



The Puck Daddy (Daddies of the League #3)

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Category: Sport

Description: Adrian DeLuca is one of Brynn U's star hockey players. And in a college town like Brynn, California, playing for the Ice Dragons is almost like being a mini-celebrity. So, when Adrian's first crush comes back to town, he can't help but flaunt his new celebrity status in front of the older man.

Theo Walsh is a puck bunny puck Daddy! Until an injury ended his career, hockey consumed Theo's life. Regardless, he still loves attending games and supporting his old team. But when the star player, Adrian DeLuca, shows up one night, he isn't the kid Theo met all those years ago. Adrian is handsome and charming and in search of a Daddy?

The Puck Daddy is a college hockey, MM romance. Get ready for stolen kisses, cuddling, and tender moments shared by two people who are meant to be together.

Daddies of the League is a college ice hockey shared world, where you'll find Daddies both on and off the ice. Skate into your newest obsession and grab them all.

Total Pages (Source): 26

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Age Thirteen

Adrian

“A drian! That old guy you’re crushing on is on TV again,” Felix calls out from the living room. A wide smile breaks across my face, and I sprint through the kitchen, socks sliding against the tile.

I dash into the living room, pick up a throw pillow, and chuck it at my brother before kneeling in front of the TV screen. “He isn’t that old, Fe.”

“Um, yes, he is. He’s like double my age,” he mumbles. “Theo is like twenty-two or something.”

“Twenty-three,” I correct.

Mom chuckles behind me. “Honey, I don’t think you need to be that close to the screen to see him.”

“Shhh...” I hush them both, leaning even closer so I can hear what the announcer is saying. Mom laughs. Out of the corner of my eye, I see her reach for the remote. She turns up the volume just as Theo Walsh smiles at the camera for his post-game interview.

He runs a hand through his wavy red hockey hair . Ugh. He’s so hot.

“Mom! It’s too loud,” Felix whines. I roll my eyes and glance back at my eleven-

year-old brother. He's curled up with his book on the large brown recliner a few feet away. I notice the cover, and it's no surprise he's rereading Percy Jackson . Again.

Mom gets off the sofa, walks over to Felix, and whispers something in his ear. He giggles and nods eagerly. Felix bounces on the chair and closes his book. I'm about to ask what they're talking about when the interview starts.

My gaze yanks back to Theo on the screen. Several mics are in his face, and sweat is trickling down the side of his temple. Hockey gear is hung up behind him, and it's obvious they're in a locker room. God, I'd kill to be able to switch places with one of those guys who're asking him questions.

Theo Walsh plays center for the Olivia Cove Wyverns, and he's a big deal.

A really big deal. He's talented and motivated and absolutely breathtaking.

Wait, breathtaking? Where the heck did that word come from?

I bite my lip as my cheeks heat. I lean forward again, hoping my brother or mom don't see me blushing like a freaking schoolgirl.

Theo oozes charm and confidence as he talks about their winning game.

At one point, the stupid media person asks him an invasive question about his romantic life, and jealousy swirls in my stomach.

Theo easily dodges the question and starts talking about the game again.

When an uncomfortable question is asked about how his knee is doing after last year's injury and if it was too soon to be back on the ice, Theo's reply comes easily.

“Hockey is in my blood. A little injury can’t keep me off the ice for long.”

I grin.

Hockey is in my blood.

God. He’s so cool. That’s exactly how I feel about hockey, too.

I’ve always had a thing for him, ever since my mom took us to a meet-and-greet over at Brynn University last year.

I had no idea that Theo-freaking-Walsh attended school in my hometown.

And the first time he’d aimed that charming smile my way, I was star-struck.

Sure, he was probably looking at some rando behind me, but I like to pretend he was talking to only me.

Mom and I got to listen to him talk about his dedication to the game, his experience attending school at Brynn U and playing for their hockey team, and the importance of following our dreams.

It was that night I realized I wanted to be a center, like him.

That I’d do everything in my power to focus on hockey and hone my skills on the ice.

I want to play hockey for Olivia Cove in the NHL, too.

Later that night, I secretly dreamed of kissing Theo; with his cocky smile and bright blue eyes.

And for several nights after that, I thought that maybe someday, if I ever got the chance, I could possibly make all those dreams come true.

I must have been sitting there for a while, just staring at the TV as I spaced out, because I didn't even realize the interview was over. Mom must have paused it on Theo's face, because I was just silently staring at that gorgeous frozen smile for god knew how long.

A flash of light snaps me out of my daydreams of kissing the only man I've ever found attractive, because my little brother is suddenly giggling nonstop with Mom's phone in front of my face.

Embarrassment and heat flood me. "What the hell? Did you just take a photo of me?" I screech.

"Language, Adrian," Mom says.

Felix cackles and tosses the phone at Mom before bolting outside.

I growl and take off after him. He's on the lawn, giggling uncontrollably, hands on his knees and breathing hard.

I can't help but smile. I love my brother.

He's always so shy and reserved, so when he opens up like this, it's almost as if he's blessing us with a rare gift.

I rush forward and wrap my arms around his waist. Maybe it's all the training I've been doing over the past year on the ice, or maybe it's just because my brother is that tiny, but I lift him easily. Felix laughs even harder and pounds his tiny fists against my back.

I slowly—and awkwardly—shuffle us toward the heated pool before tossing him into the deep end.

He kicks his way to the surface and spits out water before laughing again.

I toss my shirt over my head and jump in next to him.

Next thing I know, Mom is by the edge of the pool and cannonballing into the water with a big splash.

Over the next twenty minutes, we playfully shove each other, splash around, and swim. Before long, Mom ushers us out of the pool with a promise of pizza and ice cream. The night goes by quickly with more smiles and delicious food. It's easily one of the best days of my life.

If only I knew what the future held for us—and for Mom—then I would have savored every moment just a little longer.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Nine years later...

Adrian

As soon as my blades hit the ice for today's game, I knew something was off with our team.

Usually, we barely have to look at each other to anticipate one another's movements.

Our chemistry on and off the ice is a thing of beauty, and any other day, I can easily say that the Ice Dragons are more than just a college hockey team. We're family.

But today? It's as if we're strangers playing together for the first time. Or more accurately, it's as if we're all a bunch of newborn deer trying to walk on ice. Disastrous.

With cheers of encouragement ringing out, the crowd in the arena tries to boost our spirits.

For them, the game is exciting; this deep into the third period, the score can go either way.

But for us, it's a stark reminder that we aren't at our best. Any professional eye can tell you our defense is off.

"Get your head out of your ass," Callaway yells as he skates by. "We need you."

“Ditto, jackass,” I yell back. Callaway grins at me over his shoulder, index finger tapping his helmet.

I shake my head, making images of last night’s party come to mind, and I try not to wince.

Damn, Coach is going to kill us. We may have partied just a little too hard, and it’s clearly messing with our performance today.

Thank god I didn’t drink my weight in shots like some of the juniors did.

Instead, I was up all night making sure my team got home in one piece. Sometimes, volunteering to be the designated driver sucks ass. And doing it the night before a game is just pure insanity. Never again.

I need to focus on the game. This is my last semester at Brynn U and my chance at making a good impression.

Olivia Cove may have drafted me two years ago, but they haven’t signed me yet.

Which means my dreams of being in the NHL are close, yet still so far away.

One wrong move can just as easily fuck it up.

The game and my grades. Nothing else matters until I graduate.

Down to the wire at 2-2, the next ten minutes are painful with a lot of missed shots, sending the game into overtime. I might not be hungover, but I’m tired as hell and it definitely shows. Fortunately for us, we have five minutes to turn this game around.

As if the hockey gods decided to bless me with their presence, an opening presents

itself just in time for me to make eye contact with Rizzo. With a barely there nod, one second the puck is with him, and the next it's settled against my stick in a breakaway.

Letting all my instincts take control, I pick up speed. Heart pumping, and blades hitting the ice, I hurdle across the rink. Thanks to our quick thinking and tons of practice, Rizzo and I have finally regained the chemistry that has been missing all game.

Thank fuck.

The moment I spot my opening, all the blood rushes to my head as time seems to slow down and speed up all at once. The quick sweep of my stick against the ice is like music to my ears. The crowd erupts into a loud cheer as I score the winning goal with a wrist shot.

Suddenly, my team is there cheering, jumping, and surrounding me with fist-pounding hugs and bumping helmets. "Hell yeah!" I scream in excitement. "Let's go."

"Fucking knew you'd do it," Nelson yells somewhere off to my right.

I make eye contact with Rizzo, and he's giving me this goofy shit-eating grin.

The growing cheers of the crowd drown out Rizzo's words, but it doesn't matter.

I already know how he feels, and I'm pretty sure we're thinking the same thing. I grin back. We fucking did it!

"Adrian! Adrian, a moment of your time, please." I glance up to see Brynn U's sports blogger, Chrissy Newman, dressed to the nines in a sexy red dress and a dazzling smile on her face. Used to her line of questioning, I pause by Chrissy's side.

As soon as her regular cameraman, Ronny, begins recording, she immediately launches into her interview questions.

“Chrissy Newman here with Adrian DeLuca, Brynn College’s Center for the Ice Dragons.

Adrian just scored tonight’s game-winning goal.

How does it feel to win three games in a row, Adrian?

” Instead of the usual mic you see on TV, she holds onto this tiny little thing that looks more like a weird makeup brush.

I smile back, making eye contact with her. “It feels pretty damn good, Chrissy,” I say, leaning into her strange mic. “As soon as I saw my shot, I had to take it.”

“New rumors have been circulating as to why Olivia Cove drafted you to their NHL team when you were twenty, but still haven’t offered you a contract. That was almost two years ago, and you still haven’t been signed. Are you worried about your chances of getting into the NHL?”

I grit my teeth and try not to roll my eyes.

These interviews are always about staying in control and answering questions in a positive, or at the very least, neutral way.

“This is my last semester at Brynn U, and if everything goes according to plan, I hope to join Olivia Cove’s training camp as soon as I graduate.

When I was originally drafted, Olivia Cove and I agreed I would benefit from the extra on-ice playing experience to help further develop my skills as a center.

” They also appreciated the fact that I wanted to take care of my younger brother and graduate with him at the same time.

Olivia Cove is known for its family beliefs and diversity.

It’s one of the reasons they’re my favorite team.

“The last two games, you scored an impressive—and often elusive—hat trick, but tonight was different. The team seemed a little off. What was going on?”

I open my mouth to speak, but see Coach Wilson staring at me with his lips pressed into a firm line. He’s leaning against the wall just in front of the tunnel, waiting for me to head to the lockers.

Chrissy, like the little shark she is, must smell something in the water because she immediately starts talking again. “Does this have anything to do with last night’s escapades and the crazy party at Delfy House?”

My mouth falls open.

“Or maybe it’s about the video of you from the party that went viral this morning.”

What the fuck? What video? My mind whirls, searching for an explanation. Suddenly, Coach is next to me, and I feel like the little kid who got caught doing something naughty. Only, I have no idea what the hell Chrissy is talking about, and I hate not knowing what is going on.

“DeLuca!” Coach barks, causing me to jump. “Lockers. Now,” he says as he storms back into the tunnel and out of sight.

I give Chrissy my best panty-dropping grin. “You heard the man. I gotta go.”

With a deep blush staining her cheeks, Chrissy sputters, practically melting under my stare. Once a puck bunny, always a puck bunny. “Uh—just one more comment, Adrian. What are your plans for the future if Olivia Cove decides not to sign you?”

My smile falters for only a split second. With the camera still on me, I can’t afford to slip up. Not when anyone might be watching. But fucking hell. What kind of question was that? Her interview should be a positive one, especially right off a win.

“Hockey is in my blood,” I say with a wink, and flip around before I let my true emotions show.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

I hate puck bunnies.

Theo

Hockey is in my blood.

I scoff at the big screen before changing the channel and tossing the remote back onto the bar top next to my co-worker Kayla.

“Hey! I was watching that, Mr. Hockey Pants.” She grins and rolls her eyes.

Of course she was. Kayla has a crush on half the hockey team.

“I remember when I used to say shit like that,” I mumble, picking up the rag and cleaning my station in front of me.

Sure, I meant every word. Back when I played for the NHL, I lived and breathed hockey.

My life revolved around the sport; my diet, my exercise routine, hell, even my relationships were all planned to work perfectly into my crazy hockey life.

But what happens when hockey is ripped away from you?

What happens when you think you have only one purpose in life and suddenly, you're just... lost?

They don't really teach you crap like that when you make it to the big leagues.

Yes, technically, everyone in professional sports knows your career can be yanked away from you at any moment, but they don't prepare anyone for how to handle it, what to do next, or even how to handle the money and fame, so that you aren't left with nothing after that dark tunnel.

Ever since I was a little kid, my only passion has been hockey.

I used to think I had it all: the game, the money, the big mansion, and even a secret romance with a boy to call my own.

"I still can't believe you used to be some famous hotshot hockey player." Kayla walks over to my side and tugs the damp rag from my fingers. "And I'm pretty sure you're going to scrub a hole into the bar top if it gets any cleaner."

"Sorry." I let out a deep sigh and leaned against the wall behind me. "I just have a lot on my mind."

"Your mother again?"

"Worse. My ex."

Her eyes widen, and I nod my head. "Yeah."

"You can't be serious," she hisses, reaching for my hand and tugging me to the other side of the bar, where there are fewer people. "The ex who dumped you when you got injured?"

"The one and only."

Damn. Sometimes I hate that she knows everything about Grant.

One night after work, Kayla and I stayed at the bar after hours and had a few drinks.

When she started flirting with me, I politely turned her down.

She was the first real friend I'd made since returning to town, and seeing her hurt made me want to open up.

To tell her my truth. Being gay was something I've learned to hide from the hockey world.

And now that I have my head on straight after my injury, I promised myself I'd be honest with those I cared about.

Once I started talking, I told her everything.

About how hard it was to keep a piece of myself hidden, and about the only guy I allowed myself to love while in the sport.

While I was in the NHL, the only people who knew I was gay were my mother, Grant, and his parents.

My ex is the son of one of my mother's best friends and the only person she has ever successfully set me up with. But it wasn't for a lack of trying.

Snapping me out of my daze, Kayla smacks my arm. "Well, what the hell does he want?"

"No idea. He texted me several times and even called, too. But all his messages just say he needs to talk to me. He doesn't say what about."

“That’s it? You aren’t even a little curious? What if it’s an emergency?”

I push my way past her, but keep talking as I walk back toward the bar. “I haven’t talked to him in years, Kayla. Not since he decided to upgrade to a better Daddy.” My words are nonchalant, but guilt still swirls in my stomach every time I think of Grant.

Even though he broke my heart, a part of me feels like I was the villain in our story. I wouldn’t blame him if he thought the same thing. I kept our relationship a secret, and if I hadn’t gotten injured, how long would I have been able to keep him hidden? To keep us a secret.

“Oh no.” She grabs my hand and squeezes.

“You have that sad, guilty look again. You can’t keep beating yourself up!

He was the bad guy. Not you. A good relationship is about communication.

From what you’ve told me, Grant never even hinted that he was unhappy.

And don’t forget about the timing of when he broke things off.

He dumped you when you needed help. He dumped you when you found out you had just lost your career. He sounds like a gold digger.”

“And you sound like my therapist.”

“Yeah, well, she’s a smart lady. Like me.”

I prop a hip against the bar. Some of the weight on my shoulders lifts, and I give her a small smile. “Thanks, Kayla. It was such a dark time in my life. Sometimes I just cling to the feelings rather than remembering to think about the logic.”

“It’s why I’m in your life now.” She winks. “But you can’t keep ignoring the guy. Well, I mean you can, but for whatever reason, you refuse to block him.”

I throw my head back, already done with this conversation. “I can’t just block him. Grant’s mother is best friends with my mom. Mom loves Grant, and I can’t exactly tell her the real reason we broke up.”

“Why not? She understands why you had to keep your relationship a secret. You were constantly in the spotlight.”

I narrow my eyes at her. God, why did I have to tell my friend everything? “Hmm, I don’t know. Maybe because she doesn’t need to hear about how I was a horrible Daddy, and Grant wanted to find someone better to take care of his needs?”

She opens her mouth to say something when the front door crashes open to a loud ruckus of chants and hollers. A swarm of Brynn U students wearing hockey jerseys and face paint storms in.

“Just like clockwork.” Thank fuck. I’ve never been happier to see the riled-up fans than I was at this moment. “Back to work.”

I grin.

Kayla narrows her eyes. She knows how much I hate this particular group. Last week, their drunken state resulted in a portion of the men’s restroom toilet missing. I mean, how the fuck do you carve out a chunk of tile from a wall and live to tell the tale?

“I don’t know why they celebrate here when most of the hockey players are partying at Delfy House. The team rarely shows up here. Not that I can complain too much, since they are the ones paying our bills.”

The Brynn U Ice Dragons won their game tonight, which means it's time for the fans to celebrate. Despite its size, Brynn, California, is still a popular college town that treats the hockey and football teams like mini-celebrities. Like royalty ruling this town.

The same suspects rush over toward the bar while the others in their group make their way to their usual tables.

"It's the pregame," I reply.

"Huh?"

"The pregame to the main event. They have fun and get drunk here while the hockey team finishes showering, doing their post-game interviews, and whatever the hell else they need to do before celebrating with their fans."

The leader of the group is a muscular blond guy who swaggers toward me like a male peacock showing off for the women who giggle and stare after him. "Hey man," he says as he reaches me. "Can I get a few pints for my friends over there?" Mr. Cocky points at his table.

"Sure thing. Just tell your friends to have their wristbands visible and ready. Things will go a lot faster that way."

He scoffs. "They already checked our IDs at the door, man. Doesn't this get old?"

"Nope. Not one bit. I'm not gonna sit here and memorize every face. It only takes a few seconds to roll up a sleeve or take off a jacket. It's that or we can skip the alcohol altogether."

Mr. Cocky rolls his eyes. "Yeah, sure. Whatever, Dad."

I chuckle. You have no idea, bud.

As the night goes on, more and more fans trickle in until we are so busy I feel like I'm a chicken running around with its head cut off.

I'm checking wristbands left and right, sliding drink after drink across the bar, and constantly running to the back to refill our ice station.

"Note to self," I yell toward Kayla as I rush over with a new bucket of ice.

"We are definitely going to have to talk to the big boss man about getting us an ice machine here at the bar if the crowds are going to get like this during the weekends."

She laughs. "Yeah, good luck with that shit. I've been begging for an ice machine for two years now. Just wait till playoffs."

I groan.

At one point, Mr. Cocky shouts over the crowd and announces the party will commence over at the Delfy House. Never before have I been so thankful to see the bar clear out. Screw the tips. I'm so damn tired and just need a fucking breather.

Right as I'm about to grab a snack and head out to the patio for my much-needed break, it's as if the universe has some sick sense of humor. The door swings open again, and a few players from the Ice Dragons walk in, followed by a group of puck bunnies.

A beautiful redhead in a miniskirt saunters up to the bar. "Excuse me, can we get a few frozen strawberry daiquiris for my table?" She points at the group of smiling

puck bunnies in the corner.

“Sure thing. How many?”

The redhead squints, narrowing her eyes as she studies me. “Wait, do I know you? You look really familiar.” Her gaze travels down my body.

A sense of unease swirls through my stomach.

It was probably stupid to get a part-time job near the college that launched my hockey career, but I figured I was safe.

Does she actually recognize me? Not only is my style different from my expensive designer clothes I used to wear while in the NHL, but I changed my hair, opting for a trendy style with the sides shaved short, and a pile of red waves on top.

Even if people could recognize me with different clothes, it’s my body that’s changed the most.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

I'm no longer training or conditioning myself like I used to.

Don't get me wrong, I still work out at the gym and keep up with my cardio, but my body is slim and toned.

My face is leaner, and so is my body. Not to mention, after my injury, I removed myself from social media.

The general public hasn't seen me in years. Even my own mother didn't recognize me.

Kayla must have seen the panic on my face because she begins walking toward us. "It's fine. I'll start the daiquiris," Kayla shouts over the music. "Go take your break. John and Luna just got here."

I steeple my hands together and mouth the words, thank you.

I snag a water bottle reserved for staff only and contemplate whether I should go next door and get a bite to eat.

Deciding against it, I nod to Luna as she clocks in, remove my nametag, and place it in the little cubby beneath the bar.

Rummaging around, I find my phone and hidden stash of gummy bears before making my way out to the patio.

Outside, it's mostly quiet, with a few couples chatting and drinking beer, and two

guys laughing while vaping.

Luckily, my favorite table is unoccupied.

I plop down in the chair and tear into my bag of candy.

Taking a deep breath, I power on my phone.

Notifications quickly start beeping, and I notice most of them are from Grant, while a few are from my mom.

Grant: Hey, Theo! Give me a call.

Grant: It's nothing bad, I just want to talk.

Grant: Theo, please stop acting so immature about this.

Grant: I spoke with your mother. She said you don't start work for a few more hours.

Mom: Honey, I just got off the phone with Grant. You should really give him a call and hear him out. He's sorry, and you know how happy it would make me to see you two back together.

Mom: I just want my son to find happiness again.

I let out a deep sigh and placed my phone on the table.

After popping a few gummy bears in my mouth, I relax in the chair with my ankles crossed and my eyes closed as I chew slowly, my head tilted back.

I savor the sugary taste and the feel of it in my mouth.

I place my hand in my pocket until my fingers graze across the familiar warmth of the coin I always carry around with me.

Why the hell did Grant call my mother? It's a low blow.

