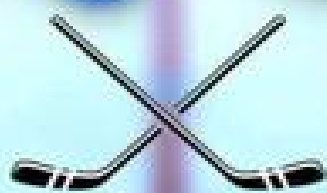




PULLER NAME

Harvolder



REGINA WADE

# PUCK ME HARDER

Snowhawks

Book 1

REGINA WADE

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## Dakota

THE HOUSTON SNOWHAWKS' training facility—affectionately known as *The Nest*—is as new as the team that calls it home.

*The Nest* is a sprawling compound sitting adjacent to Snow Summit Stadium, just outside the city limits. It's been a long time since H-Town boasted an NHL squad of its own, and it's clear that the suits spared no expense in securing a new home team. The installation takes up several acres, rising up against the Texas landscape like a mirage.

Built around a central “neighborhood” where players live, train, and relax in close proximity year-round, *The Nest* is a first-of-its-kind for the Hockey League.

Inside the walls of the training center, the excitement leading up to The Hawk's opening night is palpable.

“Right this way, ladies.” A uniformed security guard leads us through yet another set of double doors. “Coach should be here shortly. Feel free to look around while you wait. Welcome to *The Nest*.”

A burst of rapid-fire *clicks* explodes beside me as Sofie raises her Nikon. She's stalking through the space like a panther on the prowl, shooting pictures before the guard has even left the room.

“Holy shit,” I whisper reverently, taking in the state-of-the-art gymnasium. “I can't believe we're actually here.”



One of *The Nest's* most iconic features, the gym is an athlete's dream—a three-story building set apart from the full-sized practice rink and player housing.

A 2500 square foot weight room complete with cutting-edge equipment dominates most of the main floor. There are both indoor and outdoor tracks, two heated pools, a steam room, and a fully-stocked yoga and Pilates center. The scent of fresh paint still clings to the walls.

I'm one of the first people outside of the Snowhawks organization to see *The Nest*. The significance of this moment isn't lost on me. Adrenaline and nerves settle like a weight in the pit of my stomach.

*Do not fuck this up, O'Connor.*

After months of grunt work and paper pushing, I am finally out on my first solo assignment. Not some fluff piece, either. I've been handed a multi-part team interview and behind-the-scenes lead-up to the Snowhawks inaugural game of the season.

More importantly, this assignment is the key to my own recurring hockey column.

My editor made it very clear. The only way he'd even consider adding *The Hat Trick* to the weekly sports page rotation is if I bring in a *real* story. So I don't care what it takes, I'm not leaving *The Nest* without a bombshell.

This is exactly what I've been working for my whole life—ever since my humble beginnings covering JV lacrosse for the high school paper. Right now, the official press badge around my neck is worth more than a strand of diamonds.

I can almost *smell* my first Pulitzer.

“Why does it smell like sweat and *culo* in here?” Sofie lowers the camera that's permanently attached to her face and wrinkles her nose. “What even *are* men?”

Sofia Rivera and I met during our freshman year of college. We were both studying communications at UH, working towards a career in journalism. We've become fast friends in the time since—clear proof that opposites do, in

fact, attract. Last year, we began internships at *The Houston Chronicle* together— me riding the sports desk and Sofie making a name for herself behind the camera. And while there is nobody else I want to work with for the next few days, I can't help but feel that Sofie would rather be covering literally *any* other assignment.

“That’s the smell of hockey,” I grin at her. “Ice, blood, and testosterone. You’ll get used to it.”

Sofie looks unconvinced.

She’s not wrong. The only thing tougher than a hockey player is the smell of his gym bag.

Before I can say another word, the doors open again. The security guard is gone. Instead, a squat man with a broomhandle mustache strides in. He’s red in the face, with wide sweat stains already spreading beneath the arms of his polo. The chewed-up stub of a cigar dangles from one corner of his mouth.

“Mizz O’Connor,” The man grips my palm in an overly aggressive handshake. “We’ve been expecting you. The Snowhawk Organization is thrilled to share this exciting time with the citizens of Houston.”

It’s a stilted, practiced speech. The kind written by overworked PR agents and handed out to loose cannons before a press release— or an important interview.

“Please, call me Dakota.” I tighten my own grip, returning the handshake with a warm smile. “It’s an honor to meet you, Coach Wallace. My father played under you—*briefly*— back when you were at UALR.”

Coach Drake Wallace is one of the most notorious names in professional sports. Wallace’s win-at-all-costs attitude made him a contentious choice for The Snowhawk’s head coach. Rumor has it a lot of his players are still unhappy with the decision.

According to my dad, Drake Wallace is also a total dick.

But I didn’t get to be one of the youngest sports journalists in the region by having thin skin.

I was the only girl in my family. With three older brothers and a single father, I wasn't exactly raised by a pack of wild wolves— but it wasn't far off, either. I learned early on to be unapologetic about who I am.

Athleticism and femininity can go hand in hand.

“O’Connor...” Drake searches my face, and recognition lights his beady eyes. “You Jack O’Connor’s girl? Hell of a wrist fracture in his second game.”

He scratches his chin pensively, the stump of a cigar between his lips bobbing along.

“How’s Jackie doing these days?” Coach Wallace takes the cigar between two pudgy fingers, gesturing broadly with it as we go. “Can’t believe he’s got kids now. Especially not one so *grown*.”

There’s more than professional curiosity in his pointed look and it takes all of my patience not to roll my eyes. These macho jerks are all the same. Drake Wallace is old enough to be my *grandfather*.

The South is an old boys club, especially when it comes to sports.

But I’ll be damned if I let a fossilized asshole with a bad comb-over and cigar breath rattle me on my first assignment.

“He started a contracting company after college. Roofing and masonry, mostly.” I pull a small recorder out of my bag and check the batteries for the hundredth time. “You know, Coach Wallace, my father always had *so much* to say about your leadership style. Mind if I ask you a few questions as we go?”

Sofie snorts a small laugh, quickly disguising it with the *click-whir* of the camera shutter as we begin walking again. Wallace takes the lead, puffing out his bloated chest as he guides us down a wide corridor and into the locker area.

“Dakota, was it?” He licks his chapped lips, fixing me with a look that I can only assume is supposed to be enticing. “I haven’t seen you at any of the press events before. Listen, if

you want to get to know me better, I got no problem with that.”

He rattles out a laugh at his own cleverness.

“After you’re done playing Nancy Drew, why don’t you come find me.” He looks between me and Sofie. “Tell your friend to bring her camera. It’ll be a good time. Off the record, of course.”

*Of course.*

I consider pointing out that Nancy Drew is a detective, not a sports reporter. But something tells me I’d be wasting my breath.

I’m saved from addressing Coach Wallace’s proposition — and throwing up in my mouth in the process — by the slamming of another door across the room.

Two of the tallest humans I’ve ever seen materialize from the hazy shadows. Their deep voices and rumbling laughter carry through the tiled room. The men come closer, their broad outlines coming into sharp focus as they do.

I recognize them immediately.

Parker Knight is a rookie player— the last member to be added to the team. A power forward with a fantastic pre-season record, Parker has a natural gift for getting the puck into the net, no matter how impossible the shot.

Next to him is the Snowhawks’ star defenseman, Kai Mita.

Hockey is violence on ice— figure skating in a war zone. It takes a lot to earn a reputation in a sport like this. But Kai’s standing as resident NHL bad boy is unchallenged.

The New Zealand transplant is a menace on skates. He reads plays and guesses positions with uncanny accuracy. Mita’s quick skating and defensive prowess are unmatched in the league.

He also spends nearly as much time in the sin bin as he does on the ice.

Just a few weeks ago, a video of Mita, shirtless and in the midst of a bar brawl, was making the rounds on social media. The footage was grainy and dark, but there was no mistaking the sound of breaking bones and shattering glass.

I may or may not have watched *way* too many TikTok angles of that fight. For professional reasons, of course— it was all research. It had nothing at all to do with the ferocity on Kai's face or the way his muscular chest glistened in the bar lights.

The ribbed white tank top he's wearing now clings to his defined torso, damp with sweat and tight enough to make out every ridge of his cut abs. Somehow, it's even hotter than seeing him bare-chested. In the warm glow of overhead lights, the Māori *Ta Moko* tattoos that wind their way down Kai's arm are rich indigo. It's an intricate pattern, almost hypnotic against the deep copper of his skin.

"I think I'm finally starting to get the appeal of hockey," Sofie murmurs low enough for only me to hear.

Kai stops, towering over me. According to his stat sheets, Kai Mita is exactly one foot taller than me at six foot two. But standing in the shadow of his massive frame, those twelve inches seem to stretch on for miles.

His dark, shoulder-length hair is pulled up in a tight bun— not much different than my own professional chignon, but somehow a bazillion times sexier. Kai's mouth is set in a firm line as he crosses those massive arms across his chest.

I can't remember the last time I was actually at a loss for words. My tongue is stuck to the roof of my mouth, my mind utterly empty for the first time in twenty-three years.

Kai narrows his mahogany eyes, glaring daggers into my press badge. He's close enough for me to feel the heat radiating off his body.

I take a deep breath, and the scent of him fills my senses

---

*Ice. Blood. Testosterone.*



I'VE GOT a few simple rules for life.

Don't talk to the press.

Don't fuck at work.

Don't fall in love with *anyone*.

The redhead with a press tag hanging from her neck makes me want to break every one of my rules. She makes me want to make new ones, just so I can break them for her.

She's compact, with a lean, muscular frame tucked beneath the clean lines of her skirt suit. *Dakota O'Connor*, according to the laminated badge at the end of her lanyard. A severe updo and bare face do nothing to hide her wild beauty. Dakota's hair is a rich, vibrant red. Even pulled back in a tight bun, it explodes around her face, framing her delicate features with wispy auburn curls. Her peach skin is dotted with dozens of freckles, clustered together like constellations against the soft alabaster of her complexion.

But it's Dakota's eyes that rewrite every synapse in my brain. They look like the first day of spring— soft, mossy green flecked with pure sunshine.

She's clearly used to a locker room. Usually, when a girl sneaks back here, it's because she's a puck bunny. Someone chasing a player for money or clout. But there's an ease about the woman in front of me. It screams *athlete*.

Beside her, the brunette with the camera— who can't quite take her eyes off Parker— doesn't look half as comfortable.

“No press in the locker room,” I rumble. “And no, we won't be talking to you *out* of the lockers, either.”

It hurts.

I want to talk to the slim redhead in front of me all night long. I want to do a lot more than talk. But I've been burned by someone hungry for a story before, and I won't let it happen to one of my guys.

More than anything else, I protect my team. Parker isn't ready for this kind of attention. Fortunately, he's got the best defense in the league on his team.

