



PUCKED

"PUCKED is a unique,
deliciously hot,
endearingly sweet,
laugh out loud,
fantastically good
time romance!!"

*NYT Bestselling author
Emma Chase*

HELENA HUNTING

HELENA
HUNTING

PUCKED

Pucked is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are all products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locals, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

KINDLE EDITION

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Published by Helena Hunting

Cover art design by [Shannon Lumetta](#)

Cover font from [Imagex Fonts](#)

Cover image from [@egorrr](#) at [depositphotos.com](#), [@walik](#) at [istockphotos.com](#) and back cover image from [Alex Volot](#) at [shutterstock.com](#)

Formatting by LJ Anderson of [Mayhem Cover Creations](#)

Editing by Lauren Schmelz and Jen Matera of [WriteDivas](#)

Proofing by Marla at [Proofing with Style](#)

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DEDICATION

Alex, you've seen me through many a MS. Thank you for believing in my words and helping me work through them, even when I'm freaking out.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Husband of mine: You're the best inspiration. Thank you for loving me.

Debra: It's a mutual addiction. Without you I'd be rocking in a corner.

Nina: You're my voice of reason. Thank you for never mincing words.

Shannon: Everything you make is beautiful. You're an awesome friend.

Lauren: Working with you has been seamless and hilarious. Thank you for helping get this into shape and dealing with my endless list of made up words.

Jen: Between your AR and my OCD, I think we make an awesome team, and you're an awesome copyeditor.

Marla: You're a word sniper. I love you!

Liv: Thank you for being such an amazing source of support, I'm so glad we're friends.

Daisy: You're just the sweetest, but you know that. We'll hide behind curtains together.

Kelly B: Your beaver love is more than I know what to do with.

Shay: You rock, woman. Seriously. Thank you for all your support.

Filets: We keep pushing forward, making strides. I'm so blessed to know all of you.

The Locker Room: Ladies, you made the waiting, and the work, and the editing all worth it. Thank you for being on my side.

101 Ladies: You've been amazing through all of this. Thank you!

Emma: You're an absolute doll. Thank you so, so much.

Fandom friends: Thank you for coming with me on this journey. I can't express how much it means that you've stayed with me this long.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER ONE</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWO</u>
<u>CHAPTER THREE</u>
<u>CHAPTER FOUR</u>
<u>CHAPTER FIVE</u>
<u>CHAPTER SIX</u>
<u>CHAPTER SEVEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER EIGHT</u>
<u>CHAPTER NINE</u>
<u>CHAPTER TEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER ELEVEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWELVE</u>
<u>CHAPTER THIRTEEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER FOURTEEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER FIFTEEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER SIXTEEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER SEVENTEEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER EIGHTEEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER NINETEEN</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWENTY</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN</u>
<u>EPILOGUE</u>
<u>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</u>
<u>CONNECT WITH HELENA HUNTING</u>
<u>OTHER TITLES BY HELENA HUNTING</u>

FIRE DOWN BELOW CHAPTER ONE
OTHER DEBRA ANASTASIA TITLES
ABOUT THE AUTHOR- DEBRA ANASTASIA



WTF MAKES VIOLENCE SO HOT?

VIOLET

It's 6:51 on Thursday morning, and I'm thirty seconds away from an amazing orgasm. Women everywhere should take a page from the man manual. Just because I don't sport the obvious signs men do, such as morning wood, doesn't mean I shouldn't take care of my personal needs before I hit the shower. My day is always better when I start with a shot from the orgasm bottle.

I'm right there, teetering on the brink of heaven. Every nerve ending is on fire in the best way possible. My muscles are tight, fingers moving at a furious pace, the vibrator—God bless the damn vibrator—is hitting the s-s-spot, and everything is about to go blissfully white.

And that's the moment my mother's shrill voice breaks all orgasmic magic, destroying my morning *jill-off*. She must have let herself in again, as is typical.

Here's the thing; I don't live with my mom. I moved out more than four years ago—into the damn pool house. Technically, it's on the same piece of property, but it's supposed to be my private space. My refuge from my crazy awesome, albeit super-inappropriate mother.

The door to my bedroom crashes open as I shut off the vibe and pull up the covers. My vagina is raging. I can't even begin to explain. It's the female equivalent of blue balls.

"Mom!" I slump further under the comforter. "How many times do we need to have this talk?"

"You should be out of bed already! I have something for you!" She waves her hands around in the air like the crazy inflatable balloon guy on TV. It's too much this early in my day.

"I literally just woke up. I need five minutes before we have a conversation, okay?"

Her arms fall to her sides, her shoulders dropping with her smile, which would make me feel bad, except she's let herself into my home and barged into my bedroom unannounced. So all I have is frustration.

"Oh, sure." Her dejection is blissfully short-lived. "How about I put on a pot of coffee?"

My mom loves to be useful, and while I'm annoyed, I don't want to hurt her feelings in spite of the inconvenient interruption. "That'd be great." Any reason to get her out of my room is a good one, but a fresh pot of coffee is more than welcome.

She backs out and closes the door, leaving me in peace. For three seconds I contemplate finishing what I started, but there's no way I'm going to come with my mom tooling around in my kitchen. Instead, I toss my vibe into the nightstand and make a stop in the bathroom to wash my hands.

At twenty-two, I should be able to maintain some distance from my mother. However, she has a great deal of difficulty with the concept of personal space. In my freshman year of college, I threw out the idea of moving into an apartment close to campus. My mom and Sidney—my stepdad—had recently tied the knot. They were worse than virginal teenagers. I've had the misfortune of walking in on them in compromising positions more than once. The third time was my breaking point.

Guilt-ridden and embarrassed by the psychological damage he had caused, Sidney offered to renovate the pool house. I agreed only because it saved me thousands on rent.

When I first scored my job several months ago, I started looking for my own apartment again, in part because of the frequency of my mother's unplanned visits. Being the ever helpful parent, she tagged along on the expedition and told me roommate horror stories *à la Single White Female*. Seeing as the only places I could reasonably afford were shared accommodations, I chose to stay put in the pool house a while longer. As I no longer carry the burden of tuition, revisiting that option seems like a good plan.

I wipe my vagina-scent-free hands on my T-shirt as I enter the kitchen. My mom sits at the table and leafs through one of the gossip rags she loves to read while she sips a cup of coffee.

"I think they made Buck look way worse here than he really is, don't you?" She turns the magazine around so I can see the horrible pictures of my stepbrother.

I grab a mug, fill it with liquid heaven, and drop into the chair across from my mom. “I think Buck does a decent job of making himself look bad all on his own without the help of the media.”

My stepbrother is such a whore. I’m tempted to apply this label to all professional hockey players. It’s a blanket statement, an overzealous and possibly incorrect generalization. However, based on personal experience, I believe it’s true for the most part. It certainly applies to the one hockey player I dated last year. I consider him to be like Voldemort: he who shall not be named.

The third page of last week’s entertainment section confirms this hypothesis. The evidence is splashed all over the grainy two-page spread of Buck with his hand up some woman’s skirt. In a public bathroom. He appears to be devouring her face while getting her naked inside a stall—with the door open. So dirty.

The picture itself isn’t a surprise. Hundreds of similar images can be found through an Internet search. Buck has shared his manstick with half the female population in the continental US, and probably a few up in Canada. The woman he’s making out with is the problem. He’s not macking on a random hockey hooker. Oh no. It’s his former coach’s niece. Her name is Fran. She’s adorable, and now she looks like a total puck bunny, thanks to Buck.

In his defense, he said he didn’t know who she was. He’s not bright and he was hammered, so it likely was an honest mistake—not that it makes his whoring ways any less abhorrent. This little incident is the reason behind his recent trade to the Hawks. His return to Chicago means I’ll be seeing a lot more of him again.

“Well, I think they’ve blown this way out of proportion. Sidney’s excited to have him back in the city, though. Anyway . . .” She pushes a piece of paper toward me. Upon inspection, I realize it’s a plane ticket.

I snatch it up and frown. “What’s this? Why does it have my name on it? What’s in Atlanta?”

“Surprise!” She does jazz hands. “It’s Buck’s first away game with the Hawks.”

“Mom, I can’t—”

“We’re going as a family to support him. He’s had a rough couple of weeks.”

“It’s not my fault Buck can’t keep his dick in his pants and out of his coach’s niece.”

“Violet!” Her brow arches and her lips purse as if she’s sucking a lemon. “Don’t be so crass! This isn’t about Buck’s . . .” She trails off and gestures below the table.

“Yes it is. Buck doesn’t care if I come to his games.”

“He was very upset when you couldn’t make the last few. Maybe if you’d been at this one”—she points at the magazine—“he might not have gotten himself into so much trouble.”

“Are you guilting me into coming?” I glare over the rim of my mug.

“Not at all. I’m just throwing out hypotesticals.”

I cough-choke. “Do you mean *hypotheticals*?”

“That’s what I said.”

Correcting her is as pointless as fighting her on this. Once my mom makes up her mind, rationalizing an alternative is like slamming your head into a titanium wall—painful and futile. I need to reconsider the apartment situation.

I give getting out of going to the game a last-ditch effort. “I have to work this weekend.”

“No you don’t.”

“How do you know?”

She ignores the question. “A car will be at the house to pick us up at six.”

“I don’t get off until five. How are we even going to make it to the game on time?”

“The flight isn’t until tomorrow morning.” She taps the date on the ticket, which I’ve failed to read.

“Oh.” So much for finding a way out. It looks like I’m going to another hockey game. Yippee.

“It’ll be so much fun! We can go outlet shopping! Whelp, I’ve got to go! Don’t want to be late for my Pilates class!” She jumps up and bounces out the door, off to her next thing.

After my mom leaves, I check the time. I have half an hour to get ready. Nabbing the magazine from the table, I rush to my nightstand, grab my vibe, and hit the bathroom—first it needs a wash—then I flip to the milk advertisement. The subject matter is a fuckhot guy who completely misses

his mouth and dribbles a glass of milk down his chest. I don't know why it's so hot. I mean, milk isn't really a sexy drink, but whatever.

I heft my foot onto the vanity and go to town while looking at the milk porn guy. The orgasm I missed earlier takes me to the floor, and the magazine lands on my face. It doesn't matter. I'm coming and it feels good.

The jilling session takes longer than I expect, so I have to drive faster than usual to get to work. As a recent graduate from the accounting program at the University of Illinois, I scored the job through my internship—which Sidney set up for me. Having a stepfather who scouts for the NHL does have some perks. I'm a junior accountant for a PR firm specializing in—wait for it—sports financial management. This includes investing professional hockey players' fortunes. I'm surrounded by hockey all the time.

Charlene, my bestie and colleague, sits on the edge of my desk, sipping her coffee while I frantically organize files.

"I can't go out tonight. I have too much to do for the Kuntz account," I tell her.

"You're bailing on me to work late on a Friday?"

"My mom's making me go to Buck's game tomorrow in Atlanta. Apparently, we need to band together as a family to support his inability to keep his dick in his pants."

Charlene makes a sympathetic face. "He really messed up this time, didn't he?"

"Don't get me started. He's such an idiot. Anyway, we're flying out early in the morning, so I need to be prepared for Monday before I leave for the weekend."

"Can't you work on it while you're there?"

"My mom wants to go shopping, so I'm not sure how much free time I'll have. Plus, I have a hundred pages to finish for book club on Tuesday."

Charlene rolls her eyes. "Friggin' Lydia. I say we blackball her out of the club."

"You can't blackball people out of a book club."

"Says who? I was happy reading mindless smut. I'm buying the CliffsNotes."

It's not a half-bad idea. Although being the competitive person I am, I would hate to go into the book club discussion with only a vague

understanding of the crappy book Lydia's making us read. I'll suffer through it if I can come up with an intelligent argument why it's so terrible.

"I'll probably bring the book to the game in case I can get in some reading time."

"Oh, come on, Vi. The Hawks are having a killer season. I bet the game will be awesome."

"Uh-huh." I'm sure she's not wrong. However, I don't have the same warm fuzzies toward the game or the players as Charlene.

She's been a die-hard Hawks fan her entire life. She watches every game and even participates in those pools where you create your own team. Like Fantasy Football, except with hockey.

"Anyway." Charlene flaps her hand around. "That's not the point. The point is you'll be hobnobbing with the players afterward, right? Which means you'll meet Darren Westinghouse."

"Who?"

Charlene curls her lip and gives me a snooty look. "He plays right wing for the Hawks." She starts listing his stats; it sounds something like *blah, blah, blah*. I tune most of it out until she asks, "Will you take a picture of him if you get the chance?"

"First of all, Char, hockey players don't 'hobnob,' they hang out. Second, I plan to skip the after-party crap. I'll have to catch up on work." I pat the file folders on my desk.

"What a load of BS!" She looks around to make sure no one is paying attention. Jimmy, whose cubicle is across from mine, raises an eyebrow and points to the phone at his ear, so Charlene lowers her voice. "Come on, Violet, you have to go. For me, please? Just long enough to snap a pic. Then you can go be boring in your hotel room by yourself."

"I'd send you in my place if I could."

I have no problem watching hockey, even though the rules evade me for the most part. Some of those boys are hot, but the appeal ends there. Buck is a perfect example, as is the one—and only—hockey player I ever dated. He wasn't even an NHLer, just some douche in the minors I went out with last year looking for a leg up. Unfortunately, I turned out to be the owner of said leg. Not only was he awful in bed—just because those boys are built doesn't mean they've got the equipment to match—he also humiliated me in a way I'm not likely to forget anytime soon.

"Come on, Vi. You can enjoy the man candy, if nothing else."

“Yeah, because skanky guys are such a turn on.”

“Darren’s not a skank.”

I appease her rather than argue. “I’ll see about the photobomb. No guarantees.” Mostly the after-parties are a food free-for-all for the players, complemented by hordes of bunnies looking to be dessert.

She squeals and claps her hands. “You’re the best!”

I hold up my hands. “No promises, but I’ll try.”

Charlene convinces me to break for lunch, and we gorge at the all-you-can-eat Thai buffet nearby. Fortunately, the amount of food I consume doesn’t slow my roll in the afternoon.

By nine in the evening I can no longer focus on the computer screen. My stomach is growling so loudly I keep checking to make sure a bear hasn’t wandered into the office.

Drive-thru fast food is my poison of choice. I scarf down three tiny burgers and a large fries while I drive home. I reluctantly skip the milkshake because indigestion and flying don’t mesh well.

My mother has left a sticky note on my door to remind me we’re leaving for the airport at ass o’clock in morning—those are my words, not hers. The logical thing to do would be to pack my stuff and go to bed so I’m not exhausted in the morning. Instead, I change into a T-shirt and my favorite pair of Marvel Comic-inspired boxer briefs—they fit so nicely—and channel surf. I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I know, my mom is standing over me.

“Violet! Why are you still sleeping? We should’ve left ten minutes ago! We’ll miss the flight.” Her shrill morning voice functions as the worst kind of alarm.

I try to hide under a throw pillow, but she snatches it away.

“Get up, get up, get up!” She grabs my arm and pulls, forcing me to my feet.

Due to my complete lack of preparation, I pack in a rush, tossing clothes into a bag at random while I pull on jeans. I grab the first bra I find; it’s extra loud, boasting a fuchsia leopard-print pattern and black lace accents. I don’t have time to search for something else—not with my mom tapping her talon nails on my door, hovering as usual. I have the foresight to pack my copy of *Tom Jones* so I can finish it for Tuesday’s book club discussion.

My mom drags me to the car while I'm zipping up my bag, afraid we'll miss our plane. She's totally overreacting. We only have to speed-walk through the airport to make it to our gate for boarding.

Sidney, being the awesome guy he is, books first-class tickets. The seats are roomy and comfortable. This allows me to pass out until the flight attendant comes by to offer drinks. I ask for a mimosa—it's mostly orange juice—and leaf through the copy of *The Hockey News* Sidney brought. It's the same old, same old. Stats and more stats with a few pictures of disheveled, hot hockey players scattered within.

I abandon the magazine and pull out my copy of *Tom Jones*. Maybe it'll bore me back to sleep. I'm annoyed I have to finish this for Tuesday. I like reading. Hell, I even took a couple of English lit classes in college purely for enjoyment. I might've enjoyed this book had it not followed on the heels of the fun, sex-filled stories I've partaken of lately.

After reading the same paragraph twenty times, I give up and play mindless games on my phone for the rest of the flight.

There's a car waiting for us at the airport—because that's how Sidney rolls—and we're whisked away to the hotel. It's the same one the team is staying at, so it'll be easy to escape the after celebrations should the Hawks win.

However, we run into a bit of an issue with the hotel concierge. They've booked us a suite. This wasn't part of the deal; I expected to have my own room. I bite my tongue and pretend it's totally fine because I don't want to appear ungrateful—even though I didn't ask to come on this impromptu trip in the first place.

On the upside, the suite is huge. There's a spacious living room, and I have my own bedroom with a private bath, complete with a Jacuzzi tub. I lock myself away and have a two-hour soak, where I once again try to read more of my book. I accidentally get the cover wet and have to lay it on the vent to dry.

Getting dressed is an adventure. I did a crap job packing. I'm fortunate enough to have a pair of black jeans to wear. Sadly, the only bra I have is the fuchsia one, which worked with the black hoodie I wore on the plane. However, I'm clean, so I'm not recycling the hoodie, and my options are limited to a pale pink tee or a blue one with stains on the boob. The pink one will have to do. I pull on the shirt and check out my reflection in the

mirror. Oh yeah, the leopard print is way obvious through the thin fabric. I cover it up with a light sweater and call my outfit a success.

Glasses fog in arenas, so I jam in my contact lenses. I also look much less nerdy without glasses, and considering I have to meet a whole new set of teammates tonight, I'll use all the anti-nerd help I can get.

By the time I finally get my contact lenses to stay on my eyeballs—it takes three tries—there isn't time for my mom to assault my face with her pallet of eye shadow. She's a big fan of blue. I always end up looking like someone from a 70s sitcom.

Armed with my wool coat and my messenger bag, which houses a scarf, mittens, hat, my semidry copy of *Tom Jones*, and my phone, I'm game ready. As an afterthought, I check for my pack of cigarettes. I don't actually smoke. They're my crutch when I want to extricate myself from uncomfortable social situations. It happens a lot. I've learned to release the smoke slowly so people don't notice I'm not inhaling.

The arena is packed. Luckily, we have great seats, and Sidney knows everyone, so getting to the first row isn't a problem. I settle in, appreciating the ample legroom and unobstructed view of center ice. Sidney orders a round of beers as the Hawks take the ice. Half the crowd explodes into cheers despite it being an away game.

I'm mesmerized by the way these guys glide over the perilously slick surface with such ease. I'm petrified of skating, much like some people are afraid of snakes and spiders. Wearing blades on my feet screams of danger. I struggled mastering Downward Facing Dog; I don't need to slice open an artery in an attempt to expand my sports repertoire.

Sidney stands and pumps his fist in the air as Buck skates onto the ice. Buck is mammoth, like a yeti. A huge, perverted, hairy whore of a yeti. According to the sportscasters, Buck's an excellent hockey player. I'd agree, based on his yearly salary alone. No one gets that much money for sucking, not even extremely skilled prostitutes.

Behind me, a gaggle of girls—whose skirts could double as headbands—giggle obnoxiously about some guy named Alex Waters. The name is vaguely familiar. They mention a *hat trick*. He must be an awesome player to pull off one of those.

Their discussion takes an interesting turn when one girl brings up the size of individual team members' junk. I assume they get their stats from personal experience.

At the drop of the puck, penis conversations cease. The Hawks score a goal in the first three minutes. I've never seen anyone move as fast as their center. He's like a bolt of red lightning shooting across the ice. The Hawks easily maintain the lead through the end of the first period. Seconds before the buzzer goes, I bolt up the stairs and find the closest bathroom, hoping to avoid the rush. My bladder is ready to burst thanks to the giant beer I've consumed.

Unfortunately, there's a line of women suffering the same plight, so I have to grit my teeth and do Kegels until a stall opens. The whole pee adventure takes far longer than I anticipated, and the game is already into the second period by the time I re-enter the arena.

As I approach my seat, I notice shit going down on the ice. Like, *seriously* going down right in front of me. I'm equal parts elated and horrified when one player slams another into the plexiglass barricade. He smashes into it headfirst, his helmet and cage saving his face.

Vibrant hazel eyes—the color of moss cut with a shot of bourbon—meet mine. It's only for a second and then he's gone again. He and the Atlanta guy struggle to pull off their gloves while holding each other's jersey. Helmets hit the ice.

The excitement of the crowd is infectious. Everyone else is screaming, and I'm tempted to join in, but there's violence, and it seems wrong to enjoy it, so I keep my lips sealed. The concept of mob mentality makes much more sense now.

The guy with the nice eyes has the advantage. The name Waters is written in big, black letters across his shoulders. He's number eleven. This is the magic man, huh? His face is obscured by a flailing fist, but I admire his tenacity. He's giving as good as he's getting.

The refs get involved, breaking up the fight and inciting the crowd by calling penalties. Waters looks pissed. Not mildly so, either; he's raging-like-a-lunatic pissed. He glides across the ice, hurtling himself into the time-out box. He throws his helmet across the small space only to pick it up and do it again. A ref cautions him, so he drops to the bench in a snit.

Waters is far from calm while the ref chews him out. His face is red and his lips mash into a thin line. He's vaguely familiar. Even sweaty and angry, he's rather attractive. I can see why the women behind me are dressed for their shift on the corner.

Sidney was kind enough to get another round of beers, so I sip mine while observing Waters. He's watching the seconds drop off his five-minute penalty. He surveys the arena, looking in my direction, or at least I think he does. My contact lenses make my eyes dry, so I can't be positive. The girls behind me assume he's looking at them and twitter like twelve-year-olds. I roll my eyes. Waters cocks a brow. Oh no, he must think it's directed at him. On the plus side, my eye roll has helped clear my vision. Sort of.

I make a real show of digging around in my bag for my eye drops. By the time I finally find them, his focus is on the game again.

The excitement seems to be finished for now, so I take out my book. Two paragraphs in, the buzzer sounds, drawing my attention away from the story I'm half-heartedly reading. Waters hurdles out of the time-out box, helmet and gloves on. I'm rather impressed with this move. I couldn't do it in a pair of sweats and a T-shirt, let alone a whole ensemble of body armor.

A blur of black comes to a halt as Waters' stick smashes into the ice. He pivots in a move that's both graceful and aggressive and barrels toward Atlanta's goalie, dancing with the puck as he goes. He pulls back his stick and slaps the puck across the ice like it's a rubber meteor. It goes right between the legs of the goalie and ricochets off the net.

Waters has been on the ice for all of fifteen seconds.

The hockey hookers behind me lose their minds, screaming their annoying banshee heads off. The rest of the crowd get to their feet and yell with them. As do I. It seems reasonable, more so than my enjoyment over face bashing. The game is fast paced and the bodies rush by. I'm like a cat following one of those laser lights around. Suddenly an arm smashes into the plexiglass in front of me. I startle, spilling beer on my coat.

At first I'm inappropriately excited at the possibility of another fight. Instead, I'm met once again with the same stunning eyes. I swear Waters smirks as I wipe beer off my chest. I frown and give my boob a squeeze, for what purpose I'm unsure. I doubt he catches it. He's off like a slingshot, skating after the puck.

Buck's team crush Atlanta 6-1. I clap and cheer, my enthusiasm authentic. I attribute it partially to the amount of beer I've consumed. Once the players leave the ice, we file out of the arena. Crowds make me nervous, so I want to wait until most of the people have cleared the stadium, but Sidney is anxious to find Buck.

“Come on, Vi.” He slings an arm around my shoulders, protecting me from the masses.

My mom hooks her arm with mine, sandwiching me between them. “Did you have fun?”

“It was okay,” I say as Sidney maneuvers our way through the crowd.

“Just okay? You were cheering with the rest of them.” Sidney gives my shoulder a squeeze.

“I think she liked the fight!” my mom yells above the noise.

“It wasn’t just the fight,” I reply.

Sidney chuckles. “We’re finally turning you into a hockey fan.” As a scout and coach for one of the best minor league teams out there, he’s highly respected in the hockey community. It affords him major privileges and some cool perks, such as front-row seats at games.

The hallway to the locker room smells of perspiration and stale equipment. I imagine the odor inside is infinitely worse with all the naked, sweaty guys milling around, snapping at each other’s asses with wet towels.

Buck ambles out of the locker room with a towel draped across his bare shoulders and his hockey pants on, thank the Lord. The amount of fur he sports makes him resemble a matted yeti.

I stay close to the fringe of the crowd to avoid appearing in photos. The paps snap pics of Buck in his hair shirt while Sidney looks all proud and manly off to the right. They ask Buck a few poignant questions. His answers are stock; likely something his agent coached him on. That guy gets paid well with all the fuckery Buck gets into.

When Buck goes to the locker room to shower, we head out. Traffic from the stadium to the hotel is horrendous. Sidney orders a round of beers as soon as we get to the bar. I gladly accept the drink, my mild buzz having worn off during the lengthy drive.

The team’s arrival is closely followed by a stampede of puck bunnies. I’m surrounded by scantily clad, too-warm bodies, and high-pitched chatter. While Buck regales Sidney with the finer details of the game—as if he wasn’t there—I seek out the red EXIT sign. Rooting around in my bag, I find my smokes and make my move toward the beacon of temporary freedom, excited for my reprieve from social discomfort. Buck notices my attempted escape and grabs my arm.

“Where you going?” Buck shouts.

I hold up the pack of smokes; I'd have to yell in order for him to hear me otherwise.

He wrinkles his nose in distaste. "You really shouldn't smoke. It's bad for your health."

I'm irritated by the attention he's drawing to us and my fake bad habit, so I fire off an insult. "So are venereal diseases. You don't hear me lecturing you on your whoriness."

He ignores the comment and drags me to his team's table. It's covered in heaping plates of food, which the guys inhale at an unprecedented rate. Half-dressed women flit around like fruit flies near wine.

Seeing as I'm here, I'll try and make good on Charlene's request. All I need to do is figure out who Westing-what's-his-face is so I can snap a pic, feign a headache, and get out of here.

I find an empty seat; the chairs on either side of me are vacant, aside from a jacket carelessly tossed across the one on my right.

A random chick snags Buck before I can ask after Charlene's crush. The smile slapped across his face might look friendly, but I've been around him long enough to know better. I enjoy his growing frustration as she snaps selfie after selfie. When she grabs his junk, I take pity on him.

"Hey, beefcake, enough with the soft-porn photo shoot. Grab a chair!"

Both his head and the girl's snap in my direction, as well as those of half the team. I may have raised my voice too much. With the way Buck is smiling, I must be the color of a tomato. His relief and the girl's incredulity are rather satisfying, so the awkwardness is worth it. The slut-bag mumbles something, and Buck grows grim. "That's my sister."

Her expression turns from irritation to discomfort; she apologizes and teeters off on her outrageous heels.

Buck drops into the seat beside mine, throwing his arm across my chair. "Thanks for the save. I thought she was gonna whip my dick out right there."

I scoff. "Whatever. Your micro-wang is barely visible to the naked eye. Besides, I didn't want to listen to you whine about a herpes flare-up."

Movement in my peripheral vision catches my attention as one of Buck's teammates takes the seat beside me. I hope he didn't hear me slagging Buck's doodle.

I glance at him in time for a set of boobs to practically smack me in the face as a waitress places a drink in front of him. It looks like milk. I give

him the side-eye as she moves away. The guy sitting to his right asks him a question, drawing his attention away from me.

I recognize him from the time-out box: Waters. Holy shitballs, is he ever hot. His dark hair is cut short, and he's got some wicked scruff going on. Even with the beard growth, I can tell he's been blessed with one of those rugged jawlines.

Nerves, embarrassment, and Waters' hotness have a cumulative effect, making me sweaty. I pull my sweater over my head, not accounting for static, and my T-shirt sticks to the woolly outer-layer. Face covered with fabric, I scramble to pull the shirt into place. The silence at the table is telling. Once I wrestle free of the sweater, I'm met with a number of wide eyes focused on my chest. I look down. Right. My bra is visible through the pale pink cotton, and now everyone at this table, including Buck, has seen it unfiltered by the shirt.

Buck leans in and whispers, "Put the sweater back on."

I play dumb. "Why?"

"Everyone can see—" He motions toward my chest without looking.

I wave him off. "It's not that obvious." It's totally that obvious.

He shoots me one of his glares. It's meant to be threatening, but it makes him look constipated. I leave the sweater off to irritate him. It's effective. His face turns an interesting shade of red.

"I need another beer." He slams his mug on the table and eyes me as he gets up and goes to the bar, despite the half-full pitcher of beer on the table.

I'm about to put the sweater on again when Waters turns to me.

"Hi, I'm Alex." He's all pretty smile and white teeth. They're probably fake. Those eyes are something else, though, even if he is sporting the makings of a black eye. I try hard not to look directly at him, afraid I'll be ensnared by his rugged, handsome face.

"I'm Violet."

"I didn't realize Butterson had a sister."

Even his voice is familiar, satin smooth and deep. He takes a sip of his drink, leaving behind a milk mustache he quickly wipes away. It's then I realize where I recognize him from: the milk advertisements. Sweet Lord, I've been jilling off to him. My mortification reaches new heights, causing me to say something more insane than usual.

"I'm his stepsister. He likes to keep me a secret since he wants to go all Ophelia on my ass." My eyes widen at my terrible joke. Though, if he's

anything like Buck, he won't get the reference.

"Butterson would make a crap nun, eh?"

I swear he's made an accurate reference to Shakespeare. Stunned, I make direct eye contact. Or I try to. His eyes keep bouncing between my chest and my face, so that's a challenge.

Normally, I'd be put out by his blatant ogling, but I've asked for it with the sheer shirt and the ostentatious bra.

I further my own embarrassment and his by cupping my breasts and squeezing. "They're nice for real ones, huh?"

His eyes shoot to mine. Busted.

"I uh—I didn't mean to—I wasn't—"

This is one of the most entertaining interactions I've had with a member of the opposite sex in ages. I make a snicker-snort noise and look away.

Buck leans against the bar, talking to a girl whose skirt is so short it's abundantly clear she's not wearing underwear. I nudge Alex with my elbow. His arm is like a rock. "Check out Buck's friend."

The timing couldn't be more perfect. Cooter-flasher leans forward and gives our table an even better view.

"Is that—am I looking at her beaver?"

Mid-swig, I choke on the mouthful of beer, sputtering and coughing. After I recover, I ask jokingly, "'Beaver'? Are you Canadian or something?"

Those vibrant eyes move to mine. God, he's awfully pretty. And close. He's really close. Likes inches away, rock arm brushing mine close. I can even smell his cologne or deodorant—whatever it is, he smells yummy.

He's silent for what seems like a long time. Or maybe it's because I'm staring. Or the question may have stumped him.

My experiences with Buck—and the one hockey player I dated previously—have led me to the assertion that hockey players aren't notoriously intelligent. I'm aware this isn't a universal truth. But Buck certainly reinforces my perceived stereotype: he's definitely not a rocket scientist. He's not even a rocket scientist's assistant. However, I'm almost positive Alex made a literary pun a moment ago. Waters could very well be an unexpected anomaly. I'm intrigued.

"Yeah, I'm Canadian."

“Does everyone in Canada call pussies beavers? Like the Brits call them fannies?” I can’t believe I ask him this. I’m barely buzzed; otherwise, I’d blame it on drunkenness.

He blinks a few times. “Did you say ‘pussy’?”

It’s possible his helmet wasn’t up to code and he sustained a head injury during the fight. There’s a sweet bruise on the side of his chiseled jaw. His nose is crooked with a decent bump from what I imagine could be multiple breaks. It’s not ugly, though. It’s sexy, in an I-fuck-people-up way.

“No, I said ‘pussies,’ plural, as in more than one.” I’m making a complete ass out of myself.

To avoid saying something worse, I excuse myself so I can pretend to smoke. I grab my bag and sweater and leave the beer. Based on the crap coming out of my mouth, I don’t need to add any fuel to that fire.

Buck grabs my arm as I pass him. “Hey, what’s with you and Waters?”

Alex is shrugging into his jacket. Maybe he’s leaving. Too bad; he was fun to talk to and nice to look at.

I sigh with irritation. “It’s common courtesy to strike up a conversation with the person sitting next to you, or did you miss the rules of social etiquette in kindergarten?”

“Rules of what?”

“Never mind. What else am I supposed to do? Ignore him? I was being polite.” And Alex is entertaining.

“Yeah, well, I don’t know these guys that well yet and he’s got a rep. Be careful who you get friendly with.”

“I wasn’t giving him a handy under the table. We were talking. I’m going for a smoke.”

Leaving him with the Beave, I head for the door. The temperature has dropped in the past half hour, so I pull on my sweater. Finding my smokes, I pop one between my lips and search for my lighter. I can’t find it anywhere.

“Need a light?” I pull my head out of my purse to find Waters holding a pack of matches.

“Are you following me?”

He shrugs and gives me a grin that could obliterate my panties. If I were dumb enough to allow myself to be affected in such a way. I’m not. Mostly.

“I thought you might like some company.” He flips open the matchbook and tears one free.

I purse the cigarette between my lips. Alex strikes the match and curves his palm to protect the flame. He watches while I inhale, the embers burning orange as I take a shallow drag and cough.

“Shit!” Tears spring to my eye as I eye toke the smoke. Swearing like a sailor, I cover my eye with my palm.

“You’ve got a dirty mouth, eh?”

“Only when I try and smoke with my eyeball,” I say between coughs.

Alex tosses the matches on a table and pats my back until I stop hacking up a lung. “Butterson doesn’t seem too happy.”

Through the window I spot Buck and the Beave. She’s not pulling the selfie business, so he doesn’t seem to mind her hanging off his arm while he glares in our direction. He’s being a colossal douche tonight.

“Screw Buck.” I take a fake drag of my cigarette.

Dimples appear in Alex’s cheeks as I exhale a cloud of smoke and choke back another cough.

“Do you even smoke?”

I debate lying and decide against it. “Not really. I do it as a way to escape awkward social situations.”

“So you came out here to get away from me?”

“Not you in particular.”

His tongue peeks out to sweep across his bottom lip. He’s got a nice mouth, even with the split in the corner. Remembering the way he took out the Atlanta guy makes me warm all over. Thoughts such as these are bound to get me into trouble. Hockey players are bad news. Especially ones as hot as he is.

He’s looking at me expectantly. Dammit. He must have asked a question. My mind is wandering like a squirrel on Red Bull.

“Sorry, what?” I flick the ash on my cigarette.

“You were reading during the game—what book?” He sounds genuinely curious and a little offended.

“*Tom Jones*. I have to finish it for my book club on Tuesday.”

Wow. Do I ever sound like a winner. He must have been watching me while he was in the time-out box.

“Fielding at a hockey game? Kind of cerebral with beer and violence, isn’t it?”

I blink as if I’ve been high beamed with a flashlight. Alex knows who wrote *Tom Jones*, and he’s used the word *cerebral* in the appropriate

context. I was right; he did get my Shakespeare reference. Alex Waters has singlehandedly obliterated my misapprehension regarding the inferior intellect of hockey players—with one sentence. In doing so, he's become infinitely hotter than he was five seconds ago.

"You've read Fielding?" I take a step closer. My voice is low, as if I've switched into phone-sex operator mode.

"I-I-I—"

It's adorable. He's wearing an expression I'm familiar with: panic merged with fear. I sport the same one when I inadvertently revealed my extreme nerdiness. Most nights I would much rather be at home curled up with a book or playing solitaire than out at a bar. Hence the excessive beer consumption and the fake smoking crutch.

"I think literacy is sexy," I whisper.

"Me, too." His dimples make an appearance.

I have one of those rare moments where my brain fritzes and I do something completely out of character. It's so outside of my personal code of conduct that I'll probably relive the incident over and over trying to figure out what flipped the switch. For the time being, I'm blaming the beers, jetlag, and his accurate literary references.

I grab Waters by the shirt and pull his face to mine.

His mouth is soft and warm. The stubble on his chin scratches my skin, and I like it. I shove my tongue into his mouth. Well, that's not true. I slide it across his bottom lip, touching the barely healed split, and he parts for me. Soft, warm, and wet meet more soft, warm, and wet. He tastes like chocolate and, more faintly, coffee liqueur.

His hand runs a hot trail along my side, and he pulls me tight against him. He's all hard edges and heat, and I can feel . . . *holy* . . . there's a massive bulge pressed against my stomach.

After far too short a time, he breaks the kiss, trailing his lips across my cheek to my ear. "Do you want to get out of here?"

"Buck will kill you."

"I can take him."



I WISH I COULD BLAME THIS ON THE BOOZE

VIOLET

I hear my name in the distance and choose to ignore it.

Instead, I nibble on Alex's lip, more turned on than I should be regarding his willingness to take on Buck. Alex takes the hint, kissing me again. I expect him to be all aggressive and hard, considering his performance on the ice, but the way his tongue moves with mine can only be described as sensual. This is by far the best kiss ever, which is unfortunate since he's likely a hockey whore—albeit a well-read one.

I really shouldn't entertain leaving with him. My past experience with hockey players tells me this unequivocally. The difference is, this is a fling. He's not asking me on a date, and I'm not expecting one. The song "Let's Make Out" is playing through my head. I want it to be my anthem.

"What the hell are you doing?" Buck yells in my ear.

I cringe away from the noise, separating my lips from Alex's. Buck's a cockblocking asshole. The few people on the patio have stopped talking on account of his unnecessary loudness. I'd forgotten we're in a public place. I'll attribute it to the beers I had earlier and my lack of clarity thanks to Alex's tongue in my mouth.

"What's going on here?" Buck asks just as loudly, gesturing wildly with his giant, hairy knuckled hands.

"I'm sucking his dick," I say sarcastically. Sometimes I wish my mouth didn't have a faulty connection to my brain allowing everything to come out unfiltered.

Alex coughs, his fingers twitching on my hip, and Buck's face turns an unnatural shade of red. This is such an odd situation; the awkwardness causes me to continue to spew idiocy.

"Fine, you got me. I wasn't sucking his dick. We were fucking each other's mouths with our tongues. This is otherwise referred to as kissing, but mouth fucking sounds way dirtier, so I'm gonna go with that."

Buck's nostrils flare. I'm such a jerk. He's probably going to lay Alex out for this.

Buck gives up rationalizing with me and turns to Alex. "Get your goddamned hands off my sister."

"Stepsister." I can't help poking the yeti.

"It's the same damn thing!"

"Don't even!" I shake a finger in his face and throw in a head wobble. "You don't have a say in what I do or where Alex puts his hands."

"I'll tell Skye." Buck threatens, as if we're four and I stole his favorite toy.

"Like she'll care."

Buck raises a brow. "Are you kidding? She'll tell all her friends."

Shit. He's right. My mom won't be able to keep her yap shut. She'll ask me inappropriate questions. I won't stand for it.

I grab onto the lapels of Buck's jacket and try to haul myself up so we're face-to-face. It's like climbing one of those rock walls—a big, hairy rock wall—so I give up and yank on his shirt until he bends to meet me.

"You listen to me, asshole. If you breathe one word of this to my mother, I will openly talk about the time we got drunk and you tried to feel me up, you got me? I'm not shitting you. I'll do it." Buck has never tried to feel me up—not on purpose, anyway.

"You wouldn't," Buck whisper-hisses.

I've got him by the short hairs—figuratively speaking, of course. I would never actually touch those. "You wanna try me? Go for it, I've got nothing to lose."

"Okay, okay. I won't say a word . . . just . . . can we talk in private? Please?" With his hands raised he glances between Alex and me, his panic evident.

Only the two of us have knowledge of this incident. In fact, if I was honest with him, he wouldn't be worried at all. He was drunk out of his gourd at the time. Allowing him to believe he did grope me, even if by accident, gives me leverage in situations such as these.

I let go of his lapels. "You've managed to suck all the fun right out of this evening. I'm taking off."

I'd invite Alex to come with me to piss Buck off even more, and maybe to continue making out, but I'm sharing a room with my parents.

Cockblockers are everywhere tonight, thwarting my attempts at poor decision making.

Alex whispers something in my ear; it sounds like *stay*. Granted, he may be breathing out of his nose and making a whistling noise that resembles a word.

“If you want to,” Buck says amicably.

Annoyed and unable to backpedal, I turn to Alex. “Do you want my number?”

“Sure.” He digs his phone out of his back pocket, pulls up his contact list, and hands me the device.

“Don’t give him your number!” Buck’s aggravation hardly improves my mood.

I ignore him and type my number into Waters’ little black book, more than happy to irritate Buck in whatever way I can. As fun as making out with Alex has been, it’s unlikely he’ll actually call.

“Thanks for the mouth fuck,” I whisper as I pass his phone back.

He winks. “Anytime.”

I shove Buck’s shoulder as I pass—he doesn’t even have the decency to move an inch—and make my way through the bar to the elevator bank. As disappointed as I am that Buck interrupted my fun, it’s better this way. Alex is way too hot and far too good a mouth fucker to be safe.

My parents are locked in their room, so I don’t have to engage in mindless chitchat. Sometimes Sidney walks around in his underwear. I’m used to dealing with his abundance of chest hair, but the white briefs are too much. I have a solid understanding—pun completely intended—why my mom married him, beyond his stellar personality.

I tiptoe through the suite and lock myself in my room. My first stop is my suitcase. It’s beaver time. I giggle, finding the term in reference to lady parts comical.

After dumping out the contents of my bag onto the floor, it becomes evident I’ve forgotten my travel dildo, along with every other important item. I did bring plenty of extra socks and my one, awesome bra.

The make out session with Alex has left me all horned up, so I’m forced to use my own damn fingers to jill off. I don’t even have the magazine with the milk advertisement in it—which I now know is Alex—to help with a visual.

Paranoid I'll be overheard, I take care of business in the bathroom with the fan on. It takes me fifteen minutes to come. The sore wrist and finger cramps eliminates the relaxing element of the whole process. Finished riding the masturbation express, I search the pile on the floor for my pajamas, laughing upon their discovery. I haven't seen this particular pair since high school. I didn't even realize I still had them.

They don't fit well, but they'll have to do. The top is stretched tight across my chest, like an Ace bandage. The pants, complete with fly flap, are now capris. The waist sits so low, it barely covers my ass. Whatever. It's not like anyone's going to see me in them.

The usual nighttime routine goes as follows: wash face, brush teeth, take out contact lenses, and search for glasses since I'm not smart enough to make sure I have them with me in the first place. I find them on the floor between pairs of clean socks and my lone pair of clean underwear, which I need to save for tomorrow. The muffled sound of my phone ringing comes from under the pile of discarded clothes. It's probably Buck, making sure I didn't get kidnapped on the way back to my room.

"What do you want, douche-whore? Haven't you ruined my night enough by interrupting my mouth fucking session with your fuckhot teammate? Now you have to disturb my masturbation session, too?"

I cover the receiver to stifle my laugh. Masturbation discussions make Buck uncomfortable. Probably because he believes he once asked if watching me jill off would constitute incest. It's the same incident in which he believes he groped me. I may have twisted his words in my recount of the events.

There's a whooshing air sound reminiscent of Darth Vader followed by "Holy hell."

This is not Buck.

"Hello?"

"Violet?"

"Who's this?"

"It's Alex, the fuckhot teammate." I can imagine his cocky smile.

"Oh. Hi." Well, this is unexpected and rather humiliating. Although I suppose he's aware of his hotness, so it shouldn't be new information for him. Also, the mouth fucking earlier is a clear sign I like the way he looks.

Silence follows. Three seconds too late, I have six witty retorts. Sadly, the moment for cleverness has passed.

“Are you really masturbating?” There’s the whooshing sound again.

“No, I’ve already . . . stroked my beaver.” I giggle. I’m so immature. “Are *you* masturbating?” The way he’s breathing into the phone makes it sound possible. I enjoy the visual this incites; I bet he gets really into it.

“What? No,” he says quickly. Almost *too* quickly.

“Are you sure? I mean, you didn’t even hesitate at all. In fact, you didn’t even wait until I was done asking the question.” This is totally untrue. “Maybe you’re lying and you have your hand down your pants.”

“What? No. I’m not, I swear. Wait a minute—did you do that?” His voice drops a couple of octaves. He sounds intense. I try to picture the matching facial expression.

“Do what?”

“What you said about your beaver, is it true?”

It sounds so ridiculous; I laugh uncontrollably.

“Fuck me,” Alex mutters.

I stop laughing. First off because I think it’s an actual request. Secondly, I have this fantastic image of me underneath him.

“It’s true.” My voice is all breathy and soft, courtesy of the porno running through my head.

“Seriously?” He sounds excited. Like really, really excited.

“About stroking my beaver? No. Beavers are dangerous. They shouldn’t be stroked.”

“Can you stop saying ‘beaver’? Look, what are you doing right now?”

“Drinking beer and watching porn, why?” Tomorrow I’m sure I’ll be appropriately ashamed of the content of this conversation. For now, I’m thoroughly entertained.

“Because I’m standing outside your suite. Do you want company?”

I sit up so fast, the room spins. “You are not.”

“I am. Suite six-oh-nine. Want me to knock?”

“No! Don’t! Hold on.”

I sprint across the room and yank the bedroom door open. The common living room is empty. I consider a tuck and roll across the floor for fun, but I’m uncoordinated, so I settle for running. Throwing open the door, I find Alex with his jacket slung over one arm and his phone to his ear.

I step out into the hall. “You weren’t kidding.”

“Nice.”

I follow his gaze. Oh yes, now I remember. I'm wearing Spiderman jammies designed to fit pre-pubescent boys. It's cold in the hallway and I'm braless, which draws attention to my chest. My nipples are clearly saluting him through the threadbare fabric.

"I forgot my lace teddies at home." I almost wish I owned one, except lace is uncomfortable and impractical. "What are you doing here?" I cup my boobs to protect my nipples from further visual molestation.

His eyes drop for a split second, as if my nipples have their own force field, and then return to my face. "I, uh . . . do you want to hang out?"

I cringe. "I'm staying with my parents."

"You could come up to my suite."

"I was going to bed." So lame.

"I figured."

And there's the smile again. He rocks those damn dimples. The banged-up face and the bruises seem to elevate the level of pretty.

"I'm not having sex with you." Dear Lord, my mouth needs a censor.

He doesn't even flinch. "That's cool. I wasn't expecting sex."

"Really?" I assumed by *hang out* he clearly meant get naked.

"Really. Promise." He puts his hand over his heart, his eyes softening as his cheeks flush. He's blushing. It's kind of cute.

"Oh. Well, then. I guess—I'll get changed." There I am, agreeing to go up to a hot-as-hell hockey player's room in the middle of the night for not-sex.

I reach for the door and tug the handle. It's locked. I try again, knowing it won't work. Knocking will wake the 'rents. Then I definitely won't be *hangin'* with Alex. I want to, even though it's a screamingly bad idea. Nothing good can come of this. Except maybe another make out session.

"You don't have your key."

"No. No, I don't."

"You don't need to change on my account. I'm quite partial to this outfit. Spiderman's my favorite." He's still got a smile plastered on his face. It's almost as irritating as it is hot. "We could hit up the front desk and ask for another card if you're committed to changing."

"Are you kiss—I mean kidding? I mean what? No. I can't go there dressed like this." Both the Freudian slip and the idea of walking into the main lobby in Spidey pajamas are horrifying.

“Why don’t you come to my room? We can chill for a bit. When you’re ready to come back here, I’ll have a key sent up.” He offers his hand.

I look at it and then him, debating. It could be the residual booze floating around in my system—and my lack of gratification during my jill time—but I put my palm in his and allow him to guide me to the elevator. He pushes the button and drapes his suit jacket across my shoulders. I don’t want to consider how often he does this. Or how I’m probably one of hundreds.

The doors open, and he motions me in ahead of him. The entire elevator is made of mirrors, providing an awesome view of Alex from all angles. I, on the other hand, am a complete mess. My hair could seriously use a brush, I have no makeup on, and I’m wearing my glasses. I surreptitiously attempt to fix my hair.

“Hey.” His eyes are warm as he strokes my cheek. His fingers are rough and calloused, yet the touch is gentle, intimate even. “I just want to hang out. I promise.”

I want to believe him.

“It’s two a.m., Alex. Showing up at my hotel room in the wee hours of the morning usually constitutes a booty call.”

He drops his hand. “The whole bar scene gets old, and I’m kind of amped from the game. I figured you gave me your number, and we were having fun, weren’t we? It’s nice to talk to someone who isn’t caught up in the hype.”

“Right.” Whatever. He’s not going to hold me hostage. I can always leave if I need to.

“I wasn’t sure when you’d be leaving. I wanted to try—”

The elevator dings. Alex laces my fingers with his and we walk down the hall to his room. The space is laid out almost the same as my parents suite aside from the single door leading to what is most likely the bedroom.

“We usually share rooms, but I won a bet last week, so my buddy Darren had to put me up in this.”

“Darren?”

“Yeah. Westinghouse. Number twenty-six. He plays right wing.”

It’s at this moment I remember I was supposed to snap a picture of him. I was too busy sticking my tongue in Alex’s mouth to follow through. I hope Charlene forgives my distraction.

“You share rooms?”

“Most of the time.”

Bringing girls up to the room would be a challenge. Unless they’re all into watching or sharing. I suppress a shudder. I wonder what kind of bet he won.

I trail Alex to the bar, where he makes me an alcohol-free drink. He cracks a bottle of Perrier for himself.

We stand there, staring at each other, not saying anything until the awkwardness becomes unbearable and I crack.

“I’m nervous.” I follow up with, “I don’t usually do this.” Cue internal eye roll. What a clichéd line.

The corner of his mouth quirks up, his eyes alight with amusement. “You don’t usually hang out with people?”

“No. I don’t usually follow famous hockey players to their private suites when they come knocking on my door at two in the morning after having made out publicly in a bar.”

“Do hockey players usually come knocking on your door in the middle of the night?”

“No. This would be a first for me.” I shed his jacket and pass it to him, already too warm, thanks to the banter.

“Those pajamas are really something.”

“I think you like my nipple visibility.”

I turn away, wishing I could stop my mouth. Leaning across the bar, I drop a few more ice cubes into my drink. A throat clears behind me, and I remember how low these pants sit. There’s a solid chance half my ass is hanging out the back. I straighten quickly and hike the pants up, nearly giving myself a camel toe. No matter how I turn, Alex is going to get an eyeful of something.

There’s a plush couch on the other side of the room. I cross to it and sit in the corner, tucking my legs under me to prevent further wardrobe malfunctions. Alex hasn’t said anything to confirm or deny my Spidey jammies observation. In fact, he hasn’t said anything at all.

He sits beside me, leaning back, looking all relaxed and hot. Then he fucks me. Not in the literal sense; he doesn’t bend me over the arm of the couch, drop my pants, and fill me from behind. But he might as well.

What does he do to crumble my already weak resolve, other than be his absurdly gorgeous self? Alex does exactly what he said he wanted to do—hang out and talk.

“So you run a book club? What’s that like?” He stretches his arm out, grazing his fingertips along my shoulder.

I’m not sure how to answer this question without sounding too losery. “I don’t run it, I just participate. Mostly it’s an excuse to drink wine and eat junk food while discussing smutty books. We don’t typically read sixteenth century literature, but we had a real smut run for the last few months. This chick Lydia was getting tired of reading the word moist, so she picked Fielding. It’s a little extreme.”

Alex shudders. “Understandable, really. Moist is a terrible word.”

“So true. It should only be used to describe the consistency of cake.”

“Agreed.” Alex laughs, his pretty smile lingering. He twirls my hair between his fingers. “So did you study English in college?”

“Not as a major. I took a few courses for fun. What about you?” My mouth is dry and every part of me is hot. I take a sip of my grapefruit drink.

“I double majored in English Lit and Kinesiology during my first year. I had to drop the kin after I was drafted. I was a little late getting picked up.”

He double majored. My Spidey jammies are at risk of peeling themselves off my body. “When were you drafted?”

“The middle of my first year.”

“And you still finished your degree?”

“It took a little longer than usual, but yeah. I’d still like to finish the kin degree at some point, but that’ll have to wait. So you’re not into lit fic, eh?”

He’s using cute Canadianisms. I’m getting all flushed below the waist and above the neck. “I’m good with literary. I’ve read Tolstoy and Austen and liked them, but Fielding’s a pretty vast change from straight up word porn.”

I get another laugh, and his fingers drift down the side of my neck. “He saw her, like the sun, even without looking.”

Oh God. He’s quoting Tolstoy and touching me. I’m done for.

When you’re surrounded by sports-minded men whose reading repertoire doesn’t expand beyond *The Hockey News* or the sports section in the newspaper, it’s hard not to get all starry-eyed about a guy who reads books without pictures.

One second he’s talking, the next my face is glued to his. His glass clinks on the table, and then his hands are on me, under my shirt, gripping my waist and burning against my already heated skin.

“I was really hoping for some more mouth fucking,” Alex says against my lips.

I giggle, and then moan. Oh hell, do I moan. It’s been a while since I’ve been touched by a member of the opposite sex. By a while, I mean it’s been the drought of the ages for the past six months. I’m going to explode out of my skin from the contact.

I skim his jaw with my fingers and thread them into his hair. It’s soft, reminding me of those shampoo commercials, where attractive men gush about their super awesome hair.

I press closer, but it’s not enough, so I straddle his lap. This is simultaneously the best and worst idea ever. His probable hockey-whore status ceases to matter as I settle over the straining bulge in his pants.

Alex’s fingertips glide back and forth under the waistband, which rides precariously low. My focus lies on the feel of his hands on my skin and the warmth of his mouth on mine.

He breaks the kiss, and his lips travel along my jaw, warm and wet on my skin. “Is this okay?” he asks, inching his hands into the back of my pants.

“Uh-huh.”

He grabs the swell of my ass, squeezing gently. “And this?”

I *mmm* rather than use words on the not-so-off chance I might say something to ruin the moment. His full bottom lip begs for attention, so I give it a nibble and a suck. We kiss for a long while, grinding all up on each other, his hands in my pants, my fingers in his hair.

He pulls my body closer, shifting his hips at the same time. “What about this?”

And there it is—the friction I’ve been looking for. It feels so good. So much better than my own fingers because it’s a big damn dick and all I have to do is shift against it. “Fuck me.” The words come out on a breathy-groan.

I freeze. I’m so *pucked*. There’d better be a support group for hockey hookers.

I’m going to need it after tonight.



HOLY PUCK

VIOLET

Alex releases his grip on my ass and regards me with soft, warm eyes. “I was serious when I said I don’t have any expectations, okay?” Despite his relaxed posture and his reassurance, his voice is raspy—distilled sex over crushed ice.

Is this what he says to all the puck bunnies? If it is, I understand why it works. “Okay.”

I decide if we stay here on the sofa, there’s less risk of me getting completely naked. The notion is bereft of logic. The first time I had sex was on a couch, so the prospect that this is less dangerous than say, oh, a very large, comfortable bed, is ludicrous. I’m going with it anyway.

Alex kneads my ass while I grind on him shamelessly. At the same time, I’ve got a solid grip on his hair so I can keep his mouth locked to mine. He proves to be incredibly helpful with the whole hips shifting business. This is awesome, as far as making out goes.

The contrast of rough stubble and the softness of his lips against my throat send a delicious shiver down my spine.

I release his hair to explore the rest of his cut body. Muscles tense and jump under my touch. The top button of his dress shirt is undone and his tie hangs loose around his neck. Now seems as good a time as any to help him get more comfortable. I mean, I’m in my jammies and here he is, still mostly in a suit.

Unbuttoning involves multitasking, but I’m more than capable of getting his shirt undone while he kisses my neck.

Under the crisp dress shirt is a white tee stretched tight across a solid wall of chest. I’m certain they didn’t need to airbrush the milk ad all to shit to achieve his level of hotness.

Excited to find out, I slip my fingers under the hem, mindful this is similar to the unveiling of great art. I’ve never been this up close and

personal with someone in such amazing physical condition. I want to revel in the reveal of his godlike body. Below his navel is a smattering of dark hair, a treasure trail leading to something close to gold . . . or diamonds—because he’s damn hard right now.

Washboard abs flex under my fingers. He raises his arms, and I lift the T-shirt over his head, careful of his busted lip and bruised jaw. Not bothering to hide my appreciation, I exhale on a low whistle. Tattoos accentuate each bicep. The left boasts a waving Canadian flag—long live patriotism—and the right has a set of hockey sticks crossed over a puck.

I can feel Alex’s eyes on me as I trace the hockey tattoo with a fingertip.

“You really love hockey, don’t you?”

“Yeah. It’s kinda my thing.” His hands drift up my thighs, arms flexing.

“I bet you could bench press me.”

“There’s a good chance.”

His fingertips breach the hem of my shirt. When my body jerks, he hesitates.

“Should I stop?”

“No, thanks. I’m ticklish.”

“Is that so?” He looks up from under abnormally thick lashes, wearing a devilish smile.

“Just here”—I point to my ribs—“and here.” I indicate the crook in my knee.

“I’ll watch for that.”

His hands ghost along my ribs. I suck in a breath and hold back a giggle.

As soon as he reaches my breasts, his thumbs sweep over my nipples. I moan like a street walker. Like, really, it’s an outlandish porn star moan. My face and chest heat with embarrassment.

Apparently Alex is good with the moaning. Still cupping my boobs, he looks me in the eye, waiting for the okay to take this further. With every kiss and every touch so far, he’s asked permission to move forward. It makes him infinitely sexier and harder to say no to.

I raise my arms in silent assent. Of course, when he removes my shirt, my glasses get caught in my hair. Alex wrestles them free and sets them on the arm of the couch where they’ll be safe.

And now we're both topless. Alex stares at my boobs. It's no furtive peek. He's full-on staring. He cups them in his hands, which are huge—his hands, not my boobs; those are average sized. Then he bounces them around a bit.

He's like a kid who's figured out Jell-O jiggles if you poke it.

"I told you they were nice for real ones." The way he's staring makes me self-conscious, so my comment comes with extra snark.

"They really are. They're so soft," he murmurs, squeezing. "And perky." He brushes his lips across my nipple.

His eyes lift at my gasp, maybe realizing I'm attached to the boob he's making out with.

"Can I . . ." He trails off as his tongue peeks out, not quite touching my skin.

"Please and thank you."

He closes his lips around the taut nipple and sucks gently. I bite the inside of my cheek in an effort to derail the sound forcing its way up my throat. I manage to keep it to a whimper as Alex massages one boob and makes out with the other one. I can't seem to shut up with all the little noises of bliss.

His low chuckle follows. "You really like that, don't you?"

It's rather obvious I do, but I breathe out a *so much* and grind against him to punctuate my affirmation. While he's engrossed in loving the shit out of my boobs, my hands are everywhere: in his hair, feeling up his arms and chest, going lower to skim his waistband.

Alex is in serious boob nuzzle mode. I almost expect him to do the whole motorboat thing. Fortunately, he doesn't. He winds an arm around my waist and pulls me flush against him. At my slightly desperate whine, he shifts his hips.

What I'm about to do will make me a full-fledged hockey hooker. Whatever, it's only for tonight. I'm resigned—and excited—as I try to slip my hand past his belt and into his pants.

"We could go to the bedroom, if you'd like." Alex's hands have migrated down the back of my jammie bottoms.

"The couch is good."

"The bed's more comfortable." His lips move up my neck to my chin.

I'm sure it is, which is the problem. I know where this is going. I won't say no to him. I've seen Alex play hockey; he has incredible stamina. The

point is moot, but the denial makes my failed attempt at resistance seem less offensive.

He kisses me, soft and searching. Like gummy bears left out in the sun, I melt right into him. Finding the clasp on his belt, I slip it through the buckle.

He must think my actions mean I agree with his suggestion. He grips my ass firmly and stands. Locking my legs around his waist, I hurry to free a hand from his pants and clutch his shoulder.

This is really happening. Like, for real. At twenty-two, I'm going to have my first one-night stand. With a hockey player, no less. So much for good judgment. Oh well, nobody's perfect.

Alex sets me on the edge of the bed and flicks on the lamp. Of course he's going for mood lighting. The soft glow magnifies the dips and curves of his body, highlighting the sharp angle of his jaw and the bruise below his left eye.

"We don't have to do anything you don't want to."

"I know." My voice trembles, excitement and nerves fusing.

I've always been a serial monogamist, waiting until the requisite fifth date or beyond to let a guy into my pants. It eliminated most potential mistakes. If the sex was decent, and so was the guy, I'd see where things went. Sometimes there were repeat performances, sometimes there weren't.

I'm holding the waistband of his pants like there's a pot of gold tucked inside. Letting go, I shimmy back on the bed, giving him enough space to join me. It's a king; there's plenty of room for frolicking. His eyes are low-lidded, his expression intense as he follows after me.

Fumbling and uncoordinated thanks to my loss of fine-motor function, I struggle to pop the button on his pants and pull down the zipper. Alex watches my hand disappear inside. It has to look good from his point of view. How can it not? Someone else's hand in your pants is a winner of a situation. Soft, hot skin encases the hardest dick on the planet. It's as solid as tungsten carbide. And there's *a lot* of length.

I need to take a look at this thing. I push his pants over his hips, giving me room to check things out. Alex, being the helpful guy he is, takes them off the rest of the way, leaving him in a pair of boxers. I stick my hand back in, and when I finally manage to wrestle it free, my eyes are at risk of popping out of my head in visual-stimulus-induced fear.

First things first, Alex manscapes: there's no 70s style dick fro going on down there. He's not quite like my beaver—she sports only a short Mohawk—but he's neat and tightly trimmed. I know some guys do this to make it appear bigger. In this instance, I'm positive I'm not gawking at an optical illusion. It's *huge*.

Sometimes people exaggerate how big a guy's dick is to make it seem better than it is. Like it's clearly impossible for someone's dick to be that big. This isn't one of those times. Alex Waters is an aberration of cock.

“What is *that*?” The question is inane. But, honestly, what the fuck am I supposed to do with this?

Alex chuckles nervously. As is appropriate since I'm holding his dick and I'm clearly not sane.

“I mean, I know what it is. Obviously. Do you have some kind of . . . disorder? Like elephantiasis of the penis or something?” I *did not* say that out loud.

“It's not that big.” His erection slides in my grip.

I can't stop staring. My thumb and middle finger must have a good inch or more before they can meet. I squeeze to see if it helps bring them closer together. It doesn't. What it does is make Alex groan, and *that*, oh holy monster of cock, is one hot noise. He's also laughing, so it comes out all heavy with a snort thing at the end. It's quite cute and endearing while also being sexy.

I finally look up to see if he's serious. Bad idea. His arms are loose at his sides, head bowed, eyes dark, lips parted, chest rising and falling. He's staring at my hand. I'm so glad Charlene convinced me to get a manicure earlier this week.

Licking my lips, I glance at his cock. He's uncut. This is a night full of firsts. The way the skin wrinkles with each stroke toward the head and smoothes back out as I reverse the motion is entrancing. I bet it's fun to play with when it's soft. I remember he's said something which requires a response.

