

A Jock & Nerd Out Of Water (Part One)

A short story by Henry Cavanaugh

Three seconds left on the clock, third and long, we're five points down... this is it, Logan. It's now or never!

The college quarterback received the handoff, pulled his arm back and sent it sailing through the air like a rocket. Absolutely everyone in the stands held their breath as the ball arced down - and then the volume rapidly ascended as the team's star wide receiver caught the ball right in the middle of the endzone! Logan felt like he was ascending right up to Heaven in that very moment, but perhaps that was to do with the fact that several guys from his offensive line were lifting him up onto their shoulders. He was the big damn hero they'd needed to not just win the game but to advance to the championship final, something their school hadn't managed for almost two decades! There was absolutely no doubt in



anybody's mind that Logan could get with any girl he wanted tonight, especially as half the cheerleading squad were already throwing themselves at him! Between his jaw-dropping looks and his awesome athleticism, Logan was the top bachelor on campus and if rumors were to be believed, he'd racked up quite the impressive body count despite only being a sophomore.

Those rumors, however, were entirely false. Logan had only slept with two girls since the start of his college career and he hadn't exactly enjoyed either. The miserable truth was that Logan Fryes was gay and incredibly insecure about it. Having been raised in a moderately religious and conservative household, he had always perceived being straight as being *normal* and so the discovery that he felt no attraction to the female form and instead got aroused by the male physique had been nothing short of an apocalyptic event for the young man. He'd reached this discovery in high school and had done his very best ever since to keep it a secret from absolutely everyone, which to his knowledge had been mostly successful. While Logan wasn't the type to try and pray away his homosexuality, he viewed it as a potential roadblock for his father's aspirations of him playing football for the NFL (especially since there had only ever been one

openly gay active player in the league and *never* an openly gay quarterback) and so had no intention of ever letting the information spread. Sure, maybe it would cause him years of emotional turmoil and eye-watering therapy bills in the future, but this was *football*. Right from a young age his dad had taught him that it was the most important thing in his life and he wouldn't let anything jeopardize that!

It took a full twenty minutes after they were declared the official winners of the semi-final game for Logan to get off the field and back into the locker room; he'd been interviewed for the local news, hugged every member of his family in attendance, and narrowly escaped three cheerleaders who had tried to kiss him on the lips. Once the excitement of the night was behind closed doors for the time being, Logan was finally able to breathe. It seemed the rest of the team were still out there enjoying themselves (something that would continue wherever the afterparty was being hosted) so the quarterback was able to get into the shower and enjoy a few sweet minutes of peace.

After stripping down and stepping under the cascade of warm water, Logan allowed his mind to wander as it often did in those circumstances. He often dreamed of the future, where every avenue started with him being a first round pick in the NFL Draft, but for once the quarterback found his mind drifting into the recent past. Just a few days earlier he'd been chewed out by one of his professors for failing to hand in an assignment and unlike the other members of the faculty, the crotchety old man hadn't been willing to accept the excuse that Logan had been too busy preparing for the upcoming game to even think about anything else. Although he was confident that the professor's threats to have him cautioned by the Dean would come to nothing, it still managed to awaken a rare anxiety within Logan. Even though he knew that his academic studies would ultimately be of secondary importance to his skill on the football field, he loathed the idea of being considered nothing more than a dumb jock. Sure, he wasn't booksmart like the vast majority of the kids in his classes, but Logan really did try his best - when the pressure from football wasn't too much, that was. He always had his priorities in order! Still, the disdain in his professor's voice after he'd tried to use the football game as an excuse had been palpable and it had now returned to plague the young athlete's mind and sour his winning mood.