*Me.*

“Coach, Wallace, do you mind if I get some shots of Parker? Out of the locker room, obviously. Promotional material, you know how it is,” the girl with the camera — Sofia, according to her badge — waves a hand nonchalantly.

Parker is nodding along before I can stop him, and I don't bother looking to the coach for support. Coach Wallace is close to the worst human being I've ever met. I would already be out of here because of him if it weren't for my loyalty to the team.

“Of course, Mizz Rivera. Right this way,” Coach tries to put a hand on the small of her back, but Parker swoops in first, tossing an arm around the girl's shoulders and walking her towards the exit as he leans in to whisper something I can't hear.

“Good teamwork,” I narrow my eyes at the redhead when we're alone. “Separated us right away. Don't think I didn't notice.”

Dakota flashes me a smile that makes my heart melt and my cock twitch.

“You noticed, but you didn't do anything about it. Where's that insight for the game, Mita? Or are you all washed up after



that last suspension?” Her smile is wide and playful, but the words are laced with fire.

I glance around. Everyone else is still out on the ice. Parker and I were here an hour earlier than everyone else to start drilling, so it’s unlikely anyone is about to walk in.

“I’m not answering any questions for free. Not even from an *ace* reporter like you,” I reach past her to open my locker.

Dakota slams it shut, stepping lithely between me and the clean clothes inside. Those green eyes are flashing.

“Name your price,” she says, squaring her shoulders. “I need this story, Mita.”

Everything about this screams trouble.

“First, call me Kai,” I give her a cocky smirk. “Second, you can’t afford my price, ace.”

Then again, trouble is what I do best.

“Try me, big guy.” Her smile curves up. “Tough boys don’t scare me.”

She’s clearly used to dealing with men like me. Not just *dealing* with us. It’s obvious Dakota plays to win.

Easier said than done in the world of pro sports. A pretty face and a killer body are a dime a dozen at our level. It takes a lot more than that to make a hockey player fall.

Something tells me Dakota O’Connor is the definition of *a lot more*.

“Alright, ace. You want to ask questions?” I raise an eyebrow at her, knowing I’m pressing into her personal space. “I want a kiss.”

Normally not my style, but then again, Dakota is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I’m not the kind of guy to push things. But there’s something about this girl. She’s dangerous. Lethal.

I need to get her out of here, and there’s no way she’ll agree to something so—

“Deal.” Dakota nods her head once, already reaching for the slim voice recorder. “One kiss, and I set all the rules. Then you give me an exclusive. Real answers, too. None of that puff piece crap.”

She’s a firecracker— headstrong and stubborn. I wish that weren’t so damn *sexy*.

I shake my head, looking her up and down. Behind the emerald fire in her eyes, there’s a glimmer of something else. Hesitation? Anticipation?

Dakota’s mouth is writing checks her body can’t cash.

“That’s a steep price, ace,” I take a step closer. “An *exclusive*? You saying your kiss is worth that much?”

We’re only a few inches apart now. I’m drowning in her eyes, the deep green of them pulling me under. I need her more than air, more than hockey, more than *anything*.

“My first kiss should be worth more, right?” Dakota’s voice is breathy, quieter than it has been.

Some of the bravado wavers now. Biting her bottom lip, she fidgets in place but doesn’t look away from my face.

*First kiss?*

That makes me ache in a whole new way. My cock is throbbing in time with my rapid pulse. Just being near this girl is sweet torture.

“First kiss, huh? Hard to believe, beautiful,” I lean in closer, reaching for her hips.

Her hands strike out, lightning fast, to grab my wrists before I reach her.

“No hands. No touching. My rules, remember?” She whispers, her breath tickling mine. “You said one kiss, big shot. Show me what you got.”

I lean down, bringing my lips close enough to feel the warmth of hers.

*Almost.*

I'm a breath away from claiming Dakota's first kiss. She doesn't blink, doesn't break. I thought we were playing chicken, but she's calling my bluff.

With a sigh, I pull back.

"Damn, ace. Respect your commitment." I shake my head. "Alright, you've got your question. Ask away."

Dakota's eyes go wide, her face flushing even harder. She's cute when she blushes. It makes her freckles stand out. Suddenly, the hard-nosed reporter is gone, replaced by a flash of something vulnerable.

"Why didn't you kiss me?" she blurts out.

I study her face.

"Because I was just trying to scare you off, ace. Usually, I win a game of chicken, but you've got bigger balls than anyone else on this team." I shrug. "You called my bluff— you win. I'm not about to kiss a girl that doesn't enthusiastically want me to. It's not who I am— no matter what you've heard."

Dakota's hands are still on my wrists. I move to pull away, but she tugs them down, not letting me go. I cock an eyebrow at her, frowning.

"I want you to kiss me, Kai," Dakota says.

Judging by the look on her face, she's just as surprised at her words as I am.

"Ace — Dakota." I blow out a breath. "*Miss O'Connor*. It's ok. I'm a man of my word. I'll answer your question."

She shakes her head, her gaze fierce as she stares up at me. Those eyes are my undoing. They catch the light, and even under the harsh fluorescent, they sparkle like emeralds. They're full of challenge, daring me to break another rule.

"Please?" she whispers.

It's more than I can take. My lips are on hers in a heartbeat. I weave my fingers through hers, pulling her closer — enough to close the gap between us. Her body fits perfectly against mine. Her lips quiver, her breath shaky. Her eyes

flutter as I deepen our kiss, opening my mouth against hers and sliding my tongue across her bottom lip.

She whimpers, and the rest of my rules shatter.

I press her back against the lockers, pinning her, bringing our hands up to either side of her head as I move against her. The kiss shifts from slow and sensual to wild as she moans against me. Dakota kisses me back with wild abandon. I can tell, instantly, that I'm her first kiss.

I resolve on the spot to make sure I'm also her last.

She pulls away, her eyes wide, her breath coming in sharp gasps. Like she just ran a mile. I chase her mouth, kissing her again, deeper and hungrier. I want more, crave all of her.

Then she breaks the kiss.

"This is a huge mistake." Shaking her head, Dakota slides out from under me and steps away. "I shouldn't have— I'm sorry."

"Dakota, wait —"

But she doesn't wait. She moves quickly, slipping past me like the fastest, slipperiest forward. She moves like she's on ice, sprinting out of the locker room at top speed. She almost crashes into Sawyer as he comes in. She twists around, dodging him with an athletic grace that leaves Sawyer and me staring at each other in confusion.

I want to chase after her, but I can't. Not in front of the team. Especially not Sawyer. He knows me too well. He'd ask questions if he saw me chasing after a woman.

Judging by the way he's looking at me, he's already got some.

*Shit.*

Still, I can't keep a smile off my face as I turn back to my locker.

Because Dakota will still have to come back and get her interview. She'll probably be at practice again tomorrow with her photographer friend.

“What’s that shit-eating grin about?” Sawyer finally asks.

I’ll see her again. That’s reason enough for the world’s biggest smile.



## Dakota

“DON'T LOOK NOW, Dakota, but Mita is staring at you. *Again,*” Sofia lowers her camera with a wry smile.

The Snowhawks are in the middle of their first practice of the day. With the weight of the opening game hanging heavy overhead, there's a tangible urgency on the ice this morning.

From our position in the penalty box, Sofie and I have a clear view of the action.

The Snowhawks' forward, Emerson Garcia, speeds past us in a spray of ice. Sofia's hands are a blur as she captures the moment on film.

I can't help but glance in Kai's direction as he circles the ice. He's impossibly graceful for someone so big. Fast and precise, Kai skates literal circles around most players in the league. He pivots on a dime, lurching between his muscle-bound teammates without a trace. He can fly across the ice as quickly as Emerson when he wants to.

That's why I know Kai is circling near us on purpose. He's putting on a show, letting me get a good look at what he can do.

“Eyes on the biscuit, Mita!” Coach Wallace shouts from the sideline before throwing a furious glance our way.

Okay, I get it. We're distracting the players. But that's not our fault.

*Isn't it, though?*

I still can't believe what happened yesterday. Somehow, I let my guard down enough to kiss an athlete on the job. I wish the butterflies in my stomach would stop getting so excited at the memory.

"Grumpy old hasbeen." Sofia grumbles from beside me. "No wonder no one likes him."

She's particularly annoyed with the Snowhawks' coach today. Sofie packed more cameras than shoes for this assignment—which is saying something for a girl who named her cats Salvatore, Manholo, and Jimmy. Wallace only allowed her to bring one to the practice rink today. He *says* it's because he doesn't trust us not to leak information to other teams. As if I would ever risk my professional reputation by doing something as stupid as that.

I think the coach is just being difficult after Sofia and I turned his ass down.

Luckily, Sofie can do wonders with *any* camera. She won her first photography award with a disposable Kodak.

I smile, leaning over to nudge her shoulder with mine before turning back to the notebook in my hand. The pages are filled with wild shorthand and potential questions, but it makes perfect sense to me.

Parker Knight, the Hawk's rookie forward, pushes past Kai and Sofia nearly climbs out of the box to catch the shot.

"Parker is going to be giving Emerson a run for starter at this rate," I watch him fire off another shot on the goal.

"Yeah," Sofia whispers. "He's incredible out there."

I've never heard my best friend sound so passionate about any sport before—much less hockey. Something tells me there's more to her sudden change of heart than Parker's snipes and killer wrist shots.

I peer over her shoulder, watching the digital screen as Sofie thumbs through her last few photos.

"Lots of footage of Parker in there Sof," I lean in close. "Any of those for personal use?"



Sofia is the only person I know that can audibly *harrumph*.

“He’s a rising star,” she sniffs. “Besides—”

Sofie never looks away from the ice, but I don’t miss the way her mouth turns up in a Cheshire Cat grin.

“You’re one to talk. Three-quarters of that spiral notebook is filled with interview questions for *Kai*.”

She breathes the name like a schoolgirl doodling her crush’s name on the inside of a geometry textbook. Which, to be fair, isn’t far off.

“Boss told me to focus on him,” I deflect. “Just doing my job.”

“Mmhmm,” she elbows me playfully in the side. “Since when do you listen to *him*? Time to change your name from Dakota to Cairo, because girl you are in De-Nile.”

She cackles at that, impressed by her own terrible dad joke. I laugh along, but something unnamable catches in my throat. Sofie turns from practice, pinning me in place with a look I know too well.

*Shit.*

“Wait. *Wait.*” Her eyes are wide. “Did something happen between you and Kai Mita, hockey sex god?”

