the injury of finally knowing you

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the injury of finally knowing you

by rangerelizabeth

Summary

Honestly, it was a miracle they had won the Cup this past season, with how divided the team had become. And it was no one's fault but his own, Shane thought.

That's why he had been so determined to win. To prove himself. To earn back his teammates' respect. To fix the divide. If that meant more pressure on himself, stricter dieting, more workouts, more time spent at the rink, ignoring quips and small acts of defiance against him, playing through any pain or illness, then he had decided that's what he would do.

Notes

Please mind the tags. This includes spoilers for The Long Game, as well as descriptions of homophobic behavior/ language.

In my opinion, Shane's relationship with his team in Montreal, them turning their backs on him after the tripping incident, and his feelings about leaving to play for Ottawa are criminally under explored in The Long Game.

Credit to Rachel Reid and Jacob Tierney for all dialogue and settings used from the source-material.

Title from Unknown/Nth by Hozier.

See the end of the work for more notes

May 2014

“Captain’s here!” Shane hears Jackie announce, as she swings the front door open to reveal him on the doorstep, awkwardly clutching a bottle of wine under his arm that he hopes appropriately conveys the message, ‘thank you for hosting our entire hockey team despite the fact that you have three young kids.’

Her announcement is met with a chorus of excited chanting of, “Cap! Cap! Cap!” from his teammates in the living room. Shane smiles at the warm welcome, handing the wine over to Jackie with a sheepish explanation that his mom had instructed him to pick it up on his way over.

He follows Jackie to the kitchen, pulling a can of ginger ale from the fridge as he tries not to get whiplash from the immediate onslaught of questions from his teammates about the rules behind keeping or not keeping a playoff beard.

Shane feels a little overwhelmed already with all the overlapping chatter and energy in the room. He’s always felt a little bit ‘on the outside’ of his team – much like he does in most social settings – despite him being the captain and it being his fourth season with Montreal.

He hovers awkwardly for a moment, trying to decide where to sit or who to talk to first, before realizing that Hayden has blessedly saved him a front row seat next to him on the couch to watch the game.

Later, the team has gone still in the way they only do during a playoff game, everyone crowded on the couch or perched on stray chairs behind it, all eyes fixated on the screen as Boston leads 3-1.

“I can’t believe that asshole’s about to win the Cup.” Hayden says. “Shane hates him the most.”

Shane is so focused on the television, his eyes glued to number 81 on the ice, that he had barely noticed anything that was happening around him during the game. But the sound of his name from Hayden startles him out of his reverie. “What?”

“You hate Rozanov,” Hayden repeats, simply. As if it’s the most well-known fact in the world. Shane resists the urge to shift uncomfortably in his seat under his teammates’ attention.

He’s not so bad, Shane wants to argue. *Actually, he’s kind of nice. To me, at least.*

“Of course,” he says half-heartedly, instead. It sounds unconvincing even to his own ears, but it seems to appease his teammates, as most of them shift their attention back to the game just in time to see Rozanov make a particularly good play.

“But,” Miitka pipes up. “He’s very good at hockey.”

“The best, probably,” Shane says, hoping his tone comes off as more miserable than proud.

To be fair, he does feel pretty miserable, sitting on Hayden and Jackie's couch watching the playoffs on television instead of being on the ice himself. A sting of jealousy flares deep in his stomach, knowing that soon he'll be watching Rozanov hoist the Cup before him. He feels a twinge of guilt that he couldn't lead his team all the way to the Cup this year, despite his best efforts.

He knows it's illogical. It had been a particularly rough end to the season, with everyone giving it their all, as evidenced by Hayden's still bruised and battered face, JJ's arm hanging in a sling, and Drapeau in a wheelchair for the time being with his foot confined in a boot.

Realistically, Shane knows there's nothing more he could have done this season. Still, a tiny, all too persistent voice in the back of his head tells him that he just *wasn't good enough.* That he needs to be better. For his team, for his coach, for his parents, for the fans. Everyone.

Still, he can't help the flicker of happiness and pride inside him as he watches Rozanov on the ice now, too. Boston had played an incredible season, a lot of which they have their captain to thank for. Shane knows how badly the other man wants this win, especially after the devastating turnout for Russia in the Olympics earlier that year.

He knows what it's like to feel like you have everything to prove.

"Uh no, you're the fucking best, Hollander," JJ counters from where he's perched on the far left side of the couch.

On Shane's right, Comeau grins, shoving him playfully in the arm as if to punctuate JJ's point, as others chime in with their agreement. Shane's heart soars at his teammates' unwavering belief in him, relieved that they don't seem to have any hard feelings towards him not leading them to the playoffs this season.

The happiness is short lived, however, his heart immediately sinking at JJ's next words. "Yeah, not that animal shit show cock sucking Russian."

Shane swallows around the sudden lump in his throat, schooling his expression to remain neutral. If only they knew.

Moments later, as Boston declares their victory over San Francisco, Shane's teammates shuffle away in disappointment at Rozanov winning the Cup. Only he remains on the couch, a confusing swirl of pride, jealousy, and disappointment flooding his veins as Rozanov hoists the Cup above his head, grinning wider than Shane's ever seen before and yelling something enthusiastically in Russian.

Shane's not sure whether he wants to smile or cry. In the end, he thinks he does a bit of both, the corner of his lips tugging up as he blinks back the hot sting of tears threatening his eyes.

May 2015

"For the first time in sixteen years, the Montreal Metros are hoisting the MLH Cup. What a feeling it must be for captain Shane Hollander."

Shane's teammates surround him as he lifts the Cup above his head, his face split in a rare, wide and genuine grin. Everyone is yelling, everything is a blur. There are cameras everywhere. He feels his teammates periodically smacking him on the back in uncontainable excitement.

For a brief moment, JJ's voice cuts through the chaos. "Thanks to you, *capitaine!"*

Shane thinks belatedly that he should feel overwhelmed by it all, but for once, he's far too happy.

May 2016

"Can we call it a dynasty? Shane Hollander and the Montreal Metros are your MLH champions for the second year in a row. Not since Chicago in the late 90s have we seen a team take home back-to-back Cups."

In the locker room, Shane's teammates and coach jump and hug and yell; they spray champagne everywhere and upturn giant jugs of water over each other's heads like wild animals. With happiness thrumming in his veins, Shane checks his phone amidst the chaos, squinting to read the message on the screen without his glasses.