“This is like a porno dick. I realize it's not like a foot long or anything, thank Christ. The girth alone is staggering. There's no way . . .” Have I been deprived of oxygen? Am I seriously coming up with arguments against having sex and voicing them?

Instead of stopping, I continue like the head-trauma victim I am. “It's like a person who wears an extra-extra-large shirt trying to fit into an extra-

small. What the hell do you think happens to the shirt? The seams split, and they burst out of it like the Hulk. I can't even imagine the tragedy if my beaver exploded."

Alex silences me with his mouth, and I am so, so grateful. I want to avoid saying more stupid shit, particularly to a guy I just met and am planning to have sex with.

"You know"—Alex shifts his hips forward again—"you're pretty damn good for my ego. And the only kind of pussy explosions I'm hoping to cause are the ones associated with orgasms." His voice travels over my skin like marshmallows drenched in hot chocolate syrup.

His palm covers mine and pries my hand away as he nudges my legs apart. "Is this okay?"

At my nod, Alex settles between my thighs. Only a thin, worn, cotton barrier in Spiderman print protects the land of Beave from invasion.

He claims my mouth again. Butter soft, his tongue tangles with mine, lazy and lulling. I let my hands wander from his shoulders and the broad expanse of his back to his rock-solid ass. I push down and lift my hips, and there it is—his monster of a cock.

I'm a panting, whimpering mess as I wrap my legs around his waist to pull him closer. I'm moderately terrified of his dimensions, but Alex distracts me with open-mouth kisses along my throat. He continues his descent to my breast.

I fist his hair and push my chest out. I'm not sure what purpose this serves. It's not like he'll be able to fit more boob into his mouth. He spends a few minutes loving them like they're deluxe cheeseburgers after a night of binge drinking. All the while, I grind with him, lost in sensation and his little hums of approval.

Eventually, he releases my nipple and licks the tip. "You okay to keep going?"

At my nod, Alex eases his hand down my side, grazing the ticklish spot on the way. I giggle and twist away.

"Sorry." He presses a kiss below my navel, sits on his heels, and my legs drop from around his waist. With his eyes on mine, he hooks his fingers into the waistband of my Spidey pants. "You're sure you want to do this?"

"Totally."

There's a moment of hesitation on his part, so I push them over my hips. He helps remove them and tosses them on the floor.

And I'm naked in front of a porno centerfold with a preternaturally large dick. So this is an inferiority complex. Interesting. I'm sure I can deal.

Alex runs his hands up my calves and kisses the sensitive spot on the inside of my knee. He glides his palms along my inner thigh and stops inches away from where I'm aching to be touched.

"Yes?" Lifting his head, he waits for permission to continue.

No is not an option. Not with his hands where they are or his polite request. I open my legs in invitation. I'm practically hyperventilating as he makes a slow pass over sensitive skin with his thumb, barely grazing my clit.

He shakes his head. "I can't even. You're so . . ." His eyes shift to mine. "This is for me?"

It's like a torrential downpour south of my navel. I shrug. Giraffe-sized red blotches break out across my chest. "It would appear that way."

He brings his thumb to his mouth and licks it. His eyes flutter closed. He turns his face into my leg, biting high up on my inner thigh and sucking hard.

Wet kisses mark a path on the inside of my thigh. *Is he really going to? No way—oh yes, he is.*

But not right away. Oh no, Alex is the best kind of tease. He nibbles at the juncture of my thighs, drawing out the anticipation before his mouth is finally on me. It's been a long time since anyone has given me face-to-pussy resuscitation. I don't remember it being anything close to this incredible.

"Jesus, you're . . . do you like that?" His words are muffled because he's busy licking away.

The hair gripping and hip bucking should make it clear I do, in fact, like it.

I moan a garbled *God yes, Alex* to ensure my pleasure sounds are taken in an affirmative context.

Hot breath caresses hotter skin as he eases a finger inside. Intense sensation builds and spirals. Heat rolls over me in a crushing wave, funneling through my limbs to the center of my body. He adds another finger and twists up and in, hitting the heavenly spot I can only get to with my fake plastic friends.

It's an intense burn, rising higher as his fingers keep time with the soft strokes of his tongue and the intentional grazes of his teeth. I'm holding on—barely—wanting to submit to the sensation, desperate for it not to end. When he adds a third finger, my toes curl. White heat radiates across my skin.

I curse as my legs fight to close. Alex holds them open with his forearms, fingers moving faster until I'm coming, and coming, and coming some more.

He places a tiny kiss on my clit and follows a straight line up my body with his mouth, pausing at each nipple on the way until his lips meet mine.

“Was it good?”

“It was . . . I . . . you . . . awesome.” It's as coherent as I'm going to get. I reach between us and grab his cock. “Return the favor?”

He graces me with a snort. “Yeah, I don't think that's the best idea right now.”

Of course it's a good idea; you give, you receive, right? He nabs his wallet from the nightstand. He flips it open, retrieves a quartet of foil squares, and tears one free with his teeth. Seems like an awful lot of condoms. Two is smart, in case one ends up a casualty of misrolling. Maybe it happens often, so he comes extra prepared. With a quick zip, Alex rips open the foil packet and rolls on the condom.

“I'll make you feel good. I promise.”

“Take it slow, Trigger, there's a lot going on there.” I motion to his wrapped cock.

He runs a soothing hand from the outside of my knee to my hip.

His kiss is all soft lips and sweeping tongue. The thick head probes low, and Alex makes several unhurried passes until we're both panting again. Propped up on one arm so his eyes are on me, he eases inside. I panic and tense, clamping down like Fort Knox.

“Relax, beautiful,” he whispers against my mouth. The way he says it, warm and needy, makes my whole body liquid. He goes deeper. “That's it, Violet.”

He's right; it feels really good. I groan.

When he pauses, I tighten my legs around his waist to urge him on.

“You weren't kidding,” he murmurs, circling his hips but staying deep once he's inside me.

“About what?”

“The whole extra-small thing.”

I link my fingers behind his neck. “It’s because you’re a double-XL.”

He eases back and rocks forward. We both whore-moan. “I’m glad your pussy hasn’t exploded.”

I snort-gasp-giggle. “Me, too.”

With each measured thrust, I lift to meet him. Everything turns suddenly intense as he pulls out—way, way out—and pushes in again.

As the heat and the need expand to consume me, he draws one of my legs up, changing the angle. I gasp when he hits the . . . beaver button and then choke on a laugh and end up sounding like a dying animal.

“You okay?” Alex strokes my cheek.

It’s one of the most intimate gestures I’ve ever experienced in the middle of being sexed by anyone. My previous lovers have been pretty unimpressive in comparison.

“Fantastic. Carry on.”

His relief is a warm blanket of desire as he resumes his partially finished thrust.

At my insistence he goes harder and faster. Alex has unbelievable stamina, as expected. He’s like the Energizer Bunny on crack with an amazing dick. Without the slightest bit of warning my entire body flushes. The spark ignites, bursting to flame. I grip his shoulders as I come again, ecstatic I’m getting off during sex, which never happens. Volume control gone, his name is a scream on my lips.

He bites out a dirty expletive and buries his face against my neck as he pumps erratically, chasing his release. Spent, Alex collapses on top of me.

I run my fingers through his damp hair, both of us breathing hard, our hearts beating double time. As awesome as this has been, I’m going to be sore in the morning.

It doesn’t mean I don’t want to do it again.



WHAT WAS I THINKING?

VIOLET

I lie underneath Alex's heavy body for a minute until breathing becomes difficult. "Um, Alex . . ." I say breathlessly—because I'm breathless.

"Oh, sorry! I'm crushing you, aren't I?" He rolls gracefully to the left.

"Wow." I luxuriate in loose muscles and full breaths. "I could use a smoke."

Alex misunderstands my attempt at humor and turns away, reaching for the phone on the nightstand. There are red lines spanning his back from shoulders to ass. Nail marks from me.

"I can call room service and have a pack brought up. They can bring a room key, too, so you can go when you want."

Mortification slices through my post-orgasm buzz as he dials the front desk. While I didn't expect to spend the night with him, I didn't think I'd be kicked out before the sweat had a chance to dry. The smokes seem like some form of payment for my services. If so, how terribly does it reflect on my performance that I only warrant a cheap pack of cigarettes that I won't even enjoy because I'm a fake smoker.

I slip off the bed, feeling exposed as I search for my Spidey pants. Without glasses, everything more than five feet away is an indistinct blur.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Alex stands and catches my wrist. He's naked and glorious, and I'm naked and . . . well, me, and therefore self-conscious.

"Trying to find my clothes since you're sending a key up." I finally spot the blue and red smudge under the black spot on the floor, which must be Alex's pants.

When I reach for them, his hold on my wrist tightens. "What? No! You think I want you to leave? I'm not an asshole. I thought it would be easier to get a key before we pass out. I'll set a wake-up call for you if you want to stay. I want you to stay." He runs a hand through his sex-messed hair. If he

wasn't naked with his semisoft monster cock hanging out, he might be cute. He's not, though; he's gorgeous and flustered.

With no prior one-night stand experience, I can't say what protocol is in this situation. Against my better judgment, I want to stay. In case he wants to do it again.

He takes my face in his hands; his palms are wide and warm. His lips are soft on mine when he kisses me. "Don't go yet, Violet. Please?"

"Okay."

He steps closer, his cock twitching against my stomach. He can't possibly get hard again seeing as he just came.

"So sweet." He runs his nose across my cheek and kisses my neck. "I'd keep you here all weekend if we didn't have to leave tomorrow."

His hands travel up my sides to rest below the curve of my breasts. I jut my chest out like an offering and push my hips into his. I could swear his cock is harder than it was a few moments ago. With stealth maneuvers learned through endless battles on Xbox with Buck, I sneak a hand between us and pat around. Yup, I'm not crazy; he's got another hard-on brewing.

"Did you take Viagra or something?"

Alex backs up a fraction of an inch, far enough to avoid going cross-eyed. Must have been the wrong thing to ask.

"Pardon?"

I pet his dick, hoping to erase the dark look on his face. He seems pissed at the suggestion he might need that kind of assistance. Honestly, who gets hard three minutes after having sex? Isn't that a myth? In my limited sexual experience, which is rooted in the upper-middle section of the single digits, I've never had more than one round of fill-the-beaver-hole in a night.

"N-nothing." I wrap my fingers around his growing erection. My middle finger and thumb touch, so I give it a gentle squeeze followed by a slow stroke. The skin is looser, and it's fun to slide around.

"What exactly are you trying to do?" His voice is hot and sweet and hard; a Werther's Original sitting on a radiator.

"Distracting you by exploring the myth of the immediate post-sex almost-hard-on you seem to be experiencing? Despite the potential ill effects of having a double-XL in an extra-small space more than once, I don't seem to be able to stop helping it along." I give it another stroke to prove my lack of self-restraint.

“The myth of—wait, ill effects?” He places a hand on mine, his expression one of concern.

I squeeze his junk while I try to come up with an inoffensive explanation. “Well, you’re mammoth, so it goes without saying I’ll be sore. Not in a bad way. More in a ridden hard and satisfied way.” I don’t think I’m making this better. I bet if I put that dick of his in my mouth, I wouldn’t be able to talk at all.

“I see. Are you off limits now?”

“‘Off limits’? No. Definitely not.”

“That’s good to hear. If you keep doing that”—he drags our palms down his shaft—“I’m going to be rock solid in about two minutes.”

“You’re pretty solid already.”

Fortunately, or not so fortunately, depending on the projected state of my parts below the waist, we’re interrupted by a knock at the door. Alex swears under his breath. He plants an open-mouthed kiss on the side of my neck, following with teeth. “That’ll be room service with your key. Don’t go anywhere.”

“Seeing as I’m naked and you’ll be blocking the only exit with your godlike body, I don’t think I’ll be attempting an escape.”

“‘Godlike body,’ eh?” Alex flashes me his one-dimpled grin.

I roll my eyes. “Like you don’t already know it.”

He smacks my bare ass. “You’re cute.” He nabs his boxers from the floor and tugs them up his legs. There’s no hiding his semi. He reaches inside and does some rearranging as he saunters out of the room. I stare after him, rubbing my ass.

With Alex no longer presenting a sensory distraction, I become self-conscious of my nakedness. My Spidey pants help conceal the bottom half, sadly, my top is in the other room with my glasses and my phone.

I check the bathroom for a robe and catch a glimpse of my reflection in the mirror. It looks as if woodland creatures have taken refuge in my hair. I use my fingers to smooth it into some semblance of order. It doesn’t work, so I pick up the brush from the vanity and drag it through the tangled mass. It hurts, but helps.

I open the door to find Alex standing on the other side. I do the whole gasping hand-to-heart deal, as if it’s going to burst out of my chest. His eyes drop from my face. I’m palming my tit.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you,” he says to my boobs.

I separate my fingers so my nipple peeks out between them. Alex moves closer, running a single finger between my breasts and down my stomach to circle my navel. “You put your pants on.”

“You’re wearing boxers.”

“This is true.” Dipping lower, his fingers sweep over my befuddled beaver.

“I was making it even.”

“I could fix that. If it’s a problem for you.” His smile is all mischief. “If you’re still staying, that is.”

“I’m still staying.”

“This is good news.”

Plush, warm lips are on my neck again. He sifts his fingers through my hair and tugs gently, tilting my head back. “Is it okay that I want you again?”

“Perfectly okay.” I look toward the rumpled sheets. “Bed?”

“Bed.”

“I’m sending you the repair bill if you break my beaver.”

Alex bites my shoulder. “Beavers are ugly. You have the prettiest pussy I’ve ever put my mouth on.”

It’s a dirty thing to say, and considering how many pussies Alex has likely been up close and personal with, it’s a significant, moderately backhanded compliment.

Of course to prove it, Alex carries me to the bed and strips off my pants. He drops to his knees on the floor, puts his face between my thighs, and makes fireworks happen with his awesome mouth. Again.

I’m not sure of the exact orgasm tally, but by the time he comes up for air, I’m loose-limbed and one word demands are all I can manage. “Naked.”

He drops his boxers freeing the monster cock. It smacks him in the stomach with a loud thwack. I stifle a giggle and pat it, checking to make sure it’s okay. Alex’s expression is a mixture of amusement and desire as he joins me on the bed, reclining against the mess of pillows.

There’s nothing between us now, just hot skin and wet need. Shimmying back, I slide my hands up his thighs. I have a plan. It might cause lasting damage to my jaw, but he’s gone south on me twice, and it’s only polite to respond in kind. Plus, I’m curious to see how much will fit.

I run my finger from base to tip. The smooth skin is stretched tight, and I wrap my palm around him, in awe of how far apart my fingers are. I

look up and touch my lips to the head.

He does this jerky-shudder thing, which I take as a good sign, so I give it a test lick.

The satin softness and slight wrinkle of foreskin fascinates me as I take more of him. I don't get very far—halfway at best, probably more like a third. I bob a little and lick around the head. Alex is quite the vision; lids low and lips parted.

He skims the contour of my bottom lip where it wraps around his cock. "I don't want to come in your mouth."

Popping off, I say, "I wouldn't mind." Even if it tastes like shit, I'd swallow Alex Waters' jizz. Then I'd get the T-shirt.

"Maybe another time. I'd rather be inside you when I come."

He positions me to straddle him. I'm so wet. I couldn't be more ready if I jumped into a pool of lube.

"Shit, that's—" Heavy breath follows a pained sigh as he reaches for a condom and rolls it on.

Rising to my knees, I grip the absurdly thick shaft and assume the position. I sink slowly until I'm so full of cock it's ridiculous.

Alex holds my hips as I start to rock. His mouth is on my neck, my jaw, my chin, my lips. I push on his chest, and he lies back to let me ride him. It's the most delicious feeling—the sensation of emptiness followed by the nearly painful fullness. I'm probably ruined for the next dick that comes my way. Alex is stunning below me. His face is set in intense concentration. A slight sheen of sweat covers his chest. His abs flex with every rotation of my hips.

"Gimme that mouth, please."

With a palm on my nape, he holds me close, fucking my mouth with his tongue at the same leisurely pace as his cock inside me. When I gasp for air, he covers my throat and my breasts with wet kisses.

"I should tell you I'm in love with your tits," he says while doing that nuzzle thing again.

"You can date them if you want. They like bras from Victoria's Secret." I half laugh, half moan when he sucks my nipple roughly.

The combination of sensations—him inside me, the way my clit rubs against his pelvis with each shift of our hips, and his teeth grazing my sensitive nipple—sends me over the edge. He sits up, preventing my

trembling arms from giving out. I'm coming so hard everything goes black and returns in bursts of gray and stars.

“Is that good? Does it feel good? Jesus, Violet, I can feel you coming on my cock.”

I'm chanting something incoherent into his neck. With absolute horror, I realize I'm repeating the phrase *I love your cock*. The possibility I might accidentally leave out the *cock* part and profess actual love is too shameful to fathom. Obviously I don't—love him, that is. I am developing a strong bond with his penis, however. I bite his shoulder to stop the words, porn-moaning instead. It's safer.

He urges my head up, freeing my teeth from his skin. I've left a giant hickey. Actually, I've left several. His lips brush mine in a soft kiss. Alex whispers against them—how good I feel, how he's going to come, how he loves watching me come. The orgasm keeps going, steamrolling over me; it's a sensory explosion like no other. Alex groans through his final thrust.

My eyes snap open, because dammit, I want to see his come face. The muscles in his jaw tighten, and a fine tremor runs through his body like a low level earthquake. For the first time in my life, I can feel the twitch and pulse of a man coming inside of me. I'm going to put this one in the bank for future jilling sessions.

He flops down on the mattress, taking me with him. “That was even better than the first time.”

Too exhausted to speak in full sentences, I say, “So awesome. Tired.”

He laughs softly, stroking my hair. A few minutes pass, then he shifts my limp body, and pulls out. Alex sets an alarm for me and leaves the key card on the nightstand. I should get dressed and go, but my body won't obey the command to move. I mumble about needing to be in my room early, but I'm not sure my words make sense. He turns off the light and slips his arm under me, drawing me against his side.

“Fall asleep with me?”

I pass out with my cheek on his chest and his lips on my temple.



I wake with a start. My right side is sweaty. I can't see the clock on the nightstand without my glasses. Alex's arm is heavy as hell. He's wrapped around me with his nose pressed into my hair. I lift his arm—it takes some effort—and slide gingerly out of bed. My thighs and my cooter ache, and my skin pebbles in the absence of Alex's furnace-like body heat.

The reality of what I've done hits me like a UFC uppercut. I've had sex with one of Buck's teammates. I will invariably see him again. Repeatedly. This was a terrible idea. He's a hockey whore, and now I'm a hockey hooker. I experience a swell of shame followed by desire as I stare at his fuckhot form lying alone in that well-used bed. He mumbles in his sleep, so I nab my key card and Spidey pants and tiptoe into the living room. I stumble around in the dark, searching for my shirt. It's on the couch, but my glasses are nowhere to be found.

A faint beeping sound from Alex's bedroom means I've run out of time. For one terrified second I freeze. I hastily pull on my shirt, snatch my phone from the coffee table, sprint to the door, and let myself out. I take the stairs all the way to the sixth floor.

Inside my room in the suite, I slide down the door, breathing hard. I hit the floor with a wince; my cooter has been in an epic battle—with a cock monster.

I had amazing sex with Alex Waters. Twice. I have no idea how much of a player he is or how high profile. Not that it matters. It'll be awkward regardless. I drop my head in my hands.

What the hell have I done?



**I PROBABLY
SHOULDN'T HAVE
DONE THAT**

ALEX

The most annoying sound in the world permeates my sleep. I will it to stop. I want to kick its ass for interrupting my dream that includes soft, full tits I can use as a pillow.

The sound is not stopping.

Prying my eyes open, I check the clock on the nightstand. It's six a.m., an unusual time for my alarm to go off on a non-game day. I palm my phone and cease the noise, then close my eyes, hoping to resume the dream; the perfect boobs, the hot, tight—it all comes back like whiplash.

I had sex with Butterson's sister. *Stepsister*. Both times were stellar. Unless it was part of my vivid dream. I lift my fingers to my nose and sniff. Yeah, it definitely happened.

I sit up with a groan. My whole body is sore: my head, my face, and my legs in particular. I call out her name, but I'm met with silence. The bathroom door is open, so she's definitely not in there. The sitting room is the next logical option. Flicking the light, I discover it's as empty as the bathroom. My glass of Perrier and her mostly full grapefruit and soda water are on the table where we left them last night. Her phone is missing, so is her pajama top, and her glasses are on the floor beside the couch.

Those glasses—Christ, they're hot. The Spiderman jammies, too. It should be illegal for a grown woman to look so sexy in comic book-inspired bed wear. That's when I realize she left without waking me up. I almost double-check the suite, but it's clear she's gone, which sucks. Disappointment deflates my dick.

If I was like some of my teammates, I'd be relieved she left. I'm not. The puck bunny thing isn't my game. That's not to say I've never had a one-night stand with a bunny. It's more that there have been very few in comparison to media speculation. I'm not all that keen on being someone's claim to star fucking fame.

Violet strikes me as the opposite of a puck bunny. She was reading Fielding, of all things, during the game. It was as offensive as it was refreshing. As I head to the bedroom, it occurs to me she may have tried to wake me with no luck. I've slept through fire alarms in the past, and I'd been up since six yesterday morning. Practice, the game, the fight, the bar, and the phenomenal sex marathon have worn me out.

I drop facedown on the bed. The pillow smells like Violet, and it's soft like her boobs. I haven't touched ones that nice since freshman year in college.

I roll over with her glasses still in my hand, unsure how to proceed. It's too early to stop by her room and return them. Besides, she's staying with her parents so that's out. I settle on calling. Her phone goes to voice mail, which shouldn't surprise me considering the early hour. Violet's message is short and funny—it cuts off in the middle of a string of profanity—so I'm unprepared for the beep.

“Uh, hi. Hey. It's Alex. Waters. You spent the night—uh . . . Yeah. I'm sure you remember. Anyway, you left your glasses in my room. So I have them. I'll hold onto them until you call or I see you. I'll be back in Chicago in a week and a half. I hope you have an extra pair. Or maybe you wear contacts. You weren't wearing glasses at the game. About last night . . . I—” The machine beeps, cutting me off. It's the worst message ever. There isn't even an option to rerecord.

I don't call again, afraid I'll say something even worse. I set Violet's glasses and my phone on the nightstand and close my eyes. My head is pounding from too little sleep. As exhausted as I am, I can't relax enough to pass out. I have Violet on the brain. I'm not sure what happened between the time she said she wouldn't have sex with me and the moment she suctioned her face to mine, but I sure don't regret her change of mind.

Sleeping with my teammate's sister, step or not, isn't something to be proud of. Ironically, based on the media, it's exactly what's expected of me, and it blows. If Violet finds out about my reputation—assuming she hasn't already—she may very well never want to speak with me again, no matter how many orgasms I fucked out of her last night. It's thoughts such as these that keep me awake for the next two hours, wishing she'd call back so I can talk to her before someone else does. Especially Butterson.



My phone rings on my nightstand. I grab it, hit talk, and grumble into the receiver.

“Hey, man. Where are you? You’re holding us up.”

“Darren? Dude, it’s early. What’s the deal? We don’t leave until—” I hold my phone out to check the time. It’s almost one in the afternoon. I was supposed to be on the bus twenty minutes ago. “Shit. I’ll be right down.”

I throw on a pair of jeans and a wrinkled shirt. Tossing the rest of my clothes into my duffle bag, I run around the room like an idiot, hoping I don’t leave anything important behind.

Stopping in the bathroom, I check my reflection. There’s a hickey on the side of my neck. I don’t recall Violet giving me one, but there it is. There’s no covering up what happened last night now. Annnnd now I’m hard thinking about other things she sucked on. It’s shameful that I have to force myself to focus on hockey stats so I don’t leave the room with a massive woody.

The last thing I put in my bag are Violet’s glasses; I’m careful to wrap them in a shirt so they don’t get scratched. I throw on my jacket, grab my bag, shove my phone in my pocket, and check for my wallet. The elevator is empty. Stopping at Violet’s room on the way down is pointless since checkout happened hours ago. Besides, she hasn’t returned my call. I don’t like how that makes me feel.

The whole team is already on the bus when I arrive. Coach is pissed I’m late because it messes with the scheduled stops on our way to Tampa. The team greets me with hollers and snide comments. I need to come up with a story for last night—I’m usually better prepared than this.

I take the empty seat beside Darren. His brow furrows as he sniffs. “You smell like stale sex.” Darren has been my wingman on and off the ice for the past several years. He’s fully aware last night was an anomaly.

I shrug, passing it off like it’s nothing. As much as I needed a shower, in a sick way, I’m glad I didn’t have time. All I smell is Violet.

Kirk pops up from the seat behind me. “Who’d you bang last night?”

“Some chick I met in the elevator.” My stomach turns. No matter how this plays out, I look like an asshole, and right now I deserve the title.

“Oh, yeah? Only one? No Hat Trick?”

Darren rolls his eyes, and I mumble a noncommittal response.

At thirty-five, Kirk is one of the older players on the team, and this is likely his last season. He hasn't come to terms with it. He's been banging every chick he can lately, despite the wedding band he sports. It's disgusting. In my rookie days, I used to think he was cool. Now he's become pathetic.

“Weren't you screwing around with Butterson's sister at the bar?”

“She's his stepsister. We were just talking.” I want to punch him in the face for being such a dick.

Bringing Violet back to my room was bad form. I'll be lucky if this doesn't blow up in my face.

There's no justification for what I did. I don't have a good excuse. This isn't even close to normal for me. The most I do is flirt, especially with a teammate's sister. Until last night. I'd been serious about not having expectations. I might have had a chance at resisting her if she hadn't made the first move, or worn something other than those damn pj's.

Unfortunately, Butterson overhears my exchange with Kirk. He jumps up from his seat and stalks down the aisle. “Fuck you, dude. You were all over Violet. Now you hold us up 'cause you're bunny fucking?”

No way in hell am I admitting I was with her last night. “She kissed me, not the other way around.” My verbal defense is weak.

“Bullshit. You followed her outside. She thinks hockey players are dirtbags. Next time she comes to a game, you better keep your hands and your mouth to yourself. She's a good girl; she's doesn't screw around.”

“If you say so.” If she's witnessed Butterson's antics I can understand why she thinks we're all dirtbags, although I'd argue last night might have changed her opinion.

Butterson grabs me by the shirt and hauls me out of my seat. “I'm not kidding around, Captain Asshole. Violet's not that kind of girl. Lose her number.”

As the captain, I can't very well have the newest player on the team pushing me around, even if backing down is smarter. “You don't want to start a fight with me, Butterson. Especially over something you know nothing about.”

His jaw tics. It's obvious he wants to punch me. His fist slowly unclenches from my shirt. "Stay the fuck away from her."

Coach stomps down the aisle, yelling for us to cool it. He sends Butterson to his seat and I follow him to the front so he can serve me a lecture. I deserve it, so I keep my mouth shut and take it.

"You're the captain, not some rookie dickhead. How do you think it impacts the team if you go fucking around with your teammates' damn sisters?"

"I didn't—"

"Save it, Waters." Coach holds out his phone. A picture of me with my tongue in Violet's mouth takes up the screen.

"Fuck." I palm my face and lower my voice. "Has Butterson seen these?"

"I haven't shown him, but it's only a matter of time before he does. What if one of these dipshits did this with your sister?"

Coach makes a good point. If anyone touched Sunny, I'd rip his dick off and shove it down his throat with a ball-sac chaser. It's something I should've considered prior to the wick dip with Violet. "I'm sorry, Coach."

"I don't want apologies. I want you to keep your head in the game." He taps his temple. "We're halfway through the season, and we're only behind two teams. If we keep going like we are, we'll make the playoffs again this year. This is an important series, Waters. Don't fuck it up with your dick."

"It won't happen again. I'll talk to Butterson and clear the air."

"You better. He's a solid player. I need him on point for the next game, not fixed on revenge because you're getting fresh with his sister."

"Stepsister."

Coach gives me a disapproving look. "Like it matters."

"I got it, Coach. I'll get a handle on my handle."

He waves me off, shaking his head. I ignore Butterson's glare as I take my seat a few rows in front of him. Any conversation will have to take place without witnesses present, and I need time to figure out what to say.

The lecture from Coach and Butterson's outburst put last night into perspective. Clarity can be a bitch. I already had the impression Violet wasn't really a one-night stand kind of girl. Not because she said as much—it's what they all say before they get on their knees or their back—but because she truly didn't seem the type. Even though she practically jumped me both times.

She was nervous from the beginning—and hilarious. While I didn't force her to come to my room or have sex—twice—if she hadn't gotten locked out of hers, I might not have convinced her to come to mine. Regardless, I'd do it again if given the chance. It's hard not to be into a girl who tells you she loves your cock repeatedly as she comes. This situation makes me the kind of jerk I never want to be.

By the time we get to Tampa, everyone is bagged, so the first order of business is checking into the hotel, getting settled, and resting up for tomorrow's practice.

Darren and I share a room. Our accommodations are standard: two double beds, a couch, flat screen, and a minibar stocked with water and energy drinks. Darren tosses his bag on the closest bed and gives me a look. I'm waiting for the questions. He's never been part of the puck bunny scene. I envy his ability to say fuck it and fuck the guys. I wish I'd had a similar mindset at the beginning of my NHL career.

Darren grabs two bottles of water from the minibar and tosses me one. "So what happened?"

I crack the lid and drain half of it in two gulps. I'm dehydrated from last night's activities. "Nothing."

"Right. A giant hickey magically appeared on your neck."

"Like I said, I met a girl in the elevator." Normally, I'd be upfront with Darren, but the situation is complicated.

Darren shakes his head. "You're a fucking idiot."

He disappears into the bathroom. I'm not sure if he actually knows what I did or if he's playing mind games. The shower turns on. His questions will wait; Darren takes long ass showers.

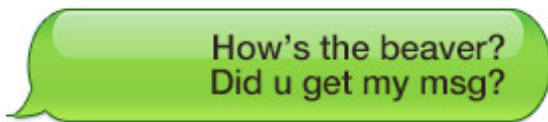
I check my phone for the tenth time today. I have twelve emails from my agent, Dick. He lives up to his name, but he gets the job done. I'm inclined to ignore his emails until I see one titled: ENDORSEMENT OFFER MUTHAFUCKA! I open it and scan the email. It's not an actual offer, but it's close. I'm a top contender for the Sports Pro Elite campaign. This is huge. It's what I've been waiting my entire goddamned career for. This kind of endorsement could set me up for years, and it could bring more endorsements with it.

In my rookie days, I was passed over by another significant endorser. Ever since then, I've been aiming for the top as a big FU to the ones who didn't believe I'd be more than a bench warmer. Dick rambles on about

some Bachelor of the Year bullshit I don't care about, until he mentions that it could affect the SPE campaign. I'll do whatever it takes to win it. I'll even pose in my damn jockstrap.

I send Dick a quick message in response, and we set up a phone call for the following day to hammer out the details. I'm riding the high as I check my missed calls.

I haven't heard from Violet, so I decide to shoot her a text.



I instantly want to unsend it. I meant for it to be funny, not offensive. After a few minutes of staring at the screen, waiting for her reply, I dig out my iPad and tap into the hotel Wi-Fi. A search for Violet Butterson comes up with nothing. She told me what she does for a living but not where she works, so that's a dead end.

Momentarily stumped, I consider my next plan of action. Facebook is a safe bet. Even my eighty-seven-year-old great-granny has an account. I locate Butterson in my friend list, and search his for Violet. Her last name is Hall. A friend request is out of the question; first I need to establish contact and maybe see her again. Also, pissing Butterson off more isn't in my team's best interests. I can creep her instead. Unfortunately, her privacy settings are high.

Butterson's feed and his photo albums are accessible. I find a few pictures of her with Sidney at what appears to be her work. I screenshot the image so I can look it up later. She's bound to have an email address in their directory.

Next I search the album labeled Summer Vacation with the Halls; it looks promising. I'm right. It contains loads of pictures of Violet. They're a few years old. Her face is softer, rounder, and her hair is different. She wears a variety of bikinis in most of them: pink and lime green striped, pale blue with ruffle-things on her chest, and a white lacy halter set.

Shouty caps in the comments draw my attention to another picture. A message from Violet to Buck reads: *GET READY TO HAVE YOUR ASS KICKED, YETI!*

I click on the image. It's one of Violet from behind. The right side of her bikini bottom has ridden up, so half her ass cheek is hanging out. Butterson's caption reads: *Hungry?* I can see why Violet might not appreciate the humor, considering it's her bum eating her bikini.

Some back and forth ensues, all in shouty caps. Violet slings creative insults. I return to the album and continue to scroll. Whoever took these pictures spent a lot of time focused on Violet. She's highly photogenic. There are a few of her with Butterson. I find one disturbing; he has her slung over his shoulder, and her ass is in the air with his huge paw of a hand wrapped around the back of her leg. What's most concerning is how high his hand is on her thigh. Maybe he used to have a thing for her. It would explain their conversation at the bar.

The next image is an action shot of Violet flailing followed by her landing in the water. Arranged in a slideshow, the progression of events appears like a flip book. The final shot is the best. Violet pulls herself up on the side of the dock, one knee on the edge, hair fanned out in a dark wave. Her cleavage is outstanding. I can imagine how hot the position would be if I was, say, doing her from behind against my kitchen island.

For someone so protective of his stepsister, Butterson doesn't have any qualms sharing revealing photos on a highly public profile. I can't mention it to him, or he'll know I've been creeping Violet.

Before I consider my actions, I save the best pics to my iPad. My rationale? I've seen her in less. Even as guilt gnaws at me, I scan to make sure I've got all the good ones. Darren comes out of the shower, so I tuck away my iPad. My invasion of privacy is shameful. Everything I've done in the past twenty-four hours is reprehensible on so many levels. I'm disappointed in myself. But I'll probably whack off to the pictures when I'm alone anyway.



ALEX WATERS IS PERSISTENT

VIOLET

My mother rises at the ass crack of dawn, even on the weekends. I've been asleep for less than two hours post stealth departure from Alex's room when pounding on my door shocks me awake.

"Rise and shine, Vi! It's time for shopping! We're hitting the outlet mall bright and early!" Her shrill excitement is an awful way to wake up.

The clock on the nightstand reads seven thirty. On a Sunday morning. What the hell is wrong with her? "Go away!" I shove my head under the pillow.

As my mind wakes up, last night—or this morning—returns in a flash of orgasms. I had a lot of them. Judging by the soreness below the waist, I won't soon forget them, either.

"You have twenty minutes to get ready. Sidney wants to hit Denny's before the breakfast rush, and we're flying out this afternoon. We need to get a move on!"

My stomach rumbles, sharing the enthusiasm for breakfast. I can't argue with Denny's. Besides, my mom isn't going to go away; she'll stand outside my door and annoy me until I open it.

"I need half an hour," I say through a yawn.

"If I don't hear the shower come on in five minutes, I'll get Sidney to bust down your door," she replies cheerfully.

Despite the threat, I don't get out of bed right away. Instead, I check my phone. I have a voice mail from an unknown number. My stomach flips as I key in the code and listen to the message. It's Alex. His sexy-as-fuck sleepy voice wakes up my beaten-down beaver. Shit. He has my glasses and wants to return them. That seems to defeat the purpose of a one-night stand. Although, being Buck's teammate also ensures I'll see him again, anyway. I listen to the message a few more times and save it. Now is not the time to

call him; I'm on too little sleep to make good decisions where Alex and his magic monster cock is concerned.

I get out of bed and wobble to the bathroom like a newborn foal. My entire body aches as if I climbed a mountain with a fifty pound weight strapped to my back and finished it off with an Iron Man. My beaver has its own pulse. Today is going to be rough.

After a marathon morning of shopping with my mom while Sidney hangs out with some of his coach homies, we catch our afternoon flight to Chicago. Shoved in the pocket in front of my seat, along with the pamphlet on plane evacuation procedures, is a gossip rag. I flip aimlessly through it, not really paying attention to the content until I come across a picture of Alex. Some skanky, hot girl is wrapped around him, practically humping his leg. I check out the date on the cover; it's from last week. Great. Now I'm the flavor of the week.

My mom grabs the magazine out of my hand. "Oh, he's cute. Didn't you meet him last night?"

"Who knows," I grumble. "They're all the same. Just a bunch of asshole players."

"That's not true. Buck's a sweetheart."

Sidney scoffs. "Buck's about as sweet as a bucket of vinegar."

By the time we land in Chicago, I'm exhausted. Sex and shopping wear a girl out. I'm all for going directly to bed, but Charlene's car is parked in the driveway behind my SUV. I grab my suitcase and head for the pool house while Sidney carries all of my mom's overnight bags to the house.

Charlene clearly used her spare key since I find her sitting on my couch, watching hockey highlights.

"Why haven't you messaged me? What the hell is going on? You need to explain this." Charlene holds up a full-color printout of two people playing tonsil hockey.

I grab it out of her hands. "Where did you get this?" It's not one picture; it's an entire stack.

"From the Internet, where else? I can't believe you made out with Alex Waters and didn't bother to text me or send an action selfie."

I flop on the couch. My glasses don't seem like such a big deal anymore, not compared to this. I've been in the paper before. I've even inadvertently appeared in magazine spreads. Until now I've always been in

the background—a vague blur of female form. Not this time. Me and my tongue are front and center in Alex’s mouth.

Booze is the only way to manage this. I go straight for the liquor cabinet. I have two bottles to choose from: vodka and Sour Puss Apple. Vodka tastes terrible straight, so I opt for the Sour Puss. I set up three shot glasses and pour the electric green liquor before downing two and passing one to Char.

“What in the world happened at the game?”

“The pictures are pretty self-explanatory. We were mouth fucking.”

“‘Mouth fucking’?”

I grin despite the mess of a situation. “Like that?”

“I think you should try to slip it into casual conversation tomorrow.”

Charlene tips her shot glass and makes a face as she swallows. “What else happened?”

“I had sex with him.”

“You’re kidding, right?” Her shock is reasonable; it’s totally un-me.

“Twice.”

“You’re not kidding.” She holds out her shot glass, so I pour her another and two more for myself. “Were you drunk?”

“Not so drunk I didn’t know better.”

“Holy shit.”

“Yeah.”

“So? Are the rumors true?”

“What rumors?” My stomach turns. I’m not so sure I want to hear Alex-inspired rumors.

“The ones about his junk.”

The hockey hooker discussion I overheard regarding the size of the teams’ man units comes to mind. Usually rumors are a bunch of crap. This time they’re true.

I keep my face impassive. “He has a finger penis.”

“Liar. You wouldn’t have had sex with him twice if he had a finger penis.” Her eyes light up. “It’s huge, isn’t it?”

I turn away and pour more shots to avoid her excitement. “Alex’s junk is not up for discussion. It’s not like I’m going to see it again anyway.”

“Look, Violet, if these kinds of pictures turned up of me with, say, Darren Westinghouse, I’d tell everyone how awesome he was in the sack, even if it was only a partial truth.” She points a finger. “Except you. I’d tell

you if it sucked, so don't you think for a second you can hold out on the details."

I sigh. "Fine. He has a monster cock."

"I'm sorry, what?" Charlene sputters.

"It's a monster."

Her nose scrunches in disgust. "You mean it's deformed?"

"No. I mean it's huge."

"How huge?"

"Unnaturally huge."

"Like a porno dick?"

"Exactly."

She holds out her shot glass. "I need another one of these."

We polish off the bottle of Sour Puss while surfing the Internet for pictures of Alex and me mouth fucking. There are a shitload of images, including thousands of Alex with various women. It appears the magazine spread I encountered on the plane and this weekend's adventures aren't isolated events.

Alex Waters is popular with the ladies. Based on media reports, he's been with a hell of a lot of them. I find a two-minute long YouTube montage of him making out with various women. He's stuck his tongue in a lot of mouths. I also discover Alex has been in several promotional ads beyond the milk one. I know with certainty he isn't storing a sock in his boxer briefs.

Sometime around midnight, my phone rings. Charlene grabs it and checks the number. "It says unknown. Is it him? I bet it's him!"

Before I can tell her not to, she answers the call. Char's eyes go wide, and she covers the receiver with her hand, mouthing *talk to him* with an excitement I'm not sure I share.

I hold out my hand, take a deep breath, and put the phone to my ear. "Hi?"

"Violet?"

His voice is its own orgasm. "That's me."

"Hey."

"Hey."

There's a long pause in which neither of us speak, and Charlene makes flailing hand gestures while mouthing things I can't understand.

Alex breaks the awkward silence. "How are you?"

“Uh, pretty good. How about you?”

“Better now. Sorry I’m calling so late. I didn’t wake you, did I?”

“Nope. Just hanging out.”

Charlene points to her crotch and makes jerking motions. I turn away so I don’t start laughing.

“Are you in your jammies?” His voice is so low it’s almost a rumble.

“Pardon?”

“Sorry, nothing. I didn’t mean to ask that. It just came out. I’m sorry.”

And here I thought I was the awkward one. Maybe Alex is drunk dialing me. I go with it, lowering my voice to what I hope is a sultry whisper. “Do you want to know what I’m wearing?”

“Yes. No. Is this a trick question? Only if you won’t hang up on me for saying yes, otherwise no.” He’s cute, even for a manwhore.

“I’m wearing a black lace thong and a matching lace bra.”

He sighs into the phone. “Really? I didn’t take you for a black lace kind of girl.”

“No. Not even close. It’s fun to pretend, isn’t it?” I’m thankful he can’t see my face right now. It’s hot, so it’s probably blotchy. “I’m in jeans and a T-shirt. I was thinking I’d lose the bra soon.” I shouldn’t be entertaining him after what I’ve seen on the Internet and that magazine spread.

Charlene smacks me with a pillow. I fight her off while trying to keep the phone to my ear.

“Is the shirt tight?”

I check out my rack. “Um, I guess. It’s a small. If I wasn’t wearing a bra I could probably see my nipples through it.”

There’s more heavy breathing on the other end of the line. I roll off the couch, run to my bedroom, and lock the door so Charlene can’t get in. “Alex?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you whacking off?”

“God, no.”

“Okay, that’s good. I think.” I can’t believe I’m having this conversation. As soon as I hang up, Charlene is going to lose it on me for being such an idiot. “Did you call to find out what I was wearing?”

“No. I called to apologize.”

What a kick in the nonexistent nuts. Apologies after sex are never good.

He clears his throat. “I’m sure you’ve seen the pictures by now . . .”

“Oh, yeah, those.”

“I hope Butterson doesn’t give you a hard time. There’s always someone at the bar snapping photos.”

“No worries. There are way worse pictures of Buck. Besides, there are plenty of other pictures of you out there, so I’m sure these ones will be buried soon enough.” I cringe at the way it sounds, and because it’s most likely true.

“I wanted to explain—”

“Anyway, I got your message and the text. My beaver’s fine, by the way, nothing a long bath won’t fix, and don’t worry, I have another pair of glasses, and contact lenses, so lots of backup.”

“I’d still like to drop them off when I’m in Chicago.”

“You really don’t need to go out of your way. You can mail them if you want. I can give you the address.”

He repeats it back to me. “I’d still prefer to bring them by, if it’s okay with you.”

The prospect of seeing Alex again makes my beaver all drooly. “Um, sure.”

“Great. Awesome. I’ll see you when I get back.” He sounds almost giddy.

“Okay. Well . . . talk to you later, then.”

“I sure hope so. Night, Violet.”

Charlene is waiting on the other side of the door. “So? What did he say?”

“He wants to drop my glasses off.” While part of me is excited, the other part is wary. According to media reports, Alex Waters is a player, and I don’t want to get played.



Despite the low alcohol content of Sour Puss, I’m mildly hungover the next morning. Char and I consume copious quantities of water as a means to flush the sugar out of our systems and follow it with a pot of coffee.

Too lazy to deal with my hair, I pull it up into a high ponytail, exposing marks on my neck. I have a hickey. No, wait. I have—let me count them—four hickeys. How I haven't noticed them until now is beyond me, but there they are: faint, pinkish-purple reminders of my failure of a one-night stand.

I find an infinity scarf, which Charlene arranges artfully around my neck—i.e. she loops it twice—and covers up my misdemeanors.

Carrying my travel mug and messenger bag, I open the door and nearly have a heart attack. A guy holding a huge bouquet of flowers stands on my front steps. It's colossal in the most preposterous way.

I can only see his eyes and the brim of his hat. "Delivery for Violet Hall."

"Oh. Wow. Thanks."

I'm surprised flower shops deliver this early in the morning. The flowers are heavier than I expect, and I almost drop them when he passes me the bouquet. After the flower guy leaves, I set them on the table and check out the card while Charlene hovers behind me.

I'm glad your beaver made a full recovery.

~Alex

"Beaver?" Charlene asks.

"He's referring to my girl parts."

"He's a bit of an odd duck, isn't he?"

"He's Canadian," I reply as if this explains everything.

Charlene plans my wedding on our drive to work. I remain mostly silent as I'm reeling from the phone call last night and the flowers. The trek to my cubicle is telling—I get a lot of looks from the guys in the office. The kind that tell me they no longer regard me as the nerdy girl in accounting. Now I'm the nerdy girl who makes out with hockey players. Someone made a collage of the Internet pictures and taped it to my computer screen.

I rip it off and survey the office for the culprit. Fortunately, Charlene and I have a pre-team-meeting meeting with two of the other junior accountants this morning, so I can evade most of my colleagues until lunch. I gather my things and avoid eye contact on the way to the conference room.

As I flip open the laptop, Dean arrives. Only Jimmy is missing now. Logging onto the system, an alert shows several new emails. Four stand apart from the rest; they're from Alex. I don't remember telling him where I worked. I supposed if he searched my name, it wouldn't be hard to find my email address on the company website.

"Oh my God," Charlene squeals. "First the phone call, then the flowers, now he's emailing you?"

"Who's emailing you?" Dean asks.

I pull the laptop toward me, hiding the screen. "No one."

"Alex Waters," Charlene says.

I shoot her a glare. "You're suspended as my best friend. I'm not talking to you for the rest of the day."

"I heard there are pictures of you two getting it on," Dean replies.

"We were just kissing."

Charlene cuts in. "Didn't you call it 'mouth fucking'?"

"Ooooh, 'mouth fucking.' That sounds dirty." Dean taps his fingers on his chin. "So we have his account now?"

"What? No!" I'm appalled Dean would think I could stoop to such low, unprofessional tactics to secure a client for the company.

"Why not? Waters is one of the top earners in the league. He cleared almost eight mil—"

I hold up my hand. Buck makes an obscene amount of money. I don't want to know what Alex is worth, even if it is as easy as looking it up on the Internet. "Stop! I didn't sleep with him to get his account!"

"You slept with him?" Dean's jaw drops, his shock is understandable.

"Shut up!" I stalk across the room and shut the door. "Why don't you announce it to the whole building since it's not humiliating enough to have pictures of us kissing taped to my computer?"

"For real?" Dean leans forward. "You slept with Waters? Is the rumor true?"

"I'm not answering that."

"So it's true."

"Enough. We have a presentation to prepare for. Unless we're changing the topic to the size of Alex's dick, we need to get going."

"It would be way more interesting than this." Dean gestures to the PowerPoint presentation on the screen.

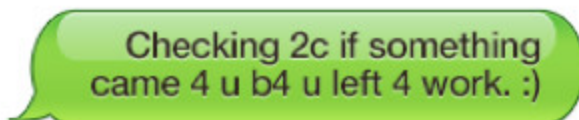
Of course, Jimmy, the last member of our team, arrives, and we have to go through the entire thing again, including the mouth fucking explanation, which Jimmy loves as much as Dean. It's going to be another long day.



I check my phone when I excuse myself to use the restroom. I have three voice mails and several texts. The first voice mail is from my mom. She found the flowers. Obviously she's been in my place without asking again. The next one is a telemarketer advertising a free trip and the last one is from Alex. It goes something like this:

“Hi. This is Alex. I wanted to call and see if anything came for you this morning. I have a game tonight, but . . . um . . . maybe I’ll talk to you later.”

I listen to it five times and save it as I did with the first one.
I move on to the text message.



Okay, so two messages checking to see if I got the flowers. Odd.
I move on to the emails.
The first one is blank.
The second one reads:

To: Violet

Violet?

The third one reads:

To: Violet

If this is you, the code word is
another word for—



The fourth one reads:

To: Violet

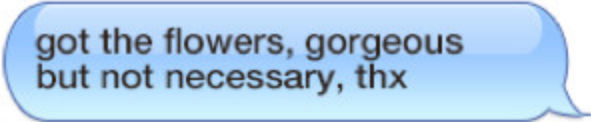
I'm sorry if I offended you with the previous email. I realize it's your work email and it was probably in bad taste. I'm also sorry for the message on the card. I was trying to be funny. I could've come up with something better.

Alex

PS. Please don't block me from your email contact list.

The email is completely ridiculous. As much as his persistence irritates me, I'm beginning to like the awkward tone and his inappropriate comments. Especially coming from a man who seems so self-assured on the ice—and in bed. I curb the warm fuzzies. He's still a player.

I hold off on responding until I'm home from work. I type and retype a message fifty times before I settle on this:



got the flowers, gorgeous
but not necessary, thx

I debate adding a smiley emoticon and decide against it. After I press send I have regret. It's not the friendliest text, but I'm torn. Beyond being great in bed and possessing the ability to read above a fifth-grade level, his media persona isn't one I like. Especially with the plethora of photos I've seen of him with various women.

I don't want to put out positive vibes because in reality, I kind of like him. If he hadn't called or texted or sent flowers or emailed, I would write him off as another asshole because it's exactly what I expected. Except he's done all these things that contradict my assumptions. How did a one-night stand get so complicated?

I should finish *Tom Jones* since my book club meets tomorrow. The Hawks are playing tonight, though, so reading isn't my first priority.

Bringing my book with me, I snuggle into the corner of the couch. I'd watch it with the 'rents on their seventy-inch HD flat screen, but my mom keeps asking Alex-related questions I'm not interested in answering. Sometimes she forgets she's my mother, and it gets weird.

By the end of the first period the Hawks are losing by one goal. No one scores in the second period and the players are getting chippy. Alex ends up with a two-minute penalty at the beginning of the third for interference. The camera zooms in on him. He's tight-jawed and livid as he sulks in the time-out box. His knee is bouncing a mile a minute as if he's barely managing to contain his frustration. I bet sex with him when he's this riled up is amazing. I can imagine him being intense, dominating, and possessing.

When Alex returns to the ice, he finally pulls it together and scores a goal, tying the game. Aggressive and focused, he's clearly determined not to let his team down because he lost his temper. The Hawks score another goal in the final minutes of the game and win by one. According to the sportscasters, it's an important game that gives the Hawks the advantage moving forward, so the team's excitement is understandable.

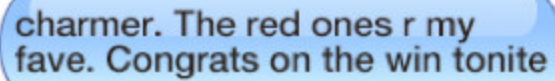
Alex is edgy during his interview with the sportscaster; maybe because the final score is too close. He rubs the side of his neck, his chagrin over his penalty obvious. I notice the dark pinkish-purple hickey, which matches several of mine. He angles away from the camera as if trying to hide it. I remember giving him one on his shoulder, but after what I've discovered in my research, I can't be certain this one's from me.

I climb into bed with the hickey on my mind. It's all I can focus on as I toss and turn, trying desperately to get my brain to shut off and let me sleep already. As the cusp of dreamland makes my eyes droop, my phone buzzes, signaling a text. I sigh and grab the device from my nightstand, highly aware I don't want it to be Charlene.

My stomach does a weird flip thing when it turns out to be from Alex, in response to my earlier text thanking him for the flowers.


not as gorgeous as you ;)

I wait exactly four minutes to respond, so as not to appear too eager.




charmer. The red ones r my fave. Congrats on the win tonite

It buzzes less than a minute later.



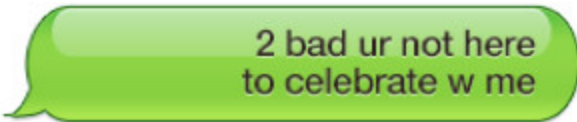
I played like shit

I smile. He's fishing for compliments.



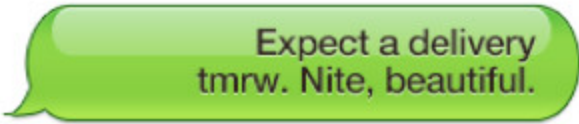
Hothead. u recovered tho

I'm graced with a winky emoticon and another message.



2 bad ur not here to celebrate w me

While my lower half gets all excited, I don't fail to recognize he could easily pick up any puck bunny and celebrate his brains out. I must not reply fast enough because another message arrives.



Expect a delivery
tmrw. Nite, beautiful.

I send one final text in response, my uncertainty as pervasive as my excitement. If he keeps this up, I'm going to start to like him more than I already do.

The week follows with daily deliveries from Alex. I receive a complete set of Tom Fielding's works with a note suggesting that he read them to me so I'm not bored to tears. I laugh and send him a text in return. He calls again during my book club meeting; I let it go to voice mail rather than answer. The butterflies in my stomach unnerve me.

The next day he sends a USB stick with a compilation of albums for a band I've never heard of called The Tragically Hip—they're Canadian, like Alex. It's accompanied by another note in his messy scrawl, citing all his favorite songs. Next is a box of truffles from Godiva and then a gift certificate from Victoria's Secret for an unknown amount. It's made out to my boobs, which Alex officially asks on a date.

He sends an email the same night, apologizing for the content of the card and asking the rest of me out on a date, as well. He's beginning to wear me down with the cuteness. It takes me a good hour to compose a response. I remain evasive by saying I'll check my schedule.

The next day I receive a giant tin of coffee from a Canadian diner called Tim Horton's. It's named after a famous hockey player. Sidney tells me it's like Starbucks, except cheaper, and if I won't drink it, he sure as hell will.

The gifts aren't the only thing I receive from Alex. Daily texts and emails follow, checking to make sure my packages have been delivered. They're always thoughtful, often explaining the nature of the gift he's sent. At the end of each email, he offers to take me out for dinner when he returns to Chicago. I don't give a definitive answer.

The day before Buck is scheduled to come home, I open a box to find a stuffed beaver wearing a Blackhawks jersey with the number eleven and WATERS embroidered on it. It was accidentally delivered to the main

house, so my mom stands beside me as I open my newest gift. She giggles like a teenager over how cute it is. She thinks he sent it because the beaver is Canada's national animal. I don't correct her.

I miss Alex's call that night because I'm watching the game highlights at Charlene's, and her basement apartment is like a cellular signal black hole. Solace comes with knowing Alex will be in Chicago tomorrow. My excitement is a problem.



I arrive home from work the following evening to find Buck on my couch, drinking my beer and eating my leftovers. I should've anticipated this; he does it almost every time he comes home from an away game. It's his way of scamming a meal while he waits for a truckload of food to be delivered to his house since he doesn't do his own shopping.

"Where's your car?"

"A friend dropped me off."

I drop my purse on the kitchen table and head straight for the fridge. If Buck is home, Alex is, too. His voice mail from the previous night is the last I heard from him. It's disappointing to have Buck taking up space in my living room yet hear nothing from my sometimes-stalker.

"Wow. You sure don't waste any time." By friend, I'm assuming Buck means one of his puck bunnies. Buck doesn't "date" in the traditional sense of the word. He does, however, have a rotation of women he sleeps with in Chicago. He calls them his "regulars." One of these days he's going to contract an STD and put his parts out of commission.

"What can I say? My ladies miss me when I'm away." Buck sets up the Xbox with a lecherous smile.

"You're disgusting."

"I have needs."

He regales me with the finer details of the last four games while we play NHL hockey. Buck plays himself, and I have my own awesome avatar which I created. His phone keeps dinging with endless messages while we play, so it's easier to kick his ass.

“You’re popular tonight,” I say after the eight-millionth text comes through.

“Some of the guys are picking me up in twenty.”

“Didn’t you spend the last two weeks on the road with them? How aren’t you all sick of each other?”

Buck shrugs. “I’m new to the team. We need to talk strategy for the next game since we’re facing our biggest competitor in the league.”

“Oh. Right.” I try not to perk up, curious who might be coming to get him and if Alex is among his buddies now.

Ten minutes later, he gets a call from some girl named *Honey*. All the puck bunnies who call him are named *Honey*. Probably easier than remembering their real names. He pauses the game while he sets up round two of puck bunny lovin’ for later in the evening, inviting *Honey* to the bar. He even goes so far as to suggest she bring some friends. This is where my beliefs about the habits of hockey players originate from. Once he hangs up, Buck makes another call, this time to a teammate. He kindly informs whoever it is that he has bunnies lined up and primed for action. He really is a dog.

Buck pockets his phone. “The guys’ll be here in two—you cool if we rematch later?”

“You would’ve lost anyway.” I turn off the Xbox and flip through the channels, looking for some crappy reality television show to watch. Might as well turn my brain into sawdust seeing as I don’t have any other plans, because I’m sure as hell not waiting for Alex to call.

“Don’t forget to bathe in bleach later,” I say, just to get a dig in.

“Not all the chicks I hang out with are dirty.”

I drop the remote and slow clap. “Congratulations. You said it with a straight face.”

He flips me the bird on his way out the door.

After five minutes of reality television, I want to poke my eyes out. I surf through the music channels and stumble on a station dedicated to The Tragically Hip. I’ll have to tell Alex about this station since he seems to love the band. When he texts me. If he texts me.

Annoyed I’m being such a girl, I decide it’s time to change into jammies and prep for my meetings tomorrow. I give the Waters beaver a rub under the chin as I pass him on the way to my dresser. Of all the gifts I’ve received from Alex, the beaver is the most bizarre. It’s found a special

home on my bed, between my pillows. I regret to admit I snuggled with it last night. The stupid thing is cuddly.

Once I've changed into boxers and a V-neck tee, I grab a stack of client portfolios and the box of Godiva and settle on the couch again. Two paragraphs into the report, I'm interrupted by a knock at the door. Buck probably forgot something, such as an industrial-sized bottle of hand sanitizer. He'll need it after he sleeps with whatever puck bunny he's called upon this evening. I shove my pen in my hair and push my ill-fitting spare glasses up my nose, ready to yell at him for making me get up.

I wrench open the door, scathing comment ready to fly. Except it's not Buck.

It's Alex. He looks like shit. Hot shit, but shit nonetheless.



I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'M DOING

VIOLET

Alex has a nasty gash over his right eye with one of those tiny fly bandages holding the skin together. He looks like he hasn't shaved since the last time I saw him. My mind immediately wanders to how his scruff would feel between my thighs. Combined with the slight slump of his shoulders, he looks cashed. I want to hug him and kiss his eyebrow better. I manage to control myself.

“Um, hi. What happened to your face?”

“Hey.” He touches the wound, looking uncomfortable. “It’s nothing. A little on-ice argument.”

“You didn’t get into a fight during the last game.”

A tiny grin appears. “So you watched it?”

Dammit. Now he’ll think I’m watching for him. I nod and shrug. “Yeah. I watch most of the games. That looks pretty bad.”

“It looks worse than it is.” His eyes dart below my neck.

I cross my arms over my chest. It’s cold, and I’m not wearing a bra. “Buck left a few minutes ago.”

“I saw Kirk pick him up. We’re supposed to discuss strategy tonight. I thought now would be a good time to return your glasses. I called last night after the game—did you get my message?”

I’m not sure what I’m supposed to say. *Yeah, you sexy stalker freak, I must be some sort of rock star in bed and it turns me on that you seem a wee bit obsessed* doesn’t seem appropriate. I go with the truth instead.

“I was out with a friend. I didn’t get the message until I got home, and it was late.”

His brows knit together. “A friend?”

“My bestie, Charlene. We watched the game at her place.”

“Oh. That’s good.” He ducks his head and peeks up. “Can I come in?”

It’s hard to believe he’s such a player with how sweet he’s being. “Yeah, unless you’re planning on binding and gagging me so you can take

me to your lair. If that's what you had in mind, I'd prefer you stay outside while I call the police and possibly a mental health facility." And there goes my mouth, spewing crap again.

"Uh . . ." Alex stares for a few long seconds.

His eyes drop to my chest again even though I'm covering the girls. "Not very reassuring, Alex."

"What?" He shakes his head, his eyes lift, then drop again. "Oh, oh right, no. I'm not planning on gagging you and taking you to my lair. I don't even have a lair."

"Good to know." I half smile and motion him inside. "Come in before I get frostbite on my nipples."

He looks momentarily ashamed. I can't fault him since I'm braless again. At this rate, he's going to think I never wear one. A gust of frosty air follows him inside, making me shiver. He might look as if he's been sleeping in his car for the past few days, but he smells fantastic.

Alex shrugs out of his jacket. His short-sleeved T-shirt pulls tight across his chest and hugs his perfectly chiseled arms. He's so built it's disgusting. I might whistle-breathe as I openly admire his body.

"You look hot." Alex's eyes go wide. "Shit, sorry. Please don't ask me to leave."

I laugh; we're two peas in a pod with our awkwardness. "Can I get you something to drink? I have beer, water, milk, and orange juice."

"A beer would be great."

I grab two bottles from the fridge, pop the caps, pass him one, and then motion for him to follow me to the living room. Alex sits in the middle of the couch, forcing me into close proximity. Couches aren't safe where he's concerned. It's where we went from talking to making out to semi-naked. I still want to straddle him and grind all up on his shit.

"You're listening to The Hip." His scruffy smile is adorable.

It takes me a few seconds to clue into the music reference. "Actually I found a dedicated station. Crazy, right?" I'm so nervous, like a high schooler with a crush. On a guy with a dick the size of Canada.

"I listen to it all the time. I've seen The Hip in concert thirty-seven times," Alex says proudly.

"Thirty-seven times? You must really love them."

He nods as if it's normal to see the same band so many times. His gaze sweeps over me. "No Spiderman pajamas tonight?"

“They’re in the wash.”

“Too bad. I liked them a lot.” He’s looking at my chest again. “I like this, too.”

“You liked getting me out of them.” I bite the inside of my cheek to stop from smiling.

I shouldn’t be flirting with him after all the media crap I’ve seen, but he’s sitting in my living room, smelling awesome, looking hot, and my beaver is excited.

His tongue peeks out to wet his bottom lip. The split has healed. “I liked that part, too.”

Silence stretches between us as memories of getting naked with Alex resurface. Being alone with him is unwise. My beaver is far too interested in a repeat of those events. In the past week, I’ve received more gifts from him than from all my previous boyfriends combined. Alex has money to throw around, so maybe it’s typical behavior. I’d be less conflicted if the tabloids didn’t paint him in such an unfavorable light.

“Is that why you came by?” I hope it’s not the only reason. I don’t think I’m cut out for casual sex.

“To get you out of your clothes? No.” He distracts me with his dimples. “Mostly I wanted an excuse to see you.”

“Oh. Well that’s . . . good.”

“I thought I was making it obvious.”

Alex does the thing guys do when they’re getting ready to make a move. His eyes drop to my mouth, and he leans in. Then he tucks a few errant strands of hair behind my ear. My hands seem to have a mind of their own. They move along his arms, feeling up his biceps.

