

Absolutely Not

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Absolutely Not

by [broccolicheddarchicken](#)

Summary

"It was nothing, Ilya. Don't worry about it."

"Ah," Ilya said, and something like understanding crossed his face. "Was about us, then."

Shane pressed his forehead to Ilya's neck. Of course Shane couldn't just slip this by, of course he would be figured out. He wrapped Ilya up in a hug and moved his hand up and down his back, in a way that he hoped said *it doesn't matter*.

"He just—after he checked me, I called him a dick, and then he said I'd need my big scary Russian husband to protect me. And then he called you a name, and..."

Shane didn't know how to finish that sentence, so he let it trail off. *And it felt so unfair. And I got more angry than I had any reason to. And I hate that I can't go one game without my sex life being brought up in some way. And it's happened a million other times, so why should I have cared on this one specific occasion?*

Over the course of the first half of his fifth season on the Centaurs, Shane considers retirement, homophobia, his public life, family, and his legacy. He also gets a tooth knocked out, visits the beach, and is repeatedly pissed off by how hot his husband is.

Notes

TW: homophobia, no worse than canon

hiii guys! I wanted to post this sooner, but writing the last fic in like 2 days burned me out a little bit, and also I've read the entire captive prince series since you last heard from me. whoops?

once again, i started with a simple idea that should've been short, then promptly blew it up to nearly 10x the intended word count. total mistake, oopsie daisy. I have no self control. also, no beta bc I was not going to force my IRL friend/beta reader who isn't even in this fandom to read 20k words of it. any errors are mine.

anyway, as always: I hope you enjoy reading this at least half as much as I enjoyed writing it :)

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

Chapter 1: Absolutely Not

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

April

Shane was trying his best. He really was. It was just that the last time he and Ilya found themselves in this position, they hadn't had fifteen years of shared history, and they *still* ended up giggling like madmen.

How was he expected to keep it together now?

Ilya stood up straight, laughter seizing him. "Oh my god, Shane! You have not looked at me like that in so long," he wheezed.

Like that referred to how Shane looked at his opponent in a faceoff, which was a totally normal thing that he did all the time as a center.

"Why's it so funny?" Shane asked.

"Because you are like a giant angry kitten." Ilya was laughing so hard that the redness was visible under the makeup.

Shane groaned. "Fuck you, Roz." He managed to hold back his smile. Barely.

The production assistant quietly cleared his throat. "Uhm—do you guys think you could try that again? We still haven't gotten the shot."

Shane and Ilya had somehow managed to become the faces of CCM's Pride campaign this year. It was not the first time that the league or CCM or some other athletic corporate entity trotted them out to show how 'accepting' they were. It would not be the last.

At least the merch wasn't ugly. They were launching a new line of Pride-themed clothing and equipment in June, with twenty percent of the revenue going to various queer charities, and Shane actually liked it. The stuff was mostly black or white with subtle rainbow stitching and decals. It wasn't garish. Shane had even asked for some of the sweat-wicking, rainbow-accented undershirts to wear on game days. He liked the idea of being seen in them in his post-game interviews.

Most of the products were only available in rainbow, but the one thing there was choice in was stick tape. It came in about fifteen varieties, all representing different pride flags. The production assistant had happily showed Shane an entire bin of the stuff, and he was too embarrassed to admit he only recognized about five of them.

Thankfully, he at least knew the purple, pink, and blue that was wrapped around the prop stick Ilya was holding. And Shane's was just the basic rainbow.

Ilya bent down. Shane caught the glint of his wedding ring against the handle—an odd sight. They didn't normally wear them during games or practices, but the marketing team had told them to keep the rings on, considering the point of the photo shoot.

Ilya turned up to face him. "Come on, Hollander. Is the last shot. Be a professional."

Shane lowered back into his stance, met Ilya's eyes—and immediately cracked up again.

It was going to be a long shoot.

Shane was quiet on the car ride home. It took Ilya longer than he'd expected to ask why.

"Is something wrong?"

Ah, there it was. Shane played with a loose thread on his jeans. "No, nothing is wrong."

Ilya didn't press. Shane spilled anyway.

"Does it ever bother you that we get called *every* time a sports company wants to do something for Pride?" Shane asked.

Ilya shrugged. "Not really. There aren't that many out gay hockey players. Plus we are the best, gay or not. Of course they want us."

Shane swallowed. "I don't know. Like... NBC Sports was one of the outlets that reported on the FanMail video. This year they're asking us to do a docuseries for them to show in June. I feel like I'm being used."

"You are," Ilya said. He didn't even look away from the road.

The deadpan tone caught Shane off guard. "What?"

"Shane, do you want me to sit here and tell you that NBC and CCM ask us to do these things because they are so deeply supportive? They are not. Maybe they are a little bit, but they mostly just want to *look* supportive. That is how it works."

Hearing the words left a bitter taste in Shane's mouth. "Should we start telling them 'no'?"

"No." Ilya shook his head.

"Why not?" The pay for these shoots wasn't that great, and besides—Shane had no interest in trading his money for his principles.

"It's good for kids to see," Ilya said firmly. "And it makes it normal for the fans. Hopefully by the time the kids now are our age, it won't be such a big deal."

"Hmm," Shane said. He crossed his arms and looked out the window. "I guess you're right. It's the least we can do. But I hate that we have to go about it this way."

Ilya shrugged again. "If we had seen people like us when we were little, we would not have been so scared. It would not have taken so long. You're helping the next generation find their love story."

That was enough for Shane to finally crack a smile. He took Ilya's hand. They were almost home, and when they got there Ilya would cook for him, and Shane would play with the dog, and it would be perfect, and *yeah*. It was worth it, if they were helping someone else reach their happy ending.

August

When Shane woke up for the first time that morning, he was being crushed. Fuck Ilya. All six feet, three inches of him.

Shane loved Ilya's size. Usually.

It's not like Shane was small. He was maybe a tiny bit under average for professional hockey players, but that was hardly a fair metric. Ask anyone who hadn't spent their life with little metal knives attached to their feet and they'd tell you he was a pretty big guy.

Of course, that meant absolutely nothing to Ilya, who could toss him around like a paper doll and swallowed him up as if he were nothing when he held him. Ilya, who could splay one gigantic hand on Shane's midsection till his thumb and little finger spanned from below Shane's navel to the tip of his breastbone. Ilya, who in addition to having a larger frame than Shane was also built more sturdily. Shane loved Ilya's thick thighs, his broad shoulders, the way his muscled arms felt when they were wrapped around him. He felt so *safe* with him.

That large body felt good curled around him. It felt good pressed against him, wringing out his pleasure.

It did *not* feel good on top of him as dead weight, squashing Shane into the mattress until he could hardly breathe.

It was early, still—the light of dawn barely streaming around the edges of the curtains—and Ilya was, of course, completely out. Ilya's face was pressed into Shane's neck, their chests pressed together, his legs splayed out over Shane's hips. When Shane opened his eyes, his view was of a wild mop of hair and an arm on the pillow next to him. A late-summer heat wave meant it was an uncharacteristically hot day for Ontario in August, and his space heater of a husband wrapped around him like a second skin was not helping. Shane had bronze curls tangled in his mouth and was so thoroughly bracketed by Ilya's limbs that he wasn't sure he'd be able to get up. On top of that, Shane's legs were caught in the sheets and he could barely move them.

Part of Shane recognized that it was sweet that Ilya wanted to be close to him, even unconscious. However, physically it felt like the world's worst weighted blanket. Shane was pretty sure the blanket wasn't supposed to weigh more than its user. He was overheated and trapped.

But Shane could get up. Totally. He was a professional athlete, he was more than capable of shoving ten sandbags disguised as a Russian off of his body.

Shane braced his hands against Ilya's shoulders. He pushed as hard as he could, and—

Nothing. He lifted Ilya up a tiny bit, which felt like a success, but couldn't get any further. And Ilya, of course, wrapped his arms around Shane a little tighter in response to the disturbance.

It was just because he couldn't get good leverage, he decided. He could try arching his hips up to roll Ilya off, but he wasn't sure he'd be able to do that on account of the legs trapped in the sheets situation.

With a sigh, Shane swallowed his pride and resigned himself to his fate. He shook Ilya gently.

"Ilya, wake up," he murmured.

He got a slight huff in response.

"Ilya, come on. I can't move. It's too hot for this."

Ilya grumbled a bit but obligingly rolled off of Shane. Shane watched with amusement as Ilya realized that his legs were *also* caught in the sheets, then kicked them clean off the bed. He rolled onto his stomach, arm under the pillow and head turned to face Shane, and settled down to fall back asleep.

Shane stretched. It was really too fucking hot. He decided he'd turn on the air conditioning when he went downstairs. It wasn't necessary most of the year, but today was definitely calling for it. He and Ilya had slept naked, but that clearly hadn't been enough.

With a quiet sigh, Shane turned over to Ilya and couldn't help but smile. The room was illuminated a very soft orange in the early morning sunshine. Ilya looked so beautiful, honey-bright and sleepy. The warm tones highlighted his tan skin, which was particularly dark now, it being late summer. All the time spent outside had brightened his hair, which combined with the current lighting brought a golden hue to each perfect spiral. Without the sheet or blankets, Shane could see every inch of the perfect body he adored so. He admired the broad, muscular back he must've cuddled against a thousand times. He admired the raw red scratches cut into it, left there in the midst of intense sex the previous night. Seeing Ilya marked as *his* like that made the primal part of Shane's brain go haywire. He admired the narrow cut of his waist, the perfect swell of his ass, and his long, long legs that nearly hung off the end of the bed.

He was gorgeous. Gorgeous, tenderhearted, and so entirely Shane's that it hurt. All of a sudden, Shane almost felt guilty for pushing him away.

Almost. It had been really uncomfortable.

Shane was so lost in thinking about how handsome his husband was that he failed to notice when one hazel eye popped open. He did see the crooked grin spread across Ilya's face as he opened both eyes and propped his head up on his elbow.

"Enjoying the view, Hollander?"

Shane was tempted to give a snarky reply, but fuck it. They'd been married five years and together in some way for fifteen—if Ilya didn't know that Shane thought he was handsome, he wasn't sure what to tell him.

"Yep. Without shame, in fact. So don't try to make me feel weird about it."

Ilya shrugged. "Why would I? I am very nice to look at."

Shane rolled his eyes and made to get up, but Ilya caught his wrist. His voice had a hint of whine to it, a rare treat. "Where are you going? Don't leave."

"Ilya, at what point in you knowing me have I not started my morning with a workout?"

Ilya looked out the window. "Is barely morning. Besides, you just got a workout in trying to push me off of you."

Shane scowled. "You dickhead, you were awake!"

Ilya just smiled. "I wasn't until you started pushing me. But then I wanted to see if you could do it."

"You were dead weight."

"You can't pick me up?" Ilya asked. His voice was decidedly smug.

"You weigh, like, thirty pounds more than me!"

"Pure muscle, sweetheart."

Shane covered his face with his hands. "You're so annoying. Yes, I could pick you up, or deadlift you, or whatever the hell else you want to come up with. I just couldn't get good leverage with the mattress."

"Whatever you must tell yourself."

"Is this how you try to talk me into staying in bed with you?"

"Yes," Ilya said. Shane did *not* obsess over how Ilya's hair looked as he ran one hand through it.

Absolutely not. Now was not the time to be thirsty, so Shane summoned up his harshest glare. "It's not working."

"Yes, it is."

Yes, it was. Unfortunately, Shane's heart had decided without his permission that it liked men who were witty and funny and would banter with him.

Well, not *men*. One man.

Shane grumbled a bit but caved in, laying back down next to his husband. It wasn't technically sleeping in if it was still before he usually woke up.

When Ilya pulled him closer and snuggled up to him, Shane decided he'd made the right choice.

When Shane woke up the second time that morning, it was to gentle kisses being pressed against the curve of his shoulder. His body was flush with Ilya's again, except this time Ilya was spooning him, one strong arm wrapped around his waist.

He liked it. He realized that the air felt cooler—Ilya must've gotten up and turned on the A/C for them.

Shane smiled when the kisses moved to the side of his face. "Good morning," Shane said. His voice was soft and sleepy in a way that would've been embarrassing had he been with literally anyone else. He didn't mind being cute with Ilya, though.

Ilya nuzzled his hair. "Good morning, sweetheart." Shane could feel the vibration of his voice. He liked that, too.

"Mmm." Shane tilted his head to give access to his neck, which Ilya dutifully began to lave attention onto. It was a lovely way to be woken up. He certainly wouldn't mind it every day.

Ilya pushed his hand over Shane's stomach, then up to his chest. Lips still pressed to his neck, he rolled one of Shane's nipples between his thumb and his forefinger.

It would be that kind of morning, then.

Shane let out a pleased sigh to show Ilya his appreciation, which was rightfully taken as encouragement. Ilya sunk his teeth into the line of Shane's jaw as he wrapped his hand loosely around Shane's cock. It was too much, too dry, and Shane was still only half-roused, but it made him want more.

Shane swallowed. "Is the lube on my side or yours?"

"Yours," Ilya answered, taking a momentary break from nibbling at Shane's earlobe.

With a little too much speed, Shane stretched to his nightstand and pulled open the top drawer. He grabbed the bottle of lube and quickly handed it back to Ilya. He heard a *click* as the cap opened. Then Ilya was back to kissing him, this time on his shoulder, and two fingers were being carefully pushed inside of him.

Ilya wouldn't normally start with two, but Shane was still a little loose from last night. The gentle stretch felt incredible like this, his husband's long fingers reaching the most sensitive parts of him, and eventually he was babbling in the pillows to ask for a third.

Ilya didn't indulge him right away. He liked drawing things out, Shane knew that, but it felt particularly rude to wake him up for sex and not at least treat him the way he liked. When Ilya finally added that third finger, Shane whimpered.

The sunlight in the window was brighter this time, Shane guessed that it was around nine. Ilya went well past the point of Shane just being open enough. He took his sweet fucking time.

"Ilya." Shane's voice made his annoyance clear. "You *woke me up* for this. Were you planning on getting started in the next three to five business days?"

Ilya tsked. "Bossy," he chastized. "Condom?"

Shane appreciated that Ilya was asking. Sometimes Shane was finicky about mess. This time, though, he couldn't care less. He wanted Ilya inside him. He didn't want a thing between them.

Shane shook his head. "No," he said. "Want to feel you."

Once Ilya withdrew his fingers, there was the familiar momentary disappointment of being empty. Ilya put a little more lube on his fingers and stroked himself to apply it, and then the emptiness was replaced with the dull pressure of Ilya pushing inside. Shane moaned softly, biting his own hand to muffle the sound. Ilya gently pulled the hand away.

