

Right Formula, Wrong Answer

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Right Formula, Wrong Answer

by [queerteaoop](#)

Summary

Rozanov concluded the interview with a nod, hefted his bag higher onto his shoulder, and turned to leave. Hayden's first reaction was to notice that Rozanov had the same type of bag that Shane had brought to the arena by accident. That was then followed by the thought that it was funny that Rozanov's bag had a worn out spot on the strap like the bag he'd been carrying earlier. And then some more capable portions of his brain informed him of the truth.

Shane had accidentally brought Ilya Fucking Rozanov's bag to the arena.

Shane asks Hayden for a favor. Hayden comes to some wildly incorrect conclusions.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Takes place in the hockey season following *The Cottage*, with Ilya still playing in Boston for now. I haven't read the books, so I have no idea what the future timeline looks like.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

“Is that a new bag?”

Shane heard the question as it was asked, but did not assume that it was being directed towards him. After all, why would it be? He'd had the same duffel bag for the past six years — or, at least, the same model. When the first one started showing signs of wear, he'd bought another of the same. When he found out the company was retiring the design, he'd bought four more. Shane's bag was reliable, sturdy, dependable and—

And not by his side on the floor in front of his stall the way it should have been.

Shane stared at the imposter bag beside him with a dawning horror. It was similar to his own bag, sure. But it was slightly larger, had a logo emblazoned on the side, and it was wrong, wrong, wrong.

Oblivious, Hayden stepped closer. “Looks a little different from your last,” he commented lightly as he set his own belongings down. Other teammates were milling about around them, filtering in slowly.

This could not be happening.

“Oh shit,” Shane breathed towards the bag, willing it to transmogrify into the familiar shape that it should have been. No such luck. The laws of physics remained unchanged and the bag remained stubbornly inert.

It wasn't Shane's. It was Ilya's.

“You good?” Hayden asked, voice edging towards concern as Shane veered towards crisis.

“Um,” he replied intelligently, “I uh. I grabbed the wrong one.” He spared a glance over at Hayden, the gears of his mind clunking against each other and grinding to a stop. Hayden's brow was furrowed.

Shane could see it now. Spending the morning together before an afternoon game. A goodbye kiss that had started sweet and become more. Blindly grabbing for one of two black bags on the floor by the front door to Ilya's Boston house. Slinging the bag over his shoulder and

pretending to be annoyed when Ilya had suggested that no one would notice if they were both just a little late for warmups, as if Shane would ever be anything other than the first one into the locker room. Shane telling his boyfriend that there would be plenty of time for celebration after Montreal kicked Boston's Dunkin Donuts drinking asses on their own home ice while he tossed the bag into the front seat of his rental car. Ilya betting him a blowjob that that wouldn't happen while doing the same and climbing into his flashy sports car, as if either of them would turn down the chance to get their mouths on one another. Distractions, distractions.

When he'd arrived at the arena parking garage, it had been to a text from Ilya bragging that he'd been faster than Shane at getting to their shared destination. Shane had chirped back something about not driving like a asshole and Ilya had responded that there was no shame in coming second. Shane had been too absorbed in his phone to notice anything was amiss.

And if he had this bag, it meant that his own was with Ilya.

All of his official gear was there in the locker room already, courtesy of the team's equipment managers. But everything he needed to get into the right headspace for an away game was in that bag. He needed his headphones. He needed his favorite compression shirt that wicked away his sweat and fit him perfectly— snug, but not too snug. His preferred stick tape and his fucking Montreal branded socks and any number of things that Ilya *absolutely under no circumstances could wear to this game*. Not to mention whatever effortlessly fashionable nonsense that Ilya had for after the game in his own bag, which Shane steadfastly refused to open.

Oh, this was a fucking disaster.

"Hey, whoa, are you okay?" Hayden bent down into Shane's line of sight, face awash with concern. "You look really pale."

That would make sense, since all of the blood in Shane's body was draining into a pit of dread deep in his stomach. He could borrow some things from his teammates and trainers, but what if they asked questions? What if someone started snooping around the locker room during the game? As it was, it was only a matter of moments before someone else started wondering why Hayden looked like he was deciding if he needed to grab a barf bucket for their captain. Shit. He was about to get outed by a goddamn duffel.

"I need to get my bag," Shane croaked out. He started to think through possibilities. A dead drop in the parking garage, so they could swap bags without being seen together? No, the last thing they needed was to create an accidental bomb threat. Some kind of major distraction? Maybe Scott Hunter could kiss his boyfriend on live TV again, that might be enough.

"Like from the hotel?" Hayden asked, still looking at Shane sideways. "I bet you could send someone to go grab it for you." He looked around like he was about to snag a trainer to fetch an intern to run the errand, scratching at the back of his head.

Shane shook his head. He hadn't even stayed at the hotel last night, just checked in and then headed straight to Ilya's. "No," he said, "It's not there, it's—"

His phone, which had never left his hand for a moment since he'd gotten to the arena, started buzzing with an incoming call from Ilya— well, *Lily*. Hayden looked down at the screen and then back up at Shane, expression turning smug.

“Oh I see,” he said, backing off towards his own cubby, “Then you are back together with that Lily girl.” He nodded like he'd solved it. “So you left it at her place? Tell her to bring it, I'm assuming she's local.”

“No, I mean yeah, it's... it's not...” The call timed out and the phone went silent in his hand again. “Shit, okay, yeah.”

Shane ignored the way that Hayden glowed with self satisfaction and started typing out a message to Ilya.

I have your bag.

The response was immediate. *Explains why I have your bag.* It was followed by three dots appearing on the screen and then disappearing.

