

## Reluctant Pacifists

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# Reluctant Pacifists

by [Theresnothingleft\\_3](#)

## Summary

Montreal and Boston are willing to do just about anything to actually hang out with their Captains after games. Even if it means drinking together, apparently.

Or, Shane tells the truth about Ilya. It changes everything.

## Notes

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

# Chapter 1

Twenty-odd blank faces stare back at Shane, stony and unblinking as he shifts his weight and shuffles his feet.

To his left, he sees Hayden smiling weakly back at him, raising a half-hearted thumbs up, and JJ with a distinctly guilty expression next to him.

“So, yeah. It’s him. I’m sorry I never told you, but it’s been hard being honest, even to myself. The whole thing felt so big and scary, and we were so young; by the time I started to understand it, it felt like the narrative had already been twisted into this stupid rivalry. I didn’t know how to talk about it.” He says, rambling in a way that feels unfamiliar in his mouth, his chest demanding a ragged inhale when he runs out of breath.

This isn’t like a press conference where his carefully chosen words will be printed across a dozen headlines and eagerly ripped apart for analysis. Instead, it’s a room full of his oldest colleagues who believed they knew him, desperately holding out for some kind of understanding as to why they were wrong. Shane’s not sure how to approach that- emotional betrayal hasn’t come up in his media training.

There is silence in the dressing room, a heavy thick quiet that Shane struggles to draw in another breath of, his chest tight as he tries to count out the seconds before he should exhale. There is a familiar burn in his throat spreading to his cheeks and the corners of his eyes, and *fuck*. He did not think this could get any more humiliating, but it is very quickly heading that way.

There are a couple cleared throats and aborted attempts at questions, his teammates looking between each other with wide eyes and confused frowns. A couple of the rookies have not yet looked away from him, the abject terror on their faces doing nothing to settle Shane’s spiking anxiety. The conflicting instinct to burst into hysterical giggles or tears wars within him until neither win, and an unexpected calm takes over as he stares his team down, one eyebrow raised while he waits.

“This... is not new.” Comeau clarifies slowly, quietly, though it might as well be a shout cutting the hush, potentially a historical first for the normally rambunctious dressing room.

Shane shakes his head but it’s unnecessary. Drapeau gasps in realization, and a dozen heads swivel in his direction. “You said it’s only been serious for a year and a half, but it was casual before. He’s your Boston girl, isn’t he? Lily is Ilya? It was always Rozanov?” He demands, and Shane can only nod as the murmurs start anew.

Hayden looks like he might cry but there’s nothing Shane can say to reassure him right now. He tries for a tight-lipped smile, barely meeting his gaze.

Logically, he knows that this is no one's fault. He had gotten carried away by sneaking Ilya in to babysit the twins and believed his shocked awe had been worth it at the time, but consequences always seemed to follow them. When Jackie had texted to say they were stopping by with Hayden's spare blades, he had failed to anticipate the girls would immediately start chattering about their afternoon spent with Uncle Shane and Uncle Ilya.

Right now, two young girls on the other side of the door were probably being scolded by their equally shocked mother, a secret spilled that no one knew to warn them about hiding. And yet, it was their innocent enthusiasm that had bolstered him, kept him standing as he stumbled through an explanation of who Rozanov really was, who *Shane* truly is, and the fear was secondary to the burning desire not to disappoint the girls.

Even JJ looks taken aback by the Lily revelation. "*Sacrament*, Shane. That's at least since 2014, *non?*" He hisses in shock, and Shane purses his lips.

There was a path he could've taken, one where he tells the team he had become unlikely friends with Rozanov, had bonded over a shared history and somehow smoothed over a century of feudal expectations on their heads. But for the first time, denying Ilya no longer feels like an option he can tolerate, not even if it threatens their safety.

Despite the fraught tension, eyes still fixed on him, it doesn't feel as hostile as he was expecting. This career had always demanded absolute perfection of him, but he gets the sense that is not what his friends are looking for. There is an olive branch here, tentatively wavering, asking only for his authenticity. Shane Hollander is not a liar by nature, though circumstance has made him one. He wonders if he can still be unmade. "No," he answers softly, "It started the night of the draft. 2009."

JJ swears instinctively, twisting his body to aim a kick at the bench. Hayden blinks, evidently stunned, before collecting himself enough to rest a hand on JJ's shoulder. The younger years are laughing uncertainly as their gazes swing between the older players, looking for cues that just aren't coming. No one knows how to react to this.

"So even when you were competing against him for Rookie of the Year...?" Taylor asks timidly, and Shane can't help his wry smile at their latest rookie, who likely can't yet imagine any higher stakes.

"Even then, I cared about him. I was involved with him when I won against him for Rookie, for seven All Star games, an Olympic medal, and two Stanley cups. I will love him through many more wins and losses over each other. I promise that it has had no effect on our careers." Shane stresses, but to his surprise, more than half his team are waving him off or outright snickering.

"No one's doubting your professionalism, Cap," Hayden says boldly, stepping forward, but he's cut off by Gagnon.

