

# PLAYOFF PASSION

INCI WARRIORS HOCKEY ROMANCE

LONDON CASEY

# PLAYOFF PASSION

Inci Warriors Hockey Romance

---

# LONDON CASEY

# Contents

[Playoff Passion](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Preview Atlas's book now!](#)

[London Casey Books](#)

## Playoff Passion

**I'm pregnant. By a hockey player.**

**My father is the head coach of the team.**

**There's literally no way I can tell anyone who got me  
pregnant... right?**



*Don't ask me 'how did this happen?' because I don't have time  
to talk about the birds and bees and what goes on between the  
sheets.*

The fact of the matter is this - I'm pregnant by the goalie of  
the Inci Warriors.

I broke the one rule my father set for myself and my sister.

Never get involved with a hockey player.

Especially one that he coach's.

And I could safely assume "don't get pregnant" falls under  
that same rule too.

But it's too late.

I'm pregnant.

*And I have to pretend I don't know who the father is.*

To make matters worse - my father confides in the man who got me pregnant. They're getting closer as my belly is getting bigger.

And on top of that, the Inci Warriors have a chance to win it all this season.

The biggest news of my life could ruin the biggest season in the history of the team.

*So it only makes sense to have everything absolutely go wrong and blow up in my face, right?*

## Chapter One

---

### WILLOW

“I ’m pregnant.”

I waited for the reaction.

*Screams? Cheers? A slap across the face? Tears?*

I swallowed hard.

*Come on. Say something. Do something.*

No reaction.

Which made sense since I stood in front of a mirror.

I had seen the positive pregnancy tests already.

*Tests. Plural. Yes. Because no woman takes one test and leaves it be.*

I had taken two tests from every brand I could possibly find.

The closest I came to wondering if the tests were wrong was one test had a faded positive symbol on it. But that was honestly because by then it felt like I was squeezing droplets



of urine from my bladder like someone rolling a toothpaste tube for one last chance to brush their teeth.

In other words?

*I'm pregnant.*

With baby.

With child.

My womb occupied.

*Knocked up.*

Any and all terms I could think of, I threw out there, wondering which would be the easiest to hear and absorb.

Two things I knew were true.

First - I was keeping the baby for sure.

*Second - nobody could ever find out who the father was.*



I TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND OPENED THE BATHROOM DOOR.

“You’re fucking pregnant?”

I stepped back.

I felt little droplets of my sister’s spit hit my face as she spoke with overzealous shock.

“What did you say?” I asked.

As though I really thought for a second I was going to defend myself. Or lie.

“I just heard you,” Kay said. “In the bathroom. Saying *I’m pregnant*. That was your voice. Right? Unless you quit your job.”

“Why would I quit my job?” I asked.

“Just wondering if you decided to become an actress.”

“Oh.”

My sister and I fell into silence.

My little sister enjoying this moment. Knowing she had something on me.

Just like many years ago when I snuck home from a party and had more than enough to drink, then climbed through her window by accident.

She made me sit at her desk chair while she lectured me about drinking, boys and partying, just to be a bitch.

“You’re really pregnant, aren’t you?” Kay whispered.

I caved.

I nodded.

For a second, Kay covered her mouth with her right hand.

Then she said, “You had unprotected sex.”

“Says who?”

“How did you get pregnant then? Were you chosen by the universe or something?”

“Kay.”

“Don’t you know the dangers? Huh? Unprotected sex, Willow. It’s not just pregnancy either. You know that, right?”

“Says the woman who thinks condoms are cheating the fun,” I said.

“At least I’m not pregnant.”

“Like I need to hear that right now.”

“Wait. Back up. This is for real? You’re really pregnant?”

“I’m really pregnant,” I said.

Kay looked down at my stomach. “You don’t look it.”

“It’s not an instant thing, Kay. Didn’t you pass health class in school?”

“Barely,” she said. “I just looked at the naughty pages in the book.”

“Cartoon penises?”

“And vaginas,” Kay said with a grin.

“What is wrong with you?” I asked. “I want to sit you down and talk to you and…”

“And what?” Kay asked. “Get my approval? It’s too late for that. You’re pregnant. You just want me by your side when you tell Mom and Dad. You want to hide.”

“Hide? I can’t hide.”

“Me on one side and the baby’s father on the other,” Kay said.

I slowly began to shake my head.

*No.*

Kay abruptly turned on her heels and walked out of my bathroom and made a line for the kitchen.

She opened the fridge.

“I don’t refrigerate my wine,” I called out.

“That’s psycho,” Kay yelled back at me.

“Wine doesn’t belong in the fridge!”

“It does if it’s in a box!”

“Get a real job and you can afford wine in a bottle instead of a box,” I threw back at my sister as I joined her in the kitchen.

She shut the fridge and turned. “That hurt.”

“Good,” I said.

“I need a drink, Willow.”

“Just you?”

“You can’t drink. You’re pregnant. So I’ll drink for both of us.”

“Do you want wine? Or something else?”

“What do you have?”

I pointed to the cabinet.

Kay turned and reached.

She stood two inches shorter than me, which wasn’t saying much because I couldn’t even reach that cabinet either.

Kay jumped up onto her knees on the counter, ripped open the door and grabbed a small bottle of brandy.

She then plopped down on her ass, tried to be cool and took a swig from the bottle.

She coughed and gagged, her face red, eyes watery as though she just ate the world’s hottest pepper.

I filled a glass with water and handed it to my sister.

She drank the water and let out a whining sound.

“You’re a wimp,” I said.

“What is this stuff? Cough medicine?”

“Kay,” I said.

“Sorry.” She took another small sip. Cringed. Licked her lips. Drank water. Then she looked at me. “You don’t know who the father of the baby is.”

*She said it. I don’t have to do a thing. That’s her statement. Not mine.*

“We need to figure this out,” Kay said. “How far along are you?”

“Can I tell you what I need from you?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “We went out last month together. To that party on the beach. And you were dancing with that one guy. What was his name? Emilio? Ed?”

“Ethan,” I said.

“He was a babe. Surfer guy. You went home with him, right?”

I didn’t respond.

“Then we went to that business thing,” Kay said. “You begged me to come with you and then bailed on me when you started talking to Flint.”

“Clint,” I corrected.

“Seven foot tall in a suit,” Kay said. “Did you climb that man and steal his seed?”

“Kay, please stop.”

“Wait.” Kay jumped off the counter. She snapped her fingers. “Before that. Before the giant suit guy. Before the surfer guy.”

*No. Don’t...*

“We went to that party.”

“So I was hoping you and I could-”

“I told you to watch out you for that guy,” Kay said. “He was so smooth and so into you. Well, I guess he got into you too, huh? Like way up there. Just exploding and spraying and all that.”

“Wow, you really have no idea how pregnancy happens,” I said. “That worries me, Kay.”

“Don’t worry about me. I can’t believe you got pregnant by that guy at the party. I mean, his house was very nice and all, but you know he’s just some spoiled guy, right? His parents are billionaires. You’re stepping into something really bad there.”

“No, Kay,” I said. “You’re wrong.”

“It’s not him? Okay then. I have an idea.”

Kay ripped open drawer after drawer.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I need pen and paper. Quick.”

“Follow me. And tell me what you need pen and paper for.”

“To make a flow chart.”

“A flow chart?” I asked.

“A flow chart of all the semen,” Kay said. “To figure out which one was the stickiest.”

I froze in place and turned to face my sister.

“Are you out of your mind?” I asked. “You’re making me look like a slut. You’re calling me a slut. You think I just open my legs for anyone?”

“I’m just going with what I know.”

“And what you know is wrong,” I said. “All those guys you just listed? Nope. Big fat nope.”

“You didn’t sleep with all of them?”

“Nope.”

“You didn’t sleep with any of them?”

“I don’t have to answer your questions, Kay.”

“I knew it!” Kay yelled at me. “You did! And one of them is the father of your baby!”

“Wrong,” I said. “So wrong. I did not sleep with any of those guys. Not even close, actually. You were the one screwing a bunch of guys. Not me.”

“Oh, I’m a slut?” Kay asked. “I’m not pregnant. So... yeah...”

“That’s how you want to talk to me?” I asked. “That’s how you want to talk about your niece or nephew? Does it really matter, Kay? You’re being selfish.”

“Me?”

“This is why I didn’t want to tell you,” I said. “You already know why I can’t say a word to Mom or Dad. Which is so stupid in itself. Or at the very least I could use my sister’s help. I could use you in my corner as I figure this all out. Did I plan on getting pregnant? Nope. Did I use protection? Yup. Do things happen? I guess so.”

“Okay then,” Kay sighed. “Sorry. I guess I got excited. I just can’t believe it. I mean... you’re pregnant. Like really pregnant. And you’re sure?”

“As sure as I can be,” I said. “I took enough tests. I know how I feel. I can track my period.”

“What period, right?”

“Exactly,” I said. “I tried to blame stress. I had a rough month at work.”

“I thought you were riding a high.”

“I was, but I work in real estate now,” I said. “One deal closes and the next day they want more and more. And my body just feels off. I’m tired. I feel weird. My boobs hurt.”

“That could be your period,” Kay said. “Fingers crossed?”

I shook my head. “It’s not that.”

“My boobs hurt like hell right before my period,” Kay said. “You know that’s a thing, right?”

“Kay, I know it’s a thing. This isn’t the case.” I touched my stomach. “I’m pregnant. I need you to know I’m keeping the baby. And I would like you in my corner. Even if you’re mad at me or disappointed or hate me.”

“Whoa, back up for a second, Willow. I never said I was mad at you. Or disappointed in you. Or hate you. Why would I hate you?”

“I don’t know, Kay. Something else about pregnancy you might not realize? Hormones. My hormones are fucked right now. And after you accusing me of sleeping with all these random men and that one of them is the father of my baby...”

My chin began to quiver.

*Shit. No. Crap. Not this.*

“Oh, Willow,” Kay said.

She lunged for me and wrapped her arms around me.



I blinked and felt tears running down my cheeks.

The middle of my throat clenched and ached.

I just wanted to burst into tears.

But I didn't know why.

That was when my mind decided to give me a reason to cry.

I thought about random stuff.

Like the one time I saw an injured seagull on the beach.

Trying to hop around.

Trying to fly.

Calling out for help.

And nobody helped it!

*Why didn't someone save that fucking seagull?*

Then I thought about the time I gave a homeless man a twenty-dollar bill. And he smiled and thanked me. Said I was an angel from heaven and he was going to have his favorite cheeseburger for lunch.

“Oh, Willow, you're breaking down,” Kay whispered.

“Hormones,” I managed to choke out. “That's it. It comes in waves for me.”

I sucked in a breath and cleared my throat.

I stepped back from my sister and wiped my cheeks.

“Listen, Willow, whatever you need from me,” Kay said. “You name it. I'm there. I'm your sister. I swear.”

“I need to find a way to tell-”

I heard someone else clear their throat.

Kay gasped and covered her mouth.

I looked over my shoulder to find my mother standing there.

“Mom,” I said. “How long have you been here? Did you hear anything?”

“I didn’t hear much,” Mom said. “*Just that you might be a slut... and that you’re pregnant.*”

## Chapter Two

### ANDERS

**L**uc made a last second move and I fell for it.  
He juked to the right, swept to my left and lifted the puck.

I didn't stand a chance.

I jumped up and threw my mask back and off.

I turned and punched my water bottle off the back of the net to the ice.

Luc skated behind the net, grabbed my water bottle and tossed it to me.

“Watch that move, Anders,” he said with a wink.

“Fuck off,” I said.

Behind me I heard the screech of the whistle.

“What the fuck was that?” Coach Pete barked. “Anders, get over here right now!”

I took a deep breath and skated toward Coach Pete.

It was obvious a lot of pressure rested on Coach Pete's shoulders this season.

Just like the rest of us.

Season after season of being talked about led us here.

*The do or die season.*

If we didn't make a long run in the playoffs... or win it all... the team would be broken up for sure.

Luc was untouchable.

The rest of the guys...

My contract had the most value when it came to trades.

I was a great goalie. Had years ahead of me. And plenty of teams would trade anything to get a goalie like me.

The hockey business - along with any other sport - was brutal.

When I got close enough to Coach Pete, I saw the fire raging in his eyes.

"Did you make that save, Anders?"

"No."

"Why didn't you make the save?"

"Luc made a move."

"Was it a groundbreaking move? Was it something you've never seen before?"

"Coach..."

"Don't fucking *coach* me!" Coach Pete roared. "I'll put McGraven in."

I curled my lip.

Threatening me with the backup goalie really pissed me off.

Mostly because McGraven was a good guy and a good goalie.

“One more fucking goal...” Coach Pete growled. “One more... and you’re in the shower. Got it?”

I nodded and skated back to the net.

Cain moved in front of me and widened his eyes when he looked at me.

Then came Roman, who had no problem opening his mouth.

He came to a stop. “What a fucking asshole.”

“Me?” I asked.

“Behind me,” Roman said.

Referring to Coach Pete.

I nodded. “He’s riding my ass.”

“He’s riding everyone. The wife must be holding out on sex.”

“You should take him out one night,” I said. “To the strip club.”

“I’ve got my hands full, remember?” Roman asked.

*How could I forget.*

Roman with his wild approach to life ended up fake engaged to a woman and was now falling for her and making his life a gigantic mess.

“What about you?” Roman asked. “Ever going to tell me what’s going on in your life? You’re still acting way off. And

it's hurting your game.”

“Get the fuck out of my face,” I growled.

I put my mask back on and grabbed my stick.

I called for Luc and nodded.

He and Nolan set up another play.

Now, to be fair...

There had been a lot going on with this team.

Not just Roman's wild shenanigans either.

Was I hiding something from my best friend?

I definitely was.

Was it a life or death thing?

Not at all.

Just a situation I had found myself in not too long ago and took full advantage of it.

A situation that could end up hurting the team if it got talked about.

Nolan passed to Luc.

Luc passed to Nolan.

They were moving fast.

Synched up together.

Trying to test me.

Trying to get me to choose a side.

This came down to one thing.

My reflexes.

My mind dropped every thought in existence.

All I saw was the puck.

The two sticks.

Knowing they'd have to make a move or take a shot in just a few seconds.

Nolan passed to Luc again.

Luc right back to Nolan, who had his stick back for the one-timer.

I inched to my right.

*To take them both out.*

Nolan brought his stick down and tapped the puck to Luc.

He took the shot and I threw my gloved hand out and stopped the puck without hesitation.

I stood up and took my mask off.

“What was that?” I asked Luc. “You forget how to shoot?”

Luc skated toward me, throwing his stick and gloves to the ice.

Nolan intercepted him.

Coach Pete... was not happy.

He blew his whistle, broke his clipboard, and made it very clear if anyone wanted to fight they'd have to go through him first.

*It only made matters worse each time he looked at me I wondered if he knew my secret...*



“SOMEONE HAS TO GO TALK TO HIM,” ROMAN SAID. “FIND OUT what’s up.”

“Where’s Mags?” Nesh asked.

“He’s with the other guys,” Luc said. “They keep going back and forth. I’ve never seen him like this. So pissed. And focused.”

“This isn’t about the game,” Nolan said.

“If he says he wants to fight me again, I’ll have no choice,” Cain said.

“Relax,” I said to Cain. “We’re not going to have a fight with the head coach.”

“I’m telling you, it’s something at home,” Roman said. “He needs to get laid.”

“Or someone can just talk to him,” Luc said.

“You’re the leader,” Nesh said to Luc.

Luc laughed.

“Send Roman,” I said.

“He’ll kill Roman in a second,” Nolan said.

“Then we need to draw straws,” Cain said.

“Or sticks,” I said. I pointed across the locker room. “Grab a stick. First one you touch is yours. Smallest one has to talk to Coach Pete.”

“That is a stupid idea,” Luc said.

“Then go talk to Coach Pete,” Cain said.

Luc ran toward the hockey sticks.

We all followed.



Pushing, shoving, reaching, grabbing.

One by one, we held out the hockey sticks.

“Not me,” Cain said. “Always the biggest stick.”

“You wish,” Roman said.

“Bigger than yours,” Cain smiled.

“I’m good,” Luc said.

“Me too,” Nolan said.

I glanced at Nesh and he nodded at me. “The goalie with the smallest stick.”

“Fuck,” I said. “For the record, this isn’t... real life...”

“Yes, it is,” Roman said. “You have to go talk to him.”

“I meant my stick size,” I said. “My cock is like thick velvet.”

“If your cock is velvety, you need a doctor,” Luc said.

“Take a look and tell me,” I said.

I grabbed for my jeans and Nesh grabbed my shoulder.

He squeezed and my life flashed before my eyes.

“Just go talk to Coach Pete,” he said. “Got it?”

He squeezed a little harder. I wiggled away and jogged toward the office.

Outside the door, I waited a few seconds before knocking.

“Who the hell is it?” Coach Pete’s voice boomed.

I opened the door. “Just me. Wanted to say hi.”

“Say *hi*? What is this?”

I stepped into the office and shut the door. “Can I talk freely?”

“Depends on what you want to say right now, Anders,” Coach Pete said. He folded his hands. “I’ve got a lot on my mind. A real lot on my mind.”

“So do I,” I said. “This season...”

Coach Pete pointed to a chair.

I inched forward and slowly sat down.

“What’s on your mind, Anders?”

“We’re going to win it all. I just want you to know that.”

“That’s good. It won’t be handed to us though.”

“I know that.”

“Are you worried about something, Anders?”

“Worried about you.”

Coach Pete smiled. “That’s why you’re here?”

“You’ve been... mean.”

“Mean?”

“Yeah. Really mean. Screaming mean. Nasty mean. Like... like a bully.”

“You’re calling me a bully?” Coach Pete asked. “Let me ask you something. Did I hurt your feelings, Anders? Huh? Did I make you go home and cry? Do you need to talk to someone about all these big feelings you’re feeling?”

I tightened my jaw.

I felt like an idiot.

And Coach Pete stared at me like I was one.

I almost felt myself slipping.

I thought about it.

*What if I stand up right now and tell him? What if I stand up, look him in the eyes, and tell him I slept with his oldest daughter? How beautiful she is. How good she was in bed.*

Instead I sat there.

“Mean,” Coach Pete. “Is this a joke? Are the others going to bust in?”

“No, not at all. You just seem... different. Like it’s beyond hockey. Like maybe something... at home?”

“Oh, you want to talk about my home life now?”

“No. Unless you want to. I mean, I’m here. We’re all here. You know? We’re, uh, we’re family.”

“Anders, get out of my office,” Coach Pete said.

“I can’t,” I said. “I need to know what’s going on. I need to know...”

“You want me to be nice, huh? Want me to bring your favorite ice cream? Want me to sing you a lullaby before bed tonight?”

“I just want this season to be it,” I said. “This has to be it. This is our year. I can feel it in my blood. I know you feel it too. Everyone here does. I just don’t want anything to mess it up.”

“Did you really just say that to me? Coming from you? Aren’t you and Roman the ones always finding trouble?”

“Roman is different now,” I said. “He’s not the same. He’s got a woman in his life.”

“And you?”

“You know me,” I grinned. “Same as always.”

“I don’t know what that really means,” Coach Pete said. “And I don’t want to. That’s the way this works. As long as you’re not in jail or fucking up the season, it’s not my issue. Kind of like my personal life. Got it?”

“Got it.”

“Now leave.”

I stood up and walked toward the door.

“Anders,” Coach Pete said. “I’m only mean because I know how good you all are. And when I see stupid stuff, I’m going to call it out. And, yeah, it’s going to make me extra pissed off because I believe this is the year for all of us.”

“Okay. Good.”

“Anders...”

Coach Pete sighed.

He placed his hands on the desk and he rose up slowly.

We stared at each other.

“You came in here to talk to me. I don’t know how they chose you.”

“Short end of the stick,” I said.

“You know what? I can relate to that these days.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Maybe I am a little extra mean right now. I can’t help it. You know, Anders, as a man, a father and a coach... you can only do so much. Everyone else is going to do what they want and be who they are. And you have to figure it out.”

“Okay,” I said. “Well, I hope whatever is going on, it works out.”

“Nothing will ever be the same, Anders. And since you’re here, why not share the big news. You know my daughter, Willow, right?”

“I think I remember hearing her name,” I said.

*Yeah, hearing her name when I groaned as she sucked on my-*

“Willow is pregnant,” Coach Pete said. “And I know she’s an adult. She has a good job. Takes care of herself and all that. But still... it’s just...”

“Willow is pregnant?” I asked.

Coach Pete nodded.

I took a deep breath and tried to exhale it slowly, but it was too late.

My heart was already racing.

Willow. Pregnant.

And I slept... with her...

And...

*There was no way I could be the father of Willow’s baby, right?*

## Chapter Three

---

### WILLOW

The first time my father took me to some fancy hockey banquet, I thought I was a princess. He bought me a really expensive dress and said I was his date. I never cared about my father's job. I didn't know any teenage girl who did.

He was my father.

He worked.

I lived in a house and had my room.

Now to step back and think about him as a professional hockey coach, that was kind of neat. The fact that he made a lot of money and took care of his family without question, that made him kind of my hero.

Or the fact that no matter what happened in my life or Kay's, he was always there to hear us talk and give us advice.

I thought about that night of the banquet because I ended up sneaking a drink or two and got sick. I threw up in the hallway of the banquet hall.

I embarrassed my father that night.

He told everyone I ate some bad shellfish.

Once we were back home, he sat me at the dining room table and just stared at me. After a minute of silence he poured me a glass of lemon water. He told me he loved me. He asked if he needed to say anything else.

I told him not to say a word and that I was sorry.

That's exactly how I felt again as I sat at the dining room table with my father looking at me.

He was older now.

His once steel-cut jaw now had black and gray stubble, with bags under his eyes.

His hairline was receding just an inch or two.

Still my hero though.

Still strong.

Still powerful.

It wasn't all that long ago I sat in this same spot after making the difficult decision to step away from teaching and pursue a sudden interest in real estate.

This time it was a little bit different.

My father's emotions hung loose above his head.

"Could be worse," I said. "At least I'm not a teenager."

"That's not funny."

I swallowed hard.

I took a deep breath.

"I've got a good career now," I said.

"You had a good career before."

“I fell out of love with it.”

“What happens when you fall out of love with real estate?”

“I make a lot more money now,” I said. “I’m saving up a lot.”

“Babies are expensive.”

“I’m having one baby,” I said. “Not *babies*.”

“You know what I meant, Willow. I don’t think this is the time to be cute.”

“I know you don’t understand this...”

“What’s there to understand? You’re pregnant.”

“You and Mom were always joking about being too old to be grandparents,” I said. “Worried that Kay or I would never have kids. Did you want me to wait until I was forty?”

“What did I just say about joking around?”

“You’re mad because I won’t tell you who the father is.”

“I’m disappointed,” my father said.

“I know you are.”

My father stood up.

“You’re going to be a grandfather,” I called out. “We should talk about what you want to be called. *Grandpa? Pops?*”

He just stared at me.

One thing about my father was he hated to be left in the dark about things. He wanted everything on the table at all times to make the best decision possible.

He loved his family and he took a very overprotective position.



In the depths of his heart he always hoped to have a bunch of boys.

He wanted five sons, wanted to have his own hockey team.

He wanted to live somewhere cold and snowy and have an ice rink in the backyard.

How in the world did a man like him end up in a sunny beach town where it never got anywhere near close enough to have an ice rink in his backyard?

*My mother.*

Who just so happened to walk from the kitchen into the dining room.

I inherited her bright green eyes.

And I guess her curly hair.

The story of my parents went like this...

*Her name was Holly and she was walking along the beach one day while a guy named Peter was tossing a football with a friend. They were on vacation and Peter looked at Holly and never looked away. He ended up getting hit in the head with the football. And that made Holly hurry over to his aid. Their eyes met and it was instant love. Peter never went back home after that vacation. All it took was two days with Holly and she became his new dream. He asked her to marry him three months later. Six months after that they were married on the beach.*

No matter how big and stern my father acted, he'd experienced instant and true love.

Except for this, I didn't experience instant and true love.

I experienced an almost *taboo* one-night stand and was now pregnant.

And the only reason it was *taboo* was because of my father's one big rule he had for myself and for my sister.

Which was to never, *ever* get involved with a hockey player.

Ever.

No matter what.

Even if he was the last man on earth.

I had done more than just break that rule.

I had shattered it.

*The baby in my womb came from a hockey player...*



“HE’LL COME AROUND,” MY MOTHER SAID.

“No, he won’t,” Kay said.

“She’s right,” I said. “He won’t. He wants to know whose it is. He wants to do the protective father thing.”

“You know why he’s like that, Willow,” my mother said.

I lowered my gaze.

*I know why he’s like that. He has every right to be that way with me.*

“Willow, how do you feel?” Kay asked.

“Tired,” I said. “Mentally tired. Physically I feel great. I can’t tell I’m pregnant at all.”

“You will,” my mother said. “Soon enough. And, hey, just be happy you don’t have morning sickness.”

“That’s a real thing?” Kay asked.

“Not for me,” I said.

“Oh, it was for me,” my mother said. “With you, Kay.”

“Are you sure it was morning sickness?” I asked.

“What does that mean?” Kay asked.

I smiled. “I’m just saying, if I was pregnant with you, Kay, I would throw up too.”

“Willow,” my mother said.

“I’m just kidding,” I said. “Look how cute Kay is. Even though she’s already thirty and has no future.”

“How old are you?” Kay asked.

“I’m your older sister, that’s all you need to know.”

“Yeah, and you’re knocked up by some random guy that’s so horrendous, you won’t even tell anyone who it is.”

“That’s enough out of you two,” my mother said. “Joking or not, that’s more than enough.”

“*Yes, mom,*” we both said at the same time.

“So that one deal I was working on... the big office...”

“Yes,” my mother said.

“I closed it last night,” I said. “Officially.”

“That was the one they said nobody could get rid of?” Kay asked.

I nodded and smiled.

“You really have a knack for this,” Kay said.

“And the commission is huge,” I said.

“I always believed in you,” my mother said.

“Even in her ability to get pregnant?” Kay asked.

“At least I can attract a man,” I said.

“You two are going to turn my hair gray,” my mother said.

“You know we’re just joking around,” Kay said. “After all, Willow did tell me first about being pregnant.”

“I just wanted you next to me in case things got bad,” I said. “Like a shield.”

“Did you just call me overweight?”

“Okay, that’s enough from both of you.” We got *the look* from our mother. “Since your father is gone and it’s just us... it’s my turn to get some information.”

“Mom, I can’t...”

She held up a hand. “I’m not asking for his name. But maybe tell me how it happened?”

“Oh, Mom,” Kay said. “Do you not know how babies are made? Okay, listen, I need a banana and a donut. Preferably one of those donuts filled with creme.”

My mother ignored her *other daughter* and just stared at me.

“You really want to know?” I asked.

“Of course I do,” my mother said. “Please tell me it wasn’t some drunk and sloppy quickie.”

“Mom!” I yelled.

Kay laughed and clapped her hands together.

Heat rushed to my face.

*I really wished I was able to have a drink.*



(THE NIGHT OF YOU-KNOW-WHAT)

THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE IDEA OF SAYING *LATE summer* when you lived next to the beach in a town where summer never stopped. Sure, temperatures fluctuated a little bit here and there, but it wasn't like in other cities, such as New York.

I had seen leaves change their color and fall from the trees.

I had seen, touched and tasted snow as it fell from the sky.

I even had the chance to make a snowball and throw it at my sister.

But here?

It really didn't mean much to say *late summer* other than the fact that it meant the hockey season was about to start.

That meant a lot more to my father than to me.

For some reason, this particular season really was on his mind.

I had done a little research on my own and read more than a few articles that suggested the *Inci Warriors* were the team to beat this season. And not that my father would ever act like a kid in a toy store, but anyone who knew him privately and listened to him talk about winning *the big trophy* as he called it, he would get way too excited.

In other words - this season meant everything.

Which was why I, my sister, and my mother attended the big team party to celebrate the season opening.

Dad was lost in a sea of people, talking hockey.

Mom and Kay stayed almost arm in arm, smiling and mingling.

I threw out way early in the day that I had my period and didn't feel well.

My hope was to avoid the party all together.

I ended up going anyway at the request of my father.

*For the record, I did not have my period.*

*And, yes, I lied to get out of some jock-filled hockey event.*

*Big deal.*

I snuck outside and down a set of a steps, kicked off my heels and planted my feet into the sand.

I listened to a wave crest and crash and I smiled.

The last year of my life had been the most insane ever.

In fact, I couldn't imagine my life getting any crazier.

It wasn't my fault that I-

My thoughts seized up.

I saw a figure appear on the beach.

Almost ghostly.

Tall, built, barefoot.

Walking toward me with his shirt unbuttoned.

The beach breeze doing all the work for me as it pulled at the shirt on both sides, throwing it back, leaving my eyes hurrying to focus on... *muscle*.

I groaned in my throat.

I licked my lips and tasted wine.

I blinked and wasn't sure if this hunk walking toward me was a ghost or a man.

As my heart raced a little bit, I realized I knew who it was.

*Anders. The goalie for the Inci Warriors.*

I groaned out loud.

Very loud.

“You're not the first person to make that noise when they see me, babe,” he said.

“Okay then, *babe*,” I said back.

He continued to walk closer to me.

I had this strange feeling and thought of him just grabbing me.

Picking me up.

Pulling my body against his.

His fingers sliding into the back of my dress and up, touching my bare butt.

Then walking me into the night, closer to the ocean, but never getting me wet.

At least not wet in the ocean...

“What are you doing out here?” I asked.

“I hate these parties,” Anders said. “I hate wearing nice clothes.”

“Oh, you'd rather be naked?”

“Sure, babe,” he said.

He stood an inch from me.

Towering over me.

Looking down at me.

I smelled ocean water and cologne.

“Why are you looking at me like this?” I whispered.

“Because you’re blocking my path.”

“Oh,” I said. “Right. Sorry.”

I stepped to the right and felt my cheeks turning red.

*What was I just thinking? Honestly...*

Anders made it up two steps before I opened my mouth again.

“You know he’ll get mad at you if you go in there with your shirt unbuttoned, right?”

Anders turned his head and looked down at me. “Believe me, babe, I know.”

“Just offering up some advice. Apparently this is a really important hockey season for you all.”

“You’re a hockey fan now?”

“Nope. Just overheard some things.”

Anders stepped one step down... then again... and then back onto the sand.

He turned and faced me again.

“Why aren’t you inside right now, Willow?”

“You said my name finally.”

“Wasn’t sure if I was allowed to.”

“Says who?”



“Says your father. Very protective, huh?”

“I’m a grown woman. He means well. He knows how much of an asshole a hockey player can be.”

“Asshole? Yes. But what do you expect from guys like us? We live in a summer beach town on the west coast and have to play a sport that involves ice.”

“That must be a tough life you live,” I said. “Making all those millions of dollars to ice-skate and hit a little thingy with a stick.”

“This was a fun talk, babe. I’ve got to go now.”

“You still haven’t buttoned your shirt.”

“If you’re that worried about it, why don’t you do it for me?”

He lifted his left eyebrow.

*Cocky idiot...*

But he looked good.

And I felt mischievous.

Both Anders and I had no intention of going back inside.

So what if we hung out on the beach?

What if I buttoned up his shirt?

Or what if I just took his shirt off?

*And what if he lifted up my dress and touched me...*



MY PHONE BEEPED WITH A TEXT MESSAGE.

Kay fanned herself.

My mother tilted her head and her eyes grew wide.

“Don’t stop now,” she said.

“I think I have to,” I said.

“When was this again?” Kay asked. “I’m trying to think of when we went to the beach together. Other than that party...”

“Wrong,” I said. “You weren’t there with me this time.”

“You were out by yourself?” Kay asked.

“I was thinking. Needed time alone.”

“And you ran into some guy and had sex on the beach?” my mother asked.

“Hearing you say the word *sex* makes me cringe,” Kay said.

I glanced at my phone.

Then I looked again.

Then I jumped up.

“I have to go,” I announced.

I turned, my face red-hot again.

The text message was from an unknown number...

***It’s Anders - we need to talk.***

## Chapter Four

---

### ANDERS

**I can't just see you. Okay?**

“The hell you can't, babe,” I whispered. “You're carrying my baby. I have to see you.”

**I have to see you. Right now.**

The thought had been racing through my mind from the second Coach Pete said Willow was pregnant.

I tried to fight it off.

I tried to convince myself there was no way in hell...

**Anders, you can't just show up to my place. I can't just show up to your place. It doesn't work that way. We have to run into each other.**

I read Willow's text twice and shook my head each time.

“What the...”

**Explain this to me, babe.**

I paced my apartment.

From the front door to the grand window that overlooked the beach.

I thought about all the handprints that had been on that window since I lived here.

That was always the favorite spot for sex.

Handprints on the glass.

Beautiful tits pressed against the glass.

Ass cheeks with round and thick prints.

*And the woman I accidentally get pregnant hadn't even been in my apartment!*

**I'm going to get some coffee, Anders. Okay?**

“No, that's not okay,” I said. “What does that-”

Another text came through.

With an address.

“She wants me to meet her there,” I said. “No. Wait. I can't *meet* her there. I have to *bump into her* there.”

The entire thing was ridiculously stupid.

Then again, I had seen how pissed off Coach Pete was over Willow's pregnancy.

I only knew Coach Pete as the coach, not as the obvious overprotective father to his daughter.

*Even if she was in her thirties...*

I took a deep breath.

I didn't bother replying to Willow's text.

It would probably end up breaking some nonsense rule of hers.

*Rules? How could there be rules here?*

*We met. We fucked for fun.*

*Now she's pregnant.*

*And there are rules now?*

I gritted my teeth and hurried out of my apartment.

When I climbed into my very expensive and super-fancy car, I looked toward the back seat that didn't exist.

*A two-seater. No room for a car seat here, huh?*

"Fuck," I whispered.

I focused forward.

The tip of my pointer finger hit the screen like a hammer and the GPS told me where to go.

I drove with the ocean to my left.

It seemed like every killer sexy woman was out today too.

Skimpy bikinis.

Rollerblading.

Or out for a jog wearing a sports bra that did nothing to contain the bounce.

I gripped the steering wheel tighter by the second, feeling as though the universe was going to torture me.

*Even though I wasn't committed to anyone... ever.*

*Pregnancy wasn't jail time or marriage or whatever.*

*I wasn't going to be like Roman and be stuck with one woman.*

*No fucking way in hell.*

I parked outside a coffee shop right on the beach and walked inside like I was just there to get a cup of coffee.

As soon as I saw Willow, I walked up to her.

I gently bumped my elbow into her shoulder.

She turned and looked at me.

Her lips parted and eyes went wide.

I looked down, right at her stomach.

*Pregnant?*

*Really?*

“Can I help you with something?” Willow asked, twisting her face like I was some creepy stranger and not the man who put a baby in her womb.

“I’m going to buy you a coffee,” I said to her. “And then we’re going to talk.”

“Are you having coffee also?” the barista asked from the counter. She then did a double take. “Wait. I know who you are. You play for the *Inci Warriors*.”

“That’s correct,” I said. “For both things you said.”

“Wrong,” Willow said. “He will not be buying me a coffee. I’m not interested in it.”

She slipped away from me, just like that.

“Okay then,” I said. “I guess I’m not paying for her coffee. Tough crowd here.”

“Not back here,” the barista said. She smiled. “I mean, if you’re buying...”

I smiled back at her.

I walked to the register.

Willow had already paid for her coffee and was walking toward the door to leave.

*What the hell is she doing?*

I threw a fifty on the counter and told the barista to buy herself a coffee and split the rest with her coworkers.

Then I went after Willow.

*Slowly. Casually.*

I had no idea what she wanted me to do.

Once we were outside, she walked to the railing and looked out at the ocean.

“How close can I get to you?” I called out.

“We can’t have attention on ourselves,” she said without looking back. “But by all means, go back inside and finish picking up that barista. Just make sure the condom is on right when you fuck her, okay?”

“Who said I want to fuck the barista? I came here to see you, babe.”

Willow turned her head and curled her lip.

That burning look in her eyes...

She was nervous.

A little bit scared.

Of me.

Of us.

*Just like that night...*



(THE NIGHT OF YOU-KNOW-WHAT)

I LET HER BUTTON UP TWO BUTTONS ON MY SHIRT.

And as far as I was concerned, that was two buttons too many.

I touched her wrists. “Are you really going to button up my shirt?”

“You can’t go back in there without it buttoned,” Willow whispered.

Her green eyes somehow shined in the night like freshly polished emeralds.

She had a smile on her face... and her curly hair...

*Oh, this is playing into the siren fantasy, huh?*

My half drunk and wild mind wanting to pretend that Willow was a mermaid who came onto shore for one night of wild passion with a guy like me.

“I don’t want to go back in there at all,” I said to her.

“But you’re the goalie. You’re the star of the show.”

“Luc is the star of the show. I’m the guy who bails everyone out.”

“Meaning you never get to have any fun?”

“I’m having fun right now, babe.”

Willow bit her bottom lip.

That great debate in her mind.

*Does she really want to hook up with a hockey player?  
Especially a player on the team her father coach’s?*



And who was I to toss away my thoughts about this too?

Coach Pete made it clear more than once that his daughters were forever off limits.

No looking. No thinking. No talking. No joking.

And definitely no touching... and more.

I didn't want to be back inside that stuffy party.

I didn't want to answer any more questions about the season either.

It was all boring.

And I felt anxious.

Yet somehow Willow calmed me.

*Her siren song, maybe?*

She undid the two buttons and placed her hands on my stomach.

Then she went from biting her lip to lifting her eyebrow.

Challenging me with those green eyes.

Making it silently known that she had made her move and now I needed to make mine.

My fingertips dangled at my sides.

Slowly, I moved them forward and touched her legs.

She gasped and her entire body shivered.

Her dress was definitely at an appropriate length, but not when my fingers got there.

I moved her dress up, inch by inch, giving her plenty of time and chances to stop me.

“What were you doing down here?” she asked.

“Does that really matter?”

“I’m curious.”

“I was going for a walk.”

“Where are your socks and shoes?”

“Under the pier. Anything else you want to ask me or can we have fun?”

My fingertips touched her hips, touching the thin line of what was a thong.

The middle finger on my right hand followed the shoelace piece of cloth around, then down between her cheeks.

She thrust forward against me and sighed. “This is going to be trouble, Anders. Probably more for you than me.”

“Lucky for you I love taking risks,” I said. “As long as they pay off.”

“I guess we’ll just have to see how tonight pays off then.”

I grabbed Willow’s ass and drove her body hard against mine.

I took two steps and she lost her footing - which was the point.

I picked her up and carried her under the pier.

Our lips brushed together once.

Then again.

Then with more force, more passion.

I slipped my right hand between our bodies and between her legs again.

Heat first. Then wetness.

I smiled as she bit my bottom lip.

*Part of the excitement was thinking about what kind of trouble this was going to cause both of us.*



“MY FATHER WILL KILL YOU.”

I stopped walking and Willow did the same.

“He will not kill me, babe,” I said.

“You really think that?”

I thought about what Coach Pete did to the clipboard at practice. Among many other items he had recently decided to destroy in a fit of rage.

“So here’s what I’m thinking, Anders,” Willow said. “Probably the best news you’ll ever hear in your life.”

“And what’s that?” I asked. I looked around. “We’re hiding under another pier. Talking. And you’re about to give me the best news ever?”

“You’re off the hook.”

“*Off the hook? What hook?*”

Willow pointed to her stomach. “This one.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“You don’t have to do a thing, Anders. Okay? I’m not going to chase you down for money or for food or toys or anything else for the baby. I won’t ask you for a thing. As far as my family knows, I had a one-night stand and got pregnant. They’ll get over being annoyed that I won’t tell them who the father is. I promise you that, Anders. Okay? I’m sure you

don't want to be bothered with this and me and everything going on. And I won't be that kind of woman to you. I swear."

"*Off the hook,*" I whispered.

"That's right. Okay? Can we just shake hands and pretend like this never happened? I mean, hey, for all you know, this baby isn't even yours. You don't know who else I slept with that week. Or even that night!"

"You didn't sleep with anyone else that night, babe," I said.

"How do you know?"

My jaw tightened.

"And I don't care. Let everyone think what they want about me. It doesn't bother me at all."

Willow's eyes glossed over.

I slowly shook my head. "No."

"No?"

"No," I repeated. I moved closer to her. "Absolutely not."

"What?"

"That's my baby," I said, pointing to her stomach. "We fucked and you got pregnant. You're not letting me *off the hook*. I didn't ask for that. I don't want that. And until you give birth and decide what you want... you're mine too, babe."

I touched her chin and nodded.

I never felt my heart slam so hard in my chest.

Willow pushed my hand away and began to walk away.

She looked back at least six times, maybe more.

Looking flustered.

*But maybe looking a little turned on too.*

## Chapter Five

---

### WILLOW

**A**fter two meetings, a virtual celebration for the deal I closed, and eating three meals in two hours (each meal being delivered by a different person and restaurant), I ended up in the shower, telling myself to wash away the day.

Some parts had gone to plan.

Some parts had not.

I expected to have a late brunch with my parents and sister to celebrate the deal I made. Mostly because of how much my father worried about my sudden change in career.

That ended up with my father giving me that *I'm disappointed* look and my mother and sister wanting the steamy details of how I ended up pregnant.

That ended up with Anders sending me a text to meet...

I stood in the shower and felt safe and unseen.

My favorite place to think.

I looked down at my body, a dangerous move to be made because if I really wanted to, I could name fifteen hundred

things I didn't like about myself.

From my stubby looking toes to the smallest of scars on my forehead...

*Don't do that, Willow.*

*Think about what your body is doing right now.*

I placed my right hand to my stomach.

I had no idea what was in store for me when it came to pregnancy, but so far the oddest part was being pregnant and not looking it or really feeling it.

No round belly. No baby kicking.

Nothing.

Everything looked and felt normal.

But it wasn't.

I promised myself I wasn't going to obsessively research what was happening on a daily basis and live in a state of panic over being pregnant.

I had to trust my body.

I did trust my body.

*Just like you trusted your body that night with Anders, right?*

I licked my lips and took a deep breath.

I felt so comfortable in the shower.

Warm. Cozy.

*Wet.*

I heard Anders's words echoing in my head.

*That's my baby.*

*You're mine too, babe.*

I bit my bottom lip.

The muscles in my upper legs began to tighten.

Anders voice was deep and commanding.

I pictured him appearing from nowhere on the beach that night.

How we both decided to...

My right fingertips slowly danced down my body.

From my belly... *down*.

I touched my smooth mound and took a deep breath.

My fingertips introduced themselves to a familiar part of my body.

I smiled and let my head fall back.

I stepped forward one more step, enough to let the shower water hit my chest.

The hot water tapping against my breasts.

Flirting with my nipples.

I caught myself slightly arching my back, enjoying the sensation of the water...

As my fingertips moved more between my legs.

Four fingers sliding against my most tender of spots.

Touching, feeling, leaving me groaning.

My middle finger then took the lead, gently curling, sliding up between my folds, touching my clit.

I sighed with a groan.



My middle fingertip circled around my clit, going faster by the second.

The backs of my legs flexed too.

My ass cheeks tightened.

My hips rocked against my own touch.

I was tender, swollen, my toes beginning to curl.

No matter what I tried to think about, my thoughts ventured back to the tall, well-built goalie for the *Inci Warriors* staring at me. Touching me. His fingertips sliding up my dress. Tracing the line of my thong. The way his fingertips pulled my thong to the side and two huge fingers plunged into me... which was just the start to that night of body parts plunging into me.

*That's my baby... you're mine too, babe...*

That protective, dominant growl in his voice.

The seriousness in his eyes.

The allure of being *bad* and sneaking around yet being so grown up and having a man to take care of me. To take care of my baby. *To take care of our baby.*

I told Anders to leave. To run. To never speak of him being the baby's father.

And he refused to do so.

*So. Fucking. Hot.*

My fingers moved faster.

Left to right. A slight circular pattern.

My clit engorged, sending orgasmic signals throughout my body.

I felt a small wave of pleasure begin to crest.

My left hand suddenly touched my left breast.

Grabbing and squeezing, feeling a newfound soreness that had just decided to exist.

I let out a loud groan and felt myself...

*Slightly come.*

If that were even a thing.

No intense orgasm.

No earth shattering moment of pleasure.

Nothing that made my knees tremble and made me scream with ecstasy.

It was just... *okay*.

I looked down at my right middle fingertip as it moved between my legs.

I stopped.

I took a deep breath.

That was... *okay*.

But *okay* wasn't good enough for me.

I swallowed hard.

*I wanted the real thing.*



SHOWERED AND DRESSED - AND MORE THAN SLIGHTLY frustrated over my lackluster attempt at an orgasm - I poured myself a big, tall glass of water. In a wine glass.

I sipped the water.

I smacked my lips together.

“Oh, that’s spring fresh,” I said. “I’m going to get hammered tonight on this.”

I snorted and laughed.

The water tasted like... *water*.

I put the glass on the counter, then turned and leaned against the counter.

I folded my arms and pouted.

I looked down at myself.

Fully dressed in pajamas.

No skin showing. No body parts showing.

Thinking about the shower scene.

*The shower scene.*

I rolled my eyes and felt a slight heat rush to my cheeks.

*You know, Willow, there is one thing you can do here... it’s really not that hard... it’s not that complicated.*

I walked out of the kitchen, leaving my wineglass full of water behind.

I began to pace my apartment, chewing on my bottom lip.

I never really considered what the *rules* were right now in my life.

When it came to sex.

When it came to men.

Was I able to go out and meet someone and have a good time?

For some reason that felt wrong. It felt risky and dangerous. It felt stupid.

Even still, pregnant or not, I was a woman. A woman with needs. With desires. With the want and need to be touched.

I couldn't envision myself standing in the shower for nine months, touching myself, hoping for a half decent orgasm.

Of course...

There was another option out there.

A much easier option.

The option I tried to shove away.

*The option I told was off the hook.*

"Anders," I whispered to myself.

I went back to the kitchen and grabbed my phone off the counter.

I stared at it for way too long.

I debated how to handle the situation.

To test Anders.

To see what kind of guy he really was.

It was easy to talk and throw out words that were sexy and commanding.

*That's my baby.*

*You're mine too, babe.*

I took a deep breath and sent Anders a text.

**Since I can't toss you away, maybe you should just come over. Right now.**

The text could have been interpreted in many ways.

A pregnant woman worried, wanting someone with her.

A horny woman looking for some fun...

Flirty? Maybe.

Casual? Sure.

Desperate? Probably.

I couldn't wait for Anders's reply.

But when it came through - a simply stupid thumbs up emoji - I frowned.

I felt like I had made a huge mistake.

"What the hell does that mean?" I asked.

A thumbs up?

Did that mean he read the message and agreed?

Or...

Heat rushed to my cheeks again. This time, embarrassment.

I reached for my wineglass full of water and took a big gulp.

"Good for you, Willow," I called out. "You got pregnant by some random hockey player. You told him to leave you alone but he said he wasn't going to and you let that turn you on in a way that is just sad. And now? You offer him to stop over and he-"

My phone vibrated against the counter.

I looked.

I gasped.

Another text from Anders waited.

Not an emoji this time.

One word. A question.

**Address?**

*And now my night was about to become much more interesting.*

## Chapter Six

### ANDERS

**R**oman had been up my ass about not wanting to go to the strip club with him.

He knew something was wrong with me.

He called me out more than once.

I made stupid comments.

But there was no way in hell I could tell him about Willow and the baby.

There was still too much to process.

Especially the fact that she tried to push me away.

*Off the hook?*

There was no hook between Willow and me.

There was one night when we decided to fool around under a pier on the beach and she got pregnant.

It took the two of us for that to happen.

Those were the *responsible* thoughts on one side of my brain.

On the other side of my brain was the voice that preferred to be motor boating a set of fake breasts that smelled like vanilla and lavender.

*Me? A father?*

*What am I going to do? Change diapers?*

*Make bottles of milk or formula?*

*Or stand there and watch Willow breastfeed a baby?*

*Am I going to live with Willow? Or is she going to live with me?*

*With a baby?*

*With our baby?*

*How does this even work...*

Those were the asshole thoughts.

Those thoughts erased themselves the second Willow sent me a text.

For me to come over?

To her place?

Right now?

At this hour?

*My baby mama is horny...*

I was running to my car as I replied to her.

I managed to hit an emoji.

A fucking thumbs up emoji at that.

Like we were best buds or something.



“Shit,” I said as I started to drive.

*Drive where, Anders?*

That’s when I realized I needed Willow’s address.

Now came the test for her.

To see if she was going to give that up or not.

If her address became mine, then that meant I-

The screen on the dashboard in my car lit up with a reply from Willow.

With her address.

The screen prompted the question to me if I wanted to go there right now.

I hit the screen and nodded.

*“You’re fucking right I want to go there right now.”*



WILLOW STOOD THERE IN PAJAMAS.

Dark pink pajamas with subtle black spots on them.

That whole oversized clothing look on her at night...

*Fucking hell. No wonder she’s pregnant.*

My eyes zoomed in on the buttons on her shirt.

Wanting to see that little space between each button, wanting to see some skin.

“Am I allowed inside?” I asked.

“Do I have to invite you in? Are you a vampire?”

“A vampire?” I raised my right eyebrow.

“Don’t you know how it goes? Vampires can’t enter your house. Or apartment. You have to invite them inside.”

“Oh,” I said. “Yes, babe, I’m a vampire.” I showed off my teeth. “We’re all vampires on the hockey team.”

“There’s a stupid movie everyone would probably go see,” Willow said. “A hockey team of vampires.”

“Did you invite me over here to talk about vampires?”

“No. But I will invite you in.”

Willow shuffled her bare feet against the floor and moved back.

I noticed her toes.

Cute, little stubby looking toes.

She had such tiny feet.

She curled her toes, hiding them under the baggy bottoms of her pajamas.

I made the mental note she was self-conscious about her feet.

I looked to my left and saw the largest wineglass I’d ever seen on the counter.

With liquid in it.

“Are you serious?” I asked, pointing.

“What? I can’t have a drink?” Willow asked.

She curled her lip and walked with a cocky strut in her hips to the kitchen and grabbed the glass.

I lunged after her and touched her wrist, stopping her from drinking out of the glass.

“What are you trying to prove, babe?” I asked. “You may not give a shit about your body or the baby, but I do. That’s my baby. You can’t drink alcohol when you’re pregnant.”

“Take a sip of it yourself, Anders,” she said.

I took the glass from her and drank from it.

I smacked my lips together. “This tastes like water.”

“That’s because it is water, you idiot,” she said. “Did you really think I was boozing it up here? Getting wasted and texting you?”

“I’m sorry.”

“You should be. I would never do something like that.”

Willow began to turn. I put the wineglass of water down and touched her arm.

“Cut me a little slack here, babe,” I said. “I don’t know much about you. Other than your ability to fuck and get pregnant.”

Willow’s green eyes flared with angry flames.

Even as I smiled, she wasn’t happy with that comment at all.

“Anything else you want to say right now, Anders?”

“I have a lot to say. And ask. You invited me here. And now I’m here. Should we get down to business?”

“What exact business do we have together?”

“You’re pregnant with my baby,” I said. “I think I can ask questions about it.”

“Okay. Go for it.”

“You’re sure?”

“Sure of what? That I’m pregnant? Or that it’s yours?”

I lifted my left eyebrow and half grinned.

“Asshole,” she said. “Yes, I’m pregnant. And, yes, the baby is yours.”

“This is a lot to take in.”

“No shit, Anders. How do you think I feel?”

“I don’t know how you feel. I’m not a woman. I won’t pretend to know how you feel. Deal?”

“Yeah. That’s good. Deal. Fine.”

“How does sex work when you’re pregnant?”

Willow laughed and threw her head back. “There it is. The only reason you showed up.”

“What?” I asked.

“I can’t believe you, Anders. Did you think I invited you over to have sex?”

“Is that wrong to consider?”

“Maybe it is!”

“I don’t understand you, babe.”

“Oh, right. I’m a freak, huh? You don’t understand me. Is it because I have clothes on? Should I strip naked?”

“That might help,” I grinned.

Once again, Willow was not impressed by my comment.

“You’re impossible,” she said.

“I’m impossible?” I asked. “Were you even going to tell me about the baby? Do you even know how I found out?”

“Well... no...”

“Your father,” I said. “My coach. He’s been an extra big asshole to all of us. We’re pushing hard this season but this was different. I got picked to go talk to him. To see what was wrong. I thought the guy was going to take my head off with an ice-skate. Then he calmed down and told me his daughter was pregnant.”

Willow’s cheeks turned bright red. “My father told you about me. Oh, shit. How good are you at lying?”

“What?”

“Did you freak out or anything? What did you do or say?”

“Nothing. I just... I don’t know.”

“Anders, this is not good!” Willow cried out. “Why didn’t I think of asking you this earlier? This is pregnancy messing with my brain. I need to think better. I need to think straight.”

“Sex helps with that too.”

“This is not a game! This is serious. If my father knows...”

“He doesn’t know a thing,” I said.

“How do you know that?”

