silence the voice of my insecurity and accept Luca's apology. "You have nothing to be sorry about. You didn't invite her here, and you aren't responsible for her rudeness."

He seems to relax a little, his charming, flirty smile firmly back on his perfect lips. "Thank you. So, Lakyn, how is it possible that you and I haven't met before today? I had no idea Bay had a sister. I immediately thought that you looked familiar when I saw you last week at the party, but it must be because you and Bay are twins."

I bite my tongue, tempted to tell him that we kind of met at the library.

Heat rises to my face at the memory of the way those blue eyes darkened when he was about to come.

“It must be why.” I decide to go with that. I’m not ready to admit how we really met if he doesn’t remember.

“So what’s your major?” he asks, looking genuinely interested.

I try to buy time to avoid telling him in case he does make the connection. “What made you decide to come here to Star Cove from Yale?”

His blue eyes flash with amusement. “You just answered my question with another question.”

I can’t help but giggle. “Two can play this game.”

My words cause his smile to widen. “Oh, is it a game? I like this. We can totally play, but I asked you first.”

I meet his blue gaze head-on. I guess if he remembers, then so be it. After all, he was the one who was doing something he shouldn’t have done in the library.

“I want to be a librarian,” I say.

And here goes nothing.

Luca doesn’t make the connection, and I realize that he probably didn’t even look at me at the reception desk and when he was getting head. He just saw my eyes behind my glasses in a small gap in the bookshelf.

Emboldened by the thought that I’m safe from embarrassment, I ask my question. “So why California? Wasn’t Yale good enough?”

He doesn’t flinch. “Unfortunately the press is very invasive, and things in New Haven had gotten... really difficult. I couldn’t fucking sneeze without having my photo on every paper, every blog, every gossip website. The scrutiny had become too much, and the attention of the media had become borderline harassment. They would get especially vicious if my team lost a game. They were relentless, and I needed a change of scenery.”

I guess I got a small taste of what his life must be like when we got here with the paparazzi waiting for us, hidden in

the bushes. I still can't resist teasing him. "Is that code for you got through all the girls in your two years at Yale?"

His reaction surprises me.

I could swear he puffs his chest out, that little teasing smile dancing on his lips. "Who knows? Maybe."

My mouth must be hanging open at his admission.

"Look, Lakyn," Luca says with a small shrug, "I'm not a saint, I'm not saying that. I really like women, and they usually like me back. Do I have a good time and play as hard as I work? You can bet your cute ass I do. I never promise anything more than what I intend to offer, so I don't set out to hurt anyone. Not everyone takes my warning that I'm not looking for a relationship seriously enough, and that's when things get messy."

I get what he's saying. "And girls show up uninvited when you're on a date for example?"

He nods. "Yeah. I know I wasn't very nice to Bianca, but this wasn't the first time she showed up somewhere totally uninvited. I would have been a little nicer if she hadn't been rude to you."

I consider his words. "So did you get stalked like that at Yale too?"

His blue eyes darken, the muscle in his perfect jaw popping as he explains. "That was something else, and it was bad. I understand that the attention is unavoidable when you're a public figure, whether you like it or not. Things in New Haven had just escalated to the point that I couldn't go to a class without being filmed if a professor called on me. It was like a frenzy, and everyone wanted a piece of me for their own gain. The last straw was when a girl stole my fucking underwear after she slept over and sold photos to the media before trying to sell the pair of boxers to the highest bidder. I spent weeks after that going from class to practice to my apartment off campus, hiding as if I had done something wrong. I finished my classes online and would have left then

and there if it wasn't for my team. I couldn't leave without seeing them through to the Frozen Four."

I nod, admiring his commitment even through a difficult personal situation. I remember Bay told me that Luca's team actually won the championship, and that he was team captain. "Is it any different here in Star Cove?" I ask, remembering seeing a few articles about him right before the hockey season started.

Luca sighs. "Hopefully. My *papà* wanted me to finish my degree back home. There's hockey there too, but not at the level of the NHL. I want to win a Stanley Cup, that's my life's dream, so we found a compromise. He let me come here as long as I don't get any more bad press. No more scandals."

The question leaves my mouth before I can even think about it. "How would you do that? I don't mean any disrespect, but with the paparazzi ambushing you everywhere and with people like Bianca..."

He runs a hand through his blond hair, mussing the lock that keeps falling onto his forehead with the effect of looking even more attractive than before, if possible. "I think you asked a few questions, and now it's my turn."

I pout. "Oh, come on. I promise I'm going to answer all your questions, but I'm really curious about how you're going to protect your privacy here."

His smirk is so attractive, it should be illegal. "Ever heard of NDAs? Believe me, my entire team, every Gamma brother, and anyone I hang out with on a more... *personal level* has to sign one. And believe me when I tell you, my family lawyers will go after anyone who breaks those NDAs. *Papà* doesn't care about a photo here and there of me leaving a restaurant, but any real gossip, and he'll go for blood."

I wonder if Bianca had to sign one, but I don't ask him that out loud.

Fuck, I wonder if he's going to ask *me* to sign one, since we're out together. Or do we have to hook up to enter NDA territory?

“My turn,” Luca says, shaking his head at a waiter who’s about to rush to our table when he sees him grab the bottle of champagne from the ice bucket to top up our drinks. “Bay said you were on a rebound. Tell me about it. Was it a long relationship? Who ended it? Are you over him?”

I laugh at his rapid-fire questions and his eager expression.

“Hey,” I scold him. “Those were three questions.”

“You don’t have a leg to stand on, Lakyn.” He chuckles. “You just asked me a ton of questions. Start talking.”

I roll my eyes, not really exasperated by his curiosity. “Three years, and two of those were long distance. He ended it, and maybe.”

He leans his elbows on the table to get closer to me, lowering his voice. “Maybe? Elaborate.”

The way he’s looking at me challenges me to object that it’s my turn to ask questions, and I decide to answer him honestly. “Up to a couple of weeks ago, I was devastated,” I admit. “Bay kept telling me it was because he was my first boyfriend and that really, our relationship hadn’t been *real* since after we started college. I think she was right, because once classes started, I didn’t have time to think about him as much as I thought I would.”

What I don’t say is that things got better since I went out with Cash.

“My turn,” I say. “How come you don’t have an Italian accent when you speak English? Didn’t you grow up in Italy?”

Luca chuckles. “You’d think that with all the stuff they write about me, the media would try to get things right. I don’t have an Italian accent because I was born in Los Angeles, California. My mom is American, and I grew up here for the first five years of my life, spending the summers in Europe with my grandparents. That changed when my grandfather, the king, died, and my father became king. It doesn’t matter that only my great-grandfather himself had really been king. *Papà* insisted on moving the family back, and my mom gave up her career.”

That sparks more questions. “But isn’t Italy a republic?”

Luca nods. “It is. The press always gets this part wrong though. I’m not Italian. My country is called Montebello. It’s a tiny republic nestled in the Alps between Italy, Austria, and Switzerland. We’re very closely related to the Italian royal family, and despite Montebello being tiny compared to Italy, our countries went through a very similar history after WWII.”

I’m fascinated. “Tell me more.”



22.

## Prince Of Hearts



Luca



I USUALLY HATE TALKING about my family. It's not because of my parents, my sister, and the rest of my extended family. They aren't perfect, but I love them.

The reason why I don't like talking about them is because whenever I'm asked about it, there's always an ulterior motive behind that interest.

It's either someone looking for a scoop they could sell to the press or for an in with my father and his connections with all the other crowned heads in Europe and worldwide, or more often than not, women who dream about becoming a part of it.

This is where I normally clam up and either steer the evening toward me getting laid or say my goodbyes.

For some reason though, Lakyn doesn't make me want to cut our conversation short. First off, I know if I made a serious pass at her now that went beyond some harmless flirting, I'd probably get one of her stiletto heels where the sun don't shine, but I'm also interested in getting to know her.

I like her twin sister. I think we're becoming friends, but with Bay, there was no spark or attraction beyond recognizing that she's gorgeous.

Things are different with Lakyn. I don't know what it is, if it's the way she walks or her smile, but I spent the entire night at the Gamma party last week staring at her and Blaze, wishing I was in his place, the lucky bastard.



I look at her open smile and pale blue eyes, and I know it's her eyes. There's something in the way she looks at me that makes me hard and interested to know more about her at the same time.

She also doesn't strike me as a gold digger. I know her and Bay don't come from money. I had a background check run on them as a precaution before this date, because after all the shit I went through at Yale, I want to make sure I protect myself.

Money isn't what I'm after though, my family has plenty. Bay and Lakyn are hard workers. They come from a middle-class family, and I'm convinced that what you see is what you get with them.

I'm asking some questions I already know the answer to, like her major, but I just like how animated Lakyn is when she talks about herself. I'm also pretty sure that if she knew I ran a background check, she'd be out of here faster than lightning.

"Tell me more," she says, and for the first time in forever, I want to share my family and my country's history with her.

"I was born in the US because my mom is American," I begin. "She was a supermodel who was discovered while playing volleyball for her college team at USC. Mom loved the freedom and travel her new job afforded her because she grew up in a conservative family in rural Nebraska."

Lakyn takes a sip of champagne before asking me a question. "I didn't know that. What do your maternal grandparents do?"

I look into her eyes, wondering for the first time if she googled me like I checked on her background and if she's asking these questions just as a way to make conversation. "You really didn't google me?"

She shakes her head. "I didn't want to. I mean, don't get me wrong, it's good to have pretty much any information at our fingertips, but I think that sometimes that takes all the wonder and mystery from our lives. You go to my school and play hockey there, you're a Gamma. I knew you weren't Jack the Ripper and I'd be safe going out with you. Other than that,

I want to find out who you are from you, not from the internet or from the gossip on campus.”

I really like her attitude, and I can't help throwing a flirty smile her way. “Is that so? *Davvero?*”

Lakyn nods. “Yeah. Googling someone before meeting them is like reading the entire CliffsNotes of a book before reading the book, and you end up missing out. I googled Cash before I went out with him, and I didn't feel like what the internet says about him gave an accurate idea about what he's really like, so I decided that I would rather go in blind and make up my own mind. What kind of family did your mom grow up in?”

“My grandfather is a pastor in a small town.”

She considers my words. “A totally different world from royalty.”

I nod. “Yeah. My parents met in Milan, Italy at a catwalk show during fashion week. *Papà* saw Mom and it was a *colpo di fulmine* (lightning strike, love at first sight). He whisked her to a party on his yacht moored in the French Riviera, and it was a whirlwind romance.”

Lakyn's smile is dreamy. “Sounds like a movie.”

I can't help but agree. “Mom says it was. They were head over heels and got engaged despite the king and queen's disapproval.”

Another question comes from Lakyn. “They didn't want your dad to marry a commoner?”

She's right. “Ridiculous, right? But you have to remember it was over twenty-two years ago. Things have changed a lot with monarchies in the last two decades.”

Lakyn nods. “So your parents paved the way for couples like William and Kate, and Harry and Meghan.”

I shrug. “Kind of. You have to remember that Harry is the spare, while my *papà* was the crown prince.”

She scrunches her nose at my words. She looks adorable. “Spare. What a horrible way to put it.”

I can't help chuckling. "Yeah, monarchies don't mess around and mince words when it's about lineage and the line to the throne."

"I don't understand why it mattered. Didn't you just say that Montebello became a republic after the war?"

I like that she's asking these questions because she's interested in the history of the country, not because she sees herself wearing a crown if she manages to bag a prince.

"You're right. My *bisnonno*, the late King Gilberto of Montebello, always had a chip on his shoulder when it came to our richer Italian cousins. Our two families have always been close, but he felt that our branch of the family was cheated out of more land when the Austrian rulers were chased out of the territory that would become Italy, so when the Italian King Umberto II allowed the referendum that cost him his kingdom, *Bisnonno* wanted to do the same. He was convinced that his cousin was shooting himself in the foot, but he thought that Montebello loved its royal family too much to choose to become a republic. In a way, he thought he was going to teach him a lesson."

Lakyn's next words aren't a surprise. "But things didn't go his way, right?"

I nod. "Things didn't go his way at all. When the voters chose to turn both kingdoms into republics, things didn't go how they thought they would. While Italy had been a constitutional monarchy for a few decades, where the king acted almost like a modern prime minister, Montebello never had a parliament. *Bisnonno* thought that should the unthinkable happen and the kingdom become a republic, he would have remained as a symbolic head of state, like the British monarchy. It never happened that way. In a way, it's ironic that he shared a very similar destiny to his Italian cousin. After the referendums, there were fears that the kings would use their armies to hold onto power or try to take it back with violent means, so the royal families were exiled."

Lakyn touches me willingly for the first time, covering my hand with hers on the table. "That's so sad, Luca. I'm sorry."

There's a beat of silence between us as I swallow, my throat working slowly at the feeling of tingling warmth her soft, small hand ignites all over my body.

"It went further than that. The rulers of the two new republics decided to add a cruel clause to the exile decrees. The male members of the royal families and their male descendants would be forbidden from setting foot on Italian and Montebello soil. If they did, they would be imprisoned."

Lakyn looks shocked. "Oh wow, that's harsh."

"I agree. Things changed in two thousand and two for our Italian cousins when the parliament passed a law to allow the male descendants of the house of Savoy back into the country. They had to officially renounce any claims to the throne as part of the deal."

I expect the next question. "Was it the same in Montebello?"

"Yeah, but it took a little longer there. About a year longer to be precise. My father was allowed back there in two thousand and three. To this day, his biggest disappointment is that Mom was heavily pregnant with me at the time. Too far off to face the move in time for me to be born in Montebello. So my younger sister, Heloise, is the first Rossi born in our country after the exile."

Her next question is asked in a soft, considerate tone. "So you're royals just in name?"

I nod. "Sort of. When we were exiled, the new republican government seized the royal palace. They let us keep ownership of our summer palace on the banks of *Lago Splendido*. Obviously my father wasn't allowed to set foot in it until after I was born. He restored the castle to its original glory, and I've been spending some of my summers there since I was a baby. Having the royals back brought in a lot of new tourism to Montebello, so ironically, the country is now very fond of its royal family, and my *papà* is very loved, even though he's king in name only."

I really like the fact that Lakyn's interest is focused on me, not on the royal palace or anything else.

“You said some of your summers. You didn't grow up in Montebello?”

I shake my head. “Yes and no. My parents divorced when I was five. Mom missed her native US and her career. There was a custody battle, but eventually, my parents agreed to share custody of me and Heloise. That meant that we spent equal time in the US and in Montebello, but for the most part, we both went to boarding school in Switzerland.”



Lakyn



LUCA AND I COULDN'T come from more different worlds. It's impossible to miss the sadness seeping into his tone when he talks about a divided family and boarding school.

My family has always been close, and my parents are still in love to the point that they are embarrassing. Coming to college here in California has been tough, and I might tease Bay and her obsession with our supposed “twin connection,” but in all honesty, I don't know what I would have done if she had gone to school somewhere else. She's a part of me and having her on the same campus is a source of comfort, it makes me feel safe.

Luca's unnerving blue eyes are fixed on me, and I don't even realize that my hand is still on top of his.

He grabs it, capsizing our joined hands. “Where did you just go?” he whispers. “You seem miles away, *bella*.”

His voice is low and smooth, enveloping me like the softest blanket as he rubs the space between my thumb and inner finger with his fingertips. I'm surprised that his hand has a slight roughness to it, not what I would expect from a prince.

“I’m okay, Luca. I was just thinking,” I admit, unable to look away from those dark blue depths, “that I couldn’t have lived at a boarding school. It sounds lonely.”

Luca’s smile reaches his eyes. “It was fine. Summers were always fun, and it was a coed academy attended by royals and children of diplomats from all over the world. I had flings with a number of princesses.”

He winks at me, the usual cockiness returning to his smile.

“Oh, I’m glad you were fine because of all the flings,” I scold him without any real heat because I know he’s totally teasing me.

“You make the best of the circumstances you’re given,” he offers, suddenly serious.

I don’t think he was joking about the flings after all. “Is that one of your father’s mottos?”

He lets go of my hand with a smile and a shrug at the exact moment the maître comes to serve us the first course of our tasting menu. “No, that wasn’t *Papà*. That’s my mom’s first rule in life.”

The maître clears her throat, placing massive plates in front of us with relatively small portions of food on them. “Our first course is terrine du pâté de foie gras, with homemade toasted brioche bread, confit shallots, and fig jam. Enjoy.”

I hadn’t paid attention to the maître before, but I notice her as she briefly hesitates, her eyes fixed on Luca before walking away.

She’s an attractive brunette, probably in her late thirties or early forties. I guess Luca’s charm works on women of all ages.

“This is delicious.” Luca almost moans, popping a piece of the toasted bread topped with jam, foie gras, and shallots into his mouth.

I have never had foie gras, but I observe the way he prepares the next bite and copy him.

At first things are okay, but an unfamiliar flavor hits my taste buds as soon as I start chewing the morsel a little more thoroughly.

This is awful.

The bread has a nice texture, and the shallots are delicious, but something else has a strong, metallic taste I really don't like.

If I were at home, I would definitely spit this into a napkin, but I know better than to do that here. I might not be used to country clubs and yacht clubs, but I'm sure that if I dared to spit the food out, the manager would escort me out the same way he did with Bianca.

"Lakyn, are you okay?"

My less than enthusiastic reaction to the first course doesn't get past Luca as I eat a piece of plain toasted bread to try and take away that horrible taste.

I nod, a little embarrassed that I don't like what I'm sure is a very expensive dish. "I—I just..." I take a sip of champagne, and he rushes to refill my flute.

"You don't like foie gras?" he asks.

I shake my head, wishing the floor would open and swallow me whole. My ex once made a big deal because I didn't like a tofu stir-fry his mother had prepared for dinner, and I wonder if Luca will judge my less than refined taste when it comes to food.

"If you don't like it, you don't have to eat it," he says kindly. "We have a lot of other courses to try."

I nod, encouraged by his genuine smile, but the feeling is short lived.

Laura, the maître, returns with two small dishes covered by silver globes.

The strong scent of garlic wafts into my nostrils even before the globe is lifted, and that in itself isn't a bad thing. Dare I hope for cheesy garlic bread or pasta?

“The second course is escargot.” The maître smiles, lifting the globes that were hiding the snails with a flourish.

The brown snails are still in their shells, and I stare at them as if they might take pity on me and walk away from the fine china bowl they are in.

There are four of them in front of me. At least it’s a good thing that it isn’t a huge portion, right?

It’s unbelievable how four chicken nuggets seem like a tiny portion, but four snails are more than I can take.

My eyes drift up to Luca, who picks up a strange contraption from the left side of his plate.

I have one too. It looks like one of those eyelash curlers I’m always terrified to use in case I rip all my eyelashes off.

Luca uses the tool to grab one of the snails, scooping out the small, dark brown fleshy part with a tiny fork.

“Lakyn,” he asks, stopping in his tracks with that tiny fork midair to his mouth. “Is there something wrong with your escargot?”

Heat rises to my face as embarrassment makes it hard to find the words to tell him that I can’t even bear to put one of these creatures in my mouth.

Isn’t this the most cliché thing ever? I must have seen a scene like this in every comedy movie where some kind of peasant dines at an upscale restaurant.

They always serve escargot, and if I had to reenact that scene precisely, I’d lose grip of the snail in my curler thingy, making it shoot across the room into someone else’s flute of champagne.

“I—there’s nothing wrong with them that I know of,” I admit. “It’s just that I don’t think I can put one of these in my mouth.”

Now if I had to judge by what I’ve seen of Luca before tonight and by the reputation that preceded him on campus, I’d expect him to make fun of me.



He doesn't.

I hate to believe that Bay might be right. So far though, I've caught a glimpse of a kind, intelligent personality under that cocky veneer he puts on to keep strangers at a distance.

This time it's no different. "Lakyn, you don't have to eat it."

Shame makes my face heat up even more. I don't want him to think that I'm lame, but I really don't want to eat the snails.

The thought hits me that the reason why I want him to think that I'm fun and adventurous is because I feel attracted to him. I would hate it if he thought that Topher is right about me when he says that I'm boring and a stick in the mud.

"Hey." He sets the tiny fork down without eating the snail, taking my hand into his like he did right before the food started being served. "Look at me, Lakyn. This isn't your kind of food, huh?"

His tone isn't mocking, and I lift my gaze to meet Luca's intense blue eyes. "No, it isn't," I admit, feeling defeated.

His lips curl into a smile as he squeezes my hand. "It isn't my kind of food either."

