

Not Even Hockey

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Not Even Hockey

by [gracerene](#)

Summary

"Why don't I tell you a story, then? You may not be able to relate—it's my story after all, and you're not that good at hockey, but try to keep up."

Notes

Y'all, this is SO self-indulgent. Like, embarrassingly so, enough that I really debated posting it at all. IDK about the characterizations, or really anything, but I have been IN MY FEELS, and if you can't be cringe on AO3, where can you be, amirite?

This takes place after *The Long Game*, so spoilers for that book and for the end of *Heated Rivalry*. This is a blend of TV and book canon because I do what I want. Don't @ me.

Unbeta'd, because who even goes here, and I was too ashamed to admit I'd written 6k of self-indulgent fic for a fandom built on smut and nobody even fucks. I don't know who I am either. This is somewhere between Teen and Mature, and I rounded up, but I apologize in advance for the lack of penetration.

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

It's the best NHL Awards event Shane's attended in years.

It helps that Ottawa won the Stanley Cup this year, and Luca Haas took MVP—the Centaurs are cleaning up, Montreal Metros who? The award show itself is as boring as ever, but this is the first time since his rookie season that Shane's stuck around long enough to properly enjoy the after-party; the first year attending with his *husband*.

Unlike past seasons, Shane doesn't spend the entire show constantly checking his Rolex, counting down the seconds until an appropriate amount of time has passed for him to sneak away with Ilya for another stolen moment. They get to be together right out in the open, regardless of what anybody else thinks of it—it's clear that not everybody present is down with the gay, but Shane's doing his best to ignore the assholes. He's with his incredible team and his award-winning husband, and Shane's... indulging.

It's officially off-season, so Shane is already several beers deep, plus a few shots of top-shelf vodka with the rest of the team to celebrate Luca's win—Wyatt said tequila was traditional, but Ilya pulled rank, ordering a round of *real Russian vodka, none of that American bullshit*. Shane's buzzy and warm, laid out on a patio sofa under the stars, Ilya's firm thigh a cushion beneath his head. They're on the top floor of the Vegas convention center the awards were hosted in, hundreds of hockey's finest crammed like sardines in an opulent bar with a three-hundred and sixty degree deck boasting gorgeous views of the city. Their group had immediately bee-lined for the patio, commandeering one of the large furniture sets outside where the din wasn't quite so deafening.

At some point Shane's third beer was replaced with a glass of vodka with a single large ice cube, and he sips it slowly. It's an acquired taste, one he's apparently picked up over the years with Ilya. He can't say it's his favorite, except for the way it makes him think of his husband, a vivid taste memory of so many moments together. His cheeks heat and he smiles to himself, cozy and comfortable and verging just past tipsy. Happy.

He's only half-listening to the conversation around him, some heated argument between Ilya, Scott, and Hayden, with Troy slyly egging them on. Most of the Centaurs are nearby, mingled with other hockey players, management, and their dates. It's a thoroughly mixed crowd, and Shane doesn't feel quite as comfortable in those as he did before he came out, but he's working on it. And he's surrounded by friends. That helps.

Sound around them ebbs and flows, snippets of other conversations flaring brief and bright as people walk by or get a little too excited about whatever they're discussing. Their group has mostly been left alone, interrupted by the occasional appearance of a past teammate (none of Shane's, other than J.J. and Hayden) stopping by to offer their congratulations before wandering off again to mingle. So even with his eyes closed and head fuzzy with alcohol, Shane immediately clocks when the vibe shifts as several players barge into their group.

Shane turns to look at the interlopers—four players, two of them rookies, and Shane's a little ashamed that he doesn't remember their names; they weren't talented enough to make it on his radar, though he recognizes one as being drafted to the Metros. Comeau is with them, too,

which makes Shane's stomach twist, and McCord from Buffalo, who Shane's never interacted much with off the ice.

The rookies seem well on their way to plastered, expressions full of a bravado Shane knows they haven't earned. Comeau and McCord are harder to read, faces bland, but eyes hard in a way that Shane can tell the rest of the group clocks by the stiffening of spines and Scott's hand tightening protectively around Kip's shoulder. Ilya's thigh goes tense beneath Shane's cheek.

"You need something, man?" Hayden asks after a long, awkward moment of silence, clearly directing the question at Comeau and the Metro rookie.

