



Pucking Fake (Pucked Up Love #2)

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Category: Sport

Description: His new assistant hates him. Too bad he just told the world they're dating

Logan Moreno

Being a problem, I can handle. Being one of my sister's problems? Not so much. I've done everything I can to keep her out of the press...even when it's meant watching my reputation take hit after hit.

But I did not expect things to get this complicated.

Because a reporter won't stop sniffing around...and I just met my assistant in a bar and took her home. I probably should have warned her about my sister and her kid.

Now, Peyton thinks the kid is mine. And she hates me.

The only solution to both of my problems is obvious. I tell the world that we're dating.

It's true. At least, it will be as soon as I convince her that what she's feeling isn't hate. It's the makings of forever.

Peyton Cloud

Going home with the goalie who looks like sin is a bad idea, but I go anyway. Color me surprised when I realize he has a wife and kid at home.

I run out faster than an Olympian in a foot race.

Only to find out he's the player I'll be working for come Monday.

Why does Baby Jesus hate me?

Logan swears I've got him all wrong and that the kid isn't his. As if I haven't heard that before. My dad said the same thing—about me.

But this time, I really want to believe it. There's something about this ridiculous man I can't resist. Even when he announces to the world

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Peyton

Either God hates me, or the devil is breathing down my neck. I'm not sure which it is. But I do know a few things for sure: my potential future boss is one of the professional hockey players seated in the booth at the back of the Players' Club, I'm not entirely sure which one he is...and every single one of them is gorgeous. I also know there's no chance this ends well for me. No chance at all.

"What exactly did Jenna say?" my best friend, Serena asks, her gray eyes locked on the team over the rim of her cocktail glass.

"Aside from the fact that my life is over? Nothing much."

Her quiet laugh whispers across the bar. "I'm serious, Peyton. What did she say?"

"One of the guys on the team needs an assistant. Something about a baby or family issues causing him to miss important stuff?" I take a gulp of water. I may have been too busy freaking out to pay attention to the details. "I'm supposed to meet with their publicist on Monday to discuss the details."

"I'd climb any of them like a frigging tree," Serena mutters, still staring at the booth in the back where they're all cloistered. "How are you supposed to work for one of them?"

I cast a furtive glance at the tables around us before shooting her a death glare. "Keep your voice down."

Her full lips curve into a smirk as she meets my gaze. "Please. Every woman here is thinking the same thing." She nods at a nearby table—one packed with women in low-cut tops and barely-there dresses. "They even came dressed for battle."

She isn't wrong about that. How do you even walk in a dress that short without the whole world seeing your ass? I don't know. It's a mystery I have yet to solve, and believe me, I've tried. My attempts led me to the conclusion that I am not nearly graceful enough to pull it off.

I've always been a duckling in a sea of swans. Except I never actually turned into anything else. I'm short, curvy, and I have trust issues. Snark is my love language, and I hide behind it like it's a shield.

There's no way I have my shit together enough to work for one of the world-famous athletes at that table without making a total ass of myself. They're literal hockey royalty. Every single one of them graces magazine covers, has brand endorsements and legions of fans screaming their names.

You know what I have? Student loan debt, a fifteen-year-old car, and a couch with a spring that jabs me in the ass if I sit in the wrong place. For the record, having extra padding back there doesn't help when metal is hellbent on performing an unsolicited rectal exam.

I need this job. Hell, my bank account needs this job. But...gulp.

I cannot talk to men who look like them. I can't even deal with men who look like them. It always ends in disaster. Mostly because I'm mouthy and combative. Guys who look like them don't like mouthy and combative. They like classy and cute.

How the hell am I supposed to work for one of them?

You've got four days to figure it out. Tick tock.

"Crap," I groan, grinding the palms of my hands against my eyes for a moment. I pull them away and glance at the table again. Nope. They're still hot. Especially...Jesus. I don't even know what color blue that is. Cornflower? Cerulean? Navy? Whatever. The giant with the wicked smirk and the gorgeous blue eyes who looks like he'd fuck you dirty against the wall without breaking a sweat? There's something wild in his expression that's a little too attractive.

Judging by the way half the women in the bar keep eyeing him up like he's cattle on the block...I'm not the only one who thinks so. He's definitely not going home alone tonight.

I'm not jealous. Nope. Not. At. All.

So we're lying instead of breathing now, huh? the angel on my shoulder asks.

I pointedly ignore that judgmental bitch.

"So did Jenna say which is your future boss?" Serena asks.

"I have no idea," I whisper. "She didn't give me a name." I groan quietly. "Why did I say yes to this?"

"Because you need a job that actually pays." Serena squeezes my hand. "And because you've got this, Peyton. You can handle it."

I shoot her the look . She knows which one. It's the same one I've been giving her since we were college freshmen together and she convinced me that I could run a marathon.

Spoiler alert: I could not run a marathon. I have asthma! She just grins in response, tucking strands of her dark hair behind her ears. "Don't look at me like that. You know I'm right. You're going to freak out and do the whole Peyton thing because it's what you do, but then you'll be a boss and nail the interview. You'll organize his whole life because that's also what you do. Frankly, it's about time you do it for someone who can afford to pay you what you're worth."

I snort. Loudly. Though I don't disagree. I've had some great bosses since we graduated two years ago, but working for peanuts in a city like this? Well, my student loans aren't paying themselves.

Gosh damn it.

"Tell me what you know about the team," I sigh, resigned to my fate. This will probably end in disaster, but whatever. If disaster pays the bills, I'll be a tornado.

Serena's expression lights up, excitement firing through her eyes. The girl knows her hockey. Her brother plays. Me? I know you play the sport on ice with a stick and a puck. And that's about all I know.

"Archer Graves, dark hair, brooding in the back corner," she says. "Team captain. Well-liked. He's a great player. No family though, so it's probably not him. Jordan Silvestri is seated beside him. He's the hunk with the piercing and tattoos. Everyone says he's difficult. He got booted from his last team for beating up the captain, but he's an incredible player. Also, no family."

I glance at Jordan, my eyes wide. "What did his captain do?"

"No clue." Serena shrugs. "River St. James is seated beside him. Avoid him at all costs. He sleeps with everyone, but he's fearless on the ice. Obviously, he doesn't have a family at home."

I wrinkle my nose. Why am I not surprised? River looks like the kind of guy women can't resist...dark blond hair, blue eyes, dimples he flashes at everyone.

"See the guy next to him? The one who looks about eighteen?" Serena waits for me to nod. "That's Diego Tapia. He's not nearly as young or as innocent as he looks. Avoid him too. No family at home. The guy in the glasses next to him is Micah Rushing. He plays defense. Very popular with the fans." She taps her bottom lip. "He could be your guy. He just had a baby."

He's laughing at something the giant with the gorgeous blue eyes said. He seems nice, approachable. Maybe I could work for him.

"What about the giant next to him?" I ask, my gaze drifting back to him in time to see him slip his phone from his pocket, his lips pulling down into a frown.

"That's Logan Moreno," Serena murmurs. "He's the new goalie."

"Is that all you know about him?"

"Avoid him," she says, her tone firm. "He's trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"The kind you want to avoid."

I tear my gaze away from him to glance at Serena.

"He just got traded from Nashville," she says. "He raised all kinds of hell out there, was in the paper every few weeks for one thing or another. He's fearless in the goal, but he doesn't take anything seriously. I don't know why we signed him."

"You don't like him."

Serena shrugs. "We don't need the bad press. He's nothing but bad press."

"So he probably doesn't need an assistant then."

Serena snorts. "He needs a babysitter, not an assistant, Peyton. I highly doubt you'll be working for him."

I exhale a tiny breath before turning back to the table. He's still texting, a furrow carved between his brows. He looks like he could be trouble. But he doesn't look like that much trouble. What do I know, though?

"Who else is over there?" I ask after a moment.

"Joaquin Reed," she murmurs. "I don't really know much about him. He's been on the team for a while, but I guess he flies under the radar. I don't think he has a family, though." She shrugs. "The player who just left the table is Nash Whatley. He was just traded, too. He's an incredible player. Everyone says he's a great guy. I don't know much about him, either. Just what the papers say."

"What do they say?" I ask, curious.

"His parents were killed in an accident when he was younger. He opted out of the draft to take care of his sister." She falls silent for a moment. "They bring it up a lot."

Of course they do. No one is ever allowed to grieve in peace, are they? Not even hockey players. The papers always want all the gory, grisly details. It's never because they actually care, either. It's simply so they can turn you and your misery into a story. In their eyes, pain is dollar signs and the people who feel it? Well, they might as well be fat stacks of cash walking around.

"Who else on the team has a family?"

"Trenton Wembley, Jeff Twomey, Carter Akers, Vito Santiago, and Arlo Santos," Serena answers. "They're third and fourth line."

"I have no idea what that means."

"It means they're good, but not nearly as good as the guys sitting at that table." She nods in their direction. "Everyone wants a piece of them and Nash."

"So my future boss might not even be here?"

"It's possible." Serena shrugs. "It's probably Micah, though. He's the only one who just had a baby. And he's the one with brand endorsements and everything else flying his way. He's a hot commodity now that he has a kid."

I glance back over at him, trying to imagine myself working for him. He seems...safe. Safer than Logan Moreno, anyway. Could I actually pull it off? Maybe. Or maybe I'll crash and burn in a blaze of humiliating glory, sinking my reputation before I even manage to build one.

My gaze drifts to Logan again. He's still messing with his phone. His dark hair hangs over his forehead, drawing attention to the furrow between his brows. He's tense, his body rigid. He seems worried, stressed almost.

What's he looking at?

Curiosity gets the better of me, and I slide from my chair before I can stop myself. "I'm going to order nachos. I'll be right back." I take a step away from the table and then pause, glancing back at Serena. "Behave while I'm gone."

She just smirks at me...which may or may not mean she's going to listen. Who knows with her? Unlike me, Serena has no problem talking to men. She's a swan, with a sea of sharks chasing after her. One day, she might actually stop swimming and let one catch her.

I stride across the bar, casting furtive glances at the team's table as I close the distance between me and it. Logan is still messing with his phone, but everyone else is giving Jordan a hard time about something. He casually lifts his middle finger in the air as if to signal his feelings on the subject.

I'm not entirely watching where I'm going as I cross in front of their table, trying to catch a glimpse of Logan's phone, so it's absolutely my fault when I smack right into a man passing by, nearly knocking us both off our feet.

He rears back, his bleary green eyes rolling over me as he towers over me. He's cute in a disheveled kind of way. His suit is wrinkled.

"I'm sorry," I mumble, rubbing my forehead where it cracked against his shoulder. "I wasn't watching where I was going."

His lips curve into a slow grin as his eyes rake down my body. "No harm, no foul, gorgeous. You okay?"

"Fine. Sorry again." I move to step around him, eager to escape the pungent scent of alcohol and cologne before my future boss has a chance to notice me. The last thing I need is to sink my chances before I even interview.

The guy steps with me, blocking my path.

"Excuse me," I say politely.

"Where you rushing off too?" Suit's smirk grows, his gaze firmly locked on my chest. Great. I would run into the one guy in the bar who wants to stare at my tits. "Maybe I should walk you. Make sure you don't bump into anyone else."

Jesus. What decade does he think we're living in?

"Uh, no. I can handle it myself."

"I insist." He reaches for my arm, still leering at me. "It'll be fun."

The way he says that clues me in to the fact that it'll be anything but fun for me. He's either an overbearing asshole...or a creep. I don't intend to find out which.

"I said no," I growl, taking a step backward.

He tries to grab my arm anyway.

He isn't that drunk. And he isn't deaf. So creep it is, I guess. Lovely. Why is there always one in every bar? It's like they spend their lives staking these places out, just waiting to make asses out of themselves. Does it ever actually work out for them anymore?

I contemplate asking him that question, but he grabs for me again, and my temper flares. I spin to the table behind me, my eyes falling on the half-empty pitcher of beer situated near the edge. Every player at the table glances in my direction, conversation abruptly ending.

"I'm borrowing this," I say, snatching it off the edge before anyone can protest. I spin again, flinging the contents at the asshole who doesn't know how to take no for an answer.

"What the fuck?" he growls as beer splashes him in the face.

"I said keep your damn hands off me," I snap.

"You stupid little..." Rage flashes across his face as he takes a step toward me, his hand lifted.

I square my shoulders, too mad to back down or cower. Maybe that's my problem. I never know when I should quit. I may not know how to talk to men, but letting one walk all over or bully me? Hell no. That'll never happen.

"Don't even fucking think about it," a deep voice snarls from behind me before Logan Moreno quickly steps in front of me, partially blocking me with his body. He shoves the asshole who couldn't take no for an answer, sending him sprawling across the floor a few feet away. "She told you to keep your goddamn hands to yourself. If you want to keep them, I highly suggest you listen."

"She threw beer on me!" Suit protests into the silence of the bar. Literal dead silence. Everyone is watching this scene unfold.

Crap. This is bad.

"And you're lucky that's your biggest problem right now, motherfucker," Logan says, stepping toward him when he tries to push himself back to his feet. "Get up, and you'll be leaving here with a broken jaw."

"I didn't do anything."

"Bullshit," Jordan Silvestri says, stepping up on my other side, his arms crossed. "We all heard her tell you to keep your fucking hands to yourself. We saw you preparing to hit her."

A chorus of agreement echoes from his teammates, who are all standing behind me now...and none of them sound happy.

"Get the fuck out before I toss you out my goddamn self," Logan snarls.

Jordan motions for someone, but I can't see who. I might as well be standing next to literal giants because they tower over me, blocking out the rest of the bar. But not even fifteen seconds later, the security guard who let us in an hour ago appears. There are muscles, and then there's this man. He's definitely been eating his Wheaties. He probably throws iron bars and cars for fun.

"Toss his ass out of here, Jett," Logan murmurs to the man. "And don't let him back in. He tried to grab her and wouldn't take no for an answer."

"On it," Jett mutters, plucking the man from the floor like he's a bug.

There's something oddly satisfying about watching a grown man being manhandled by a much bigger grown man. Suit's feet actually dangle from the floor as Jett marches him across the bar, completely ignoring the way he blusters and curses and demands to speak to a manager.

As soon as they're out of earshot, Logan spins, his gorgeous eyes locking on my face.

"Cornflower," I mutter.

"What?"

"Your eyes are cornflower blue," I say...and then squeeze my eyes closed when his lips quirk into a grin. "Never mind. Pretend I didn't just say that."

"Nah, you said it."

"Did not."

"I heard it," one of his teammates mutters behind me, laughter in his voice.

"Shut the fuck up and sit back down, Diego."

Diego laughs and then there's a whole lot of shuffling behind me. I don't open my eyes. I do not want to know what's happening. Maybe if I don't look, the floor will open up and swallow me. A girl can hope, right?

It doesn't work.

"I'll get us more beer," Jordan mutters a moment later.

I reluctantly peel my eyes open to find everyone else back at the table. Except Logan. He's still standing in front of me, all broad shoulders and corded muscle...staring. He looks like sin. Probably tastes like it too.

Maybe I should close my eyes again.

"You okay, angel?" he murmurs, practically looming over me. He's so close I feel the heat of his body searing into mine. "You look like you're trying to decide if you want to pass out or throw up. For the record, I'd go with throwing up. It's far less complicated."

"Uh, do you pass out often?"

"It's been known to happen. A puck to the head hurts like a son of a bitch." He actually has dimples when he smiles. They soften him a little, turn him from wild devil to mischievous man. I think Serena was right, though. Logan Moreno is definitely trouble. It's written all over him.

"Maybe don't get hit in the head anymore?" I suggest.

"I'll take that under advisement." His chuckle rolls over me, all rich and warm. As sinful as the rest of him. "Maybe I'll start hiding behind the goal instead of standing in front of it. Think that'll win games?"

"How should I know?" I gape up at him. "I know nothing about hockey."

"Nothing, huh?" He takes another tiny step towards me. This one puts him right up against me. His thigh brushes mine. His arm rests against mine. Everywhere we touch, wildfires break out. "Well, that's the most interesting goddamn thing I've heard all night."

"What? Why? Plenty of people know nothing about hockey. It's not a very popular sport, Logan." That could be a lie. I don't know.

His eyes drop to mine, probing and inquisitive. "You know nothing about hockey, yet you're in a bar in our arena and you know my name."

"Um..." Panic shoots through me. For a split second, I consider making something up, but I've never been a very good liar. I might as well tell the truth. "My friend, Serena, is a fan. I brought her with me to do recon."

"Recon?" His lips twitch. "Why the fuck are you doing recon in a bar at the arena?" His eyes narrow, his expression tightening incrementally. "Please don't tell me that you're a reporter."

"A reporter?" My nose wrinkles. "Do I look like a reporter to you?"

"You'd be surprised."

I'm not sure if that's a compliment or an insult, so I decide to ignore the comment. "I have an interview next week," I whisper instead, fighting the urge to shiver when he dips his head as if to hear me better. It puts his lips right up against my crown. "I was scoping out my future boss."

"What kind of job?"

I wave my hand. "Just an assistant position for someone on the team. It's not important because I don't think I'm going to get it now. I basically stole your team's beer and caused a scene. Not a great first impression."

"I disagree entirely. I'm impressed." He shrugs when I eye him sideways. "You don't take shit from assholes in bars, you don't let pricks touch you without permission, and you know how to stand up for yourself. What's not to like about that?"

"I..." I gape at him. This is not going the way it should be going. Mainly because he's still here, complimenting me. He's supposed to be back at his table already, laughing about the crazy fat chick who stole their beer.

In my experience, that's what happens when men who look like him talk to me. I say something rude or snarky or defensive, and then they report back to their buddies and have a good laugh.

It's been that way since high school. I may have grown up since then, but some things never really change. Guys like him still treat me the same. It's not even just because I'm curvy, either. That's part of it, sure. But it's mostly just...me. I'm too many of the things they aren't. Combative, awkward, snarky, defensive, poor.

Men like Logan Moreno and girls like me are from two different worlds. Just ask my father. He's one of them: rich, successful, adored by the masses. He also wants nothing to do with me. Not even after...well, that doesn't matter. The point is, I

learned early that I have a place in this world, and it's as far from guys like Logan as possible.

"It's not really fair."

"What isn't fair?" I ask, a little afraid I may have inadvertently said something out loud that was most definitely supposed to stay in my head. Wouldn't be the first time.

"You know my name, but I don't know yours," Logan murmurs. "Even the playing field, angel. Tell me your name."

I hesitate for a long moment before deciding any damage is already done. There's no mitigating it now. "Peyton," I murmur. "My name is Peyton Cloud."

His grin is a deadly weapon. It's also far too damn sexy. No wonder women throw themselves at him. No wonder Serena says he's trouble. The devil lives in that damn smirk. And part of me wants to invite him out to play.

Bad idea. Bad, bad idea, my meddling angel whispers.

She's right. Of course she's right...but I don't want to listen. Maybe that's why he's trouble. That smirk could tempt an angel straight to hell. Or maybe it's the man who could do that. There's something about him that's downright magnetic.

And I've always been drawn to trouble like a freaking moth to a flame. It's precisely how I got myself kicked out of three different group homes and two foster situations as a teenager. I'm definitely drawn to this man. My entire body is humming like it's singing a hymnal. The closer he stands, the louder it sings.

Has it ever done that before? Ha. No.

The few dates I've been on ended in handshakes and hugs at the end of the night. The only humming going on in my life is the kind that comes from a battery-operated wand and an active imagination. Sad, I know. But like I said, I've got trust issues.

"So, Peyton Cloud, how do we salvage your recon mission?" Logan asks.

"We?" I arch a brow at him.

"Yeah, baby. Whatever you're up to sounds a helluva lot more interesting than anything my asshole teammates are doing. I'm definitely down. Am I starting a fight? Pulling the fire alarm?" He waggles his brows at me. "Put me in, Coach. I've got you."

"I..." I gape at him, pretty sure he's deadly serious. If I asked him to pull the fire alarm or start a fight, he'd do it. For no other reason than because I asked. Good Lord. This man is trouble.

Why do I like that so damn much?

"Hey," Serena says, suddenly materializing at my side, concern written all over her heart-shaped face. "I saw what happened. Are you okay?"

"Um, hi," I squeak, trying to put a little space between myself and Logan. It's a useless attempt because as soon as I create space, he closes it with a little frown. "I'm fine."

"What an asshole," Serena mutters before glancing at Logan. "Thanks for saving her."

"She did that herself," Logan says, his eyes still locked on me.

"Um, Serena, this is Logan Moreno. Logan, this is Serena Moss."

"Hey." Logan barely even glances at her.

"Hi, Logan." She looks him over before shooting me a smirk that says I'm going to live long enough to regret asking for her help tonight. Why don't I have any normal friends? Oh, right. Because I live in hell and they're all demons. "Well, I'm heading out. I just wanted to check on you."

"I should go with you."

"You should stay," she says, shooting me a pointed look before cutting her eyes at Logan. I was wrong. She isn't a demon. She's Satan incarnate. "That dick could still be hanging around out there, waiting for you to leave. Completely unhinged."

I am going to kill her. Slowly. Painfully. After I give her an award for her utter lack of shame and subtlety.

A soft growl rumbles from Logan's lips, his expression hard. "Why don't you let me drive you two home?"

"Oh, I can drive myself," Serena says. "But I'm sure Peyton would appreciate a lift." She shrugs innocently, batting her lashes. "You know, opposite sides of the city, dangerous madman with a grudge, etcetera, etcetera."

I shoot her a death glare...which she ignores as she flings her arms around me in a hug. "You're welcome," she hisses in my ear. "Love you! Bye!"

"Love you too," I grumble to her back as she practically speed races away like the bar is on fire and she set the blaze.

Logan simply chuckles, shaking his head.

"You don't have to drive me home," I mutter, massaging my temples. "Serena is just...Serena. Honestly, that's the only excuse for her. I love her to death, but she's a wild woman."

"I got that impression," he drawls, cocking his head to the side. "But she's right. He could be out there waiting for you. Let me drive you home, angel."

"Is this you trying to get me to tell you where I live?" I ask, mostly teasing. Of course he probably doesn't want to know. He's just being nice because Serena basically made it sound like I was going to die if he didn't drive me home. We do not live on opposite sides of the city. We share the same dang living room!

"Maybe." He leans in close, his eyes locked on my face. "Or maybe it's just me trying to get you alone."

My stomach turns a flip, my lips parting slightly as I stare up at him, looking for the tease. Except...I don't find it. He's serious.

Logan Moreno wants to get me alone.

"I..." Never have I ever wanted to kiss anyone as much as I want to kiss this man right now.

"Say yes," he murmurs, brushing his lips across my crown. "I'll be a perfect gentleman."

"No, you won't." The words are out before I even think them...but we both know they're true. If I let him drive me home, he won't be a gentleman. He'll be the exact opposite of a gentleman. And I don't think I care. Actually, I know I don't. I want to know precisely what kind of trouble he is.

It's not like I'm getting that job with Micah on Monday anyway. That ship sank in the Mariana Trench. Why not live a little for once? If I live to regret it...well, at least I'll actually have something to regret for once.

This is insane , that little angel whispers.

She's a wise bitch. There are rules about not hooking up with strangers you met in a bar. I'm sure they probably still apply even when said stranger is a famous hockey player. But right now? Tonight? I don't care about the rules. They've never gotten me anywhere in life.

My body is humming. Logan is looking at me like he wants to eat me. And, frankly, I want to know what it's like to have this man all over me. If that's wrong, fine. I can regret it later.

"You can drive me on one condition," I say before I lose the nerve.

"Name it," he growls, his eyes meeting mine.

"Take me to your place instead."

His expression turns downright feral as he links our fingers, silently pulling me through the bar toward the doors.

I follow in his wake, my entire body still humming.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Logan

Peyton Cloud is a pretty little minx disguised as an angel. And I'm going to defile her every which way there is to defile a person, let's be clear about that right now. Judging by the way she keeps looking at me as I lead her into my kitchen, she's fully on board with my plan.

Bringing women home isn't something I do, contrary to popular belief, particularly not women who will be working for me in a matter of days. But people see what they want to see, and it suits my purposes to let them think what they want to think. I've never given a fuck about my reputation. I have more important shit to worry about—like keeping my sister, Lauren, out of the press. She has enough going on in her life without being media fodder just because I'm famous.

If breaking rules and keeping the attention on me ensures it stays off her, that's what I'll do. But I don't blow through women like I'm trying to create my own little harem. Frankly, fucking every woman who crosses my path has never interested me much...and that was before I watched my last team fall one by one.

I never thought I'd be the motherfucker who wanted a wife and kids but seeing them living their best lives made me realize how goddamn lonely my life has become. I've just been too busy to do anything about it.

Maybe that's changing because I was done for the minute Peyton snatched our beer off the table, fire in those pretty forest green eyes, and tossed it all over the dick who wouldn't take no for an answer. I couldn't take my eyes off her. And seeing that prick raise his hand to her?

Hell. No.

He's lucky I didn't break his jaw on principal before I had Jett toss his sorry ass from the bar because that's precisely what I wanted to do. No one threatens a woman in front of me. And no one tries to put their hands on the woman who has my blood roaring in my veins like a goddamn avalanche.

It's been roaring all night. I can't think through the tumult of sound and sensation. I want to be all over her...right fucking now. Maybe then I'll be able to breathe again.

Or maybe I won't. Who the fuck knows? I saw this shit happen often enough back in Nashville to know how it works. There's no fighting it. There's no denying it. Once she's under your skin, there's no getting her out again. It's kismet or destiny or something equally as powerful that means the same goddamn thing: permanence.

I am fucked.

It's about damn time.

Not telling her that I'm the hockey player she came to the bar to spy on tonight is a dick move. But I'm not completely fucking brainless. Had I told her that I'm the player looking for an assistant, she wouldn't be here right now. She would have bolted like an Olympian.

There was no fucking way I was letting that happen. I fully intend to tell her the truth. I'm just hedging my bets first. I need her hooked on me before I spill the messy details. Otherwise, I don't stand a chance in hell of convincing her that she wants to stick around.

She's a pretty little goddess. I'm an asshole in skates.

The playing field isn't remotely close to even here.

She stops just inside the door to the kitchen, spinning in a circle. Her long blonde hair flows around her, sending vanilla wafting through the air toward me.

Christ. I want to wrap it around my fist and taste those pouty lips.

Her wide eyes meet mine, burning with curiosity. "Please tell me you actually cook in this kitchen, Logan."

"Concerned about my health, baby?"

"No." Her nose scrunches. "I'm concerned you're not giving this kitchen nearly as much love as it deserves."

I lean back against the door, grinning at her. "So you like my kitchen, huh?"

