Do it Scared

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Do it Scared

by lark_ral

Summary

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> *Which of these is better?*
>
> She replies to the Rolex photo with six exclamation marks.

Shane Hollander's five rules of how to not look gay (and how he breaks them for Ilya Rozanov) + one time he doesn't have to.

Notes

My muse for this story was stocked with inspiration by many fandom friends and strangers, including Monbons, and the amazing Shane and Ilya doll WIPs that she has sent me over discord, SweetCaroline11's hockey knowledge and enthusiasm, and her perpetual encouragement despite the fact that she hasn't yet been infected by the Heated Rivalry mind virus, literally everything ticklefighthockey has posted on Tumblr.com, and everyone else on here writing about these two idiots.

Still haven't read the books, a choice I have made on purpose!

content note: this story covers a lot of Shane's youth hockey career, and includes a helping of sport-typical and era-typical homophobia.

Chapter 1: Don't be just friends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Clara Marchand? Dude… what's she like?"

Shane was strapping on his pads. Evesdropping on his teammates' rapid french. Trying to blend in. He was new to the Saguenées, billeted with an older couple, the Bouchards, retired and bored. Their son had flamed out in the AHL a decade before, then became an agent. Shane was pretty sure Michel Bouchard was going to be disappointed when he learned that Shane's mom was his agent, but that wasn't Shane's problem.

His main problems at that moment were meshing with the rest of his line and not saying anything too stupid in French.

"She's great, man. Hilarious. You wouldn't believe how much she knows about The Simpsons."

The d-man who'd asked the question laughed. Fortin, Shane thought. Alain Fortin, paired with Bernard Dubé on the second line. Aging out. Undrafted.

"Dude, you haven't gotten her in the sack yet? Tits like those?"

Shane suddenly felt like he shouldn't be eavesdropping. He'd been studying French since he was six, and he'd just finished a three week immersive French camp, so he was pretty confident he was understanding what they were saying, but he wished suddenly that he could plead his anglo ignorance. Fortin was talking to Shane's left wing, Luc Roberts. A town boy, but a strong skater. He'd probably get drafted at the end of next year with Shane, AHL at least, Shane thought. If they meshed, if they got the right kind of play.

"She's just a friend."

"Fuck, bro, you gay, or just blind?"

Shane stood to pull up his pants. Roberts rolled his eyes. "She's not my type, dude."

"Clara Marchand is everybody's type. Those lips? Those tits? Fuck."

Shane was frozen looking at them, halfway suited up. Then Fortin looked at him, "What do you think, Hollzy? Clara Marchand? Dream fuck or just friends?"

Shane felt his tongue fill up his mouth, "I…uh, I don't…"

"Leave him alone, Fortin. He got here a week ago," their captain, Daniel O'Polka, shoulder checked Shane, then said, in English, low enough that only Shane could hear, "But yeah, the first girl you pop one for in town? That's gonna be Clara."

Rose calls him the night before her premiere. It's not the X-Squad movie, it's something indie she did last year.

"Someone's gonna ask where you are," she says, smoothing gel masks under her eyes.

"And you'll say: in Seattle, working."

"Shane." She's tilting her face down, trying to get him to be serious. The effect is slightly ruined by the tape she's halfway through applying to her temples.

"What?"

"It's a good time for me to say we aren't together anymore."

"I know," he admits.

"Is that okay with you?"

He doesn't say anything right away. It's…he knows he has to say yes at some point. But now?

He thinks about his schedule for the next three months. The All Stars Game sitting right there in the middle of it. Him and Rozanov on the same roster. How Rose's Wikipedia page says she's in a relationship with him, and his says he's in a relationship with her. How far the distance is between that and anything real, anything *true* that he could have.

How far between him and Ilya.

"Yes."

She smiles, nods just a little bit. "Ok." She reaches in front of her, picks up some kind of miniature green rolling pin. "Do you use one of these?"

The door lock beeps, and Hayden walks through.

Rose rolls the green thing up her cheek. "It feels *amazing*," she says, and Hayden stops mid-stride, pivots back towards the door.

"No, Hayd, it's fine." Shane says quickly, and he sees as Hayden realizes that Shane is fully dressed and the lights in the room are all on. Hayden walks the rest of the way into the room. "Rose can tell us both about how to get red carpet ready."

"Pretty sure you're the only one who's going to need that, bud." Hayden says, but he leans in to wave hello to Rose.

"Not if I have any say in it," Rose says. "Shane and I decided we're better as friends, so I'm back on the hunt for arm candy."

"Oh," he says "Bummer. Jackie had the double date all planned."

"Tell her to make it a girls night and I'm definitely still in. Shane can babysit."

She waves the rolling pin at the camera. "I'm sending you one of these," she says. "You have such good skin, all you need is like, a two step routine."

Hayden rolls his eyes as he pulls his sweats out of his suitcase.

"Hey, I gotta go," Shane says. "Good luck tomorrow."

"You too." Rose blows him a kiss before she hangs up.

Hayden lets the silence hang for about half a minute before he says, "I know you're a good guy, Shay, but you don't have to torture yourself like this."

"What?"

"It's okay to say you'll stay friends when a girl breaks up with you and then just…not. They get it."