“I just know,” I said. “Do you really think if he had any idea he would remain calm? You think he would play it off as nothing at first?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I think I’m freaking out a little now. I shouldn’t have texted you. This is all because of the shower.”

“What happened in the shower?” I asked.

Willow tried to step back.

I wasn’t going to let her get away this time.

I touched her arms.

I kept her steady.

I brought my body closer to hers.

She slowly looked up at me.

“This was about sex,” I whispered. “You can admit it.”

“I don’t know what it was, Anders.”

“You were touching yourself in the shower, weren’t you?”

“Don’t be gross.”

“That’s not gross, babe. I think that’s sexy. You touching yourself?” I groaned. “But you wanted more than just yourself. You wanted someone. So you texted me. Which makes sense since I’m the only guy who can.”

“Says who?”

“Says...”

“It’s still my body, Anders. I’ll do whatever I want.”

My jaw tightened.

The thought of another man touching her?

*Nope. That doesn’t work for me.*

“Anders, this is serious stuff,” she whispered. “About us. About the baby.”

“Listen to me, babe, I promise you, nobody knows about me. About us. I swear.”

“Okay.”

“I wish we could talk about that more,” I said. “To figure out a plan. It can’t be a secret forever.”

“Says who?”

“So where do we go from here, babe? I’m not walking away. I’m not abandoning you. I meant what I said. And then you text me to come over and I show up. We both know what that was about.”

“You know what, Anders? Welcome to pregnancy.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“That means I’ll make quick decisions and regret them later. I’ll text you when I want. I’ll demand you keep this a secret. Maybe one second I’m horny but then ten seconds later I’m not. You’re going to have to deal with all of it.”

“Or maybe we can just break through the ice right now together.”

“How so?”

“Maybe I’ll just kiss you, pick you up and fuck you right here on this counter. Get it out of the way so there’s nothing to worry about. Which there isn’t, babe. You can’t get pregnant again.”

“So where’s the guy from the beach the night I got pregnant? He kind of just made a move when he wanted to. There was no talking in advance.”

“Oh, we talked in advance. Do you not remember buttoning my shirt?”

“Too bad you don’t have any buttons now, Anders.”

“Fuck buttons,” I smiled. “Then again, you do have some buttons...”

I touched what would be my favorite button.

The one that would open her shirt just enough to see some skin near her breasts.

As I started to twist my fingers, I lowered my mouth down toward hers.

That's when Willow made a sound I never wanted to hear again.

A stomach flipping gurgle.

*A second later, vomit sprayed all over my face and clothes.*



I WASHED MY FACE FOR THE SEVENTH TIME.

I was never so grateful that Willow had been drinking water and not some kind of flavored juice.

“Anders.”

I turned around and saw Willow in the bathroom doorway.

Her face still bright red.

“I am so sorry about that,” she said.

“I thought it was called *morning sickness*?”

“It is,” she said. “It’s morning somewhere in the world, right?”

“Is that your attempt at a joke?”

“It’s the best I’ve got,” she said. “I just threw up all over a guy. That’s never happened before.”

“Well, babe, you’re lucky it’s me,” I said as I grabbed a hand towel and wiped my face. “You’re not the first woman to throw up on me.”

“Just wonderful to hear,” she said. “I brought you a shirt.”

Willow held up a t-shirt.



Another man's t-shirt.

I curled my lip. "I'm not fucking touching that."

"Why? Because it's someone else's?"

"Yes," I said. "I'm not wearing some other dude's shirt."

"Oh, for fucks sake, Anders, you won," she said. "You got me pregnant. Don't be a jealous ass."

I walked toward her and smiled. "I'm fine, babe. I don't need a change of clothes. You mostly got me on my face. Thanks for that."

"I've got good aim."

We smiled at each other.

*Even after her throwing up on me... I still wanted to kiss her.*

## Chapter Seven

---

### WILLOW

**M**y nightly recap.  
I texted Anders to come over with full intentions of sex.

He wanted to have sex.

I said no.

He made a move anyway.

I threw up on him.

He cleaned himself up.

Then I kicked him out.

I finished my large wineglass of water and poured myself a second.

I couldn't settle myself.

A part of me wanted to text Anders.

No, call Anders.

For what?

There was nothing to talk about.

Honestly, I just didn't want to be alone.

A vulnerable moment. An embarrassing moment.

Something that totally could have been Anders wrapping his arms around me, hugging me, holding me, letting me feel crappy. Then he could have laughed at me, made fun of me in a loving way.

That would have required us to be in a relationship.

And not be strangers who hooked up once which resulted in me getting pregnant.

That didn't mean I should be alone though.

That also didn't mean I was going to call Anders to come back.

I didn't want to see him for a little while.

*Or maybe ever again!*

No, that wasn't true.

Those were the hormones talking.

Speaking of talking, I filled up my wineglass with more water and went to my bedroom to call my sister.

I needed to talk to someone.

She was my best friend.

She would understand.

"Are you having the baby?" Kay asked when she answered the call.

"Am I... no. I can't... you're... I threw up."

"You threw up?"

“Yeah, I threw up.”

“Are you sick?”

“I’m pregnant.”

Kay gasped. “You’re pregnant?”

“Kay, this isn’t a joke. Something happened tonight.”

“What does that mean? Are you okay?”

“I threw up on someone.”

“Oh. You threw up on someone. Someone who was at your place?”

“Yes.”

“Someone who came over to your place to see you?”

“Yes.”

“Do I have to keep asking questions or will you tell me something?”

“I had someone over tonight, Kay. It was just a visit. Nothing like *that*.”

“Okay. And you threw up.”

“Morning sickness at night.”

“That sounds terrible.”

“I threw up on someone.”

Kay gasped.

“Yeah,” I said. “That was how my night went. I threw up on him. All over him.”

“Wait a second, Willow. It was a *him*. You invited *him* over. And you were close enough that when you threw up it went all over *him*...”

“Yes,” I confessed.

“So you had a visitor... meaning you told *him* you’re pregnant.”

“Kay,” I said.

“I’m just following along. I’m not pressuring you. I’m really sorry you threw up. Morning sickness at night seems very cruel. And throwing up on someone is embarrassing. Wait, Willow, is *he* still there now?”

“No,” I said. “He cleaned himself up and I kind of kicked him out.”

“You kicked the guy out?”

“I was embarrassed!”

“Did *he* want to stay?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t really ask. I tried giving him a shirt and he got a little jealous.”

“Jealous over a shirt?”

“Well, it was a man’s shirt. Another man’s shirt.”

“From an old hookup,” Kay said. “And you kept the shirt and tried to give it to the man who got you pregnant? That’s a savage move, Willow.”

“It wasn’t meant to be savage. It was the only shirt I had to offer him.”

“And *he* got jealous.”

“Well, there was also no way he would fit into the shirt.”

“Meaning?”

I caught myself starting to smile a little. “He’s big. Muscular. Tall.”

“Just your type, huh?”

“I have no type. I just...”

“Fuck.”

“Kay!” I yelled. “Don’t start that again.”

“I guess it doesn’t matter anymore. You’re pregnant. And you threw up on the father of your baby. You think you’ll see *him* again? Or better yet, when can I meet this mystery man?”

“Never,” I said. “And that’s the end of the conversation about it. Okay? I called to vent to my sister. Tonight was probably the most embarrassing moment of my life.”

“I’m sure it’s the first of many, Willow. A lot of things happen when you’re pregnant. I mean, just think about giving birth. You know how that works, right?”

“Yes, Kay. I know how that works.”

“You’re going to be spreading your legs for an audience with a baby coming out of your-”

“Kay.”

“Right. That’s not helpful at all, is it?”

“Not at all.”

“Okay, how about I tell you an embarrassing story?”

“Please.”

“This was last year. I never told anyone this. I had been talking to someone for a little bit. We kind of had this running joke of meeting up at the same place as though we weren’t secretly planning it. So finally here comes the chance to move things along. You know?”

“Sure. You wanted to sleep with him. Why not?”

“Exactly,” Kay said. “So I make the plans and the moves. I pick out the matching panties and bra. The whole thing. I lead the horse to water and show him how to drink... you know?”

“Men are idiots.”

“Total idiots. And it only gets worse once you take your bra off. They’re stupid to begin with but the second they see a nipple, it’s like their brains completely turn off. But, whatever. I wanted to have sex. I needed it. We’re naked. Lights are off. Things get moving. It’s good. It’s really good. Then he makes a comment.”

“Ut-oh.”

“He says... *Uh, you’re like really warm and wet, huh?*”

“And that’s bad?”

“It is when you get your period in the middle of sex,” Kay said.

I gasped. “No.”

“Yes.”

“What happened then?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Yes, you do. I need this, Kay. Tell me what happened.”

“Well, the lights were turned on. And... you know... it was messy.”

“Right.”

“Well, this guy was not prepared for that. He leapt out of my bed, looking down at himself, screaming as though my vagina had bit his dick off.”

“Gross.”

“Then he scrambled to get his clothes and ran to what he thought was my bedroom door, but it was my closet. He screamed even louder, wanting to know how to get out of my bedroom. I had to give him directions, then he left. Naked. With his clothes bundled up in front of him.”

“Kay, that sounds horrifying,” I said.

“I didn’t care all that much. The real tragedy was that I didn’t get to finish.”

“But... the blood...”

“What do I care? We’re women. We’re used to it.”

“Not that guy!”

“Nope. Never saw him again. Never heard from him again. Oh, and the other thing he did? He blocked me. He fucking blocked me. As though I did all that on purpose.”

“What a loser,” I said.

“See? Now we’re even. I bled on some guy. You threw up on some guy.”

“Yeah, except you didn’t get pregnant by your guy.”

“Hell no. The blessings of a period, which aren’t that many.”

“Thanks for talking, Kay.”

“Seriously though, are you okay?”

“Yeah. Just embarrassed.”

“And you’re not going to tell me who this mystery daddy is?”

“Goodnight.”

“I promise I won’t say a word!”



I hung up on Kay and tossed my phone to the edge of the bed.

I knew what I was doing was completely illogical.

Eventually the truth would have to come out.

*Just not tonight.*



I HEARD A KNOCK ON MY DOOR AND REACHED FOR MY PHONE.

*Who the hell is here this early?*

After a long night of tossing and turning - *and dry heaving once in the bathroom at three in the morning* - I managed to sleep for what I would consider to be nothing more than a glorified nap.

And I planned on sleeping in a little bit.

But now someone was at my door.

Knocking.

Over and over.

They wouldn't stop knocking either.

So I decided to try out the wrath of a tired pregnant woman on whoever stood outside my door.

I knew I looked like a mess and I didn't care.

Messy hair, no bra, morning breath.

I had it all.

Not to mention a raging fire of hormonal anger looking for an easy target.

The knocking at my door was subtle and annoying.

Just this steady *knock, knock, knock...* that never ended.

I opened the two locks and ripped open the door.

“You better fucking have a...”

I caught my voice in my throat and coughed.

“Morning, babe,” Anders said.

“Anders...”

He was *yellow*.

Like literally the color yellow.

It took me a second to realize what he was dressed in.

*Rain gear.*

Bright yellow gigantic rain boots.

Bright yellow rain pants - or a bib or whatever it was called.

A bright yellow raincoat.

And then a large yellow rain hat on the top of his head.

A coffee in each hand.

A smile on his face.

“What are you doing here right now?” I asked.

“Thought I would drop by and bring you a coffee,” he said.  
“You know, just to let you know what happened last night was no big deal at all for me. It happens. I know you were more embarrassed than anything else.”

“What’s the yellow stuff? Rain gear? Is there a storm coming I don’t know about?”

“Oh, this stuff?” Anders asked as he looked down for a second. “This is for protection.”

“Protection? Now is when you worry about protection? Now is when you decide to wear some rubber?”

“No, it’s not like that,” Anders said. “This isn’t for that. It’s for you.”

“For me?”

“You really projected last night when you threw up. I thought I would wear something to keep myself clean in case that happened again.”

He smiled bigger.

My eyes grew wider.

“You brought me coffee just to show up looking like this?”

“Hey, this is embarrassing for me,” Anders said. “Do you know how many people looked at me like I was crazy?”

“You wore that when you got the coffee?” I cried out.

“Yeah. Why?”

I reached for one of the coffees.

I wasn’t sure whether to laugh at Anders or just punch him in the mouth for being an idiot.

Either way, at least I had my morning coffee taken care of.

“I can’t believe I got out of bed for this,” I said.

“Did I wake you?” Anders asked with a cocky smirk.

“I’ll be enjoying my coffee in bed now.”

“Can I come in?”

“No, you cannot,” I said.

“Good thing I’m not a vampire then,” he said.

He stepped forward and I gasped.

As he entered my apartment, I thought about what the morning could bring now.

Anders in full bright yellow rain gear.

Me feeling tired, under caffeinated, and still horny.

The possibilities...

I put my hand out and stopped Anders.

I shook my head.

Before I could say another word I heard my phone ringing from my bedroom.

That was either work, my sister, my mother, or my father.

Either way...

*It was time for the hot guy in the rain gear to go away before I made another mistake.*

## Chapter Eight

### ANDERS

Coach Pete called a timeout, then broke his clipboard in half, just like he did in practice.

The fans loved seeing the animated side of him.

The way his face turned red and his eyes bulged.

Earlier in the game, when protesting what he thought was a dirty hit on Luc, he climbed up on the bench and yelled across to the other team's coach.

Coach Pete even challenged the guy to a fight.

It took Cain and Nesh both to calm him down.

Mags took over for a minute or two after that but Coach Pete was right back at it again.

Every game to him was like the final game of the season.

He definitely felt the pressure and passion to win something big this year, just like the rest of us.

Each season had been defined by how far we'd advance into the playoffs.

And each year had been closer, but never close enough to the end goal.

I slid my helmet back and skated toward the bench.

Coach Pete pushed his way to the boards and leaned over.

His tie hung out in front of him.

His face redder than ever.

I caught myself momentarily lost in the moment of everything.

The game, the arena, and the fans.

The fact that I got to play hockey for a living.

*I made a fucking great living at it.*

I thought about Willow and the baby.

In the depths of my gut I secretly wanted her to have a boy.

A little hockey goalie.

Then again, even if she had a girl, I'd love her the same and raise her to be a goalie too.

A smile hit my face at the exact moment Coach Pete looked at me.

“Oh, look at this!” he yelled, pointing at me. “Anders is fucking smiling! He’s happy with this game right now. Just casually skating along. Wasting our fucking time! Get over here, *Mr. Smiley Boy!*”

“Coach Pete,” I said. “I was just...”

“You were just missing every fucking save! That’s what you were missing!”

My jaw tightened.

We were down two-zip.

I gave up two goals.

Goals I maybe should have stopped.

The offense had no energy either.

Luc looked tired.

Nolan distracted.

Cain and Nesh just wanted to find guys to fight instead of focusing.

Roman always seemed to be in his own world now with this whole engagement thing going on.

Coach Pete saw it all.

“Guys, we need to tighten up,” Mags said.

“Fuck that,” Coach Pete growled. “We need to trade them all away! They don’t want to be here!”

“Yes, we do, Coach,” Luc said. “We’re going to win this game tonight.”

“The fuck you are,” Coach Pete said. “Look around, Luc. You’ve got no energy. No care in the world.” Coach Pete looked at me. “And maybe you’ll make a save? Huh? What do you think, Anders? Can you do your fucking job?”

The words were venom.

And the venom wasn’t all because of the game.

I almost thought about my options as far as telling Coach Pete that I had gotten his daughter pregnant and that I intended to take care of her and the baby.

Before I could actually think about it, Mags gave Coach Pete a new clipboard and Coach Pete hollered out a play for

us.

Then the timeout was over.

I skated back to my net, put my mask on, and was ready to play.

All I could do now for my team was not to give up another goal.

I tapped my stick off the ice and bobbed my head as music echoed throughout the arena.

The fans cheered and clapped as the players took their places for the face-off.

The music ended and the referee dropped the puck.

*Game on...*

Luc won the face-off but was quickly stripped of the puck.

In a heartbeat, I had two players coming my way.

Nesh dropped back but was stuck on his own.

“Fuck,” I whispered.

I had to put on a show.

And if things couldn't get any worse, Nesh made a move and lost his footing.

Now I had nobody helping.

Two players. Two sticks. One puck.

If I gave up this goal...

*I'm not giving it up. Fucking try me.*

My eyes never left the puck.

I came out of the net, then wiggled my way back.

I crouched down, my stick and glove hand ready.



The last pass was made and the one-timer shot taken.

It was a rocket flying right at me.

I lifted my body and felt the puck hit me in the right shoulder.

A quick sting of pain rippled throughout my body.

But I had a bigger problem.

The puck rebounded back out to the ice.

The right winger on the other team was right there, a smile on his face, thinking he had me.

He took a great shot and I turned, flashed my glove, and made the save of the fucking season.

The crowd gasped first.

Then cheered.

The eruption was as loud as a goal being scored.

I looked right at the bench, right at Coach Pete, and I nodded.

That was the start of the game in my eyes.

The game ended an hour later with Luc scoring twice, Cain scoring once, me not giving up another goal.

We won.

Luc and I were held back on the ice for a few post-game interviews.

A great win for everyone, but I knew it was far from perfect.

I knew Coach Pete would still be pissed off.

Which - again - wasn't just because of the game.

*It was because I knocked up his daughter.*



I WAS THE LAST TO SHOWER.

We all found ourselves moving slow.

Celebrating the win.

Taking the heat from Coach Pete over being down two to nothing.

Finding the common ground of it all.

I wandered around the locker room for a little bit, debating on talking to Coach Pete.

I talked myself out of it.

And once things began to empty out, I took a shower.

I had a post-game routine when games were that intense.

I liked to stand in the hottest shower I could get and think about the game.

Think about the saves I made. Think about the goals I gave up.

I put myself back in the game, over and over, picturing it, envisioning myself doing something different.

That's just how my mind worked.

And once I felt confident enough to make the saves I missed, I shut off the water and grabbed for my towel.

Back in the locker room, I had it all to myself.

The guys had all bolted.

Off to do their love and family things.

Luc as a father.

Cain in love.

Nolan running businesses with the woman he loved.

Nesh broken down in love.

And Roman with his engagement thing going on.

I got dressed into a pair of jeans, then stood there, thinking.

This kind of game and kind of win were usually our favorites.

We were usually so pumped up and feeling wild, we'd go out and cause trouble.

Now everything felt empty. Quiet.

I pushed from my locker area and turned, only to hear a soft, sweet gasping sound.

Standing just a foot or two away was Willow.

Definitely surprised to see me.

Which meant this wasn't some kind of sexy surprise.

I walked toward her, shirtless, smiling.

"You're not going to throw up on me again, are you, babe?" I asked.

"You're not going to let that go, are you?"

"Never."

"What are you doing here, Anders?"

I laughed. "What am I doing here? I'm the goalie of the team, babe."

"I thought the team was gone."

“I’m moving a little slow tonight. Did you see that game?”

“No. I didn’t see the game. I don’t really watch hockey all that much.”

“Too bad. It was a really good game. I saved the team.”

“Yeah? Saved them from what? Danger? Medical stuff? Or are you just feeling good over a dumb game?”

“Hormones again?”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re acting mean, babe. Just curious if it’s the hormones or just who you are.”

“I want to slap you right now, Anders.”

“Why haven’t you?”

“I’m on my way out of here,” she said. “I came by to meet up with my father. We’re going out for a late dinner.”

“Is that an invite for me?”

“Not at all. Stay away, Anders. I mean it.”

I stepped closer to her.

Then closer.

*Then... closer...*

“This isn’t a game.”

“I didn’t say it was a game. This is my place, babe. My locker room. And you’re in it.”

“Is that some kind of sexual threat or something?”

“I don’t know what that is. I didn’t expect to see you here. And I can’t help but notice the way you’re looking at me. Trying to keep your eyes on mine but it’s not working, is it?”

“Okay, fine. You have a nice body, Anders. But I’m sure you know that.”

“What about yours?”

“My what?”

“Your body. I want to see.”

Willow laughed and put her right hand to my chest. “You’re smooth but not that smooth. I am not going to end up fooling around with you in the locker room of the team my father coaches. Do you know how insane that is?”

“About as insane as you getting pregnant by the goalie of the team your father coaches?”

“Exactly,” Willow said. “Goodnight, Anders. I don’t need my father coming back here looking for me.”

“Why did you come into the locker room?”

“He forgot his phone. I offered to get it for him. He’s in a bad mood.”

“Yeah, he was really pissed at me for giving up two goals.”

“Imagine what he would do if he found out you’re the one who got me pregnant.”

“Oh, I can’t imagine. But...”

“Don’t,” Willow whispered.

“I have to, babe. There’s always a *but*.”

“*But...* instead of continuing this conversation, I’m going to leave.”

“*But...* I’m aching to know what the deal is here with your father. Why he’s so overprotective of you and why you care so much?”

“Well, Anders, you got me pregnant, okay? That’s where this ends with us. I don’t have to tell you a thing about myself or my life. So, again, goodnight.”

Willow pushed by me and walked to the locker room door.

I stared over my shoulder right at her ass.

Her ass in the dress that night on the beach had been magnificent.

But her ass in jeans?

Forget about it.

Her ass was definitely out of this world.

*No wonder she ended up pregnant by me, huh?*

## Chapter Nine

---

### WILLOW

**T**he first time I saw him look at my ass, I let it go.  
I tried to take it as a good thing.

*Hey, my ass looks nice in this outfit. The pants are professional yet apparently show off enough to get some attention.*

The second and third time I caught him checking me out, there was no attempt to hide it.

“A three bedroom condo in this area is usually rare to find,” I said. “You and I both know this won’t last long. Hey, I might even buy it for myself.”

“What do you need three bedrooms for?”

He adjusted his suit, purposely pushing up his right sleeve to show off a bright, gold watch.

My job was to sell the place.

Even if a creep like this guy stared at me the way he did.

*Alexander.*

That was his name.

He preferred to just be called *Alexander*.

No last name.

He casually slipped into the conversation that he worked in the music business.

Another guy just finding something to brag about.

Not to mention he obviously had some kind of weird porno fantasy of fucking his realtor while being shown a piece of property.

“The master bedroom has amazing natural lighting,” I said.

“Why don’t we go there next?” Alexander asked with a smile.

I turned and walked that way.

I felt his eyes on me.

Inside the master bedroom, I went to the biggest window and pointed.

“Great ocean view,” I said. “That alone is worth the price. Actually, the way I see it, you’re stealing this place from me.”

Alexander slipped his hands into his pockets and laughed. “You’re good, aren’t you? You know what someone wants and how to dangle it in front of them.”

“There’s also natural lighting in the master bath,” I said.

“I can stand there naked for the world to see, huh?”

“If that’s your thing, then yes.”

“So you enjoy that?”

“Excuse me?” I asked.



“Never mind,” Alexander said. “So this has three bedrooms. Two and a half baths. A nice living area. The kitchen is spacious. What else, Willow? Sell this to me right now.”

Alexander took a step toward me.

I thought about using my pregnancy as a way to get him to move away.

*But no.... I'm going to win this on my own...*

I smiled. “Well, it’s really simple, Alexander. Are you here to find a place to live or a place to stay? There’s a very big difference. I’ve got people lined up to look at this place. I’m ready to move, Alexander. You were the first to reach out. You said you had an all cash offer, but you needed to see the place. You’re seeing the place.”

“Three bedrooms.”

“Plenty of space. I’m sure you can convert one bedroom into an office. Then a spare bedroom for visitors.”

“You really want to sell this place, don’t you?”

“To you? That’s not my decision.”

“How long do I have to think about it?” Alexander asked.

I looked at my phone and pretended to look at my calendar. “About an hour. That’s when I show it again.”

“What can we do with an hour here?”

My eyes met with Alexander’s. “Sign papers. Sound good?”

“Damn, Willow, you’re good. Let’s do it. Let’s put in an offer. All cash. I want this place right now. No messing around.”

I stepped toward Alexander and offered my hand.

He shook my hand and tried to linger.

*Oh, is this the big move? You're going to buy this place to impress me? Then expect me to sleep with you?*

I smiled bigger. "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to pee. Pregnancy has me all out of whack."

Alexander pulled his hand away and stepped back as though I smelled like rotten fish.

"Pregnant," he said. "You don't look pregnant."

"I'm good at hiding it, for now," I said. I touched my stomach. "Won't be for long. I'm going to go pee and then we'll sign papers. Don't worry, I'll wash my hands in between."

Alexander's face dropped.

I exited the master bedroom, feeling empowered.

*Even though this guy was a total asshole creep and I wished I could call Anders and have him show up and beat the crap out of him.*



THE MAGIC WORD WAS *PREGNANT*.

That made Alexander move fast.

We signed the paperwork and he was out of the condo in a heartbeat.

It turned out to be a pretty damn good late morning for me.

I begged for the opportunity to sell the condo and was told I had one day to do so.

And I did it.

Once alone, I caught myself walking around the beautiful place.

Very open and spacious.

Lots of windows and natural lighting.

The views of the beach breathtaking.

Then suddenly something like a *mom vibe* began to hit me.

I began to picture my baby in this condo.

Not just as a baby either.

I pictured my child as four years old.

Running around the condo.

Pretending to be a superhero.

I touched my stomach and smiled.

I pictured *him* running around with race cars in his hands.

Or a hockey stick.

I looked outside to the beach and pictured me and him holding hands, going on a morning walk on the beach. Talking about life through the eyes of a four year old.

I kept picturing myself alone though.

Because that made the most sense to me.

The thought of Anders and I becoming anything?

*Impossible.*

This wasn't some romantic movie where things would work out in the end.

This was real life and sometimes things in real life just didn't work out.

And it hurt, but it was okay.

I stepped closer to the window in the living room.

I swallowed hard.

The second I felt my chin ever-so-slightly start to quiver, my cell started to ring.

I turned and ran back toward the kitchen where my bag, phone, folders and papers waited.

When I saw Anders's name on the screen, I smiled.

Then I thought about running into him in the locker room.

When everyone was supposed to be gone.

But not Anders, right?

Of course he had to be standing in nothing but a pair of jeans.

*His body... oh my goodness...*

Just staring at his body could get a woman pregnant.

I shoved my thoughts away and answered his call.

"Anders," I said, cringing when I did so.

"Babe," he said. "How are you feeling?"

"How am I supposed to be feeling?"

"I can't check up on you?"

"Oh, is this going to be a daily thing? You realize it takes a good while to make a baby, right?"

"Actually, it only took us a few minutes to make a baby."

"And you're proud of that number?"

"We were under a pier," he said. "We were in a rush. You give me a chance now, I'll go all night."

I rolled my eyes. “Anders, you can just give me a call in June, okay?”

“June?”

“That’s when I’m due.”

“June,” he whispered. “That feels so far away.”

“It is far away.”

“June,” he repeated. “You know, if everything goes right, I’ll still be playing hockey then. We’ll be finishing up winning it all.”

“Good for you, Anders. You win a trophy and I’ll push a baby out of my vagina. That seems equal.”

“Whoa.”

“Sorry. Too graphic?”

“Not at all. I love anything that involves your vagina.”

“Did you call to ruin my mood? I’m actually having a good morning.”

“Oh yeah? Why’s that?”

“I just sold a condo.”

“Congrats,” he said.

“Thanks,” I said, lifting an eyebrow. “Um, yeah. It’s kind of cool. I’m sort of new at all this still so they keep testing me. They wanted to see if I could sell this place in a day. And I did.”

“Did you wear a low-cut shirt and flirt like crazy?”

“You know what? Fuck you, Anders. I don’t need to use my body to sell anything. I can’t believe you just said that. You’re an asshole. Goodbye.”

“Wait!” Anders cried out. “It was a joke. A bad joke. I’m sure you’re amazing at selling condos.”

“Goodbye, Anders.”

“Don’t hang up on me, babe. We need to talk about this arrangement we have. Something has to give. Or else I’ll do it myself.”

I gasped. “Do what yourself?”

“Do what I have to do. I’ll come forward with the truth about us. Okay? I’ll put it all on my back.”

“Don’t you dare do that!” I yelled. “Are you that much of an idiot?”

“What do you want me to do here, babe? Just pretend like nothing is going on?”

“Yes! That’s what I want. What guy wouldn’t want that?”

“Really? You think all guys are just assholes who would knock someone up and take off? Maybe that happens here and there, but that’s not everyone. And even if it was, that’s not me.”

I gritted my teeth as I felt my body swoon.

My breasts ached.

My womb swelled.

I just...

“Anders, please listen to me, okay?”

“I’m listening.”

“I need time to figure it all out,” I said. “Okay? You even said it yourself. The way my father is acting right now isn’t good. And even though I don’t care all that much about

hockey, I know what this season means to him. To you. To the team.”

“Oh, fuck that, babe. You’re not going to be a martyr. Not with my baby.”

*My baby.*

That whole possessive thing was just... *hot*.

“I need you to trust me a little here,” I said.

“And I need you to give me a way in.”

“A way in? Is that sexual?”

“No. I’m talking about a way into your life. I’m not going to just sit back and wait for you to pop out a baby and then show up. I want to be there, Willow. I want to see it all.”

“You want me to throw up on you again? Do you have some kind of sick fetish?”

“See? You don’t know a thing about me. Just like I don’t know a thing about you. All we know is that we can fuck. And make babies.”

“Baby. Singular. Don’t you dare jinx me.”

“Oh, come on, babe? Wouldn’t it be awesome if it were twins?”

“Do you want me to hang up and block your number?”

Anders laughed. “I need to see you.”

“I’m working right now.”

“It doesn’t have to be right now. But I need to see you.”

“Do you trust me?”

“I can’t answer that. But I won’t blow the whole thing up. You have my word. But I need to see you. Tonight?”

“Tonight,” I whispered, then nodded.

My brain reminded me Anders wasn't there with me.

He couldn't see me nodding.

“Babe?” Anders asked.

“Yes. Sorry. Yes. Tonight. You can see me tonight.”

“Is this a date then?”

“No,” I said. “This is not a date at all. We are not actually meeting up, okay?”

“If we're not meeting up then how will I see you?”

“I'll tell you where to casually bump into me.”

“Ah, got it,” Anders said. “Don't worry, I won't bump into you too hard. I wouldn't want to hurt our baby.”

*Our baby...*

*I bit my bottom lip, bent my knees... and swooned.*



## Chapter Ten

---

### ANDERS

The whole idea of *bumping into each other* played a little bit more fun and flirty in my head than it happened in real life.

I wasn't the kind of guy that liked to be told what to do. Especially when it came to someone else calling the shots. And I didn't mean Willow either.

I meant her father.

The head coach of the hockey team I played for.

I opened the door to the beachside bar and put my head down.

The idea of me blending in, I stood no chance.

Even with my head down, I was still Anders. I was still the goalie for the *Inci Warriors*. I couldn't reduce my height or size or anything else that stuck out about me.

I shuffled across the floor and looked around a little bit.

*Where the hell is Willow?*

I then had the thought of her stiffing me.

Not showing up.

Chilling back at her apartment, pacing, chewing on her nails, not wanting to meet me or see me ever again.

If that ended up being that case, then we were going to have a serious problem.

*That's my baby, babe. I can play some of these games for a little bit, but not forever. And you are not going to keep our baby from me. In the womb or in your arms.*

This rush of possessiveness felt new to me.

From my left ear I heard a voice say, *“What are the odds that the Inci Warriors finally do something?”*

I turned my head and looked at a television screen.

Three men sat dressed in ties behind a desk with the *Inci Warriors* logo behind them on a screen.

*“Look, Jake, it's really simple to me. We know these guys are a playoff caliber hockey team. They've gotten there, right? Now... it's time to finish what they started. They brought in everyone they could. We're talking league leading offense. We're talking big, mean defense. And we're talking perhaps the best goalie in the league.”*

I nodded in agreement.

I began to walk again, when from the corner of my right eye I spotted Willow.

Now pause the entire scene for a second.

What happened to me seemed like something very new and very interesting.

I felt a sudden rush of excitement throughout my entire body.

From my ears to my toes.

*Ears? Really?*

*Yes... ears...*

My heart leapt a few times in my chest, forgetting its normal rhythm for a second or two.

I swallowed hard, with no idea why.

And the desire to rush up to her, grab her and kiss her, then drop to one knee and kiss her belly...

Willow looked at me.

She stood up, tucked her hair behind her left ear, smiled, and began to walk toward the bar itself.

*This is our 'bump into each other' moment.*

As she closed in on the bar, I began to walk again.

I turned my head, staring at the television screen, but she never left out of the corner of my right eye.

I was a professional hockey goalie - my job was to see everything all at once.

Then came our moment and I gently brushed my right hip against her.

Our sizes were very different and there was no way to casually *bump* into her.

Willow gasped and my right arm shot out and around her, keeping her in place.

“Oh, damn, babe,” I said. “I almost ran you over. Are you okay?”

“Fine,” she said, looking up at me. “Can you get your hand off me?”

I reluctantly moved my hand. “Were you going to sit right here?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Mind if I sit next to you?”

“Not sure I can tell you what to do,” she said.

“Smart, babe,” I said.

I sat down and waved for the bartender.

The second he looked at me, I knew he knew who I was.

“Play it even more casual, babe,” I whispered to Willow.

“Dude,” the bartender said.

“Hey,” I said to him. “Can we not make this an event for me? I’m just trying to get out and have a beer. Cool?”

“Totally. Anything you want.” He leaned forward. “Huge fan though, man. You guys are killing it this season. I know this is the season for you guys.”

“How about that beer?” I asked.

“Yeah, sure. Yeah.”

“And get a drink for the pretty woman I almost knocked over,” I said.

Willow quickly waved her hand. “I’ll take a water with lemon. I can pay for it myself.”

“No charge for water,” the bartender said.

He moved quickly to get me a beer.

I thanked him and he walked away, smiling ear to ear.

I casually turned toward Willow.

“Knocked over?” she asked me.

“What?”

“I thought you were going to say something else and be an idiot.”

“Oh, did you think I was going to tell the bartender I knocked you up?”

“Can you say that louder?”

“What are we doing here, babe? We casually bumped into each other, right? Now what?”

“I’m not exactly sure. You said you wanted to see me.”

“And I’m following your lead.”

“Right, it’s all on my back?”

“You’re the one that wants to hide and sneak around.”

“I have no choice. We have no choice.”

“So, did we bump into each other just to argue?”

“You wanted to see me,” Willow said.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“So I can see you, babe. I want to be near you. I want to be close to you.”

Willow stared at me.

If the bar was a little bit lighter, I would easily bet she was blushing.

Her eyes told me that.

Her eyes had that *swoony look* to them.

The *swoon* I loved to look for in a woman.

Except this time it felt a little bit different.

“Anders...”

“Should you act like you know my name?” I whispered.  
“Isn’t that going to give us away? Huh?”

“What do you want me to say right now?”

“I’m not sure, babe. But I’m not going to back off.”

“Anders...”

“Sorry to interrupt,” a voice said from my left.

I turned my head and saw the bartender standing there again.

I felt my lip start to curl.

In his right hand was a drink.

“Just delivering this,” he said. He placed the drink in front of Willow. “From that gentleman over there.”

The bartender nodded.

Both Willow and I looked to the other side of the bar.

Some guy nodded at Willow.

He puckered his lips and blew Willow a kiss.

*Okay... now I was officially in a pissed off mood.*



WILLOW DIDN’T TOUCH THE DRINK.

The bartender wandered off.

She and I went back to talking.

“Does this make you jealous?” she teased.

“A drink? I don’t care about a drink. I care about seeing you. I care about figuring this thing out between us.”

“And, again, I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“Why are we meeting out in public then? Casually bumping into each other? Anyone looking at us right now can see something between us.”

“Are you assuming something like feelings?”

“I didn’t say that. But we have a connection, babe. A real connection. You’re carrying our-”

*“How’s your drink, sugar?”*

The voice boomed from across the bar.

I turned my head and saw the same guy who sent Willow the drink... yelling at her.

Willow reached for glass and pushed it away.

*“What the hell, sugar?”*

“She obviously doesn’t want the drink,” I called back to him.

Willow kicked me.

“Who are you?” the guy yelled to me. “You her boyfriend? Huh? Don’t you know a woman like her needs a drink?”

“Anders, please,” Willow whispered.

I glanced at the bartender.

He picked up on the instant tension.

He blocked the view between me and the guy.

He walked toward the guy to talk to him.

When the guy stood up, I knew there was going to be a problem.

“What the fuck is this about?” the guy yelled. “I can’t send someone a drink?”

“She didn’t want the drink,” I said. “So sit down and find someone else.”

“Are you going to make me sit down?”

“You’re too far away,” I said. “Can’t hear you from over here?”

I flicked at my left ear.

I had to be honest - I did not expect the guy to come walking toward me.

My first instinct was to stand up and keep Willow behind me.

*Protect her. Protect my unborn baby.*

“Look at this,” the guy yelled. “You hiding her? Huh? She can’t speak for herself?”

“I think she already did speak for herself,” I said.

“No, I can speak for myself,” Willow said.

She pushed her way around me.

I grabbed at her hips and she clawed my hands away.

The guy saw this and laughed.

“She don’t want you,” he said to me.

“Hey, guys, come on,” the bartender said. “Let’s not do this here.”

“Then let’s go outside,” the guy said to me. “I’ll fucking drown you in the ocean. And then I’ll fuck your girlfriend.



Show her who a real man is!”

The guy grabbed between his legs.

Willow being the walking hormone and badass she was... she threw a right punch and clocked the guy in the mouth.

The second she hit the guy, I saw his eyes bulge and turn red.

My heart sank as I instantly knew whether it was the booze or just who he was, this guy wasn't above hitting a woman.

I grabbed Willow as gently as I could and moved her to the side.

My right hand shot out and I pushed at the guy's chest. “She's pregnant.”

“What?”

“She's pregnant. Okay? Don't get near her.”

“I don't care if she's pregnant, I'm going to-”

I couldn't let the guy finish that sentence.

If he finished that sentence, I was going to kill him.

I swung my left fist. Not really wanting to. But I had to.

I hit the guy hard enough that he spun toward the bar and fell against it.

Willow gasped, grabbed my left hand and pulled.

“We have to go,” she said to me.

“Yeah, you think?” I asked her.

The guy leaned against the bar, holding his face.

I reached into my pocket, took out a twenty and tossed it to the bar.

I nodded to the bartender, who stood frozen in shock.

Willow and I then hurried out of the bar, once outside, we headed toward the beach.

“You think he’ll come outside after us?” Willow asked.

“Doubt it,” I said. “And if he does, I’m ready.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s smart. Get into a bar fight, then get into trouble. Get arrested with me standing right next to you. That won’t blow our cover, right?”

“You hit the guy first,” I growled.

“I had to!”

“He was going to hit you back, babe.”

“Yeah? He could have tried.”

I closed in on Willow and placed my right hand to her stomach.

My left hand to the small of her back, holding her against me.

“It’s not that simple,” I whispered. “I have a stake in all of this. I have to protect you, babe. No matter what.”

“Anders...”

“Another thing? We can’t ever meet like this again.”

“But we have to keep this a secret,” she said.

I wanted to be angry at her.

But her eyes were just too pretty.

And her body against mine.

My hand between us, touching her stomach.

I wasn’t sure I could ever be mad at Willow.

*And that was going to be a big problem.*

## Chapter Eleven

---

### WILLOW

The only other option I had was to invite Anders back to my place.

But it had to be done my way.

Instead of just parading some guy into my place, I decided to sneak around.

It didn't make sense as much as it actually did make sense.

Had I invited guys into my apartment before?

Of course I had.

I was a woman who enjoyed herself, had needs, and found someone to satisfy those needs.

A part of me wondered what the difference was with Anders compared to anyone else.

*He's the goalie of the Inci Warriors. My father is the coach of the team.*

*My father's biggest fear is for one of his daughters to get involved with a hockey player.*

*And worse yet... pregnant?*

I entered my apartment first.

I hurried through as though I expected to find my father, mother, or sister hiding somewhere.

I did find a random bra stuffed into the cushion of the couch.

I almost left it there, wanting Anders to find it and get jealous.

I rolled my eyes at myself.

I couldn't stand that I secretly liked him getting jealous over me.

When I thought about him hitting that asshole guy at the bar...

*Warmth.*

That was the only word I allowed in my mind.

What I felt. Where I felt it.

I ended up so distracted with my own battling thoughts, I lost track of time.

Anders ended up texting me, asking if I was home yet.

I ran to my bedroom and threw the random bra onto the bed and shut the door.

I texted him back, giving him instructions on what to do.

To just come inside and not bother knocking.

Less risk of him being seen.

Oh, and that he had to use the back set of stairs too.

No coming through the front door, taking the elevator and all that.

Anders never responded to my text, which left me lingering at my own front door.

Pacing, biting my bottom lip until I bit too hard and my eyes welled up with tears.

I licked away the quick taste of my own blood.

Then I nibbled at my fingernails.

And I waited.

I almost got to the point where I was going to text and tell him to hurry.

And believe me, I knew how messed up this whole thing was.

One second I was pushing Anders away.

The next second I was telling him to come over.

Back and forth...

My apartment door opened and Anders entered.

A gorgeous monster of a man.

With intense yet tender eyes.

His clean-cut face, steel-cut jaw, everything so fucking perfect about him it seemed so unfair.

*Why does he have to be a hockey player? Why can't he be a lawyer? Or even a surfer?*

Anders shut the door behind him.

I had this vision - this need - for him to just make a move and kiss me.

Pick me up and kiss me.

Instead, Anders looked around. Playfully.

“Are we in the clear yet, babe?”

I stepped toward him and punched him in the chest. “Don’t be an ass.”

“How am I being an ass? You started a bar fight, Willow.”

“That guy started it. You played into it.”

“I didn’t do a damn thing,” Anders said. “He was loud. And he had the hots for you.”

“Jealous?”

“No. Just making sure some other dude’s little sausage isn’t going near you.”

“Oh, that’s what it is? It’s about me being a slut?”

“Whoa, I never said that word.”

“Whether you like it or not, it’s still my body,” I said. “I can do whatever I want.”

Anders curled his lip at me.

*Just like he did at that asshole from the bar.*

*Why is this turning me on right now?*

*Why are my eyes growing wider by the second?*

“Whether you like it or not, babe, I’m a part of this,” Anders said. “From the beginning to the end. And the end isn’t with you pushing a baby out of your body.”

“You’re really that committed, Anders?”

“You want to know something about me, Willow? I grew up without a father. My old man left when I was a baby. He

woke up one morning and just decided it all wasn't for him. He left my mother stranded. That woman worked herself to death to provide for me. Now, let's be honest. Did my mother get cancer because of how hard she worked to keep the lights on and a roof over our head? Probably not. But I can't help but wonder. My mother passed away right after I graduated high school. I was on my own from there on out, but she gave me enough of a foundation that I found my way. So if you think for one second I'm going to follow in the footsteps of the guy who abandoned me, you're wrong. I can respect a lot of what you're asking of me, babe, because I understand, but I am not going to leave you."

I reached up and touched Anders's face.

My fingertips - my nails - dug into his skin just a little.

I felt myself rising up to my toes.

Knowing what I wanted to do. What I needed to do.

The look in his eyes was so obvious too.

*Men. Way too predictable.*

Then again, maybe I was the predictable one too.

After all, I was the one that saw Anders on the beach that night and wanted him. I was the one that groaned and begged for more from him when he pushed up my dress and his fingertips flirted between my legs. I was the one who told him to fuck me. I was the one who cried out against the sound of crashing waves as he plunged himself deep into me.

And now, I was the one ready to kiss him - *and more* - all because he confessed an emotional story about his personal life.

My brain knew this.



My heart didn't care all that much.

And between my legs, I just wanted Anders.

Just him. Only him.

The second Anders inched down to meet me for a kiss, something else unpredictable happened.

My stomach suddenly groaned and churned.

The sound was very loud but at least I had a warning this time.

*Meaning, I wasn't going to throw up on Anders.*



*AGAIN?*

*Why does this have to happen again?*

I made it to the kitchen this time.

Again, better than spewing all over Anders's face.

I hurried and turned the water on, then hung over the sink, feeling my stomach twisting and turning.

I let out a few obnoxiously loud dry heaves.

I shut my eyes as embarrassment swept throughout my body.

When I felt a hand touch my back, I shook my head.

"Nope," I called out. "No thanks. I don't need that right now."

"Well, you're going to get it, babe," Anders said. "I'm not leaving your side."

*Why does he have to be so smooth and sexy like this?*

I cupped my right hand under the water and splashed it against my mouth.

I shut off the water, ripped off a piece of paper towel, and dried my mouth and hand.

Then I ripped open the fridge and grabbed for the first thing I could see to drink.

Orange juice.

I wasn't sure how well that would sit in the pit of my stomach but I needed something to get rid of the awful taste in my mouth.

One sip told me I made the wrong choice.

I returned the orange juice to the fridge and ran to the bathroom.

"Hey, are you okay?" Anders called out.

I stuck my right thumb into the air and waved it behind me.

I slammed the bathroom door shut and dove for the sink, grabbing my toothbrush and toothpaste.

I brushed as though poison had laced my tongue and I needed to scrub it away.

That's when I realized what I was doing.

*I'm brushing my teeth so my breath is fresh and my mouth is clean because I want to finish that kiss that never got started between Anders and I...*

I stopped brushing that instant and spit into the sink.

When I opened the bathroom door, Anders stood there.

"You okay, babe?"

“I’m fine. Just my normal nightly vomiting session.”

“Happens every night?”

“Some nights.”

“Seems like it’s only when I’m here.”

“Maybe you should take the hint,” I said. “You make me sick.”

“I make you *something*, don’t I?”

“You’re going to flirt now, Anders? After I almost threw up on you again?”

“Nowhere else for me to go,” he said.

“I’m your last resort?”

“First choice?”

“Get new choices, Anders.”

He put his right hand to the doorway of my bathroom.

Blocking me.

His left hand touched my face.

His thumb stroked my cheek.

“I’ve made my choice, babe.”

“If you want to be serious about this, then you have to play along and keep it cool.”

“What does that look like?”

“It looks like the way things are right now. Sneaking around. Bumping into each other. Let me figure this out.”

“And you’re not going to tell me why things are like this?”

“Anders...”

“Fine. I can play along.”

“Deal?”

“Deal, babe.”

I stuck my right hand between us, wanting him to shake my hand.

Anders wasn't interested in that.

He made his move.

Closing in on me, leaning down to kiss me.

I lifted my right hand to his muscular chest and pushed him back.

“Babe,” he said. “We both need this. I need to fuck. You need to be fucked. I'm the only choice you have right now.”

I slapped him across the face. “Don't ever say that again. Don't make me feel broken and like a last resort.”

“Willow, I was just-”

“Shut up, Anders,” I said. “I'm not done talking yet. You want me, Anders? You want to fuck me again, Anders? If that's something you're really thinking about... something you... desire...” I placed my pointer finger to his chest and smiled. “If it makes you rock hard thinking about it, Anders... how much and how badly you want to take me to bed... you know what? Earn it.”

Anders nodded. “Works for me.”

“But not tonight,” I said. “It's time for you to leave.”

“Can I at least say goodbye to my baby before leaving?”

Before I could give an answer, Anders dropped to one knee before me.

His hands touched my hips.

I froze in place and looked down at him.

His right hand gently lifted my shirt, just enough to show off a little bit of skin.

I felt myself feeling slightly nervous.

I wasn't sure what exactly was visible at this point, but for me personally, there was a hardness forming inside my stomach.

Further proof that I really was indeed pregnant with Anders's baby.

Anders came forward and brushed his lips just above my belly button.

"Don't give your mother a hard time tonight," he whispered to my belly.

My toes curled and I shut my eyes for a second.

*Resisting Anders for much longer was going to be impossible, wasn't it?*

## Chapter Twelve

### ANDERS

I stopped at the bench as our equipment guy - Sid - came out to collect all the gear.

Cain sat on the bench, looking out to the ice.

Luc stood next to the bench, looking stuck halfway between getting back on the ice or going into the locker room.

Mags called practice two minutes ago.

The rest of the guys were in a hurry to get off the ice.

We lost one game out of seven and Coach Pete acted as though we blew a three-oh series lead in the playoffs.

I glanced at Luc and he nodded toward Cain.

“Shit,” I said. “Is this what I think?”

Cain looked at me. “Save your fucking thoughts. You don’t know what real life is, Anders.”

“I needed to hear that,” I said. “You prick.”

Cain stood up.

He towered over me from where he stood on the bench.

I skated back a little and opened my arms.

“Come on out, big guy,” I called out. “Come talk to me face to face. Let’s have it out here. I’m sorry about things, Cain. I really am.”

“Cain,” Luc said.

Cain turned his head and looked ready to spit fire.

From inside the small tunnel I heard the echoing voice of *da-da-da*.

Luc instantly smiled and looked.

He waved.

“Emma and Isla are here,” Luc said. “Are we good here?”

“We’re fine,” I called out. “Go see your family. I can handle Cain on my own.”

“I will snap your neck in a second,” Cain warned.

Luc disappeared and I skated toward the bench again.

“Sorry about Lexie,” I said to Cain. “I’m really pulling for you both. I mean that. I know how bad you want to have a family. I believe it’s going to happen.”

“Yeah? You believe? What does that get us? Nothing.”

“You’re right, Cain. It gets you nothing.”

Cain walked away.

I took that as a win because I had figured he was for sure going to take a swing at me.

I waddled my way down the tunnel wearing my large goalie pads.

Cain approached Luc and Emma.

Luc had Isla in his arms.

*Daddy's girl, huh?*

*Luc as a father.*

*The way Emma stares at him when he's holding their daughter.*

Cain paused for a moment.

He nodded at Emma and then gently tickled Isla.

She let out a playful yell and giggle.

Cain actually smiled for a second, then went into the locker room.

As I got closer to Luc, I thought about his story.

How Emma had been pregnant and didn't tell Luc.

How she showed up with a baby in a stroller.

I knew somewhere in Luc's heart it bothered him that he never got to experience all the stuff that came with pregnancy. Not to mention feeling bad that Emma had to go through all of it alone.

I didn't intend for that to happen with Willow.

*No fucking way in hell.*

*"Da-da-da," Isla said, pointing at me.*

"Hey, kid, shh," I said. "Your dad isn't supposed to know the truth."

"That's real nice to say while I'm holding my daughter," Luc said. "I ought to knock you out for saying that."

"Back me up here, Emma?" I asked.



“Not at all,” Emma said.

“You don’t want Luc to know about us?” I asked her.

“When is that ever going to stop?” Emma asked. “I thought Roman was finally getting under control and now you?”

“Never,” I said. I put my hands out. “Want to hang out with Uncle Anders, little princess?”

“Since when do you want to hold my daughter?” Luc asked.

Isla reached for me and I plucked her from her father’s arms.

I had no idea what had come over me.

I had Isla in my arms and suddenly things felt okay.

Next thing I knew I walked back up the tunnel toward the ice.

“Don’t you dare take her out on the ice!” Emma called out.

I looked back and smiled.

I understood why Emma would say that.

I was - essentially - an idiot to everyone.

Except I knew better.

I knew exactly how to keep Isla safe.

Without even thinking about it.

I slowly plopped down next to the ice and she was on her feet, using her left hand to hold my right thumb.

I placed my hand on the ice and shivered. “That’s cold.”

I shook my head.

Isla laughed.

She carefully crouched down and reached for the ice.

Her little hand touched it and she looked at me.

“*Coooo*,” she said with a smile.

Her version of cold, I figured.

“That’s right,” I said.

She reached down with her other hand.

Both hands touched the ice and she looked at me again, smiling even bigger.

I hugged myself and shivered. “Brrrr, right?”

Her hands suddenly began to slide forward.

A little voice in my brain told me to catch Isla or else she was going to hit her precious face off the unforgiving ice.

I moved into action without even knowing I was doing so.

I moved quick enough to help her but slow enough so that I didn’t startle her.

Without hesitation she turned to face me and slapped her hands to my face.

Laughing.

“Your hands are freezing, little princess,” I said.

I made goofy noises, wanting to do whatever it took to make Isla giggle some more.

When Luc and Emma came to get their daughter from me, Luc touched my forehead.

“You feeling okay, Anders?”

“Yeah, why?”

“I’ve never seen you...”

“I know,” I said. “Take this kid away from me right now. I need to get out of here. I need to find a bar or some trouble.”

Emma picked up Isla.

“I’ll meet you at the restaurant for dinner?” Emma asked Luc.

“Yeah, just let me shower first, okay?” I asked.

Emma shook her head.

“*Da-da-da,*” Isla said, pointing at me.

“Okay, we have to have a talk about that,” Luc said.

Emma smiled and kissed Luc.

I wondered if maybe little Isla was a psychic or something.

Maybe she could sense that I was... *da-da-da*...

Just not hers.

I was Willow’s baby’s *da-da-da*...

I sat there for another few seconds, alone, thinking.

I finally climbed to my feet and walked toward the locker room.

I opened the door just in time to have a coffee mug sail right past my head and hit the wall, exploding into thick, porcelain chunks.

*Standing a few feet away - really pissed - was Coach Pete.*



*OH SHIT, HE KNOWS.*

The thought rippled throughout my entire body.

I slowly looked around the locker room.

