Canada Day

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Canada Day

by frondsanemones

Summary

June 2018. Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov are about to execute the first step of their ten-year plan, with Ilya signing with the Ottawa Centaurs when free agency begins on July 1.

Except Shane accidentally, drunkenly, outs himself to the Montreal Metros at the end of the season. Who are not as okay with it as Shane would have hoped.

AKA the most eventful Canada Day that the MLH has ever seen.

Notes

The original idea was a social media fic with as many 2010s hockey twitter references shoved into it as humanly possible, revolving around the events of June 29, 2016, but it quickly outgrew that. There are still dozens of references that the hockeyyinsiderrs of 2008 through present will understand; I couldn't help myself.

None of the characters belong to me, and any resemblance to a real person is for purposes of parody only. The source material doesn't have various hockey personnel that are necessary for the story structure, so while I want to avoid OCs there are a few. I don't care about them though.

If you want to be in on the jokes, I list all the references I make with supporting links at the end of each chapter. With only a couple of exceptions, I tried to keep things as period-accurate as possible (jokes and usernames from only 2018 or earlier).

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: June 13, 2018

@MetrosMTL ✅ Metros Montréal
WE ARE STANLEY CUP CHAMPIONS
NOUS SOMMES CHAMPIONS DE LA COUPE STANLEY
#GoMetrosGo

@MLH ✅ Major League Hockey
For the third time in four seasons, the @MetrosMTL are your @StanleyCup Champions!

@leblondpat Patrick Leblond
ALLEZ LES METROS!

@hollysgirl katie
WE WON AGAIN BITCHES!!

@wisniewski ✅ Paul Wisniewski
No surprises here after the season they've had. The Montreal Metros are the 2018 Stanley Cup Champions.

> **@gilberto17 X - Gilbert**
> *In reply to @wisniewski ✅*
> Is it too soon to say dynasty? Because dynasty.

@metrospourmoi Luc Bellemare
DYNASTY!!

@thatshockey24 Doug Hockey
Shane Hollander the 🐐 imo

@boringhollander Boring Shane Hollander
I asked Hayden Pike if he liked winning the Stanley Cup and he said he does.

@khaleesi_snipe Mother of Hockey
OMG OMG OMG OMG I'm crying I'm literally crying

@TheBeaverton ✅ The Beaverton
Two-year-old never thought he would live to see Metros win Stanley Cup.

@metrosbrad Brad
Does anybody know when the parade is???? I need to know if I need to take off work

---

They'd done it again.

Shane was screaming. He didn't know what he was screaming, it was just a sound that he needed to get out. He also didn't know where his gloves, helmet, and stick were. Probably on the ice somewhere, thrown mindlessly away when that final buzzer sounded. Maybe on the bench. Was he near the bench? Or maybe a fan got a souvenir. Some lucky Colorado fan is going to go home and console themselves by listing Shane's left glove on eBay for $5,000. It is a Cup-winning glove, after all. Probably would cover their seats for the Final.

But anyways. Three-time Stanley Cup champions.

"Fucking right, man!" He practically tackled Hayden Pike, who had been doing some yelling of his own. "Fucking dynasty!"

"We're a motherfucking dynasty!" Hayden clutched tightly to Shane, tears in both of their eyes as he whooped in joy. "Let's fucking go!"

"I love you, man!"

"I love you too!"

Colorado's arena itself was mostly silent outside of the 30-odd men on the ice screaming and crying in celebration. There's the couple hundred fans who traveled in the stands, sure, but winning on the road meant that the celebration was theirs.

All theirs.

It had been a two month grind, mid-April to mid-June, with more games and more travel than Shane could remember for the previous Cup wins. It took them seven-, seven-, five-, and seven-game series to get through the gauntlet. Thank goodness for the Eastern Conference Final wrapping up quickly, the one respite in a meatgrinder of a run.

Shane skated around the ice, blindly hugging anyone who was in his way. Was that Greg the equipment manager he just picked up in a bear hug? Or maybe it was Tom, the media relations guy. Both of them deserved a hug, to be honest. They've both been on the road all season, and while their names won't be on the Cup they're still part of the team. And all of his internal PDA rules and reluctance went out the window.

Belatedly, he realized that Colorado had been waiting - patiently, despondently - for the handshake line. It was one last twist of the knife, but ingrained in the sport.

"Hey. Hey!" He waved his team over. "Guys, come on."

He skated over to Colorado's captain, offering his hand. "Hey man, you gave it your all."

Colorado's captain just nodded, his exhaustion written all over his face. "Congrats, Hollander. You played one hell of a series."

Shane went down the line of players, shaking hands with some and patting the backs of the couple of guys he'd played with in juniors or on the national team. If you were to ask Shane

what anybody had said in the handshake line, what he had said, he couldn't tell you. The platitudes slipped easily off his tongue, his mind still stuck on the singular thought: "We won the goddamn Cup!"

The families of the players had started making their way out onto the ice as well. He saw Jackie and her parents try to corral the four Pike children as they casually yet carefully made their way onto the ice. He knew that Hayden and Jackie had agonized over the decision to bring the kids, but "it's the Cup" won out.

Olsson's new girlfriend - so new that she had been hastily made a WAG jacket during the second round - was holding onto the wall for dear life as she tried to walk on the ice in stilettos. Shane laughed in joy and absurdity; there was always one family member who ends up eating it during the celebration, and while he hated that it happens he also couldn't help himself. It was just funny.

Ice is slippery: a realization that marked the difference between a veteran WAG and a newbie.

Shane was just about to signal to Olsson to help his girl when out of the corner of his eye he noticed MLH personnel start rolling out the carpet from the Zamboni entrance.

Shit, this will never get old.

The arena PA announcer, with just a twinge of sadness: "Ladies and gentlemen, the Stanley Cup."

Two men were holding the Cup easily between them at the foot of the carpet, sporting black suits and white gloves. They were the same duo that had escorted the Cup for the previous two wins - What a job! - and were consummate professionals. As they walked down the carpet, Shane and the rest of his teammates paused their celebrating, familiar with this song and dance but definitely not tired of it.

MLH Commissioner Roger Crowell stepped out onto the carpet, soaking in in the growing crescendo of boos from the home crowd.

It was almost funny, Shane sometimes thought, how much Crowell relished in being a villain. Well, a cartoon villain - Shane never had any delusions that the average MLH fan personally hated the guy. But three lockouts in 20 years will breed animosity, and the guy never discouraged it.

Brandishing a mic, Crowell started his speech.

"Congratulations to both the Rockies and the Metros organizations for terrific seasons and for giving us a spectacular Stanley Cup Final. For the Rockies, this was their first Stanley Cup appearance in over 15 years, and I want to congratulate the ownership group, the general manager, and head coach on getting back to the Final."

He paused alongside the crowd's boos, which turned into reluctant cheers to support the home team, before the booing starting again in earnest.

“For the Metros, it’s only been two years since they last hoisted the Stanley Cup, but after another tremendous regular season and a stunning playoff run they managed to get back to the top of the League again.”

At this the crowd really started booing, trying to drown out the commissioner. It’s no fun being on the other end of a dynasty.

“Congratulations first and foremost to the Metros players for their commitment, their sacrifice, and their achievement in winning the most sought-after championship in all of professional sports. On behalf of Major League Hockey, I have the privilege to invite Metros Captain Shane Hollander to come over to accept and hoist the Stanley Cup.”