Shane's throat seizes up. His tongue feels three times it's usual size. He remembers the way Fortin taunted Roberts after Dubé took Clara to her homecoming dance. How Fortin started to mutter "Roberts incoming" in the showers after practice, and everyone turned to face the wall. How things got more and more uncomfortable up until they all saw Roberts wheeling a cougar at one of their away games, and she dropped him off at the bus the next morning with an uncomfortably handsy kiss. Then, all of a sudden, Fortin was fine with Roberts again.

But Hayden isn't Alain Fortin. And if Shane can't trust Hayden, there's no hope at all.

"She didn't break up with me. It was really…mutual."

"Mutual. Huh." Hayden sits down on his bed and strips off his socks. "Schedule stuff?"

"We just…" he tries to think of what to say. How to say something true, even if it's not the whole truth. "We just weren't compatible."

"Damn. Sucks man. She's so hot." Hayden goes into the bathroom, loads up his toothbrush. "Same thing happened with my first girlfriend, in juniors. Sandra. Thought I was gonna marry her, then, pfft." He makes some kind of dive-bombing gesture with his hand before he starts brushing his teeth.

Shane, sitting on his bed, phone clenched in his hand, starts breathing again. He flicks open his calendar, scrolls to January. Closes it again.

Chapter End Notes

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Compliments, adoration, love, and strings of exclamation marks all accepted below.

Chapter 2: Don't dress too nice

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thomas's suit was from his older brother. Michael T and Michael R both got theirs at Zellers, and they were identical even though they said they hadn't gone together. Shane's was the one he'd worn to his dad's coworker's wedding the summer before, a little short in the arms and legs, but it still fit.

Tim's suit looked like James Bond. Next to him everyone else looked like a kid wearing hand-me-downs. Shane felt cheap and childish, with the hems of his pants an inch above his shoes.

They'd all voted on wearing suits before games. It had been mostly the Michaels and Thomas who had pushed for it — "We'll be like the pros" — and Shane hadn't been sure if he wanted to dress up before games, but they'd made it sound fun, and he hadn't wanted to be the reason they couldn't all have fun.

Except then, when they were getting undressed to suit up, and Tim had pulled a hanger out of his gear bag to hang up his suit jacket, Michael R said: "Nice suit, cocksucker," and Michael T laughed and they slapped hands.

Tim flushed as he undid his belt, unbuttoned his pants. Everyone was looking somewhere else, but Shane saw Tim's shoulders shaking, heard how the hanger clattered against the locker.

He wasn't sure what a cocksucker was, but it became pretty clear over the season that it was bad. The Michaels needled Tim until he moved to a locker at the very end of the row, and at the first team social he sat at a picnic table alone until his parents realized that he was being singled out and took him home.

He played goalie after that, and he didn't come back the next year.

Thomas and the Michaels campaigned for suits again the next year, and Shane voted no. Enough people voted yes that they still had to wear them, but when his mom suggested getting a nice suit, he said no. And the next year, when the coach at Ashbury College scouted him, Shane asked his parents if he could go.

When Shane lets himself think about what it might be like at All Stars, there's a blurry gap where he's standing. Ilya will be wearing something stylish and sexy — probably a shiny shirt that makes Shane want to grab him and never let go. There's nothing Shane owns that fits in that category.

But Reebok and Rolex have both had him work with stylists for appearances in the past. He pulls up the photos of those events, and flips through them. He sends two to Rose.

Which of these is better?

She replies to the Rolex photo with six exclamation marks. One of the alternate looks for that appearance was the leather jacket he wore to Ilya's the day he ruined everything. He liked that jacket. It was one of the only things he's ever owned that made him feel effortlessly cool.

The stylist's name is Stefan Elonsi, and he replies to Shane's email in twenty minutes with a contract.

Stefan pushes two full racks of clothes into Shane's apartment a week later. Shane had forgotten, or maybe not noticed, how absolutely gay Stefan is.

His hair does something extremely flattering to his face, which should be impossible, because at first glance, the shape of it is almost absurd.

"Are these all…" Shane says, and Stefan laughs.

"Oh no, honey, these are just to help me understand what you like, what looks good. Fit and style. Colors." He points at one of the chairs in Shane's living room. "Sit down. Okay," he tosses three shirts towards Shane. "How attached are you to the hair?"

Shane catches the shirts, but he doesn't know what to do with them. Stefan walks over and tugs the shirts from Shane's hands, drapes one over each of over Shane's shoulders and one across his collarbones.

"Which one do you like?" he asks. "The forest is stunning."

They seem the same. Green and darker green and lighter green. Shane shrugs.

"Okay. Up — shirt off, put this one on. Thanks. Alright, now what are we dressing for? Give me a rundown of your week. Then I want to know if we're doing for any events in the next quarter. It's going to be a lot of building from the foundation to start. Because I've seen your press photos, and thank god you called me. Sweetie, you aren't doing yourself any favors."

Shane tugs off his t-shirt and pulls on the shirt Stefan handed him. It's tight in the shoulders and loose in the waist, and Stefan hands him another shirt before he can even start buttoning the first one up.