"Don't hide," Ilya said, pulling himself out halfway and pushing back in. Laying on their sides like this, it barely took any effort at all. Shane could ask Ilya to stay in afterwards, fall back asleep, and wake up to being fucked again. They could go for hours, like this. He was certain of it.

Shane rolled his hips back to meet Ilya. They quickly found an angle and a rhythm that worked for them both. He didn't reach quite as deep as usual in this position, but it was made up for when Ilya wrapped his lubed-up hand around Shane's cock.

"Holy shit, Ilya," Shane said breathlessly. "That feels so fucking good."

Ilya was kissing the side of his face. "Relax, sweetheart. I've got you. You don't need to do anything."

It never got rough or fast, the way it did sometimes. It was certainly desperate, but that was hardly the same thing. They were both barely moving, and yet it felt absolutely incredible. It was strangely homey, too. Like wrapping yourself in a warm blanket. Shane was in his bed that he shared every night with the man he loved. He was sharing his body with him, and Ilya was treating it like the gift that it was. It was sweet and simple and just for them. He could feel the heat of it crackling just under his skin, and he knew he wanted this as often as he could have it for the rest of his life.

"Shane," Ilya said. His voice was broken, rough with sleep and sex. Shane could feel the warmth of his breath against the side of his jaw. "You feel so good. Have I told you that before? How incredible you feel around me?"

Shane nodded lazily. When he rolled his hips back, he got more of Ilya's cock inside him. When he thrust forward, he got to fuck into Ilya's fist. He wasn't sure which one he liked better.

"Good, because you need to know. You feel fucking perfect," Ilya said, punctuating the words with a slightly more forceful thrust. Shane whimpered in response.

It picked up a little, then. Not much—they were both too half-asleep for that—but enough that Shane could certainly feel the tension in his own body cresting.

"You'll come for me, Shane, won't you?"

Ilya paired the question with a slight increase of the pressure of his hand, and that was it. Shane was coating his own stomach and Ilya's fingers, moaning shamelessly.

"F-fuck, Ilya," Shane panted, still only half down from his orgasm. "Come inside me. Please, come inside me, I want to feel it—"

Shane knew he'd gotten his prize when Ilya's hips stuttered inside him. Even if Shane hadn't been able to feel it inside of him, he'd be able to tell Ilya had come purely from the way he was breathing in Shane's ear.

Once Ilya had come back to earth, he slid his hand against Shane's stomach, wiping most of the cum onto him. Shane didn't even complain.

"Turn around," Ilya said. "So you're facing me."

Shane did as he was told. To his mild surprise, Ilya picked up his leg and hooked it over his own hip. He slid one arm under Shane's head, then reached back with the other and pressed two fingers against Shane's ass, circling the rim with gentle pressure.

Shane liked the feeling of being touched there, after. It was enjoyable in the sense that it let him enjoy the last few aftershocks, but also in a non-sexual way. It was sensitive, and the fingers were soothing. They stayed like that for a few minutes, Shane's face pressed into Ilya's chest, smiling sleepily and reaching up to play with his hair. He even permitted a few sleepy good-morning kisses. The morning breath was atrocious, but Ilya deserved a little treat for the high-quality dicking down Shane had just received. And if Shane was honest, he really did just want to kiss him.

Shane eventually couldn't stand the feeling of the cum drying on his skin, though. Ilya must have sensed that Shane was hitting his limit on how long he was willing to feel gross, because he carefully withdrew his fingers and turned away.

The bed shifted as Ilya stood up. Shane yawned and watched him walk into the en-suite.

"That was some lazy sex for two professional athletes," Shane commented dryly.

He couldn't see Ilya, but he heard him laugh along with the sound of running water. "Yes, well... we cannot go for the gold every time, Hollander."

"Speak for yourself, Rozanov. I'm a fucking champion."

Ilya came back with a wet washcloth. "A *fucking* champion?"

Shane groaned. He'd walked right into that. He chose not to dignify it with a response.

Shane had been expecting Ilya to hand him the towel, but instead he sat on the edge of the bed next to Shane and reached down to do it himself. Ilya carefully wiped off Shane's stomach, then between his legs. The water was warm. The cleaning was as gentle and loving a touch as he'd ever received from Ilya. So tender, always.

Shane should've been protesting or claiming he could do this himself, but something about being taken care of felt good. It was shockingly intimate, but Ilya was his husband. He liked sharing intimate things with him.

Once Shane was clean, Ilya tossed the rag into the hamper. It landed at the center without so much as touching the edges.

"I should've played basketball instead."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Shut up," he said, but it lacked the usual bite.

Ilya ignored him, stood up and went into the walk-in.

Shane felt spoiled. And heavy-limbed, and sleepy, and so damn *comfortable* in the bed. He shifted a bit, stretching his legs, watching Ilya pull on his boxers, and then his joggers, and then a shirt, all his favorite little expanses of skin being hidden away.

It was time to get up. Shane yawned. "Fuck, I feel like I could just fall back asleep," he mumbled.

Ilya sat on the edge of the bed, leaned down, and kissed Shane's forehead once. "Go ahead," he said with a smile. "I will take Anya for her walk and make you breakfast."

Shane shook his head. "No, no—I actually need to go work out now."

"We can work out later. You deserve to take a day off every now and then. Go back to sleep. It's barely past eight."

Shane squinted a tiny bit at the window, letting out an unhappy little hum at the light. Ilya laughed. "I will pull the blinds shut for you, I promise."

Shane shifted in bed a little. "I just don't want to be lazy," he protested.

"Sweetheart. If you're lazy, I am an unmoving blob."

Shane laughed. He did feel *so* comfortable, and it seemed like Ilya really wanted him to take a morning off. But they had routines. And they always walked Anya together. And Shane always made Ilya's coffee while he cooked. "You're sure you don't mind?"

Ilya's face scrunched with such genuine confusion that Shane knew he meant it. "Why would I mind?"

Shane smiled and tucked in. He psyched himself up. "Okay. I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna sleep in," he said. He felt like he was preparing for something much more monumental. "You're a bad influence."

"I think we balance each other, actually." Ilya leaned down and kissed Shane's forehead again. "You keep me on track, and I help you relax, like, one tenth of one percent."

The dip in the bed disappeared as Ilya stood up. Shane shut his eyes, the brightness on the other side of his eyelids vanishing when Ilya pulled the blinds. He was true to his word. Combined with the curtains, they made the room pitch-black even in the middle of the day.

"Thank you, Ilya. I love you."

The smile in Ilya's voice was audible. "I love you too."

Shane yawned and rolled onto his side. There was a slight ache between his legs, but he liked it. A little reminder of how much his husband loved him. He heard the click of the door shutting, and then he was asleep again, alone and warm in his marital bed.

When Shane woke up the third time that morning, it was actually afternoon.

He jumped out of bed and nearly lost his balance in his haste to pull on a pair of shorts. Shane couldn't even remember the last time he'd slept that late. His workout routine was trashed, along with his sleep schedule. And Ilya would *definitely* be annoyed—they were supposed to repaint the guest bedroom today. Shane hadn't been there to help. Shane had been *lazy*.

When he practically lept down the stairs, he found Ilya standing in the kitchen. The sky was gray, rain pattering against the floor-to-ceiling windows, and Ilya was sipping from a glass of ice water. Ilya turned his attention towards the sound of footsteps. Shane saw a little streak of dark green paint on his cheek.

"Fuck, *Ilya*, I am so sorry." Shane could barely get the words out. "I didn't mean to sleep that long, why didn't you wake me up like you said? I didn't mean to leave you alone all day, I—"

The blatantly confused expression on Ilya's face stopped Shane in his tracks. Ilya sipped his water again, then set it down. "You think I am angry with you?" he asked.

"Uhm. Yeah. We were supposed to paint today, and I slept instead."

"I came in to wake you up, but you looked very happy, so I decided to let you sleep," Ilya said. "I just started painting by myself. Is not a big deal. Painting is easy."

Shane blinked a few times. "You're not upset?"

"Why would I be upset?" That same question had been turned on Shane twice now.

"I... I don't know, I guess," Shane said. "Because I was supposed to help?"

"Shane." Ilya took a few steps towards him. "Calm down, yes? You came down the stairs like—what is the English expression... bat out of fire?"

"Bat out of hell," Shane corrected with a hesitant smile.

"Bat out of hell. Yes. That was you."

"Well, you're the one who ever says I can't ever be cool about anything."

Ilya took Shane's hands in his own. "That is true. But you should try to be cool about this morning. You slept in because I let you. Believe it or not, I like when you take breaks. The thought that you were happy and sated in our bed because of me made me feel good. I like taking care of you."

It caught Shane off guard. He knew it rationally—knew it in the same way he knew that his mother was one of the most intense people he'd ever know, and that getting a high stick to the face was painful, and that Amber Pike could scream at a volume louder than any six-year-old should be capable of—but all of those things were deeply startling when he was presented with them firsthand.

Ilya liked to take care of him. He wasn't *mad* that Shane slept in—no, to him, this was a positive development. He wanted Shane to let go of some of his strict regimentation in favor of happiness and pleasure.

In that moment, Shane saw the edges of something nurturing in Ilya. He'd seen it before—Ilya treated him as if spoiling Shane was his only purpose in life—but Shane had never quite made the connection he was making now. Ilya loved taking care of him, and one day he'd take care of their children the same way. He'd spoil them. He'd make sure they were warm and happy and comfortable, the same way he did for Shane, because he loved them all so much.

Shane smiled, wrapped his arms around Ilya, and nuzzled his neck. "You're gonna be an incredible father one day, y'know. I can't wait to see it."

"I can't wait to be one. With you."

If Ilya found the declaration random, he didn't comment on it. He just kissed the top of Shane's head and held him, and Shane was quite sure that were he to look up, Ilya would be smiling.

They stayed like that for a long moment before separating. Ilya turned to go back to his water, but Shane stopped him.

"Oh, another thing," Shane said, feeling mischievous. This had to be quick. He bent down, hooked an arm between Ilya's legs, and easily scooped him up into a fireman's carry. Ilya yelped from the surprise.

Shane was a little proud of himself. It wasn't even hard.

"I can *definitely* pick you up," Shane declared, once he was settled with Ilya draped across his shoulders.

Lord help him, Ilya was *giggling* and kicking his feet. "So strong. My hero," he deadpanned.

"Exactly. You can't get this from anyone else."

Ilya giggled some more. "Wait, do a squat or something. I want to see it."

Shane rolled his eyes, but obediently carried Ilya to their home gym so he could watch this fiasco in the mirror. He did walking lunges from one end of the room to the other. It was actually a solid amount of weight, and he felt a decent burn in his legs when he was finished.

"You make a good barbell," Shane said. He carefully bent over and set Ilya on his feet.

"Add it to my list of talents," Ilya said. "Is your turn."

Shane scoffed as he stood back up. "It's not nearly as impressive, I weigh less than you."

Ilya considered that for a moment. "Okay. We will do upper body for me, then. I will bench you."

Shane knew his weight was significantly less than Ilya's personal best, but benching a person had to be harder than a bar, right?

"For how many reps?" Shane asked.

"How much do you weigh? One seventy five?"

Shane was almost offended, and then he saw the amused little grin on Ilya's face. "Two hundred, asshole."

"Sorry, it is so easy to slam you into the boards that I underestimated."

"Keep talking like that and I'm not gonna let you fuck me for a week."

Ilya was still smiling. "Fifteen reps."

"Want to bet on it?"

"Sure. What do I get if I win?"

Shane considered it for a moment. "I'll give you a back massage tonight." Shane had already been planning on doing that sometime soon, anyway. He bought a fancy massage oil for it and everything.

"That sounds nice, I'll accept that," Ilya said. "And if you win?"

"Blow me."

"Sounds like I get a treat either way."

Shane laughed as Ilya got into position on the bench. "How do you want to do this?"

"You lay across my chest face up. I put one hand on your thighs and one on your upper back. You need to stay very—what is the word... rigid while I do it."

That was a... *very* quick response. Like Ilya had experience. Shane felt a spike of frankly unnecessary jealousy. "Have you done this before?"

"Of course I have. Girls love it. I will hardly be able to tell the difference."

Now Shane was (still unnecessarily) grumpy. "The women you were bench pressing weigh as much as an NHL player?"

"No, but you are all so small to me that it is not noticeable. Is like comparing an ant and a beetle from the perspective of a lion. You are both equally tiny."

Shane scowled. He wished he'd made Ilya promise more reps. "What, so I'm just another blushing conquest? I'm not impressed by your biceps, Ilya." His voice dripped with annoyance.

"First, yes you are. Second, you are not a conquest anymore because I have successfully locked you down. Now come here."

Shane got in the position Ilya described, laying across him. He crossed his arms over his chest and held his legs out straight. He felt one large palm just below his ass, then the other between his shoulder blades.

There was a moment of hesitation that made Shane think maybe something was wrong. But then there was a pressure on his back, and—*oh*. Ilya was lifting him into the air without so much as a grunt. Shane turned his head towards the mirror, hoping he could call him out on bad form, but nope—it was textbook perfect. Ilya lowered him down until he was almost back on his chest, then restarted the motion.

Then Ilya did it again. And again. He looked *bored*.

Sometimes, on very rare occasions, Shane hated Ilya a little. This was one of those times.

And no, he absolutely *was not* into the fact that Ilya could toss his weight around like it was nothing. His body had no reaction to this situation. If his stomach was fluttering on the inside, that was just because he was hungry.

"It's too bad we're not at the arena," Ilya said with absolutely no strain in his voice. "Harris would love to use this for hashtag Hollanov content."

"Has no one ever taught you not to talk during your set?"

"I think that only applies when the weight is heavy."

Shane turned his head up to glare at the ceiling. "Don't bring up that stupid hashtag. I hate it."

"What, you do not like being *shipped*? Did you not see the viral clip of us during game six? Was cute."

It *was* cute. Ilya had scored the game-winning goal, earning them their second Stanley Cup on the same team. Shane had skated up to him and literally jumped into his arms out of excitement, being carried bridal style. It was definitely not something he would've allowed had he been in his right mind, but the fans adored it. People seemed to really like them being together. So much so that they felt comfortable prying into their marriage, and writing fan fiction about them, and making weird posts on Twitter. That clip had fed right into it.

"Well, that was my fault for doing something stupid," Shane said. He could feel Ilya's arms trembling slightly, which he took far too much pride in.

Ilya finished his sixteenth rep and extended one arm so Shane was set down on his feet beside the bench. "It was not stupid. It was perfect."