Shane, with a giant grin that he couldn’t get rid of even if he wanted to, skated over to the carpet and carefully stepped on it. He gripped the bottom and bowl of the Cup, pausing briefly for the photographer to get the shot of himself and Crowell. Normally, he hated these sort of staged photos. But all he could think about was that buzz of electricity shooting from the Cup through his hands, the excitement that this moment was here.

Then, with a roar, he grabbed the Cup away from Crowell, stepped off the carpet, and raised it over his head.

FUCK YEAH!

Shane was tired. Exhausted at dragging his team to the Final, dragging them through another seven game series, and dragging them all the way to this improbable victory. His body hurt. He definitely fucked up his shoulder, his ribs were on the worse side of bruised, and he forgot how many toes were broken.

But it’s true what they say. The Cup weighs 35 pounds except when you’re lifting it.

Shane shook the Cup above his head in disbelief, in ecstasy, in celebration. He brought it down and kissed the engraved metal side.

I wonder if I kissed this spot last time. I wonder if Ilya kissed this spot when he won.

And with that thought, a twinge of… something hit him. *Fuck, I wish Ilya was here.*

Shane shook that off - he won the Cup! He was literally kissing the Cup right now! - as he raised the Cup back up and began his skate around the rink.

Feeling like he had left his teammates waiting long enough, he spotted Hayden in the crowd and skated over to him. Handing the Cup over to him, Hayden was smiling wide as he accepted it.

“We did it, man! We fucking did it!”

“Swear jar,” Shane grinned widely while Hayden started skating away.

“Fuck you!”

@rosemary__ mary
BOOOOOO CROWELL BOOOOO (I couldn't afford tickets and wanted to feel like I was there)

@originalsix Tom
Nothing like a handshake line after a playoff series. Classiest sport in the world!

@thatshockey24 Doug Hockey
I'm so glad that the MLH gives the trophy to the players first, unlike some OTHER sports I could name.

@joshmetrosfan Josh
Just imagine. Some of these guys are going to have their name on the Cup THREE times.

@boringhollander Boring Shane Hollander
It was fun winning a Conn Smythe. I asked Gilbert Comeau if he had ever won a Conn Smythe and he said no.

@MMarcusMLH ✅ Mike Marcus
Hollander officially has two more Cups than Rozanov. Argument over who is the better is settled, as far as I'm concerned.

> **@raidersnroz sammy**
> *In reply to @MMarcusMLH ✅*
> But Rozanov has more Hart Trophies? And Rocket Richards? Plus a Cup is a team accomplishment there are so many HOFers who don't have a Cup that are still amazing.
>
> **@MMarcusMLH ✅ Mike Marcus**
> *In reply to @raidersnroz*
> Hollander proved that he's a better captain, though. Three Cups and two Conn Smythes is hard to argue with.
>
> **@raidersnroz sammy**
> *In reply to @MMarcusMLH ✅*
> The Metros won the lottery for Hollander though? They had a much better team than Boston did in 2009, so it makes sense that they've been able to have more success.
>
> **@MMarcusMLH ✅ Mike Marcus**
> *In reply to @raidersnroz*
> Dude, 2009 was almost ten years ago almost none of those players are still on the team.

@khaleesi_snipe Mother of Hockey
Hayden Pike and all of his kids are so adorable

@2435superemacy Shayden
In reply to @khaleesi_snipe
Baby in the Cup! I repeat: BABY IN THE CUP

@youppisbff meg
Omg did one of the player's wives just fall on the ice?

@khaleesi_snipe Mother of Hockey
In reply to @youppisbff
Ooof yeah that had to hurt

@TheRealGordFleury ✅ Gord Fleury
Shane Hollander, with 15 goals and 19 assists, is your Conn Smythe winner.

@TheRealGordFleury ✅ Gord Fleury
In reply to @TheRealGordFleury ✅
It would have been interesting to see if he had still won it if the Metros had lost, but that decision has been rendered moot.

The Metros director of team services had already booked out a private room in a local Denver club near the team hotel in case of the win. No such thing as superstitions for the hockey operations staff.

The team, staff, and family poured out of the chartered buses and into the club. Shane led the way, hosting the Cup over his head the entire time with a goofy grin stuck to his face while his teammates swarmed around him, swearing like they were fifth graders on the playground who learned curse words for the first time. There were already some Metros fans at the club who had heard about the post-win celebration through the Montreal grapevine.

Fuck, were there cameras? Oh my god, who cares.

Shane was already lubricated from the dangerous combination of sixty minutes of playoff hockey, locker room beers, champagne showers, and near-total alcohol abstinence during the season. There might have also been tequila at some point in the past 30 minutes, the post-game dressing room was kind of a blur. But there was no way Shane Hollander - three time Stanley Cup winner - wasn't going to drink a beer or three or seven out of the Cup.

As the bartender poured a Coors Light into the Cup, Shane felt a buzzing on his leg.

Ilya! His inebriated mind celebrated as his ears turned pink.

Lily: Lucky again Shane
Lily: For second best hockey player you are not bad
Jane: Fuck you

Lily: Yes that is the plan
Jane: Shut up
Jane: That makes it 3 1
Lily: Ahh but I was first
Lily: And first is best yes)))
Lily: Nobody remembers number two
Jane: Ffuck off..
Jane: Ill call yo later
Lily: Shane are you drunk
Lily: Shane
Lily: Shane
Lily: Shane you will get a headache
Jane: I wpn rje cuip!!
Jane: [blurry photo of Shane drinking from the Cup]
Lily: Stay safe moy lyubimyy
Lily: Don't forget to get pedialyte from the trainer

"Shane! My man!"

Hayden flung his arm around Shane, his other already dragging J.J. down by the neck.

"Mon capitaine! We did it! We fucking did it!"

"I love you guys so much." Hayden looked between the two, a sappy grin on his face and tears in his unfocused eyes. "I'm so fucking glad that we got to win it together."

"I love you guys too. More than anything."

"So how are you celebrating, Hollzy? Do you have a girl here?" J.J. grinned as he took a swig of his beer.

"Nah man, you know Shane! He's got Boston Lily!"

"Hayd, I don't have a Boston Lily."

"Sure, right right." Hayden paused and took a look around the room. "Still man, if Lily's not in the picture, we got to get you a girl. You're sooo great." Hayden had also had more than his share of tequila shots. "Any girl deserves to have you-"

"You pulled Rose Landry! You know any girl would kill to have you!" J.J. butt in.

"I just want you to be happy man," Hayden had a stupid grin on his face. "Like I am with Jackie. Shane, let's find you a Jackie! Not mine, she's mine, but your own Jackie. She's so great, isn't she?"

"Yes Hollzy, let's get you a Jackie tonight!"

Shane looked at the two of them, deliriously happy, still embracing each other, with nothing but brotherly love. It made something feel warm inside of him, like some big knot loosened

in his gut. He was happy, they were happy. They were all happy together in the happiest moment of all their lives surrounded by people who were also happy.

“I don’t want you guys to find me a girl.”

The two stared at him, still happy, but a little perplexed. At least, as perplexed as they could get more than halfway to blackout drunk.

To be frank, Shane didn’t know what came over him. It was probably the shots of tequila they did, but also could have been the utter euphoria of winning the Cup. Plus he had a boyfriend, not just a hookup he could depend on. He had Ilya and Ilya had him, and they were already thinking of the future. A future where they could share their love openly and freely. Not now, but it would happen.

But also the tequila.

Whatever it was, it buried all the anxiety that guided Shane through life and shut it in a tiny box, and then caused him to say-

“I’m gay!”