"I'm going to be at the All Star game in January," Shane says, looking down at the buttons of the second shirt. "In Tampa. I just want to look…good?"

"Oh, honey, you look good no matter what you wear. We're gonna make you look *delectable*."

Shane can feel his cheeks heating. He feels a little sick with it. He can't look too good, can't stand out like that. He has to blend in so that no one will look at him too closely, so no one will catch a glimpse out of the corner of their eye and see who he really is. What he's really like. He can't wear it like that. He can't.

"This one's nice." Stefan says, "We'll have to get it tailored. I'll send you to my guy. Once he's got you marked up on a block, he'll be able to…"

Shane's not sure he can do this. Have a stylist. Have style. Track pants and jeans and t-shirts and hoodies are camouflage, and he needs the camouflage. He needs to fade into the background, so if anyone thinks: which of these guys is a cocksucker? It doesn't land on him, because if it lands on him, he's not sure what he'll do. He's not sure he'll survive. He's run away from assholes on hockey teams enough to know that they're everywhere, and the only way to survive them is not to get in their cross-hairs.

Hockey is what he is. He loves it. Loves the moment on the ice when the play lights up in his brain, loves trusting his wings, loves the feel of fresh ice under his skates, the sounds of the rink. He loves being the best, loves working hard to be even better.

He loves hockey. He does. But since that afternoon at Ilya's house, the way he feels on the ice is different. It's sour now, the way the ice skims into powder under his skates, the cold bite of the rink air on his teeth. It's gone bad. It's rancid.

Shane has never asked himself who he is without hockey, because why would he? Hockey is his spine, it's his bones. It's at the core of him, and nothing else makes sense without it.

So for years, he's seen the ways he doesn't fit into the game, and set those things aside, put them in boxes labeled "later" or "never," and moved on with his life.

But Ilya won't stay in a box, and Shane doesn't want to put him in one. He wants to sit on Ilya's sofa and eat his delicious, too-heavy sandwiches and shit talk about Buffalo and Tucson. He wants to hear Ilya say his name, and he wants to stay. He wants to look good for him.

He wants to be delectable.

"There's someone I want to impress, at All Stars," he says to Stefan. He's not sure how many shirts he's tried on, or how many pairs of pants. He's not sure what they're even doing here, but that's why he hired someone. Maybe one day he'll have opinions about clothes, but it's not going to be in four weeks. "Someone I want to look good for."

"Okay, yes, I am here for it," Stefan says. "What do you think, five outfits? Resort casual?" Then he pats Shane on the cheek. "Who am I kidding, send me your itinerary, I'll put options together for you. You are going to slay."

Chapter End Notes

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Compliments, adoration, love, and strings of exclamation marks all accepted below.

Chapter 3: Don't make them wonder

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Peter Brandt started at Ashbury when Shane was fourteen. Shane was already the first line center, and his mom had started planning how to move his program to keep him developing. Shattuck, maybe. Or one of midget teams with a clear pipeline to the QMJHL. Somewhere stronger players went. She wasn't wrong. He could feel his gains slowing down every year when the seniors graduated. No matter how hard he pushed himself, he couldn't sketch better plays in scrimmages against his own second line. So it was mostly camps and skills clinics challenging him, and that was only one month a year at a stretch.

Their captain was a senior, Louis Gerard. He was the oldest guy on their first line, a defender, and the worst captain Shane had ever played under. He almost wished he'd gone for captain, even though a freshman captain would have been laughable.

Peter Brandt was a sophomore transfer, and right off the bat, he didn't mesh with the team. Nothing he did seemed to make it better. Their first day of practice, he sat on the side of the table where the guys who had early classes were clustered, and something in the way he got up to move down the table to join the rest of the team made everyone stop talking. That kind of thing happened a lot over the first quarter. Just, awkward Brandt.

He was a good player, as good as either wing on their second line, but he couldn't hack it with the team as a person, so he didn't play as many shifts as he should have.

One Saturday, after an early home game, the team all settled into the Matthews House common room. Tony Kell was sitting on one of the sofas off to the side, texting someone, and then all of a sudden, he said, loud enough that it made everyone else go silent, "Back off, fag," to Brandt.

The whole room went quiet, and everyone looked over at them, and yep, Brandt was sitting a little bit too close to the side of the couch Kell had obviously just gotten up from. But he looked surprised, even a little scared, at Kell shouting, at everyone's attention on him.

Shane thought maybe if Gerard had been a better captain he could have taken the whole thing down a notch, calmed down Kell and gotten everyone focused on something else. If he'd been able to lead the team, he'd have done that, because what would be the point of having a teammate no one can stand?

Instead, he said, "Shit, yeah, that's what it is, huh? You a faggot, Brandt?"

Shane stayed stock still where he was sitting up against a cabinet, where he could see the Metros game still playing on the TV. Peter's face was ashen at that point, and Shane wanted to scream, wanted to do something, wanted to say, *Can't you see he's just fucking weird?*

But he didn't. He just watched as everyone laughed and Peter's face went blotchy underneath his pallor, and he stood up and stumbled out the door.