I feel my cheeks heating up and bury my face in the notebook. Maybe the answer to this whole mess is hidden in there somewhere. But too many of my reporter instincts have rubbed off on Sofie over the years. She puts a finger under my chin, tilting my head up to meet her eyes.

“*Dios mio,*” Sofia gasps, crossing herself. Then she narrows her eyes at me. “Stop holding out, bitch. Give me details. When did you even have *time*? How’s his stick work?”

I laugh, raising my palms to stop the onslaught of questions. Sofie and I both grew up in a house full of boys. Over the years, we’ve become more sisters than friends. It’s rare to find someone who always has your back.

“Well,” I blow out a breath. “He might have *maybe* kissed me last night.”

Sofia whistles.

“Damn. Well, no wonder he’s staring at you. Did you leave one of his nuts intact, or kick them both to pieces?” Sofia knows how I feel about pushy guys.

Growing up playing sports, living with adolescent men as teens, working in a male-dominated industry — Sofia and I have both dealt with enough entitlement and harassment to last a lifetime.

“Uh, sort of. I mean, his balls are intact, I think. I *hope?* I kind of just ran away—” I lower my voice. “After I kissed him back.”

Sofia finally sets her camera down, turning in her seat to give me her full, undivided attention.

“Dakota Irene O’Connor.” Her tone is gentle, but I wince anyway. “Are you falling for a hockey player— with a bad reputation? You didn’t hit your head or anything, did you?”

She’s smiling at me, but the question in her eyes is real.

“No, of course not,” I wave a hand, dismissing the thought outright. “Falling for and being purely *physically* attracted to are two different things. But I can’t exactly antagonize him, either. I need this interview.”

I swallow hard, willing myself to believe my own words.

“Good. Because I know I don’t have to tell you that we absolutely can’t get involved with these guys.” She nods sharply. “We’re here to do a job. Sleeping with an athlete is a terrible idea.”

Suddenly, I can’t tell if Sofie is talking to me or herself. From the way her eyes turn, watching Parker on the ice, I think I already know the answer. She’s practically drooling into her lens.

Not that I’m one to talk. I’ve got a handful of one sentence notes about every player that isn’t Kai. I can’t take my eyes off

of him, and judging by the heated looks he keeps tossing my way, the feeling is mutual.

Just thinking about our kiss is making heat pool deep in my belly. I gave my travel vibrator a good workout in the hotel room last night thinking about him, hoping I could work him out of my system.

No such luck.

“Mita!” I shout, ignoring Sofie’s surprised look when I beckon him over.

Coach Wallace glares at me, but I ignore him, too. I’m not here for Drake Wallace or anyone else. I’m here for Kai.

Kai skates over, a Greek God on ice. He’s smiling that smug grin— like the cat that just ate the canary.

*I want him to eat my kitty.*

“You need something, Ace?” Kai asks, raising one eyebrow.

*Your head between my thighs.*

“You owe me an interview,” I smile back at him, biting my bottom lip.

I know how this game is played. Sofia does too. Sometimes you’ve got to work any angle you can. That’s all this is.

Just business.

“Oh no. For what you paid? A sound bite, maybe. Interviews cost a lot more than that,” Kai winks at me.

From the corner of my eye, I can see Sofia’s head moving back and forth like we’re volleying a ball instead of banter. The camera is in her hands again.

“Yeah?” I lower my voice. “What did you have in mind?”

“Well, coach is about to tell me to hit the locker room,” Kai smirks. “Why don’t you join me back there? Ace reporter like you shouldn’t have any trouble finding it again.”

I shouldn't let him get to me, but trying to ignore Kai's charm is like trying to run a four minute mile. I could train every day of my life, but it's probably going to be impossible.

I've still got to try, though.

"Locker rooms are pretty gross, you know. Not exactly the nicest place to bring a lady, is it?"

Kai studies me for a moment, letting his eyes move up and down my body.

In college, it was hard not to compare myself with every woman I knew. Social media, porn, and locker room talk are all enough to wreak havoc on self-esteem.

But right now, Kai Mita is looking at me like I'm the sexiest woman in the world. There's no mistaking the way his eyes linger on the modest swell of my breasts beneath my shirt.

"Didn't realize you were a lady, Ace." Kai's cocky grin is in full force as he leans harder against the boards. "I thought this was all business."

My nipples harden to stiff peaks beneath his dark eyes.

"Mita! Get your ass to the locker room, you're done!" Coach shouts at him.

"What'd I tell you? Alright, Ace." Kai skates backward, drifting away from me. "Tell you what. You want an interview? You come find me. I'll be in the sauna."

I watch him go, knowing this is a terrible plan.

"Dakota—" Sofia says, a note of warning in her voice.

I shrug one shoulder but don't turn to look at her.

"I'm not giving up over a little steam, Sofia. Don't worry," I project as much confidence into my voice as I can. "I know exactly what I'm doing."

I barely hear her muttering to herself as I walk away.

"That's what I'm afraid of, D."

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THE SNOWHAWKS OWNER, Mike Dominican, spared no expense when it came to *The Nest*.

Every part of the facility is pristine and top-shelf. Sofie and I have toured a lot of the compound since we got here. And as much fun as it is to tease Kai about sweaty towels, even the locker room has that new-car smell.

Not that I could ever throw that man off his game. Kai is unshakable.

Not only is his body carved from solid granite, but his mental game is rock solid.

*I bet that's not all that's rock solid.*

Kai greets me at the entrance to the sauna, wrapped in only a tight white towel. I've seen him shirtless before, of course. There's the infamous bar fight video. But I also pulled up a few of his *better* pictures last night in my hotel room while burning through batteries for my toy.

But seeing his tattooed chest up close, in person?

I'm already feeling my heartbeat between my thighs, so I feel it skip a beat *twice*.

"Looking good, Ace," Kai grins as he kicks off the wall.

I tighten my own towel more securely beneath my arms. I'm not about to back down just because some hockey-slash-sex god thinks he can intimidate me.

"Is this why you're notoriously difficult to interview?" I ask, pushing past him into the sauna. "Everything's got to be your way— wow."

I stop in my tracks. This is one part of the tour that most of the press will never get to see.

The Snowhawk sauna isn't just a spa— it doubles as a luxury box. The far wall is made of one-way glass, giving a perfect view of the ice below. It's so over-the-top that I freeze

in the doorway, prompting Kai to place a gentle hand on the small of my back and lead me inside.

“This? No. I’ve never invited any of the other reporters to the sauna,” he says. “I’ve also never kissed any of them. Or fans, despite what you might have heard. That’s just tabloid gossip.”

His hand is a lot more respectful than I was expecting. It doesn’t linger, doesn’t drift. Just guides me gently inside.

“So you’re saying your reputation is all just wild speculation?” I ask, sitting on a bench with my back to the wall. “Kai Mita is just a misunderstood golden retriever?”

The sauna feels like a different world compared to the icy arena. The strong, earthy scent of cedar fills my nose, and I can already feel beads of sweat forming on my skin. The wooden walls and benches are warm and the room tranquil, except for the hiss of the stones in the corner.

“I’m saying you’re special, Dakota. I’m giving you this interview because I want to spend more time with you,” Kai takes a seat next to me.

His body is an additional source of heat in the room. The heat ignites emotions and needs deep inside of me, warming me from the inside out. His thigh just barely brushes against mine. It’s the faintest point of contact, and it makes me ache for more.

“Alright,” I shift on the bench, turning to face him. “But no bullshit. I’m not here to write a puff piece.”

In the hazy heat of the sauna, my gaze drifts down to Kai’s tattoos before I meet his dark eyes again.

“I won’t twist your words, but I want something real.” I turn back to the glass, watching practice as it unfolds below us. “Why were you suspended for half of the preseason? All the officials said was that it had to do with off-the-ice conduct.”

It’s easier to talk— to *think*— when I don’t have to meet those smoldering eyes.

“You know Sawyer?” Kai asks casually.

Not where I thought this was going, but I nod.

“Sawyer Young?” I point at the ice. “Center, face-off wizard, and team captain? Known as *Captain America* for his perfectionist attitude and charity work? Never heard of him.”

Kai chuckles, but there’s no humor in it.

“That’s him. His little sister graduated from A&M last year. Few of us went down to celebrate with her.” Kai’s voice is quiet, without any of his usual cocksure attitude. “We were at a karaoke bar. These two assholes cornered her and— they got handsy. You know the type.”

Kai clenches his fists, relaxing them again before looking at me.

I turn away from the glass and meet his eyes.

“I do,” I nod. “In fact, I used to think you were one of them.”

Kai shakes his head with a smile.

“Not like that. I flirt, I chase. I may even kiss a pretty girl in a locker room — but only if she’s willing.” A cloud moves behind his dark eyes. “Payton made it clear she wasn’t interested. Sawyer is a better guy than me. His first instinct was to take care of his sister— making sure she was okay. So he took care of her. And I took care of them.”

I set my notebook down, turning to watch Kai as he tells the story. When he’s finished, I reach over to place a hand on his arm.

“Why didn’t Sawyer catch a suspension too?” I ask.

“Because I wouldn’t let him. It’s one thing if bad boy Kai Mita gets suspended. People expect it of me. But Sawyer has a reputation to maintain.” Sparks of gold light up his gaze when he looks at me again. “I’m a D-man. I protect the team. It’s who I am, Ace.”

I thought Kai Mita couldn’t get any sexier. Boy, was I wrong.

We sit in comfortable silence for a moment. I stare unseeingly at the ice below, turning over his words in my mind. It's getting harder to ignore the electric pull between me and Kai.

I turn to look at him now, unsurprised to see Kai staring back at me. Intensity snaps behind the dark fire of his eyes. Part of me *wants* this to be a bunch of bullshit.

Macho athletes blowing smoke up my ass is something I know how to deal with. The emotions that race through me when I look at Kai? Not so much.

Worse, I'm running out of reasons not to give in. Even knowing it's career suicide doesn't stop the demanding ache of my body when Kai is around.

"So," I move quickly, before I have a chance to think it through. "You're saying you'll stop if I say so?"

I scramble up, swinging one leg over to straddle his thigh. I'm practically sitting in Kai's lap, looking into those fathomless dark eyes.

It's more than a little stupid, but I'm too far gone to stop now.

His nostrils flare as he sucks in a sharp breath. I can see and feel his body tense, the play of muscles in his chest hypnotic beneath the ink.

"I will. Nothing is as sexy as consent, Dakota," Kai says, weaving his fingers together and putting them behind his head.

"Are you alright with this?" I ask, lowering myself onto his leg.

I've always had a weakness for guys with thick thighs, and Kai has tree trunks for legs. I can feel his quad flexing beneath me, rubbing against my sensitive skin beneath the towel.