I wasn't alone.

Which was good.

*More witnesses if he decided to take me out right now.*

"Coach Pete," I said.

He pointed at me. "Sorry about almost hitting you with the mug, Anders. Wrong place, wrong time."

*Kind of like me fucking your daughter, you know?*

*Except that was the right place at the right time.*

*And, hey, the outcome? No way I can say that's wrong, right?*

Coach Pete turned and stormed away.

I looked at Nolan.

Then down at my feet.

A few chunks of the mug were showing off what I figured to be an *Inci Warriors* logo.

"Do I want to know?" I asked.

"He just came out pissed off," Roman said.

"At least it wasn't at us," I said.

"Someone should go talk to him again," Nolan said.

"I did my time already," I said.

"He threw a mug at you," Nesh said. "He'll be calmer with you."

"Yeah, man, he owes you one," Roman said.

"Are you serious right now?" I asked.

“Just go see what’s up,” Nesh said.

“Find out if it’s us or the thing with his daughter,” Nolan said.

I almost hesitated again.

Then I thought about Willow.

If Coach Pete needed someone to verbally abuse and throw coffee cups at, then I was the guy for the job.

I finally took off my goalie pads and went to find Coach Pete.

He and Mags stood outside his office.

“Don’t fuck this up,” Coach Pete growled.

Mags nodded and walked toward me.

He widened his eyes as a warning to stay away.

Except I was going right into the belly of the beast.

“Coach,” I called out.

He glanced at me and nodded toward his office.

He left the door open for me.

I took a deep breath and entered.

“Sorry about the coffee mug again.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. That’s nothing. I’ve had much worse thrown at me. And I’ve had some fun stuff thrown at me. Bras. Panties. The good stuff.”

Coach Pete stared at me. “Need something?”

I ran a hand through my almost-dried, sweaty hair. “You did throw a coffee cup at me. Just wondering if that was something meant for us? Me? The team?”

“You want to know why I threw the coffee cup,” he said.

“Yes.”

“Not really your business, is it?”

“Tell that to the shards of porcelain in my right eye,” I said.

“Medical staff will help you with that, Anders,” Coach Pete said. “Now if you don’t mind...”

“We’re just thinking about you,” I said. “Worried about you. You know? Just trying to...”

“Just trying to do what? Be my friend? Help me? You still want me to be nice to you?”

“I’ll make you a deal.”

“What?”

“You have a nice, big coffee cup on your desk,” I said. “Looks like it’s heavy duty metal.”

“Something like that,” Coach Pete said.

“You can throw that at me,” I said. “As hard as you want. Just as long as you tell me what’s wrong today.”

I offered a quick grin.

Coach Pete shook his head. “First off, I’m not throwing my good coffee cup at you. My wife got that for me for Christmas. Keeps liquids warm for twelve hours. She’d kill me if she found out I threw it at someone.”

“Okay then,” I said.

I started to turn.

“I’m going to kill whoever got Willow pregnant,” Coach Pete said. “Okay? That’s where my mind is at!”

“Did something happen?” I asked.

“Yeah, something happened! She’s pregnant! And then I find out she went to an appointment today. All alone.”

“An appointment?”

“Doctor,” Coach Pete said. “She went to the damn doctor alone. Can you believe that? My own daughter. Alone. I’ve had it up to here already...”

Coach Pete put his hand over his head.

“To the doctor,” I said. “Alone.”

“That’s right,” Coach Pete said. “She didn’t even say a word to anyone. And then I find out and I just...”

He took a deep breath.

Then he sighed.

“This isn’t your problem, Anders,” he said. “Sorry for a third time about throwing the coffee cup at you.”

I grabbed the door, tore it open and bolted down the hallway.

*Willow? At the doctors? By herself?*

My heart didn’t just race.

My heart panicked.

Was Willow okay?

*Was the baby okay?*

## Chapter Thirteen

---

### WILLOW

“Just sit there and be quiet,” I said to my sister.

“You know, this feels a lot like you’re about to tell me you’re pregnant,” Kay said.

“Hey, you ruined the surprise!”

“Very funny,” she said. “Can’t get pregnant twice. Or can you? Is that possible? Isn’t that how twins are made?”

“You can look that up later on your own,” I said. “I wanted to show you something.”

Kay inched to the edge of the couch. “Is this it? You’re going to show me a picture of the *daddy*? Please show me. He’s got to be hot, right? Or... did you just let anyone in? Is he ugly? That’s okay if he’s ugly, Willow. I’ve slept with ugly guys before. It happens. Sometimes you just need...”

“Will you stop talking for a second?” I asked.

“My lips are sealed.”

I reached into my back pocket and brought out a long strip of ultrasound pictures.



I held them up and smiled.

Kay looked, blinked, tilted her head, and then sort of realized what she was looking at.

She stood up. “Is that?”

“Yes.”

“That’s a picture of your vagina.”

“Not quite,” I said. “Way up there...”

Kay grabbed the pictures from my hand. “So it’s like officially official.”

“It’s been official, Kay. Believe me.”

“But this is...” She looked at me. “What exactly am I looking at?”

“Look at the bubble,” I said. “That’s my womb.”

“Your vagina.”

“Kay, that’s not my vagina.”

“Right. Sure. Sorry.”

“That’s the womb,” I said. “And that bean looking *thing*...”

“Don’t call my niece or nephew a *thing*,” Kay said.

“That’s the baby.”

“That’s a baby?”

“That’s a baby,” I laughed.

“And that little thing is going to grow up into... one of us?”

“It’s pretty amazing, isn’t it?”

Kay looked down at my stomach. “You don’t look pregnant.”

“I will. Soon enough.”

“Okay, I need to do something right now.”

“What?” I asked.

Kay gently bit her bottom lip.

Kay and I had a thing when it came to one another.

We knew how to suck in our emotions and keep them hidden.

That was a gift from our stubborn father.

There were times when it was okay to cry and times when you had to just not cry.

Kay and I could never hold back when the other one cried.

Our father learned that lesson the first time Kay and I got our periods at the same time and both of us wept like babies over a commercial about a little boy writing his grandmother a letter. The commercial turned out to be selling soda, but the music and everything else just got to us.

We cried for an hour.

Then we laughed even longer.

Our father stared at us like we were psychos.

As Kay stood inches from me and her chin began to quiver, I shook my head.

“Kay, don’t you dare,” I said.

“I... can’t... hold back...”

Kay blinked fast.

Her eyes filled with tears.

My eyes filled with tears.

She threw her arms into the air and let out a crying squeal.

“I know!” I cried out. “I know!”

“Once you see it... it’s so real now,” Kay wept.

We hugged each other at the same time.

We started to jump up and down, weeping.

We kept going until I heard my phone ring.

I broke the tear-filled smile with my sister.

I was waiting for a text that had to do with work.

What I didn’t expect was a text from Anders.

*Telling me he was on his way over!*



I FROZE FOR A FEW SECONDS.

My heart climbed into my throat.

**You can’t come over right now. My sister is here. Just wait.**

I listened to Kay sniffing from the living room.

Anders wasn’t having it.

**I’m on my way. I don’t care who is there. EMERGENCY.**

That word caught my attention.

*Emergency?*

I gritted my teeth and had to think quick.

“Hey, Kay,” I called out. “Feel like doing me the biggest favor ever?”

“Not sure,” she said. “What’s up?”

“I have to take care of something here for work,” I said. “And I’m kind of having a weird craving.”

“What do you want?” Kay asked.

I looked at her. “Pickle chips. Chips that are flavored like pickles. Weird, right?”

“Gross.”

“Can you help me?”

“Cravings? Really?”

“What? Do you think I’m lying to you? If I wanted to use you to get some good stuff, I would have said I’m craving some boneless buffalo wings.”

*Oh, damn, that sounds good right now...*

“True,” Kay said. “Any special brand of chips?”

“No,” I said. “Just... what I said...”

“Are you okay?” Kay asked.

“Please,” I said. I walked to the door. “Just help me out.”

Kay didn’t believe me for a second.

She touched my shoulder. “Hey, it’s okay. You won’t be alone. I promise.”

“What?”

“You’re embarrassed right now, Willow. I can see it on your face. We’re crying over your baby and it’s so exciting yet there’s a darkness to it. That sucks.”

“Can you just get me the chips?”

“Sure,” Kay said.

She exited my apartment and turned to the left.

I watched her walk to the elevator.

I watched her stand there.

I bit my bottom lip.

*Please... please... please...*

Kay finally disappeared.

I turned to my right just as the door opened and Anders appeared.

*Talk about cutting it close.*

He ran toward me so fast I actually put my hands out.

I thought he was going to tackle me.

*Or maybe pick me up, kiss me, and just take me to my bed and fuck me.*

“Get in here,” I growled as I stepped back into my apartment.

Anders had no problem listening to that.

He ran into my apartment and slammed the door shut.

Then he came right up to me and touched my face.

I looked up at him and tried to gasp but lost my breath for a second.

Anders was so big. So strong. So commanding.

The look in his eyes...

“Are you okay, babe?”

His voice rough yet smooth.

“I’m okay,” I said. “Why are you...”

“You were at the doctor.”

“How did you know that?”

“Your father. He was in a bad mood and I went to talk to him.”

“You talked to my father?”

“Yeah. I’m sort of the go-to guy with him. Well, this time he threw a coffee mug at me so I figured he would—”

“He threw what at you?”

“Well, it wasn’t on purpose. I opened the locker room door as he threw the coffee mug. And it hit the wall and shattered.”

“Anders...”

“I asked him what was wrong and it took me a few minutes but he said you were at the doctor. He was mad you went alone. I’m mad you went alone. But aside from that, are you okay?” Anders stepped back and looked down. “Is... the baby... okay?”

I gasped. “Oh, Anders...”

I realized what I was staring at.

This huge man... terrified.

Worried about me.

Worried about our baby.

*Can he get any hotter?*

“I’m fine,” I said. “The baby is fine too.”

“Then why the hell were you at the doctor?” Anders growled.

“Anders, I’m pregnant. I have to go for checkups. I have to get seen quite a bit. That’s how this works. They have to check on the baby and make sure he or she is growing like normal. It’s all part of the process.”

“So you’re really okay? Nothing bad happened?”

“No,” I said. “This was a scheduled appointment.”

Anders didn’t look satisfied at all with that answer.

“Here, I want to show you something,” I said.

I led the way toward the living room.

I picked up the ultrasound pictures from the table and handed them to Anders.

“This is why I was at that appointment,” I said. “Just to get checked.”

“What is this?” Anders asked.

“That’s your baby, Anders. Your son. Your daughter. Your baby.”

He looked me in the eyes. “Our baby.”

My knees almost gave out.

“Yes, Anders. Our baby. That’s the ultrasound.”

“And this is the baby?” Anders asked, pointed to the white bean shaped blob.

“That’s the baby,” I said. “Looks like you, huh?”

“What does that mean?”

I smiled. “Nothing. I’m joking.”

He squinted and nodded. "I think it's a boy. Look right there."

"Anders..."

"I mean, if it's a boy and it's my son, you know it'll be easy to tell, right?"

"Just so you know, everything is perfect," I said. "Me. The baby. Everything is on schedule."

"You went to this appointment alone?"

"Yeah. No big deal."

"This is a big deal," he said. "This is a really big deal, babe. I'm on your father's side with this one."

"Oh, please. Stop it."

"No," Anders said. "I won't stop it." He touched my left hip. "Listen to me, babe. I want to be there. I'm going to be at the next appointment."

"It's not that simple, Anders."

"It's not? Watch me."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll fake an injury. Then I'll have to go see the doctor."

"To an OBGYN?" I asked with a smile.

"A what?"

"Anders, there's special doctors for this stuff," I said. "You don't just go to a regular doctor. This is a woman's doctor. For all the... *down there stuff*..."

"I don't care," he said. "I will be there. Somehow."

"You're annoyed right now."



“I’m more than annoyed. I’m pissed off.”

“You know, it’s kind of cute to see you this annoyed.”

“Are you going to resist me for this entire thing, Willow?”

“I’m not trying to do this on purpose. I’m trying to…”

I lost my words. I had nothing to say.

I honestly didn’t think twice about going to the doctor alone.

I was used to being alone and embraced it.

“If I need to say it every single fucking day, then I will. I’m not going anywhere, babe. I’m here. I’m part of this. That’s my baby in your belly.”

I reached up and grabbed Anders’s face.

I jumped to my toes.

*I couldn’t resist him any longer right now.*

I kissed him.

My lips pressed against his and it didn’t take a fraction of a second before Anders took control of the kiss.

His lips parted, his tongue touched my lips.

I melted forward.

His hands grabbed my sides.

His thumbs pressed just under my breasts.

I felt him gently starting to lift me.

Something about that move was just so hot.

The tip of my tongue flirted with his tongue and then I broke the kiss and sucked in a breath.

“It’s okay, babe. I’m here. Right here. I want to hold you, Willow. I want to hold you while you’re naked. I want to stare at these ultrasound pictures and talk about everything.”

*Oh my fucking God, Anders...*

My teeth literally chattered for a second.

I kissed him again.

He kissed me back.

I quickly broke the kiss.

“It’s time, babe,” he said. “Time for sex. We need it.”

I couldn’t exactly argue the truth in that statement.

*But...*

“Anders, you have to leave right now.”

“Why?”

“My sister was here. I lied to her and sent her to get me something to eat. She’s going to be back any second.”

He curled his lip. “Do I get to take these ultrasound pictures with me?”

“No,” I said. “She knows they’re here.”

I kissed him again.

My lips quivered.

I almost told him I was sorry.

He squeezed me just a little tighter for a second.

Then he released his hold.

He looked at the ultrasound pictures again and left the apartment.

Before I had a chance to calm down and think about just how unbelievably sexy Anders was, Kay was back with a bag of pickle flavored chips.

“Here,” she said, tossing me the bag.

“Ugh, you’re the best,” I said.

I watched as Kay paused and sniffed the air.

*She smells him. She smells Anders.*

Kay didn’t say a word.

I opened the bag of chips and tossed one into my mouth.

My face twisted from the sour taste of the vinegar-pickle flavor.

*Kissing Anders tasted so much better than these gross chips.*

## Chapter Fourteen

---

### ANDERS

**W**e were right back at it as a team.

We had a three game win streak - each game on the road.

Which was huge.

The worst part about the road trip for me was not being able to see - *or casually bump into* - Willow.

I finally understood what Luc went through, not being able to see Isla.

When we landed back home, Coach Pete called a practice.

This was the season of determination and perfection.

A three game win streak on the road but there were still things to work on.

I gave up one goal in those three games.

And that one goal haunted me.

We were all over the sports world too.

My name and face plastered everywhere, with the subtle talk of maybe me being the best goalie in the league. Maybe having a historic season.

None of that mattered much to me.

I had two things on my mind.

Winning it all.

And getting time alone with Willow.

The best I had with Willow was her replies to my texts.

I took that as a win and left it at that.

*For now.*

When we finished practice, Coach Pete didn't break anything.

He didn't have much to say either.

Mags was the one who called practice over and told us we did good.

Everyone showered and was getting ready to leave when Coach Pete came out of his office.

He whistled and nodded at me.

He pointed to his office.

I looked over my shoulder and met eyes with Roman.

He suddenly looked nervous for me.

Yet he didn't know a thing about me.

He knew something was going on. But I hadn't completely talked to him about the whole Willow being pregnant thing.

I walked toward Coach Pete's office, ready to face the music.

*I thought about texting Willow one more time... you know, before her father killed me for getting her pregnant.*



“SIT DOWN,” COACH PETE SAID.

I took a seat.

He walked around behind his desk and sat down.

He stared at me.

I swallowed hard.

I told myself my best chance here was to just confess it all.

Tell him the truth.

The whole thing.

*Did I love his daughter? No.*

*Were we in a relationship? No.*

*Did we just hook up once? Yes.*

*Was I going to be a good father? Fuck yes.*

*Did I plan on pursuing something with Willow? I would love the chance to figure that out.*

If I got ahead of this...

Coach Pete opened his bottom desk drawer.

I swore on my life he was going to take out a weapon and end me.

Instead, he put a bottle of whiskey on his desk.

“I think you’ve earned a drink, Anders,” he said.

“Oh?” I asked.

“Hell of a road trip for you,” he said. “Three away games. Three really good teams. One goal given up.”

“One goal that haunts me,” I said. “I should have had that save.”

“You should have. But that’s life. Can’t win them all.”

“I want to win them all, Coach,” I said.

“Well, I appreciate your attitude, Anders. Among other things. Drink with me?”

“Of course,” I said.

“You don’t need ice in a glass, right?”

“Ice? Why would I water down whiskey?”

“Good answer.”

Coach Pete took the lid off the whiskey bottle.

He then produced two glasses and put more than a sip in each glass.

He nodded and I reached for a glass.

“Anders,” he said. “This is for you. Keep up that kind of play and you’re looking at a record breaking season.”

“Can I admit something?”

Coach Pete nodded.

“I don’t give a shit about records,” I said. “I mean that. I don’t care. I hate seeing my face on television. I hate seeing my name trending online. I just want to play hockey. I want to win.”

“That’s why you’re the best goalie in the league,” Coach Pete said. “Cheers to you, Anders.”

We touched glasses together.

Coach Pete downed his drink first.

I followed behind him.

He didn't ask if I wanted a refill.

He just poured me one.

"I did drive here," I said with a grin.

"One more little nip for both of us. If I show up stinking of whiskey, Holly will have my head."

"That's good though. To have someone to keep you in line, right?"

"Holly does more than that. She's the boss. She's the best." Coach Pete leaned back in his chair. "Sometimes I still think about it."

"About what?"

"That she's with me. The way we met. The way we fell in love. It's just..." Coach Pete cleared his throat. "Listen to me. I sound like some sap in a romantic movie."

"No, it's good to see this side of you," I said. "Compared to the other side."

"Want me to break something?"

"No," I smiled. "A calm drink is just fine."

"Well, since you're the guy who talks to me, I can go on and on. Take this punk loser who got my daughter pregnant. Guy just takes off and disappears? What kind of man is that? I'm more upset with my daughter that she slept with a loser. You know?"

"To be fair, you don't know the entire story, right? You don't know if this guy is trying. Maybe he's just doing his own thing in the background. Maybe he's a decent guy."



“Decent? What kind of man sleeps with someone one night, gets them pregnant, and then vanishes?”

“Have you ever had a one-night stand, Coach?”

Coach Pete narrowed his gaze. “How do you not protect yourself? Or my daughter? And I get it. She should have been smarter too.”

“She’s also a grown woman.”

“What does that mean?”

“I’m just saying... people make their own decisions. Right?”

“Seems like you want to take sides here, Anders. You don’t know what this feels like. That’s my daughter. I don’t care if she’s thirty years old, forty years old... whatever. As long as I’m alive, I’m going to worry about her and I’m going to protect her. I couldn’t protect her from herself. Or this guy with his floppy willy.”

“I don’t think it was all that *floppy* if he got her pregnant.”

Coach Pete frowned.

Anger washed over his face.

*Way to go, Anders. You idiot.*

I cleared my throat and lifted my glass. “This drink is for her. For your daughter.”

“For Willow?”

“Yeah. For a healthy and safe pregnancy. No matter the circumstances, right? I mean, you’re going to have a grandchild.”

“A grandson,” Coach Pete said.

“You know that already?”

“No.” He smiled. “But I’m pulling for it. A grandson, huh? Can you imagine?”

I liked the way Coach Pete beamed with pride at the thought of a grandson.

*See? Is it really that bad?*

*I’m a decent guy. He knows that.*

*I can just tell him right now.*

*What’s the worst that will happen?*

“Then again, I have to make sure I’m not in jail for killing the prick that got Willow pregnant,” Coach Pete said. “Because mark my words, when I find out who it is...”

I swallowed hard.

Then Coach Pete stared at me.

Waiting for me to say something.

My mind scrambled.

“Fuck that guy,” I blurted out. “What a piece of shit, right? No respect.”

“Exactly.”

“You know, I bet he’s broke. I bet he’s some loser...”

“Easy now,” Coach Pete said. “My daughter did sleep with this clown. I can’t make her sound bad.”

“No,” I said. “It’s not her. It’s him. He probably said whatever needed to be said to get what he wanted from her. I hate guys like that. They prey on women. Even the strongest women. Like your daughter. She’s successful, right? Has her own place? Has a good job?”

“Well, that’s a whole other story too.”

“Yeah, I know,” I said. “She babysat Luc’s kid before. Now she sells houses? I think that takes guts. And you know what? That guy doesn’t deserve her. Hey, maybe he’s some stoned out surfer and will get eaten by a squid.”

Coach Pete started to laugh. “You know what? I’ll drink to that. Cheers, Anders. I needed that laugh.”

We touched glasses again.

We downed our whiskey.

Then Coach Pete’s wife called and he pointed to the door.

My hint to leave.

I hurried out of his office and stood in the dimly lit hallway.

Confused.

For a second I thought I was sticking up for myself. Thinking I could sell myself to Coach Pete. Let him know that it was okay that Willow was pregnant. Especially by me. I wasn’t going to duck and run, and leave her hanging. I would never do anything to hurt her or our child. Maybe I wasn’t the first choice as a father for his firstborn grandchild, but I wasn’t going to leave.

Coach Pete hadn’t been buying that at all... so I attacked myself?

*A loser. A bum. Some stoned surfer type?*

*Eaten by a squid?*

I wasn’t even sure if squids had mouths big enough to eat a human.

But it got Coach Pete to laugh.

I looked back at his office door.

The entire thing was... *confusing*.

I obviously wasn't describing myself to Coach Pete when I was talking about myself.

But at the same time, I felt...

My phone vibrated in my pocket.

I took a deep breath, dug out my phone and saw the text was from Willow.

That brought a quick smile to my face.

I turned to face Coach Pete's office door just in case he opened the door, so I could hide my phone.

Last thing I needed was for him to sneak up on me and see me texting his pregnant daughter.

Something had happened to Willow in the last few days.

I wasn't sure what the medical term was for it, but she called it *popping*.

And that's kind of what literally happened in a sense.

Her belly *popped out* a little.

Her lower belly had a sudden hardness to it and a little roundness to it.

I hadn't seen her yet but I ached to do so.

To see. To touch. To kiss.

Knowing that my baby was growing inside her womb.

**You've been asking... so fine... here you go...**

That was the text.

What waited next for me was a picture.

Willow wearing nothing but panties.

*Or at least I assumed so.*

The picture was from her belly down.

Her sitting on the edge of her bed.

Her bare legs.

Her feet.

Dark red panties showing.

But there was also the sight of her pregnant belly.

I took a deep breath and wasn't sure whether to be turned on or just be in awe of it all.

I didn't get a chance to figure out what was first.

“What in the hell are you looking at, Anders?”

I turned.

*Roman stood behind me, grinning ear to ear.*

## Chapter Fifteen

---

### WILLOW

**I**n all reality, I would have told everyone I was completely and totally drunk.

I mean, why else would I sit on the edge of my bed in nothing but red wine-colored panties and take a picture of my stomach?

What woman in their right mind wants to take a picture of their stomach?

I mean, maybe if you were a supermodel and had a tight stomach and abs showing... but still... sitting down?

*No way in hell.*

The problem I had?

I couldn't blame being drunk.

First off, I wasn't drunk.

Second off, I couldn't get drunk.

I was pregnant.

And not just pregnant by then... but *actually* pregnant.

Which sounded odd enough to think and then say out loud to my sister once my belly finally pushed out a little, but it was the truth.

All I had were the positive pregnancy tests, the ultrasound pictures, and the nightly bout of vomiting (which had seemed to slow quite a bit - *so fingers crossed*).

The morning I woke up and knew my belly was bigger, I started to panic.

It was almost instinctual the way I opened my eyes and placed my hands to my stomach. A protective mother already, I supposed.

I felt hardness under my skin.

I felt *roundness* too.

I rushed to the bathroom and saw the little belly pushing out and I thought I was bloated.

Even after using the bathroom, the *bloat* was still there.

I told myself the *bloat* was going to be there for months and months.

Then that *bloat* would be a *baby* in my arms, reaching for my breast, crying or sleeping.

A defining moment that made me feel way too unsure about myself.

And all I wanted was for Anders to come over and touch me. To hold me and tell me I looked good. Except I didn't run right to him. I texted him but I didn't get to see him.

Then the team went on a road trip.

Which I was weirdly part of in two ways.

First, as the daughter of the head coach.

Second, as the woman who got pregnant by the goalie.

And as tradition stood, before each road trip, we always got together and had dinner.

That meant sitting at the table with my father, my mother, and my sister.

Kay loved pointing out my stomach.

My mother teared up each time she saw my belly, loving her grandbaby already.

My father sometimes looked worried. And sometimes looked happy.

But mostly he just scowled.

I had a feeling the bigger my stomach got, the angrier he'd get.

Anders and the team played really well on their road trip.

Not that I watched a second of the games.

I did look up the final scores though.

There was a lot of praise for Anders and his performance.

*Was that what made me want to send him a slightly naughty picture of myself?*

I had no idea how to answer that question - even to myself.

Something had just come over me.

Anders texted me every day to check in. Just to say *hi*.

He asked how I was feeling. He asked if I needed anything.

He texted that he wanted to see my belly in person.

The way he spoke in person was panty melting fire.



His texts were the same.

The man oozed sexual craziness, with a side of heart and care.

And that did not fit anything I had ever heard about Anders before.

So after a hot shower, I walked across my bedroom to get a bra and when I looked at myself in the mirror, I had this sudden jolt of confidence.

*Between that and a burning need to be touched by someone other than myself...*

Before I knew it, there I was, sitting on the edge of my bed, taking that picture.

*That picture.*

*That picture* could have easily been deleted.

Instead of deleting it, I had the urge to send the picture to Anders.

To show him my belly.

And maybe to flirt a little.

Show off my legs.

Show off my panties.

Tempt him a little bit more.

Wanting to keep his attention.

And maybe sooner rather than later we would have the chance to fool around again without being interrupted or me throwing up on him.

The surge of confidence continued as I sent the picture to Anders.

Then for about ten seconds I pictured him seeing the picture and dropping everything to come get me. Like literally him out on the ice, playing goalie and somehow he sees the picture, then just tosses his equipment to the ice and rushes to me.

It made me smile.

*Then...*

The wave came crashing down.

My hands began to shake.

The first thing I did?

Quickly searched to see if there was a way to delete a text message or a picture sent.

Panic hit my body hard.

I told myself not to look at the picture again, but *too late*.

Just a minute ago what I saw as sexy... was not that now.

I stood up and hurried to put on some more clothes.

A long t-shirt.

Then a hoodie.

I called my sister for moral support.

Again, not quite thinking straight right away, she answered just as I realized I couldn't possibly tell her the truth about the picture.

*Oh... crap...*

“Willow? Are you there? Are you okay? Is this a butt dial or an emergency?”

“Hey,” I finally said. “I meant to call. I’m here. Hi.”

“You’re here? What does that mean?”

“Kay, I did something.”

“You know, each time we talk, it feels like you’re about to tell me you’re pregnant. But you already are pregnant.”

“I took a picture of myself.”

“What?”

I swallowed hard. “You know. A picture.”

“A... *oh*. You took a picture of yourself. You took a naked picture?”

“I was naked, but not really the whole thing.”

“The whole thing? You mean... your *candy dish*?”

“My, what?”

“Your *candy dish*,” Kay said. “The sweet center of everything. The dessert. Right?”

“Did you really just call your vagina a *candy dish*?”

“We are not going to change the subject right now,” Kay said. “My sister called me in a panic because she took a naked picture of herself. What did you do with this picture, Willow? Why does it have you so freaked out? Did you send it to someone? Who did you send it to? What happened?”

“Kay, it’s not like that at all.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Kay, I’m pregnant.”

She gasped.

“How long is that joke going to go on for?” I asked.

“Every time you tell me you’re pregnant, I’m going to gasp. It’s that simple.”

“Kay, my body looks different. Okay? And I’m nervous.”

My sister fell silent.

A good five seconds passed by.

Then she whispered, “Talk to me.”

“I’m not looking for sympathy or an answer. I’m just... I don’t want to miss a moment of it all. So I guess I’m making some kind of diary.”

“A belly diary!” Kay yelled. “That’s the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard! I’ve seen those before. You take a bunch of pictures and then when the baby is born, you put them together into a video and speed it up. That’s such a good idea.”

“Yeah,” I said. “That’s right.”

“So what are you worried about?”

“Everything, Kay. My body...”

“Oh, Willow. You’re beautiful.”

“Don’t say that. That sounds so generic.”

“But it’s true. I think you’re so pretty. And not just physically pretty. You’re so smart and so brave. Look at what you just did. You threw away your teaching career because you wanted to get into real estate. Every single person said not to do it, including me. You did it anyway.”

“What does this have to do with a picture? I’m trying to tell you I don’t like the way I look naked.”

“I get that,” Kay said. “There’s nothing I can say to convince you to look at yourself differently. You’re going to see what you see. But I can tell you what I see.”

“Don’t say I’m beautiful.”

“Fine. What I see is this... I see my sister who is pregnant. I see her belly starting to show. I see her with no choice but to be vulnerable. But she’s also very strong. She’s going to protect that baby for the rest of her life. And if I had the chance to tell her, I would remind her that it’s okay for things to change. And that no matter what she wants to have happen, her body is going to keep changing.”

“Thank you, Kay.”

“Now I have to know. Just how sexy was this picture? Boobies?”

“No.”

“Just the bottom half?”

“Covered up, Kay. This isn’t some...”

“Right. Sorry. So you took a picture of yourself in your panties. And you saw that little baby bump and panicked.”

“Yes.”

“Okay. That’s okay, Willow.”

“How would you know?”

“Do you know what a *taco baby* is?”

I sighed. “You’re really going to compare being pregnant to eating too many tacos? This is my support system?”

“What do you want me to do? Run out and get pregnant by someone?”

“Hey, that’s not a bad idea. That would take some of the pressure off me. And then Dad would have to split his anger between the two of us. Do it, Kay. Go get pregnant!”

“You’re insane,” Kay said.

We both started to laugh.

I thanked my sister for talking to me.

Even though she didn’t know the exact truth of why I was panicking.

Without Kay on the phone I had no buffer for my emotions.

Which meant I went right back to thinking about the picture and the text message.

I looked at my phone.

I looked at the picture.

*I should have thought that out. I should have taken a few practice pictures. I could have gotten a better angle. A sexier angle.*

Then again, it was just my legs.

And my baby bump.

*And, oh jeez, look, a pair of panties.*

I bit my bottom lip and decided to text Anders.

**So... do you like?**

I added in a wink face emoji for good measure.

Just so I didn’t appear desperate.

Which I was.

And that wasn’t like me.

I didn’t need validation from anyone.

Especially a guy like Anders.

Yet I secretly wanted it.

*Come on, Anders. Text me something. Anything. Please. Even if it's perverted. Text me an eggplant emoji and a water splashing emoji.*

My phone buzzed in my hand.

**I LOVE it babe. So fucking sexy.**

I smiled.

I started to blush.

I hated myself for how much I wanted to read that and how I reacted to it.

Anders sent another text.

**So does Roman.**

I stood up, gasped, and dropped my phone to the floor so I could cover my mouth.

*I screamed.*

## Chapter Sixteen

---

### ANDERS

I never ran so fast from Roman in my entire life.

I turned the screen off and told him I was late for a meeting.

The look on his face...

*He saw everything.*

*I'm fucked.*

I made it to the locker room - a second away from my attempted freedom - and Roman threw himself against the doors.

He hit with such a thud I thought there was going to be an indent of his body.

He somehow turned and wiggled his way against the door.

He opened his arms and stood there, eyes wide, smiling.

“Roman, no,” I said. “Don’t do this.”

“Oh, I’m doing this. Is this what’s been going on with you?”



“Listen to me...”

I had nothing.

My brain ceased up.

Roman grabbed my right shoulder and nodded at me. “It’s okay, Anders. I need you to know that. It’s okay.”

“What’s okay?” I scowled. “You have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, I do. I get it. We’ve all been there.”

“Been there? Been where?”

Roman grinned even bigger.

I lost my edge.

I grabbed his shirt and pulled him toward me, then slammed him against the doors.

Then I started to pick him up.

“Get that fucking smile off your fucking face,” I growled. “I’m going to move you and then I’m going to leave. I don’t have time for this right now.”

I pulled Roman away from the doors again and tossed him to the right.

Before I could open the doors, Roman jumped on my back.

He wrapped his right arm around my neck and planted a big wet kiss to my left cheek.

“I love you, brother,” he whispered. “We all have fetishes.”

My right hand was balled up tight in a fist.

Ready to throw a hard punch, hoping to break Roman’s nose.

*Wait.*

*Fetish?*

“You don’t have to be ashamed,” Roman said. “Especially with me. I have a restaurant fetish. If you want to know.”

“What the hell is a restaurant fetish?” I asked.

“I have this fetish that involves-”

“Can you get off my back?” I asked.

“Don’t leave this locker room,” Roman said.

“Just get the hell off me.”

Roman climbed off my back.

I turned to face him.

“I have this fetish about restaurants,” he said. “In the kitchen. In the freezer. At a table. With a waitress. A female chef. In the manager’s office. Just something about food and getting messy. Breaking plates. Spilling drinks...”

“Is that a fetish?” I asked. “Sounds more like a fantasy.”

“Eh, maybe you’re right,” Roman said. “But, hey, everyone has their thing. Some guys like feet. Or legs. Or butts. Or boobs. You like pregnant women.”

“Roman, you cannot... wait... what did you say?”

“You have a thing for pregnant women,” he said. “It’s okay. No shame in it, man. Everyone has their thing.”

“Pregnant women...”

“That woman was pregnant in that picture on your phone,” Roman said. “I mean, she didn’t seem all that much pregnant, but she was pregnant. Right?”

“Yes,” I said. “That’s right.”

“You like the whole spectrum of it? From beginning to end? Is it just the bellies? Or the legs? What about the... top half?”

“Top half?” I asked.

“The boobs, Anders. They get nice and full, right? Do you like... *milk stuff*?”

“You know, these are personal questions. I did not say you could look at my phone either. I thought everyone was gone.”

“You should save your fetishes for when you’re home and alone,” Roman said. “Not in the locker room. And, dude, not outside Coach Pete’s...”

Roman’s eyes suddenly grew really wide.

He stepped back.

He snapped his fingers and pointed at me.

“Dude,” he said.

*Fuck. He figured it out.*

“I get it now. I get what this is.”

“Roman...”

“We keep sending you in there to talk to Coach Pete. He keeps bringing up his daughter being pregnant. That’s a trigger for you, isn’t it? So you rush out of the office and you can’t stop thinking about your secret fetish. So you stand there and start looking for pictures online. Oh, man, that’s some wild stuff right there. No wonder you’ve been so quiet. That’s crazy. Anders. You’re insane. But in a good way.”

I stood there in total shock.

Roman was my best friend, but I really believed now more than ever he was a total idiot.

The way his mind worked - skirting right around the obvious truth - was amazing to see in action.

I shrugged my shoulders.

“And it goes beyond that too,” Roman said. “It’s about Luc and Cain. I mean, we never got to see Emma pregnant though. But she has a kid. Which means she was pregnant. And then Cain. He and Lexie trying to get pregnant. Man, all those pregnancy jokes I’ve been making. All the jokes you’ve been playing into. It’s a lot, Anders. Holy shit, brother.”

“Roman,” I said. “I really just want to get out of here. Understand?”

“Yeah, sure. Right. You need to get home and finish things up. Got it.”

“You’re not going to say anything,” I said. “I’m counting on you.”

“Hey, brother, no worries,” he said. Then he smiled. “Pregnancy fetish though? That’s intense.”

“Roman.”

“Got it,” he said. “My lips are sealed.”

I turned and left the locker room.

I wasn’t a fan of leaving Roman behind, especially with Coach Pete still there.

All I needed was for Roman to say something stupid and then have Coach Pete set his sights on me for real.

On my way back home, Willow texted me again.

Even with the added wink emoji, I sensed that my unintentional silence bothered her.

I replied to her text.

I fucking loved seeing her like that.

*Those legs. Those panties. Her little baby bump.*

I just wanted her to keep going with the pictures.

*Up and up until I could see everything.*

I had to get that out of my mind.

So I pressed the button on my steering wheel to text Willow again.

I told her Roman saw the picture too.

Ten seconds or so later, my phone began to ring.

“Hey, babe, it’s fine,” I said.

“Fine? Roman saw the picture?”

“He didn’t know it was you.”

“How...?”

“I wasn’t expecting a picture from you, Willow,” I said. “Now believe me, I loved that picture. But as I was staring at it, Roman peeked over my shoulder and saw it.”

“Fuck,” Willow groaned. “What do we do now?”

“Nothing. Roman thinks I have a pregnancy fetish.”

“And you’re okay with that?”

“I guess I don’t have a choice, do I, babe?”

Willow fell silent.

Then she asked, “You really liked the picture?”

“Fucking sexy, babe. I mean it.”

“Did Roman know it was me?”

“No, babe. I opened the picture. I was kind of looking all around at it.”

“What was your favorite part?”

“Well, depends on who you’re talking to.”

“And who am I talking to right now?”

“I’m not sure,” I confessed. “My favorite part was seeing your belly. Seeing that roundness. It makes my heart race, babe. But then again, my other favorite parts were your legs and panties. It’s a damn shame you didn’t hold your phone out all the way and get the top half.”

“Who said I was topless?”

“Were you topless?”

“Yes,” Willow whispered.

My hands almost ripped the steering wheel apart.

I gritted my teeth.

Blood rushed to my cock.

“You promise me Roman didn’t know it was me?” Willow asked.

“Trust me, he has no idea. He thinks I have a fetish. Leave it at that.”

“Do you have a pregnancy fetish, Anders?”

“Just for you, babe.”

I heard Willow giggle.

My cock thickened even more.

“When can I see you, Willow?”

“Soon. I promise.”

I took a deep breath.

I never waited for a woman before in my life.

I never had to.

I never wanted to.

*I guess Willow wasn't the only one changing thanks to this surprise pregnancy.*



I STRETCHED MY NECK AND IT FELT LIKE SOMEONE HAD TAKEN a baseball bat to my back.

We tied our first home game after the road trip and ended up going into a shootout.

It took nine rounds before Nolan scored what would be the game winning goal.

That wasn't good enough for Coach Pete.

He called a hardcore practice and even after a hot shower, I still felt like hell.

Nolan punched my left shoulder as he walked by. "Good practice."

"Yeah, right," I said.

Roman then appeared next to me.

Wearing nothing but a towel, arms folded, a smile on his face.

"What?" I asked.

"Let me see it again."

"See what?"

“That picture.”

“What picture?”

He leaned closer. “The pregnant one. I can’t stop thinking about it.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Wrong with me? What’s wrong with you? You’re the one with the fetish.”

“Did I just hear the word *fetish*?” Nesh asked.

“No,” I called out.

“Yes,” Roman said.

I threw my left elbow into his stomach.

He fell back and coughed.

His towel fell to the floor.

“Full moon Roman is here,” Luc said.

Roman coughed, grabbed his towel and at least covered his cock.

He looked at me and smiled even bigger.

I reached for Roman and he jumped back, laughing.

“What the hell is this now?” Cain asked.

“Just Roman being a complete fucking asshole,” I said.

“Did he say something about Lexie again?” Cain asked. “I swear on my life, I’m getting sick of that.”

“I didn’t say a word about Lexie,” Roman said.

“Just shut the fuck up, Roman,” I said.

“Whoa, what’s got you so rattled?” Luc asked.



“Fetish stuff,” Roman said.

I lunged for Roman again.

He laughed harder.

Then I stared at him.

I did the best I could to give him *the look*.

Threatening his life yet begging him to just keep his mouth shut.

Finally, Roman stopped laughing and nodded. “It was an inside joke between Anders and me. Nothing to worry about.” He looked at Cain. “But you have something to worry about. I’m going to get Lexie pregnant someday soon.”

“You’re dead,” Cain growled.

He stomped toward Roman and I walked away from whatever was going to happen next.

*I needed a drink.*



I STAYED HOME AND HAD A FEW BEERS BY MYSELF.

Definitely not like me at all.

I caught myself walking laps, lost in thought.

Half my brain thinking about that picture Willow sent.

*Once again, those legs. Those panties.*

*Her cute belly...*

*Cute? Belly?*

*What the hell is wrong with me?*

It was like being horny yet gushing over something at the same time.

It felt weird.

Then there was the other part of my brain.

The more logical part. Maybe.

“I can’t do this,” I whispered. “I can’t do it like this. Not anymore.”

I couldn’t fake things with Willow.

If she really wanted me to just disappear...

But I didn’t want that.

I didn’t want that for myself.

I didn’t want that for Willow.

I didn’t want that for our baby.

That’s when Willow sent me a text.

For how badly I wanted to hear from her, at the same time I didn’t want to read a text from her.

I told myself maybe it was another naughty picture.

But it was just a text message. No picture.

A date. A time. An address.

That was it.

I replied with a question mark.

Willow wrote back.

**Doc appointment. Checkup for me and the baby. You wanted to know. Let’s see how good you are at sneaking around.**

I smiled ear to ear.

*Challenge accepted, babe.*

## Chapter Seventeen

---

### WILLOW

I luckily didn't go to some big, fancy building for my doctor appointments.

It was low key.

Quiet.

Very calm and soothing.

That was part of the reason why I didn't mind going alone.

My doctor was Dr. Stephanie Landeri.

She liked to be called Dr. Steph.

A mother of two girls - six and four - and married to a professional surfer, her skin was forever sun kissed and it seemed impossible someone so beautiful could be a doctor.

For my first appointment, I made it very clear to her I wanted everything to stay between us, which she said she legally had to do, no matter what. I made it clear who my father was - *name dropping which was total ugh to do* - and that the pregnancy was unplanned, a total surprise, and that I knew who the father was but I had no desire to tell anyone

who it was. And if that wasn't going to work, I would be leaving and find a doctor who could understand and respect that.

Five minutes after saying that, I was naked from the waist down, hearing all about Dr. Steph's life.

She made everything feel like home.

A super cozy office with couches and televisions.

A mini fridge with drinks. Coffee ready to be brewed at the press of a button.

Her receptionist was her best friend - *Ana* - and she was as calm as Dr. Steph.

Another thing I enjoyed was that Dr. Steph never overbooked herself.

You showed up as the only person there and left as the only person there.

How she perfected that, I wasn't sure.

But I liked it.

I opened the office door and looked back, thinking about the texts I sent to Anders.

I wondered if and how he was going to show up today.

The thought lingered so much in my head that Dr. Steph asked, "Feeling nervous today?"

"What? No. Why?"

"Things are a little jumpy on your end," she said.

"Is the baby okay?"

"I'm sure it is," she said. "But your vitals..."

I took a deep breath. "Sorry. Just a lot on my mind."

“Welcome to pregnancy. The worry never ends. And when you’re finished being pregnant, now you’ve got a newborn to take care of. What a joy, huh?”

“Are you trying to get my heart beating even faster?” I asked.

Dr. Steph smiled. “Okay, let’s talk. How are things going?”

I touched my stomach. “I popped.”

“A little. Just wait.”

“I know. I’m going to get bigger. I’m just talking right now.”

Dr. Steph touched my right arm. “Hey. You look great. Besides being actually pregnant, how do you feel?”

“I’m slowly not throwing up at night.”

“Hey, that’s great news.”

“And you’re sure getting sick at night is normal?”

“Yes. The whole idea of *morning sickness* is just a clever name. Some women get it in the morning. Some in the afternoon. Some at night. Some never get it at all. And sometimes women are violently ill for the entire pregnancy. It’s just one of those things.”

“I’m glad it’s going away. That’s never a good feeling. Especially at night.”

*Or throwing up on the father of the baby.*

“Do you have any concerns you want to address?” Dr. Steph asked. “You know me, I’m an open book. Ask away.”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “I mean, I’m pregnant. I feel it. I get these little flutters, if that makes sense.”

“Makes perfect sense. Soon enough, you’ll feel the little one kicking.”

I smiled ear to ear at the thought of that.

“Okay, let’s check on the tiny bean and see where we’re at,” Dr. Steph said. “At least we’re doing an abdominal ultrasound and not the wand up your *special place*.”

I laughed.

“What’s so funny?” Dr. Steph asked. “Want me to be all medical and talk about your vagina and your uterus and all that?”

“Nope,” I said. “*Special place* works for me.”

Just as Dr. Steph was ready to squirt gel onto my belly, the door opened and in stumbled a man.

“You can’t be here!” Ana’s voice cried out.

“Excuse me!” Dr. Steph yelled.

I looked at the man and gasped.

“Oh, trust me, I need to be here...”

*Anders said.*



I WAS IN COMPLETE SHOCK.

So much for sneaking around, right?

The guy just burst through the door while I have my pants and panties pushed way down. Even though I had a towel covering any private areas, my shirt was up to my bra and Dr. Steph was ready to lather me up with the gooey gel for the ultrasound.

She lifted the bottle up, ready to launch it at Anders.

“You need to leave right now,” Dr. Steph said. “Ana! Call the police!”

“Wait!” Anders yelled. “I need to be seen by a doctor. I’m having stomach pains. Right here.”

Anders lifted his shirt.

My mouth instantly hung open, drool forming on the corners of my mouth.

*Slightly pathetic? For sure. But I was so horny. And Anders was the only one who could take care of it for me.*

His stomach was rippled...

He pushed his jeans down a little, showing off even more.

“I can’t help you,” Dr. Steph said.

“You’re a doctor,” Anders said. “You have to help me.”

“I’m an OBGYN,” Dr. Steph said. “Get out of here!”

“You can check me though.”

“Do you have a uterus or a vagina?”

“No, but I like both of what you just said,” Anders said with a smile.

“I’m calling the police!” Ana yelled.

“Please don’t do that,” I finally said. “He’s... here for me. To help me. For, uh, moral support.”

“Ana, hold off on that call,” Dr. Steph said.

Anders put his hands together and nodded. “Thank you.”

Dr. Steph then looked at me.



*Oh, great. She thinks I'm in some kind of abusive relationship with Anders, doesn't she?*

*Blink twice if you want me to kill him kind of thing, right?*

“Are you sure?” Dr. Steph whispered.

“It’s very complicated,” I said. “And you said we have complete secrecy, right?”

“Definitely,” she said. “Just give me the word...”

“I’m giving it,” I said. I took a deep breath. “Dr. Steph, this is Anders. Anders, this is Dr. Steph.”

“Nice to meet you,” Anders said. He pulled up his jeans and dropped his shirt back down, covering his stomach. “Don’t worry, I’m not actually sick or in pain.”

“Okay,” Dr. Steph said. “Even if you were, I couldn’t help you.”

Anders looked over his right shoulder and then did a double take.

He spun around and pointed to the wall.

At a picture of a woman giving birth.

“That’s...” Anders said.

“That’s the miracle of it all,” Dr. Steph said. “Where did you think the baby’s head would pop out of?”

“I don’t know,” Anders said. “I never saw it up close like this. Things really get that big? That’s really stretched out.”

“Anders,” I said. “Can you not do this right now?”

“Yeah,” Anders said. “Sure. Sorry. I mean... you know... this picture is just looking over my shoulder at me. I can’t help but stare.”

Dr. Steph put the gel down and took off her exam gloves.

She walked to the door and closed it.

Then she plucked the picture off the wall and put it face down on the counter.

“That better?” she asked Anders.

“Thanks, *doc*,” he said.

“Dr. Steph,” she said.

“Oh, that’s nice.”

“Anders,” I growled. “Really?”

“Sorry,” he said. “What’s happening next?”

“I was going to check on the baby,” Dr. Steph said.

“Excellent,” Anders said. “Are you going to stick something up her to do that?”

“No,” Dr. Steph said. “No wand today.”

“If I pay extra, can I see the wand?”

Dr. Steph frowned.

“How about if I pay extra, if you stick the wand up his ass?” I asked.

“I bet that’s where we’d find his brain,” Dr. Steph said.

She and I laughed.

Anders didn’t find that amusing at all.

At last Dr. Steph was able to coat my stomach with the gel for the ultrasound.

Both she and I paused to look at Anders, giving him his chance to say something gross.

Funny how he met Dr. Steph two minutes prior and she already knew he was a jerk like that.

Anders didn't say a word.

In fact, something changed in Anders.

He stared intently at the screen.

Waiting.

“Let's see what we've got going on here,” Dr. Steph said.

She pressed on my stomach and the screen looked scrambled for a few seconds.

Then suddenly there was a clearing.

A black circle.

And right there...

“The baby,” Dr. Steph said. “There you are. Let's see...”

She moved a little bit against my stomach, pressing a tiny bit harder.

Then she paused again.

“Okay, there we are,” she said. “Now let's get a heartbeat on this little miracle.”

“That's the baby?” Anders asked.

“That's the baby,” Dr. Steph said. “Doesn't seem possible that the little shape you're looking at will end up as a crying baby, right? And then think about. Babies turn into toddlers. Toddlers into kids. Kids into teenagers. All from this.”

“And you're sure that's it?” Anders asked.

“What did you expect to see?” I asked Anders. “Arms and legs?”

“Well... I don’t know...”

“Let’s listen to the heart,” Dr. Steph said.

With the press of a few buttons, there was a loud *whooshing* sound.

It took me a second to figure out the fast paced rhythm.

“You two keep listening while I measure the heartbeat,” Dr. Steph said.

I listened to that sound.

I slowly looked up at Anders.

He just stared without blinking.

His mouth slightly opened.

“And that... is a perfect heartbeat,” Dr. Steph said.  
“Absolutely perfect.”

“So the baby is okay?” Anders asked.

Dr. Steph looked back at him. “The baby is perfect. You good, *Dad?*”

“Oh, I never said he was...” I started to say.

Dr. Steph winked at me.

The room went totally silent.

I was kind of hoping for Anders to say something stupid to break the tension.

When I looked at him again, his eyes hadn’t moved from the screen.

I focused a little bit more and I was the one suddenly doing a double take.

I swore on my life that I saw Anders's eyes begin to fill with tears.

Now, not a single tear fell from his eyes.

Not even touching his cheek.

But his eyes were big and glossy as he stared at our baby on the ultrasound screen.

I swallowed hard, telling myself not to start crying.

Here I figured I had gotten pregnant by some professional hockey goalie who would have sooner written me a check so he could vanish and avoid fatherhood at all costs.

Instead, Anders was completely different.

Obnoxious. Sexy. Inappropriate. But somehow caring.

I felt my entire body begin to swoon and swell.

*I started to wonder if maybe getting pregnant by Anders was the least of my worries with him.*

## Chapter Eighteen

---

### ANDERS

One second the baby was on the screen and then the next second it was gone.

The really pretty doctor began to clean up Willow's belly.

I stared at the screen, really taking in the moment.

The entire notion of Willow being pregnant felt like it had changed me.

And now seeing the baby on the screen? Hearing the heartbeat? Watching the extremely pretty doctor take her measurements and all that? It made everything ten times more real. No, ten thousand times more real.

Willow propped herself up on her elbows.

"You okay?" she asked.

I looked down at her.

The insanely pretty doctor wiped the gel off Willow's stomach.

Yeah, that caught my eye.

So much so that Willow swung her left hand and hit me in the stomach.

“What was that for?” I asked.

“Just... don’t,” Willow said.

The ultra-pretty doctor paused and looked at me. “Really?”

“I’m just a horrible man,” I said.

“Not the first time I’ve had this moment,” she said. “I don’t get what goes through your head. I’m a medically trained doctor. And all you think about is some produced porn video you saw online.”

Willow snorted and laughed.

I was taken back for a second.

“Well said, Dr. Steph,” I said.

“Did I get you to shut up?” Dr. Steph asked.

“Nothing will shut me up,” I said. “But I’ll show myself out the door and wait for Willow to get put back together.”

“That’s the smartest thing you’ve said all day, I bet,” Dr. Steph said.

I looked at Willow and grinned. “I like her. And not in the dirty, sexual way either.”

“Just give me a minute to pull up my pants,” Willow whispered.

That made me smile even bigger.

Willow shut her eyes and blushed.

I strolled out of the exam room and stood at the door, waiting.

After a minute or so, the door opened.

I spun around and saw Dr. Steph.

I felt my brain wanting to make a comment to her about her natural good looks. The forever desire to flirt with any woman. That was just who I was.

Only I didn't do that this time.

Instead, I moved out of the way.

"Thank you," I said to her.

"Thank me? For what?"

"For taking care of Willow."

"Oh, this is just the beginning," Dr. Steph said. "Are you sure you can handle this?"

"Believe me, I can handle it."

"Good."

Dr. Steph walked away.

Willow then appeared.

My heart suddenly started to race.

She was stunning. Beautiful. Perfect. Gorgeous. Sexy.

She was breathtaking.

She was radiant.

She was...

"Are you sure you're okay?" Willow whispered to me.

I nodded.

*But... no, I was far from fucking okay.*





OF COURSE WE HAD TO SNEAK OUT THROUGH THE BACK DOOR.

No walking out the main doors together, holding hands, smiling as a happy couple who just saw their baby on an ultrasound.

Nope.

We had to sneak around as though what we had done was the worst thing in the world.