There was a little sweat on Ilya's forehead. Shane felt triumphant at the sight. He leaned down and kissed his husband's crooked nose. "Did you do an actual workout yet?"

Ilya shook his head.

"Okay. Why don't we do that now, and then we can shower, and then we can walk Anya, and then I'll help you finish painting?"

Ilya's lips turned up. "It sounds like you have the whole day planned out. You need to eat something, though. There is an omelet for you in the fridge."

Leave it to Ilya to fuss over Shane as if he were his mother. "Alright. I'll eat while you walk Anya alone?"

"Sounds perfect. I did one extra, by the way. Did you notice?"

Shane offered his hand to help Ilya sit up, which Ilya took. "Yes, I noticed. You'll get your prize after dinner."

"I am still going to blow you," Ilya stated matter-of-fact.

"I know," Shane said. "Get your ass on the bike, we're starting with cardio today."

Ilya pulled a face but did as he was told.

October

It was a one in a million injury. Had Shane been paid to replicate it, he wouldn't have been able to.

It started in the corner. He and Lavoie were digging for the puck together, and Shane won it. He skated off for the other side of the ice, but one of Tampa's forwards checked him hard into the boards and he lost the puck. That would've been all well and good—a clean, fair hit—except for the fact that ten seconds later, a defenseman shoved him down into the ice with a shoulder check.

He glared and looked up at the ref, who had missed it, of course. Shane hadn't had the puck anymore—they weren't supposed to do that. Plus, he'd landed hard on his right knee, and that was the one that had been giving him issues the last couple of years. Whatever. He stood up and turned to the guy. What was his name? Chandler? Something like that. He wasn't good enough to be on Shane's radar. There had been a whistle, although Shane wasn't sure why, so he looked the asshole right in the eye instead of chasing.

"Dick," Shane said.

"What, never been checked before?"

"Usually, the people I play against know the rules. You fresh up from the AHL or something?"

The defenseman—Coleman, that was it—cocked his chin up at Shane. "The fuck are you gonna do about it, Hollander?" He sneered. "Gonna call in your big, bad, scary Russian husband to protect

you?"

Shane rolled his eyes. "I do just fine without Rozanov, thanks."

Coleman didn't get the fucking hint. He got a foot closer, invading Shane's space uncomfortably. Shane could see razor burn on his jaw. "You bend over for him every night, it would only be fair that he lend a hand. Tell you what, I'd love to get in it with that faggot, I bet he can't even—"

Rage. A rare emotion for Shane, but it took a firm hold on him. The next few moments came in flashes. Shane ripping off his right glove. The crack of his fist connecting with Coleman's face. Another player slamming into his back, elbow first. The way he'd lost his balance and bent down, Coleman's grip on his jersey the only thing keeping him upright. The stick flying at his face when a fourth player came in to join the fray. The dull bloom of pain on the right side of his jaw as it made contact, and then the red on the ice, like blots of spilled ink on paper. The ref issuing Shane a two-minute penalty. The slight lightheadedness as he skated off.

Shane sulked over to the penalty box, blood pouring out of his mouth, and looked up at the ice. Medics were checking him over frantically, but all he saw was Ilya. Ilya, who was watching him from the bench with rapt attention. He was worried, Shane could tell even from a distance of fifty feet. He offered Ilya a little thumbs up and a smile, which seemed to calm him slightly. *I'm good.*

It was determined he had no serious injuries or concussion symptoms, so he was cleared to play. He just needed to stop bleeding like a vampire's wet dream first. He reached up and poked the source of the radiating pain, finding that his upper-right canine felt worryingly loose.

Shane slumped into a sitting position, holding the cloth he'd been given to his mouth. Thank god his shift had been basically over, anyway. When his two minutes were up, he went back to his own bench and sat down.

He turned his attention upwards when he realized he had no clue how the game was going anymore. The first line was out. Ilya was against the boards, battling some poor, defenseless rookie for the puck. He immediately stole it, of course, and took off with his ill-gotten gains.

Shane glanced down at the ground and realized he was dripping blood onto the floor. *Fuck.* He adjusted the cloth and closed his mouth around it, hoping that he'd stop bleeding soon enough. Somehow, in a lifetime spent playing a sport infamous for gapped smiles, Shane had managed to avoid any sort of severe dental damage. It was a little funny in comparison to Ilya, who had more caps and crowns than natural teeth. Shane liked to tease him for it. Now, he was probably joining the club. He could move his canine with his tongue, blood still flooding his mouth around it. And the game was tied—this was not the time for the Centaurs to bench one of their veteran players, even if it was only for a few minutes while he got himself under control.

A familiar pair of hips entered his field of vision, blocking his view. He looked up and saw his husband frowning down at him, face flushed and glistening with sweat. Ilya's body language was casual—he was very careful to never be seen as favoring Shane—but his eyes betrayed the concern he felt.

"Are you alright?" Ilya asked.

Shane shrugged. "Are you asking as my husband or my captain?"

"Captain, for now. Husband in a couple of hours."

Shane smiled. "'I'm okay' would be my answer to both. But I'll expect some coddling later. And I might be losing a tooth."

"No! Not that perfect smile," Ilya said with a laugh. He paused, and then the smile faded and his jaw set.

"Coach is asking if you want to go back on the ice."

"What? No!" Shane scrambled for his mouthguard. "Wait—I mean, yes. I'm fine. Just let me get the bleeding under control."

Shane heard an amused little exhale from above him. "You sound offended that I asked."

"I am."

"You said you wanted coddling."

"I said I wanted coddling *later*," Shane corrected. "From my husband, Ilya. Not from my captain, Rozanov."

Ilya let out that little exhale again, shaking his head with a fond smile. He put a hand on Shane's shoulder. "I will go tell Wiebe that you're good to go back in."

"Yes, thank you."

And then he was gone, going out with the second line since Shane's mouth was still dripping blood. He'd have to thank Ilya later for covering for him. One of the medics handed him a fresh cloth and took the blood-soaked one.

Shane was done with this. He wanted the bleeding to stop. He wanted to be able to actually take his shift. The tooth was wiggly enough for a fairy to come swap it for spare change. He'd seen other players do this a million times. He'd seen *Ilya* do this. He always thought it was kind of reckless, but now that he was actually in the situation, it felt natural and necessary.

Shane reached into his own mouth, took hold of his tooth, and pulled it away from his gums. There was a pinch of pain, but then mostly a flood of relief. The offender was gone, and without it, a clot could easily form over the empty socket. He carefully sipped some water and stood up, signaling to coach that he was ready.

Ilya was coming back in. There was no time for words—Ilya coming in meant Shane needed to go out—but he pressed his gloved fingers into Ilya's palm as he jumped over the boards. He turned back as he skated away to watch him.

It started with a look of confusion, hazel eyes squinting at a large hand, and then Ilya laughed. He held up Shane's tooth, waving it in the air as if it were a flag.

Shane tried not to smile too openly lovesick. Ilya was so ridiculous.

And Shane was so lucky.

Out of an old habit, Shane flipped the latch of the hotel door behind them as it clicked shut. They'd ended up winning the game against the Thunderstorms, just barely, and there was no curfew tonight

since they didn't have to leave until the next evening. Half the team had gone to Ybor City, Tampa's nightlife district. Shane and Ilya had better ways to spend an overnight together.

The room was simple, but clean and comfortable looking. They must have been the only roommates on the entire team to get a room with one king instead of two queens. Bless the management of the Ottawa Centaurs for being supportive.

Shane peeled off his suit jacket and hung it in the closet. It was moist with sweat from the hot October night. He hated Florida. "Y'know, what you did to that poor kid when I had to come off should be illegal. Taking candy from babies is rude, Ilya."

Ilya laughed, his broad shoulders actually shaking with it while his fingers worked at his tie.

"His fault for joining the NHL."

Shane took a step forward to slide into Ilya's space. "Mmm. Victim blaming, are we?" he mumbled. He leaned up to kiss along Ilya's jawline while he unbuttoned his shirt.

"Is your mouth okay?" Ilya asked, ignoring Shane's snarky little comment. He must've been truly worried if he was refusing banter.

Shane peeled his shirt off. "Yes, it's fine. The medical department already booked me an appointment with the dentist. Apparently I'm probably getting an implant."

Ilya's lips turned up, his expression warm. "Smile for me," he said.

Shane looked up and smiled obediently. Ilya's cheeks went pink.

"What?"

"It's adorable. Little gapped tooth Hollander. I wonder if your mother has any pictures of you like that when you were little."

Shane rolled his eyes, the smile immediately melting into a glare. "Don't get used to it, I'm getting it fixed as soon as I can. We've got the photo shoot with Harris week after next, remember?"

"They have photoshop for these things. Besides, why get it fixed before the season's end? It could just get messed up again."

Shane shook his head. "Ilya, I'm not going to walk around for the next eight months with a missing tooth."

"Is a shame." Ilya's voice was sing-song. He took off his own shirt, then reached into his pants pocket and pulled the little white nub out. *Of course* he kept it, why hadn't Shane predicted that?

Ilya held the tooth up between thumb and forefinger, inspecting it. "I think I will put this in the trophy room."

"Like hell you will."

"Why not?" Ilya said with a pout. "It is a trophy to me."

"How so?"

"Physical proof that the golden boy is not infallible."

"Four syllables. Impressive," Shane said.

Ilya narrowed his eyes at Shane and shot off something in rapid-fire Russian, too fast and slang-filled for Shane's tired brain to translate.

"What did you just say?"

"Some four syllable words."

Shane laughed and wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck, running his lips against Ilya's cheekbone. In order to reach, he had to get on his toes, which he did *not* feel some kind of way about. "Don't be mad at me. Teasing is our foreplay." He nipped the shell of Ilya's ear, which earned him a low growl.

Shane was expecting to be picked up, thrown on the bed, and stripped naked for his intractability. Instead he felt warm fingertips tracing along his jaw, where a bruise was in no doubt already forming. He fell back down onto flat feet, Ilya's hand following.

Hazel eyes were studying him carefully.

"Are you alright? As your husband, this time." Ilya's voice was quiet, concerned, and Shane's heart ached at the thought of being cared for so deeply.

The mattress was soft under Shane as he sat on the edge. He looked up at Ilya, letting him inspect the injury, and offered up a smile that he hoped was reassuring. "Yes, I'm okay. I mean, my jaw hurts. Might not be able to do blowjobs or aggressive kissing for a few days. And maybe be careful with your tongue. But I'm fine."

"It looked like a bad hit. You got a stick to the face. I can't believe they didn't give Kilpela a suspension." Ilya bent down and kissed the tender spot. "Not even a penalty," he murmured. For not the first time, Shane marveled at how well Ilya could restrain all that incredible strength for the single goal of touching him gently.

There was a moment of quiet before Ilya spoke again, this time in Russian. "You're absolutely certain that you're okay?"

Shane nuzzled Ilya's hand and replied in the same language. "Yes, I'm sure. I'll be all healed up by next week, I bet." Then he stood and started taking off his belt, hoping that would be the end of it.

Unfortunately, if the way Ilya was looking at Shane was any indication, he still wasn't out of the woods on this conversation. "What made you punch Coleman like that?"

Shane froze with his belt buckle in his hands, tension locking up his body. Ilya loved starting fights and would do it over basically nothing, but Shane was too small to fuck around like that. Even if he were Ilya's size, he didn't have the temperament for it. He didn't get the rush from fighting that other players talked about.

For *Shane* to start something, it had to be bad. And Ilya knew it.

"It was nothing, Ilya. Don't worry about it." He shook his head and put his hand on Ilya's bare shoulder, hoping he'd drop it.

"Ah," Ilya said, and something like understanding crossed his face. He switched to English. "Was about us, then."

Shane pressed his forehead to Ilya's neck. Of course Shane couldn't just slip this by, of course he would be figured out. He wrapped Ilya up in a hug and moved his hand up and down his back, in a way that he hoped said *it doesn't matter*.

"He just—after he checked me, I called him a dick, and then he said I'd need my big scary Russian husband to protect me. And then he called you a name, and..."

Shane didn't know how to finish that sentence, so he let it trail off. *And it felt so unfair. And I got more angry than I had any reason to. And I hate that I can't go one game without my sex life being brought up in some way. And it's happened a million other times, so why should I have cared on this one specific occasion?*

Ilya squeezed him, bringing him back to the present. "You know I do not care, yes? I have been called a faggot before. You don't need to protect my honor, sweetheart." He said that last bit with a quiet laugh. "I am not a princess."

Shane sighed. "I know. I know you can take care of yourself, and that you don't care what people say about you. But—I mean—nobody ever chirps people's wives. It's off-limits, everyone understands that." He looked up at Ilya. "It shouldn't be any different for us. I'm allowed to get mad when someone starts talking shit about my family. I mean, fuck, what about when we have kids? What if they start insulting our *kids*, Ilya?"

"I'll kill them," Ilya said without a moment's hesitation. There was something hard in his voice. Hard enough that Shane wasn't entirely sure he was kidding. "Right there on the ice, with my bare hands. On live television."

Shane frowned. "Well, don't do that. Then one of their dads would be in prison."

"They'd still have the good one," Ilya said with a shrug.

Shane laughed and shook his head. "As if. You're insanely good with kids. You're gonna be the best dad a kid could ask for. I'm gonna be the one following you around, trying to learn from your natural talent."

Ilya preened—Shane could see it—and then he ran a hand through Shane's hair. "Yes, but you will be the one who makes sure they eat their vegetables and do homework and go to soccer practice. If one of us has to go to prison, they need fun dad less than responsible dad."

"You're not going to prison," Shane said.

"I will if a hockey player chirps my children."

Shane sighed, planting his head on Ilya's chest. "So protective," he said, muffled by Ilya's body.

Ilya cradled his head and ran his free hand past Shane's side, pressing his palm into the small of Shane's back. "So are you, apparently. Starting fights for me."

Shane looked up. "Guess so."

Whatever he was planning to say next left his head when Ilya tugged his head back carefully and caught his mouth in a kiss. He was much more careful than usual, clearly scared to hurt Shane. It was incredibly endearing.

When they separated, Ilya's smile was warm. "We should go to the beach tomorrow."

"What? It's October."

"Yes, and it's Florida. Have you not noticed that it is like thirty degrees out?"

Shane thought about it for a moment. It *was* really hot out, so it was fair to assume that the weather would permit a beach day. And laying out on the sand with a clear view of Ilya's thighs and crystal blue water actually sounded like a lovely way to spend their afternoon off.

"Okay," Shane said. "We'll go to the beach tomorrow."

Ilya kissed his forehead. "That's what I like to hear. Now get ready for bed."

