

The Knee Was Unnecessary (The Knee Was Necessary)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/80203471) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/80203471>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander , Troy Barrett , Evan Dykstra , Brandon Wiebe , Anya Ilya Rozanov's Dog , Zane Boodram , Wyatt Hayes , Luca Haas , Hayden Pike , Hayden Pike's Children , Jackie Pike
Additional Tags:	Ottawa Centaurs (Game Changers) , No beta - we die like my mom , Shane knows how to fight , Montreal Voyageurs Montreal Metros Being Assholes (Game Changers) , Author hates Montreal and you can tell , Violence but not described in gorey detail , Author's first language in not english , Shane is brutal in a fight , BAMF Shane Hollander
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-02-25 Completed: 2026-04-02 Words: 14,330 Chapters: 4/4

The Knee Was Unnecessary (The Knee Was Necessary)

by [Les_Stars](#)

Summary

Violence typically solves nothing, except, on the rare and necessary occasions, it solves everything.

Notes

I had decided there were not enough fics of Shane beating up Montreal Players, and had decided to make one. I have not read The Long Game yet, this is what I have read from other fics. I would like to thank google to providing knowledge on ice hockey, and translate. Also I have only ever played field hockey, and learned to fight on solid ground so if this makes no sense, sorry! Also English is not my first language so praying my grammar (and story makes sense) is correct. Forgive me please if not. Love you x

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

Chapter 1

Violence typically solves nothing, except, on the rare and necessary occasions, it solves everything.

The rivalry between Ottawa and Montreal was new and vicious, and made the centuries-old one between Boston and Montreal look like two toddlers arguing over their favourite red crayon.

The air was charged. The fans of each teams were chattering excitedly. They were out for blood, fans of each team pressed against the glass, hurling insults across the divide. Ottawa fiercely defending their new centre, Shane Hollander, while Montreal saw his move as an act of betrayal.

Everyone thought Ilya Rozanov, *'Sexy Russian Professional Menace'* would be the one who fulfilled the request for violence after defending his husband, or Troy Barret, *'Reformed Asshole'* would be the one swinging for his teammate's honour. So referees and coaches made a silent agreement to keep an eye on them, while fans decided to only encourage the two.

This train of thought was common. Reasonable. Expected. Because Shane Hollander, 'Canada's Golden Boy' doesn't fight.

Throughout his entire career, no one seen it. There was the one incident with Scott Hunter, years back, but no blood, and no injuries occurred so it was considered to be a 'heated argument,' certainly not a fight. The whole thing ended in handshakes and a joint apology so sincere it made the highlight reel for 'playful chirping' So a simple conclusion was made. The 'Prince Charming of Hockey' who made friendly, kind, playful chirps — the kind that made other players laugh, rather than rise to anger — simply wasn't built for fighting. He needed someone else to protect him.

Everyone thought this. Montreal. Ottawa. Coaches. Referees. Even Ilya thought this, and he slept next to the man.

No one expected Shane Hollander to be the reason the new Montreal captain was leaving the ice on a stretcher.

So. What the hell happened?

A week earlier.

Friday morning practice, early in the new season. The warm-up laps became a race (as they always did) with Shane winning by a hair and Ilya loudly accusing the love of his life of cheating.

Coach Wiebe split the team into two. Forwards on shooting and passing drills, defence-men working with Hayes on marking players. Mundane. Professional. Fine.

Except Ilya was furious.

The NHL (bastards that they were) had been scheduled Ottawa against Montreal. Ottawa's first game of the season. They knew exactly what they were doing. The discourse was going to be wild, the ratings were going to be enormous, and the players were going to have to deal with the fallout.

Seriously the NHL were assholes.

They were in position, ready to start the practice drill, when Dykstra piped up.

"If we pretending to be Montreal, does that mean we should be massive dicks to Hollander, and try to beat him up then?"

A few players laughed. Shane himself scoffed and kept his eyes on the ice. But the comment cast Bood somewhere deep in thought, and after a moment he made a sudden and very important announcement.

"Wait, he's right. Montreal is going gunning for Shane, should we teach him to block a punch at the very least?"

The practice suddenly forgotten. Players skated from their positions into a growing huddle, with everyone talking at once. Can you teach a fighting crash course in a week, and what would that even look like? Someone said something about drilling jab techniques. Coach Wiebe, rather than shutting it down, drifted over himself and started nodding along, adding his own suggestions.

Ilya went very still as he realised that in all his frustration about the upcoming Montreal game, the idea of teaching Shane to throw a punch had never once occurred to him. He found himself making rapid promises to the team that he'd run drills at home every night until the game.

Shane, meanwhile, stood slightly outside the huddle with an expression of very patient boredom.

"While I'm deeply touched," he said, raising his voice just enough to cut through the noise, "could we possibly get back to practice? I'd much rather humiliate Montreal with goals rather than with how many teeth we knock out."

The team all turned at once with the sound of his voice like meerkats looking out for danger.

Coach Wiebe coughed once, and everyone turned once again and suddenly found themselves very interested in the ice. Wiebe skated over, Ilya beside him.

"Listen, kid. You're a damn good player, the best I've seen, if I'm being honest. But you probably hold the record for the longest a NHL player has gone without dropping the gloves. Montreal is going to play dirty. Rozanov can show you a few things. Nobody here is doubting you. We're just—" He paused, carefully choosing his next words. "—worried about you."

Ilya found himself quickly nodding his head.

"I agree. Let me. I don't want you getting hurt." He said it simply, because it was simply true.

Shane looked at the two of them, his husband and his coach, and smiled. It was a warm smile, the kind that made Ilya just melt, but had he looked closer and he would have seen there was something behind it. Something knowing.

"We can't sink to their level, and trust me. I can handle myself if they decided to play dirty." he replied with almost something akin to mischief in his eyes.

Ilya opened his mouth to ask what exactly that meant, but Shane had already turned and pushed off down the ice, calling back over his shoulder. "No point teaching me anything if we don't win the game first. Come on." The competitive energy in his voice hit the team like a pistol. Players scrambled back to position.

Ilya stood there for a second, watching his husband skate, turning those words over in his head. I can handle myself. He decided Shane meant he'd score so many goals that fighting would be irrelevant. Ilya would find out he was wrong to dismiss those words.

The night before the game. Their house.

The house was quiet. Anya was snoring in her little adorable dog bed. Yet, in the still-lit kitchen, nervous muttering and pacing could be heard. A cup of chamomile tea, long forgotten. Ilya walked in, and briefly considered scaring his husband out of his trace before he realised this required a serious conversation.

"Shane."

He paused, blinked. "Hey."

"You've been in here for forty minutes." Ilya came around the counter and stood beside him, close enough that their shoulders touched. "Trying to get your steps in or something?"

"I was thinking."

"Yes. This I could see." Ilya took the mug, set it in the microwave, pressed thirty seconds.

"Talk to me." Shane was quiet for a moment. When he spoke, he kept his eyes on the counter-top.

"Do you remember the first time you played against Boston? After you moved?"

Ilya did remember. He didn't particularly enjoy remembering. "Yes."

"What was it like?" Ilya thought about how to answer honestly. "Like I didn't care that I had moved from best team to worst team. Like I had to prove I could make this team the best as well. Both at the same time. It was exhausting."

Shane let out a breath that was almost a laugh. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, that's—" He stopped. "Montreal didn't even fight to keep me, Ilya. They made it very clear that they thought I was

the problem. That the team would be better without me."

He paced once more and then took his position next to Ilya again. "What if they were right? What if I go out there tomorrow and I'm...ordinary? What if I'm ordinary and everyone sees it?"

Ilya stared at him. "You," he said slowly, "who won the Art Ross two years running. Who has more assists last season than anyone since...I don't know, someone old. You are worried about being ordinary."

"Statistics don't—"

"Shane." Ilya turned to face him fully, put both hands on his face. "Listen to me. I am not saying this because I am your husband and I love you, although I am your husband and I am very much in love with you. I am saying this because I have played against you, and I have played with you, and I have watched you take a game that was lost and then win by simply deciding that it wasn't over yet." He searched Shane's face. "They didn't drive you out because you were ordinary. They drove you out because Montreal are idiots who couldn't recognise what they had. And tomorrow, you are going to make that very clear to everyone in that rink."

The microwave beeped. Neither of them moved. Shane looked at him for a long moment. Something in his expression shifted. Something calm.

"Okay," he said quietly.

"Okay?"

"Okay." He almost smiled. "Thank you."

Ilya pulled him in, pressed a kiss against Shane's forehead.

"Also, if anyone touches you, I'm going to make it a personal mission—"

"Ilya."

"—just a minor personal mission—"

"We talked about this."

"You talked. I listened politely." He saw Shane's shoulders shake, just slightly. There it was. "Come to bed. You need to sleep, and the tea is a lost cause."

Shane glanced at the microwave. "It really is."

Ilya took the cup out of the microwave, poured it into the sink and gave it a rinse (it would bother Shane if he didn't) and steered his husband up the stairs towards their bedroom.

A few hours before the game. The locker room.