@denvermetrosgal mack
The Metros are currently terrorizing downtown Denver and it is amazing.

@pikeplacehockey #1 hayden pike fan
I just saw Shane Hollander carry the Stanley Cup into a club! Oh this team is having fun tonight.

> **@jimlooksatcamera jim halpbert**
> *In reply to @pikeplacehockey*
> No shit they just won the Cup

@daveindenver Dave
Why are there so many drunk men at the Cherry Cricket right now?

@hollysgirl katie
Maybe it’s just because I’m so tired after the win but why does it seem like the rest of the team is avoiding Hollander?

> **@youppisbff meg**
> *In reply to @hollysgirl*
> Where are you seeing that?

> **@hollysgirl katie**
> *In reply to @youppisbff*

I somehow ended up at the same club as them and like, Hollander is just off on his own.

Shane woke up and noticed two things: one, he had one of the worst headaches of his life and two, that he wasn't alone in his bed.

He froze. Then carefully looked over, squinting his eyes because he was not ready for the sunlight peeking through the hotel room curtains that he had haphazardly closed prior to heading over to the rink yesterday afternoon.

Oh. OH.

It was the Cup. The fucking Stanley Cup was in his bed because he won his third Cup and he's the captain so he gets to do things like that. He didn't make some stupid drunken decision that ruined the best thing in his life - not that he thought he would have, knowing himself, but there was a non-zero chance that one of the guys had cajoled a woman at the party last night to follow him to his room. Instead he was fulfilling his childhood dream. For the third time.

As quickly as his panic started, it subsided as Shane laid back down on his pillow. He grabbed for his phone on the nightstand, briefly knocking into a half-empty bottle of Pedialyte - thanks Mikey - and opened it up. There were hundreds of unread texts from friends and acquaintances congratulating him on the win last night.

He scrolled until he found his texts with Ilya.

Jane: Illllyyyaaa
Jane: Illlyyyaaa
Jane: I lube you so much
Jane: omg love
Jane: but alos lube ahah
Jane: I canntt wjait or ou to fuck me again
Lily: Are you safe
Jane: yeaah Im in mu roome
Jane: 1470
Lily: I'm sorry Shane I will not be able to visit you tonight
Lily: I am still in Boston, remember?
Lily: But very soon I promise
Lily: ❤️

Oh god. He was *plastered* last night. No wonder he couldn't remember anything and his brain was currently doing its best Woody Woodpecker impression.

Squinting against the bright screen, he read on.

Jane: uyo wouidl be soooo proiud of mw
Jane: I was soooo bvravw tonifht
Lily: ??
Jane: I tols them im gwy
Jane: Goodnight Ilya!
Lily: Shane
Lily: Shane
Lily: Shane please pick up the phone
Lily: Shane
Lily: Shane I think you are asleep but when you wake up please call me

The panic roared back. Shane broke out in a sweat as he scrolled through his phone until - ah, there it was. The team group chat. Maybe… maybe it went okay? Maybe his drunk self was lying?

Ignoring the dozen missed calls from Ilya, he went back into his texts to scroll to the team chat.

He opened it to the latest unread message. He wished he didn't.

Drapeau: Where's the next spot?
Drapeau: Too much family here
Drapeau: I want to get fucked up and Pike's fucking wife is here
Pike: What the fuck man
Drapeau: No offense
Roy: We can party later tonight is about celebrating with everyone!
Comeau: No I agree with Drapeau
Miitka: Hollander is looking for everyone for some reason
Roy: I don't think I've ever seen Hollander this drunk before
Roy: Was he this drunk the last time you guys won?
Wilson: No this is brand new territory dude
Andropov: Yeah he finally loosened up thank GOD
Olsson: Hollander wants the whole team in the private room
Olsson: For an announcement or something
Olsson: No family or staff
Olsson: Just players
Wilson: What does he want?
Comeau: Probably something boring like he's proud of us
Roy: Yeah typical Hollander
Roy: WHAT
Drapeau: HOLY FUCK
Comeau: Did any of you know he was a fag?
Olsson: I did not guess he was a queer
Drapeau: A fucking fairy is our captain?
Drapeau: 🤮
Comeau: 🤮
Pike: Are you fucking kidding me?
Pike: I'm surprised too but come on

Pike: It's Shane, we need to support him
Boizeau: I agree with Pike it was brave of our capitaine
Comeau: I'm not supporting a faggot
Wilson: Dude watch your language
Comeau: Fuck which team chat is this
Comeau: Fuck is this the chat Hollander is in?
Drapeau: FUCK

The blood started roaring in his head as black started creeping into his vision. It felt like his heart was going to beat out of his chest. He couldn't feel his hands or his feet, stapled to his bed as he struggled to breathe, to see, to do anything outside of panic.

I came out. I came out last night and they hate me. Oh my god they hate me. Shane lay there, frozen. *They're going to tell everyone and everyone will hate me. Everyone will hate me forever and I'm going to be kicked out of the league. They're never going to let me play hockey again.*

He stared at his phone with unseeing eyes as it buzzed with more well-wishes and congratulations and *oh my god they are all going to hate me. Everyone is going to find out and hate me.*

Before his mind could stop him or think twice about it, he tapped the screen to call Ilya.

"Shane?

"Ilya I'm so sorry I think I fucked up."

"Shhh Shane first tell me what happened, yes?"

Shane let out a breath he was holding. "I… I think I came out to the team last night. No, I know I came out to the team last night."

"Shane-"

"I know I know! I got way too drunk and I think I was just so happy that I told everyone I was gay. Ilya I am so sorry I fucked up our whole plan and I'm a fucking idiot."

"Hollander!"

Ilya didn't use his last name. Not really, not anymore. Not after they confessed their love and made everything official, not since the time in the cottage last summer. Not in private at least, where it was just the two of them and they could pretend they didn't have a million reasons to keep their relationship hidden.

And that was enough for Shane to stop his spiral.

"Breathe, Hollander. You can do that."

Shane started taking slow, deep breaths.

In. Pause. Out. Pause. In. Pause. Out. Pause.

“Oh-okay. Thanks.”

“Good, now talk to me. Tell me what happened and then I can tell you if you need to freak out.”

“Like I said-”

“No no no. Not that rushed thing earlier. I want to know everything,” Ilya paused. “Like how your weak backhand can win another Cup.”

Shane snorted. Ilya was trying to take him out of his own mind and back into the real world. And yeah there was a reason for the spiral - a good fucking reason - he also just won the Cup and these past 24 hours should have been in the top five of his life, honestly.

“Well, this weak backhand scored 15 fucking goals and won a third Cup, so the team was celebrating hard. I mean, a lot of the guys had been around for all three, you know?”

“Sure Shane, rub it in while I try to be a good boyfriend.” Shane melted a bit at that.

“The equipment guys really went all out this time since it was Game 7 and win or lose we booze, right? There was a lot of alcohol flowing in the room, and I guess I just felt like I could relax, you know?”

Ilya just let out a sound of agreement, letting Shane get it out.

“You know I haven’t touched anything since the All-Star Game, and a playoff run definitely gets you dehydrated, so I probably didn’t have much of a tolerance.”

This time Ilya couldn’t help himself. “Shane, have you ever had a tolerance?”