"I'm alright with *anything* you do, Ace. Don't worry about that," Kai purrs.

His voice has no business being so sexy, like a shot of tequila straight to my pussy.



I lower myself farther, pressing my wetness directly against his hot skin. Both of us groan at the initial contact. I lean forward, hands splayed out on his chest as I begin to rock back and forth.

“What were you doing in the locker room, Ace? There are easier ways to get an interview,” Kai asks, his voice hoarse. His eyes are twin coals, burning right into mine.

I slowly slide up and down his thigh. I’m making a mess of him, but it’s only making his breathing quicker.

“I figured no one else had ever had the balls. I’ve been in locker rooms since I was old enough to play a sport. Single dad, three older brothers. I’m not a very girly girl,” I hiss as the pleasure threatens to overwhelm my senses.

“You feel pretty fucking feminine to me right now,” Kai groans, his breathing rapid.

I can’t feel his cock, but I can see the bulge trapped beneath the towel and his other leg.

“Shame about that towel, Mita. I could be grinding on your cock right now,” I whisper against his ear as I lean forward.

“You could make it up to me by losing your towel, Ace. It’s going to take more than big brothers to scare me away, Dakota.” He never takes his eyes off of mine. “When I want something, I go after it with everything I’ve got. Life is too short for fear.”

Fuck, I can’t resist him. I’m already crossing every line and breaking all the rules.

What’s one more?

I reach back and unknot the towel, letting it fall away. I’ve always been a little self-conscious of my chest. I’m athletic—lean and muscular where I’m “supposed” to be soft and curvy. College volleyball gave me the ass I always wanted, but I’m still a card-carrying member of the Itty Bitty Titty Committee.

If Kai shares my disappointment, he doesn’t show it. I hear him swear as the towel falls away and feel his body go even tenser beneath mine.

Kai's eyes drop down to my chest, then lower, taking in every inch of my naked body. I can feel the heat of his eyes on me like a blowtorch, scorching my skin.

"I like your freckles," Kai says, smiling as his eyes move back up to mine.

"I like these," I say, tracing the lines of his tattoos.

"Not fair, Ace. Let me touch you," He growls as my fingers follow the lines of ink and muscle.

God, I'm tempted. But I can't let myself give in to Kai, not completely. We've already gone too far as it is. I have a job to do, and he has a career to maintain. Neither of us can afford this, no matter how much I want him.

"Sorry. I'm going to need more, Mita," I toss his words from earlier back at Kai. "Got to buy a girl dinner first."

I shift against him again, teasing us both with forbidden fruit. I see the way his jaw clenches, the muscles in his face and neck tense with control.

"Fine." Kai shifts his leg, tilting me off balance. "I'm meeting Sawyer at Tom's tonight. It's a sports bar— why don't you meet me there? We can have a drink, then go get dinner. Off the clock."

I sigh as his leg moves against me. Kai lifts his knee slightly— shifting until I have no choice but to slide down and land against his hard chest, palms splayed against the sculpted muscles there.

Kai's hands are still behind his head. But he has more than enough core strength to tilt me on his lap, angling the movement so that my lips land on his when we crash together.

I moan against his mouth, opening up to let his tongue wrestle with mine. It's a slower kiss than our first, but twice as hot. I can feel his warm skin pressed against mine, the hardness of his muscles grinding against me.

My nipples drag across his chest, twin peaks that ache for his hands and mouth. I drag my hand down his chest, reveling in the feeling of so much restrained power. I don't know how

he's managing not to touch me, because it's all I can think of, even as I'm doing it.

I grind against him harder, chasing my release. His leg moves up again, his thigh grinding against my clit at the perfect angle to push me over the edge.

My cry of pleasure is muffled by his mouth, but it's still loud in the enclosed space of the sauna. Kai's arms wrap around my back, just bracing me against him as I ride out my pleasure.

Fuck, but it feels so much better than my solo session with my vibrator last night. Kai's warm body pressed against mine lights up every nerve ending in my entire body.

"Careful," Kai growls against me as his mouth moves to my throat. "You're on thin ice, now."

I freeze, realizing with a start that my hands are drifting down to his towel. A few inches and some thin terry cloth are all that's keeping his cock from springing out. I want it so much it hurts.

But with that ache comes a sudden, sharp fear.

I spring back, jumping off of him and grabbing my towel to wrap around myself. I thought his midnight eyes were smoldering before, but right now they're blazing infernos.

"Tonight. Tom's. I'll be there early, so come whenever you want," Kai says, not moving a muscle.

I nod, not trusting my voice.

Because if I speak, if I say a single word?

I'm going to beg Kai Mita to take my virginity right here, right now.



TOM'S SPORTS BAR IS PACKED, but there's always room for a few local star players.

The weather is finally nice enough that the patio isn't too hot for comfort. The early autumn air is crisp, but the sun is still warm as it sets, painting the sky in pink and purple.

Sawyer cuts an imposing figure, turning the heads of every girl in the place as he carries a pitcher of beer over to our table. He's the all-American all-star. Blonde hair, blue eyes, perfect smile. Even a T-shirt and jeans look expensive on his frame.

*Captain America.* It'd be annoying, if he wasn't such a good guy.

"You've got to be more careful, Kai," Sawyer sits down opposite me, setting the pitcher down. "Some puck bunny is going to get her claws into you *deep* if you keep playing games. Wallace already has you on his radar."

I groan, letting my head hang back as I balance my chair on two legs.

"I should have known." I pour a glass and raise the beer, eyeing Sawyer over the rim. "So this is not just a beer, huh Captain? Time for a wholesome lecture?"

I drain half the glass in one drink before topping it off again.

“It’s a friendly chat, Kai. I’m your team captain, not your dad.” Sawyer pours his own beer and sits back.

The worst part is that Sawyer is just a genuine guy. He cares about the team— and the players. It’s what makes him such a good captain.

“Good thing, too. My dad was a real asshole,” I observe, taking another long pull from my beer.

All around us, people cheer at various games. Baseball is on the majority of the televisions, but we’re at our usual table, which means hockey is blaring from the screens that surround us.

“Yeah. I figured. Sorry about that. If you ever want to talk —”

I wave him off, rolling my eyes.

“No, Sawyer. I don’t need to talk about my daddy issues with you. I came to terms with them a long time ago. A little percussive therapy,” I say, cracking my knuckles and grinning as I make a fist.

Sawyer shakes his head, but there’s a faint smile hidden behind his beer. My eyes go past him, watching as a group of guys enter the patio, heading towards our corner.

“Aw fuck,” I mutter. “Trouble, six o’clock.”

Sawyer twists in his chair and stiffens for a moment, before relaxing and turning back to me.

“Let’s not make a scene, alright?”

The Miami Ice Rays have the roughest, toughest reputation in the league. Half of their players have actually served time. Hockey is a physical game, but the Rays team doesn’t just play rough — they play *dirty*. It’s one thing to check someone, another to hit them so hard they go blind in one eye.

They make their way over, enjoying the same eyes that traced Sawyer’s Steve Rogers’ ass. They look more like a biker gang than a team.

“Look at this, boys. A couple of lost Snowhawks. Where’s the rest of your flock, little birdies?” A leering face bends down, leaning on our table.

Sergei Balishnikoff leads the league in time in the penalty box. The sin bin, as I like to call it. He’s about as close to an actual criminal as exists in the league. I wouldn’t offer to piss on him if he were on fire, but Sawyer is a better guy than I am.

“Sergei. So nice to see you again,” Sawyer glances up and offers him a handshake.

Sergei ignores Sawyer, his beady eyes fixated solely on me.

“I didn’t know you knew this bozo, Sawyer,” I smile up at Sergei, unperturbed.

“We played together on the last Olympic team,” Sawyer volunteers.

He’s such a boy scout, he doesn’t even care that Sergei snubbed him.

“I’ve heard about you, Mita,” Sergei says, leaning forward on his knuckles, getting in my face. “I look forward to breaking you, out on the ice.”

“Why wait?” I ask, smiling up at him. “We can settle it here.”

“Kai, no,” Sawyer says, reaching over to place a hand on my wrist.

“Listen to your captain, Mita. Be a good boy, or he’ll punish you,” Sergie says, leaving with a sneering laugh.

“Don’t let him provoke you. If you get suspended before the game, we’re going to be on thin ice out there,” Sawyer says.

I sigh.

“I know you’re right, cap. I just really, *really* want to hit him,” I give Sawyer a grin.

He doesn’t smile back, but his perfectly blue eyes twinkle.

“You are not the only one, I’m sure. But back to what we were talking about —” Sawyer starts to say something, but I’m distracted by movement behind him.

Not players, this time. Two girls winding their way through the packed bar, headed out to the patio. Headed towards *us*, with the Ice Rays in between. Sofia, the photographer, has a camera strap slung over one arm, carrying the expensive DSLR the way most women would wear a purse. And beside her, auburn hair catching the last dying rays of sunlight, is Dakota O’Connor.

Already, the Rays players are ogling them openly, catcalling, and making lewd remarks.

Like hell I’m about to let that stand.

“Fuck,” I grab the pitcher and drain it, wiping my mouth with the back of my arm as I stand. “I’m going to go get us another pitcher.”

“Kai, hey Kai—” Sawyer says, his voice rising urgently as I cross the patio towards the trapped girls.

Sofia looks good in a loose, flowing sundress. She’s built like a miniature Jessica Rabbit, and I can just see the beginning of a tattoo peaking out at her thigh.

But I only have eyes for Dakota.

She’s wearing a classic little black dress that hugs her curves like it’s painted on. It’s such a drastic difference from the unassuming jeans and t-shirt she was wearing earlier that I almost don’t recognize her. Especially with her hair down. Those crimson curls are startling against her creamy skin, and I can already see dozens of freckles, like God splattered her with a paintbrush just for me.

“Hey Sergei,” I give the girls a reassuring smile. “I don’t think they want to hang out with you. Why don’t you go back to your table and order another box of crayons to snack on?”

I step between them and the goons.

“Fuck off, Mita,” Sergie scowls, reaching past me to grab at Dakota.



The pitcher shatters on his face as I hit him with it.

In the crowd behind him, I Sawyer's horrified face comes into view. Sergei's four teammates rush me, but I plant my feet. There's no way they're getting past me.

*No one is laying a finger on Dakota.*

The first guy tackles me, wrapping his arms around my waist in an attempt to drag me down. He doesn't even budge me. I wrap my arms around his waist instead, lifting him up, and dropping him on his head.