I forget my inner turmoil and make it clear I’m okay with more contact by climbing into his lap. His calloused fingers curl around the nape of my neck, and our lips connect. I love his mouth.

His monster of an erection nestles between my legs, and dear Lord, does it ever feel awesome. It could bust a zipper it’s so huge. I imagine it with little fists, punching its way out, and giggle.

Alex bites my lip. “Are you laughing?”

“No.” I stifle a chuckle.

“No?” His lips travel up the side of my jaw, his soft beard tickling my skin. He grips my ass as he lifts his hips. He’s so hard. Everywhere.

“What’s so funny?”

I moan, all loud and desperate. I'm so horny; it's not funny at all. I wrap around him koala style, pressing closer. Sneaking a hand between us I palm him through his pants, excited by the low, primal sound Alex makes. I drag the fly down, ready to slide a finger—or my whole hand—into the opening.

While I'm busy working my way into his boxers, Alex's palm moves under my shirt. I'm so glad I ditched my bra.

I freeze at a sudden knock. Only Buck sounds as if he's sledgehammering through the door. With reluctance, I break the kiss. "Go away. I'm watching TV naked!"

Alex opens his mouth to speak, his hand still on my boob. I shush him with a palm over his mouth.

"Bullshit!" Buck yells. "That's weird even for you, Vi. Open the door. I forgot my wallet in your bathroom."

"You need to hide!" I jump out of Alex's lap and pull on his arm, but he doesn't budge.

He frowns. "My car's in the driveway."

"Buck's not observant enough to notice."

To prove me wrong, from the other side of the door, Buck asks, "Whose car is parked behind your shitbox, anyway?"

Alex arches his split brow. Goddamn him and his sexy face.

"Shitballs! What are we going to do?" I whisper in panic.

"Don't worry. I can handle it." Alex stands, rearranges his trouser monster, zips his fly, and runs a hand through his hair. He's totally calm.

"I need to cover these." I motion to my rock hard nipples.

"Probably a good idea." He caresses one through my shirt with his knuckle.

"Hey!" I bat his hand away, nab my hoodie from the arm of the couch and yank it on. Rushing to the door, I adjust my glasses and take a deep breath. I'm so screwed. Buck is going to find out I slept with Alex, and they'll have a throw down in my living room. Furniture will be ruined. At least most of it is owned by my parents, not me.

I open the door wide; no point hiding the six-foot-two, two-hundred-and-twenty-pound hockey player standing behind me. I prop a hand on my hip and sneer. "Leave your cock ring behind?"

"Ha-ha. I don't need that shit. My wallet's in your bathroom. Did Charlene get a new car?" Buck looks past me, his expression changing from

amusement to confusion. “What are you doing here?”

“Hey, man. I didn’t get Kirk’s message until a few seconds ago. I thought I was supposed to pick you up.” Alex’s smile is easy. “I figured while I was here, I could ask Sidney about the kid he’s been scouting. Kill two birds.”

For a second, I worry Buck won’t buy it. Thankfully, he isn’t the brightest bulb in the box. “You mean the Evans kid? The one breaking all the records?”

Alex nods. “He’s golden. He’ll be drafted this year for sure.”

“For real. I think my dad’s going to see him play tomorrow night.”

“I’ll get your wallet,” I mutter since I’m not part of their conversation and head for the bathroom. My heart’s thundering with adrenaline after almost being caught by Buck. It’s also occurred to me that Alex is part of the group for which Buck called his bunnies.

The wallet sits on top of the toilet tank. To avoid direct contact, I use a tissue to handle it. I don’t want to touch anything residing in the proximity of Buck’s ass.

When I return to the living room the topic has changed significantly. Alex’s back is to me, and Buck is laughing. “This girl is pretty much up for anything, so I’m hoping her friends are, too.”

Neither of them has noticed me. I hold my breath, waiting for Alex’s response.

His laugh is hard, his tone cocky. “Gotta love the wild ones, eh? Especially when they come back for more.”

I want to vomit. We’ve been making out, and he’s discussing Buck’s “regulars.” I’m probably a stop on the way to the next bunny.

I hold up Buck’s wallet. “Forget anything else? Your biohazard suit?”

Alex spins around. I’m sure my expression tells him how much I’ve overheard. I can’t even look at him.

Buck smiles widely, expecting the insult. I wait for his not-so-witty retort, but he must have been waiting for a chance to use this one because he doesn’t even hesitate.

“You’re just jealous, Vi. You’re as dry as the desert. You might as well check yourself into a convent for all the action you get.”

It isn’t a half-bad comeback. Unfortunately, he’s doled it out in front of Alex, who may be looking to add me to his own list of “regulars.”

“Fuck you, slut-bag yeti!” I throw his wallet at his head and miss. It bonks Alex in the shoulder instead. He snatches it from the air. “I hope you get crabs and you scratch your dick off! Now get out, both of you. I have things to do, and your whoriness is stinking up my living room.” I spin on my heel and stalk off to my bedroom.

“It was a joke, Vi!” Buck calls after me.

I slam my door and lock it. Cranking the volume on my stereo, I blast the music, but it’s The Tragically Hip, so it’s not angry or aggressive enough. I choose an album with lots of heavy guitar riffs and loud drums. Stomping across my room, I punch the Waters beaver, which launches it into the wall. Then I throw myself onto my bed and scream into my pillow like a pissy preteen. I feel better, regardless of how juvenile I am.

Two minutes later an insistent knocking begins. I scream, “*Fuck off!*” but it’s Buck and he’s too dense to leave me alone.

I throw open the door. “Why are you here? Don’t you have a hooker to fuck?”

He kicks at the door jamb, shoulders slumped. “I don’t pay for sex.”

I don’t care if I’ve hurt his feelings. I’m so pissed at myself, and Buck, and Alex for my current predicament. I’m angry and more confused than I was before Alex showed up at my door. He was so sweet up until now and contrary to the media portrayal of him. Maybe that’s his thing. Maybe he gets off on messing with women.

“Would you like me to throw confetti for you?” Buck holds the door open. I lean against it and get nowhere. I hate Buck and his huge hairy arms and bulging muscles.

“I think Waters likes you.”

A useless blossom of hope forms in my chest. I tromp on it with tabloid images of other girls wrapped around Alex and his uncensored comment to Buck.

“I’m not interested in your disgusting friends.” Not anymore, anyway. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to be left alone. I have work to do.” I push on the door. This time he lets go and shouts when it hits him in the face.

As soon as Buck leaves, Alex calls me repeatedly. He must have me on redial. Annoyed, I turn off the phone and toss it on my bed. I’m not interested in anything Alex has to say.



Over the next several days, I avoid all contact with Alex. I make plans in the evenings and delete voice mails without listening and texts and emails without reading. I don't empty my email trash, though. My lack of action is a problem because it means I can read them if I want to.

The Hawks are playing a home game tonight. I've tried everything in my power to get out of going. Okay, I'm lying. I said I didn't want to go. Buck and my mom pull the puppy dog and giant Sasquatch guilt trip, so I cave. It didn't take long.

I put real effort into getting ready—something I don't normally do. I don my rattiest sweats and my most stained hoodie. My mom refuses to let me get in the car.

“I told you I feel like crap. If I have to go, I want to be comfortable.”

“I don't care if you have Ebola. You're not going to the game in this.” She gestures to my outfit.

“Harsh. There's nothing wrong with what I'm wearing.”

“Not if you're homeless.” She grabs my arm and marches me into the pool house. Then she holds me at flat-iron point until I put on makeup and change into something nice. My mom is well aware of all the gifts I've received from Alex. She's perceptive enough to surmise this has to do with him.

I consider asking Sidney to stop at the pharmacy on the way to the game so I can buy Ipecac syrup as an emergency backup. With the way my stomach is rolling, I doubt I'll need it.

Our seats are close to the ice again, only a couple of rows away from the Hawks' bench. I can't decide if I'm excited or not. Thankfully, beer helps calm the nerves. Puck bunnies cluck like chickens behind us, but they're difficult to hear with my mom yapping away beside me. She insists Alex is a lovely young man and informs me I shouldn't believe the tabloids because they're full of crap. I snort into my beer and remind her everything they say about Buck is true. This shuts her up.

The butterflies in my stomach grow exponentially when the Hawks take the ice. I slouch in my seat as Alex sits on the bench, his face set in a

scowl. It's a challenge to pay attention to the game while trying not to stare at him. He's shaved since I saw him last, and he doesn't look so beat up. My beaver drools in my underwear.

Some drama has taken place while I've been staring; everyone in the arena is on their feet, people either cheering or yelling. The whistle blows, and Alex jumps the boards. Moving with fierce grace, he snatches the puck from his opponent, pivots, and barrels across the ice.

A powdery cloud follows Alex as he comes to an abrupt stop. He raises his stick and brings it through with swift surety. Everything slows as the puck hurtles toward the goalie. Breath frozen in my lungs, I grip the armrests, waiting. Like every other die-hard fan, I shoot out of my seat, screaming enthusiastically as the puck races past the goalie into the net. Alex scores an awful lot of goals.

The game is full of action. At one point the opposition scores, briefly tying it up. The Hawks take the lead again at the end of the second period with another incredible goal. This time, Alex manages to stay out of the time-out box and the Hawks take the win.

I'm an absolute mess of nerves as we make our way out of the arena to the car. It takes forever to get to the bar, thanks to celebrating Hawks fans. By the time we arrive, my bladder is on the verge of exploding. I hightail it to the bathroom and get stuck in the unfortunate line of women who need to use the facilities as well.

Three underdressed puck bunnies primp in front of the mirrors, chatting away while I unleash Niagara Falls. How do I know they're puck bunnies? They're talking about the Hawks and who they'd do. One of them mentions Alex. I tense, halting the pee stream.

I hear the term *hat trick* again. Maybe they determine who they want to score based on the team members' stats. The hand dryer cuts off the puck bunny conversation. As soon as I'm done, I button my pants and I burst out of the stall so I can eavesdrop again.

"Well, I'd rather be first in line than third. Who wouldn't want to be first?" the fake blonde asks. There's a skunk stripe of brown at her roots. She fluffs it out and pouts at her reflection.

The brunette beside her shimmies her head from side to side. "Whatever. First, second, third—if I got to handle Alex Waters' stick, I wouldn't care where I was in line." Her eyes slide my way and stay fixed on my face.

“Oh my God! I recognize you. Aren’t you the one who was, like, making out with Alex Waters, like, three weeks ago?” she screeches.

I never expected anyone to recognize me from those pictures. I assumed the focus was on my tongue in his mouth. Horrified by what I’ve overheard, I go with denial. “I must be that girl’s doppelganger ’cause you’re not the first person to ask.” I lower my voice. “I read somewhere she said he was a shitty kisser.”

If I’m going to lie, I might as well make it a good one.

Her eyes widen. “Really?”

“And he’s got a small—” I point to my crotch.

“No!” Her jaw drops, her expression one of dismay.

“That’s the rumor.”

I wipe my hand on my pants in lieu of waiting for the hand dryer and leave the bunnies to their gossiping. What I’ve done is shamefully childish and vindictive, but I’m okay with it.

On my way to the bar I run into one of Alex’s teammates. I don’t remember him even if he remembers me.

“Hey, aren’t you Butterson’s sister?”

“Stepsister, but yeah.” I scan the crowd, searching for Sidney or Buck. They should be easy to spot, both being well over six feet.

“I’m Kirk. I play defense for the Hawks. You’re named after a flower or something, right?” The way he looks at me is discomfiting.

“It’s Violet.”

“Right. You gonna come hang with us?”

“I need to make a quick call first.” I hold up my phone as an excuse to get away from this guy. He’s got to be a good ten years older than me, and he’s smarmy.

“I’ll save you a seat. Maybe we can get to know each other better.”

“Uh, maybe.” I roll my eyes as he saunters away. I can’t believe women fall for such crap, but then again, look at what happened with Alex. After overhearing the bathroom gossip, all I want is to go home.

I wait until Kirk the Jerk disappears into the crowd before I put my phone away and resume my search for Buck. A bouncer puts a hand up to stop me, controlling the flow of traffic into the section the Hawks occupy.

“She’s with me.” Alex’s palm comes to rest on the small of my back as we move forward. His voice is low, burning like DEET over my skin. “I want to talk to you.”

All my witty retorts stick in my throat. There's no escape; he's right behind me, allowing no space.

In full bullshit-gentleman style, he leads me to the table, pulls out a chair, and takes the seat to my right.

My new buddy Kirk is on the opposite side of the table, his arm hanging casually across an open seat. "Hey, stepsister. I saved you a chair."

Alex shoots him a look. "She's good where she is."

A leer distorts Kirk's smile. I can see a space where a tooth should be. "Does Butterson know you're—" A waitress with excessive cleavage stops to take his order, distracting him.

Alex seems relieved. I say nothing. Buck's at the other end of the table, too busy chatting up a puck bunny to notice my arrival. The way these women throw themselves at these guys is embarrassing. What's worse is knowing I, too, have fallen prey to the charms of a hockey player more than once.

Alex orders me a drink from the boobalicious waitress. I let him because I'll need the booze if I have to sit next to him. He tries to engage me in conversation, but it's loud and I'm too distracted for small talk.

Eventually I can't contain myself any longer. I want him to refute what I heard in the women's restroom. "So what's with all the talk about you being magical?"

His damn grin appears. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Some girls in the bathroom were making reference to a *hat trick*."

Alex blanches. The guy beside him, who's been relatively quiet up until now, chokes on his beer, and Kirk laughs. Alex swallows thickly, eyes on the table. A couple of the guys closest to us appear amused. The quiet one beside him shakes his head.

"It didn't sound like they were talking hockey scores. So I'm curious, what does that mean, exactly?"

He doesn't respond right away, giving Kirk the opportunity to cut in. "It's when Waters fucks three different bunnies in one night."

The words are slow to filter. I turn to Alex to ascertain whether this can possibly be true. His silence is a foghorn blast of confirmation.

I plaster on a smile. "Oh. Aren't you special?"

I don't need Ipecac syrup to save me from the horror show this evening has become. My stomach rolls at this information. I've had sex

with a super-whore. I push away from the table. I think I might actually be sick.



**I AM THE STUPIDEST
MAN ALIVE
(AND I HATE KIRK)**

ALEX

Violet, who's pale to begin with—unless we're having sex, then she's a crazy, sexy shade of red—is so white she looks like a ghost. She wobbles and grips the back of the chair.

Following her lead, I stand, and grasp her elbow. “Why don't you let me help you?”

“Don't touch me!” She smacks my hand away. “I don't want your help.”

Butterson puts his conversation with the bottle-blonde on hold. He takes in the scene, assessing it the same way he would a play. His eyes home in on my hand hovering near her arm. “Vi? Are you okay?”

I don't care if he's suspicious. This is the first time I've seen Violet since I stopped by her house last week. Butterson fucked it up for me then like Kirk is doing now. I need to talk to her without an audience. There's never been a Waters Hat Trick. It's a farce—an unsubstantiated, overblown rumor—much like the majority of what the media says about me. None of what she's seen and heard is accurate. Not really. If I don't clear things up, it's going to blow my chances with her—if it hasn't already.

Violet clears her throat and speaks carefully. “I don't feel well. I may have contracted an airborne venereal disease being this close to Waters.”

Some of the guys at the table laugh. Butterson's going to kick my ass if he finds out what happened. That's cool. I'll take the beating. I did sleep with his stepsister. If I can set the record straight with Violet, it'll be totally worth it.

“If you'll excuse me—” Violet shoves her way past me.

Taking opportunity where I can get it, I follow, hoping to explain. Violet is much smaller, and fast, so she slips between people in a way I can't without bowling them over.

Butterson grabs my arm. “What the hell did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything. Kirk was running his mouth, and all of a sudden Violet said she didn’t feel good.”

“I don’t know what’s going on or why you’re so damn interested in my sister, but you need to leave her the fuck alone.” Butterson goes after her.

Violet’s halfway across the bar, heading for the door. If I’d pulled her aside earlier we could have avoided this whole thing.

Darren hands me my jacket. “I’ll catch a ride with you.”

I’m sure he’s figured it out what happened with Violet, even without me telling him.

We head for the exit. “Do you think he knows?”

“What are you mumbling about?”

It’s too loud in the bar; Darren can’t hear me doing the whisper-out-of-the-side-of-my-mouth thing. Outside the bar, Butterson is on the sidewalk with his phone to his ear. “Don’t puke in the cab. Call me when you get home.”

“Is everything okay?” Darren saves me from asking incriminating questions.

“Fuck no. Everything’s not okay. What was Kirk saying to her, anyway?”

“Spouting his usual crap. Nothing out of the ordinary,” Darren replies.

“She puked on the sidewalk.” He motions to a puddle close to the bushes. “I had to pay the cab triple to take her home.”

“One of us would’ve given her a lift.” I’m annoyed he sent her in a cab, alone.

Butterson’s lip twitches. “I don’t trust you for shit. Don’t think I didn’t see you talking to her again tonight. You show up at her place last week and now this. Something is going on. Vi and I are tight, she talks to me. Don’t think I won’t find out what.”

Hopefully they’re not that tight. “Don’t be such an asshole, Butterson. She’s not well, and you sent her home in a cab when you had other options. She’s puking. It’s not like either one of us is going to hit on her.”

To avoid exacerbating the issue, I walk to my car on the other side of the lot. Darren climbs in the passenger seat and buckles up.

“That was a shitshow.” I start the car.

“I’ll say.”

“Do you think I was too obvious?”

“Do you need to ask? She’s been out with us twice and you’re all over her. Yeah, man, it’s pretty damn obvious. What the hell are you thinking?”

“I don’t know. I’m so screwed.”

“You did it to yourself when you got in her pants.” I turn right instead of left, in the opposite direction of my house. “Where are we going?”

“I want to make sure Violet gets home okay.”

“What are you, her stalker?”

“I’m only going to drive by, not peek in her windows. Look, she won’t talk to me. I’ve never done this.”

“Done what? Stalk a girl you’ve had sex with?”

“I’m not stalking her,” I say under my breath. Any parallels to stalking exist only because I want to explain and she’s not giving me the chance. “I need your help. She won’t listen if I tell her the stories she’s heard are bullshit.”

“How very astute of you.”

I’ve never admitted to having sex with three different girls in one night. My agent taught me omission works to my advantage. Leave out the details, and people will infer whatever they want. What happened and what people *think* happened are two very separate things.

The night in question took place a number of years ago. I threw a party after I moved into my house. It was wild, as hockey parties can be. I already had a rep for being a player, most of it unfounded. This event dropped me firmly into playboy status. At the time I welcomed it; not so much anymore.

I could’ve easily debunked the myth, but early on in my career I faced a few challenges. My agent, Dick, thought it wouldn’t hurt to let people believe what they wanted. The playboy reputation, however unwarranted, stuck, and those kind of things are hard to erase.

I park across the street from Violet’s house, careful to avoid street lamps. The only vehicle in the driveway is an old SUV. Exterior lights illuminate the path from the main house to the gated yard. The pool house is further back, beyond a cover of trees and bushes.

“Don’t even think about getting out of the car, Waters.” Darren presses the button on the center console, locking the doors. “The last person she wants to see right now is you.”

I give him a dirty look for being right. “She might—”

“Punch you in the face?”

I throw the car into gear, revving the engine as I pull away from the curb. I hate not getting what I want when I want it.

All I want is to talk to Violet. I also maybe want to see her boobs again and have sex with her. Considering how things are going these days, that's unlikely to happen.

Darren lives in a gated neighborhood close to my house, so I drop him off.

“Don't do another drive-by tonight.” He shuts the door, gives me the hairy eyeball, and walks up his driveway.

I ignore his suggestion. The main house is dark and the sports car is still missing, so I pull up close and cut the lights. A dim glow comes from inside the pool house. I pick up my phone, scan an email from Dick about a minor endorsement campaign—nothing as promising as Sports Pro—and scroll through my contacts to her number.

She doesn't answer. I debate hanging up until her voice mail clicks over.

“Hi. Hey. It's Alex. You must not think very highly of me right now. If you give me a chance to explain I promise . . . I'm sorry, Violet. If you could call me when you're not puking anymore, that'd be great.” It's a lame message. I've already pressed end, so it's sent.



Violet doesn't return my call. It's not a surprise. She can ignore emails, texts, and voice mails, but there is one location I can catch her where she'll have to hear me out: her work. She won't be able to yell at me or slam a door in my face there without drawing a lot of attention. We're leaving for a series of away games on Wednesday, and I want to see her before I go so I can fix things.

Monday morning I get up early so I can catch her first thing. The girl at the information desk is incredibly helpful. Taking the elevator to the sixth floor, I follow the directions to Violet's cubicle. It's nice and public. It's also empty.

“Can I help you?”

I turn to find a scrawny guy wearing a loud yellow paisley tie standing behind me.

“I’m looking for Violet.”

He blinks a few times, gaping. “Alex Waters.”

“That would be me.”

His hand shoots out, so I take it. “Jimmy Fredricks. You’re my idol.”

“Thanks, Jimmy. Now about Violet?”

He shakes his head. “Of course, Mr. Waters. She’s down the hall in the conference room.”

“Is she in a meeting?”

“Yes. No. She will be. It doesn’t start for another fifteen minutes. I’ll take you there, immediately. Is she expecting you?”

“It’s more of a surprise.”

“Oh. Right. Of course. Follow me.”

Jimmy leads me down the hall to the conference room. Before he can announce my arrival, I slip past him, winking as I soundlessly close the door. Violet is facing the table, so she hasn’t noticed me yet, which is precisely the point to my silent entrance. I take a moment to appreciate her attire. She’s wearing dark gray dress pants and a creamy top. The material has a slight sheen to it. Her auburn hair is loose and resting in waves on her shoulders. Her shoes are red with little heels. It’s sexy, yet professional.

I flip the lock, trapping Violet in the room with me. I take a moment to come to terms with my stalkerish behavior, rationalizing it with my need to defend my shit reputation.

My dick gets excited about being alone in a private room with her. There’s only a sliver of opaque window to the right of the door, leaving most of the room obscured from view. Violet doesn’t want to make out with me, although my dick seems unaware. I’m also allowing myself to indulge in the conference table sex fantasy a little. Or a lot.

First, I have to get her to talk to me again—and possibly go out on a date prior to such events. Violet turns as I adjust myself. She lets out a gasping shriek.

Her hand flutters delicately to her throat. “What are you doing here?”

“I wanted to explain—”

She stalks over and shoves her finger into my chest. “Explain what exactly?” She uses one of those angry whispers despite the door being closed.

“The Hat Trick. The story isn’t true.” She’s still digging her nail into my chest. The contact is nice even if it’s aggressive. Although there’s a chance it may be a precursor to some real violence.

“I saw the interview you did. It’s on YouTube.”

“Which one?”

She glowers. “Which one do you think?”

I try not to react. I know the interview she’s talking about. It’s atrocious. In fact, it shot a number of endorsement opportunities—unless I wanted the genital herpes campaigns. The trashy gossip spotlight did nothing good for my career. “I never admit to having sex with three women in one night.” I didn’t contest the assumption, which is as good as confirming it in most people’s eyes.

“Like hell you didn’t.” Violet stomps to the laptop.

It takes her three seconds to pull up the interview and another twenty to find the Hat Trick part. She must have watched it more than once. I can’t decide if this is a good or a bad thing. It means she’s been thinking about me, but probably not in the way I’ve been thinking about her.

This interview went live a few weeks after the incident took place. I’d grown accustomed to omitting details, especially where my sex life was concerned. At first, the way the media misconstrued everything was funny. After a while, I became resigned to the annoyance. Now I wish I’d handled things differently.

“Right here.” She jabs at the screen.

“You should listen again.” I know exactly what I said, since it’s bitten me in the ass so many times.

Violet sneers. It’s sexy-scary. “All righty, then.”

Interviewer: “There’s been a lot of talk regarding your sexual exploits recently. I’m wondering if you’d like to elaborate on the Waters Hat Trick for us.”

I can feel Violet’s angry glare.

Me: “I’m not really a kiss-and-tell kind of guy.”

Interviewer: “Rumor has it some of the women you’ve been with aren’t so tight lipped. I’ve heard the hat trick actually has nothing to do with your skills on the ice, would that be accurate?”

Violet stares at the wall and fidgets with the collar of her shirt. I want to do the same. The interview was horrifically invasive. I was appalled by the questions and that Dick had approved them.

Me: "That's quite the rumor."

Interviewer: "Would you like to substantiate it? I'm sure your female fans out there would like to know."

Me: "Like I said. I don't kiss and tell."

Violet hits pause. "Right there." Despite her triumph, I can see it's all bravado.

"That's not an admission of anything."

"It's certainly not a denial." She crosses her arms over her chest. No one really challenges me unless I'm on the ice. It makes me want to follow through on the conference table fantasy, but the interview is ruining my chances of that ever happening.

"It's an old interview."

"What does that have to do with anything? You made no attempt to correct them if they were wrong, which is hard to believe."

"The media likes to twist things around."

"Do they? You're the one who showed up at my hotel room in the middle of the night so we could 'hang out.' You're the one with the *sleeve* of damn condoms at the ready. Judging from all the shit floating around out there on the Internet, I don't think the media is far off the mark." She flails, pointing at the screen, then me, and then the screen again.

"I'm trying to explain—"

"Why bother? I don't get it. I'm just another woman you've stuck your monster cock in. I'm not your girlfriend. You don't need to account for where else you've put it."

Her eyes are shiny, the way my sister's get when she's on the verge of tears. Oh shit. What if I make her cry?

"I want a chance to defend myself before you lump me in with all the other assholes out there."

"You've done a pretty good job all on your own."

The door rattles, followed by a soft knock. "Violet?" It's a deep male voice. I don't like it.

Violet's relief isn't what I want to see. She tries to sidestep me, but I'm bigger, faster. A decade of figure skating helps. Violet trips over my foot, giving me the perfect excuse to touch her.

It happens in one of those slow motion sequences. As she falls, I wrap my arm around her waist and spin her body toward me, righting her. She ends up pressed against me, her face mashed into my chest. She's so warm,

and small, and soft in all the right places. She smells fantastic—like fabric softener and fresh shampoo. She lets out the tiniest whimper, gripping my shoulders rather than pushing away. Of course, the guy on the other side of the door ruins the moment by knocking again rather vigorously.

“I-I need to let Dean in,” she says softly, her eyes fixed on my chin.

“I want to ask one thing first.” I hold her tightly, battling an inconvenient hard-on.

“I need to . . .” Her fingernails dig in harder, and I feel the slight shift of her hips. That last part may be wishful thinking.

“Have coffee with me. Or tea or beer, whatever you want to drink. We can even go for chocolate milk. I just want to talk.”

She peers up at me, her chest brushing against my ribs. I remember with unparalleled clarity what her nipples feel like in my mouth. I’m getting harder by the second. If she feels it, I’m screwed. Letting her go isn’t an option until she agrees to go out with me. It’s a conundrum.

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why do you want to have a drink with me?”

“Because I like you. Because you’re fun. Because I want to get to know you better. Because I want you to see for yourself I’m not the kind of guy you think I am.”

Her silence lasts a long time. “One drink.”

“Yeah?”

She nods.

“Are you free this afternoon?” I don’t want to give her a chance to change her mind.

“I should be done at five today.”

“I could take you for dinner—”

“No meals. Only one drink.” Her grip on my shirt loosens, and her fingers slide down my arms. “There’s a coffee shop across the street. I’ll meet you there.”

Dean knocks again. I unlock the door, open it two inches, and hold up a finger while giving him my fuck-off-or-I’ll-beat-you-with-my-hockey-stick look. Then I close it again and turn to Violet.

“You’re not going to ditch me, are you?”

“I don’t see the point. You’ll probably break into my house and I’ll find you hiding in my closet or under my bed if I do,” she says dryly,

eyebrow raised as if challenging me to disagree.

“I don’t think I’d go that far.” Even I have my boundaries in this stalking business.

“You’ve locked me in a conference room with you. Who knows your limits?”

Before Dean has a coronary, I flip the lock and open the door again. He glances between me and Violet.

“Alex Waters?”

“I’m sorry if I’ve delayed your meeting.”

“Can I get you, anything? Coffee? Water? Fresh-squeezed orange juice.”

I swear I hear *a hand job* come from behind me. Maybe my mind is playing tricks on me.

“I’m good. I already got what I came for.” I turn to Violet, pushing a stray lock of hair behind her ear. Even her ears are pretty. “I’ll see you at five.”

“Okay.” She blushes and touches her hair, her smile suddenly shy.

Score one for Waters.



**I'M STILL NOT
SURE WHAT I'M
DOING**

VIOLET

Dean gawks as Alex walks down the hall. “That was Alex Waters.”

“Yup.”

Alex’s hands are shoved in his pockets and his head is bowed. His shoulders are so broad he nearly takes up the entire hallway. He’s a hard man to say no to. Coffee in a public venue seems safe.

Dean waits until Alex turns the corner. “He was here to see you?”

“Yeah.”

“He’s even hotter in person than he was in those pictures of you two making out.”

“What?”

“Uh, uh . . . I, uh . . . sorry. I didn’t mean . . . you look hot, too.” Dean busies himself with rearranging folders on the conference table.

“Why is everyone so hot for Alex Waters?” I grumble. I’m annoyed at how easily I’ve fallen into this trap.

I attribute it to how good he looks when he’s clean shaven and nervous. I want, in a very desperate way, to believe he’s not a fuckwit-asshole-super-whore. I’m still glad I kept my appointment with the gyno last week. Bagged or not, I wanted to make sure I hadn’t contracted any diseases from chomping on rotten wood. From what I’ve read and seen, I’ve slept with a man who’s been with the equivalent of a brothel or two of women. I’m grateful all the results were negative.

“Please tell me you’re going to bang him.”

I choke on a cough. “We’re going for coffee.”

“That’s almost a date. You can totally have sex with him afterward.” Dean nods vigorously, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

Charlene and Jimmy show up and save me from Dean’s inanity.

“Charlene told off Alex Waters!” Jimmy says, gesturing wildly to the empty hall.

I gape in disbelief. “Charlene did what?”

“I didn’t tell him off. I gently suggested he watch his ass or he’ll have me to deal with.”

“You didn’t.” I palm my face, mortified.

“He seemed very agreeable. All he did was nod a lot and apologize. I also asked if he could introduce me to Darren when you two are done making up. He offered to send tickets to the next home game, provided I bring you.” Charlene is all smiles.

I can’t believe Charlene sold me out for tickets to a game. She’s seen the Waters Hat Trick interview, I told her about the sexin’, his monster cock, the puking, the relentless emails, texts and phone calls, as well as the assload of gifts I’ve received courtesy of Alex Waters.

“You can’t be serious.”

“Oh, I’m totally serious. I’m not passing up a chance to see Darren Westinghouse play.”

“Charlene, what if I don’t want to go to a game? What if I never want to talk to Alex ever again?”

Charlene turns my laptop toward her and checks out the interview again. I’ve probably made her watch it half a dozen times, dissecting the content or lack thereof. She seems far less offended by his non-responses. In all fairness, she hasn’t slept with him.

She props her chin on her fist, eyeing me speculatively. “He told me you agreed to coffee, so you must want to see him.”

“Who says I’ll see him again after this?”

“I understand the media stuff bothers you, but he seems to be honestly interested in you. I mean, it’s been weeks and he’s actively pursuing you even though you keep blowing him off.” A smug smile is plastered across her face. “Oh, and nowhere in this interview does he say he’s done that Hat Trick thing. All he does is give evasive answers.”

“He doesn’t refute the claim.”

“He was probably coached.”

“As if that’s any better.”

Even my best friend is on Waters’ side. I blame it on his damn smile.



Today makes every other long day seem short by comparison. Meetings drag. Lunch takes forever. I'm distracted all afternoon working on one of the new accounts. I keep daydreaming about Alex's unit, comparing it to household items.

At five, I freshen up in the staff bathroom. I swish with my emergency mouthwash and give my teeth a quick brush. It's bad practice to go into a meeting with coffee breath, or garlic breath, or any kind of offensive breath. I'm applying the same logic to coffee dates. Although I'll negate the fresh breath as soon as I order a coffee. Regardless, I have no intention of kissing Alex. I think.

I reach the lobby at quarter past five. Alex is sitting on the arm of a chair, staring at the elevator. He stands, smoothing his hands down the front of his pants. I follow the movement and, of course, my eyes go right where they're not supposed to—his groin. I can't see anything exciting going on there. He's changed since this morning and now wears a pair of dark wash denim jeans and a button-down shirt. The material conforms to his hot body, showing off every deliciously cut inch of chest and biceps and shoulders. Why does he have to look so good? I'm so pucked.

"I thought we were meeting at the coffee shop."

"I thought we could walk over together."

"And you didn't want me to stand you up?"

His smile is lopsided, one dimple popping out. "Something like that."

"I could still run."

"You could try. I'm pretty fast if I'm chasing after something I want."

The butterflies flitting around in my stomach reach tornado level flutters. Images of him moving across the ice, power and speed propelling him forward, come to mind. Alex chasing after me with the same kind of singular, intense focus is a huge turn on.

He extends his hand. "It's only a drink and some conversation, Violet. That's all I'm asking."

The way he says it reminds me of the night in his hotel room when he told me he just wanted to hang out and then I had sex with him. I slam

down the gauntlet on those thoughts. I have to remind myself of the bad reputation he has yet to refute properly. I don't want to be one of his hockey hookers.

It's dark out. Fat snowflakes drift lazily from the sky as we cross the street to the little café. I used to come here when I was an undergrad. Right now is prime time for those kids between afternoon and evening courses. It's still my favorite place to go for coffee and snacks.

A fire crackles in the wood-burning fireplace. The table in front of it is empty, with a reserved sign. It's the comfiest spot in the café and romantic with the fire and the low lighting. I'm almost glad it's unavailable.

"Why don't you have a seat and I can order something for you?" Alex sweeps his hand toward the table by the fireplace.

"It's reserved."

He leans in and whispers, "I reserved it."

Of course he did.

I follow him to the counter to check out my options. I already know what I want.

Alex wraps his fingers around my wrist when I go for my wallet. "I'll get it."

"I can buy my own drink." I sound harsher than I mean to. He's being so attentive and considerate. It makes me nervous, but I like it.

"I invited you; please let me get this."

The way he's looking at me breaks my damn heart. "Okay. Fine."

A hint of a smile pulls at the corner of his mouth. His palm settles low on my back, and he strokes my spine. It's distracting. "What would you like, Violet?"

"A green tea latte, non-fat, lactose free, with extra whipped cream, please."

"Lactose free with whipped cream, eh?" Alex asks.

"It balances the dairy out."

"Sure. Anything else?"

I assess the extensive selection of desserts. Including food could open the gates for dinner and make this an official date. I'm unprepared to deal with an entire meal.

"I'm okay." I stare longingly at the caramel crunch cake.

"Are you sure? These cakes look too good to pass up. I'll feel bad ordering one if you don't have anything in front of you."

Cake isn't the same as real food, so I give in. Alex orders, and the girl behind the counter is saccharine, practically fucking him with her congeniality. Two can play at that game. Moving in closer, my boob presses against his arm. "Thank you," I whisper in his ear.

His eyebrows rise in surprise, followed by his easy smile. "It's entirely my pleasure. I'm glad you're here."

Alex insists I have a seat while we wait for our drinks and desserts. He even helps me out of my coat and hangs it on the rack near the fire. I sink into the plush chair and sigh, running my hands over the velvet covered armrests. I stare at his ass while he waits patiently at the counter for our order. I also pop a couple of lactose pills.

I'm not the only person in the café looking at him. His presence is as big as he is. The guys seem just as interested in him as the women. A lot of people appear to recognize him. Maybe a college hangout isn't the best place to have coffee with a famous hockey player.

He brings the cakes to the table. His dessert is some kind of peanut butter chocolate concoction. Mine consists of pecan meringue nestled between layers of whipped cream, topped with caramel drizzle.

Waiting until Alex returns with our drinks would be the polite thing to do, but I'm starving and it looks delicious. I skim the slice with the edge of my fork and gather a thin layer of whipped cream and bits of meringue. It's the perfect combination of creamy and crunchy, dissolving as soon as it touches my tongue. I sigh in sensory ecstasy.

"Is it good?"

Alex startles me as he sets my green tea latte on the table. He's close enough that I can see a tiny nick on his chin from his razor and the flecks of green and gold in his otherwise hazel eyes.

He moves his chair closer to mine, so we're side by side instead of across from each other, and settles into the soft velvet.

"It's heaven."

"Can I have a taste of heaven?"

I don't think he means for it to sound suggestive. He bites his lip as I dig my fork into the cake and pass it to him. Instead of taking it from me, he clutches my hand and raises the fork to his mouth. His lips part and close over the tines. Good Lord, I want to fuck his mouth with my tongue again.

He savors the bite, his expression pensive as he swallows. "Want to trade?"

“No thanks.”

“Are you sure? Maybe you want to go halves? Why don’t you try mine?” He jams his fork into the cake, ready to spear me a bite.

“I’m not parting with my cake.”

“Suit yourself.” He separates a hunk of cake from the thick piece. It’s dense, dripping with chocolate syrup. His eyes drift close, and he makes a low sound in his throat. It’s almost a growl. “If yours is heaven, then this is a mouth-gasm.”

“Mouth-gasm?”

He leans in and lowers his voice to a whisper. “It’s an orgasm in my mouth.”

In the middle of a sip of my latte, I raise my hand in time to prevent it from spraying him and the table. I get my palm and sleeve instead. He grabs a napkin and dabs at the mess.

His cheeks flush, and he shakes his head. “Sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“It’s fine. I’m fine. It was unexpected.” I remember vividly what it was like to have an orgasm in his mouth. It was pretty amazing.

He stirs his chocolate-whatever. It’s covered with whipped cream and drizzled with more chocolate syrup. I see a trend here. “I’m really glad you agreed to see me.” One second he’s being all flirty and the next he’s being sincere and vulnerable. I don’t know which side of him to trust, if any at all.

“You wanted the chance to explain.”

My stomach twists, so I leave the cake alone and focus on my drink. He clears his throat, staring into his hot chocolate. The table vibrates from the restless tapping of his foot against the floor. He’s such an enigma. I want these glimpses of sweetness and his awkward fumbling to be authentic, not a facade he wears to get women into bed with him. He takes a deep breath and looks up.

“The way the media portrays me is inaccurate.”

“Uh-huh.” Of course he’s going to say this.

“Uh, excuse me.”

The interruption breaks the tension. Two guys stop in front of our table.

“Are you Alex Waters?”

“Hey.” Frustration lies under Alex’s smile.

“I told you, man!” He smacks his buddy on the arm, his excitement gaining momentum and volume. “I told him it was you! This is so cool. You’re like the best player in the league, hands down!”

“Thanks, man. Listen—”

“Can I get your autograph, man? No one’s gonna believe this!”

“Yeah, sure.” Alex shoots me an apologetic look.

He’s genuinely trying to be nice to this guy whose social skills have lapsed in the face of idolization. The guy pulls out a piece of crumpled lined paper, rambling on about how he plays defense in Junior As and how he wants to go pro. He’s a skinny little guy and clearly a college freshman. Alex lets him go on for a few minutes, snapping selfies and asking questions. He gives them the “Keep working hard and you can reach your goals” speech. I understand why he’s the captain of his team. Once they’re done fawning, Alex gives me a pained smile.

“I’m sorry.” He dips his pinkie into the whipped cream and slips his finger between his full, soft lips . . . and I’m wet. I want to skip the make out session and go straight to naked. I’ll suck the whipped cream off any damn thing he dips in there. Including the monster cock.

“It’s okay.” I clear my throat and shift around, trying to get comfortable. I need to get a handle on my hormones. We’re supposed to be having a discussion, and my mind is in the gutter.

“What were we talking about again?” He takes a small sip of his drink. Whipped cream forms a mustache he quickly licks away.

“You’re not the person the media portrays you to be. Yet, you sure seem to play the part.” I give him my resting bitch face: squinty eyes paired with pursed lips. It makes Buck run for cover, and Sidney usually finds somewhere else to be if it comes out. Alex sinks in his chair.

“When I started playing for the NHL, the rumors were somewhat justified. The media likes to blow things out of proportion. I won’t deny there was some accuracy. I was eighteen and a rookie. There were lots of girls . . .”

I guess I can understand this. If you’re a single, hot professional hockey player, women are going to throw themselves at you. I’m a case in point, although his appeal was only physical before the Fielding comment.

“Anyway, the Hat Trick rumor is a load of crap. I threw a party when I bought my house, and my cousin came because she wanted to be introduced to one of my teammates. If I’d known then what I know now, I never

would've entertained the idea, incidentally. Another girl was interested in me, but she . . ." He shudders. "Let's just say she wasn't my type. Anyway, the third girl they accused me of sleeping with was my sister. She was underage, and she crashed the party. I was trying to get her under control. Some jerk took grainy pictures and posted them, and the myth of the Waters Hat Trick was born."

"You never deny it in the interview." It's all hearsay, anyway. He can tell me whatever he wants; I can't disprove it either way.

"No. I didn't." He drops his head with a sigh. "It was a bad move on my part. All it's done is made me look like a total jerk." He's whisper quiet. "You have no idea what it's like, Violet."

"You're right, I don't. I can't fathom why you would want to come across as a womanizer."

"Did you know Buck took figure skating lessons?"

The abrupt change in topic throws me. I learned of this after Buck became my stepbrother. I found the idea of Buck in spandex hilarious and disconcerting. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"It's standard, really. Most of the guys who play professional take figure skating to develop their skills on the ice."

"It's usually a year or two, right?"

He lowers his voice to make sure no one eavesdrops. "Usually. I was in figure skating for ten years."

I almost choke on my latte. "Pardon?"

"I started when I was seven. My mother wanted me to be a figure skater. I picked up hockey when I was nine. I didn't want to disappoint her, so I did both for a long time. I think she believed one day I'd change my mind and pick it over hockey. Until I was drafted into the minors, she was positive I'd make the Olympics."

I feel bad for Alex. Why would his mother force him to do something he didn't love for so long?

"I got razed a lot for it, especially in high school. Teenagers aren't always tolerant. The stereotypes were absurd."

"And yet you choose to perpetuate a totally different one. I'm not seeing how that's better."

"I know." His eyes are on the napkin he's folding into some origami magic. I can tell this has caused him a lot of unnecessary frustration. While

it pulls at my heartstrings, I don't understand his motivation for the playboy angle.

"Within a matter of months I was drafted to the majors, and the press took notice of me. My years in figure skating came up. There were questions as to whether I could handle the demands. The tabloids got a hold of some footage and pictures of me in skating competitions. I had to work to prove myself on and off the ice. It wasn't easy." Alex looks up from the tiny bird he's crafted out of his napkin. His eyes are soft, pleading for me to understand.

I try to imagine what it would've been like, but I'm not a hockey player or a figure skater, so I can't relate.

"I started playing for the Flames . . . which led to more bad jokes." He rolls his eyes. "So I did the one thing guaranteed to dispel any misconceptions, and it worked. I spent a lot of time at bars during the after parties surrounded by women. The media ate it up, and my agent even encouraged it. It got me a lot of coverage. At the time it was beneficial, even if it made me look like a player."

He's not lying; I've seen the pictures.

"The reputation followed me even after I was traded to Chicago. For a long time, I didn't care. The rumors were easier to manage than some of the other crap. Until now, I haven't had a reason to *want* to challenge the reputation." Alex runs his fingers through his shaggy, unkempt hair. "It's not an excuse, but can you understand where I'm coming from?"

I can. Judging from his torn expression and the way he can't stop fidgeting, there's more to this story, I'm sure. He's made himself vulnerable by pouring his heart out in the middle of a crowded café. What's more, I believe him. Teenage boys can be cruel, and men can be ruthless with each other. I've seen Buck in action with his friends. I can imagine the ribbing Alex would've taken as a rookie. It might have been all in fun where his teammates were concerned, but at eighteen it would be hard to take, especially with the media throwing it at him, too.

"It makes sense." I poke at my cake with my fork, wary. "It doesn't explain what you said to Buck about regulars."

"Regulars'?"

"Yeah. When you were at my place and Buck forgot his wallet."

Alex's eyes go wide, and the color drains from his face. "Oh God. This explains what happened at the bar after the game last week." He expels a

long breath. “I wasn’t sure what Buck knew, if anything at all, and we hadn’t had the chance to really talk. So we’re clear . . .” He leans in closer until his knee is touching mine. “There are no regulars. There never have been. I don’t care if Butterson knows what happened between us. I’ll gladly take a shit kicking from him if you’ll go out on a date with me.”

“Oh.”

He touches my cheek with warm fingers. This immediately disconnects my brain from my body. All I want to do is lean forward and feel his lips on mine.

“Is ‘oh’ code for yes?”

“Um . . .” He seems genuine. It was easier to shrug off his advances when I believed he was a player. If he turns out to be a liar, I’ll be devastated.

“If you’re going to say no, I could ask your boobs. You’ve already said I can take them on a date, and I did get them a Victoria’s Secret gift certificate. They’d probably be happy to go out with me.” His smile is impish.

It’s hard not to return it. His sense of humor is as whacked out and as inappropriate as mine.

“They probably would.” My nipples tighten at their mention. Stupid boobs.

“Please say yes,” Alex whispers.

“My boobs are willing; the rest of me will come along. I’m not one hundred percent sold on you like they seem to be.”

I can’t believe I’m acting like my boobs have a say in the matter.

“That’s fair.” Alex’s eyes dip down. “I’m glad your boobs are sold on me. I’m a fan.”

I roll my eyes. “I guess the feeling’s mutual.”

“Are you busy tomorrow night?”

“Tomorrow?”

“I leave Wednesday for almost two weeks. I’d like to see you before I go if you’re available. We could have dinner? I understand if it’s too short notice.”

“I can check my calendar.” I have no plans for tomorrow night. Even if I did, I’d cancel them. Alex sips his hot chocolate while I pretend to check my schedule. “It looks like I’m free.”

“Great.” He reclines in his chair, smiling widely.

This isn't what I was expecting at all. I assumed Alex would feed me a load of crap, and I'd be justified in my disdain for hockey players. Instead I'm mentally reviewing my underwear options and worrying whether I have anything date appropriate. A trip to Victoria's Secret is essential. My boobs want to look their best. So does the rest of me.



WHY IS DATING SO DAMN DIFFICULT?

VIOLET

By the time we leave the café, it's almost eight. Alex insists on walking me to my car. I'm not opposed. While downtown bustles with business types during the day, it's a prime club crawl location at night. The University of Illinois is only a few blocks away, making the poorly lit parking lot a perfect meeting spot for delinquent kids. Sometimes I find half-smoked roaches and empty Colt 45s on Monday mornings.

Alex keeps his hand on my waist as we walk to my car. The contact makes me aware of how much I'd like him to touch other parts. I have to remind myself it's not going to happen tonight. Tomorrow is a different story altogether.

My 4Runner is parked in one of the few well-lit areas in the middle of the lot.

"Is this thing safe?" Alex asks as I shove the key in the lock. It takes a few jiggles before it turns. The automatic locks stopped working six months ago.

"It passed the safety inspection last year."

He pokes at a rusty spot on the side panel. "I can't imagine how."

"Stop! You'll make it worse!" I put my hand over the rusty spot. "I have it serviced regularly."

"By who?"

"Sidney has a guy. It's driveable." This is only mostly true. There's a clunking sound my mechanic can't seem to identify and some issues with the rear axle. I'm not allowed to take it on bumpy roads or the freeway.

Alex frowns as he continues to inspect my vehicle. "You're sure he's reliable?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

My 4Runner has been on its last leg for a good year. I bought it with my own money, and I'm sentimental, so I won't get rid of it. I refuse

Sidney's repeated offer to buy me a new car. It's too extravagant an expense.

"At least it's big," Alex mutters.

"Bigger isn't always better." The tank on this beast is bottomless.

"Oh?"

It takes a few seconds to clue in to the double meaning. Maybe he thinks I'm insulting his manhood. I consider his manhood—and how much I hate the word *manhood*. In Alex's case, bigger is awesome. The only drawback is how hard it is to walk the day after said manhood has plundered my womanhood. I need to cut it with the historical romance references.

"In some cases bigger, isn't better. Like with this." I pat my SUV. "It's a real gas guzzler. I try to limit my driving to work and the grocery store so I don't ruin the environment. I'd invest in a hybrid if they weren't so ugly and expensive."

Alex is wearing a sexy-as-hell amused smile while he listens to me ramble. One hand is braced on the vehicle, and he's leaning in. If he moves an inch or two closer, it might feel like he's planning to kiss me. I want him to kiss me. My brain has stopped working, and I continue with the nonsensical babble.

"For you"—I point in the general direction of his groin—"bigger is sort of better. I mean, huge is nice, too. You've got huge covered well. I like it." I bite my lip to stop the words.

"So what you're saying is bigger is only *sort of* better in my case?"

"What? No, no. It's fantastic, hard on the . . ." I gesture to my crotch. Dammit. I'm making it sound bad. I don't want to offend him. "I'm sure I could get used to it after a while . . . with some practice."

"I'm good at practice."

He moves closer. He smells like chocolate and sandalwood or whatever he washes his hot, firm body with. He's wearing one of those beanie things, like a ski cap, with a band logo on it. The Tragically Hip, maybe. His hair has grown in the past month; it curls around the edges. I want to press my lips against his and finger those errant strands. Him. Me. I want.

"Can I kiss you?" His palm is on my cheek, his fingers sliding into my hair. "I'd like to kiss you. If that's okay."

And he reads minds, too. "It's okay."

He's an inch from my lips. "I've been dying to taste you since . . ."

I wait for him to finish his sentence or follow through and kiss me already. Hold up, did he say *taste*? Hell, I'll let him devour me.

He traces my bottom lip with his thumb. His fingers are cold. I shiver and inhale an asthmatic breath. Our eyes lock. I can't look away.

I do that weird thing people do when someone they want to get it on with puts one of their digits—except for toes—near their mouth. I allow my tongue to peek out and taste his skin. It's yummy, probably residue from the sugary chocolate beverage he stuck it in earlier. I have the urge to bite his thumb. So I do.

He mumbles a quiet curse. Then his thumb is gone, and his mouth is on mine. Our bodies are flush; he presses me heavily into the frame of my shit heap. If I wasn't wearing a thick wool coat, I might be able to feel whether or not he's hard.

He angles my head to the side and sucks on my bottom lip. The kiss grows deeper and more frantic. Well, I'm frantic. I grab for his hair, but his hat's in the way and my fingers are frozen—courtesy of the mid-March cold. It's annoying and inconvenient.

Meanwhile, Alex has turned into a jacket-MacGyver. He manages to get two buttons undone. Now I can feel him and he can feel me up. I molest his mouth with my tongue and shamelessly dry hump him for all I'm worth.

It's fabulous until someone shouts, "Woo-hoo! Give it to her good!"

The mouth fucking ceases instantly. Alex spins to face the would-be voyeur. Taking a protective stance, he blocks me from view. I hide behind his jacket for extra cover. Public dry humping is not something I want to be recognized for.

I peek around his shoulder. Two guys, maybe a year or two younger than I am, stand not more than ten feet away.

"What did you say?" His voice is eerily calm.

One of them loses the cocky edge. He elbows the other in the ribs. I assume this may have something to do with them being skinny and dorky and Alex being broad and angry. Nervous guy's buddy doesn't get the hint. Instead he holds up his hand like he's waiting for a high five.

"Spread the love, man." He must be drunk. It's the only explanation for his level of stupidity.

"Uh, Gene, we better go." Skinny guy eyes Alex nervously.

“Wait.” Gene holds up a finger in his much smarter friend’s face. “It can’t be. No way!” He squints and pushes his black rimmed glasses up his nose. “Oh, dude, it totally is. Alex Waters!”

Word to the wise—NHLers shouldn’t hang out near colleges.

“Don’t you have somewhere else to be?” Alex’s irritation is evident.

“S-sorry.” The guy who isn’t an idiot hauls Gene away.

Once they’re gone, Alex shoves his hands in his pockets and turns to me. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to get carried away. It’s just . . . it been a while since I’ve seen you, and you taste really good, and it makes me want . . . yeah, anyway . . . sorry.”

“Oh, uh . . . it’s okay.” I wave my hand around like it’s no big deal. I enjoyed the dry hump as much as he did. Maybe more.

“So we’re still on for tomorrow night?”

The question confuses me at first. It’s not like it’s his fault a couple of drunk kids walked by while we were making out. Against the side of my SUV.

Alex rushes on. “Please don’t back out on me. I promise I’ll be a perfect gentleman.”

It never crossed my mind, not even for a half second, to flake out on the date. “I won’t as long as you drop the perfect gentleman crap. That’s a deal breaker. My boobs won’t tolerate it.”

“I love your boobs, they’re so fun.” His smile is panty wetting. “I’ll pick them up at seven?”

We’re so weird. I like it. “Seven is great.”

“Perfect.”

“Perfect.” I return the smile. I’ll be counting down the hours until we can resume our make out session.

“I should let you go home.”

Alex holds my door open as I climb in. If I’d been thinking, I would’ve started it while we made out. However, such actions may well have led to an invitation into the backseat where he could have demonstrated how much better bigger is. Those drunk kids would’ve gotten the free show of a lifetime.

I turn the engine over. Alex waits patiently in the freezing cold for me to roll the window down manually.

“Thanks for the latte and the cake.”

“Anytime.”

I motion him closer and kiss his cheek, right where his dimple lives. It pops out at the invitation, and if it wasn't so dark, I'd swear he was blushing. He's as sweet as the dessert I polished off in the café. "See you tomorrow."

"Looking forward to it."

The 4Runner makes an awful grating noise as I shift into gear. I should get it checked out.

Later on, Alex sends me a cute text to make sure my SUV hasn't exploded and left me stranded on the side of the road. After forty-five minutes of texting, I say goodnight and shut off my phone, otherwise I'll be tempted to message him all night. If I'm going out with him tomorrow, I have work to do. By work, I mean some beaverscaping.

It's been a month since I visited my waxer. I'm currently living up to the furry nickname below the belt. I must return it to its mostly naked status in case Alex should want to pet it, or kiss it, or bury his wood in it.

I root around in my bathroom cabinet for my waxing kit. Typically, I only mess around with my legs, but this constitutes an emergency. The date is too last minute to schedule a waxing appointment.

I heat the wax in the microwave. Since I'm used to putting it on my legs rather than my cooter, I don't account for how damn hot it is. I have to wait twenty minutes for it to cool, so I can work on ripping out the beaver pelt without burning myself.

Mimicking the actions of my waxer, I lie on the bathmat, apply the wax, and give a firm, quick tug. It hurts like a son of a bitch.

Usually my waxer leaves a wee triangle I trim every week, except it's all wonky now, so I'm forced to rip that out, too. On the final strip, I mess up and redo the same spot, resulting in a mottled purple patch. It looks like I've been punched in the beave. Verdict: Beaverscaping is dangerous.



Coffee is my best friend in the morning. I slept like crap, too anxious and irritated by my excitement over the impending date. I enlist Charlene to come with me to Victoria's Secret at lunch. I'm not *planning* to have sex

with Alex again. I simply want to be prepared with a new bra and panties set should all my clothes blow off in a freak wind storm.

Charlene heads for the garter belts and corsets. I refuse to purchase anything requiring snappy doohickeys or laces. I need easy. Depending on how much there is on the gift card, I might splurge and buy a new pair of jammies, something more adult than Spiderman.

I waste twenty minutes of shopping time debating the merits of extra padding with Charlene. It's false advertising. Alex is already familiar with my boobs, so why pretend they've grown since he saw them last? I settle on a red bra with minimal padding and matching frilly undies.

On my way to the cash register, I pick out a cute little sleep set. Charlene doesn't approve. I argue that not everything I buy has to be sexy.

The cashier rings up my purchases. It's more than a hundred bucks, which seems excessive for a few scraps of lace. I pass her the gift card, hoping it will cover most of it.

"You have \$879.43 remaining on your card." She holds it out and waits for me to take it.

"Pardon?"

She repeats herself and shows me the receipt with the balance.

Charlene grabs it. "Alex gave you a thousand dollar gift card to Victoria's Secret?"

"Um, uh . . ."

"He's got it bad for you."

"Correction." I snatch the receipt and the bag from the cashier, whose smile hasn't wavered. She looks like she's made of plastic. "He's got it bad for my boobs. He asked them out on the date, not me."

"You're so strange, Violet."

I shrug. She's right.



The rest of the day passes in a distracted haze. At five I bolt from the office. I need to choose an outfit to complement my new purchases.

My mom's car is in the driveway when I arrive home. I'm hoping to avoid her. I haven't told her I'm going out with Alex yet, and I'm not interested in her advice. She's been asking me about him lately in reference to the gifts and the flowers. It's driving me crazy. The Victoria's Secret bag fits under my coat, so I smuggle it inside and hightail it to the bathroom to get ready.

I hear my mom mid-dress adjustment. I check my phone; it's five to seven. It's taken way longer to get ready than I expected. Liquid eyeliner is not easy to apply.

I launch myself out of the bathroom, hoping to get rid of her prior to Alex's arrival. If I hadn't been such a hornball when he asked me out, I would have suggested I meet him at the restaurant rather than let him pick me up at home. I'm wearing heels, compromising my already questionable coordination. As I round the corner, I skid on the hardwood and lose my footing and land on my ass in the middle of the living room. It wouldn't be so bad if Alex wasn't standing in my kitchen to witness the humiliating display.

I jump up and brush off the fall as he rushes to help.

"Are you okay?" He runs his hands down my arms, checking for injuries.

Other than my ass and my ego, I'm fine.

"It's a good thing Violet's so bootylicious! The extra padding comes in handy!"

I close my eyes and take a deep breath, willing my hands to stay at my sides and not wrap around her throat. It's a wonder I don't have more deep-seated psychological issues. "Thanks, Mom." I grab my purse and Alex's arm. "We should go."

I'm confident I can make it across this particular surface without falling again. Holding onto Alex's well-defined forearm definitely helps.

"Don't you want to see what Alex brought you? He's such a doll!" My mom makes flailing hand gestures between Alex and the flowers.

The bouquet is even more extravagant than the ones he sent previously. I'm torn. I don't want him to think I don't like or appreciate them. I also need to get the hell away from my mother. If given the opportunity for further mortification, she'll pull out my Mathletes trophies from high school. I pick up the bouquet and give it a quick sniff.

“These are beautiful. Thank you.” Alex beams like a spotlight at the compliment.

“Can you put these in some water, please?” I ask my mom.

“Don’t you want to invite Alex in for a drink? Sidney’s making me a Manhattan. It’s cocktail hour!”

His warm reply negates my snide response. “Thank you for the invitation, but we have dinner reservations. Maybe another time.”

“Oh! Of course! You kids have fun. I’m sure Sidney will be more than happy to have me all to himself tonight!”

“Okay, well, we don’t want to be late!” I tug on Alex’s sleeve, praying my mother doesn’t say anything else to further my humiliation. This is exactly why I need to move into an apartment far away from her.

Alex helps me into my coat and my mother waves us off.

“Sorry about her,” I say as we walk down the path to the driveway. It’s icy, so I hold his arm. “Parent introductions aren’t supposed to happen until the fifty-seventh date or something.”

“No worries. I think she likes me.”

“She’s embarrassing.”

“Aren’t all parents?”

He opens the passenger door and helps me in. I feel like an idiot. Here I am, a grown woman, still living in my parent’s pool house. Yet another reason I should’ve suggested meeting him at the restaurant. He puts the car in gear and we’re on our way downtown.

“Are you okay? That fall looked like it hurt.” His palm comes to rest on the back of my neck.

“My giant booty broke my fall.”

“I happen to like your booty . . . almost as much as I like your other assets.”

“Speaking of which, the Victoria’s Secret gift certificate is excessive.”

“You used it?”

“Maybe, b—”

“What’d you get?” His eyes move to my chest. It’s covered by my jacket. “Did you spend it all?”

“You want to know if I bought something for my boobs?”

“Maybe. Did you?” He taps his fingers on the steering wheel.

“Maybe.”

Alex hums and nods, his attention on the road once again.

It doesn't take long to reach our destination, which is a good thing because discussing lingerie purchases makes me nervous about what could happen later. Alex turns into the parking lot of a swanky restaurant and pulls into a spot near the door. "If you did happen to buy something for your boobs, I don't expect to see it tonight."

"You don't want to see it?"

He caresses my nape with his thumb. "I didn't say that. I don't have any expectations beyond dinner. I realize the gift card may make it come across like I do."

This is why I like him. Well, one of the reasons. I lean in. Alex mirrors the movement until our lips are less than an inch apart.

"What are you waiting for?"

He bridges the gap. I'm not interested in chaste kisses. I have to sit across from him during dinner. We could be in the restaurant for hours. It doesn't look like the kind of place where we can sneak into the bathroom for a quickie. Not that I'm considering it as an option. Since sex isn't an expectation, I suddenly want it to be. I grab the front of his jacket and strain to get closer. Maybe this is how reverse psychology is supposed to work.

With a low groan, he releases me. "As much as I'd like this to continue, we're going to be late for our reservation if we keep it up much longer."

He goes in for one last kiss. I'm into this wooing business. If dinner goes well, we can always pick up where we left off.

Alex is very much a gentleman. He opens doors and helps me out of my coat once we're inside the restaurant. "You look gorgeous. I love this dress."

It's red and clingy with a low neckline. Charlene made me buy it last summer. I never had a reason to wear it until now.

Alex takes off his jacket. He looks sophisticated and sexy in his black button-down dress shirt and charcoal gray pants. His tie matches my dress. Almost like we planned it.

The hostess takes us to a private table in a small room, away from the other guests. Alex passes me the wine list once we're seated.

"There aren't any prices," I whisper after the waiter fills our water glasses.

"Just pick what you like." His smile makes the fountain of beave turn on. I better not soak through my damn panties.

I go with red. I don't like it as much as I like white, so I'll drink slower. Wine tends to hit me hard and fast, and I don't want to make a fool out of myself in a nice restaurant. Bars and hockey games are a totally different story.

There are no prices on my dinner menu, either. I have a feeling it's purposeful. I order the bacon wrapped filet mignon, medium-rare. There's nothing better than a nice cut of beef hugged by a pork product. I opt for a garden salad instead of Caesar to avoid garlic breath. Alex orders seafood-something-or-other, and then we're alone.

Taking my hand in his, he lifts it to his lips. It's funny how he can be so smooth sometimes and other times he blunders around like me. "I'm glad you're here."

"Me, too."

"I didn't think I'd ever get you to go on a date with me."

"Me, either."

Alex laughs.

When the waiter brings my salad and his soup, Alex moves his chair closer so he's next to me, like at the café.

"I wish I didn't have to leave again tomorrow."

"You'll be gone for a couple of weeks?"

"We have a six-game series. Usually the long stretches aren't so close together. The games are spread out, so we're on the road longer than I like."