He listened as they laughed and jeered, and Kell said, "I thought he was gonna grab my dick right there," and Gerard's line partner, Neil Sacks, said "Yeah, he was all up in your balls," and Shane hoped no one was looking at him, because he was only just keeping his panic contained in his throat, only just keeping the scared, frustrated tears from dripping down his face.

He kept his eyes on the game, and tried to map out the plays as the Metros and the Seals slapped the puck back and forth. He catalogued the things he could see (the green wallpaper, the back of Anders' head, the bright flicker of the TV), could smell (dried out soft drink, axe body spray, sweat), could hear (announcers talking too fast, Marcus Hill's donkey laugh), could feel (nubby carpet under his hands, the line of the cabinet against his spine), could taste (his own bile and the snotty, salty pressure of tears in his nose).

Eventually everything faded back to normal. The Metros scored, and Gerard's girlfriend showed up with a grocery bag full of beers, and Shane headed back to his room.

The next day, when his parents came by to take him to brunch, he asked when they were going to go down to Shattuck for a tour and his tryout. He asked about the teams his mom was looking into, and she seemed excited that he was feeling ready for the change. And he didn't say anything about why, and neither of his parents asked.

He's in the white blazer, black pima cotton tee ("Wear this on day one," Stefan had said, "You'll feel sexy as hell." And he wasn't wrong. Shane's nipples are in heaven), dark wash selvedge jeans, and tan boat shoes. He brought the jade roller Rose sent him and put it in the fridge like she'd suggested.

He did the gel eye masks the night before. He laid in bed and let himself say, "Ilya," just once.

He got an early flight in, brought a garment bag, and asked the flight attendant to put it in the coat closet. Checked one bag of gear and one bag of clothes. Three pairs of pants, four pairs of shorts, twelve shirts, three pairs of shoes each in their own microfiber bag, and two pairs of sandals. A little flip book of looks and "vibe maps" Stefan had put together for the trip. He'd listened to lowfi beats on his sound cancelling headphones in the airline lounge before the concierge took him to boarding, and even though the flight attendant said she'd let him know, he checked the airline app every thirty seconds until it said his bags had been loaded.

On the plane, he watched film from his most recent game and listened to one of the team's sports psychologist's meditation tracks. Tried to sleep and failed.

He looked at the Jane and Lily thread in the car on the way to the hotel, all the way back to the beginning, leaned his phone screen hard into his chest when the top of the picture of Ilya's dick scrolled into view.

He felt terrified. He breathed. (He let his mouth move around Ilya's name, but he didn't say it.)

The event coordinator met him at the hotel, and he asked her to text him as his teammates arrive—to give him a chance to touch base. The texts rolled in all morning: Cook, Shore, Roy, Neal, Gaborik, Sakic. Rozanov.

Ilya.

His stomach is in a knot. Roiling. He takes a breath, shoots his jacket sleeves like Stefan had shown him. Is that necessary for this kind of look?

He isn't sure.

It doesn't matter.

He takes the elevator down, breathes. (*Ilya*.) Walks past the concierge's desk, smiles and waves off the event coordinator, looks out the window to the pool deck, tries not to panic at what kind of plan this is. What if Ilya already went to his room? What if he stays there until practice tomorrow afternoon? What if he doesn't want to talk to Shane? What if he's over him? What if he's mad? What if Shane gets too close and someone sees and someone says something? What if…

He can see three palm trees, the taupe tile on the edge of the pool, the poolside server's khaki pants and white polo, a stack of towels.

He can smell chlorine and sunscreen and Jasmine flowers.

He can taste the mint of his chapstick.

He can hear his heartbeat in his ears, the overhead fans swooping around, Ilya Rozanov's deep voice asking for a Corona and then laughing.

He takes a breath. (Ilya.)

He can feel the softness of his shirt, the movement of his legs towards something scary and needful and real. He can see Ilya's dumb shirt and his lovely, sharp profile. He can taste his own hope, rising up over the dry mouth fear. He can feel the smile lifting the corners of his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I did *so much* research on the youth hockey pipeline for this, and I probably still got things wrong. Forgive me, gods of hockey.

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Compliments, adoration, marriage proposals and strings of emojis all accepted below.

Chapter 4: Don't be the one they talk about

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They'd landed on Avon Old School over Shattuck. Mostly because his mom was running for the Metros, and QMJHL owned Connecticut for recruitment. It didn't hurt that they had three dedicated teams and Coach Garten had been aggressively building their program for forty years. Their bench was well populated with future draftees and NCAA players, and Garten worked to make sure the top skaters got invited to at least a couple elite camps every year.

Shane was excited about the play, about developing.

"I think we can count on a QMJHL draft next year or the year after," his mom said, and that was good enough for Shane.

There was another transfer skater joining the team, Barrett Green, and Coach Garten invited Shane and Barrett and their families over to his house for dinner their first night in town.

Barrett was funny and smart. A goalie with a record Shane had looked up and found himself impressed by.

Shane's roommate was a kid named Evanton McKinsey who kept a box of six fancy watches on his dresser.

Barrett's roommate's name was Liam Wolf.

Liam was gay. Or at least, that's what second line center, Kincaid Cain told his right wing one day six weeks into the semester as they were gearing up: "You hear Green's roomie is a homo?"

