

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

EMMA BRAY

STALKED

by the  
Coach

# **STALKED BY THE COACH**

**EMMA BRAY**

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# CHAPTER ONE

Burke

THE WHISTLE PIERCES the humid air, a shrill blast that cuts through the grunts and pounding footsteps on the track. My voice booms out next, gruff and commanding.

“Faster! Dig deep!”

They respond, my athletes, faces contorted in effort as they push their bodies to the limit. I feel the familiar swell of pride in my chest as I watch them strive and suffer under my guidance. This is why I coach, to mold these young minds and bodies into something greater.

My hands rest on my hips, feet planted firmly on the turf. I know I cut an imposing figure, years of training having honed my body into a solid mass of muscle and sinew. My white t-shirt clings to my chest, damp with sweat. Wisps of dark hair poke out from under my cap. My skin is tanned and weathered, my jaw square. I look every bit the rugged coach.

The whistle screeches again, signaling the end of the drill. Chests heave and muscles tremble as the team circles up for a quick debrief. I join them, my keen eyes assessing each athlete in turn. They’ve worked hard today, pushed themselves to new limits under my strict tutelage. I nod, satisfied.

“Hit the showers. I’ll see you all tomorrow, six o’clock sharp.”

As they shuffle off, one figure catches my eye. My chest tightens. A lithe blonde ponytail swings behind a petite,

feminine frame. She's new. I watch as she grabs her gear, admiring the leonine grace with which she moves. A curious feeling stirs inside me, one I quickly suppress.

*No*, I remind myself. *I'm her coach, nothing more*. With a grunt, I turn and stride back across the emptying field, my mind already leaping ahead to tomorrow's practice.

I turn back to glance at the blonde once more before she disappears into the women's locker room. Something about her pulls at me, awakening an unfamiliar longing. Shaking my head, I try to redirect my thoughts to the task at hand—preparing for tomorrow's training session.

My passion for coaching runs deep. I pour my entire being into shaping and motivating these young athletes, instilling in them the grit, determination and mental toughness required to excel. My methods may be tough, but they get results. And the kids respond to me. They respect my authority, trust in my guidance. I push them hard, but they know I care.

As I gather up stray equipment, I catch my reflection in a puddle—rugged and imposing as always, but with warm, kind eyes that reassure and connect. Eyes that tell my athletes, “I believe in you, I'm here for you, we're in this together.” Eyes that build bonds of loyalty and trust not easily broken.

I feel a swell of pride in the program I've built. Tomorrow will be another chance to share my passion with a new generation of talent, to mold them into champions. My thoughts drift back to the blonde and the raw potential I sense in her. I'm eager to unlock it, to see her transform under my tutelage. My mind instantly goes to all the other things I could school her in, and I close my eyes in shame. Fuck, what this girl does to me is disgusting. I'm at least twice her age.

I shake my head. I need to focus on preparations for my team. Shouldering the heavy bag of gear, I stride purposefully toward the equipment shed, mind racing with ideas for tomorrow's session. My work is never done, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

---

The sun beats down relentlessly as I pace the track, stopwatch in hand. Sweat drips from the brows of my athletes as they push themselves to the limit under my watchful eye. “C’mon, pick up the pace! You call that a sprint?” I bark. Beside me, that lithe blonde ponytail that drives me crazy bobs up and down as its owner laps the others with ease.

It’s the new girl. *Lydia Hartman*. I can’t take my eyes off her. I’ve never seen technique like that before, a natural grace combined with fierce determination. As she passes me again, I get a closer look at her face—young but serious, with a competitive fire burning behind those cerulean eyes.

“Alright, take five!” I call out, blowing my whistle. The others gratefully collapse onto the grass while the blonde jogs lightly in place, barely winded. I approach her.

“Great form, Lydia.”

She beams under my praise, and my chest tightens at the jolt of electricity that shoots through me at her full smile beaming at *me*. Up close she’s even more striking—long limbs, perfect form.

“Thanks, Coach.” How the fuck does her sweet voice have my cock pressing against my zipper like a panting dog begging for attention?

I clear my throat and try to think of anything other than what those sweet lips would feel like wrapped around my aching length.

Lydia heads back to the track as I turn my attention to the other students.

“Alright everyone, gather round! We’re gonna work on starts today.”

The group assembles around me, some still breathing hard from the workout. I make eye contact with each one, giving encouragement and feedback tailored to their needs.



“Ethan, you’ve got those long legs. Really drive off the blocks and get some power behind your stride.”

He nods, hanging on my every word.

“Amy, you’re looking strong. Just remember to stay low coming out of the blocks—you’ll shave time off your starts.”

Amy beams at the praise. I know just how to motivate each of them.

But as we run drills, I find my gaze drawn back to Lydia again and again. The way she explodes from the blocks, her lithe body unfolding like a spring. The determination etched on her face as she powers down the track.

I force myself to look away, to focus on the task at hand. But her image burns in my mind, an obsession I shouldn’t indulge, but cannot seem to resist. She’s my student, I remind myself. I need to maintain boundaries, no matter how strongly I’m drawn to her.

Lydia lingers on the track as the other athletes head to the locker rooms, her cheeks flushed from exertion, tendrils of blonde hair escaping her ponytail. I know I should dismiss her, maintain a professional distance. But some reckless impulse propels me forward.

“That was an impressive practice, Lydia. I think you have a shot at states if you keep up this level of work.”

She brightens at the praise, those striking green eyes meeting mine. “Thanks, Coach. That means a lot, coming from you.”

“Your starts need some refinement, but your speed is incredible. I’d be happy to work with you on technique sometime. How’d you like to join me for some one-on-one sessions?” The words spill out before I can stop them. I know I’m crossing a line, yet I can’t make myself pull back.

Lydia nods, ponytail swishing. “I’d really appreciate that.” She holds my gaze, something unspoken passing between us. My pulse quickens.

I'm getting into dangerous territory. I know what kind of one-on-one training I'd like to give her, but I remind myself that she really is a talented athlete, and I must hone her talent and help her achieve all she can. I can keep my cock in check. I *have* to.

But as we talk details, I'm only half listening, distracted by her lean muscles glistening with sweat, her intense gaze that seems to see right through me. Jesus, this girl would be jail bait if she wasn't eighteen. And she *is* eighteen. I made sure of it in the research I did on her last night. I force myself to focus. She's my student. I need to remember that, no matter how alluring I find her.

I feel a flutter in my chest at her words. *Get a grip*, I tell myself. This *cannot* happen. But still I find myself moving closer, drawn like a moth to her flame.

This has to stop. Yet as we talk, I find myself leaning in closer, drinking in her every word.

I finally take a step back, clearing my throat. "Well, great job today. Hit the showers and get some rest."

Lydia gives me a searching look, then heads for the locker room. I let out a shaky breath, raking a hand through my hair. I came dangerously close to the edge today. If I'm not careful, we'll both pay the price for my lapse in judgment. But even now, I cannot get her out of my mind.

I know I'm playing with fire, but I can't pull away. She is magnetic, and I am utterly under her spell...

\*\*\*

I am *obsessed*. I look forward to practice more than ever before now. Just to see *her*.

I watch Lydia from across the track, unable to tear my eyes away as she goes through her warm-up routine. Her lithe body arcs and bends with a fluid grace I've never seen before. She makes it look effortless, though I know the strength and control it requires.

I force myself to turn away, to focus on the other athletes. But my thoughts keep drifting back to her. The way her hair

shines like gold in the sun. How her eyes flash with determination as she pushes herself to the limit.

I know it's wrong, that I'm risking everything by allowing myself to feel this way. But no matter how hard I try, I cannot resist her pull. She invades my dreams at night, my every waking thought consumed by longing.

At practice, I push her harder than the others, desperate to see that fire ignite within her. I crave those moments when it's just the two of us on the track, the thrill of her undivided attention feeding my inappropriate obsession.

I know there will be consequences if I continue down this dangerous path. But the heart wants what it wants, and mine seems to have chosen Lydia, for better or worse. I can only pray that I'm strong enough to maintain my distance. But as I watch her now, hair flying like a banner behind her, I fear that this girl may prove my undoing.

Especially when I realize that I would give up *everything* for her.

# CHAPTER TWO

Lydia

MY HEART POUNDS as I jog up the front steps of my house, sweat dripping down my back. The familiar white picket fence and manicured lawn give me a sense of comfort, a place I can escape from the chaos in my mind.

Inside, the air conditioning hits my flushed skin. I grab a cold bottle of water from the fridge and guzzle it, the liquid soothing my parched throat.

Dropping my duffel bag in the foyer, I head upstairs to my bedroom. My muscles ache in the best possible way—the burn from pushing myself to my limits, proving I have what it takes. Proving I’m good enough.

Collapsing onto my bed, I close my eyes and see his face. Those warm brown eyes gazing into mine, his hands gently guiding me into the perfect form. The heat rises in my cheeks as I remember how his body felt pressed against mine, our limbs intertwined as we practiced take-downs.

