as the decade would play us for fools

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as the decade would play us for fools

by Viwrit3r

Summary

Hayden Pike met Shane Hollander when they were both 17. Now, a decade later, he thinks he knows him pretty well.

Or: Hayden Pike figures it out, or maybe he knows all along; not knowing in a literal sense maybe, but in the way one knows one's best friend, the way one soul knows another: so it's less a matter of finding out, but more one of - oh, there you are, how nice it is to see all of you.

Or: Hayden Pike has always thought Shane Hollander might be gay. Ilya Rozanov was only a little bit more of a surprise.

WARNING: some spoilers for the end of Heated Rivalry (the book)

Notes

A/N: while I don't disagree that Hayden might be a bit of a himbo (said lovingly) there is a type of knowing you have when you're really, truly best friends with someone, and though men can be impressively closed off and emotionally constipated sometimes (also said lovingly) Shane has not been chill one single day in his life (something we unfortunately share) and Hayden just like, exudes love. IMO. Also: I'm just assuming Hayden was also drafted to the Metros when Shane was? This could be wrong but we're rolling with it. I'm also assuming they were the same age, I also don't know if that's right. I've read the books and watched the show but I have a shitty memory so yeah

See the end of the work for more notes

Hayden Pike met Shane Hollander when they were both 17. His first impression consisted of dark, neat hair, a painfully serious demeanor, and a serious case of hero-worship on Hayden's part. *I mean, come on, this is Shane Hollander!* Top prospect, (almost) top draft pick, hockey's golden boy. The kind of talent that only comes once a generation, right? Oh, hello, Ilya Rozanov, Russian bad boy, top draft pick of the Boston Raiders, and the headache pounding behind Hayden's eyes for the next decade.

As annoying as Rozanov was *before* they were all in the NHL - cocky, standoff-ish, and too damn good - it's worse once they play together. In the beginning, Hayden often wonders how Shane stands it. The two of them have been linked for as long as the hockey world has been talking about them. Hayden tried to run it back once, tried to remember the first time he'd ever *heard* of Shane Hollander. He couldn't quite place it, but he was sure it had been the two of them together:

'Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander.' The announcer can't hide the excitement in his voice, and Hayden watches with some trepidation as Shane skates to the centre line. They're just rookies, both of them, but Shane's already getting enough time that he's essentially got a guaranteed spot in the roster. Hayden wouldn't be surprised if he were second line - heck, first line - next year. Shane is focused, driven, put together, unflappably competent the majority of the time. The only thing that makes that change is Rozanov, who seems to have a special skill at getting under Shane's skin. So Hayden watches the fire that lights in Shane's eyes, the clench of his jaw, the tightness in his shoulders: and the way Rozanov's mouth moves, that assholeish grin, the way it doesn't matter how he chirps Shane because Shane wins the face-off anyway.

Hayden notices, from their rookie year, how Shane plays differently when it's against Boston. When it's against Rozanov. The other guys notice it too; it's hard not too. If pressed, Hayden would hazard a guess that Boston's locker room feels the same about Rozanov. Shane just - comes to life, even more than he usually does for hockey. It makes sense, he guesses - Rozanov is the only one who can really match him.

The light, the spark, that Shane gets for hockey, for beating Rozanov, doesn't really translate to the boy - becoming a man - off the ice. He doesn't drink, doesn't party, and Hayden respects that, he does. It's just that - well, it doesn't seem that Shane has *anything* outside of hockey and his parents and hanging out with Hayden, and the very infrequent times he'll go out with the others. He knows Shane's had girlfriends in the past, but he's never seen a girl draw Shane's attention.

When Hayden meets Jackie, it only becomes more obvious. Jackie is - more than he could have ever hoped for. Smart, funny, drop-dead gorgeous - Hayden's a fucking lucky guy. Maybe it's a cliche that being in a relationship makes you want to set up your single friends, but now Hayden kinda understands it. He's so, so happy. He wants Shane to be happy too.

And - well, as most things in Hayden's life, it's really Jackie that starts it. Smart Jackie, always putting together the puzzles that would have just remained pieces in his head. Maybe if it wasn't for her, all his thoughts about Shane and girls would have stayed just that - thoughts. It's after yet another fruitless attempt to set Shane up with one of Jackie's friends and they're in Hayden's apartment, making dinner. They've only been dating for six months, but it feels like forever. Hayden's glad he doesn't have a roommate, though he does feel bad for making Shane move out. He just wants Jackie around all the time. He's gonna ask her to move in soon, when he gets up the courage.

'There was that girl who did yoga, right?' he asks, thinking. Shane just needed - one good date. One good lay, really, though he'd never suggest to Jackie that her friends were just 'a good lay'.