"Usually you only play a few away games at a time, right?" I've never really paid much attention to Buck's schedule. He shows up on my couch a few times a month to play Xbox and eat my food. Over the last little while, I've become far more familiar with who he's playing against and when.

"Most of the time. There's a couple of long stretches every season, and we've got some difficult games coming up against solid teams."

"Sidney's been on the phone with Buck lately, discussing strategy."

"You two seem to get along pretty well." There's something in the way he says it—almost as if he's jealous, which seems silly.

"You mean Buck? I guess. He's got a pretty busy life. Mostly he stops by if he needs a meal. He has his hockey hookers to fill his time."

"'Hockey hookers'?" Alex smiles questioningly, but his eyes look troubled.

"You know, puck bunnies."

His dimples stay in place, but the tic under his left eye gives away his disquiet.

Thankfully, our meals arrive and I dig in, happy to abandon the topic. My filet cuts like butter and tastes even better. Between decadent bites, I ask Alex about Canada.

“I grew up in a city called Guelph. It’s in Ontario.”

“That’s an interesting name for a city.” It sounds like a character from a Tolkien novel.

“It’s an hour outside of Toronto.”

I nod as if the geographical location helps place the name.

“Have you ever been to Canada?”

I shake my head, unable to respond as I’m chewing.

“You should come when we play Toronto next. I’ll take you to Guelph. You’d like it.”

My stomach flip-flops. We’re only halfway through dinner and he’s inviting me to future games. I’m only able to attend out of town games because Sidney’s company pays for the flights and the accommodations, but the thought is nice.

Conversation with Alex is easy. My life isn’t nearly as exciting as his, but he hangs on my every word as if I’m the one with the high profile life, not him.

He shares how difficult it is to be away from home all the time and how it makes relationships hard. I’m not sure if it’s his way of telling me this is only casual. I don’t have the guts to ask, either.

When he orders dessert, they bring two spoons. We only use one.

It’s late by the time we finish. Chivalrous as usual, Alex helps me into my coat at the door. He lifts my hair and brushes his lips across my neck.

As soon as I am secure in the car, my palms start to sweat. I have the urge to bolt or throw myself at him. Either seems like a good option. The latter better than the former.

Alex slips into the driver’s seat and turns to me. “I don’t fly out until early tomorrow afternoon. If you want, you could come to my place.”

“Your place?”

“Or I can take you home, if you’d prefer.”

“I don’t want to go home.”

“No?”

I shake my head.

“Good. I don’t particularly want to take you home, either.” His voice gets lower.

I stop breathing and wait for him to kiss me as he leans in. I’m not disappointed.

Neither one of us is buckled in, so we meet in the middle of the console and start making out. We go from kissing to mouth fucking almost instantly. I have a distinct feeling Alex may very well get to see my Victoria’s Secret purchases even without a freak windstorm.



**I DEFINITELY
WANT TO DO ~~VIOLET~~
THIS AGAIN**

ALEX

Violet tastes like chocolate and wine. Her lips are soft, and she does this thing with her tongue—there she goes again. I remind myself we’re in my car, in a parking lot; it’s not okay to get her naked.

Violet breaks the kiss. “Um, hi.” Her hand is on my chest, her face flushed. I’m almost all the way out of my seat, on top of her.

“Shit. Sorry. You taste really good.” Because that’s an excuse for jumping her in my car.

She licks her lips. “Thanks. So do you.”

I rearrange myself, and put the car in gear. “Let me show you where I live.”

In the past five years, I’ve been on a handful of dates where I’ve been interested enough to go on a second one. Of those, very few made it to the third date. Even fewer stepped foot through my door. While I might appear in the tabloids frequently, I prefer privacy in my personal life. I take back roads to the outskirts of the city.

“You said you didn’t have a lair,” Violet says as I turn into my driveway. The house is almost completely obscured by a bend in the drive.

I laugh. “I don’t. I promise.”

“You better not. I’m not into lairs.” The house comes into view. “Oh, wow. This is definitely not lairish.”

I pull into the four-car garage where I store my toys. There’s a Torino Fastback painted flashy orange with black stripes, a speedboat, two Sea-Doos, and a pair of four-wheelers.

“You have a lot of things with engines.”

“This is just the stuff I keep here. I have lakefront property an hour away and a cottage in Ontario with more water toys. It’s where I spend my time in the off-season.”

“Sidney has a cottage. I always picture them as being kind of run-down, like a shack or something. His is more like a house on a lake.”

“Do you ever go?” Maybe Butterson’s Facebook pictures came from a vacation there.

“We try to make the trip once a summer. I’m not very good at water sports.”

“Water skiing isn’t hard. I’m sure I could teach you.”

Violet snorts. “Yeah. I can barely get the hang of yoga, and you want to strap boards to my feet and drag me across water?”

“You make it sound dangerous.”

“All sports are dangerous. Especially hockey.”

Once inside, I hang up her coat. Her dress is killing me. It’s one of those wrap things with a tie at the waist. I try not to stare; it makes her tits look fantastic. I don’t want her to think the only reason I invited her here is for sex. I haven’t spent the past month trying to get her to go out with me to screw it up. However, I can appreciate her stunning cleavage.

To avoid jumping her immediately, I give her a tour of my house. I don’t take her upstairs, seeing as my bedroom would be a bad place to end up right now. I show her the main floor, then the game room in the basement. It’s as far from my bedroom as we can get.

“You’re such a dude.” Violet snort-laughs, covering her mouth with her hand.

Maybe the eighty-inch flat screen, movie style recliners, gaming consoles, and accompanying chairs are a bit much. “I don’t get a lot of down time, but when I do, I like to play.”

“I’m not making fun. This is great. Buck would be in heaven here. So would Sidney.” Violet checks out my wall of trophies.

I hope they don’t make me look like an arrogant ass. I worked hard for them; I’m proud of my accomplishments. My figure skating trophies—I have a lot of those, too—are all at my mother’s house in my childhood bedroom.

“You don’t need to look at those.”

I stand behind her, admiring her ass. It really is nice. Soft. Plush. Good for grabbing. I’d like to feel that curve against my dick again. Later. Maybe.

Violet turns around, her tone teasing. “Yeah, I’m sure you have them all out here so people ignore them.”

“They work with the room, don’t they?”

“They’re impressive. I only ever won the participation ribbon on Track and Field Day. If I had these, I’d highlight them with a flashing neon arrow. In my personal opinion, you’re understating your awesomeness.”

“You don’t think flashing neon is too overt?”

“Not even a little.” She scans the room, pausing at the posters hung on the wall. “Wow! Look at all those ads. Ohhh. You’ve even done one for Tim Horton’s. I finished that tin in like a week.”

“I must look like a narcissist, eh?” I rub the back of my neck, more uncomfortable about these than I am the trophies.

She glances over her shoulder. “Are any of these hanging in your bedroom?”

“Uh. No.”

“Not even the milk ad?”

I grin. “Not even the milk advertisement.”

“Then you’re not a narcissist as far as I can tell. By the way, if you happen to have a spare copy of the milk ad lying around and you weren’t sure what do to with it, I’d be happy to take it off your hands.”

“I might be able to get you a copy.”

She gestures to the posters. “Do you have to do a lot of these?”

“It depends on the season. We’re doing well this year, so there’s more demand. They’re good for exposure. I’ve had some interest from some big campaigns recently, so we’ll see what happens.”

“What kind of campaigns?”

“Sports companies. It’s something I’ve been working toward.”

“I hope you get it, then.” She moves away from the posters. “You have an air hockey table! Sidney has one. Buck used to try and hustle me all the time.” She claps excitedly. “Let’s play!”

“No one plays air hockey here without putting something at stake.”

“You mean a bet? I’m gonna warn you, I’m good.” Violet taps her fingers on the lip of the table. “I beat Buck all the time.”

I suppress a smirk. “Oh? In that case, if I win, I get to take you out again after this series of away games.”

This is far from fair; there’s no way Violet will win. But I want something beyond the glory of beating a woman who reads during hockey games and refers to the penalty box as the “time-out box thingy.”

Violet blushes. “And if I win, I get to take the cool car in your garage for a ride.”

At first I think she's joking. Violet has no idea what my car is worth or the time and energy spent having it painstakingly restored. I'm not worried. I'm going to wipe the floor with Violet's ass. Well, I'd like to do something to Violet's ass—maybe while she's on the floor. In the context of the game, I'm going to win.

"You're on." I reach across the table to shake on it.

Violet's smile is pure calculated innocence as she slips her hand into mine and yanks, pulling me forward unexpectedly. Her grin becomes a sneer, her eyes narrowing with something like malice.

"Be prepared to have your balls handed to you, Waters."

"You think so, eh?"

This is going to be fun. I remove my tie and toss it on the chair in the corner. Next I unbutton my shirt and shrug out of it.

"Is this strip air hockey?" Her eyes drop to my chest. All distractions are good distractions if they work in my favor.

"No. I'm just getting comfortable." My T-shirt is less constrictive than a button-down.

Violet takes a ready stance. The deep V of her dress gapes slightly, and the luscious swell of her breasts press together to create amazing cleavage. I'd love to fuck her tits—dammit, now *I'm* distracted.

My competitive nature comes out, and I practically growl, "Get ready to be spanked, sweetheart."

Her neck goes blotchy. "Nice try. That's not on the table."

"You don't think so? I could put you over the table." I wag my eyebrows suggestively.

Violet scoffs. "Check your ego, Captain."

At the beginning, I go easy on her and let her believe she'll win. It quickly becomes apparent Violet is far more adept at this game than I assumed. She scores two goals within the first two minutes, punctuating each one with a *Take that!*

"Best out of three." I sneak the puck by her goalie and smile condescendingly.

"If you feel the need to be beaten twice."

"You're going down, baby."

"If that's what you wanted"—the puck ricochets against the side of the table and heads toward my goalie—"you should've put it on the table."

She pokes the inside of her cheek with her tongue. The image of Violet's lips wrapped around my cock, her warm, wet tongue swirling around the head diverts my attention from the game.

"Take that!" she yells.

I blink, confused. Damn! She scored again. She's thrown my game with blow job references, making it impossible for me to recover the win. Violet prances around, fist pumping the air, boobs jiggling. Though I'm irritated she's beaten me—unfairly—she's still entertaining to watch.

"I. Am. Awesome!" She props a hand on her hip. "You obviously don't want another date if you're going to play like a girl."

"Enjoy the high, baby. It won't happen again."

I up my game during round two. The harder I try, the harder she tries. She's good. Better than good. I might even lose. She'll have to go out with me again to drive my car, so I suppose I win either way.

"On your knees, motherpucker!" she shouts when she scores the winning goal. She grabs the puck and kisses it. Wearing a huge smile, she rubs it on her boobs.

I can't believe she beat me. Again. Her cheeks are flushed and her breath comes in pants. Even I'm worked up.

"I want a rematch." I take a step to the side, coming around the table.

"You're a sore loser." Violet moves in the opposite direction. "I won fair and square."

"I still want to take you out again when I get home." I take another step toward her and she takes one back.

"You didn't win." She shifts right, preparing to bolt.

I fake right and go left, mirroring her movement. I'm faster and more agile. She may have beaten me at air hockey, but she can't outrun me. She shrieks when I grab her around the waist and pull her against me.

"I know." My palm glides along her rib cage. "But you cheated."

"I did not!"

"This dress is very distracting." I skim her collarbone and follow the V of her bust line with my fingertip.

I dip my head down and press my lips to her neck. Sucking lightly, I kiss a trail from her jaw to her lips.

"I didn't cheat."

"Debatable." My lips hover over hers. "I'd accept a victory kiss in lieu of a rematch."

“I still get to drive your car.”

“If you’re good with stick, sure.”

“I’m great with stick.”

“I’m not talking about the one in my pants.”

Her outraged gasp turns into a sigh as our lips meet. Violet’s hands move up my arms and her fingernails bite into my shoulders.

Cupping her ass, I lift her onto the table, and then turn off the air. Her dress rides up her thighs as I step between them and she hitches a leg over my hip. I keep reminding myself not to have expectations for tonight. I don’t. What I expect and what I’d like are two very different things.

I hold her soft body against me, splaying my hand between her shoulders. “Tell me if I’m moving too fast.”

“You’re good,” she says, shoving her fingers into my hair.

I kiss a path to the neckline of her dress. Her heel digs into my ass as I bite her collarbone. Violet gasps. I push the fabric of her dress aside. Red satin and lace overlay never looked so good on a pair of perfectly delicious tits. I cup them and squeeze, deepening the line of cleavage so I can bury my face between them. “I love your boobs.”

“They love you back.”

I pull the satin and lace down until her rosy little nipple peeks out. I circle it with my finger, before I cover it with my mouth.

“Holy hell.” Violet’s fingers tighten in my hair, holding me hostage. “Why’s your mouth so magical?”

The question seems rhetorical, so I keep sucking and kissing and nibbling. Her legs tighten around my waist and she shifts her hips, moving against me, seeking her own relief.

I finger the tie at her waist. One tug and I’ll find out if she’s wearing panties to match her bra.

I seek permission to continue. “May I?”

“By all means.”

The bow comes loose, one side of her dress falling open. It’s not quite as momentous as I anticipated. There’s a second tie on the inside, preventing a full revelation.

“Did you pick the color for me?” I kiss my way to the neglected breast, rolling her nipple between my fingers.

“You like?” Violet pushes her chest out, her words a breathy moan.

“Oh, I like. Seriously, I can’t get enough.”

I move between her tits until Violet's arms start to shake and she drops down on her elbows. We're panting, rubbing against each other, adding friction for my lonely dick. Her quiet gasps and sighs grow progressively louder until she sucks in a harsh breath.

"Oh, God. Alex? . . . I-I-I . . ." She sounds confused, maybe a little desperate. "There's no way—"

I never get to ask what's going on. It becomes self-evident, anyway. Violet trembles, eyes closed, lips parting on a sexy moan. Her body goes lax, and her legs drop from my waist.

"Did you come on my air hockey table?"

"Uh-huh."

"From this?" I circle her left nipple with my tongue. I'm feeling pretty good about myself.

"And all the grinding." Violet grabs me by the hair and pulls. "Careful. It's sensitive from all the attention."

"Sorry." I'm keyed up, ready for speed and release. It's the same feeling I get on the ice, only magnified and channeled into a very different, singular need.

I skim her side with my free hand until I reach the second tie. "Is this okay?"

Violet bites her lip and squeezes her eyes closed for a second. "Y-yes."

Her uncertainty makes me pause. No matter how badly I want to get inside her again, I won't push. "Are you sure?" I make no move either way.

"Yes."

"I've been trying to get you to go out with me for a month. I'm not interested in forfeiting future dates, so you set the ground rules, okay?"

"Ground rules?"

"Do you want to instate a minimum number of dates before I get past second base?"

"You've already been past second base."

"It doesn't mean I automatically get to go there again, does it?" Man, do I ever want to.

"Why are you so sweet?" Violet runs a finger down the bridge of my nose.

If she knew what was going through my head, she wouldn't be calling me sweet. I kiss her, soft and slow, telling her through actions I'm totally fine with it if this is as far as we go tonight. Violet makes the next move,

freeing the tie on her dress. Satin slides down her arms and pools on the table. Her panties match her bra.

I run my hands up the outside of her thighs. “*You* are a wet dream.”

She laughs as she grips the hem of my T-shirt and pulls it over my head. “If I had wet dreams, you’d be mine.”

Her palms flatten against my chest and then drift lower until she’s cupping me through my pants. “God, you’re hard.”

“See what happens when a gorgeous, half-naked woman beats me at air hockey and comes on my table.”

Violet gives me a squeeze. “What else makes you hard?”

Slipping my finger underneath the elastic of her panties, I’m met with smooth, wet skin. Her eyelids flutter.

“Shit. You really did come.”

I go lower, finding her hotter, slicker, wetter. Twisting my palm, I slide my thumb under the fabric as well. Violet bites her lip, stifling a moan as I ease two fingers inside her. She holds onto my shoulders, closing her eyes tight as she rides my hand.

“Christ, you’re sexy.”

While I enjoy the feel of her hand on my dick—even if the sensation is muted by two layers of fabric—it’s impeding my view.

“Let go, baby—”

“I’m almost—”

“I want to see—”

She obeys my request and uses her free hand to brace herself on the table. Her whole body starts to shake. I look down to where my fingers disappear inside her. Her panties have shifted to the side, exposing more of what I want. For half a second, I’m in my own personal heaven. Then I’m not.

“What the fuck is that?” I jerk back.

Violet’s head lolls forward. “What?”

A huge purple mark mars the crest of her pelvis. I clench my jaw to keep from saying something I may regret and search my brain for a reasonable excuse for what I’m seeing. I can’t find one. It looks as if someone else has been touching my fucking pussy. I don’t understand why Violet would agree to go out with me if she’s been letting someone else get all up in there.

My voice is a nearly unrecognizable growl. “Is that a hickey?”



WAXING MY OWN BEAVER WAS A BAD IDEA

VIOLET

Alex's expression reflects nothing of the blissful serenity I've been rocking up until now. Confused, I touch my neck, feeling around for the hickey. It's a fruitless action; you can't feel hickeys, you can only see them. Besides, if I have one, he put it there.

His gaze is trained lower. I check out my chest. No discoloration there other than the usual blotchiness that's a result of being sexed up.

His grip tightens on my thighs. I whimper, the sound drawing Alex's attention to my face. Holy shit. He's absolutely livid. His fury—similar to what I've previously witnessed only when he takes someone down on the ice—feeds the hockey hooker in me. I'm leaking on his air hockey table.

The fog from my orgasm-induced euphoria begins to clear. It's my naked beaver he's angrily eyeing. In my lust-induced haze, I forgot the ugly bruise from yesterday evening's impromptu waxing session. I can see how he might mistake it for a hickey.

I gesture to the horrible mark in a flaily, manic way. "It's not what it looks like." In saying this, I've made it seem like exactly that.

Alex's body is rigid aside from the twitching corner of his mouth and the pressing of his thumbs into the juncture of my thighs. He's an inch shy of my clit on either side. While staying still is killing me, an explanation is necessary.

"I didn't have time to make an appointment with my waxer because you sprang the date on me. My beave was getting unruly, and I wasn't sure how tonight would go. I wanted to be prepared in case this happened . . ." I motion to his hands.

Alex follows the movement with his eyes. His thumb moves over the purplish-red spot. Sadly, this means his thumb also moves away from my clit.

“I thought I could do it myself. You know, wax my beaver?” Alex’s brows come down low. Of course he doesn’t know. “I do my own legs sometimes, and I figured it would be easy. Judging by the result, I was wrong.” I finish with a poke at my bruise. I cringe; it hurts.

He tilts his head to the side, his expression doubtful. “Waxing?”

“Only you and your fingers, and your mouth, and your behemoth dick, and my fingers, and my collection of vibrators have been near me in the last six months. Oh, and the gyno—”

Jesus, why can’t I shut up?

“The gyno?”

I nod vigorously. “Uh, yeah, she’s female, so no worries there.” He doesn’t ask why I went to the gyno. I don’t want to tell him the truth. After sleeping with him I developed acute paranoia, afraid I contracted a contagious hockey whore disease.

Thankfully, Alex focuses on the other tidbit of information I let slip in the midst of my verbal vomit.

“You have a collection of vibrators?”

His thumbs inch in closer. Actually, it’s more like millimeter in closer. I do the damn moaning thing followed by an odd sobbing sound, wishing I could lie.

“Not a collection, a few . . . a travel one I ordered through one of those pervy sites, one I bought at a smut store, and one Charlene bought me. I think it was supposed to be a joke. It’s weird looking and textured. Like all these balls fused together? It’s not very effective for getting off—unless I’m using it wrong.”

Alex looks simultaneously disturbed and turned on. He blinks a few times and licks his lips as if trying to decide what to do or say next.

He doesn’t respond with words, but his lips are on mine again and his tongue is in my mouth. At the same time, he grazes my clit with both thumbs, causing me to make another odd sound he seems to like. All of a sudden we’re in motion. Alex grips my ass and lifts me off the air hockey table.

“God you’re sexy,” he says, carrying me to the expensive-looking leather sofa.

I have to wonder if he actually heard my ramblings about my waxing malfunction and my plastic penis collection.

He lays me on the couch; one of his knees settles between mine and the other hits the floor. Reaching behind me, Alex nabs a throw pillow and tucks it under my head. He's so considerate.

I run my hands from his chest to the waistband of his pants. Unbuckling the belt and popping the button, I slide my fingers between the material and his skin. He's commando, which I find interesting since he has a lot to contain.

I wrap my fingers around the hard, damp shaft of his monster cock. We're both making noises similar to the soundtrack of a porno—they're coming from me because I'm finally touching his ridiculously huge dick again; and I assume it probably feels good for Alex, too.

He kisses his way to my mouth. "I can't wait to be in you."

I can't and don't want to say no. A very small part of me clings to the belief I need to make him wait for sex. Like maybe until our next date. Two weeks from now is a long time, though, and it's already been a month since we've been naked together. If I hold off, my beaver might explode from lack of use.

Alex pushes up on his arms. I get an awesome view of his broad chest and the treasure trail leading to monster cock land. He seems unsure of himself. "Sorry. I'm sorry. We don't have to have sex. I don't want you to do anything you'll feel bad about later."

When he says those kinds of things, paired with his earlier comment, I want to be his love slave. An image of me in a black corset wearing a collar with a leash attached to it pops into my head. Maybe stupid Lydia was right to cut the smut from the book club for a while.

"I won't feel bad." I'm pretty sure I'll feel good, actually.

"You're sure?" Alex trails his fingers down my side.

"Positive." I'm still holding his cock; it's still massively hard.

"I should take you upstairs."

I have no desire to stop touching him long enough to make the trip upstairs. "I'm good here. I like your couch." They seem like good luck charms where Alex is concerned.

"My bed is more comfortable, and there's more room." He drops his head into the hollow of my throat, his lips touching my skin.

"I'm sure you're right, but then we'd have to stop doing what we're doing."

"You make a good point."

Alex reaches behind me, and with a quick flick, he opens the clasp and tosses my bra on the floor. My panties follow.

I slide his pants over his hips. His cock pops out, nearly smacking me in the face. I bob and weave to avoid getting poked in the eye by his swinging dick. My lack of coordination is an unfortunate issue, and I inadvertently whack it.

Alex bows forward, swearing. I grab his dick to avoid additional mishaps and apologize for beating on the monster cock. It's level with my boobs. I have an idea. He seems to have an extreme fascination with my chest. Keeping my eyes on his, I circle a nipple with the tip.

One second he's all soft and tender and "is this okay?" and "are you sure?" The next he's got my hair wrapped around his fist. His body is wound tighter than a coiled snake ready to strike, which is fitting since I'm rubbing his "snake" on my boobs.

"You can't even . . ."

I run the head of his cock across the valley to the opposite nipple. He angles my head to the side and takes my mouth as I stroke him. Alex deepens the kiss until I'm dizzy, and breathing seems like an unimportant function. Bearing down, he covers my body with his. No longer able to maintain hand-to-cock contact, I use my feet to push his pants down to his calves. There are a few awkward moments where he struggles to kick them off, and I ineffectively attempt to help with my toes.

Impatient, Alex uses his free hand to get them the rest of the way off. We both sigh with relief when he settles between my legs again. He's right there, hot and thick, eliciting one of my porn moans. That's before he starts with the controlled glide.

Skimming the length of his arm, I tug gently on his wrist. He's been fisting my hair like reins.

"Sorry." He massages my scalp.

"S'okay. I've been reading a lot of Dom-sub stuff in my book club lately."

Hair pulling isn't even close to the same thing. It's not like he's tied me up and makes me call him Sir or Master.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Nothing. Never mind. It's not important."

I knead his ass to distract him; otherwise I'm liable to start ending sentences with *Mr. Waters*.

It seems to work. Alex's eyes flutter shut and his mouth drops open as we rub against each other. I run my hands up his back, appreciating all those tight, hard muscles.

His lips are close to my ear, his voice soft. "You feel so good."

I remember getting it on with my first ever long-term boyfriend in high school. The progression from dry humping to naked humping happened in stages.

We'd get mostly naked—the pants might come off and the shirts stay on—and line our parts up. Then we'd slide against each other without really having any fucking clue as to how to get each other off. In all the uncoordinated wet humping, the slip-and-bump would happen. Everything would stop. We'd look at each other and ask the question: "Just the tip?" It almost always led to the-whole-damn-thing.

This is what happens. Except Alex's tip is beer-can wide. Okay, it's not that thick, but it's close. The sensation is a teaser, like one of those tiny spoonfuls of ice cream they give out before committing to a whole cone. I've already eaten Alex's cone before, so I know exactly how good it's going to be.

What I do next is highly irresponsible on so many levels. My justification is this: I've been on the pill since high school, Alex isn't the hockey whore I assumed he was, and the gyno results came back clean.

All objections I may have die on my tongue as I dig my fingernails into his rock-solid ass and push down with my heels. He's halfway in, give or take a couple of inches. His head snaps up and his face registers desire-hazed alarm. "No condom!"

We stare at each other, mutual conflict clear in our lack of action. Should Alex be wearing a condom? For damn sure. However, he's already partway inside me and it feels incredible. This is an example of a lapse in judgment. It seems to be frequent where Alex is concerned.

I clear my throat. "I'm on the pill, and I've always been responsible up until now." Great. Now I've admitted what we're doing is the exact opposite of responsible.

He doesn't retract the monster cock or give me any more of it. "I should put a condom on." It's supposed to be a statement, but his voice rises at the end, turning it into a question. He glances at his pants on the floor. "Fuck. My wallet's on the kitchen counter."

His forehead drops to my shoulder. He takes long, slow breaths. I do something else I shouldn't as I tighten my thighs against his hips. I flex the beave.

“Violet—” It's a lament. “I should—”

“We could—”

He lifts his head. “Are you sure?”

“Are you?”

I think it's safe to say neither of us is sure. We're committed to making this bad decision in the name of feeling good. His answer comes in the form of his hips sinking into mine. Holy hell, am I ever full. Of unfiltered monster cock. I moan like crazy and bury my face against his neck.

At the same time, Alex strings a bunch of words together which makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. It sounds like “flumothohshitregoo.”

“What?” I ask as he circles his hips.

Alex presses his lips to my neck, skimming his teeth over my skin. “This is unreal.”

“Mmm. It's fantastic.”

His face is flushed as he lifts his head to look at me with intense, glassy eyes. A lazy grin turns up the corner of his mouth. “Fantastic isn't the word. If heaven is anything like this, I wanna stay forever.”

Being compared to heaven seems like quite a compliment. “Thanks. You feel amazing, too.”

He has to readjust his position before he can start with the thrusting. I see now why the bed would've been better. All the friction makes my back sweat, and the leather under me has started to squeak. The hardwood floor isn't an option, unless I want a bruised tailbone. I push on Alex's chest.

“Should I stop?” His words are choked with disappointment.

I shake my head and continue to push. “Sit up, please.”

Alex doesn't ask more questions. Instead, he folds back on his knees, bringing me with him so we don't lose the connection. We maneuver awkwardly—well, I'm awkward, Alex isn't. There's some less-than-graceful fumbling on my part. Eventually, we're both upright, and I straddle his legs. This gives me a fantastic view of everything. We both look down to watch him slide almost all the way out.

“How good does that look?”

I'm not sure he needs an answer, but I'm inclined to give him one. “So good.” Except for the giant purple hickey-bruise I'm pretending Alex put

there with his mouth.

He lowers me slowly, filling me again. “I know, eh?”

His eyes are hooded, and he wears a blissful, sexy smile. I hold onto his shoulders, debating whether I want to watch his pretty face or what’s happening from the waist down. He rids me of either option when he buries his face between my boobs on the next upward stroke.

“I can’t believe how good this feels,” he says, his voice slightly muffled.

“I’m pretty sure I can.”

“I’ve never had sex without a condom.”

“Never?”

“Not once.”

“Wow. This must feel really good, then.”

“I can’t describe—” He kisses one of my nipples. “Have you?”

“What?” He hits the spot that makes me see stars and constellations.

“Had sex without a condom?”

He changes things up and starts a very stimulating rocking motion. If he stops asking me questions about my past sexual experiences, I’ll come soon.

How the hell do I answer? Yes, I have, with a previous long-term boyfriend. We dated for a year, and he was my last serious relationship prior to the hockey jerk. No one wants to hear that while they’re doing it. Sex talk should consist primarily of phrases such as: more, fuck me, go harder, right there, please, yes, and I’m coming.

I’m putting an end to the conversational sex and making it moaning sex instead. I respond with one of the preapproved phrases, “It feels unbelievable. Go harder. Please, Alex.” I’m quite genuine, despite how clichéd it sounds.

It has the desired effect. A low rumble comes from deep within his chest and he lifts me up, until I’m almost empty and slams me down. It’s incredible. Spectacular even.

“How’s this, baby? You want faster, too?”

“Uh-huh.”

This new, hard, intense rhythm sends me straight to the abyss. I grab onto his hair, prompting Alex to increase his speed and vigor. Then he has to go and suck on my nipple like the boob-loving hockey-stud-former-player he is. He releases it on the next downward stroke. It’s all I can take.

The world turns into a starburst of black and white as I try to shove my face in his neck and stifle my love sounds.

“Eyes on me, baby. Please.” Alex’s lips press against my temple. “I wanna see your gorgeous face when you come for me.”

Despite the blur of monochromatic fireworks clouding my vision, I can’t deny him when he’s being so polite.

I’m caught in the fire of his gaze. His fingers tighten on my hips as he thrusts hard. There’s no break in the spiral of sensation. It’s a blessing and a curse; once I’ve come, I’m like a leaky faucet—I just keep coming. The waning orgasm reignites, returning to a full force burn.

“Violet, you’re gonna make me—”

I’m so out of it I scream, “I love you,” hastily tacking on, “monster cock,” at the end.

Shitballs. Where the hell’s my filter when I need it the most?



MY MOUTH IS A PROBLEM

VIOLET

Orgasm high or not, I sure as shit know I said something I shouldn't have.

Thankfully, Alex is currently riding his own rocket into orgasm outer space. I hope it's enough of a distraction that he missed my accidental declaration. His jaw is clenched tight, lips curled in an almost-sneer, eyes cloudy, lids at half-mast. He thrusts one last time and then all the tension evaporates and his body goes lax.

He blinks slowly, his hands resting loosely on my hips. "What'd you say?"

So much for being distracted. "Nothing." I draw a circle around his nipple with my nail.

"Bullshit."

I'm not in love with him. This is only our first official date. Aside from almost a month's worth of emails, texts, and a few interesting phone calls, plus a slew of unexpected gifts, I don't know him well. I am inclined, however, to erect a shrine to his amazing super cock. I may even take up pottery or glass blowing so I can create perfect replicas and showcase them like he does his trophies.

"I wasn't talking to you." I bite his shoulder to avoid eye contact. I'm sure my face is a blotchy shade of bright red.

"Oh no?" He's still moving me over him. It's slow and torturous and oh so delicious. Every slow circle of his hips hits my special spot from the inside. A tiny, baby-size orgasm prevents speech. Sagging against him, I shudder with the sensation. How he's magically hard after coming is beyond me.

"You're an orgasm machine."

"That's why I was thanking the monster cock. It's all him."

"You do realize my dick is attached to me, eh?"

"This from a man who addressed a gift certificate to my boobs?"

“Can you blame me?” He cups them gently. “They’re pretty damn fantastic.”

“They appreciate the compliment.”

I can’t believe I’ve managed to talk my way out of my own stupidity.

Alex chuckles but then grows serious. “Will you stay the night?”

I want to. Definitely. My only worry? I have to work in the morning. I look at my dress that lies in a rumpled heap on the floor.

He follows my eyes but misinterprets my lack of response. “You don’t have to. I thought maybe—”

“I’d like to, but I don’t have my car.” I duck my head, feeling all shy. It’s absurd. He’s still inside me, and I’ve been making my come face at him for the last half hour.

“I’ll drive you to work in the morning.”

“I also don’t have a change of clothes.”

“We can wash them, or I’ll take you home first to change.”

“Or I could call a cab in the morning—”

“Nope.” Alex shakes his head. “Not happening. I’ll take you home. Either tonight or tomorrow, whichever you prefer, but it’ll be me driving you.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?” His hopefulness is as endearing as it is sexy.

“You can drive me to work in the morning.”



Alex post-sex is a hungry man. He stands in the kitchen—which is surprisingly clean for a bachelor—wearing only his pants, with the door to the fridge wide open. After pouring me a glass of orange juice, he chugs the rest straight from the jug. Hydration is sexy.

Then he proceeds to empty half the contents of the fridge onto a plate and shove it in the microwave. I’m not hungry, so I sit on his lap while he inhales a plateful of carbs. I’m only wearing his T-shirt. My dress is in the wash with my bra and panties. Alex struggled with the whole delicate cycle

thing and admitted he has a housekeeper who does the bulk of his cleaning, including his laundry.

When the plate is empty, he grabs two bottles of water from the fridge and leads me upstairs.

His room is huge and simply furnished. The bed is rustic, crafted out of solid wood. The dark sheets are ruffled, as if he was in a rush this morning, or this evening.

“Your bed is huge.”

“I told you it would’ve been more comfortable. I’m sure there’ll be other opportunities.”

The bathroom is very fêng shui with beige tile, a glassed-in shower, and Jacuzzi tub. It’s not as tidy as the rest of the house. His shaving kit and a few hair products line the counter. The cap is off his toothpaste, and a towel lies in a heap on the floor near the shower. It’s lived in but not a complete sty.

Alex finds me a new toothbrush and leaves me to freshen up. I’m prepared for the possibility he’ll want to make use of the bed before sleep. I don’t usually stay up this late on week nights, and I definitely don’t get this much exercise. After four orgasms I’m not sure my body or my brain is equipped to deal with another round of “fill the beaver hole.”

Once I finish with the oral hygiene, I join him in his king-size bed. It’s much like its own continent; I could sleep here and we’d never touch. Except the moment I slip under the sheets, he pulls me into him.

I lie with my head on his chest, listening to the powerful, steady beat of his heart. He tells me about the lineup of games for the next two weeks, the teams he’s confident they’ll beat, and the wins they’ll have to work hard for. The second-to-last game is in Toronto, near his home town.

Alex keeps running soothing fingers through my hair. The last thing I remember are his lips on my forehead and his rumbling laugh when I tell him he’s warm and cuddly like a hairless, domesticated bear.



I must pass out hard-core. When I wake up, the sun is peeking through the curtains. I check the clock on the nightstand. It's not even seven. I have loads of time to get ready. Alex is sleeping peacefully beside me. I turn on my side to study him.

I've hogged the sheets, which has left his torso exposed. I run my hand down his chest, marveling at the soft skin covering the solid wall of muscle. Even relaxed, he's hard all over.

I continue my sensory descent, enjoying the feel of him under my fingers. He's sound asleep, so I figure why not check things out. I lift the band of his boxers and take a wee gander. His monster cock looks much more innocuous in this state.

It lays on his abdomen, angled slightly to the left. It's almost cute—kind of like Snuffleupagus. Well, not really. It's huge, but not hairy, and also not nearly as daunting as when it's hard. It is magical, though. I stifle a giggle because, goddamn it, I've never seen a snuffie up close. The head is tucked up inside the soft skin, an eye peering out from the turtleneck.

Alex is oblivious to my peter peeping, so I carefully shimmy his boxers down. I want to look at it without the risk of the waistband snapping against the head. I need my hands free to touch. It would also be cool to see if it grows like those things you order out of an old school comic book. The ones that go from pill sized to huge in a glass of water. Except I assume this will happen much faster. I haven't had the privilege of seeing Alex's dick grow yet. It's always been hard when I get to it.

I poke at it. Alex expels a heavy breath, and his hand twitches at his side. Being extra careful not to jostle Alex, I rearrange myself slowly so I'm cross-legged beside him. This time I gently run my fingertips along the length. The skin wrinkles as I go. This is the best.

It's equally fun to play with when it's soft and sleepy as it is when it's hard. Sliding my hand under the shaft, I close my palm around it. My fingers touch each other and he's squishy, like a sea cucumber. Those creatures are a demonstration of God's fixation with wieners.

Alex starts to rouse, as does his monster cock. Soon he'll wake and end my alone time with the MC. I stroke down; the wrinkly skin retracts and the head pops out. Stroking up, the entire head disappears. It's like a game of peek-a-boo with a penis.

Alex moans, and this time his pelvis lifts. He's not fully conscious, so I lay his dick on his stomach. Then I take the foreskin covering the head and

roll it to the tip. Pressing it together, I pretend it's a mouth and move it around like it's talking to me. A giggle bubbles up and bursts free. I try to hold it in, so it comes out my nose, sounding like a sneeze.

I look up as Alex's eyes flutter open. "What are you doing?"

Hmm, well, that's not quite the reaction I was hoping for. "I'm playing with the monster cock. Well, actually, I'm playing with his foreskin," I say as if the MC is a person, not an appendage.

I stop messing around and smooth out his turtleneck, stroking the shaft. Alex's eyes close, and he releases a long, low groan. The monster cock grows perceptibly in my hand. Neato. I do it again. This time it twitches and grows some more. It's fascinating to watch the skin stretch and smooth out until it is tight, moving fractionally with each stroke.

As soon as Alex is fully erect I look up. Ooooh, judging from his expression, I'm getting lucky this morning. He shoves his boxers down his legs and kicks them off while I lose my shirt. We're both gloriously naked. He cups the back of my neck and pulls me to him.

I turn my head so he meets my jaw instead of my lips. I can taste the sourness of sleep in my mouth. It's not sexy at all.

"Give me a minute." I slip out of his grasp, intent on getting to the bathroom before he unleashes the beast on me. I'm no match for his speed, even half-asleep. Alex's arm locks around my waist, and I find myself stomach-down on the bed, his body covering mine. He's a quick fucker. Not literally. He takes his time with the important stuff.

His now-raging hard-on rests against the small of my back and—oh God, there's no way in hell—it's right there, between my ass cheeks. Sliding and . . . huh, it doesn't feel bad at all. Regardless, the MC will never fit in there.

The connection between my mouth and brain are faulty, as usual, and I shout, "Exit only! It's exit only!"

Oh. My. God. How mortifying is this?

Alex freezes and then laughs.

"That's not a first sleepover kind of activity."

"Wait! What?" I wish I sounded less like a prepubescent boy with his balls caught in a zipper.

"I'm kidding, Violet. I may have thought about it, but it's not like I could accidently slip it in there."

My ass cheeks clench in defiance as he passes door number two. “You’ve *thought* about it?” No one has ever so much as grazed my Hole That Shall Not Be Penetrated.

This may not be the best time for such discussions. The tip of Alex’s cock is currently pressing up against the Hole That Shall Be Penetrated Very Soon, and I’m delaying progress by talking about things that will *never* happen.

“Thinking and doing are very different, Violet.” His hand slips between the sheet and my body. He circles my clit, then moving lower, he pushes two fingers inside and pumps slowly, his erection bumping against his hand.

His fingers disappear only to be replaced by my favorite appendage. I think I might lose my mind as he eases inside; this position is like hurtling myself into Stimulation Station.

My moaning starts up full force. It’s high-pitched, like a cat in heat, so I bury my face in the sheets. Alex’s chest is against my back, his legs on either side of mine, keeping them pressed tightly together.

“Is it okay?”

I whimper because it is the only sound I can make. I feel so full. Fuller than I’ve ever been. Every stroke is magnified—divine.

“Is it too much, baby?”

Oh God, he’s calling me baby. I might come on the spot. He’s unmoving except for his lips against my shoulder. The bones at his hips press against my ass. His breath caresses my cheek, and I feel the slight tremor in his body as he holds his weight above me.

“Not too much. It’s so good.” I grip the sheets beside my head. Alex’s hands cover mine.

“You ready for me?”

I’ve been ready since I woke up and shared private time with the monster cock. “Please. Yes.”

He starts to move, and the head of his cock hits the spot. The *so good* turns into damn well fabulous. I can’t believe I doubted the existence of the elusive spot. It’s magically orgasmic. The word vomit won’t stop, so I keep my face mashed into the sheets. Only the pillow hears how good it feels, repeatedly.

It’s one of those positions where I’m right on the cusp of release. My inability to move or get to my orgasm switch prevents me from reaching the target. Alex must be psychic, or it’s possible he can tell by the pitch and

frequency of my moans I'm getting close. He nudges my knees apart, urging me onto all fours.

If I was close to an orgasm before, it's nothing compared to what I'm feeling now. Alex pops my hips out, changing the angle. His palm settles on the base of my spine, and he smoothes a path to the nape of my neck as his hips meet my ass.

"How's this, baby?"

My wordless noise seems to be a sufficient answer. The beaver button is on red alert. His hand strokes along my side, moving over my hip and lower to tease sensitive skin. I've been straddling the line since we started. He rubs my clit at the same time as he thrusts again. I'm done for; I explode into a shuddering, moaning mess.

"That's right, you come for *me*," he says as though he's scored a goal. I suppose he has. Or I have, or he's scored the goal for me. Any way you look at it, a goal has been scored thanks to the skills of his monster cock and those nimble fingers of his.

I take control of the bean flicking, aware if I keep the pressure on I might come again. I'm stockpiling Alex-induced orgasms for beaver slapping material when he's away.

This time Alex goes over the edge right after me. He collapses onto his side, taking me with him. He's sweaty, but I'm too languid to mind. Besides, it's a testament to how hard he worked to get me off. Twice.

We lie there for a few minutes, basking in the afterglow.

"What do you want for breakfast? Should we stop on the way to your work?"

At the mention of food, my stomach growls as if it has a wild boar hibernating inside. While this particular round of sex wasn't taxing for me aside from the orgasms, I'm hungry.

"What were you thinking?" I would give my left nipple for a bowl of Cookie Crisp or even those chocolate peanut butter Pop-Tarts. On the other hand, a couple of Krispy Kreme donuts would hit the spot, too.

"There's an awesome buffet not far from here." Of course the hockey player wants unlimited food options.

Watching him eat a meal unhindered by things such as portion sizes would be entertaining, I'm sure.

"As amazing as it sounds, a buffet will probably make me late for work."

“I can make you something quick. I don’t have a whole lot since I’ll be gone for the next couple of weeks.”

“I like almost anything.” I stand and stretch, stiff from all the sexing. “Do you have Pop-Tarts?”

“Uh, no. I don’t eat Pop-Tarts during the season.”

Alex fondles my boobs. Then he does the nuzzle thing. I scratch my nails up and down his back and press my nose into his hair while he has a silent love affair with them.

“I’m good with cereal,” I reply, breathless. He pouts when I pick up his shirt from the floor and put it on. The rest of my clothes are in the laundry room. The shirt is long enough to cover all the important bits.

“I have boxer briefs you can wear.” Alex’s half-limp cock bobs and swings in all its snuffie glory as he crosses to his dresser. Penises are interesting. Particularly his.

He roots through the top drawer and grabs two pairs of boxer briefs. One he tosses to me, the other he steps into. I don’t take my eyes off him as he pulls them up his legs and tucks himself in. The boxer briefs he gives me are men’s large with a cartoon print on them. They fall off as soon as I let go. It appears I’m staying pantsless for now.

Alex tilts his head as the boxers pool at my feet. “I guess you need a smaller size, eh?”

“It appears so.”

Alex doesn’t put on any additional clothing, which is fine by me. I’m more than happy to get in some extra ogle time.

Once in the kitchen, I take the liberty of browsing his cabinets. Everything is whole grain. It’s very disappointing.

“What are you looking for?”

I open what appears to be a pantry cabinet. “Cookie Crisp, Fruit Loops, even Honey Nut Cheerios would be okay.” Other than oatmeal, nothing remotely resembles breakfast food. A plethora of garbanzo beans, various pastas, sauces, and other healthy, un-fun foods awaits.

“I don’t think I have any of those.”

“Not even Honey Nut Cheerios? Frosted Mini-Wheats? Either would do in a pinch. Or Eggo waffles.”

“Uh, no, none of those, either.”

He opens the fridge, rifles around, and holds up a container that looks like cream. “I make a pretty mean omelet.”

Upon closer inspection, it appears to be liquid egg product. I stand behind him while he gathers various items and sets them on the counter. His fridge, much like his cabinets, is full of healthy stuff. Even his jam is made of real fruit. The last item he retrieves happens to be a new jug of orange juice. It isn't from concentrate, either. It's fresh squeezed and super pulpy.

I haven't agreed to the omelet yet, still in search of something better—preferably with high quantities of sugar. Alex, however, already has the frying pan out. The last cabinet I try contains Alex's candy stash. It's pathetic at best, consisting of two chocolate bars—both the extra dark, bitter variety—and a bag of Swedish Fish.

I hoist myself onto the counter and shiver as my bare bottom hits the granite. I cross my legs to keep my bits under wraps and tear the bag open.

“Swedish Fish for breakfast?”

I ignore his look of disgust and pop a green one into my mouth, relishing the wonderful, artificial, sugary flavor. “Aren't you making an omelet? What's this?” I point at the white gelatinous mixture in the frying pan.

“It's an egg-white omelet. It's healthy and it tastes good.” Alex reaches around me for a container. He pops the lid and dumps a load of precooked veggies on top of the snotty looking egg whites. I question whether it's possible for it to taste good.

“Where's the bacon? All I see are veggies. Bacon is imperative, or at the very least you should have ham for it to qualify as an omelet. Does it even have cheese? And what's with whites only? The yolk is the best part.”

I'm trying to get under his skin. I don't honestly feel this way; he's obviously one of those healthy eaters. Aside from his love of chocolate dessert indulgences. Maybe I can irritate him enough to take me on the counter. That would be more fun than making omelets.

Alex pulls a container of shredded cheese from the fridge and sprinkles a generous amount on top of the veggies, as well as a variety of fresh herbs. While the omelet cooks, he pours two glasses of his expensive orange juice and passes me one. “Egg whites are full of protein.”

“So is jizz. You don't see me harvesting yours so I can drink a glass of it.”

Alex is mid orange juice sip; he sprays me and his omelet. At least I'm not wearing my own clothes.

His shock is awesome. He wipes his chin with a dishtowel. “Jesus, Violet.”

“What? It’s true, isn’t it? Your hair grows a million times faster if you swallow instead of spit on a regular basis.”

“I’d be interested to take part in your research study.” Alex puts down his glass, grabs the spatula, and folds the omelet neatly in half. It resembles a huge smile. The pan he’s cooked it in is gigantic. He cuts it in half and offers me a plate.

I hold up the bag of artificially colored, flavored and sweetened fish. “I’m good.”

“After the workout you had last night and this morning, you need more than sugar for breakfast.”

“It’s not like I ran a marathon or anything.”

“Mmm. No. Sex with you is far more enjoyable.”

Alex cuts off a bite and lifts it to my mouth. “Try it. I promise you’ll like it.”

I relent, only because he’s put the effort in and it doesn’t smell bad. Surprisingly, it’s rather tasty. I suspect the fresh basil and sharp cheddar have something to do with it, and whatever else was in those veggies. I polish off what’s on my plate and check the time. If I don’t get a move on, I’m going to be late for work.

In the laundry room, Alex hands me my clothing piece by piece and watches me dress. By the time I’m fully clothed, he’s sporting a massive woody. He dons the shirt I slept in and throws on a pair of sweats—through which the MC is highly visible. Even dressed down, he manages to look smoking hot. I look homeless in sweats.

I was smart enough not to bring my work stuff home last night, so Alex takes me straight to the office. The ride is short, and I’m nervous about the end of the first date good-bye. It’s silly; we’ve had a sleepover, but he’ll be gone for two weeks, so all this giddy excitement could wane. Especially if some other puck bunny catches his eye while he’s on the road.

He stops in front of my building. I’m a few minutes early, thanks to his speedy, albeit safe, driving. Alex puts the car in park and turns to me, his arm slung across my seat. “I had a great time last night, and this morning.”

“Me, too.”

“Can I call you later? After I get to the hotel?”

“If you want.”

“Definitely. I can’t wait to get back so I can take you out again.”

“And I’ll get to drive your car?” I’m trying to be nonchalant, but there’s this unsettling feeling in my stomach. I don’t think it’s because of the egg white omelet, either. I really like him. More than I want to.

“We’ll discuss the car later. I still think you cheated.”

Alex goes in for a kiss. He cops a feel while he’s at it, so I give the monster cock a squeeze and a pet. It’s going to be a long fourteen days.

Charlene is waiting for me in my cubicle.

She has cinnamon rolls. They’re meant as bribery. She wants details. Extensive ones. I pick the biggest cinnamon roll with the most icing and take a huge bite.

“So? How was your date?”

With a mouth full of cinnamon roll, I reply, “Fine. He took me out for dinner. It was nice.”

“Nice?”

“The food was excellent.”

“Violet, I don’t give a shit about the food. I’m guessing it was way better than nice since you’re wearing the same clothes from last night.”

“What? How would you—”


“You’d never wear heels like that to work.”

I sigh with relief.

“And then there are these.” She holds out her phone.

I’m greeted by pictures of Alex and me at the restaurant on some Internet gossip site. They’re innocent, unlike the mouth fucking ones from our previous encounter.

My phone buzzes, distracting me from my internal freak-out. It’s Alex.



I can smell you all over me.

Oh, God. His shirt smelled like sex after I was done with it. How am I supposed to function for the next two weeks without his monster cock?

Sign me up for Alex Waters Anonymous. I officially have a problem.



**SOMETIMES MY
NEUROSES PISS
ME OFF**

VIOLET

Over the next week, Alex sends me cute texts interspersed with dirty ones. Time zone differences make it difficult to talk on the phone. Our schedules don't mesh; between flights and being on the road, our conversations are not private and therefore brief.

Buck hasn't sent any angry yeti messages about my date with Alex, so I assume he's either unaware or he doesn't care. My mother's a different story. She attempts to glean as much information as she can about the date-turned-sleepover. She even asks if the rumors are true. I refuse to answer because those aren't details I'm going to share with my mother. However, my inability to sit without wincing for the first couple of days afterward is fairly telling.

Despite the lack of opportunity to talk, Alex sends me flowers and treats incessantly. The flower dude has shown up twice in the first week with new bouquets. Between deliveries, the FedEx guy drops off packages. Most of the time, I get them before my mom intercepts. Sometimes I'm not so lucky. Despite the flowers and Alex's attentiveness, anxiety has managed to creep in and set up shop. Sexing it up with him, while fun, may not have been the smartest idea now that he's going to be gone for an extended period of time.

The lag time between our last date and the next is too far apart. Flowers, texts, and emails aside, all it takes is one too many post-win beers and a slutty puck bunny to ruin it all.



Charlene and I go out for an after work bevvvy at the end of week one without Alex. The wall of televisions by the bar shows the hockey game. Chicago isn't playing, so I'm not as invested in watching. Last night was a different story. Chicago took down Los Angeles in a stunning show of skill and mastery.

The only message I've received from Alex since then is a nonsensical drunken text. As a result, I've been on edge all day. A tabloid magazine and a well-read newspaper taunt me from the empty table beside us.

I used to be one of those people who stood in line at the grocery store and made fun of all the people who spent their hard-earned money on those garbage rags. Now I'm the person who feverishly flips through, checking to see if Alex's pretty face is anywhere inside. He's absent from the pages more often than not, but the fan websites are full of his pictures. I've also been actively avoiding searching my bookmarked websites today for fear of what I might find.

Charlene's phone dings for the eleventy-billionth time since we sat down. She recently set up a profile on an online dating site. She narrowed the field by limiting it to hockey fanatics. Her phone has been chiming all day; lots of guys are into hockey, most of whom wouldn't be considered viable dating material.

No longer able to restrain myself, I perform an image search for Alex on my phone. A slew of new pictures appear. Often I send the photos to my email and save them in my Beaver Button folder. These aren't those kind.

Alex looks gorgeous as usual except his arm is wrapped around the shoulder of a blonde. She's kissing his cheek. He's all smiles and dimples. It's possible she's just a fan. I scroll down to find more pictures of the two of them. She's tucked into his side with his arm thrown protectively around her.

I want to knee him in the balls and smack his monster cock upside the head. The hockey hooker in me wants to kick her ass and knock out all her teeth for kissing him anywhere. Reality punches me in the boob—I've started to think of Alex as my boyfriend. We've only been on one real date. The flowers and the presents don't mean we're exclusive; he's extravagant with gifts. I feel so dumb.

“Violet? Why are you breathing like that?”

I slide my phone across the table. “She’s kissing him, and he’s touching her.” As if she can’t see what’s in front of her.

“I’m sure there’s a reasonable explanation.”

“Sure there is. He’s a whore, and I’m stupid. I should know better.” I grab my phone and close the browser. I can’t look at him anymore. This situation is proving detrimental to my emotional wellbeing.

“You should call him. There must be a good reason for this. If he’s not texting, emailing, or calling, he’s sending you gifts. It doesn’t make sense,” Charlene says in her most rational, gentle tone.

“It does if he’s a player. I’m sure the whole I’m-not-a-whore line he gave me is the one he gives all his repeats—or whatever the hell I am. It’s probably some elaborate ruse. Look at Buck; he’s got all these girls wrapped around his giant yeti finger, pretending to be nice when he’s really a dog. Alex is probably the same, except smoother.”

I must sound like a lunatic. I’ve been paranoid all week, and now there’s justification.

“Vi—”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I need to do something other than sit in a bar with hockey on in the background. I push away from the table, almost spilling my beer. Char doesn’t try to stop me from leaving. I’m too deep into one of my neurotic episodes to be rational.

I listen to angry gangster rap on the drive home. I’m too upset to sit around, so I decide to do something productive. A jog seems like a smart way to burn off some of this negative energy and get perspective. The first sign my idea is flawed occurs when it takes me forty-five minutes to find my damn running shoes. Armed with more angry beats, I adjust my earbuds, and hit the sidewalk.

It’s cold out, so I start with a light jog. Two minutes in, I’m already winded but also determined to make this work. I need to do something beyond crying or calling Alex. I push on, and by the time I’ve gone a block, I have a stitch in my side and I’m wheezing like an asthmatic. On the positive side, I can see the fast food sign glowing in the distance. I check all my pockets and find a magical ten dollar bill in the little one meant for a lip balm or keys. The Arches of Indigestion aren’t too far away. I can make it. More than this jog, I need a milkshake.

I'm panting and huffing by the time I reach the door. The familiar smell of fried food greets me as I step inside. It's like coming home except I don't have to cook anything for myself. I order fries and a milkshake and hole myself up in the corner. Prying off the lid, I carefully coat each fry in frozen vanilla-flavored mock-dairy product. Fucking Alex, literally, is the reason I'm stuffing my face with this crap. Tomorrow I'll end up with the moops thanks to the fake dairy and grease.

The mild sugar and trans-fat high is destroyed by the cold walk home. I avoid checking my emails or phone messages. I don't want to talk to Alex tonight. I don't know him well enough to discern whether or not he's hosing me. Talking to him may confirm his lying bastard status, and I'll be crushed. It's too much to manage. Nyquil is my sleep aid of choice otherwise I'll never shut my mind off.

The Waters beaver stares at me from my pillow. I shove him off the bed and get under the covers. I must go in search of him in the middle of the night because I wake up clutching him.



Charlene is sitting on my desk when I arrive at work the next morning. She's becoming a fixture there.

"You haven't called him yet, have you?"

"Good morning to you, too."

She passes me a folder. "You need to look at this."

"What is it?" I flip it open; there are endless pictures of Alex with the same blonde woman. The sheer volume of them is disturbing.

"She's his sister."

"Say what, now?" I have a vague recollection of Alex mentioning a younger sister while we were on our date.

"Her name is Sunny. She's twenty-one. According to this article"—she holds up a gossip rag—"he flew her out to a game in LA last week because it's colder than a snowman's balls up there in Canada."

"I had no idea."

“He called me to explain. Apparently they’re close.” She produces her phone and shows me Alex’s cell number.

“How did he get your number?”

“Good question. Maybe you should return one of his calls and find out.”

I ignore the jab. “What did he explain, exactly?”

“About the photos. He was worried. He couldn’t get in touch with you and figured it might be the reason. You could have avoided all this if you’d called him or done some research.”

I’m too embarrassed to admit I’ve scoured images like a junkie looking for smack, but I didn’t perform a search for this vital information last night. I’ve made a horribly ignorant assumption based on personal expectations.

He really is a good guy. He took the time to seek out my best friend and relay a message through her, which tells me more about him than the flowers or the gifts.

I check my phone to find my voice mailbox full, and I have twenty texts. I fear their content. The first two voice mails from Alex simply ask me to return his call. The third one is several minutes long and the reason my voice mail is full. I feel awful. He’s tried so hard to explain the situation and I’ve ignored him.

I text him immediately. I don’t hear from him all day. He has a game tonight, so he’s likely at practice or he doesn’t have his phone with him.

Karma dictates I put myself in the same shoes he’s been wearing for the past twenty-four hours. After work, I change into comfy clothes, grab a bag of pretzels from the pantry and a couple of beers from the fridge, and make the trek across the driveway to my parents’ house. The massive television in the living room is the best place to catch the game.

The teams are evenly matched for skill. I watch with rapt attention as Alex scores a goal and manages two assists in the third period, leaving the other team unable to recover. Afterward, the sportscasters interview Alex. He’s riding the high of the win; I worry my late response is going to result in a self-fulfilling prophesy.

I’m buzzed by the time the highlight reel is finished. The game has been over for an hour, and still no message from Alex. I return to the pool house and get ready for bed. Clutching the Waters beaver to my chest, I drift into a fitful sleep.

I'm woken some time later by the sound of my phone ringing. I reach for it in frantic confusion, pressing wrong buttons until I finally answer the call.

"Hi. Hello?" I'm so disoriented. I've been having Alex boob-fondling dreams.

"Hey." His voice is a fuzzy blanket of warmth.

"Hi," I breathe out, porn star style.

"I'm sorry I woke you. I tried to call earlier but my phone died and I had to wait for it to charge. How are you?"

God, I love him. Wait, what? No, no, I don't love him. I love his sweetness.

"I'm okay. I'm sorry I didn't call you until today . . ." I feel guilty for avoiding him, afraid he was all up in someone else's beaver.

"I should've warned you. I know how the pictures look. Flying Sunny out was unplanned."

My remorse overrides my ability to censor my response. "I like you. I didn't expect to see you with someone else. I thought maybe my brand of crazy was a bit too much to handle." Goddammit, I was doing such a . . . mediocre job at being unaffected. Now I've shot the mediocrity all to shit.

"You like me, eh?"

If I could melt into a puddle, I would. Those Canadianisms get me every time.

"Mm-hmm." It practically comes out a sigh.

"I like you, too," he says softly. "Can you take Friday off? I'd love to fly you out to Toronto. You can come to the game, and we can hang out for a few days. I'll take you to Guelph."

It's hard not to get all swoony with Alex offering to fly me out to a foreign country. Okay, not foreign, but Canadians speak French and they have accents. I have vacation days. Time alone with Alex would be fantastic.

"Violet?"

Shit. I've been silent again.

"Please say yes, baby. I want you to come." His voice is low, gritty.

He must know it drives me crazy in the best way when he calls me baby. "I want to."

"We can get a hotel room the first night, then stay at my condo in the city for the rest of the weekend. Just the two of us."

“You have a condo?”

“I do. My parents stay there when I have Toronto games.”

“Right. Of course.”

The idea of spending a weekend alone with Alex makes my thighs clench. It’s been days since I helped myself out, and now I’m warm and wet and wanting.

“I’ll have to check with work to see if I can get the time off. Last minute tickets will be expensive.”

I slide my palm down my stomach to my parted thighs, stifling a moan. My breathing is already heavy, so I hold the phone away from my mouth.

“Don’t worry ab—what are you doing?”

“Uh, I—uh . . .” Should I or shouldn’t I? Prior to my discovery of the picture of him and his sister, he’d been sending me dirty texts all week citing the things he couldn’t wait to do to me when he got home. In one he mentioned spending an afternoon with his face between my thighs. Except he didn’t use that particular phrasing. I moan. Once the sound is out of my mouth, I can’t mulligan it back.

“Are you touching yourself?”

“Maybe.” I slip my fingers into the little pocket in the front. Boy’s underwear are so convenient.

“Yes or no, Violet?”

“Yes.”

“Ah, fuck. Are you petting my pussy?”

Oh sweet baby Jesus, he called it *his*. “Uh-huh.”

I bite my lip to keep from moaning too loudly.

“Don’t hold back. Tell me what you’re doing. God, I wish I could see you.”

“I—I—”

“You gonna get all shy with me now? It’s just you and me. There’s no one but us. Give me something to get through the next few days.” His voice is soft, encouraging.

“Alex. I . . .” It’s barely a whisper.

“Do you wish it was me? My fingers touching you?”

“Oh, God.” I’ve never had phone sex. I’m not a conscious sex talker. The crap I spew is unintentional. “Yes, I wish it was you.”

“Me, too, baby. Me, too. Where are your fingers?”

I hesitate for a fraction of a second. “My clit.”

“Are you wet like you were for me?”

I debate the merits of telling the truth or embellishing for the sake of phone sex hotness. “Uh-uh.”

“No?”

“Not nearly as wet as I get for you.” I’m all breathy and moany.

This is total bullshit. I’m one of those naturally lubey people. It’s a goddamn blessing. However, I’m all for stroking Alex’s ego while we stroke ourselves.

“I can’t wait to have my mouth on you again. I’m gonna eat you like I’m on death row and you’re my last goddamned meal.”

I moan—because what other response does a declaration like that warrant? Alex is really good at the phone sexing.

I rub in earnest as Alex whispers dirty things in my ear about how he wishes it was his fingers and his mouth, how good it will be when he finally gets inside me again, and how much he wishes it was my hand on his cock right now.

“I miss your cock,” I whisper.

“You do, eh?” He follows that bit of Canadian cuteness with, “Tell me how you feel about my cock.”

Good lord, this man’s head is about to explode right along with his dick. “I love your cock, Alex.”

He sucks in a sharp breath.

“I’m so close. Don’t stop.” I’m not talking to my own hand; I’m talking to Alex and his dirty mouth. It’s the driving force behind my impending orgasm.

I moan his name and some profanity as heat funnels into the center of my body. The phone falls from my ear as the orgasm hits. It’s like dropping a Mentos into a bottle of soda.

Alex’s voice is soft and distant while he croons from halfway under my pillow. “That’s it, let me hear you come. God, I wish I was inside you . . . ah shit, I’m gonna—”

I scramble for the phone. There’s no way I’m going to miss this. Alex rasps my name in the sexiest way imaginable. I close my eyes and envision him naked—fisting his cock, coming on his perfect abs.

I give him a moment to catch his breath before I attempt conversation. It’s a lame one. “Sooo . . .”

“God that was hot. What are you wearing? I pictured you topless in boxers.”

“You got the bottom half mostly right. I’m wearing a tank top. It’s white, so you’d be able to see my nipples through it if you were here.” I find it interesting Alex asks about my apparel after the phone sex.

“Will you take a picture and send it to me?”

“What if you lost your phone and it got leaked on the Internet?” I also look terrible in most pictures, especially selfies.