The wing had laughed, then shouted over to Barrett, "Green, what's it like rooming with a fag?"

Shane couldn't see Barrett, but he heard the eye roll in his voice. "Bro, I barely talk to him. All I do in my room is sleep."

It didn't give Shane that twisted feeling in his stomach he usually got when he heard words like *fag* and *queer* and *fruit* coming out of his teammates mouths. And that made him like Barrett more.

He let that liking percolate. Just a little bit. Not so much that he ever thought about doing something with it, but enough that he'd choose the seat next to Barrett on the bus if there were no open rows left. Enough that he'd toss him a water bottle first if he was at the cooler handing them out.

Enough that when, that February, he saw Liam at a post-game party, his throat closed up with a jealous kind of terror.

Barrett had played a shutout against Rivers, and one of the seniors had brought out their stash of vodka to celebrate.

Liam wove through the crowd — the JV and third teams were all there, too — and leaned his shoulder into Barrett's and whispered something into his ear. Shane didn't hear what he said, but he saw Barrett laugh and lean back into Liam.

Shane had stopped breathing.

Liam moved away from Barrett, Shane stayed standing with the JV offense players, pretending to listen to them talking about the River defensemen and their strengths and weaknesses. He tracked Liam going to talk to some of the third team players, then lost track when Scott Killian asked him about the play that led to Shane's third goal of the game.

Shane tried to keep an eye on Barrett, tried to find Cain in the crowd, tried to remember which wing had been the one to taunt Barrett about it, but he didn't have a clear picture of the moment. Had it been Jules, red hair and lean, or Welter, blonde with a scraggly mustache? His brain flipped them back and forth until it was a panicked jumble. He couldn't see any of them anyway, only Barrett, stretching his neck up occasionally to scan the crowd.

It had been two minutes, maybe, when Barrett stood up and walked in the direction Liam had gone.

Shane couldn't even attempt to hear what Barrett said when he stopped to talk to the group of seniors standing by the door with spiked bottles of Coke, but two of them shook their heads, and their eyes all followed Barrett as he walked through the door.

Shane wanted to follow, wanted to know what was happening, wanted to *help*, somehow.

"Night, guys," he said to the JV guys, and left the room through the same door Barrett had gone through.

They weren't anywhere Shane could see them, and Shane couldn't hear anyone talking outside of the lounge. He left to head towards his dorm, and saw them outside, just beyond the ring of the pathway lights. Cain was face to face with Barrett, and Barrett was shielding Liam with his body. Liam's shoulders had folded in on himself, but Barrett looked angry.

"If you've got a problem with me, take it up with me," he was saying.

"I just wanted to make sure your fag roommate wasn't getting the wrong impression of the team."

"Like what? That we aren't all complete dicks?"

Cain didn't back down, and Shane told himself to move, told his feet to walk over there, but he was locked in place, frozen.

"That we aren't all cocksuckers," Cain said.

And Shane knew that vitriol, that disgust, that fear. He knew it from the back of his neck to the pit of his stomach. He knew it and heard it and tried to ignore it, but Barrett laughed.

"No one wants you to suck their cock, Cain, get over yourself."

Cain shoved Barrett then. Not a gentle shove. He put his whole weight into it. Barrett stumbled back into Liam, and they both went down.

The sound of it—air punching out of Barrett's lungs, the thud of their bodies colliding, the scrape of Liam's jeans against the cement—hit Shane in the throat, and his feet found themselves, moved him into the fray.

"What the fuck?" he asked, reached down to help up Barrett and then Liam. "What's your problem, Cain?"

"It's fine, Hollzy," Barrett said, brushing off his pants. "Just a misunderstanding."

Cain didn't say anything. Shane wondered if he would—*when* he would. The back of Shane's neck was already hot, the pit of his stomach churning. He'd walked right into it, put a target on his back. He'd done the thing he told himself he shouldn't do even if he wanted to, even if he felt like he *needed* to. He'd lined up with the cocksuckers and now he was going to pay for it.

Then, "Yeah," Cain gritted out. "Don't worry about it, Hollander. We're fine."

Shane took a breath then. "Okay," he said, trying to keep any hint of feeling out of his voice. "Good." He turned back towards where he'd come from. "I'm turning in for the night. Might be a good idea for you guys, too."

Barrett gave a concise "Yep." Cain didn't say anything. Liam was silent.

Shane stood and watched while Cain walked back into the building, then turned to walk slowly back to his dorm. He could hear Barrett and Liam walking behind him, but they didn't try to catch up, didn't talk to him.

He didn't look back, either. Didn't look back, and tried not to wonder if they were holding hands, or walking too close, or sneaking glances at each other.

Or if they weren't.

Shane felt like, if anyone looked, they'd see the echo of Rozanov's lips on his cheek: the red hot brand of his affection where no one but the two of them had seen it before. It wasn't the first time Ilya had exuberantly kissed someone after a particularly excellent goal or save or defensive maneuver. His teammates were probably used to it. Shane was used to seeing it on tape, the announcers didn't make it into a thing.

But Shane wasn't used to it. It felt like a thing for him, and he was sure he'd done something stupid, something that would make it clear that it was more than a celly, that it was a declaration.

Or, at least that's how he felt. What he hoped.