[Lily]: Lucky.

He bites his lower lip to contain his smile as he types out his response.

[Jane]: The luckiest ;)

Covering his eyes with one arm against the spray of champagne that his teammates have now taken to aiming directly at him, Shane eventually gives up on trying to see his phone screen anymore, letting his hand drop.

He wonders if Rozanov watched his win on television with his teammates, just as Shane had done the previous year. Wonders if Rozanov had to sit in the middle of them and pretend he wasn't at least a little bit proud of Shane.

Unless he truly wasn't. Shane realizes that it's entirely possible that he's severely overestimating the extent to which Rozanov gives a damn about him.

Suddenly, Comeau sweeps in on his right, grabbing Shane's face with both hands and planting a massive kiss on his cheek, effectively distracting him from his quickly spiraling

thoughts. “Wouldn’t be possible without you, Hollander!”

The volume of the room swells at Comeau’s words, as his teammates roar their agreement.

Shane, always humble and forever uncomfortable under a slew of direct attention, gives a sheepish smile and tries to brush the comment off, beginning to form some diplomatic response about it being a team effort – because it was – until Drapeau sidles up on his left and throws an arm around his shoulders.

“Just accept it, man,” Drapeau insists. “You’re the fucking best.”

October 2018

“Hey, um, can everyone listen up for a second?” Shane says, tentatively.

It’s very different from how he would usually call for his teammates' attention, to make a team announcement or give a pep talk. Normally, in those situations, he would speak with more authority, confident in his role as captain.

But this time, his voice comes out shaky and uncertain. He wipes his hands on his pants to try to lessen the nervous sweat that’s accumulating on his palms.

The locker room falls silent, his teammates looking at him expectantly. Some are standing near their lockers, others sitting on the locker room benches lacing up their tennis shoes or packing their bags. They’ve just finished a long practice, and he’s sure everyone’s eager to head home for the day.

Okay. Deep breath. He can do this.

“There’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you guys,” Shane starts, his throat feeling tight, like he has to force the words out. “It’s kind of hard to talk about, but it’s been even harder to keep it a secret. And you guys are my teammates, and I trust you, so I just wanted you to know.”

For a moment, it’s so quiet in the locker room that you could hear a pin drop, everyone still giving him their undivided attention. Shane is terrified, but he knows he needs to do this.

“I’m gay,” Shane says. As soon as the words are out of his mouth, it’s like the floodgates open, and he can’t stop himself from rambling. “I’ve known for a while now, I guess. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you all sooner. I hope this doesn’t change anything. I don’t want it to change anything. I’m still the same player I’ve always been, and I won’t let anything get in the way of my commitment to this team. If anyone has a problem with it, I’m-”

“Shane,” Hayden interrupts him, which Shane is grateful for. He was really spiraling there. Shane finally allows himself to look over at his best friend. There’s definitely surprise written

on Hayden's face, but he doesn't look disgusted or angry. "It's cool, man. I mean, you're still the same person, right? Still our friend, and still our captain. Our fucking incredible captain who led us to back-to-back Cup wins, no less. Right, guys?"

Relief washes over Shane at Hayden's words. He scans the room, trying to gauge the others' reactions, but he's admittedly never been great at reading people.

Standing just to Shane's left is JJ, who claps him on the shoulder with a reassuring smile. "Pike's right. It's cool. Thanks for telling us," JJ says seriously. Then, a small smirk crosses his features as he continues more playfully, "And sorry for trying to set you up with girls all the time, I guess?"

Shane snorts. JJ's comment pulls some small laughs out of some of the other guys too, and he appreciates JJ for lightening the mood a little. Whatever happens next, Shane's relieved that he seems to at least have his two best friends on his side.

A few more of his teammates chime in with their reassurances then, including Miitka, Berkes, and Schneider, and Shane suddenly feels hopeful that everything will be okay.

Still, he can't help but notice the few that keep quiet, not saying a word. Comeau, Drapeau, Stetlund, Beaulier.

Drapeau's words to Shane after their last Cup win play through his head. *You're the fucking best.* Shane wonders if he still thinks that now. He sort of doubts it.

"Does Coach know?" Hayden asks, suddenly.

It's a good question.

Shane feels a little weird about coming out to his teammates while leaving his coach in the dark, but Theriault doesn't strike Shane as the most accepting person. Is it really his business anyway? Shane wanted to tell his teammates since many of them are also his friends. But Theriault is definitely not his friend.

"Uh, no," Shane admits. "Not yet, at least. I'd appreciate it if we could all keep this between us for now."

The room is quiet for a beat, and Shane is sure everyone is thinking the same thing he is – that there's no way Theriault is going to take the news well if, or when, he finds out.

"You got it, *capitaine,*" JJ finally says, cutting through the silence.

Shane offers him a grateful nod.

Despite the announcement going relatively well, all things considered, Shane is struck with the sudden urge to get the hell out of there, uncomfortable after so much time under so much attention. He musters up his best captain voice and says, "Alright, well, thanks guys. We're dismissed. I'll see you all tomorrow."

Shane gathers up his things as quickly as possible, then beelines for the locker room exit. He makes his way down the hall, out the main facility doors, and to the parking lot. He has just stepped outside into the fresh fall air when he hears quick footsteps behind him.

"Hey, wait up!" Hayden jogs to catch up with Shane, slowing to a walk once he reaches his side. They continue walking together, heading in the direction of Shane's car. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Shane sighs, turning to face his friend as they come to a halt near his car. "Look, Hayds, I'm sorry about that. I probably should have told you alone first. It's just not an easy conversation to have, so the fewer times I have to have it…" He trails off, hoping Hayden understands his point.

Hayden waves his hand dismissively. "Dude, don't even worry about it. I get it."

Shane blows out a breath of relief. "Okay."

"And I meant what I said in there," Hayden says firmly. "You're still Shane, you're still our captain, and you're *definitely* still my best friend."

Warmth blooms in Shane's chest. "Thanks, Hayden," he says softly, his voice a little wobbly.

Hayden smiles. He gives Shane's shoulder a brief, reassuring squeeze, before letting his hand drop back to his side.

"Hey, so… you totally don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but," Hayden pauses, seeming uncertain. "Is Boston Lily… a guy, then?"