My heart flutters at the memory of his smile, rare but intoxicating. The way he looks at me, like I’m the only thing that matters. The only one who understands. We’re two of a kind, driven by the same passions, chasing the same dreams.

I know it’s wrong to feel this way about my coach. But I can’t control the surge of desire that courses through my veins whenever I’m around him. I crave his touch, his kiss, his

everything. I want to get lost in his arms and forget about right and wrong.

A shiver runs down my spine as I imagine what it would feel like to have his hands roam my body, his lips trailing kisses along my heated skin. My breaths come faster, shallow and wanting. I can almost feel the delicious ache between my legs, the emptiness only he can fill.

Sucking in a breath, I force the thoughts from my mind. I have a strict training regime to follow, goals to achieve. There's no room for distractions. No matter how much my body may crave his, I have to stay focused. I won't let anything get in the way of my dreams.

Not even the one thing I want most in this world.

---

I walk into the kitchen, the aroma of charcoal and sizzling beef hitting me like a wave. My stomach rumbles in response, reminding me I haven't eaten since this morning's practice.

Dad stands at the grill, tongs in hand, flipping burgers with practiced ease. His graying hair is ruffled from the breeze, face creased in a smile as he greets me. "There's my girl! Hungry?"

"Starving," I admit, grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge. The chill liquid soothes my parched throat, quenching a thirst even the longest shower couldn't satisfy.

Mom comes up behind me, wrapping me in a hug. Her floral perfume envelops me in its familiar embrace. "How was practice today?"

Excitement bubbles up inside me like champagne, the words spilling forth in a rush. "Coach says I'm improving by leaps and bounds. If I keep up this progress, he thinks I have a real shot at making the Olympic trials!"

Dad's eyes light up with pride as Mom clasps her hands together, eyes shining. "Oh, sweetheart, that's wonderful! We always knew you had the talent and determination. You're going to do such great things."

“But the competition will be fierce,” I say, trying to temper their enthusiasm with a dose of reality. As much as I want to believe Coach’s words, there are no guarantees. I can’t let myself get distracted by false hopes or—

My gaze drifts to the window, peering into the gathering dusk. Somewhere out there, Coach is going about his evening. Does he think of me the way I think of him? Do I cross his mind when he’s alone in the dark, desire burning through his veins like wildfire?

A flush creeps up my neck at the forbidden thoughts, heat pooling low in my belly. I squeeze my thighs together, willing my treacherous body to obey. But it only makes the ache worse, an emptiness I can’t ignore.

An emptiness only *he* can fill.

Mom touches my arm, brow furrowed with concern. “Sweetie, are you feeling okay? You look flushed.”

I jerk away from her touch, pulse racing. How could I have let my guard down like that? One careless slip and they’ll suspect the truth—that their little girl is obsessed with a man nearly twice her age.

“Just tired from practice,” I mumble, avoiding their gaze. My hands curl into fists, short nails biting into my palms. The sting helps ground me in the present, a reminder of who I am. Not some lovesick schoolgirl, but an athlete with dreams bigger than any crush.

Dad’s voice rumbles with warmth and affection. “Why don’t you go take a hot shower and relax? Your mom and I can handle dinner tonight.”

“I’m fine,” I insist, summoning a smile. “Coach says recovery is just as important as training. I’ll eat, do some light stretching and get an early night.”

Another lie. The only thing I’ll be doing tonight is thinking of Coach Thompson, replaying every moment we’ve shared. His hands guiding my form, breath hot against my neck...

I grit my teeth against the memories, nails breaking skin. Pain shields me where willpower fails, a barrier between

temptation and surrender.

Because giving in would mean losing everything I've worked for. Not to mention the fact that there's no way he's interested in me. I'm way too young for him. He'd probably think I'm just harboring a silly schoolgirl crush. And no matter how much I ache for his touch, my dreams will always come first.

Mom's eyes soften with understanding. "We're always here if you want to talk, sweetheart. About your training, your goals...or anything else. You can tell us anything."

If only that were true. I force a smile and duck my head, hiding the turmoil behind a veil of blonde hair.

"I know. But right now, I just need to focus on my running."

It's the only truth I have left.

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That night, I pace my room as moonlight filters through the window, shadows dancing across the walls. Thoughts of Coach Thompson torment me, desires I can't ignore and shouldn't feel.

I shouldn't want my coach like this. It's wrong, unethical — but that doesn't stop my body from burning at the memory of his touch. The way his hands mold around my waist as he teaches me form, breath hot against my neck, muscles flexing beneath his shirt...

A groan slips free, and I slam a fist against the wall, pain clearing my mind. I can't keep doing this, torn between what I want and what I know is right. If I don't end this now, I'll lose everything—my dreams, my future, myself.

I squeeze my eyes shut, taking a deep breath. *You can do this*, I tell myself.

When I open my eyes, I've made my choice. I ignore the throbbing between my legs and push my coach out of my mind

as I climb into bed.

But, still, I dream of him.

---

The next morning, I drag myself out of bed and into my gear, muscles protesting after yesterday's brutal workout. But the ache in my body is nothing compared to the hollow ache in my chest, and I welcome the pain. It's a reminder of my resolve, a penance for my weakness.

When I enter the track, Coach Thompson is waiting. His expression is blank, giving nothing away, but his eyes light up at the sight of me. My heart flutters, but I try to tamp down my excitement at the sight of him. Guilt stabs at me, and I have to look away as he approaches, unable to meet his gaze.

"Lydia," he says, voice rough. I clench my hands into fists, nails biting into my palms. "How's my star athlete this morning?"

He trails off and I risk a glance up, startled by the vulnerability on his face. Then it's gone, hidden behind a polite mask as he continues. "Are you okay?"

I force a smile and nod, throat tight, and follow him onto the track. We launch into the usual drills and I lose myself in the routine, trying to ignore the ache inside. But I can feel Coach Thompson's eyes on me the entire time, his gaze like a physical touch I can't escape.

When practice ends, I grab my bag and turn to leave—only to find Coach Thompson blocking my path. I stop short, pulse racing as he steps closer, crowding me against the wall.

"Lydia, you're exceptional," he says softly, and then my breath catches as his hand raises ever so slowly. I stare up at him wide-eyed as he slowly brushes a stray hair back from my face. His fingers linger for a heartbeat, and I close my eyes to savor the sensation of his touch.

But when I open my eyes, he's gone, leaving me trembling in his wake.



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That night, I lie awake for hours, restless and aching. I can't stop thinking about Coach Thompson, remembering the heat in his eyes and the roughness of his voice. My body thrums with need, sensations pooling low in my belly until I'm squirming beneath the sheets.

With a gasp, I give in and slide my hand between my legs. I'm already slick and sensitive, imagining it's Coach Thompson—Burke—touching me instead. I flush at the thought of calling him by his first name. Would he be gentle? Or would he pin me in place, grip my hips and drive into me without mercy?

A broken moan escapes me as I circle my clit, pleasure building fast and sharp. I'm close, so close—I think? Hell, I don't know. I've never had an orgasm before. Never felt the need to play with myself like this.

But something's building...something that promises to be incredible.

I imagine Coach Thompson growling in my ear, a look of possession in his eyes as he thrusts into me.

And then I'm coming with a cry, back arching off the bed as I shatter into bliss. For a few moments, there's only mindless sensation and relief.

When I come back to myself, guilt hits me like a punch to the gut. I shouldn't have done that. I can't keep indulging these twisted fantasies, no matter how good they make me feel.

Tomorrow, I'll find a way to stop thinking about my coach inappropriately. I have to stay focused on my training, on the future I've always dreamed of. I won't let anything distract me again.

With that resolution in mind, I finally drift off to sleep—and dream of warm brown eyes that see into my soul.

# CHAPTER THREE

Burke

MY EYES FOLLOW Lydia as she sprints down the track, her lithe body moving with the grace of a gazelle. She's poetry in motion, each step igniting a fire in my veins.

Heat rises in my cheeks, my pulse quickening. I clench my fists, fighting the urge to reach for her. My thoughts swirl in a maelstrom of desire and guilt.

This is wrong. She's my student. I'm her coach. I should not feel this way.

Lydia glances in my direction, her bright blue eyes meeting mine. A coy smile plays on her lips, and she tosses her hair, the golden strands shimmering in the sunlight.

She knows. She can see it in my face, the hunger in my gaze. And she enjoys torturing me like this, teasing me, tempting me until I can no longer restrain myself.

I turn away sharply, my jaw clenched. I can't give in. I won't.

"Coach, did I do something wrong?" Her voice is soft and sweet, like silk against my skin.

My fingers dig into my palms as I struggle for control. "Just keep running, Lydia."

She gives me a quizzical look, but she obeys.

I think of all the other ways I'd like to make her obey and curse myself.

---

As the sun sets and darkness envelop my thoughts, I find myself alone in my bedroom, my mind consumed by thoughts of Lydia.

The fantasy plays on a loop—her gasp, her lips parting beneath mine, the taste of her desire. I can imagine the warmth of her body, the rhythm of her racing pulse.