Comeau is so pointedly not looking at Shane that it's almost funny, if it didn't make him so fucking angry. Comeau shakes his head and nods towards the rookies. "Nah, man. I'm on babysitting duty."

"Ah, fuck off, Comy," one of them replies, bumping him with his shoulder. He's not quite slurring, but it's clear he's taken full advantage of the open bar.

"Nah, we were just talking," the other rookie chimes in, a glint in his eye that Shane definitely doesn't like as his gaze pointedly sweeps over the loveseat that Scott and Kip are sharing, the chair Harris is in with Troy sitting on the ground between his legs, and finally landing on the sofa Ilya and Shane have taken over, a faint curl to his lips.

"How interesting," Ilya states, his tone dripping with disinterest. "Why don't you continue doing that somewhere else. Cup winners only."

Comeau keeps his gaze on Hayden, baring his teeth in a mean smile. "I've won some cups. That mean I get to stay?"

Ilya scoffs. "Hollander won you those cups—"

"—*Ilya!*—"

"—and you don't have Hollander any longer. So no. Go away."

Comeau's jaw tightens. "Ahh, but you've allowed Hayden into your little club."

"Mmm, good point." Ilya turns towards Hayden like he's about to tell him to leave, too, and Shane knows he's just fucking around, but he lets out a heavy sigh.

"Stop being a dick, Ilya. It's fine." Ilya grumbles something in Russian under his breath, too soft and quick for Shane to catch, but he can make an educated guess. Shane rolls his head to look more pointedly at the men trying to harsh his buzz. "Seriously guys, what do you want?"

"It's just, why'd you have to do it, man?" the Metro rookie asks, eyes all big, confused earnestness. "You coulda led the Metros to a fourth cup! An actual dynasty! And you gave it all up... why? So you could play house with some asshole on a second-rate team in the middle of nowhere?"

That earns several angry mutters from the nearby Centaurs, and Shane watches Ilya's hand flex dangerously in his periphery. He's pretty sure his husband isn't stupid enough to throw a punch off the ice, but he's not *positive*.

"Well this second-rate team just won the cup, asshole," Wyatt shoots back. "Sounds like you're just pissed you didn't get drafted to the Metros until after they gave up their star player. Sucks to be you."

"Nah, but you *left*," the rookie whines, still staring at Shane. "They wouldn't have let you go, even if—"

"Even if you were throwing games," Comeau finishes. He's still not looking at Shane, but he can see the mean edge of Comeau's smile pulling at his cheek. The rookie's eyes go wide—that clearly wasn't how he'd been planning to end that sentence, but he doesn't contradict him.

"Jesus Christ, man," Hayden jumps in, glaring daggers at Comeau. "You gotta be a fucking idiot to really think Shane ever threw a game."

Comeau raises his hands, the picture of innocence, like he's just reporting on what somebody *else* was saying. Shane's blood boils.

"No, but like," the rookie cuts in, almost pleading as he looks at Shane. He seems a little uncomfortable with the fact that Shane's head is still in Ilya's lap, but at least he manages to meet Shane's gaze. "I don't get it. You were my idol, man. Nobody else cared about hockey like you did. Why couldn't you just, like... keep quiet about it?" He gestures at Scott, who immediately bristles. "Why do you all gotta make out on the ice and turn it into a whole thing? We just want to play the game, not all this rainbow jersey shit."

An explosion of sound, and Shane briefly closes his eyes against the sudden onslaught as Scott, Harris, Troy, and Ilya all start to speak at once. He can hear other people murmuring, can tell some of the other Centaurs are just waiting for their moment to jump in while their group rapidly becomes the focus of the patio.

And Shane is... he's tired. Tired of this fucking bullshit, angry that the sport that he loves is so dead set on maintaining its dark underbelly. They've been talking about it with Scott, how the commissioner needs to go if they have any chance of top-down change, but maybe tonight Shane can start with this kid. Start with this room.

"You want to know why, rook?" Shane asks, his cheek still pressed against Ilya's thigh. He doesn't bother getting up. He doesn't shout, either, but a decade of using his captain's voice to grab attention in noisy locker rooms pays off.

Everyone quiets, and he can feel all eyes on him, save for Comeau's, of course. Shane raises an eyebrow at the rookie, daring him to show that there's something worth speaking to in that meathead brain of his. He hopes there is. Hopes the kid takes him up on the challenge.

