



Go Puck Yourself (Power Play Off the Ice: Snowed In for the Holidays)

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Category: Sport

Description: There's nothing like the Holidays. And being snowed in with the guy who pretended to be your new boyfriend after you ran into your ex on the way to your family Thanksgiving especially when he's Jacob Hale, the lumbersexual goalie for the Seattle Revenge.

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CHAPTER ONE

SLOAN

I 've never wanted to go full on ' Bah Fucking Humbug ' but this year...it could be a vibe. Or an aesthetic. Or even my entire identity for the next two months.

Maybe even for the next year. I mean, there are places where people keep their holly jolly madness going all year. I bet Ebenezer Scrooge was a crabby asshole up until he was haunted and got a bad case of the ghost insomnia. I'd be grumpy as fuck if people kept interrupting my sleep, too. But then again, he turned into Mr. Christmas himself, didn't he?

Sigh .

I hurried to the gate, just in time to hear final boarding being called for my flight. "Sorry," I mumbled and fumbled for my phone, trying to unlock the screen while my bag slid down my arm in an attempt to cut off my circulation.

"Here, let me help you," a deep voice, like honey and utterly male, said from behind me. My head shot up, and I whipped it around only to find a towering lumbersnack of a man. All that was missing from his red-haired, trimmed beard muscle-ness was a damn flannel.

So not lumberjack. But all snack.

I hated him on sight and twisted so he couldn't help as he attempted to grab my bag

that was now almost to my wrist...Nope, not today, Man. Y'all can go fuck yourselves.

"I'm fine," I bit out, the gate attendant cleared her throat. "Sorry." A scanner in hand, she held it out, and I flashed my screen.

"Have a nice trip, and happy Thanksgiving. Sir?"

The gorgeous man grinned, and his eyes sparkled as he regarded her. Actually sparkled, and she immediately softened even more, which made him smile and look even more appealing. I flinched inwardly, at all the things that made me uncomfortable.

Nice, kind, and helpful. A non-existent, fairy tale, Christmas wish that would never come true. I huffed a breath in a vain attempt to get the hair that had fallen in my eyes out the way. Then a glare directed at the two of them for a moment.

Without another word, I spun and trudged down the tunnel connecting the plane taking me to my family's holiday torture. Thanksgiving at the Poole household was a loud, boisterous time filled with nosy relations, food, and absolutely no privacy. Everyone gathered at Connie and George Poole's house for a day of food, family, and deafening annoyances. Normally, I loved the holidays at my grandparents' house. But this year, the holiday spirit looked more like a punishment filled with reminders of why I was alone, too independent, and destined to be the one everyone tried to set up with a random person from the small town they lived in for the past fifty years.

And in a little less than a month, it would be a weekend-long Christmas torture event of epic proportions.

This year, for the first time since I graduated high school, I had someone to bring home.

Until the man I thought I had a future with stole my ideas for a project at the company we both worked for, claiming it as his own. Fucking asshole. Never trust a man who can't get you off and gets jealous of your vibrator. Especially when he thinks he has gotten you off, and then like a fool, you talk over your presentation, believing that he wants to help you. Praise your work. All the while stealing every damn part of it.

And when I flew off the handle when I caught Jon pitching my ideas to our boss, he had the fucking nerve to imply that somehow sleeping my way to a promotion had been my end game. Maybe decking him wasn't the best idea, but when Justine, my co-worker, slid into the room and called him baby, I lost my shit.

It was then I realized he was a narcissistic, controlling asshole who had made me feel like I needed him because everything I did needed improvement. Looking back, I realized I apologized nonstop, even when he was a dick. And God, was he a dick.

The entire incident cost me my job, my dignity, and maybe a chance to not be single for once for the holidays. The last one could skip town like Frosty when it heated up. And kneeing a man in the balls never felt so good. I figured if I was going down, I might as well enjoy the process. I should've known when he referred to himself in the third person on our second date that he would turn out to be the guy who deserved a punch in his Nutcracker.

I loved my job, I think. And my dignity left town in such a flurry that I expected to be living at the North Pole from now on once my cheeks stopped flushing, either in embarrassment or anger. Maybe both.

The only bad part of it all was that his family lived a few towns over from mine. I cringed when I thought about how we had bonded over that stupid fact that meant he wasn't going to be as far away as I'd hoped.

But, here I was, alone, albeit in first class, on a flight home that was supposed to be my I-am-no-longer-single Thanksgiving, jobless, and no longer wanting any type of holly fucking jolly. The overhead compartment was still open when I shoved my carry-on into it. Just as I stepped back, I collided with a hard wall of muscle and nearly fell backwards onto my ass in the middle of the aisle. The flight attendant rushed forward, but strong arms stopped me just before impact. My hair fell into my face, as the world came to a sudden stop.

“Hey, I got you.”

Fuck. My. Life. It was him. Mr. Helpful Lumbersnack himself. All muscles and smelling amazing and gazing down at me with concern in his eyes.

One side of his mouth twitched. “And I doubt your life is fucked, and thank you for letting me know I smell...what was it? Amazing?”

Oh. My. God. “I said that out loud?”

He nodded and helped me right myself. “Yep, you did. I am not going to ask what a—what was it again?” I backed away, cheeks on fire and rage in my bones for reasons both known and unknown. I nearly flinched when he snapped his fingers. “A lumbersnack?”

The other passengers were having conversations as we settled into our seats, and the murmurs and low voices created a lull in the cabin that thankfully made the uncomfortable silence not so silent. I sat in my seat, thankful that at least the one next to me would be blessedly empty since Jon was no longer a part of my holiday plans.

“Thank you for catching me, now if you’ll excuse me-” My jaw dropped as he sat down. In my no-longer-boyfriend’s seat. Good smelling muscled body and all. “What are you doing?”

Mirth-filled blue eyes stared back at me. “Getting ready for takeoff. Thanksgiving is tomorrow, and I happen to love turkey and stuffing. Even if it’s takeout.”

“But that seat-”

“Opened up while I was at the ticket counter.”

“I paid for that seat.”

He continued to settle in, pulling out a book and buckling in. “Actually, I paid for this seat about an hour ago. And getting a first class ticket this close to Thanksgiving was a miracle, so...”

I looked around frantically for the flight attendant, already feeling my Bah Humbug sinking further into the marrow of my bones. Yep, I grew up in one of those the Christmas started in November households. We decorated the day after Halloween.

“After it was refunded.”

My head snapped back to him. “Wait, what? He can’t do that. I paid for his seat because he. UGHHHH.” That asshole. “He exchanged the ticket I bought him, didn’t he?” I didn’t wait for or expect an answer. “I should’ve kneed him in the balls harder.”

“Excuse me?” The lumbersnack asked. Oh, God.

He was HUGE. But not in that I’m going to take up all the space manspreading. No, he was huge in the way a girl dreamed of when she wanted to climb a tree but found a hot ginger man. Like his forearms alone could make me dream of sugar plums dancing along them. Oh, the muscles. Was he six-foot-five-and-a-million or something?

“Sugar plums?” he asked, eyes dancing again like he was more amused as I flushed once again. Cheeks heated and my dignity, once again, fleeing for a colder climate. “And I’m six five. Not a million.”

Again, I searched for the flight attendant, but she was busy with someone else. “You can’t sit here.”

“I can, and I promise, I don’t bite. Unless you want me to, and even then, I am definitely not a vampire.” He gestured to the space between the first class seats. “Plenty of room to not ‘manspread’ and I even have an audiobook to listen to, which means unless you talk, I’ll zone out for the flight.”

My eyes widened as I realized the doors were shut, and I was stuck sitting next to him, when all I wanted was to wallow in my misery and figure out a way to explain my single, jobless status over turkey and cherry clove cranberry sauce.

“Excuse me, but you’ll have to fasten your safety belt and stow your items to prepare for takeoff.”

The flight attendant smiled, and as much as I wanted to dislike her for nearly swooning over this...man, she was just doing her job. At least she had one. I nodded, mumbling an apology and buckled up. The click felt as the belt snapped into place felt like the door closing on the last vestiges of my life that were now a pile of unwanted and blown out Christmas lights. And I was too tangled and tired to do anything about it for now.

I inhaled a deep breath, smoothed my hair, and faced my companion for the flight home. “It’s not that I don’t want you here, it’s just that I really was hoping to wallow in self-pity before facing my family because I’ve had a hellish few days. I mean, I don’t really want you here, but it’s not you. At all. It’s all me, and my disaster of a life. Sulking, or maybe drinking myself into a happy tipsy buzz while I make excuses

for the things my mom will ask, or my sister will say to remind me how perfect her life is. While eating my feelings stuffing my mouth with gingerbread cookies. The soft kind, not the hard crappy ones you build things out of.”

Those eyes sparkled again, dancing before he put on a semi-serious expression. “I understand. Sometimes you need to hide for a little bit, lick your wounds, and come up with a game plan before everyone judges you. And those cookies sound amazing.”

I opened and closed my mouth. “How did you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Make me feel better, even just a little? Especially after the way I’ve acted?”

He shrugged. “Judging someone doesn’t do anyone any good. You never know what someone is going through.” A faraway look entered his eyes, then he shook his head. “Sometimes all we need is someone to tell us it’s going to be okay, we’re doing our best, and the sky isn’t falling based on the opinions of other people.”

The plane jostled as it lifted into the air, and I shut my eyes.

“Afraid of flying?” he asked.

I shook my head. “It’s not the flying, it’s the not being able to hold onto anything solid until we hit cruising altitude.”

“Here,” he said, and I opened my eyes. His hand, big and strong, waited, palm up.

“Why?”

“You can hold my hand until we hit cruising.”

“But, I don’t know you.”

“Jacob. And you are?”