My chest tightens as I shed my clothes, the familiar ache returning. Fuck, what I would do to kiss her. Instead, I'm haunted by the knowledge of what we could have, what I so desperately want.

My hands tremble as I undress, my heart pounding with anticipation and guilt, knowing the forbidden nature of my desires.

Naked, I sink onto the edge of the bed, gripping the sheets to anchor myself against the storm of emotions raging within. I shouldn't want this. I shouldn't need her the way I do. But my resolve is crumbling, my willpower shattered by the force of my obsession.

With a ragged breath, I lie back on the bed, closing my eyes as forbidden images flash through my mind. Lydia's lips, swollen from my kiss. Her body arching into mine. The soft moan that escapes her as I caress her skin.

Heat coils in my belly, tension building as I imagine the feel of her touch, the taste of her arousal. I know it's wrong, but I can't stop myself from sliding my hand down my body, my fingers closing around my rigid length.

A groan rumbles in my chest as I stroke myself, chasing the release I so desperately crave. Release from the hunger, the guilt, the loneliness. For this moment, I allow myself to pretend that she's here with me, that I can have what I want. What we both want.

The fantasy that Lydia might want me too makes my breath come quicker.

My movements quicken as pleasure overwhelms me, her name a whisper on my lips. *Lydia*.

I'm drowning in sensation, my mind flooded with images of Lydia. The feel of her body pressed to mine, her nimble fingers stroking my cock as I thrust into the welcoming heat between her thighs. The taste of her kiss, intoxicating and sweet. The sound of her ragged moans in my ear as I drive her to the edge again and again.

My hand moves faster, slick with sweat and precum. So close, I'm *so* close. Just a little more.

I dig my heels into the mattress, tension coiling in my belly as my release approaches.

"Lydia," I gasp, her name both a prayer and a curse.

Ecstasy crashes over me in waves, my back arching off the bed as I climax. For a fleeting moment, I feel whole again.

But as the last tremors fade, shame washes over me, cold and unrelenting. I've crossed a line I swore I never would.

I stare at the mess on my hands, the evidence of my weakness and the depravity of my desire for Lydia. Bile rises in my throat, a visceral reminder of how far I've fallen.

With a groan, I drag myself from the bed on unsteady legs and scrub a hand over my face. I can't keep doing this. I have to stop indulging these sick fantasies. I can't keep jacking off to my student this way.

I can't think about her like this anymore. I have to lock these thoughts in a box and bury them deep within me, along with my feelings for her.

Feelings that can never see the light of day.

I trudge to the bathroom and turn on the faucet. I wash the remnants of my release down the drain, scrubbing at my skin as if I can wash away my sins.

But no amount of soap and scalding water can purge the sickness inside me. I'm rotten to the core, corrupted by a longing I have no right to feel.

I quickly clean myself up, my movements mechanical and devoid of the passion that consumed me moments ago, as I grapple with the consequences of my actions.

With a heavy sigh, I slide between cool sheets and close my eyes. The sheets feel coarse against my skin, a reminder of the harsh truth I can't escape.

My thoughts are a maelstrom of self-loathing and longing, desire warring with decency until I'm not sure which way is up. The lines have blurred, rationality eclipsed by obsession.

I'm drowning in forbidden waters with no shore in sight, adrift on a sea of sin with no way back to the man I once was. In my weakness, I've become unmoored from my morality, set adrift by the siren song of Lydia's beauty and passion.

She is my undoing in every way, a temptation I'm too weak to resist. Sleep comes in fits and starts, offering no reprieve from the turmoil in my mind.

My fantasies flash like sparks behind my eyelids each time I close my eyes, igniting a fire in my blood that refuses to be quenched. I'm burning alive with need for a girl half my age, a sickness for which there is no cure.

Lydia haunts my every waking thought and poisons my dreams, her beauty a venom that's infected my soul. She is my drug of choice, an addiction I can't kick, and I'd gladly lose myself in her sweet oblivion again and again.

But at what cost? I've already sacrificed my integrity, my ethics as her coach, for a few moments of ecstasy in the dark. How much more of myself am I willing to compromise for a taste of her lips, a chance to lose myself in the heat of her embrace?

The answer terrifies me. I'd give it all and then some for Lydia. My self respect, my career, my morality—all of it gone in the flames of desire.

She is my salvation and my damnation, and I can't escape her hold on my heart.

By the time the first rays of sunlight peek through the curtains, I've made my decision. Today is a new day.

I drag myself from the bed as dawn peeks over the horizon, the golden light mocking me with false promises of redemption. There will be no absolution for my sins, no way to undo the betrayal that lingers on my hands like the scent of her skin.

But I have to try. I have to bury these feelings deep within and lock them away, contain the beast that claws at my insides, begging to be set free. I have to be her coach and nothing more.

The cold shower does little to dampen the fire in my blood, but it steels my resolve. I stand before the mirror and see only the lie I must become—calm, collected, professional. No hint of the passion that burns beneath the surface, an inferno waiting to engulf us both.

At practice, I avoid her gaze, afraid she'll see the truth in my eyes. But I can feel her watching me, her stare like a caress that awakens every nerve in my body. It takes all my strength to remain unaffected, to keep my hands from reaching for her, to choke back the words I long to whisper in her ear.

“Coach, did I do something wrong?” Her voice is hesitant, laced with hurt and confusion.

I clear my throat, struggling to form a coherent response. “Everything is fine, Lydia. Keep up the good work.” The words taste like ashes in my mouth, but I force a smile, hoping to reassure her.

She sees through my lies, peering into my soul with eyes full of longing. I'm drowning in depths of blue, losing myself in her gaze, and I know I can't escape her, no matter how hard I try.

Lydia has me, heart and soul, and there's no going back.

# CHAPTER FOUR

Lydia

MY HEART POUNDS as I step onto the track. Why can't I stop thinking about Coach Thompson? His strong hands guiding my form, his encouraging smile, the intensity in his eyes as he watches me run.

I shake my head, trying to clear the image of his lips pressed against mine. *Focus, Lydia*. I have a meet in two weeks, and daydreaming isn't going to get me there.

But with every stride, I see him. Feel the heat of his body behind mine as he adjusts my stance. Hear his voice in my ear, low and rough. "You can do this, Lydia. You're stronger than you know."

My cheeks flush as I round the bend, warmth spreading through me that has nothing to do with the sun. I stumble, catching myself just before I hit the ground.

*Dammit*. I bend over, hands on my knees, panting. This can't go on. I won't let my feelings for him sabotage everything I've worked for.

Coach Thompson jogs over, concern etched into his features. "You alright?"

I straighten, avoiding his gaze. "Fine. Just tripped."

His hand closes around my arm, and I shiver. "You seem distracted today."

I try to pull away, but his grip tightens. "I'm focused now."

He steps closer, lowering his voice. “Are you sure? Because I’m worried about you, Lydia.”

My breath catches as I meet his eyes. Worry, and something more. *Heat. Desire.*

I lick my lips, watching his gaze darken. “Don’t be.”

Coach Thompson releases me abruptly, raking a hand through his hair. But it’s too late. The truth is there between us, as undeniable as the attraction pulsing through my veins.

He wants this as much as I do.

And I don’t know what to do with that knowledge.

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My heart pounds as I walk to practice the next day, a riot of emotions churning inside me. Did I imagine the intensity of Coach Thompson’s gaze? The tenderness in his touch? Or was it real, a sign that my feelings for him aren’t one-sided?

I scan the track for any sign of him, my breath catching when I spot his familiar figure leaning against the railing. Our eyes meet from across the field and a slow smile curves his lips, warmth flooding his gaze. My cheeks flush with heat and I look away, a giddy smile tugging at my own mouth.

So it was real. The knowledge thrills through me, setting my blood aflame. I press a hand to my chest, trying to calm my racing heart. How am I supposed to focus on my training with these feelings consuming me?

When Coach Thompson blows the whistle to start our warm up laps, I join the other athletes on the track. But I’m only going through the motions, my mind wandering to fantasies of being alone with Burke, his hands and mouth claiming my body in the way I’ve only dared to dream about before now.

A sharp sting on my arm jerks me back to the present. I’ve drifted into the runner beside me, our elbows colliding. “Sorry,” I mutter, shaking off the distraction. But a minute



later, I stumble over my own feet, nearly taking a nasty fall that would have sent me sprawling across the track.

Coach Thompson's gaze snaps to mine, his brow furrowing in concern and frustration. I know I need to get a grip before I really hurt myself or sabotage my training. But how can I contain this fire that threatens to consume me whole? My longing for Coach Thompson has become an inferno, and I'm not sure there's any turning back.

I escape to the locker room during our break, needing solitude to wrestle with my tumultuous emotions. But the empty room only intensifies the ache inside me. I slide down to the floor, drawing my knees up to my chest as I try to steady my ragged breathing.