“Hm. Good point. I don’t want anyone else to see you naked. Or partially naked. I can wait if I have to. So you’ll come to Toronto? I’ll have the ticket sent to you tomorrow.”

“Let me check with my boss first. Give me until tomorrow night to see if I can work something out. If Sidney and my mom want to go, he’ll cover the cost so you don’t have to.”

“I want to buy the ticket.”

I’m worried about Buck’s reaction. I don’t care what he thinks, but Alex has to play with him for the rest of the season. If things don’t work out between us, it could mess up his game. I can’t imagine Buck being all buddy-buddy with Alex if he finds out he’s sticking his monster cock in my beaver den.

“When you make the playoffs, you can fly me out to one of those games.” Those are a long way off. Who knows what will be happening between us then?

“You’ll let me do that?”

“Yeah.”

“You’ll stay with me in Toronto even if you fly out with your family this weekend?”

“Definitely.” I stifle a yawn.

“Okay. I should probably let you go; it’s late there, isn’t it?”

“It is. But middle of the night phone booty was worth being woken up for.”

“I’ll talk to you tomorrow, sexy girl.” His voice is soft, like feathers drifting over my skin.

“Night, Alex.”

“Night, baby.”



VIOLET

The next evening, Charlene hangs out at my place. I have a plan to get Sidney to take us to the game in Toronto, and Charlene is part of the persuasion package.

I prepare for martini happy hour and wait for my mother's arrival. The drinks are necessary. She's a cyclone you don't want to get caught up in, especially with Charlene around to feed her hyperactivity. I didn't get my energy level from my mom.

Martini in hand, Charlene follows me into my bedroom while I search my drawers for something comfortable to wear. I need to do laundry. All my favorite Marvel Comic boxer briefs are dirty. I settle on leggings and a T-shirt.

"What's this?" Charlene asks.

I turn, prepared to issue a snide comment, until I see she's holding the Waters beaver. My fingers twitch with the urge to rip it from her hands.

"It's a stuffed animal." I pick up my phone from my dresser and scroll through my messages to avoid eye contact.

"I see that. Where'd you get it?" Charlene flips it over, inspecting the back of its mini jersey.

"Alex sent it to me." My skin gets hot. I bet I'm blotchy.

"Oh, Violet." Charlene nuzzles the beaver, rubbing her nose on top of its head. "Do you sleep with his beaver?"

She's mocking me, and I don't appreciate it. Plus she's touching *my* Waters beaver. I'm a tad territorial about my presents from Alex. I don't let anyone else near the books he's sent me. I also hid the box of Godiva from my mom to avoid sharing.

"You can't tell me that if you had a full-body pillow in the likeness of Darren Westinghouse, you wouldn't hump it before bed every night."

Charlene drops the beaver on my bed and wipes her hands on her pants. “You’re disgusting.”

“I don’t hump his beaver. I was making a point, you pervert.”

“Oh. Right. Do you think I can get a full-body pillow of Darren?”

“I’m sure you could have one made.”

I pick up the beaver and cuddle him furtively—or not so furtively—before I set him back on the bed, pet his little head, and stroke his cute buck teeth.

“So what’s going on? You’re like a crack addict on a sugar high right now.”

I’m fidgety and bouncy, which are telltale signs something’s going down. “I have a plan for—” I’m interrupted by a knock at the door.

My flower delivery guy is holding a huge bouquet of flowers with a Canadian flag perched between white and red carnations, white lilies, and a bunch of other flowers conforming to the same color scheme. The theme is strictly Canadian. Charlene is right on my heels, looking over my shoulder.

“Hi, Fred.”

“How’s it going, Violet?” He seems nervous. I can’t blame him. The last time he was here, I was pissed off and took it out on the flowers. I also made mention of hockey whores and hookers.

“I’m good. Sorry about last week.” I take the flowers. Charlene is practically piggybacking me to get a look at them. “This is my friend Charlene.”

“Hi.” Charlene waves.

“Hey.” Fred waves back and gestures to the flowers. “I guess you made up?”

“We did.”

Fred nods and looks down at his feet. This is weird.

“Well, thanks for bringing the flowers. Have a good night.” I send him on his morose way.

“I bet Alex would be pissed if he found out the guy who delivers his flowers has a crush on you.”

I put the new bouquet in a vase. “Fred doesn’t have a crush on me.”

Charlene snorts but doesn’t comment further. “Hey, there’s something else here.”

A small box sits in the middle of the bouquet. I open the card first.

*I can't wait to show you around my hometown.
~xo Alex*

Charlene grabs the card out of my hand. "What's this? His hometown? "xo"? Oh my God! What's going on?"

"Alex wants me to come to his game in Toronto."

"And?"

"And spend the weekend with him in Guelph."

"Bless you." Charlene hands me a tissue. "So where are you spending the weekend? You've already said yes, right?"

"Guelph and no."

Charlene plucks another tissue from the box.

"I'm not sneezing. Guelph is the name of his hometown, you asshole. I needed to make sure I could get the time off work first before I said yes." I cleared it with the boss this morning. I told him it would be good for networking. It's not a total lie.

"This is huge. I can't believe he invited you to his hometown. Does that mean you'll meet his family? You have to go to this game."

"If we can convince my mom we need to go to Toronto, she'll pester Sidney until he agrees, and he'll get the tickets. The Hawks are doing really well. He'll want to support Buck."

"Smart thinking."

I hand a martini glass to Charlene. "Right?"

Having Alex buy the ticket for me is far too extravagant for a second date. If my parents go, it solves all the issues. I'll still feel a little guilty about it, but I'll survive.

The other part of my plan is to convince Charlene to come, too. I'll need her moral support at the game. It's a lot to ask since I'm not sure I can get Sidney to spring for her plane ticket as well. "Will you come?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Sidney can probably get an extra ticket to the game and the hotel will be covered."

Charlene immediately starts searching for last minute flights on her phone. "And I'll get to meet Darren in person, what could possibly be better?"

I clink my martini glass against Charlene's. I've got her on my side. All I need is to convince my mom and it's a go.

The deep rumble of my mother's Mustang and the heavy dance beats signal her arrival at the end of drink number two. As usual, she doesn't knock. "Is that Char's car in the driveway?"

"Hi!" Charlene puts down the shaker to accept my mom's overzealous embrace.

"You look great!" Mom kicks off her shoes and wanders into the kitchen. "Is that a martini? What kind is it? You girls don't mind if I join you for a drink, do you? Sidney's got a conference call in an hour, and I'm not in the mood for a quickie."

I pretend I don't hear the last part and help Char make her a drink.

"Oh, new flowers!" She waves her hands in the air like she's ready to break into a dance routine. She sniffs the blossoms. "These are beautiful! What's this?" She picks up the small box on the counter.

I completely forgot about it, having gotten caught up in explaining the situation to Charlene.

"I'm not sure." I'm hopeful it's nothing inappropriate or my mom is likely to overshare her own personal experiences.

She thrusts the package at me. "Well, open it."

I take it with some reluctance, praying it's not porn related.

I tear away the red and white paper to uncover a box of maple leaf shaped candies. Huh. This is far from offensive. I've grown accustomed to Alex's mildly inappropriate gifts, cards, and emails.

I pop one into my mouth. It dissolves the moment it hits my tongue. Oh God, it's heavenly. It's like . . . maple sugar. Soooooo good. I do the contented moan thing. I don't want to share them because I'm greedy, but I feel bad moaning my food pleasure while they stare.

"Want one?" I grudgingly ask with a mouthful of melting maple sugar.

They make the same noise I did. Now I get why they were staring. They sound like they're on the brink of a sugar orgasm.

"Can you get these outside of Canada?" Charlene asks with a knowing look. "I'd go to Canada just to get something like this." She plucks another one from the box.

How much less subtle can you get?

"I don't know." My mom takes another one, too.

It's a small box. I don't want to continue to share, especially if you can only get them in Canada where maple trees abound. I guess I could ask

Alex to get me more. Knowing him, he'll send me a year's supply. Not that I'd complain.

"You should ask Alex." She goes in for a third.

"Hey." I smack her hand, gathering the half-empty box close to my chest.

"Aren't they playing in Toronto this weekend?" Charlene gives me the perfect segue.

"Oh!" My mom gets all excited and bounces up and down. *Hint dropped.* "We should go! Can you get Friday off, Violet? I'm sure Sidney will be all for going. Any excuse is a good one to go see Buck play!"

I'm shocked at how easy this is. I fully expected Charlene and I to have to work for a minimum of ten minutes to get to this point. Instead it takes one question. Some of the credit should go to the maple sugar candies.

"What about you, Charlene? Would you like to take a trip to Canada with us? Maybe we can find you a hottie hockey player, too! This is going to be so much fun!" She claps her hands together and bounces some more. "I've only been to Canada once. We should get as much of that maple stuff as we can."

My mom takes out her cell phone and starts texting away. Her texting skills are terrible. She's forever shortening words you can't shorten.

Her phone pings. "I'll chat with Sidney and report back!" She gulps the rest of her martini, hops around as she puts on her shoes, and disappears out the door.

Twenty minutes later I get a text from my mom confirming that we're indeed going to Toronto. I have some idea as to how she managed to make it happen so fast.



My mom is convinced it will be more fun if I don't tell Alex I'm coming. Charlene isn't quite as enthusiastic about the plan, but I'm a fan of surprises—as long as they're the good kind. Despite her reluctance, Charlene helps me fabricate a bogus excuse about a meeting I can't get out of on Friday and a presentation I have to prepare for first thing Monday morning. I call

Alex and give him the “bad news.” He’s so disappointed he doesn’t even want to have phone sex. I feel awful for withholding the truth and for the absence of dirty talk on the phone. I’m hoping the surprise factor will be worth it.

Preparing for a weekend away is a boatload of work, especially when one is packing for a whole lot of sexin’ with a superhot hockey player. Charlene, my boobs, and I head out on a shopping expedition to Victoria’s Secret. I buy three bra and panties sets of the sexy, frilly variety—all of them with red featured somewhere. Beyond the sexified undies, I hit up Target and splurge on a selection of new fun ones since Alex seems to be very interested in seeing me in them.

Thursday is the slowest day on the face of the earth. I’m busy with meetings and Alex has practice, so a few quick texts are all we manage first thing in the morning.

This time I’m much more prepared, having packed the night before; Charlene’s bag and mine are already in the back of Sidney’s SUV. She makes a quick trip to the staff bathroom at the end of the work day to change since we’re being taken directly from work to the airport. Charlene comes out of the bathroom dressed like she’s ready for a night of clubbing instead of a flight.

“Is this too much?” She adjusts her pleather skirt.

“Not if you’re planning on being in a music video.”

Charlene flips me the bird as she struts to the elevator. “I look hot.”

My mom loves her outfit. I’m not surprised.

Our seats are first class, as usual. Charlene has never flown with the *entitled* before.

“There’s so much legroom! I can’t believe we drink for free!” She rubs her palms up and down the leather armrests.

As soon as we’re in the air, I order shots to settle my nerves. All it does is loosen her lips and mine.

Charlene yammers away about the game and how she plans to introduce herself to Darren. Bad friend that I am, I’m not paying close attention. I’m too focused on what the weekend with Alex will entail, besides sex.

“Do you think that’s a good idea?”

“Definitely.” I nod emphatically, pretending I’ve been listening the entire time.

“So you think scaling the boards and jumping onto the ice so I can blow Darren in front of a crowd of thousands is a good way to introduce myself?”

I stifle a giggle. “On second thought, no. I don’t think you should do that.”

“Violet, I need some help here.”

“Just be yourself. If you end up in his room, making out, don’t tell him you love him or his cock or anything. Not the first time you . . . do whatever.”

“You told Alex you loved him when you met him?” Charlene’s expression is incredulous and a little hurt, probably because this is the first disclosure of such information.

“No. I didn’t even know who he was. I may have professed my love to his man unit when I was coming, though.”

“You didn’t.”

“I did.” I promised myself I would take that gem to the grave.

“Wow. It really must be huge.”

My mom’s head pops over the seat in front of me. “What are we talking about?”

“Nothing.”

“Alex,” Charlene says at the same time.

“I’ve heard some interesting rumors about him, but this one is tight-lipped.” My mom inclines her head in my direction.

“Apparently they’re true,” Charlene says with zero consideration for my privacy.

“Char!” I smack her arm.

“What?”

“You had an awful lot of trouble walking the day after your sleepover,” my mom says.

“I’m not discussing this with you, especially not on a plane.”

“Fine, fine. Charlene and I can talk later.” She winks at Char and drops into her seat. I can hear her talking to Sidney. There’s a lot of giggling. I wish she wasn’t such a fan of the overshare, especially with Sid.

We go directly to the stadium upon our arrival. Downtown Toronto isn’t much different than Chicago—full of skyscrapers and horrendous traffic. I’m not sure what I thought it would be like. Maybe I expected elves, like the North Pole, which is ridiculous since it’s only an hour north

of the US border. Apart from his monster cock, Alex is just like regular people. If all Canadian men are that gifted, I can understand why people would be willing to deal with the frigid winters.

We make it to the stadium with only minutes to spare. Charlene is shocked by the outfits—or lack thereof—on some of the hockey hookers. Her pleather skirt is modest in comparison.

“Should I have dressed like that?”

Charlene eyes a girl wearing a Waters jersey that’s been converted into a mini-dress, complimented by eight-hundred-inch heels.

“No. Definitely not. Your cooter would freeze and fall off. Then what would you have to offer Darren?”

Our conversation is put on hold as the Hawks take the ice. Even in all the padding and loose-fitting hockey gear, Alex is hot. I can’t wait to get my hands on him post-game. I’m going to molest his fine ass, Buck’s reaction be damned. It’s been two weeks since I’ve seen him; my beaver is hungry for some wood.

The Hawks are up by the end of first period, but something is off with Alex. He’s irritated. I can see it in the set of his jaw and the overly aggressive way he deals with the opposing team. On the bench he’s antsy, following the action of the game with his lips mashed in a thin line. He yells when one of the Hawks defense gets knocked down by a Toronto forward. It’s like he’s looking for a fight.

Buck is playing like he owns the rink. He deflects four goals in the second period, allowing the Hawks to stay ahead. Darren scores a goal at the end of the second period, giving the Hawks a solid two-point lead.

At the beginning of the third period, Alex faces off at center ice. Just as the ref blows the whistle his head snaps up. The puck hits the ice, and Alex’s gloves are off. Toronto’s center doesn’t even see it coming. Alex grabs his cage with one hand and punches him in the stomach with the other.

Alex knocks him down and straddles him, pulling at his helmet. It pops off and rolls across the ice. Then he starts slamming his fist into the center’s face. Toronto guy manages to get a couple of shots in. They’re relatively ineffective. Alex is just . . . kicking the everloving shit out of this guy.

Finally, the refs get their shit together and break it up. His opposition is bleeding all over the ice. I shouldn’t find this level of violence hot.

“What are they doing?” I ask as refs escort a raging Alex off the ice.

Sidney gives me a dubious look. “He’s being ejected from the game, Violet. He just kicked the shit out of someone.”

Of course he has, but what happens now? Alex is fury incarnate as he stomps awkwardly down the hallway in his skates, disappearing from view. Someone needs to calm Alex down. I’m hoping it will be me.

“I need to pee, I’ll be right back.”

I make my way through the stands toward the locker room, aware I may not get past security. I must have a horseshoe stuck where the sun don’t shine because security is too busy chatting up a couple of puck bunnies to notice as I slip inside the locker room.

I can hear a low thud followed by Alex swearing. I peek around the corner.

Alex’s uniform is strewn across the floor, along with his padding and most of his gear. All he has on is a jockstrap, highlighting his package, which appears larger than usual. It could be a figment of my imagination caused by two weeks of his absence.

His muscles are tense, his jaw flexing, and his nostrils flare with his wrath. He hurtles his skate across the room. It slams into the wall, leaving a hole in the drywall.

I’m nervous and my panties are damp. My thought is singular: angry, hot, locker-room sex.

“Alex.”

His eyes are vibrant with ire. His back expands and contracts with every heavy exhalation of breath. He rolls his shoulders, his gaze moving over me in a hungry, feral sweep.

Oh. My. God. He’s terrifyingly hot. Like The Hulk, but sexy, not green.

I’m so going to get laid in a locker room.

Go me.

**FUCK BUTTERSON
AND HIS SHITTY
TIMING**

ALEX

Toronto's center must have hit me harder than I thought because I'm pretty sure I'm hallucinating.

"Alex, baby, are you okay?" My hallucination takes a tentative step toward me and touches my chest. Her hand warms my already overheated skin.

You can't feel hallucinations. At least I don't think you can, which means Violet is really here. I'm almost naked and extremely pissed. I hope she hasn't witnessed too much of my temper tantrum.

"I thought you weren't coming."

She bites her bottom lip. I reach out to skim the plush curve. Fuck, I've missed her mouth. I've missed her everything.

"I wanted to surprise you. Maybe it wasn't the best idea." Her fingers slide from my sweaty shoulder to my neck. "You beat the hell out of that guy. He was bleeding, and you hardly have a mark on you."

"He pissed me off." As if it wasn't obvious from the ass-kicking I served. That's what happens when an asshole makes derogatory comments about "tag-teaming my newest puck bunny." I didn't handle it well. Especially since I was under the impression I wasn't going to see Violet for several more days. Cockburn and I have had a long-standing dislike for each other ever since I was traded to the Hawks instead of him. I'm a better player, and he knows it.

"I could tell. What happened out there?"

"Cockburn was being a dick. I told him how I felt about it with my fists."

"Cockburn? His last name is almost as unfortunate as Butterson. He must have done something pretty awful to make you so upset."

"He was running his mouth. It's what he does best."

“I’m sorry they kicked you out of the game.” She rests her palm against my chest, right over my heart. “Watching you . . . it made me—” Her head drops, and she peeks up at me through her lashes. “You were so *angry*. I really shouldn’t find that sexy, should I?”

The rage that’s been rocking my ability to make rational decisions ebbs in the wake of her question, only to be replaced with a different, acute need.

“I missed you,” Violet says softly as she pushes up on her tiptoes, and I bend to meet her.

I have no restraint. At all.

Two weeks with only the uncomfortable chafing of my own hand is a poor replacement for Violet. The way she tastes, the way she feels against my body and in my arms, combined with the frustration over being ejected from the game and the fight, is like an emotional, hormonal, adrenaline bomb.

“Fuck, I missed you.”

I grab her ass and pull her in tight. Her lips part and I seek out her tongue with my own. There’s no softness in this kiss; I’m pent up and on overload. Wrapping my arm around her waist, I lift her off the ground. Her feet dangle a few inches above the floor as I cross the room, away from the entrance and the security detail—who clearly aren’t doing their job since Violet is in here.

I set her down in front of the lockers and she shoves her hips into mine. “Ow!”

“Cup.”

She feels around between us. “Of course, good idea. Protect your snuffie.”

“My what?”

“Your snuffie. Your cock.”

“Huh?”

“You know. Like Suffleupagus.”

She nibbles my lip, probably as a distraction from the comparison of my most prized body part to a children’s show character.

“My cock in no way resembles a fuzzy, make-believe elephant.” I take care of my shit.

“It’s uncut, so it’s a snuffie, and it’s like a mythological creature, being so monstrous and all.”

“You’re not nicknaming my dick Snuffie, just so we’re—” I yank her shirt over her head.

I’m met with the most amazing bra I’ve ever seen. Ever. It’s awesome. It’s red and white and frilly and mesh so I can see her nipples through the fabric. Her boobs are nestled in there, just waiting for my hands and mouth to be on them.

“I missed you, too,” I tell them as I press my face into her chest and taste her warm skin. Violet makes those fantastic sounds I love.

“I love this bra,” I say from between her boobs.

“I thought you might.”

I walk her backward until she hits the lockers. She pushes her chest out, gripping my hair. As much as I want to admire the way she looks in this bra, I want her naked more. I can take my time later this weekend, when I have a bed, the privacy of my condo, and unlimited hours in which to enjoy every inch of her body. I need to get inside her. Now.

The cup is a problem, and if I don’t get it off soon, I’ll end up with a sprained dick. I have no desire to be relegated to mouth and finger duty for the rest of the weekend. My cock will not stand for it. The cup is secured with snaps; I struggle with them while still trying to kiss Violet.

“Let me help.” Violet sinks to her knees, unclasps her bra, lets it drop to the floor, and moves my hands out of the way.

My dick kicks behind the cup, trying to get free. I wanna fuck. Bad.

Violet frees the snaps. “I was a Girl Scout,” she says as though her skills in cup removal require an explanation. She tilts her head to the right as she frees me to avoid getting hit in the face with my twitching, swinging, super hard erection.

She gives my cock a soft, slow stroke. “I missed you.” Leaning in, she nuzzles my dick against her cheek. Violet looks up and brushes her lips over the head.

“Fuck. Baby, don’t do that.”

“Why not?” She gives me another stroke.

“I appreciate the sentiment, but—”

She runs her tongue across the slit. I’m sweaty and disgusting, but if it tastes bad, she doesn’t let on. I think I love her. My cock jerks in her hand, and I hit my head against the lockers, the heavy thud echoing in the room.

If she puts her mouth on me, I’ll come. I can’t let that happen. Sex in the locker room is my number one fantasy. Well, maybe not my number one

—that’s boob sex. Anywhere. This is a close second.

I haul her to her feet and drop to my knees. I unbutton her jeans and discover her panties match the bra: red mesh I can see through with the same white lacy ruffle.

“I know the gift card was for my boobs, but I didn’t want my beaver to feel left out.” She traces the lacy waistband with a fingertip.

“Totally understandable.”

I slide her jeans down her thighs, taking a moment to appreciate her soft skin. Running my hands up the back of her legs, I cup her ass with one hand and the back of her knee with the other. The motherland is right in front of my face. While I can’t wait to be inside, I’m well aware no matter how turned on she is, getting in there without a warm-up is inadvisable. Plus, I promised to eat her, and I keep my promises.

Hooking her leg over my shoulder, I kiss my way from her knee up the inside of her thigh, nipping a little on the way.

She tries to be quiet, but her hushed whimpers are my favorite sound in the world.

“Is this okay, baby?” I can tell it is. I still want her breathless, panted words. The ones that make me ache for the warmth of her body.

She exhales sharply as I place two small, wet kisses just above her pussy. “Please, Alex.”

I don’t need further invitation; I stroke her with my tongue. And then I do it again, and again. She writhes against my face, her eyes closed, biting her knuckle to keep from making too much noise. Her palm slams against the lockers as she comes on my mouth.

Her other hand is twined in my hair, yanking. It takes me a while to realize she’s trying to get me to come up for air. Her eyes bug out, and she swipes at my chin with her palm. “Oh, God. That’s . . . I’m so leaky.”

“I love the way you taste.” I’m egotistical enough to believe I’m the reason she gets so wet. I stroke myself a couple of times with my slick fingers, and then I grab her ass, pinning her against the lockers.

“Two weeks is too long to wait for this.”

“I know. I went through monster cock withdrawal.”

I lower her onto me and try not to think about how fucking fantastic it feels to be inside Violet again or how I plan to do a lot more of it over the next couple of days. I search for something else to focus on so I don’t come too fast. Stats usually work, but getting kicked out of the game makes it a

bad place for my mind to go. I shift my hips back and thrust hard. Violet gasps, and her head thumps against the locker.

“Shit. Sorry.”

“For what?”

“Not too hard?”

She shakes her head. She kisses across my jaw to my ear and whispers, “Come on, Alex. Fuck me.”

That’s it. She can’t whisper things like that and expect me to be a gentleman. Although, considering we’re having sex in a locker room, gentlemanliness went out the window a while ago.

I pull out until only the head is still inside and then push back in, fast and deep. “Like this?”

I take her garbled response as an affirmative and do it again. Her head lolls back, hitting the locker with a metallic thump. I try to fight off the orgasm threatening to overtake me. It’s coming anyway, and I can’t stop it. Violet wraps her legs tighter around my waist, and her nails dig into my shoulders as I pound into her relentlessly.

Violet doesn’t seem to mind my complete loss of control. She bites my neck and mutters *fuck me* repeatedly. I change the angle to get a better grip on her ass, and she circles her hips. Bowing my head, I bite the skin just above her breast, and she lets out the sexiest, sweetest cry.

“I’m gonna fuck you until you can’t walk.”

It’s no way to talk to the woman I am currently having aggressive, hot sex with against a set of lockers, regardless of whether it’ll be true. I wait for her to slap me across the face.

Instead she smacks my ass and groans. “I damn well hope so.”

The banging of the lockers grows louder the harder I go. Violet chants how much she loves my cock the closer she gets to an orgasm. It makes me feel like a superstar. Beyond the walls of the locker room, I hear the sound of the buzzer and raucous cheers. I’m too wrapped up in the feel to get what it means.

Suddenly, I’m being squeezed so hard the circulation to my dick feels like it’s being cut off. Violet calls out my name, followed by a string of colorful profanities as she comes. Hard. So do I.

I feel like the champion of the world. Just as I surface from the abyss of sexual gratification, I hear voices.

“That was unreal,” Violet says. “I want you to do me again.”

“Violet, baby—”

She kisses me fiercely. “I love it when you call me baby.”

Violet is so out of it, she hasn’t registered we’re no longer alone. Well, as alone as we possibly could be with security guards hanging out in the hallway.

The voices grow louder, filtering into the locker room. I tuck Violet’s head into my neck and angle my body so the only parts of her showing are her legs wrapped around my waist. Even that’s too much exposure. If I hadn’t been so volatile tonight, we wouldn’t be in this situation. I just keep screwing things up all over the place where Violet is concerned.

“What the fuck, Waters?”

Butterson’s voice echoes through the room. While I don’t particularly care if he knows about Violet and me, his walking in while I’m banging her against the lockers isn’t going to go over well. Some of the other guys stop short. The majority turn around, staying on the other side of the room, where Violet and I are mostly out of view.

“Uh-oh,” Violet whispers, burying her face in my neck. “I think we’re pucked.”

“You’re unbelievable, man. You get kicked out of the game, and first thing you do is find a bunny to screw?” Butterson sounds somewhere between incredulous and envious.

“You might want to give us a minute,” I say, adjusting my grip on Violet’s ass. I have no idea how I’m going to get her out of here without anyone else seeing her naked.

“Now you’re looking for privacy? You should’ve thought of that before you decided to fuck some bunny against the lockers.”

While I totally deserve to have the piss taken out of me for this, the situation blows.

“Hey, Butterson,” Kirk says. “Isn’t that your sister?”

If we weren’t *puucked* before, we sure as hell are now.

VIOLET

My state of blissful wonder is short-lived in the face of Kirk's ill-timed question. I'm beginning to think locker-room sex wasn't the best plan. Especially during the third period. Too bad I've already done it.

Alex holds my head against his neck, protecting me from the eyes of his teammates.

"Wait a minute. Violet? No way! No fucking way! NO FUCKING WAY!" Buck shouts. "Is your dick in my SISTER?"

It's so humiliating it's laughable. It's bad enough I'm naked, wrapped around my . . . Alex, who I'm in a yet-to-be-defined relationship with. Having my stepbrother yell at him while he's still inside me is beyond reasonable levels of mortification.

I lift my head so I can state the inappropriately obvious. "I'm your *stepsister*." As if technicalities are going to stop the rumble about to go down. "And Alex can stick his dick in me whenever he wants." The last part is unnecessary. I've ignored Buck's warning and hooked up with Alex, except I've taken it to the next level by getting it on in a public venue with all his teammates as witnesses.

I might as well throw dynamite in a gasoline fire.

"I'LL KICK YOUR ASS, WATERS!" Buck continues his bellowing. His volume is excessive as he's mere feet away.

Alex doesn't so much as flinch. He strokes a gentle palm down my back, a stark contrast to the angry, dirty sex we've just engaged in.

Breaking the connection, Alex unwraps my legs from his waist and sets me down gently, using his body to shield my nakedness from Buck and Kirk and whoever else is watching the show. I'm having a hard time standing without assistance so I grab his shoulders. He wasn't lying about fucking me until I couldn't walk.

"Let me handle this, baby."

“Did you just call her ‘baby’? How long has this been going on? Get your damn hands off my sister!” Buck’s face is an unnatural shade of red; verging on purple. He looks like he’s going to have a heart attack.

I’d love to put my clothes on, but they’re strewn all over the floor. I can’t reach them without someone getting a glimpse of my well-used cooter. Alex can’t get them for me, either, as he’s acting as a human shield, guarding my naked body from the teams’ hungry eyes. Okay, maybe *I’m* being a little over dramatic. Most of them aren’t looking at all.

“Waters, I’m not going to tell you again. Get away from my sister.”

Buck’s tone has changed to the quiet-calm voice he uses when he’s so furious he can barely function. I’ve seen him like this a couple of times before. Usually over Xbox. It’s not good. I have a feeling he’s going to try to break Alex.

Alex spins to face him. Since I’m looking at the floor, I see his dick swing in the process. I hold back the inappropriate laughter when I hear it slap against his thigh. I love his penis. I want to give it a sponge bath and dress it up like a super hero.

Peeking over his shoulder; I see a few more team members standing behind Buck, gawking rather than going about their business. I can’t blame them. This is rather entertaining.

Buck shifts his angry glare from Alex to me. “What’s wrong with you?” He’s back to yelling.

“Pardon me?” I ask, all snarky.

“Do you think we could get a towel?” Alex asks.

“Screw you! I’m not getting you shit,” Buck replies.

“It’s not for me, asshole. It’s for Violet. Unless you’d like the entire team to see her naked.” Alex matches him, even voiced and calm.

Darren, who’s valiantly trying to keep his eyes averted, tosses a towel to Alex, who in turn hands it to me. Once I’m wrapped up, Buck takes a swing at Alex. It’s totally unexpected; at least *I* don’t expect it. Apparently Alex does. He grabs me around the waist and moves us out of the way. I feel the whoosh of air on my cheek as Buck’s giant fist misses my face by mere inches.

Alex sets me down and shoves Buck, hard. “What’s wrong with you? You could’ve hurt her.”

Buck still has skates on; he stumbles backward, struggling to stay upright. Darren and Kirk move in as if to break them up.

“Enough!”

Gripping my towel with one hand to keep it in place, I put a palm on Buck’s chest. It’s gross how sweaty he is. His jersey is drenched. Alex is right behind me, his chest against my back. I’m a miniature person compared to the two of them; they glare at each other over my head.

“What the hell are you doing with him?” Buck spits on my face as he yells.

This is so repulsive. I’ll never have sex in a locker room again. I could get plantar warts from standing on the dirty floor without shoes. Okay, so the floor isn’t dirty at all. This is like a damn hotel room except it smells like sweaty men, hockey equipment, and sex—thanks to Alex and me.

“Can you quit it with the yelling? I’m standing right here. I can definitely hear what you’re saying just fine without you trying to shower me in saliva and shatter my eardrums.”

Buck gestures to Alex, his expression reflecting his disbelief. “He fucks anything with a pulse!”

“Says the walking venereal disease.” God, I’m good today.

“I bag my shit! I don’t have fungus growing on my dick. I can’t say the same for this asshole.” Buck points an accusatory finger at Alex.

“What the hell is going on here? The coach comes in, surveying the scene with a critical, confused eye. “Who hired a hooker? You know the policy on that.”

“Oh my God.” I grip the towel tight and hide behind my hand, utterly mortified.

“Watch it, Coach. That’s my sister.” Buck’s tone, while controlled, holds warning and a lot of pent-up anger. I’m thinking that’s mostly due to walking in on the locker sex—oh, and the fact that I’m now being pegged as a puck bunny of the lowest form.

“Your sister’s a hooker?” Coach asks.

What the hell? Is everyone in this room below intellectual average other than Alex? More importantly, do I look like a hooker? I suppose my nakedness paints me as such. I peek out from between my fingers—I’ve ascribed to the childish notion if I can’t see anyone, no one can see me either.

Alex hulks out again, taking a protective stance in front of me. “She’s not a hooker; she’s my *girlfriend!*” he roars.

Literally, he roars. It's loud and guttural. It makes my ears hurt since he's so close.

Getting caught having sex is only the tip of the embarrassment iceberg. Now that the coach has accused me of being a prostitute, Buck looks like he's going to blow. I'm waiting for the top of his head to pop off and steam to come pouring out along with the limited amount of brain matter he keeps in there.

I look up at Alex and whisper, "Can I get dressed now?"

Coach blows a whistle around his neck and the chatter stops. "Show's over. You better hope no one caught wind of this shit, Waters, or you'll have one hell of a mess to clean up. Take your friend and her clothes to the lounge; then come see me." His disapproval is clear. "The rest of you, get changed."

Alex picks me up by the waist and carries me over to my discarded items while the coach pulls Buck aside.

Once I've secured my clothing, Alex takes me through a door to another room. Couches and a giant flat screen occupy most of the space.

"Why did we have hot, angry sex against lockers if we could've had it here, on this couch? I mean God, Alex, you could've just bent me right over and . . ."

His jaw clenches and a muscle twitches in his cheek. "There's a couch in my condo I can bend you over tomorrow night if you want. Right now, you should get dressed."

Holding the towel in front of me, he checks over his shoulder every few seconds to make sure we're alone.

I shimmy back into my pants. "Are you going to be in trouble?"

"I'll be in trouble for the fight more than anything else. I should have waited until we were alone."

"It was my fault."

"I'm pretty sure I got you naked."

I pull my shirt over my head as Buck appears in the doorway. Alex wraps the towel around his waist to conceal his woody.

Buck notes my dressed form before taking in Alex's mostly undressed one. His fists clench, and he mumbles. It sounds like a yoga mantra or something.

"I should beat your ass for this, Waters."

“You don’t need to defend my honor, Buck. It wasn’t like I was a virgin prior to Waters here.”

Alex coughs, his expression darkening. Maybe he’s miffed by my revelation. I’ll never understand why guys, particularly those who have clearly shared their wood with a whole lot of beaver, get all territorial about the one they’re currently after. Alex has enough self-confidence without me telling him he’s by far the best.

“Waters. Out here. Now.” Coach calls from the doorway, his phone clutched in his hand.

“Yes, sir.” Alex kisses my temple. “Don’t worry, baby, it’ll be fine.”

“Don’t you call her ‘baby!’” Buck points a hairy-knuckled finger at Alex.

I slap it away. “I happen to enjoy it when Alex calls me ‘baby.’ ” I turn my face into Alex’s shoulder and say softly, “Particularly in the throes of passion.”

Buck throws his hands up in exasperation. “Will you two stop?”

Alex kisses the top of my head and saunters away, a slight swagger in his step. It might be attributed to the semi he’s still sporting or the comments that paint his sexual prowess in a very positive light. He does give Buck a wide berth, just in case he decides to strike. It’s a real possibility—he’s turning puce again.

“What the hell, Violet?” he asks as soon as Alex is out of the room.

“‘What the hell,’ what?”

“You’re banging Waters? In the fucking locker room? How long has this been going on?” Buck’s hands are on his hips like an angry mother—an angry yeti mother.

I shrug. “I guess since the first time I met him.”

Buck’s eyes grow wide. He’s putting things together. I can almost see the steam coming out of his ears because his brain is in overdrive. I feel sorry for him; as much as I’ve grown to like him over the past five years, he got the short end of the intellectual fortitude stick. He’s cute fully dressed, and sometimes, when he’s not out whoring his dick, he can be awfully considerate.

“But that was almost two months ago! You’ve been keeping this from me this entire time?” He paces, running a hand through his hair. His anger dissolves somewhere into hurt.

“Because I knew this is how you’d react.”

“Well, yeah, Vi. He’s even worse than me!” Buck scratches the back of his neck as if he’s truly perplexed. “I don’t understand why you’d get involved with someone who’s only out to wet his dick with you.” It’s probably one of the deepest, most heartfelt things he’s ever said to me.

“That’s not what this is about.” What’s going on between me and Alex is more than sex. He wanted me here this weekend. It should mean something. “He’s different when we’re together.”

“You mean he doesn’t fuck you in public places all the time? Really reassuring, Vi.”

“Says the guy who got caught with his hand up a girl’s skirt in an *open* bathroom stall.” It’s a low blow.

“I got traded for that, Vi. *Traded*. Do you get what that means? I had to start all over with a new team, and now I find out you’re doing what? Dating this fool? What if he screws you over? You think I can let it go?”

I hadn’t considered how vast the ramifications could be should things go sour with Alex. Buck has a good point. He’s the new guy on the team, and my involvement with their captain could make things difficult for Buck more than anyone. I suddenly feel guilty for not being honest with him in the first place. Buck might have been upset about the situation, but it would’ve been better than him walking in on us having sex, along with all his teammates.

I put a hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry, Buck. I thought it was going to be a fling, and it turned into something more.”

He sighs. “I don’t want to see you get hurt. I know I can be a fuckwit and a huge man-slut most of the time, but I do have a heart. I haven’t forgotten about the turdburger from the minors who messed with you.”

I’m stunned. Buck laid off the asshole comments after the turdburger and I broke up. I assumed it was because I had what would probably be considered a complete emotional breakdown.

I must have been way more emo about it than I thought if Buck is bringing it up now. At the time, he attempted to be as sensitive as his male brain would allow. He set aside his bunny time to watch horror movies with me and let me beat him at video games.

“I know you’re coming from a good place. I promise I won’t make the same mistake twice. Alex is a decent guy. I see a different side of him than you do. One that isn’t completely testosterone and semen fueled.”

“I don’t know, Vi—”

“I promise if I need you to mess Alex up over something, I’ll let you know.”

His eyes light up like he’s in a nudie bar.

“Really?”

“Really.” I nod, knowing I will never in a million years sic Buck on Alex if things don’t work out. I have knees. I know how to use them.

He nods, his relief evident. “I’m gonna shower. Wanna hug it out?” He opens his arms wide.

I make a face and back away. “I think I’ll wait until after the shower for that, thanks.”

“Okay.” He lumbers awkwardly to the door, still wearing his skates.

Our bonding session over, I find a mirror and work on fixing my hair, which is very much the product of a sex tornado. If anything, I look like an expensive escort, which is not nearly as bad as a hooker. While performing emergency hair surgery with my fingers, I get caught in memories of the turdburger, Steve.

He exemplified the term *asshole*. Not at first, though. Initially, he was charming. I met him in my last year of college at a campus coffee shop over a latte mix-up. His major was undefined, and he was in his second year. He was a little younger than me, but he was cute. On our third date, I found out he was in the minors, looking to get drafted. Lots of red flags, right? I should’ve called it off right there. I didn’t because sometimes I’m blinded by hotness and nice teeth.

We’d been seeing each other for only a few weeks when he suggested meeting my parents. I was floored. Most guys avoid that business like the plague. So I introduced him to Sidney, who offered to watch him play. I went, too, just to be a supportive girlfriend, and discovered Steve was never going to be a good enough player to make it to a farm team, let alone the NHL. Sid took him aside and let him down easy. Still, a bruised ego is a bruised ego.

A few days later I stopped by the coffee shop to pick up a latte between classes. I wasn’t surprised to see him. What did surprise me was the brunette cozied up on his junk. She was one of those skanky types, dressed in a super-short skirt with cleavage spilling out of her low-cut blouse. Her boobs were way bigger than mine.

Now, let me be clear—I knew this relationship wasn’t going anywhere. In fact, I wasn’t really interested in seeing him anymore. Sex with him was,

as mentioned previously, lackluster at best. His orgasms sounded like a hyena in heat and he was lacking below the waist. It was the ultimate in disappointing sex. At the time I was tired of being alone, and the unpleasant, high-pitched sex seemed better than nothing. It was quite the funk.

Steve and the skank were snuggling on the couch. I was as annoyed as I was relieved until he pulled the shittiest kind of move in the history of dating. It will stick with me for the rest of my life—beyond the dog-whistle moaning sex.

He looked at me as if he didn't know who I was. He even asked if he could help me. Before I made an enormous fool out of myself, I told him he looked like some douche-whore with a small dick I used to know, and left.

That was more than eight months ago. Since then I've been on a dating hiatus. Hockey players of any kind have been strictly off the table. Until Alex.

The irony that I'm involved with a would-be manwhore-who-was-never-a-manwhore is not lost on me. In my defense I thought I knew what I was getting myself into. It's not my fault all the rumors turned out to be false and Alex is a nice guy.

Several members of Alex's team wander into the lounge. Most sit on the couches and watch TV while they wait for the rest of the guys to finish cleaning up. They're all wearing suits, looking refined. A guy named Spencer sets a brush and a ponytail holder in front of me. His hair is long and pulled back into one of those man bun things I've seen a lot of lately.

"You look like you might need this." His cheeks pinken as his eyes lift to my hair. I'd appreciate it more if I wasn't so embarrassed.

"Thanks."

"No problem."

By the time I've brushed my hair into a semismooth ponytail, Alex returns to the lounge, freshly showered and dressed in a black pinstripe suit.

"Leaving the locker room should be interesting, hey, Waters?" one of the guys says, nodding in my direction.

It takes a few seconds for this information to process. I have to leave through the same door I came in. There are always camera crews waiting, even after the interviews are done. How the hell am I going to get out of here without the world finding out I've become Alex's puck bunny?



**HERE I THOUGHT
I COULD FIT IN A
HOCKEY BAG**

VIOLET

Closing my eyes, I pray for the ability to beam myself out of the locker room. Unfortunately, when I open them I'm still standing here staring at Alex. He's nice to look at, so that's a consolation.

"I can't leave the locker room."

Someone starts to speak. I shush them with a karate chop through the air. This is unreasonable. I'm aware I'll have to leave this room eventually. I'm so freaked out. I must look like those weird greeting cards with the animals whose eyes are half the size of their head. I don't want pictures taken of me like this. Unable to contain myself, I pace around the room, continuing my mini-tirade, explaining why I can't leave should Alex or any of his teammates within earshot be interested.

"People are going to think I'm your hockey hooker. Or I'm gangbanging the team. Then you know what will happen?" Alex opens his mouth, but I cut him off. "I'll tell you what's going to happen. Some porn producer will try and put me in a movie. It'll be called *Hockey Hooker does the Hawks*."

I suck in a deep breath. It's not enough; I can't get sufficient air into my lungs. I'm sweaty and clammy. If this is what a panic attack is, I never want another one. The room is dead silent, except for Kirk.

"I'd totally buy a porno with you in it," he says.

I laser-beam holes through him with my eyes. I guess he means it as a compliment. I look over at Alex, ashamed for enjoying the murderous glint in his eye. Primal yet sophisticated in his suit, he bares his teeth at Kirk.

"I'm not going to be in a porno." I try for indignant, but my voice is shrill and choked.

I'm full-on panicking. Alex better fuck me into oblivion later tonight so I can forget about this fiasco.

It doesn't matter if I look like a hooker or not, I'll be tarred as one if I leave the locker room with the team.

Buck's hockey bag has to be in here somewhere. I've seen it enough times to recognize it. Better yet, maybe I can find Alex's bag. Those bags are huge, and I'm small. If his crap isn't in there, I can most certainly fit inside. Buck can wheel me out and no one will be the wiser.

I stride into the other room, ignoring the eyes on me. I have a goal: avoid the walk of shame from the locker room into the paws and jaws of the media slores. I unzip Buck's bag and I'm almost knocked over by the smell.

"Holy hell, Buck. I think something died in here." I lift his sweaty jersey, searching for a rodent corpse, or human remains.

"Those are my lucky socks. I won't wash them until we lose a game." As if luck is going to stop them from smelling like a carcass.

"How do you not have trench foot from wearing these things? Have you checked to make sure you have all your toes?"

He crosses his arms over his chest. "Really? You wanna get on my case right now?"

I shove the offending sock back in the bag and zip it up. The smell is so putrid my eyes water. Even my nose hairs feel singed. I look around the room and spot Alex's bag. I know it's his because it says "WATERS" in huge red letters. Rushing over, I open it up. Everything smells sweaty but not vile, so I'm willing to make a temporary home of it. I start unloading the contents, surprised by how much stuff fits in there.

Alex kneels beside me. "Violet, baby, what are you doing?"

I pull out his skates and a couple of the bigger items, making room to climb in. It doesn't smell bad at all; hanging out in his hockey bag should be manageable for a few minutes.

"This is how you're going to get me out of here." I mean, isn't it obvious?

"No one's going to think you're a prostitute."

"Really, Alex? You're being awfully naive if you believe people aren't going to think I'm a super slut when I walk out of this locker room with the entire team behind me. Or in front of me. Or surrounding me."

He flashes a dimple. "You'll be with me."

I lower my voice to a whisper. "And that's better how? People already believe you're a player. How will I avoid the puck bunny label if I saunter out of here looking like an expensive prostitute hanging off your arm?" I

add the expensive part to make myself feel minutely better about this whole situation.

Alex puts a hand on my arm, his hurt evident by the sudden slump of his shoulders. “You don’t need to do this.”

“This is already complicated. I don’t want to create more problems for myself.” The hockey bag will be cramped, similar to how I imagine a body bag would feel except with smelly equipment.

“There’s another exit.”

“There is?” I haven’t seen one, but then again, I’ve been pretty preoccupied up until now.

He nods slowly. “There is.”

“That’s a much better option than snuggling with your jockstrap.”

Alex tells the coach we’ll meet them at the bus. He opens the emergency door, otherwise known as the “back door.” I put my hand over my face and peek through the slits between my fingers. No one is waiting to ambush us. I take Alex’s extended hand and follow him down the deserted hall to the exit. He pushes the release bar, and we step out into the cold, Canadian winter night.

Alex wraps his arm around my waist. “See? Much better than riding around in my hockey bag.”

“Agreed.” I huddle into his chest as he guides me across the parking lot, staying in the shadows. He keeps me curled into his side as a few reporters appear out of nowhere to chase after us. The driver opens the door, saving me from potential additional embarrassment. Once we’re on the bus, I realize my parents and Charlene have no idea where I am. I pull my phone out, turn it on, and check my texts. There are twenty-seven. Alex sent fifteen between four in the afternoon and just prior to the start of the game. The rest are from my mom and Charlene.

Having checked before I left for the Great White North, I discovered roaming charges were super expensive, hence the reason I shut my phone off. I quickly shoot a text to Charlene and one to my mom to let them know I haven’t been kidnapped by a serial killer. The plan is to meet up with everyone at the bar to celebrate the win.

When I’ve finished texting, I look over at Alex. He’s staring at me.

“Why didn’t you respond to any of my messages today?” He sounds like I kicked his pet beaver.

“Do you have any idea how expensive the roaming charges are in Canada? It doesn’t even make sense. Canada’s kind of like a huge state in the north. I know it’s a commonwealth and all, but wouldn’t it be more convenient if we had the same money and government?”

Alex’s mouth hangs open. I fear I may have insulted him. “Every text I send costs seventy-five cents outside of the US, and I didn’t buy a package. I figured I’d see you soon enough, and if I sent you messages I’d tell you I was coming, and I wanted it to be a surprise.”

“I’m going to pretend you didn’t say any of that shit about Canada being an extension of the US, Violet. I know you don’t mean that.”

Ooooh, I definitely offended him. I’ll bring it up again later. It would be the perfect way to get him all riled up before we get naked. He might smack my ass for it. Interestingly enough, the possibility gets me a little excited.

The driver takes the bus around to pick up the rest of the team. Buck is busy answering questions from reporters. He’s concentrating hard. It makes his forehead scrunch up.

“What did the guy say to you on the ice, anyway?”

“Eh?” His expression is carefully blank. I’m sure he knows what I’m referring to.

“What did he say to provoke you?” I recall what his violent outburst looked like, and I regret to say the question comes out a little breathy.

“I don’t remember. He was being a dick.” It’s an evasive answer at best, and I don’t buy it for a second. He’s too tense. He’s lying; I just don’t know why. His phone rings, saving him from more questions. He digs it out of his pocket and checks the screen. “Shit. It’s Dick.”

“Who’s Dick?”

“My agent.” Alex silences the call and shoves his phone back in his pocket.

“You’re not going to answer?”

“Not tonight. I don’t need him jumping down my throat about the fight or the locker room.”

His teammates pile onto the bus, thwarting my ability to ask more questions. Buck’s agent runs a lot of interference for the stupid things Buck does on a regular basis. I assume Alex’s agent must do the same.

Alex’s teammates razz him about the fight on the ice the entire way to the bar. No one so much as mentions the locker room. Regardless, Alex

becomes increasingly annoyed as they give him hell for being so hotheaded. While I'm a fan of an irritated Alex, I don't want him to be in a pissy mood for the rest of the evening. Even if it might benefit me later.

I've never experienced the team's arrival from this perspective. It's overwhelming. The media slags and excited fans are all over the place, flashes from cell phone cameras go off like strobe lights. They yell at Alex, asking about the fight and me, wanting to know if the locker room rumors are true. I cower into his side, disturbed by how quickly news travels. As the lone female among the throng of giant males, I stick out like a pair of boobs in a sea of dicks, just as I feared.

I grip Alex's arm tightly. "Please tell me there aren't any pictures."

He shakes his head. "It's all speculation."

His response doesn't do much to alleviate my concern.

Through the spots in my eyes from the flashes, I search valiantly for my parents and Charlene in the crowd. All the faces are indistinct blurs.

Alex takes my hand and leans down so his mouth is close to my ear. "My family is here. I want to introduce you."

Oh God. I have to meet the parents. I'm thankful I had time to manage my hair, otherwise I'd still be sporting the freshly fucked look. What if I say something dumb? This is me after all; I have a propensity for spewing idiocy. What if Alex's mother hates me? What if rumors of the locker room lovin' have already reached her?

My palm is sweaty as Alex slides his fingers between mine and gives it a squeeze. I squeeze back, unable to let up on my grip.

He pulls me close and kisses my temple. "They're going to love you."

We'll see about that. Immediately after we enter the VIP section, a woman my mother's age throws her arms around him.

Once she lets him go, I take in the rest of her. Holy shit. If there happened to be a Cougar Component for a beauty pageant, she'd be a prime candidate. Her stunning face and delicate features are overshadowed by her hair. It's huge.

The complexity of the teased style must be held in place by seven cans of hairspray. If I lit a match within a ten-foot radius of her head, she would burst into flames. I just can't get over it. As I stare in horrified awe, I snap my mouth shut and attempt a natural smile.

Alex is beaming. It would be cute if I wasn't so damn stunned by the pageant queen before me.

“Mom, this is my girlfriend, Violet. Violet, this is my mother, Daisy.”

“It’s so nice to meet you,” I say through my plastered-on smile.

How adorable. We’re both named after flowers. Her name is completely at odds with her crazy Aqua Net hair. Daisy is a name I attribute to flower children who wear tie-dye and smoke weed.

Beyond the hair and the discordant name, Alex introduced me as his *girlfriend* again. To his mother. At least he doesn’t have to tell her I’m not a prostitute, but this is crazy. I didn’t even get the chance to say I wanted to be his girlfriend—he just applied the label. Don’t people ask those sorts of questions nowadays? Or is it assumed once we reach the stage of weekend getaways? Does this qualify as a weekend getaway? I have too many questions.

“I had no idea Alex had a girlfriend.” She looks at Alex. “Why would you want to keep this one a secret?”

Oooh. I’m not liking Mrs. Waters so far.

“I haven’t been keeping Violet a secret.” He’s smiling, but there’s an edge to his tone and a warning in his eyes as he stares his mother down.

I can see the moment she decides I’m not good enough for her son. She extends her hand and gives me a limp-noodle handshake, like I have a disease. This is going so well.

Alex is either oblivious to the estrogen landmine we’ve dropped into, or he’s looking for a way to save me, because he introduces me to his father. Holy vowel sounds. Alex may have his mother’s eyes and hair color, but he has his dad’s looks. Mr. Waters’ is pulling a hard-core silver fox. His eyes are a stunning shade of blue. This family has been blessed with amazing eye genes. And everything else. His choice of clothing is something else. He’s sporting a pair of worn jeans and a white button-down. The top three buttons are undone, exposing a band T-shirt. He’s also wearing Birkenstocks—with socks.

He leans in so he doesn’t have to yell. “Don’t mind Daisy. She thinks she needs to know what Alex had for breakfast. She doesn’t like to be left out.” He winks and straightens. “I can see why he might be trying to keep you all to himself. You look feisty enough to keep him in line, which he seems to need after the stunt he pulled tonight. Fighting is for rookies, son.”

I hold in my sigh of relief, glad he’s not referring to the locker room.

Alex’s father is much warmer than his mother. His name is Robert, but he goes by Robbie. He’s all chilled-out and relaxed. He slings an arm over

Daisy's shoulder, and she rests her rock-hard hair on his chest. She doesn't look like she wants to kill me anymore, maybe just maim me.

As Robbie asks me questions about how I met Alex, a girl closer to my age comes sauntering up to the bar with a fruity drink in her hand. She throws her arms around Alex's neck.

My first inclination is to grab her by the hair, but I recognize her from the photos last week. She's Alex's sister. I have nothing to be jealous of. Apart from the fact that she's all legs and has long, flowing sandy blonde hair. Damn her and her near perfection. She's wearing distressed jeans and a T-shirt that says "100% Recycled Material." She's also sporting Birkenstocks with rainbow toe-socks. Alex's sister is a certified hippie. She and her father are two peas in a pod.

"The amaretto sours are best!" she says to no one in particular.

Daisy looks at one of her hot pink nails. "Don't get drunk and make a fool out of yourself."

Alex's sister either ignores Daisy or doesn't hear her as she chugs the rest of her drink and finally notices me. "Oh my God, you're the make out girl!" Her shriek is so loud all conversation around us stops. "You're even prettier in real life! I can totally see why Alex stuck his tongue down your throat."

I want to run away. I want to pretend this isn't happening. Daisy's confused expression tells me she hasn't seen the photos of me and Alex making out. I can't imagine how since they're everywhere. Robbie's cheeks flush and his ears go red. Alex's father must have seen the pictures of me playing tonsil hockey with his son. That's just wrong.

"Alex, not again!" Daisy exclaims with her hands on her hips. "When are you going to learn?"

As Daisy dives into a lecture about appropriate affection in public, Alex becomes more and more like a little boy being chastised. His shoulders hunch and he nods, apologizing repeatedly. It's appalling. It's then I understand his mother is in denial about her son being a player.

I'm suddenly very, very interested in the workings of the Waters family. It's like watching a social experiment gone awry. I feel much less disturbed by my own mother's behavior as I observe the interaction between Alex, Daisy, and the rest of his family.

"You know how the media twists things around. I was just kissing her goodnight," Alex says.

“With tongue,” Sunny replies, batting her blonde lashes.

“Sunny!” Daisy gives her a disapproving look.

“I wasn’t the one tonguing someone else’s mouth for the whole world to see,” Sunny replies.

“Can we not talk about this right now?” Alex asks, shifting uncomfortably.

“Vi! There you are.”

Buck worms his way into the group, inadvertently saving us from further interrogation. Well, worm probably isn’t the right word. He’s too large to be able to worm into anything, so he barrels his yeti ass into the group and says hello to Alex’s parents. He even calls them Mr. and Mrs. Waters. Daisy giggles and tells him to call her by her first name. It’s reminiscent of my mom.

Then Buck introduces himself to Alex’s little sister. I have yet to be formally introduced to her; the focus having been on Alex sticking his tongue down my throat in widely-publicized pictures. Her name is Sunshine. She goes by Sunny. Sunshine and Daisy. Violet and Skye. I see a theme here. Alex is lucky his name wasn’t Woody, or Bark.

“You two could be sisters,” Buck says to Daisy as he kisses the back of Sunny’s hand.

Sunny and Daisy giggle. Alex looks like he’s going to have a coronary. Robbie is irritated and suspicious, glaring at Buck. Rightly so. I’m sure if he’s seen the pictures of Alex and me, he’s seen the ones of Buck. I hope he has, and more than that, I hope he cares. Buck is in full hockey-whore-wooing mode.

Sunny puts her hand on Buck’s arm. “You have such a strong aura.”

“I just use Axe after I shower,” Bucks says. “It’s not too much, is it?”

“It’s great.”

“Can I get you something to drink?”

I watch in horror as Buck threads his arm through hers and guides her to an open spot at the bar, and her family allows it to happen. What I want to tell Sunny is Buck’s strong aura is a result of his VD, or maybe the vast quantity of body hair he sports makes it look like he has an aura when he’s really masquerading as a Sasquatch.

Alex seems too stunned to move. I can relate. I’ve never seen Buck act like this. Ever. Robbie goes back to asking me questions, completely ignoring Sunny’s sudden departure with Buck.

Daisy is quiet and observant—it makes me nervous. Robbie’s questions about my family remind me I haven’t seen my parents or Charlene yet. I want to check my phone because it’s been vibrating in my pocket relentlessly for a while, but I don’t want to be rude.

“I assume you’ll be coming to the house tomorrow afternoon sometime, Alex?” Daisy sets her empty glass down on the bar.

The last part sounds more like an order than a question. Daisy Waters rules the roost.

“Actually, I’m going to stay in Toronto for an extra night. I want to show Violet around the city. I plan to take her to the Guelph campus on Saturday afternoon. We could come by afterward.”

“You’ll have dinner with us then?”

Alex rubs my back. “Sure, sounds great.”

I didn’t stop to think there would be a family visit included in this weekend. I wish I could pull Alex aside and tell him this isn’t an awesome idea at all. I came here thinking we’d be locked away together for the weekend, having sex in every conceivable position known to man and a few we can make up on our own. Follow it up with a whirlpool bath and some Epsom salts for what I am hoping will be my slightly worn-out cooter, and that’s what *I* would’ve called a plan. I should be happy he wants me to get to know his family, but this is way fast. I’m not ready to be appropriate for hours at a time.

“If you think you’ll be there earlier, just call and let us know.” Her smile looks forced. I want to cry. She hates me.

As if things aren’t bad enough, I hear my mom behind me. Meeting the parents is stressful. Having them meet each other, too, is going to be the hammer of death.

“Vi, baby girl, there you are!” My mom flails excitedly, almost smacking Sidney in the face as he comes up behind her. “I wasn’t worried about you. I knew you must have gone to find your man to make him feel better.” She says the last part in my ear, but she’s yelling, so everyone hears. Daisy’s eyes have gone wide. Robbie, who wears a perma-grin, appears suddenly uneasy. Understandable, since a crazy woman has crashed our party.

The real shame is coming. This is just a warm up. I check behind her for Charlene, my backup in these situations. She’s nowhere to be found.

“Hello.” My mom waves enthusiastically at Daisy and Robbie. I brace myself for the impact of her lunacy. She’s probably three sheets to the wind. There’s a flask poking out of her purse. *Way to be discreet, Mom.*

“You must be Alex’s parents. I’m Skye, Violet’s mother.” She extends a hand to Daisy in what can only be considered one of her more appropriate gestures. Daisy smiles politely as she introduces herself, her bouffant hair moving in tandem with the bob of her head.

“And you must be . . .” She turns her charm on Alex’s dad. She’s definitely drunk. I can tell by her slight sway. I silently pray she doesn’t flirt with him in front of me, his son, and his wife, not to mention Sidney. This is too much to ask, though.

“Robbie Waters.” He gives her a beaver-exploding smile.

It’s the same one Alex gave me the first night we met, right before he told me we didn’t have to do anything I didn’t want and subsequently got into my pants.

“What a pleasure.” She winks, but it looks like she’s strobe-blinking. “I can definitely see where Alex gets his looks.”

This is disgustingly mortifying. I contemplate ordering shots so I’m less lucid.

My mom gives Daisy a huge smile, as if she shouldn’t be offended by the blatant flirtatiousness going on. “And if the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, you must be a very, very satisfied woman.” She waggles her eyebrows.

For the love of Christ, is my mother talking about Alex’s dick abilities with his mother? I glance at Sidney, who’s just standing there. I mouth “do something.” He shrugs, obviously equally as drunk and entertained. I hate them both.

Daisy stares at my mom, looking almost as disturbed as I am by this comment. She flushes and pats her hard pageant hair nervously. “I’m not sure what you mean.”

I grab Alex’s arm, my fingernails digging into his skin. He regards me with disturbed panic.

“I’m so sorry,” I tell him, because it’s about to get worse.

My mom is too wasted to muzzle herself. She puts a hand on Daisy’s shoulder and leans in as if she’s about to tell her a secret. However, the bar is loud, and anything below a yell is too quiet.

“Sidney told me when Buck was born the nurses wanted to take pictures. They said he looked like he was sporting a kickstand. You know how it is: like father, like son.”

Daisy’s eyes widen until I fear she’s going to look like an anime character permanently.

“Oh! I see. I—uh, I suppose that’s the case then. Like father, like son.”
I’m not the only one who’ll die of embarrassment tonight.

19
**MOTHERS ARE
EMBARRASSING**

VIOLET

“Well, it’s time for us to be heading home,” Robbie says, his voice cracking.

“And you know”—Daisy leans in close to her new bestie, *my mother*, and yells over the noise—“I’m definitely satisfied.” Like my mom, she’s a hand-talker and accidentally whacks Robbie in the junk.

He’s up against the bar, so he can’t escape. This is appallingly entertaining. Robbie protects himself by wrapping an arm around her waist and pulling her against his chest. He puts his mouth to her hair and says something. The sound waves traveling around in there must be absorbed by hairspray because I hear nothing.

Whatever he says does the trick. Daisy abandons the conversation with my mom—to everyone’s relief—and grabs Alex. Kissing him on the cheek, she leaves behind pastel pink lip marks. Then she molests my mother—kidding, they just hug. Daisy invites her and Sidney to come over for dinner. Thankfully they’re leaving early tomorrow morning. I can’t imagine the gongshow Alex’s parents’ house would become if such an event transpired.

Daisy pat-hugs me. It’s limp like her handshake.

“What about your sister?” I ask Alex as she and Robbie traipse to the exit.

Alex plows through the crowd to stop them. They’re too far away for me to hear their brief conversation. Alex doesn’t look happy. I can’t believe his parents would willingly leave their daughter with the likes of Buck.

Sidney uses this as an opportunity to take my mother back to their room, saving Alex and I from further humiliation.

Alex returns a minute later, rubbing the back of his neck.

“What did they say?” I ask.

He surveys the bar with a frown. “She’s staying with friends in the city. I thought she’d be at the condo with my parents tonight.”

“Why don’t we see if we can find her? Maybe she’s with the team.”

“I fucking hope so.”

The VIP section is packed, but Sunny and Buck are nowhere to be found. Buck better not be using this as a way to get back at Alex, otherwise a WWE match is likely to occur.

As gargantuan as Buck is, Alex is aggressive when he’s pissed. Now that I’ve borne witness to his temper, I’m not interested in watching it flare up in response to my thoughtless, yet sometimes lovable, stepbrother.

Glancing around, I spot Charlene sitting beside Darren. She’s not in his lap, but she’s close. Darren is the picture of a gentleman: arm wrapped loosely around the back of her chair, his attention totally focused on her while she talks animatedly. I point them out to Alex.

“Will wonders never cease.” He squints. “Isn’t that Charlene? What’s she doing here?”

“She came, too. Mostly to meet Darren.”

“She’s a good friend. She was extremely helpful when you weren’t talking to me.” He smoothes his tie.