Shane, who was frankly exhausted and still in a good amount of jaw pain, did not need to be told twice. He brushed his teeth and did the quick and dirty version of his skincare routine. He changed into shorts and one of Ilya's t-shirts before laying on his side of the bed. Ilya was already laying down, eyes half shut.

Shane turned to face him. "Ilya?"

Ilya opened his eyes fully and turned his attention onto Shane. "Mmm?"

"What if I retire?" Shane said, as if it were nothing. He didn't give the question the weight it demanded.

Ilya was awake now, sitting up a little. "What? Why?"

Shane shrugged. "I don't know. We've always said we didn't want to have kids until one of us wasn't on the road anymore. We're not getting any younger. I've already achieved pretty much everything I wanted to. My knee is all fucked up. And if I retire, there won't be so much talk anymore."

Ilya frowned. "Sweetheart, you should not retire just because you want people to gossip about us less."

Shane shook his head. "No, that's not the main reason. It's just a side benefit. Starting a family is the main reason."

Ilya hummed suspiciously. "How long have you been thinking about this?"

"Well, I've been thinking *one of us* should retire soon for a year or so. The thought of retiring right now only came to me tonight."

Ilya pulled Shane closer, so his head was on Ilya's chest. "Why don't you think about it for a while and come back to me?"

"Okay," Shane said.

"You just had a serious head injury. You are not in your right mind."

"It was not serious, dick."

"Looked serious from the sidelines."

"Whatever."

There was a pause.

"I just hope nobody really talks about it online or in the media or whatever," Shane said. "It wasn't even that interesting of a fight."

"No, it wasn't," Ilya agreed as he turned off the lights. "You punched him once and got knocked over."

Shane snuggled up a little closer. "Only I'm allowed to downplay my fight." He gave Ilya a brief kiss. "Goodnight."

He felt the laugh rather than heard it. "Goodnight, sweetheart."

@NHLUPDATES - 9:14 p.m.

That's the buzzer! The first meetup of the season between @CentaursOfficial and @TampaBayThunderstorms ends in a 4 - 2 victory for Ottawa.

@deafgirlreadslips - 9:27 p.m.

LIP READING HOLLANDER AND COLEMAN - THREAD

(1/8) - Shane Hollander started a fistfight with Aaron Coleman at tonight's game between the Ottawa Centaurs and the Tampa Bay Thunderstorms. The two were having a heated conversation before gloves came off. No direct audio of the conversation is available, but we do have camera footage.

A video of the altercation is attached to the post.

@deafgirlreadslips - 9:27 p.m.

(2/8) Compare my interpretations with the timestamps and let me know what you think.

(0:44) - Coleman shoves Hollander into the ice, Hollander gets up.

(0:49) Hollander: Dick.

(0:51) Coleman: What, never been checked before?

@deafgirlreadslips - 9:27 p.m.

(3/8)

(0:54) Hollander: Usually, the people (view blocked by Jason Holbourne skating around them). – fresh up from the AHL or something?

(0:58) Coleman: What the fuck are you going to do about it, Hollander? Gotta call in your big, bad, scary Russian husband to protect you?

@deafgirlreadslips - 9:28 p.m.

(4/8)

(1:02) Hollander: I'll do just fine without Rozanov, thanks.

(1:06) Coleman: You bend over for him every night, it would only be fair that he lend a hand. Tell you what, I'd love to get in it with that (f-slur), I bet he can even–

(1:13) - Hollander tosses his glove and the fight starts

@deafgirlreadslips - 9:28 p.m.

(5/8)

(1:22) Hollander: If you say another word about my goddamn husband, I swear to fuck—

(1:25) - Hollander gets cut off when Holbourne shoves into him. Sebastian Kilpela joins the fight. When he slides his stick out of the way, he hits Hollander in the mouth with it.

@deafgirlreadslips - 9:28 p.m.

(6/8)

(1:29) Hollander: Are you actually fucking joking me right now? (Everything Hollander says from here is especially likely to be inaccurate. He was moving his mouth weirdly, presumably from the injury).

Someone else probably said something here, but Kilpela and Coleman are facing away from the camera.

(1:34) Hollander: Yeah, well you wish. Maybe if I was on your team you'd qualify for the playoffs occasionally.

@deafgirlreadslips - 9:29 p.m.

(7/8)

(1:41) Kilpela: Oh, please. I'd pay not to have you in my locker room. You're the reason the league makes us do this pride bullshit.

(1:46) Hollander: I'm the reason your name isn't on the cup.

@deafgirlreadslips- 9:29 p.m.

(8/8)

Then Hollander got sent to the penalty box, so that's basically it.

Disclaimer: Lip reading is not a reliable form of communication. These interpretations are my personal opinion and should not be taken as fact.

@shanehoellander - 10:14 p.m.

Well no wonder shane started a fight. Man had every right to go full feral for that 🦋

@ilyassecretwife - 10:22 p.m.

ilya sitting on the bench like "what could incite my puppy dog of a husband into a fight", meanwhile shane is out there singlehandedly defeating homophobia with the power of righteous fury #hollanov

@misschirpster - 10:22 p.m.

Okay but real talk why is this tolerated still. The Centaurs have four openly queer players, two of them are married to each other. There are like eight other openly queer players across the league. Scott Hunter only retired three years ago. Why is this kind of stuff still allowed???

@shanehoellander - 10:28 p.m.

@misschirpster no literally and for me it's the fact that we all know the league will not do a single goddamn thing about it. Hollander got an actual stick to the face and pulled his own tooth out in the sin bin yet Kilpela didn't get so much as a penalty

@ilyassecretwife - 10:31 p.m.

they're jealous bc they wish they were the ones getting their backs broken by Ilya Rozanov every night 🤔

@hollanovstan2481 - 10:42 p.m.

@ilyassecretwife it's karmic balance i think. shane hollander should not have to put up with the shit he does but at least his husband looks like a swimwear model. would, 0 hesitation. as long as i don't have to make eye contact with that tattoo 🐻

@ilyassecretwife - 10:44 p.m.

side question: does Ilya Rozanov qualify as a himbo?? 🤔

@misschirpster - 10:47 p.m.

@ilyassecretwife if he didn't before he will now. if a man got in a fistfight in my defense my brain would actually melt out of my ears. god forbid he was also as hot as shane hollander. bark like you want it, bitch.

@numberonecenstan - 10:48 p.m.

did anyone else notice Luca Haas in the background skating over to where Coleman and Hollander were brawling? he looked ready to drop his gloves too. almost wish it hadn't gotten broken up so I could see what it would look like if he joined.

@nhldrama1994 - 10:52 p.m.

@numberonecenstan just go to your local elementary school and watch the third graders wrestle at recess. it'll be comparable

@misschirpster - 10:55 p.m.

@numberonecenstan @nhldrama1994 guys he has a long-term boyfriend and grows a better beard than Hollander in the playoffs. we gotta stop treating him like the team's baby 😭😭😭

@numberonecenstan - 10:59 p.m.

@misschirpster incorrect actually he will always be our favorite tiny cen. is he even old enough to be in the league? are the cens using child labor??

@nhldrama1994 - 11:01 p.m.

@numberonecenstan every cens rookie that's been drafted in the last six years slept easy bc Haas is the target of every "he's just a baby" type joke made abt that team regardless of the fact that he's scored like 150 NHL goals 🧠

@TheRealLucaHaas - 11:09 p.m.

@nhldrama1994 It's a tough burden to carry, but I do it for the good of my fellow child labor law violations. 😔

@nhldrama1994 - 11:11 p.m.

oh my god he fucking replied?!?!?!?!?!?

@hollanovstan2481 - 11:11 p.m.

this is so cute the way they're having a whole conversation across the ice from each other #hollanov *A clip is attached to the post. It first shows Hollander getting checked by medics in the penalty box, then pans to Rozanov's concerned expression from the bench, then pans back to Hollander smiling and giving a thumbs up in Rozanov's direction.*

@hollanovstan2481 - 11:11 p.m.

this is why the first husbands of hockey are so iconic. your honor they just love each other so much



@ilyassecretwife - 11:13 p.m.

@hollanovstan2481 yessssss. you may not believe me because of my handle but I have zero interest in breaking these two up (as fine as Roz is 🥺🥺🥺). They're too perfect together I need hollanov content until the day I die. (also not that i could if i wanted to, they are GONE for each other)

@CentaursOfficial - 11:15 p.m.

@ShaneHollanderHockeyPlayer went down swinging 🙄

A gif of Shane Hollander punching Aaron Coleman then getting knocked over by Jason Holbourne is attached to the post.

@nhldrama1994 - 11:15 p.m.

One thing that has not been discussed enough—in fifteen (fifteen!) years of playing in the NHL, Shane Hollander has thrown the first punch exactly zero times before tonight. One mean sentence about Rozanov and he went full rabid. You can say anything you like about him, but leave his husband out of it. 🙄🔥

@crosschecktotheteeth - 11:16 p.m.

@nhldrama1994 i mean honestly i think it makes sense. hollander is a pretty chill, nice dude, but every single person on that ice knows that if you talk shit about someone's spouse, you're getting your shit rocked. makes 0 difference if it's a husband or a wife (or if that spouse happens to be the captain of the opposing team lmao)

@heyitsrobin - 11:17 p.m.

"I'm the reason your name isn't on the cup" shane broke coleman's nose and then psychologically destroyed his henchman with a single sentence 😭 I love having openly gay hockey players but its even better when they're freaks of nature who have ruined other players' careers simply by existing

@ilyassecretwife - 11:17 p.m.

and to think coleman and kilpela will still have fans after this. they literally suck why are y'all staning assholes who aren't even good at hockey 🙄

@misschirpster - 11:24 p.m.

brb ordering new custom Hollanov jerseys from the pride line to spite Aaron Coleman. what should the number be? #hollanov

@shanehoellander - 11:28 p.m.

@misschirpster they both scored 67 goals in their rookie season

@misschirpster - 11:34 p.m.

done! and now the league actually donates the money from these to LGBTQ+ charities so it's not as blatant of a case of rainbow washing 🌈

A screenshot of an order confirmation screen shows a custom Pride jersey, primarily black but with rainbow stitching and decals. The name on the back is Hollanov, the number is 67

@shanehoellander - 11:39 p.m.

@misschirpster the league still gets the tax cut from it you know

@misschirpster - 11:42 p.m.

@shanehoellander thats true but its better than nothing

@TampaBayThunderstorms - 11:45 p.m.

The Thunderstorms as an organization are committed to diversity, inclusion, and acceptance. The comments made towards Shane Hollander by two of our players tonight do not represent the opinions of the team, our coaches, our management, or our owners. All players will be undergoing additional sensitivity training in the coming weeks.

@AaronColeman43 - 11:45 p.m.

At tonight's game I made some extremely offensive remarks in the heat of the moment about two other players. I regret my actions wholeheartedly and apologize to both

@ShaneHollanderHockeyPlayer and @Rozanov81. I have also made a donation to True Colors United, not that this makes up for my poor conduct, but to show my support for the LGBTQ+ community.

A screenshot of a \$15,000 donation confirmation in Aaron Coleman's name is attached to the post. The confirmation is timestamped 9:41 p.m.

@crosschecktotheteeth - 11:53 p.m.

ope guess the heat got to em. they never would've done this had that lip reading thread not gotten so much traction

@shanehoellander - 11:53 p.m.

someone's manager got involved 🧠

@ilyassecretwife - 11:56 p.m.

guys wait look at the donation timestamp. it's from after the lip reading thread but before Coleman even got out of his post-game interview. His PR team or whatever KNEW this shit was gonna be necessary lmaoooooooooooo

@bearsandbeershockeypod - 12:02 a.m.

It's ridiculous to expect these high-value alpha men not to act like men on the ice. Nobody is coming for the rights of gay people, but that doesn't mean that some won't find it repulsive. It's unnatural. You have a right to fuck who you want, we have a right to react the way we want.

@ilyassecretwife - 12:11 a.m.

@bearsandbeershockeypod "High value alpha men" and yet Shane Hollander has better stats than Coleman and Kilpela COMBINED in almost every possible metric. According to your logic the most "alpha" (🤔) thing a "high-value" (🤔) man can do is marry another high-value alpha man (🤔🤔🤔). You're such a fucking cabbage. this is why your podcast has a 2.7 rating on Spotify

@crosschecktotheteeth - 12:23 a.m.

@bearsandbeershockeypod They are MARRIED. If someone started talking like that about your wife, wouldn't you do the same thing? or would you just let it happen because they have a "right to react" to your marriage however they like?

@hollanov2481

@bearsandbeershockeypod so wait is the implication that having a husband means that shane and ilya aren't acting like men? when they won the stanley cup their first season playing together was that acting like a man? what about when they lead their conference (#1 and #2) in overall scoring last season? was that manly behavior?

@shanehoellander - 12:34 a.m.

@bearsandbeershockeypod if I were your wife I would exercise my "right to react" and divorce

you.

@nhldrama1994 - 12:46 a.m.

so we all agree there's 0% chance coleman even LAID EYES on that statement before it got posted, right?

@shanehoellander - 12:50 a.m.

how much do you guys want to bet that Kilpela isn't gonna say a word since twitter hasn't been going off on him like it did Coleman

@nhldrama1994 - 1:07 a.m.

update: the tampa bay Thunderstorms and aaron coleman both have a fetish for blatant PR statements they don't actually mean

The sun came in bright through the hotel windows when Shane woke up the next morning. He rolled over lazily and grabbed his phone to check the time. It was just past nine in the morning. He then made his first mistake of the day, which was checking his notifications.

After about ten minutes of scrolling his social media, Shane had a headache. #hollanov (god, he hated that hashtag) was trending on Twitter, as were several clips of his fight with Coleman. And then the apology tweet—should he reply? Should he even accept it? He knew full well that Coleman only did it because he had his arm twisted behind his back. Ilya hadn't replied yet. They probably needed to talk to Farah first.

Shane was getting really sick of waking up in the morning to discover that his relationship was everyone's favorite topic of conversation.

Ilya had gotten up before him, a rare occurrence. He heard his husband's shaver whirring in the bathroom and knew he must've been trimming down his stubble. Shane smiled—he did love his facial hair, and they were going to the beach today. If he focused on good things like that, maybe he could ignore the annoying shit.

Ilya came out of the bathroom with his warm smile, and yep—Shane didn't care anymore. Not for now, anyway. Ilya leaned down and kissed Shane's face, taking a glance at his phone.

"So, is what that lip reading girl said true?"

And just like that, Shane's momentary relaxation dissipated. He sighed.

"Yeah, it's pretty much accurate. I didn't even remember what I said during the actual fight until I saw the thread, though."