It's wrong. Pursuing a relationship with Burke would be completely inappropriate and jeopardize my training, not to mention his career. I know this, and yet...the thought of denying myself the pleasure I crave seems unbearable. I've never wanted anything the way I want him. My desire is an all-consuming flame that threatens to reduce me to ashes if left unsatisfied.

When the door creaks open, I scramble to my feet, wiping furiously at my eyes. But it's only Burke, a concerned frown creasing his brow as his gaze searches my face. "Lydia, is everything alright?"

The compassion in his tone and the tenderness of his words nearly undo me. I open my mouth to assure him I'm fine, but the lie refuses to form. Instead, I take a step toward him, the space between us crackling with energy. His eyes darken as they drop to my lips, and for one heart-stopping moment, I think he means to close the distance between us.

But he clears his throat and takes a hasty step back. "You should head back out. I won't have you slacking off during practice." His gruff tone does little to mask the longing in his eyes, giving me a shred of hope that my feelings aren't one-sided after all.

I open my mouth but no sound comes out. All I can do is nod and head back out to the field.

But I still feel Coach Thompson's eyes on me.

---

I continue my training, pushing my body to its limits, but my mind refuses to focus. Thoughts of Coach Thompson consume me—the strength of his hands, the warmth of his breath against my neck, the hunger in his eyes. I stumble again, crashing to the ground as my knee gives out beneath me.

Coach Thompson is at my side in an instant, helping me up. “That’s enough for today.” His jaw clenches as he examines my knee. “You need to rest.”

I jerk away from his touch, frustration boiling inside me. “I’m fine.”

“Lydia, stop.” His voice is sharp, commanding. I freeze, heartbeat racing. “You’re distracted and you’re going to hurt yourself if you keep running like this. Take a break.”

“You don’t understand,” I say through gritted teeth. “I have to keep going.”

“Why?” He steps closer, dark eyes searching my face. “Talk to me.”

The words burst out of me. “Because if I stop, all I’ll think about is you.”

Silence. I squeeze my eyes shut, cursing my lack of control. What have I done?

A hand cups my cheek, gentle yet firm. “Look at me.”

I obey, trembling. Coach Thompson’s eyes blaze into mine, filled with a hunger that mirrors my own. “You’re all I think about too, Lydia.”

My breath catches, and I feel dizzy. We stare at each for a long moment. It’s just the two of us on the field, and staring into his eyes, I almost forget that he’s my coach.

He’s a *man*, and I’m a *woman*.

My body is thrumming. I’m trembling. And then...

His lips crush mine, devouring, conquering, as his hands grip my waist and pull me against him. I moan into his mouth, drowning in the taste of him, as he groans and presses his hard body into mine.

It's everything I dreamed of and more.

*Forbidden.*

*Wrong.*

I don't care.

I cling to him, lost in the searing heat of his kiss, and I know I can never go back from this.

My heart and body belong to him now.

I break away, panting. He grips my arms, holding me in place. His chest heaves against mine.

"Coach," I begin, but he shushes me with a finger on my lips.

"Burke," he corrects me.

My heart does a flip.

"Burke," I try his name on for size. His pupils dilate, and he stifles a curse.

"Fuck, Lydia, hearing you say my name like that..."

My heart is beating out of my chest, but I shake my head.

"We can't," I whisper. "This is wrong."

"I don't care." His eyes blaze. "I want you, Lydia. *Here. Now.*"

A wave of heat floods my core at his words. I ache for him with a desperation that steals my breath. Is this really happening?

All of my protests die on my lips as Burke crushes his mouth to mine again, devouring me with a hunger that matches my own. His hands slide under my shirt, fingers splaying across my back, igniting my skin. I moan, lost in sensation, forgetting everything but this moment.

He lifts me, urging my legs around his waist, and carries me across the field, through the locker room and into his office.

I feel the cool tile against my back, a sharp contrast to the heat of his body pinning me in place. One hand slides up my thigh, fingers teasing the edge of my shorts.

“Tell me to stop,” he rasps, “and I will. But if you want this as much as I do...God help me, Lydia, but I can’t fight this any longer. Jacking off to thoughts of you every night only does so much. All it takes is one look at you in the morning and I’m hard as a rock again. Do you know how hard it is for me to focus on coaching when I’m walking around with a permanent hard-on for you in my pants?”

Something about his crude admission drives me wild. I crush my mouth to his, answering without words. He growls low in his throat, hand sliding under my shorts to grip my bare skin. The feel of his rough, callused palm against my flesh sends a jolt of pleasure through me. I rock my hips, urging him on, silently begging for more.

Burke tears his lips from mine, trailing hot, open-mouthed kisses down my neck. His fingers slide between my legs, finding my center, stroking and teasing until I cry out. The tension coiling within me reaches a breaking point. I come apart in his arms, clinging to him as wave after wave of ecstasy washes over me.

“Good girl. That’s it, baby. Come for Daddy.”

I spasm again. As if our relationship isn’t taboo enough, hearing Burke call himself my daddy is so forbidden, so naughty, that I come again.

He muffles my scream with his mouth, kissing me through my orgasm until my cries die down into whimpers.

“Burke,” I whisper, but he shakes his head.

“Don’t worry about me, baby. Just seeing you fall apart in my arms is enough for now. The first time I take you it’s going to be in a bed like you deserve.”

A rush of gratitude fills me.

He tips my chin up and stares into my eyes tenderly. “Am I right in assuming you’re a virgin?”

I feel my cheeks heat with warmth as I nod.

“Thank fuck,” he whispers before he kisses me again, this time gently. “I’m going to take care of you, Lydia. In every way,” he promises.

And I believe him. When the time is right, he’ll take my virginity, and I wouldn’t want to give it to anyone else.

I trust Burke.

He holds me close, our harsh breathing echoing in the silence.

I know nothing will ever be the same again. The line has been crossed, the damage done.

But I can’t bring myself to regret it.

---

I stand under the shower spray at home, hot water sluicing over my body as I struggle to process what just happened. Guilt wars with desire, my thoughts chasing each other in endless circles.

How could I let this happen? Coach Thompson is nearly twice my age, my teacher and mentor. Pursuing a relationship with him would be completely inappropriate. If anyone were to find out, it would destroy his career and reputation.

Yet every fiber of my being longs to be with him. When we’re together, the rest of the world fades away. I feel happy and alive in a way I never have before. I know in my heart that what we have is real, despite the obstacles standing in our way.

As I towel off and get dressed, I make a resolution: we have to end this before it goes any further. No matter how much it may hurt, it’s the right thing to do. Burke deserves better than a scandal that could ruin his life, and I should be focusing on my training, not a forbidden romance.

But my determination wavers when I see him waiting by my car after practice. Heat flares in his gaze as it travels over me, and I have to clench my hands to keep from reaching for him.

“We need to talk,” I say, struggling to keep my voice steady.

“Yes, we do.” He steps closer, crowding me against the side of the car. I feel the solid strength of his body against mine and bite back a moan. “I can’t stop thinking about you, Lydia. I know this is wrong, but it feels so right. We have something real here. Please don’t ask me to give up on us before we’ve even begun.”

His words reignite the longing in my heart. I lift my eyes to his, seeing the truth of them reflected there. My resolution crumbles into dust.

How can I possibly walk away from something so profound? I let out a shaky breath and surrender to the inevitable.

“I don’t want to end this either,” I confess. “I’m scared of what might happen, but I’m more afraid of losing you.”

A slow, beautiful smile lights his face. He takes my hands, bringing them to his lips for a soft kiss.

“Then don’t lose me,” he says simply. “We’ll face whatever comes together.”

Joy and relief flood through me. I rise up on my toes, twining my arms around his neck to bring his mouth down to mine. The kiss is sweet and unhurried, a promise of more to come.

When we part, I lay my head on his chest, listening to the steady beat of his heart. He holds me close, and I close my eyes.

# CHAPTER FIVE

Lydia

THE SUN DIPS below the horizon, its golden light bathing the track in a warm glow. Burke stands beside me, his hands shoved in his pockets, watching as the other athletes finish their laps.

A nervous energy crackles between us as we walk to the parking lot together. This feels different than our usual post-practice chatter. There's an intensity in his gaze that makes my pulse race.

When we reach my car, Burke clears his throat. "Do you have plans tonight?"

My stomach flutters. I know I should go home, but I can't bring myself to say no. "Nothing important."

"Come over. I want to talk." He squeezes my shoulder, his fingers lingering. "Please."

Heat floods my cheeks. I'm powerless to resist him. "Okay."

I call my parents, hating the lie that slips so easily from my lips. They think I'm staying late to practice. If only they knew where I was really going.

My hands shake as I follow Burke to his house, a modest two-story in a quiet neighborhood. When he opens the door, the scent of cedar and bergamot envelops me.

He takes my hand, leading me to the living room. A crackling fire casts a warm glow over the space. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“No, I’m okay.” I perch on the edge of the sofa, nerves coiling in my stomach.

Burke sits beside me, his knee brushing mine. I stare into the fire, acutely aware of his proximity. “Lydia, we can’t ignore this anymore.” His voice is rough with emotion. “I’m in love with you.”