His plan had been to take it in a couple of stages: To talk to Ilya right away, figure out if it was over—if he'd just blown it completely. Then be around him, casually, to make sure he hadn't been imagining how it felt—to put a toe in the waters of something else, something more.

Then talk to him privately.

To say it.

He'd been planning on finding Ilya the second day—after the skills competition, or on the red carpet before the gala—to find a time to talk in private. But Ilya had already been embroiled with Shore in the locker room when Shane finished taking his gear off, and they'd leapfrogged between reporters for nearly the whole time the red carpet was live. He'd started to feel like it was obvious he was lingering around Ilya, *for* Ilya, in a way that someone was going to ask him about. The idea made his throat seize up, so he stopped answering the reporters questions, and walked through the door. They'd been seated separately at the gala dinner, and then he'd looked for Ilya during the post-dinner drinks, and couldn't find him. So now he only had tonight.

He could have texted him. Maybe he should have texted him. But every time he opened the Jane and Lily thread, it felt like going backwards. Going back to when he didn't understand why he was lying and who it hurt. Felt like if that was how he was going to do it, he might as well do nothing. Might as well let himself slide back to fucking Ilya when they were in the same city, and never looking at the space between them more closely than that.

He didn't want that, didn't want lying and simple and secret. He wanted something real. He wanted to live in the space between him and Ilya, to tell the truth about it. Even if the only person he was telling already knew.

There was no dinner after the game. No gala. The league knew they'd used up all the players goodwill on the 36 hour media frenzy leading up to the game. Even the event coordinator had turned her duties over to the hotel's concierge, so Shane couldn't ask if Ilya's flight out was tonight or tomorrow morning without someone new wondering why he wanted to know and whether they should actually tell him.

There aren't any other Boston players on the team this year, and the only other Russian player is on the West coast team. So there isn't anyone he can casually approach who might bring it up without him asking.

It's terrifying. To imagine Rozanov's name coming out of his mouth when it's not about hockey, not in answer to a journalist's question about their scoring records or their so-called rivalry. To seek him out. To ask about him like a person he knows, a person he wants to know better. To let someone see that the thing between them isn't just the rivalry the league has fostered. To let them wonder what else there is. To let them start asking questions.

Shane puts on a different outfit. Twelve shirts for three days seemed absurd when Stefan's courier brought them over, but now he's glad of the options. He chooses a silky one. He pairs

it with the shorts and sandals that the "vibe map" book calls *Casually seductive, daytime*. He's not sure how that's different from *Elusive and withholding, daytime*, (which has the same shorts and shoes, but a different silky shirt) or *Casually seductive, nighttime*, (same shirt and sandals, but with pants), and whether he should choose pants or shorts if it's 4pm, but the sun is going to set around 5:30.

He goes down to the bar and asks for a ginger ale. He takes it with him to the pool. Cook and Gaborik and their wives and kids are spread out between the pool and hot tubs, wet and lounging, and Shane pulls up a chair next to the hot tub.

He compliments both men on their play during the game, and asks when they're flying out, and then attempts to be casual as he takes a swig of his soft drink and says, "You seen Rozanov?"

Cook laughs and says, "What, y'all gonna have a shootout at sunset?"

Shane lets his mouth go up on one side, "No, I just haven't had a chance to talk to him since the game. Gotta say something nice."

"Captaincy is shit," Gaborik says, raising his beer in a mock toast. "He was looking for you, too. I think he went out to the beach."

Shane nods and stands up. "Guess I better see if I can find him."

He threads his way through the chairs out to the beach. The sun is starting to set, and he thinks it's Ilya's silhouette he can see making its way along the sand from the north, towards the hotel's entrance. He sits down on the warm, golden sand and waits.

Chapter End Notes

I could find almost no information about what the actual NHL all star event agenda looks like, so I took many many liberties. As with many thing in this universe that I feel I'm probably getting wrong when it comes to NHL stuff, I'm just hand waving and saying "this is how MLH differs from the NHL" 🤷 Also I have obviously put in various famous NHL players names in completely anachronistic ways. Forgive or ignore.

Y'all I have been writing in this fandom in a mildly isolated way for long enough that I am beginning to truly question if this is any good, so comments, DM slides, unhinged offers to beta, and discord server recs will all be deeply appreciated.

Chapter 5: Don't get in too deep

Chapter Notes

Happy new year! Let's keep loving on these two in this wild year, yeah?

Jarred Knight was all of 5'6", but 220lbs and agile. They'd been at three camps together over the years, and Jarred was as close as Shane had ever gotten to feeling truly challenged by someone his own age. If anyone had asked Shane which centers would be drafted top three in 2007, Jarred Knight would have made the list no question. He might need another year of development before he was brought up, but he had a spot at Clarkson, and Shane was looking forward to playing against him more regularly once they were both in the league. He could see where Jarred was going, and it was good hockey.

Then Jarred didn't get drafted at all in 2007, and Clarkson played him about eighty percent less than he deserved. And by the 2008 draft, Shane would still have put him in the top 50, but none of the lists his mom was sending him even had him on them. Which kept surprising Shane in a way that made him feel like he'd stopped sprinting just short of puking.