"No shit, guys. Everyone knows Hollander's game is always on fire after he sees Lily. Now we know why." He snickers, and a few others join in as Shane's face heats up again.

“Wait, you’re saying that every time we play Boston, you always go see Rozanov after? And that’s not supposed to affect the game?” Wilson demands, and a few others chime in with him.

Hayden looks like he’s about to jump in again, but Shane waves him off. Stuck in this liminal space together, removed from the outside pressure of reality, he can somehow see things more clearly. Wilson isn’t mad as much as he is confused. They’re all confused, because Shane has been lying to them from the day they met. The fear in his chest is solidifying into guilt, heavy and sinking into his guts.

“It does affect the game because it obviously affects me. I won’t lie to you. But what I’m telling you is that it makes us *better*. When I play against Ilya, it matters more to me than anything else. I want to be the best out there because that makes him a better player, because he does the same for me. There still is a rivalry, but it exists because of respect for our athleticism, not from hatred.” Shane says forcefully, and some of his Captain voice must be leaking through because Wilson winces in apology.

“That’s true!” Taylor exclaims and turns to rustle in his bag. Shane feels a small rush of fondness for the kid, who makes it very obvious he looks up to him, and admittedly bears some resemblance in their playing style. “On average, Boston v. Montreal games generate thirty percent more points than any other match up, and they push both Hollander and Rozanov over the two points per game average.” He explains excitedly, brandishing a loose stack of paper in their direction, and- oh. It’s an actual spreadsheet.

The room goes quiet again, surprised, and JJ puts a gentle hand on Taylor’s outstretched arm and lowers it for him. “It’s okay, kid.” Shane tracks it out of the corner of his eye. He’s definitely going to steal that later.

He looks around again. It’s Drapeau and Comeau that Shane knows will be the most resistant, who have made a conscious effort to cut back on the vitriolic language they’ve all grown up with, but who were born with a taste for the Boston feud first and oxygen second. Montreal born and bred; they will not take this perceived betrayal of the team lightly. But the dark look in their eyes isn’t fury, it’s a kind of hurt that cuts into him, catches in his throat as his breath hitches.

“Christ, Captain. You can tell us you’re gay, but you can’t tell us about the guy you’ve been pining after for a decade?” Drapeau mutters, and the bitter disappointment in his tone ripples through the room, nearly sending him reeling.

Taking a moment, Shane closed his eyes and swallowed down the regret. This is the injury that comes with hiding from the world; the destruction of trust between the people who care for him, who thought they knew him. The careful distance he maintained between himself and his teammates, the hurt he hadn’t realized he was causing, has caused palpable damage to the relationship. A deeper regret ached as he realized this was the burden Ilya had been struggling under; his natural ability to make friends fracturing with his inability to be genuinely honest.

Opening his eyes, he makes deliberate, unflinching eye contact with his oldest teammates, the people who had tried their hardest to understand him despite his distance. He grits his teeth

and takes a leap, blindly swinging for the branch.

“I am so sorry that I didn’t tell you. I should have. I had an opportunity to build trust with you all, to be a better friend and I didn’t take it. I’ll work on fixing that mistake, and I hope you guys will stick by me long enough to see that.” He tells them honestly, standing tall and steady with his hands open at his sides. There is a wave of murmured acceptance, quick nods and forced smiles. Shane knows that there is work to do and cracks to seal up, but for the first time in almost a year, the last time he’d seen the impossible play out on a tv screen, wild hope flares up in his chest.

“Don’t stress it, *Capitaine*, just don’t expect us to start doing team dinners with the in-laws anytime soon, yeah?” JJ pipes up, and the scattered laughter comes easier, almost normal again.

Shane shoots him a grateful grin, and though he still sags into his gear as he finishes dressing, he feels lighter than he has in a long time.

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“You did *what*?” Ilya breathes into his phone, pulling it away from his face to check that is in fact his boyfriend on the phone, and not a pre-game anxiety induced hallucination.

There is a short burst of laughter, and though he can hear the anxious undertones, there is still an overall sense of relief in Shane’s words as he repeats them for a third time. They don’t make any more sense than they did the first time he heard them, but he’s starting to believe it anyways. It certainly would explain the vague apology that he’d received from Pike a few minutes ago, though still unclear why he’d followed it with a string of lesbian pride flags.

Unfortunately, he has a game starting very soon and if it were up to Ilya, he’d spend it sitting on the bench with his phone cradled to his ear, but Shane has enough restraint for the both of them, and chooses to end the call. Still, as he stashes his phone, there is something warm radiating out from his chest all the way to his fingertips, a faint buzz under his skin. He knows it’s obvious in his face because Cliff had already started snickering under his breath halfway through his phone call.

“You and that Montreal girl, huh? She’s sticking around for good?” He teases, but his eyes are warmly proud. It’s an open secret that Ilya’s leaving for Ottawa when the season ends, and they all know it’s to be closer to Montreal. Still, it’s a genuine surprise that he can offer them this in their last few months together, a parting gift from their Captain before he leaves.