A gasp catches in my throat. He feels it too, this pull between us that refuses to be denied. I turn to him, meeting his gaze. “I love you too.”

His eyes darken, pupils dilating with desire. He cups my cheek, his touch igniting my skin. “The world may think this is wrong, but I can’t stay away from you.”

“I don’t want you to,” I whisper.

He brushes his lips over mine in a feather-light kiss that makes me ache for more. “If we do this, there’s no going back. I’m fucking *obsessed* with you. Do you understand me? You’ll be Daddy’s little girl forever,” he warns me, his eyes darkening on his taboo statement.

I surge forward, spurred to near madness by Burke’s filthy possessive words. I crush my mouth to his. It’s all the answer he needs.

He groans, pulling me onto his lap. Our kisses deepen, tongues tangling, breaths coming fast.

There’s no more room for doubts or worries. All that’s left is desire, raw and unrelenting, consuming me until I’m lost in the sweet abandon of his embrace.

He lifts me, carrying me down a hallway to his bedroom. My heart pounds as he kicks the door closed behind us.

This is it.

He sets me on my feet at the foot of the bed, his hands roaming over my body. I tug at his shirt, desperate to feel his bare skin against mine.



He pulls back just long enough to strip off his clothes before claiming my mouth again. We stumble onto the bed, limbs entangled, feverish kisses igniting my blood.

I cry out as his lips blaze a trail down my neck. He lifts my shirt over my head, hands cupping my breasts through my bra. “So beautiful,” he murmurs, gazing at me with reverence.

He unhooks my bra, baring my chest to his heated gaze. I squirm under the intensity of his stare, nerves and desire warring within me.

“Relax, baby.” He brushes his thumbs over my nipples, sending sparks through my body. “I’m going to take such good care of you.”

He lowers his head, teasing one taut peak with his tongue. A jolt rockets through me, settling between my legs. I whimper, tangling my hands in his hair to hold him there.

He lavishes attention on my other breast before trailing kisses down my stomach. His fingers hook into my waistband, slowly dragging my pants and panties off.

I’m completely bare before him, flushed and aching. He looks up at me, eyes glowing with love and lust. “So perfect.” His voice is rough with desire. “All mine.”

He settles between my thighs, parting me with his fingers. I cry out as his tongue finds my center, teasing and stroking. Pleasure builds within me, intensifying with each flick of his tongue until I come undone, back arching off the bed as ecstasy crashes over me in waves.

I’m still trembling in the aftermath of my release when Burke lifts his head. Our eyes meet, and a surge of desire floods through me at the sight of my arousal glistening on his lips.

“I need to be inside you,” he rasps. He strips off his clothes and crawls up my body, pinning me beneath him.

The hard length of him presses against my inner thigh, evoking a fresh wave of need. I wrap my legs around his waist, pulling him against me.

He captures my mouth in a searing kiss, thrusting his tongue between my lips to tangle with mine. I can taste myself on him, spice and heat that fuels the fire burning within.

One hand finds my hip while the other guides him to my entrance. He pushes inside in one smooth stroke, stretching and filling me. We moan in unison at the exquisite sensation.

“Oh, fuck. So tight, baby. So tight...that little thing is strangling Daddy’s cock, honey.”

“Daddy!” I moan.

That snaps something inside Burke. With a curse, he begins to move, slow and deep. I cling to him, overwhelmed by the pleasure rippling through me.

“You feel so good,” Burke rasps, his lips brushing my ear. “So tight and wet for me. I love being inside you, Lydia.”

His vulgar praise sends a fresh wave of heat through me. I rock my hips to meet his thrusts, wanting him deeper, harder, faster.

“More,” I plead, digging my nails into his back. “Please, Daddy, I need more.”

He growls again, the sound primal and possessive. His pace increases, his strokes becoming more forceful. The bed creaks in protest beneath us, the headboard banging against the wall.

I cling to him as ecstasy builds, an unstoppable force that threatens to consume me. The tension coils tighter and tighter within me. Burke senses how close I am and redoubles his efforts.

“Come for me,” he orders, his voice rough with passion. “Let go and come for me, Lydia.”

His command is my undoing. Pleasure crashes over me in a devastating wave, robbing me of breath and thought. I come apart in his arms, shaking and crying out his name.

Our bodies move as one, a perfect rhythm that drives us both higher and higher.

He follows soon after, gripping my hips hard enough to bruise as he spills inside me with a hoarse shout.

We collapse together, limbs entwined and hearts pounding. He kisses me softly, gently, a tender contrast to our earlier passion.

“I love you,” he whispers against my lips.

“I love you too,” I breathe.

We lie there for a long moment, limbs entangled, struggling to catch our breath. A deep contentment settles over me, a bone-deep satisfaction I’ve never known before.

In this moment, all the reasons why this is wrong fade away, leaving only the stunning truth that we belong together. Burke is mine, and I am his, and nothing else matters.

I run my fingers through Burke’s damp hair, savoring the feeling of his weight pressing me into the mattress. Our hearts gradually slow, the frantic rhythm easing into a gentle, synchronized beat.

Burke lifts his head to look at me, his eyes soft with affection. “You’re incredible,” he murmurs, brushing a strand of hair from my face. “So beautiful, so passionate...”

His words make me blush. I pull him down for a kiss, tangling my hands in his hair. “You’re not so bad yourself,” I tease.

He nips at my lower lip in retaliation, a spark of heat stirring in my belly. I can already feel him hardening against my thigh again, and I rock my hips to increase the friction.

Burke groans, grasping my waist to still my movements. “Easy, girl, or you’ll be the death of me.”

“But I’m not done with you yet,” I protest, scraping my nails down his back.

He shivers, a mix of pleasure and torment flickering across his face. “You’re insatiable.”

“Only for you.” I capture his mouth again, kissing him with a hunger that threatens to consume us both.

Burke surrenders with a sigh, his body responding to my touch. We move together again, slowly at first, then building in urgency and passion.

The pleasure comes more quickly this time, born of intimacy and trust. We know each other's bodies now, how to give the other maximum delight.

The climax hits me by surprise, a wave of rapture that steals my breath. I cry out, clinging to Burke as he follows after, our lovemaking culminating in a perfect, shattering ecstasy.

We collapse in a tangle of limbs, too spent to do more than gaze at each other with dazed wonder.

I nestle against Burke's chest, listening to the steady beat of his heart. His arms are wrapped around me, his body curved protectively over mine. We fit together seamlessly, two halves of a whole.

I trace idle patterns over his skin, marveling at how right this feels. How did I ever think I could stay away from him? We were meant to be together, all obstacles and protests be damned.

Burke presses a kiss to my hair, his breath stirring the strands. "What are you thinking?"

"That I don't want this to end," I admit. "That I wish we could stay like this forever."

"We have all the time in the world, baby." Burke tilts my chin up, gazing at me with tender warmth. "This is only the beginning."

His lips meet mine in a slow, unhurried kiss. Unlike our earlier passion, this is gentle and full of promise. A renewal of our commitment to one another.

I sigh into his mouth, all remaining doubts and fears evaporating. We have crossed too many lines to go back now. My heart, body and soul belong to Burke, and I to him.

No more words are needed. In this moment, we have said everything that needs to be said. The rest of the world can

condemn us, but they can never take this away. We have found our truth in each other's arms, and here we will remain.

# CHAPTER SIX

Burke

THE WOODS ARE empty and still. Sunlight filters through a leafy canopy above. I wait behind an old oak, my heart pounding.

When Lydia emerges from the hiking trail, I grab her hand and pull her behind the tree. Her body slams against mine, soft and warm. “I was afraid you wouldn’t come.” My lips crush hers, hungry and demanding.

Our meeting places are getting more clandestine. We can’t chance anyone seeing her at my house. She might be eighteen, but she’s still in high school, and I’m still her coach.

Our relationship is still unacceptable.

“I couldn’t stay away.” Her hands grip my shirt, nails digging into my chest. “Not from you.”

I groan, kissing her harder. This is madness—she’s my student, half my age. But I can’t stop. I don’t want to.

Lydia arches into me, her curves molded to my body. I grip her ass and grind against her. She’s already panting, cheeks flushed. “Please, Daddy.”

The sound of her needy whimper makes me ache. “What do you want, baby?”

She gazes up at me, blue eyes dark with desire. “You know what I want.”

I do. I want it too, more than I've ever wanted anything.

Fingers trembling, I unbutton her shorts. They drop to the ground as she kicks off her shoes. My hands glide up her smooth legs and under her shirt, finding her breasts. She cries out softly when I squeeze them, rolling her nipples between my fingers.

Her hands move to my belt. In moments she has me freed, stroking my length. I thrust into her grip, swollen cock twitching. "Lydia..."

"I need you inside me," she breathes. "Now."

I lift her up and pin her against the tree, wrapping her legs around my waist. With one sharp thrust, I bury myself in her tight heat.

We moan in unison. She's dripping wet, clenching around me like a velvet vise. I start to move, slow and deep.

