



# So Pucking Over You (Power Play Off The Ice: Snowed In For The Holidays)

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**Category:** Sport

**Description:** In the fast-paced world of sports, can they find a love that's built to last?

Oakley

I thought I had it all—an exciting career as a sports journalist and photographer and a high-profile relationship with Trevor “The Jerk” Markel, the league’s hottest rising star. But after a humiliating public breakup, I’m left questioning everything, including my ability to trust again.

Then Dash steps in to save the day. He’s everything Trevor wasn’t—steady, strong, and quietly confident. The man I’ve secretly lusted after for years. I never thought he saw me.

Maybe everything isn’t lost. Maybe it’s just the beginning.

Dash

I’ve watched Oakley from afar for years, admiring her tenacity, her courage, her spunk. Even when her mouth got her into trouble, she made me smile.

She’s been wasting her time with the wrong guy. Trevor is nothing but a player. He has no idea how to support and treat a strong woman. No way in hell am I going to let him embarrass her and hurt her chances at her dream job. I’ll give her the scoop of the season. Why not? She’s already got my heart.

This may be the last and biggest save of my career.

**Total Pages (Source):** 13

# Page 1

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## CHAPTER 1

### Oakley

After pulling up at the motel, the driver drags my luggage from the trunk of his car then takes off. I'm sure with another snowstorm on the way he doesn't want to be caught away from home. It was an hour drive from Chicago to the motel where the team is staying. Now the driver has to go all the way back into the city.

Having me come for these back-to-back games is all Trevor has talked about for two weeks. He also hinted at some big life changes. My heart skips a couple beats. He was so insistent that I show up today. I wonder what's going on. Is he planning something big? Something personal?

We missed being with each other for Christmas and it's almost the New Year. Is he going to propose? He's hinted at a life together. Am I even ready? We've been dating for the last six months. Part of me thinks it's too soon. I mean with my schedule for the newspaper and his with the team it somehow feels like we haven't really gotten to know each other completely. We haven't even dated through an off season yet.

The team has been traveling by bus for the last few games since there's an issue with their corporate plane. I know he's been annoyed at the inconvenience. When he finally replied to my text saying he couldn't meet me at the train station I wasn't really surprised. He probably spent the whole day warming up and going over film for tonight's game and totally forgot.

As the sports reporter for my newspaper, they'll reimburse me most of the expenses

for this little trip, but I'll need to cover all the personal stuff.

If the Buffalo Blades win this set of games, they're almost guaranteed to make the playoffs. If they do, my boss told me I could follow the team to the next game. Winning would solidify their play-off berth.

One of the things I like about doing stories on the Buffalo Blades is I get to see both Trevor and my big brother, Gordy, since they play for the same team.

Tugging on my backpack, I struggle to roll my two large suitcases loaded with my photographic equipment as well as my clothes for a week. It's a pain trying to get everything through the snow and ice when the suitcases weigh more than I do.

Approaching the front desk, I ask for the key that Trevor always leaves for me. The concierge checks and says there is no key and they were not told I was coming. When I ask him to call the room he gets no response. I'm further frustrated when he won't even tell me what room Trevor is staying in.

I text Trevor but he doesn't respond. After fifteen minutes I try again.

What the hell. We just talked two days ago and he texted me an hour and a half ago. So where could he be?

I study my phone. Gordy and Trevor aren't getting along right now. I don't know what set Gordy off, and Trevor says he has no idea and has tried to make amends for something he doesn't understand.

I don't have a choice. I'm not going to stand in this lobby. If nothing else, I can stay with my brother until Trevor answers.

Oakley: Gordy, what room are you in and what room is Trevor in?

Gordy: Where are you?

Oakley: At the motel where the team is staying.

Gordy: What are you doing there?

Oakley: I've been assigned by the paper to follow the team for the next three games. Oh, and seeing my boyfriend.

I see the bubbles, then they go away, then appear again three times before he finally replies.

Gordy: Stay put. I was grabbing food, but I'm almost there.

Oakley: Is he with you?

Gordy: No. He stayed behind.

I glance up as a truck pulls into the lot and parks. I recognize Dash, the goalie for the team as he heads for the door in front of where he parked.

Leaving my suitcases inside the lobby, I follow the shoveled path toward Dash. He glances up as I approach.

"Hi Dash. Do you know which room is Trevor's?"

He glances at the room next to him. Room 23. Of course, Trevor's lucky number. A 'do not disturb' sign hangs from the doorknob. Smiling, I knock. How sweet to make sure we won't be disturbed.

"Uh, Oakley, wait," Dash calls as the door opens.

Trevor stands before me hastily covering his privates with a towel. His eyes widen briefly then he shrugs. "Hey."

Hey? "Sorry it took so long, but with all the snow the rideshares were pretty busy."

"Oh."

Still, he blocks the door. "Uhm, my stuff is in the lobby. Are you...."

"Trev, is that the food? Hurry up and shut the door. The draft is cold."

"What the hell!" I push him to the side and look into the room. A raven-haired Barbie is leaning back against the headboard of a very rumpled bed, a phone in her hand. She sits up displaying her augmented perfect breasts.

I turn to Trevor. "What is this?"

He shrugs.

"What is she doing in our bed?"

"You act surprised," he snarks. "What the fuck did you expect? That I'd be walking around with a limp dick because you weren't around. You're never here for me when I need you. You know I need to get off after a game. Maybe if you were around, someone else wouldn't need to be taking care of me."

"You mean because I have a job and can't just jump at your demands? You were the one who flew to the Bahamas at the last minute, so we missed Christmas. Was it with her?" I glance behind him to where she's risen from the bed and is pulling on his T-shirt. Almost as tall as Trevor, she has thick, long dark hair, an obviously toned body and those damned perky full breasts. Every guy's wet dream.

Strutting across the room ‘Raven Barbie’ stops beside him and rests her elbow on his shoulder while smoothing his hair. Giving me the once over, she tilts her head. “Is this the little reporter for that rag newspaper who you’ve been trying to help with stories? She does look a little needy.” She runs her gaze up my body from my hiking boots to the hood of my Carhartt coat.

“Oh, look. Our food is here. You need to leave, sweetie. No more free publicity for you. Trevor’s in the big time now, with important people.”

She reaches over my head and takes the bag of food before turning her back on me. Shocked. Mortified. Furious, I meet Trevor’s gaze. “Ho-how long has this been going on?”

“Doesn’t matter. We’re over.” He slams the door in my face, and I hear the lock click.

Trevor’s been cheating on me. The whole time. He thought it was perfect that I’m a sports reporter. He continually gave me ideas for feature stories I could do on him. Posed for pictures like he was a model. Made sure everything I did on him made its way to his PR team. Yeah, I’m at a small time Buffalo paper, but it was still news he could report. It still showed up on his social feeds.

The realization hits me. That’s all I was good for. Media Content. And the occasional scratch to ease his itch.

The door suddenly opens, and raven Barbie tosses out a couple of my sweaters that I had left behind the last time I met up with Trevor.

Too numb to move, I stare at the closed door. A weight settles across my shoulder, and I’m pulled against something hard.

“Keep your head down and just come with me. There’s a crowd.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 10:02 am*

### CHAPTER 2

Dash

“Oakley, take a drink of this.” Once we’re safely in my room, I hand her a shot of whiskey mixed with soda. I’m pleased when she does what I ask even though I realize it’s just reflex.

“Stay put. I’ll be right back. I’m going to get your luggage from the lobby.” I look out the window before exiting. I hadn’t noticed the spectators gathering behind us or their upheld phones until just before Trevor slammed the door. This could be a publicity nightmare. Not that I give a fuck about Trevor, the little bastard. I am worried about how this will affect Oakley. We’ve got to get on top of this quickly.

I dial Gordy as I walk to the lobby. “Where the hell are you?”

“Stuck on the highway. We took a ride to get food and there was an accident. Look, my sister’s there....”

“I know. There’s a problem. I have her in my room. There was an incident with Trevor that I think got filmed. Get a hold of Phil in PR and coach Nugent.”

I’d heard a rumor that he’d driven up with a woman, but embarrassing Oakley is unacceptable.

Walking into the lobby, I see the desk clerk looking sheepish. “There wasn’t anything I could do.”



“Give me her luggage.” I almost ask if there’s an open room, but we’re leaving in the morning, and it might be safer to have her with someone to run interference.

“Look, just so you know...,” The desk clerk pushes Oakley’s luggage from behind the counter. “There’s a guy still parked in the lot. I think he’s been watching the room. The other people out there are guests.

“I could have the maid take her luggage to the room on the other side of you. It has a connecting door with your room. Maybe less noticeable and save you some grief. It’s a late check-in room so we’re good to use it.”

“Which car?” He motions me around the desk and pulls up the parking lot and points to a late model SUV. I squint trying to see the driver. “Is he a guest?”

“No. He showed up right behind the team bus. I told him there were no rooms, but he hasn’t left.”

“Do you have a shot of his license plate?”

He messes with the camera angles and is able to give me the plate number.

“Thanks. I’ll take you up on the maid’s help. Give me a couple sodas and some of those snack crackers for now.”

Back in the room I discover Oakley hasn’t moved from where I left her. I hunker down in front of her and take her ice-cold hands in mine.

“Oakley, it’s going to be okay.”

Tears fill her eyes. “Did you know? Did everyone know? Am I a laughingstock?”

“No one’s fucking laughing at you. Everyone on the team loves you. I don’t think anyone knew or knows anything. He hasn’t traveled with the team since before the Christmas break, well, really since we’ve been taking the bus.”

“Do you know who she is?”

I’m pretty sure I do, but I keep it to myself. If I’m right this is bigger than just his relationship with Oakley. “She hasn’t been around the team before.”

I am not a social media guy. No personal accounts. Don’t look at them, and don’t care. What the team posts is all on them. As one of the senior players and goalie, I keep my presence to the interviews the team office requires of me and the publicity they schedule. I have a couple charities I support that mean something to me. I donate time with them and once in a while they will ask to publish a photo of me as part of their PR. But that’s it. I’m here to win hockey games. Nothing more. In the off season I hang out at my ranch and exist under the radar as much as possible.

“Does Gordy know he’s with someone here?”

“I don’t know.”

“He and—the jerk had a fight about something recently.”

“If they did, I don’t know about it.” Most everyone has had at least one round with Trevor. He’s a showboat and always trying to grab the limelight. Never gives anyone else their due. Fuck, if you asked him, he’d tell you he’s the only one on the ice.