"Uh, clearly." She steps deeper into the room, gaping around her. "Jesus. Do you know how much damage I could do in here?"

A quiet laugh rumbles from my lips. "I can guess. Especially if it involves beer."

She shoots me a dirty look over her shoulder, her eyes narrowed. Fuck, she's sexy as hell with that pert little nose and those dimples. Her jeans mold to her ass, lifting her round cheeks in a way that's making me irrationally jealous of the fucking material.

I've never wanted to be a pair of jeans before now.

"Do you actually cook in here or is it just for show like the rest of your ridiculously fancy house?" she asks, running her fingertips along the marble island...where she'll be in about two point five seconds.

"Oh, I cook. I eat." I smirk, pushing away from the wall to stalk after her. "I'm starving right now as a matter of fact."

"You shouldn't drink on an empty stomach. The odds of a hangover are..." She trails off with an adorable squeak when I press myself up against her from behind, caging her in against the island.

"I'm not thinking about eating food, Peyton," I growl, nuzzling my face up against her throat as my hands settle on her hips, hauling her back against me. We fit like puzzle pieces slotting together, hard against soft. The sensation of her in my arms is addictive.

She's soft and sweet, and she smells incredible. Best damn thing I've ever had my hands on. Is tying her to my bed and keeping her there permanently an option? I'm guessing not. Goddammit.

Rules are bullshit constructs meant to make a man as rabid as possible.

"M-maybe you should e-eat then," she says, resting her head back against my chest.

"Can't," I grunt, curving my hand around her jaw to angle her head.

Her lips part slightly, her glossy eyes locked with mine. "Why not?"

"Don't know what those lips feel like yet. I can't eat the rest of you before I even experience a taste of that heaven." I brush my nose along hers, eliciting a shiver from her. "I've been thinking about it since you stole our beer."

"Borrowed. I borrowed your beer."

"Same difference," I growl, swooping to get a taste of that fucking mouth. She

whimpers as soon as my lips touch hers, and I realize two things simultaneously. One, I was wrong earlier. I wasn't done for as soon as she stole our beer. I'm done for right now. And two, I need to hear her making that sound while she's coming all over me. Immediately.

I spin her in my arms, pressing her back against the counter until she's bowed over it, completely at my mercy.

"Goddamn," I groan, nipping her bottom lip. "You taste like sugar."

"You taste like beer."

"Had a glass before you stole it."

"Borrowed, Logan. Borrowed ...oh!" Her hands fly to my hair, tugging when I boost her gorgeous ass up onto the island, fitting myself between her thick thighs.

Peyton Cloud does not play fair. As soon as I'm between her legs, she wraps them around my waist, using her grip on my hair to drag me back to her mouth. Her aggression is sexy as all hell. My cock has never been this fucking hard before...and I was a teenager with unfettered access to the internet once upon a time.

I lick into her mouth, growling at how fucking sweet she is. She responds by tentatively touching her tongue to mine. Something about the way she's so confident one minute and so shy the next sets my blood on fire.

I run my hands all over her, reveling in the way she responds to me. She's trembling beneath me, arching into my touch. Her head falls back on a moan when I roll one hard nipple between my fingers.

"Logan, oh my god. Keep doing that," she demands, squirming in bliss.

"I'd rather do it with my teeth."

"Yes. Do that instead."

I chuckle, reaching for the hem of her shirt.

"Wait!" Her eyes fly to mine, her expression suddenly nervous.

"I want to see this gorgeous body while I'm all over you," I murmur, stroking my thumbs along her sides. "I promise I'll be a gentleman."

"Liar." Her lips twitch before her expression softens. "You think I'm gorgeous?"

"I'm ready to come in my fucking pants just from touching you, Peyton." I grab her hand, placing it on my cock so she can feel the truth for herself. Her hand trembles beneath mine before she squeezes me. "Goddamn," I groan, bucking into her hand. "Keep that up, and that's exactly what's going to happen."

"I wouldn't mind. It's kind of hot," she whispers.

"I'd mind," I growl, leaning down to kiss her again. There's no way I'm coming in my pants when I could be coming in her. Fuck that noise.

My tongue tangles with hers, and any protests die on her lips. Maybe because she still has my dick in her hand, torturing me as she explores. I don't know. But she doesn't say a word when I tug her shirt up over her head. She does grumble when I remove her hand from my dick to pull the fabric the rest of the way off her body, though.

And that body? Fucking hell. I've always known I was into curvy women. Something about them is just fucking sexy to me. They're so soft, so damn beautiful. But Peyton is in a class of her own. She's all curves and translucent skin, too beautiful for words.

"Fuck," I whisper, pressing against her shoulder to lay her out on top of the island. "I need my mouth all over you right fucking now, angel."

"Logan," she whimpers, staring up at me like I'm the best thing since sliced bread. Her back settles against the cool marble and she arches upward, shivering.

I unhook the front clasp of her bra, spreading it open.

Heaven used to be the ice. It was game time and the energy of the crowd pulsing through the arena. That was a sad simile. This right here? Nirvana. Paradise. Heaven. The afterlife.

My name echoes around us as I fall on her like a mannerless beast, pulling her right nipple into my mouth. I can't help it. It's hard and pink and begging for attention. It basically needs me.

I torment it with attention, loving the way she groans and whimpers and practically begs me to keep going. As if I'm prepared to stop. I move to the other, giving it the same treatment as my hand slips down her body, touching her everywhere.

She's silk beneath my fingertips, as soft and sweet as I expected. And sensitive, too. She trembles when I trace lines across her belly, and whimpers when I grip her waist.

Her whole damn body flails when I slip my hand into her pants, teasing along the hem of her panties.

Those panties are going to be the death of me. They're lace. How the fuck am I supposed to resist her in lace? I can't. It's impossible.

"Please, please," she babbles.

"Please what, sweet Peyton?" I tease, dipping one finger beneath to stroke it along her mound. "What are you begging for, baby?"

"I...you..." She chokes on a whimper when I dip my fingertip into her slit, teasing there too. "Yes, that!"

"You want me to touch your pretty little cunt? Is that what you're trying to say?"

"Yes, Logan. Please."

"Mm. No." I still my hand, dragging my lips down her sternum instead. "I think I'll just leave my hand right here until I'm good and ready."

"You know murder is justified in some situations," she groans.

"Yeah?" I dip my tongue into her belly button and then rake my teeth down her lower abdomen. "I don't think not letting you come is one of them, baby."

"Might be. Sexual insanity."

I chuckle against her skin before biting her.

She flails beneath me again, moaning.

"I think I like that sound. Keep making it." I maneuver so I can inch her zipper down while keeping one hand in her pants and my mouth on her skin.

She groans beneath me again, louder this time.

I slide my finger through her juices, toying with her. She's so fucking wet. Christ Almighty. I can't wait until she's dripping down my chin and going wild for me. I

already know she will. That fire in her can't be contained. It isn't quiet and polite. She'll come and scream and squirm until she's satisfied.

And I'll be the lucky motherfucker worshipping on his knees.

Yeah, I like the sound of that.

I tug her jeans down inch by inch, tormenting her just because I can. Just because I already know this woman is going to rule my entire fucking world and I intend to make her pay for it with sweat and come and obedience. I'll be her plaything. I'll do her bidding. But when we're like this, I'll drive her fucking wild just because I can.

"Logan, please," she whimpers, stretched thin and wrecked by the time I get her pants off. I leave her panties on for the time being and take a moment to appreciate the sight. Mostly because I was right.

Her in lace is irresistible. That wet spot spreading across the scrap of lace between her thighs is a thing of beauty. She's a literal goddess, writhing on the island, begging for relief.

I squeeze my cock, willing myself not to lose it yet.

"Damn, baby," I breathe, running a fingertip up her leg. "Look how pretty you are spread out like a little sacrifice for me."

Her eyes are bright and glossy, her skin flushed with desire.

She lifts her hips from the island in a silent demand, reaching out to me in entreaty. "Please."

I take pity on her this time—mostly because I'm starving for a taste of her. I lash my

hands around her ankles, hauling her to the end of the island. Her legs fall open around me, spread wide.

"So beautiful," I groan, leaning forward to press a kiss to her pussy. At least, that's my intention. But then I smell her heady, tangy scent and I can't help myself. I flick my tongue out, running it over the gusset of her panties.

Her hips jolt from the island, my name leaving her lips in a loud crack of sound.

Cum spills into my boxers.

I stop teasing her and rip her panties away, leaving them dangling beneath her as I lift her toward my mouth.

"Keep your eyes on me, Peyton. Watch me eat this pretty little cunt," I order, waiting only long enough to ensure she obeys before I bury my face between her legs.

That first lick is pure bliss and straight adrenaline, intoxicating and heady. I grip her cheeks, spreading her open as she sobs my name, spurring me on. I'm not polite. I don't take my time. I fucking devour her like the perfect little treat she is, eating her cunt until her juices drip down my face and she's rocking against me, her cries growing louder.

I still want more. I've never been a greedy, selfish man. Until now. Until this. Until her. There's no fucking way I'm going to stop now. There's no way I'm ever sharing this. I want all of her.

I force my tongue into her tight little hole, thrusting it as deep as I can get it. She wails as I use it like a cock, fucking her with it. My thumb grins against her back entrance, adding to the onslaught of pleasure currently wrecking her. She likes that, too. The little minx pushes back against me, greedy and eager.

I growl, turning my head to bite her inner thigh. "Fucking come, Peyton. All over my goddamn face or I might keep you here all night." I don't give her a chance to respond before I go back to work, wrapping my lips around her clit. I suck hard, thrusting two fingers inside her at the same time.

"I'm going...I..."

"Come," I order.

She shatters with a scream, squirting all over my face.

I snarl against her, licking up every drop as my goddamn balls throb, screaming for relief. I need to be inside her right now. Christ, I need it more than I need air.

I pull back, ripping through the button on my fly. The zipper comes down. I rip my shirt off, flinging it over my head with one hand as I pull my cock out with the other. Somehow, I manage to keep from falling on my face as I kick my shoes and jeans off.

When I step up between her legs with my cock in my hand, she's still writhing through aftershocks, whimpering.

I run my dick through her folds, groaning at how good she feels.

"Christ, I need to be in you, Peyton."

"Yes," she whimpers. "Please, Logan."

I notch myself at her entrance, pushing inside. My gaze jumps from her face to the sight of my dick disappearing inside her back to her face. She's so fucking tight...

Her brows furrow, a soft whimper escaping her lips as I push deeper.

"Fuck," I rumble, realization dawning. I immediately fall still, staring down at her in shock. "Baby, you're..." I swallow hard, my heart pounding. Why the fuck am I suddenly nervous? "Peyton, are you a virgin?"

"I..." Guilt dances across her face, confirming what I've already worked out for myself. This fiery little goddess has never been with anyone else. She bites her lip and nods. "Yes."

I lean down, brushing my lips across her forehead, eyelids, and cheeks in awe. In silent apology. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I...I didn't want you to stop," she whispers. "I want this."

"You think I would have?" I tangle our fingers together, kissing her hard and deep. When she's writhing beneath me again, I surge forward until I'm balls deep, every inch of her wrapped around me. There's not a chance in hell I would have stopped even had I known. I'm pretty fucking certain this girl was made for me. There is no stopping this. "I wouldn't have stopped, but I would have been more careful, angel."

"You didn't hurt me. I...um...I've used toys."

My dick pulses inside her at the thought of her fucking herself with a vibrator. "Yeah, I'm going to need to see that shit," I growl, scooping her up into my arms.

She gasps, flinging her arms around me. Her legs twine around my waist. I lift her up and down my cock for a moment, unable to help myself. She feels too fucking good.

"Christ," I groan. "Behave. I'm trying to take you to bed."

"You're the one not be-behaving," she moans, her inner muscles fluttering all up and down my shaft.

"Can't behave when your pussy feels this fucking good." I lift and drop her again, taking a stumbling step toward the doorway. "Your first time should be in a bed."

"This f-feels perfect to me." She falls forward, biting my throat.

I growl, pushing her up against the wall just inside the living room. "I said behave," I growl, pumping inside her. "I need to get you to bed."

"K-keep doing that," she moans, throwing her head back against the wall. "It feels so good, Logan."

Goddammit. She doesn't play fair at all. How is a man supposed to stop when she's practically begging him for more? He can't. I can't. Don't want to stop.

I pound into her, helpless to do anything but fuck her like a madman when she feels this good. I bottom out again and again, grunting every damn time. She shouts my name, clawing down my back. Her perfect breasts bounce in my face as she grips me like a vise, shattering apart in my arms.

I spin while she's coming all over me, peeling her away from the wall, and fall onto the sectional with her draped across my lap.

"Ride me, Peyton," I order, smacking her ass. "Bounce on my cock until you're coming for me again."

"S-show me how."

I notch my hands around her waist, helping to lift her up and down until she finds her rhythm. "Yeah, just like that," I croon, leaning forward to capture a nipple between my teeth. "Good girl."

She whimpers, planting her hands against my thighs. The position arches her back, allowing her to take me deeper. She rolls her hips as she fucks me, taking what she needs to get herself there. And goddamn, she looks like a goddess above me, so fucking beautiful.

I buck my hips every time she drops down, forcing myself deeper, extending the pleasure for as long as possible. My balls throb, the base of my spine tingling.

"Come, angel," I growl, slipping my hand between our bodies to stroke her clit. "I want you dripping down my balls."

"Logan," she whimpers.

"Do it, Peyton." I press my thumb against her clit, grinding it over and over again as her inner muscles clench and flutter, telling me she's right fucking there. "Give me what's mine, baby."

She cracks apart, whimpering my name. Her hips buck and roll, her inner muscles squeezing my cock in a vise. I groan, bucking my hips without rhythm as the sight of her, the feel of her, the goddamn revelation of her sends me hurtling over the edge with her.

I spill into her again and again, tangling my hand in her hair to pull her mouth down to mine. She pants against my lips as I consume her, my thumb still moving against her clit until she shatters again.

When she does, she falls forward, collapsing against my chest. I catch her, holding her against my hammering heart. She sighs sweetly, my name echoing between us.

"Peyton," I whisper back, brushing hair away from her face, but she's already asleep.

I watch her for a long moment, unable to take my eyes off her.

Peyton Cloud.

Where did she come from? More importantly, how do I convince her that she wants to be more than just my assistant come next week?

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Peyton

I wake up near dawn with Logan wrapped around me like a furnace on the couch, one giant hand on my boob, the other on my ass as if he's trying to keep me as close as possible. My stomach immediately clenches at his possessive hold, sending a wave of heat through me.

I lay there for a long moment, just reveling in the heat of his body against mine. The world's hottest goalie is snuggled up against me, mumbling in my ear, his dick prodding me in the side.

For once, the judgmental little voice that never shuts up has absolutely nothing to say. I think she's still riding an orgasm high.

Is it too soon to want to do this again?

Judging by the way my whole body aches faintly...probably so. Who knew sex was a full body workout? Maybe I can convince Logan to be my personal trainer. Who needs a gym when you can just have cock?

I giggle to myself and then grimace and carefully slide out from beneath him. I need to pee and then call Serena to let her know I'm still alive. She's probably worried that I didn't come home.

As soon as my feet touch the floor, Logan grumbles, rolling onto his stomach. I unabashedly stare at his firm ass for a long moment. His body is incredible. Every inch of him is hewn from thick, corded muscle. He has a tattoo across his shoulder

blade and another across his ribcage.

I want to trace them with my tongue.

"Lord have mercy," I mumble, stumbling away from the couch in search of the bathroom.

The first door I open is a home gym, full of equipment I'm convinced was designed in the dungeons of castles centuries ago. I close that one so fast my hair actually flutters in the breeze left behind. No way am I going in there.

Riding Logan was my cardio for the week, thank you very much.

The second door opens onto a home office. I smile when I realize Logan is a neat freak. Everything is perfectly arranged, right down to the pens in the cup beside the keyboard. They're even grouped by color.

The massive display case behind his desk houses more trophies than I can wrap my mind around. The only medals I've ever won have been the ones they hand out so kids don't feel bad about sucking at their activity of choice. I've never been athletic or creative. I didn't win science fairs or spelling bees. I was just...mediocre. I got a lot of medals for sucking. Honestly, the only thing I ever really excelled at was organization. I'm a planner, not a doer.

Logan is a whole different level of doer. There are dozens of trophies in that case, dating back to his childhood. They aren't all hockey related, either. Figuring skating, taekwondo, archery...is there anything the man can't do? I have a feeling the answer is a resounding no.

I quietly close the door, feeling like I'm intruding onto parts of his world he hasn't invited me into yet.

Yet? Maybe he doesn't plan to invite me into them at all. This was one night...right?

It doesn't feel like it. The way he looked at me last night felt more substantial and real than just one night. But what do I know? Maybe he looks at every girl he brings home the same way. Maybe he's attentive and perfect to everyone.

And maybe you're full of crap, Peyton Luanne Cloud.

Great. My demented angel is back, rendering judgment from her perch on my shoulder. A literal demon possession would be preferable to dealing with my subconscious. Thank you, Catholic school.

I bet Logan didn't go to Catholic school. Am I allowed to ask him that?

"Ugh," I groan, grinding my palms against my eyes. "Stop thinking." Right. That's what I need to do. Just stop thinking. Whatever this is, we'll figure it out. If it's just one night, I can handle that...right?

Crap.

I pull open the next door.

My heart slams against my ribcage, a sick sense of dread twisting through me as I gape around me.

Logan has a kid. No, Logan has a baby .

Kids don't sleep in cribs. They don't have changing tables and mobiles and baby toys and a year's supply of diapers, either.

He has a baby.

"Oh my god," I whisper, stumbling into the room. My eyes fall on a framed photo on the dresser. I snatch it from the top with shaking hands, and tears immediately spring to my eyes.

Logan Moreno has more than a baby. He has a freaking wife.

They're in the photo together, sitting beside each other under a Christmas tree. He has his arm over her shoulder. His wife is holding the baby. They're smiling, shiny, happy people.

I drop the photo, my stomach churning.

That's why he was on his phone at the bar last night. He was texting his wife. And I...

I slept with a married man.

"Oh my god." I slap my hand over my mouth, trying not to throw up or pass out. I slept with a married man. I'm a homewrecker. A cheater. "I'm just like my father."

My whole life, the only thing I've ever wanted was to be nothing like him . I was an affair baby. He lied to my mom, told her that he was single. And when she found out she was pregnant, he told her to get rid of me, like I was an inconvenience he couldn't be bothered with. The whole ugly truth came out then. He was married the whole time, with kids at home.

My mom had to prove paternity just to get him to sign away his rights. He never came around, never wanted anything to do with me. As far as he was concerned, once he signed his rights away, I never existed at all.

He cheated, and my mom was the one who suffered. I was the one who suffered. And he got to go on with his merry little life like nothing happened. Literally. People

judged my mom for living in poverty as a single mom. She was the homewrecker for sleeping with a married man. You know what they did to my father? Patted him on the back for being a good Christian man who kept his family together even when the devil was trying to lead him astray.

He's the upstanding politician they applaud.

She was the homewrecking welfare queen.

I was twelve when she died. Child Protective Services called him. He told them that foster care would be the best place for me. He didn't even show up at her funeral. He never came to check on me. My whole life, I never existed to him. I was just an inconvenience, something he only acknowledged when it suited his narrative.

And in one single night, Logan turned me into a replica of him. He turned me into my mom. He has a wife and a baby, and he slept with me in their house. At least my father never did that. He kept my mom in an entirely different city than his family.

I stumble out of the nursery, my mind reeling. A tangle of emotions surge through me—fury and revulsion collide with guilt and regret. There's a heavy dose of betrayal in there, too. I liked him. I trusted him. And he deserves neither. He's just an asshole like my father. And just like my father, he pretends to be a hero when he's anything but. He didn't rescue me from a creep last night. He tangled me in his web.

I practically race through the living room into the kitchen. For a split second, I consider launching myself at his sleeping form and strangling the truth out of him, but what's the point?

He'll either deny it, or act like he did nothing wrong. The thought of him doing either makes me want to throw up all over again. So I completely ignore him and scurry into the kitchen in search of my phone and my clothes.

They're scattered around like the wreckage of some happier time. Seeing them makes me feel cheap as hell. This is as much my fault as it is his because I didn't ask. I didn't question. I just assumed that he was a decent person who wouldn't cheat.

I was naive as hell.

"Stupid," I growl to myself, yanking my bra on before I snatch up my phone and request a car to pick me up. I don't even know the address so I have to drop a pin. "Never again, Peyton. You are never sleeping with a man like Logan Moreno ever again."

I pull my shirt on over my head before starting the search for my panties...only to remember that he destroyed those. I snatch my pants from the floor and quickly yank them up my legs before going in search of my shoes.

"Peyton? Baby?" Logan calls from the living room.

I bolt for the back door with my shoes in my hand and my heart pounding like a jackhammer.

"Peyton!" Logan shouts from behind me when I'm halfway there. "What the fuck? Where are you going, angel? What's wrong?"

What's wrong? Is he kidding me right now?

I spin in midstep, launching a shoe at his head.

"Jesus!" He barely manages to duck before it sails into the living room.

"You are such an asshole!" I shout, glaring daggers at him.

"Baby." He takes a step toward me, his face scrunched up in confusion. "What happened? What did I do?"

"As if you don't know," I sniff, clinging to fury so I don't cry.

"No, Peyton." He shakes his head. "I really don't."

"Where's your ring, Logan?" I demand, shooting him a scathing look. "Was last night a one-off? Or do you not wear it because you make a habit of bringing home random women and turning them into homewreckers when you have a wife and baby waiting for you?"

"Shit." He glances over his shoulder toward the living room. "They're home?"

Unholy rage courses through me.

I launch my other shoe at him, watching in immense satisfaction as this one cracks him in the back of his stupid, gorgeous, cheating head.

"Goddammit," he growls, spinning toward me again. He reaches up to rub the back of his head. "Will you stop throwing shoes at my head and let me explain? I didn't mean it that way."

"There's nothing to explain," I mutter, turning toward the door. "You're a cheating asshole. And you can go to hell. End of story." I grab the doorknob, ready to get the hell out of here before he sees me cry. Hell will freeze over before I allow this man to see me cry. He's done enough damage for one night.

Apparently, he doesn't agree. Before I can wrench the door open and throw myself out, he grabs my arm.

"Peyton, it isn't what you think. Stop and let me—"

I don't stop. I don't think. I spin on him, bringing my knee up as hard as I can. It connects with his groin.

"Fuck!" he groans, doubling over. His grip on my arm loosens, allowing me to yank it free.

"Don't ever touch me again," I snap, rushing through the door into the backyard. Of course there's gravel. Of course there is.

I'm in a shoeless hell of my own making.

I hobble across the gravel toward the front of the house, cursing Logan the entire way. If I ever see him again, it'll be too soon. Way too soon.

So I keep telling myself.

Right up until I'm in my Uber and he's chasing after us down the driveway, naked. My stupid heart betrays me then, a tiny piece of it splintering away from the rest.

Serena was right. Logan Moreno is trouble. Too damn bad I didn't take her advice and avoid him before I slept with him and got my feelings involved. Because they're all kinds of involved now. And they are hurt .

"Friend of yours?" my driver asks, glancing at me in the rearview mirror as Logan gives up chasing us halfway down the driveway and clutches his head in his hands, staring after us like he's losing something important. Except...we both know that's a lie.

I wasn't important. I was just something he used to pass the time.

"Nope," I lie, closing my eyes to hide the tears. "I don't know him at all."

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Logan

"Well, well, well, if it isn't Lothario himself." Micah smirks, dropping his shit onto the bench beside me bright and early on Friday morning.

"Fuck off, Micah," I growl, bending to lace up my skates. I'm not in the mood for his bullshit this morning. Actually, I'm rarely in the mood for his bullshit first thing in the morning. But I'm even less so today. He's one of those assholes who loves mornings. And I've barely slept since Peyton dipped out on me yesterday. We have practice today and a game tomorrow. I'm not in the mood for either.

I tried tracking her down to plead my case but couldn't find a single fucking piece of information on her aside from her Instagram. And her infuriating little ass blocked me after telling me to fuck all the way off back to my wife. I don't think she even bothered to read my message.

Maybe I should have led with I'm not married instead of, Hey, it's Logan .

Goddammit. Why didn't I think of that earlier?

Actually, why the fuck didn't I think to tell her about Lauren and Lachlan before I took her home with me? I'm a fucking idiot for thinking I could bring Peyton into my world without explaining the woman and child who live with me half the time.

But the simple fact is, I've spent so long purposefully not talking about Lauren that I didn't even think about filling Peyton in. I just did the same shit I do with the rest of the world and acted like Lauren doesn't exist. That's not me being a dick. That's me

honoring my sister's wishes the best way I can.

Growing up, I got the medals. I was the golden child who could do no wrong. It wasn't like that for Lauren. She spent half her time in treatment for her mental health. By the time they finally diagnosed her with schizophrenia when she was fifteen, she'd already been committed six different times. My life was damn near perfect. Hers was hell.

It hasn't gotten much better for her in the years since. When she's on her medication, she's able to function normally. But off it, her mind is a terrifying place.

She sees and hears things that aren't there, monsters that want to hurt her. They torment her, dragging her down to hell. The world isn't a magical place to her. It's a waking nightmare when she's off her meds. She's paranoid, terrified, and a danger to herself.

It's been that way her entire life. And people always made her feel like a fucking failure because of it. Because she struggled while I excelled. In their eyes, that meant something was wrong with her. They pitied her, mocked her, and treated her like shit while we were growing up.

And they treated me like some fucking hero because of her, like my accomplishments meant more because of her struggles. They don't. All that juxtaposition ever managed to do was make her feel responsible for something out of her control. She didn't ask to be born with a brain that torments her. She didn't ask to have me as a brother. And she doesn't deserve to have cameras shoved in her face or be treated like she's somehow less than because of me.

When I was drafted, we both knew the rest of the world isn't any kinder to people with mental health issues than kids are. In fact, they're a whole lot worse. She asked me to make sure she didn't become a news story. Until Lachlan was born, it's the only

thing she's ever asked of me.

So I've tried like hell to honor my promise and keep people from talking about her. I act like an asshole and cause trouble to keep them focused on me. People are easy. So long as you give them something to talk about, they don't go digging for a story. I keep the focus on me and whatever bullshit I'm doing so it's never on her. I won't allow anyone to use her struggles to hurt her. They don't get to turn her pain into a story. I'll do whatever I have to do to protect her.

But I should have warned Peyton. If I had, she wouldn't have run out in tears, thinking I'm the worst kind of asshole. I may be a lot of things, but I'm not that. I wouldn't do that to her.

