



HEALING THE QUARTERBACK

A HURTSBORO HUMMINGBIRD SERIES NOVELLA

BELLA LANE

HEALING THE QUARTERBACK

A SPORTS ROMANCE NOVELLA

HURTSBORO HUMMINBIRDS

BELLA LANE

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First Edition

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HURTSBORO HUMMINGBIRDS



Join six of your favorite romance authors as they take to the field with their team Hurtsboro Hummingbirds. These stars are guaranteed to score their very own happy ending.

Each short and steamy story promises a happily ever after that guarantees you'll be dreaming of touchdowns and championship wins with the Hurtsboro Hummingbirds.

PROLOGUE

WILL



Five years ago

“Will Anderson gets sacked again by Wallace. This will make it third and twenty-two. It’s the 4th quarter, with one minute and three seconds left on the clock. The Mustangs decide to use their last timeout.”

“So far tonight, the Mustangs are fifty percent in their third downs conversions, and I don’t know if they will be able to convert here. Even if they are able to get into field goal range, it will not be enough for them to win the game. They need a touchdown and the extra point to win, otherwise a touchdown will send this game into overtime.”

“We’ve talked about this all week, Chris. Will Anderson, the quarterback for the Mustangs, is projected to go as the first pick in the draft. If the Mustangs can pull off this upset and win, this could cement his chances,” Bob Rally says.

“I couldn’t agree with you more, Bob,” Chris Jaren comments next to him. “This has definitely been a tight game, and the Tigers are currently leading 23-17. No matter what, in order to try for the touchdown, the Mustangs need to convert this last play to a first down.”

“I agree. I mean, look, Will Anderson completed a thirty-three yard pass to wide receiver Angus Hallows to get the Mustangs to the Mustangs forty yard line from their own two, but the Tigers Defense has proven to be more impenetrable than the Mustangs thought throughout this whole game.”

“This has definitely been more of a game than anyone thought it would be. Okay, the players are taking the field again. The offense is lining up. Will Anderson looks to the sidelines, checking one more time allowing the play clock to run down. With two seconds left, he snaps the ball, looks around, drops back from the pocket as Wallace races toward him. He launches the ball in the air down field toward Angus Hallows. The ball lands perfectly in Angus Hallows hands at the twenty-five-yard line, and he continues to run to the twenty, fifteen, ten, five and into the endzone. TOUCHDOWN MUSTANGS!”

“This is Angus Hallows second touchdown of the night, and what a catch. “Wow, what a play. Angus was covered, and still Will was able to get the ball directly into his hands to score the touchdown to tie the game. A forty-five-yard pass resulting in a twenty-yard run by Angus Hallows for the touchdown. With twenty-two seconds left on the clock, the Tigers will need to get in field goal range to have any shot of winning, should the Mustangs make this field goal, making the score 24-23,” Bob says.

“Plays like this is why everyone believes Will Anderson will be the first-round pick.”

“Everyone is lined up, the ball is snapped, Jarod Johnson kicks, the ball is up, and it is good. Putting the Mustang’s on top for the first time tonight, 24-23,” Bob says.

“There’s twenty-two seconds left on the clock. Do you think the Mustangs will try to go for an onside kick, or punt it down the field?”

“If they are smart, and I know the coach is, he will have them kick it down field with hopes they can put the Tigers deep into their own endzone.”

“And that’s what they do. Williams catches the ball, but he’s quickly taken down at the seventeen-yard line,” Chris says.

“The Tigers come back on the field and snap the ball. Hunts is looking down the field for his wide receiver, finding him, he launches the ball in the air. It’s overthrown. Now it’s second and ten, with twelve seconds left on the clock. Hunts snaps the ball, and Ja’Cory Little doesn’t give him a chance to throw the ball as he sails over the center and sacks Hunts. Now it’s third and ten, with six seconds left on the clock. Hunts snaps the ball and tosses it to Devonte Adams. Adams tries to run up the middle, but is taken down, gaining three yards. With no time left on the clock, the Mustangs win the National Championship with a score of 24-23,” Bob calls out.

“Wow, what a game, what a comeback for the Mustangs.”

“I agree, Bob. This game will only help Will Anderson in the draft and should get him the Heisman trophy.”

Three months later

“Welcome to the NFL Draft of 2018. The talk of the night is all about Will Anderson, will he go as the first-round pick?”

“I think he will, look he’s had 4,872 in a single-season passing yards, and his overall college career in passing yards was 8,356. He’s had a career passing eighty touchdowns, with forty-seven being in a single season. Seven of those touchdowns were from him running the ball in. He won the Heisman trophy, and I can’t see how he’s not selected as the number one overall pick,” Collin Hubbard says.

“I have to agree. The Alabama Hurtsboro Hummingbirds are in need of a quarterback, and he would be perfect for them,” Jace Franks adds.

“The pick is in, and here comes the Commissioner, Roger Goodell to announce. Let’s see if we are right,” Collin says.

“With the first pick of the NFL Draft 2018, the Alabama Hurtsboro Hummingbirds select Will Anderson, QB, Maine.”

“We knew this is how it would go, and the Hummingbirds couldn’t have picked a better quarterback to help turn their team around,” Jace comments.

“I agree. I’m excited to see what his future brings to the NFL,” Collin says. “Hawaii is on the clock.”

CHAPTER 1

WILL



Present Day

“**A**nderson, come to my office,” Coach calls out.

I smile as I walk to the coach’s office, allowing others to think it’s no big deal, but to be honest, I’m a little concerned. I’ve been with the Alabama Hurtsboro Hummingbird’s since I was drafted as the number one pick in 2018. Though the first three seasons were great, with us winning our first Super Bowl in 2020, the last two seasons have not been my best.

Though I currently have one of the highest stats for QB’s in the NFL, with over fourteen thousand passing yards, almost four thousand rushing yards, sixty-two touchdowns, and only five interceptions.

This last draft, they drafted another quarterback, Jason McHenry, and the kid is itching to get on the field and prove himself. I see a lot of myself in him, and though I may be twenty-seven and tired, I’m not ready to give up my start yet. Maybe it’s the cocky young kid still inside me, but I know how hard I worked to get to the place that I am at. I enjoy the smell of the astro turf on the field, the feel of the pigskin ball in my hand, and the cheers from the fans in the stands.

There is nothing like a Sunday night prime game, with the lights on in the stadium. The energy from the crowd is electric, and you feel as if the whole world is cheering you on as much as they are rooting against you. The feeling is invigorating as it is daunting.

I walk into the coach's office, he immediately says, "Close the door."

I do and then sit down in the chair he is pointing to, "What's going on, coach?"

"How are you feeling about this season?"

"I feel good, Coach. No lingering issues from the concussions. I think this is going to be a great season."

"I want to talk to you about that. I'm glad you're doing better, however I would feel better if you help train McHenry," he starts out.

I look at Coach, knowing there is more he wants to say.

"I want you to help build him up. He's got natural talent, but he is still raw. I need him ready to pick up, should anything happen. God willing, it doesn't, but with the defensive linebackers on the other teams seeming to target Quarterbacks, and the fact that you've already had two concussions last season, I need to ensure we are covered, should anything happen this season."

"I understand, Coach. I will help him whenever I can. Have you spoken to Coach Star?"

"Yeah, and he will be training all the quarterbacks as usual, but we are going to need your help and expertise with the rookie."

“I get it, Coach,” I say, not really liking what I’m hearing, but I know I have no room to argue.

“Will, you will always be our starter as long as you are here, but this team needs to know that if the inevitable should happen they can count on someone else to step in and pick up where your leadership left off. McHenry reminds me of the kid you were when we drafted you.”

“I was thinking the same thing, Coach. He has a gift for sure and will make a hell of a quarterback in his career. I will work with him before camp starts, and we will see what he has to offer then,” I tell Coach.

He nods, then gets back to the roster, while I get up and leave the office.

Brick Siler, my center, walks up to me, “Everything good, man?” he asks, sounding concerned.

“Yeah, all is good. Coach wanted to talk about training.”

“Are you still going to be the starting quarterback?” he whispers as he looks over at McHenry.

“I don’t know,” I tell him honestly. “Coach says I’ll always be the starter as long as I’m here, but he wants me to train the rookie to be able to take my position, should the possibility of me going down happens,” I say, looking him in the eyes.

“Oh,” he says, and nothing else.

“McHenry,” I call out, not waiting for an answer, “come with me.”

I walk out of the locker room and toward the field. I can hear McHenry walking up behind me, probably wondering what is going on.

I remember taking in a few of his games after catching some highlights. He was the starting quarterback at my alma mater, and the sports commentators used to say he could be on par to me. Though he wasn't the first draft pick, he was still picked in the first round.

We get to the field, and I run through some drills with him. The kid is young, and has a lot to learn, but I can see the potential in him.

“You got a good arm, kid. Your throws are accurate, but you're holding back. You need to learn to maneuver around the pocket,” I tell him.

“I'm nervous and awe struck,” he tells me.

“I get it, but I'm no different than anyone else.”

“At Maine, you were the one we always strove to be as good as. I was hoping to be able to beat your record, but none of us did,” he chuckles. “You are a legend, and I can only hope to be as great as you one day,” he adds, and not knowing how to respond, I can only nod.

“Once you get to camp in a few weeks, you'll be able to get more reps in with the team, and as long as you listen and are willing to learn, your game can only grow.”

“Thanks. I appreciate all your insight and help,” he says with a smile. Not as cocky as I was when I first came here.

I've learned a lot over the years not just about the NFL games, but as a player, a teammate, and a leader. As a kid in high school and even college, I was so cocky. I was the big quarterback who led my teams into championships, the man who dated the head cheerleader, and was given prestige. Everyone wanted to be my friend, to be me, and I ate it up.

Well, everyone but one. I shake my head, not knowing why thoughts of my neighbor slipped through my mind.

McHenry and I pack up the balls and leave the field, making plans to run more drills again tomorrow.

I walk through the door of my house, after leaving the stadium, my phone rings, looking at the caller id and see my agent's name.

“Rob, what's going on?”

“Hey Will, just wanted to let you know, rumor is Dallas wants to trade Hummingbirds a first-round pick in 2024 for you. I need to know if you are interested in being traded?”

“I would prefer not, but I know the Hummingbirds have not signed a contract extension yet, and if they want to consider trading me, then I shouldn't close the door to another opportunity, but I don't expect to be traded without an abundance of a pay raise.”

“I understand and I would make sure it's as lucrative for you as it is for them. I wanted to know how to proceed should Walter decide not to renew your contract, though I really don't think we will have an issue with that, but you never know, especially with the rumor.”

“I understand and appreciate the heads up. Have a good night, Rob,” I say, sighing as I hang up the phone.

I turn the tv on and hear the ESPN commentators talking about my contract.

“His contract is coming to an end, and so far, there hasn't been any talks about the Hummingbirds extending his contract.”

“Rumor has it, Dallas may be willing to talk trade. Will Anderson, for the first-round pick in 2024.”

“Dallas definitely needs the help of a good quarterback, but their offensive line needs a makeover as well. Anderson already had two concussions last season, and with Dallas’ O-line, they may not be able to protect him enough to not cause injury to him.”

I walk into the kitchen to get a bottle of water as I listen to the commentators speak as if they know me. I only allow them to see and hear what I want them to. I learned early on that the media is not always your friend.

I wanted to ask Coach about the contract today, but I don’t want to seem overeager. I would hope the owner of the team would like me to stay. I have enjoyed getting to know my team and the trust that we have built up over these last five years.

As of right now, I’m allowing my agent and the owner to negotiate the talks.

My phone rings again, just as I get to the couch. I look down at the caller id and see it’s my dad.

“Hey, dad, what’s going on?”

“How accurate are these rumors, son?” he asks, not even saying hello.

“Nothing concrete has been said to me or Rob, so neither of us are sure yet.”

“Walter hasn’t signed a new contract?”

“No, not yet,” I sigh, knowing where this is going.

“Maybe you should retire and come back home to run the business.”

“Dad, you know the restaurant is not my dream. My dream is to be on the field, and as long as I can play, that’s where I want to be,” I tell him for what I think is literally the hundredth time.

“I know, son, but you need to think about your future. You’ve already suffered two concussions this past season, and I don’t want to see you get hurt anymore. I worry about you.”

“I know, dad, and I appreciate that you worry, but you don’t need to. I’m okay.”

“When are you going to come home and visit?”

“I don’t know, dad, training camp starts in a few weeks, and I’m currently training the rookie QB.”

“You’re training the rookie they just drafted from here? Why?”

“Probably because he is from there, and I’m the best one to train him,” I say.

“Hmmm, well I’d like for you to come home to visit this year. You haven’t been home since you were drafted.”

“I know, dad, I don’t know when I’ll be able to. Maybe it would be better for you to come out here again.”

“Son, I like my fall and winters. You don’t get that in Alabama, and the humidity is awful there. I don’t know how anyone can breathe with all that.”

I laugh, because he’s right, the humidity can be unbearable here, but it never gets as cold here as it does there. Sometimes I miss Maine winters, but then I remember all the snow, and I’m okay with where I’m at.

“I’m sure the Hummingbirds will extend your contract, son. I want you to know that no matter what happens, I’m very

proud of you.”

“Thanks, dad. I miss you too,” I tell him, a tightness forming in my chest as I hang up.

I really should consider finding time to go home and spend with him.

CHAPTER 2

KRISTA



“**R**eschedule my appointments,” I call out.

“Krista, where are you off to in a hurry,” the receptionist Sharon asked.

“To the maternity ward. Emily had her babies,” I squeal.

“What? Isn’t it early?”

“Yeah, that’s why I need to go make sure she’s okay,” I say, running out the building, having just read the text message, since I was with a patient for the last hour and a half.

I head over to the hospital, Leia’s text going through my mind.

The babies are here, and Emily could use you both.

My heart dropped, hoping the babies are okay. She’s early, though we knew there was a possibility of her delivering early, we had all hoped she would make it a little longer than this. I walk into the hospital going straight for the elevator that will take me to the maternity ward. When I get off the elevator, I walk straight to the nurse’s station.