Shane sent another. *What do we do? I have to be on the ice soon.* After a moment of thought he added, *I can't meet you anywhere, this place is crawling with reporters.*

The three dots appeared again and this time stayed for a long time. Finally, a response: *Svetlana is at the game. She knows about Jane. Not that Jane is you, but everything else. She can meet you in back concourse near service elevators.* The message was followed in quick succession by another. *She is smart and I trust her.*

Shane tamped down the smallest flame of jealousy at her name. He tried not to think about Ilya suggesting that he marry her and typed out a reply. *Not sure I can get out of here without anyone noticing.*

This time, Ilya took longer to respond, long enough that Shane had time to notice that his hands had gone completely numb and he was bouncing his knee idly. Then, finally: *Send someone for you, then. She is already on her way.*

If only it were that simple. If only Rose were here, she'd do it in a heartbeat, probably make a joke about the number of times she'd played a spy before. Shane needed his own Svetlana. He needed...

Hayden was still hovering nearby, dressing slowly and casting him looks that turned from smug back to concerned.

A friend. Shane needed a friend.

“Hayden,” he asked lowly, “Can I ask you to do something for me, and not tell anyone?” Hayden blinked at him in surprise. “I will seriously owe you,” Shane continued, “I'll babysit for two weeks if you want.”

“Uh, sure?” Hayden said, but made it sound like a question. He was suspicious, and who wouldn't be?

“Someone can bring my bag,” Shane explained, “All you would have to do is bring this one and meet her halfway.”

“Her?” Hayden’s eyes widened. “Your girl Lily is bringing your bag?”

Shane shrugged noncommittally and didn’t correct him.

Hayden nodded slowly, mulling it over. “You don’t have, like, drugs in here, right? Because I am way too pretty to go to prison for you, Hollander.”

Hayden’s joking tone grounded Shane slightly. “No,” he said, and managed the smallest laugh. “No, nothing like that.” Hayden still looked hesitant. “I promise. Three weeks, even. Go out for as many date nights as you want.”

Hayden’s face lit up. “Three weeks of Uncle Shane babysitting and I get to finally meet the mysterious Boston Lily?” He grinned. “Sounds like a good deal to me.”

Hayden would be lying if he tried to say that he hadn’t been curious.

Shane was one of his best friends, but sometimes he felt like he hardly knew the guy. Sure, he knew the ins and outs of his ridiculous, obsessive diet and he knew the difference between Captain Shane and Media Shane and Trying To Blend In At A Social Gathering Shane. It was easy to assume that Shane was just an uptight guy who lived and breathed hockey and was content with nothing more than that.

But then there was Lily.

Nothing said a crack in the armor like the girl that Shane had been not-so-secretly texting and sexting and vanishing to hook up with for pretty much as long as Hayden had known him. It wasn’t subtle; Shane would get lost in his phone sometimes, especially any time they were in Boston, often with a look on his face like any moment someone was about to catch him with his hand in the metaphorical gluten free keto macrobiotic cookie jar.

The guys all ribbed him about it, coming up with increasingly elaborate reasons for why he hadn’t made any public appearances with her or brought her to meet anyone on the team yet. He thought they’d scare her away (fair). She wasn’t real (ouch). She was too pretty for him (unlikely). Shane was worried that someone would steal her from him (yeah, sure, JJ). She was a huge celebrity (plausible until the whole Rose Landry situation, but honestly Hayden was half convinced that they were the same person for the longest time— I mean seriously, Lily, Rose? That had to be something— until the breakup and subsequent return of Lily Texting Face). The scenario that seemed the most likely and that had stuck in the semi-frequent locker room chirp sessions was simply that she was a Boston fan and couldn’t bear to show her face with Metros golden boy Shane Hollander.

He took the joking in stride. But any time someone asked to meet her for real, Shane would clam up and get awkward. Well, more awkward. So as strange as this whole bag exchange was going to be, Hayden was buzzing with the chance to finally set eyes on the woman who had captured his friend’s attention.

He just wished this whole ordeal didn't feel so goddamn sketchy.

Shane had slipped out of the locker room and into media mode immediately. He was buying himself time before he needed to get ready, serving as their own distraction. Several reporters flocked to him just a few feet away from the locker room entrance, asking him all the usual pregame standards and trying to get him to comment on the rumors that a high profile trade was in the works between several of the Eastern Conference teams, although, as far as Hayden knew, that had nothing to do with their own team. He slipped out the locker room past them and headed in the opposite direction, bag in hand. He felt like a secret agent or a drug mule or a member of a heist team delivering on some cargo.

He passed only a few people, all of whom were preoccupied with jobs too pressing to worry about a lost hockey player. No one stopped him.

He followed a map on his phone of the arena, wandering down ramps and through service corridors, thumb worrying at a spot on the bag's strap that was ever so slightly frayed. He was deep in the underbelly of a structure that sprawled like a labyrinth, and hoping to any god listening that he didn't lose cell service or he'd have a hell of a time finding his way back. They'd probably have to play the game without him.

He reached the elevators where Shane had said that Lily would be waiting. There was no one there. He started to worry that he'd taken a wrong turn somewhere, scanning the map for any sign of a second set of elevators that matched the description. Shane was going to freak out, and then they were going to lose the game.

And then she stepped around the corner. Hayden had a split moment where he let himself think that maybe she was too pretty for Shane after all.

She approached and gave him a suspicious once over. And then, in a surprisingly accented voice she said, "You are not who I expected."

Okay, so Shane was fucking a hot Russian. Or, at least eastern European, Hayden wasn't the best at picking out that kind of thing. She kind of sounded like Ilya Rozanov, if Rozanov weren't the world's biggest asshole.

"Yeah, uh," he said, remembering his task. He thought his own wife was the most perfect woman on the planet and would never in a million years do anything to jeopardize their marriage, but he could not deny that this woman was downright distracting. "Shane couldn't slip away, so..." Rather than finish his sentence, he thrust the bag out abruptly for her to take.

A spark of something ignited in her big eyes, but she took the bag without comment. She then held out Shane's bag for Hayden to take.

"Thanks," he said, shouldering it. "Hayden Pike, by the way." He nodded towards himself in introduction.

"I know who you are," she said. "I watch a lot of hockey."

“Cool, yeah,” he said vaguely, wanting to get to the meat of the matter. “So you’re Lily, right? Shane has told us absolutely nothing about you.” He laughed, triumphant in the knowledge that he was the first to meet their captain’s mysterious lady.