I snort, sure that he's just saying that for my benefit. "You don't have to say this to make me feel better, Luca."

"I'm not," he insists.

"You were about to eat the escargot, and you ate the foie gras," I point out.

Luca's eyes stay on mine as he explains. "It's not that I like this kind of food, I'm just used to it. That's what my *papà* likes to eat and serve to his guests. I'd rather eat pizza or a hot dog."

His tone is certain enough that I don't think he's saying this just for my benefit. "Really? Then why not go somewhere less..."

"Pretentious?" he finishes for me.

“Yeah.”

“I don’t know. I mean, part of it is because—aside from the press camping out outside—here, I don’t have to worry about being followed by the paparazzi, documenting every bite I eat and how many times I go to the restroom. They also don’t card me here even if I’m not twenty-one, so technically I wouldn’t be allowed to drink champagne. I also really wanted to see *Some Like It Hot* under the stars. They are setting up private cabanas in an open-air movie theater tonight.”

“That sounds awesome,” I murmur.

“Listen,” Luca offers. “Let’s find out what the other courses are. The chef here loves to surprise his guests, so he never prints the menu for special features like the tasting menu. I’m sure Laura will know what’s next. We have ten more courses, and I don’t want to force you to eat stuff you don’t want to try.”

He looks around, attempting to catch the eye of one of the servers. Don’t ask me why, but I like that he doesn’t snap his fingers or something equally obnoxious, like I’ve seen Topher do.

“Yes, Your Highness. How can I help?” Laura practically runs to our table.

“Laura,” Luca asks, “would it put you in trouble with the chef if I asked you to tell me what the next courses we’re going to be served are?”

I appreciate that he’s considerate enough to care about not putting her job in jeopardy.

“Not if you’re the one asking, Prince Luca.” She smiles. “The next course is extra cold Caviar served with blinis and sour cream. It’ll be followed by steak tartare. Then we have octopus crudo on a bed of endive salad. That will conclude the appetizers. The first main course is a giant squid ink ravioli—”

I try my best to school my face into a neutral expression, but I feel almost terrified at the thought of what dinner consists of.

However, Luca's eyes are trained on me, and he takes care of the situation with surprising diplomacy. "Laura, I wonder if I could ask you for a favor, but only if it doesn't cause any trouble with the chef."

Laura nods. "I'll see what I can do. What's your request?"

His next words surprise me. "When I made this reservation a couple of weeks ago, I thought I'd be in the mood for this amazing, fresh seasonal fare," he begins, "but tonight I'm really not feeling it. I've been practicing twice a day with the hockey season in full swing, and I feel like I need something a lot more... substantial."

"What do you have in mind?" the maître asks.

Luca throws a mischievous wink my way. "Lakyn and I would love a bacon cheeseburger. If we could also have fries with it, I would be forever in your debt."

Laura smiles. "Let me see what I can do. I'll be right back."

She returns ten minutes later with a huge smile on her face and two plates with cheeseburgers and very generous servings of golden french fries. "With the chef's compliments, Your Highness."

Luca thanks her profusely, but we're both perplexed by her demeanor. Laura's brown eyes are shiny, as if they were full of unshed tears.

"Laura, are you sure the chef wasn't annoyed by my request? Of course I'm going to pay for the food we ordered but didn't want, and I can apologize to him for the last-minute change—"

The woman shakes her head, her voice definitely trembling. "No, not at all. The chef was more than happy to fulfill your special request. He's a huge hockey fan, and I understand. You had a fantastic first game, the entire town is proud of the Star Cove Knights."

Luca still looks taken aback by the fact that Laura is quite clearly on the brink of a meltdown. "Laura, are you sure you're okay?"

The maître covers her mouth with one hand as she starts weeping quietly. “I—I’m sorry if this is inappropriate, you might not remember me, but—”

“We’ve met before?” Luca asks.

He looks suddenly uneasy, and I wonder if he hooked up with her. I mean, she might be old enough to be his mom, but I vaguely remember some kind of scandal a few years ago about a European prince and an older woman. Could it have been Luca?

“We have.” Laura nods, wiping at the corner of her eyes with the back of her hand. “I’m from Seattle,” she offers.

“I did my senior year of high school there. I joined an exchange program despite my father’s open disapproval. Laura, if I did something to offend you back then, I can only apologize—”

Laura’s eyes widen. “Oh no, absolutely not. Do you really not remember, Your Highness?”

“I’m sorry,” Luca says.

“I was born in Montebello,” Laura informs us. “I came to the US following a boyfriend I had met on vacation and decided to stay when our marriage ended in divorce. I had to start from scratch, and I was working two jobs to support myself and earn my certificate in fine dining and culinary arts. Money was tight, but I was determined to achieve my goal. You came in with your high school hockey team one night at the Italian restaurant I worked at. I was having trouble not crying that night too.”

Luca looks concerned. “I hope I wasn’t a brat to you.”

Laura sounds outraged. “*Sto scherzando* (are you joking)? I had just received a call from my mom that night. There was a family emergency. My eighty-four-year-old *nonna* back home in Montebello had been taken to the hospital, and Mom told me to come home as quickly as possible if I wanted to say goodbye.”

I understand how she felt. Bay and I lost our beloved nana our freshman year, right before spring break. We had to fly

home from California for the funeral. It has been almost two years, and I still miss my nana every day. “Did you get to say goodbye?” I ask.

She nods, tears now streaming down her face. “I did. However, I didn’t have the money for the ticket back home. I thought I wasn’t going to be able to go, and I was devastated. That’s when His Highness, Prince Luca, saw me and helped.”

For some reason, the way Luca blushes at Laura’s story is more surprising than the fact that he helped. I’m really starting to see that the cockiness and the playboy swagger are just a front, or at least that’s just an outer layer Luca shows the outside world.

“Ah, that was nothing,” he says, looking truly embarrassed. “I hope you made it back to Montebello in time to say goodbye, and I’m sorry for your loss.”

I sense that Luca is trying to gloss over the story, but Laura sinks down to her knees in front of him.

“You know that I made it there, thanks to you. You arranged a private jet to get me back home and sent beautiful flowers to the church where we had her services and a heartfelt note to my family. I never thought much about what happened to our country when it became a republic, I wasn’t even born, but *Nonna* remembered when your great-grandfather was king. I have no idea if he was a good ruler but you,” she says, overwhelmed by tears, her gaze fixed on the marble floor of the restaurant. “You will be my king and will have my loyalty until the day I die. No one had ever done anything like that for me, Your Highness. If there was another referendum tomorrow, I’d vote to put *you* back on Montebello’s throne.”

Luca rises from his chair, bending down to help Laura back to her feet. “Please don’t kneel in front of me. I did it because I wanted to help and because I adore my own *nonna*. You don’t have to thank me, truly. I’m equal part American and Montebellian, but there’s one thing I’ve always loved about my father’s motherland. It has the kindest people I’ve ever met, so I never could have let you miss saying goodbye to your grandmother.”



## 23.

### Some Like It Hot



Luca



WE DON'T SAY MUCH DURING dinner, but I'm pleased to see that Lakyn finishes everything on her plate.

Laura comes back to ask if we would like dessert.

"I *always* have room for dessert. What about you, *bella*?"

Lakyn shakes her head, placing her hands on her stomach. "I couldn't possibly eat one more bite, but dinner was delicious, thank you."

I stand to help her out of her chair, offering her my arm as I guide her outside to the large deck that leads directly to the Marina Lido private beach.

"Oh wow," Lakyn gushes as we set foot outside. "This is beautiful. Thank you for bringing me here, Luca."

The deck is, well... decked with fairy lights dangling from the potted palm trees and the jasmine bushes that border the area. Usually this is all occupied by tables, as the Californian weather allows al fresco dining throughout most of the fall season and from the early spring onwards.

Private cabanas are set up all around the deck, strategically placed in order to offer privacy and a perfect view of the giant screen where the movie will be projected with the beach behind it.

"The country club entertainment committee has decided to show a classic movie under the stars every two weeks this summer. It's now October, so this is the last feature. I caught

the two before this one, and I hope they decide to do this again next year,” I explain, ushering my date to the cabana I prebooked.

“I don’t blame you,” she says. “Especially if they show classic Hollywood movies. They always look better on the big screen.”

The cabanas are surrounded by gauzy white canopies on three sides, leaving the front open to allow the occupants to watch the movie.

A king-sized lounge overflowing with pillows provides more comfort than the seating in any movie theater I’ve ever been to.

I sit next to Lakyn, extending my legs in front of me, very aware of the way her arm is touching mine.

I’m so taken by the way the soft lighting makes her blonde hair glimmer that I almost don’t hear a staff member pushing around a cart offering popcorn and candy to the guests.

I order a huge tub of popcorn and some Milk Duds just for the sake of having something to occupy my hands, because I’m dying to put my arm around her and find out if her lips really are as soft as they look.

The space in the cabana is cozy and intimate, and my eyes are mostly fixed on Lakyn for the entire duration of the movie, wondering if she’d reject me if I tried to kiss her.

I’m definitely going to kiss her. I’ve been wanting to all night, drawn to her by this insane physical attraction. I don’t know her that well, but every new thing I learn about her makes me want her more.

I mean, fuck. I’ve been balls deep in girls when I didn’t even know their names, and I certainly didn’t buy them dinner, so why am I so hesitant with her?

I’ve been telling myself that if I do something to upset Lakyn, Bay will make sure next week’s away game will be played with my balls rather than a puck, but it’s bullshit. Bay was clear on why she bought three dates for her sister. She wants to help Lakyn rebound from a breakup, so I’m pretty



positive that she expects, even hopes, that things turn hot between Lakyn and at least one of us.

I have been jealous of Blaze getting to make out with her since the party last week, and I booked this cabana with the intention of having Lakyn lying next to me in the dark with the sea-scented sea breeze and the noise of the waves nearby.

It's the ideal setting to make a move, and I should before the movie is over.

The reason why I'm waiting is because I didn't expect to have so much fun tonight—aside from the embarrassing moments with Bianca and Laura—and I don't want to do anything that would make her say no to a second date.

This is going to be a busy year, and I hope to be drafted by a decent team, so I wasn't planning on dating. Not when I have no problem getting my needs met by hookups and puck bunnies without any strings attached.

I have a good plan and a goal to achieve. Going pro means being totally independent from the crown, and it's my priority. Does that mean I can't pursue the first girl I've been interested in since I was at boarding school?

It doesn't, I decide.

That's the moment a stronger gust of wind makes Lakyn shiver.

"Here, take my blazer."

I know, I know.

Could there be anything more lame? Probably not, but I couldn't give two shits about it because it works.

"Thank you, Luca," she whispers as I place my blazer on her naked shoulders.

Her blue eyes are fixed on mine, and I scoot closer, lifting her hair to free it from the collar.

"You're welcome," I whisper, lowering my head to brush her lips with mine.

It's not how I usually kiss. It's slow and tentative, almost tender. I almost expect her to either rear back or shoot me down with one of her sassy lines.

She doesn't. She stays there as if she's waiting for what I'm going to do next, her hand coming up to my bicep, holding me there.

I take that as a sign that she wants this just as much as I do, and I press my lips to hers a little more firmly, opening my mouth just a tiny bit to get a little taste of Lakyn Woods.

She shifts closer to me, and I cup her jaw as gently as possible, tilting her head back, ready to kiss her with everything I have.

That's when the main lights come back on, killing the soft summer night vibe the fairy lights and stars were providing.

We still have relative privacy in our cabana, but the spell is broken, and she moves back just a fraction. Dammit.

"I'm not ready to take you home," I say before I can even make a plan on how to continue our date.

"I don't want to go home," she says.

Thank fuck.

I could see if there are any vacant rooms here. It's low season, and I'm sure the suites of the country club hotel won't be fully booked.

I don't want to assume anything though, just in case that isn't what Lakyn wants.

"How about a walk on the beach? It's a nice night," I propose.

"That sounds nice. I should probably take my shoes off though. I don't think stilettos and sand mix too well."

I smile, grabbing her leg and placing it on my lap. The way the movement causes the fabric of her dress to ride up on the side with the slit is sexy and almost a little obscene.

"Allow me," I say, undoing the tiny buckle of the ankle strap of her Louboutins.

The irony that I'm a prince and I'm handling her shoe isn't lost on me. However, I'm taking her shoe off rather than putting it on. Take that, Prince Charming.

Her shoes are tiny, she must be a size seven, even six. Everything is so exquisite on this girl, and I have to fight the urge to pounce on her, flattening her into the lounge and ravishing her right here on the country club deck.

I make quick work of the other shoe and take mine off too. "Let's go." I offer her my hand to help her up.

She accepts it but throws a hesitant look at our things. "Shall we carry these?"

"We can leave everything here. The deck ends right on the sand, and no one will touch anything," I say, observing that all the other moviegoers have already left and the only people here with us are the staff who are clearing away empty popcorn tubs and glasses.

I guide Lakyn off the deck and onto the fine, slightly cool sand of the private beach.

There's a half-moon that helps us see a little better than the eco-lights of the beach, and we dig our feet into the sand, walking slowly in comfortable silence.

My hand is closed over hers, our fingers laced together, and I can't remember the last time I felt so carefree, so... happy and excited.

"Luca," she says softly. "Thank you for tonight. I'm having fun."

I stop walking, turning fully to face her. "Thank you for being such a great date," I say honestly. "You handled all the disruption that comes with hanging out with me really well."

She smiles. "What do you mean?"

I sigh. "I mean the paparazzi, Bianca, and even Laura. It seems to come with the territory that I'm recognized wherever I go. *Papà* used that fact to try to dissuade me from pursuing an NHL career. He claims that it would put an even bigger spotlight on me."

She tilts her head to meet my eyes. “Don’t you think he has a point?”

“Maybe.” I shrug. “But I’d rather be known for my achievements than for the name I was born with.”

Lakyn considers it. “I think you’re right. Besides, you’re one hell of a player.”

I’m a confident man, and because of my birthright, I’ve grown up with all sorts of people stroking my ego. I’m used to brushing it off, since it usually bothers me, but not this time.

I soak up Lakyn’s compliments. I know they are heartfelt and not used to flatter or manipulate me. “Thank you.”

“I mean it.” She beams. “And don’t tell Bay because she’s already too cocky and doesn’t need the extra ego boost, but she was right to insist that I go on this date when I didn’t exactly want to.”

I wonder what she means with that, but this isn’t the time to dwell on it. “No, please.” I chuckle. “Do tell Bay that you had fun. She isn’t someone I ever want to cross.”

Lakyn’s eyes widen at my words. She’s laughing, but I think she totally means what she says next. “On that, you’re absolutely right. My sister is scary when she’s mad.”

“Duly noted.” I nod, taking a step closer to her. “But I think we can do even better than we’ve done so far. I think she would definitely approve of this.”

“Approve of what—”

I don’t give her the chance to finish the sentence. I cut her off with my lips on hers.

It’s a totally different kiss than the one we shared earlier on the deck. My mouth is on hers, my hands tangle in her soft waves, and I taste her, exploring every corner of her mouth.

I love that she immediately kisses me back, and within seconds, we’re tangled in something hot and consuming.

The way her tongue strokes mine goes straight to my cock, and I’m so hard that I want more. I want everything.

I sink my teeth into her plump bottom lip, sucking it into my mouth.

My hands leave her hair to travel down her body, pressing her against me.

“I want to see you again.” I pant against her lips, her soft chest heaving, her warm body melting into my arms.

“You *are* seeing me.” She smiles, taking a little nip at my lips. “I’m right here, and I don’t want you to stop kissing me.”

“I mean another date, silly.” I chuckle, nipping right back at her. “You’re coming to next week’s game, right?” I ask. “It’s in LA.”

She hesitates. “I hadn’t thought about it, but I guess I could. I’m not due to work. Bay is going, so I guess I can tag along.”

Good. “I can get Luigi to drive you so you can party a little on your way down. We have a limo, he can take that.”

Her arms surround my neck, playing with the short hair at my nape. “I’ll see how Bay is getting there.”

“Seriously,” I insist. “Luigi loves to see me play anyway, so you’ll be doing him a favor. I really want you there, Lakyn.”

“I want to be there,” she whispers.

“Then it’s settled.”

My fingers fly down the buttons of my shirt, undoing each one.

“What are you doing?” she asks, her eyes wide as I slide the garment down my arms, dropping it on the sand.

“Let’s go for a swim,” I say.

“But I don’t have a bathing suit.”

I wink at her. “Me neither.”

“Luca,” she objects. “I’m not wearing a bra. This dress is \_\_\_”

Sweet Jesus. “Me neither,” I dare her.

Her glare is sexy as hell. “Ha. You’re so funny. I’m serious.”

I swallow slowly, letting my eyes descend to her chest. “Let’s make things fair then. Let’s go skinny dipping.”

She’s about to object, but something must change her mind. “Okay.” She nods, reaching behind her neck to untie the halter top of her dress.

Fuck. Whatever I was thinking, my mind goes totally blank at the sight of Lakyn’s perfect tits.

I track the movement of the fabric of her dress as it slides down the perfect curves of her body, pooling on the sand at her feet.

If I was expecting her to ask me to turn around and give her some privacy, I’m glad that she doesn’t because... fuck.

I know I’m repeating myself, but seriously.

She’s standing in front of me in just a scrap of black lace, and I’m down to my boxer briefs faster than lightning.

Our eyes are locked together as we lower our underwear at the same time.

“Let’s go!” I yell, taking off running with Lakyn hot on my heels.

I’m not even embarrassed that I’m sporting a semi—even a little more than that, to be honest.

Call me cocky all you want, but I’m confident about my royal attributes. I have it on pretty good authority that I’m way above average when it comes to size.

We run into the dark, calm sea, spraying water everywhere, hollering and laughing.

We swim toward a cluster of rocks that form a little natural cove, where the water reaches my lower chest and her collarbones.

I advance, stalking her like prey, and she stops when her back comes into contact with the rocks.



Lakyn



MY BACK HITS THE COLD rocks. It isn't an unpleasant feeling since they've been smoothed out by the incessant dance of the waves.

He stops in front of me, so close and yet so far, just shy of our chests touching.

His eyes are a midnight blue in the moonlight, and he leans down toward me, his hands hitting the rocks on either side of my shoulders.

He's effectively caging me in, but I don't feel trapped.

I swallow slowly, excited, curious, and just a little scared.

These are uncharted waters—no pun intended. I've never been totally naked with a guy, but my nerves are eased by the fact that I know Luca wouldn't do anything to hurt me.

Oh, and just in case you were wondering, he definitely didn't send that dick pic.

Prince Luca Gilberto Carlo Enrico Theodore Leighton-Rossi has the opposite of a micro dick.

My eyes go down to the water, disappointed that it's dark and I can't take another look at his cock, because I caught a glimmer of silver, and I think it might be a piercing.

"I thought that a swim would have helped us cool down a little," he whispers, his lips just short of touching mine. "I was a fool. You are hot, Lakyn, and I'm really having trouble keeping my hands off you."

God help me.

The words tumble out of my mouth without me even thinking about what I'm offering. "I don't remember asking you to keep your hands off me, Luca."

He surges forward, his big, perfect body warm in the cool water. “Good, because I’ve been dying to touch you all night. I want to know every inch of your body. I want you to feel me everywhere.”

When his lips meet mine this time, there’s no build up, no crescendo. Luca devours my mouth with passionate lashings of his tongue and skilled grazes of his teeth.

Soon my body is hot too. I’m burning up for him, ready to let him take anything he wants.

A whimper escapes me when his huge hands close over my tits, his fingers teasing my hard, pebbled nipples.

“*Sei perfetta* (you’re perfect),” he whispers, kissing his way down my neck.

His mouth leaves a trail of fire in its wake, making me feel bold, and I go on an exploration of my own.

I trace his sculpted, muscular shoulders, my palms coming down to feel the silky, tan skin of his defined chest.

Luca is like a work of art, all chiseled lines of muscled perfection.

“Lake,” he growls when my fingers reach the ridged muscles of his six-pack abs.

I love the way my name sounds on his lips, and I dare more, inching down toward the object of my curiosity.

He’s rock hard, the skin soft and velvety under the tips of my fingers.

“Oh fuck,” he hisses when I inch down past the head of his cock, feeling a small hard object.

“Sorry, did I hurt you?” I ask, hesitating to touch the piercing again.

“No.” His voice is low, full of desire. “It feels good.”

“Can I touch it again?”

He doesn’t take his eyes away from mine. “You can touch anything you want.”



I touch him again, feeling the small piece of jewelry. It isn't a ring. It feels like a barbell type of thing. "When did you get this? I'm surprised I've never heard anyone talking about it."

