Dear Future Husband

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Dear Future Husband

by orphan_account

Summary

Shane Hollander accidentally becomes the internet's favorite "work wife."

Ilya Rozanov thinks this is the funniest thing that has ever happened and commits to the bit with horrifying sincerity.

It started at the press conference in Tampa.

Shane Hollander sat ramrod straight at the long table, hands clasped in front of him, the living embodiment of Canadian restraint drilled into his bones since minor hockey. He answered questions about Montreal's power play the way a man answers a fire drill: calmly, correctly, and without a flicker of surprise. Every response sounded memorized, a careful blend of polite deflection and measured praise for his teammates, calibrated to say nothing memorable unless it involved a goal or a fight.

He was excellent at it, so professionally dull it bordered on art.

Three seats down, Ilya Rozanov was putting on an entirely different show.

Fresh off a hat trick that had buried Montreal yet again, Ilya lounged in his chair like the building had been constructed around him. His tie was already loosened, his top button undone, because rules were for people who needed them. One arm draped along the back of the empty chair beside him, he dissected his own brilliance in that lazy drawl that made reporters lean closer and fans either swoon or grind their teeth.

When the inevitable question about their rivalry landed, because it always did and always would, Ilya's gaze slid sideways for a fraction of a second, just long enough for Shane to feel it land low in his gut like a body check he had not braced for and absolutely should have seen coming.

"Rozanov, you and Hollander seem to find each other all over the ice every time you play. Is that something you actively look for, or is it just instinct at this point?"

"Of course," Ilya said, his accent thickening as he took his time with it. "I always know exactly where Hollander is on the ice. Is like…" He paused, tilting his head as if searching for the right English word, though Shane knew damn well it was already chambered. "Is like built-in radar."

A couple of reporters chuckled. Someone from TSN, a voice Shane recognized even while refusing to look up, leaned into it with the grin of a man who thought he was about to strike gold.

"You two have been going at each other for years now. That's quite the partnership you've got, alongside one hell of a rivalry."

Ilya tasted the word *partnership* before answering, eyes flicking to Shane again. Then he turned back to the room, savoring it like good vodka.

"Partnership," he repeated, letting the r stretch. "Yes. Good word. We understand each other very well."

He leaned forward, elbows on the table now, his voice dropping into that conspiratorial register that made everyone listen closer than they meant to.

“Sometimes I think Shane knows what I’m going to do before I even decide. Is very… intimate, the way he reads me.”

Laughter rolled through the room, easy and appreciative, the sound people make when they think they’re sharing a harmless joke about hockey jargon.

Shane felt his face heat instantly and was grateful for the bright lights masking it. He reached for his water bottle on instinct and took a swallow, which turned into a mistake the moment Ilya added, almost casually, “He always knows exactly where I should put my stick.”

Shane choked hard enough that the moderator glanced over in concern. He waved a hand, coughing and thumping his chest as if he could knock the humiliation loose, eyes watering as he fought for air. A few reporters shot him sympathetic looks, and someone asked if he was alright.

Ilya, the absolute bastard, did not bother pretending to care. He sat there with that faint, infuriating smirk curling at the corner of his mouth, eyes half-lidded and gleaming like he was replaying every filthy thing Shane had whispered to him in a hotel room two nights earlier.

“Wrong pipe,” Shane managed eventually.

He took a second, more careful sip, kept his gaze firmly forward, and silently begged the floor to open up and end him before the next question landed.

The next morning, The Athletic ran the headline: **“Work Spouses: How Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov’s Rivalry Became the MLH’s Most Intense Partnership.”**

By the time Shane was half dressed, brushing his teeth and doomscrolling in front of the hotel mirror, the internet had already done what it always did. Twitter had stripped the phrase down to its most inflammatory core and decided he was now a “work wife.”

Shane stared at the screen, toothpaste foaming at the corners of his mouth, then stared at it again as if the words might rearrange themselves out of basic decency.

“What the actual fuck,” he told his reflection, voice muffled around the toothbrush.

It did not get better.