The warmth in Shane's chest is suddenly replaced with panic. He tries not to let it show on his face. For some reason, he hadn't expected Hayden to put that together, and he especially hadn't expected him to ask Shane about it directly. Shane feels like if he answers Hayden's question honestly, his friend will be far closer to putting together the whole truth about him and Ilya than Shane would like.

But would that really be so bad? Hayden *is* his best friend, after all, and he's clearly pretty accepting. But Shane being gay is one thing. Shane being madly in love with his hockey archrival who Hayden is under the impression he completely *hates*, is another entirely.

Plus, Shane doesn't think he should tell Hayden, or anyone, the complete truth without talking to Ilya about it first.

Shane's already hesitated too long in his answer. Hayden is watching him expectantly. He scratches the back of his head awkwardly, then admits, "Uh, yeah. Lily's a guy."

"Wow," Hayden says, eyebrows raising in surprise. "Is it serious? I mean, you've been seeing each other for, like, *years*, right?"

Once again, Shane is completely at a loss of how to answer. Obviously, yes, it's serious between him and Ilya, but Shane can't exactly tell Hayden that. If he does, he's sure his friend will ask to meet his mystery man at some point, in a show of his support and out of curiosity.

But even more so, Hayden will be sure to notice when Shane doesn't leave their shared hotel room in Boston this season to go meet up with "Lily," anymore – because Ilya's playing for Ottawa now.

So, hating every second of it, because he thought that coming out would make it so that he didn't have to do this as often anymore, Shane lies to Hayden's face. "No, it's not serious. We broke things off, actually."

"Oh. That really sucks, man. I'm sorry." There's genuine pity in Hayden's voice, and Shane feels so, so guilty for lying. "But, hey," he continues, more mischeviously, "That just means we'll have to find you a nice guy in Montreal."

And, fuck, Shane did not anticipate that. For once, he wishes Hayden were a little less nice. He shakes his head dismissively as he tries to get his thoughts in order.

"It's really okay, Hayds. I'm not really looking to date right now. It's complicated, you know? Since I don't want this secret to get out," Shane says hastily, hoping Hayden will accept the excuse. "And I'm too busy with hockey right now, anyways."

Hayden fixes Shane with a look that says he's entirely unconvinced, but relents, holding his hands up in mock surrender. "Alright. If you say so."

Shane nods. *Please drop the subject,* he begs internally. Thankfully, Hayden does.

"Well, I should get going. Don't want to keep Jackie waiting," Hayden says. "Hey, wanna come over for dinner later this week?"

Shane exhales. "Sure, that sounds great. Thanks, Hayden."

"Love you, man." Hayden starts walking backwards towards his car, waving Shane goodbye as he goes. "See you at practice tomorrow."

"You too." Shane smiles. "See you."

Shane watches Hayden go, his friend's back now turned to him. He unlocks his car, slides into the driver's seat, and rests his forehead on the wheel with a long exhale.

That went mostly okay, right? His team wasn't horrible about it, some of them even verbally accepting of it. Not all, of course, but some. Hayden clearly views him no differently than before, and he thinks he did at least an okay job of squashing his friend's line of questioning about Boston Lily.

That is, until a couple of months later, when Hayden basically corners Shane in the exact same parking lot and says, "I know you said you broke things off with Boston Lily, but I have another theory, since you're suddenly obsessed with knowing when we play Ottawa."

Shane holds his breath, forcing his face to remain neutral.

"I think your mystery man is Ilya Rozanov."

May 2020

“It doesn’t get boring, does it?” JJ says, looking up at the rafters, where their third Cup Champions banner is currently being raised.

“Nope,” Shane smiles. “It definitely doesn’t.”

After winning the Cup, most players would probably say they felt something along the lines of happy, excited, overjoyed, or accomplished. Shane felt all of those things, absolutely, but most of all he just felt *relieved*.

He felt like he’d had more to prove this season than ever.

After coming out to his teammates, it was clear that not all of them were accepting of it. Shane remembers the first change he noticed. It was the day after he’d come out, after a long practice. Shane exited the showers to find a small group of his teammates still in their gear in the locker room.

“What are you guys waiting for? You’d better hurry up and shower,” Shane had said. “They need to close up the facility for the night soon.”

Drapeau and Comeau had exchanged a look then, one that Shane couldn’t quite decipher. “Yeah, yeah. We’re going,” Comeau had said.

Shane hadn’t thought anything of it. Until it kept happening. A few practices later, it had become clear to Shane that they were waiting for him to leave the showers before taking their own, as if Shane was some predator who was going to unwillingly creep on them.

Shane had thought about pointing out the fact that he had been gay the entire time he’d been playing with them, even if they didn’t know yet, and that showering at the same time had never been a problem before. Somehow, he didn’t think that would help the situation.

So, he had kept his mouth shut instead. If they wanted to make themselves later getting home each night by waiting to shower after him, then that was their prerogative.

Shane wishes that were all that had changed.

It wasn’t.

Perhaps naively, Shane had thought that after he came out his teammates would reduce their use of homophobic language in their locker room talk and chirps out on the ice.

And while some of his teammates had, his closest friends especially, it seemed to Shane that some others purposefully increased their use of such language - with words like *fairy*, *cock*

sucker, and *faggot* being thrown around at an alarming rate. If their goal was to make Shane uncomfortable, they had unfortunately succeeded.

But the worst change of all, in Shane's mind at least, was the sudden loss of respect towards him as captain from a select few teammates.

Guys whispering under their breath as he tries to give his pre-game speeches, defying his orders as captain, being reluctant to pass him the puck during games, purposefully leaving him out of conversations or team get togethers - and all of these things done only in ways that could be played off as a misunderstanding or an accident, so that Shane had zero real evidence to call them out on it.

Hayden and JJ tried to stick up for him as much as possible, along with some of the other more accepting guys on the team. But there was only so much they could do, and Shane felt guilty about them fighting his battles for him.

Honestly, it was a miracle they had won the Cup this past season, with how divided the team had become. And it was no one's fault but his own, Shane thought.

That's why he had been so determined to win. To prove himself. To earn back his teammates' respect. To fix the divide. If that meant more pressure on himself, stricter dieting, more workouts, more time spent at the rink, arriving earlier to practice and leaving later, ignoring his teammates' quips and small acts of defiance against him, playing through any pain or illness, then he had decided that's what he would do.