“Yes, I think he will.” Ilya breathes out with a delighted laugh, pressing his fingers against his lips, still in shock.

Cliff raises an eyebrow, though not as surprised as he probably should be, and a couple heads turn; his teammates who had been shamelessly listening in since his phone first rang. Someone coughs, but Cliff beats them to it. "Something you wanna tell us, Roz?" He asks lazily, though his smirk has grown into a wide smile.

Ilya's responding laugh is so bright that it catches his remaining teammates' attention, heads snapping towards him as he finishes tying his skates. "After," he promises. There is a game to win and another team to witness the greatness that is Ilya Rozanov, who certainly must be on top of the world. He thinks if he starts to tell Marly anything right now, he might never shut his mouth again.

He remembers nothing of the game once he steps back off the ice, hardly can recall which team they played or if they've even won. Someone congratulates him on the hat trick he supposedly scored, but he's already shedding his gear and scrambling for his phone. Afterwards, when he thinks back to this night, all he remembers is that when the rink doors close behind him, Shane picks up on the first ring.

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Unfortunately for Shane, now that his teammates knew the reason he was always sneaking out when they played Boston, they were no longer content to look the other way when he tried to ditch them.

"Come on, Hollander." Koch complains, looking moments away from getting on his knees. "Just come out for a couple hours and then you can fuck off to his place later. We'll cover for you if you get back before breakfast."

"We live in separate countries. I want all the hours." Shane argues, shocking even himself with the bluntness of his admission. Some of the younger players snicker and gag, but a few others hum quietly and Drapeau throws him a commiserating smile.

And the awful part is Shane *knows* what they're trying to do. He's earned himself a reputation for being distant, for avoiding the social stuff and bowing out before the night begins. He knows that there is guilt on all sides for that- his teammates, wondering when they stopped trying and let Shane fall through the cracks far enough that he thought his safety was in jeopardy, and Shane, feeling like he never tried hard enough to belong. He wants to go, wants to try again, be a better teammate for them, but Christ. He only sees Ilya every few weeks at best.

But Hayden, not for the last time, proves why he is Shane's best friend. "Hold on, let's just go to the Triangle, then. That's where the Raiders are going; if we happen to bump into them, it would just be an unfortunate coincidence." He offers with a hopeful expression.

"Yeah, but then we'd have to drink with *Raiders*," Wilson groans, but is quickly dismissed.

“I’d rather drink with our Captain and suffer sharing a bar with Boston than have him skip out again.” JJ announces loyally, which is how Shane somehow finds himself in the conflicting position of being in downtown Boston instead of Ilya’s penthouse, jostling for room at the bar.

A chorus of “What the fuck is this?” had greeted them as they walked in, but Shane had noticed immediately that the Raiders automatically started shifting to make room for the Voyageurs. It had certainly helped matters that they won against Montreal earlier and were in a celebratory mood in their home city.

Suddenly, a soft breath passes over the back of his neck. A low murmur in his ear, “Hollander. Here to buy me victory drink?”

He turns his head to meet Ilya’s gaze, his eyes bright and warm as he attempts to flatten the smile threatening to break free.

Shane swallows his own answering grin and hopes he sounds equally unaffected. “I suppose it would be rude to say no, seeing as we did take over your bar.” He offers slowly, biting his lip as he slides a card across the bar top.

Ilya’s eyes widen before they shutter, and he quickly ducks his head. “*Spasibo*,” he says quietly into the space between them, before quickly pulling back and fixing his unimpressed mask. A thousand other unspoken things fill the space between them, apologies and gratitude that have nothing to do with a well shot, but Shane soaks them in anyways.

“Anytime,” Shane echoes as the glasses clink down in front of them. Suddenly, it doesn’t seem like such a sacrifice to spend a couple of their precious hours in a public bar, pressed in against a couple dozen other men pretending nothing about this was unusual.

“Hollander!” Someone cries, a hand landing on his shoulder and squeezing tightly. Cliff Marlow, an easy grin on his face as he shoves his head in between them. “How’s your ginger ale?”

Admittedly, even as Ilya choked back laughter, it was pretty fucking good.

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**Pike:** Headed to the Narrows once media wraps up

**Marlow:** We’ll beat you there (again)

**Pike:** Unnecessary dude

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**Carmichael:** I guess if we're still doing this shit, we're walking down to the lower deck. Don't put yourselves out over it or anything

**Comeau:** I mean if you're that desperate for our company, we can stop by

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**Koch:** party is at Pacifico if you losers are game

**Dubek:** no parties in mtl, just sad French people. But we have nothing better to do

**Koch:** that's the spirit

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“Rozanov, can you comment on the recent frequency of which Voyageurs and Raiders are being spotted together after games?”

The reporter is young and polite, but there's a sharpness in her eyes that Ilya respects. There's no obvious angle she's hinting at, characteristic of the Canadian news cycle, but she's directed the question at him instead of Shane. Shane, who would give her an empty deflection about sportsmanship or something else lame, and so even though courtesy is to direct non-specific questions towards the host city's captain, she asks him instead.

