

connecting the dots

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connecting the dots

by [defcontwo](#)

Summary

“Holy fucking shit, it all makes sense now. Lily is a dominatrix.”

Or: Hayden is connecting the dots. Maybe.

Notes

This idea gripped me and wouldn't let me go.

Hayden is a straightish married hockey bro with four kids. He's doing his best but we do not share the same opinions on sexual liberation.

At the end of the day, the whole thing's Comeau's fault anyways. He's the one who gave Hayden the idea in the first place. Sure, maybe he didn't mean to, because he was talking shit about some girl and also 'cause Comeau's the type of guy who'd probably get a little weird about it if he knew Hayden was sitting around, trying to puzzle out Shane Hollander's sex life. Honestly, who gives a shit, it's not gay to want your best friend to get laid every once in a while, but *whatever*, Hayden thinks, to the invisible Comeau that he's arguing with inside of his head.

That's not the point of this story.

Let's track back.

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"You remember that girl Claire back in Rimouski?" Comeau's voice calls out to Drapeau halfway across the locker room, a private conversation made public, which means that whatever this is, it's something that Comeau wants to brag about to the whole team. "Huge teacher's pet but man, what a rack, right?"

Ah yes, it's that type of brag. The "remember the good ole days of our Junior Hockey conquests" brag. No wonder the Oceanic never won the Memer with these two knuckleheads on the squad. It seems like all they ever did was go to parties and terrorize the local teenaged girl population.

Drapeau rolls his eyes, not turning away from his stall. "No way you fucked Claire, Commy. That girl was way too uptight to dick around with a hockey player. I should know, I tried."

"That's where you're wrong," Comeau sing-songs. "A girl like that, she's always the biggest freak in the sheets. The more uptight, the better. You just gotta know how to press the right buttons and then before you know it, you're slapping her around and she's calling you daddy in the back of her mom's mini van."

Hayden heaves a sigh, turning to Shane because he can always be relied on for a small, shared eye-roll in moments like these, but when he turns to the stall on his left, he finds Shane frozen in place, a curious frown in place. He looks, for a brief, blink-and-you-miss-it moment, well and truly *shaken* and then just as quickly, his lips thin out, his expression goes blank and he huffs, tugging the strap of his duffle over his shoulder and making for the door.

"I think I'm gonna skip this comedy routine," Shane says, voice loud enough to carry, and it shuts Comeau right the hell up because at the end of the day, when you have a game later that day and the captain has something to say, you shut up and listen. "Try and get some rest, guys. We've got a spot in the playoffs to clinch later. We have to stay focused."

Drapeau snorts, tossing an elbow guard at Comeau's face. "You heard the capitaine, dickhead."

Comeau just turns and flips Drapeau off. Hayden catches hold of J.J.'s equally exasperated face on the other side of the locker room and this time, doesn't hold back the smirk. J.J. holds up his index finger and his thumb, like he's measuring something *very*, very small and Hayden doesn't bother smothering the cackle that erupts from the back of his throat.

"What?" Comeau says, turning around, both eyebrows raised, a flush rising in his giant block-head.

Hayden holds up both hands in surrender, still with the same shit-eating grin on his face, so Comeau just shrugs, dropping his shoulders and inventively, flipping Hayden off as he goes.

And then J.J. is dragging Hayden into some fresh gossip about Toronto and their weird thing with amulets, which then spirals into a whole long-ass argument about whether or not buying a rabbit's foot for luck is bullshit or not, and then before Hayden knows it, he's in his car on his way home, and that whole strange moment with Shane almost slips his mind completely.

Almost.

Hayden flips on his blinker to make a left turn onto his block, having made the trip back to Laval on autopilot, when all of a sudden, the words start to crash into each other, overlapping and merging in his mind until they form a complete picture.

The more uptight, the better and a girl like that, she's always the biggest freak in the sheets chase each other around in a loop in his brain. And then wait, stop, don't forget to pause on that brief moment where Shane looked honestly, truly freaked the fuck out in a way that Hayden's never really seen from before except for when...

Well, duh.

Except for when Hayden asks about Lily.

Holy fucking shit, it all makes sense now. Lily is a dominatrix.

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The thing is, Shane's always been a private guy and Hayden gets that. It's not exactly uncommon for guys like Shane to keep to themselves. The whole "top draft pick, boy child hope of a nation" bullshit.

There's a lot of eyes on Shane all of the time; coach is harder on Shane than he is on anyone else and it's because Shane is better than all the rest of them. It creates distance between Shane and the rest of the guys, right from the start, but Hayden doesn't take it personally. Shane has to be perfect because it's what everyone's expecting.