I swallowed as the plane stuttered a little more and grabbed his hand. “Sloan.” His skin was warm, his palm rough with calluses that weren’t unpleasant, but more like a map of how hard he must work. Jon’s hands had been smooth. Should’ve been my first clue.

Lazy asshole.

But this? Holding Jacob’s hand? Felt more intimate than the entire span of the relationship I’d let myself believe was something it wasn’t. My cheeks flushed, but he was right. Holding his hand did make everything feel more solid. Or maybe it was the way he looked at me, making sure I was okay.

“Visiting family for the holiday?” he asked.

The plane shuddered as we flew higher and higher. “Big family holiday. Nosy, loud family holiday. You?”

He seemed to think about it for a second, then the corners of his mouth lifted. “Same. Kind of. I’m visiting...family, and picking something up that’s very special to me before I head back home Friday.”

“Not staying the weekend?”

“I have to go back to work,” he said.

His hand felt warm in mine, like the kind of warm you get holding a mug of hot cocoa spiked with something that made your belly warm and your toes tingle.

The sun shone through the windows as we breached the clouds.

I shifted in my seat as much as the lap belt would let me, and pulled my hand from his. My throat felt scratchy all of a sudden and the attempt at clearing it wasn't helping. "Thank you. Cruising altitude and all. Listen away. I'll just be over here, reading away. Trying to be happy you're in that seat and not the person who I bought the ticket for."

A nod, and the kind of smirk that was far too sweet and sexy spread across his face. His neatly trimmed beard framed lips that I was pretty sure had kissed a lot of other lips, and those damn blue eyes were doing the damn tinsel sparkle thing again.

Curse you, mom. All the 'November begins the Christmas season' has turned me into a crazy mixture of Bah Humbug and Deck the Damn Halls this year.

I cleared my throat again. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

With one last look, I let out a sigh and resigned myself to another miserable, single and now jobless holiday with the loudest and nosiest if not well-meaning family ever.

And did my best to ignore the really good looking man who made me want to either climb him or hide in the restroom at the front of the plane for the entirety of the flight home.

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CHAPTER TWO

JACOB

“A re you sure about this, Mary? This is a huge step.” I glanced around the busy airport. The hustle and bustle of the holiday season was in full-force, and I didn’t have a game until late the day after Thanksgiving.

Which meant picking up my daughter and taking her home for more than a few days.

“Jacob, she belongs with you,” she said softly, and that panic I’d been pushing away for the past six months didn’t rear its ugly head. “She needs her dad. After you say goodnight, she makes Hal show her that video of you from last season, when you made that save against Montreal and waved into the camera for her.”

Six months ago. “She does?”

Mary, the grandmother to the daughter I’d never known I’d had until her mother passed away and Mary found my name in a letter Hillary never sent. Drunk driver. Here one day, gone the next. The girl I’d met after three years in the league. I’d been twenty-four, and high off our first division title when this vivacious redhead came up to me at a bar where the rest of my team had been celebrating.

The one and only one-night stand I’d ever had. And it made me a father.

Now, seven years later, and ten years of being between the goal posts, I had an entirely new role to take on.

Dad.

To the sweetest little girl who didn't deserve to miss her mom. At first, when Mary and Hal contacted me, I didn't believe them. After all, I was the guy who was careful as fuck after my parents had married, then divorced, after my mom became pregnant with me. They both remarried and were happy now, but it was ten years of them staying together for me.

Then, when I found out Hillary had passed away the year before and they had found the letter in a box packed away and forgotten, my anger melted away and when they sent me Josie's picture? She had my coloring, and her mom's smile. Because Hillary had been vibrant and her laugh had always stayed with me.

Josie was mine. There was no doubt.

Gradually, over the first few months, Mary and Hal FaceTimed with me, introducing me slowly. And when she found out I was her dad, Josie asked if she could hug me, because her mom told her you could tell if people loved you by the way they hugged you.

My heart was hers from that moment on.

Weekend visits when my schedule allowed. FaceTime every night when I could. The Revenge had been amazing when I told them about my new situation, and they did everything they could to help me get to know my little girl.

This weekend?

Josie was coming to stay with me. For good.

If only that damn puppy hadn't made her eyes red and sneeze and itch. Lesson

learned. At least my teammate Oliver, had her, which meant we could visit. After allergy meds. The doctor had said visits would be ok, but it was living with him that would make her miserable. And since I hadn't wanted to torture my little girl with allergy shots quite yet, having Ollie take him was the next best choice.

Even if she cried and I wanted to do anything to make her smile again. Which was how we'd ended up watching every Disney movie she'd ever loved.

Including the sing-a-long editions.

Yep, the Vezina Trophy winning goalie knew the words to Frozen, Tangled, and Moana by heart now.

Happily so.

I grabbed my carry-on and slung it over my shoulder along with my backpack and headed toward the pick up area.

Mary chuckled. "Jacob, she loves you. The hugs sealed it for her," she added. Her tone hit a more serious tone as she continued. "Last year was hard, but seeing her smile and hearing her laugh again? It's been everything. Hillary would want this."

I hung my head. "Thank you, Mary."

"Thank you , Jacob. You don't have to pay for us to come out to see her. Hal and I can handle it."

"Nonsense. You've been amazing, and you are family now, remember?"

"Glad to hear you're finally listening to me," she teased. "Now, Hal should be there, but he needs to make a stop to help a family friend with a problem before you two get

here. Annie and Ethan's place has the best burgers. Josie said you loved them. Grab a bite while Hal helps Annie fix her freezer door."

"Sounds perfect," I said as I waved to Hal as he pulled up in an impressive size SUV. "Hal upgrade?"

Mary sighed. "Only the best for Josie Bean to be chauffeured around in, especially with all the snow. I'm surprised she didn't tell you. The man loves his toys and took her out in the first snow a few weeks ago. Donuts in the parking lot, over a snow drift. See you soon, Jacob," she said before we said our goodbyes.

"Jacob!"

"Nice wheels, Hal," I said as the big man engulfed me in a hug. We were about the same height, but not everyone was as physical as Hal in my life. Must be Josie and her hugs.

Or maybe that's where Hillary had gotten it from.

"Did Mary tell you about the stop I have to make?"

I nodded as I put my bag in the back of the tailgate and shut it. "I hear the burgers are worth it."

Hal smirked. "Mary already called Annie to have one waiting for you. Annie and her husband own the place, and Hillary was best friend's with Annie. She'd love to meet you, by the way. But they're Montreal fans, fair warning."

"Can't expect everyone to like me after that save, I guess."

"Pretty sure Ethan doesn't like you at all after that one, but Annie'll wear him down."

I climbed in as snow began to fall, blanketing the earth in a soft white. And thought about the hug I knew would be waiting for me in just a little while, and not about the gorgeous girl who sat next to me on the plane or the way her hand felt in mine.

Holy. Fuck.

“This might be the best burger I’ve ever had,” I said to Annie, the petite brunette with her hair piled up high on her head. My stomach was full, and happy, because it really was next level. And the damn fries? I nearly moaned at the memory, sad that my plate was empty.

“I’m sure you say that to all the girls,” she teased. “Don’t worry, I won’t tell Ethan. Though maybe it will make him stop glaring at you.”

I glanced across the bar, which had a sports vibe mixed with the kind of small town presence without being too small town that made it a place I’d definitely want to visit again. And not just for the burger. People filled in the bar, and there was only one empty table in the corner.

Okay, maybe I’d come back for the burgers when Josie and I visited. Ethan, Annie’s husband, glared at me, but lifted his chin when I gave him a thumbs up and pointed to my stomach.

“Nicely done, Mr. Hale. Now, let me go check with Hal to see how things are going, Can I get you anything?”

I shook my head. “You go see Hal, I’m going to find the bathroom and then go try to thaw out your husband by ordering a beer and tipping him well.”

“Not too well, because I am not sure my sister can handle hearing all about the hockey player that decided to make his ego even bigger. She hates hockey,” she

added. “But her other sister, Lindsay, might not believe him without a selfie.”

“Got it. Selfie.”

She laughed and made her way through the crowd toward the back of the bar. I headed to the hallway all places like this had, and came out a few minutes later and made my way to the bar to thank Ethan and try to thaw him out. Since Annie was Hillary’s best friend and had known Josie all her life, I planned on making sure my little girl had all the people who loved her in her life. Even if they were Montreal Triumph fans.

Ethan was busy at the other end of the bar, and I was about to take a seat when I heard a voice I’d been trying to keep in the back of my mind since she said goodbye after we de-boarded at the airport.

“I can’t believe you came home and cashed out my ticket,” she hissed.

“Alone, Sloan?”

“I can’t believe you! Why do you care? And maybe I’m not-”

A man stood in front of her, but her back was to me, giving me a perfect view of her perfectly round ass, long legs, and blonde hair piled up on her head in one of those messy but perfect ways girls did that made guys act like idiots. Her neck begged to be kissed, but somehow, from her tone, I guessed this was her former seat mate. And from the smug look on his face, the guy was even more of a dick than I had thought.

“It was my ticket, sweetheart,” he interrupted, and I could feel the frustration rolling off her, but before she could speak, he continued. “I hope your family wasn’t expecting you to show up with me. After that little show and losing your job, it’ll just be another disa-”

That's it. I'd had enough.

"Hey, sorry, the airline found my bag. And then the car was late. Sorry I missed you, babe," I said, coming up behind her. His eyes widened. Being my size had advantages off the ice, too.

She spun, her lips parted, eyes wide. I arched a brow, giving her the choice to keep going or let this dickhead keep his shit up.

"It's—okay," she stuttered. "At least they found it, right?"

