







# Pucking Dirty (Pucked Up Love #1)

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**Category:** Sport

**Description:** Hell break every rule in the book to claim his coach's daughter.

Nash Whatley

Coach had two rules when I joined the team: Keep my name out of the press, and don't even think about touching his daughter. The first one? Easy. I'm not some rookie with a chip on my shoulder. The second one? Complicated.

Emilia Lariat might just be the thing I've been missing. But this sassy little minx thinks she can hide what we are together. We'll see how easy that is when I've got her bent over every flat surface in this arena.

She wants to play? That's fine. But I came to win, and not even her father will stop me.

Emilia Lariat

When my father told me to meet him in the locker room, the sausage-fest I walked in on wasn't what he had in mind. Now, I know what his entire roster looks like naked. Puck bunnies would kill to be me right now...and I'd kill to burn the image from my brain.

Thank God for Nash Whatley, my savior in skates. From the minute the growly giant drags me out of the locker room with his hands over my eyes, he's got my head and heart all messed up.

He's the last person I should be sneaking around with...but the second he touches me, I forget exactly what we're risking. I forget everything but his name.

Right up until my dad finds out, anyway...

**Total Pages (Source):** 10

# Page 1

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Emilia

I saw a dick once. My lab partner pulled his out mid-project during my freshman year of college. Naturally, I screamed, and karate chopped him across the throat. I'm not sure who was more startled, me or him.

But honestly. I don't know what else he expected me to do. Drop to my knees and slurp it down? No, thank you.

I didn't ask to see it, and it wasn't attractive. It honestly looked a little like a one-eyed lizard dying of dehydration.

Needless to say, I haven't been in a rush to see another one.

So when I march into the locker room at the Washington Carvers' arena to meet my dad, and it's a sausagefest—literally, there are dicks swinging everywhere—muscle memory kicks in.

A startled scream rips from my throat as I assume the position...knees bent, hands up. Ready to do moderate amounts of damage. The one thing I forget to do? Close my eyes.

It's like my brain short circuits, and I can't look away.

The entire locker room falls silent, a dozen sets of eyes locked on me.

I'm staring at their dicks. They're staring at me.

Awkward.

"No weird, dehydrated one-eyed lizard cocks here," I mumble. Guess that solves the mystery of why Chad decided to whip his out apropos of nothing. He was not a show'er or a grow'er. He needed medical intervention.

"Uh, who's the chick?" Logan Moreno, the team's goalie, slowly lowers his hands to cover his junk, humor glinting in his striking blue eyes.

"More importantly, did she just compare our cocks to lizards?" River St. James, second line center and countrywide playboy, makes no move to cover his as he leans up against the wall, flashing his dimples at me.

"Why does she look like she just ripped one?" Micah Rushing asks, his brows furrowed. His wedding band glints on his finger as he slowly yanks a pair of boxers up his muscular legs.

"That smell isn't me. I think it's your sweaty balls." I wrinkle my nose, glancing around. The organization spared no expense on this place. It's fancy fancy. The floor is carpeted, with rows of open wooden lockers instead of the metal cages you'd find in a school. Their jersey numbers are painted in team colors above each one, with the logo emblazoned on the ceiling. But there's a lingering hint of stale sweat, as if it's permeated every inch of the room. "Does it always smell like ass in here?"

Laughter ripples across the locker room as Micah's lips quirk up into a grin. "That's not my ass and balls you smell, sweetheart. You're probably smelling Jordan."

"Fuck off, Micah," Jordan Silvestri growls, lifting a middle finger in the air before his steely gray eyes come to me, his expression severe. With the piercing in his ear, his tattoos, and his long hair tied up on top of his head, he doesn't look like he stinks. He looks downright dangerous. Hot and dangerous. "Why are you in our locker room?"

"Wow. You are a grouch," I mumble, not really surprised. Everyone says he can be difficult. Not that I would really know.

My dad has been the head coach of the Washington Carvers for the last six years, but I've spent even longer on the other side of the country, chasing my dreams. Even if I hadn't been, my dad has always tried to keep me as far from the team as possible.

As far as he's concerned, hockey players aren't to be trusted, especially not around his daughter. I guess he'd know. He played professionally for years before my mom got pregnant with me. She wanted to put me up for adoption. He didn't. That was pretty much the end of his career on the ice.

"And you didn't answer the question."

"She's Lariat's daughter."

I glance to the right to see Archer Graves, the team captain, leaning against a door frame, his dark hair damp as if he just finished showering. He jerks his chin at me, amusement in his blue eyes. "What's up, Emilia?"

"Oh, thank God." My hands fall back to my sides, relief rushing through me at the sight of someone I know. I watch their games religiously, but Archer is the only current member of the team I've ever met. He's also fully clothed. "It's a whole sausagefest in here. I was beginning to think this is all you guys do in here all day."

"Sit around naked?" Archer asks.

"Circle jerks. Isn't that what they're called?" I shrug. "I read about them. A bunch of guys get together and..." I clock the way everyone is staring at me in varying degrees of shock and horror and realize that, perhaps, I shouldn't finish that sentence. In a matter of days, I'll be their therapist. I probably shouldn't antagonize them too much

right out of the gate. "You know what? Never mind. You've probably participated. You don't need me to explain the mechanics."

"Did she just accuse Cap of participating in a circle jerk?" Logan mumbles to Diego Tapia, who is staring at me with wide brown eyes and a shellshocked expression.

"Jesus fucking Christ." River falls against Jordan, choking on laughter.

Jordan just shakes his head and shoves him off, muttering something I can't hear. That's probably for the best. I don't think I want to know what he's thinking right now.

Judging by the way the whole team is looking at me, I don't want to know what any of them are thinking right now.

Rambling when I'm nervous has never done me any favors.

"Uh, I think she just accused all of us of participating in a circle jerk," Joaquin Reed answers for Diego.

"No. She just accused all of you of participating in multiple circle jerks," someone growls from behind me half a second before a pair of rough, callused hands cover my eyes.

My protest dies in a whimper as a hard body presses into me from behind. The faint smell of sweat is immediately eliminated by the delicious, spicy scent of his cologne. My head spins, my stomach doing this twisting spin maneuver I like a little too much.

"Pretty sure she meant you too, Nash," someone calls out.

"The hell she did," Nash Whatley growls, his lips dangerously close to my ear. His

naked chest vibrates against my back, and I think I whimper. Why does he smell so good? Why is his body so ridiculously hard? Better question, why is he covering my eyes when I'm pretty sure he's naked? I didn't see him, and I'd very much like to see him.

I'm not what they call a puck bunny and never have been. I only keep up with the team because they're pretty much my dad's whole life...and will be mine soon, too. But it's impossible to watch this sport and not know about Nash Whatley, even if this is his first season with the Carvers.

He's a beast of a man with an iron will, gorgeous emerald eyes, and a deadly smirk. Female fans swoon over him in droves, but he never pays them a single bit of attention.

It's one of a million things that make him so fascinating.

His parents were killed in a horrific accident his last year of college. His little sister, Aspen, nearly died too. He was a shoe in for the draft that year. Instead, he opted out. He moved back home and took care of Aspen, only getting back into the game once she was fully recovered. He worked his way up from the minor leagues while raising her, and has been smashing records ever since.

My dad really likes him. And I really like looking at him when they pan to him during games. If now is my one chance to see all of him before I have to pretend I'm a professional with my shit together, I am so taking it.

"Hey. Let me go," I grumble, squirming against him, but I might as well be trying to move a brick wall. He doesn't even budge.

"Out of the locker room, princess. Now."



How he manages to keep my eyes covered and march me toward the door is a mystery, but he makes it seem easy.

"Good luck with your...activities!" I call to the team. "Use lotion!"

"Jesus Christ," someone—probably Jordan—mutters.

"You're fun. Please come back soon," Logan calls through laughter.

"No, thanks. Too many dicks, not enough brain bleach."

"Did anyone else notice that she's been insulting us and our dicks since she burst in here?" someone asks.

Their voices fade as a blast of cool air and the aroma of stale popcorn slaps me in the face. Half a second later, I hear the locker room door groan closed behind us.

Nash drops his hands, and I find myself staring at the cinderblock wall outside of the locker room. For a moment, he keeps his body pressed to mine before he slowly steps back.

I immediately spin to face him...only to realize he's still a lot closer than anticipated. I land against his naked chest, staring at a memorial tattoo inked over his heart.

"Jesus," he grunts, his arms going around me as he hauls me closer. He dips his head, his eyes meeting mine. I knew they were gorgeous, but damn. They're deadly up close and personal, flecks of gold scattered throughout the rich emerald. Something dark and vast flows through them as he stares at me. It's...intense, like staring at the surface of the sun.

"You aren't naked," I say...the first thing that comes to mind.

His lips twitch. So does his dick.

I immediately drop my gaze to steal a peek. What? I'm not the staff psychologist yet.

He quickly halts me with a finger under my chin, tilting my head up toward him.

"Eyes up here, baby girl."

"Why?"

"You don't need to see what's happening down there."

"Why not?"

He stares at me levelly. "Do you always ask so many questions?"

"It depends on the day. Are you always so bossy?"

"It depends on the woman." He grimaces as soon as he says it. "That didn't come out right. There are no other women."

"Because you don't do puck bunnies?"

"Do puck bunnies?" He chuckles ruefully. "Well, that's one way of putting it. But yeah, I don't do puck bunnies." His gaze flickers across my face. "I don't do any women."

"So you're gay?"

His brows wing together. He isn't mad, though. Just surprised by the question, I think. People probably walk on eggshells around these guys all day, every day, afraid of

offending them. I am not that person. I can't do my job if I don't cross boundaries and get to the uncomfortable bits. Trauma isn't fun to talk about. If it were, everyone would do it.

"My dick is standing at attention right now because you smell like peaches, you sound fucking incredible when you whimper, and you're soft as hell," he rumbles. "I'd very much like to know if you smell that good everywhere, exactly what sound you'll make when I'm kissing you, and if you're just as soft beneath me. No, I'm not gay."

Well, then. I guess I'm not the only one in this hall comfortable crossing boundaries.

I squirm at the thought of him kissing me.

Heat blows through me at the thought of me beneath him.

Neither sounds like a bad time to me.

"What I meant to say is that I don't fuck around."

"Why not? Being a manwhore is pretty much a prerequisite for this sport." It's true. According to my father, most hockey players don't know how to keep it in their pants. I figure it has to do with spending their entire lives working to get to this level. Once they finally do, they're able to let loose for once. They take it to extremes because moderation isn't in their vocabulary. If it were, they probably wouldn't have stuck with a grueling sport they started playing when they were three.

Nash does not strike me as the type who takes things to extremes. He was probably born with his shit together, telling people what to do. It's kind of hot, honestly. I'll never be that put together or self-possessed.

He stares at me for a long moment, his gaze flickering over my face as if he's deep in

thought about something. And then he shakes his head, a tiny smile curving his lips up at the corners. "You're going to be a problem, aren't you?"

For him? Absolutely. In general? Also, absolutely. If you aren't causing a little trouble in life, you're doing it wrong. At least, that's my motto.

Hockey players aren't the only ones who have spent a lifetime focusing on their goals. I spent mine trying to get into college. And then I spent my college years determined to be the best. Now that I'm done, maybe I have a few wild oats to sow.

"Who me?" I bat my lashes. "Never."

He chuckles again, shaking his head. "Why do I get the feeling you're lying your ass off?"

"Because you have a suspicious mind? It probably comes with the territory."

"Being in the spotlight isn't too bad." The hint of shadow in his eyes tells me that isn't entirely true. I think being in the spotlight has been a lot harder on him than he wants to admit, especially after he lost his parents the way he did.

People never really let him forget it. He's never allowed to just be Nash Whatley, incredible left defenseman. He's always Nash Whatley, the incredible left defenseman who tragically lost his parents and opted out of the draft to raise his sister.

"Who said anything about that?" I smirk, teasing because I can't resist. I want to erase that shadow, replace it with laughter. "I was talking about circle jerks in the locker room. Doing that where anyone can walk in?" I arch a brow at him. "Talk about risky behavior, Whatley."

"We don't jerk off in the locker room."

"Together or separately? Because, honestly, that seems like a missed opportunity right there. That locker room is fancy."

He growls, something wholly predatory flashing in his eyes as he gently backs me up against the wall. "You talk a lot of shit for someone your size."

"Jealous of my size now, huh?" I ask, my voice breathy as he looms over me, caging me in against the wall. I'm not a small girl. I never have been. I'm five six and wear size twenty on a good day. But next to him, I might as well be four feet and ninety pounds. He's just that freaking big.

"Jealous I don't know what that fucking mouth tastes like yet," he grunts, his gaze dropping to my mouth. "Your size is part of the reason I might just be jerking my cock in the locker room today—for the first time, I might add. And no, I won't have an audience."

"Your team will be disappointed to hear that."

"It's not a team sport, princess."

"Pity," I whisper, licking my lips. "Seems like it'd be way more fun if it were."

"Fucking minx," he groans, his hands sinking into my hips as he leans toward me. My stomach bottoms out, my heart racing at the way he grips me so possessively.

This is it. Nash Whatley is going to kiss me.

He leans closer.

"Whatley! Why the fuck do you have your hands on my daughter?"

I hate my life. It's a cruel, vicious Shakespearean farce. And my father is the Bard himself, penning gosh damn tragedies right through the middle of the good parts.

Nash's eyes whip to mine like lightning striking, his hands falling from my hips. "Daughter?"

"Did I forget to mention that?"

"Yeah, princess," he growls, storm clouds roiling in his eyes. "You definitely forgot to mention that."

"Whoops. My bad."

I should probably feel guilty for not making sure he knew, but I don't. It's been the same story my whole life. As soon as someone finds out who my dad is, suddenly, I'm untouchable. Even on the other side of the freaking country, as soon as people knew, my dating life dried up faster than the Sahara. The only candidates left were the guys hoping to get in good with him...and that was absolutely not happening.

Being the only virgin left alive never really bothered me before. No one ever interested me enough to get worked up about it when toys do the trick just fine. But I really, really wanted this man to do some touching.

There's no way that's happening now.

I slide out from under his arm, disappointment coursing through me.

His lips brush my ear, sending a jolt through me. "If you think being Lariat's kid is going to save you, you're wrong," he growls.

I whip my head in his direction, my eyes wide.

"This isn't over."

"Whatley!" my dad growls. "Don't piss me off, kid."

Damn. I almost forgot he was charging toward us like a raging bull. His timing, for lack of a more apt descriptor, sucks sweaty hockey balls.

"Found her in the locker room, Coach," Nash says casually, turning to glance at my dad, who is staring at us with suspicion stamped all over his rugged face. "I just escorted her out and was making sure she's okay." He winks at me, stepping away to create some respectable distance. "She's a little upset about what she saw in there. I believe she called it a sausagefest."

Oh, he's good. Evil, but good.

"Fuck." My dad stops midstep, glancing toward the locker room door with furrowed brows. "She walked in there?"

"She is right here," I complain. Being talked around is so aggravating! I'm twenty-four, not four.

"You walked in on them changing?"

"Yes."

"Son of a bitch," my dad mutters.

"Nice to meet you, Emilia." Nash pulls open the locker room door, strolling through it. I may or may not stare at his ass the whole time. I'll never tell.

"You okay, kid?" my dad asks.

I startle, quickly yanking my gaze up.

"Fine," I mumble, and then press my hands to my overheated cheeks, staring at him with wide eyes. "You could have warned me not to go in there!"

He rubs the back of his neck, chuckling ruefully. "Well, shit, Em. I figured you'd call me when you got here, not burst right in."

I eye him sideways. Does he even know me at all? "When have I ever knocked on a door?"

"Good point." He strides forward, pulling me into a tight hug. I squeeze him back, resting my head on his broad shoulder for a minute. I've missed him like crazy. I've always been a daddy's girl. "Were they nice to you?"

"I'm going to need brain bleach to unsee what I saw, especially if I'm going to be helping out around here, but they were fine, Dad. Very respectful," I promise.

"What was going on with Nash?" He pulls back to look at me, suspicion lingering in his gaze. "That didn't look like him comforting you. He was in boxers."

"And I was a deer in the headlights with a team of naked hockey players. Naked hockey players who I'll be discussing mental health things with in two weeks, I might remind you. Would you have preferred that he left me in there? He was just being helpful."

"You sure? I'll send his ass down to our minor league team if I need to do it, Emilia," he says, his hazel eyes completely serious. "If you're going to be working for the team, I don't want them thinking they can fuck around with you. If I need to make an example of someone to drive that fact home, I'll do it."



"Dad," I protest, my heart clenching at the thought of him sending Nash to the minor league team in Pennsylvania. "That's insane!"

"You come first, kid. You aren't getting mixed up with one of these guys. I know exactly what kind of trouble they can be. I used to be one of them. How do you think I met your mom?"

I've heard that story before. My mom was a fan of the team. My dad was a fan of my mom. And she wasn't a fan of motherhood or being tied down. When she got pregnant and he asked her to marry him, she opted out.

It's just been the two of us since.

I still see her occasionally, but we've never been close. I've never known her enough to miss her when she's not around. She's just the woman who gave birth to me but didn't want the responsibility. My dad is the MVP who stuck it out. He's the one who gave up everything to give me an incredible life. As far as I'm concerned, he's a hero.

He drops a kiss on my head. "Let me go light a fire under their asses, and then I'll show you to your office."

"Sure," I say weakly, watching as he strides into the locker room. I swallow hard, leaning against the wall. Looks like my fun with Nash Whatley is officially over. There's no way I'm going to risk him being sent down just because I like him. It's just not worth his career. He was born to play, not to throw it all away for his coach's daughter.

"It was fun while it lasted," I mutter, sighing heavily. At least I got good fantasy material out of it. That'll have to do because my dad was serious. He will absolutely send him down to make an example of him. And then I'll forever be the girl who ruined Nash Whatley's career. Exactly like I ruined my dad's.

I do not need that bad juju following me around. No, thank you.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Nash

"Holy shit," Logan says, a bark of laughter erupting from his lips as we sit at our usual booth at the back of the Players' Club on one of the upper levels of the arena. "The lizard dick chick is here."

"Fuck," I mumble, sloshing beer across the table as I glance up, immediately doing a sweep of the bar. I fling the sticky liquid off, my dick turning to stone when I spot Emilia practically dancing her way across the room toward the bar, her dimples on full display as she laughs to herself.

Jesus H. Christ, she's gorgeous.

Her black hair is pinned up on top of her head with pieces hanging free around her heart-shaped face. Dark, sooty lashes frame her stunning gold eyes. Her soft blue sweater dress skims her body, hinting at the lush curves I had beneath my hands just one week ago.

I've thought of little but those curves and those dimples since. As soon as I walked out of the shower and saw her standing in the locker room, my goddamn heart stopped. I can't even explain what happened. I just know I wanted her away from my teammates and all to myself, pronto.

"The lizard dick chick? What the fuck, Logan?" Archer shakes his head in disgust. "She has a name."

Logan smirks at him, throwing an arm over the back of the leather booth. "Yeah, but

lizard dick chick is more fun to say."

"Says the motherfucker who spends half of his life talking to himself in a net," Jordan mutters.

"The conversation in that net is scintillating, bitch." Logan flips him off, earning a grunt from Jordan. "And scintillating doesn't mean it smells like your sweaty balls, in case you were wondering. I know big words are hard for you and shit."

"Man, fuck you." Jordan takes a pull from his beer as he side-eyes Logan. "Why the fuck couldn't we trade for Dacen Reaper instead of you?"

"Because they pay your big ass too much and couldn't afford him." Logan bats his lashes at Jordan. Like me, Logan is new to the team. He played for the Predators for years, but something happened with his sister. He's incredibly tight-lipped about the details, but it prompted his move here. "You're stuck with me instead. Suck it up, buttercup."

Jordan cracks a smile, shaking his head.

I go back to staring at Emilia. She stops halfway across the bar to talk to Alice Madison, our publicist. Judging by the way they hug it out and then start talking with their hands, they've got a lot to say. I lean closer...like that's going to help me hear over my loud fucking teammates.

Jesus. Do they ever shut the fuck up?

No. The answer is no.

"She's really Lariat's kid?" Diego asks from beside me.

"Yes," I growl, turning to glower at him. I send the same warning look to everyone else at the table. "That means hands off. Coach will rip your balls off and feed them to you." And by coach, I mean me, but I leave that part out.

"Damn. What did Lariat say to you in his office the other day?" Logan asks, one brow quirked. "He's got your big ass out here defending her honor like she's your kid."

"Nothing." That's a lie. He told me the same shit he told me when I joined the team—stay out of the gossip pages and away from his daughter. Neither was a problem then. I'm thirty-two, not a fucking rookie with a chip on my shoulder and something to prove. And the only thing I knew about his daughter was that he had one.

My, how the tables have turned.

I've spent the last week trying to convince myself the rules apply now more than ever. Spoiler alert: it isn't working.

