

Backbone

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Backbone

by [Content_Scrapbooker](#)

Summary

5 times Ilya Rozanov ruined his Shane Hollander's "good boy" image & the 1 time he does it himself.

Notes

So this is my first foray into this fandom. I only read the books two days ago, and am still working my way through the show so apologies for any inaccuracies. Nevertheless, enjoy!

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

Chapter 1: Selfie

Shane steeled himself with a steady exhale as he walked up to the player's entrance of the Centaur's rink. Even though this was his home stadium, it meant something new now. This was his place of work now.

He was still getting used to being a player on a whole new team. He'd only been on the roster for a few weeks, but he'd never felt more like a rookie again, trying to prove himself to management and a new set of teammates, not that he really needed to. They wouldn't have signed him otherwise.

And yet, Shane couldn't help himself.

Which is why he was here, at the stadium, three hours earlier than he needed to be for practice.

"Hey, Shane!" Harris, who was wandering the halls caught sight of him, and the stocky Social Media Manager removed his own headphones to strike up a conversation. "I didn't expect to see you here this early?"

"Hey," Shane forced a smile, suddenly feeling anxiety pool in his stomach at being confronted. "Sorry, I was just..."

"Working out?" Harris smirked. "Ilya did the same thing when he joined the team. Came in early every day. We got used to it after that."

Shane let himself relax slightly. *So they wouldn't think he was weird for being here.* In an attempt to avoid being awkward, Shane desperately searched for something to say, since the least he could do was make small talk. "How was your weekend?"

"Good. The dogs had vet checkups this weekend, and they all passed with flying colors!" Harris gushed, pride shining in his face.

"Nice! You have three right?" Shane recalled seeing a picture Ilya had showed him once.

"Yeah," Harris pulled out his phone, immediately bringing up a photo. "This is Mac, that's Shannon, and this one's Bowser. We also have a cat, Ursula, this is her." Harris scrolled to reveal the cat, who was happily curled up on what Shane immediately recognized to be Troy Barrett's lap.

"They're cute," Shane smiled, politely schooling his face to avoid any awkward expressions at the sheer sight of Troy. Even though the two of them were still getting used to each other in particular, and past their differences, things were still tense.

But before Harris could notice how tense Shane was, a notification popped up on the top of the screen, interrupting the moment. Shane didn't mean to pry, but he immediately recognized Ilya's Instagram handle and his eyes narrowed with curiosity.

Harris caught the notification and pulled the phone back to open it, only to immediately start choking.

“What?” Shane froze, noticing how Harris’s face flushed a bright red in between splutters, which was *definitely* an abnormal reaction. “What did he post?”

“You sure you want to know?” Harris asked with an odd glint in his eye, but turned the phone screen around to show Shane anyways before the hockey player could answer.

Shane’s mouth went dry.

The screen displayed a selfie Ilya had posted from their home gym. The photo showed him turned away from the camera, with his reflection visible in the mirror, stripped to the waist, and flexing revealing his back muscles. His tattoos and crucifix were in full view, and a nice sheen of sweat highlighted every subtle curve of his skin. The photo was every inch a thirst trap.

But the main focus of the picture were the fresh scratch marks decorating Ilya’s shoulders.

Bright red lesions, clearly left by fingernails underneath his trap muscles, stood out against the pale skin of Ilya’s back, spanning from the base of his neck all the way to the bottom of his ribs, fanning out like wings. Layers of scrapes, going in various lengths and directions made the skin around the marks flush, which only made the rest of Ilya’s bare torso look pale, of course, meaning the scratches stood out all the more.

The implication was clear. It was obvious to anyone who sat this picture how those marks had been caused, and for those not in the know, the comments building on the post seemingly keen to rat Shane out for his responsibility. He flushed, and Harris let out an appreciative whistle.

“Damn, you two had fun last night, didn’t you? Was it a special occasion?”

Shane opened his mouth but couldn’t figure out what to say. All he could do was gape in response, mildly shaking his head while his cheeks burned with embarrassment.

Harris eventually took pity on him. “For what it’s worth, I think it’s nice.” He said mirthfully.

“Is that what they think?” Shane asked, concern coloring his voice while he tensely jutted his chin in the direction of the phone, which was still buzzing incessantly from the fan reactions to the post.

Harris tilted his head, noticing just how tightly Shane was holding himself. “Why does that matter?”

Shane sighed, knowing he needed to relax. But a violent internal battle was going on his head, waging whether or not actually answer the question. *Everyone – Ilya, his parents, his agent, and his therapist – had encouraged Shane to open up more, and this was an opportunity for just that...*

Before he could talk himself out of it, Shane forced the words out. “I just...Ilya doesn’t get it. He’s been comfortable with his sexuality for so long that he learned how to protect himself. He’s never afraid to BE himself. And I love that about him, I do! But me... I only really learned how to be what I am around him, and being out like that in front of everyone...I feel exposed. Like I’m on the ice without pads and I’m about to get checked.”

Harris couldn’t help it, he laughed. The description was so apt. “Ilya was right, you’re such a hockey nerd! I do get that though. I felt the same way when I started coming out. But I think you’re forgetting something.”

Shane glanced up, finally making eye contact with Harris, who gave him a warm smile in return. “You’re not alone, not even on the ice. You might be out there without armor, but now you’ve got people around you willing to drop gloves in a split second. So what if you’re a little exposed?”

Shane considered that, slowly getting what Harris was saying. “So...I should just go along with it and just...play?”

“Why not?” Harris raised an eyebrow. “You win either way right? No matter what, you still have him.” He wiggled the phone, revealing the photo of Ilya again.

Shane smiled softly. “Yeah,” He glanced at the photo, finally really looking at it. Even with his face partially obscured, the curve of his cheek indicated the presence of that smile Ilya had that made Shane weak in the knees. The gold engagement ring on his hand glinted, aesthetically reflecting the overhead lighting, serving as an additional reminder that Ilya was his, no matter who saw him like this. And if he looked further down...

Well, Shane did like the way his marks looked on his future husband.

Harris rolled his eyes, recognizing the heated look dawning on Shane’s face. “If it helps, the comments have some nice things to say about you.”