So what if he's tight-lipped about his personal life? Any girl that he dates would get torn apart on Twitter, there'd be some stupid fucking argument about whether she's good for his game or not. The way Hayden hears it, that new kid out in Vegas is exactly the same, so he figures that's just how it is, when you go number one or number two in the draft, and

everyone starts looking at you like you're a statue above the rest of us. That's gotta fuck with your head, right?

Rozanov is the freak for embracing it the way he has, for not giving a single shit what anyone thinks of him in the media. Hayden bets he doesn't work half as hard as Shane does, acting the way he does.

So yeah, whatever. Shane's squirrely and private about the girls he's wheeling. He stammers and blushes when Hayden cracks a joke about Lily. Who the fuck cares, right?

It's just, it did start to feel a little weird, the longer it went on. After you make a guy the godfather to your kids, it's like, come on now - you're really not gonna tell me anything about your hot dominatrix in Boston?

Sure, maybe she's not the type of girl to take home to Yuna Hollander, but don't let the litter of kids fool you, Hayden Pike's an open-minded guy. He's not an idiot, he knows that maybe he reads as a little ...traditional, what with the babies and the house in the suburbs by twenty-four, but hey, different strokes for different folks, right? Sure, he's wondered a time or two if maybe Shane could do better, if maybe one day he'll want to find a girl to bring home to Yuna Hollander, but in the meantime, any lingering doubts that Hayden might've had were obliterated entirely by the Great Boston Snowstorm of 2015. Halfway through the game, the skies opened up and dumped over thirty inches of snow over the city, trapping the entire Montreal Metros squad in Bean Town, and right after a shitty late night loss to the Raiders no less.

The entire team stayed holed up in their hotel for the whole 48 hours, dicking around and setting up elaborate drinking games in the hallway.

The entire team except Shane, who disappeared right after the post-game press and reappeared right before their plane to Tampa Bay, looking tired but loose-limbed, like all of the strings that keep him held up so rigidly suddenly got snapped clean off. They land three hours before their game against Tampa Bay, with barely any fucking time to prepare, and then fucking Shane Hollander, the legend, goes out there and scores a dick trick like it's nothing.

So yeah, okay. The secrecy is weird and Shane is weird about it, but it's fine. Hayden can be chill about it. They could all hang out together some time, maybe have Lily over for dinner with him and Jackie. It's not like she's gonna bring the whips and chains with her, right?

It just doesn't make any sense to him, the way Shane is still, somehow, lying about it.

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"Honey. Do you have a minute?"

Hayden looks up from where he's slicing up apples into small, child-sized bites, surrounded by a veritable army of child-size Tupperware containers and peanut butter packets and individually packaged grapes. He's started taking over for Jackie now that she's heading into

her sixth month of pregnancy, which means that honestly, not only does he not have a minute, he's not even sure if he has a *second*.

But Jackie is standing there, looking so round and glowing and gorgeous, with flushed cheeks and those bright blonde locks of hers and honestly, insanely large tits this time around, holy shit. What's Hayden gonna do, say no?

So he shrugs, setting his knife down to the side. "Sure, Jacks, what's up?"

Jackie stands there for a few more seconds, opening and closing her mouth, like she didn't expect him to give in so easily. There's a furrow between her brow, her well-manicured hands clasping tightly onto the countertop. "So, uh. I was just looking up some ideas for our next vacation on our laptop and going through our past search history to try and get ideas, so uh...."

Hayden brightens. "Oh! You think the kids could behave themselves in Hawaii?"

"Hayden," Jackie says sternly, catching hold of his gaze now. She holds up a hand, like she's about to tick fingers off a list. "In 2013, you started googling about BDSM." Jackie stares at him with a heavy, pointed gaze, ticking off another finger. "In 2014, you googled some more. Last year, you went down a rabbit hole trying to find documentaries on BDSM." Now, she blows out a breath, ticking off a final finger. "A couple times a year, you google 'Boston dominatrix how to find.' So I'm gonna ask you again, Hayden. Is there something you need to tell me?"

Hayden goes cold all over, then feels himself flush. He holds up his hands like he's trying to calm down a spooked horse or something, like Jackie will turn around and run out the front door if he doesn't explain this fast enough. "Okay, that looks bad, but I promise, it has a super innocent explanation."

Jackie just crooks an eyebrow at him; it's deeply judgmental.

"I just wanted to support Shane," Hayden blurts out. "Cause, you know. I'm pretty sure that Lily is, you know. Well. That. Like she has to be a pro, right? That's why he's so uptight about it. So every once in a while, I, uh...just wanna try and understand it, okay?"