I nodded, a small smile spreading across my face. I leaned in, hugging her and breathing in her sweet scent. "I got you," I whispered in her ear. "Ok?" As I pulled back, she nodded and spun to face him. Chin held so fucking high.

"As a matter of fact, this is Jacob. He just so happens to be visiting family, too, and we—"

"Just started dating. Nice to meet you..."

"Jon."

I held out my hand, and gripped his tightly. The way you do to someone to let them know they shouldn't pull anything else while you can see them. Or find them after. "Wish I could say Sloan mentioned you but..."

"We've been busy getting to know one another every second we can. Jacob's job keeps him very busy," she added as she looped her arm through mine.

Fuck. The way her body felt pressed up against mine. Either I needed to get laid and quick, or this girl was putting some kind of spell over me. I gazed down at her, lips

softly parted. Her pupils dilated and for a moment, there was just the two of us. Until the asshole snorted.

“Seriously? You’re dating... him?”

“I am.” She lifted her chin and leaned in more. I didn’t bother to hide the smirk as his eyes narrowed on where my hand rested on her hip, just below the puffy jacket she wore. For good measure, I let my thumb rub back and forth against the leggings that conformed to her body.

She looked like a defiant and adorable snow bunny. And felt like a damn dream.

This guy should be ashamed of himself, because he was obviously a dickweed.

“Sloan, listen to me. Jacob. Hale. You expect me to believe you’re dating Jacob fucking Hale? No offense,” he added with a smile that made me want to be as violent as one of my teammates on the ice. Guy took it to heart if you looked at any of the guys the wrong way. “Your brother is going to love that. And, for fuck’s sake, he’s a hockey player. You hate hockey. What do you possibly talk about? And where did you meet?”

Sloan froze beneath my hand, but I kept my hand on her, running soothing strokes along the thin fabric. Then, she did something that made me want to kiss her right in front of this asshole and show him exactly what he was missing out on.

She lifted her chin, poked him in the chest and said, “Who says we talk...about hockey? And I don’t care. Because at least he’s not a cheating, lying narcissist with a small dick.” Then, she spun and kissed me with her body pressed along every single inch of mine.

I growled into her mouth as she nipped at my bottom lip. A sigh escaped from her,

and I breathed it in.

“WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK, SLOAN? Are you kissing JACOB FUCKING HALE ? In my bar?”

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CHAPTER THREE

SLOAN

I 'd been kissed, but up until I planted one on Jacob, I didn't know I'd never been kissed the way you read about in romance novels or see up on the screen. Or streaming, maybe. Even without mistletoe, my toes curled, I moaned into his mouth, and nearly swooned. He tasted like cinnamon and I wanted more.

And God, the way he had to bend down made me feel like my abundance in the trunk and five-foot-seven frame was no longer the monster in the room.

“WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK, SLOAN? Are you kissing JACOB FUCKING HALE ? In my bar?”

I pulled back as Ethan, my big brother, and his bellowed voice cut through the sensual haze I wanted to move into and stay forever.

“What?” I asked as my gaze darted between my lumbersnack and my big brother.

“You hate hockey and he plays for the Revenge, Sloan! For fuck's sake!”

Wait, what? Then Jon's words and the look on Ethan's face sank in. Shit. Jacob was a freaking hockey player? He looked down at me, eyes still sparkling with mirth.

Not one to give many details of my dating life (past and most recent relationship the perfect example of why) I turned to my brother and shot Jon a death glare. “Yes, and

the two of you can go puck yourselves.”

Jacob stifled a laugh as I dragged him away before our cover was really blown.

When we reached the hallway where the restrooms were located, I halted, glancing up and down it then nudging open the door I knew was the small closet where Annie kept the things she didn't want Ethan to bother with. Filled shelves lined a small wall, mementos and a few fixtures she was slowly replacing behind his back that complimented her quirky style.

“So, you hate hockey?” He asked.

“Oh, God,” I moaned. I threw my hands up and covered my face. “I never should have done that! And why didn't you say anything? You said you had to work Friday!”

He leaned against the door, as if he was making sure no one could interrupt us. “I do. I have a game that night and an early afternoon skate. Flight leaves at 6 AM, and I have practice five hours after that. And why do you hate hockey?”

I paced back and forth. “Because everyone in my family loves it, and they yell and act obnoxious when all I wanted was to watch princesses and read books in peace. Oh, God! This is even worse, because Ethan is going to tell them Jon and I aren't together and I lost my job, because I'm sure he can't keep his narcissistic mouth shut and...” My head spun and I bent over, trying to not hyperventilate.

“Hey.” A warm hand started rubbing my back through the thick puffer jacket I wore. “Breathe. In. Out. In. Out.” Jacob's voice continued for a few more beats until I could breathe normally again. When I straightened I came face to face with his beautiful bearded face and those damn lips.

“Why do you have to look like that? And why did I lie?”

“Let’s get you out of your jacket so you don’t pass out, Sloan.”

I let him take my coat off like I was a small child and couldn’t do it myself. As soon as it was off, I immediately felt a little better.

“I’ll come over for a little bit. What time is dinner?”

My head whipped up. “What?”

He took my hand in his again, and I stared at it, trying to figure out why he was asking me what time dinner started. “Don’t you have plans? Or...wait, didn’t you say something about takeout?”

He shrugged. “I usually don’t get home, plus my parents are divorced so there’s the having to choose. So I order in. Or I have to play the next day.”

I cocked my head to one side. “Why is this year different?”

Jacob raked a hand through his red hair, leaving it finger tousled and sexy.

Focus, Sloan.

“This year is...complicated. I have plans, but I don’t have to be there all day.” His eyes were filled with concern.

“How is anyone this nice and hot and why did you have to play hockey?”

Oh. God. Did I say that out loud???

His eyes danced with mischief. “Yep, you did.”

I stood and snatched my jacket from the empty shelf he set it on and threw it over my arm. My tiny purse was still on the floor where I hadn’t realized I had dropped it during my freak out. “I appreciate it, but you don’t have to, I will just find a way to hide under the table until the football games and hockey starts up. Maybe they’ll be too distracted and I can sneak leftovers or something-”

“Sloan.”

The way he said my name made me look up. Big. Mistake. “Yes?”

“I’ll come to dinner, stay for a little bit to distract your family, and then leave. Tell them we just started dating recently. No big deal. I love turkey, remember?”

“There’ll be plenty,” I said, breathless, because no one had ever stepped up for me like this. “Are you sure? Because you don’t have-”

“I’m sure. Plus, I kind of want to win over a few Montreal fans. Even if Cole plays there now. It’ll be fun to text him about. Gives me an excuse to reach out.”

I wrinkled my brow. “Cole?”

He smirked. “Ask your brother. So, what time’s dinner?”

CHAPTER FOUR

JACOB

“ I think I’m sung out, JoJo.”

My little girl, adorable in her one piece pajamas with the Revenge logo repeating over and over, sighed as she snuggled into my lap. “Are you sure?” A yawn escaped from her and Mary smiled at me over her braids that she insisted be piled on top of her head. “I promise, I’m not tired. And I know you love Elsa and Anna. And Olaf,” she yawned, “likes warm hugs. Just like me.”

“And me, JoJo. But, tomorrow is a big day. Turkey and stuffing and-”

“Pie,” she whispered as her eyes fluttered, then shut. Eyelashes on her cheeks. Soft snores and a snuggle up a second later, I stood. Holding my little girl in my arms, I trudged up the stairs that led to her bedroom. She didn’t stir as I laid her on her bed, then covered her with the thick pin blanket. I tucked the Revenge stuffy I gave her the first time we met in person. Even in her sleep, she snuggled it, and my heart fucking melted.

As I shut the door, I realized that after tomorrow, my entire life was going to change in ways I’d never known.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come with us tomorrow?”

I nodded. Mary folded the blanket and put it on the back of the couch.”I want you and

Hal to be able to do the things with her while she's here. I don't want to take that away. Or get in the way of those memories."

"Oh, Jacob. You deserve to have those moments, too. Family, remember?" She came over and took my hands in hers. "Hillary didn't mean to take those years away, and I loved her, but she was wrong even if she thought she did it for the right reasons."

I squeezed her hands. "I know. But, Josie is going to need those memories when she's sad or can't hug you. Fuck, Mary, I don't know how the hell I'm going to do this by myself." She let my hands go, and I sank down onto the couch, taking the moment in. And feeling so thankful for Mary and Hal when they could've just thrown the letter Hillary wrote but never sent in the trash.

"The offer still stands, Jacob. Always."

"And I appreciate it. You're already staying with us this weekend and bringing her to my game. But, I can't expect either of you to come and move to Seattle while I figure things out. And we'll be back for Christmas. Then I'll find a nanny who can stay with her when I'm at practice. The team is helping me find someone until I figure out...everything." I sat back. "You've been so wonderful, letting her come and get her room ready. Taking her shopping-"

"With your credit card, Jacob. It wasn't that much of a sacrifice."

I chuckled. "I don't want to mess this up. She's been through so much already, and what if she's better off with you-"

"No. Stop. She'll always have us. But, you are her father. You could've walked away when we contacted you. Never met her, and let her live without a father she never knew, and needs. Jacob, you are going to be a great father. No, you are a fantastic father. Now that little ears are gone, what's this I hear about you dating Sloan?"

Mary studied my face, and for a second I thought she could see straight through me. But then she smiled. “Her sister and sister-in-law were Hillary’s best friends in school. They’ve become the crazy aunts to Josie since she came to live with us.”

Oh. Shit.

I didn’t even think about the connection Sloan had to Josie. I shrugged trying to appear nonchalant. “It’s only been a few weeks. Still new. But, then we found out we were both coming to Archer. Crazy, right?”