As soon as I think I've convinced myself, I remember the way she smiled up at me, her relentless teasing, or the way she whimpered when I pressed up against her, and all my hard work means exactly dick.

I wasn't lying when I told her that I don't fuck around. And promising Coach that I'd stay out of trouble wasn't a hardship. I know exactly how shit in this league works.

Guys like River, Joaquin, and Diego burn hot and fast. Everyone loves them, but their stars burn out before their bodies do. They spend half their careers with fans hating them for all the questionable shit they did back in the day—like fucking their way through half the fandom. But guys like me, Archer, Jordan, and Micah? Hell, even Logan, despite how often he pretends he's just like River to keep all eyes on him and away from his sister? We've been at it long enough to know this isn't a sprint. Real

fans don't want out-of-control players who spend as much time gracing the gossip pages as they do on the ice. They want players dedicated to the game.

I've been that motherfucker for years, keeping my head down and doing what needed to be done. I never wanted my sister caught up in any bullshit, so I kept my head on straight and focused on the game.

Until now. Emilia Lariat has me ready to break every single rule in the book just for a taste.

I glance back over at her in time to see her hugging Alice again. She waves bye to her, and then resumes her trek to the bar, those dimples lighting up the entire fucking room.

Christ, I want that round ass in my hands while she's begging me to fuck my kid into her.

I slouch down in the booth, snatching my bottle from the table to take a long drink. It doesn't settle me down any at all.

"Rumor is that she's our new staff shrink," Archer says, his voice a quiet murmur.

I heard the same rumor. It's yet another reason I need to keep my hands to myself. Come Monday, she won't just be Lariat's daughter. She'll be a member of the staff. That's bound to get complicated.

"Jesus fucking Christ," Jordan mutters, turning to peer at her through narrowed eyes. "There's no way she's the shrink. She's what? Eighteen?"

"Twenty-four," Archer says. "She has a graduate degree in psychology."

"How the fuck do you know so much about her?" River leans back in the booth, suspicion written all over his face. "You got a hard on for her or something?"

I growl softly.

"Fuck no." Archer scowls at him, his gaze flickering to Micah and then away before anyone else notices. I clock it, though. Archer thinks he's subtle, but half the goddamn team knows he's in love with Micah's baby sister, Wren. I spent five minutes in a room with them together and figured it out. The only one who hasn't worked it out yet is Micah. He's too wrapped up in his wife and baby to notice. "I've met her before."

Everyone at the table turns to look at him.

"You met her before? How the fuck did you get to meet her, but we didn't?" Joaquin asks, scowling like he thinks it's a big injustice. It is, actually. I should have met her as soon as I was traded to the Carvers. But the rest of these assholes? Fuck no. They don't need to know anything about her, especially not Joaquin or River. Diego, either.

"I had to run by Coach's place one day to grab something when she was home from college a few years ago." Archer shrugs like it's not a big deal. To him, I'm sure it's not. There's a reason he's the captain. Nothing much rattles him or gets him worked up. He's solid, steady, and chill as fuck most of the time. "I stayed for dinner."

"Aww. Did Daddy cook for his little man?" Diego asks.

"Man, knock it off with that shit," Archer growls, scowling at our backup goalie.

"Yeah, Diego," Logan says, jumping to Archer's defense. "It's not his fault that virtually everyone on the planet likes him better than you."

"Not everyone," Diego protests.

"Name one person who prefers you to Archer."

"Uh, my mom, motherfucker."

"You mean the lady who broke out a jersey with his number on it and asked him to sign it, and then wore it through the whole after party when we made it to the Playoffs last year?" River asks. "Man, she'd throw you in front of a bus for Cap."

"Fine," Diego grumbles before his tone turns triumphant. "But your mom fucking loves me. She told me so before I blew her back out last night."

"You are such a fucking..."

Emilia reaches the bar, leaning over to say something to Marco, the bar tender. When she does, her dress rides up dangerously high in the back. My mouth waters at the sight of her thick thighs.

Some asshole in a suit, one of the execs named Sean or Sven or something like that, seated off to the side notices her, too. He licks his fucking lips, staring at her ass. A second later, his hand drops to his lap, adjusting his dick.

"Nope. Hell no," I growl, dropping my bottle to the table and sliding from the booth.

"Where the fuck are you going?" Micah asks.

I ignore him, stalking across the bar toward Emilia as Sean or Sven or whatever his fucking name is heads her way, too. I beat him there, shooting him a warning glare as I press up against her from behind.



She immediately squeaks, spinning around to face me...which just means her tits are crushed against my chest and my dick is nestled against her stomach. I lash a hand around her waist, pinning her in place as I glance over at the dick in the suit again.

He holds his hands up, backing away. "My bad, Whatley. Didn't know she was yours."

She isn't mine. Yet. But I don't tell him that.

Christ, I am so fucked.

I wait for Suit to walk away before I slowly release Emilia, glancing down at her. Her wide eyes are locked on my face, the desire in them unmistakable. I want to lick my way across every freckle on her face.

Goddammit.

"Hey," I mutter, sliding onto a stool.

"Are you stalking me, Nash Whatley?" she asks, hopping up onto the stool beside me. Judging by the way she smiles when she says it, she isn't opposed to the idea.

"You're in our bar, baby girl."

"What?" Her brows furrow, her face scrunching up as she glances around. Her expression quickly clears when she notices the giant television screens, the windows overlooking the ice below, and the blue and gray motif all over the place. "Oh, right."

I chuckle, shaking my head. It shouldn't be legal to be so fucking beautiful and so fucking adorable at the same time. "Did you forget that you're at the arena?"

"No," she mumbles, avoiding my gaze, which I take to mean yes, she did forget that.

I shift on the stool, trying to give my dick a little breathing room. It's a fruitless attempt. The hard bastard isn't going down anytime soon.

"I heard a rumor."

"What a coincidence. So did I."

"Oh, I can't wait to hear this shit." I motion for her to go ahead with hers. I already know it's going to be ridiculous. Damn near every word out of her mouth is full of fire and sass, as if teasing me is a biological imperative with her.

She waits for the bartender to place her drink in front of her—which looks suspiciously like a milkshake and nothing at all like alcohol—and then leans so close her perfect tits brush my arm. I feel her breath on the side of my face and my goddamn cock throbs.

"Rumor has it that a certain left defenseman may or may not have violated the sanctity of the locker room by jerking off in it," she whispers in my ear. "Alone."

A bark of surprised laughter rumbles from my lips as she drops back down onto her stool, grinning from ear to ear.

"Care to confirm or deny these heinous allegations, Whatley?" she asks, holding her milkshake out toward me like it's a microphone and she's a gossip reporter.

"Confirmed," I growl, pulling the straw into my mouth to take a big drink. I smell the alcohol right about the time I choke on it. My eyes water as the alcohol burns its way down my throat. "Jesus fucking Christ, Emilia. You could kill a horse with that thing."

She gasps in outrage, holding the milkshake against her chest like I just threatened to murder it. "Worry about yourself, Whatley."

"What the fuck is in it? Half a bottle of rum?"

"A little of this, a lot of that." She grins, popping the straw into her mouth to take a drink...and I've never wanted to be a straw more in my life. Her eyes immediately widen with shock and then start watering. "Oh. Oh, wow. That's way stronger than I expected."

"What is it?"

"A harmless peach milkshake."

I shoot her a look.

"A harmless boozy peach milkshake."

"So...our new shrink drinks boozy peach milkshakes, doesn't know how to knock, and likes to fuck with me. What else should I know about her?" I ask.

Her eyes widen.

"I told you that I heard a rumor," I say, shrugging. "Yours is more salacious than mine, but I still feel like I won this round."

Her lips twitch, her dimples popping out. "Why? Because everyone already knows about the team circle jerks?" She pats me on the shoulder. "It's okay, buddy. I won't tell them you violated the rule about being a team...player."

I chuckle, shaking my head. "You're a wild one, Emilia Lariat."

She takes a tiny sip of her milkshake, grinning around the straw.

I glance behind us to see the entire team watching us in various states of shock and awe. Archer looks worried. Jordan looks bored. Everyone else is blatantly staring.

Fuck. I should go back to the table and mind my own business. Flirting with the Coach's daughter is the last place my big ass needs to be when everyone at that booth may bear the brunt of my decisions.

I turn back to Emilia to find her staring at me like she doesn't want to look away. My fucking heart clenches, the desire to walk away rapidly dwindling.

What is it about this girl that's so fucking irresistible?

Everything, I quickly decide. It's everything. She feels...inevitable. Or hell, maybe we feel inevitable. I don't fucking know. This is far beyond my realm of expertise or experience. It's been years since I even went on a date. But I've always heeded my instincts, and they're telling me that this girl is important.

They've been telling me the same damn thing since I saw her standing in the locker room. Coach doesn't have to understand that, but I think maybe his daughter understands a little too well. I see it reflecting in her eyes. She's just as caught as I am...and just as confused.

The little flash of vulnerability in her eyes as she stares at me has my resolve to try to keep things between us professional crumbling to dust. There's nothing professional about this. It's about as personal as it gets.

"Why didn't I know you were Lariat's kid?" I murmur, leaning closer to her.

"Maybe you don't pay enough attention," she says pertly. "Archer told the team I was

his daughter."

"I was in the shower."

"Naked," she mumbles, her eyes glazing over as they slide down my body. "Think you can recreate that scene for me? For science, obviously. I, unfortunately, know what the rest of the team looks like. It's only fair I have your data for comparison." Her dimples pop out again. "My fantasy league still needs an MVP."

"Depends," I rumble, chuckling. Christ, she's hilarious. "You gotta answer my questions first."

"What questions?" she eyes me suspiciously. "You don't want to know what other datapoints I use to pick my fantasy dream team, Whatley. Trust me."

Well, shit. Now, I kinda do want to know.

"Oh! You asked what else you should know about me, right?"

"That's one of them."

"Hmm." She taps her lips, thinking about it. "I just graduated and moved back."

"To take the job as our shrink."

"To be closer to my dad. But yeah, I guess that too." Her worried eyes meet mine. "Does it bother you?"

"Which part?"

"That I'm the new therapist."

"Nah, I'm good with it."

Relief filters across her face before her teeth sink into her plump bottom lip. "What about the rest of it?"

Telling her yes and ending this here and now is the sane thing to do. But as already established, there's no fucking way I'm doing that. Not going to happen. One way or another, Emilia Lariat is going to be mine. Coach doesn't have to like it. He'll live. But I want his daughter, and I fully intend to get her.

"Good with that part too, baby girl," I grunt.

"Good." She beams at me, her gold eyes bright. "Because I'd really hate for that rumor about your...activities to get out. I mean, if the bunnies knew what you guys do in that locker room?" She shakes her head, tsking. "You'd need more than a measly door to keep them at bay."

"It certainly didn't stop you, did it?"

"Did you just call me a puck bunny?" she asks, one brow arched. "I thought we already established that you don't do puck bunnies, Nash."

"Oh, I don't. But I can think of a few things I want to do to you," I say dryly.

"I just bet you can." Humor dances in her eyes as she slides from her stool. "Dance with me."

"Uh..." I glance around. "This isn't that kind of bar, Emilia."

"So? It can be if we make it one. I mean...unless you're afraid?"

It's a goddamn gauntlet meant to illicit a reaction. I know it is. But with that wicked smirk on her lips and the fire in her eyes, I'm moving before I even know it. I grab her hand, lacing our fingers together as I pull her toward the center of the bar.

The music floating through the bar isn't loud, but it suits our purposes as I pull her up against my chest and then spin her. A loud peal of surprised laughter burbles from her lips.

My teammates whoop and holler, cheering us on.

I try to tune them out, focused on the little minx in my arms as we sway back and forth, spinning around the bar like we're the only two in the motherfucker.

"You can dance," she says, smiling up at me.

I dip my head, placing my lips against her ear. "You'd be surprised what I can do, Emilia."

She trembles in my arms, whimpering faintly. And that fucking sound... Christ, that sound. I want to hear it while she's spread out beneath me, naked and pleading for me to let her come. If she begs sweetly enough, I'll let her. I'll keep her coming until she's so high on me, nothing else exists.

I don't know if she sees my thoughts on my face or if she's just incapable of behaving herself, but when I spin her again, she intentionally brushes her perfect ass against my cock, grinding back against me.

What little restraint I have shears in two.

If I don't know what that mouth tastes like right now, I'm going to snap.

"We're leaving," I growl, catching her around the wrist to reel her back into my arms. My lips touch the side of her throat, and I inhale. Her scent works like a wrecking ball on my system as I march her out of the bar, my asshole teammates catcalling and whistling the whole time.

I glance up long enough to see Archer watching us, still looking worried. But I don't pay him any attention. Neither does Emilia. This is between the two of us. He can captain someone else for the night.

She's trembling in my arms, her nails digging into my side. Goddamn, she's perfect. I haul her out through a side door, letting it slam behind us.

Before she can even move, she's against the wall with me pressed up against her.

"Grind against my cock now, princess," I groan, dragging my lips down the side of her throat.

"Kiss me, Nash," she whispers, my name shaking on her lips.

I spin her around, my mouth crashing down on hers. I taste the alcohol on her breath, but beneath that, I taste her. She's so fucking sweet. Jesus. I press her harder against the wall, licking into her mouth as she practically climbs my body.

Her cunt nestles against my cock, a soft sob escaping her lips.

"Grind all over me, Emilia," I order, biting her lip. "Make yourself come like a good fucking girl. We both know it's what you want, isn't it?"

"Yes. No." She claws down my shoulders, whimpering. "I just want you, Nash. I can't think straight."



"Are you drunk?" I pull back long enough to ask. I don't think she drank nearly enough of that milkshake to cloud her judgement but better safe than sorry. I don't want her to regret this shit tomorrow.

"What? No. I'm..." She squirms all over my cock, her cheeks pink.

Realization dawns, hitting like a hammer blow. Jesus Christ. She's a virgin. She has no idea what she's feeling because she's never felt it before now.

I'm an asshole for feeling like a god because she chose me, but it's impossible not to feel that way. I'm the lucky motherfucker she wants. Anyone in my shoes would feel the same exact way.

My hands sink into her hips, rocking her against me.

"Turned on, Emilia," I murmur, attacking her perfect mouth again. "Your panties are dripping wet and your pretty little cunt aches because you're turned on. You can't think straight because you need to come."

"Yes, that. Do that."

I chuckle, biting her bottom lip. "Nah, baby girl. You do it. Rock that gorgeous body against me until you shatter."

"Sure, make me do all the work," she grumbles.

I grind her down on my cock. "Does that feel like you're doing all the work?"

"Oh," she moans, her head falling back. "Do that again."

I don't tell her no. I grip her ass in both hands, dry fucking her like my life depends

on it. Right now, it actually might. If anyone catches us, I'm fucked. And not in the way I want to be. But that's not my priority right now. She is. This is.

Damn, this is heaven. She's so wet she's soaking my jeans.

I kiss her again, long and deep. She moans into my mouth, running her hands all over my shoulders as she works her hips frantically, chasing the high.

"That's it," I croon. "Use my cock to get yourself there, Emilia. I want you to fucking drench those panties for me."

"I...I already have!" she cries quietly. "They're so wet, Nash."

"Good girl." I bury my face in her throat, nipping and sucking. "I'm taking them when you're done. When I come tonight, it'll be with them wrapped around my cock."

"You can do that? Can I watch?"

I chuckle through a pained groan against her skin, my balls throbbing. If she keeps talking, I'm going to be fucking her against this wall while everyone listens to her scream my name.

I adjust my position, balancing her carefully as I slip a hand between our bodies. The second I feel the sticky juices coating her inner thighs, cum spills into my boxers.

I flick her panties aside, parting her slit with my thumb.

"Oh. Oh my god."

"You can call me your god if you insist, but Nash will do just fine," I tease, pressing my thumb to her clit. She's so fucking wet. So hot. Goddamn, where has she been all

my life? I grind my thumb against her, nipping the shell of her ear at the same time.  
"Come on my fingers, Emilia. Let me feel it."

She falls forward, faceplanting against my shoulder. A second later, I feel her teeth in my skin, stifling her cries as she unravels in my arms.

I work her through it, dragging out every ounce of pleasure until she's mewling and shivering in my arms, her tits heaving against my chest.

Fuck, she's beautiful when she's coming.

I need to see it again.

I need to feel it again.

I need her coming all over me repeatedly for the foreseeable future.

I'm fucked on levels I can't even begin to comprehend right now.

"Perfect," I murmur, brushing my lips against hers in a sweet kiss before I slowly lower her to her feet. She sways against me as I slide her panties down her legs, stealing them before she has a chance to change her mind or argue about it. I catch a peep at her bare pussy and my dick throbs again.

Christ Almighty. I want to eat it...just bury myself between her thighs and never come up for air again. I can live on her pussy and orgasms, easy.

I carefully tuck her panties in my pocket, pulling her into my arms again before I give into the urge to drop to my knees and feast.

She opens her mouth to say something, but I cut her off with a hard kiss, my heart

pounding. If she says she regrets what just happened or that it shouldn't have happened...

"Nash," she whispers sweetly against my lips. "Can we do that again?"

The knot of anxiety growing in my stomach vanishes as I exhale a rough chuckle, kissing her again. "Fuck yeah. Anytime, anyplace, princess."

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Emilia

"Y ou know I can drive, right?" I ask Nash, smiling as he bundles me into the passenger seat of his oversized truck and then leans across me to latch my seatbelt.

"You've been drinking." His hand glides down my thigh, sending heat ripping through me. I practically squirm in the seat, fighting the urge to whimper. The fact that I'm not wearing panties doesn't help. There's a whole flood happening down there right now.

"You weren't?" I ask.

"I had a quarter of a beer."

"Oh. I didn't drink much, either. I'm okay to drive."

His eyes come to mine, his expression somber. "Doesn't matter how much you had, princess. I'm not letting you get behind the wheel."

"Because of your parents," I whisper, my heart clenching as understanding dawns.

He jerks his head in a tight nod, his jaw pulsing as my seatbelt clicks into place. Even in the quasi-dark of the parking garage, there's no mistaking the grief and pain lingering in the depths of his eyes.

I reach up, placing my hand on his scruffy cheek.

His eyes come back to me, settling on my face.

"I'm so sorry you lost them, Nash," I whisper.

He gently grabs my wrist, pulling my hand to his lips to kiss my palm. "Me too," he says simply before settling my hand in my lap.

I watch as he slams the door and then circles around the truck before climbing in beside me. He's...tense in a way he wasn't before I brought up his parents.

"I'm not going to ask you to talk about them if that's what you're worried about over there," I murmur, trying to reassure him. "This isn't a visit in my office to talk about your feelings. You don't owe me answers, Nash."

"I appreciate that." He glances over at me, his expression still clouded. "I don't mind talking about them. The way we lost them fucking sucks, but it's always nice to remember them. Most people are afraid to even bring them up around me. The only time I ever hear about them is from reporters." His lips pull down into a frown. "I'm just trying to figure out what the fuck the rules are here."

I hate that reporters are the only ones who talk about his parents. But I kind of love that he's just as confused by all of this as I am. A week ago, I was determined to stay away from him. Now? Well, it's not so simple. My willpower has been slowly eroding all damn week. Seeing him in the bar tonight wiped out whatever little bit remained.

I like him, far more than is good for him. Judging by the way he acts with me, I'm not the only one who feels the insane pull between us. But this is foreign territory for both of us.

So...maybe we say screw the rules and make our own.

"Um, I think we broke the rules about four exits ago," I tease to lighten the mood.

His lips lift slightly, one brow winging toward his hairline as he starts his truck. The engine rumbles to life, vibrating the entire cab. "Pretty sure we broke them as soon as we met, Emilia."

"True. You did kidnap me from a locker room at the speed of light."

"You're working hard on that revisionist history, I see."

"Glad you noticed my effort."

His smile grows, banishing the shadows from his eyes as he puts the truck in reverse, backing out of his spot. I watch him out of the corner of my eye for several minutes before I feel compelled to speak again.

"Since we broke the rules already, how about we ditch the rest of the rulebook, and make our own?" It's not a novel concept, but it is a dangerous one. If my dad finds out anything about this, he's going to lose his proverbial shit. It doesn't matter that I'm twenty-four. He's still my father. He's also Nash's boss for all intents and purposes. And he's rungs above me on the ladder around here, too. This could end in disaster.

"What are your rules, baby girl?" Nash asks, cutting his eyes at me.

I think quickly, not entirely sure I have any. At least none I'm not willing to let him break.

"No more doing what we did tonight," I decide.

A growl of displeasure rumbles from his side of the truck.

"Oh! I don't mean the stuff in the hall. Definitely do more of that. Please do more of that. I meant the whole making a public spectacle thing," I quickly clarify. "We need to at least try to be professional when we're at the arena. I don't want to be labeled as a puck bun—" I break off, wrinkling my nose. "Have I mentioned yet how much I dislike that term?"

"Puck bunny?"