And they had won.

And absolutely nothing had changed about the team culture.

Despite it all, Shane still loved playing for Montreal. He would be a free agent at the end of this season, but the thought of signing elsewhere had never even crossed his mind. He'd given a decade of his life to the Montreal Voyageurs. This was his team, this was his home, and these were his fans. He could put up with a couple of asshole teammates, if it meant getting to stay here.

"You know what's even better than three Cups?" JJ asks, startling Shane out of his thoughts.

"Four Cups?" Shane guesses.

Maybe four will be the number that finally makes all of his teammates come around, since three didn't do the trick.

"Fucking right," JJ agrees. "Let's get it."

"Let's get it."

March 2021

Shane stands outside the door to the locker room, feeling seconds away from throwing up the smoothie he had forced down that morning despite his nerves.

It's his first practice back after Hayden's FanMail video with him and Ilya kissing in the background was posted all over the internet. In the immediate aftermath, he thought some of his teammates might reach out to him, to see how he was doing. Instead, it was complete radio silence from everyone, aside from Hayden, of course.

His heart is in his throat as he steels his resolve, twisting the door handle and entering the locker room. The radio silence continues in this setting too, as his teammates refuse to acknowledge him – either glancing his way quickly before returning to whatever they were doing, or not even looking his way at all.

It's clear that Hayden isn't quite sure what to do, just shooting Shane a small, sympathetic look from where he stands awkwardly in front of his stall. Shane doesn't blame him. He doesn't know what to do either.

Shane clears his throat. "Hi," he tries.

Still, no one acknowledges him. Except for JJ, that is, who looks Shane up and down with disdain written all over his face, then scoffs before turning away once more.

Shane isn't naive about the situation. He knows this is bad. He knows how much his teammates genuinely hate Boston, hate *Ilya.* How much they believed that he felt the same way. Knows that he's been lying to their faces for the past eleven years. Shane understands how that could call into question what else he might have lied about over the years, even though he's pretty sure the answer is nothing.

Obviously, not all of his teammates were stoked about him being gay when he first told them, but he convinced himself that it was fine to not have their complete support. Because in all honesty, Shane's never considered *all* of his teammates his close friends. Despite playing together for years, some of his teammates and he had never quite bridged that gap from coworkers to friends.

But he and JJ had. And JJ's reaction to him right now was breaking his fucking heart.

Shane swallows the emotion that threatens his throat, ignoring the sudden burning behind his eyes. He walks to his stall, putting his stuff down and trying his best to act normal. Trying his best to pull his shoulders back and stand tall, to be Captain Shane Hollander.

"Hollander," Coach Theriault's voice suddenly barks from behind him. "Come with me."

Shane sighs quietly. He already knows this isn't going to go over well with Theriault. The man is known for being pretty old-fashioned. He steels his resolve and follows his coach out of the locker room, down the chilly concrete hallway, and into his cluttered office.

Theriault sits behind his desk, gesturing for Shane to sit in the chair across from him. “Was it a joke?”

Shane sits, taking his time to answer. He’s not going to deny it, even though he supposes he could try to make it all out to be some huge joke. But he’s sick of lying, sick of hiding.

“No,” Shane says, as firmly as he can muster.

He wills himself to sit still and confident, though every muscle in his body is fighting to fidget with nerves. He tries to meet Theriault’s eyes in defiance, but only manages for about a fraction of a second before allowing them to drop to focus on the lower half of the man’s face.

“How long?” Theriault asks, his expression darkening.

Shane knows the answer his coach is looking for. *This was the first time. It was a mistake. It won’t happen again.* Shane’s not going to give it to him. “Years.”

Coach Theriault leans back in his desk chair, observing Shane. Scrutinizing him. Anger and disappointment are written on his face as clear as day. Silence stretches long and palpable. Finally, Theriault breaks it. “Go home. I’ll talk to management and we’ll decide what to do with you.”

“Am I… benched?” Shane asks uncertainly.

“Yes, you’re fucking benched, Hollander!” Theriault snaps. “What did you think would happen?”

Shane tenses. He’s not sure what he thought would happen, exactly, but he supposes some part of him was hopeful that things would turn out okay. That his teammates would understand, that Theriault would understand, that they would all just let it go and keep playing good hockey.

Some part of him hoped they could overlook the unfortunate fact that the love of his life just so happens to also be their greatest rival, in lieu of everything he had given the team over the last ten years.

Theriault sighs. “This order comes directly from Crowell. You and *Rozanov.* Until this gets dealt with, you’re both sitting.”

“*Dealt* with?” Shane asks incredulously. The way Theriault said it – like it was some disease that needed to be contained, some fire that needed to be snuffed out, some problem that needed to be *fixed* – makes Shane’s blood boil.

Theriault ignores Shane’s interjection. “Don’t even think about posting anything online about this. No statements. You’re in enough trouble already.”

“But–” Shane starts.

“Go home,” Coach says, with finality.

Shane knows he's lost, at least for now. So, he swallows his pride and follows the order, leaving the office quickly. His mind swims as he walks the short hallway back to the locker room to get his stuff. Belatedly, he wishes he'd just kept it all with him in the first place, because he's not sure he can face his teammates again right now.

Unfortunately, he doesn't have a choice.

When Shane walks in, the locker room is just as silent as before. He decides to just get everything out in the open. Maybe he just needs to clear the air, and everything will be fine. Maybe if he can just get his teammates to come around, they'll vouch for him against Theriault.

Shane blows out a breath, trying to steady himself.

"Okay," he starts, garnering a few head turns. "Now you know. I'm sorry you found out this way, instead of from me, but I've been seeing Ilya for years and it's never interfered with me from contributing to this team. We won the fucking Cup last year."

"It's fucked up. It was already bad enough that you're… y'know," Comeau gestures vaguely. *Gay,* Shane fills in the missing word in his mind, his stomach plummeting. "Now we're supposed to accept the fact that you've been fucking *Ilya fucking Rozanov* behind our backs this whole time?"

"We're together. I love him," Shane says sharply. "This isn't just some stupid hookup, so don't make it sound like that's all it is."

He decides to ignore the fact that, for many years, it sort of was just that. It doesn't matter now. Now, Shane is completely, blindingly in love with Ilya Rozanov. He needs his team to understand that that fact is not going to change.