“Stand up, sugar. Your hands are freezing. Let’s get you into a warm shower. Have you eaten? I’ll order some food.”

“I’m not hungry.” She pauses and looks around. “My clothes. My equipment. They’re

in my suitcases. I thought you went to get them.”

“Your bags are being brought to us. Hop in the shower and they’ll be here by the time you get out. I promise.” I go to my duffle and grab one of my team T-shirts. “Take this just in case.”

A few minutes after the shower comes on there’s a knock on the dividing door. I’ve barely thanked and tipped the housekeeper when there’s pounding on my door. Coach Nugent, Phil, our media guy, and a red-faced Gordy are on the other side.

“Come in but keep your voices down. She’s in the shower. She doesn’t need any more drama right now.”

“Videos are already popping up,” Phil says. “So far nothing showing Oakley’s face.”

“There’s an SUV in the parking lot, or at least there was. Desk clerk thinks he did some filming.” I hand Phil the license plate number. “Know anyone who can find out who this belongs to?”

He nods and starts typing on his phone.

Gordy growls deep in his throat. “What the hell happened? What kind of incident? What room is Trevor in? I need to talk to him.”

“Sit down and shut up,” Coach Nugent snaps. “I know what you want to say with your fist, and it isn’t happening. We are three games away from clinching a spot in the playoffs. You are not risking the team’s chances.

“We all love Oakley, but there’s a time and a place and we will deal with this after the season.”

“I ain’t waiting that fucking long,” he grumbles.

“There may be more going on than the obvious,” I interject.

All eyes turn to me. “Phil, the other girl, any good shots of her?”

“A couple.” He sits at the small table and opens his laptop.

“I knew it. He’s fucking around on her.” Gordy heads to the door.

I step in front of him. “You’re going to sit your ass in a chair and get your shit together. She doesn’t need you going all neanderthal and embarrassing her even more right now.

“You start a fight and if one or both of you are too injured to play and the team loses the chance at the cup, she’ll blame herself for costing you your dream.”

He looks up at me. “He cheated on my sister. He hurt her.”

“And he’ll pay. We will make sure of it. But for now, the situation is contained. We’d only embarrass her more. We will deal with him when the time is right.”

Phil clears his throat and turns the laptop toward us. “Does anyone recognize her?”

The others shake their heads.

I run a hand through my hair. “Before the season started the head coach of the Arctic Bears tried to recruit me.”

“What the hell,” Coach Nugent exclaims. “You never said a damn thing to me.”

“Because I wasn’t, and still am not interested. They wined and dined me. I went to a restaurant I’ve been wanting to try on their tab. I even met the owner, his wife, and his oldest daughter.” I point at the screen. “Sabrina White. Daddy wants that Stanley Cup at all costs.”

I hear the shower shut off and hold my hand up to silence the others. Crossing to the door, “Oakley, Coach, Phil, and your brother are here. Which bag do you need, the pink or the green?”

“Pink please.”

“Okay, I’m going to slip it inside the door. Stand back.” As I slide the door open and ease the rolling bag inside, I catch her reflection in the mirror and get a quick glimpse of ink decorating her thigh and hip. When did she do that? I think of my own ink covered body and immediately feel the need to explore hers.

Off limits. Your best friend’s sister. Too young. The all too familiar litany takes up in my brain. The same one I’ve played over and over since the first time I met her. She was a cute sassy tomboy in high school. College brought out the class and professionalism in her. Now she’s just beautiful and smart as a whip. Pride for her accomplishments fills my chest. Her beauty sends desire racing through me.

The sweet tilt of her full lips, the sparkle in her warm brown eyes. She’s a little slip of a thing compared to my hulking size. She doesn’t even come to my shoulders and my hockey gear weighs more than she does. Graceful, supple, sleek, she doesn’t even realize how sensually she moves. She turns me on, lights me up with need and longing. I want to pleasure her, make her purr just for me. Only for me.

My need to protect her is ever present. I know she can fight her own battles. But I don’t want her to have to. I want to be there to support her in all she wants to become, can become.

She's too damn good for me. But I want her, have wanted her since the first time I saw her. I'll do anything to get her through this. Backing away, I shut the door.

"What are the social media posts showing, Phil?" Coach asks.

"Mostly trying to show what Trevor was trying to cover with his towel and what you can see of the dark-haired woman's body under the white T-shirt. The audio isn't good. No one's figured out how to clean it up yet. Do you remember what was said?"

"Yes. He dumped me for his new flavor of the month since I wasn't around enough to keep his dick warm," Oakley says from behind me.

### CHAPTER 3

Oakley

I study their faces and hate the pity and sympathy I see.

Poor little Oakley, can't keep a man. All through high school and college the popular girls would look at me and tsk tsk because I'm flat chested with no ass. Yeah, all the boys liked me. As one of the guys. I could talk sports and quote stats for most teams all night.

My twelve-year-old body never seemed to catch on that I was maturing. It's why most of the Blades team like me, and none of their girlfriends or wives feel threatened when I'm with their men.

Hell, Trevor was only the second guy I've been with. Should have known he was just using me for free PR. I swallow the rejection. It's more the embarrassment that hurts. Not my heart. He's not what I wanted. Not who I want.

Coach looks at me, a gentle kindness fills his gaze. "He will be dealt with, Oakley. He should?—"

"He needs to be left alone. Treated like normal. Like none of you really know anything. The Buffalo Blades deserve to win this year. The team, the whole team, has worked hard for this the last two years. I don't want him to take that away from you."

Squaring my shoulders, I turn to Dash. "Are you sure that woman is who you think?"

“Yes.”

I meet my brother’s furious gaze. “Gordy, think this through. There are two scenarios. The Arctic Bears are really close to us in the standings. We’re undefeated, but the Bears are only four games behind. We lose because of internal fighting and their chances improve. Maybe this was a set up to divide the team, distract everyone from the real goal.

“They could also be trying to recruit him for next year,” I continue.

“Fuck,” Coach spews.

“That’s right. Fuck him and his new toy. The best revenge you can give me is bringing home the Stanley cup. With or without him.”

“Damn, girl. You after my job?” Coach smiles at me.

“Nope. But it’s easier to see what’s going on from the stands. Keep going like you are and get Fitch, your back up, in every chance you can. The kid’s got talent and just needs more confidence and time playing with the first stringers.”

“Uhm, guys,” Phil interrupts. There’s some new posts.”

We gather behind Phil to view the screen. Pictures of Trevor and the raven goddess on the beach, at restaurants, dancing. Another back shot of Dash, arm wrapped around my shoulders and leaning into my ear as we walk down a sidewalk then enter a motel room.

## TROUBLE IN BUFFALO?

Golden boy and center for the Buffalo Blades, Trevor Markel was caught with his



pants off with Sabrina White, daughter of the owner of the Arctic Bears.

While Blades goalie, Dash Fahey, was seen sneaking Markel's ex, Oakley Wells, into his room.

Talk about stiff competition both on and off the ice.

I can't believe my eyes. "God damn it! My newspaper put that out! How the hell do they know? I'm their reporter on site."

Grabbing my phone I dial my editor.

"Put it on speaker," Dash whispers, then looks at the group. "No matter what, keep your mouths shut, she can handle this."

I meet his gaze in appreciation as my call goes through. "Stan, what the hell is this internet story I'm looking at with my name in it?"

"You tell me what's going on. I send you to report on the team and instead you're the story. You break up over the holidays with the star player and he's now dating the competition? And you've moved on to his teammate. Are you trying to ruin my favorite team?"

"Who gave you this story and told you we broke up over the holidays?"

"An independent I buy from once in a while. He had the hot photos of Markel and the girl in Florida as well as today's shots. He can get the stories that catch attention."

"Let me get this straight, you promoted me just because I was dating a hockey player? Not because I have a master's in communications and journalism?"

“I was looking for some good juice. It’s what sells papers nowadays. Instead, you come back with stats, play breakdowns and team dynamics. Any idiot can do that.”

“Obviously not, since you can’t.”

“You’re useless to me,” he snaps. “Send back my equipment. You’re out of a job.”

I disconnect and carefully slide the phone back into my jeans. Holding my head high, I meet the gaze of each man in the room.

Gordy heads for the door. “This is all Markel’s fault. I’m gonna break his neck.”

Dash steps in front of him and talks softly. Dash is four years older than my brother, but they’ve been friends since Gordy joined the team. I’ve heard him confide in Dash as if he were an older brother. They respect each other’s work ethic. My parents love Dash like a son. If anyone can control Gordy’s actions, it will be Dash.

“So, you’re fired? Out of a job?” Coach Nugent interrupts my thoughts.

“Yes, apparently so.”

“Good. You’re hired. We need a class act who knows sports, sports players and PR to work with Phil. He hates the on-camera shit and you’re a damn site prettier, so you can handle that. I’ll have the office send you the contract. Sign it as soon as you can. You’re on the payroll as of this minute.”

He looks toward the door where my brother and Dash stare in shocked silence.

“The bus is full,” Coach continues. “Dash, take her with you when we leave in the morning. Gordy, you stay the hell away from Markel but you and Dash start working with Fitch as much as you can on the side. We’ll start bringing him in more and more

to give Markel a rest.

“This situation may or may not go viral. We play it down. Get some sleep, all of you. We leave early because of the potential snowstorm.”

Phil and Coach Nugent head out the door. Gordy puts his hands on my shoulders. “I’ll respect your wishes for now. When the season is over, I’m beating the crap out of him for hurting my little sis.”

“Not necessary. I think I’m more embarrassed for not seeing him for what he really is than hurt. This may have been the best thing to happen to me. I’m not missing him at all.”

“Where are you rooming?”

“I was hoping with you. The motel is booked.”

“Shit, I’m sharing with Fitch and we’ve got a poker game going in our room. We could put you in?—”

“She’s staying with me,” Dash cuts in. “The press already has her with me. Moving her around will just cause more questions and make things worse. I can run interference and make sure she’s left alone. You can trust me with your sister.”

“Sis?” Gordy asks.

“I agree with Dash. We go with this at least until the story dies down. But Gordy, you have to play your part.”

“What do you mean?”

“If this started before the holidays, you had to have known that your best friend started seeing your sister. Dash was with us for two days during the holidays. You can’t go after Trevor when your sister has moved on.

“The story—your response—is Trevor and I were a couple but broke up and we’ve both moved on. No hard feelings.”

“I’ll still break his pretty boy nose after the season,” Gordy responds as he pushes out the door.