True to that title, she curved her lips up in a smile that gave away absolutely nothing. Then, she turned on her heels and started back down the hallway she’d come from. “Give Shane my love,” she called back over her shoulder lightly, her accent so thick that it almost made the ‘sh’ in Shane’s name sound more like a ‘j’. Her footfalls clicked softly and then disappeared out of earshot.

Hayden checked his phone again and then headed back in the direction of the visitors’ locker room. Damn. Lily was real, after all. Now the only piece left of the mystery was what Shane was doing still hiding her.

He was just a hall or two away from the lockers when he finally ran across someone whose job it was to stop him.

“Sir?” a voice called out from behind him, “Sir! Can I help you with something?”

Ah, fuck.

A man with a security vest was eyeing him like Hayden really was the master criminal he had felt like earlier. Hayden set his face into an easy smile and turned up the Canadian charm to its maximum.

“Hayden Pike, from the Metros,” he said, and held up the little ID badge the team carried on them as visitors. “Took a wrong turn on my way to the locker room.” He laughed, self-deprecating. “Honestly my wife is always joking about how I’d get lost in my own living room if she weren’t there to draw me a map.”

The security guard brightened by degrees and Hayden’s butthole unclenched. “Don’t I know it,” the man laughed in his deep Bostonian accent, “I’d be pretty lost without my wife, too.” He gestured down the hallway. “Down that way, take a left.”

Hayden nodded in thanks and made his way back to the locker room, home free. It was a miracle that he hadn’t been stopped earlier and turned back before swapping the bags, and that this whole process hadn’t attracted the attention of any of their teammates.

Shane’s face dropped all tension in immediate relief when Hayden crossed to his cubby and set the errant bag down beside him with a relaxed, “Got your bag, bud.”

“You’re an actual life saver,” Shane sighed, already digging into the contents. “Seriously, you have no idea.”

“And you can thank me by holding up your end of the bargain,” Hayden said, “I can’t wait to tell the girls you’re coming to hang out with them.” He pulled his shirt off over his head to start getting ready himself. “Now come on, we’ve got a game to win.”

Ilya pretended, for the sixth time through, to be really invested in his pre-warmup stretching routine. He had better not pull a hamstring because of all of this, that was the last fucking thing he needed.

A general commotion from the rest of the boys alerted him that Svetlana had returned, thank Christ. She slipped into the room like she did it every day, unheeding of all the men in various states of undress.

“Your bag,” she said in English, holding it out by the strap for him to take. He did so. Someone across the room— Websy, seemed like— called out a “Goddamn, Rozanov!” and the rest of the team whooped with laughter. Whatever. He had his bag, which meant Shane had *his* bag, and that was all that mattered.

Svetlana switched to Russian. “*They should really bump up security in this place,*” she said, gesturing to the locker room. “*All I had to do was pretend that the only English I know is ‘Ilya’s bag, I give’ and they let me right in.*”

“*Helps to be beautiful,*” he conceded. “*You’ve saved me. I’ll get you anything you want.*”

“*Oh yes you will,*” she replied with a smile. “*You and I have a lot to talk about, Lily.*”

If Ilya had been biologically capable of blushing, he probably would have.

“See you after the game,” she said, returning to English. She leaned up on her toes and gave him a kiss on the cheek, and he let her, loving her with his whole heart. Then she pinched that same cheek and gave it a playful little slap, and he let her do this, too, chorus of wolf whistles be damned. She turned to leave, graceful as ever. She stopped at the door to glance back at them and called out, to the team at large and Ilya specifically, “Good luck!”

“I tell you,” Ilya said the moment Shane walked into his living room, where he was already lounging shirtless with his arms spread wide across the back of his sofa like an indifferent king, “No shame in coming second.” He smirked. “Well, a little shame. It’s not first.”

“We almost had you,” Shane said, setting his bag— that damn bag— on the floor and crossing into his boyfriend’s space to stand in the vee of his legs. “Not my fault your team plays dirty.”

Ilya’s eyes widen in mock offense. “Me, dirty?” He grabbed for Shane’s hips and pulled and Shane gave in easily. “Never in my life.” Shane straddled Ilya’s lap with his knees on either side and thought about the last few times they’d fucked out here on the couch like they were slowly rewriting that time that it had all gone so wrong. If memory hadn’t been erased yet, well then it wouldn’t hurt much to keep on trying.

“Perfect angel, that’s you,” Shane said and leaned down to kiss him.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed when they broke apart. Then he gave Shane’s ass two quick taps with a hand and Shane hoisted himself back up to a kneeling position on pure automatic instinct.

“Now,” Ilya continued, fingers beginning to peel the waistband of Shane’s joggers down. “I believe you owe me a blowjob.”

Shane’s hips twitched forward at the realization of what Ilya was doing. “I thought you would have wanted it the other way around,” he said, feeling his blood pooling south.

“No.” Ilya continued to slide down the waistband, agonizingly slow. “I win, so I get to choose.” He maintained an intense eye contact as he freed Shane completely, a look that promised Shane that he was about to be devoured in the very best kind of way. “And I want my mouth around you. Want to take you apart.”

Shane nodded. Fuck, he was so gone on this man.

Ilya smiled and leaned his face closer to Shane. “Now hold yourself up like that,” he instructed as he gripped onto Shane’s hips again, squeezed. Shane’s thighs burned after the rough game, but he held fast. “Don’t fall,” Ilya said as if reading his mind. He nuzzled in close, kissed the patch of hair low on Shane’s belly. “And *maybe* I will let you come first this time.”

With that, he took Shane into his mouth at long last.

Shane did as he was told.

There were worse places than Boston for the team to lick their wounds on a night out after a loss (Ottawa, for example). They chose a bar that billed itself as a sportsbistro-slash-gastropub, whatever the hell that was. Hayden didn’t care, as long as he could get a beer and some fries to wash it down. They hadn’t managed to convince Shane to come out with them, of course, but what else was new? He was probably back at Lily’s place by now anyway. Hayden just hoped he double checked which bag he was grabbing on his way to the airport before he ended up stranded at the ass end of Logan International.

