

Starting something new

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Starting something new

by [lehnsberry](#).

Summary

“Is there a boy?” Rose asks, feeling a lot of conflicting emotions. A part of her is giddy and curious, and another dreads the answer a little. Shane sighs so hard his shoulders sag, biting his lip and blinking quickly.

“There used to be”, he admits.

OR: Shane's coming out to Rose goes a little differently.

Notes

Title from Whim by Haley Williams.

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

The second time Rose tries to have sex with her boyfriend, it all goes to hell.

They've had drinks with a few of her friends earlier in the evening and it's been lovely. Shane is still a little reserved, but sometimes his sarcastic and quietly funny side peeks out, and she feels a little high every time she manages to draw it out, every time he grins at her or makes a private little joke, just for the two of them.

The wine they've been drinking has Shane sweetly flushed and a little giggly and he goes so easily when she pushes him into the backseat of a car someone called for them. They scroll her Instagram together and he leans into her space, smelling like the cologne she's come to find so nice, and he laughs quietly as she tells him stories of people whose posts they come across. He's very warm and very close, and the anticipation glows and sparks inside her.

He pays the driver, holds doors open for her, offers to take her jacket when they get into her condo. Her perfect gentleman, she teases him as she deliberately drops the jacket on the floor. She likes him so much.

She likes how serious he gets, eyes searching hers. She likes how carefully he touches her face, how bashfully he tries to avert his eyes when she starts unbuttoning her shirt. She likes how he doesn't overwhelm her, how he lets her take the lead and guide him to her bed, shy and sweet.

She likes how he stutters out a rushed "You're so pretty" like the words feel unfamiliar in his mouth, like he's embarrassed to say it. She likes how big his hands feel on her bare waist as he holds her when they make out. She likes his scent, his taste - She likes all of it, so much.

Later, she feels ashamed of how long it takes her to realise Shane doesn't like any of it at all.

She has him sitting on her bed, leaning against the headboard in only his t-shirt and his tight little boxer briefs, his muscular thighs spread to make a space for her between them. She helps him tug off his t-shirt and smiles when he ducks his head, shyly avoiding her gaze. The room is dim, lit only by a single bedside lamp. Intimate. She goes in close, hands resting on his warm skin, kissing his lips, his chin, his chest. Her hand slides up his thigh, closer, closer, and -

He's not hard. At all.

She yanks her hand away like he burnt her, meeting his wide eyes.

"Shane?" her voice comes out small and uncomfortable. He flinches like she screamed it. Pulls his legs closed and his knees to his chest, hiding. Watches her with a quiet terror in his eyes, like he's expecting her to start hurling insults, and just like that, the moment is broken. She feels cold in her lacy bra. She feels ridiculous.

Rose lays a hand on his knee carefully, not to make space for herself again but just to establish a small point of contact and warmth. Shane's skin does feel warm, but the despair in his eyes makes her shiver. It's like she's seeing him for the first time.

Of course, logically she knows sometimes dicks just don't get with the program, she *knows* that. He's had half a bottle of wine tonight, and sure, it's been a while since then, but it's a plausible explanation. He has an exhausting job, he's still nervous around her whenever they get intimate. It's natural for guys to not always get hard instantly even if they want to, she knows, but it's just that - it's just that it was difficult last time too. Shane took a long time to get fully hard and a long time to come. He was nervous and even apologized and Rose thought it was sweet at the time, but now... she thought it was going well this time. He was touching her, and went easily when she pushed, and she wanted it so badly, hell, she got so wet for him and now it's starting to feel embarrassing and stupid and humiliating.

"I-", he begins, his voice rough. "I'm sorry, it's not..."

"It's not what?" her voice sounds weak to her own ears.

Shane looks down, cheeks flushed with shame. "It's not you, it's just - I guess I'm really stressed lately, I'm sorry."

"Hey", Rose says softly, overcome with affection for him despite herself. "It's okay."

"It's not though, is it?" Shane asks with a sad smile. "You deserve something better than this."

Better than me, he doesn't say, and Rose hates that he's thinking about himself like that.

"Do you..." she starts, then stops to think for a moment. "Do you still want...? Because there's a lot of stuff we can do even if he's not quite there yet." She glances down toward Shane's boxers, and grins when he lets out a shocked little laugh.

"I- you're great, do you know that?" Shane bursts out, taking her hand in his. He's looking at her with a lot of affection, even if he still seems a bit stiff. His dark eyes look wet and shiny, like he's close to crying.