The energy in the locker room was palpable. Everyone excited, everyone buzzing, everyone at least partially considering a crime.

Like bees in a hive who were excited at the prospect of making honey.

Ottawa vs Montreal. First game since Shane's move. Their ice, yes, but Ilya was not naive enough to think Montreal hadn't sent their fans in advance. The fans may have been out for blood, but the Centaurs were already making plans to bury the Montreal team members in a ditch, with a few exceptions of Hayden and JJ.

Comments that toed the line between joke and promise were being thrown around. There were no words to describe how much Ilya adored this team.

"If I were to fall and the blade of my skate just happened to make contact with an artery," Boord mused, with great philosophical calm, "do you think I would be thrown in the box?"

"Hmm, no, but the medics might sink their teeth into you searching for a concussion and so you might be out of commission for a bit." LaPointe quickly answered

"Damn, any more ideas?"

This opened the floor to increasingly creative suggestions, all of which occupied a cheerful grey area between team bonding and conspiracy.

Ilya laughed with the rest of them, but he kept one eye on Shane. Shane was in full gear, apparently on autopilot, his fingers moving through familiar pre-game motions while his mind was somewhere three steps ahead of the room. Ilya gently tugged at his husband's arm, letting him know he was there, and watched as Shane suddenly sprung to life, giving Ilya his perfect media smile that may have fooled others, but Ilya knew better.

"Моя любовь," His voice low, underneath the chaos of murder plans.

"Talk to me."

"I'm fine."

"You said that last night too." Shane stilled and looked at his husband, opened his mouth and then closed it, as if torn between telling him or not. His shoulders relaxed, and Shane leaned over and buried his head into Ilya's shoulder. Shane had decided to let his true feelings show, and it was moments like these that made Ilya's hatred for the Montreal Voyageurs flare up once more.

"I just need them to go home humiliated," he said, quietly. "Not just beaten. Humiliated. I want them to regret it. All of it." A pause. "And I'm scared I'll mess up. That I'll be...off. That I'll prove them right in front of our home crowd."

Ilya was going to kill the Voyageurs. He was just about to reassure his husband and say that Montreal was going to leave Ottawa, scared to come back when Hayes piped up:

"Sorry to interrupt this beautiful lovely, straight out of a romcom moment, but Shane, you were, genuinely, the only thing that made Montreal a threat. You could play in a blindfold with your hands zip-tied and still be the most dangerous person on the ice."

This comment was met with a chorus of agreement, and a 'Hell yeah, Montreal sucks now,' from somewhere in the echoey locker-room. Shane lifted his head and blinked. And then he finally laughed and smiled at his team. His new hockey family. Ilya would do anything to have his husband only make that sound for the rest of their life.

He also decided Hayes was his new favourite.

"Hayes is right. But you forgot, we are awesome team who won against Montreal even when you were still with those assholes. With you here now, tonight we become their nightmare. We become the thing they check under the bed for." He caught Shane's eye. "We make them scared to hear Ottawa." Shane looked at him. Full of something Ilya didn't have a word for in English, or Russian. He planted a quick kiss on Ilya's cheek, and turned to face the rest of the team.

"Alright," he said. "But no fighting. I need my team on the ice, not in the box. We win this clean."

"But mum, not even one punch?" Haas teased.

"No, not even one." Shane replied seriously.

Coach Wiebe appeared in the doorway. He looked around at them all, this loud, devoted, slightly unhinged group of people, and something like satisfaction settled in his face.

"Now boys, I know we are all excited for today's match, but I would prefer a nice clean game where we don't make Haris have a heart attack trying to clean up your messes on socials, but if an accident or two happens...well we can offer our sincerest apologies."

"No can do coach, Shane made us all pledge to be pacifists this game." Boob teased with a glance over to Shane

"Well, that's a first. Probably first hockey game to never have a punch thrown." He looks at Hollander with a look of determination, like a general about to send his prodigal soldier to war. "Hollander, I want you centreing the first line."

A beat of surprise crossed Shane's face. Then it was gone, replaced by something Ilya couldn't name. Wiebe moved into strategy, voice dropping. The team leaned in. Ilya looked at his husband one more moment. He had a sinking feeling that Shane was hiding something from him.

Something he couldn't figure out.

Apparently, Ilya Rozanov was now teaching a masterclass on how to swear in Russian.

He hadn't planned it. It was just that Montreal kept doing things that required commentary, and the commentary kept coming out in Russian, and his teammates kept skating past asking what that one meant, and now Bood could say ублюдки (bastards) with perfect pronunciation and was using every opportunity to practise.

Montreal weren't just playing dirty. They were just being full on violent. Ilya had never seen this level of anger from the Voyageurs, and that was saying something, given that he'd personally been responsible for a huge part of their fury over the years.

They were shoving. Slashing. Pulling at Shane's stick. Throwing elbows and not even flinching when the referees called it. The penalty box was becoming a second home for them. Every time Shane touched the puck, two of them closed in on him like he owed them money.

It wasn't working. Shane was everywhere. He moved through the chaos like he was operating on a completely different frequency. Calm, precise, a half-second ahead of everyone. Every time Montreal crashed into him, he'd already gone. Every time they thought they had him cornered, the puck was somewhere else. Ilya had played against Shane for long enough to understand his game, and he still occasionally lost track of what he was doing and why, only to watch the play develop and think 'Oh. Of course'.

The Centaurs, for their part, were keeping their promise. Every shove that went unanswered seemed to confuse Montreal more than a punch would have. The commentators were apparently beside themselves. Ilya could imagine the broadcast, "remarkable restraint from Ottawa, truly unprecedented" and wanted to laugh. He was pulled back four times. Once by Troy, once by Bood, once by Haas, and once, memorably, by Shane himself, who simply appeared at his elbow, gripped the back of his jersey, and said very quietly, "Not yet."

Not yet. He should have paid more attention to the phrasing.

Shane's jaw was set. He'd been chewing his gum shield since the second period with the focused intensity of someone who was making a decision about something, and hadn't quite finished making it.

The third period was finishing up. The score was 11-2. Ilya almost felt bad.

Almost.

He looked at the scoreboard and thought: *Yikes*. Five of those goals were Shane's. Hat trick for Ilya. Two for Troy, one for Haas. Embarrassing didn't cover it. This was the kind of score that got discussed at the end of seasons. The kind that got your highlight reel cut for compassion.

The final whistle blew. The Centaurs converged at centre ice, a tangle of gloves and helmets and shouting. Someone, Bood, probably, deployed ублюдки at the Montreal bench for no real reason except that he could now. Ilya was laughing, arm around Shane's shoulders, when the crowd noise shifted. Not louder. Different. A ripple of something sharp moving through the arena.

He turned. Everett Hardy. New Montreal captain, twenty-three years old, jaw set like a man who'd decided he had nothing left to lose had dropped his gloves. Everything after that happened very fast, and Ilya processed it in fragments.

Hardy wound up his hand and threw a punch at Shane.

Shane moved. Not stumbled, not flinched, moved, with the unhurried shifting of someone who had done this before, had drilled it until it was reflex, had been waiting the entire game for exactly this. He pulled back just enough. Hardy's fist caught air. And then Shane Hollander, 'Canada's Golden Boy,' 'Prince Charming of Hockey,' the man who chirped opponents into laughing at themselves, pulled off his own gloves.

The left jab caught Hardy above the eye. Fast. Clean. A punch that knew exactly where it was going.

The right hook took him across the jaw.

he crack was audible even in the noise of the arena. Then the arena went quiet, because no one knew what to do with what they were seeing, and silence was apparently the only available response.

Hardy went down. Shane followed him. He had Hardy's collar in one fist and was saying something. Low. Rapid. Vicious. None of it in English, some of it French, some of it Russian, definitely learned from a certain source. Ilya stood absolutely still and watched his gentle, patient, endlessly kind husband translate anger of being treated like he was a problem into two precise hands and a vocabulary that would have made Ilya proud under different circumstances.

The knee to the face was perhaps slightly beyond what the situation strictly required.

The second hook to the ribs was almost certainly unnecessary.

The referees reached Shane at roughly the same moment Ilya remembered how to move. They pulled him back. Two of them, struggling with it in a way that Ilya found, against all reason, impressive. Medics appeared from the boards and moved toward Hardy with the brisk, practised urgency of people who'd seen worse, but not often.

Ilya stood between Troy and Bood. He could not have spoken if he'd tried.

"Did you teach him that?" Troy said, eventually.

"Nope."

"Did you know he could do that?"

"Nope."

"Huh."

Shane shook free of the referees and skated over to his team. His expression was still set, the fury not gone. He looked up. Saw the wall of faces staring back at him, shock, pride, and at least in one case something that Ilya recognised as a very specific species of attraction. The fury collapsed into sheepishness with remarkable speed. Shane rubbed the back of his neck. Looked at the ice.

"Guess I took it a little far?"

For a moment, nobody said anything. Oh the locker room was going to be very loud after this.

The locker room. Immediately after.

Loud was not a good enough word to describe the noise.

