
SCORING FAST (RIVALS)

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Scoring Fast

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How did I get here again?

I continue to ask myself that one question as I sit on the edge of the pool outside our sorority house at Scotia Academy, watching the hockey players shove each other into the water as the warm September sun beats down on us.

How did this introvert—me—find herself living in an extroverted setting? Honestly, who would have thought that I, Jemma Maloney, book nerd extraordinaire—a nobody from rural Nova Scotia—would currently be hanging with the popular students, drinking fruity cocktails, and sliding into the DMs of the in-crowd? So, how exactly did I get here again?

Simply put, you orchestrated it, Jemma.

Right, right. That's exactly what I did. Yeah, I'm here getting light-headed on fancy cocktails because I'm pretending to be everything I'm not. Nothing about *this* me is real. From my blonde hair right down to the tiny bikini showcasing far more

skin than I've ever dared to show before. I casually adjust the top to cover a nipple that is determined to break free, then finish my drink, needing all the liquid courage I can handle for this poolside party. I'm pretty sure no one from back home would even recognize this version of me, and I guess that's the whole point.

I was always orbiting the popular girls back in high school, always looking in from the outside. Sure, the book nerd they loved to call Maloney Baloney was good enough when it came to helping them with their homework, but forget about friendship or being invited to any of the parties. Last fall, after I received my acceptance letter from Scotia Academy, I devised a plan to transform myself by emulating the girls in my sorority, especially my roommate Brynn. Her brother Kace is a senior and one of the best players on the hockey team, and Brynn is the epitome of popular. Not just because of him, but because she's gorgeous, confident and isn't afraid to put herself out there.

Alison, my best friend from high school, is here at the academy too. She never cared about being popular, and in the three weeks that I've been here, we've already drifted apart. My stomach tightens. I really miss her, but she doesn't want to have any part of sorority life, and she's not a fan of hockey. I wasn't either, until I realized fitting in with the popular crowd meant showing my support—in very slinky clothing. Ugh.

What is it that I'm called now? Oh yeah, a puck bunny. I don't particularly like the term—correction, the old Jemma doesn't particularly like it—but this new version of Jemma, she's just fine with it. At least she thinks she is. It's what makes her popular, after all.

But is popularity all it's cracked up to be, Jemma? Everything you've ever dreamed of?

Give it time, it's only been three weeks, I quickly remind myself. A group of loud hockey players at the other end of the pool catch my attention as they line up on the edge of the pool and jump, clasp their knees so they can cannonball and splash my sorority sisters. Shrieks saturate the air as the guys drench the girls and they scramble from their lounge chairs, pretending to be angry. It's easy to tell they secretly love the attention.

They laugh and tug on their tops, and the beginnings of a wet T-shirt contest flashes before my eyes. I tighten my arms around my body. I'm not all that comfortable with the idea of exposing myself, and while I sit here and pretend otherwise, I resist the urge to slink back to my room and crawl under the covers with a good book.

"Jemma, come on," Brynn says, taking my empty drink cup from me and pulling me to my feet. "It's been three weeks and you haven't even officially met Kace yet. I just know you two are going to hit it off." She gives me a little wink.

I groan inwardly. She talks highly of her brother, as do all the other bunnies, and she likes to joke that maybe someday I could be her sister-in-law. The thing is though, there's something in the way Kace looks at me. I truly don't think he likes me. I mean, we haven't officially met, like Brynn said, but I don't get the sense he wants to meet me either. Forget about love at first sight. I think for Kace Andrews it was hate at first sight. Maybe I'm just being paranoid, the old insecure Jemma seeping through the cracks.

Seriously though, from what I've seen in my short time here on campus, the man loves the puck bunnies. Just not *this*

puck bunny. Brynn drags me along and I lift my head to see Kace, who is easy to spot in the crowd, and not just because he's tall. He's sideways to me, talking to Sierra. I like Sierra. We bonded quickly after I moved into the house. Probably because I'm Brynn's roommate and she clearly likes Brynn's brother. Sierra is a senior and is the most popular girl in the house and it feels good to be liked by her. I'm sure she never would have given the old Jemma the time of day, though.

