

The chips are set to fall

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The chips are set to fall

by [icopythefax](#)

Summary

At the 2017 All Star Weekend, Ilya takes fate into his own hands to produce at least one out MLH player by the end of the season. Thus begins his part-time side hustle as community organizer, mastermind, and Commander-in-Chief of the Gay Hockey Army.

Notes

During 2017 All Stars.

A little bit canon divergent. Frankenstein's monster of book, show, and fandom canon. Inspired by Book-Ilya's constant lurking bisexual presence whenever a queer hockey player leaves the house. Impeccable gaydar.

This chapter has been [translated into Russian](#) by Tumblr user @zotyye !!

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

Chapter 1

Ilya has no idea what to expect from this weekend. He's sitting in a hotel bar in Tampa, nodding to various MLH All Stars as they filter in.

Scott Hunter is the first to actually greet him, if you count a sarcastic "nice shirt" as a greeting. Ilya puts on a mock-insulted face to defend his Hawaiian print button-up. Hunter settles into the barstool next to him. As much as they hate each other, their paths collide more frequently than any other two players. And Ilya is pretty sure they've clocked each other.

The impossibility of his situation with Shane has been weighing on Ilya for months. He is positive if there were openly gay players in the MLH, things would be different for them. Or, Ilya tells himself that's a factor. They can't be anything, Ilya knows that. But today, he's blaming it on having to hide. He's blaming Scott Hunter.

If there were out players, their conversation that day wouldn't have been so coded. Shane would have been comfortable preferring men, and admitting it. He would have stayed when things got too real. He wouldn't have had a panic attack— ok, he definitely still would have — but they might have talked it through. There would be no Rose Landry.

They would probably have made plans this weekend, not just vague hopes. Shane would have texted when he booked the plane tickets instead of Ilya studying flight schedules and guessing that Hollander's plane should be landing right about now. Shane would have texted when he landed and again when he got in and he would sneak up to a room before anyone saw him arrive so that Ilya could ravage him before they had to socialize at all.

Instead, Ilya is here, clueless and just hoping Hollander does not bring a fiancée. He shudders into the silence between him and Scott Hunter. Hunter looks over inquisitively, so Ilya decides to share the part that he *can* share. The part he has autonomy over, no one else.

"How long are we going to do this?"

"What?" Hunter asks. Though hearing loss can be a concern with men of Hunter's advanced age, Ilya knows he heard the question. He knows what Ilya means, too. "If this is a retirement joke—"

A light laugh escapes Ilya, "No. But you *are* old, I love that it is on your mind."

"Asshole." And after a pause, "Then what do you mean?"

Ilya glances around. There's no one paying attention to them. Even the bartender is far away.

"This. How long are we going to do *this*?" Ilya can't imagine Scott Hunter, of all people, is going to make him say it out loud.

"Rozanov." Hunter is wary and gives a threatening glare. "Are you... *propositioning* me?"

Ilya takes a second to remember that word, but then a smile splits his face, “No!” He laughs, “God, Hunter. No. No. I am allergic to dust, would not be able to suck you off. Sorry.”

“Ok, disgusting. And mean. And...” Hunter trails off, trying to understand if Ilya is serious about being the one sucking the dick in this scenario. Ilya just watches as he puts together the subtext. The puzzled, amused, cautious expression on his face is all the confirmation Ilya needs.

“The league, moron. How long will we let the league think everyone is straight?”

Scott’s face falls and he glances around nervously. “I—” he stares at Ilya and swallows. “I mean... No one wants to be the first.” His voice is low and his eyes dart around the room in a way that actually makes their conversation *more* noticeable. Idiot.

“But just one would get everyone else to do it.” Ilya says, knowing it’s not true. He and Shane are impossible, no matter what. Shane would probably rather marry a woman than come out. But if there were a lot of others... if it were *normal*...

Hunter nods in agreement. “Probably. I don’t know, I guess I would if there were others.” Then he gives Ilya a sideways glance. “Someone has to be first.”

“I have thought about this.” Ilya is careful. He trusts Svetlana’s opinion, because she’s never been wrong about the final four teams in the playoffs. She has Hunter’s Admirals to win the whole thing this year. “I will make you a deal. If you win the cup, you have to go first.”

“And if you win you’ll be first?” Scott smirks a little.

Ilya swallows. “Fuck it. Yes. I will.”

Scott puts out a hand. Ilya shakes it.

Ilya chugs the rest of his beer and stands up. “I am off. If you see Price, I am looking for him.” Scott’s eyebrows raise, and Ilya shrugs boyishly. “I will get others to make the same deal. Maybe three more? To increase our odds just a little bit.” He leaves with a wink. There’s an hour before Shane arrives. He thinks he saw someone useful by the pool.

Why not? This side quest will at least take his mind off whatever fresh emotional hell Hollander has in store for him.

Worst case scenario, he gets decked for assuming someone is gay.

Who is he kidding? Worst case scenario, Hollander is married.

With Scott Hunter out of the way, Ilya has three other pretty good guesses among the 50 odd players here for the weekend. Convincing them to take the deal and agree to come out will be

a whole other challenge.

Victim #2 says yes that evening. He, like Hunter, thought Ilya was hitting on him. Maybe he should change his strategy a little.

#3 agrees, but definitely thought he was about to be hate-crimed. Ok, so Ilya could stand to be a *little* friendlier.

Nope. Too friendly— he finds #4 by staring too long in a bathroom trying to guess. The man threw himself halfway across the room toward him before Ilya could finish his sentence, making the rest of the conversation very awkward, but ultimately successful.

During the skills competition, #2 has no qualms telling him all about his suspicions for #5. Ilya had never heard of the guy, but after meeting him, he silently agrees with the assessment. When he finds out what team he plays for, Ilya almost doesn't bother asking him. This game is for people who might actually see the cup finals. He asks him anyway, just to include the poor guy.

All five say yes to his wager. If their team wins the cup, they will come out. Ilya knows this is just a safety net. Hunter will win. Hunter will be the one to break the ice.

Five teams, not including his own. The weekend is winding down and he has one left, probably the hardest to convince.

“Shane,” Ilya says the name, just because he *can*. “Would you ever come out?”

They're in heaven, and they're fighting sleep. Shane has to get off of Ilya's chest and leave at some point but right now, they're having the first moment they've ever let themselves enjoy. Tonight was the cherry on a perfect weekend.

“I've thought about it.” Shane nods, “But I can't be the first. And it can't be...” Ilya understands. It can't be with *him*. He heard Shane loud and clear earlier. Being gay is one thing, fucking your arch rival is another.

“But you can come out without handing over a list of all the men you are fucking, no?”

Shane scoffs a little. “I guess. Why?”

“If I win the cup, I will come out.”

Shane extracts his cheek from Ilya's chest and props himself up. “Are you serious?”

Ilya is happy he sat up, glad to see his face again. God, he is so fucked.

“Make me a deal.” Ilya says quietly. “Do the same.” He strokes a thumb across Shane’s cheek freckles.

“Ilya... I can’t promise that.”

“Because you don’t think you will win the cup?”

“No, fuck you. We’re winning this year.” Shane’s face turns competitive and Ilya’s heart just fucking stops beating for a second. “That’s *why* I can’t make a promise. I can’t be the first.”

“It will be your third cup. Third in a *row*! I don’t think many people would mind.”

“It would be my third in a row.” Shane’s eyes lose focus dreamily at the prospect. “Ok. Ok, yeah. If people have an issue with a 3-time cup champion... yeah. I’ll do it.”

“Perfect.” He draws Shane’s head back to his chest and closes his eyes happily at what he’s created. Montreal doesn’t have a shot. Shane’s not at risk of having to come out. Ilya knows he wouldn’t have agreed otherwise.

Six teams plus his own. Shane was the 7th awkward conversation he’s had this weekend, and by far his favorite. Ilya also pats himself on the back for a 6 out of 7 gaydar. He could have *sworn* he saw Troy Barrett check Shane out once. But the guy nearly spat in his face when Ilya carefully brought up the subject of homosexuality.

He didn’t tell anyone except Hunter that there are more than two people in the bet, that he is collecting the queer players like infinity stones. There’s no sense in starting a witch hunt.

But he considers telling Shane. He wants Shane to know if it’s not them, it will be someone. The best teams this year are the ones with the queer players. The odds are now quite good that on the night of the cup finals, the league’s dam will be broken.

Shane finally leaves, to both of their dismay. It’s late at night but he checks his phone. He has two texts from an unknown number, received hours ago.

Unknown: Hey it’s Scott Hunter

Unknown: How many did you get?

It’s too late at night to respond now, right? The old geezer has been in bed for hours. Maybe he’s actually up by now, swimming laps in the pool before a fiber-full breakfast. Ilya texts him back anyway.

Ilya: We have 7 teams.

Ilya: Good teams.

Ilya: This is happening this season.

Weirdly, Scott’s answer comes in quickly, despite the absurd hour.

Oldest Man Alive: Christ, Rozanov.

Oldest Man Alive: 7???

Oldest Man Alive: How did you know who???

Oldest Man Alive: Don't tell me.

Oldest Man Alive: What if we all just did it at the same time?

Ilya scoffs at the old man. The Admirals are favored to win this year, it's not just Svetlana saying that. It must be sinking in, and Hunter's getting cold feet already.

Ilya: Betting is more fun

Ilya: If you change your mind you can always throw the cup

Ilya: I am sure Dallas Kent will love being first.

Oldest Man Alive: Dallas Kent???

Oldest Man Alive: No.

Oldest Man Alive: You're joking.

Oldest Man Alive: You're joking?

Ilya: And Commissioner Crowell was only sad he has no team so he can not be included

Oldest Man Alive: lol fuck off

Oldest Man Alive: But 7 guys.

Oldest Man Alive: Holy shit.

Ilya: I know

Ilya: 7 guys is your dream.

Ilya: There are more than 7.

Ilya: But I need only one per team. I have 7 teams.

Ilya: If you chicken out let me know

Ilya: I have backup Admirals on the bench

Oldest Man Alive: You're joking

Oldest Man Alive: Damn, now I can't tell if you're joking

Ilya: Shower with one eye open 😊

Oldest Man Alive: You can't make homophobic jokes if you're the diplomat of queer hockey

Ilya: Then you should win the cup.

Ilya: You don't want me to represent you.

Oldest Man Alive: I will. We have a good team this year.

Ilya: Good night Hunter. Take the dentures out before bed.

Oldest Man Alive: 🙌

And, because it makes him a little nauseous to end his perfect day like that, after Shane just moved his whole world off its axis, he texts Shane too.

Ilya: Good night Shane.

The response comes immediately.

Jane: Good night Ilya

Nothing left to do but wait.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

2017 Cup Playoffs; Beginning of 2017-2018 season

Chapter Notes

I was fully not done with this idea, I wrote 6 more chapters and I'm up to 2019, so I figured I'd start posting.

Disclaimers: 1) There are some homophobic slurs and some references to violence typical to hockey.

2) A lot of these people/events are taken from the books (and some are completely made up!) so they could be minor spoilers.

3) Ilya Rozanov is morally gray, but the ends justify the means, I promise!

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

Spring 2017

Of course, Ilya can't just sit and wait. Once he starts actively looking for players, it's hard not to see them. Sure, it would have been cool to only have elite All-Star players in his pact, no embarrassing benchwarmers or second-strings coming out to be the Face of Gay Hockey, but Ilya would rather increase his odds with more people. He secures 5 more guys after that weekend to add to his roster of 6 All-Stars, and by the time playoffs start, with Ilya included, there are 12 teams with a gay or bisexual player ready to come out if their team wins the cup.

He doesn't need to stop there. He has more in mind, and backups he could ask from a few of his twelve teams. But he's got some of the best teams, and he's pretty confident he already has the cup winner in his ranks. Because he's got Scott Hunter. And Scott Hunter is going to win.

Sure, Ilya is a little pissed when his own team gets defeated in the second round of playoffs, but the anger that would normally hatch from this loss is quickly replaced with relief that he won't have to come out. He can barely look sad for the post-game interviews, and there are only a handful of people watching who know exactly why.

He watches the playoffs with bated breath as his players win game after game. They whittle down the straight teams with ease. In the conference finals, Los Angeles beats the last team

without one of Ilya's men. That settles it: this thing is happening this year. Ilya is still waiting, though. He can't let himself believe it until he sees it.

This started as a way to make it easier for Shane to come out some day, feel less alone, make them a little less impossible. But slowly Ilya realized how much he needs it, too. He's been holding Shane at an arm's length and this representation, the dam breaking, is going to change things for him. This whole project already has, but he needs to see it actually work. He needs to see gay hockey publicly normalized.

Scott Hunter's Admirals easily advance to the finals as predicted. They'll face Los Angeles, where Ilya has a very attractive Swede in his bet. It was his 11th successful awkward conversation, fittingly at the 11th hour. This was the last person he asked before playoffs and now Ilya is glad he did. After playing a very risky, high-stakes game of "Gay or European?" Ilya had approached him and got a reluctant yes to the cup deal.

When he checked in with #11 last week, just to see if everything was still happening, the man sounded like he had nothing but contempt for the league. Apparently a meeting with his agents didn't go well when he told them his plan to come out if L.A. wins. He was advised against it and if he did come out, "start looking for homes in Sweden."

This sent a chill through Ilya's bones. He's here on the same visa. They need to stay employed to avoid being sent back home. #11 isn't a generational talent, he's expendable. Ilya could see a team not re-signing him for any number of reasons, why give them another?

Ilya also checked in with Scott Hunter last week, who, despite his age, actually has a cell phone and has been texting Ilya pretty consistently since All-Stars weekend. He seems to be really into the idea, and honestly he would make a great Face of Gay Hockey, not that Ilya would ever admit that out loud. Aside from Ilya and Shane, who are in a league of their own, Scott Hunter is one of the best players in the league. He's is morally unimpeachable. He's a great captain, the cornerstone of his team, and firing him would have serious repercussions for his franchise.

So tonight, for hundreds of reasons, Ilya is rooting for Scott Hunter's Admirals, and it's a close game. Ilya doesn't know if he'd be able to compete under these stakes like #11. The temptation to throw the game would be pretty strong, but the Swede is putting up a very convincing effort, despite his literal residency on the line.

Still, as predicted, the Admirals take the win. When has Svetlana been wrong about anything?

Ilya is still waiting though, with eyes glued to the television, not just for the buzzer to ring out the Admirals' win, but for Hunter to actually *do* something. Everyone agreed to a 24-hour window to make good on the deal, but Hunter never gave him his specific plan. Ilya is ready to watch like a hawk for 24 hours.

The confetti drops and the team celebrates. When the Admirals greet their opponents, the camera catches Hunter hugging #11. Hunter says something in his ear and #11 pulls back and grins in recognition, looking peaky but relieved, not like someone who just lost the cup. #11 pats Hunter's shoulder and though there is no microphone on them, he clearly says "Good

luck.” Ilya smiles from his couch. He never told them each other's names, just that he had someone on both teams, but he knows exactly what conversation just happened. Scott Hunter’s gaydar might not be so bad.

The opposing team exits and the families of the victors start making their way onto the ice. Ilya waits, not really knowing what he’s waiting *for*...

Until Hunter does it. He points at a man in the crowd. All Ilya can do is watch, clutching his phone in his hand, still waiting. He knows Shane’s texts are coming in, but he can’t look away. He has to see it happen, and it looks like it’s happening.

Ilya can’t help but notice this cute little Canadian-Tuxedo man wasn’t in the corral with the WAGs and families. Hunter made the poor thing walk for it. Maybe that’s a fun sex thing for them. Maybe he thought he’d lose and didn’t want to introduce him to the team families for no reason. Or maybe, Ilya thinks this might be the worst option, Hunter was on the fence. Ilya can’t decide if he would feel angry or guilty if he found that out.

Even as Scott starts kissing the man, Ilya still waits, his phone screen crackling under his tight nervous grip. He waits until there’s no possible way the media could spin this. No way Hunter could say this was a joke. No way this denim salesman could slap Hunter and say he was a stranger. No way the camera could cut away to deny it. No way this is a brother or friend or son...

A slip of tongue in the kiss? Ok, that should do it. Game on.

“I’m coming to the cottage.”

By the start of the 2017-2018 season, Ilya is Shane Hollander’s boyfriend. Shane tells him that Scott Hunter coming out made things different for him, and for them, and Ilya actually *feels* his plan working. It feels a lot like Shane’s parents texting him good luck before a game, and Shane’s things at his place, and phone calls, and texts good night, and everything they didn’t let themselves have for years.

And Shane is giving *Scott Hunter* the credit. Pfft.

Ilya knows Shane would want to be left out of this weird project. Now that they’ve had the conversation 800 times, their plan is still to gradually build a public friendship and come out after retirement. In the meantime, talking about other potentially gay hockey players just seems to make Shane anxious, and coming out right now seems like Shane’s worst fear. Ilya knows their situation is different than the other guys. They have more to lose by coming out. No one else’s partner is in the league, and certainly none of them are rivals. None of them are Russian citizens (Ilya has some guesses but hasn’t approached these riskiest gambles). None of them are at the same level of celebrity, save Scott Hunter.

So if Ilya wants to keep up the crusade to normalize gay hockey, it’ll be just for himself, for fun, to prove there are other queer players. If it happens to shave a few years of secrecy off of

their plan, that would just be an added bonus. One out player got them into a relationship. It might take a few more to get them any further.

But the pact itself is not having the domino effect he and Hunter thought it would. Hunter is still the only one out after spending all summer doing interviews and appearances, mostly to good press. What happened to the dam breaking? The glass, or ice, ceiling? Ilya reaches out to all his guys, asking if they have plans to come out now.

Some say they agreed to his deal without ever thinking they'd win the cup. Others chicken out after asking an agent or a coach what would happen. #2 and #9 just fucking retire, which is no help to Ilya at all, and he has to start eyeing rookies like a predator to get his numbers back up.

But #7's response is keeping him up at night: *"Nah, I want that Scott Hunter moment."*

Ilya basks in the warmth of that idea, and re-ups his bet with everyone for this season, and heavily implies the deal is on for every season going forward. Every time the cup is lifted from now on, a member of that team will come out.

The pessimists on bad teams agree the fastest, thinking they're safe. They don't know Ilya is leaving Boston at the end of the season and isn't above joining a team for a year just to win them the cup. Again, his players are very good. Two on one team would be unstoppable. That's why the Admirals won.

And now that Scott Hunter is out, Ilya turns to his other Admiral to place the cup bet. #12 agrees pretty quickly, but is surprised Ilya clocked him. Ilya thinks it's weird no one else *has*. Sure, the guy is married to a woman, but still. He's one of Hunter's best friends, but it turns out Hunter's gaydar is worse than he thought. Ilya is always amused when Hunter stealthily asks who the other Admiral is. He wants to remind him that bisexuality exists, but that would give him a clue, and Ilya doesn't give clues.

Scott still tries to wheedle names out of Ilya all the time. He says he doesn't see the big deal in one extra person knowing, especially when that person is Scott Hunter, First Ever Gay Hockey Player. He sees it as his reward, or entitlement, for being the sacrifice. So Ilya starts telling his guys, "Go call Grandpa Scott, he is very lonely in his old age and would love to hear from you." He doesn't know how many actually take him up on it. Except #7, because he tells Hunter those words verbatim and Ilya doesn't hear the end of it.

Some guys start to learn there are anonymous others, some don't pick up on it. Ilya doesn't try to hide it, he phrases things as "we" to imply that this is a group. When he adds two rookies to replace the retired players, he makes sure they know there are others, without naming names. #14 reminds him of Shane at that age, and it makes him wonder if this might have changed their trajectory when they were rookies. If he knew there were over a dozen gay players two weeks into the first season? That the older players had a plan to normalize gay hockey? If they had, Ilya might be married by now.

Once games start in earnest and Ilya is interacting with all the other teams, he starts expanding the group wherever he can. There are paper lists, spreadsheets, notes on his phone with every player he still needs to approach and their chances of going to the cup. He starts

talking to benchwarmers on good teams. He talks to good players on shitty teams and pushes them to sign to somewhere better. For some reason that Ilya has never questioned along the way, people are actually listening to him and trusting him. It's weird— everyone has always thought he's an asshole. But when he advises them to save their boyfriend's number under a girl's name, or to hit someone who chirps slurs at them, or to retweet Scott Hunter's boyfriend's post, all of the sudden he's Bisexual Mother Theresa. To these guys, all of his words are sage wisdom. To the rest of the league, he's still Ilya Rozanov, Certified Annoying Asshole.

By midway through the Fall, Ilya's list has doubled. He now has almost enough names to create an MLH team roster solely of dick enthusiasts. He doesn't make too many mistakes. His gaydar is keeping a rate just brushing 90%.

He's starting to think it's actually higher than that. He approaches a rookie in a Buffalo bar after a game there and asks some of his routine subtle questions.

"No! *God*, no!" The rookie exclaims, "Not that there's anything wrong with that. My roommate is gay... But god. No."

"You have roommates?" Ilya cocks his head. "Your contract is like... one zillion dollars."

"Yeah, just the one. He's my best friend, we've lived together since high school." Hmm.

It's ok. The kid would have been a backup for Buffalo, and they aren't about to win any cups.