She snorted and folded up the blanket Josie had been snuggled up in. “Jacob, I don’t believe in coincidences. ’Tis the season. Maybe you deserve a Christmas Miracle. Now, get some sleep. And you can drive that fancy truck of Hal’s over to her parent’s house for a little while. I’m sure Ethan and his dad will love having you there.” Her eyes lit up with mischief, her mouth twitching as she suppressed a smile.

“Why do I have the feeling there’s more you’re not telling me, Mary?”

In the chair in the corner, Hal snored away, just as he did the moment we started streaming Josie’s favorite, Tangled. He shifted, snoring louder before he settled back into the chair, still fast asleep. “Just be glad Hal is a Seattle fan now.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to ice skate with us? Or get cider after, then we have turkey, Daddy?” Josie stared at me. The same color eyes I saw in the mirror every morning, wide and searching my face as if she wanted to make sure I was okay. Kneeling in front of her as I helped her into her snowsuit, she obediently put one leg, then the other in, arms, and let me zip her up.

Fuck. Every time JoJo called me Daddy , I melted and fell for her more than I already had.

“You,” I said and bopped her nose, “go with Pappy and Nana so I can get a few things done and then we will eat alllll the turkey. Or maybe, you will because I have a game tomorrow.”

“And we all get to see you play after the plane ride,” she grinned. “And I get to wear your number again.”

“Yep, my girl wearing my number. But, today, you get Pappy time. He’s really looking forward to it. You know how he gets, JoJo.”

She nodded and giggled. “And you might steal his cookie, which would make him really grumpy.” She wrapped her arms around my neck. Hal did his best to not laugh as she squeezed tight. “I love your hugs, Daddy.”

“Same, JoJo. Same.”

I watched them drive off in Hal’s new SUV, which I refused to take, opting instead to take Mary’s smaller one. Sloan’s family lived further up in the hills, and though the snow had been on the ground for a few days, Mary made me promise to be careful.

Her grandparents owned a few cabins they rented out to tourists, mainly in the warmer months, a few times when it got colder, but their property was bigger than Mary and Hal’s, and further from town. A few acres with those tiny cabins people rented for the weekend or a few days to get away from life. Wooded, and not quite mountainside, but close.

The GPS guided me, the voice much calmer than I would’ve been if I’d been without it, as it directed me to what it claimed was my destination. It looked more like a long winding road up, and probably down, that went on for longer than any driveway I’d ever been on until a gorgeous cedar sided house appeared with cars and SUVs parked in front. White lights already adorned the outside, draped along the eaves of the roof

and dotting trees. Red bows here and there, and green wreaths on doors and windows.

Very Hallmark and far more perfect and Christmas than I'd expected for a Thanksgiving family get-together. I parked and grabbed the bottle of wine Mary had given me just before they left, insisting it was Sloan's mother's favorites.

Fake boyfriend mode activated, I went up the front steps, onto the wrap around porch and raised my hand to knock on the door. But before my knuckles made contact, Sloan yanked open the door and shut it behind her, her breath visible and eyes wide.

"You came," she said. Her hands rubbed her arms, crossed over her chest and gave me a pretty fantastic view of her cleavage visible in the v-neck of the cream sweater she wore.

"I said I was," I responded as I held up the bottle. "And Mary happened to have this on hand for your mom. Why don't we go inside, where it's not freezing and you won't turn into a popsicle?"

She bounced on her toes, encased in knee-high brown boots, dark blue jeans that made her legs look even longer and as she glanced over her shoulder, made her ass look just as good as I remembered. When she turned back she moved closer and lowered her voice. "There's a few things you should know. Annie already told them all about you, and Ethan is not very happy that you play for Seattle. My sister Hannah is the one with the perfect husband, and yes she's pregnant with baby number two. I told them we met by chance at a bar one night and bonded over movies but that I didn't know who you were until we'd been on a few dates. And we aren't serious but you were coming to town and we decided to fly out together but hadn't really planned on spending the day together. Tessa is my overly flirtatious cousin who might try to grab your ass."

"So, still in the feel out phase, then."

Her brows drew together. An adorable and far too enticing look. Nose wrinkled, she asked, “Feel out phase?”

“When you feel out how the other person fits. Their habits, quirks...”

“Flaws?” she asked with a look that told me volumes about how Jon must’ve treated her. Suddenly I wished I’d broken his hand when I shook it.

“No, flaws aren’t something you see right away. And if you’re with the right person, they’re not flaws, they’re who you are. We’re in the good stage and haven’t started showing our bad yet. Feeling out. Inside.” I spun her around as best as I could with only one free hand.

“And I should tell you, they’re loud and obnoxious and will probably grill you.”

“Got it.”

Her hand reached for the door knob, then she paused and spun again, back against it and bit her lip. “You don’t have to kiss me again.”

“What?”

“I’m sorry if I violated your space or whatever.” Her cheeks flushed an adorable shade of pink, and I had to remind my dick that this was all fake. Even if it was the best fucking kiss I’d had in years. Maybe ever.

“Sloan, you never have to apologize to me. And,” I leaned in close so I could whisper in her ear. “You have my permission to kiss me anytime if you want or need to.”

She shivered, and when I pulled back, those gorgeous tempting lips were practically begging for my attention but I didn’t want to scare her off. And it probably wasn’t the

best idea to make out with my fake very new girlfriend. At least, with no one watching.

“I can?”

I nodded. “Especially if it takes the heat off you. Though, you should know, I think the way you stood up to Jon was pretty badass. The guy is a complete idiot and you’re better off without him.”

“You should also know he cheated on me and stole my idea, and then I kneed him in the balls which was why I was fired.” She looked at me like she had just revealed her secret identity and I was going to announce to the world that Batman was in fact Bruce Wayne.

“No shit.”

She winced. “Yeah. Not my best moment and yet another thing to stress over in there.” A thumb hooked toward the door as her head dropped.

I put my finger under her chin and forced her to look at me as I said, “That’s fucking badass Sloan. Now I don’t feel so bad about wanting to break his hand earlier.”

She bit her lip, fighting a smile. Then, giggled.

Not now, dick. Keep it on the fake boyfriend vibe. Let’s not get creepy.

“You did?”

I smirked. “I did. But, I held back. Knowing you kneed him makes up for the loss. Remind me to never piss you off.”

She laughed, eyes sparkling and opened her mouth when the door at her back swung open.

“Oh, hey you two! Nice to see you again, Jacob! Why don’t you come in and meet the rest of the family,” Annie said, eyes darting back and forth between us with a grin as big as the damn sky on her face. “I tried to keep Ethan under control, but he’s still not loving this whole thing. Personally, I am having the time of my life over it.”

“Annie, nice to see you, too.” I took Sloan by the waist and forced her to go inside. “Sloan, why don’t you introduce me to the rest of your family so they can hate me and the team I play for somewhere warmer?”

“Yet no less hostile,” Annie muttered then ushered us inside the house.

A cacophony of noise greeted us, and Sloan shot me an apologetic look as Annie held out her hand for my jacket. I shrugged out of it, one arm at a time, shifting the wine from one hand to another, until my fake girlfriend took it with a smile and a shake of her head. Then her head tilted to one side as confusion wrinkled her brow. “How do you know Mary and Hal?”

Not sure how to answer, I hesitated, and just as I was about to tell her something close to the truth, Ethan came over with a woman who looked so much like Sloan that I knew this had to be her mother.

“Finally decided to show up, Hale?” Annie nudged her husband hard in the stomach. Ethan grunted and rubbed the spot, then held his hands up when she shot him a death glare. “Fine. But I have no control over Dad or anyone else’s behavior, love of my life.”

Annie’s face split into a grin. “That’s my good boy.”

Their mom waved her hands, shooing them away. “Ethan, take Sloan’s date’s coat and hang it up while Annie makes sure you don’t cause anymore problems.”

“Mom, he’s not my-”

I cut Sloan off before she tried to make herself any smaller in the room. “It’s so good to finally meet you, Mrs. Michaels-”

“Call me mom, Jacob, please.” Laughter from another room drifted in the air, along with Christmas music coming from somewhere further inside. Sloan’s mom put her hand on my arm with a smile. Christmas was in full-effect over every square inch of the house so far, even though it was only Thanksgiving. A tree in the foyer reached for the vaulted ceiling, twinkling white lights and red and white ornaments adorning almost every branch.

“I hear this,” I motioned with the wine, “is one of your favorites,” I said, because I didn’t know how I felt about calling her ‘mom’ when I was only fake dating her youngest daughter. I handed her the bottle, and she took it with a smile.

How old was Sloan?

Pretty sure I wasn’t that much older than her, but still. Maybe 26? 25?

“Mary told you, I am assuming. She always keeps an extra bottle on hand for our lunches.”

And that just complicated things even more.

“She did,” I confirmed as we walked into a large open kitchen that overlooked a large open space with a floor to ceiling rock fireplace, a wall of windows, couches and chairs alongside a long table, and all of Sloan’s family still talking but definitely

checking us out.

“My oldest and hers were best friends with Annie in high school, so we’ve stayed touch. Sloan was four years younger, but she hung around sometimes with them. Where do you live, Jacob? Sloan hasn’t told us much about you, other than what Ethan spilled this morning. And ignore her older brother and probably her father. The hockey thing gets intense.”

So, 25 then. Seven years wasn’t...too crazy, right?

Sloan groaned. “Mom, can we not scare off the brand new guy with the expectations until at least after dinner?”

As Sloan and her mom continued to go back and forth, both smiling as her mom teased her the way my mom would’ve. She reminded me of Mary, albeit with a little more meddle in her tone. I eyed the room, from where Ethan stood in the corner glaring at me until Annie elbowed him again. Next to him was a man I assumed had to be Sloan’s father. In the kitchen, an older woman was putting out trays of food on the large oversized island as a man helped her, smiling and laughing as a little one darted around chasing a large fluffy cat.