"Oh, I'm sorry. You're in *love*," Drapeau's voice drips with sarcasm. "Right. That makes everything so much better."

"Look, I understand that this is…" Shane pauses, searching for the right word. "Unconventional. And complicated. Why do you think we hid it for so long?"

"You didn't hide it from everyone," JJ says angrily.

Shane looks at him pleadingly. "JJ, I'm–"

"I don't want to hear it," JJ interrupts, his face uncharacteristically stoic. "Is Coach sending you home?"

Shane flounders for a moment. "Yeah, but–"

"Then fuck off and go home."

JJ's words are like ice in his veins. Shane's eyes prickle with tears, and he uses every ounce of his remaining willpower to force them down. He refuses to cry in front of his teammates. He won't give them the satisfaction.

Except, the thought that him crying *would* even give his teammates – people he thought were his family, especially JJ – any sort of satisfaction in this situation makes it even harder to fight back his tears.

“Hey,” Hayden finally speaks, standing up from the bench. “I know that everyone is fucking weirded out right now, but try to remember who the fuck this is. Shane is our fucking captain. Our leader.”

Shane exhales, shooting his best friend a grateful look.

“He’s a fucking liar,” JJ spits, clearly undeterred by Hayden’s words.

“He’s our fucking friend,” Hayden says. “So maybe everyone feels weird right now, or like, totally grossed out. I get it, it’s Rozanov.”

“Okay, thanks Hayden,” Shane says, a little exasperated. He appreciates the general sentiment, he supposes, but he’s not exactly sure that Hayden’s approach is helping at the moment.

“But that weirdness goes away, and then you’re going to have to live with how shitty you were to Shane when he needed his fucking boys the most. So think about that.”

There’s a beat of silence, followed by some muttering that Shane can tell isn’t agreement. Suddenly, he can’t bear to stand there even a second longer than he has to.

“Whatever,” he says. “I’m leaving. If anyone wants to talk to me, you have my number.” He locks eyes with JJ. “You know where I live.”

Somehow, he manages to hold himself together as he trudges through the parking lot to his car. He holds himself together as he slides into the driver's seat, starting the engine and cranking up the heat to stave off the lingering cold of winter.

He pulls up Ilya’s contact number and immediately requests a FaceTime.

It’s only when Ilya’s worried face fills the screen, and Shane hears his soft voice ask, “Shane? Is everything okay? How did it go, *moy lyubimyy*?” that he finally lets himself break.

April 2021

It’s game seven in Montreal’s series against Ottawa, the final determinant of which team will advance to the Conference Finals. The game is tied at 2-2, late in the third period, with only eight seconds left on the clock.

Shane darts after Ilya as he rockets across the ice, over the center line and towards Montreal’s net. Suddenly, it’s just the two of them, the only players in the league who can match each

other's speed. He pushes himself to the maximum, lungs burning with the effort.

If Ilya shoots and scores, it's game over, and Montreal will be eliminated. But if Shane can get the puck away from Ilya, while there's probably not enough time for him to score on Ottawa, he could at least keep the game tied and send them into overtime where they would just need to score first to win the series.

And Shane has him. He's fully caught up to Ilya now, and is just about to knock the puck away from him when he catches an edge on his skates, tumbling forward and crashing onto the ice in a heap.

He can't do anything but watch on miserably as Ilya carries the puck to the net, burying it in the top left corner. The goal light flashes red just before the buzzer signals the end of the game, though the noise is muffled by the overzealous shouting of the crowd and Ilya's teammates, who are now spilling over the boards and onto the ice to celebrate their win.

Shane can't wrap his mind around what just happened. Montreal's chances for a repeat Cup win had just been ruined, all because he had fucking *tripped* over his own skates. It was a complete stroke of bad luck.

He feels dazed, still kneeling on the ice.

Eventually, a hand settles on his shoulder, and he glances up to see that it's Hayden. "It's over buddy," Hayden says morosely. "Come line up for the handshakes."

Shane pushes himself to his feet and makes his way over to his teammates to line up. Everyone is quiet, no doubt absorbing the shock of the loss right alongside Shane.

"Good game," Shane says to Drapeau, the goalie having fallen in line next to him. "It wasn't your fault."

"I know," Drapeau says coldly.

Shane is taken aback by the response. He's sure the goalie is licking his wounds at their elimination, just like everyone else on the team. He knows that if he hadn't tripped, they might have been on their way to the Conference Finals after this, but it's unlike Drapeau to be so blunt about it. Especially over something that was clearly an unpreventable accident.

Still lost in his thoughts as he moves on autopilot through the handshakes, it takes a Shane a moment to realize that all of Ilya's teammates are saying nice things to him, whether about looking forward to seeing him at the camps that summer or just getting to know him better in the future.

It's such a contrast from Shane's own teammates' response to the Shane and Ilya dating scandal that it simultaneously warms his heart and knocks the wind out of him. *No wonder Ilya loves his team so much*, Shane thinks.

Speaking of Ilya, he's the last one in the lineup of Ottawa Centaurs, and Shane feels suddenly uncertain about what he's supposed to do as they come face-to-face on the ice now. He

expects to find excitement on Ilya's face over the win, and is surprised to find concern written there instead.

They shake hands perfunctorily, and it somehow feels like far too little and far too much contact at the same time.

"Are you okay?" Ilya asks softly.

"Yeah," Shane says, though he honestly doesn't even know if it's the truth or not. But his next words he means wholeheartedly. "Congratulations. I'm excited for you. Win the Cup for me, alright?"

Ilya's concerned expression gives way slightly to a sweet smile, the kind that Shane knows is reserved only for him, and it lifts his spirits a little. "We'll try."

"Do you fly out tonight?" Shane asks, hoping with everything in him that the answer is no. Nothing sounds worse than spending the night alone, knowing that he'll be beating himself up over his team's loss, replaying the moment he tripped over and over in his mind trying to figure out what went wrong.

Well, he won't be completely alone, since he's staying at his parents' house here in Ottawa. But only Ilya knows how to pull Shane out of his head when he's spiraling.

Unfortunately, Ilya can't give him the answer he's looking for.

"Yes, right after this," Ilya says, apologetically, his eyes scanning Shane's face as if he's trying to read something there. Finally, he seems to settle on just saying, "Get some rest tonight, okay?"

