archive.today
webpage capture
Saved from https://www.theglobeandmail.com/culture/books/article-rachel-reids-wild-heated-riva
history ←prior next→
Redirected from https://www.theglobeandmail.com/culture/books/article-rachel-reids-wild-heated-riva
no other snapshots from this url
All snapshots from host www.theglobeandmail.com
30 Jan 2026 09:24:30 UTC
Webpage Screenshot
share download .zip report bug or abuse Buy me a coffee

The heat is on

Thanks to author Rachel Reid, everyone from your mom to Gary Bettman (maybe) is watching Heated Rivalry. It's been a wild ride.

DAKSHANA BASCARAMURTY
INCLUDES CLARIFICATION
THE GLOBE AND MAIL
PUBLISHED JANUARY 28, 2026UPDATED YESTERDAY

Reid, above, lovingly refers to her books as 'hockey smut,' but her fans rave about how well she captures the interior lives of her characters.
Paul Atwood/The Globe and Mail

Share
SAVE FOR LATER

In desperate need of some focused writing time this winter, Rachel Reid locked herself in a hotel room in downtown Halifax for a few days. A Feb. 28 deadline loomed for the next novel in her bestselling *Game Changers* series and she still had thousands of words to write.

The page on her laptop was blank, waiting to be filled with conversation, conflict and spicy encounters between her two most beloved characters: Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander, a pair of rival hockey players turned secret lovers. Reid looked from her little screen to the big one: the hotel TV, which was broadcasting the Golden Globes. She watched the parade of designer gowns, the joke-laced opening monologue and then a reference to the Crave TV adaptation of Reid's book *Heated Rivalry*.

Heated Rivalry's creators on why their horny hockey hit scores with both women and gay men

Everything felt like a dream. For much of her life, the idea of writing fiction terrified Reid because "you're asking people to look at your imagination." But since the show had first aired six weeks ago, what she'd imagined had grown into something extraordinarily popular, and was now being referenced in a room full of Hollywood A-listers.

There are few authors who can relate to what Reid has experienced. In November, many major American booksellers weren't even stocking the Nova Scotia author's works. But thanks to the monumental success of the show, she's sold more than a million copies since its premiere in late November.

Last week, six of her titles were on the paperback fiction and Canadian fiction bestseller lists. Her books have netted more than 100,000 reviews on Goodreads. Last weekend, New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani urged residents to stay home during a winter storm and "take advantage of our public library's offer of free access to *Heated Rivalry*."

Open this photo in gallery:

Reid signs copies of her book at Realms & Roses Bookstore in Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotia, on January 18th 2026.Paul Atwood/The Globe and Mail

The manuscript she was trying to finish in the hotel room – *Unrivaled* – was announced earlier this month and the volume of preorders has made it Indigo's most anticipated title for 2026.

Reid has never faced this much pressure before and it's coming from many directions: a recently expanded audience that is new to the genre, a turnaround much faster than she's used to, and a progressive neurological condition that makes her unsure of how her future as an author will unfold.

Back at the hotel, the page on Reid's laptop screen remained blank all night.

"I was just pacing the hotel room and alternating between crying and just wanting to cancel the book," she says. "I was just like, 'I can't do this. I can't do it.' And then I was like, 'I can. I can.'"

Ever since she was a child, Reid dreamed of making money as a writer: either publishing fiction, like her idol Gordon Korman, or covering hockey for a newspaper. It took until her late 30s, but she found a way to marry the two.

Reid (whose real name, Rachelle Goguen, was so frequently mispronounced she chose to publish under a pen name) was raised as a hockey fan. At 14, she played forward in peewee hockey, where she was the only girl on the team. She loved the sport but struggled to find kinship with her hockey-loving peers – all of whom were boys.

It wasn't until her early 20s that she finally found her people in a scrappy burlesque group in Halifax. It was in this space she combined hockey and sex for the first time. Her character, Miss Conduct, wore sports jerseys and used a lot of hockey double-entendres. She'd always been self-conscious about her body but on stage, those inhibitions evaporated.

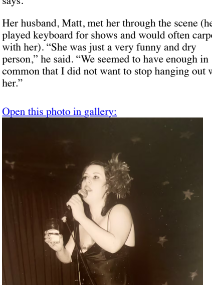
She came to see the world as split between cool, creative types and society's rule-makers.

"I just knew I wanted to stay on that first side," she says.