The tiny voice in my head says I probably could have avoided all of this if I didn't ignore him, but shit, I'm finally moving on with my life. Why can't he? Despite what my mother thinks, I'm happy. My focus has been on my Business Administration degree and studying for the SIE exam.

I'm proud of my accomplishments and excited to become a financial advisor.

Five years ago, my knee injury sidelined me, leading to a period of seclusion, excessive spending, and recovery.

After several months of poor financial decisions, I realized my money should have set me up for a long time.

My lifestyle was extravagant and unrealistic, based on the fantasy of a long-term hockey career.

Coming to that realization was like an epiphany.

Suddenly, I wanted to help others in the sport make better financial decisions.

The sound of the bar door opening and closing catches my attention, but I keep my eyes closed.

It's a nice, peaceful night with a light breeze caressing my skin.

The noise from inside is muffled, and I just want a moment to myself, away from the

loud crowd, from my ex's text messages, and from my mother's insistence.

Light footsteps click across the wooden patio until they pause nearby. A gasp tumbles from someone's lips, followed by my name being whispered into the air. "Theo?"

My eyes blink open, and for a long moment, I wonder if I fell asleep.

Like a dream, I immediately recognize the man in front of me.

Adrian DeLuca is even prettier in person.

Unlike his earlier interview, he's now neither sweaty nor in his gear.

Instead, he's dressed in a stunning suit that fits him like a fucking glove.

With his dark brown hair styled away from his face and his game-time scruff gone, he looks charmingly innocent.

The kid is a genius on the ice and far more talented than I was at his age.

I can't be entirely sure if it's because he's playing my position on the same team I played in while in school, or if it's something else, but ever since he was drafted to the Olivia Cove Wyverns, I've been following his career.

Fascinated by the way he moves on the ice.

About two years ago, my mother insisted we go to a few local games.

Rather than the jealousy I expected to feel, I felt that much-needed rush the ice used to give me before my injury.

Since then, I've secretly attended several of the Ice Dragon's home games, all while cheering on my new celebrity crush.

Adrian lowers himself to the ground in front of me, just within reach.

The sight of this boy on his knees is surreal and startling.

He looks at me as if he's seen a ghost from his past. But that's impossible.

I'd never forget a sight like this. His pretty gray eyes are large and striking, even with the dim lighting.

Adrian licks his bottom lip before biting on it, and I swear the move shoots a bolt of lust through my body.

Yeah. I'm no longer tired, that's for damn sure.

I sit up straight, uncross my ankles, and place my feet back on the ground.

The position makes me tower over him as he sits back on his heels.

He must recognize me from the bar—although I'm pretty sure I've never seen DeLuca this close in person before.

I'm about to ask him if he needs any help or anything when he does something strange.

He leans forward, slowly reaches out, and pokes me in the cheek. It doesn't hurt. It's more playful than anything, but what truly has me captivated is the way his face changes from fascination to pure giddy joy a moment after his finger touches my skin.

A wide smile breaks across his face, and he laughs. Honest to god, laughs. Unable to fight this weird pull between us, my lips twitch, forming a wide smile that mirrors his. What the fuck is happening?

“Oh my god. You’re real?” He laughs again, the rumbling noise a little deeper this time.

I arch a curious eyebrow. “Are you high?”

His smile stays in place, and even though his pretty blue-gray eyes seem to sparkle, they seem clear. There’s a faint scent of vodka combined with the citrusy scent of his cologne, but I don’t actually get the impression he’s high or drunk.

“Nah, not high,” he replies. “Just happy. Surprised, but happy.”

I’m about to ask him to explain when music pours from the open door, breaking the spell between us. Tate Rizzo, DeLuca’s teammate, saunters outside, his arm wrapped around one of the puck bunnies who was hanging out with the redhead.

Not missing a thing, Rizzo’s gaze bounces between DeLuca and me. “Ah, Adrian. There you are. I’ve been looking for you. Turns out you have a fan.”

“Hi.” The puck bunny gives Adrian a flirty smile, and I stand, suddenly feeling out of place.

“Why, hello there,” DeLuca greets her from his position on the floor.

If I’m not mistaken, the girl practically swoons at the tone in his voice.

And if I’m being honest, so do I. It’s musical and light, seductive.

Something about it reminds me of some paranormal creature, like a vampire or Fae. Fucking hell. What was in my gummies?

“My name is Judy. I’m a huge fan of yours, Adrian.”

Rizzo nudges her forward a step, causing her to giggle and blush. “I tried buying a drink for our new friend here, but Judy seems to be saving herself for you, Adrian.”

She bites her lip, and I have to admit it’s not as charming as the way Adrian did just moments before. “I wanted to ask you if the rumors were true,” she says. “Are you really gay?”

I roll my eyes. Dear Lord, I don’t miss the puck bunnies.

Adrian chuckles. “They aren’t rumors.”

I have to hand it to the kid; he’s not only more talented, but he’s also braver than I was at his age. Technically, I still haven’t come out as gay to the public. And here is this twenty-two-year-old announcing his sexual orientation before he’s even signed.

From his kneeling position, Adrian’s pretty, large eyes sweep up my body. It’s as if time stands still. I’m lost in that gray gaze, captivated. Frozen in place. The fact he’s kneeling and looking up at me in that sweet way has my cock jerking and my jeans growing tight.

My gaze sweeps down to his flushed cheeks and over to his plush lips. Adrian’s stare drops to my groin, proving that he isn’t a kid at all. I fight the urge to cover up my half chub so I don’t bring more attention to it.

“Oh yeah,” Adrian breathes. “I’m definitely gay.”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Oh god. He is flirting with me.

Adrian

H oly shit. Holy shit. Holy freaking shit.

Theo Walsh is here. Wearing a tight-as-sin leather jacket and a yummy-as-fuck pair of jeans that cup his ass perfectly.

Theo is here, at this bar. He's here, and he's real. That famous Casablanca quote unexpectedly pops into my head. "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world..."

Another bout of laughter escapes my lips, and I clap my hand over my mouth. Damn. He really is going to think I'm high.

Theo arches a thick, sexy brow. "What's so funny?" His intense stare completely shatters my fleeting confidence. In an instant, I go from feeling like a self-assured twenty-two-year-old hockey player to feeling like a shy thirteen-year-old meeting his idol for the first time.

"What's funny?" I wave a hand in the air. "Oh, nothing. I blame Felix for making me watch Casablanca with him last week. He's into the classics. But then you were here in front of me. At this bar." I stare at his hands while I ramble on.

It's only then do I realize I'm still kneeling in front of him like a freaking weirdo. Oh fuck. My face flushes with nerves and embarrassment.

“Casablanca.” Theo clears his throat. “Right. I’d better get back inside. My break’s over.” He walks away before I can say anything else to embarrass myself.

Damn. He’s even sexier now than he was five years ago. He might look a little different, but I’ve been following him and his career since he was a rookie. I’d recognize Theo anywhere. Wavy red curls and all.

Rizzo detaches himself from the redhead’s side. What was her name again? Judy?

“Well, that was awkward, to say the least,” Rizzo snickers.

“Shut up. Do you know who that was?”

“Nope,” he replies, handing his glass of whiskey to me. “But I get the feeling you need this more than I do.”

A part of me wants to jump with joy and yell that the sexy man who was just standing in front of us is Theo fucking Walsh, but another loyal part of me remembers the ex-hockey star might just want his privacy.

Due to a devastating ACL injury, Theo was forced to retire from the NHL early. But everyone was shocked when he unexpectedly deleted all his social media accounts shortly after. No one really knows what he’s been up to all these years. Has he been working here in my hometown this whole time?

Suddenly, I’m imagining all these pretty puck bunnies fighting for Theo’s attention, leaving a sour taste in my mouth. I’m tempted to take a swig from Rizzo’s glass and let the smooth whiskey slide down my throat, but Coach’s earlier lecture comes to mind.

Coach Wilson was pissed to find a video of me stumbling over with laughter had

gone viral.

I wasn't even that drunk, but my defense was shot to hell when some random girl threw up right in front of me and fell onto my lap.

Never mind that everyone knows I'm gay. Every puck bunny out there considers me to be prime meat; I found out when they had some bet on who could ' turn me straight ' first.

The whole thing was disgusting, which only strengthened my resolve to publicly affirm my attraction to men, and men only.

Theo disappears behind the closing door, and I have this insane urge to follow him. "You know what?" I hand the glass back to Rizzo. "I'll meet you in there. There's something I need to do first."

As I walk back inside, I spot Theo making his way behind the bar. Kayla, a bartender I recognize, is over in the corner serving drinks and chatting with a few of my teammates, while Theo's coworkers are busy serving customers.

Before someone else can snag Theo's attention, I slide onto the barstool in front of him.

If you had asked me fifteen minutes ago if Theo Walsh was straight, I probably would have said, without a doubt .

But I can't forget the way he looked down at me when I was kneeling in front of him.

That heated look. Fuck, please don't let me be imagining it.

"Hey, there. I'm Adrian." I hold my hand out to him. "Adrian—"

“DeLuca,” he says, interrupting me. His big hand wraps around mine, and I swear I have to hold back a shudder. “I know who you are, DeLuca.”

He’s all striking blue eyes and smoldering stares.

While I’m pretty sure he’s aiming for stern indifference, his expression looks more Daddy than anything.

And I’m totally fucking here for it. A Daddy with a bad-boy style and Prince Charming hair?

Yes, please. Who knew such a thing existed?

I squirm in my chair, and will my body not to react to his handsome charm and dominating presence.

He lets go of my hand. Call me a cliché, but I already miss his warmth. There’s a strange, tense look about him that wasn’t there when I met him outside. It’s almost as if he’s guarded, bracing himself for the worst.

I play dumb and give him a flirty smile. “Aren’t you going to tell me who you are?”

The corner of his lip tilts up, his blue eyes sparkling with amusement. Rather than answer my question, his fingers tap the bar top in a fast rhythm. “What can I get you, DeLuca?”

“How about a Shirley Temple?”

Shock registers across his face. “No alcohol?”

I lean toward him, gaining more of my confidence back. “Nah. Not tonight. Tonight

feels like a good night.”

“Do you usually skip the alcohol when it feels like a good night?”

“No. Not always.”

“Then what makes tonight so special?”

“Let’s just say I want my mind clear. Anything I do or say is done on purpose,” I flirt.

Normally, I’d just be straightforward and make my intentions obvious.

I’d ask the guy out or go back to his place—because let’s be honest, hooking up at Delfy House is a sure way to get people gossiping.

But with Theo, I want to flirt. I want to take my time and linger in the moment.

I can’t entirely be sure if he’s attracted to men, so I don’t want to scare him off.

But it’s more than that. I also have this man to thank for my career as a center. For inspiring me to attend college and chase after my dreams. And if he really isn’t attracted to me? Well, that would be a damn shame, but I still want to get to know him.

He studies me carefully. “All right. One Shirley Temple coming right up. Alcohol free.”

I laugh. “Shirley Temples don’t have alcohol in them to begin with.” Something tells me he’s happy that I’m not drinking tonight. A bartender who’s happy to serve me a non-alcoholic drink? Color me intrigued.

Theo winks and gets to work making my drink. As he tops off my drink with a maraschino cherry, he pauses before adding an extra one. “Here you go. I think you deserve a little extra sugar tonight.”

Oh. My. God.

Is Theo Walsh flirting with me?

“Thank you.” I sip on the drink and moan. Not because I’m actually trying to be flirty this time, but because this is the best sugary drink I’ve ever had the pleasure of drinking. “Holy shit. I think my tongue just had an orgasm.”

“Language,” Theo replies automatically. His tone causes me to sit up, and my heart beats faster. Why was that so damn hot?

Theo blushes. “I didn’t mean that.”

I grin. “No, no. That’s fine. I can watch my language around you if you’d like.” Theo still looks flustered, so I change the subject. “How long have you been working here? I come here every so often and haven’t seen you here before.”

“I’m new to town. Well, I guess not new, but it’s been years since I’ve lived here in Brynn.”

“What’s brought you back to our fine town?”

Theo eyes me curiously. “Hmm. Promise to not make fun of me?”

I hold up my hand as if swearing in court. “I promise.” He nods and opens his mouth, but I continue. “Unless, of course, it’s absolutely ridiculous. Then I probably just won’t be able to contain myself.”

He barks out a laugh. “What the hell? You promised.”

“I did. And I promise I’ll try my best.”

Theo narrows his eyes. “College,” he whispers.

“Did you say—”

“College. I’m finishing up a few business classes and starting an internship soon.”

My lips part in shock.

“Hey now. I told you not to make fun of me.” His words are playful, but there’s a vulnerability in his eyes.

I snap myself out of it. “What? No! I am not making fun of you. That’s...that’s amazing. Inspirational, even.” There’s something sexy about a man with brains. But a sexy athlete who also has brains? Pure kryptonite.

“You don’t think I’m too old?”

“God no. What even is too old? My friend’s mother never got the opportunity to finish her degree before she had kids. Twenty years later, and she’s finally in a position where she can. I don’t think she’s too old, she’s...”

“Inspirational?”

I laugh. “Well, yeah. But where’s the lie?”

“Touché.” He smiles. Kayla and the other bartenders work around us, making drinks and serving customers.

The selfish part of me knows I should let him get back to work, but I really want him all to myself.

He doesn't make a move to stop our conversation, and I don't remind him that this is his place of employment, either.

At one point, Kayla walks up to Theo and whispers in his ear. I'm ashamed to admit that jealousy swirls in my stomach until Theo nods at her and points at my glass. "Would you like another one, Adrian?"

My whole body lights up when he says my first name. It's the first time he hasn't called me DeLuca since meeting me, and I like the way it sounds rolling off his tongue. Fuck, I'm a sap.

I nod eagerly, glad he isn't pulling away. We continue chatting and getting to know each other. My inner thirteen-year-old does this crazy little dance and hoots with joy. I haven't had this much fun just chatting with someone in a really long time.

"What are you doing in school?"

"I'm here for hockey. Hockey is in my blood," I smile as I say the last line.

I've been dying to say that exact phrase to Theo Walsh since I heard him say it all those years ago.

It might be pathetic, but I've imagined saying it many times with so many different scenarios unfolding.

But not once have I ever pictured the way his smile falls as disappointment clouds his features.

“Have you ever considered what you might do if hockey was taken away from you?”

My stomach drops. Fuck. How could I be so inconsiderate? Of course, he would be wary. He lost everything.

“Theo,” Kayla calls out. “Can you help me with these drinks? These hockey players are thirsty as fuck.” She laughs at her own joke.

I glance over at my teammates and see several of them chatting with some of the puck bunnies.

Rizzo is on the other side of the table, chatting happily with another teammate, but I’m shocked to see Judy sitting on Callaway’s lap instead.

“Sure thing,” Theo replies. “I’ll be right back. Don’t go anywhere.”

“Okay,” I murmur as he rushes off.

I’m such an asshole. Why would I say that to an ex-NHL player who lost his entire career to something as common as an injury?

It might have been cute to say it if he were still playing, but now?

I must be lost in my own melancholy, just playing with the condensation on my glass, because I startle when a throat clears right in front of me.

Leaning across the bar top, Theo smiles. “Hey. What happened to that confident hockey god I was just chatting with a few minutes ago?”

I want to say sorry for sticking my foot in my mouth, but that would mean admitting I know who he is. Would he be mad if I knew? Is it a secret? Or is it just a coincidence

that he didn't give me his name yet? Or mention the NHL. Wait, what did he just call me?

My eyes snap up to his, and despite myself, I give him a small smile. "Hockey god?"

"Well, sure. I didn't miss that breakaway tonight. And what about those hat tricks in your last two games? That's impressive."

A wider grin spreads across my face. "You watch my games?"

"Nah," he says casually, flipping around and leaning against the bar top.

His back is to me, but he's looking at me from over his shoulder.

"The college channel was on earlier, and some blogger was interviewing you. She mentioned something about back-to-back hat tricks this season. Or at least I'm pretty sure that was you.

Sweat dripping off that body of yours. Hockey jersey.

Light blue, red, and white. Charming smile? "

Oh god. He is flirting with me.

"So, you were watching," I say, arching my brow with confidence. "I called it."

His laughter is this sexy rumble. Some of that weird tension eases, and Theo suddenly looks younger. His broad shoulders lower as he relaxes.

He smirks and flips back around to face me. His plush lips tip to the side in this sexy way I'm growing used to. "Who knew Adrian DeLuca is a little bit of a brat?"

I trail my fingers along the zipper of his black leather jacket. Oh yeah, these sexy rocker-Daddy vibes look good on Theo, even if the Daddy part is just wishful thinking. I tug him closer. “And why does that sound like a compliment?”

“DeLuca,” Rizzo shouts across the room. “Get your ass over here and hang out with your team.”

Theo pulls away, the spell between us broken once again. I roll my eyes. Fuck. Rizzo’s bad timing makes me want to scream. “Sorry.” I give Theo a shy smile.

Theo shakes his head and slowly backs away.

“No, don’t be sorry. I get it. Go on. Hang out with your team.

Celebrate your win.” His gaze is warm, and his smile is soft.

He’s no longer looking at me with those flirty blue eyes.

Instead, there’s an almost caring look on his face.

For years, I would have killed to see Theo Walsh flirt with me.

But fuck me, why am I more interested in exploring this look rather than the flirty one?

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

So much for no alcohol.

Theo

Was I really just flirting with Adrian DeLuca?

And why can't I stop smiling? He's a hockey player, of all things.

Not once in my whole hockey career have I ever checked out an athlete.

Sure, I could appreciate their bodies and their skills, but not one of them did it for me.

Back then, I was more into the smaller guys, ones I could toss around and flaunt my muscles for.

But I was different back then. Or hell, maybe I wasn't.

I was always into a submissive partner. One that I could take care of. One I can spoil and cherish. I thought I imagined that submissive side of Adrian out on the patio. And when my body reacted to this idea that had started building in my head, I panicked. I ran back inside like a coward.

Luckily, the little brat followed me. Fuck, Adrian isn't anything I'd ever imagined.

He's even better. He's attentive, playful, and sweet.

And the shy, vulnerable glimpses he allowed me to see?

Fuck. When was the last time someone flirted with me like that?

Hell, when was the last time I flirted back?

Then Kayla approached me and told me that Luna and John also didn't miss the wide smile on my face.

She said I technically still had twenty minutes left on my break and to flirt away.

I'm pretty sure there's a rule against hitting on the customers, but Kayla knows my situation, so her encouragement isn't surprising.

Note to self: I'll have to buy her a gift card for her favorite café.

I didn't miss the way Adrian looked disappointed when I snapped at him. Truthfully, I didn't mean to. Something about him made my protective side flare up. Not to mention, I wouldn't want anyone to feel as lost as I did when I had to quit hockey.

But as I get back to work and the night progresses, that happy feeling I got while flirting with Adrian begins to fade. And when a stunning little twink begins hitting on Adrian, all thoughts that we might have chemistry fade away.

The twink is blond, beautiful, and young.

Hell, he's someone I would have hit on in college.

Kayla and I keep revisiting the table and dropping off drinks, with the blond drinking the most. Initially, I was impressed that Adrian didn't want any alcohol.

I'm no prude, but I liked how he seemed to be changing my perspective on the 'typical hockey player' I've grown used to.

But as his teammates get louder and rowdier, I can't be entirely sure I imagined the sweet and slightly bratty boy I wanted to get to know.

A half an hour later, the beautiful twink plops himself onto Adrian's lap and kisses him right on the lips.

A commotion erupts at their table, and several of Adrian's teammates break out into loud shouts.

At first, I fear the worst and think there might be some homophobic assholes on his team, but the encouraging hoots ease my fear.

That's until the phone cameras start flashing and I realize there will be online proof of someone else kissing Adrian.

Maybe this is the guy that Adrian mentioned when we first met. What was his name? The one he watched movies with and likes classics.

Adrian stands, lightly pushing the blond off his lap. He leans down and whispers something into his ear. My stomach turns. Adrian's gaze meets mine, and my face heats. Fuck. Have I really just been staring at the guy like a possessive caveman?

Adrian makes his way up to the bar, avoiding Kayla and Luna. He beelines right toward me. "Hey." He smiles. "Can I get a shot of vodka and a glass of water?"

"I'm cutting him off, DeLuca."

He jerks back as if I slapped him. "What? Oh god, no. The water's for Guy. The shot is for me, I need one after that." Adrian points behind him, and I have no idea what he's talking about. So much for no alcohol. I scoff. What kind of name is Guy, anyway?

“You should probably get your boyfriend home.” My tone is colder than I mean it to be.

“He isn’t my boyfriend,” he snaps back.

“Right.” I tap the bar top, slide him two glasses of water, and give him a two-finger salute before sauntering to the other side of the bar to wipe down an empty table.

What the fuck? A salute? My face heats even more as blood rushes to my head.

I’m so embarrassed. It’s so fucking obvious I’m jealous and acting like Adrian is my boyfriend.

What the hell is wrong with me? I’ve never been the jealous type before.

Mortified, I frantically scrub the already spotless table, practically climbing into the booth to reach every inch, until a throat clears behind me.

I glance over my shoulder.

Adrian is standing there with a cocky smirk playing on his lips and a heated look on his face.

Off in the distance, I see Guy drinking his water while chatting with another teammate.

Adrian watches me as he sips from his glass of water, as if it’s the finest whiskey.

There’s hunger in his gray eyes, and I know mine mirrors his.

The well-fitted suit clings to Adrian’s muscular arms and thick thighs.

It dawns on me then: he's definitely bigger than me.

And yet, despite his size and my previous tastes, I can't deny that Adrian is the sexiest man I've ever been attracted to.

