



Pucked-Up Roommate Deal (Rustin University #3)

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Category: Sport

Description: I'm just trying to get through this semester and forget my checkered past. My roommate, the star winger for our school's hockey team and resident filthy-rich boy, has other plans. He needs a date for a gala his family is hosting, and he's picked me to be his beard. Though, since I'm male, I'm sure the term does not apply.

It seems that his cousins are bent on setting him up with any single guy they know, gay or not, so my roomie is taking things into his own hands and he wants to bring me as his date. That's his plan anyway. It doesn't matter that I'm "not gay" as he says. Any male body will do.

Little does he know, I very much swing his way. I've been crushing on him since the day we moved in together. I just hide my feelings better than he could dream of—even when he walks out of the shower all steamy and hot and devilish temptation with a big stick—a hockey stick, of course.

I have good reason. My past and his wealthy family will never mix. Problem is, I just can't say no.

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Nash Higgins

“Nash, what are you doing on the fourteenth?”

I didn't look up, despite my roommate Porter's random question. Sitting on the floor, my back leaning against the couch, I finished writing the equation I'd been working on. Part of it anyway.

“Nash,” Porter repeated, his voice demanding. “What are you doing on the fourteenth?”

Sighing at the interruption, I glanced up from my calculus book and the notes spread out all over the coffee table before me and slid my gaze over to Porter. Fresh from the shower, skin still wet and dark hair standing on end, he stood in the doorway of his bedroom, with only a towel slung low around his slim waist. The position revealed his hard belly and the thin trail of hair that led toward his junk.

God's sake, Porter.

Heat tingled through me, and I wrenched my attention back to my work before I got caught staring. That didn't stop my dick from reacting. Thankfully, the situation in my jeans was hidden behind my makeshift desk.

“You mean on Saturday? Two days from now? Probably this,” I rasped, sweeping a hand toward my homework. “Or some version of it.”

What else did I do? I studied. I went to class. I did everything I could to stay under

the radar and not fuck up my scholarships. I wasn't like Port, whose parents seemed to own half of the East Coast. I wasn't here on a sports scholarship and destined to play professional hockey. Pass or fail, he had a place here at Rustin University because his dad and the school's president were old pals. Conversely, my father was in prison someplace on the other side the county. I didn't know where, and I didn't care. My brother, Knox, and I went into foster care when I was fourteen, and I'd ceased to have any family but him.

"I need you to be my date," Porter said.

My head shot up, my gaze stumbling over his eight-pack abs on the way to staring aghast at his serious expression. He wasn't joking, and I couldn't form thoughts. I scratched behind my ear, trying to think. I was a smart guy yet my mouth opened and closed a few times before I managed words.

"What? I...um... I, uh, don't really... You—"

"Yeah, yeah." He waved away my incoherent babbled protest. "I know. I'm gay and you're straight. Which is very boring of you, but whatever. I have to attend this thing, and I need you to pretend to be my boyfriend. Please. "

"Thing?" I choked. Like a party for his hockey team? Why would he need me?

"A country club soirée ," he said, his tone mocking the word soirée, and I figured there was a story behind that.

"And...why do you need me? A date?" I asked, trying to parse through his announcement the same as I'd try to dissect a math problem or computer code. I'd have far more luck with the coding or equations. Porter had my brain twisted.

"I have to bring someone—I said I'd bring someone," he clarified. "If I don't, they'll

hook me up.”

“Who is they ?” I asked, distracted by the way his towel had dipped even lower while we’d talked. And truly, I was kind of stuck on I need you to be my date. Porter might think I had no interest, but he was wrong. I’d known I was bi for about as long as I’d been aware my dick was for more than pissing. I just wasn’t in his league. I was a computer geek with a proverbial nerd squad backing me. Porter was a jock on our nationally ranked hockey team that had gone to the finals of the Frozen Four for four years running and would be heading there again next month. We were as different as Pluto and the Sun, both existing in the same space, but having little else in common.

Besides, I was too busy doing everything I could to keep my head down and graduate with honors in April.

“ They are my cousin and her terror posse,” Porter growled. “You know how they are: oh, you’re gay? You just must meet my cousin. Oh, you’re a serial killer? No problem.” He planted his hands on his hips. “And I’m pretty sure the last one really was a serial killer—I swear I saw him on an unsolved crime show.”

“Porter...” I sighed.

“Come on. Do me this solid. I’ve never asked you for anything.”

I raised an eyebrow at him, letting him fill in the blanks. He’d asked me for no fewer than a dozen things this week, and it was only Wednesday. He might be a force to reckon with on ice, but, damn, he was needy outside the rink.

“Okay, fine,” he went on with an exaggerated sigh. “I haven’t asked you anything like this .”

“That’s true anyway.” Besides helping him with “emergencies,” like picking up

energy drinks on my way home or actually rushing back here because he'd lost something or another, I tended to tutor him in math and help him with essays so he didn't get benched or kicked off the team. And that would be a tragedy. Porter was a star left winger for the Rustin Loggerheads.

"I'll pay you," he blurted suddenly, mistaking my hesitation. "I'll cover your half of the rent for the next three months."

If we'd lived in campus housing, that wouldn't be much of a deal since we were so close to graduation, but since we lived off campus and would be staying here...

"Deal," I said.

"Really?" he gasped. "I didn't think you'd say yes."

"Oh. Was it a joke then, because—"

"No! Not a joke," he cut in as if I'd change my mind. "I really need—I mean, I really want you to go with me. Need and want. You'll really go?"

"Yeah. But you also have to pay for whatever I need to wear if it's something other than I already own." I had no doubt I didn't have anything appropriate for some swanky party at his parents' club.

He gave a sharp nod, which drew my attention to his naked torso again, a torso I'd be up close to if we danced at this event. Would he want to dance? I never had, and I wasn't sure I wouldn't stomp all over his feet.

"I'll have my tailor come by tomorrow," he said, cutting through my thoughts. "Just text me your sizes, and he'll get you outfitted."

Like I said... His family owned half the east coast. And I was trying real hard not to feel like Vivian from Pretty Woman . 'Course, I'd be following her number one rule—no kissing. Easy. And I wouldn't be kissing sleeping with Porter, either.

Besides, he thought I wasn't into men. Yeah, I was just a bi guy pretending to be a straight man who was pretending to be gay. Even on my most creative day, back when lying had been a way of life because of my dad, I couldn't have made up shit like this.

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Porter George

My skin itched with the needs to surge into motion. Instead I was lounging on the couch, watching Desmond, my tailor, fit Nash for the tux he'd wear on Saturday. I'd known the man for years, worked with him since I was a preteen—hell, he special made all my pants because hockey players had thighs and asses that didn't fit in off the rack trousers—but right now... Right now, I wanted to smack his hands away from Nash and shove him and his God damn measuring tape out the front door. Maybe after I'd strangled him with it.

My teeth gritted and I bit back a growl as he measured Nash's inseam. Every touch seemed intimate to me and excessive. I wouldn't even be able to work off this steam when the guy finally left.

Nash for his part appeared tomato-red and as uncomfortable as I was worked up. He wasn't as used to being as measured, poked and prodded.

"I think that's all I need," Desmond said, rising from where he was crouched before Nash in a way that elicited dirty pictures in my mind. I wondered how Nash would feel about being gay for the day, exploring what it would be like to be with a man.

Which was a completely out of bounds thought for me. Sure, I admired good looking men, the same as anyone would, but I didn't consider dragging them over to my own personal dark side. I knew what boundaries were and I respected them. I had to if I didn't want to get my ass kicked by my teammates. Thankfully, those who knew about me weren't homophobic, but still... I didn't test their tolerance.

“Thanks, I appreciate you squeezing us into your schedule like this,” I said, shoving quickly to my feet and thrusting out my hand.

I will not punch him. I will not punch him... I chanted in my head.

He grinned as if reading my thoughts, his eyes dancing with his ill-suppressed mirth. Asshole. That last inseam measure was to mess with me. I almost pulled away my hand before we could shake, but I didn’t hide my thoughts as I met his eyes. Nash was mine. Desmond’s grin only widened.

“Bought time you found a guy,” he muttered.

My chin lowered. “What?”

“Your tux is all set for tomorrow?” he asked without answering me, pretending as if he hadn’t said anything at all.