Ilya leans forward a little, helplessly entertained. “Boring Montreal always obsessed with us, you see it too? Maybe they try following us around, see if they get any better at hockey. Is not possible, they are no threat, so we let them be friends with us.” He says with a smirk, biting his tongue when he heard Shane scoff next to him.

There's a ripple of laughter and jostling equipment as the media team frantically switch angles, questions and narratives adjusting to capture whatever they think must be happening. Someone tries to elbow the young girl out of the way, but she holds firm, something satisfied in the way she keeps their attention. “Follow-up, please.” She announces firmly, her eyes switching over to Shane. “Hollander, can you confirm you have a friendship with Rozanov, and by extension, the Boston Raiders?”

“Absolutely not.” Shane denies, shaking his head, but his shoulders are shaking in laughter as Ilya starts poking and elbowing him. He's sure there is nothing but pure delight written all over his face, but he can't find it within himself to care. The media room is open and friendly

with their shared laughter, and its fun in a way that he can't ever remember feeling in front of a camera.

Shane feels warm next to him, smiling more than he has in a decade of shared conferences, and he will feel warm at the bar later when they go out with their friends. It has never occurred to him that this was something he could hope for.

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The problem is that Rozanov and Hollander have never been normal, so there's nothing to compare this to.

On the ice, they move in such a fluid, easy elegance that it wouldn't surprise Scott if they'd spent more years skating than walking. He's shared the ice with each of them hundreds of times over the years and he's come to anticipate the rhythm of it.

Rozanov is creative, dynamic, and he spends half the game riling up the other players and pissing off anyone who gets near him. He skips obvious passes and avoids easy shots, takes every opportunity to slam players into the boards and drop his gloves, and it's clear to anyone who knows the game that the man cares nothing for playing hockey. For Rozanov, winning is the ultimate goal, and he makes every convoluted choice to add to the artistry of it all. Scott leaves every game swearing, fists clenched and blood pressure skyrocketing.

Hollander is so different that they might as well be playing different games. He is disciplined, reserved, and with more skill in one hand than most of the league's players combined. Every choice he makes, every shift of weight as he moves, is technically perfect. Hollander makes every game feel like a tribute to traditional hockey, and no matter how well Scott plays against him, he always leaves the ice feeling a little disappointed in himself.

But together, they are something else entirely. Scott's seen it a couple times over the years at various All Star games, has even shared the ice against the pair once, and he has no desire to ever do it again. They move like they've practiced each sequence for years, predicting each other's choices, changing course in tandem as if each of their muscles were connected on a string. There's no explanation for it. It's exhilarating. It's terrifying. It's so beautiful that he finds himself drifting to a stop, just watching the pair move together, jaw dropped a little in awe. He's not alone; half the other players are doing the same, unable to tear their eyes away. There's nothing like seeing the two most talented people of their craft, fully in their element, elevating each other beyond what should be possible.

He thinks it's that specific chemistry that makes him wonder, a harmless little curiosity that has flickered over the years, because they are so interesting to watch that he thinks they would be gorgeous together. There's been moments, like the first All Stars, or the Rookie

award; little glances or stuttered excuses that bolster his curiosity, but nothing substantial enough to truly consider. Because off the ice, Hollander and Rozanov are *weird*.

They flock to attention, opening themselves up to public scrutiny on the daily. Rozanov has spent half his career on the cover of every gossip magazine, dozens of women hanging off his arms, spilling out of half million-dollar sport cars in every city. He looks away but can't escape Hollander's face on every billboard, catalogue, or commercial whenever he opens his front door. He can't so much as blink without seeing their faces and yet he knows *nothing* about them.

Not a single girl ever seen with Rozanov has said a word about him; no sex scandals, no leaked photos, no tell-alls to the tabloids, not even a whisper. It's hard to spend the number of hours he does in clubs without a single bouncer or bartender snarking about drug use or tipping blunders, but somehow nothing leaks. Smoke and mirrors. It would be impressive if it weren't logistically impossible. Hollander is an ambassador for a hundred different luxury brands including Rolex, Dior, and Hermes, but he's never spotted in anything other than gym shorts and sneakers. There's no rhyme or reason to what brands he chooses to represent, seeing as he doesn't seem to care about any of them. Scott can't figure out for the life of him *why* Hollander's on the TV again in a two-million-dollar watch.

Rozanov has never missed an opportunity to call him old, washed-up, retired, and pathetic, except that he never comes any closer. He keeps a safe distance from Scott, as if he's afraid to be seen too closely. Hollander, on the other hand, has been unfailingly polite and respectful to his face, except for the one time where the man almost broke his nose. And Scott *still* has no idea what that was about.

They're both so strange, and stranger together, and he thinks there's actually a bead of sweat forming at his temple when Kip walks in and does a double take.

"Woah, babe. You good?" He asks skeptically.

Scott gestures angrily to the TV, where their post conference is wrapping up. "They're *friends* now." He says, like it's the only explanation necessary.