Adrian DeLuca's thick muscles taunt me, and his personality tempts me.

I want to bend him over my knee and redden that pretty ass.

I groan, internally rolling my eyes at my wayward thoughts, and climb back out of the booth. To my shock, Adrian gets right up in my space, standing at the same height. There's a challenging gleam sparkling in his eyes.

His fingers wrap around my jacket, and he tugs me closer until we're nose to nose. I'm embarrassed to say, I go forward willingly.

He straightens my collar. "You look good in this leather jacket, Walsh."

My brain fizzles, and I swallow hard, trapped in his gray-blue gaze. I'm unable to pull away from the brat. It's almost as if I'm witnessing myself on a movie screen; I have absolutely no control over the outcome. All I can do is watch and see how everything unfolds.

Adrian leans in even closer until his lips are grazing against the shell of my ear. "He isn't my boyfriend."

I suppress a shiver.

"I'll take Guy back to his place, but only because it's the right thing to do. That...and because you asked me to." His hand slides under my jacket and travels up my chest.

I suck in a gasp. Big. Fucking. Mistake. Adrian's scent swirls around me, making me dizzy. Fresh soap, sugar, and lime.

Holy fuck.

I'm hard. So, so fucking hard.

His hand begins traveling downward. I'm half afraid he'll feel me up right here at work, and half afraid I won't stop him. A big part of me wants Adrian to feel exactly how hard I am for him.

His fingers graze the top of my jeans, and I growl. If this boy touches me, I'm going to come in my pants like a teenager.

I grasp his wrist, stopping his descent. "What the fuck are you doing to me, boy?"

Crap. I didn't mean to say that out loud, but clearly, I've lost my damn mind.

He shudders, leaning his chest against mine. "Theo," he whispers.

My free hand grips his hip. I push him away slightly, needing some space, but not before I feel his massive bulge against my thigh.

Movement catches my eye, and I see Guy stumbling toward us. "You better go, then."

He looks over his shoulder and spots Guy. "One last thing, Walsh. Guy might have stolen a kiss. But you're the only one who's been on my mind tonight."

I blink, searching his gaze and finding nothing but the truth.

Adrian pulls away. “Have a good evening, Theo.” With that, he gives me a two-finger salute, helps Guy to the door, and swaggers out of the bar.

I narrow my eyes. That fucking salute. Did the brat just mock me?

“Earth to Theo!” Kayla says, now standing by my side, causing me to jump. “You might want to cover that monster in your pants.” She playfully slams a menu against my chest, laughing.

I gasp, catching it. “Oh, shit!” I use the laminated menu to cover my very obvious erection.

“Oh, and Theo?”

I groan. “Yes, Kayla?”

“Don’t forget to put on your name tag.”

My name tag. It’s still in the cubby under the bar. It strikes me, then. Adrian DeLuca recognized me. No one ever recognizes me.

My heart pounds, and a wide smile breaks across my face.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Surprise!!!

Adrian

“ A ll right. Up you go. I think you’ve had just a little too much to drink.” I half lift, half support Guy as we make our way toward the exit. I wave goodbye to a few of my teammates, who give me several loud catcalls.

Guy stumbles out the door, and I catch him easily.

“God, you’re so strong.” His hands grip my biceps. “You know, I’ve always wanted to be with a hockey player. Why don’t you take me to bed, and we can make each other’s fantasies come true?”

I only met Guy last semester when he showed up at the rink after practice. Every once in a while, he’ll hit on me, but it’s mostly been harmless. Of course, he would have to make a move on me tonight of all nights.

“Sorry, Guy. Not gonna happen. I’m going to be a gentleman and bring you back to your place, where you can sleep things off.” I guide him to my car and help him into his seat. Once he’s sitting, I reach over and click his seatbelt into place. I can’t quite trust the drunk guy to buckle up.

“Thanks, Daddy.” Guy leans forward for a kiss, but I dodge him easily and jog around to the driver’s side.

“Go ahead and plug in your address,” I say, handing him my phone.

Guy pouts. “You’re no fun.”

Irritated, I start up my car and begin driving. Something about the address or street name niggles at the back of my head, but I don’t think anything about it as I follow my phone’s directions. Instead, over the next several minutes, my mind swirls around with memories of tonight’s events.

I can’t believe Guy kissed me in front of my childhood crush. Or that he just called me Daddy. Although that’s probably my fault, because buckling Guy in was a total Daddy move.

I sigh.

I would kill for someone to do sweet Daddy-like things for me—like click my seatbelt in place, wrap me up in his strong arms, or just look after my well-being.

There’s something so hot about the idea of a dominant man taking care of me.

Not just from a sexual perspective, but damn, I also wouldn’t mind calling someone Daddy while he dishes out a little ‘ funishment .’

Images of Theo come to mind.

It can’t just be me, but I’m pretty sure that all that fun banter and flirtatious chemistry has to mean we might have something.

Right? I’ve always considered myself secretly submissive, but I’m shocked by how easily we seemed to have fallen into that dynamic.

He brought out the flirty brat in me, and I’m pretty sure he liked it.

“Oh, uh, this is me. Thanks for bringing me home.”

I park my car in the driveway and give him a curt smile. “No problem.” I glance up at the cute suburban house with its white shutters and light blue paint. God, why does this house look so damn familiar?

Guy unbuckles his seatbelt and pushes the passenger door open. At the last second, he turns and looks at me. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Sure. What’s up?”

“Every week I hit on you, and every week you turn me down. Am I not attractive enough for you?”

My heart goes out to him. I shake my head.

He’s a total cutie, but something about him reminds me of my little brother Felix.

I actually don’t know anything about Guy.

“You’re very attractive, Guy. I’m just looking for something...

particular,” I say, for lack of a better word.

No way am I confessing to a near stranger that I’m looking for someone more dominant.

People never understand. All they see are my muscles and build, and they assume.

All my previous boyfriends and hook-ups assumed I was a top.

And all of them were disappointed when they found out I wasn't.

Don't get me wrong, I don't mind topping, but I was always the one expected to change myself for them.

No one ever bothered to look after me. No one catered to my wants or needs, even when I asked.

Ideally, I'd love to have a Daddy. The kink has always appealed to me, but other than a few secret interactions at my favorite club, no one has ever been willing to try. And no one has ever bothered to stay.

"It's the new bartender, isn't it?" Guy asks.

"Hmm?"

"He's the 'something particular.' It's because you like older guys, right?"

I'm not entirely sure how to explain it.

I couldn't care less about someone's age.

It's more about the vibes or their personality.

Theo projects an aura of self-assurance and power.

It's that commanding presence that I find attractive, not how old he is.

Theo might not be a Daddy, but I've seen so many interviews with him in the past that it's easy to imagine.

He totally has that energy about him. Figuring it's easier to just nod my head rather than explain my chaotic thoughts about my crush, I do just that.

Guy sighs. For a long moment, we just sit there deep in thought.

"Adrian?"

"Yeah?"

"I don't feel so good." He gags. "Can you help me to my front door?"

I wince. "Of course. I'm so sorry. I should have offered." Getting out of my car and rushing over to Guy's side, I wrap an arm around his waist, and he wraps his around my neck. "You have your keys?"

Guy pats his pockets as we stumble across his lawn. When we finally make it to the front porch, Guy turns pale. "Fuck, fuck, fuck," he says, still desperately patting at his pockets. "I don't have my key."

"Do you have a roommate? Maybe I can knock."

Guy groans. "Oh, God. Dad's going to kill me."

My mouth falls open. "I'm sorry, what? Did you just say your dad?"

Before I can fully finish the sentence, the front door is being yanked open.

To my utter and complete horror, Coach Wilson is standing there, and he looks pissed.

I've seen Coach with various facial expressions over the last four years.

Anywhere from ticked off, to irritated, and what I originally thought was the worst: disappointed.

But staring at him now, with his face a deep shade of red and his observant eyes taking in the situation, I can honestly say, I've never seen him this angry.

"Uh, Coach? Wha—what are you doing here?"

"DeLuca." Coach grinds his teeth and flexes his jaw. "Would you care to explain why you have your meaty fucking arm around my son?"

Oh fuck. I swear my knees go weak. I'm pretty sure Coach is going to punch me.

"Dad," Guy says weakly. "It's not Adrian's fault."

"I'm so sorry, sir. Guy had a little too much to drink," I reply, stating the obvious. "I just wanted to make sure he got home safe. I was trying to do the right thing."

I'm hoping the last two sentences will calm Coach down enough to let me escape, but for some reason, Coach Wilson's face turns a deeper shade of red.

"DeLuca, I need you to explain why getting my eighteen-year-old son drunk to the point of immobility is considered the right thing to do."

"Eighteen?" I gasp, reaching for Guy's wristband under the sleeve of his jacket. "You told me you were twenty-one."

Guy winces, leaning harder against me, still unable to hold himself up.

Coach's eyes snap to the wristband, and he sighs. "Guy, give me your fake ID. Now."

Of course, Guy would have a fake ID, he wouldn't have been able to drink at the bar without a wristband.

Fishing through his wallet while I hold the poor kid up, he finally passes the piece of plastic to his dad.

Coach wraps his arm around his son and takes him from my arms. With a pout, Guy rolls his eyes and gives me a little wave.

Fuck. He looks so damn young. How did I not realize the kid was barely an adult? Coach shuffles his son through the front door, and I offer to help, but Coach shrugs me off. Instead, I just stand there awkwardly, waiting for Coach to say something.

"My office. Ten a.m. Monday."

Internally, I groan. Monday morning, I have a finance quiz across campus. Even if I sprinted from class the second it ended, I would likely still be late for our meeting. "But sir..."

"I said ten a.m., DeLuca." And with that, Coach holds up his son and kicks the front door closed, slamming it in my face.

Fuck. Coach is going to take this out on my ass during practice, if he doesn't kill me first.

Monday morning, with the sun barely risen, I skip the early morning free skate and head over to the library to study for my exam.

I spend my time flipping through flashcards and taking the practice test online.

Once I feel confident enough, I figure that's as much cramming as I'm able to do.

I walk across campus to my favorite coffee shop.

I always love to treat myself to a mocha for good luck if I have time.

Even this early in the morning, the college is buzzing with students chatting and walking to class.

Stunning brick buildings nestled amongst lush green trees showcase Brynn U's beautiful, modern architecture.

Every once in a while, the sight of the impressive campus catches me off guard, and today is one of those days.

Ever since I was a teen, I imagined what it would be like to attend this school. Brynn U might be in my hometown, but the school is like its own mini village, complete with on-campus housing, restaurants, and shops.

After all those years of wishing, I'm finally here, chasing my dreams and making them a reality. It's moments like this I think of Mom and Dad, knowing they'd be damn proud.

"Hey there, Adrian," the barista greets as soon as I enter Keeper's Brew.

Recognizing the girl from last semester's accounting class, I give her a little wave.

She's in her early twenties, like me, and loves hockey.

Unlike the puck bunnies I usually have to dodge, Sandy has a real love for the sport, and I remember chatting about the games with her before class.

"Hey Sandy, can I get an iced mocha for the road? I have an exam coming up in

Professor Higgins' class soon.”

“Oh, crap.” She nods as she rings me up and takes my money. “I have to take that quiz tomorrow. How do you feel about it?”

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

“Good, actually. Make sure you take the practice quiz on Higgens’ website. I usually do that, then make flashcards on the answers I get wrong.”

“I keep forgetting about the practice tests.” I’m guessing by the panicked look on her face, she isn’t as prepared as I am. Some people might be shocked that I’m able to juggle my business classes, hockey, and a social life, but it’s never been much of an issue. At least not until this semester.

Delfy House is getting a bad rap for being a party house—this is nothing new, particularly over the weekends.

However, the frequency of these parties is increasing; they’re nearly daily now.

It’s like the graduating seniors, myself included, are celebrating harder than ever, not wanting to miss out on the fun before going out into the big, wide world of true adulthood.

Classic behavior of FOMO and YOLO all mixed into one.

Checking my watch, I note that it’s almost eight-thirty a.m. I wish Sandy good luck and make the trek toward Woodsen Hall.

This is the third business class I’ve taken with Professor Higgens, and I have to admit, he’s my favorite professor here on campus.

He’s a huge hockey fan and doesn’t mind if I sometimes skip class and sneak into one of his other lectures.

As long as I keep my grades up, turn in my homework on time, and show up for exam days, I'm good to go.

I'm embarrassed to admit, I've only shown up to my assigned time slot for this particular class twice, always sneaking in the back and staying out of sight.

Today is similar; most of my classmates are already here, chatting with each other or reading their textbooks while they wait for the professor.

When I take an empty seat in the back, I decide to text my brother.

Adrian: Hey.

The dots immediately start moving, indicating that Felix is typing. Of course, he would be up at this time. Although now that I think about it, I can't remember if he has a class on Monday mornings.

Felix: Uh oh. What did you do?

I bark out a laugh.

Adrian: What? Can't I just say good morning to my baby brother?

Felix: You can, but you didn't. You said, 'Hey.'

Adrian: LOL. What's wrong with the word 'hey?' And why you gotta assume I did something?

Felix: *Laughing Emoji* Because that 'hey' reeks of guilt. So, I'll only ask one more time. What did you do?

Adrian: I think I fucked up. Coach is gonna have my ass.

Felix: Is he still on you about those videos that went viral? Can't you sit him down and explain that the media is exaggerating things?

Felix: It's such a load of crap. You're focused on hockey and nothing like how they describe you in their wannabe tabloids. You don't get drunk or randomly hook up with strangers.

Felix: If anything, you are out half the night saving their asses.

I could almost kiss my younger brother for coming to my defense like this, but the reality is, he isn't wrong.

The media loves to paint me in a certain light.

I sigh, scrubbing a frustrated hand through my hair.

The videos that went viral have been really shitty, but I don't know what to do.

The media will only get worse when I'm in the NHL, but there isn't too much I can do now other than try to stay out of the spotlight.

Adrian: It isn't that. Remember Guy?

Felix: The cute blond who won't stop hitting on you? Please don't tell me you slept with him. I'm pretty sure he's barely eighteen. He's younger than me!

Adrian: Well, thanks for telling me that now! I didn't pay attention to his age.

Adrian: But no. I didn't sleep with him. You know he isn't my type.

Felix: So, what happened then??

Adrian: He got trashed, and I tried doing the right thing by bringing him to his place so he could sober up.

Felix: Gasp. Did he have a boyfriend waiting for him at home?

Adrian: Worse. Coach Wilson was there. Coach is his dad. He answered the door and was pissed!

Even now, guilt swirls around in my stomach. I always knew Guy looked familiar, but how the hell could I have predicted that cluster fuck?

Felix: Oh no! WTF? How do you always get yourself into so much trouble? I swear you need a Daddy.

I roll my eyes and chuckle. Ever since I found out my baby brother is a little into Daddy kink, I swear he likes to bring it up just to make me squirm.

If only he knew I'd actually be open to the idea of having a real Daddy rather than someone I can secretly play with at the club.

The occasional scene here and there doesn't seem to do much for me anymore.

Adrian: Not that a Daddy has kept you out of trouble. Brat.

Felix: *Angel-Face Emoji* I'm not a true brat. Just a little sassy.

Biting back a smile, I reply with a bunch of crying-laughing emojis.

I'm so happy my brother has come out of his shell more since high school.

He was always so quiet back then, never getting along with his classmates since they were always a few years older than him.

Felix never admitted it, but I get the impression he might have been bullied or picked on for skipping several grades.

Whenever he was around, I tried to protect him, but I can't be everywhere at once. I'm just glad that we are at the same school now and graduating at the same time. I'd do anything for my baby brother.

Just as Professor Higgins approaches the podium, a throat clears at the front of the lecture hall, and the surrounding chatter dies down.

After silencing my phone, I slide it back into my pocket.

The next hour and a half is a flurry of questions, numbers, and scenarios as I speed through the quiz, feeling confident in my answers.

By the time I'm done, only a few of my classmates have filed out, and I have fifteen minutes to turn in my work, run across campus, and pray that Coach won't kill me as soon as I walk through his office door.

"How do you think you did?" Professor Higgins asks as soon as I hand over my paperwork.

"Pretty good," I whisper, not wanting to disrupt the others still taking the test. "I'm just really glad I remembered your trick for memorizing certain formulas. It came in handy when I had to calculate Baton Blue's return on equity from back in 2022."

Professor Higgins' eyes sparkle. "You're always such a pleasure to chat with, Adrian. I'm glad I can help at least one student in my class. An NHL star, no less."

I chuckle. “Not in the NHL yet. I’m still waiting to see if I get signed.”

“Oh, they’ll sign you. They’d be morons not to give you a damn contract.

You’re on fire this season.” Professor Higgins laughs, a blush spreading across his cheeks.

“Now go on, get out of here before I get even more passionate and disrupt the whole class. Keep up the good work, Adrian. You have so much potential, son. Not just in hockey, but with your business degree, too.”

Smiling wide at the compliment and preening like a damn peacock, I spin around, only to have my mouth fall open at the sight in front of me.

Up in the first row is a very handsome, very familiar face.

Theo. In his leather jacket with his perfectly styled red hair.

He looks like a bad-boy rock star from my naughtiest dreams.

He’s sitting there, leaning over his test, hand with pencil poised over the paper as if frozen mid-answer. His lips are pursed and that damn curious thick brow is cocked, as if searching for a reason as to why I’m standing here chatting with his professor.

Surprise. I guess we are in the same class.

Just then, the silent alarm on my phone vibrates, indicating I have five minutes to get to Coach’s office in time. Fuck. A desperate part of me wants to wait for Theo to finish up his test, but I can’t afford to piss off Coach even more.

Giving Theo a sassy smile and a little finger wave, I book it out of class.

My stomach is doing those crazy little happy flips of excitement.

I don't miss that shadow of a smirk that twitches on Theo's lips as I power walk past him.

Damn, I need an excuse to go visit the bar.

Because there's no way in hell I'm waiting till the next class to see Theo Walsh and that sexy-as-fuck smile again.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Do as Coach says?

Adrian

Racing to the coach's office before practice is absolutely crazy, but then again, so is kissing his intoxicated eighteen-year-old son—not that I had a choice in that kiss.

One minute, I'm thinking about my best strategy of approaching Theo at the bar again, the next, Guy is enthusiastically kissing me.

By the time I make it across campus, a part of me is proud of the fact I sprinted here in six minutes. This trek is normally a relaxed twenty-minute stroll. I don't think I've ever moved so fast before. Not even on the ice.

“Better get in there, kid,” Assistant Coach Jeffries says as soon as I make into the locker room. “You're late, and Coach is in a mood today.”

Assistant Coach Hoots shakes his head and joins Jefferies. “Don't know what you did, DeLuca, but Wilson's pissed.”

Since I can barely breathe, I don't bother greeting either assistant coach as I make my way past the lockers. Only a few of my teammates are sitting around chatting. I send up a little prayer that most of the team isn't here to see my execution. Not that it won't stop them from gossiping.

Lightly knocking on Coach's door, I wait for his usual grunt before entering.

Coach Wilson's office is a large room filled with trophies and plaques.

On one side of his office, there's a wall made of corkboard with photos pinned to the wall.

On the opposite side, there's a large oak shelf that matches his desk.

The shelf has all kinds of books, from past plays to different types of diets for various hockey players.

"Sit!" Coach barks. "You're late."

I practically fall into the seat across from Coach, my body reacting to the command, rather than thinking.

Images of last night flicker across my brain, reminding me I only delivered Guy to his doorstep mere hours ago.

Coach Wilson's face is beet red, either from anger, embarrassment, or both. I can't really tell.

"Sorry, sir. I just got out of my Finance 3B class. We had an exam this morning. I left as soon as I was finished."

"I don't need a bunch of excuses, DeLuca. If you knew you had an early morning exam, you probably shouldn't have been getting drunk at a bar with my son."

I sputter, my mouth falling open. "Sir, I didn't know your son would be there.

It's not like I met him at the bar on purpose.

I promise, I don't even know him. And I didn't get drunk.

"I swallow hard, steeling myself for the backlash of what I'm about to say, but I feel like I should at least defend myself.

I was trying to do the right thing by bringing him home.

"No offense, but Guy's actions shouldn't affect me. "

"And yet, they do." Coach flips his cell phone around and slides it across his desk to me. Practically slapping me in the face is a photo of me. With Guy in my lap. With Guy kissing me.

Oh fuck.

While I'm sure Coach can imagine what we've been up to, seeing his son's picture in a make-out session as the college gossip blog's headline is probably where he draws the line.

"Coach," I whisper, letting my shoulders sag in defeat.

What do I even say to this? "I'm sorry, sir.

I never meant to let you down." A shaky breath leaves my lips.

I'm trying hard to keep it together, but ever since Mom passed, Coach Wilson has been the only parental figure in my life.

Well, he and Professor Higgins. To see strong emotions like anger and disappointment flicker across his face makes me feel like a little child.

For the past several years, I've had to be the one to take care of my younger brother. Even though I wasn't exactly ready, life forced me to take a parental role. So, to see one of the few men I look up to hurt by my actions makes guilt swirl in my stomach.

As if reading my thoughts, Coach's face softens. He pushes his chair back and walks across the office.

"See this board over here?" He waves at the wall made of corkboard.

It's littered with photos. I never really paid too much attention to it since I haven't had much of an opportunity to study it, but I know it's photos of the players he's proud of.

It's considered a huge honor to be on this wall and in Coach Wilson's good graces.

I nod.

"Come over here. I want you to tell me what you see."

