

## LOVE ON ICE

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Not bad for a sports-and-science-focused tomboy, Holly Travers thought, eyeing the intricate paper rose she'd just fashioned, her lips lifted in satisfaction.

"That's beautiful!" Bree Karlsson peered closer, her long dark hair gleaming as the sun poured through the lounge window. "I swear, Holly Travers, you're full of hidden talents. How did you learn to do origami?"

"I saw it at a banquet earlier this year in Japan. It was good to focus on something other than this." Holly pointed to the pale scar on her upper arm that her T-shirt couldn't hide. Her stomach tensed. Ten stitches in a Tokyo hospital hadn't been fun. But it could've been worse. Thank God the other skater had shifted in time, otherwise Holly's face would be wearing a permanent reminder of the debacle that was Japan.

Her best friend shuddered. "I'll never understand why you do short track. It's so dangerous."

"What can I say? I have a need for speed." And she *loved* the sport. Mostly. "Now, do you want me to teach you how to fold the roses into place cards? I thought they'd be great for the tables at the reception. But it gets a little tricky, so you must be patient..."

Bree's laughter was as joyous as her vivacious personality. "It's so funny to hear you, the speed queen, go on about patience."

Holly grinned. Bree's perpetual bubbly smile was even bigger now that the family was counting down to Bree's wedding in seven days. "I brought some beautiful paper with me. I'll go get it."

Holly raced up the stairs to the guestroom of the Karlsson's family home. The room was painted white with apricot accents now, but the old oak tree in the backyard still spread welcoming arms. She smoothed her boring light-brown hair into its usual high ponytail, then

retrieved the expensive mauve-flecked handmade paper from her suitcase. A car door slammed outside.

As she made her way down the hall, she studied the pictures on the walls. Cute baby photos, vacations, high school and college graduations, hockey photos. The only constants were the glossy dark hair and blue-gray eyes the Karlsson family shared. She smiled. Her time here in Toronto as an exchange student seven years ago had been the best year of her life.

As Holly headed down the stairs, she caught the vague murmur of voices. She paused at the sound of Bree's voice coming from the kitchen. "But Holly—"

"Holly?" There was a snort. "Bree, I'm over you and Mom trying to fix me up with one of your good little girl friends. I get enough offers as it is. Drop it, okay?"

Holly stilled. Little? So she wasn't a giant like the rest of the Karlsson clan. And anyway, what was so bad about being good? So she didn't have a past you'd ever read about in *People* magazine. Where were the guys who could appreciate that? Not that she was here to find a man.

She bit her lip, uncertainty keeping her rooted to the step. Arrogance always made her prickly and defensive. Should she go in guns blazing or smile and just pretend she hadn't heard? Eavesdroppers never heard good about themselves, did they? She closed her eyes for a few seconds and drew in a deep breath. One of Coach Chan's mottos floated into memory: *Put on brave face; don't let fear win.*

She lifted her chin and headed into the sunny modern kitchen, pasting on a smile as three faces swung her way. "Hi!" Aim for bright and perky. "Mike, how are you?" She stepped forward to give Bree's burly hockey-playing fiancé a quick hug.

"Holly. Good to see you again." He eyed her with good humor. "Bree was telling us you got off the plane this morning and went straight into bridesmaid mode. The wonder from Down Under, eh?"

"Ha. Not that wonderful. But it's nice to know I've got some long-distance fans."

Her smile faded as she turned to the other man. Brent. Breanna Karlsson's twin. Bree's emailed photos of her family hadn't done him justice. Muscled, probably a foot taller than Holly, dark hair and blue eyes holding hints of gray and green—he'd grown even better looking than the guy she recalled from her time here on exchange. Back then, he'd lived away, playing junior hockey in Sault Ste. Marie. But on his few visits home, he'd made an impression.

Holly's hand strayed to the tiny scar on her forehead. Brent had made an impression, all right. His skating lessons—reluctantly given—might've left her with this scar, but they'd ultimately set the direction for her life. And his popularity with girls had further strengthened her resolve to never, *ever* throw herself at a guy or settle for cheering from the sidelines. Nope. She'd much rather be the one who actually did something worth cheering about, and between her skating and her university studies, she was going to do it. According to Bree's emails over the years, many girls continued to be charmed by that physique and those unusual eyes. Not that looks mattered if his attitude stank. "Hello, Brent."