"Yes!" I cry. "Bunnies are prey. They're innocent little creatures hunted by predators. Hockey players aren't predators, and the women who sleep with them aren't prey. I know it's meant to be an insult, but it's honestly kind of infantilizing in a way not intended, as if they're not fully involved in their decisions to sleep with hockey players."

He glances over at me again. "What would you call them?"

"Sexually liberated women hockey players like to fu—"

"Do not finish that sentence," he growls, making me laugh.

"You asked."

"I regret it already."

I fall back against the seat, smirking at him. "I don't remember what we were talking about now."

"You were telling me how you don't want to be labeled a sexually liberated woman a hockey player likes to fuck," he says, deadpan.

"Just one, huh? Smooth, Whatley. Very smooth."



"Didn't even have to try." He shoots me another look as we roll through a green light.  
"I hate everyone you've ever seen naked."

"So...just your teammates, then." I grimace. "And Chad."

"Who the fuck is Chad?"

"We went to college together. He's the reason I didn't know sex was magical until..."  
I pretend to look at my phone. "Twenty minutes ago."

"What the fuck did he do to you, Emilia? I'll end him," Nash says, his voice dropping so low it sounds like thunder rumbling across the cab of the truck.

"Whoa. Make that sound again. That was hot."

"Start talking, princess," he growls.

"He didn't do anything to me. Well," I amend. "That's not entirely true. Sexual harassment is sexual harassment. It shouldn't be trivialized."

"You are not making me want to rip his head off and shove it up his ass any less right now," Nash warns, his tone black.

"We were lab partners my freshman year. He decided to whip his dick out in the middle of a study session and try to shove it in my hand."

"Jesus fucking Christ."

"If it makes you feel better, I punched him in the throat."

His lips curve into a wicked smile. "That does help. I still want to shove his own head

up his ass, but good girl. Never let some asshole put his fucking hands on you without permission."

My stomach flutters at his praise. I do not hate when he calls me that.

"Anyway, he spent the rest of the year telling everyone I assaulted him. He left out the part where he pulled his dick out and tried to force it into my hand," I mutter. "He was popular. I wasn't. It was a very isolating experience."

"What a little prick."

"It was actually. And weird looking."

Nash doesn't laugh.

"I think he's the reason I decided to declare as a psych major, honestly. My mental health needed serious work that year." I tuck strands of hair behind my ear. "I don't want to end up in that same headspace because everyone thinks I'm sleeping my way through the team. It may surprise you, but I'm actually pretty good at this mental health thing."

"Not a damn thing about that surprises me, Emilia." He pulls to a stop at a red light, glancing over at me. "Why would it?"

"I can be a lot for some people," I say, shrugging. I'm not ashamed of it, but it's the truth. I was raised by a single father who spent his whole life on the ice, surrounded by hockey players. I've never been appropriate or well-behaved. I'm not entirely sure what either of those things even look like.

I say what's on my mind. I give as good as I get. I rarely ever back down. And on most days that end in Y, I'm a whole damn mess. But that's the beauty of knowing

who you are and what you believe in. It's the joy that comes with having a parent who embraces every loud, messy part of you and wants you to thrive exactly as you are. No one ever tried to pour me into a mold and chip away the edges that didn't fit.

I was always allowed to just...be.

I want the same exact things for the people who come to see me. Everyone deserves that freedom. I can't talk people through their issues and coach them into being their authentic selves if I'm not authentically myself.

I can't help but worry that the team and management may be expecting someone...a lot less like me, though. Most people do. I do not want to add to any preconceived notions by getting a reputation right out of the gate. People accuse women of sleeping their way to the top every day. I don't want to be one of them, especially when I'm already going to be judged because my father is the head coach.

I leave out the part about my dad threatening to send Nash down to the minor league team to make an example out of him. I don't want to hide it from him. I just...really don't want him to decide this isn't worth the risk.

Can't I have one night before being the Coach's daughter ruins it? That's been the story of my life. I don't want it to repeat itself this time. Not with Nash.

Maybe that's selfish and unfair of me. I don't know. But I want Nash badly enough to accept those labels.

"Yeah, well, they weren't the right people then," Nash mutters, reaching over to touch my cheek. "Professional doesn't mean you have a stick up your ass. I've known doctors who have wheelchair races in the halls and scientists who pilfer supplies to make dick molds."

"Of their own...?" I stare at him with wide eyes.

He shrugs. "People are who they are. Professional means you know your shit and know when to act like you have it together. It doesn't mean you've gotta walk around with a superiority complex seven days a week."

"Wisely spoken," I murmur.

He winks at me, slowly sliding his hand away. "I'm a wise motherfucker on occasion, baby girl."

"Only on occasion?"

"I willingly spend about half my time in a locker room that smells like ball sweat and swamp ass, Emilia. Wisdom is definitely an occasional thing over here."

I throw my head back, laughing loudly.

"What other rules do you have?"

"No talking about Fight Club?"

He shoots me a look, making me laugh.

"I can't think of any right now. You?"

"You make the rules, Emilia. I'll follow your lead."

"You may regret saying that, Whatley. Never give a girl all the power. She may use it to tie you up in the Sin Bin. Just saying."

His lips quirk into a smile. "Bring it on, baby girl."

We don't speak again as he navigates through Penn Town toward Columbus Heights. Once he parks outside of my townhouse, he looks over at me, his green eyes full of curiosity and something far deeper that sends a thrill twisting through me.

It should be criminal to want this man as much as I do. And yet...I'm swimming in a pool of evidence over here. My heart freaking pounds every time I look at him. He's nothing like I expected, and somehow precisely what I expected. I feel like a kid in a candy store, trying to decide which pieces of him I want most when, in reality, I want it all.

"Come in with me," I blurt before I can talk myself out of it. I can be sensible and rational and slow this down again tomorrow. But for tonight, I don't want to be or do any of those things. I want him all over me.

"That's a bad idea."

"Why?"

His grip on the steering wheel tightens, his eyes not deviating from my face. "Because if I come in, you'll be coming all over me again."

"I mean, that was kind of the plan, Whatley." I arch a brow, unable to resist challenging him. I think he loves it. I think he thrives on it. And I think it drives him freaking wild when I don't do what he expects. "Unless you don't think you can keep up?"

His eyes immediately narrow, something hot and wild rolling through them as a groan tumbles from his lips. Before I can even move, he's reaching for me. My seatbelt vanishes, and then he's hauling me across the console onto his lap.

"You want to say that again, princess?" he breathes, his lips inches from mine.

"Sure. You probably couldn't hear me since you get hit in the head with pucks all day," I say sweetly. "I said, maybe you're afraid you can't keep u—"

His mouth crashes down on mine, stealing the words from my lips. His kiss is as hot and wild as the look he gave me, as if he's trying to brand my lips as his possession.

My hands sink into his hair, holding him to me as I kiss him back the same way, pyroclastic clouds of desire raging through me.

"You're going to fucking own my big ass, aren't you?" he groans against my lips.

"Yes," I whisper back, the truth spilling from my lips without conscious thought. "That's exactly what I want. To own you. To rule you. To drive you so crazy all you can think about is being inside me."

The truth should scare the shit out of me...and yet it doesn't. He makes me feel bold in a way I've never felt. The way he sets me on fire makes me brave in a way I never knew existed. It's terrifying and freeing at the same exact time.

He growls wordlessly, pulling me closer. He's all sex and sin and control as he devours my mouth, annihilating any defenses I had against him...if I ever had any at all. I'm beginning to think not. This man is potent, intoxicating magic. And all six foot three inches of him is wrapped around me like he can't get enough of me.

"Nash," I whisper, not entirely sure what I'm trying to ask him. For more? For him to get me inside before I burst into pieces? I have no idea. But as soon as I say his name, he growls, dragging his mouth from mine.

"Fuck," he groans, burying his face in my throat as he pants for breath. "You can't say

sexy shit like that, Emilia. I don't have any self-control around you."

"You started it," I mumble.

He squeezes my thigh, sending a jolt through me. "Get in the house before the neighbors hear you screaming my name."

Disappointment flows through me. He's not coming in with me.

"But..."

He touches my bottom lip, his eyes dark. "Hell, maybe they'll hear you anyway. I doubt those walls are going to stifle that sweet voice much once I'm inside you."

My core clenches so hard I think I have a mini-orgasm. He is staying.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

I practically launch myself off his lap, eager to get inside so he can...get inside.

My plans go up in smoke when he growls like a wild beast behind me.

His hand comes down on my bare ass, trapping me across the center console.

"Goddamn. It's right here in my face," he mumbles, pure agony in his voice, as if he's going to lose it any minute.

Hearing that tone from him? Goodbye, ovaries.

I don't even think about it. I just wiggle my hips, shaking my ass at him...teasing him because I can't help it, not when he sounds that damn sexy just looking at it.

Best. Decision. Ever.

The sound he makes vibrates through me like a gong striking against my soul. He moves like a panther, all coiled muscle and sexual aggression. I bite my hand to stifle a scream as he pries my cheeks apart and buries his face in my pussy from behind.

"Goddamn, baby girl," he groans against my skin before licking me from top to bottom. "You taste so fucking good." He licks me again. "I'm breaking your rule, but I can't stop now. I need to know what you feel like coming all over my face."

I sob his name, rocking back against him as he licks and sucks, eating me like I'm the best thing he's ever tasted. Pleasure rips through me in intense waves, leaving me babbling and pleading for mercy.

He has none for me. He just holds me in place across the console and devours me. I'm pretty sure the neighbors can hear me moaning his name. I'm also pretty sure I don't care as he forces his tongue inside my hole, fucking me with it.

"Please, please," I chant, trying to crawl away as an orgasm bears down on me. I'm going to scream the whole neighborhood awake. I know I am.

"Nu-uh," he growls, hooking an arm around my waist to keep me right where he wants me. "If you didn't want me eating it, you shouldn't have waved it in my face, Emilia. Fucking come on my tongue."

I shatter apart immediately, exploding into nothing. Choking on the scream I try like hell not to voice.

He doesn't stop. He keeps eating me, ruthlessly demanding another orgasm. But I can't give it to him. I freaking know I can't. Not without the whole neighborhood hearing me scream.



"Come again," he snarls, flicking his tongue against my clit in rapid strikes.

And even though I know I can't give him what he wants quietly, my body bows to his wicked tongue and those honey lips. They're weapons of destruction employed against me, obliterating me so completely I'm left gasping for air as I crack apart with a shout of ecstasy.

I shake and tremble and moan, riding a current of pleasure so intense I can't breathe.

"Good girl," he murmurs, running a gentle hand down my ass as he peels himself off me. Before I can even miss his heat, he's bundling me into his arms, tugging my dress down so the whole neighborhood doesn't see my ass. He climbs from the truck, striding toward the door with me tucked against his chest as if I weigh nothing.

"What's the door code?"

"12496," I mumble, still floating.

He punches it in and then waits for it to whir and click before he carries me inside.

"Bedroom?" he asks.

"Last door on the right."

He immediately locks the deadbolt and then turns toward the hall. Calming lavender wafts toward us, lulling me toward sleep. His lips against mine as we cross into my room bring me wide awake.

I groan, tasting myself on him. Maybe I shouldn't like it. Maybe I should pull back and pretend I don't want more. I don't know. But...I do like it. I do want more. The fact that my taste is all over this man is intoxicating as hell.

I slip my tongue into his mouth as he drags me down to the bed beneath him. We sink into one another, kissing like we can't stop as he yanks my dress up over my head.

I drag his shirt off over his.

"Fucking hell," he breathes, heat blazing in his eyes as he flings my bra off the side of the bed and then bends down, dragging my nipple through his teeth. "Every inch of you is stunning, Emilia."

"You aren't so bad yourself, Whatley." His body is every bit as incredible today as it was last week. Somehow, I missed the hockey-inspired tattoo inked on his left shoulder.

His lips curve into a smile against mine as he rolls us until I'm straddling his chest, my breasts against his pecs. And good lord, I thought he felt amazing pressed against me when he was in his boxers and I was fully clothed, but that was nothing compared to the way he feels against me right now.

He leans up, chasing my lips as he grinds against me. "Fucking hell. I want to feel you dripping all over my cock right now."

"You should definitely do that then," I gasp.

"Yeah? You want it?"

I bravely reach between us, settling my hand over his straining erection. "What do you think, Nash?"

He groans like he's in pain, arching into my touch. Is this agony for him like it is for me? Does every inch of him ache right now like I do? God, I hope so. I want him as wild and desperate as I am...and right now, I feel like I might vibrate apart at the

freaking seams if he isn't inside me soon.

I dip my head, my lips landing against the tattoo over his heart. I lick and kiss a trail down his stomach, teasing him until he's growling beneath me like an unruly beast.

"Take my fucking cock out, Emilia," he snarls, his eyes on fire with need.

"Or what?" I blink up at him, pushing him because I can...because he needs to be pushed. He's so damn bossy, so in control. I want all of that unleashed on me.

"Or maybe you choke on it before I let you come again."

"Don't threaten me with a good time, Whatley," I breathe, inching down his body until I'm eye level with the massive bulge in his jeans. I hold his gaze as I reach for the zipper, tugging it down as slowly as humanly possible.

"You're desperate to feel my hand against that gorgeous ass, aren't you?"

"Haven't you figured it out yet?" I ask, slowly peeling his jeans down his legs. "I'm just desperate for you. Have been for a week already. You're even haunting my dreams."

"Oh, yeah?" His lips curve into a deadly smirk. "How hard do I fuck you in them, Emilia?"

"Depends on how sexually frustrated I am when I go to bed."

I delve my hand into his boxers, wrapping it around his cock. My mouth goes dry as I pull it out. Lord have mercy. He's going to split me in two.

"Jesus Christ, Nash," I breathe. "You win the dick measuring contest." I glide my

hand up the shaft, fascinated that it can be so damn hard yet so soft and smooth at the same time. It's...beautiful in a way I didn't expect. It looks nothing like a one-eyed dehydrated lizard. He's a beautiful monster, purple veins running up the underside, the broad head glistening with precum.

I flick my tongue out to taste him.

"Fucking hell," he growls, hips arching from the bed again as his tangy taste hits my system. One hand fists around my ponytail, his fingers clenched against my scalp as he loses it beneath me.

The sight of him like this—eyes blazing with heat, cheeks flushed, panting for breath— damn . A girl could get used to this.

I lean forward, sucking him into my mouth.

"Ah, goddamn, baby girl," he moans. "That fucking mouth is heaven."

I have no idea what I'm doing, but I keep going anyway, taking my cues from him. When I suck, he groans. When I run my tongue around him, his hand spasms against my head. I roll his balls between my fingers and his hips lift from the bed again, a string of curses flying from his lips. And when I try to take more of his cock and choke on it, he has me on my back so fast my head spins.

His wild eyes meet mine, the emerald of his irises so dark they're almost black. "Did you have fun ruining my life with that perfect fucking mouth?"

"Yes," I whisper, licking my lips. "I had a ball. Two, actually. You?"

"Best goddamn five minutes of my life," he says. "I'm never going to get another thing done. For the rest of my life, I'll be jerking off every minute of the day, thinking

about you choking on my cock."

"RIP to your career."

He drags me closer, yanking my legs up over his hips.

My head falls back, a moan tumbling from my lips as his cock slides through my folds.

"Jesus, look at that," he growls, tipping my head down.

I whimper as my juices smear across his cock, soaking it.

He rocks his hips so his cock slides back and forth. Neither of us says a word, both too focused on the sight of us together like this. There's something downright sexy about it. Beautiful, even.

Waves of heat rip through me when he reaches between us, using two fingers to close my lower lips around his cock. He rocks his hips, pumping between my lips as if he's inside me already.

"Goddamn," he rasps, his gaze tangling with mine. "You feel that?"

"Yes," I moan.

"It's going to feel even better when I'm inside you."

"Then get to that part," I cry, clinging to the sheets as if they'll root me to reality. They don't stand a chance against him though. He's liquid sex above me, driving me out of my mind as if that's his only reason for existing in this moment.

"Not until you come just like this."

I whimper a protest.

"I just found my rule."

"W-what rule? You said you had no rules."

"Things change." He dips his head, brushing his lips against mine. "You don't get to come on my cock until you've got it nice and wet for me just like this. And I'm not coming anywhere except for in this perfect little cunt." He drags my bottom lip through his teeth. "You better not spill a drop once I do. If you do, I'm putting it back in. Or you are."

Oh. My. God.

His filthy promise sets off a detonation in my womb. I cry out, my body bowing from the bed as the wave rolls through me, igniting every nerve ending.

"That's it," Nash practically purrs above me, rocking his hips so the head of his cock strikes against my clit with every pass, prolonging the pleasure. "Just like that, princess."

My toes curl. A kaleidoscope of bright light swirls behind my eyelids. It's bliss, pure unadulterated ecstasy.

It barely even ends before a whole new type begins. He presses the head of his cock against my opening. "Eyes on me, Emilia," he rasps. "I want to see how good you feel when you're wrapped around me."

I peel my eyes open, focusing on him... trying to focus on him. But he does not play

fair. Every time he presses forward, he grinds his thumb against my clit, keeping me tangled in a web of pleasure. I feel him stretching me, feel the burn...but if there's any pain, it's so subtle the intense pleasure overrides it within seconds, leaving me writhing beneath him.

"You're taking me so fucking well," he groans. "Goddamn, baby girl. This perfect body is going to make me work for every inch, isn't it?"

"Yes." I wrap my legs tighter around him, clawing at the sheets. It should be illegal to feel this damn good.

He chuckles, dipping his head to kiss me. As soon as our tongues tangle together, he snaps his hips forward, impaling me on his cock.

I shout into his mouth, coming unglued beneath him.

"Fuck!" he roars, ripping his mouth from mine as my inner muscles clamp around him, fluttering wildly.

I claw down his back, sobbing his name. I can't stop writhing, can't stop whimpering. I'm just a bundle of wild sensation, vibrating at a frequency so far beyond anything I've ever felt before.

I rock beneath him, taking what I want from him.

He doesn't stop me or tell me no. He plants an elbow on the bed beside my head, driving into me so deep I think he's trying to fuck his way into my soul.

The headboard taps the wall with each powerful thrust, singing a counterpoint to the slap of his skin against mine—to the sound of his grunts and curses and my sobs and pleas.

"Come on my cock, Emilia," he growls. "I need to feel it right fucking now, baby girl."

"Yes, yes," I chant, willing to give him anything if he keeps fucking me like this.

He slams into me again, his teeth closing around my nipple in a sharp bite. The sting of pain sings along my nerve endings, adding to the wildfire of sensation threatening to consume me.

The coil in my belly cinches tighter, everything balancing on the head of a needle.

"Christ, princess. I want to fuck my way into your soul," he groans against my chest, leaving a litany of love bites in his wake. "Think you'll be able to breathe without me inside you then?"

I sob his name, exploding apart with a scream of surrender. If he wants my soul, I'll give it to him. Hell, right now, he could ask for just about anything and I'd willingly hand it over.

"Ah, god, yeah," he groans. "Soak me, princess."

I do, detonating around him again and again as he goes wild above me, driving into me so hard and deep that I know I'm still going to feel him tomorrow.

Within seconds, he goes rigid above me, my name leaving his lips in a loud crack of sound. He comes hard, his cock jerking inside of me as he spills into me in hot ropes that leave me trembling and moaning beneath him.

He collapses a moment later, rolling to the side so he doesn't land on top of me. His dick slips from my body, and we both groan.



I feel his seed leaking out of me and remember what he said about keeping it inside.

Apparently, he has the same thought. He gently grabs my hand, sliding it down my body. "Put it back inside," he rasps against my ear. "Every drop."

"Nash," I whimper, knowing damn well this is a dangerous, dangerous game. But I don't tell him no. I do exactly as he commanded, scooping his cum up and pushing it back inside while he watches, heat blazing in his eyes.

"Good girl," he breathes when I'm finished, brushing his lips against mine in a sweet kiss before he pulls me into his arms. I land against his chest with a sigh, my head over his heart...and my heart tangled in knots over this fierce, beautiful man in a way I did not see coming.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Nash

Emilia is not a graceful woman in the mornings.

She isn't a quiet one, either.

I wake up far too early to the sound of her stumbling around, muttering under her breath. She knocks into walls, cracks her shin on the edge of the bed, and then nearly falls on her ass trying to pick her clothes up from the floor.

I watch her through slit lids, my lips twitching with amusement, as she huffs, throwing her hair up in a messy bun. Her full breasts lift and jiggle with every move she makes. The thickness of her waist and the roundness of her ass are captivating. Within seconds, my dick is standing at attention, begging for another round.

The little minx woke me up once with it down her throat. I woke her up three hours later with my tongue between her legs. Neither of us slept much. I'm certainly not complaining. Being inside her is, hands down, better than any championship.

"Did he have to throw my bra all the way to China?" she mumbles, searching around for it.

"It's not in China. It's hanging off the side of your desk chair."

She spins that way, a triumphant cry escaping her lips as she spots it. She darts that way to grab it before turning to look at me. "You're awake."