Her husband, Matt, met her through the scene (he played keyboard for shows and would often carpool with her). "She was just a very funny and dry person," he said. "We seemed to have enough in common that I did not want to stop hanging out with her."

View this post on Instagram
A post shared by Rachel Reid (@rachelreidw…

Open this photo in gallery:



Reid found her people in a scrappy burlesque group in Halifax in her early 20s.Rachel Reid/Supplied

A few years later, they married and had two kids. Reid launched a business manufacturing promotional products, such as branded hoodies and mugs, but was aching to return to that cool, creative side of the world that burlesque had introduced her to.

Viral Heated Rivalry Canada fleece is about to become a reality

She quietly began writing a novel about a closeted professional hockey player who begins a secret romance with a barista. She wrote it over two years, often typing out chapters on an iPad while lying in her kids' rooms as they drifted off to sleep. She wanted to know if it was any good, but was too shy to even show it to her husband so she posted it on the fan-fiction forum Archive of Our Own to get feedback. She changed the names of characters to Captain America ones – Marvel fanfic was very popular at the time – and uploaded it.

She made edits, restored the original hockey setting and submitted it to a few publishers. Carina Press, an imprint of Harlequin, published the resulting novel, *Game Changer*, in 2018 as an e-book.

The following year she published *Heated Rivalry*. Reid has roughly averaged a book a year – all hockey romances – since then. In 2024, her book income surpassed what she was making at her day job, which she has no plans to abandon.

Reid lovingly refers to her books as "hockey smut" but her fans rave about how well she captures the rich interior lives of her characters and uses sex scenes to illustrate the growing emotional bond between players who struggle to communicate verbally.

Open this photo in gallery:

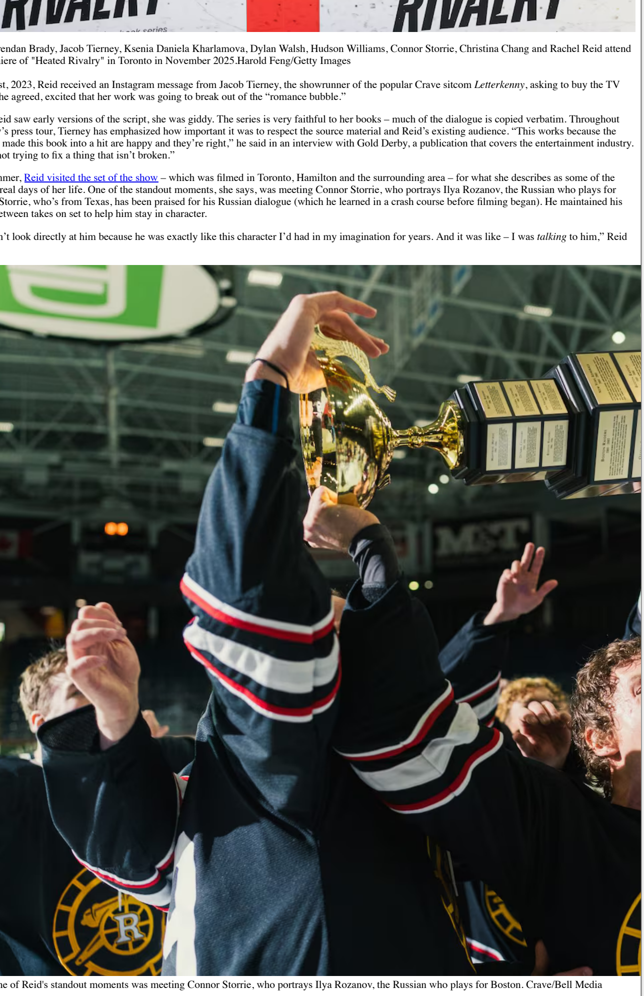
(L-R) Brendan Brady, Jacob Tierney, Ksenia Daniela Kharlamova, Dylan Walsh, Hudson Williams, Connor Storrie, Christina Chang and Rachel Reid attend the premiere of "Heated Rivalry" in Toronto in November 2025.Harold Feng/Getty Images

In August, 2023, Reid received an Instagram message from Jacob Tierney, the showrunner of the popular Crave sitcom *Letterkenny*, asking to buy the TV rights. She agreed, excited that her work was going to break out of the "romance bubble."