Shane nearly did a double-take, and was sure his face couldn’t get any redder, having picked up on the implication of the social media manager’s tone. “Oh no...”

“Oh yes!” Harris crowed. “Look!” Harris shoved the phone in Shane’s hands, with the comments on the post open and ready for him to scroll through.

Leo @NH(e)Llion • 2m

Damn did not expect @shollander24 to be a wildcat in the sheets

Molly @cellybr8 • 2m

Poor Roz getting checked on and off the ice

CJ @centaurus • 1m

It's always the quiet ones 🤔

Tarron @ottawabread • 1m

Imagine if @shollander24 brought *that* kind of energy to the ice 🙄

Riley @24stangirl • 1m

Anyone else wanna see what @shollander24 looks like now? 👁️ 🍑 👁️ #hollandov

Faye @deadgalwalkn • 1m

Hell yeah @ilyarozAnov81 ! You're clearly doing something right!

Dennis @torontoes • 1m

See I knew there was a freak behind that good boy exterior Hollander's got going on!

Shane stepped back, shoving the phone back into Harris's hands before he lost himself in the endless stream of comments. "Well, that's gonna be fun checking my phone later..." He sighed, but was relieved that he could say it while smiling. It was relieving to know that all of the comments he had seen thus far, were in fact, nice. "I'm sure Ilya is going to say *something* about how many comments are actually about me on his post."

Harris chuckled. "You could always post a response with marks he's left on you? They might do the same to you!"

Shane laughed knowingly and started walking towards his original destination; the gym. He still had a workout to do after all. "No can do."

"Why not?" Harris called out, and Shane glanced over his shoulder with a smirk.

"Because I'd get flagged for posting indecent content and make your job a whole lot harder."

Harris spluttered, having not expected the raunchy response.

Shane chuckled to himself and continued on his way, leaving the other man behind. *Maybe opening up wasn't such a bad thing after all.*

Chapter 2: Interview

“So, not only are you two the first openly gay couple to both be in the NHL, you’re also the first married couple to be on the same team. What’s it like being on the ice together?” The reporter, whose name Shane had already forgotten, asked, clearly looking at Ilya to take the lead. They’d just won another game, with a goal each, and another that they both took credit for in a singular beautiful moment of teamwork.

And yet, somehow, their relationship was still the topic of conversation after every match.

At this point the questions weren’t even *original*.

“Is no different to when we on opposite teams,” Ilya declared. “We compete, we argue, we collaborate. Push ourselves and each other to be better, yes?”

“It must be nice spending so much more time together?” She followed up, clearly not willing to yield the floor for the sake of press room etiquette. Shane took the opportunity to jump in.

“The decreased phone bill is certainly a perk.” Shane joked, triggering a laugh from the assembled journalists. Ilya rolled his eyes, a comment about them both being millionaires surely on his lips, but was cut off before he could say it. “But yeah, it’s really great being on the same team again. I think our playing styles really complement each other, and it makes for an interesting dynamic on the ice, as we saw especially tonight.”

“And do you ever take what happens on the ice home with you?” The reporter asks. “Like if you lose, does that impact your home life?”

So much for his subtle redirect, Shane sighed. Ilya opened his mouth again, but Shane answered faster, ready to stop answering questions about this. “We’re both guilty of taking that kind of thing home with us, but I don’t think it’s ever impacted our relationship. If anything, it helps having someone there who truly understands what you’re experiencing in that moment and being able to work through it together.”

“Working off wins like tonight is much more fun though,” Ilya winked lewdly. “Celebration does not have to stop at home.”

Wolf whistles and knowing murmurs arose from around the room at the innuendo, and Shane fought the urge to bury his face in his hands.

He already knew it now, Ilya’s statement was bound to have the opposite effect of discouraging the personal questions. The internet was going to have a field day.

“Next question?”

“For the record, the less we know about our captain’s sex life, or yours, the better!” Bood nudged Shane’s shoulder as he joined the forward center at the bar a few hours later. The

team had congregated there, and the post-match celebration was mostly in full swing.

“Fuck, what’s he said now?” Shane groaned, wondering if it was too late to find a roll of tape for Ilya’s mouth. Screens littered the walls of the bar, split between showing replays of the match and pundits speculating about their flagrant display – the consequences of Ilya’s innuendo.

“Nothing new. It’s just, he implied in that interview that you two, y’know,” Bood gestured nonsensically. “...every time we win a match! Now whenever you leave a post-game celebration, we all know exactly where you’re going and what you’re going to do. I didn’t need that image in my head Holzy.”

Shane dropped his head on the bar top, letting it make a solid thunk. “Well if you come up with a way to keep his mouth shut...?”

“You that worried he might say something else?”

Shane gave Bood a flat look that was almost incredulous. “You’ve met him right? He’s absolutely going to say something else!”

“Who is saying something?” Ilya walked up to the conversation, beer in one hand, casually easing up to wrap the other around Shane’s waist.

“You.” Bood said pointedly. “Maybe put a TMI warning label on his forehead?”

Shane snorted, but relaxed immediately at his husband’s proximity. “We were talking about how you keep implying things about our sex life,” Shane answered Ilya’s question. “Bood here is issuing a complaint.”

Ilya grinned. “Oh? I should be more direct?”

“No,” Bood waved his hands in alarm, glaring at Shane with betrayal at being rattled out to his captain. “No thank you!”

Shane nursed the ginger ale the bartender passed him. “He has a point though,” glancing up at Ilya, who raised an eyebrow. “The fans tend to speculate. You give them ammo.”

“I could say you kiss me before match and they speculate.” Ilya waved his beer dismissively. “I might as well say what on mind, yes?”

“And that’s me?” Shane asked.

“Always, moy dorogoy.” Ilya replied easily, and Shane melted, giving him a sappy grin. Bood let out a noise of disgust.

“Hopeless, you are. Hollander, have you no decency?”

“Not really,” Shane admitted. “I knew what I was in for, and so should you by now.”

Bood sighed good-naturedly, and reached out to shake hands with Ilya and Shane. “Fair enough. I gotta head out though. Cassie’s expecting me. Nice win, you two.”

Ilya nodded, suddenly distracted from saying anything else as Shane snuggled deeper into the half hug, deliberately saving Boon from whatever quip the team captain had on hand.