He chuckles, sounding a little breathless as I keep playing with the piercing, and his dick twitches a little under my touch. "Fuck, you know, I hadn't thought about it. Aside from the press, I like to think that people have something better to worry about than my dick."

I shake my head. "You'd be surprised. I mean, Bay told me she's heard rumors that you have a big dick, and those rumors are definitely true."

His cocky smile returns in full force. "Really? You and Bay have been talking about my dick?"

I should be embarrassed about it, but I'm not. I have no problem admitting it. "We did. I didn't want to google you, but since she chose you to take me out on a date, I wanted the full report."

He snorts. "Fair. And what else did Bay tell you?"

I shrug. "That you weren't the insufferable man-whore I thought you were if I had to believe the reputation that preceded you since the second the team announced your transfer from Yale to Star Cove."

"Oh wow, Lakyn. Please don't sugarcoat it on my account."

There's no real chagrin in his tone, and I laugh too. "No, I'm known for being too honest for my own good."

He nods. "I noticed, and that's one of the things I immediately liked about you."

"I like you too," I say, lowering my voice.

I feel a little vulnerable admitting that out loud.

The cocky smile is back again. "I know you do." He winks.

I stop touching his dick. “Oh, really?” I don’t even try to hide the slight affront at his excessive self-confidence. “You’re awfully sure of yourself, Your Highness.”

He suddenly turns serious. “This isn’t what it is, Lake. The reason I know is that from what Bay told me about you and from what I learned tonight, I’m sure if you didn’t like me, there would have been no way you’d have let me kiss you, let alone convinced you to get naked with me. I’m not being arrogant, I’m just using some logic.”

He isn’t wrong. “True. I must admit that I started liking you when I saw that you aren’t as cocky as you try to let the world believe. I don’t like cocky people, that’s why I detest Topher.”

Luca chuckles again. “We agree on that. But stop talking about Topher. That’s a boner killer if I ever heard one. Let’s go back to talking about how you really like me.”

He’s funny. “I said I like you, not that I *really* like you.”

Luca takes my hand, returning it to his cock. “Nah, hear me out. I think you wouldn’t go out skinny dipping with someone you didn’t really like. I know I’m hot, I have a big cock, and I’m very hard to resist.”

He’s right again. “You’re also humble,” I deadpan.

“No, again, I’m just honest. Do you know why I like you?”

My curiosity is piqued. “Why?”

His fingers come up to trace my jaw. “You’re gorgeous, sexy, and smart,” he begins, his voice as soft as his touch. “You also don’t give a fuck about who I am and how much money my family has. There’s no way you’d let me get away with any shit, so I had to drop my cool act or you’d have gone home before the first course was cleared out. Am I right, Lake?”

I nod slowly, mesmerized by the intensity in his eyes. “You are. No offense, but the first course didn’t help my decision to stay.”

A slow smile forms on his lips, and the corners of his eyes crease ever so slightly with the movement. “What did?”

“You’re kind. You didn’t judge me for not liking that posh expensive food. You’re very interesting to talk to, and you should also thank Laura for the fact that we’re naked together.”

The slow caress of his fingers stops. “Why is that?”

“Because what you did for her—I saw that you weren’t just kind to me because you wanted to get in my pants, Luca. It’s just who you are.”

His tone is serious. “I had totally forgotten about all that.”

Since we’re being honest with each other, I volunteer another piece of information. “I also like you because you aren’t a total pig.”

His smile widens. “Really? Even though I got you to take your clothes off, and I’m having very dirty thoughts about you right this second?”

I hum my assent. “When I told you that Bay and I talked about you and your dick, you didn’t make any lame, disgusting jokes about fucking both of us like certain people would have.”

And I don’t mean good-natured teases about it, those don’t bother me. Cole said something like that to me the first time we met, and I knew he was totally teasing me. I mean serious passes disguised as jokes, in the hopes that my sister and I happen to be into it, like her douche of a boyfriend has done multiple times.

I don’t mention Topher this time though, there’s no need.

“I like your sister,” Luca offers. “But not that way. I think Bay and I could become good friends.”

It isn’t just that he says the right things, it’s the softness in his tone, the way his blue eyes zero in on me, as if I were the only person in the world right now, and the way his fingers are caressing my jaw again, slowly, gently.

Our lips are so close that his warm breath tickles mine, and I don't even think about what I'm doing. My fingers find his cock again, and I explore the hard and yet delicate flesh.

“I really like the way you twitch when I play with the piercing.”

I didn't mean to say it out loud, but Luca's response comes with a soft groan.

“Trust me, I like it too. I had no idea that being touched with that thing in would feel this good.”

I stroke my fingers over it again in a back and forth motion. “Are you telling me that you got this recently?”

He touches his lips to mine, but it's just fleeting. “Are you really going to make me tell you about it?” He chuckles.

“You don't have to, but now I'm curious.”



## 24.

# Walk Of Shame



Luca



I LEARNED VERY EARLY on in life that trust is a very precious commodity.

It's true in general, but more so when you're born into a prominent family, like mine.

People on the outside might think that it's a nice problem to have when you'll never have to worry about earning a paycheck because you have more money than you could spend in five lifetimes.

What people don't see are the finer details in this very appealing canvas.

First off, until I turn twenty-five, *Papà* has total control of the strings of the royal purse. He's lavishly generous with me, but he has expectations to keep extending that generosity beyond the basics of housing, food, and education.

Monarchy means fame, and for me, it was a double whammy because Mom was at the height of fame when she met Prince Gilberto Rossi of Montebello and fell in love with him.

I've learned early on that not only will people befriend you purely because of what you can do for them. People will use you and exploit you for their own gain with total disregard for the consequences on your life.

I've learned to be guarded, to always protect myself, and to never trust anyone who hasn't proved themselves over and

over.

Especially if she's a woman.

Especially if she has your hard cock quite literally in her hands and you're desperate to get that cock inside her.

So everything I've learned in my twenty years on this planet should make me steer clear of opening up too much with Lakyn.

I've actually given her way more than it's wise to give to anyone, and I haven't even asked her to sign the NDA that's still sitting in the car Luigi drove us here in.

"I'm not exactly proud of how it happened," I say, surprising even myself.

All the red flags that usually make me avoid opening up are nowhere to be seen, and I might be crazy, but I know Lakyn would never post anything I tell her on social media or sell it to the press or gossip about it.

"I got it the night we won the championship, last spring. I don't even remember how it happened. That night was an endless wild party that took us from New Haven to New York City. Alcohol started flowing in the locker room, and by the time I boarded my private helicopter to get to the city with nine of my teammates, I was six sheets to the wind. All I remember is that we were playing a game of dare the whole time. Someone must have dared someone else to get a tattoo, and the next thing I know, I woke up with that thing."

Lakyn's eyes are as wide as saucers as she listens to my story. "You really don't remember actually getting it? It must have hurt like hell."

I chuckle. "Oh, believe me, I might not remember getting the fucking piercing, but that's exactly what woke me up the next morning. The pain was so bad, I thought my dick was about to fall off. *And* when I googled how to help with the pain, I got all this stuff about how it's advisable to avoid sex for at least four weeks."

She offers me a small shrug. "It isn't a long time."

“Are you kidding me? No sex for three days is a long time, but since I had to be careful to avoid infections even if I took it out, I decided I might as well keep it.”

She narrows her eyes, suddenly suspicious. “So how in the world did you manage to keep that a secret, and it isn’t all over the press or no one at school has been gossiping about it? No offense, but your fame preceded you, Luca. I also assume that you and Bianca hooked up?”

Ah yeah, don’t remind me. I regret that hookup every day.

“It was by total chance,” I admit, rubbing the back of my neck. “I had a vacation planned before hockey training camp started in the summer. I had to report to the school’s athletic department earlier than that anyway because of all the medical stuff to get cleared to play for the Knights. I took the piercing out so it wasn’t in the way and because I didn’t know my teammates yet, and I wanted to avoid starting my career with the Cove Knights being tagged in a photo of my junk. They were all asked to sign NDAs, even the Gammas who aren’t on the hockey team, but you never know. Then I was busy with the start of the season, and it didn’t occur to me to put it back in until yesterday.”

She touches it again, causing my balls to tingle with need. “I like the way it feels. Do you mind if I look at it when we get out of the water?”

I nod. “Absolutely. It’s the least I can do, since you’re the first girl to ever touch it.”

Lakyn giggles. “I really like the piercing, and I like the idea that no one else touched it or looked at it before me. By the way, your secret is safe with me. I won’t tell anyone, not even Bay.”

This is the funny thing, I don’t have a doubt in the world that she’s going to keep the secret. “I know. Thank you for that. If my father heard about it, he’d blow a gasket. He’s been on my case for not being ‘royal enough,’ whatever that means.”



She tilts her head, considering my words. “If he ever finds out, you could always say that it’s a very royal thing, since it’s called a Prince Albert.”

I laugh. “Not this type. A Prince Albert is on the tip, this is under my crown.”

Lakyn laughs at the pun I don’t even notice until she points it out. “Aren’t crowns quintessentially royal?”

She isn’t just hot as fuck, she’s also funny. “Lakyn,” I murmur, kissing her again until we’re both breathless. “Do you have any idea how much I want you?”

I’m all talked out right now, and the way she responds to my kiss tells me that she feels the same way.

She holds onto my biceps, smashing her soft, sexy body against mine.

I trace the curve of her shoulders with my fingers, descending to the side of her tits, her narrow waist, and the sexy flare of her hips.

She reaches down, closing her fingers around the base of my shaft, gliding her fist all the way up my erection and finding that piercing with the pad of her thumb.

Her touch is tentative, even a little timid, but it makes me see stars. I know it isn’t the stupid piercing—it’s the feeling of her kisses and her hands on me. It’s that I feel a connection I didn’t even know I was looking for.

I press her more firmly against the smooth surface of the rocks, bucking my hips to get more of her touch.

If I don’t stop doing this, I’m going to come right here, and I can’t let that happen. I want more, so much more than just a hand job in the water.

I take a step back, and that’s when she shivers. “Fuck, I’m sorry, *bella*,” I whisper. “Are you cold?”

I was so fucking taken by her gorgeous body and by her soft touch that I didn’t realize that her skin is covered in goosebumps.

“I am now that you aren’t pressed against me,” she says. “Luca!” she squeals as I scoop her up into my arms, getting out of the water.

“Our clothes are there.” She points to the pile of our discarded clothes, but I walk past them without a second look.

“I have a better way to warm you up, *bella*,” I practically growl, lowering her onto one of the loungers that are dotted all over the private beach.

I thank my lucky stars that we’re alone here tonight and cover her body with my much larger one, careful not to crush her with my weight.

I take her lips in a searing hot kiss, and she responds just as passionately, consuming me as we explore each other’s mouths.

Lakyn’s hands are on an exploration trip of their own, raking her fingers over my hair and descending to my neck and shoulders.

The tips of her fingers trace the muscles of my back, and that touch goes straight to my cock.

I ache for her. The need to take everything, to possess her body is like a fever scorching every inch of my skin.

I drag my lips down the column of her neck, peppering open-mouthed kisses all over the swell of her gorgeous tits.

My hands follow that trajectory, skimming down her slender waist and soft hips.

Lakyn is perfect. I love that she isn’t rail thin, and I could lose myself in the soft slopes and valleys of her curves.

“Luca,” she moans when I close my mouth over one of her pebbled nipples, licking and grazing the aching tip with my teeth.

My fingers sweep over her lower stomach with one destination in mind.

“Fuck.” I smile as I reach the smooth skin of her pussy. “I knew you’d be wet for me. Do you have any idea how fucking

hot that makes me?”

I leave her tits to place a bruising kiss on her lips, tormenting her bottom lip with my teeth as I sink one finger into her wet heat.

“You’re so tight,” I murmur, hooking my finger and pumping slowly in and out.

Her inner muscles contract around my digit, and just the thought of how that will feel around my cock is almost enough to make me blow my load before I even get to sink balls deep inside her.

“Lakyn, I want you so much, *bella*. Please, tell me I can make you feel good. If I don’t get to fuck you, I think I’m going to die.”

Dramatic, I know. That’s my Italian blood, according to my mom.

“I want you too, Luca.”

Those are the best words I’ve ever heard, and I reach down to get my wallet where I always keep a condom.

“*Merda*,” I bite out when all my fingers find is sand.

Our clothes are in a messy pile closer to the water, but my wallet is actually in the inside pocket of my blazer, all the way in the cabana.

“I’m such an idiot.” I sigh, stopping to think about what my alternatives are.

“Why?” she asks.

My chest is heaving as I hide my face in the crook of her neck. If I run to the cabana to get my blazer, I might kill the moment, but I don’t think I have a choice.

“I left my only condom in my wallet, and it’s on the deck,” I admit, cursing my own stupidity again.

Lakyn runs a soothing hand down the back of my neck. “I can wait here if you want to run and get it, or...”

“Or?” I don’t dare hope that she has a rubber hidden somewhere on her dress, since her purse is right next to my wallet.

“I’m on birth control,” she says, her voice barely above a whisper.

I freeze for a second. Is Lakyn offering what I think she is?

“I’m clean,” I say, just in case she does mean what I think she is. “We just got tested during our medicals, and I’ve never been with anyone without a condom before, but I can show you the test results later.”

I don’t even know why I’m saying this. I should excuse myself and run to the cabana to get my wallet.

I’m clearly thinking with my little head right now, because I can practically hear my father’s voice screaming at me in my head.

It’s been drilled into me since I was barely a tween that you never, *ever*, have sex without using protection.

*“There are plenty of women who would stop at nothing to earn a place in our family. A royal baby would set anyone up for life, and the men of the Rossi dynasty don’t have children out of wedlock. Be careful, figlio mio (my son), never put yourself and your legacy in jeopardy.”*

The king is right, I know he is, but tell that to my cock.

I look at the beautiful creature underneath me. Lakyn isn’t a puck bunny, she isn’t like Bianca. I know she wasn’t faking it earlier when she acted totally unimpressed by my luxury car, the ostentatious venue I chose for our date, and the even more pretentious menu. Until I opened up and started acting like Luca, rather than a snobby asshole, she was probably counting the seconds until she could ditch me.

Could this be an act to make me think that she’s interested in me as a person, rather than my title and my status? Absolutely, but I know—no, I *feel* that she’s genuine on a deeper level.

She must take the beat of silence as hesitation on my part. “I’m clean too,” she offers. “And I don’t have any tests to show you, but I haven’t been with anyone.”

I nod, remembering how she mentioned a long-distance relationship. “You haven’t been with anyone since your ex?”

Lakyn shakes her head as she lowers her gaze, hiding her face in my chest. “No, I mean I haven’t been with anyone. Ever.”

“Are you telling me that if we fuck, this would be your first time?”

The incredulity in my voice is more due to the fact that I can’t believe a beautiful woman like Lakyn made it to her junior year of college still holding onto her V-card. I have no doubt that she’s telling me the truth, not only because I don’t think she has one lying bone in her body, but also because she’s so embarrassed that she’s avoiding looking at me.

“Lakyn,” I murmur, forcing her to look at me by lifting her chin with gentle fingers. “Are you sure?”

She misunderstands me. “Am I sure that I’ve never had sex before tonight?” She snorts, her natural sarcasm bubbling to the surface. “No, Luca. I’m just saying that to you because I love blurting out embarrassing stuff to hot naked guys just to see how they are going to react.”

“I didn’t mean it like that, *bella*,” I placate her. “I meant are you sure you want your first time to be with me?”

She nods. “I like you, Luca. I know you’re going to take care of me.”

Holy shit, yes.

If I wanted to fuck her before, now I want her more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life. Just the idea that no one else has ever had her, that I’ll be the first one to ever be inside her beautiful body, is enough to drive me insane with desire.

I’m going to make it good for her, and she’s going to remember this night—she’s going to remember *me*—forever.

I've never been someone's first. I've always liked popular, experienced girls. There's no doubt in my mind that I want to be Lakyn's first.

"I'm sure," she says.

It's all the permission I need to kiss her with renewed purpose. I'm a man on a mission, and I'm not going to stop until I feel Lakyn's tight pussy coming all over my cock.

I kiss her, and it's slow, deep, and hot.

I love the way she kisses me back, uninhibited in my arms, her soft skin now warm under mine as I explore her body with my hands.

I'm going to get a room here tonight. I want to be with her all night. I'll draw her a bath to wash away the salt from the sea, and then I'll kiss her and watch her fall asleep in my arms.

I want to give her a perfect first time, but that's going to be *after*. After I make her mine.

My lips never leave hers as I give her clit a slow, soft massage. I'm a little worried about hurting her, but I'm going to go slowly, giving her time to adjust.

I shift to line myself up with her entrance, biting my bottom lip as I fight the urge to slam into her with one single thrust the second the head of my cock comes into contact with her soft skin.

It's like a primal need to take what no one has ever had before me.

"Luca," she gasps, her body going rigid under mine, her nails digging into my biceps. "Please be gentle. I know it's going to hurt."

And just like that, I think I can't do it. Not right now, not like this.

"I've got you, *bella*," I whisper as I shift again, away from her entrance.

I enter her with two fingers, gathering her wetness and fisting myself to make my shaft slippery for what I have in

mind.

My lips find hers as I lower myself onto her so that my shaft hits the smooth skin of her slit.

This isn't the same as being inside her, but if she's scared that I might hurt her, I can't do this. I don't even think about the fact that I usually look after number one when I'm with a woman.

I'm not a total asshole, and I make sure my hookups have a good time, but ultimately it's all about me and what I want.

I move slowly at first, dragging my hard flesh across her soft one, sliding over and over.

Lakyn's tense body relaxes gradually, her mouth greedily accepting my kisses.

I wish she could see herself right now. She's so beautiful under the moonlight, her skin soft and pale against my tan coloring.

Her body is like putty in my hands as I grab one of her thighs and bring it over my hip to open her up to me even more.

I know I'm hitting her clit with the barbell under my crown when every thrust of my hips elicits a moan from her. I swallow each one with my kisses as I feel my balls tightening.

"Luca," she moans, and it's like the most beautiful song I've ever heard.

"Are you going to come for me, *bella*?" I don't even know if I'm asking her or if I'm begging her.

I'm close, so damn close, and it's almost funny because I haven't dry-humped anyone since I was fifteen, and I hadn't gone all the way yet.

Dry-humping, of course, isn't exactly right, since things are extremely wet between Lakyn's sweet arousal and my own precum.

That's definitely a first for me too. I've never had precum before, I thought it was something my body didn't do.

“Luca.” Her nails dig into my back, and she tenses up again, but this is different than earlier. This time it’s a good tense, and I know she’s close too.

“Let go, *dolcezza* (sweet thing). Come for me.”

She cries out, and that’s my undoing too. I feel my release shoot out of me as my cock throbs, spilling spurt after spurt of white cum over Lakyn’s lower stomach.

I keep moving, rubbing against her clit until she goes limp in my arms.

It takes us a few minutes to catch our breath, and I keep her close, placing slow, soft kisses on one of her shoulders.

I don’t even want to start analyzing this. It’s so unlike me. Life has taught me that people look after themselves and your worth to them depends on what you can give them. This is why I keep my walls up high and only share the bare minimum. It’s like this with everyone except my parents and my sister.

Usually, I’d already be dressed, and I’d call her a cab with an excuse to avoid awkward goodbyes or any attempt to spend the night in my bed.

Instead, I have to bring myself to sit up, gathering Lakyn in my arms. “We should probably go,” I murmur, kissing the top of her head. “There’s no one here, but you never know who might decide to take a walk on the beach when the restaurant closes down and the staff gets off the clock. Wait, let me grab our clothes.”

I dash a few feet away, returning with her dress and my slacks and shirt. “Sorry, I can’t see your panties.”

She takes the garment without looking at me, her shoulders rigid with tension. Does she regret what just happened between us?

I swallow a knot of anxiety as I gather the courage to ask her. Isn’t it funny how a two hundred- and twenty-pound defenseman gunning for me on the ice doesn’t scare me one bit, but this beautiful, feisty girl has me terrified?



“Lake, is everything okay?” I manage to ask.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

Yeah, no. I know that tone. I’ve heard my mom and my sister use it countless times, usually when I fucked up. I call it “the fine of death.”

“*Che succede, bella* (What’s up, beautiful)? If I did something wrong, I need to know so I can fix it.”

She shrugs, as if whatever has her so tense and withdrawn didn’t matter. “Nothing, I just thought—I just thought you wanted to have sex with me. I guess you changed your mind.”

