

THE RIVAL NEXT DOOR

GINNY STERLING

The crowd loved him – and honestly?

Drake loved them back.

It felt like on the field, specifically on the base waiting for the ball to cross the plate, was the one place where he could truly be himself or be free of all the pressures, the commitments, the grind that sometimes pressed upon him. The fans devoured his antics, the playful way he was lobbing the erratic dances, the lip-syncing, the outrageous things that he did – like earlier today. He’d been doing an interview, and when his part was finished, the table was cleared, and the coach walked in... something clicked in his brain.

Maybe he shouldn’t have done it.

Perhaps he should have his head examined...

But whatever was wrong with his brain, the media loved him – even if the coach didn’t. Yeah, putting one knee in the air, both hands behind his head, and grinding against Coach Martinez’s chair behind him like he was dancing probably wasn’t the smartest idea in the book. He could end up benched, traded, or fired – but as long as he

1

DRAKE

GINNY STERLING

filled stadiums, Drake knew he was getting away with murder... in a fashion.

Coach slowly turned to him, Drake paused, made a face like ‘What just happened’ – and took off, scampering like a scene out of Scooby Doo, making the crowd laugh in delight as the cameras exploded in a series of clicks, whirls, and he heard his name being called once more. So long as they called his name, he was safe... in theory.

Did he learn his lesson?

Heck-to-the-nawww...

It was the eighth inning, and Drake already been chased by the umpire, bunted his way onto first base with a flair that was comical, and slid into home, scoring a run. All in all, it should have been a good game, heck – a great game – yet he felt empty inside. He knew what was coming next, and there was no excitement anymore. Life was... monotonous.

Slap the other team’s hand after the game, shout encouraging things, do a little playful something for the camera filming so he made it on television – good, bad, or otherwise – and it kept him fresh in the fans’ minds. It sold jerseys, baseballs, hats, heck – he even had his name and number on one of those plastic baseball cap cereal bowls. He knew because he used them for ice cream bowls at home and mailed one to each of his brothers. Pete was living in Alabama, flying for the Air Force and married to the cutest little ‘hobgoblin’ to ever grace the planet... and his brother, Tommy, was living in Detroit as a ‘Kept-Man’. Gosh, it irked Tommy when Drake called him that, but what else did you call it when the guy stayed home taking care of the kids while the wife was the breadwinner?

A mife? A man-wife?

2

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, **thank you** to my friends and family as I dive back into *Flyboys* once more. I always knew Drake’s book was coming—and thank you for understanding why his story needed to wait just a little longer. You cheer when my characters finally cooperate and give in, and you lovingly tolerate my brain hopping from small town to hockey to who-knows-what as inspiration strikes. We’ll have fun, I promise. I adore you all to the moon and back.

To my husband—thank you for always having my back, even when impostor syndrome comes knocking a little too loudly. You believe in me, cheer me on, and somehow tolerate all of my book boyfriends. Thank you for never questioning my emotional breakdowns over fictional people and for listening patiently while I talk myself out of corners I’ve backed myself into.

To my phenomenal Patreon family—your support truly means everything. I’m beyond lucky to have you along for this adventure. You’re the cheerleaders I need on the days I’m having *a moment*, and I’m so grateful you’re always there.

And finally—to you, dear reader. I hope this book made you laugh out loud, swoon shamelessly, and maybe shake your fist once or twice. If you’re craving more romance, more banter, and another round of

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, **thank you** to my friends and family as I dive back into *Flyboys* once more. I always knew Drake’s book was coming—and thank you for understanding why his story needed to wait just a little longer. You cheer when my characters finally cooperate and give in, and you lovingly tolerate my brain hopping from small town to hockey to who-knows-what as inspiration strikes. We’ll have fun, I promise. I adore you all to the moon and back.

To my husband—thank you for always having my back, even when impostor syndrome comes knocking a little too loudly. You believe in me, cheer me on, and somehow tolerate all of my book boyfriends. Thank you for never questioning my emotional breakdowns over fictional people and for listening patiently while I talk myself out of corners I’ve backed myself into.

To my phenomenal Patreon family—your support truly means everything. I’m beyond lucky to have you along for this adventure. You’re the cheerleaders I need on the days I’m having *a moment*, and I’m so grateful you’re always there.

And finally—to you, dear reader. I hope this book made you laugh out loud, swoon shamelessly, and maybe shake your fist once or twice. If you’re craving more romance, more banter, and another round of

1