"Mmhmm. Come back to bed." I lick my lips, my hand wrapped around my shaft as my gaze rakes down her body. "I'm starving."

She ignores me, scooping my clothes up from the floor and tossing them on top of me. I glance at them and then at her, grinning. "Are you kicking me out, baby girl?"

"Yes." She meets my gaze, seeming frazzled. "My dad just texted. He's on his way over here."

"Fuck." I sit up, abandoning my plan to eat her for breakfast. If we're going to do this, we need to do it right. And Coach walking in on us with my tongue buried in his delicious daughter is not the right way to ease him into our relationship.

"I don't want him to know about us," Emilia blurts, pulling me up short.

I stare at her for a long moment, something grinding in my chest. I don't know what the fuck it is...but I know I don't like it. I don't like the thought of hiding her, either.

Frankly, it feels dirty, like we're doing something wrong. I'm not entirely sure what this is yet, but it damn sure isn't dirty. And it damn sure isn't wrong. She's got me all fucked up in the head over her, feeling shit I've never felt.

Is she still worried people will think she's sleeping her way to the top? Fuck, maybe. But anyone ignorant enough to say some dumb shit like that about her clearly hasn't spent five minutes with her. She may be playful and say a lot of wild shit, but there's no mistaking her intelligence or her authenticity. There isn't a manipulative bone in her body. She's all heart and fierce dedication.

People like her don't sleep their way to the top. They don't need to do it. They get there through their own merit...and they do it without stepping on people along the way. Anyone who says otherwise is a jealous fucking idiot who couldn't hack it.

"You nervous people are going to judge you, Emilia?" I ask, trying to get to the root of the problem so I can solve it.

"Yes. No." She huffs a breath, carefully avoiding my gaze. "I just think it's better that he doesn't know. That's all."

Yeah, that's bullshit. There's something she isn't telling me, some reason she wants to hide this that has nothing to do with her anxiety about being judged. This is something else, I'd stake my life on it.

I set my clothes aside and climb from the bed.

"What are you doing?" There's no mistaking the nervousness in her voice.

I don't answer as I stalk toward her.

She carefully backs away, eyeing me warily.

"Cute," I grunt.

"What?"

"You thinking you can get away from me. I move a helluva lot faster than you do, princess."

Her gaze flickers toward the bedroom door.

"Try to run if you're feeling brave," I say casually. "See how far you get before I have you over my knee, turning that perfect ass red."

Her gaze flies back to mine. "You wouldn't."

I smile, still stalking toward her as challenge wars with more immediate needs in her eyes. She's a hell of a drug. Even now, she's desperate to defy me, to rile me up just because she knows she can. Just because she can't fucking resist. Emilia Lariat wasn't born to behave. She wasn't created to meekly fall in line. This gorgeous little princess was made to defy kingdoms and bring me to my fucking knees.

I'm two steps from her when she darts toward the bedroom door.

I let her get within inches of it before hooking an arm around her waist. She moans as I gently shove her up against the wall beside it, crushing her tits to the cool plaster. My hand slides down the crevice of her ass.

"Nash," she moans.

I slap her right cheek. Hard.

Her head flies back, landing against my shoulder.

"Told you what would happen, princess," I rasp, raking my teeth down the tendon in her neck as I swat her other cheek. "You run; I chase. And you pay when I catch you."

"We d-don't have time!"

"Then I suggest you tell me the truth." I nip her ear, grinding my cock against her round ass. Christ, I want to haul her up to her toes, spread her legs apart and fuck her from behind just like this. "Why don't you want your father to know about us?"

"For reasons."

"Better share those reasons if you don't want him to catch me fucking you dirty

against the wall, Emilia."

She sobs my name, pushing back against me in blatant invitation.

I slip my hand between her body and the wall, growling at how wet she is. She fucking loves this, as much as she wants to pretend otherwise. This right here is exactly where she wanted to end up. And I'm too goddamn hooked on her not to give her exactly what she wants.

What is she doing to me?

Ruining me. She's ruining me is what she's doing.

And not a single part of me cares one goddamn bit. Let her do it. She can have whatever pieces of the wreckage that she leaves behind. I'm pretty fucking certain they'll all belong to her anyway. Hell, I'm not entirely sure they don't already belong to her.

"Nash, please," she pleads. "Please."

"What do you want, Emilia? Tell me."

"Fuck me!" she cries.

And that right there? That tells me she's ruined too. She may not want her father to know about us, but she's too damn helpless to the storm raging between us to push me away. She wants me, just as badly as I want her. Enough to risk getting caught. Perhaps, enough to risk everything.

"Tell me what you're hiding," I growl against her ear as I press two fingers inside of her. The wet squelch of her cunt is sweeter than any music. So are her cries of

ecstasy.

She writhes against me, babbling incoherently as I keep her pinned to the wall, fucking her with my fingers. My lips run down her neck, my dick against her ass.

"Tell me, Emilia. What are you so afraid of?"

"Losing this!" she cries, surrendering to me.

I press my lips to her throat, breathing her in. "You think I'm going anywhere, baby girl?" I grind my thumb against her clit. "You think anyone can stop this? Hell no."

"Nash," she whimpers.

"Come," I demand, giving her exactly what she's pleading for...exactly what we both want.

She throws her head back, her pussy clamping around my fingers as she shatters apart. My name rolls from her lips in a decadent moan that has my balls throbbing. Fuck. There's no better sound than her. There's no better sight than her. There's nothing better than her, period.

She falls limp against me, plastered to the wall.

"Nash, I—"

The doorbell rings cutting her off.

She immediately tenses in my arms, whipping her head toward the bedroom door. There's absolutely no mistaking the look of fear that crosses her face.

Motherfucker.

She's genuinely afraid for Coach to find out about us. I may be a lot of things, but capable of hurting her isn't one of them. If she isn't ready for this...I can't force her into it. I'd rather back off for now and have pieces of her than push her into something and end up with none of her.

I'm not giving up, though. Fuck that noise. There isn't any hiding what we are together. I'll give her this reprieve. But after that? All bets are off.

I press a soft kiss to her throat, slowly withdrawing my fingers from her body. "Get dressed," I murmur. "I'll slip out the back."

"Really?"

"Yeah." I tip her chin up, kissing her hard and deep before I step away. "But this isn't over. Don't think it is."

The overwhelming gratitude in her eyes damn near brings me to my knees. This fucking girl... Jesus Christ, she's going to own me exactly like she said she wanted.

And I'm going to let her do it.

"Whatley."

I glance up from lacing my skates to see Archer dropping onto the bench beside me, his expression somber. Fuck my life. I've only been on the team for a season, and I already know that look on sight.

He wants to talk.



"You got a minute?" he says right on cue, shaking his gloves off.

"Yep," I sigh, leaning back against the boards behind me. I look out at the ice to see Coach standing on the far side of the practice arena, reaming Logan and Diego for fucking around on the ice. "If you're here to tell me to keep my hands off Emilia..."

Archer glances at me, genuine surprise in his eyes. "Is that what you think?"

"Saw the way you were looking at us when we left the bar," I mutter. "Figured we'd be having this conversation sooner or later."

He chuckles quietly, shaking his head. "You don't know me nearly as well as you think you do, Whatley. I don't give a fuck what the two of you do. It's your business. I'm just here to do my job as Captain and tell you to be careful." He nods at Coach. "There's a reason he guards info about her so closely. That girl is the center of his world. If things go badly between the two of you, it'll be you who suffers. And if you suffer, we all suffer."

I grit my teeth, resisting the instinctive urge to tell him to fuck off with his warnings and advice. It's not him I'm irritated with anyway. He's just doing what a good captain should do—looking out for his team. I'm not in the right headspace to think about shit ending badly between me and Emilia right now. Not after last night. Not after this morning.

All I've thought about since I climbed out her bedroom window was that look on her face and the way she said she was afraid of losing this, as if it's a foregone conclusion that it'll happen. Is that what she thinks? Clearly, it's what Archer thinks. That Coach will find out, and I'll be forced to choose between her and the team.

Like a good little team player, I'm supposed to choose the team. I'm supposed to choose hockey. That's what I've always done. Choose hockey, put it above everything

else. Never let anyone close so I never had to split my focus. Except for after my parents were killed, I've always been all in on this sport.

It doesn't feel right this time. Emilia is in my head in a major way, shifting my priorities in a way that's foreign to me. Now that I've had her, I'm not letting her go. Not for Coach, not for the team, not for any goddamn reason. I'm all in on her, even knowing what I'm risking.

But I can't explain that shit to Archer when I'm still trying to wrap my head around it myself. Falling in love wasn't ever on my agenda. My whole life has been hockey and taking care of Aspen. That's what I always wanted.

Until now. Until Emilia.

I'm falling. Like a fucking meteor crashing through the atmosphere.

The fact that she's Lariat's daughter should stop me. The fact that the team is counting on me should be all the deterrent I need to pull back and let it ride. Yet neither is doing the trick.

I want every piece of her, and I don't want to stop.

"It's not going to go badly between us," I mutter to Archer. "In fact, it isn't going to end at all."

His eyes widen before he shakes his head, a slow smile spreading across his face. "So it's like that, huh?"

"Yeah. I think it's exactly like that."

He holds his fist out for me to bump, laughing quietly. "It's your funeral, brother.

Just...be smart about it, will you? With you and Logan, we have a real shot at the Cup this year. Don't burn it all down."

"Don't plan on it." I haul myself to my feet, and then pause, glancing down at him. "You ready to hear my advice now?"

He glances up at me with furrowed brows. "Advice about what?"

"You can only pretend you don't feel it for so long," I say. "Eventually, you gotta deal with it."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about." I cut my eyes at Micah. "Everyone knows how you feel about his sister except him."

"Fuck." Archer goes rigid, scrubbing a hand down his face. "It's not like that, Whatley."

"Yeah, it is." I hop over the boards onto the ice, glancing back at him. "If you don't get off your ass and do something about it, it won't be him you gotta worry about. It'll be some other motherfucker swooping in and putting a ring on her finger when you know damn well it should be yours."

"Jesus Christ," he growls, his jaw clenching.

"Just saying. If it were me, there's no goddamn way I'd be cool watching some other man love her because I was too worried about what her brother would say." I glance across the ice at Coach. "Why the fuck do you think I'm willing to risk his wrath for his daughter?"

Archer doesn't say anything, but he doesn't need to say it. He knows I'm right. I see it written all over his face. Micah may be his best friend...but Wren Erikson? Well, she could be his world.

The same fucking way Emilia Lariat is going to be mine. Doesn't matter what Coach thinks. Doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. The pretty little minx is mine.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Emilia

"Jesus, this place is packed tighter than a jock strap," I mutter to Alice Madison, the team publicist, as we head toward the row of seats reserved for VIPs and staff behind the team box before the game is set to start.

She leans close to me, her soft laugh spilling out. "It's always like this during game nights!"

I shake my head, trying to wrap my mind around the sheer number of people here. It's been a long time since I attended a game. I think I was fifteen or sixteen, and my dad wasn't the head coach back then. He was an assistant. I do not remember it being this packed.

Between the music, the laughter, and the shouting, the wall of noise is honestly overwhelming. But...I kind of like it. It's exciting.

We squeeze past a row of wives and girlfriends before falling into our seats directly behind the box. A few of the women in our row shoot me assessing looks, but I choose to ignore them, instead scanning the ice.

The whole team is out there, warming up.

My eyes immediately pick out Nash, my heart leaping into my throat. God, he looks good.

It's been two days since I kicked him out of my bed. Two days since we saw each

other. Well...technically. I saw him briefly this morning when my dad introduced me to the team as their new therapist.

It wasn't a surprise to anyone. Word traveled fast. I'm not entirely sure how they feel about it yet considering I've seen them naked—and accused them of masturbating together—but they didn't seem like they hate the idea of having me on staff. So it's a start.

What was a surprise were the flowers and the jersey with Nash's name and number waiting on my desk when I got to my office after the introductions were done. He left a note telling me to wear it tonight. I feel like a jerk for not having the nerve to follow through...but I did not have the nerve to follow through.

I'm wearing a T-shirt with the team mascot instead. It felt like the safer option. And that's what has me so messed up in the head. I've never been the girl who does the safe, sane thing. I've never been the one afraid to take flying leaps.

And yet, that's precisely what I'm doing now. I'm playing it safe. I'm trying desperately to keep my father from finding out that I'm falling fast for one of his players—one who looks at me like I'm the only thing he sees. I can tell myself all day long that this is about protecting my reputation, but it's a lie. It was a lie before I ever told it the first time.

The only thing I'm truly afraid of...is Nash being sent down to the minor leagues. Of us imploding in a way that ruins everything for him. He didn't work as hard as he did to have it ripped away. That isn't fair to him.

But giving him up doesn't seem fair to either of us. I'm a grown ass woman. Why can't I have this one thing? Why can't he have it? No matter how many times my mind spits those defiant questions, it circles back to the same complicated answer.

This isn't just about us. It's about every man on the ice with him. A rift between him and my father over me creates a rift for the whole team. They have to be on the same page. It's the only way they win games. That has to come first right now.

I want to be selfish, though. God, do I ever.

Nash glances up from his conversation with Jordan. Even from halfway across the ice, his eyes lock with mine. My heart clenches in a vise, heat blasting through me.

He abandons the conversation, skating toward me.

I hold my breath until he's in the team box, pressed up against the Plexiglas between the bench and our row. He does not look happy.

"Hi," I squeak, fully aware that everyone in the vicinity is staring at us. I can feel Alice's eyes boring into the side of my head.

"Where's your jersey, princess?" he growls.

"Oh. Um..." I glance down at my shirt and then shrug helplessly. "I'm in team regalia."

"You need a jersey."

"This is fine, Nash."

He shakes his head, something unholy possessive in his eyes.

"Oh my," Alice whispers as he reaches over his shoulder, hauling his jersey up over his pads.

"Nash!" I hiss, fully aware that everyone in the vicinity is blatantly staring now. I hear them whispering. "You can't take your jersey off in the freaking box!"

He completely ignores me as he strips it off over his head and then straightens, crooking a finger at me.

I briefly consider ignoring him, but the look in his eyes tells me I'll pay for it if I do. I leap from my seat like the damn thing is on fire, stepping up against the Plexiglass off to the side so we have the semblance of privacy.

He skates over and tosses the jersey over the top to me. "Put it on, baby girl."

"You're out of control, do you know that?" I grumble, snatching the jersey as it falls over this side of the glass. "You're risking a frigging penalty just to get me in your jersey."

He smirks, the devil in his eyes. "Wouldn't be an issue if you'd worn the jersey I sent you. You going to put it on?"

"Maybe. Maybe I'll burn it to keep myself warm." I shrug, scowling at him. "Undecided."

His smirk grows. "You're cute when you're pissed, Emilia."

"And you're not cute when you're being ridiculous."

"Really? Is that why you're staring at me like you want to climb over here and climb me right now?"

"Am not," I lie.



"Yeah, you are." He places his palm against the glass between us, sighing. "You going to wait for me after the game?"

"Maybe. Maybe my dad will strangle you before it ends and I'll be attending your funeral instead." That's a very real possibility right now. There's no way he's not going to find out about this.

"Maybe I should climb over there and climb you." Nash arches a brow, glancing behind me. "Think there are any reporters in the audience right now willing to document the show, princess?"

"Probably. I bet you could even make a few dollars off it. I mean, since you'll need a job after you've finished destroying your career and everything," I say sweetly, batting my lashes. "But go ahead. Do your thing, big guy."

"Do not tempt me right now, Emilia," he growls, his gaze tangling with mine. "I haven't seen you in two days. I'm ready to snap."

I soften like melted freaking butter when I see the look in his eyes. He missed me.

"I'll wait for you, Nash," I say softly, unable to resist him. As if I ever stood a freaking chance. "Will you please go put a jersey on now before my dad sees you and there is bloodshed before the horn even sounds?"

"Fine." He smirks at me. "But just so you know...I like it a helluva lot better when you're trying to get me out of my clothes. You trying to get me back into them is not working for me."

"We can't all have what we want, Whatley."

"Oh, we can." He sends me a look hot enough to scorch the freaking earth. "All you

gotta do is say the words." He winks and then turns and skates toward the tunnel, leaving me standing there, reeling.

"I should have brought extra panties to this game," I mumble, yanking his jersey on over my head before I turn to scurry back to my seat. I already need them.

The wives and girlfriends are completely silent as I squeeze past. Alice is not. As soon as I drop into my seat beside her, she turns to me, her grin reflecting in her hazel eyes.

"Girl," she says, drawing the word out.

"I know," I groan, scrubbing my hands down my face. "I am so screwed."

"By Nash Whatley from the looks of it." Her wicked laugh spills out around us...and I can't help but smile. She has no clue just how right she is.

"My dad is going to murder him when he ends up in the box for this."

"I'm already all over it."

I blink at her.

"I told everyone that you're the newest staff member, and this is your first game. The guys are trying to make sure you feel welcome, same as they do with everyone else." She shrugs, smiling brightly. "Can't do anything about him ending up in the box, but if you mix in enough truth while stretching it, it usually works for avoiding gossip."

I stare at her in awe. "You're an evil genius."

"Thanks." She pretends to buff her nails, smirking. And then she sobers. "Seriously,

work with them for long enough, and you learn how to manage them and the furor around them. Nash is easy. He has a good head on his shoulders and doesn't make waves. People like him. They trust him. If I tell them that he did X for Y reason, they believe it because, nine times out of ten, it's true."

"And the tenth time?"

"You're the tenth time, Emilia." She laughs when I gape at her. "Like I said, he doesn't make waves."

Until now. Until me.

I glance back out at the ice to see him vanishing through the tunnel, a ref hot on his heels.

Maybe I'm not the only one falling.

Crap.

The game is intense. I spend most of it on my feet, screaming at the top of my lungs. Jordan and Diego spend more than their fair share of time in the Sin Bin.

Surprisingly, Nash doesn't get sent in for removing his jersey, but he does spend a few minutes in for aggressive play. Officials are all over him the entire game thanks to his little show before the horn even sounded. But we still manage to pull out a win, sending the entire arena into chaos.

By some miracle, my dad doesn't notice my jersey. If he knows what happened, he's too preoccupied with the game to mention it. Between the action on the ice, discussions with the coaching staff, and discussions with the guys on the bench, he barely has time to breathe.

Alice and I hug it out as the guys celebrate on the ice. But I feel Nash's eyes on me the entire time. When we break away, my suspicion is confirmed. He's staring right at me, looking like he wants to climb the boards and devour me.

I gulp, shooting him a congratulatory smile.

He winks back before he's swept up by his teammates.

"I need to get down to the Press Pool," Alice says. "Do you want to come with me?"

"I actually think I'm going to go down to my office for a little while," I murmur. The Press Pool is the last place I want to be right now.

"Come on," she murmurs, looping her arm through mine. We join the throng spilling into the aisle, but instead of heading toward the exits, we head toward a door leading onto the ice near the players' tunnel. A member of security lets us through.

"How in the hell do you strut across the ice in those shoes?" I mumble, impressed as Alice sashays on her stilettos like she was born on the ice. Meanwhile, every step I take has me worried I'm going to faceplant in front of the entire arena.

"Do something long enough and you become a pro."

"Tell that to every adult on the planet still trying to fold a fitted sheet."

"That isn't a job, Emilia. That's torture. Different concept," she says, tossing her head. "Fitted sheets weren't meant to be folded. They were designed to annoy the hell out of us."

I laugh quietly. The more time I spend with her, the more I like her. She's gorgeous, with big hazel eyes and flawless ebony skin. She's also sassy as hell, which I fully

support. And it's obvious she loves this team and this sport. She is as protective of the guys and their reputations as she is the team and its reputation. She knows her shit.

"Ugh." Her grip tightens on my arm suddenly. "Charles Montaque is heading this way."

My stomach quivers with anxiety. Charles Montaque is one of the biggest investigative sports reporters in DC. My dad hates him because he's a snake. He says he'll smile in your face and then stab you in the back without hesitation. Not exactly the guy I want to see right now, especially not when I'm in the jersey Nash literally took off his own back to give me.

I glance up, confirming that he's heading toward us, dressed in a dark suit and tie. He's in his mid-forties with carefully gelled hair and blue eyes. I suppose people probably think he's handsome, but he just looks like a problem to me.

"Just let me do the talking," Alice instructs as he quickly closes the distance between us. "I know how to deal with him."

"Alice! Just the publicist I was hoping to see." Charles grins, his blue eyes flickering from her to me and then back. "And who is this?"

"Charles," Alice says, her tone cool. "This is our new staff psychologist, Emilia. Emilia, this is Charles Montaque."

"Hello," I murmur politely.

"Emilia," he says, cocking his head to the side. "Lariat's daughter?"

"Yes, and?" Alice asks, her tone acerbic.

"Hey, now." He laughs easily. "I was just making a connection, not implying anything."