Jarred was at the draft, with a new manager at the opening cocktail hour, but he looked less cocky than usual. He looked right at Shane when he started to make his way over to him and gave a tight, firm shake of his head. *No,* it said, *don't.* And Shane nodded, shifted his trajectory ten degrees left, and ended up at the same table as Barrett Green.

Barrett was projected as a top fifty draft, top ten goalie draft, and Shane had barely thought about him in the year he'd been with the Saguenées, but seeing him now made something settle in Shane's chest.

"Hey," he said, setting down his low-ball glass of ginger ale on the table Barrett was standing by. Shane's mom was finishing up a conversation with the GM of the Metros, and Barrett's agent was nowhere to be seen.

"Hey!" Barrett said, and cuffed Shane into a one-armed hug. "How's the projected number one draft pick?"

"Can't complain," Shane says with a half shrug. "Though I think Rozanov will give me a run for my money, with Boston having first pick. Heathson runs a more aggressive line strategy."

"Nah, man, overall one, for sure."

"Thanks," Shane said, and tried not to notice that he was blushing. They talked for a bit about their old teammates, their most recent seasons, the prospect cup that Barrett had just missed being picked for.

Eventually, Shane could tell his mom was wrapping up her conversation, so he leaned into Barret just slightly.

"Do you know the story with Knight?"he asked.

Barrett's eyes went flat. "Someone saw him. Last year."

"Saw what?" Shane asked, low.

Barrett tilted his head meaningfully, raised one eyebrow. "Saw him with someone."

Shane wasn't sure what that meant. With…

He glanced at Knight, shoulders newly cowed, and he knew, even before Barrett said it, knew what everyone else knew already.

"A man."

Shane's shoulders rolled back, his spine straightening. His disguise reaffirming itself. "Oh."

"Yep. Anyway, brave as hell of him to come. Not sure it'll pay off, though."

"No," Shane said with a grimace. He was pretty sure it wouldn't.

They'd sat there for a while, as the sun set, and then Shane had stood up and said "Eight?" And Ilya had said "Yes," and Shane had walked back to the hotel. He'd had dinner at the bar and then gone back to his room to take care of some optimistic hygiene and change into Stefan's nighttime look slacks before going to Ilya's room.

But then he hadn't done either of those things. Instead he's standing at the closet, hand on a hanger, wondering if he's going to be able to do this. If he's really going to walk out the door of his room, take the elevator up two stories, knock on Ilya's door, and just…tell him.

Instead he's staring at himself in the mirror, mapping out the walk from his room to Ilya's, He's breathing shallowly, and his hand feels foreign, feels heavy and detached at the end of his arm, as though the vital thing that moves him has left his body behind.

It's just… Shane hasn't ever had trouble with follow through. He's always had iron willpower. When the other kids were dragging themselves to the rink for 5am practice before class in sixth grade, he was there, fresh and ready. He goes to sleep with enough time to get his eight hours every night, sticks like glue to every guideline his nutritionist gives him; hits his miles, his heart rate, his reps, his ice time; does the interviews, suffers through the ad shoots, shakes hands with the owners, the investors, the representatives, and the partners. He says the right things, does the right things, follows the rules to the letter.

And now, when it's so important—*so important*—he can't.

This is what he's good at. This is what he does. He doesn't understand why it's so hard now. He makes a decision to do something, and he does it. He follows through. So why can't he do

it now? Why can't he take the pants off the hanger and bring the into the bathroom? Why can't he follow through on his plan and go for the thing he wants and fuck the rest of it?

He breathes out slowly, feels the breath rattle in his chest.

He pulls his hand back. He lets it settle against his leg, lets his fingertips worry the crisp, nubby texture of his shorts.

Of course he knows why—why this is hard for him when all of the other shit has always been easy.

Because he's alone in this. Because his mom and his coach and his trainers and his teammates and his nutritionist and his sponsors and his fans all expect him to do those things. So what else is he going to do?

But this? Walking to Ilya Rozanov's room and telling him he's gay? Telling him he wants as much of Ilya as he'll let him have?

No one wants that except for Shane.

They even, probably, would tell him not to. Would ask if it's worth the risk—his career, his influence, his goddamned *legacy*.

It is.

Because what's any of that worth of he's crumbling behind that smiling shell? What does it mean if he can't have the one thing he's let himself want that's only for him?

He knows how big a risk it is. He's seen where it can lead. Maybe it won't happen to him. Or if it does, it was always going to, someday.

Because there have been cracks, haven't there? In his follow through. French fries and desperation. Beer and resentment. Lust and longing and their inevitable hangovers.

He focuses on his breathing, makes it go long, in and out until it's no longer rattling in his throat. He counts his breaths. On ten, he walks to the door, slips his hand into his pocket and checks for his keycard. At twenty, he turns the door handle and pushes it open.

And then he's walking to the elevator, pressing the button, stepping through.

He can hear his heart beating in his ears. He can see Ilya, in his mind's eye, holding out his hand, saying "Hollander," and meaning, *I didn't want to scare you*, or *what are you doing*, or *I'm sorry*.

And he knows, now, what he wanted in that moment, but all he could see was the men and boys he'd watched dragged down by the ways they were too bold, too strange, too different. The ways they couldn't hide.