“Fuck you! Anyways, we left the Pepsi Center to go to a club the team had booked for the postgame celebration, and geez, I don’t know. I had been carrying the Cup, I had some more tequila shots, and I was just so happy with everything, you know? I’m on a great team, I have an amazing boyfriend-” Ilya let out a little aww at that. “-and just everything seems to be going perfect! Then Hayden and J.J. were talking about finding me a girl to marry and I don’t WANT a girl to marry when I have you.”

Ilya practically cooed. “Moy vozlyublenniy why are you saying such sweet things when I cannot kiss your face right now?”

Shane turned a little pink. “Maybe if you were there it would have helped. Or it would have gone even worse, no idea. But I was just so happy with everything that for some reason I thought it was the perfect time to come out. Like, nothing could wreck the happiness.”

Ilya’s voice turned hard. “Did Pike and Boizieau say anything? Are they homophobic? Will I need to punch their stupid little faces?”

“No no! Well, I don’t think so. I mean I can’t really remember much, but I do remember Hayden and J.J. were surprised but not… mean, I guess?” Shane thought back to his hazy memories from the night before. “I think J.J. mentioned something about finding me a man in Montreal instead. Which… better than expected.”

“Ah okay, so I do not have to kill the fifteenth best Metro and mediocre defenceman.”

Shane sighed. “No, those two are fine. The rest of the team…”

The memories started coming back in flashes. Shane, yelling at the guys to come to the private VIP room in the back for a “big announcement.” Hayden and J.J. desperately trying to stop Shane from going back there, from saying anything.

God, at least Shane had been aware of himself enough to remember to do it in a private room, rather at the main stage of the club.

Shane had waved them all over, and tried? to stand on a chair before giving up and made the announcement at the front of the room.

He remembered Hayden nervously standing next to him, his hand on his shoulder like he was his newest bodyguard. J.J. meanwhile was in the back of the room, guarding the door and making sure nobody outside the team had accidentally made their way in.

Okay, maybe those two were more than fine.

Shane said the two words - “I’m gay!” - and then it really fell apart.

Faces blurred together, but the individual looks of disgust were seared into his brain. So were the slurs. He’d heard them from that group before, he had resigned himself to it being standard jock talk a long time ago, but now it was personal. It was just a way of hyping the team up, but it was pointed and malicious and dangerous.

Hayden took Shane by the arm and guided him out of the room, carefully navigating him through the crowd of teammates who suddenly wanted nothing to do with him. That if Shane touched them, they’d catch the gay.

Then things got blurry again. At some point Shane got ahold of the Cup again, and at some point Mikey had gotten him the Pedialyte, but that didn’t really matter.

“...I came out to the rest of the team, too. I think I was just so happy that they were cool with it, I thought everyone might be too.” Shane felt his eyes welling up with tears. “They were not. They were really, really not.”

Ilya was silent. Shane could hear him breathing on the phone as he tried to formulate what to say.

“Moy lyubimyy I am sorry your team are assholes. But you are still captain, yes? You just won them the Cup?”

“Actually,” Shane blushed. “I didn’t just win them the Cup. I uh, I got to sleep with it last night. It’s in my bed right now.”

“Cheater! You cheat on me, Hollander? You are cheating on me with the Cup?” Shane could hear Ilya’s grin through the phone.

“I mean, I do love the Stanley Cup, but I love you even more.”

“Ah, you are in love with me?”

“Fuck you, of course I am!”

“And your team still let you take the Cup with you, even with your gay cooties?” Ilya switched to a more serious tone. “Shane, if they really hated you that much, they wouldn’t have let you do that. I don’t want to get your hopes up, but also, maybe it’s not so bad?”

Shane shook his head, wincing in pain after forgetting his headache. “I don’t know, Ilya. They were texting the team chat some gross stuff until they realized I was in there.” Shane gazed skywards. “Hayden and J.J. tried to get them to knock it off but I don’t know if they just moved it to a different chat.”

Ilya’s sigh crackled in the phone speaker. “Then you can’t do anything. Maybe they listened to Pike and Boiziau, maybe they didn’t. But Shane, you are still captain. And you have the number one hockey player waiting for you in Montreal-”

“I thought you were in Boston?”

“Shane if you do not think I am flying to Montreal as soon as we get off the call you are stupider than Pike. But yes I will be waiting for you in Montreal and not even whine about your boring little parade and do puzzles with David and Yuna.”

“I love you, Ilya.”

“Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Shane glanced at the clock, finally calm enough to focus on something other than his accidental coming out.

“Shit! The bus leaves in 15 minutes for the flight.”

“Plenty of time then. Your clothes are already folded and ready to go, I bet.”

They were, and Shane loved and hated that Ilya knew that.

“Yeah but I have to figure out how to get my suitcase and the Cup downstairs and you know how heavy the Cup is.”

“Ah yes of course Mr. Captain you have the Stanley Cup, of course they can’t leave without you, Mr. Humblebrag.”

“Shut up, who even taught you that?”

“Woe is me, I am big important captain of team and I had sex with the Cup last night-”

“I did NOT-”

“Because I saw my very hot boyfriend’s name and could not resist of course.”

“Ilya that’s gross.”

“But you would not say no, yes? Imagine me fucking you from behind while we stare at our names on the Cup.”

“Ilya…”

While this call had gotten off topic it had also gotten Shane VERY distracted because now that’s the only thing he could picture in his mind. And how hot it would be. Their names all on the bottom band of the Cup, being able to see himself getting absolutely railed in the blurry, distorted reflected on the silvery surface…

Wow.

That was a fantasy that he didn’t think of but was definitely one of his now. Like, maybe top three. He wasn’t sure how he hadn’t thought of it before. Maybe because Ilya wasn’t his like the Cup was his, and now that they’re both his…

“Okay Ilya, while I’d love to have phone sex right now, we are going to have to talk about this when we get back, but now it’s only ten minutes until the bus leaves and I think I gotta find one of the Cup keeper guys.”

“You better be spending the flight thinking about how we are going to fuck in front of the Cup.”

“Jesus, Ilya. Love you.”

“Love you too. Bye.”

Chapter 2: June 15, 2018

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His leg was jiggling as he sat on the couch, mindlessly scrolling social media while the local news was playing on the TV, the volume on low in the background.

Ilya still couldn't believe it sometimes.

He was at Shane Hollander's apartment. His boyfriend's apartment. Shane Hollander was his boyfriend. And yes, he had a whole year to get used to the idea, after their tearful confession at Shane's cottage and an accidental outing to Shane's boring but wonderful father, but it still made him sit back in wonder. He loved Shane and Shane, unbelievably, loved him too.

Sometimes he was scared that he was making this up, that he was fooling Shane into loving him, and that Shane would realize how much better he was than Ilya and leave him like everyone else Ilya's life had done. That Shane wouldn't love Ilya like Ilya loved him, and didn't think they could survive being together outside of the clandestine meetings they've gotten so good at over the past nine years. But for the time being, he was content that he had Shane now, and that he was the one that Shane would text his detailed opinions and observations about whatever hockey game he was watching at the moment.

Neither of them had ever had a boyfriend before, so to Ilya, that's what a boyfriend does.

And his boyfriend, the unbelievable hockey player that he is, had just won the Stanley Cup for the third time. Ilya would be lying if he said he wasn't envious. It helped that he had won the Cup first, and could hold that above Shane's head forever, just like their draft order. But now Shane had three Cup wins, and Ilya only had one.

So yeah, Ilya was a little jealous.

He was also slightly, a tiny bit annoyed. Shane winning the Cup meant that Shane's team played deep into June. And the stupid Metros had the audacity - the audacity! - to not wrap any series up quickly except for the Eastern Conference Final. But then the stupid Rockies had to play seven games in the Western Conference Final which meant that Shane - and Ilya, by extension - had to wait that much longer to wrap up the stupid Stanley Cup Final.

