A Lily by Any Other Name

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A Lily by Any Other Name

by V_L2_3

Summary

Shane took a long sip of his ginger ale. “Lily isn’t… I mean… she’s not-”

“She’s not a she, is she?”

Shane shook his head. “No. She’s a he.”

Or: Shane decides to come out to Hayden after breaking up with Rose, and Hayden is determined to find out who Lily is.

Chapter 1

It was a few days after Shane had ended things with Rose that he decided to sit Hayden down. The season was over, and with the upcoming all-stars he had been thinking a lot about his identity and priorities.

Rose had known he was gay. Sure, they had been dating and Shane's inability to perform in the bedroom was a huge factor in her figuring that out, but he knew he couldn't hide it much longer, especially not from his best friend.

They met at a restaurant. Not a particularly fancy one, and one far enough away from the arena that it wasn't likely they'd be spotted by any die-hards. Shane got there first, ordering a house salad with no croutons and a ginger ale while he waited for Hayden to show.

His food hadn't arrived yet when his friend walked through the door. He had a hat on, as did Shane, and waited until he was at the table before greeting him.

"Dude!" He whisper-yelled, patting Shane on the back. "Long time no see!"

Shane bobbed his head, slightly ashamed for his lack of communication over the past couple of weeks. He hadn't seen Hayden since their last team meeting before breaking for the summer, and he felt bad. "Sorry, been busy."

"I bet." Hayden grabbed the menu and ordered a burger and beer as Shane sipped on his ginger ale. "How's Rose?"

"Good, good." Shane fiddled with the string of his hoodie before deciding to just bite the bullet. "We, uh, we broke up."

"Oh. Sorry to hear that." Hayden sounded like he meant it. Shane knew that he had really liked Rose, even though they had only met a handful of times.

“It’s okay.”

“Did something happen?”

Shane took a breath. “That’s actually why I wanted to talk to you.”

Hayden went slightly pale. “She’s not pregnant, is she?”

“Oh god, no!”

“Thank fuck.”

“No, we just weren’t… compatible.”

“Compatible?” Hayden rose a brow. “You weren’t compatible with Rose fucking Landry? Dude, I’m married and I’d be compatible with her!”

Shane hissed and looked around as Hayden’s voice grew. There was only one other table and they were on the other side of the restaurant, but voices, specifically Hayden’s, carried. “It had nothing to do with her.”

“Right. It’s not you, it’s me?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“So… what? What happened?”

Hayden was his best friend. He had known him for years. And yet the thought of revealing this secret, this secret that he hadn't even admitted to himself until days ago, terrified him more than he thought was possible.

"I need…" Shane started then cut himself off. He hadn't actually made a plan of how he was going to tell Hayden, having been more worried about the prospect itself than the execution. "I need you to know that I'm still me."

Hayden leant back in his chair. "Okay, now I'm scared. Are you dying or something?"

"No. I just… You're my best friend, and I don't want to do or say anything that would jeopardize that."

Hayden's face softened at that. "Shane, buddy, you're my best friend too. You can tell me anything."

Shane felt tears starting to well up in his eyes, the similarity between this conversation and the one he had with Rose not overlooked. "I, uh…" he steeled himself. "I'm gay."

There was a moment of silence, then Hayden repeated, "gay?"

Shane nodded.

"Like… men gay?"

"Is there any other kind?"

"But you were dating Rose."

“And we broke up.”

“Because you’re gay.”

“Because I’m gay.”

Hayden took a swig of his beer. “Oh-kayyy, uhhh….”

“Sorry. Maybe I shouldn’t have told you.”

“No! No.” Hayden looked at him with wide eyes and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. “Sorry. I’m just surprised, is all. So Rose was, what, your beard?”

Shane shrugged. “Not really. She didn’t know, if that’s what you mean. We had dinner the other night and she asked me if I was.”

“She asked you?”

“Yeah.”

“Dude.” Hayden covered his mouth, obviously trying to stifle a laugh. “Your girlfriend came out for you?”

Shane laughed at that. The concept was pretty comical, even if it hadn’t felt so at the time. “Yeah. She, uh, told me. That I was gay.”

Hayden smiled widely. “That’s hilarious.”

“I guess it is.”

They chuckled together for a bit, then their food arrived. Shane got a second ginger ale and began picking around his salad, watching with thinly veiled jealousy as Hayden took a chomp out of his massive burger.

Not paying any mind to the stream of grease running down his chin, Hayden said, “so it was mutual?”

“Yeah. We’re friends.”

“That’s good. She’s fun.”

Shane agreed. He truly did like spending time with Rose, even if he hadn’t enjoyed the romantic elements of dating her. She was a breath of fresh air from the hyper-masculinity that followed him throughout the NHL.

“What made her figure it out?” Hayden had moved onto his fries, dipping them in the mound of ketchup he had squirted on his plate. “If you don’t mind me asking.”

“It’s awkward.”

Hayden looked at him. “More or less awkward than telling me you’re gay?”

“More. Definitely more.”

He nodded knowingly. “Sex stuff.”

Shane made a face but didn't deny it, earning himself a smug grin from the other man. "Fuck off."

Hayden raised his glass in a mock salute, then took another swig. "So she found out through sex stuff. How long have you known?"

Although Shane was still reeling from his friend determining that he hadn't been able to get it up with Rose 'fucking' Landry (it was true, but hey!), the question took him by surprise. He hadn't expected Hayden to want to know, or to care enough to ask. "A while, I guess? I mean, I've known for a long time now that I like guys, but it wasn't really until Rose pointed it out that I realized I didn't like girls."

There was a beat of silence as Hayden chewed thoughtfully. Shane hadn't actually taken a single bite of his salad, but he decided it could wait. He wasn't really that hungry anymore anyways.

"What about Lily?" It came out quietly, almost a whisper, Hayden's eyes trained on his half-finished burger. "I thought maybe that was serious. It was at the very least consistent."