“Yeah, fine.” It had only been a couple weeks since the last time I’d had to wear it and it was still wrapped in the cleaner’s plastic.

He nodded, stepping back and gathering his things.

“I’ll have your clothes here tomorrow morning, Mr. Higgins,” he told Nash. He looked back at me. “I’ll courier them over midmorning, so they’ll be here in plenty of time.”

“Thank you,” Nash said. “I appreciate you doing this. I know it’s a rush.”

“No worries at all, Sir. I imagine we’ll be seeing each other again soon. Have a good night.”

With that, he was gone and I sucked in a relieved breath. I liked Desmond or I would have demanded someone else do my apparel, but I really didn't like him so close to Nash. My Nash, even if just in my imagination.

"Pizza?" I asked him as soon as we were alone. I had to do something to get my libido and temper under control. Food seemed like a good detour.

"What did he mean by that?" Nash said, clearly not on the same page as me. Of course, he wouldn't be. He was just a straight guy getting fitted and not feeling the vibes of the room. Which were probably just in my head due to sexual frustration. Wanting something I couldn't have.

"What do you mean?"

"That I'd see him again soon."

"Oh. Um. I'm pretty sure that he meant, if we," I swung a hand back and forth between us, "are together, that he'd be tailoring more clothes for you. All my suits and trousers are bespoke and even my off-the-rack stuff gets fitted. I'm sure he figures I'll have him do the same for you."

"But..." The flush in Nash's face deepened.

"I know," I sighed, tamping down my regret. "But he doesn't. I guess, get used to it for the next twenty-four-ish hours, right? Playing the part?"

"Oh. Yeah. Right," he said. "Dating. Boyfriend. Just...weird to me, you know? I've never..."

"Pretended to date a guy?"

“No,” he laughed. “Never done that. Never dated a girl, either, if you must know.”

“I didn’t ask.” But it made me feel damn smug to know I was his first date. Wow. His first fake date, but I wouldn’t dwell on that.

“It’s the whole nerd thing, yeah?” he said. “I’m not exactly on people’s radar. Plus my life is kinda...” He shrugged. “Well, you know. I’ve kept my head down to get the best grades possible, so I could graduate and not fuck up.”

“Because of your dad?” I knew there was something there, that his dad was some sorta deadbeat loser, but Nash hadn’t ever elaborated to me.

Nash’s eyes widened, his nostrils flaring. Shit! I shouldn’t have said anything.

“So, pizza?” I asked, playing off as if I hadn’t just stepped into a can of worms. I was shutting the top on that real fast. And if hockey had taught me anything, it was redirection and subterfuge. I was real good at both.

Watch me hide the verbal puck and shoot it somewhere else...

I pulled out my phone. “Or do you want Chinese? Or subs? Or that new burger place is on delivery too. Don’t know how great the fries will be by the time they get here.”

Nash swallowed, and I could literally see his internal battle. Ask me what I knew or let it go. I hoped he’d let it go. I didn’t want things to be any more awkward than I was already making them with the fake date thing. I really did need him as a shield.

“Burgers,” he said, his head bobbing as he spoke. “But I want rings. Not fries. Those should be alright.” His shoulders lighted with his breath. “I’m just gonna go work. I have to try to wrap up the programming tonight.”

“I thought it was due next week?”

Besides school, he and his nerd patrol—his words, not mine—ran a company that developed apps and software. A company called...drum roll...Nerd Patrol.

“It’s not, but you know I like to finish things early in case I run into an issue or there are bugs. Can’t really rush a deadline and get the job done right.”

“Fair enough,” I agreed, but he was already headed away to his computer desk that took up a corner of his bedroom. I watched him go, hoping I hadn’t just screwed things up with my big mouth—not just for tomorrow but for our roommate relationship, in general.

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Nash

The tux fit as if it had been made for me, which I supposed it had. Still, I felt like a complete fish out of water in it. When I'd looked in the mirror after showering and dressing, I'd hardly recognized myself. I'd gotten a haircut this morning, telling my regular stylist, Victoria, to give me something country club worthy. She'd been thrilled to do more than trim my floppy hair for one, and had even broken out product to tame my hair into submission.

"Look at you," she breathed. "Who would have thought you look like Nicholas Hoult when you're all cleaned up?"

"Who?"

Victoria had rolled her eyes at me. "Never mind. Just trust me. You're going to make girls drool at this party you're going to."

I hadn't clarified my date was a man. I'd just asked her to show me what to do with my new cut. Looking in the mirror that evening, I thought I'd done a pretty good job of following her directions. That and the tux... I looked better than I had in my whole life. My friends would never recognize me. Also, they'd give me shit about selling out too. I chuckled to myself. Jealous asses.

"Here goes nothing," I muttered, heading for my door to meet Porter in the living room. I'd heard him moving around earlier, I knew he was out there. We had to leave in about ten minutes, too. Honestly, I was surprised he hadn't come knocking on my door. He could be high-strung and pushy that way.

Porter turned as I exited the hallway and my breath caught in my throat. Damn... Sure, I'd seen him dressed up before since he attended functions often, but I'd never seen him spiffed up for me. At least, in theory it was for me...his fake date.

I wasn't the only one affected. His eyes scanned over me, and my body heated. I tried to think of equations...programming language...icy water...anything to dull my body's reaction but nothing worked as he looked at me.

His tongue shot over his lips and I had the random, unwelcome thought about what it might feel like to have his full lips pressed to my mouth, his hard body against my softer more lanky frame. His dick rubbing against mine since we were relatively the same height.

"You cut your hair," he said, taking me by surprise. Of everything, that wasn't what I expected.

"Yeah."

Brilliant, Nash. Brilliant. What's your follow-up? Uh-huh?

He nodded and I wondered if he hated it.

"I just thought I'd clean it up a little, so you wouldn't be embarrassed tonight. I'd imagine any guy you go to these things with must look like he's in GQ."

Porter closed the distance between us, his hand curling on my hip, and I stiffened, my eyes going wide as I stared at him. It was only through sheer will I didn't reflexively pull back from the surprisingly intimate touch and his proximity.

"Firstly, I wouldn't be embarrassed by you—short hair or longer hair. Secondly, I have never brought anyone with me. That's why my cousins are always trying to set

me up. So, I guess, about the GQ comment... Yeah, when I do bring someone he looks like he could be in GQ. You look amazing. But I like regular you, as well.”

“Thanks. You look great, too. I... Why are you so close?”

“Because. I want to be. And, supposedly, we’ve been dating. You need to be used to me being in your space.” He leaned closer, so close he could have kissed me and I tasted the mint on his breath. “It would help sell the story if you didn’t flinch away.”

“I didn’t.”

He laughed in my face as he backed up. “You did. I thought you were going to run for your room and lock the door.”

“Fuck off, Porter,” I groused, hating that he made me sound like some virginal Victorian girl.

He moved in close again, and I forced myself to stay still. Still a slight shiver went through me at the prickles that erupted across my skin when he leaned in and his breath wafted over my ear. “Time to go.”

My hand flattened on his belly and pushed him away.

“Fucker,” I muttered at his playing with me. “I’d punch you in the gut, but it would probably break my hand.”

He laughed, grabbing my hand and pulling me toward the door. I tugged. “No one’s around to see.”

“Like I said...” His grip tightened. “You need to get used to it. Today, you’re gay and this is normal... boyfriend. ”

I just growled under my breath. He wasn't wrong, I supposed. I just liked the sensation of his hand around mine way too much, and I was having a difficult time controlling my reactions.

My chest tight, I was alert for anyone in our building who might see us. There were plenty who'd have opinions and gossip about the jock holding hands with his geeky roommate, but no one seemed to be about that evening, which was super strange but a relief. I wasn't ready to jump out of the closet I'd kept myself firmly closed in.

Outside, a limo waited at the curb for us, and a driver popped out to open the door for us when she saw us.

"A limo?" I murmured, surprised we weren't taking his Caddy XLR.

"Only the best, sweetheart."

Startled by his calling me that, I glanced over and found him smirking.

"My dad sent it," he revealed. "Since I might drink at their anniversary party, he wanted to be sure I was shuttled back and forth in style and safety."

