Don't Poke the Bear

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Characters:	Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander, Hayden Pike, Troy Barrett, Zane Boodram, Patrice Drapeau, Gilbert Comeau, Theriault (Game Changers), Yuna Hollander, David Hollander, J. J. Boiziau, Farah Jalali, Roger Crowell
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by meetmebythelilactree

Summary

PS: Prompt is related to the events of The Long Game, so there will be spoilers for the plot of that book!

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After Shane and Ilya are outed in the events of The Long Game, Montréal and Ottawa play seven games against each other in the Eastern Conference.

The Centaurs still love their captain, of course. The Voyageurs, however, are not so united.

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A.K.A - Five times Shane's team was an asshole to him, the one time Ilya got to do something about it, and the obvious humiliation ritual that is the Centaurs playing a game against a post-Hollander era Voyageurs.

Notes

This fic was born after I saw a TikTok video about Ilya chirping the Voyageurs after Shane signs on with the Centaurs. Everyone in the comments was lamenting that there were no fics surrounding that prompt, so I'm here with a Christmas miracle to make some dreams come true. **The angst doesn't get heavy until the 6th chapter, but when it does it should *not* be taken lightly. PLEASE heed the tags i am losing sleep and hair.**

Hope you enjoy and happy holidays to those who celebrate! And a happy winter season to those who do not :D

PS: PLEASE HEED TAGS CAREFULLY!!!!! As the fic tackles blatant homophobia that Shane faces at the hands of his teammates, the F slur is used in the fic. In addition, the tags for Graphic Depictions of Violence, Blood and Injury/other violence/injury related tags, Hate Crime, and Sexual Harassment come into effect in Chapter Six- it is a very heavy chapter!! If you are looking to read the rest of the fic (which ofc contains homophobia-typical bullying/harassment but contains no physical violence) but are hesitant to engage with that chapter, I've included a small synopsis in that chapter's end notes so that you can have context for the seventh and final chapter. PLEASE heed tags, read at your own risk, DNI if necessary, and keep yourself safe always! I've been so stressed out trying to make it as clear as possible that this is not a light fic that i've

almost taken it down entirely like three times due to anxiety, so please please please read the tags properly and take them to heart.

PPS: Everything I write is messily, wonderfully human. In the words of a wise chaotic freak, F U C K AI to death.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: 1. The Locker Room

The first time it happened, he'd been expecting it.

After being benched from the last game, Shane was rightfully nervous to step back into the Montréal Voyageurs locker room. He'd made sure to keep his skills sharp, of course: Roger Crowell might be able to keep him off the ice for a game but he couldn't keep Shane from obsessively training in his own home. Ilya had rolled his eyes when Shane had finally slunk back into the house, spine curled in exhaustion. He'd flopped onto the couch dramatically, Ilya quickly following suit.

"I don't want to hear it."

A pause.

"Okay. I say nothing, then."

Ilya made to rise from the couch but Shane moved fast, whining as he wrapped his legs around his fiancé's torso and refused to let go. "*Noooo*, stay."

Ilya snorted, letting himself be pulled back to the couch. "Moya lyubov, if you move half as fast in the game tonight, you will have no problems with team."

Shane grabbed a nearby pillow, using it to muffle his groan. "They fucking hate me now."

"Hayden does not hate you. He is idiot, but not stupid."

Shane groaned again, louder this time, lifting the pillow from his face. "Hayden doesn't count. I'm his best friend and he feels horrible for outing us. I could literally hit him with your car and he'd say thank you."

"Mm. Sounds fun. Shall we test?"

The pillow hit him in the face. "Stop it."

Ilya brushed the decorative pillow off of himself and pulled Shane into his chest, breathing in the scent of sweat as he tucked him into his arm. "They do not hate you."

"They *hate* me." Shane emphasized. "They think I've betrayed them."

"You have been perfect captain for ten years. Given them three Cups."

"I *lied* to them for ten years."

"That was not lying, lyubov. That was…" Ilya struggled for the English word.

"Different?" Shane offered.

“Necessary.” Ilya grabbed his fiancé’s hand. “Neither of us were ready to be out. We had people to care for, careers to…make like sidewalk?”

“Cement.”

“Yes, cement. And now we are here, very out and very proud. It is joy to be yours.” Ilya punctuated his sentence with a smooch to Shane’s forehead.

Shane grumbled. “Wish it’d happened differently.”

“Me too. But we are able to stand in the sun now.” Ilya hummed thoughtfully, bringing a hand to Shane’s hair, carding it through softly. “I would not trade this for anything.”

Shane sighed into his chest, letting Ilya’s petting quiet the anxieties in his mind. “I love you.”

“And I love you, Shane Hollander.”

Another pause.

“But we will still wipe the floor with your team tonight.”

Shane slapped Ilya’s chest playfully, face scrunched up in a faux-mean look. “Not if we do it first.”

They’d stayed there on the couch until they had to leave for the game, piling into Shane’s sensible jeep and jetting off towards the arena. When they’d parked and began walking towards the doors, Ilya was quickly pulled away by a gaggle of his teammates, who patted Shane on the back in greeting and smiled as they dragged his sheepish fiancé into the rink, whooping. Shane hiked his own back up on his shoulder, nodding to a few of his own teammates as he grabbed the door to hold it open.

“Hey, guys! Ready for the game?”

They moved inside without a word.

He quickly swallowed the growing lump in his throat, gritting his teeth as he made towards the locker room. Each step forward felt exponentially heavier as he began to hear his teammates, a rowdy and unintelligible mixture of English and French leaking out into the hall.

Here goes nothing.

He slipped inside the room as quietly as he could, making a beeline for his space next to Hayden. The brunette shot him a weary smile, patting him on the back.

“Good to have you back, Cap.”

Shane glanced around the room as it got quiet, registering his presence. “Good to be back, Hayd.”

It was then that Coach Theriault decided to make his appearance in the locker room, calling for everyone's attention as he stepped inside. With a quick survey of the room his eyes landed on Shane, narrowing his eyes as he huffed out a sigh.

"*Right*. Listen up. It's no secret that there's been a bit of…newfound *interest* in the players on this team as of late. Not just from the fans, but from the goddamned commissioner of the NHL himself. So I'd just like to take a moment to remind *everyone*," He threw a very unsubtle, icy glare at Shane, "That our first priority is and always will be the game. Your job is to eat, sleep, and breathe hockey. *Nothing else*. Is that clear?"

A rumbling of agreement rippled around the room.

Theriault stepped towards Shane. "And I won't tolerate the captain of my team being distracted for a single second of this game. If you make even one little move without my say-so on that ice tonight you're running drills until your fucking legs fall off. Understand?"

"Yes, of course."

"Yes *what*?"

Humiliation burnt in Shane's cheeks as he locked eyes with Theriault. "Yes…sir."

"Good. Be out there in five, gentlemen. We've got a game to win."

With that, he rounded on his heel, pushing open the door roughly and letting it slam behind him.

A few snickers echoed around the room as Hayden grabbed his shoulder, pulling him in to speak lowly into his ear.

"Brush it off. Go show them who they're trying to fuck with."

Shane let out a deep sigh. "Thanks, Hayd."

It took all of two minutes before someone acknowledged the elephant in the room.

"God, I can't believe we're playing against Ilya fucking Rozanov tonight." J.J moaned.

"C'mon, it's just the Centaurs. Sure they've made it to the playoffs but they're still figuring out their team balance. They're all over the place."

"Yeah it's not *team balance*," J.J made air quotes with his hands, "That I'm worried about. I'm worried about losing another tooth to that Russian motherfucker."

"Well. Not motherfucker, exactly." Drapeau snickered. "Maybe some of that good old Canadian niceness has managed to rub off on him."

Shane let him laugh, biting the inside of his cheek to keep from grimacing. He could take a little locker room talk. He could–

“I doubt it, but maybe Holly could ask him *nicely* to stop trying to bowl you over every time you get close to a breakaway.”

Shane’s brow furrowed, crude implication flying over his head as he focused on the nickname. *Holly*. That was new. He was Shane to most, Hollander on the ice– hell, even Hollzy if the drinks were flowing a little too generously at the local bar while he stood back and watched, taking measured sips from his ginger ale. But never Holly.

Perhaps he’d misheard him.

Hayden swooped in with a quip of his own before Drapeau could continue. “Good luck trying to get Ilya Rozanov to do anything he doesn’t want to.”

Shane joined in their laughter, it coming out slightly uneasy-sounding. He swore he could feel Drapeau’s eyes on him as he shimmied his jersey on over his padding.

You’ve got this, Shane. Get out there, score goals, leave it all out on the ice. Get out there, score goals. Don’t. Fuck. Up.

He felt nauseous as the team formed a messy line, preparing themselves for a promenade down the hallway towards the mass of roaring fans. A solid body bumped him as he took his place at the head, causing him to stumble as he reached for the door handle.

“Careful there, Holly. Wouldn’t want you to go down before you’re ready.”

Right. Definitely hadn’t misheard, then.

Shane was clenching his jaw so hard it hurt.

Fuck this. Let’s play some fucking hockey.

Chapter 2: 2. The Bar

The second time it happened, it snuck up on him.