By the time the locker room started to fill up, Logan had already finished his shower and dressed himself in casual clothing. He stuck around long enough to embrace the teammates who immediately sought him out and made various promises to see them at the afterparty that was happening at the tight end's house, but truthfully Logan wasn't sure he had the energy for a night of partying. He had given absolutely everything he had during that game and with the professor's words weighing him down, he was left absolutely exhausted. Given how dark a cloud the professor's words had created above him, Logan actually wanted to return to his room at the frat house and attempt to write the assignment that he'd been purposefully avoiding. The honest truth was that he

hadn't been too nervous about the game to focus but rather that he simply hadn't understood the content that he was supposed to be writing about. It was frustrating and humiliating, two emotions that Logan didn't often have to contend with.

Switching off his cell phone as he left the locker room, Logan stuck to the shadows in order to avoid any of his friends who might be hanging around hoping to get his attention and began to slink away into the night. Even several blocks away he could still hear the sounds of celebration and although he wished he could join them in the reveling, the dark cloud above him refused to dissipate. Normally he would have driven home, but he'd originally anticipated having a few beers in the locker room before riding with someone to the tight end's mini-mansion in the suburbs, so he'd left his car at the frat house. It was frustrating but Logan was also thankful for the chance to feel the cool air against his face - although a chilly wind was starting to pick up and he had nothing more than a hoodie to keep him warm. *Great, I might freeze to death before the championship game. That'll go over well with the coach...*

The sound of an approaching car from behind caught Logan's attention and he turned in order to glance over the shoulder, almost anticipating it being one of the guys from the team. The soft folk music playing from within the vehicle hardly seemed like something one of them would listen to though and sure enough, the guy behind the wheel looked to be about as far from a football player as a man could be. The driver was thin, with sallow cheeks, a mop of brown hair and a stylish pair of glasses; he'd look right at home as a Starbucks barista or running some hipster candle store. Logan very vaguely recognized him as being in a number of his classes although he couldn't for the life of him recall the guy's name. Their eyes met for a brief moment and, to Logan's great surprise, the driver hit the brakes.

"Hey, you're the football guy, aren't you?" the driver asked, surprising Logan in the process with an unexpected British accent. "The team's quarterback, right? Shouldn't you be at some sort of afterparty or something?" The British man wore a complex expression that looked to be a smirk one moment and a frown the other, like Logan was some sort of mystery he was attempting to solve.

"Probably," Logan replied as he shrugged a broad shoulder. "I have an assignment due though so I, uh, I wanted to work on that instead." When the other man raised an eyebrow, a short bark of a laugh escaped the jock's lips. "Well, it's more of a need than a want. It's for Eastern Religions 102, Professor Kraft. You're in that class too, right?"

The driver's face illuminated in surprise. "I didn't think you knew we shared a class," he confessed with a tone of vague nervousness in his voice. "Is that the one about Shintoism that was due last week?" Logan nodded. "Ah, yeah, it was eas... I mean, it took me a while."



A silence fell between them and lasted for several seconds before the quarterback cleared his throat. “Well I should probably go work on--”

“Did you want my help?” the other man asked sheepishly, appearing surprised by his own words. “I mean-- well, you don’t have to, but since I’ve already done it and you’re like a local hero or whatever... You know what, ignore everything I’ve just said. I’m sorry for bothering you, sir. No, not sir - man! *Shit*. I’m gonna drive away now.” A fiery blush had crept up on the British man’s cheeks as he rambled and he looked just about ready to put his foot down on the gas and ride off at full speed. Something about it was strangely endearing to Logan, who was quick to throw his hands up in a “stop” motion.

“I’ll absolutely take the help!” he declared quickly, not wanting to give the other an opportunity to drive off. “Seriously dude, I’m out of my depth. It’s like facing off against the goddamn Buffalo Bills with Josh Allen in full turbo mode!” The confusion that flashed across the other’s face suggested that he didn’t quite understand Logan’s reference, but the jock was sure that the spirit of his remark still got across. “But first I should probably know your name because I don’t feel much like getting into the car with a *total* stranger.”