Which meant that it wasn't until late June that Ilya was able to see Shane, what with their stupid no sex during the playoff rules.

In the back of his mind, Ilya knew that they had gone longer without seeing each other before. Six months of no contact wasn't out of the question, between Sochi and Rose Landry and the gay panic of it all. But now that they were official, the three months of text-only contact felt like torture.

And then, of course, you throw Shane's late night texts into the mix.

Shane, who had come up with the ten-year plan for their relationship that certainly did not involve coming out at any point in the near future, had told his team that he was gay.

Ilya would never admit it to Shane, but he was also jealous of him for that. Secretly, Ilya wanted to be out. He yearned to be out. He wanted to shout from the rooftops that he was in love with Shane Hollander and Shane Hollander's freckles, Russia be damned. But Ilya also recognized that while he had plenty of experience with people hating him, Shane was always Canada's golden boy. Shane had tried so hard for years to be the perfect Canadian hockey player so people could maybe overlook the fact that he's bi-racial, that he was terrified of being anything less than perfect.

And the Montreal Metros, based on what Shane said, definitely considered being gay as less than perfect.

Speaking of the Metros, the local news had finally switched to covering the arrival of the team to the airport.

A tradition like no other, a small crowd had gathered at the general aviation terminal to welcome the Montreal Metros' charter after their victory. The news cameras were set up to capture the team coming off the plane, Stanley Cup in hand, bringing it back to Canada. Ilya didn't get that experience when he won - the Raiders were fortunate enough to win in Boston in front of their home crowd - but he was familiar with the scene from the other teams who had won before.

Ilya's thumb paused from scrolling as the camera zoomed in on the plane door and stairs, while the local reporter was saying… something. The channel must be the francophone one, because Ilya didn't understand anything outside of a few phrases here and there, but to be honest Ilya couldn't give two shits about what they were saying.

He just wanted to see Shane.

After a beat, he saw him. Shane. Exhausted, and definitely limping, but there.

Carrying the Stanley Cup while his travel bag was slung across his body, Shane slid out the door and paused at the top of the stairwell. Ilya saw Shane look around, seeing the crowd, and plastering one of his media-trained smiles on his face as he raised the Cup again.

Only Ilya saw Shane's real expression, the wince of pain and the lack of enthusiasm for this whole song and dance. Shane was hurting. Physically, emotionally, everything.

It broke Ilya's heart.

Ilya watched as Shane carefully made his way down the stairs while his teammates filed out behind him. Ilya watched as Shane turned to his teammates on the tarmac, only to be ignored by all of them.

Well, not Pike. Pike had clasped Shane's shoulder - the bad one, Ilya noted, and caused Shane to wince - while they were milling around waiting for their luggage.

But the rest of them kept a healthy distance from Shane and, in turn, the Cup. Eventually, the Cup keepers approached Shane and convinced him to hand over the trophy to their very capable hands. Ilya saw that it didn't take too much convincing; when he had won, he had practically ran away from the keepers, trying to keep the Cup for himself as long as he possibly could.

Marleau took a video of it. Connors put the video through one of those gif convertors, and it became one of the most popular clips spammed to the group chat.

"When the digital media team asks Roz if he has a sec."
"When the ref tries to chat with Roz."
"Roz when the trainer has a new nutrition program."

Ilya's stomach tightened a bit at the memory. He didn't regret his decision to leave Boston one bit, not for a single second, not if it meant that he got to see Shane more than seven times per season. But he was going to miss the boys. He was going to miss the place that he had made his second home, where he was able to grow up outside of his father's influence and become his own man.

Swallowing hard, Ilya decided to distract himself by scrolling through his social feeds while waiting for Shane to get back from the airport.

@leblondpat Patrick Leblond
Back in Canada where it belongs!

@pikeplacehockey #1 hayden pike fan
Look at our champions! #GoMetrosGo

@BoringHollander Boring Shane Hollander
They told me I should carry the Stanley Cup. I asked why. They said because I was the captain. I said okay, and I carried it off the plane.

@mtlpuckgirl abby
Is anyone picking up some weird vibes from the Metros around Hollander??

> **@ijustmetrosyou And This is Crazy**
> *In reply to @mtlpuckgirl*
> Yeah, why does it look like they're all avoiding him?

@RoyRDS ✅ Nic Roy
The @MetrosMTL Stanley Cup parade is scheduled for June 18.

Le défilé de la Coupe Stanley des @MetrosMTL est prévu pour le 18 juin.

Ilya shot up from the couch as soon as he heard the key in the door.

And when the door opened, and the key jangled and Shane was clearly trying to corral his luggage from Denver, Ilya practically attacked the man, pinning Shane's arms in a tight embrace.

"Moy lyubovnik you have returned to me," Ilya breathed into Shane.

Shane stiffened for a second, and then collapsed into Ilya's arms.

"You're here," Shane exhaled as he buried his face into Ilya's neck as he hugged back.

"Of course, I said I would be," Ilya said in between kisses all over Shane's forehead. "I do not want to waste one second of this stupidly short offseason."

The two men stood there in each other's arms, content with staying there, both needing the assurance that the other was real and was there.

Finally, Ilya released the embrace.

"Come. I can tell that you want to tell me all about your boring Stanley Cup win," Ilya teased. He desperately wanted to talk about Shane's coming out and the Metros' reaction - and if it had gotten any better in the light of day and the absence of alcohol - but he knew that Shane was still shaken up.

Shane's appearance at the airport told him that.

And yeah, Ilya would much rather if they'd go straight to bedroom and give each other a mutual release that they'd been denying for *months*, but he could hold off. Maybe.

Shane toed off his shoes, kicking them towards the shoe rack by the door. He rolled his luggage over to the door by the laundry room, and then dropped his carry-on next to the entry table, in a nook that Ilya had seen Shane drop his bag before.

Everything had its place. That he was still adhering to that was… good, Ilya thought.

Ilya motioned to the couch, the TV with the local station still playing in the background, though it looked like the news was over and an old sitcom rerun was on instead.

He sat heavily on the couch, stretching his arm across the top of it in invitation. Shane, never one to turn down any minute suggestion from Ilya Rozanov, quickly followed, collapsing into the space next to Ilya.

Laying his head on Ilya's shoulder, Shane sighed in an attempt to release all the tension he felt over the past 24 hours.

"I mean, it was fucking great," Shane started.

“Yes, yes, I remember the feeling after I did it first,” Ilya couldn’t help but tease as he ran his thumb over Shane’s shoulder.

“Fuck you. I mean, it was really fucking great. Like, you never think you could actually be a dynasty in a 31 team league, but we’re a dynasty you know? Three in four years… I was on the top of the fucking world,” Shane paused while shifting his shoulder slightly into Ilya’s thumb. It was the good shoulder, so it felt nice.

“And you know I hadn’t had anything to drink since the All-Star Weekend,” Shane turned pink at the memory. Ilya loved that Shane turned pink. It meant that he was remembering what they did that weekend, holed up in Ilya’s hotel room trying to keep quiet while also discovering very new and very fun positions to fuck in. There might have been some role-playing, recreating that night after the Awards.

It was hot.

“And Hayden and J.J. were telling me that they were going to find me a girl, and I don’t know,” Shane gulped, looking down. “I wanted them to stop because that made me think about you, and how the only thing that could make it better would be if I could share it with you.”