“Should we leave too?” Ilya asked, gaze heavy as he turned his full attention to his husband.

“To continue celebration at home?” Shane paraphrased, putting on a slight Russian accent to remind Ilya of the comment he said earlier with a dirty smile. Ilya’s eyes darkened, matching Shane’s salacious expression.

“We will leave now,” Ilya declared, dragging a laughing Shane through the bar, steamrolling through the crowd, whistles and taunts from the remaining team members scattered throughout the crowd watching them leave. Shane dragged his feet, trying to encourage Ilya to at least say goodbye, but his husband was determined, and Shane eventually gave up all pretense of delay.

He wanted to go home just as much.

They were just out the door when those plans were shattered. Bright camera flashes blinded them, and Ilya stumbled back, letting out a few expletives in Russian automatically. Shane raised a hand, shielding his face, but gripped Ilya’s hand tight, refusing to succumb to his instincts of pulling away.

“Rozanov, Hollander, are you on your way home to continue your celebration?” A paparazzi taunted, taking more pictures. “Confirm for your audience! Who’s most to thank for the win?”

Ilya growled, but Shane held him back, glaring flatly at the obtrusive “reporter”. “We’re going home, yes, but what we do in the privacy of that home is not your audience’s concern.” Shane said levelly, using his media voice, moving to pull Ilya along.

“It is though, since you two seem keen to flaunt that lifestyle of yours in public.” The reporter retorted. A matching chill rushed down both players’ spines, hearing the vitriol behind those words.

Shane took a deep breath, feeling Ilya’s grip on his hand get tighter, to the point of being borderline painful. He was sure his own was the same, but he maintained enough composure to turn around and glare at the reporter. “And that lifestyle is...?”

The reporter faltered, and even Ilya paused at Shane’s response. “You know,” the man sneered, eyeing their interlocked hands. “That.”

“If you’re referring to two people being in a loving committed relationship while managing successful respective careers, and getting paid more money for one game than you’ll see in a lifetime, then yeah, we’ll show it off. We earned that.”

Shane’s delivery was flawless, and the paparazzi lowered the camera, actually looking pissed off at the flagrant insult. But Shane didn’t back down, deliberately letting the corner of his

mouth quirk up, to show the offensive journalist that he wasn't getting a rise out of Shane. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. And if you don't wanna lose more of your paycheck over a harassment charge, you'll leave us alone now." Shane raised an eyebrow and the journalist flinched. There was nothing in Shane's voice or posture to indicate a bluff, but even without it, both of them knew Shane wasn't bluffing.

The reporter ran off, and Shane let out a long breath, feeling his pulse pick up as his body's natural instinct to panic returned. But Ilya intervened, wrapping his hands around Shane's waist, drawing him into a passionate kiss.

"You. Are. Incredible." Ilya breathed, planting kisses on Shane's lips between each word, sounding breathless by the end of the sentence. "That was so hot."

"I'm sorry that happened," Shane reached out to rest his hands on Ilya's hips, feeling the warmth emanating from his husband. Ilya chuckled, and shook his head, before letting the tip of his nose and his forehead rest against Shane's own features.

"You are so... Canadian." Ilya huffed. "Reporter is rude and you apologize to me. If anything, is my fault. Mouthed off."

"You did mouth off, but it wasn't like you weren't telling the truth." Shane recaptured Ilya's lips, seeking out another kiss. "And I'm not apologizing for the reporter."

Ilya cocked his head, confused. "Then what are you apologizing for?"

"I'm apologizing for the delay. We have somewhere to be, don't we," Shane purred, eyes darkening. "Captain?"

Ilya's breath caught at the title. Despite their vicarious sex life, that was a new one. "Yes," he corrected, compensating for the pause. Shane grinned, seeing a slight blush tinge Ilya's cheeks. "We do!"

Chapter 3: Practice

“Doesn’t the media have enough footage of us on ice from the matches?” Luca complained, eyeing the communications team as they directed a group of media experts around the to film the Centaurs practice.

They’d been there for most of practice, showing up after only running through one play, and taken over putting the team through their paces.

The sound of camera shutters echoing across the practice rink was borderline-irritating at this point, and everyone on the ice was a little sick of it.

“Clearly not,” Ilya sniffed, for once tired of being followed and photographed. As the captain, they’d been looking at him the most, and while Ilya normally loved the attention, the whole circus was had successfully gotten in the way of hockey. Practice was nearly over, and it wasn’t just time they had to fight – it was the practice conditions themselves. “It will be done soon, Zambonis need to go out.”

With multiple takes of action shots and stunts, the ice was scraped up into slushy hazards, and puddles were forming everywhere. It was an accident waiting to happen.

And as if on cue, at that moment across the rink, Shane’s skates slid out from under him, pitching him forward and flat onto the ice.

It wasn’t a hard fall, merely a minor slip, and unconcerned, the whole team laughed at Shane’s expense, Ilya included. From the sound of things, the media team was also reveling in the moment, but the sudden appearance of Shane’s newly-brandished middle finger discouraged them. The man had his priorities straight, as he hadn’t even made an attempt to get up yet.

Hazy, being the kind and generous teammate he was, skated over to Shane’s aid, offering a hand to help the player to his feet. “Thanks,” Shane smiled warmly at the right wing, firmly gripping Haas’s glove to get up, only for Hazy to slip on the same patch of water, sending both players crashing back down into the ice.

The rink erupted with laughter. Despite their embarrassment, even Shane and Luca had joined in, full-on laughing at themselves and the situation at hand.

Ilya’s gaze went soft, enjoying hearing Shane laugh so openly, and took a moment to just drink in the scene. But soon enough he was looking at something else as Shane got on all fours to try and push himself up. His mouth went dry, his brain locked in on appreciating the sight of his husband’s body from this angle. It was hard to pinpoint what he wanted to leer at first; the arch of Shane’s back underneath the practice jersey, or the curve of his rear as he folded in on himself, getting his powerful legs underneath him.

“Off the ice!” Wiebe shouted, gesturing for the Zamboni driver to make his way onto the rink. “Quickly, before someone else takes a tumble and breaks something! Hollander, Haas,

move it!”