Shane took a long sip of his ginger ale. "Lily isn't… I mean… she's not-"

"She's not a she, is she?"

Shane shook his head. "No. She's a he."

"Wow." Hayden looked dumbfounded. "You've been texting her- him for what, seven years?"

"Give or take."

"So it's serious?"

Shane tried not to look as hurt as he probably did, but Hayden's face told him that he didn't succeed.

"Sorry, man."

"It's okay. It's… complicated, I guess."

"I get it. I mean, I don't. But I do?" Hayden shook his head at himself. "You know what I mean. I'm here for you, bud. No matter what. You being gay doesn't change that."

"Thank you, Hayden." He meant it, truly. He had been so scared of telling him about this secret, even more so than when he thought about telling his parents. He couldn't imagine doing what he did without the other player by his side.

"And hey!" Hayden's face brightened. "You'll be in beautiful Tampa, Florida in just a couple of weeks, man! There have got to be some hot dudes down there."

Shane felt his face flush again. He was sure that there would be some hot dudes there, but there was only one that came to mind…. "Uh, yeah. Maybe."

"I expect details when you get back."

So now that was two people who expected him to come back from the all-stars with a boyfriend, or at the very least some interesting hook-up stories. Rose had texted him that very morning with her own demand.

"Yes, okay. Details. Sure."

Hayden grinned and got back to his burger. Shane finally began eating his salad, wishing retrospectively that he had gotten croutons.

Then next time Hayden opened his mouth, Shane half-expected more questions about his sexuality to come out, but instead he began rambling about hockey. Like they always did.

Shane was happy that he had friends, two now, that knew and accepted him. He should have been happier, but there was still an ache in his heart that he knew only one person could heal.

Ilya Rozanov.

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Shane came back from the all-stars a different man.

JJ had noticed before Hayden had, actually. The man came up to him one day after practice and, in a hushed voice, asked if Shane was on drugs.

It seemed that way.

Shane had been… smiley, for lack of a better word. On top of the deep Florida tan that he now sported, it looked like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. Hayden, being the horrible person he was, hadn't even noticed his best friend had been acting gloomy until he was happy again.

Hayden wondered if it was partially because Shane had come out to him, but in the few weeks in between that day at the restaurant and when he left for Tampa nothing really had changed. It was only after the all-stars that he started acting differently.

So what had happened?

He got his answer when, one day after a particularly rough practice, he noticed Shane smiling down at his phone in the locker room. He hadn't even taken his left glove off yet and was typing only with his exposed right hand. Hayden, who was openly and unapologetically a snoop, glanced down at the screen and caught the name of who he was texting right as Shane noticed and flipped his phone over.

Hayden grinned widely, looking at Shane with his deer-in-headlights eyes. "Lily?"

"Shut up."

"You two back together or something?"

"Seriously, Hayden, fuck off."

Ah, but Hayden seriously did not fuck off. "You are! Oh my god, did you tell him that you broke up with Rose?" He made sure his voice was hushed, even though they were the only two people there.

Shane clenched his jaw and looked around at the empty room. "Yeah. I told him."

"Congrats, dude!" Hayden patted him on the back good-naturedly. "You deserve it."

"Thanks, asshole."

"Hey, I mean it! You seem happier."

Shane paused. "I do?"

“Yeah, man. Even JJ’s noticed.”

Hayden saw the blush creep onto Shane’s cheeks and flicked him on the padded arm. “You’re in loooove.”

“Am not!”

“Are too!”

Shane was about to retort back, likely with the same thing, when his phone buzzed again.

Hayden leant against his locker, eyes raised as he glanced towards Shane’s overturned phone. “God, you’re smitten.”

Shane glared at him as he read his newest message from his mystery lover. Hayden didn’t say anything about the way he licked his lips before replacing his phone back on his shelf.

“So… when do I get to meet this Lily-guy?”

“Never.”

Hayden pouted. “Never?”

“Nope.”

“C’mon! You’re my friend!”

“I won’t be if you keep this up.”

“We play in Boston in, what, a week? I can meet him then!”

“No.”

Hayden rolled his eyes. “Has Rose met him?”

“No one has met him.” Shane finally took his padding off, revealing the black underclothes he always wore. “And no one will.”

“Jesus, you meet all of our significant others.”

“He’s not-” Shane caught himself. “He’s not my significant other.”

“But he’s significant to you, is he not?”

“I mean… yeah, but-”

“But what? Seriously, dude. I promise I’ll be supportive. You’ve been seeing this guy for almost a decade! That’s longer than Jackie and I have even known each other, and we have three kids!” He softened his voice. “If you’re really not comfortable with it, that’s fine. But I feel like I’ve only just gotten to really know my best friend.”

“You know me.”

“I just found out that you’re gay.”

“I just found out I’m gay.”

“Still.”

Shane looked at him with an indescribable emotion in his eyes. “I’m sorry. I just can’t. It’s not… He’s not… It has nothing to do with you. Seriously. It’s complicated.”

Hayden couldn’t help but feel hurt, but he also knew he needed to be a supportive friend. “Okay. Well know that I would never judge you.”

Shane huffed, and Hayden thought for a moment that there was a glint of something in his face, but then it disappeared. “Thanks. I appreciate it.”

That night, as Hayden got his kids ready for bed, he thought about Shane’s Boston boy. There was no way, absolutely none, than a ray of sunshine like Shane Hollander could be in a relationship with someone for that long without it meaning something to him.

So maybe, just maybe, if he needed a little push to realize he was gay, he needed a little push to realize he was in love.

And Hayden knew just the person to reach out to for help.

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Rose had given Hayden Pike her contact information the first time they met. He was a fan, as he freely admitted to her face, but Shane assured her he was harmless. And, being her boyfriend’s best friend, she thought it wouldn’t hurt if they were able to reach one another in an emergency.

But Shane hadn’t been Rose’s boyfriend for over two months, so why Hayden wanted to meet with her now, she didn’t know.