"Damn," Diego says, laughing from across the room. "How is it that you took a puck bunny home after the game, but you're somehow moodier than Jordan, who we all know hasn't been laid in a goddamn century?"

I whip my head in his direction, my fists clenched. "Peyton isn't a puck bunny," I say, a warning vibrating in my tone. She's not even remotely close to one of the women we can't escape. Christ, she was a virgin. Until me.

Diego arches a brow at me. "Ah, so you didn't get laid. That explains so much."

"Diego, shut the fuck up."

He falls silent, eyeing me sideways.

"Holy shit," Micah mutters, looking at me the same damn way. "You actually liked her."

I grit my teeth, scowling at him. Why the fuck do the guys on this team talk so

goddamn much?

"You did, didn't you?"

"Doesn't matter," I mutter, yanking my practice jersey on over my head. "That ship sailed."

"What happened?" Diego asks.

I shoot him a dark look. There are guys on this team I'd absolutely go to for advice in this situation. Micah is one of them. Diego is not.

"I'm not a complete asshole," he protests. "I can help with this shit."

Micah snorts, bending to lace up his skates.

"She found Lachlan's nursery and dipped out on me," I mutter, skipping over the parts about her nailing me with a shoe and then kneeing me in the balls. I also conveniently leave out the part about chasing after her bare-ass naked. There's not a chance in hell Diego won't spread that shit all the way around the arena in a matter of hours.

"Damn." Micah shakes his head. "She thinks he's yours?"

"Yep."

"Sucks to be you," Diego says.

"Thanks," I say sarcastically, hauling myself to my feet. "That's so helpful."

He grins at me, shrugging. "I've got nothing useful, brother. That situation is way above my pay grade."

Why am I not surprised?

"You going to try to fix it?" Micah asks, glancing up at me.

Should I? Hell if I know. She's mad as hell. But am I?

"Uh, fuck yeah." She hit me with a shoe and kneed me in the balls after giving me the best night of my life. There's not a chance in hell I'm letting her get away that easily.

Besides, I know what she doesn't. I'm the future boss she was so goddamn worried about. She's going to be livid when she finds out now, there's no escaping that inevitability, but it gives me an opportunity to fix this shit.

Sneaky and underhanded? Absolutely. Do I care? Uh, fuck no.

If you aren't willing to play a little dirty, why are you even playing?

"She's coming in for an interview on Monday."

"You're hiring her?" Micah asks, his brown eyes wide behind his glasses.

"That's the plan."

"It's your funeral, man," he mutters, shaking his head.

"Well, fuck you and your vote of confidence."

"Just saying, there are bad plans and then there's whatever the fuck that is," he says, shrugging.

"I think it's a good plan," Diego interjects.

Micah shoots me a look as if to say point proven.

I choose to ignore him. There isn't anything wrong with my plan. He just has no faith.

"I changed my mind about the interviews next week."

Alice Madison looks up at me from her desk, her hazel eyes narrowed. "Too late. They're already scheduled. I am not calling ten people on Friday afternoon to cancel."

"I'm not trying to cancel them."

"You just said you changed your mind about them."

"I didn't mean cancel them. I want to sit in on them."

She leans back in her chair, crossing her arms. "What are you up to, Logan Moreno?"

"Who says I'm up to anything?" I ask, chuckling as I lean against the wall. Alice is amusing. She reminds me of Kelsey from back home. Neither of them take any shit and they give as good as they get. Alice isn't a terrorist like Kelsey, though. She's sweet as pie...when she wants to be. Shit. Maybe she is just like Kelsey.

"That little boy look on your face says you're up to some mess," she says. "Spill so I can decide if I want to help you or not."

Well, that doesn't sound like a fucking trap at all, now does it?

Screw it. Might as well play along.

"I've already decided which of the candidates I'm hiring," I say.

"Who?"

"Peyton Cloud."

"Why her?"

"It's confidential."

"Interesting." She drums her nails against her arm before pointing at her door. "I don't know if you noticed the sign on that door, but it says team publicist. You know what that means, Logan?"

"Uh, that you do press shit for the team?"

Apparently, that's the wrong answer because she rolls her eyes at me. "It means your business is my business. Spill."

"I slept with her," I mutter.

"Oh, absolutely not!" she cries, staring at me like I've completely lost it. "You are not hiring someone you slept with. Have you lost your frigging mind?"

"Possibly."

She snorts, which I assume is her agreeing with me.

"I planned to hire her before I slept with her."

"You are not helping your case any whatsoever," she says, her tone flat. "In fact, you should probably stop talking now."

Winning Kelsey over to the Dark Side was so much easier. Maybe because she was born in hell. Alice is a hard sell.

"I think she's my one, but I fucked up. She thinks Lauren is my wife and Lachlan is my kid. I need a chance to explain so I can fix it before I end up alone forever." I grin at her. "Do you really want to be the reason I end up alone forever, Alice? That's bad karma."

"Boy, bye. Get your ignorant ass out of my office," she says. But she cracks a tiny smile.

"You know you want to help me."

"Not really."

I gape at her, but she just shrugs at me.

"You said that you think she's the one. If you don't know she's the one, I'm not helping you blow up your career because you're horny."

"That is not what this is," I growl, narrowing my eyes at her. "I knew the moment I set eyes on her that she was going to change my damn life."

"And yet you didn't tell her about Lauren."

"Stop trying to psychoanalyze me, Alice," I warn, my voice hard. I fucking hate when people poke and prod at shit related to Lauren. She isn't anyone's business, goddammit. And neither are my feelings on the subject.

"I'm not. I'm just concerned, Logan," Alice says gently. "The fact that you're here right now, asking for help with this is a big deal. You've made it crystal clear that

Lauren is off-limits to everyone. But it's impossible to try to keep a relationship in a separate compartment when you juggle the things you juggle. They're going to touch one another. You can't compartmentalize life, and I'm not sure you know that because you've been compartmentalizing it your entire career."

"I'm aware," I grit out. "Lauren isn't off-limits to Peyton. I simply didn't think to mention that she and Lachlan live with me part-time."

"And the rest of it?"

"I'll tell her." Obviously, I'll fucking tell her. I'm not ashamed of or embarrassed by my sister. That's never been the case and never will be. The people who matter know about her. They've met her. Hell, they've spent time with her. And if there's ever a day when she tells me that she's ready to step out into the spotlight, I'll be there, cheering her on the whole goddamn way. But that day hasn't come. All having a famous brother has ever done for her is made her life harder.

She didn't get a choice in me joining the league. I made that decision. The least I can do is ensure she gets to decide whether she's part of the circus surrounding me or not. I owe her that much.

Alice eyes me silently for a long moment and then nods before flipping open her schedule to look at it. "I'll cancel everyone but her. Be in the conference room at ten on Monday. She's scheduled for then." She pauses. "And don't fuck it up, Logan."

Relief blasts through me.

"I won't fuck it up," I promise.

"Are you at home?" Lauren asks as soon as I answer my phone after practice.

"I'm on my way. Why?"

"Lachlan and I need to spend the night with you."

"Why? Is everything okay?" I ask, instantly on alert as I cut through the parking lot, heading toward my truck.

"Everything is fine, Logan," she sighs like I'm getting on her damn nerves. "Roland got called out to a site. I didn't want to be home alone."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. Lachlan's father, Roland, owns a construction company. When he has to go out of town, Lauren and Lachlan stay with me because she doesn't trust herself to stay alone. She's been on her meds and doing well for months, but she's still anxious as hell that something will go wrong. She's doing everything right and she's an incredible mother, but she's fucking terrified she's going to lose Lachlan or end up in treatment again like she was right after he was born. She was postpartum and her meds needed to be adjusted. She still feels guilty as hell about it.

"I'll be home, sweetheart," I murmur. "But you and Lachlan don't need me, Lauren. You've got this. You can handle it."

She's quiet for a minute. "I'd rather come stay with you."

"Come on then," I say, giving in. Maybe I'm enabling her. I don't fucking know. But I'm not telling her no if she needs me. Roland and I are her support system. We're her only support system. If she isn't ready to trust herself alone yet, I can't force her into it. Baby steps. "I'll stop and pick up Thai for dinner."

"You're the best brother ever. Have I told you that lately?"

"It's been a while. Say it again."

Lauren's soft laugh echoes down the line. "Best brother ever."

"Uh, fuck yeah, I am. Does Lachlan need anything?"

"Maybe a bite guard," she grumbles. "Those baby teeth are no joke, Logan. He's biting everything."

"So...just like you then."

She gasps. "I did not bite."

"Please. I still have scars from where you bit the shit out of me when you were a baby."

"Whatever. Lies."

I chuckle, my eyes narrowing on the motherfucker standing near my truck. What the fuck is Charles Montaque doing snooping around my shit? He's a world class prick. He calls himself an investigative sports journalist, but it's bullshit. He's a gossip with a pen. "I've gotta go. I'll see you at the house."

"Okay. See you soon."

I disconnect, shoving my phone into my pocket as I saunter toward Montaque, scowling. "Is there a reason you're all up in my business today, Montaque?"

"Logan." He flashes me a smile, stepping forward to meet me. "It's good to see you."

"Wish I could say the same about you." I'm not playing nice with this motherfucker. I

don't like him, and I won't pretend I do. "What do you want?"

"Do you have a minute to talk?"

"To you? Never." I pop the locks on the truck before tossing my bag inside. "I've got places to be and shit to do."

"I heard a rumor I'd like to discuss with you. Let's set up a meeting."

"Too fucking bad," I grunt, sliding into the driver's side of the truck. "I don't discuss rumors with dicks." I glance at him in contempt. "Write that in whatever bullshit hit piece you're writing, Montaque. You aren't getting your meeting."

I slam the door in his face, irritated as hell. Why the fuck is he harassing me about some rumor instead of taking it to Alice? He knows I'm not going to talk to him. I never talk to him.

"It's about your sister!" he shouts.

Fucking hell.

My heart skips a beat before pounding against my ribcage. How the fuck does he know about Lauren? Who talked to him? I'm not about to ask him to find out. Anything I say, he'll take as confirmation.

I'm not stupid enough to play that game. So I do the only thing I can do instead. I completely ignore him and drive away.

As soon as I'm out of the parking lot, I call Alice.

"We have a problem," I growl as soon as she answers, my hands tight around the

steering wheel.

"Why do we always have problems when I've just poured myself a glass of wine?" she complains. "Why can't we ever have eight o'clock on Monday problems?"

"Charles Montague was just in the fucking parking lot, trying to set up a meeting with me to talk about my sister."

Alice goes completely silent.

"How the fuck did he find out about her, Alice?" I growl, my temples throbbing.

"I don't know," she says quietly. "It's not like people don't know she exists, Logan. They just usually don't go prying into her life. What did you tell him?"

"Nothing. I didn't say a word about her."

"Good. That's good. Be in my office first thing on Monday," she orders me. "We'll figure it out. In the meantime, just try to focus on the game tomorrow, Logan. We'll handle this."

I jerk my chin in a nod and then remember that she can't see me. "Fine. First thing Monday." I pause. "Send Peyton's address to me."

"Logan..."

"Please, Alice," I growl, stretched to the breaking point. I need to see her. Not on Monday. Not in a damn conference room. But now. Tonight.

"Fine," she sighs quietly. "Don't make me regret this. If you do something stupid and get me fired, I will murder you. And then I'll get myself sent to hell just so I can

spend eternity torturing you."

I smile despite myself. Maybe all team publicists are terrorists in training.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Peyton

"We should go out tonight."

I look up at Serena through bleary eyes to find her standing over me with her hands on her hips, smiling like she just solved all my problems. She's still dressed for work in black slacks and a cute pink blouse with her hair pulled up into a bun. I look exactly like I haven't left the bed since I crawled into it yesterday morning.

"No, thanks," I mutter.

"Peyton!"

"You go." I fling myself backward, dragging the pillow up over my eyes. "I'm staying right here."

She huffs before sitting beside me. A second later, my pillow disappears, snatched away by a tyrant masquerading as my best friend. "You can't mope forever."

"I haven't been moping forever. It's been one day."

Her lips curve into a triumphant smile. "At least you finally admit that you're moping."

"Do not. I'm plotting revenge. It takes a lot of brain power, so I'm doing it from bed like a normal person would."

"Oh, yeah? What have you come up with so far?"

"Thumbtacks on the ice. Poison ivy in his jockstrap. Setting his stupid truck on fire." I scowl. "Preferably with him inside it."

"Savage." She nods. "I like it."

"Telling his wife," I whisper, squeezing my eyes closed.

She gives me that big-eyed, startled look.

"I know!" I cry, dragging another pillow over my head...which she immediately steals. Trying to hide from your problems when you have a tenacious roommate is hard work. I roll my head in her direction. "It's probably a bad idea. They have a kid. I could blow up their entire life. I just..."

"You feel guilty."

"Yeah," I whisper. "But I'd want to know if it were me. Besides, isn't that what we're supposed to do as women when a man cheats? We're supposed to have their backs, and out the cheater. No one should have to go through life cluelessly being cheated on."

"Maybe she already knows what he's doing."

I eye her sideways.

"A lot of women who marry men like him are fully aware of their...activities. They just choose to ignore them because they like the lifestyle." Serena shrugs. "It happens a lot."

"That's depressing."

"I know. But it's also true. I'm not saying it's right or fair or that I understand it. I'm just saying that it happens."

"And somehow, none of this make me feel any better," I groan.

"Have you talked to him?"

"Why? So he can lie to me? No, thanks. I'm never talking to him again."

"You might not have a choice," she points out. "Your interview is on Monday. And this is probably the worst time to bring it up, but have you considered the possibility that he's the one you'll be int—"

"Do not finish that sentence," I warn her.

She snaps her mouth closed, holding up her hands. "I'm just saying. It's a possibility."

She isn't wrong. Isn't that part of the problem? Somewhere between running out of his place without my shoes and arriving at mine—also without my shoes—the truth dawned on me. The sick sense of dread battling around in my stomach since I got home is mostly because I slept with a married man...and a tiny bit about the fact that I'm pretty sure said married man is my maybe future boss. I'm not sure why I'm so confident of that fact—perhaps because the universe currently hates me—but I am confident.

Micah Rushing isn't the player in need of an assistant. It's Logan. And he freaking knew it when he decided to take me home with him and chose not to tell me that he was the player I was worried about. I'm mad as hell about that. Was it all just a big joke to him? Was I supposed to walk into that interview on Monday and be

humiliated when I saw him sitting there?

I thought I was a pretty good judge of character. I've never been more wrong about someone in my life. That stings. I trusted him enough to sleep with him, something I've never done. And the whole time, I was just a joke to him. There are no words to describe how that feels.

I don't want to talk to him. I never want to see him again. And I'm absolutely not going to that interview Monday. Whatever pleasure he hoped to get out of humiliating me, he isn't getting.

He can go kick rocks.

I'll be right here. Wallowing until I come up with a better plan.

"You can't stay in bed forever," Serena says.

"Watch me." I grab the only pillow remaining on the bed and drag it up over my head. "Do not steal this one, Serena. I mean it."

"Fine," she sighs. "I'll leave you to be sad and miserable while I go buy ice cream and find us a movie."

I tug the pillow down to look at her. "You should go out."

"And leave you here to be sad and miserable alone?" She shoots me a patented Serena look. "No way. If you're wallowing, I'm wallowing."

I smile despite myself. "Are we pigs now?"

Her nose wrinkles. "I do not love that comparison, Peyton."

"I just meant they wallow. They're social. They love being in groups..." I roll my eyes at her. "You know damn well there is nothing piglike about you." I pause, frowning. "Actually, that's not true. You're a lot like a pig in all the best ways."

She narrows her eyes on me. "And now you're getting pistachio ice cream."

"It was a compliment! Pigs are intelligent, playful, clean freaks. Like you." I smirk, batting my lashes at her.

"Only in your weird brain is that a compliment," she mutters.

"So you admit it is a compliment in my weird brain."

"Shut up." She smiles at me.

"I love you too."

"Pistachio ice cream."

"You hate me. Understood."

She laughs evilly, spinning on her heel. I watch her practically dance from my bedroom before I pull the pillow back up over my face with a groan.

Being a pig would be so much easier.

I bet male pigs aren't total dicks like Logan Moreno.

"Uh, Peyton?"

"My wallet is by the door," I mumble without even moving the pillow.

"Logan is here."

I sit up so fast my head spins. "What?"

Serena stares at me with wide eyes. "I practically ran into him on my way out the door." She grimaces. "He asked to talk to you."

"Did you tell him to go away?"

"Yes." She bites her bottom lip. "He brought flowers."

"Of course he did." I scowl, hopping up from the bed. Of all the freaking nerve... He really thinks he can just show up here with flowers and reel me back in? Absolutely not.

I march toward the bedroom door, ready to kick his proverbial ass, but Serena quickly jumps in front of me.

"Maybe you should change first?" she suggests. "Or at least brush your hair?"

I glance down at my nightie and then shrug. She's probably right. But he isn't worth the effort. I can kick his ass in a nightgown with my hair messed up. And be back in bed in five minutes. Win-win.

"Nope," I say, gently steering her out of my way. "I am not putting on a bra for him."

"Oh boy," she mumbles behind me.

I march through our apartment, gathering righteous indignation around me like armor.

How dare he show up here?

How does he even know where I live?

I practically rip the door off the hinges, my gaze landing on him. He's leaning against the banister with his head bowed. For a second, I forget that I'm mad as hell because he actually looks...wrecked. Like his world is caving in. And then he lifts his head, his gaze raking down my body. When they darken, I wish we were back in his house again. And I wish I had launched myself over the sofa to strangle the truth out of him.

"I thought you looked good naked," he rasps, lifting his gaze to mine. "But goddamn, angel. You look even better in that nightgown."

He just can't help himself, can he?

"Leave," I growl. "Now." My gaze falls on the massive arrangement at his feet. "And take your gaslighting flowers with you."

"Gaslighting flowers?" His lips twitch. "What the fuck species of flower is that, angel?"

"How did you even get my address, Logan?" I hold up a hand before he can respond.

"Let me guess, you got it from my application, right?"

"You going to quit being pissed if I say yes?"

"You're the one in need of an assistant, aren't you?"

He actually manages to look regretful. "I was going to tell you."

"Right," I snort. "Just like I'm sure you were going to tell me that you're married and

have a kid."

"I'm not fucking married," he growls, taking a step toward me. "And Lachlan isn't mine."

"But you are the one in need of an assistant because he's struggling to juggle his family and his responsibilities with the team," I point out. "I could drive a tank through the holes in your story."

"It's not like that." He takes another step towards me. "Jesus, Peyton. I may be an asshole, but I wouldn't do that to you."

"Just like you wouldn't fail to tell me that I'm interviewing for a job with you, right?" I retort, backing away from him.

He clenches his jaw, frustration stamped across his face. There's a tiny bit of guilt lurking in the depths of his eyes, too.

"What was the plan, Logan? Wait until I showed up so you could see me squirm? Then run back and tell your teammates how hilarious my expression was? I actually believed you when you..." My voice cracks, so I quickly shake my head. "It doesn't matter. Just leave."

"No!" He lunges for me, dragging me into his arms before I can dodge him. I end up pressed up against the door, trapped between it and his hard body. "You weren't a fucking joke, Peyton. Jesus Christ, is that really what you think of me?"

"Why shouldn't I?" I demand, glaring up at him. "You lied to me."

"I didn't lie. I just...fuck." He blows out a breath, curving his hand around my jaw. His forehead rests against mine squeezing my waist, and damn it, my knees quiver.

Even now, my body remembers the feel of him all over me. It hasn't caught up to the fact that he's a liar and a cheater and God only knows what else. It still wants him. "I knew you wouldn't give me the time of day if you knew I was the one looking for an assistant, so I withheld that information. I wanted you, and I was willing to play dirty to get you. It was a dick move, but I don't regret it because it got you in my bed. I'm not fucking sorry about that, angel. I'm fucking sorry you're mad as hell right now. I'm sorry you aren't still in my bed. But I'm not fucking sorry that you gave yourself to me."

"You're married with a kid, Logan."

"I'm not fucking married," he grits out, his eyes flashing unholy fire at me. "Lachlan is my nephew. It's complicated, but I swear to you, I'm not married. I don't have kids. Until you..."

"Until me what?"

"People say a lot of shit about me, baby. I act like an asshole. I do a lot of dumb shit so they'll keep talking. But most of what they say isn't true. I don't sleep around. I've never fucked a puck bunny." He swallows hard. "Until you, I never brought a woman home with me. There was never anyone I wanted to bring home until you."

"You're lying."

"I haven't been with anyone in years, Peyton." His nose brushes mine. "And for the record, there's only you. There are no wives, no girlfriends, no fuck buddies, none of that bullshit. It's only you, sweet girl."

Damn him. He's way too good at that. I feel my resolve weakening, feel myself caving. And that has bad idea written all over it. I won't end up like my mom, dangling on his hook until he decides he's bored with me or I'm not good enough.

He's already too dangerous. We slept together. Didn't even use a condom. I can't go down that road with him again, especially now that I know that I can't trust him.

Maybe he's telling the truth now—I'm surprised to find that I actually believe him. He isn't married with a kid. He probably doesn't sleep with every woman who throws herself at him. But none of that changes the fact that he didn't tell the truth when it counted.

He knew I was supposed to interview to be his assistant, and he didn't say anything. He just took what he wanted without considering how that'd work out for me. And I let him do it because...well, because he's dangerous to me.

There's something about him that's magnetic and irresistible and I like the way it feels when he looks at me like I'm the only thing he sees. But girls like me don't end up with guys like him. We work for them. We're toys to play with until something better comes along. And then they discard us and move along like we never existed. Their lives continue uninterrupted while ours fall apart.

We end up as heartbroken, struggling single moms to little girls the Logan Morenos of the world won't even acknowledge. And then we die alone, too afraid to put ourselves out there and trust anyone else when the one time we did that, we paid for it.

I won't repeat my parents' mistakes. Not even for Logan.

"You need to leave," I whisper, ducking under his arm. "Whatever happened between us is over, Logan."

"Goddammit, Peyton." He grabs for me, but I jump back a step, evading him. "Please don't do this."

"I didn't," I say quietly. "You did when you decided to make decisions without giving me a choice. Now, I'm making my choice. I don't want to see you again."

"You have your interview on Monday."

"I'm canceling it."

"Don't."

"I can't work for you. We slept together."

"Please, angel," he pleads quietly, his eyes locked on my face. He kneels in front of me. Literally drops to both knees. "Don't walk away from me now. Come to the interview. Give me a chance to prove to you that I'm not a complete asshole."

The plea in his eyes is deadly. I don't think he's the kind of man who has to beg for much, but he's begging me right now. He's on his damn knees, pleading with me to give him this.

"I always knew I was going to live long enough to regret being a pushover," I mutter, sighing heavily. "Fine. I'll go to the interview."

His eyes light up.

"But that doesn't mean I'm taking the job."

He bounds to his feet with so much power and grace it's overwhelming. One second, he's on his knees at my feet. The next, he's in front of me, dragging me into his arms.

His lips come down on mine in a hard kiss. And damn me, but I kiss him back. Even as I tell myself not to do it...I do it anyway.

"I missed that," he groans against my lips, his hands digging into my waist.

I jerk out of his arms, glowering at him. "You cannot kiss me."

That wicked smirk tells me I might as well be talking to a brick wall. Are all goalies so unholy contrary or is it just this goalie? Maybe I need to learn more about this sport if I'm going to be dealing with this man. I need to learn what makes him tick so I can figure out how to counteract it.

"I mean it, Logan."

"I hear you." He doesn't hear me. He isn't even in the same dimension as hearing me. He reaches out, running his thumb along my bottom lip. "Come to the game tomorrow, baby."

"Uh, no."

"Why not?"

"Because you've stressed me out enough for one weekend."

He grins, those dimples wreaking havoc on me. And dammit all, before he even says another word...I know I'm going to that game. Just like I know I'm going to take the job if he offers it on Monday.

I'm more like my mom than I'd like to admit.

I picked a hell of a time to figure that out.

Hockey is intense. I spend most of Sunday's game on my feet, screaming my head off like a crazy person. I'm not even entirely sure what's going on, but Serena does her

best to fill me in on the action. Not that I'm really paying much attention. My eyes are on Logan in the goal most of the game.

The man is a menace. I may not be the best judge but considering the way the crowd goes nuts every single time he manages to stop the puck, I'm guessing they think he's pretty talented too. He twists and contorts and ducks and dives like his life depends on it, utterly fearless of the puck and players flying toward him. I've never seen anyone move as fast as he does.

It's impressive. Really damn impressive.

"What did you think?" Serena asks once it's over. The Carvers won. Unsurprisingly. Logan wasn't letting anything past him.

"I think I need to learn more about hockey," I mutter.

She clutches my arm, laughing loudly as we join the throng heading toward the exits. As we pass by the glass partition near the ice, Logan glances in our direction.

His eyes land on me, darkening. He abandons his conversation, skating over.

"Crap," I mutter, my heart jolting against my ribcage.

"I'll just be...yeah, bye!" Serena says before abandoning me. The traitor. Her evil laugh echoes in her wake as she darts away, leaving me to face him alone.

I walk up to the glass where he's waiting. Smirking. His hair dripping wet with sweat.

God, he looks delicious.

"What did you think?" he shouts.

"Meh," I say, casually shrugging.

He chuckles, watching my face. "You had fun, didn't you?"

"I did," I say softly, fully aware of everyone looking at us as they file past. "Thanks for getting us tickets."

"Anytime, angel. You heading home?"

I nod. "Serena is waiting for me."

"You going to call me later?"

"Uh, no?"

He narrows his eyes at me. "Fine. Are you going to answer if I call you later?"

I should say no. That's the reasonable thing to do. I have an interview to be his assistant tomorrow. Do I even trust him? Not entirely. Have I forgiven him? Also not entirely. So whatever this is obviously can't continue. It's insanity.

"Yes, I'll answer," I say, rolling my eyes when he growls at me.

His smirk tips me a little further into madness.

"Hello?" I groan three hours later, blinking in the dark.

"Shit. Did I wake you up?" Logan drawls into the phone.

My heart immediately picks up the pace, pounding like a drum.

"Um, I think so. What time is it?"

"Almost midnight. I just got home."

"From where?" I yawn, stretching my arms over my head.

"The bar."

"Oh." I drop my arms back to the bed.

"It's not like that," he says quietly. "It's tradition for the team to go out to celebrate after a game. We're supposed to see and be seen or some bullshit like that. We go out, have a few drinks, let people congratulate us, and then take our asses home to bed."

"Did you have fun?"