We didn't hold hands.

We didn't even talk until we were outside.

The second we stepped out into the beautiful warm sunlight, Willow began to look around.

She was nervous.

Beyond nervous.

I didn't like that.

"Here," she whispered to me. "I want you to have something."

She touched her left hand to mine.

As though she were slipping me some drugs, instead it felt papery.

Almost slippery.

I glanced down and instantly smiled.

"Not here," she said to me.

"I have to look," I said.

Willow had handed me an ultrasound picture.

I lifted it up and studied the grainy image.

I really wasn't sure what my eyes gazed upon but I just knew how special it was.

"Anders, you have to listen to me," Willow said.

"Give me a second here."

"Anders, please," she growled.

She grabbed my right forearm.

I looked down at her. "What's wrong, babe?"

"My name is on the ultrasound picture," she said. "Okay? My name and information is on it. This isn't something you can show off. This isn't something you can hang on the fridge. Or take into the locker room to show off and brag about. Got it?"

"Babe, look at me," I said. "Nobody knows a thing about me. About you. I'm hiding it all. Just like you want me to."

"I know. And I just..."

My jaw tightened for a second. "I'll keep this hidden. I appreciate this, Willow."

"I figured it's the least I can do. You really showed up today. I wasn't sure what you were going to do or how to do it."

"I debated on a few ideas," I said. "Then I decided to just barge right in."

"You scared the hell out of Dr. Steph and Ana."

"I know I did. You also left me hanging there for a few seconds."

"I was in shock. And I kind of wanted to see what you were going to do and say next."

“I mean, if Dr. Steph wanted to touch me...”

“You’re disgusting,” Willow snapped. “I knew you were thinking something. Just waiting so say it, right?”

“Sorry. That’s just who I am. And when I get backed into a corner, I tend to get worse.”

“You feel backed into a corner right now?”

I smiled. “Babe, you hand me an ultrasound picture after we snuck out the back and you’re telling me I can’t do anything with this. I have to hide it like it’s some dirty secret.”

“I’ve been honest with you, Anders.”

“Actually you haven’t,” I said. I reached behind me and tucked the ultrasound picture into my back pocket. I needed both hands free to touch Willow. To touch her hips. “You keep me in the dark a lot. You’re vague. Very vague. A part of me appreciates that. You’re protecting yourself. That’s why you tried to push me away. I want to know why things are really like this. No offense to your father but it’s not like you live at home and depend on him. Or anyone else but yourself. His rules are cute for a romantic comedy movie but not real life.”

“You’re just as worried.”

I thought about sitting across from Coach Pete, trying to defend myself but only ended up agreeing with him that whoever got his daughter pregnant had to be some kind of loser.

“I’m an asshole, babe,” I said. “But I would never hurt you or our baby.”

“I believe you,” she said. “I want you to know that. I believe you.”

“Say it again, babe.”

Willow placed her hands to my chest. "I. Believe. You."

My hands moved up to her sides.

Her hands moved up my chest to my neck.

I felt a feral growl in the back of my throat.

I just had to kiss her.

It felt more like instinct than anything else.

And not just any kind of kiss either.

A real kiss.

A damn real kiss for the woman carrying my unborn child.

I pulled her against me as I lifted her up.

Her fingers interlocked around my neck.

No escaping the moment for both of us now.

We kissed fiercely.

Our tongues battling.

Both of us closing our lips, pulling away, just to hear that sexy wet kiss sound.

Then going at it again.

And again.

My right hand moved up her body just a little more.

My thumb eased over her breast, over her shirt.

Pressing, wanting to find her nipple.

My hand kept going, up, until I gently touched the side of her neck.

But as my fingers touched the back of her hair, I felt myself...

I broke the kiss and touched my forehead to hers.

“Anders,” she purred.

Her lips were wet and pouty.

Lips that enjoyed being kissed the right way.

My left hand moved down her body, sliding over her jeans but between her legs.

That’s when Willow grabbed my wrist.

She pushed my hand away and bit her bottom lip as she stepped back.

“We can’t here,” she said.

“Then come to my place, babe. Right now. No worries at my place. Nobody is going to show up. It’ll be just us.”

“I’ll think about it,” she smiled. “I’ll decide what to do. Okay?”

“What’s there to fucking decide, Willow? I can taste the desire in your mouth. I can feel your body melting against mine. Tell me you don’t want this.”

“Anders...” Willow shook her head. “I have to go. I can’t be here right now. I have to leave. I have somewhere else to be.”

Willow began to scramble. Panic.

She hurried to get around me.

At the last second, I reached out and touched her left arm.

She gasped and stopped.

She looked back at me, her cheeks flushed.

I stepped back, closer to her.

“You like it,” I whispered.

“What?”

“You like this between us. I know you’re worried. But you secretly like it.”

“Yeah, this is the dream for me, Anders. Getting pregnant from a one-night stand.”

“Was what we had even that?”

“Probably not,” she said. “We weren’t even naked, were we?”

“No. We weren’t. I have seen, touched, tasted...”

“Anders, no,” she whispered.

“No, what?”

“Don’t say that stuff right now,” she said. “I can’t hear that. You can’t say that.”

“I can say whatever the fuck I want to, babe. Just like I can tell you how beautiful you look right now. How fucking sexy you are. That picture you sent me... I can’t stop thinking about it. Or looking at it. Your legs. Your pregnant belly.”

“Anders,” she growled.

“What?”

She moved closer to me again. She reached up and touched my face.

Then she shook her head.

“What?” I repeated.

“You don’t have to say that to me.”

“I know I don’t. I want you to know that. And I mean it.”

“I have a suggestion for you.”

“I have a lot of suggestions for you, babe.”

“Anders, I need you to listen to me. I think maybe you need to go out.”

“Go out?”

“Go out and do your thing. What you normally do.”

“What does that mean?”

“Anders, come on. I know the kind of guy you are. You enjoy women. You like to go out and have fun. That’s your personality. I didn’t intend for any of this to happen between us. I gave you an out and you didn’t want it. That means a lot to me. I’m not going to be in your way. You need to go out and get laid.”

“Excuse me?”

“Take that as a victory, Anders. I’m telling you to go out, find someone and get laid. Get it out of your system.”

“You think that’s going to make me leave you alone, babe?”

“I don’t know. But at least you’ll be satisfied.”

“This is you hinting to me that we will never get together?”

Willow swallowed hard. She didn’t respond to me.

“What about you, babe?” I whispered. “What about your needs? What about your pleasure?”

“Anders...” She touched my face. “Just go. Okay? Or I’m going to go. And you do whatever you want to do.”

Willow stepped back, then walked away.

I stared at her until she was out of sight.

Then I reached to my back pocket and looked at the ultrasound picture.

For the first time in my life I didn't want to go out and get laid.

I wanted to go after Willow.

And hug her. Hold her. Touch her belly.

*I wanted to be the father to our baby he or she deserved and I wanted to be the man and protector Willow needed.*



## Chapter Nineteen

---

### WILLOW

**M**y sister called me.

“Please tell me you’re having some kind of craving right now.”

“For what?” I asked.

“Please tell me to get us some pizzas. I’m talking all the toppings too. Sausage, pepperoni, meatballs, onions, mushrooms.”

“You are just like Dad,” I said.

“Don’t act like you don’t like that either. Come on. Tell me you’re having cravings.”

“Are you really trying to use my pregnancy as a way to eat guilt free?”

“That’s exactly what I’m doing.”

“Are you treating?”

“Well... duh,” Kay said.

“Then bring it on. I could use the company right now.”

Those last seven words slipped off my tongue before I could swallow them right back down.

*Fuck. No. I shouldn't have said that.*

“We’ll talk when I get there,” Kay said. “Love you!”

She hung up and I put my head back and groaned.

I knew my sister.

She wasn’t going to let that little comment of my mine slip.

I thought about calling her back and lying to her. Telling her I had gotten sick.

*Morning sickness at night again!*

Except the more I thought about that pizza, the hungrier I became.

It took Kay almost an hour to arrive with the fully loaded pizzas.

My sister was smart.

She had been taught well from our father.

There was a rule in our house.

*Never - ever - order just one pizza. Ever.*

“Took you long enough,” I said.

“It’s not like I was the one making the pizzas,” Kay snapped.

“Oh, nice. Yell at a pregnant woman. I’m hungry and hormonal.”

“Are you really going to use that excuse?”

“Until the day I give birth,” I said. “Now I’m going to go sit on the couch and you’re going to serve me.”

Kay scoffed as I walked away.

“Do you at least have something real to drink here?” she yelled.

“The water is delicious!” I called out.

I heard her mumble, calling me a *bitch*.

I sat down and smiled.

Kay then came into the living room with the two pizza boxes, a bottle of wine for herself, and a bottle of water for me.

I reached for the wine and she slapped my hand. “Not funny.”

“I never would.”

“I know that.”

“So it’s funny then.”

“You’re in a mood,” Kay said.

“Of course I am.”

She flipped open the pizza box lids and let out an orgasmic groan.

“If pizza is better than sex, then you need to find someone else to fuck,” I said.

Kay looked back at me. “And when was the last time you had sex? The night you got pregnant?”

“Ouch.”

“Wait. Are you screwing the guy?”

“What guy?”

“The father of the baby, duh,” Kay said. “Do you have a thing going on with him?”

“No, Kay,” I said.

“So you’re going to go all that time without sex?”

“Looks like it,” I said.

“So pizza is then technically better than sex for you,” she said. “Meaning you need to eat your own words.”

“Fine. I’ll eat my words. And the pizza. I’m starving.”

Kay pulled two slices from the fresh pizza pie and eased them onto a plate for me.

The cheese was gooey. The toppings were so overloaded, they began to tumble off onto the plate.

The smell was heaven.

I smiled and let out a groan.

Kay helped herself to two slices too and sat down.

We looked at each other and smiled.

“Hey,” I said. “Remember the first time Dad made you eat mushrooms?”

“Shut up.”

“Come on,” I said. “Laugh with me.”

“I was a kid.”

“You thought they were magic mushrooms. You thought they were drugs. You cried so hard.”

“I thought I was going to get high!” Kay yelled at me.

“You cried and cried and cried,” I said. “And Mom got mad at Dad. And then Dad got mad at her.”

“Wasn’t that the night she slapped him in the face with the pizza slice?” Kay asked.

“That was the one,” I said. “She slapped him so hard the cheese flew across the room.”

“And I started laughing.”

“We all did,” I said. “Even Mom and Dad.”

“They’re the best, aren’t they? They have the best relationship in the world. It’s so hard to compete with that.”

“Compete?”

“I want what they have,” Kay said. “And it’s impossible. I can’t even get a guy to bring me flowers without his zipper undone and his dick hanging out.”

“What? No. That’s not real.”

“Happened to me last week.”

“Kay...”

“I swear,” she said. She took a big bite out of her pizza slice and held up one finger.

I took an even bigger bite.

The night of the *mushroom-slash-pizza-slap* incident was a memory we never forgot. Watching Mom and Dad playfully argue and then Mom slapping Dad with pizza. Then Kay crying thinking the mushrooms were going to make her see pink elephants.

And after that, we had weekly pizza nights and Kay never complained about mushrooms again and Dad never ran his mouth off at Mom when she had a slice of pizza in her hand.

“Okay,” Kay said. “There was this guy. Andrew. We were doing the chatting thing. Met up for a drink. You know the rest.”

“You slept with him,” I said.

“Judging me from over there?” Kay asked. “Little miss pregnant from a one-night stand?”

“Continue your story,” I said.

“So Andrew seems decent. I’m always hoping for something bigger. That spark kind of feeling, you know? I thought maybe that was happening. Then he shows up with flowers. That’s a thing for me. I like flowers. There’s something so sweet about them. Willow, I swear on my life, he used it against me. I must have mentioned flowers to him, right? So he is standing at the door with this big bouquet of flowers. He hands the flowers to me and reaches up over his head to stretch and there’s his dick. Just hanging out of his jeans.”

“Wow,” I said. “At least he has confidence.”

“He shouldn’t,” Kay said. “He’s more of a *grower* than a *shower*.”

“So what happened?”

Kay shrugged her shoulders and looked down at her pizza.

“Kay,” I said.

“The flowers did it. And his dick was already right there. It was a quickie on the counter. That’s all. Then I made him leave.”

“Hey, did you ever tell someone to go have sex?” I asked. “Like, you kick a guy out and tell him to go sleep with someone else?”

“Not sure I ever did that before. Did you do that? Recently?”

“Never mind,” I said.

“Willow, what did you do?”

“Nothing,” I said. “I’m trying to navigate this whole thing, okay? I can’t have some guy wanting to hump me every two seconds.”

“Why not? You get to have all the free sex you want.”

“I don’t want to talk about this, Kay. I’m sorry I brought it up.”

“Fine. I assume this is why you said you needed company.”

“I knew you weren’t going to let that go.”

“Nope.”

“What kind of flowers did Andrew bring you?” I asked.

“Red roses.”

“Right. Red roses and a hard dick.”

“Going right for my heart,” Kay said.

Then she snorted and started to laugh.

I tried to laugh along with her, but it was hard to laugh.

*I kept wondering if Anders was sleeping with someone else.*



KAY LEFT THE LEFTOVERS FOR ME TO KEEP.

And she left with a giant hug and even crouched down and talked to my belly for a few seconds.

She decided at that moment she wanted to be called *Aunt Kay-Kay*.

Then she left.

And I was alone.

With delicious pizza.

And my horrible thoughts.

Thoughts about Anders.

My mind locked on Anders.

I took one bite of another slice of pizza and gave up on it.

I went to the bathroom and did my full nighttime routine.

Each time I looked in the mirror...

*Is Anders fucking someone right now?*

I crawled into bed and touched my stomach.

I tried to just focus on my body and my baby.

It didn't matter what Anders was doing right now. Especially since I told him to go out and find someone to have sex with.

It still made my heart feel angry.

I finally got to the point where I needed to know for sure.

Yes. Or no.

The only way to do that?

I texted Anders.

I pondered what to say.



Then again, why not just get to the point?

**Are you fucking someone right now? Or tonight? I just need to know.**

*Boom. Done. Sent.*

There was no undoing what I did and I didn't care one bit.

I needed to know what Anders was doing.

No matter how crazy it made me think, feel, or seem.

I really wasn't sure if Anders was going to reply to me or not.

*But he did.*

**Hey, babe. You okay?**

I curled my lip.

**No, I'm not okay. Did you go out tonight?**

*Oh come on, Willow. This is now who you are?*

**I did not go out tonight. Were you worried about that?**

I took a deep breath.

I didn't like that I felt relief that Anders didn't go out.

That meant he was home. Alone.

I was home. Alone.

*Wait. Is Anders alone?*

**Are you alone right now?**

I didn't realize how flirty that text must have read until Anders responded to me.

**I'm alone, babe. Want to send me another pic? Please be everything this time. Okay?**

I shook my head and sat up in bed.

**Look Anders I just wanted to know what you did tonight. This is all confusing for me too. I'm not trying to flirt with you or anything. I don't know what I'm doing at all here. And no, you cannot come over. Don't even say it. Don't even try it.**

Then I waited for what felt like way too long for a response from Anders.

**Well then you have a good night, babe. Take good care of our baby. Maybe someday I can sleep next to you and put my hand on your belly and feel what you feel.**

“Oh, come the fuck on!” I cried out.

I tossed my phone to the bed and looked up at the ceiling.

What kind of guy says stuff like that? Right?

He was either a perfect asshole jerk or he was just trying way too hard.

The only way to find out was to spend more time with him.

But that was not possible.

*Unless...*

“No,” I said. “Absolutely not. No.”

My phone buzzed against the covers and I slapped my hand down and picked the phone up.

I thought it was a text message again from Anders.

It wasn't.

It was a work email.

About a showing.

*And in that moment was when a wild and risky idea  
popped into my head.*

## Chapter Twenty

### ANDERS

**A** day without practice. A day without a game.

A day without the sports world slowly trying to drive us all crazy because apparently, a west coast hockey team that lived near the beach where it was always sunny didn't make sense to have the chance to win it all.

The only problem I had with a day off was that time tempted me into looking for trouble.

This was the exact kind of day I always lived for.

Roman and I would spend the entire day at the strip club.

Or we'd hit the beach and enjoy the eye candy there, then go to the strip club once we were good and drunk from whiskey and the sun.

Now he was lost in his world of being engaged.

I could have easily caused all the trouble in the world by myself, but I caught myself waking up and almost wishing Willow was next to me.

*Okay, not almost wishing - definitely wishing.*

And it wasn't even sexual.

*Okay, it was definitely sexual.*

But it was sexual and other things.

There was some kind of connection.

It didn't make sense to me at all.

I did my normal morning routine.

Coffee, a cold shower, then I went to the gym.

I was the only person there for a while until a few women came in and went for the treadmills.

I went back to my condo and took another shower.

A hot shower in which I stood with my hands on the walls and stared down at my cock for way too long.

*She wanted me to go out and get laid.*

*She keeps pushing me away.*

*But that's her trying to protect herself from me. She wants me to fuck up so she can point the finger at me.*

That should have pissed me off.

The fact that Willow refused to even pretend to be vulnerable near me.

She'd rather hurt me and mess things up between us.

And within that entire mess of emotions there was a baby on the way.

*Our way.*

The baby I put in her womb.

The baby she carried in her womb. Every second of every day her body caring for the baby. The baby growing.

I got out of the shower, got dressed, and found myself in an interesting position.

*Slightly bored.*

Now with a day off, the possibilities were endless.

One phone call and I'd be on a private jet to anywhere I wanted.

But going alone?

It had lost its luster.

To my surprise, my phone started to ring.

"Willow," I whispered.

I started to smile but quickly stopped.

*Something is wrong...*

I answered the call. "Willow, is the baby okay?"

"Hello to you too," she said.

"The baby?"

"Yes," she said. "The baby is fine. Is that where your mind really goes?"

"You never call me, babe. What am I supposed to think?"

"Are you busy right now? Or today?"

"Busy? Define what you mean by that."

Willow took a deep breath. "Anders, you're looking for a new place to live. Right?"

"What?"

"I'm at a condo right now," Willow said. "You mentioned you were looking to move. So I'm at a condo that's for sale. I thought you mentioned you were meeting me here today?"

I opened my mouth to ask Willow if pregnancy had messed up her thinking.

But then... I realized...

“Yes,” I said. “I’m looking for a new place. Maybe. Just testing the market, Willow.”

“Well, I’m waiting, Anders. I’ll text you the address. I think you’ll love this place.”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Sure.”

“How’s the master bedroom?”

“I think you should come see for yourself,” Willow said, almost purring through the phone.

Every muscle in my body flexed for a second.

“I guess I’ll see you soon then?” Willow asked.

*Oh, babe, you have no idea what you just did...*



THE CONDO WAS TWENTY MINUTES AWAY.

Not really fancy but definitely overpriced because of the location.

Then again, what the fuck did I care about this place or the cost of it?

As I walked toward the door of the condo, it opened.

Willow stepped out to greet me.

Wearing a nice, *professional*-looking dress.

The first thing my eyes did was look down.

*Her belly... it's...*

Willow placed her hands to her stomach. “Yeah, I know. It popped even more. I’m not kidding when I say it happened overnight. You don’t have to stare though. Okay?”

I closed in on her and touched her stomach. “You look fucking stunning right now, babe.”

Willow smacked my hands away. “Now if you’ll follow me inside, I think you’re really going to love this place.” Willow turned and began to walk. “It’s very open and spacious. Great views of the beach and some of the nightlife.”

I shut the door behind me and locked it.

“There are also....”

Willow stopped talking and turned around.

Her hands at her sides.

She gently bit her bottom lip and stared at me.

Her green eyes were so beautiful but nothing compared to the shape of her body in that dress.

Natural curves she couldn’t hide plus the new curves thanks to pregnancy.

She seemed vulnerable in that moment as she stared at me.

This was her idea.

And I was the one who was supposed to make the next move.

I walked up to Willow and touched her hips.

“Tell me more about this place,” I whispered.

“It’s, uh, it’s a nice place,” she whispered. “There are, uh, two bathrooms...”



My right hand moved over her stomach.

We both paused for a second.

“What else?” I whispered.

“Three bedrooms,” she said. “Two on one side, the master on the other all by itself.”

I eased my hand down along her dress, seeking the bottom.

When I found it, Willow took a deep breath.

“The kitchen is all custom,” she said. “Beautiful countertops...”

“Countertops,” I said. “Maybe we should take a look at them.”

My fingertips danced along the bottom of Willow’s dress but now I had other ideas in mind.

Both of my hands touched her hips again.

I gently lifted her, making sure there was zero pressure applied anywhere near her stomach.

I turned and moved toward the kitchen.

She clawed at my forearms, her fair skin turning bright red.

*Heat. Need. Desire.*

I felt everything radiating from her.

Plus that little bit of vulnerability...

*I never felt so attracted to a woman in my entire life.*

Once in the kitchen, I put her on her feet and reached down for the end of her dress.

“Are these countertops marble?” I asked.

“No, they’re not marble,” she said. “They’re, uh...”

My bare hands touched the backs of her legs.

I picked her up again and sat her on the counter.

Her legs were open - enough for me to nestle between them.

My right hand grazed her left inner thigh.

She touched the edges of the counter, her fingers already curling around it.

“I’m done with the tour of this place,” I said. “I want another tour. I’ll do it on my own though.”

I lowered my mouth to Willow’s.

The only thing hotter than the kiss was the way she felt as I ran my fingers up between her legs. Feeling that thin line of her panties, hiding what I needed the most from her.

I curled my fingers against the edge of her panties and moved them to the side.

A hot wetness greeted me.

My middle finger took charge, turning and plunging into her beautiful depths.

Her hips thrust forward at me as she groaned.

*Finally, babe. I’ve been waiting to hear that sound again.*

Last time her voice competed with the sound of the ocean.

This time, it was just her.

All her.

Everything was about her and for her.

I broke the kiss and without hesitation, I dropped down to one knee before her.

With my left hand, I pushed her dress up her legs.

Willow leaned back and let out another groan, looking down at me, knowing what was about to happen next.

Carefully, I touched the top of her panties and began to tug.

She lifted her hips and I slid her panties down her legs and off.

I dropped them to the floor.

Willow brought her left foot to the counter and slightly turned, inching forward, giving herself to me.

“Oh, babe, you are so beautiful,” I growled.

I watched the way she breathed.

Deep breaths.

Trying to keep control.

All the while losing control.

I pressed my lips against her soft, sweet, wet lips.

I nuzzled the tip of my nose against her clit and rubbed left to right.

*Gentle, Anders.*

Willow thrust herself toward me.

I curled my tongue forward and rolled over her clit.

I closed my lips on her, sucked her warm honey and growled.

Willow grabbed at my hair and let out a loud cry.

I slid my tongue down and thrust against her body.

She sheathed my tongue for a moment before I pulled away.

I looked up at her.

Those green eyes meeting mine.

I then slowly licked my lips, starting with my top lip.

Then my bottom lip.

I groaned.

“I need more,” I said.

“Then take it, Anders. Take it all. Right now.”

My hands grabbed her thighs and I went for her again.

My tongue savored her tender clit.

Kissing and flicking and rolling in any direction I could make up.

The faster I moved, the more her hips rocked.

The louder her groans echoed through the spacious condo.

*The condo that wasn't either hers or mine.*

That thought alone made everything hotter.

I eased my hands around and cupped Willow's ass.

She flexed over and over, my hands kneaded at her, pulling her even closer to my mouth.

Her right leg then fell over my shoulder.

Her heel smacking against the middle of my back with a hard thud.

She didn't care.

Neither did I.

She pulled at me with her heel.

I kissed her harder.

Her body slowly began to shake.

As though she were cold but she wasn't.

Her groans were breathless gasps now.

*I had her. Right there. She was...*

“Coming!” Willow managed to cry out.

I didn't need the warning or the information to know what was happening.

A warm rush of her honey touched my lips and I growled so deep in the back of my throat I thought the counter was going to crack.

My tongue lapped up all I wanted to taste, then I quickly pulled away and stood up.

“We're not done yet, babe,” I told her.

“I know,” she said. “I brought a bag. With a huge blanket. To put on the bed.”

I touched her chin and licked my lips again. “You thought this through.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “A lot. I want you, Anders.”

*Fuck...*

I pulled her off the counter and cradled her in my arms.

I walked through the condo and crouched to swipe her bag off the floor.

As the realtor, she pointed and guided me to the spacious master bedroom.

I sat Willow on the bed, unzipped her bag, then pulled out the large blanket and tossed it over the bed.

Then I offered her my hands and she stood up.

My fingertips touched the shoulders of her dress.

*Down they went.*

I reached behind her and pulled at the small zipper, guiding it down to the small of her back.

Before taking her dress off, I made damn sure to unsnap her bra too.

I was done waiting.

I was done messing around.

The taste of her sweetness lingered in my mouth and went right to my brain like a shot of whiskey. Not to mention it went right to my heart and down to my cock.

As I pulled the dress off her body, I paused at the sight of her breasts.

They were beautiful, full with a rich, dark-pink hue to her nipples.

I wondered if they were always this size and shape or if pregnancy changed them already.

Not that it mattered.

I wanted her. All of her.

My hands eased her dress down past her hips and then I paused.

I had to touch her chest.

As my hands crested over the swell of her breasts, Willow let out a soft sigh and placed her hands to mine.

“Gentle, Anders,” she whispered. “They’re sore.”

“Because of the baby?” I asked.

She nodded. “Do you like them?”

I moved our hands away from her chest and looked down.

“Oh, babe, they’re perfect.”

My right hand cupped under her left breast. My thumb rolled over her nipple.

“Everything about you is perfect.”

I dipped my mouth down to her breast and slowly engulfed her into my mouth.

She clawed at the back of my shirt and cried out.

I moved her down to the bed, on the blanket she brought with her.

I pulled the dress completely off her body and she put her hands to her pregnant stomach and stared at me.

I moved fast then, tearing open my jeans and shoving them down.

My cock jumped free, stiff and ready for Willow’s body.

I moved closer to the bed and used one hand to take my shirt off.

She reached for me, her fingertips moving along my hardness.

I moved even closer, joining her on the bed.

I looked down at her again and shook my head.

“Fucking beautiful, babe,” I said.

“Yeah, enough of the sweet talk,” Willow said. “First off, you already got me pregnant. Second, I’m naked, wet, and waiting. No more talking, Anders.”

I gritted my teeth and joined my body to hers.

Her familiar warmth and sheath greeting me, along with the sound of her voice as she groaned.

I thought about what she just said to me.

Talking that way.

Being sexy, blunt and dirty.

*That was the kind of talk that might make me fall in love with her.*



## Chapter Twenty-One

---

### WILLOW

**E**ach thrust harder than the previous one.

*Each thrust leaving me fuller.*

*Leaving me happier.*

*My body rippling with pleasure.*

*I slide my hand between us and touch my stomach.*

*I'm not sure what the rules are here with us together...*

*He puts his hand over mine.*

*We look into each other's eyes.*

*I can feel him... not just between my legs.*

*I feel him everywhere.*

*Strong. Brave. Protective.*

*I have nothing to worry about when I'm in his arms or he's inside me.*

*His hand dips between my legs as he fucks me.*

*I feel two fingertips against my clit.*

*My jaw drops and my eyes go wide.*

*Another sudden rush of pleasure attacks me.*

*I start to arch my back but he prevents me from doing so by kissing me.*

*Hot and deep... just like between my legs.*

*His fingertips leave my clit just as I climax again.*

*I feel the trail of my own wetness as he glides his fingers up to my breasts.*

*Touching them gently, one at a time.*

*Each squeeze seemingly sending signals between my legs, screaming for more.*

*MORE!*

*And that's what he gives me.*

*More.*

*More for me.*

*More of himself.*

*Taking all he wants. All I have to give.*

*His lips then inch from my mouth, down to my neck.*

*Down to my chest.*

*Then to my breasts.*

*I claw at his back.*

*I can feel him getting bigger.*

*Even bigger.*

*I know what that means.*

*It's now his turn.*

*The last time it was 'his turn' he got me pregnant.  
But this time... 'his turn' is for both of us to enjoy.*



“HOW LONG DO WE HAVE HERE, BABE?”

“Not much longer,” I whispered. “If the people who own the place show up and find the realtor and a hockey player naked in their bed...”

“Then I’ll be forced to buy the place, won’t I?”

“For sure,” I said.

“What do I want with two condos then?”

“This can be our secret meeting place,” I said.

I picked my head up from his chest and looked at him.

“Are you being serious, Willow?”

“No,” I said.

*But maybe...*

Anders touched my face. “If that’s what you wanted, I would do it. I’ll buy this place just for us to secretly meet and hang out.”

“Now you’re just trying to show off,” I said. “Trying to make the whole *after sex vibe* not seem awkward.”

“Whoa, why would this be awkward?”

“We just fucked in a stranger’s bed,” I laughed.

“Your point?”

“This is the first time we really... you know...”

“What? Seen each other naked? Does that make you feel awkward?”

“I don’t know, Anders. You’re seeing a different side of me right now. You don’t know what I looked like naked when I wasn’t pregnant.”

“What are you worried about? That your boobs will be too small?”

“I guess that’s something to worry about later in life,” I said. “If at all. It’s not like we’re... you know... this doesn’t imply we have to be together or anything.”

“Wow,” Anders said. “You really are trying to make things awkward, aren’t you?”

“I suck at this.” I cringed. “That’s why the beach thing was easier. We fucked, then we went our separate ways.”

“Except now we’re stuck together forever,” he said.

“I guess we are in a sense,” I said. “We probably should get dressed and get out of here.”

“Maybe open a window too. It smells like sex in here.”

I inched away from Anders.

He stood up from the bed and I looked back and marveled at his ass.

I never cared that much about muscles and all that, but I loved a nice butt on a guy.

And Anders... *wow*.

He put on his jeans, then placed my bra and dress on the bed.

“Your panties are on the kitchen floor,” he said.

“Yes, they are,” I said. “Mind if I get a second or two to get dressed?”

“Ah, right.”

Anders grabbed his shirt and exited the bedroom.

I put my dress back on and my bra.

I folded up the blanket and stuffed it back into my bag.

Then I ran my hands across the bed, making sure it looked as perfect as when Anders and I entered the room.

I walked out of the bedroom to find Anders standing there with my panties dangling over his left thumb. Smiling at me.

“You want to keep those, Anders?” I asked.

“No, thanks,” he said.

He tossed my panties into the air.

I made a daring grab and tucked my panties into my bag.

Anders made a fist and bit it.

“What’s wrong?” I whispered.

“You’re going to be walking around without panties,” he said. “After what we just did.”

He did have a point.

Sex wasn’t like in the movies when people could just get up and go about their day.

There were... *things happening* between my legs.

I rolled my eyes and went to the bathroom to clean everything up and put my panties back on.

Anders waited for me outside the bathroom.

In my attempt to avoid any more awkwardness, I looked around the condo and smiled.

“So what do you think of the place, Anders?”

“It’s alright,” he said.

Then he winked.

“What?” I asked.

He lowered his lips down to mine for a quick kiss. “*I think we need to see a few more places though...*”



IT WAS NOW GOING TO BECOME *A THING*.

*A thing* that was very hot and *a thing* I had to keep a secret.

I couldn’t stop thinking about what Anders and I had done in that condo together.

Risky in more ways than I cared to count.

But just as sexy too.

Yet I could have just gone over to his condo.

We didn’t need to sneak around or have me pretending to be showing a condo or have him pretending to buy one.

It also didn’t help matters that my boss asked how my showing went and I had to scramble and say it went well but the buyer wanted something else.

Yet there I stood in my bedroom with my phone on the dresser with a beautiful condo for sale on the screen.

This one was really nice.

Four bedrooms.

Three full bathrooms.

A large kitchen that led into a dining room.

Insanely expensive because it was literally on the beach.

The seller was some tech startup guy and he was selling the place only because he bought a mansion.

I pushed my phone out of the way and looked at myself in the mirror.

I turned sideways and took a deep breath.

I honestly swore my stomach grew bigger each day.

Which it probably did.

My little baby bump that popped wasn't really all that little.

If I wore a baggy enough hoodie, I could still hide my pregnancy - barely - if I wanted to.

Today wasn't about hiding anything.

Hence the reason I wore the same thong I wore the night I got pregnant by Anders.

It wasn't exactly all that comfortable at the moment, but that was okay.

In a short while he'd be taking it off me.

I wanted to wear a nicer bra but my boobs were a little bit bigger and always aching. So I went with comfort.

Which was okay.

Because I had a surprise for Anders.

I looked at my phone again.

We were going to have fun in this massive condo together.

The best part was the place had been up for sale for over a month with no buyers yet.

So even if I showed it and nobody bought it, it wasn't that big of a deal.

Today was all about winning for myself.

Nothing could go wrong.

At all.

Just to be sure of it, I texted Anders to confirm his appointment to see the condo for sale.

**Hey Willow. It's Anders. Can't wait to see the place.**

I liked that he played into the *realtor and buyer* thing we had going on.

I wiggled my hips into a tight, sexy dress and went on my way to the condo.

When I arrived, I made sure the place was empty.

*Just in case.*

The place was bright, clean, and empty of anyone else but me.

I looked at my phone.

I had a little time to spare.

Which was good.

I had to prepare my surprise for Anders.

I took a deep breath and unzipped my dress.

Once it lowered down to my hips I stopped there.

I wasn't going to give it all away at once.

Anders could find out about my thong by himself.



Next, I reached back and unhooked my strapless bra.

It jumped off my chest.

My boobs pushed forward with force.

I let the bra fall to the floor.

And I stood just like that.

I couldn't wait for Anders to show up and open the door and see me standing there like that.

I thought about what to say to him.

*See anything you like?*

*What do you think of this?*

*Is this... good enough?*

*Do my boobs look bigger?*

*Oh, Anders, my boobs are so heavy, will you come hold them?*

I smiled at those last few.

In reality, I didn't have to say a thing.

I was a horny, topless woman with a big, strong hockey player on his way to come fuck me.

Once again, nothing could go wrong.

I heard the knock on the door and sucked in a breath.

"Come on in," I said.

I mentally told myself Anders was a little bit early.

The door opened.

I was ready for Anders to come take me...

*I let out a scream when I realized it was my mother who had just shown up!*

## Chapter Twenty-Two

---

### ANDERS

I was going to be late to the condo by a few minutes, but for a good reason.

I knew Willow wanted me to show up just so we could have sex, but I maybe wanted just a little bit more than that.

Which led me to getting her some flowers.

Me buying flowers for a woman?

Unheard of.

Things were obviously much different with Willow than any other woman I had been with.

I had never gotten someone pregnant before.

*At least I hoped not.*

Last thing I needed was a situation like Luc with some woman showing up with a kid.

I planned on being there for everything when it came to Willow's pregnancy.

Even if we had to hide it.

After getting a bunch of deep red roses, I drove to the condo that someone else owned.

It seemed insane to be fucking each other like that, but it sure was hot as hell.

I thought about how things were going to play out if Willow and I kept this going.

This whole secrecy thing.

So what was the plan?

Willow would go into labor and text me?

Then what?

I would have to fake an injury or something. Or some kind of organ failure thing to get into the hospital. But even that wouldn't really work because they had a separate part of the hospital for babies.

I'd end up in a damn MRI machine while Willow gave birth to our baby.

I didn't like that at all.

I wanted to be right there with her.

Which meant I'd have to maybe pretend to be a doctor or male nurse.

Dress up in scrubs and wear a protective mask to hide my face.

Now that thought did make me smile at least.

I mean, I knew my way around between woman's legs with total confidence, but I wasn't so sure about a baby sliding its way out of there.

I arrived at this massive condo and shook my head at the sight of the building.

It was obnoxious looking.

I climbed out of my car, walked into the building and went up to the top floor.

The best part of the condo was by far the view.

That made me grin.

I pictured myself standing behind Willow. Her hands pressed against a window. Me thrusting deep into her perfect body. The two of us watching the ocean. Watching the waves build and crash. Feeling that same building and crashing of pleasure between us.

And once we were done, we'd need some window cleaner for her handprints.

*Damn, Willow is so fucking hot, huh?*

I trotted my way to the door, then debated what to do next.

What to do with the flowers.

I could have been sweet and romantic, walked into the condo and handed them to Willow, then slowly got things going.

*Or...*

I reached down and unzipped my jeans.

Then I unbuttoned them.

I pushed them down enough so my cock unrolled itself free.

I lowered the roses down to cover myself.

And I grinned ear to ear.

*Willow will see the roses and start to gush.*

*She'll blush and think I'm so sweet.*

*Then I'll tell her to take the roses and she'll see her real gift.*

*She'll take the roses from me and there's my cock, just hanging there, waiting for her body.*

I lifted my hand to knock on the door and shook my head.

No knocking needed for this.

I grabbed the doorknob, opened the door and stepped inside.

The place was quiet.

Too quiet.

Eerily quiet.

For a second I thought I entered the wrong condo.

Now that would have been a story to tell the world, huh?

When I spotted Willow's bag on the counter, I felt a little bit of relief.

But where was Willow?

*Unless...*

I started to smile again.

I went and got her flowers and she was probably already in bed waiting for me.

Probably naked, legs spread.

Maybe she even started without me.

"Willow?" I called out. "Where are you, babe? Are you waiting for me? Please tell me you're naked? I have a big

surprise out here for you. You should come get it.”

I started to walk across the open floor plan of the condo.

I had no idea which door was a closet, bathroom, or bedroom.

“If you’re hiding, I’m going to kick down every fucking door in this place, babe,” I called out. “Nothing will stop me from getting to your pussy, babe.”

I opened my mouth to say something even more vulgar.

That’s when one of the doors opened and out stepped a woman.

I thought she looked kind of familiar but I wasn’t sure.

And next to her stood Willow.

Willow wore... a robe...

“Anders,” Willow said. Her face turned bright red. *“This is my mother...”*



AT FIRST, I STOOD THERE FROZEN IN PLACE.

That’s how I knew the woman.

She was Coach Pete’s wife.

I had seen her in pictures on Coach Pete’s desk, not to mention seeing her at games and other events.

And there I stood with a dozen roses covering up my exposed cock.

My eyes moved from Coach Pete’s wife over to Willow.

*A robe... meaning...*

“Anders,” Willow said. “Maybe you should just go.”

“No,” Willow’s mother said. “Allow me to introduce myself. I’m Holly. I’m Willow’s mother.”

She walked toward me, her right hand out.

I quickly reached down and exchanged hands with the roses and offered my right hand to Willow’s mother.

All the while my cock still hid behind the flowers.

Holly and I touched hands.

My brain scrambled to figure this one out.

The look on Holly’s face though...

I glanced at Willow. “Am I early?”

“Did you bring me roses?” Holly asked. “Or were they for my daughter?”

Holly began to reach for the roses and I had to hurry to step back.

It was one thing to get Coach Pete’s daughter pregnant, but it was a whole other thing to have Coach Pete’s wife accidentally touch my cock.

With his pregnant daughter watching.

*Oh, fuck, this is messy. Really messy.*

*Think, Anders, think!*

“I brought them for Willow,” I said. “For helping me.”

“Helping you with what?” Holly asked.

“Mom, please don’t do this,” Willow said. “Anders, you should just go. We can reschedule this for another time, okay? I forgot that I told my mother to meet me here for lunch. I got my times messed up.”



“I’ve got this,” I said to Willow.

“And what exactly do you have?” Holly asked.

Her eyes were the same color as Willow’s.

A naturally beautiful woman, just like Willow.

I mean, if I had to admit it, she was a smoking hot mother.

No, better yet, she was a sexy grandmother.

*Anders, focus.*

“I’m, uh, in the market,” I said. “For a new condo. Like this one. I think I’m going to buy this one.” I looked around. “Yup, I’m going to buy this condo. That’s why I brought the roses. To thank Willow for helping me. For putting up with me. I was kind of driving her crazy with looking at places.”

“Oh, okay,” Holly said. She stepped to the side. “Then by all means, give my daughter those beautiful roses. Just go and hand them right over.”

My jaw tightened.

Willow stared at me with her eyes three times as big as normal.

Her mother smiled.

Her mother was enjoying this very awkward moment.

“Go on, Anders,” Holly said. “Hand those roses over.”

“Anders,” Willow said.

“I can’t at the moment,” I said.

I had no choice.

I took a deep breath and turned away from Willow and her mother.

There really wasn't a graceful way to do what I had to do.

So I took a deep breath and moved the roses away from my cock.

Then I tucked my beast away and buttoned and zipped my jeans.

When I turned back, both Willow and her mother were in shock.

"I have weird ways of thanking people," I said.

"Remind me to never do a favor for you," Holly said.

"Mom!" Willow cried out. "This is... this is so messed up."

"Okay, fine," I said. "I'm not here to buy the condo. Or even look at it."

"Which explains why I walked in on my daughter standing topless in a dress," Holly said.

I looked at Willow and almost dropped to my knees.

*You did what, babe?*

*You did that for me?*

"I'm..." My brain scrambled even more. "I have a fetish."

"A fetish?" Holly asked.

"Yeah. I have a pregnancy fetish. So I was here to, you know, enjoy that fetish."

"So my daughter is selling real estate and her body?" Holly asked.

"Well, one is a career and one is a fetish," I said.

"Which one is the career?" Holly asked.

“Mom!” Willow yelled even louder. “This is the worst day of my life!”

“I’m just following his lead,” Holly said to Willow. “So you’re not here to show off the condo but instead give your body to him? That’s what this is?”

“Well, yeah,” I said.

“Anders!” Willow cried out.

“I mean, no,” I said. “I mean...”

“So which is it?” Holly asked. “Is my daughter a whore or just having fun or what?”

“Well, I mean, fun for sure,” I said. “She’s a blast. She’s a ball of fun.”

“I’m not a ball of anything,” Willow said. “Was that some kind of pregnancy comment?”

“Oh, fuck, babe,” I said. “No way. You know how beautiful you look right now.”

“So she’s beautiful to you too?” Holly asked.

I started to take a step toward Willow.

I just wanted to hug her. I wanted to know more about this whole *standing there topless in a dress waiting for me* situation.

Willow was beyond embarrassed and shocked.

Each time I opened my mouth I made the situation worse.

I took a deep breath and finally extended my right hand toward Willow, handing her the roses.

“I got these for you, babe,” I whispered.

“Yeah, thanks,” Willow said.

“I’ve got this,” I winked.

Then I turned and looked at Willow’s mother.

Holly had her hands on her hips, waiting for me to say something.

There really was only one thing left to say.

*“Holly... I knocked up your daughter.”*

## Chapter Twenty-Three

---

### WILLOW

**I** *knocked up your daughter.*

The words lingered in my head and echoed throughout the condo.

You'd think saying something like that would make Anders cringe or step back or scramble to say something else.

*Nope.*

He stood tall, muscular, proud.

He even tried to reach for me, like he wanted to put his arm around me and pull me close. Like I was his property or something.

I elbowed him away and took a deep breath.

“Time for you to go, Anders,” I said.

“Really?” Anders asked. “I thought we were getting somewhere.”

“What did you expect next?” Mom asked Anders. “Want me to hurry up and leave so you and my daughter can screw in

some other person's condo?"

My face filled with heat.

Anders didn't miss a beat. "That's actually really nice of you to say, Holly. That would be great."

I swung my right fist and punched Anders in the stomach with the back of my hand.

He didn't move an inch.

*Fucking rock-hard abs.*

My mother laughed.

She loved watching this.

I looked up at Anders.

I wasn't sure what kind of look I gave him, but it seemed reality finally hit home.

His jaw tightened and he nodded.

"You okay?" he whispered to me.

"No."

"Want me to stay, babe?"

"No."

"Can we talk later?"

*No.*

"Yes," I whispered.

Anders moved toward me and touched my stomach.

I knew he wanted to say goodbye to me. He wanted to kiss me.

My mother watched intently.

Smiling, yes, but also offering that sense of motherly protection.

Anders's left hand sprawled across my stomach.

My pregnant stomach.

Saying goodbye to our baby.

Anders looked back at my mother and nodded. "I had a lot of different scenarios of how I was going to meet you. This wasn't one of them."

"I guess we're all full of surprises today, aren't we?" Mom asked.

Anders opened his mouth and then said nothing.

*Speechless? Really?*

Anders exited the condo.

Now I was alone with my mother again.

Now she knew the truth.

I looked at her with guilt-filled eyes.

It reminded me of the night Kay and I went out to a party and we both drank.

Kay and I came home stumbling around, drunk and giggling.

And then Kay threw up.

Just as Mom walked into the kitchen and turned on the lights.

Kay started to cry, fearing she was going to die from throwing up while drunk.

All the while Mom stared at me as though it were my fault.

I hated that look.

I hated the feeling I felt.

“Anders,” I said with a nod.

“How about you get dressed in actual clothing and then maybe we can talk?” Mom asked.

I turned and hung my head.

*I thought for a second I heard my mother laughing.*



“THIS IS A REALLY NICE PLACE,” MOM SAID AS SHE LOOKED around.

I stood wearing the dress - all the way this time.

I wasn't topless.

But I still wore the strapless bra.

*And the same thong from the night I got pregnant.*

The robe that I had thrown on myself?

That had been at the condo.

I didn't even want to think about that part of it all.

“Are you in the market?” I asked with a smile.

Mom looked at me. “I might be.”

“Really?”

“I don't know, Willow. What do I do right now? Keep this secret from your father?”

“Mom.”

“What?”



“I’m not sure what anyone wants me to do right now,” I said. “I’m trying to make everyone happy. I’m trying to figure this out the right way. You think this is easy for me? I can’t be happy and brag about everything?”

“Are you with him? Are you two dating? Are you engaged? Are you in love? Or are you two just fucking like rabbits because you can’t get any more pregnant than you are? And if you’re doing that, are you sure he’s not out screwing around? Because if he is... and then he’s porking my daughter...”

“Mom,” I said.

“What, Willow?”

“Did you just say *porking*?”

Mom tilted her head.

“Can I talk now?” I asked.

“Sure,” she said.

“I wish this were a better story to tell, okay? I wish it was about romance and love and all kinds of that stuff. But it’s not. Anders and I have never dated or really hung out or anything like that. It’s not a love story, Mom. But there’s a baby involved now. And I told Anders to leave. I told him he didn’t have to do a thing for me or the baby.”

“Willow,” Mom said. “You didn’t.”

“I did.”

“And what did he say?”

“He refused. He told me there was no way in hell he wasn’t going to be there for me and the baby. He even showed up to my last appointment and just barged in. Almost had the

cops called on him. Then he tried to convince my doctor that he had stomach issues. He even tried to play off saying his uterus hurt...”

“He doesn’t have...”

“Exactly,” I said.

Mom took a deep breath. “Willow.”

“I know,” I said. “I know. Here’s the thing, Mom. I’ve never really been into the hockey thing before. I know this season is a big deal. A really big deal. I’m not stupid when it comes to this. I know what this means to Dad. Everything he’s worked for to get here. I know this is the best team he’s ever had. I promise I’m not making this up as some cheap excuse to not say anything to anyone. I just know this is the year. If they don’t win it this year, then big changes are coming for the team.”

“So you want Anders to win it all this year so he doesn’t get traded?” Mom asked.

“Not really,” I said. “But that is a good point.”

“Would you leave with him?”

“What? No. I don’t know. I can’t even think about that.”

“So, let me get this straight,” Mom said. “You hooked up with the goalie from the *Inci Warriors*. You got pregnant. Now you’re trying to hide as much as you can because you’re worried about the hockey season.”

“Yes.”

“That’s your story?”

“That’s not *my* story. That’s *the* story.”

“Well, Willow, I think you’re my daughter.”

“What?”

Mom closed in on me. She used her right pointer finger to tuck my hair behind my ear. “You’re just like me. Always protecting. Always guarded.”

“I know how crazy this is.”

“But you’re telling the truth. I can see it in your eyes. Your sister is good at lying to me. But you have my eyes. I can see everything.”

I swallowed hard and nodded.

Mom touched my cheek. “Have I told you yet today how beautiful you look, Willow? You’re so radiant right now.”

“I’m getting pudgy, Mom.”

“Just wait,” she said with a smile.

“Don’t say that.”

“Do you have any cravings yet? Besides hockey goalies?”

“Mom,” I said as I stepped back.

My cheeks turned bright red.

“What?” Mom asked.

“Listen to me for a second. Everything I just told you. I swear it’s the truth. Anders is all about this. He’s everywhere, wanting this. I’m almost overwhelmed with how much he cares. But, again, this season...”

“What are you getting at, Willow? Just say it.”

“I think you know what I’m saying.”

“I want to hear you say it to me. I want you to put me in an even more uncomfortable position. Because it wasn’t hard enough to calm your father down after you announced your

pregnancy. He was ready to hire someone to find out who got you pregnant and beat them up.”

“He means well,” I said. “I put him in this position. I know that.”

“Does your sister know?”

“No. Nobody does. Except you.”

“Well, this is just...”

“You can’t tell him,” I finally said. “You cannot tell Dad a thing.”

“You’re asking me to lie to my husband.”

“I’m asking you to not tell him.”

Mom tilted her head.

“Mom, please,” I said. “I need to do this on my own. It’s my life. I’m not living off anyone but myself. Okay?”

“Can I talk now?” Mom asked. “Maybe throw some advice your way?”

I nodded.

Mom stepped toward me. “No more fucking in other people’s condos, okay? You know how risky and stupid that is. The fantasy side of it? I’ll give that to you. But you’re risking your job, Willow. That’s stupid. Okay?”

“Yeah, but where do I fuck him then?” I asked.

Mom blinked fast. “You got yourself into this. You’ll figure it out.”

“I guess I will,” I said.

“Just don’t risk your career. That’s my advice. Now, don’t forget, you have your own place. He has his own place. I’m

sure you can make it work. After all, you managed to get pregnant without anyone knowing.”

I bit my bottom lip.

“Willow... what?”

“Nothing.”

I turned.

Mom touched my right arm. “I don’t think so. What are you hiding now?”

I looked over my shoulder. “It really wasn’t some romantic night. Or even in a bed.”

“Oh,” Mom said.

“Remember the party before the season started?”

“I knew it.”

“What?”

“I knew it,” Mom said. “I knew something was off that night about you. You left the party for almost an hour. Then you came back acting differently. I thought maybe you got high.”

“Well...”

“Sex high,” Mom said. “Willow.”

“What?”

“How... where...”

“Do you really want me to answer that?” I asked.

“As a woman, yes, I want to hear all the sexy details,” Mom said. “But as your mother, no. I don’t want to know a thing.”

“Okay. Just leave it at that. You can paint the scene for yourself. Assume what you want.”

“My daughter got pregnant on the beach,” Mom said.

“You said it.”

“You’re not defending it.”

“I don’t have to defend a thing anymore.”

“You sure about that, Willow?” Mom asked.

“All I need is your support by not saying a word,” I said. “That’s it. I’m trying to look at the end of the road of this. Dad gets his big trophy. I have my baby. Anders and I figure out how to be a little family. And you and Dad are grandparents.”

“Speaking of that,” Mom said. “Really? Grandparents? Do you know how old that makes me feel?”

“You’re not young, Mom.”

“I’m also not *grandma* age.”

“You’re a hot grandma,” I said. “You’re a *GILF*.”

“What is that?”

I laughed. “You can look it up when you get home.”

“Wait a second,” Mom said. “Is that like the *MILF* thing?”

I nodded.

“Willow...”

“What? It’s a good thing. I know you and Dad are still *active*.”

“That man can’t keep his hands to himself.”

“Ew! Don’t tell me that.”

“How do you think I feel?” Mom asked. “I’m at a hockey event, schmoozing with people all the while my daughter is on the beach with her legs spread...”

“Mom!”

She laughed at me. “Seriously though, Willow. A hockey player?”

“Have you seen Anders?” I asked.

“Well, that part I get. I’m past my prime for having babies, but that man’s smile and eyes definitely made my ovaries ache a little.”

I really didn’t need to hear that, but she wasn’t wrong.

Anders did more than just make my ovaries ache.

*He put a baby in my womb.*

## Chapter Twenty-Four

---

### ANDERS

**W**illow sent me her daily picture.

I stood in my bathroom, just after splashing some expensive cologne onto my neck and on top of my shirt.

The picture of her standing sideways in front of her mirror.

Her shirt pulled all the way up to her breasts.

*But never showing her breasts.*

They were huge.

Big, full, and Willow wasn't sure about them.

Just like she wasn't sure about the rest of her body.

A lesson I learned the hard way over and over?

Never tell a woman how they should feel about their body.

I pissed Willow off more times than I cared to admit.

It wasn't necessarily me trying to convince her what to think, I just wanted her to know how beautiful she looked to me. And that this journey was kind of amazing and unique.



Then again, she was the one pregnant, not me.

Her belly was round.

*Really round.*

I wasn't sure how it happened, but time seemed to slip away for a little while after her mother caught us together.

It was total radio silence about the ordeal.

Meaning nobody else knew or said a word.

As Christmas coasted by without anything big happening, I did sneak a few gifts to Willow.

I wasn't sure if it was insulting or not but I got her an appointment with a maternity clothing store that came with an unlimited budget.