That’s totally a jab. There’s a sharpness to his statement. He did a good job hiding his hurt before, although phone sex was likely helpful.

“I’m sorry.” It’s a long overdue apology. “I should’ve called and let you explain. I was worried you’d tell me you were hooking up with someone else and I was going to be your side bunny, so I avoided you altogether.” I stare at his chin as I ramble on. “Am I forgiven?”

If this relationship is going somewhere, I’ll have to learn how to deal with all the media crap, which means talking to Alex. My main concern is becoming one of those paranoid freak girlfriends who will require endless reassurance. It’s scary to be someone’s girlfriend, especially when that someone is a well-known hockey player with unlimited puck bunnies looking to take a ride on his monster cock.

He tilts my chin up and brushes his lips over mine. “You’re here aren’t you? I invited you. I want to be with you.”

“So I am forgiven?”

He grins. “Mostly.”

“Mostly?” My heart squeezes. I want to be totally forgiven.

He brushes my hair over my shoulder. It seems like a tender gesture until I realize he’s looking down my top. “I think I’ll get over it better if I could clock some time with your boobs in our room.”

“That’s a reasonable demand. As long as you’re equitable about things. I’d hate for the rest of my body to get jealous.” I can feel his semi against my stomach as he presses into me. “Speaking of our room, we should head back there.”

“Don’t you think you should talk to Charlene first?”

“Oh. Right.”

It takes a while to get Charlene’s attention. “Hey!” She jumps up. “I need to use the little girls’ room, and you need to come with me.”

Way to be subtle, Char.

I turn to Alex and Darren. “We’ll be back after we’re done talking about you two in a public restroom.”

Darren snorts as Charlene shoves me from behind. Once we’re inside the stall, she flaps her hands and mouths things I can’t decipher.

“Charlene, I can’t read lips.”

She grabs my hands and does the thing girls do in the movies when the dude they like likes them back—she squeals loudly and jumps around in the confined space. If the stalls were smaller, she’d be banging into the wall.

“I’m in love!” She grabs my shoulders and shakes me. “Okay, well, that’s a lie, but Darren is the hottest guy I’ve ever met, and he’s smart *and* he’s got all his teeth! Isn’t that unheard of for a hockey player? Does Alex have all his teeth?”

She sucks in a deep breath, wheezing, and continues. I know better than to cut her off in the midst of one of her monologues, and this one is going to be fun.

“So after you took off to make Alex feel better with the locker room lovin’—”

“Shh! This isn’t a soundproof bubble. People can hear you.”

She rolls her eyes. “All the guys are talking about it. Well, not all of them. Some asshole named Kirk wouldn’t shut up, even when Darren told him he’s going to kick him in the nuts. He was even going on about it with Buck there, but the blonde tree hugger seemed to be a good distraction—”

I grab her arm. “Where did Buck go?”

“I’m not sure. He must have left just before you showed up. He and the blonde were eye-fucking each other, so I assume they were going to get their freak on. Kind of odd, really. I didn’t think she was Buck’s type.”

“The tree hugger is Alex’s sister.”

“Really? She looks so different in real life.”

She doesn't share my worry over this situation, so she continues with her story. "Anyway, after the game, I went with Skye and Sidney to the locker room hallway. Darren came out and gave this interview where he totally defended Alex's position and talked about the stress of the game." Charlene sighs.

"When we got here, I had Sidney introduce me to him. We've been talking ever since. He's the sweetest man alive. He's close to his family, he likes romantic comedies, and he has a degree in sports management. Did I mention he has all his teeth? I want to have his little hockey babies."

I picture tiny hybrids of Charlene and Darren with skates, jerseys, and helmets.

Someone bangs on the door and asks if we're done with our therapy session. It's funny, even if it's rude.

"Piss off!" Charlene yells and hikes her skirt. I turn around. We're not so close that I want to watch her pee.

I don't have to tell Charlene not to say anything about Buck and Sunny. She's smart enough to understand why I wouldn't want Alex to know they may have left together. Conjugal visits aren't sexifying.

When we return to the table, Alex keeps checking his phone. It's obvious he's trying to get in touch with his sister without success. I would hate for her to get involved with Buck without knowing what kind of guy he is. I send Buck a quick text, threatening to wax his balls in his sleep if he's planning a fuck and chuck. If he revenge bangs Alex's sister, I'm making good on my threat.

Eventually, I persuade Alex it's time to go to our room. He isn't hard to convince. Charlene and Darren are completely absorbed in each other. Since we were supposed to share a room, she has ours all to herself. I'm curious whether Charlene will give it up tonight if the opportunity presents itself. As much as she talks about riding Darren until the sun comes up, she's a traditional girl and isn't likely to fall into bed on the first night. Although neither am I, and look what happened with Alex.

We stop at the room I'm supposed to sleep in to grab my bag and then head up to Alex's room. I commandeer the bathroom and don my new jammies, ready for post-game celebrations.

I emerge to find Alex standing in the middle of the suite. His suit jacket is open, the top two buttons of his shirt are undone, and his tie hangs

loose. He's focused on his phone, so he doesn't hear me clear my throat. I assume he's still trying to track down Sunny.

"Hey." I had hoped to use the doorjamb as a place to cop a pose. Instead, I stand in front of him with nothing to use as a prop.

Alex glances up briefly, and then looks back down as his phone buzzes. I'm on the verge of tears at his lack of response. Fortunately, he notices what I'm wearing and drops his phone on the floor.

That's more like what I'm looking for.

He cups my boobs. I'm wearing a Hawks T-shirt and a pair of matching panties with the logo over my crotch. The same logo is stretched over my chest. I rush-ordered them as soon as I knew I was coming to the game.

He tugs at the hem of my shirt, presumably so he can have unobstructed access to my boobs.

"Wait." I hold up a finger. "Let me show you one thing, then my boobs are all yours."

He looks unimpressed. "It better be good."

I turn around, pulling my hair over my shoulder. On the back, in white lettering, is the number eleven with WATERS across the shoulders. The panties read: WATERS' ASS.

Alex runs his hands down my sides and squeezes my ass. "Are you sure this is exit only?"

"What?" I lurch away and bolt to the other side of the room as I shield my backside with my hands, protecting it from potential invasion. Alex stalks toward me.

"There is no way, Alex! It's not an option. Access denied, access denied!" My voice is so high I sound like I've been inhaling helium.

Alex holds his hands up in supplication and speaks softly. "I'm just kidding, baby, I promise. Come back here and let me check out those panties again."

I'm still wary. This isn't the first time he's said something about getting up in there. I'm a firm believer if he's talking about it, he wants to do it. He's even admitted he's thought about it.

He almost backs me into a corner, so I sidestep him to escape. I'm not fast enough. I find myself in the air, and suddenly I'm on the bed, facedown with Alex's body covering mine. His monster cock presses against my ass cheek.

“So help me God, Alex, I will never let you touch my boobs again!”

I mean it, too. Maybe.

The weight of his body leaves me, and I flip onto my back. He’s doing a push up over me. It’s impressive.

“I was just playing around. I like the panties.” His monster cock lines up with the right part of my body.

His kisses are soft, as if he’s apologizing for scaring my bum. After a few heavenly minutes of making out, I’m no longer worried about his desire to enter the “no go” zone.

He grips the hem of my shirt and tugs it over my head. I’m not wearing a bra, so his view is unhindered. He pushes my girls together and nuzzles into them, nibbling and kissing. He stays away from my nipples, avoiding full contact. It’s killing me.

I’m a porno-moaning mess, writhing underneath him when he finally circles my left nipple with the tip of his nose.

“Does that feel good?” I can feel Alex smiling against my boob.

I bite my tongue to stop from begging him to just lick already. He’ll give in sooner or later. There’s one way to make it happen. I snake my hand down to the waistband of his pants, wrestle with his belt, and pop the button. There’s no messing around. I shove my hand inside and palm the MC. Alex makes a low noise in his throat.

A moment later I feel the heavenly wet press of his lips followed by gentle suction.

I squeeze encouragingly, not that he needs any encouragement once he gets started.

While he devotes attention to my upper half, I push his pants over his hips and line up our lower halves. Even with my panties in the way, I’m still able to get some friction.

“God, I want to fuck your tits.”

It’s almost a growl. I stop moving.

With his mouth still on my boob, he looks up and mumbles, “Oh shit, did I say that out loud?”

Based on all the boob lovin’, it’s not like it’s a surprise he wants to slide his dick between them. What *is* surprising is how appealing the idea is.

“You can if you want to.” I offer a tentative smile.

Alex gapes at me. “What?”

“You can . . . fuck my tits.” It sounds dirty. I like it.

He scrambles up onto his knees. “Are you sure?”

Biting my lip, I squeeze my boobs together in invitation.

I’ve never seen anyone undress so quickly. Alex is naked before I can blink. He straddles my torso, gripping his giant cock. Oh God, it’s leaking. He rubs his thumb over the tip and strokes down the shaft as he stares at my boobs. His fiery eyes flip up to mine. “Is this okay? We don’t have to be in this position.”

He’s so sexy like this—hard cock in his hand, looming over me, waiting for me to give him the go-ahead. I shimmy up the bed, rearranging the pillows so I’m mostly upright. Wrapping my fingers around his, I lick the head.

A soft curse falls from his lips. He roots around in the nightstand, producing a bottle of lube. At my frown he’s quick to offer an explanation. “My hands are rough. This makes it better. Plus, I’d hoped you’d be coming to see me, and I figured it’d be good to be prepared in case we have lots of sex.”

“You’re like the Boy Scout of sex, aren’t you?”

I take the bottle from him, squirt a generous amount into my palm, massage it over my chest, and then stroke down his length. Guiding him between my breasts, I squeeze them together. Alex’s mouth drops open as he grabs onto the headboard and shifts his hips. The view is pretty incredible from where I am.

After a few minutes, he abandons the headboard and takes over holding my boobs together. He pinches my nipples as he quickens the pace. I grab onto his rock-solid ass, helping out where I can. When he’s close to coming—he’s kind enough to warn me—I push his hands away, grab his cock, and wrap my lips around the head.

“Sweet fucking—” He doesn’t finish the sentence. Instead he groans as he comes.

I mentally pat myself on the back for taking one for the team. I’d rather swallow than have his jizz cooling on my chest.

“You didn’t have to do that,” he says breathlessly.

“I can always use the vitamins.”

Cradling my face in his hands, Alex kisses me. “I love this mouth.”

He moves down my body, dropping kisses as he makes his way to the land of Beave. Then he shows me with his mouth how much he appreciates the boob lovin’.

I'm all for spending the rest of the weekend in bed if this is how things are going to go. Here's hoping Buck hasn't coerced Sunny into the same kind of position, otherwise things are about to get messy.



HANGING WITH THE WATERS FAMILY IS DANGEROUS BUSINESS

VIOLET

As much as I would like to say Alex and I spend the rest of the weekend having wild monkey sex, this isn't entirely true. Friday morning we check out of the hotel and take a cab across the city to his condo, where his parents stayed last night.

The one-thousand square foot, two-bedroom unit is on the top floor of a high-rise, overlooking the Toronto Harbour. The space is furnished for functionality, and the master bedroom boasts a stunning view of the city, including the CN Tower.

A note from his mother sits on the dining room table, thanking him for letting them use the condo. Alex sends his sister another text as he shows me around the space, possibly checking for signs of her presence, as well. Fortunately, this time he receives an almost immediate response telling him she's home in Guelph. Sunny loves emoticons. Her texts are more pictures than words. I'm relieved because he's no longer worried about the Buck situation and far more focused on me.

We spend the majority of Friday afternoon dodging cameras and ducking into funky little shops on Queen Street. Every time I express excitement over something, Alex buys it. It's as excessive as it is charming. I have no choice but to accept his forced gifter, otherwise he feigns hurt feelings.

I thank him later for all his presents by staying naked for the entire evening. Mostly I end up under him, not that I'm complaining.



On Saturday morning, we have shower sex, pack our bags, and leave the condo. Alex's mother invited us for brunch, and he couldn't say no. Alex loads everything into the back of a sporty SUV. The man loves his vehicles. He has two in Toronto; a Mercedes for the summer and the SUV for winter.

I'm nervous about spending time with his family. Eating a meal in their home where I'll have to make small talk and tell them about myself is very different than meeting them at a loud bar.

We drive in silence for a while as I stare absently out the window. I don't note the change in my surroundings until Alex pulls onto a road which disappears into a forest.

"Where are we?"

"An off-roading trail."

"We're going off-roading in an SUV?" Alex is an intelligent man, so he must know this car isn't built for off-roading. SUV or not, it's snowy, and we could get stuck. Also, we're on our way to brunch with his family.

"No." Alex puts the car in park and unbuckles his seat belt. He leans over and kisses me. Roadside make out session? Yes and please.

"I want you to tell me what's wrong."

"Nothing's wrong."

"Liar." He kisses the spot on my neck that makes me wish we were naked.

I close my eyes and debate whether or not I should tell the truth. "I'm nervous."

"What about?"

Alex sits back, his expression somber. It's hot. Although I'm biased; I find all of Alex's facial expressions hot.

"I think your mom hates me. What if I say something dumb in front of your family? We haven't been seeing each other long, and you don't know how ridiculously inappropriate I can be in social situations. I mortify myself sometimes—quite often, actually. It's fine with my friends, not when I'm dealing with the parents of my successful, intelligent, inordinately hot, and extra-well-endowed boyfriend."

"Once they get to know you they'll love you, I promise." He kisses the back of my hand. "My dad is super laid-back, and so is my sister. As for my mom, she's probably certifiable, but she's harmless."

“What if I accidentally make a comment about your monster cock? What if they serve breakfast sausages, and I compare its inadequate size to your love stick?”

These might seem like stupid questions, but when nervous, I put myself in jeopardy of saying something this humiliating.

“Did you just call my cock a ‘love stick’?” He smirks.

“I don’t think you’re focusing on the issue here.”

“Baby, everything is going to be fine. You have nothing to worry about.”

His reassurances are starting to work. It’s as though he’s hypnotizing me with his voice and his touch and his pretty, pretty eyes. He kisses me softly.

The heat between us explodes and we end up making out for fifteen minutes. It’s long enough to get us both worked up and almost make us late. The sexual tension in the car is thick like potato leek soup. I’d help him out with his problem, but I think it’s only fair we both suffer through brunch unsatisfied.

Guelph is more of a town than a city, and it’s nothing like Chicago. Downtown is quaint, full of little cafés and shops interspersed with bars and pubs, catering to the college crowds. Despite the cold winter morning, the streets bustle with people, young and old alike. We turn onto a side street and pull into the driveway of a large, old, brick house.

“Ready?” He squeezes my hand.

“I think so.”

When he gets out of the car he adjusts his pants. He has an obvious hard-on. Hopefully, the cold air will help shrink it. The only thing more horrifying than me making comments about his package would be him sporting a woody in front of his parents.

Daisy greets us at the door. I’m stunned once again by the horror of her hair. It looks like the eighties threw up on her head. It seems even bigger today than it was the other night. Her matching eighties attire is a helpful diversion, though. While acid-washed and high-waisted pants have made a comeback in recent years—Lord help us all—it looks as though she unearthed her original duds from the attic. I sniff, there’s no mothball smell. How she’s managed to avoid being lynched by the fashionista police is beyond me.

“Alex!”

He turns his face away from her hair as they hug.

“Violet, it’s so nice you could make it.” She hugs me, too. It’s another one of those loose, back-pat ones with no real affection.

Her hair is so solid I worry it might ensnare me like a fly caught in a spider web. I make the mistake of talking while hugging Daisy.

“Thanks so much for inviting me.” Stray hairs stick to my lips, and hairspray invades my mouth. It’s simply horrendous. I want to spit the taste out. I swallow repeatedly instead, spreading it around my tongue.

“Alex, why don’t you bring your bags in, and Violet can help me in the kitchen.”

Alex stands there for a few long seconds with a smile plastered on his face. He runs a hand nervously through his hair. “I already booked us a room—”

“At a hotel? Why would you need to do that?” She looks from him to me and back again, her smile calculating. Alex’s mom is kind of a bitch.

“This is Violet’s first time in Guelph—”

“Which is exactly why you should stay here. You can cancel your reservations.” Daisy loops her arm through mine and steers me toward the kitchen. “I don’t get to see enough of my baby boy, and Violet has had you most of the weekend. I think she should be able to share you for one night. Grab your bags and bring them inside, sweetie.”

Panic-stricken, I look over my shoulder as Daisy leads me away. Alex’s brows are drawn, and his lips are mashed in a line. He looks about as happy about this situation as I do. Brunch with the ’rents is one thing, a goddamned sleepover is another.

“I’m so glad Alex was able to find some time to spend with us while he’s here. We see so little of him already these days with his schedule.”

I stand awkwardly in the middle of the kitchen, unsure if I should sit or stand. “He’s on the road a lot.”

She picks up the biggest knife I’ve ever seen and slices the top off a pineapple. “Mmm. Relationships have always been a challenge for him because of it.”

I hope the next twenty-four hours aren’t going to be full of jabs at me. I don’t think I can handle it without saying something I’ll regret.

Daisy immediately gives me a task; thankfully, it’s not a difficult one because I can’t cook for shit. While I cut the tops off strawberries, Daisy

makes mimosas. Booze is exactly what I need to beat back the anxiety and the gross lingering taste of hairspray.

She hands me a glass as Alex and his dad saunter into the kitchen. Robbie is wearing a pair of plaid pajama pants and a Grateful Dead T-shirt.

“Robbie! You’re supposed to get dressed! We have company.” Daisy puts her hands on her hips. “Are you doing research again?”

I look from Alex, who’s smiling, to his father—also smiling, and back to his mother, who is not smiling. I take a closer look at Robbie. The whites of his eyes are shockingly red. If I didn’t know better, I’d say he’s high as a flipping kite.

“I’m testing a new batch of medical this week. It’s supposed to increase appetite by fifty percent.”

I guess my hypothesis is accurate. He slides his hand under his shirt, rubbing his stomach lazily. He’s got some abs under there. I look away. I don’t want to ogle Alex’s father.

“How are you, Violet?” He grabs a handful of hulled strawberries and takes a seat.

“I’m great. You?”

“*Mellow* would be the scientific term.”

I’ve only “met the parents” a couple of times in my dating history. None of those experiences were as bizarre as this one is turning out to be.

As Alex and his dad chat about medical grade *Mary Jane*, I continue to chop fruit. Most of it ends up in Robbie’s mouth rather than on the platter. I’d say if the point is to increase appetite, it’s working well.

Until now I’ve been so focused on being polite I’ve failed to take in the decor of the house. It looks like a bohemian gypsy got into a fight with a southern belle, and they exploded all over the place. Everything is either *überfrilly* or a throwback to the seventies. It’s hard to process it all. I wonder how a laid-back man like Robbie can handle so much visual overstimulation. Maybe he likes tripping out to it.

As I sip my mimosa and ponder this, Alex’s sister comes into the room. I nearly choke as Buck comes in behind her. Shit is about to go down, rumble style.

Alex has his back to them. I do the most logical thing in the world. I grab his hand, pulling him toward me. My intention is to molest him. However, this plan has holes—the most important being the presence of his

parents. So I stand there, staring up at him as I stroke his thumb with my fingers. Alex gives me a funny look.

“Alex! You’re here!” Sunny’s voice distracts him from my distraction.

He turns around. I assume he’s not very happy based on the way he squeezes my hand since I can no longer see his face.

“What the *hell*?” He scares his mother half to death—and me, too with his thunderous shouting.

“Alex! Use your inside voice,” Daisy says.

“Alex,” I say gently as his grip on my hand tightens. If he keeps going he’s going to break it. I need my hand, not just for my job but for other important tasks, such as jilling off.

Unfortunately his focus is not on the hand he’s crushing, It’s on Buck standing beside his sister and smiling his ass off. At least he’s not touching her.

“Hey, man. How’s it goin’?” Buck asks like it’s no big deal he’s here.

I pull on Alex’s sleeve with my free hand.

“What are you doing here?” he asks calmly.

I’m losing the feeling in my fingers. I lean in and bite Alex’s arm.

“Ow!”

It works. He lets go of my hand.

His head swings around. Oh man, is he ever pissed. As badass as he is on the ice, and as dominating and frisky as he can be in bed, he doesn’t intimidate me. Plus, his family is here, and so is Buck, so I’ll be fine.

He rubs his arm. “Why’d you bite me?”

“You were crushing my hand and words weren’t working.”

He inspects my hand with his lips. “Shit, baby, I’m sorry.

“Alex, watch your language.”

“Sorry, Mom.” Alex then glares at his sister and motions to Buck. “Care to explain this?”

Sunny looks Buck up and down. “Explain what?”

“Why are you being so rude?” Daisy asks. No one pays any attention to her.

Sunny flips her hair over her shoulder. She’s wearing a rainbow colored tie-dyed shirt and a flowy, ankle-length skirt. She’s not Buck’s type at all. He goes for the skanky, nearly naked sure-things. Yet here he is with Sunny, who seems like neither.

Alex abandons questioning his sister—she does seem genuinely confused—and moves onto Buck. “Who invited you?”

“I invited him,” Sunny replies.

“Why?” Alex’s fists clench at his sides.

“Um, because I like him?” Her body language tells me things her words don’t. She wraps a tendril of hair around her finger, and her eyes drop to her feet. Buck has snared her with his yeti magic.

“You like him?” Alex’s voice rises with his eyebrows. “He’s a dirtbag!”

Part of me wants to defend Buck; he’s a nice guy under all the whoriness. But if Sunny was my sister, I would castrate Buck before he could get his dick into her. Sadly, with the way Sunny gazes at Buck and Buck smiles back at her, it appears this may have already happened. Alex could be too late to save his sister. I should offer to take her to the walk-in clinic later today.

Sunny props her fist on her hip. “Look who’s calling the kettle a pot!”

She and Buck may be on a level playing field intellectually with the way she completely butchered that saying.

Apparently Daisy gets what Sunny is trying to say. She defends Alex’s nonexistent virtue. “Don’t you say things like that about your brother!”

Either she’s truly in complete denial or she’s too blinded by her maternal love to see the truth. Alex may not be a player, but he can be a dirty, dirty boy.

I look around the room; the various expressions are hilarious. Sunny is enraged, Daisy looks like she might cry, Buck is staring at Sunny’s chest—so he has no idea what’s happening—and Robbie has pulled the fruit tray closer. He’s shoveling food into his mouth and peeking up on occasion to check if anyone notices. I like him.

Sunny props a fist on her hip. “I saw the paper this morning. Did you?”

“What paper?” Alex asks.

“The tabloids. There’s a whole article on what happened in the locker room yesterday.”

“Wait, what?” Buck is suddenly alert. As are Alex and I.

“It’s not like I’d actually believe any of the stuff in there. Even if it’s mostly made up, it sure doesn’t make any of you look good.”

“What kind of tabloids do you read?” Buck is wearing his constipated expression.

It’s clear he’s afraid Sunny has read about his sexual exploits in the tabloids. He’s too involved with figuring out what Sunny might know about him; he forgets about the argument brewing with Alex and settles into hushed conversation with her.

Alex and I look at each other, clearly wanting to know the same thing—what did Sunny see in the tabloids and how much should I worry.

I have no idea what’s happening between Buck and Sunny, but I have to admit, even though the two of them seem as deep as a puddle, they get along well. Buck is actually being polite.

Brunch is awkward, in part due to our inability to get the information we need. Robbie leads the conversation. He’s incredibly articulate for a man under the influence of pot. Alex mentions taking me to the Guelph campus later, and Robbie goes off on a tangent about the Women in Lit classes he took during his undergrad.

He pats Daisy’s hand. “That’s where I met my Daisy. She was the smartest, most beautiful woman in the room, so of course I had to ask her out.”

“That’s not true. I failed the course, and you asked me out because none of the other women in the class were interested in you,” Daisy replies.

“*And* you were the most beautiful woman in the room.” He kisses her cheek without getting a mouthful of hard hair. It’s amazing.

“How about the two of you? How did you meet?” Daisy directs the question at me.

“We met after a Hawks game.”

“Oh?”

“I went with my family to see Buck play.”

She smiles the same calculating smile she wore when Alex and I first arrived. “That’s so nice. Sunny comes to games if she can, but she’s in school right now and her studies are important to her. What about you? What is it you do?”

“I’m an accountant.”

“Really? But you’re so young.” Daisy folds her hands under her chin. The evil glint in her eyes makes me nervous.

“I graduated with my bachelor’s in accounting and finance last spring, so I’ve been working at my firm for less than a year.”

“What kind of accounting do you do?”

“Vi manages my bank accounts.” Bucks spears a sausage patty and crams it into his mouth.

“So you manage sports figures’ accounts?”

“Mostly. I’m a junior accountant, so I only manage smaller accounts, apart from Buck’s.”

She tilts her helmet head to the side, her inquisitiveness intimidating. “You must be very familiar with what these boys make during their career.”

“Mom.” I can hear the tension in Alex’s voice.

“What? I’m just interested in getting to know Violet. It’s been a long time since you’ve brought a girl home to meet us.” Daisy gives him an angelic smile and then turns her attention back to me. “It sounds like a very interesting job. It must be a lot of responsibility.”

I nod enthusiastically. “Oh, it is. I love working with numbers and figures.”

Daisy doesn’t ask any more questions about my job. Her blatant dislike makes me so nervous I can barely eat. I force food down so as not to offend her further. Alex doesn’t say much apart from directing the occasional barb at Sunny and Buck. Neither pick up on them; they’re likely too busy playing footsies under the table.

After brunch, Alex takes our bags upstairs and gives me a tour of the rest of the house.

“I’m really sorry about this,” he says once we’re away from his family. “I only planned for a meal. I thought if we did brunch we could get out of dinner.”

“Your family wants time with you. It’s understandable.” I still wish we were staying at a hotel where I don’t have to worry about behaving myself after dark.

We make our way up a narrow flight of stairs to the third floor. It’s an awesome room if you’re an eighteen-year-old boy. It looks like nothing has changed since Alex moved out. The ceilings are high and angled, and large windows frame either end of the wide space. Hockey paraphernalia hangs everywhere, and posters from the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition* have the prime spot above his bed.

Alex drops our bags on the floor beside his double bed and pulls out his laptop.

“What are you doing?”

“Checking for the article Sunny was talking about.” He clicks furiously for a few seconds. His brow furrows as he scans the screen.

I sit down and read with him. Very little of the article has to do with the fight, the mystery of the locker room is much more interesting. There’s nothing concrete in the article. It’s speculation apart from a few grainy photos of Alex smuggling me out of the arena’s emergency exit and a few more of him ushering me onto the bus. My face isn’t visible.

He heaves a sigh of relief and squeezes the back of my neck. “No one will recognize you.”

“That’s good. What about Buck and Sunny? Do you think there will be pictures of them, too?”

Loads of pictures flood the screen when he puts their names into the search bar together. “Shit. This isn’t good. Buck better watch himself.”

They’re all pretty harmless as far as I can tell. Nothing like the ones of Alex and me mouth fucking.

“If it’s any consolation, I don’t think Buck has ever done the whole ‘brunch with parents’ thing.”

“He’s probably doing it to get back at me.”

”Maybe they genuinely like each other.”

“If he does anything to hurt Sunny, I’m going to kick his ass.”

“Totally reasonable. I’ll even help.” I really hope it isn’t something I’ll have to follow through on. I change the topic, not wanting this to ruin the rest of our day. Honestly, I would feel the same way if I were Alex.

“Why don’t we go out? You said you were going to show me around Guelph. I’d love to see where the Hobbits live.”

Alex takes me to The University of Guelph, where there are no Hobbits. Spread over the expanse of a square mile, the campus is a stunning fusion of old architecture and modern design. He even takes me to the hockey rink where he was scouted for the NHL. I try to imagine what it would've been like to be offered millions of dollars a year to play a game with blades on my feet barely out of high school.

Every time Alex runs into someone he knows—which is often—he introduces me as his girlfriend. It’s sweet. No one takes photos or asks for his autograph. They treat him like a normal person. It’s a refreshing change from the scene after the games. Especially considering the whole locker room debacle.

“I’d like to take you out to meet some of my friends tonight, if that’s okay,” Alex says once we’re back in the car.

“Sure, that sounds great.” This is big. Family is huge, but friends are the ones you end up hanging out with.

We head back to his parents' to freshen up after our little adventure. Alex won’t tell me anything about our plans. All I know is that I should dress casually and we’re having dinner with whoever we’re meeting up with. He’s being too vague. These are the kinds of surprises I don’t like.

I have an idea. I’m not above using methods of half-naked persuasion to get the intel I need. Excusing myself to the bathroom, I strip down to my undershirt and underwear.

Alex is sitting in a pint-sized computer chair with his back to me, talking on his Bluetooth when I come out. I’m definitely going to make fun of him later.

“Publicity spots? The timing's pretty inconvenient.” He taps restlessly on the desk. “Yeah. I know. You didn’t hear the shit he was spewing—Fine. I get it. I’ll keep my temper in check.”

Alex cracks his neck. Clearly he’s unhappy with whoever he’s speaking with.

“It’s all conjecture. There aren’t any pictures from last night. It was only the two of us—” He swivels in his chair. “Hearing and seeing aren’t the same. Just email the questions and tell me what you want me to say.” He pauses. “Why would I need to tell you about her? It’s pretty self-evident, isn’t it? What? Why would I do that?” Alex clicks the mouse in his left hand, opening an email attachment. I recognize the picture from the other night. The one of Alex and me where my face is obscured. “So what? How would that impact either endorsement?” Another long pause ensues. “What’s a couple of weeks matter?”

They’re talking about me in relation to endorsements. It makes me uneasy, especially with how agitated Alex has become.

“That’s not fair. You should’ve said something long before now if this was going to be an issue. It’s not like I tried to keep it a secret. Motherf— No. Yeah. I get it.” He runs his hand through his hair. “I know it’s good exposure, but—yeah. The money isn’t the issue . . . Well, what the fuck am I supposed to tell—”

I take a step backward, rethinking my plan. The floor creaks under my foot, and Alex swivels in his chair.

“I don’t like—” His jaw drops. “I gotta go. I’ll call you on Monday.”
He takes off the headset and drops it on his desk. He misses, so it lands on the floor.

“Who was that?” I finger the hem of my tank.

“My agent, Dick.” His eyes drop from my chest to my waist.

“Are you in trouble for the other night?”

Alex shrugs. “He’ll get over it.”

I’m not sure I should buy his nonchalance. “You sounded pretty upset.”

“Just annoyed. I have an interview spot as soon as I get back to Chicago.”

“For the fight or the locker room?”

“Both. But you don’t need to worry about that.” He grips the armrests and swivels in his chair. “These are my new favorite panties, by the way.”

“I believe these are technically called underpants.” I trace the outline of The Hulk. His cartoon body is strategically placed so it looks like he’s punching his way out of my cooter.

“I don’t give a shit what you call them; they’re perversely fantastic on you.” He twirls his finger, signaling for me to turn around.

I comply and am rewarded with a heavy exhalation of breath and muttered profanity. I turn to face him again and saunter his way.

When I’m close enough, he slides his palms up my legs and wraps his hands around the backs of my thighs. He’s still staring at the underpants.

“I love the flap.” I finger the opening. “It’s very convenient.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Alex brushes my hand out of the way. I whimper in anticipation as he slips his fingers into the little pocket. His other hand travels up my thigh and under the elastic to palm my ass.

He circles the beaver button and slides two fingers inside me. He hits the spot that makes me feel a million shades of sheer awesomeness. My moan dies on my lips as the door to his room bursts open.

Daisy stands at the threshold, holding out a framed photograph.

I look down at Alex, who’s looking at his mother with an expression of sheer, unfiltered horror. “I guess you forgot to lock the door.”

This is exactly the reason why we should’ve gone to a damn hotel.

21
**I'M GOING TO
LOSE MY SHIT**

ALEX

“Oh my God!” My mother raises the humiliating picture of me in front of her face like a shield.

“Mom!”

Backing out of the room, she fumbles with the door and slams it shut.

“As if she doesn’t hate me enough already.” Violet’s face is beet red and blotchy.

“She doesn’t hate you.” I circle her clit with my thumb as a distraction. “I’m so sorry.”

She pushes my hand away. I can’t say I blame her for giving up the orgasm quest, all things considered. “We can still get a hotel room tonight. I’ll make a call.”

“Don’t do that. I don’t want to offend your mom. More than I already have, anyway.” She grabs her bag from the floor. “I should get ready to go wherever we’re going.”

She disappears into the bathroom, locking the door behind her. I drop my head back and scrub a hand over my face. The same one that was just inside Violet’s underpants, which means I’ve rubbed her pussy all over my damn face. Those fucking underpants. Why they’re so hot is beyond me. Christ. I’ve got one hell of a hard-on, and it doesn’t look like I’m going to be able to do a damn thing about it now.

Today has turned into a fucking nightmare. First Buck shows up for brunch with my sister—God only knows where they’ve gone now. Following it with the call from my agent about the locker room BS and cooling it with Violet until the publicity for the Bachelor of the Year is out of the way was bad enough. Then my mother walks in while I have my hand in Violet’s underwear. Can’t a guy get a break and a little fucking privacy when he needs it?

While Violet hides out in the bathroom—because that’s what she’s doing—I take the opportunity to deal with my mother. She’s in the kitchen, humming away as if nothing happened.

I lean against the doorjamb with my arms crossed over my chest. “Wanna tell me what that was all about?”

She jumps, pretending to be startled. “Oh, Alex! I didn’t see you there!”

Yeah, she’s not fooling me. At all. Her voice is high, the way it used to get when she’d tell me we were going out to pick up new hockey equipment. Instead she’d take me to get one of those sequined getups for another skating competition.

“You need to apologize.”

“For what?”

“Don’t pretend you don’t know.”

“Oh, you mean about . . . that.” She waves her hand toward the ceiling. “I’m sorry, sweetie. I was looking through some old pictures. I found my favorite competition photo. You remember, don’t you? You were so close to qualifying for the Olympics.”

She looks at me expectantly; I remember it vividly. If I wasn’t doing triple salchows, I was shooting a puck. I was always exhausted, and it sucked. I had no life.

I continue to glare.

Uncomfortable, my mother looks away. “Anyway, I thought I would share it with you and Violet. I suppose I should’ve knocked.”

“Damn right you should have!”

She tosses the dishtowel on the counter. “Don’t you take that tone with me! I didn’t expect your little girlfriend to be parading around half-naked!”

Her implication is clear: she believes Violet is trying to take advantage of me. I don’t get it. My mother has always had her head so far up her ass when it comes to me. It’s as if I’m still a teenager, not a grown man who can make his own damn decisions.

The only reason I didn’t bone my way through high school was my complete lack of social life, thanks to balancing the damn figure skating with hockey. I was also a huge nerd, but I choose not to focus on that part. I was barely eighteen when I was drafted into the NHL. That was an eye-opener.

I hold up my hand in warning. “Don’t start.”

Of course my mother doesn't heed it. She voices her opinion as usual, whether or not it's solicited.

"What? I'm your mother. I have a feeling about this one. Her father's a scout, Alex! She knows exactly what you make a year. She's used to a certain lifestyle, I'm sure, and you're perfectly equipped to provide it." She slaps an old magazine on the counter with the pictures of my first kiss with Violet. I don't want my baby corrupted by some puck slut."

Sunny must have given her the magazine, because it's not something my mother would typically buy. I cross the room, slapping my hands over the image.

"Let's get a few things straight. I'm twenty-five. Any corrupting took place years ago. Everyone on the fucking planet can find out what I make in a year. It's not a damn secret."

She opens her mouth to interrupt, but I jab my finger at her.

"Oh no you don't. I'm not finished. Violet isn't a puck slut, and she's not after my money."

"How can you be sure?"

"Because I am. End of discussion. You want to know why I don't bring girlfriends home? It's because you treat them like crap." Her eyes grow wide. I've never been this upfront with her before. "I won't stand for it. Not with Violet. I care about her, and she's important to me. This'll be the last time I stay here if you can't be nice."

Her eyes drop, hiding her hurt. When she lifts them, anger flares. "This is the first we've heard of this girl from you. You can't blame me for being worried, especially with all the press you're getting lately."

"So you grill her at brunch and make her uncomfortable? How's that helpful? I'd pack up and take Violet to a hotel, but she doesn't want to offend you. As for me, I don't really give a good goddamn how you feel about it."

"Alex." She reaches across the counter for my hand, but I step back.

"Unless you're going to apologize, keep it to yourself."

I don't let her say another word. Instead, I leave the room and head back upstairs. I'm going to get it from my father later for sure, but she needed to be confronted. My mother's behavior is completely out of line.

Violet is surfing the Net, searching for more locker room articles. So far it remains conjecture and nothing else. It's not as if it stops the media from reporting on the nothing they uncover, unfortunately.

She's wearing super tight jeans and the red Blackhawks shirt from the other night. The logo is stretched across her boobs. I love them. The shirt, her boobs, whatever is under the shirt cupping her boobs—I wish I was her bra.

“You look—”

She startles at my voice. “Should I change? I didn't know what to wear.” Violet adjusts her shirt.

“That's perfect.” I motion to her chest. “I want you to wear that. Definitely.”

I'd like to have sex with her while she wears that shirt. I'll get her one in white instead. Then I'll stick her in the shower so it's see through and fuck her against the wall. My phone beeps in my pocket, alerting me it's time to leave. Not have sex.

I pocket my phone and wallet. “We should get going.” Otherwise I'm going to try and get her naked. She might resist at first thanks to the previous interruption, but I'm convincing when I want to be.

“Is there a back door?” She fidgets with the hem of her shirt.

“There is. The car's parked out front, though.”

“Okay. Yeah. Uh . . .” Violet rummages through her purse for something. It's huge, almost the size of a duffle bag. I'm not sure why girls need such big purses. It seems like it makes it difficult to find things. After a couple of minutes she still hasn't found what she's searching for. Her shoulders slump and she sighs.

“What's up?” I tuck my finger under her chin and coax her to look at me.

“Oh, I don't know. Your mother just caught us with your hand in my underwear. I'm not interested in running into her at the moment.”

“I just talked to her about that—”

Violet looks like she's about to have a heart attack. “You what?”

“About her privacy issues.” The rest of the conversation I'll keep to myself. Violet's already stressed enough; she doesn't need to know I've been fighting with my mother over her.

“Oh.” Her shoulders relax a little. “I still don't want to see her right now, so can we go out the back? I'm already nervous about meeting your friends. Avoiding more awkwardness would be great.”

“Sure, baby. Whatever you want.” I steal a kiss.

Violet softens, allowing me to deepen it for a few seconds before she pulls away.

“My friends are just as laid-back as my dad. You’ll get along with them no problem.”

“You think so?”

“Trust me. You’re going to love them.”

We take the back stairs and walk around the side of the house to avoid another run-in with my mother.

“So . . .” I’m about to introduce her to my closest friends. These are the guys I grew up with—the ones who knew me before I became a seven-figure earner. They have tons of dirt on me . . . and not the kind that makes me look good.

“I’ll get over the thing with your mom,” she says. “As long as she never brings it up. Ever.”

“She won’t.” She better not. I put my hand on Violet’s leg and give her thigh a squeeze. “There’s something you should probably know.”

“Please don’t tell me you had gender reassignment surgery. I don’t think I can manage that today.”

“What?”

“Sorry.” She crosses and uncrosses her legs. “You sound serious. It’s making me nervous.”

I try not to laugh. “I assure you, all my parts are my own.”

“That’s a relief; otherwise you would’ve had the biggest vagina in the world as a woman.”

I laugh because, honestly, the shit that goes through her head sometimes baffles me.

“You’d probably win the Guinness world record for that.” She sinks into her seat and puts her hand over mine. “You wanted to tell me something.”

“Just a heads-up. I was kinda dorky as a kid.”

“I have a degree in accounting and finance. The nerd award belongs to me.” She gives me the side eye. “I really can’t imagine you looking dorky.”

If my mother brings out more photographs like the one she used as a shield earlier today, Violet will know exactly what I’m talking about.

“The guys you’re going to meet tonight are more chess club than hockey player.”

“Like Jimmy and Dean from work?”

“Who?”

“The guys you met the day you locked me in the conference room.”
She makes it sound so bad. “Oh. Yeah. Like those guys.”

It only takes a few minutes to make the trip downtown, and I manage to find a spot close to the pub. Reid and Dave have already secured a table and ordered a pitcher of beer. We slap each other on the back, and I introduce them to Violet.

Dave wraps her up in a wiry hug. “It’s great to finally meet you. Alex hasn’t shut up about you for the past few weeks.”

“Oh, really?” Violet gives me a questioning look. “What kind of things has he said?”

“That’s under the cone, bro,” I reply.

“Don’t worry. He’ll have to go to the bathroom at some point. You can tell me everything then,” Violet stage-whispers.

Reid laughs. “I like her already.”

I pull Violet into my side and kiss her temple. “See? I told you.”

We settle into the booth, and Dave and Reid cheerfully throw me under the bus, regaling Violet with embarrassing stories of my youth. I was not a cool kid.

We’re already through dinner and on our second pitcher of beer when Violet excuses herself to use the bathroom. I let her out of the booth and watch her ass as she navigates her way through the crowd. There’s a little weave in her step. She’s small; the beer hits her hard.

“You must really like this one,” Reid says.

I keep my eyes on the table. “Things are casual for now.”

Dave scoffs. “Cut the bullshit. You tell me the last time you brought a girl home for the weekend to meet the parents.”

“Or us,” Reid adds.

“She’s fun to be around.”

Dave pours what’s left of the pitcher into Reid’s glass. “Come on, Alex. It’s gotta be more than that. What’s the deal?”

I’m still uncomfortable with the conversation I had with Dick earlier. “My agent wants me to keep our relationship on the down low until we’re closer to playoffs.”

“Why would you do that?” Reid asks.

“I could make the short list for Bachelor of the Year. He thinks it’ll look better if I appear available.”

“That’s gonna be a challenge after this weekend, don’t you think?”

“That’s what I said.” While I don’t give a shit about the title, the potential endorsement is hard to turn down. “Plus Dick thinks it will set me up for the Sports Pro campaign. It could open the door for more opportunities.”

“Sports Pro? That’s huge, man. I hope that happens for you.” Reid leans across the table and lowers his voice. “What’s the deal with the locker room story, anyway? The rumors are crazy. Was it for publicity or something?”

I shake my head. “It wasn’t a stunt if that’s what you mean. I’m just glad the media reports are vague.”

None of us realize Violet’s returned until she slaps Reid on the back.

“It would’ve been awesome if we hadn’t gotten caught by the rest of the team. Sorry I came back before Alex could give you details.” She slides into the booth beside me.

Reid rubs the back of his neck. “I’m sorry. It’s not really my business.”

“Whatever. I’d totally want to know if it was my friend. I’m having a girl’s night with my bestie next week to share the details. We’re way worse than you guys.” She looks to me. “Unless you want me to keep them to myself.”

I’m glad she’s not more freaked out. Although the beers may have something to do with her lack of concern. I know the media attention gets to her. “The locker room story is fair game.”

She spends the rest of the night with her hand on my thigh, grazing my hard-on every once in a while to torture me. By the time we leave the pub, Violet is tipsy and my balls ache.

Once we get back to my parents’, it’s a feat getting Violet to my room without waking the whole house. All she wants to do is make out; in the hallway, on the stairs, in front of my parents’ room, in front of my room. Once we’re inside, I lock the door.

Violet pulls my shirt over my head.

“God, you’re the sexiest man alive. I have a folder of pictures of you on my laptop. Is that weird? I always pick the hottest ones so I can jill off to your pretty face. The milk ad gets me every time. I still want a life size copy of that one. It’s not the same as when I’m with you, obviously. Nothing compares to you and the monster cock. He’s in a league all his own.” Violet rubs my dick through my pants.

“We have to be quiet, okay?” I whisper. She’s being awfully loud.

“Oh, right. We don’t want your mommy to hear.” She presses a finger to her lips. “I can be quiet. I promise.”

“Good girl.”

Inhibitions muted by alcohol, Violet strips off her top and tosses her bra on the floor. Her jeans go next, but the underwear stay on. She pops open the button on my pants and pulls them down to my knees. I step out of them, watching as her hands move up my thighs. Her lips part and she wets her bottom lip. The way she practically worships my cock is the best fucking ego boost in the world.

“Hi there.” She gives him a pat. She’s been grazing my dick all night; I’m so hard it hurts.

I hold my breath and fist my hands at my side as she leans in and kisses the tip. Violet looks up at me as she circles the head with her tongue. “So much cock.” She parts her lips and engulfs the head with her soft, warm mouth.

She begins to stroke and suck in earnest. I’d like to say I last a long time, but Violet keeps moaning—very quietly—and I keep watching. Too soon, I issue a warning. She releases me from the hot suction of her mouth, and I groan a whole lot louder than I should as I come on her chest.

Violet looks down. “Huh. That wasn’t nearly as gross as I thought it was going to be. It’s almost like a porno, right?”

I’d be interested to hear more about the porn she watches and if she’d watch some with me. “You’re the best girlfriend ever.”

Violet wears a shit-eating grin as I wipe up the mess with a handful of tissues.

“Do I get a trophy for that?”

“How about an orgasm instead?” I follow as she lies back on the bed and straddle her hips.

“That’s a decent consolation prize.”

“I’ve been waiting all night to get my hands and my mouth on you. I doubt I’ll be stopping at one.”

I bend to kiss her shoulder, skimming her sides with my fingers. “I’m going to make you feel so good,” I whisper.

Violet’s cry is stifled by my neck, which she’s biting. I flick my thumb over her nipple. She makes another noise, louder this time.

“Shh, baby.” I cover her mouth with mine.

“Sorry,” she says after I pull back. “I’ll be quiet.”

“That’s my girl.” I kiss my way from her chin to the valley between her breasts, avoiding her nipples. She arches her back, seeking some kind of relief.

Flicking my tongue over her nipple, I exhale and watch it tighten.

This time Violet muffles a curse. I won’t admit she can probably be as loud as she wants. My parents’ room is on the floor below us at the other end of the hall. It’s unlikely they’ll hear anything. On the off chance Violet gets a little too exuberant I keep that information to myself. We’ve had enough shit go down this weekend.

Still, I’m not being very nice by keeping her legs pinned together. Usually when I’m getting in some boob time, she has the opportunity to grind all over me. Not so right now. She can’t get off without the friction I’m denying.

When her moans turn desperate, I kiss my way down her stomach and part her legs.

“Please, Alex. I just want to come.”

I blow across her clit, and she groans. She clamps a hand over her mouth.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Don’t stop. Please,” she mumbles from behind her palm.

I’m about ready to be inside her, but she deserves a little torture for the hours of hard-ons I’ve endured this evening. I kiss the skin right above her clit.

She holds onto my hair tightly with her other hand. “Your mouth is made of magic.”

I keep her legs pinned, moving my hands higher, until my thumbs are perilously close to her “freak out” zone. It’s purposeful. Her whole body jerks with the contact. I do it again. Violet moans, loudly.

I stop. As mean as it is, I want her worked up. The more I tease her, the more intense her orgasm should be. The wetter she is, the longer I’ll be able to go. It’s a win-win for both of us.

“What are you doing?” she exclaims in a furious whisper.

“You’re having an awfully hard time being quiet . . .” I edge my thumbs in.

She’s so close to an orgasm she must not notice or care. She lifts her hips, pressing my face into her pussy. I don’t even get to use my fingers

before she comes.

Her body shakes with the restraint required to stay silent.

I leave a path of wet kisses from her stomach to her mouth, settling between her thighs. She stills, her eyes fluttering as I press forward. I stay close and move slowly until it isn't enough for either of us. Grabbing her ass with one hand, I go harder, faster, deeper. Hovering above her, I'm ready to swallow up the sounds I know she won't be able to hold back.

Violet stiffens as I readjust my grip, and I accidentally graze her "access denied" area.

She digs her nails into my skin and bites my shoulder to muffle her moan. Her pussy clenches so tightly, it's like my dick is being held in the warmest velvety vice on earth. So, of course, I come like a fucking bulldozer.

I roll us over so Violet is lying on my chest and rub her back while her breathing slows. Aftershocks make her whimper every so often.

"Your fingers were awfully close to the no-go zone."

"Sorry." I rub her back. I'm not all that sorry.

She snorts. It's an exhausted sound. "Liar face."

"I would never—" I hesitate, trying to decide what exactly I would never do.

If given the chance, would I get up in there? Fuck yeah, eh. Is it likely to happen anytime soon? Not unless I can convince Violet to let me near Never Neverland with my fingers. "It wasn't intentional."

"Yeah, right."

I gather up her hand, bring her fingers to my mouth, and bite her knuckle. "I only ever want to make you feel good."

"You make it sound so innocent." She snuggles in and tucks her head under my chin.

This is what I've been missing—the easy closeness we share.

Violet drifts off to sleep, but it takes a long while for my mind to turn off. I have figure skating dreams where I can't catch my partner before she falls. Performance anxiety dreams aren't uncommon at this point in the season. But these unsettle me, as if my inability to stop my partner's fall is a mirror for my reality.

I brush it off.

Dreams are just dreams. They don't mean anything.

VIOLET

Alex drops me off at the airport, and we make plans to see each other as soon as he returns to Chicago. I sleep all the way home on the plane. I'm exhausted from the weekend of marathon sex. Alex wasn't lying about his stamina. He's like a machine, except better because he's Alex. I wake up from a dream about his penis as the plane is landing. The flight attendant gives me an odd look, so I have to wonder if I've been talking in my sleep. Ignorance is probably bliss in this case.

Charlene, being the amazing bestie she is, picks me up the next morning on the way to work. I expect a full inquisition about my weekend with Alex, which I'm prepared to share, but Charlene has had some excitement of her own.

"I have so much to tell you! Darren is amazing. I've already merged our faces to see what our babies would look like—you know there's a website?" She pauses long enough to take a breath. "They'd be so pretty."

"You're kidding about the last part, right?"

"Um, no. Why? Is that weird? I did it for you, too." Charlene drives through Starbucks for us. I'm grateful considering my level of exhaustion.

"No, Charlene, that's not weird at all." It is, but I want to see the pictures.

Charlene is very much a romantic. She dives head-first into every relationship. It's common for her to tell me she's in love after the first date. Two weeks later, she's usually over it and moving on to the next guy. It's why she doesn't generally fall into bed with them right away; otherwise she'd have a pretty high running tally.

Charlene shares the details of her evening with Darren, including the size of his dick, on our drive to work.

"Wait a second—you had sex with him?"

"What? No! Of course not!"

“How do you know how big his wang is? Did he whip it out?”

“I wish. I grabbed his junk. Just to check—you know? I don’t want to waste his time or mine if he’s got a tiny winkie. Anyway, he was such a gentleman. If I hadn’t made a move, he probably would’ve kissed my cheek and been done with it. He has the softest lips, Vi. We must have made out for like, I don’t know, an hour?”

“Where did this epic make out session take place?”

“In my hotel room. It was just supposed to be a good-night kiss. I got carried away, and I felt him up. He wants to take me out for dinner next week. Maybe we can double date sometime.”

“That’d be great.” I won’t hold my breath, though, just in case Darren ends up in her discard pile.

“What about you? How was your weekend?”

“My weekend was good.”

“‘Good’? You spent the weekend with Alex and that’s all you have to say? What’s this I hear about you staying at his parents’? How was that?” She sucks in a huge breath. “Did you see childhood photos? Was he always super-hot? What’s the deal with his mom’s hair? It’s huge.”

This is more the line of questioning I expect. “It definitely has its own zip code. The childhood photos were epic. He was nerdy hot in high school.”

I expected things to be uncomfortable with Daisy after she caught Alex with his hand in my pants—and they were—but she was a lot nicer to me the next day. Much like my mom, Daisy’s into oversharing. I got to see Alex’s awkwardness up close in all his skating photos.

He was skinny and dorky and completely adorable. The spandex skating outfits were something else; Alex grew into his junk, not the other way around. I can see why the girls in high school would have been afraid of his trouser anaconda.



The following evening, I rush home from work so I can shower and pack an overnight bag before Alex comes to get me. I open the door to discover

Buck in my kitchen, raiding my fridge. I don't know why he does this. It's not as if I keep it fully stocked for hockey player style eating. I've got the basics covered, and that's about it. Most of it is sugary crap, to be quite honest.

"Did they run out of food at Poon-central, or did you just get tired of eating the same thing over and over?"

He completely misses the barb. "I've never heard of that grocery store. Kind of a messed up name."

"What are you doing here? Other than grocery shopping in my fridge."

"I thought I'd stop by and see how your little holiday went. I'd like to thank you for scarring me for life with the locker room fuck-a-thon." He finds the one healthy food item in my fridge—an overly large cucumber—and takes a massive bite.

"That's disgusting."

"No shit. Imagine how you'd feel if you walked in on me boning some chick." He jabs the cucumber in my direction.

"I'm talking about the phallic vegetable you're eating."

"So you'd be fine walking in on me boning some chick?"

A chunk of chewed food flies out of his mouth and lands in his beard when he snorts. It looks like snot. He wipes it away and it lands on the floor.

"I don't think that's something you should joke about, considering the chick you're currently boning is Alex's little sister. I won't stand in the way if Alex decides to kick the shit out of you."

"I'm not boning Sunny."

"Call it whatever you want. Fornicating is still fornicating no matter what slang term you use."

"I haven't slept with her." He has the decency to look horrified for lying.

I give him my best bitch face. "I'm not an idiot, Buck."

"You can't tell anyone." He's gripping the cucumber so hard it starts leaking out the top, juice dripping down his fingers.

I process his stance and his expression. He's legit terrified. "You're seriously serious?"

"I know it's hard to believe, but I haven't even *tried* to bone her."

"Yeah, right."

“I’m telling the truth! We’ve made out and I touched her tits, and I may have tried to . . . never mind.” His face contorts as he thinks. “I love talking to her. She gets me.”

This is so not the Buck I know. His eyes are wide, and he keeps swallowing. It’s so loud I can hear it from where I’m standing. Buck is freaked out. I feel bad for him. He has no idea what it’s like to want more than sex and maybe the occasional snuggle.

“I mean it, Vi. You can’t tell anyone.”

“Is it such a bad thing if people know you’re not trying to get into Alex’s sister’s pants? It might help resolve some of the tension between you two.”

“I will try to get into her pants, just not right away because . . .” He scratches his beard. “Well, I don’t know why exactly. The guys can’t know, though. They already think I’ve slept with her.”

“Did you tell them you slept with her?”

I’ll be pissed at him for making Alex’s sister look slutty. I’m lucky Alex isn’t the bragging type. Even when the only things he knew about me were how loud I am in bed and my love for his monster cock, he still didn’t soil my reputation. I’m well-equipped to do that on my own—see locker room for details.

“Not really.” He takes another bite of his cucumber.

“Care to explain?”

“I didn’t tell them I did. I also didn’t tell them I didn’t.” He has the good sense not to look me in the eye.

“So you lied to them.”

“No.”

“Yes you did.”

He still looks confused.

“Alex’s sister isn’t some random chick you’re sticking your wang in. She’s one of your teammates’ sister, kind of like I’m your sister.”

The lightbulb appears to be flickering, so I figure it’s safe to continue.

“There are hundreds of pictures of Sunny and Alex together. It’s no secret they’re close. She spends a lot of time under the scrutiny—” Buck frowns; maybe I’m using words he doesn’t understand. “The watchful eye of the media. If you make it seem like you’re all up in that, how do you think it will look?”

“I know what scrutiny means. I don’t want people to think Sunny is a puck bunny.”

He continues to stroke his beard as he ponders what I’ve said.

“I’m sure you don’t. Just like you don’t want people to think I’m one for sleeping with Alex, even though I’ve done a good job making myself look like one, anyway.”

“I thought we agreed not to talk about that. It was bad enough catching the end of it. I don’t like that you’re with him. Just because Waters isn’t taking puck bunnies home right now doesn’t mean he’s a changed man.”

“That’s like the yeti calling the Sasquatch hairy.”

He runs a hand self-consciously over his forearm. “What?”

“You do realize Alex thinks you’re after his sister to get back at him for me, right? Imagine how he feels believing you’re doing his sister, knowing the number of girls you’ve put your doodle into.”

“Yeah, ’cause Waters’ rep is so much better.”

I roll my eyes. “He’s not really a manwhore. It’s all just public misconception.”

Oh God. I don’t think I should’ve said that. Alex’s non-whoriness is probably something we should discuss, which is absolutely insane.

“Where did you hear that?”

“Never mind. Forget I said anything.” It’s the wrong thing to say because it evokes curiosity.

“What kind of bullshit is Waters feeding you?”

Buck’s face starts to get red as unnecessary anger sets in. He reminds me of The Hulk, which reminds me of my underwear, which reminds me of Alex’s mother walking into his room while his hand was in the flap. Stupid, humiliating unlocked door.

“It’s not important. Besides, this isn’t about Alex and me. It’s about you and Sunny, and you telling your boys you banged her so you can be the man. It’s immature. You’re making her look bad. Is that what you want?”

He hangs his head in shame. “No. Definitely not.”

“Then stop being an asshole. Now get out of my pool house. I have a date, and I don’t want you here when Alex picks me up.”

He points the cucumber at me. “I still don’t like that you’re dating him.”

“And I still don’t care.” I open the door and shoo him out.

Maybe Sunny can do the impossible and tame Buck. If he screws this up, it's going to make things hella awkward for Alex and me.



Alex and I spend as much time together as we can over the weeks following his return, although constant practice, away games, and preparation for playoffs keep him busy. We don't go out apart from picking up the occasional takeout; Alex is trying to keep things low key after the fight and the locker room sex.

During his interviews to dispel the rumors, Alex is as evasive as ever, neither confirming nor denying anything. It reminds me of the Hat Trick interview. I understand the reasons for his non-answers and the omission, but it makes me nervous. While the pictures of him and I leaving the stadium after the locker sex are unclear, there are plenty more from later in the evening with us together.

When our relationship is brought up in one interview, he dodges the question altogether, as if it wasn't even asked. I've gone from being no one important to the topic of speculation in the gossip rags. The attention is foreign. I don't want to be seen as Alex's puck bunny. Beyond that, I worry about how I'll be perceived at work by my colleagues.

I can't decide whether I'm being paranoid or if my fears have legitimate basis. He's so considerate when we're together; it's hard to know how much is a result of my own insecurities.



Our weeks blend together, and the April thaw brings wet weather followed by the promise of May sunshine and warmth. Tonight is a rare evening

without obligations, so we're making use of his back porch. Not having sex. Yet.

I discovered his black onyx Scrabble board and challenged him to a word-off.

"Let's talk about the rules," he says as he sets up the board and shakes the bag of tiles.

"They're right here." I hold up the booklet that contains the rules as well as the list of two letter words I've memorized. Those come in handy at the end of the game.

"I have a few new ones."

"New rules?"

Alex crosses his legs, getting comfortable. "Mmm. I'd like to up the stakes a little."

"Is that so?" I'm just as good at Scrabble as I am at air hockey. The key to Scrabble isn't creative words, it's in the points.

"All words need to be a minimum of four letters, with no less than ten points, and they need to be dirty."

"Or what happens?"

He grins. "Or you take off an article of clothing."

"Strip Scrabble?" I crack my knuckles. "You're so on."

"Says the accountant to the English major. Get ready to get beat."

"Pfft." I take a dainty sip of my wine. It's so good. Alex has an entire wine cellar. He has a particular fondness for Niagara Rieslings, and now I do, too. They're sweet and crisp, and I could guzzle a bottle no problem. I want to win this Strip Scrabble competition, so I won't. "Your snuffie is going to be hanging out long before my beaver."

"We'll see about that."

We pick tiles to see who goes first. I get lucky with my selection and start the board with "clit."

The challenge of dirty words with four letters isn't so much the issue; it's that so many of them contain the letter C.

We go back and forth, me consistently making smutty four letter words, such as slut, poon, and anal. Alex comes up with a questionable Q word he wants to use on the triple letter tile. I let him get away with it since I'm kicking his ass so badly.

Alex currently has seven vowels, so he's having trouble forming a smutty word. I think he's stalling so I'll drink more wine and become

incapable of making good words. He drops an A between the letter V in *beave* and the G in *gonad* to make the word *vag*.

“That’s only three letters. Take something off.” I lick my lips in anticipation.

We’re only halfway through the game, and he’s already lost his socks, watch, and pants. The next logical item is his shirt.

Of course, Alex decides he’s going to lose his boxers instead. He stands, with his eyes on me, and shimmies them down his thighs. They slide to the floor, and he kicks them off to the side with the rest of his discarded clothing.

I prop my chin on my fist and sigh. “Strip Scrabble is my favorite.”

“I thought my cock was your favorite.”

“That, too.”

Alex has a semi. It’s probably because I’m in my bra. I took off the shirt first as a distraction, so he’s getting me back. Every time I look at the board, I get an eyeful of Alex’s growing MC.

I have an awesome word thanks to the blank tile I’ve scored, but Alex’s crappy *vag* has done nothing to help open the board. “I’m thinking about going apartment hunting next week,” I say as I search for a creative place to put my letters. I’m trying super hard not to focus on his hard-on. It’s a challenge since he keeps absently stroking his monster cock.

“Oh? Why would you need to do that?”

“So you can come to my place, and we won’t have to worry about my mom crashing our party.” Alex has only spent the night at my place once. She barged in while we were making out—mostly naked—on the couch. Since then, I’ve been coming to Alex’s and looking at apartments close to my work.

“What’s wrong with you coming here?”

“Nothing. I just thought it would be nice if it was equitable.” I scour the board one last time. There’s no good place to put my word, and without a double-letter score of some kind, I’ll only manage eight points.

“You should move in here.” He says it nonchalantly, but his eyes are on his tiles and his hand is still wrapped around his mostly hard cock.

My heart does this fluttery thing. I’m not sure whether he’s kidding.

“We’ve been dating for what, like two months? Yeah, I think moving in with you is totally reasonable.” If we’d been dating a few months longer, I’d jump at the opportunity. Things have been so crazy lately. His

evasiveness in interviews isn't canceled out by how much time we spend together, or introducing me to his friends and family.

"It's close to three months. You don't want to move in with me?" He's peeking up at me from under his pretty, long man-lashes, looking hurt.

"It's not that." I pick up my tiles and lean across the board. I don't know how to deal with this, mostly because as irrational as it is, I totally want to move into Alex's crib and play house with him.

Instead of giving him more of an explanation, I place the letter D on his snuffie, followed by an I, the blank tile, and a K. I smile triumphantly.

"Nice word. Except it doesn't count if you can't lay it on the board. Lose the bra." He gestures to my chest.

I don't follow Alex's instructions. Instead, I drop my pants and toss them on the floor. Alex looks unimpressed. I'm wearing frilly underwear, so he shouldn't be too upset. He stands up—totally hard now—and knocks over the board with his dick, spilling our carefully crafted smutty words all over the floor.

"Hey! I was winning."

"Hardly." Alex pushes my chair back and drops to his knees in front of me.

"I was up by fifty points."