“Can I help you?” the nurse asks.

“Can you tell me what room Emily Janoby is in, please?”

“She is in room 264, down the hall, last door on the right.”

“Thank you,” I say as I walk quickly down the hall.

I knock lightly on the door, then open it. Emily is laying on the bed, Jake right beside her.

“Hey, Em,” I say.

“Krista,” she says, her eyes lighting up when I walk in.

“Guess the babies didn’t want to wait anymore, huh?” I ask, with a chuckle.

“No, they did not,” she says, shaking her head.

“How are you feeling?”

“I feel tired, but I’m okay. Jake was a trooper, doing everything the 9-1-1- operator said, delivering our babies safely,” she tells me with a smile as she looks at Jake, and he smiles down at her.

“How about if I go get us something to eat?” he asks her.

“That sounds good. You know I hate hospital food.”

We all laugh, then he leans down and kisses her, causing my heart to ping with jealousy, but I smile at them both.

Once Jake leaves, I sit on the bed, looking at Em. “How are you doing, really?” I ask.

“I was so scared, Kris,” she says, tears welling up in her eyes.

“Oh, sweetie, I would say you were crazy if you weren’t scared. How are the babies doing?”

“The doctor and Leia both say the babies are doing well in the NICU, in fact Leia sent me a picture of them.”

“Oh, let me see,” I say, excitement coursing through me.

She opens her phone and pulls up the pictures and passes the phone to me.

“Oh my goodness, Em, they are so beautiful,” I tell her as I look at both pictures. “Leia didn’t say, are they boys, girls, one each?”

“Boys,” she says with a smile.

“Oh, they are going to be a handful, I can already tell,” I say, laughing as a knock comes at the door.

We both look over when the door opens, and Riley walks in.

“Hey guys, is this a good time?”

“Of course, come in Ri,” Em says, smiling at our friend.

“How are you feeling?” Riley asks Em.

“I’m okay. Sore, tired, and anxious to see my boys.”

“I’ll bet.”

“Want to see the pictures of the boys that Leia sent to Em?” I ask Riley as I pass the phone to her.

“Of course. Oh my goodness, they are so adorable, Emily. When do you get to see them?”

“Hopefully tomorrow,” Em says with a sigh. “Jake was amazing delivering our babies.”

“I’m so happy you all are alright, and healthy it would seem.”

“Yes,” I nod in agreement to what Riley said.

She tells us how everything happened, from her water breaking to Jake shaking through the delivery. We can’t help the laughs that escapes us all.

Just then, there is a soft knock on the door, and Riley quickly opens it.

“It’s about time you showed up,” Riley says, pulling Leia into a hug.

“Tell us, how are the babies?” I ask her excitedly.

“The boys are doing well, and waiting for their mama,” She looks at Emily.

“I can’t wait to see them, too,” she responds.

“Well hopefully tomorrow you get your chance,” she says, then asks, “where’s Jake?”

“He went to get us some food. Hospital food is the worst,” Em comments with a scrunched-up nose, and we all laugh.

Just then, Jake walks in with a bag of food and looks around the room, “Ummm, I don’t think I brought enough.”

We all laugh again, including Emily.

“It’s fine, Jake, I am on my way home. I wanted to check in on Emily,” Leia says.

“Yeah, we are leaving too. You guys enjoy your dinner, and we will come back tomorrow,” I say, giving Em a hug as my stomach growls from the smell of food, reminding me I haven’t eaten today.

We all walk out of the room together, heading for the elevators.

“Are the twins really okay,” I ask Leia, as we all step into the elevator.

“As with all premie’s, there are always some health concerns, but I think the twins will be fine, especially with all the care they are receiving,” she tells Riley and I, pressing the

button to the ground floor. I feel my body sag in relief at hearing those words from one of my best friends.

“Do they have everything they need?” Riley asks. “Emily and Jake. Do they have everything they need since the babies are early?”

“Oh. Hmm, I don’t know if they were able to finish the nursery before Emily went into labor or not,” Leia says.

“I’ll find out, and if not, we can do it for them,” I tell them both, making a mental note to talk with Em about it.

The elevator doors open, and I see my dad standing in front of us.

“Dad, what are you doing here? Are you okay?” I ask, shocked to see him.

“I’m fine. I’m coming to check on a friend that was admitted last night. Are you okay?”

“Yes, we were checking on Emily. She had the twins today.”

“Oh, how wonderful. Are the babies okay?” he asks, looking a little worn down.

“Yes, they are in the NICU, but we’ve been told on good authority they should be fine,” I say looking over at Leia.

“Hello, Mr. Strauss,” Leia says as we step off the elevator, allowing him to step in.

“Ms. Stone, you look tired,” he says, but I’m still completely shocked to see him here.

“It has been a long day, sir. In fact, I’m on my way home to crash. Hope your friend gets to feeling better,” I hear Leia tell him before the doors close.

“I have never known my father to come to the hospital for anything. Not even when I had my appendix taken out,” I mutter, still processing that he was here in the hospital.

As we continue walking toward the exit, my stomach grumbles again, so I say, “We should all go grab something to eat before we go home.”

“I don’t know, ladies,” Leia starts to say, when all of the sudden we hear, “Leia, why have you not returned my calls, babe?” a man I’ve never seen before calls out.

“There is no reason for me to answer your calls. We broke up a month ago.” She tells him.

I realize quickly this must be her ex-Josh. She never did say what happened, and I’ve never pushed. I figured she’d tell us when she was ready.

“Now, babe, you know we only had a little spat. Couples fight. I’m sure we can work through this if you would talk it over with me.”

“There is nothing to talk over. You did what you did, and I said what I said. We are done, now please leave me alone.”

“Listen, Leia, I’ve given you time and space to realize that you belong to me, it’s time for you to come home,” he tells her, but I get the feeling there is more to it.

“Is there a problem here?” I turn and see Noah Ashton walking up behind us.

“No, my girlfriend and I are just having a chat, officer,” Josh says with menace lacing his voice.

“Ex-girlfriend,” she reiterates.

“Leia, we are not done talking,” Josh says, as I watch Leia turn to talk to Noah.

I'm standing here, watching, and listening, not sure what else to do. I never got to know Josh. He kept Leia away from us when they were dating, but by the sounds of things that I'm hearing, it's a good thing she broke up with him. He seems a little possessive for my liking and not in a good romantic way.

"Yes, you are Josh. Leia has already told you it's over, and you need to leave," Riley says.

"You need to stay out of this, Riley, if you know what's best for you."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Noah asks, getting in Josh's face, and I step closer to Riley.

"No...Nothing," Josh stutters as Noah gets in his face.

"That didn't sound like nothing. That sounded like a threat made in front of an officer of the law. You do know I can arrest you for that, right?" Noah growls angrily.

We all watch as Josh's face pales.

"I suggest you leave this property, and stay away from these ladies, or next time, I will handcuff you and drag you to the station for harassment. Do I make myself clear?"

"Fine," he says through clenched teeth, "Leia, I'll see you soon," he adds, before turning and walking away.

"I would not suggest trying," Noah calls out.

We all watch Josh leave the hospital. I watch as Riley pulls Leia in for a hug. I stand back, not sure what I should do, or what I even witnessed.

"Hey, are you okay?" Noah asks Leia.

"Yeah, I'm good," she tells him before asking, "What are you doing here?"

“I had to bring in a suspect to be looked at, before I can book them into jail.”

“Oh, are their injuries bad?” she asks.

“Not at all. They ran, and the K-9 got them really good in the leg. The doctor is patching him up. He’ll be fine.”

“One day, maybe the suspects will realize they shouldn’t run,” she says with a smile, and I can’t help the chuckle that escapes me.

“We can only hope,” he replies back with his own chuckle. “Hey, I wanted to ask, have you heard from Mike recently? I emailed him, but I haven’t heard back from him and wondered if maybe you had?” Noah asks.

“No, we haven’t, but you know how his missions are. He can’t reach out unless he’s back at a secure base. Hopefully someone will hear from him soon,” she tells him.

Mike Stone is a Captain in the Army, currently in Special Ops Forces. He’s always gone, and I know it hurts when Leia doesn’t get to hear from him often. I remember him and Noah always following behind us when we were freshman in high school. Luckily once they both graduated, we were able to have a little more freedom to enjoy our time in high school, but I know how much Leia has missed her brother.

I come back to the conversation hearing Leia say, “No, I’m good. We are going to get something to eat, then I’ll go home and crash. It was good seeing you, Noah. Be safe.”

“Thanks, and you too. If you have any more issues with that guy, call me. I’ll handle it.”

We head out of the hospital, leaving Noah behind.

“So that was Josh, huh?” I ask Leia as we walk to the restaurant down from the hospital.

“Yeah. I wish he would just leave me alone already.”

“Well, maybe now he will now that he knows Noah is around.”

“Maybe,” she says, but not convincingly.

We walk into the restaurant, and the hostess takes us to a table toward the back. The food smells amazing and I can’t help the growl that my stomach does in anticipation.

The hostess leaves us with our menus, and my stomach grumbles again.

“Girl, you must be starving?” Riley says chuckling.

“I am. I was with a patient when Leia sent the text, so once I was done, I immediately went straight to the hospital, forgetting that I haven’t eaten today, so thank you girls for coming to eat with me,” I tell them with a chuckle, and they both laugh.

“I think we all need food, though if I went straight home, I probably would have crashed instead of eating,” Leia says.

“Riley, how are things going over at the fire department?”

“They are good, same old things, nothing too exciting, thank goodness. How are things going with you? Meet any celebrities yet?” she asks with a chuckle.

“No, no celebrities, but things are going well. I enjoy helping people get back their independence,” I say with a sigh.

The waitress comes and takes our order before leaving with our menus.

“How are you doing, Leia? I feel like we haven’t talked in ages. Are you okay with the break-up with Josh, seriously?”

“Oh, I’m definitely okay with breaking up with him. My only regret with him was that I actually agreed to go out with him in the first place.”

“He did seem a bit possessive when he was talking to you, and not in a good way either.”

She sighs, and says, “Because it wasn’t. I realized a little too late, Josh is very controlling, amongst other things. I’m very grateful I never had sex with him.”

“You didn’t?” I ask, completely shocked.

“It’s not like he didn’t try, but I never felt comfortable, so I always told him I wanted to wait until I was married.”

“Leia, are you still a virgin?” I whisper in shock.

Her face turns a dark shade of red, and even with the dim lighting in the restaurant I can tell.

“Yes,” she says, sighing, but looking around to make sure no one is listening to us.

“Good for you,” I tell her and watch the smile on her face grow. “You should wait for the right person, and never let anyone push you to do something you are not comfortable doing, and I am so glad you didn’t give that creep what he wanted,” I tell her.

“Me too,” she sighs, “but at this point, I don’t know if or when I’ll ever find someone, I can be comfortable with.”

“You will,” Riley says, and I nod in agreement.

The waitress brings our food, laying it in front of us, and I quickly pick up my fork, taking a bite, before I know it, my

plate is empty.

“You weren’t kidding about being hungry,” Riley says, looking down at my plate with a smile.

“I think I was even hungrier than I thought,” I chuckle, my stomach still not feeling full.

“Leia, are you okay?” I ask, looking at her barely touched plate.

“Yeah, I’m sorry guys, I think I’m more tired than I was hungry. You want it, Krista?”

“Are you sure?” I ask.

“Yeah, I’m sure,” she says, as a yawn hits her.

I take her plate and am only able to eat half of her dinner.

The waitress comes back and takes our plate, leaving the bill. I give her my card.

“No, Kris, we should split the bill,” Leia says.

“Why? I ate mine and yours. It’s only fair I cover the bill.”

“I’ll take care of the tip if you are okay with that,” Riley says, and I nod in agreement.

“Thanks ladies, I appreciate you both,” Leia says, stifling another yawn.

“Come on, let’s get you back to your car so you can go home and get some sleep,” I tell her as I take in the dark circles around her eyes.

We walk outside the restaurant and begin the walk back to the hospital parking lot.

“Thank you again ladies, for coming to eat with me. Be safe driving home, Leia.”

“I will. I’ll call you both later. Love you all,” she says, getting into her car.

I wave as they both drive off, then walk to mine, before heading home.

I moved to a one-bedroom apartment when I started working as a physical therapist. Dad said I could stay in our home for as long as I wanted, but since mom passed away before my senior year, it hasn’t really felt like home.

I pull into my apartment complex and make my way inside. I quickly jump in the shower, washing up. Now that the excitement from Emily’s delivery has died down and my stomach is full, I can feel the exhaustion creeping in.

I dry off and climb into the bed, allowing sleep to pull me in.

CHAPTER 3

WILL



Two months later

“The Hummingbirds have offered Will Anderson a five-year contract extension, with the biggest payout to date for quarterbacks. He will be the highest paid quarterback in the league. I can see big things coming from the Hummingbirds this season,” *ESPN Sports News* says.

“Anderson,” Coach calls out from the sideline.

“Yes, Coach,” I say as I jog over to him.

“I want McHenry to play the start in the preseason games,” Coach Jacks tells me.

I look at him with confusion.

“I want him to experience the pressure of the field, gain the knowledge of how the NFL differs from college, and just get comfortable before the season starts. Since it’s preseason, it won’t matter if we win or lose, I want to give him some field time.”

“I’m okay with that, Coach. It will definitely make the other teams, and the rumors run rampant with confusion,” I tell him chuckling.

“Exactly,” he says with his own smirk. “How do you think the kid is doing?”

“He’s come a long way in the two months we have been working together. I’ll know more when I see him play in a game.”

“Agreed.”

“Is the team ready for the Cure for Children’s Cancer Charity event tonight?” Coach asks.

“As we are every year. We have explained to the new guys what’s expected. I’m hoping we can exceed our goal as we did last year,” I tell him.

“Agreed. This is the only Charity event I don’t mind going to,” Coach says, and I nod in agreement.