Jackie lifts her hands up from the counter and buries her face in her hands. Her shoulders start shaking and for a hot minute, Hayden is absolutely terrified that he just made his wife cry, but then she lets out a loud yelp of laughter, and no, he should've known better.

She's laughing at him.

"It's not that crazy of a theory, okay?" Hayden cries out, now feeling unexpectedly defensive. "He's got that whole, uptight control freak thing going for him, you know? Except for *right after* he meets up with this Lily chick."

Jackie presses her lips together, like she's trying to erase a smile, or hold in her laughter. "So, that's your big theory, huh? That Shane...what, goes to some BDSM dungeon in Boston and meets up with Mistress Lily?"

“Yes! That’s exactly what I’m saying!” Hayden doesn’t think it’s fair, the way Jackie’s cheeks are flushed bright red from holding back her laughter. She shouldn’t get to look so hot when she’s making fun of him.

She folds her arms over her chest, now. “You really think *that’s* what’s going on with Shane?”

The skepticism is heavy in her voice; Hayden frowns, matching her body language. “You’ve got a different theory, huh?”

“No, I guess not.” Jackie drops her hands to her hips, breathing out a sigh. She looks like there’s something else she’s not saying, Hayden can tell from the way her lip twitches.

But Jackie at six months pregnant is not the time and place to press the issue. She’ll say what she wants to say, when she wants to say it. He’s not starting any fights with her in this condition, he’s made that mistake once before and he will not be making it again.

“Sooooo, Hawaii?” Hayden prods, plucking the knife up off the counter and resuming his chopping.

“For your next bye week?” Jackie props her hip up against the counter and smiles brightly at him, her matching sweat suit pulling tightly over the soft curves of her very pregnant body. Shane’s sex life is immediately banished from Hayden’s mind, quickly replaced by the mental image of his gloriously hot and pregnant wife in a bikini on a beach in Hawaii.

“Hell yeah, babe,” Hayden says, chopping with more vigor. “Maybe we can pick one of those places with those crazy pools at the hotel, you know, the ones with a lazy river.”

“Sold,” Jackie says, coming around the corner of the kitchen to press a kiss to his cheek.

“Apple slice?”

Hayden turns and reels Jackie in by the hip, holding up an apple slice for her to eat, and then they’re making out in the kitchen, which is exactly how they wound up with the fourth kid on the way in the first place. It’s several hours later by the time they’ve got the whole counter covered in neatly organized, prepped containers of fruit and by that point, Shane’s slipped his mind completely.

There’s so much else going on, Hayden forgets all about it.

And then Rose Landry happens.

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See, here’s the thing about Rose Landry: she seems perfect for Shane. She’s already famous, so she gets it, the way Shane’s life in Montreal is like a fishbowl sometimes. Honestly, she’s way more famous than he is, which is kinda blowing Hayden’s mind, that he’s seen her in about a dozen movies and now she’s going out to romantic candlelit dinners with his best friend. She seems smart, she’s talented as hell, she knows hockey, and she’s drop-dead gorgeous.

Like seriously, Rose Landry, what a total fucking smoke show and on top of all that, she's definitely the type of gal that you can bring home to Yuna Hollander.

It's just, you know. He expected Shane to seem happier about it, right? He's going out on dates, he's going to clubs with the team, he's loosening up, he's having a couple of beers – he's doing all the things that people expect from a famous, generational talent like Shane Hollander, especially one so established, one who's already standing on the other side of back-to-back Cup wins. Record breaking wins? Check. Brand sponsorships out the wazoo? Check and check. And now here's the movie star girlfriend, just to round the whole perfect picture out.

The picture is too perfect, of course. It had to be, right? That's the first thing that pops into his head when Hayden catches Shane pulling up his text conversation with Lily a time or two, grabbing hold of his phone and angling it away from the others, scrolling through the chat history and pausing, his thumb tapping over the glass, like he's mulling over whether he should send a message. And yeah, at first, Hayden gets kinda steamed about it because come on, man, Shane Hollander is not the type of guy who goes around cheating on his movie star girlfriend. That's the kind of shit Comeau gets up to, you know, in the alternate universe where Comeau is capable of landing a bonafide movie star.

Except, Hayden never catches Shane *texting* Lily; he only catches Shane scrolling through their messages with a horrible hang-dog expression, all mournful and heartbroken, like he's walking around with part of his heart pulled clean out of his chest.

It's the first time that it actually hits home for Hayden. That whoever Lily is, Shane is real deal, stick a fork in him 'cause he's done, head over fucking heels in love with the woman. When Rose Landry fades into the background alongside half-hearted excuses about conflicting schedules and compatibility, Hayden's probably the only person in the world who's not surprised about it.