When Reid saw early versions of the script, she was giddy. The series is very faithful to her books – much of the dialogue is copied verbatim. Throughout the show's press tour, Tierney has emphasized how important it was to respect the source material and Reid's existing audience. "This works because the fans that made this book into a hit are happy and they're right," he said in an interview with Gold Derby, a publication that covers the entertainment industry. "We're not trying to fix a thing that isn't broken."

This summer, Reid visited the set of the show – which was filmed in Toronto, Hamilton and the surrounding area – for what she describes as some of the most surreal days of her life. One of the standout moments, she says, was meeting Connor Storrie, who portrays Ilya Rozanov, the Russian who plays for Boston. Storrie, who's from Texas, has been praised for his Russian dialogue (which he learned in a crash course before filming began). He maintained his accent between takes on set to help him stay in character.

"I couldn't look directly at him because he was exactly like this character I'd had in my imagination for years. And it was like – I was *talking* to him," Reid recalls.



One of Reid's standout moments was meeting Connor Storrie, who portrays Ilya Rozanov, the Russian who plays for Boston. Crave/Bell Media

Fictionalizing the league has allowed Reid to work out some of her issues with men's hockey: The widespread homophobia, the sexual-assault allegations and what she describes as 'toxic masculinity.' Sabrina Lantos/HBO Max/AP

She has since become close friends with Storrie and his co-star Hudson Williams, who was cast as Canadian golden boy Shane Hollander, who plays for Montreal. Though the actors have catapulted from unknowns to megastars, they still regularly exchange texts with Reid, whom they affectionately refer to as "Mom."

In January, Williams mentioned in an interview that Reid regularly forwards him messages she receives from closeted NHL players, who thank her for telling stories like theirs.

She clarified she's received plenty of messages from once-closeted athletes, but none from active NHL players.

Fictionalizing the league has allowed Reid to work out some of her issues with men's hockey: the widespread homophobia, the sexual-assault allegations and what she describes as "toxic masculinity." In Reid's hockey universe, gay characters come out of the closet and continue playing professionally (there has never been an openly gay player in the NHL). When a player is anonymously accused of rape by several women, a teammate calls him out for it instead of dismissing the claims.

Since the show premiered, clips of it have played on the Jumbotron at NHL games and cast and crew in attendance have been given a hero's welcome. Reid has heard that the show has prompted a bump in NHL ticket sales but helping the league find a new audience was never her goal.

"I don't think the NHL is a charity that needs my help. I encourage people to go to PWHL games," she said, referencing the women's hockey league.

Open this photo in gallery:

The show has prompted a bump in NHL ticket sales, but Reid says helping the league find a new audience was never her goal.HBO Max/AP

A few weeks after the finale aired, a reporter in a scrum asked NHL commissioner Gary Bettman if he'd watched the show. "I've watched all six episodes. I binged it in one night. I thought the storyline was very compelling," he said, adding that he enjoyed real-life references to the all-star game that took place in Tampa and the 2014 Olympics in Sochi.

To that, Reid rolled her eyes.

"The hell he did," she said. "I don't think he watched a minute of it."

"I think he was given some talking points. The things he said didn't make sense," she continued. "It sounded like somebody who did not do any research for their project but had to present it anyway."

In *The Long Game*, the sequel to *Heated Rivalry*, which is being adapted into the second season of the TV show, the fictional league's commissioner is a key villain.

(The Globe and Mail reached out to Bettman to confirm he'd actually watched the show. John Dellapina, the league's senior vice-president of communications, said in an e-mail that he was taken aback by the question and that Bettman had indeed watched all episodes.)

More than 50 fans waited for hours in line to be able to meet Reid and have their books signed by her. Paul Atwood/The Globe and Mail

Some fans swallow back tears as they thanked her for her books. Paul Atwood/The Globe and Mail

Reid walks gingerly along the unpaved side of a building in a strip mall in Hammonds Plains, a rural area near Halifax, her black leather boots sinking into the pebble-dotted muck. An unglamorous arrival for the woman of the hour.

She's here for a signing that begins in 45 minutes, but had received a text from the owner of the romance and fantasy bookstore Realms and Roses advising her to discreetly enter from the back of the building to avoid getting mobbed. A queue of more than 50 fans have been waiting in the cold for hours, some arriving as early as 9 a.m. for a 1 p.m. event, others having driven up from Pennsylvania, Virginia and Ontario.

It's one of the last local stops for a while. This spring Reid will be in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Maine, Spain and Portugal. In the fall she's heading to London, Paris and Brazil. And once *Unrivaled* is out on Sept. 29, she expects to be making stops in almost every major American city.