I scan the various images of hockey players. Some are on the ice doing drills, others are playing a game on home ice, others are portraits of faces I recognize—some famous, some from previous school years. It's a beautiful board filled with history and pride.

My heart skips a beat when I see a photo of Theo in his NHL jersey, arm slung over Coach Wilson's shoulder. If I'm not mistaken, I'm pretty sure that had to have been the day I saw him visit the campus all those years ago.

He looks so damn young. Despite his age, though, he's better than he is today.

He might be just as handsome back then, but I think I prefer his toned bad boy look

he's sporting now.

I continue to scan the photos, my eyes constantly trailing back to the photo of Theo, until something catches my eye.

The number four. My jersey number. The guy is skating across the ice, hockey stick hugging the puck, a moment frozen in time.

I almost expect it to be a hockey player from a previous year, but I'm shocked when I realize it's me.

I gasp. "I made it onto your board?"

"Of course you did, son. You're the most talented player I've had the pleasure of coaching.

But it's more than that. You're smart, loyal—to a fault, and determined as fuck.

You're the first of my players to get drafted so high, and I couldn't have been prouder.

" Coach's fingers clasp my shoulder in a comforting grip.

Suddenly, tears burn the back of my eyes, but I don't let them fall.

"We've worked hard together to hone your skills, DeLuca, and you have kicked ass doing it.

But with all this amazing talent and attention, the vultures will eat it up.

They'll twist things around. It's on you to stay ahead of it.

When you go to the NHL, you'll have a PR manager to help you.

But you don't want to screw things up before the Wyverns even offer you a contract.

Stay focused, keep your grades up, play hard, and get signed.

For now, all you have to focus on are me, your actions, and your performance on the ice.

Don't give them anything to talk about but your game and how well you play. ”

It's as if Coach's speech has lit a fire in my heart. I want to make us both proud. “Yes, sir!” My mind races for solutions, ways to stay out of the media, ways to get away from all the parties and temptation.

“That means enough parties. You don't have to stop your social life, but the media needs to see a different side of you. Not this party-boy player picture they've painted.”

“What do you suggest, Coach? I've already cut back on the alcohol, but you've seen what they've said. I can try to stay away from the parties at my house, but I know the team will want me to celebrate the wins.”

“You'll figure it out. Maybe start off by talking to your agent or someone you trust. I don't care if you have to get a damn fake relationship to do it. Just make sure you keep my son out of this. Clean up your image, DeLuca, or Olivia Cove might stop looking your way.”

“Yes, sir!”

“Now hit the ice, DeLuca. We've got practice.”

Any ideas that Coach Wilson might be lenient after our little heart-to-heart vanishes the moment our warmup ends, and practice really begins.

We start off with a series of drills. I take so many shots on net, I know I'm going to be sore tomorrow.

The rest of practice is focused on our stickwork and passes.

Then, we finally end the day with a vigorous round of speed skating before our cool down and stretches.

Most of us tend to get a mini workout after practice, but there's no way in hell that's happening today.

Despite the crazy pounding my body was taking on the ice, I couldn't stop replaying what Coach said. Did he mean it?

A fake relationship?

My mind strays to all the rom-coms Felix makes me watch.

Damn. If only it were that easy. Although I have to admit, a fake boyfriend would solve my faux-player image.

It would also explain to the guys why I'm not partying as often.

I might even have a friend or two who would get a kick out of pretending we were an item, but for some reason, that doesn't sound too appealing. Could I really do it?

As soon as I ask myself the question, my thoughts wander over to Theo.

He shouldn't even be a factor in this whole equation, and yet I can't help but go there.

Should I really be trying to convince some friend to fake date me when I can go after the man I've been low-key crushing on for years?

Sure, my attraction might have started off as a little celebrity crush, but that chemistry I experienced with Theo at the bar was palpable.

I've never clicked with a guy that fast. And fuck me, I want to explore that connection.

"Yo, man," Rizzo says, nudging me as he skates to my side. "What's with you? You were distracted today. Nelson said Coach was pissed earlier, and you two were locked up in the office before practice. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, man. I'll tell you all about it when we're alone."

"Good. I need a jogging partner." He smirks. "Let's hit the gym."

I groan. "Are you fucking serious, bro? Wasn't that ass beating enough for you?"

Rizzo's grin grows wider. "Nah, man. That was child's play. Come on, we'll be the only ones there today."

"Yeah, because you're the only crazy one on the team," I mumble.

"Damn straight." Rizzo laughs, eyes sparkling.

Holy shit, the fucker really is a masochist. Rolling my eyes, I follow Rizzo to the locker rooms to change into our workout clothes.

Thirty minutes later, I'm drenched in sweat, but not any closer to figuring anything out.

I didn't bother explaining that the bartender I hit it off with is ex-NHL player Theo Walsh.

He'd probably tell me to go after Theo for all the wrong reasons, and I need to make a decision based on the fact that Theo is just a guy I had a really great connection with, not my childhood idol.

I know what it feels like to have people try to get close to me just because I'm the center for the Ice Dragons.

I can only imagine how much worse it was being a real famous person with high-paying endorsements, millions of dollars, and real-life paparazzi.

I really need some help to navigate this one. Figuring I don't really have a choice in the matter, I text the rom-com expert himself.

Adrian: Hey, you free tomorrow?

Felix: Depends. What were you thinking?

Felix: I'm not going to some random party at Delfy House, if that's what you're asking. My Daddy won't let me.

A little bout of jealousy swirls together with confusion.

I'm so happy that Felix has someone he can call Daddy.

As one of the cutest littles I've ever seen, he deserves the world.

Yeah, I might be biased because Felix is my brother, and I've always thought he deserves the best, but there's something about his current Daddy that I just don't like.

While I have no hard proof, Jared's controlling nature seems...

off. And I don't think Felix ever told me he wanted to relinquish that much control in a relationship.

He might be a little, but he's also had a very independent streak.

I've tried asking Felix about it several times, but he just shrugs me off, not wanting to focus on himself. And, well, Felix is an adult. So, all I can do is continue to let him know I'll always be here for him and wait for him to open up.

Adrian: Not a party. I could use some advice.

Felix: Advice on what?

Adrian: I might have met someone.

Felix: *Squeal!!!!* Why didn't you lead with that? What time and where?

I smile at my brother's enthusiasm, when suddenly an idea comes to mind.

Adrian: Do you remember the bar that's downtown near campus?

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Maybe Hockey Is Still In My Blood.

Theo

“Thanks for the extra time, Professor Higgins,” I say, handing over my exam.

“I’ve always been the type of person who likes to double-check my answers by using every spare moment to do so.

” I glance behind me and notice there are only three students left in the classroom.

“It used to annoy the hell out of my buddies back when I was in college the first time around.”

“Of course.” Professor Higgins chuckles. “I was the same way in school. You know, I have to admit, I was a little star-struck when I saw your name on my roster this semester. I thought there was no way in hell I’d have the Theo Walsh in my class.”

I grin, remembering the way the professor seemed to fanboy over Adrian, too. “I’m guessing you’re a big hockey fan?”

“Definitely. What do you plan on doing with your degree?”

“Actually, I’m taking all the necessary steps to become a financial advisor. I know there are so many different ways I could have approached it, but it just felt right to come back to my alma mater.”

Something that looks like shock flickers across Professor Higgins' face before morphing into excitement. "Please tell me you don't have an internship lined up yet. I'd love to offer you one so you can get that extra experience you need."

"That's very kind, but I've actually been working with the owner of the Wyverns and several of my ex-teammates." My face heats. I really shouldn't be embarrassed, but sometimes admitting my goals out loud also feels like announcing my failures as well.

Shaking away that train of thought, I straighten my shoulders.

I'm proud of the career path I'm taking.

"My goal is to help hockey players make sound financial decisions and be the voice of reason. And if a player ever finds himself forced into an early retirement, I want to help him stay on his feet rather than blowing through all his money."

He nods as I talk and offers me a warm smile. "That's a wonderful goal. Looks like hockey will always be a part of you."

I blink. "Anytime I've explained my goals to others, they just assumed it's me clinging to the past. An injured hockey player grasping at straws.

" Or at least that's how my mom acts, wishing I'd stay home here in Brynn rather than move back down to Olivia Cove.

I won't even go into the things Grant said about my career dreams when I mentioned them.

The idea of my making millions, only to take a severe pay cut and manage other people's millions, was beyond degrading to him.

“Bullshit. Just because you aren’t in the NHL anymore doesn’t mean you aren’t a hockey player deep down.

It’s natural that you want to help your team.

Some players become coaches, scouts, or physical therapists.

I can name several football players off the top of my head who became famous sports announcers.

There are even some baseball players who became sports photographers. ”

Warmth fills my chest. “Thank you, Professor.” My eyes land on the pile of exams, and I remember being shocked to see Adrian in this classroom.

I also remember that he was one of the first students to turn in his exam and run out the door like he was on fire.

Being a college student and an athlete, I was used to my teammates half-assing their tests and rushing off to practice or some party or another.

It strikes me as odd that Adrian is taking an advanced finance course, yet didn’t put effort into his exam. Why even bother taking such a difficult class when he could take something simpler? But then I remember how familiar Professor Higgins was with Adrian and some of the compliments I overheard.

Raking a hand through my hair, I glance back up at my professor. “Was that Aidrian Walsh I saw in class earlier?”

Higgins’ whole face lights up. “It was. Smart kid. I’m not supposed to say this, but he’s always been one of my favorite students. Very passionate in class.”

Shock reverberates through me. “Passionate?” I blurt. “I’ve never seen him here in class before, and we’re weeks into the semester.”

“Well, you remember how it was being on the hockey team. Most students have to work their schedules around practice and games. Adrian needs this class for his business administration degree, and this was the only time slot I had available. Unfortunately, it’s right before practice.

So, instead of pissing off Coach Wilson by being late, he shows up to one of my other classes.

Luckily, I’m teaching this particular course at three different times this semester.

He always shows up to one of them filled with enthusiasm and knowledge.

It’s clear he’s as passionate about things on the ice as well as off. ”

I don’t realize there’s a small smile on my face until Professor Higgins clears his throat.

“But something tells me Adrian might make it to this particular time more often than I predicted.”

My head snaps up. “Excuse me?”

Professor Higgins’ eyes are sparkling. “Don’t think I missed that little wink he gave you before leaving class.” He waves a finger in my direction. “And that look on your face? It says it all.”

Biting my lip, I nod absentmindedly and say my goodbyes to the professor.

My mind whirls with all the new and unexpected information I found out about Adrian.

In such a short amount of time, Adrian has surprised me at every turn.

He's talented, smart, attractive, and an intoxicating mix of sassy and submissive.

In other words, exactly my type and tempting as hell.

I really shouldn't get tangled up with someone like him.

He has his whole life ahead of him. He's on track to get signed into the NHL, and to the team I want to work for, no less.

And what would I have to offer someone as beautiful and talented as him?

My last relationship left deep scars, and I couldn't even keep my boy satisfied.

Not saying that Adrian is a boy or looking for a Daddy, but...

Images of him on his knees smiling up at me flood my mind.

Maybe it's because he's the first guy I've been really attracted to in years, but I'm half afraid I'm projecting.

I'm seeing Adrian in a light I want to see him in.

But could it be possible that someone like me can be a Daddy to Adrian DeLuca?

Professor Higgins' words echo in my head. I'm so preoccupied that I'm barely aware of where I'm walking until I come face to face with Brynn U's on-campus ice rink.

‘Just because you aren’t in the NHL anymore doesn’t mean you aren’t a hockey player deep down.’

It isn’t until I feel the icy, cool air that I realize it’s been nine years since I was last here, skating on this rink.

I’m hit with a comforting wave of nostalgia as I see the college students in front of me skating on the ice and doing drills.

From here, I can see three coaches, but I can’t make out Coach Wilson from this angle.

I tell myself I’m looking for Coach and want to say hi.

It’s beyond time for me to stop being afraid and greet the man.

I tell myself I miss him, and I do; he was practically a father figure to me.

But the truth is, I’m looking for one young man, and one man only.

The guy who has captured my attention and won’t let go.

Like a moth to a flame, I see him. Adrian.

He’s working on his passes. He’s impressive, but even from here I can tell something is off. And damn me for wanting to figure out what’s wrong and how I can help him.

My fingers slide into the pocket of my leather jacket and touch the warm metal of my lucky coin.

Taking a seat, I continue to watch the Ice Dragon’s practice, curious about who

pissed in Coach's Cheerios.

I chuckle. Clearly, the man is upset, and he's taking it out on the team.

When the whistle blows, my thoughts are confirmed.

Rather than cooling down and getting ready to end practice, the team launches into a round of speed skating.

When the next whistle blows, indicating the guys can wrap things up and head into the lockers, I sneak out, not wanting to get caught watching.

I promise myself I'll say hi to Coach next time.

Before I leave the rink, I walk up to reception and ask how to find the schedule for free skate.

Higgins is right; deep down, I'm still a hockey player, and I'm meant to be on the ice.

Even if it isn't on a professional level, carving the ice will help clear my mind and hopefully get my head on straight.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

We're totally stalking him.

Adrian

Staying away from the parties at Delfy House would be a whole lot easier if half the hockey team didn't live there.

Or, hell, if I didn't live there. But when there are people cheering, laughing, and dancing just beyond your bedroom door, it's practically impossible.

Especially when everyone comes knocking, trying to see what I'm up to or if the room is available for a make-out session.

Right before heading out to see my brother, I go downstairs and say hello to everyone.

Since it's not the weekend, the guys have made it a habit to start the parties at Delfy House early, claiming the earlier they start, the sooner they can get to bed on a school night.

It's all just a load of crap to get drunk or hook up throughout the week.

I almost make it out the door when Callaway appears in front of me, red cup in hand. "Yo, superstar. Where are you going?"

"Dude, stop calling me that. I'm not a superstar.

” Out of all the people on my team, Callaway is the trickiest to navigate.

I used to be close with the defenseman when I was a freshman.

Now, while I never really hid the fact I was gay, I didn’t go around announcing it either.

Some of my teammates knew, and others didn’t.

When a scout from Olivia Cove approached me one night after a game, I confided in him.

I’d heard that the Wyverns were inclusive, but I needed to know for sure.

I’ve read so many articles about players, famous people—actors, musicians, athletes—who stayed in the closet throughout their entire career.

They mentioned how miserable and lonely they were. I didn’t want that for myself.

The scout told me my sexual orientation doesn’t affect my talent, and if I decide to come out, it shouldn’t change my chances at the draft, and it didn’t.

I was drafted high, and the cliché nickname ‘ superstar ’ was born.

What I didn’t expect was for it to change my friendships with some of my teammates.

Callaway seemed to take it the hardest, confused as to why I’d come out.

He didn’t particularly seem upset that I was gay, but more concerned.

Whether it was for me, the team, or himself, I can’t be entirely sure.

Either way, after a few awkward months, Coach Wilson had about enough and told us to get our heads out of our asses.

For the most part, we work well together, but we never fully regained the level of friendship we had before I was out. Sometimes, I get little hints of jealousy, and it makes me feel bad. Especially since I know Callaway is just as talented as me.

“Well?” he asks, taking a sip from his red cup. “Where are you off to looking so damn sharp?”

I glance down at my tight black tee and fitted jeans. For the most part, I look the same, but tonight I took extra care in styling my hair and added a little extra cologne—not too much, but enough to know I’m clean and smell damn good, not like a sweaty athlete.

“Meeting up with Felix,” I reply.

Callaway arches a brow. “Only Felix? You look like you’re trying too hard. Like you wanna impress some poor sap.”

Barking out a laugh, I shove past him right as my face begins to heat up. “Shut up, man.”

Callaway grins. “I fucking knew it,” he crows. “Okay, bro. Have fun with your ‘brother.’” He adds air quotes with his fingers when he says the word brother.

Since parking by the bar is a nightmare, I decide to walk. It’s a cool night, but the California climate prevents it from becoming too cold. The moon is visible tonight, and there’s a light breeze. Felix is waiting for me a few blocks away from the bar.

“Hey, you!” I rush over and greet my little brother with a hug.

I don't care what others think. Ever since Mom passed, he's needed extra affection, and if I'm being honest, so do I.

Felix sinks into the hug, and when I pull back, he's frowning.

Something about him looks sad tonight, and I'm ready to kick asses and take names. "What's wrong?"

He lets out a deep sigh before he continues walking. "Nothing. Just had a fight with Jared." Jared. Not 'my Daddy . '

"What did the fucker do to you?"

"It's fine, Adrian. I'm fine. It's just a fight. Couples fight sometimes. You can't protect me from everything."

I know that, but damn, do I want to. Felix is all I have left. Dad is gone. Mom is gone. I place a hand on his shoulder and stop him from walking. "I don't think I can just switch it off, Fe. I love you. I always want what's best for you."

He turns to me, face softening. "He didn't believe me. Jared didn't think I was actually meeting with you, and he wanted to call you and ask. I told him no."

Rage bubbles inside of me. Fuck that guy. "Is he hurting you, Fe?" I blurt, pleading. "Please, please tell me the truth."

"Oh my gosh, of course not." He must hear the desperation in my voice because he throws his arms around my waist. "Is that what you thought?"

My body begins trembling with a mixture of relief, fear, and helplessness clashing together.

“I promise you, no matter what, Adrian. I would tell you if one of my boyfriends is ever abusive toward me. I swear it.”

After a long moment of still clutching my brother, his words hit me. A relieved chuckle escapes my throat. “One of your boyfriends? So, Jared isn’t the one? Please tell me he isn’t the one.”

“He isn’t the one,” Felix whispers. “He isn’t the Daddy for me.”

Another long minute passes with Felix and me clinging to each other. I don’t feel like the older brother I try so hard to be, and Felix doesn’t feel like the person I’m protecting. Rather, it feels like we are two children trying to stay afloat.

Finally, Felix pulls away first. He punches me in the arm. “Ouch!” he yelps.

I burst into laughter as he waves his hand back and forth in pain.

“What was that for, brat?” I ask, rubbing the spot he punched.

“That’s for making our meet-up so serious! You owe me a freaking milkshake.”

I grin. “I’m pretty sure they don’t serve milkshakes at the bar.”

“Fine. Then get me one here.” Felix tugs me into the ice cream shop, and I get the impression he planned this.

We shuffle inside, and Felix eagerly bounces around, reading all the various flavors and combinations before settling on vanilla.

He always does this, claiming he’s so indecisive that vanilla is just the safe bet.

I'm pretty sure he's just waiting for the perfect Daddy to figure him out and order the right flavor for him.

Jared always lets him fuss about it before Felix gives up and orders vanilla.

Jared really is all kinds of wrong for my baby brother. Felix deserves only the best.

"Now, tell me about this guy you met," he says as he sips from his straw. We are only a block away from the bar, and if I'm going to say anything embarrassing, it's probably best if I get it out now.

Only, I open my mouth and the words that tumble out are none of the things I mean to say.

"He's perfect, Felix. He's sexy, with this bad-boy style that I had no idea was my thing.

He's kind and smart. He leans forward and really listens when I talk.

I'm not entirely sure he's in the lifestyle, so probably not, but he has this dominant air about him. "

"Why am I just hearing about him?"

"We officially met at the bar the other night. And I just found out he's in my finance class."

"The one with Professor Higgs?"

I nod.

“Oh my gosh, this is just like my rom-coms. What was your meet-cute like? Did he approach you and offer to buy you a drink? Did he ask you to dance? Did he shove away some himbo flirting with you?” Felix bounces on his toes, and I laugh.

My cheeks heat as I remember the amount of shock I experienced seeing him out on the patio. I can’t believe I kneeled in front of him and poked his fucking cheek. What a weirdo.

“Oh my god! You’re blushing!” Felix squeals before sipping his milkshake.

“Um, he works at the bar.” Opting for the less embarrassing answer.

Felix stops abruptly, causing me to slam into him from behind. “Oh my goodness! This is so exciting. So, we’re stalking him.”

My heart begins to pound wildly in my chest, and my cheeks grow hotter. I glance around, afraid that Theo will pop out of nowhere.

“No!” I hiss. “We aren’t stalking him.”

“Then what are we doing here, at his place of employment?” Felix’s voice is pure sass.

“We aren’t stalking him,” I repeat.

“No, let me guess. We’re just here to hang out. If we run into him, then great,” Felix says, with a smirk. “We’re just trying to see him, maybe chat with him. Or hell, maybe even dig up a little information on him.” “Ahh fuck.” My lips twitch. “We’re totally stalking him.”

Felix cheers. “I knew it!”

“Fine. Fine. Now hush, brat. Please don’t embarrass me.”

We walk up to the front door and let the security guard check our IDs.

He places a wristband around my wrist and leaves Felix’s wrist blank, indicating he’s under twenty-one.

Since this bar is technically considered on campus, they don’t exclude anyone over the age of eighteen and offer food and non-alcoholic drinks to the underage students.

My eyes adjust to the low lighting and trail over to the bar.

Theo is standing there chatting with his co-worker, Kayla.

She sees me first and nudges him. Theo’s head pops up, and our eyes meet from across the room.

Even from here, my cock jerks at his attention.

And when Theo recognizes me, I practically swoon at the wide, happy smile spreading across his lips.

“Is that him? Wait a second, why does he look familiar?” Felix asks, trying to get a better look.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

I groan. In all my excitement, I forgot to tell Felix it's Theo.

Damn it. Now my mouth isn't working, and I'm suddenly feeling shy.

What the fuck? I never feel shy. I wanted to tell Felix before we got here so he wouldn't be so shocked.

I want real advice. Not for my little brother to tease me over my celebrity crush.