Ilya melted. He fucking melted, even though his boyfriend was telling him something very serious and very scary, because Ilya loved Shane so much that he couldn’t handle it sometimes, and it helped his brain to know that Shane loved him too.

“So it just like, came out of me,” Shane closed his eyes at the memory. “And I guess Hayden and J.J. were surprised, but also okay with it, so I guess I just figured that everyone else must be okay with it too…”

Ilya moved his hand from Shane’s shoulder to his head, stroking his hair.

“And I told the whole team,” Shane looked over at Ilya, meeting him eye to eye. It was that serious. “I didn’t tell them about us, I guess I at least knew that would be too much, but the guys know I’m gay.”

Ilya moved Shane’s head towards his, so he could bury his face in Shane’s hair. Breathe it in, while he tried to find the English words for what he wanted to say.

Shane smelled like his seaweed shampoo.

“So the team is… not supportive?” Ilya asked cautiously.

Shane closed his eyes. “No, there was a lot of homophobic shit in the team chat that night. Maybe they would have hid it more if I came out when we were all sober… But I’m kind of glad I know where I stand with them, you know?”

Ilya continued his exploration of Shane’s head with his face, nuzzling Shane’s ear.

“And then none of the guys would fucking look at me on the plane. I mean, I had the Cup in the seat next to me, and normally it would be like fucking Disneyland with the line to take

photos with it, but nobody wanted to be within five feet of me. Not the boys, not any of the trainers or coaches… It was like my row didn't exist."

Ilya took one last sniff of Shane's hair before pulling back to look at him. "So the Metros suck. Even more than usual."

"Yeah," Shane sniffled. "I'm- I'm hoping it's just the shock of it all, but I'm scared. I'm fucking scared that it's not, and that I'm going to have to go into next season with them hating me."

Ilya didn't know what to say to that. Shane still had two more years on his contract, with a limited no-move clause. This had been a key part of the plan Shane had dreamed up at 3am last year: Shane, with trade protection, would stay in Montreal, while Ilya, who didn't sign a max length deal at the first possible chance, would move to Ottawa when he became a free agent so the two could be close. Well, closer.

So he decided to be cautious. "Do you… do you still want to be in Montreal?"

The question was met with a moment of silence and then a deep sign. "Fuck. Yeah, I guess?" Shane stared off in concentration. "I had always dreamed of playing for one team my whole career, retiring there and then seeing my number in the rafters. And while this sucks, I just can't give up on that easily."

Ilya nodded. "So we stick with the plan, yes?"

Shane looked over at Ilya sharply. "Were you thinking of not signing with Ottawa?"

"Well if you didn't want to stay in Montreal…"

"Oh. Right." Shane bit his lip. "Maybe we wait until all the year end stuff is done. You can't talk to anybody until July 1 anyways, and maybe things'll work out in the meantime."

Ilya highly doubted that, based on what Shane said. But Shane was stupidly loyal to his team, even if they were idiots.

"Okay. We stick to plan, but if Montreal continues to be buttheads…"

"Buttheads, really Ilya?"

"If they continue to be buttheads we change plan!" Ilya finished the pronouncement.

Shane swallowed and nodded. "Yeah. Plus, there's so much that's going to happen between now and free agency. We got the parade on Monday-"

"Of course, can't forget the very important parade."

"Shut up! And then there's the Awards later that week-"

"Ah, I actually cannot wait for the Awards," Ilya grinned devilishly at Shane, eyes darkening. Both were among the nominees, as usual, and Ilya had big plans for the Vegas hotel room the

league reserved for him. Big plans. Sexy plans. Plans that were much better than the boring awards show filled with Z-List celebrities. Last year the MLH got a magician to perform a card trick during the ceremony. Unfortunately, the magician messed up the trick.

That part was better than the rest of the ceremony combined.

Still didn't hold a candle to the Rozanov and Hollander private afterparty.

"-And after that we've got a week to ourselves before free agency begins," Shane finished, eyes also darkening.

"And then we have the whole summer to ourselves," Ilya ran his thumb across Shane's jaw, before resting it on the bottom lip.

Shane's pupils blew out. "The whole summer," he breathed.

And finally - finally - the two started to make up for the three month drought. They wouldn't be able to do it in a single afternoon, but that didn't mean they weren't going to try.

June 18, 2018

Shane was on top of an open-roof bus, wearing the ugliest shirt the MLH had ever designed. He had his sunglasses on, and a water bottle tucked into the pocket of his shorts. "Just in case," Tommy said as the media relations guy handed one out to every player.

Tommy had a very pale and slightly green face on the flight back to Montreal, hungover after the team had collectively decided that the media relations group needed to go shot-for-shot with the players. That water was self-preservation as much as anything.

But anyways, the bus. Shane was on top of a bus.

He was also lifting the Stanley Cup to the roar of the crowd.

It was parade day, the unofficial final day of team celebration. The busses were taking them down Rue St-Catherine - "the usual route," as old timers liked to say - in front of all the rabid Metros fans. Shane had overheard one of the media relations staffers - one of the more junior ones that stayed behind in Montreal and didn't travel with the team - mention that the city was expecting over a million people. Thank goodness Shane was on the bus, and not out there.

Shane pumped the Cup up and down a few times as the crowd cheered wildly. His grin - he hoped - was just as wide.

But even a pro athlete gets tired pumping 35 pounds after a while, and he looked to see if anyone was around to take it.

He was sharing this bus with J.J., Hayden, and their families. Noticing that Hayden had his hands full with Jade (Ruby?) and J.J. was busy waving to the adoring crowd, Shane placed it on the table instead.

Shane grimaced slightly. His ribs were bruised from the cumulative effects of months of body checks, and his shoulder was definitely fucked up. And he had three broken toes, but honestly who didn't after a playoff run.

But his grimace wasn't just from the pain of a long and successful playoff series.

In previous years, during the other two Cup parades, he was usually on a float with Coach Theriault and Patrice Drapeau. The reasoning was that the star centre, starting goalie, and head coach were the three most important components to the win (debatable) and so should share the float with the Cup.

There was never any discussion with the players about it. That was where the GM and media relations staff put them, and so that's where they were. It was near-impossible to talk or do anything but yell and wave to the fans, regardless. But still - once was a choice, twice was a routine, and Shane liked routine.

And this was a definite break in the routine.

Only Hayden and J.J. noticed it, though. And Ilya of course. Ilya, who was back in Shane's Montreal apartment waiting to take him apart after the parade. Ilya, who knew Shane would want to get out of his head after dealing with the tension around the team. Ilya, who knew that Shane would have to give a speech broadcast live internationally and that Shane would hate every second of it but still deliver half of it en francais.

Speaking of which…

Lily: Oooh big strong guy lifting the Cup over his head
Jane: You're just jealous
Lily: Extremely
Jane: Of the Cup
Lily: I wish you were lifting me over your head
Jane: Shut up
Jane: How would that even work anyways?
Lily: You're smart you would figure it out
Lily: I can see you texting on stream!

Shane whipped his head up, trying to find the camera before glancing back at his phone.

Lily: You're so funny when you're scared
Lily: Look to the left

Shane looked to his left, not seeing anything.

Lily: Other left dummy

Shane rolled his eyes and looked to his right. There! One of the news vans had a camera stationed on top of its roof, streaming the performance for local TV as well as the team website. He awkwardly waved to the camera after realizing that yeah, it was probably stranger for Shane to stare it down.