One of his buddies is already rushing me. He swings wildly, the glint of light catching on glass as he swings a bottle at my face. I dip my head, meeting his fist with my forehead. I hear the sickening crack of bone as his hand breaks, and then Sawyer is wrapping him up from behind. I give the team captain a nod of appreciation as he wrestles one goon away, lifting him bodily off the ground.

The remaining two look a lot less sure of themselves now that three of their teammates are no longer in the fight. I can feel warm blood trickling down my face, and couldn't care less. I tense, faking a charge at them to make them flinch.

I laugh as their eyes go wide with fear.

"Get out of here boys, and take your trash with you. This is a Snowhawk bar," I give the men my best feral grin as they grab their unconscious friends and drag them away.

"Captain— is everything ok?" I twist around to see Emerson rushing over with Parker in tow. "What'd we miss?"

Sawyer is glaring at me.

"Just fine, boys. Kai, that was —"

I ignore him. I only have eyes for Dakota.

"You alright?" I ask.

"*Me?*" her voice is full of indignation, her eyes flashing as she jabs me in the chest with a finger. "You got yourself hurt, you big idiot. We would have been fine on our own."

“Those guys aren’t the sort who take no for an answer,” I retort.

Dakota just rolls her eyes, grabs my hand, and starts to drag me away.

“Come on. I’ve got a first-aid kit back at my hotel. I’m not about to let your bleeding ruin the night for everyone else.”

It isn’t until we’re almost out the door that I notice more of *The Nest* crew has entered the bar. Yasmin, the team physical therapist, and Sawyer’s little sister Payton are already rushing over to Sofia.

“You’re just trying to get that interview, Ace,” I say with a smile.

“Damn right, I am. You’re going to give it to me, too.” Dakota’s hand is warm in mine.

Her skin is soft, but I can feel a few rough spots. She plays sports— volleyball and lacrosse if I had to guess by the position of her callouses. That’s alright. I like a girl who doesn’t mind getting her hands dirty.

“I’ll be happy to give it to you all night long,” I lean in, whispering into her ear. The bar around us is loud and growing louder, but she still hears me perfectly clearly.

Dakota’s cheeks darken until her porcelain skin is nearly the same shade of red as her hair.

“Bandage. Interview. Then you leave.” She marches me past the security guard in a stripped referee shirt at the front door. “Got it, Mita?”

“Whatever you say, Ace,” I chuckle as she leads me to the waiting Uber.

If those are her rules, fine. I’ll just have to make sure this interview is even more memorable than the last one.



KAI MITA IS INFURIATING.

It's a good thing his head is hard as granite, because most people would be seeing stars after that little altercation. The man is pushy, smug, and arrogant.

*I've never been more turned on in my life.*

"Get in here and shut the door before someone sees us," I tug on Kai's shirt, urging him into my hotel room before slamming the door.

Moving him is impossible. The man isn't just built like The Rock—he's a whole damn *mountain*. I might as well be trying to drag a bus.

Kai gives me that smug smirk as he looks down to my hand rumpling the front of his shirt. It makes my blood boil, but not in the way it should. I ache to feel that strength pressed up against me.

I'm going to burn out my vibrator once he's gone.

"Ashamed of me?" Kai asks with that slightly amused grin on his face.

"One of us has to be an adult, and it's *clearly* not going to be you," I roll my eyes and stomp further into the room.

My heels make sharp *click click click* sounds as I move around, setting up a makeshift triage area on the bed.

"If you want to get *adult*, that can be arranged," Kai says with a husky laugh.

I didn't pack enough batteries for the man to be this hot.

"Sit," I point at the bed. "Let me patch you up before you bleed all over the carpet. I can't afford it."

Kai saunters over, dropping down onto the edge of the bed. Sitting, he's at eye-level with me.

"You don't have to tell me twice to get into your bed," he chuckles. "I thought you'd never ask."

I huff out a sigh as I rummage through my bags, searching for the first-aid kit. I never leave home without it.

"Just sit there and try not to pass out, ok?" I dig through my underwear, hoping he can't see me.

I shouldn't have brought him back here.

Big mistake. *Huge.*

But how can I ignore his injuries, especially when he got them protecting Sofie and I from those muscle-head jerks? Kai got hurt defending me, and I don't know how to feel about the shimmery excitement that leaves in the pit of my stomach.

"I'm going to bandage you up, and then you're going to go home," I say, pulling out the small box with its red cross and holding it up triumphantly.

Kai rakes a long look up and down my body. He isn't undressing me with his eyes, he's *fucking* me with his gaze. I feel like I could get pregnant just from those dark eyes.

"That's really all you want, Ace?" He asks.

His voice doesn't have any of the usual swagger. There's no joke in it, no playful banter. His words are quiet, calm, and infinitely dangerous.

I swallow, my mouth suddenly dry as I meet his eyes.

"That's all," I say.

I was going for fierce and self-assured. Instead, the words come out shaky, my voice cracking.

*That* makes him chuckle again. God, he has a gorgeous smile.

“Alright. I’ll take your hands on me anyway I can get them,” he beckons me forward.

I take a hesitant step closer but freeze as he reaches out.

“No touching,” I remind Kai as his hands hover over my hips.

“Fine,” he takes it in stride, moving his hands behind his back and clasping them.

The pose does amazing things beneath his shirt. The play of muscles in his shoulder and chest is almost hypnotic, and I have to shake myself to keep from staring.

“Alright. I’m going to clean this. It’s gonna sting, alright?”

Kai smiles and bites his bottom lip, which I mentally file away for later tonight when I’m alone and naked.

“It’s fine. I play hockey. I don’t mind a little pain,” he says, all of the swagger back.

I sigh again, leaning forward to dab at the cut with my little disinfectant-soaked cotton ball.

“What about you?” he asks, his voice full of that deadly quiet again.

“Me?” I ask, my voice shaky again, incredibly aware of how close his lips are to mine. The angle is wrong for a kiss, but it wouldn’t take much. “I don’t need any first aid, but thanks.”

My pussy throbs in sympathetic memory as I recall exactly how good of a kisser Kai is.

“Do you like it sweet, or do you like a little pain?” Kai asks, leaning into my hands, and pressing his wound against the burn.

I can feel my heartbeat in my entire body. My panties are goners, too. This man is turning me completely liquid, and I want nothing more than for him to plunge into me.

“None —,” I clear my throat, “ — none of your business.”

I pull the cotton away, inspecting my handiwork. The bleeding has slowed down, but it still needs a butterfly bandage.

“I’d like to make it my business, and I think you want that, too.” Kai growls

*Focus. I instruct myself. Ignore the smoking hot stud. Ignore the way his eyes are heating up your skin, ignore the rough burr in his voice that you never hear except when he’s talking like this to you.*

“Whatever makes you think that?” I ask, falling back on sarcasm. My first, last, and best line of defense.

I peel the band-aid and apply it a little rougher than I mean to. But I need to get this done, get this man out of my room before I make a huge mistake. If he notices, if it hurts, he doesn’t give any indication.

“Well, I could say it’s in the way your hands are a little shaky. Your cheeks are flushed, and it’s spreading. But mostly it’s because you keep sneaking glances at that vibrator on your nightstand.”

*Oh fuck.*

I whip my head over to look, panic singing through my veins. There it is, staring back at me in all of its hot-pink glory.

I left my toy out.

The blush spreads from my scalp to my toes as Kai laughs that quiet laugh.

“Kiss me,” he says, making me rip my horrified gaze off the sex toy.

I blink down at the sex god sitting on my bed.

“What?” I ask, my voice breathy and unsteady.

He smiles that hungry smile again, and my legs go weak.

“I’m in time out,” he says, shrugging to indicate his hands. “You said no touching. So I can’t pull you in or brush that hair out of your face the way I want. But your pretty little mouth needs kissing, so kiss me.”

I want it so much I can't think of any reason not to. My career, his career, who cares? This kind of connection is worth taking a beating. The chemistry between us is a physical thing, chains drawing me closer and closer to him despite my reservations.

But if I kiss this man, I won't stop. I can't. Perched on the edge of an abyss, I'm terrified about what will happen to me if I fall into Kai. Because my heart is already doing triple axels for this man, and I know all too well this is just another weeknight for a player like him.

"No touching," I whisper as I lean in. "I'm in control. I'm not going to sleep with you. Not tonight."

Kai nods ever-so-slightly, his eyes on mine as he tilts his head, waiting for me to come to him.

"No sex. I'll keep my hands to myself. But we're going to finish what we started in the sauna, Dakota," Kai whispers against my lips.

Then he pushes himself forward, closing the gap between our mouths.

Kai's lips trace hot fire against mine. There's a slight graze of stubble as his mouth opens against mine, a burn that only makes me want him more. I grab his face, hands on either side of his face as I pull him harder against me.

He doesn't get up, doesn't move an inch. Following all my rules, letting me be fully in control. It's completely different from our first kiss, or the sauna, or any kiss that's ever come before in history. He took what he wanted then, but now he's showing patience and restraint I didn't know men like him could possess.

It makes him even hotter, and I didn't think that was possible.

"Slide closer. Straddle my thigh," he tells me, breaking our kiss to whisper the words before reclaiming my lips, sucking the bottom one gently. "That's it. Just like before."

Sparks fly up and down my spine at the sensation, and I moan against him.



I know I shouldn't, but I can't help it. I follow his instructions, letting my weight grind my aching pussy against the thickness of his thigh.

"Good girl," he whispers again before sliding his tongue into my mouth.

That little bit of praise pushes my buttons almost as much as his thigh is pushing against my *button*. I moan louder, my hands moving from his face to his shoulders, holding on for dear life as I rock back and forth against him.

"You make the prettiest noises for me, Ace," Kai whispers, his mouth moving from mine to rest against my ear. "Fuck, I want to strip all your clothes off you and touch that sexy body. Every inch of you."

I whimper, sliding myself back and forth along the length of his thigh. I'm probably making a mess, but I don't fucking care. His words are lulling me into a state of boundless need. So horny I can't think straight.

I'm close when he moves. He must know, must sense my orgasm coming, because he stands up, sliding me off of him.

I whine at the loss of sensation. I smack a fist against his chest, glaring up at him as he towers over me once more.

"Asshole," I whisper. "I was so close."

"Good, but I'm not going to let this end so soon. Lay down," Kai says, jerking his head at the bed.

"I said no sex," I narrow my eyes up at him.

Kai sighs, and for once I can see his patience crack. There's nothing nice or kind in the way he meets my eyes.

"I'm going to follow all your rules, Dakota. I'll keep my hands to myself. Have I given you any reason not to trust me?"

I chew on my lip.

"I've known too many players," I counter.

