

Our Club

Interviews

As the 90th minute came to a close, the whistle blew, wrapping up the game. The home team had made their victory one to celebrate, and Stella was there, writing everything she could down. The score ended up being a 4 – 1, and while everyone in the stands was next to her celebrating it, she documented it all.

“First goal was scored by team captain, Lance, second by that of his twin brother, Gareth. The third was quite a surprise when a midfielder Ollie knocked it in with his head, and the last was by that new guy... Adam, I think his name was,” Stella said, reading her notes to herself. “Max tried to defend against that one guy... but it didn’t go that well. Penalty shots have never really been his forte...” she looked around, noticing that people were clearing out of the stands. Yeah, she wasn’t going to move yet. No need to have to put up with all that pushing and shoving nonsense until she had her interview.

“Stella!” Max’s voice called to her from the pitch. “Come on down. Coach says now’s the best time for you to do your interviews and all.”

She nodded, gathering up her computer into her backpack, and hopped over the poles that separated the pitch from the stands. “Ah, shit,” Stella muttered. She landed a little roughly, hurting her left foot a bit, but it was worth it to avoid having to walk in that damn crowd. For a moment she slumped over, gripping her ankle. That stung a bit.

Max extended his hand down to her, and when she looked up at him, he was so happy to see her, to look into her eyes. “I can’t believe you actually did that,” he said. “Hopping over the barrier’s a bit dangerous. It’s kinda high for someone who’s not that... physically inclined.”

“I don’t have to be physically inclined,” Stella said, taking his hand. He helped her up, and she put her weight on the foot to test it. “I just didn’t want to have to file out of the stands, then have to show my school ID to show why I need to get back in. It’s a hassle!” Her foot was fine, aside from the little bit of stinging, so she walked on without his aid. “Thanks, Max. You’re a real sweetheart.”

“Any time,” Max said kindly. He wanted to hug around and squeeze her, but he tried not to push his limits. It was enough that she took his hand there for that moment.

Now would be a great time to tell her how I feel, Max thought, looking over at her. We’re here, we’re pretty much alone... I think now would be perfect! He tried to gather his confidence. *Stella, I’ve had a crush on you ever since I’ve met you and...*

Stella went on when she saw that Coach J was waving at her from afar. She needed to get the interviews done, as the sun had all ready gone down and it was well into the evening by now.

Wait, I... I didn’t say that aloud?! I was just thinking it?! Max thought, wanting to pound his head on something.

“Stella?” Max asked, making her stop and look back at him.

“Yes?” she asked. “Is... something wrong, Max?”

He blushed a little, slowly looking down at the ground. “Oh, no, it’s just that I...” he scratched the back of his head. “...I wanted to thank you for being there today. I felt at the top of my game because you were there to cheer me on.”

“You know I come to the games to write the articles,” Stella said.

“It’s not just that,” Max said, walking up to her. “It’s that I... I...”

I love you, Stella. God damn it, I’m so smitten with you I don’t know what to do with myself.

“I really like having you nearby,” Max said. “You always inspire me to do my best, no matter what.” He reached over and tried to put his arm around Stella’s shoulders.

Stella grinned. “Hey, there’s the new guy...” She ran off without giving Max the time to finish his thoughts. “Hi, there... um, Adam? I’m the reporter for the school paper, and I’d love to interview you for this week’s soccer article!” she said, making the black-haired young man stop in his tracks.

Max watched them from where he was standing. He was never going to be able to catch up to her at this rate, and it made his heart ache. He sighed. Stella was writing down all sorts of details as Adam gave his replies somewhat stoically, like he had somewhere he needed to be.

“Nice try, Romeo,” a voice said from behind Max.

“Gareth, were you hiding in the shadows so you could eavesdrop?” Max asked angrily, crossing his arms. “That really is the last straw! All you’ve ever done is tease me since soccer camp! I’m not gonna put up with any more.”

“I’m not here to make fun of you,” Gareth said, coming out of where he had been standing. “Truthfully, we were hiding back here because we didn’t want Naomi’s paparazzi getting pictures of us being romantic.” He laughed for a minute.

“I thought you were being really sweet with her,” Naomi said quietly.

“If a bit dorky,” Gareth said, grinning from ear to ear. “Oh, Romeo, you’re gonna have to try harder than that!”

“Oh stop it,” Naomi said, hitting Gareth lightly. “Your confession to me didn’t go very easily, now did it?”

Gareth almost turned as red as his hair. “D-don’t... you didn’t have to say that, Naomi.”

Naomi stepped out of the shadows and walked up to Max, putting her hand on his shoulder. She was trying to be reassuring, but she knew it wasn’t his encouragement he needed. “I sat next to her during the game. She probably won’t tell you this, but when you blocked that one goal during the first half, she jumped off of the bleacher and cheered as hard as she could. I honestly think she likes you a lot. So do your best, okay?” Then she sighed, going back to Gareth’s side. “Hey, Gareth, I’m gonna have to head

out of here pretty soon. I don't want them to come looking for me and then decide without knowing anything that you kidnapped me or something."

"It's amazing you don't have one of those super model boyfriends," Gareth said bashfully. "With all the people that flock to you..."

"I don't want one of those," Naomi said gently, grabbing him by the collar of his uniform. "I like real men." After an intense kiss, she let him go and started going off the field. "See ya tomorrow, Gareth. Bye, Max. Good luck."

"Thank you." Max nodded looking at Gareth once Naomi had left. "So even Gareth Flores has moments where he's nervous?"

"Well when you're dating someone like... *her*, wouldn't you be?" Gareth asked. "Well, anyway, Romeo... you should try to go talk to Stella before she leaves. Wouldn't want to miss your big opportunity."