She didn't hate me for that, so I took it as a win.

Then as a joke, I got her a shirt that read *I HOOKED UP WITH THE GOALIE AND ALL I GOT WAS THIS SHIRT... AND THIS BABY...* with an arrow pointing down to her belly.

She did take a picture of herself in the shirt and sent it to me.

Then she told me she would hide it forever.

I also wrote a letter to our unborn baby.

Nothing too intense.

I was a goalie.

Not a writer.

On the hockey side of things, we were dominant.

We rarely lost.

A tie was considered a loss for us.

Losing in a shootout was unheard of.

I was the best goalie in the league.

Yet I had my focus on two things.

*Fatherhood. And winning a championship.*

The whole daily picture thing started in February during an east coast road trip.

It snowed like crazy when we were in Boston.

We ended up getting stuck for an extra night until the storm passed, so they could clear the runways and get a plane ready.

Stuck alone in a hotel room, I sent Willow some pictures of the snow.

She sent back a picture of her standing in front of a mirror with her belly showing.

Then she promised me she would send me a picture each day as long as I promised to make sure no one – *meaning Roman* - didn't see it.

It was a fair deal.

She kept to her word.

I kept playing goalie.

I kept thinking about being a father.

We kept sneaking around to see each other.

No more *pretending to be buying a condo* though.

That thing ended the day her mother caught us.

As far as tonight went, Coach Pete decided to take the entire team and trainers out for a dinner.

We had been playing so many games, playing so intensely, and playing so well throughout the entire organization, he wanted to properly thank us.

The playoffs were still a little bit away, but that was obviously our next goal.

*Playoffs.*

I shoved all that hockey talk to the back of my mind as I stared at the picture of Willow.

**Beautiful like always, babe. I need to see you soon. I need to touch you soon.**

My phone buzzed with the notification that a car was waiting for me outside my building.

I left my condo, still holding my phone.

Feeling slightly desperate for Willow to reply to my text.

Sometimes she did.

Sometimes she didn't.

I slipped my phone into my pocket and switched my hockey brain back on.

Tonight was about expensive food and drinks, all on Coach Pete's tab.

There was one thing though...

The guys all brought someone with them.

I arrived at the restaurant on the beach - *which Coach Pete had shut down for the night for the team* - and realized I was the only *single* guy there.

Luc and Emma already had drinks.

Enjoying a night out and away from parenthood.

Cain and Lexie holding hands as the beach breeze played with Lexie's hair.

Then there was Nolan and Harlow.

Dressed up way too nice, staring at each other with puppy dog eyes.

*Fucking love...*

I nodded to everyone as I made my way to the outdoor bar.

Who was the first person to literally bump into me?

I felt my right elbow move and turned to see Holly staring at me.

Wearing a black dress.

Looking stunning.

No surprise to know where Willow got her beauty from.

I nodded to Holly.

“You don't have to play dumb, Anders,” she whispered. “Pete is inside.”

“Not sure what the protocol is here.”

“I don't know either. I will say it does bother me a little that my daughter isn't here.”

“I agree with that,” I said. “I feel lonely.”

“You're really a decent guy, aren't you?” Holly asked.

“Not if you ask any of my other hookups.”

Holly got closer to me. “You better not be fucking other women and then coming near my daughter as though she's some freebie.”

“I never would do that to Willow. I swear on it.”

“Good. If I find out that you’re doing that, I’ll cut that nicely hung cock right off your body and feed it to the sharks,” Holly said with a smile.

“How do you know...”

I stopped.

I remembered the roses and my cock hidden behind them.

Which meant Willow’s mother had caught a glimpse of my cock.

Which meant Coach Pete would have even more of a reason to kill me.

Speaking of Coach Pete, he appeared and locked right in on me.

“There he is!” Coach Pete called out. “The star of the team this season.”

Holly smiled. “I was just telling Anders how amazing he’s been playing. And I hope he keeps it up.”

“Trust me, I’m not going anywhere,” I said.

Speaking to Willow’s mother and the rest of the team.

Nesh and Penny came outside.

Right behind them, holding hands, was Roman and Scarlett.

Now that was a whole other story right there.

Roman and Scarlett with their fake engagement which somehow turned into a real engagement.

They were in love and they were happy.

They were together.

They were lucky in that sense.

Able to show up, hold hands, walk around.

They both had that glistening look in their eyes like they recently had sex.

That made me clench my jaw.

*I fucking missed Willow.*

*I needed Willow.*

*I wanted Willow.*

“Here, bring everyone around,” Coach Pete yelled. “I want to say something to you guys.”

I could see in Coach Pete’s eyes he was feeling good.

I glanced at Holly.

She smiled at me.

“This is the best fucking team I’ve ever coached,” Coach Pete said. “And I’m not just saying that. This is the best starting line in the league. This is a historic season for us all. The bench, the trainers, the admin staff. And Mags. Where the hell is Mags at?”

“I’m right here,” Mags said.

Coach Pete turned his head and let out a laugh. “This fucking guy right here. He’s going to be a head coach next season. Someone is going to steal him from us. So let’s make this season count. We’ve come this far. We’re not going to let it slip away.”

“Cheers to that, Coach,” Roman said.

“Cheers to all you guys,” Luc said.

“I have a feeling this is the greatest and most surprising year of our lives,” I said as I looked right at Coach Pete.

*Speaking the truth, Coach. You don't know it yet but you and I are family. I'm the father of your soon-to-be firstborn grandchild.*

“And it all hinges on you,” Coach Pete said. “No pressure!”

“Don't worry, he knows how to keep himself calm,” Roman said.

I looked at Roman, ready to attack him.

He smirked at me and pointed to his stomach.

He still believed I had a pregnancy fetish.

“I don't want to know what that means,” Coach Pete said.

“Trust me, you don't,” Holly added as she laughed at me.

I looked at Holly.

*I feel like the entire world is against me.*

“How about we just finish what we started?” I asked.  
“Cheers to that!”

Everyone started to cheer.

I felt my pocket vibrate.

I turned toward the bar and dug my phone out of my pocket.

A text from Willow waited.

**I'm lonely. Wish I was there.**

“Fuck,” I whispered.

I texted her back.

**I wish I was there with you, babe. I hate this situation.**

“Now make sure everyone eats, drinks and has a good time,” Coach Pete said. “And nobody is allowed to drive home!”

Willow texted me back as I ordered a beer.

**You should bail on that stupid hockey thing and come visit me. I think I’m better than hockey, don’t you?**

I froze and felt my entire body stiffen.

*Flirty, huh?*

I looked around as everyone started to disperse and talk.

I smiled.

**Someone horny?**

Willow didn’t wait long to answer.

**Maybe.**

Then came another text.

**Want to see what I was wearing under the robe when we got caught?**

The bartender handed me a beer.

I walked toward the railing and chugged half the beer, staring at my phone.

Willow sent me a picture.

It was a closeup selfie.

From her lips down to the top of her chest.

Her beautiful shoulders.

The soft cuts of the collarbones.

The allure of the picture...

**Hey, you missed some parts, babe. Where’s the rest?**



I drank the rest of the beer in another gulp.

I went to get another one.

By the time I got that beer, another text came through.

Not a picture.

Just a text.

**Come see the rest, Anders.**

I squeezed the beer bottle and thought it was going to shatter in my hand.

I started to walk away and she texted again.

**How far are you willing to go to get to me, Anders? Am I worth it?**

I chugged the second beer like it was a bottle of water.

There was no way in hell I could just leave this gathering.

Coach Pete would have my head.

Then again, that would be the least of his reasons to have it.

After all I had gotten his daughter pregnant and his wife had seen my cock.

*But I had to get to Willow.*

There was only one thing I could think of.

I put my phone into my back pocket and ran to the railing and leaned over it.

I started to make the loudest fake vomiting noises I could come up with.

I screamed. Groaned. Yelled.

Coughed and spit.

“Holy shit, brother, are you okay?” Roman asked.

“What’s wrong with him?” Coach Pete asked.

I put my right hand back. I slowly lifted up. “Oh, fuck, I’m sick.”

“After two beers?” Roman asked.

“No, asshole. It was my lunch. Something didn’t taste right. Now it’s coming back...”

I leaned over the railing again and let out growling vomit sound.

“Christ, Anders,” Coach Pete said. “You sound awful right now. You know what? You better get out of here.”

“Coach,” I said as I stood back up. I wiped my mouth. “It’s a team event...”

“But I can’t have you get anyone sick.”

“I’m not sick,” I said. “It’s just a food thing.”

“Anders,” Coach Pete said. “Go home and rest. Please. Feel better.”

“Are you good to leave by yourself?” Roman asked.

“You can send Scarlett home with me,” I said.

“Fuck you,” Roman said with a smile. Then he got close to me. “You wouldn’t like her. She’s not pregnant.”

I pushed Roman away and looked at Coach Pete.

“Just go,” he said. “I’ll tell everyone you’re under the weather. Okay?”

“Thanks, Coach,” I said. “Sorry about this.”

*Sorry about faking sick so I can get out of here and go fuck your pregnant daughter.*

Coach Pete gave a stern nod.

I walked off the balcony of the restaurant and walked to a group of waiting cars.

Coach Pete had them all paid for in advance.

As I approached one of the cars, I heard someone clear their voice.

I turned my head and saw Holly.

She stared at me.

I stared at her.

Finally, I shrugged my shoulders and smiled.

She slowly nodded.

I had no idea if that meant I had her approval or not.

I honestly didn't care all that much in that moment.

I just had to get to Willow.

*I just had to taste all of Willow...*

## Chapter Twenty-Five

---

### WILLOW

**I**t seemed like the perfect night to flirt.

The perfect night to act like a spoiled princess, wanting something I couldn't have.

Slightly bored, super horny, yet feeling very strange about my body.

I was far beyond the stage of *popping out*.

At this point in my life it was pretty clear - I was pregnant.

My stomach had once been growing little by little but one random day it *grew*.

It grew so much all at once I called for an appointment to see Dr. Steph, wondering if something was wrong. Dr. Steph saw me, talked to me, and even checked the baby just to reassure me. If that wasn't enough, she brought pictures with her when she was pregnant. One thing I came to terms with was that every single pregnancy was different in its own way.

I calmed myself with the simple fact that the baby was healthy.

That I was healthy.

And that I could basically text Anders whenever I wanted and he would reply.

I wasn't sure if it was the dangling of sex in front of him or if he really did care about me.

I knew the answer to that though.

*Both.*

I was okay with that fact.

And I was okay with the fact that I liked flirting with Anders.

I liked tempting him to see what he would do next.

Now for full disclosure, a small part of me... felt jealous.

*Jealous? For what?*

A kind of a goofy feeling that I would have normally talked to Kay about. But my sister didn't know about Anders. Nobody knew about Anders except my mother. And she kept everything secret.

Tonight, I knew where Anders was.

I knew about the team dinner thing my father insisted on having.

He did things like this.

Especially now with how good the team was.

Now I never wanted to go to any hockey event ever.

Even the night I got pregnant by Anders, I tried to get out of going.

But tonight felt different to me.

I bought into the fantasy of family.

I pictured myself showing up with Anders.

I could see the big, dumb smile on his face as he showed me off, telling everyone how beautiful I was. And then in some moronic way, my pregnancy was proof of him having sex with someone.

But it would have been us together.

I pictured myself getting all the attention from everyone, including my parents.

And anytime I felt too bothered, that's when Anders would sweep right in and save me from any conversation I wanted to end.

My hero and protector.

Was that my reality?

*Hell no.*

I wasn't even sure if I wanted that at all.

It was a passing fantasy.

But it mixed with my uneasy feeling of being alone. It mixed with the hormones that never seemed to calm down for a second. It mixed with my body's demand for attention.

That led me to texting Anders.

Flirting.

Sending a picture that looked pretty damn seductive if you asked me.

I wasn't sure where it was going to go, but I wanted to see if I could make Anders just-

A quick pounding at my door made me jump.

I placed my hands on my stomach, my first instinct to protect my unborn baby.

I turned and looked at the door.

The knocking continued again.

“Who is it?” I called out.

“It’s me, babe.”

My mouth fell open.

My heart jumped from my chest into my throat.

My hands instantly began to shake.

“Open up, babe,” Anders’s voice said.

I inched toward the door, reached with a shaky hand and unlocked it.

I opened it.

Anders was here.

I didn’t even get a chance to ask him how... why...

*Anders moved in for a kiss.*



ANDERS DEVoured ME.

He ran his hands from my face down my body.

Over my breasts.

Down to my belly.

He paused for a moment and broke the kiss, looking down.

My body shivered with a sense of excitement I never felt before.

I had questions but I didn't want those answered right now.

I just wanted Anders.

And I had him.

I counted three seconds in my head, then Anders lifted his gaze back to mine.

There was an extra second or two between us.

I felt the connection.

Then he kissed me and swept me off my feet. Literally.

He picked me up.

Now the whole sexy scene of me wrapping my legs around him was way off the table.

I more or less kicked my legs a little.

I couldn't put my legs around him.

My belly was in the way.

Anders put me back on my feet and touched the bottom of my hoodie.

His hands found bare skin and climbed up to my chest.

Touching my breasts.

*My heavy, aching, tender breasts.*

His huge, strong hands took control.

My head fell back and I let out a groan so loud, my face began to blush.

I couldn't control myself with Anders.

"Oh, babe, you really needed me here," he whispered.

I reached for his jeans. "Yes. Now get naked and fuck me."



His thumb rolled over my nipples at the same time.

Electric pulses soared throughout my body.

Floodgates of desire broke wide open between my legs.

My knees tried knocking together, wanting to clench, but it didn't matter.

*Wet was wet.*

Anders slid his left hand down my round belly, no hesitation at all, and he grabbed the bottom of my hoodie. He lifted it up over my pregnant stomach and kept going. Until my left breast was exposed.

I looked down just as his mouth dipped to taste me.

I didn't hesitate for a second when I grabbed the back of his head.

Dug my nails in hard.

Pulled him against my chest with force.

He opened his mouth and took my tender breast into his mouth.

His tongue played and teased with my nipple.

My body shook with shivers and the allure of an orgasm.

I curled my fingertips and pulled him even closer.

His face squished against my breast.

His mouth took more and more.

The warmth and pressure... his tongue circling...

"Oh, fuck, Anders," I groaned.

At the exact perfect moment, he pulled away and the sound made the loudest *pop* I ever heard.

He pulled my hoodie down and placed his hands on my hips and began to gently push me back.

I pointed to the door of my bedroom.

That's where we went next.

I stood next to my bed and stared up at Anders.

I reached for his shirt, smiled and nodded.

"Anything for you, babe," he said.

He grabbed his shirt and ripped it right up and over his head, then threw it to the floor.

Then he unbuttoned his jeans and I stopped him there.

I studied him.

Rock hard, round shoulders.

A beautiful chest.

Abs... I mean... *so many abs*...

And the way the lines slid into his jeans.

I bit my bottom lip and tilted my head.

"Should I just stand like this all night, Willow?" Anders asked.

"No," I said. "Make your move. I'm going to just eye fuck you until you start to fuck me."

"Wow, you have a mouth on you," he said with a smile.

"Yes, I do," I said.

Anders shocked me when he suddenly dropped to his knees before me.

Not one knee. Both knees.

He looked up at me and winked.

That idiotic wink of his.

I almost slapped him across the face.

But I already had him on his knees.

Anders touched my hips again.

Fingertips around the sides of my pajama bottoms.

He pulled them down and I felt heat rush to my cheeks.

“No thong, babe?” Anders whispered.

“Thought you’d like this better,” I whispered.

“You’re not wearing anything.”

“That’s the whole point.”

As Anders eased my pajama pants down to my ankles, I touched his shoulders for balance.

I was forever all about balance now.

That was just part of pregnancy.

I stepped out of my pajama pants and Anders made his move again.

He kissed my right leg.

My body jumped and I gasped.

The tip of his tongue wasted no time sliding between my legs. Curling up. The tip of his tongue like a magnet to my clit.

He make a circular motion and then kissed me down there.

*Kissed me.*

I smiled ear to ear and blushed even harder.

Anders began to kiss up my body.

I groaned when his tongue left my sex.

He kissed through a patch of pubic hair that I had a hard time shaving anymore.

I almost apologized.

Then Anders paused at my stomach and kissed my belly button.

I never felt anything like this before.

These waves of emotions.

I wanted Anders to ravage me, yet he took these tender seconds to be almost romantic as he took care of my pregnant stomach.

Then he was on the move again.

His hands sliding my hoodie up my body.

Moving in perfect unison, leaving me standing there mesmerized.

I slowly lifted my arms up over my head and shut my eyes.

Anders was gentle, but very commanding.

My hoodie was off.

I was naked.

In front of Anders.

This wasn't like before either.

My body looked *very* different.

And Anders being himself, took a step back and looked at me.

Not just my face. Not just my boobs. But everything.

Scanning down and back up.

He stepped toward me again and touched my sides.

“You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met, Willow,” he whispered.

“Spare me that pillow talk, Anders. I know how I look.”

“Hey,” he growled. “You look like the woman carrying my child. I can’t imagine what you must feel on a daily basis. Inside and out. There’s nothing I can do about it either. So I’m going to keep telling you how fucking amazing and hot and perfect you look. Got it?”

“How about we don’t talk anymore, okay?”

Anders moved his hands to my ass and pulled me against him.

I slipped my hands between my pregnant belly and his body.

I pushed the front of his jeans down and felt his thick, stiff cock.

Beautifully rock-hard, I stroked him bottom to top with both hands.

I tugged at him.

Want. Need. Desire.

All the words.

*Let’s fucking go, Anders.*

His hands wrapped around my body to my ass.

Then down the backs of my legs.

He nudged his body against me and guided me down to the bed.

I grabbed for the sheets.

I never felt so *seen* and so vulnerable in my entire life.

Anders gently touched my right leg, opening it.

I was there for him.

My body more than ready.

He moved onto the bed, his hard, athletic body hovering over my pregnant one.

His right hand touched my left breast.

Cupping, his thumb swiping across my nipple again.

His left hand touched the bed.

He smiled at me and lowered his mouth down to mine.

His right hand moved from my breast to my jaw.

Everything he did was just perfect.

Then he lowered the lower half of his body down to mine.

The sudden rush and swell... that fullness...

I groaned into his mouth and felt my toes curling tight.

*I didn't even care how fast I was about to orgasm.*



ANDERS HELD ME AFTER WE WERE DONE.

My stomach rested against his body.

I draped my left leg over his body.

My head on his chest.

I listened to the soft thudding of his heartbeat.

The moment was far too soothing for our situation.

“Anders,” I said.

“I know what you’re going to say, babe.”

“I don’t want to say it.”

“I know you don’t.”

“I have to say it...” I lifted my head and looked at him.

“I faked sick tonight.”

“That’s how you got here?”

Anders smiled. “I pretended to throw up. There was no way I could miss out on this. Those texts you were sending...”

“I was just horny, that’s all,” I said.

“Now you’re kicking me out.”

“We both got what we wanted.”

“Did we, babe?”

“Anders...”

He touched my face. “We’re going to figure this out, Willow. We’re going to be together. We’re going to be a family.”

He gently kissed me.

I moved away from him and covered myself up.

I watched him get dressed, wanting him to just stay.

He turned and came toward the bed again.

I put my right hand out to stop him.

I knew one more kiss and he’d be in my bed all night.

Anders smirked and lowered his lips down to my stomach.

Kissing my belly through the covers.

Saying goodbye to our baby.

*Okay, this man is the sexiest man I've ever met.*



## Chapter Twenty-Six

---

### ANDERS

**F**ast forward to a couple very exciting things in life at the moment.

The baby started moving and kicking, doing all kinds of tricks.

The first time I felt the baby move was when I was trying to leave Willow's place after a little *private time* between us.

I got down on one knee and Willow lifted her shirt.

This was our routine.

I could not leave without saying goodbye to my son or daughter.

*I snuck into a few other appointments with Dr. Steph and she offered to tell us the sex of the baby but at the exact same time both Willow and I said we didn't want to know.*

As I kissed her even rounder belly, my kid kicked me. Or punched me.

I felt that *thud* and I thought my head was going to explode.

I never felt so happy before.

So I stayed there on one knee, my hands on the sides of Willow's stomach, and I talked to it.

The more I talked, the more the baby moved.

That opened a whole other thing for me.

Making love to Willow. Then talking to her stomach.

There was one time when the baby started kicking when Willow and I were *together* and it freaked me out a little.

It took a minute or two to recover from that.

Willow wasn't letting me off the hook when it came to her pleasure though.

She all but pinned me to the bed, climbed on top of me, and made it very clear we weren't finished yet.

All those subtle moments that weren't exactly tender but rather Willow being sexy and mean... they made me start to really feel for her.

*Not feelings. Not love.*

*No way.*

*Not me, right?*

Now besides Willow, there was hockey.

The *Inci Warriors* were for the first time going to make the playoffs and they were the best team in the league. The stats were unbelievable. Most goals scored by a team. Best save percentage by a goalie. Most wins by a team for the season. We owned our home ice and had the best record on the road.

The word *unstoppable* came up quite a bit.

And the playoffs were just around the corner.

The final stretch of everything.

In my head I envisioned how it would all play out.

We'd win it all, Willow would give birth and there would be no more secrets.

The way I figured it with Coach Pete, it was maybe simpler than everyone thought.

*If I take care of his daughter and his grandkid, plus win him his first championship, how can he hate me? Right?*

It was a good thought but a tough task.

One thing about the playoffs?

Records meant nothing.

Everyone went into the playoffs with a zero-zero record.

Coach Pete reminded us of that each time we practiced.

Mags followed suit, constantly holding up his hands, making the shape of a zero with each one.

Our first task was to take on Seattle.

They had barely snuck into the playoffs but were riding hot on a seven-game winning streak. They had been plagued by injuries all season and for the first time the entire team was healthy and ready to go.

They were the underdogs and wanted to make a statement.

A team like that you could not take lightly at all.

They had nothing to lose.

We had everything to win.

On top of everything else, I had a lot of incentive to get through the first round of the playoffs as fast as possible.

And that was a break.

If we won quick enough and the other series took a while, we'd get a break.

We didn't need the break as far as resting to feel better physically.

*I needed the break.*

*So I could get some alone time with Willow and figure out these wild, lingering feelings I had in my heart.*



I SAT ALONE AND HAD MY HANDS IN MY BAG.

I kept an ultrasound picture hiding in a secret zippered pouch.

The ultrasound pictures were unbelievable now.

That first one where the baby looked like a misshaped bean?

That was long gone now.

The baby looked like a baby.

A big, round head. Little arms and hands. *Fingers.*

Legs. Feet. *Toes.*

All of that put together and growing in Willow's womb.

It was a lot to take in when I really thought about it.

A part of me wished I could have just went into Coach Pete's office, showed him the ultrasound, and then he and I could sit there, have a drink and celebrate life together.

That wasn't going to happen though.

I tucked the ultrasound picture away, zipped up my bag and slid it under the chair I sat on.

I stood up and saw Roman a few feet away, grinning.

“A little pre-game prep?”

“What?” I asked.

“What were you looking at? More pregnancy pics?”

“Roman, let that go,” I said. “I don’t have a pregnancy fetish.”

“Then why did you have a picture of a pregnant woman in your phone?”

“Do you want to talk about who has what on their phone?” I asked. “I’m sure you have some skeptical things, right?”

The locker room door opened and the rest of the guys came in, along with Coach Pete and Mags.

Both Coach Pete and Mags began to walk away.

At the last second, Coach Pete looked at me and pointed.

Anytime Coach Pete looked at me, pointed, talked, yelled, my stomach turned into a knot.

I didn’t like not knowing what he knew and didn’t know.

“Anders,” he said. “Take this one. Tell them what this means. Tell them what we’re going to do.”

Then I had all the guys looking at me.

A pregame speech from the goalie?

I’d much rather sit there to think and focus.

“I’m not giving a speech,” I said.

“Come on,” Roman said. “We know you’re flustered with your fantasies and all...”

“What does that mean?” Nolan asked. “You keep saying that. What’s he up to?”

“He’s been acting a little different,” Luc said.

“You better be ready for this,” Nesh growled. “Don’t fuck up, Anders.”

“Yeah, he looks different,” Cain said. “He’s hiding something.”

“Just talk about the fetish stuff,” Roman said. “Get it out in the open. Why hide it?”

I reached down and folded the metal chair.

I picked it up and looked at Roman.

All the guys started to laugh.

I swung the chair and purposely missed Roman.

The chair hit the floor and I let it go.

“We’re sweeping them,” I said in a calm voice. “That’s not a speech. That’s not a pep talk. That’s the truth. If you need someone to get you excited to play this game, then get the fuck out of this arena and do something else.”

I started to walk and the guys opened a path for me.

I opened the locker room door and looked back.

“You know what’s at stake,” I said. “You know what happens when we get out there. You know what to do and how to do it. If you trust me to make every save, I’ll trust you to do your jobs.”

“Hey, that’s it?” Roman called out. “No yelling and cursing? Nothing to get excited for? I was hoping for some booze and naked women!”

I ignored Roman, stood in the tunnel and looked toward the ice.

The arena felt different now.

The playoffs were different.

Everything was different in my life.

And it was going to keep changing.

Which meant it was time to do what I did best.

*Protect.*



GAME 1 ENDED IN A SCORE OF THREE TO ZERO.

Game 2 finished, four to one.

Game 3 came in tighter with a two to one victory.

And finally Game 4 was a blowout of seven to one.

Luc scored the most goals.

Cain had the most penalty minutes.

Nesh had the most fights.

Nolan had the most assists.

Roman made the most annoying remarks before, during, and after the games.

He caught me looking into my bag more than a few times and busted me about it, thinking I was looking at pictures of pregnant women.

In reality, there were two things I looked at the most.

Obviously the ultrasound of my unborn baby.

The second?

With each win, Willow sent me a picture of herself.

With another piece of clothing missing.

The four game sweep?

That got me a topless picture of her standing in front her mirror.

*I could have stared at that picture for the rest of my life and died with a smile on my face.*



## Chapter Twenty-Seven

---

### WILLOW

**I** *t's a beautiful, warm night out.*

*The sky is clear.*

*There's a trillion stars looking down at me.*

*And I'm standing outside the back of my apartment building as though I'm about to buy drugs or something.*

*I touch my round stomach, smile, and have no choice but to wait.*

*I check my phone.*

*I keep waiting.*

*Then I hear a whistle.*

*That catcalling whistle.*

*I look to my right and see Anders walking toward me.*

*The goalie.*

*The hockey player.*

*The last person in the world I ever thought would get me pregnant.*

*My heart starts to race.*

*I pretend not to notice, but how can I not?*

*“Hey, babe,” Anders calls out.*

*Not even two seconds after hearing his voice, the baby starts to kick.*

*My heart swells as it races.*

*The baby knows his or her father.*

*I nibble at my bottom lip and then tell myself to stop.*

*Anders touches my face and inches down for a quick kiss.*

*Then he crouches down and places his hands on my belly.*

*The baby kicks and Anders lets out this happy playful laugh that I’ve never heard a man make before.*

*It almost makes me tear up.*

*Anders loves the baby.*

*I look down at him. “Can we talk quick?”*

*“Sneaking around again, huh?”*

*“We don’t have to...”*

*“For, what, a couple days?”*

*“It’s better than nothing,” I say. “This is what you wanted, right?”*

*“Yes. I made sure we swept Seattle so I would get this time off.”*

*“I have to drive separately.”*

*“I know.”*

*“We could have done this over the phone, Anders,” I say.*

*“Of course we could have,” he says. “I wanted to see you. I’ll text you the address.”*

*“Is this crazy?”*

*“What? You and I getting time alone together? You and I sneaking away to have some peace and quiet? That’s not crazy at all. What’s crazy is everything else surrounding it.”*

*“I want you to know that I am sorry about it all,” I tell him.*

*Anders touches my chin. “Don’t apologize for a thing, babe. This is where we are. I just can’t wait to have you all to myself.”*

*I touch my stomach. “You’ll never have me to yourself.”*

*“That’s okay, Willow. I’ll have my family.”*

*Of course he has to say something like that a second before kissing me goodbye.*

*And then - of course again - he crouches down and kisses my stomach and tells the baby goodbye and goodnight.*

*Then he wanders off and I float all the way back to my apartment.*

*It’s one thing to get pregnant by a hockey player.*

*But to possibly be falling in love with one?*

*That. Can’t. Happen.*



MY MOTHER ROLLED A SUITCASE INTO THE DINING ROOM.

“This is the one,” she said to me. “Anything bigger and it’s too heavy for you to move. No straining anything. Got it?”

She had a slight smirk on her face as though that *no straining anything* comment meant something else.

Before I could poke back at her, Kay appeared with a drink in her hand.

“Want a sip?” she asked me.

“There’s booze in there,” I said. “You’re a bitch.”

“A little day drinking,” Kay said.

“Don’t you have a place to live?” I asked.

“This place is much better,” Kay said. “Plus, Mom invited me. We’re going to get drunk and cook.”

I glanced at my mother.

“Your father wants to be left alone,” Mom said.

“We would have invited you,” Kay said. “But you’re doing what again?”

I curled my lip at my sister. “It’s a retreat. Okay? I don’t even like that word. I’m going away. I need a break for a minute. A breather before things get even crazier.

“Pregnant women do that,” I said. “They take a vacation before the baby comes.”

“I just don’t like the idea of you going alone,” Kay said.

“I need this,” I said. “I’ve been working like crazy.”

“And growing my grandchild,” Mom added.

“That too,” I said. “This career change has been a pain in the ass.”

“You wanted it,” Kay said.

“I don’t regret it,” I said. “But I have a chance to take a couple days and just kick back. Not at home either. I’m looking forward to it.”

“I have an idea,” Kay said. “We should all go together. No, wait. Just me! I’ll go with you, Willow! We’ll have some sister time.”

“This is a solo trip,” I said.

“It doesn’t need to be,” Kay said. “I just might show up no matter what. You can’t stop me.”

“You don’t know where I’m going.”

“I can track your phone.”

I tried hard not to panic.

Suddenly, Mom was next to me. “Kay, leave your sister alone. You’re being mean.”

“How?” Kay snapped.

“You heard what she said. She wants to be alone. Take the hint.”

“Are you yelling at me?” Kay asked Mom. “You never yell at me.”

“I always yell at you,” Mom said. “And you promised me you’d be here.”

“Whoa, you two, relax,” I said. “No fighting. I need to do this alone. I need a break. I need to prepare myself for what’s about to happen. I’m going to have a baby soon. Like really soon. Dr. Steph said it could be any week now. That scares me.”

“Are you even ready for this?” Kay asked. “You don’t have a crib or anything...”

“That’s why I’m doing this,” I said. “I’m going to sit, relax, and shop.”

“Using your own money?” Kay asked.

“Kay, you have to stop this,” Mom growled at her.

“We should have a big baby shower for her too,” Kay said. “This is bullshit the way Dad is acting!”

“Oh, my,” I whispered.

I glanced at Mom.

It seemed like maybe Kay had more than one drink already today.

Mom looked at me and nodded toward the door.

Then she closed in on Kay and hugged her.

“I want a baby too!” Kay whined.

“Oh, Kay,” Mom said. “You’re drunk already, aren’t you? Come on. We’re drinking some coffee and you’re getting your emotions and hormones in check.”

Mom put an arm around Kay and walked her toward the kitchen.

I grabbed the suitcase handle and rolled the suitcase toward the door.

I heard Kay let out a loud cry.

Her drunk cry.

If she was over emotional - *or close to her period* - she would weep loudly and then suddenly just get over it.

Either way, Mom had her hands full.

As for me... I had my hands full too.

*Secretly meeting Anders at some cottage on the beach so we could have wild and guilt-free sex.*



THE IDEA OF SNEAKING AROUND AND SNEAKING AWAY JUST TO see the father of my baby was completely and totally messed up. I had processed all the thoughts of it. The good and bad. The risks. The rewards. All the *blah* to it.

And what did I do?

I packed up a suitcase and got into my car to drive to meet Anders.

My GPS told me I had about a thirty minute drive up the coast and I used that drive to put the windows down, drive slowly, and sing at the top of my lungs to horrible eighties ballads.

The baby kicked the entire time too.

I wasn't sure if he or she liked my singing and the music, or was desperate to make Mom shut up.

Either way, I caught myself rubbing my stomach and smiling as I sang.

*This feels way too good.*

It felt more than good.

It felt right.

It was what I wanted.

To be with Anders.

No. I wanted to be alone with Anders.

Not with him.

*Not with him... like that...*

This was just about having the chance to talk and not worry about being interrupted.

And a chance to get naked and crazy.

With one minute left on my journey, I turned the music off.

Because for some reason turning the music down or off meant it would be easier to follow directions.

When I pulled up to a small, cute-as-hell cottage with the ocean as the backdrop, I swallowed hard and took a deep breath.

For some reason I almost started crying.

I pulled into the gravel driveway and parked my car.

The blue front door opened and out stepped Anders.

The man wore dark gray jeans and a black t-shirt.

As if I needed any other reason to want to fuck him, right?

I wiped the drool from my bottom lip and climbed out of my car.

I noticed he held a bottle in his right hand.

He picked it up and smiled at me.

“That’s nice of you,” I called out. “Teasing the pregnant woman with wine?”

“Just get over here, babe,” Anders yelled back to me.

Again, the second the baby heard Anders’s voice, he or she started kicking.

*Wants to see her Daddy.*



I walked up to the small porch and Anders handed me the bottle.

“Really?” I asked.

“Just look at it, babe,” he said.

I glanced at the bottle and smiled.

“You got white grape juice for me,” I whispered.

“That’s right. We need to be able to sit down and have a drink together.”

“You know this probably is going to taste like crap.”

“That’s the whole point,” Anders said. “We can sit in front of a fire and drink crappy white grape juice.”

“That’s the big plan?” I asked. “You finally get me alone and have nothing to worry about, and you want to drink white grape juice?”

“What did you want me to do, babe? Open the door and step out butt naked?”

“Now that would have been a memory,” I said.

“Then allow me...”

Anders touched the front of his jeans. I reached down and grabbed his wrist.

We smiled at each other.

“How about you go get my suitcase?” I asked. “Backseat. I don’t feel like dragging it over the gravel.”

“Done deal,” Anders said.

He started to walk by me but paused.

His right hand touched my stomach.

The baby kicked at him.

We smiled at each other again.

I felt my heart pounding in my chest.

“Forget the fucking suitcase,” I said.

“Oh yeah, Willow?”

*“Anders... take me inside and fuck me.”*

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

### ANDERS

**I** saw the look on Willow's face when she saw the inside of the small cottage.

She beamed with happiness.

A sense of relaxation instantly washed over her.

I stepped up behind her and placed my hands on her hips.

I pulled her back against me.

She melted.

My cock throbbing inside my jeans, no chance of hiding what was simply instinctual based on how attracted I was to Willow.

Willow put her head back and looked up at me.

Her lips parted.

I lowered my mouth down to hers.

This kiss was like no other kiss I ever experienced in my life.

I wasn't even sure how much of a bragging point it was, but I had kissed a lot of women in my life. But with Willow...

*I could just stand right here and kiss her for days.*

Except that wasn't why we were here.

My left hand moved around, following the swell of her belly.

I hated to use the wrong word to talk about Willow's womb, but she was huge. Beautifully huge. Protecting our child. Caring for our child. *Growing our child.*

The thoughts raced through my mind and body.

It made me want to do something for her.

I wanted to buy her this cottage. I wanted to buy her the ocean.

I wanted to become her servant for the rest of my life.

*Just as long as I was also her sexual servant.*

I inched my lips away from hers. "Let me get you off your feet, babe."

"Who says I can't stand? Are you trying to say something?"

"No," I said. "This is your little vacation though, right?"

"And I don't want to spend it talking to you."

She reached up and grabbed the back of my neck.

We began to kiss again.

My left hand dipped down from her pregnant belly to between her legs.

I curled my fingers and gave a quick pull.

She gasped and jumped back against me even harder.

“You’re all mine now, babe,” I said with my lips still kissing hers.

“I know,” Willow groaned. “Now take it all.”

She made me growl in the depth of my throat.

I found the top of her pants.

I would never point out to her that I knew the difference between regular pants and pregnancy pants. The way the top of the pregnancy pants had a big layer of stretchy fabric that allowed Willow to be comfortable.

All of this was sexy to me.

Willow was sexy to me.

I thought for a minute my knees were going to give out.

*Anders, what the hell is wrong with you?*

It wasn’t all that long ago that I was the guy who would go to the strip club and pay a lot of money to take two women into a private room and watch them fool around with each other.

Now?

I just wanted one woman.

My left hand inched down Willow’s body.

“Sorry about that,” Willow whispered.

“Sorry about what, babe?”

“What you’re touching right now. I kind of can’t reach down there and look...”

“You’re fucking perfect, Willow,” I said. “You have nothing to ever worry about when you’re near me.”

“Except I have to worry about everything, Anders. You’re messing up my entire life.”

“You’re doing the same to mine, babe.”

We kissed again.

I eased my fingers through the pubic hair that made Willow worry.

I knew how to make her forget about everything.

My middle and ring fingers slid between her wet folds.

I followed her warm curve all the way down and around... then I slid back and curled my fingers.

I gently entered her body this time.

Feeling her hot sheath pulse against my fingers.

I curled my fingers again, knowing right where her tender spots were.

I knew all the spots that some thought didn’t exist.

*Believe me, all those areas exist on a woman, you just have to have patience and find them.*

As I began to massage inside her body, my right hand gripped her hip tighter.

I thrust myself a little bit harder against her, making sure she felt my cock getting thicker by the breath.

When I moved my fingers ever-so-softly from her pussy to her clit, that’s when Willow reached up and back, then sank her nails into the back of my neck like I was being attacked by vixen vampires.

Her knees bent a little and she thrust against my touch.

She bit my bottom lip and groaned.

“Oh, babe, you’re close already,” I whispered.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” she groaned. “Finish me quick, Anders. Right now.”

I rubbed her clit for a moment and then broke the kiss for good.

“Turn around and face me, babe,” I said. “Let me honor your body the way you deserve.”

I swore I saw her teeth chatter for a second as her face turned bright red.

I stepped back and dropped to one knee as she turned around.

She covered her mouth with her hands and stared down at me as I eased her pants down her legs.

I helped her step out of her pants, leaving her slip-on shoes on.

I had no idea why but that made her even sexier.

But I went to work.

I touched the backs of her legs and praised her wonderful body with a kiss first.

Then my tongue went for her clit.

She was wet, swollen, and just a breath or two away from climax.

She rocked her hips to the movement of my tongue.

Her hands moved from her mouth and she grabbed at my hair, then at my shoulders.

She finally let out a loud screaming groan.

Then another.

And another.

And with each noise she made, more of her luscious honey greeted my lips and my tongue.

I took her, I tasted, and I brought her to the edge of climax.

Her body jerked and I thought she was going to lose her balance.

My hands shot up her body and I held her at her sides, keeping her safe.

Allowing her to orgasm without worry.

She grabbed my wrists and rocked her hips back and forth.

*Once again, I could have stayed just like that for the rest of my life...*



I STOOD UP AND TOWERED OVER WILLOW.

She managed to inch her way back and leaned against the couch.

We were far from being done.

And the best part was that we had nothing but time.

No worries about getting caught.

No worries about the door opening.

Our guards were down.

“Want to know something amazing, babe?” I whispered.

“What?”

“We can do whatever we want. I can get naked and walk around freely. I can wave my cock at the ocean and not have a



care in the world.”

“Go for it,” she said.

As though I wasn't going to accept the challenge, right?

I opened my jeans and dropped them so quickly, you would have thought they were on fire.

I kicked off my jeans and shoes and was naked from the waist down.

Willow's eyes lit up and she smiled.

“Keep going,” she said.

“Oh, this?” I asked as I grabbed the bottom of my shirt.

I ripped it up and over my head.

That's when I caught Willow staring at my cock.

Those pretty green eyes of hers wide.

The way her tongue gently licked her lips.

“My eyes aren't down there, Willow,” I said.

“That's fine. I'm not looking for your eyes. I'm looking for your cock.”

“Seems like you've found it.”

“Kind of hard to miss, isn't it?” Willow asked.

I took that statement with pride.

Then I walked away from her.

I strutted around the cottage like I was marching in a parade.

I rocked my hips, looking like a fool, my cock bouncing around like a playful elephant's trunk.

I stood at the window and stretched my arms high into the air and leaned forward just enough that the head of my cock touched the glass window.

“Are you humping the window?” Willow asked.

I looked back and saw her near me, still naked from the waist down.

Except now she didn't have her shoes on.

“I'm leaving my prints on the glass,” I said. “Marking my territory.”

Willow kept walking toward me.

I turned to face her.

Once close enough, she grabbed my cock.

Both hands.

My hardness.

She pulled at me.

“I wasn't done with you, Anders,” she whispered. “Your tongue is nice but I want more.”

I started to reach for her but she had other things in mind.

Willow turned but kept her left hand reaching back, holding onto my cock as though it were a leash.

She walked, pulled, and I followed.

I had never met a woman like Willow before.

She didn't have a hold on my cock.

She had a hold on me completely.

The cottage was small, quaint, and only a few doors.

Each door wide open, leaving an easy pathway to the bedroom.

The moment Willow stepped into the bedroom, she released her hold on my cock and turned around.

Something about that look in her eyes.

The color of her eyes.

The shape of her face.

The shape of her entire body.

I moved closer to her and went for the bottom of her shirt.

I had her shirt off in three seconds - *her bra off in one.*

Then I placed my forehead to hers and we just stood there.

Her round belly touching me.

My hands exploring her body.

My left hand touched her face, my thumb sliding along her cheek.

When I moved my thumb down to her top lip, she curled her lip and then playfully tried to bite me.

My right hand eased over her left breast.

Her breasts were bigger than the first time I saw them.

They were fuller, heavier, veins showing in such a subtle yet beautiful way.

My thumb touched her nipple, rolling right to left.

She sighed and arched her back a little.

“Anders,” she whispered. “Just be careful.”

“Be careful of what?” I asked.

“Of... stuff.”

*“Stuff?”*

Willow rolled her eyes. “They’re *full* for a reason.”

I looked down and saw my thumb glistened a little.

I realized what Willow meant now.

*Stuff wasn’t stuff... stuff was... milk...*

I lowered my mouth down to her breast.

She let out a gasping sound and her body tensed.

My lips eased over her breast and my tongue flickered against her nipple, tasting her.

*Now that’s something new for me.*

I kissed up her chest with a very interesting taste in my mouth.

At her neck, I paused and pulled away.

“I wish you could see and feel and taste what I can, babe,” I whispered. “You’re a fucking treasure to me.”

“Treasure? Is that you trying to be romantic?”

“I don’t know what I’m trying to be. I’ve never felt like this before.”

Willow reached up and touched my face. “That’s why I said we don’t need to talk right now. We need to fuck. Right now.”

That’s when I moved into action again.

There was no stripping my mind of everything with Willow.

Her body. The way she tasted. Between her legs. Her breasts. Everything about her.

But I had a job to do.

I moved her to the bed and moved right over her.

No chance of thinking about what was next as I thrust forward.

As my cock sank into her warm core, she grabbed the sheets on the bed and arched her back.

This was Willow truly giving herself to me.

In probably one of the most vulnerable states of her body and life, and she trusted me.

I took her.

I took her trust.

I took her body.

I watched her bite her bottom lip as I thrust harder and deeper into her body.

My hands grabbed at her hips, but only for a second.

They began to travel up her body.

Her hips. Her sides. Her breasts. Her shoulders. Her neck.

And then I cradled her head in my hands.

She lowered her back to the bed and looked at me.

I had to curve my body to kiss her.

Her belly was in the way - *but it wasn't in the way... it was part of this. Part of us.*

We kissed hard and fast.

I thrust hard and fast.

*Everything about Willow and I seemed to be hard and fast.*

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

---

### WILLOW

“Get out of bed, I want you to do something, babe.”

I opened my eyes and saw Anders standing at the edge of the bed wearing nothing but a pair of gym shorts.

Thin fabric gym shorts that did nothing to hide a thing.

In fact, the gym shorts hugged the shape of his cock in a hypnotic way.

If Anders rocked his hips back and forth and his cock started to sway, I would have been lost in la-la land for sure.

I managed to force my gaze from the large outline of his cock to his eyes.

“Come on,” he said.

He offered his hand.

“I’m comfortable here,” I said.

“You’ll be right back in bed, don’t worry,” he said with a smile.

“No, I won’t,” I said. “I’m hungry. And I want to go down to the ocean.”

“We’re going to take pictures, right?”

“Pictures?” I asked. “You’re the kind of guy that wants to take pictures?”

“Willow,” he said. “You’re pregnant. These are priceless moments. Are you really going to just let them slip by?”

“Are you trying to be romantic again?”

“I’m just being honest. Now come with me, babe.”

It took me longer to get to the edge of the bed than I wanted to admit.

As I sat up, I pulled the warm comforter around my body.

I looked at Anders and didn’t have to say a word.

He helped me stand up.

I felt like the cliché *beached whale*.

But I accepted the fact that this was just pregnancy.

Coming to the end of the pregnancy too.

Anders helped me up and then made sure not to touch or treat me as though I didn’t know how to walk.

Even in silence this man seemed to know exactly what I needed.

I didn’t believe in any man being perfect, but Anders seemed to be damn close to it.

He led the way back to the main part of the cottage.

A large open floor plan with the living room area, a small kitchen area, and a small two chair table set near a window.

There was a door that led to a set of wood steps right down to the beach.

We weren't going outside.

Anders took me to the window.

The first thing I did was look for the *dick print* he left.

I had to admit it made me smile, thinking about him being naked, pressing his cock against the glass.

I liked that Anders could be a little crazy like that and then instantly flip a switch and knew how to pleasure me. Then flip another switch and say romantic things.

"There," he said.

"You want me to look at the ocean?" I asked.

"Yeah. We can stand here, babe. We can look in this direction instead of looking at the door. I think that's kind of nice."

I looked up at Anders. "Are you really a sweet guy underneath all the douchebag stuff?"

"Oh, no, Willow, trust me, I'm a douchebag," he said. "Except when it comes to you. You're, uh... you're..."

He touched the back of his neck.

He was nervous to finish his sentence.

That made me nervous too.

Lucky for me, Anders knew how to flip that switch.

He broke up the tension by stepping behind me and grabbing for the comforter around my body.

He moved surprisingly fast.

Before I could take a breath, the comforter was gone.



*Gone.*

Meaning I was naked.

Totally, completely, butt, belly, and boobs naked.

In front of the window.

The first thing I did was knock my knees together and try to cover up my boobs.

They were the biggest they'd ever been.

For good and obvious reason too.

Anders touched my arms, sliding his hands down to my wrists.

“No, babe, don't cover up,” he whispered. “Nobody can see you. Except me. Just stand here for a second like this.”

“Are you trying to fuck me, Anders?”

“Maybe,” he said. “But first, just stand at the window. Look at the ocean. Be naked. Be free.”

Anders moved my hands to my sides.

My body shivered for a second but then I took a deep breath.

I looked at the ocean.

At the waves.

At the horizon.

Then I looked down at my body.

I swallowed hard and turned my head.

Anders stood a few feet away from me, arms folded, muscles everywhere.

But it was the smile on his face that did it for me.

I just wanted a few days away to be alone with him to talk about the baby and what our plans were.

*Why the hell did my heart have to get involved?*



THEN SOMETHING STRANGE HAPPENED.

When I turned from the window and walked toward Anders, he didn't grab for my breasts. He didn't use his thumbs to tease my nipples until they were damp with milk.

He didn't eye fuck me with a lusty stare or a smile that made my toes curl.

Instead, I walked right to him and he touched my belly at the sides and I wrapped my arms around him and placed my head to his chest.

He held me.

I leaned all of my weight into him.

The moment was quiet, tender, perfect.

Then I looked up at him.

"Hey, babe," he whispered. "Remember when you threw up on me?"

"*Hey, babe,*" I mimicked. "Remember when you put that comforter back around me, then opened that gross white grape juice and then ordered pizza with mushrooms on it?"

"Pizza with mushrooms?"

"Cravings," I said.

Anders gently kissed me, then picked the comforter up off the floor and wrapped it around me.

He then ordered pizza and poured us each a glass of the white grape juice.

We didn't do a toast or cheers.

We each took a sip, made a gross face, and started to laugh.

The pizza came and we ate.

Anders offered to walk down to the ocean with me but honestly it felt like way too much work to put clothes on for that.

Of course, he suggested I walk down to the ocean naked.

I almost made a *beached whale* comment but didn't.

Instead, I ate one more slice of mushroom laced pizza and told Anders I wanted to sleep. Next to him. In bed. All night.

*He agreed.*



I HAD DREAMS OF ME TELLING MYSELF I WAS DREAMING.

My pre-pregnancy self, sitting on a table, legs dangling, smiling at me.

Trying to tell me that Anders wasn't real. That being pregnant wasn't real.

And that bothered me.

I ended up waking up in the middle of the night, fearing my dream was right.

I sat up in the bed and touched my stomach.

*Oh, I'm pregnant for sure...*

I looked to my right and saw the silhouette of Anders.

The hunk of muscle that got me pregnant.

Without hesitation, Anders's eyes popped open and he sat up.

"Hey, babe," he said. "Is it the baby? Are you okay?"

"Bad dream," I said.

"Need a glass of water?"

I nodded in the dark.

Anders got out of bed and brought me a glass of water.

He was still shirtless. Still in those *cock-hugging* shorts.

Sitting next to me in bed while I took a sip of water.

Then he touched my face and tucked my hair behind my ear.

"Want to talk about it?"

"No," I said. "I need to get some more sleep. I'm sure I'll have to pee soon."

"From one sip of water?"

"I have a human squishing all my organs together, Anders. There's no room. I can think about drinking water and have to pee."

"Got it," he said.

We both eased our heads down to the pillows.

He stared at me.

I stared at him.

He touched my face, then my shoulder.

I inched closer to him, wanting to smell his skin.

Muscle and man, plus a strong, gentle touch that helped me drift off to sleep.

There were no more dreams.

Anders chased all the nightmares away.

The sunlight eventually climbed through the thin curtains and that's how I woke up.

No alarms.

No panic.

No sudden rush to accomplish anything.

The first thing I needed to do was pee.

*Really bad.*

I kicked the covers off my body and waddled toward the bathroom.

I completely forgot I was wearing one of Anders's hockey hoodies.

I had put the hoodie on when I realized the comforter I wore as clothes wasn't going to cut it when it came time to eat pizza.

The hoodie was long, comfortable, and stunk like Anders.

Each breath of his scent turned me on.

That's what must have driven my mind crazy last night and caused that dream.

I sat and peed for what felt like thirteen days straight.

Then hunger hit me.

I washed my hands and opened the bathroom door to find Anders sitting up in bed with food.

“Hey,” I said.

The smile on my face... *ugh*.

“Breakfast, babe,” he said. “Got a whole bunch of sandwiches for us. And a small coffee for you. And me.”

“Just a small one?”

“I heard that caffeine wasn’t good when you’re pregnant,” Anders said.

“Where did you hear that?”

“I looked it up,” he said. “I don’t know much about the rules here. So I’m just...”

“You woke up this morning, got out of bed and looked up pregnancy stuff? Then you ordered breakfast?”

“Yeah, why?” Anders.

I walked to the bed and climbed up on it.

I then crawled my way to Anders and straddled him.

He was still shirtless. Still in those fucking shorts.

Still driving me insane.

His hands went right under my hoodie.

I smiled.

I wanted him to touch me.

*Everywhere.*

He touched my stomach and that just felt perfect.

I touched his face with one of my hands.

I leaned down and kissed him.

He tasted like coffee and good morning.

I kissed him a second time.

Then a third.

I had plenty of intentions but I suddenly stopped kissing him and turned my head to the left.

“Willow?”

“I smelled the food,” I admitted.

My cheeks blushed.

“Makes sense,” he said. “Have to keep the baby fed and happy, right?”

Once again, Anders said and did the perfect thing.

I climbed off him and sat next to him in bed.

I dove right into an egg, bacon, and cheese sandwich on a bagel.

It was heaven in my mouth.

My *small* coffee tasted perfect.

And to top it off, Anders had a glass of fresh orange juice for me.

“This feels good, huh?” Anders asked.

“I’m actually relaxed,” I said.

“Which is good.”

“You know, I don’t have anything ready for the baby.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t have stuff for her or him,” I said. “A crib. Diapers. A nursery.”

I frowned and swallowed hard.

“Don’t take it personally,” Anders said. “Everything is hectic.”

“How is that fair?”

“How do you know your family isn’t going to surprise you with a baby shower?”

“Even if they do, it doesn’t feel the same,” I said. “I want...”

I looked away from Anders.

I shut my eyes.

He gently nudged into me. “Talk to me, babe.”

I swallowed it all down and looked at him. “Just hormones.”

“That’s a lie.”

“It doesn’t matter, Anders. Won’t change a thing.”

“Okay,” he said. “Now that breakfast is done, we get to shop.”

“Shop?”

“Get out your phone, babe. I know you have a wish list or registry or something.”