A week later, Ilya receives a social media DM saying his conversation got the rookie thinking and, wouldn't you know, he just finished banging his live-in best friend. He quickly agrees to the cup deal when Ilya proposes it and becomes #25. The roommate also DMs Ilya to thank him.

Ilya can't be... *creating* gays, can he?

The guys vent to Ilya a lot because, in most cases, he's the only other queer player they know, unless they want to out themselves to Scott Hunter. One day, #4 texts him after playing Carolina, a team known for their infamously obnoxious, bigoted, violent star forward.

#4: Just got off the ice and the fucker is back at it

Ilya: Who? Tiny Dickman?

#4: LOL is that what you call him?

#4: he was like berating our poor rookie all game with the worst shit

#4: faggot, cock sucker, I think there were some sexual threats...

Ilya: you are not the first to say this

Ilya: and I have seen this

Ilya: guy should be in prison

#4: and the refs did fucking nothing, obviously

#4: sorry lol can't exactly go to my team with this really just ranting

It's not the first time Ilya has heard this about Tiny Dickman. He's seen it firsthand, too. If the refs aren't going to do anything about hate speech and threats, someone should. Ilya checks Carolina's game schedule and sends out a few texts.

For the next two weeks, poor Tiny is brutalized in every game, no matter who he plays. Ilya watches Carolina's games with glee. Sometimes even straight players are ganging up on the guy, too, and there's probably only one or two people on the ice who truly know why. He laughs picturing the pre-game locker room conversation, his players justifying the strategy to target this one guy without giving the real reason: that Ilya's queer mafia put a hit on him.

Carolina had one of Ilya's guys, #3. He gets traded halfway through the Fall without much public reason, but he tells Ilya confidentially that the whole team is toxic and he tried to call it out. With none of Ilya's players left on the team, Carolina is still doing very well and, though it's early in the season, they're favored to win the cup. Svetlana has them making it to the finals, at least.

Ilya is a little worried about the pact now that he has no one on the top-seeded team of notorious assholes. He eyes every Carolina player carefully and gets nothing. He even sends out a call to all his guys asking for any leads. "We do not have anyone on Carolina... Right?" No one picks up any vibe. Some say Tiny Dickman himself is probably gay, but Ilya would rather not get murdered for approaching him with that. Some who haven't heard the trade news yet tell him they think #3, and Ilya has to stop himself from saying, "No, he got traded," as that could confirm what might have just been a suspicion.

He would never even hint at any of their names to anyone, but sometimes he wishes he could just fucking publish his list to all the guys. Or get them all in the same room. Or even text all of them at once instead of copying and pasting messages to each one individually and acting like a carrier pigeon when they have ideas. He also kind of wants to set up #14 with #13.

Instead, he has to worry about the future of his annual cup deal in only the second year. Last season, two teams with his players made it to the final matchup. This season, a team with no gay members might actually take the 2018 cup.

Chapter End Notes

Edit: ok fine I will help you out by including a list at the end of every chapter

#2 Retires

#3 was on Carolina, traded bc of the toxic locker room
#4 (one of the ones who) tells Ilya about Tiny Dickman
#7 wants the Scott Hunter moment, also ratted Ilya's chirp out to Hunter
#9 Retires
#11 Swedish player for LA 🙄
#12 Hunter's best friend on the Admirals, married to a woman 🙄
#13 Ilya wants to set up with #14
#14 Rookie, Ilya wants to set up with #13
#25 Buffalo rookie who Ilya turned gay (lol)

Coming up: Shane

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Early December 2017

Chapter Notes

Yes, I have a running list of identities for the numbers! Most of them will have to be OCs obviously (if they were all canon we wouldn't be able to hit these kinds of numbers) but hopefully you've already recognized some from the books. Ilya doesn't have a number, he is 0. Also, when a player retires, their number doesn't get replaced. Any new people just get the next number up.

Anyway, none of that really matters as much for this chapter.

Let's see what Shane's up to! POV alternating between them.

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

Early December 2017
New York City

A charity event in the middle of a season is always annoying, but Shane has to be here. He's trying to network in philanthropic circles so it's not such a shock when he starts a foundation with his boyfriend next year. Well, so that the *charitable* part of it isn't a shock. The rest definitely will be.

These events make Shane feel like he's doing something to make his relationship less impossible. He's proud of the mastermind behavior, secretly already working on the third step in their long line of dominoes: Move Ilya to Ottawa, become public friends, start the foundation, retire after fruitful careers, and hopefully end up with a small tasteful wedding when they're in their 40s, away from hockey, when no one will care if they ever find out. Ilya should be trying to do these events too, but as far as Shane can tell, charities stopped inviting him to things because he's too much of an asshole on the ice. It's ok. Shane doesn't mind doing all the work for their plan. It was his idea, anyway. Ilya will give up a lot by signing with Ottawa. Shane can take care of the rest.

Tonight is the worst kind of charity event: tuxedos and a terrible guest list. Shane likes it when there are no other players so he doesn't have to socialize, or when there are tons of

them so he probably has a friend. The worst case scenario is just one other player, especially if that player is Scott Hunter.

Hunter always makes Shane a little nervous. Not only has he looked up to the guy since he was in Juniors, he's pretty sure Hunter has clocked him. The awkward email Shane sent after last year's cup probably didn't help that.

But here's Scott Hunter, cozying up to Shane at a standing table in this opulent ballroom because they're the only two players. After some quick niceties, Scott lowers his voice.

"You uhhh..." Scott's eyes dart around the room and land back on Shane's face, "...you *talk to Rozanov*, right?" His voice is quiet, almost a whisper. There's a look of secrecy on his face. It's kind of dumb. Anyone looking at him would know he's trying to be stealthy.

But the question itself catches Shane off guard. Scott said '*talk to Rozanov*' like it's code for something. Shane isn't great with trying to guess at double-meanings. He wishes people would just say what they actually mean.

Even if he takes the question at face value, he still doesn't know how to respond. He and Ilya are famously rivals. They're not set to announce their friendship for another year. Scott shouldn't know that they "talk"... unless he knows they do much more than that. Shane pushes that idea out of his head. Hunter probably doesn't know about them. Right?

"We— Not really. Why?" Shane's confusion is probably obvious on his face.

"Huh." Scott furrows his brow. "I just thought..." Again, Scott is asking Shane to fill in some imaginary gap in his head, and Shane just doesn't know what to do with it.

"Sorry, I don't know what you mean."

"No, I've just been talking to him a lot," Scott looks like Shane will interrupt him with the correct response any second, "and I thought he was... *in touch* with you."

Oh god, the subtext is getting unavoidable. Scott Hunter knows about them. Also, since when do Ilya and Hunter talk a lot? "Umm yeah, I mean, we've talked, like, a few times I guess." and then, because he can't help it, Shane adds, "Why are you asking? Did he say something about me?"

"No! Not like that!" Scott looks... relieved? "He's never told me about you, or if you're... He's very careful about what he says. No, I just kind of... got a vibe?"

Shane looks down. He could deny it, but it sounds like it would be a lost cause. If Scott and Ilya really talk enough for him to have caught a "vibe" when Ilya talks about Shane... the damage is done. "No one is supposed to know about us." He says quietly.

"Yeah, I think only we do." Scott nods. "Everyone has been really good about keeping a lid on it."

"Everyone?" Shane looks up.

“Yeah.” Scott looks a little confused, “Rozanov’s players. Ilya’s Angels, Ilya’s Army, whatever you call it. All of Rozanov’s guys.”

Shane’s eyebrows shoot up. “*All of Rozanov’s guys?*” He feels a little lightheaded. They maybe could have been clearer about what “boyfriend” means... Shane assumed it was exclusive but...

“Am I way off here?” Scott shakes his head, “You said “us” like you know the—” His eyes widen. Shane does not like the look of this. “Holy shit... You said “*us*” but...” He brings a hand to his mouth. “You and *Rozanov*!?” He loudly whispers the name.

He didn’t know? “I thought you knew! What the fuck were you talking about then??”

“Wait. Give me a second.” Scott breathes, “So you... and *Ilya Rozanov*... are....”

“Keep your fucking voice down!” Shane whispers.

“And you don’t know about his weird group of gay avengers?”

“No, and you keep making this sound worse. What are you talking about?”

“Oh my god.” Scott glances at the ceiling, “I think this is something you two maybe should talk about? There has to be a reason he hasn’t told you about it.”

“No, I would like to know now.” Shane steps closer as if he’s blocking Scott’s exit, never mind they’re in the middle of the room. He’s going for intimidating but probably coming off as desperate.

Scott scrubs at his face. “Jesus. Ok, it’s not a big deal. There’s just a group of gay and bisexual players that Rozanov knows and... organizes.”

Shane steps back. “What does that mean?”

“Like,” Scott thinks for a second, “Remember when that forward from Carolina got pummeled for like two weeks straight?” Shane nods. They haven’t played Carolina in a while, but he *had* noticed that asshole getting targeted. “That’s because he kept using homophobic chirps and threats. Rozanov just, like, coordinates us.”

“Holy shit.” Shane feels like he maybe should be passing out about this. Maybe he would, if he weren’t so... impressed. “How many people?”

Scott shakes his head, “I can never get an answer out of him. He wanted one from every team, so when a team wins the cup, they can have a player come out. I won the cup, so I had to come out,” he adds with a trace amount of bitterness in his voice.

“Wait— he had *me* make that deal.” Shane pales. He didn’t really take it seriously at the time. Montreal’s chances weren’t great, so he felt safe saying yes. Who else did Ilya make that deal with? Shane knows their conversation must have been at least a little different. At least, he *hopes* none of the other guys were naked in bed, post-coital when Ilya had that discussion with them.

"Everyone agrees to the cup deal, I think that's like the barrier for entry. So you're in it."

"I guess. Is it like 3 guys or like, 10?" Shane gives an outlandish number with a weak laugh. Imagine, 10 gay players in the league.

"No, more than that." Scott looks like he's seriously considering it, and Shane is ready to faint. "I'd say he's got about 12 teams, maybe 18 guys total with duplicates on some teams. He says he has other Admirals, but I haven't heard from any."

Shane gapes at him, "18 players!?"

Scott eyes Shane carefully, "It's an important community for everyone, not that there's a lot of engagement between players, but just knowing there are loads of us and working against common enemies... it's powerful stuff. Guys have told me it's making a difference for them." Scott cringes and adds, "This is really going to hurt to say but... In a few years, we'll probably have Ilya Rozanov to thank for a lot of progress."

"What the fuck." Shane breathes. They stare into space for a few seconds, quietly reeling in their own revelations.

"Ok, so now all of my questions are completely different."

Ilya's phone lights up with Jane's name late at night. Shane was supposed to be at a charity thing in New York while he's there to play New Jersey, so Ilya's a little surprised he's not tired of socializing by now. Usually Shane would want some peace and quiet after something like that.

"Hey. Weird story." Shane dives right in. He sounds like he's walking. It couldn't wait until he got to the hotel? Ilya gets a sinking feeling he knows where this is going, and it's not somewhere sexy. "Scott Hunter came up to me tonight." Nope. Not sexy, unless...

"He was propositioning you?"

"No, Ilya, *god!* He's so old." Ilya loves this man. "Plus, you're the one who thinks he's hot." Ilya hates this man.

"Lies."

"Right. Anyway, he asked if I had talked to you. He looked like it was a secret and—" Ilya gets a text.

Oldest Man Alive: you and SHANE HOLLANDER??

"Ah."

Shane barrels on, rambling, "So I figured he knew, right? Why else would he secretively ask me if I had talked to you?"

“Right. Well what *did* he want?”

“Well, tonight I learned about something called Ilya’s Apostles or something—”

“He called it *what*??”

“Ok, so you definitely know about this.” Shane sighs. “Ilya, do you lead a group of gay men and command them when to come out and when to physically abuse other players?”

“...If I say no right now—”

“God Ilya, what the *fuck*??” Shane cries.

“I didn’t want to tell you! I did not think you would be... into it.”

“No I—” he sighs and is quiet for a few seconds. “Ok. I kind of love it. Including the fact that you knew not to include me. But you could have at least *told* me about it so I don’t out us to Scott fucking Hunter.”

“He is blowing up my phone.”

“You’re *texting* with Scott Hunter. God.” Shane is silent for a moment. “How many guys? Hunter didn’t know.”

“I can make a full roster and still have some reserve. Have been thinking of team names. What do you think about—”

“Stop. There are over 23 gay men in the league?”

“Very much over. I am cautious, though. I have to... expose my own self to ask them. Is risky.”

“Yeah, I’m not crazy about that either.” Shane says. “Wait— expose yourself how?”

Ilya laughs, “Yes, sex is included in the hazing.”

“Ilya.”

“Shane! Fine. I am kidding. I only have sex with the two best hockey players in the league.” Ilya grins, “A lot of it is masturbation.”

There’s an audible sigh on the other end of the line, followed by Shane grumbling “It better be.”

After the initial shock about Ilya’s underground operation, Shane is reacting generally positively. Ilya is relieved— his new backup for Montreal is a mess. Shane doesn’t mention the deal they made last year or how it might apply to this year’s cup. It’s ok. Shane doesn’t need to make the deal. It really looks like Carolina will take it. Still, Ilya is glad a backup got traded to Montreal last week, taking some of the pressure off Shane, even if he doesn’t know

it.

Ilya: Yes, I heard you ran into him tonight.

Oldest Man Alive: I did. What the fuck?

Ilya: please do not proposition my boyfriend again

Oldest Man Alive: Oh my god no!

Oldest Man Alive: I always thought he liked men

Oldest Man Alive: So I was just touching base with him to make sure you got him

Oldest Man Alive: But he took that wayyyy differently.

Ilya: do not touch his bases.

Oldest Man Alive: You are a rich tapestry of the most batshit surprises.

Oldest Man Alive: ...How the fuck did you land him??

Oldest Man Alive: And when??

Ilya wants to respond with something funny and mysterious, but he gets a text from #11 asking if he's spoken to the third-line forward for Nashville. Ilya needs to watch a few interviews, stalk some social media, check when he'll see the guy next... So Hunter can wait. His city needs him.

A week later, Shane is at Ilya's place in Boston after their game. Only a few more of these hasty meetings here before Ilya moves closer and they can have more time. At least now Shane knows he has the full night, not just a quick intentioned visit before returning to his hotel, always feeling like he's leaving something behind. They can take their time. So after reuniting for an hour or two, Shane finally gets the nerve to ask what's been eating him alive since the charity event.

"So? Ilya's Infantry?"

Ilya sighs and leads him to the home office. Shane has never really been inside this room. It's kind of a guest bedroom with a desk in the corner, and Shane has never needed to use either during their quick visits.

Shane is immediately impressed by what he sees, and then, as the scale of the thing dawns on him, a little weirded out. "Do not look at names. Cross your eyes." Ilya warns, but Shane is a little too shocked to take in many of the words he's seeing anyway.

The focal point is a map on a hanging cork board. It has pins on each MLH city and most of the pins have a slip of paper or several attached.

Below that, there are handwritten lists taped to the wall that go on for pages, each new page stapled neatly to the bottom of the one before it. Shane carefully does not read any of the

items on the lists.

But his eyes cannot ignore the word GAYDAR written on a post-it on the wall. There are two columns on the post-it: The left side is full of tally markings, the right side has just two tallies.

On the wall next to it, there's another list of all the teams' logos with numbers written next to each one. Shane's brain reflexively finds the Montreal logo and sees #6 and #13 are written next to it. Fuck, he shouldn't have looked. But his jersey number isn't on there. In fact, there's not a #6 jersey on the team. He bites back the question. He shouldn't have looked. Are there really other people on his team? He really shouldn't have looked.

Next to the laptop on the desk, there's a legal pad with illegible handwriting in a mix of Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, an old-timey rolodex, a stack of index cards 4 inches high, a stack of papers that look like the calendar for each team in the league.

"What the fuck." Shane barely whispers, taking it all in, and turns his gaze back to Ilya, who is looking at the scene with pride.

He starts pointing and listing, "I have my master roster, my maybe-list, my straights, and my assholes. I have only one non-binary player but there are more. That list will go here." Shane isn't looking where he points, he's still staring in shock at Ilya's face. "I have players by team and team rank, there is all my contact informations, division standings are over there, fucking *Carolina*... and one index card for every player in the league." He picks up the stack and rifles through it for a moment. He pulls out a card with the top corner colored in green.

#6 SHANE HOLLANDER ♥

Team: Montreal Voyageurs

Orientation: Super gay

Status: ~~single~~ *In a relationship*

Certainty: 100%

Evidence: begs for it

Approached: ✓

Cup deal: 2017— ✓ // 2018— ?

Army activities:

Connections: ←→ #1

Notes: LOML.

Ilya looks at the card fondly. "I drew this little heart..." he mutters. Shane takes it from him lightly and inspects it. Ilya carefully splits the deck and finds another with a green marking. He hands it to Shane.

#1 SCOTT HUNTER — OUT

Team: New York Admirals

Orientation: Gay

Status: In a relationship (*Kip Grady*)

Certainty: 98% 100%

Evidence: constantly checking out men; *made out with boyfriend on TV*

Approached: ✓

Cup deal: 2017— ✓ (*won*)

Army activities: ✓ ✓ ✓

Connections: ← everybody // → #7, #11, #26, #6

Notes: dead mom club; *Kip Grady— smoothie salesman, Brooklyn fan, has gay friends*

“Ilya...” Shane starts, but he’s being handed another card. This one has a blue mark where the other two had green. There are a series of symbols at the bottom that Shane can only assume is Ilya’s short hand for any number of things.

HAYDEN PIKE

Team: Montreal Voyageurs

Certainty: 98%

Evidence: reposted #1’s coming out post, attended Montreal Pride with daughters

“No, Hayden’s straight.” Shane blurts out.

“Ok.” Ilya says skeptically and gives him a Look. “But anyway, not what blue card is. Blue is safe.”

Shane is a little touched. Ilya hates Hayden, but he’s still here, calling him safe. Also maybe implying he’s not straight, and Shane tries not to think about the Gaydar post-it’s ratio too hard. But that’s not why he has him, he has him as an ally. Shane eyes the deck in Ilya’s hands. Most don’t have a color on top, but there’s one with red peeking out. As if he’s reading his mind, Ilya rifles through and finds one with a red corner he doesn’t mind showing to Shane.

DALLAS KENT

Team: Toronto Guardians

Certainty: 100%

Evidence: verbal and physical; definitely assaulting women (*#10, #18*)

Complaints: ~~1-4-6-11~~ 14

Army action: *Scheduled Dec/Jan 2018*

He knows Ilya hates Kent. Most reasonable players do. He’s obnoxious and cruel and Shane is not surprised at all to see that Ilya has good reason to believe he’s assaulting women. He doesn’t have to ask what the red signifies.

“Ilya...” Shane is still reeling. He shakily hands back the last three cards and Ilya files them neatly into the pile again. Shane holds onto his own card and stares at it. He lingers on the Notes line, at 'Love of My Life.' His chest tightens and his eyes well up. He couldn’t agree more. He whispers, “I love you so much.”

Ilya pulls him by the waist so they can stand side-by-side and survey the masterpiece that is his office. “It’s for you.”

Shane doesn’t want to think about what he means by that, or if Ilya's been working on this for them while Shane has been distracted by their official 15-year plan. He keeps his blurring eyes focused on his card where there's a blank next to 'army activities,' and a question mark next to the 2018 cup deal. Shane shakes his head and points to them. “Put me down as a yes. To all of it. Whatever you need.” He puts the card down on the desk and kisses Ilya deeply. “Fuck, I love you so much.”

The rest of the night, Shane tries to help by spouting off names at random intervals. Ilya probably already has all the people Shane has clocked, but it’s worth a shot. Ilya nods and says “Ok” to each one, like he’s considering it. Shane knows Ilya can’t tell him whether or not he already has them, and Shane doesn’t really need to know. He just wants to help. He knows he wants to be a part of whatever it is Ilya is building. Seeing the office made him realize that Scott was right last week: in a few years, a lot of people might credit Ilya with turning things around.

As they’re sitting side-by-side on the couch, idly watching TV and scrolling, just existing together, Shane tries not to think about when he was on this couch a year ago. He's trying to distract himself with the task of running through every MLH player he can think of.

“Fredericks!” Shane blurts out his fifth name of the night. The defenseman from Carolina has always given him a vibe, though if pressed, he wouldn’t know what to write under 'evidence.' “He’s Carolina’s, too!” Shane knows Ilya doesn't already have him because he doesn't have anyone for Carolina, and they're favored to win the cup. That's a big one. Finally, Shane feels like he contributed something useful.

Ilya gives him another “Ok” but this time he clamps his lips together like he’s trying not to say something. Or worse, trying not to *laugh*.

“What?”

Ilya shakes his head, still trying not to smile. He’s looking at Shane with fondness, the scene so reminiscent of what scared Shane to death last year. Tonight, Shane can appreciate the expression on Ilya's face, instead of running from it. “You were very lucky I forced myself on you.”

“You didn’t f—” Shane starts to object, “What do you mean?”

“Zero for five.” Ilya lets the smile take over as he says it.

“Zero??” Shane exclaims and sits up. “How can you be sure?”

Ilya shakes his head and the affectionate half-smile nearly melts Shane’s heart. “Zero.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Your fave is problematic, straight people, moral ambiguity, 2018 cup finals.

