

POWER PLAY

TWO BOOKS IN ONE!

W.C. Mack

Cover by

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Chapter Six

The last couple of days of the school week felt like two whole centuries.

Sure, we played floor hockey in gym, which was awesome, and yes, my oral report for English class went so well Mrs. Foster had tears in her eyes (or maybe an eyelash was stuck in there), but everything else was a drag.

We were still stuck on a Geography segment in Socials, and Math was seriously starting to hurt my brain.

“I think you’re making this stuff seem harder than it is,” Bosko said, as we sat down for our Friday afternoon tutoring session at my house.

He grabbed one of Mum’s brownies from the heaping plate she’d left for us and took a big bite.

She didn’t usually let me have more than a couple of treats, but when Bosko came over, she was all about the snacks.

I loved it.

“Why would I do that?” I asked, licking the warm icing off of mine.

Bosko stared at me. “That’s what I’m asking you.”

“Look, it *is* hard. All I want to do is pass. You already know that.”

He shook his head as he chewed. “You should want to do more than just pass. You know you can do better.”

“Not with statistics in the mix,” I sighed.

“Okay, that’s what I’m talking about,” he said, through a mouthful of brownie. “You’re psyching yourself out.”

I picked up another brownie and ate it in three bites.

Bosko ate his in two.

I grabbed another one and shoved it into my mouth whole.

Only one bite! Take that!

Unfortunately, I practically choked on the brownie and was in the middle of a huge gulp of milk just as Wendy walked into the room.

Great.

Bosko stopped chewing and his mouth hung open, like he needed air.

Like a flounder.

“What are you doing here?” I asked.

Ever since Bosko fell in love with her and all that junk, we’d been scheduling our tutoring sessions at the library on the days she was home. That way, he wouldn’t get distracted.

And I wouldn’t puke.

“I live here, twerp,” Wendy said, reaching for one of the brownies.

Bosko practically fell out of his chair trying to hand her a napkin.

This was the gorilla who slammed kids into the boards and took no prisoners?

I just shook my head.

Why couldn’t he fall in love with Carrie Tanaka instead?

Or better yet, why couldn't he see that girls were a waste of time, like the rest of us?

"How are things going with Shane?" Bosko asked, trying to act like he didn't care that she was dating his brother.

"Good."

He closed his eyes for a second like he was in pain.

It was my turn to shake my head.

"I'm coming over to your place tonight," Wendy said. "We're watching a movie."

Bosko swallowed hard. "At my house?"

You'd think he'd just won a million dollars, not a night with a snotty teenager.

"Yeah. Shane asked me to give you a ride home when I go."

"You and me?" Bosko asked.

I thought the guy's heart might burst through his chest if he got any more excited.

"Yeah. Will you be ready to go in an hour?"

"We could go now, if you want to," Bosko said.

"Thanks," I told him. "I'm pretty sure we haven't even started our session yet."

Bosko glanced at me. "Right. Yeah, an hour would be cool."

Wendy grabbed one more brownie and walked up the stairs.

Bosko watched her every step of the way.

Enough, already.

"I know we've kind of been through this before, but you're wasting your time, Eddie."

"Maybe," he sighed. "Maybe not."

"Okay, since we're doing statistics, I'm going to tell you

that a twelve-year-old guy has no chance with a sixteen-year-old girl. Especially that one.”

“You never know,” he said, reaching for another brownie.

“What about Carrie Tanaka? She likes you.”

He chewed slowly while he thought about it. “Yeah, and she’s cute and everything, you know?”

Actually, I didn’t know. None of them were “cute.”

“Uh-huh,” I lied.

“But it’s just not the same.”

I rolled my eyes. “Okay, so what *is* the same, is that Math is still killing me. Can we maybe get back to that, since the clock is ticking?”

I never thought I’d be begging Eddie Bosko to talk Math, but I couldn’t take the stinkin’ girl talk anymore.

We got down to business, and just like he always did, Bosko started to make sense of everything Mr. Holloway was talking about. Not perfect sense, but sense.

It was no surprise, considering my hulking hockey teammate was a bona fide Math champion. His “Meeting of the Math Minds” team had actually won at Nationals.

“Are you getting this?” he asked me, when our time was almost up.

“Yeah.”

He gave me one of his classic stare-downs. “Don’t just say yeah if you aren’t.”

“I’m not. I’m getting it.”

“Cool,” he said, patting his hair into place and glancing at the stairs.

Oh, brother.

Just then, Dad came in the front door, with his briefcase and a stack of magazines.

“Hey guys,” he said, leaving the briefcase on the floor and carrying the magazines over to us. “Check these out.”

When he put the stack on the table, I saw that they weren’t magazines at all. They were catalogues, packed with hockey training equipment.

“Sweet,” Eddie said, flipping through the top one.