Ilya nodded as he put his toiletries away. "You are nicer than me. I would have lost it entirely. Laid him out and gotten suspended, probably."

Shane raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Absolutely," Ilya said with a laugh. "I once punched Dallas Kent during a stop in play for saying something mean about you. The ref gave me a game misconduct for it and everything."

Shane thought back for a moment. He remembered that punch and the following ejection—he'd meant to ask Ilya about it, but then their call that night had gone down the "video sex" route, and by the time they were done he'd forgotten entirely. "Wait, that's why you fought Dallas Kent that one game?"

"Yes," Ilya said.

"What did he say?"

"Something about me taking a break from fucking you to put my dick in Barrett instead."

Shane sat up sharply, a rise of anxiety in his throat. "You don't think he *knew*, did he?"

Ilya shook his head, unzipping his bag. "No, he just heard the rumor you were gay and knew we were friends and assumed I'd get offended by it. Which, to be fair, I did. Just not for the reasons he thought." He turned his attention back up to Shane and looked at him quizzically. "Besides, what does it matter if Kent knew or not? Everyone does now."

Oh, right.

"Yeah, I—you're right. I guess sometimes my first instinct is still to hide, and then I remember that we're very much out. It's stupid."

Ilya grabbed his swimsuit from his suitcase, his expression unreadable. Shane wondered if maybe he'd said the wrong thing.

Shane and Ilya hadn't anticipated making a trip to the beach, so they hadn't brought anything for it. The bathing suits they'd packed were in case they wanted to hit the hotel pool.

The whole process was more complicated than they'd been expecting. Apparently, because the actual city of Tampa faced a bay with gross water, Tampa itself had no swimming beaches. You had to cross a bridge over the bay and go to one of the next cities over, St. Petersburg or Clearwater, which faced the Gulf of Mexico. They picked St. Petersburg, since Ilya thought it was kind of funny that a Russian city had a counterpart in Florida. Plus it was closer to their hotel.

After a forty minute Uber ride where Shane heroically chose *not* to run his hand along the warm, exposed skin of Ilya's inner thigh, they found themselves in some godawful surf shop. It was packed to the gills with people and was not air-conditioned. Despite it being the middle of autumn, the sun was beating on them with more intensity than even the worst summer days in Ontario. Shane's entire back was soaked in sweat. Ilya's curls had gone dark with it.

Shane hated this. He was not made for the heat. "Let's get the stuff and get the fuck out of here."

When Shane didn't get a response, he turned back to where he thought Ilya had been standing and found empty space. Shane had forgotten who he'd married. Ilya was not going to choose *expediency* in this situation. No, he was in the souvenir section, holding up a snow globe.

Shane crossed the room and stood next to Ilya. "What even is that?"

Ilya held it up for Shane to look at. "Is cute. Look."

The snow globe contained Santa Claus in his hat, reindeer-themed swim trunks, and a pair of red sunglasses. He was sitting in a folding chair on what was clearly meant to look like sand. Two young women in bikinis were sitting on the ground on either side of him. When Ilya shook it, the entire scene was showered in teal glitter. The base of the snow globe said "St. Petersburg, Florida".

Shane didn't see the appeal. "Ilya. We are here for towels and sunblock."

Ilya huffed in reply. "You know, our job comes with a free vacation. You would think that maybe you would enjoy it."

"I will enjoy it. I'll enjoy sitting on the beach with you, drinking something cold, and watching waves hit the sand. I do not enjoy being in this god-forsaken tourist trap gift shop that's hotter than the depths of hell."

Ilya snorted and took Shane's hand to look at the sunblock. There was a special display for some high-end brand called *Sun Bum*. Ilya handed Shane a bottle of 60 SPF. When Shane checked the label on the back, he gasped. "This sunblock is thirty dollars. We are not paying that."

"Why not?" Ilya asked as he searched the display for something else. "We're incredibly rich."

A woman nearby bumped into Shane as she passed, squinting at his face, and *oh god*, they'd been recognized. Yes, they had hats and sunglasses on, and Ilya had tied back his hair, but they were still a distinctive couple. A tall Canadian with freckles who was visually part-Japanese plus a gigantic Russian with a pretty grin, wild curls, and a clear accent. And once this woman asked for a picture, someone else would notice and ask, and then the next person would, and then they'd be stuck here for half an hour—

The woman's face relaxed, and she smiled conspiratorially up at Shane. Her voice was low when she spoke. "Enjoy your day off. My whole family loves watching you two," she said. "You're my daughter's favorite player in the league." Then she was gone, heading towards the children's bathing suits.

Shane blinked. He was half-tempted to get on his knees and thank her, but that would definitely undo the kindness she had just done them. He looked up at Ilya, who was finished searching the display and now had a bottle of tanning oil in his hands. His eyes were wide with surprise—he was clearly caught just as off guard as Shane.

Shane walked up to the woman and tapped her shoulder.

She turned to look at him. "Yes?"

"Uhm." Shane realized he wasn't sure what to say. He whispered as if he were sharing state secrets. "Direct message my Instagram account, okay? Or my Twitter. We'll send you some signed stuff."

The woman shook her head. "You don't have to do that."

"For your daughter, then."

The woman smiled. She had a kind smile—it reminded him of his own mother. "Well, okay. Thank you very much. That's very nice of you."

"You're welcome. Thanks for not blowing our cover. What's your name?"

The woman laughed, pulling a toddler-sized one piece off the shelf. "Jennifer. And of course. Everyone deserves a relaxing day at the beach."

"Well, still. Not everyone is as considerate as you, Jennifer. I mean it. Message me." He gave her one last friendly smile, then returned to Ilya's side. It was rare to have such a positive fan interaction in public.

Shane turned up to face his husband. "That... that was really nice."

Ilya smiled back at him. "People aren't all bad. She seems like a nice lady."

It was then that Shane's brain processed the fact that Ilya had *a bottle of tanning oil in his hands*.

"Absolutely not." Shane took the bottle from Ilya in a manner that could only be described as *snatching* and put it back in the display.

"What? It's Florida! I could be tan," Ilya said with a pout.

"No, Ilya. You're gonna use the sunblock."

"Do you not like when I am tan?"

"I love when you're tan, but it doesn't change the fact that it's because of damage from UV radiation and increases your risk of skin cancer." Shane scowled. "You already spent twenty years of your life smoking, we don't need to come up with new and creative carcinogens."

Ilya slumped his shoulders like a petulant child. "I quit smoking!"

"You did, and I'm very proud of you for that, but even if you'd never looked at a cigarette in your life I'd make you wear sunblock. I love you too much to let you be stupid."

"You let me keep my motorcycle."

"Don't tempt me," Shane warned. "I will sell that thing faster than you can say 'Ducati'."

Shane headed for the towels, not willing to argue any further, and Ilya followed in resignation. He knew he'd been beat. In addition to two towels, they ended up selecting a giant, ten by ten foot sand-resistant beach blanket with weighted edges. When they brought their things up to the register and Ilya slid the snow globe onto the counter along with the overpriced sunblock, Shane didn't say a word. Marriage had taught him to pick his battles.

Ilya took the bags, Shane took Ilya's other hand, and they started their walk to the actual beach. It was barely half a mile, so they set a leisurely pace, stopping occasionally to look at the palm trees or the murals or the street performers. St. Pete Beach was exactly what one would expect of a Florida coastal town—all white sand and tiki bars and girls in bikini tops and jean shorts. The streets were thick with activity and tourists, even in October, although it was clear they were at the tail end of the busy season. Shane was grateful they got to spend their day off like this. Even with five years of marriage behind them, they'd spent twice as much time hiding as not. It felt good to just *be*. They were a couple, and they didn't have to stand out, and they didn't have to pretend they weren't. They could just enjoy their day together without it being a big deal.

Once they finally reached the actual beach, Shane picked a secluded spot tucked along the dunes. They set their things down and split up—Ilya went to the closest bar to get them cocktails while

Shane got their blanket all set up. He peeled off his t-shirt and his shoes. He applied sunblock where he could and waited for Ilya to come back so he could do his back.

When Ilya returned, it was with two dried, hollowed, and carved coconuts which had red plastic cups sticking out of them. They were cut along the side to look like they had little faces. If his grin was anything to go by, he was extremely proud of himself for this choice.

"What did you get me?" Shane asked, fully trusting it would be something he liked.

"Blue hawaiian," Ilya answered. "Apparently we get cheap refills if we buy the coconut."

Shane wanted to be annoyed, but he laughed instead. "How drunk were you planning on getting?"

"I don't know. Go with the flow. See how it happens."

Shane rolled his eyes and pressed an appreciative kiss to Ilya's cheek. He took one of the drinks and set it carefully on the blanket, then watched as Ilya did the same. Finally, he handed the sunblock to Ilya.

"Can you do my back, please?"

"Ooo, I don't know," Ilya answered. "Free opportunity to put my hands all over my sexy husband. What's the catch?"

Shane blushed and smiled when he'd meant to glare. "Why are you like this?"

"Don't know." Ilya turned Shane around and got to work. "I know you like it, though."

Shane couldn't argue with that, so he bit his lip instead.

Once Ilya had applied his sunblock and Shane had done *his* back, they settled on the blanket together. They'd get in the water later—for now, they had a moment to simply enjoy one another's company and watch the waves. And despite the oppressive heat, Shane put his head on Ilya's shoulder, sipping from his coconut.

He looked up at Ilya, cheek still pressed to his skin, straw hanging from his lips. Ilya looked back down. They lasted about five seconds before they both broke into a fit of giggles, seemingly for no reason at all.

When the laughter had subsided, Shane shook his head a little bit and looked back out at the water. He planted his head on Ilya's shoulder again and took another sip of his drink, and it was as if nothing had happened in the last minute or two.

A strong glare hit Shane's eyes, making him half-shut them even behind his sunglasses. He looked down at the source—it was the reflection off Ilya's phone. Ilya was squinting at it, barely able to see the screen in the bright sunshine. He managed to open his camera and positioned it for a selfie. That was very like him—it never really occurred to Shane to take pictures when they were out, but Ilya seemingly lived to add photos of Shane to his camera roll. To be fair, he'd share the pictures with Shane after he took them, and Shane was always quite glad to have them.

Shane looked at the screen and positioned himself in frame. He kept his head on Ilya's shoulder, the drink in his hand, and he didn't even have to play up his smile—he was so happy that he was sure it bubbled out of his skin.

It was only after Ilya had taken the photo and retracted his arm that Shane realized his mistake. He'd smiled with teeth—you'd clearly be able to see the gap. He turned to Ilya to ask him to take another one, but froze before getting the words out.

Ilya was looking at his phone with such obvious happiness, such obvious fondness. He had the sweetest, most private smile on his face. Shane couldn't bear the thought of asking him to replace a picture he clearly adored just for something as stupid as a spike of vanity. It was an accurate memento of their time here, anyway—one of a growing number of occasions where Shane had fought for what he loved.

Nope. Shane wasn't going to say a word. Ilya seemed to sense he was being looked at, though, because he set his phone aside and turned to Shane.

"What?" Ilya asked. Shane's throat was dry. Ilya's eyes had so many golden flecks in this light.

"I—nothing." Shane shook his head. "I just love you a lot." He leaned in, palm finding its home on Ilya's cheek, and then they were kissing, and no. Shane didn't give a damn about a stupid tooth. He felt the warmth of Ilya's hand against his side as he wrapped an arm around him—he felt Ilya smiling against his lips.

Shane pulled back and leaned into his husband's side once more. He felt a kiss on his temple, and then Ilya was speaking Russian into his hair.

"I love you too. More than you know."

They ended up spending almost the entire day on that beach. Shane drank far too many of the blue Hawaiians—he just kept letting Ilya bring him more. One time, he was brought a paloma instead, which was also quite good. He was solidly drunk when they got in the water, splashing each other in the deep sections and kissing on a sandbar. The ocean was warm as bathwater—a symptom of the shallowness of the gulf, a local helpfully informed them—so they didn't stay in for too long. They grabbed their phones and wallets and left the rest to fend for itself as they walked along the edge of the water, sticking to where the waves had left the sand wet and compact. Ilya occasionally stopped to pick up pretty shells, showed them to Shane, and then tossed them back into the sand. There was one tiny pink one (it looked like a miniature conch) that Ilya slipped into his pocket instead of discarding. At one point, they passed by a rather large family, and Shane caught Ilya watching a little girl build a sandcastle with a smile on his face. It reminded him to bring up their conversation from last night at some point in the next few weeks.

After a long, leisurely walk, they turned around and started the trek back. Halfway between their spot and where they'd turned, a group of college-aged kids had started playing volleyball. Shane had to be the voice of reason in telling Ilya that *no*, he could not ask to join.

"Why not?"

"Because there's no chance in hell I'm going to play, and if you don't spend your time with me on our day in Florida I'll be mad."

That seemed a good enough argument for Ilya to accept.

Once they made their way back to their blanket and found their things undisturbed, Ilya grabbed the coconuts to get them one last round of drinks. They had about an hour before they needed to pack

up and go back to the hotel and three before they were expected to be on the bus.

Shane settled on the blanket and reflected. He was content—it had been a really nice day. He hadn't thought about that social media hellstorm since the morning, and it didn't seem like such a big deal anymore. Regardless of what people online had to say about him, they couldn't take this away. As long as he had Ilya, the rest of it would sort itself out.

It didn't make it *okay* or anything. But compared to this, it was unimportant.

Ilya returned with their refilled drinks and sat next to Shane, smiling at him. He frowned when he got a better look, though.

"What's wrong?" Shane asked.

"Your cheeks are pink. You need to put more sunblock on your face."

Shane did as he was told. When he was done, he sat with his drink on his knees, looking out at the water. Half of him still didn't think this was real. In Ottawa, the first dusting of snow would come in the next few weeks. Here, it might as well have been July. While he was thinking, he saw Ilya lay down on his back out of the corner of his eye.

After a while, Shane decided to join his husband. He set the coconut aside and laid on his stomach with closed eyes, resting his head on his folded arms. The heat and humidity had this way of sapping all of his energy. His muscles were heavy. He felt like he might've been able to fall asleep, had he not known they needed to leave soon.

Shane stayed like that for a while. Eventually, he opened his eyes sleepily. When he did, he found Ilya looking right at him.

No, not looking. Ilya was *gazing* at him with big, soft eyes. It was an expression that Shane had seen in photos of them together dozens of times, usually when Ilya didn't think he was being watched, but it still disarmed Shane any time it was turned on him in the flesh.

Shane lifted his upper body, supporting his weight with his forearms. The breeze was blowing his hair across his face. "What?"