He swallowed. Hopefully it was some pride. "Hey, Holly. How's it going?"

She pasted on a big smile. "Great!" Okay, maybe tone down the perkiness a tad. "Congratulations on your Cup win."

"Thanks." He still eyed her warily.

"How are you?"

He shrugged. "Can't complain."

Holly snickered. No, with his recent NHL championship win and multi-million dollar contract with Detroit, she bet he had little to complain about.

He stared at her blankly. "What?"

Holly gave her sweetest smile. "I imagine the only thing you have to complain about is all the girls throwing themselves at you."

He blinked. Bull's-eye. What was it with women and pro athletes? Her stomach twisted. Girls could be so stupid. She shook her head as she carefully placed the package of special Ogura lace paper down on the marble counter top. "But you don't need to worry about me. You're not my type."

The room filled with Mike's laughter. "So, what is your type, Holly?"

Not arrogant, for starters. Brent might share the same genetic pool as Bree, but he seemed the polar opposite of Holly's warm-hearted, generous friend. Brent leaned back against the marble counter, watching them, eyes narrowed, arms folded across his broad chest.

"I like guys who are short, blond, and plump, who aren't obsessed by sport and can show their feelings." She smiled, thinking of the little boys at church, their chubby arms that wrapped tightly around her whenever she was in town and able to help lead their Sunday school class. Yep, they definitely knew how to help her feel the love.

Bree chuckled. They'd emailed about Holly's "guys" before. "Now, before we start on the place cards, are you hungry? Mom said to make yourself at home, eat whatever. She was so sorry not to be here for your arrival. She had to take Grandma Violet to a doctor's appointment."

"No worries." Holly watched Bree hunt through a cupboard. "I hope everything's okay?"

"Granny V wants her blood pressure checked. She's a little excited about next weekend." Bree produced a container. "Ta da! Muffins. Mom said she tried to make them healthy for you."

Holly sighed, even as her saliva glands kicked into overdrive. "Your mum's such a good cook. But I need to be careful while I'm here. I can't afford to put on any weight."

Brent snorted as she grabbed an apple. "You one of these girls who's always on a diet?"

Bree laughed again, tossing her hair over a shoulder. "Just look at her, Brent. She's the only one of us who didn't need to diet before the wedding."

Holly stifled the sigh. She sometimes wished she weren't so lightly framed and had Bree's more voluptuous curves. It might help her feel more feminine. She'd never been a girly girl, too busy trying to keep up with her sporty brother and his mates, trailing after them on the bike or running, getting pretty good at the disciplines even before training started demanding it of her.

Oh well. Wishing never changed anything.

She eyed Brent. "I've a week off on the proviso I eat well, train, and visit the gym as much as possible. Competition season starts again soon, and my coach wants me ready."

His eyebrows shot up. "Your coach?"

Mike wrapped an arm around Bree. "Come on, man. Even I know she's the best short track skater in Australia." His blue eyes twinkled. "And going to compete at the Games in a couple of years."

Holly forced a smile. Crashing out in Japan had raised serious doubts about whether she should even be part of the skating program, let alone dream of competing in Vancouver. And yet this passion to prove herself burned inside and wouldn't be denied.

Brent shrugged. "Oh. I forgot what you do."

His indifference felt like a slap. Obviously she didn't rate too highly on Brent's radar. She bit into her apple, wiped juice from her chin.

"Maybe Brent can take you to the gym. He's always training and watching what he eats." Bree's smile widened. "He's like you, even if he's not exactly your *type*."

Holly slid a look at Brent, who seemed unimpressed. No way was she going to force her company on him. She shrugged. “It’s fine. I’m sure I can walk or bike there.”

Mike’s lips twitched. “He’s gonna need a new training partner now that I’m too busy.”

Bree turned to her twin, her purple-hued eyes wide. “You don’t mind, do you, Brent?”

The siblings engaged in a stare-off before Brent sighed, shook his head, and finally turned to Holly. “I like to go pretty early in the morning. Six thirty okay?”

She smothered the smile. Six thirty was an hour later than her usual training started. “That’ll be fine. Thank you.” She threw the apple core in the bin and carefully wiped her fingers, then turned to her best friend. “So, Bree, are you ready to start on those place cards now?”

Holly glanced up from her muesli at the kitchen’s new arrival. “Good morning.”

Brent nodded, grabbed a bowl, poured in cereal and milk, and started eating silently.