But she met with him anyway. It worked out best for them and their schedules to connect in New York, him the night before their game with the Admirals and her before she flew back to LA after shooting some scenes in the city.

She had him choose the restaurant, someplace low-key. She had no idea what she was walking into and was slightly surprised to see him sitting at a table alone.

“Uh… hi,” she said awkwardly as she walked up to him.

He smiled warmly, standing up to pull out a chair. “Hi Rose. Sorry I haven’t reached out in a while, how are you?”

“I’m good, thanks. You?”

“Good, yeah. Same.”

Rose nodded. “So… why did you want to speak with me?”

Hayden let out a breath, seemingly grateful of the fact that Rose wasn’t the type of person to beat around the bush. “It’s about Shane.”

“Is he okay?” Rose leant forward. She and Shane texted nearly every day, and Rose had been planning on going to the game the next day to see him. The media knew they weren’t together anymore, but their friendship was still very public.

“Yeah. Totally. Better than okay, to be honest.”

She blew out a sigh of relief. “Good.”

“I wanted to ask you something.”

“Shoot.”

“He, uh, came out to me a few weeks ago.”

Rose tilted her head. “He did?”

“Yeah.”

“How did that go?” She realized after she said it that the question could be taken in a wrong way. “I mean… it’s good that he came out to you. I think it’s healthy. He said there aren’t any out hockey players in the NHL.”

“He’s right, there aren’t. He’s still not out. Not like, fully. Just to me and you, I think. And Lily.”

Rose’s brow creased. “Who’s Lily?”

Hayden looked at her in surprise. “You… don’t know Lily?”

“Never heard of her. Some friend of Shane’s?”

“She’s not-” Hayden suddenly looked like he was about to pass out. “He’s…”

“He?”

“Yeah. Lily’s a guy.”

Ah. That did not help at all with Rose’s growing confusion.

“I thought maybe Shane would’ve told you about him. Especially after coming out to you.”

“It was more like he came out by me, to be fair.”

Hayden chuckled. “Right. He did tell me that.”

“So who is he? Lily?”

“He and Shane are together. I think. To be honest I don’t know the extent of their relationship, but they’ve been texting for, like, years. Like 8 years. Not that Shane ever cheated on you! I think they broke up, or something, then he got with you. Then you guys broke up, and he went to Florida, and he came back all giggly, and now he and Lily are texting each other again.”

Rose blinked. Hayden talked fast, but she thought she got the gist of what he was saying. “So they’re lovers?”

“Or something. Shane is definitely in love with him.”

“Right. So?”

“So… I wanted to know if maybe you knew who he was.”

“I didn’t even know he existed.”

Hayden slapped his hand on the table, not forcefully but enough to cause Rose’s eyes to widen. “That’s the problem! He came out to you, he came out to me. Both of us were accepting because we’re not douchebags, but he doesn’t want to tell us about the guy he’s been in a relationship with for years?”

“Maybe the guy is shy?”

Hayden scoffed. “At least show us a picture. Or tell us his real name!”

“Maybe Lily is his real name.” Rose knew she was grasping at straws, but a part of her wanted to protect Shane’s privacy.

“Shane more or less told me it wasn’t. I didn’t want to pry, but…” he leaned across the table. “I really wanna know!”

Rose smirked. Even though they had only had short conversations, she liked Hayden and his lack of personal peace. “Well now you’ve got me curious.”

“Right?!”

“I’ve told him about all the dates I’ve been on in the past few weeks. With details.”

“He was literally at the bar when my wife and I met. He babysits our kids!”

“So why wouldn’t he want us to know about a serious relationship?”

“You tell me, Ms. Landry.” Hayden looked satisfied at Rose’s compliance with his prying.

Even though Shane was both of their best friends, it was clear that he was hiding this guy from them and wasn't giving either of them a good enough reason as to why.

"I think," Hayden continued, "that you did the right thing by telling him he was gay. Now he just needs us to tell him he's in love with mystery-man and everything will fall into place."

"We're matchmakers."

"Exactly!"

"So… what's your plan?"

Hayden shrugged. "We go to Boston from here, I can try to snag Lily's contact info before Shane goes to meet him."

"Wait, they meet in Boston?"

"Yeah. Always have. That's where Lily's from. I used to call him his Boston-bang, but now I think Boston boy has a better ring to it."

Rose could feel the wheels in her head turning. "I would have assumed Montreal. Aren't you guys only in Boston for like a few days a year?"

Hayden nodded. "It's not uncommon for the single players to have a 'girl in every port', if you will."

"Does Shane have a guy in every port?"

“No, just Lily.”

“Just Boston?”

Hayden hummed, seeming to realize that Rose was stuck on that tidbit of information. “Why, is there something wrong with Boston?”

“No, it’s just…” Rose bit her lip. Back when the Metros played the Raiders in Montreal and she and Shane were still dating, she had dragged him out to a club with her friends. She remembered seeing some Boston players in the crowd that night and noticed Shane’s discomfort when he saw them, but didn’t think much of it at the time. “What’s the NHL’s rules about interpersonal relationships?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean… what would happen if two hockey players started dating.”

Hayden’s face scrunched minutely. “It’s happened in women’s hockey, but never in men’s. I don’t think there are any rules, per se, but there aren’t any out players anyways.”

“Okay. Rules aside, then, how would the community respond?”

She watched Hayden balance between telling her the truth and protecting his league. He decided on the former. “It would be bad. Hockey is one of the most conservative sports right now. There’d be backlash, public hate. Probably ostracism from the team. It sucks but… they probably wouldn’t be drafted again.” He suddenly looked up from his hands, which had been apparently very interesting since she started asking hockey-related questions. “Wait. You don’t think Lily is a hockey player.”

Rose shrugged. “It would make sense, wouldn’t it? I mean… that’s who Shane spends most of his time around anyways. And it would be a reason why he isn’t comfortable telling us who he is.”

“But that would mean…” Hayden’s eyes were bulging out of his face, hands gripping his cheeks like the kid in Home Alone. “Lily is a Boston Raider?”