When texts from Lily start popping up on Shane's phone again, he's even less surprised about that.

But nothing else changes. Shane is in love, but still, after everything, he doesn't talk about her at all. Whose fault is that, Hayden wonders – hers or Shane's? He wishes there was some way for him to know, so he can pick a side, so he can finally figure out how to help out his best friend.

There's a voice inside his head that sounds suspiciously like Jackie that's urging him to just *talk* to Shane about it but Jackie doesn't get it, she doesn't see the way Shane clams up every time Hayden so much as hints at it.

Rose Landry seemed like a real seismic shift to the status quo but really, she didn't last all that long, in the grand scheme of things, and now that it's over, now that she's gone, the dust has settled and they're right back to where they started from.

Shane plays hockey. Shane texts Lily. Shane still won't talk about her at all.

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From: Hollzy

Hey, are you free after practice tomorrow?

To: Hollzy

Define free. I have three kids and a newborn, man, free is relative.

From: Hollzy

Heh. Can I come over to yours? Nothing crazy, just want to talk to you about something.

To: Hollzy

Yeah dude. You may have to change a diaper or two tho.

From: Hollzy

Haha. No problem, you know I don't mind.

Hayden pockets his cell, wiping sweaty hands off on the soft, worn-in cotton of his sweatpants. It's not an unusual text, is the thing. Sure, maybe it would've been more like Shane to sneak in a quick joke about how he's more than used to taking on babysitting duties at the Pike household.

It's just, he wants to *talk* about something. Shane never wants to talk about anything unless it's hockey and he sure as shit doesn't need to set aside a special time to talk about hockey. Which means that probably this isn't about hockey.

Shane's different, these days. Ever since coming back from the off-season break, there's this lightness to him that Hayden's never seen before. He's happier. Smiles quicker. He checks his phone a hell of a lot more than he used to, which honestly, considering how often he's always texting Lily, is really saying something.

Obviously today is the day that they're finally gonna talk about Lily, and Hayden? Hayden is sweating. He keeps running over supportive talking points in his head, afraid that he's gonna fuck it up and say something judgmental by accident. He wouldn't mean to, it's just, even after all these years and his rather lengthy attempts at research, he doesn't *get* it. But whatever, he doesn't have to get it.

Shane is happy. That's what counts. Shane is happy and Shane is — Shane is already here, judging by the tentative knock at the front door.

Hayden strides to the front door, swinging it open. He aims for casual and misses it by about a fucking kilometer. "Hollzy! What's good!"

Shane's eyebrow furrows together but he steps through the door anyways, shooting Hayden a small, furtive smile. "Hey, man. Thanks for having me over," he says, his fingers tucked nervously into his belt loops.

Okay, so they're both gonna be weird about this. Probably Hayden should've seen that coming but anyways, this is better. Maybe. At least they're in this weird ass boat together.

“You want a ginger ale?” Hayden offers, turning tail and running for the kitchen, because he doesn’t know what to do with his face right now. “Jackie’s thinking of ordering sushi from that place you like, she can’t get enough of it now that she’s not pregnant anymore.”

“Oh shit, yeah. I mean, I don’t have to stay for dinner, but...that sounds nice. If you’re okay with it,” Shane says, and okay, so that’s even weirder. Shane’s an anxious guy but since when does he think he’s not gonna be welcome to *dinner*?

Hayden grabs a fridge-chilled ginger ale and pushes it across the kitchen counter to Shane. This is a familiar spot for them; talking shit across the kitchen counter, Shane with a ginger ale, Hayden with a beer or two. He can’t even count the number of times that the two of them have stood here, exactly like this, over the last decade or so.

Jackie’s on her way to pick up the kids from daycare and somehow, miraculously, Hayden managed to get the baby down for a nap, so now it’s just the two of them plus the baby monitor standing proudly next to Hayden’s beer. Maybe he should not be having a beer right now but whatever, the energy in the room is fucking off right now.

They’ve hung out like this a million times and yet somehow, it’s never felt quite this fraught.

Hayden pops the cap off his favorite IPA and takes a deep swing. He can be normal. He’s gonna be so fucking normal about this. “So, man. What’s up? You wanted to talk about something.”

“Yeah, I guess I should just...” Shane starts, pulling the tab back and forth on his ginger ale nervously, the motion making a small, strange creaking sound in the sudden quiet of the kitchen. He heaves out a sigh, dropping his hands to the marble countertop.

“I’m here for you, dude,” Hayden says. “Whatever you think you can’t say, I promise you, Hollzy, you can say it here.”

“Kinda sounds like you already think you know what I’m gonna say,” Shane says with a huff, raising an eyebrow.