"Good to know. I'd hate for yet another woman in this field to be accused of not deserving the job she earned." Alice looks at him pointedly. "But you wouldn't know anything about that, now would you?"

"Right." He looks mildly uncomfortable. Interesting. "I was coming to see you about a rumor."

I tense, holding my breath. If he got wind of Nash's little display, there will be no stopping my dad from finding out.

"What rumor?"

"It involves Logan Moreno's sister," he says. "I tried to set up a meeting with him to discuss it, but he was...less than enthusiastic."

The fact that he isn't here about Nash should be relieving, but this is honestly just as bad. I read through the former psychologist's notes on Logan this morning. He has a sister who has been involuntarily committed multiple times for schizophrenia. He's fiercely protective, going out of his way to keep any information about her from leaking.

"What about his sister?" Alice asks.

"The rumor is that she's in an insane asylum."

I stiffen, narrowing my eyes at him.

"An insane asylum? Really, Charles?" Alice scoffs at him, disgust heavy in her voice.

"You're going to stand in front of a trained mental health professional and insult people with mental health conditions?"

"I didn't mean it that way. Jesus, Alice."

"You said it," she points out. "At least have the balls to own it."

"Fair enough." He holds his hands up in surrender. "I apologize. It's a shitty term. But the question remains."

"And it's a ridiculous question unworthy of an answer." Alice steps around him, gently dragging me along with her. "When you have something worth discussing, I'll be happy to talk it over with you. But this isn't it."

Whether Logan's sister is currently committed or not, I don't know. But I'm guessing Alice does. And she absolutely doesn't want this man to know. My respect for her grows. She is a bulldog for this team. That's exactly what they need, especially guys Logan and Micah, with family members to protect.

"I cannot stand that man," she mutters when we're out of earshot.

"I didn't notice," I murmur dryly.

"He's a misogynistic rat. He wrote a hit piece a couple years ago, heavily insinuating that women who work in sports are only hired to meet diversity quotas. Never mind the fact that most of us have as much, if not more, education and experience than men in comparable positions in the field." She scowls. "I want to punch him in the face every time I see him."

"I'll help," I volunteer cheerfully, glancing over my shoulder to see him staring after us, his eyes narrowed thoughtfully. He does not look happy.

Crap. He's going to be a problem. I feel it in my bones.

I just hope he isn't a freaking problem for Logan...or for me and Nash.

A little over two hours later, Nash appears in the doorway to my office, leaning against the frame with a smirk on his face. Heat waves through me at the sight of him in his suit. Lord, he makes it look good.

"Damn," he murmurs, looking me up and down. "You look good wearing my name."

"Charles Montaque thinks so too."

He blanches, a dangerous growl rumbling from his lips. His body tenses as he pushes away from the doorframe, striding toward me. "Did that prick say something to you?"

"I'm just teasing, Nash." I tip my head back, staring up at him. "I met him after the game. I felt like I had a freaking target on my back."

"Because of me," he says, his gaze flickering across my face.

"Because you stripped your jersey off in an arena full of people and demanded I put it on."

"You're mad."

"I'm not mad." I sigh, pushing my way into his arms. I don't think it's possible to be mad at him when I want him as much as I do. He's like a drug—potent, dangerous, wildly addictive. And, as I'm quickly coming to realize, there isn't much I'm not willing to do to get another hit of him.

He tips my head back, his lips brushing mine. "You know I'm not going to let



anything happen to you, right? You're safe with me."

My heart squeezes in a vise. "Maybe it's not me that I'm worried about, Nash. You have more to lose than I do. That game could have started with you in the box or on the bench tonight, and you know it."

His lips brush mine again, starting an inferno in my womb. "Maybe you should let me worry about me and my decisions. I'm a big boy, Emilia. I can handle myself."

"You think so, huh?" I bite his bottom lip, frustrated. "You've never gone up against my dad when he's pissed, then."

"I'm not afraid of Lariat." He thrusts his hand in my hair, craning my head back. His lips slide down the side of my throat, making me whimper. "He can't stop what's happening between us."

"W-what's happening between us?"

His eyes lock with mine, his expression deadly serious. "I'm convincing you to fall in love with me."

"I..."

"Fuck it," he groans, seaming his lips to mine. He kisses me like he's trying to brand me again, setting entire sections of my soul on fire. Hell, he sets me on fire, sending me up in an inferno of quivering need.

"Nash," I moan into his mouth, my fingers tangled in the damp strands of his hair as he kisses me again and again, leaving me drunk on his taste. It isn't nearly enough to satisfy me. It's been two days since I felt this man inside me. I need him to fuck me.

"You want me, princess?"

"Yes."

"How bad?" He drags my bottom lip through his teeth, tugging me so close I feel his erection against my stomach. "How many rules are you willing to break to get what you want, Emilia?"

That's not even a question, and I think he knows it. There isn't a rule I'm not willing to break for him. That's the power he has over me. That's the danger he presents. And that's part of why I can't imagine not having him just like this. He's consuming me, turning me inside out, upside down, and changing me into something new. Someone willing to risk everything just for a taste of the forbidden, just for one more kiss, one more touch, one more second just like this.

He doesn't have to convince me to fall. I've been falling all along, crashing to earth like a falling star. And God help us both, but I don't want to stop.

"Every rule, Nash," I whisper. "I'll break every rule for you."

The smile he gives me is worth the confession. So is the way he kisses me like I just handed him the entire damn world.

"Come on," he growls, breaking from my lips with his hands on my ass. "Let's go see how brave you really are."

I gulp...but I don't tell him no. Instead, I place my hand in his, allowing him to pull me from my office. We hurry down the empty hall, neither of us speaking.

We don't say a word until we reach the mouth of the tunnel and step out onto the ice. It's been smoothed over, every groove from their skates wiped away in the hours

since the game ended. The silence of the arena is almost eerie after so much noise earlier.

"What are we doing?"

"You'll see." He shoots me a devilish smirk, holding onto me as he strides out onto the ice with all the confidence of one who's spent his life on it. He heads toward the boards, pulling me along with him.

"You owe me five minutes in the box, princess."

"For what?"

"Showing up out of uniform. Keeping my cock hard all night. Driving me fucking crazy." He shrugs. "Take your pick."

I turn wide eyes on him.

"Think I can make you come all over me before your time is up?"

"Nash," I hiss, my gaze darting around. "There are still people here." I mean, there's no one out here except the two of us. But janitors and support staff are probably still crawling all over the building.

He lifts me into the penalty box with his hands on my hips and the devil in his eyes.

"Guess you should be real quiet then, Emilia."

The door slams behind us.

I gulp, scurrying backwards.

"What'd I tell you about running from me?"

"Something, something, you're a madman?"

"Yeah, that was definitely it." His lips quirk as he stalks me across the narrow box, heat in his eyes. "Your five minutes starts as soon as I get my hands on you."

He's deadly serious...and God help me, but I don't hate this nearly as much as I probably should. I want him. Here, now, against the freaking wall. It doesn't even matter that someone might see us. I don't care that we're playing with fire. I want to burn.

And I want him to burn, too.

I back up against the wall beside the bench, shivering when he immediately presses his body to mine, caging me in. His hand lands against my shoulder, gliding down until his fingers tangle with mine.

I whimper, my knees trembling as he lifts my hand up over my head, pinning it to the Plexiglas above me.

"Damn," he breathes, his eyes glittering with lust. "I'd spend a whole lot more time in here if you were here."

"Guess it's a good thing I'm not then. You can't skate with your dick in me."

"Wanna bet?"

"Definitely not." He probably can skate with his dick in me. He's crazy talented like that.

His free hand rakes down my body, those talented fingers finding my hard nipples. He plucks and pulls and pinches, sending lava into my veins.

I moan, arching into his touch.

"I love how sweet you sound when you're moaning for me," he murmurs, sliding his hand down the center of my chest. "That sound makes my cock so fucking hard."

"I want to see," I blurt immediately.

"Nah. Not until you come. That's my rule."

"Fuck your rule, Nash."

He growls, leaning forward to bite my lip.

I bite his in return, not willing to play fair if he isn't.

He growls again, shoving his hand in my pants. His fingers are cold against my skin, but the dichotomy is too damn good to resist. I sob his name, my eyes locked on his face.

"I like that sound too, Emilia." He flicks my panties aside, his thumb teasing along my slit. "I've spent the last two nights dreaming about you begging for my cock."

"Funny," I gasp. "I spent them dreaming about you begging for another taste."

His eyes drop to half-mast, his tongue flicking his bottom lip. "You're definitely on the menu tonight. Just as soon as your five minutes are up."

"Clock is ticking, Whatl... Fuck!" I cry, rising up on my toes as he thrusts two fingers

inside me without warning. His thumb settles against my clit, a ragged groan escaping his lips.

"Christ, I love breaking your rules, Emilia," he murmurs, his gaze riveted to my face as he finger fucks me against the glass. "You're so damn beautiful when you're going wild for me."

"Nash, please." I writhe in the sweetest torment, caught in a maelstrom of his making, one threatening to drag me under and drown me in bliss.

"Please what, baby girl?"

"Let me come," I whimper, not above begging if that's what he needs to hear to send me toppling off the ledge. When he has his hands on me, I'm willing to give him anything just to keep them there. Just to keep feeling like this. "Please."

He growls my name, his lips sliding toward my ear. "You don't have to beg for anything, Emilia," he breathes, his teeth closing around the shell. "Anything you want, I'll give you. You own me."

I cry out, falling to pieces around his fingers, sobbing his name. He holds me through it, strokes me through it, crooning praise in my ear. I'm surrounded by him, completely annihilated by him. And God help us both, but I'm not going to do a damn thing to stop what's happening.

"Spend the night with me," he whispers against my skin. "I want you in my bed tonight."

I don't tell him no. Of course I don't.

Instead, I drop to my knees, reaching for his zipper.

"What are you doing?" he asks, his eyes dark.

"It's time for your five minutes in the box, Whatley," I murmur, looking up at him as I inch his zipper down. "Be a good boy and don't let anyone hear you."

If there's anyone left in the arena but us...they definitely hear him.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Nash

"Where the fuck is Logan?" Jordan asks, looking up from his gym bag with a furrow between his brows.

I shrug in response, rummaging through my bag for a protein bar. I'm fucking exhausted already and practice hasn't even started. I blame Emilia. Her little ass keeps me up late every night lately. If she's in my bed, I'm inside her.

If we aren't careful, she's going to end up pregnant. Shit. I hope she ends up pregnant. There won't be any hiding me if she does.

"In a meeting," Archer says, dropping his shit on the bench beside me with a grunt. "Charles Montague is causing problems."

"Over what this time?" Diego asks, glancing up from his phone.

I watch through slit lids as Archer shrugs, carefully avoiding the question. I'm guessing he knows though. The man knows every goddamn thing we do. He just also happens to know how to keep his mouth shut.

"Probably the chick he took home after the Manitoba game," River says from the opposite side of the room. "She looked like trouble."

"They all look like trouble to you, man. It happens when you're an asshole who can't remember their names before they even leave your bed," Micah mutters, no real heat behind the insult. It's true, though. River can't remember their names before they



leave his bed.

He's a hell of a player, but he's not the kind of guy I'd spend time around if we weren't teammates. To him, every hole is a goal. It's...honestly kind of fucked up.

"Aww. Is someone cranky because they're not getting laid anymore?" he asks Micah, flipping him off.

Micah grunts in disgust, shaking his head. "You would think marriage means the end of a sex life, motherfucker. Having someone to go home to at the end of the day is fucking great. And my sex life is better than ever." He shoots River a dark glare. "It's also none of your goddamn business."

River holds his hands up, chuckling. He knows better than to press Micah about his wife. The man does not play about her.

"It could be about her," Diego says. "He's been all bent out of shape since she dipped out on him while he was sleeping."

"Some puck bunny dipped out on him?" Joaquin cracks up. "How the fuck did we not know this?"

"I swear to Christ, the way some of these guys talk about women," I mutter, shaking my head. "They're going to die alone."

Archer grunts his agreement.

"It's what they deserve," Jordan says quietly.

He isn't wrong.

I glance at Archer. "Is Montaque going to be a problem for Logan?"

"Maybe," he murmurs.

"Damn." I don't press for more. It's not like I need to do it anyway. Whatever is going on has nothing to do with a girl...and everything to do with his sister. Half of these idiots may think he's just like they are, fucking anyone willing, but they haven't paid nearly enough attention. They see what he wants them to see and never look beyond it. He's smart as hell, and he uses it to his advantage to protect what matters.

Maybe I need to take a few lessons from him if Montaque is sniffing around for a story. I don't want it to be Emilia in his crosshairs.

And as much as I hate to admit it, she was right last week. I acted rash and put a target on her back. I wanted her in my jersey and nothing else mattered. That shit could have sent everything up in smoke. That's the last thing I want. She isn't fodder for some fucking article for a prick like Montaque.

She's...Christ, at this point, she's quickly becoming the center of my world. In the week since I made her come all over me in the penalty box, things between us have only gotten better. She's at my place damn near every night. Or I've got her bent over every flat surface with a modicum of privacy in the arena.

But she's still determined to hide us. Which means I'm more determined than ever to change her mind. She isn't a secret or something I'm ashamed about. I don't want someone like Montaque learning about her and turning us into some fucking story. That isn't what we are.

The simple fact is, I'm fucking wild about her. I'd have my ring on her finger tomorrow if I thought she'd let me. I don't give a shit if it's fast. My instincts have never been wrong, and they've been screaming since day one that she's it for me.

I just need to get her on the same page.

I'm fucking trying.

But Emilia is full of fire and flame and fierce independence. She's bold and wild and hysterically funny. Intelligent and so goddamn sweet it's unreal. And underneath that, she's nervous as hell. I don't think she's ever had anything to lose before now. It's always been her and her dad against the world. And she does not want to disappoint the man she's hero worshipped her entire life.

More than that, she doesn't want me to disappoint him. And she's convinced that this will seriously fuck up the team's dynamics. I'm working on proving otherwise, but it's taking baby steps. I push as far as I can without pushing her right out of my life.

My phone buzzes with an incoming message.

I pull it out of my pocket, biting back a groan as soon as I pull up her message and see her gorgeous face filling the screen.

Future Wife: Did you know there's an entire closet of nacho cheese back here?

Me: Yes. It's called a supply closet. Why are you raiding it for cheese?

Future Wife: First of all, you suck for failing to disclose the existence of the cheese closet, Whatley. Second of all, who says I'm raiding it? Maybe I'm waiting for a certain hockey player to come fuck, I mean FIND me...

"Fuck," I groan, my dick immediately raging to life.

Me: You better be wet when I get there, princess.

Future Wife: Worry about yourself, Whatley. I've got myself well in hand. As a matter of fact...

Another picture comes through, and I damn near drop the phone. She's got her skirt hiked up around her waist so every inch of her thick thighs is on display. Her hand is in her panties, touching my pussy.

Fucking hell. She's in the supply closet, playing with my pussy.

Me: Hell no. Do not touch it, Emilia. I will spank it.

Future Wife: That, oddly, did not make me want to touch it less. Must unpack this later...you know, when I'm not otherwise occupied.

I jerk to my feet, shoving my phone in my pocket.

"I'll be back," I growl to Archer. "Got something to take care of."

"Mmhmm," he says.

"I just bet you do, motherfucker," Jordan says, shaking his head. "Tell her we said hi."

"Fuck no. I'm not telling her shit for any of you."

Archer and Jordan laugh as I storm toward the door.

"Where the fuck is he going?" Joaquin asks. "I thought we had practice."

"He has a meeting," Archer lies.

Most of the team knows about Emilia, but they're keeping what they know to themselves. Frankly, I don't think they want to be caught in the middle when Coach finds out. I appreciate the hell out of them for being cool about it, though.

"Goddamn. Does everyone have meetings today?"

I barge through the door into the hall, breathing hard. My shoes slap against the cement as I practically jog down the motherfucker toward the concession supply closet three hallways over, eager to get my hands on Emilia.

I round the corner to the last hall at a fast clip and run right into Coach.

"Goddamn, son," he growls, rearing back with a dark scowl on his face. Lines carve little grooves around his mouth as he stares at me, his hazel eyes too much like his daughter's. "You being chased or something?"

"No. Just in a hurry."

"You should be. You're supposed gearing up for practice, not running around the damn halls like you don't have any sense. Where the fuck are you going?"

"Supply closet. I need to grab something." I stretch the truth as far as I can without outright lying to him. I actually respect the man. He's a hell of a coach and a good man. Sneaking around behind his back doesn't sit well with me. But I'm not going to stop doing it, either.

I want the truth out there so fucking bad I'm ready to explode.

"You can't get it from the closet in the locker room?"

"Nope. We're fresh out of what I need in there." If hell exists, I'm definitely headed

there. But at this point, I've accepted it. It is what the fuck it is.

He jerks his head down the hall. "Hurry it up then. We've got shit to do today if you guys are going to be ready to get on that plane tomorrow." He steps forward to go around me and then pauses, frowning. "You good, son? You've been off lately."

"My scoring average is up every game."

"I'm not talking about hockey. I'm talking about you." He pins me with a hard, assessing look. "You seem like you've got shit on your mind."

"Yeah, maybe." I scrub a hand down my face. "I'm good, though, Coach. Just trying to sort out some shit."

"Anything I need to know about?"

"Can I get back to you on that?"

"Don't piss me off, kid. Either you're dealing with shit I need to know about, or you aren't."

"It's not at that level yet." Jesus Christ. I'm spanking Emilia's perfect ass when I get my hands on her.

Coach grunts. "Go talk to the therapy staff after practice, Nash. That's an order. I need your head on straight. You're one of the few on this team who has his shit together. Try to keep it that way, will you?"

"Will do," I mutter.

He shakes his head and takes off down the hall, muttering to himself.

I wait until his steps recede and then haul ass toward the closet, practically ripping the door off the hinges.

My heart rolls over in my chest when Emilia smiles up at me from her perch on a stack of nacho cheese boxes, looking like a curvy goddess with her legs crossed so her skirt rides halfway up her thighs and her dimples on full display. She's got her dark hair up in a bun, little pieces hanging free around her face. She looks downright edible.

"Well, well, well," she says, leaning back to look me up and down. "If it isn't my savior in skates."

"Your savior isn't in today, princess. He sent the sexually liberated hockey player you're going to fuck," I growl, slamming the door closed behind me.

A delighted laugh burbles from her lips as I yank her up into my arms, my lips coming down on hers in a hard kiss.

"It took you long enough to get here," she says ten minutes later, carefully adjusting her skirt as I slip her panties into my pocket. She'll get those back a quarter to never.

"Blame your dad." I quirk a brow at her, leaning back against the door. "I ran into him in the hallway."

Her eyes go wide.

"He wanted to know where I was going." I crook her chin up. "Do you know how hard it is to stretch the truth without breaking it just so you don't outright lie to a man you actually respect, baby girl?"

Guilt flickers through her expression. "Nash, I—"

"But I keep doing it because I'm fucking crazy about you," I continue, holding her gaze. "You drive me insane, Emilia Lariat."

"You drive me crazy too," she whispers.

I brush my lips across hers in a soft pass.

"I'm sorry," she whispers miserably.

"I don't want you to be sorry. I want you confident enough in what's between us to feel like you can tell him," I murmur. "If I haven't made you feel that way yet, that's on me."

"Nash, that's not what this is about."

"No?" I quirk a brow. "So you aren't scared you're going to lose me?"

She bites her lip, not answering...which is answer enough. That fear still exists for her. She still thinks there's a way this ends with me breaking her heart.

"That's what I thought, princess." I lean forward, brushing my lips across hers. "I gotta get to practice. Come to the house tonight."

"Okay," she whispers, regret heavy in her voice. And I fucking hate that for her. I don't want her feeling guilty. I don't want her to regret a damn thing. I just want to know why the fuck she's so worried about him finding out about us so I can fix it. Until I do that, we're stuck in this limbo. And as much as I enjoy stolen moments and fucking her anytime, anyplace, she deserves a whole helluva lot more.

"Did your dad ever play hockey?" she asks later that night as we're sprawled across my bed, our legs tangled together and the sweat still drying on our skin.



My fingers pause against the softness of her stomach before I clear my throat. "He did. He played all the way through college, but he says he wasn't cut out for a professional league, so he gave it up when he graduated."

"I'm glad you guys shared that," she whispers.

"We did. He's the one who taught me to skate. He was at every game he could get to right up until..." I swallow a wave of pain. "They were on the way to my last game when they were killed by the drunk driver who hit them. Aspen barely survived the accident."

"Nash," she whispers, craning her head back to look up at me.

"You want to know the truth about why I skipped the draft?"

She nods quietly.

"I couldn't step out onto the ice without feeling like the accident was my fault," I admit. "They were on the road because they were coming to support me. It took a whole metric fuckton of healing to get back into a headspace where I felt mentally ready to play again."