O-kay. Obviously not a morning person. She refocused on her breakfast. Last night Brent had looked at her askance more than once as she happily answered questions from Bree’s parents about her recent travels. Perhaps God’s gift to women thought she was here to find a man—namely him. Her lips curled up on one side. As if he’d ever meet her boyfriend criteria.

Top of the list was someone whose actions and attitudes demonstrated his love for God. Second was someone who could cope with the demands her sport placed on her, like no time for a social life and constant jetting off for competitions around the planet. Hello? What guy could cope with that? Those two qualifiers always filtered out any prospective candidates. Handsome had certainly never needed to be factored in. Not that she could afford to be interested, even if Mr. Right should miraculously appear. Coach Chan said it best: *Firsts need focus, not distraction.*

Brent grabbed two bananas and nodded to the door. “Ready?”

Holly quickly scooped up the last mouthful. “Yep.” After rinsing her bowl, she grabbed her gym bag and followed him to the Jeep outside. A few fat raindrops splattered against the windshield as they drove through Toronto’s busy suburban streets.

As they waited for the red light to change, she tried out a tentative smile. He was Bree’s brother, after all. “So, Bree mentioned you bought a house in Detroit last year.”

“Yeah.” His face grew animated for the first time that morning. “After staying in hotels and rooming with others for so long, it’s great to have my own space.”

“It would be.” She nodded. “People think the travel for competitions is glamorous, but staying in crowded dorms and long bus rides with all that gear isn’t always easy.”

“I had some of that growing up.” He flicked a look at her. “It’s easier now, of course.”

Oh. Right. Of course. Mr. Millionaire, who flew with his team on private planes, stayed in five-star hotels, and had bought his first house at the ripe old age of twenty-five. Holly glanced out the window and sighed inwardly. She’d always had to trust God with finances. There wasn’t much money to be made in short track, or much financial support, especially in Australia. Most skaters had to have a full-time job to help supplement the basic scholarship from the Australian Institute of Sport. She’d always had to work hard, save harder, and budget well to make ends meet.

Enough of the pity party. “So, how will you cope with being on your own? Will you get lonely?” Her cheeks heated. For goodness’ sake—she sounded like a desperate groupie! “I mean, when you live by yourself, that’ll be different...” She glanced over, noticing a twitch in his jaw as he pulled sharply into the gym parking lot and quit the engine.

He reached into the back to collect his gym bag. “I haven’t thought about it much, to be honest.”

So much for chit chat. She grabbed her gear. “Uh, thanks for doing this.”

“No problem.” He led the way in, holding the gym’s front door open for her.

Maybe he was nice, and she’d misread the ego. “Um, sorry about yesterday.”

He turned to study her steadily for a beat before shrugging. “Sorry for liking short blond guys?” A grin flickered. “Don’t be. No skin off my nose.”

She took a deep breath and lifted her chin. Ignore him. Act like a grown up. Usually she was pretty good at the ice maiden persona. Not for nothing did she train on ice.

He signed them in, and she followed silently as he gave a quick tour of the bright, spacious facility with its gleaming equipment. She swallowed a chuckle at the blatant ogling he got from some women working out. If only they knew. She stowed her bag in the locker, grabbed her towel, phone, earbuds, and water bottle, and headed back to the cardio room.

Brent was there, already warming up on an exercise bike. He glanced over. “So, should we be on the lookout?”

She moved to the treadmill, pulling her ponytail tight. “What for?”

He mimed short and plump before smirking.

Holly nodded toward the big-haired, big-busted woman in the far corner. Seriously, who wore that much makeup to exercise? She kept her voice low. “Funny. I thought you’d prefer a Barbie clone.”

He looked over. The woman smiled a *hi there*. Brent nodded before turning back to Holly with a scowl. “Yeah, you sure got me pegged.”

She gave him a tight smile and jammed in her earbuds, flicking her phone to her favorite workout playlist. Honestly, what was wrong with her? She wasn’t normally so snarky. Maybe working up a sweat would help her heart and brain function normally. This was ridiculous.

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Brent stood at the front of his family’s church, watching as Mike rocked gently on his toes, his eyes on the big double doors at the other end of the aisle. “How’re you doing?”

“I can’t wait to see her.” Mike grinned. “This’ll be you too one day, my friend.”

Brent rolled his eyes. Not for a very long time. Miss Right had to appear first.