Ilya had been in loud locker rooms before. He'd been in locker rooms after Stanley Cup wins, after the kind of games that got written about for years. He had never been in a locker room quite like this one, where approximately fourteen people were all trying to have different conversations at the same time and none of them were willing to wait their turn.

Dykstra was re-enacting the fight using his stick as a prop. Haas was somewhere in the middle of a sentence that had started as a question and turned into outrage at this secret being kept from him.

Shane sat on the bench in the middle of it, still half-geared up, and had the expression of a man who had made a choice and was now living with the consequences and finding them louder than expected.

Coach Wiebe appeared in the doorway. The room didn't go quiet. It was incapable of going quiet at this point, but the buzzing was lessened, the way it always did when Wiebe walked in with that particular set to his jaw. He looked around at all of them. He looked at the re-enactment. He looked at huddle of men. He looked, for a long moment, at Shane. He pulled up a chair, turned it backwards, and sat down on it like a man settling in for something.

"Hollander," he said "what the actual fuck? Hardy has a broken jaw, nose and four ribs. I thought you were a pacifist or something."

The room found a hush from somewhere.

"I'm not going to pretend I'm not going to get a very interesting phone call from the league tomorrow morning, because I am." He paused. "I'm also not going to pretend that Hardy didn't throw the first punch, because he did, and every camera caught it, and frankly the boy had it coming for about sixty minutes before that." Another pause, longer. Pride shown through his face. "You played one hell of a game tonight, kid. All of you." His eyes stayed on Shane. "You proved something out there. I hope you know that."

Shane looked at him. Something moved in his throat. "Yeah," he said quietly. "I think I do."

Wiebe nodded once, stood up, replaced the chair. Nodded. He was gone before anyone could respond.

The room exhaled. Troy, who had been quiet through all of it, leaned forward from his spot along the wall.

"So," he said, in the conversational tone of someone asking about the weather.

"The fight." Shane looked at him.

"The fight."

"Yeah." Troy gestured loosely. "Where did that come from, exactly? Because I've played against you, seen you play many, many games and you have never...I mean, you literally made us swear a holy vow of pacifism and then you—" He stopped. Seemed to search for the right word and give up. "Where did that come from?"

Every head in the room turned toward Shane. Shane had the grace to look slightly embarrassed. He unclipped his helmet, set it on his knee, ran a hand through his hair.

"My mum," he said. Silence.

"Your mum," Troy repeated.

"She's a big hockey fan," Shane shrugged, Ilya had expanded his arms out to his full wingspan as if to provide a visual aid. "She knew what hockey was like, and as soon as I told her I wanted to play hockey professionally, she wanted to make sure I could handle myself if someone came at me. Boxing classes. Every Saturday morning from when I was eight until I was sixteen." He paused. "She was very firm about it."

The silence held for another moment. Then the room absolutely erupted. Ilya sat in the middle of it and laughed until his chest hurt, because what else was there to do, really. His husband, gentle, diplomatic, chronically polite Shane Hollander, who once spent ten minutes apologising to a stranger for an accidentally bumping into him, had been quietly carrying eight years of boxing training his entire NHL career and had simply never mentioned it to anyone.

She was very firm about it.

He was going to love Yuna Hollander until the day he died.

Eventually, the noise died down with teasing remarks being thrown Shane's way. Gear came off. Showers running. Plans were being made for afters celebration, and for a fight club hosted by Shane. Ilya showered and changed and waited, and when Shane finally emerged, damp-haired and quiet, Ilya fell into step beside him without a word.

They walked to the car together through the cold.

Their house. Later.

The kitchen light was on. Not like the previous night. Tonight Shane had turned it on deliberately, moving through the kitchen with the expression of someone who was expecting an interrogation.

Ilya sat at the counter and watched him make tea and waited. Shane set a mug in front of him. Sat down across from him. Curled both hands around his own mug and looked at Ilya, waiting.

"Go on, then," he said.

"Your mother," Ilya said.

"My mother."

"Eight years of boxing classes."

"Every Saturday." Shane's mouth curved. "She drove me herself. Watched them. Made notes on weaknesses. Never missed one." Ilya looked at him.

"And you never told me."

"You never asked if I could box."

"Shane."

"I know." He wrapped his hands tighter around the mug. "It never came up. It's not something I wanted to use. I never wanted to be someone who used it." He looked down. "I wanted to beat Montreal with goals. That was the plan. That was always the plan."

"And then Hardy threw a punch."

"And then Hardy threw a punch." A pause. "And I was sick of everyone thinking that I was an easy target in a fight, and so I wanted to give Hardy a 'taste of his own medicine.'" He stopped. "And I thought about my mum driving me to a boxing club every Saturday morning so that no one could ever make me feel small on the ice." His voice had gone quieter.

Ilya was quiet for a moment. Then he couldn't help it, because it had been building since the moment he'd watched it happen. He started laughing. The real, loud, kind, from somewhere deep, the kind that had Shane looking up sharply and then catching it like a spark, both of them laughing in the quiet kitchen while Anya lifted her head from her bed in the corner.

"I am," Ilya managed, eventually, "going to call your mother tomorrow and thank her personally."

"She already texted me," Shane said, wiping his eye. Ilya put his face in his hands, trying to suppress giggles.

"She saw the—"

"The knee, yes. She mentioned the knee specifically." Shane's voice was full of laughter. "She said the follow-through was excellent."

Ilya looked up at his husband. Bright-eyed, loose-shouldered, the last traces of tension finally, visibly gone and felt something settle in his own chest. He loved learning something new about Shane everyday and fall in love with him over and over again.

"You're okay," he said. It wasn't a question. Shane looked at him.

"Yeah," he said. Simply, completely. "I really am." Ilya reached across the counter and took his hand. Shane turned it over and squeezed it.

Outside, Ottawa was probably still talking about it. The sports channels would be running the clip on loop. Someone was already writing the headline. Tomorrow there would be calls from the league, and a fine in all likelihood, and a press conference where Shane would have to explain how he learned to fight, why he never did before, and Ilya was already looking forward to watching that. But that was tomorrow.

Tonight, the kitchen was warm, the tea was hot, and Shane Hollander , 'Canada's Golden Boy,' 'Prince Charming of Hockey,' and apparently boxing champion was okay.

Ilya decided that was more than enough.

Chapter 2: Scott Hunter Has A Realisation

Chapter Summary

Most revelations arrive quietly. Some arrive via a right hook to the jaw of the new Montreal captain.

Chapter Notes

Scott POV! Enjoy!! This was very fun to write! Also fun fact! The Russian masterclass bit from the last chapter was actually inspired from my real life -- my friends know so many swear words in Russian / Ukrainian because of me (much to my horror (and maybe delight))

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

Most revelations arrive quietly. Some arrive via a right hook to the jaw of the new Montreal captain.

In an apartment in New York.

The lights were set low, the apartment comfortably warm. The New York skyline shone brightly through the grand windows, the city doing what it always did, indifferent and luminous. The TV buzzed at low volume in the background, ads playing to nobody in particular.

In the kitchen, Scott was watching his husband make dinner.

Montreal vs Ottawa.

First game for Ottawa in the season. First game since Shane Hollander's move.

Scott knew that Montreal were full of assholes who had somehow convinced themselves that once you were gay, you were suddenly no longer the player with the highest hockey IQ in the league. No longer the player everyone knew lived and breathed the sport. Scott had played against Shane enough times to know exactly how much Montreal deserved what was coming to them tonight.

He wasn't Shane's best friend. Wasn't even close to it. But bullshit was bullshit, and Scott had never had much patience for it.

What he did have patience for, he thought, watching Kip move around the kitchen with easy, unhurried grace, was this. The low lights. The warm apartment. The smell of whatever Kip was making that had been making the place smell incredible for the last forty minutes.

He was not, however, looking forward to watching Shane Hollander get taken apart by Montreal.

Because Shane Hollander couldn't fight. Everyone knew it. It was practically a footnote in his Wikipedia page at this point. The man chirped, he scored, he assisted, he shook hands with a sincerity that had once made Scott feel genuinely guilty for the incident. He did not fight. And Montreal tonight were going to try to make that everyone's problem.

The one silver lining was Rozanov. Scott was very much looking forward to watching Rozanov spend half the game in the penalty box after making Montreal regret their life choices. Montreal deserved the full force of that man, and Scott intended to enjoy every second of it.

"What are you thinking about so deeply?"

Scott blinked. Kip was standing in front of him holding two plates, watching him with the patient amusement of someone who had long since made peace with the fact that hockey thoughts infected dinner time.

"Sorry." He took his plate. "Thinking about the game."

They moved to the couch together, settling into the leather couch that creaked every time they sat on it.

"Hollander might end up on a stretcher tonight," Scott said. "But I'm hoping Rozanov at least takes out a few of those Montreal bastards before that happens."

Kip tilted his head. "Hollander, Rozanov... aren't those the two who used to be rivals? And then got married?"

"Yeah."

"So Rozanov is going to defend his husband by committing several crimes on ice."

"That's the hope."

"Why do you think Hollander's going to get hurt?"