Hayden just shrugs, taking another sip of his beer. “I have a theory.”

Shane presses both hands flat to the counter top, taking another deep breath. “Okay, uh. Well. Here we go. I’m uh. So, I’m gay.”

Hayden pauses, letting the words hit him. It takes a few seconds for the meaning to sink in and when it finally does, he fucking freezes. “Wait. What?”

Shane pulls the tab clean off his can of ginger ale. “I’m gay, Hayden.”

Hayden nods once, and then he nods again. He takes another sip of beer. “Okay, cool. That’s what I thought you said. That’s, uh...okay! Not what I expected but that’s cool, man! I’m, uh. Wait, holy shit....”

He pinches the bridge of his nose; right now, in the moment, he can so easily picture the skeptical, slightly bemused expression on Jackie’s face, back when he first explained to her

his little theory. She fucking *knew* and she must've thought he was the biggest fucking idiot on the planet, holy shit. They'll be so lucky if the kids inherit her brains, wow. "That, uh. That makes a lot of sense, actually. Shit. Okay. Good for you, man. Wait - is Lily actually a *dude*?"

Shane's eyes are wide, first with shock and then with — oh yeah, there it is, there's the amusement and once the dust settles, Hayden already knows he's gonna get chirped to hell and back for this.

"Yeah, uh," Shane starts, letting out a small, disbelieving laugh. He takes a casual sip of his ginger ale, shaking his head like he can't believe how this is going. Hayden can relate. "Lily is a guy. He's, uh. Also...not out, so. We're still kinda figuring out how that works for us, but...yeah, we're together now."

Hayden frowns. "Wait, what do you mean now? What were you before?"

Shane just gives Hayden a flat look, raising both eyebrows. Oh right. Uh. Yeah. It's not like it's some great big surprise to Hayden that Shane and Lily have spent the greater part of the last decade hooking up whenever they could. It's just now he has to rearrange the facts in his brain. Lily is a *man*. Shane Hollander, generational talent, has spent the last decade having an illicit sex affair with a *man*.

Shit. No wonder he was so fucking squirrely about it.

"Hey, man, just so you know — this doesn't, like, change anything about us. Or it doesn't have to. You're my best friend, Hollz," Hayden says, already mentally re-writing the speech that he's had prepared for just this exact moment. "And uh, I'm pretty sure Jackie already figured it out and was just waiting for me to catch up, so. You're all good here."

Shane goes still, his expression pinching inwards. "Jackie figured it out?"

"Well, maybe," Hayden explains in a rush. "Or at least she knew my theory was bullshit, I guess. She never actually said."

Shane relaxes only slightly, the tension in his shoulders sinking by just a few centimeters or so. Hayden can't imagine carrying around a secret like that for all these years — shit, no wonder Shane's so fucking uptight.

"What, uh..." Shane reaches for his ginger ale, then clearly thinks better of it, before grabbing hold of the edge of his sweatshirt strings, clenching the small metal piece at the end between two teeth. After ten years on the road, Hayden is very well versed in Shane's tells. He's nervous, still. "What was *your* theory?"

Hayden opens his mouth, then immediately flushes. Fuck. He really didn't think this through but that's his best buddy standing right there, looking like he's about to shit a brick. Maybe Hayden's gotta embarrass himself a little here, even the score a little. He swipes at a fine layer of condensation around the edge of his beer bottle and then sighs, blowing out air from the side of his mouth. "So, it's possible that I, uh. I kinda thought maybe Lily was like, a dominatrix that you hired?"

Shane stares at him blankly.

“It’s Comeau’s fault, for the record,” Hayden says in a rush.

“You were gossiping about my sex life with *Comeau*?” Shane’s voice tilts up, incredulous.

“No, no, no,” Hayden blurts. “Fuck no. It’s just, you know....”

“No, Hayden, I don’t know,” Shane says impatiently, his cheeks bright red from the blush that’s risen across them. “Please explain.”

“He was talking shit about some girl he hooked up with back in Rimouski,” Hayden says, throwing up his hands in defeat. “About how like, she was some goody two-shoes smart girl and how girls like that are always freaky in bed, and then you...you got this weird fucking look on your face — “ Here, Shane grimaces, his expression going through several stages of grief. Hayden pops up on the balls of his feet, feeling strangely vindicated. “Like that! Exactly like that! And I thought - I don’t know, I guess I thought maybe there’s something to it, alright?”

“I think I need a beer,” Shane says blankly. “Can I get a beer?”

Hayden wordlessly reaches back, grabbing another IPA from the fridge and popping the cap off, then carefully sliding it across the countertop. Shane takes a healthy swig, his lips twisting together with distaste. He hates IPAs, but he keeps drinking it anyways.