I'm hoping for every-other-day updating? 🙌

Edit: and because I am being nice, I'm including the list of numbers we heard about:

#1 Scott Hunter

#6 Shane

#7 is in touch with Hunter

#10 says Kent is assaulting women

#11 provides a lead for a Nashville player, is in touch with Hunter

#13 Montreal backup (recently traded to Montreal)

#18 says Kent is assaulting women

#26 is in touch with Hunter

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Still 2017-2018 season

Chapter Notes

This chapter might get me in a little trouble because all your faves are problematic.

There are more canon characters, but just a fair warning: NO ONE is a good guy here (including me). Except Wyatt Hayes. We love Hayes in every universe  Everyone else has no defense. There's a lot of moral gray area.

There's a very vocal contingent of apologists on this site for one guy so  but remember he doesn't get better for another year, and then two more until he's actually better-better.

Don't worry about remembering names you don't recognize.

Warning: there are (gay) slurs, racist imagery, and normal canon-typical hockey violence in here.

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

The next official action for Ilya's artillery is dealing with Dallas Kent. He's got a reputation for homophobic and racist taunts. Two of Ilya's players have also heard stories from his teammate, Wyatt Hayes, about some unsavory interactions with women. So just like they did with Tiny Dickman, Ilya's thugs start waging war. Unfortunately for Kent, there are now twice as many teams on Ilya's roster. Unfortunately for Ilya, Kent's teammate and best friend Troy Barrett seems to pick up on the pattern.

"Why are all these faggots coming for Dallas?" Barrett spits at Ilya as they wrestle on the ice a week into the onslaught. Ilya's position as captain means his team doesn't think twice about targeting Kent when he asks. He frames it as a good strategy: Kent is the best shooter on the Guardians. So Boston's enforcer is currently beating the shit out of Kent and everyone else has roughly paired off for the brawl.

Ilya nods at the enforcer, "You think he is gay?" and punctuates it with a shove. "I think you might hope."

“You know what I mean.” Barrett has sparks in his eyes as he shoves back. “Kent’s had a fight every game this month, and it’s usually from guys like you.” Ilya wonders how Barrett knows they’re all gay, and how he noticed that pattern. He remembers tactfully getting a read on Barrett at the All Stars weekend last year, and Barrett aggressively turning down the accusation. That conversation was short and scary. Ilya implied heavily he thought Barrett was gay, that he’s also somewhat of a gay himself, and Barrett returned some choice words steeped in anger. Ilya really thought he’d be getting socked that afternoon.

“You notice the guys?” Ilya asks. The refs are slowly breaking things up. Normally, Ilya would back down at this point, but normally he is fighting over someone getting tripped or a cheap shot, not something so personal. He knows it’s just a few seconds before they’re broken up, too, so he has to act quickly. It’s risky, to basically come out *again* to one of his red-marked-cards, but Barrett also has a green-marked-card that Ilya made just in case. “I think you would have more fun joining us.”

Barrett stills for a second before landing a good punch to Ilya’s jaw that has the referees sailing over and even some teammates grappling for their arms. Oh well. When Barrett is ready, maybe he’ll be in touch. Worst case scenario, he tells people Ilya is gay. But Barrett and Kent call everyone gay, so it wouldn’t actually matter all that much. Plus, Ilya has a decade of public womanizing to keep his reputation mostly clean. In this way, it’s to his advantage if society forgets bisexuals exist.

For another week, Ilya’s forces get to keep up the clobbering on Kent. Unfortunately, Scott Hunter texts Ilya one afternoon.

Oldest Man Alive: I just had my monthly meeting with Crowell

Ilya: you meet monthly??

Oldest Man Alive: Mostly kidding.

Oldest Man Alive: That’s just about how often I’m called in.

Ilya: Jesus

Ilya: am worried he has crush on you

Oldest Man Alive: He asked if I knew anything about what’s going on with Kent.

Ilya: maybe he has crush on Kent

Ilya: did you say your homosexual biker gang wants Kent dead?

Oldest Man Alive: No, because I value my fucking job.

Oldest Man Alive: I said no, that he’s probably got some personal problem that’s making his chirps too mean and getting under peoples skin.

Ilya: yes he has personal problem

Ilya: called being an asshole

Oldest Man Alive: Crowell is pissed because social media noticed the pattern.

Ilya: good for social media

Ilya: they are usually so dumb

Ilya: sorry this must be hard for you

Ilya: social media is a group of websites and applications young people use to communicate

Ilya: you can ask Kip to show you when he is there to give your meds

Oldest Man Alive: Fuck off you'd be lost without me.

They can't be found out, especially by the commissioner of the league. Ilya doesn't know if what they're doing is legal or not, but it's definitely not *great*. When he's done trying to bait Scott Hunter into an overdue retirement, he writes up the text:

Ilya: Crowell suspicious. Pausing Kent-Pocalypse for now. Unless Kent says something to you. Then kill the fucker.

He copies it and sends it to 26 contacts separately. The replies start coming in, all in individual texts. Ilya expects his phone to be chaotic whenever he sends a mass message like this, but this time there are more responsible voices interspersed with the chaos.

#18: God dammit i didnt even get a chance!!

Oldest Man Alive: Oh my god you can't text everyone to "kill the fucker"

Oldest Man Alive: That's a threat! I think? Or at least could be used as evidence??

Oldest Man Alive: I don't know. You just don't do it.

#17: lol but he did nothing when Carolina fans hung a doll of their (Black) division rival by a noose in the stands ok

#10: Wish Crowell would get suspicious of the date rape allegations

Jane: oh my god you sent this to all of them??

Jane: you can't tell people to kill anyone!!

Shane and Scott are buzzkills. They are also probably right. So he sends 26 follow-ups:

Ilya: Mr. Hunter has informed me this is not a good message. Do not actually kill anyone. Even if he deserves it.

#15: Tell Hunter to lick my balls

#15: please

Ilya: TELL HIM YOURSELF

Ilya: [Contact info: **Oldest Man Alive**]

#15: No stop giving me his number I like this better

The next week, Scott texts Ilya again.

Oldest Man Alive: lol Crowell is asking why the attacks stopped the day after we talked.

Just can't fucking win with this guy.

Luckily Kent's Toronto Guardians aren't at risk of winning the cup. But Carolina, the current frontrunner, is especially villainous this season. They are killing it on the ice, but the whole organization should be burned to the ground, in Ilya's opinion. Not only are they still using hate speech and threatening players during games (to no penalty from the refs), their fans are being racist and their coaches are allowing shady playing tactics. Their goalie has about half a dozen DUIs. One of the benchwarmers was just charged with animal cruelty. And the team management hasn't said one word about any one of these issues. No statements, no apologies, no firings. Only positive social media posts, proud of their band of violent criminals and bigots.

With the playoffs looming in a few weeks, and Carolina still at the front of the pack with no queer players, Ilya sits up late one night in his office, going over his cards and lists. He feels so helpless, despite having so many names. Most have no notes yet, but even of the ones that do, he can only use a fraction of them. There's a missing piece here, and it's a big oversight.

As Mastermind of Gay Hockey, he has the goals set out for his groups:

Green marks: come out of the closet, normalize gay hockey, marry Shane Hollander, win 12 cups, live happily ever after

Red marks: get destroyed, lose career, go to jail, contract painful genital warts, die from the warts, penniless and lonely, in a swamp where no one will find the warty body. The warts rejoice.

But these blue cards—the straight allies—he has no goal for them. That's a mistake.

He texts one of his teammates, a 97% cool-with-gays certainty score

Ilya: lunch tomorrow?

Cliff Marlow has been Ilya's friend since he was drafted. They've been through a lot together, and Ilya appreciates him, though he keeps him at arm's length. It's weird to think he's now closer with Scott fucking Hunter than this man he's spent most of his professional life with. Now they're here at a diner in Boston and Ilya is ready to let him in.

“Marly, are you good at keeping a secret?” Ilya frames it this way but he already knows. He gave him a test secret a few months ago. Nothing crazy, just something little to ensure he could be trusted if he ever needed him. Sure enough, Marly can hang.

“I like to think so.”

“I run an underground mob of gay and bisexual hockey players.”

Marlow nods, “I figured it was something like that.” Ilya’s jaw drops. In the stunned silence, Marlow continues, “Look, you kept telling us to lay into those sexist guys. Then I noticed other teams were doing it, but not every team. I figured you were in some kind of woke anti-asshole group. To be honest I thought it was the captains, not necessarily the... gay players.” Ilya wants to name just how many captains he has in his ranks, but he doesn’t actually need to. “Though I guess it *is* some captains, between Scott Hunter and I’ve always thought Utah’s captain and I’m assuming, you?”

Ilya wants to come to the defense of his #23, but refrains and keeps the conversation on himself. “Am bisexual.” At least Marlow didn’t mention Montreal’s captain. That would have made it harder to keep a poker face.

“Also figured that. We share a wall in, like, all our hotel rooms. I’m pretty sure you like women.” Marlow’s brow furrows. “Or... actually? That hasn’t happened all season. You ok?”

Well, fuck. Ilya has always seen Marlow as a kind of hockey ape, but the fact that he is so perceptive might be helpful here. He ignores that last revelation altogether.

“Then I have a small favor.” Ilya pulls out and unfolds a list of names and phone numbers. The blue marked names with higher than 95% cool-with-gays-certainty are Ilya’s next step. Sadly it’s fewer people than the queer corps. But Ilya really can’t risk anything in this first round draft, so it’s only guys he really trusts. “I need a group chat with all these guys. Need a convincing message without giving too much away.”

Marlow scans the paper. “Good list. How did you get all of their numbers?”

Ilya just shakes his head. These names mostly came from his players’ anecdotes of people being helpful and those players usually had the number to give him. But even if they didn’t... Ilya doesn’t have the words to explain his layers of connections. He could get the phone number, home address, dating history, probably credit card number of any player in the league at this point. He should probably keep that under wraps, though. “Unimportant.”

Marlow helps craft the message, checks Ilya’s grammar, offers better word choices. They finally get a text they like. Well, four texts, that Ilya sends rapid fire so they don’t get interrupted. This many people in a group chat might be a mistake.

Ilya has started a group chat.

Ilya: This is Ilya Rozanov. You do not know this, but there is an organized group of over 20 MLH players who are gay or bisexual. You are all in this group chat because 1) you are straight and 2) you have been deemed Cool. If you are not Cool, please remove yourself from this group chat. If you are not straight, I can send you over to the other group.

Ilya: You may have noticed some very awesome targeted campaigns against known assholes this year. The leader of the gay group has asked me to find more straight players to be on reserve to help with any such future efforts. Correcting the homophobia in the league helps the gay players feel more welcome to eventually come out, and some straight allies will be helpful.

Ilya: You would need to refrain from speaking about this group to anyone else. The other group has been able to keep secret for some time. This is a risk they are taking, please let's not disappoint them.

Ilya: Also, a 20-person group chat is not ideal, so be respectful. And say your name so people have the number.

Marly: Marlow, Boston. I know I'm sitting next to you but 👍 I'm in.

Pike: ???

Pike: Is this real? I'm in, obviously just... wtf

Pike: Hayden Pike, Montreal

Vaughn: Vaughn, ny

Vaughn: hang on

Pierce: Pierce, Columbus. sounds good. Can't believe there are that many LGBT players in the league

Ilya: very few L and T, mostly G and B.

Marly: lol

Vaughn: I just asked Hunter and this is real holy shit.

Vaughn: he said to just listen to Rozanov??

Vaughn: he also said "that guy is going to be league commissioner one day"

Vaughn: not fucking joking

Vaughn: [screenshot]

Becker: Becker. Chicago. In.

Ilya: Hunter would know. He has been in the league for 125 years.

Hayes: yeah I'm down but this is wild

Hayes: Wyatt Hayes. Toronto (sorry, I know, and tell them good work on Kent)

Hayes: but jesus imagine the group chat of 20 gay players seeking vengeance on assholes
lmao thats so cool

Hayes: superhero shit

Woodrick: Woodrick. Houston

Woodrick: you think they just talk about which of us they would bone?

Hayes has removed Woodrick from the group chat

Ilya: 5 points to Hayes.

Ilya: I think there is no group chat, they cannot be out.

Hayes: oh dope, there's a points system here??

Sullivan: even to each other? That's so sad. 😞

Sullivan: oh im so down btw Sully. Phoenix

Pike: sorry, and I'm totally on board and this is a great idea but

Pike: why the fuck is it Rozanov??

Pike: still hung up on that

Becker: hard agree

Sullivan: you'd think at least it would be Hunter

Vaughn: Scott's really busy all the time with press

Pierce: maybe they didn't want to use a gay player?

Pierce: still a weird choice.

Pierce: no offense Rozanov

Ilya: ok glad you are all on board. Meeting adjourned. Send me names of other people who are Cool and they might get added. Western conference especially. Do not add anyone without me. Remove any assholes.

Pike: so we can remove you?

Pike: kidding, please don't kick me out I really like this.

The straights continue to chat like this late into the night and Ilya stops checking it when they get far off topic. Every few minutes, he gets private texts with suggestions for players. Some have a common problem.

Pike: Shane Hollander would be good in there

Pike: I know you don't get along but like

Pike: we don't either lol

Ilya: only one per team for now.

Pike: ah ok sorry

Ilya will have to think of a solution. He wants to expand the straights to more than one player per team. Ideally, he wants hundreds of people in that damn group chat.

The next morning Ilya notices they whittled it down to 15 members overnight, and he knows he got the right guys in there. Even if they are a talkative bunch and clearly desperately

craving positive masculine friendship with known non-assholes.

He's a tiny bit grateful he isn't able to put his queer camarilla into one group chat. This may be even more chaotic than his individual texting system. A little more fun, though, admittedly.

As the playoff picture starts shaping up, ten of Ilya's teams are still in contention, which means six teams in the playoffs do not have a gay member. Two don't even have an ally member. The Carolina Assholes, led by Tiny Dickman, are still poised to win. Just in the last two weeks, he's received 4 complaints from his guys about Dickman running his mouth with insults and threats. The team does nothing, and in most cases, they laugh or join in. Carolina can not win the cup, and it's no longer just about Ilya's cup deal failing in the second year. From the fans to the management, the franchise is the worst in the league.

In any other year, Ilya would feel shitty about his own team knocked out before the playoffs, as he won't get a chance to take the assholes out himself. But now, with dozens of men in his various bisexual brigades, Ilya has a little more power. In fact, he has the power to do something a little... not *illegal*, just... immoral? Is it immoral if it's for a good cause?

Ilya can rig it. He can rig the cup.

His first message to every single one of his men in both armies is simple: "Carolina can not win." Ideas start pouring in.

"We could give them food poisoning."

"Convince the WAGs to go on a sex strike."

"Do you have any refs in the army?"

Oldest Man Alive: Maybe try being the better team and getting them out of the playoffs the old fashioned way.

Ilya: You know a lot about old fashioned ways

Oldest Man Alive: I walked into that.

Oldest Man Alive: Don't do anything dumb.

Ilya: tell Kip. He does something dumb every day.

Ilya: isn't he like, very smart? what is he doing with you?

Oldest Man Alive: You're an asshole.

Ilya: oh, sorry is he not putting out?

Oldest Man Alive: Way too mean. Rein it in.

Hmm. Scott Hunter, spokesperson for kindness and sportsmanship, inadvertently gives Ilya an idea that is not kind nor sportsmanlike. See, Ilya has only ever been affected by one chirp. It was a benign "your mama" joke, which are usually fine, and Ilya can brush them off. But this one landed on his mother's actual birthday, and he had already been feeling profoundly sad about that. He was so distracted that he lost the puck to the chirp. Ilya files this idea away.

Although his men have some good ideas, and Ilya jots down "WAG army" and "refs" on his legal pad for future use, one strategy seems most feasible. It's not a new idea for this group: They could kneecap Tiny Dickman. He's the highest point scorer on the team, and if Carolina does win the cup it should be without him. That becomes the strategy they go with, fuck Crowell's suspicions about the campaign against Dallas Kent. It's completely legal, and it's not terribly obvious, because it would be a good strategy for each team to take individually anyway. So he spreads word to his relevant playoff teams and now his ally army teams: impair Dickman.

This is what he tells the guys, as Ilya starts secretly working on research for below-the-belt chirps to dole out to each of Carolina's opponents privately during the playoffs. He thinks this will be their atom bomb, the pièce de résistance. That is, until another unexpected option appears one evening just before the first round of playoffs. Ilya gets a notification from a new group chat with just Pike, Vaughn, Hayes, and Marlow.

Pike started a group chat.

*Pike renamed the group chat **Council of Straight Elders***

Pike: hey i have an idea but didn't want it in the big group.

Hayes: clutch small group actually

Marly: best of the best

Marly: why is there no dabbing emoji?

Ilya: Pike just had his first thought ever, can we hear it?

Pike: fuck you

Pike: what I'm about to say doesn't leave this chat

Hayes: 😊

Pike: I have a friend on Carolina.

Pike: we were in Juniors around the same time and he's a chill dude

Pike: I just texted him gg and he was complaining about the team

Pike: he said he doesn't even want them to win.

Vaughn: this is more of a story and less of an idea.

Marly: Pike's typing dots are giving me a headache

Hayes: seriously this is taking forever the suspense is killing me

Pike: I may have like... asked if there was a way we would be able to beat him if we have to play him, and he said he could give me their plays. Literally just offered that to me, their full strategy doc. He could also probably be convinced to self-sabotage and give me minor injury lists. I'm not sure how he is with LGBTQ+ issues or politics or anything, but he seems to really fucking hate the team and doesn't really want to see them win the cup.

Hayes: holy shit

Pike: so it really depends on how bad we want it.

Vaughn: Pike what the fuck

Pike: yeah it's dumb sorry so illegal

Ilya: do not do that.

Ilya calls Pike. None of this should be in writing. Pike picks up on the first ring, and Ilya doesn't waste any time on a greeting. "We're doing it."

Chapter End Notes

Next up: 2018 cup 🤨

This chapter's list, because you have a benevolent overlord (I've gone back and added similar lists to the last two chapters too):

#10 wishes Crowell took the allegations seriously

#15 likes Ilya being carrier pigeon to chirp at hunter for him

#17 takes issue with Crowell's silence on racist fans

#18 wishes he had a chance to hurt Kent

#23 Utah captain

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

2018 Cup Playoffs and Finals

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for being on board with my morally gray Ilya and Pike, and being vehemently against my morally fucked Carolina team.

We get some OC details and some canon gays here (whether you remember them or not is a different story lol a lot of people didn't clock the last minor book-gay).

I couldn't find any canon info for the 2018 playoffs, so I made it all up. Yes, I created a complete playoff bracket for this and ensured all of the divisions and conferences make sense and align with canon, why do you ask? That's not a normal thing to do??

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

Hayden Pike does not disappoint. Within two days, Ilya is in possession of Carolina's plays and strategies document. Pike's guy also lists all the players' weak spots: Tiny Dickman has a bad knee from their onslaught earlier in the season, the good defenseman has bruised ribs, the starting left winger just had shoulder surgery. There's usable intel on about 12 of Carolina's players here.

For his own contribution, Ilya starts to research Carolina's players' lives. What will actually *hurt* them? He looks at court documents, divorce proceedings, recent obituaries, anything that will give them chirp fodder that won't just annoy, it will distract, disarm, even paralyze. It's below the belt, for sure, so he makes sure the guys on the receiving end deserve it. He doesn't want to traumatize some innocent rookie with a chirp about his brother in prison just because he got drafted by the wrong team. For those more neutral, non-odious players, he finds innocent but freaky facts: their third-grade teacher's name, their mom's favorite brand of wine, what instrument they played in high school. Weird enough to startle them and give the opponent the advantage. The referees might dislike some of this stuff, but if they do it out of earshot, or the chirping player is expendable, the payoff could be worth the risk.

He is cautious. Only one team plays Carolina at a time, so the intel is limited to that team. He spreads it carefully between gays and allies so no one player has it all. Luckily the first series is against New Jersey, where Ilya has two gays (well, #19 is gay and #7 is bisexual) and an ally, Brophy. It's a little frustrating; Ilya can't even tell his three guys that there's someone else

on the team with other information. But if one of them approaches another queer player with a cheat code, they're going to get inadvertently clocked and outed. Finally he comes to the best conclusion, which is just telling the two Queer Council members that there's another on their team and if they don't want to be clocked they should be careful with the info. God bless New Jersey, they are both amenable to coming out to each other. They could have done that to begin with and saved Ilya a lot of stress. He tells them the ally member will also have separate instructions.

The information is dispersed strategically. The highest-ranking person should get the leaked strategies and plays, but if that person is a goody-two-shoes, it will go to the shadiest. Luckily, as an Alternate Captain, #7 is the highest-ranking *and* he is adequately shady. Enforcers and defensemen, like Brophy, should get the injuries list. Offensive lines get the chirps. He doesn't send the original document out, and everything in writing is carefully coded. To an outsider, it could just look like a player giving another player helpful tips. The outsider would not be aware of the phone call preceding those tips with all the context. Even if they get caught, the only one in real trouble is Pike's traitorous Carolina friend, but Ilya does what he can to protect that nameless, faceless person anyway.

