



Battle for the Top

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Description: Whether it's on or off the tennis court, Knightley is always ready to battle for the top. An explosive confrontation with his nemesis Kingston leads them to take their rivalry to the next level off the court. Can two fierce adversaries turn passion into romance? Knightley Neilson Kingston Sabatino throws fuel on my fire like nothing else ever has. Our rivalry is all-consuming since I'm determined to dethrone him and reclaim my rightful place as the number one tennis player in the world. I will beat him, someday. When I confront Kingston after another devastating loss, the line between my rage and obsession to win begins to blur as I discover there might be another way for me to come out on top. True, I've never been attracted to a man before, but the temptation to have him at my mercy matters more to me than his gender. I'm not just willing to make him mine; I want to claim him as mine in every way. Having him give in to me will ultimately be the sweetest victory. Is it really possible for me to love a man like Kingston while still wanting to be the winner? Kingston Sabatino I'll do anything to win Knightley's heart. That includes becoming the best tennis player in the entire world and defeating him every time we meet. Next, I'll issue a challenge I know he'll never be able to resist, even though he's straight: take his passionate rage out on me in the hottest way possible. That's how I discover he kisses to win. And I'm not about to let him stop there. Can I help him see past our rivalry to understand that we're perfect for each other in every way? Tennis starts with "Love-all," so let the game begin.

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Chapter One

Knight

As I sat in front of the horde of reporters with a fake smile plastered on my face, I burned with the incandescent rage of eight thousand exploding suns. Kingston Sabatino had beaten me again. For three years, I had been the undefeated tennis champion who won every tournament while barely breaking a sweat. But then that fucker came on the scene two years ago, the only man I couldn't beat. Each time he triumphed over me, my wrath twisted into a fury that demanded vindication.

I hated him for being so good. As many endless hours as I had spent watching and rewatching his games to analyze his every move, I still couldn't crack the mystery of how he always came out on top. There was something beautiful about his graceful movements and powerful swings, which I had a begrudging admiration for that also irritated me to no end. I didn't want to appreciate the fact that he was light on his feet, fast, and made everything look effortless. If his success hadn't come at the expense of my reputation, I would have actually respected him as being worthy of playing against me. But it grated on my nerves seeing him do fashion spreads because he also happened to be attractive in addition to infuriatingly skilled.

My obsession with him had even caused two of my breakups with my girlfriends. They claimed I cared about him more than them. The sad thing was, they weren't technically wrong. He fueled my fire like nothing else ever had, making me burn with a furious need to face off against him again. I lived for the day when I would rub his nose in my achievements. That was something I fantasized about before every tournament. I wanted to make him bow down before me and admit that I was better

than him. If he begged for forgiveness over making me look bad for the past two years, it would be even better. I wanted him at my mercy as I dominated the hell out of him on the court. It was twice as crushing when I came in second every time, because I'd lose my chance to make him submit to me.

The minutes kept flying by, but the golden wunderkind was nowhere to be found. My jaw ticked from clenching it as I attempted to rein in my anger. He had pulled the same stunt at our last press conference, which, combined with my loss, meant I lost my cool in front of everyone. It had been in the headlines for days, forcing me to do major damage control to contain the controversy. It had been months since then, but it was galling that he had won a second victory over me that day by making me look so bad.

The door opened with a clatter, and an excited din greeted Kingston's late appearance. Dressed in a white polo and tennis shorts, it contrasted his golden-bronze complexion from so many hours of playing under the sun. His dark hair, green eyes, and sparkling personality made him a fan favorite. Everyone proclaimed him as the king of tennis, whereas my nickname was the Iceman for my stone-cold seriousness on the court.

He waved with a friendly smile as he took a seat, his cheeks flushed from rushing over to the event. It annoyed me he acted like he wasn't almost half an hour late. "Sorry for the delay, everyone. I'll stay later to make up for it if that'll help."

I loathed him. What gave him the right to decide to stay later? Because if he did that, then I had to remain there with a dumb smile on my face when all I wanted to do was throttle him. I was sick of being number two to him. I'd do damn near anything to get back on top. My pride demanded I make him take his rightful place beneath me.

With his arrival, the press conference began. A journalist in the front row started off the questioning. "Kingston, how do you feel after winning another Australian Open?"

“It’s the best feeling in the world,” he replied with his easy-breezy smile and trademark good humor that charmed everyone but me. I refused to let him hoodwink me any more than he already had. “It’s even more satisfying because I was playing against Knightley again. No one’s better than him, except for me.”

Don’t react. Don’t show anyone how much he bothers you. Don’t take his bait in front of all these people and cameras. I repeated that to myself as many times as it took to keep my stupid mouth shut as the audience tittered with laughter.

A female reporter called out a question for me. “Knightley, you must be disappointed with how the tournament turned out?”

Fucking obviously, I silently fumed. Putting on my best PR voice, I gave my beauty pageant answer to appease the public and maintain a shred of dignity. “It’s not the outcome that I had hoped to start off the season with, but I’m determined to learn from this and improve my performance for next time.”

“Is it true that you’re considering retirement?”

I rarely addressed rumors, so I kept my answer short. “No.”

“I’m confident he won’t retire until he’s defeated me twice,” Kingston added with a chuckle.

“Why twice?” the reporter asked, tilting his head in confusion.

“He’ll want a second win to prove that the first time wasn’t a fluke. Isn’t that right, Knight?”

It infuriated me he was correct and always seemed to understand me. A single victory over my adversary would never satisfy me. I needed to defeat him multiple times to

demonstrate without a doubt who the better player was. It also irritated me to no end whenever he called me Knight, because I was uncomfortable with the implications when King was part of his name. I'd never kneel before him.

Recognizing that an answer was required, I tried to sound civil. The last thing I wanted was to cause another international incident with the press. "I will defeat you someday."

"I look forward to you trying." His comment set off another round of laughter in the crowd that made me want to grind my teeth from how much it put me on edge. They might have taken it as a joke, but I'd show them all. I'd prove to everyone that I was still the best. I wouldn't be satisfied until I was victorious over that bastard bane of my existence.

* * *

After the press conference ended, my coach pulled me aside to discuss my performance before I was free to leave. Without witnesses, I stewed in my foul mood as I headed to the locker room to pick up my stuff so I could leave. Kingston's glib interview had added insult to injury after my shameful defeat.

As I rounded the corner, Kingston came out of the bathroom. I couldn't stop my hatred from leaking out of me as I spat, "You."

He glanced over his shoulder to see who would dare to address him in such a rude manner. When he saw it was me, he crossed his arms with a smug chuckle and leaned against the wall to wait for me to come closer. He played it cute, which only made me angrier. "Me?"

"Yes, you." I loomed over him, staring him down in a show of intimidation that didn't work.

He pushed off the wall to invade my personal space. “What about me?”

Whatever my first answer was, it died in my throat at the challenging way Kingston stared up at me. His cocky confidence was as intriguing as it was infuriating. But my ego was smarting too hard to be anything other than pissed off at him. Still, it was rare for me to see his intense green gaze up close and personal instead of at a distance across the tennis court. “We need to talk.”

“Oh?”

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Rather than answering, I gestured for him to follow me as I led him to a location more private than the hallway. I took advantage of an empty break room, locking the door behind us. Other than a couch, a chair, and a small table off to the side, it was free of any other furnishings.

“Do you want to talk or make out with me?”

I slammed Kingston against the wall, pinning him into place under me with my larger form. We were so close I could almost taste his breath as I pressed closer to inspire fear in him. But just like always, it failed to get a rise out of him, even though I was significantly larger than him.

My actions seemed to excite him. “Great, I’m thrilled you decided to choose the making-out option.”

Ignoring his stupid joke, I focused on the bigger issue. “What trick did you use to win?”

He was never one to back down from a challenge. “Is it really so unbelievable that the amazing Knightley Nielson could come in second again?” With an arrogant tilt of his head, he stared me down. “What bothers you more? That you lost, or that you lost to me?”

“I should have won!”

“Then you should have played a better game.” He laughed as I struggled not to lose my composure in the face of his taunts.

A feral growl escaped from me without my permission. “How did you do it?”

“Fairly, and with more skill.” He smirked up at me. “Did it ever occur to you that maybe I’m just better at tennis than you?”

“Impossible!” He may have beaten me time and time again, but I had confidence in my abilities despite my recent stinging loss.

“Is it?” He hummed with interest, shifting under me but making no attempt to free himself. “If that’s the case, then why haven’t you defeated me once?”

Was he really going to play innocent? I wasn’t about to allow that. I refused to believe he was better than me at the thing I had dedicated my life to, which left only one possible conclusion. “Because you’re cheating somehow!”