"Would have been a helluva lot more fun if you were there stealing our beer," he teases.

"I didn't steal your beer. I borrowed it."

His chuckle sends a pulse right to my clit.

I don't know why I do it, but I immediately slip my hand down my body, sliding it into my panties. I bite my lip, fighting a groan as I roll my fingers over my clit.

This is so wrong. I don't even need my judgmental little angel to tell me that. I'm using his voice like audio porn. But...I don't stop, either.

"So you enjoyed the game, huh?" he asks. "What was your favorite part?"

"Watching you land on your ass over and over again," I lie.

"Why am I not surprised?" He chuckles again. "I'll have you know, that's all skill, baby."

"Mmhmm. I'm sure it is." I throw my head back, squeezing my eyes closed as I touch myself, imagining that it's him doing the touching. He's the one with his hand between my legs right now. He's in this bed with me, grinding against my clit like he did the other night.

I whimper softly, arching toward my hand.

"Fucking hell," he growls. "Are you touching your pussy, Peyton?"

"What? No." I thrust two fingers inside me, only to whimper again.

"You little liar. You're playing with it right now, aren't you?"

"Yes," I moan. "God, Logan. I'm so wet."

He growls like an angry bear. "Goddammit. I want to see you. I want to eat you again. I'm losing my fucking mind over you, Peyton."

"You only w-want me because you can't have me."

"That's bullshit," he snaps. "I want you because you're mine."

"No, I'm not."

"No? Is that why you're fucking your fingers right now? Because you aren't mine?" His voice is silky sin and black as night. It scrapes against my clit in a way that

should be criminal. "We both know you're lying, baby. You're thinking about me inside you, aren't you?"

"M-maybe."

"How hard am I fucking you right now, Peyton? How hard are you squeezing my cock?"

"So hard," I whisper. "I hate it."

"Liar," he groans through a chuckle. "You fucking love it."

"Do not."

"No? Then why are you ready to come all over me, hmm? If you hate it so much, why are you whimpering and moaning, desperate to shatter for me?"

"Logan," I whimper in response, losing the damn plot as I throw the blanket off and spread my legs, giving myself room to work. I thrust my fingers faster, chasing the pleasure dancing just out of sight. I'm so close, so damn close. "Please."

"You want to come, baby? Tell me the truth."

"I already t-told you."

"No, you didn't. Tell me that you're mine, Peyton."

"I'm not yours."

"The hell you aren't," he growls. "As soon as you stop being so fucking mad at me, I'm going to show you again just how much you love being mine, angel. I'm going to

show you over and over again until you're screaming the fucking roof down."

"Please," I plead, right freaking there. But my body is betraying me, refusing to obey. It's completely on Team Moreno now, dammit.

"Say it," he croons. "You can have what you want as soon as you tell me the truth."

Damn him.

"Yours," I whisper, my heart clenched in a vise. It's the most terrifying word I've ever spoken. Mostly because it feels all too true. I think I belong to him. And I don't even know where to begin processing that. How can I when I'm not even sure I trust him?

"Good girl," he breathes. "Now, come all over that perfect hand for me, angel. Let me hear you unraveling for me."

I give in to the temptation, give in to him. I can't help it. I want it too damn badly to resist. My back arches from the bed, a whimper escaping my lips as I shatter into pieces, coming all over my fingers.

When it's over, I bury my face in the pillow, panting. Reeling.

Logan Moreno is a dangerous, dangerous man.

"You are mine, sweet Peyton," he whispers. "Sooner or later, you're going to forgive me. When you do, all bets are off, baby. See you tomorrow."

He disconnects before I can respond, which is probably for the best because God only knows what I'd say. I can't think of a single thing that isn't utterly terrifying.

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Logan

"What the fuck do you mean, he asked you if Lauren is in an insane asylum?" I growl, pacing in circles around Alice's office. "What the fuck kind of question is that?"

"I don't know," she says, her tone calm. "I blew him off, but we're not going to be able to blow him off forever, Logan. Montaque is like a dog with a bone when he wants something."

"He isn't getting it." I whirl on her, fury pumping through me. "Lauren isn't a goddamn story."

"I know." Alice holds up her hands in a placating gesture. "I'm not suggesting that she is. Of course I'm not. I'm just warning you that Montaque isn't going to quit unless you give him incentive."

I know she's right, even though I hate to fucking admit it. He ruins careers like it's lightwork and then sits back and enjoys the show. He'll have absolutely zero qualms about dragging Lauren's entire life story out for public consumption just because he can. The prick gets off on dropping bombs and watching the chaos that unfolds in the aftermath.

Christ, this is going to break her heart. Right now, that's the last thing she needs. We'll never convince her to trust herself with Lachlan if she's looking over her shoulder, feeling like the paparazzi and press are following her everywhere and judging every little thing she does. That'll only feed the paranoia that comes along

with her illness.

"How the fuck did he even find out about her history?"

"I don't know. I couldn't very well ask him without confirming..."

I grit my teeth, so pissed I want to hit something. Preferably Montaque's face. Repeatedly. "How the hell am I supposed to tell her that the world's biggest asshole is sniffing around? And that he, apparently, knows enough about her to know she's been committed?"

"I'm sorry, Logan," Alice says softly. "We can try to find a different story to wave in front of him."

"Yeah." I scrub my hands down my face. Isn't that what I always do? Throw something else in front of them until they stop looking? I've made a career out of being a dog and pony show, just to manipulate the story and keep them focused where I want. But Montaque? I'm not sure the same old tricks are going to work with him. He's seen them from me too damn many times, and he's too fucking smart to fall for it.

Every time something happens with Lauren, I get in a fight. I let myself be photographed with some girl whose name I don't even know. I fuck up and do something big, just so people look left instead of right. He's seen that song and dance my whole career. And he's smart enough to know there's a reason I do it.

That's not the only problem, either. If I try to pull that bullshit now...well, any chance I had with Peyton is long gone. I promised her that I'm not the asshole she thinks I am. Acting like that guy will only reinforce everything she thinks she knows about me.

I can't do that. Christ, I don't want to do it.

There has to be a better way...one that doesn't mean ripping open still healing wounds for my sister or watching her become some goddamn story. One that doesn't cost me the sassy little minx consuming every thought in my mind.

"I've gotta go," I mutter. "I need to think."

Alice shoots me a sympathetic smile. "Do you want me to cancel Peyton's interview?"

"Shit." I glance at the clock and realize it's already almost ten. She'll be here any minute. "No. Don't cancel." Right now, she's precisely who I need to see. Actually, that's a lie. I don't merely need to see her. I need her in my arms. I need her air in my lungs. I need that smart-ass mouth and take-no-prisoners attitude of hers.

Maybe she can make sense out of my life because I sure as hell can't.

Alice rises from her desk, grabbing a file from the top.

"Mind if I take this one alone?"

She stares at me levelly for a long moment and then sighs, holding out Peyton's file. "Do not have sex with her in the conference room, Logan. I mean it."

"Don't plan on it," I growl, grabbing the file. There are cameras all over this arena. No one is seeing my girl naked and riding my cock except me. I might fuck her in a supply closet, though. As soon as she decides to forgive me for doing what the fuck I had to do to get her in my bed, anyway.

If she's waiting for me to regret that, it'll never happen.

I duck from Alice's office, striding toward the conference room. Halfway there, our new shrink, Emilia Lariat, pops around the corner, nearly plowing into me.

"Christ on a cracker," she yelps, glaring at me with exasperation written all over her face. "They should put a bell on you."

"Me?" I smirk, shaking my head at her. Emilia is a fucking trip. The first time we met her, she waltzed in on us naked in the locker room...and then spent the whole goddamn time insulting our dicks. Now that she's officially settling into her new role as our staff psychologist, she's here all the damn time. "You're the one racing the halls like you're on a mission."

"I am on a mission."

Why am I not surprised? The woman is hell on wheels. I like the hell out of her, though. Nash is losing his mind over her already. I'm pretty sure they're fucking all over the arena, but that isn't my business. The less I know, the less likely I'm going to be caught up when Coach kills him for sleeping with his daughter.

"Who are you terrorizing now?" I ask her, genuinely curious. The whole team has been in her sights this week. They've been bitching about it nonstop. But I'm the only one who hasn't gone to see her.

I've got nothing against therapy. I'm just not in the mood for the shit. I've spent too many hours on the couch in my life already, listening to shrinks explain Lauren's condition and state of mind and progress. Being asked how I'm doing or how I feel or if I want to talk.

"Why do you always think I'm terrorizing people?"

"Why can't you ever answer a question without asking a question?"

"You...I..." She huffs at me, blowing strands of hair out of her face. "I can so answer a question without asking a question," she finally mumbles. "But it's way more fun for me if I'm getting something out of it."

A quiet laugh rumbles from my lips. At least she's honest. "You went into psychology because you're nosy as fuck, didn't you?"

"Maybe." She shrugs, grinning mischievously. "It's not a crime to like knowing everyone else's business." She narrows her eyes on me. "Just like it's not a crime for you to mind yours."

I grin at her. "You done busting my balls now?"

"I've seen your balls, Moreno. Trust me, I will not be going near them." She leans back against the wall, her expression turning serious. "Are you okay? I was with Alice last night when Montaque chased her down."

"Fuck." I tip my head back, cursing up at the ceiling. "Of course you were there."

"Jeez. It's not like I planned it or anything. Honestly, I figured he was there about me and Nash."

"What's going on with you and Nash?" I ask, arching a brow.

"What? Who said anything about me and Nash? Never even heard the name." She bats her lashes at me. She is so full of shit. "I know what you're doing, Logan. It isn't going to work."

"I'm just asking after my dear old friend," I lie innocently.

She harumphs loudly. "Right. Go away and stop bugging me. I have relationships to

hide. Players to terrorize. You know, important things."

"You don't have shit on your schedule this morning, do you?"

"Not a thing," she sighs, heading down the hall.

"You should really try talking to Alice if you're that hard up for someone to annoy. She's awful fucking bossy. She probably has shit to work out. Therapy would help."

"I'm telling her you said that!" Emilia calls over her shoulder as she hurries down the hall.

"I'm denying I said it!" I shout back to her, chuckling. Jesus Christ. There's no way we're going to survive with her, Coach, and Alice running the show around here. They're like the three ghosts sent to harass Ebenezer.

Huh. Maybe I should set them loose on Montaque. That prick could use a proper haunting.

Christ. What am I going to do about him?

By the time I make it the conference room, I'm no closer to figuring it out and Peyton is already inside, seated at the long table with her hands folded in front of her. I stop in the doorway, just staring at her for a long moment.

Goddamn, she's stunning.

She has her blonde hair pulled up into a demure bun, though pieces have fallen free around her face. Her cheeks are stained the same pink as her lips. I want to kiss that gloss off her.

I clear my throat, closing the door behind me.

She bolts to her feet, her eyes locked on me. "Um, hi," she squeaks, smoothing her hands down the sides of her form-fitting skirt. It clings to her curves, and I'm once again jealous of a piece of fabric. Guess that's my permanent state of being now: jealous of her fucking clothes because they're touching her in places and ways I'm not.

"You look beautiful," I rasp.

"Logan," she says, disapproval heavy in her tone. "This is an interview."

Yeah, fuck that noise. If she expects this to be some bullshit where I ask stupid fucking questions and she gives rehearsed answers, we aren't doing that. Hell no.

After the morning I've had, I'm not in the mood for that game.

I decide to play one of my own instead.

I drop her file on the table, sauntering toward her. "First question," I growl, my eyes locked on her face. "What are you wearing under that skirt, baby?"

"Logan!" she hisses.

"Answer the question, Peyton. Is it lace? Leather?"

"A chastity belt. It's made of titanium and has ten locks on it," she snaps. "And a troll has the keys."

"You going to let me see it later?"

"Sure," she says sweetly. "Just as soon as hell freezes over and demons rule earth." She glances around the room pointedly. "I don't see demons yet, Mr. Moreno."

"Next question," I say, my dick throbbing. "You going to call me Mr. Moreno next time you're playing with yourself while we're on the phone? Because I can work with that."

If looks could kill, I'd be in a woodchipper right about now.

Fuck. Why is it so goddamn sexy to me when she's pissed? The fire in her eyes and the flush of her cheeks shouldn't turn me on this much, but they do. So does the way she holds herself with her chin up and her shoulders back, like she's perfectly willing to battle dragons and wage war. When she's mad, she knows her worth. Confidence blazes from her like the fucking sun. There is nothing unattractive about that.

I step up beside her, pressing so close I smell her vanilla shampoo. "How many fingers did you take last night?"

"Logan."

"How many, Peyton?" I growl.

"T-two."

I press my lips up against her ear. "You know you need more than that stretching that pretty little hole open for me, angel. I've been inside you."

She whimpers softly, swaying on her feet.

"You ready for another question, baby?"

"Stop calling me that," she whispers, the pulse in her throat beating like the wings of a hummingbird. "Stop flirting with me. Just stop, Logan."

"Never," I growl. "Not until you thaw and give me what I want."

"I thought this was supposed to be an interview," she mutters. "If it's just going to be an hour of you being like this, I'm opting out."

"I'll behave if you kiss me."

"You can't manipulate me into getting your way, Logan."

"It's not manipulation. It's using the tools at my disposal to remind you that you feel the same thing I do." I run my hand down her arm, watching the way her skin pebbles in response to my touch. "You can't tell me you don't feel that."

"Maybe I do," she says softly. "But it doesn't matter. You still lied to me. That doesn't just go away because you've decided it's inconvenient."

"Would you have gone home with me had you known the truth?"

She bites her lip, refusing to answer.

"Tell me," I command, stroking her arm again.

"No," she groans, turning to glare up at me. "I wouldn't have gone home with you, okay? I would have run out of the bar, mortified that..."

"Mortified why?"

"Because it wasn't supposed to be you!" she cries, grinding her palms against her

eyes. "My boss was supposed to be someone safe like Micah. Someone with a wife and kid at home. Not someone..."

"Not someone you wanted to sleep with," I finish for her.

She jerks her head in a nod.

"We're consenting adults, baby. What happens between us is our business."

"Spoken with all of the confidence of someone with nothing to lose," she mutters. "You have a fortune in the bank and a legion of adoring fans. You get to walk away with your reputation intact, no harm, no foul. I don't have that luxury. I'll be your employee. You know what they'll say about me? I seduced you. I'm a puck bunny. I wriggled my way into your life just so I could wriggle my way into your bed. That's how the story goes for girls like me."

"That narrative is bullshit, Peyton. It isn't you."

"It won't matter once they find out you're sleeping with your employee. It's the story they'll tell anyway. I'll be the villain. And when you decide you're—"

"When I decide what?" I prompt when she breaks off, biting her tongue.

"When you decide you're finished with me, I'll be the one picking up the pieces," she says, avoiding my gaze. "And I'll have to do it without a job."

I stare at her for a long moment, caught off guard. This isn't about me, at least not entirely. This is old pain, the shit that took root a long fucking time ago and made her terrified to trust. She likes me, a whole helluva lot, but she's running scared because it's all she knows how to do.

"Who hurt you, Peyton?" I ask, a growl in my voice.

"Who says anyone hurt me, Logan? Maybe I'm just being a realist."

"Now who's lying?"

"Fine." She glares up at me. "You really want to know?"

"Yeah, I do." I can't kill the prick if I don't know.

"My father."

"What'd he do?"

"You mean aside from get my mother pregnant, tell her to abort me, and then spend my whole life refusing to acknowledge my existence? Nothing."

Jesus Christ. I'm going to find him and tear his throat out through his asshole.

"What's his name?" I growl, my hands clenched into fists.

"Doesn't matter. None of it matters. It was a long time ago. I answered the question. End of story."

Yeah, I guess she did. But she's lying to herself if she thinks it doesn't matter. It clearly fucking does because she's still bleeding over it. Whatever his name is...fuck him. He doesn't deserve her.

Hell, maybe I don't, either. I don't know. But I'm willing to work my ass off to be the guy who does deserve her. That has to count for something, right?

I don't know.

Maybe I should walk away. With Montaque hanging around and all the shit with Lauren, maybe that is the safe, sane thing to do. But I've never done the easy thing just because it's easy. I've always fought for what I wanted, even when the shit was hard, especially when it was hard. And what I want is standing in front of me right now, scared to trust because her father scarred her in ways that no child should be scarred.

I'm not going anywhere.

I reach for her hand, tangling our fingers together.

"Take the job, Peyton," I murmur, turning her to face me. "Trust me enough to believe that I'm not like the prick who never deserved you or your mother. You're safe with me."

"Logan."

"You really think I'd do anything to hurt you, angel? That I'd let anyone else hurt you?" I ask, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "Is that really who you think I am?"

She stares up at me for a long moment, her tongue peeking from between her lips, before she huffs a massive sigh. "No," she says reluctantly. "I don't think that, okay? I just..."

"Don't trust me."

"You lied to me."

"And I'm an asshole for not regretting it," I mutter. "I get it. But regretting it means regretting the best night of my life. It means not knowing what you sound like, what you taste like, what you feel like unraveling on top of me." I press my face to her hair, breathing her in. "I don't regret you, Peyton."

"You make it really freaking hard to be mad at you, Logan."

"Yeah?" I grin, my lips against her crown. "That's probably a good thing because I have a feeling I'll be pissing you off a lot."

"Yay for me," she says sarcastically.

I tip her head back, brushing my lips across hers in a soft kiss. At least, that's my intention, but the road to hell and all of that. As soon as I feel her lips beneath mine, my restraint unravels. I haul her into my arms, devouring her lips like a man starving. That's what I am. Starving. Drowning. Going out of my fucking mind in want of her. I've been in hell since the minute she ran out on me, and the furnace is only growing hotter.

"Goddamn," I groan, nipping her bottom lip when she pulls my hair, whimpering. "I could kiss you all day."

"I told you not to kiss me, Logan."

I grin against her lips. "Oops. My bad."

She huffs quietly, pulling back to look at me. "I'm going to live long enough to regret this, aren't I?"

"Nope. You're going to live forever."

She rolls her eyes at me, but she can't hide her smile. She's thawing, slowly but surely. Christ. How long until I can take her back to bed?

Judging by the way her smile slips and her brows furrow...not soon enough. Goddammit.

"Come on," I growl, grabbing her hand. "We have places to be."

I wasn't lying to Alice when I told her that I planned to tell Peyton everything. I'm doing that today, before she finds another reason to be pissed at me for withholding information from her. If she's going to be part of my life, I want her to know every part of it. I owe her that much.

"What?" She tugs against my hold in protest. "I don't work for you yet, Logan."

"Then it's a good thing this isn't work, isn't it?"

She huffs loudly, but I just smile in response. She isn't fooling anyone. What she feels isn't hate. It isn't even annoyance. It's the makings of forever. I just need her to cooperate and let me prove it.

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Peyton

"Where are we going?" I growl, glaring at the back of Logan's head as he practically drags me through the parking lot toward his truck. I swear, he drives me nuts! One minute, he's being infuriating. The next, he's being sweet. And then the next, he's being bossy and mysterious. There are more facets to this man than a dang diamond, and I'm not sure any of them really capture all of him. He's complicated. Quadratic equations complicated, and no one understands those because math is situated on the level of hell Dante never traversed.

"To meet someone."

"Who are we going to meet?" I stop walking, squinting against the sun to stare up at him.

"You'll see when we get there."

"I swear to God, Logan Moreno. If you don't stop walking and explain right this—"

"Fucking hell," he mutters suddenly, jerking to a stop. I plow into him from behind, bouncing off his ridiculously hard body.

"Logan!" I cry, scowling up at him. Is murder really illegal, or is it more a suggestion like speed limits? Asking for a friend.

He turns to me suddenly, his expression grim. "Charles Montague is headed our way," he says. "Don't confirm or deny a damn thing. Don't even speak to him. Just

follow my lead, okay?"

"Who?" I ask, staring at him blankly.

"Investigative sports reporter," he explains beneath his breath, his lips barely moving. "He's a prick. Just follow my lead." He pauses, grimacing. "And I'm sorry in advance."

I peer around him at the guy in a suit hurrying toward us with a false smile pasted on his face. He's maybe forty-five, with way too much gel in his hair. He reminds me of my father, all fake smiles and patently false bullshit. I immediately dislike him.

Judging by the way Logan is scowling at him like he wants to set him on fire, he doesn't like him much either.

What is he sorry for in advance? I probably should have asked him that. It's too late now.

"Logan!" Charles says like they're old friends, stopping in front of us. "Just the goalie I was hoping to see."

"Fuck off, Montaque," Logan says, his tone flat. "I'm not interested in whatever bullshit rumors you've concocted today."

"So you're saying your sister isn't in a mental institution?" he asks. "Can I quote you on that?"

What in the world? I cast a quick glance up at Logan to see him staring through Charles, a bored expression on his face. But the anger banked in his eyes? That's hot enough to burn.

He is next-level pissed.

Is his sister really in a mental institution? God, no wonder he needs help organizing his life. He's trying to juggle more than anyone should have to juggle. And I'm guessing he's trying to do it quietly.

Is that why he didn't tell me about his nephew? Because he didn't want the truth to get out? My heart clenches at the thought. I'd never tell anyone. Of course I wouldn't. I know what it's like to be a media spectacle. Been there, done that. I've been dragged, kicking and screaming, into the press every freaking time...well, that doesn't matter. The point is, it's exhausting.

But Logan doesn't know that, does he? I never told him. It's one of those painful things I never discuss because if I don't talk about it, I can pretend it's someone else's life instead of mine.

I'm beginning to think maybe he knows how that feels. Beneath that devil-may-care attitude and the flirting, Logan may be a little bit more like me than I'd like to admit.

Why is that so terrifying?

Because you like him , my little angel whispers.

I ignore her. Mostly because she's probably right, and I can't deal with that right now. I can't afford to like him. That's a slippery slope that'll lead me right back to his bed.

"I'm not saying a goddamn thing to you. Ever, as a matter of fact," he says, stepping around the shorter man, his hand still laced with mine. "You can fuck right off."

Charles glances from him to me, homing in on the way our hands are locked together. Curiosity blazes to life in his eyes. "Hello," he says, planting himself in my path. "I'm

Charles Montaque. What's your name?"

I stare at him mutely, refusing to say a word.

"Leave my girlfriend alone, Montaque," Logan snaps, sliding his hand around my waist to shuffle me away from the reporter. "She has nothing to say to you, either."

"Girlfriend?" Charles asks, sending a sharp glance in his direction.

I barely manage to keep from squeaking the same question. Has Logan lost his mind? We are not dating! I'm not his girlfriend. This is...Good Lord. This is going to be all over the freaking news by morning.

I'm going to kill him for real this time.

"Yeah, girlfriend," Logan snarls, gently nudging me to get me moving again, except my legs feel like rubber and don't want to cooperate so I stumble more than walk. "You know, the only one of the two of you with any right to ride my dick as hard as you do. Funny how that never stops you though, does it, Montaque? Come on, angel. Let's go home."

I stumble along at his side, my mind reeling.

Ride his dick? Oh my god. Did he just tell a reporter that I ride his dick ?

I'm going to go to jail for murdering DC's favorite goalie. It'll be all over the news. The only thing I'll be organizing for the rest of my life is Bertha's commissary and shank stash.

"What's her name, Logan?" Charles calls after us.

"Not your fucking business!" Logan yells back at him.

"You know I'm going to find out anyway."

"Yeah? How about I spell it for you, then? F-U-C-K O-F-F." Logan glances back at the reporter, lifting his middle finger in the air with an arrogant smirk. "Was that clear enough or should I spell it again, you dick?"

I whimper quietly.

Logan pops the locks on the truck, quickly ushering me inside.

"I'm going to kill you," I hiss. "Literal murder, Logan."

"We'll talk in a minute, angel."

"There will be blood. And pain. And death."

He buckles me in, leaning forward to brush his lips across my forehead. "Sounds kinky. I like it."

"I hate you. I hate you so much."

"No, you don't." He slams my door.

I slump in the seat, whimpering like one of those baby dolls that's running out of batteries. They're supposed to talk or sing, but instead, they just make that god-awful shrill sound that haunts your nightmares. Yeah, that sound actually leaves my lips. It isn't pretty.

Logan climbs in beside me, slamming his door. "Are you okay?"

"I'm not alive right now. Please check back later."

He has the audacity to laugh. Mighty bold for a man on death's door.

I turn to glower at him. "You told him that we're dating," I growl. "Do you have any idea what you just did?"

"I know exactly what I did, angel."

I close my eyes, practicing deep breathing. It doesn't help. He may think he knows, but he really doesn't. He doesn't have a freaking clue what he just did. As soon as Montaque finds out my name...

"Have you completely lost it?" I cry, whipping my head around to glare at him. "We are not dating. Never, ever!"

"I can explain."

"Is he still out there?"

He glances in the rearview mirror and then nods. "Yes."

"Then you should drive."

"Why?"

"Because I'm pretty sure my head exploding all over your truck is just as newsworthy as you telling a reporter that I ride your dick."

"So...you're big mad, huh?" he asks, grinning at me like he's pleased with himself. And I have never wanted to kiss someone and kill them at the same time before.

Being this infuriating has to be a kink with him, right? It's the only explanation.

" Why did you tell him that I'm your girlfriend?"

"Two reasons," he says, starting the truck. "You didn't want the whole world to think you were fucking your boss. Now, they won't. They'll think you're fucking your boyfriend. They never have to know you work for me unless you want them to know."

"I hate you."

"No, you don't."

"I actually do. Second reason?"

"Give me a second to get out on the road," he mutters. "You're less likely to kill me if I'm driving."

"So you think."

He glowers over at me, all hot and bossy. "You aren't allowed to endanger yourself, Peyton."

"The only danger to me in this vehicle is you, Logan. You are a hazard to my health." I lay my head back against the seatbelt. "You're giving me high blood pressure. I probably have angina now."

His laughter rumbles across the truck. "You do not have angina."

"Says you," I mutter. "If I spend much more time around you, I'll be gray and have wrinkles before I'm twenty-five."

"You'll still be stunning."

I crack an eye open to glare at him. "Start talking, Moreno."

"Ouch. You're using my last name now? I'm in serious trouble."

I reach for the latch on my seatbelt, ready to crawl over the console to kill him. Who cares if he's driving? Watching him struggle and panic will be worth the risk to my health and safety.

"I'm kidding!" he says through laughter, flipping on the blinker to get into the turning lane. "I'm just kidding, angel. Jesus. Settle down."

"Start talking," I growl. "Now."

"My sister, Lauren, has schizophrenia," he says, sobering instantly. "She's struggled with her mental health her entire life, and people have always treated her like shit because of it. Like it's her fault she was born the way she was. They compare her to me and treat her like a fucking failure. It's been that way since we were kids."