"I think I all ready have," Max said. He felt that sweeping sadness again. Every time he thought about his inability to put his heart out to Stella, he got the same exact feeling.

"No, you haven't," Gareth said. He walked up to his teammate and poked the man right where his heart was. "Stop pussyfooting around, or my brother might just get her love back."

"Lance," Max muttered. "It's *because* of your brother that she can't even--"

"Hold on there, sport," Gareth said. "You don't know *anything* about what happened. Lance told me himself that he didn't do anything in the chemistry lab. It was those girls who wanted to see them break up that did it. They set my brother up because those damn hoes wanted him for themselves, and now, the girl he adores won't even look at him! So if you want Stella, you'd better make your move before Lance does. I'm being serious about this. He hasn't had a girlfriend since that that incident... It hurt Stella, but it hurt Lance, too." He shook his head. "Shut your damn trap before I give you a good punch, Romeo."

Max looked back over there to see that Stella managed to strike up a friendly conversation with Adam. He walked away from Gareth. Even if what the younger of the twins said was true about Lance, it didn't change how he felt about her. He wasn't going to let anything stop him from saying his peace tonight.

"So you joined the team to help find a healthier lifestyle?" Stella asked. "That's really admirable, Adam."

"It's less admirable than you might think," Adam answered her very quietly. "I just want to graduate on time, so I can move on with life and get out of this town."

"My mom used to say that the only things that live here willingly are broken hearts and broken dreams," she said. "And the more I live here, the more I agree with that sentiment. I can't wait to graduate, either."

"It's nice to know that I'm not alone in that mindset," Adam said, watching her write all of this down on her steno pad with the pencil she usually had tucked behind her ear. "Even if your path has more lights than mine, it is still one of shadow..." Adam spoke very poetically. Then he took in a very deep breath. "I should thank you, Stella."

"Why?" she asked.

"I believe I have an idea for a new song," Adam said. "Much like your writing, I tell stories, too. I just do it with a guitar and a microphone instead of a pencil and a pad of paper." Even though he looked like someone who didn't care, after speaking with Adam, Stella got a much different impression.

"You're a musician," Stella said. That interested her even more. She always was a sucker for a man with a good musical sense. "Amazing. Well, it's sort of like Max. He's so in love with stage production, and yet he still manages to play soccer. Just goes to show you how multitalented our team really is."

"Talented," Adam repeated it, not believing it for a second. "...if it absolves your heart to think of it that way. Did you have any more questions for me?"

"Not at the moment. I'm sure I'll think of more after I'm all ready back home for the night, though," Stella answered, laughing at herself. "Thanks so much, Adam."

"It's not a problem," Adam said. He bowed his head just a little before going on his way. "Have a good night."

"Yeah, you too," Stella said. She tucked her pad and pencil into her backpack, ready to leave for the night before anything else happened. Luckily, she lived only a few streets away from the school, so she could walk, so there was always that plus. "And now, home. I can use a good soak..."

Max came up from behind her. "Did you get what you needed?"

"Yep," she answered.

"So, can I offer you a ride home, then?"

Stella shook her head. "I only live a few streets away. I can walk."

"In this night? In this town?" Max asked. "You haven't heard about the attacks in these areas lately? Stella, I--"

"I can handle myself, Max. I'll be fine."

"Humor me, please," Max said. "If anything happened to you when I know I could have done something to ensure your safety, I... I wouldn't be able to take it. Please, Stella, let me drive you home."

"I can't. My step-dad would freak the fuck out if a guy brought me home," Stella said. "I don't want to have to speak to him if I can avoid it."

“Stella, if I explain to him why I did it, I’m sure he’d understand.”

She rolled her eyes. “I... can’t let him hurt you, Max. Because he would.”

That remark confused Max. What did she mean by that? Was her step-dad a violent man? She started to walk on, and knowing that his heart was in the right place, he took her hand. “He won’t hurt me, Stella. He won’t hurt you, either. I don’t care what you say or what he says. I have to do right by my heart... and if he does anything at all to hurt you, then... I’ll stop him. I’ll stand between you and take the hits myself. I’m taking you home, Stella Silverberg. I will not accept otherwise!”

Stella blushed. “Max...” she whispered. “...you’d do that... for me?”

“I would do more than that,” Max said. “If only I had the opportunity.” He pulled her close for a moment. “I’ve known you for years now, Stella, and I... I... really like you.”

That didn’t come out right... stupid, stupid Max!

“You mean... like...” Stella stared at him for a moment. “You mean...”

“I mean that I... I-love you, St-Stella.”

Great... now I’m starting to stutter?! Smooth move there...

“...is that why you’re always...” she shook her head. “...oh Max. Why did you never tell me?”

“I couldn’t... I wanted to but... I...” Max hugged around her. “...never could work up the courage.”

“Why is tonight different?”

“Tonight’s different because...”

Because I heard from Gareth about your exboyfriend’s feelings, and I... I didn’t want to lose my chance...

Max squeezed her tightly. “Tonight’s different because I... I... because I wanted to make it clear that I am concerned for your safety, that I would do anything I could for you... because tonight seemed like the perfect opportunity to let you know.” He relished in the fact that he finally had the chance to hold her close. If this was indeed a dream, he never wanted to wake from it.

*I’ve done it... I’ve finally managed to **tell** you! I’ve managed to get it out of my system and out into words that make sense! Oh, glorious day! My Stella has heard my heart, and she accepts my affection... this is too good to be true...*

Stella smiled. “All right,” she said. “You can take me home... but you have to do something for me.”

“What I wouldn’t do for you,” Max said.

“You have to help me with my math homework! I don’t fucking get this algebra shit.” She laughed, kissing his cheek very quickly. “So, please?” When he nodded, she smiled at him.

Everything... was *perfect*.