“Do you really think I could get away with that when the whole world watches us compete?” His valid point irritated me even more. “If you’re as good as you claim, you should be able to beat me, even if I was cheating.” His brash grin was the same one he had every time he served a lightning-fast ace at me.

I laughed triumphantly. “Oh, so you’re finally admitting that you’re cheating?”

“It appears that I’m also better at language than you.” His airy nature ruffled my feathers like few other things did. “I said if I was cheating—not that I was cheating.”

“You have to be!” I refused to accept my failure to my competitor. “There’s no other way for you to keep coming out on top.”

He started pushing all my buttons. “Face it. I’m better than you at playing tennis, at winning matches, and apparently at grammar, too.”

“You’ll never be better than me at anything!”

Even though the room was dim with the lights off, Kingston’s green eyes seemed to glow with an unnatural light. “I believe I just proved in front of a very large international audience that I’m better at everything than you.” He shrugged as if it wasn’t a big deal. “At least you did a better job of pretending to be a gracious loser today at the press conference.”

The reminder of my previous failure at the US Open made me clench my hand in a tight fist at my side. My storming out in a rage had caused an ugly backlash against me in the press about my poor sportsmanship. My publicist leaked the news that my girlfriend and I had split up before my match, which hadn’t been a lie. But I knew the anger that had fueled me had everything to do with the man I currently had pinned against the wall.

“I will never admit defeat to you.”

He laughed, which grated on my nerves. “I don’t need you to, since I have all the evidence on my side to prove that I’ve defeated you. Repeatedly. Do it. Admit that you’ll never be able to beat me.”

“No!” I’d never stop trying to defeat Kingston until I succeeded; my pride would accept nothing less.

I was unprepared for Kingston’s smirk to turn sensuous. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you’re a masochist who gets off on losing to me.”

The claim was preposterous, but it outraged me with the presumptuousness of it. I vibrated with the force of my rage, resenting that everything in my life had become tied up in one infuriating individual who refused to submit to me. “I fucking hate you.”

Kingston arched against me with a sensuous moan. “Yeah? Then hate me harder.”

Confusing as it was, I couldn’t ignore that my body reacted to his gratuitous display. “What?”

“Harder,” he gasped like he was begging me to fuck him. He rocked his hips against mine with another breathy, pleading noise.

My eyes widened when I felt Kingston’s hard length pressing against me. Part of my brain was shocked that maybe Kingston was gay, since I had never heard rumors about him being with a partner of either gender. But the realization of what I had done to him sent a jolt of adrenaline rocketing through my system. Having the power to arouse him opened up new avenues to get even with him. I may have been straight, but the prospect of dominating Kingston fired me up like nothing else ever had.

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The thought of having him under me, begging me for pleasure, stoked my lust into a roaring blaze. It was a powerful aphrodisiac, swaying me into questioning the merits of our latest battle taking place with our bodies rather than in a stadium. Even the rational part of my brain was on board with the idea, making the argument that a hole was a hole, and defeating him in bed would provide a new level of satisfaction.

Revealing none of my interest or intentions, I needed to make sure we were on the same page. “Are you offering yourself to me?” When he didn’t answer, I groped his ass and pulled his body flush against mine. It didn’t appall me as I would have expected considering I had only been interested in women in the past. Instead, I flew high on the power trip of knowing I had him at my mercy if he wanted sexual gratification from me.

“I want you to fuck me like you hate me.” He pressed himself against me, allowing him to tug on my earlobe with his teeth.

The action went straight to my cock, which demanded I take the chance to dominate my otherwise unbeatable opponent, sexuality be damned. “I absolutely hate you.”

“Then fuck me like you mean it.” Kingston gave me a cocky smirk before he pulled me down for a harsh kiss.

My competitive nature took over as my tongue battled his as I claimed his mouth for mine. I pushed him harder against the wall, losing myself in the pleasure of having him under me and subject to my whims. Having a new way to shut him up was incredible, which made it an even more gratifying experience. Although I had never been attracted to a man in my life, my cock came to life at the thought of having

Kingston under me, begging for more.

He pushed me back to give us both a moment to catch our breath. I waited for him to protest that we shouldn't have done that or rebuke me. However, he caught me by surprise when he tugged his polo shirt off and threw it on the ground. While I had always associated him with being scrawny and scrappy, his toned physique unexpectedly got me hot under the collar. Without a second thought, I took off my shirt and cast it aside.

His eyes lit up with desire as he drank in the sight of me, making my ego purr. I inhaled sharply when he reached out and ran his hands up my muscular abs and up to my defined chest to rest on my broad shoulders. The skin-to-skin contact when he pressed against me in a hug electrified my entire body.

Our next kiss was even more intense now that I was able to caress him. For somebody so toned, he was soft and yielding under my touch. It drove me to rake my nails down his back to leave angry red lines of possession on my rival. I was the only one worthy of someone who could play at such a high caliber. That meant he was mine.

"I'll fuck you until you can't move," I growled in a voice I barely recognized. "And then I'm going to turn you over and keep pounding into you until you're screaming my name."

"Yes," he moaned, writhing against me with a needy noise. "Hate me with everything you have."

After another ardent kiss, we paused long enough to remove our shoes, socks, pants, and underwear. I smugly noted that my cock was at least two inches longer than his. It was petty to revel in that kind of victory, but I'd take a win any way I could when it came to him. I burned with an almost unbearable need for more. "I'll show you who

the better man is.”

“I always enjoy watching you try.”

“Try?” I quirked an eyebrow at him before using my background in martial arts to throw Kingston to the floor on his back. Before he could move, I used my height to my advantage as I immobilized him under me. I pinned his wrists above his head while my body kept him trapped. The power rush over having beat him at something made me heady. “Don’t be so insulting.”

The slightest hint of a smirk was all the warning I got before he stunned me by reversing our positions before I could process what had happened. I blinked up at him in disbelief as he held me down with a shocking amount of strength. He countered in a teasing tone, “Don’t be so overconfident.”

He cut off my protest with a punishing kiss, denying my attempts to take control or overthrow him. It only made me burn hotter for victory. I flipped our positions once more, holding him in place despite his desperate squirming to free himself. I sounded more breathless than I liked when I replied, “Same goes for you.”

It had taken considerable effort to pin Kingston down again, which piqued my curiosity about what other secret talents he had. The train of thought took a perverse turn as I imagined the sexiest method for shutting him up for good. I wanted Kingston to gag on my male pride while I had complete control over him, silencing him through pleasure. Imagining looking down at him while he sucked my cock seduced my ego, encouraging me to want something I never should have desired.

The bastard freed his hands when I grew distracted by the thought of him blowing me. He groped my ass to pull our bodies closer together. “Does it?”

“Yes.”

“I’m not convinced.” He punctuated his sentence by nipping at my neck.

It drove me wild. Deciding that my tongue worked just as well at shutting him up, I surged forward to claim his lips once more. He nipped at me, which only turned me on more. We continued trying to outdo each other, with him wrapping his arms around me and burying his fingers in my hair.

The intensity of it made me forget myself as everything narrowed down to the points of connections between my body and his. Kingston brought me back to awareness when he murmured, “I’m starting to think that you don’t loathe me as much as you insist you do.”

It took a moment for his comment to filter through my lusty haze, but my anger flared. “I fucking hate you.”

“With a passion.”

My rebuke disappeared when he reached between us and worked my cock with his hand. It was more pleasurable than I expected, so I knocked him away to stay focused on the argument. The resulting amused laugh infuriated me.

I narrowed my eyes at him in displeasure. “What are you implying?”

“That your hatred of me stems from somewhere deeper inside you.” He once again sought my cock to tease it.

I forced him to stop because it made it too difficult to think. “Why the hell are you trying to psychoanalyze me?”

“Because you’re boring me.” His wicked grin stoked my rage. “You always were all talk and no action, Knight.”

The comment sent me over the edge. “I’ll show you who’s all talk and no action.”

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He reached down and rubbed his fingers over his entrance. “Do it. Fuck me with your massive cock until I scream.”

With my ire in full control, I wasn’t thinking about condoms. Instead, I accepted his challenge by penetrating him without thinking. To my surprise, he was slick and ready for me. “Wait, why are you...?”

Kingston laughed as he arched up under the intrusion. “You’re bright. I’m sure you can figure it out without me spelling everything out for you.”

My confusion morphed into outrage. “Bastard! Youplannedthis?”

“And Knight finally scores a point.” He wrapped his legs around my waist to prevent me from pulling out and leaving.

Things were becoming too muddled and complicated for me. I was torn between storming out and staying to punish Kingston for his presumptuous actions. “What?” I seethed that the shock had rendered me so inarticulate.