"Uh, maybe you've seen him here before?" I say weakly.

Felix shakes his head. "No, that isn't it."

I yank Felix by his arm and usher him toward an open booth. He giggles and places his milkshake on the table before sliding in. "I'm on to you, Aid."

I plop down on my side of the booth. Before I can explain, Kayla passes Theo the pad of paper to take orders, and suddenly, Theo is walking toward us. He's no longer smiling. He looks guarded, his eyes bouncing back and forth between Felix and me. Oh crap. It probably looks like we're on a date.

"Don't make a big deal about this, okay?" I whisper to my little brother. Images of Felix teasing me throughout the years whenever Adrian was on TV come to mind. Oh, no. Oh no. This was such a bad idea.

"A big deal about what?" Felix bats his lashes innocently, right as Theo stands in front of our booth.

He glances between my brother and me with a small smile, but something about it seems forced. “Hey,” he says casually, making eye contact with me.

My face grows hot under his stare, and all I can do is blink up at him.

Internally, I’m screaming at myself to say something, but it’s as if I’m frozen in place.

I used to get this way around guys I found attractive, but it’s been years since that happened.

Slamming my mouth shut, I just stare up at Theo, knowing that if I say anything in this moment, I’d just word vomit and embarrass myself even more.

Before it can get too awkward, Felix holds his hand out to Theo. “Hey. I’m Felix.”

Theo glances down at my little brother. “Hi, there. I’m Theo.”

“Theo, Theo, Theo. Hmm.” Felix taps an index finger playfully to his chin. “Why do you seem so familiar?”

Theo’s posture changes. He straightens his shoulders as if bracing himself. Maybe he really doesn’t want people to know who he is.

“Are you a hockey fan?”

Felix’s face scrunches up, and it’s as if my awkward bubble of tension pops.

I burst into laughter right as Felix speaks.

“No. I’m definitely not a fan of hockey.

It's a bunch of neanderthals skating around like ballerinas playing with sticks until one wrong move, and all that caveman aggression comes forth, and suddenly everyone's fighting or slamming each other into the boards. No, thank you."

I can't help myself. I grin at my brother. He's always had such a crazy imagination.

Theo's lips twitch. "That's oddly...accurate. My name is Theo Walsh. I used to play in the NHL."

Felix flutters his lashes before clarity hits him. Then a slow smile spreads across his lips. "Well, well," Felix drawls. "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world."

"Casablanca?" Theo's intense blue eyes meet mine. "Okay, so you're the rom-com guy Adrian mentioned. Well, I hope the two of you have a nice night together. Look, my shift is almost over, so what can I get you tw—"

"Felix is my brother," I blurt. "The rom-com guy I watch movies with? He's my brother."

"Ah." Theo's whole body seems to relax, and suddenly that lazy, sexy smile is back on his lips. "Your brother."

I nod eagerly. "My brother." Theo and I stare at each other for a few moments, and I swear it's as if we are lost in one another's gaze. The spell between us only breaks when Felix clears his throat.

"Right," Theo says. "What can I get you two?"

Since I'm a little tight on funds this week, I order a Shirley Temple, remembering how good it was last time. Just then, my stomach growls. Both Theo and Felix glance

down at my stomach, and I bite my lip.

Theo gives me a stern look that makes my toes curl. “Adrian—”

“Why aren’t you ordering anything else?” my brother asks.

“Felix.” I kick his foot under the table. “I don’t really have the funds to eat out right now.”

Felix rolls his eyes. “Then why did we come here if—”

“Let me get you something,” Theo interrupts. “Both of you, on the house. You probably just got out of practice, right?”

I sigh. “Yeah, about two hours ago.”

“And did you eat anything after practice?” Theo’s voice grows with determination.

I shake my head, suddenly feeling small. I was too eager to get ready and come here. Then I spent most of my cash on Felix’s shake.

“You can’t do that to yourself. You need to eat. Let me treat you both.”

I start to protest, but Felix cuts me off. “On one condition,” he says, smiling up at Theo. “You can get us food on one condition.”

Theo grins. “And what’s that?”

I kick Felix under the table again, but he just ignores me.

“You order something for yourself and join us.”

My heart skips a beat before it starts racing frantically in my chest. What. The. Fuck? I'm going to kill my little brother.

"Deal," Theo agrees easily. "Any allergies or things you two dislike?"

"Nope," Felix replies. "We'll eat about anything. Especially this one." He points at me.

Theo beams. "Good. As an athlete, you need all the extra calories you can get. I'll be right back."

My mouth falls open. Theo finally looks my way and tosses me a wink. With that, he rushes off.

Felix leans toward me from across the table. "Is it just me, or did he seem really eager to take care of you?"

I sputter. "What?" My heart pounds as I replay every little embarrassing detail. I'd be lying if it wasn't what I was just thinking, too.

We both watch him as he talks to Kayla, takes off his nametag, and places it under the bar. She laughs and gives him a shove before he eagerly rushes to the back and disappears behind the swinging doors.

Felix kicks me in the shin. "Yeah, not stalking him, my ass. Why didn't you freaking tell me the guy you're crushing on is the same guy who helped little baby Adrian come to the realization he's as gay as a rainbow?"

"Hush, you. I don't want anyone to overhear us."

"You should be happy I invited him to hang out with us. Now you can really get to

know him. Oh! I can't wait to interrogate him. No one knows what he's been up to since he retired."

"Oh my gosh. You aren't going to interrogate him. Haven't you ever thought that maybe he doesn't want the world to know what he's been doing? I get the impression he needed time to heal."

"But don't you want to find out what he's been up to for the past five years?" Nodding, I bite my lip again. "I do. But is it crazy to want to hear it from him? To build something I've always craved from a potential partner?" And a Daddy? "And what's that?" "Trust and loyalty."

Something flickers across Felix's face, but it's gone before I can even analyze it.

"Okay, the food will be here in about ten minutes. Until then, I got us some chips and salsa to snack on." Theo places the chips in the middle of the table. "Scooch," he says, sliding down into my side of the booth and pressing against me.

I scoot over enough to give him plenty of room, but he continues to slide closer until our thighs are touching under the table. Theo stretches out his arm, casually placing it behind my shoulders. He isn't hugging me to him, but I can totally pretend he is.

Felix gives me a wide grin, as if he knows my skin is on fire. Hell, I'm probably as red as a tomato, but at this moment I wouldn't change a thing.

Of course, this is when my stomach decides to growl loud enough to be heard over the background music. Again.

The three of us burst into laughter. I take a chip and get a heaping amount of salsa on top. "Oh my gosh. This is good. I don't think I've eaten here before."

Theo nods. “They make pretty decent food here, especially for the campus lunch rush. Since we’re so close to everyone, the boss realized students might want to eat here too.”

That makes sense.

“So,” Theo hedges. “Did you get your friend home safely the other night?”

For a moment, I’m confused until I realize who he’s talking about.

Felix laughs and snags a chip and dips it into the salsa. “You mean Guy? Oh, my gosh. Adrian. Tell him the story.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I can see Theo cock a sexy, thick eyebrow.

“Guy is Coach’s son.”

Theo’s mouth falls open. “Wait, little baby Spencer? Damn.” He scratches his chin.

“I remember the kid when he turned seven. He used to hang out and watch us during practice when I was on the hockey team. That had to have been what?” Theo counts with his fingers.

“Eleven or twelve years ago... wait a second.”

Theo leans away from me to look me in the eye. I turn my face toward him.

“That would make Spencer, or excuse me, Guy, only eighteen. He was drunk that night.”

I nod, launching into the story of how I took him home and how Coach answered the

door.

“Damn,” Theo laughs. “No wonder Coach was taking things out on you during practice. I’m going to have to tell the bossman to crack down on the IDs.”

I glance back at Theo with a grin. “Wait, you were there? At practice?”

Now it’s Theo’s turn to blush. I’m vaguely aware of Felix’s head bouncing back and forth between Theo and me.

Rather than shy away, Theo smiles again. “I was too curious about this hockey player I met the night before, and showed up in my advance finance class the next day.”

My chest fills with warmth and happiness.

Kayla arrives at our table with our drinks, followed by another coworker who brings our food. Seeing Theo’s order makes my mouth water. Two kinds of melted cheese overflow juicy double cheeseburgers, accompanied by a large, heaping bowl of salad.

Theo reaches for the tongs and serves a large portion of salad onto my plate.

I notice the way he adds extra cherry tomatoes.

My brother doesn’t miss the move, either.

Felix nudges me under the table and grins before handing Theo his plate as well.

Theo doesn’t even miss a beat, serving Felix salad like we’ve done this a million times.

We spend the next thirty minutes eating and reminiscing about how significant Coach

Wilson is to each of us, Felix included.

I'm shocked to find out that Theo has kept in touch with Coach all these years, but hasn't seen him in person since enrolling back at Brynn U.

I get the impression he's a little nervous about seeing his idol after retiring.

We laugh and bond over our crazy stories, and all the while, Theo keeps his thigh pressed firmly against mine.

"Wait," Theo says, leaning back and pushing his empty plate away. "What did Coach say to you before practice? You know, the day after you delivered his son to his doorstep."

I groan, giving him the condensed version of Coach Wilson's lecture.

Theo laughs. "There's no way he said you should have a fake relationship."

I nod. "It's true. I mean, I couldn't really tell if he said it as a joke, but he seemed pretty serious. Honestly, the more I think about it, it'd be an easy solution."

"Wait." Felix points his index finger back and forth, bouncing between Theo and me. A wide grin spreads across his face. Oh crap. I know this look. I don't like this look. What the hell is he up to?

I narrow my eyes. Felix has always been the sweet one of the two of us, but sometimes he has his moments when he decides to be mischievous, and even more so lately.

"You two. The two of you." He claps his hands together eagerly. "Wait, this is perfect!"

“What the hell are you going on about?” I ask.

“The two of you should fake date!”

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Not that I'm really entertaining this whole fake idea. Am I?

Theo

"Felix!" Adrian hisses, kicking his brother under the table.

The two siblings have practically been playing footsie all night.

Adrian doesn't seem to know that because my leg is pressed against his, I can feel whenever the brothers kick one another.

Quite honestly, the whole thing is sweet and kind of adorable.

"Oh, come on! This is perfect." Felix leans forward and ignores his brother, making eye contact with me.

I can't believe I didn't see the resemblance between the two of them, but now that they're both in front of me, I can see that they both have a sassy, mischievous side to them.

He glances back at his brother. "Think about it, Aid. You need someone to help you clean up your image, so you don't look like the player—"

"I'm not a player. You, of all people, know I haven't been sleeping around. And I won't date anyone unless they have the potential to be my Da—" Adrian stops talking, eyes wide. He snaps his head toward me.

I'm leaning forward, almost desperate to hear him finish that sentence.

"I won't date anyone unless they have the potential to be my boyfriend."

"Jeez, Aid. I know that. I was going to say that you need someone to help you clean your image, so you don't look like the player the media has made you out to be."

Is it crazy that I'm happy to hear all the rumors I've heard about Adrian over the last few years aren't true? I shake my head, pushing those thoughts away and focusing on what the two brothers are talking about. "And how would dating me help?"

"Fake dating," Felix corrects.

Right. It wouldn't be real. But damn, what if it could be? Not that I'm really entertaining this whole fake idea.

"You could..." Felix trails off when Adrian places a hand over his brother's forearm.

"I got this, Fe." Adrian faces me. "Not only would it help me look like I'm in a committed relationship with one person, but it would also give me an excuse not to be seen at so many parties."

I shake my head again. "And why do you need an excuse to not be seen at these parties? Just don't go."

"It's not that easy. Most of the hockey team lives at Delfy House with me. I don't have my own place, and everyone will just knock on my door all night if I don't show up."

A sense of unease settles in my stomach. I've heard that Delfy House has gotten even crazier throughout the years, but this year has been out of control. If Adrian is living

there, I doubt he's getting much sleep during the weekends.

Felix is giving me this pleading look while Adrian just seems tired and defeated.

I want to wrap Adrian up in my arms and tell him I'll help, but the fake bit is what's stopping me.

I like Adrian. A lot. And if it's fake, does that mean it can't be real?

Does this mean he'll hook up with others in the privacy of his room, but go out with me in public?

Because I don't think I can handle that.

If I'm around this boy as often as I hope to be, I will want to cherish him. I'll want to take care of him and make him mine. I'll want to spoil him so much that everyone around us will know I've put a claim on his heart.

Then, of course, there's the fact I haven't come out to the public.

I want to be out of the closet, so that isn't a big issue anymore.

I don't care who knows, but at the very least, I'll have to tell my mother.

Mom is in quite a few circles, and there's no way she wouldn't hear about her son dating one of the local celebrities.

Brynn, California, is a college town, and they worship the hockey team.

"I'll have to think about it," I finally reply.

Adrian's shoulders sag. "Forget about it. It was a dumb idea."

Without thinking, I tip his chin up to meet his pretty blue-gray eyes. I'm at an awkward angle, sitting so close to him in the booth, but I need him to look me in the eye. "I said I'll think about it." I don't mean to use my Daddy voice, but I totally do.

I'm vaguely aware of the loud gasp that comes from Felix as he stares at us.

Adrian's pupils darken, and his lips part. We stay like that for a moment before he finally swallows and nods. "Okay," he says in a shaky voice before giving me a shy smile. "I need to go to the restroom. Mind if I get by?"

I study him for a moment, hoping I didn't cross some invisible line or make him feel uncomfortable. Dropping my hand from his chin, I slide out of the booth and stand. When Adrian gets out of the booth, his fingers purposely trace over my hand, causing my heart to skip.

"I'll be right back," he says. "You two don't go anywhere."

As soon as Adrian is out of sight, Felix snaps his fingers. "Oh my gosh! Now I know why you look so familiar! You're the new Daddy I saw at Clutch."

My eyes widen with shock. Adrian's little brother goes to the local kink club?

I search my memory, trying to place Felix at the club.

For some reason, my brain is screaming little , but I still can't remember actually seeing him there.

That's when something else dawns on me. If Felix is in the kink community, does that mean Adrian is too?

Or at the very least, would he be open to it?

A little flicker of hope ignites in my chest.

“You are! You’re the Daddy that all the littles are chatting about. The one who sits on the side looking for the right boy to play with. I’ve seen the way you look at my brother, you know. Does this mean you might’ve found your boy?”

My heart beats triple time in my chest, and that little flicker of hope burns into a desperate need. “Are you saying that Adrian might be a little or a boy?”

Felix hesitates. “Would it matter if he were one or the other? Or neither?”

My respect for Felix grows even more. He’s trying to protect his older brother by not outing him.

I decide to lay my cards on the table and be as honest as possible.

“It’s true. I’m a Daddy, but my last relationship didn’t end well.

The boy I fell in love with hurt me deeply, so I’m nervous about fully putting myself out there again.

It’s another reason why I’m hesitant to want to do this whole fake thing with Adrian.

I want to find my forever boy. Whether he’s a little, middle, puppy, or some other kind of submissive, it doesn’t matter.

As long as my boy understands that I’m a caregiver through and through. ”

Felix nods eagerly. Just then, his phone vibrates on the table.

He glances down at it and hits ignore. “That’s my Daddy.

He’s here to pick me up. Talk to my brother, Theo.

The two of you have amazing chemistry. Call me a hopeless romantic, but maybe a fake relationship is exactly what you need.

The two of you could test the waters. See how the two of you would be if this thing were real, because I think it has the potential to be real if you want it to be. ” He beams at me.

That hopeful, desperate inferno blazes even brighter right when I spot Adrian walking toward us. I definitely have a lot to think about. “Thank you, Felix,” I whisper.

“What’s going on here?” Adrian asks with a large grin as he reaches the booth. “Why do you two look so happy?”

My eyes bounce to Felix.

“Jared’s here. So, I thought I’d leave you two,” Felix replies.

Adrian glances behind me, and his smile falls, replaced with a frown. “Will you be okay, Fe?”

Peering over my shoulder, I notice someone walking toward us. I immediately recognize the man from Clutch, and wish I didn’t. If this is Felix’s Daddy, I’ve definitely seen the man chat with other littles. The guy seems like a player and reminds me of the possessive Daddy my ex replaced me with.

“I’ll be fine. Promise.”

Felix and I climb out of the booth at the same time, and I leave a few twenties with the bill.

Adrian scoops Fe into a protective hug. “Call if you need anything. Any time. You can also stay in my room with me if you need to. I can sleep on the floor. I promise I don’t mind.”

Suddenly, I feel like I’m witnessing something I shouldn’t. I want to give the two siblings privacy, but I don’t like the look on Jared’s face as his gaze bounces between Adrian and me. My Daddy instincts are telling me to stay. To protect what’s mine.

Wait, mine?

Felix pulls away from the hug with a bright smile. “Don’t forget what I promised you earlier, Aid. I’m fine. Nothing’s happened. Okay?”

“Okay,” Adrian grumbles.

“Plus, I left Delfy House because it’s too loud and crazy. You should, too. And stop trying to protect me, big brother. You’ve done so much for me growing up. I’m an adult now. I got this.”

Adrian pulls Felix into another quick hug, determination on his face. “I might not be very good at it, Fe. But I promise I’ll always be here for you.”

I swear, if my heart didn’t melt at this moment, I’d be made of stone. Something about the fierce loyalty Adrian has for Felix makes me fall for him just a little. Adrian has clearly been through more than I realized, and the Daddy inside of me wants to reach out to help him.

The brothers say goodbye, and Felix gives me a meaningful look. Jared approaches

but doesn't say anything. He offers me a small smile and a nod, which eases my thoughts just a little.

Suddenly, Adrian leans against me, pressing his arm against mine. I'm tempted to lace my fingers with his, something I've never done in public before.

As soon as Jared and Felix are out the door, Adrian pulls away. "Sorry about that. I wanted Jared to think we were together, and to know that he doesn't have anything to worry about when it comes to you and Fe."

"What do you mean?"

"Felix and Jared got into a fight when Jared found out he was meeting me at the bar. He didn't believe Felix. And I didn't want the asshole to think that Felix was meeting you instead, even though I'm standing right here."

I nod, glad it isn't just me who thinks Jared seems like an asshole.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

“The ironic thing is, my teammate, Callaway, thought I was meeting someone else, too.” He lets out a deep sigh. “What’s wrong with hanging out with my brother? He’s my best friend.”

I give Adrian a reassuring squeeze on his forearm, causing him to smile at me. “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“Thanks, Theo.”

“Come on,” I say, leading him toward the front entrance. “Did you drive here?”

“No, I walked.”

I arch a brow. Even though it’s technically still considered on campus, it’s a bit of a trek. Adrian might be a muscular guy, but the need to take care of him flares up again. “My car is just down the block. Let’s walk over there, and then I can drive you back to Delfy House.”

He nods gratefully.

The cool air of the night hits my cheeks as soon as we make it outside. Decorative lights glitter around us, the campus illuminated against the starry sky. It’s a lovely night as a few people walk by the local shops. Even on a weekday, this street is busy until midnight.

“The stars are out now,” Adrian whispers.

“Hmm?” I glance up at the sky. The sight is beautiful. Suddenly, it’s like I’m reliving a cliché movie scene where the main character realizes it’s been forever since he enjoyed the little things in life. But seriously, when was the last time I stopped to appreciate the stars?

“When I walked here earlier, all I could see was the moon. I like that we get to see the stars together.” As if planned, we both slow our steps to a casual stroll. It’s almost as if we want to spend as much time together before stepping back into reality.

“You seem very protective of your brother.”

“I am,” he replies, brushing his fingers against the back of my hand.

“Our mom passed right after I turned eighteen. Felix was fifteen at the time. He turned sixteen about a month later, but even then, he always looked younger than his age. Felix had a few issues with some bullies when he was in high school. I get the impression it was because he was so smart and skipped a few grades, but he never confirmed it for me. Despite Felix being so book smart, he never had a social life back then. He was really shy and never connected with the kids around him, especially since they were a few years older than him. When mom passed, I was kind of forced into a parental role, not that I would have it any other way. Plus, Felix was a great kid. I think he purposely made things easier on me.”

“Wow, that sounds really tough. If you don’t mind me asking, where was your dad?”

“He passed when I was thirteen.”

I sigh deeply. God, poor Adrian. “I’m so sorry to hear that.

I can’t even imagine. It seems like you’ve dealt with so much at such a young age.

” Placing my hands into my leather jacket, I feel around until I find my lucky coin.

It’s something I’ve had for about nine years now, and whenever I feel unsteady or nervous, something about the metal grounds me.

“But it seems like you take really good care of Felix, and from what I just witnessed between you two, he appreciates it.”

Adrian shakes his head. “I’m not very good at the whole caregiver thing. I want to be, but I don’t know.” He rakes a hand through his thick, dark hair. “This is going to sound really bad, but…” he trails off.

I swallow hard. I didn’t expect this. I didn’t prepare for vulnerable confessions under the stars. “It’s okay, you can tell me.”

He looks over at me, his eyes pleading with mine. “I’m so tired, Theo. And sometimes I just wish… I wish it was my turn. Sometimes I wish someone out there would care enough to want to take care of me.”

I inhale sharply, fisting my hand and rubbing my chest. I rub at that spot just above my heart. Damn, if that didn’t get me right in the feels.

Going against my better judgment, I pull Adrian to my side, wanting to cuddle him close to me. He snuggles into my embrace.

Fuck. He feels perfect. We continue our walk, my arm still around him.

I don’t tell him how huge this moment is for me.

This is the first time I’ve publicly shown any affection to another man.