"Why don't you want to move in with me?" He hooks his fingers behind my knees and parts my legs so he can fit between them.

"What does that have to do with you sabotaging the Strip Scrabble game?"

"Stop avoiding the question. Do you think you'll get sick of me?" His hands roam up the outside of my legs.

"No. Of course not."

"Then what?"

"It's a little premature, don't you think?" I like the idea, but it's too soon. We haven't even dropped the L-bomb, although I'm starting to suspect these fluttery feelings mean that's exactly where I'm at now.

"Who cares? I'm gone half the time with away games and practice. It's a big house. There's lots of space." He flicks the clasp on my bra. "By the time the season's over, we'll have been dating for the better part of four months—maybe even five, depending on how far we make it in the playoffs."

"I think six months should be the cut-off for moving in."

“Is that an arbitrary number you’re throwing around?” He traces the delicate lace ruffle on my panties with a fingertip.

I close my eyes, absorbing the sensation for a moment before I work on forming a response. “I read an article about it.” I won’t tell him it was from some silly girl magazine.

“What’s the significance of six months?” He places a wet kiss below my navel.

“By that time all the fairy dust has settled. You’ll know all my weird quirks, and maybe then you’ll decide you can’t live with the way I brush my teeth, or how my hair clogs up your shower drain, or my obsession with Swedish Fish.”

“I like all your weird quirks.” He pulls his shirt over his head.

“I like your naked body,” I say, running my hands over his chest.

“Then you should move in with it.”

“Ask me again after playoffs.”

“I don’t think I can wait until then.”

“They’re only weeks away.” I pull his mouth to mine. All my paranoia seems to have been for nothing. Alex wouldn’t ask me to move in with him if our relationship wasn’t important.

We don’t even attempt to make it to his bedroom. We have sex on the floor. It’s intense and charged, and I want it to stay like this between us. I want to want him with this kind of insatiable need forever. But passion fades eventually, and the warm, soft balm of love is what keeps the fire burning.



The Hawks keep winning games, which should be a positive. Instead of being excited, Alex gets moodier the closer they get to securing a place in the playoffs. Whenever Dick calls—which is frequently—he gets tense and leaves the room. I hate Dick. Alex is always pissy after they talk. He’s also always horny which is the only upside. After the calls, I find myself promptly carried up the stairs and loved into oblivion.

While the orgasms are stellar as usual, I feel like I'm missing something important.

I notice the pattern and call him on it. "What's going on with Dick?"

He tenses, staring up at the ceiling. "We're not seeing eye-to-eye on how to handle some of my endorsements."

"Which endorsements?"

"The ones for Bachelor of the Year."

He mentioned this in passing a few weeks ago and hasn't brought it up since. "What's the issue?" Silence stretches out so long I prop up on an elbow. "Alex?"

He shifts his gaze from the ceiling to me. "Dick thinks it's better for me to appear available until it's over."

"Available?"

"Unattached." He swallows.

My stomach bottoms out. "There are pictures of us together everywhere."

"I know. So does he. It's stupid." Alex sighs. "It could help me secure that big endorsement campaign, Violet. I have to start thinking about my career outside of being on the ice."

I know this. Hockey careers are short. It's the reason I have my job and also the reason I have to do it well. It doesn't mean I have to like what he's telling me, though. "Is this why we've been staying in the past few weeks?"

"I'm trying to fly under the radar. I don't want you caught up in all my crap."

It's another evasive answer. I try a different angle. "Does Dick know you've asked me to move in with you?"

"No."

"Don't you think you should tell him if you're serious about being with me?"

Alex skims my cheek with his knuckles. "You're right. I should. I will. I'll talk to him this week."

"Promise?"

"Promise, baby." He holds out his arms. "Come snuggle with me."

I settle with my cheek on his chest. His arms wind tight around me, his heart beating hard beneath the cage of flesh and bone. Our conversation should make me feel better. Instead I worry about what else he might be keeping from me.



Instead of things settling down when the Hawks make the first round of playoff games, Alex is more stressed. Needier. I stay at his place almost every night leading up to the first playoff game.

“I’m going home tonight,” I say while Alex inhales a heaping plate of pasta.

He finishes chewing before he replies. “Why?”

“You need to get a good night's sleep tonight. I won’t be responsible for messing up your first playoff game because I kept you up with these.” I motion to my rack.

“I sleep best when my head is resting on your delicate pillows of love.”

I roll my eyes. “You can snuggle with them after dinner, but me and the girls are going home at nine.”

“That’s less than two hours from now.” Alex shoves his plate aside, picks me up out of my chair, and slings me over his shoulder. “Dinner’s over.” He takes the stairs at a run.

Two and a half hours later, I’m fully dressed and standing at the front door. I’ve been trying to leave for the past twenty minutes. Alex is having some difficulty letting me go.

I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss the dimple on his left cheek. “I’ll stay tomorrow night.”

“Since we’re into playoffs, I was thinking maybe you’d reconsider moving in.”

I smile. “I thought we were going to talk about it after playoffs were over.”

“No. You said you’d talk about it after playoffs are over, not me. You’ve stayed here the past six nights. You might as well keep staying and make it permanent.”

I can’t understand why he’s pushing now. “So we have Dick’s seal of approval?”

“I don’t need Dick’s seal of anything. Are you considering it?”

“You’re impossible.”

“I prefer the term tenacious.”

“I’ll call you before the game tomorrow.” I wait for him to kiss me for the seventy-fifth time. It takes another ten minutes to get out the door, but I don’t mind.



The following evening, Charlene comes to my place and we all pile into Sidney’s Hummer, excited to be front and center for game one of the playoffs. The stadium is buzzing with exhilaration.

I’m currently staring at the back of Alex’s head while Charlene moans about Darren’s hotness. Charlene and Darren have been out a bunch of times since returning from Toronto. It’s been all over the gossip rags, which is a nice distraction from the less positive attention Alex and I have been receiving. The hockey fanatics are shocked. Darren has never been captured with anyone except his fans. He and Charlene spending time together makes for good publicity. He’s getting a lot more press on and off the ice. Charlene pretends she isn’t fazed at all by the attention; however, it did take her two hours and twelve wardrobe changes to get ready for the game.

“Just look at him.” Charlene sighs as Darren skates across the ice.

“He’s awesome.” It’s what she wants to hear. It’s also true.

“He really is, Violet. He’s got to be the most romantic man I’ve ever met.”

She yammers on and on, but I can’t be mad at her. I’ve definitely done the same thing to her regarding Alex over the past couple of months.

Alex is on his game tonight, as is the rest of the team. No one’s messing around or getting chippy with the opposition. The focus is singular: Get the puck in the net and win the first game of the playoffs. This is a big game; it sets the tone for the series.

These boys are determined and apparently off to an awesome start—the score is two-one in favor of the Hawks at the end of the first period. Buck is high on adrenaline, seeing as this is the first time he’s ever made it to the playoffs. He keeps the puck away from the Hawks’ net. That creepy Kirk guy even manages an assist, proving you can be dodgy and an

amazing hockey player at the same time. The Hawks hold their lead all the way through and run away with the game. The final score is four-one, putting the Hawks in a great position moving forward in the series.

The high is contagious, my own excitement spiraling as I absorb the state of the fans around me. Interviews are being televised on the big screens after the win, and the entertainment bulldogs are all over the team. The roar of the crowd makes it difficult to hear. Reporters fire questions at Alex.

“Two game suspension earlier in the season . . .”

“Reflects on you as the captain . . .”

“Sexiest bachelor . . .”

It’s disjointed, but the last bit catches my attention. I push forward through the crowd, hoping to hear better.

“It’s an honor to be nominated,” Alex says, running his hand through his sweaty hair.

He seems uncomfortable. A sea of people surround him, and I’m short, so he can’t see me.

Another fragmented question filters through the crowd. Dammit, I wish I could hear what they’re asking.

“. . . rumors about your relationship . . .”

Alex blinks nervously. “I thought we were going to talk about the game, not my personal life.”

Another reporter pipes up. “So the rumors are true?”

The mic crackles with static, but his next statement is foghorn clear. “No comment.” He scans the crowd, and his guilty expression makes my stomach turn.

Everything feels like it’s moving in slow motion. I want to kick the shit out of someone. I want to cry. This is the same as a complete denial, which makes me look like a total hockey hooker. I’m pissed.

It’s obvious he lied about talking to Dick, and just last night he asked me to move in with him. Again. None of this makes sense.

His answer feeds the vultures. “. . . The woman you’ve been seen with . . .”

The words *just friends* drop like a sewage-filled balloon.

Everything else is drowned out by the media’s questions. I’ve heard enough, anyway. If I have to listen to him a second longer, I’ll projectile vomit all over his fucking fans.

I push through the crowd, desperate to escape. I don't look back. I'm sure I can catch my own humiliation on YouTube later.

I've learned an invaluable lesson today: Never trust a hockey player.

ALEX

I regret the words as soon as they're out of my mouth. I hate that I've done this for the sake of an endorsement. None of this is worth it if it means I have to hurt someone I care about. And that's exactly what I've done. My remorse is a kick in the nuts.

From my right, Butterson yells, "You asshole!"

I turn in time to see his fist barreling at my face. It connects with my nose; the crunch and pop of cartilage come from inside my head. I deserve it, but it damn well hurts.

"Sonofa—" The warm flow of blood hits my lips and travels down my chin.

I'm so pissed. I've been an asshole to Violet, Sunny is talking to Butterson every day, according to my mother, and now he punched me in the face. Thanks to the stupid advice of my dickface agent, I've put my pride before Violet. All the fucking evasiveness is pointless now that I've screwed my relationship with her. I want to take it out on someone. Butterson is the perfect target since he broke my nose.

He grabs my jersey, intent on punching me again. "I'm going to kick the shit out of you!"

"Bring it on, sisterfucker!" I yell back.

Kirk grabs Butterson while Darren puts me in a choke hold and drags me away. Under a veil of red, I'm aware I've lost control.

"Keep your mouth shut, Waters. They're going to string you up by the fucking laces if you don't get yourself together."

Swinging me around, he pushes me into the locker room, away from the media circus.

Despite my fury, I have the wherewithal not to lash out again. The last thing I want—in addition to having destroyed the one relationship worth

pursuing—is to add games to what could become a suspension. One more and I'll be benched for the playoffs and let down my entire team.

“Son of a bitch!” I clomp around the room. Skates suck for pacing.

Darren tosses his gloves on the bench. “Do you even realize what you did out there ? What would possess you to say something like that to the damn media?”

Butterson storms into the locker room flanked by our teammates. “I'm gonna rip your head off and shit down your throat!”

“I'd like to see you try.” I pull my jersey over my head and rip off my padding, happy to unleash some of the pent up anger currently ruling my body.

“Don't be an idiot, Waters.” Darren shoves me back.

I'm not thinking clearly. In what can only be considered a reflexive action, I throw a punch at Darren. It only takes a second for him to lay me out, his knee at my throat. I don't move because attached to his knee is a leg and a foot with a sharp skate at the end.

“What the fuck is wrong with you guys?” Coach yells, getting in the middle. “I've never seen a more embarrassing display in all my fucking years in hockey.”

Darren jams his knee into my throat, cutting off my air supply. Then he releases the pressure and stands. I roll to the side, gasping for breath. It takes a minute to regain composure and pull myself up. No one offers to help.

“Butterson, what's gotten into you? The media is on fire with this shit. You mind telling me why the hell you punched out your own goddamned captain?”

Coach's face is redder than I've ever seen it before. He doesn't give Buck a chance to answer—it's tirade time. Coach can go on for hours when he gets into one of his moods. Some of the guys sit down and throw glares my way. This is going to be one of the long ones.

“You're supposed to be a team. We should be celebrating this win, not hashing out our personal shit in front of the fucking world.” He gives Butterson and me the stink eye. “No one is going to remember we won the first game of the playoffs or how well it was played. All they're going to talk about is how the newest team member went after the team captain. It might only be a headline for a day or two, but you know who it's going to

stick with? Boston. They're going to know we have a weak link, and they'll take advantage of it."

Butterson's shoulders slump, and he looks at the floor.

"So, Waters, what did you do to piss Butterson off?" Coach looks at me expectantly.

I feel like absolute shit for a multitude of reasons. Not only have I let my team down and potentially screwed us during this series, I've demo'd my relationship with Violet. Instead of celebrating with her, I'm sitting in a locker room with a broken nose, a decimated ego, and my whole team pissed at me.

"I followed Dick's advice." I look down at my lap and shake my head. I need to fire his ass.

"Do you think you could elaborate, Waters? So help me God, if you're taking advice from your penis, I'm going to clock you myself."

"Dick, my agent. I'm supposed to appear available until the Bachelor of the Year crap is done with." Spoken aloud, it sounds absolutely insane.

"You've got to be shitting me!" Butterson forces his way through the guys holding him back. "You humiliated my sister and broke her heart in front of millions of people for publicity? So you could what? Make some fucking list and score a new bunny? Pocket some cash?"

"It's not like that." It hits me, what he's said. I've broken Violet's heart. I'm overwhelmed and on the defensive, so I do the one thing I can—I hit below the belt. "Who are you to talk, anyway? I know you're banging my sister, you cocksucker."

"I haven't had sex with Sunny." Those are the last words I ever expected to hear out of Butterson's mouth.

I stare at him and say nothing. He's not lying; I can tell. He's just as bad at lying as Violet is. If they were truly related, I'd think it's a genetic trait.

"Wait a goddamned minute." Coach breaks the uncomfortable eye contact between Butterson and me. "Is this about a broad?"

"Violet isn't a broad," We say in unison.

Coach shakes his head and turns to me. "I want to see both of you tomorrow. You'll be doing interviews to straighten this garbage out, so kiss and make up, and come up with a story that doesn't sound like complete bullshit."

With that, Coach storms out. No one talks to me as they strip out of their uniforms and hit the showers. Usually the guys will get over things quickly. Not tonight. Darren won't even acknowledge me.

Once the entire team is gone, I shower. I don't bother with my suit, since I'm not going out to celebrate. Instead, I change back into my street clothes, get a cab to my place, and get in my car. I need to get my nose checked, but that'll have to wait until later. I drive to Violet's and park in front of her house. Her SUV isn't there, so I call her. Unsurprisingly, I get her voice mail. I let my head drop back as I listen to her new message.

"Hi, you've reached Violet, the dumbass hockey hooker. I'm too pissed off and humiliated to answer my phone, but you can leave a message. Unless you're Alex "Asshole" Waters. In that case, you can fuck the hell off. Have a nice day."

I sit there for a few long seconds after the phone beeps, just breathing, until I realize I should either speak or hang up. I choose the second option because it's clear Violet doesn't want to hear from me. I follow up with a call to Dick and fire him. He tells me I'll regret the decision. I tell him to fuck himself in the ass with a hockey puck and hang up.

I try Violet's number again. It goes straight to voice mail. I've ruined everything.



The meeting the following morning with Coach and Butterson is brutal. We manage to work out a feasible story which makes me look like a complete asshole. Like the broken nose, I deserve it.

The next few days are plain old shitty. X-rays prove my nose is definitely broken. Again. It's swollen and it hurts like a bitch. The black eyes are a sucky reminder of how badly I messed up.

Beyond that, I receive endless calls from TV journalists wanting interviews. It's a pain in the ass. I'm not used to dealing with this stuff on my own. I make a bunch of phone calls and find a new agent who's willing to take me on despite the shitstorm I've created recently.

If that isn't bad enough, Violet's phone has been disconnected, which tells me she changed her number. I have no way to contact her aside from email, which isn't the way I want to go about explaining what happened.

Beyond that, practices are rough. Coach is right; if Butterson and I can't deal with our shit, we're going to destroy our chances of making it to the finals. I don't want to be the reason for that. He pulls Butterson and me aside and tells us we're to keep our personal issues off the ice or he'll encourage the general manager to trade both of us. I think he means it.

Butterson watches Coach walk away. "For the sake of our team, I'm going to let this go on the ice, but don't think for a second I've forgiven you for what you've done to Violet."

"I get that. I'd really like to apologize to her—"

He points a finger at me. "Stay the fuck away from her. Violet's broken up enough as it is. She doesn't need you making this worse by throwing out some bullshit apology."

I push his hand away. "It's not bullshit. I care about her."

"Yeah? Well if that's the way you treat people you care about, I'd hate to see how you are with the ones you don't even like. How you got to be captain of this team is beyond me. You're a selfish fucking bastard." He turns away and skates back onto the ice. He's not wrong, which makes me feel a million times worse.

Despite Butterson's violent warning, I try to contact Violet. I call her parents, hoping if I get to Skye, I can persuade her to put Violet on the phone.

"Hall-Butterson residence."

"Hi, Skye."

"Alex." Based on her icy tone, she's not happy with me. "You screwed up big time."

I heave a sigh. "I really did."

"Violet doesn't want to talk to you."

"I know. Buck's made it pretty clear and so has Violet." I kick at the leg of my bed, noticing something red peeking out from the bottom. Picking it up, I find a pair of Violet's panties. The red ones with my name on the ass. I sit down on the edge of the mattress and resist the urge to sniff them.

"I'm afraid I can't help you out of this one," she says after a long pause.

I heave a despondent sigh. I expected this. She's Violet's mother, after all. It's her duty to protect her daughter. I'm lucky she isn't ripping me a new asshole. "I figured as much."

"Honestly, Alex. You're such a fighter on the ice. Why can't you be the same way off it? Stop being an idiot and make a move. You haven't even sent her flowers, and you always send her flowers, whether you've messed up or not. How do you think that looks?"

This is what I need; more people to tell me how badly I've screwed this up and what to do to fix it. "You think I should send her flowers?"

"No, Alex. I don't think you should send her flowers." She uses the tone reserved for mothers who want to make you feel like a complete dumbass.

"But then what—"

"You're a smart boy—" She stops herself. "*Some* of the time. I'm sure you'll figure it out—otherwise you don't deserve to be with my daughter." A dial tone follows. Violet's mom has hung up on me.

I call Darren. He's the only other person I can think of who might be willing to help. Unfortunately, he doesn't pick up, and it's clear he's still not talking to me off the ice.

I try one last person: my father. His ability to help is questionable.

"Hey, Alex."

I make small talk for a minute or two until I can't stand the awkward chit-chat. "I screwed up with Violet."

"I know. So does most of North America as well as other hockey-watching countries."

"You've messed up with mom, right?" She can be a bit of a Fruit Loop. I'm positive my father's been in the dog house plenty of times.

"Of course." My father sighs. "I have the benefit of keeping my private life private. That isn't the case with you and Violet, is it?"

"No. It's not. I shouldn't have followed Dick's advice."

"No, Alex, you shouldn't have."

"I fired him."

"It's about fucking time." My dad exhales into the receiver with a whoosh. There's a good chance he's doing research. "I know it was hard when you started playing professional hockey. I understand you want to be the best, and you want to prove you are. You don't need the endorsements to do that."

“I just wanted this, you know?”

“But at what cost, Alex? You don’t need validation. You’re team captain. You make more money a year than I will in a lifetime. What you need to do is be an older brother your sister can look up to, not one she has to defend because you’ve earned a shitty reputation over old rumors. And you need someone like Violet to keep your head on straight. Stop worrying about what other people think and do what’s best for you.”

“Violet is what’s best for me.”

“Then fight for her.”

“She won’t talk to me.”

“And you’re going to let that stop you? Since when do you give up that easily?”

He has a point. “I don’t.” I can find a way to get Violet’s attention. I shouldn’t let anything stand in my way. Especially not an endorsement. No matter how much I want it, it’s not worth losing Violet.

“Good. I hope you figure this out, son. I really like Violet. She’s good for you.”

“Let’s hope I can convince her I’m good for her, too.”

“You’ve got the art of persuasion on your side.”

“Thanks, Dad. I’m going to need it.”

I have to come up with something better than flowers or candy to fix this. I have to show her unequivocally that I need her far more than any endorsement.

I stew for several hours, trying to come up with a creative way to get Violet to hear me out. If she won’t answer my phone calls, there’s one option that worked in the past. Hunting her down is the best chance I have.

I change out of my sweats into dress pants and a button-down shirt. I should look presentable. I can’t do anything about my nose. The white bandage and splint cover the worst of the swelling and bruising.

The playoff beard has to stay, even if it makes me look less presentable. It’s a tradition I won’t mess with. The only way I’ll get back on the team’s good side is by playing well. Game four of the series is tomorrow night, and we’re up two-one. Shaving my beard could jinx the game. I concede by cleaning it up around the edges so I only look partly shitty.

I figure stopping at her house is my best first shot. Flowers aren’t going to be enough this time. I need something better. I stop by the coffee

shop we went to on our first date. They have one of those caramel crunch cakes, but slices are missing. A piece isn't enough; it has to be the whole thing. I still get her one of those green seaweed-looking drinks she likes, though.

An ice cream store down the street is still open. Girls like ice cream when boyfriends mess up, based on my experience with Sunny, and Violet likes cake, so it seems like a logical choice.

I wipe my sweaty palms on my pants after I park in Violet's driveway behind her beat up SUV. A few media assholes tag along behind me, as seems to be the way of things these days. They stay on the sidewalk, keeping a respectable distance while they shout questions.

Sidney intercepts me before I get more than five feet from my car. We're the same height, but right now, I feel small.

"Hello, Mr. Butterson. How are you this evening?" I check to make sure he doesn't have a baseball bat hidden behind his back.

I've hurt Violet, which means he's suffering in some way because of what I've done. It makes sense he'd be protective of Violet under these circumstances. I know what it's like living with a scorned woman. If Sunny or my mother was miserable, everyone else in the house had to be, too.

"Alex." He steps in front of the gate, blocking the way to the pool house.

"I was wondering if Violet's home."

"Yeah, she's home. She's busy packing."

"Packing?" I scan the pool house.

"She's moving. She wants her own place." He says it as if it's my fault. Maybe it is.

"Is she staying in the city?"

"If Violet wants you to know where she's moving, I'm sure she'll get in touch."

He's not going to make this easy. "Do you think I could speak with her?"

"Violet made it pretty clear she doesn't want to see you right now. In fact, she's said she never wants to see you again. Can't really say as I blame her, either." His lip twitches, his disdain for me obvious.

I have a sinking feeling once Violet makes up her mind about something, she doesn't usually go back on it.

“I understand. Could you give these to her then?” I hold out the takeout cup and the box. “This needs to go in the freezer; it’s an ice cream cake.”

Sidney takes them from me with a frown and waits for me to get in my car. He’s still standing in the middle of the driveway as I pull away, barely avoiding running over the paps who never seem to let up. That definitely didn’t go as planned.

The next night I have a game, so there’s no time to follow up with Violet. I don’t hear anything the next day, or the one after that. I resort to emailing her. It bounces back. The message should be clear by now, but I’m not ready to give up, so I stop by her work. I make it past security only to find Violet is in a meeting.

Charlene comes down the hall, her smile far from friendly. She slips her arm through mine and walks me down the hall to the elevator.

“I want a chance to explain.”

“Explain what, exactly, Alex?” She props a fist on her hip. “That you invited her to move in with you one night and the next you’re pulling this *just friends* bullshit on national TV? It’s been almost a week, and now you have the audacity to show up here as if she’s going to want to talk to you? What kind of head games are you playing?”

I should have acted sooner. “My agent wanted me to keep things on the down low. There’s an endorsement campaign—”

“That’s supposed to make it better?” She punches the elevator button, eyeing me with contempt. “You need to leave Violet alone. She’s had enough of the media sniffing around without you showing up to make it worse for her. Next time I see you here, I’m going to puncture your testicles with my stilettos.”

“Charlene—”

She flips me the bird. As she clips down the hall, I check out her shoes. I don’t want them anywhere near my balls.

I go back and try to see Violet again a few days later, despite the threat. The media is up my ass, following me to the doors, hounding me with questions I refuse to answer—because I have none. Those weenie dudes who work with her are as bad as Charlene, and I can’t get within fifty feet of Violet. I even try stopping by her house again, media constantly in tow. Her SUV isn’t in the driveway, and no one answers the door.



Violet isn't with Sidney and Skye in the prime seats at the next few home playoff games, and Butterson is tight-lipped. I put my energy into practice and games because there's no other option. We make it to the third round, and I want to share my excitement with Violet, but it's been more than two weeks and she isn't talking to me, so I can't.

Tired of the media constantly dogging me, I tell my new agent, Janette, I need an image overhaul to dispel the rumors about my "heartbreaker" ways. She's in agreement, so she sets up a TV interview with one of the big entertainment syndicates. This interview is about my personal life, not my hockey career. It won't go live for several days, which gives me time to work on Violet, not that I've gotten anywhere in the weeks since my epic fuck up.

On the day of the interview, I discover Violet is moving to her new apartment on the weekend. Charlene passes the information through Darren. Media snapshots of Butterson loading a moving truck act as additional proof.

Darren has almost forgiven me, thankfully. He's not mad about being punched; it's the stupid endorsement he's not quite willing to let go of yet. He does divulge the proximity of Violet's new apartment, giving me a general location to work from.

Desperate for any kind of contact, I check her Facebook profile. She's blocked me there, too, so I try Butterson's page. New pics of him with Violet toasting beers and packing boxes highlight his Facebook profile. In the background, the stuffed beaver I gave her hangs from a ceiling fan with a makeshift noose tied around his neck. Angry at myself and my situation, I tear into a bag of Cheetos and inhale the entire thing while I wait for Janette to pick me up for the interview. She won't let me go on my own, concerned I'm going to self-sabotage. By the time she arrives I've eaten my way through the whole bag, and I've used my shirt as a napkin. It's in this state that I open the door.

Janette's smile slides off her face. "You're supposed to be ready to leave."

“I should fix my hair?” I run a hand through it. It feels greasy.

She pushes past me, her heels clicking on the tile floor, and heads for the stairs.

“Where are you going?”

She stops halfway up and motions to the ceiling. “I assume your bedroom is this way.”

“Uhhh . . . yeah?”

She rolls her eyes. “You can’t go to an interview like this.”

I glance at my stained shirt. She has a point. My bedroom’s a mess. I haven’t let my housekeeper in to clean since the last time Violet stayed over.

Janette makes a face at the sight, or possibly the smell. It’s ripe in here. “Why are boys so disgusting? Get in the shower.” When I don’t move right away, she prods me toward the bathroom. “I’m interested in getting you your girl back so you don’t screw up the playoffs and ruin all your endorsement opportunities. You need to look and smell less pathetic.”

“I don’t care about the endorsement opportunities.”

“That’s fine. You don’t have to. However, it’s my job to care about them, so get your ass in there.”

I shower while she scours my closet for appropriate attire. Twenty minutes later, I’m dressed and ready to head to the news studio.

She inspects me as she would a side of beef.

“Don’t look at my beard. It’s playoffs.” I stroke it affectionately.

“You look like a homeless man in expensive clothes. It should work in our favor.” Janette ushers me out the door. She hands me a folder once we’re in the car, heading to the studio. “These are the questions they’re going to ask. You will *not* be evasive.”

I leaf through the sheet of questions. “These are pretty personal.”

“That’s the point, Alex. You’ve spent the last seven years acting like a womanizing asshole in the eyes of the media for no good reason I can see. You want Violet back in your life?”

“Yes. Definitely.”

“More than you want the endorsements?”

“Of course.”

“Then you need to show her you’re not a total dick. To do that, you have to be honest for once.”

I nod and review the questions. I've barely finished reading them when she grabs the sheet from my hand, balls it up, and tosses it on the floor by her feet.

"What are you doing? I haven't memorized them yet."

"I don't want you to memorize them, and I don't want stock answers. You need to speak from the heart. How do you feel about Violet?"

"I love her."

"Then make sure she knows it by the time you've finished this interview. Oh, and there will be a print version coming out next week with the interview as well. We want to cover all the bases." She pats my cheek. I hope I don't fuck this up, too.

We avoid the reporters lining the street outside the studio. Never in my life has the media paid so much attention to me as they have in the weeks since messing up with Violet. No one cares about the playoffs or how close we are to the Stanley Cup. All the media wants to hear about is why I broke Violet's heart on national TV, because clearly we were in a relationship.

Janette accompanies me to the green room. She shoos away the makeup people. "You look like hell, I want to keep it that way."

I assume she knows what she's doing, so I don't argue.

"How do you feel?" Janette adjusts the collar of my shirt and tries to smooth my hair.

"Like I'm going to puke."

She puts her hands on my shoulders. "You can do this, Alex. Just be honest. You're an absolute doll. Show the drama-loving public you're not a jerk."

"Okay." She pats me on the back and sends me out into the jaws of the interview shark, Angelica Chase.

The questions start out easy enough. They're pretty standard and revolve around the playoffs and the potential to compete for the Stanley Cup. I give the humble answers I'm used to providing.

Eventually Angelica moves on to questions surrounding my fight with Butterson and the rumors that he's dating my sister. They're meant to provoke, as Sunny and Butterson have made no attempt to hide their relationship. I know she's going to bring up Violet next; it's always the perfect segue.

"Over the past several months you've been seen with your teammate, Buck Butterson's stepsister. Recently you intimated you were just friends.

Your comment seemed to incite animosity between you and Buck. Would you care to discuss some of the rumors floating around about you?”

I look to Janette, standing in the wings. She nods, and I take a deep breath, ready to spill it.

“Violet and I have never been just friends.”

“Mmm.” She nods her agreement. “Media coverage certainly suggests there’s more going on between you than friendship. So you lied in your previous interview?”

I wipe my damp palms on my thighs. This is it. I need to come clean if I have a hope in hell of winning Violet back. “I did. It was a terrible mistake. It cost me my relationship with Violet.”

“And why would you lie about your relationship?”

“Because I’m an asshole.” Janette gives me her death stare from the wings. I’m not doing well so far. “Sorry. I mean a jerk.”

“It’s fine, we can cut that out.” Angelica relaxes in her chair. “Would you care to elaborate?”

“I’m not used to being forthcoming in interviews, not where my personal life is concerned.”

“You’ve certainly never seemed to mind the media attention before.”

I nod. This honesty thing isn’t as simple as I thought it would be. “I’ve always assumed publicity, no matter what form it comes in, is positive, even if it makes me look like a player and a jerk. Recently, I allowed some endorsement opportunities to cloud my judgement.”

“I’m not sure I understand.” Angelica slow blinks. “You’re saying you lied in order to secure an endorsement?”

I reach for the glass on the table and take a long drink, working to formulate a response that isn’t going to dig me into a deeper hole.

“We all have goals. There were questions about whether or not I’d be able to handle the demands of NHL hockey when I was drafted. I had to prove myself as a valuable player. I didn’t get this far without working for it, so when the endorsement I’ve been striving for became a possibility, I listened to some bad advice without considering how it would affect the people I care about.”

“Are you referring to *Beautiful People*’s Bachelor of the Year shortlist? Word has it you’re expected to be in the top ten. Are there others?”

“I can’t talk about them. They’re hardly worth it if it means I lose the person I love, though, are they?” I look at Janette in the wings, concerned

I've said the wrong thing. She smiles encouragingly, so I focus my attention on Angelica.

"So you're saying you love her? Violet Hall? Buck Butterson's sister?"

"Yeah. I'm in love with Violet."

She leans forward, lowering her voice, "Does she know that?"

"She does now."

Angelica grins and settles back in her chair. "I assume your relationship with Violet has created tension between you and your teammates."

"We're all trying to stay focused on the playoffs and the game, but yeah, it's been difficult. I'm not proud of how I managed the situation, and this may be my only chance to tell Violet how I feel."

Angelica folds her hands under her chin. "Why do you say that?"

"Because she won't talk to me."

"I see. This puts you in quite the quandary, doesn't it?"

"It does."

"What's so special about Violet that she's made you want to change?"

I frown, unsure what she means. "Change?"

"Come on, Alex. You're a notorious ladies' man."

"I'm not really."

"There's quite a significant amount of photographic evidence to the contrary."

I need to be careful how I word this. "I think people see what they want to see. Just because I'm standing beside a woman in a photograph doesn't mean I've had a relationship with her."

"Are you saying your reputation—"

"—Is based on conjecture. I won't say I'm not at fault for perpetuating it, but it's not an accurate representation of who I am, and it's not how I want to be seen. Not when it jeopardizes my relationships."

"You're referring to Violet, specifically?"

"I miss her. She's my Q on a triple word score."

"I'm sorry; I don't understand the last part."

"It's a Scrabble thing. Never mind. I just want her back in my life."

"What are you going to do to make that happen?"

"Whatever it takes."



**I HATE ALEX
WATERS
(I'M ALSO IN LOVE
WITH THE JERK)**

VIOLET

I allow myself some time to mope post epic televised humiliation. I even take a few days off work and lie around in ratty sweats and a stained hoodie, eating copious quantities of junk food. I refuse to wallow in self-pity for long, though. I made the choice to be with Alex even with Buck's warning and all the red flags waving right in front of my face. Between bouts of uncontrollable sobbing and some mild self-loathing, I scour the classified ads for an apartment. I need to make some life changes, and I'm starting by getting my own place.

Sidney secures a realtor who finds the perfect building only two blocks from my work. It's a tiny little one bedroom, barely more than five hundred square feet. The rent won't kill me, and it's in a decent neighborhood. There's a Thai restaurant and a candy shop two doors down, so I'm set. It's also available immediately, which is a plus.

As unhappy as my mother is about me moving out of the pool house, she helps me pack my things. Three weeks after I was publically dumped, Buck and Sidney load up the U-Haul while Charlene, my mom, and I head over to clean my new apartment. It's exactly the kind of distraction I need. As much as my heart hurts, the best thing I can do is move forward. I've changed my cell number, blocked Alex's email address, and stayed far away from social media.

Alex has come by on more than one occasion—not just at my house but at work, as well. So far everyone has been good at keeping him away from me, and I'm grateful. I don't want to see him because I don't think I'm strong enough not to cry all over him yet.

“What do you want to do with this box?” Charlene asks.

It's labeled with a biohazard sticker.

“You can put it in my bedroom closet. I'll figure out what I want to do with it later.”

She and my mom exchange a look.

“What’s in here?” Charlene rifles through the contents.

“All the stuff from Alex. I’m not ready to get rid of it, okay?”

My mom puts her arms around me and gives me a hug. “It’s okay, Vi. When you’re ready, we can get drunk and burn it all.”

I laugh and sniffle. Heartbreak is aptly named. The thought of burning the Waters beaver makes my stomach clench. I don’t know if I’ll ever be ready for that.

My mom does a little jump, like a yippy terrier and claps her hands. “I picked up a few new things for you!” She opens a box filled with brand new glassware. It’s another diversion, and I gladly take it. Thinking about Alex makes me emotional.

It turns out she went on a shopping spree with Sidney’s credit card, so I have a whole bunch of new things I didn’t anticipate. Including a flat screen television and an awesome leather couch. Once my living room and bedroom are set up, and most of the boxes are unpacked, we crack open some beers and order pizza.

Charlene stays long after everyone else goes home. We watch bad sitcoms on my hi-def TV until her eyes get droopy and she calls it a night. As soon as she leaves, the tears I’ve been holding onto all day begin to fall. I want the ache in my chest to stop, but I know it’ll take time. I torture myself by watching hockey highlights until my eyes are puffy and I’m too tired to keep them open. In bed, I toss and turn, unable to sleep.

I stare through the darkness at the closet. Several minutes later, I get out of bed and open the door. I flick on the interior light and kneel on the cold parquet floor to open the box. The Waters beaver is on top. I bring him back to bed with me. I want to hate Alex, but my heart hasn’t quite caught up with my head.



Apartment living takes some time getting used to. It sucks when I forget something and have to wait for the elevator to go back up and get it. The

walk to work is nice, though, and having my own place affords me some much-needed independence.

A few days after I move in, Buck stops by to play video games. It's his way of making sure I'm okay. He also brings treats.

"I wasn't sure what you'd want, so I brought options." He hands me a tray with a milkshake and a chocolate sundae topped with peanuts.

"That's a hard choice. I'm gonna have to go with the sundae."

Buck follows me into the living room, which is about six feet away from the door, and we lounge on my couch. I dive into my sundae while Buck sets up the Xbox.

"How's it hangin' these days?"

"Limp and to the left." I don't even crack a smile.

"That bad, eh?" He's adopted some Canadianisms from talking to Sunny.

"It's fine. I'm fine."

"You keep saying that, but I don't know if I believe you, Vi."

"This one's gonna take a while for me to get over, that's all."

"Look, Violet, I know you feel shitty, but Waters is a huge dildo. You can do way better." His phone rings. He holds up a finger and answers it. "Hey, babe . . . I'm with Violet . . . no, no way." He shakes his head vehemently. "I'm not telling her that. He's a dick—sorry. I know he's your brother—" He chews on a hangnail while he listens for a few seconds. "I don't—okay, Sunny. I miss you, too . . ."

There's another minute of back and forth, followed by an air smooch. "Bye, Sunny Sunshine."

I make gagging sounds as he hangs up. I shouldn't ask, but I can't help myself. "What did Sunny say?"

"Nothing important. Let's play something violent." He hands me a controller and picks up his own.

I don't argue or push for more information. It's better if he doesn't tell me.

"I know it hasn't been long, but maybe you need to go on a date or something. Get out there and have some fun." He's trying to be helpful; it's nice but not realistic.

"This is fun." I gesture to the screen where Buck is running over a pedestrian.

“You know what I mean. Sometimes you need to get back in the ring and fight.”

I raise my eyebrow; a boxing metaphor for relationships is actually quite fitting.

“I know you’ve had some bad luck recently, but there’s this guy, he plays for New York, they’re looking at trading him—”

“Buck, I don’t want to date another hockey player.” I set down my controller so I can shovel more of the sundae into my mouth, uncaring of the suffering that will follow this frozen dairy heaven.

“Not all of us are dogs, Violet. Randall’s a great guy.”

“His name is Randall. How awesome can he be?”

Buck mows down a group of people playing road hockey. “He goes by Randy.”

“Even better. His name is another word for horny. Sounds perfect for me.” I’m not sure if I should laugh or cry.

It’s not Randall’s fault his parents named him in relation to horniness. I can’t even entertain the idea of dating anyone else right now. Besides, I could never get serious with a hockey player again, or a dude named Randy. I’d make thrusting motions every time I said his name. It’d be awkward.

“Wait a minute. Didn’t Alex get suspended for kicking the shit out of some guy named Randy?” I’m almost positive this is the case.

“That was Randolph Cockburn. This is Randy Balls.”

“Are you serious?” What’s with these guys with terrible last names?

“Yeah, why?” Buck, my perverted stepbrother, doesn’t connect the outlandishly pornographic last name with the first name.

“Randy Balls?” I burst out laughing. “You want to set me up with a guy named *Randy Balls*? Can you even imagine what would happen if we got married? My last name would be Balls. Violet Balls!”

“Huh.” He makes a scrunchy face. “That wouldn’t be so good, would it? Specially if you hyphenated. Hall-Balls.”

I continue to laugh until I start crying, which turns into hysterical, desperate sobs. I don’t want to end up as Violet Balls. I wanted to be Violet Waters—it sounds so romantic—and Alex ruined it all.

My life sucks Randy’s balls.

Buck has no idea what to do. He offers to go out and get more ice cream, but my stomach is already cramping thanks to my dairy intolerance.

“I’m sorry, Violet. I didn’t realize how serious you guys were.”

“It’s not your fault.” I swipe my tears away, but there are new ones to take their place.

“I introduced you to him. I should’ve stopped you from meeting up with him.”

“How were you supposed to know I was going to hook up with Alex? Besides, you tried to warn me. I’m too much of an idiot to take your advice, that’s all.” I believed he was a hockey whore in the beginning, and I still slept with him.

He flexes his biceps. “I can punch him in the balls if you want.”

“That’s kind of you to offer, but if I ever see him again, I want to do it myself.”

Buck pats my shoulder and gives me an awkward hug where my face ends up in his armpit. I hold my breath until it’s over.

“I’ll totally let you beat me.” He motions to the TV.

I indulge Buck in a few rounds, but he has to work pretty hard to lose. After an hour of Xbox, it becomes pretty obvious I’m not invested in the game, and my stomach starts to gurgle.

Buck puts a beefy hand on my shoulder. “You okay?”

“The sundae isn’t sitting well.”

“Shit. You’re gonna have the moops, aren’t you?”

I grimace as another stomach cramp rolls through. “Yeah.”

“I should probably head out and leave you to it.”

I follow Buck to the door and watch while he shoves his feet into his massive shoes. We exchange a quick hug, and I open the door. We’re immediately assaulted by the stench of body odor. Melvin must have been in the hallway recently.

Buck frowns. “What the hell is that smell?”

“That’s my next door neighbor Melvin.”

“That’s from a *person*? It smells like a rotting sweaty corpse was dragged through the hallway.”

“I know. Rank, isn’t it? That’s nothing compared to his taste in music.” As if on cue, the death metal starts up.

“Is this guy for real?”

“The music doesn’t last too long.” Only two or three hours. I don’t tell Buck that Melvin also stops by almost every night to see if I want to hang out.

“You let me know if you want me to have a word with this guy,” Buck says with a shake of his head.

“I’m good. Thanks, though.” I give him another hug, mostly because I’m desperate for affection, and send him down the hall. He stumbles past Melvin’s door—the odor is horrendous—and then rushes on to the elevator.

After a lengthy time-out in the bathroom, I go to bed. The ensuing ice cream coma is neither restful nor peaceful. I dream of Alex and his air hockey table, except in my dream it’s not me he’s banging, it’s some other hockey hooker.



Two days later, there’s a knock at my door. I assume it’s Melvin because it’s about the right time of the evening for him to come knocking. If that’s the case, I can’t even pretend I’m not home because he can hear my television through the wall much like I can hear his death metal serenades. I peek out the peephole and discover it’s not Melvin, but Alex.

All sorts of weird things happen inside my body. I feel like my stomach is going to come out of my throat. My heart is pounding like I’ve had a massive orgasm. My beaver is so excited she’s gnawing at my underwear—which, incidentally, are hideous—and tears spring to my eyes. After almost a month I should have a better handle on my emotions, but I don’t.

He looks exhausted but gorgeous, as usual, even with the full beard he’s currently rocking. Especially with that damn beard. He’s all rustic and lumbersexual looking.

I squeak when he raps on the door again and clamp a hand over my mouth.

“Violet?” His forehead comes to rest against the door so I’m only able to see his fuzzy jaw, and I hear him sigh. “I know you’re in there. I saw your 4Runner in the parking lot and I heard you make a noise.”

Hands pressed against the steel panel separating us, I say nothing. Even though I hate him, I love him, and it fucking hurts so bad. I just want

it to stop. I wish he hadn't done this to us; I want him to leave, but I want him to stay. I also want to know how the hell he managed to get up here.

I have to bury my face in the crook of my elbow and bite my hoodie to stifle my pathetic sob.

"I know I fucked up, Violet. I just want to talk to you. Please, baby? I miss you. I made a mistake. If you let me explain, maybe we can work things out. I wanna work things out."

I take two or three deep breaths and clench my fists so I don't reach for the doorknob. I want to talk to him. I want Alex to have a reason for what he did to us. But whatever it is, it can't be good enough. There's no justification for that kind of humiliation.

Knowing this doesn't prevent the ache in my heart from flaring until it reaches yeast infection levels of discomfort.

"Baby, open the door. You don't have to let me in. I'll stay here in the hall. You can even leave the chain lock on. I only want to see you." He pauses and waits a few endless seconds. His head thumps against the door. "Everything sucks without you. I was under a lot of pressure. I didn't mean what I said—"

"*Then why did you say it?*" I scream and then cover my mouth with my palm, horrified I'm too weak to maintain my silence. I put my eye back to the peephole in time to see him lift his head and brace his hands on either side.

"Because I'm an idiot. Please, Violet. Don't make me talk to you like this. Give me a chance to explain."

"Why bother? Everything you say is bullshit anyway."

He stares directly into the peephole as if he knows I'm on the other side, coveting his beautiful, annoyingly perfect face. "You know that's not true. People make mistakes. This is a really huge mistake, and I wish I could take it back, but I can't. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

I close my eyes, the pervasive ache inside rippling outward. I want so badly to believe him, but I've learned my lesson. "But you did, Alex, and you're right, you can't take it back. Nothing you say is going to change that."

"Baby, please. Hear me out." The desperation in his voice is echoed in his eyes.

"You need to leave." My words are at complete odds with what my heart wants. More than anything, I want to open the door and do exactly as

he's asked: hear him out. If I do, there's a good chance I'll be tempted to give him the second or third chance he's looking for, and my poor beaten-up heart can't take that right now.

"All I want is five minutes. Can't you give me that?"

I have to hand it to him; he's persistent to the point of infuriation.

I'm about to threaten to call Buck and have him escort Alex out of the building by his balls, when the door across the hall opens. It's Ms. Bullock. She's a feisty little old lady with a mop of white, permed hair.

She eyes Alex with suspicion. "Excuse me, young man. Do you need help with something?"

"He was leaving!" I shout through the door.

"Violet, please." Begging might have worked once, but it isn't going to now.

I rest my forehead against the door and cringe at the crack in my voice. "Just go, Alex."

Ms. Bullock takes a long drag from her cigarette and raises her drawn-on eyebrow at Alex. "You heard the young lady. It's time for you to go."

Alex rubs a palm over his face and winces. "I'm not giving up on us."

Ms. Bullock goes back into her apartment, but leaves the door open. Alex returns to the peephole. "I get it if you need more time, but I care about you too much to walk away."

"You sure have a shitty way of showing it."

My hand is on the doorknob. Thankfully, Ms. Bullock comes back with a whisk broom. She doesn't give Alex a chance to leave peacefully. Instead, she starts whacking him on the shoulders.

"When a lady asks you to leave, you leave, dammit!" Ms. Bullock shouts.

God bless her violent, ancient heart.

Alex covers his head with his arms. "Okay! Okay! I'm going." He stumbles out of my line of sight. "I'm not giving up, Violet. I'll find a way to fix this."

"Good luck with that," I mutter as Ms. Bullock follows him down the hall, still beating on him.

I wait about thirty seconds before I turn the lock and crack the door. Ms. Bullock is still in the hallway, wielding her broom like a sword. From down the hall, Melvin sticks his head out, death metal and rank body odor seeping into the hall with him.

“Is he gone?” I whisper.

She purses her lips and gives her head a quick, almost imperceptible shake. Her cigarette is perched precariously between her lips. Her bright orange lipstick has bled into the creases around her mouth, making it look like a messy starburst.

I hear the ding of the elevator from the other end of the hall. After a few protracted seconds, Ms. Bullock clamps her lips around her cigarette again and takes another haul. Blowing out the smoke in a long stream, she finally gives me the nod. My shoulders drop, and the tension leaves my body.

I unlatch the chain lock and open the door. “Thank you.”

“It seemed like you weren’t all that interested in talking to him. Too bad. That’s one nice looking boy.” Her cigarette bounces between her lips as she speaks. The ash is more than an inch long.

I can still smell a hint of his cologne, even with the pungent cigarette smoke and Melvin’s body odor. “Don’t be fooled by the pretty. He’s bad news.”

“Must be if you’re keeping him out in the hall instead of inviting him to jump in your bed.”

I choke back a laugh. Ms. Bullock is probably my favorite person in the building.

Melvin waves from his door. “Everything okay, Violet?”

I wave back. “Everything’s fine, Melvin. Thanks for asking.”

“You wanna play Guitar Hero?”

“Maybe another time.”

His face falls, but he nods. “If you change your mind you know where to find me.” The door to his apartment clicks softly, his stench lingering in the hall.

“Now that’s a nice boy.” The ash finally falls, landing on Ms. Bullock’s flower print slipper. “Too bad he only showers on full moons.”

“Really?”

She shrugs. “It certainly smells that way. That’s saying something because my sense of smell is almost nonexistent thanks to these.” She points to her cigarette. “Well, dearie, Wheel of Fortune is starting, and I don’t want to miss out on Pat Sajak.”

“Thanks again, Ms. Bullock.”

“Anytime.”

I turn away, considering a junk food binge to combat the emotional exhaustion this whole debacle has caused.

“I hope you give him a chance to tell you how he feels about you.”

I swallow hard, fighting back tears. “I already know how he feels about me.”

She nods solemnly. “Ah. So it’s a case of unrequited love, then.”

“Is it so obvious?” How pathetic am I that my ancient neighbor lady can tell I’m in love and brokenhearted.

“Poor boy. He’s like a lovesick puppy.”

She disappears inside her apartment before I have a chance to correct her. Alex doesn’t love me. I was a game he played until he got bored. Then he broke all my pieces and threw me in the trash.

25
ALEX IS ALL
ABOUT WEARING
ME DOWN

VIOLET

The next morning I find an enormous bouquet of chocolate-dipped fruit in the shape of flowers.

The message on the card reads:

I want you back.

~Alex

I'm tempted to throw the whole thing in the garbage, but it's such a waste, and the fruit looks amazing. Plus, it's covered in chocolate. I put it in the fridge instead. I'll share it with Ms. Bullock later.

When I get to work, Charlene is already at my desk with a cinnamon roll and a coffee. I tell her about Alex stopping by and the fruit bouquet. I even manage not to cry, which is an improvement. Charlene decides we need a girl's night out, and I agree. Partly because I'm scared Alex will show up at my apartment again and I won't have the restraint necessary not to let him in this time.

The cab pulls up in front of my apartment building. Neither of us is driving since the plan is to get shitfaced. I climb into the back seat and she follows after me, giving the cabbie directions.

"I think you should talk to him."

I respond with silence.

My mom has been hinting—not so subtly—that I should rethink my Alex Waters boycott. I don't agree. I won't survive if he breaks my heart again.

Okay, I'll survive, but I'll cry a lot, and I'll end up gaining twenty pounds from excessive junk food consumption. Then I'll rebound and have meaningless sex with some other dumb jerk. Like Randy Balls. Or maybe even Melvin. He'll think it's more than rebound-depression sex and want a relationship.

“Violet, come on. He’s been trying to see you for weeks. He came to your apartment. He was willing to talk to you through your door. He got an asskicking from an old lady. You can’t give him the silent treatment forever. Besides, Darren says all this has to do with his former agent.”

I can’t believe what I’m hearing. “Are you on his side now?”

“Of course not!” Charlene’s expression softens. “Honestly, Vi, I’ve never seen you so broken up about a guy. Maybe it’s worth it to talk to him. If nothing else, you can get some closure.”

This doesn’t make me feel better. He’s hurt me worse than Steve, the turdburger, ever did. Still, a huge part of me—which I hate, incidentally—doesn’t want closure. My stupid heart is still in love with him, even if my head knows I shouldn’t be.

“Can we not talk about Alex tonight? I want to get hammered and forget him for a while,” I say as we get out of the cab.

Char squeezes my shoulder. “Whatever you want, Vi.”

We snag a table and order a pitcher of margaritas. There’s a crappy cover band playing, which makes conversation difficult. At least I don’t have to talk about Alex, even if I can’t stop thinking about him.

“Violet?”

The overpowering scent of cheap cologne singes my nose hairs. Shitballs. It’s the flower delivery guy. “Hi, Fred.”

“You remember my name! I totally thought it was you. I haven’t seen you in a while.” He stands there with his hands shoved in his pockets, nodding. He’s an odd dude.

“Yeah. I moved recently.” I swish my drink around in my glass, hoping he won’t ask questions about why I moved.

The bobble-heading is contagious. I have the urge to look at Charlene to see if she’s bobble-heading, too.

“So, I, uh, read you and the hockey player aren’t a couple or anything . . .” He kicks the leg of my chair while he stares at the top of the table.

It’s all anyone asks me about these days. I’m sick of it and sick of missing Alex. “Nope. Looks like we were just friends even though I’ve had his dick in my mouth.”

It isn’t until Charlene chokes on her drink and Fred’s eyeballs look like they’re about to pop out and roll onto the floor that I realize how inappropriate my comment is.

“Right. Huh.” Fred nods some more and blinks like he’s creating his own personal strobe light. “So, uh, since you’re not dating him, maybe you want to go to a movie or something?”

I stare at him because what the hell else am I supposed to do? He delivered Alex’s gifts to my house for weeks. I’ve probably tipped him more than a hundred bucks. He likely thinks the tips mean I’m into him. A movie date is crossing the customer-delivery guy line. Besides, I’ll choke to death if I have to deal with his cologne for an entire evening.

I know my silence has stretched on too long when he clears his throat. “Uh . . . I . . . uh . . .”

“Look, Fred. It’s cool of you to, um . . . want to cheer me up. I’m not in any state to be going to the movies with anyone but Charlene, here.” I thumb across the table at my best friend. “She’s the only person who can reasonably deal with my emo ass. Thanks for the offer, though.”

“Oh, right. Okay.” He bobbles his head in understanding. “Well, see you around.”

I feel bad for rejecting him, but it’s for the best. Besides, he asked me out immediately after I mentioned Alex’s dick having been in my mouth. I’m sure he thinks if he takes me to a movie, I’ll blow him. If he talked to Alex, he’d know it takes much less to get that out of me. Or it did. I’m turning over a new leaf, one that no longer includes blow jobs without definite commitment.

“That guy wears a lot of cologne.” Charlene waves her hand in front of her face. “It’s too bad since he’s hot.”

“He does and he is.”

“Didn’t I tell you he had a thing for you?”

“You sure did. You could start a side business as a psychic. All you need is a crystal ball.”

One day I’ll have to start dating again, but Fred is not the guy and now is not the time. Charlene may have a point about talking to Alex if I’m going to get over him and move on. No matter how the conversation goes down, it’s bound to be painful.



On Saturday morning I realize I've run out of clean clothes. One of the major drawbacks to apartment living is the inconvenience of using communal laundry facilities. I cart everything into the elevator and navigate my way to the laundry room. All the machines are in use. The whole room smells like onions and detergent thanks to some burly guy in ripped sweatpants who's eating a sub. I don't feel like waiting or socializing, so I pack up my stuff and head to my mom's. I'm also low on groceries, so I plan to scam a meal out of her.

I'm folding my third load of clothing, eating my second turkey and cheese sandwich, and watching hockey highlights when my mom drops down beside me. She's holding a magazine in one hand and a martini in the other. She smacks the entertainment magazine on the table with a dramatic flourish. Alex's scruffy, lumbersexual face is plastered on the cover. His face is everywhere these days.

"You're coming to the game tomorrow night," she says with finality. My mom never uses that tone, so she must mean business.

"What game?" I maintain a neutral expression. I think.

My mom knows I know what she's talking about. The Hawks have made it to the Stanley Cup finals. I've watched every game up to this point, often while hugging the Waters beaver. Tomorrow the Hawks are playing what could be the title game.

"This is the first time Buck has ever been in the finals."

"But—"

"No buts, Violet. You're coming with us. So is Charlene." She gives me her angry mom stare. It'd be funny if the turkey sandwiches in my stomach weren't thinking about staging a revolt.

"Fine." I've dodged every home playoff game at this point. I can't avoid Alex forever and I should be there to support Buck. This could be the silver lining on his hockey career. I gesture to the magazine. "What's this?"

"There's an article in there you should read. I think you'll find it very entertaining and informative."

I give her a look as she flounces out of the room. She thinks if she leaves it here after saying something like that, she'll entice me into reading it. It's difficult not to give in, but I manage not to look.

When I get back to my apartment, I find a gigantic box of maple sugar candies in front of my door. Alex has been by again. My stomach rumbles

in anxious anticipation.

Ms. Bullock must have been waiting for me to get home because she pokes her head out the door, cigarette dangling from her lips like a semi-flaccid, burning penis. Holding it between two gnarly fingers, she hides it behind her back so it's in her apartment rather than the hall. "Your friend stopped by again."

"I see that. When was he here?"

"He left a few minutes ago. Stayed for a good three hours, he did. The only reason he left was because he got a phone call and it sounded important. He brought me a little present, too."

Three hours is a damn long time to wait around. His perseverance makes more than my heart hurt. She disappears from the door and returns a minute later with her own little box of maple candies. Goddamn Alex for being a smooth bastard.

"Did he say anything?"

"Oh yes. He had lots to say about you. Lots of questions, too. That boy has it bad for you."

"I don't know about that." I pick up the box of maple candies. Underneath is the same magazine my mother tried to entice me to read as well as a USB stick and note.

Violet,

I know you're hurt and angry, but please watch the interview on the USB.

It airs tonight at eight. I miss you.

Love,

~Alex

It says "love." In all the notes and emails Alex has sent, not once has he used *the* word. If he's looking to get my attention, it's worked. I toss the magazine in the recycle box without looking at it, but I can't find it in me to dispose of the USB stick. After five minutes, I crack under the pressure, insert the USB stick into the port on my flat screen, and pull up the movie file. My stomach feels as though a dying fish is flopping around inside as I wait for the video to cue up.

Alex's face greets me as an interview with a popular entertainment news show pops onto the screen. He's dressed in a button-down and casual pants, and he's still sporting the beard. Alex looks uncomfortable and

uncertain as he answers the invasive questions. I hang off every word and nearly fall off my couch when he says:

“I’m in love with Violet.”

I pause and replay it several times, processing the words. He’s talking about me. On a show watched by millions. This is one heck of a way to get my attention. I would’ve preferred to hear those words face-to-face, but then, I haven’t given him the opportunity to say them to me with all my avoidance techniques. After I get past the initial shock, I listen to the rest of the interview.

When I’m done, I’m certain of two things. One: Alex is in love with me. Two: Nervous Alex is adorable, and his former agent is an asshole. Okay, that’s technically three things I’m certain of. Whatever. The point is there.

I nab the magazine from the top of the recycling and flip to the earmarked page. There it is in print:

“I’m in love with Violet.”

My heart is all sorts of gushy over his public declaration. I almost want to forgive him. Almost. Just because he’s said he loves me doesn’t mean it’s true. While the article definitely makes a statement, it could easily be another publicity stunt meant to help redeem him in the eyes of his fans. I don’t want him to have advance warning that I’m going to be at the game. It’s only fair since I had no warning when he threw our relationship under the bus and ran it over.

I call Charlene and freak out. She already seems to know what’s going on, so there’s no explanation necessary.

“Should I call him before the game tomorrow? I don’t think I should call him. He doesn’t deserve a call.”

“Do you want to call him?”

“Yes. No. I don’t know.”

“This is probably an in-person conversation,” Charlene says.

“Right. Okay. Can you come over? I think my head’s going to explode.”

Charlene spends the rest of the day with me. I make a list of pros and cons, which ends up being a list of all the things I miss about Alex. Surprisingly, his MC doesn't even make the top five. Afterward, I make Charlene watch the interview with me four thousand times. I should probably do yoga, or meditate, or take art therapy, so I can stop being an idiot.

Lying in bed later, my mind continues to spin for several hours before I finally pass out. I have the weirdest dreams ever. Alex's monster cock is a superhero. He saves me from a giant boob ball that's rolling through the streets and crushing people. Super Penis has googly eyes, and he talks out of the come hole. His balls are his feet, and he wears a red cape with MC emblazoned on it. Oh, and he has a little mustache and a French accent. Like I said, it's a bizarre dream.



The next day, I do something I usually try to avoid: I go to the spa with Charlene and my mom. We all get mani-pedis while drinking mimosas. Then we get our hair done and buy new outfits.

My stomach is in knots when we arrive at the arena. I'm so anxious, and Charlene's reassurance is the only thing capable of keeping me from bolting. We have the same awesome seats as we did the first time I saw Alex play. Other than looking at him through my peephole, it's been a month since I've seen him in person.

"Oh. Here." My mom reaches into a huge bag at her feet and pulls out three black, puck-shaped pillows. She hands one to Charlene and one to me.

"What is this?"

"It's called a butt puck."

"I'm sorry, what?" That's way too close to other things I don't want near my butt.

"It'll keep you from freezing your ass off on these chairs and"—she turns the puck over—"it's a cheerleading pillow!"

On the front of the pillow puck are the words "GO Butterson!" Charlene's says "GO Westinghouse!" And mine says "GO Waters!" Upon

closer inspection, I find a hand-shaped pocket on the back of the puck pillow, so I'm able to wave my butt puck in the air with little effort.

I sit on the pillow, still snickering at the pervy name. Talk ceases as the Hawks take the ice. Charlene grips my arm, and my mother whistles with her fingers. Raging anxiety renders me silent and immobile, both of which are highly uncommon.

When Alex skates out onto the ice, I inhale a sharp breath as my chest constricts. For a second, I think I'm having a heart attack, but I realize it's just that I'm in love with this man. I haven't seen him in weeks, and I'm still conflicted about the article and the interview. He's so close, the plexiglass barrier the only thing dividing us.

Even faux-unkempt, he's hot. His beard is neatly groomed, unlike some of the other guys who look like they crawled out of the alleyway and decided to play professional hockey.

"Oh God. Darren is sex on skates. I can't wait until after the game. It doesn't even matter if they win or lose!" Charlene yells over the cheering crowd.

"How can you say that? Of course it matters."

"Think about it, if they win, I have hot victory sex. If they lose I get to have sexy make-Darren-feel-better sex."

I nod slowly, absorbing the information. She's totally right. It doesn't matter if they win or lose, she wins by sex default. I'm envious of her certainty regarding either victory or solace sex. I wish I knew what tonight will bring and whether or not I'll ever be reunited with the monster cock. My beaver doesn't seem to realize a reunion isn't imminent, considering the way she's lubing up in preparation for what might never happen again. I hope I can get my shit together enough to have a real conversation with Alex. One thing at a time; the game is first.

Alex's brow is set in a deep furrow, and his pouty lips are mashed in a straight line. He doesn't even look around; he simply waves at the cheering crowd as he skates to the bench. I want him to notice me sitting here, but I don't want to draw unnecessary attention to myself. So I stare.

As the end of the first period closes in, Chicago ties with Philly one-one. I have to pee, but I don't want to leave my seat, worried someone will recognize me. Alex is killing it out there, but he can't seem to get the puck past the goalie. I can practically taste his frustration. The puck is a black blur across the ice as Philly gains control. I crane my neck to see what's

happening when a body slams against the plexiglass and scares the living bejesus out of me.

It's déjà vu. Those pretty, pretty eyes bore into mine the way they did the first time I saw him play. They hold shock, surprise, and a whole lot of sexy as his mouth drops open. I wave shyly. He's so close; if it weren't for the damn plexiglass, I would be able to touch his sweaty, fuzzy face.

Our eyes lock for the briefest moment before he pries himself off the glass and bolts down the ice after the puck. For the rest of the period, I feel Alex's gaze on me and meet it often when he's on the bench. He looks hopeful, worried, desperate, and determined at the same time. Interestingly enough, it's a reflection of my own emotions. I can't sit still, nervously wringing my hands every time we make eye contact.

It's an intense game with a close score. I'm already in celebration mode in the third period. That is until Philly scores a goal with two minutes left, tying the game. The crowd goes insane. Fans scream at the Hawks' goalie and freak out on the defense. Unable to recover, they go into overtime. I'm on the edge of my seat, my butt puck no longer underneath me but pressed up against the glass as I scream Alex's name.

He steals the puck from the Philly center and flies down the ice. I can see ten years of figure skating come into play as he maneuvers around his opponents with incredible grace. He dances with the puck, getting in close to the net only to pass to Darren and skate around behind it.