I turn my focus to Kace and study his tall frame. My gaze follows a bead of water as it slides down his chest, disappearing into the band of his swim shorts. Warm sensations rocket through me, and I'm pretty sure it has nothing to do with the late day sun. I work to control my racing heart, not wanting to appear breathless when I reach him.

As if feeling my eyes on him, he angles his head, and his gaze meets mine. The second our eyes lock, his lips tighten, and he stands up a bit straighter, like he's preparing for battle—with an ogre. Yeah, I'm pretty sure the man hates me. What I don't know is, what is it about me that offends him so much?

"Kace," Brynn calls out, grabbing my arm to drag me forward when my feet slow.

Kace nods, turning away from Sierra, and eyes his sister. "Hey. What's up, sis?"

Sierra stands there for a second, her gaze going between the three of us. With his attention no longer on her, Sierra touches his arm and his gaze cuts her way.

"Catch up with you later?" she asks.

"Yeah," he agrees and Sierra gives me a smile before walking away. Oh, I get it. She's hooking up with Kace tonight and wants me to know it. Like I could actually compete with a

beautiful, outgoing girl like her anyway. I wouldn't even know where to begin which makes me wonder why Brynn thinks Kace and I would be a good fit.

"Kace," Brynn begins, and his head slowly turns back toward us. "This is Jemma." Brynn shoves me until I'm standing directly in front of him, and I fight the old urge to shrink into myself. "My roommate. Jemma, say hello to Kace, or as he's known on the team, Dragon."

"Why...would they call him Dragon?" I ask, glancing at Brynn over my shoulder.

She grins. "You'll have to ask him."

I turn back to Kace, who looks less than impressed. Yeah, no, I'm not going to ask him why they call him Dragon. My imagination can figure it out. Kace stares at Brynn over my head, his eyes narrowed. Brynn must take his disinterest for confusion, because she says, "What's the matter with you? I told you all about Jemma. Remember..."

What the heck did she tell him?

"Yeah, Jemma. Your roommate. I remember." He finally looks at me. "Hi Jemma."

"Hi," I reply for lack of anything else, and fold my arms across my chest, unintentionally plumping them up. "Nice to meet you." That's when his eyes drop to my cleavage. But it's not lust or want I see there. He tears his gaze away, but not before I glimpse the...disappointment? What the hell is wrong with this guy? I don't know and I really shouldn't care if he likes me or not. Heck, I don't like him. I'd never tell Brynn that, though. She adores him. I guess with him being her brother, she sees something I don't. Although he did call her sis, and that's kind of adorable.

“Yeah, nice to meet you too,” he finally replies and runs his thumb over his jaw. “I’m going to get a drink,” he grumbles, about to step away. That’s when he notices the empty glass in Brynn’s hand. “You guys want anything?” he asks, staring at his sister again, like the sight of me makes his skin crawl. What a jerk.

“Of course, we do,” Brynn answers and while I’m sure I’ve had enough, I nod in agreement. Truthfully, I’m a lightweight and those drinks I’ve had are already messing with me, and we all know overdrinking at a poolside sorority party can only lead to good decisions—said no book worm ever.

From the corner of my eye, I catch a couple more hockey players coming around the corner with more coolers, and Brynn waves. Sebastian Turner, who I met earlier, and who is Kace’s roommate, grins at me.

“Drink, baby?” he asks me. “I’ll make it a stiff one.”

Kace shakes his head, disgust on his face. What’s his freaking problem with me? I shrug, playing it cool, like I’m not already halfway to drowning in the pool from alcohol poisoning. “Yeah, sure.”

“Heard you like stiff ones, but no worries, baby, you’ve never had a stiff one like mine before.”

“Jesus,” Kace mutters and rubs the back of his shoulder, like he’s trying to work out a strain.

“It’s Saturday,” Brynn bursts out. “You guys won against the Islanders last night. We need to celebrate in a big way. Stiff ones all around.” She weaves her arm through mine and while I truly don’t know her all that well yet, I worry she might be a bit self-destructive. But hey, who am I to judge? “Right, Jemma?”

