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do it how you want it done

by [zarathuse](#)

Summary

(very vaguely) grease-inspired high school au.

yeah, i went there.

Notes

when i call this grease-inspired, i only mean that i've totally ripped off the gloriously cheesy "summer love" plot device. this is not set in the 1950s, nor do i hold *any truck at all* with grease's bullshit true-love-means-changing-everything-about-yourself! moral.

grand forks

North Dakota, Patrick decides, is boring as shit.

That's probably not fair of him to say—so far all he's seen of the state is the arrivals lounge at the Grand Forks airport. It's a boring arrivals lounge, though. Actually, the airport's so small Patrick's not even sure it qualifies as a lounge. It's just, like, a row of benches and a newsstand. Patrick's been sitting on one of those benches for the last 45 minutes, staring at that newsstand and waiting for the 4:00 shuttle from the camp.

When the shuttle finally arrives, it's just Patrick and one other guy who get on, some blond kid who doesn't look up from his phone even when Patrick tries to make half-hearted conversation. He hopes the rest of the guys at the camp are friendlier, because otherwise this is gonna be a long two weeks.

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By the time Patrick makes it through registration and gets his ID card and everything, it's almost 5:00. One of the guys standing behind the registration table in a bright green FIGHTING SIOUX SUMMER HOCKEY SCHOOL t-shirt takes him to the dorm where all the campers will be staying and shows him how to swipe in using his card. His room is basically a shoebox, but it has wi-fi and there's a common room with a giant tv right down the hall, so Patrick can't really complain.

His roommate's already arrived, apparently, and claimed the bed closest to the window. Like, *really* claimed it. He's already put his sheets on the mattress and his duffle bag and jacket on the desk along the wall. Then he's actually *taped a note* to the wooden bedpost at the foot of the bed explaining that he's chosen this bed so would his roommate please use the other one thanks -JT, like "JT" or whoever thinks Patrick's enough of an asshole to try to steal it from him.

Jesus, is this guy for real? What a douche.

Patrick drops his own bag on the floor by the unclaimed bed, though he's seriously tempted to take the other one just to fuck with his roommate. He probably would have if the counselor—he'd introduced himself, probably, but fuck if Patrick can remember his name—weren't still lurking in the doorway.

"It's almost time for your welcome dinner," the guy says, ushering Patrick out of the room and back down the hall. "Most people got here earlier, so they've been free-skating over at the arena all afternoon. I'm supposed to go help round them up and get them headed to dinner, so you can just come with me. That way I know you won't get lost, and you can see where you'll be playing for the next few weeks."

"Thanks," Patrick says.

The walls of the dorm are still dotted with random flyers for parties and bake sales and Spanish tutoring. It's only been a couple of weeks since graduation—according to the brochure, they hold the camp early in the summer so the university's own hockey team will have enough time to practice closer to the start of the season.

The arena's not as far away as Patrick figured it would be, and it only takes them about five minutes to get there, counselor guy pointing out campus landmarks along the way.

There are at least 40 different guys on the ice when they get inside, just kind of fucking around, getting a feel for the rink and each other. A few of them are clustered around the far goal, taking turns showing off their best shots. Patrick, watching from behind the glass, is unimpressed: It's a pretty solidly mediocre showing. None of these players will ever make it past college hockey. Most of them probably won't even make it that far.

And that's not just Patrick being a dick or whatever. Everyone out there's in high school, probably 16 or 17, and even though it bills itself as a serious hockey school, the program's basically just a glorified summer camp. By this age, anyone really *good* would be training with a team or a private coach, or at one of those fancy summer clinics. Not here.

Patrick's better than anyone on the ice, probably by kind of a ridiculous margin. It's gonna be awkward playing these guys, and he starts wondering if maybe he shouldn't have come. He's only here because one of his cousins works at UND and told his mom about it, and his mom thinks it'll be "good for him." She's been worried about him enough lately that he'd felt more or less obligated to go, but now he regrets giving in so easily. Maybe if Patrick, like, fakes sick he can get himself sent home?

The shots on the far goal are getting more and more ridiculous, guys throwing in spins and dekes even though the net is empty and most of them just wind up tripping themselves up and missing. The ones who do score throw their arms up and jump around like they've just won the Cup. It's good they're having fun, Patrick guesses, but it makes the whole thing seem really—well, summer camp. There's a guy standing by himself just a few feet away from Patrick, on the other side of the glass, who seems to agree. He's kind of leaning on his stick, watching the kids at the other end of the rink. Patrick can't really see his face through his helmet, but his body language looks . . . pained, somehow, if that's even possible. Like it hurts him to watch these guys fuck around like that.

Suddenly, the guy takes off, skating breakneck across the ice. He steals the puck from a kid who's trying to shoot it from underneath one leg and takes it to the net, expertly dodging the three startled players who don't get out of the way in time and popping off a neat, no frills wrist shot.

It's *amazing*. And also pretty much the ballsiest and/or douchiest thing Patrick's ever seen. Everyone's just sort of staring in shock, including all the counselors and coaches. Oh man. The kid who got robbed is just standing there, stick dangling limply from one hand, and Patrick has to bite his cheek to keep from laughing.

Maybe this won't be so bad after all.

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The welcome dinner is long and boring and involves entirely too many speeches, but at least the food is pretty good and the dudes at Patrick's table all seem cool. They spend a lot of time talking about what happened at the arena, and Patrick learns that the shooter was some guy named Jonny who is apparently a) from Canada and b) a giant standoffish jerk. That's all anybody can tell him. They can, however, point Jonny out—he's two tables over, looking bored or possibly annoyed and picking at his chicken. That's how Patrick learns that Jonny is also c) really fucking hot, in a weird, angry kind of way.

Patrick keeps stealing glances throughout the dinner, because what the fuck else is he supposed to do during *yet another* speech, seriously, and Jonny catches him at it over dessert. Patrick automatically gives his best, most innocent smile. Jonny scowls at him. Yikes. Apparently no one ever explained the concept of *recreational summer camp* to this guy. Or *friendship*.

After dinner, they're divided up into three groups of 14—their "sections"—and taken back to the

dorm. Each section has its own counselor. Patrick's is a UND senior named Jordan who doesn't play hockey but follows it religiously. Jordan keeps Patrick's section in the common room for about half an hour, going over the camp rules and handing out schedules for the next week. It's almost 9:00 by the time he's through, and he tells them they have an hour before "quiet time" to get to know their roommates and settle in.

Three guesses who Patrick's roommate turns out to be.

No, seriously. Guess.

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"So," Patrick says awkwardly as he struggles to get the fitted sheet to stretch over the last corner of the mattress. "I didn't take your bed."

Jonny doesn't look up from where he's sprawled across his own, neatly made bed, reading a magazine in French. *French*.

"Thanks."

"Um," he racks his brain for something else to say. "Are you from Quebec?" He's careful to pronounce it "kuh-beck," because his sister takes French and that's the way she always says it.

"Winnipeg."

"Ah, ok." For the first and almost certainly last time in his life, Patrick wishes he knew more about Canadian geography. "And that's. . .not in Quebec?"

Jonny does look up at that, the better to glare at Patrick with his giant, dark eyes.

"It's in *Manitoba*."

"Ha, right, of course," Patrick says weakly, and spends the rest of the night on AIM with his friends from back home who can actually carry on conversations like non-insane people. *you can have my car if i die*, he types to Seabs. *i think my roommate might murder me in the night*.

Seabs types back, *ur cars a piece of shit. sweet dreams tho!*

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Patrick wakes up at 7:30 the next morning, which gives him plenty of time to wash his face and head down to breakfast before he's supposed to be at the arena at 8:00. Jonny's already gone, bed neatly made and everything, and Patrick rolls his eyes while he's getting dressed even though no one's there to see it.

They start the day out with a bunch of stretches and an easy jog around the campus. Patrick falls in with a couple of guys from his section, who keep giving him sympathetic looks and pressing him for details about Jonny.

Patrick tells them honestly that he doesn't know anything about the guy. He doesn't mention the note on the bed thing. If he knew them better he probably would (he already bitched about it to all his Buffalo friends last night), but he's not gonna break, like, roommate code for a bunch of strangers, no matter how big a dick Jonny is.

The other guys lose interest when Patrick doesn't have any dirt to share and start talking about how there's supposedly a women's basketball camp somewhere on campus. Patrick pretends to

listen, making appropriate “yeah, sweet” noises every now and then, but mostly he just watches Jonny, running up at the head of the pack, off to the side and by himself. It’s not that Patrick’s, like, obsessed with him or anything. He just doesn’t get it. Jonny clearly doesn’t belong here, even more than Patrick himself. Patrick wants to figure him out.

The rest of the morning is kind of hilarious, because even though they do finally get out on the ice, they spend about two hours doing nothing but drills.

That’s not the hilarious part, though. The hilarious part is watching Jonny. At first, he’s pretty obviously annoyed the camp coaches are wasting his time with this kids’ stuff. Then, when he notices all the other guys are either a) terrible or b) not taking it seriously, he gets really mad and starts yelling at everyone to quit fucking around and step it up. He sets the example by blowing through every drill like he’s competing for a fucking Olympic medal, then skating over just off to the side of the head coach and crossing his arms all smug, presumably so he can watch everyone else and *judge them*.

Much like his goal the day before, it’s both douchetastic and amazing. The best part is the poor head coach (and man, Patrick has really got to start paying attention when people introduce themselves), who doesn’t seem to know quite how to handle it.

Jonny’s all anyone talks about at lunch, to the point where even Patrick, who, ok, is maybe a *little* obsessed with him, is sick of hearing about the dude. Patrick just eats his sandwich and tries to start up a conversation about the rumors they’re gonna make a *Twilight* movie with the guy in the seat next to him. Shockingly, it doesn’t work.

That afternoon they get broken up into two groups of 20 and sent to different ends of the rink to work on shooting. Jonny’s not in Patrick’s group, and Patrick’s not actually enough of a creeper to stand there and watch him the whole time, anyway, but he can tell every time Jonny takes a shot just by all the impressed murmuring from the other goal.

Patrick gets his fair share of that, too, of course. He tries to hold back a little, make himself closer to the general level of skill the rest of the guys are all showing, but he’s not sure it’s working. It’s a pretty long afternoon, honestly.

They finally hit the showers at 5:00, and then dinner’s from 5:30 to 6:15. After that they have free time until 9:00, the curfew for when they have to be back in the dorm, and Patrick goes out to explore the town with a couple of guys. They’re limited to places within walking distance, so they wind up just going to a diner for milkshakes and fries. It’s super 1950s, but the guys are nice enough, so it’s ok. At least it gets him out of the room so he doesn’t have to sit around and watch Jonny, like, glare at the wall or whatever.

When he gets back to the dorm, Jonny’s at his desk, typing something on his laptop. He responds to Patrick’s “hey” with a vague grunt, so Patrick doesn’t even bother trying to talk to him.

Instead, he calls his parents to check in and ends up spending about 30 minutes being passed back and forth between his sisters. Surprisingly, Jonny doesn’t act annoyed or make angry faces, even though Patrick knows he can get pretty loud, especially when he’s talking to Erica. Actually, Jonny’s really decent about it. He even puts on headphones and listens to something on his laptop to give Patrick some privacy.

After he hangs up, Patrick just lies on the bed for a while, exhausted and sore but not really tired. Even if this camp is below his level, he still hasn’t worked out like this for a few months. He’s out of shape, and he’s feeling it.

There’s a *click* from across the room, and Patrick looks over to see that Jonny’s taken out his

headphones and closed his laptop. While Patrick watches, he walks over to his bed and climbs under the covers. He doesn't close his eyes, though. Just stares up at the ceiling, hands crossed loosely over his stomach. Maybe he's in the same situation Patrick is—exhausted but not tired.

“Why are you here?” Patrick asks suddenly, deciding he's curious enough to risk getting his head bitten off.

Jonny turns his head toward Patrick and gives him an unimpressed look. “This is my room.”

“No,” Patrick says, “I mean *here*, at this camp. This place is a fucking joke. You're way too good for this.”

“So are you,” Jonny says shortly, and rolls over so his back is to Patrick.

Huh. Conversation over, apparently.

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The next day is pretty much the same thing: stretches and drills in the morning, followed by smaller group instruction in the afternoon. Toward the end of the day, they spend about an hour doing scrimmages. The “teams” are just the two groups they were broken into the day before, so Patrick and Jonny are on opposite sides. They aren't even on the ice together most of the time—the coaches are just sending players out randomly, making sure everyone has a turn instead of using any kind of real strategy.

Patrick scores two goals pretty much immediately, and after that he feels kind of bad and limits himself to making assists, letting the other guys have a chance.

Jonny, on the other hand, scores four, even though the coach only lets him stay on the ice for a total of about three minutes. Even when he's on the bench, Jonny keeps yelling at the players on his side, calling out orders and even some occasional words of encouragement. He's actually giving really good advice, and when the guys listen to him they play better. Mostly they just ignore him, though, because who the hell does he think he is bossing them around like that?

That night, a bunch of guys Patrick's gotten sort of friendly with go off in search of the girls from the rumored basketball camp. They invite Patrick to come with them, but even if he thought they'd actually find them, he still can't muster up any enthusiasm for the idea. He spends a few hours in the common room instead, watching *South Park* reruns on Comedy Central, then heads back to his room to play around on his laptop for a while. Maybe he'll see if any of his friends are around to videochat on Skype. (Not that he actually wants to look at Sharpy's ugly face or whatever, but at least it would be a change of pace.)

Jonny's on the phone when Patrick walks in, sitting on the bed, propped up against the headboard. Patrick lies down on his own bed, wondering if he should listen to some music or something like Jonny did when Patrick was on the phone. But then Jonny says, “Yeah, you too, Dad,” and switches to French for the rest of the call. His mom or one of his grandparents must be French, Patrick thinks. French Canadian, whatever.

Patrick's never heard Canadian French before. It sounds weird and. . .flat, or something. Or maybe that's just Jonny. Patrick closes his eyes and lets it roll over him. He doesn't feel like he's eavesdropping or anything because it's all in French, and Jonny's low monotone is strangely soothing when Patrick can't understand all the undoubtedly douchey, annoying things he's saying.

So Patrick's already half asleep by the time Jonny gets off the phone. He's trying to muster up the energy to get up long enough to brush his teeth when Jonny says, suddenly, “My mom.”

Patrick blinks, surprised. Jonny's never actually initiated a conversation with him before.

"Yeah," he says. "I figured."

"No, I mean. That's why I'm here. My mom."

"What?" Patrick lifts himself up onto his elbows and looks across the room to the other bed.

"Like, she made you come? Mine did too, basically."

Jonny shakes his head. "She didn't make me do anything. But I—I was gonna go pro. Everybody said I could, and then I got recruited for this boarding school, you've probably heard of it. Shattuck-St. Mary's?"

"Yeah," Patrick nods, impressed, even though Jonny sounds more matter-of-fact than like he was trying to brag. He'd known Jonny was good, but that's a pretty big deal.

"So I went there for a semester," Jonny continues. "And it was great, I guess, but I really missed home. And my mom—she just didn't take it real well."

Jonny pauses, takes a breath like he needs to steel himself for the next bit, and Patrick kind of wonders why he's telling him all this. It doesn't seem like the kind of thing Jonny would talk about with someone he just met. It doesn't seem like the kind of thing Jonny would talk about *period*.

After a few long seconds, Jonny says, "I'd call home a few times a week, and every single time we talked she sounded like she was about to have a breakdown. My brother told me she used to hang up the phone and just start crying. I stuck it out until Christmas, but it never got any easier, and she never got any better. So, you know." He shrugs. "I transferred back this spring."

"That's it?" Patrick asks. "You gave up hockey, just like that? You don't seem like the quitting type." He doesn't mean it to sound, like, accusatory or whatever, but it just doesn't make sense with what Patrick's seen of Jonny so far. It's pretty obvious the guy is *really serious* about hockey.

"You don't know anything about me."

"But I'm right, aren't I?"

Jonny turns away, shifting his gaze to the ceiling.

"It was my *mom*," he says, sounding helpless. "What else was I gonna do?"

Patrick can hear, in his voice, how devastating that decision must have been. How devastating it still is. It's the most emotion he's ever heard from Jonny. (The only emotion, really, unless you count "smug.")

It makes him want to give Jonny something in return.

So he says, "I'm kind of the same story, actually. I was planning on going pro, too. Obviously. Hockey was pretty much my life. And then one night at dinner, one of my sisters tells us she's broken up with her boyfriend. And I thought she was joking, you know, because I hadn't even known she was dating anyone. Turns out they'd been together for *four months*."

Patrick forces a laugh. It's not funny, not at all, not even a year after it happened. He can still remember the look on Erica's face when she'd realized he wasn't just being an insensitive dick, he actually *didn't know* this huge thing about her life.

“That’s pretty pathetic, right? I was so busy, so wrapped up in hockey and my own shit that I didn’t even notice. There are four of us, me and three sisters, and we’ve always been really close. But I realized, like, I was sacrificing that to play. I mean, they’ll be around for a long time, I hope, but it’s never going to be all four of us together like this again. We’re never going to be this close again, after we all move away. And I decided that hockey just wasn’t worth it to me, to miss out on all that.”

Across the room, Jonny’s totally silent, and Patrick wriggles his feet under the covers, suddenly self-conscious. This is the first time he’s really talked about this with anyone other than his family or his coach, which was bad enough. His mouth is dry and his throat feels kind of tight.

Jonny surprises the hell out of him then by throwing off the covers and coming to sit on the edge of Patrick’s bed.

“Hey,” he says, reaching out to grip Patrick’s bicep with a warm, calloused hand. “I get it. I think you did the right thing, for what it’s worth.”

“Thanks,” Patrick says. “It’s just—hard.”

“Yeah.” Jonny pulls his hand back, picking at a loose string on the hem of his sleep shorts. “It is. I’m only here because my parents thought it would be good for me to play again, seriously but without any pressure, ‘just for fun.’”

He makes a face and puts actual air quotes around “just for fun,” and Patrick has to laugh, because yeah, that’s not working out so well.

“Shut up,” Jonny says, but he’s smiling a little. “I’m trying, but it just feels wrong not to push myself, not to go out there and give it everything I’ve got, you know?”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed you’re not great at holding back.”

“I’m sure all the other guys think I’m a jerk or a show-off,” and Patrick nods at that, because they all pretty much do, “but I honestly don’t know how else to play.”

Patrick doesn’t really know what to say to that, and the moment stretches, silent but not awkward. After a few seconds, Jonny gets up and walks back over to his own bed.

“Hey,” Patrick says, watching Jonny crawl back under the covers and fuss with his pillow, “thanks for telling me that. You didn’t have to.”

“You too,” Jonny says. “Um. Thanks.”

He turns off the lamp by his bed, so the only light in the room is coming from the lamp on Patrick’s own bedside table. In the dark, Jonny’s eyes look almost black.

“Night,” Patrick says. It takes him a long time to fall asleep.

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After that, they’re almost—friends, maybe?

They talk to each other a lot and hang out together all the time, at least, but Patrick’s never had a friend like Jonny before. For one thing, they fight. Like. *A lot*. All the time, pretty much.

They fight about:

1. Hockey

“I can’t believe you didn’t pass the puck,” Jonny says.

“I was right there!”

“That kid had a much better angle.”

(Patrick takes a certain amount of comfort in the fact that Jonny hasn’t bothered to learn anyone’s name either. Then again, Jonny’s kind of an asshole, so maybe he’s not the best role model.)

“Yeah, but he’s a *much worse* player. Even at my crappy angle I had a better chance of scoring.”

Jonny thinks about that for a minute. “Ok, point. But in a real game, with an actual team, you should have passed.”

“I can’t believe you’re doubting my skills like this.”

“You missed the shot!”

“Ugh, whatever,” Patrick gives Jonny a shove that’s just slightly too rough to be playful and brushes past him out of the cafeteria.

Somehow, this degenerates into a wrestling match.

2. Canada

“So how’d you end up down here? Hockey’s huge in Canada—weren’t there any camps closer to home?”

“I didn’t want to stay too close to home,” Jonny says. “They know me. They’d. . .expect things from me. Ask if this meant I was getting back into hockey or whatever. And besides,” he adds, “I told you, I’m from Winnipeg,” like that’s supposed to be an explanation.

Patrick stares at him blankly.

“It’s only like 250 kilometers away.”

Patrick stares even blankier.

Jonny rolls his eyes. “About three hours.”