Jackie hums noncommittally. She's chopping carrots. 'When was the last time Shane had a girlfriend?' There's something contemplative in her voice, something Hayden has not yet come to realize is a warning sign that she's approaching a difficult topic. Dancing around the start of something.

'Um - ' he wracks his brains. 'I know he had one when we were drafted. I think they broke up pretty soon after that, though.' That had been - well, at least two years ago, right? That wasn't so long, Hayden supposed.

'Right,' Jackie said.

'What?' Hayden asks, only now getting the sense that she is hinting at something. Jackie puts the knife down and looks him in the eyes, steady.

'Babe - do you know for sure that Shane likes girls?'

He reels for a moment, shocked - looks around, almost automatic, that fear ingrained in him. You didn't - you couldn't - you never *seriously* suggested a fellow hockey player might be gay. Guys made jokes, sure, some more outright homophobic than others. Hayden isn't homophobic - he doesn't care who people love. But he knows that it's not ok, not really, to be anything different in the MHL. If you didn't know that, you were stupid, or maybe just viewing the world through rose coloured glasses. 'You can't say that, Jackie,' he says.

She sighs. 'I wouldn't tell anyone,' she gestures with the knife. 'And anyway, it was just a question.'

'I mean, I guess - ' Hayden wracks his brains, trying to think of a single time his friend has unpromptedly and genuinely talked about a girl, and comes up blank. 'I - I guess I don't. I mean, do you think he might be…?' he can'ts say it. He knows that's stupid, and yet.

'Gay?' Jackie says gently. 'Maybe, yeah.'

'Why?'

She shrugs. 'Well, like you said, he's never really expressed interest in a girl, right? For as long as you've known him. And - ' she blushes. 'Well. Remember the other day, before he moved out, when he came back early?'

Hayden does remember. He'd rather he didn't.

'Well, you were in the bedroom and I walked out without my top on and he was just there, and - ' she shrugs. 'He was blushing, sure, but he didn't look like he wanted to look, if that makes sense. His eyes never left mine.'

'Well, yeah,' Hayden says. 'He's like, the politest guy I know. He wouldn't have.'

'Yeah, but he didn't even look like he *wanted* to,' Jackie says, coming over. 'And I've got decent tits, if I say so myself.'

‘You do,’ Hayden says, eyes dropping.

‘Hey!’ she smacks him. ‘Focus. There was no lingering, no hint that he saw me as a sexual object at all.’

Hayden thinks. ‘I don’t know…’ he says doubtfully. ‘Maybe that’s just the way Shane is.’

‘Maybe,’ Jackie says. ‘But maybe we should give him a break from our matchmaking efforts?’

Hayden had agreed, and they hadn’t talked about it again. But Jackie’s question had sat at the back of his mind. *Are you sure Shane likes girls?*

So Hayden watched. And the more he watched, the more he noticed. Shane didn’t really go out, but when he did, girls practically threw themselves at him - and Shane just didn’t seem to care. His eyes never lingered, or widened - and he never, ever touched them. But they go out one night and there’s a guy at the bar that even Hayden can admit is hot, and Shane stutters when he orders and nearly trips, and Hayden thinks he catches him staring at the strip of the guy’s skin revealed by the stretch of his t-shirt, and Hayden thinks - maybe.

It’s far from conclusive. But Shane has a particular Starbucks he goes to, and a barista with short curly hair and a fond smile who knows Shane’s order and draws little pictures on his cup. Shane blushes, the one time Hayden asks him about it. Says he’s just friendly - and Shane is, behind the awkwardness. He could make friends with anyone. So maybe Shane’s eyes linger longer on the guys in the action movies they watch in indistinct, blurring together hotel rooms on the road than they do on the girls. And maybe Shane has never, not ever, gone on a second date with any girl in the time Hayden’s known him. And maybe Hayden’s not even sure what Shane’s type is, or if he has one. So what?

But now that Hayden has started noticing, he can’t stop. It’s only because he started noticing that he started noticing Rozanov. (Just like most things in Hayden’s life tie back to Jackie, most things in Shane’s career can be tied back to Rozanov). He notices how Shane always knows when their next game in Boston is. He notices how Shane doesn’t really care about any competition, unless it’s Rozanov.

As the years pass, Hayden notices that for such a so-called rivalry, such hatred, Shane doesn't seem to hate Rozanov all that much. They all bash him - when they play Boston, in the locker room, joking about fans burning Rozanov effigies in the parking lot. But Shane never joins in. On face-offs, Shane leans in and his eyes light, with that fire he only gets around the cocky Russian. In interviews he's polite, but he tenses when the reporters say Rozanov's name. He laughs, jokes back, almost. He quotes Rozanov's interviews like he's seen them, or pretends he hasn't to play into the punchline. He keeps track of Rozanov.