The air of the rink was biting down harder on Shane's nerves as he skated out to center ice. He should have been grateful, really, that his coach hadn't threatened to bench him for a second time after their disastrous loss to the Centaurs in the first game. Then again, homophobic or not, you'd have to be fucking insane to bench Shane Hollander during the playoffs. He had scored twice in the last game, making up both of the Voyageurs only two points, but their line of defence had not been good enough to stop Ilya from scoring twice, earning a third off an assist from Barrett and setting up Haas for his own goal. By the end of the game, the Voyageurs had slunk off home ice with a definitive 4-2 hanging over their heads.

Today, he could feel that his breath was coming out in little puffs, far from the usual cadence he sported. The roar of the crowd drowned out the soft gasping as he forced lungfuls of air as deep as they would go. Ilya was already settled at center ice, looking amazingly, infuriatingly unaffected by the situation. Shane skated up to him, mouth open to make some sort of comment about the situation at hand.

He didn't even get one word in before Ilya spoke, his tone firm.

"Let them talk."

His fiancé's voice cut through the fray, accent heavy as he addressed Shane. He nodded his head out in the direction of the crowd. "They know nothing."

It didn't feel like nothing. It felt like they knew *everything*.

"I just-"

"I cannot comfort you here, moya lyubov." Ilya's voice was quieter now, gentler as he leaned down, stick jutting out to rest on the center line. "But I can remind you who you are. Show them that."

Shane bit his lip. "But what if-"

"*Hollander!* Stop making fucking heart eyes and get on with it!"

Theriault's thundering voice ripped him from the safety of Ilya's soft-spoken tone, pricking up the hairs on the back of his neck. He leaned down to copy Ilya's stance, wobbling slightly as he did.

Fuck. Fuckfuckfuck. Can I do this? Shit. Fuck. I can't do this-

"Hollander."

This time, the moniker didn't come from the sidelines. Shane glanced back at Ilya to see him throw a lazy smile, jerking his head to nod at the rows of seats just beyond the boards.

"Will you disappoint them?"

It was like he was back in that Montreal arena, bent over the ice of their first NHL game against each other. He'd been nervous then, too, for a scarily similar reason. Facing off against Ilya Rozanov, his then-budding rival. Still infuriating, of course, but now with a sort of endearing quality that made Shane's heart thump a little louder in his chest whenever he caught a glimpse of him.

Fuck, he had it bad for his fiancé.

He huffed out a small laugh, giving Ilya's stick a playful smack as he settled in, letting the familiar teasing roll over his body. He returned the Russian's smile with a wink, shoulders now tense only with the familiar burn of anticipation.

The puck dropped.

"Not a fucking chance."

"God, that game was rough." Hayden dropped himself into the booth seat of the table, not bothering to make room when Shane shoved in next to him.

"Tell me about it," J.J rubbed his shoulder, plopping down beside Shane. "That one fucking cross check was brutal."

"Just be glad there wasn't someone built Ryan Price out on that ice tonight," Hayden joked, "You'd have gone home on a stretcher."

The rest of the team trickled into the bar behind them, taking suspiciously distant seats at the table. It was only Comeau and Drapeau, wearing matching grins, who parked themselves down directly across from Shane.

Fuck. He should say something.

"Good game tonight, boys. First round's on me." Shane threw a weary smile to the team, who cheered. Nothing like free alcohol to celebrate a win and unite the masses.

"You're a fu-cking, legend, Hollander." J.J threw an arm around his shoulders, yanking him closer to rub his knuckles across his scalp playfully. "I've needed a cold beer in my hand ever since we got off that fucking ice. And let's do some fucking shots!"

Shane laughed at J.J's antics, shoving him off. "Nice try, asshole. Just ginger ale for me, I'm sure that by the end of the night the team will do plen-ty of shots to make up for my lack of drinking."

“You sure you don’t want something more fruity, Holly? No need to pretend in front of us anymore. We know how you like it.” Comeau gave him a sleazy smile that made Shane shiver.

Shane opened his mouth to retort but Hayden wasn’t playing games tonight. “Can it, Comeau. You know he doesn’t really drink, just get him the goddamn ginger ale. And you can fuck right off with the jokes.”

Comeau raised his hands in faux surrender. “Easy, tiger. Just making sure our captain’s staying hydrated.”

As he retreated to the bar, Hayden leaned in. “You good, man?”

Shane bit his lip. “Not really. But I’ll get through it. For the playoffs. For the team.”

Hayden seemed unconvinced. “Okay. But if you call me one day needing help with hiding the body, I’m down. Just remember that you have personal experience in how indiscreet I am.”

Shane laughed. “Don’t I know it, Pike.”

It seemed far too soon when Comeau set a pitcher down at the table, a stack of cups bundled under his arm and Shane’s ginger ale in the other. He leaned in far too close as he passed Shane his drink, murmuring so low that only he could hear.

“Got you a straw, Holly. So you’ll feel right at home with something between your lips.”

Shane wrenched the can from his grip, hating the way he could feel Comeau’s breath against his cheek. He plucked the straw from the drink, all but slamming it down onto the table, earning a strange look from Hayden. He shrugged the other man off, taking a sip as he avoided Comeau’s gaze, seemingly fixed on his lips.

Fucking weirdo.

Chapter 3: 3. Warm Up

The third time it happened, he hadn't even known.

Shane was, predictably, incredibly serious about his pre-game rituals and even more strict about his warm-up routine. In the past he'd run a tight ship with the Voyageurs, slipping into a well-worn mask of no-nonsense captain to lead stretching and drills as the coaches talked strategy on the sidelines. Ilya always teased him for the way he'd shout out instructions on the ice.

"Is like…malen'kiy kotonok. So angry, like little kitten. Very adorable."

Shane had shoved him off the bed that night, the Russian hitting the floor in a fit of giggles.

But now, in light of the news, most of the players seemed reluctant to follow his lead, choosing instead to congregate in a separate corner near the net. Hayden, seeing him alone, stepped onto the ice and skated towards him.

"Ignore it, dude. They'll have to come together for the drills anyway."

"But it makes us fucking look bad." Shane's head was spinning as he glanced up at the jumbotron. "We need to look united. This looks…"

"Shitty?" Hayden offered.

"Shitty."

Hayden nodded, lips tight. "I'll get Coach to yell at them. Get started without me."

Shane sighed, resigning himself to the situation with a sigh as he watched Hayden skate away towards the boards. He didn't want his coach or the fans to sense the tension between the team. Carefully he lowered himself to the ice, leaning against his stick with knees slightly parted, rocking his hips lightly forwards. He could close his eyes here and breathe, letting the cool air of the arena mix with the subtle heat of his breath as he stretched.

Ilya was leaning against the boards, hydrating as he watched his partner stretch. Ever since that fucking documentary it had been common knowledge to Ilya and, regrettably, the world, that Shane Hollander was extremely flexible. He watched carefully, entranced as Shane moved languidly, pressing his hips open as leaned into the ice. Every rock of his hips was admittedly a small torture and Ilya felt himself requiring his water bottle much more than he had a second ago. He raised the bottle to his lips, eyes never leaving Shane.

Suddenly, there was another figure beside him.

"Maybe you're onto something, Rozanov." The voice spoke casually beside him, as if talking about the weather. "He does look real fucking pretty on his hands and knees."

Ilya almost dropped his bottle.

“What the fuck did you just say?” The Russian hissed but the Voyageurs player was already skating away, joining a pathetic line of teammates begrudgingly joining Shane in stretching at his spot on the ice. Zane Boodram skidded to a stop next to him, ducking a hand behind the boards for his own bottle.

“What the fuck did Comeau want?”

Ilya scowled, gripping his water bottle tightly. “He makes fun of Shane. To me.”

Bood sucked in a breath through his teeth. “Damn, his own team? That’s low.”

He then turned to face Ilya, eyes serious. “You know we’ve got nothing but love for you, right, man?”

Ilya nodded. “Do not worry, Bood. I know team is supportive.”

“Good.” Bood threw a glance back to the Voyageurs. “I hope they get their shit together soon.”

Ilya grimaced. “Me too.”

The Montréal Voyageurs did not, in fact, get their shit together. What should have started as good-natured chirping had quickly devolved into drive-by comments and quickly spat insults whenever Ilya took to the ice.

And even worse, they were doing it in *fucking French*.

While he had tried to pick up a bit of French from Shane, English was hard enough to learn. He’d felt so guilty for not wanting to improve right away, but Shane had laughed at his pouting, telling him it felt more important for Shane to learn Ilya’s first language than for Ilya to learn his second. He’d kissed his head, calling him darling in an incredibly poor but very sweet Russian accent, and had dragged him upstairs with promises to teach him some important French phrases. And Ilya hadn’t cared about not being able to translate the French when Shane was worshiping his body, but now? He’d never fucking hated a language more.

Ilya leaned sideways as he sat on the bench, head tilting to speak yet not taking his eyes off the ice. “Barrett. You speak French, da?”

Troy Barrett’s face came into his peripheral view as the player leaned back towards Ilya. “Yeah, Roz, a bit. Why?”

“Other team is saying things to me, I think it is about Shane. I must know what they are saying.”

“You sure, Roz? Sometimes ignorance is bliss.”

“Very sure.” Ilya was glaring at the player who’d insulted Shane earlier. “Next time you are on ice near me, I need you to drop your ears.”

"...Eavesdrop?"

"Yes. That. Do not jeopardize game, but if you hear, you tell me, yes?"

Barrett nodded. "I'm on it, Cap."

———

Unsurprisingly, Ottawa had won. Shane looked pissed as he'd skated off the ice, joining Hayden in his walk back towards the locker rooms while the rest of the Voyageurs hung back, muttering amongst themselves and throwing shady glances to the Centaurs. Ilya would console him later. For now, he gripped Barrett's shoulders, steering them quickly into a corner of their own locker room. He leaned in, voice low as the other players came trickling in.