Kip swings his face to the screen, where Rozanov and Hollander are still sneaking glances at each other and snickering in between questions. Scott can count on zero fingers how many times he's seen Hollander laugh in the last ten years, and now he's doing it freely next to Ilya Rozanov.

"Is that... a problem?" Kip asks, uncertain this time, and Scott knows his face is already answering for him, but he doesn't care.

Last week, he got added to a group chat with half a dozen Voyageurs and Raiders in it, inviting him and Kip out this summer to Hollander's cottage, of all places, and he's honestly over it. Neither of the two players are even in the group, and it's unclear if Hollander is aware he's hosting, but somehow he knows this is completely Rozanov's fault. He's convinced the Boston-Montreal thing is either a psy-op from the higher ups, or also somehow Rozanov's fault, but he's just exhausted.

Scott gestures wildly at the screen again when Kip repeats his question, but the conference footage has changed, switching to a reporter standing outside the rink doors. He's interviewing Marlow and Boiziau, who are grinning widely and have their arms slung over each other's shoulders.

"Just... never mind." He mutters on a long exhale, closing his eyes and turning off the television. "Can we just go to bed, please?"

## Chapter 2

The world sees Shane laugh on live television next to Ilya Rozanov, and things are... okay.

Nothing really changes, other than when his parents call him, his mom smiles a bit wider and his dad gets misty-eyed more often. He breathes a little easier these days, and he wonders just how much of that shows on his face, in his game, at his interviews.

He sees Ilya every few weeks, and it never feels often or long enough, and each time feels a little harder to walk away. If Shane breathes easier, then Ilya moves easier, like he weighs twenty kilos lighter. There's a heaviness that weighs on him sometimes, even though he hates to acknowledge it, but Shane is certain that he carries it with less effort these days.

There's a brightness in Ilya's eyes that never dims when they see each other, and Shane gets almost high off the contact fumes from Ilya's touches. Brush of hands as he reaches for a glass, his elbow dragging up Shane's ribs, long curls brushing against the nape of his neck as Ilya leans in closer to hear. He feels giddy with the feeling of it all, like a little kid with a crush, and when his head hits the pillow after they go their separate ways, he finds it wet with tears from how overwhelmed he feels.

There are only a couple months until playoffs are over, until Ilya comes back to his cottage, and his career with Boston will be done.

He doesn't expect to feel brokenhearted over it, anticipatory grief coming in like rolling waves, but he knows how *happy* Ilya is with Boston. He knows it, because shock of all shocks, he's happy with them too.

It's a double-edged sword to have waited this long to have Ilya, and that as soon as he's in reach, he's making a genuine connection with his team for the first time in ten years.

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**Varkov:** Split Crow?

**Taylor:** Okay yeah! I'll tell the guys! Shane is stuck in post conference, is like 11 cool?

**Varkov:** don't care

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**Jane:** You can tell me if this is too weird, but one of the rookies just got engaged, so we're going to this penthouse thing that the girls organized. It's not super intimate or anything, but there's security and obviously not public. Apparently the kids are all friends now so they want you all there.

**Jane:** Or I can bail after an hour and meet you back at mine.

**Lily:** we will come

**Lily:** i bring vodka

**Jane:** I promise you they have that covered.

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**Jane:** Thanks.

**Lily:** no

**Lily:** thank you *moy lyubimyy*

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**Cliff:** Its nice having my friend back again, even for a couple hours. Thanks for this man

**Hayden:** Fucking tell me about it, brother.

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They've spent the last few months having the time of their lives, practically flaunting their indiscretion in public while overestimating the amount of protection their teammates provide, so it's not entirely surprising that someone finally gets a photo.

Unsurprising, but bitterly disappointing.

The image of Ilya pressing a kiss into the corner of his mouth will be burned into his brain until the day he dies, purely because he has already seen it sixty times in the time it takes to brush his teeth.

It was an accident, in more ways than one, but mostly because Ilya was aiming for his cheek when Shane suddenly twisted his head. He remembers the flutter of shock, the spike of anxiety, but it had been smoothed over when Hayden reassured him no one had seen.

They might have been able to brush it away and laugh it off as an awkward fumble, except Shane's eyes are wide and adoring in the picture, locked in somewhere unseen where Ilya's curls block his face. There is no point in denying anything. Shane has never been a good liar, and the love welling deep in his eyes is unmistakable.

By the time he's done washing his face, there's seventeen new messages on his phone, and half of them are incoherent strings of coloured hearts from his and Ilya's teammates. Hayden has sent a number of pride flags that don't look quite right, but he doesn't know enough to question it.

He pockets his phone just as Ilya knocks frantically on the door; once, twice, and then continuously.

"SH- ane?" He cuts himself off as Shane swings the door open. "Have you seen... I am so sorry, I-"

Shane pulls him into a tight hug, feels his boyfriend tense up in surprise, then melt into the embrace. His arms come up to cradle Shane's jaw and back of his neck. "It's okay. I love you." Shane tells him, lips moving against his shoulder, and surprises himself by how steady he is, how assured it sounds.