“We’re not strangers, we share a class,” the other retorted, his cheeks still thoroughly flushed. “Whatever. I’m Nick. I’m from England... uh, in case you didn’t pick up on that already. No offense but I don’t know your name either and calling you ‘Local Football Hero’ is a bit of a mouthful.” Seemingly to distract himself from his own awkwardness, Nick reached over and pushed open the passenger door to his vehicle while Logan just laughed at the other’s remark. Considering how popular he had become since being elevated to the starting quarterback position it was actually a nice change of pace for Logan to meet someone who didn’t just see him as the school’s best shot at getting a championship ring for the first time in twenty years.

Sharing his name as he threw his bag into the back and then climbed into the passenger seat, Logan immediately plastered his most winning smile onto his face. Not only was Nick doing him a favor by offering to help him with the assignment but he was also getting him out of the cold which had been getting more and more bitter the longer that Logan stood there on the sidewalk. Closing the door behind him, he turned his attention back to Nick. Now that he was closer to the other student, he was able to take in the angular features of his face and the inviting hazel of his eyes. It was enough to awaken a pang of attraction deep within Logan and as soon as he recognized the

feeling for what it was he knew that he'd made a grave mistake by accepting Nick's help. The absolute last thing he needed given how crazy things in his life were right then was to start developing a crush on a nerdy classmate! No, he had to keep his focus on the upcoming championship game so that he could really prove to his father that he was on the right track and he wouldn't end up being another disappointment like his older brother who had flunked out in his freshman year.

"So... your place or mine?" Nick asked, his tone entirely innocent but the double entendre of his words prompting a stirring deep in Logan's gut. *Don't be an idiot, of course he isn't flirting with you. As if a skinny dude like that would dare hit on a guy he presumed was straight, especially a jock like me!* While Logan was having this inner conflict, the British nerd seemed to finally realize how his words could be perceived and his blush returned in full force.

Logan cleared his throat and attempted to once again defuse the awkwardness of the situation. If he wasn't so desperately in need of help with this assignment then he definitely would have given up on the conversation already. "Uh, mine I guess. The frat house will be empty and my laptop's there so we should be able to work in peace for a bit," he suggested, forcing a tight smile onto his face. It mercifully did the trick, as Nick soon applied pressure to the accelerator and the vehicle began moving in the general direction of fraternity row.

The pair exchanged small talk for the next few minutes, with Nick asking how Logan felt the game had gone that evening. While he was usually happy to talk about football with people, the quarterback found it mildly frustrating having to explain every single rule to the confused Brit, so he ultimately changed the subject to the classes Nick was taking. Unsurprisingly the other was on top of all his assignments and had scored well in all his previous submissions, something Logan definitely couldn't say about himself. When he asked Nick what his plans for after college were though, the other didn't have an immediate response. "I guess maybe something like journalism or web design?" the Brit replied after considerable hesitation, "I don't know, I haven't really got that figured out."

Secretly Logan wondered how Nick hadn't sent himself into a frenzy without having concrete plans for the future laid out; if he didn't have his goal of making it to the NFL then he was certain that he would have floundered throughout his teenage years! He knew that suggesting as such to a near stranger wasn't the smoothest move though so he kept that thought locked up and instead offered a more optimistic response: "Hey, there's plenty of time to work it out. You never know what life will throw your way!"

"Speaking of, is that a shooting star?" Nick cut across, pointing at something through the windshield in the sky above them. Logan followed the other's direction and spied a fast moving object piercing through the darkness of the night. Bizarrely though it

seemed to be getting brighter and brighter the closer it got to them until it was practically blinding, even when he forced his eyes away. Not only that but there was a sudden ringing in Logan's ears that was rapidly growing louder and his heart was thundering dangerously fast in his chest. *What the hell is going on?!*

Then, as if things weren't chaotic enough already, the ringing in his ears was drowned out by a loud screech and Logan was suddenly thrown to the side. Two seconds later and with a loud *crash*, the vehicle made impact with something solid and unforgiving. The collision prompted the quarterback to once again be jolted violently around in his seat, this time forward where his head bounced off the dashboard in front of him.

Even as he rapidly sunk into unconsciousness though, Logan was briefly aware of a strange weightlessness, almost as if he was somehow rising out of his own body...