“You coulda just said. You’re in America now, son. We don’t put up with that metric system crap.”

“How many inches are in a foot?”

“Twelve,” Patrick says immediately.

“How many feet in a mile?”

“Um.” Patrick can never remember if it’s 5,200-something or 2,500-something. It’s like he’s got number dyslexia, if that’s even a thing.

Jonny doesn’t give him a chance to figure it out. “How many inches in a mile? How many

yards?” He grins, all *Ha!*, when Patrick can’t answer. “See? Metric system’s way easier.”

“Oh, go fuck a moose,” Patrick says.

Somehow, this degenerates into a wrestling match.

3. Jonny’s weird exercise routine

“Jesus, dude, at least put some fucking pants on.”

“I’d just get them all sweaty,” Jonny says, only slightly out of breath from where he’s been doing squat thrusts in their room at 6:00 in the goddamn morning like a psychopath. In his *underwear*.

“Yeah, maybe, but at least then I wouldn’t feel like you’re one jumping jack away from flasher territory.”

“I’m not gonna flash you.” Jonny snaps at the elastic waistband of his boxer-briefs to demonstrate the security of the fit or whatever. Mostly, it just draws Patrick’s attention to his hipbones and the sharply defined muscles of his stomach.

Ugh, Patrick’s life is so hard. Literally. He tugs to blankets around himself a little tighter and curls over sideways to hide his truly epic boner. This is *torture*.

“Can’t you at least go to the gym, then?”

“It doesn’t open until after breakfast. I talked to Coach Epps about it, but he said they did that on purpose so we won’t wear ourselves out.”

The sneer on Jonny’s face as he says that last bit is kind of amazing. Patrick would probably appreciate it even more if it weren’t practically still the middle of the night.

“You’re a freak. You know that, right? Like, seriously, there’s something wrong with you.”

That one doesn’t degenerate into a wrestling match, but Jonny does come over and retaliate by shaking his gross, sweaty hair in Patrick’s face like a dog. It’s disgusting but also totally hot, because Jonny’s leaning over him half-naked, all red-faced and panting. Patrick almost misses breakfast that morning because he has to wait to take a shower until everyone else is done so he can jerk off without worrying about being overheard.

4. Books

“*Twilight*, seriously?”

“Fuck you, man, Stephenie Meyer is a national treasure.”

5. Hockey again

“You’ve gotta stop bossing the other guys around like that,” Patrick says one day at lunch.

It’s just the two of them, sitting at a table by the wall. It’s pretty much just the two of them all the time now. Patrick would feel bad about ignoring the other guys, but Jonny—weird, douchey loser

though he is—is the most interesting person here by far. No one else even comes close.

“I’m just trying to get them to play better,” Jonny says. “None of these guys are great, but they could be better for sure if they’d work a little harder.”

“Yeah, probably. But if they were really serious about it, they wouldn’t be *here*, you know?”

Jonny runs a hand through his hair and sighs. “You’re right. I guess I just get really frustrated watching people waste their potential.”

Patrick frowns. “Are we still talking about the other guys?”

“Shut up.” Jonny kicks him under the table. “Stop trying to be insightful. You suck at it.”

Which means: “No, we’re totally talking about me and my MASSIVE UNRESOLVED ISSUES.”

“Man,” Patrick says. “You really shouldn’t have signed up for this thing. You’re just fucking yourself up in the head. Like, even more than you already were.”

Patrick expects to get kicked again for that, but instead Jonny just smiles up at him from over his plate and says, absolutely serious, “Maybe. But I’m glad I came.”

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By the end of the first week, Patrick and Jonny are pretty much inseparable.

They have free time all Saturday, so they blow off all the organized group events and just kind of bum around campus by themselves. UND’s mostly deserted, and there’s no one around to yell at them when they climb over the fence at the old football stadium and lie down in the center of the field. They spend most of the afternoon there, just talking.

Patrick tells Jonny more about his sisters, tries to make him understand why Patrick was willing to give up hockey for them even though they never would have asked him to.

Jonny, in turn, talks about his younger brother, just as driven as Jonny himself but not quite as talented.

“He’s mad at me, I think,” Jonny says, absently stripping the bark off of a twig. “He understands why I did it, but it’s hard for him.”

“Jealous?”

Jonny laughs, but it’s not a happy sound. “Oh yeah. Not that I blame him. He’s spent his whole life hearing that he’s good, but not as good as me, and now he thinks I’m just throwing all that away. It’s like the ultimate fuck you.”

There’s nothing Patrick can really say to that. So he doesn’t say anything, just scoots a little closer in the grass until his shoulder’s brushing against Jonny’s.

Jonny turns to look at him, expression unreadable. Of course, most of Jonny’s expressions are unreadable, so that doesn’t necessarily mean anything.

But then Jonny leans over and kisses him, quick, with his eyes halfway shut like he’s afraid to look. It’s a bad angle, both of them side by side on the grass, so Jonny misses and winds up kissing just to the side of Patrick’s mouth, more cheek than anything.

It takes Patrick a second to process, because he kind of thought he might lose control one morning while Jonny was doing practically naked jumping jacks and just tackle the dude, but he never in a million years would have thought *Jonny* would make a move. Then it sinks in that yes, that actually just happened, and Patrick rolls over onto his side for a better angle and drags Jonny in for another try.

It's weird, kissing a guy outside in broad daylight, even if there's no one else around. It's weird kissing a guy at all, really. Patrick's bisexuality has been basically theoretical up to this point, aside from two drunken makeouts and spectacularly terrible blowjob.

But there's nothing theoretical about how stupidly turned on Patrick is, even though they're just kissing. Even though Jonny's a pretty awkward kisser, actually. He's too intense, too focused, like he's trying to suck Patrick's soul out through his mouth or something. Probably he's so busy concentrating on making this the best kiss Patrick's ever had—because that's totally the kind of thing Jonny would do—that he's forgotten to just enjoy it.

Patrick laughs a little into Jonny's mouth at the thought, and Jonny pulls back, startled. Patrick gets a hand around the back of his head and reels him back in, taking the opportunity to slow things down a little, to shift the kiss into something lazier, sloppier. To his credit, Jonny goes with it, letting Patrick tilt his head until the angle's just right and easing up a little.

It's pretty obvious that neither one of them really knows what they're doing, but that makes it better, almost. That makes this something they can figure out together. Patrick bites at Jonny's bottom lip, because that's something people always seem to love in porn, and Jonny responds by moaning really loudly and then looking kind of embarrassed about it. Or maybe just annoyed that he didn't make Patrick moan first.

Either way, he comes back strong, grabbing Patrick by the arm and using some weird, like, karate move to shift them both until Jonny's flat on his back and Patrick's more or less sprawled out on top of him.

“Damn,” Patrick says, both because that was *really fucking hot* and because lying on Jonny's chest like this gives him a chance to finally feel all the muscles he's been not-so-subtly staring at all week.

Jonny smiles, stupid and smug and unfairly attractive, so Patrick leans down to kiss him again because that is just 100% unacceptable.

They stop before too long. Patrick doesn't want to, but he *really* doesn't want to come in his pants and then have to walk all the way across campus all sticky and gross, so. It's a trade-off.

They skip dinner that night, heading to the diner just off campus instead. Halfway through his cheeseburger it hits Patrick that they're on a *date*, and instead of feeling weird it just feels awesome. He smiles kind of stupidly and drips ketchup on his shirt, and across the table Jonny smiles right back.

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Camp is a lot more fun after that.

Jonny still gets frustrated and yells at players on the ice, but they've actually started listening to him, more or less, because once you get past what a complete asshole he is, there's no denying Jonny knows what he's talking about.

It also helps that Patrick's asked his coach to put him on the ice whenever Jonny's out there during

scrimmages. He doesn't hold himself back, then, just follows Jonny around the ice like a fucking shadow and throws everything he's got into keeping him contained. Into out-playing, out-skating, and out-scoring him. Out-chirping him, even. He's laughing the whole time, though, even as he's talking shit about Jonny's backhand. It feels so good to be skating again, really skating, that Patrick doesn't even care when Jonny robs him and scores what would be the game-winning goal, if this were an actual game.

(Well, he kind of cares, because Patrick's maybe not as crazy about it as Jonny, but he's pretty fucking competitive himself. But Jonny's smile is so bright it's hard to get too worked up about it.)

And then, of course, there's the part where they spend every night tangled together in Jonny's bed, trading lazy kisses and inexperienced handjobs.

They only get a week of that, though, before they're sitting across from each other at the farewell dinner, awkwardly avoiding each other's eyes. They haven't talked about what's going to happen when Patrick goes back to Buffalo and Jonny heads up to Winnipeg. There's no point, really. Even if they wanted to try to do something ridiculous like go to the same college or something, Patrick still has two years left, and Jonny has...whatever the Canadian equivalent of senior year is.

And anyway, Patrick knows that's stupid to even think about. They've only known each other two weeks, and they've only been dating (if you can even call it dating when mostly they just hang out in their room and make out) for one.

He just—he feels like he *knows* Jonny. Better than a lot of his friends back home, even. He's definitely told Jonny things he's never told any of them.

After dinner, Jordan holds a little ceremony for their section in the common room where he hands out award certificates. Patrick gets MVP, and Jonny's just says "C." Jonny's super proud, but Patrick figures that was probably just the nicest way Jordan could think of to phrase "bossy know-it-all jackass."

That night, Jonny goes down on Patrick for the first time, all spit and nervous enthusiasm, and Patrick's stomach clenches up in a way that has nothing to do with arousal as he watches Jonny concentrate so hard on trying to make him feel good. Patrick offers to return the favor afterward, but Jonny just curls up next to him on the bed and grabs Patrick's hand, twining their fingers together and stroking himself off. They kiss, but when Jonny gets close he just tucks his head into Patrick's neck and breathes, ragged little gasps that tickle Patrick's throat.

They both sleep in Jonny's bed that night, even though it's way too small for two people.

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Patrick leaves for the airport on the 9:00 shuttle the next morning.

Jonny's parents aren't coming until that afternoon, and Patrick has the sudden, ridiculous impulse to try to change his flight so they can have a few more hours together.

Instead, he and Jonny trade email addresses. They don't promise to write—what would even be the point? But it somehow makes Patrick feel better just to have it.

"Goodbye," Patrick says.

Jonny doesn't say it back, just kisses him, but when Patrick's standing in the parking lot in front of the dorm, waiting for his turn to board the shuttle, he can see Jonny watching him from the window of their room.

buffalo

Chapter Notes

warning: RIDICULOUS HIGH SCHOOL AU-TYPE SHENANIGANS AND MELODRAMA ABOUND. be prepared to handwave *a lot*, especially when it comes to a) timelines, b) the specifics of high school athletic programs in buffalo, ny, and c) college/pro hockey recruitment procedures. also, obviously, everyone's ages are all fucked up because, again, RIDICULOUS HIGH SCHOOL AU.

also, please note that i am trying to make this sort of almost kind of canon-ish, so it's set in 2004 when kaner and tazer actually would have been in high school. don't be thrown by all the 2004-era references, haha.

Patrick doesn't email Jonny.

He starts to.

The drafts folder in his Hotmail account is getting kind of ridiculous, full of things like, *oh man you'll never believe what my sister did yesterday*, and, *dude my parents finally broke down and bought me a new car*.

hey so i really miss you.

i think about you all the time.

Patrick's not sure why he never sends any of them. Mostly because even though he used to want to play professional hockey, he's not actually a masochist. He doesn't enjoy pain, especially when suffering through it stoically or whatever won't do him any good, and talking to Jonny at this point would just be like pressing on a bruise.

There's also the part where Patrick's kind of waiting for *Jonny* to email *him*.

Back in Buffalo, sulking around the house with nothing better to do than work his way through his summer reading list and complain to all of his sisters about how fucking terrible *Doctor Zhivago* is, those two weeks with Jonny seem almost unreal. Removed. Like something he saw in a movie, maybe, or read about.

Because shit like that just doesn't happen in real life, you know? And definitely not to Patrick. Not to mention that now that Jonny's not right there in front of Patrick distracting him with his stupid face and his terrible jokes and his awful smile, Patrick kind of can't believe he fell so hard for *that dude*.

It's like—have you ever seen *Arrested Development*? Awesome show, he really hopes Fox doesn't cancel it. But anyway, you know George Michael's girlfriend that he's super into but then anytime he mentions her to anyone else they're all like, *her*? Like, seriously, that's who you're so crazy about?

Jonny is Patrick's *her*?

Thinking back on it, now that he's not constantly being assaulted by Jonny and his ridiculous abs and mostly naked morning workout sessions, it's hard to understand why Patrick would be this torn up about someone who is so objectively horrible.

Was Patrick just, like, blinded by his hotness? By how good he was at hockey? He sure as hell wasn't blinded by his sparkling personality or compassionate nature.

After a while, Patrick starts to doubt the whole thing, to wonder if he's making more out of this than there ever really was. Is he just idealizing everything now that it's over, like when the guy down the street died and suddenly all anyone talked about was what a nice old man he was and no one ever mentioned all the super racist things he used to say?

That seems like the most likely explanation, because it couldn't possibly have felt *that good* to lie with Jonny on top of the covers and talk shit about each other's taste in movies. It couldn't have been *that satisfying* to play against him on the ice, to look up and see him skating across the rink like he was born for it. Jonny's mouth definitely shouldn't haven't felt *that amazing* on his dick, especially since there was drool all over the place and it was honestly kind of a disaster of a blowjob.

And then Jonny doesn't email, and a few weeks go by and he still hasn't emailed, and Patrick pretty much takes it as proof that it was just a stupid summer camp fling Patrick blew way out of proportion. Cause, like, obviously it didn't mean very much to Jonny.

(The tiny, rational part of Patrick's brain points out that Patrick hasn't emailed either. It's not the same, though, because Patrick is Patrick and Jonny is Jonny. Patrick gets shit done and all, but Jonny *gets shit done*. If he really wanted to talk to Patrick, he would have made it happen by now and not have worried about all this stupid maybe-he-doesn't-really-like-me bullshit. Jonny's not that insecure.

Probably.)

By the time July rolls around, Patrick's pretty much managed to convince himself that it was just one of those stupid things that happens at camp sometimes and that the only reason he ever thought it meant anything more was because he was still all fucked up from giving up hockey. A classic case of transference. Or projection. Or something. Whatever it was the guidance counselor was talking about at that assembly last year where she told them all not to kill themselves over their SAT scores—Patrick wasn't really paying attention.

He spends the whole month feeling feeling weird and off-balance, snapping at his sisters and being such a dick to his mom she actually sends him to his room, which hasn't happened since he was like 11.

Patrick throws all of his frustration into working out, dusting off the weights in the basement he used to use religiously in a pretty fruitless effort to bulk up. It works better this time, maybe because he's more motivated or who the fuck even knows, and by the time school starts in August he's put on a few pounds of muscle and his sisters have stopped laughing quite so loudly when he asks them if they want tickets to the gun show. (They still laugh, though.)

The night before the first day of junior year, Patrick opens up his email account and deletes everything in the draft folder.

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Patrick didn't exactly slack off for all of his high school career, but he definitely put all of his eggs in the "professional hockey" basket.

Now that he's decided that he's not gonna go that route, he has to start worrying about actually getting into college and shit. His SATs will be fine, but his grades aren't amazing and his counselor tells him he needs to beef up his transcript with an AP class or two if he wants to get into anywhere decent.

That's how he winds up in AP Environmental Science. It's a joke of a class because the teacher went on maternity leave three years ago and never came back, and instead of hiring a real replacement the school just dumped it on the men's soccer coach. Also because it's *environmental science*. Patrick figures he can coast through, make a few dioramas of, like, biomes or whatever, and then study just enough to pull out a three on the AP exam.

The only problem with this otherwise flawless plan is that there's only one section of APES, and in order to fit it in his schedule, he has to take his World Civ requirement as a 7:30 class. This is terrible not only because it will require him to be awake and at school a whole hour earlier, but also because the one APES section is last period, which means Patrick won't even get to leave early. He'll have a free period right before lunch, which is useless because only seniors are allowed to leave campus for lunch and all of his friends will be in class. So basically he'll just get to hang out by himself in the library for an hour every day. And he'll be tired. Double fucking whammy.

There's no 7:30 period the first day of the school year, at least—they just report to homeroom and spend like half an hour going over all the shit they go over at the beginning of every year. He gets his new locker assignment and an updated version of the student handbook to take home for his parents to sign, and then the principal comes on the PA and wishes them all a safe and productive year full of the joy of learning.

On the plus side, homeroom means a short first period, so Patrick only has to sit through 20 minutes of English. Second period is Spanish with Nick and Brandon B., and third is the one he has free. He spends it in the library, changing the desktop background on all the computers to pictures of Nicolas Cage. It's super productive.

After that is lunch, thankfully, and Patrick heads out to the picnic tables on the front lawn he and his friends have more or less claimed as their own.

The guys give him a ton of shit for being such a recluse over the summer and make fun of the way he's slicked his hair back today because it dried all funny and was sticking straight up.

“Fuck you, Hoss,” Patrick says, then tries to subtly rearrange his hair using the reflection in Sharpy's super douchey mirrored sunglasses.

They have a point, though. Thinking back on it, Patrick can count maybe 10 times, tops, he actually left the house with non-family members the entire summer. That's. . .totally pathetic, actually. If he loses his shit like that over what was basically just a week of trading handjobs, how the hell is he gonna handle a real relationship?

Duncan distracts him from that line of thought by talking about the new kid in his English class who's weird but apparently Canadian, which is pretty much all it takes with Duncan. Brent responds by getting hilariously and super obviously jealous, and Patrick loses the rest of the lunch period to making up increasingly ridiculous stories about all the awesome Canadian dudes he caught Duncan friendship-cheating on Brent with over the summer.

Fourth period is newspaper, which Patrick signed up for in another attempt to pad his transcript because Jamal is a features editor and told him it was super easy and that the teacher lets you do other work in class if your articles are all finished. After that comes math, which, the less said about that the better.

Last period is, of course, APES. Coach Hamilton must have bitched about having it in a classroom close to his office or something because it's in that weird, dank room in the basement of the gym that that freshman sued the school over a few years ago because he said it triggered claustrophobic panic attacks. To be fair, Patrick thinks as he takes a seat in the back, there is a window, and it's propped open about six inches to let in some air.

None of Patrick's friends are in the class with him, and so far he doesn't see anyone he recognizes, so he digs his phone out of his pocket and starts playing snake under the desk. You're not really supposed to have your phone out in class, even before the bell rings, but Coach Hamilton is standing by the door marking people off as they come in, so Patrick's not too worried about getting caught.

He's just about to beat his all-time high score when he hears, if not the last thing he ever expected, then definitely up there in the top five:

"It's *Taves*, actually. You pronounce the w like a v."

Patrick's head jerks up, over to the doorway, because that stupid, flat voice is painfully familiar, and he'd heard Jonny use that exact line before with just about everyone at hockey camp.

Even then, it's somehow still surprising to see Jonny there, standing just inside the classroom. He's facing Coach Hamilton, back turned to Patrick, but Patrick would recognize him anywhere just by the back of his head, the hair Patrick ran his fingers through like a million times and the dark mole on his neck below his ear.

And if there were any doubt at all, Patrick would just have to look further down to the distinctively Canadian jorts and the truly spectacular ass beneath them.

Patrick's still staring when Jonny and Coach Hamilton finish talking. Jonny still hasn't noticed him; he doesn't even look at the seats in the back, just makes his way straight to the front row and sits down at one of the desks.

That might be a strategy—some of Patrick's friends swear that the safest place to sit if you wanna slack off is the front row, because teachers will automatically assume you're paying attention—but it might just as easily be Jonny being an overachieving freak and genuinely wanting to, like, environmentally science. They care about that kind of shit in Canada, right? Pretty much all of Jonny's stories about his childhood involved camping and/or fishing. (Or hockey, of course.)

As Patrick watches, Jonny settles himself in, pulling out a notebook and a pencil and then stashing his backpack under the desk. When that's done, Jonny finally starts taking in the room around him. Patrick keeps watching, waiting for the moment when Jonny will turn his way and—

Jonny freezes, eyes wide, staring straight at Patrick.

For that instant, Patrick is so blindingly, idiotically happy that his chest hurts with it, and if Jonny had smiled, just for a second, if Jonny had done anything at all to show that he felt the same way, Patrick probably would have jumped out of his seat and kissed him right then and there.