I pull her into my arms, grabbing her chin to force her to look at me when she resists my first gentle attempt. “Lakyn, you were scared. You were scared I would hurt you. I can’t guarantee your first time won’t hurt, but I panicked a little bit, okay? I know I’m not small, I just—I thought that maybe we should take this a little slower? You know I want to see you again, so please get the idea that I don’t want you out of that gorgeous head of yours. It’s just the opposite. I want you, and I like you more than I’ve ever liked anyone. We were caught in the moment, but I’m glad you told me it was your first time. Can you imagine if I fucked you hard and fast? I think we should get a room and spend time together in bed.”

She finally relaxes a little. “Naked?” she asks.

“Very, very naked.” I chuckle. “I would like to get us a room tonight too, but not because I want to try to have a round two. Tonight we cuddle and sleep, then we get to know each other better. Maybe you could spend the night in my room next Thursday, after the away game?”

She tilts her head in that cute way of hers that tells me she’s about to tease me. “Will we cuddle then too?”

I smack her toned ass as I take her hand and start walking back toward the country club building. “We’ll cuddle *after* I give you a first time you’re always going to remember.”

She snorts, looking at my satisfied smirk. “I thought you wanted to take it slow? Next Thursday is in four days.”

I roll my eyes, but I'm just being goofy now. "That *is* slow. I'm a hockey player, Lake. Have you seen me on the ice? I don't do anything slow. Four days in hockey player time is like a month for everyone else."

She looks amused, and I'm happy she's no longer nervous or sad. "So you're going to get to know me better in four days?"

"I'm going to know the shit out of you in four days, *bella*. I'm going to call you every night and every morning after practice. Now let's go, I want to watch you fall asleep in my arms."

"Creepy." She laughs.

Ha, maybe. I sink my free hand into one of my pockets, feeling the lace of her panties. I've been jealous that Blaze had a pair the other night after the party. I'm not sure if he gave them back to her, but I want a little memory of our first date.



Lakyn



THINGS I'VE LEARNED in the past couple of weeks:

One: My sister must have followed me or put a tracker on me—it might be that she has a sixth sense, but let's not go there. She obviously thinks our twin connection is real.

Two: Never rent a ground floor apartment again so the above sister can't lurk behind the curtains waiting for me to come back from a date.

Three: Giving my sister a spare key will never happen again, because she clearly abuses her power and comes and goes from my apartment as she pleases, rather than using the key for emergencies as intended.

That's the thought that hits me the morning after my date with Luca, when Luigi stops in front of my apartment building

and Luca insists on walking me to the door.

My hand is engulfed in his much larger one, and he stops on the doorstep to place a soft, lingering kiss on my lips.

“I’ll call you after practice,” he murmurs, his intense blue eyes smoldering as he tucks a lock of hair behind my ear. “Have a great morning, *bella*. You too, Bay!” he calls out, turning to look at my living room window before he walks away.

I don’t even get the chance to put the key into the lock before my front door opens and I’m pulled inside the house.

“That was so freaking cute!” Bay hugs me so tight that I’m surprised she doesn’t cut off the blood supply to pretty much everywhere in my body. “I knew you and Luca were going to hit it off. I knew it!”

I push her away, my arms crossed over my chest as I try my best to glare at her and look like I mean it. That girl has to learn some boundaries, for fuck’s sake. Being twins doesn’t mean we’re the same person, she has to understand that.

“Good morning to you too, sis. To what do I owe the pleasure of such an early social call?”

She snorts. “I swear to God, Lakey-Lake, you should be an impersonator in a Jane Austen full immersion amusement park or something like that. Who says ‘social call’ anymore?”

I have no chance to voice the sarcastic comeback that’s ready on the tip of my tongue, because her eyes widen with some kind of realization.

“Hold on, no, scratch that. You’re perfect. I bet you Luca’s family talks like that all the time. See? I told you that you two are made for each other. You’ll fit right in with the Italian royal family.”

I don’t even know where to start, she’s so full of shit. “They aren’t Italian,” I correct her. “They are from Montebello.”

“Pfft.” She waves her hand as if she were swatting a pesky bug. “They are practically the same country.”

I open my mouth to tell her that they are not, but Bay drags me into the living room. She lowers herself on the couch, bringing me down with her.

“You were with Luca all night.” Her tone is excited and slightly accusatory. “I need to know everything. Did you lose it? I didn’t feel it, but I was doing shots with Topher last night and alcohol might mess with our twin connection.”

I roll my eyes. I’m pretty sure I’ve heard Bay say that alcohol heightens her spidey sense when it suits her.

“No, I didn’t lose it, but I came very close to it.”

She covers her mouth with her hand. “Tell me everything.”

I want to. I really need to talk to someone about my dating situation, and of course Bay is the person I trust the most in the entire world. She needs to learn to be a little more discreet with her snooping though, so I make her work for it as punishment.

“I would, but you don’t deserve it. Do you have any idea how embarrassing it is to come home to your sister hiding behind the curtains and craning her neck to watch your date kiss you good morning? Luca saw you!”

She takes offense. “I don’t deserve it? Sis, I practically had to force you to go on that date last night. Let’s not even mention the fact that I bought you that date.”

She’s right, and I’m dying to tell her, but I make her suffer just a little more. “I almost had to eat a snail because of you. I should tell you nothing.”

I should know that nothing stops Bay when she sets her mind on something. “Spill the beans, Lake, or I’m going to get all the details from Luca.”

I gasp. “You wouldn’t dare!”

I know she totally would. “Luca and I are friends,” she informs me. “I’m not going to go to him unless you force my hand.”

Okay, time to give it up, I guess.

“God, Bay, has anyone ever told you that if your career as an influencer and CEO of your own makeup company doesn’t pan out, dictator is the other natural choice for you?”

She flips her hair in a defiant, mean girl move. That gesture mollifies me because it’s all a front. I don’t know anyone who’s more loving and generous than Bay. When she isn’t annoying the crap out of me, obviously.

I tell her everything, from the second Luca’s car pulled in front of my apartment last night, to the kiss on the doorstep she just witnessed. The only thing I leave out is the piercing. I know Bay would never tell anyone, but Luca values his privacy, and I think I owe him that.

“Oh my fucking god.” She swoons. “So that tells us two things.”

I’m almost scared to ask. “What does that tell us?”

“That Luca isn’t the perv who owns the micro dick in that dick pic you got.” She ticks the items off on her fingers. “And that Luca is the one!”

I ignore her first statement because frankly, I couldn’t care less who sent that dick pic. At this point, I’m convinced it was some random weirdo.

“I don’t know, Bay.” I groan. “I like Luca a lot, but—”

“You like him enough to practically agree to let him be your first.”

I nod, feeling suddenly anxious. “I do, but I felt the same way with Blaze. I would have had sex with him in that changing room if he hadn’t bailed out because he wanted our first time together to be special. We’ve been texting back and forth since that night. I mean, sure, it’s mostly just stuff about our busy days, but he made it clear that he wants to get to know me better. And then there’s Cash,” I continue. “He and I had an instant connection, and the only reason we didn’t end up having sex was because you and Tasha walked in on us.”

“Sorry.” Bay giggles, not sounding sorry at all. “I adore Cash, and I could totally see the two of you together. That’s

why I chose him at the auction. Has he called you at all since your date?"

I shake my head. "No."

Bay sighs, squeezing my hand in hers in a comforting gesture. She used to do that when we were kids every time I was scared or anxious about something. "Then maybe we can rule Cash out?"

I open my mouth to say that I don't want to forget about Cash, but maybe she's right.

I never have the chance, though, because the buzzer informs me that there's someone at the door.

"Hold that thought," I say to Bay as I get up to see what's up.

"Cash!" I can't hide my surprise when I open the door to the tall, gorgeous goaltender of the Star Cove Knights. "What are you doing here?"

Cash is standing on my threshold in a Star Cove College sweatshirt and sweatpants, obviously on his way to the same early morning practice Luca was headed to after he dropped me off.



## 25.

### Chances



Cash



I HOPE I DIDN'T FUCK things up with Lakyn.

I know I didn't call her or text her since our date ended suddenly, but my plate has been full to say the least.

“Hey, baby,” I say, letting my eyes rove over her sexy body clad in a daring dark blue cocktail dress. “I don't have much time because I can't be late for practice, but I wanted to see you.”

I don't know what kind of welcome I expected, but Lakyn doesn't throw herself into my arms.

“Hey, Cash.” She crosses her arms over her chest, and I do my very best not to let my eyes follow that trajectory as the movement causes her perfect tits to bunch up in a way that doesn't go unnoticed.

I didn't come here to act like a douche though, so I keep my eyes trained on hers—for the most part.

“What's up?” she asks when I stand there, staring at her like a complete idiot.

“I've been meaning to call or text you, but things have been a little hectic on my end, and I wanted to touch base with you and ask you if you'd like to do something together soon. We have an away game next week, so maybe next weekend?”

I see the hesitation in her eyes, and I know I probably fucked up.



“I’ll be at the game on Thursday,” she informs me. “It’s nice to see you. To be honest, I was starting to think I wouldn’t.”

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

“I know, and I’m sorry. I know how this might have looked to you, but I thought about texting you all the time. I just didn’t get a chance to.”

This is one of the things I like about Lakyn. She’s sweet and smart but she doesn’t take any shit from anyone.

“I’m sorry, Cash,” she says, meeting my gaze. “I don’t mean to sound like a bitch because you don’t owe me anything, but I don’t understand what you’re doing here. I know you’re a busy guy, but it takes a second to text a ‘hey, what’s up?’ I didn’t expect a three-thousand-word essay.”

I might have fucked this up to the point that I can’t fix it, but I’m not giving up. I have no choice but to be honest with her. “Look, I can’t stay long. Coach is going to choose a team captain sometime soon, and if I’m late to practice, I can kiss that chance goodbye. I really want to see you, baby. I have never had as much fun as I did on our date. I was going to call or text you, but I had a family emergency, and I had to help out. That meant spending every second I wasn’t in class or on the ice at home. I even had to miss the party last week for the first time since freshman year.”

That seems to soften Lakyn’s gaze, but I know I haven’t totally convinced her yet. “Is everything okay?” she asks.

I shake my head. “I’m handling it. My family counts on me to make ends meet. I don’t come from money like a lot of the students here. I have a full athletic scholarship though, and that meant I had to go ask Coach permission to get a part-time job so I can help out at home.”

I feel a little ashamed having to admit that, especially since I know Blaze took her for a ride on his pricey Ducati, and Luca... let’s not even mention Luca. I don’t hate the guy, but I don’t think he’ll ever have the slightest clue about what it

means to have to worry about keeping a roof over your head and the lights on.

“I’m sorry, Cash.” She unfolds her arms, taking a step toward me. “It sounds like you had an intense couple of weeks.”

I nod. “I did. This couldn’t have happened at a worse time, but hopefully the situation is under control. My schedule was already tight, and until hockey season is over, it’ll be even busier. I know you’re busy too, but I hope we can find a way to continue seeing each other. I’m sorry I upped and disappeared. At first it was just a lot to deal with the emergency. Now things are somewhat more stable, and believe me, all I want is to make time for you. It might not be as much time as I’d like, but I promise I’ll make sure you won’t feel like I forgot you ever again.”

She keeps her eyes on me, quiet for a beat, obviously considering my words. “Okay. Is there anything I can do to help you?”

She’s so fucking sweet. “No, baby. All I need from you is a chance. Can I text you later?”

“Yeah, I’d like that, but Cash—”

The alarm on my phone goes off, telling me that if I don’t leave now, I’m going to be late for practice. “I really have to go.”

Rather than heading back to my truck that’s parked right behind me, I surge forward.

I pull her against me, crushing my lips to hers.

Her initial reaction is a surprised gasp, but she immediately relaxes in my arms as I coax her lips open with my tongue.

The kiss heats up in seconds, and I’d like nothing more than to push my way inside her apartment and spend all day showing her how I thought about her all the time since our first date.

My alarm goes off again, reminding me that I really have to go, and I know this will have to wait. “I’ll text you tonight, after work,” I growl against her lips, reluctant to move away from her.

The noise of someone clearing their throat behind me is what finally breaks the spell, and I turn around.

“Lakyn Woods?” a guy holding one of those thermal bags for food delivery asks.

“Yeah, but I haven’t ordered anything.” Lakyn smiles.

The guy opens the bag, extracting a white take-out food container. “This is three-two-six-three Oak Street Court, apartment A, right? And you’re Lakyn Woods? Then this is for you. Enjoy.”

I notice a yellow Post-it Note on the lid of the box.

*I wanted you to start the day with the best breakfast burrito in town. Enjoy, B.*

I wink at Lakyn, jogging back to my truck. I better hurry, or I’ll really be late. While I could take losing the captain spot to Luca, Blaze, or even Jagger, I can’t stand the idea of having Topher as team captain.

People like my frat president are the reason why I don’t open up to anyone about my family situation.

My stomach growls as I drive back the short way to campus. There’s no time to go to the student center for breakfast, not even if I take it out.

I had a choice between having breakfast or going to see Lakyn, and it was a no-brainer. I wasn’t lying when I told her that the last couple of weeks have been a nightmare, but I knew that after two weeks of total silence, I needed to see her in person.

She probably thought that I was just interested in getting laid and I never meant it when I asked her for a second date, so I needed to make sure that I explained myself in person.

Another hungry growl from my stomach has me reaching into the glove box of my truck as I park in front of the ice rink.

I get a protein bar from the glove box, biting into it as I walk into the building.

I'm glad Lakyn is having a much better breakfast. Her sister must have surprised her with it like she always surprises Topher with takeout from the best places in town.

Speaking of the devil, Topher nods in my direction as I'm about to open the door to the locker room.

"Yo, Cash," he says. "Leave the bag and come to the media room. Coach wants to talk to everyone before practice."

I throw my bag inside the locker room without even looking and follow Topher down the hallway.

I'm wondering if Coach has made his choice and he's about to announce who will be the Star Cove Knights' team captain this year.



Blaze



I SHOULD KNOW BETTER than to look at my phone when Coach Harrison is talking to us, but I can't resist a little peek when I feel it vibrate in my pocket.

I can't help but smile when I see it's a text from Lakyn.

**Lakyn:** *Good morning, Blaze. I know you're at practice, so you won't probably see this until later, but I just wanted to say thank you for breakfast. That burrito was delicious and totally hit the spot. I have a long day of classes and a shift at the library later. We have a new shipment of fiction arriving today, and I'll see if there's something we'd like to read.*

I have a really full day too—practice, classes, another practice, and then I should study and possibly find the time to eat during the breaks from all of that.

Maybe I'll go study at the library so I can at least say hi to my girl.

The thought hits me like a wrecking ball. I've never thought about any girl in those terms.

*My girl.*

I like the way that sounds, even if I'm just mouthing it quietly or my teammates would think I've taken one too many hits to my head during fights.

That doesn't change the fact that the thought of asking Lakyn to date sort of officially doesn't sound bad at all. It actually sounds good.

The reason why I've never had a girlfriend before is because I've never had a problem finding hookups. Variety was the key to my satisfaction when I didn't have anything in common with my occasional "dates."

Things are different with Lakyn. I'm insanely attracted to her, and it's not just because of her pretty face and hot body. Lakyn is funny and smart, and we could talk about books for hours. The way her body fit mine on the back of my bike—

"Gentlemen!" Coach demands our attention, and Cash sinks his elbow into my ribs, nodding toward my phone.

I pocket it quickly because he's right. If Coach catches me texting when he's about to address the team, I wouldn't put it past him to bench me on Thursday.

I reluctantly tear my attention away from the thought of Lakyn and focus on Coach Harrison.

The man is still in tip top shape, which isn't surprising since he played in the NHL until two years ago.

He lets his eyes skate over his team, as we all stand in a semicircle. "Some of you are aware that I've been thinking about who in this room would be team captain material. I haven't known you gentlemen for very long, but I've been observing you during practices and during last week's game. Initially I was considering practically my entire starting lineup, but I've restricted my candidates to three names. Cash, Luca, and Blaze are the players who have stood out to me so far, both on and off the ice. I expect my team captain to work with the coaching team not only when you're playing and training.

Your team should be your family, and the ideal captain will be a guidance and an example to follow on and off the ice.

“The three players I’ve just mentioned are the ones who stood out to me as excelling in both areas. However, a captain’s work and influence must be effective, so it helps when the entire team supports their leadership. This is why I’ve decided to let the team choose. It’s an important decision, and the chosen person will guide the team next year too, since none of the three players is a senior.”

I consider Coach’s words. In theory, he’s right that all three of us have another year before graduation. However, this is the last year we’re eligible for the draft, and depending on which team drafts us and what they want, we might not come back to attend our senior year. At least, I know I might not if one of my preferred NHL teams picked me.

That’s a problem for future Blaze though. We have a whole season to play, and my draft prospects depend strongly on how I perform.

“So when do we get to vote, Coach?” Cole asks, throwing a satisfied smirk in Topher’s direction.

“I’m not going to make the vote an official thing. You have until right before winter break. When you’ve made your choice, come see me and let me know. I’ll keep track of it. Any questions?”

Coach’s question is met with silence.

“Okay then. See you all on the ice in five.”

The second Coach and his assistants leave the locker room, it’s total chaos.

“So I know Jagger wasn’t really into this whole captain thing, but what happened to you, asshole?” Cole chides our frat president. “Has Coach just seen that you can’t help being a douche even during a game or did you do something to show him that you don’t have what it takes to lead the Knights?”

Those two have been at odds since freshman year when everyone in the Gamma house thought there was something

between Bay Woods and Cole, but then Bay started dating Topher, surprising everyone.

Cole was friend zoned, even though I don't think he minds, since the guy gives Luca a run for his money when it comes to the number of girls they nail on the regular, puck bunnies or not. Coexistence has been hard for the two men in Bay's life.

"Fuck off, Cole!" Topher snarls. "I just realized that I have too much on my plate with my course load, the Gamma presidency, and you know... *my girlfriend.*"

For some strange reason, Topher looks at Luca when he mentions his girlfriend.

Our new left winger doesn't say anything. Luca doesn't even look at Topher as he starts donning his protective gear, but there's a muscle in his jaw that keeps popping as he makes a show of ignoring our two bickering teammates.

I wonder what that's all about. Topher doesn't strike me as someone who would give up the chance to have a spotlight on him, no matter how busy he might be.

There's no time to dwell on it though. On time performance is important if I want a shot at being team captain, and I know how much Coach hates waiting.

"Come on, ladies," I yell at my teammates. "Let's get this show on the road. LA won't know what hit them on Thursday night!"

After we secure a victory, I hope to score a date with the prettiest girl on campus.





## 26.

# A Hollow Victory



Lakyn



“I’M GOING TO BE HONEST with you, Lakey-Lake.” Bay beams as Luigi pulls up in front of the LA hotel where the team is staying tonight. “When I bid on those three guys for you, I didn’t have a favorite, but what do you know? My loyalties can totally be bought.”

I roll my eyes at her, sure she has something smart to say. “Who’s trying to buy your loyalties?”

“No one yet.” She giggles. “But I could get used to riding in a limo with a driver at my beck and call and unlimited champagne. So if there’s going to be a vote, I think I’m going to have to go with Luca. You’d also be a princess if things became really serious. Not too shabby, if you ask me.”

I shake my head. “Maybe you’ve had too much champagne if you think you’re going to get a vote.”

We’ve been discussing this the entire way from Star Cove.

Bay can tease me as much as she wants, but I’m a little stressed about the situation I’m in.

“God, stop acting like your life sucks. If you ask me, having three super hot, super popular athletes pursuing you is a really nice problem to have.”

I flip her off. “You don’t get it, Bay. What am I going to do? They’ve all been calling and texting me every day this week. Even Cash.”

My sister stops ribbing me, taking my hand and giving it a reassuring squeeze. “So you forgave him for going MIA after your date?”

I nod. “Yeah. I understand what it’s like to have a busy schedule, and he’s been a sweetheart. He’s been texting every morning and calling most nights, and he even showed up to the library yesterday with two cans of Diet Coke and two chocolate chip cookies so we could hang out during my break.”

“Right.” She snorts. “I’m sure you ended up making out behind the Ancient Greek literature section. It’s way in the back, and no one ever borrows those huge, dusty books.”

I don’t even want to know how she knows where one of the most notorious make out spots in the library is.

There’s no need to say anything, because the heat that rises to my face is confirmation enough for Bay that she’s spot on.

“Ha. I knew it!” She laughs. “Did you get to see his cock so we can officially rule him out as our possible micro dick weirdo?”