When he reached the Amalie Arena and filtered into the Metros’ locker room for pregame, the familiar smell of tape and sweat did nothing to settle his nerves. He had barely dropped his bag when his phone buzzed in his pocket.

Lily:

hello wife

Shane's hand jerked so hard the phone slipped clean out of his grip and clattered across the concrete floor, skidding under the bench like it was trying to escape the building. A couple of teammates glanced over, eyebrows lifting in unison.

He dove after it, swearing under his breath, then unlocked the screen to find the thread had already exploded.

Lily:

i learn new english today

work wife

this is very important title

do i get to complain to you about job

i think yes

also you bring dinner tonight?

i have been a very good boy

Shane typed *go fuck yourself* and deleted it.

He typed *this isn't funny* and deleted that too.

I swear to god survived maybe half a second before disappearing.

After a few deep breaths that failed spectacularly, he settled on the safest response he could manage.

Jane:
Don't.

Lily:

don't what, wife

don't think about you bent over hotel sink?

too late

Shane shoved the phone face-down into his locker and slammed the door hard enough to rattle metal down the row. Hayden, lacing his skates beside him, flinched and shot him a look.

“Jesus, man. Everything okay?”

“No,” Shane muttered, yanking his own skates on with unnecessary violence. “The entire internet is trying to ruin my life.”

Hayden snorted and went back to his laces with infuriating calm. “Yeah, I saw the headline.” He paused just long enough to enjoy it. “Work wife, huh?”

Shane was already calculating how many more games he could survive before he either murdered Ilya Rozanov outright or dragged him into the nearest equipment room and finished what that goddamn press conference had started.

Warm-ups were always a frenzy, pucks snapping off the boards, skates carving lazy figure eights, players stretching and jawing in loose clusters while early fans pressed against the glass with phones and handmade signs held up like offerings. Shane stuck to his routine, tight circles near the blue line, sharp stops that kicked up sprays of ice, his eyes fixed on the familiar rhythm of his edges.

He was not thinking about Ilya.

He was absolutely not thinking about the way Ilya had looked at him during the press conference, or the messages still sitting in his phone like radioactive waste he was afraid to touch.

Ilya appeared at his side anyway, like he knew exactly how much space he occupied in the world and in Shane’s head.

“So,” Ilya said, his voice pitched low but bright with mischief, “you see the news, yes?”

Shane did not break stride. He was not having this conversation again, and he was sure as hell not having it on open ice with half the league circling them.

“No.”

“You sure?” Ilya matched his pace without effort, his stick dangling loose in one hand. “Because is trending. Everyone talking about my beautiful wife.”

Shane’s edges bit harder into the ice, carving a sharper turn than necessary. “I’m sure.”

Ilya hummed thoughtfully. “Is very exciting. I learn new tradition. Work wife brings dinner. Makes sure husband hydrated. Maybe also,” he leaned closer, his breath warm against Shane’s ear despite the chill of the rink, “helps with stress relief in hotel rooms.”

Shane snapped his head around at that, eyes narrowing to slits, jaw locking so tight it sent a dull ache up his temples. The words were quiet enough that no one else would catch them over the scrape of skates and thump of pucks, but they landed like a glove to the face all the same.

“Do not,” Shane hissed, “say another fucking word.”

Ilya's grin only widened, all teeth and zero remorse. He tilted his head, going mock-bashful. "My wife is shy."

Shane's stick lashed out before his brain caught up, a quick, vicious crack against Ilya's shin pads that rang out with a sharp and satisfying *thwack*. Ilya laughed and staggered theatrically, clutching his leg like he had just taken a sniper shot, drawing a few curious looks from nearby teammates who immediately decided it was none of their business.

Ilya skated off still chuckling, already savoring the bruise blooming under his gear and deciding without hesitation that every second of annoying Shane had been worth it.

The thing about Ilya was that once he scented blood in the water, he never just circled. He dove in headfirst and thrashed until everything turned red.