It's a fraction of the boy-band reception Storrie and Williams get wherever they go, but there's a palpable giddiness amongst Reid's fans – most of whom are women, the biggest consumers of male-male romance – when they spot her.

Reid gravitates toward bright colours and loud, clashing patterns and has the aura of a beloved shopkeeper in a weird small town. She greets the hundreds of people who stream into the store to meet her with warmth and deadpan humour, impressing a few by remembering them from previous encounters.

Some fans swallow back tears as they thank her for her books. Others present her with handmade gifts: a palm-sized painting of two loons (an important reference for *Heated Rivalry* fans), felted hockey pucks embroidered with Rozanov's and Hollander's jersey numbers, Taylor Swift-style friendship bracelets that spell out the titles of her books. One woman, having learned Reid played clarinet when she was younger, spends several minutes making the pitch to join her amateur community band.

The bookstore is adorned with references paying homage to Heated Rivalry, in addition to gifts for Reid brought by fans. Paul Atwood/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

After 40 minutes of signing, Reid asks for a break. "I'm going to stand up for a second to shake out these shakes," she announces.

She stands up, rolls her shoulders back a few times, loosely dangles her forearms from her elbows and lets her wrists go limp like a marionette. After she relaxes back into her normal posture, her right arm bounces against her body and continues to after she sits back down.

In the summer of 2023, the same week she received that fateful DM from Turney, Reid learned she had Parkinson's. The diagnosis came after she'd noticed some strange changes to her body: her toes involuntarily curled, she'd developed a limp on her right side when she walked and, hardest to ignore, there was a tremor in her right arm.

After learning she had this progressive neurological condition, Reid peppered her doctor with questions: Did she need an exit strategy for her job? Would she still be able to drive? Should she move into a home without stairs?

Her doctor told her that her disease usually progressed slowly and that for the next decade, there likely wouldn't be much change.

But Reid still felt like there was a clock ticking away inside her. Signing books and operating a mouse became challenging.

For now, she's only on one medication. She'd been taking two others, but stopped both a few weeks ago following the advice of a Parkinson's expert in New York, and it immediately improved her sleep. The specialist had contacted her after watching a CNN interview with Turney, in which he mentioned Reid's condition.

The uncertainty around her health – when she might lose the ability to type altogether – is something she thinks about often.

"That was part of why I wanted to write *Unrivaled* as soon as possible," she said. "I knew if there's any book that people want from me, it's this one and I would hate to not be able to write it."

She's switched from using a mouse to a touchscreen, and is experimenting with voice to text. She's writing at two-thirds the speed she did a few years ago.

Writing *Heated Rivalry*'s follow-up, *The Long Game*, was gruelling because readers gave her a laundry list of requests of what they wanted to see in a sequel.

"I knew all these things that people wanted to see, and some of them, I was like, 'It's not what I want to see,'" she said.

To protect herself from distraction but also that outside pressure, Reid temporarily deleted Instagram off her phone a few weeks ago.

"I'm kind of pretending there's no show at all, and that there's no fans, even," she said. "That I'm just writing for me."

Editor's note: This article has been updated to clarify that many major American bookstores were not stocking Reid's books in November.

Report an editorial error Report a technical issue Editorial code of conduct

Related stories

Navigating an era of heated rivalry, in the world and on our screens

MARSHA LEDERMAN

Heated Rivalry stars are headed to the 2026 Winter Olympics – as torchbearers

NHL commissioner, PWHL stars profess love for gay hockey drama Heated Rivalry

Follow related authors and topics

- Dokshana Bascaramurty Follow
- Books
- Pop Culture

Authors and topics you follow will be added to your personal news feed in Following.

Interact with The Globe

Trending

Stepfather of missing Nova Scotia children charged with sex assault

Opinion

Europe on the decline? Quite the opposite

Doug Saunders

Tiny Italian town of Bormio hopes Olympic spotlight won't dim its traditional spirit

Wealthsimple partners with Canada Post to accept physical cash deposits

Ontario police charge eight people in an alleged scheme at driver-licensing centres

The week's best fixed and variable mortgage rates

This tiny B.C. city is one of the most livable in Canada – for those who can find it

Canada's 20 most livable cities for retirement

© Copyright 2026 The Globe and Mail Inc. All rights reserved.

351 King Street East, Suite 1600, Toronto, ON Canada, M5A 0N3

Andrew Saunders, President and CEO