"He's probably the one guy in the league who's never actually fought anyone." Scott picked up his fork. "It's one of the things he's known for. Montreal going to be going for him tonight."

Kip furrowed his brow, something moving behind his eyes. The particular expression that meant he was pulling at a loose thread.

"Wait," he said. "Didn't you two fight?"

Scott blinked. Then laughed.

"That didn't count. He tried to chirp me, but I was having a bad day, and I—" He stopped. "I compared him to Rozanov."

Kip's eyebrows went up.

"There were insults. No gloves dropped. We both apologised after. He didn't deserve that comparison." He paused. "It wasn't my best moment."

He was still turning it over in his head, the way he occasionally did, that particular memory with its strange texture, Shane going very still and then very deliberate in a way Scott had clocked as something and never quite been able to name—

The thought hit him like a shot to the chest.

"Holy shit."

Kip looked at him.

"He thought I knew," Scott said slowly. "He thought I was threatening to out him. Right there on the ice." He stared off into the distance. "Holy shit. That's what that was."

Kip was quiet for exactly two seconds.

Then he started to laugh. The real kind, the kind that bent him forward slightly, and Scott found it making him breathless everytime he made that beautiful sound.

"He must have thought you were the biggest asshole," Kip managed. "Oh my god. He should have absolutely kicked your ass."

"He can't fight! Thank God for that!" But Scott was laughing too now, the kind that came with the belated horror of understanding something years too late. "I don't even like fighting and I would have destroyed him!"

"You accidentally threatened to out a man on national ice and he responded by throwing out some insults and then apologising."

"We both apologised."

"Scott."

"I know." He rubbed his face with one hand, still laughing. "I know."

Kip shook his head, delighted and appalled in equal measure, and reached over to squeeze Scott's arm once before picking up his fork again.

Scott reached for the remote. Found the channel. Turned the volume up.

The pre-game coverage was already running, analysts talking about Shane's move, about what tonight might look like. The camera panned to the ice. Scott settled back and slung an arm over Kip's shoulder.

He knew how tonight was going to go. Montreal would play dirty, Rozanov would do something that got him benched, Shane would score enough goals to make the whole thing almost pitiful.

"Hey," he said. "Want to bet how many minutes Rozanov spends in the penalty box?"

Kip leaned into him, warm and easy.

"I'll say twenty," he said. "Final answer."

Scott looked at the screen. Looked at the pre-game video of Shane Hollander standing at centre ice, calm and focused and completely unbothered by the chaos that was about to descend on him.

"Forty," Scott raised.

The game started the way Scott had expected it to.

Montreal came out angry. The kind of angry that had been building for months, the kind that had been marinating in press conferences and had now been handed ice time and permission to do something about it. They were physical from the first drop of the puck. Grabbing. Closing in on Shane every time he touched the puck like they were trying to remind him of something.

It wasn't working.

Scott had watched Shane Hollander play hockey for years. Had played against him enough times to have a working understanding of how his mind operated on ice, the way he was always two decisions ahead of everyone else. But there was something different about tonight. Something settled and precise and almost, Scott thought, like Shane had been waiting for exactly this.

Every time Montreal crashed into him, he'd already gone. Every time they thought they had him cornered, the puck was somewhere else entirely.

"He's good," Kip noted, from beside him.

Scott said nothing. He was watching Hollander thread a pass through a gap that should not have existed, watching the play develop the way Shane's plays always developed, in a way that made you feel slightly foolish for not seeing it coming.

"Scott."

"He's fine," Scott said. "He's doing that thing."

"What thing?"

"The thing where everyone else on the ice looks like they're playing a different, slower sport." He heard himself say it with something that was not quite resentment and not quite admiration and lived in the uncomfortable territory between the two. "He's been doing it for years. It's very annoying."

Kip looked at him with the expression that meant he was filing this away for later.

The score climbed. Scott ate his dinner. Montreal kept pushing, kept fouling, kept cycling through the penalty box with the grim determination of a team that had decided that if they couldn't win the game they could at least win something, and Ottawa kept playing like they were the only ones on the ice who understood what the game was actually for.

By the third period it was 11-2.

Scott may have had bad games before, but never this *bad*. It was like Montreal never played hockey before, focusing too much on trying to attack Hollander. He made a mental reminder to check whether a team in the league had ever lost this badly before. He was sitting forward, elbows on his knees, watching with almost a sense of divine reverence.

"I thought Montreal was a good team?" Kip questioned

"No, Hollander made them good."

"Hmm, from the best to the worst. Well deserved."

Scott could only agree.

The final whistle blew. Ottawa converged at centre ice in a tangle of gloves, helmets and noise. Scott was already analysing the game's outcome, when the crowd noise shifted.

He saw it before he understood it.

Hardy. New Montreal captain. Gloves hitting the ice.

Scott sat up straighter.

Hardy wound up. Threw a punch at Shane.

Shane moved.

Not stumbled. Not flinched. *Moved*, with the clean unhurried efficiency of someone who had done this before, who had drilled it until it lived in the body rather than the brain. Hardy's fist caught air.

And then Shane Hollander pulled off his own gloves.

The left jab caught Hardy above the eye.

The right hook took him across the jaw.

The crack came through the broadcast loud and clear and Scott heard it from his couch in New York and felt it somewhere in his back teeth.

Hardy went down.

Silence.

Not in the arena. The arena was doing something enormous and overwhelming that the broadcast was struggling to contain. The silence was in Scott's living room, where neither he nor Kip said anything for a long moment, both of them staring at the television where Shane Hollander was saying something to Hardy that the cameras couldn't pick up, low and rapid, and then—

"Was that a knee?" Kip said.

"Yeah," Scott said.

"To the face?"

"Yeah."

They watched the referees reach Shane. Watched it take two of them. Watched Shane shake free eventually and skate back to his team, and watched his expression shift from fury to something sheepish with a speed that was almost funny except that Scott was not laughing, was not capable of laughing, was sitting completely still on his couch processing the systematic dismantling of something he had believed without question for years.

Shane Hollander cannot fight.

Everyone knew it.

Scott knew it.

His head threw him back to all those years ago. Back to when he stood on the ice and accidentally threatened the man, and Shane had gone very still. Scott's instincts had clocked something he hadn't been able to name, and now, watching the broadcast run the clip back in slow motion. The jab, the hook, the crack, Hardy going down. He could name it with absolute clarity.

He remembered how almost Shane's entire team were holding him back. He analysed the scene. His brain providing details he hadn't noticed before. The fury in his eyes, how his team was struggling, how one of his gloves slipped—no—was dropped.

Shane Hollander, 'Your Grandmother's favourite player' was going to fight him.

No, no, he was going to kill him.

He was going to kill Scott for threatening to out him.

Scott sat with that for a moment.

"He was going to kick my ass," he breathed. Not really to Kip. Mostly to the room.

"He really would have, and in his defence, he would have thought he was justified," Kip agreed, softly.

On screen the analysts were falling over each other trying to find the right words for what they'd just witnessed. The clip played again. And again. Scott watched it a third time and felt something that took him a moment to identify as relief, which didn't make complete sense, except that it did.

Scott could feel the dread crawl into the skin, as his brain made up a what if, supplied with the new information. He imagined he was Hardy. The broken nose, ribs, jaw was his.

No, he would have been worse. He would have gotten career ending injuries.

He exhaled slowly. Leaned back into the couch.

Kip reached over without a word and took his hand. Didn't say anything about the fact that Scott turned it over and held on.

On the television, the analysts were still talking. The clip was still running. Somewhere in Ottawa, Scott knew, a locker room was absolutely losing its mind.

"You owe me," Kip said eventually, quiet and warm. "Rozanov was well-behaved tonight, didn't go to the penalty box."

Scott laughed. Small and genuine, the kind that came from somewhere tired and fond and oddly settled.

"Yeah," he said. "I owe you."

Outside, New York did what it always did. The skyline held. The lights stayed on. The game was over.

Scott stayed where he was, his hand in Kip's, and watched the clip run one more time.

His phone was in his hand before he'd made a conscious decision to pick it up.

This was the problem with watching Shane Hollander do something that he was not meant to be able to do. It apparently ran past the part of Scott's brain responsible for reasonable behaviour, and jumped straight into the chasm of 'irrational actions'.

He was typing before he could stop himself.

I just watched your game. I remembered that old game. You were going to do that to me, weren't you?

He hit send.

The moment it delivered, he stared at it.

"Oh shit," he said.

Kip looked over at his phone. Read the message. Made a sound that was not quite a laugh but was definitely its close relative. "Oh, Scott."

"I panicked."

"I can see that."

"He's going to think I'm insane."

"You did just accuse him of planning to commit murder on ice."

"It was the truth." Scott put his phone face down on his knee. Picked it up again. Put it face down again. "He's probably not even going to see it tonight. He's going to be busy. The locker room, the press, Rozanov is going to be...doing something...I don't know." He stopped. "He's not going to see it for hours. I have hours to figure out how to follow that up with something somewhat normal."

Kip said nothing. He had the expression of a man who knew exactly how this was going to go.

Scott's phone stayed dark.

Five minutes passed.