"I'm so sorry, Nash," she whispers, wrapping her arms around me. "I wish you hadn't lost them. But the accident wasn't your fault. They were on the road that day to support you because you mattered to them. They died on their way to one of the people they loved most in the world, and I imagine they're probably at peace with that. They loved you enough to be there, and that's a piece of them you get to carry with you forever."

"Yeah," I murmur, brushing my lips across her crown. "Took me a while to get to a place where I could see it from that perspective, but I finally got there."

She places a sweet little kiss to the tattoo over my heart, resting her head against me again. For a long moment, she doesn't say anything, and then she sighs. "I barely know my mom. My dad was wild about her, but she wasn't as wild about having a kid. He chose me over her by refusing to put me up for adoption. So as soon as she gave birth, she signed over her rights and walked."

"Jesus."

"I see her a few times a year when she isn't busy, but she's never really been a mom, you know? I guess it's hard to look at her as one when she's always been honest about the fact that she never wanted me."

"That's fucked up, Emilia," I growl, my heart clenching for her. How the fuck do you know this woman and not want her? It defies explanation.

"Maybe, but I have one parent who changed his whole life to keep me. It's always been us against the world."

"Is that why you're so afraid to tell him about us? You don't want to disappoint him?"

She tenses slightly and then sighs. "No, that's not it. I don't think anything I do could ever really disappoint him. He's always been my biggest cheerleader. But...he threatened to send you down to the minor league team if anything happened between us, Nash."

"What?" I blink, shock rippling through me. "When?"

"The day we met," she mutters. "He told me that he'd send you down to make an example out of you if anything happened between us. And he was dead serious. He's never wanted me to date a hockey player. Growing up, he kept me away from the arena just so I wasn't exposed to that whole world. Honestly, I don't think he wanted

me to follow in his footsteps or make his mistakes."

"Baby girl, you aren't one of his mistakes."

"I think my mom was," she whispers. "He never really got over her, you know? I think it skewed his perception of relationships and the role his career played in theirs. Hockey and heartache are invariably tied for him. He doesn't want the same for me."

I process this for a moment before flipping her over beneath me. "What do you want, Emilia?"

"This. You," she whispers, her eyes watery. "I...you feel like part of me, Nash. I'm not ready to give that up. I'm just freaking terrified that he'll learn the truth and follow through. And then I'm the girl who ruined your career, just like my mom getting pregnant ruined his."

"Emilia, princess." I rest my forehead against hers. "Your mom getting pregnant didn't ruin his career. He chose to give up something that he enjoyed to keep the child he loved. That isn't a sacrifice. That's fatherhood."

"Rationally I know that, I just..." She expels a sharp breath, searching for words. But she doesn't need them. I get it. I get her. She's carried this weight for a long goddamn time, feeling like her father sacrificed his career to be her father. She doesn't want to be the reason something happens to jeopardize mine the same way. But her father didn't give up anything he wasn't willing to lose for her. I know that for a fact because I feel the same fucking way.

Telling her that isn't what she needs to hear right now, though. What she really needs is reassurance that her father doesn't regret his decision. That's what this is really about. And that's not something I can give her. She needs him for that.

"Have you ever asked him if he regrets it?" I ask, rubbing my thumb across her bottom lip.

She quickly shakes her head.

"Maybe you should."

She stares up at me silently, anxiety lurking deep in her eyes.

"Ask him, Emilia. And let yourself believe him when he tells you that you're the best decision he ever made, because I can guarantee you, when he says it, he's going to mean it."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know you." I dip my head to kiss her. "Because I feel the same fucking way." I swallow her gasp, pouring everything into her, willing her to hear it and believe it.

Christ, I need her to believe it.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Emilia

"Hey, Jordan." I glance up from my desk, surprised to see him standing in the doorway to my office, scowling. "Do you need something?"

"Yeah." He stomps inside, his hands shoved in his pockets. He looks uncomfortable as hell as he paces around my office. "I need you to psychoanalyze me or something."

"Okay..." I say carefully, trying to mask my surprise. I tried to get him in here a week ago and he told me hell no. I figured hell would actually freeze over before he ever willingly walked through my door. Logan is not cooperating either. Surprise, surprise. The rest of the team has been a lot more willing, but these two? It's been an uphill battle the whole way. "What's going on?"

"We're playing the Bucks tomorrow," he says.

Crap. He played for the Bucks for a few years before he and a teammate, Jamison Peters, came to blows midgame. It got ugly. Jordan knocked him out in front of an arena full of people. That fight almost upended his entire career. He was sent down to their minor league team before they eventually traded him to the Carvers. He's turned it around since, but it hasn't been an easy road for him.

"You're still dealing with the fallout of what happened between you and Peters," I guess.

"Fuck him," he snarls, turning those steely gray eyes on me. "He deserved what happened between us."

"Okay," I murmur, inclined to believe him. Jordan may be difficult, but he's not the kind of guy who starts fights with his teammates for the fun of it, especially not fights as bad as that one reportedly was. It still tops lists as one of the worst fights in hockey history.

"He sent his fucking sister to try to talk me," he says. "She ambushed me in the parking lot the other day, begging me to talk to him."

"Ah." I sit back in my chair. "And you don't want to talk to him?"

"He should have been banned from the game for life." Jordan mutters a curse. "But she doesn't know that. He fed her some bullshit about it being a misunderstanding."

I eye him silently for a long moment. "What's her name?"

"Sutton," he says, his tone soft.

"You like her."

He whips his head around, glaring at me.

I smile gently, not buying the act when I heard the truth in his voice. He has feelings for her. Intense, complicated feelings. "You're allowed to like her, Jordan. Just because you have issues with her brother doesn't mean you have to have issues with her."

"She's his sister."

"There's no rule that says you have to forgive him." I shrug. "That's up to you. But you don't have to punish her for whatever he did."

"She doesn't even know." He resumes pacing. "How the fuck am I supposed to tell her what he did, Lariat?"

"Do you want to talk about what he did?"

"Hell no," he barks. "Not with you."

"That bad, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Do you want to tell her?"

He shrugs, which makes me smile. He really likes this girl. Interesting.

"Then don't tell her. You can hate him and what he did and still protect his relationship with her. That doesn't mean you're doing it for his sake, Jordan. If they're close, let it be for her sake."

"Yeah," he mumbles after a minute. "Yeah, maybe I can do that."

"Then problem solved."

He grunts, shooting me a look. "You don't suck at this."

"Surprised?"

He holds his thumb and forefinger an inch apart. "I had my doubts after the whole lizard dick, circle jerk fiasco, Lariat. But...you might actually make it around here."

"Might?" I arch a brow at him. "Don't flatter me too hard, Silvestri. I might begin to

think you actually like me."

He grins, striding toward the door. "Who me? I don't like anyone."

"Right," I say, chuckling as he disappears into the hall.

Alice pops her head in not even sixty seconds later. "Did I just see Jordan leaving your office?"

"You did."

"Wow," she says, clearly impressed.

"I know, right?"

She laughs softly. "I'm going out to the arena to watch them practice. You want to come?" She waggles her brows at me. "I heard that a certain defenseman is out there."

I glance at the paperwork on my desk and then at her. "Hmm... paperwork or staring at Whatley's ass," I say, pretending to think about it. "Tough call."

"Girl, get your ass out of that chair," she says, cackling.

I bounce up with a grin, tossing my pen down.

"Morning." I lift up on my toes to kiss my dad on the cheek before sliding into the cracked leather booth across from him. This early in the morning, the diner down from the practice arena is mostly empty, but the smell of coffee and sizzling bacon permeates the place, making my stomach growl.



My dad glances up from his phone, his expression softening when his gaze lands on me. "Morning, kid."

I eye him critically, not missing the deep shadows beneath his eyes or the weary lines around his mouth. They had the game against the Bucks last night that went into a second overtime before Archer managed to cinch a win for the team with a backhand shot the opposing goalie didn't see coming.

I have no idea what time they got back into town. Nash texted me from the locker room after the game, but I passed out on him before they made it to the airport.

I woke up to him wrapped around me in my bed this morning, snoring in my ear. He looked every bit as exhausted as my dad. I didn't wake him before slipping out for breakfast. I figured he could use the sleep.

"You look like hammered crap," I tease my dad. "What time did you guys get in?"

"Two."

My eyes widen. "Dad. You could have skipped breakfast!"

"Fuck that," he grunts. "The only time I ever see you outside of work is at breakfast once a week. I'm not missing it to sleep in."

Guilt pricks at me because he isn't wrong. We've barely seen each other in weeks. I spend every waking moment with Nash, carefully avoiding my dad. I've been freaking terrified he'd see the truth written all over my face, and that would be the end of Nash's career. But I've had a lot of time to think since my conversation with Nash last week.

Too much time, perhaps.

I want to be honest with my father about Nash. I hate feeling like I have to hide this big, important part of my life from him. I'm not ashamed of Nash, and I never want him to think I am. Yet, the longer I drag this out, the more I risk making him feel like he's some dirty secret to me, or like our relationship is something I don't value.

That couldn't be further from the truth. I'm so in love with him that I can't breathe through it most days. He consumes every thought in my head. No one has ever set me on fire and made me feel so safe, so seen, and so heard at the same time.

I want him to feel seen and heard too. I need him to know that he matters to me. And I can't do that the way he deserves if I'm too damn scared to even tell my dad that I'm in love with the man.

My whole life, my father has warned me away from hockey players, preaching that they'd screw up my life. I don't think I ever fully grasped how I internalized those talks until the other night in Nash's arms. He was right, though. I think I have spent most of my life believing that I ruined my dad's career...and a little afraid he regrets having me as a result.

My mom walked away, but he didn't. He's always been my hero for choosing me when she didn't. It'll crush me if some part of him wishes he'd made the same choice she did, so I've never asked. I've never wanted to face the possibility of having that fear confirmed. But...I don't have a choice any longer. I'll never move beyond it if I don't face it.

And Nash and I will be stuck in a perpetual limbo, constantly hiding. That isn't what I want. It isn't what he wants either. As fun as it is for him to drag me into every dark corner of the arena to fool around...we can't keep going like this forever.

It isn't fair to either one of us.

"Can I ask you a question?" I ask my dad, fidgeting with a napkin.

"Depends on the question, Emilia." He eyes me sideways. "I don't know how to answer half the shit you ask when I've had a full night's sleep. I'm running on far less than that today, kid."

"I'm not that bad."

He snorts, sipping his coffee.

"I'm not!" I protest.

"Really? So you didn't accuse the team of engaging in group masturbation?"

"Oh my god." I stare at him in shock. "You heard about that?"

"Oh, I heard about it." He chuckles, shaking his head. "Circle jerks, Emilia? Really?"

"I told you I panicked when I walked in, and they were all naked!" I whisper-hiss, squirming in my seat. I cannot believe they ratted me out to my dad! "And just so you know, trying to conduct therapy sessions with men you can no longer look in the eye—who can't look you in the eye—is all kinds of awkward and uncomfortable. I blame you."

"How the fuck is any of this my fault?"

"Meet me in the locker room, kid," I say, pitching my voice low to mimic his gruff voice. "And then who wasn't in the locker room? Uh, that'd be you. But guess who was in the locker room? Oh, just an entire team of naked hockey players!"

His lips curve into a grin. "You were supposed to knock."

"When have I ever?" I cry, throwing my hands out wide.

His shoulders shake with the force of his laughter. "Ask your question."

I hesitate as the waitress cuts across the checkered floor toward us to take our order. My stomach is in knots, so I just order eggs and toast. My dad orders half the menu, like usual.

"Do you ever regret giving up your career for me?" I blurt, chewing on my bottom lip as soon as she walks away.

"What the fuck?" he growls, his brows winging together as he glares at me. "What kind of bullshit question is that, Emilia?"

"I don't know," I whisper, dropping my gaze to my hands. "You hate the thought of me dating a hockey player so much. It took me months to convince you to let me take this job! Part of me has always felt like it's because the association between relationships and hockey is so negative for you, personally. And I guess I wonder how much of that is because of me." My shoulders bounce in a shrug. "If you hadn't decided to keep me, you'd have been able to play a lot longer than you did. Maybe you and my mom would have worked out. Without me, your life would have turned out a lot different."

"You're right," he says, and an entire section of my heart shears away. Tears spring to my eyes. I blink rapidly, keeping my gaze firmly on the table. "My life would have turned out differently. I would have kept playing. Maybe your mom would have stuck around a while longer. And I would have missed out on the best goddamn thing I've ever done."

I jerk my gaze up, staring at him in shock. The look on his face... Good lord. It makes my damn soul quiver. I've seen my dad angry before. I've seen him

disappointed. But I don't think I've ever seen him look so righteously furious.

"I didn't choose being a father over my career. There was no choice. You're my daughter ," he growls. "You will always come first. And you will always be the crowning achievement in my life. A few more years playing a sport will never compete with that, Emilia. Your mother sure as hell didn't. You think I wanted to tie my life to someone willing to walk away from a child we created? You aren't the reason I lost her. You're the reason I found out who she was. I don't regret that, Emilia. Not for a second."

"Dad," I whisper, flinging myself out of my seat. I crawl into his side of the booth, snuggling up against him like I used to do when I was a little girl.

He drops a kiss on my forehead and then sighs. "It pisses me off that you don't know that already, kid."

"I know it," I say. "I just..."

"Just what?"

"I guess I'm just trying to understand why you're so dead set against me dating a hockey player." I glance up at him in time to see his brows slash together, suspicion ripping through his gaze.

Crap.

"Who the fuck are you trying to date, Emilia?"

"No one," I lie, sliding away from him. "I'm just curious."

"Why?"

"Because I don't understand you! You act like they're terrible guys who can't be trusted, but you love them. You've dedicated half of your life to supporting them. It doesn't make sense. I've spent time around them now, and most of them are incredible men. I mean, some of them aren't the greatest when it comes to relationships, but some of them are amazing."

"Give me a name, Emilia Anne," he growls.

I think about it. For about five seconds, I consider telling him that I'm in love with Nash. But I see the stubborn intractability stamped across his face and the fire in his eyes, and I know exactly how that'll end. He doesn't want a name because he's going to be rational about it. He wants one so he can put a stop to what he thinks is a mistake on my part.

He's never going to approve of this. He's never going to see reason. To him, I'm always going to be the little girl he needs to protect. I can work for the team. I can be an adult in that way. But in his eyes, I'll never truly be capable of making my own decisions for my life, especially if they involve a member of the team.

Nash will never be good enough for me as far as he's concerned, simply because he plays hockey. And the real irony of the situation? The part that's the most fucked up? He's the only one who has ever seen me for me instead of as my father's daughter. He's exactly the guy my dad would have chosen for me if he weren't so damn biased because he's on his team. But he'll never think Nash is good enough, simply because Nash plays this sport.

How incredibly demoralizing.

"There is no name," I mutter in defeat. "There's never been any name except yours, Dad. It's the only one anyone has ever heard. "

"What does that mean?"

"Why do you think I've never dated anyone? All they hear is your name, and suddenly, they either want to date me because I'm your kid, or they won't come anywhere near me because I'm your kid. Your name is all they hear. It's always about you," I sigh, sliding from the booth. "What I want never even enters the equation. It's never even been on the board with the equation. That's never going to change."

"Emilia—"

"I've gotta go." I lean down, pressing a quick kiss to his cheek. "See you at work."

"Emilia, dammit. Wait."

For the first time in my life, I ignore him. He'll never get it. I don't think he wants to get it. But, being the Coach's daughter sucks. Sometimes, well, sometimes it sucks sweaty hockey balls.

Today is one of those days.

By the time my workday ends, my nerves are frayed to the breaking point. My mind hasn't been on my work. It's been on my dad. It's been on Nash. It's been all over the freaking place.

The roar fades to silence as soon as Nash appears in the doorway, his eyes locking with mine.

I immediately jump out of my chair, rushing toward him.

"Fuck," he grunts, catching me with his hands on my ass as I practically leap into his arms, desperate to feel them around me. I don't even have to ask him to kiss me. As

soon as I wrap my legs around his waist, he kicks my door closed, backing me up against it.

His lips come down on mine, his kiss hot and hungry. I thrust my hands into his hair, holding him to me as I kiss him back the same exact way. I want his air in my lungs and his hands all over me. Maybe then I'll forget what a coward I am.

"I'm packing you in my bag next away game," he growls, kissing his way down my chest. His lips close around my nipple, his sharp bite delivering a shot a bliss right to my clit.

"Yeah? You think I'll fit in there beside your giant jock strap?"

"Giant, huh?"

I kick my flats off, hooking my toes into the back of his sweats to drag them down. "Let me take a look, and I'll get back to you on that."

He chuckles, burying his face between my breasts. "I fucking missed you, Emilia."

"I missed you too."

He lifts his head, grinning at me. "Yeah? You ready to show me how much you missed me?"

"Depends. You ready to put me down so I can?"

His eyes light up as he steps back, slowly lowering me down his body to the floor. I tug his hair just hard enough to hurt before releasing him and then drop to my knees at his feet.



"Fuck," he groans, tipping my head back with his fingers beneath my chin. "You belong on a goddamn throne, but I love the way you look on your knees, princess."

"I know. The proof is right in front of me." I lick my lips, staring at his cock. "Take it out, Whatley. I have measuring to do."

"Nah, baby girl. You're running this show. You take it out."

"Fine." I reach up, planting my hands against his stomach. My gaze locks with his as I embed my nails in his skin through his shirt, raking downward.

He hisses, throwing his head back as his eyes turn my favorite stormy green. "Goddamn, you little minx."

"You said I was running the show," I remind him, yanking the front of his sweats down. His dick immediately springs into view, nearly smacking me in the face. "No underwear? Mighty brave of you, Whatley."

"Figured you'd appreciate that. Get to work, princess."

"Feeling bossy, huh?" I smirk up at him and slowly lean forward, flicking my tongue out. I don't touch his cock, though. Instead, I swirl it over his hipbone.

"Feeling feisty, huh?" he growls, his hands sinking into my hair. "You want me to be bossy with you and take what I want? Is that it?"

"Maybe." I blow across his cock, fascinated at the way he trembles above me. "Or maybe I just want to torture you for a little while, see how much you can take before you beg."

"Not much," he says, a rasp in his voice. "I haven't had that perfect mouth on me in

two days. I haven't been inside you in just as long. I'm already losing it."

My heart flutters, my stomach clenching. Lord, he's good at saying exactly the right thing at exactly the right time. It's not an act or manufactured charm with him, either. It's like he can't help but tell me exactly how he really feels. We'll be teasing, and the truth just spills from his lips because he can't contain it. That's so damn sexy to me.

I lean forward, plunging down on him.

"Fuck!" he growls, bucking his hips.

I moan around him, already in heaven. There's just something about this man with his dick in my mouth that's utterly irresistible. His hands tighten in my hair, his hips rocking as if he can't stop the involuntary movements.

"Keep that up and I'll be taking more," he warns me when I reach up to fondle his balls.

My womb clenches, a heatwave rolling through me. I have the power here, but he's still the one in control. Maybe I shouldn't love that so damn much, but I do. The exchange of power is intoxicating.

I roll his heavy balls, tugging gently.

"Fucking hell. You're trying to kill me."

He isn't wrong. I like him out of control. I like him wild. And I really like when he's so turned on that he can't think about anything but me.

He grips my hair, angling my head as he thrusts forward. His dick hits the back of my throat, my lips stretched wide around him.

"Damn, you look beautiful like this, Emilia. Exactly like a fucking angel on her knees," he groans.

I whimper around him, slipping my hand into my pants.

"Oh, fuck yeah, baby girl. Play with my pussy for me."

I should not love that he calls it his pussy as much as I do, but I'm soaking wet as I flick my panties aside, my fingers flying across my clit. He grunts, his eyes locked on my hands as he fucks my face harder. His cock hits the back of my throat again and again, each thrust driving me higher, making me wetter. So does every filthy, devoted word that leaves his lips.

"Too bad your mouth is so fucking full right now," he growls, bucking his hips against my face. "I can't hear you moaning my name. You know how much I love it when you're moaning for me like a good little girl."

I moan around him, already on the verge of an orgasm.

"Are you going to come for me? You better," he says, pulling my hair to angle my head. "I'm not going to give you what you want and come down this perfect throat until you do."

I claw at his thigh with my free hand, choking on him as the coil shrinks.

"Christ, you're everything to me."

I shatter like crystal at his confession, cracking apart at the seams. Waves roll over me, annihilating me.

He groans my name, his muscles quivering as he tries to pull back, but that isn't what

I want. I follow him, keeping him right where he is. His eyes meet mine, so much emotion in them I can't breathe. I can't think. I fucking drown in him as he growls my name, his seed splashing across my tongue and down my throat.

I swallow eagerly, greedily, drinking him down with my eyes locked with his. Every last damn drop he spills.

"Fuck," he whispers when he's so sensitive he's shaking. He pulls back, slipping from my lips.

I smile up at him...and then I'm in his arms, his mouth on mine as he kisses me, stealing my air and making it his own.

"You fucking own me, Emilia," he breathes against my lips. "You hear me? You own me."

"You own me too, Nash," I whisper.