Lydia whimpers, "Harder!" Her nails rake down my back. I slam into her, bark scraping her bare skin. She cries out again and again, urging me on as our bodies slap together.

Nothing exists but this, our forbidden love—

My release explodes inside her with a hoarse shout. Lydia shudders in my arms, her inner walls spasming around my cock.

Breathless, I lower her to the ground. She clings to me, still trembling. I bury my face in her hair, inhaling her scent.

"I love you," she whispers.

Guilt rises in my chest, but I push it down. I can't give her up. Not now, not ever. "I love you too."

I feel like our time is running out, but for now I hold her close, savoring each stolen moment. My heart overflows with equal parts bliss and anguish. This is our secret, our sin—one I'll keep committing again and again.

I reluctantly release Lydia from my embrace. We hurriedly dress, exchanging longing looks and fleeting touches, savoring each second together.

When she's fully clothed again, I pull her into my arms once more. "I don't want this to end," I murmur into her hair.

"Me neither." Her voice trembles. "But we have to be careful."

I know she's right, yet part of me wants to throw caution to the wind. To shout our love from the rooftops and damn the consequences.

But I can't do that to her. I'm the one who should know better. She's so young, her whole life ahead of her. I'm just her coach. I have a duty to protect her, not take advantage—

Lydia frames my face in her hands. "Stop it. I know this is right. What we have is real."

Her conviction touches me. I cling to it like a lifeline as we steal one another searing kiss.

"You're exquisite," I rasp, trailing kisses along her jawline. "The way you move, the sounds you make...you drive me wild."

A faint blush colors Lydia's cheeks. She averts her gaze, a small, secretive smile playing at the corners of her mouth.

"No one has ever made me feel the way you do." I cup her face, forcing her to meet my eyes. "You're like a drug I can't get enough of. One taste, and I'm hooked."

Her eyes darken with desire. "Kiss me," she breathes.

I crash my lips against hers, kissing her with a hunger that knows no bounds. My hands roam greedily over her body, relearning every curve and hollow. She arches into my touch, a soft moan escaping her throat.

The sound goes straight to my groin. I'm hard again already, aching for the feel of her velvet heat enveloping me.

"I want you," I growl. "Here. Now. Always."

Lydia nods, eyes glassy with need. "Then take me."

I don't need to be told twice.



In one smooth motion, I roll Lydia onto her back and settle between her thighs. Our bodies join as though made for one another. A strangled groan rips from my chest at the exquisite sensation.

Lydia's fingers dig into my back, blunt nails scoring my skin. "Yes, God yes..."

I set a punishing rhythm, driven by lust and longing. Her cries of pleasure urge me on. I pound into her welcoming body, chasing the sweet oblivion of release.

Our passion crests, peaking in a blinding flash of ecstasy. I empty myself into Lydia with a shout, stars exploding behind my eyes. Her inner walls clench and spasm around me as she finds her own climax.

We cling to each other, hearts pounding, as the tremors fade. A bone-deep satiation washes over me, calming the restless hunger inside.

For now, I am sated. Lydia is mine, and I am hers. Nothing else matters.

When she pulls away, I force a smile. "See you at practice." The words taste bitter on my tongue.

"See you." Her answering smile doesn't reach her eyes.

We exit the woods from opposite sides, returning to our separate worlds. But my thoughts remain in that secluded glen, lost in Lydia's embrace.

Counting the hours until I see her again. Hating myself for it. Unable to stop. This forbidden desire has consumed me, heart and soul. There's no turning back now.

Our secret romance marches on.

---

But I should have known my feelings of unease meant something.

Jack Simmons, a fellow coach at the high school who has always wanted my job, strides into my office, his muscles rippling under his polo shirt. He looks like a cat who ate the canary, and my unease grows as I take in his confident demeanor.

There's no good reason Jack would be looking so confident.

He looms over my desk, arms crossed. "We need to talk."

I swallow hard, my throat tight. "About what?"

"You and Lydia." His eyes gleam with malice. "Word's gotten around."

*Shit.* My heart pounds as I weigh my options. I can't lose Lydia. Not now, not ever. But if this gets out—

"I won't have you ruining the school's team." His voice is low and dangerous. "You'll resign as coach today, or everyone will know you're screwing your star athlete."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I lie, "But even if it were true, Lydia's eighteen. She would be a consenting adults." My voice comes out steady, despite the panic rising in my chest.

"Like anyone will care." A cruel smile twists his lips. "You'll be finished. Is she really worth your career?"

I meet his gaze, refusing to back down. Lydia's worth more than my career. More than anything.

Jack's face reddens, anger etched into the lines around his eyes. His fists clench at his sides, yearning for violence. I brace myself, ready to fight for what's mine.

For a long moment we stare at each other, the tension as sharp as a knife's edge. Then Jack snarls and turns on his heel, slamming the door behind him.

I slump into my chair, wiping the cold sweat from my brow. Jack won't give up easily. There will be consequences, obstacles we'll have to face.

But I'll be damned if I lose Lydia without a fight.

The door bursts open again. I surge to my feet, muscles tensed, but it's Lydia standing in the doorway. She's a vision in a sundress the color of ripe cherries. Her hair tumbles over her shoulders in waves of gold, framing eyes as blue as the summer sky. My heart stutters at the sight of her, as it always does. She is beauty personified, a goddess among mortals, and she is mine.

But her eyes are wide, cheeks flushed.

"I heard shouting. Is everything okay?"

I force a smile, crossing the room to pull her into my arms. Her warmth soothes my frayed nerves. "Everything's fine, sweetheart. Just a disagreement with Coach Simmons."

She pulls back, brows knitted in concern. "What about? Does he know about us?"

There's no point lying to her. Lydia's perceptive, and she'll get the truth out of me one way or another. I cup her face in my hands, brushing a stray lock of hair behind her ear.

"He found out. He threatened to expose our relationship if I don't resign as coach."

"What?" Her eyes flash with anger. "He can't do that! He has no right—"

"He doesn't. But that won't stop him from trying." I sigh, wrapping her in my embrace again. "I won't give you up, Lydia. No matter what it costs me."

She looks up at me, eyes haunted. "But you love your job, and you're a great coach."

I cup her face in my hands, "But I love you more. You know that, right?"

She bites her lip and nods before her eyes go stormy. "Fuck Coach Simmons!"

The fire in her gaze ignites a flame low in my belly. Lydia rises up on her tiptoes, her mouth seeking mine in a searing kiss.

When we break apart, chests heaving, she gives me that cute, innocent smile of hers that captivates me so much.

Heat floods my veins as Lydia slides the door shut and strides towards me. The world beyond this room ceases to exist, filled only with her—my fierce, brilliant girl.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

Burke

I ROUND the corner toward the locker room and freeze. Mrs. Chen and Mr. Reed stand in the hallway, whispering to each other. "...anonymous emails...Dalton's losing it...thinks there's something going on between a student and coach..."

My heart leaps into my throat. *They know. Shit, they know!*

I duck behind the trophy case, pulse pounding. They can't find out about me and Lydia. Not now. Not when we're so close.

Mrs. Chen glances over her shoulder, and I shrink back into the shadows. "Who do you think it is?" she hisses.

"I have my suspicions," Mr. Reed says. "There's something off about that Thompson fellow. Always hanging around the girls' track practices, staring at that Hartman girl."

Rage boils in my veins. How dare they cast suspicion on me? On Lydia? We've been careful. So fucking careful.

They walk off, still deep in conversation, and I slump against the wall. We can't risk being seen together anymore. No more secret rendezvous in my office after hours. No more longing looks across the track as Lydia rounds the bend, blonde hair streaming behind her like a golden banner.

My hands curl into fists. They want to take her away from me. They want to destroy us.

But they can't have her.

Lydia is *mine*, and I'll do whatever it takes to keep her. Even if that means going to ground until this whole investigation blows over.

She's waiting for me in my office like always, perched on the edge of my desk with her long, tanned legs crossed. Heart-shaped face, rosebud lips, eyes like blue fire. Desire rips through me at the sight of her.

I lock the door behind me, and in two quick strides I'm pinning her to the desk, claiming her mouth in a savage kiss. She moans, arching into me, and I swallow the sound. "We have to stop," I growl against her lips. "They're onto us."

Lydia pulls back, eyes wide. "What? Who?" Panic edges her voice.

"The teachers. They suspect there's something going on between a student and coach. We have to be careful."

She bites her lip, and I fight back a groan. Even in the face of discovery, she still has the power to get me rock hard.

She buries her face in my chest, her body shaking with sobs. The sound tears at my heart, and I curse myself for being so selfish and dragging her into this.

Still, I can't find the strength to let her go. Not now.

"We'll get through this," I murmur, rubbing her back in slow, soothing circles.

Lydia looks up at me, eyes red-rimmed but filled with hope.

I cup her face in my hands. "You're my girl, Lydia Hartman. That will never change."

A ghost of a smile flickers across her lips before she throws her arms around my neck, clinging to me like I'm her lifeline.

I flex my jaw.

No one will take her away from me.

