Two sides of the same coin

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Two sides of the same coin

by peachmintfizz

Summary

Hayden cannot believe what he’s seeing.

This huge, intimidating Russian hockey player – who has rookies quaking in their skates with one glare, who never misses an opportunity for a fight on the ice, who Hayden had once overheard during a scrum let loose a volley of swear words so fucking filthy that Hayden was actually speechless – is staring at Shane with the softest, most lovesick look on his face that you’d think Shane had hung the moon in the sky himself.

And Shane is staring right back like Rozanov is the sun.
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Hayden and Cliff find out.

Hayden has just hung up a call with Jackie, and he's contemplating whether to maybe jerk off or watch the Friends re-run marathon that's currently on TV when the door to the hotel room suddenly flies open and Shane comes in.

Hayden scrambles to sit up in bed, flinging his phone away guiltily as though it was already playing porn.

"Hey man, you're back early."

Shane doesn't answer at first, turning his back on Hayden to toe off his shoes at the doorway. "Yeah, just…wanted an early night."

Hayden's brain registers for a second that Shane is wearing a completely different outfit than the one he'd left in- he's pretty sure he had also been wearing a jacket earlier, but now it's nowhere to be seen, instead replaced with a slightly oversized black t-shirt. But the thought immediately slips from his mind when he hears Shane's voice- tight and quiet, and he's known his best friend long enough to know that means Shane is either really upset or angry about something. But Shane keeps his head down and refuses to meet Hayden's eyes.

"You alright, buddy?" Hayden asks carefully, using the same voice he uses when one of his twins is on the verge of a volcanic meltdown.

"Fine. Shower," Shane bites out, then sidesteps into the bathroom and closes the door.

Shane spends an inordinately long time in the shower- long enough that Hayden starts to worry he's going to use up the hotel's entire hot water supply. When he finally emerges with a towel wrapped around his waist, his hair is dripping and his eyes are red-rimmed. Whether it's because he was crying in the shower, or because he was cooking himself in boiling hot water for the last hour, Hayden is not sure.

Did she hurt him? Did she *break up* with him?

He wants to ask so badly. He knows Shane went out to meet his secret hook-up. That's all he knows, because Shane never talks about his love life with him. With anyone. It's kind of an unspoken rule in their friendship. They'll talk about anything else – Shane's parents; hockey, obviously; his cottage; his plans for the summer – but whenever anything comes up about dating or relationships, Shane will change the subject, or skilfully evade the question. And after a while, Hayden stopped asking. If Shane ever wanted to tell him, he'll tell him.

On the other hand, Hayden talks to Shane about everything – when him and Jackie had that explosive fight which stupidly started because he didn't pick up his dirty socks off the bathroom floor, or that time the twins both had chickenpox, and Arthur wasn't sleeping through the night yet and Hayden was so fucking tired he thought he was actually going to die. And no matter what time Hayden calls to vent, Shane always picks up, always listens, calms him down, gives him advice. Because that's just the kind of friend he is. And now Hayden can't even return the favour.

Hayden keeps his eyes trained on the TV- he's watched three whole episodes of Friends in the time Shane was in the bathroom - and tries to keep his voice casual and upbeat while Shane rummages around in his suitcase for a change of clothes.

"JJ texted if we wanted to grab dinner? There's this place nearby that's supposed to have amazing pizza."

"Um, I think I'll pass," Shane replies softly. "Headache. I'm gonna turn in early."

"You sure? I can stay in if you want some company-,"

"No. You guys go. I really just want to sleep."

When Hayden leaves the hotel room, Shane is curled up in his bed, the only part of him visible is a shock of black hair poking out from under the covers.

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Cliff curses loudly, almost tripping over a box of old skates in the third dusty storage room he'd searched in the last half an hour. It's bad enough the team physio made him come in extra early, three whole hours before the game against Montreal, but his shoulder was still a bit messed up from when they played Pittsburgh last month and they wanted to do some dry needling before the game so he doesn't make the injury worse.

On top of everything, no one told them there was some maintenance going on in the arena, so their usual physio room had been cleared out and the massage tables are nowhere to be found. And now Cliff has been sent on some fucking scavenger hunt to help locate them.

Well, the tables clearly aren't in here, so he gives up and heads back down to go yell at the physio. At this point, he'll lie down naked on the fucking *ice* to get his needling.

As Cliff goes down the hallway, he passes the away team's change room, and he decides to poke his head in to see if the tables might be in there. The room is already set up for the Voyageurs for that afternoon's game, but it's otherwise deserted. The tables aren't in there either, and Cliff about to head back out when Rozanov suddenly comes around the corner into the change room.