I look over at Coach Jacks and know he is thinking about his daughter. He lost his daughter to cancer when she was eleven. It was a devastating time for him, and he has since been a big advocate for Children’s Cancer research. The team has made it our mission to help and support where we can.

This year we are raffling off a date with a player, season tickets in one of our luxury executive suites, and one weekend of yard cleanup. Our goal this year is to raise half a million, but I’m hopeful that we can double that and reach at least a million dollars.

I stand on the sideline next to Coach, watching McHenry snap the ball. He’s doing better moving around the pocket and being more aware of his surroundings. I watch as he throws the ball down field and into the hands of running back Henry Sanders.

“Kids got talent, that is for sure,” Coach says.

“I agree. He will make a great addition to this team,” I comment, while still watching the field.

I get back on the field and get some practice alongside my teammates.

We finish practice, and everyone heads for the showers, before going home to get ready for the charity event tonight. I take my black tux out of the closet and begin getting dressed. I made sure my shoes were shined ready for this event. The event is being held at the Country Club, where the rich and elite come together.

I look at the time and know I need to get going. I don't want to arrive late, so I walk out to my garage and get into my Aston Martin DBS. It was a bit of a splurge, but I have always loved and wanted this type of car. Mine is a metallic slate gray color and it's perfect for showing up to functions like this.

I take the drive a little faster than I should, but I can't help the speed when the vehicle drives so smoothly. I drive to Ashley's house, my date for the evening. We are encouraged to bring a date for picture ops, and I trust Ashley to not expect or want more from me. She knows how to play the game, but most of all she is my trusted friend.

We met when I was first drafted to the Hummingbirds. I was a cocky kid, who no one ever told no to. Everyone always tripped over their own feet to make me happy, be my friend, or try to trap me. No one ever told me the hard truth, until I met Ashley.

I put my cocky moves on her, and she turned me down. Not just turned me down but laid into me. At first, I was pissed, said so much negative shit about her, but then I finally had to realize she was right, and I owed her an apology.

From there we started talking and became really good friends. She is my go-to person when I need honest feedback or if I have an event that I need to attend.

We pull up in front of the Country Club and step out. Grabbing a ticket from the valet, I walk around the car and help Ashley out of the car as pictures are being taken. We walk up the walkway to go inside the venue.

Julius Haynes, the Director of the Hurtsboro Hummingbirds, is standing inside the door, welcoming the guests.

“Will, how are you this evening?”

“I’m good, Mr. Haynes. You remember my date, Ashley, and we are excited for this evening,” I tell him.

“Nice to see you again, Ashley. I’m glad you are both excited for this evening. How are we looking for this season? Do you think we have a shot at the Super Bowl again?”

“Sir, we always have a shot at the Super Bowl, and I think we are looking really good for the season.”

“That’s what I like to hear, and it’s also why your contract was extended. We know you are the best quarterback out there,” Mr. Haynes says with a chuckle coming from his mouth, but seriousness radiating from his eyes.

“I understand, Mr. Haynes, and I appreciate the confidence you and the board have in me.”

He waves his hand, like it’s not a big deal, though I know it is, then he says, “Go mingle, have a good time, and let’s raise lots of money.”

“Yes, sir,” I respond as I begin to walk further into the venue.

I mingle with all the potential donors, as well as the players throughout the night. Coach gives his yearly speech on why the donations are so important and reminds every one of his little Ellie, then we have the raffles. We surpassed our goal of half a million, but we didn't reach the million-dollar mark, though seven hundred and fifty thousand is an amazing number to raise, and we aren't sad about our part in helping the children.

As soon as I drop Ashley off, I go home after the event, feeling good about what we have accomplished tonight. The smile on Coach Jacks' face was worth all the efforts that we put into the event.

Once I get home, I undress, shower, and climb into bed, knowing I need to be in the gym early tomorrow. Preseason starts in a week, and even though I'm not starting, I need to ensure I am ready.

Four weeks later

"It's the official start of the NFL season. Coach Jacks has had rookie, Jason McHenry starting during the preseason games, do you think we will see Will Anderson as the starting quarterback, or will the coach keep McHenry in as the starter?" ESPN Sportscaster, Jesse asks.

"I can't see the Hummingbirds renewing Anderson's contract for the amount that they agreed to pay him, if they aren't going to start him," Bill says.

“McHenry wasn’t bad in his start. He definitely showed the world he has an arm and is willing to get out there and do what needs to be done. He lost the first game but seemed to find his rhythm in the second and third game allowing the Hummingbirds to win,” Jesse says.

“This is true, the kid has talent, and that can only help the Hummingbirds going forward,” Bill says.

“The Hummingbirds will take the field at noon against Dallas. All our questions will be answered then, and I can’t wait to see what Coach Jacks and the Hummingbirds decide,” Jesse comments.

In the locker room we are suiting up, hyping each other up, and hydrating.

“Alright, listen up,” Coach calls out in the locker room. “We are going to go out there and show Dallas what we are capable of and whose home turf this is. McHenry did a great job throwing the teams off kilter these last few weeks, but today, we are going to show them how we win. Remember, we are hummingbirds. Hummingbirds are fast, have keen eye sights, and are associated with royalty and warriors, and we need to prove that we are warriors. You all know your assignments, and I expect you to play your positions accordingly. Linebackers, I expect you to protect Anderson while also keeping to your blocking assignments,” Coach says.

“Yes, Coach,” all the players say in unison.

“I want everyone to go out there, have fun, but do your jobs, and bring us home a W, but be safe. Stay healthy for as long as you can, got it?”

“GOT IT,” the players call out in unison as the coach nods and says, “Coach Star, we need a prayer.”

“Yes Coach. Bow your heads. Dear heavenly father, thank you for the blessings you have bestowed on each and every one of us. Thank you for bringing us together as a family, and father we ask that you protect us, guide us, and bless us with all the knowledge that is needed as we take to the field today. Lord, please bless our opponents on the field, may you guide their hearts and their bodies as these men take the field today, and keep everyone safe. Lord, we ask that should victory be ours, we accept it humbly and gratefully. Lord, we ask all these blessings in your name, Amen.”

“Amen,” all the players call out.

“Alright, it’s time to go to the tunnel. I want to see those game faces,” Coach calls out, “Let’s show them who we are, and who are we?”

“Hummingbirds,” the players call out.

“Who are we?”

“Hummingbirds.”

“That’s right. Now go out there and show them what that means.”

I follow behind the coach as he leads us through the tunnel to the opening. I hear the screams of the fans, then the announcer as he calls for the team. We run out of the tunnel to the field, making our way to our sideline. I take in a deep breath to calm my nerves.

I walk out to the middle of the field with the rest of the captains for the coin toss. We shake hands with the opposing team captains, and then the head referee introduces himself and proceeds to tell us what is heads and what is tails on the coin.

“Dallas, since you are the visiting team, you get to call it,” the Ref says.

“Heads,” one guy calls.

“It’s tails, Hummingbirds win the toss. Do you want the ball or defer it?”

“We will defer,” I say.

“Which side of the field do you want to start?”

I point to the home side.

“Hummingbirds have won the toss and elected to defer. Dallas will take the field first. Let’s have a good game.”

We all shake hands again, before going back to our respective sidelines.

The kicking team takes the field, and the game starts.

“Hummingbirds win the first game of the regular season, beating Dallas, 42-17. Will Anderson has shown that he still has an arm, and he is not afraid to run. He has 863 passing yards and 120 rushing yards in today’s game, resulting in one touchdown,” Bill says.

“If anyone doubted Will Anderson, I don’t think they will after today,” Jesse comments.

We make our way into the locker room after the game, excitement for the win as cheers and smack talking can be heard all around.

“Hey, hey,” Coach starts.

“What you all did out there, is exactly what I asked from you. You all did a wonderful job today, but there is still some work to be done. There were too many penalties on the field and missed block assignments. We will work on those this

week in practice, but you all should be proud of the W you got today.”

“Hell yeah!” some of the players cheer out.

“Next week will be tough as we have Washington. I need you all to keep your focus and momentum.”

“Yes, Coach,” everyone calls out.

“Coach, the media is ready for you,” someone calls out.

“Don’t go anywhere, Will, I’m sure they are going to want to talk to you as well,” Coach says, and I nod.

Once all the media is done, I quickly shower, change, and head out to get something to eat with the team, before going home.

CHAPTER 4

KRISTA



“Can you turn the game on?” Mr. Matthews asks as I have him doing his leg lifts.

“What game is that?” I ask him.

“Dallas and Hurtsboro. I want to see if Will Anderson will be in the game as a starter. They’ve been playing that rookie, McHenry, during the preseason games,” he says.

“Absolutely not,” I say with conviction in my voice. “You are here to get better, and if I turn the game on, you will not pay attention to what you need to be doing in order to get better.”

“That’s not fair,” he tells me, but I stay resilient in my excuses.

There is no way I am going to sit here and listen to the commentators talk about Will like he is the best thing since Joe Montana. That is not happening. Too bad they don’t know the true asshole, who can’t be bothered to come visit his own father.

I don’t understand how they could all think he is so amazing, when those of us who grew up with him, know better. Especially me since I grew up next door to him.

I work on Mr. Matthews, making him do his drills, but I can tell he is only trying to hurry through so he can go watch the game. Seems he and some of the rest of the town forgot what an ass Will was growing up here, or maybe they never realized when he spoke to them.

“Mr. Matthews, I would prefer you not injure yourself any more than you already are. We will call your session. Make sure to put some ice on it to keep it from swelling.”

“Yes, Krista. Thank you for understanding.”

“I would suggest not requesting me on a Sunday any more so that you can watch your football games.”

“That’s a good point. Can we schedule our sessions on Mondays?”

“Yes, we can. I’ll mark you in my calendar. Now be safe walking to your car.”

“I will. Enjoy your Sunday, Krista.”

“Thanks, and enjoy the game,” I call out.

I start cleaning up the equipment and setting the room in order.

I look at the time, and realize if I don’t hurry, I’m going to be late meeting Leia and Riley at Emily’s.

Things have been chaotic these last couple of months. Leia’s ex Josh was harassing and stalking her and Noah Ashton, then he beat Riley so bad she was in the hospital for a few weeks, some of that time she was in a coma.

Josh escaped from jail, through a botch-up in the paperwork. No one has seen him, and now truths are coming out about his father, the Senator. Seems the Senator has been abusing his maid, and though he says he doesn’t know where

his son is, the rest of the state believes he sent him to Mexico, or another country where extradition is not authorized.

Riley seems to have moved on, though I don't know how she's not worried that he could come back. Maybe because she is a firefighter, and deals with life and death every day, I don't know if I was in her shoes, I could be that nonchalant.

I finish cleaning up, lock the doors, and head to the parking lot. I head over to Emily's house, where I find Leia and Riley waiting for me out front.

Emily brought the twins home two weeks ago, and now we get to visit them while they are all at home.

"Sorry I'm late," I say as I get out of the car, grabbing the gift bags from my front seat, before closing the door.

"Don't stress, we just got here ourselves," Leia says, with a smile.

I take a deep breath as we all make our way up the walkway to the front door. Riley knocks on the door, and my excitement kicks in at seeing the babies and Emily of course.

Jake opens the door, and he can't hide his surprise.

"Sorry to intrude, Jake, we wanted to stop by and drop some things off for Emily and the boys," Leia says.

"Come on in, Emily will be excited to see you all," he says as he opens the door wider for us to enter.

We find Emily in the living room with the boys.

"What are you girls doing here?" she asks.

"We brought some stuff for you and the boys, and we wanted to see you," I tell her with a smile.

“I’m so happy to see you all,” she says with a smile gracing her face. “Come see the boys,” she adds.

“Oh my goodness, they are so cute,” I say.

“They look so much alike. How can you tell them apart?” Riley asks.

“Patrick has a small birthmark on his left shoulder, and Payton doesn’t,” Emily explains.

We hand her the bags, as we play with the babies.

“Oh, these outfits are so cute. Thank you, Leia.”

“These blankets will definitely come in handy, Riley, thank you.”

She opens my gift bags for the boys next, and then she laughs. “Kris, they will not be able to use these for a while.”

I shrug. It’s never too early for them to get a feel for the gloves. These two are going to love baseball, huh little men.” I say to the boys as they coo on the floor while looking at us all.

“See, they love the idea,” I say as they both squeal and we all laugh.

Emily loved her gifts of bath spas and wine for when she’s able to have both of those. Since she’s currently breastfeeding, it will be a while before she can enjoy the wine.

We spend a couple of hours with the family, calling it a night, when the boys start getting fussy. I say goodbye to the girls and head home.

When I walk into the house, I turn on the tv and hear the ESPN sports commentators talking about the Hummingbirds and Will Anderson.

“Guess they won their game,” I say as I mutter with disgust.

Then I hear them talking about Will with some female at a charity event four weeks ago.

“Of course, he had a gorgeous woman on his arm. When has that man never had a woman on his arm for anything, except when he’s on the field playing?” I say out loud, while I opt to make a sandwich for dinner. “The better question is why are we all supposed to care?” I ask the tv.

“The man is a man whore and doesn’t care who he hurts. Never has, never will,” I mutter as I take a seat on my couch, picking up the remote to change the channel. I settle on The Avengers movie as I eat my sandwich, before calling it a night and going to bed.

Three weeks later

“Hey Leia, what’s going on?” I ask, answering the phone.

“Hey, I wanted to see if you want to go to the fair with me, Noah, Riley, and Mike?”

“Mike’s home again?”

“Yeah, I’m so happy to have him here.”

“I can imagine, and I’m so happy for you. When are you guys thinking of going?”

“This upcoming Friday,” she tells me.

“I’ll have to get back to you, when I know more about my schedule.”

“Sounds good. I’ll talk to you later,” she says.

“Talk later,” I respond before hanging up.

I place my phone down on my desk as Doctor Hellman walks in.

“Krista, I have a new patient for you. He just had surgery, and it was more intense than we had originally thought it would be. I anticipate it will be a couple of weeks before you can start working with him. As you know, we have to wait for the swelling to go down.”