“Maybe he was at the all-stars and that’s why they were able to fix things.”

Hayden shook his head. “The only Raider in Florida was Rozanov, and Shane fucking hates him.”

Suddenly, Rose shot a hand out and pulled Hayden closer to her by the arm. In a whisper, she said, “Lily.”

Hayden made a questioning face, and Rose rolled her eyes.

“Rozanov’s first name. Ilya.”

She watched as realization flooded Hayden’s entire body, and his arm went limp in Rose’s grasp. “No.”

“It makes sense, doesn’t it?”

“I mean-”

“It would be one thing if it was just another hockey player, right?” If they weren’t in a restaurant, Rose would have started pacing like Sherlock Holmes solving a crime. “Yeah, it would be weird but the league would probably get over it. It’s completely different when it’s your-”

“Arch-rival.”

They met each other's gaze, realizing that they had just unlocked not only their best friend's biggest secret, but the greatest possible scandal the NHL had ever seen.

"Fucking Rozanov."

***

Shane was enjoying some well-deserved post-orgasmic bliss when his phone rang. He had just gotten off of facetime with Ilya, taking advantage of the empty hotel room as Hayden had gone to dinner with a friend, and didn't really feel like talking to anyone at the moment.

Still, being the anxious guy he was, he picked the phone off of the bedside table and saw Hayden's contact photo staring at him. Assuming his friend had lost his hotel card, he picked it up.

"Hey man, gimme-"

"Ilya Rozanov?" Hayden said it quietly, like he was mad.

Shane felt his blood run cold. "Uhh… what about him?"

"Lily?"

"Shit."

"It's true?"

“How did you-”

There was some shuffling, then a second voice spoke to him.

“Hi Shane. Sorry.” It was Rose, who sounded as shocked but marginally less angry than Hayden. “We may or may not have been scheming about who your mystery Lily-lover-Boston-boy was and figured out it’s your arch-rival.”

“Arch-rival of the fucking ages, might I add!” Yelled Hayden from the background. Shane could hear the sounds of cars honking, so at least they were outside.

“Uhh….” He didn’t really know what to say right then. He felt whiplashed, having just come down from an extra-steamy video session with Ilya to now having to defend their relationship. And to Rose Landry, of all people, who he hadn't even known was the friend Hayden was meeting!

“Don’t worry,” Rose laughed lightly. “I don’t care. I was pissed you didn’t tell me about Lily, but hey, I get it now.”

“And Hayden?” Shane’s voice came out in a hoarse croak.

“I think he’ll be a bit tougher to come around,” she admitted. “But I think he will.”

“He hates Ilya.”

“I thought you did too.”

“I may be having second thoughts about that.”

“Ooh, Shane’s in love!” She sang.

“Shane is not in love! Shane is most definitely not in love!” Hayden yelled again.

“How drunk is he?” Shane assumed they were on their way back to the hotel and really did not want to have to deal with an intoxicated Hayden Pike.

“He’s actually completely and totally sober, if you’d believe it.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it.”

“Well good, because we’re about to walk into the elevator. See you soon!” And then the call disconnected.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

After many comments asking for a follow-up, here you go! I hope you enjoy it!

“Rozanov?!”

Hayden barreled into the hotel room like a bull, Rose hot on his heels with a deep blush painting her cheeks. The door closed with a slam and, though the sound was final and daunting, Shane was inwardly grateful that it had shut before Hayden’s outburst.

Shane had had only a few moments to prepare himself for his best friend’s wrath. He had scrambled to pull on his shirt, thanking whatever god there was that he had cleaned himself off after disconnecting his call with Ilya. He was wearing loose loungepants and now felt like he was sweating through them.

Shane stood there, unsure of what to say. “Why don’t you sit,” he finally settled on after a tension-filled moment. He hadn’t looked Hayden in the eye yet, nervous for the hatred and disgust he knew would be staring back at him.

Rose gave Hayden a soft nudge in the direction of the desk and chair that seemed to be identical to those in every single hotel Shane had ever been in. He walked there slowly, looking like a ghost, or a zombie.

“So….” Rose remained standing, though she had walked further into the room. “Sorry. Again.”

“Rozanov?” Hayden repeated, slightly softer this time. He had the chair swiveled so he was directly facing Shane.

“Hayden, I’m so-” Shane was cut off by Rose’s hand.

“We shouldn’t have been prying,” she admitted. “Hayden was just worried that you were being, well, *you* and not admitting to yourself that you were in love. With Lily. Who I was able to decipher through actually not that much work is Ilya Rozanov.”

“AKA your sworn enemy!” Hayden added unhelpfully. He looked like he was in a choir with how straight his posture was sitting in the chair. His arms were stiff and, with his hands on his knees, he reminded Shane a bit of the Barbie dolls his daughters played with.

“Hence you not wanting to tell us who he is.”

Shane winced. “I figured you’d react poorly if you knew.”

Hayden huffed, probably realizing that the way he was acting was exactly how Shane had predicted he would.

“But… you could have at least told me you were in a relationship.” Rose’s voice was timid and, when Shane turned to her, she was looking at the ground. Her face had hurt written all over it, and Shane couldn’t help but feel bad.

“I’m sorry. Really. I just… no one knows. The only reason Hayden knows about ‘Lily’ is because we room together at away games.”

Hayden’s hand waved in the air. “Are you saying you wouldn’t have told me either if we weren’t roommates?”

Shane shrugged.

“Wow.”

“It’s not that I don’t trust you! It’s just that Ilya and I haven’t really talked about what our relationship even is.”

“Ilya, huh. First name basis.” Hayden’s arms were crossed, but he looked slightly more relaxed now that they were speaking openly.

“A newer development.”