“What I’m saying is that after our match and before the press conference, I locked myself in the bathroom and fucked myself to celebrate my victory.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “That’swhy you were late?” His cheeks hadn’t been flushed because he was rushing to make it to the event, but because he had been masturbating? His audacity was outrageous.

He clenched his muscles around my tip that was still inside him, making me push

deeper on instinct. “It felt almost as good as defeating you.”

His actions should have disgusted me. But I couldn't stop visualizing Kingston in the stall as he thrust down on his slicked fingers while jerking off with his other hand and moaning my name. It was more arousing than I was comfortable admitting. Knowing I had that kind of control over him when I wasn't physically there was incredible. “You're saying that you got off while thinking about me?”

He reached up to wrap his arms around my neck, embedding his fingers in my brunet hair. It allowed him to embrace me completely. Why didn't that upset me? “Now you're getting the right idea.”

“You're so fucking twisted,” I said in a tone that hovered somewhere between disgust and admiration. It didn't stop me from pushing deeper into his tight heat.

“Like you're not?” He dropped his arms onto the floor above his head with a challenging smirk.

Since I couldn't refute his claim, I did the next best thing. “Shut up!”

“Make me.” His laugh turned to a gasping moan when I thrust into him.

I hated how clearly he had played me, but it felt so good to take my anger out on the source. It drove me to fuck him hard and fast, which earned me enthusiastic responses from Kingston. Unlike on the tennis court, we were in perfect sync with each other as we moved. The pleasure washing over me was like nothing I had ever experienced. Never in my life had I gotten so aroused by having someone under me and begging for more. I lost focus of my original goal to punish him as I shifted his legs higher to allow me to bury myself deep inside his welcoming body. “This is what it feels like to lose to me.”

“It’s not as good as winning over you.”

His childish taunts made me redouble my efforts. “You’re just saying that to be a dick.”

“Maybe I am. Maybe I’m not. You’ll never know because you can’t defeat me.”

My fire sparked into a blazing rage. “Fuck you!”

“Harder, please,” he called out in a singsong voice that earned a bark of laughter from me.

While I wanted to deny him to prove a point, my lust demanded I give him what we both were after. I gripped his hips with near bruising force as I set an unrelenting pace. Unlike him, his body submitted to me as he moaned and writhed under me, arching up with mewls that drove me wild. “I’m the only one who can defeat you!”

“You’re the only one who stands a chance of succeeding,” he corrected me with breathy smugness.

“And don’t you forget it.” His admission that I was his sole competitor worthy of standing on the same level as him gave me toe-curling pleasure. Digging my nails into his skin, I came harder than I ever had in my life.

It left me dazed as I gasped from my powerful release. Having Kingston submit to me was almost more pleasurable than what our bodies had done. I needed a moment to compose myself before I withdrew. The sight of my cum leaking out of his pink hole was an unexpected turn-on. Something primal inside me purred at seeing my only rival marked in such a state. It was like I had physically laid claim to him as mine.

Why was that so appealing?

Chapter Two

King

After regularly enjoying fantasizing about sex with Knightley for the past two years, it thrilled me that reality was even better than my vivid imagination had promised. Getting him to succumb to his fiery passion that drew me to him despite his best attempts to push me away had been incredible. To feel his cum leaking out of me after a satisfying fuck was my new favorite thing in the world. But I wasn't done yet.

My body protested at the sudden stop, but I endured it for what would come next—provided Knightley cooperated. Taking advantage of his afterglow, I knocked him onto his back and got on top of him once more to kiss him senseless. I knew I had my victory when his hands sought me out to cup my ass instead of overthrowing me.

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I did my best to be subtle about pulling what I needed out of my nearby pants pocket. Since physics denied me the ability to prepare him in that position, I moved between his legs as I kissed down his sculpted body. When he didn't fight me, I dispensed some lube from the foil packet I had grabbed and took a chance on easing a single finger into him.

He jerked in surprise. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Showing you why you shouldn't be such a selfish lover." I snickered at the indignant noise my comment earned.

He propped himself on his elbows to look down at me. His voice went up in pitch with each word as he repeated, "Selfish? Lover?"

"That's always been your problem." Since he hadn't told me to stop, I continued working my finger in and out of him to help him grow accustomed to the sensation. "You get so fixated on winning, you don't pay attention to what you need to do to be victorious."

"Excuse me?" He sounded exactly as offended as I had expected.

"You only focus on yourself." Not wanting to rile him up too much, I began kissing his body as I worked him open. "Relentlessly pursuing your goals, you forget about the importance of details with your opponent."

He huffed in anger. "What are you talking about?"

“This.” To illustrate my point, I teased one of his nipples with my tongue. It earned me a sharp gasp, but it wasn’t until I toyed with it using my teeth that I got Knightley to jerk under me with a gasp. I did it again to allow me to slide in another slicked finger. Thankfully, his body didn’t resist me. “You get so wrapped up in the competition that you overlook everything else.”

“Stop with the bullshit!”

Switching to the other nipple, I repeated my demonstration, wringing a whimper out of him when I tugged on it. It made me want to see what other erotic sounds I could inspire him to make. “You’re so focused on winning that you forget to play the game. The fun is in the experience, Knight, not the outcome.”

When he protested, I curled my fingers inside him. I couldn’t hold back my glee at his shout of surprise. Shifting positions, I slipped in another finger and continued manipulating that spot while kissing and caressing him all over until he was half-hard again. It was tempting to mark him with a hickey. However, I didn’t have the right to claim him yet, even though he had been mine since our first match.

“You’re so obsessed with winning that you fail to defeat me.” I licked along the length of one of his hip bones, then blew on him to raise chills on his skin. “Which brings us to where we are now.”

“Since I decided not to jerk you off—not that you gave me a chance to—you’re expecting me to bottom for you?”

I rolled my eyes before calling his bluff. “Oh, please. Touching me there never occurred to you, and you know it.”

He defended himself with a bluster I found endearing. “I was supposed to be punishing you.”

“Sorry to break it to you, but getting fucked by you isn’t a punishment; it was my goal.” I withdrew my fingers to give him a fair chance to put a stop to things if he objected to what I was desperate to make happen. “Unless you’re not interested.”

“Do you think I would back out now?” He stunned me when he tugged me up for a demanding kiss to hide his embarrassment.

I refused to let him sidetrack us from consent. “I’m serious, Knightley. If you object to this—”

“What I want is for you to shut up and get on with it,” he growled. “Stop treating me like some delicate virginal flower.”

It was a surprising answer considering I had never seen him express an attraction to men other than his obsessive interest in me. “But you blush as beautifully as one.” I kissed his flushed cheek. “Plus, unless I’m mistaken, you’ve never been with a man before.”

“Which is why you better make damn sure I enjoy myself if you ever want a chance at doing this again.”

His unexpected answer filled me with joy. “Do you want me to use a condom?”

“No, I want you to get on with it.”

Not wasting any more time, I guided my aching arousal into his tight heat. “Shall I show you just how good losing to me can feel?”

“Who said that I lost?” he snarled, wrapping his legs around my waist in an attempt to control me.

I resisted his efforts, knowing it would hurt him too much to bury myself to the hilt in a single thrust. Instead, I chuckled at his brash claim as I continued easing into his body that yielded to me like his feisty spirit never had. To keep him focused on the good, I feathered touches over any part of him I could reach. I loved how his channel tensed around me whenever I drifted over a sensitive spot. It amused me at how honest Knightley's physical reactions were compared to his words.

Once I was all the way in, I gave him time to adjust to the sensation of fullness. He tolerated it for a few moments before he grouched about it. "Are you planning on staying there, or are you going to move?"

Knowing it was likely his first experience with being penetrated, I started a gentle rhythm that was a stark contrast to the satisfying pounding from earlier.

It caused him to groan in protest. "Seriously? If we're doing this, then fuck me like you mean it, Kingston."

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I couldn't resist drawing more parallels between our actions and the match we had just finished. "You're so fond of using all your strength to beat your opponent, but there's something to be said for the slow buildup, too."

"Now I'm the one who's bored," he complained, shifting under me as he tried to coax me into a more satisfying pace.

Rather than taking offense, I laughed it off and did nothing more than rock against him to quiet his fussing. I let my hands draw lazy lines of lust over his skin, determined to make him desire me until it was almost painful that his needs weren't being met.

"Come on!" He bucked his hips to encourage me to give it to him. "Stop messing around!"

"I'm making you ache for more." I cut off his angry response with a hard thrust that made him fist his hands on the ground as he pushed back with equal force. "Because as much as you crave glory, you want more."

Having gotten his attention, I stepped things up and gave him the aggression he was after. He swore with abandon as he kept pace. I grinned when he reached out to grab hold of my shoulders as he writhed under me. Watching him in the throes of passion was the most arousing thing I had ever had the privilege to enjoy.