Instead, I continue to chat with Adrian, telling him more about myself as I lock up this moment deep in my heart.

I tell him stories about my mom and her crazy antics.

And my dad with his obsession with golfing.

When we arrive at my car, Adrian tugs me forward, and we make two more loops around the block as I tell him more stories of my life in the NHL, and he tells me about his goals for the future.

I kiss his temple and let go when we arrive at my car for the third time tonight. “Let’s get you home.” Fuck. There’s no fucking way I just went into Daddy mode with Adrian DeLuca. But that’s exactly what I just did, and I don’t regret a thing.

Like a gentleman, I open the passenger door for him, showing him silently that I want to be the person he talked about. The person ‘who cares enough to take care of him.’ I lean across his chest and gently buckle him in.

A few people walk by, but don’t seem to pay us any mind. If anyone were to get a good look at us, we’d probably look ridiculous; a grown man buckling in another man who is even more built than he is. But fuck it. Fuck them. Anyone who has a problem with it can look away.

A party is in full swing as I pull up to Delfy House. My hackles rise the closer we get to the pounding base and loud cheers.

I glance over at Adrian, but he doesn’t seem fazed. “How often do your roommates party?”

He shrugs, suddenly looking tired. “When do they not party?”

Not my business. Not my business. Not my business. But a small voice in my head says that it can be. That I already made it my business the moment I wrapped my arm around Adrian and he cuddled to my side.

Parking my car, I unbuckle my seatbelt and turn to face him.

“Will you really think about the whole fake dating thing?” he asks, staring out the window.

I turn his head back toward me. “I promise. Just give me a few days. In the meantime, can we exchange numbers?”

His whole face lights up, and he nods eagerly.

Once he passes his phone to me, I text myself so he has my number.

Then I get out of the car and rush around to the front.

He looks amused when I open the door for him.

As soon as he’s out of the car, I don’t let him get away.

I take one small step right into his space.

A pretty blush spreads across his cheekbones and, damn, I want to lean in and press kisses to that heated skin.

To trace that pink trail and follow his blush down his neck, till I work my way lower.

I’ve never felt this way before. Not with any of my previous relationships, and definitely not with any boy I’ve met at the club.

His pretty gray eyes darken and drop to my lips. This time, he steps closer to me.

“Adrian.” My voice is low and husky. “What are you doing?”

“Theo...” he breathes, voice just as wrecked.

And then he kisses me. His arms wrap around my shoulders, and his soft, plush lips press against mine. His lips part on a tiny gasp, and I’m not sure if it’s because he’s shocked, or because I’m not pulling away, or if it’s because he feels what I feel.

This kiss is raw and passionate, my tongue slipping inside his mouth and deepening the kiss. Tasting him for the first time feels electric. A bolt of lust shoots down to my cock when I pull him tighter against me and he whimpers.

He untangles his arms from around my shoulders and trails his fingers in my open leather jacket. I groan and suck on his tongue, my fingers grasping his head and tugging at his hair. When we finally pull apart, I’m as hard as steel, and I can feel his own erection pressing against my hip.

Holy hell, Adrian DeLuca can kiss.

“What was that for?” I ask, unable to fight the goofy grin that’s on my lips.

“I figured that whether we fake date or not, I wanted at least one kiss. Something that’s just for me. No audience. Just mine.”

My smile widens. God, this boy. “A stolen kiss.”

He grins back. “A stolen kiss just between us.”

“Just between us,” I agree.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Confessions and Coffee.

Theo

A few mornings later, I wake up early, feeling happy and refreshed. Ending my evenings by texting with Adrian has done wonders for my soul. Even though we haven't been able to see each other since that night at the bar, I love how we always find the time to text.

Theo: Good morning.

Theo: Do you still want to meet up before Higgins' class? I'm headed to the café now.

Adrian: Morning!! I'm on my way! See you soon.

The fresh scent of coffee and pastries greets me as soon as I walk through the door.

With the café quiet, I explore their shelves of merchandise.

Brynn U's little dragon mascot is on several things like mugs, shot glasses, and pens.

And on the top shelf, there are random coffee gadgets that I have no idea how to use.

When I spot a shelf of stuffed animals, my mind wanders over to the conversation I had with Felix.

He never confirmed if Adrian is a boy or little, or if he is a submissive at all, but by the encouragement I got from his brother, I'm going to assume he is.

Would he like it if I bought him a cute little stuffie?

Or maybe even a good luck figurine of the Brynn U dragon?

The bell over the door chimes as Adrian walks in.

He's wearing a hoodie with the dragon mascot on it, and I'm immediately reminded of the thoughts that were just floating around in my head.

His eyes drop to the figurine in my hand when he makes it to my side.

Placing it back on the shelf, I casually go in for a hug, as if that's what I do when I see all my friends.

Newsflash: it isn't. I'm not necessarily a touch-feely type of guy, but Adrian brings it out of me.

Pulling him tight against me, I'm surrounded by his citrus scent as he melts into my embrace. I don't miss the way he lingers, and I don't mind. I'd linger in this moment for as long as he wants. When he finally pulls away, I get a good look at his face and see the dark circles under his eyes.

I purse my lips. "Did you get any sleep last night?"

He shakes his head. "My roomies got a little wild, and it was way too loud. I had to go to the library to study. I'm so freaking lucky that part of the library is open 24/7. I don't think I'd get any sleep otherwise."

Startled, I jerk back. “You slept at the library?”

“Not on purpose. Delfy House started partying early. So, Rizzo and I went to the library to study for a bit. I accidentally fell asleep while reading my econ textbook.” Adrian places a hand over his mouth to hide a yawn.

“I usually catch up on some sleep at this time and head over to practice after, but...”

I arch a brow. “But what?”

Adrian blushes, a deep red high on his cheeks. “I didn’t want to... miss this class.”

Because of me. He didn’t want to miss class because of me. I can read between the lines. Guilt swirls in my stomach. Adrian was so bummed out when we couldn’t meet up earlier in the week, but damn, I didn’t know it was so bad at Delfy House that he literally had to sleep in the fucking library.

Sighing, I press a palm to the small of Adrian’s back and guide him toward the line that’s starting to form.

“While I appreciate seeing you this early in the morning, I don’t think you should lose sleep over it.

You need a good night’s rest before each practice.

Plus, what you worked out with Higgins for attending his other classes seems to work for you.”

Adrian squirms, looking down. I didn’t mean to make him feel guilty, but that damn need to take care of him overrides any of my thoughts.

And that's when it hits me. I can't push down my need to care for him because I do care for him.

I'm developing strong feelings for Adrian, and I want him to know that.

I want him to know I'm here for him. That I care.

Changing my tone, I go for cheerful, because I need to see that pretty smile on his face and know that I put it there.

"Well, there isn't much we can do about it now.

Why don't I treat you to your favorite coffee, and we'll worry about your schedule later?

If you want, I can have a look at it. I'm sure there's somewhere you can sneak in some extra time to catch some z's.

Even if you have to take a nap here or there, we can figure it out. "

Adrian beams at me. "You'd help me do that? Wouldn't it be boring?"

"Not at all." We shuffle forward in line, our arms casually brushing against each other, and sending jolts of electricity through me. I glance around us to make sure no one can overhear. "I kind of have a confession to make."

He eyes me curiously.

"That night at the bar, your brother thought I looked familiar."

Adrian's blush returns and spreads down his cheeks to his neck. Interesting. Does he

already know? Or is it something else entirely?

“Felix saw me at Clutch, the local kink club. I’m a Daddy.”

A surprised gasp leaves Adrian’s lips. “Oh. Um. I wasn’t sure. I mean, it’s kind of obvious when you say it out loud,” he rambles. “And I kind of hoped, but yeah. Thank you for confirming.”

Fuck, he’s so adorable.

We make it to the front of the line, and I ask him what his favorite drink is here. Our arms brush again, and I lean in close. “Would it be okay if I ordered for you?”

Our gazes lock as he gives me a sweet smile and nods.

It might be something minuscule. Something so small that others wouldn’t understand.

But for me, I’m asking if I can take control, and he’s giving me permission.

Does he understand? Does my wide grin tell him how happy it makes me when he lets me take care of him?

As if reading my mind and giving me all the reassurance I need. He leans against me, almost cuddling up to my side as I order our coffees for the two of us. After I pay, we find a small table to wait and chat, but just before I sit down, he tugs on my arm and whispers in my ear.

“I have a confession to make, too.” His breath is caressing the shell of my ear, causing me to shiver.

I pull back to look at him. “And what’s that?”

There’s a sparkle in his eye and a sassy smile playing on his lips. I love that smile. I’m completely captivated by the way he switches from sweet and shy to sassy so naturally. It just does it for me. He does it for me.

I always thought I should settle for one or the other, but never dreamed of seeing both in one person.

He glances around, like the way I did when I made my confession. Then he playfully tugs me back to him. “I’m looking for a Daddy.”

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

My advice—make that man your Daddy.

Adrian

For the next several days, Theo and I text each other during any spare moments we get. I don't mention the whole fake dating thing again, because I don't want to put any pressure on him, and oddly enough, I'm okay with it. I like what's growing between us.

We only see each other once during the week, meeting right before Mr. Higgins' class. He treats me to an iced mocha before we walk to class together. Every time our arms brushed together, I thought about the kiss we shared and wished we could hold hands.

Over the weekend, while my team and I were on the bus to our next away game, he texted me.

Wishing me luck and giving me all kinds of great advice.

And when we won, he was there texting me his congratulations, before reminding me to celebrate with a nice meal and making sure to drink plenty of fluids.

Some people might think it's strange that he's reminding me to eat and drink, or to get plenty of sleep.

But I fucking love it.

Theo is everything I ever could have wanted in a boyfriend, and my crush on him only grows the more I get to know him.

Right as practice ends for the day, I message my brother.

Adrian: You know, you were supposed to give me advice on Theo the other day. And I totally just realized you didn't!!

Adrian: Help! What did you think? ADVICE NEEDED ASAP.

Stopping by my favorite restaurant, I order their seasoned grilled chicken, a large spinach and arugula salad, and a side of their garlic asparagus.

I snap a few photos and send them to Theo.

My phone vibrates so quickly, I think it must be Felix replying to my earlier texts, but instead, it's Theo.

Theo: That looks good, sweet boy. Are you eating now?

A small smile fills my lips as I reread the message he sent.

He's recently started calling me 'sweet boy' through texts, and I love it.

I'm desperate to hear him call me that in person, though.

The morning we met up for coffee, he confessed that Felix had mentioned seeing him at the local kink club.

A part of me was wildly jealous until he said that he never played with anyone there and probably won't be back for a while.

I secretly hoped that I was the reason he didn't need to go, especially with the way he already seems to be Daddy-ing me.

I ended up making a confession of my own: that I was a boy looking for a Daddy. Did he purposely send me all these caring, sweet texts because he wants to be the one to fill that role, or is it just in his nature?

Adrian: I am. I walked down to the open patch of grass in front of the quad and picked a bench to sit at.

I don't admit I'm avoiding Delfy House since there's another party everyone is setting up for. Felix is right; I need to find somewhere else to live. But I don't have many options this deep into the school year, or with my limited funds.

Theo: I wish I could be there with you, but this next exam I have on Monday is a big one. Forgive me?

Adrian: Nothing to forgive. I'll see you soon.

God, why did I have to meet Theo now? Why couldn't we have met sooner?

With the Ice Dragons being so close to getting into the playoffs, Coach Wilson has us starting practice half an hour earlier, which means from now on, I'm attending one of Professor Higgins' other classes, rather than the early morning one with Theo.

Theo: I'll be studying all night. Text me in the morning and tell me how your night went.

Adrian: I will. Have a good night, Theo.

He doesn't need to know I accidentally typed in Daddy and erased it before hitting

send.

When another text message comes through, this time it's from my brother.

Felix: My advice—make that man your Daddy.

I smile to myself, half tempted to reply to Felix that it's too late.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

I see you.

Theo

Tuesday morning, the day after my big exam, I wake up feeling refreshed. Despite that, there's a lot on my mind. From the fact that both my mother and Grant keep blowing up my phone with texts, to the fact that I'm falling for my perfect boy—and he doesn't even know it.

Now that my exam is over, the millions of little thoughts that have been circling around in my head come forth, asking for attention.

Realizing I'm not going to be able to sleep, I decide it's finally time to visit the one place I've been avoiding, and the place I know will help me sort this all out.

Finding parking this early at the arena isn't hard to do. Not that many people take advantage of the early morning free skate unless they're one of the hockey players. And even then, they aren't here every day, since they still practice like crazy throughout the school week.

Pulling out my old skates that I sharpened earlier in the week, I get ready to go onto the rink. As soon as the cold air hits my face and my blades touch the ice, I feel like I'm home. I spend the next two hours skating while sorting the jumbled mess in my brain into proper thoughts.

“Walsh!”

Instinctively, I straighten my shoulders as the voice triggers a wave of memories. I turn around and see Coach Wilson standing at the edge of the ice like a drill sergeant.

“Coach,” I nod my head in respect.

That familiar stern look on his face melts away, and it’s replaced with a warm smile. I blink. I don’t think I’ve ever seen the man smile like that before, and if so, it definitely wasn’t aimed at me.

I skate toward him, and his grin grows. “Well, I’ll be damned, it is you. Seeing you on the ice threw me back a decade. I thought I lost my damn mind.”

To my shock, Coach Wilson throws his arms around me in a comforting hug.

It’s ironic that I looked up to this man as if he were a fatherly figure when I was in college.

Back then, he was only in his mid-thirties, probably close to my age now.

There are a few wrinkles around the corners of his eyes, and his stomach is a little rounder in the middle, but Coach Wilson is a damn good-looking man, and I never even noticed—not that I would, with my tastes back then straying toward a smaller, more submissive man.

“How long have you been at this?” He checks his watch.

I wince. “A couple of hours.”

He chuckles softly. “Looks like nothing’s changed much. I’m guessing by the way you were carving the ice, you had a lot to work out?”

“Yeah. I needed to get my head on straight and thought the ice would help.”

“Well, it’s about damn time.”

I arch a brow. “Coach?”

“Don’t think I didn’t know you were avoiding me, son. I knew you’d eventually make your way back to the ice. I’ve run into your mom several times at the grocery store, and she told me you’ve been to several of our games throughout the years.”

I close my eyes, shame running through my blood. “I’m sorry, Coach.”

He waves my words away. “No need to be sorry. We still keep in touch. You needed your time to heal. Now, go change and meet me in my office. The boys will be here soon to start warmups. I’ll tell Coach Hoots to get the ball rolling while we catch up over some coffee.”

By the time Coach Wilson and I return from the on-campus café, I’m eager to lay eyes on Adrian. I ended up confessing to Coach all about my crush. From there, he gushed about Adrian and his talent and how he’s practically like a second son to him.

Afterwards, he talked to me about Guy and how proud of him he’s been—minus the drunken escapade at the bar and the kiss that started a media frenzy. I felt a little bad since I know I can help Adrian, which was actually one of the things I wanted to sort out while on the ice.

I have to admit, I’m falling for the boy, but truthfully, I’m also scared. Felix’s words from that night at the bar ping around in my head. ‘Maybe a fake relationship is exactly what you need. See how the two of you would be if this thing were real.’

When I make it back to the arena, I follow Coach toward the edge of the rink. Adrian

is on the ice with his teammates. The team is divided into different pairs, all working on various drills. Adrian and Rizzo are working on passes when Coach Wilson barks out, “DeLuca. Visitor!”

Adrian’s head snaps up, and a wide grin breaks out across his face when he sees me. Skating up to the edge of the ice where I’m standing, Coach walks off to give us some privacy.

“Well, this is a lovely surprise. What are you doing here?”

I smirk at him. God, I missed him. “Mind if I watch?”

He laughs. “Looks like Coach already gave you permission. Who am I to stop you from watching the team?”

“I never said I was watching the team.” My voice is low and rough with need.

Adrian blushes and bites his lip. Damn, I’ve even missed the way he bites his fucking lip. How gone am I?

“I’d like that. I like the idea of your eyes on me.” As if realizing what he just said, his cheeks turn even redder. Fucking adorable.

“Don’t worry, sweet boy. I see you.”

He lets out a shaky breath and playfully narrows his eyes. “Careful, Da—Theo. Keep saying things like that, and you’ll make me hard. Getting an erection while wearing a cup is no fun.”

Finally, that sassy personality I’ve spent all week dreaming about is back. I laugh.

“What’s that?” Adrian points to the cup I’ve been holding.

“It’s an insulated iced coffee sleeve. It keeps drinks like iced mochas cold for hours without melting the ice. Or so I was told when I bought it for you about ten minutes ago.”

The look on his face is a mixture of shock and pure joy. “You bought me something?” His voice is soft with awe.

I mean, sure, the coffee sleeve was a little pricy, but damn.

When was the last time someone bought something for him?

Then it slams into me. His parents are gone, and Felix is all he has.

I make a silent vow right here and now: if Adrian agrees to my proposition, then I’ll spoil him for as long as he lets me.

“Consider it an after-practice reward.” I reach out, unable to stop myself from caressing a finger across his cheek. His skin is cool from the ice, but soft under my touch. He leans into it willingly, almost eagerly, reminding me of a flower seeking sunshine.

“You’ll wait for me, then?”

I grin, encouraged by his hopeful tone. “I will. Remember, my eyes are on you, sweet boy. Now show me all that talent out on the ice.”

For a moment, he just takes me in. Gray eyes sparkling, and a happy little smile on his face. Then, with a nod, he spins around and takes off down the ice.

All throughout practice, I couldn't take my eyes off Adrian. I always thought I was a good center, but Adrian has me beat by a mile. Not only is he talented with his stickwork, he's fast on the ice and a quick thinker.

While he's in the locker room getting ready, I head down to the gift shop and take a peek around. I immediately gravitate toward a hoodie that has the Ice Dragon's mascot on the front, and the number four, along with 'DeLuca' on the back.

I'm browsing through a few racks and pause by the shelves of merchandise when I feel a vibration in my pocket. Checking my phone, I see a text waiting for me.

Adrian: I'm so excited you're here. I'll be out in ten minutes.

Smiling, I make my way up to the cashier when something catches my eye.

An adorable ice-blue dragon, complete with horns and wings.

Adrian told me he isn't a little, but he loves to collect stuffed animals.

He only has a few that he keeps hidden under his comforter so the other guys in the house can't see.

Something about the dragon calls to me. It looks soft and cuddly. And if things go the way I'm hoping for today, maybe I can give it to him later. Deciding to trust my intuition, I purchase it along with the hoodie, making sure to rearrange the stuffie so he's hidden at the bottom of the bag.

I'm hoping to surprise my boy.

When Adrian emerges from the lockers, freshly showered and smelling like the delicious citrusy scent of his cologne that I've grown used to. His dark brown hair is

styled back, and he's wearing a pair of black jeans and a snug white shirt.

"Hey! Thanks for waiting for me," he says with a shy smile, stopping short just by my side. Hopefully, it will only be a couple of hours before I can hug him to me in the embrace we both seem to crave.

"Hey there." I hand him his mocha. He takes a sip, lightly rattling the cup so he can hear the ice inside.

"This is good. I wouldn't have been able to tell you bought it twenty minutes ago. Even the ice is still intact. Thank you!"

"You're very welcome. I place my palm on the small of his back and guide him toward the exit. I hold the plastic bag with the Ice Dragon's logo away from him. I know he's already spotted it, but he probably just thinks it's for me. "Let's get you some food."

His smile is wide and teasing. "Are you trying to feed me, Theo?" He looks over at me with this faux innocence, and I suddenly find myself speechless. He's beautiful like this.

Damn.

That's exactly what I'm trying to do. Isn't it?

What is it about this man that makes all my Daddy instincts come to the surface?

I clear my throat. "We need to sort out our...relationship." The last word is almost a whisper.

Several other students are nearby, and all we need is for the wrong person to overhear

us call this thing a fake relationship to fuck it all up.

His eyes widen with excitement. “Does this mean you’re saying yes?” His voice is so cheerful, I can’t help but smile back and nod.

Adrian throws his fist into the air and does this little happy dance. The excitement radiating off of him is contagious. Suddenly, I feel like we’ve won the lottery or some all-expenses-paid vacation. “I figured we could chat over food and lay out some ground rules or requests and limits.”

“Good idea. Can we go to my favorite restaurant? It’s only about a five-minute drive from here, and you need to try their grilled chicken. Oh! Maybe we can split an arugula salad and some French fries.”

I chuckle. “Just give me directions and we’ll head right over.”

Stalking seems a little dramatic.

Theo

“S o,” Adrian says, popping a fry into his mouth. His voice is a little too casual, and there’s a slight blush on his cheeks. “If we’re going to do this, I have to ask. What have you been up to for the last five years? If we’re in a fake relationship, I’d know something like that, right?”

My stomach flips with excitement, and my lips curl into a smirk. “First...” I drawl, mocking his nonchalant tone. “I’ve been dying to ask you about that first night we met. Why did you come up to me that night? And how did you know who I was? I wasn’t even wearing my nametag.”

That light dusting of color turns into a deep red blush that covers his cheeks. God, this man. He looks so fucking submissive and sweet like this. My cock jerks, and my pants get a little snug when I remember Adrian on his knees for me.

“I kind of always knew who you were.” Adrian squirms in his seat. “You’re the whole reason I decided to become a center.”

My mouth falls open, and I sit up straight. “Wait a second, that can’t be true. I remember reading an article from you when you first got drafted by the Wyverns. You mentioned training to be a center when you were thirteen.”