But Jonny just looks—blank. He keeps staring, mouth open a little, like he can't quite believe it. He doesn't smile, or mouth *holy shit*, or make frantic "meet me after class" kind of gestures. He sure as hell doesn't run over to Patrick so they can be gloriously reunited or whatever, and Patrick can feel his own face closing off.

Fine, he thinks, suddenly, furiously angry. He scowls, lets it show on his face, and takes some vicious satisfaction in the way Jonny kind of flinches back, just a little.

Good. Fuck him anyway. Fuck him times a million. Patrick was obviously right when he decided it was just one of those weird summer things that just happens sometimes, and he feels like pretty much the biggest idiot in the whole fucking world for wasting so much time thinking about it.

The bell rings, and Coach Hamilton walks to the front of the room and starts in on the typical first day speech. Patrick pays maybe closer attention to him than he ever has to any teacher before, absolutely determined not to let himself look over at Jonny again. That backfires a little when the coach calls Jonny up to introduce himself, which he does as “Jonathan” who just moved here from Canada with his family.

Patrick keeps his eyes fixed firmly on the desk in front of him during the whole thing, trying to work out in his head how long that means Jonny must have *known*. Even last-minute moves don’t just happen overnight, which means Jonny has probably known for months he was gonna be in the same city as Patrick, even if he obviously didn’t realize they’d be at the same school.

And he still didn’t email.

Patrick spends the rest of the period scribbling angrily on a sheet of notebook paper and all but runs out the door as soon as class is over, not willing to wait around to hear Jonny *not* call after him.

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That night, Patrick throws what would most accurately be described as an “epic hissy fit” when he gets up to go to the bathroom and Jessica steals the comfy chair in the den. He realizes, as he’s gearing up to call her the Hitler of furniture, that maybe he’s a little bit emotional from school that day, and he mutters a half-hearted apology and slinks off to his room for the rest of the night.

He thinks about calling one of his friends to talk it over, but none of them even know he’s bi. Not that it would be that huge a thing to come out to any of them—none of his friends are assholes, and Brent and Duncan are all but married even though they’re not actually dating. But even just the thought of that conversation is humiliating:

“So, you and this guy hooked up a few times at summer camp.”

“Yeah.”

“And then you both went home.”

“Yeah.”

“And you didn’t make any effort to get in touch with him.”

“Yeah.”

“And he didn’t get in touch with you.”

“Yeah.”

“And now he’s transferred to our school and you’re. . . heartbroken?”

There’s no way to spin it that doesn’t sound like Patrick’s worked up over nothing. It’s not like they made each other any promises. It’s not like Patrick sent a bunch of emails and Jonny ignored them. It’s not even like they had actual sex.

Like, logically, there’s no reason for Patrick to be upset. But he just can’t stop thinking about how

Jonny *knew* he was moving to Buffalo and didn't fucking tell him. Even if them hooking up or whatever hadn't meant as much to Jonny as it did to Patrick, they were still friends. Really good friends, actually, once they got past the part where they couldn't stand each other.

At least, Patrick thought.

But even if he explained that part, Sharpy or Duncan or whoever would just say, "Yeah, man, that was a dick move," and that would be it. And then Patrick would just feel even more ridiculous for feeling so—he doesn't even know how he feels. Betrayed? Is that something people actually feel outside of, like, soap operas?

Patrick throws himself face-first onto his bed in a super melodramatic move that feels surprisingly satisfying. He pounds his fist against the pillow for good measure, pretending it's Jonny's stupid fat face.

Feelings are the worst. Lucky Jonny, Patrick thinks, who doesn't seem to actually have any.

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Patrick has to get up insanely early the next day to make it to his 7:30 class on time, but at least there's nobody at school yet so he gets a prime spot in the parking lot.

The class itself is as fine as anything can be at ass o'clock in the morning, and Patrick only almost-falls-asleep once. Then it's just more of the same from yesterday: English, Spanish, boring free period, lunch. Patrick's always shocked how quickly the school year settles into a routine. It's only the second day and it already feels like he's been doing this forever.

Newspaper is actually pretty interesting, because Patrick gets made sports editor even though it's his first year on the staff. Partly it's because of his reputation at school as being that crazy hockey guy, but mostly it's just because the last sports person graduated last year and there aren't any other upperclassmen who aren't already editors. It's a small class anyway, and a surprising number of them are freshmen. Two of them, Andrew and Brandon, get assigned to sports, and suddenly Patrick finds himself as, like, a leader of men. He has a *staff*. It's super weird but also awesome, and the very first thing he does is see if he can make them get him coffee.

(He can't.)

Math is math and therefore terrible, but Patrick goes up to the teacher afterward and makes up enough questions about the homework that he misses the bell so she'll give him a note to be late for APES.

Jonny is sitting in the same place he was yesterday when Patrick finally gets to class. He turns around to look when Patrick walks in, but Patrick refuses to meet his eyes. That's super hard to keep up when he has to pass right by Jonny's desk to get to the front to hand Coach Hamilton his note, but he manages. Head held high and all that shit.

What he doesn't manage to do is avoid Jonny after class. He basically sprints out of the room, just like he did yesterday, but Jonny follows him to his locker like a creepy stalker even though Patrick powerwalks the whole way and keeps, like, dodging and weaving in and out of other students to try to ditch him.

And then he just *stands there*, watching, as Patrick gets the locker open and dumps all his books inside. He looks like he wants to say something, maybe, but doesn't know what. Or like he just doesn't want to say it with so many people around.

"Hey," he says finally, when the hall's cleared out a little and Patrick's just about finished packing

up his bookbag.

“Hey,” Patrick says, trying to convey just how done he is with all of this bullshit by tone of voice alone.

Jonny looks down at his feet awkwardly, so maybe it works.

“Um, look. I don’t—are you worried I’m gonna,” and here he lowers his voice, “out you or something?”

And shit, Patrick hadn’t been, but he kind of is now.

“Because you should know I wouldn’t do that to you.”

Patrick sneers, turns his head slightly to make sure Jonny sees it. He doesn’t know shit about what Jonny would or wouldn’t do, apparently. He doesn’t know shit about *Jonny*.

“I’m not even out myself,” Jonny says.

Patrick stares into his locker like he’s looking for something even though he already has all the books he needs, trying to figure out Jonny’s angle. Is he afraid Patrick’s going to out *him*? He has a lot more to lose as the weird new kid than Patrick does with his group of mostly-senior friends and reputation as being awesome at a sport where fighting is pretty much accepted gameplay.

Without really thinking about it, Patrick slams the locker door shut, beyond frustrated with this whole situation. Jonny actually takes a step back, startled. Then he rolls his eyes and says, “Fine, whatever,” and stomps off down the hall.

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The rest of the week goes pretty much the same way, except Jonny doesn’t try to talk to him again. Which Patrick is happy about, really, because the last thing he wants to do is spend any more time looking at that loser’s face than he absolutely has to.

No, really.

Then Friday rolls around, which means all the seniors can go off-campus for lunch. Most of Patrick’s friends abandon him because they’re all terrible people with no concept of loyalty, so the lunch crowd that day is just Niklas, who’s a junior like Patrick, and Leddy, who’s a sophomore.

Andy and Brandon show up, too, because Patrick’s kind of taken them under his wing ever since they were assigned to be his sports writers. He remembers what it was like to be young and clueless, so he’s graciously decided to share the gift of his wisdom and experience with them. Mostly, this involves taking them around campus and pointing out the little grove of trees where everyone goes to smoke up and warning them away from that one bathroom with the urinal that always overflows. But he also teaches them valuable life lessons, like which of the ladies in the attendance office will actually fall for a forged signature and which ones will write you up.

Today, he’s lecturing them on how blatantly unfair it is that only seniors can leave campus for lunch. He’s right in the middle of explaining that he’s pretty sure it’s, like, a violation of his constitutional right to eat Taco Bell whenever the hell he wants when Duncan and Brent walk up, sipping on drinks from Subway as obnoxiously as possible.

Patrick’s about to yell at them for being so cruel in front of the poor, sensitive freshmen when he notices Sharpy trailing a few steps behind them, working his way through a bag of chips and talking animatedly to none other than Jonathan fucking Toews.

“Hey guys,” Sharpy says. “This is Jonny. His family just moved down here from Canada.”

Niklas, Leddy, and the freshies all smile and say hi, but Patrick just nods, not trying all that hard not to look like he hates Jonny’s guts. Sharpy notices and gives Patrick a weird look, but whatever. Patrick’s not gonna play nice when Jonny’s the one who’s off having lunch with Patrick’s friends while Patrick’s stuck here with *freshmen*.

“Hi,” Jonny says, looking super awkward and avoiding Patrick’s eyes.

Good. Let the fucker squirm.

“Jonny’s in French with me and Sharpy,” Duncan says, apparently unable to pick up on Patrick’s complete disinterest/epic hatred. “He’s way better than us, but it doesn’t count because his mom’s from Quebec so he’s basically fluent.”

Everyone makes vaguely interested noises that Patrick knows they have to be faking just to be polite because no one could possibly really care about stupid boring Jonny and his stupid boring French Canadian mom.

So Patrick says, “Isn’t that cheating? It’s not really a foreign language if your *mom* speaks it.”

“Hey, c’mon, man.” Brent flicks soda on him with his straw. “Play nice.”

Patrick shrugs. “I’m just saying. Seems pretty unfair to me compared to all the people who actually, like, *work* to learn another language.”

“Jesus, Pat, what the hell?” Sharpy’s look has gone from weird to that awful I-am-so-disappointed-in-you-right-now face he gets when Patrick’s being especially heinous. “You do understand that just because his mom speaks it doesn’t mean he was born knowing it, right? He still actually had to learn it.”

“Sure, whatever,” Patrick says. He knows he’s being ridiculous, but just the idea of anything being easy for Jonny—of him being able to waltz in and impress everyone with his lame French and win over Sharpy, Duncan, and Brent with his even lamer Canadianness—is pretty much intolerable. It’s not fair that Jonny gets to ruin his summer, gets to twist him up so completely he can’t even sleep, and then show up here at Patrick’s school, at Patrick’s *picnic tables* and act like nothing happened.

There’s a beat of awkward silence, then Jonny suddenly says, “I have to stop by my locker before next period,” and walks off without saying goodbye.

“What the fuck was that?” Duncan asks as soon as Jonny’s out of earshot. “You’re not usually such a douche to people you don’t even know.”

Patrick shrugs, picking at a splinter in the table.

“Be better, man,” Sharpy says, punching him hard in the shoulder. “Anyway, I actually do have to go to my locker before next period, so I’ll see you losers later.”

He walks off, still shaking his head in disapproval. Even the freshmen, who’ve been looking at Patrick all week with something scarily close to hero worship in their eyes, look pretty solidly unimpressed with him. Andy, Patrick remembers suddenly, is Canadian, so he probably has whatever gene it is they all have up there that makes them think that being bilingual is, like, a valuable life skill and the mark of a good citizen instead of what it actually is: fucking useless ever since the dawn of Babel Fish.

Patrick tries to make up for it by being extra awesome in newspaper the next period. He listens to all the article ideas they come up with and nods super encouragingly and even approves Andy's terrible idea to title his article about the women's soccer team *Having a ball!*

In APES that afternoon, Patrick sits in the back corner like always and Jonny sits up front and they don't look at each other the whole time.

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The next few weeks are pretty much the same.

Patrick staggers out of bed way too early every morning, half-dozes his way through all of his classes until his stupid free period when he's taken to actually curling up in the cramped back seat of his car and catching a few precious minutes of sleep. He sets the alarm on his watch for lunchtime and makes it back to the picnic tables well before the bell rings at the end of third period to make sure some detention-happy teacher doesn't catch him in the parking lot and assume he's trying to sneak off campus for lunch.

And then comes lunch.

Ahhh, lunch. It used to be Patrick's favorite part of the day (aside from the part where he actually got to, you know, leave), but it's quickly become 40 minutes of solid torture.

Sharpy, Duncan, and Brent have basically, like, adopted Jonny, and they all sit down at the end of one of the tables and spend the whole time getting all nostalgic about stupid Canadian shit Patrick doesn't understand. (Not that Patrick wants to understand or anything because a) fuck Canada and b) fuck Jonny and actually c) fuck Canada again just because.)

Patrick sits as far away as possible, surrounded by the protective buffer of his freshmen and doing a generally terrible job of pretending not to be interested in whatever's going on at the other table. Not that he actually—ok, fine, he's totally interested.

These are his best friends, after all, and Jonny was his—well, Jonny wasn't his anything, apparently, but that doesn't mean Patrick's gonna sit back and watch the guy steal *his* friends. Unfortunately, the few times Patrick tries to sit with them he can't help but be like the world's biggest dick to Jonny and then Sharpy gets mad and Duncan and Brent do their freaky mind-twin thing to glare at him in unison. Jonny just. . .takes it. Bites at his lip and looks all stoic and pained, and if Patrick didn't know what had *actually happened*, he'd totally buy Jonny's manly suffering in silence routine.

So, yeah, Patrick sits with the freshmen.

Then the three of them walk to newspaper together after lunch and brainstorm article ideas. Patrick's contributions are mostly things like, "Um...something about volleyball?" because beyond a very vague idea of the rules, he doesn't actually know anything about any sports other than hockey. And basketball, which he's totally awesome at (fuck you, Sharpy, he is *not* too short for the net).

Math is still math and, therefore, by definition the worst. Except for APES and how that's kinda the worst now. Not even just because Patrick spends the whole time alternately glaring at the back of Jonny's head and trying to will himself to forget Jonny even exists. It's also the worst because Coach Hamilton is the world's most terrible science teacher. He spends 75% of the time trying to convince people to try out for the soccer team, 20% of the time trying to convince people to actually come to soccer games, and the remaining 5% of the time talking about how he doesn't think we really landed on the moon.

Maybe somewhere in there is like a 1% margin of error he spends talking about the ozone layer and shit, but that's being generous.

On the plus side, the workload stays super easy and Patrick gets a bunch of inspiration for the article on the men's soccer team the editor in chief wants him to write.

On the minus side, everything else.

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Four weeks into the school year, Patrick almost quits the newspaper.

It goes down like this:

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Yes. This isn't a choice, Patrick. It's an assignment. I am *assigning* you to do it.”

“Why can't one of my writers do it?”

Radha, the editor in chief, looks pointedly over at the copy of last week's paper lying on her desk. Andy's hard-hitting back page feature about mini-golf—*Join the club!*—is clearly visible.

Ok, point. But, “Why can't Brandon do it?”

“I'm not having a freshman write the first big sports article of the year, ok? I already get enough flak from the coaches about not giving them enough coverage since we had to cut the sports section down last year.”

“Fine,” Patrick bites out, furious but not actually willing to take it out on a girl. Or, more accurately, not actually willing to take it out on Radha, who could assign him articles about nothing but, like, curling from here on out. “Gimme.”

He reaches out to take the sheet of paper she thrusts at him, and staring grim-faced and blank-eyed up at him from the page is one Jonathan Toews, the men's soccer team's most promising new player. Underneath the picture, in Radha's neat bullet points, are the guidelines for the article.

- one-on-one interview with Toews
- personality piece, “sports lite”
- 750 words
- supporting quotes from Coach Hamilton, at least 2 teammates
- draft due next Fri., final copy the following Fri.

Jesus, Patrick thinks. How do you even write a personality piece on a dude who doesn't actually have a personality? Other than “emotionless jackass,” of course.

Desperate, he says, “I thought this was supposed to be a piece about the whole team?”

Radha shrugs. “That was before this guy showed up at tryouts. Hamilton's nuts about him, thinks he's going to turn the whole team around.”

And ugh, fucking of course. *Of course* Jonny's amazing at soccer, too. He's probably doing it just

to spite Patrick, somehow.

“I already set up an appointment for you,” Radha says, smiling prettily. “Tomorrow after school. And don’t even give me any bullshit about being busy, I asked your fanclub over there,” she nods toward Andy and Brandon. They wave back, either oblivious or just completely unapologetic.

So that’s how Patrick winds up lingering awkwardly in the doorway after APES the next day, waiting for Coach Hamilton to finish grinding all up on Jonny’s dick, blabbering on and on about how great he was at practice the other day and how excited everyone is to have him on the team and blah-di-fucking-blah.

When Hamilton finally shuts up, Patrick asks if they can use the room for the interview, and the guy falls all over himself agreeing. Anything for Jonny, Patrick guesses.

Radha gave him a tape recorder to use, and Patrick sits down at one of the desks and starts setting it up with the vague idea that maybe he can get through this somehow if he just keeps it absolutely professional.

Naturally, Jonny ruins that plan by being a gigantic freakjob. First, he sits down practically on the other side of the room, so far away Patrick knows the recorder won’t be able to pick up anything he says. Then, even after Patrick’s rolled his eyes and made him come closer, he stares down at his knees and mumbles terrible one-word answers to Patrick’s generic list of interview questions.

“Look,” Jonny says, after the third time Patrick asks him to repeat his response to *What’s your favorite thing about Buffalo so far?* “Maybe you should just give me the questions and I can type up the answers and give them to you tomorrow.”

“Seriously?” And Patrick is so over this shit he cannot even. “You seriously can’t stand to sit here and talk to me for 20 fucking minutes? Jesus, just. Fine.” He balls up his list of questions and throws it at Jonny. “Here. Knock yourself the fuck out.”

Patrick half expects Jonny to just sit there looking quiet and pained and awkward the way he does whenever Patrick gives him shit at lunch. To pull that stupid “helpless transfer student being bullied by the local asshole” routine that seems to have all of Patrick’s friends fooled. Instead, Jonny looks *furios*. He bends down to pick up the ball of paper off the floor and throws it right back at Patrick, aiming for his face.

“What the hell is your problem? You’ve been nothing but a gigantic asshole to me ever since school started.”

“Gee,” Patrick says, putting a finger to his chin and pretending to think about it. “I wonder. What problem could I *possibly have?*”

Jonny’s so mad his entire face is flushing red, and it makes Patrick viciously happy to see.

“I told you,” Jonny says, “I’m not gonna out you. You can stop trying to prove how much you hate me or whatever. Everybody gets it. And actually, I’m pretty sure that makes you look more suspicious than if you just ignored me.”

“Oh fuck you, that’s not even—I’m not your new best friend Duncan, ok? I was actually there. I know what *actually* happened. So don’t even give me that bullshit.”

Patrick’s standing now, leaning over with his hands braced on the desk, kind of looming over Jonny. Jonny spoils it, like he spoils everything, by standing up, too, and stepping forward just enough to loom over Patrick.

“What bullshit? What the fuck are you even talking about?”

“This!” Patrick’s pretty much yelling now, but he can’t stop himself. At least they’re down in the gym basement where no one’s around to hear. “Your little, like, innocent routine. You don’t get to act like I’m the bad guy here when you didn’t send me one fucking email all summer.”

“You didn’t email me either!”

“Yeah, but that’s because I thought there wasn’t any *point*. You’re the one who,” he trails off, suddenly not so much angry as just really fucking sad. “You’re the one who knew you were moving to Buffalo and didn’t even bother to tell me.”

“I didn’t know, though,” Jonny says, voice lowered to match Patrick’s softer tone. “My dad got a really good job offer here in May but my parents didn’t want to leave Canada. Then my grandmother got sick in July and my mom decided it would be good to be a little closer to her, so my dad called to see if the job was still open and they told him yeah but he’d have to move immediately. I didn’t know we were moving for sure until the beginning of August. And by then, well.” Jonny shrugs, mouth quirking kind of sadly. “I hadn’t heard from you, so I wasn’t sure if you’d even care.”

Of course he would have cared, Patrick wants to say, but he doesn’t. He can’t really make that argument when he’d spent the whole summer agonizing over basically the same thing. God, what a clusterfuck.

Patrick opens his mouth to say something—he doesn’t know what, exactly, but probably something along the lines of “we are both too stupid to live”—but Jonny’s apparently not done yet because he holds up a hand and gestures for Patrick to let him finish.

“And then,” he says, “then I showed up here and I turned around and you were *right there* and I thought—I don’t know. I thought maybe it was, like, fate or destiny or whatever.” He laughs a little, obviously at himself. “Something stupid like that. But then you just glared at me, so angry, like I was the last person you wanted to see.”

“You didn’t smile,” Patrick says weakly, shaken. “I thought—I was waiting for you to smile. To look like you were happy to see me.”

