FLY EAGLES FLY

1480

The whole school is a flood of green and white to support the hockey club in their state championship appearance tonight.

 “Yo dude, are you ok?” My best friend, Roope says concerningly as I continue to throw up in the school bathroom.

 “I’m fine, just crazy stressed about tonight. I really hope my hyper awareness comes back tonight. I don’t know what happened last weekend. Who knew your superpower could disappear just like that.” I reply, “We need to get to class though”

I look at the time, 9:05. We get out at 12:30 to drive to St. Paul for the game. I need to get to class, so I fist bump Roope and book it to my Finances class. I look at the clock every minute until it’s time for lunch. The team all sits together today to get prepared to leave, and the coaches bring us all sandwiches from Goldberg’s, our favorite restaurant named after the goalie from the USA Junior team in the 90s.

When we head outside, all our gear is packed into the coach bus we rented for the weekend.

We all hop on to get to St. Paul in time to check into our hotel before the game.

I try to sleep, but I just sit there the whole drive, sick to my stomach. All I can think about is this game. This is Eaton’s first time in the state championship in thirty years. Our whole town is relying on us to bring light back to this mediocre town.

We make it to St. Paul by three. It’s bluebird skies and twenty degrees in St. Paul. Absolutely beautiful.

“Alright guys listen up,” Coach McKinley says. “We’ve got two hours until warmups, we are going to meet in the hotel conference room in thirty. Be in your suits ready to leave, got it?”

“Yes sir.” The whole team rejoins.

“Damn, this room is crazy nice, dude!” Roope yells as soon as we walk in.

“We should play mini sticks tonight.”  I say as I’m texting it into the “Players Only” group chat for the team. When the whole team gets to the conference room, we look over game tapes of the Peterville Penguins, the team we are playing tonight, the team with one of my worst enemies, Quinn Buckley. I played him a couple times in Hockey Day Minnesota tournaments. He is as cheap as can be. All he does is hit kids to hurt them. But he keeps playing because his dad is the best lawyer in the state. My mind is spinning and throbbing just thinking about playing him tonight.

The tapes are crazy. That team looks like an NHL team. They have great puck control, speed, and shooting. Their goalie, Mason Delacroix, only let in six goals this season. His team put up ninety. But we are just as good. This is going to be a very tight game. Thinking about the game makes my stomach knot up so bad I almost double over.

It is finally five o’clock and we are headed to the *Xcel Energy Center,* home of the NHL team, the Minnesota Wild. That’s where we get to play. I am so excited to feel like Kirill Kaprizov, the starting left wing for the Wild. Warmups and our pregame stuff fly by. Suddenly, I’m standing on the blue line with my team, facing Quinn and his team. It’s dark, with green and red lasers flying around the rink. It’s almost time for hockey. First, the Star-Spangled Banner. I try to replicate how the pros look, slowly swaying side to side, looking down and my skates, but I can’t keep the stupid smile off my face. *I’m in a state game, I need to look cool,* I think to myself. *Act cool man, act cool,* I tell myself. The anthem is over and now I'm standing at center ice, staring right at Quinn Buckley. He is smirking like a wolf does to its petrified prey.

The puck drops with a crisp snap. The game has started. Immediately I am shoved onto my back by Buckley. I saw this coming. Why didn’t I stop it? I pop up and zip down the ice to catch Buckley, too late.

The rink shakes with how loud the goal horn blasts.  1-0 Peterville.

Back at center ice, I win the face-off and spin around Buckley, leaving him dumbfounded. I race down the ice, stickhandling around the wingers and the defenseman. At the last second, I sling the puck to Roope. He smacks into the back of their net. 1-1.

I stare at Buckley with a little grin. His face goes red and thankfully my shift is over. I skate to the bench and get high-fives and smiles from everyone.

Back on the ice, it’s still 1-1, with eight minutes left in the first period. The face-off is on our defensive side. I need to win this and get the puck out. I lose the face-off, but book it into the shooting lane and dive in front of the puck. It rebounds off my helmet with a crack and flies into the corner of the rink. I bounce up and skate down the ice for a pass while Roope carries the puck up through the neutral zone, passing it to me on the blue line. I deke through the defender’s legs and carry it into the other team’s zone. I wind up for a slapshot, but I don’t get the chance to shoot as I’m flung into the boards by Buckley. *That hurt* I think, slowly getting up. The play is down on the other side, so I move over there, stealing the puck from an unsuspecting winger and dump it back down the ice to get a line change. My head is throbbing, but I must keep playing. At the end of the first, it’s still 1-1.

Back in the locker room, McKinley is talking to us.

“We need to get the go-ahead goal guys, shut these boys down.”

The boys erupt into a chant, “EATON! EATON! EATON! FLY EAGLES FLY!”

We rush out onto the ice, ready to turn things around. I win the face-off and push right past Buckley. I get the puck at the blue line and snap it at Delacroix. It almost gets over his glove side, but he snatches it like a cat. Roope takes this face-off. I skate to the left side of the rink, and receive a beautiful pass. I slap it as hard as I can, not even realizing where it goes. The puck beats Delacroix under his leg pads. 2-1 Eaton.

Our bench explodes with screams and cheers as I skate back to center ice. Our team gets three more goals in the second period. Peterville gets two. 5-3 Eaton.

The third period breaks out in chaos. Our team can’t keep the puck. Peterville scores instantly. 5-4.

Coach McKinley calls a timeout.

“Boys! We can’t lose tonight. Bring back the fire from the second. Let’s go boys!”

We get out on the ice, my face burning hot. *We cannot lose this game, I yell* to myself. We have three minutes left of the game. I lose the face-off but dive towards the defender and poke the puck away from him. Roope picks it up and we fly down the ice on a two-on-one. Roope moves around the other defender. He shoots and the goalie kicks it away, right to me. I snipe it over Delacroix’s right shoulder. The puck hits the crossbar and drops down behind the red line. The Siren goes off and I throw my hands in the air and my line flies over and we all jump around in the corner. 6-4.

With twenty seconds left, my teammate loses the puck causing a turnover.

Buckley rushes down the ice weaving in and out of our defense. His shot completely misses the goal. To their luck, it bounces off the glass and lands on one of Buckley’s teammate’s sticks with an open goal. He shoves it in.

My head drops in disappointment.

*Why wasn’t I there? Get there next time you idiot,* I say to myself.

Now it's 6-5. We cannot let them claw their way back. Ten seconds left.

 I win the face-off in our defensive zone, and I take it up the side of the rink. Buckley tries a dirty hit, but my hyperawareness finally comes back and I dodge it. *Yes! It’s back!* I yell to myself.

 The near packed stadium is chanting.

“Ten! Nine! Eight! Seven!...”

I dump it into Peterville’s zone with one second left.

Our bench clears as we dogpile at center ice. The Eaton Eagles have finally won the Minnesota State Hockey Championship! The flowing ocean of green and white jumps around the rink as if the Minnesota Wild Just won the Stanley Cup.