“No,” I said. “No way you’re going to flaunt your money around to make me feel better about myself.”

“Fine,” he said. “I’ll just buy what I want then.”

“Don’t be like that, Anders.”

“Be like what? My baby needs a crib. My baby needs to come into this world knowing he or she is safe and protected. And on top of that, the mother of my baby needs to be at ease the best she can.”



I curled my lip. “Your sweet talking is getting old. Just so you know.”

Anders got closer to me. “Will you at least text me a link to the registry?”

I opened my mouth and almost lied to him and said I didn’t have a registry.

But I did.

Of course I did.

What pregnant woman didn’t want to shop and get stuff for the baby.

It was instinctual. Biological.

It was *nesting*.

Anders smirked at me.

I wanted to punch him. I wanted to fuck him.

*I settled for texting him the link to the baby registry... for now.*

## Chapter Thirty

---

### ANDERS

**T**here were moments of total complication.

Even tucked away in a cottage on the beach, trying to hide from the world, the reality of our situation found a way to smack us both in the face.

Guilt struck me horribly that I had nothing ready for the baby at my place.

And then the thought that Willow didn't either...

As though we were both holding out, secretly wanting things to work out.

As though we secretly planned on getting a place together and turning it into a home.

More than once as I scrolled through the registry Willow sent me I considered telling her to find us a place. To just say screw it to the outside world. It was our time to be a family now. It didn't need to be complicated.

*Even just thinking that made everything even more complicated, didn't it?*

I put my phone down and watched as Willow stood at the large window that looked out to the beach. Funny how that window was something of a joke when I pressed my cock to it. And then it was something sexy when Willow stood there naked.

Now? Watching her fully clothed at the window?

I quietly placed my right hand over my heart to feel it thudding harder and faster.

She made my heart race.

A woman made my heart race.

And it wasn't just a sexual thing either.

It was *everything* about her.

I reached for my phone again and secretly took a few pictures of her.

I couldn't help myself.

I texted those pictures to Willow.

Then I waited.

I waited for the pictures to send.

I waited for her to feel her phone vibrate.

I watched as she looked at her phone.

Then I saw the smile...

Then she looked at me.

I winked.

She nodded for me to come to her.

Something about being alone with her just felt comfortable and right.

Like this was meant to be real.

*This is real.*

I closed in on Willow and she showed me her phone.

“This is the stuff that causes trouble,” she said.

“And I told you, babe, I’m taking pictures,” I said. “I’ll hide mine. You hide yours.”

“It’s risky.”

“I’m not losing these moments, Willow,” I said. “I don’t give a fuck what the risks are.”

“I’m glad you don’t give a fuck, but I do.”

I ran my middle finger through her hair, tucking her hair behind her ear.

Then I touched her pregnant belly.

“Talk to me,” I whispered. “Tell me what the reason is.”

“The reason for what?”

“Willow.”

“Anders.”

“You don’t have to hide from me. You don’t have to be scared to be vulnerable.”

“I am vulnerable.”

“I’m not talking about being naked and vulnerable. I’m talking being emotionally vulnerable.”

Willow laughed. “And you’re suddenly the guy who wants a woman to be emotionally vulnerable? Didn’t you fuck me under a pier while my family and your hockey team were inside a restaurant?”

“Yes, I did fuck you under a pier while your family and my hockey team were inside a restaurant. That doesn’t mean I don’t care right now.”

“Just right now, Anders?”

“Too bad we couldn’t have dated before you got pregnant,” I said. “So I could be prepared for how stubborn you could be.”

“Too bad you didn’t pull out when you felt the need to come inside me.”

I took a deep breath.

Willow looked annoyed yet she had the slightest smile on her face.

She turned her head to see the beach again.

Next thing I knew she was walking toward the door.

She opened it and looked back at the last second.

“I want to go down to the beach,” she said.

Then she was gone.

I ran after her.

We met with our feet sliding into the soft, warm sand.

The salty breeze touched my face and grabbed for her hair.

“I have my phone,” I said.

“I know you do.”

“I can just take pictures with your phone if you feel more comfortable,” I said.

“Come on, let’s go down to the water,” she said, completely ignoring me.

She grabbed for my hand and started to walk.

I turned my hand and interlocked my fingers to hers.

Tight. Protective. Strong.

The first time she *sort of* stumbled because of the uneven sand, I got even closer to her.

I unlocked my right hand from her left hand.

I put my right hand to her back and had my body against hers.

Slowly I started to walk behind her, my hands at her hips.

“Is this necessary?” she asked.

“I don’t want you to fall and get hurt.”

She looked back at me.

I was going to kiss her but her hair covered her face thanks to the breeze.

When we reached the wet sand, she stopped walking.

I looked down and watched her wiggle her toes.

Her feet sank into the sand.

I moved around her and crouched down.

“What are you going to do?” Willow asked. “Write something romantic and cliché in the sand?”

“I can’t put our names in a heart and take a picture?” I asked.

“Anders.”

“Fine, watch this,” I said.

I stuck the tip of my pointer finger into the wet sand and I drew a very obnoxious and cliché penis.

Then I stood up.

“Aw, that’s sweet,” Willow said. “Should I take a picture with it?”

“If you want to,” I said.

She stepped over the *sand penis* and turned to look at me.

She tilted her head back just a little and began to bat her eyelashes at me.

Hands on her curvy hips.

Wearing my hoodie still, so it looked like she was naked under it.

Her hair still being played with by the beach breeze.

And there it was again.

My damn heart doing that racing thing.

Jumping all over the inside of my chest and up into the back of my throat.

I took a picture of Willow and immediately texted it to her.

Then I offered my hand. “You wanted to touch the water, right?”

“Maybe I’ll go for a swim too,” she said.

“Are you allowed to do that?”

“Why couldn’t I?”

“What if water... you know... goes up?”

“Goes up where?”

“You know where, babe,” I said.

Willow snorted. “What do you think I am, a syphon? Do you think my vagina is a turkey baster? That it’s going to suck

the ocean dry?”

“I never said that,” I said. “I thought there were rules... you know... baths and stuff like that...”

“Were you researching things online again?”

I didn't answer.

Willow touched my face. “I'm not going to go swimming in the ocean. I'm just going to get a little bit wet.”

“If you need to get a little bit wet, I can help with that,” I said.

“I know, Anders,” she said.

She gently slapped my face, then walked into the water.

She only went in far enough that the water touched her ankles.

The waves did crash just above her knees.

I stood next to her and we held hands.

“Picture,” she said.

I took out my phone and Willow rested her head against my arm.

I realized she wanted me to take a picture of us.

So I did.

Then she began to turn, wanting a picture of us with the ocean at the background.

I would have taken ten billion pictures just to make her happy.

I stepped to the side, kept my phone pointed at Willow, and reached my left hand into the ocean water.



“Anders? What are you-”

I lifted my right hand and threw water at Willow.

As I did, I took pictures.

A lot of pictures.

I kept doing it over and over, listening to her playful screams.

She threw water back at me.

I had to put my phone away.

I protected my phone from getting soaked as our ocean water fight continued.

Right up until I closed in on her and kissed her.

She touched my face with both hands and I snuck my phone out and took just a few more pictures.

*I couldn't believe how much I cared about making memories with Willow.*



SHE TEASED ME IN THE DOORWAY WEARING NOTHING BUT A towel.

I teased her by pushing the front of my shorts down.

She laughed and disappeared into the bathroom to take a hot shower.

*As though I wasn't going to follow her, right?*

I stepped into the bathroom and looked at the silhouette of her figure behind the shower curtain.

I knew I was taking my life into my hands as I did it, but the moment was definitely picture worthy.

I took the picture and texted it to Willow.

Her phone vibrated on the sink and she ripped open the shower curtain.

“Really?”

“It was a good picture,” I said.

“Of me naked?”

“Yeah but you can’t tell,” I said. “It’s the figure.”

“The figure,” she said.

“Babe.”

“Whatever.”

She closed the shower curtain.

“You know, you haven’t talked to me yet about everything,” I said. “I’m still interested. I’d still like to know why things are the way they are.”

She opened the shower curtain again and wiped water off her face. “The reason why things are the way they are is because you came inside me and got my pregnant.”

“That’s not what I meant, babe.”

“Anders, can I take a shower by myself, please?”

I gritted my teeth and backed off.

I exited the bathroom and sat on the bed, waiting for Willow.

Things were beginning to really bother me.

At the start of the pregnancy, that was one thing.

But now?

I needed to know why she was so worried. So I could help.  
So I could save her. Or just so I could be there for her.

Willow stepped out of the bathroom wearing a towel.

Her hair thrown to one side.

“Anders,” she said.

“Yeah?”

“I appreciate you worrying. I really do.”

“Then talk to me, babe,” I said.

“How about we do something better?”

The towel fell to her feet and I sucked in a deep breath.

She walked to the bed and joined me.

Just before straddling me, she pulled the front of my shorts  
down.

Her two hands suddenly gripping at my cock, stroking me  
full.

I touched her arms for a second.

Then I cupped her breasts.

Then I touched her face and pulled her down for a kiss.

Our tongues met and I growled.

She groaned.

She inched forward and grabbed for my shoulders.

I felt the heat of her body as she welcomed herself to mine.

My cock ached and throbbed as I felt her hot sheath take  
control.

She lowered herself down gently.

Taking me inch by inch, groaning each time she rocked her hips.

Pulling up and thrusting back down...

My hands moved down her body, touching her pregnant belly, touching her sides, and finally touching her legs.

I felt her muscles tighten as she fucked me.

Rocking back and forth, up and down.

I growled even deeper in my throat.

*This woman really knew how to change the subject, didn't she?*

## Chapter Thirty-One

### WILLOW

**O***ur second night in a row together.*  
*Alone.*

*Wanting to sleep with the windows open to hear the ocean and feel the breeze.*

*It took me five minutes to feel sweaty and stuffy.*

*Anders didn't say a word.*

*He shut the windows, turned on the air conditioning, and went back to holding me.*

*Ten minutes later when a chill made me shiver, he added another blanket on us and kissed the top of my head.*

*My hands explored his body in an attempt to be non-sexual.*

*Of course, the second I went down too far and felt the steel-like root of his cock, I bit my bottom lip and decided I needed him again.*

*My fingertips teased him.*

*I felt him grow harder by the second.*

*I stroked him over and over, memorizing every inch of his  
cock.*

*Then all I had to do was give him a little bit of a tug...*

*He knew what I wanted.*

*And he took care of me.*

*He always took care of me.*

*I chased away anything that resembled guilt and just  
enjoyed the pleasure.*



WHEN I WOKE UP, ANDERS WAS AWAKE.

We stared at each other.

The morning felt slow and comfortable.

Almost dreamy.

The absence of the worry of getting caught aided in that.

Anders and I reached for one another at the same time.

He touched my face. I touched his.

We inched closer together at the same time.

A morning breath filled good morning kiss was just what I  
needed.

My very pregnant belly pressed against his body.

The baby kicked.

We both laughed.

We both looked down.

“I guess I need to get used to that too,” he said.

“To what?”

“To the baby interrupting us. That’s what he’s going to do.”

“*He?* For real?”

“What?”

“Don’t do that. Don’t just assume the baby is a boy.”

“Are you afraid I won’t love the baby as much if it’s a girl?”

I shrugged my shoulders.

I saw Anders’s eyes go wide.

“No,” I said. “Anders, do not try connecting dots. I will fuck you right now to shut you up.”

“Either way I win then,” he said.

He moved to kiss me and I grabbed his jaw and squeezed his lips. “You’re wrong here.”

“What am I wrong about? That your father had two daughters and secretly always wanted a son. And that has caused some kind of deep down issues?”

“I hate you right now, so much,” I said.

“Then come fuck me,” he said.

“No,” I said. “You’re not getting that satisfaction.”

I rolled away from Anders and climbed out of the bed.

I still wore the same hoodie.

And it felt good to do.

I glanced over my shoulder and saw the grin on Anders's face.

"I'm serious, Anders. You're way off base on this one. Okay?"

"Then give me something, babe. I know the outline of it all. I deal with your father all the time. I get it. He never wanted one of his daughters involved with a hockey player. I respect that. But I should get the chance to prove myself to everyone, shouldn't I?"

"Anders..."

I knew it was wrong to leave the bedroom, but I did it anyway.

I found myself going to the window again.

Staring out at the ocean.

The view made me happy.

The cottage made me comfortable.

And Anders?

He made me feel...

"Sorry about that, babe."

I shut my eyes and swallowed hard.

"It's not my job to push you like that," Anders said. "I'm pretty sure anything else I say right now will just come across cliché. You know, about me wanting to take care of you and protect you and make sure our family is safe and happy."

"Well then I'm glad you didn't say it to me. You keep saying that stuff, Anders, and we're going to end up getting closer and making things more complicated."



“You think we’re going to fall for each other? No chance.”

“No?”

“No,” he said. “How can I fall in love with you, Willow? You think just because you’re beautiful and great in bed, make me smile and make me want to have a future with you in my life that it means I’m falling in love with you?”

“You better not be,” I said. “Same for you. Just because you’re protective and sweet, yet annoying and gross but then really sexy, plus you do things with your tongue that could make me blush just thinking about it... does that mean I’m going to love you?”

“That sounds terrible,” he said.

“So we agree then that we’re just here to fool around and have a baby together?”

“Seems to be the most logical thing, babe.”

“So, no more asking questions that you shouldn’t?”

“If you say so,” he said.

There was silence for a few seconds.

I then threw my arms around Anders’s neck and hugged him.

I stood on my toes and my pregnant belly got in the way of a decent hug but he didn’t mind.

He held me.

He made me feel... beautiful.

I shut my eyes and begged my hormones to not do anything stupid like make me cry right then.

Anders was far too understanding to be with someone like me.

Not that he was the type of guy that looked for relationships.

I figured that meant he was acting like this because of the baby.

Not that it was a bad thing.

What I knew?

Everything would change the second the baby was born.

It didn't matter about truths or not. It didn't matter about sneaking around.

What mattered was how things went after I gave birth.

Anders pointed out with a laugh how the baby kicked to interrupt a good morning kiss.

What would happen when the baby woke up every few hours hungry? Or a dirty diaper?

Long day. Longer nights.

The allure of a quiet cottage on the beach?

Never again.

This was *the moment*.

The sweet, soft and kind pregnancy moment.

I didn't want to ruin it by talking about anything.

“You know, I have to confess something to you, Willow,” Anders said.

“What?”

“I remember the first time I had that *feeling* about you.”

“Oh yeah?” I asked. I broke the hug. “Let’s hear this story.”

“I know what happened that night on the beach,” he said.

“Yeah, I got pregnant.”

“Besides that. The way we had that instant connection. Almost like we wanted to make the world angry, right? I saw it in your eyes, Willow. Just like I saw it last year.”

“Last year?”

“Do you remember the pre-season dinner?”

I shook my head. “No...”

“The caterer hitting on your sister,” he said.

I gasped. “Oh. That.”

“*That.*”

“Well, let’s hear the story from your angle then,” I said.

“I was enjoying my drink and I spotted you and your sister near the bar. Then a caterer came over with some bacon-wrapped scallops. You said no thanks to him. But he ignored you. He said he was there to talk to your sister. He wouldn’t leave her alone so you took all the food off the tray and told him to leave.”

I nodded. “Those were pretty good bacon-wrapped scallops.”

“Except I wanted some,” he said. “And you kept taking them all.”

“That guy kept bothering Kay. Mind you, she was dating someone at the time. She was in a complicated thing herself at that time. Torn on what to do. I didn’t need that guy up her ass bothering her. Or me.”

“He did flirt with you too, didn’t he?”

“Yeah,” I said. “After I cleared off the third tray of food. He offered to sleep with both of us. Kay and me. At the same time.”

“That didn’t sit well, babe,” Anders said with a smile. “When he came back again and you took the tray from him...”

Anders laughed.

“That’s right. Don’t fuck with me.”

“You threw the food at him, smacked him with the tray and made him yelp. Your sister grabbed you and you two bolted from the bar and went outside. I swear on my life, Willow, I was a second away from chasing after you to applaud you for that.”

“Why didn’t you?” I asked.

Anders shook his head.

“Hey,” I said, punching at his chest. “You’re telling me there was a chance we could have started talking then? We could have a one year anniversary right now?”

“You won’t like this part.”

“I’ll decide that for myself.”

“Roman cut me off because he wanted me to look at one of the bartenders.”

I rolled my eyes.

“You wanted to know,” he said. “She had the tan skin, jet-black hair, low-cut shirt. The v-cut shirt. Roman wanted me to give my opinion on if I thought she was wearing a bra or not.”

“Well, was she?”

Anders shook his head.

“How did you find out, Anders?”

“Research,” he whispered.

“Hands on research?”

“Are you going to try and scold me for something I did over a year ago?”

*He's right.*

I touched my forehead.

*I'm slipping. I can't get jealous of some woman he slept with over a year ago, right?*

“Okay, time to change the subject,” he said.

“Yes,” I said. “You really want to know everything, Anders? Why things are like this with my life? With us?”

“That's up to you to decide,” he grinned.

I almost slapped him because of that grin.

My plan was just to blurt it all out.

Tell him everything all at once.

I opened my mouth just as the front door to the cottage opened.

I let out a small cry and Anders pulled me against him to protect me.

I looked and almost screamed.

*The Inci Warriors were here.*

## Chapter Thirty-Two

---

### ANDERS

**L**uc. Nolan. Roman. Nesh. Cain.

They all stared at me. At Willow.

Willow and I stared right back.

Roman shut the door and then waved at me.

A keychain hung from his pinky finger.

“Spare key outside,” Luc said.

“We knew there was no way you were alone,” Nolan said.  
“But if you gave me ten thousand guesses on what I’d find in here... I’d never guess this.”

I stepped in front of Willow and put her behind me.

Not that it mattered now.

“Too late,” Cain said.

“Way too late,” Nesh said.

“I think the term we’re all looking for here is *holy shit*,”  
Luc said.

“I told you guys he had a fetish,” Roman said.

We all looked at Roman.

Willow moved around me and stared too. “What did you just say?”

“No offense to you,” Roman said to Willow. “I’m sure whatever he’s paying you, it’s well worth it.”

Willow looked up at me. “Did he just call me a whore?”

“That’s just Roman,” I said. “He doesn’t know how to read a room. You’ll get used to that.”

“Oh, I know who Roman is,” Willow said. “He just doesn’t know who I am I guess.”

“What am I missing here?” Roman asked.

“Nothing,” Nesh said. “Just stop talking.”

Luc finally took a step toward me. “So this is the big secret?” He touched his lips. “Ah, damn, that was the wrong word to use. Forgive me for that.”

“Oh, no, it’s fine,” Willow. “I’m big. Look at me. Ate too much pizza.”

She turned sideways and let out a nervous laugh and rubbed her belly.

“You guys shouldn’t be here,” I said. “You guys should leave. Yes. Leave. Right now. Just get the fuck out of here.”

My anger level went from zero to three thousand in a second.

“Whoa, Anders, chill,” Luc said.

“This isn’t a chill moment for any of us,” I said.

I looked back at Willow.

Her green eyes screamed with anxiety back at me.

She attempted to diffuse her feelings with a poorly timed pizza joke and now she was genuinely scared.

“I’ll be right back,” she said.

She darted away from me.

I began to take a step but realized if I went after her, the guys would come after me.

Willow slammed the bedroom door behind her.

“Anders,” Luc said.

I turned and grabbed his shirt.

I drove him back, wanting to slam him against a wall.

Both Nesh and Cain came rushing toward me, each grabbing an arm, forcing me to let go of Luc.

Luc put his hands out. “Brother, it’s okay.”

“What the fuck are you doing here?” I growled. “How did you get in?”

“Spare key,” Roman said. “It was under the doormat.”

“I tracked your phone,” Nolan said. “Just wanted to make sure you were okay. You have to admit you’ve been acting weird lately.”

“I didn’t say a word either,” Roman said. “Even though it’s been on my mind too. You’ve been acting really different. I mean, I get it now. You just need to do your thing. Explore and all that.”

“We’re not here to bust your balls,” Nesh said.

“Let me the fuck go right now,” I said.



“Let him go,” Luc said. “If he wants to fight me, let him. He’s been holding a lot in.”

Nesh and Cain released their hold on me and I went right for Luc again.

I grabbed his shirt again and drove him into the kitchen and up against the fridge.

The asshole then smiled at me.

*Smiled!*

“What are you smiling about?” I growled.

“Congrats,” Luc whispered.

“What?”

“You’re going to be a father, Anders. That’s amazing.”

My hands started to shake and then I let Luc go.

He grabbed my face and smiled. “That’s what this is all about? You slept with Coach Pete’s daughter and got her pregnant. And you’re terrified of what he’ll do to you.”

“It’s something like that,” I said. “A little bit more complicated though.”

“Anders, you’re going to have a baby,” Luc whispered. “We’re going to be fathers together, man. Do you know what Willow is having?”

“Yeah. A baby.”

“Come on...”

I shook my head. “We didn’t want to find out. Listen, you need to keep the guys quiet for a minute. I need to go talk to her.”

“We’ll leave,” Luc offered. “We honestly thought we were going to bust in and catch you having some wild sexy party.”

“I was hoping for twenty strippers,” Roman called out. “But I get what you’re doing now. Why you needed to be alone. I support you, Anders. I’m happy for you.”

“Keep him quiet the most,” I growled. “And don’t leave. Just let me go talk to Willow.”

“We’ll hang back right here and wait,” Luc said. Then he closed in on me and kissed my left cheek. “You’re going to be a father, Anders. That’s fucking amazing.”

I hurried across the cottage to the bedroom and slowly opened the door.

I snuck into the room and found Willow standing at the bed with her suitcase on it.

“Babe?” I asked.

*“I’m sorry, Anders, but I have to go.”*



“GO WHERE?” I ASKED.

“I’m leaving. I can’t do this. We just got caught. The one fucking place we weren’t supposed to get caught and we still did.”

“Hey, wait a second,” I said. I placed my hand on the suitcase as I leaned across the bed. “You’re just going to pack up and walk out? What are you going to tell them?”

“Whatever I fucking feel like telling them,” Willow said. “I’ll tell them I booked this place for myself and you showed up. That my father sent you the text about this place by

accident. Or I'll tell them that I accidentally called you. And you showed up. Yeah. I butt-dialed you. You thought I was in trouble."

"Why would you have my number?"

"I don't know!" Willow yelled. "Does it matter? They can't see us like this! We can't get caught like this!"

Willow grabbed for my hand and I placed my other hand on hers.

"Take a deep breath, babe," I said.

"Don't tell me what to do, Anders."

I eased my hands off the suitcase.

She flipped it open and walked to get her belongings off the dresser.

Then she paused.

I carefully got closer to her.

My right hand touched her shoulder.

She didn't flinch.

I squeezed once and then began to massage.

My left hand touched her belly.

My hand spread wide and across.

Holding her and my unborn baby.

My right thumb gently dug in the back of her neck and she groaned.

"I understand how tense you must feel," I whispered. "I had no idea this was going to happen. They were expecting to find something else."

“Like what, a giant orgy?”

“Yeah,” I said.

“You’re gross, Anders.”

“And those guys out there are my family, babe. Really the only family I have. This secret’s been killing me. Keeping it from them? It’s been really hard to do. I don’t think we can escape this one right now.”

“So what do we do? Just walk out there and tell them everything?”

“I think so?”

“And then trust them to keep their mouths shut?”

“I get it. You’re scared.”

Willow elbowed me back and turned to face me. “Don’t talk to me like that. Don’t tell me what you think I’m thinking. You don’t know what I’m thinking.”

“Then tell me what you’re thinking, Willow.”

“I’m thinking... I’m scared.”

She sighed.

I cupped her face in my hands. “We’re having a baby together. This is our safe spot, right here. Why not own it? Let’s just act like we would if things were normal.”

“I feel cornered and trapped.”

“Make a decision,” I said. “I’ll do anything you want. I can go out there and tell them to leave. Make it known if they say a word, I’ll hurt them. I can help you pack up and sneak you out of here.”

Willow thought about it for a few seconds, then walked around me and to the bedroom door.

She looked back and lifted one eyebrow. “Are you coming with me or what?”

I nodded and caught up to her.

We held hands and went back to the main floor of the cottage.

The guys all stood near the front door.

“All good?” Luc asked.

“Hormones,” Willow called out.

“Oh, I know about those,” Luc said.

“Luc has a daughter,” I said. “Which you probably already know.”

“So I guess we have to just get this over with?” Willow asked. “You all know who I am. I know who you are. You know what this is...” She pointed to her belly. “You know who he is...” She nodded to me. “And you can guess the rest from there.”

“This is wild,” Nolan said. “Anders is going to be a father.”

Nesh clapped a few times.

Cain gave a nod but kept his distance.

I respected his stance.

He and Lexie had been trying to have a baby but couldn't. And here I go and have sex with Willow one time for fun and she gets pregnant.

“I’m happy for you both,” Luc said. “I mean, I know the circumstances are a little...”

“Wait a second,” Roman called out. “What is actually happening here?”

Everyone looked at Roman again.

“What do you think is happening?” Cain asked.

“Well, I caught Anders with a sexy pregnancy picture on his phone,” Roman said. “So I figured that was just his fetish. And I thought he had someone meet him here to... you know... enjoy the fetish or whatever. But... Willow? You’re Coach Pete’s daughter. You’re pregnant. And if Anders is...”

Roman tilted his head.

“Holy shit, he doesn’t get it,” Nesh said.

“I’m trying to connect the dots,” Roman said. “Because...”

Luc looked at me.

I looked at Willow.

“Anders got me pregnant,” Willow said. “Are you that thick in the skull?”

“Anders got you pregnant?” Roman called out. “He wanted to explore his fetish that much?”

“I don’t have a pregnancy fetish,” I growled.

“Well, you kind of do,” Willow said to me.

“Not like he’s thinking.”

“But I know what I saw on your phone,” Roman said.

“That was a picture of Willow,” I said. “She sent it to me.”

“Oh,” Roman said. He looked away for a second and then his eyes grew wide. He snapped his fingers. “Wait a second...”

“Now he’s getting it,” Luc said.

“Almost there, big guy,” Nolan said in a soothing voice to Roman. “Come on, you can do it.”

Roman pointed at Willow and me. “You two...”

“Yup,” I said.

“You fucked,” Roman said. “And she got pregnant. And you’ve been keeping a secret. And...”

“Okay, that’s enough thinking for one day,” Willow said to Roman. “Don’t need you to hurt yourself before the next playoff series.”

“Wait,” Roman said. “So that’s Anders’s baby in your belly?”

Willow touched her stomach. “Yes.”

I placed my hand to hers. “Any other questions?”

“How did this happen?” Roman asked.

Cain cleared his throat. “I can take it from here. By any chance, does anyone have a banana and donut?”

“Are we making a snack?” Roman asked. “I’m actually a little hungry.”

That made all of us laugh.

Roman really had no idea what was going on.

As I laughed, I looked down at Willow.

She looked up at me, laughing.

*Why did this moment feel like I was falling in love with her?*

## Chapter Thirty-Three

---

### WILLOW

“Let’s have a drink to celebrate this,” Roman announced. “Where’s the booze?”

“No booze here,” Anders said.

Roman clutched at his chest. “No... booze?”

“I’m pregnant,” I said.

“What does that have to do with booze?” Roman asked.

“I don’t drink, he doesn’t drink,” I said, nodding to Anders.

“Oh, shit, you’re whipped,” Roman eyed Anders.

“You know what?” Anders asked. “I am.”

All the hockey players erupted in cheers and hoots.

They were all picking on Anders.

Anders stood with his arms open, nodding, waving his hands, wanting more.



My hormones adjusted themselves and eyebrows furrowed with anger.

I stepped in front of Anders and stuck my right fingers into my mouth and whistled.

They all shut up at the exact same second.

“You’re going to make fun of him?” I asked. “Are you serious? What kind of teammates are you? Huh?”

“Oh, babe, it’s fine,” Anders said. “I can take it. It’s all part of what we do.”

“Fuck that,” I snapped.

I opened my mouth and stopped.

They all stared at me like I was a psycho.

I took a quick breath and I started to smile.

“Of course Anders is whipped,” I said. “That’s how good my pussy is.”

They all began to cheer again, this time for me.

Roman fell to this knees and put his hands out.

Behind me, Anders touched my sides and slid his hands around to my stomach.

Panic hit me for a moment and I quickly shoved his hands away and then put distance from him.

I swallowed hard.

I felt terrible.

Roman grabbed for my hands and surprised me. “Listen, Willow. I had no idea you were in the market for a wild romantic fling and a baby. You should have come to me to make you come.”

“Are you really hitting on a pregnant woman?” Nolan asked.

I looked at Nolan. “What’s wrong with that? Am I defective or something?”

Nolan’s face turned white.

Cain let out snickering sound and punched Nolan in the arm.

“You are far from defective to me,” Roman said. “You’re put together like an angel from heaven.”

I looked back at Anders.

His face was only slightly twisted with jealousy.

Getting caught was such a massive risk.

*But maybe in this setting with these guys it would be a little bit fun.*



LEAVE IT TO ROMAN TO FIND BOOZE.

A frosted bottle of vodka buried in the freezer.

Nobody else wanted to have a drink with him.

So he stood with the bottle of vodka in his hand while we all casually sat in the living room area of the cottage.

When Anders sat down in the chair and reached for me, it took me a second or two to accept his desire.

He grabbed my hand and pulled me toward him.

It amazed me how much I wanted to sit on his lap yet doing so in front of the others felt like a crime.

I caught myself looking at the other guys...

*Willow, look where you are. Look who you are with. Own this moment. For yourself. For your baby. For Anders.*

I plopped down on Anders's lap and he wrapped his arms around me.

We stared at each other for a second.

My heart raced.

I looked back at the other guys.

They all stared.

They all smiled.

It all started to feel right.

"I have a speech to make," Roman said.

"Please don't," Nesh said.

"First off, fuck you," Roman said, pointing to Nesh. "Second, I have to make this speech. Look at us. Look at this team. We're all... grown up."

"Do we have to do this?" Cain asked. "I don't need any more sentimental bullshit. Especially with Coach Pete..."

Cain looked at me.

He looked away.

"Wait a second," I said. "What's my father been saying?"

"Nothing," Cain said.

"Hey, it's okay," I said. "Tell me. My father shows emotion?"

"Besides anger?" Luc winked at me.

“I mean, that’s just how he is,” I said. “And if he ever finds out about Anders...”

I made a scissors gesture with my fingers.

“Oh, please,” Anders said. “If those are his scissors, they won’t fit over my dick. And you know that for sure, babe.”

I gently slapped Anders in the face.

I looked at Cain. “Now tell me about my father.”

“This is weird,” Cain said as he stood up. “I don’t know if I can handle this.”

“Sit!” I snapped my fingers.

Cain sat right back down. “Okay then.”

“Tell me about my father,” I ordered.

Anders pointed at Cain. “You better smarten up and listen to her.”

“You better put that finger down before I come over there and snap it in half like a pretzel rod.” Cain curled his lip. “Now as far as your father goes. The last couple games when we were finishing up the first series, he was talking about the history of us. How we all came together. How we got to know each other and became a family.”

“He used the word *family*?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Cain said.

I looked at Anders.

Anders shrugged. “I don’t know what it means. Maybe he’s getting nicer.”

“Hardly,” I said.

“Can I say something here?” Roman asked.

“Just let the man give his speech,” Nolan said.

“Roman, go for it,” I said.

“Thank you,” he nodded. “I just wanted to say that this team is family. And it’s amazing watching the family grow. Luc. Cheers to Emma and Isla. Anders. Cheers to you and Willow and your baby. Cain...”

“Don’t,” Cain warned.

“No, this isn’t a sex joke. I promise. I mean, yeah, Lexie is beautiful and I would give her the night of her life...”

Cain stood up.

Nolan grabbed Cain’s shirt.

“I’m toasting you next,” Roman said. “To you and Lexie. You’re going to have a baby.”

“Really?” I asked. “That’s exciting.”

Cain looked at me with fire in his eyes.

Luc cleared his throat. “They’re still trying. Actively trying.”

“Oh, shit,” I said. “Cain, I’m sorry. I misheard that. I...”

“Don’t worry about it,” Cain said.

“No, it’s not okay,” I said. “You and Lexie are struggling right now. And that’s bullshit. That shouldn’t happen to good people. Here I am getting humped by a random guy and getting pregnant on the first try. That has to piss you off.”

“You said it,” Cain mumbled.

“You’re pissed at me, man?” Anders asked.

“He’s not mad at you, Anders,” I said. “He’s mad at the situation. And he has every right to be mad.”

Cain looked like a monster. His size and shape and his nasty demeanor.

But as he tilted his head and stared at me, he slowly nodded.

“You know, that’s the best thing anyone has ever said to me about this situation,” Cain said. “Thanks, Willow. Thanks for getting it.”

Cain sat back down.

“Fuck it,” Roman said. “Cheers to everyone. And since it’s just us, let’s be honest. We’re winning it all this year. We’re not fucking losing. Agreed?”

I jumped up off Anders and threw my fists into the air. “Fuck yes!”

They all looked at me and started to laugh.

“Can we back up for a second here?” Nesh asked. “I caught a comment from Willow.”

“Ut-oh,” I said.

“You said something about getting humped...”

“Oh, no,” I whispered.

“Come here, babe,” Anders said.

He pulled me back down to his lap.

“Look, if we’re going down this road, I’m all in,” Roman said.

“You, sit down,” Cain said to Roman. “And keep your mouth shut.”

“Hold on,” Luc said. “I think what my teammates are trying to say... we want to hear the story.”

“Of us fucking?” Anders asked.

I slapped Anders across the face again. “Don’t be gross about it!”

“It was on the beach!” Anders said.

“Oh, this is good,” Nolan said.

I took a deep breath. “Fine. You want to hear all about it? It was before the season started, at the party.”

All at once, their eyes opened wide.

Connecting the dots.

“Wait,” Luc said. “So you two weren’t having a fling or something?”

“Nope,” Anders said. “I went outside for a breather and down to the beach. I saw Willow. She saw me.”

“On the beach?” Nolan asked.

“Sort of,” I said. “Under a pier.”

“Up against a pier,” Anders said.

“Holy hell,” Roman said. “I’m a little bit turned on right now.”

Everyone ignored him.

“And then this happened,” Anders said as he touched my stomach. “The most amazing surprise of my life.”

“Mine too,” I said.

I looked at Anders.

We smiled at each other.

I wanted to kiss him.

*But I wasn't sure...*

Anders gently touched the back of my neck and nodded.

I leaned down and brushed my lips to his.

“So this is a thing,” Nesh. “You two are serious.”

“It’s complicated as hell,” Anders said. “For a lot of reasons.”

“Coach Pete has been pretty adamant about killing the person who got his daughter pregnant,” Cain said.

“Which is why things are quiet,” I said. “So you guys can get through your season. Win it all and then...”

“No offense to you, Willow, but how much longer do you have?” Luc asked.

“Are you saying I look too big?” I asked.

“Whoa, no,” Luc said. “I would never...”

“I’m kidding,” I said. “Ease up.”

“I want to hear more,” Roman said.

“You are not going to ask questions and then eye hump my woman,” Anders said.

I looked at Anders. “What did you just call me? *Your woman?*”

“Well, what are you to me then?”

This would have been a much better moment to face if I didn’t have a hockey team staring at me.

It also would have been better if I didn’t feel my cheeks blushing.

Or my heart fluttering.

Or butterflies in my stomach.



Or the baby kicking.

*In other words - I was starting to fall in love with all of this stuff happening.*



I SNUCK OUT OF BED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

I shuffled toward the kitchen and almost screamed when I saw the fridge door open.

Light cast upon Roman's face.

He nodded to me.

He looked like crap.

The man all but drank an entire bottle of vodka on his own.

We spent the night talking, laughing, ordering food, and wasting time in a way I hadn't done in such a long time.

A part of me ached that Kay wasn't with me to enjoy everything. And the fact that she still didn't know about Anders.

But that could have been said for everyone who didn't know.

"Are you okay, Roman?" I asked.

"I need something other than vodka," he said. "I did not plan on spending the night."

"You were in no shape to leave. Your fiancée is okay with this?"

"What? Me shacking up with a pregnant woman?"

"You're really this kind of person in real life, huh?"

Roman handed me a bottle of water and held a container of orange juice.

“Cheers to you, Willow,” he said.

“For what? For how crazy this is?”

“Crazy?” Roman asked. “Crazy is when a woman showed up with Luc’s baby. Crazy is when Cain fell in love with his physical therapist. Crazy is Nolan going away for a weekend and coming home with the woman he loves. Need I go on?”

“What about you?”

“Me? I pretended to be engaged with a woman, we fell in love and now we’re actually engaged.”

“Okay, that is crazy. But is it as crazy as getting pregnant by Anders?”

“Well, I can’t get pregnant by Anders,” Roman said with a smile.

“True. But you know what I mean.”

“I don’t think it’s crazy at all, Willow. Not if you’re both enjoying this.”

“He’s such a good guy to me. And the baby. I told him to leave. I gave him the chance to take off but he refused.”

“Yeah, that’s Anders,” Roman said. “He and I are closest out of everyone. We’re the party animals. The troublemakers. But I know Anders is a loyal friend. And I can see the way he looks at you. How you look at him. You can hide all you want, Willow, but you two are going to be together forever.”

He shut the fridge and started to walk away.

“I think that’s the vodka talking,” I called out.

“Maybe,” Roman said.

I stood in the kitchen alone and sipped some water.

Anders and I together? Forever?

Raising our baby together?

The thought of it made me smile.

*The thought of it made me want to cry too.*

## Chapter Thirty-Four

### ANDERS

**A** breakaway with three seconds left in the third period.  
With us up by one goal.

Game four of the series and we were up by one game, but Arizona wanted to send it back to our ice with a tied series.

We were on away ice and the crowd cheered for me to miss this save.

I came out of the net fast, then crouched down and wiggled my ass like a cat about to attack.

I slid back toward the net and waited for the shot.

I couldn't tell who had the puck.

I wasn't expecting this to happen.

Nolan butchered an easy pass to Cain and now I had to make the save of the night.

I was ready.

Normally in that kind of moment I shut everything down.

Almost like an intensely focused meditation.

I didn't hear the crowd.

I didn't feel pressure.

I zoned out and told my body I trusted its instincts on how to move.

Tonight was different.

I thought about Willow and my unborn baby.

I pictured Willow rubbing her belly, sitting on the edge of her bed, waiting for me to show up and rub her back.

I needed to make this save to end the game so I could get on a plane and fly back home to Willow.

If I missed this shot and Arizona scored, we'd go into overtime.

And playoff overtime was maybe the most intense hockey a player could play.

I saw the puck flip up into the air.

It was a good shot and I didn't have much of a chance to make a grab.

I threw my arm and stick up and felt the puck hit and go up over my head.

I fell back, hoping the puck wasn't behind me, going into the net.

It wasn't.

I heard the *thud* of the puck hitting the boards as the crowd gasped and groaned.

That meant I left a big rebound.

The seconds moved like hours.

I cut my left skate to the post at the absolute last second as the player got the rebound and tried a quick reach around goal attempt.

I slammed my left hand down on the puck, on the ice, took in a deep breath and waited for the buzzer to echo.

When it did, the crowd began to *boo* me viciously.

That was the game.

*Done. Over.*

*We won.*

*That's great.*

*Where's the fucking shower?*

*I gotta get out of here.*

*Right fucking now.*

I moved fast.

I moved too fast.

I moved so fast that it was Cain who blocked my path in the locker room and cornered me.

“Look, man, I know you want to get back to her,” Cain said.

“What?”

“You look like you're high,” he said. “Last thing we need is someone writing a bullshit story about our star goalie taking uppers to get through a game, you know?”

“Fuck off, Cain,” I said.

He put a hand to my chest and pushed me back against the wall. “I'm telling you what I see. I know you want to get back

to her. I know you have some special arrangement to sneak around. That's got to be hard. For both of you."

I gave a quick nod.

"I don't have advice," Cain said. "I'm just telling you the way you look right now, it's too jumpy."

All I had for Cain was another nod.

I slowed way down.

I did a few interviews.

I kept myself calm.

Then we got back to the hotel and I started to move fast again.

Ready to get on the plane and get the fuck out of-

My phone vibrated.

A text from Mags to the entire team.

"No," I whispered.

The text was simple.

**Issues with the plane. We fly out first thing in the morning. Sleep tight. Great game. NO TROUBLE TONIGHT.**

It felt like someone punched me in the gut.

I refused it.

I sat on the edge of the bed and tried to figure out how to get a private jet *right now*.

I was rich but not *crazy-ass-I-own-a-private-jet* rich.

I never considered owning a private jet until that very moment.

I almost called my agent. My lawyer.

Ready to call everyone.

I had to get to Willow.

That's when she texted me.

**Great game. Yes, I actually watched it.**

I called her.

*No texts tonight, babe.*

"Hey," she said in a sleepy voice that almost brought me to my knees.

"Hold on, babe, I need to see you," I said.

We switched over to video.

*And there she was...*

Sitting up in bed, looking tired and sexy.

Her cheeks had gotten puffier in the last couple weeks.

She was simply gorgeous.

"You're not calling to praise me for watching your game, are you?" Willow asked.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Something is wrong with the plane."

"Oh, wow."

"At least we didn't get on the plane, right?"

"Don't even say that, Anders."

"Does that mean you'd miss me?"

Willow rolled her eyes. "My father would be on that plane too."

"Right. Forgot. You'd definitely miss your father."



She smiled. "I'm going to miss you tonight."

"Don't say that, babe. I'm about ready to finance a private jet just to fly to you."

"Can you even afford that?"

"I'm the best fucking goalie in the league right now. I can afford anything I want. In fact, I might even call the ownership group and demand a flight tonight."

"Don't do that. I'm actually really tired right now."

"Everything okay?"

"Yeah. Just a long day. Had showings all day. Weird day. A lot of interest and no offers. Makes me feel like I'm failing."

"You're not failing, Willow. But I don't have to tell you that. You wouldn't listen anyway if I did say it."

"Then I'm glad you didn't say it," she smiled.

"Hey. Can I see?"

"See... what...?"

"Your belly," I said.

"Oh. Yeah. Of course."

The phone began to move and then I saw Willow's belly.

Her hand moved over the roundness of it.

"I can't wait to meet him," I said.

"Or her," Willow said.

"Of course."

"Say goodnight, Anders."

"Goodnight," I said. "I'll see you tomorrow definitely."

Willow turned the screen back around so I could see her face.

The angle was just right to see the silhouettes of her breasts pushed up, hidden under her shirt.

I gritted my teeth.

She smirked at me.

She knew what she was doing.

“Going to move that shirt up, babe?” I asked.

“Goodnight, Anders.”

“Goodnight, babe,” I whispered.

At the very last second Willow blew me a kiss and then ended the call.

When my screen went blank I blew a kiss to my own fuzzed reflection.

Someone began to knock on my door.

I welcomed the sudden distraction from my thoughts because words like *love* were floating around way too easily.

I opened my hotel room door and Roman stood there with a six pack of beer.

“Nothing else to do,” he said. “I heard this place has great pizza too.”

“You think a six pack is going to do the trick right now?” I asked.

“You miss your pregnant sweetheart, don’t you?”

“Why don’t you say that fucking louder, Roman? I don’t think it echoed all the way down the hallway into Coach Pete’s fucking ears.”

Roman handed me the six pack of beer.

Then he reached into his back pocket and brought out a bottle of whiskey.

*Okay, now we were talking.*



THE SECOND I MADE IT TO WILLOW, I KISSED HER FIRST, THEN dropped down to one knee to kiss her stomach.

I caught myself hugging her belly.

I wasn't sure if it was sweet, foolish, pathetic, or me being a protector, but it felt right.

I stood back up and touched her face.

“What happened, Anders?”

“I should have just driven home,” I said, curling my lip. “They got us a new plane and then that one got delayed. Then they said we were good to go. The entire team gets on the plane. We start moving on the tarmac and the plane stops. Damn storms rolling through. So we sat there and waited for hours, babe. *Hours*. Your father was ready to kick the door open and get us off the plane and find another one. Like hitching a flight.”

“He was texting Mom like crazy too,” Willow said. “I think he was panicking a little. I think he's a little bit claustrophobic but won't admit it.”

“Or maybe he just wanted to get home to the woman he loves the most,” I said.

Willow smiled.

“I'm sorry it's so late,” I said. “I just had to see you.”

“I’m still here,” she said. “I’m awake. Right?”

“You look tired, babe.”

“I am tired. I’m growing a human.”

“What can I do right now, Willow? To help with something. Anything. Name it.”

“You really want to help me?”

“Yes, babe.”

“How about a glass of water. No. Glass of lemonade. Oh, yeah. Lemonade. And toast two pieces of bread. And put pickles on it. Make it into a sandwich.”

“Really?”

“Don’t judge,” she said.

Willow jumped to her toes and we kissed again.

She turned and walked away.

I stared at her waddling ass and never felt so happy in my entire life.

Then I went right to work.

*Bread. Toaster.*

*Toast.*

*A jar of pickles in the fridge.*

*Then... the pickle... sandwich...*

I poured a glass of water for Willow and walked to the bedroom.

“Here’s your...”

I stopped myself.

Willow was tucked into her bed, sound asleep.

I put the glass of water on the nightstand.

I leaned down and brushed my lips to her cheek.

Back in the kitchen, I wasn't sure what to do with the sandwich so I decided to help myself.

I took a bite of the toasted pickle sandwich and cringed for a second.

Then the flavor hit me.

So I ate the entire thing.

I had to leave a few minutes later.

*I was getting really sick of having to leave Willow.*

## Chapter Thirty-Five

### WILLOW

I couldn't bend forward to put on my shoes.

I rocked back and forth, over and over, groaning until I burst into tears.

That's when I succumbed and texted my sister to help me put on my shoes.

Kay showed up with a smile on her face.

"Fair warning," she said. "I'll do anything for you, but I'm going to enjoy this."

"Just help me. I have a long day of showings."

"And you want to wear those?" Kay asked.

"Those are my fancy work shoes. They help me."

"Oh, you're selling condos and sex?"

"Really?"

"You're already pregnant, Willow. Guys know you put out. You don't need sexy shoes."

“Just help me.”

Kay crouched down in front of me and began to twist and turn the shoe to my right foot.

After just a few seconds, Kay dropped the shoe to the floor.

“What?” I asked.

“Do I have to say it? Do I have to be the bad person here?”

“Excuse me?”

“Willow. Your feet are... too big. They're swollen.”

“I should kick you for saying that,” I growled.

“Come on, Willow. Don't be stubborn. You know your feet are swollen.”

“I refuse to believe it,” I said. “Give me the shoe. I'll figure it out.”

“If you bend forward too hard you're going to pop the baby out,” Kay said.

“That's not funny.”

“Willow, lighten up. You're pregnant. Like really pregnant. You have to adjust.”

“I can't wear shoes now?” I asked.

“I brought you something,” Kay said.

She walked toward the kitchen and I turned to watch her.

I hadn't realized she put a bag on the counter.

“These are slip-on shoes,” Kay said. “They're made for you.”

“For pregnant women?”

“These things cost a lot. Not that I mind. Just try them on. They’re very comfortable.”

“Oh yeah?”

“I bought a pair for myself too. Just for lounging around.”

Kay put the shoes in front of my feet.

I was able to slide my feet right into the shoes.

I stood up and the shoes were...

“Heaven,” I whispered.

“Told you. They’ve got special padding and all that. And they look good. They’re not slippers but they feel like it.”

“They’re very comfortable. Thank you, Kay.”

“You know, I love being here for you.”

“Here we go.”

“What?”

“I know what you’re going to say. About the baby’s father.”

“And?”

“And... I need to go sell some real estate so I can afford to pay for a baby.”

“Hey. Are you going to buy anything soon?”

“Are you going to throw me a baby shower?”

Kay laughed. “You don’t remember when you told Mom and I you didn’t want that? You wanted to handle things on your own.”

“When did I say that?”

“A while ago.”



*She's probably right. I'm stubborn and scared. I'm falling in love with Anders. I can't talk about him. But I should be able to talk about him.*

"I should go, huh?" Kay asked.

"You can come with me. I can tell the clients you're in training."

"And then you get caught and get fired. No thanks."

"Thanks for the new shoes," I said.

"No problem," Kay said. She quickly crouched and swiped my other shoes off the floor. "I'm borrowing these though. These are sexy. Total *fuck me* shoes."

"Your feet won't fit in those."

"They will. But only for a little while. If you know what I mean."

"It makes me cringe that my favorite footwear is going to be on the dirty floor of some bedroom of some random guy you're going to fuck."

"Love you too, sister," Kay said.

I walked her to the door and we left together.

*I almost hated to admit how comfortable the pregnancy shoes were.*



MY FEET STILL ACHED.

My ankles were swollen.

Pain moved up and down my back, radiating around to my belly.

I had somewhat gotten used to the bothersome fake contractions.

Going up from there, my boobs felt full, heavy and they hurt.

I had to be careful of what bras I wore because there were times with certain bras I would *show through*. Of all the things with pregnancy I didn't anticipate leaking milk before the baby was born.

The exhaustion of my body led to the exhaustion of my brain.

As I walked around my last showing of the day, I opened a door and smiled back at the client.

"This is the spacious master bedroom," I said.

"Doesn't look spacious to me," John said.

I looked and gasped.

I had opened a closet door by accident.

I completely forgot which condo I was in.

So much so that I began to panic that I entered the wrong condo completely.

*Is this place even for sale?*

I looked at John and felt my bottom lip start to wiggle.

"Hey, it's okay," he said to me. "I have the layout right here on my phone."

I waved my hands in front of my face. "This is so unprofessional."

"Stay right there," John said.

He walked away and returned with a glass of water for me.

“Thanks,” I said.

“I like that fridge,” he said. “Fancy. Built-in everything. Kitchen has great lighting. All natural lighting.”

“What about the closet?” I asked with a weak smile.

John laughed. “That’s a great closet. Hey, give yourself some credit. When my wife was pregnant, she went through this. She pushed hard, not wanting to admit maybe it was time to slow down.”

“How many kids do you have?”

“Just the one. For now. We’re looking to get out of the main part of the city. Right here on the beach is what we both want. I’m a writer and I have to get something written soon.”

“Well, this is a great place for that,” I said. “You, your wife, your...”

“Son.”

“Your son. On the beach.”

“Now, when my wife gets pregnant again, I’ll have to decide what to do with this place,” John said.

“You can call me to sell it.”

“Deal,” he said. He stuck his hand out.

“What?”

“I want this place,” John said. “I want it right now. Asking price. No stipulations. As long as the appliances stay.”

“They do,” I said.

“Then it’s done.”

“Did you just make an offer because you feel bad for me?”  
I asked.

“No,” John said. “I’m going to go call my wife and tell her I found our new place.”

“Shouldn’t you have her look at it too?”

“We trust each other,” John said. “Can’t have true love without true trust. And have some fun. And not give a damn what anyone else thinks.”

I smiled.

I swallowed hard.

All I could think about was Anders and how he made me feel cared for and that I could trust him... and how much fun I had with him...

*Even with my clothes on.*



THE LONGEST DAY CAME TO AN END.

I kicked off the comfy shoes and changed into comfy pants, took off my bra, and put on a new hoodie.

My old hoodies no longer fit over my belly.

What I really wanted to wear was one of Anders’s hoodies.

It was a good thing I didn’t tempt fate because my pregnancy brain decided to erase the part of the evening where I had promised Dad we would have dinner together.

He showed up at six, right on time according to him.

I looked like a pregnant, sloppy mess.

He looked dashing and handsome, ready to take his daughter out.

I almost began to cry.

Dad quickly untucked his shirt and unbuttoned it.

He ran his hands through his hair to make it look messy.

Smiling at me the entire time.

Underneath all that rough and tough hockey stuff was a really good man. A man who loved, cared, protected. A man who kept all his promises. A man who met the love of his life and made it his only goal to keep her happy. A man who had two daughters and raised them to know what it meant to be respected and cared for.

And yet I still just couldn't tell him about Anders.

Tonight felt like the perfect night to do so.

Dad handed me his phone. "Pick a place. My treat. We'll have dinner here."

"Dad, I feel bad. You were looking forward to this. You have a quick break before the next series."

He smiled ear to ear. "You've been watching."

"I've been casually following. You're close, huh?"

"Really close, Willow. And it feels right this year. And, hey, I just wanted to have dinner with you. We can stay right here. Tell you what. Order whatever you want. We'll plop down on the couch and put our feet up. You can even put on some crappy dating reality show. Or one of those cooking ones. I like those."

"Oh yeah?"

"I like the ones where they go into restaurants and find the bugs and all that," Dad said.

"That doesn't make me want to order food from a restaurant," I said.

“A little dirt never killed anyone.”

“But disease from rotten food could.”

“So you want to make dinner here? What do you have?”

“Half a box of spaghetti and some pickles.”

“Gourmet stuff,” Dad said.

“How about pizza?” I asked.

“What’s the craving this week?”

“Black olives.”

“I like that. Sausage?”

“On a second one.”

“Consider it done,” Dad said. “Now go sit down and put your feet up. Take good care of my grandchild, Willow.”