"I know", Rose says with a smile. A part of her is already imagining making out with him while he fingers her, or laying him out and kissing him all over, coaxing him into relaxing and getting hard for her, sliding featherlight fingertips over his skin until he's shaking and begging for more - but she's starting to understand that may not be somewhere they can go.

"Do you want that?" she asks. She has to be sure. "Do you want me?"

Shane draws a breath. Then another. She can see him at war with himself, trying to find the right thing to say - and that's answer enough, isn't it? If he did want her, he'd know it, he'd know how to say it without such a struggle.

It hurts like some beast biting into her, ripping out a piece. She's an actress, she's used to rejection, going after roles, after directors and co-stars and stories that interest her and getting a no for an answer, time and again. It comes with the territory, and it's fine. She knows she can survive personal rejections too, she's had a few boyfriends who took a while to gather the courage to tell her she wasn't what they wanted after all, and - oh.

That... does make sense, actually.

Shane squeezes her hand. The tears are unshed still, welling and making his eyes shine, and he looks so sad. Her own eyes sting.

“I want to want you”, Shane finally whispers. “So bad. Because I love being with you, and you’re incredible, it’s just... I don’t know.”

A tear falls, running down his handsome face. She reaches out to swipe it off with her thumb. He closes his eyes and leans his cheek into the touch, sighing shakily.

“I’ve loved being with you too, you know”, Rose says softly. “But - and you can tell me if I’m totally off base here - but you’re not actually attracted to me, are you?”

Another tear falls as he slowly shakes his head. “It’s not because... It’s not you, I promise. Anyone in their right mind would be attracted to you.”

She sniffles and smiles. “Anyone... who is attracted to women.”

The words hang between them for a long moment. Shane looks pained, looks like a part of him wants to get up and run. When he finally whispers a “Yeah”, it’s a quiet and fragile thing.

She closes her eyes, nodding. In a way, it’s a relief to know it’s not her fault, but she still feels the rejection, the hurt. She was really starting to fall for him before all this.

“I’m sorry”, he says, and she looks at him again. Whatever pain she’s feeling, he has it worse, she’s pretty sure. She knows hockey, and there isn’t a *single* out hockey player in the MLH or the minor leagues, active or retired. It’s still so macho all the time out there, all posturing and name calling and picture perfect blonde WAGs. And Shane is such a prominent figure in that world, so widely known. Everyone’s always looking to him to be the model captain, expecting him to stay as perfect as he’s always been. If he’s gay, she can’t even imagine what it’s been like for him. How afraid he must be of getting exposed.

She wants to pull him into a hug, but suddenly it feels like too much, with him in his boxers and her in a bra. It’s made of a delicate, see-through lace, and even though she looks great in it, she would actually like for her nipples to not be a focal point of any hug right now.

“Can you wait for five minutes if I get changed into some pajamas?” she asks in a rush. “I want to keep talking if that’s okay with you.”

“Okay?” Shane says, baffled, and Rose impulsively leans in to ruffle his hair.

“Don’t go anywhere, okay?”

He nods, ducking to avoid the touch, but she spies a hint of a smile on his face.

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In the bathroom, she wipes off her makeup in record time. She pees, washes her hands and face, slaps on some moisturizer and changes into her softest pajama pants and an oversized

grey t-shirt. Considers brushing her teeth too, but she knows Shane would get self-conscious if he noticed and then he'd have to get up to do the same, and she doesn't need the distraction.

She looks at herself in the mirror, the resigned set of her shoulders, the pinched set of her mouth, her big sad puppydog eyes. If she can see the signs of her worry and uncertainty this clearly, there's no doubt Shane will as well.

Get it together, Rosie, she thinks at herself, frowning. *Just because you're losing a boyfriend doesn't mean you can't keep a friend.*

When she returns to her bedroom, Shane has apparently been busy as well; there are two tall glasses of water on the edge of the bedside table with a bowl of grapes he's rinsed, and the man himself is sitting on the bed, back in his navy chinos and his fitted black t-shirt. Back straight and socked feet tucked under him, he looks nervous and cute, and Rose allows herself a few more seconds to mourn the fact that she can't kiss him anymore.

"I don't know how to do this", Shane says quietly, worrying at the hem of his t-shirt, unable to look at her. Rose finds herself getting over her mourning and pulling back the comforter, easy as anything.

"Lucky for you, I do", she grins as she slips under the covers and pats the mattress next to her. "Get in here and bring the grapes."

They settle down with her lying on her back and Shane curled into her side, his head on her shoulder. She cards her fingers through his soft hair and he just rests there, warm and familiar. The bowl is balanced on her stomach and they both occasionally pop a grape in their mouths. They're good.