Lily: How do you make a Cup parade boring
Lily: In Boston we were taking shots the whole time
Lily: Even the police joined in
Jane: Shut up this is not boring
Jane: I just don't want to get drunk again
Jane: Last time was bad enough
Lily: Ah yes I can agree

"Dude!"

The sound of Hayden's voice pulled him away from his phone. "What's up, Hayden?"

"Get your head out of your phone and enjoy the parade, man! You out of anyone deserves it the most," Hayden said, grinning widely as he slapped Shane on the back, his hand firmly holding onto Ruby's (Jade's?) wrist as the young girl squirmed. "Bask in your adoring fans."

Shane had to laugh at that. "Sorry, just was… catching up."

Hayden tried to take a peek at Shane's phone before he quickly turned off the screen. "Boston Lily, huh?" Then his eyes widened as the realization came over him. "Wait."

Shane's eyes also widened. He did NOT want to be having this conversation on the top of the bus in the middle of a Stanley freaking Cup parade. "Hayd-"

"Stop being so serious you two!" J.J. came over and put his arms around the two men. "All these people came to see us, so let's give them a show!"

He dropped his arms and went over to the Cup. "Anyways, it's my turn with the Cup."

Shane laughed and went over to the side of the bus to wave to the crowd some more. Some fans had gone up to the bus and were thrusting jerseys and Sharpies up towards him. He started grabbing and signing - finally, something he could do without thinking a whole lot about it.

Hayden came over, Jade/Ruby handed over to the grandparents, and started joining Shane in the impromptu autograph session.

"We're going to have to talk about Lily," Hayden murmured, trying to ensure no fans would hear.

Shane sighed as he signed another bright blue Metros jersey. "Yeah, Hayd, but I'd really rather not do that now."

"Oh, don't worry dude," Hayden snorted. "I'm going to want the full run down. With Jackie. We should get dinner together."

Shane mentally went through his calendar - did he have any nights free? Did he want to have any nights free? His mom went a little overboard booking his brand deals - "*You played much further into the summer this year, which means less time for you to shoot anything for their fall/winter campaigns"* - and he was booked solid for the next two weeks. Well… there were a few free nights here and there, but he had one very hot, very horny Russian waiting in his Montreal apartment and he's only human.

"My mom has me booked with campaigns until July, do you want to do something after Canada Day?" Shane said, still signing autographs - wait, what jersey did he sign? Was that a Scott Hunter jersey? Fans are so weird.

"Suuure buddy, booked until Canada Day," Hayden said wryly, knowing exactly how much his friend really wanted to talk.

"It's true!" Shane protested. "You know how my mom is."

Hayden playfully rolled his eyes. "I'd give you more shit if I didn't know that was exactly how Yuna Hollander is. But Shane, text me your next free date. I want to catch up before you go to that cottage of yours." Then Hayden's eyes lit up with an idea. "Unless…!"

Shane groaned good-naturedly. Hayden had been trying to get an invite to the cottage for years, and while he had nothing against his best friend, his cottage had always been his sanctuary away from the pressure of everything. And now, of course, it was where he and Ilya could do whatever they wanted without fear of being outed.

"Maybe! I'll have to see. I don't exactly host there," Shane answered.

"As long as you consider it, man, I'll be happy," Hayden went back to signing autographs and waving at the crowd.

Awkwardly smiling, Shane wrapped up one final autograph and turned back towards the center of the bus.

Lily: Look at Canadian superstar giving out autographs to all the poor people
Lily: Oh look I am Shane Hollander I am so boring and perfect
Jane: Shut up I know you signed twice as many jerseys in your one parade
Lily: Yes I also signed many tits
Jane: Jesus
Lily: But I only like one pair of tits now
Lily: I can sign yours when you are back at your apartment)))
Jane: Ilya stop sexting me
Lily: Make me
Jane: Shut up
Jane: …
Jane: I wish you were here with me
Jane: I wish you could celebrate with me like Jackie is with Hayden
Lily: Why so you can rub it in my face?
Lily: And why do you want to be like the 15th best Metro?
Jane: Ilya

Lily: Shane
Jane: I just wish we didn't have to hide
Jane: I'm supposed to be so happy here but
Jane: Fuck
Jane: All I can think about is you
Jane: And how much of a menace you would be to everyone
Lily: Moy lyubovnik its only for a few more hours, right?
Lily: And I am right here waiting for you
Jane: But I want you all the time
Lily: Me too

Soon enough, the bus had reached City Hall, where a big stage was set up for the players, staff, and broadcasters.

Ignoring the pain in his shoulder, Shane carried the Cup off the bus and made his way over to the stage to place it on the podium. The crowd roared in delight.

Oh, I probably should have lifted it again, he thought.

But the moment was lost, and Shane went back to take a seat, his number 24 helpfully taped to the chair. Front and center. Right between Hayden and J.J. He'd like to think that it was because he was captain, and those were the two assistants, but he knew better. Just like the bus. Just like on the team plane back from Denver, when everyone was on part two of the party but nobody felt the need to linger by his seat near the back of the plane with the rest of the veterans or invite him up to the front. Or even why there was partying in the front - that had always been a back of the plane type of thing.

The Montreal Metros did not like Shane Hollander.

But it was up to Shane, the captain, the hockey prodigy, the one who had willed them to the Cup with his franchise-record 34 points in a single playoff run, to be the bigger man.

Shane fixed a smile on his face, but let his eyes relax behind the dark shades of his sunglasses. Most of the team was wearing them, between the glare of the summer sun off the expanse of pavement and the non-stop hangover they've all had since June 13. Those sunglasses became his shield from the outside world.

He sat patiently through the speeches. The English- and French-language radio broadcasters had taken co-emcee duties, guiding the ceremony with all the pomp and circumstance a Montreal ceremony demands. Oh, there were some jokes - probably some broadcast-related quips that fans were intimately familiar with but the players didn't know about until their Twitter mentions were full or a reporter asked them about it - but the Metros organization liked to keep things dead serious. They are Montreal, the oldest team in the MLH, so old that they were founded BEFORE there was even a MLH, and thus they treat everything with a gravitas it only sometimes deserved.

Finally, after at least 30 minutes of broadcaster banter, it was Shane's turn at the mic.

“Uh, hi everyone. If you don’t know, I’m Shane Hollander. Bonjour, je m’appelle Shane Hollander,” Shane started things off with an awkward wave. The crowd laughed; they were in love with their captain, so only saw Shane’s awkwardness as endearing.

“I have to admit, I’m kind of running out of things to say at these things,” Shane laughed as the crowd roared. “So if this sounds kind of familiar, I’m sorry. Si cela vous semble familier, je m'en excuse.”

“I am so proud of this team, how we battled through one of the longest playoff runs in franchise history,” the longest, but Shane was told that make a declarative statement like that would cause the old columnists to ramble on about the old playoff format and the media relations team would rather not deal with that again this summer, “And how everything clicked at the right time for us again. Drapeau was there to be an absolute wall for us…”

“Fucking right!” Comeau shouted out behind Shane, loud enough to be picked up by the mics.

“Uh, sorry about that. He meant ducking,” Shane said with a smile as the team laughed behind him. “Boiziau blocked so many shots I think his legs are permanently bruised, and Pike-”

The Metros’ fifteenth best player, Ilya’s voice in his head popped up like a devil on his shoulder, which caused Shane to pause to clear his throat of the chuckle that threatened to escape.