The players gingerly made their way off the rink, each of them minding the rapidly growing puddles of slush and water, but Ilya stayed put – still very much staring appreciatively at Shane.

“ROZANOV!” Wiebe shouted, drawing everyone’s attention to Ilya. The team captain snapped out of his frozen trance. “Check out Hollander’s ass at home! Move it!”

Shane immediately rolled onto his back to catch what the Coach was talking about, and shot Ilya a surprised look, like he hadn’t expected his husband to be looking his way. All Ilya could do was spare him a bashful grin, and the two shared the briefest of moments with each other before Ilya adopted that cocky look he was famous for. Spreading his hands with an apologetic gesture, he turned around to face Wiebe. “Sorry, Coach. Position triggers...how you say...? Pavlovian response?”

Those who understood the reference let out loud groans, and Shane blushed hard enough that Ilya could see his husband’s face burning from halfway across the rink. Those who didn’t get it were quickly put in the know, and soon many cheeks flamed as bright as Shane’s as they processed what he meant.

And then, just to make it worse, one of the media team stage-whispered “I can’t believe I got that on livestream.”

Ilya winced.

He hadn’t known they were live.

He looked back over at his husband, ready to gauge Shane’s reaction, but Shane was just shaking his head with a poorly-concealed smile, like he wasn’t even upset. Getting his skates under him, Shane finally pushed himself to his feet, and managed to get Haas up too, guiding the younger player off the ice. Ilya followed suit, only to be blocked by Shane at the box door.

“Sorry.” Ilya whispered, actually meaning it. He knew how much it bothered Shane when people talked about their sex life over their work, and this was bound to fuel flames.

“Don’t.” Shane just laughed. “It was funny.”

“You are...not...mad?” Ilya was confused. “You hear about livestream, yes?”

“Yep.” Shane nodded.

“So...?”

“Between the world having footage of me wiping out on my home rink during practice and everyone knowing that despite being fully kitted out in hockey gear, my ass can still make you hard, I’ll take the latter trending, thanks.” Shane reasoned.

Honestly, Ilya couldn’t argue with that. He’d prefer the same thing.

Ilya was already scrolling online by the time Shane got out of his post-practice shower, passing gif after gif of Shane bent over in the ice with a quick pan over to Ilya's own face.

"What's the damage?" Shane asked, trying to force his voice to sound light. It was true what he'd said at the boards about not being mad at Ilya, but that didn't mean he still wouldn't freak out. That's why he'd insisted on a shower at home, where he could break down in private.

And now he was done.

"Trending. And lot of people saying they knew I top." Ilya kept his expression neutral, trying to hide his own frustration at seeing the commentary, questioning their professionalism and whether or not Shane's sheer presence was a distraction. *His husband was a three-time Stanley Cup winner, for fucks sake. No one had the right to say his presence on the team wasn't valuable.*

Shane draped himself over the back of their sofa, leaning over Ilya to embrace his husband, noticing just how irritated Ilya really was. "You can't be mad about that. You have, as the kids say, big dick energy."

Shane's attempt at modern lingo fell flat, with Ilya barely noticing the comment, aggressively swiping past another post. "What's bothering you?"

"I embarrassed you, today." Ilya sighed, throwing down his phone. A denial was instantly on Shane's tongue, but Ilya didn't give him the chance to speak. "And I know you say you are not mad, but I...I see them talk about you in such disrespectful ways and I see how is my fault."

Shane pushed himself over the back of the sofa, controlling the movement so he landed carefully on Ilya's stomach, putting his face inches away from Ilya's. "It's not your fault." Shane said forcefully, draping his arms over his husband's shoulders.

Ilya rolled his eyes. "I give, how you say, ammo?"

"You do," Shane replied carefully, mulling his words over. "But I know you say it with good intentions. On the Internet, what you say, no matter what, has the ability to be taken out of context and perverted beyond your control and mine. So, sometimes, yes, I end up feeling embarrassed, but I know it's your way of telling me you love me, and I wouldn't ask you to change that for the world."

Ilya brushed a gentle hand down the side of Shane's face, softly cupping his husband's head. Shane pressed a light kiss to Ilya's wrist before leaning into the touch.

"I don't understand how I deserve you, Shane Hollander." Ilya marveled, drinking in the sight of his husband, who seemed fully relaxed and comfortable despite the situation.

"You deserve the world, Ilya Rozanov, and I'll check anyone who says otherwise." Shane declared, before pushing forward to lay a kiss on the tip of Ilya's nose.

“I would like to see that someday.” Ilya teased.

Shane rolled his eyes. “Speaking of things you like to see...me slipping around like a fish does it for you, now?”

Ilya cackled. “No. Was pathetic wipeout. You should be embarrassed. But getting up was show.”

“It was, was it? You liked watching me bend over?” Shane’s tone shifted from playful to dirty, and his eyes darkened.

“Always. One of my favorite things.” Ilya rolled his hips, and Shane could feel his husband’s erection pressing slightly against his stomach.

“And what else do you like watching me do?” Shane crooned, nosing his way to ghost his mouth over Ilya’s neck, gently teasing his Adam’s apple with playful nips.

Ilya groaned. “I like you on your knees.” He exhaled, trying to focus. “I like you on your back, with your legs tucked up on shoulders. I like your mouth...”

Shane bit down on Ilya’s clavicle. “My mouth?” He asked bemusedly. “Like in general, or doing something in particular.”

“Both... both is correct answer.” Ilya watched as Shane sat back on his heels, straddling Ilya’s waist, only to scowl as Shane moved to stand up.

Shane grabbed Ilya’s hand, pulling on it. “Come on.”

“Where we...”

“Coach gave you instructions at practice, remember?” Shane taunted, pulling free of Ilya’s grip, walking in the direction of their bedroom, stripping off his clothes as he walked.

Ilya frowned, trying to recall.

Shane glanced over his shoulder. “He told you to check my ass out at home, yeah?”

Ilya’s mouth dropped open. “Was sarcasm, I thought?” He played along, teasing Shane by staying put, hoping his husband would come back and finish what he started.

“Maybe. Maybe not.” Shane bared his teeth, bending over to remove his underwear and pick it up off the floor, fully revealing his ass in Ilya’s direction.

Ilya’s pants had been gradually getting tighter, but now they felt far too constricting for his liking.