Ilya trembles slightly, pulling back just enough to see his face, jaw growing slack in surprise. "Boring, predictable, no surprises from you, Hollander." He says gently, pulling Shane's head back to rest against his chest. "Except when you do surprise, and I never see coming."

Maybe it's because after Scott Hunter came out and Shane was so optimistic that everything would work out, it didn't feel like there was much push back. It's possible he was also still fighting a concussion at the time and keeping up with the news was a struggle.

Either way, finding out from management that they are both indefinitely benched comes as a genuine surprise.

Boston plays Montreal tonight, which is why the team flew in a day early. They spent a relatively tame evening out in Fenway before going back to the hotel for a good sleep, or in

Shane's case, to Ilya's penthouse. They are halfway through their respective pregame rituals, pretending that nothing is wrong, when the news reaches Roger Crowell's desk.

Shane finds himself standing in the living room, watching the pre-show, wringing his hands. It's all anyone's talking about, of course, even the panel of pundits who are supposed to be talking about their playoff chances. They could change the channel but every single one is playing the same headlines anyways. Speculations run rampant about their relationship, the teams' new friendly behaviour, or anything else they can get their hands on.

Ilya sits cross legged on the couch, a half full glass of vodka resting on his thigh. They should be downtown at the arena; even scratched players are expected to be on the bench to support the team, but every single member of both PR teams has advised them to stay away from the media. There are seven different drafts of statements that range from strict denials of any romantic entanglement to impending marriage announcements. There's no consensus on what they're supposed to say, so Shane agrees to say nothing for now. They'll pay the fine for no-showing.

They talked to Hayden for a little bit, and then Cliff, and then Shane's parents. No one really knows what to say, and they're all pissed. Shane stops answering after he finds himself repeating all the same things to each new caller.

He sits down next to Ilya as the teams file out onto the ice, takes comfort in the fingers tracing over his own shaky hands. There is a distinct lack of energy in the warmup, and Shane is gratified to see that after the third close-up of a player's livid expression, the camera stays panned out on the whole ice. He swallows when Hayden and Cliff line up for the face off, a bitterness he can't quite clear when he knows it's supposed to be him there with Ilya.

He closes his eyes when the puck drops, but strangely, he doesn't hear the clash of sticks on ice. Ilya stiffens next to him, shifts forward, and it prompts Shane to peek at the screen.

The puck sits unattended a couple feet away from where it has slid after being dropped. The players have not moved a muscle, and the alternate captains continue to stare at each other. Seconds tick by, slow and syrupy, and Shane watches in disbelief. The referee looks baffled, his eyes darting around as he looks between each center forward, tentatively waving a hand in their faces. The hush of the crowd moves from a muffled whisper to a growing buzz.

Suddenly, Hayden drops his stick, and both he and Cliff sink down to the ice, their limbs an awkward tangle of gear as they manage to sit across from each other. Before Shane can even process it, all four of the forward wings drop down around them, and the defense follow suit. The referee spins in a slow circle, his eyebrows knit as he notices every player sitting on the ice.

"What the fuck?" Ilya breathes, sitting so far forward on the couch that his knees are centimeters from hitting the floor.

Shane moves his lips soundlessly. "Is someone hurt?" He wonders, eyes scanning the ice, looking for the safety issues they must have spotted. Instead, he notices the two goalies, limited by their massive padding, flopping down on their backs.

The crowd grows a little louder, the referee skates over to the Boston bench, but the broadcast remains silent. Distantly, Shane wonders if they have been instructed to stay quiet until they know something.

It doesn't take long. The second the referee reaches the bench, the camera pans towards the two boxes of players. A couple of them shove each other in recognition, and then each team starts jostling around.

There are two white poles that are being unspooled, players pulling on the white banner and slowly stretching it from one side of the bench to the other, mirror imaged on each team's side. It isn't until they flip it that Shane can see the bold black letters, uneven and slightly smeared in its apparently hasty construction.

He lets a strangled shout fall from his lips, rubbing his eyes and blinking at the impossible image in front of him. Something wet is dripping on the floor- Ilya has dropped his glass and vodka trickles down the couch.

He looks to Ilya, whose face is white, lips parted in shock. "*Bozhe moy*" he whispers, and his hand wraps around Shane's ankle.

His eyes find their way back to the screen, where the two banners still ripple between thirty odd pairs of hands. *Protesting Roger Crowell* hangs across the Montreal bench, while *Supporting our Captains* spans the Boston side. He wants to get closer to the screen, to touch the white pixels that flicker, but he knows it won't feel any more real. Suddenly, desperately, he wants more than anything to be at the rink, with his teammates, standing back in that dressing room like he was months ago. The black letters, and Christ, they look like they were done with the crayola markers that the twins kept leaving in Hayden's gear bag, all blend together as his vision blurs, until they read a dozen different messages. *I forgive you. You can trust us. We trust you. You're safe here.*

Ilya is crying, he can feel his shoulders shaking against his legs. Shane might be too, but he can't really feel his face, so he's not sure. He sinks down onto the floor next to Ilya, and they wrap around each other, clinging and pulling until any space between them evaporates.