The bag thing had been odd, for sure, but Hayden wasn’t really letting it bother him. Hockey players were a superstitious bunch and as much as Shane liked to pretend that he didn’t believe in superstition, he believed in “the logic of self optimization for repeatable results,” Hayden knew that Shane wouldn’t have played nearly as well as he had without his own gear. They still hadn’t won, but it had been a close game, with Shane scoring two of their three goals. If Rozanov hadn’t clinched that last point in the last seconds of regulation time they might have had a chance to win it.

And speak of the fucking devil.

Rozanov was on several of the screens that were scattered around the bar, where highlights and commentary about the earlier game had been playing since they’d walked in. It was a clip of an interview from after the game, the informal kind where he was on his way out of the locker room giving last comments to reporters who somehow hadn’t gotten enough of him in the presser.

“Boo!” JJ cupped his hands around his mouth and complained loudly at the TV.

Hayden laughed and whacked him on the arm. “At least pretend like you’ve ever been in public before, yeah?” he chastised, though on the inside he couldn’t help but agree: Rozanov deserved to be booed.

“Sorry, Papá,” JJ shot back and a few of the other guys around them within earshot joined in with their laughter. Hayden tossed a fry at JJ, who caught it and stuffed it in his mouth.

According to the subtitles on the screen, Rozanov was being asked the same questions that Shane had been earlier about the rumors of a possible mid season trade involving one of their players, which he dodged with some bullshit about being too focused on winning to care about any stupid rumors. As much as Hayden wanted to stop looking at that smarmy face, TV screens in bars always had that magnetic way of drawing his eyes.

And if he hadn’t been paying attention to the screen, he may have missed it.

Rozanov concluded the interview with a nod, hefted his bag higher onto his shoulder, and turned to leave. Hayden’s first reaction was to notice that Rozanov had the same type of bag that Shane had brought to the arena by accident. That was then followed by the thought that it was funny that Rozanov’s bag had a worn out spot on the strap like the bag he’d been carrying earlier. And then some more capable portions of his brain informed him of the truth.

Shane had accidentally brought Ilya Fucking Rozanov’s bag to the arena.

The conversation around him faded into nothing as he tried to make sense of any of it. For what possible reason could Shane have mixed up his bag with Rozanov’s? Why would they even have been in the same place together? Sure, they’d been pretty friendly at the All Stars game, but as far as he knew they weren’t actual friends. And if they had been around each other earlier, then why the secrecy? Why enlist Hayden to go hand off an illicit parcel to Lily?

Lily.

His thoughts went back to that beautiful curly-haired woman that had had Shane tied up into knots for years on end. Why get her involved?

His mind flashed through everything that had made up her first impression. Her unquestionable confidence. Her Russian accent— and it had been Russian, he was pretty sure of that now. He thought again about how the way she had spoken had reminded him a little of Rozanov...

And then all of the terrible, terrible pieces clicked into place. The bags. The handoff. The secrecy. The Russian accent.

What the actual hell.

Shane Hollander was fucking Ilya Rozanov’s girlfriend.

Everything I know about hockey I've learned from fiction that's barely about hockey.

There's going to be one more chapter, I just have to finish it and edit :)

This show has consumed me :) :) :)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Took slightly longer than expected! I found a huge plot hole and then had to patch it with about 1000 words 😊

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Hayden had worked himself up into such a spiral by the time he was climbing into his own bed at home the following night that Jackie asked him point blank if he'd decided that now was the perfect time in his life to try out cocaine. He folded immediately and started to tell her everything. Shane had asked him not to tell anyone, but that had carried an implicit "except Jackie" and they both knew it.

"Wait so, it was Rozanov's bag?" Jackie's eyes tracked Hayden back and forth as he paced at the foot of their bed, having jumped up in the middle of his retelling.

"Yes!" He ran a hand through his hair. "I mean, I think so. Maybe."

"Hayd, honey," she soothed, "That's an awful lot of pacing for a maybe. You really think Shane, of all people, is sleeping with his rival's girlfriend?"

Hayden leaned heavily against the footboard. "It's probably the most un-Shane-like thing I've ever heard of," he said, "But what else could explain it?"

She held her arms out to her sides and shrugged. "I don't know," she said, "Maybe something a little less crazy? Maybe he and Rozanov are friends now, I mean we all saw their chemistry in the All Stars game."

"Okay, yes," Hayden said, "That's what I tried to tell myself, but why wouldn't he mention that? And why was he being so weird? I mean, he was full-on panicking about it. I thought he was about to spew his guts all over the locker room floor."

"Well, honey, Shane is, you know..." She gave him a significant look. "Particular. He probably thought you'd lose unless he had on the specific pair of socks he'd picked out for that day."

Hayden sighed, long and heavy, and finally made his way back to the side of the bed to climb back in. "You're right," he said, "But we did still lose."

"Yeah, well, Boston plays cheap on home ice," she dismissed with a wave of her hand. Hayden leaned over to give her a quick kiss because she was perfect in every way. "Look," she continued, "I know plenty of guys in the league sleep around and get into all kinds of drama, I mean you should see the WAG group chat sometimes!" Hayden laughed softly and

she grinned back at him. “But I feel like I’ve got an eye for the good ones. And I would have a hard time believing that Shane isn’t one of them.”

Reluctantly, Hayden nodded. “Yeah, right, something else must be going on.”

“Just ask him,” Jackie said. “He’s your best friend, that’s got to count for something.”

Hayden pulled the covers up over himself and snuggled down close to her. “How does it feel to be so correct and so pretty all of the time?”

“It’s a heavy burden,” she said with an air of nobility, and then broke down giggling and wiggled in close to him as well.

They settled into a nice, quiet moment between the two of them that lasted for just long enough for Hayden to relax before one of the baby monitors lit up with the sound of wailing.