Adrian’s eyes sparkle. He takes a sip of water from his cup before leaning forward. “Did you just admit to stalking me, Da—Theo?” he teases, letting his gaze linger on

me for a moment.

It's my turn to squirm and blush as I subtly try to readjust myself in my pants. "Stalking seems a little dramatic, sweet boy."

"Oh my god, you didn't even deny it!" he laughs, the sound curling around my heart and burrowing there.

Grinning, I shake my head and take a sip of coffee from my mug. I know I'm showing my hand by not denying it, but I want Adrian to know just how much he's pushed his way into my thoughts.

"I met you once before," he says, causing me to arch a brow.

There's no way I could forget. "When?"

"Nine years ago. I was thirteen. You were still playing in the NHL. You visited Brynn to talk about your career with the Wyverns, you talked about attending Brynn U and playing for the Ice Dragons, and you talked about being a center. You might have been talking to a whole lecture hall of students and families, but deep down, you were only speaking to me."

"Damn," I whisper. I never even knew I could have such a significant impact on one person's life. For some reason, it hits me square in the chest, causing me to take in a sharp breath.

Adrian continues, as if he didn't just shake my world to its core. "My brother likes to tease me, but you were also my sexual awakening. God, this is so embarrassing, but knowing Felix, he'll spill the beans eventually, anyway. I had a bit of a celebrity crush on you."

When my world finally tilts back and rights itself, I glance over to see Adrian just staring at me, that wild blush still on his cheeks.

“Say something,” he whispers.

I clear my throat and reach over the table, lacing his fingers with mine. “Two years ago, when Olivia Cove drafted you, I found out you were a center for the Ice Dragons. My alma mater. This talented twenty-year-old would be taking my place on the team I’ve grown to love.”

Adrian opens his mouth to protest, but I hold up a hand to silence him.

“I kept in touch with my team, coaches, and even the owner. So, I was fascinated when everyone seemed excited about drafting this new rookie. But then I heard you were finishing out the next two years here at Brynn U, and honing your skills on the ice. I will never forget the first game I attended where I saw you pull off a hat trick like it was no big deal. That night, I realized that even at the college level, your raw talent far exceeded mine.”

Adrian barks out a laugh. “That’s not true. You were my idol.”

I lift his knuckles to my lips and kiss them. “It is true. But what I’m trying to say, DeLuca, is that I’ve had a bit of a celebrity crush on you, too.”

“And now?” he asks, his voice shaky.

“And now, let’s just say I have more than just a crush on you.

” I squeeze his hand. “I also have a proposition for you. I’ve thought over the whole fake relationship thing.

And I'll do it. We can pretend we've been dating for as long as you want, that we've grown serious, or whatever story you want to weave.

I'll help you clean up your appearance. I can even coach you on the things our PR team taught me while I was in the NHL.

We can fake whatever you need until graduation, but I know what we have is blossoming into something very real. At least it is for me."

"Me too."

"Good. Then, behind closed doors, we'll let our relationship continue to bloom naturally. We can take things as slowly or quickly as you want. We can lay down any rules or guidelines. But there are two more things I'm hoping for, sweet boy."

He nods eagerly. "What's that?"

"First, will you let me be your Daddy?" As soon as I let the words escape, I hold my breath and wait.

Adrian's lips part in shock. "Yes, I want that. More than anything."

My heart does happy fucking somersaults in my chest.

"And what's the second thing you're hoping for...Daddy?"

The smile that breaks across my face is intense, almost painful, with the way it's splitting my face. I close my eyes for a moment and let it echo around in my head. Fuck. I missed hearing that word, and it's even sweeter coming from Adrian's lips.

"It's my first request as your Daddy, sweet boy. And it's a big one. One that I don't

mind if you take a few days to think over. But I'd like you to move into my place, at least until the end of the semester. Just until graduation."

A gasp tumbles out.

"Hear me out. I know it's quick, but I have a guest room and a spare key.

You can keep your room and most of your things at Delfy House if needed.

For all your roommates know, you're just sleeping over at your boyfriend's a lot.

But that house is getting out of control.

You've said that a lot of the seniors are partying almost daily now.

I know you've been struggling to sleep, and I'm just concerned you're going to burn yourself out. Just think about it, please."

Adrian offers me a sweet smile. "Okay, Daddy. I'll think about it. Promise. I just have two questions for now."

"Okay, what is it?"

"What happens after graduation?"

I let out a deep breath, nerves rolling through me.

If I had it my way, I'd say we remove the fake status from our title and continue to live together.

But I don't want to put that much pressure on him.

Just because I'm sure that I want Adrian to be my forever boy doesn't mean he wants to keep me, too.

I've failed at being a Daddy once, maybe he'll move on once he gets signed.

"I figured you could see how you feel once you get your contract. We can continue seeing each other, and I can continue to be your Daddy, or if you want to part ways, then it's completely up to you. "

He studies me for a long moment, cocking his head to the side like an adorable puppy trying to decipher my words. After a few seconds, he nods, and I finally feel like I can breathe again. "And for my second question, please tell me we can get physical."

My cock jerks to attention. "That isn't a question, boy."

A teasing smirk filled with mischief replaces the innocent look he was giving me. He pushes his empty plate to the side as he leans across the table so only I can hear. "Please, Daddy. Can I be physical with you?"

Fucking hell. I don't think I've ever paid the check faster.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

In the bedroom, Daddy likes to control things.

Adrian

As soon as we make it inside his house, I kick the door closed and slam into him, my lips colliding with his. A surprised ‘ oomph ’ leaves his lips, but then he’s pulling me to him, walking us backwards.

“Over there is your room,” he says against my lips, causing me to chuckle.

Too much talking. I suck on his bottom lip and palm his dick through his pants. If I had it my way, the spare room would be just that, a spare. Sharing a room and a bed with my Daddy? It sounds perfect. Although I might be thinking with my other head at the moment.

“Don’t care,” I murmur into the kiss. “Where’s your room?”

He continues guiding me forward. I yank his leather jacket off and tug his shirt over his head. We finally make it into his room, and I continue to strip him until he’s completely bare in front of me, cock bobbing and pointing my way.

Smirking, he sits on the edge of his bed like a king on his throne. He spreads his legs wide and strokes himself as I stand there and watch.

“In the bedroom, Daddy likes to control things. Is that okay with you, boy?”

I gasp before biting my lip and nodding. Oh fuck. His voice is so rough, I’m pretty

sure I could jerk off to the sound of it.

Theo's gaze narrows, his jaw tightens, and a possessive darkness seems to cloud his eyes. I swallow hard. It's a look I've never seen from Theo before, but something about it makes me even harder and gives me hope. "Words, sweet boy."

"Yes, Daddy. I want you to take control."

He smiles, stroking his cock faster. "Are you okay with the stoplight colors for safe words? Red for stop, yellow for slow down, and green for keep going?"

"Yes, Daddy. Green. Green."

"Good. Now, kneel in front of me, Aid."

I swallow hard and drop to my knees.

Theo groans at the sight of me as he continues to stroke his cock. I want to push his hand away and grab hold of him. He's beautiful there, long and thick with prominent veins that make my mouth water. Instead of giving in to my urges, I wait for Daddy's command.

"Take your shirt off. Show me those pretty muscles."

I yank the shirt over my head and toss it behind me.

"So beautiful." He leans forward and tweaks a nipple, tugging it gently and pinching it just right. I tremble and moan. Oh fuck. Can I come just from nipple play? Letting go of my nipple, he shoves two fingers into my mouth. I immediately start sucking, wishing it was his cock instead.

“Fuck. Look at you. So desperate for Daddy’s cock.”

I nod.

“How filthy can we get? Would you like it if I made a mess of you, sweet boy?”

I nod again.

“Words,” he commands.

“Yes, Daddy,” I mumble around his fingers. “Green, green, green.”

I’ve never really had the opportunity to be filthy, or messy, or rough with someone. But they are all things I crave desperately. Secret desires I’ve held close to my chest.

“Such a good boy for Daddy.” He pulls his fingers out of my mouth and lightly touches my cheek, smearing my saliva all over me. I groan, palming my rock-hard cock through my jeans.

His eyes follow the movement. “You can touch yourself through your jeans, but no coming and no pulling your cock out. Not until Daddy has his way with you.”

I moan desperately. Holy shit. The combination of his wrecked but still commanding voice and the way he keeps calling himself Daddy almost makes me spill over.

“You can touch me, baby boy.”

Leaning forward, I don't give him the opportunity to change his mind. My hands are everywhere, exploring his stomach, sucking on his abs, and playing with his nipples. I want to drive him as wild as I feel. The bratty side I usually keep hidden has come forth. I can tell Daddy wants to take his time, but I want him hard and needy. I want

him to come before he realizes it's happening.

He sucks in a deep breath when I continue to work him over. He wants it filthy? I make loud slurping noises and moan as I leave a trail of saliva all over, using it to slick my way as I play with him.

“Fuck, baby. Fuck . You're so fucking sexy. I need to come.”

It isn't a command, so I continue to work his body, concentrating as if I'm on the ice, looking for the next pass.

His fingers tangle in my hair roughly, and he tugs. “Fuck, baby boy. Please. Please suck Daddy's cock.”

Oh god. Just hearing Theo Walsh beg for me is the single hottest thing I've heard in my whole life. I eagerly take his cock down my throat.

He groans so loud, I almost thought he was actually coming, but his cock is still thick and leaking in my mouth. “I'm gonna come, boy. Whatever you do, don't swallow. You hear me? Hold it in your mouth until I say.”

I nod just in time. He fills my mouth, and it's more than I think either of us realized it would be, because it's spilling out of the corners of my lips as I try desperately not to swallow. He groans again, his pupils so blown out, I can't even see the pretty blue I've grown used to.

“Don't swallow,” he commands again, still panting heavily. “Stand up and finish stripping.”

I do just that, kicking off my shoes and tugging off my pants.

“Fuck, look at all that precum dripping from your cock. You’re leaking like a damn faucet, baby boy. Come here.”

My face heats at his words. I step between his legs. He’s still lounging on the corner of his bed, leaning back on his elbows, which are propping him up. With one hand, he lifts his still hard dick, giving it a few pumps.

“I want you to get even closer, so your legs are touching me and the bed. Good. Now go on, spit. Use my cum as lube and get yourself off.”

My eyes widen with shock, and I have to pinch the base of my cock to keep from coming before I’ve even started.

I spit onto my cock, using my hand to catch some of the extra as I coat my dick. Fuck. He wasn’t kidding about this being filthy. I fucking love it. I begin stroking eagerly, and I know I won’t last.

“That’s it, sweet boy. I want you to come all over Daddy. Mark me with your cum.”

His words cause me to lose my rhythm, and the next thing I know, I’m fucking my cum-slicked hand, spilling all over his chest, his stomach, and his cock. I tremble, coming apart as I have the most powerful orgasm of my life.

And when I come to, it’s to the sweet murmurs of my Daddy’s praise as he peppers kisses on my cheeks and cleans me up with a damp washcloth. My chest fills with warmth. Smiling, I whisper my thanks and fall asleep against the first man to have ever taken care of me after sex.

Moms will be moms.

Theo

The next morning, I wake to the sound of my phone vibrating on my nightstand.

It must've been vibrating for a while. Either that or the person calling gave up because the vibration stops.

It's immediately followed by a beep indicating I have a missed call.

Memories of Theo and me from the previous night rush into my head.

My morning wood throbs as I replay everything we did.

I'm so turned on, I have to refrain from grinding against Adrian, who is snuggled at my side.

He feels so perfect, pressed up against me like this. Glancing at the clock, I see we overslept, yet his peaceful, happy expression in my bed keeps me still for a moment longer. Savoring the feel of Adrian in my arms is something I could easily get used to.

Right as I'm starting to doze off, my phone starts ringing again. Carefully pulling myself away from my boy, I climb out of bed and answer the phone.

"One second, Mom," I whisper, quietly clicking the bedroom door closed and making

my way to the kitchen.

“Hello?” Mom says on the other end, sounding confused.

“Hey, Mom. Sorry about that. I had to be quiet. I just got out of bed.” As soon as the words leave my lips, I silently smack my face, dragging my hand down.

“Honey, why would you have to be quiet in your own place? It’s almost noon. Why would you still be in be—” she trails off, and I’m pretty sure she’s piecing the puzzle pieces together at a rapid pace.

Then she squeals.

Oh, dear lord. This is not how I wanted to tell her.

“Ah, sweetheart! Please tell me you got back together with Grant.”

I inhale deeply before counting backwards from ten. I need to tell her. If I have any hope of turning my so-called fake relationship with Adrian into something real, my mother needs to know how I really feel about my ex. She needs to stop meddling. Plus, I want to introduce her to Adrian someday.

“Mom, please stop chatting with Grant,” I say in a serious tone.

“He hurt me deeply. Grant left me when I needed him the most. Then he made me feel like everything in our relationship was my fault. It took me a really long time to heal. I really didn’t want to tell you this part because I didn’t want to hurt you, but he replaced me within a week of breaking up.

He told me he found someone better and continued to flaunt him in front of me just to be cruel. ”

She gasps.

“I don’t love him anymore,” I continue. “I know our families will always be friends, but Grant will no longer be a part of my life.”

“Oh, sweetie. I’m so sorry. A week? You didn’t tell me. Was he—was he cheating on you?”

“I don’t know. Maybe. Probably.” It’s the first time I ever voiced those thoughts out loud. The fact he had found another Daddy so quickly had me questioning things. But I continued to blame myself. I convinced myself that I was in the wrong and deserved to be hurting.

“That asshole,” Mom hisses.

I bark out a laugh. I don’t remember the last time I heard Mom cuss. Pulling out a few things from the fridge, I place them on the counter. I want to impress my boy and show him how our lives can be together.

Mom starts to say something else about how horrible Grant is when I interrupt her. “I met someone, Mom. He’s wonderful. A little younger than me, but so sweet,” I admit. “He’s smart, too. I think you’d love him if you gave him a chance.”

I lean against the kitchen counter, smiling.

“You sound happy.” She hums in approval. “And he sounds wonderful. Can I get a photo?”

I chuckle. “You already know what he looks like. His name is Adrian DeLuca.”

She squeals again. Only this time, when her excitement comes through the phone, I

feel arms circle me from behind.

Adrian.

I hug him to me, clutching his hands in mine and pulling him in tight, so his front presses solidly against me.

“Morning, sweet boy,” I whisper. “Did I wake you up?”

“Oh, is that him? Tell Adrian I want a photo of the two of you together. Something cute for me to print out and post on my fridge.”

I groan. “Mom, you don’t need a photo. You already know what he looks like. You’ve been to his games.”

Adrian chuckles. “We can take a photo together and send it to her.”

Mom cheers. “Oh! I like him already.”

I roll my eyes, but can’t help the warmth filling my chest. This is how it’s supposed to be when I tell my mother about my boyfriend. No hiding or begging her to keep secrets. No guilt or fear. Just happiness... and maybe a little embarrassment, too.

“All right then, Mom. I’m going to get off the phone so we can take this photo for you. Then, I have to get some food into my boy. He’s an athlete and needs the calories.”

Between the fun and silly poses in our selfies, I must say, we make a stunning couple. Or hell, it’s probably just Adrian. He’s the stunning one. Unable to decide on a favorite, I send all the photos to Mom.

“I was going to make you waffles with fresh strawberries and whipped cream. I also have some sausage I can cook up for protein. How does that sound?”

Adrian’s mouth hangs open. “Wow. That sounds really good.”

After breakfast, I pour each of us a cup of coffee.

“Daddy?”

My eyes jerk up to his, that word filling me with happiness I can’t even begin to explain. It’s not just a word, it’s a title. And, by the way my boy is looking at me, all guilty and shy, he knows it’s a title too.

“Yes, sweet boy? What’s wrong?”

“I didn’t mean to spy, but I overheard you talking about your ex.”

I nod. With the timing of when he wrapped his arms around me, I assumed he must have heard some of it, if not most. “His name is Grant. You asked me what happened over the last five years... he was the main reason I got off social media.”

Adrian flexes his jaw, and his eyes narrow.

Is my boy angry? For me? I chuckle to myself.

God, why do I find it hot? No one has ever expressed these feelings for me before.

At least not when I can plainly see them in front of me.

I lift his knuckles to my lips. “You can ask me anything, sweet boy. I want to tell you.”

“Okay,” he says slowly. “How did you meet Grant?”

“My mother.” I laugh. “The sneaky woman was always trying to set me up on blind dates, but when I came out to her, Grant was the first man she introduced me to.”

I start from the beginning. I tell Adrian everything, from our introduction to how I became his Daddy to the secrecy, and eventually, to my heartbreak.

I explain how I kept my sexuality a secret.

I stayed in the closet out of fear, and now I never want to live like that again—I want the world to know how much I care about my boy.

A part of me holds my breath as soon as the words slip past my lips.

Even though Adrian is out and proud, he might not want an actual relationship when he gets into the NHL.

When he stands up, walks around the table, and sits in my lap, I know I have nothing to worry about. And when he pulls out his phone and takes another selfie with the two of us beaming into the camera, I know, without a doubt, this photo will be my favorite.

“There,” he says after typing into his phone. “Now the world will know I put a claim on you. No more hiding.” Adrian places a sweet kiss on my cheek. He flips his phone around, and right there in front of me is a social media post of the two of us.

We look so happy that deep down, I know nothing between us is fake. No matter what we keep telling ourselves.

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

We'll both be here when you're ready.

Adrian

“We look good together. Don't we, Daddy?” I ask as I stare at the photo for a moment longer. I didn't miss the tender look that crossed his face when I showed it to him. Nor did I miss the way he seems to melt every time I called him Daddy.

I'm about to get off his lap when he hugs me tighter. “Where do you think you're going?”

I laugh. “I guess I'm staying put.” Even though I'm bulkier than Theo, I decide that if he doesn't want me to leave, I'll just take advantage of it and cuddle up against him. Why are things between us so easy?

After a few more minutes of laughing and awkward cuddling, I squirm in his lap. “Daddy, I have to get ready for practice.”

He checks the time on his phone. “Let me give you a tour of the house real quick. Then I can give you your surprise.”

“A surprise?” I ask, voice embarrassingly cheerful.

He chuckles. “Since you're in a hurry, let me skip my bedroom. Wanna see the backyard, or will that cut into your time?”

“I want to see it. Let's go there first.” I bounce on my toes. “It might seem ridiculous,

but the backyard is my favorite part about living in a house. Mom, Felix, and I had so many memories in our backyard and in our pool.”

He slips into his sexy leather jacket and guides me outside.

I’m already wearing my thick V-neck sweater with the Ice Dragon colors on it, so I’m not cold when we step outside.

“I don’t have a pool, but I’ve always wanted one.”

“Honestly, I’m surprised you don’t have a bigger house, being an ex-NHL star and all.

” He mentioned losing a lot of money after his breakup and constant traveling, but that he had plenty of endorsements and paychecks to bounce back with.

Theo Walsh is still a wealthy man, even if he pretends not to be.

“Once I got my head out of my ass and began saving money, I decided to get a small place. I figured my boy and I could find our forever home together.” He gives me a meaningful look that causes my heart to flip and my toes to curl. I want to be that boy.

No, fuck that. I am that boy.

His boy.

I just have to prove to him that I will never hurt him the way Grant did.

Smirking, I let my bratty side come out. “Maybe we can find a place with a pool.”

A wide grin and a blush spread across his face. “Maybe we can.” Then, with a quick swat to my ass, he guides me back inside. “Come on, brat. I want to show you your surprise.”

Theo directs me to his guest bedroom. It’s cute, with a matching white dresser and nightstand.

Against the far wall is a large window with a lovely view of his backyard.

In the middle of the room is a queen-sized bed with a teal comforter.

But the thing that has me frozen in place is the adorable stuffie in the middle of the bed.

It’s a light blue dragon. But not just any dragon.

It’s a very expensive plushie of our Brynn U Ice Dragon mascot.

It’s a limited edition that was exclusively made for the children’s line, making the material extra soft and cuddly.

I always claim that I’m not a little since I don’t really regress to a certain age, but there’s something comforting about stuffies.

Even when Felix is in his little side, I always like playing with him and his stuffies.

I love to cuddle with them at night. And since moving into Delfy House, I’ve had to resort to hiding my need to sleep with a stuffed animal by cuddling with a pillow.

Some of the guys still make fun of the way I clutch my pillow, or ball up my comforter on away games, but only Felix and Theo know about the two stuffies I

keep hidden under my blanket at Delfy House.

Picking up the cute dragon, I rearrange his wings and cuddle him to me. “How did you know?” I whisper.

He tilts his head. “What do you mean, sweet boy? Know what?”

“I’ve always wanted this specific dragon. I see them at the on-campus shops, and they’re selling out quickly. I actually thought I missed my chance.”

Theo shakes his head. “I didn’t know. I just saw the little guy and felt like I needed to give him to you. I figured you could bring him with you, or you could leave him here until you make up your mind on whether you want to move in.”

Images of the guys finding the little dragon in my room come to mind. I could imagine them tossing the stuffie around and roughhousing with him. Not in a mean-spirited way, yet Icy might still fall victim to their antics.

I must have said all of that out loud, because Theo pulls me to his side and wraps an arm around me. “Icy, huh? Is that his name, sweet boy?”

I nod, laying my cheek on his shoulder. “He looks like an Icy, doesn’t he?”

Theo chuckles. “I think he does. I can keep Icy here and protect him. And don’t worry, we’ll both be here when you’re ready.”

I feel those words settle deep in my chest as I translate their true meaning. What he’s really saying is he’ll protect my heart, and he’ll be here when I’m ready. And I believe him.