“Right,” I agree and plaster on a bright smile. I lift my head and find Kace studying me, the darkest eyes I’ve ever seen narrow in on my face as a scowl mars his handsome features. My entire body freezes, everything inside me telling me he can see right through me, see that I’m just an unlovable, boring book nerd—Maloney Baloney—that no one wants to be around, and probably shouldn’t be here. God, I really do need another drink. Or ten. Although when Sebastian talked about a stiff one, I’m not so certain he’s referring to alcohol.

We follow Kace to the coolers, and the chill radiating from him as he pours a little bit of this and a little bit of that into a glass, knowing exactly what we’re drinking, freezes my blood. He finishes and hands me a cup. When my skin touches his, warmth ripples through me. My God, what is wrong with me? The man hates me—I hate him—and I shouldn’t be thinking about what it would be like to have his hands on other parts of my body.

I’m a virgin, for God’s sake. Virgins—who have no idea what it’s like to be touched—don’t suddenly begin to fantasize about guys’ hands all over them, do they? It’s not like I haven’t touched myself over the years, however. Although it’s been happening more often these last three weeks after watching Kace play hockey. He’s known to be a fast scorer, and I’m guessing the bunnies aren’t just talking about his on-ice skills.

Just then, Sebastian comes up and throws his arm over my shoulder, like he’s laying claim to me. He’s not my type, but I don’t want to offend him. He glances at the cup in my hand. “What are you drinking, baby?”

“Oh, it’s ah...” Okay, I saw what Kace put in it, Aperol, proscocco and soda but I have no idea what it’s called.

Brynn laughs. "It's a prosecco cocktail."

"But I made you a drink, baby," Sebastian pouts, and I can't help but steal a glance at Kace as he folds his arms across his broad chest and stares at me. What is he waiting for?

"What's in it?" I glance at the concoction in the red cup.

He grins. "All the good stuff." He sips it, as if to prove it's safe, and holds it out again. Kace reaches out and takes it before I can try it.

"She already has a drink," he says. "I'll take this one."

"What the fuck, Drag," Sebastian yells, shortening Kace's nickname as Kace takes a big swallow from the cup. He winces and wipes his lips with the back of his hand.

"Gin." A hard quiver goes through Kace as his lips pucker. "That's fucking strong."

"Like I said..." Sebastian pauses to wink at me. "A stiff one. It's my own special drink."

"Gin is panty remover," Brynn pipes in with a laugh. She glances at what's left in the cup and pokes her brother. "You might not want to finish that."

"If I wore panties, maybe I'd be worried." His gaze strays to me, a possible warning in his eyes as he puts the cup to his lips and finishes it.

Sebastian tightens his arm around my shoulder, pulling me against him. "Come on, baby, I'll make you another one." I walk away with Sebastian, my stomach tight as he makes me a drink and I keep a close eye on what he's doing. I know all about drugs getting slipped into drinks. My older sister, Krista, who is in her third year at Montreal College, warned me all about college life. She didn't come home after her

second year, something about working on a research project, and I miss her like crazy. I make a mental note to call her again, even though she hasn't been answering me.

But I'll think about that tomorrow, because right now Sebastian is tipping a cup to my lips. For the next hour or so, I drink gin, party, swim and...I'm not sure what else, because my brain turned fuzzy and the world around me went black. The next thing I know, I'm waking up in my bed, my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. What the hell happened last night? I groan and that's when someone moves beside me.

There's someone in my bed? Oh my God there's someone in my bed! What the ever-loving hell did I do?

I try to control my breathing as I slowly turn my head, not wanting to move the mattress, but there's nothing I can do to quiet the moan of regret crawling out of my throat when I see who's beside me.

Kace peels his eye open and winces at the sun creeping in through the open curtains. His gaze lands on mine, and he quickly sobers. "What the fuck?"

"Kace," I say, as I too try to wrap my brain around the events of last night. How did Kace end up in my bed—dressed in his bathing suit from last night? Panicked, I quickly glance down and find myself in a T-shirt—one I've seen Kace in before—and my bathing suit bottoms. I scramble to pull the blankets up.

He shakes his head and pinches the bridge of his nose. "What the fuck did Sebastian put in that drink?" he asks.

"Gin," I answer quietly.

"Yeah, I'm sure there was more than gin in it."

“A lot of gin.”

He moans and presses his palms to his eyes. “I’m going to kill that fucker.” He groans some more. “Did he make you one?”