Dash steps in front of me. “How about I order us a pizza and go pick it up. You snuggle in and find us something to watch on TV. The bus leaves at four in the morning so calling it an evening early would be wise.”

“Why are you in your truck and not the bus?”

He smiles. “Sanity. I’m the old man of the group and they’re like a bunch of frat boys. My truck is more comfortable. I also need to stretch my legs a little more often than the bus can stop. Our team plane is different, there’s more leg room and the flights are short. Hopefully, it will be back in action after these games are over.”

I nod, knowing at his height of almost six-four and well over two hundred pounds, leg room and the size of a seat is always an issue. He doesn’t move like a big man though. In fact, he’s damn agile for a goalie. I’ve seen part of his workout routine including his yoga and Pilates. He takes good care of himself. But the position always takes its toll.

“Are you still into pepperoni and black olive, thin crust?”

“How do you remember that?”

He shrugs. “You still mainlining coffee?”

“My drug of choice. But it has to be from a real coffee shop. Gas stations are emergency only.”

“I saw a cute little coffee shop earlier and they had a drive through.”

“Perfect. Extra-large, double shot of espresso, double the cream-whipped, and extra extra extra hot. And get it after the pizza so it doesn’t get cold before you make it back. Actually, make it two of them. I can always drink what’s left when we leave in the morning. Do you need to write this down?”

“I can remember. Are you going to be able to sleep?”

“It’s never stopped me before.”

Shaking his head he pauses at the door and looks over his shoulder. “Don’t open the door to anyone. Could be a reporter, and you don’t want to risk an interaction with Trevor. You’re the media person, think about how we can handle this while I’m gone. We can brainstorm together while we eat.”

Pulling on a hoodie from my suitcase I curl up on the bed and turn on the TV, stopping at the first sports program I come to for background noise. Closing my eyes I lean my head against the headboard.

I’m a little surprised at how little I care about Trevor. If I’m honest with myself, I’m glad he found someone. He wasn’t the ‘one’ for me, and I wasn’t what he wanted. I can buy the fancy clothes, and dress the part, but I still don’t look sexy and I never feel comfortable. I’m definitely not into the attention seeking parties he likes.

I could have done without the drama. I’m thankful that Dash was there. Cool headed,

logical, dependable. My secret crush.

Did Trevor just give me the break of a lifetime? Is Dash finally seeing me?

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 10:02 am*

### CHAPTER 4

Dash

The cold air feels good. I swear looking at her always raises my temperature and my dick. It's why I pulled on a flannel button up when she went to the shower. I needed the coverage.

She's Gordy's little sister which automatically puts her off limits. She's just had an embarrassing breakup.

I shouldn't think of her the way I do. Although I'm only eight years older, it feels like a lifetime.

But I want her so bad I ache. Not just for her sexy little body, her mind, her spirit, her spunk calls to me as well. Pulling into the parking lot at the pizza place I run a hand down my face. What did I get myself into? Will I be able to keep my feelings under wraps?

I can do this. I will do this. For her. I'll let her save face, embrace her new job and watch her back. When the season's over... I'll let her go.

My phone pings. I glance at the message from Coach.

Coach: It's all over the press, blowing up the airwaves. Goddamn social media. Reports are he was seen cheating. She was seen cheating. The team is imploding, taking sides. This kind of craziness could blow our concentration, our chances.

Owners are demanding to know what's going on. We've got to get our fucking story straight.

We need to meet. You, Oakley, Trevor and I, and one of the owners insists on being videoed in.

Dash: Why Oakley?

Coach: Because I just insisted on hiring her. I've had my eye on her talent for months. She's exactly what we need in front of the camera.

Dash: This is too damn soon. She just caught him cheating. Give it a couple days.

Coach: The owners insist. Now.

Dash: I'll ask her. If she says no, I'm not forcing her. We need an hour.

Coach: There's a small conference room off the lobby, meet us there.

After picking up the food I head back. She doesn't need this shit show. She deserves time.

As I pull back into the motel parking lot, I see Trevor and Sabrina entering their room. She turns and snaps something at him. He scowls, says something back and nods. Looks like trouble in paradise.

When her daddy was parading her in front of me, I noticed that she's as much of a shot caller as her father. I can't imagine two self-centered divas ever making a relationship work. Ought to be interesting.

Trevor's a fool. He had the real deal and threw it away.



I knock before unlocking the door to my room and push it open. “Just me, Oakley.”

She’s stretched out on the bed, leaning against the headboard, her gaze slightly unfocused as if lost in thought.

When she sits up, I read the pink words etched on her black hoodie: I’m not arguing, I’m simply explaining why I’m right. I stifle a smile. That’s my girl. She may barely top five feet, but she acts like she’s six-four.

Scrambling off the bed, she takes the coffee, pops one open, takes a swallow and sighs. “Perfect.”

Waiting until after she’s eaten two slices of pizza, I meet her gaze. “Coach called. There’s been a lot more social media. The owners are demanding a meeting. We’ve been asked to join them in about twenty minutes on a video call. Coach, Phil, you, me, and Trevor. It’s up to you whether you go or not. I told them I wouldn’t force you.”

Not answering, she grabs her backpack, removes her laptop and a notebook. I watch in silence as her fingers fly over the keyboard and she makes written notes. She glances up. “How much more time do I have?”

“We should probably head over.”

She nods, repacks her backpack before changing out her sweatshirt for a light blue sweater then pulls on her coat and boots as I do the same. Grabbing her bag, she meets me at the door. I hold out my hand. “Give me your bag.”

“I can carry my own bag.”

I shake my head and smile. “Oakley, you know me. If I’m with you, you don’t carry

anything.”

She rolls her eyes and shakes her head, but hands me the backpack. Then pauses. “If anyone’s out there, let them film whatever they want. We don’t engage.”

She’s the expert. I wrap an arm over her shoulder, and we walk to the office then down the hall to the meeting room.

Coach and Phil are standing to the side, the owner is already displayed on a screen. Oakley slips off her coat and takes the chair directly across from the video screen lowered from the ceiling. Her hand trembles slightly as I hand her the backpack. My little hellcat isn’t as calm as she’s trying to pretend. That’s okay. I got her back. I’ve got a couple aces up my sleeve if we need them.

I take the seat next to her, coach sits beside me, and Phil is across from me.

“Good evening, Mr. Lee. I’m Oakley Wells.”

He raises his eyebrow, acknowledging that she knows who he is. “Your brother is Gordy Wells, my right winger, correct?”

“Yes, Gordy is my brother,” Oakley replies.

“I understand you’re a media specialist?”

“I have a master’s from NYU. I worked for the Times as an intern through college and did articles for magazines and other papers. I’ve been working for a paper in Buffalo since graduating. I recently created a social media test platform called ‘The Oakley’ where I’ve been talking about the Blades. It’s still in the infant stage where I’m measuring what works best and what will bring the Blades the most followers.”

Trevor saunters in, hands shoved into his team jacket and takes the seat across from Coach.

Mr. Lee's gaze flips to Trevor. "Explain to me, Markel, the pictures of you and Sabrina White, the daughter of one of our biggest competitors, in Florida over the holidays."

"I was invited to a party. I didn't pay attention to who threw it."

"So it wasn't a recruitment ploy? They aren't offering you a contract package?"

Trevor squirms in his seat before answering, "No."

"And the fiasco from today that is putting the team in a scandalous light?"

"Bad timing."

"The rag reporter just happened to know where you'd be when we haven't disclosed any of the stops for the team bus?"

"He must have been following me. I missed the bus, so I drove."

"I recommend that you revisit the morality and publicity clauses in your contract. There are substantial penalties for violating them." He turns his attention to Oakley. "Ms. Wells, have you spoken to your brother? I'm sorry, but he can be a hot head."

"Gordy's fine, sir. He understands the situation. Dash has been a friend of my family for years. We're all good."

He pauses and turns his attention to me. "Dash?"

“Gordy and I have talked. We’re on the same page and he understands today’s unfortunate incident. The misunderstanding. However—” I make sure to have eye contact with Trevor. “We are both sensitive to how Oakley is treated. A second incident, accidental or not, will be handled swiftly and appropriately.”

“Which brings me to the publicity damage control. Ms. Wells, Coach and Phil passed on your suggestion for how we can handle this. I’ve approved your suggestions, and the board signed off on your employment contract.”

“What? What are you hiring her for?” Trevor exclaims leaning forward.

“Ms. Wells is our new publicity contact. Phil will continue in his position and Ms. Wells will be taking over all media interface until the end of the season. She will control all interviews, who gets interviews, and all press releases. Again, in accordance with our contracts.

“No interviews will be given without her approval. I have already approved her release regarding today’s unfortunate incidents.

“Let me make myself clear to all of you. Another trash tabloid release like today will not happen again. This is not the image the Buffalo Blades will tolerate.”

Mr. Lee scowls. “Next time you open a door, Trevor, you damn well better have your pants on.”

“Dash and Oakley, understand I insist your relationship also be circumspect. Now, what’s the plan?”

Oakley squares her shoulders. “Sabrina’s name and relationship to the Arctic Bears is going to cause a lot of speculation. I recommend we call a press conference, so we have everyone contained in one area, one feed.”

“Our response should be on the offensive. I suggest that the three of us, Trevor, Dash, and I appear together. We are aware of the video and the misrepresentation of the situation. Yes, Trevor and I broke up before the holidays. It was a mutual decision between two adults. No scandal, no hard feelings.

“We avoid the towel and immediately go after the relationship with Sabrina. Which is the real story. They met at a party and didn’t realize the connection to opposing teams. Trevor did not know that she was the daughter of the Bears owner. Life happens, and personal relationships are not immune to complications. He is fully committed to his contract with the Blades and is looking forward to a shot at the cup.” She stares at Trevor.

“They will ask, multiple times, in multiple ways, if he’s being recruited. He will need to speak convincingly that it was a random meet at a party. He was in Florida enjoying the sun and sand before hitting the ice again.

“I can come up with some questions we should expect, and we can do a mock interview for practice. If we stick to the plan, we can deflect this.”

Mr. Lee nods. “I think it would be best if you handle all the questions if possible. You’re trained in this. Dash and Trevor are more knee jerk.”

“And I’m more expendable if I make a mistake.” She smiles. “Mr. Lee, I’ve been a fan of the Buffalo Blades since I was a young girl. I even had hopes of someday playing for the team. Since the league has not embraced co-ed teams that’s not possible. Yet. I care about this team. I won’t let you down.”