All of that could be nothing. Guys can be friendly with each other even on opposing teams, and the two have known each other as long as Hayden and Shane have. On good days Hayden can even be generous and acknowledge that it could get lonely at the top, where only Shane and Rozanov really are. Pushed together, always. Why wouldn't the rivalry be a little friendly?

But there are two events which stick in his mind, two events that later he'll look back on and think: there. That's where I should have known.

The first is the All-Star game in Tampa, in 2017. Hayden wasn't in attendance, but he watched the game mostly for the same reason everyone else was, he imagined: to see Rozanov and Shane play on the same line. He couldn't decide beforehand if it was gonna be a disaster, or a masterpiece.

It was a masterpiece. To see the two play, you'd think they'd always been playing on the same team. The rest of the players faded away, like they didn't matter. The third guy on their line, Hayden couldn't even remember his name. He felt kinda bad for him. The two seemed to be able to read each other's minds, flying down the ice at a pace the other players couldn't match. But there was one moment - it had been a beautiful goal, a classic give and go, right into the back of the net, easy as everything.

Shane had been jubilant, and Rozanov had been grinning ear to ear, slinging an arm around Shane, pressing an obnoxious kiss to his cheek as he pulled him into a rough hug. The kind of thing the Russian did every game, the obnoxious sort of touchy feely behaviour that was really Rozanov's whole thing with his teammates. But Hayden noticed things now, so he noticed the blush on Shane's cheeks, the fondness in his eyes. The way Rozanov kept his hand on Shane's shoulder just a little longer than necessary.

The second is when Shane gets injured, an unfortunate hit from Marleau that caught him at the wrong angle. Hayden sees it go down, too far away to do anything about it but close enough to see the way his best friend crumples to the ice and doesn't get up. Close enough to hear the punched-out sound Rozanov lets out, the brief second where his mask slips and nothing but cold panic covers his face. *What?* Hayden thinks, but then he's too busy fighting Marleau, the bastard, and yelling at the refs, and yelling at Shane to get up, just get up, and playing out the rest of the game somewhat numb, unmoored without his best friend and captain.

Later, when he knows Shane is going to be all right, he watches the footage back. Sees how Rozanov skates closer, not further away, watches his mouth as it shapes frantic words, sees how the medics have to quite literally push him away to get him to skate to his bench. He plays like shit after that. The announcers make some comment about how long the two have been playing together, rivalry or no; how it just shows that there's familiarity and care there. How it's normal, now, after so many years, that Rozanov would react like that.

Hayden wonders. Those two events sit at the back of his mind, even as the disappointment of being out of the playoffs buries them. He keeps them, though, and when Scott Hunter wins the Cup and kisses his boyfriend on the ice for the world to see, Hayden thinks, *huh*.

But Shane doesn't say anything, and Hayden doesn't press. Ilya Rozanov leaves the Boston Raiders and goes to fucking Ottowa, of all places, and Shane doesn't say anything. Shane stops keeping track of Boston games and starts knowing when they're playing Ottowa, and though he has the hometown excuse, Hayden wonders.

That fall, a whole decade since they were drafted to the same team, his best friend comes out as gay, and Hayden thinks: *ok. Is that all?* But Shane says nothing, even when he admits to having a mystery man. Ok, Hayden thinks. Ok. Mystery man in Boston. Jesus, does his best friend think he's an idiot? Hayden might not be the sharpest crayon in the box, but he's got eyes for crying out loud.

But… well, if this *thing* between his best friend and fucking Ilya fucking Rozanov has been going on for even half as long as Hayden has been noticing, then no one else has seen anything either. Maybe Shane would be right to assume the whole world is fucking blind.

Hayden tells Jackie all of this, and then has a serious *oh fuck* moment when he realizes that he's really treating this like it's serious. Shane and Rozanov. Fuck, is he gonna start having to

call him Ilya?

‘Do you think he’s happy with him? Rozanov, I mean?’ Jackie asks, pointedly not laughing at the way Hayden’s doing careful deep breaths.

Hayden thinks about when he first met Shane, baby-chub still intact and hair just a few weeks past the point of needing a hair cut, far too serious and far too young for the expectations which had been placed on him. He thinks of how from that very first face-off, Shane lit up around Rozanov. He thinks about ten years of hiding (because there had to have been something from the start, right? There had to have been), ten years of Shane being MIA after they played Boston, of smiling at texts he never shared, of the way he’d looked at that All-Star game, when Rozanov had pressed a kiss to his cheek, in front of the entire world.

‘Yeah,’ he says, and it’s only a little grudging. ‘Yeah, I think he is.’

End Notes

I realize I never actually wrote the scene where Hayden confronts Shane about Ilya so... maybe I'll write that next, idk. I felt like this was a good ending point though.

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