"So?"

Barrett avoided his gaze. "Roz, man, you're not gonna like it."

"Don't care. Tell me."

"I can't."

A long moment of silence passed between them as Ilya narrowed his eyes, letting his face contort into a signature, terrifying Rozanov scowl.

"*Fuck*, fine– Just, let me write it down instead. I'm sorry, Roz. I know I'm only translating but I can't say that shit out loud." He crossed the room to grab a small notebook from his bag, tearing out a page.

Ilya watched him write quickly, nodding. "Is okay. Thank you."

Barrett looked incredibly apprehensive as he handed Ilya the paper, who accepted it gratefully. He watched him walk away before unfurling it, reading slowly. As he did, time seemed to slow to a stop.

Here it was, on paper, all the vile things that the Voyageurs, *Shane's own teammates*, were saying about him while he worked tirelessly to help bring them home another Cup.

I hope he sucks your cock better than he's playing tonight.

Push Holly into the boards harder, doesn't he like that?

At least the Centaurs have a captain who isn't a full fucking fa-

Ilya quickly crumpled the paper in his fist as Bood approached, placing a gentle hand on his forearm.

"You good, Cap?"

The Russian's jaw clenched tight, the pressure of it pulsing through his teeth as he worked to conceal his rage from his teammate. He drew a slow breath through his nose, letting out a controlled stream of air as he met his eyes.

"Yes, Bood. Everything is fine. Go change."

Bood's lips pursed as he gave Ilya a small nod, patting his forearm as he leaned away. "Let me know if you need anything."

Ilya squeezed his fist tighter, willing the paper to combust within his palm.

"I will."

Chapter 4: 4. Shane's Apartment

The fourth time it happened, they hadn't even played a game that day.

Shane had been on the couch, Anya tucked neatly into his side, waiting for his fiancé to join him with the food he was preparing. The tuna melts, now a comedic delicacy in the Hollander-Rozanov household, filled the apartment with a cloying scent of melting cheese and toasted bread. He breathed it in slowly, sighing with content as Anya snuggled closer. He'd needed this.

It had been a rough few months. As games came and went, whether win or loss, his teammates' attitudes towards his sexuality and his relationship with Ilya had not improved. In fact, many of them were finding creative ways to be cruel. Shane had not enjoyed the embarrassing walk through the showers and into the changeroom to retrieve his towel from a smug looking Drapeau, who waved the item in his face tauntingly before J.J. snatched it out of his grasp, flinging it at Shane wordlessly with an apologetic look on his face. He also hadn't fancied speaking to the team's management about replacing his jersey, which had been ruined by spurts of a cornstarch-bleach mixture flung onto the garment in a horrifyingly suggestive manner. Shane didn't even want to think about whose idea that had been.

He heard a clunk as a plate was set down in front of him, snapping him back to the present. Shane looked up at his partner with an appreciative smile. "Thank you, Ilya."

Ilya hummed in acknowledgement, depositing a kiss to the top of his head as he went. And just as Ilya wrapped an arm around Shane, the doorbell rang.

Odd. They weren't expecting any visitors.

Ilya made to stand but Shane waved him away, already moving towards the door. "You stay. I'll go get it."

Shane peered into the hallway through the peephole, seeing nothing but the retreating back of a delivery person as they disappeared into an awaiting elevator. Opening the door cautiously, he was met with a small vase of delicately arranged flowers on the doorstep. The blooms were all different colours yet very obviously the same flower, thin petals large, rounded, and progressively darker as they tapered into the center. He picked up the small arrangement, turning the vase over carefully in his hands.

"Shane." Ilya slunk up next to him, grinning at his fiancé. "You get me flowers? So sweet."

Shane shook his head slowly, reaching for the card from the middle of the arrangement. "No, I didn't. I think it's from my parents? For the playoffs?"

Ilya snatched the card from flowers before he could grab it, a gleam of mischief in his eye. He winked at Shane as he flipped it open.

"Perhaps a secret admirer." He teased.

Shane watched as Ilya read, gleeful expression dropping quickly.

“Ilya?” He asked warily. “Is it for you?”

Ilya’s voice was quiet. “No, I do not think so.”

Shane let the door fall shut as he followed Ilya, who was retreating rather quickly into the kitchen, the arm with the offending card outstretched away from him. “Hey! Let me see!”

Ilya positioned himself on the opposite side of the kitchen island from Shane, who placed the vase down gingerly. “No. I throw it away now.”

“*Ilya*.” Shane huffed, attempting to round the corner of the island and nab the damn thing. “Let me see.”

Ilya was one quick motherfucker when he wanted to be. He dodged Shane effortlessly, ignoring his grunt of frustration as he scurried to the opposite side of the island.

“Nope.” He popped the ‘p’, eyebrow raised. “You want it? Come get it.”

Challenge accepted.

Shane lunged for Ilya a second time, who again danced away from his grip with a gracefulness that was frankly unfair for the bulky hockey player to possess. He darted up the stairs, Shane hot on his heels as he made towards the bedroom’s attached ensuite. Ilya had wrenched the toilet lid up, about to drop the paper into the bowl before Shane managed to snatch it out of his hand with a triumphant shout.

“*Lyubov*,” Ilya was immediately after Shane, who had flung himself onto the bed and was using his legs to keep the other away, kicking lightly like a newborn horse. “You do not want-”

“Actually, I do want.” Shane flipped up the little folded paper before Ilya could stop him.

Inside, the small, scripted message was written neat and succinct.

Enjoy your flowers, Holly.

“Oh.”

Ilya slid himself onto the bed across from Shane, who had gone still.

“It’s from someone on my team.”

“Yes.”

“Not in a good way.”

“Yes.”

“And you,” Shane’s eyes flitted up from the card to look at his fiancé. “You know enough to know they’re being…cruel.”

Ilya looked uncomfortable as Shane let the card fall to the bedspread below. “Yes. I do.”

Shane’s eyes slipped shut as he breathed in a shaky breath. “*Fuck*.”

Realistically, he didn’t think that Ilya would be so naive as to assume that his team was being supportive. He had all but confirmed it when Ilya had come home that first day back, a huge grin on his face, letting Shane know that his talk with the team had gone incredibly well. Shane had hugged him tightly, so happy that the Centaurs were supporting him, even if a brief pang of jealousy swept through his body. But when Ilya had asked how Shane’s own conversation went he had sputtered out a clearly unconvincing affirmation, saying that it hadn’t gone as well as it had for Ilya but that it also hadn’t been too bad.

Evidently he *was* a really bad liar.

“I did not want to make you say.” Ilya pulled Shane into his chest, “But last game I heard your team. They say things about you…” He looked reluctant to say the words. “To me.”

Shane lifted his head from Ilya’s chest, anger flickering in his eyes. “What things?”

“I cannot repeat. Was in French. But Barrett told me after the game.” Was Ilya’s simple, half-truth of an answer.

Shane swore, also in French, and let his head thump back onto Ilya’s hardened chest with a groan. “And why flowers?”

“I don’t know, moya lyubov.” Ilya placed a hand in his hair. “But we will give them to neighbours. Make nice thing out of strange joke.”

Shane hummed, thinking about the colourful arrangement on their counter. Flowers that seemed like an uncommon choice for a standard bouquet, now that he thought about it.

Wait.

“Ilya,” Shane sat up slightly. “What kind of flowers are they?”

Ilya frowned. “They are…*Anyutiny glazki*. Little Anna’s eyes.”

Shane turned to him, an incredulous look on his face. “They’re what?”

Ilya groaned, running a hand over his face. “That is name in Russian. God, what is stupid English word…” He cursed to himself, grabbing his phone from his pocket and typing furiously. “Here.”

He shoved the phone at Shane, who stared down at the screen.

Pansies.

Shane felt his stomach sink deeper.

“Do you know what this means? In English?”

Ilya shook his head. “No.”

Shane sighed. “In English, pansy can be a derogatory name for someone who’s gay.”

“Dear-o-gator-y?” Ilya tried sounding out the word.

Shane placed a hand overtop of his. “Derogatory. It means to be…nasty. Hurtful.”

“So it is…” Ilya trailed off. “Like slur?”

“Not quite that bad,” Shane sighed again. “But…kind of.”

Ilya’s arms snaked around him again, pulling him back down into an embrace. Shane could feel the deep rumble in his chest as he spoke.

“I’ll kill them.”

Shane huffed out a small laugh.

“Murder is illegal, Ilya. Plus,” he added, “Hayden already offered, kind of– so we’ve got someone willing to do our dirty work for us.”

“I have always liked Hayden Pike.” Ilya hummed. “Good man. Good hockey player.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “You literally say you hate Hayden all the time.”

Ilya tutted, voice light. “Does not sound like me.”

“*Whatever*.” Shane shifted in his grasp, only partially amused by his fiancé’s antics. “Point is, I’m not doing anything until one of us wins the Cup. We’ve got enough drama right now as is.”

Those large arms squeezed him tight. “Fine. I will wait.”

A beat passed.

“Also, it will be me.”

“What will be you?”

“The one who wins this year’s Cup.”

Shane sat up properly, turning sharply to Ilya. “You know, you’re starting to piss me off.”

Ilya waggled his eyebrows. “And you’re very hot when you’re angry.”