“Ugh,” Shane finally says, once half the bottle is gone. “Well. Lily is, uh. He’s just a guy. He’s also...an athlete. And that’s all you’re getting out of me for now. It was bad enough when my dad walked in on us at the cottage this summer.”

Hayden almost chokes on his beer. “David walked in on you — “

“Not — not like *that*,” Shane says hastily. “But we were kissing and uh, not wearing a lot. It was...definitely headed that way, so.”

“You know, Hollzy,” Hayden says, putting on a wise dad voice, because he has to make a joke, here, has to get them back to solid ground. “What’s that saying — if you can’t talk about the sex you’re having, you shouldn’t be having it?”

Shane lets out a sharp burst of laughter. “Sorry, man, that ship sailed a long time ago for me.”

Hayden shrugs. “Well, I was right, anyways. You do play better after you get laid.”

“Shut the fuck up, Hayds,” Shane says, casually flipping him off. He’s relaxed now. That’s probably partially from the beer, sure, but there’s an ease in the line of Shane’s shoulders, in the openness of his expression, that Hayden’s not sure he’s ever seen before.

Huh. Shane Hollander, everyone. A gay legend, apparently.

“Soooo,” Hayden says, dragging out the vowels, smirking a little now. He likes this new world, the one where he gets to give his best friend shit about his *boyfriend*. He’s so fucking

curious that he's bursting with about a million questions right this second, but still. This, right here? This is long overdue. "You invited him to the cottage, huh? Must be pretty serious."

Shane tucks his face into his shoulder, like that's gonna somehow hide the absolutely besotted smile that steals across his face. Hayden wishes he had his phone anywhere near him, just so he could snap a picture to show Jackie later. "Yeah, uh. Well. I love him," he admits, his voice going soft and quiet. "We're in it for the long haul."

Hayden reaches across the counter, clinking his beer bottle against Shane's. "Well, alright then. Cheers to that, brother."

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Later, when he spills the whole, long rambling story to Jackie, she laughs so hard and for so long that she immediately wakes up the baby, setting off a chain reaction of crying children all throughout the house.

"I don't get it!" Hayden complains, picking Amber up from her crib and holding her gently against his chest, shushing her softly. "How did you *know*?"

"Hayden," Jackie says patiently, wiping tears from her eyes. "Shane's the only guy on the team that I've never caught staring at my pregnancy tits. I introduced him to *all* of my hottest girlfriends. He wasn't interested in a single one of them and you know how hot my friends are."

Hayden drops his face into his palms, letting out a groan. She's right, she's so fucking right. Her pregnancy tits are *fantastic*. "I'm the dumbest man alive," he groans.

Jackie pats him on the shoulder lightly. "But you're a very good friend, Hayden Pike."

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"Yo Pike, you check out that new stats website?"

Hayden looks up from where he's untying his skates, only to find Wilson, their latest goalie call-up from the AHL, looming over him. Like all goalies, Wilson is weird as hell, visibly scraggly at all times, and also, very much obsessed with hockey stats.

Hayden wishes he could be the type of guy who gets obsessed with stats. Unfortunately, most of the time, he's the type of guy who's too busy watching Bubble Guppies with his kids to do as much of a deep dive as he'd like. It's too bad that Hollzy's at home with some shitty-ass cold — if there's one thing Shane loves, it's getting nerdy with his hockey stats. He's always going on about how Corsi is too limited for the modern game.

Wilson's a decent guy, though, so Hayden humors him. "Haven't gotten the chance yet, man. Anything cool about the Metros turn up?"

"Dude," Wilson exclaims, plopping his enormous six feet and five inches worth of mass down onto the bench. "They did this whole breakdown on Hollander's stats against Boston."

Like, did you know that he's *more* likely to play a multi-point game if we play them in the afternoon versus at night?"

"Huh," Hayden says, pursing his lips. They usually get into Boston the day before, for afternoon games. Maybe that gives Shane more time to prepare, but for games at home, like the one they're playing in about four hours, that wouldn't make any sense. He cocks his head, an idea slowly percolating in the back of his mind. "What about after we play Boston?"

"Oh dude, that's the best stat," Wilson says, punching Hayden lightly in the arm. Or, well, it's probably light for Wilson. Hayden winces, rubbing at his bicep lightly. "Hollzy has a 92% chance of playing a multi-point game right after facing Boston. Every time. It doesn't matter which team we face after, either! Isn't that fucking crazy? He must really feed off that rivalry shit, huh?"

"Heh, yeah," Hayden agrees, even as the back of his throat goes dry. There's a kind of low-level buzzing that's rising in the back of his mind, like a warning bell that keeps going off at low volume.