He doesn't see Cliff right away- and Cliff has half a mind to jump out from where he is and scare the fucker to death- some payback for Rozanov's usual antics and chirps. Then he catches sight of Rozanov's face- and well, he looks like absolute shit. His handsome face – and even Cliff can objectively admit the guy is good looking- is withdrawn and there are dark circles under his eyes, like he barely got any sleep.

Cliff watches silently as Rozanov stops in front of a stall- Shane Hollander's stall- Cliff realises with a start as he catches sight of the nameplate. He's carrying a nondescript black paper bag, and Cliff watches curiously as Rozanov starts to put the bag in Hollander's stall, hesitate for a moment, then reaches inside and pulls out something. A white T-shirt.

What was he doing, playing some kind of prank? Everyone knew of the infamous rivalry between Rozanov and Hollander- maybe this was some kind of pre-game, arch-rival bullshit they did?

Rozanov stares at the shirt in his hand for a long moment, then bizarrely, buries his face in the material and inhales- his shoulders go up, then down. Cliff is so fucking bewildered. And there's no way he can jump out now and scare Rozanov, not after watching him like a creep from behind a row of lockers.

So instead, he watches Rozanov fold up the t-shirt neatly and return it into the bag, then reach up and tuck it deep into the back of the top shelf of Hollander's stall. The whole time, he has that same, almost…heartbroken look on his face that's really starting to unsettle Cliff.

After all these years, he's seen plenty of expressions on his Captain's face- fury and frustration (when they're losing a game); excitement and glee (anytime they destroy the opposing team); smirking and suggestive (every time Roz makes a dirty joke, which is approximately twenty times a day); exhaustion (whenever he falls asleep on a flight and drools with his mouth hanging open). But he's never seen Rozanov like this- despondent, beaten down – like someone had told him his puppy died.

Rozanov looks up at Hollander's name plate for a brief second, his lips drawn in a grim line, then turns and strides out of the room.

Cliff stands in the change rooms for several long minutes even after Rozanov's footsteps fade away into silence. What the actual fuck was *that* about?

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6 months later

Hayden exits the elevator on the fourth floor of Montreal General Hospital. He has a plane to catch to New York in two hours for the next game, but not even Coach could have stopped him from checking in on his best friend. Yuna had texted him Shane's room number earlier, and updated that he's resting but allowed visitors.

Hayden makes his way down the corridor looking for room 421, when he catches sight of Cliff fucking Marlow walking right towards him from the opposite direction.

They see each other almost exactly the same time.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Hayden hisses, drawing himself up to his full height because, goddamnit, Marlow is actually quite tall, the fucker. He's satisfied to see a faint bruise on Marlow's cheek where Hayden managed to get in one punch last night before the referees pulled them apart.

"What, I didn't hit you hard enough yesterday? Came back for more?"

Marlow holds out a palm in concession. In his other arm is a fruit basket, which Hayden notices looks quite expensive.

“Pike, I’m not looking to start anything. I feel terrible. It was an accident. I swear I didn’t mean to hit Hollander that hard.”

“But you fucking did,” Hayden bites back. “And now he has a fucking concussion and is out for the rest of the season.”

“Fuck.” Cliff brings up a hand to scrub tiredly at his unshaven face, and he genuinely looks contrite. “Look, I just came to drop this off, okay? I know I’m the last person Hollander wants to see. I just…I feel bad.”

Suddenly Hayden feels the anger drain out of him, replaced by pure exhaustion. He’s tired. He watched his best friend get hit, he barely slept, he’s about to get on *another* flight at the tail end of a long, hard season – and all he wants to do is crawl into bed and curl up with his wife and his babies and sleep for like, five years.

“Whatever, I don’t have energy to argue. I’m going to Shane’s room. You can come drop off your fucking fruits and then leave.”

Hayden doesn’t bother waiting for an answer, and he strides down the hallway. They get to Room 421- Hayden can feel Marlow half a step behind him.

Before he reaches for the door handle, he peeks in through the small window on the door- and freezes. Because Shane isn’t alone. There’s someone in the room with him. Not just someone- Ilya Rozanov is in Shane’s hospital room.

Hayden hears a sharp intake of breath next to him. Marlow has stopped short right behind him- and is clearly seeing the same thing. For a split second, Hayden’s imagination runs wild- is Rozanov here to smother Shane with a pillow in his sleep? Is Marlow here to distract him while Rozanov commits homicide?

Then he looks closer, and takes in what’s happening. Rozanov is not, in fact, holding a pillow. He’s holding Shane’s *hand*. And gazing down at Shane with a look that can only be described as tender. Hayden wants to throw up a little bit, even associating that word with Rozanov.

And Shane is awake, with a slightly loopy smile, staring up at Rozanov. He looks infatuated. Hayden has never once seen that expression on Shane’s face.

“What the fuck,” Marlow breathes out, next to him.