"Wait...it's your parents' anniversary?" I asked as soon as we were settled in the plush, leather upholstered backseat of the limo, his hand still firmly around mine. "I didn't bring a gift."

He patted the side of his suit coat, and I heard a quiet crinkle. "No worries. I got us covered. A gift from both of us. All you need to worry about is being with me."

He squeezed my hand and it didn't seem quite as unnatural. I could do this. It was only for one night, and I could indulge in the secret fantasies I kept locked away—at least some of them. Others would stay right where they were, never to see fruition.

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Porter

Game time.

I rolled my shoulders as the car pulled up to the valet circle and stopped before the modern brass and glass canopy that curved over the walkway to the entrance. My hand tightened on Nash's, and to my surprise, he grasped back with equal force.

"Ready to do this?" I asked as my driver rounded the car. "You look fucking fantastic, by the way. I'm a lucky asshole to be going home with you tonight."

"Porter—" he started.

"I know, I know. But let a guy have his delusions for the night."

"Whatever," he laughed, the chuckle tight with nerves. "Technically it's true. To a point."

To a point. Yeah. But that didn't mean I wouldn't be taking advantage of making this show look like the real deal tonight.

The door beside me opened and I stepped out, buttoning my tux coat as I straightened. Turning, I held a hand toward Nash. Ignoring it, he stepped out beside me and mirrored my motion in fastening his suit coat button. He looked around as I flattened my hand in the middle of his back and guided him away from the car.

I supposed it was a stunning sight. Though the club was funded by old money, this

part of the place, rented out for receptions and large parties, was ultra modern—all glass and brass and steel. Built at the precipice of a hill, it looked out over the grounds like a castle of old. Through the huge windows on this side, I could see people milling around. The other side had a wide balcony that ran the length of the building and had an open bar. There would be one inside too, and I was glad. I'd need one.

An attendant opened the door for us. I took his hand again, leading him inside. I suspected if I didn't, he'd remain frozen on the deep blue all-weather carpet beneath the entry canopy.

"This is...something," Nash murmured, looking around like a tourist in New York. In awe. Overwhelmed. A complete fish out of water.

I shrugged. I supposed the club's new venue was better than the building that had been razed to build this complex. Call me a spoiled rich kid, but usually, to tell the truth, I barely noticed the marvel of architecture. Most of the time, I wasn't here by choice, so I resented all of it.

"You want a drink before my family descend on us?" I asked.

He took a bracing breath, nodding slightly as he inhaled. "Yeah. Will you order for me? I don't know what kind of stuff they have and I don't want to embarrass myself—or you."

"Just regular bar drinks, same as anyplace near campus."

"Right," he scoffed. His gaze scanned around to make a point. "I'm guessing they don't have any sort of light beer."

"Sweetheart, no place on the planet should have light beer." To my satisfaction, his

eyes flared slightly when I called him that, his pupils dilating. I heard him take another slow breath as he dipped his head forward. Though he'd never admit it, Nash enjoyed when I called him that. He felt something which...surprised me, and I wanted to explore it. But this wasn't exactly the place.

Didn't mean I wouldn't push a few boundaries. Hell, that was a trait that made me a sought after winger on the ice.

"I'll get you a Jack and Coke." I raised an eyebrow at him, letting go of his hand to skim my fingers along his arm. "Light on the Jack?"

He nodded, looking relieved. I knew he didn't drink much, another thing I thought harkened back to his father. Maybe, he'd tell me someday if this fake-date deal didn't screw up things between us.

Which was my biggest fear in this whole thing. My only fear. Admittedly, that was strange, since this whole ruse could blow up in my face if we got found out. My parents had come to terms with my being gay years ago. Their associates, while more judgmental, "overlooked" it. They would not overlook being lied to.

That was a worry for another day. Tonight, I had Nash on my arm, and if he seemed uncomfortable, that could be put down to being unaccustomed to this setting with its glitz and glamor and overt wealth. Hell, after weeks on college life, stepping back into this sometimes startled me.

I leaned in, my hand curling on his waist, my lips near his ear. I knew to a casual observer it would appear as if I were kissing Nash's temple. Fine. Perfect. If only it were true, because my stirring dick sure wanted it to be.

"I'll be right back. Find a table and don't get lost—or run away." I winked and nodded to a couple vacant high-tables near the wall. After he turned that way, I

headed toward there the inside open bar where I continued to keep an eye on him.

Fuck, Nash was hot. I mean...I lived with him. I'd noticed how handsome he was, but tonight with his new haircut and in that tux? I'd have to beat away my cousins. Those girls would be drawn to him like flies to honey. And Nash sure was sweet—on the surface. Like his history with his dad, I suspected something darker lingered beneath the surface. Not evil or bad, just some trauma that had helped to mold him into the quiet man he was now.

That was all my psychology classes speaking. Yeah, I was at Rustin University for hockey, but I'd also be graduating this year with a phys ed bachelor of science and a minor in psych. And Nash, he was smart as fuck, but he had some shit he kept hidden.

I sighed as the guy in front of me hemmed and hawed about what fucking wine to order. Pussy. And three of my cousins closed in on Nash. Fucking hell.

“Get the damn Riesling,” I growled. “Some of us have things to do.” I looked over his shoulder at the bartender. “I’m gonna want a whiskey and rye and a Coke with barely any Jack.”

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Nash

“And who are you? I haven’t seen you before, and I would definitely remember someone as hot as you,” a woman asked, all breathy and suggestive, as she and her girl posse closed in on me. I took a step backward, but my back hit the wall with a soft thud where I waited next to one of the tall tables for Porter to get back to me. I should have gone with him

The one who’d asked the question had long golden-blond hair flowing over her shoulders like Margot Robbie in the Barbie movie while her sidekicks looked like her clones. Obviously, they were related. Maybe these were the infamous cousins Porter had spoken about.

“I... Yeah, I’m Nash,” I said, wondering what the hell was taking Porter so long. He’d deserted me so quickly, and I was beginning to wonder if this was some elaborate joke. Get the nerdy roommate to some swanky party then leave him alone to flounder.

“Nash,” one of the posse breathed. She reached out to stroke a finger along my lapel. “What brings you—”

“Back off, Barbie. He’s mine,” Porter growled, sliding in beside me, then reaching between me and Barbie—was that really her name?—to place two drinks on the table.

“Oh, rats,” the girl who’d spoken first said, grimacing. “I thought there was finally someone fun at one of these things. It figures he’s gay and with you.”

“Snooze you lose,” Porter returned, putting his arm around my waist. “Shoulda brought your own. Now back off and give my man a little room, would you?”

She huffed, but did inch away slightly. She reached out a hand. “I’m Claire, Port’s twin cousin.”

“They call us that because we were born the same day,” he told me.

I shook her hand then glanced at the other two. “You’re also his cousins.”

They nodded.

“I’m Barbara,” the one he’d called Barbie said.

“And I’m Darby,” the third woman said.

“B, C, D,” I murmured before I could stop myself as I noticed the pattern. “Is there an A?”

Claire snorted. “Yeah, Angela’s around here someplace. But she doesn’t care about fresh meat since she’d with her new British hubby.”

Oh, right...the wedding Porter had needed to go to in February.

“It’s really kinda sickeningly sweet,” Darby muttered with a fake gag. “And we all want our own. So...Nash. Tell us about you.”

“I...” What exactly should I say? What would Porter want me to tell them. We should have talked about this ahead of time.

Porter pulled me in to him and pressed his lips to my temple. A flush burned up my

body, familiar prickles erupting down my spine.

“Nash is a genius,” he said. “Runs a tech company with his friends.”

“Really,” Claire asked. “How did you meet? The tech genius crowd doesn’t seem like a circle Port would find himself in—no offense, Port.”

“Yeah, right,” he scoffed. “Let’s talk about your makeup vlogs.”

“Shut up. At least I’m not knocking around a piece of rubber with death blades on my feet. Anyway, we’re talking about Nash.”

“I go to Rustin with Porter,” I said then glanced over at him, letting some of my pent-up desire show. My “date” would think it was an act for the girls, and that was okay. It freed me up so I didn’t have to hide for a night. “We hit it off right from the start. I’m not much into sports, so I didn’t know he was on any of Rustin’s teams when we met.”