“Besides,” Shane continued. “I want to see what other Pavlovian responses you have.”

Ilya nearly slipped himself in his rush to follow Shane into the bedroom. But he was glad he didn’t.

That would have, after all, been incredibly embarrassing.

Chapter 4: Present

The raucous laughter echoed throughout the restaurant where the Ottawa Centaurs had chosen to host their team Christmas dinner, with the party in full swing.

Dinner had been a great hit, in the aftermath of a great game, and now they were most of the way through their gift exchange. Only a few players were left, so it was getting easier to deduct who had who, and yet Shane tried his best to look casual as Wyatt opened his gift.

“Hollander...” Hayes looked at him in utter shock, holding the gift like it was precious ceramic. “How in the fuck did you...?”

Nick leaned over to get a glimpse of the gift, which was still concealed enough by wrapping paper to leave the rest of the team in the dark. “It’s a comic book.” He announced, and the others nodded. It made sense after, since it was well known how much of a nerd Wyatt was.

“A comic... a comic book?!” The goalie spluttered, glaring at the defenseman. “This is the first Adam Strange issue! This is a classic! Is it a reprint?” He asked, glancing at Shane, expecting the answer to be yes, but the center forward only shook his head in response.

“No, it’s a graded original, from the 1958 Showcase series.” Shane answered. Wyatt’s mouth dropped open even further.

“I don’t even want to know how much you spent on this, or how you got it, but know this is now my most prized possession.” Wyatt declared seriously, ignoring his wife jokingly elbowing him in the ribs. Shane internally sighed with relief, just glad he’d liked the gift. *Not that Shane had agonized for days over it or anything.*

He’d been so unsure of what to get the goalie. He was still a little unfamiliar with most of the team, a familiarity that would only come with time, and hadn’t a clue what to get Wyatt at all until he remembered the other man’s Halloween costume. From there, the thought process had been logical; as surely a comic book nerd would enjoy getting a comic book. And so Shane had done his research, and spared no expense.

“Speaking of Hollander getting things...” Ilya boomed, pulling out a package from under his seat. The whole team let out a collective moan, except for Shane. Only with their luck would the chances of a 22-man team, plus the coaching staff, exchanging names work in the favor of, out of everyone participating in the gift exchange, his husband getting him.

“Oh thank god. Hollander was going to be so hard to shop for if it was anyone else.” Someone remarked as Ilya handed the package over to Shane, who didn’t hesitate to open it, happily ignoring the comment.

The first thing he saw was the Ottawa Centaurs logo, and he realized immediately it was a jersey. The jersey was neatly folded, exactly like how Shane had his shirts folded at home,

but wasn't like his practice jerseys or team uniform, or even the Centaurs' fan merchandise that Ilya had bought him as a joke back when they'd still been on separate teams.

No, this garment was different.

The rich black fabric was lush and soft, with perfectly hidden seams and no labels, addressing two of Shane's biggest gripes with fast fashion clothing. The typical ribbed necklines and hems were replaced with a softer fabric that gave it nice, red accents. He'd never seen a jersey made like this.

The only problem was, it wasn't Shane's jersey.

Rozanov was stamped proudly on the back of the jersey, right above the large number 81. Holding it up for the team, scattered laughter echoed around the table. Ilya smirked. "Figured you should have jersey for best player in League."

Shane rolled his eyes, muttering something about how *he* was the best player in the league. *How he was going to murder his husband, how wearing another player's number was tantamount to sacrilege*, but despite all that, Shane couldn't resist putting the jersey on anyways.

It fit perfectly, of course.

Shane had already guessed the shirt was tailor-made from the quality, but this proved it. He glanced at the team, standing up and turning around to give them a glimpse of the back, while privately admiring the fit. *He would have to remember later to ask where Ilya had gotten it done, so he could get his own made.*

The team laughed, and chirps about Shane taking on his husband's name roused the room, until Caitlyn Dykstra beat them all out with a single devastating question.

"Shane, since you're wearing your husband's jersey and you now look the part, should I add you to the WAG's group chat?"

Shane froze on the spot, genuinely horrified to respond to that question amidst all of the laughter emitting from his teammates. Wiebe was bent over, his head resting on the table as his body was wracked with deep-bellied chuckles, while Hazy, Troy, Deeks, and Bood slipped out of their seats to laugh on the floor. Shane turned to Ilya, half-expecting his own husband to be laughing, but Ilya's eyes were still affixed to Shane, frozen in place with an unmistakably aroused look on his face.

Shane blinked, struck by the apparent reaction of his husband, until it finally struck him; Shane was wearing Ilya's number.

Turning back to Caitlyn, Shane nodded breathlessly. "You know what? Sure! But uh, I just remembered, we've got to run. Goodnight, and uh...happy holidays!"

Loud boos came from their assembled teammates and relatives, but Shane didn't care. *They did have somewhere to be, and by god, he was going to get them there.* He physically

wrestled Ilya out of the restaurant, uncaring that he was still wearing the jersey, even as passing patrons recognized them and a few sports paparazzi snapped photos.

Eventually Ilya finally came back to his head, and realized they were moving. “Uh, where are...”

“Home.” Shane snapped. *He was in a hurry.*

Ilya cocked his head to the side. “Why? Party is not over.”

“Yes it is.” Shane responded with a clipped tone, frantically searching for their car in the darkened parking lot.

“Did...” Ilya sounded hesitant. “Did you not like present?”

Shane stopped in his tracks, mentally kicking himself for not explaining. He abruptly turned around to press his whole body against Ilya, cupping his husband’s face with both hands, and dragging him into a heated kiss, intent on wiping the insecure look off of the Russian’s face.

“Thank you for the jersey, it’s perfect.” Shane reassured, relieved to feel Ilya start to relax under his palms. “But you have two options right now.” He whispered, his breath warming the sensitive skin around Ilya’s lips.

“And those are?”

“We turn around and go back to the party...” Shane offered, trailing off before giving him the (far more) appealing option. “Or we go home right now and you fuck me wearing your name like a true WAG.”

Ilya stared down at Shane in shock for the briefest of moments, before sweeping him into a lavacious kiss. “Team will have things to say about that.”