Shane threw him an unimpressed look. Ilya had shuffled back, leaning against the headboard with a slightly challenging grin on his face. He reached a hand down to play with the hem of his too-tight shirt, which had ridden up slightly to reveal the contour of his abs, trailing down to a small patch of light-blonde hair sitting just above the waistline of his jeans. He was clearly trying to tempt Shane into some sort of distraction sex. The problem was, it was working.

Shane's mouth watered as his thumb slipped down to hook the edge of his jeans, pulling them down just enough to show off that gorgeous v-line.

"Well?"

Shane shook his head slowly, grinning as he closed the distance between them. "You're incorrigible."

Ilya smirked. "You like it."

Shane rolled his eyes as Ilya tangled a hand in his hair, pulling him in for a kiss. "God help me, I do.

Chapter 5: 5. Game #7

Chapter Notes

> Warning for those heeding tags - from this chapter on, the F slur is used in full a couple times rather than just implied.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The fifth time it happened, Shane was reaching his limit.

At last, the day of the final game had come. Montréal had managed to get the same amount of points, *somehow*, as the Centaurs, mostly in thanks to Shane. Both teams were itching to get their chance to win the Stanley Cup, which felt closer than ever.

Secretly, Shane was relieved the last game of the conference was tonight. He was excited at the prospect of winning, yes, but also at the chance to take a fucking breather. He was exhausted from the back and forth— the snide comments from Drapeau and Comeau, the verbal abuse from Theriault, the overall silent treatment from the rest of the Voyageurs. Even J.J had begun to throw him a questioning look or two, brow furrowed in a mixture of confusion and what looked to be growing disgust. It broke Shane's heart to be on the receiving end of that look from one of his closest friends on the team. But if they won tonight, a small part of him hoped it'd be enough to dissuade their newly harboured distrust.

But, win or lose –although hopefully win– Shane was going to be able to put a stop to it all soon. No more pulling punches for the good of the team. The second that the playoffs finished, he'd stand up for himself or go down trying.

"So, are we winning tonight, Hollander?"

Comeau looked at him expectantly as he threw his bag down, canvas hitting solid wood with a resounding *thwack*.

Shane was already failing to tamp down a gigantic lump in his throat, keeping his eyes on his own equipment bag as he leaned in to grab his neck guard. "I beg y–?"

"I bet you do." Comeau muttered.

A familiar flush rose to his cheeks, face burning at the implication. He abandoned his search for the neck guard, stiffening under the other player's gaze. "I don't know what you're talking about, Comeau. Try making some sense."

"What I'm trying to ask you, *Holly*," There was that *fucking* nickname again. "Is if you gave it to your boy Rozanov good enough for us to take home the win tonight."

All chatter in the locker room screeched to a halt.

Shane could feel the pit in his stomach opening its maw wider, dark and greedy, just waiting to swallow him whole. He leaned a hand against the wall in what he hoped looked to be a nonchalant manner as the familiar pinprick of dread started to overtake his balance. He couldn't sit down, not with a room full of players watching, waiting to see his reaction to the gibe. He'd have time to have a panic attack later.

Right now, he needed to be professional. Cordial. Extremely…*boring* about it, as Ilya would say. But sometimes something boring was best, especially when the opposite, a certain *something interesting,* just happened to be his sex life with his fiancé.

"You should all know I am always confident that there's a great game within us, no matter who we're playing against." He was proud of the way his voice only slightly wobbled, addressing the whole room. Every member of the team was looking at him now.

"Well, was this great game in *you* enough times last night to get us a fucking win or not?"

Absolute. Fucking. Silence.

The shame in Shane's body started shifting, morphing itself into a vat of red-hot, bubbling rage. He fisted the material of his hockey pants, jaw tight with fury as he stalked up to Comeau. "*How fucking dare you*-"

Hayden was quick to rise, springing from his seat on the locker room bench to come between the two as he glared at Comeau. "Dude, c'mon, that's completely inappropriate-"

Shane shoved Hayden aside, stepping forward to confront Comeau. While the height difference made Shane look physically smaller, he seemed a hell of a lot more threatening as the anger radiated from him.

"First of all, I have given fucking *everything* to this team for the last decade, and any insinuation otherwise will be taken as a personal insult. And second, my relationship with my *fiancé*," Shane practically growled the word, "Is absolutely none of your fucking business."

"It becomes my business when I find out the captain of our team has been on his back for his rival for the last ten fucking years." Comeau spit at Shane's feet, glaring.

"Our relationship has never once interfered with the season. We play hard, we go home, and then we do it all again. End. Of. Story." He punctuated the last words with a finger jabbed into Comeau's chest.

Comeau grabbed his wrist, grip tight. "How convenient that we have *just* enough wins under our belt to be in the conference finals. Do you get fucked better if you let him win?"

Shane's eyes were fiery, refusing to back down from Comeau's challenging gaze as he yanked his wrist out of the other player's grasp. "Maybe we wouldn't be losing if my team had my fucking back out there instead of pretending I don't exist. And I *never* let him win."

“Comeau, you need to shut the fuck up.” Hayden looked pissed, reaching out again to break them apart. “And *everyone* needs to get over themselves and remember the vital part Shane has played in getting this team two back-to-back Cups. *Back to fucking back*.”

Fuck, thank God for Hayden Pike.

“Have you ever considered, Comeau, that maybe you’re the problem here? Last time I reviewed our contract it’s not in the job description to miss every single fucking connection you’ve been set up for in the last five games. Or maybe it’s only in yours?” Shane brought his wrist close to his chest, rubbing the affected skin absentmindedly as he taunted the other player.

Comeau’s face was starting to turn his own angry shade of red. “Well at least I’m not throwing away my career to go be Ilya Rozanov’s personal little slut.”

The ringing in Shane’s ears was getting louder.

“Say that to me one more fucking time, I dare you.”

“Gladly, you little fucking *faggot*.”

The door to the locker room crashed open just as arms had raised, muscles tensing to let fists fly. Comeau stepped back reluctantly as Coach Theriault’s inquisitive gaze bore down into two of them.

“Coach,” Hayden was the first to speak up, “Comeau’s been spewing a constant stream of slurs at Shane for the past few games now. Do something about it.”

Theriault blinked, giving Shane’s flushed face a disinterested glance. “I didn’t hear anything.”

He then turned to the rest of the room as he addressed them. “Did anyone else?”

Hayden immediately began protesting as Drapeau spoke, voice sounding entirely too pleased. “Nope.”

A few affirming murmurs echoed around the room but Shane felt too dizzy to identify them. He stood focused on J.J, who was still slipping into his gear in the corner of the room.

“J.J?” Shane whispered.

The other player refused to meet his gaze, staying silent as he pulled on his jersey.

“Well then,” Theriault’s eyes glinted with a hint of deeper malice that Shane hadn’t seen before. “Guess that settles it. Everyone get their asses on the ice.”

Hayden, having already dressed, followed Theriault out immediately, his argumentative tone fading from Shane’s awareness as the door swung shut. “Coach!”

“Not how you’d hoped that’d go, huh.” Comeau was back in his face again, patting Shane’s shoulder mockingly. He let his hand rest there, gripping ever so slightly before running the lingering hand down the length of his back.

Shane bolted away immediately at the invasive touch, scowling as he reached for his gear. “I swear to God, when playoffs are done–”

“When playoffs are *done*,” Comeau sneered, “This team is washing it’s fucking hands of you, Hollander. So you better leave it all out on the ice.”

Shane felt like a ghost in his own body as he watched Comeau grab the last of his gear, disappearing out into the hall. He reached for his helmet with trembling hands, yanking it onto his head as his breathing quickened. He was alone in the room now, every last player having slipped out without so much as a nod in his direction. He sank to the bench, wheezing.

By now he knew the signs of hyperventilation– had been through enough panic attacks this year alone to make keeping score unpleasant. He tried to imagine Ilya’s voice as he squeezed his eyes shut, fists clenched tight as he drew his knees up to his chest. He stayed there for what both felt like ages and no time at all, letting the false sound of his partner’s voice calm his nerves.

Breathe. Breathe, lyubov. In, slow. Out, slow.

Alongside his fiancé’s, his own voice chanted in his head.

One more game. Just one more game and then you get a bit of a break. Just one more game. Just one more game–

Shane wrenched his eyes open, forcing himself to stand on unsteady legs.

Just one more game.

Chapter End Notes

Just a friendly reminder that all of the potentially triggering tags on this fic *will* come into effect in the next chapter - please read the chapter's beginning note carefully for further details of warnings. If the content is something you do not wish to read, the 6th chapter's end notes contains a synopsis of the content so that you can continue on to the final chapter with context.

Chapter 6: +1 The Aftermath

Chapter Notes

REMINDER: ALL potentially triggering tags, including but not limited to sexual harassment, hate crimes, homophobia, major character injury, blood and injury/violence, and graphic depictions of violence come into effect in this chapter. This chapter is intense and heavy, which should not be taken lightly. If these topics are triggering for you, PLEASE DO NOT READ. If you'd like to screen the content to see if it'll be okay for you, I've put a summary and extended synopsis in the end notes (which you can navigate to useing the "more notes" hyperlink at the end of this note) so that you can have context for the final chapter. As always, mind tags and keep yourself safe!