"That's awful," I whisper, my heart aching for her.

"Yeah, it is." His hands clench around the steering wheel. "Life is hard enough for her without constantly feeling like she doesn't measure up because of me. So when I was drafted, she begged me to keep her name out of the press. It's the only thing she's ever asked of me. She doesn't want to spend the rest of her life being Logan Moreno's poor little schizophrenic sister. And she doesn't want me to be poor little Logan Moreno, the motherfucker who accomplished so much despite having a sister like her. That's what they always fucking turn us into."

My heart clenches at the pain in his voice. At the guilt. He hates that she's treated that

way. It's written all over his face. "You're trying to protect her," I say quietly.

He jerks his chin in a nod. "Montaque found out about her somehow and has been sniffing around, asking questions. He knows enough about her history to know she's been institutionalized in the past. I figured if I gave him something else to chase, he'd back off, at least long enough for me to figure out what the fuck I'm going to do." He sighs. "I have to find a way to tell her, and I need to ensure that her and Lachlan don't suffer for whatever bullshit he decides to print. It'll destroy her if she loses Lachlan because of him."

"Lachlan is your nephew, right?"

"Yeah. He's eleven months old." Logan sighs. "He's the reason I requested to be traded to the Carvers. She was struggling right after he was born and ended up in treatment again. His dad has a construction company and travels a lot. She doesn't trust herself to stay alone with Lachlan yet, so when Roland is out of town, she and Lachlan come and stay with me."

"You switched teams to be here to help with your nephew?"

"Yeah," he says, shrugging like it's not a big deal as he merges with traffic headed away from the city. "They needed me."

I stare at him silently for a long moment, anger dying a swift death. It's impossible to be angry at a man willing to change his entire life around for a baby that isn't even his. And I accused him of being like my father, who couldn't even acknowledge the baby that was his. I feel smaller than small.

"I'm a jerk," I whisper, regret heavy in my tone.

He glances over at me, a question in his eyes.

"I accused you of being a cheater and an asshole and a terrible person." I swallow hard. "I thought you were like my father."

"You didn't know, angel."

"Doesn't excuse the way I acted."

"I happen to like the way you act." He arches a brow, shooting me a smirk. "Your little attitude is sexy as fuck, Peyton. You don't take any bullshit, and you call me on mine. You know how many people are willing to do that? Not many. Most people let motherfuckers like me do whatever the fuck we want. They roll over and take it simply because we are who we are. You have a voice and a spine, and you know what you are and are not willing to tolerate. It doesn't matter what my name is or how many people know it. In fact, that doesn't mean a goddamn thing to you at all. That's sexy as hell to me."

"I spent my whole life being bullied by guys like you, Logan," I mutter, glancing out the window as we crawl through traffic. "Eventually, you learn to stand up for yourself or you keep getting knocked down. I got tired of being knocked down."

"Why the fuck did they bully you?" he asks, a growl vibrating in his voice.

"Because I'm me?" I shrug. "Because I'm everything they aren't? A lot of reasons, I guess. I'm mouthy and combative and I didn't fall at their feet. I was awkward and made things uncomfortable. I didn't just go along just to go along. And..." I lick my lips nervously. "And I guess because my father made it easy. When you're a news story every few years because your father hates you, it makes you an easy target."

"Hold the fuck on." He glances at me, his expression sharp. "What do you mean, you were a news story every few years?"

"Michael Keller is my father," I whisper.

His eyes widen with shock. "Michael Keller? You mean...?"

"Yeah. Senator Keller."

"Jesus Christ, Peyton," he whispers.

I glance down at my lap. "Every single time he's up for reelection, I'm the skeleton people drag out of his closet."

"That's fucked up."

"I'm not mad about it." I shrug. "Honestly, as much as it sucked for me, I appreciated that his opponents never really let him forget that he had a kid he just threw away. Especially after..."

Logan growls, and I know he's worked out the rest of the story. The stuff I didn't tell him back in the conference room. Refusing to acknowledge me wasn't the worst of what my father did, not by far. Sending me to foster care after my mom was killed by the guy who robbed the convenience store where she worked?

Well, there's a special place in hell for him for that.

"That fucking prick," he rasps. "He abandoned you after your mom was killed."

"He abandoned me long before she was killed, Logan." I rest my head against the window with a sigh. "You can't re-abandon a kid you never bothered to meet in the first place."

"How the fuck is he a senator?"

"Because the truth about who he really is only matters when it's convenient. The rest of the time, it gets swept under the rug. People see what they want to see. He talks a good game and trots his perfect little family out to play the perfect husband and father. That's what they see. Not the daughter he never wanted. Not the woman he cheated with and then abandoned. They see the lie. It's all they ever see."

"Fuck," Logan growls, jerking beside me. "Peyton, I—"

"If pretending we're dating will help protect your sister, I'll do it," I say, cutting him off before he can apologize. He didn't know, and he was trying to protect me. It's not his fault I had a target on my back before I was even born because my father is evil. I appreciate him for trying to protect me. It's more than anyone else has ever done.

"Why?" He glances over at me, curiosity burning in his gaze.

"Because sometimes, the lie is worth it," I murmur. I've survived being a media spectacle my whole life. There's nothing they can throw at me that I haven't already heard. His sister is a different story, however. She has a baby to protect. She doesn't deserve to be in the crosshairs just because some reporter wants to blow up his life. If I can prevent that, I want to do it. "Your sister deserves peace. I'll do my part to make sure she gets it."

"Had I known, I never would have..." The guilt is heavy in his voice. "Christ, Peyton. I'm an asshole."

"You didn't know." I lick my lips, eyeing him warily. "But just so we're clear, we aren't dating, Logan. This is just for show. I'm your fake girlfriend and your assistant. Nothing more."

"Yeah?" He meets my gaze, his eyes dark and fathomless. "How long do you think

you're going to be able to keep selling yourself that lie, baby?"

For as long as it takes for it to become true.

"It's not a lie," I say instead of voicing that frightening truth.

"Whatever you say, angel." He smirks at me, shaking his head. "But we both know you're full of shit. Just like we both know you only pretend you hate me because you know if you stop, you'll have to admit how you really feel."

"Yeah, and how do you think I really feel?"

"You're falling for me. You were falling for me before you ever left the bar with me. That's why you were so goddamn mad. And it's why you're so afraid to trust me now. I feel like something you need, and Peyton Cloud doesn't want to need anyone."

"You should really stop buying into your own press, Logan. It's giving you a big head," I mutter, my heart pounding. He's got me pegged so well it's scary. It's uncomfortable. It's...kind of beautiful, too.

What? No. I didn't mean that last part. Absolutely not.

"Whatever you say, baby," he murmurs, exiting the freeway. He meets my gaze again, a smirk dancing on his lips. "But just so we're clear...it doesn't matter how hard you fight or how hard you run. You're going to end up in my arms anyway. Make me bleed if it makes you happy. I'm not afraid of that attitude. You aren't pushing me away. All you'll do is make my fucking cock hard."

"Logan?" I hold his gaze, my eyes narrowed. "Shut up and drive."

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Peyton

"What are we doing here, Logan?" I ask, reluctantly trailing behind him as he unlocks the front door to his place not even fifteen minutes later.

Instead of responding, he simply shoots me a little boy grin over his shoulder and then disappears inside.

I tip my head back, staring up at the sky.

"Why couldn't you send me a normal hockey player instead of a goalie?" I groan to whoever is up there listening.

Serena said goalies are basically the Siberian Huskies of the hockey world. She didn't mean it as a compliment. Her brother has a husky. Butch argues with birds, takes naps in the bathtub, digs random holes to nowhere, farts without shame, and may or may not bite. He's basically feral but he loves his bed and his people. Logan is like that...only in human form and without the random blasts of swamp gas. He's a menace, specifically to me. Probably to others as well.

Whatever he's paying me isn't nearly enough.

Huh. What is he paying me?

"I need a raise," I growl, stomping into the house after him. "If I'm going to have to deal with your infuriating inability to answer a ques..." I trail off, gaping at the woman standing on the far side of the foyer with a sleeping baby in her arms. The

same pretty brunette from the photo in the nursery. Logan's sister, Lauren.

Crap.

She glances up at me, her lips twitching with amusement. The same glints in the depths of her eyes. I don't know how I didn't notice in the photo—probably because I was too busy freaking out—but they're the same exact shade of blue as Logan's eyes.

"Hi," she whispers. "I'm Lauren. You must be Peyton."

"Um, hi," I squeak, turning a death glare on Logan when he steps up beside her, grinning at me like he's proud of himself. "It's so nice to meet you. I'm so sorry. Your baby is adorable."

"Thank you." She glances down at her son, her expression soft. "His name is Lachlan. He's my world."

"He's way cuter than your brother."

She laughs softly.

I press my palms to my blazing cheeks, trying to get myself together as Logan's grin grows. He's enjoying this way too much. "I'm sorry. I'm frazzled. Logan didn't tell me that we were coming here. He basically kidnapped me after my interview."

"Logan!" Lauren jabs him in the ribcage.

"What? I figured I had a better chance of luring her back here if she didn't know where we were going," he says, shrugging. "And look, it worked. She's here."

"Is he always like this?" I ask his sister.

"Pretty much always." She shoots me a mischievous look. "You definitely need a raise."

I groan, squeezing my eyes closed. "I didn't think anyone heard me say that. I promise I'm not after his money." I bite my lip. "Well, not very much of it, anyway."

Her quiet laugh echoes around the foyer. "I'm not offended. He's been my brother my entire life. Trust me, you need a raise."

"I don't even know how much I make," I mutter.

Lauren gasps quietly. "You didn't tell her how much she makes? What the fuck, Logan?"

He has the grace to look embarrassed. "It didn't come up."

"How does her pay rate just not come up?" Lauren narrows her eyes on her brother, shifting the baby in her arms. He really is cute, with a head full of dark hair and an angelic little face. "Are you a crappy boss?"

"What the fuck, Lauren?" Logan growls. "What kind of question is that?"

"The good kind," I say sweetly, stirring the pot because he deserves it. And because watching him squirm is all kinds of fun for me. I don't think he tells his sister no very often. It's cute. That's not a word I ever thought I'd attribute to Logan Moreno, but it's the only one that applies. He towers over his sister, but he looks at her like she's his hero.

"I'm going to show you exactly what kind of boss I am, baby," he growls, narrowing his eyes on me.

"Oh," Lauren whispers, her gaze darting between the two of us.

I feel the heat climbing up my cheeks as she clocks the way he's looking at me. It's not subtle at all. I doubt that word is even in his vocabulary. "Stop calling me that," I mutter, glowering at him. "I already told you that you can't call me that. Don't call me angel, either."

"Why the fuck not? You're mine."

Lauren's eyes practically bug out of her head at his declaration. "Oh my gosh. You two are dating? I thought she worked for you?"

"We are..." I bite my tongue before the denial forms. If I tell her that we aren't dating, Logan is going to have a whole lot of explaining to do when the news of our fake relationship breaks. It's not my place to force him into telling her about Montaque when he asked for time to make sure she's protected. "We are dating," I sigh. "And now I work for him too. Somehow."

"You sound so thrilled about it, baby," Logan says, his tone light.

"You definitely owe her a raise then," Lauren mutters. "No woman should have to work for you and date you without being paid ungodly amounts of money, Logan. That's cruel and unusual."

His face blanches, and I throw my head back, laughing. I bet she gives him hell every day just because she can. I already like her. I can also already see why he's so protective of her. Their bond is obvious.

It's also obvious that she adores the little boy in her arms. Every time he moves, she glances down at him, checking on him. Her expression softens with wonder, like she can't quite believe that he's real. Love practically flows from her. I barely know her,

and I can already tell that she's an amazing mother. It would destroy her to lose her baby. And I'm guessing it scares the crap out of her to consider that there may come a day when she isn't able to care for him because of her illness.

In the group homes, there were a lot of kids who struggled with mental health issues. It was always devastating to watch kids who were thriving one day slowly fall apart as their meds stopped working. I can imagine it's even worse to be the one slowly unraveling, not knowing how to stop it. To be a prisoner in your own mind, held hostage by a disease no one fully understands, has to be terrifying.

And to be judged and labeled for it? To be treated like you've done something wrong just because you were born the way you were? Well, that's always been one of the biggest problems with people, hasn't it? We fear what we don't understand. We avoid what makes us uncomfortable. If it isn't perfect, it's broken.

This world isn't kind to the people it sees as broken. Even now, the stigma around mental health hasn't gone away. People talk about depression and anxiety. But the more complex stuff like schizophrenia? Those still scare the hell out of us, so much so that we've convinced ourselves that they only happen to broken people. It's more palatable that way, less terrifying. We aren't at risk if the big, scary diseases only happen to people who are fundamentally broken.

We live in a bubble of comforting lies because the truth is overwhelming. And people like Lauren pay for our ignorance.

I may not know what it's like to be in her shoes. But I do know what it's like to suffer because people prefer the comforting lie over the hard truth. Been there, done that. It's why people like my father stay in power despite their sins and excesses. The lie is easier.

"Ninety thousand," Logan says, pulling me out of my thoughts.

"Think that's fair or should we push for more?" Lauren asks me.

I turn wide eyes on Logan. "Ninety thousand?"

"One hundred thousand?" He scratches his chin. "Name your price, angel."

"Are you... Have you..." I gape at him, spluttering. Is he seriously offering to pay me whatever I want?

"One hundred and fifty thousand," Lauren hurries to say.

"Done." Logan doesn't even bat a lash. He doesn't blanch or squirm. He just freaking agrees like it makes no difference to him, his eyes locked on my face. We might as well be discussing the weather or the state of the frigging union for all the concern he shows.

"And she gets health insurance, a 401K, and all the fancy stuff."

"Obviously," he says dryly.

"Perfect." Lauren beams at her brother. "Then my job here is done." She bends, scooping up a bag from the floor. "I need to run. Roland will be home soon."

"Here," Logan murmurs, sliding his nephew out of her arms. The baby whines before nuzzling up against his chest with a soft grunt. Logan cradles his head carefully before tugging the diaper bag out of Lauren's hands. "I'll carry him out for you."

"Fine," Lauren grumbles. "But only because he's going to wake up and go into ninja mode as soon as I try to put him in the car seat. He can bite you for once instead of me." She turns to me, smiling. "It was really great to meet you, Peyton. I can't wait to get to know you better. Please harass Logan as often as possible."

"I'll do that," I promise. "It was great to meet you too."

"I'll be right back, baby," Logan murmurs, reaching out to stroke my arm as he and Lauren stride past me out the door.

I watch them go and then stumble into the living room, sinking onto the sofa. For a long moment, I just stare blankly at the wall across from me. Is he seriously going to pay me that much money just to organize his life? How much help could he possibly need?

I feel him standing behind me a few minutes later, watching me.

"You cannot pay me one hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year, Logan," I mutter, not even turning around. "That's highway robbery."

"How much is your time worth, angel?"

"What?"

"How much is your time worth to you?" he asks, striding around the side of the sectional. "Fifty thousand? Sixty?"

"I don't know."

"Contrary to what you may think, I actually did look at your resume. I saw your references. Your previous employers all loved you, said you were highly organized, efficient, and instrumental in keeping their companies running." He kneels in front of me. "Don't undervalue yourself, especially not to me. If you can keep me functioning, you're worth every goddamn penny."

"I need a nap," I mutter, grinding my palms against my eyes. "And alcohol. Probably

something else too but I don't even know what. There's no way I can deal with this right now. I'm too something to deal with this."

"Too something?" he asks, a smirk in his voice.

I shoot him a death glare.

"You know what else is worth it?" His eyes tangle with mine. "Knowing that you're being taken care of the way you should be. Knowing that, even when you're pissed at me, you're eating well, sleeping well, and not worrying about whether you'll be able to pay your bills."

"You cannot pay me one hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year just because you like me, Logan!" I cry.

"I'm not. I'm paying you a hundred and fifty grand because you're worth every penny. And it just so happens to come with a few perks for me." His lips kick up into a proud little boy grin. "It's a win-win."

"Yeah, until Montaque finds out that you're paying me," I retort. "And then the story changes. Guess what they say about me then?"

His expression turns black. "He isn't the only one who can ruin careers, Peyton. I'll fucking destroy anyone who even suggests that I'm paying you to sleep with me."

I open my mouth to respond and then snap it closed when I realize that he's deadly serious. Good Lord. Serena was not joking when she warned me that he was trouble. I'm just not entirely sure what kind of trouble he is yet. But more and more, I find it harder to deny that he isn't precisely the kind I like. A little too much.

He's turning my whole life upside down and inside out. Hell, he's turning me upside

down and inside out. And some crazy, irrational, wild part of me loves it. I feel like someone brand new with him, someone completely free. I've never felt that way before, like I can say whatever I want, do whatever I want, and be perfectly accepted. He doesn't judge me. He doesn't laugh at me. He just...freaking grins like he fucking loves it.

I swallow hard, dangerously close to crossing a line that there won't be any coming back from. If I unbend now, he's going to ruin me. I'll give him every single piece of myself. And then what? What happens when he gets bored? What happens when he decides to walk away?

What happens if he doesn't? that damn little voice whispers. And maybe that's the most terrifying question of all. Because it's the one I don't know how to answer. My whole life, no one has ever stayed. Not my father. Not the foster families I was placed with. Hell, not even my mom. And maybe that wasn't her fault or her choice, but she still left me alone.

So...what happens if that doesn't happen? What happens if he stays?

I have no idea. And that's terrifying.

Logan leans forward, reaching for my hands. I don't know why I do it, maybe because I'm desperate to stop thinking, but I practically launch myself at him. He growls, hauling me up against his chest.

"You done being mad at me now?" he asks, his lips inches from mine.

"You give me a new reason to be angry every five minutes."

His hands sink into my hips, yanking me flush against him. "Yeah? Then maybe I should spend the time in between giving you reasons to forget, angel. Think I can

make you come before I piss you off again?"

"No." I pull his hair, which makes him growl. And that sound? I feel it scraping against my clit. "I'm not sleeping with you, remember?"

"Who said anything about sleeping? You'll be too fucking busy screaming my name to rest." He attacks my mouth, grunting as he flicks his tongue against the seam of my lips, silently demanding entry.

When I deny him, he plunges his hand into my hair, snapping the band holding the bun in place. I whimper as he cranes my head back, not being gentle about it. Lava flows through my veins, setting my system on fire.

"Fucking open, Peyton. Now," he snarls.

"Make me," I gasp.

His hand tightens in my hair. He shoves the other one down the back of my skirt, gripping one ass cheek hard. God, I shouldn't love the way he touches me like I'm his. His rough possession is going to annihilate me, and I do absolutely nothing to stop or dissuade him. I egg him on, unable to resist when the pleasure feels this damn good.

"Want to dare me again, baby?" he breathes, his fingers sliding down the crevice of my ass. "Or do I need to play with this little hole to get you to behave?"

"Logan," I moan, pushing back against him.

"Ah, goddamn," he growls. "You'd let me do it, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

He snarls like a wild beast, attacking my mouth again. I let him in this time, too turned on to keep pretending I don't want him all over me. We both know it's a lie anyway. I'm playing with fire, praying to God we both burn.

What else am I supposed to do when I ache every time he looks at me? Every time he smiles at me? He's driving me out of my mind without even trying. And he knows it, damn him. Logan Moreno is Kryptonite, making me weak, poisoning my good sense. And I fucking love it.

He tips me backward on his lap, draping my body across his knees. "You're going to make yourself come just like this," he growls, already yanking my skirt up my thighs. "I want to watch you squirm and whimper and beg while you fuck yourself with your fingers like you did on the phone."

"Logan," I groan, a wave of heat blasting through me at the thought of him watching me get myself off. Part of me wants to say no, but the other part? The part that wants this man as wild and crazy as he makes me. That part is fully on board.

"Get that perfect hand between your legs, baby," he orders, the gritty rasp of his voice sending a heatwave rolling over me.

I hesitate for a moment—just long enough to make him growl at me—and then slowly slip my hand down my body. He tugs my panties to the side, using two fingers to part my lower lips.

"Fuck," he mutters. "You're already soaked."

"Jealous?"

His wild eyes meet mine. "Hell yes. It should be my mouth between your legs right now," he snarls. "You should be dripping all over my fucking face."

My clit throbs.

"Too bad." I bat his hand out of the way, loving the possessive growl that rumbles from deep in his chest. Logan Moreno does not like to share. Not even a little bit. I swirl my fingers over my clit, moaning far louder than I would if I weren't trying to torture him. Something about the look in his eyes... I love it way too much. He's a man on the edge, desperation in every breath. And I'm the one who dragged him there.

If that isn't power, I don't know what is.

"Three fingers, angel," he demands, his gaze locked on my pussy. "Stretch that perfect little hole open for me. Pretend it's my cock splitting you wide open and fucking you to heaven."

"K-keep talking," I groan, slowly pushing one finger and then another inside me. I'm so wet there is no hiding the loud, messy sounds. I fuck myself with my fingers, too turned on to be embarrassed. Too caught up in the way he watches me to feel awkward. I slowly add another, sobbing quietly when a bead of sweat drips down his forehead.

"What do you want me to say?" His gaze flickers to my face and then back to my center. "You want to know how desperate I am to shove your hand aside and take over right now? Do you want me to tell you how fucking much I want to toss you down on the couch and eat you until you're squirting all over my face again?"

I whimper, thrusting my fingers faster.

"You want to hear how hard I jerked off on the phone while you were playing with yourself last night?"

My inner muscles clench around me, a flood of moisture trickling from my body. I moan softly, bucking my hips.

"Yeah, you like knowing that, don't you?"

"Yes," I gasp, too far gone to deny it.

"I came all over myself, listening to your little gasps and moans, Peyton. Wish like hell I'd been in that bed beside you, watching you touch yourself just like this. You're so goddamn sexy right now, baby."

"Logan," I whimper, so damn close.

"Next time, you'll be coming all over me again. It'll be my fingers, my tongue, and my cock taking you to heaven." His gaze flashes to mine, his expression feral. "I won't fucking stop until you're too hoarse to keep pleading for mercy."

I shatter with a groan, his name tumbling from my lips as I topple over the edge, completely unraveled by the dark promise stamped across his face and vibrating in his words. He means it. And God help me, I want it. I want him. Too damn much to deny it.

This isn't hate. It isn't anger. It's something a whole lot bigger than that.

"Goddamn, that looked good," he growls, hauling me back up into his arms to kiss my breath away. He comes back again and again, like he can't help himself. And then he sighs softly, snuggling me up against his chest with his face nuzzled in my throat.

We sit just like that for several long moments before he reluctantly pulls back. "I should get you home so you can pack, baby."

"Pack?" My brows furrow. "Uh, what are you talking about?"

"We're playing the Bucks tomorrow. You're flying out with us."

"No, I'm not."

"Yeah, you are. It's in the job description, angel." He grins at me. "You go where I go."

"That is not in the job description, Logan."

"I added it before I hired you."

"I can organize things from here."

"Maybe. But you don't know much about hockey. You need to be at the games until you figure out how it all works."

"I can attend home games. You know, the ones that don't require hopping on a plane and flying across the country?" I retort.

"Rules are rules," he says, shrugging innocently. "And I make the rules."

"Unmake this one!" I demand.

"No can do."

I gape at him for a long moment, take stock of the stubborn intractability on his face, and decide there's really no other choice. I twist, grabbing a pillow from the couch.

"What are you doing?"

"Smothering you," I say cheerfully, trying to cover his face with it. "I probably won't even go to prison for it. Especially if I get a jury who knows anything about you."

He laughs, trying to cage me in as I squirm and dodge, doing my best to push the pillow over his stupidly gorgeous smug face. He wins in the end. Mostly because he has a home gym and a hockey career, and the only cardio I've done lately was riding him the other night.

"Fine," I mutter when I'm too out of breath to keep fighting. "You win."

"Fucking obviously. I always win when it counts, Peyton."

I shoot a withering look in his direction, crawling from his lap. "Don't be so smug, Logan. You're only winning because you're a giant bully, and I'm out of shape. But just so it's clear, I am so mad at you right now."

He grins, flashing those dimples at me. "Oh, I'm aware, angel. Why do you think my dick is so fucking hard?"

I throw my hands up, stomping toward the front door. There is no talking to him. There really isn't. He was put on this earth specifically to terrorize me.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Logan

"I'm going to kill you," Alice swears early the next morning, stomping toward me as I'm leaned up against the side of the team bus, waiting to load to head to the airport.

"Shit," Diego mutters from beside me. "Which one of us is she mad at?"

"Not me," Micah says. "I know how to behave."

Everyone looks at Jordan.

"Why the fuck are you all looking at me?" he growls, yanking one of his earbuds from his ear. And then he notices Alice storming toward us and his brows furrow. "Who pissed her off?"

"They all figured it was you," Nash says.

Jordan sends a dirty look at the rest of the team.

"Uh, you looked at him too, you lying dick," River mutters to Nash, who just smirks and glances back down at his phone.

"It was me."

Everyone turns to look at me.

"What the fuck did you do this time?" Joaquin asks.

Archer just shakes his head, looking at me like he already knows. Shit, he probably does. It's goddamn spooky how much of our business he knows before anyone else. And yet...we know damn little of his.

Funny how that shit works.

He isn't nearly as subtle as he thinks he is, though. He may have Micah fooled, but I know damn well that he's been sneaking around with his sister since we played Vegas. I caught them in the elevator together. He was all over her...and she wasn't telling him no.

But that's not my fucking business so I keep my mouth shut and my nose out of it. If he wants to play with fire, more power to him. I'm not going anywhere near those fucking flames.

"Don't worry about it," I mutter to Joaquin, pushing away from the bus to meet Alice.

She draws to a stop a few feet away, her arms crossed and a thunderous scowl on her face. "You told Charles Montague that you're dating Peyton," she growls.

"He's already running the story?"

She snorts. Loudly.

"I'll take that as a yes," I mumble, scrubbing a hand down my face. "So he has her name already?"

"What do you think?"

"Shit." I tip my head back, looking up at the sky. It's cloudy and overcast. Hopefully we get the fuck out of here before it starts raining. Otherwise, we'll be sitting on the

goddamn tarmac for hours, waiting for clearance to takeoff.

Peyton might actually find a way to murder me if she's stuck beside me on the tarmac for hours. She's still pissed that I'm making her fly out for the game with us. I probably should have told her before I demanded that she make herself come for me yesterday, but I wasn't thinking about the game. When I'm with her, she's the only thing I'm thinking about. The rest of the world doesn't even register. But she tried to smother me with a couch pillow, which was basically her squirming all around on my lap with her tits in my face while I pretended to fight her off. Good times.