I touched my stomach and walked to the living room.

When I sat down I felt like I could cry.

It was so nice to relax.

Dad ordered pizza and soda.

It reminded me of when I was younger.

Dad always insisted on having *Dad-daughter nights* with Kay and me.

Again, a man who always kept his promise, he always made time for Kay and me.

He and I would hang out, order pizza with weird toppings and watch gory movies.

Stuff that Mom and Kay hated.

Except now we were older.

Dad had that *older man* look coming in on his face.

And I had a huge, pregnant belly.

“So how do you feel?” Dad asked.

“Big.”

“Almost time, Willow.”

“I know.”

“Anything I can help with?”

“I know I don’t have anything ready yet,” I said. “I will. I promise. I know the reality of this. I’m just trying to...”

“Hey, if I don’t say things, I’m not a good father.”

“I know that, Dad.”

“You know, if you stayed at your teaching job, you’d be in a lot better situation right now.”

“Really?”

“Better benefits than starting over.”

“Dad.”

“I have to say it. I have to stick up for you.”

“I don’t want you to stick up for me. I’m okay.”

Dad glanced at me. “Remember the last time?”

I swallowed hard. “Dad.”

“I just want you to be happy. That’s it. That’s all I care about, Willow. And I’ll be honest. You know how I feel.”

“I know how you feel, Dad.”

“Just give me two minutes alone with him. That’s it. I’ll knock his teeth around into his skull.”

“Can we just eat pizza and not worry about who knocked me up?”

“Wow, Willow,” Dad said. “I didn’t need to hear you say that.”

There was a bit of a moment when I felt like the walls were down.

I thought about it for a second.

Just blurting it out.

*Hey, Dad, just so you know, Anders got me pregnant. And before you try to kill your star goalie, I’m kind of in love with him. I wasn’t in love with him when we had sex on the beach and I got pregnant. But I am now.*

I felt my mouth opening.

My tongue bone dry.

My heart pounding.

I placed my hands on my stomach.

I took a slow breath.

*I can do this. I can just say it.*

My mouth opened even more.

I screamed at my brain to tell my vocal cords to work.

To just say the words.

It was time.

More than time.

*Right now, Willow.*

*Right now!*

I moved the words from my brain to the tip of my tongue.



The doorbell chimed and Dad jumped up.

“Pizza is here!”

He took off running like a little kid.

I closed my eyes and swallowed hard.

My stomach growled and the baby kicked.

*Okay... tonight I'll just eat pizza...*

## Chapter Thirty-Six

---

### ANDERS

**A**fter my second shutout game, all eyes were right back on me.

It didn't help matters that Luc pointed everyone to me.

He called me the star of the team.

I wasn't a fan of having phones and cameras in my face all the time.

I stood in the locker room and felt swarmed.

Before, during, and after practice we had to give interviews.

"Anders, how do you feel today?"

"I feel great," I said. "Did I miss some kind of report about an injury?"

Everyone laughed.

"Anders, you're playing at a historical level. Does that stick in your mind at all?"

"No," I said. "I just want to win it all. This is the year."

“What makes it *the year*?”

“Look at the team,” I said. “We’ve been getting better each season. Building. Growing. Getting closer. Finding our roles.”

“What’s it like to have the cameras in your face?”

“Annoying,” I said with a grin. “I just want to take a shower and get some pizza.”

“What’s your favorite topping?”

“Classic pepperoni,” I said. “Now go bother Luc. He loves to hear himself talk.”

More laughter.

Nobody moved an inch.

“Do you think you can pull off the sweep again?”

“I can’t see the future,” I said. “I can just prepare.”

“What about the practices? Coach seems to ride you guys hard.”

“Coach Pete knows what he’s doing,” I said. “And every single guy in this locker room believes in him as much as he believes in us. That’s why we’re here right now. That’s why we’re going to win it all. Okay? That’s enough for now.”

There were a few more questions thrown my way but I walked toward the showers.

Luc gladly took over.

He and Nolan stood together, smiling, ready to be on TV.

Coach Pete stood leaning against the far wall.

“Madhouse,” he said.

“I’m not used to this.”

“You need to get used to it, Anders. You’re a star. You’ve always been a star, but now?”

“Thanks for the pressure,” I said.

“I believe in you,” Coach Pete said.

*And I got your daughter pregnant. But it’s okay. I love her. I know that’s a lot to hear right now, but...*

I nodded and went into the showers.

Once dressed, I checked my phone and smiled when I saw a certain confirmation text pop up on the screen.

I stood up and said goodbye to the guys.

With Coach Pete lingering around, they couldn’t say what they wanted.

But at the same time, they all made a gesture as though they had pregnant stomachs.

I waved my middle fingers, smiling.

As I stepped out of the locker room, I saw Luc running after me.

He motioned for me to keep going.

Once we were outside, he put his hands to my shoulders.

“Should I touch your sides and we slow dance?” I asked.

“You touch me and I’m going to hurt you,” he said.  
“How’s Willow?”

“Seriously?”

“Nobody is out here. Talk to me.”

“She’s good. She’s... you know... pregnant.”

“Nothing new yet? Not dropping the news?”

“I’m probably going to do it when we win it all,” I said. “Willow isn’t due for another two weeks after, if it goes to seven games. That gives us time to talk and get everything handled.”

“I’m excited for you. I hate keeping things like this quiet.”

My phone vibrated again.

“I have to go, Luc.”

“That must be the wife, huh?”

“Easy with that talk,” I said. “She’s far from that. We don’t have anything labeled yet.”

“Just *Mom* and *Dad*.”

“Yeah,” I said.

“Call if you need anything,” Luc said. “I never got to see Emma when she was pregnant, you know?”

“I know, Luc.”

“Okay, get out of here,” he said.

Luc beamed.

So happy for me.

I almost considered telling him to go talk to Coach Pete.

Almost.

I cleared my head.

Completely cleared my head.

I had one thing to focus on.

*My family.*



“STAY BEHIND ME,” WILLOW PURRED.

I pressed the front of my body to her back.

My left hand touched her bare hip and moved between her legs.

She was soaked.

Dripping with sweet honey for me.

She opened her left leg and bent her knee.

I rocked my hips and guided my cock against her warm slit.

Willow put her head back and smiled.

“I need this,” she whispered.

“I know you do, babe,” I said. “I hope you know you look beautiful.”

“Yeah, okay. Just fuck me, Anders.”

I moved my hand to the head of my cock and pressed against her body.

I offered a hard thrust and entered her.

She threw her hips back at me, wanting more.

My right hand moved under a pillow and then popped free, touching Willow’s chin.

She turned her head and I kissed her.

Our tongues slapped together like a wet sword fight.

Then we kissed harder and faster.

My left hand moved to her side again, holding her in place as I led the way deeper into her.

Inch by inch, offering myself head to root.

I held deep inside her and thrust even more.

Her body wiggled and the bed protested with groans quieter than the ones Willow offered me as we kissed.

She grabbed my left hand and placed it to her left breast.

She cupped.

She squeezed my hand.

I squeezed her breast with gentle force.

I began to massage her breast and felt wetness.

She groaned into my mouth again.

I started to fuck.

Long and slow strokes, savoring her entire body.

She rocked her hips and ass back against me, making smalls circles.

Her groans turned into quiet whimpers.

I tasted her tongue, breath, and lips.

I broke the kiss and pressed my lips to her shoulders.

Then I gritted my teeth.

I had such an urge...

“Do it, Anders,” Willow purred. “Do it harder. It’s okay. I promise.”

I moved my right hand to the bed and slightly hovered over her.

My left hand moved up to her face.

My thumb stroked just under her bottom lip.

Her eyes slowly began to shut.

I thrust harder.

Moving her entire body.

Grunting as I did so.

“Oh, fuck, babe,” I whispered.

“I know,” she said. “Keep going, Anders.”

Oh, believe me, I kept going.

I studied her body.

Knowing there might have been a chance I’d never see her like this again.

*Unless... we got together, stayed together, and had another baby, right?*

A thought like that should have made my cock shrivel up and hide.

Instead, it made me harder. Thicker. Stronger.

It made me want Willow even more.

On her nightstand, I saw my phone screen light up.

“Fuck, babe,” I groaned. “We have to finish this.”

“Why?” Willow called out.

“You’ll see...”

I moved faster.

My left hand trailed down her body once more.

Over her large, full breasts.

Over her large, full belly.

Dipping between her legs.

My middle finger touched her clit and she cried out.



She grabbed my hand and began to shake.

My phone lit up again.

Then the doorbell to Willow's apartment rang.

"Coming!" Willow screamed.

She wasn't talking to the delivery guy outside the apartment.

She was calling out her pleasure.

And that was fine with me.

*The delivery guy in the hallway would have to wait a little while.*



I MADE SURE TO TIP THE GUY VERY WELL.

He was thrilled to have a break and have some cash in his hand.

I even told him I didn't need his help moving the boxes into the apartment.

Willow stared at the boxes and bit her bottom lip.

She wore my favorite *INCI WARRIORS* hoodie.

Between that, her belly, and the messy sex hair...

*I love you, Willow.*

"I'm not sure if this is the one you want," I said. "But it's the best. I researched as much as I could. So it's the crib, the changing table, and then the rocking chair. It's a set. So it all matches. Same color and design and all that."

Willow looked at me. “So you went out and bought all this stuff for the baby without me.”

“If you hate it, I’ll send it all right back.”

“I don’t hate it at all. I just...”

“What?”

“I mean, is this it? This is the decision? The baby is going to have a nursery here? What about your place?”

“Do you want to come live with me?”

“Are you offering?”

“I just asked.”

“It wasn’t very sincere.”

“Want me to get on one knee and ask?” I offered.

“No, Anders. I’m just... it’s just...”

I touched her face again. “I know, babe. Whenever you’re ready, I am.”

“You know we can’t now. More than ever.”

“I wish we would just do it. Who cares anymore?”

“Anders, this is really sweet of you to do,” she said. “I’ve never had someone care about me the way you do. And I don’t know if it’s real or just because of the baby.”

“That should hurt me to hear but I get it. So let me prove it all to you.”

“I’ll be right back,” Willow said.

She quickly darted away from me.

I tried to grab her right hand.

She shook me away, went into the bathroom and slammed the door.

I just stood there.

I hated the situation we were in...

I wanted her to be set up for the baby.

Whether it was here, my place, or anywhere in the world.

This whole thing was new for me.

A baby.

Caring about one woman.

*Love...*

I walked toward the bathroom door.

There was no backing down now.

I placed my right hand to the door.

I didn't knock.

I almost didn't know what to say to her.

Maybe it was time to just tell her I loved her.

"Willow," I said from the other side of the bathroom door.

"Willow, we need to talk."

"Anders!" Willow's voice yelled from inside the bathroom.

*"Anders, I think something is wrong with the baby!"*

## Chapter Thirty-Seven

---

### WILLOW

“**D**on’t leave me! Please don’t leave me! Swear you won’t leave me. Please. You can’t leave me.”

Those words became a jumbled mess for me.

One second I had been in the bathroom and the next...

“I’ve got you,” the voice said to me. “I will always protect you, Willow. I will always be there for you. The only job you have right now is to focus on our baby. I have everything else under control.”

And while panic swept through my body along with some pain, I gave Anders all my trust. Every ounce of trust I had to give. Maybe I had no choice or maybe I really did love him.

But here’s what I knew...

The second I screamed in pain, Anders threw the door open and was at my side.

When I reached for him, he held me.

When I told him something was wrong, he didn’t hesitate to help me to my feet, then carried me to his car. He moved

fast, was big and strong, but gentle enough with me.

I felt safe, even if I felt scared.

I knew there was no way Anders didn't feel any sense of worry, but he was calm.

Focused.

Laser focused at that.

I distracted myself by wondering if Anders being so calm and focused in a messy situation was part of the reason why he was a goalie.

Then came the moment when I saw the neon glow of the hospital.

*EMERGENCY.*

I groaned and reached for Anders's right arm.

I felt myself shaking.

My breathing started to get quicker, faster.

"Anders..."

"I know, babe," he said.

"That's it? *I know?* You have nothing to say to me?"

"My focus is you and the baby. Dr. Steph said she'd meet us out front."

"Wait, what?" I asked.

"I called Dr. Steph," he said. "That's part of the plan, Willow. Anything starts happening to you, we call Dr. Steph and she gets involved."

"How did..."

“I’ve got this, babe,” Anders said. “Now go back to being scared and yell at me all you need to, okay? I can take it.”

“Yeah, you can take it?” I asked. “What if I reach down, rip your dick off and beat you over the head with it?”

“If you have the strength and energy to do that right now, then we don’t need to be at the hospital.”

“Asshole,” I whispered.

I shut my eyes and felt the rippling shake throughout my entire body.

This wasn’t me getting ready to give birth.

It was far too early for that.

This feeling...

This feeling was bad.

“There she is,” Anders said.

I turned my head and saw Dr. Steph waiting for us.

Totally dressed down.

Her face stern, serious, ready to get to work.

“Please don’t leave,” I said to Anders again.

“I’m not going anywhere, Willow,” he said.

I shut my eyes and threw all my trust into him again.

I had to trust him. I had to trust Dr. Steph.

I placed my hands on my stomach.

*I had to trust that my baby was okay...*



DR. STEPH CAME INTO THE ROOM AND SHOOED TWO NURSES out.

I had to admit - when Dr. Steph spoke, people listened.

Nobody messed with her or told her what to do.

“Are these lights too much for you, Willow?” Dr. Steph asked. “I know why they need these big, bright lights in these rooms, but sometimes they can stress you out.”

“Just tell me about the baby,” I said.

Anders stood at my side, holding my right hand.

He had his other hand on my stomach.

I tried to sense emotion coming from him, but he held himself strong.

For me.

For our baby.

*Please... please make sure I'm going to give this man a baby...*

“Okay, first thing we’re going to do is take a collective breath,” Dr. Steph said. “The baby is fine.”

The three of us exhaled.

I started to cry.

Anders leaned down and kissed the top of my head.

Then he kissed my belly.

“If you want me to give all the medical lingo, I’ll take you home and into my office, then we can study medical dictionaries until the sun comes up,” Dr. Steph said.

Anders lifted his gaze. “Did you just offer to take me home with you?”

“Ah, the flirter,” Dr. Steph said.

“He’s about to be a dead flirter,” I said.

“I’m just kidding,” Anders said.

“Here’s the deal,” Dr. Steph said. “The baby is fine. Heartbeat is strong. Size is fine. Your baby is starting to get into position. Doesn’t mean you’re going into labor tonight. But this is what the little ones do. They get themselves ready for that final push. Good news is that as long as he or she stays head down, everything should be okay. Now as far as the pain goes, it seems like the little one wanted to remind Mom and Dad of their existence.”

“Well played, kid,” Anders said to my stomach.

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“It means the baby was more than likely sitting on something,” Dr. Steph said. “Nerves, muscles, whatever. That’s what sent the sharp pain into your leg and back. Also, you need to relax a little, Willow. You’re very pregnant now. This isn’t the time to prove anything to anyone.”

“You’re telling me to slow down.”

“I have to,” Dr. Steph said. “I can’t keep meeting you here like this. I was just about to have a glass of wine.”

“Lucky for the husband, huh?” Anders asked.

“No husband tonight,” Dr. Steph said. “He’s away. Wine and fresh batteries will do the trick just fine.”

“Good for you,” Anders said.

“Now if only Willow stuck to that, huh?” Dr. Steph asked with a smile.



“You’re telling me,” I said. I curled my lip at Anders. “But Anders is much better than batteries.”

“If you think that’s true then you’ve never had a really good toy,” Dr. Steph said. “Now, back on topic here, you’re going to be okay, Willow. But you need to slow it all down. A lot. We don’t want the little one here just yet.”

“But if the baby came right now...”

“I can’t predict anything,” Dr. Steph said. “I don’t say things I don’t mean. But if your baby was born tonight, I think he or she would be just fine. A trip to the NICU for sure. But that’s okay too.”

“That eases my mind a lot,” I confessed.

“Good,” Dr. Steph said. “I’m glad you called me. I’m glad I can be here for this. Last thing I would ever want is for you to be pushed around here and scared. Look, the end of pregnancy isn’t exactly glamorous. Some women can act normal right up until their water breaks. Other women are bed bound from a few months in. This isn’t a movie or sitcom. You have to listen to your body and listen to your baby. With that said, any kind of strange pains or anything, always call me.”

“It came out of nowhere,” I said. “Anders and I were talking and then...” I swallowed hard. “I went into the bathroom for a minute. I was standing at the sink and all of a sudden there was this jolt. My right leg, hip, and back. I screamed and the pain moved everywhere else.”

“Now you know you’re okay,” Dr. Steph said. “Keep yourself as calm as you can though. Which is harder to do than it is to say.”

Dr. Steph offered a smile.

Then she hugged me.

Tight.

She and Anders shook hands.

He wished her luck with her wine and her batteries.

Dr. Steph told him that once nine hit, she had to be a *good girl*.

I felt guilty now.

Dr. Steph was a busy woman and mom and had a night to herself, then I messed it up.

Not that she was ready to go home yet.

She said she would wait until I was out of the hospital before leaving.

When she left the room, I looked at Anders.

He hurried to lower his mouth to mine.

He kissed me.

First, soft and sweet.

Then, hard and caring.

I clawed at his face.

He touched the back of my neck.

We were fully making out.

I actually wondered for a moment if he was going to climb into the hospital bed and see just how fast he could make my heart beat.

Anders didn't do that.

He broke the kiss and pulled up a chair next to the bed.

He sat down and grabbed my hand.

“Dodged a bullet,” I said.

“Not even close, babe,” he said. “This is my fault.”

“What?”

“Look, we were talking and then...”

“Oh, Anders.”

“I caused a lot at once, Willow. First, we were in bed. Having fun. Next thing you know, there’s a whole bunch of boxes in your apartment. Nothing built yet. Total clutter. I should have thought that out better.”

“Anders, you didn’t...”

“Yes, I did,” he said. “You heard what Dr. Steph said. You have to keep things calm.”

“I will do that,” I said. “I’ll talk to my boss. I’ll have less showings. Maybe I’ll just take a break until after the baby is born.”

“It’s more than that, Willow,” Anders said.

He stood up.

“What is it?” I asked.

“I... I’ve got a lot going on in my head and heart for you and the baby,” he said. “But look at tonight. Look at right now. You need to call your family. Tell them what’s going on.”

I needed my phone.

Anders got it for me without me asking.

I had texts from Kay.

Wanting to know what I was up to. Then wanting to know why I wasn’t answering.

Her last text?

*She was on her way to my apartment to check on me.*

“Oh, shit,” I whispered.

I quickly texted Kay.

Before I even thought about taking a minute and coming up with a decent lie, I told the truth.

That I was at the hospital.

That I felt pain but the baby is okay.

As soon as I sent the text, I looked at Anders.

“You have to stay calm,” he said. “Text me later when you can, babe. I’ll have my phone in my hand at all times.”

“Anders...”

“It’s what we have to do right now,” he said. “We can’t tell them right now. Not tonight. Not like this. You have to keep yourself calm. Relaxed. It’ll be okay. I promise it’ll be okay.”

He leaned down again and kissed me.

As my tongue tried to taste his lips, my phone started to ring.

My mother was calling.

Which meant Kay had begun to spread the news of me being in the hospital.

*Which meant it was time for Anders to leave.*

## Chapter Thirty-Eight

---

### ANDERS

**W**illow called me right around midnight.

“You answered,” Willow gasped when she heard my voice.

“I promised you I would. How are you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Physically?”

“Things are touchy,” she said. “I still have some aches and pains. But as long as I keep myself breathing and calm, I’m okay. I think I panicked earlier.”

“Of course you panicked, babe. You felt a jolt of pain. You having no idea what to expect when it’s time to have this happen.”

“Anders, how do you know what to say to me?”

“I honestly don’t know,” I said. “Can I say I’m trusting my heart?”

“That makes me want to have you come over here...”

“I’m on my way, babe.”

“You can’t.”

“Your sister?”

“Kay is on the couch,” Willow said. “I’m in the bathroom, hiding. How sad, right?”

“Not at all.”

“My mother tried to get her out of here. She tried to help us. But she had her hands full. Especially with my father.”

“I bet he was nervous, huh?”

“Well, when Dad gets nervous, he gets angry.”

“I’ve seen that side,” I laughed.

“Yeah, well, he was scared for me, for the baby, and then it turned into anger and rage for the father of the baby.”

“So he threatened my life again?”

“Oh, he said he wanted to rent out a surgery room and strap you to the table and have his way.”

“Wow,” I said. “That’s violent.”

“Anders... I’m sorry.”

“No, babe. No doing that right now either. You need to get some good rest. Look at all the people who care about you.”

“Don’t try to make this situation seem good. This sucks, Anders. You should be here right now with me. I need you here.”

“Then I’ll sit on the phone with you all night,” I offered.

“And what do I do? Sit in the bathroom all night and pretend that I ate fifty bad tacos and can’t get off the toilet?”

I smiled. “I don’t know, babe. How about we both get some shut eye and talk in the morning?”

“Fine. Goodnight, Anders.”

“Goodnight, Willow. Thank you for taking good care of our baby.”

“Ugh,” she groaned. “Saying the right crap all the time. It’s like you want me to tell you I love you or something.”

“Don’t do that, babe. If you tell me you love me then I’m going to tell you that I love you. Then what?”

“You’re right. Let’s get some sleep.”

The call ended.

I sat down on the arm of my couch and stared at my phone.

I was in love with Willow.

And our baby.

*Now I needed to figure out how to make this family happen.*



MAGS BLEW THE WHISTLE TO END PRACTICE.

I took my mask off and grabbed my water bottle.

The guys all closed in on me.

We touched sticks, gave fist bumps, the usual stuff at the end of practice.

These practices were focused and intense.

This close to getting to the finals, we didn’t have a second to waste.

“Hey, how’s Willow?” Luc asked.

“Heard she was in the hospital,” Nolan said.

I looked around the ice.

No sight of Coach Pete.

“She’s good,” I said. “Just a little scare. The way the baby is sitting. That’s all.”

“You should have told us,” Nesh said.

“I probably should have,” I said. “Sorry about that. There’s a lot going on.”

“Nobody else knows?” Cain asked.

I shook my head.

“Hey,” Roman said with a smile. “The secret sex has to be hot though, right? Secret, pregnant sex. Damn, that makes me a little jealous.”

“It’s not that simple, Roman,” I said.

“It is to me,” he said.

“Can you ever be serious?” Nolan asked Roman.

“No,” Roman said.

“It’s all good,” I said. “Thanks for checking up on me. On things. It’s just so messed up. I got Willow a bunch of stuff for the baby. Now she’s really ready in her place. And my place...”

“It’ll work out,” Cain said. “Let it work out.”

“I was thinking about something,” Nesh said. “What if we all go talk to Coach Pete together? We’ll have your back, Anders. You know? He can’t attack all of us. He can’t kill all of us.”



“That’s a great idea,” Luc said.

“Guys, don’t do that,” I said. “That means a lot, but we have to keep things the way they are now.”

“Seriously, if we can help at all,” Luc said.

“Let’s just win this thing,” I said. “The entire thing. No more fucking around. I’m sick of getting close and then it falls apart.”

“Not this year,” Cain said. “No fucking chance we’re falling apart this year.”

“I can’t wait to hold that thing above my head,” Roman said. “And press my lips to it. I might even tongue fuck it a little.”

“That’s probably not the weirdest thing you’ve ever tongue fucked,” I said.

“Not even close,” Roman said with a wink.

Then he flickered his tongue at all of us like a snake.

Before I had the chance to laugh, I heard my name bellowed from across the ice.

Coach Pete’s voice carried far.

And his eyes stared right at me.

“Anders! In my office! Right now!”

“Great,” I said.

“Fuck, I hope he doesn’t know,” Roman said.

“Why would you say that to him?” Nolan asked.

“Should we go with you?” Nesh offered.

“No, I’ve got this,” I said.

*If Coach Pete wanted to kill his star goalie for getting his daughter pregnant... then I guess that meant my time was officially up.*



I TOOK A MINUTE TO GET OUT OF MY PADS BEFORE WALKING TO the office.

I knocked on the door once and Coach Pete roared for me to enter.

The guy was pissed.

It couldn't have been about my playing either.

I was setting records left and right.

When we practiced, I acted like I was in a game.

That left one thing for Coach Pete to talk about.

*His daughter.*

*The woman I got pregnant.*

*The woman I loved.*

*His Willow.*

*My Willow.*

“Fuck,” I whispered as I stepped into the office.

I was barefoot and smelled like dried, filthy sweat.

“Should I shower first?” I asked.

“You think I care how you smell?”

“Just offering.”

“Sit down, Anders.”

I nodded and slowly sat down.

My eyes scanned the desk, thinking of all the things Coach Pete could use as weapons.

Or he could just grab a hockey stick.

A hockey skate.

Or maybe he'd just come at me with fists.

The man was built for fighting, no matter his age.

Coach Pete sat back in his chair. "I want to talk to you about my daughter."

*Oh. Shit.*

*This is really happening.*

*Fuck...*

My back stiffened. "Go for it."

"Do you think I'm stupid, Anders?"

"No."

"I know what you did."

I instantly hung my head.

Ready for Coach Pete to take his best shot at me.

Only then maybe I'd get the chance to explain how I felt about his daughter.

"Anders, I need you to look at me when I'm talking to you."

"I don't think I can," I said. "Coach Pete..."

"I said to look me in the eyes like a fucking man," he growled.

I lifted my gaze and then I stood up. “Fine. I’m looking at you. Man to man. You want to do this? Let’s do this. Last time I checked, we have a championship to win. For ourselves. And for this team.”

Coach Pete stood up. He nodded. Slowly, he opened his right hand and extended it my way.

“What’s that for?” I asked.

“For what you did for my daughter,” he said. “And for my grandchild. You saved them both, Anders.”

I grabbed Coach’s right hand and shook it.

“Willow told me what happened,” he said. “I felt bad asking her how she got to the hospital. It scared me to think that she drove herself, you know? She said she collapsed to the bathroom floor and grabbed her phone and you were the first person she managed to call.”

“She told you that?” I asked.

“Yes, she did,” Coach Pete said. “She said you told her a while ago that if she needed anything you’d help out. To make it easier for her and for me. You’re a good man, Anders. I wished you would have stayed at the hospital though. You didn’t need to run off. You didn’t need to hide from me.”

My jaw tightened. “I guess I didn’t want any other worries or whatever.”

“You have nothing to worry about, Anders.” Coach gripped my hand a little and then let it go. “Have a beer with me.”

“Yeah,” I said. “I think I would like that.”

Coach Pete walked to a mini-fridge and opened it.

He looked back at me, smiling.

“My wife got this for me a while ago,” he said. “She wanted me to keep healthy snacks in here. Of course I use it for beer. She knows it too. But she meant well. I love that woman.”

“You seem like you have a good marriage,” I said.

“A great marriage. She’s the driver of it all though.” Coach Pete handed me a beer bottle. “Don’t tell anyone I said that either. I get to be the alpha around the ice. But at home?”

I smiled. “Cheers to your family, Coach Pete. No matter what the circumstances are.”

“I can drink to that,” he said. “And, you know, it’s not all that.”

“You mean with your daughter being pregnant?”

“Well, you know...” He plopped down and twisted the cap off his bottle.

I slowly sat and did the same.

“Hey, Anders,” he said. “You seemed a little defensive a minute ago. You jumped right up. What was that about?”

“Honestly? I thought you were going to get mad at me for being near Willow. I was ready to defend myself. And you know what, Coach Pete? Maybe it’s time you-”

“You did something for my family,” he said. “You did good, Anders. Not sure anyone else would have the calm poise you have. That goalie brain, right?”

“Hey, if all else fails, maybe I’ll help with the baby,” I said. “You can... adopt me...”

I laughed.

Coach Pete's face went serious.

Way too serious.

*Oh fuck...*

"I'm not sure I follow," he said.

"Dumb joke," I said.

"Look, Anders, no offense to you, but I don't need to have to kill two people, you know?" He grinned for a second, then shook his head. "You know, it does bother me inside. To think about my daughter being alone like that. And some guy is out there, waving his dick around, no care in the world. I know my daughter isn't an angel in all of this. But I just..."

"You're protective," I said. "I respect that. I can..."

*I can live with that, Coach Pete. But you need to realize I love Willow and that's my baby inside her belly.*

"Hey," Coach Pete said. "Let's talk hockey! Can you believe how fucking close we are, Anders? We're going to fucking do this, aren't we? This year is happening."

"It really is happening, Coach Pete," I said. "The craziest, most shocking year of your life and mine."

"Now that I can drink to," Coach Pete said. "Cheers, Anders."

He stuck his beer bottle out toward me.

I clanked mine against his and nodded.

*"Cheers."*

## Chapter Thirty-Nine

### WILLOW

I bite into the ranch dressing covered baby carrot and I spit it right back out.

Like a child trying a new food.

Embarrassment hit me hard as Mom stared and laughed.

“I did not mean to do that,” I said.

I quickly reached for a napkin to clean up my mess.

“Baby doesn’t like it?” Mom asked.

“I guess not. That was...”

“Instant,” she said.

“Yes. I can’t believe I just spit it out like that.”

“That happens. When I was pregnant with you, the smell of bacon made me throw up. Your father was not happy about that. For four months he couldn’t eat bacon.”

“What about with Kay?”

“With Kay I just felt miserable from day one.”

“So you’re saying from day one my sister has been a pain in your butt? And it didn’t stop after birth, right?”

“Easy now,” Mom said. “Kay isn’t here to defend herself.”

“Yeah, she’s out on a date.”

I wiggled my eyebrows.

“You have no ground to stand on and make fun of anyone when it comes to dating,” Mom said. “Or booty calls.”

I touched my stomach. “Are you insulting your grandchild?”

“No. I’m not pointing out the fact that my normally smart daughter decided to think with her clitoris instead of her brain.”

“Mom,” I said as I cringed. “Two things. First off, don’t ever say *booty call* again. And second, don’t ever say *clitoris*.”

“What am I supposed to call it?”

“How about nothing?” I asked. “Do you want me to throw up some more food?”

Mom laughed and glanced over her shoulder. “Oh, I think the game is back on. Come on. Don’t worry, I’ll grab the veggie tray.”

“And I’ll grab all the delicious deep fried food,” I said.

I sniffed the air and smiled.

“At least the good food doesn’t make you sick,” Mom said.

“Agreed.”

Back in the living room, I put the food on the table and gently tried to sit down.



Which wasn't possible anymore with my current condition.

I was able to stick my butt back toward the couch, then I had to rock back on my heels and just *plop*.

And that's what I did.

When I hit the couch, Mom almost got launched off it.

I leaned back, touched my stomach and let out a long breath.

"Makes you feel like you can't breathe, huh?" Mom asked.

"Yes," I said. "I can't believe how big I am."

"What did you think would happen when you got pregnant?"

"Not sure. I didn't really plan this out."

Mom smiled at me and then touched my shoulder. "Look. There he is. Getting back into his spot."

I looked at the massive television hung above the fireplace.

The screen was big and the picture so clear I could see everything about Anders.

He stood with his mask on his face, drinking water, looking *fucking* sexy.

"You're curling your toes," Mom pointed out. "Are you..."

"No!" I cried out.

Mom laughed. She placed her hands to my stomach and leaned forward.

"Hey there," she said. "It's your grandmother. I just want you to know I'm watching your daddy play goalie. If the team finishes this period with the lead, they're going to the finals."

I swallowed hard and thought about that.

Life had been chaotic to say the least.

More than ever before.

The *Inci Warriors* were so close to the finals.

They were up three games to two on Denver.

They actually won three games in a row.

Then they lost the next.

*Then they lost again.*

Dad was flipping his lid about that.

And now... it came down to this last period.

The *Inci Warriors* were up three goals to one.

Denver was big and fast though. Definitely not ready to quit the game.

Mom kissed my stomach and looked at me.

“What?” I asked.

“I hope I haven’t let you down, Willow.”

“Let me down? About what?”

“The pregnancy. It just feels so... different.”

“It is. My decision though. Remember?”

“I just pictured if one of my daughters ever got pregnant it would be...”

“I’m the one who owes you an apology,” I said.

“Willow, no.”

“Yes, Mom. Yes. You wanted to do so much for me and I pushed you away. I felt like I had to push you away. Just to be

safe.”

“Sometimes I want to smack your father.”

“I did that too. You know what happened before.”

Mom grabbed my shoulder. “I’m sorry for bringing this up, Willow. I don’t want to put a damper on our night.”

“I promise, Mom, I’m going to figure this all out. There has to be a way to make it all work out. It’s a little backwards but that’s how we are. That’s how love is, right?”

Mom almost dove off the couch.

She turned, bending her left leg, facing me, forgetting all about the hockey game.

“Look, they’re showing Dad,” I said.

Mom waved a hand. “I don’t care. You just said the word *love*.”

I looked down and shook my head. “I meant...”

“Willow?”

I bit my bottom lip for a second. “Okay. I’m in love with him, Mom.” I looked at her. “I love Anders.”

“That’s so exciting.”

“Is it?”

“Of course it is!”

“It’s so messed up though. We hook up one time and I get pregnant. And now we fall in love?”

“*We*?” Mom asked. “Has he...?”

“No,” I said. “I mean, not directly. We kind of have this way of talking but not talking.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Like he’ll say to me *I won’t tell you what to do but if I was going to...* and then tell me something. You know what I mean?”

“That sounds adorable.”

“I guess it is. Just a complicated version of adorable.”

“Hey, want to know something?”

“Sure.”

“Your grandfather *hated* your father in the beginning.”

“What? Grandpa Duke hated Dad?”

“Big time,” Mom said. “He didn’t like the way we met. Or that your father threw his life into the air for me. He always felt your father was going to end up controlling me or regretting it.”

“What changed?”

“He just saw it over time,” Mom said. “Little by little. Like the time I got a flat tire and it was pouring rain and your father came out to get me. Or the time I was really sick with the flu and your father took care of me. I think what did it though was the time your father bought me tampons.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes,” Mom said. “Your grandfather liked to use a metal detector on the beach. He swore to himself he was going to find a rare coin and wind up rich. Your father went with him one time. He wanted to ask your grandfather for permission to ask me to marry him. Only he didn’t ask. Your grandfather had him digging holes with nothing in them. Just to be an ass. I ended up getting my period and I needed tampons. So I called

your father. He didn't hesitate for a second to go into a store and get them. I think that won your grandfather over for good."

"I didn't realize that," I said. "Do you think Dad will eventually be okay with this?"

"Probably," Mom smiled. "You know how he is. And how these situations go. Truthfully, the longer you wait the more of a shock it'll be."

"Great."

"But I also think we all understand what this is."

"What is it, Mom?"

"What you just said. You and Anders got together. You weren't planning on making a baby but you did. Now through all the *stuff* that comes with that, you've fallen for each other."

"I told him to leave. To stay away. He refused."

"He's a good man. And he's very good looking."

"Mom..."

She smiled. "Just saying."

She reached for the table and grabbed the tray of delicious fried foods.

I leaned back into the couch a little more and balanced it on my stomach.

"Built-in table," I said.

"Not for long," Mom said. "No offense, but you look ready to pop."

I stared at the television screen.

Denver had the puck.

They were on the move.

They dumped the puck behind the net.

Cain went into the back for a vicious hit, making the boards shake.

The puck popped free and one of Denver's guys got the puck, turned and took a quick shot.

Anders had his glove right there, stealing the shot.

The whistle blew and Anders moved his mask up to get another drink.

He really was sexy. And good to me. Good to our unborn baby.

The baby kicked a few times.

The tray on my stomach wobbled.

Almost like a scale.

*Do I really love Anders or not?*

Of course I knew the truth to that one.

*For all I figured, I probably fell in love with Anders the night I met him.*



THE *INCI WARRIORS* HAD DONE IT.

With a final score of five to two, they were officially advancing to the finals.

It was the first time any of the starting guys on the team were in the finals.

And it was the first time Dad was in the finals as a head coach.

As soon as the game was over, Mom told me she needed to get to Dad to celebrate.

I took that as my hint to leave, which I had no problem doing.

Being as pregnant as I was meant being tired all the time.

Driving back to my apartment, then getting into my apartment, it felt like I ran twenty miles.

I waddled my way through the apartment and into my bedroom.

When I flicked on the lights, I looked at the crib, the changing table, and the rocking chair.

I smiled.

Throughout all the chaos of hockey and sneaking around, Anders found time to build everything he had gotten for the baby.

I walked to the crib and touched the smooth wood.

I hadn't decided on a theme or colors or anything like that.

Anders wanted hockey. *Duh.*

I had no idea what I wanted.

Or maybe I secretly did know what I wanted.

I didn't want to live here.

Not in this apartment.

Not with a baby.

I wanted a different place.

A big enough place for *us*.

For me. For the baby. For Anders too.

A place right on the beach where I could go for walks and Anders could go for runs or surf or whatever he liked to do.

I could take the baby down to the beach on nice days.

A relaxing, enjoyable life as a family.

I ended up sitting on the edge of my bed.

I looked at my phone.

**Hey - congrats. You guys are going to win it all. I can feel it.**

Not exactly a text message of romance.

Anders not only read the text, he replied.

**Thanks babe. What a wild ride. Still not over. Glad you were watching. Hey - I think we need to talk. A real talk.**

I took a deep breath and nodded.

*A real talk.*

There were a handful of directions that something deemed *a real talk* could go.

I touched my stomach with my left hand.

With my right hand, I agreed that Anders and I needed to talk.

Between the baby kicking the side of my belly and now Anders's text...

*I was not going to get much sleep tonight.*



## Chapter Forty

---

### ANDERS

**W**e celebrated.

We playfully trashed the locker room, turning it into one gigantic party area.

A bunch of hockey players just going crazy.

After all the work - and not just this season - we were finally getting our chance to win it all.

Mags stopped the fun to give a speech.

He stood on a chair. “Guys, I just want to say one thing. That I’m proud of you all. I’m proud of this team. I’m proud of everything right now. We didn’t give up. Not once this season. And now we’re down to... four games. Who’s got four more wins in them?”

We erupted in screams.

Roman charged after Mags and ended up putting our assistant coach over his shoulder and running around the locker room.

Then Coach Pete wandered into the fun and whistled.

Everything went silent.

Roman put Mags back on his feet.

“Not much more to say here,” Coach Pete said. “I don’t want to put a damper on the celebration. You’ve earned this. But we’ve got more work to do. I don’t think this team came this far to stop now. One thing we can’t do right now is let the moment get too big. We have to play the game like we know how to play it. The vibe outside this locker room is going to change. But our approach? Our game? Our attitude? That doesn’t change. Four wins to make history.”

“Four fucking wins,” Nesh growled.

“I feel like getting naked!” Roman cried out.

And that was when the celebration began to end.

*Thanks, Roman.*

I didn’t mind all that much because I needed to get to Willow.

She and I were overdue for a talk.

I turned and saw Luc standing right behind me.

A grin on his face.

He put his arms around me. “How is she?”

“Pregnant.”

“Come on, Anders.”

“I can’t do this right here. He’s right behind me. I’ve got to get out of here.”

“Okay,” Luc said. He patted my back. “I can’t wait for this to happen. You’re having a baby and we’re winning it all.”

Luc broke the hug and walked toward Cain.

Cain warned Luc if he tried hugging him, he'd break Luc in half.

All the work I had put in to get to this moment and all I wanted to do was get out of it.

That just proved how much I cared about Willow.

How much I loved her.

I rubbed my jaw.

*I loved her.*

“And then we have our stoic goalie,” Coach Pete called out, pointing right at me. “Look at him. Calm as can be. Can't even embrace the celebration. I bet he's already thinking about his strategy on how to play. Right?”

“That's right,” I called out.

I lied to Coach Pete for what felt like the millionth time.

Why not, right?

The least of his worries would be me lying about some hockey games.

*Especially when you compared it to the fact that I was the one who got his daughter pregnant.*



MY HANDS RESTED AGAINST THE SIDES OF WILLOW'S pregnant stomach.

My son - *or daughter* - kicked me a few times.

The baby felt strong.

Definitely big.

The last appointment Willow had with Dr. Steph showed everything was perfect.

Now it just came down to waiting.

She still had a little bit of time before she was due, but according to Dr. Steph, it could happen any day now.

I brushed my lips against Willow's.

She flirted her tongue to my lips, wanting more.

She grabbed my hands and moved them up her body.

Making me cup her breasts over her hoodie.

Her now favorite hoodie - which was my hoodie.

"You're not getting out of this, babe," I whispered.

"Want to bet?" Willow purred.

She backed away from me and turned away.

She then wiggled her way out of the hoodie, standing naked with her back facing me.

Her hips and the curve of her ass... the backs of her legs...

"Still not going to work," I said, already lying.

Willow turned around to face me.

Her green eyes so bright and beautiful.

Her hair pulled back but messy.

Everything pretty. Sexy.

Lusty. Pregnant.

My eyes spun and I almost started to get dizzy.

I looked at Willow's body and couldn't believe how I felt.

Turned on. Wanting her. My lips demanding I kiss her. My tongue suddenly dry, telling my brain her body was the only source of nourishment in the world.

Then at the exact same time, my heart raced, appreciating what I stared at.

Her full breasts, full belly, carrying my unborn child.

“I’ll be in the shower,” Willow said. “Join me if you’d like.”

“Willow, we need to talk about everything,” I said.

She was already gone.

Playing games with me now.

Fucking with my head. My heart. Fucking with my cock.

Knowing my entire existence had been just to enjoy my life.

Play hockey. Sign big contracts. Enjoy all the women I could find.

Now I was reduced to one woman - by choice.

And now that woman was going to fuck with me like this?

I listened to the sound of the water being turned on.

I swiped Willow’s hoodie off the floor and joined her in the bathroom.

She already stood in the shower.

She poked her head out, her face dripping wet.

Smiling at me.

“Coming in?”

I gritted my teeth and dropped her hoodie to the floor.

Serious conversation or not, there was a basic concept when it came to life.

*If Willow was naked. If Willow was in the shower. If Willow wanted me to join her.*

*Then I had to join her.*

I stripped out of my clothes and stepped into the shower.

Willow almost pounced on me.

Moving closer, her hands reaching between my legs, her wet hands sliding along my cock.

Stroking and tugging, biting her lip as I grew harder by the second.

My hands cupped her under her heavy breasts, lifting them, my thumbs flicking over her nipples.

Wet, smooth, and hot...

“This is not fair, babe,” I said.

“Yeah? Neither is getting someone pregnant during a one-time hookup.”

“But look what it got us. We get to hookup all the time now.”

“Exactly. Quit worrying about talking. Just hookup with me.”

I closed in on her and cradled her beautiful pregnant body.

She leaned against the wall, opened her legs and thrust herself toward me.

My cock lined itself up to her body and I pressed forward.

The welcoming hot sheath rippled throughout my entire body.

Willow became everything to me in that moment.

It was more than lust, fucking, getting pregnant, and even more than just falling in love.

My right hand traveled up her body and eased behind her neck.

My left hand eased over her breast.

I squeezed tight.

Firm. Hard.

*Mine... all mine...*

Willow shut her eyes and put her head back.

I sank deeper into her body and she let out a long groan.

I curled my back and leaned down, pressing my lips to her wet chest.

My tongue lapped up the shower water off her skin, up to her neck.

There I kissed her. I growled.

I buried my face into her neck.

*And I began to fuck her... hard.*



WILLOW REACHED UP AND PULLED HER WET HAIR OUT FROM the inside of the hoodie.

She turned from the mirror and I sat on the corner of her bed, wearing only jeans, and reached for her.

Reluctant at first, she finally offered her hands to me and I gently pulled her closer to me.

As she got closer, I had to touch her stomach again.

I kissed her stomach.

I rested my head on her stomach.

She dug her hands into my hair.

The baby kicked the side of my face.

I smiled.

“Anders,” Willow whispered.

“I have to know, babe,” I said. “I have to know everything.”

“I know you do,” she said.

I lifted my gaze to her eyes. “This is more than just a baby between us. At least it is for me. I can’t imagine you being here alone with the baby. Without me here. I can’t imagine me having the baby alone. Without you with me. I don’t think that’s what we’re supposed to be, Willow.”

She swallowed hard.

Her chin began to quiver.

I stood up from the bed and touched her face.

“I’ll protect you and love you and show the world just who I am for you,” I said. “Only for you.”

She swallowed hard a second time. “I was a teacher. Do you remember that?”

“Maybe,” I said. “You watched Luc’s kid, right?”

“Yes. I babysat Isla a few times. In fact, they stopped asking me when I found out I was pregnant. But by then I had moved into a new career and I was busier anyway. It was all really quick. Kind of... crazy...”



“Did you want to change careers?”

“I’m not sure,” Willow said. “It was something I wanted to do. I always did stuff like that. My father leaned on me more than he did with Kay. I guess I was supposed to be the smart one and rich one and all that.”

“That doesn’t seem fair.”

“It’s not about being fair. That’s just who I was. And when I wanted to become a teacher, I got into money trouble. My father was there for me. When I wanted to leave teaching, I got into money trouble again. My father was there for me. He was always there for me, Anders. The worst though? There was someone...”

I touched her chin and smiled. “It’s okay to talk about other guys, babe. I won’t get too jealous.”

“This wasn’t a good thing,” she whispered. “He was sort of my boss. And he wanted money to keep things quiet. He used me. He used my family.”

“Money...”

“He wanted a scandal,” Willow said. “He wanted to have this huge story about me and him, then drag my family into it. Which would have brought my father into it. What would have happened then?”

“You were worried about his job,” I said. “Your father’s job. As a coach. As a sports figure.”

“It was bad, Anders. It got really tense for a while. Then there were rumors about me and my parents started getting involved. I felt like I was being setup and scammed.”

“Sounds like you were, babe. Did this guy get what he wanted?”

“No. My father paid him a visit. Man to man. He handled it in his own way and the guy backed right down. But I had to leave my job. See, my father always protected me. Kay too. He dreamed of having sons but when he had daughters he was just so overprotective from day one. Which isn’t a bad thing, but sometimes it feels suffocating.”

“So you really think he would want to kill me,” I said. “After all we’ve been through?”

“I don’t know about right now, Anders. I just know in the beginning? After everything that happened? And you being you? What were we supposed to do?”

I didn’t have an answer for Willow.

And even if I did, that was the past.

I knew what I wanted now.

“What do you want now, Willow?” I asked. “Tell me the truth.”

“I want you,” she said. “I want to have this baby and you be right by my side. I want to have a family. I don’t want to live here alone. I don’t want you to live alone. I want us. I love you, Anders. Okay? I fucking love you!”

*And there it is...*

“Yeah? Well I fucking love you too, Willow.”

We kissed.

A tear rolled down her right cheek.

“Now if we only knew a real estate person to find us a place,” I said.

I never saw Willow move so fast before.

She jumped away from me, grabbed my hand, and pulled.

“Let’s order pizza and look at places,” she said.

“Perfect,” I said. “What crazy topping do you want tonight?”

“Pineapple?”

“That’s a dealbreaker for me, babe,” I said.

She laughed.

We rushed out of the bedroom.

She wore nothing but my hoodie.

I wore nothing but my jeans.

We were in love. Going to have a baby together.

It was all coming together.

Then Willow dug her feet into the floor, came to a sudden stop, touched her stomach, and let out a gasp.

I opened my mouth to ask her what was wrong, but I had no voice.

*All I could do was stare at Coach Pete as he stared right back at me.*

## Chapter Forty-One

### WILLOW

**T**he last time I saw Dr. Steph she begged me to stay calm, quiet, and relaxed.

I again asked her if the baby was healthy and if the baby came early, would he or she be okay.

Dr. Steph reassured me things would be just fine.

She just preferred things to be calm and let my body do its job.

That's all I thought about as I stood in nothing but a hoodie, staring at my father.

Anders right behind me. Shirtless.

“Thought I would check on you,” Dad said. “Wanted to talk about some stuff. Didn't know you had someone over.”

“Coach Pete, I can explain this,” Anders said as he stepped around me.

Blocking me.

Thinking he was protecting me.

“Why the hell are you in my daughter’s apartment not wearing a shirt?” Dad asked Anders.

“Well, that’s easy to explain,” Anders said.

“We just got out of the shower together,” I blurted out.

Anders slowly turned his head and looked down at me.

His eyes grew wide.

I felt my body shaking as I stood next to Anders once again.

“You can see what this is, Dad,” I said. “I can’t do this anymore. I can’t hide this anymore. I just can’t...”

“Coach Pete,” Anders said. “Why don’t we go grab a beer and talk about this? This is all my fault. Everything happening right now is my fault.”

“Anders, no,” I said. “I was the one who said we needed to keep it a secret. I forced you to keep this all a secret.”

Anders looked at me again. “Babe, let him kill me. I don’t care. This is all on me. I got you pregnant.”

“You weren’t alone that night,” I said. “I was the one who came on to you.”

“You didn’t come on to me,” he said. “I was the one who wanted you first.”

“Not a chance, Anders. I saw you and just knew I-”

I heard a door slam.

I looked.

My father was gone.

“I’ll go get him,” Anders said.

He took one step and I grabbed his hands with both my hands and pulled him back.

“You can’t do that,” I said. “He’s going to call my mother. This is all blowing up now.”

“That’s okay, babe. I’m here. It’s time for this to blow up.”

“I have to go talk to him.”

“*We* have to go talk to him,” Anders said.

“Do you want to be there for me, Anders? Do you really mean it?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Then you’ll stay right here. I have to go.”

“I’m taking you,” Anders said. “You are not going to try and drive like this. Your hands are shaking. Your face is pale. You know you can’t be stressed and scared right now. There’s no way I’m not going to be with you.”

“Anders...”

“I’ll stay in the damn car.”

“Stay in the car?”

“You said it yourself, he’s going to call your mother. You need to do the same. And then call your sister. Get it all in the open. I’ll drive while you make your calls. He’s going to rush home to your mother, right?”

“Probably,” I whispered.

“Then let’s go. I’ll drive. You make your calls. And when we get there, I’ll stay in the car and wait.”

“Anders, I’m so sorry about all of this right now.”

“You have nothing to ever be sorry about,” I said. “I think it’s expected to have issues with your in-laws, right? This is how it goes.”

“In-laws?” I asked. “What... are we married now?”

“Not yet, babe,” Anders said.

He kissed my forehead.

Then he went to put on a shirt.

I realized I needed to put on some clothes too.

I quickly text my mother one thing.

**THE SHIT HAS HIT THE FAN!**

She replied two seconds later.

**I KNOW.**

My hands were indeed shaking.

I felt pale, clammy and cold.

Almost sickly.

I had to calm down.

For the sake of the baby.

I couldn’t take back or undo what was done.

I stepped into my bedroom just as Anders finished getting dressed.

My phone went off again.

This time from Kay.

**YOU GOT PREGNANT BY ANDERS?! OMG! HES SO HOT! WTF! WHY DIDNT YOU TELL ME!!!!**

I took a step and looked at Anders.

I reached for him.

He jumped to be right by my side.

“Talk to me, babe,” he whispered.

“This is all crashing down,” I said.

“It’s not crashing down. We’re just moving forward. This is a storm. That’s all. We have each other. I’m not going anywhere, Willow. I don’t care if your father hates me for the rest of his life. I don’t care if he gets me traded.”

“Don’t say stuff like that! I don’t want a broken family! A family that fights!”

He hugged me.

I wanted to cry but wasn’t able to.

I shut my eyes and took deep breaths, smelling Anders’s shirt.

I needed to be calm.

*Or at least attempt to be calm.*



ANDERS PARKED THE CAR, GRABBED MY LEFT HAND AND kissed it.

“This is fucked up, right?” I whispered.

“Majorly fucked up. But I’m going to sit right here and wait.”

“I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Of course not. Your father is a stubborn asshole. But he’s a good man. A great coach. And if anything, babe, it’s up to me to win your father over. I’ll make this a family.”



“It’s so hot hearing you say stuff like that. But I don’t know about this one. I have to go.”

I climbed out of the car and waddled toward the house.

This was all messed up. More than I thought possible.

Kay waited for me on the porch.

Her face in total shock.

She blocked the door.

“Is he with you right now, Willow?”

“He drove me here. I told him to wait in the car. I need to talk to everyone.”

“Talk to me first. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t tell...”

“Mom knew.”

“Mom caught us.”

“Wait, she caught you how?”

“At a condo I was showing. I was waiting for Anders. I was kind of naked.”

“Holy shit,” Kay said. “What kind of life have you been living behind everyone’s back?”

“A hectic one,” I said. I touched my stomach. “But a good one.”

“Anders.”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“The party before the season.”

Kay’s eyes went even wider. “How? We were all...”

“Under a pier,” I said. “Up against one of the posts. Okay?”

“Wow, Willow,” Kay said. “You’re... wild.”

“Speaking of wild, how is Dad?”

“He’s pissed. Big time.”

“I have to go in there,” I said.

“He’s in the kitchen. Drinking his scotch from the bottle.”

“Mom with him?”

“Yes,” Kay said.

“Will you hold my hand?”