Ultimately, it's up to each player. If they want to use the resources Ilya is offering, they can. If their personal moral code can't stand it, he's not pressuring them. Shane, for example, probably wouldn't be open to these kinds of ideas. But Ilya won't have to worry about that unless both of their teams advance another two rounds. Even then, Montreal's backup, Ilya's #13, is a corrupt little loose cannon with zero moral qualms. So Shane could probably be persuaded to take some of the more benign chirps, while #13 and Pike take the serious stuff.

The New Jersey players are not only game to try the tactics, they gently inform their teammates, each agreeing to take credit for Ilya's intel. It's a lot less suspicious to say "It seems like Gordon is favoring his right foot," or "I looked it up and the goalie hit a pedestrian during his last DUI," than to say "Ilya Rozanov told me dozens of horrible secrets about every member of the team, each worse than the last."

All Ilya can do is watch from his base of operations in Boston, where he has moved many of the lists and documents in front of the television to keep track of which details are used. Repeating the same chirp, being too obvious about targeting the same injury, or blocking the same play could give them away.

In the first round, New Jersey does pretty well with the information. They are able to hold their own and push 6 games against what should be the best team in the league. Ilya's #7 could have been less obvious about tripping that defenseman with the bad ankle, but it ends up a moot point. In game 6, they fail to catch up in time and let Carolina advance. There's a bright side: Brophy targets some pre-existing injuries and by the end of the series, two of Carolina's guys are out for the playoffs.

NJMLHLGBTQFOIR group chat

#19: Sorry cap we tried

Ilya: the fuck is this group name

Ilya: FOIR?

Ilya: all three of you are here?

#19: New Jersey Major League Hockey LGBTQ Friends of Ilya Rozanov duh

Brophy: I told them the chat name didn't really apply bc you and I aren't gay

Brophy: but im cool with it if you are

#7: RIP to my Scott Hunter moment

#7: At this rate, I'll never be Rozanov And Scott Hunter's Yearly Coming Out Club King 🙄

#19: Stop trying to make RASHYCOCK happen.

#7: just wait. it will spread.

Ilya: you got two asshole starters out

Ilya: is good first round

#19: we're taking Broph to a gay bar tonight to mourn our loss

#19: it's his role as cultural ambassador to come with us

#7: lol like you live in gay bars? you JUST turned 21 and your bf still has a fake ID

Brophy: im going to feel like a predator

Brophy: Roz I heard you went to a Scott Hunter night at a gay bar last year, any tips for a straight dude?

NJMLHLGBTQFOIR (minus Brophy) group chat

#19: wait what does Brophy think is happening?

Ilya: he thinks i am spokesperson for straights

#7: sorry WHAT?

Ilya makes a note that #7 and #19 can be texted together and shortens his mass text list by one. For a moment, he thinks maybe he can convince his other teams to do the same. Most of his players would still not be ok coming out to even the other queer members of their team, but he wants to work toward it. That is, until the New Jersey group chat continues throughout their bar night. After several hours of "where did you go?" and "are you two leaving?" Ilya is once again counting himself lucky. Individual team chats of 3-4 people would be way worse than his current system.

RASHYCOCK is catchy, though.

Montreal is also booted out of the running in the first round, by Buffalo. It's great because Shane is now with Ilya all the time. It's terrible because Ilya needs to orchestrate the largest maybe-not-legal game fixing in MLH history with Mr. Rulebook sitting next to him on the couch. Ilya loves that Shane is so supportive of his enterprise, but he would not be as accepting of *all of it*. So, he tells Shane the bare minimum: he's doing work for his flock. Shane's usually not around 24/7 so maybe he thinks this amount of work is normal. That said, when Shane first arrives, Ilya doesn't look at his phone for almost 24 hours. The man is only human.

In the second round, Ilya's Washington player and the ally are not as comfortable with the idea of physically taking advantage of someone's injuries, but they do come through with the chirps. It's fun to watch from the couch with Shane. Occasionally #14 will be fighting against the boards for the puck and Carolina's player will just freeze, shocked at whatever they just heard. Washington forces a 7th game and for a second it really looks like Carolina is finished but unfortunately, they still rally and advance to the conference finals, the penultimate round.

Carolina beats Buffalo pretty handily in the conference finals, but there is a big consolation. In the last game of the series, Tiny Dickman is injured beyond repair by the Buffalo enforcer, Ilya's #8. Ilya's phone blows up with joyous texts, and some of his members suggest getting shirts or even tattoos of #8's fan slogan. Ilya knows the guy would probably hate that. Still, he sends him everyone's gratitude for vanquishing their biggest enemy. Carolina will move onto the final round without their star forward.

Ilya is ecstatic, obviously, but he's also a little disappointed Tiny Dickman didn't make it to the final. There was supposed to be a grand finale for Tiny. Ilya had contacted Dickman's ex-girlfriend and she was happy to be forthcoming with some *very* personal information. He was really looking forward to that.

The moment Carolina clinches a spot at the cup finals, it feels like everything stops and a panic sets in. Ilya was so concerned with stopping Carolina at any point during the playoffs, he never thought they would actually make it to the final and have to play the Western Conference team. Ilya stopped paying attention to non-relevant playoffs when it was clear every team in contention had someone to come out if they won the cup. But over on that bracket, some kind of miracle was happening in Vancouver.

Vancouver has always been a pretty shitty team, and the fact they made it to the playoffs at all this year was impressive. It was a combination of luck, timing, and opponents' injuries that led them to the cup finals. Not skill or strategy or anything that would make a team good.

A smart mastermind would have been paying attention. He would have instructed a better team to advance. He wouldn't have let *Vancouver*, of all teams, make its way into the most important series in the history of professional hockey. Well, maybe that's dramatic. But at the moment, it certainly feels like it.

Vancouver's landmark season has become a real underdog story. It seems every hockey fan is rooting against Carolina. Even if he wishes a better team made it through, Ilya will not let

them be disappointed.

To everyone's surprise, Vancouver wins the first game of the series in a shut-out. Carolina is playing hard despite losing their star, but Vancouver's goalie is incredible. He's blocking shots as if he could predict each shooter's next move.

And if it looks like that, it's because he can. Vancouver's goaltender is #5 of Ilya's army, an early recruit from that first All-Star weekend. Turns out, you only really need to give the plans to the goaltender. #5 told his defensemen some vague advice based on the plans, but mostly he just knows where the shots are coming from, so he can stop them. He's not even trying to make it look believable. The man is fed up with the league and is cheating like he has no fucks left to give. In combination with Ilya's vicious chirps, always new material, and the Carolina roster scraping the bottom of the barrel with all their injured players out, the next two games go largely the same way. Carolina is only able to put up 1 goal in each. The hockey world is abuzz with the Cinderella story of Vancouver, their incredible defense, and the teardown of the best team in the league.

In the fourth game, when Vancouver could win it for the sweep, Ilya doles out his most atomic chirps, the grand finales for the rest of the douchebags on the team. It's also... *interesting* to see one of Carolina's linemen make three passes to blocked players. Interesting. Just... interesting. That's all.

Ilya is watching the game with Shane and his parents at the cottage. "I bet Carolina is missing Reinhold Glickman right about now." Yuna says, "It must be awful to have your captain injured right before the finals like this."

"Yes. Awful." Ilya deadpans.

"Mom, Ti— Riney Glickman is like, the worst guy." Shane says, "No one feels bad for him."

"He's a good player, though, and look, they kind of suck without him! They need to use their backup wing? This guy is terrible. This is a massacre!"

"Good for Canada, though. Vancouver deserves it," David contributes what he can.

After the third intentionally-sacrificed pass from Carolina's traitor, Ilya's phone lights up with a call from Scott Hunter. His stomach drops, because he already knows he's about to get scolded. He gets up to take the call, definitely not wanting to have this conversation in front of anyone. The fewer people who know how this happened, the better.

Shane calls after him, "Hurry, there are only a few minutes left!"

"Ok. If Carolina scores three times, come get me." Ilya says as he steps onto the patio. He closes the door behind him and answers the phone, "Happy 2nd Annual Scott Hunter Homosexual Awareness Day!"

"Ok. Ignoring that." Scott cuts right to the chase, "What did you do?"

"It is that obvious?"

“Rozanov, I’m watching a clinic on rigged games.”

“Not *rigged*!” Ilya argues. “Well... what is rigging, really?”

“God damn it.” Hunter sighs. “How bad is it?”

“Just some leaked plans... a hit on Tiny Dickman—”

“—*Tiny Dickman*??” Scott stifles a laugh.

“—And, I think probably self-sabotage now from that little wing boy.”

“But he’s not one of ours?”

“No, he is a... friend of a friend. You could say. I think. Probably.” Ilya actually doesn’t know who Pike’s friend is but... it’s getting pretty obvious.

“Ok. Actually, I’m not asking anything else about that. I want plausible deniability.” Scott is quiet for a moment, “Who do we have on Vancouver?” Hunter is always so fucking nosy.

“I told you, #5.”

“Yeah. Again. As I don’t live inside your brain or your spreadsheet, I don’t know who that is.”

“Am surprised you know spreadsheets, is there a computer class at the senior home?”

“Come on,” Scott whines, “there’s like three minutes left. Kip and I have a bet.”

Ilya looks through the wall of windows to the TV. The game is almost over and Carolina is still way behind. Maybe it would be safe to tell him. Earlier today, Ilya called #5 to check in, and he knows exactly how this is planned to go down. The man’s fiancé is ready to hit ‘Post’ on a statement for him when the game ends and then walk out with the families. The fiancé has probably already been coming out to the WAGs and answering awkward questions for hours. There’s no real way it’s not happening, so Ilya lets Hunter in. “Goaltender,” he admits as he watches #5 block another shot through the window.

“No kidding.” Scott breathes. “Huh.”

“Do not be excited, you are still lonely. He has to retire.” And then, for the first time ever, Ilya decides to let Hunter further in and share more than expressly necessary, because this is killing him and he has no one to talk to. “Not just because he is ancient, maybe older than you. Contract renegotiations stopped because he told his coach. Just to invite the asshole to his fucking wedding. Now no other team will take him.”

“Oh my god, Ilya.” Hunter doesn’t often use his first name. “That’s... what the fuck?”

Ilya relates. Part of the check-in before the game was to make sure the goalie wasn’t being pressured into giving up his career just for the cup bet. Ilya wouldn’t be able to live with the

guilt. For the fourth time since the series started, Ilya was assured it was the plan anyway, and then he even talked to the fiancé, who basically thanked Ilya for giving his man the last push needed to retire. The management's response made the couple hate hockey, and they can't wait to be done.

"He is fine."

Neither man can say anything else. There's nothing fine about this.

Scott laughs a little, "Did I just hear a loon? Where the fuck are you?"

"Yes. I am outside, am going back in now. Happy Carolina Loses day!"

"A Happy Carolina Loses day to you too. You belong in prison."

That reminds Ilya to also quickly text Pike while he's outside. He is emotional with gratitude for the two armies behind him.

Ilya: The Gay Cabal thanks you.

Ilya: someone is coming out after the game because of your work

Ilya: maybe mob boss is good job for you?

Ilya: hockey is not.

He gets back to the couch in time to see Vancouver win the cup. The second the buzzer sounds, Ilya refreshes the goaltender's Instagram. He doesn't even read it. He saw a draft of it last night. Instead, he shows it to Shane.

@Baldwincouver

[image: Baldwin stands arm-in-arm next to a rugged older guy in front of a log cabin, holding up a ringed hand.]

I have loved just about every minute of my career, but it is time for me to step back, plan my wedding, and settle into the role of the trophy husband. I love you Joshua, can't wait to spend the rest of my (very unoccupied retired) life with you. 🌈 Proud of my team, and proud to accept the 2018 SCHUMEM Cup Award.

Shane looks up from the screen with tears in his eyes, because the man cries at a slight breeze, and pulls it up on his own phone for his parents. Ilya's phone is already blowing up with texts and most have a similar question.

Oldest Man Alive: SCHUMEM Cup Award?

Ilya: SCott HUnter MEMorial

Oldest Man Alive: Oh go right ahead and fuck yourself with that.

Oldest Man Alive: I can't believe Baldwin agreed to that name.

Oldest Man Alive: Memorial?? I'm not dead!!

Ilya: it will be easier than changing the name in like two years

He sends the queer army the mass text he already had drafted in celebration of the... 2nd Annual Scott Hunter Memorial Cupping Out Day? ...SCHUMEM Cup Award? He included #7's title, RASHYCOCK, Rozanov and Scott Hunter's Yearly Coming Out Club King, as a reason to workshop the name. He immediately gets some responses to that brainstorming request.

"I like the Memorial part. Scott Hunter Memorial Yearly Cupping Out Club King SHunMYCOCK"

"The winners could be Agents of the S.H.E.I.L.D: Scott Hunter award for Excellence In Loving Dick. Works if you don't know how to spell."

"I think we should be the Scott Hunties or Scunties."

"PHOODS. Professional Hockey's Order Of Dick Suckers"

"Most Vagina-less Peen? Men's Venereal Player? Massive Veiny Penis?"

"I still like Friends of Rozanov"

"Ashcock sounds like it could be an actual award."

"Are we not doing Ilya's Avengers anymore? Ilya's avenger of the year, IAOTY?"

"Shouldn't we have settled on a name before Baldwin posted this?? Schumem is dumb."

But unfortunately, the bad name example backfires and a lot of them actually like RASHYCOCK. These texts get progressively worse and one thing becomes clear: they are never going to settle on a name. Shane just shakes his head at every response Ilya shows him. Because they are in front of his parents, and Ilya is not open about his role as executive of the queer cartel, Shane texts him.

Jane: These are so bad. it should be simple and clear. Alliance of Gay and Bisexual Hockey Players.

Ilya: AGBHP? AOGABHP? what does this spell?

Jane: it doesn't have to spell anything!

Ilya: you are so boring.

Jane: you can't put RASHYCOCK on a coming out post!!

On the TV, Baldwin's fiancé is walking onto the ice with the other WAGs and families. There's no big Scott-Hunter-style tongue kiss, because not everyone is an exhibitionist, but the two men hug and Baldwin celebrates with his team and his teammates' families with an arm around the man's waist.

"Kind of an annual tradition now, huh!" David Hollander remarks. He has no idea.

"If you won the cup, would you do that?" Yuna asks the room, even though they all know the 10-year plan.

"At this point? I think I would have to," Ilya says honestly. He can't tell if he is relieved that this will never happen with his upcoming move to Ottawa, or if he wants that moment more

than anything in the world. Either way, if Ilya himself didn't uphold the cup bet, there would be a mutiny.

Shane noticeably avoids the question and instead whispers, "Baldwin was my last guess for Vancouver." Ilya just has to laugh at his boyfriend's terrible gaydar as they cuddle on the couch next to his parents, watching the scene he set.

Chapter End Notes

I think the constant workshopping of the name will continue, so if you have any suggestions I might include them and name a Gay after you.

#5: Baldwin, goaltender for Vancouver, now retired (minor canon book-gay)

#7: New Jersey Alternate Captain, originator of RASHYCOCK

#8: Enforcer for Buffalo 🐻, takes Tiny Dickman out of the playoffs

#13: Montreal's backup, corrupt

#14: Washington player, ok with non-physical harm

#19: New Jersey younger player

Coming up: MLH Awards, more ally army, Scott Hunter Attention Whore™

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Between the cup and the MLH awards

Chapter Notes

Heavier on the plot, lighter on the dick jokes.

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

After Baldwin's coming out post, Ilya's ally syndicate gets to work fighting trolls on social media. They post their own supportive messages, some even with pictures of themselves in Baldwin jerseys. Once they do it, others start doing the same, and Ilya sends private messages to those others to recruit them. It's a big step, showing the world that the players can get on board with queer teammates. Baldwin isn't as big of a star as Scott Hunter, yet there are already more hockey players sharing support for him than for Hunter this time last year. Ilya can't help but think his plan is to thank for that.

He wants to keep building the ally army, but the problem thus far has been keeping his queer members safe from being recommended for the group. At first, he told the allies he only will take one member per team, which protects most of his guys. But now that Pike's Carolina traitor has joined up, he has one person from every team in the league in the group chat. Technically, it should be capped out with these 32 members. According to them, it's just the 32 of them.

Except, that number is a lie. Ilya actually has another 80 straight people he has been texting individually. He started with the first few after he made up the dumb one-per-team rule to get Pike off his back, and now any team duplicates get a private message. It's annoying, and he hates it. So, he makes a *second* ally army group chat for those not in the first. This one is too big for standard message threads, so he moves it to a messaging app.

The second group allows him to inform everyone that there are levels with no overlap. It makes it seem like maybe if a guy isn't in the group, he could be in the other one. But everyone is sworn to secrecy, so they could never ask in real life.

But Ilya finds himself overwhelmed. Now with the extended ally chat, and the 32 allies from each team, and his queer squad, he is the sole leader for groups that make up about a fifth of the league. The gays are terribly complicated to lead, because he can't ask anyone else for help without outing everyone. The logical idea would be Hunter, but Hunter is constantly

swamped with interviews and appearances, being the only out current player. Baldwin wants very little to do with professional hockey. Ilya can't even ask Shane to do it. If they both openly like men, and are close enough to be sharing this responsibility, the group will start putting things together. Especially if they then start a foundation together this fall.

So in the sheer volume of straight-army chaos, he sees the opportunity to delegate a little. Ilya makes a series of decisions.

Council of Straight Elders group chat

Ilya: wanted to admit something

Hayes: fucking finally

Ilya: I run both groups.

Ilya: I started the gay army and I also started the straight army.

Ilya: a benefit of being bisexual

Ilya: no one knows this so obviously it is something I would like to keep secret between us

Ilya: and I guess also the 30 guys who also know this about me from the gay group.

Ilya: and my boyfriend's parents.

Ilya: and one friend.

Ilya: and also Marly knew.

Pike: wait are you for real?

Hayes: he was literally making decisions for them all the time, you didn't notice?

Vaughan: I kind of figured this when Scott told me to just trust you.

Vaughan: with Scott now btw he says hi

Marly: I just want to point out how good I kept the secret

Pike: Am I the only one??

Ilya: 0/10 gaydar Pike

Ilya: [image: Gaydar post-it with tallies.]

Ilya: this is mine. I got back above 90% recently

Hayes: Jesus Christ.

Hayes changed the name of the group chat

Council of (Mostly) Straight Elders group chat

Vaughan: Scott just confirmed the gaydar numbers.

Vaughan: says Rozanov is a freak of nature

Marly: but you're probably only asking if you're like 100% sure, right?

Marly: It must be scary to just walk up to a random hockey player like hey u gay?

Pike: I feel like Rozanov could get away with it.

Pike: I would get hit.

Ilya: you have hittable face disease

Ilya: only one person ever hit me when i asked

Vaughan: you got hit??

Ilya: when he comes out in 5 years I will tell you who it was

Ilya: he does not yet know he is gay

Vaughan: you just have like... a crazy life huh

Ilya: anyway I started the other group last year. It was 3 people and then it was 7 and 12 and it is getting out of hand with 30 now.

Ilya: It is just me and sometimes Hunter. One other guy helps a little.

Ilya: confession number 2:

Ilya: the ally army is too big. 115 guys total.

Ilya: and the gays need individual messages and that is overwhelming

Ilya: so was wondering if I can stay out of the straight mess and trust you to keep them in order?

Ilya: would be very appreciated.

Hayes: 115???

Ilya: people were being nice to Baldwin

Vaughan: yeah i can step up

Vaughan: Scott says he doesn't help at all, it's just you and maybe the other guy

Ilya: no the other guy does not help much

Ilya: actually sometimes makes things harder

Hayes: Don't worry Roz you're good.

Hayes: We'll take care of it.

Pike: still fucking shocked that Rozanov has a boyfriend???

Pike: but yeah whatever you need

Ilya: Ok so. We break it up by division? Vaughan will take Atlantic, Marly Metropolitan, Hayes Central, and Pike Pacific. You can add or remove whoever you want.

Ilya: for entry: they need to actually DO ally stuff. Not just ignore bad stuff. Do good stuff.

Marly: 😊

That's his actual solution to the Pike-Shane problem. The barrier for entry isn't only Cool-With-Gays, you have to actually do something beneficial. So it's not just avoiding

homophobic jokes, these guys actually call them out. They're wearing a rainbow sticker or attending a pride parade or shutting down locker room shenanigans. Some are even sperm donors for lesbian couples, officiating their gay brother's wedding, attending Scott Hunter nights at gay bars. Candidates have to actively do something *good*. Not just react neutrally or give off safe vibes.

This seems to protect all the guys who want to stay in the closet. The guys who are adamantly closeted aren't using rainbow tape on their hockey stick or objecting to homophobic slurs in the locker room. They're trying to fly under the radar.

Like Shane. Shane has, for years, kept any trace of homosexual evidence out of his life. In fact, that's what gave Ilya the idea to begin with. Ilya has been hinting at this excuse with Pike for months. So it should come as no surprise when Shane says something about it at the cottage in the week after the cup finals.

"I think Hayden might know I'm gay." He announces as he looks at his phone, "He keeps dropping hints."

Ilya furrows his brow. Pike fully thinks Shane is straight. Just yesterday, Vaughan said Pike suggested Shane for the straight group and Vaughan told him to come back with evidence, which has been Ilya's response, too. He specifically didn't put anyone in charge of their own division so they couldn't just add their friends without screening. "What hints?"