Darby studied us. “How long have you guys known each other.”

I looked over at Porter. “A couple years.”

“You have not been dating a couple years,” she countered.

“He didn’t say we’ve been dating that long,” Porter growled when I tensed. “He said we’ve known each other that long.”

“So you’re saying you didn’t just get some random guy to come with you?”

“Darby,” Barbra chided under her breath.

“I’m just saying—”

“No,” Porter snapped, interrupting her, and if possible, the hand on my waist tightened. “Nash is my boyfriend.”

He pulled me against him, so we were chest to chest. His hand cupped behind my neck and he brought my mouth to his. And God help me, I groaned at the sensation of his firm lips on me. Tension knotted in my chest and another more powerful, far more dangerous sizzle of arousal burned down to the base of my spine. I fisted his lapel, trying to get closer while my arm wrapped around him, my hand stealing beneath his coat to curl on his back.

Porter growled, his mouth forcing more than coaxing my lips apart, but I wasn’t resisting. I wanted the slide of his tongue against mine. Now, I had it and I tasted the alcohol he must have sipped on his way back to the table.

The world melted away as he tugged me tighter to him, all the power gained from constant training coming into play in his iron-like hold.

“Porter George,” a new voice hissed, cutting through the euphoria of our kiss. “We’re entirely tolerant and accepting of your life choices, but do you have to do that here . So publicly. Man or woman, it’s inappropriate.”

Porter pulled back, his forehead to mine as his turbulent dark eyes stared into me. His questions were clear. So was the realization that I’d been hiding more than my past from him.

“Sorry, Mother,” he said, not breaking our gaze. “I was just proving a point to Darby, Claire and Barbie.”

“Well, prove it someplace more private, would you, Son? Now, who is this?”

Porter sighed, his whiskey laden breath wafting over my cheek. Moving to my side, he slung his arm around my waist again and I found myself facing his cousins and a middle-aged couple who must be his parents. My face burned at them catching Porter and me in such a passionate kiss. They were right. It should have been private.

“Mother. Father. This is my boyfriend, Nash Higgins.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. And Mrs. George. Happy anniversary,” I said, extending my hand to first his mother and then his father.

“I have to say, it’s very nice to meet you, too,” his mom said. “Porter’s told us so much about you?”

I looked over at him, blinking in surprise. “He has?”

“If you’ll excuse us,” Porter cut in, “Nash and I...need a moment.”

“I would think so.” His father smirked, the expression another surprise. I’d expected everyone here to be so stiff. As it turned out, that was only me and Porter. And I had to be thankful my tux coat hid that right about then or meeting his parents would have been a million more times embarrassing.

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Porter

What. The. Fuck?

My hand clenched an iron grip around Nash's, I dragged him from the ballroom and down a side corridor I knew led to spare coat closet that would probably be unused tonight. He easily kept up with my long strides. Good thing, because I wasn't putting up with any bullshit.

Pulling him into the room, I shoved him hard against the wall.

"What the fuck was that?" I demanded.

"You kissed me."

"Yeah. Yeah, I did and you kissed me back like you wanted to kiss me, like you wanted me to kiss you. Like you were totally, one-hundred percent okay with kissing a guy."

Nash's tongue lashed out over his lips, and he drew in a sharp breath, but he stayed silent. His gaze shifted over my shoulder.

I shoved his shoulder. "Hey."

"What? What do you want me to say?" he exploded, shoving me back and stalking away a few paces. When he spun back toward me, he looked as angry as I was.

“Are you gay?” I demanded.

He rolled his eyes. “What do you think?”

“I think you are.” I advanced and shoved the tip of my finger into his chest. “I think you are and you’ve been playing a game with me.”

“It’s not all about you, Porter,” he snapped, shoving away my hand. “I’m bi-sexual if you must know. Not that it’s ever been any of your business. You just assumed I’m straight and I never disabused you of the belief because I never intended to do anything about—”

“About what?” I demanded when he broke off suddenly and snapped his lips shut.

He shook his head.

“God damn it! Tell me.”

“About fucking wanting you. Okay?” he yelled. “About being attracted to you. Happy now?”

I stared at him my anger deflating. “No. No, I’m not happy.”

“What do you even want?” He spun away. “Damn it. I knew this was a bad idea.”

“It’s not. Why didn’t you want me to know?”

“Why do you think? How uncomfortable would it be to have a roommate who wants to slam you into a wall and fuck you? Or who wants you to do that to him?” He shoved a hand through his hair. “So I didn’t say anything that would just make things uncomfortable. I was pretty sure you wouldn’t be interested anyway.”

Closing the distance between us, I banded an arm across his belly and dragged him back against me. I pressed into him and wedged my cock against his ass. “Does this fucking feel like I’m uninterested?” I nipped the shell of his ear. “Does it feel like I don’t want you to fuck me—or for me to fuck you, sweetheart?”

“Port,” he breathed.

“I much prefer the former to the latter, though. Does that surprise you?”

“As much as you’re a needy princess? No.”

“Hey!” I protested, sliding my hand down and squeezing his hard cock.

Nash groaned low in his throat, and his hips thrust up into my hand. I wasn’t sure the movement was intentional the first time, but for sure, the second push into my tight fist was on purpose. Without thinking much about it, I turned us and shoved his back to the closet door.

“Let me show you how much of a princess I can be?” I smirked, holding his gaze as I dropped to my knees and yanked open his pants.

“Porter,” he gasped. “We can’t.”

“Oh...but we can.” I tugged down his underwear and came face-to-shaft with the prettiest damn cock I’d ever seen. Maybe, it was because I’d been celibate for a while, but it was nice and long and thick, and I knew for sure I’d be feeling it for days once I got it in me. And as of about ten minutes ago, I’d known it would be.

I wrapped my hand around him, tugging along his length while Nash thunked his head back against the door with a strangled moan.

“Gotta be quiet,” I warned, teasing the underside of his shaft with my thumb pressing into the sensitive divot beneath his glans.

“Fucking hell,” he swore through his teeth. His eyes squeezed shut, his hands fisted at his sides. I pumped my hand a few more times, opening my mouth and huffing breaths over the head of his dick and earning a shudder.

I grinned continuing until precum formed on his tip, pearly droplets begging for me to taste. And who was I to say no? Leaning in, I flattened my tongue over the velvety skin, gathering the salty-sweetness then engulfing the head with my mouth.

Now it was my turn to groan and close my eyes in pleasure. I might be a bruiser on the ice. I took zero shit from opponents and I had no problem slamming someone into the boards. But there was just something about being on my knees for a lover, dick filling my mouth and sliding along my tongue to my throat. I gave off top energy in public—literally everywhere but in intimate situations—but when it came to sex? Bottom all the way. It was almost as if, after exuding all that dominant take charge energy, I needed someone to take charge of me.

Or let me pleasure them, as the case was in that moment.

Dropping my hand lower, I cupped Nash’s balls, rolling them in my hand while I took him deeper. His fingers knotted in my hair as I bobbed along his shaft, going all the way to the tip before surging forward again, taking him deeper each time. It wasn’t long before he couldn’t stay still any longer. His hips rock, meeting me, his hands pulling my head into him, and I was in heaven, in exactly the place I loved to be.

My tongue lashed around him, my suction growing stronger when ever I pulled back. I kept working his balls in my palm, listening to Nash’s breathing, waiting for the moment when I knew he was a moment from breaking. Then there it was, the broken

and uneven pants, the tensions railing through him as he tried to keep from coming. Playing dirty, I stretched out two fingers and curled them along the skin separating his cock from his ass.

Nash jerked, a strangled yell rasping from him as he poured into my mouth. I swallowed convulsively, taking it all, owning it all. He might not know it, but I'd just made him mine.

Grinning, I sat back on my heels and wiped my hand over my lips. Nash stared down at me with dark, hungry eyes.

“What do you think?” I asked.

“I think...you can do that whenever you want. And...I think...I want to bend you over the closest surface and fuck that grin right off your face,” Something shifted in his gaze as his confidence seemed to grow. “And then fuck you some more until your coming all over the sheets while I fill you.”

I watched his throat convulse as he swallowed and reached to pull his boxer-briefs into place and fasten his pants. I stood, helping him to tuck in his shirt, but he stopped me. His hand wrapped behind my head, and he pulled me in for a kiss, pressing my lips open and claiming my mouth.