“What’s the injury?” I ask.

“He had to have ACL reconstruction surgery,” he tells me.

“Wow, that’s major.”

“Yeah. He’s not happy to know he will be missing his entire football season.”

“I can imagine. That’s tough for anyone. Let me know when you are ready for me to start working with him,” I tell him, and he nods before walking away.

Just then, my next patient comes in and I forget about the potential new patient to focus on the one here now.

Everyday has been the same, and thankfully it’s Friday. I walk into the office, holding my cup of coffee, and hoping I can make it through today. I have a light patient load as I take in my calendar, with my first patient already waiting for me.

I finish my cup before opening the exercise room and calling Mr. Case in. I get him set up on the treadmill and assess how well he is able to walk on his left foot. It’s been two months since his cast came off, but I can tell he is making immense progress.

After an hour of walking, “Okay, Mr. Case, let’s take a look at that foot,” I tell him as I turn the treadmill off and

guide him to the seat. He takes his shoe and sock off, and I dawn on gloves. I take his foot, rotating it, and looking for any discomfort from him, however I see none. Mr. Case has a smile, and I know he has mended.

“Everything looks good. I see no reason why we need to continue with the treatment, I will suggest however that you walk every morning to keep it from getting stiff and developing scar tissue, and as long as you do that, you will be fine.”

“Thanks, Krista. I do feel a lot better, and I will do the walking as you suggest.”

“Do you have any questions for me?”

“Nope. Thank you for all your help and advice. I couldn’t have recovered as quickly as I did without you.”

I smile at him, as he puts his sock and shoe back on. I make notes in his record, then tell him, “If you start feeling any discomfort or pain beyond what is normal, I want you to come back and see me, but if you do everything I suggested, you should be fine for years to come.”

“I will, Krista, thank you so much, again.”

“Have a good day, Mr. Case.”

I move on to the next patient, and the day goes by quickly, before I know it, I have just seen my last patient. I’m in the middle of cleaning up when Doctor Hellman walks in.

“Krista, the new patient should be ready for you on Monday to start physical therapy. I would like to take you upstairs and meet him, before he is released to go home. Do you have a moment?”

“Absolutely,” I tell him with a smile.

We take the elevator up to the recovery floor, and I follow him into the room.

“Will, this is the Physical Therapist, Krista Strauss, Krista this is Will Anderson,” Doctor Hellman says, and I freeze.

“No, I don’t think so,” Will says. “I asked for the best.”

“Krista is the best in her field, you will find no one better for what you require,” Doctor Hellman says.

“I think Mr. Anderson would be a better fit with someone else,” I say, turning to walk out of the room. “I don’t have time for people who think they know better than me. He’s only going to hurt himself more, and I want no part of it.”

“Krista,” Doctor Hellman calls out to me.

“Sorry, Doc, not this time,” I say, allowing the door to close.

I go back to my office, to collect my things, calling Leia to let her know I won’t be able to go to the fair with them. I need time to collect my thoughts, seeing Will again has shaken something in me.

I’m at home stewing over my contempt of Will suggesting I’m not the best in my field. He would be lucky to have me as his physical therapist, but I refuse to work with him, so why should I care what he thinks of me and my profession?

My phone rings, pulling me out of my thoughts. I look at the caller id and see it’s my dad, he never calls me, especially this time of night.

“Hey, dad, are you okay?” I ask.

“I’m fine hunny. Could you meet me at the house? I have something I need to talk to you about.”

“Are you sure you are okay, dad?”

“For now, yes.”

“Okay, I’ll be there shortly,” I tell him, sliding my feet into my sandals.

I grab my keys and make my way to the family home.

I arrive within fifteen minutes of dad calling me and walk into the house. “Dad, I’m here.”

“In the living room,” he calls out, and I quickly make my way there.

“Dad, what’s going on?” I ask.

“I need to talk to you, and you are going to want to sit down for this,” he tells me, though he doesn’t seem like himself.

“Okay, dad. What’s going on? Is your health okay?”

“My health is fine, but I need to explain something to you, and I hope you don’t hate me when I’m done.”

This has the hairs on the back of my neck standing, but I nod, allowing him to continue.

“A little over twenty-six years ago, your mother and I were in a bad place in our marriage. We had been unable to get pregnant, your mother was always depressed, and I used work as my escape. We had opted to divorce and had started the proceedings. I hired a part-time secretary to help me out in the office as business was taking off.”

My stomach tightens, knowing I’m not going to like what I hear, but I allow him to keep talking.

“On a really bad day, your mother and I had been arguing on the phone, she was fighting me on some issues with the

divorce, and when I walked out of my office, I caught my secretary crying. I asked her why, and she told me about her troubles in her marriage. We tried to be there for each other as we both navigated through our divorce proceedings, but one night, we had an affair at the office. It was just once, and it was shortly after that night, that your mother decided she wanted to work on our marriage. A few weeks later, I found out your mom was pregnant with you, but then my secretary came and told me she was also pregnant, however we both agreed never to tell anyone about our night together.”

He takes a deep breath, but I can't breathe. I feel like my world is about to come crashing in on me.

“Her husband had found out that he was not the child's father, and it caused some issues. I didn't know any of this until tonight, when the mom was telling the story to her child, but I've always known that I was the father.”

“They know you are their biological father?” I ask him.

“Yes,” he says solemnly.

“Who?” I ask.

“Leia Stone is my daughter and your half-sister, and she knows you are hers.”

“Oh my God,” I whisper in disbelief.

“I told her I would be telling you this evening since she found out, it was only fair that you know as well.”

“I'm going to need some time to process this,” I say.

“That's what she said as well. You two are so much alike, you always have been,” he tells me, and I can only stare at him.

“I can’t believe you knew and never said anything to either of us. Did mom know?”

“No,” he says, shaking his head. “She never knew or had a reason to know. She always wanted you and loved you very much, but no matter what we tried, our marriage was never strong or a priority. We simply co-existed together, until she died in that car accident.”

The car accident that I blame Will Anderson for. I should have been with her in the car, she wanted me to go, but... I shake my head, not wanting to go down that road of thoughts right now. Instead, I say, “I’m going to need some time to digest this, so I better go home. I’ll call you later, dad.” I finish as I stand up and make my way to the front door.

Getting in my car, I make the drive back to my place, trying to process that Leia, who has been one of my best friends since middle school, is actually my half-sister.

I didn’t think this day could get any more awkward, but I guess I was wrong. What do I say to Leia? What if she doesn’t want to talk to me?

God, what a mess our parents made.

CHAPTER 5

WILL



“Welcome back to New York and the Hummingbirds game. The current score before halftime is 34-7, the Hummingbirds, who get the ball to start the second half. So far, Will Anderson is having a great game. Take a look at the stats from the first half, the Hummingbirds have 432 passing yards and 376 rushing yards. Two of the touchdowns came from Will himself.” Bill says.

“I will say, every time Will Anderson gets on the field, he always seems to amaze me, and in a good way,” Jesse says.

“I agree. Let’s see what Will and the Hummingbirds will accomplish this next half, or can New York adjust and come back, what do you think?” Bill asks.

“If New York can clean up their defense and close up the holes on the left side, they may be able to come back, but the offense also needs to find a way to get down the field as well as converting third downs,” Jesse says.

“Well let’s see if they can,” Bill says as New York kicks the ball down the field.

“The ball lands in the hands of Safety, Jamare Corey. He goes wide to the sideline breaking tackles as he spins, he’s to the twenty, the twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, and he’s finally brought down at the forty-two, and that’s where the offense

will start this half, as we watch Will Anderson walk onto the field.”

“Will snaps the ball and passes it to running back, Henry Sanders. Sanders runs, gaining fifteen yards to ensure a first down,” Bill calls out.

“The chains get moved, and everyone lines up. Anderson snaps the ball, looks down the field, sees no one open, but he sees an opening and runs the ball. He looks to be getting ready to slide after making the first down, and, Oh...wow, that was a hit from Martin on Anderson at the thirty-three-yard line in New York’s territory,” Bill says.

“I think they are going to have to replay that, it looked like targeting to me,” Jesse says.

“Anderson hasn’t moved, yet, and the medical team is on the field assessing him. Looking back at the replay, Martin definitely dropped his helmet and hit with the crown. That is definitely targeting, though we will have to wait for the ref and see what they decide,” Bill says.

“It looks like the ambulance is coming out onto the field. This doesn’t look good for Anderson and the Hummingbirds,” Jesse comments.

“This obviously doesn’t look good. It looks like the staff is bringing his father down to the field. The EMT’s are placing a c-collar on him, and they have a back board. All the players have taken a knee on the field for the quarterback. The EMT’s are loading Anderson onto the stretcher and wheeling him into the ambulance. Coach’s face doesn’t look great, but hopefully this is just a necessary precaution, and Anderson only misses a couple games and not the season,” Bill comments.

“If you are just joining, Will Anderson, quarterback for the Hummingbirds, has just been loaded into the ambulance, and his father is getting in with him. Our prayers are with Will and that the injury is not season ending, but we will have to wait to see what the doctors and coaches say,” Jesse adds.

The ambulance leaves the field carrying an unconscious Will inside.

“Will, you were hit so hard you were knocked out. We did an MRI and found that you have an ACL tear,” the ER doctor says.

“How bad is it, Doc?” I ask.

“You need reconstructive surgery and lots of physical therapy. Unfortunately, you will be out for the rest of the season. Let’s not forget the concussion you suffered.”

“I get it, Doc, thanks,” I say, feeling defeated.

“Look, you have the surgery and get the best physical therapist, do exactly what they say, and there will be no reason why you can’t be back on the field in time for training camp next year, but you are going to have to do the work and listen to what you are told.”

“Who’s the best physical therapist?”

“The best is in Largo, Maine. Would you like for me to have them come here?”

“No need, Doc. Largo is home, so I will go there for the surgery and recovery. Are you okay with that, dad?”

“Yes, son,” dad says, looking at me with a mixture of relief and sadness.

“Keep the ice on it for the drive and use the crutches. Go straight to the Hospital in Maine, I will call and let them know

you are coming. You need to stay off the leg as much as possible, especially before surgery,” Doc says, and I nod in agreement.

Coach Jacks, Coach Star, and some of the players come by and see me. I have to break the bad news, telling them I will be going back to Maine for surgery and physical therapy. I also tell them what Doc said about being back with them in time for training camp.

“Do what you need to get better and come back to us fully healthy,” Coach Jacks says.

“I will, Coach, I promise,” I tell him, ensuring he sees the determination on my face, and he nods.

“Martin was penalized for targeting and was ejected out of the game, but I think at that point everyone was more concerned about you,” Sanders tells me.

“McHenry, remember everything I taught you. The guys will take care of you if you take care of them.” I tell him.

“I promise, I will do everything you taught me, and I will keep your seat warm, while making you proud.”

I nod, “I’ll be watching every week,” I tell them all.

Dad comes back into the room, “I have the car, and the doctor is getting your discharge paperwork as well as what you need to give the doctor in Maine.”

I nod, then look at my teammates and coaches, “I’ll be back.”

“We know, focus on you and getting better. That’s all we want,” Coach tells me.

“Good luck,” all the guys tell me as they file out of the room.

“Call me, and keep me informed of your progress,” Coach says, and I nod.

Doc brings me the MRI scans and results, and the doctor I need to see when I get to Maine.

The nurse wheels me to the car, and I get in the backseat where I can elevate my leg over the passenger seat as the doctor suggested for the ride and to help keep the swelling from getting worse.

When dad pulls up in the ER, Doctor Hellman is there waiting for me with a nurse and a wheelchair.

“Hello Will, I’m doctor Hellman, and I will be doing your surgery. Let’s get you settled into a room, and I will look at the MRI that Doctor Williams sent with you.”

“Okay,” I say with exhaustion in my voice.

I get taken to my room and helped into bed. Doctor Hellman comes in an hour later.

“Will, we are going to do your surgery tomorrow morning. You won’t be able to start physical therapy until all the swelling goes down, but as long as you stay off it, it shouldn’t take long. Get some rest tonight, and I will see you first thing in the morning.”

“Okay Doc, thank you.”

The nurse gives me some pain medicine, and I am able to get a few hours of sleep. Though the position is very uncomfortable.

In the morning, Doctor Hellman comes in, to help prep me for the surgery.

“Will, you will be asleep for the surgery, and when you wake up, I’ll be back to tell you what we find. Don’t allow

yourself to worry about anything.”

“If you say so, Doc.”

The anesthesiologist comes in and begins to prep me for what I need for the surgery, then the nurses come in and wheel me in my bed to the OR.

I don't know how many hours I am out, but dad is sitting in the chair beside me, and my knee is completely bandaged. Doctor Hellman walks in at that moment.

“Good, you are awake.”

“He just woke up, Doc,” dad says, and the doc nods.

“There was more damage than we thought, so I can't tell you how long it will take for your swelling to go down, we will watch it and adjust accordingly. I plan to talk to the physical therapist tomorrow to make sure you get on her schedule. Do you have any questions?”

“No, I think I'm okay for now, Doc. I'm very tired.”

“Get your rest, you are going to need it. I will have the nurse bring in some ice packs so you can keep it on your knee.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

He nods, then walks out.

Friday

“Will, you should be able to start your physical therapy on Monday. I'm going to release you today to go home, but before you go, I want you to meet your physical therapist. She will be at your house on Monday to begin your therapy.”

“Great, Doc, I’m ready to get out of this hospital bed.”

“I’m sure you are. Give me a few minutes, and I will be right back.”

Twenty minutes later, my door opens and in walks the Doc.

“Will, this is the Physical Therapist, Krista Strauss, Krista this is Will Anderson,” Doctor Hellman says, and I lose all thought.

“No, I don’t think so,” I say, without even thinking. “I asked for the best.”

“Krista is the best in her field, you will find no one better for what you require,” Doctor Hellman says.

“I think Mr. Anderson would be a better fit with someone else,” Krista says, turning to walk out of the room. “I don’t have time for people who think they know better than me. He’s only going to hurt himself more, and I want no part of it.”