“Yes.” I close my eyes, and sort through the foggy memories from last night. Drinking. Partying. Swimming. Dancing. Wait, did I lose my bathing suit top? Is that why I’m in Kace’s shirt? I gasp for breath, pretty damn sure I’ve gone ghostly white.

“What?” he asks, his brow furrowed as worry narrows his eyes.

“I was drinking.... partying...” I look down. “You were there...” I point to the mattress as memories take form. “You...you took me back here. I remember laughing, and then you dragging me away.”

He runs his hand through his hair, his head down. “Did we...”

I glance at the bed and find the sheets clean. I’m a virgin, so I’d expect a trace of blood or something. When I don’t immediately answer, he jumps up.

“Jesus Christ,” he swears, and starts pacing. “This was a mistake. This never should have happened. Fuck me.”

I swallow against a tight throat, and tears threaten. As far as I know he’s been with numerous puck bunnies. Why would I be such a mistake? I’m not sure, but heck, maybe I should let him think he slept with me. Maybe he doesn’t deserve the truth after telling me I was a mistake.

“I have to go. I have to run home before I head to the rink... practice.” He walks to the door, puts his hand on the knob and stops. He takes a big breath, turns back around and

zeroes in on me. There's genuine concern on his face when he asks, "Are you okay?"

"I'm okay," I manage to get out without a tremble in my voice as I lift my chin high.

He gives a tight nod and walks out the door. I throw myself on my bed as memories of what I'd done last night come back to haunt me. Although I can't remember when or how my bathing suit top came off.

God, is this really who you want to be, Jemma?

I stare at the ceiling for a long time, my blood pounding like thunder through my veins as the minutes tick by. A long while later a knock comes on my door, and I sit up. "Who is it?"

"It's Kace. Can I come in?"

My heart jumps into my throat and I try to sound casual. "Sure." I hug my blankets to my body as his big frame walks through the door and overwhelms my senses.

His face is hard, his jaw clenched so tightly I'm sure he's going to crack his teeth. He has something in his hand as he takes two steps, stops at the small dinette table, and slaps his palm down. "Found this in the locker room." He glares at me, hard disdain in his eyes and my heart stops beating. "Thought you might want it back."

Unable to speak, I nod, and stand on wobbly legs. I keep the sheet wrapped around my body as I take a tentative step closer. His big body towers over mine, every muscle tight as I lean forward and see the picture he just slapped down.

The world around me spins, and tears pool in my eyes. I put my hand on the table, bracing myself before I fall—before I lose all contents in my stomach. Who would do this? Better

yet, why did I ever take my top off, which I can't even remember doing? I don't know what is going on, but what I do know is that this...this mistake...could have followed me around forever, ruined me. Thank God Kace got to it before anyone saw it. Wait, did he really find it?

"Did you..." I lift my eyes to his and find anger brewing.

"Jesus Christ, Jemma." He grips his hair, the look he's aiming my way full of anger. "Of course, I didn't take it."

"Who did?" Whoever took it must still have a copy on their phone. What if it resurfaces. I'd die of embarrassment.

"I don't know. I saw it, ripped it down and brought it here before anyone could see it. At least I think I got to it before the other guys saw it."

I open my mouth and try to speak as I work to sound nonchalant, like this is no big deal. That's what the new Jemma would do, right? I mean, it's just my breasts, right? Half the population has them. God, if only I really felt that way. I try not to take deep gulping breaths in front of Kace. I look back at the picture, and my throat squeezes so tight it hurts. I am such a fool. Is it too late to run back to Shelburne, crawl in my bed and stay there for the next ten years?

"Jemma," he whispers, his voice so soft, so tender and so full of concern, it does the strangest things to my insides. Is this the side of him his sister knows? I tear my gaze from the picture, and take in dark eyes that are waiting for an explanation. But how can I tell him who I really am—a book nerd that no one here would be friends with—and avoid humiliation? Dammit, I'm in too deep now, and what would he think of me if I suddenly told him I'd fabricated a new life just to feel accepted. I can't do that. I can't turn back now. Right? Heck, I've already let him believe we slept together.

How could I have done that?