“Jesus, Patrick, I was in *shock*. You gave me a fucking death glare and practically fled the scene as soon as class was over because I didn’t look happy enough to see you in that split second?”

“I—”

Jonny’s on a roll, though, because he just keeps going, taking a step forward and jabbing a finger into Patrick’s chest. “When I tried to talk to you, you completely shut me down. So I tried to leave you alone, and you still went out of your way to be a dick to me every chance you got.”

And really, there’s nothing Patrick can say to that except, “I’m sorry.”

Jonny blinks and takes a step back, deflating a little. “What?”

“You’re right, I never gave you a chance to explain, and I’m sorry. That wasn’t fair of me. I just—you don’t understand, Jonny. I spent all summer going crazy, psyching myself out trying to figure out if you, like, cared about me or not,” and that’s maybe more than Patrick meant to admit, but he figures he owes it Jonny after getting everything so epically wrong, “and then you showed up here. And I figured that meant you’d known you were moving to Buffalo and didn’t care enough to tell me.”

“Jesus, Patrick,” Jonny says again, but he doesn’t sound angry this time. “I’m sorry too, I guess, that I didn’t try harder to make you understand.”

“I’m not sure I would’ve listened,” Patrick admits. “I was pretty fucked up over you.”

“Yeah?”

Patrick nods. “Yeah.”

As far as romantic declarations or whatever go, that’s maybe a little morbid, but Jonny smiles, soft and pleased.

It’s the first genuine smile Patrick’s seen from him all year, Patrick realizes with a sudden pang of guilt.

“I really *am* sorry,” he says.

“It’s ok.” Jonny looks like he actually means it, too, which makes him either the nicest person in the entire world or (more likely) the kind of guy who likes it when other people fuck up so he can lord it over them forever.

Either way, it works out well for Patrick, who’s not the best at dealing with emotions generally and even worse at feeling like he’s let down people he cares about.

“So,” Patrick says awkwardly. Is this the point where they leap into each other’s arms and make out on top of Coach Hamilton’s desk?

“Yeah,” Jonny says, looking just as awkward. “Does this mean we’re friends again?”

“Yeah, totally. Friends. We can do that. And then maybe see where it goes from there? I mean, if you’re still, you know. Interested or whatever.”

“I am,” Jonny says immediately, then blushes a little at being so eager. “Um. I think that’s a good idea, though, taking it slow.”

“Slow is good,” Patrick agrees.

Jonny nods, biting at his lower lip nervously. Patrick’s eyes drop down to follow the movement automatically, and he lets them linger, lets himself enjoy the sheer, stupid relief of knowing that he was right about Jonny back at camp, that he’s not alone in whatever it is he’s feeling.

Jonny notices him staring, because Patrick’s not exactly being subtle about it, and the moment stretches, tense, but the good sort of tense.

And ok, *that’s* the point where they leap into each other’s arms and make out on top of Coach Hamilton’s desk.

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Jonny tastes the same.

That’s a stupid thing to think, really, because it’s only been like three months even though it feels like forever, but still. It’s the first thing that runs through Patrick’s mind when he practically launches himself across the room at Jonny and Jonny responds by half-lifting him off his feet and kissing him like it’s the ending of the goddamn *Princess Bride* and Jonny wants to put all the other kisses in the history of the world to shame.

“Fuck,” Patrick says when he finally has to pull away to breathe. Jonny loosens his grip a little, just enough that Patrick can settle back down so he’s flat on his feet again. “I missed this. Missed you.”

“Me too.”

He’s out of breath, which is both flattering and totally hot, and Patrick has to lean in and kiss him again for a little bit.

Even though they’re in the most isolated classroom on campus, they’re still at school, and Patrick knows this isn’t exactly the smartest place to be doing this kind of thing. Coach Hamilton’s the only person who might still be hanging around the gym this late after school, and he’s *probably* gone home for the day, but Patrick doesn’t know for sure. The door’s closed but not locked, and there’s a remote but distinct possibility Hamilton might show up right in the middle of things. Obviously, the responsible thing to do would be to stop.

Also obviously, that’s not what they do. Well, obviously that’s not what Patrick does. Jonny’s usually good at responsible, though, so it’s weird he’s not trying to shut things down, but Patrick’s sure as hell not complaining.

In fact, he’s not complaining so hard he’s basically trying to climb Jonny like a tree, pressing his hips against Jonny’s and hooking his leg around the back of Jonny’s knee until Jonny gets with the program and gets a hand under Patrick’s thigh to hitch him up. It’s awkward, because Jonny’s bigger than Patrick but not by enough that he could actually, like, lift Patrick all the way up without it being a strain. (Not that Patrick’s even sure he’d *want* to be lifted up. Not so much because it would be emasculating or whatever as because he’s not sure he trusts Jonny not to drop him on purpose. Though Patrick would kind of deserve it now, probably.)

That’s when Patrick has the genius idea of using Coach Hamilton’s desk, which is already completely clear of paper and everything because as far as Patrick can tell Hamilton never does any actual work. He disentangles himself from Jonny just long enough to walk over and lift himself up onto the desk.

“Really?” Jonny pretends to frown, but his hair’s all messed up and his lips are red from where Patrick’s been biting at them so Patrick can’t take him too seriously.

Patrick does a sexy little “c’mere, sailor” finger crook in response and Jonny laughs but c’meres, settling right in front of the desk, in between Patrick’s legs.

It’s a million times better like that because they’re the same height, Patrick maybe a tiny bit taller, and Patrick can wrap his legs around Jonny’s waist and pull him in as tight as he can, reveling in the friction. Jonny pulls back eventually, panting that they’ve gotta stop because he’s gonna come. Patrick doesn’t even really mean to do it, doesn’t consciously think about it, but suddenly he’s worming a hand down between them and pressing hard against the front of Jonny’s jeans, tracing the outline of the erection he can feel trapped beneath the denim.

Jonny moans and does this funny little full-body shudder, and then he’s coming. Patrick can’t actually feel it, not through two layers of cloth and with the zipper in the way, but he imagines it, thinks about how Jonny’s boxers must look now, ruined and clinging. He wonders if there’s a non-creepy excuse he can make up to get Jonny to unzip his pants right now and show him.

Patrick keeps his hand there after, squeezing lightly until Jonny pushes him away when it gets to be too much.

“Shit,” he says. “Fuck, Pat, I *told you* I was gonna come.”

Patrick grins. He's too turned on still for it to be properly shit-eating, but he gives it his best shot. "I know."

"Asshole." Jonny wrinkles his nose and squirms a little. "Ugh, gross. Do you want me to uh, you know, or do you wanna get out of here without completely embarrassing yourself?"

"That wasn't embarrassing," Patrick says, tugging Jonny back in for one last quick kiss, "that was hot as shit. But no, I'm good. I guess we better get out of here, huh?"

The clock next to the door says it's almost 6:00, and Patrick's mom is gonna start freaking out if he doesn't get home before too long.

"Probably."

Jonny steps back, and Patrick slides down off the desk.

He grimaces. It's late enough that there probably isn't anyone still hanging around campus, but the tent in his pants is obvious enough that he doesn't want to risk it. He's gonna have to engage stealth mode.

Patrick thinks about asking Jonny to turn around for a second, but he figures that's not really fair since he just made the dude come all over himself without even asking. So he just gives Jonny a sheepish smile and reaches down into his pants, grabbing his dick and tugging it up until the head is trapped underneath the waistband of his jeans and his boxers in a classic Texas Tuck. Then he pulls his shirt back down over everything and voila: boner gone.

Jonny's staring at him when he's done, looking like he kind of wants to back Patrick up against the desk again and go another round. Then he visibly snaps himself out of it, clearing his throat and turning away to get his books and shit together.

Patrick walks over to get his own stuff, wincing as he goes. Ugh, stealth mode is so fucking killer. Every step pulls his waistband tight against his dick, right at the super sensitive part underneath the head, so it's basically like getting the world's least satisfying handjob. Usually Patrick loves his dick, but times like these it's pretty much the worst.

As he's shoving his things into his bookbag, Patrick notices the crumpled ball of paper on the floor and realizes suddenly that they never finished their interview.

"Make something up," Jonny suggests as they're walking out to their cars. "Just don't make me sound like a dick."

"Wow," Patrick says. "You are a brave, brave man."

Jonny shrugs. "I think I can handle whatever you can throw at me."

"All right. But don't say I didn't warn you."

When they get to the parking lot, Jonny looks to see if anyone's around and then kisses Patrick goodbye, and it's almost like the last few terrible months never even happened.

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Patrick's stupid dick has finally calmed down by the time he gets home, so it's not too awkward when his mom ambushes him in the hallway and spends like 20 minutes lecturing him on how he needs to call if he's going to stay late. He nods along, pretending to listen, but mostly he's just planning out all the ridiculous shit he's going to quote Jonny as saying.

When he gets upstairs and actually starts trying to write the article, he realizes the recorder was on *the whole time*. He doesn't listen to any of the part where they were making out, because even though it's super tempting to jerk off to Jonny's stupid and amazing sex noises, Patrick's not actually creepy enough to get off to a recording Jonny didn't realize they were making. Not that Patrick realized they were making it either, but still. It would just feel wrong.

He's not above listening to the part where he asks if Jonny's still interested and Jonny immediately and sincerely says, "I am," though. Or the part where Jonny said he saw Patrick sitting there in APES and thought it must be fate or something.

He listens to those parts kind of a lot before he erases the recording.

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[The article](#) is pretty amazing. Patrick would almost feel bad about it, except he *did* warn Jonny. Also, the newspaper has a readership of about 12, so. It's not exactly killing Jonny's rep.

Just in case, he makes sure that every article he writes about the soccer team mentions what an awesome player Jonny is at least once. The best part is that he genuinely is really awesome, so Radha can't even call Patrick out on his blatant favoritism, though she does give him increasingly dark looks every time he turns in a draft featuring a pull quote from Jonathan Toews, senior.

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It's kind of amazing how much better life is after that.

Like, Patrick knew this Jonny thing was fucking him up, but he didn't realize just how much until the first day he comes down to breakfast with a smile on his face and his mother literally throws up her arms and says, "Oh thank God! Now we can call off the intervention."

His friends notice, too. Not just the part where Patrick's happier now, but also the part where he and Jonny are boyfriends or whatever. They get weird looks the first time they sit next to each other at lunch, and even weirder looks when they manage to go the whole 40 minutes without fighting (much), but it's not until Jonny actually stays on campus one Friday to eat with Patrick that Sharpy's eyes go all wide and he says, "Holy shit, I knew it!"

Patrick's never really given much thought to coming out before, but he kind of expected it to be harder. Not that he thought his friends would be, like, assholes about it or anything, but he thought they might at least be surprised. Encouraged, Patrick decides he probably ought to tell his parents.

He sits them both down at the dinner table one evening and tells them he's bi and that there's a boy he's kind of dating. They keep giving him little supportive nods and smiles the whole way through, and then afterward his mom smiles, kind of teary-eyed.

"I'm so glad you decided to tell us, Pat. We always want you to feel like you can share anything with us."

Patrick frowns a little. That's pretty much exactly what you want to hear when you tell your parents something like this, he knows, and he's lucky everyone's been so accepting and everything, but just a little bit of surprise from *someone* would be nice.

"Did you already know?"

"Oh, honey," his mom says. "Did you forget we bought a subscription to the paper after you told us you were going to be on the staff? Every article you write talks about that Jonathan boy, even

the ones that aren't about soccer.”

And huh. Maybe Patrick should tone it down a little.

Then again, fuck that noise. Why should he? If Radha gets really mad and does try to banish him to a year of writing about nothing but curling, he'll just be sure each article includes a bunch of quotes from Winnipeg native and therefore curling expert Jonathan Toews, senior.

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Patrick's parents want to meet Jonny's family, of course.

It has to wait until after Jonny's come out to his own parents, but Patrick has it on the good authority of Fox News that they're all, like, godless European-style socialists up in Canada, so that shouldn't even be a thing.

(According to Jonny, he tells them over breakfast one morning and his brother gets up and hugs him and his parents tell him they just want him to be happy and that's basically it. See? Socialists.)

They decide to have dinner together, eventually. It has to be at Patrick's house, because the Toews are living in a frankly pretty shitty apartment while they try to sell their house in Winnipeg—the move really *was* last minute.

Jonny's dad is just a regular kind of dude, but his mom is tiny and has this really thick French Canadian accent. She reminds Patrick a lot of Jonny, somehow, even though they don't really look that much alike. Something around the eyes, maybe. Either way, Patrick decides he loves her pretty much immediately and spends the whole dinner trying to prove he's good enough for her son.

Jonny's on his best behavior, too, at least when the parents are around. As soon as they slip out for wine on the back porch, he starts pretending to hit on Patrick's sisters, and they play along because they're terrible people and they love to cause him pain. (Actually, Patrick's more worried about Jonny's younger brother, David. All of his sisters are totally digging on him even though he has a super unfortunate nose and is even shorter than Patrick himself.) (Not that Patrick's short compared to regular-sized people, no matter what Jonny says.)

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By the end of the night, Patrick's mom has a new best friend in Andrée and Patrick and Jonny have their parents', like, official blessing to date. In Patrick's case, that really just means his mom takes to slipping him a 20 every weekend and telling him to go catch a movie or something with his boyfriend. It's kind of humiliating, but Patrick doesn't actually have a job right now so he just says thanks and pockets the money.

There's a dollar theater a few blocks away from Jonny's apartment, the kind that shows movies for a buck a few months after they've already come and gone at the regular theaters, and he and Jonny spend a lot of nights there. They've seen all the movies already—and the ones they haven't are ones they didn't see for a reason—but let's be honest, they're really not in it for the *movies*.

They actually pick the worst ones on purpose, usually, because those are the ones most likely to be completely deserted. Jonny has this weird complex about making out when other people are in the theater, even if they're rows and rows away. He doesn't want to ruin their cinematic experience or whatever.

Jonny's stupid hang-up is the reason they wind up watching the entirety of *The Whole Ten Yards*, *Clifford's Really Big Movie*, *Soul Plane*, and *New York Minute*.

(Patrick's not even gonna pretend he didn't enjoy the hell out of that last one, though. The Olsen twins are the brightest lights of their generation, and he'll fight anyone who says different.)

Sometimes they get there a little early and do a few shots of whatever they've managed to get their hands on in the back of Patrick's car—always Patrick's, because his has tinted windows. They never drink enough to get sloppy, because Patrick has to be sober enough to drive them home in a few hours. Just enough that everything seems warm and glowy and amazing, even *White Chicks*.

It's just the two of them in the theater right now, because shockingly, no one else seems to have been interested in the 10:00 showing of *Garfield: The Movie*. Jonny'd been angry when Patrick picked him up tonight, stewing over some fight with his brother Patrick can't get him to talk about. He'd taken seven shots to Patrick's three in the car before the movie, even though his sense of fair play means he usually matches Patrick drink for drink. Seven shots is nowhere near enough to get him legitimately wasted, but he keeps getting distracted and pulling away from kissing Patrick to laugh at a CGI cat, so. He's definitely pretty drunk.

Patrick gives up making out as a lost cause after while and just sits back and watches Jonny watch the movie. Jonny's gone enough that he lets Patrick pull him down until his head's resting on Patrick's lap and his legs are stretched out across the empty seats on down the row. The movie's pretty terrible, so Patrick amuses himself by running his fingers through Jonny's hair, which doesn't sound that amusing, maybe, but actually totally is.

It's hard enough for the two of them to get real, genuine, don't-have-to-worry-about-being-interrupted privacy that when they do they usually spend it kind of frantically making out. Which is *great*, don't get Patrick wrong here. But it's kind of nice to just run his fingers across Jonny's scalp, scratching lightly when Jonny turns his head into it. Jonny has a well-formed head, which is probably a weird thing to think about someone, but it's true. His forehead is kind of big, but the way he sighs and burrows against Patrick's thigh a little when Patrick strokes across his brow bone more than makes up for it.

Three-fourths of the way through the movie, when Patrick's pretty sure Jonny's fallen asleep, Jonny surprises him by saying, "The coach called today."

"Coach Hamilton?"

Jonny shakes his head—Patrick can feel it against his leg.

"No, Coach Hakstol."

"Am I supposed to know who that is?"

"He's the new head hockey coach for the University of North Dakota."

"Holy shit," Patrick says. By mutual, unspoken agreement, they haven't really talked about the fact that Jonny's going to college next year. On Patrick's part, that's mostly denial. On Jonny's part. . . Patrick's not sure, but he thinks it freaks Jonny out that he doesn't have a solid plan yet. It's still only October, but he suspects that in Jonny's mind that's practically last minute.

"Yeah," Jonny says. He sounds miserable, so Patrick resumes the stroking he'd left off when he thought Jonny was asleep. "The old coach recruited me pretty hard when I was at St. Mary's, and it was kind of—that was kind of my plan for a while. A couple years in the NCAA, then hopefully move on to the NHL. He stopped calling when I, y'know, quit playing."

Patrick frowns. Jonny hadn't mentioned any of that at camp this summer, and Patrick wonders if that's the real reason he chose a program at UND instead of somewhere closer to home. If he

wanted to see what he was missing. It's just the kind of thing Jonny would do, Patrick thinks bitterly, because he seems to think it's his duty in life to make things as hard on himself as possible.

On the screen, some rando is writhing around on the floor in an electro-shock collar. It startles Patrick enough that he looks up from where he's softly tracing the shell of Jonny's ear. What the fuck? Patrick hasn't been paying any attention to the plot, but he thought this was a kid's movie. Patrick watches for a few seconds, waiting for Jonny to start talking again.

"But this new guy," he prompts eventually when Jonny doesn't say anything else. "He thinks he can change your mind?"

"Basically. He just said there's still a place for me there if I can get on a team and get myself back in fighting shape before next fall."

"And that's what you and David were fighting about?"

Jonny sighs. "Yeah. He thinks I should go for it. Join the school team."

"Well," Patrick says. "You know. Maybe you should."

"You know why I don't want to, Pat."

"Yeah, but maybe that's bullshit." Jonny starts to sit up, but Patrick pushes him gently back down. "No, like, I understand, ok? You know I do. You didn't want to leave your mom before. But now—you're gonna have to leave for college anyway. You can't stay at home forever, and even if you could I know your mom wouldn't want you to do that to yourself."

Jonny's quiet, so Patrick goes on. "You gave her an extra few years, but at some point you have to leave, right? You should be happy about this. Things are working out the way you always wanted."

After a moment, Jonny says, "I really don't want to talk about this right now," and they finish the movie in silence.

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Halloween's on a Sunday, which means there are like a million parties the Saturday before.

Duncan's parents are out of town for the weekend, which is just terrible planning on their part, really, so he throws one just for their group. Patrick wrangles invites for his freshmen and a few of their little friends, too, and they spend the whole week leading up to it being adorably and satisfyingly grateful.

The men's soccer team is capping off a great season by kicking ass in the playoffs (thanks in no small part to the exceptional skills of Jonathan Toews, senior, as anyone who follows Patrick's crack reporting would know), and Patrick's been running all over trying to be both a good sports editor and a supportive boyfriend-thing, so he doesn't have time to even think about his costume until Saturday afternoon.

The Toews (Toewses? Whatever.) have finally bought a house. Patrick's theoretically helping Jonny unpack, but mostly he's just sprawled across Jonny's bed, watching, occasionally offering helpful commentary about what Jonny should do with his truly ridiculous number of flannel shirts and his *Country Music Classics for Beginner Guitar* songbook.

"We should totally go as a couple," Patrick says, staring unashamedly at Jonny's ass when he

bends over to dig through a box of old clothes. He waggles his eyebrows even though Jonny can't see.

“Great idea. Do you wanna be Duncs or Brent?”

“Oh man,” Patrick laughs, “that would be the best. We'd probably have to wear nametags or something so people would get it, though, and that's cheating.”

“I don't see why we have to dress up at all.”

“Because it's Halloween, duh. C'mon, give me some real ideas here.”

Jonny shrugs. “I dunno. I was basically just a hockey player every year after I got old enough to pick my own costume.”

“Yeah, same here.” Patrick carefully doesn't say anything else, because the North Dakota thing's still a touchy issue and he doesn't want to get into it again at the start of what promises to be an awesome night. “Except for this one year I was a witch because I didn't think it was fair all my sisters got to be witches and I didn't. My mom *loves* to bust out those pictures.”

“I haven't seen them,” Jonny says, looking delighted. “Did you have a fake nose? Please tell me you had a fake nose.”