“Henry, take Chessy to the couch so Grandma can get the turkey out,” the older man said with a fond smile. “Before she yells at us,” he added in a loud whisper behind his hand.

“K, Grandpa.”

“Yells at you, huh?”

Sloan’s grandpa grinned. “You know I love it when you do, Peggy.”

“Ignore them. They’re worse than Annie and Ethan. Though, I think Grandma taught Annie her left hook,” Sloan murmured.

All that kept running through my mind as she leaned in closer to me was how damn good she smelled. And how right she felt by my side. My lips twitched. “Did she teach you how to knee that douchebag in the balls?”

A brilliant smile spread across her face. “Maybe she did.” Perfect white teeth raked her bottom lip as she glanced over at a pregnant blonde talking to the little boy torturing the poor cat from earlier. “You ready to dive into the fray?”

“Baby, I was born ready.”

CHAPTER FIVE

SLOAN

It was so unfair.

Rule number one. Don't fall for your fake date.

Not going well. Maybe not falling yet, but holy mistletoe, I wanted to kiss him again. The way my sister's eyes were darting between us and having a silent, yet so loud conversation with Annie, told me Hannah was thinking the same thing.

Not that she wanted to kiss him, but she was definitely giving me the nice one, sis, vibes. Jacob, to his credit, endured Ethan and Dad's ribbing and semi-hostile comments. Eventually, he wore them down. And now, thirty minutes later, he had them almost eating out of the palm of his hand. My cousins and their kiddos ran around, and the volume eventually increased as the rest of my family showed up.

My attention kept creeping between whatever Hannah was going on and on about and the way that Jacob had set his plate on the table in front of us so he had a free hand that was tracing circles on my lower back.

My body was on fire, and I swear he smelled like some sort of mixture of a sexy non-flannel-wearing lumbersnack and a balsam fir. The urge to run my nose along his neck and other places even if it put me on the naughty list grew with every second. At first, I kept my eyes on his eyes, but the crystal blue made me squirm. Jacob looked at you like every word you said was more important than the last. So, I switched to his

hands.

Wrong.

Because then I wanted to know how his hands felt on my heated skin.

When his thigh, muscular and thick, brushed against mine, I nearly jumped out of my skin.

“It’s a good thing the snow held off, or you’d be snowed in,” Hannah said as she took a bite. Rather than having everyone sit down and be formal, my grandparents preferred to let everyone rove around the room. Talk. And talk, while eating. “At least the cabins are mostly empty. I think Grams said only one of the three are rented this weekend, and it's blacked-out for Christmas if the two of you need a little privacy.”

“Hannah,” I growled. I’d have just about enough of the whole check out the shiny new toy antics. Between Hannah and my dad, not to mention two of my cousins who were practically salivating over Jacob. Escape the crowd time. “We just started dated! At least let us get to know each other before you make a forced proximity situation happen! I think I see something over there I need to show Jacob before I get anymore embarrassed than I already am!” I stood, brushed my hands down my pants. As I grabbed my plate, Jacob went for it at the same time. Our hands touched, and a shot of electricity shot through my body like a live wire had connected with it. My eyes darted up to his face.

Total mistake.

Because it made every thought and that damn rule fly right up the chimney like Santa on Christmas Eve. Because if a simple brush of fingers felt like this, what would more skin on skin contact feel like?

And that kiss? On replay, over and over, as my cheeks heated with the memory. I could still taste the cinnamon on my tongue and the way his muscles flexed beneath my fingertips.

“Sloan?”

“Yeah?” I asked, my voice breathless.

“You wanted to show me something?”

Oh, God, did I. He looked at me expectantly as Hannah exchanged a glance with Annie across the room. “Could the two of you please, for the love of God, stop telegraphing your opinions back and forth?” I hissed. “And yes, please. I need to show you...something. Anywhere but here.”

Then, Jacob rose from the couch, both our plates in hand, and I became keenly aware of how tall...and big he was. All muscles, and that damn red beard?

Nothing like Jon. Which might be why I was blushing. Unlike my ex, this man took it upon himself to help me whenever he'd had the chance to.

He had to have flaws. I followed him, watching every movement as my grandmother took the plates from him and shooed us away with a huge grin on her face. With a smile of his own, he spun to face me and gestured for me to lead the way. The urge to get away from everyone staring at us made me grab his hand and drag him toward my grandpa's office, off the hall where there was a guest room, the half bath, as well as the one room I'd spent hours playing on the floor when I was younger. The lights were off since everyone congregated in the living room.

But even so, I could make out every line on his face as I dragged him into the office, and shut the door behind him. The way his beard was closely trimmed yet made my

fingers twitch to see how it felt beneath them. His lips stared back at me, daring me to give in to the one thing I'd been fantasizing about since that first kiss.

I studied him closely until he closed in, step by step. "Tell me what's on your mind, Sloan?"

"You really want to know?"

"I asked," he said, his voice low and intimate.

"I was thinking that you can't be real and was looking to see if I could find any flaws."

Closer and closer until my nose tingled as I breathed him in. The same scent, this time without the cinnamon, taunting me when he smiled. "Is that all?"

"No," I whispered. My hand found his chest, either to stop him or make him closer. My fingers curled into his shirt, the fabric soft and expensive. Maybe not so lumber-snack. Definitely not flannel. My head fell back a little so I could look him in the eye. "I was also thinking about that kiss," I admitted in the darkness of the room, hoping it hid the flush in my cheeks.

"I'll let you in on a little secret," he whispered and swept a lock of my hair behind my ear. The calluses on his hand delicious against my cheek. "I am, too."

"But we shouldn't," I protested weakly. "Fake, right?"

"What kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn't kiss my girl when she wanted it? Fake or real, I don't like letting people down, Sloan. And if your sister and Annie watched us come back here, chances are they're going to get suspicious if you don't look a little...mussed."

“Mussed?”

He nodded. “Or disheveled.”

“Disheveled?”

“Kissed.”

“Kissed?”

“Are you going to repeat every word I say Sloan?”

“Only until you shut me up, hockey boy.”

He moved achingly slow, inch by inch until our lips almost touched. Our breath mingled, and just when I thought I couldn't take it, his mouth crashed into mine. The force of it made me stumble backwards until I hit the door. Caged between Jacob and the door, I had no choice but to surrender to the moment. And God, what a moment.

The way he kissed me was like he was using every lick, touch, and second to learn me, what I liked, his hands taking full advantage of how badly I wanted to feel him. The darkness made giving in so much easier, to pretend like he was actually my boyfriend, and that he wanted to kiss me just as much as I wanted to kiss him.

One hand slid underneath my sweater, hot on my stomach and I moaned into his mouth. He pulled back just enough that I protested, but then he said, “He was such an idiot to lose a woman like you, Sloan.” Jacob nipped at my bottom lip, and I whimpered. “But who you are isn't defined by who you bring home, or your job. You are gorgeous, funny, and so fucking smart. Your family sees that, and that's why they want to see you happy. Remember that.”

And then he kissed me until we were both breathless and wanting more.

“Sloan!” Ethan knocked on the door. “I hope you’re not making out on grandpa’s desk with the enemy,” he teased. “Jacob is a decent guy, but he still plays for the enemy.”

Jacob chuckled and rested his forehead against mine.

“We should probably go back to being tortured. But only if you want to.”

“I want to.”

I paused as he stepped back from me. “How do I look?” I asked, smoothing my hair.”

Jacob grinned. “Mussed. Disheveled. And kissed.”

My lips twitched as I fought a smile. “Thank you. For...”

He swept my hair behind my ear again. “You are more than welcome, Sloan. Always.”

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CHAPTER SIX

JACOB

Two hours later, Sloan leaned back against me like she'd always been doing as I sat on a tall barstool, going back and forth with Ethan and one of her cousins about the last game I'd played.

The one where I added another shutout to my tally.

"The pipes saved your ass," Ethan said. He raised his beer and pointed it at me. "And if LeCavalier was in the net, he wouldn't need them."

I scoffed. "That's because he relies on his line."

"Don't go knocking our goalie just because your line isn't as good," he said with a laugh, teasing more than meaning it for real. "Too bad we got Sanders in that trade. Come to the other side, Hale. If Sloan's going to date you, the least you could do is make it so the family isn't ashamed."

"Okay, enough. Don't make me get Annie over here to rein you in," Sloan said as she leaned back against me.

As much as I knew this was all fake, getting ribbed by her brother and enjoying holiday for once felt...right. More than right. The last few hours, I watched as Sloan let herself enjoy the ribbing and even joined in even though she claimed to hate hockey. Her laughter ingrained in my mind forever, sexy and free. The worries she

had about her family were more about letting them down in some silly way than rooted in truth.

Even not her not having a job seemed to not be a big deal, though Hannah ran through a ridiculous number of dream jobs. Like male romance cover wrangler or Christmas cookie taster and even social media manager for the most hated yet loved goalie by the Michaels.

The last one had me wondering what it would be like to keep Sloan by my side for longer than just a few hours.

Then my phone vibrated in my back pocket, Sloan stepped forward so I could check it.

JJ: Daddy, we are done but I saved you a cookie!

And reality made its appearance, reminding me that this wasn't real.

"Everything ok?" Sloan asked, eyes filled with concern.

I nodded. "Yeah, but I-"

"Have to leave," she said wistfully, coming in closer to whisper in my ear. "Thank you, hockey boy." She squeezed my upper thigh, and fuck if it didn't hit me that this might be the last time I see this girl.

"Give me your phone."

Her brows drew together. "Why?"

"Humor me."