At first, he kept it subtle, or at least as subtle as he was capable of managing. During a post-game scrum a few nights later, a Russian reporter lobbed him an innocuous question about on-ice chemistry. Ilya answered, his tone smooth and serious.

"Холландер — моя рабочая жена."

The translator froze, blinked twice, then hesitated just long enough for panic to flicker across his face before settling on, "Hollander is my work spouse."

The North American press exchanged delighted looks, half confused and fully entertained, while Ilya's eyes gleamed with pure malice.

Then, because he believed deeply in inclusion, he switched to English for the cameras.

"Hollander is my work wife," Ilya announced to a Boston sports network, his face arranged in flawless deadpan sincerity. "He keeps me in line. Tells me when I am being…" He paused, brow furrowing as if the English language were briefly betraying him. "Difficult asshole."

The reporter, a woman who had clearly been doing this long enough to smell bullshit from across the room, let out a cautious laugh. "That's… uh, is that a joke?"

Ilya tilted his head and studied her like she had just asked whether gravity was real.

"Is life a joke?" he replied.

It became a pull quote.

A week later, after Montreal scraped out an overtime win, someone finally found the courage to ask Shane directly how he felt about the label.

Shane stood at the podium in his post-game suit, hair still damp from the shower, staring into the middle distance like a man mapping escape routes. The room fell silent, sensing weakness.

“I feel,” he said at last, his voice polite in that unmistakably Canadian way, “like the internet should be taken away from some people.”

The laughter that followed was warm and sympathetic, which somehow made it worse.

Later that night, alone in his Boston hotel room with half-packed bags strewn across the bed and the faint, stubborn ghost of Ilya’s cologne still clinging to his skin from their last… encounter, Shane replayed the clip on his phone. He watched himself deliver the line, watched the reporters eat it up, watched the view count climb in real time until a notification slid down across the screen.

Hayden:

dude

i am deceased

i’m so sorry but also this is the funniest thing that has ever happened to you

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The call from his mother came on a quiet afternoon in Montreal, snow outside muting the city until even time seemed to slow down. Shane was sprawled on his couch, half asleep and still fighting off the tail end of a road trip hangover, when his phone began to buzz on the coffee table. He ignored it once, then twice, before sighing and reaching for it. Seeing *Mom* on the screen, he answered with the automatic warmth he reserved for her.

“Hi, Mom.”

“Shane, sweetheart,” she said, her voice bright but careful, edging into the tone she used when she was testing uncertain ground. “I saw something online today. Something very funny, actually. About you and that Rozanov boy being… work spouses?”

Shane sat upright so fast the room tipped slightly. “It’s nothing,” he said at once. “Just stupid media nonsense. Rivalry garbage.”

Yuna hummed on the other end, unconvinced. “Well, it was everywhere on my Facebook,” she replied. After a pause, she added, “You two do spend a lot of time together.”

“Mom,” Shane said, stretching the word out, “we’re rivals. That comes with the territory.”

“I know. I just mean that not all rivals end up quite so intertwined.” She hesitated, then continued carefully. “If there’s something you want to tell me, you know you can.”

“There’s nothing,” Shane cut in too quickly, the sharpness in his voice surprising even him. He exhaled and immediately softened, because it was his mother and he refused to be that kind of guy. “Really. It’s just Rozanov being an idiot. Loud, arrogant, media-loving idiot.”

The silence that followed was long.

“All right, honey,” Yuna said at last. “As long as you’re happy. That’s what matters.”

The breaking point came a few nights later at an MLH mandated charity dinner held in a cavernous downtown restaurant, all low light, overpriced wine, and far too many players in tailored suits doing their best impressions of grown men enjoying themselves.

The room was still half empty when Shane spotted Ilya near the bar, nursing a glass of something clear and definitely not water, looking unfairly good in a charcoal suit that clung to his shoulders.

Shane did not stop to think. He crossed the floor in long strides, caught Ilya by the elbow, and steered him toward a corner near the coat check where the music faded into background noise.

“I need you to stop,” Shane said, keeping his voice low and tight. “My mom called me.”