"Can we", Shane begins slowly, "Is it okay if we maybe don't try again?"

He sounds so nervous. Like she could *make* him fuck her when he doesn't want to. She wants to hiss she'd *never* do something like that, because she's not a total *asshole*, but she manages to swallow the outburst.

"Yeah", she says softly instead. "It's okay."

She can feel him relaxing a fraction, settling slightly heavier against her. God, this must've been weighing on him for a long time.

"How long have you known?" she asks.

"That I like men?"

"Mhm." It's good that he can at least say the words out loud.

"A long time", Shane says softly, "since I was a teenager. That I really only like men? Maybe fifteen minutes."

She lets out a delighted giggle. "Well, if there's a way to make sure..."

“I shouldn’t have got you mixed up in my shit”, Shane sighs. “It’s not fair to you at all.”

Rose hums. “It’s not my first time, actually.”

“Wh- you’ve had another - another gay boyfriend?” He pulls back to look at her, eyes wide.

“Babe, I went to theater school, I’ve had several. You’re not that special.” She grins when he laughs and buries his face in her shoulder again.

“Maybe - that says something about you?”

“What is that supposed to mean!” she hisses and playfully grabs at his hair. “I have the worst gaydar in the world? I *know*, it’s like a curse.”

“No, I mean”, he says slowly, pondering. “If even the loveliest woman you’ve ever met can’t turn you straight, then you really have to accept it?”

She melts a little. “Please never stop flirting with me. You’re better at it now.”

He snuffles a little laugh into her shoulder. She pets his hair, and they’re quiet for a long moment. They eat some grapes. She feels a peculiar kind of peace; maybe, somewhere in the back of her mind, she already knew this was where they were headed, even before tonight. Maybe from the start. Maybe it’s possible to know someone is meant to be your person from the moment you meet them, and she just has a bad habit of mistaking one type of connection for another.

“You should follow Miles back on Instagram”, she suggests after a while. “He’s like half in love with you, you must’ve noticed.”

“Um”, Shane says awkwardly, “is he? I was trying hard to... not notice.”

She laughs. “He totally is. I can give you his number, too?”

“No”, he says firmly, then backtracks. “Or, not ‘no’, just... there’s...”

Oh.

Rose shifts so she can see his face. He’s resolutely staring at her chin, his sweet brown eyes shining again.

“Is there a boy?” she asks, feeling a lot of conflicting emotions. A part of her is giddy and curious, and another dreads the answer a little. Shane sighs so hard his shoulders sag, biting his lip and blinking quickly.

“There used to be”, he admits. “Not for the last few months, though. I never went behind your back, I promise.”

She’ll never tell him how relieved that makes her feel.

“What happened?” It’s a risk, asking so directly. She knows he’s likely to clam up, but she’s so curious. She knows him better now than she did before, but she doesn’t have the whole picture. There was always a sadness to him, and she could always sense he was holding some of himself back. Now she knows some of that was the gay thing, but she’s pretty sure there’s something else too. He’s like a tightly wound string, twanging with the pressure he’s under.

Shane meets her eyes for a moment, then looks away again. He’s tearing up in earnest now, his mouth set in a tense line. “You can’t tell anyone. Please.”

Her heart aches. Has he ever been able to talk to anyone about this? She has a feeling he hasn’t.

“I won’t, I promise.”

He searches her eyes, looking desperately for something. Maybe he finds it, because he ducks back down into her shoulder and starts speaking.

“It’s complicated. Or it was, when it was happening. It’s not anymore, because... I don’t know, a lot of little things that went wrong, and I just...”

She pets his hair and just waits. Sometimes what works best is to give him time to figure himself out without trying to push him.

Shane draws in a deep breath and starts again. “He’s not out either, and his situation is similar to mine. I can’t tell you who he is - I trust you, but it’s not my secret to tell. But yeah, we were... seeing each other in secret for a long time. It started out casual, but...”

“Then it became more?” she supplies softly. Her mind is working furiously, trying to figure out who Shane’s mystery boyfriend/hookup/situationship could be. A similar situation to Shane’s could mean another high profile athlete, maybe even another hockey player, but it could just as well be someone else in the public sphere, like an actor or a musician or a politician or something like that.

“At least for me”, Shane confirms. “But it’s complicated. He hooks up with women too, we were never exclusive. Maybe I wanted to be, but we never really talked about it.”

“And then something happened?” she asks carefully. Shane is a creature of habit, he likes routine; if this thing had been going on for a long time and he liked this person, something had to happen to end it, right?