He caught the smiles of his older brother Dean and his sister-in-law Laura, balancing their six-month-old son on her lap, then nodded to Jai Mullins, Beau Nash, and Dan Walton, fellow hockey Bible study friends, here for Mike’s wedding.

Mike leaned closer. “So, is it me or are there a lot of women here checking you out?”

Brent glanced across the congregation. He couldn’t help but notice that more than one lady sat up straighter, smiling wider. He grimaced. “It’s pretty uncool if women are here checking *you* out on your wedding day.”

“Everyone knows I’ve always been a one-woman man.” Mike eyed him. “But you...”

How long would it take for him to live down the ladies’ man reputation? Sure, he’d partied hard a few years ago, but since he’d started attending Pastor Josiah Abrahams’ online Bible study group, he’d straightened out. He hadn’t dated anyone for months, despite his teammates’ offers of setups—and the loneliness that made some of those offers so tempting.

Brent stared down at his shiny black shoes. Maybe his mom and sister were right and he should make more of an effort to find someone with similar goals, who liked him for himself and wasn’t obsessed with celebrity or the other superficial trappings of his sport. His mouth twisted. Like that’d be easy. How could you ever know?

The music in the background shifted, and the congregation turned to watch the first bridesmaid walk down the aisle. Brent’s gaze lifted just in time to see Holly begin her approach.

His eyes widened. With her pretty hair down for once and that pale green strapless gown accentuating her slender figure, she was...beautiful.

Mike snickered quietly. "Pick up your jaw, dude. You're embarrassing yourself."

Brent closed his mouth with a snap. He noticed some of Mike's teammates kept on staring as Holly moved gracefully down the aisle. His gut tightened. He'd made too many dumb comments this week. Holly's work ethic, loyalty, and sassy tease had intrigued him. She was nothing like the short, skinny, shy girl he vaguely remembered from seven years ago. Especially in that dress.

Her sunny gaze shifted to him. Brent smiled at her, catching the surprise in her green eyes before her lips thinned and she glanced away.

His lips hitched. Yeah, he definitely had bridges to mend.

"I know it's hot, but we need just one more of the groomsmen with their lovely ladies!"

Brent groaned at the photographer. Photos with Bree and Mike, photos with the bridal party, photos with various family members—on and on it went. His cheeks ached from smiling.

"Holly, move closer to Brent, please."

Holly sighed. Brent grinned, wrapping an arm around her waist. The photographer beamed. "That's it, Brent. Holly, let's see that lovely smile again!"

"I'm not six years old," she muttered through upturned lips.

That dress was definitely unsuitable for a six-year-old. "Relax, Holly, you look beautiful."

She arched her eyebrows, staring warily at him. Brent held her gaze. Her eyes were such a pretty green, like the sea, with violet rims and tiny golden flecks around the pupils—

"Brent! Holly! Pay attention!"

Brent ignored Mike's chuckle as he turned back to the photographer, trying not to squint as the afternoon sun beat down. The reception venue's rose gardens were super pretty, but his neck was getting sticky from Toronto's muggy heat. The photographer pronounced himself satisfied, and they were finally freed to go.

As they waited to be introduced to the cheering guests inside the function room, Holly looked up at him again. "Is my hair still okay? Hot weather makes it go frizzy."

He stepped closer and smoothed a few recalcitrant strands. "Relax. You look great." He leaned down, taking a delicate sniff. "What's your perfume?"



“It’s Beautiful.”

“Yeah, I know that. But what’s it called?”

“My perfume?” Her voice was squeaky. “It’s called Beautiful. It’s by Estée Lauder.”

“Oh, right.” He glanced at her before focusing again on the door. “Suits you.”

He caught the disbelieving side-eye as she raised her bouquet higher to match the angle of her chin.

“Ladies and gentlemen, let’s hear it for our best man, Brent Karlsson, and the lovely maid of honor, Holly Travers.” They stepped into the limelight and stopped for yet another photo before he escorted her to the bridal table and they turned to applaud the newlyweds’ entrance.

The next two hours passed in a whirl of food and laughter as Brent chatted with numerous relatives and friends. He was listening to his grandmother when he glanced across the room to see Holly sitting at the main table, shaking her head at one of Mike’s Calgary teammates. He frowned.

“Brent?” His grandma’s faded-blue eyes peered anxiously at him. “Is something wrong?”