Page 22

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Let Daddy take care of everything.

Theo

The cold chill of the air hits me as soon as I step foot in the ice rink.

I close my eyes and inhale a deep breath.

It's been almost a week since I asked Adrian to move in with me, and I'm starting to go a little crazy here.

Feeling restless, I knew I wasn't going to get any more sleep, so I opted for an early morning skate.

I make several laps around the rink while I contemplate the best way to ask Adrian if he's made any decisions. I really don't want to pressure him, but the parties at Delfy House are daily now. And I know he isn't getting the rest he needs.

Adrian and I have grown really close over the last several days, and I'm desperate to be the caregiver I've always wanted to be for my boy.

As a Daddy, I want to cook him meals, take care of him, make sure he's getting plenty of rest, and do simple things like cuddle up with him in front of the TV.

We have plenty of orgasms, but the Daddy side of me doesn't want just sex.

Movement catches my eye, and Adrian skates onto the ice. He isn't wearing any of

his gear, just a nice pair of jeans and an oversized sweater like me. For a moment, we just stare at each other before I finally wave. Adrian takes it as an invitation and skates right up to me.

“Hey.” He gives me a lopsided grin that’s more sweet and charming than flirty.

“Hey,” I reply, my eyes drinking him in.

Even tired, he’s still beautiful, but those dark bags under his eyes give me pause. I made sure to check today’s free-skate schedule, and I know for a fact that the hockey team has practice in two hours. So why is he here before the butt crack of dawn?

“What’s going on, baby boy?”

And just like that, Adrian’s tears spill over. “I’m so tired, Daddy.”

“Shhh. Sweet boy. Daddy’s got you,” I say as I wrap him up in my arms. “Everything will be okay.”

He’s so tired, he stops talking.

“Here’s what I’m going to do for you. I’m going to call Coach and explain that you’re missing practice today. I’m going to take you home, to our home, and we are going to curl up in bed. Just you, me, and Icy. Then we are going to sleep.”

“But what about your class?”

“Shush, sweet boy. Let Daddy take care of everything. All you need to worry about is staying up long enough to make it back home, because there’s nothing better than the idea of cuddling and sleeping with my sweet boy. Do you understand me?”

Adrian nods, a small smile on his face. “Daddy?”

“Yes, Adrian?”

“I really want to move in with you. I wanted to the moment you asked me. I just didn’t want to come on too strong or seem too needy.”

I pull him into a soft kiss. “You could never be too needy for me, boy. Now, let’s go home. You’ve made Daddy very happy.”

Page 23

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Phones are for Sexy times.

Adrian

“ Did you see the way I skated past that asshole defender? I slipped past him like I was buttered up,” Rizzo says with a wide grin. We make our way through the hotel lobby after our big win against Arizona.

Two large TVs are displayed on the walls. Whoever’s on staff must be a college hockey fan because it’s currently on the ESPN channel interviewing the captain of the Orcas, Luke Hotchkiss, and Andry Rykov from the Bellport U team.

“Wait, what?” I laugh. “Buttered up? What the hell are you talking about?”

“You know, man. Like I was super fucking slippery.” Rizzo shuffles around in his pocket and comes out empty. “Crap. I think I lost my key. One minute. Let me try to get a new one.”

When I originally told the team that I was tired and was going to celebrate our win by going to sleep, I didn’t expect Rizzo to tag along.

I promised him one drink at the bar, but as Rizzo saunters up to the pretty receptionist behind the counter, I wonder if I should just cancel.

As lame as it sounds, I’m excited to get back to my hotel room and call Theo.

It’s rare I get a room to myself, and I wanted to take full advantage of it. I was still

too nervous to bring Icy in my bag, so instead, Theo made a deal with me. He'd sleep with Icy and send me photos, and I got to travel with his leather jacket for good luck.

My gaze focuses on the interview, and I chuckle to myself as I listen to Andry's sexy Russian accent.

I can't believe I had a low-key crush on him when he first transferred here to the US.

Don't get me wrong, he's still sexy as hell, not to mention gives off those dominant Daddy vibes, but he's so damn young.

No, I think I like my men aged like fine wine. Not that thirty-two is old by any means, but with that age gap between us, Andry looks so young compared to my Daddy.

When the interview wraps up, the highlight reels focus on Gabriel Nagy from the Phoenix Penguins, the team we're playing against tomorrow night. My gaze wanders over to Rizzo. He's leaning against the counter and flirting with the receptionist. She's smiling widely, totally eating it up.

Standing, I walk over to them and clap Rizzo on the back. "Gonna head up, bro. Take your time. I gotta call my boyfriend."

Rizzo waggles his brows. "Ah, yes. I get it, man. Have fun sexting."

I punch him in the arm. "Shut up, man. We aren't sexting."

He play-punches me back. "My bad. I forgot you're more sophisticated than that. Have fun having phone sex and whispering sweet nothings into each other's ears."

Unable to shake off thoughts of phone sex with my Daddy, I'm half hard by the time

I get into my room.

A fun, wicked idea comes to mind. Stripping until I'm completely naked, I pad over to my closet and pull out Daddy's leather jacket.

Thanks to my build, the arms are a little snug, and the jacket is just a tad short, but I look pretty damn good.

I let the jacket slide off one shoulder and grab my phone.

I snap a few photos until I get the perfect one.

You can't see my full face, just from the lips down.

But my abs are on display, and so is the V of my groin.

The photo cuts off right before you can see my cock, which is already rock hard, but photos are sexier like this somehow.

Instead of overthinking it, I hit send. I toss the comforter to the side and climb on top of the sheets, desperate to stroke myself.

Within a minute, my phone is ringing.

"Hello?" My voice is rough and husky as if I've already spent the whole night sucking Daddy's cock. Okay, yeah. My mind is a one-track railroad to sexy times.

Theo groans into the phone. "Fuck. You look good in my jacket, baby boy."

I moan. Damn. How embarrassing. I didn't even mean to, but I've never had phone sex before, and I don't know what I'm doing.

In the past, I've had a few lame attempts at sexting, which pretty much resulted in random dick pics.

But this? Hearing Theo's rough voice in my ear while I squirm on the clean sheets? It's something else entirely.

"What are you doing over there, sweet boy?"

All I can manage is a breathy, "Daddy."

"Are you playing with Daddy's cock without permission?"

Oh fuck. A few days ago, I confessed that the idea of letting my Daddy control my orgasms appealed to me. I'm horny and leaking. And oh-so curious about what Theo will do to me if he finds out that I'm touching myself.

I wrap my fingers around my thick length and begin stroking.

Daddy groans. "Fuck, Aid. I can hear the rustling of my leather jacket. You're being bad for Daddy on purpose, aren't you?"

I stroke faster. "Yes, Daddy," I whine. "I'm being naughty for you."

"Oh, baby. I wish I was there with you. Tell me what you're doing. Let Daddy picture how filthy his boy is."

I bite my lip hard to keep from coming.

"Come on, boy. Tell me what I'd see if I walked through that hotel room right now."

My eyes wander to the door. Then I close my eyes and pretend he's there, walking in

on me. “I’m in nothing but your jacket,” I reply, voice shaky. “I’m on the bed writhing for you while I stroke my cock.”

His breathing picks up, and I hear rustling on his end. I place the phone on speaker and toss it on the pillow next to me. A snapping sound can be heard, and suddenly I know my Daddy is opening his bottle of lube and coating his thick cock.

“My strokes are fast and desperate,” I moan. “But I’m so empty. Empty for you, Daddy.”

Theo sucks in a sharp breath. We haven’t had penetrative sex yet, but I’m ready. I trust him and need him inside of me.

Daddy groans. “Fuck, baby. Is that what you want? You need Daddy inside of you?”

Hot damn, Theo Walsh is good at the phone sex.

I nod frantically until I realize he can’t see me. “Will you do that, Daddy? Will you stretch me open and fuck me?”

“Yes, sweet boy. I bet that little hole of yours is so tight.”

Oh, my. I never realized how into dirty talk I am. “I’m so close. Please, please, let me come.”

“I’m close too, boy. Go on. Stroke your cock faster. Harder. Pretend I’m there pounding into you.”

My strokes pick up speed, and words tumble from my mouth. I whisper dirty things into Daddy’s ear, telling him how much I need him, how much I want his cock, and what it would feel like to finally have him inside of my tiny hole.

“Keep talking, dirty boy. Don’t stop,” he commands. “Daddy’s about to come.”

I only get a few more words out when he’s shouting into the phone. The thought of me making Theo come pushes me over the edge, and suddenly I’m making a mess all over the sheets.

After a few minutes, Daddy is saying sweet things into the phone. I’m so comfy and sated, I peel off his jacket and pad over to the bathroom while he talks me through cleaning myself up. Then I crawl back into bed and listen to the rich tone of his voice.

Eventually, he sends me a photo of himself cuddled up with Icy in our bed. I fall asleep feeling happy, snuggled up with my pillow, and pretending it’s Theo keeping me safe.

Page 24

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Wednesdays are reserved for movie night.

Theo

“Are you sure it’s okay that I’m here?” Felix asks as soon as I open the front door a few days later. “I got into a fight with my boyfriend, and I’m just so sick of his crap, but I don’t want to interrupt.”

“Of course it’s fine. Come on in. Adrian said Wednesdays are reserved for movie night, anyway. He’s already in the kitchen fussing over the snacks.”

Felix laughs. To my surprise, he goes in for a quick hug. “Thank you. You’re a good Daddy and so perfect for my brother. You’ve made him so happy, Theo.”

I place my hand over my chest and rub the spot over my heart. “Thanks, Felix.”

Over the next three hours, we watch two rom-coms in our pjs while I cuddle with Adrian on the sofa.

We share several stolen kisses while Felix plays with some blocks on the floor and watches the movies.

To an outsider, the whole scene might seem strange, but for me.

It’s perfect. I can’t imagine a better night than spending it with my boy cuddled into my side.

When the movies are finished, Adrian grabs Icy and shows his brother.

They continue to play on the floor. And while Adrian claims he doesn't have any age-regression tendencies, I notice just how much he loves playing with Felix.

It makes me wonder if Adrian might actually be a middle.

Regardless, he has the big brother part down pact, and if Adrian ever decides to explore age play, I'll be here for him.

If he decides it's really not his thing, I'll still be here for him.

Because no matter which way I look at it, I'm falling in love with my boy.

Page 25

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Do you hear that?

Adrian

As soon as Felix is tucked into the guest bed, he falls asleep. I didn't realize how late it was. Theo said he'd be in our room reading his book. He wanted to give Felix and me some privacy, and I appreciate it.

Hugging Icy to me, I tiptoe into the room, just in case Theo fell asleep. The lights are dim, and he's sitting up in bed reading from his Kindle. When he sees me, he sets it on the nightstand next to him and holds out his arms.

I playfully jog toward him and jump onto the bed, causing him to bounce. "Thanks for letting my brother come over for movie night. And for letting him play. He really needed it."

Theo hums. Pressing a kiss to the top of my head. "Did you two get to talk, or was he little the whole time?"

"We talked. He's breaking up with Jared tomorrow."

"If he needs a place to stay, I apparently have an empty guest room now," he jokes, tickling my side.

My laughter is so loud it practically echoes in the room.

"Wait," I say, holding up my index finger and hushing my Daddy.

“What’s that sound?” Theo arches a sexy, thick brow.

“What sound?” “Shhhh.” I place my finger over his lips.

“It’s so quiet. Do you hear that? No crazy roommates partying.

No puck bunnies. No rowdy teammates.” Theo smiles.

“No drunk customers or crazy coworkers,” he agrees.

I burst into laughter. “I don’t think Kayla will appreciate that one.

” “Hush,” he says, this time placing a finger over my lips.

He looks around as if trying to hear something in the distance.

There’s a sparkle in his pretty blue eyes, and I love it when Daddy gets playful like this.

Suddenly, he flips me over on the bed so I’m lying flat on my back. The movement is rough and sexy as fuck and has me hard in an instant. I love it when Daddy manhandles me a bit. Especially since I’m so much thicker than he is. It’s hot knowing he can play me this easily.

With expert hands, Theo quickly works the buttons on my pajama shirt. He peels back the material so the cool air hits my skin, causing my nipples to grow hard. His fingers trace my skin until they slip into my pants and wrap around my hard cock.

I gasp.

“Fuck, baby boy. You’re already hard. Is this for Daddy?”

I nod eagerly.

“Words, sweet boy,” he reminds me.

“Yes, Daddy. I’m hard for you. I’m all yours, already horny and needy.”

He chuckles softly, before his fingers trail lower and he plays with my hole, teasing me. “Will you finally let Daddy inside of here?”

I moan. “Yes, please.” For the past several days, Daddy has been teasing me, saying I’m the one stopping him from putting his cock inside of me. So not true. He just loves to rile me up until I’m shouting and begging. Apparently, I’m loud in bed. Who knew?

But this time, when he flips me over again and trails light kisses over my cheeks before spreading me open, I know it’s different. Fucking finally .

His tongue works me open until I’m a begging mess. “Please, Daddy. I need your cock. Please.”

He climbs up the bed, leaving my hole emptier than ever. He turns me on my side and pulls my leg up so he has better access. My breathing is quick and desperate.

The snick of the lube bottle startles me. I almost come right then and there, realizing he’s getting his dick ready for me. Since we shared our test results the night we started getting physical, I’ve told Theo I want him to be the first person ever to fuck me bare.

Suddenly, his fingers are there. First, one.

Then two and three. He continues to stretch me wide for his cock.

I'm so fucking ready, I'm going to scream if tonight isn't the night.

Then I feel it: his head against my entrance.

He slides one arm under my neck as we both lie on our sides.

With one perfect, solid thrust, he's inside of me, his palm covering my mouth, keeping my moans muffled.

Daddy thrusts forward, again and again, before finding a rhythm that drives me wild. He doesn't remove his hand, and something about that makes this whole experience even hotter. With his free hand, he alternates between playing with my nipples and stroking my cock hard and fast.

Even with his hand over my mouth, the noises I'm making grow louder and louder, until I'm afraid that the neighbors can hear.

"Quiet, boy. Do you want your brother to hear?"

I gasp. I completely forgot Felix is in the next room.

To my shock, Theo's strokes get faster. He removes his hand from over my lips and uses it to play with my nipples and stroke me at the same time.

Fuck the noise. I don't care who hears me.

Moans fall from my mouth, and I begin thrusting back against Daddy's cock.

I've never had sex on my side, and didn't realize I had so much control.

Daddy growls, his movements becoming erratic and desperate like mine. His hand

loses rhythm, but the pressure is fucking perfect. “That’s it, baby. Come for Daddy. Such a good, filthy boy. Fuck, listen to you.”

With a scream, I come and come and come, my hole tightening until I feel Daddy spill inside of me.

“So perfect. Thank you, Adrian. My sweet boy. Mine.” He kisses the back of my neck tenderly, cuddling me from behind. He’s still hard, and inside of me. I want to fall asleep like this.

I smile, feeling lust drunk and happy. Sweet boy. Filthy boy. Baby boy . I love all the titles. But I especially love being called his.

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:52 am

Theo

It's been four weeks since the night I became Adrian's Daddy, and three weeks since he moved in with me.

Chrissy Newman has already written several articles about Adrian and his new boyfriend, but when she found out who I was, she had a field day writing an article so juicy that she had several big magazines reach out and offer her a job.

Social media is eating us up as a couple, and all the rumors that Adrian is a player have disappeared and turned into us being the up-and-coming celebrity 'it couple.' The whole thing is hilarious, considering I'm no longer in the NHL and technically Adrian is still just on a college team.

But the important thing is his image looks good, and he's playing better than ever.

I'd like to take some credit since I'm not only helping him get some sleep—and multiple orgasms—but because he can finally truly let go when he's around me.

After only one night of sleeping in the spare room, he wiggled his way into my room, his new stuffed dragon in hand, and cuddled up with me until he fell asleep. He's been in my bed ever since.

Even though it's only been a few weeks, we've reserved every Wednesday night as movie night with Felix. He comes over and we binge-watch several rom-coms while Felix wears a cute little onesie, and Adrian cuddles up to my side.

The relationship between the two brothers is so sweet and genuine. I don't think I could ever pull them apart.

The following week, Kayla, Felix, and I meet up on campus before walking over to the stadium. It's the first day of the playoffs, and the crowd is electric with excitement.

We push through the crowd of foam fingers and light blue jerseys until we reach our seats. From here, we have a front-row view of all the action on the ice, and I have to admit, I missed this feeling. The energy of the crowd is always higher during the playoffs.

Right from the first puck drop, Adrian is on fire, proving exactly why he deserves to be signed by the Olivia Cove Wyverns. I've always been impressed with Adrian's stickwork and accuracy, but tonight he has something to prove.

The Ice Dragons are in perfect sync with each other. Rizzo is a whirlwind, always in motion in the offensive zone, intercepting passes and covering as much ice as he can. Even Nelson constantly blocks the shots on goal, allowing Brynn U to win by a landslide.

After the big win, Kayla heads off to the bar since it's the playoffs, which means more professional interviews will be taking place, and it will be longer before Adrian shuffles out.

I'm so proud of Adrian, and still buzzing from their win, that I'm shocked when my phone starts vibrating in my pocket.

Ever since the news of Adrian and me being a couple hit social media, Grant stopped calling. It could be my mom, but she would know that I'm at the game. Checking my phone, I'm surprised when I see it's Casey Blake, the mayor of Olivia Cove and the owner of the Wyverns.

I excuse myself from Felix's side. "Mayor Blake, how are you?" I tease as I answer the phone, knowing how he prefers to be more casual.

Blake chuckles. "Walsh. When were you going to tell me you were dating my upcoming star athlete?"

I laugh. "Does this mean you're finally going to give my boy a damn contract?" I tease.

"Hmm. Your boy, huh?"

My eyes widen with shock. I didn't mean to say that out loud. I must have stayed silent for too long because Blake continues talking.

"I'm guessing by your silence, you didn't mean to call him your boy over the phone."

I clear my throat. "Um. No, sir."

Blake chuckles again. "No problem. Your secret is safe with me. I actually wanted to call you to congratulate you on your relationship. And let you know that we've been impressed with the work you've done as a financial advisor.

I want to offer you a permanent position here with Olivia Cove.

Since you'll be hired by the team, assuming you take the position, it means more pay than if we were just able to hire you for each individual player. "

My heart begins to race. "Thank you, sir. I'd love to. Please, email me the contracts to look over."

"Done and done. I'm not supposed to say this, but don't worry, Adrian's contract is being drawn up as we speak. Once you graduate, I can't wait to welcome you and

your boy home.”

“Thank you, sir.”

I make my way back over to Felix, right as Adrian walks out of the locker room.

To my shock, he isn’t wearing his usual suit.

Instead, he’s wearing a thin long-sleeved shirt with the colors of his jersey and a nice pair of jeans.

So filled with joy, I swoop him up into a huge hug and kiss him right there for everyone to see.

He chuckles and whispers in my ear. “Daddy, what was that for?” He glances down and sees I’m holding Icy, his plush dragon. Adrian reaches for it and hugs Icy to his side. “Thanks for bringing my good luck charm.”

“Felix, we’ll be right back. Give me a few minutes.”

Felix winks and nods. I tug Adrian into a private alcove away from prying ears.

“Sweet boy, I have some good news. I just got off the phone with Casey Blake.”

“The Mayor of Olivia Cove and owner of the Wyverns?”

I nod eagerly. “I don’t think he was supposed to tell me, but they’re drawing up your contract as we speak. And not only that, but he’s offering me a permanent position in Olivia Cove with the Wyverns.”

Adrian’s smile is wide. “Oh my god! This is wonderful. Does that mean we can find our own place together? For real?” he asks happily.

My heart races, and I slide my hand into my pocket.

I touch my lucky coin. “That’s actually what I was hoping to say.

I want to find a place with you after we graduate.

I want to move in together. I love you, sweet boy.

Nothing about this has been fake for me.

I think you’ve been in my heart since the beginning. ”

Adrian pulls me into a sweet, passionate kiss.

“I love you, too, Daddy. You’re a dream come true.

Nothing has really been fake for me either.

Ever since I gave you my dad’s lucky coin when I was a kid, I’ve harbored this celebrity crush on you.

But ever since meeting you and getting to know you, you’re even better than my daydreams. You’re real and loyal.

You’re so sweet and sexy as hell. You say you’re flawed, but you’re perfect for me. ”

I tug him back to me, capturing his lips with mine. That’s when his words register. “Wait, did you say your dad’s lucky coin?”

Adrian nods. “When you came to Brynn U nine years ago, I overheard you talking to your agent. You were down on your luck and worried about your injury. So, I gave you my dad’s lucky coin.

It's an arcade token. A place my dad and I used to go to.

It brought him luck. When he gave it to me, it brought me a lot of luck too.

I thought maybe you could use it..." he trails off, blushing. "You probably don't remember, but—"

"No, no. I do. I remember. I'm just shocked it was you." I place my hand in my pocket and pull out my lucky coin. "It brought me four more years in the NHL."

Tears brim in Adrian's eyes, and he gasps. "You still have my dad's coin?"

"I had no idea it was yours. But it seems fitting that all this time, I've been carrying a little piece of you with me for good luck."

Suddenly, a sniffle can be heard to our left. Felix is standing there with tears in his eyes. "Oh my god, if that isn't fate, then I don't know what is! Kiss already!"

Bursting into laughter, Adrian and I pepper kisses all over each other's lips and cheeks. "I think your brother is right, sweet boy. I think we were always meant to find each other again."