“Oh that,” I say, my voice filled with laughter, even though my insides are in turmoil and I’m seconds from racing to the toilet to vomit. I wave my hand. “Fun and games.” How could I have been so stupid? I force my lips to part in a smile, and grip the table harder to keep my hands from shaking as my stomach churns.

“Fun and games, huh?”

“Yeah,” I answer, a lightness in my voice that doesn’t reflect anything going on inside me. Maybe I should be taking acting classes instead of English literature, because I’m not too sure I’m pulling this off.

“Right.” He turns his back on me and walks out the door, clicking it tightly shut behind him. I crinkle the picture in my hand as I run to the bathroom before I lose everything in my stomach. As I grip the porcelain, I groan out loud, because I’m beginning to believe that being popular isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, and that I’ve gotten myself in too deep to turn back now.

I stand outside Jemma's sorority room, my back against the wall and take a couple of deep, fueling breaths. Last night is still a bit of a blur to me, and while I want to kill Sebastian—he must have put something in her drink—the fact of the matter is, I didn't have to drink it.

I only downed it because Jemma already had a drink in her hand and maybe there's a part of me that just doesn't trust my roommate. Then again, it's not like Sebastian needs to liquor up a girl to get her in his bed. Not only is he a hockey player, a jock, his father is a well-known political figure here in Nova Scotia. Talk about money and power. The ultimate aphrodisiac, right? The girls here fall all over Sebastian and Jemma is no exception, which fucking pisses me off.

Why?

Oh, believe me, it's not because I want her—it's because I don't like her. Which, when it comes right down to it, means I shouldn't give a shit what she does or who she does it with. But she's Brynn's good friend and roommate, so by proxy, I

guess, I do care about her well-being—hell, I care about every woman’s well-being—but it doesn’t mean I have to like Jemma.

The more my brain fills in the gaps from last night, the more I’m sure I didn’t sleep with the girl I woke up beside. Why does she want me to think I did? Probably because she’s pretending to be something she’s not. Yeah, I can see it. Every time I look at her. When she has no idea she has an audience of one, I can tell how uncomfortable she is with this whole party scene, the whole sorority puck bunny persona, and I hate her for pretending otherwise.

I hate liars. Thanks to my old man and the double life he led, of course. Yeah, I know. A man with two families sounds surreal, the stuff of fiction, right? But it fucking happened, and because of it, I hate liars with every fiber of my being. Imagine, pretending to love and care for your family when you secretly have another. How can I ever again trust a person who lies about who they really are? I know Jemma and Brynn have grown close in the last month, but that doesn’t mean I have to be friends with her too.

Just then a noise sounds on the long set of stairs leading to the main level, and I push myself up to my full height. I catch Sierra’s eyes and she angles her head. Curiosity, and maybe even a hint of anger, passes over her gaze when she spots me outside this particular room. I think she was looking to hook up last night. Will she think I’m visiting Brynn, or sleeping with her roommate? I don’t want her to feel shunned. I’d never do that to anyone on purpose.

“Hey Kace,” she murmurs, and runs her hands through her messy hair. She looks like she’s just getting home from a wild party. “What happened to you last night?” Her gaze goes from me to my sister’s door, and I’m guessing she’s putting

things together—I slept with the roommate. “You bailed early.”

“Yeah, I just uh...had some things to do.” I jerk my thumb over my shoulder, toward the door beside me. “My sister,” I fib, even though I hate liars and I’m not a very good one. I suppose that’s a positive trait to have—until I’m in a situation like this.

She laughs, and it cuts through my brain like a jagged knife, reminding me I drank way too much last night. “Yeah, okay. Sure.”

I don’t want to continue this conversation, or upset her. I really don’t. I just want to go to the rink and practice and lose myself on the ice for a few hours. Before I can leave, she points a finger at me.

“I knew Jemma had a thing for you.”

“She likes my roommate,” I clarify. “She was hanging with Sebastian.”

Her grin widens, and my heart thumps. “If she likes Sebastian, then why were you in her bed last night?”

Maybe because underneath the persona, there’s something very vulnerable about her...something you want to protect...and you hate the idea of any guy messing with her.