“No, I didn’t see his cock,” I snap. “We did go to that spot, but all we did was kiss.”

Bay looks disappointed. “What a waste of an opportunity,” she gripes.

“Can I just remind you that I work there? Kissing Cash in there was risky enough, but if one of the librarians caught us doing more, the only thing I’d be kissing is my job goodbye.”

Her smirk is full of mischief. “It would be worth it because Cash is hot, and I don’t get why you insist on working when I have your tuition and I can help with your rent and your other expenses too. I make enough money, and I don’t want you to pay me back. I told you a million times.”

I sigh, because even though she might know exactly how to push my buttons, Bay is the sweetest, most generous sister in the entire world—not that I have any other siblings of course.

“Bay, I—”

“I know, I know. You want to pay me back. We’ll see about that. But enough about money. Let’s talk about something important. All three of your dates asked to see you again, and you like them all. Jokes aside, what are you going to do?”

I cover my face with my hands. “I don’t know.” I groan. “I’ve been so stressed about this. What if they get mad that I said yes to a second date with each of them?”

Predictably, my sister doesn’t see the issue. “I already told you. You aren’t doing anything wrong. Until someone says they want to be exclusive, you’re perfectly within your rights to see whoever you please.”

I nod. “I know. The problem is that I want to be exclusive.”

Bay immediately perks up. “Really? With whom? I bet it’s Luca! Or no, Cash! Even though Blaze is so hot.”

I close my eyes, banging the back of my head against the top of my seat. It doesn’t hurt at all because the leather of Luca’s limo is softer than butter. “See?” I whine. “Just the thought of breaking things off with one of them makes me want to cry. I can’t choose.”

Bay pulls me into a side hug, like she always does when I’m sad or stressed. I hide my face in the crook of her neck. “Be honest with them, Lake. Tell them how you feel. If giving you time to figure out your feelings is a problem, I guess you’re going to have your answer.”

Bay is right, as usual. “Okay,” I say softly. “They all sort of asked to see me tonight after the game. I guess I’m going to put all my cards on the table. When you told me you bought me three dates, I didn’t want to go to any of them. It’s crazy that I like all three guys.”

She looks at me with that slightly arrogant smile of hers—the big sister smile. “I told you I chose well. No one knows you better than I do, Lake. So are you going to talk to them one-on-one or together?”

“I have no idea.” I shrug. “The only one who made an actual plan for tonight was Luca. He upgraded the room you booked for me to a suite. He wants to—”

Bay claps her hands, giddy with excitement. “Oh, you’re right. He’s been wooing you all week, and now he wants to seal the deal.”

“Stop it.” I snort, giving her a playful push.

I’m relieved that she doesn’t say anything gross.

“I’m serious, Lake. He wants to put his P in your V.” She giggles right when Luigi opens one of the car doors for us.

“*Signorine*, we’re here. Sorry it took me so long. I took the liberty to take care of check-in and your overnight bags.”

My face is so hot that I’m sure I’m practically crimson. If Luigi heard what Bay just said, however, he’s professional enough not to give it away.

When Bay and I get out of the car, my stomach is in knots. I hope this entire thing won’t blow up in my face.



Luca



I SPOT LAKYN IN OUR fans section the second I step onto the ice.

Bay is next to her, and they both wave back when I wave at her.

She’s so hot in her Cove Knights jersey and tight leggings that my cock stirs to life at just the sight of her.

A thought enters my mind when I spot Bay next to her as she turns around to show Topher his number on the back of her own jersey. I know it’s early days, but it would be cool if Lakyn was wearing my number.

I flex my hands inside my gloves to steady my nerves, and that has very little to do with the game that is about to start. I can't wait to spend the night with Lakyn tonight.

I'm going to make sure I make it good for her when we make love for the first time.

I shake my head as I take a lazy circle around the rink. It's the first time in my life that I think of fucking in these terms. *Making love.*

I mean, I'm not in love with Lakyn. Even though our date was epic, and we've talked for hours every day this week, I know it's too soon to use the L-word, especially since I've never used it before outside of family.

Could I see myself falling for her though? The answer to that is yes, and I can't wait to kiss every inch of her gorgeous body tonight before I make her mine.

We've talked about it, and we won't use a condom. It'll be my first time going bare, and I think it's only fitting that we both have a first time together. What makes this more special, aside from the obvious attraction between us, is that I feel like I can trust her. I've never had that before with any woman. I've always had to watch my back. Anyone who ever got close to me always had an agenda. They never really wanted me, but what I represent.

The game is about to start, and I get called to the center ice for the first face-off.

That was Topher's job until I came to Star Cove, but after reviewing hours of footage from last year, Coach decided to give me a chance. I did all the face-offs for my team at Yale and had a great record, winning over sixty-five percent of them.

Coach put Topher and me on opposite sides during last Tuesday's scrimmage, and I absolutely smoked him.

He has barely talked to me since then, and I know it isn't just because I took his face-off spot. I think Topher blames me for losing his chance at being chosen as team captain.

Maybe I shouldn't have intervened in his argument with Bay. The Zeta president can definitely handle herself, she has that in common with her twin sister, but I couldn't stand there and watch him push around a girl who's so much smaller than him.

I've never liked bullies, and it took a long time and years of therapy to repair my relationship with my father after I witnessed him doing the same thing to Mom. Even if it was just one time, I don't fucking care. You don't put your hands on a woman unless it's to make her feel good, and she told you in no uncertain terms that she wants it. Anything else will make me step in and fuck the consequences.

The referee starts the game, and I don't even have to think about it, getting that puck is second nature. My opponent doesn't even know what hit him as I take off with the puck glued to my stick.

I'm skating too fast, and I pass the puck to Blaze as I turn and spot him slightly behind me on the opposite side of me.

I signal to him that I'm going for it once he passes it back, I just couldn't shoot it a second ago, or I'd risk being offside.

Blaze and I haven't played together for very long, but we've had an instant connection on the ice since I reported for summer training.

He nods, and I take off, dodging LA's defensemen. He passes me the puck at the right time, and I shoot. The action takes mere seconds, and I don't think the goalie even sees the legit missile that comes flying by his head and hits the left upper corner of the goal.

My teammates all skate toward me, cheering and hollering to celebrate starting the night on the right track.

The only one who stays put and glares at me from behind the grid of his helmet is Topher.

He only has himself to blame for getting taken off the shortlist for team captain, and I ignore him.

I slap hands with my other teammates in passing as I skate toward the section with our fans.

I yank my helmet off, and when I meet Lakyn's eyes, I wink at her and blow her a kiss.

Our fans go crazy, and I can't help but chuckle when I can see her blushing from here.

*If you think I scored now, wait for tonight, bella.*

As I get back to the game, Blaze slaps me on the back. "Great fucking shot, dude. Want to do it again?"

"You can bet your ass I do!" I laugh.

"Nice of you to go celebrate where our fans are sitting," he says before skating away to his right wing.

He gave me a strange look, and I have to wonder if he noticed exactly who I was celebrating with, and if he has a problem with it.

I can't help but think about Lakyn's panties in Blaze's pocket when they came out of that changing room at the party. Did something happen between them?

I mean, fuck, they were kissing after they did that body shot where she had to pour tequila in his mouth. That was a party game though, and we all know that kisses during a party game don't count, right?

The thought is wiped out of my mind as one of the opponent's defensemen comes barreling into me, and I'm bodychecked against the boards.

*Focus, Luca*, I tell myself, shaking it off and smiling at the dude who just hit me, because two can play this game. I've never backed away from a fight to my parents' chagrin, so bring it the fuck on.

From that moment onwards, it's like there's a giant target painted on my back.

Despite being pushed, hit, and downed at every chance, I still manage to score another goal thanks to Blaze, who seems to be exactly where I need him at the right time tonight.

We dominate the first two periods, with Blaze and me giving the USC's goalie a run for his money, and Cole and

Jagger defending Cash like an impenetrable wall.

“It would be great to close our first away game without taking any goals,” Coach Harrison says in the locker room. “Keep your focus, keep being hungry, and don’t let those motherfuckers get in front of Cash without putting up a fight!”

We all roar our approval. All of us except Topher.

My instincts tell me to ignore him. He needs to shake off whatever crawled up his ass tonight and soon if he doesn’t want to risk losing his starting spot.

However, that isn’t what a captain would do. If you see one of your teammates struggling, you support them no matter how you feel about them off the ice.

That’s what I did at Yale, and our support system, and how close we had become, was a fundamental factor in our success.

I’m not team captain yet, but if I want a shot, I need to show Coach that I have everything it takes.

“You okay, dude?” I ask him as we exit the locker room, headed back on the rink.

I don’t know what I was expecting—if it was to be ignored or to be told to fuck off.

I sure as hell didn’t expect Topher to smile at me.

“Oh, I’m good, Prince. Fucking peachy. Let’s go kick some LA ass.”

I nod, perplexed by his sudden change of attitude, but I shake it off. Maybe my attempt at a pep talk worked.

The third and final period starts on the right track with me winning another face-off.

I take off, nodding at Blaze in a repeat of our opening play of the night.

I don’t even look at him when I pass him the puck, confident that he’s going to bring it forward and serve me the perfect assist if I can get around LA’s defense.

“Ouch!”



Blaze's loud grunt makes me turn to check if he's been stopped by LA's defensemen, but nothing could prepare me for what I see.

It's like my brain refuses to process the images my eyes are sending to it.

Blaze has been smashed against the boards, but not by one of the USC players.

Topher is the one who pushed him hard, stealing the puck from him and taking off toward USC's goalie.

I'm confused by his actions, but when I spot the two huge defensemen who zero in on him, I lift my hand, yelling his name to show him that I'm wide open.

I'm sure he heard me, but he acts like I don't even exist as he attempts to push through the impenetrable wall of LA's defense.

Predictably, his ass hits the ice within seconds from his encounter with our opponents, and I watch, powerless, as one of them takes off with the puck.

"Motherfucker!" I don't even know if I'm yelling at Topher or the USC player as I take chase, but there's no way I'm going to catch him.

I'm not even the only one who's yelling. Coach Harrison is roaring from our bench, and I have no doubt the abuse he's shouting is directed at his own player.

Cole's and Jagger's attempts to stop USC are fruitless, as their reaction is slower than it should be due to the shock of what Topher just did.

The same can be said about Cash, and when the buzzer goes off to confirm that USC scored a goal, our team is frozen in place. We're all looking at Topher, probably wondering the same thing. What the fuck just came upon him?

Blaze is the first who reacts, scrambling onto his feet and skating toward our frat president with fury in his eyes.

I'm prepared to have to break up a fight when Cole and Jagger head his way too.

Thankfully Coach intervenes before things can get out of hand and we offer a spectacle to the audience, where rather than fighting our adversaries, we beat the crap out of one of our teammates.

“No!” Topher yells when Coach signals to him that he’s being replaced by Madden, the other new recruit of our team this year.

“Get your ass in here, Mumford!” Coach seethes. “You have a lot to explain.”

The rest of the game goes without a hitch, and USC doesn’t have any other chance to score on us.

In the end, we take the victory home 3-1.

Our spirits should be high, we should be celebrating, but we all walk to the locker room in total silence as if a dark cloud is hanging over our heads.

It’s surreal having to get ready for an ass chewing from Coach after we just won a game.



Cash



THE MOOD IN THE LOCKER room is completely off.

By looking at us and especially at Coach Harrison, you’d think we got our asses handed to us by USC and not the other way around.

I can’t fault Coach Harrison though. He’s absolutely right for being livid about what Topher pulled on the ice.

“If anyone in this room,” Coach bites out, “thinks that they are untouchable, and that their spot on this team is safe, think the fuck again! You’re a team, you work together, and you all answer to me. I’m not against individual talent, that’s actually the reason why each of you is in this room tonight, but what happened tonight? What the actual fuck were you thinking,

Mumford? If you want the puck, you ask for it. You don't fucking tackle one of your teammates. And just to make sure the message is loud and clear, I'm not pissed because your stupid move ended in us taking a goal. I'd have been equally furious if your idiotic actions had resulted in you scoring."

Topher is obviously the main target of Coach's wrath, and for as much as he's never been my best friend, I have to admit that he takes this monumental ass chewing like a champ.

Our frat president doesn't even flinch, his face an expressionless mask as he stands there still in his full gear.

"I don't know how this team was run before this year," Coach continues, letting his eyes pause on every single one of us. "But I can tell you for sure that what happened tonight won't fly. Not the actions that resulted in us taking a goal, not the fact that you tried to argue with me when I benched you. Let this be your first and final warning that if I ever see anything even remotely comparable to what happened in tonight's game, the perpetrator won't find themselves just benched."

No one dares to talk, but there's a murmur of assent coming from each of my teammates.

"There's no room in my team for dumb-ass, hot-headed divas," Coach says to Topher, but he lets his scowl travel around the room to make sure that we all get how serious this is. "So watch yourselves, because next time something like this happens, you're off the team. If you think I'm being tough, let me remind you what most of you are aiming for. No NHL team will ever draft a player who's difficult to control, so keep this in mind if you want one fucking chance in hell to go pro. I'm going to handle the press tonight. One word from any of you about what just happened, and there's going to be consequences!"

He leaves the room, slamming the door on his way out.

Usually after a victory, there would be laughter and the guys would be horsing around and challenging each other about who parties harder, but not tonight.

There's complete silence in the locker room as Topher is the first one to hit the showers without a word.

I do the same thing, making quick work of it because I can't stand the tension in here for much longer.

I vaguely hear Cole and Jagger talking about heading to a club not far from our hotel, but I have something else on my mind.

Lakyn is here, and I wonder if she's up to going out for something to eat, or even better, ordering room service and watching a movie.

I'm pleasantly surprised when I find a text message from her the second I take my phone out of my locker.

**Lakyn:** *Hey, I was wondering if you had time to come to my room for a bit after the game? It's okay if you'd rather go out with the team. I know you guys always do after a game. If you want to come see me, I'm in room five-three-zero. XO*

I smile as I tap a quick answer to her. The next thing is tugging my sweats and my Cove Knights T-shirt on in record time while I order an Uber to get me from the arena to our hotel.

I debate if I should stop in my room to put on something better or even if I should change back into the suit Coach demanded we travel in, but I don't think Lakyn is going to mind.

One of the things I love about her is that she isn't pretentious or high maintenance like a lot of the girls that tend to hang around the team.

Talking about pretentious, I notice a limo outside. Luca comes out seconds after me and surely enough, he heads toward the luxury vehicle.

When he arrived at summer training, I really wanted to dislike the dude. Everything about him screamed pompous asshole. From his royal title and the paparazzi following him almost everywhere, to the fact that he had just won the Frozen Four with his team at Yale.

I thought he would be arrogant and a douche, but he's actually one hell of a left winger. He works harder than anyone I know, and when he isn't putting on an act with the ladies, he's surprisingly approachable.

As expected, there are a bunch of photographers rushing after Luca, and as I watch his driver try to shield him from the flashes of the cameras, I get into my hired vehicle.

I wonder if things will change once I get drafted—I'm saying once and not if, I'm totally manifesting here—and if I'll have to worry about the press as much as Luca.

The idea isn't appealing. I'm not pursuing this because I want to be famous. I couldn't care less about that shit. I love this game for starters, but the main reason why I want to go pro is because the money that the NHL can pay would ensure that I could take care of my family.

I was raised by a single mom. After we lost my dad when I was in high school, she worked hard to raise me and my younger siblings.

I want to repay her for all her hard work and provide for my little brother and sister.

“Oh, hey, Blaze.” I nod as I walk through the hotel lobby and see my teammate waiting in front of the two elevators that are coming down from the top floor. “Not going out tonight? Or are you getting changed before heading to that club the others are checking out?”

My teammate shakes his head. “Nah, I'm fucking tired. Besides, Topher doesn't know when he isn't wanted, and he's going. Believe me, I'm not the only one who's pissed at him after what he pulled tonight during the game.”

I don't blame him. “Yeah, he really needs to watch his fucking mouth tonight. Cole already has a problem tolerating him on a good day, but after tonight?”

Blaze nods. “Yeah. I don't even know how I resisted the urge to rip his head off. He hit me so fucking hard, my ribs have been throbbing ever since. He's lucky it wasn't bad enough to cause an injury, that's all I'm saying.”

One of the two elevators opens, and we both get inside. “He didn’t use to be like this last year,” I comment.

Blaze shakes his head, pressing the buttons to the fourth floor—where all our rooms are located—and to the fifth floor.

I wonder if he did that by accident or if he has a room on a different floor. Sometimes it happens, since there are a lot of us.

I’m going to the fifth floor anyway to see Lakyn, so I cross my arms, leaning against the elevator wall.

“You’re right,” Blaze finally says after giving me a sideways glance. “He’s always been a bit flashy, a bit of a douche, but I always thought he was good-natured. I think he changed since he was elected Gamma president.”

I agree. “Hopefully Coach put it in perspective for him tonight that he can’t act like a candy ass clown, at least on the ice.”

The elevator slows down, a mechanical voice announcing that we’re on the fourth floor.

Neither of us moves, so I guess Blaze must have gotten a room on a different floor.

He looks at me again as if he is about to ask me something. “Do you think he did what he did because Coach excluded him from the running for captain?”

“I don’t know.” I shrug. “But I’m glad after how he kept shooting the puck at me as if he was trying to hurt me the other day. Thank you for having my back that day, by the way. Cole told me that you and Luca called him out on that.”

Blaze shrugs. “No worries. You would have done the same if the roles were reversed.”

He’s right. “I just wanted to say, Blaze, that I’m really going to give it my all to become captain, but I’m not going to be mad if Coach chooses you or Luca. You both have my respect as athletes and brothers, and whoever is captain will have my support.”

The elevator doors open on the fifth floor. “Same.” Blaze nods, stepping out in the hallway.

I take my phone out of my pocket to check Lakyn’s room number. Five-three-zero. I look at the plates on the wall and turn left.

Blaze turns the same corner.

“Did you get an upgrade?” I ask him as I notice that this wing has fewer doors than our floor, so they are probably suites rather than rooms.

“Nope. Did you?”

I’m about to say that I didn’t when I stop in front of the room Lakyn told me was hers.

She must have mistyped the number. “Hey, Prince.” I nod as I spot Luca with his fist in the air, about to knock on the door of room five-three-zero.

At first, I think that it makes sense that Luca would pay for an upgrade and get a suite. Prince isn’t just his nickname on the ice, like everyone knows. I googled him for shits and giggles when it was announced that he would be transferring to our school, and I learned that his family might no longer reign, but they are one of the richest monarchies in Europe.

He turns to look at me and Blaze. “Hey, guys, what are you doing here?”

On second thought, why would he knock on the door of his own room?

And why the fuck did Blaze follow me like a lost puppy?

I’m about to ask those questions out loud when the door opens.

“Hey,” Lakyn says softly as her eyes go from Luca, to me, then Blaze. “Come on in.”

We look at one another. What the fuck is going on here?





27.

## Tonight's The Night



Lakyn



TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT.

Luca and I have been planning to get together and go all the way, but I feel like I can't do that with him without being honest about my feelings.

Or at least I'm going to try.

The truth is, I have no idea what I'm doing. My relationship with my ex didn't prepare me at all for all these feelings and the intricacies of dating.

Once again, Bay was right that Jon and I went from friends to boyfriend and girlfriend, but that it was just a label. I could count on one hand the times my ex and I even shared a kiss.

With him, I never felt these constant butterflies in my stomach, this tingling feeling that makes me feel like a live wire, and these waves of hot need when it seems like my pulse has found permanent residence between my thighs.

I might have promised Luca that tonight I'll give him everything, but I can't do that without being honest about the fact that I was ready to have sex with Cash and Blaze during our dates as well.

I'd be lying if I said that I'm not worried that they'll all walk away when I tell them how I feel.

While they all asked to see me again, and they've been treating me how I'd expect a boyfriend to act, none of them

has actually told me that they want an actual relationship or if this is just a casual fling.

I don't think I can do casual, it's not the way I'm wired, but I like them too much to walk away without explaining how I feel. If there's even a slim chance that we can work this out together, then I have to be honest with them.

I've hovered by the door since I got back to my room after the game, so when I hear footsteps and Luca's voice, I open the door and invite them in.

"*Ciao, bella.*" Luca smiles, his blue eyes roving over my Star Cove Knights jersey and my black leggings.

"Come on in," I invite them, stepping aside to let the three men into the room.

The suite Luca insisted on upgrading me to has a large living room, but for some reason, once he, Cash, and Blaze are inside, it seems to shrink almost to the point of looking too crowded.