Ilya turned to face him fully, one eyebrow lifting with immediate interest. “Your mother,” he said.

“Yes,” Shane said. “She saw everything on the internet.”

Ilya’s mouth curved, but the delight dulled slightly. “And?”

“And I had to lie to her,” Shane said. “I had to pretend it was nothing.”

Ilya studied him for a beat, the performance slipping. “You did not tell her.”

“No,” Shane snapped. “Of course I am not going to!”

“Very rude,” Ilya murmured, reflexively teasing. “Canadian boys are supposed to be honest with their mothers.”

Shane grabbed the lapel of Ilya’s jacket and pulled him closer, just enough that their shoes bumped. “I am serious. You have to knock this off.”

For a long moment, Ilya only looked at him. When he smiled again, it was… affectionate.

“But you are my work wife,” he said. “Is not inaccurate.”

Shane felt his stomach betray him before he could stop it. “Don’t.”

Ilya leaned in, lowering his voice until it was meant only for Shane. “You yell at me when I am stupid. You remind me to eat vegetables. You make sure I behave in public.” His eyes flicked briefly to Shane’s mouth. “You also make sure I do not smoke after we fuck.”

Shane swore, clapped a hand over Ilya’s mouth, and hauled him down the hall toward the single occupancy restroom. The door clicked shut behind them, the sudden silence loud in Shane’s ears.

“You cannot say that shit out there,” Shane hissed, backing him against the marble counter. “Do you understand how bad that could get?”

Ilya licked Shane’s palm deliberately before he could pull away. Shane jerked his hand back, wiping it on his slacks as Ilya laughed softly.

“See,” Ilya said. “You worry. You’re wife.”

Shane glared at him, chest rising too fast, anger colliding with a want he had never successfully outrun.

“Why are you doing this,” he demanded. “Actually why.”

The laughter faded. Ilya’s expression shifted, something careful settling into place as he finally answered honestly.

“Is funny,” he said. “But also because is useful.” At Shane’s look, he continued. “People stop asking worse questions. They think we hate each other with jokes. Is safe. Silly. They laugh, they don’t dig.”

The truth slid into place with uncomfortable clarity.

Right.

They were trying to keep their hookups secret, after all.

“Is noise,” Ilya added, stepping closer and crowding him gently. “Loud, ridiculous noise. Everyone hears it, so no one listens for anything else.”

Shane swallowed hard, every nerve attuned to the narrowing gap between them and the warm, fleeting press of Ilya’s hand at his waist. One more heartbeat and he would have hauled Ilya in for a kiss that would wreck both their suits when a sharp knock hammered the door.

“Hey!” Hayden called through the wood. “Whoever the fuck you two are, I watched you sneak in here. You guys aren’t slick. Quit screwing around, show some goddamn decorum, and get out. Some of us gotta piss.”

Shane dropped his forehead to Ilya’s shoulder with a muffled groan. Ilya’s chest shook with silent laughter, already unrepentant and entirely pleased with himself.

The next stretch of interviews and games blurred together in a way Shane had almost forgotten was possible.

The circus moved on, not all at once, but gradually, like a crowd losing interest when the trick stopped escalating. Reporters stopped circling back to the same tired joke. No one asked about work wives or partnerships with a wink. The questions returned to safer ground: ice time, matchups, momentum, whether a win meant anything at all in the long run.

Ilya still answered like an asshole, just a more restrained one. He gave plus-minus stats with exaggerated patience, corrected reporters when they got details wrong, and smirked his way through questions like he was doing everyone a favor by showing up. Shane, for his part, praised his teammates, credited the system, and spoke in the calm, polite cadence he had been trained into.

The internet noticed the shift, too. Threads fizzled instead of exploding. Speculation slowed, then stalled. The jokes stopped trending and slid off people's timelines. For the first time in weeks, Shane scrolled without his stomach tightening, his shoulders loosening as the noise finally began to die down.

Late one night, alone in his hotel room, his phone lit up, the screen a soft glow against the dark.