"Maybe I'm overthinking or being paranoid or... like he sent me the link to this LGBTQ charity and told me he donated and that I should post it on my page. It was weird. And then lately around the team, when like, Comeau would make a joke about someone being gay, he's has been looking at me for a few seconds before he shuts it down. Like he's expecting me to react somehow?" *Or shut it down yourself*, Ilya mentally fills in. This is making Ilya feel a little bad. Pike has been so honest. At any point, he could have just said Shane did one of these things to get his way. He doesn't know Ilya talks to Shane. He's trying to go about it the right way, getting Shane to do something to prove his allyship. "And just now, he invited me to come to the Pride parade next week. Luckily it's the same day as the MLH Awards, so I have an excuse."

"Maybe he is just being a good ally." Ilya tries, but Shane isn't convinced. "Why don't you tell him?" This would solve the problem for Ilya. None of the other allies are as adamant about one person as Hayden is about Shane. Most take no for an answer once. Hayden has been relentless.

"I will." Shane swallows. "In the fall. I'm going to tell the team, and I have to tell him first. But... in the fall."

Ilya sighs. He hates exposing just how deep he's gotten into this community-building. Shane always worries he's over-exerting himself, and this won't help. "Ok. You know I have this big gay army?"

"Yeah?" Shane looks confused.

"Ok. I also have this big straight army."

Shane rolls his eyes and heaves an exhausted breath, “Of course you do.”

“Is bigger than the gay one, by a lot. And Pike, he... is asking.” Ilya pulls out his phone to demonstrate.

“He’s in it?” Shane asks as Ilya scrolls through to find him.

“Yes. But I told him you cannot be in it because you are not an active ally.”

“What do you mean? I could be an ally!”

Ilya laughs, “You go around stopping locker room talk and wearing rainbows?”

“No, that would make it a little obvious!” Shane looks perturbed.

Ilya just gives him a hand gesture like he can fill in the rest of the blanks. Shane does, eventually.

“So he’s trying to get me to prove I’m an ally.”

“Is up to you, what you want to do about it now.”

“Fall. In the fall, I’ll tell him.” Shane looks at his phone. “For now I can just kind of... imply the gay stuff makes me uncomfortable.”

It’s perfect. Hayden will think Shane is a little squeamish about gay people, which will stop him from wanting Shane to join the group. So Shane’s reputation with Pike takes a hit for a few months. It will recover when Pike learns the truth. And then it will take another hit when he learns it’s Ilya. They’ll cross that bridge when they come to it.

Between the Council of Straight Elders and the 32 original guys who become representatives for their teams, the straight army becomes a mostly self-governing body. If anyone gets a whiff of homophobia (or misogyny, or racism, or any other intolerance, which Ilya did not ask for but appreciates anyway), they are booted. It's nice, when no one's identity has to be hidden, everything runs a lot smoother. So Ilya can focus on the gay fleet's issues.

And there are some big issues. The Tuesday before the MLH awards, Baldwin texts Ilya and Scott Hunter.

RASHYCOCK winners + Roz group chat

Baldwin: you want to hear something crazy?

Oldest Man Alive: Literally always!

Ilya: Hunter you are so nosy

Oldest Man Alive: He's offering!

Baldwin: apparently the league handed Vancouver the playoffs to make the cup easier for Carolina

Baldwin: and they're suspicious of our performance but they can't do anything about it without admitting they fixed the Western conference playoffs to get us there to begin with.

Ilya: wait this is true?

Baldwin: yeah Crowell just had me and our captains in a meeting with some other execs and they let it slip while they were asking us how we did it.

Baldwin: basically "you guys were so bad that's why we tried to get you to the final, what happened?"

Oldest Man Alive: they asked you how you did it??

Baldwin: Yeah. Um roz should I break off into a private message? Not sure who knows what.

Ilya: no it's fine Hunter knows everything

Oldest Man Alive: So that's just in writing now.

Ilya: there was nothing illegal. I asked Mr. Rulebook. Hypothetically? is that the word?

Ilya: the refs didn't call unsportsmanlike on the chirps

Ilya: they can't do it after the game so we are safe.

Ilya: and plays were leaked not stolen

Ilya: all injuries were legal

Ilya: none of us had any money on the game

Ilya: no one did anything bad

Oldest Man Alive: Ok "bad" and "illegal" are two different things

Oldest Man Alive: So he knows about all this too?

Ilya: no. again, hypothetical.

Oldest Man Alive: He's not dumb.

Ilya: no but i am very hypothetical.

Baldwin: who are you talking about?

Baldwin: anyway I didn't tell them anything.

Baldwin: I told them it sounds like a smear campaign on the newly out gay guy.

Baldwin: I said it wouldn't be a good look to accuse my team of anything.

Ilya: damn retired Baldwin has balls?

Ilya: Ballwin?

Baldwin: what are they going to fire me?

Baldwin: they were never putting me in the HOF anyway

Baldwin: and maybe they won't ask me to do dumb shit like other retired players.

Baldwin: win/win

Oldest Man Alive: wow so 1) the league was literally rigging the cup

Oldest Man Alive: and 2) Rozanov's Regiment out-rigged them.

Ilya: We are better than them at most things

Oldest Man Alive: They asked me to give a speech at the awards about my first year out.

Oldest Man Alive: Probably to say how great they've been about it, like Crowell hasn't actively threatened me like 10 times this year.

Baldwin: they probably don't want you to talk about how I couldn't get another contract after I told my team.

Oldest Man Alive: Nope. I bet they don't want me to say anything about that at all.

Oldest Man Alive: Or Rozanov's queer death squad.

Ilya: I would also not like you talking about that.

Ilya: you said yes to making a speech?

Oldest Man Alive: Yeah I'm doing it.

Oldest Man Alive: But now that there are so many of us, we can try to use it to maybe say something.

Oldest Man Alive: Can you see about getting everyone together?

Oldest Man Alive: Would that be insane?

Oldest Man Alive: Maybe the night before the MLH awards next weekend? We'll all be in the same place.

Ilya: not everyone is invited to the awards.

Baldwin: I wanted to be as far away from the MLH awards as physically possible.

Baldwin: but I could make the trip maybe for that.

Ilya: people might come to Vegas if I tell them to

Oldest Man Alive: God how do you have these guys so whipped?

Oldest Man Alive: Hang on...

Oldest Man Alive: Do they think this is blackmail?

Ilya: they just love me 

Ilya: will see what I can do

Oldest Man Alive: Assemble your gay hockey militia and let's have a damn meeting about this.

Ilya: some of us are bi

Chapter End Notes

I had to break this chapter up, so *still* coming up: MLH awards

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

MLH Awards meet-up

Chapter Notes

Just mafia doing mafia shit (like hanging out, maybe some light whistle-blowing as a treat)

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

The trouble with getting dozens of closeted hockey players in the same room is... literally everything about that sentence. Ilya asks them to come to Vegas with different personalized strategies. Some are into the idea of a meet-up already. Some he tells it's just to meet one-on-one, and casually drops if there are others, maybe they could meet up. Some he knows it would be easier to convince in person when they get there. A few decline Ilya's invitation outright.

Upon Shane's suggestion, he tells them if there will be someone else from their team. For some reason that's freaking Shane out, so he downplays the meeting to #13, Ilya's other Montreal guy. Ilya's a little disappointed; he really wanted the rookies to come, make sure they see and believe there are others. Plus, #14 will be there, and Ilya wanted to introduce them and watch them hook up. Not *watch* them. Well, if the opportunity arose to— it doesn't matter. Shane doesn't want to come out to any teammates yet, and Ilya would much rather have Shane there.

As for the closeted portion, everyone in that room needs to be real ok with keeping secrets. Ilya thinks this one is easy. They're closeted gay hockey players. They're good at keeping secrets.

And everyone in the same *room*? Discreetly? They can't exactly rent out a hall or ask for a committee event at the awards. Maybe someday, but for now they have to do this in the shadows.

So that's how Ilya, Shane, and Scott Hunter end up in a hotel room on the outskirts of Vegas the evening before the MLH awards, pushing the bed against the far wall to make room for— again— *dozens of professional hockey players*. The three of them already feel compact. Ilya arranges some bottles of alcohol and mixers on the desk. He briefly worries if he should have gotten food. But it's late, people should have eaten already...

Shane rubs his back to comfort his anxiety. Scott shakes his head at the gesture, “There is no way you guys are staying secret.” They both turn to glare at him and he raises his hands. “I’ll do what I can, but this,” he gestures at them, “is not subtle.” Ilya squeezes Shane’s hand one more time at the first knock on the door.

Baldwin gets there first. “Can’t believe I’m—” he looks at Shane, and then back to Scott and Ilya. “Are you serious? With Hollander, you three are the top scorers in the league.”

Ilya laughs a little, “We can tell everyone that sucking dick gets you better at hockey.”

“Crass.” Scott says, at the same time as Shane says “Stop.”

“Hang on. Are you Mr. Rulebook??” Baldwin asks. Shane looks confused between Ilya and Scott, who both nod. “You might want earmuffs for this then.” He turns to Scott and Ilya. “Before there’s more of us, I gotta say I don’t think we should tell anyone else about the meeting with the commissioner and my captains.” He eyes Shane. “I take it not every guy knows the full story, and I’d prefer if we kept it that way. I kind of like my reputation untarnished, thanks.” He’s speaking vaguely, but Ilya gets it. He doesn’t want to be known as the guy who used *totally legal information* to win a cup. Even if it means exposing the league rigging the playoffs.

“It’s cool.” Scott says, “I wasn’t planning to say that in the speech, but we’ll talk tomorrow about what I can say about your retirement. I want that in there.” They both look at Ilya.

“We have to make the situation public at some point.” Ilya says, a little disappointed. He has no idea how they’ll use that blackmail on the league if they can’t expose how they got it. “But we will figure out a way to do it without...” He waves a hand through the air. There’s no way he can finish that sentence with Shane here. “Later. It does not have to be this weekend.”

Scott and Baldwin glance at Shane nervously, and Shane says nothing in response to any of this. Ilya is not surprised. Between the closeted players and the informants, Shane has always understood there’s a lot of privileged information, and he knows not to ask. Ilya is struck with appreciation for his boyfriend and already feels an acute withdrawal from being able to touch him. This might be a long night.

Slowly, men start to filter in. It’s so awkward, Ilya kind of forgets why this was a good idea. Was it ever?

Each newcomer has the same reaction: a sheepish, nervous, shy nod to Ilya, Scott, and Baldwin before their eyes greet Shane Hollander and widen. One even says “*Shane Hollander??*” and Ilya chuckles to himself. Even if your gaydar was absolute shit, you should be able to get Shane. Fucking *Scott Hunter* got Shane, and he’s scraping 60% now.

Maybe they're surprised that such a huge name is gay, or willing to be seen here. Many of them had the same reaction to Ilya at first, and they're over it by now, more annoyed by him than anything else. But tonight, it's more obvious than ever: The league's three biggest stars are in one room, and it's the gay room. In fact, with each new arrival, he sees the recognition on all of their faces. It's not just the three superstars, it's everyone. Maybe it's because they're at the awards, so the best would already be here, but... These are *all* good players.

Gay hockey players are better at the sport, but it's becoming clear they're also more fun. Any air of awkward silence dissipates when they get enough guys to stop noticing the new ones come in. People stop craning their necks to see who else is here. They just start to laugh and, importantly, commiserate. Some guys chicken out and they end up with 12 people.

"This isn't even my first time in this hotel," #7 laughs and gets a couple other chuckles. The hotel is a little notorious for keeping secrets on the outskirts of Vegas, and everyone in the room knows something about that life. They discuss some similar grievances and strategies and every guy has a look of relief on his face to finally hear and say these things out loud. The camaraderie is quickly worth the insanity Ilya has been feeling. Shane's eyes are welling up. The man cries so easily.

Shane and Ilya stay pretty far away from each other, and Scott has been put on "heart-eyes" duty to throw a wet blanket over any visible affection pouring out of either of them. Even this open-minded group of their peers wouldn't accept the rivals in a relationship for, depending on how you measure, almost a decade. Scott doesn't even know that part. It's another reminder for Ilya that their situation is impossible, if they're in this room of the only people in the world who might understand, and they're still unable to be a couple.

"I'm surprised you guys are ok in such close quarters," #16 comments, his eyes a little too suspicious for Ilya's liking. "Don't you have beef?"

"We don't hate each other." Shane responds. Some guys look confused. "With this group you'd think you could imagine being one way in public and another in private." He doesn't tell them anything else, but everyone should know they get along. In a few months, they are scheduled to tell the world they are friends and start a charity together. This could be a test-run for that.

"Rivalry sells well," Ilya adds with a flippant gesture, "Keeps us competitive. League would be boring if I had to play against just losers like you all. But we are cool."

"Actually? Can I just say," #11 speaks up, leaning against the wall, "This would make a fucking killer team."

"The league should make the CHODE into an actual award." #15 suggests, "Probably have better players than the Conn Smythe."

"Ok. I'll bite," #23 sighs. "CHODE?"

Ilya giggles, "You will bite CHODE?"

“Champion of Hunter’s Order of Dick Enthusiasts.”

#7 shakes his head in awe, “It’s genius. No RASHYCOCK, but nothing ever will be.”

“I like OLDSHAFT.” #16 offers, “Ones Like Daddy Scott Hunter And Friends Tribe.”

Ilya giggles again, “Hunter, he likes OLDSHAFT, you should go for it.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “Ones, Friends, and Tribe all mean the same thing. It’s redundant.”

“It should just be simple.” #14 agrees, “Gay and Bisexual Professional Hockey Union.”
Shane nods aggressively.

“GABPHU? That doesn’t even make any sense.”

“Ooh Professional Hockey Union of Cock Kings!”

“No, if we can get RASHYCHODE to—”

“Ok.” Scott objects, “That’s about as good a time as any to get started.” It turns out, Scott has asked them here for a reason, and surprisingly it’s not to think of genital acronyms that include his name (potentially twice). He explains how he is scheduled to give a speech tomorrow at the awards, that the league wants him to tell everyone that his first year out has been great, and most importantly, that the league has been welcoming for him. He tells them his plan to talk about Baldwin’s contract instead. After an unintentional moment of harrowed silence following Baldwin’s story, they read what Scott has written so far.

“But this part about the league itself being ok is bullshit,” #18 sits on the bed with Scott’s phone in his hand. “Didn’t Crowell basically threaten you?”

“Oh, yeah.” Scott nods.

“Are they going to make you do this every year?”

Ilya interjects, “This is why we need people coming out.” He gestures around the room, “No one needs to hear Hunter give annual State of the Cock-Sucking Union speech.”

“Why not?” #15 laughs and adds on, “He could tell the audience that year’s advances in fellatio.”

“Rozanov, you seem like you’d be the next up,” #16 declares.

“If I win the cup, ok.” These guys don’t know he’s heading for Ottawa, where he’ll likely never even see the *playoffs* again. “But uhh my situation is... complicated.”

“Yeah. Whose isn’t?”

“No.” How does he explain this without outing his relationship? He starts sputtering. “Is *bad* complicated... like... It—”

“Russia.” Scott looks at Ilya like he’s dumb. “I mean. It’s *Russia*, guys.” He shifts his gaze between Ilya and the other guys. Why didn’t Ilya just say that? Maybe he *is* dumb. The

players murmur in sympathy and move on. “Anyway, is it still really going to be just me all year?”

“I want people to know there are more of us,” #14 says, “but I can’t come out right now.”

“Fucking great.” Shane grumbles sarcastically and the poor rookie looks devastated to have offended Shane Hollander. The kid probably grew up with a Shane Hollander poster and is on whatever diet because Shane mentioned it once in an interview. “So no one wanted to be the first and now no one wants to be the next?”

Ilya furrows his brow, “What if we all come out?”

Now *everyone* looks around like he’s dumb.

“No.” Ilya palms his forehead. How does he explain this with the amount of CTE in this room? “What if we came out... what the fuck is the word for this?”

“Anonymously?” Shane guesses correctly.

“Yes, thank you. Anonymously.” A few guys look between the two, like maybe one of their faces will tell them how Shane just read his mind. Hunter just looks defeated.

“How the fuck do we do that?” #16 asks.

“Hunter can say it in his speech,” Ilya looks at Scott. “He can talk about the 29 of us.”

“29!?” The room kind of gasps in unison. Shane even looks surprised, which helps anyone who might have thought they were telepathic. Or involved.

Ilya rolls his eyes. “Yes. Only 29. Out of how many hundreds of players...?”

“736.” Shane mutters.

“Nerd.” Ilya says with a little more vitriol and less affection than he would at home.

“Fuck off,” Shane spits back, “It’s 32 teams times 23 players. Everyone should know that.” He knows Ilya is fully aware of the exact number. They have that number of index cards sitting on a desk in the temporary office at the cottage. But it’s a little fun to fight with Shane in front of everyone, knowing what they’ll be up to later. Ilya tries to not look visibly aroused when Shane scowls at him.

“More than that, if you count the 90 potential reserve players per team,” #14 says, maybe trying to win Shane’s good favor back with hockey numbers.

#18 scoffs, “Yeah, like it would matter if one of them came out.”

Ilya makes a point to ignore them. “So yes, 29. This is probably not even half, though.”

“You know that reminds me.” Scott says with a furrowed brow, “Baldwin and Lundin, you both said the same thing, that Crowell tried to talk you out of it, and told you there are no

other players, or that I'm the only one. I wonder how many other guys he's said that to."

Shane scrunches his face. "That's so fucking cruel, when he knows there are others? He just lets everyone think they're alone?"

"I'd love to shut him up," Scott's smile twists darkly.

"Tell the whole room tomorrow, we have you and 28 others. After that, he will not be able to say that to anyone else."

Council of (Mostly) Straight Elders group chat

Ilya: hello friends

Ilya: hunters speech tomorrow is going to say how many gays there are, so news will start witch hunt.

Ilya: Plan of action for 120 straight people?

Vaughan: run and hide not an option?

Marly: all 120 of us come out and say we're gay

Hayes: That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard

Hayes: I love it.

Pike: ok what if we all post the same exact message. Something about how it doesn't matter who's gay

Pike: once 120 people post it, everyone else will too they'll just think it's a trend

Pike: maybe other people will join in and we can recruit more members?

Hayes: boring but probably more logical

Vaughan: yep this is the play.

Vaughan: "Hunter told you about the 30 in his group, but let us tell you about the hundreds in ours." or sth

Hayes: sucks we don't have a cool name like Justice League or X-Men or anything.

Ilya: the gays don't have a consistent name either.

Vaughan: yeah we've been switching between Rozanov's guys, Ilya's avengers, Ilya's army, and the Queer Corps.

Ilya: fewer dick jokes than the gays suggestions

Pike: they have dick jokes in their names??

Marly: still think we should all be seen like holding hands with other dudes

Marly: I think that would do it

Marly: confuse the hell out of the press

Ilya: brother Marly do I need to move you to the other group?

Ilya: tbh this would work

Ilya: but I can not ask 120 straight men to be seen with men holding hands and kissing in public.

Hayes: ...but can WE ask them?

“Ladies and gentlemen, and hockey players, and everyone in between... I’m here to give you an update on how wonderful my life is.” Some murmured laughter comes from the crowd at the awards. Scott continues from the podium, “The league has asked me to say a few words about how this year has been for me. And actually, my life *is* wonderful. I’m openly gay with the love of my life and most of my coworkers have been great. Never been happier. Thanks for asking.”

He makes a show of folding the paper he was reading and unfolding another. “That’s as much as I’ll say for myself tonight, and instead I’ll speak for a community. See, I am part of a much larger group than you would think, and I mean that quite literally— There’s actually a group. Some day we’ll be able to thank our ringleader publicly, but for now you just get me. I’m the face of this group because of a very fair process that decided who would be *it*... and do *this*,” he gestures to the podium, “for the rest of his life. Be the first, be the sacrificial lamb. It’s been a terrible hazing ritual. I don’t recommend it.” There is some awkward laughter from a crowd that doesn’t really know what to do with this information, unsure where this is going.

“I share this podium with— Christ... *twenty eight*...” he says the number like he still can’t believe it, “...of my closest friends, most of whose identities I don’t even know. Because they’re not even really out to each other.”

Some whispers of “*twenty eight?*” are scattered in the room.

“Here’s the thing— You know a player like us. You’ve played against one, and you’ve played on a team with one. They’ve checked you and knocked you out, they’ve stolen the puck from you, they’ve passed to you. They’ve taunted you on the ice about your mother, or your wife, or your face...” *or your age*, Ilya can hear the restraint in Hunter’s voice to not call him out specifically. “And, as we all found out after this year’s cup, some have blocked your shot from the goal.” People are looking around for Baldwin, but he wasn’t invited.

“The group is working hard to improve conditions so more guys feel comfortable coming out and joining me up here. Having vocally out players is the best way to make that happen. But we can’t have out players if they are removed from the league as soon as they come out. So the list might be more difficult to grow than we thought, because it turns out the league doesn’t want us. Let me tell you a story that only about 30 people want me to tell.” Scott breathes deeply, clearly gaining courage from the inhale. “Before Baldwin came out, Vancouver expressed interest in re-signing him, and he even had interest from other teams. After coming out to his team management, Baldwin’s contract renegotiations stopped, and no

other team picked them back up. He knew this would happen. He knew coming out would effectively be a forced retirement from the sport. We all know this. Other players have spoken to their coaches, agents, management, and received the same advice: It's a career killer. You'd be out of the league. *I* received that advice, but not everyone is the captain of their team." Earlier that day, Scott sat in Ilya's hotel room with Baldwin to write this speech. These are all words he chose.