The rookie looks at his friend, bravado wavering, but to his credit, he nods. "Yeah, sure, why does it matter then? Why can't you all shut the hell up about it and just play hockey?"

They've drawn a bigger crowd, but subtly, farther conversations quieting as everybody strains to eavesdrop. Shane's friends are staring at him with naked curiosity—he's always been more private than the others, playing his cards closer to his chest. Maybe he'll regret this moment of drunken openness in the morning, but his stomach burns, and he wants this dumb fucking kid to *know*. To see him. Shane smiles, mean and a little bitter, and turns his head back so he can stare up at the stars. He doesn't think he can tell this story if he has to watch people react to it.

"Why don't I tell you a story, then?" Shane suggests, quiet, but his voice carries. "You may not be able to relate—it's my story after all, and you're not *that* good at hockey, but try to keep up, hmm?"

Ilya's body rumbles with a quiet laugh beneath Shane's head, and he can feel the indignation rising up off the rookie, but he mercifully stays quiet. Shane doesn't look at him. Trusts the others to keep him in line.

"Picture it—you're a kid—"

"Shouldn't be too hard," Scott scoffs, "Rook's practically an infant." The others chuckle, a quiet rumble that threatens to pick up steam.

"Shush, I'm talking." Shane waves dismissively in their general direction, and everybody quiets again. "So you're a kid and you fucking love hockey. Eat, sleep, breathe it, and everybody says you've got potential. More than potential. A *once-in-a-generation* talent, and sometimes they don't even feel the need to point out that you're half-asian, in their condescending little asides meant to make sure you know you don't really belong. That you're an outlier they're deigning to allow into their special little club."

Somebody hums in agreement nearby. Shane thinks it may be Bood. He's not the only one who's dealt with racism in the league, and Shane's had it better than many.

"But it's fine," he continues, voice light but hard. "You're *good*, so fucking good nobody can deny it. It doesn't matter that you don't quite fit in, that you're eighteen and the only thing you think about is hockey, that you still don't get why all your teammates are so girl-crazy. You're just focused, *locked-in*, and maybe if they all cared more about playing than getting their dicks wet they'd actually be able to keep up with you. You tell yourself they lack discipline, and you've got your eye on the real prize. If you want to get drafted, then you need to put the work in now. Everything else—girls, partying, having a life—all of that can wait."

The whole patio's gone silent save for the quiet throb of music drifting through the cracked-open door. Nobody's even pretending not to listen in anymore. Usually this is where Shane'd get self-conscious and shut up, but the words keep pouring out of him, a dam overcome.

"And then you meet the asshole who's going to steal your number one draft pick"—a self-satisfied hum from Ilya has Shane digging the back of his head hard into Ilya's thigh—"this arrogant, *rude* motherfucker who seems perfectly at ease in his skin in a way that instantly has your back up. He gets under your skin, and you pride yourself on being cool under pressure, but it's fine. It's *fine*, because you just want to be the best, and it's okay if you notice things about him—how he moves off and on the ice, the playful way he taunts the press. He's

a competitor, and you're just studying him so you can beat him. It's okay to be obsessed, because hockey is the only thing you've ever cared about, and he's basically hockey, so it's not even really about him. Not even when he comes on to you in the shower—"

Ilya clearly can't let that one stand because he interrupts. "No, no, no. *You* came on to *me*, moya lyubov, don't lie."

"*After filming a commercial before your rookie season.*" Shane raises his voice and finishes the sentence without acknowledging Ilya's interruption, ignoring the quiet gasps from the crowd from the people who didn't already know how long he and Ilya had been together. "And it's so fucking stupid," he continues with a bitter laugh, "but you've been thinking maybe it's not only the hockey that you can't stop thinking about. You can't remember the last time you wanted something that wasn't hockey, but you want him." Shane shakes his head, momentarily overwhelmed as he remembers. God, he was so young. So afraid. "It's a distraction, *he's* a distraction, and you need to get it out of your system. So it's stupid, but you're curious, and even though he's a fucking dick, you're pretty sure this is as safe as it'll get. He has just as much to lose if he were to ever tell—maybe more—and he's still an asshole so there's no way you'll catch feelings, and it'll just be this once, cause the next time you're in the same place you'll be playing against each other, and there's just no fucking way."