“No nose, sorry, but I did have a long black wig and a bunch of those plastic witch's fingers from Chuck E. Cheese. I only had eight so I walked around all night with Bugles on my thumbs.”

Jonny laughs, the sound of it muffled as he dives into the box again. He comes back up with a handful of black and purple fabric, which he frowns at and drops into a pile at the foot of the bed.

“What's that?”

“Just stuff that was supposed to go to Dave's room. It's too small for me now.”

Patrick rolls over onto his stomach and slides forward until he can reach the pile.

“Are these purple knee socks?”

Jonny blushes. “They were the school colors, ok?”

“Sure they were, baby.”

Jonny blushes even harder at the name but looks strangely pleased, and even though Patrick was totally joking he resolves to use it again as soon as possible.

Patrick roots through the rest of the pile, coming up with a few black and purple workout shirts and black cold-weather leggings.

“Dude,” Patrick says, struck by sudden inspiration. “We could totally be [the evil team from Dodgeball](#).”

“In those?” Jonny frowns. “I told you, they don't fit anymore. You can try them, but they're way too small for me.”

“Don't be such a bonerkill,” Patrick says, and throws a shirt at him.

The clothes are way too small for both of them, actually, but it kind of works. Both in the sense that half the joke in the movie was Ben Stiller running around in ridiculous spandex and in the sense where Jonny's ass looks, like, criminally awesome in too-tight leggings.

They stop by Target on the way to Duncan's and buy some cheap black sweatbands and elbow pads because Jonny doesn't want to risk any of his legit equipment at a party that involves as much drunken idiocy as this one undoubtedly will. Then they get a bright red ball, just in case anyone doesn't get their costumes. (That's not cheating, Patrick clarifies. That's accessorizing.)

The party itself is fun but pretty shitshow, and Patrick spends at least half of it playing nursemaid to the freshmen after one of Brandon's little friends tries to bong a bottle of 'crat and winds up passing out on the back porch. He spends the other half of it making out with Jonny, picking locations strategically calculated to get them walked in on by Sharpy. That's what the dude gets for having the nerve to make fun of their awesome costumes when he's just running around with a water gun calling himself the "Sharp Shooter." Pathetic.

Patrick passes out on the couch in the upstairs den around 3:00 in the morning. When he wakes up again just before dawn with a headache and like the world's worst case of drunksomnia, Jonny is curled up on the cushions behind him, pressed in tight because there isn't really enough room for both of them. Patrick knows his head will thank him later if he gets up now and drinks a few glasses of water and maybe takes some Advil, but he doesn't want to wake up Jonny. So he just lies there instead, focusing on the rise and fall of Jonny's chest against his back until he manages to fall asleep again.

-

Even though he's usually spectacularly hungover, Patrick loves mornings after.

There something about watching people stagger around miserably that brings him great joy, especially when those people are Duncan and Sharpy.

"I can't believe I thought this was a good idea," Duncan says. At least, that's what Patrick thinks he says. It's hard to tell because of the way he's got his face buried in his arms on the kitchen table. "Why didn't any of you stop me?"

Sharpy just groans. He's stretched out on the kitchen floor in front of the dishwasher, and Patrick can't be sure, but he has a strong suspicion that's where the guy slept last night.

"I, for one, had a lovely time," Patrick says, making his voice as bright and cheerful and loud as possible even though it probably hurts him just as much as it hurts them.

He's only in the kitchen do track down caffeine, but it's proving to be kind of difficult because they'd used up all the soda last night for mixers. He looks briefly at the Keiths' weird space-age coffee machine before just grabbing a bag of chocolate covered espresso beans off the top of the fridge.

On his way back upstairs, he passes Brandon and Andy stumbling out of one of the bedrooms. He's 99% sure they were just sleeping, but he still vows to keep an eye out. He really doesn't want to be their gay relationship guru, but he's willing to step up if they need him. If nothing else, he can give them a long list of shit not to do. (#1. DON'T BE AN UNCOMMUNICATIVE MORON.)

Jonny's still out when Patrick gets back, and he only groans sleepily when Patrick climbs awkwardly over him to reclaim his place on the couch. He does wake up when Patrick kisses him, but only to shove Patrick away and croak, "God, no."

“Nice,” Patrick laughs.

“It’s too early,” Jonny says. “And I think I’m still drunk. Also your mouth tastes like ass.”

“You’re such a fucking charmer,” Patrick says, and plies him with espresso beans until he’s at least semi-functional.

Later that afternoon, Corey, who’d stayed sober all night because of what he claims were moral reasons but Patrick is pretty sure was just a desire to watch everyone else make idiots of themselves, sends out a group email. It contains: a completely WRONG award for best costume (Montador’s stupid matador outfit, like, haha that’s *so* original), a bunch of pictures of Duncs and Brent drunkenly passed out on top of each other, and three minutes of blurry video footage of Patrick trying to do the Time Warp again.

Damn, Patrick loves Halloween.

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And then it’s November.

The soccer team gets knocked out in the second round of playoffs, because aside from Jonny and one or two other guys, they’re actually pretty terrible. Jonny spends maybe an hour sulking about it after the game, rehashing all the ways he could have been better and all the things he should have done differently, but he snaps out of it pretty easily when Patrick reaches over and starts jerking him off right in the middle of a rant about how Jonny should have worked out two hours a day instead of just one. Patrick wants to credit his magic hands, but mostly he just thinks Jonny knew the team never really had a shot.

Coach Hamilton takes it way harder, and for a solid week they do nothing in APES but watch movies while he sits at his desk and mopes. For the first few days he makes at least a token effort at picking titles relevant to environmental science—*FernGully*’s totally about pollution and deforestation and shit—but by Friday they’re watching *Cool Runnings* and it’s become pretty obvious that he’s just grabbing whatever random videos he can find that he thinks will be appropriate for all ages.

That afternoon, after everyone’s clapped for the heroism of the Jamaican bobsled team, Coach Hamilton dismisses them with a bitter reminder that hockey tryouts start on Monday.

Jonny tenses up in the seat next to Patrick, face going blank.

“Are you still coming with me?”

Patrick has to finish up the back page for tomorrow, and he doesn’t have PageMaker on his computer to do it at home. Jonny had volunteered to stay behind and keep him company over lunch, but Patrick’s half afraid he’s going to make up some excuse and run off now.

Jonny surprises him by nodding yes, and they walk to the newspaper room in silence. There’s nobody else there, because all the other editors are responsible and shit and had their pages finished in class today. Patrick takes a seat at one of the computers along the back wall, and Jonny settles into the chair next to him on the right, opening up IE to check his email while Patrick works.

After a few minutes of relatively comfortable silence, Patrick can’t help himself anymore.

“So,” he says. “Are you gonna try out or what?”

Jonny gives him a warning look. “Pat, don’t.”

“I just don’t understand. Why are you so afraid of getting what you want?”

“I’m not,” Jonny says. “That’s not what this is about.” He turns back to the computer screen, pretending to concentrate hard on the cursor to avoid Patrick’s eyes. “It just doesn’t feel like I’ve earned it, you know? I mean, I *quit*.”

“That is such bullshit. You realize that, right? You haven’t ‘earned it’? What does that even mean? That’s nothing but your stupid fucking, like, martyr complex.”

Jonny turns to face Patrick again, scowling. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. You weren’t there when I gave up and walked out on my team.”

“No,” Patrick says, “but you’ve told me all about it. I know what happened. And I know you, and I know why you did it. It’s not like you just got lazy and decided you didn’t want to play anymore. You did it for your family. That’s different.”

“It just means I wasn’t willing to make the sacrifice,” Jonny says, vicious. “It doesn’t matter why. The important part is it got too hard and I just walked away. I don’t—”

“I swear, if the next word out of your mouth is ‘deserve’—”

“I don’t know what that says about me as a player.” Jonny sags down in his chair a little, suddenly looking more miserable than angry. “I’m not gonna be on a team if I can’t be there for them 100% every day. If I can’t make those hard choices, those sacrifices—then no, I don’t deserve to be there. And that’s not a ‘martyr complex’ or whatever the hell you think I have. That’s just what it means to be part of a team.”

“Jonny,” Patrick starts, but he doesn’t know how to finish. Jonny has the most overdeveloped sense of responsibility of anyone Patrick’s ever met. It’s one of the best things about him, except for those times when it’s the worst, when he tears himself to pieces for it. Like now.

“I think you’re looking at this the wrong way. You *did* make the sacrifice: You gave up hockey. You didn’t stop for you, you stopped playing because your mom needed you to. You put her ahead of yourself, right? I think that shows you have exactly what it takes to be on a team.”

“Maybe,” Jonny says. He sounds unsure but hopeful, like he wants to be convinced but isn’t quite there yet.

Patrick scoots his chair over a little, closing the space between them. He reaches out a hand to rest on Jonny’s forearm, squeezes. “Can’t you just let this be easy? This is everything you always wanted. Don’t you get that? Everything can work out for you.”

His voice catches a little as he says it, and he can’t help but feel a sudden, jealous wrench in his gut, because Patrick would *kill* for this kind of second chance, and here Jonny’s getting ready to just throw it away.

Something of that must show on Patrick’s face, because Jonny brings up his right hand and rests it lightly on top of the hand Patrick has on his arm.

“What about you?”

“What about me?”

“Are you gonna play?”

Patrick laughs a little, hoping it doesn't sound too bitter. "What would be the point? There's nobody waiting to offer me a spot at UND."

"Maybe not," Jonny says, "but you're only a junior. You still have two years."

"Yeah, but see, then I'm just right back where I was last year. The problem was never that I couldn't play. The problem was that I couldn't play seriously enough to have it go anywhere without giving up my family."

Patrick tugs his hand away from Jonny's and stands up, suddenly restless. He walks over to bookcase where they keep copies of all the old papers and starts thumbing through them just to have something to do with his hands.

"I had dinner with my sisters every night this week," he says to last week's edition. "I'm ok with my choices. I'd make them again. But you have to realize how lucky you are here, Jonny. It's—you couldn't have asked for it to work out any better than this."

"I can think of one way," Jonny says, and Patrick rolls his eyes and is not at all touched or anything because that's so totally cheesy.

He walks back over to the row of computers and stands behind Jonny, resting his hands on the back of the chair. Jonny leans his head back a little to kind of butt against Patrick's chest in what he probably thinks is a super romantic gesture.

"If I do play," Jonny says after a beat, "would you play with me?"

"I . . . don't know. I don't know if I could handle that."

"I get it. I'm not sure I could either. But I'd really like to play with you, if you think you could."

"Ask me again on Monday," Patrick says, dropping back down into his own chair, "and in the meantime help me figure out a headline for this stupid volleyball article."

-

The answer is yes, of course.

It's *hockey*. And *Jonny*. Those are pretty much his two favorite things in the world right now, and even if this isn't exactly what Patrick used to dream of, when he gets out there on the ice and Jonny sends him a perfect pass and a perfect grin when Patrick nets it, like Patrick is the best thing that's ever happened to him—well. It's hard to dwell on all this ways this isn't quite what Patrick wanted.

Most of Patrick's friends are already on the team. (It's how they met, actually: Patrick used to come to games whenever he had the chance. He maybe chirped a little at first, when certain plays didn't live up to his expectations, but eventually his natural charm shone through and they accepted him as their own.)

They're all thrilled when Patrick shows up at tryouts, of course, except for Sharpy, who's mostly thrilled but also kind of wary, because he's the guy Patrick spent the most time talking to before he decided to give up playing.

Patrick's freshmen try out, too, because they look to him for guidance in all aspects of life, including extracurriculars. They actually show some decent potential, but they're not quite good enough to make the cut. Patrick does, of course. And Jonny.

It's actually pretty funny to watch. Not to brag or anything, but Patrick's kind of a big deal, and Coach Duff just about jizzes in his pants when *the* Patrick Kane skates out onto the ice for the first time.

Then Jonny gets out there, and he and Patrick start screwing around a little, just trying to get back into the rhythm they'd built months ago at hockey camp. As Patrick watches, Duff's eyes get wider and wider, and by the time he and Jonny skate back over to the bench the guy looks like he just won the fucking lottery.

Even if Duff is small potatoes, it's still super gratifying. But nowhere near as good as when Jonny smiles at him in the locker room, soft and kind of goofy, and says, "I'm really glad you were out there with me."

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The next week is Patrick's birthday.

All the guys chip in to buy Patrick a digital camera because he's been talking about wanting one since seeing all of Corey's Halloween pictures. Jonny puts in some money for that, then gets him a box set of Olsen twins DVDs because he's an asshole.

(Patrick forgives him because he also gives Patrick a birthday blowjob that lasts for like an hour.

Also because *New York Minute* really is a cinematic masterpiece.)

He doesn't really celebrate, except that his parents take him out to dinner and his sisters bake him a (frankly pretty lousy) cake. The guys offer to chip in for a suite at the sketchyass EconoLodge off the highway so they can have a party, but Patrick's so exhausted he turns them down. Getting back on the ice again is amazing, but it's also wearing him out, and he's started crawling into bed at around 9:00 every night, texting with Jonny for maybe an hour before he passes the fuck out.

It's worth it, though. It's so fucking beyond worth it. Being back on the ice again is like—well, if Patrick had words to describe it, he'd be in a higher level English class. It's just. *Awesome*.

Even though Patrick has seen the rest of the team play plenty of times before, he'd always sort of dismissed them as not being quite at his level because they weren't playing in any of the elite competitions he was running himself ragged to win. They were just a regular high school team.

And yeah, Patrick's still better than most of the guys out there, but that's not because they're bad. It's because Patrick's just that good.

It only takes him one practice to realize just how seriously he'd been underestimating these dudes, and then he feels kind of bad about it, not least because he's supposed to have better hockey sense than that.

Sharpy is a fucking stud, and Brent and Duncan are just as married on the ice as they are off of it. Hoss is a beast, Viktor's amazing, Nick is awesome even though he's just a sophomore. Even Jamal is good enough that Patrick almost forgives him for all the terrible spreads he's always doing about men's fashion for the newspaper.

And Jonny, well. Jonny's just as intense, just as driven as he was at camp. Except here, that focus actually makes sense. What seemed out of place and just plain douchey during those ridiculous kids' drills is downright inspiring here, against real players. He's not as flashy as Patrick, just solidly, quietly competent, except for those moments when he just seems to, like, *decide* he's gonna make something happen and suddenly he's halfway down the rink and scoring on a breakaway before anyone else can even blink.

Jesus, Patrick can't wait to see him in an actual game.

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So.

The thing is.

They've never actually had sex.

Like, they've fooled around *a lot*. They've given each other plenty of handies and blowjobs, which Patrick's 9th grade health teacher would insist totally count, but nothing has gone up anyone's ass yet except for just the very tip of a finger that one time Jonny gave Patrick the world's longest birthday bj.

It's not a thing. They're not waiting for a special moment or whatever. P-in-a just seems like it's gonna take the kind of time and privacy they just haven't had up to this point.

Also, to be perfectly honest, Patrick's a little. . .not scared, definitely not that. But. Bravely and manfully cautious? Rationally hesitant? Because he's gotten pretty up close and personal with Jonny's dick over the past few months, and he really just doesn't see how that whole situation is gonna work out.

How will it even fit? What if Patrick has, like, a rectal prolapse or whatever? Can people even get those? It happened to his neighbor's cat one time and it was fucking disgusting. Patrick would rather just be a virgin forever in that case, thanks.

Of course, it could just as easily be Patrick putting his p in Jonny's a. Patrick thinks about that kind of a lot. It's a pretty great thought to entertain in the theoretical sense (read: while he's jerking off), but if he ever starts trying to imagine how it might actually go down, he just psychs himself out. What if he's no good? What if Jonny doesn't like it? What if he *hurts* Jonny somehow? There are so many horrible ways it could go wrong, and Patrick can't help but picture every single one of them.

So basically, Patrick's in no hurry to get his v-card punched. The things they're already doing are more than enough for him—especially that one thing Jonny does with his tongue that Patrick still can't figure out how to replicate.

But then Coach Duff gives them their full schedule for the season: Practices four times a week until winter break, then two weeks off, then their first official game at the end of the first week in January. The important part, though, is that Duff has them down for four practices that week before the game, starting on January 3rd, even though school doesn't start back until the 5th.

It doesn't make any difference to Patrick, whose family is staying in Buffalo, but Jonny's parents are taking him and David up to Quebec to see their mom's family. Jonny has to change his flight so he gets in two days earlier than he'd been planning.

Which means: Andrée is furious the coach waited so long to let parents know practices would interfere with break and sends a very strongly worded but perfectly polite letter. More importantly, it means: Jonny will be home alone for two days while he and Patrick don't have any obligations besides hockey practice for a few hours in the afternoon.

It's too perfect a situation not to take advantage of, no matter how manfully cautious Patrick might be feeling about what they're actually going to get up to.

Winter break itself is pretty great. His aunt and uncle come over for Christmas dinner, so Patrick spends the day hanging out with his cousins, but for most of the break it's just him and his sisters. This time last year Patrick was already well into the hockey season, and it's *so nice* just to be able to bum around every day with his family, watching shitty made-for-tv Christmas movies on *Lifetime* and trying (and failing) to make gingerbread men.

Jonny calls him on Christmas day, and they spend almost an hour talking on the phone even though they're both pretty terrible at it and mostly it's just a lot of Patrick narrating what he's doing as he sets up the air mattress in the basement for his cousins to sleep on and Jonny laughing when he can't figure out the air pump. It's ok, though. Good just to hear his voice or whatever.

Hoss invites him to a party on New Year's Eve but it's way out in the country in some kind of, like, abandoned barn or something and Patrick's mom is just not having that. Instead, he spends the evening with his family, watching the ball drop at midnight and drinking his one allotted glass of champagne. It's super lame, except for the part where Patrick and Erica sneak back downstairs after everyone's asleep and finish off the bottle at the kitchen table, just talking.

Patrick's waiting for Jonny at the airport when he gets in on the morning of the 2nd, because Patrick's totally awesome at this boyfriend-whatever thing. Jonny, because he totally sucks at this boyfriend-whatever thing, brings him back a souvenir t-shirt written in French but won't translate it, which means it's probably something insulting.

They go straight to Jonny's place after, with a slight detour through the McDonald's drive-thru for lunch. Patrick maaaaybe didn't tell his parents about the part where Jonny's home alone for two days, so they think he's gonna hang out with Jonny all day and then have dinner with his family. He actually thought about asking if he could spend the night—his mom has enough faith in Andrée's parenting skills to trust her to keep things kosher—but ultimately decided that would be pushing his luck.

Stashed in the back seat is a plastic bag from the drugstore, the product of the most excruciating 10 minutes of Patrick's life, wherein he grabbed a box of condoms and three different kinds of lube because he wasn't sure if Jonny would have, like, preferences or something, and then endured the completely judgemental stare of the weird old dude behind the counter.

Whatever, fuck him anyway. Patrick's about to get *laid*.

-

Except for the part where Patrick totally doesn't get laid, because he somehow forgot that Jonny is a gigantic fucking weirdo.

After they've eaten, and Jonny's told Patrick all about his one asshole cousin from Quebec City who always pretends not to understand Jonny's accent, and Patrick's told Jonny all about how he and Erica got so drunk on New Year's Eve they snuck outside at 4am in their pajamas to make snow angels, Patrick pulls out the bag from the drugstore, empties it out all over the table, and says, "So whaddya think?"

(Admittedly, it's maybe not his smoothest move ever.)

Jonny's eyes go wide. Then they go *dark* somehow, and Patrick has to swallow because his throat is suddenly dry. Then Jonny seems to snap out of it, and he levels Patrick with his best I'm-taking-this-really-seriously-and-you-should-be-too face.

"You want to have sex?"

“Yeah. Don’t you? I mean, we’ve been dating or whatever for like four months now, so.” He trails off a little, shrugging, and Jonny’s serious face shifts into an outright frown.

“You don’t sound super enthusiastic about it.”

“I am,” Patrick says, and he genuinely is. Mostly. “I really want to. It’s just—it’s kinda weird, you know?”

Jonny nods. “Yeah.” He picks up one of the bottles of lube and squints at the label on the back. “I think. . . I think maybe we should warm up first.”

“What, like, practice? Isn’t that what we’ve been doing, kind of?”

“No,” Jonny says. “I mean, look. You wouldn’t go out to play a game without stretching, right?”