Rose stepped minutely closer. “Hayden told me that you’ve been texting for almost a decade. If that’s not serious, then…”

“It wasn’t serious.” Shane sat on the end of his bed and folded his hands in front of him. He had practiced explanation speeches in the mirror before, but it was always to his parents. This, his two best friends who had only met maybe three times before today, was completely uncharted and unpracticed territory. “It wasn’t supposed to be. We only saw each other a few times a year for less than a day at a time. There weren’t many opportunities to discuss what we meant for each other.”

“So what, you’d get together and…” Hayden’s voice trailed off as he came to the realization of what his best friend and his best friend’s supposed arch-rival did when they were together behind locked doors. “Oh.”

“Yeah,” Shane cleared his throat before continuing. “Anyways. It started getting… serious. We spent more time together. One day he asked me to stay.”

“Stay?”

“It was before a game in Boston. I had gone over the night before because we had the time. He made us… he made us tuna melts.” Shane’s heart beat strongly at the memory, the calm before the storm that he had caused. “I got freaked out because… because I realized that I was feeling things that I shouldn’t have been feeling. I told him we had to stop. I left. I met-”

His eyes connected with Rose's. "I met you. I thought maybe if I could fall in love with someone else, with a girl, it would be okay. But that obviously wasn't the case."

Rose came and sat next to him, resting her head against his shoulder. "I'm glad it didn't work out. I love knowing you and I love being your friend. I'm sorry you felt like you couldn't tell me about him."

"It's okay." He rubbed a hand on her shoulder, grateful for the support. "After you, uh, came out for me-"

"Oh my god."

Shane chucked. "I thought it'd be good to explore a bit. I met some guys, went to bars, you know. But I couldn't get him out of my head."

Hayden, who had been quiet and introspective throughout Shane's speech, finally spoke up. "The All-Star game. You reunited there, right? I saw the way you guys played together, like you had a telepathic bond or some shit."

"You know, I'd never actually played with him before. Always against."

"That must have been fun." Hayden sounded like he meant it.

"It was."

At his best friend's soft smile, Shane felt some more of his anxiety melt away.

"We had to keep it a secret. Even if the NHL was okay with players dating each other, the fans would be furious. They've been playing this rivalry up for years."

Hayden nodded. “I understand. I do. I just… why couldn’t you tell me? Do you not trust me?”

“I do. I swear. But I don’t want to do anything without Ilya’s permission, and I’m not sure how comfortable he would be. We haven’t even seen each other in person since Tampa, and I think it’s a conversation I’d rather have face-to-face.”

“Well, I know now, so…”

Shane groaned and fell back against his bed. “Fuck, I’m going to have to tell him.”

“He hates me.” Hayden’s face had broken into a grin.

“He’s not particularly a fan of either of you, to be fair.”

Rose feigned insult, a hand against her chest and mouth agape. “He doesn’t like me?”

“Well, I dated you, so, no.”

She shrugged. “He knows you’re gay, right?”

“Oh yeah. I came out to him in Tampa.”

Hayden blanched and stood up, hands waving furiously. “Wait wait wait. You, Shane Hollander, came out to Ilya Rozanov, your fuck buddy-slash-FWB-slash-boyfriend-slash-arch rival, after eight years of fucking each other?”

Rose laughed loudly. “Dude, you are so emotionally constipated I don’t know how you’ve survived as long as you have.”

“Hey!” Shane couldn’t exactly deny what Rose had said, but still.

“Shane, buddy, is Ilya not gay too?”

“He’s bi.”

“Ah, that makes sense.” Hayden turned to Rose. “He’s a known womanizer in the league.”

Rose made a face and looked back at Shane. “Your boyfriend is a womanizer? Yee-ouch.”

“He’s not-” Shane rubbed a hand down his face.

“He’s not your boyfriend?”

“He’s not a womanizer.”

Hayden hummed in disbelief. “But he’s your boyfriend?”

“We haven’t labeled it.”

“Do you want to be boyfriends?”

Rose’s question hit Shane in a way he hadn’t been expecting. Of course he wanted to take things further with Ilya, but he also knew that solidifying their relationship into something as tangible as *boyfriends* would only complicate things further.

Looking at Rose and Hayden, his two best friends who had been nothing but supportive of him throughout the time he's known them, he decided to be honest. "I do."

"Then tell him that!" Rose pushed herself back from Shane and looked him directly in the eye. "You've been hiding your relationship for so long, Shane. I mean, even Hayden knew something had to be serious with this Lily-guy. You deserve to be happy. You both do."

"I just… I don't know how he would react."

Hayden joined Rose and Shane on the bed, sitting on the right side so they were in a line. "Look, I'm not going to lie and say I'm Ilya Rozanov's biggest fan. I'm not a fan to begin with. But I know you, Shane. Lying and everything aside, I know you. And I agree with Rose; you deserve to be happy. If Ilya doesn't see that, then fuck him."

"Literally and figuratively," Rose added with a wink, earning herself a disgusted groan from Hayden.

Shane let his head fall into his hands. He had not been expecting to have this conversation that night. "I was planning on asking him to come to my cottage this summer."

"You should," Hayden said supportively. "We play Boston in a couple of days, you should invite him then."

Shane looked at Hayden apprehensively. "You, of all people, are encouraging me to ask Ilya Rozanov to spend two weeks at my cottage?"

Hayden mimicked puking and shook his head. "I know. I think I've been possessed." Then he stopped and looked at Shane seriously. "You are my best friend. If Rozanov means as much to you as he seems to, I can put my *strong* dislike aside. For now. Don't tell him I said that."

"I won't."

“So you’ll ask him?”

“I’ll ask him.”

Hayden grinned and put an arm around Shane’s shoulder. The three of them stayed there for a moment in comfortable silence until he broke it again.

“Fucking Rozanov.”

***

Ilya felt good. He felt better than good, in fact.

He was playing against Montreal for the first time since the All-Stars. Which meant he was playing against Shane.

The crowd was loud and excited. Boston fans ringed the rink, flashes of yellow, red, and black sharp contrasts from the few blue jerseys that sprinkled the array of spectators. As much as Ilya felt the pressure on the ice, he couldn’t imagine being a fan of the away team at a place like this.