Lee smiles and nods. “Welcome to the team, Miss Wells.”

I glance at her and wink. Fuck, I love this woman.

We all stand, and Oakley begins to pack up her stuff. Coach and Phil come to talk to her. Trevor heads for the door and I follow a few feet behind.

“Hey Trev.” He turns to look at me.

My hands are hooked in my pockets, and I nod to an empty hall. I already checked with the desk clerk and know there are no cameras in the area. I pause a few feet down the hall and lean against the wall. He mimics my posture on the opposite side.

I get right to the point. “White isn’t a nice guy. I know some players on the Arctic Bears, and they say he’s a liar and conniver. He doesn’t keep his promises.”

He stiffens. “You jumped on my girl pretty quick, old man. Are you trying to play daddy to me, too?”

“Those years I’ve got on you have seen a hell of a lot. I was trying to warn you. Truth, I don’t give a fuck about you. But in two years when you’ve burnt your bridges and are settling for a third-rate team, remember this conversation.”

I straighten to my full height. “You hung her out to dry over the holidays and then you set her up to be embarrassed. Right now, she’s in there trying to help you save face and keep your job, because she’s a good person. Fuck with her again, and I’ll cut your balls off and shove them down your throat.”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 10:02 am*

### CHAPTER 5

#### Oakley

Back in the room Dash heads to the shower. Pulling out my laptop, I lean against the headboard and research the Whites in more depth. Daddy and Sabrina both have a reputation for drawing attention from the press. They like the limelight.

Searching her personal social media, I find photos of several other sports players she's dated, not all of them hockey, and three broken engagements over the last five years. The girl gets around.

The current center for the Arctic Bears has a decent record, but no flash. He's a team player handing off when the play makes sense. I've seen him play and he's good, just not a media hog. My gut tells me the Whites like the spotlight as much as the win. I wonder what they've offered Trevor.

The water shuts off and a couple minutes later Dash walks out pulling on a T-shirt over his grey sweatpants. I swallow twice before shifting my gaze.

I know from the times he's stayed with Gordy at the house that he's more of a sleep naked kind of guy. He must be dressing for my delicate sensibilities. But damn, those grey sweats fit fine.

He'd be shocked if he saw the file of photos I've taken of him the times he's come to visit my brother at our house. It's where I perfected my talent for candid shots. My personal favorite is him in front of the bathroom mirror when he's shaving, and the

towel wrapped around his waist starts to slip. Gordy almost caught me that time.

I drop my gaze back to my screen. Okay, so I've kind of stalked him. I know that he's an only child and his parents both died in a car accident when he was in high school. His grandfather raised him after that. Dash was recruited for hockey during college. Most people don't know he's got an MBA. He's not a dumb jock.

His second year in the league his grandfather died and left him his ranch. Although he keeps a few farm animals, he's turned part of his property into a camp for underprivileged and orphaned kids. He also has a wedding venue to help support the camp. Good business sense.

After thirteen years on the ice, he still plays all out and is the true team leader, even though as goalie he can't be the captain. Then there's that smokin' hot body. Smart. Kind. Hot. The real deal in a business where the media flaunts the superficial.

He and Gordy have been friends since I was a senior in high school. Damn. Have I really had a crush on him for eight years?

Yes, and after today, after he came to my rescue, it's gotten worse. I want him. But if I make a play for him, I could lose the friendship I've nurtured.

But you could win it all....

"Bathroom's all yours. We need to get some sleep. Four AM is going to be here before we know it."

"Don't remind me."

Coming out of the bathroom I see he's stretched out on the too short couch with the spare blanket from the closet. "What are you doing?"



“Gonna get some rest.”

“Not like that, you aren’t. The bed is plenty big enough for both of us. If not, I’ll take the couch.”

“The bed is yours.”

“Dash, you have an important game in forty-eight hours. That couch will mess you up. We’re adults. Get in this bed or so help me, I’ll lay on the floor and neither of us will be worth anything tomorrow.”

“Bossy little thing, aren’t you?”

“It’s been suggested to me a time or two.”

He chuckles but hinges off the couch and crosses to the bed. “I need the side by the door so scoot over.”

Shuffling closer to the wall, I remember him reminding my brother that a man always walked on the street side when he’s with a woman. The fact that he has those old school manners is even more appealing in today’s hype driven world. Where being an obnoxious media hog makes you big news instead of the childish frat boy or girl you really are. But drama and scandal sell papers as my ex-boss so clearly believes. I still prefer facts.

Laying on his back he folds his arms under his head.

I lean up on one elbow and stare down at him. “What’s the game plan in the morning?”

“We’ll get up and leave around the same time as the bus. I prefer to be ahead of them.

We should be able to make better time than they can, but it will depend on how quickly the road crews get the highway cleared. The bigger concern is if more snow hits or if it goes around us. The other thing that might slow us down is your coffee addiction.”

Slapping his chest, I do my best to scowl at him. “It’s totally manageable. Every time you stop for gas get me four large cups loaded down with cream to make it palatable. I’m totally capable of drinking it cold if I must.”

“Then we’ll be hitting every rest stop and gas station on the way.”

I lift an eyebrow. “How much do you want to bet I can hold it longer than you, hot shot?”

“No way.”

“Loser buys steaks at Giancarlo’s when we reach Buffalo.”

“Deal. Just know I can eat my weight there.”

“That’s ok. You’ll be buying.”

I wake to a gentle stroke up and down my back and a soft rumble over my head. “Wake up babe, we need to get going.”

Wrapped in a nice warm blanket I balk at being disturbed. “No. I’m comfortable and warm. Leave me alone.”

The warmth slides down to my waist and back up to my shoulder. “You can sleep in the truck, but we need to get going. They’ve upped the likelihood of more snow.”

While Dash loads our luggage into the back of the crew cab I head over to the bus, snapping a few pictures of the team loading. Then record a few questions with some of the guys before hitting up Coach Nugent on how he feels about the possible delay and if there is an option that the game could be rescheduled.

When I'm done, he stares me down. "Did you just record me? What are you doing?"

"My job. This is for the Blades' social media page. We need to refocus the fans from the personal drama of yesterday. We're about the team and the wins. The fans are anxious about whether we can win after the drama and even if the next game is going to happen. A game has not been rescheduled for years but with this storm front all bets are off."

Phil brushes past to climb onto the bus. "Check your app, boss. She's already posted twice since midnight. Fans seem to be responding favorably. Good job, Oakley."

Coach yells after Phil as he boards. "You never did this shit."

"I hate social media," Phil responds. "Besides, you don't even know how to look for it."

I grin at Coach. "Have Phil show you on the bus. Text me what you think or if you have any suggestions."

Gordy walks up behind me. "Morning, Coach. Can I talk to my sister for a minute?"

Leading me to the side, he shoves his hands into his pockets. "Everything go okay last night?"

"Huh? What do you mean? Coach said he'd talk to you about the plan."

“He did, but I wanted to know how you were—emotionally.”

I laugh. “Oh my god, Gordy. Are you kidding me?”

He scowls, “I’m just trying to be supportive. You know the touchy feely shit. You’re my sister.”

“Who the hell are you? My brother would tell me to get up off the floor and shake it off.”

“I would not!”

“Seventh grade, Evelyn Dejon deliberately stole a play from me on the soccer field. I was embarrassed and hurt that my best friend would do such a thing. You told me it was a game and to not take it personally. Then to get my ass back up, trip the bitch, stomp on her back, and go out play her.”

He smirks. “Yeah, you did good. Scored two more goals that game.”

“I’ve used that same philosophy for years.”

His eyes shine with the love I know he feels for me. Reaching out, he tucks a lock of hair behind my ear. “I just want you to be okay.”

“I didn’t love him. I don’t care. Dash saved me from any embarrassment. Actually, Trevor did me a huge favor. I’ve now got my dream job with the Buffalo Blades.”

And an in with the man I’ve always wanted.

### CHAPTER 6

Dash

She's killing me. She drank all four of her coffees and still has not asked to stop. I drank half of what she did and can't wait any longer.

She's been working on her laptop since we hit the road. I was surprised at first, expecting her to want to talk. But the drive has been oddly companionable, with only rare comments on a song playing on the country station.

Glancing up as I pull into the gas station she smiles sweetly at me. "Are you going in?"

"Yes. You won. I'm hitting the restroom first so the bet dinner will be on me. I have no idea how the hell you do it."

She laughs. "It's genetic. My mom's the same, she can go forever."

After filling the gas tank, we both go inside. I meet her at the counter where she's buying out the junk food section. "What is all that?"

"Road trip supplies. I checked the forecast, there's a fast-moving system barreling in and it really looks like we're going to be hit hard with another storm." She nods at the clerk. "Rita says there's a sandwich shop a mile down the access road. We should probably stop there as well. Oh, I forgot water."

“I’ve got a case in the back seat.”

At the truck door she pauses. “You want me to drive for a while?”

“Naw.” When she bristles, I continue. “It’s not a sexist thing. I’ve seen you on the farm equipment at your parents’ place. I know damn well you can handle this rig. But you’ve got work you can do, and I’d be twiddling my thumbs and going crazy. It would be like riding on the damn bus.”

“Fine. But if you need a break let me know.”

I nod. We drive to the sandwich shop and order three footlong sandwiches and each down a cup of soup in deference to the dropping temperatures. A light snow has started to fall, getting heavier and heavier as we proceed, impacting visibility and slowing us down to an almost crawl. The highway message signs are flashing warnings to get off the road until the storm passes. We’ve come across at least three cars abandoned off the side of the highway and traffic is non-existent.

Oakley’s phone rings. She glances at me. It’s Gordy, she mouths before answering. “What’s up?”

She pauses, concern etched on her face. “Let me put you on speaker.”

“Get the hell off the road,” he snaps. “There’s a five-car pileup in front of us. We’re going to be stuck here for hours, and the weather is predicted to get worse. I want to know you’re safe.”

“We’re fifteen miles from the next exit,” I respond. “I’m familiar with the town and was already planning on pulling off. Once we’re settled, we’ll let you know where we are.”

“Take care of my sister. I’ll keep you posted on what’s going on with us. We’re down to seventy-two hours before the next game. If we even get home in time, we’re going to be playing on no real rest. If we have to push to the next day we’ll be playing back to back games again. This sucks.”

“Don’t buy trouble. We’ll deal with it as it comes.”