She might actually murder me for not telling her shit one day, though.

I'll probably deserve it.

I tip my head down, glancing over to where she's sitting in the back of my truck, reading a book. "Peyton," I call, and then wait until she glances up at me. "Come here."

She huffs like I'm getting on her fucking nerves and then reluctantly shoves her bookmark into her book before sliding off the tailgate. She sashays toward me, her lips pursed.

"How can you annoy me again this morning, Mr. Moreno?" she says sweetly. The look in her eyes is pure sass. She's fucking with me just because she can.

Alice chuckles quietly, drawing Peyton's attention to her.

Peyton's eyes widen, her cheeks turning pink. "Oh. Um, hi," she mumbles. "I'm sorry. I didn't see you there."

"Don't mind me," Alice says, holding her hands up. "He annoys the hell out of me,

too."

"Why am I not surprised?" Peyton says before cutting her eyes at me. "You're three for three, you know."

"What?"

"She's the third woman who says you annoy the hell out of her. That's not a good hat trick, Logan."

"The only other woman in my life you've met is Lauren," I protest, chuckling.

"I'm counting me as the third. You definitely annoy the hell out of me."

"She's met Lauren?" Alice says, unable to hide her surprise.

I cut my eyes at her. "Did you think I was joking when I said I was going to tell her everything?"

"I..." Alice shakes her head, her expression bemused. But I see the glimmer in her eye as she glances between me and Peyton again, as if she's wising up to the fact that I'm not fucking around about her. I'm dead serious about this girl. I have no secrets from her.

"News broke about us this morning, angel," I murmur to Peyton. "And they already know your name."

"Lovely," she sighs. "I'm guessing they're already running through my whole life story too?"

I glance at Alice who hesitates before nodding reluctantly.

Peyton stands quietly for a minute and then nods. "Fake dating you better be worth it, Logan."

"This isn't fake, Peyton," I growl. "We're dating."

She sniffs at me, lifting that pert little nose in the air. And Christ Almighty, I want to back her up against the bus and fuck her until she's screaming to everyone who will listen that she's mine. But I can't do that. Not yet. She needs to work out for herself that she's in love with me. I can bide my time until then because I already know that's where this is headed.

She wouldn't let me kiss her or touch her if she didn't feel it. She may be trying like hell to pretend she doesn't feel it, but she wouldn't be here now if she didn't. And we both know she wouldn't have offered herself up to the press in Lauren's place if she wasn't in love with me.

As much as she'd like to think she did it for my sister's sake, we both know she did it for me too. Just like we both know I told Montaque she's my girlfriend because I want the whole goddamn world to know that she belongs to me.

I wish like hell that I'd known who her prick of a father was before I opened my mouth, though. I wouldn't have done it. Not because I don't want everyone to know that she's mine, but because I'm worried as fuck. She's been through every bit as much as Lauren has. Putting her in front of my sister like a shield knowing the truth doesn't sit well with me. I want to protect her too. She fucking deserves for someone in her life to protect her. It's pretty goddamn obvious that no one else ever has.

She's terrified to trust because she's never been able to do that. She's been let down and hurt over and over again. Letting me in is probably the most terrifying thing she's ever done. And yet, she still offered herself up anyway. She's still here anyway.

I can't fail her. I fucking won't fail her.

"Okay, so I'm going to need someone to fill me in on whatever the two of you have going on here," Alice says, wagging a finger between us. "Because I can't sell a story if I don't even know what it is or why I'm pushing it."

"We told Charles Montague that we're dating to give Logan time to figure out how to protect Lauren," Peyton says. "Since he's never had a girlfriend before now, that should keep them occupied for a while." She grimaces. "If they already know who I am and have gone digging into my life, I'm guessing it'll keep them occupied for a while."

I wrap an arm around her waist, squeezing.

Alice worries her bottom lip between her teeth and then shoots me a look that tells me we need to speak privately. Fucking wonderful.

"Why don't you go finish your book, baby?" I murmur to Peyton. "I'll finish filling Alice in."

Peyton shrugs before strolling back to the truck. I keep one eye on her, making sure she's safely in the bed of it before I turn back to Alice.

"How much do you know about her past, Logan?" Alice asks, keeping her voice pitched low so it doesn't carry. "Because I'm having a hard time believing you know the full story and still set this in motion."

"I didn't know when I set it in motion," I mutter.

"Logan," Alice groans.

"I know. I fucked up, okay?" I pinch the bridge of my nose. "But I had my reasons, none of which really matter at the moment. What matters right now is making sure that she doesn't become a target. I don't want them thrusting cameras in her face, asking about her prick of a father."

"You know we can't stop them," Alice says. "He's a United States Senator, for God's sake. They're going to ask. We can hire security for her and refuse any interview requests, but we've never been able to stop the paparazzi. And we'll never be able to control what reporters do or don't ask. It doesn't work that way. It's a symbiotic relationship, Logan. We get as much from their coverage as they do."

"She isn't part of the game, Alice," I growl. "Our families shouldn't be on the table. Doesn't matter how much the team or the league gets out of their coverage if it causes more harm than good to actual people with actual fucking feelings."

"I'm not condoning the way they do things," she says softly. "I'm on your side. I'm just saying...there are ways to do things and there are ways not to do things. Starting a war with the press isn't going to get you what you want. You can't silence them just because you don't like what they do."

"I'm not trying to silence them. I don't give a flying fuck what they publish about me, the team, the league, or anyone except Peyton and Lauren. Neither of them signed up to play this sport. They didn't sign contracts agreeing to have their lives put on display or to have cameras shoved in their faces. After everything they've already been through, they shouldn't have to suffer because I'm in their lives."

Alice glances at me sharply, her gaze assessing and then she sighs. "I'll do what I can to mitigate the damage, Logan. But you need to prepare her for the probability that her father is going to be brought up. Her mother's death will be too. The sooner the two of you address it, the sooner they'll move on. If you want to protect her, you really need to sell the fact that you're crazy about her. Logan Moreno in love is big

news. It's new. But her past is old news. Keep the focus on your relationship and they'll lose interest in her past."

I jerk my chin in a nod, hopping she's right.

"As for Lauren..." She tips her head to the side, sighing. "You need to prepare yourself for the very real probability that Montaque is going to print his story about her. Both of you need to decide if you want to head that off at the pass and tell it from your POV before he gets an opportunity to skew it. And believe me, he will skew it because that's the kind of ignorant prick he is. No one knows anything about her history, so there isn't going to be any mitigating the damage there. The best you can do is take control of the narrative and allow Lauren to tell her story her way. It's what she deserves. You know it is."

Hell, maybe she's right. Maybe all I'm doing by stalling is delaying the inevitable here and giving Montaque more time to fuck her over and hurt her. I don't know anymore. But Alice has no idea what it's like to watch the sister you promised to protect slowly lose herself to a disease she can't control over and over again. She doesn't know what it's like to have to sneak into a mental institution to visit her or listen to her pleading with people only she sees not to hurt her. That's been my life...and it's been Lauren's.

How the fuck am I supposed to tell her that I fucked up and let her down? I don't know.

Just like I don't fucking know how I'm supposed to tell Peyton that maybe she was right about me and I'm the last motherfucker she needs in her life. I've been fucking up with her from the very beginning.

And the real hell of it? I don't know how to stop. When it comes to her, I don't know how to fucking stop. She's an addiction, something I crave with an intensity that

borders on desperation. Even knowing that I'm fucking up and pissing her off at every turn, I keep doing it, because so long as she's pissed and fighting me and being mouthy and we're all over each other, maybe I don't have to admit that she's not the only one terrified out of her mind.

I am, too.

I am fucking terrified she's going to realize what I already know. She's been right about me all along. I am a fucking asshole who doesn't deserve her. And I have no clue how to become someone who does.

"Moreno!" Coach shouts, stomping into the locker room after the first period, his face red and his expression hard. The door slams behind him as he stomps in my direction.

Son of a bitch. He's been pissed all day because I'm all over the news again. There are few things he dislikes more than seeing our names on the news when it's unrelated to the game.

"What the fuck are you doing out there, kid?"

"Defending the goal," I mutter, mopping sweat from my face with a towel.

"I've seen toddlers stop pucks better than you have tonight," he growls, stopping in front of me.

Shit, he probably isn't wrong. My mind has been all over the place. The one place it hasn't been is on the ice. I need to get my shit together and get my head in the game before we lose it. They're killing us out there right now because I'm fucking up.

"Do I need to pull you from the net?"

"No, sir. I've got it," I say. "It was just a rough start."

"If you don't have it together soon, I'm pulling you out," he warns me before whipping his head in Diego's direction. "Get your head on straight in case Moreno has to come out, Tapia. And do not piss me off, kid."

"On it, Coach," Diego says somberly.

Coach shoots another quelling look in my direction before stomping away to talk to Archer. He pauses in front of Jordan briefly, shooting him a death glare. He doesn't say anything, though. He already reamed his ass on the bench once he got out of the penalty box for the third time.

I'm not sure what the fuck is up with Jordan tonight, but his mood is worse than usual. Actually, it's been worse than usual all day.

"Fuck," I mutter, bouncing my head against the wall behind me.

"You good?" Jordan asks, glancing over at me.

"Fucking fabulous."

"Right," he snorts. "You hit your head against that wall any fucking harder, Coach isn't going to have to pull you out. You're going to knock your own dumbass out."

"Maybe that's the plan."

"Whatever. Have a fucking ball."

I narrow my eyes on him. "What's up with you?"

"Not a damn thing. What's up with you?"

"Not a damn thing," I say.

"Well, at least we're on the same fucking page."

I snort, shaking my head before taking a big drink of water.

"You pissed about your girl being all over the news?"

I shoot him a dark glare.

"Figured," he grunts. "Want some advice?"

"Fuck no."

"Too bad. I'm in an advice-giving mood."

"Since fucking when?" I eye him sideways. The only advice Jordan ever gives is fuck and off, usually when someone is pissing him off. And that's all the warning they get before their faces become intimately acquainted with his fists. It's why he spends so much damn time in the penalty box.

"Since now." He purses his lips, staring at me for a moment. "Don't be another asshole in her life who lets her down because you're feeling sorry for yourself over whatever bullshit you're telling yourself over there. You dragged her into this. She's counting on you to lead her through it. Get your head out of your ass and lead."

"I'm not feeling sorry for myself," I growl.

"Really? Because that puck went right between your legs. Literally right between

them." He extends his arms and brings them down between his legs, whistling. "And you were off in another world, thinking deep thoughts about the goddamn lights."

"I was thinking about you, actually, you prick. You know how much I love that pretty face of yours."

"Take my advice or leave it," he says, flipping me off. "Doesn't matter to me either way. You'll be the one who regrets it if you leave it, though."

I stare at him for a long minute, shaking my head. "I liked you better when you sat over there and didn't say anything."

His lips curve into a smirk. "Maybe I'm a changing man."

"Yeah, that's bullshit. You've been in a pissy mood all night, and that's saying something because you're always a cranky motherfucker. What the fuck is going on with you? Since you're all up in my goddamn business, I'm stepping into yours."

"Nothing."

"Right. You're just extra fucking cranky and weird for no reason." I roll my eyes. "That makes total sense."

"The past is a bitch," he finally mutters.

"Oh. Oh, shit." My eyes wide, realization dawning like a hammer blow. "We're playing the Bucks."

He jerks his chin in a nod.

"I'm an asshole."

"You expecting me to disagree or something?"

"Fuck." I scrub a hand down my face. No wonder he's so goddamn moody. Jordan used to play for them before he and Jamison Peters, their captain, came to blows in the middle of a game. It was nasty. He knocked Jamison out, and team management gave him the boot. It almost cost him his career. He's fucking hated Peters since. "I'm sorry, man. You good?"

"I'm fine," he growls. "Why does everyone always ask me that shit?"

"Uh...you mean aside from the obvious?"

Jordan scowls at me.

"Mostly because people actually give a shit," I say quietly. "Peters is a dick, but we like you. We ask because we're ten toes down, standing behind you. If you decide you need to hit the prick again, we'll throw elbows and cause a scene. They can't boot us all."

"He's right," Archer says, picking his way across to us.

Jordan and I both look at him in surprise. Archer can be aggressive as hell on the ice, but he rarely starts fights. He damn sure knows how to finish them, though.

"We ask because we care," he murmurs to Jordan. "And we ask because we want to know if we're playing nice or starting a riot. Either way, we've got your back, fucker. Get your shit on. It's time to hit the ice."

"Jesus Christ," Jordan mutters, glancing between the two of us like he's never seen us before tonight. Guess he hasn't been paying attention. We're a fucking team. We ride together; we die together. That's how this shit works. Fuck Peters and the Bucks. If

Jordan wants to spill blood, we're down.

"We're playing nice," he growls, grabbing his shit from the bench.

"Pity," Micah sighs, stalking past.

I throw my head back, laughing. Jesus Christ.

Peyton is waiting for me in the hall outside the locker room after the game. I skate right to her, picking her up off her feet. She squeaks, kicking her feet.

"Put me down right now!" she hisses.

"No can do," I murmur, breathing her in. "We're dating, remember?"

"I hate you."

"You keep saying that, but I don't think it means what you think it means, baby."

"You're sweaty and you stink, Logan."

"I don't seem to remember you complaining when you got me all sweaty, angel," I murmur, nuzzling my face against her throat. "Christ, you smell good."

"Logan," she groans. "Will you please put me down? Everyone is staring."

"That's the point," I whisper against her skin. "I want everyone staring, Peyton. I want them to know you belong to me." I had a whole goddamn game to think about what Alice said this morning. Actually, I've been thinking about the shit all day. I don't know if she was right or not. But I know I'm fucking crazy about this woman. I know my heart is beating out of my chest for her.

I've spent years keeping attention on me. But this time it's different. For once, I'm not causing trouble or being an asshole. I just get to be a motherfucker in love, one doing his best to be worthy of a woman lightyears out of his league. Maybe I don't deserve her. Maybe I never will. But I'm damn sure going to try.

I'm going to choose her. And I'm going to keep fucking choosing her until she realizes that I'm not her prick of a father and I'm not going anywhere. I'll be right here to catch her every goddamn time.

I can't give her perfect, but I can give her that.

"Logan," she groans. But she doesn't tell me that she isn't mine this time. We both know she can't. She's been mine since that night in the bar. And little by little, she's figuring that shit out, too.

I nip her throat before reluctantly lowering her back to her feet.

"Why don't you go wait with Alice, angel? We need to shower before we head to the airport."

She narrows her eyes on me. "You know I could have stayed at home today, right?"

"And made me come all this way by myself?" I tease, smirking. "What kind of assistant are you?"

"The smart kind, Logan." She rolls her eyes at me. "And the tired kind."

"You can sleep on the plane, baby," I promise, reaching out to stroke her cheek as Jamison Peters appears at the end of the hallway, heading straight toward Jordan. Fuck. "Go ahead and go find Alice."

"Okay," she murmurs, turning in the opposite direction.

I watch to make sure she's heading off before glancing back toward Jordan in time to see him shove Jamison away from him. Motherfucker. Maybe we aren't playing nice tonight, after all.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Peyton

"Wake up, angel."

I groan as Logan's lips slide down the back of my neck, his breath tickling my ear. His body is pressed up against me in a long, delicious line, one big hand cupping my breast. The other is...

Oh, lord. He's got the other between my legs, gripping my pussy like it belongs to him.

"W-what are you doing in my bed, Logan?" I ask, my voice raspy.

"I'm not in your bed." His teeth close around the shell of my ear. "You're in mine."

Oh. Right. We didn't get back into town until the wee hours of the morning. Instead of forcing him to drive me home, I agreed to stay with him. The last thing I remember is laying my head back against the seat.

"Did you carry me to bed?"

"Mmhmm."

"Why am I in your bed?" I peel my eyes open, glancing down to confirm my suspicions. "And what happened to my clothes?"

"Borrowed them," he breathes against my skin, brushing his thumb over my nipple.

"You mean stole."

"No. Unlike the beer you stole, I plan to give the clothes back." His thumb brushes my nipple again, sending a wave of heat through me. "Just as soon as we're up for the day."

"Something is already up," I grumble pointedly.

His gritty chuckle should be criminal. It's sexy as hell. So is the way he rocks his hips against me, grinding his hard cock against my ass. "Your fault, baby. You're naked in my bed, and you were whimpering my name in your sleep."

"What? No, I wasn't." I probably was. He's haunting my dreams like the Ghost of Orgasms Past.

"No?" His fingers drift along my slit, teasing. "Then why are you so wet right now?"

"I was dreaming about—"

"If any name other than mine leaves your lips, I'm spanking your pussy before I fuck it," he growls.

"Hockey," I squeak, my core clenching hard. Why do I love how territorial and possessive he is? I'm a strong, independent woman. It should not be that fucking hot. It really shouldn't. And yet, every dang time he growls that I'm his or acts like a caveman, my body throws up a white flag and screams, 'Yes, king, yes!'

"Mm." He nips my throat, his chest rumbling against my back. "Was I sticking you against the boards?"

"Logan," I groan.

"Was I?"

"No. In the net."

"Good girl," he breathes, his fingers dancing along my slit again.

I groan softly, inching my legs apart.

"You want to come, don't you?"

I consider denying it, but what's the point? He already knows I do. He can feel the truth for himself. And frankly, I'm tired of denying and fighting the truth. I want this man more than I've ever wanted anything. Maybe I live long enough to regret it. Maybe he breaks my heart in the end.

Or maybe he doesn't.

Maybe I finally find out what it's like for someone to stay.

I want to know...and I want it to be him who stays. I want that more than I've ever wanted anything. I'm falling in love with him. Hell, maybe I'm already there. I don't know. All I know is that I don't want this to end. As scared as I am of putting my heart in his hands, I'm even more afraid of not taking that chance and spending the rest of my life regretting it.

He isn't my father. In fact, he's antithetical to my father in every single way. Logan is probably the best man I've ever met. He hides behind that devil-may-care persona. He raises hell and causes problems, does whatever he wants to do and drives me nuts, but he isn't an asshole. He isn't just another rich man taking what he wants. He's holding the whole world up on his shoulders, trying like hell to protect the people who matter to him. He's complicated and infuriating and bossy as hell, but he's all those things

because he cares. He cares a whole hell of a lot. And he understands me in a way no one ever has.

I'm not too combative or contrary for him. I'm not too stubborn, too awkward, too curvy, too untrusting. As far as he's concerned, every flaw I've got is just one more reason he likes me as much as he does. Every inch of me is one more inch he can't resist. I may be too much for guys like him, but I'm just right for him.

"No," I say.

He growls a wordless protest, pulling a smile to my lips.

"I want to make you come, Logan," I whisper, flipping around to face him.

His gorgeous blue eyes locked on my face, all sleepy and dilated with lust. His jaw is scruffy. He has a pillow crease on his cheek. He's rumpled and undone, and somehow, he's more damn gorgeous than ever.

I reach for his cock, holding his gaze. "I want you inside me again."

"Fuck." He bucks his hips into my hand, rolling me beneath him. "It's about goddamn time, angel. I was prepared to do desperate, unholy shit to get inside you again."

"Yeah?" I squeeze his cock, jerking him off. He's so damn big I can barely wrap my fist around him. "Like what?"

"Don't ask," he growls, attacking my throat. "You just decided you aren't pissed at me. I'm not fucking it up now."

"Logan Moreno," I tease, running my thumb over the head of his cock. "Were you thinking about defiling me while I was sleeping?"

"Yes," he snarls, dragging my nipple through his teeth before biting down. "It would have been so easy, sweet Peyton. You were dripping wet, begging for it."

I moan, my back arching from the bed.

"You probably wouldn't have even stopped me when you woke up wrapped around my cock," he grunts against my skin. "You would have just begged me to keep fucking you."

"Do it next time," I gasp.

"Fuck." A bead of cum spills from the head of his cock, rolling down my fingers. He practically flings himself down my body, ripping his dick from my hand. Before I can even protest, my legs are over his shoulders. "Oh, fuck yeah," he groans. "Look how pretty and pink."

"Logan," I whimper, grasping a handful of the blankets.

"Hush, baby. Let me eat in peace," he murmurs, flicking his tongue out to taste me.

I don't let him eat in peace. Not even close. Because that first lick seems to unleash a beast between my legs. He roars like he just tasted heaven and buries his face in my pussy.

There is no stifling my cries or holding them back as he consumes me. He licks and sucks and bites, fucking me with his tongue one minute and then lashing it against my clit the next.

I come and scream...and then come and scream again.

"Logan!" I shout, trying to squirm up the bed away from him when he moves lower,

flicking his tongue against my back entrance.

"Stop fighting me, Peyton," he growls, lashing an arm around my waist.

I sob wordlessly, squirming beneath him as he teases me with his tongue before replacing it with a finger.

"Relax. Let me in," he orders.

I sob again, nervous...too damn turned on to pretend I don't want this.

The tip of his finger slips in.

I whimper, pushing back against him.

"That's it," he croons. "Give me this greedy little hole too, angel. Make it mine."
More of his fingers slips in, stretching me. Filling me.

"Oh, God, Logan. That f-feels so good. Why does it feel so good?"

"Just wait. It's about to feel even better," he murmurs, pressing a kiss to my clit before he carefully shifts around until he's kneeling between my legs, his finger still inside me.

"Logan," I whisper. "I...I..."

"Easy, baby. I'm not taking that pretty little hole yet. I'm just going to have a little fun with it while I'm inside you." He rocks his hips so his cock bumps my clit. "I want to know how it feels to be everywhere at once, ruining you."

"Y-yet?"

He smirks, lining up at my entrance. "Yet, Peyton," he growls, slowly pushing inside me. "As in, one day soon, it won't just be my tongue or a finger in that perfect ass. It'll be my cock."

Oh my god.

"Don't pretend you don't love the thought. I feel you clamping down around me, already so close to coming all over me at just the thought." He surges forward, bottoming out in one delicious thrust.

"Am not," I lie.

"Fucking liar." He rocks his hips, pumping his finger in and out of me at the same pace. "You're desperate to know what it feels like, aren't you?"

"N-no." I bite my lip, fighting a sob. Trying to keep my eyes open as the onslaught of pleasure ricochets through my body in a way I've never felt. I'm full in a way I've never felt. And it is terrifyingly good.

"Little liar." His lips quirk into a grin as he fucks me, his eyes locked on my face. "I know you, baby. You're so fucking desperate for it that you're already on the verge of coming all over me."

"Then shut up and make me come," I retort, challenging and defying him because he loves it. Because, for some reason, the mouthier I am, the more it turns him on. He needs to be defied. He wants to work for it. Logan wasn't made for a meek, obedient woman. He was made for one like me.

No. He was made for me .

He growls softly, unholy fire turning his eyes into twin flames of burning midnight

blue. His hips slam into mine, pulling a loud moan from my lips.

"Is this what you want, baby?" he rasps. "You want me fucking you until you can't open that smart mouth to do anything but say my name?"

"Yes," I moan. That's precisely what I want.

"Good," he grunts, slowly pushing a second finger inside me. He fucks me like a storm then, pounding into me so ferociously I can't do anything but take it. His body surges into mine in powerful strikes that leave me breathless and shaking beneath him.

I come and scream...and then come and scream again.

He still doesn't stop.

He keeps on and on, fucking me until I can't remember my name. I can't remember anything but what it's like to have him all over me.

And my god, he is all over me. He licks and bites and sucks, swatting my breasts, wrapping his free hand around my throat. He fucks my ass with his fingers the whole time, telling me every filthy, delicious thing he's going to do to me.

He's a force of nature, set loose on me at my request, so damn powerful and fierce I know in my bones that I'm not going to survive him. He'll either leave me in ruins or sweep me away with him. Those are the only two options. I think they've always been the only two options.

"Please," I gasp when another orgasm looms up. I can't take it. If I fall again, there will be no putting me back together. "I can't."

"Yeah, you can." He buries his face in my throat, still driving into me again and again. His fingers twist and plunge, driving me to the brink of madness. "You can do anything, Peyton. So come on my fucking cock again and show me just how strong you really are."

"Logan," I whimper.

"I've got you, baby." His lips brush my skin. "I've always got you. Be a good girl and come."

I can't resist him. Since the very beginning, I haven't been able to resist him. So I throw my head back, spitting defiance and screaming my surrender as I submit to the inevitable, and fall to his power.

Powerful waves drag me under, drowning me in a sea of ecstasy.

But this time, I don't drown alone. He's right there with me, groaning my name and drowning with me. Making a mess of both of us in the process.

"Perfect," he whispers in my ear when the waves recede, spitting us out to gasp for breath. He wraps his big body around me, allowing me to use him like an anchor. "You're so goddamn perfect, Peyton."

Tears sting my eyes, a vise clamped around my heart. No one has ever said that to me before. And no one has ever meant it.

He does. I don't even have to ask to know...he does.

"Holy crap!" Serena cries, flinging her arms around me. "It's been eighty-four years, Peyton."

I laugh softly, squeezing her tightly. "Settle down, Rose. It has not. I was just home the day before yesterday."

"Yeah, for like five minutes." She pouts, releasing me. "And you were packing the whole time."

"Blame Logan."

We slide into the booth at the back of our favorite Thai restaurant, a tiny place wedged between a nail salon and an upscale boutique in a strip mall ten minutes from our apartment.

"You mean your boyfriend?"

"Crap." I squeeze my eyes closed, guilt pricking me. "I forgot to tell you."

"Uh, yeah!" She scrunches her face up at me. "It's fine, though. I already decided you were paying for dinner to make it up to me."

"Fair."

"I thought so. I even ordered for us." She grins, her eyes running over me in a sharp assessment. "You look good. Happy. Are you happy?"

"Yeah," I whisper, surprised just how much I mean it. I feel like I'm floating on cloud nine. "It's so weird."

"Being happy isn't weird. It's normal." She smiles sadly. "You just haven't had enough of it to know that, Peyton."

"That's not what I meant." I tuck hair behind my ears. "I mean, everything is so crazy."

I can't remember a single other time I was all over the news and wasn't stressing out about it. I haven't even looked this time."

"That's probably a good thing." She grimaces, her brows furrowed. "They were all over your life story before the game yesterday."

"They aren't now?" I ask, surprised.

"Not really." She shrugs. "Someone got a picture of the two of you kissing after the game. Now, they're all over that. The whole world is giddy because Logan Moreno is in love." She meets my gaze. "You should see the pictures of him watching you in the stands."

"He wasn't watching me in the stands. He isn't in love."

"Right. He just stands on the ice during every game, staring into the crowd, looking like he wants to storm through the boards and fu..." She breaks off with a little cough when our waitress appears, arms laden with bowls.