Ilya reached up and pushed Shane's hair back. He took a moment to gather his thoughts, face unguarded and earnest in a way that was reserved for Shane alone. "I was thinking about how beautiful you are. How much I love you. But also how hard it is watching you get hurt, especially when that piece of trash hit you in the face with his stick. I wanted to go out there and strangle him."

Shane snorted. "You can't, Ilya. You'd get in trouble."

Ilya shook his head, turning up to look at the sky. "I don't care about that. If it were just that, I would do it anyway."

"So why didn't you?" Shane asked.

"I can't because it would make people think that you are not able to handle yourself, and you would hate that." Ilya sighed, eyes finding Shane again, and reached up to trail his fingertips over the bruise. His touch was softer than spring rain. "But I wish I could. I love this face very much. The

fact someone knocked your *teeth* out... it makes me very angry, Shane. And there is nothing I can do about it."

Shane smiled in a way that didn't reach his eyes. "It's hockey. It happens. Besides, I was probably overdue for it."

Ilya hummed his disagreement.

Shane tried again. "It means a lot that you care that much, though."

There was a slight pressure at the back of Shane's head as Ilya pulled him down. He was expecting a kiss, but Ilya gently brushed their noses together instead, tugging Shane more fully into his arms.

When their eyes met, Ilya's expression was austere. "I don't just 'care', sweetheart. I love you."

Shane wasn't sure exactly how to reply to that. "I love you too," he whispered.

Maybe it was Ilya, or maybe it was the Florida sun, but Shane felt warm down to the core. He kissed his husband briefly, then snuggled against his chest on the shared blanket, despite the heat. "I'm okay," he reassured. "And here's the bright side—Sportsnet is gonna be replaying that clip for a month. When's the last time *Shane Hollander* started a fight?"

"Never," Ilya agreed with a laugh. Shane could feel it in the shake of Ilya's ribs under him. "You made history last night. Not such a nice Canadian boy after all."

Shane looked up. "I mean, with the things I let you do to me, I think you've known I'm not a 'nice Canadian boy' for years now."

"No, you are." Ilya shook his head. "Nice Canadian boys are still allowed to do depraved things for the sake of their orgasms."

Shane cracked up, which made Ilya crack up, and Shane thought that maybe yesterday wasn't so bad after all. Not if it lead to this.

Ilya was sleepy on the bus ride to the airport, his head tipping into Shane every few minutes, eyes drifting shut. They'd taken a shower after getting back to the hotel, but Ilya's hair still smelled like saltwater. It was so soft. Part of Shane wished he could nest in it, like some sort of baby bird.

Not right now. They had responsibilities. "Come on, Ilya," Shane said, gently shaking his shoulder to jostle his husband. "We just need to make some kind of statement about last night, and then you can sleep for the entire flight."

Ilya grumbled and nuzzled Shane again. "Can we not do it tomorrow?"

"Farah says that we should either say something now or not say anything at all. If you want I can just post my statement, and you don't have to comment publicly. It's not like this whole thing directly involves you, anyway."

Ilya hugged Shane's arm in a frankly adorable way, pulling his phone out from his backpack by his feet. "No, I think I can think of something."

Shane left Ilya to type up his thoughts. He carefully copied and pasted the statement Farah had whipped up for him into his Twitter, gave it one last look over, and posted it. He looked over at Ilya, who was still typing, and something slotted into place.

"You suggested the beach last night on purpose," Shane said. "You didn't want me worrying about Coleman."

"I did not want you reading every post you were tagged in on Twitter for six hours," Ilya corrected. "But yes. The idea was to take your mind off of it."

Shane put his head on Ilya's shoulder and shut his eyes. "You're very good at handling me," he said with a quiet laugh.

"I have a lot of practice." Shane heard the zipper of Ilya's backpack as he put his phone away, and then Ilya put his head on top of Shane's.

Shane hadn't noticed before, but he was dead tired too. The beach really had taken it out of both of them. He allowed himself to doze off, tangling his fingers together with Ilya's.

@ShaneHollanderHockeyPlayer - 6:34 p.m.

I was disappointed in the comments that were made by @AaronColeman43 during our altercation last night. Those types of insults cause the league to go back on the progress we've fought so hard to make, especially in the last few years. However, I appreciate that Coleman took the effort to apologize and made a donation to a charity that @Rozanov81 and I have personally done a lot of work to support. I look forward to the next @TampaBayThunderstorms game in December.

@Rozanov81 - 6:37 p.m.

@AaronColeman43: I am glad you apologized and I hope your nose heals. In the future, I recommend maybe thinking before you speak. Shane is gentler than me.

January

Shane had never packed so angrily before. Including that one time he'd stormed out of Ilya's penthouse and driven home after a bad fight during their long-distance year.

It was just supposed to be a simple date. They were going to get dinner at Shane's favorite Italian place and see some action movie Ilya was excited for. The date itself had gone perfectly. The food had been good, they'd gotten a little drunk on wine, Ilya loved the movie, and when they got home, Ilya fucked Shane into the mattress. All according to plan.

But of course, Shane had clung on to Ilya a little too openly while they were standing in line for the movie ticket. They'd kissed a few too many times. They'd failed to notice the person with the phone camera.

The first tweet hadn't been that popular. Neither had the second. Then it got picked up by Entertainment Quarterly, and all hell broke loose.

#hollanov (god, he fucking *hated* that hashtag) was trending again, and it wasn't just people talking about how cute the kiss was. Whatever, he could deal with that. That would actually be weirdly sweet. But no. It was parasocial comments about how Shane should be trying harder than a movie

date. It was speculation about how Ilya *totally* fucked Shane's brains out that night (which he did, but that was none of their business). It was people saying that Ilya was clearly bored of him because he didn't pull Shane close enough. Then the replies to that tweet, saying that of *course* he was bored of him, that he was Ilya fucking Rozanov, that he definitely had a whole roster Shane wasn't aware of.

It was just the flavor of prying that Shane hated most. And now, less than a day later, they had to pack up for their road trip to play the Las Vegas Silver Swordsmen. They couldn't get it shut down themselves—they just had to trust Farah. Shane would be thinking about it all night.

Ilya, to his credit, had not teased Shane about it at all. He knew that sometimes there were lines. Shane heard him coming up the stairs, presumably with the basket of clean laundry Shane had sent him down for.

Sure enough, Shane was right. Ilya set the basket on the bed and started folding and packing his clothes.

It was quiet—they just working together, the heaviness of it hanging in the space between them—and then Ilya made the first move.

"It's not that bad," Ilya attempted.

Shane scoffed. "Easy for you to say. You're not the one whose husband is apparently fucking five girls in every city with an NHL team."

Ilya looked at him hesitantly. "You do know that is not true?"

Shane shot Ilya a glare. "Of course I know it's not true. That's not the point." He shook his head and packed his shorts, afraid he would say the wrong thing if he kept going.

"This stuff is annoying, I know, but it is not as big of a deal as you think," Ilya said.

"This *stuff* didn't happen when you were still a secret," Shane said, and oh—that was very much the wrong thing after all, because Ilya's face made it clear that he was absolutely fucking crushed.

Ilya's voice was tight. "Yes, but—"

"But what, Ilya? I hate this."

Ilya did not comment on being interrupted. It was more patience than Shane deserved. "You hate what?"

"I hate being a gay hockey player. Sometimes I love it, and sometimes I really fucking hate it, and right now I hate it."

Ilya looked as though he were staring over the edge of a cliff and trying desperately not to fall. "What do you mean?"

Shane shoved some socks into his bag, forcing them past the zipper. "You don't hate this too? You don't hate that people can't go five seconds without bringing up your sex life? That strangers on the internet swap theories about the inner workings of your marriage?"

"No, I do hate those things. But I would never trade getting to love you openly for them." Ilya's voice was quiet and shaky, and Shane realized he'd fucked up badly. He turned towards him and did his best to let the anger seep from his tone.

"It's not about *you*, Ilya. I can't think of a single person who's brought up Jackie while interviewing Hayden. Nobody grills Bood on what Cassie thinks of his passes. Body language experts on TikTok don't analyze clips of their games to figure out if they're on the brink of divorce."

Ilya was chewing on his cheek again. "It is different. We play together. Makes the relationship more relevant."

Shane shook his head and turned back to his bag, stiffly folding a t-shirt. "But it's never questions about our performance in the context of our relationship. I think I could handle that. It's stuff about our personal lives. I want what we have to be just for us. Did you know people online write *fan fiction* of us?"

Ilya snorted. "I did. We don't have as many as Scott Hunter, though. Is a shame."

Shane frowned. "I don't need you making jokes right now, Ilya. I'm upset. Every time I give a post-game interview or kiss you in public, I feel like people are shoving cameras into my home. Into my *bedroom*." Shane shoved the t-shirt into his bag.

For a long moment, there was nothing but heavy silence.

"I guess I didn't understand before," Ilya said. "Why sometimes you are so happy to touch me, and why sometimes you treat me like before."

Shane had hurt Ilya. He knew he had, even if Ilya was being a hero about it right now. The realization cut him like a knife. Shane met Ilya's eyes. He needed him to understand so badly. He needed him to know that it wasn't like *before* at all.

"It's not about you," Shane said again. "I love showing you off. I love acting like a couple in public. But when I do, it's like I'm digging my own grave." He swallowed. "You're mine, Ilya. I'm so tired of having to share everything. But then when I want to keep my personal life separate, it's internalized homophobia and I'm clearly ashamed of who I am. Or the Centaurs are forcing me to shut up about 'the gay stuff'."

Shane sighed and sat on the edge of the bed, holding his head in his hands. "I feel like everything I do, I have to be the representative of an entire community for this sport, and it's exhausting. If I fuck up, it's not 'Shane Hollander is bad at hockey', it's 'gay men are bad at hockey.'"

"That's ridiculous. No one would ever say you are bad at hockey." Ilya's voice was so flat that Shane knew it wasn't meant as a joke.

Shane laughed despite himself, leaning into Ilya's hip. "It's not about you, and it's not about shame. You're perfect. I love being yours, I love people knowing I'm yours. But it's hard sometimes to be publicly affectionate, when I know it's just going to feed into the commentary and the weird prying. When someone is gonna film it and post it with 'hashtag Hollanov' and it'll get thirty thousand likes."

Shane looked up and continued. "Sometimes I feel like people don't even care about me as an athlete or a person anymore. It feels like to half the world, who I'm married to is the most

interesting thing about me. I'm sick of it."

It felt good to get all that off his chest, and also a little terrifying. He didn't want Ilya to doubt for a second that Shane was proud of him.

The bed dipped as Ilya sat down next to him, and then warm hands were pulling Shane into Ilya's side. Ilya spoke into Shane's hair. "Nobody thinks it is the most interesting thing about you. Not anyone with a brain, anyway." Ilya took one of his hands and squeezed gently. "Yes, we get a lot of attention and it is not fair. Yes, people ask stupid questions. Yes, we have to carry a bit more of the burden for a while with the pride promotions and things, but it is worth it. We are making things easier for the younger players."

Shane knew that was true. There were about ten active, out queer players in the NHL, and other than Shane and Ilya, they were all under thirty. Most were under twenty five.

Shane nodded and let out a breath, forcing his tightened shoulders to drop. "It's worth it. I know it's worth it. I guess I just get in my head sometimes. I start wondering if maybe being the 'gay one' is all I have left to give. Like maybe I'm not good enough anymore for my accomplishments to speak for themselves, so they have to start speculating about us instead."

"*Shane.*" Ilya's voice carried an edge of danger that caught Shane's attention. Had he said something to upset him?

When he looked up, Ilya's expression was one of gentle admonishment. "Have you forgotten what an absolute fucking superstar you are again? Do we need to go to the trophy room?"

Shane blushed. That stunt had been repeated three or four times over the course of their marriage, whenever Ilya felt like Shane's self doubt was getting a little too strong. The mental image of the last time came to Shane's mind in clear focus- Ilya on his knees in front of the leather armchair, Shane's silver Olympic medal bouncing against his chest as he bobbed his head on Shane's cock. All while Ilya's iPad, balanced carefully on the armrest, played a YouTube compilation of Shane's most impressive goals.

Shane dismissed the thought—that memory was not going to be useful right now. "No, we do not."

"You are sure?"

Shane nodded against Ilya's chest, wrapping his arms around him. "Yes, I'm sure."

Ilya ran one warm palm over the curve of Shane's back. "Alright. If you are certain." He paused. "You are the best, Hollander. Who you are married to or who you fuck has nothing to do with it. And we do not have to give them a single thing that we do not want to. They will say weird things and speculate, but let them. Their lives must be boring if that is so interesting to them." Ilya paused. "I think it is just a curiosity to people. We are the only pair of professional athletes in the same league to ever date. Publicly, anyway."

Shane mumbled into Ilya's shirt. "You seem very confident that you know what's going on in strangers' heads."

"I'm perceptive," Ilya said proudly.

Shane laughed.

The Swordsmen hadn't stood a chance.

Shane almost felt bad. They were an okay team. The players seemed nice. They didn't deserve to be absolutely eviscerated in a 6 - 0 shutout, where the opposing captain had gotten a hat trick against them. They definitely didn't deserve to watch the alternate captain make heart eyes at his husband after he scored his third goal.

The key word was *almost*. If the Swordsmen didn't want to be embarrassed like that, they'd have to get better at hockey. And any pity Shane might've felt was completely outweighed by how proud he was. Ilya was always a monster, but he'd been on fire tonight. Shane felt blessed just to be able to watch him.

The atmosphere in the locker room was electric. Typically, Shane and Ilya were fairly reserved in their affection when they were at work. Side hugs, chaste pecks, and nothing when they were actually playing. They weren't *ashamed* or anything, it was just more professional that way.

Tonight, Shane was standing in Ilya's stall, arms wrapped around his neck while Ilya tried his best to get his gear off.

"A hat trick, huh?" Shane kissed Ilya's cheek, relishing the scrape of stubble against his lips. "You absolutely deserve something special for that."

"I think I can give you your own hat trick," Ilya replied, voice low and dangerous. "Do you have three in you?"

"You're not the only one in this room with stamina," Shane whispered. He let Ilya go so he could actually get undressed. If he was honest with himself, also because he didn't want to end up on his knees in front of all their teammates.

Before Shane could make it back to his own stall, Wyatt Hayes had a hand on his shoulder.

"Hey, Bood and I are gonna hit the Strip with some of the Swordsmen. You and Roz should come!"

Shane shook his head with a quiet chuckle. "I don't think Rozanov is the person they want to see right now."