"I'm not them. Ask around— *later*." He growls. "Right now, you better get in that bed and take those panties off, or I'm not going to make you come."

I blink up at him. I should be furious at him, at his presumption, at his cocky attitude. Tomorrow I'll get all the tea, but tonight I need him whether he's lying or not.

I'm mad, but I want to take it out on his body.

Without another word I crawl up onto the bed, moving on all fours. He groans behind me as I look over my shoulder and slowly peel my panties off. It really feels like peeling, too. Because they're so wet that the soft cotton clings to my body.

"Fuck, you're the sexiest woman in the world," Kai says.

His eyes dart back and forth between my eyes and my pussy, as though he can't make up his mind where to look.

"Well, here I am," I raise an eyebrow at him, stretching out onto my stomach. "Lying down, panties off. How are you going to make me come, Kai? No hands, no cock."

He moves around the bed, taking his time.

"I'm going to do what I do best, of course," Kai says, his cocky smirk now back in place.

He grabs my toy off the nightstand, weighing it in his hands as he stretches out beside me.

"I'm the best in the league with a stick for a reason," he says, his lips moving against my ear as he rubs the tip of my toy against my pussy.

I moan into the mattress, the sensations so familiar and yet so foreign. I don't know what he's doing differently — I can't see it from my position — but Kai makes my dildo feel a hundred times better than I ever have.

"This is going to be so much better when it's my cock, but I'll make you come anyway I can, Dakota," Kai croons against my ear. His breath tickles me, but it's the way he's sliding the toy against me that really takes my breath away.

"Oh fuck, Kai. That feels so good," I whimper.

I feel the tip slip between my lips, sliding ever-so-slightly into me before dipping down, spreading my wetness down to

my clit. I gasp as I feel him turn the vibration on, sending pleasurable rumbles coursing through my sensitive pussy.

“You’ve made me jealous for the first time in my life, you know. Jealous of a toy,” his words are smooth, bypassing my brain altogether and going straight down my spine to punch into me.

He pulls the toy away, making me whimper again as I rock my hips back, chasing it.

“Look at me, Dakota,” Kai whispers, and I twist my head to meet his eyes.

Kai slips his tongue along the tip of my toy, tasting me off it. It’s so fucking hot I almost come from the sight alone.

“Fuck, Kai. Eat me. Please?” I groan. “Put your mouth on me.”

Kai flashes me one of those brain-melting, panty-incinerating smiles, and is kneeling behind me before I can blink.

“Even sexier up close,” he murmurs.

And then his mouth is too busy to speak.

If I thought Kai’s stick handling was good, his filthy mouth is even better. His tongue laps greedily at me, his stubble tickling the sensitive skin of my thighs as he works his mouth up and down.

His lips wrap around my clit and I swear loudly, my hands clawing at the headboard as I desperately try to hold on as the earth moves beneath me.

“Good girl,” Kai says, his breath tickling along my most sensitive parts.

The praise cuts through the fog of pleasure and reignites desire. I’ve never come twice in one night before, not even with my toy on max speed, but Kai’s tongue has me seeing stars again within minutes.

I don’t know how long I’m lost in my own orgasm. I shudder and sob against the mattress. There’s paint under my

nails, and despite what I said about blood on my carpet, there's no way the hotel isn't billing me for this room.

“Kai,” I say once I can think again. “Stay with me? I don't want you to go.”

His warmth slides up into the bed next to me and Kai pulls the heavy comforter up over both of us. I know I'm asking for trouble, but I can't push him any farther away.

“I'm not going anywhere, Ace.”



THE RAYS PICKED the wrong day to play dirty.

It's opening night at Snow Summit Stadium, and the seats are packed with Hawk fans. The energy is palpable, spreading across the ice as the game ticks on.

There's a reason hockey players have such bad reputations. A reason that puck bunnies exist— Blue balls make for angry, violent players.

Which might explain why the Rays are so determined to crack skulls tonight.

Spending a night with Dakota in my arms, her warmth pressed against me? Sweet torture. A torture I'll gladly endure as long as it takes for her. I'll do anything for that woman— hold out as long as it takes for her. I'd wait an eternity for Dakota if that's what she needed.

But in the meantime, I'm going to take my frustration out on some Rays.

We're up 2-1 with minutes left in the third period. A low scoring game, but that's because I'm not out to score goals. We're playing knock-down, bare-knuckle hockey.

I don't want to score. I want to smash heads.

I check another Ray into the boards, and when he slumps, I lock eyes with Dakota. She's sitting with Sofie and Payton, her pen limp in her hand. Looks like I interrupted her mid sentence.

*Good.*

I blow her a kiss. Any of the girls in the area might think it's for them, but she knows. I can see it in her eyes before I get back to my job.

That's when I see it.

Emerson is gliding along at top speed when that asshole Sergei hits him with a high stick. Emerson goes down, blood spraying the ice and boards.

My vision bleeds red and I eat up the distance between us.

Sergei never sees me coming. I'm on him in a flash, the crowd reacting with a sudden 'ooh' as I slam him into the bloody boards. I rain punches down as he twists around, his face almost purple with rage.

A zebra tries to break us up, skating between us, but Sergei shoves him away. My fists find his gut again and again as I pummel him, making him feel it even through his kit. This piece of shit already crossed the line once, making a move on Dakota.

*Two strikes and you're dead.*

Whistles ring in my ears, rising above the roar of the crowd. Fans near us bang on the other side of the clear plastic, rattling it, but I'm lost in a berserk fury.

No one messes with my girl or my team.

Sergei gets his feet under him and grabs my head, his thumbs trying to gouge my eyes. Dirty bastard. I shake him off with a roar, but he hammers his now empty hands into my stomach and chest.

Good. I needed an excuse to *really* hit him.

Teeth hit the ice like a bag of dropped marbles as my fist connects with Sergei's face. The crowd sucks in a collective breath as they watch Sergei go down, still clutching his ruined jaw.

"That's it, Mita! You're out of here!" Two different refs pull me off Sergei, and this time I let them.

I might catch a suspension, but it was worth it. Sergei won't be running his mouth again, *ever*.

"Folks, it looks like number 42 has been ejected!" The announcement is met with a chorus of boos from the crowd. "After that display, he'll probably be out for a few games!"

I don't say a word as I exit the ice, heading back to the locker room.

"Hey Mita, what the fuck was that?" Coach Wallace shouts at my back.

"Justice," I say, turning around to meet his eyes.

We stare for a bit, but he relents, jerking a thumb backward.

"Hit the showers. We'll talk later. I've got to see to Emerson, and figure out how we're going to win with two subs." He looks redder than usual.

"Not my problem. My job is to make sure no one ever even thinks about playing dirty hockey with us again," I say with a shrug.

Coach shakes his head, but he knows I'm right.

I scan the crowd, giving it one last look. *They're* not upset. They're chanting my name. I'm looking for one face in particular, but Dakota isn't sitting with her friends anymore.

Swearing, I stomp into the locker room, stripping off my kit as I go.

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I'M HALFWAY to the showers when I find her, leaning against the wall.

*Fuck* she's gorgeous. Her face is almost as red as her hair, except for the clusters of freckles dusted across her cheeks. I want to kiss each one and play connect the dots across her creamy skin. Her eyes are closed, and it's hard to tell if she's angry or crying.



“Dakota, you can’t be back here —” I startle her with my words as I approach and her green eyes flash open.

Angry it is, then.

“Kai, what the fuck were you thinking?!” Dakota hisses, pushing off from the wall to jab me in the chest.

“I was thinking Sergei is an asshole who had it coming,” I keep my tone light.

“Two fights with him in two days? Is this how it’ll always be? Patching you up every night?” She asks.

Her jewel-toned eyes spark with emotion.

“Of course not. I’m about to be suspended for two games,” I give her a cocky smile.

Dakota narrows her eyes and screams low in her throat— a strangled sound of frustration. She looks ready to knock a few of my teeth out herself. Instead, she turns on the spot and begins to stomp away.

“Hey,” I move fast, getting in front of her. “Dakota, wait— Don’t leave. Hear me out first.”

Dakota’s mouth is set in a firm line. Somehow, she’s even more beautiful when she’s furious at me.

“I’m trying, but you’re not making it easy,” she says softly.

I blow out a breath and drag my hand through my hair.

“We’re a new squad. Other teams were bound to see how far they could push us eventually,” I explain. “It just so happened we got matched up with the biggest assholes in the league first. But now everyone will know they can’t mess with us, not without consequence.”

My palms out as I explain, trying to be as peaceful as possible.

“So this had nothing to do with the bar last night? Or anything that happened after?” She asks, crossing her arms under her breasts.

“I mean, I had an eye on Sergei. Sure. I knew he was an asshole. No one who treats women like that isn’t.” I shrug. “But you saw that stick on Emerson. I kept my cool for fifty minutes. I was willing to let him skate on by for another ten.”

She studies me, her eyes boring into mine. I feel like a scolded schoolchild, called up in front of the class by the hardass teacher. In those eyes, I see my judge, jury, *and* executioner.

“Damn, Ace. If you ever turn that glare on anyone else, I might knock a few of their teeth out, too. I know you’re mad, but do you know how sexy you look right now?”

Dakota blinks, and all her fury shatters in an instant as she stammers.

“You— Kai, I — ugh!” She looks like she can’t decide if she wants to stab me or kiss me, so I make the choice for her.

I pull her close in one smooth motion and bend down, brushing my lips against hers.

She melts against me, her kiss as hungry and savage as mine. Oh, she’s still mad, but she’s clearly decided she’s going to take it out on me the *fun* way.

“I got told to hit the showers, but not where to hit them.” I pull away from Dakota’s sweet mouth. “Coach can bust my balls tomorrow. I know who I want busting them tonight.”

Dakota laughs against my lips, shaking her head.

“You are *such* an asshole,” she whispers, but there’s a smile twisting the corners of her mouth.

“That’s not a no,” I whisper back, before kissing her again.

“Yes, okay? Take me home, Kai. I don’t think we’ve got enough time left before the rest of the guys show up—”

“Oh, no. We absolutely don’t.” I sweep her into my arms, already striding toward the door. “I’m going to need a lot longer than a locker room shower to pluck this sweet cherry.”



KAI DOESN'T STOP TOUCHING me the whole way back to his house.

We don't even make it inside before we're making out, tearing at each other's clothes. Kai is still sweaty and bloody. Fresh bruises peek out from beneath his tattoos as I work his shirt off. I trace the lines of them, the intersections of his wounds and his marks.

"Do you like them?" Kai asks, his voice rough with need.

"The ink? Yes. The bruises?" I lean forward, pressing a kiss to the purpling skin. "Also yes."