Scott continues with his own words, "Imagine waiting until you're retired to live your life, loving someone in secret your entire career." Ilya spots Shane a few tables down, who is looking down at his glass and rubbing his thumb across his own hand. "But this summer Baldwin is finally getting married, and we couldn't be happier for him." Scott smiles and then asks the audience, "Right?"

None of them could have predicted the standing ovation that starts to filter through the room at this question. Ilya jumps to his feet when he realizes what's happening, and stands with the rest of the room to cheer for Baldwin, who wasn't even invited to the stupid event. Ilya sneaks another glance to see Shane is glassy-eyed with tears, obviously. He needs to pull it together if he wants to appear not-personally-affected-by-this. Because they are telepathic, Shane squares his shoulders off and schools his facial expression as soon as Ilya thinks that.

Ilya carefully picks out who is not standing. Some are standing out of peer pressure and not clapping. Some have a look like Shane's, like maybe they are personally affected. He memorizes those names, too. He makes a mental note to watch the crowd shots tomorrow with a pen and paper. Through a gap in bodies, he sees Commissioner Crowell seated, fuming and staring daggers at Scott Hunter on the stage.

As people resettle in their seats, Hunter continues. "So if you want the 'Gay State of the Union', thanks—" *Rozanov* really almost slips out of Scott's mouth. "You shouldn't be asking about my life, because I'm the minority. I have a lot of advantages that allowed me to come out and keep my job. For everyone else, it's awful. The league isn't ready for us all to come out, regardless of whether the fans, our teammates, or our personal lives would benefit. There is still a culture of bigotry; players can use slurs and get away with them, and teams can effectively excommunicate a player for liking men." Scott looks toward Crowell's table. Ilya noticed he's been avoiding looking at that section of the room, but for some reason now he's facing the commissioner, "But in the meantime, it's been far from lonely, and we want everyone to know we're working to make it better."

He smiles a little. "So you can keep asking me to do this every year, though after this you probably won't, and I'll continue to tell the truth as agreed upon by our committee. And we promise to keep trying to add to this list of out players every year, as much as we are allowed."

I just realized as I was posting this that tonight is ACTUALLY the (United States) State of the Union address. Scott Hunter will always be my president, this is my State of the Union speech.

Numbered guys at the meetup:

#7

#11 (we already kind of know him? I think I can say he is a minor book-gay and gets his name called out in this chapter)

#14 (sad he made Daddy Shane mad 😞, wants a boring acronym, likes hockey numbers)

#15 (CHODE supremacy)

#16 (likes OLDSHAFT)

#18

#23

(#13, Montreal rookie, wasn't there)

Up next: The group meeting directly following this speech; Scott Hunter gets another close friend (it's not Bennett why are so many people saying Bennett in the comments??)

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Same night, after the MLH award show

Chapter Notes

Your favorite character is about to get their long-anticipated redemption arc!!

No, not Troy Barrett you fucking psychos, he's not even dating men yet. I'm talking about Shane Hollander's gaydar!! ...that's not everyone's favorite character? Why not?

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

Six guys head from the award show ballroom to Ilya's hotel room. It's risky for them to be gathering in the same hotel as the event, but their jitters are getting the best of them, and they jog up the stairs and through the hallways. When the door closes behind the last guy, Ilya breathes a sigh of relief. "Is a rush, yes?" He looks around and smiles at Shane, but it seems like no one notices.

At least they had the foresight to put away Shane's clothes when he left to go back to his own room this morning. That could have made things awkward.

The five guys who came just for the queer congress and not for the MLH awards quickly join them. Apparently they all had a viewing party at a bar nearby, so they're all a little drunk and Ilya is honestly jealous. He pulls out the bottles of alcohol leftover from the gathering the night before and people help themselves.

A knock on the door brings Ilya back to the peephole. "Hunter!" He squeals, letting him in. "You said so many words tonight!"

"Thanks? Downstairs is buzzing, guys." He turns to Ilya, "I have like 300 journalists to call back. They're asking about the group which... we kind of knew they would, right? What do we do?"

"Ok. Maybe we write a statement or something?" Ilya furrows his brow. He's not sure how much of this should be made public, with so many sensitive moving parts.

"Well it's not like you can give an interview!" Shane snaps at Ilya, looking a little distraught at the prospect.

Scott shrugs, “I mean, *I* could.” Ilya can tell he’s fighting an eye-roll.

Ilya looks around to get someone else’s opinion, but the group just has more questions. #16 asks, “Isn’t there gonna be a witch-hunt?”

“Oh for sure.” Hunter says, “When I said 28, every reporter in the room started numbering a list.”

“#28plusScott is trending on Twitter.”

“Is there a plan for that?” All eyes turn to Ilya.

“I am bisexual.” Ilya smiles. “I also have a straight army.”

“Of course you do,” Baldwin sighs, replicating both Shane and Scott’s reaction when they heard that news.

“Actually, I think I’m in that.” #18 says.

“You are.” Ilya confirms. At one point, #18 verbally assaulted a troll on Baldwin’s coming out post, which was enough to be let in.

They chat for a few minutes about guys who could be trusted in the straight army. Ilya finally gets to ask them if they’d prefer to just be in the chat than suspiciously absent from it. Shane eyes him cautiously, and Ilya knows he’ll have to answer one hundred million questions later. If he could get Shane to do something ally-worthy and just join the group, it would get Pike off their backs.

“Speaking of gay armies... can we talk about how Ryan Price fucking murdered that asshole from Carolina?”

“We do not say names here.” Ilya corrects, “But yes, to answer the question, it was awesome.”

“Price is an open secret, I thought.”

“I saw him on Grindr once.”

“He had a boyfriend in New Jersey.”

“Does not matter.”

“You’re telling me you don’t talk about any of us?” #11 asks, “not even with Hunter? Or...” he looks at Shane and then furrows his brow as if he’s wondering why he thought Ilya would talk to Shane.

“No, he really doesn’t.” Hunter says, “pisses me off, too, because I’m nosy as hell. Sometimes he gives me a number. Like, I’m 1, Baldwin is 5, Hollander is 6... That kind of thing. He’ll say ‘*you will never guess what 10 did today!*’,” Scott puts on a terrible Russian accent, “But I don’t fucking know who 10 is!”

The group laughs, and everyone asks for their numbers. Ilya considers it but declines to tell them. “I’ll tell you when you come out. Is just the order I asked.” He shrugs and deliberately doesn’t look at Shane for a reaction to that. He’s probably pissed he’s 6th. Maybe later he’ll get jealous-possessive-Shane instead of million-questions-Shane.

“Anyway, Price is getting traded.” Baldwin announces.

This time, Ilya is too shocked to correct the name usage, “Again?”

“Yeah, apparently he freaked out and had another meltdown about ending Riney Glickman’s career.”

“—Tiny Dickman.” #7 corrects and there are some giggles from people who aren’t still shocked or concerned for Price.

“And that’s not even the worst part.” Baldwin continues, nonplussed by the group’s attention deficit and obsession with genital puns, “You know who needs an enforcer? To protect their star forward? Because he was recently brutalized by a hoard of gay musketeers?”

Half the room groans. “He is going to Toronto?” Ilya asks to confirm. He pulls out his phone to text his #8. This can’t be happening. He knows from Hayes how shitty the Toronto team will be for Price. And protecting Dallas Kent seems morally worse than damaging Tiny Dickman, so Price’s mental health probably won’t be any better there. But maybe he’ll convince Troy Barrett to come out. The room murmurs similar sentiments, maybe without the speculation about Barrett.

“Holy shit did you guys see this?” #14 turns his phone screen to the guy next to him. “Fredericks, from Carolina, just posted on Instagram.”

Ilya joins everyone else in the room in pulling up Instagram. The picture is of the huge defenseman holding a tiny rainbow flag.

@fredericksandhockeysticks

Actually, @ScottHunter, you have 29 close friends. Being married to my beautiful wife doesn’t make me less bisexual. The guys (and ladies) I disappointed before marriage would say the same. Looking forward to the next gay agenda meeting. Or if there’s a newsletter or something, can you sign me up? Thanks. Love you for everything you’ve done (as much as you can love a division rival). 🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈

Ilya’s mouth hangs open, astounded. The research to find mean chirps should have uncovered affairs with men. But all he found for Fredericks was an embarrassing karaoke video that Ilya told his guys to quote at him during the playoffs. Fredericks had never done anything bad enough to warrant a really nasty chirp, but Ilya had some stuff prepared about his sister in rehab just in case. No one got a chance to use anything against him in the actual games, and now Ilya is glad for it.

“No one clocked this??” They all look dumbfounded at each other.

Shane, though, is grinning. “How’s that gaydar, Rozanov?” Ilya realizes with a cold rush that Fredericks is the man Ilya roasted Shane’s gaydar about. Ok. So Shane is 1 for 5 from that night in Boston.

Ilya wants to lick the smug smile off Shane's face. “You could not even clock *yourself*, Hollander, I had to—” Ilya stops himself. “Rose Landry had to tell you.”

“Wait, what?” Scott looks amused.

“Is that true?” #14 asks.

“Which part?” #16 grumbles, obviously referring to whatever Ilya was about to say before catching himself.

Shane turns a little pink. “This isn’t about my— Point is, I said Fredericks last year and Rozanov said no and roasted me for it.”

Hunter can clearly see how easily this could turn into foreplay and pointedly tries to save the moment. He says, maybe *too* loudly, “Well, either way, looks like we’ll have another active player out after all.”

Ilya ignores Hunter’s attempt to keep them civil and keeps up the tirade on Shane’s life: “...Because you also said four other guys who I will not even name, they are so embarrassing for you.” It’s probably dangerous to be goading Shane on like this in front of everyone. At some point one of them will give away that this exact kind of argument *is* foreplay.

Now fully in contest mode, Shane's face is angry, “No, now I kind of want to know about those guys too. I bet I was right!”

“Ok, who was it?” #18 challenges. Ilya and Shane are harshly reminded that other people exist, and some of them might start realizing that they are side-characters intruding on an intimate moment.

Shane looks warily at Ilya. Even speculation shouldn’t really be allowed in front of other people, and he knows that. “Go ahead,” Ilya waves his hand, “You are so wrong you are not at risk of outing anyone.”

Shane sheepishly rattles off four names to increasingly loud laughter in the room. “Ok!” He snaps, “That’s what you all would have said about Fredericks an hour ago!”

“Hollander, that’s just a list of hot men.” #15 points out, “This is a wish list, not good gaydar.”

It’s true. They are all Shane’s type and he probably didn’t even realize he had crushes on any of them, so Ilya joins the group laughing at him. Shane glares at his laughter and says, “Fine. I’ll just shoot my shot with them and let you all know how it goes.” He probably thinks that would make Ilya mad, but it's doing the exact opposite. It had never occurred to Ilya to use Shane as bait to lure people into admitting they like men. But now that it has, Ilya is grateful for his dark suit pants not giving away his growing predicament.

“If anyone could convince them, it's probably Shane Hollander.”

“Can we put money on this?”

“I am so curious what Hollander’s flirting game is like.”

“I would watch that straight bait porn.”

Ilya needs everyone to leave the room for what he wants to do right now, and Scott actually steps forward like he might have to get between them. “Ok, Shane, you do that. In the meantime, can we call Fredericks? I have his number from a charity thing we did a while ago.” He holds his phone practically in Ilya's face so he has to tear his eyes away from Shane. They will have to pick this back up later, he laments. He tries to not look super obvious about shaking himself out of it.

Ilya punches the numbers from Scott into his own phone and calls. He puts it on speaker phone and shushes everyone.

“Hello?” A voice picks up.

“Hello, Fredericks! Congratulations from twelve of your new family.” Ilya makes a gesture and the room awkwardly mumbles greetings to the man on the other line.

“What— is this the *group*? Who is this?” He laughs, “It does *not* sound like Scott Hunter.”

“I’m here, though.” Hunter responds.

“No, it is Ilya Rozanov and... friends.”

“Fuck off.” Fredericks says, and does not elaborate. There’s silence, or as much silence as there could be in a room with 12 grown men, before he says “You’re serious?”

“Uhh yes. Am sorry, can put you on with Hunter if you want.”

“Or Shane Hollander.” Someone mutters.

“What?” The voice on the line sounds actually confused about that.

Shane rolls his eyes. “Hey Fredericks, it’s Shane... Hollander. Welcome aboard. Thank you for doing that tonight.”

“What... in the *fuck* is going on?” Fredericks sputters. “Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander are in the same room? The same, *gay* room?”

“It’s weird for all of us.” #16 says, laughing. Ilya doesn’t know what he means by that, but ok.

“How’s the announcement going for you?” Scott asks.

“Could be better. Crowell wants to meet with me.”

“Yeah, he wants to tell you to say it was a joke. Or a mistake.” Scott shakes his head, “He wants you to think there’s no one else out here.”

“I didn’t think there was.” Fredericks says. “I looked at my wife when I heard your speech and we decided, fuck I probably need to be doing that. I’ve got some leeway, being married to a woman. I hope it just makes it easier for the guys who maybe can’t do that.”

“Carolina’s locker room sucks though, right?”

“Yeah. I told them I’m putting in my trade request as soon as I can.”

Everyone looks around uncomfortably. If Baldwin couldn’t find a team that wanted him once he was out, it might be an issue.

Ilya chooses to ignore the issue and claps Hunter on the shoulder. “We got two this year! Next year three.”

As the group starts making plans to head to the actual, MLH-sanctioned, heterosexual after-party, Shane says his goodbyes and leaves their mini after-party. No one is surprised; it's well-known that Shane Hollander doesn't stay out late. Ilya is very careful not to look at him in any way as he leaves. Once the door closes, though... who thought it was a good idea to put a dozen catty gays in the same room? Well, that's a mean stereotype. But at least five of them actually *are* catty and ready to read Shane to filth.

“Ok I know I’ve had a day to sleep on it, but I’m still like... *Shane fucking Hollander is gay?*”

“Probably bi. What was that about Rose Landry, Roz?”

“Oh my *god* Rozanov are you gonna hit that??”

“What?” Ilya sputters. “No, I— can you imagine.” He doesn’t have to imagine, he can remember this morning. He actually probably will hit it again tonight.

“It was hard *not* to imagine with you two smoldering at each other.”

“For real, warn us next time there’s an event with a splash zone.”

“The room physically cooled ten degrees when he walked out.”

“We don’t *hate* each other, but he’s still—”

“You can’t be seriously saying you wouldn’t get in that man’s pants,” #16 argues.

Scott exhales a tired sigh, “I think anyone would.” Ilya has to restrain the glare he wants to shoot at Scott Hunter’s stupid fucking face, but Hunter is speaking to #16, “Why don’t you go for it? I think Roz is seeing someone.”

“Are you?”

Ilya shrugs in confirmation, begrudgingly grateful for Hunter continuing to bail him out.

The men all take this into consideration. Finally Baldwin says, “It would be hard, anyway. To date another player.”

The room murmurs in understanding.

“Who would even want to? Hockey players are disgusting.” #23 quickly corrects himself, “No offense.”

“True. Plus, it would be impossible to stay a secret,” #11 admits.

“It would be worse for Rozanov and Hollander,” says— wait, *Scott*? Back stabber! “Can you imagine the media circus? The accusations? God, no thank you.”

“True. Rozy, you should probably stay away from that.”

Everyone agrees. Some of them look like they’re piecing things together, others are two concussions away from not being able to drive, so they’re just imagining the hypothetical.

“It would be hot though.” #15 says, and the room brightens with laughter.

People file out slowly, some opting for a gay bar instead of the heterosexual afterparty. Soon, Ilya is just left with Scott, Baldwin, #7, and #23. They’re all a little older and probably haven’t been to a club since a disco in 1977.

“Fredericks, huh?” Baldwin says into his drink, “Who would have thought?”

“Hollander, I guess.” #7 says, and Ilya scowls at him.

“Does Fredericks even count? I mean he’s married to a woman.” #23 whines.

Ilya throws an empty plastic cup at him. “Bisexuals are real, asshole.”

“Ilya?” Scott furrows his brow. Uh-oh. If Hunter is using Ilya’s first name out loud, there’s something up. “Are there other guys like that in the group? Married to women?” There’s not much Ilya could say here to protect the identity of Scott’s own teammate, so Ilya just confirms with a nod and his best innocent *why-are-you-asking* face. Scott hums and takes a long swig of his drink.

“Yeah, those count. We can’t be picky,” Baldwin doesn’t pick up on Scott’s potential realization.

They sit and drink for a while, talking through the weekend’s events, sharing hopes for the future of the group, gossiping about the other guys (though Ilya just listens and doesn’t partake in that). Ilya, #7, and #23 share some of their obstacles to coming out, within reason, and commiserate. It’s so cool to be able to have this kind of conversation and Ilya easily loses track of time.

#23 is talking about his Mormon family's objections to his sexuality when there's a knock on the door. Ilya curses and gets up from his spot on the carpet. He opens the door ready to warn him, but the scolding starts before he has the chance. "Are you just not answering your fucking phone? It's almost midnight, I've been—" Shane makes his way into the room but stops at the sight of Scott and #23 on the small couch, Baldwin on the cuck chair, and #7 on the floor leaning against the wall. "Hi," Shane says like the wind was just knocked out of him.

#7 and #23 look at each other with twin shocked, amused expressions, open-mouthed smiles invading their faces. Baldwin asks, "Hollander?" The rest of the question hangs in the air. *What are you doing here? Didn't you go to bed? Why are you in pajamas? Why do you look like you've been waiting to get railed?*

"The rest of them went to the club or to the party downstairs." Scott smoothly tries to give him an out, as if Shane had come back looking for everyone, and not just one person. But this is dumb, Ilya thinks. It's just Baldwin, he's not even an active player anymore. #7 and #23 are cool and they've all just shared enough for Ilya to have blackmail for years. If Shane leaves now he might not come back before he goes to sleep.

Plus, it's a little hard to deny what's happening here— Shane is out of his awards show suit and is wearing sweatpants. His hair is damp from a recent shower.

"Shane," Ilya draws out the name in a whine, "Just..." He gets a ginger ale from the minifridge, hands it to Shane, and gestures at the bed. He goes back to sitting on the floor, leaning his back against the bed. These guys can know that they are maybe more than civil with each other.

Shane stands uncomfortably holding the can, clearly trying not to panic. Finally he rolls his eyes, "Fine." He sits on the edge of the bed so his feet are next to Ilya on the floor. Baldwin's eyebrows are high and Scott grins.

"Ok," Baldwin finally breaks the silence, "So you like, *actually* can't come out." It's unclear who he's talking to, but it doesn't matter, it's true for them both.

"You missed it," Ilya looks up at Shane, "They talked about us after you left. They said it would be hot."

"And poor little Rivera looked like he was going to die picturing it," Scott stays smiling.

"Do you mean Little-Shane?" Ilya grins. The relief of being able to talk about these guys is overwhelming, and he's not sure he'll ever get over it. #14 *did* look like he was going to keel over after the older guys brought up the prospect of Ilya-Shane sex.

"What are you talking about? He's not little-me!" Shane protests, "He clearly has a giant crush on you."

"And...? So do you." Ilya looks back up and folds his hands out. Shane nudges Ilya with his knee a little. "So, he is Little-Shane."

“You knew about this?” Baldwin takes that tiny hint as a chance to look at Scott and gesture to Shane and Ilya. Scott nods.

#7 is still visibly amused and shakes his head, “Why do I get the sense the league would be more mad about this than all the... other stuff we've been doing?”

“You’re not wrong. This rivalry sells a lot of jerseys,” Scott responds bitterly. “They’d be pissed.”

“Are you going to, like, stop being rivals?” #23 asks, his face still shocked, “Now that you’re... well I guess... when did...?”

Scott leans forward and Ilya can almost see him salivating for the gossip.

“Don’t give them anything, Hollander. Hunter is so nosy.” Ilya looks back at #23 and deadpans, “Yesterday. Last night it started.” Shane laughs.

Scott turns to #23 to correct the record, “I found out in December, so obviously before then.”

“Yeah,” Shane smiles, “It was the night before that.” Ilya giggles. He doesn’t really get the chance to hear Shane interact with people like this, and it makes his heart feel warm. He wraps his arm around Shane’s calf, tilting his head to rest on Shane’s knee. He’s a little worried the PDA might make Shane uncomfortable until he feels a hand tuck into his hair.

Baldwin takes in that familiar gesture with a more concerned look, “So it’s like... for real? What, are you *dating*?”

“This is my other question,” Scott nods.

“No.” Ilya says from his position making as much contact with Shane’s leg as possible, “He is just a warm mouth to me.”

“Yep, it’s just convenient.” Shane plays with a curl on Ilya’s head. Ilya doesn’t have to look up to hear the smile in his voice. “Simple, really. No strings attached.”