He almost lost it when I reached down and started pumping his erection with firm tugs. When he tried to growl my name in a warning, it came out as a wanton moan.

After the exquisite torture, I was nearing my limits. I leaned forward to brace myself on my arms, causing him to cry out from the shift in positions. I moaned in my most seductive voice, “Knightley,” before I captured his earlobe in my mouth and tugged it hard with my teeth.

It triggered his second orgasm as he cried out my name while his cum spurted out and decorated his beautiful abs. That was all I needed to take me over the edge. I came with a soft cry as I thrust until I was spent.

When he didn’t shove me aside, it gave me the best sexual afterglow I had ever experienced. I pushed my luck by giving him a gentle kiss, but he shocked me by not stepping it up. For the first time in two years, he allowed me to show him the affection I had held for him since the beginning. Not even his best efforts to drive me away would keep me from him.

As much as I didn’t want to, I pulled out of him and settled at his side. It was a pleasant change of pace to not dissolve into instant bickering, so I enjoyed the silence as we drifted in our separate thoughts. It lasted longer than I had expected before he asked me, “How long have you been planning this?”

Rather than telling the truth, I kept my answer playful. “Your arguments with reporters at press conferences give me a lot of time to think about other stuff I’d rather be doing.”

“Like me?” He scoffed at the notion. “You can’t be serious.”

I couldn’t resist teasing him a little. “Our fighting wasn’t foreplay for you?”

He turned his head to stare at me. “Seriously?”

I gave him my best attempt at an innocent expression. “What? Our banter really gets

me going.”

Covering his face to hide the grin he couldn't quite smother, he laughed hard. For once, it wasn't bitter or haughty, but a sound of genuine amusement that warmed my heart. “Is that why you antagonize me?”

“Yes, and I'm very offended it took two years to get you to translate that into ‘please fuck me stupid,’” I said with mock upset. My peals of laughter ruined the effect, though. “How much more obvious could I be that I desired you?”

“Why?”

I reached out to caress his cheek with my clean hand as I gave him a sincere look. “Because all I have ever wanted these past five years was to be yours.”

“Five years? We've only been competing for two.”

“Yes, because it took me three years to become good enough to stand on the same stage as you.” I opened my heart up to him, hoping like hell he didn't reject me for it. “I've been chasing after you since you trounced Terrence Rayston in your debut match.”

It was the first time I had ever stunned him into silence. Swallowing hard, he eventually said, “I don't understand.”

“The media dubbed you the Iceman because of your icy blue eyes, the way you ruthlessly defeated every opponent, and your cold and aloof demeanor.” I stroked the outline of his strong jaw, amazed he hadn't rejected me yet. “It confused me how so many people got you so wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re not ice—you’re fire.” I took a deep breath to steady my nerves. “I didn’t understand how none of them could see that you burn with a need to be the best and always win. You torched all your opponents to ashes with every triumph. It took me years to become good enough to feel your heat as I faced off against you.”

When he said nothing, I hesitated before I continued confessing. “If I didn’t beat you, you’d never notice me. That meant I had to be better than the best, because that was the only way to make you focus all your fire on me. I’m the only one who can withstand your flames. To make you see that, I had to drive you wild by being unbeatable. I want you to only burn for me.”

It took him a while to settle on a response. His confusion was precious, while also making me wish I could bash my head into the nearest wall. “But that almost sounds romantic.”

“Almost?” I snorted at the claim. “Try it absolutely sounds romantic because it is. You couldn’t tell this entire time that you’re what I’ve been after and not the tournament wins?”

Rather than answering directly, he said something that thrilled me all the same. “You’re my only rival. For the last two years, all I’ve thought about is you, because no one else is worthy of me.”

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“Is that your way of saying you’re just now realizing that your obsession with me may be rooted in something much deeper?”

“Maybe.” A tiny smile tugged at the corner of his mouth, melting my heart. “I might require more demonstrations later to help me reach some definitive conclusions, though. This has been way too weird for me to process right now.”

I beamed at him with happiness. “You can face off against me anytime you want, on and off the tennis court.”

“We definitely need a rematch after this.”

Taking a chance, I leaned in for a tender kiss. He set my heart alight when he allowed it to stay gentle and reached out to pull me closer. I couldn't resist getting a little cheesy. “Now I know why they score tennis with love.”

We both dissolved into laughter before kissing again. I had played the long game to reach that point, but it was the best win of my career to have Knightley as my own.

Chapter Three

Knight

After returning to the hotel and taking care of some personal business online, I jumped in the shower to help me unwind from such a strange day. I had pushed myself hard during the Australian Open, and the encounter that followed, so the hot water felt amazing on my tired muscles. Letting the spray wash over me, I got lost in my

thoughts, which centered on Kingston, just like they always did.

As often as I had fantasized about all the different ways I could beat him, I had never imagined it involving sex. But our explosive encounter had given me an outlet for my frustration, plus opened new forms of winning over him. That power seduced me, despite never having an interest in men before. Having him moaning under me as he submitted to my desires had been an intense aphrodisiac. It left me hungry for another chance to achieve a sexual high unlike anything else I had ever experienced. I needed more of him, whether I was comfortable with that or not.

While it was one thing for me to be in control, I shouldn't have been okay with him reversing our positions. At first, my acceptance of the shift had partially been about saving face by not backing down and looking scared. But in my orgasmic haze, I had rationalized that having him fuck me was its own form of power over him. He needed me to achieve his own pleasure, which meant I was still the one with all the control in that situation, even when I was on the bottom. I had the ability to deny him, which meant he was at my mercy. As a result, making him come had been one hell of an ego boost. I also derived a special kind of gratification from proving my sexual prowess with a second climax to his single one because there wasn't anything I wouldn't turn into a competition. Above all else, it had felt so damngood.

It angered me that he had made me feel better than any woman ever had. Why did he have to be so gifted at everything? And what was up with his sincere confession afterward? The cynic in me wanted to dismiss his interest in me as an underhanded method of trying to best me yet again. However, I begrudgingly conceded that Kingston wasn't that kind of person. No, he had shown me his genuine vulnerability and given me the chance to destroy his heart. But I wasn't that kind of person, either.

I struggled to come to terms with how I handled our post-sex conversation. After two of the best orgasms of my entire life, my anger mellowed out to the point where I could be civil with him. It was the first time I hadn't seen him as my opponent but

more of my equal. He had even been funny enough to make me laugh in genuine amusement, which was a first. That was a Kingston I could see myself calling a friend, which was a mind-blowing concept when I had always considered him my rival.

It was strange to realize that as much as I hated him, I had never once conceived of him as my enemy. He lacked the evil and menacing spirit to be awarded such a title. I always said I hated him, but I had to wonder if he was right after all. Maybe part of me had always been attracted to him and used my anger as a form of denial. Ignoring his gender, he was attractive, good-natured, and shared my passion for the sport of tennis. His incredible work ethic, impressive accomplishments, and dedication to training had earned my respect, even when I didn't want to like him. Beyond that, he was the first person to ever see the fire burning inside of me and not the Iceman that everyone else made me out to be. Despite seeing the real me, he still had an affection for me I couldn't understand. I was a monumental dick to him every chance I got, so why would he be interested in me? Let alone be so sincere about his desire.

Washing my hair as I continued sorting through my emotions, I couldn't figure out what happened next. Someone had tried to enter the locked room, forcing us to get dressed and make a hasty exit past a very confused custodian. We lost our chance to discuss what the encounter meant going forward. Worse, I wasn't sure what direction I wanted to go. His feelings seemed too deep for a casual hookup, but was I ready for something serious on that level? How had I gone from hating his guts in the morning to contemplating a future with him as a partner? It didn't make sense, so why did being with him feel like the right choice?

By the time I finished, I still hadn't reached any definitive conclusions. Drying off, I wrapped the towel around my waist and returned to my room. I debated the merits of calling it an early night when a knock on my door drew my attention.

I walked over and used the peephole to see who was on the other side. It didn't

surprise me it was Kingston. As much as I wished I could ignore him, the part of me that needed to hear what he had to say won the debate.

His green eyes widened in surprise at the sight of me wearing nothing but a towel. “Hello, gorgeous.” He was one to talk. Although I had never been interested in men before, it was an undeniable fact that he looked handsome in jeans, a gray T-shirt, and a black leather jacket.

“I should shut the door on you just for that.”

“We both know you won’t.” He strode into my room like I had invited him inside, sitting down in the chair beside the window. His gaze once again drank me in from head to toe. My ego loved every second of his appreciation. “Are you ready to talk?”

“About what?”

“What happens next.”

It was hard to be mad at him for offering me answers to the thing I had spent the better part of my shower wondering about earlier. “Okay.”