Sloan reached behind me to where she had set it earlier. Annie watched, amusement dancing in her eyes. “Phone, as requested.”

I held it up, and snapped a selfie as I pulled her against my body and nuzzled her cheek.. “Send it to me. I want to remember this day. No matter what the future brings.”

A second later, my phone pinged, and I saved her in my contacts. I leaned in closer, hating that I had to leave, but at the same time, knowing it was my little girl I was going to was everything. “And now you will always remember the day you stopped worrying about enough for the people who love you.”

I said my goodbyes, betting hugs from her mom and grandma, Hannah, Annie, and her cousin that held in a little longer until Sloan pulled her off me. Sloan walked me to the door and handed me my jacket.

“Thank you, Jacob. For...everything.”

“Hey, look up! One last one for the road,” Annie called from the kitchen as she peaked her head out, pointing over our heads.

Mistletoe .

“One last kiss?” I asked.

Sloan’s cheeks pinked, and fuck I wanted to kiss her so badly.

“Yes, please.”

Right before my lips touched hers, I murmured, “And now you have my number if you ever need me, Sloan.”

“I should’ve known you had a plan, hockey boy.”

Then I kissed the girl I never saw coming, and hated to see her face as I left her behind.

Three weeks later...

“Letty’s nice, but I like when you’re here, too,” Josie said as she bounced at the table. Letty, the nanny the Revenge HR department helped me find, laughed as she gathered the dishes and cleared the table. “We both agreed you tell better jokes.” Her eyes widened, red curls flying as she looked at the older woman. “But I do like you, Letty, promise!”

“Oh sweetheart, I know. But yes, your daddy tells better jokes.” She hid her mouth behind her hand with a wink. “Even if they’re dad jokes.”

“I can clean this up,” I protested.

“Nonsense. Now, go and get ready for your game, Mr. Hale. And Miss Josie and I will figure out what she’s going to wear tonight so we can cheer and eat all the soft pretzels.”

Josie sighed. “I do love pretzels, Daddy. Especially when you’re in the box.”

Three weeks of having Josie with me, two since Mary and Hal went back to Colorado. They FaceTimed with Josie every night, and had helped me interview the nannies. Mary and Letty hit it off right away, and I trusted Mary to know more than I did about what Josie would need. Letty watched Josie during practice and my games. When I bought the house this summer, I had a gym outfitted so that I could do my workouts at home when I could.

“And we’re going to see my puppy with Miss Corey before the game, Daddy!” Her eyes lit up, and made a mental note to thank Oliver again for taking the little rascal and letting Josie see him. “Oliver said I could still call him mine, but he thanked me for sharing so good. I made good choices. And Miss Corey said she’d make sure I could do the family skate without falling on my bottom-”

“Josie! That’s a secret!” Letty laughed.

The day after Christmas, the Revenge planned a family skate at the arena and Letty had hinted that Josie had something special planned.

Six-year-olds were notoriously bad at keeping secrets, she said, and wanted to make sure I was ok with her learning how to skate.

The ache in my chest bloomed into the Grinch’s heart growing when I thought about taking my little girl out on the ice. Last season, I hadn’t told anyone about Josie until I knew what the future looked like for the two of us. But when I finally told the guys and the organization, the support floored me. And now, over half a year later, my little girl sat in the kitchen going on and on about which jersey she was going to wear because Sophia and Coach sent over a slew of them. I blame Sophia, the girl I had thought was the one for about a split second before I found out Coach was the guy for her. Once Josie said she liked the cropped Venge Hype Team hoodie she wore one day, Sophia had her named an honorary member. And now JoJo’s closet was filled with what seems like a thousand variations.

“Didn’t hear a thing,” I laughed as I stood and planted a kiss on her head. “Time to get ready, JoJo.”

“Kiss the pipes for me, Daddy,” she beamed as I ruffled her hair.

“On it.”

“You keep getting shutouts, and that girl’s family might switch teams,” Kas teased.
“And who knows, maybe it won't be so fake , after all.”

I scrubbed a hand over my face as I sat down after the game. A hot shower soothed the spots the fucking puck had flew into me like a missile, but even so, I was high not just on the shutout, but from seeing Josie cheering behind the glass with Letty and Sophia. And when Sophia took Josie out on the ice between periods, I hid in the hallway to watch as Corey helped my little girl teeter on her new skates. She thought I didn’t know Hal had bought her as an early Christmas present.

Cutest thing ever.

Sloan texted me a few days after Thanksgiving, thanking me again, and once more after we beat Montreal to let me know Ethan had told her I deserved the win, even if Sanders had scored on me.

Sloan: Even a hockey hater like me found that butterfly hot.

GOALIE: You know what it’s called? Impressive.

Sloan: Annie told me while Ethan feigned outrage. It was loud, but kinda fun for the first time in my life.

GOALIE: If I knew you were watching, I’d have given you a secret signal.

Sloan: I told Ethan when you kissed the posts that you were kissing me.

GOALIE: Now that’s all I’ll think of...kissing you. Definitely better than the pipes.

Fuck .

I glanced at the Revenge Captain, and sat back as the rest of the guys finished removing their equipment. “Not happening. Fake dating means no feelings.”

He snorted. “Keep lying to yourself. But if she’s suddenly watching a sport she claims to hate and texting you? There’s feelings, Hale.”

Letty ended up taking Josie home after popping into the family area so my girl could give me a sleepy hug.

“I think the between periods skate wore her out. She was trying so hard to not fall so you’ll be impressed,” she whispered over Josie’s red curls as her eyes fluttered shut.

“I should only be a few minutes behind you,” I grinned and kissed the top of my daughter’s head. “Sweet dreams, JoJo.”

I slung my gym bag in the passenger seat of my SUV, adjusted the mirror, and stuck my phone in the holder just as it pinged.

Sloan: Emergency fake boyfriend situation. Can you talk?”

Hell. Yes. I started the engine, my dick already excited at the prospect of hearing Sloan’s voice.

I hit the call button, and she picked up before it even rang.

“You can absolutely say no, because I can pretend we had a big blow out or something, but my mom told Ethan and Annie you were coming to town from Mary, and they asked if you were coming over for Christmas Eve because Hal and Mary do Christmas morning and you’d be free and then Hannah butted in and I might've said we were getting serious because she teased me about watching your games and-”

“Woah there, Sloan, take a breath.”

“This was a bad idea, never mind, I’ll just say we had a fight and then figure out how to hide all night,” she said, her voice raising an octave.

“Yes.”

Shit . Did I just agree to go to Sloan’s family’s Christmas Eve?

“Wait, what?”

“Yes, I am coming to Archer and I’m visiting Mary and Hal. And yes, I’d love to fulfill my fake boyfriend duties again on Christmas Eve. They have plans that day, anyway, and I was going to find a way to occupy myself, so...”

“We can totally break-up after and I promise I won’t bug you ever again.”

Oh hell, no. I wanted her to bug me.

And I wanted to kiss her again. Along with other naughty things that would land a fuckton of coal in my stocking. “Sloan, breathe. Let’s take this one fake date at a time, okay?”

After we solidified times and places, her grandparents' place again, she sighed. Sexy and sleepy, as if she’d worn herself out and the adrenaline had worn off. “I feel like I am always saying this to you, but thank you, Jacob. I owe you.”

“I’ll take a kiss if you really feel like paying me back.”

“Don’t tempt me, lumbersnack.”

“Lumbersnack?”

“Did I say that out loud?”

“Oh, you did. Better hide the mistletoe, Sloan.”

“Who needs mistletoe? Oh God, I just did it again, didn’t I?”

“Oh, yeah. And you’re definitely landing on the naughty list.”

“So worth it,” she laughed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SLOAN

C hristmas Eve Eve...

Rule number two: Don't Fall For The Hot Hockey Goalie You're Snowed In With...

"I can't believe you're picking him up in this snow," Annie mumbled next to me.

"I can't believe you insisted on coming along," I countered and turned up the volume on the radio so she'd stop questioning me about all the things I knew about Jacob.

"It was either me, or Ethan. I figured you'd rather have me. He's been insufferable since he found out I'm pregnant. Plus, he sent you fancy gingerbread cookies. Maybe he has more." She sniffed. "And you rarely share anything about your dating life. Color me happily curious and wanting to see the two of you together."

I snorted. "So what you're really saying is you escaped with me not because you're worried about me driving, but because your husband won't let you out of his sight for the past two weeks. And you want to steal my favorite cookies if he has more to give me." Outside the front windshield, the snow fell, thick and fluffy, but the forecast had called for a winter storm to roll through in the next few hours. Most of the flights had been delayed or cancelled but so far, the roads were ok, at least close to the airport. For now.

"He's mad I didn't tell him until I was a few more weeks along, but I didn't want to

disappoint him if anything was wrong.”

Last year, Annie miscarried early in her first pregnancy, and it had devastated the two of them.

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell Hannah or me,” I muttered with a smile. I’d wondered why Annie had started wearing loose clothing. Looking back, she’d been barely sipping, or fake sipping, wine at Thanksgiving.

My sister-in-law shrugged. “I didn’t want Hannah to worry, or you. New relationship and all. Plus the other stuff you’ll have to deal with.”

I pulled up in front of arrivals, and searched for Jacob. “What other stuff?”

“I can’t believe you’re taking this so well,” she said. “Mary, made mom, Hannah, and I stay quiet about the whole thing. She said he was keeping it close to his chest until things were settled and all, but I really thought you’d be kinda free-”

But I wasn’t listening to a word she said. The man I dreamed of and probably shouldn’t stood out in the snow. Oh, lumberjack for Christmas. “Oh! There he is!”