Kai hisses, and I start to pull back, but his fist tangles in my hair, stopping me. Pulling me against him.

"I want your mouth on each and every one," he growls, and I have to squeeze my thighs together to ease the sudden, fresh ache between them.

Then I'm in his arms again as he scoops me up, kissing my lips with a ferocity that leaves me feeling bruised. His tongue licks across my lips, teeth, the roof of my mouth — like he just can't taste enough of me.

I jump into his embrace, wrapping my legs around his torso. He just skated hard for most of an hour. Capped it off with a fight. Still no sign of strain, not an ounce of fatigue evident anywhere. His hands cup my ass, massaging my cheeks through my jeans.

I moan against his mouth as he carries us towards the house. My hands on either side of his face pull him in harder as I grind against him. I can feel his bulge rubbing straight against me, pushing the seam of my jeans hard enough against me that I see stars.

Kai kicks the door open with a splintering crash, and I laugh, burying my face in his shoulder.

“You’re outrageous,” I say, squeezing my legs together, and hugging his thick torso.

“I’m not about to take my hands off you,” he whispers against my ear as his mouth moves along it, his teeth nipping lightly. “I can fix the door, but if I stop touching you I might die.”

His confession makes me whimper with renewed need as I undulate my hips, grinding against him. The low groan in his throat just makes me move harder. I leave myself completely in his hands, pulling my hands down to his chest to splay my hands against him.

The house is a blur. I’ll explore it tomorrow. Tonight, I want to explore the man in my arms.

Kai doesn’t stop until we’re in his bathroom. He cranks the water with one hand while he lets me slide down his body. My hands are already beneath the waistband of his shorts, tugging them down. His cock springs free to slap up against his belly, and I feel my mouth water.

I’ve never wanted anything in my mouth so much in my life.

“Shower first,” Kai rumbles, his tone rich as he hooks his thumbs in the waistbands of both my jeans and panties and kneels to peel them down.

I’m soaked again, of course. The first time I was embarrassed at how wet I was, how wet he’d made me. Now I know how much he loves it, though.

On cue, Kai cups my mound, slipping his big middle finger through my lips, swiping it from bottom to top like a credit card. It glides easily, and we both moan at the sensation.

Then, without missing a beat, his finger slides into his mouth.

“Delicious girl,” Kai purrs approvingly. I can’t blush any harder, or I might at the way he’s looking at me.

“Kai, please. I need you so much,” I reach down, taking him in my hand. Barely. His cock is built as thick as he is, and already I’m anticipating the delicious ache of how he’ll stretch me.

“Holy fuck, Ace. Your hand feels so good,” he moans.

I can feel a rush of desire coating my thighs as I slowly pump him. It’s so much different than my toy — harder, yet softer. His skin is so soft against my fingers, but the hot steel beneath makes my knees go weak. More than anything, it’s a part of him, a part of this amazing man. Reacting to my every touch, twitching and throbbing in my grasp.

“How’s my stick handling?” I ask, looking up at him.

He answers without words, grabbing me and dragging us both into the shower. It’s huge, twice as big as any shower I’ve ever been in, with two heads spraying warm water from either end.

“Too good. Later, we’re going to play. Right now, I need you, Dakota. I need to feel this sweet pussy wrapped around my cock,” he reaches down, slipping two fingers into me now. Curling them along my inner wall in a way that makes me dig my animal into his biceps. Hanging on for dear life.

“Please, Kai. Please, take me. Take my virginity,” I pant against his mouth as our lips meet in another hungry kiss.

“Fucking filthy mouth for such a good girl,” Kai groans against my mouth.

Fuck, I might have a praise kink after all, because the way Kai says ‘*good girl*’ makes my pussy clench so hard it leaves me gasping.

His hands move me, positioning me. The water is a thousand points of contact on my sensitive skin, but somehow his hands feel like they’re touching me even more. He turns

me, my back to his chest. His mouth moves from my shoulder, kissing up my throat all the way to my ear.

“Hands out. Brace on the wall,” he instructs. I lean forward, pressing my ass against the fat length of his cock. I wiggle my hips, eager to push him to the limit.

“Try not to fall,” he whispers against my ear, and then the warmth of his breath disappears.

I gasp as I feel it reappear between my thighs.

“Kai, what —” I have to bite off my words as a strangled cry forces itself out of my throat.

“I’m not about to pop your cherry without making sure you’re ready,” Kai says. He’s loud enough I can hear him over the water, so loud I *feel* it buzzing against me.

Vibrators have nothing on a deep voice right against your pussy.

Kai buries his face between my cheeks, and my elbows give out as he gives me one long lick straight down the center. The angle makes me feel so exposed. His moans against me only grow deeper as his tongue enters me.

“Fuck, Kai,” I gasp, my entire torso and face flush against the shower wall. I twist, looking at him over my shoulder, and the sight makes every muscle in my body tighten.

Kai, on his knees behind me, his eyes locked to mine as he licks, sucks, and worships me. I feel like I died and went to sexy heaven. Or maybe this is hell— because this is definitely a sin. *Worth it.*

He’s worth anything.

I reach back, trying to grab Kai’s hair, trying to gain some semblance of control, because if he keeps eating me like this I feel like I’m going to die. He doesn’t let me. His hand wraps around my wrist, pinning it in the small of my back.

It’s just a bit of restraint, just a hint of dominance, but it drives me wild. It makes me grind back against him, bucking my hips. I push myself against him, riding his mouth as much as I can. I need to come *now*.

“Such a greedy little thing,” Kai laughs as he pulls back. His face is soaked, chin dripping, and I know it’s not just the shower.

“Kai, *please*,” I beg. I’ve never begged before, never wanted to, but this man makes me crave the dirtiest things I can imagine.

“Please what, Ace?” Kai says, popping to his feet and pressing himself up against me.

The heat of his cock against my lips sends me spiraling. I could get off just rubbing his thickness against myself. I want to rub all of me against all of him. I can’t get enough of Kai.

“Please fuck me,” I hiss as he leans in close, kissing the back of my neck.

One of his hands tangles in my hair and firmly tugs me back off the shower wall, forcing me to arch. He’s so tall I’m looking up into his eyes, dark with lust.

The head of his cock notches into me, sliding against my tight entrance. I moan, the feeling of him intoxicating. So much better than I imagined.

“This might hurt,” Kai says, and then he’s pressing into me.

I gasp. It doesn’t hurt the way he’s worried — I did too many sports as a girl to have an intact hymen — but he’s so thick that I’m still grateful that he’s taking it slow. The stretch of his cock in my pussy becomes my entire world, Obliterating everything else.

“God, you’re so tight,” Kai hisses from between clenched teeth. “If you weren’t so wet I’d never fit.”

His hand lets go of mine, and I reach back to place my palm on his stomach. The ridges of his abs send another thrill through me as I feel them flexing, pulling himself back only to push in farther. I try to brace myself against him instinctively, but I might as well be trying to stop a train with my bare hand.

He hurts, but he hurts *so good*.



Without warning, I feel my inner walls clamp down hard on him as an orgasm rips through me.

“Good girl,” Kai says in that sexy half-whisper that slips into my ear and drills straight down my spine. “I’m going to make you come all over me, again and again.”

I whimper, one hand clawing at him, nails dragging across the hard ridges of his muscles. The other is trying desperately to tunnel through the shower wall. I can feel myself getting wetter, my pussy pulsing, eager to take him deeper.

Kai takes it slow, but it doesn’t take long before I feel his balls tapping against my clit. The extra stimulation makes me cry out as he begins to fuck me with a slow and steady rhythm. I roll my hips, pushing back against him.

“That’s it, Dakota. Fuck back onto me,” he growls right against my ear, his teeth nipping along my skin. “You’re so hot. God, I love looking at you.”

I bring both my hands forward and push myself against the wall, pushing with all my strength just to gain inches. His deep voice, whispering sweet recognition in my ear is driving me wild.

*Yeah. New kink unlocked.*

I start moving with every muscle in my body, not just rocking but throwing myself back onto him. I feel him slow and then still, holding himself steady while I back up onto his cock.

“Fuck, Ace. You’re going to make me come,” Kai pants, his voice ragged.

He grips my hips and begins to thrust into me with a speed and intensity that leaves me gasping and seeing stars. I thought he was fucking me rough before— but this makes me realize just how much he was holding back.

“Kai, I’m going to come,” I cry out, my throat stinging from the force.

“Give it to me. It’s mine,” Kai growls as he slams into me. “I’m going to come too. Claim you, mark you as mine.”

His words wash over me as my orgasm crashes into me, making me choke back a sob from the intensity. Kai grunts and groans as I feel him swelling and spilling his seed inside me. Each throb makes my pussy shudder with aftershocks of pleasure.

“Mine,” Kai whispers against me, his hand turning my head to kiss me softly, gently.

“Yours,” I whisper back.



TWO GAMES of suspension leave me more pleasantly exhausted than I've ever been. Muscles I didn't even know I had ache. Dakota is as insatiable as I am, and neither of us is good at saying *stop*.

Half a week of marathon sex has left scratches all over my body. Each one is its own separate thrill. I like Dakota claiming me. I've staked my claim on her, too—in half a dozen hickeys and bruises.

So I'm surprised to find her sitting quietly this morning, a wistful look on her face.

"What's wrong, Ace?" I ask, sliding into the seat across from her.

"I feel like it's the last day of summer. Last day of vacation. Soon this is all going to end, and I'm not ready," she says, her bottom lip quivering with emotion.

Immediately, I feel my stomach drop.

"I'm just going back on the ice, Dakota. It's not the end of the world. It doesn't have to be the end of *anything*. What makes you think anything has to change?"

She sighs, shaking her head.

My heart is an erratic mess, beating out of time as I search her face.

"Because I'm supposed to be an objective journalist. My boss didn't send me out here to knock boots with you, Kai. He

wanted a juicy story. Some tabloid gossip. When I don't give him that, he's going to fire me," Dakota says, her eyes meeting mine.

I reach over and take her hand, peeling it off my favorite coffee mug to weave our fingers together.

"Why not write the story? It's not like my reputation can get any worse, and I don't care. Hell, it might be fun," I smile, trying to set her at ease.

"Because it's not true. You're the kindest, sweetest, guy, Kai. I can't — I *won't* do that," her eyes flash emerald fire and I know there will never be anyone for me but Dakota.

I pull her out of her chair and into my lap. I brush a red lock of hair out of her face and kiss her soft lips. Dakota tastes like sweet coffee and sin.

"Well, then, what if there was another option?" I tilt her chin, forcing Dakota's sprinting gaze up to mine. "If your boss doesn't appreciate your expertise, I know someone who will."