“Do I look like I give a fuck right now?” Shane panted, fumbling in his pockets for the keys.

“You look like mine.” Ilya said softly, and Shane butted his forehead against Ilya’s, letting the tips of their noses brush.

“With your name and number and everything.” Shane whispered. He pressed the keys into Ilya’s palm, taking one last deep inhale before forcing himself to step back. “Now take me home.”

“I must drive?” Ilya pouted.

“You’ll drive faster. Oh, and you have to give me the website you ordered this from.” Shane tugged at the collar of the jersey.”

“Why?”

“So I can order one with my name and number on it for you. We deserve to match right?” Shane bit his lip, giving Ilya one last playful smile before turning to march out in search of

the car.

Ilya was hot on his heels. They had somewhere to get to.

Chapter 5

Whether the rest of the League admitted it or not, it sucked playing against Ottawa now that Rozanov and Hollander were on the same team.

Specifically, it sucked for them. With Ilya's aggressive style and underhanded tactics that psyched out the front line in contrast with Shane's fast-paced plays and rapid response times, no one stood a chance unless they managed to get under one of their skins during the match.

Hollander was easier to bait, always had been, but as a few players had come to learn, Hollander was Rozanov's sore spot too.

That was what was going through Max Reeves' head, new captain of the Vegas Vipers as he faced down Rozanov on the ice, at Game 2 of the Cup Playoffs. "So," Max drawled, staring through his visor to make eye contact with the Ottawa captain. "I've always wondered, is Hollander as much of a bitch in bed as he is on ice?"

Ilya's breath quickened, eyes narrowing as Max cockily observed him, waiting to see what the impact of his taunts would be.

"Maybe after you're finished fucking up your career and I've won the Cup..." Max carried on as the ref approached with the puck. "I'll buy him a drink and see what all the fuss is about. He might appreciate a younger, more successful model."

It took every ounce of willpower for Ilya not to let his reaction show on his face, but hidden beneath his gloves, Ilya's grip on his stick was so tight that his knuckles had gone the same color as the ice. His pulse was so loud he could hear it in his ears, causing him to miss the exact millisecond the puck hit the ice, allowing Max to win the face off.

Ilya went after him like a dog to a bone, uncaring as he performed an illegal move to send Reeves crashing to the ice. He didn't even care who got the puck as the play developed, walking himself to the penalty box before the ref even blew his shrill whistle to make the call.

Max laughed from where he was still sprawled on the ice. "Maybe I should get him that drink now, since you're busy." He called out.

Ilya stopped dead in his tracks, already turning to shed his gloves, but his team pulled him back, and even they were barely enough as jeers from Reeves' teammates echoed their captain's taunts, incensing him further.

Shane physically intervened, skating between Ilya and Reeves, and placed a gentle hand on his chest with a questioning look on his face. A look that Ilya just knew would mean Shane would ask him later what Reeves had said during the face-off. But despite his husband's subtle attempts at reassurance, Ilya couldn't let what Max had said slide. "Only person allowed to call him bitch is me." Ilya yelled, peering around Shane's head to stare Max in the face, loud enough for all of the players and the refs to hear.

The Centaurs players all winced, Shane included – if not for the volume, because of the phrasing.

Everyone was able to deduce enough of what might have transpired during the face off, and the Vipers laughed, fist bumping Max as Bood dragged Ilya over to the penalty box before he could say anything else.

For just a moment, Shane hesitated. *It felt like everyone was looking at him, laughing at him, because he had something to be embarrassed or ashamed about, and it made him feel sick to his stomach.* He knows Ilya didn't mean it like that, that his husband was just being defensive in response to Reeves' cruel words, and that it wasn't Shane's fault they were in this situation.

He let himself have that moment, just that single heartbeat between breaths before shrugging it off. They couldn't afford to let the Vipers get under both of their skins, not when they were so close to the Cup now, no matter how much the harassment and the bullying bothered him.

Hazy nudged Shane's shoulder, checking in silently to see if he was okay, and Shane gave him a controlled look in turn, reassuring his teammate that Shane was good to go.

The refs signaled for the team to reorganize for the next play. The Vipers were still laughing, obviously looking in Shane's direction as they all got into position, only finally quieting down as the two centers posed for the face-off.

Max gave him an aggressive once-over that made Shane's stomach broil with discomfort. "So, I hear you're committed to being Rozanov's bitch now." Max drawled. "Shame. I wanted to buy you a drink."

Shane glared. "How about I buy you a drink instead? I'll even sponsor the feeding tube you'll need to pour it down your throat when we're done."

Max barely had time to react to the uncharacteristic threat before the puck dropped, and Shane's wrist snapped, allowing him to take control of the puck, and then from center ice, without moving a single inch, sent the puck flying into the Vipers net.

The buzzer rang and the crowd erupted. Shane skated past Max, the two players giving each other matching filthy glares, before Shane broke off to glance over at the penalty box where Ilya was screaming in unison with the fans. Pure delight and vindication was written all over the Russian's face, pride shining in his eyes as he poured love into every single micro-expression.

Shane didn't even care (that much, at that time) that it was probably the best shot of his career. He was too choked up internally at Ilya's reaction, barely registering as his teammates knocked on his helmet and armor in joint celebration. This is what he'd wanted for so long; the two of them on the ice together, just living and celebrating each other without having to hold back.

He was just so happy to share this moment with his husband. *Fuck what Max Reeves and the other players called him, fuck what Crowell and the NHL thought, fuck what every critic and*

hater had ever said about him/them. They'd earned this.

It was finally their turn.

More insults from the Vipers echoed across the ice, met with responses in kind from the Centaurs. Even Ilya, who was still stuck in the penalty box, was joining in on the vitriol.

Shane ignored it all, doing his best to focus on the match. He was not going to let anyone take this from him now.

Reeves and Shane faced off once more, both players bending into position. "Do you regret making Rozanov ruin his career?" Max sneered. "Ruin his life even? You think your bitch-ass is worth him never going home again, huh?"

From Shane's right, a loud growl came from Troy, who had overheard what Max had said, and from the way the rest of the Centaurs also went quiet, they had too. That was a sore point for Ilya, and the whole team knew it. It was a sore point for Shane, and beyond that, it was just cruel.