He quickly kissed her cheek. “Sorry, Gran, I need to go check something.”

Ignoring the nearby group of smiling women, he strode over to Holly. Tyler Woletsky was too bold, on the ice and off. Brent sat down next to Holly and stretched his arm along the back of her chair. “Woletsky! Didn’t see you there.” Brent turned to smile down at Holly. “How’s it going?”

Her eyebrows lifted. “Fine.” She looked back to TJ, who still leaned against the table. “Thanks, Tyler, but I want to finish my cake.” She smiled. “Besides, I’m not used to high heels.”

Woletsky glanced between them, his blue eyes suspicious. “If you change your mind…”

“Thank you.” The smile she offered was sweet as Woletsky lumbered off, then drained away as she faced Brent. “What was that about?”

Brent shrugged. “Woletsky doesn’t always play nicely, especially with pretty girls.”

Her eyes narrowed. She stabbed at her piece of cake. “And you think I can’t take care of myself?”

He held up his hands. “Hey, I’ve seen you in the gym. I know you’re tough.” And super fit. The weights she could lift? “But, Holl, you need to be careful when you smile.”

“What?” She twisted in her seat to study him. “What’s wrong with my smile?”

“Nothing. Just that guys could get the wrong idea.”

She blinked. “Are you serious? You sound like a caveman, blaming a woman for how a man acts, as if he can’t be held responsible.”

Huh? “I didn’t mean it like that. I only meant to compliment you,” he mumbled.

She stared at him for a long moment before shaking her head and looking away.

He followed her gaze back to the dance floor. “Want to dance again?”

“Once was enough. I hate dancing.” Her smile held an abundance of sugar. “But don’t let me stop you.”

Dancing with random women sure wouldn’t help him live down the reputation. Talking with Holly was far safer. “You’re not that bad, for someone with two left feet.”

“Two left feet? Hey, if you hadn’t insisted on doing all that fancy twirly stuff, I might’ve been okay.”

“Yeah, well, maybe I’m just a fancy kind of guy.”

Her lips finally tilted up, and he felt like doing a fist pump to celebrate but settled for undoing his bow tie and slouching back in his seat. “So, are you having fun?”

“Yes. But I can’t get over how big your family is.” Her amusement faded as she picked off some icing with her fork. “Mine’s so small now.” She looked down at her plate, the white chocolate mud cake now thoroughly ruined. “I don’t see them often enough.”

“When do you go home?”

“I fly back to Brisbane tomorrow, but I won’t get home to Wollongong until Christmas.” Her face fell, and she started fiddling with the pretty paper rose place card she’d made, her slender fingers tracing the ruffled edges back and forth, back and forth.

Brent gazed across the chandelier-lit room, crowded with family members. It was amazing he’d been allowed to talk this long uninterrupted. “Big families aren’t necessarily all they’re cracked up to be.”

Like his Uncle Ken, who sat in the corner, watching the girls dance. Bree had always found him slightly creepy. And there were those cousins who only ever called him when they wanted tickets to games, then got upset when Brent wouldn’t work his connections to get them freebies. And as soon as he finished this conversation, he knew his grandmothers and aunts would buttonhole him to ask about that nice girl and wonder aloud when he’d get married.

He grimaced. “Hey, want to go outside?”

Holly cast another look at the crowded dance floor, raising her voice over the thumping disco music the DJ had begun to play. “But what about Bree and Mike?”

“I don’t think they’re going to miss us too much, do you? You know Bree. She never misses an opportunity to talk. And look, she’s making Mike talk to every relative. They’ll be here for hours.”

“Poor Mike.”

“And hey, if you disappear, Woletsky can’t hassle you to dance again.”

“Good point.” Holly pushed back her chair. “Let’s get out of here.”

Brent found a side door that led to the reception venue’s terrace, holding it open for Holly, then closing it firmly against the DJ’s throbbing music. Her heels clicked on the tiles until they stopped at the far end near a marble fountain, lit up in the night by several spotlights. The stillness was broken only by the gentle song of insects and splash of water. The scent of roses filled the cooling air. Brent sucked in a deep breath, releasing it slowly. He looked over to see Holly standing still, her eyes closed.

“Are you tired? Want to go home?” Something about her today made him feel...protective. He swallowed. Like he would for his sister. That was all.

“No.” She opened her eyes. “I’m just enjoying the peace and quiet. It’s been a big week.”