“So,” Jackie said, giving Hayden a little pat on the chest, “Three weeks of babysitting, huh?”

“Oh yes,” he said, heaving himself up out of bed again, “And you better believe I intend to cash in.”

“*Just ask Shane*” had sounded great when Jackie said it. Actually asking him was another story.

Hayden had to approach this right. If he spooked Shane, then he would shut Hayden out. But if he waited too long, it would be awkward to bring up again. And then there was the crushing weight of trying to carry a secret that the secret keeper didn’t know that he knew. And if the secret turned out to even be true in the first place, then, damnit, it was enough to make him feel kind of bad for Ilya Rozanov.

Well, not too bad. Maybe just slightly bad.

...shit, okay, no, this was fucked up, right? How could Shane do this sort of thing? Wanting to beat your rival was one thing, but sleeping with his girlfriend behind his back was way over the line. What the hell was he even thinking? How did he—

“Pike!” A voice barked its way through his thoughts and he remembered that now was not the best time to be staring at his best friend and spiraling. “Get your head out of the clouds and onto the ice!”

“Sorry, Coach!”

Another puck came his way and this time he didn’t let it bounce off of his stick and slide away limply out of reach. He broke away from the line and took off down the ice, focusing on nothing except being in control of the puck. The hiss of another set of skates rushed along behind him. He feinted right and then sent the puck arcing back behind him to the left. A moment later, Shane sailed past him and brought the puck all the way into the net at the far end of the ice, completing the drill.

It had to be today, Hayden couldn't wait any more. All week he'd been jumpy and distracted at practice and if he kept it up for much longer, he was likely to get pulled from his line for their upcoming game. They were a team, they knew each other, they supported each other, and he needed to get to the bottom of what was happening or it was going to keep eating away at him. And besides, maybe there really was a logical explanation for the whole secret bag exchange that didn't involve anyone cheating on anyone.

Hayden waited until they were leaving for the day and it was just the two of them heading out of the facility to bring it up.

"Hey so," he started slowly after they'd been walking in silence for a minute or so, "Can I ask you about something?"

Shane looked over at him, brows drawing together. "Of course, what's up?"

Don't spook him, don't be weird about it. Middle of the road. "You know you can tell me anything, right?"

That might have been enough for some people; remind him of their friendship, hint that he knows that Shane has something to tell him, wait for him to open up. Instead, Shane looked away first, pretending as though something at the far end of the hallway was more interesting. "Yeah, I know," he said in a tone that said he was about to do anything but.

Okay, different tact. Be more direct. "Look, I just keep thinking about everything the other day," Hayden said, and then tacked on, "With Lily." Shane's eyes darted to him for a moment before cutting away again, so he just kept going. "I was thinking about the bag, and how you confused it for your own, and... and I don't know, I guess it's been bothering me."

"Oh," Shane said. They reached the lobby. Shane was starting to look like he was going to bolt away the second they made it through the doors outside.

"I'm not trying to put you on the spot," Hayden said, though he had a feeling he was doing just that. He stopped walking towards the door, knowing his moment was closing. "Just tell me one thing, okay?"

Shane stopped, too. Paused. Then nodded. Hayden looked around him to double check that they were still alone. They were.

"That other bag," he asked slowly, "That wasn't Lily's, right? That was another player's?"

Shane was fixed staring at a spot somewhere near Hayden's left elbow, all color drained from his face. After a beat, he nodded again.

Hayden found himself nodding as well, absorbing the confirmation. "Hey, man, I'm not going to judge," he said, dropping his voice even lower than it had been. "But it seems like a lot of risk. How did something like this even happen?"

Shane closed his eyes and sighed, speaking again at last. "It's complicated," he said, voice rough. "I never meant for it to turn into what it is, but we've never been able to stay away

from each other for long and it just... developed. From there.”

Shane’s face was fully downcast now, lashes shining with the kind of tears that he thought that no one would notice and that Hayden would never, ever acknowledge. Shit. This wasn’t just some hookup, this was something more.

He was in love with her.

Ah, fuck. Time to engage supportive best friend mode, even if this whole situation was upending Hayden’s entire image of who that best friend was.

“Hey, you don’t have to explain it to me,” he said, “Not until you’re ready. I just wanted to make sure I wasn’t misinterpreting things.”

Shane lifted his head again at last, looking surprised and appreciative and Hayden felt at least a little more like he was making the right choice.

“Wow, um,” Shane said, “I really thought you’d be freaking out about this more.”

“I’m not going to lie, I’m seriously questioning your decision making skills right now,” Hayden said, slapping a hand onto Shane’s shoulder. He laughed a little and Shane did as well, sniffing and swiping a finger at those nonexistent tears. “But you’re my best friend, and I’ve got your back. One hundred percent.”

The first thing that Shane said when Ilya answered the video call was, “I think Hayden knows I’m gay.”

“Good evening Ilya, so nice to see you Ilya,” Ilya droned.

“Hello Ilya, I’ve missed you,” Shane said sweetly, then repeated, flat, “I think Hayden knows I’m gay.”

Ilya blinked at him and then asked, “You *think*?”

“Neither of us outright said it,” Shane said, “But he asked me if the bag I brought belonged to another player, and I kind of confirmed it. And then he was being really supportive.” He leaned back against his headboard, settling in to spend his night chatting with his boyfriend.

“Yes?” Ilya said, “And I knew you were gay from first meeting. Pike should not get an award for this.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “It was nice to hear, that’s all. I mean he told me it was risky, but he wasn’t being bad about it.” He breathed a small laugh out through his nose. “Of course, I don’t think he knows it’s you.”

Some tension that he’d clearly been trying to hide bled away from Ilya’s shoulders. He leaned back against his own headboard, the chain resting on his bare chest catching in the low light.

“Well, if he tries to fight me next game, I know why.”

“He won’t,” Shane said, “It’s just nice to feel like someone else is in my corner, not only you and my parents.” Shane shrugged. “Makes me feel like more people could know about us. Not everyone, obviously. Just some. Hayden, his wife Jackie— he tells her just about everything.”