Patrick can feel his face turn bright red. “Um. Actually, the stretching is something you do, y’know, *during*. I looked it up.”

Jonny squirms awkwardly in his seat and says, “Yeah, uh, me too. But that’s not what—maybe that’s not the best comparison. I meant more like if you’d just started running, you wouldn’t immediately go out and try to run the Boston Marathon. You’d work up to it. A few kilometers at first—”

“A few *miles*, you mean, because Boston is like the birthplace of freedom.”

“—and then you gradually build up to the 40k.”

“All right,” Patrick says after a second to think about it, both because it’s actually a totally reasonable argument and also because no matter how much he’d been trying to tell himself he was totally excited about getting laid, he’d been freaking out hardcore all week about the possibility of this afternoon ending with a dick up his ass.

“But how do you build up to sex?”

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If your name is Jonathan Toews and there is *something actually wrong with you*, this is how you build up to sex:

You make a training schedule.

Jonny doesn’t make an actual, physical schedule, thank God. If he’d shown up in the bedroom with like a fucking word document or something, Patrick would have had to seriously reevaluate all the life choices that had led him to the point where he would date somebody who was that much of a loser. (He can’t even lie, though: It totally wouldn’t have been a dealbreaker. Ugh, how embarrassing.)

Instead, the training schedule mostly just involves Jonny pressing Patrick down against the bed with an arm across his hips, working him open excruciatingly slowly with just one thick, blunt finger.

“After this,” Jonny says, bending down to press a kiss to Patrick’s hipbone, “you can do me. And then tomorrow—you’re coming over again tomorrow, right? Tomorrow, we’ll try two. My parents’ll be home on Tuesday, but we can take your car out to that parking lot behind the construction site where no one ever goes. If you slide the passenger’s seat all the way back, I think I can fit in the footwell, give you three fingers just like that.”

It's the most Jonny's ever talked while they've been fooling around, and though it's maybe too matter-of-fact for straight-up dirty talk, it's probably the closest Jonny's ever gonna get.

When Patrick finally, *finally* comes after Jonny takes pity on him and sucks a little on the head of his dick, he's not sure if it's more from the finger up his ass rubbing against his prostate or the low, turned-on rumble of Jonny's voice.

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They win their first game 4-0.

Patrick's not surprised, because they're awesome, but he didn't expect it to be quite such a blowout. Jonny, Patrick, Sharpy, and Viktor all had goals, and Patrick got the assist on Sharpy's, too, which he tries not to gloat about *too* much.

After, they go out for pizza to celebrate at this so-so place that sponsors their school's athletics program and gives half-price discounts to anyone who shows a student ID on game night. It's not the most impressive victory of Patrick's career, certainly, but he can't stop smiling around his slice of ham and green peppers. Jonny notices and smiles right back, brilliant, then throws a handful of napkins at him and tells him to stop being fucking disgusting and chew with his mouth closed.

Patrick missed this, so much, and even if *this* is all it's ever going to be from now on, well. He thinks he can live with that.

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After that, things settle into a routine.

School, practices, games, going out with the guys to celebrate—Jonny there for all of it.

Patrick's classes are just as boring as ever, except for World Civ, which is actually turning out to be really interesting. None of them are actively terrible besides APES, which continues to be a complete joke and probably, like, an insult to the scientific community.

(Last week, Coach Hamilton had them make dioramas of the atmosphere. Patrick partnered with Jonny. He would have anyway, but since Coach Hamilton is basically in love with Jonny's awesome soccer skills, this had the added bonus of guaranteeing them an A even though they just bought a cake from the grocery store and drew different colored circles on it with tubes of icing.)

Newspaper kind of sucks now, though, because Radha says it violates journalistic integrity or whatever for Patrick to write articles about hockey when he's on the team. She points to the fact that he and Jonny have both been stars for all five of the games they've played so far. Patrick tries to explain that that's not favoritism, that's just them being really good at hockey, but she doesn't buy it. So Andy and Brandon get to write all the articles about hockey and Patrick is stuck making up shit about wrestling and basketball, which blows because a) wrestling is dumb and b) their basketball team is terrible.

On the plus side, it's super gratifying when Andy's first hockey article comes out and right under the headline—*Stick it to 'em!*—he's listed Jonny as first star and Patrick as second.

Overall, though, Patrick can't really complain.

He's having a better second semester than Jonny, at least. The upper-level language classes have this weird system Patrick doesn't understand where they, like, switch teachers halfway through the year because otherwise there aren't enough native speakers to go around, and Jonny's locked in

some kind of epic battle of wills with his new French teacher.

“He keeps correcting my accent,” he says one day at lunch. “And then when I tell him it’s not wrong, it’s just not Parisian, he gives me this snooty look and says, ‘Well, this is a Parisian French class.’”

(At least, Patrick’s assuming that’s what the last part of that sentence is. Jonny says it in French, in a really high-pitched voice with an exaggerated [Pierre Escargot](#) kind of accent.)

Sharpy and Duncan nod in sympathy.

“Yeah,” Duncan says. “He gets on me for that, too. He has a lot of ideas about,” he waves his sandwich around vaguely, “language purity. That’s why he and Madame Wolfe hate each other.”

“That’s what you get when you try to cheat your way through your foreign language requirement,” Patrick says, far enough removed now from the awfulness that was the beginning of the school year that he can joke about it.

“Oh fuck you,” Jonny says, and elbows him just this side of too hard, but at least now he’s kind of smiling a little bit underneath his annoyed face.

The next day’s just as bad, though, and Jonny shows up to lunch red-faced and fuming. He won’t talk about it, and Patrick has to wait until later, at practice, to get the story out of Sharpy.

“It was pretty ugly,” Sharpy says. “They got into it in the middle of class. Jonny was trying to keep himself in check so he wouldn’t get in trouble and have to sit out for any games, but. I don’t know, it was bad.”

The rest of the week’s not any better, if Jonny’s short temper at lunch and even-more-intense-than-usual practices are anything to go by. Patrick does his best to be, like, supportive and caring or whatever, but it’s kind of hard to do when Jonny won’t talk to him about it.

He settles on taking him to the dollar theater that weekend for a double feature of *National Treasure* and *Seed of Chucky* and not even trying to make out with him the whole time, just sitting next to him in the dark and holding his hand.

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They keep winning.

And winning.

And *winning*.

It gets kind of embarrassing after a while, how hot their streak is, but it’s not like they haven’t earned it. They work as hard at practices as any of the other, more elite teams Patrick’s been on, mostly because no one wants to disappoint and/or get yelled at by Jonny. Patrick’s been on the wrong end of Jonny’s “you should be better than this” stare enough times that he completely understands the motivation.

By the middle of February, they’ve pretty much sewn up their invitation to the state championships in March, and everyone except poor, bitter Coach Hamilton seems to think they’ve already got the title in the bag.

The whole team’s gotten super popular all of a sudden, and Patrick and Jonny, especially, are kind of local celebrities now, both for the way they play together on the ice and the insane screaming

matches they get into on the bench. People have started, like, coming up to Patrick randomly around school to complement him on some play or wish him luck for the game that week or once, bizarrely, to ask for his autograph.

So when someone comes up behind him one day in the computer lab and just kind of stands there, hovering, he automatically assumes it's some random admirer waiting to make smalltalk.

Instead, when he turns around, he sees Jonny, staring at the game of Bejeweled frozen on Patrick's computer screen.

"This is what you do with your free period?"

"Not always," Patrick says. "Sometimes I do homework if I forgot to do it the night before."

Jonny snorts and takes a seat at the computer next to Patrick.

"What are you doing here, anyway?" Patrick asks. "Don't you have French right now?"

Jonny holds up a little wooden slat with BATHROOM PASS written on it in black Sharpie.

"We had a vocabulary test today. I finished it as fast as I could, then asked for a pass so I wouldn't have to sit there looking at that asshole's face."

Patrick spins his roly chair all the way around so he can kick at Jonny's ankle a little in sympathy. "Do you have to go back, or can you just hang out here with me the rest of the period?"

"The test was supposed to take all class," Jonny says. "So I think I can probably skip. Do you think the librarian would write me a note saying she needed help, like, lifting boxes or something?"

"I think the librarian could lift her own boxes," Patrick says, because he's gotten to know Ms. Warren pretty well over the course of the year and she's told him all about how she used to throw shot put on her college track team. "But she's totally cool, so she might help you out if you asked."

"Ok, good."

Jonny's logging into his email account, so Patrick unpauses his game and goes back to trying to beat his high score.

A few minutes later, some pretty spectacular strategizing by Patrick has gotten him seven jewels in a row, and he tugs on Jonny's sleeve to get him to look before they disappear. Jonny just shrugs him off, though, and when Patrick turns to bitch him out he sees that Jonny's just staring at the screen, frozen.

"Jonny?"

Patrick rolls his chair over a little so he can lean over Jonny's shoulder and see what's so fascinating.

It's an email from d.hakstol@und.edu that starts *Dear Jonathan*.

"Holy shit," Patrick says. "What's it say?"

"He says he wanted to give me a heads up that in a few weeks I'll be receiving an official offer to come play for the Sioux after graduation."

“That’s *awesome*.” Patrick kisses Jonny on the corner of his mouth, quick, because neither one of them is big on PDA at school. (During school hours, at least.)

“Yeah.” He sounds stunned, shaky, like he can’t quite believe it even though they’d both pretty much known this was coming for months.

“And you’re gonna say yes, right?”

Jonny doesn’t answer right away, so Patrick leans into him until his whole side is pressed against Jonny’s, drops his forehead down to rest on Jonny’s shoulder. “C’mon, please tell me you’re gonna take it.”

“I’m gonna take it,” Jonny says finally, bringing a hand up to card through Patrick’s hair. “I’m gonna play for North Dakota.”

-

March is *insane*, because all of his classes are starting to kick into pre-finals mode, especially APES. They actually have to take the AP exam for that shit, which is basically guaranteed to be a disaster unless the AP people place as much value on children’s movie classics and conspiracy theories as Coach Hamilton does.

Shit’s getting real in newspaper, too, because they do this gigantic, like, 80-page issue at the end of every year that handles all the superlatives and senior tribute stuff they can’t fit in the yearbook. Patrick’s still not allowed near any of the hockey articles, and since that’s the biggest deal in sports on campus right now, that means he somehow gets stuck with all the grunt work of typing up ballots and putting them in teachers’ mailboxes to distribute and then going to every single classroom in the whole damn school to pick them up.

Even worse than that is that seniors have the option of buying space in the issue to leave messages to their friends or their favorite teachers or whoever. It’s a good idea, and it’s where the paper makes most of its printing budget every year, but it also means Patrick has to read through every single fucking message to make sure there aren’t any dirty words or blatant references to sex, drugs, or alcohol. He’s bitter enough that he lets a lot of things slide, banking on the fact that none of the teachers will actually go through and read all this shit because it’s so goddamn boring.

On his third straight day of reading through his classmates’ stupid, tedious inside jokes, he comes across Jonny’s.

He stops, surprised. Jonny hadn’t mentioned he was buying one. It doesn’t seem like a particularly Jonny thing to do, either—the guy’s not exactly public with his feelings.

But then Patrick actually reads it, and ok, he could see Jonny writing something like this. It’s pretty short, but he managed to work in one or two words of acknowledgment for *everyone* on both the hockey and the soccer teams. (Marian’s actually been out for the last few weeks with an injury, but by his name Jonny’s just put “☆.” It’s. . .really sweet, actually. He’s gonna make an amazing captain someday.)

At the very end of the message, there’s a line break. Then: “**PK:** Thank you so much. For everything. I really hope we meet each other again.”

And shit, ok, suddenly Patrick’s having trouble breathing. It’s not like Jonny’s breaking up with him via newspaper—they’ve actually talked about this, believe it or not, and they both decided it doesn’t make any sense for Patrick and Jonny to try to stay together while Jonny’s off in North Dakota and Patrick’s stuck in Buffalo. It’s just not logical, and statistically that kind of thing

almost never works out.

But there's a world of difference between knowing that, knowing that in two months Jonny's off to Quebec for the summer and then straight to North Dakota for school, and *knowing* it. Reading it in this message Jonny probably didn't mean for him to see until the last day of school.

Patrick feels like he might cry, suddenly, which is total bullshit, because even if he were the kind of guy to cry over some dude, it wouldn't be over someone as objectively terrible as Jonny, with his stupid jokes and his ugly haircut and the way he always waits in the driveway when he drives Patrick home after dark to make sure he gets inside safely. The way he spends his Saturdays playing with his brother, trying to help him train even though David's nowhere near the natural hockey player Jonny is. The way he looked at Patrick the first time they had sex, like there was no one else in the world he'd rather be with.

Total fucking bullshit. Really.

-

The one good thing is that Patrick doesn't have much time to dwell.

They make it to the state championship tournament, just like everyone thought they would, and they get to miss a Friday and a Monday of school so they can compete.

For the three days of competition, Patrick's too busy playing some of the best hockey of his life to be sad. Or, maybe, he's just channeling all that sadness into 100% pure *awesome*. Seriously, he doesn't think he's ever been this dominant in a tournament before. He gets a hat trick in the first game and just never lets up after. All his passes are connecting, the puck is going exactly where he wants it to, he's out-skating just about everyone else on the ice. He scores the game-winning goal in the semi-final game, and just like that they're through to the state finals.

Patrick and Jonny are sharing a hotel room, because Coach Duff is kind of oblivious, but they've mostly been too exhausted to take advantage of it. That night, though, Jonny follows him into the shower and blows him right there, on his knees on the tile. It must be hard for him to breathe because the water keeps running down Patrick's stomach into his mouth, but he just keeps going like he's desperate for it, pulling off every now and then to press his cheek against Patrick's thigh and gasp for air.

Good hockey, Patrick realizes then in what is maybe the most *duh* moment of all time, really turns Jonny on.

Patrick plays even better the next day in the final game, and even though he doesn't score a goal, he gets assists on three of the four goals they do score. Jonny gets the game-winner, which is so fitting somehow that Patrick can't even be jealous, especially since it's Patrick's beauty of a saucer that makes it happen.

They go out to eat at the T.G.I. Fridays down the street from the hotel to celebrate after, but things stay pretty tame because Coach Duff and the staff chaperones are all there, too. They'll have a real celebration once they get back to Buffalo, Patrick knows. Hell, he and Jonny'll have a real celebration just as soon as they get back to the hotel if the way Jonny is looking at him over the priced-to-share chicken strips appetizer is any indication.

Later, when Patrick and Jonny are lying tangled together in the scratchy hotel sheets, Patrick says, "I don't want you to graduate."

"Yeah," Jonny says. "Me neither, kind of. I mean, I want to go, I'm excited to play, but."

He looks at Patrick kind of helplessly, and Patrick rolls over onto his stomach so he won't have to see that expression on Jonny's face anymore.

"We could try," Jonny says softly, shifting closer and smoothing a hand over Patrick's back. "When I go away, I mean. We could make it work."

"Just don't," Patrick says, because they've been through this a dozen different times, gone over all the variables and made the stupid pros and cons lists Jonny insisted on making, and it always comes out the same way.

Maybe they'd stay together. That could happen, sure. But two guys with their communication skills? Hundreds and hundreds of miles apart? There's just no way Patrick can see it happening. Jonny can't really see it either, Patrick knows. He just always has to make everything harder than it has to be.

Jonny doesn't push it. Instead, he says, "I wish you were coming with me."

He doesn't mean he wishes Patrick were going to North Dakota too. He means *I wish everything had worked out for you the way it did for me*.

Yeah, well, Patrick kind of wishes that too. And that's another reason he and Jonny wouldn't work out after Jonny went off to college. Patrick likes to think of himself as a good person, but he just doesn't have what it takes to stand by and watch Jonny become some big college star, to watch him get drafted, to watch him get everything *Patrick* wants without starting to hate him, just a little. Better to end it cleanly before Patrick starts resenting him.

Patrick sighs, disgusted with the whole situation. Clearly, feelings are for idiots. After he and Jonny break up, he resolves not to have any for at least a year.

He rolls back over suddenly and scrambles on top of Jonny, pressing him down against the bed in a desperate kiss.

Fuck this maudlin shit, he thinks, determined. If he's only got a few months left with Jonny, he's damn well gonna make the most of them, and he's gonna start by celebrating their state championship with another round of awesome sex.

-

Jonny takes to skipping French pretty much every day, and Ms. Warren, who was highly sympathetic when Jonny explained the situation, provides him with increasingly ridiculous notes to excuse his absences.

Yesterday's read, *Please excuse Jonathan, he was helping me sharpen pencils*.

"Aren't you gonna get in trouble for this eventually?" Patrick asks one day.

"Nah," Jonny says. "All my tests and essays and stuff get perfect marks. He only takes off points for oral, and even then he can't mark me down too much because my grammar's good."

Patrick's still stuck on: "Heh, *oral*."

"Oh my God, seriously?" Jonny rolls his eyes and goes back to playing this weird knock-off version of the Sims he found online.

He *should* be using this free time to read the AP Environmental Science review book his mom bought him last week. Patrick should be too, really. The exam's in three and a half weeks, the end

of May, and they both have pretty much an entire year's worth of material to learn because their class was such a fucking joke.

Patrick's never started studying that far in advance for anything, though, and he's not about to start for something as ridiculous as APES. Besides, if all the students bomb the exam then he's pretty sure the school will have to give in and finally hire an actual science teacher. Patrick's pathetic, humiliating failure will ensure the success of future generations. That's totally a worthy sacrifice, he thinks.

Jonny is unimpressed when Patrick explains this logic over lunch and busts out the review book the very next day. Of course, it just sits there while he and Jonny spend the whole period bullshitting, Patrick trying to get Jonny to just come out and say what he wants for his birthday already and Jonny waving him off with really lame and blatantly untrue "oh you don't have to get me anything" kind of answers.

Just to spite him, Patrick almost really *doesn't* get him a present. Eventually, he decides the long-term consequences (ie the silent treatment and Jonny's awful judgey you-have-disappointed-me face) aren't worth the short-term hilarity. He still doesn't know what Jonny wants, though, so he just winds up ordering him a UND jersey online.

Jonny gives him a funny look when he opens it and says, "You know they're gonna give me like a million of these for free when I get there," but he wears it to school the next Monday and spends all day looking super smug, which is basically Jonny's version of happy, so Patrick counts it as a win.

That's also the day before the big end of year issue of the paper goes to press, so Patrick and a few of the other editors stay after school to get everything finalized. He and Radha almost throw down because she doesn't like the way he handled the superlatives—which, to be fair, was to get bored halfway through and start making up his own categories and declaring winners as he saw fit. She wins the argument by pulling the editor-in-chief card, and Patrick has to go back and redo [his awesome superlatives spread](#) with all the super boring actual results. His life is so hard sometimes.

After everything is finally done, Mr. Rozelman, the advisor, holds Patrick back to tell him how proud he is of how much Patrick's matured over the course of the year and how much he appreciates all of Patrick's hard work.

Patrick just blinks, completely taken by surprise. Did this guy not see the epic smackdown Radha just gave Patrick for fucking around with the superlatives and "jeopardizing the journalistic integrity of the entire paper"?

"Don't think I haven't noticed the way you've taken those freshmen under your wing," Mr. Rozelman continues, apparently not registering Patrick's blank shock. "That's the mark of a true leader right there. I hope you'll be back to join us next year."

Patrick nods, says, "Yeah, definitely."

He'd already been planning on it if the class fit in his schedule, but he *has* to make it work now, if only for the awesome college recommendation he'll be able to get Mr. Rozelman to write him. Schools love all that leadership shit.

He and Jonny get together that night, theoretically to study for APES but really just to highlight random parts of the review book that look important and science-y and fantasize about the look on Coach Hamilton's face when everyone fails and he gets fired, and Patrick tells Jonny about Mr. Rozelman's weird, earnest praise.

“Good,” Jonny says, reaching over Patrick to highlight a line about the thermosphere. “I’m glad he noticed. You’ve been great with those kids all year. They really look up to you.”

“Thanks,” Patrick says, awkward, pleased in a way he hadn’t been hearing the same thing from Mr. Rozelman.

It’s always strange to get compliments from Jonny—*real* compliments, not shit like “fuck, yeah, you’re so good at that.” He’s not stingy with them, exactly, but he doesn’t give them out unless he really means them. It makes them worth more to hear.

“Anyway,” he says after a minute, before it can turn into like a thing, “help me figure out this chart on page 97. I’ve never even heard of most of these animals.”