"Oh, they're not like that. They're cool," Wyatt said. "For some people, being enemies on the ice doesn't mean you can't get along off of it. You have some personal experience with that, right?"

"Funny of you to assume Ilya and I ever got along." Shane sat down on the bench to take off his shin pads.

Wyatt actually laughed, even though the joke wasn't that funny. He must've really wanted them to go. The least Shane could do was humor him, considering he'd been a fucking brick wall tonight.

"Who all is going?" Shane asked. He set the first pad aside.

"So far it's me, Bood, Dykstra, and Greene. And then Nadeau, Robinson, and Kolesnyk from the Swordsmen. We're trying to talk Barrett into coming. Also you or Roz, since if one of you says yes, you'll both go."

Shane considered the offer. Most of those players were within five years of him in age. That sweetened the pot considerably—he'd have no interest in going out with a bunch of kids. Really, though, he just wanted to go back to the hotel room and ride Ilya until his dick broke.

Yeah. A kind offer, but his mind was made up. He took off his second pad and stood. "Okay, first of all—there is zero chance in hell you talk Barrett into hitting the Strip with you," Shane said. "Second, thanks for the invite, but I think Ilya and I would rather—"

He was cut off by a very recognizable, very Russian-accented voice exclaiming loudly on the other side of the room. "Yes, we will go! Shane is going to be so funny, it will be great." Then a laugh that Shane had heard a million times. "You guys always have the best ideas. I want to get those fancy burgers."

Shane turned. Ilya wasn't facing him, but Bood was. He grinned at Shane smugly.

"Like I said, Hollander. We knew we only had to talk one of you into it. You're a package deal." With horror, Shane realized that Wyatt and Bood had split up intentionally.

Shane groaned. He couldn't tell Ilya "no". Not after how he'd played tonight. He turned his glare onto his goalie, who was currently one of his least favorite people on the planet. "Did you honestly think there was any chance *I'd* be the one to say yes?"

Wyatt shook his head. "Nope. But figured it would be rude not to try."

Shane scowled, finished undressing, and hit the showers.

Shane had the foresight to force Ilya to pull out cash from the ATM and confiscate all his debit cards. Ilya was generally responsible and they were very wealthy, but being a millionaire did not make blowing ten grand in Vegas an okay decision. Ilya could be impulsive (and a bit stupid) when he was drunk.

Everyone went back to the hotel to change with the agreement that they'd all meet up at the hotel bar at eleven to pregame a little. Shane was not looking forward to this. He'd only been dragged out clubbing about ten times total in his life. It was more fun now that he was married and there was no pressure to pick up, but he still failed to see the interest into going to some loud, hot, overstuffed building to get drunk and embarrass yourself.

Plus he hadn't packed clothes for it. He should've. He should've predicted Ilya would want to do this. They were in Las Vegas and he'd married the NHL's biggest playboy, of course he'd want to go party.

Shane decided he'd just have to wear his suit. Part of it, anyway. He ditched the jacket and the tie, unbuttoned his shirt to the middle of his chest, and rolled his sleeves to the elbow. It wasn't a terrible look, he decided. He grabbed a hair tie and pulled up half of his hair in a style he knew Ilya liked.

Then he wandered to the bathroom, where he could hear Ilya getting ready. He pushed the door ajar and nearly gasped.

Ilya looked way better than he had any right to, considering the relatively short notice. He was in dark pants and a blue top that was so thin it was nearly transparent—Shane could just barely make

out the shadows of the contours of his body underneath. The contrast between it and the crucifix made the blue seem richer and the gold seem brighter. His hair was perfect and soft and defined—he must've ran product through it after showering at the arena. He had applied his cologne.

There was blood in the water, and Ilya could smell it. He leaned over Shane, resting his forearms against the door frame. His grin was undeniably smug. "Like what you see?"

"Fuck yes," Shane said. He was too horny for teasing. "I am so fucking mad we have to go out tonight. I want to spend the next six hours on my knees for you."

Ilya's jaw tightened, as if resisting that proposal took real effort on his part. "Good things come to those who wait, yes?"

"I guess," Shane huffed.

"You do not look terrible yourself. I like the little bit of chest showing. And I have seen girls on TikTok talk about how good rolled up sleeves look, but I did not understand. Now I do. Very handsome."

Shane felt the heat on his cheeks before he saw his face pinken in the mirror. "Well, I'm glad I could help you understand yourself better."

Without warning, Ilya slid one hand down Shane's back, pulling their hips flush. Then he kissed him, mouth moving so agonizingly slow that Shane wanted to bite him. Every nerve in his body felt raw and exposed, heat crackling just under his skin. Ilya deepened the kiss as Shane slid his palms over his torso. His hands ending up resting on Ilya's pecs. Then Ilya shoved a thigh between his legs, and *fuck*, Shane was dead to the world. He ground against it lazily while they kissed. It was different than they were used to—usually Shane would be pressed against a wall by this point—but it got the job done.

This had to stop. With a quiet gasp, Shane forced himself out of Ilya's grip. He took a step back.

Ilya frowned at him, lips red and glistening. "What?" He sounded like his favorite toy had been taken away.

"If you keep doing that," Shane explained, "we won't make it to the Strip."

Ilya's lips turned up, that crooked grin that drove Shane wild. "Fucking—fix your face," Shane said. "That's not helping. You *know* that's not helping."

Ilya laughed and looked down, which only sharpened the masculine lines of his face. "Is not my fault that me existing turns you into a desperate, horny little slut, Hollander."

God fucking save him, why did that string of words coming out of Ilya's mouth turn him on even more? Shane hated him. He hated him so much, right then. He also wanted Ilya to throw him on the bed and rip him apart.

"Just—hurry the fuck up. It's ten-thirty." Shane stormed off and sat at the desk while waiting for Ilya to get dressed, forcing his dick to calm down through pure willpower.

It only half-worked.

The Strip was exactly what Shane expected. Packed with drunk people, bright, noisy, and Ilya's natural environment. Despite it only being ten degrees, every woman Shane laid eyes on was tottering in unnaturally high heels and showing an obscene amount of skin.

It ended up being an eleven-person group. Seven Centaurs and four Swordsmen. Someone had somehow tricked Barrett into coming, but Shane was glad to see him. They could be boring together while the rest of the group got wasted.

At least they weren't walking along it anymore. That had sucked. There were way too many people. Now they were in line for some high-end club called Reign. Supposedly one of the Swordsmen—Nadeau, he thought—knew the promoter and could get them a table. Shane was pretty sure they could get a table anywhere by virtue of being eleven millionaire professional athletes, but it was cute to watch the kid argue up front with the bouncer. He was by far the youngest in the group, barely twenty-two, and he hadn't quite realized that being in the NHL came with privileges.

The waiting in line wasn't so bad, though. The thumping music from inside was muffled. The air was cool. Ilya had one arm wrapped around his waist, Shane leaned into his side. He almost hoped that the line took forever so they could just stay like this.

When two girls walked by in nothing but tiny jean shorts, cowboy boots and pasties, Shane couldn't begrudge Ilya openly taking a second glance. It had caught *his* attention, and he didn't even swing that way.

"This place is fucking insane," Shane said.

"Is Vegas," Ilya replied.

Shane watched as a tall woman with an impossibly smooth ponytail, a pencil skirt, and stiletto heels came outside of the club. Was she the promoter? No, the manager, if the way she was talking to the bouncer was any indication. She and Nadeau were walking back to the group now.

"I am so sorry that you had to wait," the woman said. "My bouncer—he's new. He doesn't know any better." She looked about as panicked as any club manager who'd made a group of eleven NHL players wait in the cold would.

Somehow, Ilya became the leader of their little group. "Is fine," he said. "We are not as special as you think." He was smiling that charming smile and the woman seemed calmer. She led them inside, pushing past couples grinding on each other and drunk girls dancing, and then they had a table. A cocktail waitress brought a bottle of some high-end tequila as an apology.

One side of the table had chairs, the other was a booth. Ilya sat at the edge of the booth. Shane, feeling braver than usual and already a little drunk from the shots they'd had at the hotel, chose to splay himself in Ilya's lap instead of sitting beside him.

Ilya's eyes went wide in pleased surprise. He wrapped his arm around Shane's waist, the other supporting the back of his thigh.

"Hello," Ilya said.

"Hello," Shane replied. "You better keep me drinking if you want me to stay this friendly."

Ilya did, in fact, keep him drinking. Perhaps it was their conversation the other night, or maybe it was the alcohol, but Shane was being much more permissive than usual.

When the whole group got up to dance and Ilya held Shane by his hips the entire time, he allowed it. When Ilya wanted to kiss him, right there on the dance floor, he allowed it. When Ilya begged Shane to sit in his lap again when they went back to their table, he allowed it.

When Ilya pressed Shane against a wall and stuck his tongue down his throat, he *more* than allowed that. In between breathless kisses, Shane informed Ilya that he had to take him home, like, *right now* or Shane was going to end up doing something he'd regret in a public bathroom.

Thankfully, by that time the players who'd come out to drink were drunk, and the ones who'd come out to pull had pulled. Successful night on the Strip, let's fucking leave. The club manager helpfully ordered them two black cabs and they split into groups. Shane and Ilya's group ended up being comprised entirely of the boring married ones, except Greene. Greene (being single and thus free to hook up with whomever he pleased) had some pretty blonde girl hanging off of him. Shane leaned up to whisper in Ilya's ear.

"That girl is all over him. Is she okay?" Shane giggled, putting his arms around Ilya's neck, letting Ilya take his weight.

Ilya cracked up, which confused Shane, because he didn't think it was that funny.

"You and that girl? You look exactly the same as each other right now," Ilya explained.

It was then that Shane saw himself through Ilya's eyes—his arms wrapped around Ilya, his palms pressed against the muscular planes of his body, his head draped against Ilya's chest. Ilya's arm tightly around his waist to keep him up, the same as Greene and the girl.

With a scowl, Shane straightened himself up and let go of his husband. Ilya laughed even harder.

Shane felt better once he was in the car. He was so forgiving he even allowed Ilya to rub the inside of his thigh. They'd be back in the hotel soon and he'd have his husband inside him. He was fucking dying for it. He leaned over to tell Ilya as much, but an interruption startled him away.

"Hey, Rozanov, wait!" It was Bood. "You said you wanted In-N-Out, right?"

Ilya subtly ran his fingers over Shane's clothed cock, hiding the motion from the rest of the car by leaning forward. "Oh, yeah! I did want In-N-Out. Are they open this late?"

"The one by the Flamingo is. You were a fucking rockstar tonight, dude. You deserve a burger."

Ilya grinned. "Let's fucking go."

To Shane's dismay, the cab rerouted. He wasn't sure who was more dejected—himself or the Swordsmen in the car, who'd just realized they had to watch the opposing team's captain eat his drunken victory dinner.

Whatever attraction Shane had once felt towards Ilya, it should've died upon watching him demolish a double cheeseburger, strawberry milkshake, and an order of something called "animal style fries" in less than twenty minutes. It would have, he was sure of it, had Ilya not still been rubbing his dick under the goddamn table with his free hand.

Shane took a bite of his own fries, the only thing he'd ordered. They were plain. "How do you eat that shit?"

Ilya shrugged. "I've put worse things in my mouth." He took a bite and palmed Shane again.

Fuck him. Fuck him for being so attractive and so snarky. Shane was five seconds from bending over the table.

When they finally, *finally* got back to the hotel, Shane was not into playing games. He openly made out with Ilya in the glass elevator, not caring if someone from the ground took a picture. He didn't even care that he could taste the remnants of the mustard from Ilya's burger as they kissed. He needed this, *bad*. It wasn't from the alcohol—the food and the time had sobered him up most of the way.

No, this desperation was all him.

Ilya (bless him, bless him for being so attractive and so strong) got the message. Within three seconds of the room door closing, Shane was pressed up against it, one of Ilya's hands on his shoulder, the other picking up his thigh and hooking his leg around Ilya's hip.

They kissed like that for a while, messy and deep and hot, Shane's hands tugging at Ilya's hair, but it wasn't enough. It was so good, but it wasn't enough.

Shane tilted his head back to break the kiss. There was a gentle "thunk" as it hit the door.

"Already out of breath?" Ilya teased.

"Shut the fuck up and sit on the edge of the bed. I need your cock in my mouth."

Ilya seemed slightly bewildered, but only for a moment, and then he obeyed. At some point in the last few years, Shane had come to realize that even though Ilya loved to fuck him and manhandle, he also liked to be told what to do. They experimented with that from time to time.

Not tonight, though. Absolutely not.

Shane got on his knees in front of Ilya. He could've taken his time, but he didn't want to. His fingers were flying to undo the buckle of Ilya's belt, which he pulled off and tossed to the other side of the room as soon as it was physically possible. He undid the button of Ilya's pants, then the fly, then slid them down Ilya's hips rather roughly.

Ilya leaned back a little, putting his palms behind him on the mattress to support the weight of his upper body. "You are in quite a rush."

Shane glared at him. Ilya's smile was warm, his hazel eyes were hazy and soft. He was beautiful. Shane hated him again.

"I told you an *hour and a half* ago that I needed to get back here, Ilya."

"And yet you managed to make it just fine."

"You palmed me in the car," Shane said as he slid Ilya's underwear down his hips. As sassy as Ilya could be, his cock always betrayed his true feelings on the matter—and right now it was hard and ruddy, begging for Shane's attention.

"And in the restaurant," Ilya added helpfully. "You were very—"

Shane had no interest in letting Ilya finish his sentence, so he put his mouth around Ilya instead. Ilya stopped talking and gasped. Shane liked that sound much better.

Shane adored this. He loved being on his knees for Ilya. He loved feeling Ilya's hands pulling his hair, and feeling the little half-aborted rolls of his hips as he got close. He loved letting Ilya fuck his mouth. He wasn't even sure how he wanted it right then, he just knew that he *did*.

Right. Can't just sit there with cock in his mouth. Shane wrapped his hand around it and started to stroke, moving his head up and down while he worked his throat open. He came off and gave one long lick from base to tip. It took a while for him to get in a headspace where he could relax his gag reflex, and Ilya knew that, so there was no rushing. He felt Ilya's hand in his hair, which prompted him to look up and meet his eyes as he opened his mouth again.

Ilya had the same expression he seemingly always had when he watched Shane do this for him, which was a sort of detached wonder. Almost like he still couldn't believe who was down there between his legs. Down there, between his legs, sucking him off like it was the most enjoyable thing he'd ever do. Like he was getting off on it more than Ilya was.

Which was probably true. Shane could spend an entire day like this, he was pretty sure.