“Of course. I’ve got your back. But, hey, Anders. Is that something good?”

“It’s something great, Kay. I wasn’t sure at first for the obvious reasons. But he’s the greatest guy I’ve ever met. All he’s done is take care of me. Sneaking around to see me, be with me, everything. Sneaking to the doctor appointments. He’s the one who got the crib and all that. And he built it.”

“I knew you didn’t build that yourself,” Kay said. “I feel like an idiot I didn’t pick up on any clues.”

Kay slipped her hand into mine and we went into the house.

Our childhood home.

The pocket doors leading to the living room had little notches in the wood measuring mine and Kay’s height throughout the years. With our names and dates.

The stairs that led to our bedrooms... I pictured them lined with stockings at Christmastime. Kay and I hurrying down the

stairs in the morning to see if Santa showed up or not.

He always showed up.

Even if Kay and I weren't the best of kids throughout the year.

The house was built from love.

But the second I stepped into the kitchen and saw my father again, I didn't feel anything but tension.

I touched my stomach.

"Peter, we have to talk about this," Mom said.

"What's there to talk about? The one rule I had. After everything that happened..."

"Dad, stop," I said. "Mom knew."

"I know," Dad said. "She told me. Normally we don't keep things from each other."

Dad looked at Mom.

Mom was smart. Beautiful. She knew how to take care of her husband.

"I didn't even know," Kay said. "But I do now. And from what Willow has told me-"

"This isn't your business, Kay," Dad said.

"Pete, it's our family," Mom said. "Our family is growing."

"Growing?" Dad growled. "There is nothing growing here except how angry I am. After all these months, this is what I get?"

"How was I supposed to tell you?" I asked. "Look at the way you've acted."

“What have I done for my family throughout the years?” Dad asked. “How am I supposed to act? Pretend I’m okay with one of my daughters sleeping with a hockey player and getting pregnant? That was the one thing I didn’t want for you. Either of you.”

“Don’t look at me,” Kay said. “She’s the pregnant one. Not me.”

“Thanks, Kay,” I said.

“Sorry,” she whispered.

“What’s so wrong with Anders?” I asked. “He’s got a job. Has a lot of money. And he makes me happy.”

“*He* makes you happy?” Dad asked.

“That’s right. We’re in love.”

Dad slammed his bottle of scotch down on the counter.

“Peter, calm down,” Mom said. “You know what you went through with my father, right?”

“That was different, Holly.”

“How?” Mom challenged.

“She thinks she’s in love with Anders,” Dad said. “We were in love from the day we met.”

“And they can’t be?” Mom asked.

“Did I drop my pants the day I met you?” Dad asked.

Then he looked at me.

“Is that what this is about?” I asked. “What do you think people do when they’re attracted to each other?”

“My daughter is not some hockey player’s one-night stand,” Dad said. “Used and thrown to the side!”

“That’s what Kay is for every guy she meets,” I said.

“Willow!” Kay cried out.

I looked at her and gave a devious grin. “You just threw me under the bus. I’m returning the favor.”

“I don’t find any of this funny,” Dad said. “I am not okay with any of this. And I never will be.”

“If you mean that, then you don’t respect me,” I said. “You won’t even give me a chance to talk to you.”

“You want to talk?” Dad asked. “Sure, let’s talk. But where’s he at now? He can’t even face me like a man?”

Mom’s eyes suddenly grew very large.

Dad’s lip curled.

A familiar smell hit my nose and I turned my head.

*“I’m right here, Coach Pete... so let’s talk this out.”*

## Chapter Forty-Two

### ANDERS

“**W**hat do you have to say for yourself?”

Coach Pete stared at me with such hate and anger.

Or maybe it was just plain fear.

Fear for his daughter.

Fear for his unborn grandchild.

Fear for who I once was and who I might end up becoming to him and his family.

“Do I have to defend myself?” I asked. “This is about us. Myself. Willow. It’s about our family now.”

“Your family?” Coach Pete roared.

“He’s not wrong,” Holly said. She touched her husband’s arm. “He’s not wrong at all.”

“Dad, he’s doing the right thing,” Kay said.

“I didn’t ask for your opinion,” Coach Pete snapped.

I moved in front of both Willow and her sister.

“Keep your anger here, Coach Pete,” I said.

“Aw, that’s so cute he’s still calling Dad *Coach Pete*,” Kay whispered to Willow.

“Will you shut up?” Willow growled back. “This is a serious situation.”

“Be mad at me,” I said. “I’m the one who did it. Right? I got your daughter pregnant. I did the one thing you feared the most in life. She’s pregnant by a hockey player. A goalie. *Me*.”

“You’re not selling yourself to me, son,” Coach Pete said.

“Dad called him *son*,” Kay whispered to Willow. “Maybe that’s a good sign.”

“Pete, why don’t we sit down and talk?” Holly asked.

“How can I talk?” Coach Pete yelled. “Everyone lying to me this entire time? How do you think I feel right now? I feel like an idiot. My daughter lying to me. My wife lying to me.”

“I didn’t lie,” Kay called out.

“And you,” Coach Pete said, pointing at me. “You had the nerve to walk into my office multiple times to talk to me? You knew what was really going on?”

“I had the shortest stick,” I said.

“You, what?” Coach Pete asked.

“We were debating who would talk to you,” I said. “So we each grabbed hockey sticks. I had the shortest...”

“A short stick, huh?” Kay whispered.

I looked back at Kay. “Not like that. Ask your sister.”

Willow gasped.

Holly snorted and turned her head away.

Coach Pete's face turned a deep shade of red and he stepped toward me.

"You lied to my face," he said.

"You never asked me."

"You played along."

"I just followed the conversation. I tried to tell you maybe the guy wasn't so bad, right? You just wanted to attack. You wanted to vent. So I let you."

"I told him not to say a word," Willow said.

"It's fine, babe," I said.

"*Babe?*" Coach Pete roared. "She has a fucking name!"

"Dad!" Willow said. "I did this. Not Anders. I told him not to say a word. I told Mom not to say a word. I hid this from everyone. I did it. I even told Anders to leave and he wouldn't."

"You told him to leave?" Coach Pete asked.

"Not like that," I said. "She didn't really mean it."

"I really did mean it," Willow said. "I figured it would have been easier for everyone. Anders could live his life how he wanted. I could have just played this off as whatever. That's what I told him to do."

"That's not how I raised you," Coach Pete said.

"She was scared," I said. "That's why I didn't listen to her. I've been by her side the entire time."

"And that gives you something in my book?" Coach Pete asked.



“I’m in love with your daughter,” I said.

Holly gasped.

“Oh... fuck,” Kay whispered.

Willow’s green eyes were a mile wide each.

Coach Pete’s nostrils flared.

I wasn’t sure why that was so wrong to say.

I was dedicated to his daughter. And his unborn grandchild.

Coach Pete stepped even closer to me. “Say that again, Anders.”

“I’m in love with your daughter,” I repeated. “I’m in love with Willow. Maybe it’s not some fairy tale story but it’s our story. It’s the one we have together. I love her.”

“Pete, come back here,” Holly said.

Coach Pete touched his chin.

For a second he looked defeated.

Then he nodded a few times.

I thought for sure the wall had been broken.

That he understood.

That things would be okay.

Then he looked me right in the eyes.

“You. Me. Now.”

“Pete, absolutely not,” Holly said.

“What are we doing?” I asked.

Coach Pete used his right hand to grab the front of my shirt. “*We’re going to fight... like men.*”



“YOU ARE NOT GOING TO FIGHT ANDERS,” WILLOW SAID.

“Yes, I am,” Coach Pete said.

“Dr. Steph told me I have to stay stress free,” she said.

“No stress, Pete,” Holly said. “Do you hear that? Do you want Willow to end up going into labor early?”

“She better if the baby wants to meet his or her father,” Coach Pete said.

“Dad, you sound like a dumb jock right now,” Kay added.

“That’s fine,” Coach Pete said. “Are you ready to do this, Anders? You and me. A fair fight. No bullshit.”

“Then what?”

“What happens in hockey, Anders?”

“We go to the penalty box, Coach Pete.”

“Then we come right out again...”

“No talking to you, is there?”

“No talking,” Coach Pete said. “Follow me.”

“This is barbaric,” Holly said. “I am so mad at you right now, Pete.”

“You’ll be okay,” Coach Pete said to his wife.

He kissed her forehead.

I looked down at Willow. “Does he fight all your boyfriends?”

“You’re my boyfriend now?” Willow asked.

“I’m about to fight your father, babe. I’m not worried about titles.”

“Dad always threatens to fight guys we date,” Kay said. “But I’ve never seen him go this far. Are you really going to hit him, Anders?”

I didn’t know what to say.

Or do.

*Fight Coach Pete?*

*Actually throw a punch at him?*

What was I supposed to do though?

If he was going to throw a punch at me... it was going to hurt.

Coach Pete was a jacked up guy.

Big, strong, mean.

Extra mean considering he now could face the guy who got his daughter pregnant.

“I’m so sorry, Anders,” Holly said to me.

“Let me talk to him,” I said. “If this is what he wants. I’ll do anything to make it known how much I care about Willow.”

“That’s sweet of you,” Holly said.

I looked back at Willow.

Coach Pete appeared in the kitchen again. “I said to follow me, Anders. I don’t want to trash my house.”

I nodded and followed Coach Pete through the house and out the front door.

I curled my hands into fists, waiting for him to turn and throw a punch.

But Coach Pete was honorable when it came to fighting.

He wanted me to join him in the front yard.

Then he turned to face me.

Fists up.

I did the same.

I gave a nod.

From the corner of my right eye I saw the audience we had.

Willow, her mother, and her sister.

Holly stood with a hand over her mouth.

Kay smiled.

Willow touched her belly.

“You sure about this, Anders?” Coach Pete asked.

“If this is what you need me to do,” I said.

“What if I told you I don’t want you to be part of this family?”

“Then I would have to tell you you’re wrong.”

“You think you can just win me over?”

“No, Coach Pete. But I respect you. And I love your daughter. If you want to have messed up holidays and birthdays and a shitty family routine, then that’s your choice. I’ll respect it. But please don’t put Willow in a position to ever choose. If you do, I’ll make sure she chooses you and that will hurt her.”

Coach Pete closed in on me and grabbed the front of my shirt.

I grabbed the front of his shirt.

We started to circle around.

Almost like a real hockey fight... or least right before one would start.

“Tell me the truth right now,” Coach Pete said. “Tell me everything.”

“I fucked your daughter and got her pregnant,” I said.

Coach Pete jammed the fist holding my shirt up into my jaw.

My head snapped back.

I tasted blood.

“Then I fell in love with her,” I said.

“Did she really tell you to leave her alone?”

“She did.”

“And you refused?”

“Yes.”

“She did all that because of me?” Coach Pete asked.

“You’re protective. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“Fuck you, Anders,” he said.

He threw the same hit to my jaw.

I returned it right back to him.

His head snapped back and I saw blood seeping from his nose.

“You can’t stop me from being a father,” I said. “You can’t stop me from loving Willow. I’m going to be there for her and

take care of her. You want to fight each time we see each other? Then let's go for it."

Coach Pete wiped his nose. "I'm bleeding."

"So am I."

"You'd really fight me for the love of my daughter?"

"This is some backwards medieval shit, Coach Pete, but if that's what it takes."

"And you're going to be a good father to my grandchild?"

"Of course I am. I would never do anything to hurt my child. Or the mother of my child. Ever."

Coach Pete released his hold on my shirt.

I did the same to him.

I tasted blood in my mouth.

He wiped blood from under his nose.

"This isn't over yet," Coach Pete said. "You drove Willow here and sat in the car?"

"She asked me to wait," I said. "And there was no way in hell I was going to let her drive alone."

"Go back to the car," Coach Pete said. "Willow will be joining you in a few minutes."

"So that's it?"

"Like I said... for now. Before we finish this, Anders, we have a championship to win."

"I promise you, Coach Pete, we're going to win it all."

"You're making a lot of promises here, Anders."

“And I’m keeping each one of them. To you. To my unborn child. And to the woman I love.”

Coach Pete curled his lip and walked away from me.

He threw his hands into the air. *“To the woman he loves?”*

He said in a mocking tone.

I looked at Willow.

She was still in shock.

*I was just happy I got to walk away with my jaw still in one piece.*

## Chapter Forty-Three

---

### WILLOW

**I** *hear the baby crying.*  
*My eyes pop open and I sit up in bed.*  
*The massive, gigantic bed.*  
*I move the covers off my body and step out of the bed.*  
*I walk to the nursery to find my daughter in her crib,*  
*crying.*  
*Yes, that's right.*  
*A daughter!*  
*I reach down and gently pick her up.*  
*She's tiny and warm.*  
*A ball of cozy love.*  
*Her lips instantly pucker and she presses her face to my*  
*chest, seeking one of my breasts.*  
*I smile as I step back and sit down in a rocking chair.*  
*I feed my daughter and stare into her eyes.*



*She has my eyes.*

*The most beautiful eyes I've ever seen.*

*These are the moments that leave me overwhelmed with emotion.*

*Maybe it's the hormones and all that, still... I'm not sure...*

*But I've never felt this kind of love before.*

*I feel extra tired.*

*My body is tired.*

*From giving birth. From providing nourishment.*

*My daughter needs to be burped and she needs to go back to sleep.*

*I need to go back to sleep.*

*I take a deep breath and I smile.*

*Everything is just so...*

*"... perfect..."*

*"Yes you are, babe," a voice whispered.*

*My eyes popped open and I looked up at Anders.*

*I looked around the nursery and placed my hands to the arms of the chair to stand up.*

*"I have to check on the baby," I whispered.*

*"You had that dream again, huh?"*

*I sucked in a breath and looked down.*

*My stomach was... huge.*

*"The crib?" I asked.*

“Oh, babe, it’s empty still,” Anders said. “Not yet. You were just dreaming.”

I blinked a few times. “I didn’t mean to fall asleep in here. I don’t remember coming in here.”

“I do,” he said. “You insisted on checking the blankets. I knew you were going to sit down and fall asleep.”

“I guess this is my new routine?”

“You’ve been doing it every night for a week now,” Anders whispered. “Want to come back to bed? Or I can throw a blanket on the floor and sleep right here.”

“The dream was so real though,” I said. “It was a girl. A daughter.”

“Last night was a son, right?”

I smiled. “Fine. You win. Help me up.”

It took me a little bit longer to get to my feet these days.

I saw Dr. Steph two days ago and begged her to make me go into labor.

I wept in her office like a baby, she smiled and rubbed my back.

She told me to just hang tight.

I hated that answer.

I was done with being pregnant.

Everything was swollen. Very swollen.

Sex with Anders was hot but very gentle.

We were limited to only a couple positions.

Not to mention we were in a new place together and the tension with my family wasn’t exactly gone.

Too much change at once.

I wanted that change and it made me just want the baby here.

Anders walked next to me as I shuffled from the nursery to the master bedroom.

The bed from my dream was my bed in real life.

I wasn't the kind of woman that demanded to be spoiled. I wasn't a fan of someone else taking care of me.

Somehow Anders broke through that wall.

It was the bed that did it.

A massive master bedroom with a balcony that overlooked the beach. Plus a huge bathroom that had a shower, plus a large tub with jets that promised to hit every inch of your body. Of course I wasn't able to use that tub yet. But once the baby arrived, I planned on living in that tub for a while.

Anyway - back to the bed.

The bed took up a good portion of the massive bedroom.

The biggest bed I'd ever seen.

Again, I caught myself thinking about my life post-pregnancy.

And all I wanted to do was get a running head start and jump into that bed.

And sleep for a month.

Which I doubt would happen with a newborn at home.

*At home.*

*Our home.*

I stopped walking and looked up at Anders. "Hey."

“Hey, babe.”

“We really did all of this?”

“I told you we would.”

“Did I ruin everything for you?”

“Ruin what?”

“It’s your time, Anders. You’re in the finals. And it’s been tough so far. Back and forth. And yet somehow you managed to pay for a new condo, then pay to have some stuff shipped here. You made sure the place was furnished with new things. You made sure the nursery was put together with everything I wanted.”

“That’s my job and my promise, babe,” Anders said. He touched my face. “You’re giving me the greatest moments of my life. I’m living in a dream on and off the ice.”

“You’ve done a lot.”

“So have you.”

“Oh, don’t talk about the baby.”

“Of course I’m talking about the baby,” he said. “Look at you. You’ve done so amazing, Willow.”

“You’re not going to take credit for a second, are you?”

“No need for me to,” he said. “You need to get some sleep. You’re all tied up in your emotions.”

“Are you really calling a very pregnant woman emotional? Do you want to die?”

“Love you too, babe,” Anders said.

Another fun part of my life was getting in and out of bed.

Since the bed was so gigantic, I had to plop down on my butt and wiggle my way back.

It took me a good few minutes to get into the bed.

Anders was patient and waited.

Then he was right next to me.

I turned and leaned against him.

My head on his chest.

My huge breasts resting on his body. That part he didn't mind.

My very large belly rested on him too. That part he loved the most.

I fell asleep.

I wasn't sure if Anders did or not.

I had a dream that I played hockey.

That I was the goalie.

And thanks to my pregnant belly, not a single puck could get past me.

As that dream ended, another began.

Me standing on the beach.

My water breaking.

When I turned to call for help, I saw Roman.

Wearing teal exam gloves, smiling ear to ear, wiggling his fingers at me.

He told me he needed me to spread my legs wide for him.

*Now that was a nightmare.*



THE DOORBELL RANG AND ANDERS WALKED TO THE DOOR.

He opened it and my father stood there.

I placed my glass of orange juice down on the counter and swallowed hard.

My heart began to race.

“Come on in, Coach Pete,” Anders said.

Dad didn’t look at Anders.

He walked right by him and came to me.

“How are you feeling this morning?” Dad asked.

“Big,” I said.

He touched my stomach and grinned. “You look radiant, Willow. I can’t wait.”

“Neither can I,” I said. “Did you really drive all the way here just to say good morning to me?”

“To check up on you,” he said. “Also wanted to bring you something. For the baby.”

“Oh?”

Dad reached behind himself and held up the smallest *Inci Warriors* jersey I’d ever seen before.

I covered my mouth and almost started to cry.

Anders let out a laugh and Dad looked back at him.

“That’s amazing,” Anders said.

“Oh, Dad, look at that,” I said.

“Custom made,” Dad said. “I had to make a few calls for this one. Was thinking maybe the little one could wear it home from the hospital.”

“That’s something we’ll decide,” I said. “Myself and Anders.”

“Right,” Dad said.

His jaw tightened a little.

He handed me the newborn hockey jersey and kissed me on the cheek.

“Just wanted to give you that,” he said. “I couldn’t wait.”

“I love this, Dad. Thank you.”

Dad looked around and nodded. “This is a nice place.”

“Really nice place,” I said. “Got a great deal on it too. People love a good pregnancy story.”

Dad once again looked back at Anders.

Anders didn’t flinch. He didn’t puff out his chest.

He just stood there.

“Well, I’ll leave you two be,” Dad said. “Busy day for all of us.”

Dad turned and walked toward Anders.

Okay, here was the entire deal with the hockey stuff.

The games literally went back and forth.

Win, lose, etc.

Now the series was tied at three games apiece.

Meaning tonight was the last game of the season.

This was it.

I told Anders to go stay somewhere else for this.

Get a hotel and just focus on the game.

Of course he refused.

Tonight was the biggest night of his career.

Same for Dad.

All the work they put not just into this season, but into their lives.

This was Dad's dream.

This was Anders's dream.

And it all ended tonight.

Either they'd be celebrating on their home ice with their fans having won the championship or they'd be in the locker room, sweaty, defeated, knowing they gave it their all... *but was that really good enough?*

It gave me butterflies to think about.

It made my body shiver and ache.

Now add to that, Dad and Anders stared at each other.

Inches apart.

I still thought about the night Dad wanted to fight Anders.

A hockey fight without ice.

Both of them bleeding, but not much.

"See you in a little bit, Anders," Dad said.

"Tonight's the night, Coach Pete," Anders said.

"Yes, it is," Dad said.

They both nodded at each other.



That was the closest to respect they had for each other.

Both Anders and I took that as a win.

Dad shut the door behind him.

Anders locked it.

I reached for the super-tiny jersey and held it against my stomach.

“Fits good?” I asked with a smile.

“You’re so beautiful, babe,” Anders said.

“How about you help me get out of all these clothes and take a shower with me? Maybe I can be your good luck charm for tonight.”

Anders closed in on me and touched my stomach. “You’re already the luckiest thing that ever happened to me.”

“Oh, jeez,” I rolled my eyes. “Can you turn off the sweet side and just be perverted?”

Anders laughed. “*Anything for you, babe.*”



I WANTED TO BE AT THE GAME BUT I WAS TOO FAR PREGNANT.

So I stayed home.

I had some snacks, some pizza, and I had Kay with me.

Mom was at the game with Dad.

“This is too exciting,” Kay said.

“I’m on the edge of my seat here,” I said. “This is so big for everyone.”

“For Dad. For the guy who knocked you up.”

“Thanks, Kay.”

“You really crossed some wires, didn’t you?”

I looked at my sister. “Too bad I didn’t cross my legs, right?”

“Never. I can’t wait to meet my niece or nephew. And you’re so much happier in life right now with Anders. This is perfect for you.”

“Can we just watch this game without any issues?”

“Sure,” Kay said.

She reached and flipped open the lid to the pizza.

I leaned forward and reached for a potato chip.

On the television screen, the game was about to begin.

Without thinking, I stood up.

With a potato chip between my thumb and pointer finger on my right hand.

The camera showing on television panned around the arena.

Then it was time to drop the puck.

Luc was at center ice, ready to go.

“Willow, are you okay?” Kay asked.

I shook my head.

The puck was dropped.

I dropped the potato chip.

I touched my stomach.

I looked at my sister.

She jumped up.

“Willow?”

I swallowed hard. “*My water just broke.*”

## Chapter Forty-Four

---

### ANDERS

**M**y nerves bounced.

The arena was electric.

The fans showed up and they weren't afraid to cheer.

That added to the pressure.

This was really it.

An entire season of work coming down to one final game.

The absolute last game of the season.

The season itself stretched out as far as it could go.

As I stood in net, taking deep breaths, I thought about where this season started. The party for the team. Coach Pete making us all get together to have a drink and talk about life and hockey. And I snuck away down to the beach for a minute. And that minute changed my life forever.

The thought of Willow's green eyes.

The vibe of the beach.

The feel of the moment.

The two of us looking at each other.

In that moment, I could only assume one thing, which was we were attracted to one another and wanted to have some fun. There was nothing wrong with that either.

But looking back, it was more.

It wasn't love at first sight because I had seen Willow before.

It was love in that moment.

As though Cupid actually existed and that little porker with the wings shot an arrow right into my ass.

Because that was the moment I fell in love with Willow.

Right there on the beach. Before I kissed her. Before I had sex with her. Before I got her pregnant.

And it all came down to this moment.

*Win Game 7.*

*Win the championship.*

*Get back to Willow.*

*Hold her until she went into labor.*

*Then become a father.*

Nesh and Cain skated toward me.

They each patted my mask.

Nolan and Roman were locked in, ready to play.

Luc at center ice.

*Here. We. Fucking. Go.*

The puck hit the ice and Luc passed back to Nolan.

Nolan to Roman.

Nesh and Cain skated up the ice.

We took the first shot on goal.

A quick play and quick save.

The crowd cheered.

The next face-off was won by Roman.

Behind the net, he turned over the puck.

New York began to skate my way.

Nesh and Cain played defense, holding them off.

They dumped the puck behind the net.

I steadied myself, waiting for the play to happen.

Nesh drove his guy into the boards with a thundering boom.

The crowd loved that.

Cain fought for the puck.

Everyone started screaming at each other.

Nolan stood right next to me.

“Watch the left,” he said to me.

I crouched down.

New York made a quick play and I kicked my left skate out, blocking the shot.

The crowd cheered for a quick second because I kicked out a big rebound.

New York pounced on the rebound.

Roman and Luc went for the puck.

That was a bad idea.

I saw the cross-ice pass happening before it happened.

A vicious one timer was on the way.

I jumped up and had to make the save and protect the puck.

I felt the shot hit my right shoulder.

Pain surged through my body.

I saw the puck fall to the ice.

I collapsed down and covered up the puck.

I felt a couple sticks touch me and all hell broke loose.

Cain and Nesh came to my defense.

Pushing, shoving, gloves hitting the ice.

The refs blowing their whistles like crazy.

The crowd loved every second of it.

The game continued just like that.

Back and forth, up and down the ice, shots taken, shots blocked, shots saved.

Halfway through the first period the game had no score.

The tension was still high.

The energy even higher.

We were on a television timeout on the ice.

I doused my face with water and took a drink.

Then I heard whistles blowing like crazy.

I looked and couldn't believe my eyes.

I had heard of and seen on sports shows about fans streaking at other sporting events. Soccer. Football. Baseball. That kind of thing.

But I never saw a fan get onto the ice of a hockey game.

I saw some woman flailing her arms, sliding her way toward me.

Being chased by the referees.

Being chased by Coach Pete too.

It took me a second to realize it wasn't just some fan.

It was Kay.

Willow's sister.

I dropped everything in my hands and skated toward her.

Kay waved her hands. "She's in labor! She's having the baby! It's time!"

When I got close enough to Kay, she grabbed my arms.

The referees were there. Security was on the ice.

Coach Pete too.

"Willow's water broke," Kay said to me. "It's all happening."

"Is she at the hospital?" I asked.

"Yes! I couldn't get a hold of anyone! I came down here! Told Mom already! We have to go!"

I looked at Coach Pete.

I skated toward him.

He grabbed my arms. "It's time, Anders."



“You have to be there with me, Coach Pete. She wants you there too.”

We raced to the bench.

Coach Pete told Mags it was his game to call now.

I looked at up our backup goalie - Jimmy.

“Your moment, brother,” I said to him. “You’re ready for this.”

“What the fuck is happening?” Jimmy cried out.

*“I’m going to become a father tonight!”*



TO SAY IT ALL HAPPENED FAST...

*It all happened fast.*

Security rushed Coach Pete and I out of the arena.

A car waited for us.

The driver sped like a mad man, knowing every twist and turn of the roads.

Coach Pete called his wife, who had already arrived at the hospital and was with Willow.

The way everyone seemed to move and call, text and travel was almost mind boggling.

I just wanted to get to Willow.

There was no way she was going to be without me while having our baby.

I ran through the hospital still half dressed in my goalie gear.

I smelled like sweat, my skin dried with it, and I made it into the hospital room before the baby came.

Holly threw her arms around me and cried tears of joy.

Coach Pete gave Willow a quick pep talk, then Willow told him lovingly to *get the fuck out right now*.

Willow made everyone leave the room except me.

It was me and her with two nurses.

I brushed my lips on Willow's, then pressed my forehead to hers.

I held her hand.

She whispered, "This is the part where I get mean and hate you for doing this to me. Don't take it personally."

"I never would," I whispered. "I love you, Willow."

"I love you too, Anders. Now get out of my face so I can get this baby out of my body."

Next thing I knew, I had the nurses explaining to me how to hold Willow's left leg.

They asked if I wanted to look and of course I wanted to look.

I looked and then I looked away.

"That's really fucking flattering!" Willow cried out. "You didn't seem to mind looking between my legs when you got me fucking pregnant!"

She slowly began to roar.

I looked again and it felt like time suddenly stopped.

Dr. Steph was then in the room. All smiles. But looking very serious and composed. She gave out orders to the nurses,

to Willow, and to me.

She knew how to command a delivery room, that was for sure.

I watched the birth of our baby.

The birth of our son.

*A son.*

*I have a son!*

My hands shook when Dr. Steph walked me through the steps on how to cut the cord.

I looked at Willow and watched her crying.

My eyes welled up with tears.

And just like that, our son was placed onto her chest.

She held him with love and care.

I touched her face and wiped away tears and sweat.

She never looked more beautiful than she did in that moment.

Our eyes met, just like that night on the beach.

“You gave me a son,” I whispered.

“I gave you a son,” she whispered back.

“I think your father is going to like me a little bit more now.”

Willow laughed.

Then she cried some more.

Dr. Steph tended to her while the nurses took the baby to check him out.

Everything still moved fast.

It felt like a whirlwind that suddenly stopped when the little guy was bundled up in a blanket, Willow sat up in the hospital bed and was given him.

“So, do we have a name yet?” Dr. Steph asked.

“If it was a girl, it would be after you,” I said.

Dr. Steph touched my shoulder. “Just because I was just reaching between Willow’s legs doesn’t mean you get to flirt with me.”

Willow snorted and laughed.

“I’m not... flirting...”

“Cameron,” Willow blurted out.

She looked at me.

“Cam,” I whispered. “Our little Cam.”

“You sure?”

“I’m positive, babe.” I looked at the nurse. “Cameron Peter.”

And just like that, the baby had a name.

I looked at Willow again and leaned down to kiss her.

“Wait,” she said.

“What?”

“The game! What’s the score? Who won? What time is it?”

I reached into my pocket and took out my phone.

My damn eyes filled with tears once again when I saw the pictures of the guys on the ice after winning it all.

“They did it,” I whispered. “They really did it...”

I turned and darted toward the hospital room door.

When I tore it open, Coach Pete stood there.

His eyes were glossed over too.

I showed him my phone.

He nodded and smiled.

“Holy shit,” I said.

Coach Pete put his hands to my shoulders. “Holy shit is right, Anders. You did it.”

“I didn’t do a thing.”

“Yes, you did. You brought my first grandchild into the world. And you gave me my first championship.”

“Your first grandchild is a boy,” I said.

Coach Pete howled and hugged me.

He turned into a blubbering mess of tears.

I hugged him back and looked at Holly and Kay.

They were both teary eyed.

Holly gave me a thumbs up.

I led the way into the hospital room.

Coach Pete couldn’t control himself.

He kept crying.

Kissing Willow’s forehead.

Touching his grandson’s back.

Then it came time to tell him the baby’s name.

When he heard Cameron, he smiled with pride.

When he heard Peter as the middle name, he pinched the bridge of his nose and lowered his head.

Holly had to comfort her husband as he was so overcome with happiness.

We put on the television and watched the celebration on the ice and in the arena for the *Inci Warriors*.

I held my son in my arms and couldn't fight back the smile on my face.

Coach Pete eventually joined me.

We stood shoulder to shoulder.

“Still want to fight me, Coach Pete?” I asked.

“You have no idea,” he said. “But you keep your promises to my daughter and grandson and I'll keep my fists to myself.”

We then looked at each other.

We nodded.

We smiled.

I looked back over my shoulder and saw Willow had shut her eyes.

To imagine what her body had just gone through... bringing a new life into the world. My son. Our son.

I had never before felt so much love all at once.

I blinked a few times and looked at Coach Pete again.

His eyes were full of tears again too.

Once again, we nodded to one another.

*A silent pact to never let any of the guys know that we were just big crybabies when it came to this emotional stuff.*

## Chapter Forty-Five

### WILLOW

**W**inning a championship and having a baby together was hard work for Anders.

He won all kinds of awards for the season too.

Best goalie.

Best save percentage.

Best performance.

Everything was *best*...

And what did Anders do the night that he got his award?

He called Jimmy up on stage to stand with him.

He made it known that Jimmy was the one who covered his ass when he had to leave because I was having a baby.

There were radio show interviews.

Television interviews.

Appearances and events.

All of that came after the parade.

Right down the main strip next to the beach.

All the guys on top of buses, drinking beer and booze, cheering and celebrating with their fans.

At the end of the parade, someone stopped Anders and asked what his plan was for the offseason and he made it very clear.

*I can't wait to spend time with my newborn son and the woman I love.*

One thing Anders knew how to do was keep promises.

Two in the morning, I heard little Cam belting out a scream.

My eyes peeled open and I felt my lip curl.

Without hesitation, Anders touched my leg and whispered, "Just sleep, babe."

"I should feed him," I whispered.

"There's plenty of your milk. I can make him a bottle."

"He needs to be changed."

"I know that too, babe."

"I'm kind of full over here, Anders. I'm going to make a mess in the bed."

Anders didn't respond.

I opened my eyes all the way and caught him smiling at me.

"You're a perv," I said.

Anders licked his lips and left the bed.

The man was completely and totally obsessed with my breastmilk.



Especially when I had a situation where things were clogged up.

Of course Dr. Steph gave the great suggestion to have *someone* basically suck the clog out. Anders stepped up for that job and succeeded at it. Since then, it was his favorite thing to do in bed.

The mom instinct in me refused to let me fall back asleep.

So I watched on the baby monitor as Anders checked on Cam.

Fatherhood came to Anders naturally.

He just seemingly knew how to do everything. No fear. No worry. Just complete control and total love for his son.

It took my father all of a week to finally fall in love with Anders as the guy who got me pregnant. He watched Anders carefully and as soon as he realized the kind of father and man Anders was, he really had no choice but to accept him.

Not to mention if it wasn't for Anders, my father would have never won his first championship. He wouldn't have been in negotiations for a huge pay raise. He wouldn't have a grandson either.

The whole concept of being a family started to come together.

Dad didn't throw punches at Anders.

Mom loved Anders - maybe a little too much at times.

Two glasses of wine and Mom found every excuse in the book to touch Anders's arms and smile when she did so.

Kay enjoyed being an aunt. She bought herself a shirt and a hoodie declaring herself the best aunt in the world. She also

bought Cam a custom onesie that said his aunt was hot and single.

I wasn't sure I wanted my newborn to be a billboard for my sister's relationship status.

I stared at the monitor as Anders changed Cam's diaper.

"Whoa, son, that's a lot of pee," Anders said. "You're like a mini camel over here, huh?"

In seconds there was a fresh diaper on Cam and he was dressed.

Seeing that... *very hot and sexy.*

Watching Anders as a father... *insanely hot and sexy.*

Anders then sat down in the rocking chair and fed Cam his bottle.

I felt my chest literally starting to leak a little but I didn't care.

Motherhood was amazing and complicated at the same time.

I couldn't imagine doing it without Anders by my side.

After Cam finished his bottle, Anders made sure he burped a couple times.

Then Anders stood up, cradled our son in his arms and began to walk around the nursery.

Some nights Cam would doze off in a second.

Other nights you were walking miles in that nursery.

Never once did Anders complain.

In fact, I swore there were times when little Cam was sound asleep, Anders purposely just kept pacing the room,

staring down, smiling.

In awe of his son.

Which made me in awe of him.

I pretended to be asleep when Anders came back to bed.

He wiggled his way right up against my body and eased his right hand around to my front.

His hand flirted under my shirt and up to my breast.

His fingertips glided over the warm liquid and I heard him groan.

“Your fault,” I whispered.

“I’m feeling thirsty, babe.”

“Go to sleep, perv,” I said with a smile.

Anders kissed my cheek and we both fell asleep.

*Little Cam had us both awake again exactly three hours later.*



ROMAN STARED DOWN AT CAM.

“Something wrong?” I asked.

“I don’t know, Willow, this baby looks a lot like me,” Roman said.

“Here we go,” Nolan said.

“What?” Roman asked. “I’m just saying... maybe Anders wasn’t the only one that night...”

“Are you really going to look at my baby, then look at me and call me a whore?” I asked.

“I never said that,” Roman said.

“You damn sure implied it,” Scarlett said.

She smacked the back of Roman’s head.

“Better her than me,” Anders said. “If I hit him in the back of the head, his eyes are going through the window.”

“Can’t get rid of him now,” Scarlett said. “I love him too much.”

“Need to keep the band together,” Nesh said.

“Think we can pull it off?” Luc asked.

Little Isla appeared with a toy unicorn in her hand.

Apparently our couch was some kind of a majestic land and the unicorn was there to protect it.

“We demand it,” Anders said. “Nobody is going to break this up though. We’re running it back next year again. Unstoppable.”

“What if Mags bolts?” Roman asked.

“He’s not leaving,” Nolan said.

“Do we have to talk about hockey?” Penny asked.

Nesh put an arm around her. “Should we tell them about your new book? And that one scene...”

“Please tell,” Roman said.

“Please don’t,” Scarlett said. “You had something written about licorice rope and Roman insisted we try that. He kept eating it before he could tie me up!”

“It was so good,” Roman said.

“My daughter is listening to this,” Luc said.

“So, Harlow, how’s the new business going?” Emma asked, changing the subject.

“Busy,” Harlow said. “But really fun.”

“I have to ask,” Nolan said. “How are things within the family around here now?”

“Coach Pete?” Anders asked.

Everyone nodded.

They wanted the juicy details.

“It’s actually going really well now,” I said.

“No family dinner fights?” Luc asked.

“Not yet,” Anders said. “Coach Pete and I have an understanding.”

“It’s got to be hard for him though,” Roman said. “To look at the baby and know how it happened. That you deflowered his precious daughter.”

“Excuse me?” I asked. “Deflowered? Trust me, Roman, by the time Anders got to this flower, it was well bloomed and cared for.”

“Hell yeah, girlfriend!” Scarlett yelled.

Little Cam jumped and stared to cry.

Scarlett apologized.

“*Baby?*” Isla asked.

Emma picked up Isla.

Anders picked up Cam.

I kind of looked around at everyone.

I took it all in.

That sense of brotherhood with Anders, Roman, Nesh, Nolan, Cain, and Luc.

And then all the women who had entered their lives over the last couple seasons.

Myself. Scarlett, Penny, Harlow, Lexie, and Emma.

“I have to say something,” Luc announced.

“No,” Roman said. “Luc, I can’t take anymore sappy speeches from you. You’re like a woman now. No offense to the women here.”

“I’m just happy,” Luc said.

“He’s getting his period soon, huh?” Nesh asked.

“I have something to say,” Cain growled.

His gruff voice shook the entire condo.

We all looked at him.

He and Lexie looked at each other.

He nodded to Lexie.

She took a deep breath.

“Are you finally ready to give me a chance?” Roman whispered. “I’m sure we can talk to Scarlett about it.”

“A chance at what?” Scarlett asked.

“He thinks he can get me pregnant,” Lexie said.

“What is wrong with you?” Scarlett asked Roman.

“We don’t have all day to answer that,” Anders said.

“By the way,” Lexie said with a smile. “Sorry, Roman, your services are no longer needed.”

Lexie touched her stomach and bit her bottom lip.

Cain put a hand over hers.

“Wait,” Luc said. “Are you... is this...”

The room erupted with yells of joy.

So loud that both Cam and Isla started to cry from the sound.

Everyone gathered around Cain and Lexie, saying their congrats.

“How far along?” I asked.

“Just past twelve weeks,” she said. “Without any treatments. We were kind of just taking a break...”

“Giving up on it,” Cain said.

“And then...”

“Wait a second,” Roman said. “You’re pregnant?”

He pointed to Lexie.

“Welcome to the conversation,” Lexie said. “What did you think I was doing? Touching my stomach... for what reason?”

“I don’t know. Some good tacos?”

“You’re such an idiot,” Scarlett said to Roman.

Then she jumped up and kissed his cheek.

We all stayed gathered around Lexie and Cain.

Celebrating their *soon-to-be addition*. Celebrating mine and Anders’s newborn. Celebrating Isla. Celebrating the championship.

Just... celebrating everything that made life worth living.

At one point Anders faced me, holding Cam in his arms.

He leaned down and kissed me.

*Now that was the best kiss of my life.*



ANDERS CRAWLED INTO BED. “AND HE’S FINALLY OUT.”

“That one took a while.”

“He’s just excited from the big news earlier.”

“Funny how life does that to people. They were trying and struggling, then...”

“Hey,” I whispered. “I don’t want to talk about any of that right now.”

“Okay.”

“Did you happen to check the date today?”

“No. Why?”

“I got an interesting text earlier. From Dr. Steph.”

“Is everything okay?” Anders asked.

“More than okay. She wanted to remind me that our waiting time is up.”

“Waiting time...”

“That’s right,” I said. I moved my hands under the blankets and eased my hand between Anders’s legs.

“Oh, that waiting time,” he groaned.

“That’s right,” I whispered. “It’s been way too long for me.”

“For you? I’ve never had to go this long before.”

Anders grabbed me and pulled me on top of him.



We tore each other's clothes off as though the end of the world was ticking down to midnight.

We kissed, touched, licked, groaned... everything possible.

And then I finally settled on top of him.

My inner thighs trembling with excitement yet a little bit of fear of what it would feel like after everything that had happened.

It was as good as ever.

Maybe even better.

I took Anders into me as his mouth latched to my left breast.

He pulled away with a very wet kissing sound and wiped his lips.

His hand touched the back of my neck and he pulled me close for a kiss.

I rocked my hips, working through my own doubts and worries of sex after pregnancy.

Within seconds there were none.

I didn't have a thing in my life to doubt.

I had Anders.

The MVP goalie when on the ice.

The MVP lover in bed.

The MVP man, protector, and father to our newborn son.

I rocked my hips harder and faster.

I began to lose myself.

A feral scream of pleasure built inside my body and I let it out.

Anders's hands climbed up my back as his mouth kissed down my chest again.

We really went at it.

Hard. Fast.

A moment we'd never forget.

Especially when we finished and the baby woke up again.

Anders and I looked at each other, then we both started to laugh.

Then we cleaned up, got dressed, and went to check on our son.

Together.

*One small family wide awake in the middle of the night, on a journey to whatever our version of forever looked and felt like.*

Preview Atlas's book now!

**The SOLA EMPIRE are your new hockey romance  
obsession!**

*Meet Atlas*

Just traded to the worst team in the league. His job is simple.  
Be the enforcer on the ice that the team needs to win a few  
more games.

*What isn't his job?*

Being selected by the owner's wife to take part in a contest  
titled '**WIN A DATE WITH A HOCKEY PLAYER!**'

*Meet Hazel*

Having a rough year.

Her best friend convinces her to have a night out.

Her best friend also enters a certain contest using Hazel's  
name.

*What happens next?*

**Hazel wins a date with Atlas!**

But guess what?

That's not even the craziest part.

*What is the craziest part?*

Oh, maybe... **IT'S WHEN HAZEL ENDS UP  
PREGNANT!**



ATLAS

The *Verwert Family* were well known for their real estate holdings across the world. Kind of a quiet family compared to other outspoken billionaire families, but still... they were billionaires and they owned the hockey team.

They were the ones who signed the contract that brought me here.

Oscar was the big wig.

His wife - Ellen - stared at me.

Their son stared at me too.

I released my hold on Tucker's shirt.

I noticed a fancy looking tissue box and swiped one and handed it to him.

“Clean yourself up,” I suggested. “We have royalty here.”

“Royalty?” Ellen laughed.

I turned to face her and threw a quick grin on my face.

Her son continued to stare up at me.

The little guy wore a *Sola Empire* hoodie with a flannel over it.

Way overdressed for this west coast beach weather, but he was trying to look the part as a cool skater kid.

Even though the kid was worth billions already.

“And who is this guy?” I asked, nodding to the kid.

“This is Timothy,” Ellen said. “My son.”

I offered my right hand. “Nice to meet you, Tim.”

“Wow,” the kid whispered. His right hand shook as he reached for mine. “You’re... huge...”

“Timothy, that’s not polite,” Ellen said.

“No, it’s fine. I am huge. I was well over six feet tall when I was in middle school. Everyone thought I’d be a basketball player. Want to know why that didn’t happen, Tim?”

“Why?”

I grabbed his hand. My hand swallowed his up.

Then I crouched down and curled my lip. “Because I liked to fight people. I liked to beat them up. I liked to rough them up. You can’t do that in basketball. They would kick me out. But in hockey...”

I smiled.

Timothy’s eyes lit up and he smiled too. “Cool.”

“Do you play hockey?” I asked.

“No,” Ellen said. “He refuses. He likes his goofy skateboard.”

“I have a skateboard park in my backyard!” Timothy yelled at me.

*Of course you do, you spoiled little shit. Please don't grow up to be some entitled punk. Or kids who grew up like me will kick your ass.*

“And he liked to surf,” Ellen said. “That scares me to death. I can't build him an ocean in the backyard.”

I looked at Ellen. “Why not? Does that cost *trillions*?”

“Atlas!” Tucker roared. “Show some respect!”

Ellen smiled back at me. “You're a nasty one, aren't you? I heard about you. Big. Mean. Forgive me language here... but you're an asshole.”

Timothy gasped. “Mom! You said the *A-word*!”

“Oh, kid, that's nothing compared to the words I know,” I said to Timothy. “Maybe we can catch some waves and I'll teach you how to properly curse.”

Tucker let out a gasp.

He lunged forward and smacked his left hip off his desk.

The entire desk jumped, knocking over picture frames.

He let out a yelp and looked ready to fall over in pain.

He reached for the wall and forced a smile.

“He's just kidding, Mrs. Verwert,” Tucker said. “Atlas likes to run his mouth. That's just part of his charm.”

“I have charm?” I asked Tucker.

“Atlas, please,” Tucker whispered.

“Oh, relax, Tucker,” Ellen said. She started to stand. “He’s just being himself. Can’t blame a man for that.”

“But he should have more respect,” Tucker said.

“Since when do I have respect?” I asked.

I stood up too.

Ellen and I began to face off.

It didn’t intimidate me for a second that the woman before me was worth billions.

I didn’t give a shit about the fact that her husband was the guy who signed my big paychecks either.

She knew that as she looked back at me.

She was taller than Tucker but much shorter than me.

Not an ounce of fear showing though.

Her eyes were crystal blue, but aged.

As was her face.

She definitely wasn’t some plastic surgery addict.

But she did have some work done.

Just the basics though.

“Mom, aren’t you scared?” Timothy asked.

“Of what? Atlas?” Ellen asked. “I think he’s a big teddy bear.”

“More like a grizzly,” I said. “And I don’t care what someone is worth...”

“Okay, this feels extremely tense,” Tucker said. “Atlas, focus that anger on me. I’m the one who screwed you over here.”

“No,” Ellen said. “It was me. I chose you, Atlas. Out of the entire team, I chose you to be the one for our little promotion.”

My lip snarled. “Little promotion, huh?”

“It’s not secret that our organization is the worst team in the league. Record wise. I feel we have a great organization from the inside. We take care of our fans. We take care of our city too. But I decided I want something bigger as we move into another season. Maybe we aren’t destined to win a lot of games, but we sure as hell are going to be visible.”

“So why not give kids some free shit when they show up to a game?” I asked.

“Atlas,” Tucker growled.

“Tucker, stop,” Ellen said. “Atlas, I wanted to be here today to see you. I wanted to shake your hand, welcome you to the family, and then thank you for your support. We have a very rabid fanbase. The thought of someone winning a date with you is a very enticing offer.”

“Couldn’t have picked the star on your team?” I asked.

“You are the star now,” Ellen asked.

“I’m far from a star, Ellen,” I said.

“That’s Mrs. Verwert,” Tucker whispered.

“Ellen is just fine,” Ellen said to me.

She offered her hand to me.

“Am I supposed to shake your hand and agree to this nonsense?” I asked.

“No. You can shake my hand because this is the first time we’re meeting. The *win a date with a hockey player* event is already set. You’re going to be there, Atlas. And from myself, my family, and the entire *Sola Empire* organization, we thank



you for doing this. And we look forward to a productive and exciting hockey season with you here.”

I gently touched Ellen’s hand and shook it.

“Mom,” Timothy whispered and he tugged at her shirt.

“Please?”

“You can do it yourself, Timothy,” Ellen said to her son.

Timothy then looked at me.

In shock and fear.

“What is it, Tim?” I asked.

“I... can... you... sign...”

“Are you asking me for an autograph?”

Timothy’s face turned red as he nodded.

I crouched down. “I don’t sign autographs, kid. Who the hell wants my signature?”

“The son of the owners,” Tucker said.

“Let him talk,” Ellen said to Tucker.

“Why is your mother afraid of you surfing?” I asked Timothy.

“She thinks I’ll drown. Money can’t bring me back to life.”

“Good answer,” I said. “What do you want me to sign?”

To my surprise, Timothy slid a hockey card out of his pocket.

One of my cards.

*Christ... look at that...*

It was amazing they put me on a hockey card.

I signed the card for Timothy and then looked at Ellen.

“Want me to sign anything?” I asked.

“You already did,” she said. “The contract that brought you here. Thanks again for your support, Atlas.”

With that said, Ellen led her son out of the office.

I looked at Tucker.

He put his hands out and smiled at me. “Atlas...”

“She wants me to be the guy for this stupid promotion? I’m going to ruin it.”

“I think she knows that,” Tucker said. “I think that’s why she chose you. You’re bad news, Atlas. And you’re always full of surprises.”

I turned and walked away without putting Tucker through a window.

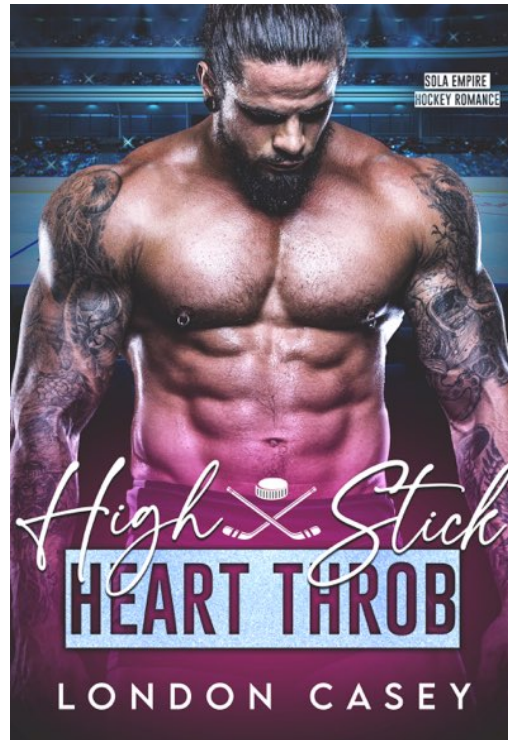
*Win a date with a hockey player?*

I shook my head.

*I felt bad in advance for the woman who was going to step in my world.*



**It was supposed to be ‘WIN A DATE WITH A HOCKEY  
PLAYER’ ... not ‘GO OUT ON A DATE AND GET  
PREGNANT!’**



**[Click here to read Atlas's book!](#)**

Go to [Amazon.com](#) and type in "HIGH STICK HEART THROB"

OR

[CLICK HERE!](#)

OR

Go too [www.LondonCasey.com](#) and look at all my books - previous releases, new releases, and upcoming releases!

## London Casey Books

*Here are some of my books! Collect them all!*



The INCI WARRIORS HOCKEY ROMANCE series:

- **First Period Foreplay**
- **Second Period Seduction**
- **Third Period Temptation**
- **Overtime Obsession**
- **Shootout Steam**
- **Playoff Passion**
- *PLUS MORE!*



The SITUATION ROM COM series:

- **The Accidental Pregnancy Situation**
- **The Waking Up Married Situation**
- **The Falling for the Boss's Daughter Situation**

- **The Breaking Up Your Ex's Wedding Situation**
- **The Hooking Up With a Single Mom Situation**
- *PLUS MORE!*



The HOW TO ROM COM series:

- **How to Marry Your Frenemy**
- **How to Steal Your Best Friend's Fiancé**
- **How to Have Your Boss's Secret Baby**
- **How to Fake an Engagement to the Best Man**
- **How to Get Auctioned to a Billionaire**
- **How to Fall for Your Best Friend's Brother**
- **How to Love a Single Father**
- **How to Find Totally Mr. Wrong**
- **How to Get Revenge on Your Ex**
- **How to Deal with a Grumpy Neighbor**
- **How to Get Pregnant on the First Date**
- *PLUS MORE!*



The JUSTA FAMILY ROM COM series:

- **Just a Single Dad**
- **Just a Proposal**
- **Just a Rock Star**
- **Just a Positive Pregnancy Test**
- **Just a Fling**

- **Just a Wedding**
- **Just a Drink**
- **Just a Kiss**
- *PLUS MORE!*

[Visit me on Facebook!](#)

[Visit my site!](#)

[Get The Casey Chronicles for FREE!](#)

- LC

THIS BOOK IS A WORK OF FICTION. ANY REFERENCES TO HISTORICAL EVENTS, REAL PEOPLE, OR REAL LOCALES ARE USED FICTITIOUSLY. OTHER NAMES, CHARACTERS, PLACES, AND INCIDENTS ARE THE PRODUCT OF THE AUTHOR'S IMAGINATION, AND ANY RESEMBLANCE TO ACTUAL EVENTS OR LOCALES OR PERSONS, LIVING OR DEAD, IS ENTIRELY COINCIDENTAL. (THIS ALSO INCLUDES THE COVER IMAGE AND/OR COVER MODEL(S) APPEARING ON THE COVER. THE CONTEXT OF THIS BOOK DOES NOT IN ANY WAY DEPICT THE PERSONAL LIFE OF SAID COVER MODEL(S). IMAGE IS LICENSED AND USED PURELY FOR FICTIONAL PURPOSE ONLY.)

FIRST ELECTRONIC EDITION MARCH 2023

COPYRIGHT © 2023 BY LONDON CASEY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THE RIGHT OF REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART OF ANY FORM.

COPYRIGHT IMAGE iSTOCK/DEPOSITPHOTOS

COPYRIGHT COVER COSMIC LETTERS