Whoa. As that thought kicks me in the nuts, blurry visions of her dancing and taking her bathing suit top off rush through my brain. No fucking way was she in her right mind last night, which is why I dragged her away. I vaguely remember giving her my shirt, and sitting down on the side of her bed, just for a moment, to make sure she was okay. Only I woke up this morning, tangled in her sheets beside her.

“It’s not what you think.” She stands there looking at me like I’m dense and it’s exactly what she thinks. I shove my hands in my pockets, digging for my phone. Are there pics of a half-naked Jemma in our group chats? My search for my phone comes up empty. Fuck, I’m always losing the damn thing. Wait, I remember now. I left it at home last night before the party. “She wasn’t feeling great last night.”

Her gaze drops to my crotch. “I take it you helped her with that?”

I like Sierra, I really do, but I also know she loves to gossip, and before I leave this building rumors of me sleeping with Jemma will spread faster than a brush fire in the dry heat of summer. I know I have a reputation and the girls I sleep with know it and don’t care. Does Jemma want that? Does she want others to think we slept together? Fuck, maybe she wanted that naked picture of her breasts in the locker room too.

I shake my head. No that can’t be right. She had no idea what she was doing, and someone, I can’t quite remember who, screamed something about hazing. Or maybe I dreamt that. Not that I was dreaming of her breasts or anything. I don’t think it was Sebastian, though. I’m not sure he’d do something like that. Could it have been one of her sorority sisters? No, that can’t be right either. They’re a sisterhood and they all protect one another.

I push off the wall, still confused and a bit dizzy. Fuck, honestly, I have no idea what’s up or down, left or right. All I know is I’m leaving this situation alone and for the rest of this year, I’m going to avoid Jemma. “Can you drop this?”

Sierra holds her hands up and walks past me. “You got it.”

“Thanks, Sierra,” I say quietly as she leaves. I listen to her footsteps until they disappear and then I bolt from the sorority house before any other doors open, or anyone comes home. I don’t want to explain myself again, and where the hell was my sister last night? Not that it’s my business. She’s here enjoying her first year like I enjoyed mine. After what we’ve both been through in our short lifetime, finding out about Dad’s secret marriage and trying to keep Mom from falling apart, I need to give her some leeway to let her find herself. As long as she’s doing it in a safe and healthy way, it’s all good.

Oh, like you are, Kace? Walking around with a heart full of anger—unable to trust or get close to anyone?

Yeah, well, whatever.

My thoughts go back to Brynn. I’m sure after a couple years in this house, she’ll want out too. I might not love or trust my roommate—then again, that’s sort of a running theme with me—but he pays half the rent, allowing me to live in a house not too far from campus. I refused to take a dime from my father. I’ll get my education and get to the NHL on my own. Then I’ll show him I never needed him, and that I’m better than him because I made it and he didn’t. Yeah, he was never good enough for the NHL.

Will that make you feel better, Kace?

Brynn however, she’s not as bitter as me, and I don’t know why. Maybe because she’s younger, but Dad is paying her way, and she’s happy to take it. Maybe that’s her way of saying *fuck you, Dad*.

I head back to the rink, and stalk to my locker, glancing around in search of Sebastian. I have no fucking idea if he

was behind the picture I found here this morning, or if it had been sent around to everyone.

I turn when I hear a voice, not really expecting to see Sebastian. It's Sunday, and we don't have to be on the ice. I just like to skate to clear my head, and I want to keep my skills up. After getting drafted by the Edmonton Eagles, I want to stay on top of my game. I can't let anything or anyone, not even a ridiculous freshman pretending to be something she's not, get in my way.

"Hey Conner," I call to our goalie as he comes in, ending the call with whoever he was talking to and shoving his phone into his pocket. He was at the party last night, but he looks like he's in much better shape than me. He eyes me for a second. "What?" I ask.

"Dragon," he says. "I'm surprised to see you here." I stiffen. What the hell happened last night?

"Why? I come in every Sunday, don't I?"

"Yeah, but..." He stops and whistles. "You went all fucking caveman last night with Jemma." I sit on the bench and try not to appear panicked.

"She was sick. She's my sister's roommate. I was just helping her out." Okay, stop rambling. It's not making this lie, if it even is a lie, any better.

He grunts out a laugh. "I heard you were doing more than that."