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There is one good thing about the exam: It’s on a Tuesday morning, 9:00-12:00, in the main hall of the church down the block from the school, and they get the rest of the day off after it’s over.

Jonny and Patrick stand next to each other in the line for the water fountain during the break, and even though they’re not technically supposed to talk about the test, Patrick answers Jonny’s slightly wild-eyed look with a whispered, “Oh my God, half of that wasn’t even *English*, I am so screwed.”

They make it through, though, somehow, and Patrick’s pretty sure he’s gonna pull out a three despite everything. They go to a diner for lunch, and Patrick drowns his sorrows in a giant stack of pancakes and approximately half a gallon of maple syrup.

“You should have had that this morning,” Jonny tells him, digging into a club sandwich like it’s going out of style. “Carbs are supposed to make you think better, I read.”

“I don’t think there are enough pancakes in the world to have gotten me through that disaster,” Patrick says. “I totally just guessed for like the last seven questions.”

“Yeah, same here. And then there was one section where I got six Bs in a row—I think they do that on purpose just to freak you out.”

“Probably. Bastards.”

They spend the rest of the afternoon kind of aimlessly driving around, eventually pulling off at one of the scenic overlooks around Lake Erie and just sprawling out in the grass. It feels strangely like summer vacation’s already started. Actually, Patrick thinks, it feels like that afternoon they spent together lying in the football field at camp, what feels like forever ago now. When they kissed for the first time.

Patrick’s not, like, a super sentimental guy or anything, but he can’t shake the idea once it occurs to him, so he leans over after a few minutes, turns his head to the side and kisses Jonny right in the middle of some stupid story he’s telling about going camping one summer in Canada. Patrick’s not sure if Jonny gets the symbolism or whatever, but he laughs into Patrick’s mouth and kisses back, and they make out like that for a while until some car driving by honks at them and they break apart, startled.

Right, Patrick remembers. Side of the road.

Jonny drives them back to the church parking lot so Patrick can pick up his car, then Patrick has to go home and spend the rest of the night studying for his World Civ final on Thursday. It’s the only one besides APES he’s actually really worried about. (Well, that and math, but he’s mostly just

given math up as a lost cause by now.)

He does ok on it, he thinks, and then the day after he has his math exam and an in-class essay final in English and that's *it*. There's still another week of school left, but for all intents and purposes, Patrick's done with junior year.

The week flies by, and on the last day of school they get their yearbooks and the final edition of the newspaper with all the superlatives and senior tributes and shit. Patrick gets stupidly emotional reading Jonny's message again, then distracts himself by telling his friends all of the awesome superlatives he made up for them that Radha wouldn't let him print.

There aren't any classes after lunch; they have the whole afternoon to sign each other's yearbooks and say their goodbyes. Andy and Brandon hug him after he signs their yearbooks, which takes him kind of by surprise but is actually pretty awesome and, like, touching or whatever. Patrick hugs them both back and promises they'll hang out over the summer. Maybe he'll show them some hockey moves.

He says goodbye to Viktor, Niklas, and Marian, because they're all going to spend the summer overseas, but most of his friends are going to be in town all summer, so there aren't too many tearful farewells. Just Jonny, really, and at least he's sticking around for another week until after graduation before he runs off to Quebec. They've got all the time in the world, really.

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That week, after school's over but before graduation, is one of the weirdest times of Patrick's life.

He doesn't have anything to do, so he just spends every day hanging out with Jonny, tagging along when Jonny drives out to pick up his ridiculous green graduation robes, not bothering to hide his laugh when Jonny tries on the stupid hat. He has dinner at Jonny's house three nights in a row, and then when he calls home to check in and his dad pretends not to recognize his voice, he just drags Jonny over to his house to eat.

It's—strange. Jonny has to go to one graduation rehearsal, but other than that neither one of them has any obligations. They're totally free, just lazing around, but at the same time everything's undercut by this nervous sense of urgency, like they have to squeeze as much as possible into the next few days because *this is it*.

It's like a whole week of that last, horrible night at camp, when they held onto each other a little too hard and carefully didn't talk about what was going to happen next. Except that this time they have talked about it. They've talked about it a lot, actually, they've fought and made up and fought about it some more, and all that talking hasn't made a single thing any fucking better.

Watching the graduation ceremony on Sunday evening just makes everything a million times worse, because for the first time it really sinks in for Patrick how much the next year is going to suck. He'd realized most of his best friends were seniors, of course, but watching them all march across the stage in their hideous robes drives home the fact that after tonight, after this summer, they're all going to scatter. Sharpy and a few of the other guys are staying in New York, but Duncan and Brent are headed back up to Canada for school. Marian's going to Pennsylvania, of all places, Corey got a decent hockey scholarship somewhere in Connecticut, Jamal's going into some kind of fashion design program at this school in Florida. . .

Patrick can't even keep track of them all. Except for Jonny, of course, heading off to North Dakota. He can't seem to forget about that one.

After the ceremony, which is nice but like four hours long, Jonny's parents have a big family

dinner at this fancy steakhouse. Patrick goes because Jonny swears up and down he wants him there, but he spends a lot of time being awkwardly introduced as Jonny's "friend" to elderly relatives Jonny obviously hasn't come out to yet.

Luckily, dinner only lasts an hour or so, and then he and Jonny drive out to Corey's parents' lakehouse, which Corey somehow tricked them into volunteering for a post-graduation party. Corey's parents themselves are back at their condo in town, and they've left behind a fully stocked bar, which is either the best parenting in the world or the absolute worst. Either way, it means Patrick can finally pour himself the drink he's desperately needed all night.

The party's already in full swing by the time he and Jonny arrive, and they hang out in the den for a while with the rest of the guys, sipping at Patrick's shitty attempt at a White Russian and trying to catch up. They're not in any rush: Patrick's not used to being the most sober dude at a party, and it's a surprisingly good feeling *not* to be the idiot dancing shirtless on top of a table for once.

(That would be Duncan. Brent's just as bad, though, because even though he still has his shirt on, he keeps pouring champagne into his mortarboard and trying to drink out of it. Apparently he doesn't realize those things are a) made of fabric, b) lined with cardboard, and c) probably held together with cheap, super poisonous glue.)

After about an hour, when Patrick's still not drunk but is definitely feeling no pain, Jonny gets up suddenly and walks out of the room. At first, Patrick thinks he maybe has to go take a piss, but then he stops in the doorway and gives Patrick an impatient little *follow me* head nod, so Patrick gets up and follows him down the hall and outside onto the back deck.

There are a couple of over-sized plastic lounge chairs, and Jonny surprises Patrick by tugging him over and pulling him down into one. The plastic creaks dangerously, and it's a tight fit, Patrick scrunched up kind of sideways and half on top of Jonny, but it's surprisingly comfortable for all that.

It seems like Jonny must have had a reason for bringing them out here, so Patrick keeps waiting for him to launch into some kind of "it's been real" speech or something, but it never comes. Jonny just settles his arm around Patrick, stroking a little at the skin right above the waistband of his shorts, over his hipbone, and stares up at the sky.

"So," Patrick says finally, when the silence has stretched to the point where he feels like one of them has to break it. "Quebec tomorrow, huh?"

"Yeah."

"You sure don't waste any time, do you?"

Jonny shrugs. "It just worked out that way. I have so much stuff to take with me for the summer that it makes more sense to drive back up with my aunt in her van than to fly up with my mom later."

"I know," Patrick says.

"I didn't plan it that way. I don't even—you know I'd stay if I could."

"I know," Patrick says again, insistent, because Jonny sounds kind of defensive, like he thinks Patrick might actually blame him for going. "I understand. It's good that you're going, I think. It'll be good for your grandma to have you there."

"Yeah, I guess." Jonny takes one final swig of his drink, then leans over to set it on the deck beside the chair. The movement almost tips the chair over, and Patrick has to throw his weight

back against the other armrest to counter-balance.

“Shit,” Jonny says, laughing. “Nice reflexes.”

“The best,” Patrick agrees. Then, “You’re gonna have a hard time replacing me, you know. I’m a pretty awesome boyfriend.” He tries to make it sound like a joke even though his stupid throat has gone all tight.

“You’re a terrible boyfriend. You didn’t even take me to prom.”

“Oh what-the-fuck-ever, like you wanted to go to *prom*.”

“I could have,” Jonny mutters. After a beat, he adds, “And I am, you know.”

“Am what?”

“Gonna have a hard time—I guess replacing isn’t the right word.” He swallows, and Patrick can feel the movement from where he’s pressed against Jonny’s chest. “Getting over you, maybe?”

“Yeah,” Patrick says. “Jesus, me too. But can we not. . .can we just not do this, you think? Like. You didn’t say goodbye that time at camp. I think maybe that’s the best way.”

Patrick can practically feel some of the tension drain out of Jonny at that. Patrick doesn’t laugh at him the way he usually would, doesn’t tease him about his emotions-phobia, because he understands completely right now. This is bad enough without having to *talk about it*, to find ways to put into words how absolutely fucking terrible it all is.

“At least this time we know what the deal is,” Patrick says. “Like, we know where we stand and we won’t have any miscommunications or misunderstandings or anything.”

“Yeah. That should make things easier.” Jonny sounds like he doesn’t believe that at all.

Patrick doesn’t really either.

There’s a sudden crash from inside, and Patrick lifts himself up a little, craning his neck around the edge of the chair to see if he can make anything out through the glass doors. All he can see is the faint glow of light from further down the hall, though, so he lets himself drop back down onto Jonny’s chest, cuddling a little, unashamedly.

“We were pretty good together, weren’t we?”

Patrick waits a minute before answering, listening to the sound of Jonny’s breathing and the faint noises from the party and the crickets chirping around the lake.

“Yeah,” he says softly. “We really were.”

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A month later, Patrick gets an international phone call.

He recognizes the country code as Canada, and for a split second he thinks it might be Jonny, except that even if Jonny did call him, which he wouldn’t, it definitely wouldn’t be on his landline.

“Hello?”

“Yes, hello. I’m calling for Patrick Kane?”

“Um, yes,” Patrick says. “Speaking.”

“Hi, Patrick. My name is Ben Remondi. I’m one of the assistant coaches for the London Knights up here in Ontario.”

“The CHL London Knights?”

“Exactly. And I just wanted to let you know that I caught some of the footage from that New York state championship tournament you played back in March—pretty fantastic stuff, kid.”

“Thanks,” Patrick says dumbly.

“I’m not making any promises, you understand, but I think you should know that we’re all very impressed by what we’ve seen of you up here.”

“Thanks,” Patrick says again, because really, what else is there to say? “That’s, uh, that’s really exciting to hear, thank you.”

“We’re going to be sending out a scout next season, so you make sure you keep up the good work, all right?”

“Oh, I definitely will.” Patrick’s nodding like an asshole even though the other guy can’t see him because, *phone*, but holy fuck. Just. *Holy fuck*.

Remondi hangs up without a real goodbye, and Patrick knows he probably has two dozen other calls exactly like this to make. He knows that, realistically speaking, this is not that huge a deal.

Or like, it *is* a huge deal, maybe, because most players will never even get this much, but it doesn’t mean anything definite. It’s just a heads up from a team that they’re interested in him. A year and a half ago, he would have accepted this kind of call as his due. But then, a year and a half ago he was devoting pretty much every waking moment to hockey, letting his friends and family drop by the wayside.

If he can do this, though, if he can get drafted onto a team like the Knights without giving up the balance he’s found this year between hockey and his family—

Jonny got his happy ending, Patrick thinks.

Maybe he can have his.

everywhere else

Chapter Notes

LAST CHAPTER. for better or worse, this thing is now complete.

previous warnings about super cheesy high school au style ridiculousness and handwaving timelines are still in full effect. also, for this part in particular, please be prepared to suspend your disbelief about chl and nhl draft procedures, although i tried to keep things at least halfway realistic.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

So Patrick gets his fairytale second chance and signs with the Knights.

Eventually.

First he has to make it through his senior year, which is. . .not great.

It's pretty terrible, actually. Patrick spends the first few weeks of school the same way he spent most of his summer: just kind of moping around, listless, watching his sister's *OC* DVDs and working his way through his emergency stash of Burnett's. (Whenever he's not at the gym, that is, pushing himself until he's too exhausted to think about anything other than crawling into bed.) He's kind of depressed, but he's not, like, heartbroken or whatever, because he and Jonny were serious, sure, but they weren't—

Well. They couldn't have been in love, right? High school's way too young for that. Patrick's pretty sure they learned about that in health class, how teenagers have too many hormones to fall in, like, actual love, and that's *science*, ok? That's not just Patrick being in denial or something, no matter what Sharpy says when they all go out at the end of the summer to celebrate before the guys head off to college and Patrick gets wasted and has kind of a mini-breakdown in Duncan's back yard.

And that's the other reason senior year sucks such hairy donkey balls, right there: All of Patrick's friends are gone. He still has his freshmen, which is how he thinks of them in his head even though they're technically sophomores now, and Niklas and Leddy are both still around. But everyone else has left for school. They talk on AIM sometimes, and he gets random texts from most of them pretty much every day, but it's just not the same.

Patrick makes new friends, of course. Jonny leaving didn't suddenly turn him into some kind of bitter, joyless hermit, and Patrick isn't actually a social outcast, no matter how much time he spent this summer drinking terrible homemade gin and tonics and overidentifying with Seth Cohen. (Erica still hasn't let him forget the night he spent 20 minutes drunkenly explaining that Jonny was Patrick's Ryan and North Dakota was Jonny's Chino and hockey was like that Theresa chick Ryan thought he knocked up and went back to Chino to do right by. Maybe not his best analogy ever, but there was *a lot* of really cheap gin involved, to be fair.)

He even goes on a few dates, three with different girls and a couple with this guy from his Spanish class, and although none of them go anywhere, it's still kind of nice. At least he gets some human contact and a few decent makeout sessions.

The point is, Patrick's senior year is bad but—survivable. He throws himself into newspaper, of all things, and actually sits down and makes himself learn the rules of volleyball so he can finally start writing articles that provide more in-depth game analysis than, “and then she hit the ball back over the net, really hard.” He still refuses to learn jackshit about wrestling, but at least he stops devoting at least a paragraph of every article to making fun of the stupid unitards.

When hockey season rolls around again, he throws himself into that even harder. He starts seriously training pretty much as soon as the leaves start to turn, a good two months before the team's first real practice. He takes Andy and Brandon to the rink with him sometimes, gives them some tips, tries to help them elevate their game enough that they'll make the team this time around. He likes it more than he thought he would, all the frustration of having to show them the same move over and over completely worth it for that one moment when it just *clicks* and they suddenly get it.

Also for the way their little sophomore faces light up when Coach Duff tells them they made the team. God, Patrick's getting sentimental in his old age.

Coach Duff gives Patrick the C, pretty much by default—Patrick's the best, most experienced player left on the team by such a margin that it would be kind of ridiculous to make anyone else captain. Still, Patrick tries to, like, live up to the title or whatever. It's not his strength, and it certainly doesn't come naturally, but he likes to think he doesn't totally embarrass himself the few times he tries to give locker room speeches. Mostly he just goes out every night and skates his heart out, trying to shake the nasty habit he's developed of constantly looking over his shoulder, expecting to see Jonny barreling down the ice right behind him.

They don't win another championship—they couldn't, with a roster cut this drastically—but they make it to the playoffs, largely due to Patrick playing night in and night out like a total fucking baller.

He's good enough that it gets him another call from the Knights, this time to set up a phone interview with the head coach.

And then May rolls around and the Knights actually draft him, which is just—

It's not unprecedented, because even though it's rare for the CHL to take players from regular high school teams, it does happen. And Patrick's regular high school team *did* win the state championship last year.

It's not unbelievable, because it's not like Patrick suddenly came out of nowhere and took the selection by storm. The Knights are the very last team to pick in the Ontario League that year, so Patrick goes 20th instead of the 1st he'd always dreamed of growing up.

It's not even unexpected, because Patrick had known this might be coming for months, and had actually gotten another call a few weeks ago all but saying it was a done deal.

But still, it's fucking *ridiculous*.

Patrick gets his second chance at hockey, gets to actually have all the things he thought he'd given up to stay with his family, and unlike Jonny, he doesn't hesitate for a minute out of some bullshit sense that he doesn't deserve it. He says yes to the Knights almost before they even ask him, he's so eager to sign.

Moving to Canada on his own is weird and kind of scary, but he's so much more ready for it than he was when he left home to play in Detroit at 14. While that disaster had ended in a miserable, lonely year and Patrick retreating back to Buffalo after just one season, reevaluating his

commitment to hockey, this time around goes just about as well as he could possibly have hoped. He still misses his family, of course, but it's different. He's older now. He knows what to expect. Is it totally cheesy to say it just feels like it's the right time?

He tears shit *up* on the ice, posting frankly ridiculous numbers and getting more time per game than a rookie has any right to expect. Going so late in the selection is kind of worth it for all the hilarious "holy shit where did this guy come from?" press he's getting. By the time the first dozen games of the season are over, Patrick and his linemates are basically the face of the team, and any nagging doubts he might have had about not being able to make the transition back to the bigtime are well and truly crushed.

Things are pretty sweet off the ice, too. Most of the guys on the team are great, and even the handful of players who seem to resent his sweeping in and basically taking over at least do it pretty quietly, with a minimum of obvious douchery. Nobody's, like, pissing in his stall in the locker room or anything.

His best friend in London is probably Gags—Sam Gagner. He's one of Patrick's linemates, about Patrick's age, and pretty much the best kind of player as far as Patrick's concerned: good enough to help the team win and elevate Patrick's play, but not actually better than Patrick himself. He's also just an all-around awesome dude, serious about hockey without being obsessive, and he and Patrick hit it off immediately.

Sam's a local, so he shows Patrick around, invites him over for dinner at his parents' house when Patrick gets too obviously homesick. He takes Patrick under his wing a little, even though Patrick's actually a few months older. It's a relief, honestly, after a whole year of having to be the guy everybody looked up to.

They fool around sometimes, just hand jobs and the occasional drunken bj, but even though Patrick really likes the guy, it never turns into anything serious. Patrick's not, like, pining for Jonny or anything—because how pathetic would that be, seriously, after a year and a half—but it just never feels right. They're too much alike, maybe. They'd let each other get away with too much shit.

In December, Sam flies out to fucking Sweden, of all places, to play for Canada in the World Juniors. He sweettalks Patrick into blowing him the night before his plane leaves, "for luck," and Patrick promises to watch all the games and tries not to be too bitter about not heading over himself for the American team. He's better than a lot of the players on Team USA, he knows, but the training camp to make the team was held that summer, and no one was gonna invite some random kid who hadn't played serious hockey for over three years to come try out.

Next year, he promises himself, and tries to remember that this was his choice, tries to focus on all the things he gained in return for setting himself back a year or two. He's kicking enough ass this season that they'll invite him for sure next year. And then he'll have the satisfaction of *turning them down*, because he'll be in the fucking *NHL*, so valuable his team won't let him miss games to go.

It's just really hard to remind himself that his time is coming when everyone else's time is apparently already here.

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Because Patrick's an awesome friend and a man of his word and all that shit, he watches every single game Team Canada plays.

It's. . .hard.

Not, like, physically watching the games. He's living in Canada now, which means the World Juniors are an actual thing that people have heard of and get legitimately excited about. All the games are on TV live, then shown again the next day at a more reasonable time, then covered that night on TSN.

So that part's easy. The hard part is watching game after game of young Canadian sensation Jonathan Toews.

Patrick had known Jonny made the team, obviously. Like he said, the World Juniors are a pretty big deal here, and Toews isn't that common a name. It was kind of hard to miss. And even if he hadn't managed to figure it out on his own, he'd gotten at least three different emails about it from Sharpy, who still maintains that Patrick and Jonny's simple, practical, no contact breakup policy was total bullshit. Sharpy did the same thing earlier in the year when the Chicago Blackhawks shocked everyone by blowing their number three draft pick on a relatively unknown college player just on the strength of his "intangibles," as if Patrick wouldn't hear about *that*. As if Patrick hadn't watched the whole fucking draft, sick to his stomach with a strange combination of pride and resentment and jealousy and *want*.

But it was one thing to know, kind of distantly, that Jonny would be out there with Sam every game, skating against the best young players in the world. It's something else entirely to see it. To watch Jonny kick ass up and down the ice, to listen to the announcers basically jizzing their fucking pants over him. It gives Patrick that same weird nauseous feeling he got watching the draft, and no matter what Sharpy says, Patrick knows without a doubt that he and Jonny did the right thing by making a clean break.