I guess that's what happens when you put three tall, huge men in the same room.

"I thought you might be hungry, so I ordered pizza," I say, gesturing toward the round dining table where I got a few pies with different toppings to make sure each of them would find something they liked. I even got one with pineapple, even if personally... yuck.

Blaze is the only one to go for the pizza. I ordered it thinking about him. It doesn't compare to Rocio's tacos, but I know he's always hungry after a game.

"Thank you, pretty girl." He smiles, taking a large bite of a slice of pineapple pizza.

Cash's intense gray eyes are fixed on me, as neither him nor Luca pay any attention to the food. "I was hoping to spend some time with you tonight, so I was happy when you texted me. I'm surprised to see that this is more of a party than a date," he says, looking from Blaze to Luca.

“Yeah,” Luca agrees. “I thought you and I were going to... *hang out?*”

His gaze is full of questions, Cash’s is too, while Blaze keeps eating, but I know I have his full attention because his green eyes are tracking my every move.

My pulse is fast to the point that I almost feel dizzy. I’m anxious about what I’m about to say, aware that I might end up alone tonight. “We’re still hanging out,” I say to Luca, as I look at all three of them. “The thing is that you all asked me to hang out tonight, and I—I wanted to spend time with each of you, and I didn’t know what to do about it, so I invited you all here.”

Luca moves incredibly fast for such a big, tall guy. His perfect body is built for power but also for speed, and if I hadn’t seen him on the ice, I would be surprised, but I’m not.

He’s on me in seconds, advancing until my back hits the wall. “I thought you wanted to be *together*,” he growls, taking my lips in a furious kiss.

The gentle coaxing of our first date is gone as his teeth torment my lips and his tongue sweeps into my mouth. His kiss is hot, hard, and dominant.

I let out an excited whimper as I pull him closer by his sweatshirt, gasping when his huge, strong hand wraps around my throat.

Luca doesn’t squeeze, he doesn’t hurt me, but he’s keeping me there. His fingers around my neck send a clear message.

*Mine.*

I let his mouth consume me to the point that I forget that we aren’t alone.

Things change when I spot movement and Blaze’s citrusy scent invades my senses. “You want to hang out, pretty girl?” he asks, pulling me away from Luca’s arms and attacking my lips with the same ferocity. “I’m fucking game.”

He bites my bottom lip, immediately sucking it into his mouth to soothe the slight sting he just caused.

His big hands tangle into my hair, massaging and pulling as his tongue caresses mine over and over.

Luca doesn't stand there watching, he latches onto my neck, licking and nipping the sensitive skin.

A needy moan sounds in the room, and I barely realize it comes from me until Blaze chuckles. "Do you like this, pretty girl?"

My answer is a throaty, breathless, "Yes."

A look passes between Blaze and Luca, and the latter nods with a tight smile. "If this is what you want, who am I to deny you, *bella*?"

He kisses me again, hard, as Blaze's hands sneak under my jersey, feeling the weight of my tits, rubbing my already aching nipples through the lace of my bra.

My eyes are closed, and my head feels light like when I'm tipsy, but I haven't touched a drop of alcohol tonight. I'm drunk on feeling their hands on me, on their addictive mouths.

"What the fuck is going on?" Cash's voice reaches me from his spot in the middle of the room.

I stiffen when I meet his gaze and see the hurt in his eyes.

Luca breaks the kiss, turning to look at his teammate. "I have no fucking idea, but either come here and help us or fuck off."

There's a beat of silence, and the tension in the hotel room is so thick that you could cut it with the proverbial knife.

Cash advances, closing the distance between us in a few long strides. He mutters a string of curses before stopping in front of me. "Do you really want me to stay, baby?"

I nod, my teeth sinking into my bottom lip as I reach out for him. "Stay, Cash, please. And kiss me. I missed you."

He hesitates for a split second, but I see the moment he makes up his mind when determination darkens his stormy gray eyes. "I fucking missed you too."

If Luca's and Blaze's kisses lit a fire inside me, Cash's hot, confident lips stoke it to a raging inferno.

He slants his mouth over mine, his tongue skilled and daring as he explores me.

His huge hands roam my back through my jersey, going on an exploration of their own until they find my ass. He cups my buttocks, squeezing and kneading my flesh in a way that might have been painful if I wasn't so turned on.

His possessive, rough touch doesn't hurt though. It turns me into a heap of liquid heat.

All I can feel is raw need pulsing through me as my inner muscles contract with the need to be filled.

The feeling is so intense that it makes me forget everything that isn't them and the need to feel their solid bodies, their hands, and their mouths on me.

"Cash." I gasp as my hands roam the hard planes of his chest and stomach. "I want you, please—"

His lips quirk up in that sexy almost smile of his. "Fuck yeah, baby. Shall we kick these fuckers out and continue the party in your bedroom?"

I lower my gaze, worried that he's going to leave when I tell him how I feel. "I like you, Cash, but I like Luca and Blaze just as much."

I've said it before, but this time it seems to sink in. "Are you telling me that you want me to fuck you, but you also want these two to stay? You want all three of us to—"

"I do."

I don't know if they can even hear my words through the loud hammering of my heart.

I'm not ashamed that I want all three of them. I'm just scared that it's going to be too much for them.

I'm also nervous and terrified about my first time being as painful as Bay told me hers was.

Cash traps my chin between his fingers, forcing me to look into his serious gray eyes. “You want all three of us.” His tone is something between surprised and uncertain.

All I can do is nod.

“I must have gotten too many fucking concussions for even considering this, but what the heck,” he grumbles as he lets go of my chin and bends down.

I react with a surprised squeal when Cash hoists me onto his shoulder, lifting me up and walking toward the open door of the hotel suite’s bedroom.



Luca



BLAZE AND I LOOK AT each other for a second, and when I nod, we haul ass behind Cash and Lakyn.

Her toned ass looks spectacular in her tight black leggings as the hockey jersey rides up while she squirms on Cash’s shoulder.

I watch as Cash throws her on the California king-sized bed and covers her body with his, crawling over her.

He kisses her so hard that it looks almost savage, but Lakyn is definitely into it, at least judging by the way she grabs his practice jersey, dragging it up Cash’s torso.

I’m keeping a cool and collected demeanor on the outside, but inside? I’m a fucking mess.

I had a hunch that Blaze liked her. For as much as I kept telling myself that what I saw at the last Gamma party was just drunken party games, the chemistry between them was undeniable.

Seeing the possessive way Cash looks at her is more of a surprise, but I don’t know why I’m so blindsided by the fact that he likes Lakyn. He didn’t say anything about their date,

but that isn't much of a surprise, since Cash is one of the quietest guys on the team. In all fairness, none of us said anything to the others, and it never occurred to me to wonder how their dates with Lakyn actually went.

My feet are rooted to the ground as I can't take my eyes off of Cash and Lakyn on the bed.

He strips her jersey off her. "Fuck, baby, you're so beautiful," he says as he admires the pale pink lace of her bra.

I can't take my eyes off how the darker pink hue of her nipples is visible through the lace. Don't even get me started on the matching panties that come into view when Cash lowers her leggings on her hips.

He attacks her mouth again as his hands map Lakyn's soft, perfect skin.

This shouldn't turn me on as much as it does. I mean, fuck, I dig shit like this when I watch porn, but usually the girl I want doesn't star in those videos.

The thought that I should be pissed hits me when Cash's kisses leave Lakyn's mouth and travel down the column of her neck, all over her soft chest, and reach the creamy skin of her stomach. When Lakyn and I had planned to spend the night together, it never occurred to me that we wouldn't be alone.

"I promised you I would eat your pussy before I fucked it, and I always keep my promises, baby," Cash growls before burying his face between Lakyn's thighs.

My already hard cock stiffens to the point of becoming painful as I observe the way Cash licks and sucks on her clit through the lace of her panties.

Lakyn's fists grab the luxury comforter of the hotel's bed as she squirms under Cash's mouth.

The way her perfect tits heave with every breath she takes is so hot that I snap out of my trance-like state and advance toward the bed, taking off my shirt on the way there.

I'm going to analyze what this means for me and Lakyn tomorrow, because right now, I want in on this. She said she

likes all three of us, and for as much as I'd rather have her alone, I want her too much to let my jealousy dictate my actions.

I've had threesomes before, but I was always the only man in the mix. Having two more guys in the picture is going to be different, but right now there's nothing—not even two of my teammates—that could make me leave this room without feeling Lakyn's pussy coming all over my cock.

I bend down to whisper into her ear as I keep my eyes on the way Cash moves her panties to the side, latching his mouth onto the smooth, bare skin of her pussy. "You look so hot right now, *bella*," I say, making quick work of removing her bra. "The guys and I are going to make you come all night long. Right, Blaze?" I ask, lifting my gaze to encourage our enforcer to join us.

Blaze nods, coming to kneel on the bed on the other side of Lakyn. I hadn't noticed how our team's enforcer had lowered his sweatpants and was stroking himself as he watched Cash eating Lakyn out.

The gasp that escapes her lips when I close my mouth over one of her taut nipples goes straight to my cock, and I debate taking matters into my own hands like Blaze was just doing. I don't want to come too soon though, not before I've been inside my girl.

Lakyn cries out the second Blaze joins me, licking and sucking on her other nipple.

I know she's coming by the way her muscles tense, and I keep lapping at her, wishing I was tasting her right now.

I'm going to make sure I have my turn too though, and I'm not leaving this room until I've done that.

"That was so hot, baby. You taste incredible," Cash says as he wipes his mouth with his forearm. "Now that I've tasted your perfect little pussy, I'm going to take it, and the next time you come, it'll be on my cock."

He lowers his sweatpants with both hands, fisting his hard cock and stroking himself a couple of times as his eyes remain



fixed between Lakyn's legs. "Oh shit." He frowns all of a sudden, looking at me and Blaze. "I'm a fucking idiot. I didn't bring any rubbers. Do you guys have some?"

It's impossible to suppress the snort that erupts out of my mouth. "Are you for real, dude? One second ago, you looked ready to kick my and Blaze's asses for crashing 'your date,' and now you expect us to let you borrow a condom?"

Blaze lets out an amused chuckle too. "No, shit. Luca's right."

A muscle in Cash's jaw pops as he averts his gaze from us. "Yeah, I guess you guys are right. We can talk about our differences later. If one of you has some condoms, you'd do me a real solid by sharing."

This is kind of funny.

Cash is never rude, but this is one of the longest sentences I've heard him say. Actually, scratch that, earlier too. Maybe it's Lakyn's presence that makes him more talkative than normal?

"Sorry to disappoint, dude." I shrug. "I don't have any condoms."

He arches his eyebrows in disbelief. "Seriously? Are you telling me that you came here to *hang out* with Lakyn and didn't bring any protection?"

I can't help but smirk, elated that Lakyn and I planned to sleep together, but he doesn't seem to have had that conversation with her. "I'm telling you that we discussed it, and since I'm clean and she's on birth control, we decided we didn't need to worry about condoms." I'd be lying if I said that I don't feel a rush of satisfaction at Cash's and Blaze's expressions.

"Blaze?" Cash asks, ignoring my attempt at riling him up.

"Sorry, dude." Blaze sighs. "I'm afraid I also fucked up and didn't bring any myself, but I'm clean too, assuming Lakyn is comfortable with that."

Our girl nods her head, taking Blaze's hand into hers. "I am. I know you guys get tested, and I've never done this, so I'm definitely clean."

Blaze nods. "I get it, pretty girl. You've just come out of a long-term relationship, and I know you aren't like some of the puck bunnies who like to hang out with several of us in the same night. Not that I judge those girls—if guys can do it, so can they. You just didn't strike me as the type—"

She interrupts him. "True, but that isn't what I meant. I've never done any of this, as in I've never needed condoms because I've never had sex before."

The matching shocked expressions on my teammates' faces make me feel a little vindicated that I wasn't the only one who was surprised.

"What do you mean, you've never had sex before?" Cash is the first one to recover.

She explains the same thing she told me during our date. "I mean that before I went out on a date with you, the most I had ever done with a man was kissing. To be honest, even that didn't happen very often because my ex wasn't very affectionate, and he sucked at it."

"Holy shit," Cash says. "Are you telling me that I was—"

"The second guy I've ever kissed?" she finishes for him. "Yeah, that's exactly what I'm telling you, Cash."

He shakes his head, as if trying to make sense of what she just said. "I swear I had no idea. What I mean is that you're a great kisser, baby. I never would have guessed that you were so new at this."

She scoots closer to him, cupping his jaw as she looks into his eyes. "If I'm any good at it, it's thanks to you. I hated kissing my ex, but I love kissing you." She lets her eyes skim down Cash's body, stopping when she gets to his cock. "I was ready to have my first time with you after our date, if my sister hadn't walked in on us."

The tension in Cash's shoulders seems to ease at Lakyn's words. "Really?"

“Really.” She nods.

“What about me?” Blaze intervenes. “When we were in that changing room at the party, we almost—”

She turns to look at him. “You didn’t want to rush it, but I wanted you just as much as I wanted Cash.”

Lakyn gets closer to him, and fuck, the way she kisses him makes me hot and jealous at the same time.

Her hands are feeling their way down Blaze’s chest when he gasps, trying to move away from her touch.

“Are you okay, babe?”

Blaze takes her hand away from his lower chest, bringing her knuckles to his lips. “Yeah, nothing I haven’t dealt with before. I’m a little sore after the way Topher charged me. I hit those boards pretty hard.”

Lakyn’s eyes widen. “Are you sure your ribs aren’t broken? Now that I look at you, that side is all red. Maybe we should get you checked out.”

Blaze chuckles, lacing his fingers through hers. “I don’t think they are. I broke two ribs my senior year of high school, and believe me, the pain was a lot more than this. I iced it before coming here, and I’m sure I’ll get a bruise by morning. If I don’t feel better by tomorrow, I promise I’m going to get seen. There isn’t much they can do even if there was a fracture anyway, but right now, the only thing that can make me walk out of this room is if you tell me that you don’t want me here, Lake.”

She shakes her head, looking at me and Cash too. “No, I want you all here. This is what I’ve been trying to tell you since you all got here.”

I take her other hand. “*Bella*, do you really want this? I know we’ve been talking about making love, and I want nothing more than to be with you like that, but the other night you were worried about it being painful, and if that’s still the case, maybe we can still take care of you and—”

“No.” She cuts me off. “I’ve thought about it all week. I want this. With you and Cash and Blaze. I’m worried that it’s going to hurt, but I know you’ll do your best to be gentle.”



28.

## Teammates



Blaze



THIS IS FUCKING SURREAL.

Not only wouldn't I have pegged Luca for the considerate type, but the way he's looking at her and the genuine concern in his voice changes the way I've been feeling since the three of us set foot in this room.

I love to read reverse harem romance, and all the sexy scenes where the men share their girl are my favorite. I never thought I'd find myself in this kind of situation in real life though.

Not that I want to share Lakyn after tonight, but if she wants a wild night, then I'm game.

Especially because I'm pretty sure that when push comes to shove, I can make my girl feel one thousand times better than Cash and Luca.

We can all play with her tonight, but I'm going to be the one she's going to want in the end, I have no doubt. Lakyn and I have too much in common, and the chemistry between us is unreal, so it doesn't matter if I share her once.

Since this would be her first time, it's good for her to get other guys out of her system so she won't wonder what's out there when she's with me. She's going to know without the shadow of a doubt that I'm the one who can give her more pleasure.

What matters the most is that we make this good for her, and I'm going to make sure we do.

"Pretty girl," I murmur, caressing her jaw. "Luca, Cash, and I are going to make you feel good. We'll try to make it hurt as little as possible, I promise."

She nods, but I know she's nervous. She's looking at me the same way she was on our first date. "Okay."

I kiss her slowly and deeply, reining myself in to show her that I've got this.

Truth be told, I've never gone bare with anyone, and the idea of doing that with Lakyn has my heart pounding hard in my chest and my cock throbbing in anticipation.

This is about her though, and I want to show her that I can be fast and furious like when I ride my bike or I start a fight on the ice, but I can give her slow and sweet whenever she needs it.

I break the kiss, dragging Lakyn down with me against the pillows piled by the headboard.

She's so beautiful, cradled in my arms as I rain kisses all over her face, neck, and chest.

My eyes meet Luca's, and I don't need to say anything. He gives me a nod.

I shouldn't be surprised that he understood what I was trying to tell him without words. We might not have been teammates for very long, but our connection on the ice was instant. We always know where the other one is, and we can anticipate each other's moves even when we stray from what we've practiced during training.

It happens right now as he kisses his way down Lakyn's body until he gets to her lower stomach.

"Have I ever told you that you have the prettiest, most perfect pussy I've ever seen?" he croons.

Lakyn reacts by hiding her face in the crook of my neck, suddenly shy.

“Luca is right.” I coax her to look at me as I palm one of her tits, playing with her hard nipple.

Lakyn might be feeling out of her element right now, but her body is sending us all the signals that she’s enjoying our attention.

She’s put her trust in us to be her first, and there’s no way I’m going to let her down, even if that means stopping if she changes her mind.

“You’re beautiful, Lake. Perfect,” I say, lowering my head to swirl my tongue around her nipple.

“She also tastes so sweet,” Luca continues, licking a path on the smooth skin of her slit. He goes from entrance to clit. “Did you know that, Blaze?”

I nod with a chuckle, remembering how much I enjoyed kneeling in front of her during our seven minutes in heaven.

Luca repeats the movement with another slow, long lick.

The sight of him kissing her like that and the way Lakyn’s breathing hitches in her throat are so hot that I can’t resist the urge to bite her pebbled nipple.

I’m rewarded with a little, soft moan, and I could fucking spend all night doing this just to hear that sound.

Luca’s lips cover her clit, and he makes a humming sound before sucking noisily on her sensitive bundle of nerves.

My eyes track his every movement as he caresses the inside of her thighs at the same time until he gets to her entrance.

“Fuck, I love how wet you are for us, *bella*,” he praises her. “Wet, hot, and tight. Just perfect for us.”

He enters her with one finger, not moving for a few moments when she tenses up.

“Does my finger feel good inside you?” he asks her.

“Hmm.” She nods.



Luca withdraws slowly until he's halfway out, entering her again. He begins pumping slowly in and out of her.

I can feel the tension leaving Lakyn's body while her breathing speeds up a notch.

I kiss her lips, enjoying the way she's giving herself to Luca's exploration.

"Cash," Luca calls, looking at our goalie who's been standing on one side of the bed, watching intently, but he hasn't made a move to join in. "Come here, feel how wet she is for us."

There's a flash of hesitation in Cash's eyes, as if he's trying to decide what to do.

I'm very good at reading people. It's especially helpful on the ice when I'm trying to gauge someone's reaction to being punched or shoved. It totally comes with the territory as I avoid starting fights I can't win.

I see the moment he makes up his mind, his jaw set with determination as he comes back to the bed, settling on the other side of Lakyn.

Cash runs a finger over her slit, following the same path Luca's tongue had been on before. "So fucking soft and wet," he bites out.

"And you haven't felt inside her. Come see how much our sexy girl wants us."

Cash's gaze meets mine briefly, and I nod at him in encouragement.

I know what Luca is trying to do. He's slowly trying to stretch Lakyn, getting her used to a couple of fingers before we replace them with our cocks.

That's a good strategy. I have to give it to our prince.

"How does that feel, *bella*?" he asks once Cash's finger is inside her too. "Does it hurt?"

Lakyn shakes her head. "No, but I feel very full."

Luca smiles. “What about now?” He resumes pumping his finger in and out of her, adding a small twisting movement.

Cash doesn’t need any encouragement to do the same this time, and the guys work together for a few moments.

I watch with rapt fascination, taking Lakyn into my arms when she starts moaning and writhing.

My lips glide down one side of her neck, delivering slow, soft kisses, but my eyes are fixed on Luca’s and Cash’s fingers coming in and out of her perfect pussy.

Her breathing grows more and more labored with every passing second, and it’s one of the hottest things I’ve ever seen.

“Blaze.”

I know what Luca wants without him even saying it. Our communication is so good, you’d seriously think we’ve been doing this for years.

I keep my mouth on Lakyn’s neck as I reach down to find her clit, pressing on it and stroking to add sensation to what the guys are doing.

Luca adds another finger, so there are three inside her now.

Her body tenses for the briefest moment, but she relaxes again when I pinch her clit between my fingers, rubbing slowly.

That must be what tips her over the edge.

I wear it as a badge of honor, happy I was the one who made her come apart. It’s a great feeling, and it helps soothe the slight jealousy toward Cash and Luca who are getting to feel the way her pussy is pulsing around their fingers.