Suddenly, several pieces are starting to fall into place.

Lily is in Boston. Lily is an athlete. Shane plays better after he gets laid and Shane *always* plays better after they've played the Raiders.

Holy fucking shit, Lily is a Boston Raider.

This time, Hayden *knows* he's right. He gets dressed in a fugue state, pulling on his sweats and grabbing his gear in a daze. He can just — well, he can just run over to Shane's real quick, say hi, make sure he's got enough cold medicine. It's the right thing to do, especially since Hayden's almost positive Shane's cold came by way of Jade and Ruby's sticky, germ-filled hands.

And who knows, Hayden thinks a little hysterically. Maybe he'll find a member of the Boston Raiders there.

He starts up his car, still turning over the same few facts over and over. He very carefully doesn't let himself wonder *which* Boston Raider it could be.

He has a theory, anyways. A new one and this theory actually has legs and a solid foundation and like, shit, what the fuck, it's not like he knows what goes into the scientific basis of developing a theory, he's just a stupid fucking hockey player, but knowing Shane, and knowing all the ways in which Shane doesn't do anything by halves, gives Hayden a decent idea at just how right he could be.

He just really doesn't wanna be right about this.

Before he knows it, he's pulling up to the front of Shane's condo and parking smoothly in one of the open spots out front.

The elevator is as smooth as ever, taking him to the top floor in no time at all, and then there's nothing left to do except bang impatiently on Shane's front door and hope against hope that he's wrong.

Unfortunately for Hayden, the door swings right open and standing on the other side, looking smug and annoying as ever, is Ilya Rozanov.

"You!!" Hayden yells, shoving his finger in Rozanov's face. "It's fucking you!!"

"Da, yes, it is me." Rozanov lets out an impatient sigh, turning towards the inside of the condo. "Shane, Pike is here. I think he has - what's the phrase? Connected the dots."

"He's sick, you know," Hayden says, pushing through the front door. "He's not up to any... funny business right now."

Rozanov doesn't bother dignifying this with a response; instead, he pivots on one socked-heel and walks confidently towards the kitchen, like he actually knows where he's going which ugh, he probably does.

Hayden swears softly to himself, kicking off his shoes at the door because this is still Shane's house, after all, and then trudges in after him, feeling like a man headed for the gallows.

Shane is slumped over the corner at his own kitchen island, surrounded by a pile of tissues, with a nose that's gone red from too much chafing. To complete the picture, he's wearing an oversized black Adidas sweatshirt with the hood pulled up, just to really drive home how pathetic he looks. But no, actually — it's not oversized, it's just a little big in the shoulders and the cuffs of the arms fall too far over his hands and anyways, Shane's sponsored by Reebok, which means he's probably wearing Rozanov's sweatshirt right now, what the fuck.

"Hey, Hayds," Shane says, with no small amount of awkwardness. He waves with a tissue in hand, his voice coming through thick with congestion. Rozanov steps in close behind him, like a bodyguard. "Surprise."

"You know, Boston also has a football team. I bet one of those guys would date you," Hayden says, propping both hands on his hips. "If it's like, some kind of hate sex thing."

Shane rolls his eyes; the hoodie pulled all the way up only adds to the surliness. "You know it's not. I already told you that much."

"I was sorta hoping I hallucinated that," Hayden huffs, dropping his hands to both sides.

"So. What gave us away?" This question comes from Rozanov, who's eyeing Pike up with a sharp, assessing gaze, as if *Hayden* is the one who needs to prove himself here.

"You know that new stats page Wilson's obsessed with, right?" Hayden says, turning to face Shane instead.

Shane's brow furrows, like he doesn't follow the connection.

Hayden waves a hand impatiently. “Whatever, it doesn’t matter. It’s just, uh. Apparently you play better right after playing Boston. Like, statistically. They’ve got that shit pinned down mathematically, dude.”

Shane tugs the sleeves of Rozanov’s sweatshirt all the way down over his hands, then tucks both arms over his chest with a shiver. “Okay. So what? You’re the one who always says I play better after I get laid.”

“Hollz,” Hayden says, making sure to put a slow, intentional emphasis on every word, just so Shane can really hear how it sounds. “You have a 92% chance of putting up points in every game you play after facing the Boston Raiders. You know that’s insane, right?”

Rozanov cocks a hip, raising an eyebrow at Shane, with a smile crossing his face that can only be described as both annoying and gleeful. Shane, very reasonably, blanches. “Fuck, Hollander. Maybe I should charge you for sex, like Pike says. Who knew my dick was so good, I make Montreal play better?”