Shane nods, and they part ways, knowing they've been standing there talking on the ice for far too long already. They'll talk more on the phone later, anyways, Shane is sure.

Still, he wishes they could steal a moment to themselves before Ilya has to leave for the Conference Finals, no matter how brief. Just to get a kiss from the other man and tell him that he loves him. But he knows they won't get the chance amongst the post-game hustle and bustle.

Maybe Shane should have just done it right there on the ice, he thinks belatedly. Everyone knows about them now, anyways. He still hasn't quite wrapped his mind around that fact.

Shane shakes himself from his thoughts as he enters the locker room. "I can't believe I fucking tripped," he says to JJ.

"Did you?" JJ asks, skepticism clouding his features.

Suddenly, Shane's heart is pounding in his chest. He stops in his tracks, turning to face his friend. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know, Hollander. Just… *fuck,* tell me it was an accident."

The full implication of JJ's words hits Shane like a freight train, to the point where he feels a little dizzy with it. Worst of all, the room is dead silent, their entire team listening in on the conversation.

"What? You think I fell on purpose? That I *let* Ilya score?" Shane asks incredulously.

He can't believe that JJ, of all people, would even suggest that.

"I know what I saw," Comeau interjects from across the room. "What everyone saw. It didn't look like an accident."

Shane spins on his heel to face Comeau and the rest of his teammates, suddenly overcome with anger. "Well, it *was.* What the fuck? You guys don't actually think I fell on purpose, do you?"

There's a beat of silence. JJ blows out a long breath, running his hands through his hair. "No, I don't think that," he admits.

Then why did you bring it up in the first place? Shane wants to retort. Although relieved that JJ seems to have come to his senses, Shane knows he's going to have a hard time forgiving JJ for even opening the door to this conversation.

"Of course we don't fucking think that," Hayden jumps in. "Come on, guys. Shane would never betray his team."

And Hayden's right. Shane wouldn't.

But his teammates clearly aren't convinced, murmuring under their breath or rolling their eyes in dismissal of Hayden's words.

Do they not see how much he's given to this team? Over a decade of his life. The blood, sweat, and tears, the dieting, the hours upon extra hours of workouts and practices. The subtle jabs and disrespect he's ignored for the past two seasons in an attempt to make the team cohesive again. His complete and total obsession with proving himself to still be the same player he was before he came out to them. They've won three Cups under his captaincy.

None of it matters to them.

To think that he would go through all of that, just to let his boyfriend win at the last second in game fucking seven.

They want to talk about betrayal? Well, Shane's never felt so betrayed in all his life.

"Fuck this," Shane spits, turning to face his stall. He angrily strips his gear and gathers up his things. He doesn't even bother with the showers, for once not caring if he leaves still feeling sweaty and gross. He doesn't want to be here a second longer than he absolutely has to.

"Good luck next season without me," Shane says bitterly, then pushes through the locker room exit, not bothering to wait for a response. It's a brash thing to say, he knows, but at that moment he hardly cares where he ends up playing next season, as long as it's not Montreal.

His parents are waiting for him down the hall from the locker room.

“If you want to stay with your team longer, we can head to the house without you,” his mom offers kindly.

“No. I want to get out of here. Now.” Shane brushes ahead of them to get outside and to the car. He doesn’t mean to be so rude to them, but he’s suddenly so overwhelmed with anger, hurt, and disappointment that he feels like he could explode.

Shane leans back against the side of the car to wait for his parents, feeling tears well up in his eyes. He blinks furiously in an attempt to contain them, swallowing around the lump in his throat.

“They think I fell on purpose,” Shane says miserably, as soon as his parents catch up to him, his voice coming out thin.

Shock and anger flash across his mom’s face. “What? Who said that? I want names.”

“I’ve given this team everything, and…” Shane suddenly crumbles, hot tears tracking down his cheeks as he’s no longer able to contain them.

His dad steps forward to hug him tightly, and Shane presses his face into his shoulder, into the comforting scent of his worn flannel as he cries. It’s not Ilya, whose familiar scent has come to feel most like home to him over the years, but it will have to do. For now.

“I’m sorry, Shane. It’s been a rough couple of weeks for you,” his dad says, stroking a soothing hand up and down his back.

“I’m done playing for Montreal,” he manages between sobs, his voice muffled by the fabric of his dad’s shirt. “I can’t do it anymore.”

His dad, blessedly, doesn’t react, aside from holding him a little bit tighter. But he hears his mom suck in a surprised breath. Shane understands her surprise. He’s purposefully kept a lot about the negative team culture from his parents over the past couple of years, so that they wouldn’t worry. But he knows he’s going to have to tell them now.

“We can talk about that later,” his mom says softly, after a moment's pause. “For now, let’s just go home, okay? One thing at a time. Maybe you can even catch Ilya on the phone before his flight leaves.”

Shane finally lifts his head from his dad’s shoulder, who gently releases him from his embrace. He steps back, wiping at his tear stained face. He’s certain that he looks like a complete mess, and he wants to get out of there before any of his teammates can see him like this.

Letting out a shaky exhale, he nods. “Yeah. Let’s go home.”

June 2021

Shane sits in a spacious, brightly lit office at the Ottawa Centaurs facility, flipping through page after page of his new contract, initialing and dating and signing on all of the appropriate lines. The paper feels heavier than it should, as if the weight of it is more than just ink and clauses.

The room is mostly quiet, save for the occasional shift of a chair or the soft rustle of pages from its other occupants. Brendan Wiebe, the Centaurs' head coach, Franklin Pembroke, the team's owner, Harris Drover, the Centaurs' head of communications and social media manager, and Farah, Shane's own agent, are all seated close by and watching him carefully.

When he reaches the final page of the contract, Shane exhales slowly, the reality of the situation truly sinking in. Maybe he should feel more terrified, since big changes in his life usually don't sit well with him, but mostly he just feels relief. And beneath that, a quiet spark of excitement.

He signs on the last dotted line, sets his pen down on the desk, and looks up with a small, almost disbelieving smile. "All right."

"All set?" Coach Wiebe asks.

Shane nods. There's a brief stretch of waiting as Farah double-checks every page, her eyes scanning quickly before she gathers the papers and hands them over to the Centaurs' representatives. The pause doesn't last long, and before Shane can overthink it, he's on his feet, shaking hands with an enthusiastic Coach Wiebe.