His eyebrows arched in surprise. “Wow, you’re not going to fight me on it?”

I crossed my arms over my chest as I remained standing. “Do you want me to?”

“It makes it more fun for me when you do.” His cheeky grin was infectious, but I fought my urge to return it. “I enjoy when you make me work for it.”

“Get on with it already.”

He took a deep breath as he lost some of his playfulness. “You hate beating around

the bullshit, so I'm going to put all my cards on the table for you. You're more than a meaningless fuck for me, Knightley. I want to be your boyfriend."

His willingness to state his ambition impressed me. That he had phrased it as he wanted to bemyboyfriend and not that he wished I'd behisboyfriend also spoke volumes about his insights into how I worked. His intuitive understanding of his opponents was one of the things that made him impossible to beat. "Exclusively?"

"For both of us." He smoldered in a way that made me shift uncomfortably as it stirred the embers of my desire from our previous encounter. "I play for keeps. It's all or nothing with me."

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Maybe I had lost my mind, but I gave his proposition serious consideration. Relationships were almost more trouble than they were worth because none of my past girlfriends had accepted that tennis would always come first for me. But Kingston was wired like me, which meant he was one of the few people who would understand my priorities because they were his, too. My contrarian nature forced me to push back at his claims a little. “Is it really dating when we can’t go on dates? The media would have a fucking field day for weeks with speculation if we were spotted together.”

“We don’t have to go out to fancy restaurants to be in a relationship.” He stood up and closed the distance between us. I inhaled sharply when he pressed against my body, running his hands up my bare chest to rest on my broad shoulders. “All I need is to be with you like this.”

My arms encircled his slim waist as I held him closer. Why was that such a natural action with him? “And to be intimate with me?”

“Especially that.” His cocksure grin ignited the spark within me into a roaring blaze once more. “But more than that, too.”

It was impossible to think with him pressed so close against me. Why couldn’t I smother the urge to kiss him again? “Meaning?”

“Everything. I dream about falling asleep in your arms. I’d love to play tennis just for fun with you, when it’s only us, with nobody watching. When you’re pissed off that you had an off day, I want you to call me and ask me to come over to make it better. Let me be there for you without pushing me away. I want to be yours in every sense

of the word.”

“And you want me to be yours, too.”

He bit his lower lip as he looked up at me. His sudden shyness was unexpectedly endearing. “More than anything.”

I kept waiting for my ego to object, but it was strangely silent in the face of what he was offering me. It was indisputable that he was my sole rival, because we were both at the top of our game, which meant we were the only ones worthy of each other’s immense talent. We already belonged to each other in that sense. Was it such a bad thing to add a physical component when it had felt so incredible?

Since I had never been much for talking, I gave him my answer in a tender kiss. Earlier had been about brutal and demanding passion, but with the luxury of privacy, we could do more. It was a necessary test to see if I could tolerate something more intimate. I indulged in teasing kisses as I took my time exploring him. Once again, having him open for me and letting me take what I wanted from him gave me an incredible high, while leaving me wanting more.

His hands wandered with gentle caresses that stoked my desire once more. It differed from the all-consuming fire that had raged within me after the press conference. Instead, I wished to dive deep into him and never come up for air. If we didn’t stop soon, I would be in danger of passing the point of no return where my towel wouldn’t hide my enjoyment much longer.

I made myself pause, but my body wasn’t ready to let go of Kingston yet. I teetered on the brink of a cliff over making an unbelievable decision. However, I required a few more pieces of pertinent information. “Are you in love with me?”

“Yes.” There was no fear in his eyes, only an unshakable certainty that appealed to

me. “And someday, you’ll love me, too.”

“Slow down. I’m still learning how to like you first.” We both chuckled at my comment. “I wasn’t expecting to come to terms today with something other than rage being my primary reaction to you.”

He took the comment in the spirit I meant. “That’s fine. I’m willing to wait as long as it takes for you to figure out there’s a reason you’ve possessively been calling me your rival for years. You’ll eventually understand it stems from a deeper attraction to me and isn’t blind hatred.”

That was something I would have to think about later. “I have one condition.”

“Name it.”

“If I agree to this arrangement, absolutely nothing can change between us with tennis.”

I didn’t expect my question to cause him to light up with excitement. “Oh, don’t worry. You being my boyfriend isn’t going to stop me from kicking your ass all over the court.”

It fascinated me that his answer both reassured my fears and spiked my indignation. “I’ll be insulted if you ever play against me with anything less than your absolute best.”

He cupped my face in his calloused hands. It confused me why the roughness of his palms excited me. “Knightley, you have my word I’d never disrespect you by bringing what happens off the court into our game. I know you’ll give me the same courtesy.”

“I’m never going to stop trying to defeat you,” I swore. “And when I finally win against you, I’ll keep winning.”

His radiant smile was beautiful. “I’d expect nothing less from you. That’s one of the things I love about you the most.” He guided me down for another kiss, this one more heated than the last.

As we continued, my towel quickly betrayed my arousal. I didn’t protest when Kingston pulled it off and cast it aside, freeing him to tease my length to full hardness. To my surprise, he started kissing down my chest and stomach, lowering himself until he was on his knees in front of me. The thought of getting a blow job from him made my erection twitch at the exciting prospect.

He gazed up at me with a challenging expression. “How badly do you want me to suck your dick?”

“Bad enough that I won’t risk saying something stupid.”

“Good answer.” He rewarded me by taking the tip of my cock into his mouth to tease. Letting more of me slide into him, he put on a show of working my length with his hand as he bobbed his head.

It had been a while since I had enjoyed someone sucking me off. I carded my fingers through his dark hair, caressing him as he continued pleasuring me. My ego purred with satisfaction at seeing him worshipping my cock, loving his muffled moan as he took me deeper. Having Kingston on his knees for me and at my mercy was one of the most arousing things imaginable.

A promising tingle spread through me as my enjoyment spiked thanks to his throat milking me for everything I was worth. It was officially my new favorite method of silencing him. I looked forward to using the tactic in the future.

While I was an asshole on the court, I owed him the courtesy of a warning in the bedroom. “Fuck, this feels so good. I’m getting close.”

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Instead of pulling off and finishing me with his hand, he responded by grabbing my ass and forcing me deeper into his throat. I tightened my grip on his hair as I came with a gasp. He swallowed me down without complaint, then licked me clean when he finished.

Petting him in a silent show of appreciation, I took a moment to steady myself after another spectacular climax. He responded by standing up and taking off his clothes in a sensuous striptease that my body was too spent to react to. Once he was naked, he led me over to get on the bed with him.

Since I wasn't quite up to tasting myself on him, I settled for kissing his neck and down to his shoulder. My hand drifted down his defined muscles until I reached his erection. Wrapping my fingers around it, I gave it a few tentative strokes to get used to the feeling of touching another man. Once again, my revulsion was noticeably absent. "Is this okay?"

"Better than okay." He keened low in his throat. "Please, Knight."

Having him begging me for more pushed all my buttons. Being in control of his pleasure gave me a hell of a power trip. It made it even more enjoyable to jerk him off as I kissed any part of his body I could reach while lying on my side next to him. Nipping at his skin, I loved how he thrust into my fist. He was so responsive to me; I couldn't get enough.

Combined with my satiated state, it pushed me to try something I never would have imagined doing before. I sucked on his earlobe before I sensuously moaned, "King." It was a nickname I had steadfastly refused to address him by because of its regal

connotation. However, my curiosity demanded I find out how he would react to it.

He didn't disappoint me, crying out my name as he came. His cum decorated his stomach as I pumped him until he finished. Even though I was incapable of physical arousal, it was deeply satisfying to be responsible for his orgasm. It was further proof that he was mine.

When he wrapped his arm around me, it allowed me to curl up and rest my head on his shoulder as he recovered. It was a complete mystery to me why the position felt so comfortable. But the afterglow was too good for me to worry about, so for once in my life, I let it go.

Chapter Four

King

I had big plans for my first date with Knightley. They were sadly thwarted by the amazing pasta primavera he made me combined with jet lag from returning home after the Australian Open. I crashed hard after dinner from overexhaustion but did my best to rally when he took me into his bedroom.

Like the rest of his house, it was enormous, elegant, and staged as if it were the feature spread in an interior design magazine. His king-sized bed had clean white linens that reminded me of a classy hotel. With oversized fluffy pillows, it beckoned me to curl up and go to sleep rather than go wild.

I hugged Knightley, who was strong enough for me to surrender myself to. He held me tight, which was something I had spent the past five years dreaming about enjoying. With my cheek pressed against his cream-colored cashmere sweater as I listened to the steady beat of his heart, I became more puddle than man.