PS: some extended notes on this chapter!

i'd like to make it clear that as a queer person myself, this chapter was extremely hard to write, and as such the decision to include violence in a story like Ilya/Shane's, which has many moments of beautiful joy, was not taken lightly. Violence against queer people, even fictional, can be exhausting, which is why I have taken as many precautions as I can think of to ensure people are prepared for what they are reading. With a prompt such as this I've chosen to directly address the realities of violence that many have faced while in traditionally toxic and homophobic environments such as the locker room/sports teams, not as a means to normalize/glorify it but as an unwillingness to ignore the fact that atrocities such as this have happened to real people. It is important to me as a queer person that those who are not within the queer community understand that while fandoms like the Heated Rivalry are very fun to be a part of, the threats that queer people have faced in environments such as this are very much non-fictional and part of changing an industry from the inside out is not turning a blind eye from the ugly truth. This show is not "just about hot hockey players" - it's a story of grappling with sexuality/self-acceptance, fighting for a love that goes unaccepted/unvalued, and demonstrates real fear/anxiety within the world of a violent sport with a very clearly homophobic legacy.

I sincerely hope that with the success of media/literature such as the Game Changer series, irl sports communities and major league organizations will begin to change, becoming a welcoming and safe environment for all, rendering fics like this TRULY a piece of fiction. This all being said, once again, please heed the tags and keep yourself safe. from the bottom of my little gay heart, i'm sending my love!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane tripped. *He had fucking tripped.*

The second that his knees hit the ice, he knew it was over. He could hear Ilya's skates cutting the ice as he closed the distance between himself and the net, scoring just seconds before the buzzer went off. As the arena erupted into deafening cheers, he simply knelt there in shock.

Shane barely registered the hand that gripped the back of his jersey, yanking him onto his feet and pushing him towards the bench, away from the cheering group of Centaurs lifting his fiancé into the air in celebration. A slimy voice hissed in his ear as hands pushed at him again, more insistent this time.

"I'm going to fucking kill you, Holly."

Shane felt himself in a daze as he left the ice. He moved wordlessly to the showers and then to his bag, dressing himself as quickly as he could while the team circled around like uncertain vultures. He vaguely recalled Theriault, purple faced, screaming as Hayden attempted to create space between them. He could hardly feel Hayden's hands on his shoulders as he ushered his friend out of the changeroom into the hallway.

"Go, go home. Talk to Ilya, be with Anya. I'll deal with them."

With the most reassuring smile he could give, Hayden was gone, rushing back into the lion's den on his behalf.

He lost track of his own movements, body moving on autopilot in the direction of the parkade. By the time he made it down the hall and stepped off the elevator, a small part of his senses were beginning to return. Leaning on the heavy doors leading into the parkade, intent on making his way down to the Jeep as quickly as possible, Shane had a thought.

Wait, did Ilya need a ride?

They'd carpooled to the arena together, as usual, but it was tradition that the winning team go out to celebrate their victory as a group. He fumbled to get his phone out of his pocket, firing off a quick text.

Shane: About to leave - is the team going somewhere to celebrate or should I wait for you?

A minute or two passed before he got a response.

Ilya: I will drive us home. Team will go out but I will meet them there.

Ilya: I need change of clothes. Mine are covered in champagne.

Shane laughed to himself. Of course they were. He pushed past the doors into the parkade, lights flickering on as they detected his movement. Taking a few steps out, he breathed deep, enjoying the cool bite of fresh air.

Another trill followed a few minutes later.

Ilya: Barrett and Bood will come say hello.

Shane smiled, typing back quickly.

Shane: Okay. Waiting outside.

Ilya: Will be there soon 😘

Ilya: I love you.

Shane had barely raised his thumb to respond before pain exploded in the back of the head. He dropped his phone at the force of it, bag sliding off his shoulder as he turned to defend himself.

“What the fuck was that, Holly?” Drapeau punctuated his outrage with a second blow, throwing Shane off balance. He stumbled as he tried to turn around, head pounding.

“God, you just couldn’t wait to get on your knees for him until after the game, huh? Had to give the whole fucking arena a show.” Comeau sneered, shoving him to the ground.

Shane caught himself with his hands, palms burning as skin scraped along the concrete.

“*I fucking tripped*,” Shane hissed as a hand fisted his hair tightly, jerking his head upwards. The bright lights of the parkade seemed to twinkle as his vision spun, still reeling from the hit. “Fuck, I’m sorry, it was an acciden-”

Another hit, rougher this time, made contact with his cheek. He groaned with the force of it, scalp still burning from the pressure of the fingers tangled roughly between his thin, dark strands.

“Sure it was.”

Comeau’s sneering, slightly blurred face came into view as he stepped forward, blocking Shane’s view of the parkade elevators.

Shane gulped. “You don’t wanna do this.”

“Really?” Comeau was rolling up his sleeves now. “Kinda feels like I do.”

He squirmed in Drapeau’s grip as he tried to shake the dizziness away.

Get it together, Shane.

All he had to do was put some distance between him and these two idiots. Get in the car, get back to the elevator, *something*. Or maybe someone would see them, hear them. A security guard, maybe.

Maybe he should buy himself some time.

“Don’t they have cameras in here?” Shane asked cautiously, blinking languidly as he forced his eyes to focus.

“Not where we are.” Comeau's voice sounded warbled as he leaned down to Shane’s eyeline.

Shane swallowed a grunt as the hand in his hair released, pitching him forward into the concrete. He caught himself just in time to feel the dirty leather of Comeau's boot connect with his jaw, throwing him to his side. He lay limp on the parkade floor, stunned, squeezing his eyes shut from the haze of lights that now seemed far too bright. The pulsing in his head had turned into a frenzied pounding, each beat feeling like a violent slam within his own skull. His ears rang with a high pitched whine as he struggled to recall how to move his limbs, slumping uselessly into the concrete.

"Shit, dude, I think you hit him too hard." A hand wound back into his hair as Shane felt his chin being tilted up. "His pupils are all fucked up."

"I think he's fine."

Shane didn't feel fine.

"Hollander? Do you know what's going on right now?"

Oh. There were people here. That's nice.

"C'you help me? Think I…something's not right."

He could feel a hand on his cheek. He squinted, trying to make out the blurred shapes in front of him. A face came close to his– he could feel the unpleasant breath ghosting over his skin.

"I-It…it really hurts. Need t– to call someone."

The voice that answered was sweetly condescending.

"Yeah? Who do you wanna call, baby?"

Who did he want to call?

His arms felt heavy, so, so very heavy as he was pulled upwards. His head lulled while thick, calloused hands gripped his shoulders to stop him from swaying. A trickle of blood flowed from his mouth as he tried to speak again.

"He'll w'rry."

"He'll be just fine, sweetheart." The voice speaking floated airily in Shane's ears as the ringing continued. "Do you know who I am?"

He squinted again at the figure in front of him. "N-no. Should I?"

A hum cut through the waves of shrill sound as the man ignored his question, addressing someone outside Shane's line of vision. "Drapeau, grab his legs. He might be right about those cameras."

Shane groaned in protest as a pair of hands gripped his ankles. He was dragged down the parkade and around the corner, tossed carelessly against the concrete wall while the two men

talked in hushed whispers. He whimpered as his head made contact with the cement, back aching from small cuts now adorning his skin.

“Okay, dude, this is a little bit more than I signed on for. What the fuck are we going to do now?”

The second voice was more confident. “Fucking relax. He’s got a few screws loose right now, probably doesn’t even remember his own name.”

He knew his name. He was Shane. Shane Hollander.

“The plan was to just rough him up a bit.”

“Plans change. Now go grab his things. We can get a few more hits in, make it look like a mugging gone wrong, and then go the fuck home.”

Fuck, his head hurt. His whole body hurt. Where was he?

The lights, detecting no obvious movement, dimmed as his vision wobbled.

Right. Parkade. What was he doing in the parkade?

His knees stung as he tried to bend his legs up to his chest.

The game. The fall. The quick exit from the locker room. Carpooling.

Carpooling. He was waiting for…Ilya.

Ilya.

Where was Ilya?

Ilya was positively drenched in champagne. He hadn’t even been in the locker room for more than a minute before a strong jet of foamy liquid hit him straight in the face. Luca Haas had made it a personal mission to spray him head-to-toe with the entire contents of his bottle, so much so that the bubbly liquid was dripping steadily from his dirty blond curls. Ilya strode over to shake his hair at the younger player like a wet dog, who shoved him away playfully. Winning the Eastern Conference felt good, yes, but he was even more excited for his team to have earned their first real chance at winning the Stanley Cup.

He gave his own bottle to Bood, moving quickly to his things and stripping away the thick padding until he was down to his compression gear. Snatching his phone from the ledge to text Shane, Ilya was met with a plethora of messages. A few stood out from the crowd.

Yuna Hollander: Congratulations, Ilya! David and I are so proud. We’ll take you boys out to celebrate sometime this week ♥

Svetlana: знала, что ты сможешь это сделать

Shane: About to leave - are you going somewhere with the team to celebrate or should I wait for you?

He typed out a quick thanks to Yuna and Svetlana, then messaged Shane.

Ilya: I will drive us home. Team will go out but I will meet them there.

Ilya: I need change of clothes. Mine are covered in champagne.

He threw his equipment into his bag haphazardly, slinging it over his shoulder clumsily. He could pack his things properly later. Right now, he wanted to go see his fiancé.

“Roz! Where you going, man?”

Ilya barely looked up from his phone. “I am driving Shane home. Text me address, I will meet you there.”

“Shit!” Bood put the now-empty bottle down, wrapping an arm around Ilya. “Let me come say hi!”