"Welcome to the team," Wiebe says warmly.

After that, everything blurs together, more handshakes, congratulations, and friendly claps on the shoulder. Someone presses an Ottawa Centaurs baseball cap into his hands, and moments later it's settled on his head as he holds his new jersey up for a photo, the fabric crisp and unfamiliar in his grip.

Harris snaps the shot, then glances down at his camera to check that it came out okay. It must have, because he grins up at Shane. "Looks great. Ilya's gonna love that one," he says, punctuating it with a wink.

Shane feels his cheeks flush red, but he doesn't mind. He smiles, a little wider this time.

He's happy.

July 2021

Shane should have known that his lack of anxiety about moving teams would be short lived.

The happiness was still there, of course. Every time he thought about playing on the same team as Ilya, rather than against him, he could hardly contain his joy.

He knows Ilya feels the same, if his reaction when Shane had come home from signing his contract the week prior was any indication. Ilya had taken one look at him – all decked out in his new Ottawa Centaurs merch, the silly logo displayed proudly on his chest – grinned wider than Shane had thought possible, and then immediately swooped in to capture Shane's lips in a heart-stopping kiss before tugging him upstairs to have his way with him.

But that doesn't mean Shane hasn't been spiraling, just a little bit, since then. What if playing on the same team actually creates more barriers between them, instead of removing them? What if Shane doesn't fit in with his new teammates and disrupts the team dynamics? What if they actually play worse this season, with him there?

He doesn't realize he's bouncing his leg anxiously in the passenger seat of the car until Ilya reaches over and places a calming hand on his thigh. They're on their way to Bood's house, for the first team get-together before the season starts.

Shane has met a couple of the guys here and there, like Wyatt Hayes, for example, who helped out with the kids fundraiser camps last summer. But it would be his first time meeting everyone else, and it's safe to say that Shane was freaking the fuck out.

"You are nervous," Ilya says. It's not a question. He knows Shane well enough by now that he can read him like a book at any given moment.

Ilya had added Shane to the team group chat right after he had signed his contract, and he was met with a barrage of excited welcome texts. But he was still nervous. What if the Centaurs only liked the idea of playing with him because of his reputation in the hockey world, but didn't actually end up liking him for who he was?

Shane hadn't answered Ilya. His boyfriend – no, his *fiancé*, they were getting married at the end of the month – barrels ahead anyways. "You do not need to be nervous. They will love you, because I love you." Ilya says.

Shane always appreciates how Ilya states things so calmly, so matter-of-factly, like there's no room for any question otherwise. It's so opposite to how Shane himself tends to navigate life, and he knows that's part of why Ilya is so good for him.

Giving Ilya a grateful smile, Shane forces himself to breathe. He maneuvers Ilya's hand off his thigh to intertwine it with his own, and is rewarded with a reassuring squeeze from the other man.

The rest of the short drive is quiet, aside from the low murmur of the radio playing today's pop hits in the background. At least, that's what Shane thinks it is. Ilya chose the channel.

When they arrive at Bood's house, Ilya leads Shane through the front door of the house, through the empty living room, and out to the backyard without even knocking, as if he owns

the place.

It seems that they're the last ones to arrive. The guys on the team are spread out all over the backyard. Wyatt, Dykstra, and Luca appear to be playing sewer ball, while Troy, Chouinard, Dillon, and Holmber are engrossed in a two on two game of cornhole, the others lounging in lawn chairs just chatting, and Bood himself at the grill flipping burgers.

It's the sewer ball boys that notice them first, abandoning their game in an instant to come over and say hello. They greet Ilya in what Shane assumes is their usual manner, all slaps on the back and one armed hugs and good natured chirps.

They greet Shane much more calmly, much to his relief, while Ilya watches on with fondness in his eyes. Wyatt, who he's already met, gives Shane a quick hug, while the others shake hands with him and introduce themselves. He's familiar with everyone to some extent already, from playing against them and having shaken hands with all of them several times before in post-game formality.

Some time later, once Shane's been officially introduced to everyone and they're all settled in various spots around the backyard with burgers and drinks, Shane finds himself wedged between Ilya and Troy on the outdoor couch. The conversation quickly turns to the upcoming hockey season.

"You guys think we've got a real shot at the Cup this year?" Luca asks hopefully.

"Of course we do," Wyatt laughs, nodding towards Shane and Ilya. "We bagged the two best players in the whole fucking league."

Shane gives Wyatt a small smile. *No pressure there*, he thinks to himself.

"Ah, but he is number two, yes?" Ilya teases, nudging Shane's shoulder playfully. "I am number one."

"Whatever helps you sleep at night, Roz," Bood says, earning a chorus of laughter from the team.

The chatter continues, but Shane finds himself having a harder time being present than usual, having to force himself to try to make eye contact and smile and laugh at the appropriate times. The feeling of Ilya's warm shoulder pressed against his own helps ground him a bit, but he can't deny that he's a little overwhelmed. He just hopes he isn't coming off as rude.

"How are you feeling about this season, Shane? Big change for you," Chouinard asks good-naturedly.

Shane knows he could, and should, be honest with them if he wants to connect with everyone and have a genuine friendship. But he's so caught between desperately wanting everyone to like him and fit in, and also being terrified at the thought of being vulnerable, that he finds himself giving a boring, impersonal answer instead.

“Uh, yeah, big change for sure,” Shane says, wincing internally at how awkward he sounds. “But I’m happy to be here. It should be a good season.”

Chouinard nods, mercifully not pushing him with any follow up questions. “Well, we’re happy to have you.”

Shane just offers him a grateful smile in response. He can feel Ilya’s watchful eyes on him, as if boring a hole into his soul, and he purposefully avoids making eye contact with his boyfriend.

Later, after plates are cleared and drinks emptied, people scatter around the backyard once more. Ilya tugs him by the hand into the house, leading him around a corner to the kitchen and away from any prying eyes.

“Shane,” Ilya says worriedly, eyes searching his face. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Shane says, but his voice comes out flat. “I’m fine. Why?”

He should have known that Ilya wouldn’t let him off the hook that easily. “Please do not lie.”