Philly's goalie is focused on Darren, so he doesn't notice Alex come around the other side. Instead of taking the shot, Darren passes back. By the time Philly realizes what's happening, it's too late. Alex taps the puck; it sails past the goalie's stick and ricochets into the net.

And just like that, Alex scores the goal to win the Cup.

The crowd goes absolutely wild, and so do I. It's a high like I've never experienced before. The Hawks swarm the ice, slamming into each other in aggressive, enthusiastic hugs. Wives and kids meet their sweaty, excited husbands and fathers in the middle of the rink, where the media film the action and broadcast it on the huge screens.

The Cup, in all its majestic glory, is passed among the team. Alex raises it above his head and skates around the center of the rink, his triumphant grin directed at me. A camera is suddenly trained on me, and my face is plastered on the huge screen for the entire arena to see. I raise the butt puck, shielding my face, and return his excited smile.

Eventually we make our way out of the arena, and Sidney drags the three of us toward the locker room. I want to be here, but my stomach is in knots. My mom and Charlene flank me in an attempt to protect me from the media slores. They're so busy questioning the team they don't notice me. Not yet, anyway.

A million microphones are pointed at the team, with Alex front and center. They're all beaming, gripping the massive trophy. One reporter shoves the mic in Alex's face.

"How does it feel to score the winning goal?"

"It feels good to be able to come through for my team on such an important night. We worked together to make it happen." Alex throws an arm around Darren, who stands beside him. "I'm proud of my teammates for bringing the Cup home."

This is the version of Alex I thought I knew; the one who shares the victory. His eloquence and humility are sexy. I want this to be the real him, the man I've fallen for.

He scans the crowd and when he finds me, his smile widens, those dimples deepening. He passes the trophy off to Darren and grabs the microphone from the closest sportscaster. To her credit, she tries to hold on. It's comical the way her arm extends as Alex yanks it out of her grasp.

"I need to say one thing." He reassures her, then seeks me out once again. "Violet Hall. I'm an idiot for not saying this sooner. I'm in love with you."

A split second of silence follows his declaration. The subsequent roar of the crowd is deafening. Reporters' questions blend together in the cheers and screams. Cameras flash incessantly, blinding me and making it impossible for me to see past the spots in my vision. Microphones are shoved in my face. I can't hear their questions. Besides, I'm too stunned to speak.

Alex Waters stole his own thunder in front of the entire sports-watching nation.



**PUBLIC LOVE PROFESSIONS,
COMMUNICATION, AND
MAKEUP SESSIONS ARE
WICKED FUN**

VIOLET

It's the cheesiest declaration of love ever. It belongs in one of those romantic comedies my mom forces me to watch on girls' night. The ones I secretly love but pretend to hate.

I'm frozen, which is unfortunate since my mouth is hanging open in utter shock. I know I should do something, but I can't seem to connect my brain to my body. Charlene is bouncing beside me, screaming her head off at the reporter who keeps trying to ask me questions I'm unable to answer. My mom grabs the microphone and graciously responds for me. She ignores their commentary on my relationship with Alex and tells them how excited I am that the Hawks won the cup. It works for me.

Alex passes his mic back to the wide-eyed woman and pushes his way through the crowd.

"I love you," Alex says. I can't hear the words because it is too damn loud. For all I know he's actually saying "vacuum" which looks like "I love you."

The romance and sweetness of the sentiment is devoured by the incessant clicking of cameras and the overwhelmingly raucous cheers of the crowd. This is definitely not the way I imagined the first real ILY going down, but I'll take it. Somewhere down the line it'll make a good story—if there's a somewhere down the line for us.

Alex takes my face between his hands and presses his lips against mine. His beard tickles my mouth and nose.

Disregarding his smelliness and the dampness of his palms, I thread my fingers through his sweaty hair. He wraps an arm around my waist and bends me backward as he goes in for a real kiss. The mouth fucking commences. Good Lord, he's just going for it. His lips are warm, his tongue soft as he eagerly seeks out my own. I've missed this. The way it feels to be touched by him, kissed. I strain to get closer, impeded by padding. As hot as

this is, considering how long it's been, I'm thinking it would be a good plan to stop while we're ahead.

"Um, Alex?" It's difficult to get a word out when he goes in for yet another kiss.

His arm tightens around me. "I missed you."

"Um, yeah, I get that, but do you think we could continue this somewhere more private?" I don't want to look like a complete ho-bag if I can avoid it.

"Huh?" Alex pops back into reality as he surveys our surroundings. Numerous phones and cameras are aimed at us right now, along with several mics. "Oh. I'm sorry. Of course."

There's a ridiculous amount of excitement as he waves to the screaming crowd, and he blushes when he sees Charlene and my mom behind me, flanked by an irritated Sidney. Buck is behind the line of reporters, wearing an expression similar to Sid's. Alex keeps a protective arm wrapped around my waist, pulling me along as he clomps his way to the locker room. Inside, a few mostly naked guys mill around. Now that I know them by name, and most of them have seen me in a similar state of undress, it doesn't feel right for me to be in here.

I cover my eyes with my hands. "Maybe I should meet you at the bar."

I motion with my elbows in what I'm sure approximates an uncoordinated version of "*The Chicken Dance*." With my hands still in front of my face, I sidestep in the direction of the door only to slam into the wall.

Alex takes me by the shoulders and turns me around. "You can open your eyes now, Violet."

I spread my fingers and peek through them.

He takes my hands in his. "Promise me you'll be at the bar?"

He looks so worried. My silence has been as hard on him as it's been on me, but I feel somewhat justified. He did tell the entire sports watching nation we were just friends, after all.

I nod, excitement and anxiety duking it out in my stomach. "I promise."

He ducks down, his lips close to mine. "I probably should've asked before I kissed you the first time, eh? Can I steal one more? Please?"

At my nod, he touches his lips to mine. He doesn't try to slip me the tongue this time.

My parents and Charlene are waiting outside the locker room. They surround me like security detail, shielding me from the flash of camera phones, video cameras, and outstretched mics. Alex has certainly created a buzz tonight.

“I knew he’d finally get it right!” my mom yells.

Charlene nods. “Here I thought Alex was pulling out the big guns with the interview! Everyone’s going to be talking about this!”

As we make our way to the after-party event, my nerves kick into high gear. As awesome and embarrassing as it is to be on the receiving end of a public profession of love, Alex and I still need to talk.



Tonight’s party is a private affair, but the venue is still packed. The crowd is in a celebratory mood courtesy of the win. I accept a tall glass of champagne and sugary shooters, more as a means to manage the nerves than anything else. By the time the Hawks arrive, I’m tipsy.

Alex finds me immediately. “I can’t tell you how glad I am you’re here. It makes the win so much better,” he says. His lips brush my cheek, but he doesn’t make another move to kiss me. “I have so much I want to say.”

While a conversation is coming, it will have to wait until later, when he’s not the center of attention and in celebration mode. His teammates and his family swarm him, but he keeps a tight hold on my hand. It’s difficult because so many people want to bask in his glow tonight. I can sense how divided he is by the way he constantly reaches for me, making sure I haven’t disappeared.

An hour into the party Alex switches to water and stops accepting drinks. I follow suit, aware we should be sober for our inevitable talk.

We find Charlene at a table with Darren. Buck and Sunny are cozied up together as well, along with both sets of parents. I look to Alex to gauge his reaction to the way Buck’s arm is casually slung across the back of Sunny’s chair. Surprisingly, he doesn’t seem worried. Although, I suppose

in the past month, Buck has made it abundantly clear to the media hounds that he's off the market.

Robbie stands as soon as he sees me, his smile broad as he opens his arms and welcomes me with a hug. "It's very good to see you again, Violet."

"You, too."

He smiles down at me. "I'm sorry my son was a dipshit."

Alex's dad is the best. I don't think he sugar-coats anything. "Me, too, but I think we're going to try to work it out."

"I'm happy to hear that."

Daisy stands when Robbie releases me. She runs her hands down my arms, her smile soft. She leans in and air kisses my cheek. "He's been miserable without you."

It's Daisy's version of an apology, and I accept it. "I've been miserable without him, too."

We join the table; it's cramped and Alex has to put his arm around me so both of us can fit on the bench. The closeness is welcome, as are his whispered words of apology every time he leans in to kiss my cheek.

When the party starts to wind down, Alex makes a call for a car to pick us up. We say our good-byes and leave the bar. Once we're in the car, Alex gives the driver his address but holds up a hand and turns to me. "I know it's late and we have a lot to talk about, but I would really love for you to come home with me. I'll understand if you'd rather I take you back to your apartment."

The idea of going home holds no appeal, now that I'm here with him. I'd rather figure out how we move forward from this. "I'll come back to your place."

The tinted glass divider whirs up, separating us from the eyes and ears of the driver.

Alex takes my face in his hands. "It's been so shitty without you."

I put my hands on his chest when he goes in for a kiss. I'm aching for his touch, and my beave definitely wants to hug the monster cock. Unfortunately, if I allow the kissing to continue, I won't be capable of coherent thought, let alone words. Plus, we're not actually alone.

"I think we should talk." I'm all breathy and clinging to his shoulders. It's hardly convincing.

“You’re right.” His lips are still on mine. “We definitely need to talk.” He softens his kisses as though he’s preparing to stop. I fail to push away. Instead, I suck on his bottom lip, so he maintains a slow mouth fuck. I underestimated how much of an impact he has on me—physically and emotionally. After a couple minutes where I don’t make an effort to pull away, Alex shifts until I’m lying on the back seat.

“Wait!” I cry.

He releases me immediately, and I sit up and move back a few inches so we’re no longer touching anywhere. This helps with the whole perspective and control issue. While the interview explained a lot, it’s not a replacement for a real discussion.

“I can’t do this yet.” I adjust my shirt and try to get my breathing under control.

He runs a rough hand through his hair and scratches his beard. God, it’s sexy. “I know. You’re right. It’s just been so long since I’ve touched you. I’m sorry.”

My stomach drops into my toes. We’re doing this right now. I’ve never done the “we need to talk” without it ending in a breakup.

“What are you sorry for?” Beyond an apology, I want the explanation I never got. Or never let him give me.

“For saying you were just a friend when I should’ve said I’m in love with you. For listening to my stupid-ass agent, who I fired, by the way. For blindsiding you and not telling you how I felt about you sooner.”

It’s a decent list. I want so badly to forgive him and move on, but he ripped my heart out and high-sticked it into the dumpster. “Do you understand how much you hurt me?”

He turns, facing me, and takes my hands. “I know, and I’m sorry. As soon as I said it, I wanted to take it back, but I couldn’t. I didn’t know how to fix it once it was done. You wouldn’t talk to me.”

“Can you blame me?”

“No. What I did was awful.” His knee bounces nervously. “I know an apology is just words if it isn’t followed by action. I just want a chance to show you that I love you. There’s a huge void in my life, and you’re the only person who can fill it.”

“How do I know you mean any of this? How do I know this isn’t part of some publicity stunt to help boost your reputation?” It’s a reasonable, if not slightly neurotic, question.

“Come on, Violet. You know me better than that.”

“Do I? I’m not sure if that’s true. One minute you were asking me to move in with you, and the next you tell the media we’re just friends. How does that even work, Alex?”

There’s no denying how I felt about him before he did what he did, and those feelings are definitely still there. However there are so many sticky webs to weave through, and I don’t want to end up tangled in them.

“I should’ve been upfront with you about Dick and the endorsements. None of it felt right, but I was under so much pressure. It’s a terrible excuse. I know that. I’m not justifying why I said what I said. I’m just trying to explain so you’ll understand and maybe find a way to forgive me.” He sighs. “You’re here right now, so I hope you want to work this out, too. Unless you’re just here for . . .”

“Here for what?”

“This.” He motions below his waist.

It’s the first time I’ve ever seen Alex look truly insecure. As a famous hockey player, women must want to use him for sex all the time. Meaningless sex could make a person feel lonely and resentful after a while.

I give him a small, sad smile, gesturing to the front of his pants. “That may have been how we ended up together in the first place. But it’s not why I came home with you.”

He looks relieved. “Do you think you can forgive me?”

Avoidance was so much easier in some ways. “I think so.”

“Then talk to me, please. Tell me what you need.”

What he did was hurtful, but at the same time, I’ve made this harder on myself by postponing a conversation. Instead of confronting him, I shut him out. If I want to be with Alex, I have to let him in, at least a little.

“There’s a big difference between being evasive with the media and flat out denying anything was going on between us. I need to know you’re never going to do something like this to me again.” I can’t stop the tears from leaking out of the corners of my eyes. Sometimes being an emotional girl sucks.

“I made some bad decisions, Violet. I compromised your integrity with the locker room sex, and I created a lot of issues for my team because I kept my relationship with you from Butterson. I did a piss-poor job of managing the situation.” Alex cups my face in his palms and brushes away my tears.

I'm shocked to find his hands are shaking. "I'll do whatever I have to do to make it up to you. Please don't cut me out of your life again."

He's so earnest in his plea. I have two options here. I can take a leap of faith and put my heart back on the line for this man, or I can walk. As terrifying as it is, I'd rather take a chance on him than wonder if we could've made it work if I'd been a little braver.

I take a deep, steadying breath. "Just don't do something like that ever again and I won't have to."

"I won't. I promise." The car comes to a stop as he moves to kiss me, and the intercom in the ceiling crackles.

"We've arrived, Mr. Waters."

Alex closes his eyes and exhales on an annoyed sigh. Releasing his hold on me, he reaches over and opens the door and Jeeves offers me his hand. I accept it, feeling a little unsteady after such an intense conversation. Alex thanks him, and guides me up the steps to his house.

Once we're inside, things become awkward again. He shoves his hands in his pockets and offers me a drink.

"I'm not thirsty right now."

"Neither am I."

He scratches his beard. "Do you want to talk some more?"

I shake my head. "I don't think so."

"We could play Scrabble."

Right. Because that's what I want to do right now.

"Maybe another time." I step closer, and my chest almost grazes his stomach through the inconvenient layers of his suit. His eyes drop to my cleavage. I wore a V-neck tonight for a reason. "Are you going to kiss me?"

He swallows. "Do you want me to?"

"I think it would be a good idea."

"Me, too."

He's tentative until I press into him, bringing us together. Then he cups the back of my head with his palm and lays one on me. It's all tongue and teeth and aggression.

We stand in his foyer for a good ten minutes, mouth fucking with abandon. It's the same, but it's different. So much has changed between us since the last time we were together.

But he's still Alex, and I'm still Violet. He's already got his hand inside my shirt. At the same time, he's trying to shed his suit jacket and

carry me to the stairs. In a rare moment of ungracefulness, he trips on the first step and we land in a heap. The intensity of the moment broken, I laugh against his lips.

He pushes up on his arms, his eyes are wild, chest heaving. “Do you want me to stop? Should I stop? Am I moving too fast?”

I shake my head and pull him back down by his tie. “Don’t stop kissing me.”

“Fucking hell, I’ve missed you so much.”

With an arm around my waist, Alex drags me up the stairs while keeping his mouth fused to mine. The coordination to do this is astounding. I keep bumping my elbows on the stairs along the way. The only reason my head is safe is because Alex is cupping the back of it. He pauses at the top of the landing, apparently unable to wait until we’re in the privacy and comfort of his bedroom.

His tie is tossed aside, followed by my shirt. Alex moves on to his shirt, flicking the buttons open. In the meantime, I struggle uselessly with the clasp of my bra, incapable of getting it open despite having done this every damn day for the past ten plus years.

My chest is in Alex’s face, so he slides two fingers into the front of my bra between my boobs. Then he yanks, hard. One strap ricochets off the railing.

“What the hell?” I ask because, well, what the hell? This is a brand new bra.

“I’ll buy you another one. I wanted it off.” His mouth descends over one glass-cuttingly hard nipple, and his palm covers the free one.

He groans, and squeezes, and gropes, and sucks, and groans some more. I throw my head back and bang it on the railing when he uses his teeth.

Alex looks up. “You okay?”

I moan in response.

“God, you’re sexy,” he says around my nipple, hard-pressed to give up making out with it, I suppose.

“You know what’s sexy?” My voice comes out raspy and low. I’m working on sounding sexified, not like I have emphysema.

“Mmm?”

“You, half-naked.”

“You think?” He stands and pulls me up with him.

“You know what’s even sexier?” I ask as he picks me up and carries me down the hall.

“You naked?”

“No. You naked.”

As soon as he sets me down on the bed, I frantically unbuckle his belt and yank his pants off.

The monster cock springs free, nearly taking out my eye. I sigh as I touch the hot skin. “I missed you so much.”

“Are you talking to me or my dick?” He looks mildly offended but mostly entertained.

“Both.” I lift my gaze. “But mostly you above the waist.”

Cocky smile aside, his relief is obvious. He traces the curve of my bottom lip. “I should hope so.”

I slide my hand up his chest, hook my palm around the back of his neck, and crane to reach his lips. “I missed every part of you.”

Alex’s body is suddenly pressed flush against me, his lips on my neck. I turn my head to give him better access and am distracted by one of his jerseys hanging on the footboard. I shouldn’t notice things like this while Alex and I are busy getting our freak on, but it’s red.

“You won the Stanley Cup tonight,” I murmur.

“Mmm, we did,” Alex says. He doesn’t take credit for the win. He’s such a team player.

“You scored the winning goal.” I run my hands over his shoulders and down his back, as I circle my hips. My damn pants need to come off.

“Does that make you hot?” His eyes light up in the most devilish way.

“Everything about you makes me hot. Watching you play makes me so wet I brought extra panties so I could change between innings,” I whisper-lie.

“They’re called periods in hockey. Innings are for baseball.” Alex sits back on his knees and pops the button on my pants.

I know that. I said it to see if he’s paying attention. Alex dips his fingers inside my panties, and I can no longer think straight. This means I start asking dumb questions. “Why do guys use sports metaphors for sex?”

He pauses, likely to see if I’m serious. “Because we can relate to them, I guess.”

Alex drops my pants off the edge of the bed and runs his rough hands up the outside of my thighs. He starts at my knee and kisses a path north.

“I’m about to round third base.” He grins, closing in on the land of Beave.

I’m all out of snarky commentary. I grace him with a wanton sound as he dives between my legs.

His tongue glides along my slit. We both moan like crazy. Well, I moan, and Alex makes this tremendously sexy sound halfway between a growl and groan. He mumbles things I can’t understand, but the sensation it creates is unparalleled, so I’m not about to stop him to find out what I’m missing.

He sits back on his knees, lifting my hips so only my shoulders and my head rest on the bed. It gives me an incredible view of what he’s doing to me. He grazes my clit with his teeth at the same time as he rolls my nipples between his fingers.

It’s at this moment I explode into orgasm. My entire body feels like it’s being sucked into a vortex of sensation. I have no idea what sounds I’m making, if any at all, because my whole world seems to have gone black.

Alex sets me gently on the mattress, his head no longer between my thighs. “Did I do good?” He hovers above me, his face an inch from mine, and I can feel the monster cock twitching on my stomach.

“Ahmehgaw.”

“Is that a yes?” He looks awfully pleased. I can’t blame him. If I’d made him momentarily black out, I’d be smirky, too.

I nod in lieu of a verbal response. The monster cock nestles in, getting reacquainted with my special parts. Alex runs the head of his cock back and forth over my clit a couple of times, probably so he can hear my porn-like soundtrack. Then he slides home.

“Holy shit,” Alex groans.

“I know.” I nod into his shoulder and bite down because, hot damn, it’s been a while and nothing has changed about the dimensions of his cock.

He lifts his head as he begins to move. I’m locked in his stare, unable to break it as he shifts his weight so his pelvis grazes my clit with each slow thrust. I thread my hands into his hair and exhale unsteadily. The warmth spreading through my body is reflected in his eyes. His love, his desire, our mutual need envelop me, sensation and emotion merging. When I come, it’s going to be unbelievable.

“Violet.” He slides his hands under my shoulders, holding me tightly.

I moan the words I’ve been too afraid of until this moment. “I love you.”

I hope I'm semi-coherent, or I'll feel like an idiot if he asks for clarification. My eyes beg to close, but I won't let them. I stay focused on him as the sweetest smile appears, followed by the unexpected reply.

“Oh fuck. I'm com—”

His lips part and his eyes glaze. He pushes into me, deep and hard, hitting the special place inside that makes me see stars and fireworks and leprechauns. Never mind the leprechauns, they're creepy.

We must lie there, completely immobile, for five minutes, which feels more like forty-five.

“That was awesome.” I look up at him blearily. I'm orgasm-stupid right now.

“Uh-huh.”

“Violet.”

“Mmm.”

Alex pulls the covers up, cocooning us in warmth and each other. “I love you, too.”



**EVEN AWESOME
RELATIONSHIPS
TAKE WORK**

VIOLET

Our relationship isn't magically perfect after Alex apologizes and we exchange I love you's. We're figuring things out and having fun while we're doing it—and each other.

In the off-season, Alex trains almost daily, and much of his free time is taken up by promotional shoots. Apparently stealing one's own thunder with a public declaration of love has an amazing impact on marketability. Companies are clamoring to use him for various campaigns. My personal favorite is his endorsement for Trojan condoms. Magnum, of course. I have a seven-foot cardboard cut-out of him in the corner of my bedroom. He wears only boxers. It's the best jill-off inspiration I have. Alex turns it around to face the wall whenever he sleeps at my apartment.

I haven't moved in with him yet. It's only been a couple of months since we got back together, and I'm trying not to rush things. Alex is like a fairy tale prince. Not so much that he comes riding in like a white knight to save me, more like he dives into huge life decisions with absolutely no caution. He asks me to move in with him on a weekly basis. I've decided if things are going well by fall, I'll say yes.

It would be easy to slip into a routine where all I do is go to his house and eat his awesome food and sleep in his huge comfortable bed. I do this no more than twice a week—okay, three times. We balance it out with the occasional sleepover at my apartment. Alex isn't a fan. It's not so much the apartment, it's the lack of luxury. I feel it's important to know what it's like not to have millions of dollars and four thousand square feet of living space.

Tonight, Alex is slumming it at my place. We reserve his sleepovers here for Wednesday nights. This is purposeful on my part. Melvin, my smelly, death-metal-loving neighbor, goes out for his role play club every Wednesday. He always leaves dressed as a wizard.

Now it's not that I'm trying to hide Melvin's crush on me. Alex knows about it. Although he's unaware Melvin still stops by on a regular basis to see if I want to play Guitar Hero.

What I am trying to hide is Melvin's habit of listening to obscenely loud music every night between the hours of seven and eleven. I don't want to give Alex more ammunition to convince me to move in with him. I'm not ready. I don't think. Not yet.

Alex is sitting on my couch, nursing a light beer—he can't drink the regular stuff because of pre-season training. He rarely takes a break from all the healthy eating. We're watching Netflix since I won't pay for cable, and I won't let Alex pay for it either. Melvin should be out tonight with his friends. Instead, he's serenading us with his music. I can sing along if I want to. Or scream, as the case may be.

“What the hell is wrong with that guy?” He glares at the wall separating us from the barely muffled sound.

“Maybe he has a hearing impairment.”

Melvin's hearing is fine. I believe he plays it at this volume to cover up how often he whacks it. The only reason he can get away with it is because the neighbor on the other side is an old man who's practically deaf. He also happens to be Ms. Bullock's booty call—the old man, not Melvin. I discovered this when I caught him leaving Ms. Bullock's apartment in her too-short zebra print bathrobe, his saggy old-man balls hanging out the bottom.

“How long does this go on for?” Alex moves around as though he's uncomfortable, which is absurd. I fall asleep on this couch all the time; it's like sitting on a cloud.

I shrug. I don't want to tell him it's nearly constant.

“Violet?” He cocks his sexy eyebrow, his tone demanding a reply.

“It's not that bad.”

“I don't believe you. I'm going to have a word with this douche.”

Alex stands, ready to tell Melvin off. I can't let this happen. If Alex sees Melvin and Melvin says my name the way he usually does—like he wants to hump it—Alex is going to kick his stinky ass. I don't want to get kicked out of my apartment, nor do I want Alex to be charged with assault.

“No, don't. I'm fine with it. I like this music.” I hum along for a few seconds, thrashing to the beat. I really hate this shit.

“Why don’t you want me to talk to him?” Alex is too quick, too smart, and too perceptive for his own good.

“Um, uh . . .”

He crosses his arms over his chest. It makes his muscles bulge in a distracting way.

“Is he still trying to get you to go out with him?”

“No.” It comes out all high-pitched. I need to learn how to lie better.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake.” Alex grabs me by the waist and carries me to the wall I share with Melvin, where he pins me to it with his body.

“What—”

“We’re gonna make a little noise of our own.” Alex grins, but his eyes are dark and possessive. Ooooh, angry, dark, possessive Alex is sexy.

“Oh. Good plan.” The monster cock has risen to the occasion. My corresponding parts respond accordingly.

I’m naked in a flash. My clothes literally incinerate off my body thanks to Alex’s smoldering gaze. Not really—he’s got nimble fingers. He only bothers to lose his shirt and undo his pants. Being the considerate lover he is, he still uses his fingers for a minute in preparation for the MC.

Once I’m sufficiently primed, he lifts me up and lowers me onto him. Alex slams his hand against the wall every time he thrusts. It’s hard and fast and loud, which is what he intends. At one point, the music stops completely—right in the middle of one of my epic declarations of cock love.

The music returns immediately, louder this time. This pisses him off even more; he channels his anger into my pleasure, loudly. This makes me the recipient of two stellar orgasms.

When he finally comes, he leaves a dent in the drywall with the side of his fist.

I can’t stand on my own after he sets me down. At first, he’s worried he’s hurt me, and then he realizes he’s fucked me until I can’t walk again.

“Here, baby, let me help you out.” He carries me to the couch, his annoyingly cocky grin fixed in place. I’m too much of a limp noodle to do more than glare from a semi-prone position.

Alex is a big fan of post-sex meals. I don’t have a personal chef who prepares such things for me, so we have to go out to get something. I’m too post-orgasm dumb to argue against it, so I try to figure out how to use my legs again and get dressed, with Alex’s help.

I tiptoe quickly past Melvin's door. Alex has other ideas; he knocks hard enough to make the light above us rattle. Melvin peeks out with the chain lock still attached. His eye—the one I can see—flickers to me and away. His face goes beet red.

Alex wrinkles his nose as he takes in the rank odor emanating from Melvin's apartment. His smile is dark, and he keeps one arm wrapped protectively around me. "Hey, buddy. You mind keeping your music down a little in the future? Violet's too polite to ask. It makes it hard for her to function." Alex stresses the "funk" in function, making it sound like *fuck-shun*.

"Oh, yeah, yeah, sure." Melvin nods, his wide eyes on Alex.

"Thanks, man." Alex guides me down the hall with his hand on my ass. I'd protest, but it's actually kind of funny.

Two horrifyingly embarrassing weeks after the wall-sex fiasco—during which Melvin avoids me and Ms. Bullock gives me knowing winks—the pipes in my kitchen burst and flood my apartment. The landlord tells me it's going to take a week to fix it.

Alex totally overreacts and comes over to let my landlord know it's unacceptable. My landlord's "not my problem" attitude pisses off Alex. After a yelling match, where Alex questionably threatens to kick his ass with his hockey stick, my landlord says he'll do his best to get the pipes fixed as quickly as possible. Alex doesn't seem terribly worried about the pipes, to be honest.

I hastily throw a bunch of stuff into an overnight bag, and we head to his place.

Alex rubs the back of my neck. "You can stay with me until the pipes are fixed."

"Okay." I hadn't really considered any other options, although my parents' pool house is always open if I don't mind my mom popping in without warning.

"Maybe you should think about looking for another apartment."

"Why would I want to do that?"

"I don't know; maybe because your landlord is an asshole and your neighbor humps the adjoining wall while you sleep."

That's a creepy thought. "It's so close to my work, though. The music thing isn't bad."

He pulls into his driveway. "Violet."

“Okay. It’s bad. I can still manage, and I really don’t want to pack up all my stuff again. It’s such a pain in the ass.”

“Right. Okay.” His face falls.

I put my hand on his arm. “Alex, Melvin is harmless. He smells worse than Buck’s hockey bag. He’s not a threat.”

“I know, baby. Let’s go inside and get you settled.”

I’m surprised he doesn’t suggest I move in with him; maybe I’ve avoided giving him an answer so many times he’s afraid to ask again. I bring my overnight bag upstairs. Alex lies on his bed and watches me as I hang a few outfits in his closet. Then I move to the dresser; I have a drawer reserved. Mostly it contains a variety of underwear, some sexy, some comic-book inspired.

He takes off his shirt and unbuttons his jeans. “Hey, wanna go for a swim? I hiked the pool up to thirty degrees today.”

“That’s below freezing.” Which is technically impossible since it’s July and we’re in the middle of a heatwave.

“Centigrade, not Fahrenheit.”

“I don’t have a bathing suit with me.”

“So? What do you need a bathing suit for?” His grin is full of sex and promise.

“Good point.” I strip out of my clothes while Alex watches from his bed. Naked, I sprint down the stairs and out the patio door to the backyard. I glance over my shoulder to find him chasing me, shedding his shorts and nearly face planting in the process. I’m almost across the lawn when he loops an arm around my waist and lifts me off the ground. He doesn’t slow as he races toward the edge of the pool. I scream when we take flight, and we land in the balmy water with a massive splash.

Alex keeps his hands on my waist, propelling us upward.

I break the surface with a gasp, laughing. “I almost outran you.”

His left eyebrow lifts. “Not even close.”

“It was totally close.” I hold onto his shoulders so I don’t have to tread water.

“You might’ve had a chance if you hadn’t been naked. It’s a strong motivator for catching you.” His hands are on my waist and migrating north.

“Now we know what would increase your speed during practice.”

“You know what you should practice? Floating on your back,” he says.

“You just want to see my boobs glisten in the moonlight.” I put my foot against his chest, intending to use his solid body to push off. He grabs my ankle and pulls me toward him.

We bob to the edge of the pool where Alex pins me against the side with his body. His smile is soft, sweet, like melty maple sugar candies on my tongue. “You know me so well.”

He wraps my legs around his waist, but keeps me high up, so we’re face to face and the MC isn’t touching the Beave.

“I’m going to start training again soon.”

“Does that mean fewer sleepovers?” It’s a good thing my pipes burst; I can stock up on us time.

“I hope not. But I’ll have less free time. I’ll be at the gym and the rink a lot more.”

I’ve been by the gym while Alex was engaged in a light training session. Watching him run and sweat and pump iron is almost obscene.

“Are you worried about how I’m going to deal with that?”

“No.” He rubs his nose against mine. “I’m worried about how I’m going to deal with it.” I love that he’s hard on the outside and a total marshmallow on the inside.

I also know where he’s going with this. “Are you going to ask me to move in with you again?”

“No.” His lips are on my neck, teeth nipping at skin.

Well, that’s a surprise. “No?”

He readjusts his grip, lining things up this time. “Nope. That’s an open invitation. When you’re ready to move in, you let me know.”

It’s not the answer I expect. I try to challenge him, but he kisses me and there are no more words.



It takes more than a week to fix the pipes. After nine days at Alex’s I’m finally able to go back to my apartment. I’m not at all excited about having my own space again, and not because Alex’s house is so much nicer than my crappy apartment. I’ve gotten used to seeing him every day. I even

cooked a meal for him—granted all I had to do was set the timer on the oven. I made a salad to go with it. And I chose a bottle of wine. I’m totally domesticable.

The second I open the door to my apartment, I’m smacked in the olfactory senses. It smells like a gym sock covered in rotten eggs. It’s also rankly hot. I discover the gagworthy odor is actually my garbage. By the time I’m done disposing of it, I’m dry heaving and dripping with sweat. It’s not a sexy look for me. I take a tepid shower and debate my options.

Alex will be more than happy to have me back at his place, and I’m happy to stay there. I’m also certain if I go back, I’m not likely to return to my apartment. I’ve been holding out, thinking if I wait until the end of the summer, we’ll have been together long enough for it to be reasonable. Putting a timeline on it doesn’t change whether or not I’m ready for this step.

I pack an entire suitcase full of clothes and throw essential items—such as my home waxing kit and razors—into a box. It says a lot that I’ve never fully unpacked. Six boxes remain in the back of my closet, containing items which should live on shelves or bookcases. I haven’t taken the time to make it happen. This apartment has always been an interim, a stop on the road to another destination.

It’s after nine by the time I cart all my stuff down to my car and drive to Alex’s. I don’t bother to call. I park as close as I can to the front door and wheel my suitcase up the steps. I have the code to get in, but I figure it’s more impactful if I ring the doorbell.

Alex answers the door wearing only a pair of basketball shorts. He’s good at pretty much every sport including balls or pucks.

He looks down at my suitcase. “Hey. Did you forget the code?”

“My hands were full. Something’s wrong with the air conditioning in my apartment,” I say by way of explanation.

The excitement in his eyes dims, but he grabs my bag just the same. “Oh. So you want to stay here for a couple more days?”

“Actually, I didn’t call the landlord about it.”

“He’ll have to do something, Violet. You can’t go without air on the twentieth floor.”

“That’s the thing,” I say as I follow him into the house. “I don’t think I want to stay there for the summer.”

He turns around, his eyes the kind of wide associated with surprise and hope. "Is this you moving in with me?"

I nod, and his grin lights up my world.

"I love being here."

"Yeah?" He's still smiling as he pulls me in for a kiss.

"Of course." His love is the best gift, filling my heart, giving breath to a future I can't wait to start living. "My favorite thing in the world is here."

"Me?"

"You."

EPILOQUE
**THE MONSTER COCK
IS A SUPER HERO**

ALEX

“Violet, are you ready to go? We need to get to the airport.” I check the bedroom. She’s nowhere to be found. I could’ve sworn she said she was getting her bags together. This is unusual—where there’s Violet, there is rarely silence. “Violet?”

“Whatcha doin’?” Violet scares the crap out of me as she comes out of the guest bedroom we’ve turned into her “private space,” which she uses to store her unpacked boxes.

“Trying to find you. Are you ready?” I look her up and down.

She’s definitely not ready to go. She’s wearing underpants and a tank top with no bra. We need to leave in the next fifteen minutes so we can make our flight. She’s not wearing a bra.

She covers her chest with one of the books she’s holding. It only hides one of her boobs. She does the same thing with her other hand, shielding her straining, erect nipple from my greedy eyes. The damage is already done. I’ve seen them. The monster in my pants has awakened.

“See what you’ve done.” I motion to my crotch.

“I’m sure we can sort it out.”

Violet lowers the books, taunting me. Boobs are the best thing ever created. My dick is in agreement. He punches at my fly, trying to strong-arm his way out of my pants and get to Violet’s boobs—and possibly between her thighs since that’s his favorite place to hang out.

“We don’t have time, Violet.”

She sways her way over and rubs against me. I can feel her nipples through the thin fabric of both our shirts, which exacerbates the swelling in my pants. I can’t deal with hard-on ache for the next three hours.

“I’ll solve your problem on the way to the airport; as long as you can multitask.” She pats my dick through my pants.

Lust barrels its way into my brain. I’m positive I heard an allusion to road head.

“What can I do to help?”

“I guess you can hold my boobs for me.” She looks pointedly at her chest.

I’m already cupping them.

I give them a squeeze and try for a kiss. This leads to some over-the-clothes cock-to-pussy friction until my phone alarm goes off; we have five minutes to get in the car and go, or we’ll miss our flight. We pry ourselves off each other. Violet throws on a pair of yoga pant things, and I load the car. I surreptitiously check my carry-on bag one last time to make sure the Tiffany’s box is still in the front pocket.

Once we’re on the road, Violet fiddles with the radio, ducks under her seatbelt, and follows through with her problem-solving strategy. I recline the seat to give her more room to do her thing. She’s considerate enough to put her hair in a ponytail so I can see what she’s doing while she’s doing it.

I’ll admit it’s rather difficult to concentrate on driving while Violet’s lips are wrapped around my cock. I’m willing to perfect the art of multitasking should she decide she wants to do it again. It’s not until I’m groaning and coming that I realize I’m going almost a hundred miles an hour. We make it to the airport in record time. I’m lucky to evade a speeding ticket and an indecent exposure charge.

The flight from Chicago to Toronto is short, and I’m super relaxed, thanks to Violet and her mouth. We pick up the rental car once we land and leave the city, driving north—away from skyscrapers and into the dense forest and rocky landscapes.

“Where, exactly, are we going again?” Violet asks as I turn off the highway onto less traveled roads.

“Lake Muskoka.” Up until now, I’ve kept the details vague. “We’re only about a half hour away.”

“Is there indoor plumbing? I’m not going to have to pee in a bush or one of those outhouse things, am I? My mother sent me to Girl Scout camp as a kid. There were spiders in the bathroom!” She shudders and pulls her knees to her chest as if reliving the memory.

I laugh. “There’s indoor plumbing. You don’t need to worry about peeing on spiders.”

She grumbles something about it not being funny as she searches in her bag. Producing a lip balm, she slathers it on liberally, making them glisten. It reminds me of what they look like when she pops off my dick. Dammit. I need to settle down. I’m way too excited for this vacation.

Violet finds a music station she likes and belts out the lyrics to eighties rock ballads. She’s tone deaf, but she’s still adorable.

“This isn’t a cottage,” she says when I turn off the dirt road and down the tree-lined driveway.

“Did you expect a rundown shack?”

“Well, yeah, I guess I did. This is a house, Alex. A nice house on a lake. I figured we’d be staying in a trailer or something.”

I only get to come here a few times a year. I wanted something comfortable and functional, if not a little excessive.

Violet takes in her surroundings; the two story cottage with peaked roof and stained-wood siding is set close to the waterfront, providing a stunning view of the lake. The sun peeks through birch and pine trees, shining down on her upturned face. She closes her eyes and breathes in deep. She likes it. I like that.

I take her hand. “Come on. Let me show you the inside.”

The cottage is open concept with windows across the front, giving me an uninterrupted view of the lake. The master bedroom is no exception. Facing west, it has its own private deck, complete with hammock. We can lie out there and watch the sun set. I can’t wait to have outdoor nature sex with Violet. I don’t even care if she’s loud and the neighbors hear. Well, maybe I do. If I was into the BDSM stuff she likes to read, I might try a gag or something. I’m not. We’ll have to play the “see how quiet we can be” game instead.



Violet falls in love with cottaging. She also falls in love with Sea-Dooing, kayaking, and my speed boat. I have two sets of everything; one for the

cottage here and the other for the lake front property in Chicago. I even try to teach her how to water ski. Try being the optimal word.

Our neighbor has a nineteen year-old kid named Louis who's semipro. I consider asking him to teach her while I drive the boat. Except Violet is wearing her Hawks bikini. The one I bought specifically for this trip. While I can understand why he's checking out my woman's rack, I'm not interested in him getting close enough to really appreciate all she has to offer.

I get his dad to drive the boat while I show her how to ski and Louis gives her pointers on form. There's a lot of ass and junk grabbing under the water. It may have had an impact on Violet's inability to figure out skiing.

Later in the afternoon, we kayak to a natural whirlpool and have hot, outdoor, whirlpool sex. By late afternoon, we're exhausted from all the activity and the sun, so we crash out on the couch and watch a movie.

I must pass out hard because I open my eyes to the sound of giggling and the flash of a camera. I blink blearily as consciousness slowly returns. Violet's lips curl in an uncommonly devious smile.

“What are you up to?”

My question is rewarded with more snickering and a very cute, worrisome snort. “Your snuffie is a super hero.” Violet bursts into a fit of laughter.

I glance down at my semi hard cock. “What the fuck? Are those googly eyes?”

Violet nods excitedly. How I've managed to sleep through this will forever be one of life's unsolved mysteries. My dick is wearing a cape, the googly eyes are stuck to the head in such a way that the hole at the tip looks like a mouth, and—“Did you draw a mustache on my dick?”

“I wanted him to be French Canadian.” Violet pets my dressed-up dick and adjusts the cape.

For a few seconds, I debate whether or not this is a messed-up dream. However, the up and down motion of her hand is a good indicator it's not. It's difficult not to react to the petting, despite the really fucking weird scenario going on here. “Why *French Canadian*?”

“He's suave, you know, like French guys? And romantic.” Violet gives my dick an affectionate stroke and leans in and kisses the tip—below the drawn on mustache. “I had a dream awhile back; Super MC had a French accent.”

“Right.” Because dreaming about my dick as a superhero isn’t strange enough. He’s got to have an accent.

“Once, I dreamt he was wearing a tuxedo and we went to prom.” Violet circles the head with a fingertip. “The prom penis even had glasses.”

I’m losing focus. I’m still shocked by the emasculated state of my cock, but her hand feels nice. She leans forward as though she’s about to kiss him again. She does. Even I’m referring to my cock like he’s his own person. This is so bizarre. Suddenly it’s painful.

I sit up and groan as my shaft engorges further thanks to Violet’s caresses. The cape has a little bow tied under the head; it’s cutting off the circulation.

I’m only about three-quarters of the way hard. I’m a grower. There’s more to go. She’s going to decapitate my dick. “The cape! It’s tied too tight!”

“Oh! Oh God! I’m suffocating Super MC!” She pulls at the tie, but the bow unfurls into a knot. “Shit!” Her high pitch fuels my panic.

I push her hands away. “Let me try.” Maybe if she’s not touching me, my dick will stop growing. Violet stands. She’s wearing a pair of superhero briefs and a sheer tank. She’s not wearing a damn bra again. *Shit*. I scream like a little girl as the pain intensifies.

“I’ll get scissors!” Violet runs from the room, taking her perky nipples with her.

“What?” I yell after her.

Images of a severed penis flash through my mind, deflating my cock marginally. The problem is the blood already trapped above the neck of the cape is slow to drain, and I’m still mostly hard.

Violet returns with an enormous pair of scissors. The idea of any sharp object close to my dick is not appealing. “What the fuck, Violet? Don’t you dare come near me with those! Don’t you have a pair of nail clippers or something not so *fucking huge*!”

“Your snuffie is suffering! I promise I’ll be careful.” Violet motions to the head of my cock as if I’m unaware of the problem.

“So help me God, if you cut me—” I let the sentence hang. If I can’t have orgasms for the rest of the trip, neither can she.

“I won’t, I swear. Let me help.” Her voice shakes and her bottom lip trembles.

I hold out my hand. “Give them to me.” I don’t need a crying woman with scissors near my dick.

Violet passes them over. Sinking to the floor in front of me, she wrings her hands in distress. I take a deep breath and think of Grandma Waters without her teeth. It seems to help with the deflation enough so I can slip the scissors between my shaft and the string. With one snip I’m free, and the circulation to the head returns. I flop back on the couch, heaving a huge sigh of relief as the blood flow equalizes and the ache fades.

“Alex?” Violet asks in a small, watery voice.

I don’t open my eyes because I don’t want to see her crying. Then I can’t be mad at her any more. Considering I’ve had a pair of scissors against my dick, I definitely want to be angry for a few minutes.

I grunt.

“I guess that wasn’t a very good idea.”

“Ya think?” I snort derisively and crack an eyelid. Then I feel bad; she’s crying.

“I’m sorry. I thought I tied it loose enough.” She plucks the small cape from my lap. “I even measured it against the circumference of my hand span.” Violet demonstrates by forming a circle with her forefinger and thumb. “I thought Velcro would chafe.”

My dick is still hanging out of my shorts, shrinking slowly. I notice lettering on the back of the cape. I grab it out of her hand and inspect it. The M and C are designed in such a way to mimic the S on a Superman cape. It’s also blue and red.

“Where did you get this?”

“I made it.”

“You made a cape for my dick?” I expect weirdness from Violet because frankly, sometimes she’s a little weird. Or a lot.

“I thought it would be funny.”

I continue to stare at her.

“I guess I was wrong.” She looks down at her hands, biting her lip.

“I guess so.”

“I could make it up to both of you.” She looks at me with wide, not-innocent eyes and tentatively puts her hand on my thigh about six inches away from my mostly-soft-but-starting-to-get-hard-again dick.

While I don’t want Violet to think she has to perform sexual favors in order to redeem herself for almost causing permanent damage to my dick,

my superhero cock feels differently. Violet smiles softly and she walks her fingers up my leg.

“Mouth or boobs?” She gently peels the googly eye stickers off the head. Thank God she didn’t use glue.

“Both.” I’m feeling selfish.

“Okay.” Violet kisses the tip, looking me in the eye before she engulfs the head. She pops off for a second. “But I want you to finish inside me, if that’s all right with you.”

“I guess I can do that.” That’s me being generous.



In homage to the near fatal choking of my dick, Violet makes her own Play-Doh so she can fashion a replica. We make a trip to Bracebridge so she can buy craft supplies and fix the cape. This time she uses Velcro to secure the tie. She dresses up the penis replica as Super MC. It’s the centerpiece on the kitchen table, so we can look at it whenever we’re eating. It’s bizarre and something Violet would totally do.

And I still love her. In fact, for some crazy reason, I love her even more than I did before this whacked out vacation. I’ve got the ring tucked safely away in the nightstand drawer. Now, I need to put it on her finger. Over the past couple of days, I’ve come up with what I think is a good plan for a proposal. Violet isn’t flashy; she’ll appreciate something less ostentatious than, say, a public profession of unending love. Besides, I’ve already done that. Tomorrow is our last day here, and then it’s back to reality. I need to bite the bullet tonight.

No problem. Dinner is covered; there’s a salad in the fridge, and all I have to do is put the steak and potatoes on the barbecue. Afterward, we can have dessert on the dock. I’ll ask her to be my wife while we watch the sun go down. The mosquitos better keep the fuck away.

After a day of dock hopping, Violet is tired. She stretches and yawns. This is perfect. I’ll be able to set everything up while she’s having a nap.

“Maybe you should lie down for a while before dinner,” I suggest.

“Mmm. That sounds nice.” Violet takes a few steps toward the bedroom. When I don’t follow, she stops. “Aren’t you coming?” She pulls her shirt over her head and drops it on the floor.

“Maybe for a few minutes.” A little pre-nap sex wouldn’t hurt. I can get dinner started after she falls asleep.

As soon as I’m on the bed she straddles me and pulls the tie on her bikini top, setting her boobs free.

She usually lets me take the lead. Occasionally she doesn’t. This is one of those times. Violet pushes on my chest to keep me down and then brings her fingers to her lips. “I think I want you here first.” She goes lower, running her index finger between her luscious breasts. She lowers her voice to a sultry whisper. “Or maybe you’d prefer here.” Skimming past her tanned stomach, she cups her pussy. “And we can finish here.”

“I’m game for whatever you have planned, baby.” I grip her hips and restrain myself from flipping her onto her back to get things started.

Violet leans over to the nightstand where we keep the lube for such occasions. Which are admittedly frequent. The curtains are drawn, making it difficult to see. She rummages around in the drawer for a few seconds.

“Dammit. This isn’t lube.” She sits up, turning the package in her hands. “What is this?”

It’s at that very moment I realize what it is: the engagement ring. This isn’t part of the plan. I don’t intend to ask her to be my wife prior to a tit fuck.

“It’s nothing, give it to me,” I order, reaching for it as she holds it above her head.

“Did you buy me a sex toy? Is it a set of those weird ball things you shove up your beaver?”

“Weird ba—give me the box, Violet.”

Ignoring me, she flips the lid open. Inside is a second, smaller box covered in black velvet. The pale blue box drops to the bed. Violet is still topless. Still straddling me. I’m still sporting a hard-on.

“Alex?” She blinks in confusion.

“Give me the box, baby.” I need to fix this, stat. I don’t want this to be the way I propose to her, half-naked in bed. I want a story we can tell people. Not one we have to censor.

“What’s in here?” Her voice is barely above a whisper.

“I’ll show you later.” My fingers close around her wrist.

“Why can’t you show me now?” She strokes the velvet. She knows. I can tell by the way her eyes widen. “Alex?”

“Let’s have dinner first.” It’s a plea.

“Is this—are you?” Her gaze lifts, her smile soft as she clutches the box tightly in her hand. “It’s not a pair of earrings, is it?”

“Nope.”

All my careful last-minute planning will go to shit if she opens the box. Or I could go with the flow. I sit up in a rush, and Violet finally let’s go of the box. Lifting her from my lap, I scan the bed for a shirt. One of mine is hanging on the footboard.

“Give me your arms,” I say, holding it out so she can put it on.

“But I thought—”

“We need to talk first.”

She blinks nervously but complies. I slip her hands through the sleeves and pull it over her head. Then I drop to one knee and flip the lid open.

“I love you, Violet Hall. You make every day an adventure. Marry me.”

Violet bites her lip and stares at the ring. “Are you sure?”

“One hundred and ten percent.”

“We’ve only been together for six months.”

My hand is starting to shake from the anxiety. Is this how rejection feels? If so, it sucks. “We can have a long engagement.”

“I don’t like big weddings.” Her panic is clear. “All those people make me nervous. I’ll mess up the vows and say something inappropriate.”

“It doesn’t have to be big. It can be just the two of us if you want. We can wait until next summer—or the one after if a year isn’t long enough. We can get married up here by a justice of the peace on the end of the dock at sunset. A damn Rastafarian can perform the ceremony if that’s what you want. I don’t care about the wedding part. All I want to be is connected to you in the most significant way possible. I want you as my wife.”

She strokes my cheek. “I love you so much.”

“Is that a yes?”

“Yes. It’s a yes.” Her smile is radiant, like the rising sun reflected on still water. I get to see it every goddamned day of my life.

I exhale in relief. “That’s good, that’s great. I almost thought you were going to say no.” I slip the ring onto her finger.

“I couldn’t say no to you from the beginning. Why would that change now?”

I thread my fingers through hers, kiss the back of her hand, and move to her lips.

“I’m sorry I ruined your proposal.”

“You didn’t ruin it.”

“I sorta did.” Her hands drift down my chest.

“I have some ideas if you feel like you might need to make up for it.”

“I bet you do.”

We make love as the day fades into evening and stay wrapped in each other until the sun disappears below the treeline.

Violet shudders. At first I think it’s because she’s cold, but then a stifled giggle bursts free.

“What’s so funny?”

She giggles again. “I was thinking about Super MC.”

It looks like Violet has given my dick a superhero name. It’s better than *snuffie*. “That’s not much of a surprise since he’s been making you come for the past hour.”

“Fishing for compliments?”

“Just stating facts.”

“I’m going to make him a tuxedo.”

“A tuxedo?”

“And I’ll make a veil for my beaver. They can have their own private ceremony.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Super MC. He needs a tux, but no tie. That would be dangerous.”

Violet’s entire body shakes with pent-up laughter.

I take her face between my hands. “This ridiculousness right here”—I kiss her—“is why I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Her hands cover mine, her smile full of tenderness and love. “I’m so glad you fought for me. You’re the best chance I’ve taken.”

THE END

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Helena Hunting lives on the outskirts of Toronto with her incredibly tolerant family and two moderately intolerant cats. She is the author of *Clipped Wings*, her debut novel, and *Inked Armor*.

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the first chapter of:

FIRE DOWN BELOW

DEBRA ANASTASIA



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CHAPTER ONE
Keep Cold!

Dove clutched her second prescription in one week to her chest as she approached the pharmacy counter in Save-Mart. She hated getting any embarrassing drug filled. Specifically, medicines required for parts of her body below her belly button and above her knees.

She even tried ordering personal items online. Her tampons and maxi pads had arrived in a covert brown box on her doorstep. She didn't even have to look at the UPS deliveryman. Dove had peeked from behind the curtains in her apartment and waited until he was gone before she picked up the package. But her period was unpredictable and she was forgetful, so she had to do the period walk of shame damn near every month. Chocolate, something salty, and a box of hag rags gave her away to any cashier.

Her first UTI had snuck up on her like a hairy little kitten. She never got urinary tract infections, but when she wound up crying from the burning sensation while peeing, she made an appointment with her decidedly female general practitioner. Dove filled her prescription for antibiotics at her friendly Save-Mart pharmacy, comfortingly staffed by discreet ladies. Dove vaguely remembered commenting on her pharmacist's large belly. Mrs. Pills should be about eight and a half months pregnant as of right now.

When Dove found herself battling a yeast infection due to the powerful antibiotics, she had to make a return trip to her doctor and picked up her current prescription. Now, as she got to the Save-Mart Pharmacy counter again, she waited patiently. She didn't see Mrs. Pills. From the conversation Dove overheard between the woman's assistants, she was now both a pharmacist and a happy mom to a healthy baby girl.

Dove didn't notice the gentleman tucking purple and white bags into uniform alphabetic rows until he noticed her first. She had no time to run with her prescription clearly in view. He unfurled his large frame and his handsome smile at the same time.

Oh crap, kill me. Someone kill me dead. A lot.

"Hello. Dropping off?"

His voice should have been counting down the hits on some radio station. His green eyes flashed with friendliness and maybe a bit of flirtation. Dove swallowed hard and nodded.

After an awkward pause, Mr. Fitzwell, as his nametag claimed, reached between her breasts to pluck the paper from her clenched hands. He raised an inquisitive eyebrow—possibly at her bizarre behavior—and smoothed the paper on the laminate counter. Dove wanted to crap her pants when he announced the name of her drug way louder than Mrs. Pills would ever mention a lady prescription.

“Gynazule®?”

Anything with the sound “gyn” in it would perk up people’s ears. Dove looked over her shoulder. What looked to be an entire football team of boys was gathered around a grandmotherly lady. They were obviously showing her their support in great testosterone-filled numbers. Dove was sure the woman’s problem was a lot more devastating than her own.

All eyes were trained on Dove. She tried to curl her body into itself and turned back to Mr. Gorgeous McLoudypants.

Dove whispered quietly, “Yes, that’s it. Thank you.”

Mr. Fitzwell leaned closer to hear her. “Okay.” He seemed to want to engage in some more conversation. “Have you ever used it before? Because it’s a little bit different than your regular VAGINAL cream.” His voice just carried; it was like he couldn’t stop it if he tried.

Dove let her hands grab one another for support. If she didn’t have a wall of teenage meat behind her, she would’ve run. She wasn’t exactly sure because her heart was pumping loudly in her ears, but she thought the supportive boys behind her were snickering.

“No, I... haven’t used it before.” Dove wondered if she could fit in her own purse.

He obviously was quite proud of his extensive knowledge of pharmaceutical products. He decided to spout the difference between “traditional” yeast infection creams and GYNAZULE®.

“You see it’s administered with one dose in an APPLICATOR. It’s unique because it contains adhesive that will stick to your VAGINAL WALLS, as opposed to running DOWN YOUR LEGS. I think it’s called VAGI-GRAB®. But let me check.” Mr. Fitzwell ignored the large crowd and clicked away on his computer.

Don’t check. Good fucks out loud. DON’T check!

Dove thought the blush she felt on her cheeks might actually give her sunburn. She tried to be savvy. She wanted to be an empowered woman who tossed tampons around like confetti to just anyone, but she wasn't. She could always try.

“Yup. That’s it. VAGI-GRAB[®]. So, Ms. Glitch, any questions?” He turned his interested, trying-to-be helpful, sexy eyes back to her red, red face.

Dove’s voice got quieter as she tried to think of something—anything—to ask. “Um. Is it unscented?”

Mr. Fitzwell squinted as if he could turn up her volume by making his eyes smaller. “I’m not sure. Are you allergic to any types of VAGINAL medicines?”

Dove’s mouth talking before her head could shut her up. “Uh... I need to use very gentle soaps because I have sensitive... parts.” Her voice was getting higher and higher.

Mr. Fitzwell looked as professional as a brain surgeon. He clearly wanted her to have the correct information. There were definitely stifled chuckles behind her now. Dove was pretty sure her ass was blushing as well. The crack was sweating all on its own, like it was on a super high diving board about to jump.

“Okay, Ms. Glitch GYNAZULE[®] is not a soap. It will not work if you put it in and then rinse it off in the shower.” He patted the prescription paper to emphasize his words.

Oh God. We’re talking about me being naked, in the shower with cooter cream. Please world, end. Kill me.

“I know it’s not soap. I just... if it’s scented... I can’t do scented. Flowers and stuff like that. Fruit-flavored soaps make... things... burnish.” She could tell from the peeks at his face Mr. Fitzwell had never stepped foot in a bath and lotion store, wanting to try the array of fun fragrances. Nor had he purchased Peppermint Candy shower gel, foamed up his nether regions, and felt like he had dipped them in lava. Dove crossed and uncrossed her legs at the memory.

Mr. Fitzwell seemed concerned. “Okay, just a heads-up. It’s definitely not good to put any fruits or plant life near your genitals.” He made a V with his hands and formed his own pretend vagina in front of his pants.

Dove covered her eyes and tried to defend herself because now she could hear the sickly older woman beating her supporters with a purse.

Dove's mumbling got louder with her embarrassment. "I don't put weird things down... there. Just make sure that the cream's vagina-scented. Just plain. For vaginas." She kept her eyes on the counter.

Stop saying "vagina," you screaming asshole!

The assistants were cooing and ogling pictures on the computer. Mrs. Pills had obviously forwarded images of her newborn baby to her coworkers at the perfect time for them not to come to Dove's aid. Finally, Mr. Fitzwell asked her for her phone number and birth date.

"You can wait right over there; I'll have this ready in ten minutes. I'm sure the itching is horrendous."

Dove shuffled to the hard purple chairs and grabbed a magazine off the rack to hide behind. From the questions and directions he asked, Mr. Fitzwell was obviously Mrs. Pill's temporary replacement for her maternity leave. Dove peered over the top of her magazine at him. He was stunning and from the way smiled, he almost knew it. His jaw was like a stiff, hard cliff somewhere in Ireland. The kind on postcards. His Adam's apple was like his throat's erection. Dominant. He had the sleeves of his shirt pushed up and his forearms revealed. Veins and muscles. From doing stuff. All kinds of sexy, manly stuff. The assistants fluffed their hair when he wasn't looking and pretended to pinch his butt.

After the football team took care of the lovely grandma, Dove was as alone as one could be in a Save-Mart. Mr. Fitzwell looked over the counter while he was working to see if she was still there. Just before Dove could scurry her gaze away, she saw him look at her magazine and raise his eyebrows in surprise. Dove hadn't thought to check which magazine she was pretending to be reading. She'd just needed a shield to hide behind. She closed it and looked at the cover. It was a copy of *Cosmopolitan* with large print over most of the cover:

MAKE YOUR ORGASMS LOUDER, HARDER AND LONGER!

Dove dropped the magazine like it was a snake that had bitten her.

Fuck you! Crazy lady magazine!

Dove wanted to cry. This was the worst twenty minutes in her entire existence. After all her semiclandestine feminine product acquisitions, she was facing everything she worked to protect herself against. And the drop-dead gorgeous pharmacist had witnessed it all.

He knew her vagina was sensitive to products and that it was itching. Dove contemplated the magazine again. She wondered if she could actually

paper cut herself to death while sitting in the waiting area.

Mr. Fitzwell called her name. “Ms. Glitch? Your GYNAZULE® is ready.”

She grabbed her purse and stomped over to the counter. He was smiling at her, ready to ring up her purchase. “You might want to grab some probiotics to go with this. Fight the infection from the inside and the outside.”

Dove just stood and stared at him. She rarely got angry and certainly not over womanly products with a man, but she’d had enough.

“Listen, Mr. Fitzwell!” She slammed her purse down in front of him, and he blinked in surprise. “For future reference, when a lady hands you a script like that?” She pointed to the crinkly bag he was holding. “Go get one of the assistants to handle it. No one wants to talk about her ‘vaginal walls’ ”—she mimicked his V-shaped hand motion from earlier—“with a *dude!*”

Dove let out a satisfied breath.

I told him. Good for me.

She didn’t expect his hurt expression and dejected nodding. His loud voice was quiet, finally.

“Of course, ma’am. I’m very sorry.”

He motioned for her to sign the screen in front of her to accept the prescription. She hated the look on his face—like he was a puppy and she had just kicked him. She took the bag from his hands, careful not to touch his beautiful, long fingers. She couldn’t leave him all dejected and dragging.

“It’s okay. I overreacted. I get mean when I’m embarrassed.”

Instead of helping he shook his head and rolled his eyes. “Great job, Fitzwell. Living the dream now, you big fool.” He ran a hand through his perfect hair. He was talking to himself.

Dove bit her lip, and he used her pause to explain himself more. “This is my first day as a pharmacist. I just wanted to be really thorough and make sure you were comfortable with the medicine. I did a great job with that, huh?”

She had been angry with him, but now she had compassion. This was his dream, and she was probably the worst customer to have right out of the gate.

Dove smiled at him. “It’s okay, Mr. Fitzwell. I think you’re going to make a great pharmacist.”

He looked at her doubtfully.

“No, really, you will.” She reached out and patted his hand to solidify her message.

They both felt the spark—an actual, blue, snapping spark. Dove’s wool jacket, combined with the pharmacy rug, had turned her into a walking electrical appliance. They both pulled their hands away from the contact, shaking their fingers.

“Damn!” Mr. Fitzwell stepped a few feet away from the counter and her.

Dove laughed; it was clear nothing here was going to go well.

“Well, I guess you got me back. I hope you feel better soon, Ms. Glitch.” He was smiling at her laughter. At least they could end the experience with a bit of joy. His teeth were pearly white and straight, and there was a hint of a dimple. Her uterus swooned.

“Call me Dove. You already know so much about me.” She held out her hand formally.

He gave her a huge smile and went about the most awkward handshake of her life. He touched her palm with his first finger. When there was no shock, he flicked her finger to get rid of any latent electricity.

“Ow!” She winced. His thumping forefinger made her fingers curl into her hand.

“Sorry, sorry. I’m making a mess of this, but it’s just that I hate shocks.” He finally grasped her hand, but it was before she could completely unclamp her fingers, so he wound up shaking her claw.

“I’m Johnson. Thanks for being my first customer and breaking me in.”

He seemed like he was about to release her hand when she dropped her prescription bag between them. They both reached for it at the same time and clanked foreheads together like drunken sumo wrestlers.

“Damn it!” Dove staggered backward.

Johnson put his hands to his head, wincing in pain. The assistants tried to stop giggling, but lost their battle. Dove scooped up the bag and backed away from the disastrous transaction.

“Well, Johnson, I might remember nothing at all after that whack, but my head won’t forget when you banged me.”

Oh, holy piss cushions. I just said he banged me. Like ‘sex’ bang.

Johnson reached into the little pharmacy refrigerator and pulled out the first bottle he laid his hands on. He pressed it against the slight contusion on his forehead.

He waved in her direction and had clearly missed her verbal faux pas because he was deep in the middle of his own, shouting, “I like to leave a mark when I bang people!” in his too-loud voice.

Dove’s last glimpse of him made her smile for hours. To his forehead, as impromptu first aid, he had a bottle, clearly marked in bold letters: Anal Suppository! Keep Cold!

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About the Author

Debra Anastasia lives in Maryland mostly wearing her pajamas. She is never going to reveal how many of the things portrayed in this story really happened to her. Her family consists of two kids, a husband, three dogs and the best cat in the world. In her free time she likes to procrastinate.

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