Creeping down the highway, it takes us almost an hour to get to the town. There’s a motel right off the exit next to a truck stop and diner.

Stopping to fill up at the gas station first we go to the motel next. I get the last room available, a single queen bed.

“Why don’t we get our stuff into the room then walk over to the diner for a hot meal. No telling how long this storm is going to last, or when we’ll be able to get back on the road. All we’ve had is junk food today,” I suggest getting my thoughts off the single bed.

I woke this morning to her cuddled against my side, one arm over my chest and a leg thrown over my thighs. It took me ten minutes to slide out from underneath her without waking her. Then another ten in the shower to get my boner under control. I don’t know if I can handle another night like that.

She nods in agreement.

Inside we both layer up. She pulls a sweatshirt over her thermal top. This one says I don’t need your attitude. I brought my own.

After pulling on our boots, we walk to the diner. The place is packed but we’re led to a small table for two next to the window. We’re barely seated when her phone pings, pings again, then pings once more. She glances at her screen and frowns.

“Something wrong?”

She chews her lips for a minute then shakes her head. “No. All’s fine.” She texts a reply and lies the phone on the table.

The waitress comes and we both order the meatloaf special. After taking one sip of her coffee, she folds her arms on the table and meets my gaze. “So, tell me. How’d you recognize Sabrina White?”

I’ve been waiting for this question from her. “During the off season I went to Florida to visit my friend PJ. We were invited to an exclusive party at a restaurant PJ had heard about and was dying to sample. PJ’s a chef and he’s always scoping out the competition. And he’d tried for a month to get us reservations at this place but it was always booked.

At first, I thought the invite was because of PJ. I’m banking his new restaurant in Buffalo, and I thought I was going to protect my investment in case the competition was trying to recruit him for their restaurant. Turns out the party was being hosted by the White’s. It quickly became clear they were trying to recruit me for the Arctic Bears.

“I turned them down and I’m glad to say, so did PJ.”

“Were the Whites there?”

Something is off with this questioning, but I play along. “Yes. Wilson tried to impress me, then made me an offer to join the Bears. When I turned him down, his daughter took over the negotiations and tried to make me an offer of a different kind. I turned them both down. They lack the integrity I prefer in my dealings. Both business and personal.



“Why are you asking?”

She opens her phone and hands it to me. There are two pictures of me with Sabrina White. The same ones I was aware of, but these have been doctored to appear more intimate. “That’s not me. I never put my hands on her. I told her to get away from me and when she backed up, I stood and walked out.

“The team is aware of me attending the party and my response to the Whites. Who sent this to you?”

“It came from Trevor’s number.”

My heart twists. “Do you think he realizes how stupid he was and wants you back?”

She shakes her head. “I doubt that. He sees her as his next great conquest. I think she probably sent it from his phone trying to cause trouble. Maybe to try and one up me since I’m with you— according to how we’re playing this.

“I’ve done some research on her, drama and pitting people against each other seems to be her default technique.”

“Oakley, I...” What am I doing? This isn’t real. I can’t tell her the truth, how I feel. It’s just for show until the drama dies down. Until we make the playoffs. Nothing can come of it. She’s too young and my best friend’s sister. She can’t be interested in me.

“What?”

The waitress approaches, saving me from making a fool of myself. “Our dinner’s here.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 10:02 am*

### CHAPTER 7

#### Oakley

That's not what he was going to say. It also doesn't match the look in his eyes. He was going to say something personal. I'd bet money it was about us.

In the cab of his truck, I was aware of every side eye he gave me. How he ran his gaze over me when he thought I wasn't paying attention. I swear he almost reached for my hand once but instead fisted it on his thigh.

I'm not the most experienced woman out there, but could he be interested in me? If he has feelings for me what's holding him back? I wonder if my brother threatened him with rule seven of the bro code? Don't date your bro's sister.

That is so something Gordy would do. Hell, he'd still have me locked in my room if he could. I could ask Gordy, but he'd lie. If he did say something to Dash, he'd deny it. If he didn't, he'd lie and say he did because he didn't see it coming, or my interest in Dash.

This is something I need to figure out on my own. Handle my way.

By the time we head out from the diner there's a good foot and a half of snow accumulated on the parking lot we need to cross.

Dash takes my hand and tugs me to a stop. "Let me carry you."

“Are you kidding me? No way. You have to be able to play in three days and we need that win. You fall carrying me and we’ll both be out of a job. I have boots on. I can handle this. You be careful. Don’t you dare fall and bang up your knee.”

He shakes his head but reaches for my hand. “Let’s help each other.”

We make it to the motel door entrance without incident, but I’m damn cold. We should have layered more. “You want to warm up in the shower?”

“What?” he almost shouts and a faint flush stains his cheeks.

Humm, did he think I meant together? Now that’s an idea I could get behind. Soon, I promise myself. “Do you want to go first?”

“Ah, no, you go ahead. I-ah-need to call and check in on the ranch.”

Rifling through my suitcase I realize the only nightgown I brought is one that The Jerk gave me. I need to burn it when I get home.

“Do you have a T-shirt I could borrow to sleep in? I really didn’t pack enough. Once we get to Buffalo, I’ll need to get to my place and pick up more clothes.”

“Sure,” he grabs one from his bag and tosses it to me.

In the bathroom I place my phone and the shirt on the counter and climb under the warm spray. The heat feels good, relaxing, comforting. When I’m warm, I dry and hold his shirt to my nose. It smells like him—woody, warm, comforting.

Wearing his shirt I blow dry my shoulder length hair. The heat fills the room with his scent. All my girly parts pulse to life.

Does he even see me? How do I get his attention? His interest?

Grabbing my phone, I see a couple missed messages from my parents.

Dad: Your mother saw the posts on that social media place and showed me. That jackass Markel was never good enough for you, Oakley. Be glad he showed his true colors.

Dad: I talked to Gordy. He said you and Dash are traveling separately from the bus and that you were able to find a motel room to get out of the weather and you're safe. Dash is a good man. I trust him to watch over you.

We got tickets for the game. Roads permitting we're coming to town whether they play or not so we can see you, your brother and Dash. Happy New Year's Eve. Love you.

Dad: Hold on, your mom wants to say something.

I laugh, tears filling my eyes. Mom and Dad are new to texting and I'm really proud of them for getting into it. We practiced over Christmas.

Mom: Honey this is mom on your father's phone. Gordy said you got fired by that little weasel at the paper. Sorry, but I'm glad. He didn't appreciate you. He also said you got hired by the Blades to work in Public Relations. That's the kind of job I know you'll love and be so good at. We are so proud of you.

Mom: Your father and I have seen the photos and the videos. I'm so glad Dash was there to prevent you from kicking that SOB in the balls even though he deserved it. We both know he wasn't the one for you. Maybe it's time you went after what you really want. If you don't ask, the answer is always no.

Mom: We love you. Happy New Year. See you in a couple days. Be safe.

Mom: Give Dash our love.

Did my mother just say what I think she said? Did she just tell me to make a move on Dash?

I know she's caught me watching him a couple times over Christmas and maybe over the summer when he came for the fourth of July picnic. I was sure I brushed it off and redirected her, but...

Me: Mom, what are you saying?

Dad: Hold on honey. Mom walked out of the room. I'll take her the phone.

Oh my god. I forgot this is Dad's phone and he'll be reading all of this. I press my forehead to the wall.

Mom: Hi honey, it's Mom. Don't you remember that I proposed to your father because he was dragging his feet. That young man you want isn't immune to you. I've seen how he watches you. How he cares for you. Use a little perfume before you go to bed. And snuggle. It's cold outside.

Make sure he uses protection. Love you.

I don't believe this. Slumping against the counter I wonder if that last one was from Mom or Dad.

I splash cold water on my face and stare at my image as I brush my teeth.

He's in the other room. The man I want. The man of my dreams. Maybe Mom is

right. If you want it, you need to grow a pair and go for it.

Dash is sitting in a chair watching the weather report. He glances up when I walk in wearing his T-shirt that I've knotted at my hip. He swallows hard as his gaze travels from my head to my thighs where his shirt ends. The heat in his gaze gives me hope and courage.

He clears his throat. "Gordy says they've cleared the cars in front of the bus and the drivers are willing to push through following the plows. They're about five hours behind us. According to the guy at the front desk, they clear the highway first then come back to the access roads. It will be two to three hours after that before the parking lot is plowed and we'll have access to the highway.

"If we get some sleep and leave here around four in the morning we should get to Buffalo about the same time as the team.

"It will be a tough game especially since the other team is already in Buffalo. We'll maybe get a decent night's sleep but not much practice time." He shrugs. "Coach is trying to have the start time pushed out an hour or so since most people who would be coming will be dealing with the same travel impact of the storm."

"Tomorrow, if it's clear and you trust me, I can drive and you can get some sleep and at least stretch out a little more," I offer.

He nods, places his laptop on the table and heads to the bathroom.

I pack up my laptop and organize my suitcase for a quick exit then roll it beside where Dash put his. He's laid his clothes out for the morning. Jeans, T-shirt and sweater are stacked on top. The sky-blue sweater is one I gifted him two years ago for Christmas.

Glancing at the dresser I see Dash's keys, change and wallet. Running my finger over the worn leather and tracing the engraved horse head my heart skips a beat. That was the gift I gave him the first year he came to Christmas with Gordy. The key chain was the year after.

He's kept my gifts and obviously uses them. I've seen how he watches you.

Why haven't I seen it? Because I was too embarrassed and out of his league to think he'd ever see me. Pulling off his T-shirt, I rifle through my carryon until I find just what I think will get his attention. Crawling into bed next to the wall I wait and plan.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 10:02 am*

### CHAPTER 8

Dash

Standing under the shower spray I lean my head against the wall. I almost lost it when I looked up and saw her in my T-shirt. Fuck, she looked so sexy with the way she'd knotted the hem so it hugged her shape.

I've heard her refer to herself as having the body of a twelve-year-old boy. It's not true. She's hot as hell. Natural. Authentic. In body and attitude.

I've had so much plastic shoved in my face I should know. I blame the tabloids, television, movies, and media for telling women they can't just be themselves. I wish they'd just let their natural beauty shine through. Tall, short, round, slender. Just fucking be real and you're already beautiful.

Shape and size have never meant much to me. I've dated them all. What gets to me is attitude. Kindness, consideration, and intelligence are by far sexier than shape. Oakley has it all.

She leads with her heart and compassion but has the backbone to go toe to toe with an asshole. She's the kind of woman you want by your side. Not in front of or behind you.