It stole my breath and filled my chest with warmth. The dynamic between us had shifted, snapping into reverse like opposing magnets. Now that he knew how I leaned, he'd stepped into place to top me as easily as if he'd always been there. As if he'd always known.

I melted into him, loving the pull of his fingers in my hair.

He pulled back too soon, pressing his head against the door and keeping me where I

was as he stared at me. “I wish we could stay here.”

“Me, too.”

“Your parents, though.”

“Yeah. You’re right. Let’s get ourselves together, go get drinks and mingle, I suppose. Then we can go home. And we’re gonna fuck.”

He raised an eyebrow at me. “Are we now?”

But we both knew the answer to that question.

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Nash

Who knew Porter would be the one to make me feel comfortable in my skin again. And yet, at the moment, I could practically claw it all away. Standing beside him all night, sharing little touches, heated looks, but otherwise keeping everything very PG, had just about done me in with frustration.

When Porter had asked if I was ready to go, I'd been hard pressed not to nod vigorously and drag him out of there. Still, we hadn't been all over each other in the limo, though he'd held my hand tight in his, so I didn't think he'd had a change of heart.

"My room," he rasped as soon as we were inside the apartment with the door locked.

"You're awfully pushy," I muttered the heavy feeling that had been settling on me lifting again. Hooking an arm around his neck, I pulled him toward me and kissed him.

"My room has lube," he said against my lips.

"Fair point. Port?" I asked.

"Yeah?"

"Where does this leave us? After tonight?"

"Your mine now," he said. "No more pretending to be straight anymore."

“No fake dating?”

“Real dating. Real fucking. Probably every night?”

I could deal with that. It was as if I’d woken to find out the fantasy I’d had was actually true. But he was still him and I was still me and I wasn’t sure how we’d meet. Sexually, yes, I got that. In life? Life was messy. We were so different.

“Genius,” he said, getting my attention, the name not mocking me. “You’re thinking too hard. We’ll still be friends. We work as friends. As roommates. And now we can fuck, too. All works. All good.”

He grabbed the front of my shirt and tugged me toward his bedroom. I was quickly reminded that though he like to submit, he was a lot stronger than me.

I stumbled along behind him, shedding my coat and tie on the way, then kicking off my shiny shoes and managing to toe off my socks. By the time we got into his bedroom, I was only in my unbuttoned shirt, undershirt and pants.

Porter smiled, giving a small nod, as he surveyed me. I tugged off my T-shirt, taking the dress shirt with it and dropped them to the floor. Immediately, I reached for Porter to unbutton him.

“You’ve seen a whole lot of me and I’ve barely seen any of you.”

“Fuck, I walk around here practically naked all the damn time. You’ve seen me.”

“Why do you do that?” I asked, suddenly suspicious.

“Why do you think?”

My eyes narrowed, but I didn't stop slipping the pearly disks through the buttonholes while I questioned him. "But you thought I was straight."

"Maybe my gaydar wasn't completely broken when it came to you. Or maybe, I was hoping you'd be gay for me. Maybe, I'm a masochist."

I yanked off his shirt much the way I'd stripped off mine. "Or maybe all three."

He shrugged, and I reached for his pants, intent on getting him naked and getting my mouth on him. As soon as I had his fly open though, he reversed our positions and pushed me down on the bed, climbing over me. I stared up at him, meeting the heat in his eyes with heat of my own. When he bent to kiss me, I met him halfway.

"Are you planning to be a good princess for me?" I teased. Porter was no princess, except for when he was being extra needy.

"Sweetheart, you have no idea how good I can be," he said against my lips as I reached down and tugged his pants lower. In his position, they wouldn't go farther than his upper thighs, but I was still able to free his cock and wrap my hand around him.

"Fuck, Nash."

"You see what you did to me with a couple hundred people just yards away?"

"Mmm..." he moaned, the sound almost a mew of pleasure.

I jacked my fist along his length, drawing his pleased sounds, returning the favor he'd given me earlier. "You going to come all over my belly before I turn you over and fuck that ass?"

“Fuck, Nash,” he gasped again, and it was quickly becoming my favorite phrase in the world.

I moved my lips to his ear. “Oh, yeah, babe, Nash is going to fuck you. You have no idea how much pent-up frustration I have waiting for you.”

He licked his lips, breathing hard as he stared down at me. Determination in his gaze, he jerked his hips, fucking my hand while his balls grazed my own dick still trapped inside my pants. Almost as if realizing I was still clothed, he clawed between us, trying to push my trousers down. I lifted my hips to assist him and groaned as his warm sac dragged along my naked cock.

I shoved him off me so I could shuck off the rest of our clothes then pulled him back to where he’d been.

“Do that again,” I demanded.

“Do what?” he taunted, fucking into my tight fist again and tormenting me with the swing of that flesh over me, skin-to-skin this time.

“That,” I gritted, using my free hand to drag him closer for more friction. We groaned, rubbing together, touching. I explored him with my hand and mouth, tasting his skin, tracing the multitude of muscles that only an athlete in peak condition could have.

Before long, I released his cock and licked my palm before wrapping around him again, the slick giving just the right lubrication to take him to the edge as I jacked him into a fervor.

“Shit!” Porter yelled, throwing back his head as I took him to the edge then pushed him farther. Skimming my hand up his torso, I circled his pec and then zeroed in on

the nipple. With a pinch and a tug, combined with my hand wringing along his shaft, I shot Porter over into his release, his cum spilling out onto my belly in fiery splashes.

I hugged him to me, stroking my hand over his back while his spend coated us both.

“Good boy,” I murmured into his ear, wondering how we’d gotten to this dynamic but knowing it was exactly right. Yesterday, I wouldn’t have thought we’d be here. Today, I wondered how I’d never seen it.

His breath huffed out. “I need you to fuck me, Nash. Need it. Now. Stuff is in the top drawer of the bedside table.”

I nodded. “Middle of the bed, that perfect rock-hard ass up.”

My breath shuddered in my chest as I anticipated what was to come. My hand shook as I reached for the condoms and lube that were right where he’d said they would be. I wasn’t nervous. Not even close. I just...couldn’t wait to fuck him. We’d gone from zero to a hundred so fast, but it still didn’t seem fast enough.

When I climbed back onto the bed, Porter was exactly as I’d ordered, his head turned toward me, resting on his arms. He watched me move, and his tongue ran over his bottom lip before he sucked that lip between his teeth.

“This is what you want?” I confirmed, trailing my fingers up his thigh and watching the goosebumps appear. I cupped one firm globe marveling at the carved perfection. What an ass.

“For longer than you know?” he rasped, his voice the only clue that he was on edge.

Kneeling beside his hip, I watched him as I traced the crack along the center of his ass. His eyes closed, and his mouth dropped open with an indrawn breath.

Emboldened, rolled on a condom then I lubed up my fingers and worked them between his cheeks, seeking the place that would bring us both pleasure. Tracing the hole, I pressed demanding entrance but taking my time. Circling....scissoring...working inside ever so slowly. Until I was thrusting one long digit in and out. Then two. I added more lube and continued while Porter moaned and pushed into the me.

“Please,” he begged. “Please...fucking hell, Nash.”

“You’re doing so good, babe,” I said. “Keep working that ass against my fingers while I open you up, so I can fuck you good and hard.”

“Now,” he whined.

“Don’t want to hurt you.”

“I want to feel you. For days. I want to feel you for days. Just fucking fuck me already.”

“You will feel me.” Keeping my fingers working in and out while I loosened his hole, I leaned to the side so I could kiss him. His mouth was wild on mine, demanding. I knew what he wanted, but he wasn’t in charge right now.

But I barely was either. Crawling behind him, I shoved him down to the bed and forced his legs apart for me. With one hand I notched my dick to him then slowly started to push inside his ass. He closed around me like a fiery glove, squeezing hard, too hard, and I gritted my teeth to keep myself in check.

Planting my knees wide on the mattress, I pushed deeper. My hands grasped his biceps, holding them to the bed and at the same time, using them for leverage and letting him know who had the control.