"I've got a question for you too," Shane forced himself to smile. "You think you'll still be worth the ink on your contract after we knock you out of the playoffs with no points on your record for your first game as Captain?"

Shane timed it perfectly. Max just opened his mouth to retort with something when the ref dropped the puck, and in a single instant, Shane took possession and was gone.

The fans could barely keep up with the number of passes the Centaurs made in the ensuing minutes, with the entire front line working in harmony to evade the Vipers. When it became clear they couldn't outmaneuver the Ottawa team, they diverted to more underhanded tactics, but not even that helped as Shane passed the puck to Luca just before for the blue line, and Luca top-shelved it into the net.

It didn't even feel like the stadium had a chance to quiet down between the goals for the rest of the match. The Vipers would never recover, and Ottawa won the game, 5-0.

But the loss wasn't even the worst part for Vegas Vipers. It was knowing that there wasn't anything anyone could do now.

Whether the NHL liked it or not, the two best players in the League were on the same team, on the same page, and in the same bed.

And come the last match of the playoffs, they would be on the same Cup.

Chapter 6: Dropping Masks

It was a well-known fact that despite his years-long career as a hockey player, Shane Hollander had never dropped gloves on the ice.

He'd chirped, he'd checked, he'd beefed, and he'd defended his teammates, but he'd never ripped off his gear with the intent on fighting another player, outside of the practice they'd had on that particular subject during his little league matches.

People had teased him about it when he was a rookie, saying he was too tame, too nice for the sport. That his reservedness and docile nature would make him a weaker player, whatever the fuck that meant.

Later, once he had some experience under his belt, they praised him for it. They called him a role model, a textbook example of sportsmanship, the metric for appropriate conduct in hockey even.

But the truth was, Shane Hollander had just never wanted to hit anyone in his life.

Hockey was a contact sport, and they were already prone to injuries enough as it was, so getting in a physical fight that could only exacerbate conditions that would make a player unable to play seemed reckless and ill-advised.

Until today.

Fate seemed intent on changing Shane Hollander's mind on his no-violence policy, on the day of the most intense match of the season no less; Game 7 of the NHL Stanley Cup playoffs.

It wasn't enough that the Centaurs had only won 3 games of the playoffs, or that the opposing team for this match had to be Shane's old friends, the Montreal Voyagers.

It was that everyone on the ice that didn't wear a Centaurs jersey seemed to have it out for his team tonight.

Hayden and JJ had both been injured earlier in the season, which meant there wasn't a single friendly player left in the match on the other side of the line.

And Montreal held a grudge.

The refs, in Shane's professional opinion, were blind to the attempted slashes, hooking, and general interference directed mostly his and his husband's way, and by now, late into the second period, more than one of the Ottawa Centaurs had been sent to the penalty box already for trying to call it out instead.

Shane could see Ilya's mounting frustration, and he was sure if he looked in a mirror right this second, he would see his own, along with the bruise one of Montreal's defensemen had

left on Shane's jaw in the first period. Ilya had taken a ten minute penalty for slashing said defenseman right after.

Even their fans were outraged, shouting and pounding on the glass, screaming at both the players and the refs, making the noise in the stadium nearly unbearable.

All they needed was to end this match with a win. And then it would be over and they could tend to their wounds and celebrate their victory.

But first, they had a period to finish.

Luca sneered as the ref issued him another penalty, the third one of the night, and Shane watched the rookie walk into the box, joining seven other teammates knowing he would be out for the rest of the period. There were only four minutes left on the clock, and with two periods nearly down, and no points scored for either team, the pressure was driving everyone mad.

"Can't believe you left us for this, Hollander," one of Shane's former teammates said in passing. "This waste of a team who can't even stay out of the box long enough to score."

Shane snarled. "You know damn well this team isn't why I left. And you don't get to call them a waste when you haven't scored a goal all night either. Your team has been too busy trying to cheat."

As soon as the accusation left Shane's mouth, the world went into slow motion. The play developed around them, and Ilya got control of the puck. The player Shane had been arguing with lunged, whipped around him with his stick raised, as if to prove Shane's point.

The blade swung up in the air, too high and too fast for Shane to stop it...

And then it came back down, connecting hard with the side of Ilya's helmet, sending the Russian crashing to the ice.

Shane didn't even think about it; lunging for the player that had hit his husband. In one, single, smooth motion, Shane shed his gloves in such a way that would have people admiring him later for making it look so easy. *And questioning where he would even have practiced such a maneuver.*

And with a single flourish, grabbed the other man by the collar, sending a sharp uppercut into his lower jaw.

Shane must have put all of his anger and all of his frustration into the punch, because the player in his hands sank to the ice, knocked unconscious in one hit. The rink fell silent, the crowd included, and people grabbed Shane, yanking him back before he could attack the unconscious man.

Around them, chaos erupted. The minute Shane threw hands, the rest of the players saw it as permission to brawl, and every player, even the goalies, shed their gloves and helmets. It was a full on attack, and the fans renewed their bloodthirsty screaming, entertained by the violence.

But Shane didn't even notice it happening. He ripped himself from their grip, uncaring who was even pulling on him, immediately kneeling at Ilya's side. Ilya squinted and relaxed, immediately recognizing Shane's presence, letting out a soft grunt and some swearing under his breath.

Shane worried, and from where he was, tried to run through the list of preliminary symptoms for a concussion, but Ilya wouldn't stay still long enough for him to identify them. His helmet may have absorbed the brunt of the blow, but it was still possible.

"Help me up," Ilya asked, gesturing for Shane to assist, but Shane shook his head, caressing the side of Ilya's jaw.

"Stay down, the medics are coming." Shane pleaded.

"Am fine." Ilya shook his head, sitting up. "Not hurt. He hit like a pussy." Ilya grumbled, only to stop short upon seeing who he was talking about still in a crumpled heap upon the ice.

"He took a hit like a pussy too." Shane spat, glaring at the unconscious player, and the ref who called for Shane to take a penalty.

Ilya looked down at Shane's hands, finally noting for the first time that they were bare, putting it together. "Did you..." Ilya trailed off, distracted from talking by seeing the Jumbotron screen replay enlarged footage of Shane punching his attacker. He gave Shane a double-take, actually looking speechless for the first time in his life, his eyes darkening with lust in a fraction of a second.