Clearly apprehensive, Ilya nodded slowly. “Svetlana wants to meet you. She figured out all of it from something Pike said.”

“To be fair, I didn’t tell him who he was meeting. He thought he was going to finally meet Lily. I might have broken his brain a little with all of this.” Ilya laughed, a rare and fleeting sight that Shane wanted to wrap around himself like a warm blanket. “Would you like it if I met Svetlana?”

“I would,” Ilya said, “Very much.”

“Then I’ll meet her,” Shane said. “Bring her to Scott Hunter’s charity event, then we’ll all be there. We can have drinks afterwards.”

Ilya groaned and threw his head back like the idea was causing him physical pain. “Fucking Scott Hunter,” he grumbled.

“It would be good for both of us to go,” Shane said, “If we’re starting our own charity soon, then we should be seen supporting at least a few others. We can control the narrative of how people start to see us together.” He had the whole thing mapped out in his mind, ever his mother’s son. “You can’t tell me you weren’t invited, players from almost every team will be there.”

“I was invited,” Ilya sniffed. “I don’t want to go.”

Shane looked at him levelly. “Ilya.”

“Shane,” Ilya said, echoing the same tone. “Why are we talking about that old man who should retire when I could be watching you touch yourself for me?”

Heat bloomed in Shane’s gut, but still he pushed back. “Is sex all you think about?”

“Sometimes I think about hockey,” Ilya said, “Which makes me think of you, which makes me think of sex.”

“So that’s a yes, then.”

“No.” Ilya smirked. “Sometimes when we are fucking I look at you and you make me think of hockey.”

“You’re ridiculous, you know that?” Shane asked, but he couldn’t help but smile along. “You won’t distract me that easily. Will I see you at the gala?”

“Hollander I am hard,” Ilya said in a voice that he would probably adamantly deny to be a pout, “Cannot make decisions like this.” To prove his point, he held the phone lower, allowing the camera to focus on his tented joggers.

“Hayden and his wife will be there,” Shane said, unmoved. “I bet Hunter’s boyfriend will be, too.”

Ilya groaned again. “If I agree, will you stop talking to me about Hunter and Pike and take your clothes off already?”

Instead of answering, Shane pulled his shirt up and over his head. He folded it in front of himself on his lap carefully, as slow as he could. He set the shirt to the side. Ilya watched his every motion through the small phone screen. Shane stopped there.

“Unfair,” Ilya said. “Okay, fine. I will go to stupid party.”

Shane slid his pants off, and then underwear, too, in an awkward one-handed way that gave Ilya little glimpses here and there. He folded these as well and set everything into a little pile. Then he propped his phone up against this pile so that Ilya could see more of him, get the angle he deserved.

“Good,” Ilya said, palming over his bulge. “Now show me what you would want me to do to you if I am there.”

“Well, you would start right here...” Shane said, running his hands up the insides of his thighs and setting to work giving Ilya a show.

“Hey, thank you for coming,” Scott Hunter said as he slipped away from another conversation to greet Hayden, Jackie, and Shane. “Means a lot.”

“Thanks for having us,” Hayden said, “You’ve met my wife Jackie, right?”

“Of course,” Hunter said, nodding to her in greeting, “Though I think she was your girlfriend at the time, congrats by the way.”

“Thanks, and congratulations to you on all of this,” Jackie said, gesturing around to the party in full swing around them. “Really great speech. Seems like a big deal this year.”

Hunter laughed. “I may have drawn a little extra attention to myself this year.”

“Maybe just a little,” another voice said, and then Hunter’s boyfriend—the one they all recognized from TV—was there at his side. “Hi, I’m Christopher, but everyone calls me Kip. Yes, really.”

“Kip, this is Hayden and Jackie Pike,” Hunter introduced, “And Shane Hollander.”

“Good to meet you,” Shane said politely. He looked like he wanted to say more, but buried it in a sip of his champagne instead.

“Good to meet you!” Kip echoed, sounding just a bit starstruck. “Sorry, this is still so crazy to me sometimes, like *everyone* is here. I’m pretty sure I just walked past Ilya Rozanov housing canapés over by the bar.”

Hayden saw a jerky smile twitch over Shane's face and then disappear into a smooth mask at the mention of Rozanov.

"See I told you you did a good job with those," Hunter said, nudging at Kip with his elbow, and then explained, "Kip picked out the entire menu."

"I like to think I have good taste," Kip said, nudging his boyfriend back. Hayden and Jackie laughed, but Shane's attention had drifted elsewhere. Hunter zeroed in on it.

"Flying solo tonight, Hollander?" he asked.

Shane was zoning out, scanning the room the way he did sometimes like he was searching for something. Or someone. He startled and then turned back to their conversation. "Uh, yeah. Just me," he said.

"What about Lily?" Jackie asked. Hayden gave her a quick, urgent look, and she sent one right back that said *I still think you're wrong about this, Hayden, you can't assume the worst without knowing all of the pieces.*

Shane, interestingly enough, didn't seem too fazed by the question. "She was busy," he said vaguely. His eyes were distant again, fixed on something across the room. There were too many people mingling about for Hayden to see what. Or who. "Sorry, I see someone—I mean, I should go say hi. To people." He nodded awkwardly. "Good to meet you, Kip. Scott." And then he was off into the moving crowd.

"He's always like that," Hunter stage whispered to Kip. "It's not you."

"Oh thank god," Kip breathed out a long sigh.

"Just Shane being Shane," Jackie said fondly. "So, Kip, I have been dying to ask: that kiss, did you have any idea he was planning that?"

"Not at all!" Kip laughed. "I was almost as surprised as anyone else."

"I'm not great at doing things by halves," Hunter said with a little self deprecating chuckle.

"Understatement," Kip said, taking to a gossiping tone, "This is the man who practically asked me to move in with him after a single date."

"Oh my god, Hayden was the same way," Jackie gushed.

"Really thought I was about to scare you away," Hayden said, reaching an arm to rest around her waist. "Glad I didn't."