Porter yelled out as I surged forward burying myself the rest of the way in him. I didn't pause. I fucked him just the way he'd begged me to, my forehead between his shoulder blades while he writhed under me and I nailed him to the sheets, watching my cock disappear into him over and over.

I didn't last long and for the second time that night, his iron grip had me coming with a choked cry.

"Holy shit," Porter muttered when I collapsed on his back.

"Yeah."

"Hope you know I'm never letting you go."

I smiled, shaking my head. If only it were that easy. Tonight had been a fantasy come true, but who knew what tomorrow and real life would bring. But that was for tomorrow and not right now. Shoving away thoughts, I got rid of the condom then climbed back into bed with Porter and we fell asleep in a tangle of limbs.

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Nash

I wasn't exactly surprised to wake up alone. Porter always left super early for training—even on Sundays, though on Sundays the team only had early morning conditioning. What surprised me was that I hadn't heard him get up and leave.

My phone was on the bedside table and through the open doors, I could see across the hallway where my my clothes were folded in a neat pile on the end of my bed. How dead to the world had I been? Holy crap. I mean, sure, we had fucked a couple times last night in a fuck-nap-wake-fuck again pattern, but I shouldn't have been that knocked out.

I grinned into the pillow. I couldn't complain since it was because of Porter. Inhaling, I breathed in, inhaling his scent and letting it fill me the same as it surrounded me. With a happy sigh, I flopped onto my back and stared up at the ceiling then laughed. Last night I'd been so distracted by Porter that I didn't realize he had motivational messages plastered to his ceiling.

My eyes pinned to one in particular by Mike Eruzione. "Hockey is a metaphor for life. You have to be willing to get knocked down and get back up."

That was something I needed to remember. I'd been knocked down early with my mother disappearing and my dad being an alcoholic crook who had tried to rope me into his schemes. I'd heard horror stories about foster homes, but for me, I knew it had been the best thing to ever happen to me. If he hadn't been arrested, I would have gone down that path, been a crook like him.

Trouble was, I'd kept myself down, and kept myself small ever since then. "Keep your head down; don't get noticed." That had been my motto...until last night. Last night I'd stepped outside the shell I'd kept around myself for years. And look what had happened.

My phone dinged letting me know I'd missed a call and I had a voicemail. That must have been what woke me. Scooping it up, I reclined back on the pillows, holding my phone over me to read the screen.

Unknown caller.

Ugh. Probably spam. Out of curiosity, I opened the voicemail and hit play.

"Nash, this is Fletcher George..."

Porter's dad? Why was he calling?

I sat up, trepidation roiling in my gut.

"I'm calling because, well in short, I know your background and who your father is, since I check into all the people around my son. Please call me, so we can talk about this."

I dropped the phone into my lap as he finished with his phone number and disconnected.

"Shit," I muttered, scrubbing a hand over my face. I should have known better than to think I could just be with Porter, that my past wouldn't rear up again and ruin everything.

I'd spent the last eight years doing whatever I could to not be like my father and he

was still poisoning my life. I wouldn't let him poison Porter's life, too. He had such a promising future, with professional teams already scouting him for training camp this summer and placement on their teams this fall. There was a real good chance he'd land with the Charleston Lynx and be staying right here in South Carolina, albeit a little over two hours from where we were now.

And me...? I had the gig with two of my friends as Nerd Patrol. We were growing by leaps, and it was lucrative for all of us, but what would they think if they knew my background?

My eyes closed and I shook my head before I climbed from the bed. Unsure what to do, I just stood there for a moment, looking around Porter's space, taking in the bits of his life all around. Hockey. Everything hockey. It was his life, everything he'd been focused on. He'd once told me he started playing when he was four. een years he'd worked toward his future. I couldn't screw it up.

The phone rang in my hand as I stalked toward my room, still unsure what to do.

"Hello," I barked into it, not even looking to see who was calling.

"Nash?"

I froze at the sound of my little brother's voice. We didn't talk often, both of us trying to make our way in life, but he was my only family. And if he was calling me this early on a Sunday morning, when it was barely five a.m. where he was, something was wrong.

"Knox. What's wrong?" I asked, suddenly on high alert.

"They kicked me out. Said...I was eighteen and...They kicked me out."

Mother fuckers. The kid had just turned eighteen this past week and had a couple more weeks of high school before I brought him to live with me, or near me, depending on Porter. Something I had yet to discuss with my new boyfriend. Well...would-be boyfriend.

“Where are you?”

“One of my friends has been let me squat on his couch, but his mom and dad said I had to go before Monday.”

Shit.

“You should have called me sooner. I’m going to come get you. Do you have your stuff? Can you meet me at the airport?” I asked. I already had my laptop open and to the airline site to buy tickets.

I supposed that I could just buy him a ticket and have him come here, but to my eyes, Knox was a vulnerable teenager. I’d never forgive myself—or his mercenary foster parents or the system—if something happened to him.

“Yeah.”

“Okay. I’m getting tickets, and I’m going to send you some cash. Once you get to the airport, go to one of the restaurants or lounges and wait for me. I’ll be there in... Looks like in about six hours.”

“Thanks, Nash.”

“Don’t worry. We’re gonna get this all worked out.”

After hanging up with Knox, I rushed around my room to pack up a few things and

my laptop. I'd work on the plane and while I was in California, taking care of my brother. Then I'd come back here and take care of Porter.

I didn't call back Fletcher George, however. That would have to wait for another day. Knox was the priority right now, and I was rushing to him. It wasn't until I was almost to the airport that I realized, in my rush, I'd forgotten my phone somewhere between talking to my brother and flying out of my apartment. But as I climbed out of my car at the airport's long-term parking, it was too late to deal with that problem, too.

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Porter

Sweat coated my body as I skated back and forth, stick in my hand, blades scraping on the ice. It had been a bad session, so our pissed off coach had us skating suicide drills back and forth across the rink.

“This is bullshit,” Parrish, our team captain, muttered in heavy pant beside me.

To the other side of him, Cohen, the right winger of our line grunted. “Shut up before coach catches us chatting.”

Yeah, we didn’t want him to add more time to this punishment. I’d been exhausted this morning and it had shown. Not sure what Parrish and Cohen’s excuses were, but the whole line had put on a shitshow performance today. And fuck me, all I hoped was that we’d get out of here soon and I wouldn’t be too tired to tackle Nash back onto the nearest mattress. Maybe, talk him into moving into my room—or at very least, my bed. We could come up with a new roommate deal. One that involved us together as a couple.

“George,” Coach bellowed. “Keep up!”

Shit. My thinking had caused me to lag behind Parrish and Cohen. I scrambled to keep up with them, keeping my mind where it should be for the next fifteen minutes.

My whole body ached by the time we were sent to the showers, and for the first time in my life, I knew I’d be happy not to see my hockey gear for a week. That wouldn’t happen. I’d be back on the ice tomorrow, without a real break until Saturday.

“Midnight Java?” Parrish asked over the wall between us. Often, we headed over to the coffee place after Sunday practices, but I shook my head.

“Heading home. Got something to do.”

“Or someone,” Cohen said from the stall farther down. “How the date go last night?”

I rolled my eyes. Both Parrish and Cohen knew about the fake date setup to ward off my cousins matchmaking, and Cohen had bet that something would happen between me and Nash.

“Yeah, yeah,” I said before rinsing my hair. “I owe you a coffee and a pastry. Just not today.” Yeah, our bets were laughable, but we bet about everything, so we needed to keep the payouts small.

Parrish and Cohen started arguing over Parrish owing Cohen too, since he’d bet that Cohen was wrong. I ignored them. Ten minutes later, I was out the door and jogging toward home, despite my aching body.

My brow furrowed when I entered my eerily quiet apartment.

“Nash?” I still called. It was midmorning, but after last night he could still be asleep. I wished I was. Grinning, I headed toward my bedroom, but my bed was empty. It took me about two seconds after that to realize Nash wasn’t there. I didn’t see a note anywhere, either. Which made sense. We’d never left each other notes before now, and if he were stepping out for a few minutes, why would he start now?

Well, maybe, I could urge him to hurry home. Grinning at the prospect of what we could get up to for the rest of Sunday, I pulled out my phone to call him. Ringing immediately started in his bathroom. Curious, I followed the sound. Nash’s cell sat on the corner of the vanity. I’d never known him to leave it anywhere. He always had it

nearby in case the Nerd Patrol got a project.