“I’m sorry, I’m just freaking out a bit,” Shane says, scrubbing a hand over his face. “Sorry. Didn’t mean to lie.”

“Come here,” Ilya wraps his arms around Shane, rocking them gently back and forth. “No sorry. Is okay. Lots of new people to meet, is overwhelming, maybe?”

Shane nods into Ilya’s shoulder. He already feels a bit better away from all of the chaos of the backyard and in the comforting quiet of his boyfriend’s embrace.

They stay there for a few moments, Ilya stroking a hand up and down his back, until finally, they separate.

“Is that all?” Ilya asks.

Shane averts his eyes. “I just… I want them to like me. I want to get to know everyone and be friends with them, and to feel like I belong here. I want to feel like they’re not just your teammates and friends, but mine, too.”

“You will,” Ilya assures him. “It just may take some time.”

“I know,” Shane says. “But…”

“But, what?” Ilya implores gently.

“I want all of those things, but… I’m also scared of them,” Shane admits, his eyes downcast. It’s difficult from him to admit that he’s scared, despite knowing that Ilya would never judge him.

Ilya’s eyebrows furrow in confusion. “Why are you scared?”

“Because I had all of that, once. In Montreal. I thought those guys were my family. I let them in, I trusted them. And in the end, they broke that trust. When it really mattered most, they were horrible to me,” Shane says, voice trembling. “I can’t go through that again.”

Understanding dawns on Ilya’s features. He strokes Shane’s cheek softly with his thumb, then cups his jaw to tilt his face up and make their eyes meet. “You won’t. These guys, they are not like your team in Montreal. They will not hurt you. You will be their family, and they will protect you, when it matters most. I promise, *moya lyubov*. I promise.”

Shane’s uncertainty must show on his face, because Ilya continues, “Do you trust me?”

“Of course.” *With my life*.

“Okay, so trust me.” Ilya says, simply.

Maybe it really can be that easy, Shane thinks. “Okay.”

Ilya kisses him. “*Ya tebya lyublyu*.”

“I love you too.”

Then, Shane hears the sliding glass door open, followed by what sounds like a couple of people coming in from the backyard.

Bood and Dykstra appear in the kitchen after a moment, carrying various empty cans and dishes. Bood raises his eyebrows when he sees them standing there. “Uh oh,” he teases. “I hope you two were behaving in here. We eat off that counter, y’know.”

Shane laughs, his face flushing. Ilya rolls his eyes. “Do not worry, Bood, we weren’t defiling your kitchen,” Ilya pauses. “Yet.”

“Ilya!” Shane admonishes, his face somehow heating up even more.

Ilya just winks at him, then saunters out of the kitchen towards the backyard, leaving Shane alone with Bood and Dykstra. Shane has to admit, that was well played.

He stands awkwardly for a moment as the other two guys move around the kitchen, emptying their arms of the items they had brought in from outside. “Uh, do you guys want any help?” Shane finally asks.

Bood smiles gratefully. “Sure, if you don’t mind. We were just going to wash these dishes and then bring out some more drinks and some card games.”

“Not at all,” Shane replies quickly.

They fall into an easy rhythm, Dykstra washing, Shane drying, and Bood putting the dishes away. It’s so oddly domestic for three hockey players that Shane has to fight back a laugh.

“So, are you nervous about playing Montreal this season?” Dykstra asks, out of the blue. “I have to admit, I was kind of surprised you left, even if Ilya is here. I thought you’d play for

Montreal forever."

For a moment, Shane hesitates, wanting to lie. Or at least not tell the full truth. To give some flat, media-trained type of answer and keep his true feelings to himself. But then he remembers Ilya's promise, and he decides to try.

"I am nervous," Shane admits. "I feel like there's going to be a lot of pressure to prove that coming here was the right choice. But I didn't just leave to come play with Ilya. Things were pretty… bad for me with Montreal before I left."

At that admission, Bood and Dykstra both pause their actions to give Shane their full attention, so he sets down the dish towel, turning to face them both too.

"Bad how?" Bood asks, concern lacing his voice. It surprises Shane how much he seems to care. "Like, they weren't accepting of you?"

Shane sighs. "Yeah. Most of my teammates and my coach weren't. And it really sucked, because I thought I was going to play for them forever, too. But I *am* happy to be here now."

Dykstra gives Shane a sympathetic look. "That sounds awful. I'm sorry. You don't have to worry about anything like that here, I promise."

"I know," Shane smiles gratefully. "Ilya's only said good things about all of you."

"We're glad you're here, Shane," Bood says firmly. "And this just means one thing for certain."

"What's that?" Shane asks, his curiosity piqued.

"We're gonna kick Montreal's ass this year."

"Damn, right," Dykstra agrees. "Teach them not to mess with one of our own."

Shane thinks he might cry. He smiles instead.

Later, when the three of them return to the backyard with drinks and card games in hand, Shane plops down next to Ilya on the couch once more. Ilya wraps an arm around him and kisses his temple, earning them some playful catcalls.

"You guys were in there a while," Ilya says quietly, for his ears only. "Good talk?"

Shane gives him a genuine, relaxed smile. "Yeah. They're great. I think this is going to be a good year."

Ilya returns the smile, seeming relieved. "Yes. The best," he agrees.

Feeling settled now, Shane allows himself to notice how the low afternoon sun casts golden rays across the yard, bathing his boyfriend's face in warmth, his summer sun lightened hair shining a honeyed gold and his blue eyes sparkling.

And, because he can’t help himself, Shane kisses Ilya right there in the backyard, in front of all of their teammates.

“Hey, lovebirds! Get a room!”

May 2022

As captain, Ilya hoists the Cup first. For the first time in Ottawa Centaurs history.

He passes it next to Bood, as the alternate captain, who – after his moment of celebration – passes it on to Shane. As he does, he says, “Told you we’d kick Montreal’s ass this year, didn’t I?”

Shane grins.

As Shane lifts the Cup over his head, Ilya skates to a stop in front of him. “Can I kiss you? Here?” Ilya asks, grinning so wide Shane thinks his face might actually split in two.

“Hell, yes.”

He lowers the Cup to his side. Ilya reaches out so they’re each holding it with one hand, and kisses him.

Shane thinks it’s the best kiss of his life.

End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hadn't written anything in over a year until now, so I'm very happy to be feeling inspired again. I hope you enjoyed it.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!