Ten.

Scott got up and took their plates to the sink, washed them with the focused energy of someone doing something with his hands so he didn't check his phone. Came back. Sat down. Did not check his phone. Just thought about it.

Didn't check it though, he was proud of that.

Kip had found something else to do. Something calm and unrelated to hockey, bless him.

Fifteen minutes.

Scott checked his phone.

Nothing.

Right. Obviously. Shane was in a locker room somewhere being absolutely swarmed by his teammates and coaches and probably the entirety of Ottawa. He was not sitting quietly checking his messages. Scott was being ridiculous.

He put the phone down.

It buzzed.

He picked it up so fast he nearly dropped it.

There were two messages.

The first, sent about a minute ago:

Hollander: *Sorry just got out.*

And then, thirty seconds later:

Hollander: *Also I wasn't going to kill you. probably.*

Scott read *probably* three times.

He looked up at the ceiling. He looked at Kip, who had heard the buzz and was now watching him with patient, loving amusement.

"Probably," Scott said.

"Probably," Kip confirmed.

Scott looked back at his phone. Typed.

That is not as reassuring as you think it is

The response came faster this time.

Hollander: *You threatened to out me in front of a full arena, Scott. probably is generous.*

Scott read it twice. Felt something that was equal parts horror and a laugh trying to get out of his chest.

In my defence I didn't know that's what I was doing.

Hollander: *I know that now. But in that moment, I didn't and I was scared.*

I swear I didn't know. I'm sorry.

He sat with that for a moment. Then typed, because it had been sitting in him since the moment Hardy hit the ice and everything he thought he knew rearranged itself:

For what it's worth. what they did to you. Montreal. All of it. It was bullshit. Always was.

The delay this time was longer. Long enough that Scott wondered if he'd pushed past the careful boundary of their strange not-quite-friendship.

Then:

Hollander: *Yeah.*

And then, a few seconds after:

Hollander: *Thanks, Hunter.*

Short. Simple. It still did little to scare off the made-up scenarios racing in Scott's head.

Scott put his phone down on the cushion. Looked at the television, where some other channel was playing something neither of them were watching. Looked at the skyline through the window, New York still there, uncaring for the mental anguish Scott was going through.

Kip leaned over and put his head on Scott's shoulder.

"Okay?" he asked quietly.

Scott thought about probably. Thought about *'thanks, hunter'*.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I think so."

Outside, the city held. The lights stayed on.

Scott's phone stayed quiet for the rest of the night, and he found, somewhat to his own surprise, that he was glad he'd sent the message.

Even the first one.

Chapter End Notes

I have found out I do not understand the difference between 'worst' and 'worse'. I guessed on how to use them (google was not helpful) Thank you for the lovely comments last chapter!! I was grinning so much reading them! Hope you enjoy this! Hayden POV should be next! I have no idea how to remove the previous's chapter end note so it is appearing twice! Sorry!

Chapter 3: The Man They Gave The C To

Chapter Summary

We map the people we love and call the map the person.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is so late! I had a lot of projects / essays to finish up! I have not read the Long Game yet, so sorry if there are mistakes! Most knowledge is from tiktok extracts but I did buy the book and am excited to read it, but first I will read Heated Rivalry first (again, properly, not on my phone, with annotations) !!

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

We map the people we love and call the map the person.

The house was chaos.

Clothes thrown around everywhere. Children screaming in at least three different directions at the same time. And in the middle of it all was Hayden Pike, who knew his wife would murder him for leaving the house in this state, but not before laughing at his misery first.

He loved his family. He swears he does.

"Kids please." He look around at the destruction. "Please. Let's clean his up before mommy comes home." he pleads

He is met with 4 children who look at him for exactly one moment before continuing to run wild.

He takes a breath. In. Out. Repeat. Stood up for his position one the couch, crouched down, and started collecting the wreckage of whatever game seemed like a good way to get the kids to calm down (spoiler, it did not) had seemed like a good idea an hour ago. Perhaps, out of pity for their poor father, his children helped him re-build the living room into something that resembled one.

It was around ten, all four children settled in their rooms, that Jackie came home.

Hayden nearly cried with relief when he heard the key in the door. He crossed the room in four big strides and wrapped his arms around his wife before she'd even fully stepped into the

house, telling her over and over again that she was a brilliant mother, a saint, an extraordinary woman.

"Ah, now you see what I deal with everyday," she says with a small smug grin on her face

"I love them. I love them so much. But how do they have that much energy? Where does it come from? Is it stored somewhere?"

"Oh, I know. It never ends." She patted his arm with the calm of someone who had long since made her peace with it, and moved to the couch, settling into the corner of it with the ease of a woman who had earned her seat. She patted the space beside her. "Come on then. Sit down."

He sat.

She looked at him, with an expression of something careful.

"Tell me what's bothering you," she said. "Apart from the energy question."

Hayden never knows how she does that. Always know what he is thinking. But he does know he loves her all the more for it.

Jackie once again reads his mind.

"I have been married to you for over ten years now," she stated simply. "I always know."

He was quiet for a moment. Looked at his hands.

"The game's the day after tomorrow," he said

"I know."

"Ottawa." A pause. "Shane."

Jackie didn't say anything. She understood their relationship intimately, having known Shane for all long as he knew her husband. She cherished the guy, saw him as her brother and knew that Hayden felt the same way.

"It's just that..." He stopped. Started again. "He's my best friend. Has been since we were rookies. And I know he's okay, I know Ottawa is good for him, I know Rozanov is," He made a vague gesture that was meant to convey the entire complicated reality of Ilya Rozanov. "But tomorrow I have to go out there and play against him, and the guys on this team are...well..." Another stop.

"Still saying things," Jackie finished for him. A glare quickly reaching her eyes.

"Yeah." His jaw tightened. "Still saying things."

She reached over and took his hand.

"And you feel guilty," she said. Not a question.

"I couldn't stop it. I tried but it wasn't enough. I mean I'm the reason they found out. I should have checked that damn video. You should have seen his face when the guys asked if he 'tripped', I don't think I have ever seen him look like that...I should have done something, anything—"

"You couldn't have fixed it, Hayden."

He looked at the wall. "He never once made me feel like I let him down, you know? That almost makes it worse. He just...moved. And called me from Ottawa and said he was okay, and he sounded okay, and somehow that made me feel worse."

Jackie was quiet for a moment. Outside, a car passed. The house settled into its late-night sounds, the particular creaks and silences that meant all four children were finally, genuinely asleep.

"Call him," she said.

Hayden looked at her.

"Before the game. Call him." She squeezed his hand once. "Not because you owe him an apology, though maybe a little because of that. But because he's your best friend and you've been sitting with this for months and he's probably been sitting with his version of it too. And I love the guy, but he isn't the best at recognising what someone is feeling so he's probably doesn't know you feel like this." She raised an eyebrow at his attempted rebuttal. "You know I'm right."

He did know that. That was the problem.

"What if it's—"

"Hayden."

"Right." He exhaled. "Yeah. Okay."

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Come to bed. You can catastrophise over the next couple of days."

He followed her up the stairs and tried not to think about the match, and failed, and eventually slept anyway.

Montreal's team practice. The next morning.

Hayden thinks about moving teams. He does this while watching Beaumont runs his mouth in the middle of the skate laps. He thinks about it while Hardy talks about beating that "filthy traitor" black and blue. He thinks about in the locker room after practice.

It had been months. Shane was gone. Ottawa was pulling ahead of the league in a way that was making the hockey game analysts genuinely emotional, and still, still, the locker room talked about it. About him. About the move.

Hayden was going to need to get new teeth with the amount of times he has ground them now.

"He thinks he is so good. So perfect." Beaumont was saying, to no one who had asked.

"Because he *is* the best," Hayden said, before he could stop himself. "You know it too, that's why you're complaining so much. Because you know he's going to beat our asses."

A beat.

"Jesus, Pike. Whose side are you on?"

"Montreal's." He spat out as he stuffed his hoodie in his bag.

"You sure about that Pike? Because attitude like that is the reason why you still wear that A on your jersey and not a C." Hardy had questioned

Hayden gritted his jaw once more. Hardy had always been insufferable before the C. The C had simply given him an audience.

"I wouldn't be so cocky Hardy. We've lost eight of our last ten matches since you been promoted, so perhaps instead of focusing your energy on talking about Hollander, and more time thinking about the fact we lost our star player and how we are going to make up for that, you may just get to keep that C." Hayden loomed over Hardy.

"Oh yeah? Well maybe you should just abandon this team and go join that fa—"

"Finish that sentence, and I will be the one in charge of the team tomorrow and maybe, just maybe, we will actually seem like a decent team." Hayden walked off, before he could hear the response.

He reached his car. Slammed the door as he climbed in. Took a breath. In. Out. Pulled out his phone and found the contact he'd wanting to talk to.

It rang twice.

"Hayden." Shane's voice, warm and familiar and completely calm, which was somehow worse than if he'd sounded strained. "Hey."

"Hey." Hayden placed his chin on the steering wheel. "How are you?"