Hayden says something under his breath, a faux little cough that sounds suspiciously like "*Lily*." Shane pauses and tilts his head up so he can look at Ilya, who's staring down at him with wide, startled eyes. Transfixed, and open, like Shane's a revelation. Shane immediately looks back up at the stars. He'll cry if he keeps looking at his husband.

"Throw something at Hayden for me, will you?" he murmurs, and the whole room takes a breath, a moment of levity as Ilya pelts Hayden with something—a coaster, maybe?—and Hayden yelps.

Shane waits a beat, can feel the restlessness of the crowd as he makes them squirm. He smiles and takes a sip of vodka, relishing the burn as it slides down his throat. He's got the rookie on tenterhooks, not to mention the dozen or so other hockey players and dates listening in. It's heady, almost as much as the vodka warming his stomach.

"So you hook up, and the world doesn't end, but it kind of does, because all the shit you've been pushing down for years starts to bubble up. He's not the only one you've noticed, but you can't be gay. Not in fucking hockey, not with everybody's eyes on you, a *role model* beyond reproach. You like being good, being liked, being the best, even if most of the time you feel like a ghost haunting your own life, like nobody really knows you."

He shivers, and Ilya runs a hand down Shane's arm, heat bleeding through the fabric of his white button-down, anchoring him. By his feet, he hears a rustle as Troy shifts, and they've shared enough about their pasts that Shane knows this isn't only *his* story, even if the details are different.

"And you keep hooking up with the asshole. Not often, not enough. You pretend you keep doing it because it's convenient, and safe, and it's so clearly neither of those things, you can't even make yourself believe the lie. Each time you tell yourself it'll be the last. You'll stop responding to his texts. Next time you're in the same city you'll ignore him. But the only time

you feel real is when you're on the ice, or when you're with him. You play better, after, and maybe if it's for hockey, it's okay. Anything, *everything* for hockey." Another laugh, choked out, and it sounds wet, but his eyes are dry. He hears somebody sniffing nearby. Harris, probably. He's a softie.

"Besides, it's all still temporary. You're not together. He's screwing anything that moves when you're apart"—a wounded sound from Ilya, and Shane reaches up to tangle their fingers together; he's never been angry at Ilya for sleeping around before they were exclusive—"and you tell yourself you don't care, because you'd do anything *not* to care, and maybe if you say it enough times you'll start to believe it. You're crazy enough not to call it off, but not so crazy that you think it's going to last forever. Someday he'll move on, and you'll get over it. You'll have to.

"So you pretend you don't feel hollow inside every fucking day. You play the best goddamn hockey of your life, and you obsess over workouts and nutrition, like if you get the exact right amount of protein you'll finally feel whole." Troy lets out a heavy breath, pained, and Harris murmurs something quiet and soothing that Shane can't quite make out. "You're more dedicated than you've ever been, you've got two Stanley Cups and more money than you know what to do with, but you're lying to everybody you love, and you feel sick with it, plagued with shame and self-loathing. Your best friend asks about the girl you've been texting, and you shut it down because you don't want to have another conversation using the wrong pronouns. Scott fucking Hunter chirps you on the ice, tells you you're starting to sound like him, and you freak the fuck out because what if he knows? What if he tells?"

"Shit," Scott mutters as Ilya growls under his breath. Shane shakes his head, hoping Scott takes it for the dismissal it is. Scott didn't know, he didn't mean it.

"The entire fucking hockey world creams themselves every time you play him on the ice because nothing gets them hotter than a rivalry, and you understand that a little too intimately, but you know how quickly they'd turn on you if they ever found out."

A deep breath, a comforting squeeze of Ilya's hand, their wedding bands clicking together.

"And when the guy you're in love with starts to act like maybe it's not all as one-sided as you thought, as you needed it to be just to make it through the day, you freak the fuck out. Because you've been miserable, but that's nothing new, you can handle it. But if he feels it too... *that* might break you. Because if being with him for real is an actual option, then it means you'll have to make a choice between the only two things you've ever loved."

It's easier to talk about than Shane would have thought. He feels a little detached from it, this story he's weaving for everybody about his life. He wonders how much of this will be leaked to the press, later, and decides he doesn't care. He's not saying anything he's ashamed of, that hasn't been picked apart and speculated over ever since they were outed.