“Should I be worried?” His voice sounded more amused than concerned. All that mattered was he didn’t let go of me. If he had, I might have melted to the floor without his support.

“I’m sorry,” I mumbled against his chest. “You made me relax too much, so jet lag is kicking my ass.”

I loved the sound of his rumbling chuckle. “Oh, so it’s my fault you’re falling asleep standing up?”

“Take it as a compliment.” I stifled a yawn. “I just need my second wind to kick in, then we can have some real fun.”

“That sounds like a challenge to see if I can wake you up.” He tilted my chin up to bless me with a teasing kiss that made at least one part of my anatomy perk up. I loved how he kissed to win, refusing to be defeated on any playing field.

I didn’t resist as he undressed me, and I savored the show he put on of stripping out of his clothes. But while my dick was ready to make things happen, my body was sluggish and disconnected. Get your head in the game!

Our naked bodies pressing against each other made me moan. I became even more aroused by his hard length pressing against me. How many nights had I spent fantasizing about being with Knightley? It was a dream come true that he had agreed to be my boyfriend. I didn’t want to ruin our first date by not being appreciative enough of the opportunity to be with him.

He refocused my attention when he teased my hardness. His calloused palm from decades of playing tennis was a huge turn-on for me. I loved Knightley’s roughness, whether it was his hand or his gruff personality. Having him fuck me with his raging anger after the press conference had been the hottest sex of my life. I desperately

wanted him to dominate me the same way he tried to on the court. But I also had to make him work for it, because he'd never enjoy an easy victory over me.

“Get on the bed.”

The authoritative tone in his voice had my body obeying before I processed his words. It was a mistake, because as soon as I lay down, my will to move again deserted me. His mattress and sheets were the most comfortable I had ever had the privilege to enjoy, which made my exhaustion increase tenfold. “Why would you leave this bed when it's so wonderful? I want to sleep here forever.”

He sat beside me with a bemused expression. “So much for that second wind, huh?”

“I'm sorry,” I apologized through a yawn. “Between the tournament, the long trip home, the jet lag, the delicious dinner, and this spectacular bed, it's making me aware of how tired I am. You have no idea how mad I am at myself right now.”

“Why are you mad?”

I had a particular weakness for powerful and defined arms, which caused me to reach out and run my hand up his. The corded muscles made my hard-on twitch with interest. “Because I had so many plans for our sexy evening together, but my stupid body isn't cooperating with me to make it happen. There's nothing enjoyable for you about me being pliant and complacent.”

He ran his fingers along the underside of my erection with an uncertain noise. “I'm not so sure about that. Maybe I'd enjoy you being compliant and at my mercy.”

“There's only one way to find out.” I spread my legs and reached down to tease my hole. Maybe if he got my lust firing on all cylinders, it'd wake the rest of me up, too. “Show me what you've got.”

There was a spark of excitement in his blue eyes that made me think maybe I underestimated his interest in having me be completely submissive. I had assumed he'd always require me putting up a bit of a fight. He moved to fetch a bottle of lube out of his nightstand and then settled between my legs. "Can you handle it?"

“I can take it.”

There was no hesitation as he slid a slicked finger into me. “Are you sure?”

While I may have been exhausted, I was never too tired to push his buttons. Instead of challenging him to fuck me and find out, I tried the submissive route to see what happened. “Please don’t deny me, Knight. I need you more than sleep.”

“How romantic,” he said in a droll tone that made it difficult not to laugh.

“When I touch myself, I can’t stop imagining that it’s you pleasuring me instead. All I can think about is how much I want to be yours. I go out of my mind with lust.” That earned me a second finger and an interesting rumble from him. “Do you know how many times I’ve fantasized about us hooking up in the locker room after a match?”

“Seriously?”

I squirmed as I pushed against his fingers. “You confront me to prove that if you can’t beat me off the court, you can still dominate me in other ways.”

His blue eyes had gone dark with arousal. “And you enjoy that?”

“Somuch,” I moaned. “That’s half the fun of winning.”

“Clearly, I’ve underestimated your masochistic streak.” He added a third finger as he continued to prepare me.

I snickered at that. “Do you honestly think that was the first time I’ve had to get myself off after our match?”

“You might find this hard to believe, but I’ve never thought about yours or anyone else’s postgame masturbation habits.”

He was so adorable. “It’s not just a postgame ritual. It’s a pregame one, too.”

His eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Why?”

“Because I can’t risk getting a hard-on while playing against you.” I had to bite the inside of my lip to stop myself from laughing at his perplexed reaction. “Competing against someone as skilled as you is fucking sexy. Nobody makes me work for a victory like you do. It gets me all fired up, so I have to do it as a precaution. After the match, I have to do it so I don’t have to suffer through a press conference with a raging erection. You’re the only player I’ve ever had that reaction to.”

He withdrew his fingers and moved up to give me a demanding kiss. I opened for him with a whimper, loving how his tongue teased mine. That was a better response than I had expected. When we parted, he gave me a look that was somewhere between annoyed and amused. “Great, now I’m going to have to start doing that. Thanks.”

“We could do it together.” What could I say? I was an eternal optimist.

“Right now, I’m only interested in one thing.” He slicked his cock with lube and pressed the tip inside me. “Ready?”

I arched up under him. “Yes, so please!”

Thankfully, I didn’t have to tell him twice. He eased into me, surprising me by taking it slow. Even after he was buried to the hilt, he didn’t start the same fast and furious

pace as he had last time. Instead, his gentleness took my breath away and made me fall for him all over again as I learned what it meant to be cherished by him. He heightened my enjoyment further by letting his hands roam over my skin as our bodies rocked in sync with each other. It caught me off guard, because I never expected him to be the type to make love to someone, let alone be that affectionate with me.

I held on to his broad shoulders, enjoying how they flexed with his every movement as he took me higher with each thrust. It got even better when he leaned down to kiss me. The intimacy made my heart sing. Despite my body's exhaustion, I savored the gentle joining of our bodies as one.

At the risk of ruining things, I had to say something; I just hoped it was what he wanted to hear. "Being yours feels so good, Knight."

"You're allmine."

I whimpered as my muscles tensed in anticipation of my climax. "Everything that I am is because of you. Nothing feels better than being yours, not even winning."

"You love me more than you love winning?"

Cupping his cheek in my hand, I held his gaze. "There's no competition between the two. You'll always come in first place in my heart."

He kissed me with a hunger I couldn't get enough of with him. I moaned against his lips when he came inside me, triggering my orgasm in turn. We kept kissing before he rested his forehead against mine as we tried to recover.

"How do you make somethingthatcheesy sound so sincere?"

His question caused me to burst into laughter. “Maybe because it’s true? I’ve never wanted anything more than I’ve wanted you.”

“Why?” He pulled out of me and settled beside me. “It doesn’t make sense.”

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“I told you before: I’m drawn to your passion, dedication, and fiery spirit. This entire time, I’ve been the kid with a crush pulling your pigtails, hoping you’d eventually understand I secretly liked you.” I tugged on his hair at the nape of his neck, making him laugh. “I’m so glad you finally decoded the message.”

He hesitated for a moment before saying something I never expected to hear. “So am I.”

“Have you accepted that I’m not nearly as annoying as you thought I was?”

“Against my better judgment, yes.” He got out of bed and shocked me when he scooped me up to carry me to the bathroom. “Having you being submissive under me goes a long way with helping that.”

I grinned up at him once he set me on my feet in front of his massive shower. “Admit it. You’d be bored if I was like that all the time.”

“You wouldn’t be a worthy competitor if you were always that docile.” He opened the door and turned on the water. “It’s worth a little agitation sometimes.”

“What a sweet way to say you enjoy my spunky side livening things up.” I went up on tiptoe to give him a kiss. “Now, hurry and get me clean so I can sleep forever in your wonderful bed.”

He laughed as he ushered me inside. Despite his protests, his actions as he took care of me showed that he already loved me more than he could tell me with words yet. I was over the moon with joy that everything had worked out better than in my best

dreams.

Chapter Five

Knight

I had won a game I hadn't realized I was playing: capturing Kingston's heart. His desire to compete at my level had driven him to greatness. He became so good that even I couldn't defeat him. It was a staggering display of the depths of his love for me. It was the ultimate compliment to my abilities as a world-class tennis player. Since my unparalleled skills had created my talented rival, that meant he was mine.

He had been right. Since my first loss to him, thoughts of him had consumed me. Caught up in making him acknowledge me as the number one titleholder, I missed the point when every thought I had was tangled up in my blinding obsession with him. Thanks to our explosive encounter after our last press conference at the Australian Open, it became crystal clear that he lit my fire more than sports ever had. My desire for him triumphed over my embarrassment at succumbing to the sexual tension between us I had willfully been blind to.