“Krista,” Doctor Hellman calls out.

“Sorry Doc, not this time,” she says, allowing the door to close.

“What is that about, Will? She is the best, and if you want to get back on the field, she is the one you need to make that happen.”

“There has to be someone else, Doc.”

“No, there isn’t. Not one who can get you where you want to be in the timeframe you are needing.”

“Shit,” I mutter. “Doc, that woman is crazy, she would probably hurt me under the guise of helping,” I tell him.

“Nonsense, that’s not Krista’s way,” he tells me waving his hand in the air, before bringing it down on his face, “Plus, I don’t know if you’ll be able to convince her to be your physical therapist at this point.”

“Ughhh, she’s really the best?” I have to ask again, because I can’t correlate best with the girl who tried to make my life hell outside of school.

“She really is,” Doc says.

I wipe my face. “Fine, Doc. Is there any way you can talk to her?”

“Nope, this one is on you. You are going to have to make amends and convince her to work with you, especially if you want to meet your timeline goal. Good luck.”

He walks out of the room as I glare at his back. I can’t believe this is happening. Dad walks into the room, “What’s wrong?”

“Krista Strauss was the physical therapist I was supposed to work with,” I tell him.

“What do you mean, supposed to?”

“I said no, when I saw she was going to be the physical therapist.”

“Why would you do that, Son?”

“It’s not like she wanted to work with me either, Dad,” I say frustrated.

“What are you going to do?”

“Doc says she’s the best, there is no one else. He says I’m going to have to convince her to work with me if I want to be back with the team next year,” I admit, not liking my options.

“We will figure something out, for now, let’s get you home, and maybe we both can get some decent rest tonight,” dad says, as the nurse brings in the wheelchair and my discharge papers.

I nod because I am ready to get out of this hospital, and I’m going to have to make a plan to get Krista to work with me, even if it may kill me. I grimace as the thought hits me.

CHAPTER 6

KRISTA



It's Monday morning. I spent the entire weekend hiding in my apartment, ignoring phone calls. My mind is still trying to process that my best friend, Leia, is actually my half-sister. I mean, I've always considered her, Emily, and Riley as my sisters since we all connected in middle school, so I'm not upset at the thought of her being actual blood, just that my father and her mother kept a huge secret like that from us for a quarter of our lives.

I know I need to call Leia and talk this out, I'm not quite sure what to actually say. I've come up with different scenarios and conversations in my head over and over, and everything seems so awkward and weird no matter what I come up with.

I know I need a little more time to come to terms with this new revelation, but I am curious how Leia feels about this as well. I don't know what to say, and maybe she doesn't as well since she didn't reach out to me either.

I walk into the office, getting ready for Mr. Matthews, since we changed his therapy days from Sundays to Mondays, due to the football games. Though now that I know Will Anderson is out for the season, I wonder if he will still watch the games?

I hear the door open, but thinking it's Mr. Matthews coming in a little early, I think nothing of it until I hear a voice behind me.

"Hello Krista."

I turn immediately and see Mr. Anderson standing at the door.

"Good morning, Mr. Anderson. I didn't expect to see you, but I guess I should have anticipated it," I tell him. "Did your son send you?"

"No," he says, shaking his head. "He doesn't know I am here, but I wanted to talk to you."

"I can't work with him, Mr. Anderson. He doesn't want me to, and I won't be responsible for him thinking he knows more than I do, and it hinders his recovery. If he thinks he can do it better, I will give you some exercises that he can do on his own, but I won't take the blame when he's not ready for his next season or worse does permanent damage."

"That's why I'm here, Krista. He can't do this by himself. He's stubborn, as you know, but he truly needs your help, and I know he knows this," he says, getting a bit breathless and sits down on the nearest bench.

"Mr. Anderson, are you okay?" I ask, concerned.

"Ahh, I'm fine, just a bit of old age and out of shape. Don't worry about me, it's Will who needs your help."

I take in a big sigh. I know I shouldn't help the asshole, but I look at Mr. Anderson and notice he's looking a bit gray in the face.

"Okay, I'll talk to him, but I will not promise to work with him just yet," I say, when I see him start to smile.

“I guess that’s fair enough. I want my son to be able to fulfill his dream, whatever that looks like.”

I nod because I can see he loves and wants the best for his son, no matter what.

“I have a client coming in soon, so I’ll drop by your house this afternoon and have a conversation with Will. Will that be okay?”

“That will be great. Thank you, Krista,” he says, standing up with a smile.

“I’m not making any promises to help him. I only agreed to talk to him,” I reiterate.

“I know, and I appreciate that.”

He leaves, and I chew on my lip. I didn’t agree to work with Will, but why do I feel like I may have just sold my soul to the devil?

Mr. Matthews comes in, and we begin his session.

After finishing my morning appointments, I tell Sharon, “I’m going to meet with a potential new client. I’ll let you know what I decide.”

“Sounds good. See you when you get back,” she tells me as she answers the ringing phone.

I get in my car and make the drive to the Anderson house, which of course is next to my father’s house. I get out and look next door, knowing I’m going to need to deal with everything that was thrown at me on Friday evening, but first, I have something else less pleasing to do.

I walk up to the door, and before I can knock, the door opens, and Mr. Anderson is standing there.

“Krista, I’m so glad you came,” he says, opening the door wider to allow me access.

“I’m here to assess and speak to him. Remember, I’m not agreeing to anything, yet.”

“I know, but I’m still glad you came.”

I nod as he leads me to the living room, where Will is watching ESPN. I see his leg is elevated, and he currently has an ice pack on it.

“Who’s at the…” he begins to ask, until he sees me standing there.

I suck in a deep breath, trying to control my racing heart and the anger that seems to be simmering below the surface.

“Krista is kind enough to come look you over and talk to you, Son,” Mr. Anderson says as we both keep looking at each other.

“Okay,” he says, drawing it out.

I stiffen my shoulders, walk over to where he is laying and lift the ice pack off his knee. I can see the redness around the stitches, and I take in the swelling.

“What have you done?” I ask.

“I tried to do some exercises that I found online, but I think I did too much.”

“No, you did something you are not ready for yet.”

He shrugs his shoulders, like it’s no big deal, but I can tell he’s in pain.

“Let’s hope you didn’t set back your recovery,” I tell him, taking his knee into my hands and feeling around it.

I can feel some inflammation within the back of the knee. “Where are your crutches?” I ask. Looking around the room.

“They are in the bedroom,” he says, sounding disgusted.

“You need them for two weeks, at least. You are not to move around the house without them. You are straining your ligaments in the back of your knee, and if you keep it up, you will injure yourself permanently.”

“Mr. Anderson, do you have a few more pillows?”

“Yes, I’ll be right back.”

I grab my tablet out of my bag and make some notes on what I’ve noticed so far. Mr. Anderson brings in four more pillows, and I put them underneath Will’s knee and on top of the other pillows, lifting his knee higher.

“Mr. Anderson, could you also get his crutches and put them nearby?”

“Sure,” he answers, and I watch him walk away, before turning to Will.

“This should help to alleviate the swelling, keep the ice pack on it for another twenty minutes, then ice it again this evening for thirty minutes. Use the crutches when you need to get up and move around. This is all you should do for the next week. The goal is to get that swelling down before you can do anything else,” I say, putting my stuff in my bag.

“Look, Krista, I’m sorry for how I acted in the hospital. I wasn’t expecting you, so I was a little thrown off when the Doc said you were the physical therapist, and you were standing there.”

“Hmmm, I get it. You were not the patient I was expecting when I was asked to take on an athlete. I actually expected a

high schooler, though I guess I wasn't too far off, huh?" I quip.

"Bitchy, much? Must be that time of the month," he responds with a chuckle, like he had said the best come back.

"I've been called worse things by better men than you," I say, giving him a condescending smirk.

"Here we go," Mr. Anderson says, coming back into the room before Will can retort with something else that could piss me off.

"Perfect. So, keep the leg elevated and the knee iced. Use the crutches every time you get up to go anywhere, especially to the bathroom at least until next week," I tell Will, then look over at his dad, "Next week, you will need to check his swelling and if there is none, allow him to walk for about thirty minutes a day, with no crutches. As long as the swelling doesn't come back, he can up the time the week after. I'll get you some exercises that he will need to do."

"You want me to do this with him?" Mr. Anderson asks.

"He needs someone here with him, and since you live here, it makes sense. Will you be able to handle it?"

"It's just that, I have to go out of town for work. I leave in two days, and I'm not sure how long I'll be gone. Can you please come over and take care of Will, while I'm out of town?" he asks, with a shaky voice.

"I don't need a babysitter, I will be fine," Will says, and I look over at him.

"I'll send a list of exercises over, I'm sure he can handle it all until you get back. He doesn't want to do anything to jeopardize his NFL career," I say, probably a little too sweetly as I grit my teeth.

“I’m sure I will have no problems following it and being by myself, it’s not that big of a deal, dad. If it becomes too much, I’ll call Ashley and see if she can come out and help me while you are gone,” Will says.

“I better go. I have another patient to see,” I say, needing to get out of this house.

“What does Ashley know about physical therapy?” Mr. Anderson asks Will.

“She knows how to read, as well as I do. It will be fine.”

Mr. Anderson shrugs his shoulders when he looks at me, and I shake my head, grabbing my stuff, and heading for the door.

“Mr. Anderson, if you need anything, you can give me a call. Good luck on your business trip,” I say, walking out.

I get in my car, taking a deep breath, I start the car, and put it in drive.

The man may look good, like mouth-watering good, but his mouth is the biggest turn off. I shake my head of these thoughts. I don’t need to think about Will and his body like that. The man is an arrogant brute, who seems to think the world revolves around him and his fame.

“Ugghhh, I need to stop thinking about him,” I mutter out loud.

I dial the number I have been putting off, as I need someone to talk to.

“Hello?”

“Hey Leia, it’s me. Can we meet to talk?”

“Yeah, I think we should. How about drinks at our favorite place?”

“Perfect. Twenty-minutes?”

“I’ll meet you there.”

“See you there,” I tell her as I hang up, my heart pounding.

I get to the restaurant, making it there before Leia. I allow the hostess to show me to a table in the back and let her know Leia will be coming soon.

My heart is racing, not sure what to expect. The waitress comes by, and I order a glass of wine. She brings me my glass as Leia arrives.

“I’ll have the same, please. Thank you,” Leia tells the waitress before she sits down. Looking at me, she says, “Hey.”

“Hey.”

“Are you as nervous as I am?” she asks, and I nod.

The waitress brings her glass of wine, and we both take a sip.

“How are you doing?” I ask her.

“I’m still processing, to be honest. I mean, I’ve always thought of us as close as sisters, you, me, Riley, and Emily, but it’s a little different finding out we are actually sisters. I guess the good part is we already know everything about each other,” Leia says.

“I thought about that as well,” I admit to her. “I mean, if I was going to have a secret sister, I’m glad it’s you, but yeah, it is definitely a lot to process.”

“I’m okay with us being sisters, and please don’t take this the wrong way, but I think my issue is your dad, or well our

dad, I guess. I'm not sure how I feel about that. He's always been your dad when we were growing up, and I don't know that I can change that."

"I understand completely. Our parents picked a hell of a time to tell the truth, which has me wondering why now, after all these years?"

"Because of me. You remember when we were fifteen and went to the fair?"

"Yeah. That was the night Riley was supposed to meet up with Will, but he went with Jessica Miller."

"I actually forgot about that, but yes. The haunted house started all this. We went in that night, and I.."

"You had a panic attack or something, and Noah carried you out," I say, finishing up her thought.

"Yes. Well, for years after that I would have a dream, and it was always the same, the haunted house, and I would hear someone talking to me. Well Noah decided I needed to confront it, so that Friday we went to the fair, he had me go into the haunted house. I heard my mother screaming for me and telling someone to stop, so we left the fair and went straight to my mom's. That is where she admitted my father was not my father, and then your father was there to tell me he was. It was a whirlwind night of information."

"Wow, that's a lot. No wonder you need time to digest."

She nods.

"How are you and Noah doing?"

"We are good. Things are really good," she says, with a blush creeping up her face.

“Oh, I can’t wait to hear all the details at our next girl’s night. How is Riley doing?”

“She’s still adjusting, but you know Riley. She doesn’t allow anything to affect her for long.”

I nod because it’s true.

“What about you? What’s going on in your world?”

I take another sip of my wine.

“What’s going on, Kris?”

“I was asked to take on a client who had to have ACL reconstruction surgery.”

“Okay, well that shouldn’t be an issue for you,” Leia says.

“Normally, no, but the client is Will Anderson.”

“Oh wow. Are you taking him on?”

“He doesn’t want me as his therapist, and I can’t work with him, but his dad came and saw me today, asking me to come over and check on Will.”

“Did you go?”

“Yeah, I went. He of course tried to push himself sooner than he should, but now his father says he’s leaving for a business trip, and he’s not sure how long he will be gone. He asked me to come take care of Will.”

“Wow, so are you going to do it?”

“No. He plans to call his girlfriend, Ashley, to come take care of him. I just need to send a training schedule over.”

“Sounds simple, so what’s the real problem?”

“There is no problem.”

“You know I can tell when you are lying. You bite the inside of your cheek, like you are now.”

“Damn. Okay, I’m not sure why I feel like someone is taking over my job, but I do. We all know I’m the best at what I do, but having a client who doesn’t want me to help them feels like a challenge to me. I don’t know, because this is Will Anderson we are talking about. Mr. I’m perfect, and everyone is supposed to want me or want to be me.”

“Is he still like that?” Leia asks.

“I’m sure. Leopards never change their spots.”

“Hmmm,” Leia says, taking a sip of her wine.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I ask.

“Nothing, just thinking that maybe you should reconsider working with him. I know how important it is to you for everyone to have the best care, and you are not going to be happy unless you have your fingers on the treatment.”

Hmmm, true, but I don’t know.”

“I know you’ll make the right decision, regardless of what you decide,” Leia tells me with a smile.