Leaving the shower, I dry and put my sweats and T-shirt on. One more night in my bed. One more night I can watch her sleep without her knowing, inhale her essence and pretend it's real. That we're a couple. That she's mine. She sure as hell doesn't



belong with our team man-whore. Trevor's got talent, just no ethics. He's all about himself and doesn't care about anyone else. He's gonna crash and burn. I just hope he can hold it off until after this season. We have a chance at the cup.

Shutting off the light before opening the door I hope she's asleep. Lying next to her and not touching her has been my greatest challenge. All I've wanted for years was to make her mine. To cherish and worship her. I'm too old and she doesn't see me like a boyfriend anyway.

I'll play the game that Trevor forced on me. She'll never know how I really feel. I will not let her be embarrassed or hurt. Ever.

Walking into the bed area I hesitate. She's leaning against the headboard in a peach-colored spaghetti-strap Cami leafing through her notes. She changed. Oh fuck, I can see her hard little nipple pressing against the soft fabric.

She smiles at me from her side of the bed. "Perfect timing. I was just finishing."

Placing her notepad on the shelf next to her, she settles on her side facing me and pats the mattress. "There's plenty of room for the both of us on this bed. You need to relax and rest. Tomorrow could be a rough day."

I've fantasized of having her in my bed so many times. Under me, over me, beside me. I shut off my lamp hoping she didn't see the boner that instantly sprang to life when I saw her waiting for me in bed. I want nothing more than to climb under the sheets and snuggle up to her.

Sliding under the blankets, I lie on my back, one arm under my pillow, one leg cocked to hide my reaction to her. What kind of a sick fuck am I? She's too damn young for me. She's just starting her career. At thirty-five and as a goalie, mine is on the down slide.

I love her. I've loved her from the beginning. Oh, I tried to lose her image in the beds of other women for a while, but it didn't work. Afterward, I never liked myself. She had my heart, so it felt like cheating. I gave up trying a couple years ago and subsist on the companionship when her family lets me be part of theirs.

From the time I was ten I spent every summer with Gramps on the ranch. Grams died the year I turned twelve. My parents died in a car accident two years later and I moved in permanently with him.

As a ballsy teen, I noticed some of the ladies from town making sly moves on Gramps. I asked him why he didn't take them up on it. He looked at me and said, 'For some men any port in a storm will do. For some of us there's only one in a lifetime. I was blessed to find your Gram.' He tapped his chest. 'She's still here and I'll be true until we're together again.'

I thought he was still mourning, and he'd get over it. I didn't understand until I met Oakley.

Blowing out a breath I start mentally counting backward from one hundred. On my third round, the bed shifts and Oakley snuggles closer and places her head on my shoulder, her hand on my chest. "You can't sleep either?"

With her body pressed to mine my brain short-circuits and I'm unable to do more than croak out a yeah.

"Are you worried about the lack of prep time for the game, or whether Trevor will make a scene at the press conference after?"

Hell, I haven't even thought about the little prick since I've had her on my own. I clear my throat. "A little of both, I guess."

She sits up. “Roll over. I’m going to give you a shoulder rub. It will help to relax you.”

Like hell it will. My cock is already hard as a pipe. She grabs the covers to throw them back and I roll the opposite direction as quickly as I can, so she won’t see my arousal. “Uhm, you don’t have to do this, Oak. I’ll be okay.”

“I want to. You’ve done so much for me.”

She straddles my hips. I feel the heat of her bare thighs against mine and the warmth of her satin clad pussy through my sweats. Fuck, she’s going to kill me.

Slowly, she runs her palms up my back from my waist to my shoulders. Beginning with a firm pressure. With the heel of her palms, she works on the tight muscles near my neck. Her touch is warm and soft.

“You can ask Gordy, I’m pretty good at giving shoulder massages.”

If Gordy knew I was in bed with his sister, he’d castrate me for sure. “Uh, I don’t think we should tell Gordy about this.”

She scoffs. “He can just get over himself. We’re consenting adults. He has nothing to say about what I do or who I do it with.” She tugs up the hem of my T-shirt. “Pull this off.”

Grabbing the bunched up back of the shirt, I pull it over my head. Her soft palms on my flesh send more shock waves to my cock.

“Oakley?”

She leans into the massage and I feel her whole torso pressed against my back. Her

hips rotate as if she's finding the perfect seat against the small of my back. I swear I can feel her satin covered mound pressed against me as she slides her hands up from the small of my back to my shoulders and back down. Each long stroke brings her front into a teasingly light contact with my back. Each stroke taunts me with images of her making love to me.

"Relax Dash, let me take care of you for once. You're always looking out for me."

Sliding down my body, she aligns her knees on either side of mine and pulls my sweats down. Her warm soft palms press against my ass cheeks and slowly, firmly, stroke upward gently kneading as she goes until she's stretched over me, her thumbs working the tight muscles in my shoulder and neck and her torso pressed against me.

Slowly she rubs her way back down. Again, she works her way to my shoulders and retreats. She's like a cat, stretching and kneading me in all the perfect places.

Her hands, her body, feel so good, so right pressed into me. The pleasure. The need could kill me. But I can no longer deny myself the touch I've hungered so long for.

Let me have this, I beg the gods. I'll never be this close to heaven again. I let out a sigh and relax into the mattress, savoring her touch, her presence. Just this once.

### CHAPTER 9

#### Oakley

After a few more strokes he finally relents and lets his body relax. If Mom is right and he wants me as much as I want him all this pent-up tension in his body makes sense.

I know how tense I get when I'm close to him and try not to reach out and touch what I so desperately want. The restraint it takes to not let him see my desire. Have we really both wasted all this time?

Tonight, I plan on doing a lot more than give him a shoulder massage. Tonight, we get the truth out in the open. One way or another.

When he finally relaxes and lets me work the tension from his back and shoulders, I feel like I'm making progress. Now for the hard part.

"Did you date Sabrina?"

He tenses immediately. "Hell no!"

"Why not? She's beautiful."

"She's not my idea of beautiful. I prefer natural women."

"I get it. I like guys that are grounded."

“Then what the hell did you see in Trevor?”

“That’s complicated.”

“I’m listening.”

“There’s this guy on the team that I’ve had a thing for. He’s never noticed me.”

Dash tenses under my palms. I’m taking that as a good sign. “I was a little tired of sitting home all the time and Trevor kept hounding me. I told myself I’d do one date. Which turned into an article for my boss. He liked that I was dating the star Center of the Blades and Trevor also liked the coverage he was getting. It was easier to go along with it and it let me be with the team more.

“Trevor was already getting on my nerves with his suggestions for articles I could do on him and places he wanted to go where we’d be ‘seen’. When he said he had to be somewhere else for Christmas I was relieved. After he returned, he started pushing for the publicity options again and insisted I come to these games and be with him.

“I was so over Trevor by that point, but I was a little worried he was going to propose. There was no way I could have said yes and was stressed with thinking he’d cause a scene.

“Honestly, I prefer the out he handed me to the one it could have been. I don’t think he handles rejection well.”

“He embarrassed you,” Dash snarls.

“Maybe, but you stepped in and fixed that.”

I take a deep breath for courage before asking what I really need to know. “How

come you never brought anyone to the house when you came to visit with Gordy? You know you could have,” I press.

“There hasn’t been anyone in a long while.”

“Dating Trevor wasn’t all bad. It did get me the lead sport reporter experience on the paper.” Inhaling, I go for broke. “But I’m glad the facade is over. And even though you were forced into it, I’m glad I’m with you. You’re the one I’ve always wanted anyway.”

His body instantly tenses under my palms. So much time ticks past I wonder if he’s even breathing.

“Dash?”

Twisting, he reaches an arm behind him. Snagging my waist, he rolls us both. Settling me under him, he braces himself above me on his forearms doing a plank over me, so our bodies don’t touch. “Say that again.”

“You’re the one I’ve always wanted. The one I compared everyone else to.” Stroking a finger down his chiseled jaw I continue. “Am I just Gordy’s little sister? Is that how you see me? Or could I be more?”

“I noticed you. Hell, I can barely keep my eyes off you,” His voice is gravely, filled with emotion. “I’ve noticed you for longer than I should have. First you were a cheeky young girl who spoke her mind and could argue sports like a pro. You made me laugh and proud you were your own person. You played hockey like your brother and soccer like Pelé, all out.

“But there was another girl inside who always thought of others before herself. The first one to cheer on your teammates. You took care of your friends and stood up for

people at school. You ran a special raffle to get equipment for the kids that couldn't afford it.

"The first year Gordy invited me to your parents' house for the holidays," he continues, "You had a gift for me. One your mom told me you bought with your own chore money. You gave me the first Christmas presents I'd had in years. I watched a thoughtful child grow over the years and one day you were a young woman I couldn't keep my eyes off of. At first I couldn't reconcile the child with the grown up you were becoming.

"Then it was too late. I saw the woman you'd become and you're all I've thought about for years. But you're too young."

"You don't see me as an adult?"

"No — Yes, but I met you when you were young and you're my best friend's little sister."

"Screw the bro-code. I'm an adult who gets to decide what she wants and who she wants. I want to see what— if— we can make something of this attraction. Quit giving excuses. If you aren't interested, just say so."

He lowers his hips letting our bodies touch from thigh to hip. I can feel his arousal pressing into me through his sweatpants. "Babe, I can't get any more interested. But there will be consequences if we do this. Your brother's going to be pissed, your parents may not approve, and I'm not sure what the team's fraternization rules are now that you're an employee. Not to mention, I'm a little possessive and a lot obsessed with you."

I smile up at him. "Was any of that supposed to scare me away? Because it didn't. Now kiss me, big guy, and show me what you got."



Slowly, as if giving me time to change my mind, he lowers his lips to mine. The soft brush of his mustache teases me first. Then his warm, tender flesh meets mine, a hint of mint scents the air between us. He teases the tip of his tongue gently over my lips as if asking permission to enter.

“Yes. Please, yes,” I beg.

Part of me expected him to pounce but he’s teasing, cajoling. Somehow, I know he’s waiting, seeking, requiring my participation. I cup his cheeks running my thumbs over his surprisingly soft beard before swiping his lips with my tongue. “Let me in, Dash. I want you. I’ve wanted you for so long.”

As if I’ve shattered the damn holding him back, he thrusts past my lips, his tongue dueling with mine. His needy moans and gasps fill my head as his tenderness wraps me into his embrace.