“And a big day.” He leaned over the handrail, watching the water swirl around the base of the fountain. “But they seem happy, so all the hard work has been worth it.” He glanced up to see Holly biting her bottom lip even as she nodded.

“I’m so glad. Bree’s been like a sister to me.” Holly blinked. “I’m going to miss that.”

“You heard Dad before in his speech. Apparently, it’s not about losing someone but gaining another.” Brent shrugged. “But yeah, it won’t be the same.”

He frowned. It wouldn’t be the same. Why hadn’t he realized? Who would he call in the middle of the night to offload the stress for the day? Mike had been his closest friend for years. He totally understood the pressures that went with playing in the NHL. Brent knew his sister loved him, but he’d bet Bree wouldn’t appreciate too many late night interruptions. Was this why his mom had ramped up the *find a wife* mantra? He sighed.

“Don’t get me wrong, I am really happy for them,” Holly’s quiet voice continued. “They’re perfect for each other.” She peered up at Brent again. “But it’s nice to know someone else understands.” She smiled.

Her smile... Whoa. He blinked. Dragged his gaze away. Weddings were notorious for making people act weird. "I think people should be best friends with the person they marry."

"I agree," she said.

So they agreed on a couple of things at least. He turned away to watch the water again. "So, do you want to get married?"

Man, he must be super tired. Had that seriously just come out of his mouth?

"Is that an offer?" She laughed. "You're lucky I never believe anything you say."

His stomach twisted. "Why not?"

Holly's gurgling chuckle came again. "Come on. You flatter and flirt all night and expect a girl to believe you?" She patted his arm. "It's okay. I know you can't help it."

Ouch. "When was I flirting?"

Her cheeks reddened as she looked away, pushing her hair behind her ear. "I've seen how you act with girls."

"Hey, I'm a friendly guy. Besides, I do think you're pretty."

She rolled her eyes and shifted away.

So much for building bridges. He gazed at a tree lit up in the garden, trying to ignore the knot in his stomach. Tonight's rich dessert had been a bad idea.

Awkwardness stretched between them. What to say, what to say...

"So, you want to compete at Vancouver, eh?"

She straightened, energy vibrating from her. "Have you ever had a dream you feel you're on the cusp of living?"

He nodded. "I could barely sleep the night before my first game in the NHL."

"Then you understand what it's like to devote your life to something, to wanting to be the best, feeling like it's in your DNA, like it's who you are, what you were born to do."

He nodded again, her passion oddly inspiring. He'd taken a lot for granted these past few years, but the recent Cup success had only cemented his drive to win. There'd be selections for Canada's hockey team next year. The thought drifted, stilled, anchored. Maybe he should focus a little more too.

"So, even if I met Mr. Right tonight, I can't think about a relationship right now. Not for another two years, anyway."

So, the romance of today definitely hadn't gone to her head. Still, her steely-eyed focus curled fascination within. She sure wasn't like any other girl he'd met.

"How about you, Brent? Is marriage on your to-do list?"

"One day. I want to focus more on my hockey right now. But down the line, it'd be good. It just needs to be the right time...and the right girl."

He glanced over at her again. She was rubbing her bare arms, the right sporting a silvery-pink scar.

"Are you cold? Here, have this." He removed his jacket and wrapped it round her.

"Thanks." She glanced up at him again before gazing across the moonlit gardens. He studied her profile: the classic nose, determined chin, her long-lashed, beautiful eyes that the evening shadows only seemed to enhance. He swallowed. Her skin looked so soft. He reached out a hand—

"Oh, there you two are!"

He swallowed a groan as Holly turned.

"Are you okay, Bree? Do you need anything?"

Bree shook her head. "Mom just wanted your help with something inside."

"No worries." Holly shrugged out of his jacket and handed it to him with distracted thanks, then quickly strode back to the reception room without a backward glance.

He watched Holly disappear before turning to his smirking twin. "Breanna?"

"Anything I need to know about, brother dear?" Bree raised her eyebrows. "Anything at all?"

"Nope." He shook his head, hoping to shake off the strange mix of emotions he felt.

"I can give you Holly's email if you like." Her expression held hope.

His stomach lurched. He ignored it. "Nope. I'm fine."

Holly might be nice and all, but she lived on the other side of the world and had made her opinion about him and relationships very clear. So what was the point? How on earth could that ever work?

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