“I guess we will see,” I say, my thoughts getting away from me.

Leia looks at her watch. “Oh, I need to go. I promised Noah I would meet him at the station to get dinner. For what it’s worth, I’m glad you are my sister.”

“Me too, Leia,” I tell her sincerely as we both stand and hug.

“I’ll call you later, and we will plan the girl’s night, since we are going to need to tell Emily about all this.”

“Hahaha, that’s very true. We will need to do it soon.”

“Agreed. Talk to you later.”

“Be safe,” I tell her before she leaves, and I sit back down to finish my wine, and mull over my thoughts.

CHAPTER 7

WILL



“**H**ow come you didn’t say anything about going out of town for business until today?” I ask dad.

“I had hoped it wouldn’t be an issue if Krista was willing to take you on as a client. She would ensure you didn’t do anything you weren’t supposed to do.”

“I don’t need Krista. I promise not to overdo anything or do anything I’m not supposed to, and if I do get injured, I promise to call someone, but I will check with Ashley and see if she’s available to come stay while you are gone.”

“As long as someone is here with you. I hate that I have to leave you during this time, but it can’t be helped. It’s not something that can be rescheduled. I’m sorry, Son.”

“It’s fine, dad. Everything will be good. I won’t do anything to jeopardize my career.”

“I know, son. I know how important your career is to you,” dad says solemnly as he walks away.

I make a mental note to call Ashley later and ask her about coming, until then, I turn the volume up on the tv to hear what the sportscasters are saying about the Hummingbirds and McHenry.

“Hey Ashley,” I say when she answers the phone. “How is everything going?”

“Hey Will, how are you doing?”

“I’m managing, though I can’t lie, it’s difficult lying around with my leg propped up and not being able to move.”

“I’ll bet. You’ve never been one to lie around,” she says as she laughs. “How long are you out?”

“I’ve been told it will take about nine months if I do what I’m told. I should be back on the team in time for training camp if everything goes well.”

“That’s good news.”

“Yeah, it is, which is the reason for my call. How would you like to come to Largo, Maine for a few weeks and help me out?”

“Help you with what?”

“My physical therapy,” I tell her.

“I’m not a physical therapist, plus I can’t. I’m in Milan for a fashion show.”

“That’s wonderful. I’m so excited for you. I know how much you wanted to get in on that.”

“Thanks. Did the doctors not give you a physical therapist to see?”

“They did, but she and I do not get along.”

“Why? What did you do?”

“To be honest, I don’t know what I ever did to her. She grew up next door to me, two years younger than me.”

“You did something to that girl. No one holds a grudge that long, and I’m sure you probably never considered that whatever you did was wrong.” Ashley says.

“Maybe, but we are adults now.”

“Well, she is. You still have some growing up to do, my friend,” Ashley says honestly.

“Ouch, you wound me.”

“Never. So, tell me, is she cute?”

“Who?”

“The old neighbor slash physical therapist, dummy.”

“I haven’t noticed,” I say.

“Liar. She must be really cute.”

I don’t respond, because it’s true, I did notice today how gorgeous Krista was. Even when she was being snarky, she still looked cute.

“Yeah, I thought so. Maybe you should call her and ask her to work with you. Then let her see how you’ve changed since your younger days.”

“Maybe,” I mutter.

“I’m sorry I can’t be there to help you.”

“It’s okay, Ash, what you are doing is more important to your career. I completely understand and am happy for you and maybe a little jealous since I’m laid up instead of on the field.”

“I get it. I would be jealous if I was in your shoes as well,” she says with a laugh. “Seriously, call, what is her name?”

“Krista,” I respond.

“Pretty name. Call Krista and ask her to help you and apologize for everything you ever did. I will be in touch, but for now I need to go.”

“Thanks Ashley, I’ll talk to you soon and good luck.”

“Later, Will,” she says before hanging up.

I put the phone down and blow out a breath. *What am I going to do now?*

A week later

I’ve been doing everything that Krista said for the last week, and I notice the swelling has gone down some, but I’m not sure if it’s gone down enough for me to start working on it.

Dad left Krista’s number on the coffee table, so I pick it up, taking a deep breath, I dial the number. I know if I’m going to get back on the field, I’m going to need her help.

“You’ve reached Krista Strauss, Physical Therapist. I’m currently with a patient right now, but if you leave your name and number, I will get back to you as soon as possible. Thank you, and have a wonderful day,” her voice message ends.

“Umm, this is Will Anderson, my father left your number. Could you call me back at 205-565-5451, I think you need to come look at my knee,” I say, leaving the message before hanging up the phone.

Forty-five minutes later, my phone rings. “Hello?”

“This is Krista. What is wrong with your knee? Did you do something?”

“What’s wrong with it is I had surgery, and no, I didn’t do anything other than what you told me to do. I’m not sure if the swelling has gone down enough for me to do some exercises.”

I hear her suck in a deep breath, then let it out slowly. “Fine. I’ll come by your place and look it over.”

“Thank you,” I say softly before hanging up.

I’m anxious to get working on it, but I don’t want to jeopardize my recovery. I know I’m going to need Krista’s help, I just hope she is willing.

Twenty minutes later, the doorbell rings, and I yell out, “Come in.

The door opens, and I hear Krista call out, “Will?”

“In the living room.”

She walks in and looks at me, asking, “Okay, so what is the issue exactly?”

“I’m not sure if the swelling has gone down enough to safely be able to start any exercises. I don’t want to do something prematurely and mess the recovery up. I’d like for you to tell me if it’s okay to start or if I still need to wait,” I tell her.

She looks at me thoughtfully, before setting her bag down, and putting on some gloves.

“Let me take a look,” she says, crossing over to where my leg is propped up.

She places her hands around my knee area. “Hmmm, it’s still swollen more than I like, but we haven’t been able to do any rotations.”

She moves my leg and knee around a bit. “Do you have a stationary bike here?”

“Yes. There’s a gym on the other side of the kitchen that dad put in a couple of years ago.”

“Good. Let’s walk to the gym, slowly. When we get in there, I’ll see how your knee took to that, and I may have you do the stationary for a few minutes to get everything moving. What you don’t want is scar tissue to form. That will hinder your recovery as well as the complete healing process.”

She grabs the pillows from underneath my leg and moves them to the floor, allowing me to put my foot on the floor with the other one.

“Do you want me to walk with the crutches?” I ask her.

“No. I’ll hold them in case you need them, but I would like for you to walk uninhibited to get the blood flowing and see if it helps reduce the inflammation.”

I nod. I think I read that somewhere when I was looking up the recovery process. Walking is a slow process. The stitches are more of a hindrance than the actual pain of the process in my knee.

When we get in the gym, I hear Krista breathe out a ‘wow’. I look around and realize it’s probably more than what she expected for a home gym. Dad got all the high-tech workout equipment, same equipment we use in our gyms at the stadiums. I think he hoped if I could maintain my workouts here, I would come home more.

“Here, come sit on this bench and let me look at your knee.”

I do as she says, and feel her hands go back to my knee. She’s lifting my leg, bending my knee, and though I know I

should be feeling some sort of pain, I'm not feeling anything in my knee as I stare at the woman before me, who is in full concentration mode.

Her blue eyes remind me of the deep blue sea in the Virgin Islands. They are looking at me, but she's not seeing me, more like seeing through me. Her touch is soft like a feather, and my cock is twitching. I squirm a little bit, and Krista's eyes snap their attention onto me.

"Did that hurt?" she asks, concern lacing her voice.

"No, why?"

"You twitched, when I touched here," she did it again, but I felt no pain.

"I'm sorry. No, there is no pain, I was moving my ass, as I'm not used to sitting as much as I have been this last week or so." Not wanting to let her know all the blood flow in my body is currently in my dick.

She looks at me, then nods. "I get it, when you're used to being active, anything else can make you itchy, per say."

"Exactly," I tell her, giving her a little smile.

I watch her eyes dilate as she sucks in a breath, but just as quickly she shakes her head and gets back to business. It was so quick, I may have imagined it all.

"Okay, let's get you on the bike and see how well you handle it."

I will my cock down enough to be able to stand up without bringing attention, then walk over to the bike. Krista helps me get settled on it, then sets the timer for thirty minutes.

I take this ride easy, easing myself into the movements, and do everything Krista is telling me to do. Before I know it,

thirty minutes is over, and I'm covered in sweat, like this is the first workout I've ever done.

"That is a great start," Krista says, helping me off the bike.

My legs buckle from underneath me, and I almost collapse, but Krista is there to hold me up as she helps me back to the bench.

"Sit here, and I'll be right back."

She leaves the room, and I sit here waiting for the feeling to come back to my legs. Krista comes back with a bottle of water and a towel for my face.

"Drink this," she tells me before continuing on. "You did very well for your first time moving the knee since the surgery and not be active as your normally used to."

"My legs definitely feel like jello, that's for sure."

"It won't take long for you to get back into a routine. You have to remember not to overdo it."

I nod as I continue drinking the bottle of water.

"How does your knee feel?" she asks.

"It feels okay. A little stretched," I reply, thinking about how it feels.

"That's good. That's what you want. You can do this for the next week, and try walking without the crutches when you can, but keep them nearby in case you need them."

"Okay."

"Let's get you back on the couch with an ice pack for the next thirty minutes, then you can ice it again, before you go to sleep tonight."

"Sounds good."

She hands me one crutch and allow it to bear my weight as I walk slowly back to the living room.

She helps me get settled, then says, “I’ll come check on you next week. Only do the things we talked about, nothing more. When will your girlfriend be here?” she asks, and I look at her confused.

“I don’t have a girlfriend?”

“The girl you told your dad you would call to come help you,” she says with irritation in her voice or is that jealousy?

“Oh, Ashley? She’s a really good friend of mine and she can’t come. She’s in Milan for a fashion show. In fact, she’s the one who told me to call you and allow you to help me since you are the professional.”

“You are here by yourself?” she asks, chewing on the inside of her cheek.

“Yeah, but I should be okay. I promise not to do anything I’m not supposed to.”

She nods, but there’s a look in her eyes, before she shakes her head, and then says, “if you do as we did today, you should be fine.”

“Thank you for coming over,” I tell her.

She nods, grabs her bag, looks me over one more time, then squares her shoulders and walks toward the front door. I hear her phone ring, and then she answers.

“Hello, dad.”

“I’m working.”

“Yes, next door. I’m checking on Will and going over some exercises with him to do.”

“Yes, I’ve talked to Leia, and no, she’s not ready to talk to you yet. She’s still coming to terms with everything.”

“You’re leaving? Where are you going?”

“I see, okay, well, have a safe trip.”

“Yeah, maybe we will see dad.”

“I need to go, I have another patient I need to go see.”

“Yeah, talk to you when you get back.”

“Bye.”

I hear her blow out a breath and wonder what’s going on with her friend Leia. I vaguely remember the group of girls she used to hang out with in school.

I hear the front door open and close, and I know she is gone. The house seems very quiet now. I grab the remote and turn the tv on.

CHAPTER 8

KRISTA



Against my better judgment, every morning for the last week, I go to Will's house and help him with his exercises. He seems to be getting better and stronger so today, I will be putting him on the treadmill.

I walk in like I do every morning, only this morning I find him on the floor.

"Will, what happened?" I ask as I rush over to him.

"Umm, I fell asleep on the couch. Something woke me up, and on reflex, I jumped up, tripping over the coffee table in my sleep haze and fell on the floor."

"Does anything hurt?"

"Besides my pride, I don't think so, but I'm not sure if I banged my knee or not," he tells me, giving me a sheepish smile. The one that can be so disarming that you forget what a jerk he is.

"Let's get you up and have a look," I say, trying to sound exasperated, though I'm very concerned that he may have reinjured himself.

With his help, I'm able to get him back on the couch, and I look his knee over. I don't see any swelling or feel any ligaments out of place.

I let out a sigh of relief and look at him. “Everything seems to be okay, how does it feel? Any pain or throbbing?”

“No. It seems to feel okay.”

“Alright, let’s walk to the gym and see how it feels then.”

We make it to the gym, and he seems to be walking on it okay. “How do you feel from the walk?”

“Good. No issues or immense pain.”

“That’s good. I’m going to have you do two different pieces of equipment today. We’ll start with the bike for warm up, then I want you to walk on the treadmill today. I’m going to set it on the lowest setting, so I can evaluate your progress and then maybe take it up another click.”

He nods and walks over to the bike. I have him ride for thirty minutes. I watch as his knee bends, looking for anything that is out of place, but so far, the fall he took doesn’t seem to have damaged him in any way. After I get him off the bike, I take him to the treadmill. He steps on it, and I set the settings at the lowest level and allow him to get feeling back in his legs from being on the bike.

I keep an eye on him, looking for any strain or pain, but he seems to be handling it well. I let him walk for fifteen minutes, then I up the incline by one, to give a little resistance, but not enough for him to tell the difference.

After fifteen more minutes I stop the treadmill, allowing him to get off and sit on the bench, so I can look at his knee.

There is no swelling or redness, and that is very promising.

“Will it be a problem if I lift some weights?” he asks.

“I think you should be okay, as long as it’s not leg lifts.”

“Could you spot me?”

“Me? Ummm, I guess so,” I tell him.

He lays down on the bench, under the bar, and then begins to bench press. I stand behind/above him, really hoping he doesn't need me to save him from being crushed, since I don't think I could lift this weight, even if I wanted to.

Before I know it, he's at twenty, and he sets the bar back in place. I look down at his knee to ensure he didn't add any pressure to it, but it looks fine. I can't help but to notice the massive hard on he has under his shorts.

He sits up, grabbing his towel and water bottle, taking a drink, and wiping the sweat from his face.

“That felt good,” he says, but my eyes are on his back and arms. His body is muscular, and the gleam from the sweat that is currently covering his body, plus the image of his hard on has my mind conjuring all sorts of dirty thoughts.

I try to shake the dirty thoughts from my mind. *What the hell is wrong with me?* I think to myself.