Jacob lumbered through the snow, flakes dusting his red hair and catching in his neatly trimmed beard. I jumped out of the car and went to the back of the SUV but before I knew it, he swept me up in his arms and spun me around. “Hey you,” I said, breathless, as he set me on my feet. “Happy to see me?”

CHAPTER EIGHT

JACOB

“Happy to have a few days of semi-calm before the run for the division starts. And yes, I'm also happy to see you.”

He walked to the driver's side and shooed me to the passenger door as Annie climbed into the back. “I'm driving. This weather is insane, and only going to get worse. My flight for the day after Christmas is already delayed because of the storm that's coming through.”

“I thought you didn't have practice or a game until the 28th?”

I adjusted the mirror and started the engine. “The Revenge have a team event at the arena I can't miss. I can, but I don't want to.”

“Hey Jacob. Nice to see you again. Nice save a few days ago. Sloan and I were very impressed,” she teased. “Even if she kept leaving the room because Ethan was yelling so loudly at the TV.”

I pulled out into traffic after checking to make sure Sloan was safely buckled in.

“It's not like I miss a lot, plus I've been working,” Sloan said, sticking her tongue out at Annie in the rearview mirror.

“I am so glad you found something that you love to do,” Annie gushed. “And from

home. Which means you'll have plenty of time to help-"

"Can we please talk about other things?"

"Like my congrats on the baby," I added, laughing as Sloan squirmed in her seat. Ever since she'd called me last weekend, we'd talked almost every night after Josie went to sleep. About her new job freelancing for a PR company that worked with charitable donations and sports teams as well as events in the Seattle area. And the fact that Annie was pregnant. She'd squealed so loudly I thought she was going to wake up Josie with that one.

Every time, I'd wanted to tell her about my daughter, but when she didn't ask after watching the game, where I'm almost positive they'd shown her after my latest shutout, I wasn't sure why she wasn't bringing it up.

"Thank you. Now, concentrate on the road so we get home in one piece," Annie admonished.

I chuckled. "Yes, ma'am."

As we neared the house, or should I say compound after looking up the palace on the internet, the snow fell thicker and faster. The wind picked up and the temperature dropped. Sloan's phone rang, and she answered it with a grimace.

"Hi! No, we're almost- wait, what? Ok. I know, Ethan, I don't want her out in this either. Yes, I'll have-"

"Give me the phone," Annie demanded as he hand shot out between the seats. She grabbed the phone, and started to tell her husband to calm down.

"The roads are getting worse, and they're advising people to stay off the streets

except for emergencies. I know we were going to drop you off first, but Ethan wants us to drop off Annie first, then he'll drive you back?"

One glance told me the snow wasn't going to let up anytime soon, and I didn't blame him for wanting Annie safe. Hell, I hated that Sloan was out in this weather. The SUV slid, and I corrected as she clutched the dashboard. I nodded. "Let's get the two of you home, then we'll go from there. Then I can call Mary, too, to make sure she's ok."

Thank fuck Josie had flown in the day before to spend extra time with her grandparents since I was at practice and with my physio almost all day. She'd become an expert flyer, and loved that she got to sit in first class every time she went back and forth. Which wasn't as much now that she was with me in Seattle.

There was no way I wanted her out in this storm. Up ahead, I could barely make out the turn to the house, the snow was falling so quickly. There was at least a foot and a half, if not more, blanketing the ground already, and it wasn't going to let up anytime soon.

"Hold on," I warned them both as I got enough speed to plow through the initial pile of snow, and slowly, we made it up the long drive until the SUV stopped about fifty feet from the front of the house.

Ethan came flying out the front door. Annie rolled her eyes. "It's going to be a long nine months for us, kiddo."

As her husband gathered Annie in his arms and carried her to the house while she protested loudly, Sloan wrinkled her nose. "I'm not sure you're going to be able to get back down the drive," she yelled.

I knew she was right as I grabbed my bag from the back. The wind picked up and the

world was white even in the dark of night, thick and heavy. I followed her up to the house, steadying her once or twice as we trudged through the snow.

“It’s just falling too fast to keep up with,” Sloan’s grandma said as she ushered us inside. “Mary called, Jacob, and said to tell you everything is fine, not to drive, and stay here.”

A pang of guilt sank into my chest. I’d told Mary and Hal about Sloan after they’d asked on Thanksgiving, telling them we’d just met and were seeing if we fit but that I didn’t want to make a big deal yet because of Josie. Mary beamed, and I’d since learned Hannah and Annie had taken Josie out a few times when she came to live with her grandparents after Hillary passed.

“Sloan is already in the cabin closest to the house since Ethan and Annie are staying in the spare bedroom for the night.” Her eyes twinkled with mischief. “I even put the honeymoon package in there, and kept the boys from decorating with Montreal Triumph things. Men.”

Sloan’s eyes widened. “Maybe Jacob wants—”

“Thank you, that’s so generous of you.”

Annie called from the couch where Ethan had covered her with a fuzzy blanket and delivered hot cocoa, “I’m sure Josie is getting spoiled rotten. Mary and Hal bought the entire toy store, I think, and that’s not even including what Hannah and I bought. I hope you have room for it all!”

“Josie?”

“You two should head over before it gets any worse. Fridge is stocked, too.”

I guided Sloan to the door, not wanting to have this conversation in front of her family. “I’ll tell you in a few minutes. Trust me, okay?”

After a second she nodded.

And I prayed she’d understand that her fake boyfriend came with a little something special with the package.

Rule Number Three: Ignore How Sexy You Think The Single Dad Hockey Player Is.

The wind howled outside as I shut the door and shook off the snow. I dropped my bag on the floor as Sloan went to the kitchen area and poured a glass of wine.

“Wine?”

“Sure.”

“White ok?”

“Yep.” She sat two glasses on the counter, tried to get the cork out and let out a frustrated sound. I walked over, trying to ignore the proximity of her body, and failed. “Here, let me.” She handed me the corkscrew, eyes intent as I uncorked the bottle and poured. She immediately downed hers and held out her empty glass for a refill. I poured and she took a small sip, eying me over the rim, then licking her lips. “Ask.”

“Who’s Josie?”

I let out a sigh. “My daughter.”

Her jaw dropped. “You have a daughter?”

I nodded, tipped the glass back, and refilled it.

“And you didn’t think this was important fake relationship news that should be shared?” She drained her glass again, and I refilled it once more. “At this rate, we’re going to go through all six bottles.”

“Six?”

“Honeymoon suite, remember? It's stocked for more than just one night.”

Bottle in hand, I followed her to the living area, and she spun to face me, the fireplace illuminating her curves and framing her blonde curls in a halo. “I just found out about Josie this spring.”

Her hand flew to her forehead. “JOJO! Hillary! Oh my God , that’s how Mary knows you. And Hannah. Annie . I must look like such an idiot. ” She groaned and sat down on the couch, wineglass empty once more. The bottle flew out of my hand as she grabbed it and refilled it.

“No, you’re not. I told Mary we were taking it really slow since you just got out of a relationship, and I just became a dad.”

“That must be why Annie was acting strange after Thanksgiving on the phone and when I visited last week. She knew. Ugh, she keeps secrets like a damn vault!”

“I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want you to feel uncomfortable. I tried, a few times but-”

“It’s okay.” Her bottom lip trembled.

“Hey, why the tears?” I asked as a single drop traced down her cheek. I wiped it

away.

She sniffled. "I am not Hillary. How did you even know her?"

I grabbed the back of my neck. "It's a little embarrassing."

Her hand flew to cover her eyes as she flopped back further into the couch. "One night stand. I'm right, aren't I? She was away at college, and she was gorgeous and you two...and then Josie. And I'm nothing like Hillary. I get it."

"Hey, hold on."

I put my glass down and took hers. She stood, and started pacing the room. "We can totally say we had a fight and this will be all over. There's a couch, I'll take that since you're way too long for it, obviously. And then tomorrow you can leave and go be with Josie."

I'd never seen a more beautiful sight, and even though I had promised myself I'd let her take the lead, no matter what on this trip, I walked over, wrapped my arms around her and stopped her.

Right under the damn mistletoe I was sure one of the Michael's women had strategically placed, along with a few others, around the cabin.

"Maybe the fuck it moment is so good because it's when that tightly held onto control finally snaps because you need something so bad the Universe decides to harness all that I want you but I shouldn't energy into one tiny atom that just explodes." That was it, right there.

"But-"

“I’m going to shut all that down and kiss you now unless you tell me no. We may be stuck in here, Sloan, but I’ll never do anything you don’t want me to do. Say the word.”

Eyes wide, she asked, “You don’t want to fake break-up with me?”

“Fuck no, baby,” I breathed. Hand gripped her and pulled her in, watching and waiting to see if she was going to tell me no. When she didn’t, I made sure she knew just how much I wanted to not fake break-up with her. “If we’re going to be trapped here, I might not be able to resist kissing you. Touching you. Fuck, it’s all I’ve been thinking about since you fell into my arms in that airplane aisle. But Josie’s a part of the package.”

My erection pressed into her belly and her eyes widened, but she said, “Josie is...the sweetest, and she’s practically family already, Jacob. I can’t believe I didn’t see the resemblance before and I love Josie and package deals-”

I shut her up before she could say another word, my mouth claiming hers, Swallowing her soft moans as she arched her back, her softness against my growing dick. “Wait, are we catching feels?”

I growled. “Too late. I’ve been caught. And I want-”

“To stuff my stocking?” she teased.

I lifted her up. “I want to fill you with my cum until you can’t move, over and over. Make every inch of you mine. And make sure everyone knows it. From here on out. baby.”

She mewled, and my hands went under her ass, legs wrapped around my waist, my dick pressed against her core, hot and I was so fucking sure wet, beneath her

leggings. Lips and teeth crashing until I laid her out on the couch. With rough hands, I yanked her leggings off, and growled when I saw the thin scrap of purple that covered her pussy.