The Metros were introduced first, the starting line-up taking their place in the rink. Shane was called last, earning himself deafening shrieks of boos, cheers, and the occasional chirp. Ilya couldn’t see him, but he could picture his face. Stoic and set, ignoring or, at the very least, disregarding the taunts and yells.

Then the Rangers were called. Ilya, being captain and starting center, was also last to join his team. He met Shane in the middle, a few yards apart as they waited for the national anthems to be sung as was tradition if teams from both countries played.

Shane looked at him with a professional smile, stick held steadily in his hands. When it was finally time to play, they skated towards one another until they reached the ref who waited with the puck.

“Hollander,” Ilya greeted coyly. “Good to be playing against one another again, da?”

Shane smirked and bent over. “Tired of trying to keep up with me?”

“You wish.”

Ilya won the face-off, and managed to score a point in the first period. He and Shane faced off together a handful of times before the game ended, but neither man was able to get much of a chirp in before the puck was tossed.

Boston ended up winning by three points, a feat that was nearly impossible given how competitively close the two teams were. Ilya couldn’t help but notice that Shane had felt off. He had missed easy passes, slipped on the ice. Once he even accidentally ran into Pike while skating over to the penalty box.

Fans would undoubtedly be speculating about Montreal’s pride and joy, and Ilya was speculating along with them.

He texted Shane as soon as he left the ice, careful not to let his phone screen be visible in the locker room.

I’ll be done soon. He typed. **There is key under mat by front door.**

He watched as the bubbles popped up from Shane’s end then disappeared. He layed his phone down and joined his teammates in their celebrations, taking the shot of vodka Marlow offered him with ease.

Usually after a win as triumphant as that the team would go out for drinks, but Ilya feigned having an appointment in the morning to get out of going. He managed to evade the press as he left the arena, walking rapidly to his car.

It had only been an hour since the game concluded, but he knew Shane tended to get anxious if he left him waiting too long. Besides, the last time he had been in Shane's apartment was when….

Ilya didn't let himself think about that day. About Shane's back retreating to the door, the deafening thud as it closed behind him. He didn't think about getting up and grabbing their plates, remnants of tuna melts sticking to the ceramic that he had to scrub off.

Shane had apologized for leaving, but a part of Ilya was still scared that he would leave again.

He had just started his engine when his phone started ringing. It was Shane.

"Hello?"

"Uh, hi, sorry." Shane's voice was muted and weird.

"Did you find the key okay?"

"Yeah. I'm in. That's not why I'm calling."

Ilya waited a moment. "Okay? Why are you calling?"

"I don't want it to be a surprise."

Okay, this conversation was getting less and less fun and much more confusing. Ilya rolled his eyes and began driving, linking his phone to his bluetooth so Shane's voice rang out throughout the car. "If you don't want it to be a surprise then you should tell me."

"It's Hayden."

"Hayden who?"

"Hayden Pike, asshole. My best friend?"

"I do not know who that is." Ilya smirked to himself as he pulled out of the parking lot.

"Fuck you!"

"Oh, oh, Hayden Pike! The worst hockey player of all time, yes. Him. What about him?"

"He knows."

"Oh good, he knows that he's the worst."

"No, Ilya." Shane's voice was serious. "He knows about us."

Ilya was glad he was behind the wheel and thus focused on not crashing and/or dying, otherwise he probably would have blacked out. Instead, his grip tightened and he took a deep breath. "He knows about us?"

Shane gave a noise of assent.

“You told him?”

“No. He found out on his own.”

Ilya sighed, feeling a slight twinge of guilt that he had thought Shane could have told Hayden. “How?”

“He and Rose, actually.”

Ugh, Rose. What Ilya wouldn’t give to never hear that name come out of Shane’s mouth again. “Okay?”

“Look, I think it’s best if they explain it.”

“They are here?”

“Hayden is, obviously. Rose is back in LA. He’s not here now, though. I wanted to tell you first. Then maybe ask if he could come over so we could talk?”

“I will have to move.”

“Why?”

“Infested. Hayden Pike is pest in my home.”

“You’re an asshole.”

Ilya grinned. “You will help, yes? Mr. Landlord?”

“You’re not moving. Hayden is fine. He’s at the hotel right now showering, so he won’t smell or anything.”

“I am not sure that will help.”

“Ilya, Jesus, I’m trying to be serious!” Shane was huffing, but Ilya could hear an edge of humor in his tone.

“Okay, okay. Hayden comes over, then what? Threesome?”

“Three-” Shane’s voice broke off and Ilya heard him scream into a pillow. “If you ever, *ever* suggest a threesome again-”

“Was not suggestion! I would not fuck Hayden Pike. He is Hayden Pike. He comes over, we talk, yes?”

“Yes.”

“About…”

“About us! Give him a bit of a background, maybe?”

“He wants to know the story of us fucking each other?”

“It doesn’t have to be detailed.”

“Mhm.” Ilya was pulling into his driveway and could see the lights in the kitchen and living room were on. “I am here.”

“I left the door unlocked.”

“Brave of you, Shane Hollander. Anyone could walk in.”

Ilya could smell something being cooked when he entered. He set his bags down next to the front door and headed to the kitchen where Shane stood with a scrunched face.

“You are stressed.” Ilya said it as a fact because it was. He had known Shane for long enough that he knew when he was anxious about something.

“Of course I’m stressed.” Shane ran a hand through his hair, which was still wet from his post-game shower. “Hayden is texting me asking when he can come over.”

“So he really knows?”

Shane nodded before laying his head on Ilya’s shoulder. “I didn’t tell him, I promise.”

“I believe you. How did he and Rose find out?”

Shane explained it to him as he worked around the kitchen. He had taken to making pasta for the two of them, creating some sauce with the oils and spices that Ilya had miscellaneously strewn about in his cabinets. It smelled good, and Ilya was grateful that he wasn’t stuck making them the low-carb frozen pizza he had bought the day before like he had originally planned. Another reason he knew that Shane was nervous was because he didn’t seem to care that he would be eating boxed noodles like he normally would.