"So you run away, and you meet a girl. You tell yourself you could love her. Everybody else in the world does, and she's gorgeous and funny and you can talk with her for hours. And maybe you really *did* just need to meet the right woman for it to all finally click. You can be *normal*, and blush when your teammates chirp you about her in the locker room, and you don't have to choose after all." He snorts a laugh, this one lighter, because Rose is one of the

best things that ever happened to him, and he'll love her forever for being so kind when he was so fucking lost. "Except that perfect girl is not an idiot, and when she tells you she thinks you might be gay, how the fuck can you keep denying it? It's terrifying, and it's a relief. To tell somebody, to be seen. To have her say it isn't a problem, because it's not something that needs to be fixed."

Another audible snuffle, some quiet murmuring. Ilya's hand continues to rub Shane's arm, and he feels floaty, words still coming up out of him almost without conscious thought.

"You say it out loud. You're gay. And it feels okay. It feels right. Except for the guy. Who barged his way into your head seven years ago, burrowed his way under your rib cage and stayed there. You can't seem to extract him, and even if you could be with a man, you still can't be with him. If you could only call it off, find a nice boy in Montreal, maybe, *maybe*..."

Ilya's breath catches, like he's reliving it too. Like he's remembering all the what-ifs, all the places their paths could have diverged if either of them had made a different choice. Shane is so, so glad neither of them did.

"But he feels it, too, and you're too far gone to turn your back on that. You invite him to spend a few weeks with you at your private cottage that summer. The indulgent luxury of a *week*, of consecutive days, or more than just a couple of hours every few months. Can you imagine it?" He's really asking, wanting the kid to picture a world in which the prospect of spending just a week with the person he loves would feel like an impossible, unattainable gift. "It's insane. It'll make everything harder, worse, because you won't get to keep it. But you can't help yourself, you think you want this more than you wanted that first cup."

A mock gasp from Ilya, and Shane smiles up at the stars.

"He stalls. Tells you *maybe* he'll come. Avoids committing. You know he wants to say yes, but you're pretty sure he's going to say no. You wonder if he'll be smart enough to break things off for good, if you finally pushed for too much. Or maybe you'll just keep stealing hours together a couple times a year for the next decade of your careers, slowly hollowed out by a starvation diet of stolen moments in dark hotel rooms."

He inhales deeply, then exhales all at once, and for just a moment he's back on his sofa, staring at the television screen as Scott changes everything.

"And then the fucking Admirals win the Cup, and Scott Hunter kisses his boyfriend in front of god and everyone, and if *he* can take a chance like that, let himself be happy..."

Shane turns his head, then, just enough to make eye contact with Scott. He's got his arms around Kip and is staring at Shane with shining eyes. He gives Shane a nod; Shane gives him one back.

"You make a plan," Shane continues, looking back up at the sky. "He'll be a free agent soon, and he'll give up his original six team with a real shot at another cup for a team that hasn't made the playoffs in decades, move to another country, just so he can be closer to you. You'll start a charity together. Encourage the rivalry to fade. Give people a reason for you to be seen together, for you to be friends in public. You'll be within driving distance during the season,

and you can spend your summers together, and it will be better, but won't be enough. Because retirement isn't anywhere close to soon, and the two guys that came out after Scott were out of the NHL within a year. You love hockey too much to risk that happening to you.

"You stop lying to your parents, and they love him the way you dreamed they would. Your best friend figures it out, and he's a better man than you gave him credit for, because he sticks by your side."

"Always, man," Hayden whispers, and Shane smiles. Even when Hayden didn't get it, couldn't stand Ilya, he never once made Shane doubt that he had Shane's back.

"But you won't get to bring him to team BBQs, or introduce him as your partner. He won't get to hold your hand in public, or come to one of your games unless he's playing across the ice. It's still death by a thousand cuts, but worse, because you're not the only one being shredded, and you hate seeing how much hiding is wearing on him. And when"—Shane's breath hitches for the first time, and he pauses, takes a breath to fight back the tears that always threaten when he remembers how close he came to losing Ilya. He clears his throat and continues, voice rough, "When you find out in the locker room after a game that his plane almost went down on the way to Florida, and you're on the verge of the worst panic attack of your life, you have to pretend you're absolutely fine. Have to remember how to get back to your hotel room alone while fighting off a devastation that nobody has any reason to expect you to feel."

He pauses again, steadying himself and listening to the heavy breaths of the Ottawa players and their partners, the ones who'd also lived through that day, giving them a chance to feel through the memories of what almost was.