"Well," Hunter said, slipping an arm around Kip's shoulders as well, "When you know, you know."

Only Shane could have convinced him to come to this, the most boring night he had ever spent around so many hockey players. Ilya had to admit that Shane was right; they could be

seen supporting a charity, could be seen together even, getting along the way they had at the All Stars weekend, and it would all support the framework of their story later. Coming to this event also meant supporting Scott Hunter and all that he stood for as the first out player in the MLH, showed everyone which side of the dividing line Ilya stood on.

He knew that he owed something to Hunter for being the first, though he'd rather let a Zamboni drive over his balls than admit that to anyone. He was the reason that the idea of being out didn't make Ilya's vision narrow into a tiny, terrifying pinprick. He was the reason that Shane could start planning for a future where they told the world about their relationship. He was the reason Ilya had agreed to go to the cottage.

But he still didn't have to like the guy.

"You can't avoid him all night," Svetlana said from his left.

"Who, Hunter?" Ilya asked, *"Of course I can."*

"Not Hunter," she said. *"Jane."*

She eyed him until he caved under her gaze. *"What if you don't like him?"*

"You like him too much for me to imagine that could be possible."

He stalled for a while longer before saying, *"I'm not avoiding him."*

She sipped delicately at her drink. *"Then it won't bother you that he's walking up to us now?"*

Shane was indeed cutting his way through the crowd towards them. "Rozanov," he said in greeting when he got close.

"Hollander," Ilya said back. He kept himself carefully contained, but couldn't help being happy to see Shane. He looked damn good in that suit.

"Svetlana Vetrova," she said, and held out a hand for him to shake lightly. "I've heard so much."

"Good things, I hope," he said.

"Of course," she said, then leaned into Ilya and said in Russian, *"He's even cuter in person."*

Ilya allowed himself to feel smug for that.

"You have me wishing I could speak Russian," Shane said. It was clear he was trying to keep his voice neutral but it carried with it that little spark of jealousy that made Ilya want to grab him tight and show him exactly who he belonged to.

"I'm sure Ilya could teach you," Svetlana said. "Private lessons."

"I am good teacher," Ilya said the corner of Shane's lips curved up. It was nice and also strange to be able to flirt like this in so public a space, with no one even paying them any

attention beyond noticing Hollander and Rozanov were interacting, all because there was a beautiful woman at Ilya's side.

It wasn't enough, though. He wanted more, he always wanted more.

"Oh shit."

Scott and Kip had moved on to mingle with other guests and the crowd had parted enough that Hayden finally caught sight of where Shane had disappeared to. He was over near the bar. He wasn't alone.

"What?" Jackie asked, following his line of sight, "So Shane's talking to Rozanov. I'm telling you, they're friends even if they pretend not to be."

"That's *Lily*," he whispered, "Next to Rozanov."

"Oh," she said, taking in all three of them, "Shit."

"He's going to get himself killed." Hayden watched on. Should he go over there and diffuse things? Cause a diversion?

"Looks like an okay conversation," Jackie reasoned, "Rozanov actually looks kind of happy to see Shane if you ask me."

"Rozanov looks ready to eat Shane," Hayden protested.

"He always looks like that." She waved her hand in an attempt to dismiss his worries. Then she considered more. "Hm. Maybe they're a throuple."

"A what?"

"You know, like an open relationship."

Hayden looked at her as though she was about to sprout a second head. "Those are two of the most competitive guys I've ever met. You really think they'd share?"

"Wouldn't be the weirdest thing to come up in the group chat." She shrugged. "Oh, actually it looks like she's leaving?"

It's true, she was stepping away from Shane and Rozanov and heading towards one of the exits. The two men continued to have what seems to be a stilted conversation. Both kept glancing around like they were looking for somewhere better to be. Then, a few minutes later, Shane stepped away from Rozanov with a nod. Hayden didn't even have time to relax before he realized that Shane was following in the same direction as Lily. Rozanov leaned back against the bar and continued to drink his drink like he had no cares in the world.

Hayden knew that they should be interacting more with the rest of the attendees, many of whom were longtime friends and acquaintances, but this was rapidly turning into a situation

in need of his full attention. Seriously, Shane? Sneaking off to meet up with your secret lover here of all places? Hayden never thought he'd see the day.

And then—

Oh, fuck.

Rozanov was leaving, too.

“Oh my god, he's actually going to kill Shane,” Hayden breathed.

“Hayd,” Jackie said gently, “If you're wrong about this...”

“But if I'm right—” Hayden shook his head to clear away a few terrible thoughts. This had just gotten way, way too real. “Shane needs me.”

And then he, too, took off for the exit that led to a back hallway.

The gala was being held in the lowest few floors of a stately building with huge windows that looked out towards the Manhattan skyline. Everything about it was elegant, even this hall that led past the bathrooms and a kitchen where the caterers bustled away dishing up party food. Just as Hayden stepped into this hallway, he saw Ilya Rozanov disappear down a few stairs and around a corner and he hurried after him.

When Hayden turned this corner, it was to another long hall, this one much more utilitarian and industrial. It sloped downward and away, running under, Hayden assumed, the ornate hall above. It was deserted except for a few carts stacked high with spare plates and linens and Shane and Rozanov standing close together at the far end. Hayden couldn't hear them from here, but they looked like they were quietly arguing. Before Hayden could react or get any closer, Rozanov grabbed Shane by the lapels and shoved him through a doorway.

The door slammed shut behind them. Hayden took off running.

When he reached the door, he barely paused to think before slamming his shoulder into it. It resisted for just a moment before giving way.

“Get your hands... off of... him.” Hayden's voice died in his throat as he took in the scene he had burst in on.

Rozanov's hands were certainly on Shane. All over him, in fact.