Without thinking, I picked it up. I wasn't his only missed call. The lock screen showed a call from someone named Knox, and my dad had called him a couple times, as well.

The fuck...

Sitting on Nash's bed, next to the pile of clothes I'd left there this morning, I dialed my father.

"Why are you calling Nash?" I asked as soon as the line connected.

"Porter," he greeted. "Hello to you, too. I rather thought it would be your boyfriend calling me back."

"He's not here." I glanced around seeing his laptop missing and one of his drawers open. A couple hangers lay on the bed—hangers that hadn't been there this morning. Unlike me, Nash was always so neat about his things. It was why I'd so carefully folded his clothes and stacked them on his bed this morning.

Dread sank into my gut, knotting so painfully I bent over my knees. "He..." I rasped. "He left."

"Fuck. That's why I've been trying to call him back."

"Call him back?" I echoed. What did my father say to him?

"I wanted to let him know... Fuck. I told him I knew about his father and we should talk. When I thought about it, and he didn't call me back, I figured I'd phrased it badly. I've been calling to let him know we have his back and I don't hold his

father's actions against him. Nash has proved over and over through the years that he's a good man."

"Over the years? Father—"

"You know I do background checks on your friends. I did one on Nash as soon as you were going to be roommates."

"So you threatened him?"

"I didn't threaten him."

"Must have been damn close for you to scare him off. What did you say to him?"

"Your Nash doesn't seem like one who'd be warned off by a phone call. Like I said... I just told him I knew about his father and I wanted to talk. His dad's con man and in prison for his role in trying to rob a casino—job went bad and it ended up in someone dying. Before that, he had a rap sheet longer than most books. Nash and his younger brother were sent to foster care. Mother nowhere to be found."

"So you were warning him off, because—"

"No. I already told you I wasn't. No wonder your coach had you running suicides all morning. You don't listen."

"How did you—never mind." I didn't really want to know how he knew about my practice. His eyes were everywhere at the university, and I swore he knew my grades before I did. I only hoped for more privacy after I graduated and was fully out on my own.

My father sighed and I heard his fingers tapping on his desk. "Look, let me see what I

can find out about where Nash went. If he uses a credit card, it shouldn't be too hard to track him."

"Okay." I didn't ask how he'd make that happen. I knew all he'd tell me was connections .

* * * *

Three days later, I stared at the wall in the apartment feeling like hammered shit and wondering what the fuck to do.

Nash had flown to California on Sunday. He was at a hotel there, in a room reserved for two occupants. And I wanted to know who the fuck he was with. He was mine damn it. Unfortunately, no one could tell me that.

I'd stewed. Gone to practice. Got the shit kicked out of me at a scrimmage. Gone to class. Stewed some more. Then repeated it all.

This morning, Wednesday, I hadn't bothered. And tonight, I'd fly to California and track Nash's ass down. My phone clattered across the coffee table as I tossed it down after making a reservation. I didn't even care enough to pick it up off the carpet.

I was staring at the cell, willing Nash to call, when I heard a key in the lock of the front door. I flew across the room body-slamming Nash into the wall the second he crossed the threshold.

"Where the fuck have you been?" I demanded. "And the fuck have you been with?"

I didn't wait for an answer. My hand fisted in his hair and I crushed my lips to his, demanded the answers I needed from his body and not his words.

Nash

I was exhausted, but adrenaline surged through me at Porter's greeting. I turned, reversing our positions, and pressed him to the wall, taking over the hungry kiss, My tongue demanding entrance to his mouth, and taking everything I could give.

"You're not leaving me," Porter muttered, his hand grasping my shirt at my neck.

"No, I'm not," I agreed, so relieved to be home and with him. I didn't know what our future held with my responsibilities to my brother and the veiled threat from Porter's dad, but I wasn't giving up my man without a fight.

"Geez, dude, I'm right here. I know you told me you have a boyfriend but fuck's sake."

I leaned my forehead to Porter's looking down into his turbulent eyes. "Porter meet my little brother, Knox. This is my boyfriend Porter. For now you'll be using my room, on the right side of the hallway. Why don't you go check it out while I talk to Porter, then we'll take you for burgers in a little bit."

Porter pulled back slightly to look over my shoulder, but his grip on me didn't loosen. "Hi, Knox. Nice to meet you."

Knox said something but I was focused on Porter. I hugged him tight to me, enjoying the bare skin of his torso against my hands, and loving the way he snuggled into me, though he was more powerful.

“I thought you left,” he muttered. “That being with me was too much and you ran.”

“No. Being with you will never be too much. I’m sorry I scared you. I ran out of here so fast to get to Knox that I forgot my phone. I don’t have your number memorized. I tried to get someone to come over here to explain, but my friends are out of town at a seminar. I’m so sorry,” I said again, feeling like I needed to say it a million times after upsetting him. “Knox’s foster family kicked him out because he turned eighteen, and they decided their responsibility to him was done. He was all alone in the city. Then it took forever to deal with bullshit with his school so he could get his diploma. He already had all the credits he needed for graduation, and he was just biding his time before the convocation.”

“So he’s smart like you.”

“Smarter. Has a full ride here next year—combo for scholastics and diving, believe it or not.” Closing my eyes, I buried my nose in his neck and breathed him in. “Fuck, I missed you so much. I was worried about you all alone here without me. But most of all, I just missed you.” I trailed my lips to his ear. “I want to drag you to the bedroom and show you how much, make you feel how much.”

Porter made a soft sound, pressing closer, his cock jabbing into my hip through his soft gray sweatpants that hung low on his hips. “You can show me later, sweetheart.”

I sniffed a laugh. “I know it’s early for dinner, but you feel like grabbing a late lunch. Knox gets hangry if he’s not fed on the regular.”

“So we’re parenting a teenager, huh?”

“Only for the summer until he moves into his dorm. If it’s too much, I can—”

“Don’t you dare suggest moving out,” Porter growled, grabbing the front of my shirt

again and giving me a little shake. “If nothing else, this three days proved I need my roommate here. I missed you too much.”

“Roommate?”

“Boyfriend. Lover. Pain in my ass. Pick one,” he said.

“You like when I’m a pain in your ass, princess,” I teased, gathering him back against me.

“Shut up,” he whispered, glancing toward my bedroom. “So he’s about four years younger than you?”

“Yeah. He’s...um... I probably need to tell you about my father.”

“My father told me a little about him.”

“Oh. Which brings us back to another problem.”

“The only problem is my dad shouldn’t use the phone without supervision. Makes me seriously question how he’s successful in business. He wasn’t calling to warn you off. He was calling to tell you that our family has your back.”

I wasn’t sure how to process that. Warmth filled my chest and something burned my eyes. Blinking it away, I took a bracing breath. No one had had my back in...well, ever that I could think of. Maybe, my mom had before she disappeared. I couldn’t remember. I’d been so little then. And I’d been taking care of myself since the morning I’d last seen her.

“But your career—” I asked weakly.

“Has nothing to do with it. The sins of your father don’t reflect on you, and if it’s going to be an issue with anyone, I’ll choose you first. Even over hockey.”

“Porter...” I gasped.

His eyes looked glossy and I could see how much that choice would rip him up. “Even hockey,” he repeated, more determination in his voice. “Look, I... I know it’s too soon to have big feelings, forever feelings, but you have to admit—”

“I have big feelings for you, too,” I interrupted. He’d just told me he’d pick me over the sport he’d played since he was four. I would throw him any God damn rope he needed. I’d give him whatever he wanted.

His lips rolled together, and he nodded, capturing my hand and lacing our fingers together. Our locked gazes spoke what we couldn’t put into words. Porter might have needed me for a one-night deal, but it was turning out to be the deal of a lifetime. We couldn’t say it out loud yet, but this was...this could be...forever.

“Let’s take your brother out then get him settled. You can tell me all about your feelings tonight.”

“I’m a guy. We don’t talk about feelings.”

“Fine,” he smirked. “I guess you’ll just have to show me. What do you say?”

I shook my head, smiling, overwhelmed by how much my life had changed in just a week. I had my family here. I had my boyfriend, the hottest jock on campus in my opinion. And I had a future I never dared imagine.