He stands up, and my eyes automatically goes to his cock, but somehow, I am able to sound professional when I ask, “How does the knee and leg feel?”

“Good. I mean, I know I can't run sprints and routes, but I feel okay. Better than okay, actually.”

“That's good,” I say walking back to my bag and checking the time on my phone. “I have another appointment to get to. If there is no swelling, then there is no need to elevate or ice, however if you start noticing some swelling, then go ahead and do it, while taking some ibuprofen.”

“Thanks. I will,” he says with that gorgeous smile.

I nod and walk out of the gym, toward the front door. My body feels warm, as my head is still swimming with images of the man, whom I should hate, but I'm finding it hard to remember why. *God what is wrong with me?*

I get in my car and head back to the office to meet my next client.

A month later

Will and I have spent everyday together, working on his therapy. I come over in the mornings before going to the office to take care of my other patients. I've incorporated more exercises for him, and he is improving and healing at a fast rate. Today, he has an appointment with Doctor Hellman to check on his progress.

I'm currently sitting in my car at his house waiting for him to show up. Hopeful that the doctor says his therapy is working, but nervous that I may have been pushing him too much too fast.

He pulls up in his dad's car, and gets out with a smile on his face, so hopefully that means it's good news.

I step out of my car, and ask, "How did it go?"

He grabs me by the waist, picking me up, slamming me into his chest, and twirls me around. I screech from the unexpectedness of it all.

"You are a miracle worker. Doc says, at this rate, I will be back with the team this spring."

“That’s great news,” I say breathlessly, as he continues to press me up against his hard body.

He slams his lips on mine, and I’m too shocked for a moment to realize what’s happening, until he slides his tongue into my mouth. My body ignites as he deepens the kiss. My fingers wrap themselves around his hair, and I can feel his length harden against my stomach.

I begin rubbing myself against him, looking for and needing relief.

It takes a moment for my brain to catch on to what is happening, but when I do, I push him back to break the kiss. He sets me down, and says, “I’m sorry, I..”

“Don’t. Please don’t. Not again,” I say, as I feel the tears welling up in my eyes. “I need to go,” I whisper.

“Krista, wait, please,” I hear him call out, but I can’t stay, I know I can’t. I need to leave.

I get in the car and drive away as the tears fall down my face. *What have I done?*

I need someone to talk to, and I dial the first person who comes to mind.

“Krista, are you okay?”

“I don’t know. I need someone to talk to, and you were the first person I thought of.”

“Where are you?” Leia asks.

“I’m in my car heading, I don’t know where I’m heading to,” I say, choking back a cry.

“Come to the hospital. I’ll meet you by the coffee cart.”

“Okay,” I say before hanging up.

I find Leia waiting for me when I get there. She sees me and stands, pulling me into a hug.

“Come sit down, tell me what happened.”

“Will kissed me,” I tell her.

“Okay. How did it happen?”

I tell her about the interaction and how the kiss happened.

“How did it make you feel?” she asks.

“I was rubbing myself on him, how do you think it made me feel?” I say, a bit bitchy, but Leia pays no mind to it.

“So, you want him, and it seems he may want you too. What’s wrong with that? You both are grown adults.”

“Will is a player, and I don’t want to get caught up in his games. You remember how he was when we were all in school.”

Leia laughs. “Hunny, he was a high school teenage boy, and all the girls wanted him. You can’t hold that against him. I’m sure he’s grown up since then.”

“What about Riley?” I ask.

“What about Riley?” She looks at me confused.

“Doesn’t she still have a thing for Will?”

“Hell no, girl, that was a freshman crush, that did not last beyond the night we went to the fair. Riley is not an issue here.” She takes a deep breath, then says, “Look, Kris, if there is a legitimate reason for your issues with Will, then you need to work it out with him, but if you are only using his antics from high school against him, then that’s not fair. None of us are who we were in high school now. People change, and people grow. If you are interested in the man he is now, and by

the look of your face, I think you are, then you need to decide if you are ready to let go and give love a chance.”

“Love? Who said anything about love?” I scoff.

“That’s for you to decide, and only you can do that,” she tells me with a sweet smile that is Leia, and not really addressing my question. “You should go talk to him,” she tells me.

I take a deep breath because I know she is right. “Okay, you are right,” I tell her.

CHAPTER 9

WILL



I watch as Krista leaves down the driveway. I'm not sure what happened, one minute, I was swinging her in the air, and the next, I couldn't help but kiss those lips I have been dreaming about for over a month.

I didn't expect her to run like that. We had been spending so much time together this last month, I thought things had gotten better between us, and we were actually friends now, and maybe that's the problem, I crossed a line I shouldn't have.

I rub my hands down my face, wondering how bad I fucked up, this time.

I go into the house, sitting on the couch, I remember the feel of her body in my hands, her soft lips against mine, and the taste of her tongue. I can still feel her hands in my hair as she pulled a little and the way she rubbed her body on mine. I know she wants me as much as I want her, but something is holding her back, and I'm not sure what.

I sit here lost in my thoughts, not sure how much time passes as I sit here, but then I hear her voice.

“Will, I think we should talk.”

I look over in the direction of her voice and take in her tear-streaked face. Tears that I caused, and my heart aches with regret.

“What did I do?” I ask in a small voice that doesn’t sound like me.

She takes a deep breath, comes into the living room, and sits in the chair across from me.

“Do you remember the summer before you started high school?”

I shake my head because I really don’t.

“I didn’t think you would. You had asked me to meet you in the backyard, you had something you wanted to show me. I was so excited because I had the biggest crush on you. My mom wanted me to go with her to her friend’s house, but I didn’t want to miss out on what it was that you wanted to show me, so I told my mom I didn’t want to go. I wanted to stay home. She begged me to go with her, but I threw a fit, and she let me stay home.”

She takes a deep breath, and I can see the tears welling up in her eyes. I’m trying to rack my brain on what she is talking about.

“After mom left, I went to the backyard to meet you at the time you said. Your firepit was going, and you held up s’more fixings. We sat there roasting marshmallows and making smores, watching the lightning bugs, talking, and laughing. You pointed out that I had chocolate on the corner of my mouth, and instead of wiping it off with your finger, you kissed me.”

The memory clicks into place, and I feel like an ass, because I remember what happened next.

“I was over the moon about the kiss, but then you said, ‘Sorry kid, I shouldn’t have done that. You’re too young.’ You grab all the s’more fixings and then went inside your house. I was devastated, but the worst part came later that night when the cops knocked on our door to tell us my mom had been in a car accident, and she was gone.”

I watch as the tears flow down her face, not able to say anything.

“I blamed you. If I hadn’t stayed home to be with you, I would have been with my mom, and maybe she wouldn’t have died. Then I watched how you played with all the girl’s feelings when I got to high school, and it set me off. Especially, when you asked Riley to meet you at the fair, but you turned up with Jessica Miller. I watched her face, and it reminded me of what you did to me, though you didn’t kiss her.”

“Fuck,” I say, rubbing my face. “I never meant to hurt anyone, especially not you. I thought walking away from you that night was the best thing for you. You were sweet and innocent, and I knew I was no good for you. I was a rebellious kid who was always looking to get into trouble, but with you I always felt like you saw the best in me and not the troublemaker. I thought I was protecting you. I’m sorry,” I whisper out.

“As for Riley, I did want to go to the fair with her, but when I got there, she wasn’t there yet, and Jessica showed up, clinging to my arm, giving everyone a show, I just went along with it. Now it all makes sense why you started so many rumors about me and did the things you did. I’m so sorry Krista, I hope one day you can forgive me, but I never set out to hurt you.”

“I realize now, as I tell you these things out loud, I’ve been holding on to a kid’s version of pain, and I guess I’ve allowed it to consume me where you are concerned, so allow me to apologize. I need to stop blaming you for my mom’s death. It was a car accident, and if I was with her, I could have easily been killed as well. I know that now, but a part of me has hated you for many years, considered you my enemy. Spending this last month with you, I’ve started to see the man you have become, and not the boy I remember you to be.”

“Krista, I’m not the same cocky kid I was, and if I could go back, I don’t know that I would change anything. I can only tell you I’m sorry for the part I played in your pain and ask that you forgive me.”

She nods, “I do, but I thought I should come back and explain to you why I left.”

“I’m glad you did. Can we start over? I would like for us to get to know each other better. Can I take you out to dinner tonight?”

She looks at me, and I’m waiting with bated breath, praying she says yes.

“I would like that, Will,” she says with a smile, and I smile back.

“Great, how about I pick you up at seven?”

“Okay. I’ll text you my address. Now I need to go before I’m late for my next patient.”

At seven o’clock, I knock on her apartment door, and she opens it, standing there in jeans and a shirt.

“Did you just get home?” I ask, confused.

“No, I thought I would change the plans a little and cook us dinner. Are you okay with that?”

“Sure,” I say surprised as I hand her the flowers I bought. “If I had known, I would have brought some wine.”

She smiles. “No need, I already have some, and thank you for the flowers, they are beautiful.”

She leads me into the kitchen, where the aroma smells amazing. She hands me a glass of wine, then says, “To fresh starts.”

“I like that,” I say with a smile as we clink glasses and take a sip.

I watch as she moves around the kitchen with ease. Putting together a salad while checking on the meal.

“It smells amazing, what is it?”

“Tenderloin steak, with roasted potatoes, and a salad.”

“Wow, I can’t wait.”

She has me take the salad to the table as she gets the rest of the meal. We sit at the table, and I wait for her to make her plate before I make mine.

Once I take a bite, I am amazed at how well it tastes. “Wow, this is really good,” I tell her while taking another bite of the tenderloin.

I watch a smile cross her face and see her shoulders relax. “Thank you.”

We finish our meal, then I help her clean up the kitchen.

“Want to watch a movie?” she asks.

“Sounds good, what would you like to watch,” praying it’s not a chick flick, though I think I’d watch anything just to be

able to sit next to her.

“How do you feel about Lord of the Rings?”

“Is it the extended version?” I ask.

“Of course.”

“I’m in,” I say with a smile, taking our glasses to the couch as she sets the movie up.

When the movie is over, I look down where she is curled up next to me, and see she is sleeping. I grab the throw blanket that’s draped over the couch and place it on top of her, while wrapping my arm around her. I close my eyes, feeling at peace as I fall asleep.

Three weeks later

Krista and I have spent every day together doing my physical therapy and every night either cooking at her place or cooking at my dad’s, then talking and really getting to know each other.

I found out Leia is her half-sister that no one knew about until recently. Apparently, Leia’s mom worked for Krista’s dad, and they had a one-night affair. Leia and Krista seem to be doing well in their relationship, but Leia still has not made an effort to get to know Krista’s dad. Though to be fair, he’s also been out of town.

Krista and I always end the night with a movie and her falling asleep in my arms.

Dad called the other day to check in and say it would still be a little while before he was home. He won’t be making it

for Thanksgiving this week. He was happy I was making progress with my recovery, but he sounded a bit off, tired maybe.

Tonight, we are cooking at my place, and I decided to do something romantic for her. I set the table with candles and made her my famous beef wellington. For dessert, I made a soufflé.

I hear the door open, and my heart beats with nerves and excitement.

Krista calls out, "Will, I'm here."

"In the kitchen, babe."

"Babe?" she questions, then I hear her sharp intake of breath as she takes in the candlelit table.

"Yes, babe." I say behind her. "Come sit down." I take her hand and lead her to the table.

I see the tears welling up in her eyes when she looks at me. "This is beautiful," she says, then turns back to the table. "Wow."

"You are beautiful," I tell her as I hold out her chair, waiting for her to sit down as I continue on, "I'm glad you like it. I hope you like what I've made," I tell her, taking the chair across from her.

She cuts into the beef wellington, takes a bite, and moans. "This is amazing."

I smile as I discreetly adjust my hard cock. I'm in a constant state of arousal with this woman, though we have not gone to that level yet. I want her to be comfortable before we take the next step.

We talk about her day and mine, now that she has let go of the past, conversations between the two of us are effortless.

I bring out the soufflé for dessert, setting it in front of her, and she stares at it for a minute.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“I had something else in mind for dessert tonight.”

“Oh?” I ask, perplexed as to what she could want. I know soufflé’s are her favorite.

She gets up from the table coming over to my side. I can tell she’s nervous because she always bites the inside of her cheek.

I look up at her, as she sits on my lap, her face inches from mine. I swallow a lump in my throat as she rocks herself on my hard cock, causing me to groan.

She leans down and kisses my lips, and I allow her to take control. I don’t want to do anything that would cause her to rethink her decision. She deepens the kiss, and I grab her hips, pushing up into her as she continues to rub herself against me.

I break the kiss from her lips, to trail down her neck.

“I want you to touch me, Will,” she whispers before she kisses my neck.

My hand snakes under her shirt and I caress her soft skin, until I find her breast. I fondle it through her bra. She bends her head back, enjoying the feel of my hands on her and that spurs me on more. I snake my other hand up her shirt, and grab the other breast, squeezing them both.

Her breathing picks up, and she moans, causing my cock to become rock hard.

“Oh, yes, Will,” she calls out my name, and I slam my lips on hers, allowing our tongues to battle each other.

I stand up with her, placing her on the dining room table, then I move the soufflé’s, before scooting her back a little more. I lift her shirt over her head, remove her bra, and bend my head down to take a nipple in my mouth.

I flick her hard nub with my tongue, before sucking it into my mouth, then blowing on it to make it harder.

“God, you are so gorgeous, Krista,” I whisper to her.

Her hand rubs down the front of my jeans, rubbing my painfully hard cock.

“Wait,” I tell her, grabbing her hand, then her shirt and bra.

“Huh?”

“We are not making love on the dining room table for our first time together. I want to explore and taste every inch of your body, and we are going to do that in bed,” I tell her and watch her smile.

I help her off the table and lead her down the hall to my room. Once in my room, I close the door and tell her, “Take off your pants.”

I quickly shed my clothes, as she takes off the rest of her clothes. My cock is standing straight out, completely hard, but I plan to savor this gorgeous goddess in front of me and take my time.