“So long. So long, I’ve hungered and craved you. Never believing you could ever be interested in me. I still can’t believe it. But I’ll love you, cherish you as long as you’ll have me. I’m yours, Oakley. You’re the only one for me.”

“And I’m yours, Dash.”

Leaning back, he grabs the hem of my top and gently pulls it over my head. Instinctively I reach to cover the size of my breasts.

“Stop.”

“I’m so small,”

“You’re perfect.”

“There are peaches bigger than I am,” I sigh.

“I love peaches. So sweet and succulent and the perfect size to fill my mouth.” He proceeds to prove his point by suckling my hardened nipple before devouring my breast. Oh my god. I’ve never had someone pay so much attention to what I’ve always considered my worst asset. The way he plays me has me begging for release. “Dash, fuck me. I need you to fuck me.”

“When you’re ready, babe.”

He holds me still as he licks a path down my body until he reaches my satin thong and pulls it off. I push and shove his sweats until he kicks them to the floor.

Arms bracketing my hips, he studies my mound as if it’s the sweetest fruit he’s ever seen. Inhaling deeply, he chuckles. “You even smell like peaches.”

“Body wash. My body wash,” I groan as he laps his tongue over my needy bits. “Dash, oh my god, Dash. Please. Now. Right now.”

“I’m clean,” he says as he slides up my body.

“Me, too and I’m on the shots. Do it. Do it now! Please.”

“I’ll always please you, babe.”

Balancing on one hand he uses his other to guide himself to my entrance. Glancing between us I realize my man is super-sized all over. I must have gasped because his gaze shoots to mine.

“You okay? I can stop.”

“Don’t you dare! I am so ready for you.”

Gently he eases into me, filling me, stretching me, but in all the best ways. Once seated, he leans on his forearms that are braced on each side of my head and brushes his warm lips over mine. “You feel so good, babe. Even better than my dreams.”

“You dreamed about me?”

“You’re the last thing I think of before I sleep and the first thing in the morning.”

“Really?”

“A little stalkerish, I know.”

“No, we just wasted a lot of time. You’ve been in my heart for years.”

He lowers his lips to mine and slowly starts to move inside me. Each stroke is deeper than the last. “More, Dash. More. I want you, all of you.”

“You have me, babe. Forever.”

Each thrust sends me higher and higher. He’s hitting me in all the right places. The pressure is building in a way it never has before. “Yes, Dash. Oh yes. More. Yes!”

“Come for me, babe. Let go. Give it to me.” He shifts his hips and angle, and I explode. He follows me with a deep shudder.

### CHAPTER 10

Dash

“I’ve never come that way before,” she whispers.

I just climbed back into bed to lay beside her after I cleaned us both up. I was surprised she thought she was supposed to take care of that for both of us. What dip sticks has she been dating? Oh, yeah, Look-At-Me-Trevor. I set her straight on how a man pampers his woman.

Lying on my side, propped up on my elbow, I take her hand in mine and bring it to my lips for a kiss. Now that I’ve touched her, I can’t keep my hands off her.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve only been with a couple guys and they-uh-said I wasn’t very responsive.”

“Bullshit. They were just selfish. You’re beautiful and your body is so reactive.”

Her tentative smile warms my heart. “You’re real, Oakley. Kind, thoughtful, smart, confident. Others can be threatened by your poise. That isn’t your problem. You’re perfect as you are.”

She blushes and looks down. Gordy told me some of the girls at school would make fun of her for being so small. I wonder if it was someone else. “Trevor. He said something to make you feel bad.”

She blushes letting me know I guessed correctly.

“What did he say?” My words come out harsher than I want. But so help me if that little shit-head hurt her I’ll take him out myself.

“It’s okay. He just made a couple suggestions when we first started to date.”

“Like what?”

“Maybe I could get boob or booty enhancements.”

“He’s such a douche. Look babe, society has some really screwed up ideas. Reality TV is not real life, and there is no perfect body shape. What you have is real and fits you. Enhancing and reducing doesn’t make you a beautiful person. That comes from your heart.”

“Now you sound like my Dad trying to pump me up.”

Her Dad . Fuck, what am I doing? Running a hand over my face, I make a show of glancing at the clock. “We should get some sleep. We need to leave early.” I reach for the lamp and turn it off.

“Dash, what just happened here?”

“Nothing. I just realized the time.”

“You’re having second thoughts. I wasn’t good enough. Experienced enough.”

I slap her ass. “Do not talk that way about yourself. You’re amazing! Perfect. Everything.”

She crawls over my chest to turn the light back on. “Then what’s the issue here?”

“I’m too old for you.”

“How old?”

“Nine years.”

“Wrong. You just turned thirty-four. I’ll be twenty-six next month. Besides, that age gap is nothing. So quit trying to come up with excuses. If I don’t interest you, just say so. But the wood you’re sporting is a little telling. Unless it’s just been so long, any port in a storm has that effect on you.”

“It’s you. It’s been you for a while.”

She smiles, rolls on top of me and props herself up with her arms on my chest. “Really, like a really long time? Cuz I’ve had this crush on you since I was eighteen. In college when the other girls would give me shit because I looked like a boy and never seemed to date I told them you and I dated and you liked my sleek cat form. Of course they had no clue who you were. The only sport they were even remotely aware of were football and quarterbacks.

“Anyway, I showed them pictures of you. Remember that shaving commercial you did with your shirt off? Then when you came to the house with Gordy for Thanksgiving, I took all those family photos. I cropped a few and showed them you and me together. That was such a great holiday. They left me alone after that and I actually started to enjoy college.”

“You didn’t?”

“Oh yes, I did.”

“That explains the conversation your father had with me at Christmas that year, where he mentioned you were still in college and had a lot yet to experience. He reminded me that it was the man’s responsibility to always protect the woman. Shit, he thought we were having sex.”

“Possibly. It doesn’t matter. They like you. If it makes you feel better, they told me to go for what I want.”

“And what is that?”

“You.”

I laugh. “That’s what I love about you. Your outspoken, tell it like it is attitude.”

Her eyes go wide, and she gasps. “You love me?”

“Babe, I’ve loved you forever. I’m not trying to rush you, but maybe you need to know that this is not a fling, a booty call, or a few nights stand for me. I want you. I want you forever. I want to marry you if you’ll have me.”

“Dash, I...”

“Wait. There’s a couple more things I need to say. I know you love the Blades and you just got your dream jobs. And I support you one hundred percent.

“I-I’m retiring at the end of the season. Win or lose this is my last year on the team. On any team. You’re the first and only one to know.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I have the ranch, and I’ve made good investments. I’m set. I wouldn’t mind getting

married, if the right woman said yes. I'd follow her around while she shows the world that women belong in hockey, in sports. Then when she's tired of the rat race maybe we raise a few kids and dogs together.

"There's no timeline or pressure once I retire. I just want to be with you. If you'll have me."

"Are you sure? No more dick moves about age? Because Dash, I want the same thing. I've wanted it for a long time."

"I'm sure, but you don't have to answer me now. I only want you to know the truth. I'm tired of holding back. Let's finish out the season together and see how it goes. I'll do whatever you want. Come here. Let me hold you while you sleep."

Sitting up, she pushes me to my back and covers my lips with hers. "Yes. The answer is yes."



### CHAPTER 11

Oakley

The sound of a buzzing alarm pulls me from the sweetest dream of a little girl and boy running through the field with a pack of dogs. Pushing up on my forearm I realize I'm resting on a warm hard chest. It wasn't a dream. Memories of our epic night fill me and I realize I'm half-on, half-off of Dash and there's no mistaking his state of arousal. I hope he woke us early enough to do something about the situation.

"Morning wood or is that for me?"

"It's all for you. Forever."

"Humm." I've just gotten comfortable kissing a trail down his chest when his phone rings.

He frowns when he sees the caller Id. Glancing at me, he mouths Coach and hits the button to answer the call on speaker. "What's up?"

"Are you on the road?"

"Not yet."

"Get your ass moving. Another storm is blowing in."

The drive is tense with icy spots and slow traffic. The wind gusts blow snow across

our path, but there's no new snowfall to impede our progress.

"By the time we make it to the stadium we'll only have two hours before warmup starts. It's going to be a tough game," Dash says. "And Trevor is going to be pissy because coach insisted that he ride the bus with the rest of the team."

I've been focused on my notes planning a dozen different responses and comebacks for the press conference after the game.

"Do you want to come to my place to shower and change before we go to the arena? Or can you get ready there?" Dash asks.

"The women's locker room will be fine. I sorted my bag in preparation for that likelihood."

"What can I do to help you?"

Placing my hand on his thigh, I smile. "Win today. It will make everything else fade away."

He smirks. "Gotcha. One win coming up."

At the arena he takes me to the office where Phil is waiting. He smiles, handing me a packet with a press card clipped to the front. "Man, am I glad you're the one dealing with the press today. I thought we'd go over what's in your new hire info and get you signed into all the team's social media accounts, update you on anything new and then I'd show you around. We've got a little time before the local press starts trying to rattle your cage."

"Perfect."

“Watch over her, Phil,” Dash instructs before squeezing my shoulder, kissing the top of my head and leaving. I wonder if he even realizes what he did. I glance at Phil. He waggles his eyebrows but doesn’t say anything. After an intense hour and a half, I let myself into the women’s locker room with the key Phil gave me. Showered and hair blown dry I head to the locker where I stored my change of clothes.

Rounding the corner, wrapped only in my towel, I come face to face—ok, face to boob—with Sabrina. “What are you doing in here?”

“I saw you come in here. Trevor told me you were the new press contact for the Blades. Whose dick did you suck to get that job?”

“Humm, no one’s. I didn’t have to. It’s called credentials, a master’s degree, and a stellar dossier. I’m sure you understand hard work and commitment. Your daddy bought you a bachelor’s degree in fashion.”

“I went to school for that,” she snaps.

“Yes, three days for each class for each semester and you paid someone to do your homework.”

“That’s a lie.” Sabrina stomps toward me.

Crossing my arms over the towel, I hold my ground and glare back. “No, it’s the truth and I have the records to prove it. It’s called research.”

“You little bitch. I’m gonna slap you down.”

“Please come ahead and try. But before you do, I should warn you I have a black belt in karate and am working on my purple in Jiu jitsu. Are you sure you want me to mess up your hair? I’d hate to pull out your extensions. Your makeup looks really

nice. Would you have time to fix it before the game if it gets smudged?”