“There’s some great gear out there for speed and strength training.”

And maybe it should stay “out there.”

I wanted to remind him that there was also something called a puck, which the Cougars liked to use every once in a while.

I cleared my throat. “Sure, Dad. But the thing is, a lot of the guys are starting to complain about not playing at practice.”

“I think it’s cool,” Bosko said, still checking out the catalogue. “The plyometrics and all that.”

“I think so too,” Dad said, glancing at me. “They’re very beneficial.”

“I’m sure they are, but—” I tried to tell him, just as Wendy came downstairs.

“Ready?” she asked.

Bosko whipped around to check her out and almost knocked over his milk glass.

Geez, Louise.

“Sure!” he said, leaving me and Dad in the dust while he scrambled to get all of his books into his bag. “See you at the game,” he called over his shoulder as he headed out the front door.

Wendy shrugged as she walked by us, but she was actually smiling, for once. I’d told her Bosko liked her, and I

could tell she kind of enjoyed watching him drool over her.
She was twisted like that.

When Dad and I were alone, he sat down on the couch and invited me to join him.

“Big game tonight,” he said. “Kenny coming over?”

“Yup. Ducette’s been even more awesome than usual lately. The Bruins are toast,” I said, with no doubt in my mind.

The Canucks were rocking and with my hero playing better than ever, the game would be in the bag.

I didn’t have to wear all the gear, like Kenny did, because my Canucks didn’t need luck. They were too good for that.

“So,” Dad said, frowning a little. “The Cougars aren’t too keen on the training, eh?”

I didn’t know what to say, because I didn’t want to hurt his feelings. At the same time, I wanted him to switch back to doing things the way Coach O’Neal did. The way we all did.

“I don’t know,” I shrugged. “It’s just different, I guess.”

“Different doesn’t have to be bad, Nugget.”

“I know.”

“And they haven’t tried for long enough to see what a difference the drills will make. I think it’s a good idea to shake things up.”

Couldn’t he see that the only thing he’d really shaken up was me?

“Uh-huh,” I sighed. Obviously, he was sticking with his plan, no matter what I said.

“Having a meeting?” Mum asked, coming in from the kitchen and flopping onto the recliner next to us.

“Just talking about the team’s reaction to plyometrics,” Dad said.

“Good?” Mum asked.

I shook my head slightly.

“Well,” she continued, “Your dad knows what he’s doing, Nugget.”

“I know, it’s just—”

“They’ll get used to it,” she said, like that was the end of it. “What do you guys think about chicken enchiladas for dinner?”

I looked at Dad and we both smiled.

It was that easy for me to ignore the fact that everything was starting to go haywire.

All it took to distract me was shredded chicken and perfectly melted cheese.

* * *

When Kenny came over that night, he brought a huge bag of Cheezies because he knew the ripple chips were a total fluke last time. If the package didn’t say “whole grain” or “no preservatives” it rarely made it into Mum’s grocery cart.

I could tell that even Dad was excited when he saw the bag.

“Kenny!” he said. “Good to see you. Let me grab a bowl for those.”

“Uh, sure,” Kenny said, as Dad took off with the Cheezies. When he was gone, Kenny asked, “So, have you talked to him about practice?”

“Kind of,” I shrugged.

“That doesn’t sound good,” he said, settling at one end of the couch.

“Not tonight, okay?” I asked, ready to drop it.

“But—”

“Kenny,” I warned, and he took the hint.

A couple of practices were bad enough. I hated to think what would happen when the guys found out Coach O'Neal was having surgery.

I didn't even want to think about it.

By the time Dad got back with a full bowl, the game was about to start and his fingertips were already bright orange from whatever made Cheezies taste so good.

"Game on!" Kenny shouted as the NHL logo flashed onscreen.

The Canucks looked ready to rule the rink, and I almost felt sorry for those stinkin' Bruins.

Almost.

My favourite announcer, Dave Hodgkins, was calling the game, and even though I knew he was supposed to be unbiased, I also knew he loved the Canucks.

He and I were on the exact same page, especially when he started talking about Jean Ducette's phenomenal season.

The truth was, I was ready for a phenomenal season of my own, but it sure wasn't turning out that way.

Not wanting to think about it, I concentrated on the game.

When the puck was dropped, I watched Sean Masters scoop it up and pass it straight to my hero.

I couldn't help smiling as I stuffed my face with Cheezies and Ducette deked out three of the Bruins, heading straight for the net.

When he took the shot, it was beautiful.

"Yes!" I shouted, jumping off the couch. "Ducette is the man!"

"Cool your jets, Nugget," Dad said, laughing. "He's just getting started."

And Dad was right.

The guy was on fire!

It wasn't until the first period ended that I had a great idea. If the Cougars won, no one could complain about Dad's training methods. All I had to do was lead the team to victory, just like Ducette.

And I could do that.