Over the past month of being together, he had found his way into my heart. Freed from hating him, I understood why the entire world adored him. He was a playful imp that livened up my life and made me realize how much I had been missing out on. The longer we were together, the more I craved him. Despite his promises, part of me still feared that by becoming my lover, our tennis would suffer as our feelings came into play. But as we played our first match against each other on my private court, it was Kingston Sabatino staring me down across the net, not my boyfriend, King.

His passion and love made our "friendly" court encounter even more exhilarating. I would have lost all sense of respect for him if he had gone easy on me. To my great relief, he played even harder than when there was an audience watching us. His

seriousness pushed me to my limits. Every point I won was hard-fought, which gave me an exciting thrill I had never had before when victory had been a given with everyone else. For once, instead of fixating on defeating my opponent, I had fun playing against him and savored the challenge he presented.

That meant I made fewer technical errors, since my raging need to defeat him didn't distract me. After three hours of fierce competition, I was riding high on endorphins and adrenaline from forcing him into a tiebreaker for the first time in my career. Our polo shirts were drenched with sweat from the effort and the heat of the sun, but neither of us would give an inch. For the last point, he served an ace right on the line in the outside corner that I couldn't return.

Resting my hands on my knees, I gulped in air as I panted from the exertion. It took me a moment to process the whirlwind of emotions my loss stirred up within me. I was pissed I had lost again, because I would defeat him someday.

At the same time, I was elated that I had played the best tennis game of my career. It didn't matter that there wasn't an audience or cameras to record for posterity how much closer I had come to defeating him than anyone else ever had.

More than that, it was a relief that he had won against me, fair and square. He hadn't handed me an easy victory to soothe my wounded ego now that we were secretly dating. I had held my own while forcing him to put in a genuine effort to claim his win over me. Somehow, that felt better than if I had trounced him in the match.

For once in my life, I was happy I lost. We both had given it our absolute best, just like we were duking it out in a Grand Slam tournament. I couldn't remember when I had last played to have fun and not just to win.

He walked over to me with his trademark cocky smirk, bouncing his racket on his shoulder. "How much do you want to kill me right now?"

Killing him wasn't anywhere on my list of things I wanted to do to him. I reached out and grabbed his polo shirt, yanking on it to pull his body flush with mine. The floodgates burst open from all the pent-up lust that accumulated during our three hours of dueling. Dropping my racket on the court, I cupped his face in my hands as I crashed my lips against his. There was no finesse as I savagely claimed him, leaving him no choice but to cling to me as he submitted to my aggressive demand.

King understood my desire to win, which was why he knew how badly I needed him to beat me in our match. It made me love him with a ferocity that no one else could have withstood. He was the only person strong enough to endure all of me. Without fail, he instinctively seemed to know when to give in to me or when I ached for him to fight back.

When I stopped kissing him, we both were panting and hard. In true King fashion, he grinned as he teased me. "Ready for a rematch in bed?"

"This time, I'll definitely win."

We returned to my house and up to my room. Tearing off our clothes, I then pinned him under me to kiss until I forgot what air was. Both of us were still hot and sweaty from playing outside for so many hours, but it aroused me instead of grossed me out. I licked up the curve of his neck, moaning at the salty tang of his exertion from how hard he worked to beat me. Because he knew me so well, he didn't protest that he was too dirty for me to enjoy. He let me run my hands up his powerful legs and arms as I covered them with admiring kisses. I threw in a few nips to make him squirm under me with tantalizing whimpers.

"I swear to fuck, if you don't get something inside of me soon, I'm going to lose my damn mind," he groaned.

Taking the hint, I paused long enough to grab the lube from the nightstand. He rolled

over onto his hands and knees, presenting me with a tempting view. Since we were both impatient, I started by sliding two slicked fingers into him. I used my other hand to tease his heavy sac.

To my surprise, he burst into laughter. “So that’s what your tennis balls feel like when you cradle them in your palm as you decide which you’ll serve. I’m going to be so mad at you if I get aroused the next time I watch you do that on the court because I can’t forget how good this feels.”

“You’re supposed to complain that my skin is too calloused and makes everything feel awful.” It was a complaint all of my ex-girlfriends shared about my rough palms thanks to playing tennis since I was five.

He scoffed as he rocked against me. “Screw that. I enjoy it because of that. You’re touching me with all your years of dedication, hard work, and sacrifice. It’s fucking sexy. If your hands were all soft and smooth, it’d be a huge turn-off for me.”

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To reward him, I slid in another finger. His answer endeared him to me further. “Good to know.”

“Do you disagree?”

“Let’s just say that it goes a long way to explaining why my relationships with women never worked.”

He laughed as he stretched out while luxuriating under my preparation. “What do you mean? The number one reason had to be because none of them challenged you.”

“A few of them challenged my patience. So do you sometimes.”

“We all know that. I’m talking about challenging you in a competitive sense. None of them could do that, which is why you inevitably got bored with them once the fun of the chase was over.”

Sometimes he was unsettlingly accurate with his reads on me. “Whenever you say things like that, it makes me think you missed your calling as a therapist.”

“If I hadn’t become a tennis player, I probably would have gone that route. I’ve always been great about understanding people.” He wiggled his ass to tease me. “I got you to open up to me, so you know I would have been great at it.”

“You would have been the best at it, just like you are with everything else.”

He grinned at me over his shoulder. “Aww, you’re getting closer to admitting I’m the

best boyfriend in the world.”

I rewarded him for playing a proper game of tennis with me outside. “You’re the best boyfriend in the world for me.” I withdrew my fingers and slicked my cock with more lube. “You’re certainly the only boyfriend for me.”

“Damn straight. Now, stake your claim and mark me as yours.”

That was all the encouragement I needed. I slid into him with a sigh of relief, relishing how his tight channel embraced me so intimately. Considering I had identified as heterosexual until our encounter, I had quickly become enamored with the pleasures of being with King. I loved that I didn’t always have to be gentle and loving with him. He enjoyed a bit of roughness, which meant I could grab his hips and drill into him with a hard and fast rhythm. It made both of us cry out in lust as we worked up another sweat.

“Hang on, wait.” He stopped to shift positions, making me rest on my haunches to allow him to ride me reverse cowboy-style. It didn’t take him long to work up to a satisfying bounce. “Oh, that’s better! Fuckin’ yes!”

The change freed me up to reach around and start jerking him off as he went to town on me. When we weren’t in public, I loved how loud he got while we fucked. It reminded me of his grunts when he let loose one of his powerful backhands across the net, which aroused me now that I wasn’t opposing him. The noise was pure aggression, which tapped into that primitive part of me that couldn’t get enough of King.

When I brushed my thumb over the head of his cock, he came with a shout. I stroked him until he finished with a full-body shudder. He collapsed against me with a contented sigh, breathing hard from the effort after our grueling three-hour match earlier. “Sorry, give me a second, Knight. I promise we’ll return to rocking your

world soon.”

With my clean hand, I guided him to turn his head for a soft kiss. He reached back and embedded his fingers in my hair with a moan as he surrendered to me. As much as our rougher coupling did it for me, the gentle moments with him touched something deep inside me I hadn’t known was there until he showed me.

After he recovered enough, he pulled off me with a groan of protest, then flopped onto his back. Sliding into him again was like coming home as he wrapped his arms around me and cradled my head. His tired body rocked in sync with the gentle rolls of my hips. I used to scoff at the notion of making love to someone, believing it to be nonsense that sold romance novels and Hollywood movies. But I was finally free to express that part of my guarded heart with the only person worthy of my affection. It meant I could show him that he meant more to me than all of our bravado, banter, and battles. Tennis made my heart beat, but King was what made it sing.

“I love you, Knight.” They were words I had resisted the first few times he said them, but now they endeared him to me even more every time he said them. The world may not have known we shared those kinds of feelings for each other, but as long as he understood how I felt about him, that was all that mattered.

Burying my face against his neck, I came with his name on my lips. I hugged him tightly as I kissed up to his ear. “Almost as much as I love you.”

He laughed like he always did when my competitive nature demanded I turn declarations of our feelings into a battle of one-upmanship. I couldn’t help it. That was my favorite game, because it was the only one where we both came out as winners on top.

Chapter Six

King

I had gotten so used to Knight's warmth during our four-month relationship that the first time he froze me out like the Iceman everyone called him, it hurt like hell. That was saying something, because every muscle in my body ached after a punishing French Open tournament. It had taken all the strength I had left in me to survive it while acting like I was fine. I had barely scraped by with my win against Knight at the end. If we had gone for more than three sets, I would have lost for sure.