"Good. Really good, actually." And he sounded it. That was the thing. He sounded genuinely, thoroughly good in a way that Hayden had not heard from him in a long time, and something loosened in Hayden's chest and tightened at the same time. "You?"

"Nervous," Hayden said honestly.

A small pause. "Yeah. Me too, a little."

"You don't sound nervous."

"I'm good at that."

Hayden laughed despite himself. There it was. The easy rhythm of it, unchanged, like no time had passed at all. That was Shane's particular gift and his particular cruelty, the way he made everything feel uncomplicated.

"Shane, I need you to know that I am still sorry. I should have said more," Hayden blurted out. "When everything was happening. I should have been louder."

Silence for a moment.

"Hayden—"

"I know you're going to tell me it's fine."

"It is fine."

"Shane."

"Do you remember what Ilya told you at our wedding?" His voice was quiet. "None of us blame you, in fact it was probably for the better. Now I get to live with my husband. Play with him. I love my life because of that mistake. A pause. "Plus, you were there. I know you tried. That mattered. You didn't let me down. I need you to know that."

Hayden felt something move in his throat that he was not going to address in his car.

"Okay," he managed.

"Okay." And then, lighter, the tone shifting with the ease of someone who had decided the moment had been had and they could move on now. "I'll see you on the ice when we beat you."

"Hey!" He began to protest but then "Yeah, you probably will. See you on the ice."

He hung up, placed the keys in the engine, and drove off.

He thought about moving teams again.

Game Day.

Ottawa's arena was loud in a way that felt personal.

Hayden had played in loud arenas before. Had played in playoffs, in overtime, in games that mattered enough that the crowd noise became its own kind of pressure. He knew how to block it out, how to narrow his world down to the ice and the puck and the next ten seconds.

This was different.

This crowd knew exactly what tonight meant. He could feel it in the way they cheered every time Shane touched the puck, the particular quality of it, not just excitement but something fiercer underneath. Something that had been waiting. Hayden understood it completely and tried not to think about the fact that he was on the wrong side of it.

He focused on his game. Kept his head. Did what he came to do.

It wasn't enough to keep him from watching.

He couldn't help it. He knew Shane's game better than almost anyone. He had argued multiple times with Ilya over who knew Shane better. Shane was different tonight. Not different bad. Different good. Like he'd arrived at the arena having already decided how this was going to go and was simply executing the plan with the calm of someone who had done all their worrying in advance and was finished with it now.

Every time Montreal closed in on him, he was already somewhere else.

Hayden watched this happen four times before he stopped being surprised by it and started being something closer to relieved.

He spent the rest of his energy keeping an eye on his teammates.

This was the other problem with tonight, the one that sat alongside his guilt and his complicated pride and his inability to stop watching Shane like he was checking for damage. Beaumont was angrier than Hayden had ever seen him, which was saying something. Hardy was worse. The hits were coming in late and hard, and Hayden kept positioning himself, kept getting in the way, kept appearing at elbows and shoulders in the scrums with the focused energy of someone trying to prevent a disaster with nothing but his force of a wish of wanting to protect his brother.

It wasn't entirely working.

"Back off," he said quietly to Beaumont, after a hit that drew a penalty and a significant reaction from the Ottawa bench. "You're making it worse."

"Making what worse? It's a game, Pike."

"It stopped being just a game about forty minutes ago." He nodded toward the scoreboard. "Look at that and tell me picking fights is helping."

Beaumont looked. Said nothing. Skated away with his jaw set, which was not agreement but was at least temporary silence.

Hardy was on the ice doing something that was going to draw a penalty in approximately ten seconds. Hayden watched it happen and thought, not for the first time. *'That's the man they gave the C to.'*

The score climbed. By the third period it sat at 11-2, and the arena had the particular atmosphere of a crowd that had already won and knew it and was choosing to celebrate anyway, loudly, for as long as possible.

Hayden played his game and kept his head and tried not to look at the scoreboard.

He mostly failed at the last one.

The final whistle blew.

Ottawa erupted at centre ice. Hayden had already started moving toward the handshake line, his mind shifting toward the brief warm exchange that was waiting at the end of it, the moment he'd been turning over since the phone call yesterday. He was thinking about what to say. Something light, probably. Something that acknowledged the game without making it into a speech. Shane would appreciate that.

The crowd noise changed.

He turned.

Hardy. Gloves on the ice.

Hayden was moving before he'd made a conscious decision to move, skating hard towards Hardy and Shane, only caring about the latter, not the former.

Shane moved.

Hayden's skates slowed.

Hardy's punch caught air.

Shane pulled off his gloves.

Hayden stopped completely.

He was close enough to see it clearly, closer than the cameras, closer than most of the arena. He watched the left jab land above Hardy's eye with clean efficiency. Watched the right hook that followed. Heard the crack from fifteen feet away, felt it somewhere behind his sternum.

Hardy went down.

Hayden stood with his stick in his hand and did not move.

He had known Shane Hollander since their rookie season. From when he was terrified and pretending not to be. Had been his teammate and his friend and his phone call and his alibi on more than one occasion. He was 'uncle Shane' to his kids, the brother he wished he'd grown up with.

He had thought he knew the full shape of his best friend.

The knee landed. Precise. Deliberate.

The referees arrived. It took two of them.

Hayden watched Shane shake free and skate back toward his team, watched the fury drain out of him in real time, watched the sheepishness arrive in its place, and felt three things arrive in his chest at roughly the same moment.

Guilt. Deep and specific and his. Because the fury that Hayden had been standing close enough to see it and had never thought to ask about the things Shane wasn't saying.

Pride. The kind that didn't need dressing up. His best friend, who had every reason to fall apart and hadn't, who had taken everything Montreal had thrown at him and had quietly, patiently, put it somewhere and waited.

And underneath both of those, so quiet it almost wasn't there:

He had known Shane Hollander for over a decade and Shane had never once mentioned it.

A quiet voice reminded him he had never asked.

The handshake line reformed around him. Hayden moved through it on autopilot, shaking hands with Ottawa players who were barely suppressing grins, nodding at the ones who caught his eye. When he reached Shane they looked at each other and Shane's expression did the complicated thing it sometimes did, the one that meant he was feeling several things and had organised them into something manageable and was presenting the manageable version.

Hayden look at him for a moment.

"How long?" He said quietly

Shane blinked. Then understood. "Since I was eight."

Hayden stared at him.

They had approximately four seconds in a handshake line and a full arena watching. Hayden used two of them just looking at his best friend, this person he had known for a decade, who had apparently been carrying his boxing knowledge his entire NHL career and had simply never mentioned it to anyone, including Hayden, not once, not in ten years.

"We," Hayden said, very carefully, "are going to have a very long conversation."

Something in Shane's expression broke open into a real smile. Brief. Warm. Completely him.

"Call me," he said.

"I will."

They moved on down the line.

Later. The bus.

The bus back to the hotel was quiet in the way that losing teams are quiet, which is to say not fully silent but close to it, the sound of separate people sitting with separate versions of the same bad night.

Hayden sat near the back and looked out the window at Ottawa going past, lit up and still celebrating, and thought about the phone call he was going to make tomorrow.

He thought about Shane at eighteen, nervous and pretending not to be, the first time they'd been called up together. Thought about the years between then and now, all the games and flights and late nights and conversations. Thought about how well he thought he knew that person.

JJ dropped into the seat beside him without invitation, which was very JJ. He looked out the window too for a moment.

"Did you know?" he said finally.

"No."

JJ nodded slowly. "Me neither."

They sat with that for a while. Outside, Ottawa moved past the windows, indifferent and bright.

"He's okay though," JJ said. Not a question exactly. More like something he needed to say out loud.

"Yeah." Hayden looked at his reflection in the glass. "He really is."

JJ nodded once more, satisfied, and put his headphones in.

Hayden looked out the window for the rest of the journey and thought about his best friend, who was somewhere in that lit-up city right now, in a loud locker room with his husband and his team, and okay.

He was going to call tomorrow.

He was going to ask about all of it. The boxing, and the years of carrying it quietly. He was going to ask about Ottawa and how it felt and whether the new team was everything Shane had needed it to be. He was going to ask all the questions he should have been asking, and he was going to listen to the answers.

He had ten years of being Shane Hollander's best friend and he had somehow missed an entire chapter of him.

He wasn't going to miss any more.

The hotel room was dark and JJ was asleep in approximately four minutes, which remained one of the most impressive things about him.

Hayden lay on his back and looked at the ceiling.

He thought about the jab. The hook. The crack he'd heard from fifteen feet away. He thought about Hardy going down and Shane standing over him saying something low and rapid that Hayden hadn't been able to catch, and thought about what it would have cost to hold all of that and play hockey and sound, on the phone, genuinely and completely fine.

He thought about watching his kids destroy the living room, and Jackie sitting down beside him and reading his mind, and saying *call him, he's your best friend*.

She was always right. That was the thing about Jackie. She was always right and she was always kind about it, which was somehow more humbling than if she'd been smug.

He picked up his phone. Looked at the contact. Put it back down.