“You cunt.”

“Or,” I continue, “We could just talk like adults. Congratulations on hooking up with Trevor. You are so much more his type than I ever was. And the two of you look really really good together as a couple. Your pictures are all over the press. You’re stunning by the way.”

Sabrina pauses for a moment, then straightens and flips her hair over her shoulder. Hand on her hip she strikes a models pose and studies me.

“When Trevor’s not showing off, he’s a damn good hockey player. He could go far in the league. But he needs to focus before game time. Don’t screw it up for him, stay away from him until after they win.”

“I know how to handle my man. I give him what he needs.” Her painted lips twist into a sneer.

“I’m sure you do. I’m sure the two of you are made for each other.

“Look, Sabrina, I’m no threat to you. I’m just a scrawny little wordsmith. I have no intention of interfering with the two of you. I just want to get the Blades through the end of this season with as much positive press as possible. Whatever trades happen next year... well that’s next year. The two of you will have time to work that out.”

There’s a shift in air as the door opens. Glancing up I see a stone-faced Dash walk in.

“Everything okay in here?” he asks.

“All’s good. Sabrina and I were just catching up. You know, girl talk.”

She nods and pushes past him to leave. I snuggle into his arms when he reaches me. “Whew, that was close. How did you know?”

“I saw her from down the hall. When she didn’t come back out, I got nervous.”

Cupping my face, he tilts my head to his. “A black belt in Karate and a purple in Jiu Jitsu?”

“I did take a year of Karate in college, and I bought a purple Jujitsu belt at a garage sale.”

His chuckle rumbles in his chest before he kisses me. Knees weak from his ravishment, I pull back. “I need to get dressed and meet Phil.”

“I’m going to have a guard hang outside the door until you’re done. No more surprises.” He runs his hand down my exposed hip and thigh. “When did you get the Phoenix tattoo on your thigh? It’s beautiful.”

“A year ago. I always loved the eagle wings on your chest. It felt like I was sharing something with you when I got it.”

“Maybe our next one we can get together.”

“I’d like that.”

The team was sluggish on the ice, but we won. Now we just need to get past the press conference. Coach answers his game questions then introduces me. Trevor, Dash and Gordy stand behind me.

The first question is from a female reporter congratulating me on the position and asking me how I feel being a female representative for the team.

“I’ve loved the Blades since I was a little girl. I’m proud to have the opportunity to be part of the organization. I have a master’s in communication and have worked for newspapers, television, and charity organizations. As for the job, facts are facts, and my job is to answer your questions truthfully.”

“The team seemed off today. What do you attribute that to?” the second reporter asks.

“The worst snowstorm of the year, traveling for long hours on a cramped bus, little sleep, junk food, and not much warm up time. Our opponents had two full days of rest. It was a tough game, but we won. We’ll do better tomorrow. Next question.”

“The Blades were on fire before today. Do you think having all the personal relationships and drama out in the open is going to help or hurt?” Reporter three.

“I think when your personal life feels good, is in order, then everything goes easier. The whole team got a few days off with their loved ones over the holidays. We’re ready for the rest of the season.”

“Gordy, it’s no secret that Trevor dumped your sister and now she’s dating your best friend. How is that going to affect the team dynamic?”

Oh shit. Here we go. I just hope Gordy sticks to the script. He glances my way before answering.

“Look, people date, sometimes it works out sometimes it doesn’t. It’s life. If she has no hard feelings, then neither do I.

“Hey, my best friend is now part of the family. Feels right to me.”

“Trevor,” the fourth reporter calls. “You’ve been seen with Sabrina White of the Arctic Bears organization. Are you under contract negotiations?”

Trevor steps closer to me and puts his arm around my shoulder. I hear Gordy hiss, but Dash must have settled him down because he stays in place.

“No. I’m happy to be a part of the Buffalo Blades and I have a contract. Sabrina and I were introduced by a friend at a party after Oakley and I decided we were just good friends. Still are.” He gives my shoulder an obvious squeeze.

I lean into the mic, “Thank you all for hanging around. The weather threw everyone a curve. After a good night’s sleep, we’ll all be back in the groove for tomorrow’s rematch. Game on fans.”

Dash steps forward, takes my hand and leads me down the steps and into the team tunnel. As the others pass us, he backs me against the wall. “You were amazing. So together, so poised. Damn, is there anything you can’t do? I am so proud of you.”

Leaning into me he cups my cheeks and kisses me.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Gordy’s growl tears us apart. Red faced with fury he grabs Dash’s shoulder and spins him.

I try to push between them. “Wait!”

“Gordon,” a female voice snaps the tension. “May I have a word with you. Now.” My mother’s voice freezes Gordy in place. We both look down the ramp to see Mom and Dad approaching via the team entrance.

“Ma?”

I glance at our mother, and she smiles at me before turning her attention and scowl back to my brother. “Now please, son. It’s important. Your father will stay with your sister and Dash.”

Dad looks down at me as he wraps an arm over my shoulder. “You good, girl?”

“Best I’ve ever been, Dad.” He nods before kissing the top of my head, then turns to Dash. “So, son, do you think you guys can win tomorrow?”

Dash’s stunned gaze meets mine. I smile and take his hand, giving him a reassuring squeeze. Yes, my father just officially welcomed him into the family.

“Yes sir, I think we can. We’ve got the heart for this and will do everything to make our dream of the cup come true. We won’t let you down.”

Dad pats him on the back as we walk toward the exit. “I know you won’t, son. Mother and I always have known. You never will.”



## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 10:02 am*

Dash

I asked Oakley to stay with me since my place is bigger and has an actual office. We've both waited so long to be with each other we don't want to wait any longer. Oakley's parents took her to her apartment where she'll pack up some things to bring over. I know it was important for her parents to have private time with her to make sure that this is what she wants.

We're all going to dinner tonight, including Gordy. I need to have a talk with him beforehand. I tried to call him then texted to ask him to stop by but he hasn't responded.

There's a pounding on the door. I check security and it's a furious looking Gordy.

I open the door. He takes a swing grazing my chin and bumping my shoulder. It hurts, but no damage. I've been in fights with him before, this was more for show than attack. My tension eases.

"You're fucking my baby sister!"

"I'm loving your sister and I'm going to marry her if she'll have me."

"You took advantage of the situation."

"I've loved your sister for years. I stayed away because she was too young."

"So you were sniffing around my sister while pretending to be my friend?"

“Can we sit down and talk about this, or do you want to continue to shout it in the halls for the neighbors to hear?”

He brushes past me, heads to the fridge and grabs two beers. Twisting the caps off, he hands one to me and leans against the counter.

Taking the seat across from him I take a swallow and start. “You’re my best friend. In a lot of ways my only friend. It was always just my gramps and I and I never had a need for a lot of people around me. You’ve said it yourself. I’m a loner.

“That first year when I gave you the ride to your family home after the season ended and you introduced me to them was the first time in years that I’d felt included. I liked working with you and your dad on the farm. You became my friend that summer. Your parents are great, and your little sister was cute.

“As the years and seasons went by, I grew to love you as a brother and your family as if they were my own.”

“And my sister?” He scowls.

“She was a cute kid, thoughtful and smart. She’d make me laugh.”

He doesn’t look at me. “And you wanted to fuck her.”

“Don’t make this something it’s not. She was in college before I ever saw her as a woman. And I made damn sure to stay away from her after that. But I’m not going to lie to you. I’ve been in love with her for years. Because of our friendship I knew it couldn’t work.

“When Trevor pulled his shit, you weren’t there and there was no way in hell I was going to let her be hurt. I didn’t know until then that she’s had a thing for me for quite

a while.

“None of that matters. And all of that matters. I love her. She loves me. I’ve asked her to marry me when she’s ready. I’ll love her and support her in every way possible.”

He leans over the counter and uses his half empty beer to point at me. “Bullshit. You took advantage of her, of the moment.”

“What did she say when you asked her?”

He looks away, takes a draw on his beer, then smiles. “She said if I messed this up for her she’d make sure I’d never be able to procreate any little monsters like me.”

We both laugh. Yeah, that sounds like our Oakley.

We did it. We won the Stanley Cup.

Actually, Trevor won it for us. Instead of trying to take an impossible shot, he handed it off to Gordy who buried the puck for a win.

Trevor has grown a lot the last couple months. He broke up with Sabrina and after a few slams in the press, he started acting like a teammate not a player.

Tonight is something I’ve worked years for but there was never a guarantee. It’s also my last night as a player, although only Oakley knows. Once the celebration of tonight’s win dies down, I’ll make the announcement.

I’ve loved every minute of my career, but I’m not going to miss it. Oakley fills my life and heart now. We’ve bounced a lot of options around, but we’re going to take a month’s vacation before we decide anything. The team wants her back and I’ve toyed

with being an assistant coach so we can travel together.

I have the ring in my pocket and later when we're with her family I'll get down on my knees and ask her the most important question of my life.

“Will you marry me?”

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 10:02 am*

Oakley

“CarterLee, where are you?”

“I’m in the babies’ room, Mom.” My son’s voice echoes through the baby monitor.

I glance down at the dog bed. Oh no, this can’t be good.

“Dash, I need you,” I call out knowing he too will hear what’s being said over the monitor.

Grabbing my little lavender bundle of joy, I glance at the clock. Mom, Dad and Gordy will be here any minute to meet the newest members of the family. Thank god. We can use all the extra hands.

I head up the stairs to the second floor of the ranch house. My husband’s steady footfalls aren’t far behind.

“I fixed it, Mom,” my four-year-old son proudly states from beside the crib.

I look over my shoulder at Dash. “This is all your fault, and you know it.”

“Why?” He feigns innocence.

“Because you told him the story.”

“What story?”

“The one where you asked Mom to marry you and help you raise babies and puppies,” CarterLee replies. “If we’re raising them as family, they need to be together. We’re family.”

I glance into the crib. My daughter’s twin brother is swaddled in green and surrounded by six King Cavalier newborn pups and Lovey, our doggie mom.

“Yes, I did.” Dash laughs and ruffles our son’s hair. Glancing out the window he grins. Reinforcements are here. “Son, go get your Grandma and Grandpa.”

“They get to pick a puppy to take when they’re grown right? Not one of us kids?”

I try to stifle my laugh.

Dash doesn’t even try to hide his. “Right, son.”

He takes our daughter in one capable arm and snuggles me to his chest. “You’ve made me the happiest man in the world. I love you, Oakley.”

“I love you, Dash. Forever.”