“Rose seems nice,” Ilya said once Shane was done.

“You sound surprised.”

“Am not. You like her.” Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane’s waist as the other man stirred the noodles. “Hayden was more accepting than I thought he would be.”

“He’s not homophobic, if that’s what you mean.”

Ilya shrugged. “Many hockey players are homophobic. Hayden does not seem like it. I meant with me. He is good friend.”

“Yeah, he is.”

“You can send address. I will meet him properly.”

Shane spun in Ilya’s arms so they were facing each other. “You mean it?”

“Yes, of course. I must show him I am a stand-up person.”

“I don’t think that’s possible.” Shane winked and resumed his stirring, stopping every once in a while to check in on his simmering sauce. “Let’s eat, then I’ll text him.”

The pasta was delicious. Ilya didn’t eat many homemade meals, opting instead to get takeout or canned soup. The idea of him and Shane sitting at his rarely-used dining room table and eating a meal together was something out of a dream.

“You must give me recipe for sauce,” Ilya told Shane once they were done. They were back in the kitchen as Ilya rinsed the dishes and put them in the dishwasher, Shane sitting on the counter behind him.

“Sure.” Shane was sipping on a ginger ale, the same ones Ilya had bought for him back before the tuna-melt-disaster-that-shall-not-be-referenced. “I texted Hayden.”

“Good.”

“You don’t seem nervous.”

“Am not, really. I have met him before, yes?”

“Yeah, but not like… this.”

Ilya finished filling the dishwasher and started it before turning to meet Shane at the counter. “Hayden is your friend. He knows about us and hasn’t told anyone. You trust him, and so I trust him.”

Shane bit his lip, eyes turning glassy. “I just don’t want to ruin anything. I feel bad enough that he found out about us.”

“Wasn’t your fault,” Ilya assured him. “Was mine, if anything.”

“Yours?”

“Lily and Jane. I came up with names.”

“Has anyone asked you about Jane?”

“Marlow. He saw name on the phone. And my friend Svetlana. But no. No one knows more than that.”

Shane nodded, jaw clenching and unclenching. “Okay.”

Ilya pressed a soft kiss to Shane’s lips. “Everything will be fine. We will talk to Hayden, tell him what we feel comfortable telling him. I will be, how you say, civil? I will be civil. He will fall in love with me, I will break up with you, he will divorce wife, and Hayden and I will live happily ever after.”

Shane laughed lightly, batting a hand at Ilya’s chest. “I lied. I’d much rather you talk about a threesome than marrying Hayden.”

Ilya grinned and kissed Shane again, deeper this time. They weren’t able to go much further, though, because then the doorbell rang.

Shane cursed against Ilya’s lips and slid off the counter. “I’ll get it.”

“Okay.” Ilya watched Shane’s back retreating to the door, thinking of the last time it happened and the events that followed.

Before he was out of view, though, Shane turned back and smiled at Ilya warmly.

“I’ll be right back.”

***

Rozanov’s house was beautiful.

Of fucking course it was. Everything in Rozanov's life was beautiful. His cars, his women, his house. Now even Shane was 'his'.

Hayden hated it. Hated how he admired the clean windows and bright exterior of the home, hated how he disappeared behind sharply trimmed hedges to get to the front door.

He especially hated how Shane greeted him, like it was his house Hayden was about to enter.

Shane was dressed comfortably in a black lounge sweatsuit with a Nike logo stitched into the chest. He didn't have shoes on, just socks, so Hayden decided to take his off too. He couldn't really imagine Rozanov being a stickler for clean floors, but he also couldn't have imagined the Russian being fuck-buddies with his best friend. You learn something new every day.

"You'll be chill, right?" Shane asked as he led him into the house, voice quiet and slightly shaky.

"Sure." Hayden ran his hand against the wood of the walls, watching as his fingers dipped into the spaces between the panels. "Always am."

Rozanov was standing in the kitchen next to the sink. Hayden assumed that they had just finished eating, given that the dishwasher was running and there were pots soaking in the sink.

"Pike," Rozanov greeted with a sly grin. "Welcome to my house."

"Rozanov." Hayden stood there awkwardly for a moment, looking back and forth between the two men in front of him, before he relented and stretched out a hand.

Rozanov took it politely with a solid grip. "You are probably overwhelmed."

"Understatement of the fucking year."

They made their way into the living room, which was just as nice as the rest of the house. Hayden sat in one of the armchairs while Rozanov and Shane made themselves comfortable on the sofa, sitting down next to each other like it was second nature.

"So," Shane started, "I explained to Ilya how you and Rose found out about us."

"Not overly difficult, might I add. Rose was the one to 'crack the code', so to speak. I suppose I'm more confused about…" he wagged his finger at them.

"It started our rookie season," Shane supplied rather unhelpfully. Hayden already knew that they had been going at it since their first year playing hockey professionally.

"Is not true."

Shane turned to Rozanov, a sharp look in his eye. "What do you mean?"

"Summer before."

"Summer before?" Hayden leaned forward, elbows on his knees.

"We did commercial." Ilya was sitting back on the couch, looking way more comfortable than he should be.

Shane was the complete opposite, sitting rigid and proper next to him. "Yeah, uh, I guess that's when it actually started."

"But you knew each other before that, right?"

Shane groaned and rubbed his head. “We met a year before at the International Prospect Cup, but nothing happened. Then we saw each other at the draft. That’s the first time there was an actual, uh, connection, I guess? But nothing really happened again. It wasn’t until we were shooting the commercial together that we… you know. Then we’d see each other whenever we played against one another. Or at award ceremonies and shit.”

Hayden was shell-shocked. The fact that this… whatever it was… had been going on for longer than either of them had been in the NHL was bizarre. That the first time he had even met Shane, the other man had already been with Rozanov.