Shane needed to be touched so bad. He found himself moving his hips in the air while his throat worked his husband's cock, body trying to find friction against something, *anything*, and coming up empty. Fuck, he was probably leaking. He was so goddamn horny he couldn't think straight.

Shane watched hazel eyes flit below his face and realized Ilya must've noticed.

"That desperate?" Ilya teased with a grin. "Here."

Shane wasn't sure what had changed, and then he realized. Ilya had straightened his leg and slid it beneath Shane's thighs.

Ilya was *offering his leg* for Shane to grind against. It *should've* pissed him off. He *should've* found it degrading.

Instead, Shane whined in pure appreciation. Then he rolled his hips against Ilya's shin and pushed Ilya's cock all the way down his throat.

Shane wasn't sure how it happened. It was just supposed to be mindless grinding to take the edge off until Ilya could take care of him properly. But then he found a good angle, and Ilya was fucking up into his throat, and Shane could practically feel his heartbeat in his cock. It felt so good, just rubbing against Ilya like that.

He didn't realize he was coming until it was too late. Shane sunk his fingers into the meat of Ilya's thighs and tried not to make any obvious noises. It was a shockingly powerful orgasm, considering the stimulus that had caused it, but then again he'd been teased all fucking night.

Shane moaned low around Ilya's cock and shut his eyes. He kept rolling his hips, albeit a little slower as he rode out the aftershocks. He couldn't stop entirely, he knew, or else Ilya would definitely realize what had happened.

It didn't take long after that. Ilya was moaning above him and swearing in Russian and Shane had put on a show. He felt Ilya's hips stutter before he heard him. "Fuck, Shane, I'm—"

Ilya had started too late to finish his warning properly, but Shane didn't mind. He let Ilya come in his mouth, then carefully slid off of him. On a particularly slutty whim, Shane opened his mouth carefully and let Ilya see the white liquid on his tongue before he swallowed. All while keeping eye contact, of course.

Ilya was looking down at him like he'd just been offered a golden fucking ticket. Shane tucked that information away for later. Then he jolted as Ilya hooked his arms under Shane's armpits and pulled him up from his kneeling position. He almost stumbled forward onto the bed, caught off balance, but managed to straddle Ilya instead. He put his arms on Ilya's shoulders as they made out and Ilya unbuttoned his shirt, and for a moment he thought his secret was safe.

"Lay back on the bed," Ilya ordered. "I'm going to suck you until you cannot fucking move, Hollander."

Shane turned red. Right. Of course Ilya would want to reciprocate. That was how their relationship had worked for all fifteen years of its existence. Why did he not consider that?

"That, uhm. That won't be necessary."

Ilya gave him an odd look, almost like he was worried, and then he saw the wet spot on Shane's pants and it clicked.

Shane wished he'd worn a black suit instead of a gray one.

"Oh my god. Shane. Did you come in your pants?"

Shane turned to get up. "If you're going to make fun of me for it, I'll fucking leave."

Ilya had his arms wrapped around Shane's midsection before he could take the first step. "Oh, hush. Is just teasing. You'd do the same thing if it were me."

Shane couldn't argue with that, because he absolutely would.

Even though they weren't going to fuck, Ilya was as attentive as always. He laid Shane back on the bed and kissed him breathless. He undressed him with nimble fingers. He put the dirty laundry in the drawstring bag Shane kept in his suitcase for that express purpose. Then he wiped the cum residue off of Shane's dick, balls and thighs with a warm washcloth. Once that process was complete, he put fresh underwear on Shane and started getting himself ready for bed. Shane got comfy and waited.

When Ilya came back a few minutes later, he was just in his joggers. He lowered himself over Shane carefully and kissed his nose.

Ilya was leaning over him, the crucifix hanging in the space between them. Were Shane to stretch his neck up, he could've bitten it.

Ilya was chewing on the inside of his cheek- Shane could tell from how it looked on the outside. Nervousness was a strange feeling on Ilya, and Shane didn't like it.

"What?" Shane asked, trailing his hand over Ilya's cheek.

Ilya released it. "Did you mean what you said at the hotel in Tampa?"

"What did I say?"

"You said you maybe wanted to retire."

Oh. This was a serious conversation. Shane sat up a little, propping himself up on his elbows. He was still prone under Ilya.

"Yeah," Shane whispered. "I meant it."

"Why?"

"I told you why."

"Tell me again," Ilya said.

Shane took a deep breath, trying to sort out the jumble of thoughts that led to 'maybe it's time to call it a day'.

"I love hockey, but it has to end someday. I'd rather do that while I'm at a high point than be forced to quit by age or injury. I've done everything with my career that I ever possibly could've set out to do."

Ilya smiled. "Best of a generation, some might say."

Shane shook his head. "One of two."

"Keep talking."

Shane reached up and fidgeted with the crucifix. "It'll be a hard transition. I know it will. I know I'll probably go a little insane for the first season or two that I'm not playing. But it has to happen eventually, and I feel ready for it. I want to start the next chapter of my life, Ilya. And I want us to start a family soon. We can't do that when we're both still on the road, that wouldn't be fair to them."

Ilya nodded. They'd already agreed on that point, years before. They didn't want their kids raised by grandparents and nannies. He put a hand on Shane's chest, thumb tracing his collarbone.

Ilya's voice was tentative when he spoke. "Would you want me to retire, too?"

Shane met his eyes. "I want you to do what *you* want to do. If you think you're ready and you want to, then yeah. If you want to keep playing, you should. I certainly won't mind. I'll FaceTime you every night when you're away. I'll go to all the home games and sit in the WAG box to cheer you on with our baby in my lap."

There was a valiant effort from Ilya to not let his face show how much he liked that idea, but he failed. Shane could see it clear as day. He immediately decided to keep pressing there.

Shane ran his hand through Ilya's hair while he began to think out loud about what the future could look like. "I'll wear your jersey, obviously. I'll get a custom one made for the baby. It'll be 81, with the captain's 'C' on the chest and everything, but instead of 'Rozanov' it'll say 'Daddy'. Or maybe 'Papochka'." He nodded. "Yeah, that's even better."

Ilya laughed, hair falling in a poof as he tipped his head onto Shane's chest. "You know just what to say to make my knees weak, Hollander."

"You're a gigantic sap," Shane said. "Of course the thought of your husband and child wearing your name makes you melt."

"I am not a sap," Ilya argued, face still pressed into Shane's chest.

"You totally are. It's one of my favorite things about you."

Ilya, for once, had no rebuttal. Shane could just barely see that his cheeks were pink. He relished it, cradling Ilya's head in his hands.

"I know you're worried because you think this is about me not being able to handle the commentary or whatever. It's not. I love hockey way too much to let idiots like Coleman or the press or people on the internet keep me from playing. It's just that as much as I love hockey, I love the thought of what comes next even more. Hockey has always been 'for now'. You..."

Shane punctuated the pause by gently tipping Ilya's face up. His eyes were wide and raw, face still flushed.

"You're forever, Ilya."

Ilya blinked once slowly, expression ripe with disbelief, then leaned up and closed the gap between them. The kiss was soft, Ilya's hand cupping Shane's face, and Shane felt like he could've just melted into a puddle right there. *Here lies Shane Hollander. He died doing what he loved.*

When Ilya pulled back, it was so slight that their lips brushed as he spoke. "You are my forever, too. You always have been."

Shane scrunched his face in suspicion, heart cracked open from the sweetness of it all. "Always? From World Juniors? When you were a total dick to me?"

Ilya laughed. "Yes, from that horrible rink in Regina. I just didn't know it at the time. My heart knew, I think. My head had to catch up." He seemed almost embarrassed, and Shane supposed it was a vulnerable thing to lay out his emotions so plainly.

"Well." Shane smiled. "I was definitely yours then, too. Took us a while to figure it out, but..." He pushed Ilya's hair back. "Of course I wanted you. You were my first love. You know that, right? I've never had eyes for anyone else."

Ilya kissed his jawline. "You were mine, too." The statement sounded ridiculous on its surface, but Shane knew it was true. In all of Ilya's years of drifting from partner to partner, hookup to hookup, he'd never felt *this* for anyone but Shane.

Shane wrapped one of Ilya's curls around his pointer finger. "I think we have this weird high-school-sweethearts-ness to us. Like—we met when we were *seventeen*. Do you ever randomly think about that? It feels like we were older."

"We didn't start dating for much longer," Ilya pointed out.

"Yeah, but I was in love with you the whole time," Shane said on a laugh. "We just established that. Were you listening?"

Ilya rolled his eyes in a very *Shane* gesture before getting off of him. Shane grabbed his wrist. He gasped in true panic. "Where are you going? Don't leave."

Ilya offered a wry smile in response. "Fucking relax, Hollander. I am getting us some water. You will have me back in ten seconds."

Shane narrowed his eyes, flicked the hand he had gripped, then let Ilya free. He settled down in the hotel bed, getting comfy under the blanket, and for a moment he wondered when he'd become so soft.

The water was ice-cold when Ilya returned. Shane wasn't sure how Ilya had pulled that off, but it felt good. He'd been a bit rough on his throat earlier.

"How sure are you?" Ilya asked as he settled into bed beside him.

Shane set the glass on the nightstand. "About what?"

"Retirement." Ilya wrapped his arm around Shane, pulling him in until they were pressed chest to back.

Shane settled his body against Ilya's and considered the question before he answered. "I think... I think I'm pretty sure about it. I think we should start talking to adoption agencies soon. I need a little while to sit on the decision, too. But if I still feel this way in April or so, we should notify management. Maybe have a press conference." Shane paused for a second, then continued in a blurt. "We should tell my parents that I'm thinking about it, like, *now*. I don't want to catch them off guard. They'll be devastated."

Ilya nuzzled his hair. "They will not be devastated. They will be a little sad at first, but they will also understand that you are done and will be excited for grandchildren," he said. "Were you thinking after this season?"

Shane nodded.

"Well then." Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's temple. "You will retire. And we will adopt a baby."

Shane nodded.

"And I will send you away with another cup win before you go."

Shane laughed, but he nodded.

"And when I retire too, in about fifteen years—"

"Absolutely not. You get five more max, or else your husband will be very pissed off at you. Besides, with the way your hip has been, I think you'll be tapping out within three."

The grip around Shane's waist tightened. Ilya ignored the comment about his (definitely damaged) hip. "Five? Can we compromise at ten?"

"You know Scott Hunter was the age we are now when you were making fun of him for being a grandpa?"

Shane couldn't see Ilya's face, but he was sure it was scrunched up with distaste. "Maybe I should retire after all. Would hate to be a hypocrite."

Shane smiled. "Yeah, but you're better than Hunter was."

"You flatter me," Ilya said.

"Of course I do. You're the second-best player in the NHL."

Ilya snorted.

Shane realized something, then rolled over in Ilya's grip so they were facing each other. "You're gonna break all my records, you know."

There was no doubt in his voice. If Shane retired, Ilya *would* break most of his records. He currently had a lead on Ilya in most of their stats—good stats required a good team, and Ilya had spent a long time without one—but that lead had never been large, and it had shrunk considerably over the last few years. Ilya had even managed to overtake him in some categories.

To people who didn't really watch hockey, Shane was seen as the better player. He'd spent his entire career on dynasty teams while Ilya built the Centaurs from the ground up. To actual hockey fans, it might've been easy to come to the same conclusion just from Shane's stats. But hockey wasn't just about numbers, so in reality, there was no real consensus on whether Ilya Rozanov or Shane Hollander was the superior center. On paper, though, it was Shane. Shane liked it that way. That was part of why retirement was scary—without Shane adding to his own stats, Ilya would overtake him. At least numerically. And with one of the edges Shane had on Ilya gone, maybe...

Maybe the fans would finally decide who was best. Maybe it wouldn't be Shane.

Ilya's grin was wicked. "Does that mean I will finally be considered the strongest player in the 2009 draft class?"

"Never," Shane said. "One of two, remember?"

Ilya kissed his nose. "Always. Can't get away from you," he teased.

"Like you'd want to. You get off on it. It's you and me, together at the top and everyone else ten miles below. You like it that way." It was a very arrogant thing to say, coming from Shane. Ilya had rubbed off on him.

"I do," Ilya admitted. "I like watching you win. Is like—see the best one out there? The one who just got a breakaway and scored with the most beautiful snap shot you have ever seen? That one is mine."

Shane nuzzled Ilya's chest. He could've talked for hours, but the satisfaction of his orgasm and the heaviness of the liquor was making him sleepy. "The feeling is mutual."

He distantly felt Ilya's hand combing through his hair. "Tired?"

"Very," Shane mumbled.

"Okay. Let's sleep." Ilya reached over to the bedside table, turning off the lamp, and then they were plunged into wonderful, blessed darkness. Ilya settled back down next to Shane, who immediately

nuzzled his chest again.

Talking about Regina had made Shane remember all the places this could've gone wrong. All the times he'd meant to call this thing off and lost his nerve, all the times Ilya had done the same. All the moments they nearly drifted apart, months spent without a text, meetup, or word.

But here they were. Married and snuggling in a hotel bed. Every breath Shane took was affected with the sharp, addicting scent of his husband's cologne. The ending felt like fate, but Shane knew that it wasn't. They had fought desperately for every scrap of happiness in their life. They'd *earned* this.

Ilya's hand was smoothing over Shane's back. It was impossible to be anything but incandescently happy in that moment. Shane allowed the gentle touches to soothe him, and before he realized it, he was asleep.

Chapter End Notes

So. This is (as of publication) the longest oneshot in this fandom by several thousand words. I know I probably should've broken it up into two chapters, or maybe even three, but I just couldn't find a natural breaking point. It was written as a oneshot and lord help it, it shall be read as one. I know I probably scared half my readers off because these longer chapters are a pain in the ass to read, but oh well.

EDIT: I have been beaten on oneshot word count. When I posted this, there were like 300 fics in the tag. I never could've foreseen this growth lmao.

The twitter account lipreading Shane/Coleman's conversation was inspired by @tismejackieg on TikTok, so check her out :)

finally that tooth is def somewhere in the trophy room.

Thank you so much for reading! Every single kudos and comment is so so very appreciated :)

SOCIAL MEDIA:

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[Twitter](#)

[Bluesky](#) (not active, but I check my DMs every now and then)

Chapter 2: Art!

Chapter Notes

This art has absolutely captured my soul. It's stunning and depicts their moment on the beach SO WELL. Every time I see it I want to scream (in a good way!)

Thank you to both [cecikiwi](#) for creating it and [lydiablackblade](#) for commissioning it :)



Art by cecikiwi

[Tumblr](#)

Commissioned by [lydiablackblade](#).

End Notes

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Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!