"It's been a decade of hiding and you can't take another one. You love hockey, but you've finally figured out that it's not the love of your life. It won't kiss you good morning, or bring you your favorite soup when you're sick, or play Yahtzee with your parents. It won't love you back unconditionally—and you're so goddamn sick of the strings attached. You choose him. You propose"—a giddy feminine gasp, and Shane thought it was common knowledge that he was the one that popped the question, though he's always considered Ilya's promise at the cottage all those years ago the real proposal—"and you make a plan to come out. And then —"

A pained groan from Hayden, and Shane winces, cause yeah, this part of the story isn't great. "Your best friend accidentally outs you, and everything goes exactly the way you always knew it would." The anger that's been simmering below the surface comes bubbling up to the top, and Shane's voice gets harder, edges sharper than the blades on his skates. He knows Comeau is still there, quietly listening, but Shane doesn't care what he thinks, not anymore. "The team you've been playing for since your rookie season, the one you've led to three Stanley Cups, turns on you like they've been waiting for a reason. The Commissioner calls you an embarrassing, disloyal liar, and says he'll throw you out of the league if you get married." There are a few murmurings of outrage at that, which Shane can't help but find gratifying. "The media speculates over every game you've played against one another, convinced you must've thrown the ones you lost."

"*Idiots*," Ilya growls to several hums of agreement.

"You thought you'd retire on the team that drafted you, but there's no way you can stay. You can't captain a team that hates you, you won't win another cup that way. You're the best player in the league, and you're not sure you'll be able to get a contract; you know if the commissioner has his way you won't. You don't want to do long distance again, anyway.

"So you give up the C you've had on your jersey for almost a decade, even though you fucking earned it. And you take a massive pay cut, because you really don't need the money. But you were *worth* every penny that you were making before, and it burns that there's a literal number on just how much less you're worth now that you're out."

Shane's been largely motionless this whole time, but even off the ice and a few sheets to the wind he's got speed, so when he decides to sit back up he's a blur, feet planted on the ground and body pivoting to face the rookie. He can tell the kid is startled, that everybody is, eying Shane with a wary curiosity. Shane's eyes bore into the rookie, taking in his overwhelmed expression. Shane doesn't know him well enough to read what else is lurking in his gaze. Maybe a bit of awe, a bit of shame. Shane doesn't look away from the kid, but he can tell every eye in the place is on him, and Ilya always did tease him about liking attention. Usually he's only comfortable with it when he's in uniform, on the ice, but this feels pretty good, too. It feels like he's being seen on his terms, for once.

"And I'd do it all again," Shane says fiercely, because he needs the kid to know, needs them *all* to know. In the end it was worth it, even if the road didn't need to be so long and hard. "Every single stupid choice, I'd do it over, if it meant I'd end up exactly where I am right now." He pulls his gaze away, finally looks at Ilya, heart thumping at the expression on his husband's face, pride and shock and love radiating out with an almost palpable warmth. "I didn't know people could actually feel so goddamn happy. I didn't even know to dream of it, to wish for it. But you—" He turns back to face the kid gesturing at him with his mostly empty glass of vodka.

"If you're as straight as I'm assuming you want us all to believe with this little stunt of yours"—and Troy's enough proof that being a homophobic dick doesn't mean you're not queer, but Shane doesn't need to get into all of that—"then you'll get to be young and messy and make mistakes right out in the open. Maybe you'll forget to wrap it and knock up some poor puck bunny. Maybe you'll fuck your way into an STI that a few rounds of antibiotics will clear right up. And if you do screw up, the commissioner won't be calling *your* phone, telling you to be more discreet about where you stick your dick if you want to keep playing. If you're lucky you'll find a girl that makes you feel the way I do when I'm with Ilya, you'll find somebody you want to kiss at center ice if you're ever fortunate enough to hold the cup. And you won't have people publicly speculating online about how you and your girl fuck that night to celebrate.

"So no, I'm not going to shut up about it. I'm lucky enough to get paid to play the best sport in the goddamn world, but there are talented queer kids out there right now, kids who can skate circles around you, and some of them are going to decide that it's not worth it to go pro. They're going to hang up their skates, and we're never going to get to see them dominate in the rink because they'd rather have a partner to hold them at night than be alone on the ice.