Fuck me sideways.

"Are we practicing or not?" I grouch.

"Practicing." He drops it and heads to his locker. I stand, tugging some gear from my locker as my gaze goes to the spot

on the wall where I found Jemma's picture. A hot stab of fire goes through my veins, and I slam my locker shut with more force than necessary. Why the fuck would someone do that to her? Aren't we all better than that? Shit, I can't help but want to tear through Storm House and interrogate every guy on the team until I find the asshole responsible.

"Conner?" I ask as I drop back down onto the bench.

"Yeah?" He turns back to me.

"Do you know if any of the other guys were in here this morning?"

He glances over his shoulder. Other than the two of us, the place is empty. His locker makes a scraping noise as he pulls it open. "No, why?"

I dig into my bag, searching for my phone. Didn't I put it in here earlier when I'd stopped at home before the rink? "No reason."

"You sure you're okay, buddy?"

"Good, just tired." I tug on my skates and lace them, happy that whoever took the picture and printed it out didn't widely distribute it and I managed to pull it down before anyone saw it. Although I'm sure lots of the guys saw Jemma in the flesh last night. Fuck. What was she thinking?

She wasn't dude. Something was wrong.

Then why did she act like there wasn't anything wrong when she saw the picture this morning? Because she's pretending to be something she isn't, and you fucking hate that.

Stop thinking about her.

“Come on, Dragon,” Conner says and puts his hand on my shoulder. “Work it out on the ice.”

I nod, happy he’s not pressing, because what would I say? I follow him onto the ice and we both do a few stretches before he takes up position in the net and I practice my shots. About ten minutes later, a few of the other guys join us and we practice a few plays.

I’m about to call an end to it when I spot Sebastian on the ice. Now that’s a surprise. Maybe he’s coming in to check on the picture, to see our reaction. Maybe I should have left it up for Coach to see. He would have gotten to the bottom of it. I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I saw fucking red and reacted when I walked in and spotted it. Honestly if someone did that to my sister, I’d murder them.

He skates over to me, and I stand there scowling at him. “Hey, you cool, man?” he asks.

“What the fuck did you put in my drink last night?”

He shakes his head. “Gin and more gin. You just drank too much.” He bangs his gloved hands together. “I told you it was a stiff one.” He nudges me. “Just like what you gave Jemma last night when you dragged her back to her room. She was mine for the night, dude. You fucking owe me.”

Owe him? Jesus, what an asshole. I resist the urge to punch him in the face. Wait, does everyone know I dragged Jemma away? Of course, they do, and I know what they’re all thinking. Why wouldn’t they?

He snorts, taking my non answer as confirmation that I did indeed sleep with Jemma. “It’s okay. I don’t mind sharing.”

I once again see red and before I can help it, I blurt out. "Jemma and I are not a couple. We didn't even...I don't think."

"Oh, then if you want me to share her with you, I don't mind."

"I'm not...there's no sharing. Drop it." Jesus. The next thing I know, I'm blurting out,

"Did you fucking put a nude picture of her up in the locker room?"

His head rears back. "What the fuck, dude? No. I'm not going to risk getting kicked off the team."

I stare at him for a long second, and he stares back, holding his ground. I don't know why, but I believe him. Which is crazy, because I don't know what to believe about anyone anymore. I'm a terrible judge of character, but after my dad's deceit, I've gotten better at spotting liars. Or at least, I thought I had.

I skate backward, putting distance between us. "Fine, I'm out of here."

"Catch up with you later."

I skate off and head to the locker room. I'm still in a foul mood by the time I dress, walk home and head to the kitchen for something to eat. I grab a left over cold-cut sub and take a huge bite. Breakfast of champions right here. I walk around as I eat, searching for my phone. I eventually head up to my bedroom and that's when I spot my phone lighting up on my desk.

I reach for it, and when I see numerous texts and messages from Brynn, the bite of sandwich in my mouth sours as I

swallow. I drop what's left and grab my phone. I quickly read the four texts telling me to call her.

What the hell is going on?

My heart thunders in my ears as I call her. She answers on the first ring, and her voice is breathless when she says, "Kace."

I go perfectly still at the panic in her voice. "Sis, what's going on?"

"You need to get over here. Now."