I shoot her a death glare, which she blatantly ignores. Naturally. Serena sees what she wants to see.

Was Logan really staring at me after the game? Hell. Probably. The man is always staring at me. And he's always wearing that look, that infuriatingly sexy I-want-to-pin-you-to-the-wall-and-fuck-you-dirty-before-I-snuggle-you look. That look is the reason I left the bar with him the night we met.

Is he in love with me?

You know he is , that demonic angel whispers. You're just too chicken to admit it.

I really hate when she's right. Logan is in love with me. I am afraid to admit it. He's... God, he's everything. And I've never had anything to lose before now. I'm so afraid I'm going to screw it up.

"Thank you," I murmur to our waitress when the petite woman places my bowl in front of me.

She shoots me a furtive glance and then scurries away.

"We should probably eat fast," I sigh when she whispers something to a coworker, who turns to look at me too. "I have a feeling I'm going to be a public spectacle soon."

"Shit," Serena mutters, her expression darkening. "Should we leave?"

"Absolutely not. I'm not going to hide just because I'm fake-dating the world's most infuriating goalie."

Serena chokes on a rice noodle. "Uh, fake dating? What?"

"Crap. I forgot to tell you that part too, huh?"

She glowers at me.

"He promised his sister to keep her out of the press, but a reporter is snooping around, asking questions about things that aren't really anyone's business. He told him that we were dating to throw him off," I explain quickly.

"Right," Serena says, smirking at me. "That's totally why he did it."

I shoot her a dirty look.

"That man is in love with you, Peyton. You can tell yourself it's fake all you want, but I've seen the photos. You can't fake that kind of adoration."

"You're delusional," I mumble, popping a piece of chicken into my mouth.

"Mmhmm. Keep telling yourself that." She bats her lashes at me. "But I have photo evidence to back me up. I also have that hickey you're trying to hide."

I slap my hand over the spot in question, heat rising to my cheeks.

Serena's evil laugh ripples across the restaurant.

"I hate you," I mutter, scowling at her.

"No, you don't."

"Now you sound like Logan."

"Smart guy. You should listen to him."

I narrow my eyes on her. "Since when are you on his team?"

"Uh, since you started glowing?" She cocks her head to the side, shooting me another one of those patented looks of hers. "I'm able to admit when I'm wrong, bestie. And I was wrong about him. He may be trouble, but I think he's precisely the kind of trouble you need. The real question is when you're going to quit denying it."

I glance down at my bowl, my heart pounding. It's a damn good question, isn't it?

"Maybe I already have," I finally whisper.

Serena squeals quietly.

I shoot her a quelling look, but she just shrugs unapologetically.

"I'm not apologizing for being happy for you. You deserve it." She scans my face, her gaze probing. "So he's really the one, huh?"

"Yeah." I clear my throat, nodding. "He's really the one."

"Have you told him that yet?"

I shake my head.

"Peyton," she says softly.

"I know, I know." I exhale a sharp breath. "It's on the list."

"Well, move it up," she advises.

"You don't think it's too soon?"

"Uh, who cares what I think? Who cares what anyone thinks? He's crazy about you. You're crazy about him. Go be happy." She makes a shooing motion at me, smiling brightly. "Seriously, be happy, Peyton. Who gives a crap what anyone else has to say? It's your life. You've already spent enough of it being held to standards that aren't yours. You don't owe anyone explanations. You don't have to measure up to anyone else's expectations. All you have to do is live on your own terms. If you're happy, that's the only thing that matters."

"When will I see you again?" Serena demands half an hour later as we linger outside of the restaurant.

"Um, I'm not sure. My boss is kind of a tyrant."

"You freaking love it," she says, laughing at me.

She's right, I do. Logan and I spent all morning going over his schedule and everything on his plate. There's so much.

Between games, practice, gym time, press commitments, time with his sister and nephew, and his brand endorsements, I honestly don't know how he juggles it. I was exhausted just reviewing his schedule.

Some days, he leaves at four in the morning and doesn't get home until well after midnight. I'm already rearranging as much as I can to make sure that isn't happening any more than is strictly necessary. He's a professional athlete. He needs rest or he's going to crash hard.

Endorsement meetings, the press, and everything that isn't strictly essential can wait until non-game days. Those are strictly off limits to anyone but family, the team, and game-related press commitments. So are travel days. He shouldn't be running straight from the airport to a meeting because some brand executive couldn't respect his time.

When I told him that, he grinned and told me that I'm sexy as fuck when I'm telling him how to live his life. And then he put me on his cock and told me how to live mine.

We're not allowed to work naked anymore. Or in bed. Honestly, we probably shouldn't be allowed to work in the same general vicinity. I accomplished way more after he ran off to practice.

"Want to come to the game with me on Thursday?"

"Uh, obviously!" Serena cries.

I laugh quietly. "I'll call you to plan it if I don't see you before then."

"You won't see me. Your fake boyfriend is going to keep you busy." She wiggles her brows at me.

We hug before parting ways.

Halfway to my car, someone shouts my name. Like an idiot, I turn...only to be blinded by a bright flash of light.

I lose my footing, stumbling into the guy walking next to me.

"Careful, sweetheart," he murmurs, grabbing me before I manage to knock us both to the ground.

"Thank you. I'm sorry." I blink up at him, trying to clear the spots from my eyes. It's hard to do when bright lights still flash. Gosh damn it. I knew our waitress was not going to be discreet!

"It's all good." The man grins down at me, his gray eyes flickering toward the photographer on the opposite side of the street. He looks oddly familiar. Not nearly as gorgeous as Logan, but definitely up there. "Uh, do you need me to walk you to your car or something?"

"No, thank you," I murmur, politely untangling myself from his arms.

"You sure? The prick over there looks kinda fucking relentless."

"I'm sure." I sigh, shooting a furtive glance in his direction. "Trust me, you walking

me anywhere will only do more harm than good."

"If you say so." He shrugs before shooting me a wink and then strolling away.

"Peyton!" the cameraman across the street shouts at me. "How do you know Austin?"

Austin? Who the hell is Austin?

"Mr. Hawkes, does Logan Moreno know you're meeting up with his girlfriend behind his back?" the cameraman shouts, glancing at the guy who just kept me from falling on my ass.

I startle at the question, turning to gape at the man's retreating back. That's how I know him! He's on billboards all over the city. He's the frigging quarterback for the Washington Monuments.

"Great," I mutter, stomping toward my car as the paparazzi continue shouting questions at me. "Just great."

Why does the universe frigging hate me?

Logan isn't home when I get back to his place. I hop in the shower and then curl up on his bed before reluctantly pulling out my phone to see what the world is saying about the two of us.

I'm not entirely surprised to find that the photographer from outside the restaurant has already posted photos of Austin saving me from falling on my ass. But I'm mad as hell when I see the headline they chose to go along with said photos.

Like Father, Like Daughter?

I skim the article from Celebrity Teatime, my blood boiling. They're trying to make it sound like I was out meeting up with Austin. The photos show him with his arms around me. Austin is grinning at me. I'm staring up at him. Coupled with the headline, it looks bad. Really bad.

"Dammit!" I cry, tossing my phone across the room as tears well in my eyes. I fling myself backward and then curl up in a ball around Logan's pillow, taking deep breaths.

It's like I just can't escape my father. No matter what I do, I'll always be an affair baby. I'll always be the kid he created but didn't want. I'll never be good enough.

I'm so damn tired of it.

And now, they're dragging Logan into it too. It's not me they're laughing at this time. It's him. They expect me to be a horrible person. My mom slept with a married man. As far as the world is concerned, being worthless is encoded in my DNA. But Logan doesn't deserve to be dragged down with me.

And I don't deserve their crap, either. I've never done anything to deserve it. I can't help the way I was born. The only one responsible for cheating on his wife is the one they continue to give a free pass. It's infuriating!

"Baby?" Logan calls from the doorway.

I snifle, leaping to my feet. "It isn't true!"

He must notice the tears on my face because he curses and strides toward me, his expression downright lethal. "What happened?"

"I... They..." I groan, burying my face in his throat. "It isn't true, Logan. I wasn't

cheating on you."

"What the fuck?" he mutters, tipping my head back. His gaze runs across my face, nothing but concern written there. "Who the fuck said you were cheating on me?"

"The waitress at the restaurant called Celebrity Teatime," I whisper. "Some photographer showed up when I was leaving. He started snapping photos. I tripped into a guy. I nearly knocked us both over, but he kept us on our feet and made sure I was okay. Then the freaking photographer started asking me if you knew I was meeting up with him behind your back. I guess he was Austin Hawkes."

Logan growls softly.

"I didn't even know who he was until the stupid photographer started shouting his name," I mutter. "But they're already publishing stories, saying I'm just like my dad." My bottom lip quivers. "They think you're an i-idiot for being with me."

"Fuck them," he snarls, scooping me up into his arms. He strides toward the bed before settling against the headboard with me against his chest. "I've never given a flying fuck what they had to say about me before, do you think I care now?"

"You should," I whisper. "They're never going to stop pointing out that I don't deserve you."

He cranes my head back, forcing me to look at him. "Do you really believe that bullshit?"

"I..." I swallow nervously. "I don't know."

"Well, I do." He presses his lips to mine, his kiss firm and unyielding. "You're worthy exactly as you are. You aren't your father. They don't get to judge you because of his

sins, baby. Fuck that noise. If they want to judge someone, they can walk their ignorant asses over to Capital Hill and judge that prick. He's the motherfucker who got your mom pregnant and then abandoned both of you. And he's the one who let you suffer in foster care instead of stepping up when you needed him most."

"I wish it worked that way."

"Why can't it?" he asks me. "Have you ever told the world what a piece of shit he really is?"

"I..." I shake my head.

"Didn't think so. You just kept quiet and let them lob all that bullshit at you because they were too goddamn cowardly to lob it at the person who deserved it."

"What else was I supposed to do?" I whisper. "I was just a kid, Logan. I didn't even really understand what was happening until my mom died. And then they tossed me into a group home. I think that's the first time I really understood just how fucked up the whole situation was. The kids there..." I swallow. "What happened to my mom was all over the news. They made my life hell because I had this rich father who didn't want me."

"Jesus," Logan grunts, pulling me closer.

"I got myself kicked out of there pretty quickly. But the second home wasn't any better than the first. So they sent me to a family. I guess once the family realized my father wasn't going to change his mind and swoop in with a big check, they didn't have any use for me anymore either, so it was on to the next." I rest my head against his chest, sighing. "I got good at getting myself booted out of places before they decided they didn't want me. It was easier that way. As soon as I turned eighteen, I took my little stipend and my scholarship and raced off to college."

"It's time to stop running, angel," he murmurs, stroking his hand down my back. "And it's time to let yourself believe that there is a place for you. There are people for you. It's right fucking here. I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere. I don't give a flying fuck what they say. None of it fucking matters. This matters." He cups the back of my head, tilting it until I'm forced to look up at him. "We matter, Peyton."

"I..." I lick my lips and then nod.

"You going to tell them to fuck off and go harass the prick who actually cheated next time they bother you?" he asks, arching a brow at me.

"Maybe."

He grins. "Wanna get married and give them something else to talk about instead?"

I gape at him, my eyes wide. "What? No. We can't get married!"

He laughs quietly, pulling me back up against him. "Next time I ask, you'll say yes, baby. Just wait."

I groan, pressing my face to his throat. "I'm too something to deal with this right now, Logan."

"Too something, huh?" His hand slides down my back to my ass. "I'll show you exactly what you are, angel."

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Logan

"Why the fuck is Joaquin telling everyone that you decked a photographer last night?" Jordan asks, dropping onto the bench beside me.

I glance over at him, shrugging silently.

"Jesus Christ, Logan." He grabs my hand, examining my knuckles. "You did hit a photographer last night, didn't you?"

"Maybe." I absolutely hit a photographer last night. The same prick who took those photos of Peyton and made her cry showed up at the bar as Joaquin and I were getting ready to leave. He shoved his fucking camera in my face, asking if I knew Peyton was fucking Austin Hawkes.

I warned him to back off. He wouldn't listen. He just kept encroaching, shoving that damn camera in my face, bumping into me. So I decked him.

Next time, he'll listen.

Oh, he'll probably try to sue me for assault. Whatever. The police came out and took his statement. They took mine too. He was trespassing. He was in my personal space harassing me. And he wouldn't back the fuck off. Everyone agreed that he pushed me first, so I didn't go to jail.

"Coach is going to murder you when he finds out."

"Who said he's going to find out?" I pull my hand away.

"Motherfucker, you took Joaquin with you." Jordan glowers at me. "The whole goddamn arena is going to know before the end of the day. Believe me, Coach is going to find out. And he's already pissed at you because your ugly mug is all over the news right now."

"He knew what he was getting when he signed me," I mutter. "He signed me anyway. Besides, I didn't take Joaquin anywhere. The fucking cameraman showed up when we were leaving the bar."

Jordan laughs abruptly, shaking his head. "I'm guessing he was the prick who took photos of your girl the other day?"

I scowl at him.

"Thought so."

"Does she know?"

"Hell no." She went back to her place after the game last night to hang out with her roommate. And I haven't seen her yet this morning. I'm not entirely sure what I'm going to tell her when I do see her.

I don't regret hitting the motherfucker. He had it coming for making her cry. She isn't a cheater. She damn sure isn't like her father. And I'll be damned if I stand around and let anyone say she is.

Peyton is a fucking goddess. No one gets to treat her like shit unless they want to answer to me. Especially since I'm the one who got her into this. She shouldn't have to deal with this bullshit because of me.

"One of these days, you're going to bite off more than you can chew," Jordan says, yanking his practice jersey on over his head. "I just hope I'm around to..." He trails off when the door slams open and Peyton storms in, her skirt swishing around her legs. "Well, shit." He laughs quietly. "Looks like that day might be today."

"You," Peyton growls, those forest green eyes narrowing on me. "Are in so much trouble."

"Good morning to you too, baby."

"Do not call me that right now, Logan."

Jordan slaps me on the back. "That's my cue to get the fuck out of here. RIP, motherfucker."

I shoot him a dirty look.

He loops his skates over his shoulder and then saunters toward the door, leaving plenty of space between the two of them, like he's scared she might fucking bite him if he gets too close. Hell, the way she's looking right now, she actually might. She is pissed.

She waits until the door closes behind him and then stomps toward me, her tits bouncing with every step. It's a hell of a time for my cock to be this hard...and yet...here I sit. Hard as a goddamn rock.

"You got in a fight last night?" she says once she's standing in front of me, her hands on her hips. Breathing fire.

"It wasn't much of a fight, angel. He wouldn't get out of my face. I hit him. End of story."

Wrong thing to say, apparently. Her eyes narrow further.

"Who was he?"

"Doesn't matter."

"Who was he, Logan?"

"A photographer."

"A photographer. You mean the one who took those pictures of me the other day, don't you?"

"Is there an answer here that isn't going to piss you off?" I ask, eyeing her warily.

"Because the truth isn't going to accomplish that, baby."

"Jesus, Logan," she groans, tilting her head back. She's quiet for a moment. I think she's counting. "Do you plan to hit every photographer who hurts my feelings?"

"Depends."

She meets my gaze, a question in her eye.

"If they make you cry? Yeah, I might hit every single fucking one of them. If they print bullshit comparing you to your father? Yeah, might hit them then, too. If they fucking lie about you? Yeah, might hit them then, too." I haul myself to my feet, getting up in her personal space. "I'm not apologizing for protecting you, Peyton. If that's what you expect, it's not fucking happening."

"You have a career you need to worry about protecting," she growls, spinning on her heel. "Have you ever thought about doing that instead of trying to be the freaking

hero all the time?"

I grab her before she can storm for the door, hauling her up against my chest. I spin, pressing her up against the wall. "Fuck my career," I snarl, sinking my teeth into her throat. Christ, she drives me up the goddamn wall. "Fuck everything, Peyton. I'll tear it all down if it means keeping you."

"Maybe I don't want to be kept if it means watching you blow your life up," she snaps, trying to buck me off her.

Yeah, to hell with that. I'm not letting her go. Not now. Not ever.

"You drive me fucking crazy," I growl, biting her again.

"Yeah, well, I hate you," she snaps right back at me.

"Oh, yeah?" I rip her skirt up her legs, shoving my hand beneath it. "Is that why you're so fucking wet right now? Because you hate me so goddamn much?"

"Go to hell."

"I'm already there, baby. Or haven't you been paying attention?" I shove my hand inside her panties, kicking her legs apart. "Every minute I'm not inside you is my own personal hell."

She pushes back against me, groaning.

I bury my face in her throat, dragging my boxers down with my free hand to release my aching cock. The other is hard at work between her legs, my thumb against her clit as I press two fingers inside of her, fucking her with them.

"This right here? This is heaven, Peyton," I rasp against her ear. "This greedy little cunt and your smart-ass mouth is my personal goddamn paradise."

"Shut up," she mutters.

"Fucking make me."

She turns on me with a growl, shoving me back against the wall this time. Something feral lights her eyes, lust stamped across every line of her perfect face as she immediately drops to her knees, wrapping one hand around my shaft.

"Fuck!" I roar, slamming my hand back against the wall as she plunges down on me, taking me so far she chokes.

"That's the sound I like to hear, Logan," she says, pulling back with a satisfied smirk. "You, desperate and groaning."

"Put your mouth back on my cock, angel. Now," I snarl.

"Go to hell." She jerks me off in that perfect hand, her eyes locked on my face. "You don't get to tell me what to do. I decide when to suck your cock. I decide if I want to ride it."

"Keep being a mouthy little brat," I growl. "I'll bend you over the fucking bench and spank your gorgeous ass while you beg me to let you ride it."

"You wish."

"Yeah, I do," I say. "Every minute of the day, Peyton. What part of that aren't you getting? You're the only goddamn thing I think about."

She plunges down on me again, and I realize her game. She's fighting like hell to stay mad, and every time I say something sweet, she wavers. She forgets why she's so pissed at me. And she's desperate to stay mad. Because so long as she's mad, she doesn't have to admit that she fucking loves me, too. She doesn't have to admit that she's so worried about me ruining my career because she's spent her whole damn life being told that she'll never deserve anything except the shit people have flung at her since before she was born. And she doesn't have to admit that she's scared.

Peyton doesn't do scared. She does pissed. She does sassy. She does ball-busting and mouthy. But scared? Nothing makes her skin crawl more than fear. And nothing makes her more afraid than the thought of losing me.

She plunges down on me again and then again, taking me as far as she can before she chokes and has to back off.

"Is that all you've got, baby?" I ask, smirking down at her. Giving her exactly what she needs because of fucking course I do. I'm hers in every way. My heart beats for her. It has since the minute I met her...and I know all the way to my bones that it always will. She owns me, body and soul.

Her eyes narrow, her grip tightening. She sucks me into her mouth again, her tongue sliding down my shaft.

My eyes threaten to roll back in my head. I grunt quietly; my eyes locked on her face. She's a goddess on her knees as she works me over, tormenting me with that perfect fucking mouth. And I let her. I egg her on, taunting her until I can't take it anymore.

She's panting when I pluck her up from the floor, shoving her up against the wall. My lips come down on hers, branding my claim against her perfect mouth.

"Get your legs around my waist," I growl. "Now."

She pulls my hair in response.

I snarl, slamming myself inside her. And Christ, it's like coming home. She's tight, wet perfection around my cock, gripping me like she's never going to let go.

"Do you hate me now, Peyton?" I ask, burying my face in her throat to kiss and bite everywhere I can reach.

"No. I mean yes."

"Fucking liar." I pound into her, fucking her so hard I can't breathe. But neither can she. All she can do is claw those little nails down my back and take it. "You're so goddamn in love with me that it terrifies you."

"Yeah? And you think you aren't, Logan?" She pulls my hair again, yanking my head to the side to kiss me. "You're fucking obsessed with me."

She has no idea just how obsessed I am. Hitting a photographer is just scratching the surface of the shit I'd do for her. But I don't tell her that because that isn't what she needs to hear right now. Right now, she needs to feel like she has a little bit of control. She needs me to be bossy and rude and play her game.

Shit, maybe that's what I need too. Because I don't know how the fuck else I'm supposed to get through to her and make her realize that I'm not going anywhere. No matter how hard she fights, I'm not going anywhere. I'll be right here, hitting photographers and fighting her infuriating little ass until the cows come home.

"Shut the fuck up and come on my cock like a good girl, Peyton," I snarl, biting her lip. "Before I decide not to let you come at all."

"Shut up and make me."

Challenge accepted.

I slip my hand between our bodies, pounding into her while I play with her hard little clit. She gasps, her head falling back against the wall.

"I...I..."

"Do it. Now," I order, trying to hold off my own orgasm as her inner muscle clench and flutter all up and down my shaft.

She whimpers my name, her eyes rolling back.

I growl, yanking her down on me as she shatters, sending me hurtling over the edge with her. Her pussy milks the cum from my balls, draining every drop inside her perfect body.

My goddamn knees give out.

I spin, collapsing down the wall with her in my arms.

"Logan," she whispers, pressing her face to my throat. Shaking.

I hold her tightly, breathing her in.

"Logan, I..." She tips her head back, staring up at me. The truth is right there in her eyes, blazing like twin stars. "I lo—"

The locker room door opens.

"Oh, shit," Diego says.

I yank Peyton's skirt down over her ass, turning a dark glower on my teammate.

"Get the fuck out, Diego."

He backs out slowly, his hands in the air and a smirk on his face. But the damage is already done. As soon as the door closes behind him, Peyton slides from my lap, adjusting her skirt.

Fucking hell.

"Peyton, baby."

She avoids my gaze.

"Dammit, Peyton," I growl, hauling myself to my feet. "Talk to me."

"And say what?" She spins to face me. "What do you want me to say, Logan? That I'm in love with you? Fine, done. I'm in love with you! I've been in love with you from the beginning!"

"Fuck," I growl, reaching for her. It's about goddamn time she finally admitted it.

"But I don't need a hero," she cries, darting out of my reach. "And it's not okay that you're willing to destroy everything you've worked for just to protect me when I never asked for that."

"It's my job to protect you."

"No. It's your job to love me," she says sadly. "And I think Lauren would tell you the same thing if you asked her, but you won't. Because you're so hellbent on beating yourself up that you do the same thing to her, too."

"What does that mean?" I ask, narrowing my eyes at her.

"It means..." She sighs, scraping her hair back into a quick bun. "It means that I finally figured you out. You didn't hit that photographer because you were trying to protect me, Logan. You hit him because you felt guilty."

"Bullshit," I growl.

"You know it's true," she says quietly. "It's what you've been doing with Lauren for years. You punish yourself, and hope it'll make her life better. But it doesn't work that way. All you're doing is destroying yourself and teaching her that she isn't strong enough to fight her own battles. The last thing she needs is to believe that she's a coward who can't face whatever life throws at her." She turns for the door, sighing. "I don't need that, either. The last thing I need is for the man I love to throw himself in front of me every single time my past comes up. I can't be the reason you beat yourself up and get yourself in trouble. I won't be. That reputation has haunted me long enough, Logan. If you're going to love me, then love me. Be my partner. But don't ask me to let you be a martyr. Don't give my past and my father that much power over our future when you're the one who convinced me that I was ready to stop running."

She sails through the door, leaving me standing in the middle of the locker room.

"Fuck!" I growl, slamming my hand down against the wall.

"Lariat." I drop into the booth beside Emilia later that night, shooting her a grin. "Haven't seen you around the locker room lately."

We're at a bar downtown, hanging out before we have to fly out for another game in the morning. Peyton came with us, but she's barely speaking to me. She's still pissed. Actually, that isn't true. She's hurt.

It's my own damn fault. I've spent all day thinking about what she said. She wasn't wrong. About any of it. I do punish myself because I feel guilty. I have royally fucked things up. And I don't have the first clue how to start fixing them now. But I've gotta do it. For her sake, for Lauren's sake...and for mine. Because I can't spend the rest of my goddamn career throwing myself on the sword every time motherfuckers like Montaque or that photographer come around.

If that shit is going to cost me Peyton, I have to find a different way. She told me she loves me today. I know how fucking scared she was to say it, but she said it anyway. She actually stood there and told me exactly how she feels, despite her fears, despite her insecurities, despite all of it. I've never been prouder than I was today. And I've never felt like a bigger asshole, either.

I won't be the reason she feels like she isn't enough. I refuse to let her live with guilt, thinking she's fucking up my life every time I do something wrong because I can't let go of my guilt. So if fixing my shit is what I have to do to prove to her that I can give her the future she sees with me, I'll find a way to do it.

And I'm guessing the tipsy little shrink sitting beside me can help me sort my shit out.

"And I haven't seen you in my office," Emilia retorts, eyeing me over the rim of her wineglass. "But I know you've been getting my emails. You've responded to them."

"Yeah, and I responded no." I smirk at her, fucking with her because I can't resist. She's wild when she's wound up. "That means I'm not coming, Doc."

Peyton's lips pull down into a frown, disappointment flowing through her expression. Fuck. I never can quit when I'm ahead, can I?

"Not a doctor. But fine, then I guess I'll be seeing you in the locker room again soon." Emilia eyes me levelly, refusing to give up that easily. She's a dog with a bone. I'm

pretty sure she sends me seven email invitations a day to meet with her. It has to be a program auto-sending them because there's no goddamn way she has that kind of time.

"Jesus Christ," Jordan growls from the opposite side of the table, scowling at me. "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," Emilia agrees sweetly.

Peyton snorts...which I assume is her agreeing.

"You are a little shit-stirrer, aren't you?" I ask Emilia, amused.

"Takes real to recognize real, Moreno."

Archer laughs abruptly from my other side. "She has you pegged to a fucking T, man."

"Fine. I'll consider dropping by your office." I hold up a finger. "But only to say hey. Not to discuss shit."

"Fine. Then I'll consider not barging into the locker room again," Emilia says sweetly.

Peyton wraps her arms around herself, leaning her head back against the booth. I try to catch her eye to ask if she's okay, but she turns away from me, staring out at the bar. Goddammit.

Conversation flows around me while I stare at her, willing her to look at me. She stubbornly refuses, icing me out like she has all damn day. I don't like it much. Frankly, I fucking hate it.

I used to think the worst thing in the world would be disappointing Lauren. Turns out, it's disappointing the pretty little goddess sitting across from me. That shit stings in ways I didn't even know was possible.

"We should all head out," Archer says, setting his beer on the table. "Flight leaves early in the morning."

"Don't remind me," I growl, glancing across the table at Peyton again. I'm not ready to fly out in the morning when I'm not entirely convinced she'll be getting on that plane with me. "You ready to go, angel?"