Lily:

wife jokes were better before

Jane:

You still make them

Lily:

i do

but is not fun anymore

you do not get mad

i miss making you mad

Jane:

You're impossible

Lily:

married men often are

*married women

Jane:

Maybe I should divorce you then

Lily:

impossible

we are catholic

Jane:

Yeah well

You’re an asshole

Lily:

:)

Shane tossed the phone onto the couch beside him, face warm, staring up at the ceiling with a grin he did not bother to fight. He felt half annoyed, half helplessly gone, and entirely relieved that some things, at least, had not changed at all.

Years piled up like snow on the rink, layer upon layer, relentless and transformative. Time dulled and made secrets heavier the longer they were carried. The rivalry never softened in public. It stayed loud and vicious for the cameras, a spectacle everyone knew how to sell.

Behind closed doors, though, they built something that lasted. Stolen summers. Late nights. Loving each other, finally, finally. They laid a foundation together under the careful disguise of friendship, nudging the world into accepting them as allies first, easing the blow before the truth could land.

When they finally came out together, the league reeled. Headlines detonated. Fans split, multiplied, argued themselves hoarse. But the story had already shifted, sliding irreversibly from bitter enemies into something messier but truer.

Marriage followed a couple of years later, once the dust had settled enough. Vows were traded in hushed English and Russian, rings simple and unbreakable, sealing a partnership that had already survived everything the league could throw at them and then some.

Now, sprawled across the wide bed of their Ottawa home, sheets tangled low around sweat-damp hips and city lights spilling softly through the windows, Ilya lay on his back with one arm draped over his eyes.

“Remember the work wife thing,” Ilya murmured. “I still say you are wife.”

Shane snorted against his collarbone, lips brushing warm skin as he shifted closer. “I’m definitely the husband.”

Ilya dropped his arm and rolled onto his side, fixing him with that familiar wicked curve of a smile. “No. We are both wives. Is more progressive.”

“That’s not how it works, not even a little.”

“Twenty-first century, Shane,” he said solemnly. Then his eyes narrowed with mock intensity. “Or fine. We are both husbands. Work husbands who became real husbands. Double husbands. I think is nice.”

“Alright. That’s enough.”

“Husband husband husband husband—”

Shane cut him off the only way that ever worked, mouth slanting over Ilya’s in a kiss that was deep and deliberately distracting. Ilya hummed in approval, kissing back like it was a challenge he planned to dominate, hands sliding down to grip Shane’s ass and pull him closer.

Eventually they broke apart, foreheads pressed together, breathing uneven and grinning like idiots who knew exactly how lucky they were.

It was in that hushed pocket, when the moment had softened instead of faded, that Ilya spoke.

“Thank you.”

Shane blinked, still catching his breath. “For what?”

“For being my person. For as long as I remember. For now. For, I hope, very long time more.”

Shane thought about all the names the world had given them. Rivals. Enemies. Partners. Work spouses. Friends. Boyfriends. Husbands.

Each one fit well enough when spoken aloud, when printed in headlines or muttered in locker rooms, but none of them ever managed to hold the whole truth.

He just kept thinking about that one afternoon years ago when he’d been lying on his back after practice, staring at the rink lights, thinking about contracts and seasons and how much longer his body could keep doing this. He’d mapped it all out automatically, the way he always did. Hockey first. Always hockey.

Then, without meaning to, he’d thought, *and where does Ilya fit into this*. Not if. Not maybe. Not someday. Just there, already accounted for, like thinking about Stanley Cups and injury timelines and somehow, inevitably, Ilya too. Like it had never even crossed his mind that there might be a version of the future where he wasn’t.

“Yeah,” Shane whispered. “Long time more.”

“Good,” Ilya said, smug and pleased. “You are stuck with me now, work wife.”

Shane bit his shoulder, just hard enough to leave a mark.

“I mean—husband!” Ilya corrected himself.

“Husband,” Shane echoed, smiling into his skin.

Ilya’s laugh followed, bright and helpless and perfect, and Shane decided, not for the first time, that it was the best sound in the world.

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