I walk her over to the bed and lay her down while I spread her legs and run my finger through her slit.

“Damn, you are so wet,” I whisper as I kiss her lips, while sliding my finger inside her. “So tight,” I say against her mouth.

She moans, and the thought of her pussy wrapped around my cock, has me so hard. My thumb plays with her clit as I add another finger inside her. I bend down and take a nipple into my mouth, I roll her hard, taunt nub between my teeth, and continue finger fucking her.

I slide down her body, leaving kisses everywhere and get between her thighs, looking at her glistening pussy around my fingers. I pull my fingers out and pop them into my mouth tasting her on my tongue. God, she tastes like honey. I settle my head between her thighs and begin licking, sucking, and fucking her with my tongue.

I can't get enough of her taste. I feel her hand on my head as she begins to ride my face. I look up and see her head thrown back on the pillow, her back bowed, and the other hand gripping the sheets beside her. I continue fucking her pussy, as her moans get louder. Her legs start to quiver, and I know she is close.

I flick her clit with my tongue before I suck it into my mouth, and gently bite down, causing her to orgasm hard. I lap up every drop of her juices before making my way back up her body, stopping to pay special attention to each of her breasts as I line my hard cock up to her entrance.

I kiss her neck to her mouth, allowing her to taste herself on my tongue before I slide my cock into her perfectly tight pussy, making me groan with how tight she is.

I hear her moan, as I slowly ease in and out of her.

“Oh Will,” she whispers as I continue to work her up.

I kiss her, allowing my body to convey to her what my heart already knows.

“Krista,” I whisper.

“Yes,” she calls out, meeting me thrust for thrust I pick up the pace.

“Oh wait,” she calls out panicked, and I stop.

“What?”

“What about your knee?”

“It’s fine, unless you want to ride on top,” I say with a smirk, and she rolls her hips, causing me to moan.

“I’m okay as long as you don’t hurt yourself.”

“If I do it will be worth it,” I tell her as I thrust deep into her, causing her to moan.

“You do have a physical therapist who knows how to heal you,” she says.

“Yes, I do. I have the best,” I tell her as I pound harder into her pussy and rotate my hips, causing her to cry out.

I continue making love to her, speeding up and slowing down. I know it’s driving her crazy, but I don’t want this to end. She feels so good in my arms and wrapped around my cock.

Both our bodies are slick with sweat, our breathing is erratic, and our kisses frantic, as we continue to take each other.

I feel her walls tightening like a vice grip on my cock, and I know it won’t be much longer before she comes again. I can feel the tingling in my spine as my balls tighten up, telling me I’m close too.

“Will, so close, a little more,” Krista calls out as she detonates, screaming out my name.

“Krista,” I roar as I empty my cum inside her.

Our breathing is labored, both of us trying to fill our lungs. I lift my head and kiss her lips deeply.

“Wow,” we both say at the same time as I lay my head on her chest, nuzzling her breasts, waiting for her pussy to let my cock go.

My soften cock, slides out of her, and I flip over onto my back, lying beside her.

“How is you knee?” she asks.

“It feels fine,” I say, still trying to catch my breath.

“I can’t lie, that was amazing, and I want to do it again, I just need some rest first,” Krista says, and I chuckle.

“Oh, we will definitely be doing that again and again.”

“Good. Glad you agree,” she says incoherently, and I laugh, pulling her into my body and closing my eyes.

A couple of hours later, I wake up to Krista’s hand pumping my cock. I can’t help the moan that escapes me. She wraps her mouth over my cock and sucks me in deep.

“Fuck,” I hiss at the warmth of her mouth and the swirl of her tongue, then she moans around my cock, before she pops it out, licking the head with her tongue.

“Are you awake now?” she asks slyly.

“Hmmm,” I comment because I have nothing else.

I watch her with hooded eyes as she climbs on top of me and guides my cock to her entrance, where she slams herself down on my cock, causing both of us to moan out.

“Fuck, babe, that feels so good,” I tell her as I fondle her breasts while she bounces up and down on my cock, rotating her hips.

I thrust up to give her more friction and hear her gasp.

“Mmm, like that?” I ask.

“Yes,” she calls out, so I do it again.

I lean up taking her breast in my mouth before my thumb finds her clit, and I play with it.

“Ohhh, Will, Ohhh, yes,” she moans out.

I grab her hips, holding onto her, and thrust up hard. “God, so good, babe,” I call out and do it again and again, until her legs begin to shake, and I feel her orgasm explode within her. I continue thrusting into her, prolonging her orgasm as I chase my release, until I come inside her.

“Fuck,” I roar out with my release.

We get in the shower to clean up, only to ravage each other’s bodies again and again, making love all night from that day on.

CHAPTER 10

WILL



A month later

For the last month, Krista and I have spent time with each other and her friends. I've made amends to Riley for how I treated her, and though she thanked me for it, she told me it wasn't necessary. We were all kids, but when I looked at Krista, Riley quickly became quiet.

I've gotten reacquainted with Largo, even spent some time at the high school coaching. I still miss my team, Coach Jacks calls for updates all the time and is looking forward to me coming back for training camp. All the guys can't wait for me to be back, even though Jason is doing a great job with them this season.

Krista understands this is my passion for the game, and she is okay with me going back onto the field as long as I promise no more injuries. You can imagine that conversation when I couldn't do that, but we are doing well.

She's talked to Ashley on the phone, and both ladies are becoming fast friends, which is good for me. Ashley will always be my best friend, but she will never come before Krista.

Christmas is a few days away, and for the last week Krista, and I have spent it decorating her place and my dad's.

The front door opens, and I call out, "Hey babe, what would you like for dinner tonight?"

"Whose babe?" my dad says from the doorway.

"Dad, your home. Whoo, what's wrong?" I ask, seeing him and Krista's dad standing in the doorway.

"Come sit down, Son," dad says, and I noticed he has lost a lot of weight, his face looks grayer.

I hear the door open again, and this time I know it's Krista.

"Hey." The smile falls from her face. "Dad, what are you doing here. What's going on?"

"Come sit down hunny, you should hear this too," her dad says, and she comes to sit beside me.

Both our dad's giving each other knowing looks, but then my dad drops the bomb.

"Son, I haven't been away on business. I've been at the Cancer Treatment Center in Chicago."

"What?" I whisper.

"I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, it's an aggressive stage, and that's why I had to go to Chicago for treatment."

"Why didn't you tell me?" I ask.

"You were having your own issues, and you didn't need mine. You needed to focus on your recovery, and if you were worried about me, then you wouldn't have focused on you," he tells me.

I feel Krista take my hand and squeeze, showing me support. I squeeze back letting her know I appreciate her.

“What about now? Are you okay now?” I ask.

“I’ve completed all the treatments that I can for right now, so we will have to wait and see.”

“You were with him?” Krista asks her dad, and he nods. “That’s why you were at the hospital that day I ran into you,” Krista muses, and her father nods.

“I wasn’t going to let me best friend go through this by himself. He called me from the hospital, and as much as I hate them, I knew he needed me,” Mr. Strauss says nonchalantly.

At least I know my dad wasn’t by himself going through treatment alone. That’s a plus, I wish he would have told me sooner.

“Seems we have all missed something,” dad says, looking at me and Krista.

I look over and smile at her, and then say, “Yeah,”

Then I look back at dad. “When will you know more?”

“I’ll go back to the doctor in three weeks and have some more tests completed. We will see then if the treatment worked or if I may need more.”

I nod. “Okay, then we enjoy each day. What would everyone like for dinner, since it seems we have a lot to catch up on,” I say to the room.

I get up and go to the kitchen, and Krista follows me.

“Hey, look at me,” she says, and I do as I feel the sting of tears in my eyes. “It will be okay. We will get through this together, no matter what happens. We are stronger together.”

“You are right,” I tell her, pulling her in for a hug. “He’s my dad, and I don’t know what I’ll do if I lose him.”

“I get it, but you are not alone. I am here, and I’m not going anywhere.”

“I love you,” I tell her and watch her eyes widen in surprise.

“What did you say?” she asks in a whisper.

“I love you. I understand if you can’t say it yet, but I need you to know how I feel. One day, I plan on marrying, hopefully soon.”

“Really?” she asks with tears falling from her eyes.

“Really,” I state simply.

“I love you too. I guess I always have,” she whispers, and I kiss her hard.

“Later, I’ll show you how much I love you, but for now, could you help me make dinner?”

She laughs, gives me another kiss, and then we set about making dinner.

Dinner with both our fathers was easier than I originally thought it would be. There were no personal questions, thank goodness, and they both seemed happy for Krista and me to be together.

After dinner and clean-up, Krista and her dad left to go next door and catch up. Dad was sitting in his favorite chair in the living room. I can see how tired he is, so I say, “Dad, why don’t you go get some rest.”

He looks at me, then says, “Son, I want you to know, I am so proud of the man you are, of who’ve you become. You had a dream, and you chased it, making it a reality. I love you son.”

“I love you too, dad,” I reply, tears welling up in my eyes.

He’s always told me he was proud, but it never had any meaning to me until now.

“I think I will go lay down for a bit. We should have the Strauss’ over for Christmas,” he says, walking to his room.

“Sure, dad, we can do that,” I say with a small smile touching my lips.

I hear his door close, and tears fall from my eyes.

Christmas Day

Krista and her dad came over to spend Christmas with us, and I was so grateful to have her here. She’s currently holding my hand, while having a conversation with both of our fathers.

Dad seems to be holding up, but I’m not sure how much of that is for show or real. I pat my pocket, where the box is currently sitting. I know this may seem quick and sudden to some, but I hope Krista knows I mean everything I am about to do.

I’ve already asked for her father’s blessing, and surprisingly, he didn’t say no. In fact, he told me, “Nothing would make me happier, Son.” Then he hugged me.

I get up, round the table, pulling the box from my pocket, knowing now is the time. I get down on one knee in front of Krista and watch the confusion cross her face.

“Krista, I know we’ve had some turbulent times,” she laughed out loud and muttered, “understatement.”

I chuckled with her, because it's true, then I continue, "These last few months have shown me when you are willing to let go of the past and hurt, how beautiful and true love can be. You are my soul, and there is no other woman on this earth that I want to spend the rest of my life with."

I open the box in my hand showcasing the ring, "With your father's blessing, and my father as a witness, Krista Strauss, will you marry me?"

The tears flow down her face as she looks from me to the ring, then back to me, "Yes, yes, I will marry you."

I slip the ring on her finger and pull her to me for a kiss.

"Congratulations, we are so proud of you both," my dad tells us both, lifting his glass of water.

"Congratulations to the perfect couple," Krista's dad says with a beaming smile.

I give my fiancée another kiss before hugging her to my side.

"Wow," she whispers, looking at her ring before hugging her dad and mine.

CHAPTER 11

WILL



Six months later

The treatment for dad didn't work. His cancer has gotten more aggressive. He can't move around very well anymore, and we know he is on borrowed time.

Today, Krista and I are getting married. I wanted to make sure my dad was here to see and enjoy this milestone with me. My teammates are all here, not only excited for the wedding, but that I have been cleared to play again and will be with them for the training camp next month.

Krista says she's okay with me playing, but she will not watch a game unless we are in the Super Bowl. She has no desire to see me get hit or hurt.

"Are you ready for this, son?" my dad asks, sitting in the front row, directly in front of me.

"I am, dad. I am so ready for this."

The music plays as I watch Krista's bridesmaids come down the aisle. Her sister Leia is in the front, followed by Emily, and then Riley. They are all wearing a peachy pink color dress, and I can tell Riley is not a fan.

Just then, the doors open, the wedding march song comes on, and I see Krista holding her father's arm, looking gorgeous in her white dress with lace. Her smile is bright, and her eyes are shining like stars in the night sky. She looks absolutely gorgeous, and I am the luckiest man in the world, because she is mine.

I hear McHenry say, "does she have a sister?"

I chuckle, because she does, but she's engaged to Noah and hoping for a Christmas wedding.

My eyes never leave Krista as she continues walking down the aisle. Finally, she is standing in front of me.

"Who gives this bride to this man," the preacher asks.

"I do," her father says loudly, placing Krista's hand in mine before taking a seat next to my dad.

"Dearly beloved...." the preacher starts the ceremony, but my thoughts and focus are on my soon to be wife.

"Do you, William Anderson, take Krista Strauss to be your wife?"

"I do."

"Do you, Krista Strauss, take William Anderson to be your husband?"

"I do," she says with a smile.

"You may now kiss the bride."

I already have her in my arms before he finishes and slam my lips on hers. I only pull back, when I hear the church erupt in clapping, I look down at her and say, "I can't wait to get you home, wife, you look stunning."

"You look very handsome yourself, husband."

“I love hearing you call me that,” I whisper as I grab her waist tighter.

“Reception first, then I’ll call you that as you make me scream,” she whispers before pulling back, and smiling at everyone.

We walk down the aisle together, and I can only think about pulling her into a back room and fucking her until she can’t walk.

“Soon, love, soon,” she says, knowing exactly what I’m thinking.

We enjoy our reception, and dad looks to be enjoying himself, even though he’s in a wheelchair. I haven’t seen him smile and laugh as much as he is now. Tears come to my eyes knowing there isn’t much more time, and soon I will have to say goodbye, but tonight I’m going to enjoy hearing his laughter and seeing him smile as the women, including my wife, all dance around him.

Two weeks later, we are back in church, but this time to say goodbye to my dad. My wife is sitting next to me, while her dad is sitting next to her.

My dad made me, was my biggest supporter, but my wife healed me, and I think that’s all dad ever wanted, was for me to find happiness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm an author of steamy suspenseful romance novellas.

I have always loved the idea of happy endings, but with real life drama.

I currently live in North Carolina and have always loved the beauty of the Appalachian Mountains. Hiking is one of my favorite hobbies as it helps to clear my mind and allow my imagination to roam freely.

I'm an avid reader of all genres.

I love traveling, especially to small communities, as the people are always so nice and

welcoming, with hidden gems in their sweet little towns.

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