Coach Theriault is pissed, that much is clear. His face is beet red as he shouts down at his team, arms waving and papers fluttering in his clipboard. The Voyageurs hardly even glance in his direction, their faces set as they stare down the cameras. On the other side, Boston's coach looks quietly pleased, even as he politely ignores his players' banner. The lines have very much been drawn, and they're on display for the world to see.

The spectacle on the ice has become secondary to the sidelines, and the cameras shamelessly press in closer to the two coaches, who are both receiving phone calls with varying levels of enthusiasm. Then, without warning, the screen switches to a generic NHL graphic, and the audio is fully cut.

In the silence left behind, beyond the faint hitches of their shared breathing, Shane can hear their phones vibrating on the coffee table. It's maybe three feet away, but his body feels like it's been encased in lead and reaching that far would be a Herculean task.

Ilya likes nothing more than a challenge, so he stretches forward far enough to knock one free and kicks it close enough that Shane can put it on speaker between them.

It's Farrah. Of course it is. It's probably the twelfth time she's called, but Shane imagines she's probably just grateful she got through. He notices the time on the screen as he clicks answer and nearly breaks into hysterics. It's been six minutes since the puck drop.

Somehow, they've managed to get the game rescheduled for the next evening. Farrah tells them management has been pulled into an emergency meeting while all the players have been sent home.

Shane isn't sure what this means for Crowell, but she assures them that they will be on the ice come tomorrow. Evidently, it's a bad look for the league commissioner to be blasted by the top two playoff contenders on national television.

She sends them a final draft, and this one is a joint statement they can both post online. It's signed Shane & Ilya at the end. He doesn't read it because she tells them they can worry about it tomorrow. Let the news cycle focus on Crowell tonight, she says.

Ilya hangs up for them and they both settle back into each other.

Minutes pass, or possibly hours, but it's long after his left thigh has gone numb where Ilya's knee presses into it. His head feels cloudy, skin itches, and he's not sure what even needs to be fixed right now. But Ilya looks at him, peers closer, and then smiles.

"Shower?" He offers, and something sparks in Shane's chest. He nods eagerly. That'll work.

**Boiziau:** Got the day off work, nice job boys

**Carmichael:** Wish I'd thought of it last month when I tweaked my shoulder

**Comeau:** We're at Bearly's if you two are good. Carmy bought out the joint so no cameras

**Carmichael:** I thought you were paying jackass. And I don't care if you're not up for it, you're both coming anyways

**Hollander:** We've spent the last hour crying if I'm being honest. Not sure you'll want us there

**Marlow:** pics or it didn't happen

**Rozanov:** i kill you dead marly

**Rozanov:** cant believe you love us so much. Very embarrassing for you all

**Pike:** you're uninvited actually

**Taylor:** we'd really like to see you both if you're feeling up for it! No pressure, just vibes 

**Hollander:** ...

**Hollander:** Yeah, alright

Bearly's House of Blues is a nondescript pub in a back-alley that Shane has surprisingly never heard of, considering the embarrassing amount of time he spends staring at maps of Boston. The sign is wrapped in multicoloured Christmas lights, and half the neon letters have burned out, and he feels the thrumming panic start to recede.

Ilya mutters something about a valet, and Shane laughs in his face as they double park on the street.

Inside, the main bar is lit by a thousand more strings of tiny Christmas lights, wrapped and tangled across the shelves and rafters. Two women work side by side, one with significantly more gray hair than the other. She lifts her head and catches them staring as she heaves two stacks of pitchers in the air.

"The fuck you looking at?" She snaps in a gritty accent, and Ilya instinctively flips her off.

Shane laughs loudly, the first time all day, and as they follow her upstairs, he is quietly stunned by just how much he's going to miss Boston.

They've bought out the bar, so there's no logical reason why nearly forty grown men have squished themselves into the private space upstairs, but Shane grins fondly when he sees them half tangled and sprawled out across the seating.

"You fucking assholes", Ilya shouts, but the tone is all wrong, and an excited cheer rushes over them as the teams realize they've arrived.

Shane finds himself squished between Hayden and Hammersmith, and Ilya's across the table somewhere, but he's okay. Hayden gives him a sunny smile, eyebrows drawn like he's assessing something, and then gives him a light pat on the shoulder. "It's okay," Shane manages, "you can hug me."

The smile turns heartbreakingly kind. "I can wait." Hayden tells him, and waves over the bartender to ask for a ginger ale. The scowl that the woman offers him in return is nothing short of revolted, and Shane feels the laugh bubbling up in his chest again.

On their other side, Gil and Ryan are still squabbling over the bar bill which, now that Shane has seen the place, can't be more than the taxi fare they paid just to get here. Hammersmith bows out of the argument and turns his attention back to him.

"By the way, if they're of any interest to you, we brought the banners with us." He says casually, nodding towards one of the gear bags in the far corner. Sure enough, a couple slightly crumpled rolls of paper are hanging out of a front pocket.