“I hate you,” Shane mutters, swinging an elbow into Rozanov’s gut.

“You do not,” Rozanov says, still with that horrible smirk that Hayden’s starting to realize Shane is apparently very fond of.

Fortunately, he’s immediately put out of his misery by a low hissing noise, followed by a series of cheerful beeps.

Rozanov, for his part, jumps. “Shane, the fucking rice maker is making stupid noise again.”

Shane’s put-upon scowl fades away almost instantly, replaced just as quickly with a small, tender quirk of the mouth. “Ilya. I can’t believe you’re scared of my rice cooker.”

Rozanov crosses both arms over his chest, drawing up to his full height as he steps around right into Shane’s space. “I am not scared. Is stupid, having that many settings. You want to cook rice, you cook rice. You should have let me cook on stove.”

Shane reaches out, hooking a finger through one of Rozanov’s belt loops and reeling him in close. “Absolutely not. You didn’t even know to wash the rice first.”

“It goes in water and then boils!” Rozanov says, throwing up both hands. “What is there to wash?”

“So you’re gross, is what you’re saying,” Shane cracks, even as Rozanov loosely wraps himself around Shane, draping both arms around his shoulders. “You’re gonna get sick too, you know.”

“Yes, that is why you pull me in close,” Rozanov snips right back just as fast. “You want to take me out too, level playing field.”

“Well, it’s probably too late now,” Shane admits, although the words come out mumbled through Rozanov’s chest. *What the fuck.*

Hayden shakes himself, taking a step back. It's quite the domestic scene: a simmering pot of what looks and smells like miso soup on the stove. Several empty mugs of tea strewn across the countertop. A fresh package of tissues and a plastic CVS bag chock full of even more related supplies. Rozanov is playing *nursemaid* to Shane Hollander. Is there a word for when something's kinda gross but also kinda heartwarming at the same time? Maybe in German. He'll ask Jagger later, maybe.

"Huh," Hayden says, reaching several new and exciting conclusions at once. "I mean, I have to say, it does make sense. You and Rozanov."

Shane cranes his neck to the side, turning to face Hayden with an expression of absolute bewilderment. "It does?"

"I mean, yeah," Hayden says, lifting a shoulder in a shrug. He's warming up to the idea the more he's thinking about it. "You never do things the easy way, you know?"

Shane casts a quick glance up at Rozanov, then looks away with a small, private smile. "You'd be surprised. How easy it is, I mean."

"Wow," Hayden says, barely smothering a laugh. This is premium grade, high quality chirping material and man, he's never gonna be able to fucking use it. Instead, he lets out a low, pointed whistle. "So that was gross."

"Fuck you, man," Shane says, laughing as he throws an empty tin foil pack of cold meds in his direction.

Rozanov pushes back the top of Shane's hoodie back, pressing a kiss to the top of Shane's head. "See how good I was just now? So many jokes about Pike and I made none of them."

"It's just 'cause I'm sick," Shane says, poking Rozanov in the side.

"Yes, probably," Rozanov admits. "But still."

"I don't think you get points for that, Rozanov," Hayden gripes. The nerve of this guy sometimes, honestly.

Rozanov steps away from Shane to start digging through the drug store bag that he must've *brought with him from Boston*, what the fuck. "You try to set Shane up with New England Patriot. I must get even somehow."

Hayden winces; he can't lie, that's fair.

Finally, Rozanov plucks a singular blister pack of cold meds out of the bag, peeling away the tin foil and then punching out the pills inside. "I think time for next dose, Hollander."

Shane eyes the pills skeptically and Hayden tries bravely to fight down a smirk. In all the years that he's known Shane, he's never once seen Shane admit to being sick enough to need real cold meds. "I don't think I need them anymore. I feel a lot better, honestly. I could probably still play tonight."

Rozanov raises both eyebrows, then reaches out with his free hand to press the back of it against Shane's forehead. "Fever says otherwise."

"You can't really tell if I have a fever that way," Shane complains. "That's not even a little scientific."

Rozanov grabs a bottle of lemon-lime Gatorade from the bag, then simply holds out the handful of pills. "Shane, you're sick. Take the medicine," he says, his voice deepening, his tone going stern, like he's in the locker room about to give a lecture to a wayward rookie or some shit.

And Shane — well, Shane wordlessly plucks the cold meds out of Rozanov's palm, popping them back into his mouth and then washing them down with some Gatorade. When he's done, he raises both eyebrows expectantly, his nose and mouth scrunched together in a bitchy expression. "Happy now?"

"Very," Rozanov says, right before brushing another tender kiss across Shane's forehead.

"I should've done less research," Hayden mutters to himself. "I would love to know less."

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