“Me too!” Barrett slung his own bag over his shoulder.

“You are both gross. Go shower off champagne.”

“You’re gross too, dude. And I wanna say hi to Hollzy.” Bood pouted.

“Yeah! Let us say hi to your boyfriend. Congratulate him on a hard fought game.” Barrett playfully shoved his shoulder.

“*Fiancé*.” Ilya rolled his eyes, willing himself not to break out into a grin at their antics.

“*Sorry*,” Barrett rolled his eyes unseriously. “Fiancé.”

“Fine,” Ilya relented, “But be nice. No being stupid assholes like usual.”

Bood feigned a gasp, placing a hand to his chest. “Us? Never.”

Ilya smacked him. “Hurry up and get bag. We will not keep my future husband waiting.”

A few wolf whistles echoed around the room as Bood threw up a mock-salute. “Yes sir.”

Ilya sent another quick text to Shane as he and Barrett left the room, Bood not far behind them.

Ilya: Barrett and Bood will come say hello.

He received a message back just as quick.

Shane: Okay. Waiting outside.

Ilya smiled at the screen.

Ilya: Will be there soon 😘

Ilya: I love you.

“Man, you’ve got it bad, Cap.”

“Bood, I will run you over with Shane’s boring car.”

As they approached the elevator, Barrett leaned forward to press the down button before addressing Ilya. “Do you think he’s doing okay right now?”

Ilya pursed his lips. “Shane never likes losing, but he will be happy for us.”

“Not like that,” Barrett held his arm out as the elevator doors pushed open, gesturing for Ilya and Bood to step inside. “I mean like, about the end of the game.”

Bood grimaced, sucking in air through his teeth. “He caught a really bad edge, poor bastard. I’d be disappointed as hell if I were him.”

“Was not his fault.” Ilya mused. “He will know this.”

“Yeah, but,” Barrett looked uncomfortable. “His team looked pissed.”

“And they should get over themselves.” Bood spoke as they watched the numbers drop, taking them closer and closer towards the parkade. “It’s not like he did it on purpose.”

Barrett’s lips were pursed. “Do…do you think his team knows that?”

Ilya and Bood turned to stare at him.

“I mean, anyone with a brain would know Hollzy would never. Hell, he probably cares more about the integrity of this game than anyone else in the league.”

Ilya nodded, agreeing with Bood. “Is true.”

“Of course, of course. And *we* know that,” Barrett hurried to elaborate, “But I’m just wondering if, considering everything going on, they’re gonna see it that way.”

Now it was Bood’s turn to look confused.

“Everything going on?”

Ilya and Barrett exchanged a knowing look.

“Voyageurs have been treating Shane badly since we were outed.” Ilya supplied.

Barrett nodded. “They were saying really awful things about him in one of the earlier games. Ilya had me translate.”

“Like what?”

Barrett held up a hand. “Nothing I can repeat.”

“Fuck.”

The three players stood in silence for a moment as the elevator doors opened.

Ilya’s voice was tight. “Now that playoffs are done for him, I will convince Shane to let me take revenge.”

Barrett clapped Ilya on the back. “Atta boy. Let us know if you want a hand.”

Ilya grinned, wide and toothy. “Perhaps.”

The elevator door opened with a small dinging sound, the three players stepping out of the vestibule into the echoey mass of concrete. The lights flickered on from their dimmed state, revealing a seemingly empty space, save for someone’s belongings with a horrifyingly familiar Canadian flag patch ironed onto the side pocket. A small rectangle lay beside it, face down.

Ilya pushed past his teammates to snatch the phone from the ground, its cracked screen lighting up at the motion and displaying a very familiar wallpaper image of himself, smiling as he pressed a kiss to Anya’s fuzzy cheek.

Shane’s phone. Shane’s bag.

No Shane.

Ilya’s heart jumped into his throat.

Where was Shane?

_____

Shane was in pain. Lots and lots of pain. The lights from the parkade, flickering on again, seemed to stab at his retinas as he forced himself to blink, willing his vision to return. His head ached something fierce from where he’d been hit, swelling on the side of his jaw most likely already beginning to show. He coughed, once, expelling a small bit of blood which dribbled from his split lip down his chin.

The voices were closer now. Shane let his head fall back towards the wall as he squinted up at the two men above him. He felt a shiver of discomfort run over his body at the sound of their harsh whispers.

He knew them. He was sure he did.

“Y’r…” Shane slurred. “I know you. Y’r…”

“Yeah? Who are we, Holly?”

Holly.

He dimly recalled the way the nickname had been spat at him for months now. At the bar. In the locker room. On the ice.

Drapeau. Comeau.

He let their names spill from his mouth, syllables coming out in nonsensical jumble as he peered through his lashes. Even with his vision still foggy, he could make out the sneering faces of the teammates he once thought respected him. They were looking at him quizzically, one almost amused. Shane blinked again as his eyes finally focused, bringing their features into proper view.

He willed his tongue to cooperate and tried again. “C-Comeau.”

Drapeau swore. “Well. There goes your theory.”

“Shut up.” Comeau growled in response. “He’s probably concussed. I-”

Faintly, he thought he heard the sound of a heavy door clicking shut. Instantly the players lowered their voices once more as footsteps began to echo down towards them.

“Fuck. Is that Rozanov?”

“What the fuck are they doing out of the arena so early?”

Rozanov. *Ilya*.

Ilya was coming.

“*Ilya*.” Shane moaned, hand grasping for purchase on the wall as he attempted to stand. His muscles were on fire as he pushed, legs failing to cooperate fully as he swayed on unsteady footing.

“Shit.”

A sweaty palm was smacked over Shane’s mouth, clamping tightly, while another hand pushed him back down to the ground. He was yanked into someone’s chest as he breathed quickly through his nose, willing himself not to focus on the sweatiness of the hand gripping his face.

Gross.

He tried yelling again to no avail, voice muffled by the large hand across his lips. An arm snaked around his torso, pulling him in closer until their torsos were flush.

“Shh,” Comeau whispered in Shane’s ear, “We’ve got company.”

Shane could hear Ilya now, calling out for him in the echoey space. More voices joined his own, yelling for Shane.

“Lyubov, where are you?”

“Hollander!”

“Shane!”

“Fuck this shit, I’m out of here.”

Drapeau threw Shane one last disgusted look as he took off down the sloped ground, disappearing further into the parkade. Comeau hissed a curse at the retreating player but made no move to stop him, still clinging Shane to himself. At his departure, Shane wiggled in Comeau’s grasp, brushing against the other man as he did so. To his horror, he felt a distinct firmness press into his lower back.

“Don’t struggle, sweetheart. It only makes me like it more.”

Fuck. Shane really had to get out of here.

With the last of his strength, he bit down against Comeau’s fingers, causing the other man to spit a curse, yanking his hand away from Shane’s mouth. Shane took the opportunity to yell in the loudest voice he could.

“*Ilya!*”

He winced at the sound of his own voice as it reverberated around the parkade. It wasn’t strong but just loud enough, he hoped.

The sound of footsteps stilled for a moment before picking up into a steady patter, voices getting closer, louder.

Thank. God.

“Fuck. You are really going to pay for that now, you little shit.”

Comeau shoved Shane out of his grip and stood quickly, anger palpable as he clenched his fists. Shane made to crawl, back scraping along the floor as he scrambled away as quick as he could. He’d barely moved a metre before the hard rubber of Comeau’s boot connected with his shoulder. He threw his hands up to protect his face as Comeau stomped on his hip, his stomach, his knee. The other player had an evil glint in his eye as he stared down at Shane, whose pleas were coming out as weak coughs.

“S-stop. Please.”

The wicked grin only grew wider as he begged. “Sorry, Holly. Can’t. Don’t have much longer alone, you know.”

He definitely didn't sound sorry.

The footsteps were thundering now, getting closer and closer. Shane closed his eyes as he saw Comeau raise his foot.

"This is what happens when you fuck with the game. With our chance at the Cup. You *stupid–*"

He punctuated the insult with a stomp, this time to the thigh.

"*Fucking.*"

Another one. His arm.

"*Fa-*"

He waited for the final blow.

It never came.

Shane wrenched his eyes open to meet the gazes of Zane Boodram and Troy Barrett, looking incredibly worried. He breathed out a chaste sigh of relief, breath hitching as it morphed into a cough. Bood was immediately on the ground with him, lifting his head into his lap while Barrett dabbed some blood away from his lip. He hissed at the contact, eliciting a hurried apology from the Centaurs player.

Shane blinked up at them confusedly. "Guys? Where's-"

A thick accented voice cut through the fray, dark and hot with fury. As Shane rolled his head in Bood's lap he caught a glimpse of Ilya, a singular hand wrapped around Comeau's throat.

"You will regret that."

Comeau made to spit in his face but simply choked in Ilya's firm grasp, spit dribbling down his chin as he failed to tear Ilya's fingers from his neck.

Ilya tutted disapprovingly. "Mm. Not very good at hockey, not good at this either, da?"

He released the Voyageurs player with a shove, letting him stumble to the ground. Ilya cast a quick glance back to Shane and his teammates, locking eyes with Bood, who gave him a firm nod while Barrett pulled out his phone, dialling 911. Satisfied that Shane was in good hands, he turned back to Comeau, who had risen back to his feet, rubbing his throat.

"Fuck you, Rozanov."

"Mmm." Ilya hummed sarcastically, nodding his head. "You would like that. Too bad, I do not go for ugly, talentless hockey players."