Dakota's eyes soften, a hand softly caressing my cheek as she gazes down at me with a look I can't quite read.

"See, this is exactly what I'm talking about. You're too good to be real, Kai." She laughs, but her eyes shine with unshed tears. "Too sweet, too honorable— and *god damn*. You are too sexy. I must be dreaming."

I kiss her again, savoring the soft brush of her lips against mine.

"If you are then we both are— and I refuse to wake up. Come on, Ace. Time to unearth your clothes and go be adults."

Dakota bites her bottom lip, squirming in my lap.

"Think we have time for a shower, first?" she asks huskily.

She squeals with laughter as I scoop her up and carry her into the shower.

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MIKE DOMINICAN'S office is at the top of *The Nest*. It's decorated in the man's eclectic style — something we affectionately call 'modern cowboy'. The desk is an old-school, rich mahogany roll top. The walls are all glass, the tinting shifting with the intensity of the sun. The overall effect is cozy, but professional.

*Maybe someday, I'll make this my office.*

Mike is leaned back in his luxurious chair, feet up on the desk. His outfit matches his decor — urban cowboy. I'm surprised he doesn't have LEDs on his spurs.

"Mita, you're our best player. That's the only reason I'm even entertaining this meeting. But I'm not about to cut this girl any slack just for being *your* girl, understand?"

I can't help but grin at Mike. He really doesn't know me at all, if he thinks that's something I'd ever want.

"Don't worry, boss." I shake my head. "She would hate me if she felt like she was getting any special favors."

"Alright. Bring her in. But whatever happens, you're lacing up tonight. Got it?"

"As if you could keep me off the ice, boss. But I'm not worried about it. Trust me, she's going to blow you away."

I poke my head out the door and beckon Dakota into the office.

She's cutting a professional figure today. We had to cut the shower short so she had time to get ready, but it was more than worth it. Her damp hair is up in a tight bun, the pencil skirt and blazer accentuating her curves beautifully. Her heels click on the hardwood of the manager's office, beating to the rhythm of my heart.

I'm looking forward to getting her home and taking her outfit off one piece at a time. Except for the heels.

"Knock him dead, Ace" I whisper encouragingly as she brushes past me.

"Miss O'Connor," Mike stands up to shake Dakota's hand. "I read your article. It's exceptionally written. Fantastic profile

of the Snowhawks— insightful as hell.”

“Thank you, Mr. Dominican.” Dakota smiles, returning the handshake. “That means a lot. You’ve got quite the organization here.”

Dominican gestures to one of the plush arm chairs across from his desk before taking a seat.

“Please, call me Mike. Now, Kai tells me you’re the right fit to lead the Snowhawk’s PR team. I’m sure you understand — I have some reservations.” Mike fishes a pair of glasses out of the desk, scanning the copy of Dakota’s resume pulled up on his computer screen. “I see you played quite a few things in school— but there’s a big difference between girls leagues and the NHL. I prefer my staff have experience with the sport in question, and I’m not sure you’ve got what it takes.”

Mike leans back in his chair, spreading his hands wide. It takes everything in me not to call him out for being misogynistic, but it wouldn’t be doing Dakota any favors.

Besides, she can handle herself.

“Quiz me,” she says simply, settling down in the chair across from Mike with a grin.

Beneath her sweet smile, I can feel Dakota’s fangs starting to come out.

“I’m sorry, what?” Mike blinks, his forehead wrinkling in confusion.

“Quiz me,” she repeats. “If you’re worried there’s something I don’t know, ask.”

Dakota’s voice is as crisp as her suit.

“Miss O’Connor, I’m not sure that’s fair. Kai tells me you’ve only been covering this beat for a week —”

I raise a hand to interject.

“I think it’s perfectly fair, boss. Really.”

I don’t look at Dakota, but I can feel her eyes on me.

“Alright. If you insist,” Mike shuffles some papers in front of him before leaning back in his Herman Miller chair. “Let’s start with something easy. I’m going to go down the roster, and you tell me— righty or lefty, passer or shooter.”

Oh, he’s *so* fucked. Dakota just nods, not letting her poker face drop an inch.

“Let’s start easy,” he sets the papers down. “Mita.”

Dakota raises an eyebrow.

“With all due respect,” she crosses her arms. “Bullshit question, Mr. Dominican.”

Mike rolls his eyes, sitting forward in his seat.

“Miss O’Connor, I’m trying here,” he blows out a breath. “But you’ve got to give me something to work with. I’m sorry, this isn’t going to work out.”

He starts to stand again, but I interrupt—

“Hear her out, Mike,” I lean up against the wall. “You owe her that much.”

Mike gives me a look that could melt ice.

“Really, Mita? Fine.” He sits back down with a huff. “Miss O’Connor, I asked you about Kai Mita’s stats. Why is that a bullshit question?”

*Got ‘em.*

“Because Kai can shoot left or right,” Dakota grins. “He’s ambidextrous.”

Mike twists in his chair to look between me and the paperwork in his hand. His eyebrows raise high in an unspoken question.

“She’s right, boss,” I hold up both hands, wiggling my fingers. “Go ahead— Keep going down the roster.”

This is going to be fun.

“Sawyer,” Mike says, leaning forward in his chair.

“Lefty, passer. I think he needs to throw some more shots into his game. Little bit too much of a team player.”



“Emerson,” Mike fires off, excitement tinging his voice.

“Righty, shooter. I don’t want to offer any critique while he’s injured,” Dakota says tactfully.

“It won’t leave this room, right Kai?” mark asks.

“My lips are sealed, boss,” I say, miming buttoning my lips.

“First time for everything,” Mike mutters.

“Emerson is the opposite of Sawyer. Shoots too much, when he should pass. Robinson is a lefty who needs to retire, but he’s stubbornly clinging on to glory. Parker is another lefty who needs experience, but Robinson is too focused on his pain to have time to train him. You’ve got a lot of problems with this team, Mike. The biggest is that they aren’t a team.”

Mike sit back in his chair, his eyes narrowing.

“I sure paid a lot for a team, and I hate wasting money.”

“You need a new coach, Mike. Drake Wallace is just driving a wedge in between players who should be working together. You’ve just got a bunch of guys, not a team.”

Mike whistles, his face transforming to shock as he sits back, a dumbfounded look on his face.

“Yeah, that’s how I felt when she laid it all out for me, too,” I grin. I want to wrap Dakota up in the biggest hug I can and kiss her until her toes curl, but I’ll save it for later.

“Well, butter my butt and call me a biscuit,” Mike says.

“Does that mean I got the job?” Dakota asks.

“No,” Mike says.

Her face falls, but he follows up fast, smiling.

“It means you’ve got a different job. I clearly need a new assistant manager. Someone with their pulse on the team. Plus, I’ll be honest, I think Mita needs a handler. What do you say?”

His hand reaches across the desk, and Dakota takes it, giving it a firm shake.

“When do I start?” she asks, smiling for the first time since we walked into the office.

“Permission to be unprofessional?” I ask, kicking off the wall to cross the room in three long strides.

“No, absolutely no —” I cut Dakota off by scooping her up into a bear hug, spinning her around.

“Lord almighty, ya’ll look as happy as a clam in high water,” Mike says, a grin spreading across his face.

I set Dakota down, beaming as she brushes herself off.

“Mita, we’re going to have a serious discussion about what is and isn’t acceptable at the office,” Dakota says, glaring up at me.

“I look forward to it. Over dinner tonight?” I ask, as I saunter out of the office.

# Epilogue

KAI HISSES in pleasure as I sink down onto his cock. The look on his face is absolutely stunning. It fills me with warmth to see just how much it blows his mind.

“Fuck, I love you,” Kai groans as I lean forward, bracing myself on his chest.

“You’re about to love me a lot more,” I say, laughing throatily.

I rock back and forth on him slowly, just like I rode his thigh in the sauna. Only this time, he’s getting just as much out of it as I am. Only this time, it’s ten times better. Kai fills me perfectly, stretching me just enough that I feel it every time.

Sex is like a good workout. If you aren’t sore afterward, you didn’t do it right.

“So, tell me about the new coach,” I tease, tracing my fingertips along his chest.

We never stop playing our games. I don’t think we ever will. We’re both too competitive and too playful by nature to want to stop.

So I get to quiz my man on anything I want in bed— and *only* in bed.

Well, and the shower, and the sauna, and the car, and the kitchen. Kai can’t keep his hands off me, now that I let him use them. I wouldn’t have it any other way.

“He’s young. Not much older than me. One of Spencer’s old teammates. I hear he has a daughter about your age,” Kai’s voice is strained as I slide up and down his dick, taking my time.

“That’ll be fun. We can bond over being hockey player’s daughters. That reminds me, when did you want to meet my family?” I ask innocently, raising my hips until he’s barely inside me before sinking down to the hilt.

Kai has to bite his fist, his stifled moan music to my ears.

“Whenever you want, ace. You’re not going to throw me off by bringing them up, you know,” he grins up at me as he slides his hands down to my hips. “Nothing can make me lose this game.”

I place my hands over his, using his grip to move from being on my knees to crouching on the balls of my feet.

“Oh yeah?” I ask as I adjust my position. His eyes flash as I sink down on him again and then go wide as I begin to ride *hard*.

The room fills with the echoes of my ass slapping against his thighs as I fuck Kai with everything I’ve got. I can feel his cock twitching and throbbing inside of me as I give him everything I’ve got.

“Fuck, Dakota,” Kai groans as he helps hold me steady. “I’m already close.”

“Good. Give it to me, Kai,” I smile ferally.

I’ve discovered that I love nothing so much as feeling Kai filling me up. It’s my new favorite sport, and I’m going to go for Olympic gold.

“Not until you come too,” he hisses through clenched teeth, his hand snaking down to rub my clit in a tight circle.

“That’s cheating,” I pant, shifting against his hand despite my words.

“Put me in the penalty box, then,” he grunts as he bucks his hips up into me.

I come hard, my cries of pleasure echoed by his as I feel him shooting deep. I slam my hips down one last time, grinding against his hand as I shudder on top of him. Kai just holds on for dear life as I ride us both through our orgasms.

I collapse against his chest, keeping him locked inside me. I know that if I do, he'll be ready to go again sooner.

“You're unbelievable, ace. I love you so much,” Kai whispers against my head.

“I love you too, Kai.”

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# About the Author

Regina Wade specializes in sizzling-hot happily-ever-afters. Her sweet and spicy quickies are packed with OTT alpha males and fun, feisty heroines. Regina is obsessed with dark chocolate, organic coffee, and her rescue hamster, Waffles.