I brushed my lips over his, then hugged him to me, swaying as I held him, bringing us both comfort.

“I say... Deal, Porter. You have a deal.”

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Nash

There was something about watching my man on the ice that had me wanting to take him home and give him a good body slam—on the mattress. That was usually the way things went. I went to all his games and afterward I helped him will all the aggression he didn't release during the game. Although tonight...shit. Porter was full of aggression.

Though I was up in one of the boxes, with drinks and snacks flowing behind me, my attention was glued to the action.

Brisson on the other team had been talking shit the entire game. He and Porter had history from college, and apparently, it was continuing. Porter had already landed in the penalty box twice after getting into it with the guy. Which was something, considering Porter was on the third line, so he didn't necessarily get as much ice time as other guys in the first and second lines. He didn't mind not being first or second line, though. He was just thrilled to be pro and that he wasn't in the minors, which was where he figured he'd start.

Still, everyone knew when his line went in things were gonna get physical.

The crowd roared as he and the winger opposite him shouldered through the other team's defense, battling toward the net. Everything moved so fast, I'd lost track of the puck, but I knew approximately where it was. I sat forward, tension vibrating through me, as sticks clashed near the goalie and a body from the other team went flying sideways, during the body to body action.

The horn went off, and the Lynx fans surged to their feet, screaming as our team got their third goal of the night. Porter circled his fist in the air, but I yelled, seeing Brisson beelining for him, slamming him into the boards.

“Porter,” I yelled, seeing his helmet go flying, his face smashed to the glass.

“Oh God,” the coach’s wife, Iris, murmured beside me. “This will be bad.

Down below, I saw coaches yelling as gloves were thrown and at least five other players joined the fray while refs tried to break up the brawl.

I couldn’t breathe as they finally peeled Brisson off Porter. Blood covered my man’s face when they got him off the ice and guided toward the locker room.

“Come on,” Iris said, tugging my arm. “Let’s go down. He’s gonna want you.”

Minutes later, security let me through and I rushed to where the team’s doctor was checking Porter. His jersey was off

“I’m fine. I’m fine,” he grumbled his words sounding a little garbled from his busted up lip. He’d stripped off his jersey, leaving him in pants and his pads. And there was my name on the bulge of his bicep.

He glanced over at me and I shook my head. “If he messed your pretty face, princess, I’m gonna have to hack in and destroy his credit score.”

The doc working on him just snorted, thinking princess was a joke between us—which, kind of it was, but on the other hand, it was always what I called Porter when I planned to drill him hard.

“His face will be fine,” the doc said. “Nothing broken; no stitches needed. But you should hack in and do it anyway. That attack was bullshit.”

I raised a brow at Porter and he shrugged on of his shoulders—probably because it would hurt too much to do both. He'd been beat up far more tonight than usual. And by that reasoning, I should probably leave him alone tonight. I knew he wouldn't let me. He'd have too much adrenaline to work off.

“You gotta stay to the end of the game?” I asked.

He shook his head.

“I'm sending him out of here,” the doc said. “I don't think he's got a concussion and the idiot refuses to go get scanned, even though he has a contract that clearly states—”

“I know,” Porter interrupted. “Nash knows what to look for. He'll take me to emergency care. Besides...I've had concussions. I knew the signs.”

The doctor finished cleaning him up and checking for injuries while I stood next to the table where Porter sat. Afterward, I waited quietly by the door while Port changed and shoved gear into a bag.

“Ready,” he said.

Shaking my head again, I took the heavy duffel from him, refusing to grunt at the weight. Side by side, we walked out to the care waiting for us. The driver took the duffel with a slight oof that made me feel better, and Porter and I climbed into the backseat.

In the only true sign of how he really felt, he treaded his fingers through mine and leaned his head on my shoulder.

“Brisson's an asshole,” he muttered.

“I could tell. What did he say.”

“You don’t want to know. Just allusions to my lifestyle.”

One of those. Thankfully, Porter didn’t run into many who were prejudiced against him, but apparently, Brisson was one of those guys .

“Like you said, he’s an asshole. Probably in the closet.”

Porter chuckled, then moaned as something hurt.

“Ice bath or hot tub?” I asked, as the driver pulled into the circle in front of our new house.

“Hot tub. I want you to come in with me.” Angling his head, he kissed along my jaw to my ear. “Naked.”

Fuck, I wanted that. I’d been hard all night while watching him. “You’re sure.”

“I need you.”

I nodded, turning, I kissed him. I poured all my pent up desire into it, letting him know I wanted him just as much, even if I was concerned for his wellbeing. I cupped his cheek, careful of his injuries, then gently pulled back.

“We’re here. Let’s get you taken care of.”

Moments later, we were inside. I dropped his bag on the tile of the entryway, and started stripping off my clothes to catch up with Porter who was already shucking off his pants. Pausing, I drew my knuckles along his side that was covered with bruises that were growing darkened as time passed.

“I’m gonna kill him,” I muttered.

Leaning in, Porter pressed his lips quickly to mine. “No, you’re not. This is just a product of my job. Now, come on.”

I finished undressing and followed after him, my cock pointing at exactly what it wanted. He opened the double doors leading to our private patio where the hot tub already bubbled. The autumn chill lifted goose bumps on my skin, but did nothing to cool my need to fuck Porter. And he knew it.

Looking slyly over his shoulder, he bent to open the storage hidden beneath one of the bench seats that circled the tub, purposely angling his ass toward me.

“Lube,” he said, tossing the tube toward me. Then he rested his crossed forearms on the edge of the hot tub, one knee up on the bench. “Hard and deep, sweetheart. Make me yell.”

“With all your bruises, that should be too hard,” I grumbled.

“Stop. I’m fine. You know I need my man in order to wind down.”

I did know it. I needed him, too. Wasting no time, I lubed up my cock then set to work on his asshole to get him ready for me. Within minutes, I was notching my glans to his opening. With a firm push, the head popped inside. I paused, while Porter whined in frustration, trying to shove back to take me deeper. My tight grip held him in place.

“Look at me,” I demanded. “I want to see your face.”

Eyes wild with lust, he peered over his shoulder at me. I held his gaze as I slowly pushed in. “I gotta tell you something.”

“What?” he groaned, he stare turning half-lidded and his mouth dropping open as I bottomed out. “Fu- uck . Fuck , Nash.”

“I love you.”

He gasped, the breath broken with shock and sensation, but I didn’t wait. Holding his hips tight, I pounded into his. My dick sawed over his prostate and in moments, Porter came, spraying over the side of the hot tub.

I didn’t stop. I chased my orgasm, knowing I could make him come again, even if it was only spasms with no spend. Cum boiled in in balls and the fiery sensation of my release surged down my spine, fisting there, knotting before exploding lava through my veins. Wave after wave hit me as I filled Porter’s ass giving him exactly what he’d asked for.

I collapsed over him, bracing myself with one arm so I didn’t give him my full weight. We panted together, his face on his forearms and my forehead planted between his shoulder blades, his heart beating so heard I could feel it against my cheek while we heaved for breath.

“Asshole,” he muttered finally.

I chuckled, shifting my hips and reminding him where my semi-hard dick was still lodged. “Exactly where you wanted.”

“Not what I mean, dick.” He flexed on me, making me groan. Every sensation was too much. “No nice dinner. No candle light. Just an I love you before you fuck me bareback in the backyard?”

“You know I’m a romantic,” I teased.

He sniffed an annoyed laugh. “Well, I love you, too. I guess.”

“You should probably make up your mind,” I said, pulling free of him and pressing kisses down his spine. I nipped his ass cheek. “I plan to marry you next year. You should know how you feel by then. You know...as part of the deal.”

Leaving him, I went to get a cloth, a bit surprised he didn't say a word. When I turned back, he was staring at me.

“Did you just propose?” he squeaked.

I lifted a shoulder. “What do you think?”

“I think you just proposed,” he gasped.

“Maybe, I just want to see my fucking hot man in a tux again.”

He shook his head and a slow smile bloomed across his face. “I love you, too, Nash. You're the best deal I've ever made.”

Dropping the cloth on the bench, I pulled him into my arms. My lips slanted over his. “No, you're the best I've ever made. Deal of a lifetime, and I'm never letting you go.”