Not tonight. Tonight belonged to Shane and Ilya and Ottawa and a locker room that was probably still losing its mind. Hayden's phone call could wait until morning. He did, however, text Jackie a good night.

He put his phone on the nightstand.

Looked at the ceiling.

Ten years. He had never asked.

He thought about Shane's face in the handshake line, the complicated expression resolving into something real and warm. *Call me*.

He would.

Tomorrow, he would call, and he would ask, and he would listen. He would do better than he had done, which was not the hardest bar in the world to clear but was the one in front of him and he intended to clear it.

He closed his eyes.

Outside, Ottawa was still celebrating.

Hayden let it.

The Next Morning. The House.

The kids were already at school.

Of course they were because Jackie ran school mornings like the military.

This was, Hayden had learned over many years of marriage and four children, the only reliable window for a conversation that required more than thirty seconds of no interruptions, and kids attempting to get their parent's attention. Jackie had made coffee. The good kind, not the weekday morning kind, which meant she had known about this conversation since before he got home.

He still hadn't known how she could do that.

He had gotten in late. She had been awake anyway, because she always was when he had away games, a habit from the early years that had never quite left her. She had taken one look at him in the doorway and said *sit down, I'll make coffee* and then said nothing else until the kids were up and fed and out the door and the house was quiet.

Now she sat across from him at the kitchen table with her coffee, with an expression he knew as the one she wore when she wanted to talk about something, and was waiting for the right moment to bring it up.

He wrapped his hands around his mug.

"You watched the game," he said.

"I watched the game."

"And?"

Jackie looked at him for a moment. Something moved in her expression, careful and warm and just slightly, unmistakably satisfied.

"I knew," she said.

Hayden stared at her. "Sorry?"

"Not knew knew." She curled both hands around her mug. "I didn't know about the boxing, or the classes, or any of that. But I knew there was something." She paused, choosing her words. "You know how my dad moved. You've seen him enough times."

Hayden thought about Jackie's father. Thought about how the many times he subtly threatened Hayden the first time they met. He may be retired now, but he was still the kind of man who moved through the world with a certain sense of awareness, the kind that wasn't about aggression but more about simple always knowing where he and everyone he loved was, what was coming and from where.

"Shane moves like that," Jackie said. "He always has. I noticed it years ago, the first time I really watched him play, and then a few times off the ice too. The way he carries himself in a crowd. The way he positions himself without seeming to think about it." She tilted her head slightly. "I didn't have the evidence for it so I never said anything. But it was always there."

Hayden looked at his wife.

"You noticed," he said slowly, "that our best friend moved like a boxer."

"Like someone who had been trained, yes."

"And you didn't say anything."

"What was I going to say? I thought I might be imagining it. And it wasn't my business to go looking for something Shane hadn't offered." She raised an eyebrow. "Unlike some people, I don't assume I know everything about a person just because I've known them a long time."

There it was. Gently delivered. Landing precisely.

Hayden sat with that for a moment.

"I should have asked," he said.

"Yes."

"I didn't know there was anything to ask about."

"No one ever does." Jackie's voice was gentle but certain. "That's rather the point, isn't it. You only know to ask about the things people show you. Shane is very good at showing you exactly what he wants you to see." She paused. "It's not a criticism of you. It's just true."

Hayden thought about ten years of phone calls and flights and locker rooms and late nights. Thought about every conversation he had believed was the full picture.

"It was probably his mum," Jackie's expression did something that was almost a smile and something more complicated than that. "Yuna Hollander got him to the NHL by the time he was eighteen. She would have wanted him to be able to protect himself. I know I would've."

Hayden thought about Shane's face in the handshake line. The complicated expression and then the real smile underneath it. *Call me.*

"He asked me to call him," Hayden said.

"I figured."

"I was going to do it this morning."

"I know that too." Jackie reached across the table and put her hand over his. "How are you feeling about it?"

Hayden considered the question honestly, the way he could only do in this kitchen with this woman and the kids at school and the coffee going cold between them.

"Like I missed a room," he said. "Like I knew the house and thought I'd been in every room, and it turns out there was one I never opened because I never tried the door."

Jackie looked at him. Her thumb moved once across his knuckles.

"Then open it," she said simply.

He nodded. Looked at his hands. Looked up.

"Your dad," he said. "Did he teach you?"

Jackie's mouth curved. Small and private and fond. "A little. Enough." She picked up her coffee. "Why? Worried about me?"

Hayden looked at his wife, who had apparently also been quietly carrying something he had never thought to ask about, and felt a laugh arrive from somewhere unexpected, the real kind, the kind that came with the belated recognition of how much you could know a person and still find new rooms in them.

"I married you without knowing that," he said.

"You married me knowing what mattered." She smiled at him, warm and completely certain. "The rest is just details that you have the rest of your life to find out about."

He reached over and took her hand properly this time.

"And yes, you probably should move teams. Montreal sucks, and I didn't marry a loser." A certain gleam sparkled in her eye.

Outside, the neighbourhood was quiet. The coffee was cold. Somewhere across the city, his phone was sitting on the kitchen counter waiting for a call he was going to make in about ten minutes, and he was going to ask all the questions he should have been asking, and he was going to listen.

But for a moment he sat in his kitchen with his wife, who had always known more than she let on and had loved him anyway, and felt something settle that had been restless for a long time.

"Call him," Jackie said eventually, in the tone that was both gentle and final.

He called him.

Chapter End Notes

This was a very fun chapter to write. I love this entire fic, but this chapter was very nice because it fits my usual writing style more which is some philosophical topic as the main theme and build around it. It was very fun! Social media chapter will be coming soon!

Chapter 4: For The Record

Chapter Summary

The story belongs to the person who lived it. The narrative belongs to everyone else.

Chapter Notes

AHHH SOCIAL MEDIA CHAPTER!! SORRY TOOK SO LONG! STRESSFUL MONTH! PROBLEM WITH PASSPORT, STUPID GOVERNMENT, MY TEACHER USING AI TO MARK DISSERTATION AND HAVING A THOUSAND DEADLINES!! All finished though, just have exams now :(did I mention ENGLISH TEACHER WHO SHIT ON MY ENGLISH USING AI? Not having fun!

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

The story belongs to the person who lived it. The narrative belongs to everyone else.

The Press Conference. The Next Morning.

The room was full of different noises. Cameras whirring as they switched on. The click-clack of pens, closely followed by rapid scribbling on paper. Hushed mutters as reporters and camera crews conferred with each other about what was the best angle.

Shane had done many press conferences and yet he could never get used to them. The feeling of so many eyes on him felt like ants crawling under his skin. But it was one of things you got used in professional hockey. He knew how to sit in front of a microphone. Knew how to answer the question being asked and the three questions underneath it. He knew how to pretend that his skin wasn't on fire, knew how to cover up any mistakes in his words, think three answers ahead. Yet, he still never felt prepared for them, no matter how many smiles he practiced in the mirror.

He sat down. Adjusted the microphone. Noticed Harris give him a small thumbs up from across the room, letting him know he was there. Looked out at the room.

There were more reporters here than usual. Much more. Someone in the back had the expression of a person who had driven a considerable distance to be here and intended to get their money's worth.

Shane folded his hands on the table and waited.

The noises multiplied by ten. Each reporter eager to gain Shane's attention. Harris quickly indicated to answer a question from the reporter from the first row. A young woman, smartly dressed, hair pinned neatly. She brimmed with the energy of someone who had been awake since approximately four in the morning.

Shane made eye contact with her, gave his best smile, and asked:

"Yes, sorry, what was your question, Miss...?"

"Lagoy, from TSN. A couple of questions actually Mr Hollander. First, can you walk us through what happened at the end of last night's game?"

Shane considered the question. Considered the eleven cameras pointed at him. Considered what answer would be best to stop anyone from twisting his words, and destroying his reputation. Considered the fact that the clip had been played on loop on every sports channel since approximately thirty seconds after it happened and that everyone in this room had watched it at a minimum of four times.

"The Captain of Montreal dropped his gloves and I defended myself against him."

A beat. Several pens moved.

"Could you expand on that?"

"He threw a punch. It didn't land. I threw two back. And a knee." A pause. "I'll acknowledge that it was probably beyond what the situation strictly required, and would have loved if the fight never need to happen in the first place."

The room was still for one second, before the vultures had started to cry their questions once more. Harris pointed to a reporter in the back. A man with greying hair, and a stoic face, who wore a blue pinstripe suit.

"Shane. You've played professional hockey for many years now. In that time there's no record of you ever dropping the gloves, even earning you the nickname of the 'Golden Boy of Hockey'. A lot of people are wondering, whether that has just been a persona all of these years, and whether you have just been hiding this ruthless streak all along."

Harris went pale. He wasn't expecting this. It was obvious this man didn't like Shane, and wanted to paint him in a bad light.

Shane clenched his jaw, still keeping that smile plastered on his face. He glanced over at Harris, who had regained his composure, and grinned at Shane as he nodded, telling him he would handle whatever consequences would arise.

"I'm sorry, I must've not have heard the question, can you please repeat it once more."