“Zero strings.” Ilya nuzzles his head into Shane’s knee a little more and hugs his leg with his other arm, too. #7 and #23 laugh.

“I expect that kind of joke from Rozanov,” Scott shakes his head, “but not *you*.”

“I have rubbed off on him.” Ilya says with a wink, “Actually, earlier today I—” Shane pulls his hair and nudges him with his leg.

“So?” Shane changes the subject, “Are we talking about all the secrets?”

“We probably should.” Baldwin and Scott nod in consent. Ilya looks up at Shane seriously. “I will tell you but you can’t ask how we know this.” Shane also nods. Ilya looks at #7 and #23, too. They look a little curious but follow Shane’s lead. #7 was in on the group’s playoff strategy, so he might be able to guess how they acquired this information. “The league rigged the playoffs so Vancouver would play Carolina. So Carolina would win.”

#23's eyes widen again. The poor guy had just gotten over the shock of Shane and Ilya, now this. "What? Why would they do that?"

"Money?" Scott shrugs, "I can't think of any other reason."

"You think they had money on the game, or someone paid them or..." Shane asks. He looks like someone just shot his childhood dog. Ilya knows he still has a lot of faith in the league and this is probably shaking his core.

"No clue."

"If we do anything with the information, which again, *I don't know where we got it*," Baldwin says with emphasis, "I think we should give it to a journalist. They'll know how to do something about it."

"I have a couple of reporters who were good to me about everything," Scott says, "I could ask around. Lots of people would kill for that scoop."

"Might distract them from trying to guess 28 names."

#7 looks grim for the first time tonight, "I thought Baldwin's contract was going to be the shittiest thing the league could do."

Scott shakes his head. "Never underestimate how shitty this league can get."

Chapter End Notes

Coming up: fun off-season summer shenanigans, some Fall 2018 ones too.

A list for you:

#7 now knows about Hollanov

#8 is getting traded to Toronto to protect Dallas Kent 🙄

#14 Ilya thinks is Little-Shane, has a name now (not canon if we didn't know that already)

#15 thinks Hollanov would be hot (who doesn't?)

#16 would get in Shane's pants (who wouldn't?)

#18 was already in the ally army

#23 now knows about Hollanov, is Mormon?, thinks hockey players are too gross to date (who doesn't?)

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Summer/off-season 2018

Chapter Notes

A “social media chapter” in which there's a lot of talk about social media and then we don't actually see any of it, sorry. Help from journalists, allies, and Ottawa.

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

In the days and weeks following Scott's speech, Baldwin and Fredericks coming out is secondary news to most people, which Ilya considers a win for normalized gay hockey. Some serious journalists even ignore the whole “30 people” of it all and focus on what Scott actually said: The league forced a gay player into retirement. Scott has a favorite journalist, Kavita Kingsley, from his own media circus last year. She's a senior MLH reporter at a high-profile sports magazine who has been kind to Scott and tough on the league. Ilya agrees to be in contact with her on the condition of anonymity.

On the same condition, some of his players provide quotes for her. They confirm what Scott said in his speech: they would be more likely to come out if they felt like their jobs were safe, and there are instances of homophobia that don't get penalties out on the ice. Ilya instructs them to say nothing about the cup bet, the group itself, or its sordid activities, and they listen, for some reason that Ilya has given up trying to figure out. But because she is a good journalist, Kavita does put together that there's a tradition about the cup to be upheld here, at least.

Kavita doesn't know this was just a test. Once the article comes out and it's clear she's a trustworthy and thorough journalist, Ilya and Scott decide they can disclose the bigger scandal. They inform her they have reason to believe the league rigged the cup playoffs. They can't inform her exactly what happened for the same reason the league can't accuse Baldwin of anything. The public shouldn't know they were *also* trying to rig the cup. As much as Ilya wants it to be public knowledge that he is better than Crowell at basically everything, he cares about his group more.

She says it's a big accusation, but since their other story was a good lead, she'll look into it.

Meanwhile, the journalists who *do* choose to focus on the 30 people make the summer actually pretty entertaining. Between the absurd task of trying to name 30 gay players in a league of 700-plus (where are Shane and Little-Shane for this figure?) and Ilya's straight army confusing the rumors and muddying the waters, all sorts of things can happen unnoticed.

Following his speech, 10 players message Scott Hunter asking for admission to the Gay Hockey Club. With their permission, he forwards them to the ringleader, who now has all but 6 teams collected like Pokémon. Ilya didn't even know half these newcomers existed aside from writing their names on a card once a year ago. Some of them are backups to the backups and will probably never see ice during gameplay. Still, he watches what interviews he can find, inspects their social media, and gauges them carefully to try and make sure they're not lying to infiltrate the ranks or anything like that.

Scott also forwards him some heartfelt messages from retired players who never saw this kind of representation during their careers and would have liked a group like this. Ilya is honored, obviously, but he's also a little pissed. Not that he can blame the guys, but he can't help but feel resentful. He could have had what his rookies have. The culture could have been shifted enough to make his and Shane's lives easier from the beginning. Each time he hears from them, he tells them that they can organize, and it would be helpful to have a fleet of retired players at the ready. But he gets the feeling if he doesn't organize them himself, it won't be happening, so he jots each name down on a new list. Still, any negative feeling is completely erased by the positive messages. One player has spent 10 years of retirement quietly transitioning. She has to stay out of the news, and has basically erased herself from professional hockey circles, but she sends her support and thanks them for helping the next generation.

Messages like that carry the group through the shitstorm of negative feedback, even from their colleagues. Dallas Kent starts a trend of about 8 assholes. #22 starts calling them the Axis powers because of how hard they work to prove they are not Allies. They "come out" as straight to mock the whole movement and try to get eyes on the people who aren't doing the same. It's undermined by how many straight players Ilya has, and mostly just tells the public who the assholes are. #7 starts a trend when he posts that he is "coming out as an asshole" to really drive the point home.

Dallas Kent's best friend, Troy Barrett, has never been active on social media, so it's not weird when he doesn't post anything. Ilya laments that this isn't happening during the season when they are all interviewed daily, and Barrett would have to give his opinion. Ilya thinks Barrett is probably glad for that same reason.

The straight players take their job seriously, and their efforts are sowing the chaos needed to distract the witch hunt. A surprising number of them are on board with Marlow's plan to confuse the public. They muddy the waters by posting pictures of themselves holding hands and kissing other guys' cheeks. It catches on beyond the 120 members, and Pike (of all people, for some reason) gets a dozen messages per day asking to be added to "whatever group is organizing this." They create another tiered group for these newcomers until they can sort out whether they're actually good. They delegate four members of the second tier

and Pike to sift through them. When everyone can know each other's identities, the power structures can be a lot more smooth.

The allies' campaign means Ilya can post the picture of himself kissing Shane's helmet at the 2017 All Star game where this whole thing started. He lets the paparazzi take pictures of him holding hands with Marly, because that boy really seemed like he just suggested the plan out of a need for affection. Shane posts the same picture of them, one hugging Hayden from behind, cheeks smushed together, and one arm-in-arm with Scott Hunter from the MLH awards. These aren't statements, really, because they land in a sea of similar pictures from hundreds of players. But after that, Shane has no choice but to join the ally chat. Most of the gays enter the group in the wave of new members. Only some real seriously closeted guys remain completely silent on the issue.

A few players from Ilya's gay fraternity attend Baldwin's wedding. There are so many hockey faces there, no one really registers that any one of them could be attending because they are gay. Ilya and Shane share a brief slow-dance that maybe exposes them as an item to the other henchmen at the wedding, but to anyone else, in the current confusion, it comes off as a continuation of the straight army's statement. They both make sure they're photographed doing similar stuff with other guys, too, but for a few minutes it feels like heaven. Ilya tries to catalog every single detail to memory. He is dancing with Shane in public. His plan is *working*.

At the end of the summer, after the frenzy has died down, #11 is still posting pictures with a VERY handsome man, effectively soft-launching his sexuality.

That one deserves a phone call.

"You could not wait to win a cup to do this?"

"Oh, sorry. I didn't tell you. The Swedish league heard what was happening over here and made me an offer, so I moved back home. My team wasn't going to have me. Crowell said I should never come out. I'm just safer here, I can live my life a little."

Ilya's heart breaks at that, for so many reasons, so he lashes out. "So this boy from Instagram, he is here in US lonely?"

"I heard you danced with Shane Hollander at Baldwin's wedding?" #11 retorts pointedly.

"Have a great season!"

"That's what I thought."

@LundinHockey

For the 2018-2019 season, I am happy to announce that I am heading back to the Swedish Hockey League. Thank you to Los Angeles for everything! Because Scott Hunter took away my only chance last year, I will also inform you that I am the 11th #FRIEND 🏳️‍🌈

RASHYCOCK winners + Roz group chat

Oldest Man Alive added Lundin to the group chat

Oldest Man Alive: Welcome Lundin!

Baldwin: can I object to Lundin and Fredericks being here because they didn't technically win a cup?

Ilya: FRIEND? What does this stand for

Oldest Man Alive: Not everything has to stand for anything

Oldest Man Alive: It's probably just a Friend of Rozanov or one of my "close friends" thing

Lundin: Fellowship of Rozanov's International Elite Nancies and Dandies

Oldest Man Alive: I hate every person in this organization.

There are public whispers about every player in the league being one of the 30 close friends, but Ilya's name in those conversations is overshadowed by his sudden move to Ottawa. It's not subtle to the avengers who were suspicious at the MLH awards or at Baldwin's wedding. But to the public, at least, it's a bigger mystery than anyone's sexuality and actually helps the whole hockey world move on. No one is smart enough to figure out that Ottawa and Ilya's sexuality are actually related.

Before he signs the contracts, he tells the general manager. Not that he is the infamous "ringleader" in Scott Hunter's speech, but that he will probably publicly come out during his tenure at the organization. It's terrifying, knowing what happened to Baldwin, that they could tear up the contract and no one else would pick it up. But he needs to know if this team is more like Hunter's New York or Baldwin's Vancouver. And for whatever reason— if they are supportive of gay hockey or just ecstatic to have Ilya Rozanov— the general manager embraces it. He vows to keep the secret between them and even says Ilya should let him know if anyone in the franchise is bad about it. It's a load off Ilya's mind to have management behind him.

Just a few years ago, the move to Ottawa would have killed Ilya. Shane's parents have been great, the Centaurs are a cool group of guys, and obviously seeing Shane more often is ideal, but he knows he isn't going to win any more cups. He realizes that at some point in the last year, his priorities changed. He wants his legacy in professional hockey to be an actual,

lasting impact. He still wants to win every game and score every goal, because he is still Ilya Rozanov. But he recognizes that his name might go down in history for something other than a point record. This idea might have sent his younger self spiraling, whether for his father's approval or his own expectations for himself, but now it's a hopeful, warm thought. Before now, he's never felt like he could contribute much outside of hockey prowess. Now, hockey prowess is the means to make his other endeavors successful.

During his first week in the Ottawa facilities for preseason practice, he is called into the social media office. Harris Drover, the weird little social media guy who also just started with the team, sits him down for an orientation. The team's PR people are concerned that Ilya's reputation on social media is a bit... chaotic. Ilya likes to engage with fans, which is great, but he has a tendency to overshare and ragebait. In short, he is a social media director's worst nightmare. He and Harris both see this as the first in a long line of stern meetings.

After a long discussion about what is and is not "on brand" for the Centaurs' star player to be commenting and posting, Harris finally makes a declaration with an air like he's been biting his tongue. "Ok, you've been staring at this Pride flag this whole time." Harris is still settling into his office, but already has a small rainbow flag on his desk next to the computer. "Is this going to be an issue for you?"

"Is rare to see one in a hockey building." Ilya explains, but he's surprised by how direct Harris is about it. They're both in a new workplace, and while Ilya has been cautiously testing waters all week, Harris is already comfortable calling out potential bigotry.

"Oh," Harris laughs, relieved, "I guess it is."

Ilya breathes. The way Harris immediately wanted to get this out in the open put Ilya on the back foot, like maybe he needs to prove himself somehow. But could he really be so reckless in sharing secrets with someone he just met? He's had this conversation approximately one million times now; his sexuality is well known among the queer players, and probably an open secret for many others. He's never thought of expanding out to a hockey *staff* army, but if he does, this is the guy to—

"Does it mean something to you?" Harris asks quietly. Ilya realizes he's still staring at the flag.

He nods. Sure he's come out to 50 different guys at this point, but his non-player list is much shorter: The Hollanders, Svetlana, and the Ottawa general manager. And the guys he's hooked up with... but Harris would definitely fall more under "friends, family, and work" than "potential new hookups."

"You remember when Scott Hunter came out?"

"Of course." Harris says, "I cried." Ilya is not surprised by this fact.

"I did that. Was me." Ilya has never been this bold in claiming credit for that evening, but it's true. Harris just looks confused so Ilya continues. "We made a bet, whoever wins cup needs to come out. He won, he comes out."

Harris's jaw drops. "He came out because of a *bet*?"

Ilya smiles and nods. "First year, there were 12 of us in the bet. 2018 cup there were 29. Now I have 40 for the 2019 cup."

"*You*?" Harris's jaw drops. "You're the *ringleader*!"

"I am." He smiles shyly.

"*Ilya*!! I've been *obsessed* with finding out who the leader is! That's incredible!" Harris's eyes are wide. He gets up and closes the office door, which Ilya should have probably done before outing himself. He sits back down at his desk, his eyes sparkling with fascination.

"How does it work?"

"I text 40 guys every time we have to do anything. I decide who wins the cup. I decide when we attack. People come to me with league corruption... that stuff."

Harris laughs like Ilya is kidding about any of that. "They need to make a documentary about this."

He considers Harris for a moment. "If you ever wanted to start something... like this but for staff, I would help." Really, Ilya wants to do it himself. But he's already stretched so thin with the barracks he has. "It is not as much risk to be out as the players, but we also have the ally army to help us... Staff army might be good, with the corruption."

"I might have to think about that." He narrows his eyes a little bit. "You said corruption?"

"Yes. There is a lot of it."

Harris thinks about this for a minute and fills in a blank for himself, "But you can't call it out without outing yourself."

Ilya nods and shrugs. He's used to this reaction, the '*that's so sad*' when people realize how shitty any aspect of this situation is. But usually people don't have solutions. Harris looks like he has a solution.

"Have you heard of Rogue POTUS Staff?" Harris asks and judges Ilya's blank face correctly. "After Donald Trump took office in the U.S., a few government agencies started anonymous Twitter accounts to highlight issues in the administration. It was a good use of social media because no one knows who runs an account. It's very easy to be anonymous. You could start an account to blow the whistle on... whatever you're talking about."

Ilya sits back to think. He initially laughed at the idea of social media directors, he kind of thought it can't be a real job. But now he quickly sees how this kind of insight would be helpful for any kind of organization, including his own. "Is not a bad idea."

"I would help, obviously. You're on Twitter 24/7," he laughs, "You have a very recognizable style."

"Ok." Ilya points to the computer, "We can set it up."

“On a work computer?? Are you *trying* to get caught??” Harris balks and then shakes his head. “How did you survive this long without me?”

After that, Ilya makes the executive decision to let Harris in. He hasn’t known him long, but it seems like he can trust him and the expertise is desperately needed. He tells Harris about the league fixing the playoffs, but not about their own group doing the same. Harris is floored, like everyone is when they hear this news, but says they have to build up a following and credibility before dropping any huge bombs like that. So they make a few calls to get permission from Baldwin and start with something low-stakes.

@RogueMLH

5 teams vied for Baldwin’s contract, then dropped interest when he came out. 3 signed goalies with lower goals-saved averages.

@RogueMLH

Here is the list of those teams...

“Ilya,” Kavita Kingsley calls Ilya two days later, the day before before the season opener. “We need to talk.”

“Hi Kavita, how are you Kavita?” Ilya mocks the direct lack of greeting. But maybe she’s taking that tone for a reason....

“I have some good news and bad news.”

“You are journalist, I hope you have both.”

Kavita pauses and Ilya can tell she’s trying to be serious and not laugh. “I found evidence on the league execs. Someone was gambling money on the cup. I’m not sure how much Crowell himself knew but it’s definitely illegal.”

Ilya feels like he could dance, “Oh this is fantastic!”

“Yes. But Ilya?” Kavita sounds less than enthusiastic. “I’m rewatching the games to find out how they did it, and I can’t help but notice a few... issues... in teams that played against Carolina.”

“This is off the record?” Ilya learned that phrase recently and he’s been loving it.

“No, Ilya, I have a job to do. What can you tell me about Baldwin’s performance? And Litterick?”

“Who is Litterick?” Ilya is genuinely asking. The name rings a bell but he is so bad with names. “Oh!” It’s Little Dick. “The little wing boy from Carolina. Nice guy.”

“Yes. Were you aware he threw the cup? Or, at least, his performance during it? I’ve counted six instances in the final series where he sees an open player, looks at them, and passes to someone else.”

“He is not gay, if you are asking.” Ilya doesn’t like how close she is to getting this, or that she said they couldn’t be off-the-record.

“I wasn’t. But now it’s pretty public knowledge that there is also a coalition of straight allies. Do you know anything about that?”

“What do I say here? no comment?”

Kavita sighs. “If you’re not doing anything wrong, it’s just a great story. Huge amounts of people team up to fight bigotry at the MLH? I love it. But if there was a coordinated effort to illegally win the cup, it’s a very different story. Not much better than Crowell.”

Ilya wants to argue this point. It *is* much better than Crowell, as they were fighting for a moral correction, not a payout. “There was nothing illegal. I cannot stop you looking at it, but our names stay private, regardless?”

“Yes! Of course, I’m sorry if that wasn’t clear. I get why you wouldn’t tell me but it just makes my job harder.”

“If you wait... five? years, I will give you full story.”

Kavita laughs, “Yeah, I can’t do that. Let me know if you want to tell it sooner.” Ilya grumbles a confirmation. “My second question is about Rogue MLH, is that you?” The twitter account has gone viral in the two days since they started it.

“I can’t say.”

“Right. *Now* we can be off the record. Do you have a lawyer?”

Ilya’s heart races with fear. “No? You need lawyers to be on Twitter?”

“Ok, then let me just give you a public whistleblower 101. You can’t post anything without knowing for a fact that it’s true, preferably with hard evidence. Libel laws are serious stuff. Then, you can’t post any MLH branded content without their express permission. They can get you on copyright stuff, too. I even had concerns about you— or whoever—” she adds dubiously, “using MLH in the handle, but I spoke with our legal department and they said it was fine.”

Fuck. Maybe they *should* get a lawyer. This is all getting a little big, but at the moment he’s just grateful for the weird hodgepodge team he’s been putting together. “Thank you for telling me. Or— I will pass that along if I know who... I’ll let them know. If anyone tells me it is them. Hypothetically.” He sounds out each syllable of the word.

“Hypothetically,” Kavita responds, her smile audible through the phone. “I’ll text you some names who can advise you.”

“Thank you, Kavita.” Ilya singsongs like a kid. She seems like she’s wrapping up, but he and Shane have been planning their press conference, and he’s been meaning to call her anyway. “I wanted you to be the first journalist I invite to a press conference I am holding with Shane Hollander in November.”

Kavita is quiet for too long. Maybe there was a better segue into that invitation. “You and... Shane Hollander?”

“—are hosting a press conference. Yes.”

“To...” Kavita hopes he’ll fill in the blank. It probably sounds like they’ll be announcing this group, or their sexualities, or god forbid, a relationship.

“Joint project. Nothing related to this, sorry. But I will send you the date so you have it early.”

He finishes the call and immediately dials Scott Hunter with the update. He cautions Hunter not to speak with Kavita about the group’s part in last year’s playoffs. He and Hunter draft and then send a mass text to his men about not speaking to anyone about the group. The texting list is a little smaller now despite the new members; he has the 12 guys from the MLH awards in a group chat, which is great, but feels like a tiny victory amidst everything else balanced precariously, ready to fall. Ilya hangs up with the familiar feeling that this thing is getting out of hand, just in time for the season to start.

Chapter End Notes

No cool fun list for you this time, I don't think, just the one.

#11 is Lundin (minor book-gay) but we maybe knew that already. And now he is out! but also out of the league.

Coming up: Montreal is shitty (surprise!), the league is shitty (surprise!). And somewhere in there, they start a foundation, because clearly Ilya doesn't have enough on his plate. This poor boy needs to get off his grind 😭

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

First week of the 2018 season

Chapter Notes

Glad to see we all survived the AO3 outage (that I maybe caused by bragging on Tumblr about how close we were to 20,000 works)

I was going to try to Russian-Doll an elaborate Hayden-Finds-Out into this but it seemed like a tangent. Someday when I'm ready for that oneshot to also turn into 20 chapters and a [Hallmark original movie](#), maybe I'll publish it.

Serious question, at what point do I need to add a "Shane Hollander cries easily" tag? The boy is a geyser. Anyway, this chapter bounces around a lot but we get a lot of Shane (some POV shifts) featuring everyone-is-an-asshole

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

"What you're looking at is collective bargaining, like a union." Cooper Lee, the lawyer in the laptop, says, "And there is already a players' union."

The voice echoes into Ilya's new living room in Ottawa where he and Scott Hunter are hunched over the laptop. Hunter had a day off after playing Montreal's season opener, so he convinced his coach (and Kip) to let him fly back separately a day late. He's so nosy, Ilya would have to recount the whole meeting to him again anyway, so it's good he's here now. Ilya gets why they're doing this, he knows objectively it's the best thing to do.