"Stop calling me that, Logan."

"Sure." I shrug. "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 in my direction before stomping toward the door.

"Shit," I mumble, hopping up as laughter ripples around the table.

"Stop antagonizing her, man," Micah says. "You're only making it worse for yourself."

"Fucking clearly," I sigh, pinching the bridge of my nose as I take off after her.

I catch up to her just outside the door, spinning her around to face me. The watery sheen in her eyes sends my heart slamming against my ribcage.

"Baby," I groan.

"Let me go," she growls, trying to yank free.

"Never." I scoop her up in my arms.

She mutters under her breath, probably cursing me to hell and back, as I stomp toward the parking deck. I don't stop moving until we're at the truck and she's inside, her legs dangling out as I crowd her.

"I'm an asshole," I say quietly, brushing away the tears on her cheeks.

"The problem is that you actually believe that." She smiles sadly. "You're the best man I've ever met, Logan. When are you going to let yourself believe it?"

I groan quietly, thrusting my hand into her hair to tip her head back. My mouth comes down on hers, a desperate edge to the kiss. She moans, kissing me back the same way. We're fire and ice, steaming everywhere we touch.

"I love you," I breathe against her lips.

"I know." She presses her face up against my throat, sighing sweetly. "I love you too."

"But you're still pissed."

"You hit a photographer. I may not know much about hockey, but I'm not stupid," she mutters against my skin. "I know how bad that could be for you."

"I'm going to talk to Emilia."

"Yeah, about the weather or whatever ridiculous thing that pops into your head."

"No." I tip her head back, forcing her to meet my gaze. "I'm going to talk to her about my shit, angel." I sigh. "You were right today. I do lash out because I feel fucking

guilty. Everything has been handed to me my entire goddamn life. And because it's handed to me, people like you and Lauren end up being collateral damage. It's fucked up."

"That doesn't make it your fault, Logan. You're responsible for how you treat us, not for how the rest of the world does. You can't police other people."

"I know," I sigh. "Doesn't mean I fucking like it."

"Of course you don't." She smiles up at me. "That's who you are. You want to fight everyone's battles and protect everyone, and you feel responsible when you can't because you're one of the good ones. But that isn't what I need from you. I just need you to love me despite what they say. And I need you to keep reminding me that I can handle whatever they say."

"You can," I growl. "Christ, baby. Do you have any idea how goddamn strong you are?"

"I'm...finally figuring that out, actually."

"Good."

"It's because of you, you know," she murmurs. "Because you push and you push and you push and you never stop pushing."

"Why the fuck would I stop if it means letting you run? Fuck that." I brush my thumb over her bottom lip, bouncing my forehead gently against hers. "You were stuck with me the second you let me inside that perfect little body the first time."

"Logan," she groans.

"I mean it, Peyton. I knew then that I was home."

"Speaking of..." She waggles her brows at me. "Want to go home and have make up sex?"

"Hell yes," I growl before shaking my head. "But I can't. There's something I need to do first."

She meets my gaze, searching. "Lauren," she whispers after a moment.

"Yeah. Fuck." I expel a breath. I've put it off for too long already. She and I need to talk.

"Do you want me to go with you?"

Christ, I love her. In ways I can't even define and for a million little reasons just like that. She gets me in ways no one ever has, and she has my back, no matter what. Even what it means telling me what I don't want to hear, she's behind me the whole way. If I'm the best man she's ever met, it's because she's turned me into him.

"As much as I'd love that, I think this is something I need to do myself, baby," I murmur regretfully, brushing my lips across hers. "But will you stay with me tonight? I need you in my bed."

"I need to be in your bed."

"Fuck," I groan, kissing her again. "Let's go before I decide to put this off again."

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Logan

By the time I get back to the city from Roland and Lauren's place, it's after three in the morning. Peyton is curled up in bed, snuggling my pillow, completely naked. She's a goddess in moonlight, her hair shining like gold.

I groan at the sight of her creamy thigh where it's slipping from the blankets and strip my shirt off over my head. My pants go next, my eyes locked on her the entire time. My cock throbs when she moans my name, shifting restlessly.

I stalk across the room, sliding onto the bed behind her. Even in her sleep, she seems to know I'm there. She immediately scoots back against me, snuggling in against my chest with a cute little sigh.

Her ass brushes my cock.

I should behave and let her sleep.

But I don't.

I gently lift her leg, draping it back over mine...opening her up to me. My dick nudges against her hot little cunt, but I don't slip it in. Not yet. I play with her instead, nuzzling my face against her throat as I stroke her clit.

She moans in her sleep, still dreaming about me.

Christ, I'd pay a fortune for five minutes to walk through her dreams just to see what

naughty things she thinks. I already know they're probably kinky as hell. I want to bring every single one of them to life.

Starting with this one. She didn't give me permission to fuck her while she was sleeping for the hell of it. She did it because she wants it.

I notch my cock at her entrance, slowly pushing inside her.

"Fuck," I groan, watching her face. She's so fucking beautiful. Even asleep, she's stunning. I grind my thumb against her clit again, rocking into her in slow pulses.

She moans again, slowly coming awake as I fuck her.

"Mm, Logan," she whispers, tipping her head back against my chest. "I thought I was dreaming."

"You are," I murmur, nipping her shoulder. "Just close your eyes, sweet

Peyton. Let me take care of you."

She whimpers, arching against me.

I touch and fuck her, driving her higher and higher with my lips against her ear, telling her how perfect she feels. How tight she is. How goddamn beautiful she is.

She rocks back against me, meeting every thrust with a soft moan.

"I'm so close," she groans.

"You think I don't know?" I shift slightly, changing the angle so I can go deeper.

"You think I can't feel how ready you are to fall apart all over my cock, angel?"

I slip my hand lower, teasing her perfect little asshole.

She whimpers, pushing back against my hand.

"I love you," I whisper.

She topples over the edge, crying out my name.

I follow with a groan, driving into her again and again as her body milks my cock, stealing every last fucking drop.

"I love you too," she whispers.

"Fuck." I nip her throat. "I'm going to need you to say that at least nine thousand times a day from now on, Peyton."

"Mm, no."

I bite her, making her body shake with laughter.

And then she sobers, turning to face me. One hand rises, drifting down my face. "How did it go?"

I capture her wrist, kissing her palm. "It went...surprisingly well," I say, dragging my teeth down her wrist. "Better than I expected." I meet her gaze, arching a brow. "Maybe you should be a shrink. You're perceptive as hell."

"She's ready to talk, isn't she?"

"She...yeah," I mutter, shaking my head. "She's been ready for a while; she just didn't know how to tell me. Said she didn't want everything I did to be for nothing."

"She loves you," Peyton says softly.

"Yeah, I know." I blow out a breath. Lauren and I talked for a long fucking time. Hell, we cried. And we ultimately decided that Charles Montague doesn't get to tell her story. She does. She's been talking to her therapist about it a lot over the last few months.

She said having Lachlan made her realize that she's been hiding from her diagnosis for a long time and using me a shield. She doesn't want to do that anymore. She doesn't care what people say anymore because it won't change anything.

She isn't her illness. She isn't my poor little schizophrenic sister. She's Lauren. She's Lachlan's mom. She's a woman who has overcome everything life has thrown at her and still found her way. She's found peace in her life. The press can't shake that. And she knows nothing they say can rip Lachlan from her arms. She has the support system she needs. She's on her meds. She sees her therapists and doctors.

And she isn't afraid to be alone with Lachlan because she doesn't trust herself. She's afraid because the new meds still make her groggy and sluggish at night. She's scared he'll need her, and she won't hear him.

I guess that happened right after she got home. By the time she finally woke up, he was soaked through and screaming, and she felt like a horrible mother.

Roland felt like an asshole when she said that. Hell, I did, too. Had she told us, we would have handled it months ago, but she didn't want it to be one more thing we worried about. She should know by now that Roland fucking loves her. He's always going to worry. And so will I.

Roland is hiring a night nurse to help alleviate her mind when he's out of town for work, and she and Lachlan can always come and stay here if she really needs the

help. But she doesn't need me. She never really did.

She's just trying to be a good mom the best way she knows how, but hell. She's always been that. From the moment she found out she was pregnant, she's done everything in her power to put Lachlan first.

She kept apologizing to me, but she doesn't have anything to apologize for. All she ever did was ask me to keep her out of the press. I'm the one who decided to act like an asshole to accomplish it. That's on me, not her. My guilt isn't her doing. That's something I need to work through myself.

If she and Peyton can handle their shit...well, I damn well better handle mine. I owe it to both of them. I owe it to myself. I won't be the thing holding either of them back. Fuck that noise.

"I'm going to call Alice in the morning and ask her to set something up," I murmur to Peyton. "We'll release a statement or something." I'm sure Alice will have a blast with that. She can't fucking stand Montague. Any chance she can take to screw him over and make him look like an asshole, she's going to take.

I don't feel sorry for him. When you make a career out of dropping bombs into people's lives, you should really prepare for a few to be aimed your way.

"I think we should say something about my father too," Peyton says, snuggling up against me.

"Yeah? What do you want to say, angel?"

"That I'm not him and that if people want to know about him, they should ask him because a man who abandons a woman he got pregnant and then leaves his child in foster care after that woman is murdered is no father of mine," she says. "What do

you think?"

I press my lips to her head, smiling. "I think that's exactly what you should say if that's how you feel."

"It'll probably top the photos of you creeper staring at me when you were supposed to be watching the puck."

"Creeper staring?"

"Mmhmm. I saw the photos, Logan Moreno. You were all up in my business."

I chuckle, dragging her on top of me. "I'll show you all up in your business ," I growl, grabbing her ass.

"Bring it on," she breathes, pressing her lips to mine.

I kiss her hard, rolling her underneath me.

"Thank you," I whisper.

"Um, you don't have to thank me for having sex with you. It's basically the only exercise I plan to do for the next sixty years or so," she says, hitching her legs around my waist.

"That is not what I was thanking you for, smart ass."

"Oh." She shoots me a cheeky grin. "Then, you're welcome."

I dip my head, biting her bottom lip.

Christ, I love this woman.

Peyton

"Get on the bus with me, baby," Logan growls, nuzzling my throat as we stand against the side of his truck outside the arena early the next morning. "You know you don't want to sleep without me tonight."

"You hog half the bed and ninety percent of the covers, Logan. I'll sleep just fine in that big bed all by myself."

He squeezes my cheek, biting me gently. "I'm sick. I can't play."

My body shakes with laughter. "You are such a liar."

He fake coughs, which only makes me laugh harder.

"Get your ridiculous ass on the bus, Logan. I'm not flying out with you. I have things to do."

"What kind of things?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Yes, actually, I would." He tips my head back, meeting my gaze. That damn smirk makes my stomach dip and spin. "You've already taken a wrecking ball to my schedule. I'd really like to know what fresh hell is going to await my return."

"Oh." I beam at him. "I'm signing you up for anger management classes."

"You wouldn't," he growls, his smirk slipping.

"I am actually." I pat him on the chest. "I already ran it by Alice and Coach this morning. They think it's a brilliant idea to help get management off your butt over punching a photographer."

"You're evil."

"You did the crime." I shrug, completely unrepentant. "Now, you gotta do the time."

"Can't I do community service or some shit instead?"

"That's on the agenda, too. We're rehabbing your image. And Alice is already collecting witness statements from everyone who saw what happened. That way, once the police report leaks, we have a whole list of people willing to stand up and say that you didn't start that fight." I narrow my eyes on him. "But this better be the last fight, Logan. I mean it."

"No can do, sweet Peyton." He brushes his lips across my forehead. "If shit goes down on the ice, I'm throwing elbows."

I roll my eyes at him. "I meant off the ice. Hockey fights don't count. Everyone knows that."

"Hockey fights, huh?" He smirks at me.

"Isn't that what they're called?"

"Sure, baby. We'll go with that."

I glare at him.

"Stop glaring and kiss me, Peyton."

"Stop being bossy and make me."

"I'll show you bossy in a...motherfucker," he growls, going rigid. "What is that prick doing here?"

I crane my head, trying to see who he's talking about, but I don't even get a chance before he practically hauls me across the parking lot. We're halfway to Charles Montaque before I see him.

Great. Just who I wanted to deal with this morning.

"What the fuck are you doing here, Montaque?" Logan growls, planting himself in front of the smaller man.

"Logan," Montaque says. "I'm not here for you."

"Don't care. You aren't welcome. We're all tired of your bullshit."

"I'm just doing my job."

"Right," Logan snorts. "Harassing our families isn't your fucking job, you prick."

"I'm not harassing your family. I've never spoken to anyone in your family, Logan. I was simply following up on a rumor for a story." Montaque's gaze flickers to mine. "There are a lot of those flying around about you right now."

"Don't even look at her," Logan says, a warning growl rumbling from his lips.

I squeeze his hand, trying to settle him down before he ends up punching someone

else. That's the last thing we need right now. "Let him look," I say softly.

Logan shoots a sharp look in my direction.

"Let him look," I say again. "If he wants a story about a family so bad, I have a quote for him."

"Peyton..."

"It's okay." I smile up at Logan in reassurance before glancing back at Montaque. "Do you want my quote?"

"Uh...." His gaze flickers to Logan and then back to me. "Sure?"

Logan sighs loudly.

Montaque whips a recorder out of his pocket.

I stare at him for a moment, trying to gather my thoughts. After a lifetime of silence, there are a lot of them. But maybe I already said what I needed to say. I said it to Logan last night. I've been saying it to Serena for years.

"Michael Keller may have slept with my mother," I say carefully, "But that doesn't make him my father. It takes more than DNA to do that. A man who abandons the woman he got pregnant because votes and power are more important than actual people isn't a father I want to know. I don't want to know a man who told that woman to abort their child and then walked away. And I absolutely don't want to know a man who happily tossed a scared, lonely little girl into foster care after her mother was murdered. That man is no father of mine. He never has been, and he never will be." I pause. "So people can stop asking me about him now because I don't know him. I've never met him. And everything I needed to know about him, I learned a long time

ago."

"Jesus," Montaque mutters.

"He isn't the one who shaped my life," I say quietly. "And he shouldn't be the one who defines it when he never had any part of it. My mother is the one who raised me. If people want to compare me to her, I'll happily accept that comparison. She was an amazing mother. She loved me fiercely. She worked her ass off to support me. And she did it on her own because the man who lied to her about being single dropped her the second he found out she was pregnant. I'm proud to be her daughter." I swallow hard, my throat working convulsively. "And I miss her every single day."

Logan squeezes my hand. "Do you have anything else to say, baby?"

"Just one more thing," I murmur, glancing at Montaque. "People aren't stories, Mr. Montaque. We're people. The guys on this team may be famous, but they're people too. They have families and feelings. They bleed. And they deserve privacy just like I did when I was a kid. Treating them like dollar signs instead of human beings is shitty. If you want respect around here, quit doing it. It isn't earning you any points with anyone."

Montaque clicks off his recorder with a curse. "I'm just doing my job, Ms. Cloud."

"No, you aren't. It stopped being a job when you intentionally started digging, trying to expose things that aren't anyone's business just to get ahead. That isn't a job. That's you being a dick for your own personal gain." I arch a brow at him. "Believe me, I know all about men like that. I just told you about him. Do you really want to be like him?"

Montaque's face turns red. He splutters, searching for a defense, but we both know he doesn't have one. Just like we both know I'm right. He isn't digging into Logan's sister

because it's the job. He's digging because he's a dick just like my father.

It's up to him to choose a different path. I doubt he will. Men like him rarely do. But the option is there.

"Montaque!" Coach Lariat growls from behind him. "I already told you to get the fuck out of here. Do not piss me off."

Montaque holds up his hands, shooting another glance in my direction before he mutters a curse and turns, striding across the parking lot.

"On the bus, Moreno!" Coach shouts. "We're leaving!"

"On my way!" Logan calls back to him before dragging me into his arms. His lips come down on mine in a hard kiss. "You're fucking incredible, you know that? Christ, I'm proud of you right now."

"I'm pretty proud of me too," I murmur against his lips.

He smiles, tucking strands of hair behind my ears. "You should be, baby. I hope he prints every goddamn word."

Surprisingly...so do I.

Maybe it won't make a difference, and people will still bring my father up. They'll still treat me like I did something wrong because he's rich and has the power. I don't know. But I also don't really care anymore, either. For once, I said what I should have said a long time ago. It's not my cross to bear anymore. It's his. What he does with it is his business.

I'm not shackled to his bullshit anymore.

I'm shackling myself to a gorgeous goalie, one who looks at me like I'm the center of his world. One who gives me power to be...me.

That's more than enough for me.

One Month Later

"Give me back my phone," I growl at Logan, trying to tug his arm down to reach it. It doesn't even budge. Naturally.

Why is he so ridiculously strong?

Better question, why do I always let him talk me into going out with him and the team after they win a game? It never works out in my favor.

"Nope." He smirks at me. "Not until you kiss me."

"I am not kissing you in a bar full of people, Logan."

"The bar isn't full, baby," he says through laughter. "It's just the team."

I snort. Loudly. "Unless half the team grew boobs and learned to apply a wicked cat-eye, this is not the team, Logan. It's fans who would like to fu—"

He swoops, claiming my lips in a hard kiss as his teammates laugh and cheer, egging him on. Like I said...this never works out in my favor. They're all idiots.

I bite his bottom lip, which only makes him growl and pull me closer.

I swear, there is no stopping this man. He's on cloud nine all day, every day, and nothing is bringing him back down again. It's annoyingly cute. I'm not telling him

that, though.

"That's better," he sighs, his lips curving into a grin against mine.

"Can I have my phone back now?"

"No. You can work later. We're celebrating right now."

"I'm not working."

"Little liar."

"I'm not. I was reading comments on Lauren's essay," I mutter.

"That can wait until later, too," he says firmly. "You can troll the assholes of the world tomorrow."

"Oh, can I help?" Joaquin asks, rubbing his hands together. "I like fucking with assholes online."

"Of course you do," Archer sighs, sliding his arm around Wren's waist.

"Um, I seem to recall you calling someone a few colorful names online just a couple weeks ago, Mr. Captain," she retorts, poking him in the side. "What was it again? Oh, yeah." She snaps her fingers. "You said he couldn't kiss Alec Greggson's ass any harder if he was a poop stain in his underwear. And he'd be more useful to the world if he were a poop stain because at least then he'd be chafing his ass instead of—"

Archer cuts her off by kissing her.

"Stop kissing her," Micah growls, his eyes narrowed on the two of them. I don't think

he's mad, though. At least, I don't think he is. He stopped being pissed after...well, never mind. That's a long story.

"Yeah, stop kissing her," River says, smirking. "I want to hear what the fuck you actually said. Because I know damn well you didn't call some motherfucker a poop stain."

Archer responds by flipping them off.

"Give me my phone," I grumble to Logan while everyone is distracted.

"No." He taps my nose. "We're living our lives tonight, baby."

That's what he always says. We're living our lives. No matter how crazy things get, he just keeps saying it. And things have gotten crazy.

Montaque shared every word of my quote about my father. Reporters showed up en masse, trying to see what else I had to say. That lasted for about two days before some other woman came forward to admit that she's been having an affair with my father for the last three years.

A leopard doesn't change his spots.

And the press never stay gone for long.

They were right back on our doorstep once Alice helped Logan draft and release a statement about Lauren. It was not complimentary to Montaque. When they mentioned the reporter trying to gain access to release her private health information, people were...shocked. They were equally as shocked to hear that he called a mental institution an insane asylum. It's been a long month for him, too.

Lauren followed up the statement by releasing a personal essay about living with schizophrenia. Her story is beautiful and tragic and so full of hope. If anyone doubted the kind of guy Logan is...well, there's no doubting him after reading what she had to say about him. I bawled like a freaking baby reading it.

Judging by most of the comments, I'm not the only one. He's going to have a whole new legion of fans in his corner soon. He deserves it. Honestly, I can't think of anyone more deserving. He's been her sword and her shield for so long. Now, he's mine too.

But he's doing it the right way this time. He's been talking to Emilia, working through his issues. It's helping. I think seeing the way most people are embracing Lauren has helped too. The world still isn't kind. There are still assholes. But it is kinder.

Men like him have made it that way. And men like him will keep making it that way. In the meantime, I'm telling off the people who are jerks. It doesn't really help, but it does make me feel better.

Logan just rolls with it, just like he does every other thing I do. It's one of the million things I love about him. I'm sure I'll find one million more. For the record, him stealing my phone is not one of them. That's just annoying.

"I'm borrowing this," I tell the team, reaching for the pitcher of beer as he tucks my phone into his pocket.

"Hell no," Jordan growls, snatching it off the table before I can reach it, making his fiancée, Sutton, laugh loudly. "I am not buying these assholes another round because Logan is pissing you off."

Everyone else cracks up.

"Give her back the phone," River demands, scowling at Logan. "If I have to wear beer tonight, I'm going to be pissed."

"Mm, I'd rather give her this instead," Logan says, holding something out in the palm of his hand.

I glance down at it and then gulp as everyone else at the table falls silent, staring intently at us.

"You're holding a ring, Logan."

"Yeah, baby."

"Why are you holding a ring?" I squeak, my heart slamming against my ribcage.

"We need popcorn for this shit," Diego mutters.

"Shut the fuck up, Diego," half the team growls in unison.

"You know why." Logan cups my cheek, forcing me to look at him. His gaze tangles with mine, deep and fathomless. So damn full of love it's overwhelming. "I told you last time I asked that you'd say yes the next time. Don't make a liar out of me. You know how much you hate when I lie."

A shocked laugh rips from my lips. "Are you seriously trying to manipulate me into saying yes?"

"If you aren't willing to play dirty, are you even playing, angel?" He smirks at me, humor dancing through his eyes. "What do you say? You going to make an honest man out of me, or are you turning me into a liar?"

I briefly consider teasing him. It's what I always do—tease him. Torture him. Drive him nuts. We're fire and ice, push and pull. It's part of what's so damn good between us. But that doesn't feel right this time. This time...there's only one word that feels right.

"Yes," I whisper.

"Fuck," he growls, crushing his mouth to mine.

"Does that mean she's marrying him or not?" Diego asks.

"Jesus Christ," someone mutters.

"Shut the fuck up, Diego!" someone else growls.

Half the table just laughs.

I don't really care what they're doing, though. Logan is kissing me and slipping his ring on my finger at the same damn time.

This is heaven.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 7:22 am

Logan

Five Years Later

"Oh my god," Peyton moans, squirming all around. Her hands slip against mine. "Oh! I feel it."

"Fuck," I growl, my lip caught between my teeth so I don't lose it. I'm already sweating, barely holding on. Christ, it's so fucking hard. "Yeah. Right there, angel."

"Yes!" she cries, slipping her hand out of the way.

I press forward, growling as the pipe pops back into place.

Fucking finally.

"Jesus Christ," I grunt, falling back on my ass. "We're hiring a plumber next time your daughter breaks the bathroom."

Peyton wriggles out from beneath the sink, water dripping from her hair, dropping a little pile of Legos on the floor beside her. "My daughter?" she says, all indignation and sass. "You're the one who was supposed to be watching her."

"You're the one who decided to run around the house without a bra on." I shrug. "Can't blame me if I had my hands full while she was in here, dismantling the goddamn house." I didn't even know you could fit eighteen Legos down the damn sink at once.

Peyton laughs quietly, brushing wet strands of hair away from her face. "I was not running around the house without a bra. We both know I don't run. I was sitting on the couch, minding my business."

"Your hard little nipples were begging for attention, baby."

"Whatever." She rolls her eyes at me. "You're lucky Lauren and Roland got here when they did to pick her and Lex up or we'd have a whole flood on our hands." She glances at the disaster around us. We had to dismantle the entire fucking sink to get those damn Legos out. There are tools scattered in puddles of water all over the floor. "She's definitely your daughter, Logan."

I lean back against the door, chuckling. "You always say that when she's destroying shit."

"It's most true when she's destroying shit." My wife shoots me a cheeky grin. "She looks just like you when she's being a little terror."

I can't even deny it. Livvie does look just fucking like me when she's running around the house, trying to wreck it. But we both know her attitude is all Peyton. Just like we know her older brother is all me. Lex looks just like me. He acts just like me. He even growls at everyone who gets too close to his mom just fucking like me.

I appreciate the hell out of him for that. Peyton isn't nearly as appreciative, but that's because she doesn't get it. I know what I've got with her. It's the best goddamn part of my life. There's no fucking way I'm going to risk some other prick trying to move in on what belongs to me. I know damn well that she'd never go for it if they tried. But still...she's mine. End of story.

As far as she's concerned, I'm the only man who exists. She looks at me like I hung the moon for her. I intend to make sure she always looks at me that way. Five years isn't long enough. Hell, I don't think fifty will cut it, either. I need every single second

I can get. A lifetime. An endless supply of them would be preferable.

She's the light in my life. She's my peace. I breathe for her. I fucking exist for her. Everyone knows it. It's not like I've made a secret of it. I'm done hiding shit. I left that life behind five years ago and haven't looked back. Even when Lauren had to be committed again two years ago while they worked out a new medication regimen for her, we didn't try to hide it. We just fucking dealt with it.

And so did she. She bounced back stronger than ever. My sister is a badass. She always has been.

"I hope the baby is all you," I murmur, pulling Peyton onto my lap. My hand brushes her stomach. "We need another little girl around here."

Peyton buries her face in my shoulder, laughing quietly. "We're not going to survive the one we already have."

"Yeah, we will." I nip her throat. "She has a warrior for a mom, a badass for an aunt, and a legend for a dad. We've got this shit, baby."

"A legend?" Peyton lifts her head, a soft smile on her face. "You're reading your own press again, aren't you?"

"Nope. I just know I'm that good."

She snorts, shaking her head. "If your head gets any bigger, Logan Moreno..."

"You fucking love my big head."

Her lips tilt into a smile. "Yeah, I kind of do."

I slide her off my lap, rising to my feet. Once I'm steady, I scoop her up into my arms,

striding from the bathroom.

"Where are we going? We still have to clean up the mess," she says.

"I'll clean it up," I murmur. "After I clean you up, baby. You're all wet. My baby might get cold."

She smirks, cupping my cheek. "You know damn well the baby isn't going to get cold in my womb, Logan. You just want to get me naked."

"Obviously. We were interrupted before I finished playing with you earlier."

"I'm not a game."

"No, you aren't." I set her on the vanity in our bathroom, caging her in with my arms. "But you are my favorite little toy, baby."

"Logan," she groans.

I tip her head back, kissing her long and deep. "Christ, I love you. You know that?"

"Yeah?" She twists her hands up in my shirt, smirking at me. "Get naked and show me how much."