---

The next day I enter Rick Dalton's office, my heart pounding wildly in my chest. He looks up from his desk, eyes narrowing at my obvious discomfort.

"Have a seat, Burke." His tone is clipped, impatient. I sink into the chair across from him, wiping my sweaty palms on my jeans.

Rick leans forward, pinning me in place with his stare. "I've been hearing some disturbing rumors about you and Lydia Hartman. Care to explain?"

My mouth goes dry. I struggle to form a coherent response, panic threatening to overwhelm me. "There's nothing to explain," I say weakly. "Those rumors aren't true."

"Really?" He raises a skeptical brow. "Because multiple students and teachers have reported seeing the two of you in... compromising positions. And Lydia's performance has been suffering lately, which suggests she's distracted. By you."

I swallow hard, fighting to keep my expression neutral. "Lydia and I have a strictly professional relationship. Any allegations to the contrary are false and unfounded."

"I don't believe you." Rick's eyes narrow, seeing right through my lie. "The evidence against you is damning. If you don't come clean now, I'll have no choice but to report this to the school board. Your career will be over, and Lydia's future will be in jeopardy. Now tell me the truth, or face the consequences."

His threat hits me like a punch to the gut. I can't let that happen. Lydia's future is too important, her talent too precious, to throw away over our mistake.

I take a deep breath and prepare to do the hardest thing I've ever had to do: sacrifice my heart to save the woman I love.

---

## Lydia

My palms are slick with sweat as I pace the hallway outside Rick's office. Every second that ticks by feels like an eternity, my imagination conjuring worst-case scenarios of what might be happening behind those closed doors.

A group of students walk by, their curious glances and hushed whispers making it clear they've heard the rumors. My face burns with humiliation as I avoid their judging stares, a painful lump forming in my throat.

How did things spiral out of control so quickly? We were always so careful, meticulous in our deception. Now everything we've worked for is crumbling around us, our secret affair threatening to destroy Burke's career and ruin my future.

I slump against the wall, no longer able to hold back my tears. They stream down my cheeks as panic and despair consume me. I'm afraid of what comes next, afraid of losing the one thing that makes me feel alive.

Most of all, I'm afraid of being alone again.

The door to Rick's office creaks open, and I straighten abruptly. Burke steps out, his expression unreadable, and for a moment we just stare at each other in silence.

Burke strides toward me, his eyes never leaving my face. I brace myself for the inevitable goodbye, for him to tell me it was a mistake and we can't see each other anymore.

Instead, he grabs my hand and pulls me along after him. "We need to talk," is all he says, his tone urgent. I follow without protest, too stunned to ask questions.

He leads me into the locker room, quickly checking to ensure we're alone before locking the door behind us. Then he



turns to me, cupping my face in his hands, and the raw emotion in his gaze nearly brings me to my knees.

“It’s going to be okay,” he whispers, brushing away the tears on my cheeks.

“What?” I stare at him, confused. “But I thought—”

“Rick knows there’s something going on between us, but he has no solid proof. As long as we’re careful, he can’t do anything.” Burke wraps his arms around me, holding me close against his chest. “I’m not giving up on you, Lydia. I don’t care what it takes—you’re worth fighting for.”

Relief and joy flood my senses as I cling to him. He’s not leaving me. We’re not over. A breathless laugh escapes me as I bury my face in his neck, breathing in his familiar scent.

“I love you,” I whisper, my heart swelling with emotion. “I love you so much, Burke.”

“And I love you.” He kisses the top of my head, his embrace tightening around me. “Everything will be okay. I promise.”

In this moment, wrapped in his arms, I can almost believe that. As long as we have each other, nothing else matters. We’ll get through this.

---

As the day progresses, the rumors about our relationship intensify. Students whisper behind their backs, and some even confront me directly, adding to my stress and anxiety.

Everywhere I go, eyes follow me. Whispers and giggles erupt into silence as I pass by, only to start up again once I’m out of earshot. It’s maddening. I can feel the heat rising in my cheeks with each new wave of gossip, my hands curling into fists at my sides.

Some are bolder, like the track team. They don’t even try to hide their snide comments and pointed looks during practice. A few have even approached me directly, asking

invasive questions about Coach Thompson and me with sly smirks on their faces.

I try to ignore them, but it's no use. Their words cut into me, sharp as knives, leaving wounds that ache and bleed. I don't know how much more of this I can take before I break.

Burke notices my distress, of course, but there's little he can do to comfort me in public. We have to be careful. So he watches me with worried eyes and gives me subtle nods of encouragement, silently reminding me that this will pass. That we'll get through this together.

It's the only thing keeping me going. His love and support. The promise of being alone again, away from prying eyes, wrapped up in his embrace.

But this is all taking its toll on me. Burke and I are even more careful about avoiding any public displays of affection and keeping our interactions strictly professional during practice. We hope that by doing so, we can quell the rumors and lessen the scrutiny.

But the next day, my anxiety spikes when I overhear two teachers discussing the rumors in the teachers' lounge.

"Did you hear about Coach Thompson and that Hartman girl?" Mrs. Collins whispers conspiratorially. "Supposedly, they've been involved for months. And now that the principal knows, he's threatening to fire Burke if he doesn't end it immediately."

My heart leaps into my throat. Fire him? Burke didn't tell me he'd actually been threatened with being fired. But of course it makes sense. Which means it's only a matter of time before Burke loses his job, and it will all be my fault. Because I couldn't resist him, couldn't stay away like I should have.

Guilt and shame wash over me as I hurry to find Burke. He's in his office, staring out the window with a brooding expression. When I walk in, he turns to face me, and the bleakness in his eyes confirms everything.

"I'm so sorry," I say, tears welling up in my eyes. "This is all my fault. I never should have—"

“Don’t say that.” Burke pulls me into his arms, holding me close. “This is my fault, Lydia. Not yours.”

I cling to him, breathing in his familiar scent. “But now your career is on the line. You could lose everything because of me.”

He cups my face in his hands, gazing at me with intensity. “You’re the only thing that matters to me. My career means nothing without you in my life.”

“But it’s not right,” I protest weakly. “You have so much to offer as a coach. You can’t throw it all away for a relationship that isn’t meant to be.”

“This relationship is the only thing that feels right to me.” Burke brushes his thumb over my lips, his eyes dark with longing. “Tell me you feel the same way. Tell me you want this as much as I do.”

I falter, torn between my love for him and the knowledge that our relationship can only end in disaster. I push away from him and refuse to meet his gaze.

“Lydia,” I hear the desperate warning note in his voice, but I still don’t look at him, knowing that if I do I’ll change my mind, and I know what I have to do if I really love him.

“Burke, it’s over.”

# CHAPTER EIGHT

Burke

MY EYES ON BLOODSHOT. I can't eat. I can't sleep. All I can feel is pain.

My heart aches at the thought of Lydia. Her blonde hair, her piercing blue eyes, the curve of her hips as she runs the track.

I can't go on without her.

I slam my fist on the desk, papers scattering. *Fuck this!*

I stride to the principal's office and throw open the door. "I want to host an assembly. Today."

Coach Dalton sputters. "Today? Coach, we have schedules, protocols—"

"This is important." My voice is steel. "More important than any lesson plan or budget meeting. Do you understand?"

He swallows and nods. *Good.*

Within the hour, the entire school has gathered in the gym. The air thrums with curiosity and confusion.

I step onto the stage. Search the crowd until I find her, standing with her teammates. Our eyes lock.

I can see the pain in them but also the resolution. God bless her. My beautiful girl thinks she's doing the best thing for me, but doesn't she realize I have no life at all without her?

My heart swells. “Thank you all for coming.” My voice echoes through the room. “There is something I need to say. Something I can no longer contain.”

Murmurs rise from the audience. I raise my hands, waiting for silence.

“Lydia Hartman.” I point to where she stands, frozen in place. “This woman has changed my life. Awakened my soul. Made me feel alive again.”

Gasps and shouts. Lydia stares at me, eyes wide and glistening.

“I know this is unconventional. Taboo, even. But love knows no bounds. And my love for Lydia is eternal.”

The gym erupts into chaos. But their reactions fade away, and all I see is Lydia. Her wide eyes, the way her lips part.

I clear my throat, and the noise subsides. “Lydia is not just my love, but my everything. The missing piece that makes me whole. Which is why...”

I pause for dramatic effect, heart pounding. This is the moment. No turning back now.

“I’m officially resigning from my job and asking Lydia Hartman to marry me.”

The gym falls silent. Then a lone figure in the front row begins clapping. Others join in, whistles and cheers rising in a tidal wave of sound.

It’s like Lydia is in shock. She’s frozen in place, and all I can think about is getting to her. Waves of shocked students part as I make my way to her.

“Lydia,” I take her face in my hands, feeling whole once again having her this close to me. “Say yes, baby. Marry me. Nothing matters without you.”

“But your job...” she begins, her lips trembling.

“Fuck my job. I can get any job. Hell, I can start my own coaching gig. Fuck this school. And we’ll get you to the

Olympics, baby. I'm going to make sure all your dreams come true. So what do you say, honey?"