"C'mon," Shane tugged Ilya to the penalty box, still gripping his husband's glove tight. "Let's get your head looked at."

"My head is fine."

"Yeah, and to make sure you're still good to give head tonight, I'd appreciate you being looked at."

Ilya choked at Shane's words, still unused to Shane saying such filthy things in public (that was usually his job), and daftly allowed his husband to pull him into the box where a medic was already waiting. Luca patted the bench next to him, and Shane sat down with a sigh, watching as the clock for the period counted down to zero.

Ilya sat down next to Shane, his helmet now removed. "Medic says I am fine, but should be supervised for any delayed problems. I told him you would not take your eyes off me."

"True enough." Shane removed his own helmet, and Ilya hissed at the sight of the bruise marring Shane's face.

“Ublyudki...” Ilya swore angrily under his breath, shedding his own gloves to brush a thumb over the discoloring skin, and Shane leaned into the touch, letting his eyes slip closed for a moment in relief.

Ilya was fine, Shane forced himself to repeat over and over, moderating his breath to get his thoughts to slow, only for his attempt at peace to be interrupted by the shrill whistle coming from the referee.

The man was shaking his head as he engaged the mic pack, before saying. “Penalty for roughing and interference to every player on the ice, two minutes.”

The fans booed but Luca just laughed next to Shane. “There’s no one left to play,” the younger man pointed out. “Everyone on the ice was already subbing in for someone else. They’re gonna start the clock on an empty rink.”

Ilya cackled, making Shane jump. “So is it first from box to puck who gets possession?”

“I think so,” Luca squinted, but Shane breathed out in wonder. It was more than that. The nets were unguarded. Whoever was first to get the puck would have a chance to score without interference.

“You good with me going back out there, Shane checked, deferring to Ilya’s leadership. Ilya frowned but nodded.

“Yes, why?”

Shane explained what he was thinking, and Ilya’s eyes widened. Starting a period off with an immediate goal would change the game, and give them a chance, the refs be damned.

Others leaned in, listening to Shane lay out the play, nodding with enthusiasm. Even the penalty box attendant seemed interested, checking his watch to see how long was left of the break. Shane moved to be directly behind the box entrance, tugging his gloves and helmet back on, and as the buzzer rang and the clock counted down, Shane turned back to look at Ilya.

They locked eyes, silently communicating with each other, and as soon as the attendant tapped Shane to release, Shane gave his husband a cheeky wink before bursting onto the ice.

The center forward for Montreal was trying to do the same, but Shane was faster, sweeping the puck into his possession and skating freely in the direction of the net.

In Shane’s peripheral gaze, he could see Montreal’s goalie trying to beat him there, but the plan worked perfectly. He switched the puck over to his other side and slapped it straight into the center of the net.

Ottawa had finally scored.

And then twenty minutes later, Ottawa won the Cup.

Montreal vacated the ice, unable to bear seeing the Cup be handed over to Ilya, who brandished it aloft, surrounded by the rest of the Centaurs Shane was pushed into the middle, and each with a hand on the Cup, they pressed a kiss onto the smooth metal of the trophy.

And then they kissed each other.

Ilya mindlessly handed off the trophy to Bood, giving him the chance to pass it around as he swept Shane into a kiss, the two of them embracing on center ice.

The fans cheered, and cameras flashed, but neither of them cared. They had each other, and they had a Cup. They'd won!

Pats and words of congratulations met their deaf ears until finally Wyatt shouted "You both have to breathe at some point!" Ilya laughed, breaking away to flip the goalie off, but Shane didn't mind, eyes locking back on to the trophy as it was passed to him.

"It feels different," Shane shouted over the noise and celebration, testing the weight of the Cup in his hands. It was the same trophy he'd held before, but that wasn't what he meant.

Winning this, now out to the world and with his husband at his side, felt more genuine than anything Shane had ever experienced in his life. He couldn't be prouder of himself, or of his team. Words welled up within him, but he didn't need to say them.

They knew what he meant.

Later, Shane and Ilya walked out in front of the press, hand in hand with matching grins on their faces, sitting at the head of the media room right next to the Cup which had been strategically placed on the table.

"Who is first?" Ilya asked, and a reporter from the front shot up, eagerly raising her hand.

"First of all, congratulations on winning, to you and your teammates," She said, pulling out her recording device. "That was a rough match, and you pulled through when it counted most. Shane, this question is for you. It's been remarked upon that you've become an entirely different player since joining the Centaurs, becoming more open, collaborative, and intimidating. You broke out of that image you spent your career creating and tonight was a testament to that when you struck another player on the ice for the first time. Can you tell us what caused that transformation?"

Shane leaned into the microphone. "I've been called hockey's golden boy for a long time, and throughout my career I felt like the reality of who I am was nothing further than that. It scared me shitless to think what would happen if the truth ever came out, and I spent a long time actively sabotaging myself and the people around me, whether I meant to or not, in an attempt to prevent that worst possible scenario."

Under the table, Shane squeezed Ilya's hand, reassured when Ilya squeezed back in support. "But when the truth did come out," Shane continued. "I learned to let go of a lot of what was holding me back, and i couldn't have done it without the amazing support of the Centaurs

team, my family, and of course, my husband.” Shane turned his head to smile at Ilya, who was already smiling back. “I realized I don’t have to be some golden boy. I can be myself, and I think I’m both a better player and a better person because of that.”

“Your fans would agree. Ilya, do you agree with that as well?” The reporter followed up, and Shane held his breath, waiting to hear what his husband had to say.

“I had proof of this transformation long before fans did. Nothing sexier than fucking confident hockey player who wins.” Ilya boasted, winking for the cameras. “But yes, I am in agreement. Shane is best player I know, apart from myself of course, and seeing his progress has been one of greatest privileges of my life. I am most proud!”

Later that night, Shane would agree with Ilya’s earlier assessment from the press conference for the umpteenth time. There *was* nothing sexier than fucking a hockey player who wins. And he didn’t mind screaming it from a rooftop either, because he had nothing to be embarrassed of.

They had won the Cup.

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading, and a huge thank you to those who kudos, bookmark, or comment. Your engagement means so much!

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