"You just want to play hockey? Us fucking, too, man. I don't know if you've noticed, but the four out, active players"—Shane gestures at himself and Ilya, then Troy and Scott—"have eight cups between us. We're *playing* hockey, kid, and what, you want to whine because we also happen to be complete human beings with lives outside the arena?" He snorts. "Grow the fuck up. You don't want to watch us hold hands"—Shane reaches out and twines his fingers around Ilya's—"then go away and stop fucking staring. We're sure as shit not looking at you."

"I know it's hard to look away from so much hotness," Ilya adds, a sexy, infuriating smirk dancing on his lips, "but I've heard it is possible. If you try very hard."

Shane stands, abruptly done with this whole conversation. He's said his piece. Now all he wants is to be alone with the man he loves, sink to his knees and let Ilya consume him.

"Look, kid—"

"Jackson," the rookie says, quietly, eyes on the ground.

"Jackson," Shane corrects, his voice kinder. Maybe he's wrong, but he thinks there may be hope for the rookie yet. "If you work your ass off, and you're *very* lucky, you'll be playing for a long time. Now Scott's going to retire any day now—"

"Oh fuck off, I'm not that old!"

"—but the rest of us aren't going anywhere. And gay players aren't going anywhere, either. You get to decide what kind of teammate, what kind of *leader* you want to be. You want to have a locker room that gives guys like Kent a free pass? That would rather gut their offense than play with a gay dude? Because you can be that guy." Shane nods his head at Comeau, who still can't meet his eyes. "Metros have a lot of guys like that." He shrugs, tilts his head towards Hayden. "They also have guys like Pike. You can choose."

He tugs on Ilya's hand, and he doesn't quite have the leverage to pull him up, but Ilya gets the hint and stands, looking down at him with a heated gaze that has Shane flushing.

"And on that note, I think I've had enough socializing for tonight." Several of his friends try to protest, but Shane waves them off. "Seriously, it's been a long fucking day."

"Yes, we must be off. Time to be gay behind closed doors so we don't scare big, manly hockey players," Ilya agrees, slapping McCord a little too hard on the back, forcing him to stagger. "See you on the ice, yes?" He smiles meanly at Comeau. "I'm looking forward to it."

Shane snorts, and glances back at the others, still looking a little shocked by Shane baring his soul. He gets it. He feels raw, tender, ready to crawl into a dark bedroom with Ilya and have all the racing thoughts fucked out of his head. "We'll see you guys at breakfast."

"Yes, absolutely," Harris agrees. He opens his mouth as if to say more, but Shane shakes his head. He's got a feeling he'll be a popular topic of conversation tonight, but he's not ready for a play-by-play just yet.

"Tomorrow."

"Yeah, alright. Goodnight."

Shane waves at everybody, making quick eye contact with Hayden, Troy, and Scott, before heading towards the door. He claps the rookie—Jackson—on the shoulder as they pass, and the kid flashes him a look, one Shane might say was grateful if he didn't know better. Maybe he doesn't.

"That was very brave," Ilya tells him as they head towards the elevators, fingers intertwined. "I'm proud of you."

Shane flushes and lets out a deep breath. "Yeah, well. I'll probably freak out about it tomorrow, but..."

"Has been festering for a long time, yes?"

"Yeah."

Ilya nudges up against him, breath hot against Shane's ear. "Was also very hot, seeing you put them all in their place. So sexy and fearless. Made me want to fuck you right there."

Shane lets out a breathless laugh and presses the elevator button several times in quick succession, willing it to come faster.

"Yes, I think you deserve a reward for being so brave."

"Jesus, Ilya, you're going to kill me! Kinda ruins my whole speech if we start fucking right here in front of everyone."

"Pshh, they should be so lucky. But no. Your sexy sex face is just for me."

Shane grins, giddy and turned on, his earlier anger gone, left out on the patio where it belongs. There's a lot he'd change about the world, about hockey, and men who wield their power like a weapon, but this?

Shane brings their clasped hands up to his mouth, and grazes his lips against the back of Ilya's hand. He meets Ilya's gaze in the mirrored reflection of the elevator doors, basking in the love and desire naked and unashamed on Ilya's face as he stares back.

This, Shane wouldn't change for anything. Not even hockey.

End Notes

[Kudos ♥] and [Comments] are fabulous! I'd love to hear what you think!

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