He doesn't usually let himself imagine what it would be like if he and Jonny still talked—if they'd tried to make it work, to stay together, or even if they were just still friends. He thinks about it now, though, watching as Canada and the US duke it out in the semis. Canada wins, he knows already; this is a repeat for everyone who hadn't been crazy enough to stay up until 4am to watch the game in real time last night. He tries to imagine making that phone call. What would he even say? "Congratulations," he guesses. But could he say that and *mean* it? Could he really bring himself to say anything other than, "It really sucks I wasn't there to stop you"?

Probably not. Patrick doesn't think he has it in him to be that unselfishly happy for anyone, not even someone who deserves it as much as Jonny. That's why it's so much better he doesn't have to make the call, doesn't have to worry about trying to be supportive when all he actually wants to do is stew about how unfair everything is.

Really. It's *better*.

On TV, the OT clock runs out and the announcers start talking excitedly about how the game will go to shootout. Patrick knows how this will end, too, because it was in all the papers this morning. Still, he wants to see it for himself, so he watches as the shootout stretches on for eight agonizing rounds, as Jonny goes three for three in a frankly ridiculous performance that leaves the announcers breathless and Patrick himself half-hard.

Patrick thinks about rubbing one out, but he decides that would be kind of unpatriotic and creepy. And besides, it's probably, like, psychologically unhealthy to jerk off resentfully while watching your ex-boyfriend kick your country's ass on national TV.

Instead, he just keeps watching as the Canadians jump all over each other in celebration and the Americans stand around looking shell-shocked. He watches through the handshake line and Canada's super lame national anthem, long enough that he eventually has to give up and just admit to himself he's waiting to see if they'll interview Jonny.

They do, of course, because they couldn't *not* interview him after a performance like that. He's up right after Carey Price, the Canadian goalie, and he looks—shockingly the same. He's filled out a little, maybe, though it's hard to tell with all the pads, but he's still got the same awkward smile and lousy haircut and that stupid red stripe he always used to get across his forehead from his helmet.

The interviewer calls him “Mr. Clutch” and asks about his insane shootout goals, but Jonny just gives a long, rambling answer about teamwork because he's a perfect little Canadian hockey robot. They only give him a minute or so to talk, because Jonny's actually pretty terrible at interviews even if he says all the right things, and then Jonny skates back over to his teammates, who are still milling around on the ice, celebrating.

The camera follows him, panning out slightly, so Patrick has a perfect view when one of the other Canadian players comes up behind him and pulls him into the longest, most lingering, least heterosexual hug Patrick has ever seen. Patrick can't see Jonny's face, just the back of his head, which this random dude, like, *caresses*, so he can't tell if Jonny's actively participating or just kind of tolerating it. Based on the guy's number, Patrick recognizes him as one of Jonny's linemates.

That makes Patrick think of Gags, and he realizes guiltily that he hasn't paid any attention to Sam all game. Hasn't paid any attention to him for most of the tournament, really, not since that first game when Jonny came out onto the ice and he was all Patrick could watch, just like always.

Patrick tries to look for him now, squinting at the screen to make out number 38, but it's like trying to find fucking Waldo with all the idiots jumping around in red and white jerseys. Instead, he finds himself drawn back to Jonny and his linemate, still standing too close together in the middle of the rink. Are they fucking? Like, fooling around like Patrick and Sam? Patrick's heard stories about what can happen at tournaments like this, guys thrown together for a few super intense weeks. Jonny never seemed like the kind of guy who would fuck around with a teammate just to relieve stress or whatever, but who knows.

Or maybe it's serious.

The thought makes something in Patrick's chest go all tight, and he turns off the TV in disgust and doesn't watch the final game the next day even though he promised Sam he would.

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The Knights don't make it all the way that year—they go down pretty easy in the Western Conference finals—but Patrick himself makes out pretty fucking well. He gets the OHL scoring title, the rookie of the year award, and is runner up for league MVP.

It's a good enough showing that he feels comfortable entering the draft after only one season. He's not gonna go first or anything, probably, because he still doesn't have the kind of high-stakes international experience a lot of teams like to see, but he's not gonna embarrass himself either. He'll be top ten, for sure.

Then suddenly, around the beginning of May, he gets a call from his agent. (Which, like, seriously, how weird is it that Patrick has an *agent*?)

He says he's been hearing all kinds of rumors, some of them completely ridiculous and some of them actually pretty believable, about Patrick. And the *Blackhawks*.

“What the fuck,” Patrick says later when he calls Sharpy about it. “Like, seriously man, how the fuck would that even—just. *What the fuck.*”

“Yeah,” Sharpy says, dry. “You said that already.”

“Oh fuck you, c’mon, this is serious.”

“And I’m taking it seriously, I promise. I just think you need to calm down before you have a heart attack.”

“Ugh.” Patrick groans in frustration then forces himself to take a few deep breaths. “Ok, whatever. I’m fine. Help me figure out why Jesus hates me.”

Sharpy laughs.

“Don’t be so melodramatic, little man. I would’ve thought this would be your dream come true here. You can’t tell me you don’t want to play with Jonny again.”

“I do,” Patrick says, because he does. Whatever else he’s feeling, whatever else there is off the ice, he’s always gonna want to play with Jonny. “But. I don’t even know. Do you think he’s heard yet?”

“Who, Jonny?”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t know,” Sharpy says. “Probably not? I mean, he still hasn’t signed with the Hawks yet, so I’m not sure how much they would tell him about this kind of thing.”

“Everyone says he’ll sign before next season, though.”

“*Everyone?*” Patrick can almost hear Sharpy’s smug little grin. “Have you been hanging out on the forums, Patrick? Stalking Jonny on Facebook?”

And that’s just totally unfair, because a) Jonny probably doesn’t even have a Facebook account because he’s a giant loser, and b) Patrick *plays hockey*, ok? Him hanging out in the UND threads on hockey message boards is basically, like, professional development. It’s totally legit and not at all weird or stalkery.

“Anyway,” Sharpy goes on, “when I talked to him last week he said he still hadn’t decided if he wanted to stay at UND for another year.”

“You talked to him last week?”

Sharpy’s voice goes a little hard. “You aren’t gonna be weird about this, are you? You know I still talk to him.”

“Yeah,” Patrick says. “I mean, no. I’m not gonna be weird. Just. Um. He’s doing all right?”

“Jesus, you’re both idiots. Look, just call him, ok? You can ask him yourself.”

“Nothing’s for sure yet. I’m not gonna call him over a rumor. For all I know I could end up on the fucking Islanders or something.”

“Fine,” Sharpy says, “but just for the record, I think you should call him. His number’s still the same.”

“If I hear anything more definite I will,” Patrick says, just to get Sharpy to shut up about it already, and then does the thing where you hold your hand over the receiver and muffle your voice a little and call out your own name to pretend somebody’s yelling at you and you have to get off the

phone.

Sharpy doesn't buy it, judging by the way he laughs and calls Patrick "pathetic" before hanging up, but he only sends five annoying SERIOUSLY JUST CALL HIM texts, so Patrick counts it as a win.

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The next week, Patrick gets another call from his agent.

Apparently, the Hawks *really* want him. And since they have the fifth overall pick, which is about as high as Patrick could realistically expect to go, the Hawks pretty much have him.

"Unless you show up drunk at your interview," his agent tells him, "this is it. You're going to Chicago."

And that's—it's *weird*, because Sharpy was right. Two years ago, this would have been Patrick's dream come true, the absolute too-good-to-hope-for best case scenario.

But it's not two years ago. And right now, Patrick's sitting here, staring at his phone, trying to make himself nut up and just fucking call Jonny already. If this is really gonna happen, the two of them need to talk. To make sure they'll be able to play together, that there's no lingering. . . whatever. Patrick figures he might as well get it over with now, before the draft.

Jonny picks up after the third ring.

"Hello?"

He sounds kind of—not excited, exactly, because Patrick's not sure Jonny's actually capable of sounding excited about things that aren't either hockey or sex. But, like, breathless, kind of. Anticipatory, if that's even a word.

"Hi," Patrick says.

"Um. Hi."

Patrick smiles a little, some of the nervous tension in his shoulders easing up. God. How could he ever have been afraid of calling *Jonny*?

"Hey," he says, then laughs out loud just because he can.

Jonny laughs too, kind of awkwardly, but whatever. Patrick'll take it.

"Don't take this the wrong way or anything," Jonny says, after a long pause where Patrick was maybe just kind of listening to him breathe like a giant weirdo, "but why are you calling? Is everything ok?"

"So I guess you haven't heard then."

"Heard what? Pat, seriously, is everything all right? Is your family—"

"We're all fine," Patrick says, cutting Jonny off before he can work himself up any more. "Sorry, I guess that was a little ominous or whatever. No, it's good news, actually. I think. I'm pretty sure I'm gonna get drafted by the Hawks next month. I just thought I should give you, y'know, like a heads up."

Jonny's silent for a minute, then: "Wow. I didn't think they'd actually—I mean, wow. That's great, Pat, seriously. Congratulations."

Patrick frowns.

"You didn't think they'd actually what?"

"Oh." Jonny clears his throat, obviously uncomfortable. "Uh. I didn't think they'd actually take you."

"Why not?"

Patrick can feel himself bristling. He tries to tamp it down, because he doesn't want their first conversation in literally years to turn into a stupid fight, but seriously. Does Jonny think he's not, like, worthy to play on his stupid team that hasn't even won a Cup in like a million years? Of all the people he figured he'd have to prove himself to wherever he wound up, Patrick never thought *Jonny* would be one of them.

"Not like that," Jonny says, doing that fucking annoying thing he always used to do where it sounds kind of like he's laughing at you even though his voice doesn't really change. Apparently even after so long he can still tell when Patrick's upset. And he still thinks being an asshole about it is a legitimate response.

"Like what, then?"

"Like, they called me up about a month ago and asked me about this year's draft—who I liked, who I'd played with, that kind of thing. Trying to see if they could get some ready-made chemistry, I guess. So I told them you."

Patrick doesn't know what to say to that, so he just doesn't say anything.

Jonny must interpret his silence as anger or disapproval or something, because he starts backtracking hardcore after a minute, all, "Not that I'm saying I got you drafted or anything. I'm not sure they listened to me at all, really. They just asked, and I told them the truth."

"No, I know that's not what you meant," Patrick says. "That wasn't, like, an angry silence. I'm just. . . surprised. There must be some guys in the pool you've played with more seriously, or more recently. A few of those guys were at Worlds with you, weren't they?"

"Yeah, but. They asked me who I played *best* with."

"Oh," Patrick says softly, startled. "Oh."

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After that, they talk almost every day.

Well, to be completely accurate, after that Patrick freaks out and calls Sharpy, then Erica when Sharpy just laughs at him, then Sharpy again when Erica laughs at him even harder.

"How terrible," Sharpy says while Patrick clutches the phone to his ear and tries not to hyperventilate. "Jonny thinks you're great at hockey and wants you on the Hawks with him. No wonder you're so upset."

"I don't know why I even bother calling you," Patrick moans, tragic.

“Because Brent and Duncan aren’t nearly as tolerant of your ridiculous Jonny-related meltdowns.”

Which is true. They always shoot that wallowing in self-pity shit down pretty immediately. Sharpy at least lets him whine a little first.

“Seriously, though,” Sharpy says, “I don’t see what the problem is here. You already did the hard part. You called him, and now you know he still wants to be your friend and that it won’t be weird to play on the same team. Where’s the bad?”

“Think about what you just said.”

Patrick can practically hear him replaying it in his head.

“Oh. The friend thing, of course.”

“Yeah,” Patrick says, “the friend thing.”

Sharpy laughs at his pain, because he’s a bad person, then says, “I’d just like to take this opportunity to point out that I *told* you two your preemptive breakup was a stupid idea. And then I told you your whole ‘let’s never talk to each other again to make the pain more bearable’ or whatever plan was an even stupider idea.”

“I know, I know. Congratulations, you were right.”

“And,” Sharpy goes on, apparently not done gloating yet, “you just kept telling me I didn’t know what I was talking about. And Jonny—at one point, Jonny actually told me it was an A-B situation so I should C my way out. Like. He *literally* said that to me. Did I ever tell you about that?”

“God,” Patrick says, a little dreamily. “He’s such an asshole.”

Patrick doesn’t even bother pretending that doesn’t totally do it for him. Sharpy knows him too well for that at this point.

“Maybe you should worry about getting him on the team for next season before you start worrying about whether or not you’re going to get back together,” Sharpy says.

Which, yeah. Probably sound advice.

“Thanks for letting me freak out at you,” Patrick says. Then, “Fuck you,” just once on general principle because just cause Sharpy’s right all the time about everything doesn’t mean he has to be so damn smug about it.

So anyway, after *that*, Patrick and Jonny talk almost every day.

They spend a lot of time just catching up, Patrick talking about senior year and his season with the Knights, and Jonny telling him all about college and playing for UND and that time he kinda sorta got arrested.

Patrick laughs his ass off at that last one, because only Jonny would get in trouble with the law and have it be over something as completely lame as just being in a bar. He’s like the least badass criminal ever.

(Patrick also takes that opportunity to *totally subtly* ask about that Oshie guy everyone on the message boards always talks about as, like, the Batman to Jonny’s Robin or whatever. Jonny doesn’t seem to get what he’s asking, though, because he just starts telling Patrick a bunch of

stories about all the stupid shit he and “TJ” have done together and never says anything helpfully definitive like, “Yeah, we’re totally banging even though I’m way too good for him and that’s why I don’t want to leave UND.” Or, better yet, “No way, that dude’s a loser. Besides, I’ve totally been saving myself for you this whole time.”)

It’s surprisingly easy, and so fucking *good*, just to talk to Jonny like this again, after so long. Part of Patrick thinks maybe he should be embarrassed he’s still so hung up on the guy after two fucking years. Another, bigger part can’t help but wonder if it could have been like this all along. If maybe they could have made it work, or at least kept in contact. Patrick really doesn’t think so, though. He doesn’t think he could have handled two years of just not knowing how everything would turn out. The reason it’s so easy to talk to Jonny now, aside from the fact that it’s Jonny and it’s pretty much always been easy for Patrick to talk to Jonny when Jonny’s not, like, actively stonewalling him, is because they know they’re both gonna wind up in Chicago. There’s a definite endgame for them.

Or, at least, there will be once Jonny hurries up and signs his fucking contract.

“Why won’t you just commit already?” Patrick asks one day, maybe a week and a half after that first phone call.

“I don’t know,” Jonny says. “It’s—complicated, I guess.”

“This isn’t some bullshit where you feel like you owe them or something because they gave you a second chance, is it?”

“No, I promise, it isn’t. I mean, I do owe them, because they’re my team and they’ve been great to me. But mostly I just really like playing at North Dakota.”

“Yeah,” Patrick says, “but c’mon. Like you’re not gonna *really like* playing for Chicago?”

“Well,” Jonny hedges. “It’s not just that. It’s also about getting some more experience. I don’t want to make the jump to the NHL and then just humiliate myself.”

“You honestly think that would happen? Did you sleep through Worlds? Did you somehow miss how ridiculously awesome you were there? Besides, you know staying at UND would just get you another season of skating around with a fucking target on your back, just waiting for another serious injury. That’s irresponsible, Jonny. You’re putting your whole career at risk.”

Patrick’s proud of that last argument—appealing to Jonny’s sense of responsibility almost always works—but Jonny ignores it.

Instead, he clears his throat kind of awkwardly and says, “You watched me at Worlds?”

“My linemate was on Team Canada,” Patrick says defensively, knee-jerk. “Sam Gagner. I promised him I’d watch.”

“Oh. Right, yeah, of course. He played really well.”

“But.” Patrick swallows, licks his lips. “Mostly, um. I mostly watched you.”

There’s a long pause, then Jonny says, all at once, “I got my friend in Ontario to send me tapes of some of your games last season.”

Patrick laughs out loud at that.

“Shit,” he says. “We are really terrible at this clean break thing.”

“Yeah,” Jonny agrees, “we really, really are.”

They talk for another half an hour about nothing in particular, mostly just because Patrick can't bring himself to hang up, and at the end of the conversation, when Patrick really does have to go meet his parents for dinner, he says, “You're coming to Chicago with me next season, right?”

And Jonny's quiet for just a second, and then he says, “Yeah. I think I am.”

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Between one thing and another, he doesn't actually *see* Jonny until rookie camp.

They keep up the daily phone calls, and Jonny watches the draft on TV and texts Patrick the whole way through, just stupid shit like, *is that your dad's suit its way too big for you*, and *stop messing w/ your hair it looks like you have lice*, and then, finally, *congrats. that sweater looks really good on you*.

They never actually talk about them or whatever, their relationship, because even though a lot's changed over the last two years, their mutual inability to handle emotions is not one of them. Patrick does at least manage to determine that Jonny and Oshie are just friends, and that that weird guy who, like, felt him up on the ice at Worlds was just a teammate with a desperate crush Jonny seems mostly oblivious to. Poor dude. Patrick knows his pain.

For his part, Patrick mentions the fact that he's totally single once or twice or half a dozen times, but Jonny never follows up with the appropriate “I can fix that!” response.

Realistically, he knows it couldn't be that easy. Even though he and Jonny have fallen back into each other with surprisingly little awkwardness, Patrick knows actually trying to get back together would be a little harder than that. They're both different people now; they'd have to figure out how to fit together in a slightly different way. And trying to do that while simultaneously trying to both make the transition to the NHL and keep their relationship totally secret would be—well, it would really fucking suck. There's no guarantee they'd even be able to do it, and then they'd be stuck on a team together for who knows how many years.

But then, realistically, Patrick shouldn't even be here. He should be back in Buffalo working some shitty retail job, waiting to start classes at the best college he could trick into accepting him. He never should have made it to the NHL, and he certainly shouldn't have made it onto the same fucking team as Jonny. Like. Shit like that *doesn't happen*. It just doesn't.

So Patrick's not too worried about the realistic chances of their relationship working out or whatever. As far as he's concerned, realism can just go fuck itself. He and Jonny have made it this far, despite everything. There's no reason they can't keep defying all the odds.

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When Patrick finally does see Jonny again, he's walking behind Mr. Tallon and Coach Savard, looking nervous and excited and strangely young. When he notices Patrick, he stops in his tracks and smiles, stupid and brilliant and absolutely genuine. He looks so *happy*, so excited to see Patrick again, and Patrick can't help but think of the last time they met like this, how Patrick had waited for a smile that hadn't come.

This is everything that moment wasn't, and Patrick smiles back, face aching with it. Coach Savard is looking at them kind of funny, but Patrick doesn't even care, because they're gonna work out, him and Jonny. They're gonna get back together, and it'll be a million times better than before because this time there won't be an expiration date. They're gonna turn this team around, take this

fucking town by storm.

They're gonna be *amazing*.

Chapter End Notes

1. thanks to [ryan](#), as always, for being such a baller.
2. title from the justin timberlake classic [summer love](#), because i am the worst.
3. ryan o'marra, the dude patrick is jealous of at worlds, played for team canada with jonny in 2007. i know absolutely nothing about him except that a) he's had a lousy career and b) he had the world's biggest boner for tazer back in the day. i am basing that second thing entirely off of the 5-second clip of him in [this video](#), but i feel like it's justified. just watch it—it's short. i'm not even gonna tell you when o'marra shows up. you'll be able to tell because of all the EPIC PINING.
4. i am SUPER AWARE of the glaring plot hole in this where even though patrick and jonny wind up on the hawks, none of their teammates are there because i made them patrick's high school friends. i really wanted them in the fic, though, and this is the way it worked best. if it makes you feel better, pretend that they all eventually join the nhl and end up on the blackhawks together. somehow. there is so much other ridiculous shit in this fic i feel like you guys can work with me on this, right? RIGHT.
5. i had to fuck around with *a lot* of timelines and details to make this even halfway work out. one thing that might jump out is that i gave the blackhawks 5th pick in the 2007 draft instead of 1st to make it ~believable~ that they would take patrick. they were actually slated to go 5th originally but then won the lottery to go 1st, so that's. . .kind of legit. ish. JUST GO WITH IT OK. remind yourself this is a ridiculous high school au and it will all be fine. some of the details did work out surprisingly well already, though, like the fact that tazer really didn't sign with the hawks and agree to leave und until summer 2007.

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