

Desert Sun

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by [maggs689](#)

Summary

Taylor could come to love Arizona. But there's still Edmonton. And New Jersey.

And Nico.

Notes

To the handful of other people still clinging to this sinking ship: This is for you.

Taylor doesn't really drink anymore, but he can't help but throw back a few after the Yotes win their play-in series. There's no place to go but the bar in the hotel, already half-full with sad Jets, waiting for their flights home.

The Coyotes do their best to drink themselves silly before stumbling through the hotel lobby to the ballroom that's their dining room for the duration. Taylor eats - lets himself put butter on his pasta for once - until he's warm and happy, his body loose with the beer and the high of the win. He'll be sore tomorrow, covered in happy bruises, but for now he's golden.

He shouldn't call Nico when he gets back to his room. He should drink two bottles of water, take some Advil, floss, and go to bed right away. He should do a lot of things he doesn't.

Taylor didn't know about the desert until he was traded. I mean, he knew about the desert, that it was out there just west of the arena. But he didn't know how suffused the city was with it, the bite of sand in every gust of wind, the dryness leaching out with every breath. At first, it was suffocating. But after a few weeks, after the questions died down and the attention refocused elsewhere, he felt his whole body relax into it. No more shivering while he waited for his car to warm up in the players' parking lot in Edmonton, no more cold rain in New Jersey in February. He would grow to love this place.

He didn't call Nico, not when he landed, not after his first goal in his new jersey with the new number. Nico didn't call him either. Taylor imagined Nico back in the apartment in Hoboken, every light on, the tv blaring, Nico curled up on the couch under the afghan Taylor's mom knit them. Nico wasn't looking at his phone every 5 minutes. He wasn't refreshing Taylor's Instagram account, looking for signs that he had moved on.

Hockey kept Taylor sane. Game days were the best, lots of distraction. Taylor wanted good distraction, not the Clayton-Keller-making-eyes-at-him kind of distraction. On days off, Taylor still went to the arena and spent most of the day working out by himself, only the red emergency lights on in the gym. He'd stop by a bar on the way home and have exactly one beer before heading home, where he'd take a scalding shower and go to bed.

He's going to stay in Arizona after this year, he's pretty sure of it. He can't make a new home again. He doesn't have the energy. He knows it's all downhill from here, hockey-wise, and he wants a place where he can be happy. When he retires, he just may stay here. He can get used to the 105 degree days if it means he can golf year-round and not freeze his balls off in January.

He doesn't let himself think about whether Nico could like Arizona. He doesn't run through a list of things Switzerland and Arizona have in common (mountains?) so he can convince Nico to spend off-seasons here with him. He doesn't spin out long elaborate fantasies about winning the Stanley Cup and then buying the team so he can trade for Nico. All of that would be a waste of his time.

It's almost like Arizona is another planet. Hockey media doesn't even go there. Compared to Edmonton, it's the quietest place on earth. As long as Taylor is there, he can pretend that he's stepped sideways out of his life and can step back in at any time. He doesn't have to think about the fact that Nico's gone. He doesn't have to think about more friends he never sees anymore.

But back in Edmonton, in this fucking bubble, he feels like he's woken up with his entire reality shifted one inch to the left. So when he drinks too much after that winning game, he can't help dialing Nico's number, the one to Nico's brother's apartment in Bern that Taylor has had memorized for years. He can't help talking as soon as Nico sleepily mumbles hello into the phone, telling him how he always thought they'd be doing this together, can't imagine doing this without him. He hasn't called Nico since the morning he told him that things weren't working out in New Jersey and he has a lot to say.

In the morning, it's like everything has snapped into focus. He's got a Stanley Cup to battle for. But instead of that being his only goal with the future stretching out blank beyond it, he now has Nico too. He doesn't know how things are going to turn out - not this week or in his life generally. None of us know. But until then, until Taylor looks back on his hopefully long life, he'll hope for the best.

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