"Lariat." Logan drops into the booth beside me, grinning. "Haven't seen you around the locker room lately."

We're at a bar downtown with the team. They're flying out for another game in the morning, so we're hanging out while we have the chance. Nash insisted I come with him. I wasn't entirely sold on the idea, but Alice is here too. So is Logan's new assistant, Peyton.

I'm glad I came. It's been a lot of fun.

"And I haven't seen you in my office," I retort, eyeing Logan over the rim of my wineglass. "But I know you've been getting my emails. You've responded to them."

"Yeah, and I responded no." He smirks at me. "That means I'm not coming, Doc."

"Not a doctor. But fine, then I guess I'll be seeing you in the locker room again soon." I eye him levelly, refusing to give up that easily. Between his sister and the way he keeps looking at Peyton, he very obviously has a lot going on in his life. He may hide it behind that devil-may-care attitude, but I'm not fooled. The man needs someone he can talk to about it, and from what I know, he doesn't share much with the guys.

"Jesus Christ," Jordan growls from the opposite side of the table, scowling at Logan. "If she shows up in the locker room while we're changing again, I'm kicking your ass. We still haven't recovered from last time she came in, insults blazing."

"It will be his fault," I agree.

"You are a little shit-stirrer, aren't you?" Logan asks, amusement heavy in his voice.

"Takes real to recognize real, Moreno."

Archer laughs abruptly from his other side. "She has you pegged to a fucking T, man."

"Fine. I'll consider dropping by your office." Logan holds up a finger. "But only to say hey. Not to discuss shit."

"Fine. Then I'll consider not barging into the locker room again," I say sweetly.

Jordan shakes his head, laughing quietly. "You're a fucking terrorist, you know that?"

"Stop flirting with my girl, Silvestri," Nash growls, stepping up behind me. He places a hand on my shoulder, sending a shiver through me.

"Get fucked, Whatley," Jordan retorts, flipping him off. "You're the one who ran off and left her here all alone. You're lucky I'm the one sitting here and not River."

"I went to the bathroom, you dick."

Jordan shrugs, picking up his beer. "Like I said, you left her alone in a bar with River."

"Fuck," Nash mumbles, his worried eyes coming to me. "Was he a problem for you?"

"No." I laugh quietly. "I haven't even seen him, Nash. Jordan is just messing with you."

"River left an hour ago," Micah says.

"Thank God," Nash mutters, pulling me up out of the booth. "I don't want you anywhere near him."

"Sucks for you. I'm his staff psychologist too." It's not like I can't handle River anyway. He flirts with everything that moves, but he's not a Chad by any means. He's just...deflecting. He thinks if he talks a big game, no one will look beyond it to the stuff he doesn't want them to see. Eventually, he'll realize that he's causing more problems for himself than he's solving.

Nash scowls at me.

"Don't even start, Whatley," I warn him. "I can handle River. You worry about yourself."

"I like her more every time I see her," Micah mutters. "She has brass balls."

"Jealous because mine are bigger than yours, Erikson?"

"You wish, Lariat."

"Uh, I've seen yours." I bat my lashes at him. "Mine are definitely bigger."

Jordan stands abruptly. "And that's my cue to get the fuck out of here."

"We should get going too," Nash murmurs.

"We should all head out," Archer says, setting his beer on the table. "Flight leaves early in the morning."

"Don't remind me," Logan growls, glancing across the table at Peyton. "You ready to go, angel?"

"Stop calling me that, Logan."

"Sure." He shrugs. "Just as soon as you stop looking like one, baby."

She rolls her eyes, sliding out of the booth. "It was nice to meet everyone. See you later." She shoots a death glare at Logan before stomping toward the door.

"Shit," he mumbles, hopping up as laughter ripples through our group. She's been giving him hell all night. I kind of like her for it. He needs someone willing to call him on his shit.

"Stop antagonizing her, man," Micah says. "You're only making it worse for yourself."

"Fucking clearly," he sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose as he takes off after her,

looking stressed in a way he never has before.

"I don't know why the fuck he hired her," Micah mutters. "He knew she hated him, but he just can't leave shit alone."

"Yeah, well, you don't do the shit I walked in on them doing in the locker room today with someone you hate," Diego snorts.

Everyone turns wide eyes on him.

"They were fucking?"

"All I'm saying is that isn't hate, motherfuckers. That's something else." He drains his beer, standing up. "I'm out. See you in the morning."

"Us too." Nash places his hand on the small of my back, turning me toward the door.

"Wait. Where is Alice?"

"Uh...she left an hour ago," Micah says, an odd expression on his face.

"An hour ago?" Nash asks.

"Yep."

"Alone?"

"Nope."

"Jesus Christ," Nash mutters, shaking his head.



"What? Who did she leave with?"

Everyone avoids looking at me.

Nash presses his lips close to my ear. "She left with River."

"Oh." My nose scrunches. "Oh. Well, good for her, I guess." It's not a choice I'd make, but I am not going to judge her for making a different choice. Who she chooses to take to bed is not my business.

Micah laughs quietly.

"Come on," Nash murmurs, leading me toward the door.

As soon as we're outside, I lean my head against his shoulder, peering up at him. "Thank you," I say softly.

He glances down at me. "For what?"

"For tonight. For bringing me."

"You're part of the organization too, Emilia. You belonged at that table just as much as everyone else there."

"I know. I just..." I shrug, not sure how to explain how much I needed tonight. How much I needed a night to just be a normal couple doing normal couple things without worrying about my dad or any of that. "Thank you."

He turns me toward him, cupping my cheek. "You don't owe me thanks, princess," he murmurs. "As soon as your dad knows about us, we'll be doing shit like this a whole lot more often."

"I tried to tell him this morning," I whisper. "I asked him if he regretted giving up hockey for me."

"And?" Nash asks.

"He doesn't." I pause before sighing. "I chickened out before I could tell him about us, though, Nash. He got all suspicious and cranky and I just...lost my nerve. I'm such a coward."

"Hey." He pulls me into his arms, his lips brushing mine. "You've got brass balls bigger than Micah's, remember? Don't talk about yourself like that."

"I do have brass balls," I whisper, smiling despite myself. "And I am going to tell him. As soon as you guys get back, I'm telling him that we're together and he can just deal with it."

"We can tell him together."

"No, we can't." I touch his cheek, gratitude swirling through me. "This is something I have to do myself."

"You mean I have to let you slay dragons by yourself?"

"Afraid so, Whatley."

"Well, goddamn." He bends suddenly, scooping me up into his arms. "Guess I better get you home and prepare you for battle then. You can't win a war without training."

"Yeah, you think you can train me, huh?"

"Oh, I can definitely train you. We'll start with endurance." He smirks down at me, a

dark promise reflecting in his gaze. "And then we'll see how much torture you can take before you break, sweet little Emilia."

"Not much," I moan, pressing my legs together as my clit throbs in anticipation.

"Guess we'll see, won't we?"

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Emilia

"Nash," I moan as he presses me up against the side of the bus early the next morning, his body pinning me in place as he attacks my throat with stinging bites.

He grinds his dick against my ass, growling softly. "Still time to put you in my bag, princess," he breathes, nipping my ear. "You can be naked and waiting for me in my room after the game tomorrow."

I whimper, heat blowing through me in waves.

"I can feast on you in celebration." He licks a line down my throat, slipping a hand between us to palm my pussy. "You know that's what you want."

"Nash," I whimper, my knees threatening to buckle under his sensual onslaught. Good lord, there is no stopping this man when he's determined to get his way. He's sex on legs. Or in skates. Whatever. The point is, he's too hot to handle.

"Whatley! Where the fuck are you?" my dad shouts from the other side of the bus.

"Goddammit," Nash growls, pressing his face up against me. He takes a steady breath before placing a soft kiss to my throat. "Guess that's my cue to let you go."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"You better be waiting for me in bed when I get home on Saturday."

"Maybe."

"I mean it, Emilia. I want you naked and dripping wet, ready for my cock." He nips my throat again. "I think I'll keep you on it for the rest of the weekend."

"We'll see," I say.

"Yeah, we will see," he growls, spinning me around to kiss me breathless. When we're both panting, he breaks away with a groan, pressing his forehead to mine. "Goddamn, I hate leaving you."

"It's not my favorite thing either," I admit, my heart feeling like it's in a vise. "But I do enjoy watching you walk away, Whatley. That ass is a thing of beauty."

He doesn't smile. Instead, he groans again, his lips brushing mine. "Forty-eight hours," he mutters like it's a lifetime. "Forty-eight fucking hours."

"Whatley!" my dad shouts again. "Don't piss me off, kid. Time to get your ass on this bus!"

"You gotta go."

"Yeah." Nash sighs, reluctantly pulling away. "See you soon, princess."

"See you, Whatley."

He turns to head toward the other side of the bus...and my freaking heart drops into my stomach. Charles Montaque is standing right there, watching us.

"Fuck," Nash growls, going rigid.

"I thought I recognized the two of you last night," he says, smiling at us like we're old friends and he isn't about to blow up Nash's entire life. "But it was dark outside of the bar, so I wasn't sure. I guess this is confirmation."

He was at the bar last night? He was watching us ?

Bile crawls up my throat, threatening to choke me.

"Fuck off, Montaque," Nash says, his hands in fists as he steps toward him. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"It seems pretty clear to me, Whatley. You're fucking Lariat's daughter."

"Watch who the fuck you're disrespecting, Montaque."

"What the fuck is going on back here?"

No. Oh, no.

My dad steps around the side of the bus, glowering at Montaque...and then he notices Nash standing a few steps from me, his body angled as if he's trying to keep me out of sight. His brows pull down as he looks from Nash to me and then back again, suspicion slowly taking root in his eyes.

"Dad, I..."

"How do you feel about your daughter dating Whatley, Lariat?" Montaque asks, blowing up my world without a single care.

For the longest, my dad doesn't say a word. He just stares at me, complete silence stretching between the four of us. "Is this true, Emilia?" he finally asks, his voice

softer than I've ever heard it.

"I..." I glance at Nash, the truth right there on the tip of my tongue. My heart screams at me to say yes, to tell my dad the truth and damn the consequences. But Nash's career might just be the consequence. His future may be the price.

That's the story Montaque is waiting for—how dating me ripped apart a team headed for the Playoffs. I see it in his eyes. He wants this to blow up, wants it to be a big, torrid scandal he can hock to the masses. He doesn't give a shit if this is my life or Nash's career. All he sees is a damn story to sell.

And I don't want to give him the ability of telling it. But I should. For Nash's sake and my own...I should.

I shake my head anyway, denying the truth with tears streaming down my face. And as soon as I do it, I know I'm making the wrong decision. I'm failing myself and I'm failing Nash. But I'm still so fucking scared of ruining him that I make it anyway.

The look in Nash's eyes when he meets my gaze... I hate myself for putting that devastatingly handsome, broken look on his face. But he doesn't stop me. He doesn't say a word. He just quietly accepts that, even now, I can't tell the damn truth about us.

I wrap my arms around myself, trying to hold myself together as my heart threatens to shatter into pieces.

"Get on the bus, Whatley," my dad says.

Nash turns away from me without a word.

"Nash," I whimper, my freaking soul screaming in protest.

He doesn't stop. He just walks away without even looking at me.

"Montaque, get the fuck out of here. We have nothing to say to you," my dad growls at him, a warning in his voice.

Montaque holds up his hands, backing away. "No problem, Lariat. I got what I needed anyway."

I bite my lip, fighting back a sob.

My dad just stands there, staring at me like he's never seen me before.

"Please, let me explain," I whisper.

"Go home, Emilia," he says. "We've got a plane to catch."

"Dad, please."

"Go home." He turns on his heel and stalks away, leaving me standing in the parking lot by myself, staring after him, certain I broke three hearts today. And only one of us deserved it: me.

I'm not even sure if I'm welcome at Nash's place anymore, but I go there anyway. I fall into his bed, clinging to his pillow like that'll hold me together.

It doesn't.

I cry until I can't breathe. And then I pull out my phone, texting him with shaking hands.

Me: I'm so sorry. Please, talk to me.



When he doesn't respond, I cry some more.

I've been so fucking afraid of losing him, of being the one who ruins his career, and then I pushed him right out the door anyway. All because I'm a coward.

He deserves so much more.

Why couldn't I speak up for once? Why couldn't I stand up, just once, and tell my dad that I made my choice, and my choice is Nash?

Because, on some level, I'm still that little girl afraid to disappoint the man who gave up everything for her. I think in some ways, I always will be her, clinging to my dad because he stayed, because he loved me enough to stay.

But she can't rule anymore, not when entire tracts of my heart belong to someone else. Not when my whole damn soul is tied to a man who would walk through fire for me. My father did what he did because he was my father. That's what a parent is supposed to do—choose you. Love you enough to choose you no matter what.

But Nash? He'd choose me simply because he's mine. Because, even if he hasn't said it, he loves me. Not because he has to love me, not because it's his job, but because he feels the same undeniable pull I do.

That man is crazy about me.

And I feel the exact same way about him.

He deserves for the whole fucking world to know it.

If the choice is my dad or Nash...there is no choice.

It's Nash. It'll always be Nash.

I dry my eyes, take a deep breath, and then text Alice, praying I'm not too late to fix this.

Me: I need a favor.

Alice: What's up?

Me: Can you call?

My phone rings not even two seconds later.

"What's up?" she asks. "Why aren't you at work?"

"Long story," I say, crawling from the bed to throw my stuff into an overnight bag, determination fueling every step.

"Are you crying?"

"Not at the moment."

"What did he do?" she growls.

"He didn't do anything. I did." I sigh, my bottom lip quivering. "Charles Montaque ambushed us this morning, and my dad found out about us. I screwed everything up."

"That son of a bitch! You need help killing the story?"

"No. I, um, need help changing the narrative." I quickly explain what I want and then pause. "Can you do it?"

"Yeah," she says quietly. "I can do it. But are you sure, Em? Once you put it out there, you can't take it back."

"That's the plan," I whisper. Nash and the way I feel about him isn't something I want to take back. Not now, not ever. That's what I should have said this morning. That's what he deserved to hear. He deserves to hear it now. Even if it's too late and I've broken it beyond repair, he still deserves to know that he isn't a secret. He isn't something I'm ashamed of. And he doesn't deserve to be hidden away.

It'll kill me if he never wants to see me again. But so long as he knows that he never deserved to feel like a dirty little secret, I'll live with the pain if that's my fate. I'll never get over him. I'll never move on. He'll have every single piece of my heart forever. But the whole world should know that Nash Whatley isn't a scandal. He's the most incredible man I've ever known. And he should know that, too. He always should have known that.

"I'll make it happen," she promises. "I'm assuming you need it done sooner rather than later?"

"As soon as you can make it happen. I plan to be on the first flight out."

"Good for you," she says. "Go get your man, girl."

"I am." I clear my throat, my heart in a vise. "If he'll even talk to me."

"Oh, he'll talk to you," she says with a soft laugh. "Trust me, Emilia. A man who looks at you like that isn't going anywhere."

"You didn't see the way he looked at me this morning."

"We all fuck up. And, in your defense, Montague was standing right there, just

waiting to pounce. You did the best you could."

"It doesn't feel that way."

"Yeah, well, that's because you don't know Montaque," she mutters. "He's pure evil in a pretty package."

"Speaking of pretty packages...River St. James, huh?"

"Don't know him," she says, making me smile for the first time all morning. "Definitely didn't sleep with him. And absolutely am not planning to do it again."

"Good for you," I whisper. "Be safe. Have fun."

"Oh, I plan on it." An evil laugh ripples down the line before she sobers. "Call me when you get to the airport. I'll have something for you by then."

"Thank you." I clear my throat, gratitude putting a lump in my throat. "I mean it, Alice. Thank you."

"You can thank me by making me your maid of honor when you marry that man," she says before hanging up on me.

I send up a prayer that we make it to that day. Right now, it doesn't feel like it's even a possibility. But...I'm not giving up. Not on this and not on Nash. Even if it costs me everything, I'm all in.

I just hope he's still all in, too.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Nash

"Y ou good, man?" Archer asks, leaning across the aisle to look at me.

"Fucking perfect," I grunt in response, staring up at the ceiling of the plane as we touch down in San Jose.

Coach won't even look at me. Emilia is back in DC by herself. Montaque is writing God only knows what. This is the ninth circle of hell. And there isn't a fucking thing I can do about it.

I'm mad as hell that Montaque ambushed us. I'm mad as hell that Coach found out the way he did. And I'm mad as hell I didn't put an end to all of this bullshit long ago. Emilia looked like her entire fucking world was crumbling this morning. And it felt a whole lot like mine was too.

She never should have been put in that position, and I'm pissed that she was. I should have talked to Coach weeks ago, told him that I'm crazy about his daughter. Instead, I've let her stress and worry and carry it until it came to this.

I think some part of her broke this morning.

And I'm not fucking there to put her back together again.

My arms ache for her. My goddamn heart hurts for her.

I need to talk to Coach, explain this shit. She may not have been able to say anything

this morning, but he knows the truth. I know he knows. And it's going to break her heart into little pieces if he follows through on his threat and sends me to Pennsylvania.

"If you want to talk..."

"I don't," I growl, shooting a hard look at Archer.

He sighs, shaking his head. "Then I'll do you the favor of getting out of your face," he says, hauling himself to his feet before grabbing his bag and his gear. And then he pauses, glancing back over at me. "Coach is always the last off the plane. He does a walk-through before he deplanes."

I inhale a sharp breath, gratitude pulsing in my chest. "Fuck. Thanks."

He jerks his chin in a nod before disappearing up the aisle.

I stay in my seat, my foot tapping restlessly against the floor as my teammates take their sweet time getting their shit together and getting off the plane. They're loud as fuck, fraying my nerves.

But within a few minutes, they're off the plane, leaving me in silence.

Coach appears at the head of the aisle a few minutes later, scanning. His face drops into a scowl when it lands on me. "Off the plane, Whatley," he barks.

"Can't do it, Coach."

"Son of a bitch." He charges down the aisle toward my seat, looking like he's brewing for a fight. Christ, I hope it doesn't come down to that. "I said off the plane, Whatley."

"I'm in love with your daughter, sir."

Coach grunts, his jaw pulsing.

"I should have told you that weeks ago."

"Yeah, you should have, kid." He leans against the seat across the aisle, his arms crossed. "But you didn't. I expected that shit from Emilia. She's always been too afraid of what I thought, but you?" He narrows his eyes on me, disappointment rolling through them. "Didn't expect a member of my team to be lying to me, Whatley."

"And I didn't expect my coach to threaten to make an example of me," I say, holding his gaze levelly. "Keeping our relationship from you was fucked up. I won't deny that. But you don't really have a moral high ground here, sir."

"She's my daughter, Whatley," he grits out.

"And she's the reason I breathe ," I growl, gripping the arms of the chair. "You have no idea how I feel about her, and that's on me. But it's on you, too. She's spent her whole life worried she ruined your career. The last thing she wanted was to ruin mine too. And the first thing you did was give her a reason to fear that exact thing happening if we told you the truth. She's agonized over you finding out because she didn't want to be the reason I got booted from the team."

"Jesus Christ," Coach mutters.

"I should have put an end to that weeks ago," I mutter. "I'll own that. I thought I was doing right by her by giving her the choice, but I was fucking it all up the entire time. She needed me to step up, and I failed her." I hold his gaze, not mincing words. If he wants to boot me from the team, I can't stop him. But at least I'll go having defended

her the way she deserves. The way I should have weeks ago. "But you failed her too. She doesn't need you giving her something to fear. She doesn't need you making choices for her. She needs you to trust her enough to make choices for herself. You raised her to be that woman, Lariat. And believe me, the woman you raised is fucking incredible."

"And you think you're a good choice for her, Whatley?" he asks. "You're on the road half the season. Is that really the life you want for her? For your kids? Leaving them behind?"

"It's the life she wants," I say quietly. "I don't know if that'll change when we have kids. But I know the choice should be hers because it's her life."

"And if it changes? If she decides that having you gone all the time is too much for her? What then?" he asks. "You break her heart when you decide that you're not willing to give it up for her and your kids?"

"No," I say quietly, not really surprised that's what he thinks of me. It's the choice most players make. It's why so many goddamn marriages end in divorce in professional sports. This life isn't easy, especially when kids are involved. But I'm a whole helluva lot more like him than I've ever been like them. I've been in his shoes once. I raised a sister while playing this sport. I know what it mean to put someone else ahead of this game because their needs came first. And if he thinks I wouldn't make the same choice for Emilia and our kids that I'd have made for Aspen in a heartbeat, he doesn't know a goddamn thing about me. Putting Emilia first isn't even a question. She's my world.

"If she ever changes her mind and decides this life is too much, I walk away, and I don't regret a single goddamn second of it."

Surprise flares in his hazel eyes, as if he didn't expect that answer.



I grab my bag, sliding out into the aisle. "You should be able to understand just how easy that decision will be to make if it ever comes down to it. You made the same choice for her once."