They were in a narrow room where spare event chairs were lined up against each other in neat rows. One chair clattered to the ground from where it had been holding the door shut (ineffectively against his shoulder check). Along one wall, there were several tall shelves where there were more linens and candles and assorted centerpiece materials. It was against this shelf that Shane and Rozanov had been clinging onto each other, Rozanov with one hand still gripping at Shane's suit coat and the other tangled into his dark hair, and Shane with his hands clutching tight around Rozanov's back. They sprang apart the moment they heard him come in, but he had almost definitely seen their mouths on each other, too

“Hayden!” Shane yelled, wiping at his mouth as though that were any less suspicious. “Shit. Fuck! Okay, this isn’t what it looks like.”

Hayden continued to stare at both of them, brain refusing to work. Rozanov was looking anywhere but back at him. When he finally managed it, the only words that Hayden could get out were, “But what about Lily?”

Shane’s face scrunched in confusion. “Lily?”

“The girl you were with earlier?” Hayden asked weakly, “Curly hair?”

“Svetlana?” Rozanov asked. “No, she is friend. Stepped out for cigarette.”

“So you aren’t fighting over her?” Hayden wasn’t sure he had ever felt so dazed and surprised.

Shane’s expression opened in shock. “Okay, uh, then this is really not what it looks like.” He ran a hand through his hair, smoothing it. Rozanov looked briefly annoyed. “I thought you knew that I’m gay?”

No, actually it was possible to be more surprised. “You’re gay?!”

“Keep your—!” Shane cut himself off and then started again more quietly. “Keep your voice down!” he hissed.

Mortified, Hayden looked left and right behind him down the long hallway. Blessedly, it was empty still. He stepped all the way into the small space and closed the door behind him. “I don’t mean it like that,” he assured, “I just... I thought. Uh. I thought you were sleeping with Rozanov’s girlfriend.” Saying it now sounded so goddamn stupid. Hayden wasn’t sure how he’d gotten it all so wrong.

This confession was met with silence. He wasn’t prepared for it to be broken by the sound of Ilya Rozanov giggling. Shane glared over at him.

“No, no, I’m sorry,” he said, waving a hand but doing little to stifle his laughter. “I’m trying to picture it... Shane and Svetlana...” He broke into a fresh wave of laughter, which he hid badly behind his hand.

Shane glared harder. “You think I couldn’t be with her if I wanted to?”

“Hollander,” Rozanov said flatly, “She would eat you alive.”

“Okay,” Hayden broke into their bizarre back and forth, “Can we go back to the part where someone explains anything to me?”

The two shared a long look, something unspoken passing between them. Then Rozanov made a little nudging gesture and Shane sighed.

“Hayden,” he said, “Ilya and I are together.”

Hayden thought about everyone possible meaning of that word and then settled on one.

“I think I get it,” he said slowly. “Years of being rivals, there’s tension there, you realize you both like men, you get together to blow off steam.”

“Something like that,” Rozanov said, sounding smug.

“No, it’s more than that,” Shane said. “Well, it was years of that but now it’s more.” Years. Jesus. “Ilya is my boyfriend.”

Hayden looked between the two of them, waiting for the punchline. None came. “*Rozanov* is your boyfriend?”

“Why do I feel like you’re more offended by the Rozanov part than the boyfriend part?” Shane asked. Hayden tactfully did not answer to tell him it was because this was fucking crazy and Rozanov was possibly the craziest choice of boyfriend on top of all of it. “We’re not coming out to everyone yet, but I was planning on telling you soon. Especially since I thought you already half knew.” He laughed a little, nervously, and Hayden did as well. “You can’t tell anyone, not yet.”

“I won’t,” he said, then clarified, “Except Jackie?”

“Of course,” Shane agreed easily, “No one except Jackie.”

“You are not bad guy,” Rozanov said, and then ruined it by adding, “Just bad player.”

“Oh shut the hell up, Rozanov,” Hayden said without any real heat. “This is insane. I can’t believe I thought you were sleeping with your rival’s girlfriend.”

“You’re right, is crazy,” Rozanov agreed.

“Why is that so crazy?” Shane asked, glaring at his— holy shit— boyfriend.

“I am not saying would not be hot,” Rozanov said innocently, “I am saying she would make you cry. When we used to have sex she is even teaching me tricks.” He grinned a sharklike grin. “Sometimes I use them on you.”

All right that was just way too much information for one night. Hayden expected Shane to say something, like tell Rozanov that he was being too much. Instead when he saw the look on his face—

Well.

That was Faceoff Shane. No, wait. That was *Jealous* Shane.

“I could show you a new one if you like,” Rozanov continued. A spark lit in Shane’s eyes. Wow. It was like Hayden wasn’t even there anymore.

“Okay, I’m out,” Hayden said, fumbling for the door knob and then taking a quick glance into the hallway to make sure it was clear.

“We’ll be back up soon,” Shane said, not taking his eyes off of Rozanov.

“Give us...” Rozanov looked Shane up and down slowly. “Eight minutes.”

Hayden didn’t need to be told twice that that was his cue to leave.

“Everything okay?” Jackie asked as soon as he returned to her side, sure that the events of the last few minutes were written all over his face.

“Well,” Hayden said, “No one’s cheating on anyone.”

“See? What did I tell you?” she said. “So what was going on then?”

What was really going on was that Shane Hollander was fucking Ilya Fucking Rozanov. Had been for a long time. They were doing god knows what below them all right now, would probably come back upstairs soon, stagger their entrances and go on with their nights as if nothing were happening.

Hayden snagged a new glass of champagne from a passing waiter and took a healthy sip before he replied.

“I’ll tell you when we get home.”

Chapter End Notes

I loved all the love on the first chapter! You are so wonderful!!

These characters are fun as hell to write, I for sure will be indulging any other little plot ideas that drift into my brain

Bye for now!

EDIT: actually I wasn’t done, this now has [a sequel](#) currently being posted

Leave a comment or kudos here if you liked this one! It really means a lot 💖

Feel free to go find me on [tumblr](#) where I exist for short bursts and disappear intermittently

Works inspired by this one

[Missing You \(Before You Even Leave\)](#) by [Verdant_Words](#)

[Miscommunications \(Lead to Fallout\)](#) by [thrilll_a](#)

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