We were always careful in public not to let on about our relationship, but he had avoided me during the entire tournament. He had even spent the night in his own hotel room, which hurt worse than my arm. When he was forced to be in my presence at the postgame press conference, he had been simmering with a barely contained rage. It was worse than before we had gotten together. I thought he was going to storm out at one point, but he sat and silently fumed while I tried to make coherent words come out of my mouth.

I didn't have any energy left to find out why he was upset with me. I just wanted to pass out in bed and never move again. Now that the adrenaline of the tournament was over, I was in sheer agony with my arm. I hoped like hell it was just tennis elbow and not a muscle tear. I didn't want to be in a position where I had to decide between pulling out of Wimbledon or risking it turning into a major injury. The last thing I needed was to deal with a surgery that meant missing the rest of the season.

Battered and broken, I barely had the strength left to make it up to my hotel room. When I entered the enormous suite, I wasn't expecting to see Knight standing inside. He had his arms crossed over his chest, glaring at me with seething rage. "What the fuck, Kingston?"

Tossing the key card on the side table, I hung my head in defeat. "Look, I know we need to have this fight. I deserve whatever lecture you want to give me, but I'm too

tired. I need a rain check until at least tomorrow.”

He stormed over to me, getting in my personal space. “No, we’re talking about this right now. What the hell were you thinking?”

All I wanted to do was curl up in his arms, not get yelled at. In my exhaustion, I had to fight back tears. “About what?”

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“You’re badly injured, but you kept playing, anyway! Why would you do something so stupid?”

I had fought so hard not to show I was hurting, but he had figured it out, anyway. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I owed him an answer. “Because I didn’t want you to win that way! You deserve to win because you’re the best, not because I’m hurt!”

“You’re such a fucking idiot!” That was what his words said, but his arms pulled me into a tight hug of comfort. He trembled as he cradled me against him. “Do you think I give a single fuck about winning when I’m so worried about you?”

“Then why are you so mad at me?” I asked in a broken voice.

“Because I’m angry that you’re pushing through a potential career-ending injury for my sake! It’s not worth it!” He sighed heavily, refusing to let me go yet. When he spoke again, he sounded calmer and more rational. “I’m upset that I couldn’t tell you to stop, because we both have too much pride to call it quits. It was hell watching you fighting through the pain and not being able to do a damn thing without letting the world know I care about you. I had to stay away from you, because if I knew for a fact how much you were suffering, I’d never let you leave this room and keep playing.”

A sob escaped me, breaking the floodgates on my emotions. The tears poured out of me at the realization that my selfish need to push through my injury had harmed him, too. He shushed my apologies, before picking me up and carrying me into the bedroom. As he undressed me, he took extra care with removing my shirt. Despite

that, I still cried out in anguish from the blinding flash of pain that exploded inside me.

“Lie down on your stomach.”

Too tired to disobey, I collapsed with an agonized groan. He carried over a bucket full of ice and water to sit down beside me. My mind drifted, but I hissed when his freezing hands touched my bare skin. Before I could ask what he was doing, he started massaging my shoulder and upper arm, making me moan in relief. His fingers were so cold, it felt like an ice pack was working me over. It was so good; I almost broke down in tears once more.

“You can’t do this to me again,” he said in a soft voice. It was a tone he rarely spoke to me in, so it always turned my insides to mush whenever he did. “My heart can’t handle it.”

“I’m so sorry.”

Since my skin had warmed his hands, he put them back in the watery ice to chill them down. “Don’t be sorry. Be honest with me next time. I’d rather pull out of a tournament than have you play hurt. Winning doesn’t matter to me if you’re not okay.”

I turned my head to look at him. “Can I ask a question you might find insulting?”

He resumed working my arm with his icy hands. It was heavenly against my heated skin. “Yes, I let you win in three sets. Don’t be stupid.”

Realizing he had thrown the match for a Grand Slam tournament title for my sake was as sweet as it was infuriating. “You shouldn’t have done that!”

“The alternative of risking doing more damage to you by stretching our match out to five sets or more was worth sacrificing my pride on an international stage.”

“Knight, I—” When he reached closer to my elbow, I interrupted myself with a yelp. He used less pressure as he tried to release the tightness in my muscles. “Fuck, I’m so sorry. I know what that sacrifice means for someone as competitive as you. I’m such an asshole for putting you in a situation where you had to make that choice.”

He was quiet for a moment before his voice took on a hint of teasing that released the vise clenching my heart. “Well, there’s one bright side to this disaster.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s given us definitive proof that I love you more than tennis.” He leaned down to press a tender kiss on my shoulder. “Please remember that next time you think about doing something this foolish.”

His words filled me with sunshine that helped chase away some of the pain. “Wow, that’s the most romantic thing you’ve ever said to me.”

“This was not how I wanted to discover I apparently have a secret schmoopy side when I’m worried sick about you.”

My tired laugh turned into a moan as he moved to my forearm that was killing me. I was putty in his hands as he helped erase all the stress the tournament had put my body under. The care and love he showed in massaging away some of the pain made me adore him even more than I already did. Hopefully, one day we would reach a point where we didn’t have to hide it from the world.

“When we get home, you’re going to start rehab immediately. If they don’t clear you to compete in Wimbledon, I’ll withdraw. When we play there, it’s going to be with

both of us at our best, or not at all. Promise?”

“Promise.”

Knight moved on to give me a cold back massage that liquified me into a puddle.

A relieved moan escaped from me. “I always knew your fingers were talented, but I had no idea they were this magical. You definitely win at being the best at giving massages.”

“Maybe if you’re good, I’ll do this when you aren’t dying, so you can properly enjoy it without the pain.”

“That’s excellent incentive, thanks.” I yawned as exhaustion overtook me. “If I fall asleep, please accept it as a compliment about how amazing your massage is.”

“I’ll take care of you, so rest now, King.” He gave me a gentle kiss on my cheek. “I need you to get better.”

It wasn’t hard to translate what his words actually meant. “Love you, too.” I got another glimpse into how worried he was about me because he didn’t try to escalate my claim into a battle like he normally did. For the second time that day, he gave me a win to make me feel better. I wanted to tell him how much that meant to me, but words were beyond me. Having surrendered to his touch as he continued working my battered body, I quickly drifted off to sleep.

Epilogue

Knight

ONE MONTH LATER

We had reached the tiebreak that would decide whether I was finally going to have my first victory over King at Wimbledon. He had recovered from his shoulder injury from the French Open in time to play the best tennis of his life at the tournament. But I had been on fire, too. It led us to the moment where it all came down to a single point.

I bounced the ball several times, before glancing at him across the net. Even at a distance, his challenging gaze dared me to bring all the heat I could muster. He wanted me to win almost as much as I did. However, he wouldn't insult me by giving me a meaningless victory—not after we'd both worked our asses off to reach the apex of our careers.

Taking a steadying breath, I was free from worrying only about winning. All I wanted to do was make King proud, and that meant doing the impossible thing no one else had ever done: defeat him. Tossing the ball into the air, I put my everything into slamming it his way. It bounced within the service box with a beautiful spin that sent it beyond the range of his racket, despite his desperate lunge for it.

The audience went wild with a deafening roar, making me realize I had finally reclaimed my rightful title as best in the world. King beamed with pride as he cheered along with them, freeing me to pump my fist with a joyous whoop. I had

fucking won! Elated didn't come close to describe the rush of triumph that overcame me as I celebrated my victory. It may have taken me almost three years, but I had defeated my rival on an international stage, a feat no other tennis player could say. It felt even better than earning my fourth Wimbledon trophy.

He rushed over to me, practically bouncing in his excitement for me. "You fucking did it! You really did it, Knight! You're amazing!"

When he held his hand out to shake mine, I accepted the gesture of sportsmanship. But that was something regular winners did, which wasn't worthy of the massive scale of my accomplishment. I had beaten the reigning two-time champion, my best friend, my boyfriend, and the love of my life, who gave my world all its color and joy. There was only one way to celebrate that, and it damn well wasn't with a chaste handshake.

Using my grip, I tugged him into my embrace and kissed him with all the affection and happiness my heart couldn't contain in my overwhelmed state. He dropped his racket with a clatter on the court as he hugged me back and returned the passionate kiss. The crowd gasped in shock, making us laugh when we broke apart.

He flashed his trademark cocky grin. "Congratulations. Not only did you win, but you just guaranteed our press conference is going to be batshit bonkers now."

"I'm counting on it." I rested my forehead against his as I squeezed his hand. "But what better way is there to tell the world I love you?"

This time he kissed me, causing a deafening cheer from the stands. None of that mattered, though. All I cared about was the beautiful man in my arms who had pushed me to the top of my sport by bringing out the best in me. Love literally meant zero in the game of tennis, but it meant everything to me when since I had won the heart of Kingston Sabatino.

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