“Right,” Comeau was squaring his shoulders now, fists raised. “Just the prissy little faggots, then?”

“Shane is more of a man than you will ever be.” There was no room for argument in his tone as he stared at Comeau, voice coming out almost as a growl. “And you should really stop saying that word.”

“You gonna make me?”

It was clear that the Voyageurs player was itching for a fight. What was unclear is whether he genuinely believed he could win it.

“I will only say this once.” Ilya took a menacing step forward. “I know you have been saying bad things about Shane. I know your team is being cruel. And the only reason I have allowed it to slide without payback is because Shane wanted no drama during playoffs.”

“So what, you speak French now?” Comeau leered.

“He’s got teammates that do, asshole!” Barrett yelled from Shane’s side.

“Thing is,” Ilya took another step forward, “It is no longer playoffs for you. Game is over. Bye-bye! Everyone goes home.”

He was steadily getting closer to Comeau, who looked torn between the idea of throwing the first punch and turning on his heels to flee.

“And considering what you have done, I feel,” Ilya laughed to himself in a way that would have frightened even Shane, “Well–”

He took a deep breath in, eyes flashing with something scary.

“I think no one will have problems with what I am about to do to you.”

The definite resonance of his tone was all the warning Comeau got before Ilya lunged at him. The hand he threw up to protect his face was quickly ripped away, doing nothing to stop Ilya’s fist from making harsh contact with his jaw, snapping it backwards. He barely registered the flicker of worry flash through Comeau’s eyes before immediately going in for a second hit, knuckles smashing into his nose. A sickening crack reverberated around the concrete structure as Comeau yelled, stumbling back as a stream of blood poured from his face.

“*Fuck*.”

Ilya took a moment to wipe his hand onto his sleeve. “You should work on your reflexes. Would help make connections on ice, no?”

Comeau wipes his mouth with the back of his wrist, blood smearing across his face. “Fuck you, Rozanov.”

“I guess I should not expect more from a 7th round draft pick.” He sounded almost bored.

Comeau growled at Ilya's taunt, steadying himself. "You fighting his battles for him now?"

Ilya shook his head. "No. I do this for me. For fun."

Comeau shook his head, raising his fists in a weak imitation of his earlier stance. "Fucking come at me, then."

And who is Ilya to refuse such a request? He had, after all, been told in the past that he should be more accommodating.

Comeau threw a weak punch to Ilya's side as the Russian sidestepped him, kicking the back of the other player's knee. Comeau crumpled at the pressure, giving Ilya the opportunity to push him to the ground and stomp once, hard, on his hand. The Voyageurs player howled in pain, stunned as Ilya moved to pin him to the ground.

"S-someone should stop him." Shane was regaining a bit more of his consciousness as the sirens blaring in the distance crept closer.

Bood and Barrett looked down at Shane's bruised and bloodied face, sharing a look.

"Yeah, uh. In a minute, buddy."

Ilya was on top of him now, straddling his waist as he gripped the front of his t-shirt, pulling Comeau slightly off the ground as he drove his fist into soft flesh again and again. Comeau's hands were grappling with the hand fisted in his shirt, trying in vain to pull Ilya off of himself.

"F-fuck, I'm sorry, man, stop-"

"No, you are not sorry." Ilya stopped for a moment to look Comeau in the eyes. "You are sorry you got caught."

He leaned down to whisper something unintelligible into Comeau's ear, wrapping thick digits around a twitching finger. Shane thought he heard a snap.

The sirens had stopped and footsteps grew louder, the clack of heels hitting pavement reverberating around the parkade. Finally, flashlights and loud voices rounded the corner, rushing to their side as Ilya sat up to continue his onslaught.

It took three police officers to heave Ilya off of Comeau's limp body. The Russian was breathing heavy, shoulders tight with animosity, simply staring down at the man's battered figure as two officers hauled him into the back of their cruiser. The second the door slammed shut Ilya was by Shane's side, who'd been helped into an ambulance, despite his protests.

"I'm fine." Shane attempted to push Ilya's hand away, who shushed him immediately.

"Not fine. They check for concussion."

"He's right, Mr. Hollander." The hand cleaning his split lip stilled as the EMT addressed him. "You took a couple nasty blows to the head, better safe than sorry. We'll do a proper physical

at the hospital too, make sure nothing's broken."

Ilya nodded, pleased. "Da. Better safe than sorry.""*Fine*." Shane let himself be tugged into the ambulance, Ilya gingerly guiding him onto the stretcher.

"We'll be checking your hands too, Mr. Rozanov."

"Fine. But after him."

The paramedic nodded. "Of course."

Shane stared at his fiancé, trying to hide the beginnings of a grin from his expression. "You shouldn't have done that."

Normally, Shane abhorred violence. In his opinion, there was always a more constructive way to prove a point or and an argument than with the swing of a punch. But there was a part of him, however small, that was secretly pleased with the ordeal. Ilya was, to most of the world, an incredibly intimidating player, yet Shane rarely saw this side of his husband. The Ilya he knew behind closed doors made kissy faces at their dog and pouted at protein shakes– a veritable kitten lacking claws. But he also knew that Ilya was fiercely protective of his own, having seen what he would do if his teammate went down on the ice. It made Shane feel part of it too, wrapped up in a comradery reserved for the rink that he hadn't felt from his own team in quite some time.

And, as his fiancé, it was also incredibly hot to watch his soon-to-be husband defend his honour.

Ilya shrugged. "He deserved it. And playoffs are over."

Shane did his best to roll his eyes, wincing as the ambulance doors slammed shut. "You're so stubborn. And stupid. Fighting is stupid."

A bruised hand brushed his cheek ever so gently. "Yes. It is."

Shane watched as his soon to be husband leaned down, pressing a soft kiss to his forehead.

"But some things are worth fighting for."

Chapter End Notes

summary for those screening tags!

in this chapter, Shane gets jumped in the arena parking lot by Drapeau/Comeau and sustains injuries from a heavy beating (blood/violence, graphic depiction of violence tags). During this, the F slur is used (homophobia/hate crime tags). While not explicit in any physical description, it is also made known through one line of dialogue that

Comeau is getting aroused while in bodily contact with Shane (who is attempting to free himself from the other man's grip while being heavily concussed) and a gross comment about Shane's struggling turning him on is made (sexual harassment tag). If any of this is triggering to you, I implore you to skip to the next chapter!

If you would like to skip, your synopsis is as follows:

After Shane trips in the final game betwen Montréal and Ottawa (canon to TLG), he rushes out of the changing room and texts Ilya on his way to the car, asking if he needs a ride since they carpooled. Ilya responds saying that he will be down soon/that he loves him but before Shane can respond properly, he is hit from behind by his two teammates, Drapeau and Comeau. While they attack Shane and drag him deeper into the parking lot, the POV briefly switches to Ilya, who reflects on the game/unity of the Voyageurs team as is making his way down to the lot with teammates Bood and Barrett. When hearing the three Centaurs players enter the lot, Drapeau flees, leaving Comeau to pull Shane (who is attempting to get away while heavily concussed) into his chest, make the gross comment mentioned above, and then try to get one last beating in before they're found. He is unsuccessful, as the three players intervene, and the chapter ends with Ilya beating the fuck out of Comeau while Bood and Barrett call an ambulance and tend to Shane while they wait for EMS/police to arrive.

real end notes!

1. To be clear, I think Shane could absolutely, 1000% defend himself in a clean fight. This man is not weak or docile! However, if someone sucker punches you from behind when you aren't expecting it and then you get a nasty concussion from repeated blows to the head, it's gonna make self-defense a little hard.

2. For anyone curious, Svetlana's text reads "Knew you could do it"

Chapter 7: +2 Ottawa Centaurs vs. Montreal Voyageurs

Chapter Notes

> slightly updated to include some more specifics about jail time for these evil mfs. also adding a further yuna mention because she is driven and i just KNOW she would do everything in her power to bury Comeau and Drapeau into the dirt where they belong.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Four months later.

If you asked Ilya Rozanov five years ago what his favourite team to play was, he would have said the Montréal Voyageurs. And the reporters, nodding enthusiastically, would grin a knowing smile and ask about Shane Hollander. Ilya would smile too, throwing a cheeky wink and gifting an inflammatory comment about his rival to the camera before walking off to prepare for the game. They expected a heated tension, some grand, palpable weight between the two captains that bled out from the boards into the rink. Ilya couldn't tell them just how right they were.

And, If you asked him today, he'd have the same answer. But for entirely different reasons.

Since the night the Centaurs won the Eastern Conference, a few things had changed.

The tabloids had exploded once the news broke of Shane's injuries. Images of Ilya's arm wrapped around Shane's retreating figure through hospital doors had spread to vast corners of the internet, spawning a mountain of rumours across social media. And, with Comeau's mugshot leaking at a similar time, face positively littered with bruises and permanent scars Ilya was incredibly proud of creating, it hadn't taken a genius to put two and two together.

Before an official statement had been made by either of them, Gilbert Comeau and Patrice Drapeau had been relieved of their contracts, barred from engaging with the NHL in any capacity, which ironically would have been difficult to uphold from within the walls of the prison yard. Even after testifying against his attackers, Shane remained far too pacifistic for Ilya's liking, who felt a pang of dread fill his body at the sight of his husband's, albeit fading, bruises. Behind closed doors, he shared rigid nods with Yuna Hollander as she'd begun her own silent, furious legal war against the former players. While not a violent woman herself - although she'd really considered it, this time - Yuna was just as deadly with only her words, whipping together an army of lawyers, sending downright terrifying emails, and engaging in screaming matches with anyone who dared question the events of the attack. With the staggering amount of evidence against them, it had barely taken her legal team any effort to secure the two bastards a hefty sentence on multiple charges in an awful prison with no chance for parole. When the gavel struck, signifying the decision, Ilya could have wept: *Fuck*, he loved his scary mother in law.