He'd thought if he hid from everyone, even himself, if he kept that final morsel of truth tucked away behind his career and his influence and his fucking legacy, he couldn't fail.

He follows the dim hallway to Ilya's room, and pulls out his phone.

He's ready to stop hiding from himself. But it's not a failure. He knows that, now, too.

Here. He types

It's a choice.

Chapter 6: Don't let them win

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ilya Rozanov was fucking beautiful. On the ice, obviously, but also everywhere else. Shane could hardly stand it. First draft pick, easy charisma, hell on skates. It made him feel sick with something that felt close to jealousy, closer to need.

It was exhilarating to skate against him. It made Shane feel alive in a new way. And then there was everything else. The appraising way he'd smiled at Shane before the Prospects Cup, his hand lingering on Shane's as he passed his water bottle over after the draft, the way he looked at Shane across a room, like he knew Shane would be looking back.

It was a lot like Jarred. Like Barrett. A glimpse of a kindred spirit across the ice, only more—*hungry*.

When the MLH press rep sent the adjusted shoot schedule for his rookie ad spots, Shane was surprised to see Rozanov's name next to his on a video segment, but he wasn't mad about it.

He was a little bit excited, if he was honest with himself. More than a little bit famished.

Then Rozanov had said he'd suggested they do the spot together, and it felt crystal clear, like Rozanov was skating up to the circle, teeth flashing in challenge.

It was a risk, waiting to shower until he knew Rozanov would be in there, but a calculated one. Rozanov wouldn't be in the same locker room as Shane for at least a year, probably more. He wouldn't have much of an excuse to say anything about Shane that wasn't in answer to a question at a presser for months.

And Shane had been drafted. He'd made it past that gauntlet at least. He wasn't one player in a draft year anymore, he was one player in a league. The scrutiny would be different.

The thing he hadn't counted on was Rozanov's ass, and the cut of his hips, the moles everywhere.

He was staring. He was staring and he couldn't stop himself and this was it, wasn't it? Going out in a blaze of humiliating gay horniness at a nothing rink in the middle of nowhere Connecticut before he even skated his first pro game. Ilya Rozanov's knuckles in his teeth and everyone knowing the secret that would stop him from doing the job he'd been working toward for his whole life.

Fuck.

He was caught between looking his fill—making it worth it, at least, before the inevitable end of everything—and looking away—holding on to plausible deniability, shoving it all down harder.

Then Shane caught Rozanov's glance cutting to his cock, his little smirk, his eyebrows raised. The taunt there.

"Fuck off," Shane said. He wasn't about to get out a measuring stick or make a move, he wasn't stupid. No matter how hungry he was.

And then Rozanov wasn't taunting, he was facing him, his hand stroking his wet cock, his eyes flashing with something that couldn't be disgust. Shane's stomach felt like it had left his body, the jolt of arousal so strong and sudden it terrified him.

Shane finished showering and dressed. Sat by his locker, his stomach clawing itself to shreds from hunger for Ilya Rozanov. He gave Rozanov an out.

Breathed for the first time in what felt like years when he didn't take it.

Shane is used to being the desperate one, with Ilya. Desperate for his cock, desperate to kiss him, desperate to see him, desperate to let out the words he's been holding under his tongue for six years.

But it's Ilya this time. Ilya who can't seem to get enough of kissing Shane, Ilya who says "Give me, let me…fuck, Hollander," then, later "Fuck, Shane, fuck, fuck, fuck."

He feels completely full and completely empty and completely overwhelmed and completely…complete.

Is this what they're all so scared of? Shane wonders. All of those angry, disgusted, wary faces in the locker room and on the ice, is this what they're imagining? What they're moving away from? Are they thinking that they need to save all the raw, bare, ugly things inside of them? That no one would ever hold them if they understood their true shape?

He thinks of Ilya, laughing, when Shane told him the thing that he's always kept hidden. Thinks of Ilya, hiding, angry, terrified of letting Shane see him cry.

Thinks of Barrett leaning into Liam's shoulder, Brandt mere inches from Kell's side, Knight touching his lover in whatever way he did. Thinks of Ilya's fingers tearing at the fly of his shorts, shoving them down. Ilya flipping Shane onto the bed, sinking to the floor. Shane's hands in Ilya's hair, tugging him up for a kiss.

It isn't about any of that, he knows now. Not the fear of being looked at or touched or approached. It's about being seen, being known, being *there*.

They're afraid of the best fucking thing that's ever happened to Shane.

He's afraid too. He's not sure he'll ever stop being afraid of what it means to let someone in like this. What it means that Ilya is willing to let Shane in. He isn't sure he deserves it.

He presses a kiss to Ilya's chest.

But he isn't ever going to stop trying.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for joining me on this ride.

And thank you to anything_thats_rock_and_roll for the late entry beta so that I didn't have to wring my hands too extensively over this chapter. <3

To everyone who comments, I am kissing you on the mouth. If you've been reading along as I've posted, we're married now. Those are the rules of hockey, as far as I'm aware.

Works inspired by this one

[Podfic] Do it Scared by Amanita_Fierce

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!