My time will come though, quite literally.



Lakyn



I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY fingers Cash and Luca have inside me, but it doesn't matter.

My orgasm hits with the violence of a tidal wave, and it's wild and intense.

"Let go, pretty girl, come for us." Blaze's soft whisper encourages me, and there's no way I could hold back.

The sensation is overwhelming with their fingers inside me. It doesn't exactly hurt, but my body is stretching to accommodate their invasion, and my inner walls begin fluttering like crazy when Blaze adds his touch where I need it most.

I cry out, surrounded by their hot touches, their deep voices, and their soft lips.

Once the pleasure starts ebbing away, it hits me that I feel safe.

When Blaze's lips find mine, I attack his mouth with a need that surprises me considering I just had two orgasms in the space of a few minutes.

My body is still tingling with the aftershocks of the one they just gave me, but I want—no, I *need* more.

I look at Cash and Luca, kneeling between my legs with their perfect, sculpted bodies and their big, hard cocks.

I can feel Blaze's steely erection rubbing against one of my buttocks as I'm nestled in his arms.

"I want you guys," I say, staring at Cash and Luca and reaching to the side to stroke Blaze's hard shaft. "Please."

"*Bella*," Luca says softly, coming to place a hot kiss on my lips. "I'm sure I'm not the only one who's dying to fuck you right now. I know you and I have been talking about doing this, but if you want Cash or Blaze to be your first, I can wait."

His words shock me. It's the last thing I would have ever expected Luca to say. "Really?" I ask.

He shakes his blond head, that defiant lock of hair falling into his eyes, begging for me to brush it away. “No, not really.” He chuckles, but the mirth is gone very quickly as his blue eyes darken when I reach out to move his hair away from his face. “I want you so fucking much, and I fucking want you first. What I want even more is for your first time to be perfect, so if you want one of these two idiots to be your first, I’m going to live with it and wait for my turn like a good boy, but this is a one-time offer. After tonight, I’m not going to roll out a fucking red carpet for them. I’m going to fight them for you the same way I’m going to fight our opponents for the championship.”

If those words came from anyone else, I’d probably be offended, but I know that for Luca, Blaze, and Cash, very few things are more important than hockey.

“I don’t know, Luca,” I admit. “That’s why I asked you all to come here. I like all three of you, and I can’t choose.”

“Fine,” he bites out. “Then I want to be your first.”

Cash is the first one to react. “I fucking want to be your first too, but without protection, I can’t.”

It isn’t the reaction I was expecting from him. “I—why?”

“Baby,” he says, cupping my jaw. “I’m clean, and I know you are too. I just—whatever birth control you’re on, I know that nothing is one hundred percent. Using a condom would get us as close as possible to that. It’s not that I don’t trust you, it’s just that I can’t risk having a baby until I know I can provide for him or her. I’m not going to be in that position until I either get drafted or get my degree. I hope you understand.”

Maybe his words should hurt. The way he’s looking at me and the honesty in his tone tell me that this is about him, not me. He’s standing up for what’s important to him, he isn’t rejecting me because he doesn’t trust me.

It still stings a little bit, but I understand. “Okay.” I nod.

Cash looks troubled as he utters his next words. “Do you want me to leave?”

I don't. "Please stay. We can—remember you were talking about fucking my mouth or tits?"

The corners of his lips curl up in that barely there smile I find so sexy. "How the fuck could I ever forget that?"

I've been thinking about that too. "Maybe we can do that?"

Cash gives me a hot, lingering kiss that causes the other two men to groan. "I'd love to fuck your tits or mouth," he says, his forehead touching mine after he breaks the kiss. "But next time you and I are together, I'm bringing a whole box of condoms."

I nod, reassured by his promise that there's going to be a next time. "Deal."

"That doesn't solve our problem though, *bella*," Luca says.

"We have no problem," Blaze intervenes. "I really want to fuck Lakyn's perfect little pussy, but I don't want to go first."

I turn in his arms to look at him, but he begins shaking his head.

"No, no, pretty girl. Before you think something ridiculous like I don't want you, let me explain. I've never been anyone's first time, and believe me, while the idea of being your first turns me the fuck on... I just realized that I'm too worried about hurting you. So if it's true that you can't choose, I'd rather be your second, but I'm dying to feel you come all over my cock. I would love to hold you in my arms while Luca fucks you though, if it's okay with everyone."

Blaze never ceases to surprise me. His job on the ice is literally to start fights and make people hurt—even if it's under the guise of protecting his teammates. It's crazy that he's worried about hurting me. "Okay," I say, turning to look into Luca's blue eyes.

He doesn't say anything as he crawls between my legs, slanting his mouth to mine in a deep, possessive kiss.



Luca



*THANK FUCK.*

This is my first thought when Blaze says that he's worried about hurting her.

It's not that I'm not, I'm terrified that I might fuck this up, but at the same time, I've come to care about Lakyn faster than I ever thought possible.

I like her more every time I talk to her, every time we see each other, so I'm fucking glad Cash and Blaze aren't fighting me on this, because the only way I would have accepted not to be her first is if she chose one of them instead of me. She's so beautiful in Blaze's arms, her blue eyes fixed on me. I can't wait one more second to make her mine.

My lips travel down her neck.

I leave a trail of open-mouthed kisses, encouraged by her soft moans. I know she loves being kissed on her neck and shoulders, and I shower her skin with attention, sucking and grazing on her most sensitive spots.

I know I'm leaving marks on her creamy skin, and I love that. I love the idea that she's going to think about me when she looks at herself in the mirror tomorrow morning.

Blaze cups her tits, toying with her nipples, while Cash lowers his head to kiss her lips, swallowing her moans and gasps.

I'm dying to taste her again, but the urge to take her, to be inside her, is too strong to resist, and I settle between her thighs.

I had never anticipated that our first time—or any time really—Lakyn and I wouldn't be alone.

I know Lakyn is worried about this being painful, like she was on the beach on our first date, so I'm kind of grateful for

Blaze's and Cash's presence. Their kisses and touches are helping her relax.

Like that first night on the beach, I drag my hard shaft over her slit, making sure to tease her clit with the piercing under my crown.

It feels amazing for both of us, and my body is taut with tension, with the effort of not blowing my load before I'm even inside her.

The truth is that I'm nervous too. I'm worried about hurting her and excited because I like this girl more than I've ever liked anyone before. Just the idea of feeling her wet heat without any barriers between us is enough to bring me a little closer to the edge.

I rub myself against her soft skin over and over until she arches her back, already close to the edge.

Blaze is still massaging her tits, but Cash stops kissing her, his eyes intent on the way she lifts her hips in a silent offering.

I shift the angle, aligning myself with her entrance. "You're so wet for me, *bella*," I murmur as I start driving the tip of my cock inside her.

She's incredibly tight, and I'm careful as I surge forward, fighting the instinct to slam into her.

Her body tenses up at the feeling of my invasion, but I stay the course, keeping my eyes on hers. "That's it, Lakyn," I murmur once I'm buried inside her to the hilt. "How are you doing, *dolcezza*?"

I don't dare move a muscle until she exhales. "It hurt but only a little bit. I feel so full. Way more than with your fingers."

I smile, relieved that I didn't hurt her too much, and I'm also a little pleased that I'm way thicker than three fingers. What can I say? It's well known that hockey players are obsessed with their sticks, and that isn't just on the ice.

"I'm going to start moving. Are you ready?" I grab her hips, pulling her closer as I rear back slowly until I'm half out.

Pleasure warms the base of my spine when I push back inside her. “Fuck, you feel so good,” I grind out, totally unprepared for the sensation of being skin to skin with her.

I repeat the movement a couple of times, careful to control my pace and going as slow and gentle as possible.

Then it happens.

Her body finally accepts me, opening up to me as the tension seeps out of her, and I sink in deeper and deeper with every slow thrust.

I pick up the pace just slightly, giving her every inch over and over. I try changing the angle, mesmerized by the different textures inside her. That kind of feeling is totally lost with a condom, but like this, I can feel everything—from her slick, warm wetness to a little bumpy spongy spot on the front of her top wall.

It feels amazing to me when I touch it, and by the way she moans and bucks her hips into my movements, I know she likes it too.

I concentrate on that, hitting that sweet spot again and again.

I’m rewarded with a new gush of wetness, and the sensation of warmth while her inner walls pulse around me is enough to send me right to the edge.

“Luca,” she moans.

“You feel so fucking good.” I’m so close to snapping as my cock throbs inside her and my balls tingle.

There’s a pleasant numbness at the base of my spine, and I know I’ve lost my battle.

“I’m going to come,” I bite out as my movements grow more uncoordinated. “Can you come with me, *bella*?”

She bites her bottom lip in that way that drives me crazy. “I’m close, so close. I—”

“We’ve got you, pretty girl,” Blaze whispers, his eyes fixed where my and Lakyn’s bodies are joined. “Cash, help



me.”

He finds her clit, pressing on it and stroking a couple of fast, tight circles on it while Cash concentrates on her tits, kissing and sucking her nipples.

I’m barely keeping my shit together between the incredible feeling of Lakyn’s body and the sight of what my teammates are doing to her.

Conflicting emotions war within my chest as their intervention pushes Lakyn over the edge. It’s hot but also makes me jealous.

I don’t have time to dwell on it, though, because when her orgasm hits, there’s no way in hell I can hold mine any longer.

Her pussy clenches around me, squeezing my cock into a mind-blowing, tight embrace that’s my undoing.

I still, pushing inside her as far as I can go as a hot wave of pleasure gushes out of me, followed by another one.

My cock pulses in perfect sync with her, until I’m breathless.

I lean on her, careful not to crush her, seeking her lips. “That was—are you okay?”

Lakyn’s smile warms my heart in a dangerous way, and I withdraw slowly, careful in case she feels tender.

“I’m more than okay, Luca. That felt so good.”

It felt better than good. Sex has never felt this way before.

“That was hot, pretty girl,” Blaze admits. “So fucking hot that I could have come just from looking at you.”

Her smile widens. “I want you to come too, Blaze. Are you going to fuck me?”

It’s impossible not to recognize the heat in my teammate’s gaze. He wants her just as much as I do.

“I’m dying to fuck you, Lake,” he says. “But I can wait for another time if you’re too sore.”

I've liked Blaze from the beginning because of his easygoing attitude and his hard work on the ice, but my respect for him grows tenfold for putting Lakyn's needs before his own.

"I'm sore, but it's a good kind of sore. Just be gentle, like Luca was, please?"

Blaze chuckles. "I can try, but I'm fucking worried it's going to be too much. I don't want to lose control."

No one can understand Blaze more than I can. I was in his shoes a few moments ago.

I don't even think about it when I come to his aid. "We can make sure Lakyn has control. Do you trust me, *bella*?"

She nods, and I band my arms around her waist, lifting and turning her so that she's facing Blaze, her thighs straddling his hips.

"If you're on top, you can control how deep and hard you go."

"Hmm." She nods. "Let's try this."

I watch, ready to steady her if she loses her balance as she hovers over Blaze's erection.

My eyes are fixed on the way his cock disappears inside her, inch by inch.

"Holy fucking shit," Blaze bites out when he's fully sheathed inside her. "I—fuck."

I nod. "I know, she feels perfect."

My teammate closes his eyes for a second. "So fucking perfect."



Lakyn



BLAZE IS BIG.

He isn't as long as Luca and Cash, but he beats both of them when it comes to girth.

I'm glad I can control how deep he goes in this position, because I feel incredibly full.

The feeling of Blaze's huge hands on my hips as he keeps me steady when I start moving adds to the warm feeling that's spreading in my chest.

My entire life, I've heard people talk about sex in different ways. From the way my ex considered it a sin if out of wedlock, to the way Bay and her friends compared their experiences.

One thing I never thought about when I imagined my first time was how close I'd feel to the guys.

Not just the obvious physical closeness, but it's the way they look at me, the way they hold me, and how they worry about making this good for me.

The way Blaze is looking at me, as if I were the most beautiful thing he's ever seen, makes me feel powerful and sexy and daring.

Luca's lips kissing down the back of my neck and spine only add to the feeling.

"Damn, Lakyn." Blaze grunts. "Your tits look incredible from here. I love the way they bounce when you grind on my cock."

Cash intervenes. "It's true. You look so fucking hot, baby."

"I don't just look hot." I smile. "I feel hot. This feels so good."

I lift my hips in what I decided is my favorite move that makes the entire length of Blaze's hard shaft drag over my clit when I sink back down.

My inner muscles begin to contract as I repeat that movement a few times. "I think—I think I could come like this."

“Fuck yeah,” Blaze says, tightening his hold on my hips. “I want to come with you.”

His green eyes are smoldering with heat, heat I put there. It’s a heady feeling that these three hot, elite athletes are as turned on by me as I am by them.

They are so different from one another, and yet each of them is perfect in his own way.

I turn to look at Cash. His eyes are fixed where Blaze and I are joined, and he’s stroking himself but isn’t touching me.

I’d be lying if I said that I’m not a little disappointed that he doesn’t want to be with me unless we have condoms. I don’t know if it’s just fear of a birth control failure or if he just doesn’t want to be with me if Luca and Blaze are part of the deal.

Our initial connection was powerful, and I know that this slightly distant guy isn’t the real Cash. He showed me his caring side, and he sounded so excited about hanging out tonight until he saw his teammates.

I hope the three of them are okay to give me time to figure out what I want, even though I can’t breathe at the thought of losing two of them.

All I know is that none of them left tonight. They are all here with me, and I want Cash to feel included. I want him just as much as I want Blaze and Luca.

“Cash.” I beckon him closer. “Come here. I know we don’t have any condoms, but I want to taste you.”

The uncertainty in his gray eyes makes me feel vulnerable, but he scoots closer, cupping my jaw.

“Baby, are you sure? I’m dying to feel your mouth wrapped around my cock, but I don’t want you to do anything unless you really want to.”

I look at his impressive dick. It’s thick, long, and with a few raised veins on the shaft that make me want to run my tongue over them. The thought hits me that he definitely isn’t the owner of the dick in that dick pic I got.

I'm excited and nervous at the same time as Cash finally closes the distance between us. I've never done anything like this before, but I've heard Bay's stories about going down on her high school boyfriend too many times not to feel like I've been missing out.

"I'm sure, Cash." I take his hand away from my face, kissing his knuckles. "I'm totally new at this though, so you have to tell me what to do."

Cash's gray eyes darken, his voice thick with lust as he stands on the mattress, so his hips are at the right height. "I'm going to show you how I like to get head another time. Right now, I'm going to fuck your pretty little mouth, baby. All you have to do is be careful with your teeth. You'll just have to tell me if it's too much and you want me to stop."

I nod, licking my lips and opening my mouth for him.

"Fuck." Blaze groans. "Cash, our pretty girl is very excited about you fucking her mouth. She just got even wetter than she was before, she feels fucking amazing."

When the head of Cash's cock enters my mouth, I swirl my tongue around it the way Bay said every guy loves.

I taste a hint of saltiness on the tip, and I add a little suction as I relax my jaw.

Cash withdraws a little, going a little deeper into my mouth when he surges back in.

I love the way he feels against my tongue. His skin is soft and velvety in contrast with the hardness of his shaft.

"Fuck, I love your mouth," he growls, gathering my long hair on top of my head and using it to guide me along his entire length.

Nothing could have prepared me for how exquisite this feels—the sensation of him on my tongue and throat, his gray gaze intent on me, and the pleasurable tingle caused by the slight pull on my hair as he fucks in and out of my mouth.

My body feels like a live wire, hot pleasure coursing through every nerve ending as Cash's movements rock me into

Blaze.

A wave of heat begins mounting and building into something fierce and powerful with every thrust of my two men.

I'm getting closer and closer to another orgasm when I feel Luca's soft lips on my ear. "You look so hot, *bella*, so perfect. I love the thought that Blaze is pushing my cum deeper inside you every time he fucks into you, but some is starting to spill out, and there's something I've been dying to do."

I'd ask him what it is, but you know, my mouth is pretty full right now.

I feel Luca's fingers behind me as he gathers some of the wetness that was starting to coat my inner thighs.

"Relax, I promise I'm not going to hurt you, but I want my cum in your ass."

He spreads that wetness between my butt cheeks, circling around the tight ring of muscle there until it's slippery enough for his finger to enter me.

Luca doesn't move, he just keeps his finger there as his lips place soft kisses down my spine.

That feeling of extreme fullness is my undoing. I cry out around Cash's cock as the first wave of bliss takes me under with unexpected violence.

My muscles pulse as intense pleasure spreads everywhere in my body.

"Fuck, this feels too good. I'm going to come too." Blaze pulses inside me, filling me with the warmth of his release.

"Dammit, this is so hot." Cash's strangled grunt comes a few seconds before he explodes in my mouth.

I lick and suck every last drop he gives me. I miss the feeling of his hands in my hair when he releases me, kneeling next to me and helping me off Blaze's body.

"Come here, baby." He takes me into his arms, guiding my head to his sculpted, hard chest.

My body is still tingling with pleasure, but my eyes are closing after a long day on the road and an even longer night.

“That was fucking amazing, but we’re all sweaty. Do you want me to run you a bath or help you shower?”

I shake my head, yawning against his chest. “I’m so sleepy,”

Cash chuckles. “Okay, baby. Luca, can you go get a cloth and wet it under the faucet? Warm but not too hot, please.”

I’m vaguely aware of being placed against the pillows and of something warm and wet wiping between my legs.

Strong arms surround me as my head rests on a hard chest, and a different set of arms circles my waist while someone smooths my hair in a soothing manner.

I succumb to a sound sleep, surrounded by Cash’s clean cotton scent, Blaze’s fresh citrus, and Luca’s luxurious fragrance.

I feel safe and pleasantly sated.





## 29.

# The Bet

Cash



OUR ALARMS GO OFF EARLY.

The team bus back to Star Cove is leaving soon, and Coach Harrison runs a tight ship, so it's mandatory to ride with the team, even on the way back from an away game.

Lakyn stirs as I disentangle myself from the warmth of her arms, mumbling something in her sleep.

She's beautiful with her blonde hair fanned on her pillow as she pulls the covers up, wrapping herself in the sheets like a cute burrito.

I walk toward the suite's bathroom as Blaze goes to shower in his original room and Luca, already dressed, bends down to scribble something on the hotel's monogrammed notepad on one of the nightstands.

"I'm going to leave her a note," he explains as I peek at it over his shoulder. "I don't want her to think we just sneaked out after last night, and if we text her now, we'll wake her."

I nod. Good thinking.

The note reads:

*Good morning bella,*

*Sorry for not being here to give you a kiss to start your day, but the team bus is leaving soon, and the guys and I have to go. Coach isn't a fan of tardiness, and after yesterday's game, I bet he isn't in the best of moods.*

*You can sleep in as late as you want. I made sure to get a late checkout when I upgraded your room, and Luigi is on standby whenever you and Bay are ready to go back. I put his*

*number in your phone, so just shoot him a text when you want to leave.*

*Let me know when you get back safely to your place. I'm going to call you later.*

*XO*

*Luca*

I'm pretty impressed. Luca is far from the entitled brat the press describes him as every time they run an article about him. He works harder than any of us on the ice, and he's always available to offer his help to any teammates or brothers who might need it.

The team bus is quiet, the lights are dimmed, and most of my teammates are either sleeping or have their earbuds in.

I'm glad no one wants to rehash what happened last night during the game, and I have to wonder how their night out went, since Topher joined the group that was going out.

Talking about our frat president, he's sitting toward the front, leaning against the window. There's an empty seat next to him, and several of the guys look at it but walk past it as they board.

I've never had a problem with Topher until very recently. We aren't best friends, but I thought there was mutual respect between us. His recent actions are making me doubt that Topher has much respect for anyone else.

I find an open seat in the back, and I'm glad when neither Blaze nor Luca come to sit next to me.

I'm still trying to come to terms with what happened last night. If I hadn't woken up next to Lakyn in that hotel suite, I would have thought I had a hot but really fucked up dream.

I don't know about Blaze and Luca, but I had never been naked with another dude unless it was in the locker room.

What happened was undoubtedly hot but kind of surreal, and I'm still struggling to wrap my head around the fact that Lakyn likes all three of us.

I take my phone out, thinking about texting her, but it's barely six thirty, so I decide to wait until later and let her sleep.

Sleep is exactly what I do too, and I don't wake up until the bus pulls in front of the ice rink building.

I think it's a little odd, since the bus usually stops at the Gamma house because most of us are brothers and live there.