She stares at me for a long, terrifying moment. I don't know what I'll do if she refuses me. Hell, probably throw her over my shoulder cave-man style and kidnap her.

"Yes," she whispers, tears sliding down her cheeks. Joy explodes in my chest, hot and potent. "One thousand times, yes."

I cup her face and kiss her deeply as the applause reaches a frenzy around us. We're buffeted on a sea of joy and goodwill, but in this moment, we are the only two people in the world.

I stand, taking Lydia's hand again and raising our joined hands in triumph. The applause is deafening, a wave of sound and support washing over us.

"There's one more thing." I wait for the noise to die down, a hush of anticipation falling over the room. "I'm thrilled to announce that Lydia has been chosen as a semifinalist for the local track and field championships. This is the first step on her journey to Olympic gold!"

The crowd explodes, a chaotic blend of cheers, whistles and stomping feet. Lydia gasps and blushes, ducking her head even as a radiant smile curves her lips. I've been waiting to tell her this big news in person. She's made it, and I couldn't be prouder of her. All the long hours of training, the sweat and determination, have paid off. Just like our love, her dreams are within reach.

I bend to press a kiss to her hair, so damned proud of this woman by my side. She glances up, eyes shining with unshed tears, and the love and gratitude I see there steals my breath.

Our story isn't over. It's just beginning.

# EPILOGUE

Lydia

THE CRACK of the starting pistol still echoes in my ears as I burst forward, spikes biting into the track. The roar of the crowd fades into white noise. All that matters is the finish line ahead, the long strides of my competitors at my sides.

My heart pounds, legs churning, arms pumping. The world narrows to the track, the finish ahead. Every muscle in my body screams but I push forward. I can't lose. Not now. Not when so many are watching.

The finish draws closer, a red ribbon stretching across the track. My chest burns as I gasp for breath, vision tunneling. The runners at my side fade from view.

Five more strides. Four. Three.

I lunge, my chest crossing the finish line first. A split second later, a boom of noise crashes over me—cheers and applause rolling across the stands in a wave.

I stumble to a stop, chest heaving as I suck in lungfuls of air. The roar of the crowd echoes in my ears, a wordless chant of victory. I close my eyes, relief and triumph warring within me.

I won.

When I open my eyes again, the first thing I see is Burke pushing through the crowd, heading straight for me. His face is lit with a smile, eyes glowing with pride.

He reaches me and pulls me into his arms without a word. I cling to him, heart pounding against his chest. His embrace is warm, strong, soothing.

“I knew you could do it,” he murmurs against my hair. He gives me a little shake, grin widening. “I told you, didn’t I?”

I laugh, the sound muffled against his shoulder. “You did.”

We stand there for a long moment, wrapped up in each other while the crowd continues to cheer around us. I breathe in the scent of him—sweat and spice, everything that means safety. Everything that means *home*.

My parents weren’t too thrilled about our relationship at first, but they’ve since come around. Ultimately, they just want me to be happy, and they can see that Burkes makes me happy. Plus, Burke really does want the best for me. Everything he does is to make my dreams come true.

When he finally pulls back, it’s only far enough to meet my gaze. His eyes are warm and deep, filled with a love I never dreamed I’d find. A love I know now I can’t live without.

“I’m so proud of you,” he says, brushing a loose strand of hair from my face. His touch ignites sparks under my skin, as it always does. As it always will. “You were amazing out there.”

“I couldn’t have done it without you.” The words come easily, as natural as breathing. As natural as the way I lean up to capture his mouth with mine.

The kiss is hungry, filled with all the emotions churning inside me. Joy, relief, love—a maelstrom only he can bring me out of. Only *he* can complete me.

We break apart, foreheads pressed together as we catch our breath. Burke’s eyes meet mine, dark and smoldering, and a familiar heat coils low in my belly.

“Ready to celebrate?” he asks, lips curving.

I laugh, the sound husky to my own ears. “Absolutely.”



The crowd fades away as Burke takes my hand, leading me off the track. Today, nothing else matters but him.

We slip into the shadows, away from prying eyes, until we find an empty storage room. Burke locks the door behind us and in an instant, I'm pressed against it, his mouth devouring mine.

I moan into the kiss, wrapping my arms around his neck to pull him closer. His hands roam my body, squeezing my ass and thighs before sliding under my shirt. Every touch ignites my skin, sets my blood on fire.

He yanks the shirt over my head and unhooks my bra, baring my breasts to his hungry gaze. I shiver as he palms them, rolling my nipples between his fingers until they harden into peaks.

"Look at these perfect little titties," he rasps, dropping to his knees. He presses a kiss to my stomach, tongue tracing the lines of my abs. Lower and lower until he reaches the waist of my shorts.

He tugs them down my legs, panties and all, and helps me step out of them. Then he's devouring me, tongue and fingers stroking my pussy until my knees buckle. I cry out, pleasure rolling through me in waves as I clench around his tongue.

Burke stands, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. The bulge in his pants is obvious and I reach for his zipper, freeing his cock. He hisses as I stroke him, hard and velvet steel in my grip.

"I need to be inside you," he growls, pinning my hands above my head. He lifts me, guiding my legs around his waist, and slams into me with one hard thrust.

I scream, stretched and filled so completely I can hardly breathe. But I don't want to breathe, I only want this, him, forever.

Burke fucks me against the wall, hard and fast, chasing the release we both crave. "You're mine," he says, claiming my mouth in a bruising kiss. "Always mine."

“Yours,” I gasp, clinging to him as I shatter around his cock. Burke follows soon after, burying his face in my neck as he spills inside me with a groan.

We stay there for a long moment, still joined, his heart beating against my chest.

Burke lifts his head, eyes shining with more than just desire. “You were amazing out there today. I’ve never seen anyone run like that.”

His praise makes me blush. I duck my head, but he tilts my chin up, forcing me to meet his gaze.

“Don’t hide from me,” he murmurs. “You have so much talent, Lydia. Raw, powerful talent. And the dedication and heart to back it up. You’re going to do great things.”

Tears prick my eyes at his unwavering faith in me. “Only because of you,” I say softly. “You made me believe I could.”

“No,” he says firmly. “I only helped you see what was already there. You did this, Lydia. You worked your ass off and earned every victory, every record, every medal. I just gave you the tools and the opportunity. You’re the one who used them.”

He kisses me gently, reverently. “I will always be here to support you. But never doubt how much of your success is due to your own heart and determination.”

His words fill me with warmth and purpose. I cling to him, hiding my face against his neck.

“Regionals are in a month,” Burke murmurs, stroking my hair. “If you win there, you’ll qualify for state. And if you take state again...”

He trails off, eyes gleaming. We both know what comes after that. Nationals. The biggest stage of them all.

“I know we can do it,” I say, meeting his gaze steadily. “If we increase my speed work and add in more interval training on the track, I’ll be unstoppable.”

Burke grins, pride and determination etched into his handsome features. “Damn right. We’re going to push you

harder than ever before.” His hands slide down to grip my ass, pulling me tighter against him. “And when you get down from that podium in front of the whole country, taking the gold that should have been yours from the start, I’m going to fuck you until you can’t walk.”

Heat pools between my legs at his words and the thickening length pressed against my stomach. I arch into him with a moan. “Promise?”

“Promise,” he growls as he claims my mouth again.

And then his hands are everywhere, stripping away my clothes with impatient tugs until I’m bare before him. I return the favor, shoving his shirt up and over his head, running my nails down the solid planes of his chest.

When we’re both naked, Burke lifts me easily and carries me to a storage bin. I wrap my legs around his waist, grinding against his cock and moaning at the sensation.

He tosses me onto the box and crawls over me, eyes burning. “So fucking gorgeous,” he rasps, fisting a hand in my hair to pull my head back. His lips blaze a trail of fire down my throat as he positions himself between my legs.

I gasp as the broad head of his cock nudges at my entrance again, still slick with need for him. “Please,” I beg, trembling with desire. Burke has ruined me for anyone else. I crave only him, every inch of him, for the rest of my life.

With a groan, he sinks into me to the hilt. The delicious stretch and fullness steal my breath for a moment. Then he starts to move, and I cry out at the exquisite pleasure that spirals through me.

“That’s it,” Burke grunts, hips pistoning. “Take it, just like that. Gonna fill you up, Lydia. Put a baby in you so everyone will know you’re mine.”

His words trigger a fierce, primal need in me. I meet his thrusts with my own, clawing at his back and urging him deeper. All I want is for him to mark me, claim me, breed me as his own.

Burke's rhythm stutters, and with a shout, he spills hot inside me. The feel of it sends me tumbling over the edge, vision whiting out as rapture consumes every inch of my being.

We collapse together, limbs entangled and chests heaving. Burke kisses me softly, gently, a contrast to our earlier passion. "I love you," he whispers.

"I love you too," I reply, and know it to be the truth. Burke owns my heart, my body, my soul. And someday, he will be the father of my children.

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