

It was the 2023 world cup, and Ronaldo was really nervous.

"It's a big deal playing in the world cup," he said, looking into his locker forlornly. "I'm really nervous about it,"

"Don't worry about it," said Jack Grealish. "Here, take this BoohooMan x Grealish Homeware™ face towel, you're still dripping from the shower." Ronaldo took the small but stylish towel from Jack Grealish and rubbed it against his moist torso, which was bare to the waist, where he had wrapped a white towel, precariously low.

"I'm so glad I have team mates like you Jack Grealish, you're a real friend."

"That's okay, Ronaldo. Although I know you have some... *deeper* friendships on the team," Jack Grealish said, shooting him a smirk, which was only slightly shot through with envy. Ronaldo rolled his eyes and grabbed his kit out of the locker.

"I know who you mean Jack Grealish, and for the record – we're *just* friends." He tried to hide the sadness in his eyes as he said this.

"Speaking of, he's late to the match. Kick off time is in 10 minutes."

"Your favourite's running late, again?" Came a dark and brooding voice. Ronaldo met its gaze – in the twinkling eyes of Lionel Messi. "He's lucky he's still in the squad."

"Back off, Messi," Ronaldo growled in return. "You and me both know he's the best player we have."

"Speak for yourself," Messi chuckled villainously.

"That's the last time you disrespect our team mate," Ronaldo replied. "You're a *messy-ass* hoe, and by the way? Jealousy is *not* a good look on you."

"Guys, guys," said Marcus Rashford. "This isn't what we need mere minutes before the match of our lifetime. How can we win this football match if our hearts aren't full of laughter and light?"

"Marcus is right," said Jack Grealish.

"Yeah," said another team member. "We have to remember we're all on the same team."

Soon the team was ready and before they knew it, they were being ushered out onto the football field. The roar of the crowd filled Ronaldo's veins with hot, sweet pumps of adrenaline. It was rare that he had ever felt a thrill like this – only for big finals, and for...one man. His "favourite", as Messi had said. The best man, the best football player, the best striker, and the best lover Ronaldo had ever known.

He realised with some anxiety that he hadn't had a chance to speak to his "favourite" before coming onto the pitch. They had a secret good-luck ritual of amorously locking eyes before games – and it had never lost him a match yet. They were all lined up to sing the national anthem, so it wasn't easy to sneak a sideways glance and see if he was there. Maybe he'd got stuck in traffic? Maybe he'd been cornered by the other team before the match and intimidated? Had Messi made him a victim of his own frustrated lust for Ronaldo, that often drove him to severe paroxysms of envy?

Ronaldo looked nervously down the line. The crowd were going crazy with anticipation. Soon his anxieties started to melt away as he realised it was time to move into formation. What felt like mere moments later, the starting pistol went off, and it was time to play football.

They played hard, and they played good. Ronaldo passed to the Arsenal centre back, who was then tackled by Chelsea wing defence. They lobbed it to the goal but the goalie was no fool; he batted away the ball with a defiance both masculine and becoming.

The ball was zipping back and forth across the field like a rolled-up pangolin in a giant, angry pinball machine, powered by nothing but muscle, sweat and sexual fury. The noise of the pinball machine was the rapt roaring of the crowd, and the lights were... the lights of the football stadium.

Messi had ownership of the ball and was kicking it along with his feet without passing. He made for the goal, but a Chelsea striker skidded before him and pushed the ball to a team mate.

"You made it too easy for him," Jack Grealish called out. Gareth Southfield gently chided him for not supporting his fellow team mate.

“It’s not about how many goals we score, it’s about how we learn to let everyone’s inner light shine. Remember everyone, love and light.” Came the words.

“It’s true,” Ronaldo said, deftly passing the ball on to someone. “We have to stay positive. It’s the only way to win this thing.”

The Arsenal United team continued skilfully shepherding the ball the right side of the pitch, and when Ronaldo found his chance, he went for it and kicked the ball really hard. Seconds turned to minutes as the orb traced its arc through the air and into the net. The net danced jubilantly upon impact; the crowd went wild. Cheers of “Ronaldo! Ronaldo! Ronaldo!” went up, and before he knew it, he was being lifted up by the boys on his team. But among them – he could not see the face of his beloved. The only face he ever wished to light up with victory. Where was he? Was he okay? Cristiano tried desperately to hide the pang of longing stabbing through his heart; longing for that one, breathtakingly chiselled face to illuminate his sight; longing for those deep blue eyes, the depths wherein dwelled a beauty both mysterious and divine. He did what he always did – forced himself to smile, and convinced everyone around him that the tear running down his cheek was one of happiness.

Before he knew it, the game had started again, and the ball was going everywhere.

“Wondering where your favourite player is?” said Messi with a smirk as he jogged alongside Ronaldo.

“I’m focussed on winning,” Ronaldo replied huskily.

“Not focussed enough!” hissed Messi, taking the ball and making it change direction back towards their own goal.