He didn’t really know what to say. He sat there dumbly, looking between the two men in front of him. Shane was still on edge and had unconsciously gotten the string of his sweatshirt into his mouth and was chewing on the end of it. Rozanov looked directly back at Hayden, though his gaze wasn’t threatening or daring in any way. It seemed almost nervous, almost scared. Like he was worried what Hayden thought about the bomb of information that had just been dropped. It was an interesting juxtaposition with the relaxed pose he was in.

It ended up being Rozanov who spoke first. “This,” he gestured between him and Shane, “is new. Not the, uh, physical part of it, but the emotion. Before Tampa the story is… uneventful?”

“Not uneventful,” Shane corrected him, not unkindly. “Just… nothing too crazy, you know? We’d get together and-”

“Fuck.”

“Jesus, Ilya, I was going for something a bit more subtle.”

“What, he does not know we fuck?”

Hayden watched as the two of them spit back and forth for a few moments, insults thrown but never landing in a place that hurt.

“I know you fuck,” he finally interrupted just as Rozanov was beginning to get graphic. “Jesus. Yeah. Okay, so you’d get together and *get together*. Then Rose, right?”

Rozanov rolled his eyes. “Oh yes, please, let’s talk more about Rose Landry.”

Shane elbowed him. “Rose, yeah. We started dating, but that did not work out, obviously, and I realized I’m gay. Cut to Tampa-” Hayden did not miss that he omitted the fact that he had dated around during that gap, “I see Ilya, we reunite, and… now we’re here.”

“Ta-da.” Rozanov spread his hands wide. “Magic.”

“And emotions?” Hayden asked.

“Sure.”

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“It means we don’t know yet. We have to talk about it.”

Shane looked like he wanted to crawl into a hole in the ground and die, but he nodded in agreement. His eyes were trained on the floor as he said, “we’re figuring it out.”

“Right.” Hayden’s voice was annoyingly hoarse. “I guess I’m kinda stepping on your guys’ plans to do that right now, aren’t I?”

Rozanov shrugged. “It was important to Shane that we talked with you. I don’t want you to be mad at him.”

“I’m not.”

“Good.”

“I’m a little thrown off by his choice of men, but I’m not mad.”

Shane huffed. “Thanks, dude.”

“No offense.”

“You can be mad at me,” Rozanov offered, sacrificially and selflessly. “I do not care. As long as you understand why everything was and is a secret.”

Hayden blinked, taken aback by everything he had seen from the man since he arrived at his home. “I’m not mad at you either. Jesus Christ, I’m not mad at all. I never was. Was I hurt that my best friend kept an important relationship from me? Yes. Do I completely understand the ins and outs of said relationship? Absolutely the fuck not. But am I mad? Never. I get it, guys. This thing… god, it’s complicated. I can’t imagine how complicated it is. There are no publicly out players in the NHL. If this came to light…”

“The backlash would be insane,” Shane finished. The string had fallen from his mouth, and now his teeth were worrying his bottom lip. “We know that.”

“Is one of the things we need to talk about.”

“Are you, like, exclusive?”

Shane and Rozanov met each other’s eyes. “We haven’t talked about that either,” Shane said.

“So what *have* you talked about?”

Rozanov shrugged. “That we like each other. More than we probably should. Family, a little. Stakes.”

“Stakes?”

“Russia.”

Ah. Of course. Hayden knew that Russia was not the best country to live in, especially for someone who was queer. But he also knew that Rozanov still had family there, a father and a brother if he remembered correctly. Fuck, there were so many things he hadn’t even begun to think about that would happen if Rozanov chose to be with Shane, much less if he publicly came out.

He suddenly felt like he was intruding on a very important night in his best friend’s life. All because he was confused about him fucking another man. Another man who his friend would only get to be with for a few more hours before having to be away from him for several weeks.

God, Hayden was a shitty friend.

“I should go,” he said, standing up. “You two look like you have a lot to talk about, and I don’t need to be here for that.”

A small frown formed on Shane’s face. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be. Seriously.” Hayden reached his hand once again to Rozanov, who shook it as he had before. “I appreciate you both being willing to talk with me. I won’t lie and say I understand everything, but… Shane, you’re my best friend. If you’re happy, then I’m happy for you. Even if it’s with Ilya fucking Rozanov.” He winked playfully down at the two of them.

“Sorry we don’t have much more to tell you.” Rozanov sounded like he meant it. “Kind of poor timing to figure it all out, to be honest.”

Hayden chuckled. “Yeah, probably. I expect more details after tonight though, deal? And the same goes for Rose.”

Rozanov smirked. “Deal.”

Both men led Hayden to the front door, even though he figured he could find his own way out. It wasn’t incredibly late, but exhaustion weighed on all three of them. Hayden did not pity Shane or Rozanov, knowing that they would probably be up for the next few hours talking things over. Even though he still didn’t really love the idea of his best friend being with Rozanov, he hoped that their conversation was productive. Healthy.

A pang of longing hit him. He missed Jackie, his kids. He missed Montreal and his house. He couldn’t fathom being in a long-distance relationship, which is what he knew would inevitably fall upon the two men behind him. He didn’t know what exactly they felt for each other, or even if they knew that themselves, but the sympathy for them grew stronger.

“At least I’ll get the room to myself,” Hayden quipped as he stepped onto the patio.

“Enjoy it.” Shane left Rozanov’s side to give Hayden a hug, something they rarely did but was not at all discouraged. In his ear he whispered, “thank you.”

“Thank *you*,” Hayden whispered back before letting go. He tried his hardest not to let tears spring to his eyes. “I’ll see you tomorrow, don’t be late.”

Shane grinned. “Never am.”

As Hayden stood at the curb waiting for his cab, he looked at the magnificent house before him. He watched slowly as the lights in the downstairs rooms flickered off, replaced with

those upstairs. The neighborhood was quiet and asleep, the only sounds those common for a city like Boston to have.

It thankfully didn't take long for the car to arrive and, as they pulled away, Hayden whispered to himself.

"Ilya fucking Rozanov."

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