But it's so *boring*.

"Ehh, no. Is not like that." Ilya corrects the lawyer.

"Forming a union, or getting involved in your existing union, would privilege you with protections under collective bargaining laws. You could organize strikes, participate in contract negotiations, and maybe establish some firmer anti-discrimination statutes." Cooper explains, "Make it so it's illegal for a team to drop contract renegotiations over sexuality." Scott looks over to make sure Ilya is understanding all the fast English legal-speak. Honestly, he's not. But he gets the gist.

“No. The league cannot know about our group.”

“Mr. Rozanov, I’m sorry to tell you, but I think the league already knows about your group.”

Hunter agrees, “I *did* tell them about it in front of 300 people and about a million watching at home.”

“Fine.” Ilya sighs. “They may know about us. But they cannot know about me. Or the other players.”

Cooper looks frustrated with him already, and it’s only 20 minutes in. Ilya described the group at the beginning of the meeting, but not anything about any actions they have taken. Ilya halfway wonders if he even *should*. Can they trust this guy? But then he remembers Kavita’s voice saying he needs a lawyer. He knows the Canadian and United States legal systems prevent lawyers from squealing, and at some point he has to trust someone with this. Shane keeps saying this will make him feel less anxious, but right now *all* he feels is anxious. And bored.

“I think we could work around the represented class being anonymous, but the leader would have to be known. Mr. Hunter, would you be comfortable being the public leader of the group?”

Ilya answers for him, “Of course he would, Hunter is attention whore.”

“Fuck off,” Hunter says under his breath so the laptop might not pick it up. “Yes, it would be fine with me. That’s basically been my role, providing press interviews and liasoning with the commissioner. But I kind of agree with Rozanov, I’m not sure we should go the union route.”

“You’re in direct contact with the commissioner?”

“Yes, he calls me in to meet occasionally.” Hunter shrugs, “Because I’m in New York, it’s easy. I’m not sure what he would do if I were on any other team.”

“What is the nature of these meetings?”

“Ummm...” They haven’t told Cooper Lee about their strikes against homophobic players yet. “Just what I should and shouldn’t be saying to the public. Basically, whenever I give an interview that disparages their name. Then...” Hunter looks at Ilya, who nods. “Asking whether I know anything about particular underground homosexual militias.”

“Ok. We’ll circle back to that. But Mr. Hunter, you need to stop having those meetings without counsel present. Or a union representative.” Ilya begins to speak, but Cooper rolls his eyes, “An *actual* union representative.”

“Gladly. If I don’t take the meetings, though, he’ll be pissed. There’ll probably be consequences.”

“They can’t terminate your contract over that, and your team has shown they are supportive. Call me when he asks for the next meeting.” Cooper flips a page in his legal pad off screen.

“Now. Why are we calling it a militia?”

Ilya and Hunter look at each other, Ilya takes a deep breath, and they tell their new lawyer everything.

When they're finished, Cooper no longer thinks they are a worker's union. “It’s almost like you don’t *want* to keep your jobs.” He shakes his head, “You’ve actually been relatively smart about things so far, and haven’t broken any laws, or even any MLH rules, but you’re walking a fine line. My general advice for both of you is to not piss off your teams. New York and Ottawa are keeping you safe. There are no rules broken but some of these things could be used to break your contract.”

“If New York didn’t think it was worth putting up with my shit, they would have canned me last year.” Hunter laughs.

“This is true.” Cooper nods. “So, going forward... I have a feeling if I told you to include me in the planning, I wouldn’t hear much.”

Scott starts to refute the statement, but Ilya is quicker to say, “Accurate.”

“Then I’ll just say this. Just tell me when you’ve done something and I’ll let you know what kind of trouble you’re in.” He sighs, “Obviously I’d prefer if you asked beforehand, but I’m starting to get the sense that’s not going to happen.”

“See?” Ilya turns to Scott and points to the laptop. “He gets me.”

Hunter shoves Ilya a little. “I’ll try to give you a heads-up before anything happens. If I’m even privy to it.”

They agree to keep an open line of communication and Cooper agrees to look at any tangential legal questions they or their players have. Shane and Kavita were right. Ilya feels a little more at ease.

“And just as an aside,” Cooper says more casually before they hang up, “I loved hockey growing up but lost interest because of stuff like this. All my favorite players were not great role models. They were assholes. I’m selfishly glad you called me, just so I can be one of the few who know about this effort. I don’t agree with some of the methods, but you’re doing the right thing. You’re definitely not assholes.”

Pike: you asshole

Pike: you knew??

Ilya: ???

Pike: not really. Just.

Pike: I know you couldn’t say anything.

Ilya: again

Ilya: ???

Pike: oh sorry Shane just came out to me

Pike: wait

Pike: fuck

Pike: oh my god

Pike: he's on your roster right?

Pike: right??

Ilya: Shane HOLLANDER ???

Ilya: is gay???

Ilya: what about Rose Landry???

Shane inspects his red-rimmed eyes in the mirror in Hayden's powder room and dabs a towel over his face. He knew his best friend would be good about this, but Shane ended up crying anyway. They finally got to a break in the conversation so he could go pull himself together. Now, he would really like to go back into Hayden's kitchen and never talk about this again, if possible.

No such luck.

Shane rounds the corner to a panic-stricken Hayden.

"Fuck, Shane, I'm so sorry I..."

Shane's heart pounds. It took thirty seconds for Hayden to out him to the entire internet? Did Hayden have a sex tape of Shane and Ilya's that got out? No, that's crazy, there's no sex tape. Did he tell his parents? Wait, they already know. Did he tell the *team*?

"While you were in the bathroom I texted Rozanov because I figured you..." Hayden waits for Shane to fill in the imaginary blank. He really wishes people would stop doing that to him. "He didn't know about you. I figured he would, he has a list of all the gay players and ___"

"He didn't know about me?" Hayden hands him the phone with the text conversation. Shane smiles at it. His surge of relief could power a city. Hayden looks like he just killed someone, which makes this significantly less funny. "Hayden. He knew about me. He's messing with you."

"*God* that guy is an asshole." Hayden puts his face in his hands and leans on the counter. "I'm having a freaking heart attack, why are you laughing?"

"No he uhh... definitely knows." Shane knows his smile is probably giving too much away. But he scrolls up in their text messages. Turns out, Hayden and Ilya text all the time. Maybe the news that it's Rozanov wouldn't be the worst thing in the world at this point. Hayden

snatches the phone away when he sees that Shane is scrolling through. That's fair, it sounds like there was important straight-army business in there that Shane probably shouldn't see. "So you two talk a lot?"

"Umm. Yeah, I'm in the straight... or, ally? group thing. I feel like an idiot, I kept harassing him to let you in. He was just trying to be a good guy, covering for you, too... Ugh. I don't want to like him but he makes it hard." Shane smirks. Hayden doesn't know the half of it. But ok, maybe there's some respect there. Maybe he could tell him. As he opens his mouth to do so, Hayden laughs and shakes his head. "So bizarre that *Rozanov* knew before I did, but I get it." He wants to tell Hayden that Rozanov knew before he knew it himself.

"Actually, he's known for a while." Shane figures that's about as good of a lead-in as possible. "Actually—"

Hayden takes this at face value, nodding, and continuing before Shane can finish his proclamation. "You know he has a boyfriend? Am I allowed to tell you that?"

"Yeah I do know that." Shane swallows. It's an even better opportunity to tell him. "It's—"

"Lucky guy," Hayden mutters. Shane's eyebrows shoot up. Hayden puts his hands up in surrender, "I'm not going to pretend he's not attractive! And now that we know he's ok when he's not being a shit bag? I mean... you won't tell anyone I said that, right?" That's one thing Shane can promise. Ilya's smug, stupid, hot face if he knew his gaydar was right about Hayden is something Shane never wants to see in his life.

Shane nods and begins the confession. "So—"

Hayden interrupts him again. "It's a shame he's taken, but he's not your type anyway."

"What?" Shane abandons his admission and smiles, "What exactly is my type, Hayden?" He wishes he recorded this entire conversation. He wonders if he could stealthily call Ilya so he can overhear this. "Because until 20 minutes ago, you thought my type was female."

Hayden looks at the TV playing the muted Admirals game. "Like... Bennett. He's your type." He points at the goalie.

"Ugh, Hayden he's so old." Shane does a double take at the goalie on the screen. He wonders... no, Bennett has a wife. Right? But so does Fredericks, and Shane was right about him. Shane still thinks he was right about all five of his public guesses. He pulls out his phone to text Ilya two words: *Eric Bennett*? He knows Ilya can't tell him, but he just wants Ilya to know his gaydar is better than everyone at that stupid meet-up thinks. He can even guess guys who have wives.

"Ok bad example. Because he's probably pretty straight, too."

Shane laughs. "That's my type, *probably pretty straight*." It might come off as sarcastic, but Shane can't help but think about how accurate that is. Hayden is finally quiet for more than five seconds, reminded that the game is on and now watching it. Shane takes advantage of the silence. "Hey, didn't you think Rozanov was *probably pretty straight*?"

Pike: ok now I am actually a little pissed.

Ilya: ?

Pike: you want to explain why Shane just told me he loves you and you moved to Ottawa for him?

Ilya: Shane HOLLANDER???

Pike: shut UP

Pike: am I fucking blind???

Pike: how did I not see this coming.

Ilya: 0/10 gaydar

Pike: relationshipdar

Pike: what do you want to bet when the Council finds out about this they'll all pretend they knew

Ilya: 100%

Ilya: they probably do know

Ilya: we are not sneaky

Pike: don't gaslight me!

Pike: you are so sneaky!

Pike: Shane just walked me through all the ways you kept it private

Pike: he also thinks you put all this together for him.

Ilya: I did.

Pike: man don't make me like you

Pike: I don't want that.

Council of (Mostly) Straight Elders group chat

Marly: why isn't Pike talking at all today

Ilya: Hollander was at his house

Ilya: and Pike is mad at me 🤔

Hayes: thank god

Hayes: can we say it now??

Vaughan: oh fuck yeah

Marly: I'm not going to be the first one to say it

Pike: ??? All of you!?

Pike: how???

RASHYCOCK + Roz group chat

Fredericks: idk who to go to with this

Fredericks: Rozanov as group leader still doesn't really feel right.

Fredericks: did anyone catch any of my games yet?

Fredericks: There's a weird pattern and I don't want to sound crazy but my wife said i should tell you guys

Ilya: only highlights why?

Ilya: we are only a week into the season what pattern

Fredericks: can you watch this and tell me if i'm crazy?

Fredericks: watch what the ref does here

Fredericks: [\[link\]](#)

Oldest Man Alive: Holy shit.

Oldest Man Alive: Are you like ok?

Oldest Man Alive: That was a bad hit, you went down hard.

Baldwin: that wasnt a legal hit.

Baldwin: but the ref did nothing?

Ilya: he sees this happen. watch his face at 03:12

Ilya: ref is watching and then turns away.

Fredericks: yeah im fine just spent a while getting xrays, nothing is broken and they already said i'm going back out on the ice for tomorrows game.

Fredericks: bruised ribs

Fredericks: but yall this was the fourth game of the season and it's been every game

Fredericks: i dont want to sound like a conspiracy theorist but ive had illegal hits on me in every game

Fredericks: none of them got called

Baldwin: where is your team not protecting you or calling this out

Fredericks: lol have you met my team?

Fredericks: Carolina would probably burn me alive on center ice if they could get away with

it

Fredericks: they won't be protecting me from shit

Baldwin: theres another one at the beginning of that clip but you knock the guy back

Baldwin: youre lucky youre freaking huge

Oldest Man Alive: the illegal hits are weird AND the refs are weird.

Oldest Man Alive: Roz?

Ilya: finding Carolina or other team video of this posted on social media

Ilya: I want to make a fucking fan edit but we cant

Ilya utilizes some of his allies on these offending teams to ask why Fredericks is getting targeted. Each offender responds with some homophobic "he has it coming" kind of nonsense. So Ilya is starting to think the illegal hits aren't an orchestrated effort, just rampant garden-variety bigotry. He publishes the names of the delinquents to both armies, ensuring the assholes won't know a minute's peace on the ice for weeks. The refs, on the other hand...

Oldest Man Alive: Talked to my boy Hal, the ref at tonight's game.

Oldest Man Alive: Asked him what was going on with all this.

Oldest Man Alive: Nicest man on earth.

Oldest Man Alive: Says "Keep your head down Hunter, it's not you."

It's one thing for bigoted players to take advantage of hockey's violent nature to commit hate crimes, but the concerted neglect from the referees, even good ones like Hal, suggests this thing goes further. Kavita thinks so, too, and is frustrated that between this, Baldwin's dropped contract, and the league's gambling scandal, her entire workload is sourced by Ilya Rozanov. In posting on RogueMLH, they all hope someone else might pick up the story.

@RogueMLH retweeted **@BrooklynScouts**

Notice the ref at the Fredericks hit at 03:12 #FrederickRefFail

@BrooklynScouts

Intense power play from the Scouts! Capitalize on that and take down Carol-whinea!

[[Video](#)]

@RogueMLH retweeted **@MinnesotaNomads**

Notice the ref at the Fredericks hit at 01:56 #FrederickRefFail

@MinnesotaNomads

Highlights from tonight's game @ Carolina! [[Video](#)]

@RogueMLH

We cant post MLH clips directly, but you definitely dont want to notice the ref at the Fredericks hit vs. DET at 15:35. #FrederickRefFail

@RogueMLH

Would be tragic if you also noticed the ref at the Fredericks hit against Columbus at 12:01 in the 2nd period #FrederickRefFail

@RogueMLH

4 illegal hits in 4 games. Refs see it, say nothing? Let's keep an eye on Fredericks tonight in MTL, shall we? 🙄 #FrederickRefFail

Their posts land just after the Carolina-Montreal game gets underway. Montreal players take two or three strikes on Fredericks, including an illegal hit to the head, and in the second period, the refs finally start calling them. Unfortunately, the last bad check breaks Fredericks's arm, and he texts the RASHYCOCK group with that news by the end of the game. He'll be out for at least 6 weeks. Harris is on the ready with Ilya's phone to get the update and relay the news, on top of his normal, official Ottawa social media job responsibilities. It's helpful if these tweets go up when Ilya is playing, so he couldn't be suspected of posting them, but it also helps their credibility to be the first "news source" to have the scoop.

@RogueMLH

Fredericks out for at least 6 weeks with a broken ulna thanks to MTL's Comeau. #ToldYouSo #FrederickRefFail

Ilya made sure Kavita would be watching the game. He and all his really trusted guys are playing tonight, so she chronicles the game via text as if Ilya won't be watching the recording as soon as he gets home. She notices something interesting: the refs only started calling penalties after first intermission, when they might have gotten a chance to hear about RogueMLH's posts. Something fishy, and coordinated, is going on with these refs.

After the Carolina game, Shane sulks on the bench in the Montreal change room.

This could have gone worse. It could have gone a lot better, too. The team is subdued as they recover from a tough game, followed by an even tougher conversation. Actually, that's not right. A conversation has more than one participant.

Shane fixates on his phone and he texts Ilya to let him know what happened. Not just that three separate douchebags had fucked Fredericks up with no better explanation than "just don't like the guy," but what came after that.

"You can't check Fredericks for being queer when you have a gay captain." Shane had said. *"I've been quiet about this, and I'd like it to stay that way, but it's time you knew. Especially if you're pulling shit like that."*

Most of the team said absolutely nothing after Shane made his announcement. He can't blame them, necessarily. It's gotta be a big shock. Still, he wishes they had said *something*. "Not a big deal" or "we support you" or "if you have a boyfriend, bring him around" or

“you’re still our captain who won us two cups and brought us back from nothing and reliably scores every game and sells more jerseys than anyone in the history of the franchise.”

Hayden broke the initial silence with “We’ve got your back, cap.” But no voices joined in agreement. One whispered “holy shit” in the back somewhere and JJ had clapped him on the shoulder. Shane breathes and reminds himself that they didn’t kill him, or worse, immediately demand his resignation as captain. So that’s a positive.

His eyes well up as he replays the last twenty minutes. He wishes he didn’t cry so easily because now he can’t show the room his face, opting to stare down at his phone, even though the screen went black. It’s several minutes before he gets himself calm enough to safely pick his head up.

Now Shane can tell the silence in the room is due to a lack of people. Apparently while he was seething, everyone left for the night, and no one stopped to say bye or offer support or love or even “good game.” Just Hayden and the Melnyk kid, last season’s trade-in rookie, are left. Hayden jingles his keys and pats Shane on the shoulder. “You’re gonna be ok?”

“Yeah, sorry, I zoned out.” Shane looks down and realizes he still hasn’t changed out of his clothes from the game. He lowers his voice a little so Melnyk doesn’t hear. “How do you think they took it?”

Hayden shrugs. “I tried to get some support going and they didn’t take me up on it. So maybe not great? I don’t know.”

“Yeah. It’s fine. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Hayden waves at the kid across the room and heads out. Shane gets up. He hates feeling dirty but he can shower at home. He just wants to be out of here.

“Hey cap.” Melnyk sits on the bench by Shane’s bag.

“Uh hey.” Shane fumbles with his stuff, not meeting the kid’s eye. This could go one of two ways, and Shane is preparing for the worst. This kid is arrogant and occasionally mean. Shane really doesn’t want to hear whatever homophobic shit is going to—

“You’re *friends with Rozanov*, right?”

Shane stills. He’s heard that tone once before, from Scott Hunter. Shane briefly has to remind himself of the layers to that question, and remember he’s probably not asking in a literal sense. This is a code that Shane knows.

“Yeah.” Shane says, studying the kid. Melnyk has a hint of something serious on his default amused face. All at once, Shane has to admit Ilya has a gift. How did he clock Melnyk? Shane never would have guessed this loud, abrasive, cocky little shithead likes men. He’s a defenseman who’s not good enough to talk as much shit as he does. Shane doesn’t know much about his personal life, just that he’s part of the younger group that goes to clubs after their games. Shane always kind of assumed he picked up women there, but maybe he likes both. “Umm... you?” He doesn’t really know the script here at all. And he’d rather this not

turn into a pornography. Melnyk is objectively hot but he's like 20 and Shane has a Skype date with Ilya tonight he would rather be doing than anything or *anyone* else.

"Yeah. I was early." He announces this fact with pride. "Like, Fall last year. I think my number is under 15." This kid will brag about anything. It's so annoying that Shane finds it loops all the way back around to endearing.

Shane doesn't really know what's supposed to be secret, but he knows the other Montreal guy was #13 on Ilya's list. If his timeline is right, that's Melnyk. "You're under 15." Shane confirms with a smile. And then, because Shane is *also* a competitive asshole, he adds, "I'm 6." The look on Melnyk's face is delicious. Shane battles with himself, wanting to earn more of that addictive victorious feeling. He could do it easily by telling the kid about the headquarters in Ilya's Boston home office, that there's a makeshift battle station in his vacation home, that the last text in his phone is their beloved Ringleader telling him 'I love you so much, can not wait to see your dick on my phone tonight.', but decides against any of that.

"Holy shit! Yeah, I guess that makes sense. You've known Rozy like your whole career right?"

"Yeah." He doesn't know the half of it. Shane knows that one syllable doesn't give anything away, but it's still weird to admit. They're supposed to give a press conference in a month that will announce their foundation and friendship, so he's been trying to sow those seeds into his conversations. "He's not a bad guy. The rivalry is mostly fake."

Melnyk is quiet for a minute. "That could have gone better today, right?"

"Yeah," Shane is reminded of the events that led to this conversation, and lets himself deflate for the first time, showing more disappointment than he showed Hayden. Something feels different about another queer person confirming it for him. "It really fucking could have."

"I think when I do it I'll put it on the Jumbotron during a playoff game, what do you think?" The kid laughs, "maybe I'll spell it in boogers on Comeau's locker? I could probably seduce his dad, let him catch us in the act. Or maybe I'll set a flaming turd on Crowell's porch? Not to tell him I'm gay, just always wanted to do that."

Shane laughs hard at this, despite having the worst day of his life.

"You have someone, right?" Melnyk asks. It's strange to see this immature asshole so concerned and actively working to cheer Shane up.

"Yeah." He doesn't elaborate. Even if the kid knows about both of them individually, he can't know about Shane and Ilya as a couple.

"Well good. Go home and get some." Shane must look sad at that because he corrects himself, "...Or call him? I don't know man, whatever you're into."

"I'll call him." Shane smiles again.

Chapter End Notes

I miss writing Haydenov texts, can you tell?

Again, only one number this time, but I like this one.

#13 : Montreal's trade-in rookie from last season (we already knew this), now has a name (Melnik), and Shane and him know about each other now.

Coming up: Irina Foundation, the referees, Hayes gets transferred.

An FYI if you are worried about our mains from the books. I'm trying to drop hints about them where I can but just so we're all clear

BOOK SPOILERS:

Right now is Fall 2018, so we're in Tough Guy territory, RP/FS just started up. EB is getting a divorce by the end of the year, TB starts dating his first boy in December.

End Notes

I'm on tumblr: [@exactphoify](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!