The mystery is revealed when Coach stands at the front of the bus. "Good morning, gentlemen. I know your old coach used to give you the day off after an away game. I was on the fence about that to begin with, but after the performance you offered last night, I'm more than convinced that you need to spend more time building team spirit. So get your bags and let's go practice. I think a scrimmage would be a good way to begin your weekend, don't you?"

He grins at his own rhetorical question as many of my teammates groan as they wake up, but no one dares argue with Coach Harrison.

"Go put on your gear, and I'll see you on the ice in ten," Coach says, stepping out of the bus without looking back at us.

I make quick work of changing into my training uniform, grabbing my phone to text Lakyn. I don't want her to wake up and think I just walked out of that room without a word.

***Me:** Good morning, baby. We're back on campus, and Coach sprung a surprise practice on us. I can't stop thinking about you, and I'm already missing you. I'm going to call you later. I would like to make plans to have our second date. Last night was hot, but I want to spend some time together, just the two of us. If you're free tonight, I'd like to take you to dinner. Talk later. Kiss emoji.*

I place the phone in my locker, and I'm about to close the door when Topher hollers, "Yo, Cash! Are you fucking ready or not? Coach said ten minutes, you know he doesn't like to wait."

I grit my teeth, irritated by his tone. He's acting like he didn't behave like a complete dipshit last night.

“Who made you team captain, huh, Toph?” Cole snaps, glaring at him. “We’re all grown-ass men here, and we don’t need you to tell us what to do and when, especially since I bet this extra practice is punishment for the little stunt you pulled during last night’s game.”

Topher’s smirk is full of malice. He and Cole have been clashing since our frat president started dating Bay freshman year. “I might be out of the running for captain, but I’m still your frat president, and since Cash is one of Coach’s candidates, I’m making sure he understands the importance of on time performance.” He turns his arrogant smile my way. “Who are you texting anyway? Did you find a puck bunny to warm your bed last night? Is that why you didn’t come out with the rest of us?”

I usually ignore him when he’s being an asshole—which lately is most of the time—but the last few weeks, between family problems, the new season, and meeting Lakyn, I’m a little on edge. My patience is at an all-time low and Topher’s chiding tone is the last straw. “Cole is right, mind your own fucking business, Topher. I was just texting my girl to let her know that I’m stuck here for who knows how long in case she comes back from LA before we’re done.”

My answer attracts Luca and Blaze’s attention. “Is Lakyn awake? I haven’t heard from her yet,” the first says.

“Me neither,” Blaze chimes in. “I just texted her to ask her out tonight.”

“You’re too late,” I snap at Blaze. “I already asked her.”

Luca barks out a laugh, but the smile doesn’t reach his eyes. “Fuck, you two need to back off. I was planning to surprise her with her favorite takeout and another classic movie.”

I clench my fists.

This is why I was so fucking hesitant to get involved in last night’s craziness. “Well fuck, I don’t care what the two of you were planning,” I bite out. “I already asked her, and I was the first one to go out with her, so I get dibs.”

I know it's not my finest moment, but at the risk of sounding like an asshole, I don't want them to get ideas about Lakyn. I want to keep seeing her and hopefully ask her to become exclusive.

Luca is the first one to react. "What are you, twelve? I don't give a fuck about who took her out first. I like her. I like her a lot, and I'm going to keep pursuing her unless she tells me she isn't interested."

Blaze crosses his arms over his chest. "Me too. Exactly what Luca just said."

Nope. That won't fucking do, and I don't have a problem letting them know that last night was a moment of insanity, and I have no intention of sharing Lakyn with them.

The words die in my mouth, though, when I realize that we have an audience. All our teammates are watching our exchange like you watch a tennis match. "Whatever. Let's go to practice, and we'll talk about this later." I have no intention to talk other than to repeat that they need to find their own girls to date, because Lakyn is mine.

"Actually," Topher intervenes with a smile that promises nothing good. "Let's talk about this right now. I know you've all taken Lakyn out on the dates Bay bought at the charity auction. Are you fucking telling me that you all want to keep seeing her?"

We might disagree on who gets to date Lakyn, but when it comes to Topher, it seems like we're all on the same page.

"Butt out, Topher," Blaze says with a menacing scowl. "This doesn't concern you."

I'm not surprised when Topher shakes his head. "Oh, but I think it actually might. Lakyn is my girlfriend's twin sister, and that practically makes her family."

"Really?" Blaze snorts. "I don't think she sees it that way, dude. She told you not to call her Lake in front of half the school."

Topher flips him off. "Fuck you, Blaze. Lakyn and I have a special relationship. We like to banter. But this is really

interesting. So you all asked her out on second dates, and she said yes to all of you?”

Luca nods, his tone cautious. “Yeah, but I agree with Blaze. I don’t see what that has to do with you.”

Topher’s smile widens. “Well, well. I always say it’s the little Virgin Mary types who are always the biggest sluts. Who would have thought that little goody-two-shoes Lakyn would turn out to be a dirty puck bunny?”

I take a step toward him, using the height difference between us to intimidate him. “Don’t call her that.”

He ignores me, looking at the rest for our teammates. “This gives me an idea, guys. These three are all up for captain, and they are all after the same girl. It’s up to us to choose a captain, but we could make things more interesting. I think the first one of you to nail little Lakyn Woods should become the next Cove Knights captain. What do you think guys?”

Luca, Blaze, and I react the same way.

“Fuck you, Topher! We aren’t going to play your disgusting games.”

Our frat president laughs, not intimidated by our reaction. “I don’t think this is up to you. Our fraternity has a long history of challenges, and this is too much fun not to do it. Who’s with me?”

Over half of our teammates side with Topher. It’s mostly the freshmen, the pledges, and a couple of the seniors who hate riding the benches in favor of a starting line made up entirely of juniors.

Luca confronts him. “That’s bullshit. We don’t have to play your stupid game.”

Topher snorts. “You keep acting like you have a say. The majority of the team has spoken. The one who gets Lakyn’s precious V-card will have proven he’s worthy of leading the team, so I suggest you hurry up. You have until Coach’s deadline to get in her pants, Prince. Let’s see if your playboy reputation is well deserved or just a fabrication of the media.”

Luca's Italian temper flares up. "You think you know everything, don't you, asshole? Our problem is that Lakyn likes all three of us, and she doesn't know whom to choose, even after sleeping with us—"

I shake my head for him to shut the fuck up, but it's too late. Topher heard him loud and clear.

"Ha. Are you serious? You all fucked her? Damn, I must admit that I'm pleasantly surprised by Lakyn. I thought she was a boring, frigid nerd, but maybe I chose the wrong sister if she's already fucked all three of you. This makes things even more interesting. You sampled the goods, and you obviously want to go back for seconds. To become team captain, all you have to do is make sure Lakyn chooses you."

**Are Cash, Blaze and Luca up to the challenge?**

**Will Lakyn agree to be their trophy?**

**Who will be the Cove Knights captain?**

**Find out in the final book of the first duet of the series:**

**Preorder now:**

**[The Trophy](#)**

**\* the release date on Amazon is simply a placeholder.  
The Trophy will release in the first half of 2024.**

If you enjoyed The Auction, you might enjoy more RH sports romance by Melissa Adams.

**The Heartbreakers series is completed and set in Star Cove.**

**Here's a little sample:**

**[The Heartbreakers](#)**

**[Her Devils](#)**

**[Their Angel](#)**





# The Heartbreakers

## 1.

### No Peace In Hell

Peyton



“PEYTON, PEYTON! DO you think you have a shot at the World Championship this year? Is it true that *Wild Horse Energy Drinks* chose to sponsor the Cove Angels because of your reckless lifestyle?”

The paps are right up my ass, mere yards away from where I just landed.

Motherfuckers!

I unclip my parachute without bothering packing it back up and storm off.

“Peyton, Peyton!”

Those fuckers don’t give up and I’m not in the mood, so I quicken my pace and flip them off before disappearing back inside the hangar and into our divers staff area without looking back.

I begin unzipping my wingsuit as soon as I enter our private locker room.

“Hey, dude!” Channing smirks at me, loosening his grip on the hair of the brunette who’s bobbing up and down between his thighs.

He doesn’t look bothered by my intrusion and I shake my head. Typical Channing.

“Have you seen my dad?” I ask him, annoyed by the fact that we have an audience here too. I swear to fucking God, today no one leaves me the fuck alone. “He knows I hate

having any type of audience around unless it's an official diving day."

Channing's gaze glazes over, his lids growing heavier as the girl picks up speed, moaning loudly around his cock.

I roll my eyes, chuckling at how skewed my best friend's priorities are. I begin taking off the wingsuit and think that I wish my passion was football or surfing or fucking drag racing, anything but skydiving or BASE jumping; anything where I didn't have to compete with Darrius Penn.

I've just fastened the button of my shorts when a grunt coming from Channing's direction tells me that he's done with ... what's her name? For the fucking life of me, I can't remember. Britney or Bethany or something with a B, I think.

"Hey Peyton." She smiles, licking her lips and not looking in a hurry to fix her tank top that's bunched up around her thin waist. "You look tense. Maybe I can help?"

I think her name is Brooke, I'm almost sure. "Thanks B." I smile, opting for the safest option here. "I'm tired today and I need to have a word with Channing, if you don't mind?"

I wrap one arm around her shoulders, walking her to the locker room door.

"Sure, I understand. I can wait outside if you guys want to hang out later?"

Ah, yeah, no. We've been hanging out with Briana, I'm pretty sure that's her name, for the best part of a week now. I fucked her once or twice, and the fact that I can't remember her name tells me all I need to know about the idea of keeping her around.

"We have a few things to talk about, babe." I smile, opening the door and ushering her out. "I don't know how long we're going to be and I have too much respect for your time to keep you waiting. We'll call you later, ok?"

She smiles. "Aww, Peyton! You're such a sweetheart!"

I take a step back when she tries to kiss me. I mean, I've fucked my fair share of girls not only with Channing and

Jameson in the room, but *with* them. Sometimes we like to take turns, sometimes we tag team, whatever we're in the mood for, so I'm more than comfortable with them; but the fact that it doesn't bother me seeing them naked, doesn't mean that I'm attracted to them. I wouldn't even notice if she were trying to kiss me after blowing me, but tasting my friends' cum is where I draw a definite line. Thanks but no thanks.

I sit on the bench opposite Channing, who's tucked himself back in in the meantime.

"Hey, thanks man." He smiles. "I didn't really know how to get rid of Brielle."

Ah, Brielle. I knew it started with a B; Briana was close enough, I guess.

Channing continues. "I mean, when she offered me to blow me, I declined and she started crying, so I didn't know what to do."

I shake my head. "You're fucking welcome. That's why I keep telling you and J that a one night only policy is the best option. If they're gone before breakfast, they don't get strange ideas, right?"

He shrugs. "I guess."

Channing is too fucking nice, I swear to God. "Dude." I sigh. "This is where you go wrong. I mean, if you like a girl enough to keep her around, be my fucking guest; but if not, the sooner you send them on their way, the less awkward the goodbye. It's not like we promise them anything more than a good time, right?"

Channing nods but I know way too well that he can be a pushover; all it takes are a couple of tears from anyone who owns a pussy and he panics.

"So, did you see my dad?" I ask him now that his blood has migrated away from his little head and back to his big one.

"He had a couple of meetings with possible sponsors. He took J with him. They've been gone a while, so they should be back soon."

As if summoned by Channing's words, the locker room door opens and my father steps inside with Jameson in tow.

They're both in their best suits and under normal circumstances, I wouldn't miss this opportunity to rib J for being a pretty boy, but the scowl on Dad's face stops me in my tracks.

"How many times do I have to tell you guys that beyond the front office is authorized staff only?"

I level a hard stare on a sheepish looking Channing but Dad isn't an idiot. "I don't give a fuck who between you two was fucking her. But we bumped into your flavor of the week as she was leaving and she didn't miss the opportunity to get noticed and tried to stick to J."

Jameson nods, wiping some red lipstick off his face with the back of his hand. "Yeah, I thought I took her home last night?"

Channing shrugs. "You did, but then she showed up here and I didn't know what to do. I couldn't be rude, right?"

Right. And in Channing's opinion, not being rude means sticking his cock in her mouth. Fucking typical.

I'm about to crack a joke about it but Dad shakes his head and by the way he's grinding his jaw, I know he's pissed.

The meeting with prospective sponsors must've not gone like he hoped.

"That bad?" I ask.

"I have a few leads and a plan B that's ambitious but might work if everything else fails. I just need one thing from you guys," he says, with a tired sigh.

"We'll win the next events and this year we'll go to Nationals as State Champions." I promise.

Dad levels me with a hard stare. "I appreciate your drive and your motivation, Peyton; but you know better than me that diving at the level we want is fucking expensive. *Wild Horse's* money would've been a huge help. Especially if we want to beat the Angels and now, instead, they have that sponsor."

I feel fury mounting again. Always the damn Angels, always in our fucking way! “We can beat those losers this year,” I declare. “Especially with the mods I’m planning on our wingsuits.”

Dad sighs. “Can you even hear yourself, son?”

His tone rubs me the wrong way and I struggle to keep my irritation at bay. “Why, you don’t believe we have the skills? We’ve been training hard. And you know I have the technical knowledge to design cutting edge wingsuits, I—”

“Wingsuits cost money, Peyton. And they need to be tested, and that costs even more money if you want to do it in safety. I have no doubt about your skills. And the Devils’ skills. But last year the Cove Angels won State and then Nationals. That, with their legacy, means that their pockets are full. *Wild Horse* going with them is a huge blow for our team’s finances.”

I run a hand through my hair, now feeling positively furious. “Well they fucking bet on the wrong horses! Mark my words, I’ll fucking wipe the tarmac with Darrius Penn’s ass all summer. Like the French team did with him at Worlds. And then the sponsors will line up at our doors.”

I’m not being an arrogant asshole, I swear. That’s mostly Darrius Penn’s job. He wins because he joined the best team in the country and it’s his fault that years ago I wasn’t selected. “When I’m done with that asshole and his team, Star Cove will have just one team, the Cove Devils, like it should be.”

Dad interrupts me, the rivalry between our two teams runs deep and it isn’t just sport related, it’s personal. “Right. But if you want that to happen, we need sponsors. And if you want those to pan out, there’s two things I need from the three of you.”

Something in his tone and in the way he’s looking at us tells me that we won’t like whatever he’s about to say. “You need to be civilized toward the Angels. No more spats during interviews and on social media.”

I immediately react. “You know very well that they started it. They keep going for our sponsors and they signed Trent just to spite us!”

Dad shakes his head. “Right, that might be so and Trent left because they offered him more money. I know you and Penn have always hated each other, but you need to keep your fucking temper in check.”

I roll my eyes. He knows that hell will freeze over before there’s going to be peace between the Cove Angels and the Cove Devils.

“Peyton, I fucking mean it. Don’t rise to their provocations and start cultivating a better relationship with the press. That’s one of the things that drives sponsors away. Penn is the press’s sweetheart and the sponsors love that.”

I grind my jaw; I know that the ass chewing isn’t over and I willingly take the bait. “What’s the other thing? You said you needed two things from us.”

He nods. “Clean up your fucking image. Stop being photographed with different groupies at every turn. *Wild Horse* passed on us because of shit like this.” He opens his phone, showing me articles I’ve seen before.

Tons of pics of us at parties, surrounded by different girls. There’s a few where I have my hand down someone’s panties; one of J doing body shots on a topless girl at a beach party; Channing with a chick’s nipple in his mouth at a club and humping a different girl on the dance floor at the same party later that night.

Every article talks about our wild partying and numerous hookups; the press has named us “The Heartbreakers.”

I don’t fucking get what the problem is. “Are you serious? Sponsors have a problem with a party or two?”

Dad puts his phone back in his pocket, his frustration is more than clear. “You’re athletes, not fucking rock stars! Sponsors want a cleaner image and if you want to have the money for your new wingsuit, you three have to clean up your

act. No more Heartbreakers antics. Find yourself a steady girlfriend, or even better, keep it in your pants.”

I look at my two best friends and they look as pissed as I am; we aren't the relationship types and what the fuck does it matter to anyone if we play as hard as we work?

“With all respect Ken,” Channing objects. “We can try and be better with the press and ignore Penn and his team of assholes, but shouldn't winning be what attracts sponsors? And it isn't like Darrius Penn doesn't fuck around. He just broke up with his girlfriend and the rumor is that he was caught cheating. So why is it that the sponsors flock to him? He lost spectacularly at Worlds and he's one sleazy motherfucker if I ever saw one.”

Dad sighs. “It's all down to perception, guys. If he fucks around as much as you do, he certainly doesn't get caught on camera doing it. And you know better than me why he's so popular.”

I clench my fists so hard that my knuckles turn white; the urge to sink my fists in Darrius Penn's face is stronger than ever. “Because the Angels is Patrick DeLaurent's team. They are The Team.”

And I'd be in his place if he hadn't played dirty five years ago.

Dad looks each of us in the eyes. “I'm only telling you what you need to do to put us in the position to compete with him and even out the odds. And I have just the thing that will kick start your new image. And to do that, we need to look good in front of the enemy; friendly even.”

I look at Dad as if he's sprouted a second head. “Friendly? With the Angels? I'm sorry, Dad, I mean no disrespect, but what the fuck have you been smoking?” At the risk of repeating myself, we'll be friendly with the Angels when hell is under a thick slab of ice, with Darrius Penn trapped right underneath it.

But whatever my father is planning, he's dead serious. “I mean it, Peyton. No more wild nights with groupies and no

more fighting. And it starts tonight. Gina DeLaurent is having a party to celebrate her only daughter's birthday. I've scored the three of you invites; of course the Angels will be there. This is your first chance to start building your new image. This is non-negotiable. Fail to show up or get into any kind of trouble with Penn and his team, and so help me God, I'm going to start recruiting a new team for the next State event."

I look at my brothers. Channing and Jameson look as excited I am at the thought of making nice with fuckface Penn and his cronies.

The fuck am I going to their lame party! But I get my stubborn streak from my father and when our eyes meet I know that he isn't issuing an empty threat. Fuck my life, and most of all, fuck Darrius Penn!

#### **More from Melissa Adams:**

Do you want more RH stepbrother romance and love men in uniform? Then the dark contemporary trilogy Broken Warriors is for you. Her stepbrothers are all hot soldiers:

[The Lieutenant](#)

[The Sergeant](#)

[The Captain](#)

If you love dark, super steamy contemporary RH romance, then my cult series the Preacher's Daughter is for you:

[The Pact](#)

[Twisted Sinners](#)

[Chasing Lynda](#)

[Freeing Lynda](#)

For more spicy, contemporary RH stepbrother romance, check out my completed series **Perfect For Them**:



MY LATEST DARK STAND-alone RH contemporary romance Luxe, part of the shared world of Society of Secrets.



(Each book can be read independently and in any order):

[Luxe](#)

If you love RH contemporary romance set in High School, you can enjoy two completed trilogies:

Beverly Hills Prep Academy (Bully Romance):

[The Initiation](#)

[The Reputation](#)

[The Retribution](#)

[BHPA Complete Boxset](#)

Lake Emerald Chronicles (RH summer camp romance):

[The First Summer](#)

[A Winter Tale](#)

[Fall In Love](#)

[The Lake Emerald Complete Boxset](#)

Do you need steamy, LOL RH contemporary romance?

Then my books within the Silver Springs shared universe are for you (you don't have to read every book of the series to enjoy them):

[Onyx](#)

[A V-Day for Onyx \(book 1.5\)](#)

[Magnolia](#)

[Magnolia 2: Don't Trip The Bride](#)

[Iclyn](#)

If you like paranormal romance:

[Dreams: Dreaming Of You](#)

I have some super exciting co-writes.

What if **Dirty Dancing** was RH and had surfing instead of dancing? Mary Martel and I wrote a red hot duet:

**Dirty Summer**

[Summer Heat](#)

[Summer Nights](#)

My High Octane, Heist RH with M Sinclair Rebel Hearts  
Heists:

[Steal Me](#)

[Keep Me](#)

Babe, a RH contemporary stand-alone with Angel Lawson:

[Babe](#)

Finally, if you want to follow me on social media and get  
all the last updates on my upcoming books:

Join my Facebook group:

[Reverse Harem with Melissa Adams Books & Readers](#)

Like my [FB Page](#)

Follow me on:

[Amazon](#)

[BookBub](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Goodreads](#)

[TikTok](#)

Visit my [website](#)

Sign up for my [Newsletter](#) and get a [free Initiation short story](#).