*If they're of any interest to you*, Shane marvels, letting the words roll around in his mouth. "Brad, someone will be in touch in the next two business days, asking if they can put those in a museum." He says seriously, but Hammersmith laughs like it's a joke.

"I think you're probably the only hockey fan spending any time in a museum." Hayden teases, and Shane just shakes his head.

It seems impossible that they've accomplished something so remarkable, and yet have no concept of how significant it actually is. They will talk about this night like they talk about Scott Hunter. There will be legislative change, leadership change, cultural change, and it will all point towards a single picture of two banners, held up by two rival teams in solidarity.

There will be a game tomorrow night, and the entire world will tune in to watch it, and he will be watched closer than ever before because of who he has chosen to love. Every shot will be analyzed to see if he's making his best effort, and every mistake will be used as further evidence that he can't be trusted.

But after the game, he will come back to a dressing room full of people who know him, who understand him, and who will fight for him. His brothers. And maybe they will come back here, to this quiet bar, and drink together in that understanding.

He feels the heat travelling up his throat again, a lump that's hard to swallow around, and he screws his eyes shut. He doesn't really *want* to cry anymore tonight, but he thinks no one will care either way.

Another light pat on his shoulder. "Get out of your head, brother. It's all good." Hayden tells him, tapping their glasses together.

Shane blinks a couple times and manages a smile. "In that case, I think I want a beer." He says with a laugh, and among the people close enough to hear, an even wilder cheer erupts.

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"*Fuck*," Scott repeats hoarsely, unable to tear his eyes away. Kip is slowly raising his phone, hands shaking, possibly trying to take a picture of their television screen. As if this image

won't be flooded through the news, on social media, in fucking *history* books. As if this could be something they might forget unless they document it themselves.

It's not possible. It just isn't, because Scott knows a little something about coming out in the public eye as a professional athlete, and this kind of reception doesn't happen.

He saw the photo earlier, along with millions of others, and his heart broke for them even as he fought back the tiny thrill of vindication. Because yeah, they *do* look gorgeous together, and he's comfortable enough to admit that to himself, even though he'd rather die than ever tell Rozanov.

But the media has been kinder to him over the years, quieter, and Kip doesn't get recognized when he goes to work. He can live his life easier, go out to dinner with his boyfriend, and very rarely do people notice them.

It will never be like that for Hollander and Rozanov.

The Admirals have been fine, good even, sometimes. But there's always distance, there even before everything. They just know what to call it, now. His coach has been amazing, supportive, and even half his team has met Kip by now. He's invited to all the events, and more times than not, they even go together. But there's a true sense of belonging that Scott never feels and thinks he might just never find in professional hockey. He thinks he's come to accept that by now.

Except that the Voyageurs and the Raiders are holding up banners protesting Crowell, sitting on the ice, and refusing to play without their captains. Hollander and Rozanov, who have been clearly scratched from the game, are nowhere to be seen. And yet. Their support doesn't end when they aren't in the room.

And isn't that the most annoying thing about them? They don't even have to be in the goddamn room, yet their presence is on display for the entire arena. Everywhere he turns, they're always both there, practically taunting him. Now they've even upstaged his own kiss.

Whatever they've done, whoever Hollander and Rozanov are when they leave the ice and the cameras turn off, they've managed to unite two enemy teams. It's strange, and impossible, and definitely fucking weird, but somehow it makes sense. He remembers the fluidity; the way they reacted like they share a single mind.

He wonders how long it would take to predict someone else's behaviour, and he thinks about that fucking Rookie of the Year award. *Where's your boy at?* He wonders if this is what it feels like to know them a little more.

The banners are still waving, and there are forty odd men on his screen who know if the league calls their bluff, they all go home with zero points for this game. They are the two most likely teams to end fighting for the Cup, but that result would shut them out of playoffs entirely.

Scott swallows with some difficulty. Maybe, he has room to ask a little more from his team.

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**Hunter:** Goddamn it, I guess we can come

**Marlow:** Oh thank our lord, Scott this is the best news I've gotten all week

**Hunter:** I've already changed my mind

**Pike** has added **Hollander** and **Rozanov** to group

**Pike:** Canada Day BBQ at Shane's cottage! Everyone's welcome!

**Hollander** what

**Hollander** no one's welcome. Do not come to my cottage

**Marlow:** wait I thought it was a Fourth of July bbq

**Pike:** why in the FUCK would it be that

**Rozanov:** yes! so fun! but why is Hunter in group

**Hunter:** nope I'm out, have fun

**Hunter** has left group

**Rozanov:** I will convince him

**Pike:** you'll convince him into an early retirement

**Rozanov:** would not be early

**Hollander** has left group

**Marlow:** Now what, Roz?

**Rozanov:** i need Taylor's number

## End Notes

I too have become obsessed with this ridiculous hockey show lol. Thank you for reading! All parts finished.

Edit 01/02: The response to this has been so kind and so supportive! Currently working on a second part, stay tuned!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!