“Messi, we’re on the same team, you have to shoot the ball the other way!” Marcus Rashford cried, looking to his teammate John (?) Sterling in disbelief. But that wasn’t enough. Feigning to trip on his shoelaces, Messi toppled over and his foot set the ball flying – into their *own* goal!

“Oh dear, that’s an own goal!” Cried the referee.

“He tripped on his shoelaces, that can’t be fair! Surely that doesn’t count?” Jack Grealish growled, pushing up his Jack Grealish x BoohooMan by ASOS™ headband from his forehead.

“It does count unfortunately,” replied the referee. “Sorry.”

The crowd booed acrimoniously.

“Lionel Messi, what happened?” cried Rashford. “You’re one of our best players.”

“I guess I... tripped,” Messi said with a smirk, his eye glinting evilly at Ronaldo. “Where’s your saviour now?” he whispered into Cristiano’s ear a moment later.

The crowd was tearing their hair and beating their breasts in shock. It felt like they were about to descend and rip them all to shreds. The other team had already taken over the ball and were making full use of their opponents’ crestfallen demeanour.

“What have you done with him?” said Ronaldo. “If he was here, he’d have scored loads of points by now,”

Messi smirked evilly. “He might not ever come.”

“You’re sabotaging your own team! What’s wrong with you?”

“Hehe... I always admired your innocence,” Messie replied. “But I know what you two do in the showers. You’re not as pure as you seem. And you see, like you, I’m also willing to get my fingers—my *hands* dirty to get what I want. Like, for example, getting rid of your loverboy forever, your paramour, your star striker – I wanted that. And I can get it, for a price.”

“What price is that?”

“Oh, you sweet, white-cheeked youth,”

Christiano gasped. “You’re match-fixing for the Armenians, aren’t you?”

Messi’s face tensed. “Yes, yes I am. And in return, they’re doing me a favour, and calling a hit on a special someone. Now that your sexual savant striker boy will be out of the picture, I can have you all to myself.”

Christiano shook angry tears from his face. “Never. I can never love you. Not after what you’ve done,” “You won’t be saying that when I buy a brand new car with the extra £70,000 the Armenians are giving me in return for fixing the match,”

Christiano bit his lip. He loved cars. But no – the only reason he’d want a car would be to drive into his lover’s arms.

“You can’t magic me into your arms, even if you are being showered with unimaginable quantities of cash by South Caucasian mafiosi,” Christiano growled.

“Then I have to kill you,” hissed Messi. He made a lunge for Ronaldo – Christiano saw his life flash before his own eyes as the gun slid into Messi’s hand from a concealed holster. But unbeknownst to them both, a substitution had been called while they were talking – the player on goal defence was being substituted for a striker who, instead of going for the ball, went straight to Ronaldo.

Ronaldo thought those moments would be his last – and as he saw his lover dive in front of him, he felt an instant peace that they should be so sweet; that his love should be so close. It all happened so fast. A foot, nimble and muscular, swooped into view and kicked away the gun that Messi was raising, knocking it to the ground. Then, the striker-saviour continued to extend his foot, skidding 50 metres across until he reached the ball, which he then instantly began to dribble to the opposing goal.

“He’s doing it!” Ronaldo gasped. “He’s doing it.”

“I’m doing it for you, Ronaldo,” the star striker called back, before instantly turning forward again and kicking the ball into the goal.

“He’s kicked the ball into the goal!” the commentator roared. “What a cracking way to score a point!” And that striker, was Wayne Rooney.

“Wayne! Wayne, Wayne!” Was all Ronaldo could say, with as much ecstatic fervour as he had said it but two nights ago, when he was last in Wayne’s arms. “You’re alive, I thought they killed you! I thought you were dead!”

“The only thing that’s dead,” said Wayne Rooney, “is Messi’s career.”

Messi wept as the police officers held him secure by his handcuffs. “It wasn’t meant to end this way... Christiano, please! I love you!”

“No, Messi.” Said Ronaldo, with a melancholy glint in his eye as he remembered times past. “You had your chance, many years ago. You’ll never love me the way Wayne does,”

Wayne Rooney put his arms around the shoulders of his lover, and the two locked eyes. The crowd went wild.

“We’ve won the world cup! I’m so happy! Yipeeeee!” cried Marcus Rashford and Jack Grealish™ together. They all celebrated the way they knew how – taking off their clothes, dancing, kissing, exchanging boyish spansks. Only the two lovers stood in one place, as they sunk into each other’s arms and locked lips, long and deep. Their hands explored each other’s bodies until they dropped to the floor, writhing in a harmony both sacred and profane. One by one, their team mates joined in, until the football field became a moist, humming nexus of muscular limbs. Until the audience broke the barriers and joined in too. Until each tribal tattoo blurred into one living necklace of inked flesh. Until Wayne Rooney dug his nails deeper into Ronaldo’s back, deep enough to feel his lover’s throbbing pulse, and lifted his face up into the lunar stadium lights, like a werewolf on poppers, and howled into the sky: “It’s coming! IT’S COMING HOME! IT’S COMING HOOOOOOME!!!!!”

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