"Jesus," he mutters as I squeeze past him, striding down the aisle.

"Is it just me, or is everyone in this motherfucker staring at us?" Diego asks, his brows furrowed as he glances around the restaurant down from the hotel where we're having dinner.

I don't bother looking up to confirm, instead, staring at my phone the same damn way I have been all day. I've been calling Emilia since the plane landed this afternoon, but she isn't answering. She isn't reading my texts or responding to them, either.

I'm worried as fuck.

"It's not just you," Logan mutters from beside me. "They're all staring."

I glance up in time to see everyone at the table looking at me, as if waiting for an explanation as to why we're suddenly more popular in San Jose than we are back home. I don't particularly feel like giving them the details, though. They're all going to be pissed about it.

"Fuck," I mutter, shoving my phone in my pocket. "Montaque found out about me and Emilia. He ambushed us and Coach this morning."

"Damn," Joaquin whistles. "And you're still standing?"

I shoot him a dirty glare.

"I'm just saying... that's his daughter, man," Joaquin says, shrugging. "Figured he'd

rip your balls off once he found out what the two of you have been doing."

"It's not even like that," I growl. "I'm marrying that girl."

"The writing has been on the wall on that since day one, motherfucker." Logan rolls his eyes as half the guys at the table nod their agreement. "Fuck Montaque though, straight up. What'd he print about you two?"

"Don't know. Haven't looked."

"Jesus Christ," Jordan mutters, dragging his phone out of his pocket. "You're in enemy territory, Whatley. You need to be prepared for whatever bullshit they're going to throw at you tomorrow. I can guarantee it'll be something about her meant to piss you off."

"I fucking hate coming here," Micah agrees. "It's always some bullshit."

"Blame Jordan," Diego says, and then shrugs when Jordan throws a dirty scowl at him. "I didn't mean it that way. I just mean, they hate us because you're on our team. Peters is their captain. It probably drives them up the fucking wall that people still remember their precious Captain getting the shit kicked out of him on national television by one of his own teammates."

"I wouldn't mind kicking the shit out of him on national television," Archer says, shocking everyone.

"What the fuck did he do to piss you off, Cap?"

Archer's gaze flickers toward Jordan and then away before he shrugs. "Maybe I just think he deserves it," he says quietly, leaning back in his chair.

Logan catches my gaze, one brow arches as if to ask if I knew that Archer knew what happened between Jordan and Jamison. I just shrug in response. Jordan adamantly refuses to share the details no matter how often the guys ask him about it, but I'm not really surprised he told Archer. Frankly, I'd be more surprised if he didn't. Archer knows everything. It's fucking wild how much of our shit he picks up on and files away.

"Fuck," Jordan mutters suddenly. "Uh, Whatley. You may want to look at the news, man."

"Why? What did the motherfucker publish?"

"He didn't." Jordan slides his phone across the table toward me, his face carefully blank. "I think she did."

What the fuck?

I snatch the phone up, flipping it around to read.

Emilia Lariat confirms she's dating Nash Whatley

Emilia Lariat, daughter to longtime Coach Aaron Lariat of the Washington Carvers, released a statement earlier today confirmed that she and Nash Whatley, the newest addition to the Washington Carvers' roster, are a couple.

"This isn't some big scandal, as much as some would like to try to twist it into one," read the statement sent to us by Alice Madison, publicist for team. "We're two private people living public lives who fell in love. Quite simply, Nash is the best man I've ever known. That's the story."

Whatley joined the Carvers this season after entering unrestricted free agency status

last year. According to sources, Lariat was recently hired as the staff psychologist for the Carvers organization.

No word yet from Coach Lariat on his daughter's statement.

"What did she do?" I mutter, my heart in my throat. Jesus Christ. She just... I drop Jordan's phone, jerking to my feet. "I've gotta go."

"Where?" Logan asks, his brows furrowed.

I don't answer, already striding toward the front door.

Archer catches up to me halfway across the restaurant. "We have a game tomorrow, brother," he reminds me, following me out the door.

"I know. Fuck." I shove a hand through my hair, my mind racing. "I need to get to her. I need..."

"Go back to the hotel. I'll call Alice and figure out how to get her on a plane to you."

My fucking knees threaten to buckle. I grip his shoulder, squeezing. "Thank you."

"Go." He jerks his head, grinning at me.

He doesn't have to tell me twice. I spin on my heel, jogging down the sidewalk toward the hotel. She just told the entire world that we're together. No. She told the entire world that she's in love with me.

Jesus Christ.

For a girl convinced she'll ruin my career, she really does have brass balls.

I don't know if Lariat heard me today. At this point, I don't really care if he believes I'm the best choice for her or not. The only thing that matters to me—the only thing that's really mattered in all of this—is what she wants, what she needs, and what's best for her. For weeks, I told myself that letting her do this her way in her time was the best thing for her. I thought if I pushed just enough, teased her with the thought of us getting caught often enough, eventually she'd realize that she can't hide us or hide from us forever.

I went about that shit all wrong. What she needed was for me to tell Lariat the shit I told him today. He has failed her. He did make shit harder on her than it had to be. And she'll never have a chance to be the woman he raised if he can't back the fuck off and let her.

The man adores his daughter. There's no disputing that. But you can't smother the things you love, especially not when those things are women like Emilia. She needs to be every wild piece of herself. At some point, he has to cut the fucking cord and let her.

I've got her from here. I will always have her. Whether he sends me to Pennsylvania or trades me off the team or makes my life a living hell, it won't change the facts. And the facts are real fucking simple.

His daughter is mine. Every wild, beautiful piece of her belongs to me now.

And I intend to be a motherfucking beast when it comes to loving her.

I burst into the hotel lobby like the hounds of hell are nipping at my heels. Too impatient to wait for the elevator, I turn for the stairs, racing up to my room on the third floor. I need to get her on the phone. I need to hear her voice. Hell, I need to see that beautiful face. I've got shit to say—important shit.

My lungs burn with exertion by the time I make it to my floor, but I don't even slow as I charge toward my room, determined to get to her one fucking way or another to say what I should have said this morning. Hell, what I should have said day ago.

As much as she's mine, I'm hers too. Heart and fucking soul.

I stumble to a stop a few doors down from my room, staring in shock at the gorgeous little goddess curled up in front of my door with her head on her knees, staring at the carpet.

"Emilia?"

"Nash!" She leaps to her feet, her gold eyes full of anxiety as she spins to face me. She's been crying. Probably all fucking day judging by the shadows around her eyes.

I stride toward her, pulled like a magnet. "What are you doing here?"

"I..." She breaks off, glancing around. "Can we talk in your room?"

I shove the keycard in the door, holding it open for her to go in ahead of me. She looks around, her brows furrowed.

"This is way less fancy than I expected."

"You thought they rented us penthouses?"

"Maybe." She shrugs. "Isn't that where stars usually sleep?"

"A bed is a bed after a game, Emilia."

She bites her lip, looking up at me. "I broke into your house today. I mean, I used the

key you gave me, but it was probably breaking and entering anyway since you hate me."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"I love you," she blurts, wringing her hands together. "I should have said it this morning. Actually, I should have said it days ago, but I'm dumb and I didn't. If you never want to see me again after this, I'll understand." Her bottom lip quivers as if the thought alone is going to break her wide open. "But I just wanted you to know that I'm not ashamed of you. I've never been ashamed of you or what we are. I just didn't want him to send you to another team when you're the best thing that's ever happened to me. And now, I've messed it up anyway."

"Two things," I growl, stalking toward her. "First, stop calling yourself names. It pisses me off. Second, I'm so goddamn in love with you it's driving me crazy. Third—"

"You said two things."

I shoot her a warning glare. "Third, you didn't mess anything up. I knew you weren't going to answer him with Montaque standing there." I stop in front of her, tipping her head back until she's looking at me. "I didn't expect you to answer him with Montaque waiting to use every word of it to tear the team apart."

"You looked so disappointed."

"I was disappointed in myself, princess. I was mad as hell that you were in that position to begin with. It never should have happened." I brush my thumb across her bottom lip. "I felt like a fucking asshole watching you cry and knowing anything I did was likely to be the exact wrong thing with that motherfucker standing there, waiting to tell the whole world our business."

Her chin wobbles, tears welling in her eyes. "I thought you hated me, Nash."

I drag her into my arms, my heart pulsing. "Then I'm not doing my job right, baby girl," I groan, pressing my forehead to hers. "I've been telling you that I'm crazy about you for weeks."

"I didn't know you loved me," she whisper-hisses, making me smile.

"You did," I murmur. "You were just afraid to let yourself believe it."

"Maybe you should be the therapist, and I should play hockey."

"Nah, you know people, Emilia. I know you. There's a difference. Besides, the world isn't ready for you with a stick. You're savage enough without one."

"I'm not savage with your stick, Whatley."

"Liar." I boost her up into my arms, pressing her back against the wall. "You're a ruthless little savage when you're on my stick, and you know it."

"Put me on it now. We'll see who's right," she whispers, arching toward my mouth.

I take her invitation, my lips slanting down over hers. She whimpers, her hands flying to my hair to hold me to her. And this shit right here? Her curvy body in my arms, pulling my hair and grinding all over me while I kiss the air from her lungs? This is home. This is worth fighting for. This is worth keeping at any cost.

"Nash, please," she groans, tugging at my hair. "Please."

"What do you want, princess? Tell me."



"You inside me."

I spin, dropping on her the bed before following her down. We kiss and touch and roll and moan, leaving clothes strewn all over the room. By the time I kiss my way down her gorgeous body, lavishing attention on every soft inch, she's already a panting mess beneath me, chanting my name.

She only chants it louder when I throw her legs over my shoulders and set to work, feasting on her. I devour her like the perfect little treat she is, thrusting my tongue in her hole to fuck her with it until she's right on the edge, and then I back off to run circles around her clit. I do it over and over, keeping her right there until she's pleading for mercy.

As soon as the plea leaves her lips, I'm inside her, thrusting deep.

She throws her head back, coming all over me.

I fuck her through it, snarling at how damn tight she is. At how beautiful she looks. At how fucking perfect she is.

"Emilia," I breathe, tipping her chin up until her eyes lock with mine. "I love you, princess."

A wave of intense emotion rolls through her eyes, stealing my breath. "Nash," she whispers, reaching for me.

I fall forward, catching myself on my elbows...and get lost in her.

My hands never leave her body. My lips never leave her skin. And when she falls this time, she takes me with her, groaning her name as her cries of pleasure ring out around us.

It's perfection. Best night of my life.

Until she's curled up against my afterward and someone pounds on the door.

"Whatley! Open the damn door," Lariat growls from the other side.

"Fuck," I groan, glaring up at the ceiling.

"I know my daughter is in there with you."

"Of course he catches us now," Emilia mutters. "All the times we fucked all over the arena with people everywhere, and nothing. But as soon as I sneak into your hotel room in a different state, suddenly we're busted."

"Are you complaining that he didn't catch us sooner?"

"No." She rolls from the bed, grabbing her clothes. "I'm just saying...his timing sucks sweaty hockey balls."

I chuckle, grabbing my pants to yank them up my legs. "Why don't you get dressed in the bathroom? I'll keep him occupied."

"Uh, no way. We're doing this together."

"Whatley!" Coach pounds on the door again. "Don't make me take it off the hinges, son."

"Hold your freaking horses!" Emilia yells back at him, quickly shimmying into her pants and then throwing her shirt on over her head. She spots her panties and bra on the floor by the window and kicks them under a chair, shrugging. "How do I look?"

"Freshly fucked."

"RIP to your career," she sighs, patting down her hair as if that's going to do anything to fix the mess I made of it.

"You let me worry about my career from now on," I murmur, pulling her into my arms to kiss the anxiety from her eyes. "All you need to worry about is you."

"I love you." She melts against me.

"I love you too." I brush my lips across her forehead and then stride across the room to let her dad in.

He charges in, red faced and puffing, his eyes narrowed on his daughter. Of-fucking-course he clocks the state of the bed, his face turning apoplectic as he turns to look at me.

Emilia quickly jumps in front of him. "You can't kill him," she says. "I'm going to marry him."

"You asked her to marry you without discussing it with me first?" Coach growls, looking at me like he wants to murder me.

"No," Emilia interjects before I have a chance to say anything. "He hasn't asked me. I'm asking him."

"Oh, hell no," Coach and I growl at the same time.

Her face falls, disappointment rolling through her eyes. Shit. Does she think I don't want to marry her?

Fuck that. I've had the ring in my pocket for weeks already.

I cup her cheek, tipping her chin up and forcing her to look at me. "We will be getting married," I murmur. "But I'll be the one asking you, not the other way around." I glance from her to her dad. "And I won't be asking for your permission because it's Emilia's choice to make, sir. But I am asking for your blessing."

I'm not entirely convinced he'll give it to me. Actually, I'm half certain he's going to tell me to go fuck myself and keep my hands off his daughter...but I ask anyway. For her sake and for his, because, despite everything, he adores his daughter. And he's always been her hero.

He glances from me to her and then sighs heavily. "You were wrong about something, kid."

"What?"

"What you want should be the only goddamn thing on the board," he says. "It's the only part of the equation that matters." He jerks his chin in my direction. "As much as I hate to admit it, you found one who gets that. It'll never be about me or my name to him. It'll always be about you and yours."

"Dad," she whispers.

"You have my blessing, Whatley." He glances over at me, emotion in his eyes. "But if you ever hurt her, hell will not compare to the level of agony I'll put you through. You put her first, even if it means you walk away." He glowers. "And you keep her damn name out of the press."

Emilia squirms from foot to foot like a little girl who just got busted breaking the rules. "Um, about that..." She peeks up at him, grinning. "Too late?"

He shoots her a glare cold enough to freeze hell. "Oh, believe me, kid. I'm aware. My phone hasn't stopped ringing all fucking day."

"Whoops," she whispers.

Lariat actually cracks a smile. "You're going to think whoops," he mutters, shaking his head before he looks at me. "Good luck with this one. You're going to need it."

"I think I can handle her."

It's goddamn eerie just how alike they are when they throw their heads back and laugh at the same time. And that laugh tells me in no uncertain terms that they can't wait to see me try to keep up with her.

Christ, I can't wait either.

"Don't you dare take that jersey off, Nash Whatley!" Emilia shouts, jumping up from her seat behind our box as soon as I skate over to the boards. "I'm wearing mine!"

I laugh quietly, crooking a finger for her to come to me.

She stomps my way, looking too damn beautiful with my name across her chest and my ring on her finger. I put it there as soon as her father left last night. I hope I planted my kid in her belly too. God knows, I've been trying for weeks.

"What kind of trouble are you here to cause now?" she asks, eyeing me suspiciously as she steps up against the boards.

"No trouble," I lie. "I just came to tell you that I love you."

Her expression softens. "I love you too."

"I also wanted to remind you that you owe me five minutes in the box after the game."

She squeaks, whipping her head around. "We're in San Jose, Nash."

"So?" I arch a brow at her. "I mean...unless you're afraid?"

Her shoulders go back, her eyes narrowing on me. "Meet me after the game, Whatley. We'll see who's afraid."

Fuck, I want to kiss her right now. And for once, there's nothing stopping me.

I motion her toward the door off to the side and wait for her to reach it. As soon as she does, I hook my fingers in her jersey, tugging her forward.

She crashes into me, her tits up against my chest.

I swoop, claiming her lips in a hard kiss as everyone around us whoops and catcalls, cheering like we're putting on a show for them. I don't give a fuck about them, though. The only thing that matters to me is right here in my arms, whimpering in a way that sets my blood on fire.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:46 am*

Emilia

Five Years Later

"Daddy!" Evie squeals, racing toward Nash with her little hockey stick waving wildly in one hand and the puck in the other. "I got the fuck! I got the fuck!"

Nash whips his head around to look at our four-year-old daughter, his eye wide.

"Did she just say...?" Alice whispers from beside me.

"Yep," I say, biting my lip.

"Lord help us," Alice says, covering her mouth to stifle a laugh.

"Baby doll." Nash kneels at her feet. "It's called a puck. A puck. And you're not supposed to pick it up, remember? You hit it with your stick to move it."

"I said it was a fuck, Daddy." Evie looks at him like he's lost his mind.

Nash glances over head toward me, shooting me a what the fuck look. I just smile and shrug. He's the one who wanted to teach her to play. He can deal with the consequences. Unlike her twin brother, Evan, Evie was not cut out for a life on the ice. Actually, she probably shouldn't be anywhere near any kind of sport anytime in the next decade.

She is a wild child, as likely to lead a riot amongst players as she is to play by the

rules. Nash swears she gets that from me. I'm pretty sure it's all his doing though. Only one of us has ever played sports. It isn't me. And only one of us sometimes fights during said sport. That also isn't me.

There is no flaw in my logic.

"Here, let me show you again, baby doll," he says, gently prying the puck from her hand and dropping it to the ice before showing her how to use the stick to move it across the ice.

"He's so patient with her," Alice murmurs, smiling.

"Tons of practice." After five years with me, the man is basically a freaking saint. I spend half of every day finding ways to get under his skin. He just lets it roll off his back, completely unbothered. It doesn't matter what I say or do, he just loves me.

And then I pay for all the shit I give him when we're alone. That man still fucks me like he can't get enough of me. Every damn chance he gets, he's inside me, making me come apart again and again. It's bliss.

Every damn day with him is the best kind of beautiful. It's our kind.

"Are you excited about Texas?" Alice asks, looping her arm through mine. "I have to say, I am not excited about Nash being traded."

"We are excited," I whisper. "We'll be close to Aspen and Noah. The kids will grow up with their cousins. It'll be good for us."

"You're still going to come visit, right?"

"Uh, duh!" I look at her like she's lost her mind. "My dad will still be here. We'll be back every chance we get. If we aren't, he may kidnap the kids," I say, laughing



quietly. He retired from coaching last year. He spends most of his time fishing now. It's been good for him. Actually, I think having grandkids has been good for him. He's a lot more laidback these days.

He and Nash get along surprisingly well. Once they realized they could team up against me, it was all over with. They've become quite the team. It's annoying as hell. I can't get away with anything. My dad tattles on me to my husband. My husband tattles to my dad.

I think Nash is going to miss him as much as I will. But he's spent years away from his sister. After losing their parents the way they did, they only had each other for a long time. It's beyond time for them to live closer to one another again.

"You and River will have to bring the kids out." Out of all the couples that have sprung up around us on this team over the last five years...that's the one that still surprises everyone.

River fell hard for Alice. And Alice made him work his ass off for her. I wasn't convinced he could be redeemed, but...I guess for the right woman, even a man like River St. James can put in the work. And he definitely put in the work. He was in my office three days a week for months, working through his shit. He's good for Alice. She's good for him, too.

"Um, obviously," she says and then glances at her watch before pulling me into a hug. "Crap. I need to run. I have a meeting. Love you!"

"Love you too!"

I climb to my feet, waddling out of the box onto the ice.

"Hey!" Nash whips his head in my direction, climbing to his feet. "What'd I tell you about coming out on the ice, princess?"

"Something, something, you're a madman?"

He chuckle, striding toward me as Evie runs off after the puck, cracking her stick against the ice. "That's definitely not what I said, Emilia." He tugs me into his arms, pressing his lips to my forehead in a kiss. "I said my baby girl is baking in there and you're clumsy. Stay off the ice."

"Yeah, something like that," I agree.

He swats me on the ass, nipping my bottom lip. "What am I going to do with you, hmm? You never listen."

"Oh, I can think of a few things you can do with me, Whatley."

"Yeah? Will any of them make you behave?"

"Mm, maybe for about five minutes."

He smirks, glancing toward the penalty box and then down at me. "Our daughter is right there, princess."

"Yes, but she's busy chasing her fuck, Nash. I'd really like to chase a few of my own. And not the kind she's chasing around over there. I want the real deal."

He buries his face in my hair, his body shaking with laughter. "Goddamn, I love you."

"I love you too. Penalty box, Whatley. Now."

"Yes, ma'am," he says, pulling back to grin at me. "Hey, Evie. Why don't you go ask Uncle Archer to get you a snack? He's in his office."

"Can I hab nacho cheese?"

"She's definitely your kid, Emilia," he mutters to me before raising his voice so she can hear him. "You can have whatever you want, baby doll. Tell Uncle Archer that your daddy said so."

"Yay!" she shouts, abandoning her stick as she scurries across the ice toward the tunnel. As soon as she's out of sight, Nash is leading me toward the box.

"Now...what was it you said about chasing a few fucks of your own?" he growls, slamming the door behind us.

"Don't remember," I lie, leaning up against the wall. "Why don't you come and refresh my memory?"

"Gladly," he growls, stalking toward me with fire in his eyes. "But you're paying off security to erase the tape this time."

"Yeah, yeah. Get over here already, Whatley. The clock is ticking."

He presses his body to mine, his lips coming down on mine in a hard kiss as he pins me against the wall, being careful of my belly. I moan into his mouth, so damn glad this man is mine.