"Ah no worries. Very simple question. Do you regret what you did, or have you just been waiting for a chance to finally break free from your social media persona, or perhaps...did Rozanov have a negative influence on you?"

Here it was. Shane had been waiting for this since he sat down. He let a beat pass, the way he'd learned to do when a question needed to land properly before you answered it.

"Do I regret what I did?' Funny that such a simple question has such a complicated answer. I regret that a fight broke out between me and Hardy. I prefer to win my games clean, and it has always been that way. So, no, I have not been hiding a 'ruthless' streak. No, my husband may have influenced me in many ways, none of them negative. In fact, he had no idea I could fight. But that's not what you want."

A pause.

"I do not regret defending myself. There, your answer. Montreal made it very clear, for a very long time, that they considered me a problem" he kept his voice even. Careful. Saying the thing he's decided, somewhere between the kitchen and this room. "I don't believe that was true. Last night, I think, demonstrated that fairly clearly." He looked at the room steadily. "I'm very happy to be in Ottawa. I'm very happy to be playing with this team, and I'm looking forward to the rest of the season."

He unfolded his hands. Folded them again. Found Harris in the crowd again. Gave him a small smile.

"Hardy is currently listed as day-to-day with his injuries. Do you have anything to say to him directly?"

Shane was quiet for a moment.

"I hope he recovers quickly," he said. "What happened was...unfortunate and I'll be speaking with the league about that directly. And I hope, that next time we meet, we can have a *clean* game."

Another pause. A different reporter. One Shane didn't recognise, but clearly eager as they held the recorder slightly too high.

"Shane, you mentioned Ilya Rozanov had no idea you could fight. In fact, most people were under the assumption you couldn't, so where did you learn to?"

"My mother," he said.

The room went quiet, the reporters perched on the edge of their chair as this was the thing they all wanted to know.

"She wanted to make sure I could handle myself. She signed me up for boxing classes when I was eight years old. Every Saturday morning. I went until I was sixteen." He paused. "She drove me herself. She never missed one."

Silence. Then approximately fourteen questions at once.

Shane waited for it to settle, which took a moment.

"So you've had eight years of boxing training," the first reporter said, with the tone of a woman recalibrating something fundamental. "And in nine years of professional hockey you've never used it."

"I never needed to," Shane said. "And I never wanted to be someone who used it unless I did."

"Until last night."

"Until last night. I have always been aware Hockey isn't exactly a peaceful sport, but I always wanted to prove that I never needed boxing in order to win, and I always wanted to create a hockey environment where violence wasn't needed, and players were valued for their hockey skills, not their ability to take a punch. Perhaps, it is an unrealistically optimistic goal, but one can only hope."

Harris stepped forward. "That'll be all for today. Thank you everyone."

The room exhaled. The hungry, jostling energy broke apart into the noise of chairs scraping and recorders clicking off and reporters already typing on their phones before they'd fully stood up. The cameras swung away. The lights shifted.

Shane stood. Adjusted his jacket. Picked up the water glass in front of him that he hadn't touched once.

He looked up.

Harris was already looking at him from across the room. He wasn't smiling exactly. It was something quieter than that. The expression of someone who had watched something difficult happen and seen it handled well and didn't need to make a production of saying so.

He gave Shane one small nod.

Shane gave one back.

That was all. That was enough.

He walked out of the room the same way he'd walked in — calmly, deliberately, like a man who had already decided how this was going to end — and didn't look back.

Twitter. @NHLHighlights

Shane Hollander press conference clip — "I do not regret defending myself."

[2.4M views]

@sammm87: CANADA'S GOLDEN BOY SAID WHAT HE SAID

@hockeylover4ev: nine years. NINE YEARS he was just walking around with this information

@ottawacentaursfan: the way he said "my mother" and then just waited for the chaos to unfold. King behavior

@ShaneHollander'sJersey: I need him. Like yesterday. @real_ilyaRozanov81 let's fight for him.

@real_ilyaRozanov81: I do not share my husband. He does not share me. We will fight together.

@braket_lion: OH SHITT @real_ilyaRozanov81 IS HEREEEEEE!

@ShaneHollander'sJersey YOU ARE SO SCREWED

@ShaneHollander'sJersey: I did not expect him to actually respond, damn, guess I'll go say my goodbyes to friends and family

@voyageursforever: this is so embarrassing for Montreal I need to go lie down

Reddit. r/hockey

Thread: "Shane Hollander fight — breakdown and analysis [MEGATHREAD]"

Posted by u/hockeygossip_discourse

Okay so I've watched the clip seventeen times and I need to talk about the form. The LEFT JAB. That is textbook. That is not something you learn in a week. Eight years every Saturday and he just...kept it in his back pocket for nine years of professional hockey? I need a doctor I think I'm having a heart attack.

u/centaurs_hockeyblog: Did you see Ottawa's reaction bro??? Rozanov goes still. Like a man whose entire worldview just got tipped sideways in real time.

u/coffee_enthusiast: THE WHOLE SITUATION WAS MONTREAL'S FAULT!! I WILL DEFEND SHANE LIKE I AM ILYA OH MY GOD. HARDY WAS JUST THE FINAL CHAPTER

u/refereefuture: the knee was excessive. I'm saying it. Someone has to say it. But did I love watching it? Yes, yes I did.

u/piklovich_defender: Nobody is going to talk about how Hayden Pike was moving toward him? Like he started SKATING TOWARD SHANE and then just...stopped? Because he realised Shane didn't need him? I need a whole documentary about whatever is happening with those two

u/slapshot_discourse: @piklovich_defender I saw that too. The way his skates just slowed. He looked like a man who had just discovered a room in his house he didn't know existed.

u/habs_heartbroken: @slapshot_discourse this is poetry and i didn't come to reddit for poetry today but here we are

Instagram. @NHL official post:

Caption: Ottawa 11 - Montreal 2. Shane Hollander with 5 goals, 3 assists. Footage of the post-game incident under review by the league. [Photo: Shane at the press conference, hands folded, expression calm]

847,492 likes

@bood_centaurs: "under review" self defence = bad, homophobia = good — NHL

@real_ilyaRozanov81: I second that this is bullshit

@s_hunter_nhl: The NHL doesn't exactly have the best reputation when it comes to players who don't match their ideal stereotype

@real_ilyaRozanov81: Even one as prehistoric as **@s_hunter_nhl** knows this, NHL do better

@s_hunter_nhl: Big word for you Rozanov

@real_ilyaRozanov81: **@s_hunter_nhl** My husband would have beaten your old bones into dust. Not that it would have taken much, considering how old you are

@s_hunter_nhl: **@real_ilyaRozanov81** I'm thirty three

@real_ilyaRozanov81: **@s_hunter_nhl** yes. very old. practically a dinosaur. how are your joints Hunter

@s_hunter_nhl: **@real_ilyaRozanov81** I'm two years older than you

@real_ilyaRozanov81: **@s_hunter_nhl** yes and yet here we are. creaking around. very sad.

@Yuna_Hollander: **@real_ilyaRozanov81** play nice, elders deserve your respect

@real_ilyaRozanov81: **@Yuna_Hollander** I love you so much

@ottawagirl_1967: this comment section is everything

@ThePuckStopsHere — Verified Sports Journalist

Hot take that isn't actually a hot take: Shane Hollander's press conference this morning was one of the most carefully constructed pieces of public communication I've seen from a professional athlete in years. Every answer was precise. He acknowledged the excess without apologising for the act. He addressed Montreal directly without making it personal. He gave his mother credit in a way that was both genuine and completely bulletproof PR. And then he sat there and answered every single question with the patience of a man who had already decided how this story was going to end.

"I do not regret defending myself."

Well said, Shane Hollander, well said.

Comments:

@hockeyanalyst: it's extraordinary media discipline. he acknowledged the excess once, clearly, and then moved on. he didn't dwell, didn't over-explain, didn't apologise for the wrong thing. textbook.

@voyageursforever: this is the worst week of my life

@ThePuckStopsHere: **@voyageursforever** I understand. it really was an extraordinary scoreline.

@shark_week: This is going to live rent-free in my head forever

@puckdropperr: "well said, Shane Hollander, well said" IF I WAS SHANE, I WOULD HAVE TO PAY A MILLION IN CURSING FINES

@ThePuckStopsHere: **@puckdropperr** I completely agree, no idea how he stayed that composed

Somewhere in Ottawa, Shane Hollander put his phone face down on the kitchen counter, accepted the cup of tea Ilya put in front of him, and decided not to look at the internet for at least forty-eight hours.

He lasted about six.

Chapter End Notes

This has been so much fun! I love all the comments I have gotten omg! What should I write next? Something nice and sunny like high school / college / university AU or sad war journalist / soldier AU? or something else! I love all of you, everyone is so sweet! Also found out about ao3 skins, it is now purple and sparkly x

End Notes

Scott Hunter, watching the match: Holy fucking shit, I was sooo lucky

Thank you for reading! Any comments regarding advice about my writing would be greatly appreciated, again sorry if my writing turns out to be shitty -- My first language is very different and English is a shitty language. I do not like it, but I need to practice. x

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!