“Yeah”, Shane sighs miserably. Rose makes a sympathetic noise and rests her cheek against his head. She pops another grape in her mouth and hopes her chewing doesn’t feel uncomfortable for him.

“He arranged this... I don’t even know. He cooked, and he had ginger ale for me, and he wanted me to spend the night, and we never do any of that. But he kept talking about all the women he sleeps with? And asking me about them, and I didn’t know what to think. But at the same time it felt like we were getting closer and I guess I just freaked out. And I left.”

His voice goes small, and Rose can tell how confused and hurt he feels. And she must be the only person he's ever been able to tell any of this to.

She presses a kiss to the top of his head. "It sounds to me like maybe it was more than a hookup for him too. Has he reached out to you at all since?"

"No", Shane says softly, so dejected and ashamed it breaks her heart.

"And you haven't either?" she confirms.

He shakes his head. "Do you think I should?"

She shifts again so she can see him. He avoids her gaze at first, but when she finally catches his eye, he looks both terrified and hopeful.

"Yeah", she finds herself saying. "Tell him we broke up and that you're still thinking about him. Even if he doesn't feel the same as you - which, he'd be an idiot not to and you can definitely do better -"

He gives a fraction of a smile, and she nods. "Even if that's how it ends, at least you'll know."

Shane nods slowly. "I'll be seeing him soon for... I mean, we'll be in the same place. Maybe I'll talk to him then."

"You should!" Rose can almost hear her brain whirring with how hard this makes her think. In addition to the regular season games stretching out before the start of playoffs later in the spring, the All-Star game in Tampa Bay is coming up soon. If the mystery man is another hockey player, or even someone associated with the MLH in some other way, they'll definitely meet there. She knows she shouldn't pry, but a part of her wants to pull up the roster and start interrogating Shane on each and every one of the players voted in to play this year. She wants to look up his regular schedule and start talking about each of the opposing teams in turn, watching his face for some sign to tell her if she gets close. She wants to beg him for a name, a story, for every little detail that would help her understand. She's always been an inquisitive person, asking altogether too many questions, and it's hard to control it when she wants so badly to know Shane.

Maybe, if she can behave now, he might tell her one day. Not because she's trying to force it out of him, but because he actually wants to. She can be patient, right?

Shane stays quiet for a long time, curled into her side and thinking. Rose holds him and breathes in the scent of his hair.

"When I talk to him", Shane says after a while, a hint of a sardonic smile in his voice, "if it goes badly, can I call you?"

Rose hugs him tighter. "Yes! And if it goes well - and I think it will - call me then too."

"Yeah?"

“Yeah”, she says firmly. “I’ll call you all the time too. I want us to stay friends, okay? And not like that bullshit ‘let’s stay friends after breaking up’ and then we never speak again. Let’s be real friends.”

“I’d like that”, Shane says softly, and she grins.

“You’re never getting rid of me now. You’ll wish you never met me.”

“That’s not possible”, Shane says, and her heart feels all warm and gooey.

“Should we go to sleep?” she asks after a while, hoping he’ll be okay with sharing the bed and cuddling.

“Not yet”, Shane says, but it sounds more like a question. “I don’t think I can sleep yet. Too many thoughts.”

She hums distractedly, eyes catching on the large TV screen she had mounted on the wall over her bed first thing when she moved into this apartment. “Okay, two options. We can watch a movie…”

“I’ve seen far too many and you take forever to pick one”, Shane interrupts, a little bitchy, and she likes him so much.

She tugs at his hair gently. “I know! So, option two: wanna play Chel?”

He laughs, and it’s a loud, unrestrained kind of laugh. She hides her smile in his hair.

“Chel, definitely”, Shane says, just like the predictable hockey bro he is.

“Great”, Rose says. “Go get it and my PS4 and the controllers from the living room?”

Shane sits up to look at her. “We can’t just go play in there?”

“Nooo, I’m so comfy”, she whines, turning the full force of her puppy eyes on him. “Go!”

He smiles at her helplessly even as she pushes him out of bed and cocoons herself in the blanket like a little caterpillar.

“I’ll kick your ass”, he warns her.

“You’re on, Hollander!”

He disappears into the living room, grumbling something unintelligible under his breath. She eats another grape and watches him go, still grinning, and then starts looking for the remote in the mess of books and water bottles and makeup on her bedside table.

She could never have seen tonight going quite like this, but as she listens to her brand new ex-boyfriend going through her stuff in the other room, probably looking for the game or the power cord to the PlayStation, she realises she really wouldn’t have it any other way.

End Notes

Thank you for reading! ♥

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