He’s dreaming, Hayden thinks, he has to be. This can’t be real. He’s not actually looking at Rozanov, who is now reaching out his other hand to gently caress Shane’s cheek, stroking up and down slowly with the back of his fingers as Shane’s eyes drift close, a content smile on his bruised face. Rozanov’s eyes never once leave Shane’s face. He looks like a starving man staring through a window at a table full of food.

Hayden cannot fucking believe what he’s seeing.

This huge, intimidating Russian hockey player – who has rookies quaking in their skates with one glare, who never misses an opportunity for a fight on the ice, who Hayden had once overheard during a scrum let loose a volley of swear words so fucking filthy that Hayden was actually speechless – is staring at Shane with the softest, most lovesick look on his face that you'd think Shane had hung the moon in the sky himself.

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There are a thousand questions currently flying through Hayden's mind. The first- Shane's gay? The second – Shane's gay with *Ilya* fucking *Rozanov*? Because there was clearly something going on here- no enemies – no teammates, even– would be gazing at each other like Shane and Rozanov currently are.

Hayden's shock is now being replaced with a tsunami of emotions. They hit him one after another, like dominoes falling over rapidly. Confusion – how long has this been going on; hurt- that Shane didn't think he could trust his closest friend with any of this. And finally hitting him the hardest, like a tidal wave – panic and fear.

This information can't get out. There's a hundred reasons no one can know. Shane's career could be over. Hayden loves his team, but he also knows Montreal. He feels sick, picturing what Coach and their management would say about this, how some of their older, more conservative teammates would react. He feels a sudden, desperate surge of protectiveness toward his best friend.

Shane, his Captain, who he's known since they were eighteen and young and clueless, currently lying in a hospital bed with a concussion and a broken collarbone. Shane, who lives and breathes hockey and who would give up anything for this sport – so much that he clearly thinks he needs to hide such a huge part of himself to continue playing it. Shane, who asks so little of him, and yet continues to be the best friend Hayden has ever had.

He can keep this secret for Shane. He *will* keep this secret for Shane.

Hayden seizes Marlow's arm and pulls him away from the room door.

"Marlow. This…this stays between us, you understand? Whatever this is, they clearly don't want anyone to know. So you and I, we're not going to say *shit*. Not to them, not to anyone. Not until they're ready to tell us. What we saw, it's not leaving this fucking hospital, you got it?"

He's expecting Marlow to laugh in his face, or maybe tell him go get fucked, but instead the other man is staring back at him with a solemn expression. Hayden wonders if he can read the fear in his eyes. He'll beg if he has to. Anything to protect Shane.

After what feels like an eternity, Marlow speaks. "Roz's private life is no one else's business. Not even mine. I won't say anything. I don't fuck around when it comes to my teammates, Pike."

Hayden's breath comes out in a relieved huff. He and Marlow stare at each other for moment, before Marlow gives him a nod. The nod seems to say a whole lot without words- some kind

of unspoken promise between them.

Hayden glances back into Shane's room one last time. Rozanov is now sitting up on the bed, perched on the edge with his long legs stretched out in front of him. Shane is curled up next to him, eyes closed and his head resting on Rozanov's broad shoulder. Their hands are still entwined, resting on top of Rozanov's lap.

Marlow is also looking thoughtfully in the same direction, and they watch as Rozanov turns his head to press a soft kiss onto the top of Shane's head, before burying his nose into his dark hair. It's so intimate that Hayden looks away, dropping his gaze to the floor.

Next to him, Marlow huffs out a short, disbelieving laugh and shakes his head, like he just realised something. "His Montreal girl. Of course. I'm so fucking blind."

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At the hospital entrance, Hayden gives Marlow a nod before turning to head to the carpark. He's going to have to break some speed limits to the airport to catch that flight.

"Hey, Pike," he hears Marlow call out behind him.

He turns back, and Cliff Marlow is holding out a hand for him to shake. "See you next season, I guess," Marlow says.

Hayden wants to laugh – this day was getting weirder and weirder by the second – but he reaches out and grips Marlow's hand briefly. "This is so strange," Hayden replies. Not even twelve hours ago he was about to punch this guy into the ice.

Marlow shrugs a shoulder, and angles his head back toward the hospital building. Toward what they had just seen in Shane's room. Something that was obviously real, and not very casual at all, and they both knew it.

"Figured we should probably start getting along now. As it looks we're gonna be, what? Friends-in-law? Shit, man, fuck if I know."

Hayden blanches. Yeah, he's probably gonna have to start being nice to Ilya fucking Rozanov, isn't he? And Ilya Rozanov's friends, by default. God help him.

Marlow barks out a laugh at Hayden's expression and walks off.

Hayden exhales. Absurdly, he feels his mouth stretch into a smile.

You know what, Shane? Anything for you, buddy. Whatever makes you happy.

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