Her eyes, heated with desire, stayed on mine as I slid them down her legs. The sweater she wore tore over head and off as she laid back down in only her bra. That matched the thing I'd just stuffed in my pocket. Her curves. Her skin. I kissed down one leg then up the other. "I love you in Revenge colors, baby."

"Jacob," she moaned.

"So fucking wet for me, aren't you? Ready for my cock and I haven't even touched you yet. Tasted you." I bent down over her, breathing her in, nuzzled her soft curls, then finally licked along her core. Back arched, I spread her legs and delved into her, starving after only one taste.

Sloan squirmed on the couch and I reached up, pushing the bra up over her full tits. God, she was all curves in all the right places and even better than the times I'd fantasized about doing exactly this all these weeks.

"Jacob," she pleaded.

One finger, then two, stretching her, wet and swollen. I bit on her clit, just enough, and she thrashed her head side to side, her inner walls clenching. My fingers curled, and she gasped and made the most fucking sexy noises I'd ever heard as she came all over my beard.

And I licked up every fucking drop. "Mine," I growled. Then, I shucked off my jeans, along with the rest of my clothes. My eyes went around the room, searching. "There has to be condoms if this is the honeymoon suite," I muttered as she watched me, eyes on my cock.

“I’m not sure they’d be big enough,” she squeaked, still blissed out. “And I seem to recall something about your cum being inside me.”

Fuck. Me.

“Are you sure, baby?”

She nodded, needy and wanton.

“Say it. Tell me you want me fuck you bare. Raw. Come inside that sweet pussy I stretched with my cock. Say it, Sloan.” I fisted my cock as she watched, fascinated. “Be a dirty girl for me and I’ll fuck you so good, fill you with my cum, and make you beg for more.”

She licked her lips. “Please, Jacob, fuck me bare and fill me with your cum. Please?”

I smirked as I knelt between her thighs. “No more fake boyfriend, Sloan. Once this pussy is mine? It’s all real.” Her eyes widened as I lined up my thick cock at her entrance. I eased in inch by inch, stretching her until her eyes rolled back. “That’s it, baby. Take my cock. Such a dirty girl, taking all my thick cock in your sweet little pussy.” Hips wiggled as she tried to get me all the way in. “You want it all, baby?” She nodded, unable to say a word. I thrust in as she gasped, her wetness coating me as I pumped in and out, giving her time to adjust.

“Jacob,” she whimpered.

And then I lost all control, pounding into her. I reached in between our bodies and found her clit, pressing and circling it, each thrust faster and harder than the last until a slick sheen of sweat coated our bodies. Her inner walls clenched. “That’s it, baby, choke my cock. FUUUUUCCCCCKKK.”

I came hard as she let out a gasp and trembled over and over, shooting thick ropes of cum into her pussy, filling her and marking her as mine.

No more faking.

“I have an entirely new appreciation for Mistletoe,” she giggled. “And the fake dating trope.”

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CHAPTER NINE

JACOB

S now fell outside in a never ending blanket covering the earth, and I spent the rest of the night learning every fucking inch of Sloan's body. What made her blush, what made her wet, and how many different ways I could make her orgasm.

We made it to the bed just before dawn.

The next morning, I took full advantage of the oversized shower and washed her body, then dried her with the fluffy towels before feeding her breakfast. Around nine, Ethan came knocking on the cabin's door.

"You'd better be clothed. I may kinda like Jacob even if he's with the Revenge, but I don't want to see his naked ass."

I called Josie, who was very concerned that I not drive until it was safe, and talked to Mary before kissing Sloan under another bough of mistletoe as Ethan groaned.

Carefully, the three of us climbed over the snow, until I made her jump on my back as we made our way to the house. Inside, I could smell cookies and coffee and something else that made my mouth water. Aside from Sloan, of course. I set her down inside the foyer and kissed her again under the same mistletoe from Thanksgiving.

"Show off," Ethan muttered. "Now Annie's going to want piggy-back rides."

“Duh,” his wife said from the kitchen where she was pouring coffee into mugs. “And when I’m huge, you’ll have to carry me everywhere because I won’t be able to see my feet.”

“Stop looking at me like that,” she hissed as I snaked my arm around her waist and pulled her in for a kiss.

“Like what?”

“Like you want to eat me.”

“I do like how you taste, baby.”

Her cheeks did that thing again, and I groaned, because now that my dick knew how it felt to be inside her, it was all I could think about. “I should’ve known your real boyfriend was going to blow the fake boyfriend out of the water.”

“You haven’t seen anything yet,” I promised.

The rest of the day was spent opening gifts, eating and FaceTiming with Josie until it was time for me to go.

The way her eyes lit up when she opened the gingerbread cookies and jumped up to keep them out of Annie’s hands?

Fucking gorgeous . So worth not eating them and imagining I was tasting her after I picked them up and had to smell them the entire plane ride.

We sat side by side on the couch, and I had to restrain myself from seeping her onto my lap.

“I know you have to leave, but-”

“It’s a good thing you live close to Seattle.”

She beamed. “Twenty minutes. Definitely close enough to do...all sorts of things.”

“Like come to the family skate the day after tomorrow and officially meet Josie.”

Her brow wrinkled. “I’ve met Josie.” She pointed to Hannah. “Sister to her Godmother, her grandma is my grandma’s bestie.”

“As my girlfriend, Sloan.”

“Oh,” she breathed.

“And not my fake one either. Because I plan on having all kinds of real boyfriend time to make up for those weeks we missed out on when we were supposed to be dating.”

“Looks like my Christmas wish came true.”

“Oh yeah?”

She nodded. “A family holiday where I didn’t have to explain why I was single. Only this time, all it took was a little snow, and me falling for the lumbersnack. Who let me kiss him anytime I wanted.”

SLOAN

A cacophony of sound greeted me as I made my way into the Revenge Arena the day after Christmas.

Thankfully, the storm hadn't been as intense near the airport, though there were delays and a few cancellations. But I made it, and so had Josie and Jacob, who sent me a text when they landed, along with info for the family skate.

Families wearing Revenge hoodies and jerseys dotted the ice, a few sitting in the team boxes sipping hot cocoa or talking.

"You must be Sloan!" A tall woman with long brown hair made her way to me, a smile on her face and a jersey in her hands. "Jacob is a lucky man. Tell him I'm glad he finally had luck with the mistletoe, but don't let Coach Grumpy Pants over there hear me say that. All I need is another lesson in the penalty box. Anyway," she smirked as she handed me the jersey. "This is yours. And Jacob is over there with his little one." She pointed to the far corner of the ice where Josie and a blonde woman with a sleek shoulder-length cut guided the little girl on the ice.

"Thank you," I murmured, eyes on my man as I took off my jacket and slipped on his jersey. When I neared them, I overheard Josie as she giggled.

"See! I told you my present was the best! One day, I'm going to be just like you, Daddy. Or maybe Miss Corey. I think I'd rather score goals than block them."

Jacob laughed as he scooped her up, adorable in her mini Jacob Hale jersey and

skates. Red hair in the cutest braids and a huge smile on her face. Then he spotted me and whispered something in her ear. Josie nodded.

They skated over and I couldn't help but smile.

“JoJo!”

“Hi Miss Sloan!” She looked at Jacob who nodded. “Daddy said you're his new girlfriend and since I already know you, that I can be your new special friend, too. But I told him that was silly because you were my friend first. And he gets to have you as his new special girlfriend. And then, he asked if that was okay.”

“And what did you say, JoJo?”

“I asked if that meant we could play here, too, and not just with Hannah when we're at Grandma and Grandpa's house. He said yes! But if you sleep over, can we do hot cocoa even in the summer?”

Jacob laughed. “Let's take things a little slow, JoJo. Maybe Sloan doesn't like sleepovers.”

“But Daddy, she sings all the Frozen songs by heart. And Encanto.”

“We don't talk about Bruno, JoJo. Wait, aren't you the one who told me I could have whatever I wanted? I think that would be amazing. I happen to love sleepovers. Snowed in or otherwise.”

Josie wiggled out of his arms, wanting to skate more as more kiddos and families filled the ice. Jacob slid to a stop next to me. “So, you'd like to sleep over again, huh?”

I nodded. “But only if you want to-”

He kissed me, in front of everyone. No faking or pucking around in sight.

Want know how the rest of the team spent the family skate and read a bonus scene from Go Puck Yourself? [Click here](#) ...

Keep reading for a peek at the first Montreal Triumph Hockey series and Cole and Eden's full story, Check My Body, Grumpand be sure to check out the team Cole played, Seattle Revenge!

Eden

I had a stalker. But for one night, I wanted to forget the texts, the flowers and everything that went bump in the night.

A haunted house charity event put on by the Montreal Triumph fit the bill. Halloween, costumes, masked men. Hockey players. A girl could indulge in the fantasy that everything was right in the world. For one fun, scary night.

Little did I know what I was getting myself into.

Cole

Leaving the team I'd thought I'd retire on was the last thing I expected. But a season ending injury and the estranged dad I hadn't talked to inters flipped everything I thought I knew on its head.

Until I saw her. Pink hair, running from me, and my world made sense. Because she was mine.

Warning. The players from the. Montreal Triumph don't always play by the rules.

It's a whole new era.

Possessive.

Obsession.

MINE.

Tropes: Stepbrother/sister, age gap, masked moments hockey romance.

Read it here .

And I have two special Montreal Triumph prequels up next! One is a Masked Hockey Halloween story that leads up to Check My Body, Grump, and the other is a best friend's older brother revenge fvck coming soon in the Well Played Sports anthology!