The commission had made a statement about the incident, of course, carefully leaving out the real reason behind the confrontation despite the detailed police report, which had made its way into public knowledge. They'd tried to give Ilya a warning too, citing excessive violence. In response, Farah had drafted a simple email with a list of Shane's injuries from the evening and a quotation from the report citing that Ilya acted in what they defined as "irrefutable self-defense", while Yuna picked up the phone to have what she'd defined as a "quick chat". Predictably, they didn't hear a response back.

On the day of the finals, Shane, Yuna, and David watched Ilya play with unreserved fascination, being some of the loudest voices in the audience when the Centaurs played fiercely on home ice for the Cup. And while New York had taken home the win, the team had still been elated with their overall standing in the tournament.

Then they had gotten married, of course. Hayden would vehemently deny any tears were shed during the wedding ceremony between his best friend and the NHL's biggest asshole, but J.J had the evidence on tape. Since that fateful game, the defenseman had apologized profusely many times to Shane who, after sitting with his feelings for a while, had chosen to forgive his friend. They spent days together at the cottage, the three of them unburdened by the weight of the season and openly shit-talking the dumpster fire that was the Montréal Voyageurs. Ilya had simply sipped his drink as he watched them, plotting.

Shane, naturally, had decided to let his contract expire. When the option for renewal came up, he'd almost laughed out loud.

"We can't convince you to stay?" Theriault asked, eyes wide as Shane slid the paperwork back towards him.

Shane's gaze was cold, regarding his soon-to-be former coach with a fury he'd been reigning in for months. "Not a fucking chance."

A week later, he'd signed with the Centaurs.

Now here Shane was, on the ice with his husband, watching as his new teammates laughed while they stretched together. A united group of players, happy and comfortable with each other on the ice. He couldn't have asked for anything better.

"It feels weird to be on this side of the ice." He mused, hearing skates skid to a stop beside him.

Ilya shook his shoulders playfully. "Is that right? You will get used to it."

Shane looked away quickly as one of the Voyageurs raised their head, glancing in his direction. "I know. It's just…" He trailed off. "I'm not sure I'm going to enjoy this game.

Ilya sucked in a breath through his teeth. "No worries. I enjoy for the both of us."

Shane raised an eyebrow, a warning in his voice. "*Ilya*."

Ilya raised his hands in mock defense. “Is nothing! As captain I will enjoy emotionally confusing game for new teammate. That is all.”

Shane looked incredibly unimpressed as he turned to face his husband. “Just stay out of the penalty box. And keep the gloves *on*.”

Ilya fought to keep a smile off of his face. “I make no promises.”

As Shane pushed off, going to join his new teammates, Ilya set his sights on the other side of the rink, watching the Voyageurs move like a hyena waiting to strike.

He lost the battle, grin slipping onto his features.

This would be fun.

_____

The first chirp was tame, in his opinion. As he lined up to center ice, he leaned in a little closer to the player across from him.

“Should I say thank you now or later?”

The opposing center tilted his head in confusion. “What?”

“For getting rid of best player right before new season. Centaurs are very grateful for your mistake.”

The man’s jaw tightened. “Shut up, Rozanov.”

By the time the puck dropped, Ilya was already skating away, leaving the disgruntled player in the dust. Minutes later, the first goal was scored. As a cheer erupted from the crowd, Ilya patted the goalie once on the back with mock sympathy.

“Is okay, is not your fault. New captain cannot skate fast enough to keep up with me.”

The goalie made a sound of outrage, whipping around for the referee. Ilya skated away gleefully before he could be yelled at, chuckling to himself. Barrett threw him a questioning look as he drifted back to the boards, tagging out with Haas, who was excited to be playing a new season with two seasoned all-stars.

“Having fun?”

Ilya continued his laughter. “Immensely.”

The second time he got a word in, the Centaurs were up 2-0. The Voyageurs were struggling to keep their former captain away from their net as he zipped past their defense with ease, narrowly avoiding a few too many bodies intent on slamming him into the boards. It seemed that only J.J and Hayden were committed to playing fair this evening.

Ilya pursed his lips and memorized jersey numbers. He could work with this.

Back out on the ice, he zeroed in on his first target. Number 18 had the puck, determined to carry it past center ice as he deked past Bood, sights set into their team's defending zone.

Not on his watch.

The crowd rippled in shock as Ilya slammed him into the boards– a clean but exceedingly rough hit.

The player wobbled as he got to his feet, glaring at Ilya. "Dick move, Rozanov."

Ilya tutted. "Perhaps learn to take hit. The Foundation's hockey camp still has slots for next year…do you want? Shane is *very* good teacher."

He left Number 18 seething by the boards as he lined up for the next face off.

As the game drifted into the second period, he would simply skate by the opposing team's bench, letting his voice carry.

"You seem distracted. Very sorry, no one on Centaurs is interested in ugly hockey players."

"Should have stretched before game. Shane does yoga with us, very helpful."

"Your team used to be good. What happened since last season?"

"For next play, it would be good strategy to start playing real hockey, da? Or did you not learn how because your captain used to do it for you?"

He could see jaws tightening, basking in the feeling of weak shots thrown back at him with more desperation than bite. He could also see Hayden turning his face away, shoulders shaking as he hid his chuckles from his teammates.

By the third period, he was even mocking the coaches.

"*Oh, I'm sorry,*" Ilya pitched his voice higher, feigning crying with his hands, "Did someone throw away their only good player because he had boyfriend? That's too bad."

"*Ref!* Get this fucking wise-ass away from our bench."

The referee looked almost reluctant to send Ilya back to his team, lip upturned into a smirk with a tone that lacked any sincerity in the chastizing. "Hop to it, Rozanov."

He blew a short raspberry before skating away to the Centaur's side of the boards.

"Last five." Shane was grinning as he hopped the boards, trading places with Ilya on the ice.

Ilya leaned in, letting his helmet touch Shane's. "Go show them what they're missing."

Shane winked at him as he pushed away to go win the face-off. As Ilya watched him, smiling wide, Evan Dykstra elbowed him in the arm.

“What’s it like, seeing him out there with us?”

Ilya was certain he had the dopiest look on his face. “It is everything.”

Dykstra chuckled at the obvious softness in his tone. “We’re happy he’s here, Roz.”

“Fucking right we are.” Dillon chimed in, others on the bench murmuring their fierce agreement. “We’ve got a real shot at the Cup this year.”

They all turned their attention back to the game just in time to see the puck launched into the net with a vengeance by a flash of red and black, proudly sporting the number 24. Shane whooped as skated around the net, pumping his fist in the air. After a moment of hesitation, he turned to the Voyageurs bench.

“How’s that for throwing a game, assholes!”

Ilya chuckled. Not bad.

As predicted, the Voyageurs had lost badly, unable to get a single goal. When the buzzer went off, the team rushed Shane, lifting him up into the air with a glee they couldn’t contain. Casting a glance back to the Voyageurs, Ilya could have sworn he saw a tear in someone’s eye. *Good.*

While they lined up for handshakes, Ilya felt thrilled about humiliating Shane’s former team on their home ice. But he wasn’t done yet.

As Ilya moved the line forward, grasping hesitant hands with the opposing team players, he stayed silent until he neared the end, blue jerseys fading into grey suits with wrinkled white shirts and ugly ties. Here he slowed to a stop, stalling in front of Coach Theriault.

“To think,” Ilya mused, twirling his stick in his hands, “If you weren’t an intolerant piece of shit, you could have won another Cup.”

Theriault looked like he was going to burst a blood vessel. “Shut the fuck up.”

“Want to know something?”

“*Fucking what*, asshole.”

Ilya leaned in, hand outstretched in what would look like a show of sportsmanship to the crowd, voice suddenly dark.

“Take a good, long look at everything plastered with his number in this rink. The banners, the jerseys, the trophies. You should print it out, get it tattooed. Because after today, you must know that this team will never hold another Cup until Shane retires. He was *only* reason Montréal was good and you pushed him away. So now you reap consequences of terrible, *terrible* fuck-up.”

He grabbed the coach's limp hand, grinning as he leaned back like nothing happened.

"*Good game.*"

He thought he may have even heard a sniffle as his back was turned, skating confidently towards the boards. As Shane's hand found his, squeezing, he couldn't contain the blossoming of joy spreading through his body.

His game.

His team.

His husband.

He pulled Shane into a passionate kiss, letting the crowd's uproar fuel the fire he felt in his chest. Shane's lips melted against his, slotting together with practiced ease. Faintly he could hear a few hollers and whistles from his– no, *their* teammates.

Shane pulled back first, muttering into his lips. "You're ridiculous."

Ilya could do nothing but smile, grabbing his husband's hand and pulling him in for another kiss.

"Only for you, lyubov."

Chapter End Notes

> And they all lived happily ever after. Except the Voyageurs, who go home and cry themselves to sleep.

End Notes

as always, please feel free to leave a kudos/comment if you enjoyed!

ps: thank you to everyone who has read this fic or come back to reread!

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