“Uh, sorry. Pike was able to read my mind on my wing all year, to the point where his wife Jackie was texting me their grocery lists so that he’d remember to go after practice,” Shane turned and smiled at Hayden, who groaned with his hand over his face.

“That was one time!” Hayden shouted out to the crowd as they roared with approval and the surrounding team started playfully shoving him around.

Shane turned back to the crowd, a little more confident, and ready to recite the rest of the speech he had been working on with his mom ever since he got back from Denver.

Maybe - just maybe - things would be okay.

@youppisbff meg
Shane Hollander is good at many things. Public speaking is not one of them.

> **@rosemary__ mary**
> *In reply to @youppisbff*
> He has gotten better since the first Cup win. That whole speech needs to be studied for how many hockey cliches/60 a guy can fit in two minutes.

@youppisbff meg
In reply to @rosemary__
I still can't believe he mentioned getting pucks in deep and being focused on the next game with a big two points on the line. At a Cup parade! Baby there is no next game

@thebeaverton ✅ The Beaverton
BREAKING: In stunning turn of events, Montreal not on fire after major hockey win.

@mommametros Metros Mother
Did you see that awkward little wave Hollander gave to the camera at one point? Must have been for his mom!

@ol_and_ssons Sara Olsson
So cute that they had all the captains on one bus this year!

@pikeplacehockey #1 hayden pike fan
In reply to @ol_and_ssons
Yeah, I loved that touch this time. Plus bffs Shane and Hayden got to celebrate together!

@joshmetrosfan Josh
Hollander must have spent half the parade on his phone.

@denvermetrosgal mack
In reply to @joshmetrosfan
Imagine being so good at hockey that you can pull an "act like you've been there before" at a championship parade. Because you have. Twice

@RobertTremblayTVA ✅ Rob Tremblay
Local authorities report that over 2 million people attended the Montreal Metros Stanley Cup parade.

June 19, 2018

"Hollander, take a seat," Metros GM Ron Bourque motioned to a chair sitting in front of his desk. "Hell of a season, huh?"

Shane slid into the comfortable leather-upholstered chair. "Yeah, it really was."

It was Shane's annual year-end meeting with the GM. A time to reflect what worked, what didn't, any specific training he'd have to focus on during the summer, and an opportunity to give feedback about the staff and team. He knew that Bourque would do these with every guy on the team; usually, Shane's was near the end so he could also get feedback about his leadership.

Shane knew that his leadership style was not the fiery, speech-making style that his counterparts favored. But he thought that leading by example - scoring lots of goals, always being team-first with the media, *never* missing any practices - would work for this team.

“So, Hollander,” Bourque said as he leaned back in his office chair. “Another season with you leading the team in goals and assists. Kind of becoming expected, huh?”

Shane laughed a little nervously. This was not the tone of meeting he was anticipating, given his year. “Yeah, I mean, I always try to do my best.”

“Still not in the top half in hits, though.” Bourque leaned his head up so he could look down at Shane from his nose, analyzing him like he was something that needed to be looked at with a more cautious eye.

“Well it’s hard to hit anyone when you always have the puck-”

“Still playing soft, huh Hollander?”

Bourque’s eyes narrowed. “Thought someone like you would understand the need to get physical with the other team.”

Oh.

This was getting uncomfortable.

“Hollander, I know that you probably put that Lady Byng trophy right next to your Conn Smythe, but the Metros are a proud organization that aren’t afraid to get in the corners, you know? And that’s something that’s seriously lacking in your game.”

Shane cleared this throat.

“Ron, you know my even strength offence and defence is the best in the league. Both my Corsi and Fenwick are up there with the all-time great seasons, and my WOWY shows how I’m elevating everyone on the ice. My xGF percentage is double anyone else on the team-”

Bourque cut him off again. “You know this isn’t the Corsi Hockey League. Truculence is what wins games, not that fancy stats bull made up by bloggers in their basements who’ve never watched a game.”

Shane swallowed hard. This was… remarkably different from his past meetings with the GM. Before, while Bourque certainly hadn’t seen eye-to-eye with him on the so-called “fancy stats” that Shane had dutifully tracked with help of the video coach, he still respected Shane’s contributions.

Shane tried a different tactic. One that hurt that part of him that nerded out over hockey stats, just a little bit.

“Okay, even if you ignore that, my plus-minus is still among the best in the league.”

He resorted to plus-minus. Plus-minus! If Ilya, or - god forbid - his mother heard him just now, they would be aghast. Sure they all knew the legendary +722 of the legendary Metros defenceman, but that was a stat that deserved context! It was one that only enhanced a career, not made it! It was only extreme outliers and relative to teammates did it actually mean anything, and even then he could cite a dozen stats that did the same thing but better.

Actually, belatedly, he realized Ilya would be laughing at his internal spiral around plus-minus. “Only Shane Hollander, Mr. Hockey Player, would be so mad about a hockey stat that said he was good at hockey. Look at you, my angry kitten, mad that you are so good.”

Yuna Hollander would understand, though.

Sensing that Bourque wasn’t quite as sold on Shane’s internal sell-out, he scraped his mental database. “I also had 10% more blocked shots this year than last year!”

Okay. A physical, good ol’ hockey game stat.

Bourque just hummed in response. He turned in his chair, looking over at the framed photo of himself with the Cup - the first of the three wins, all delivered by Shane Hollander, captain of the Montreal Metros.

“You’re not going to take the Cup to some gay bar for your day, are you?” Bourque said casually.

Shane’s mind, already stressed from desperately trying to prove itself, shorted out. “Uh, no. That uh, hadn’t even crossed my mind.”

Bourque let out a relieved breath. “Good, Hollander. Good. I figured you were smarter than to do some shit like that.” He leaned back in his chair. “Legal told me that I couldn’t bring it up, but I knew you wouldn’t mind.”

Why did he even ask legal about it? When was legal ever involved in these meetings?

Shane felt a knot start to form in his stomach.

This had passed uncomfortable territory. This was straight-up not good.

“Anyways. Hollander. You know I always ask the team for feedback on the leadership group,” Bourque abruptly changed the subject as he shuffled some papers on his desk. “And I got to be honest, the team wasn’t very happy with it this year.”

“Wha-” Shane’s confusion was written all over his face.

“You’re quiet, and soft. It takes real balls to be the captain of Montreal,” Bourque looked down at the papers, looking for something. “Ah yes, one of your teammates said that you were too busy staring at the other players to rally the room?”

Shane’s mouth dropped open. *What the fuck?!*

“What the fuck?” Shane couldn’t stop himself. He knew he shouldn’t, but it was out of his mouth before we could think. “Who said that?”

“Hey, Hollander, all feedback is anonymous,” Bourque quickly gathered the pages together. “But that is a sentiment that was expressed to me multiple times today.”

“None of the guys had said anything to me about that,” Shane sputtered, trying to get a handle on this meeting.

“Do you think they felt comfortable telling you?” Bourque asked mildly. “And really Hollander, that says more than enough to me. We need a guy that everyone’s comfortable with to be the C, some man’s man. Rozanov in Boston, for example.”

Shane’s eyes bugged out. How was this happening. There was no way this could be happening. And *Ilya*? *Ilya* as the prime example of a man’s man? Sure, he had certainly earned that reputation during his earlier years in Boston, but Shane knew the real Rozanov, and that Rozanov had sucked Shane’s cock that morning. This was getting absurd.

“Ron, I won you three Cups-”

“Yes, yes, and we’ll take that into account going into next season,” Bourque waved that off. “I mostly wanted you to know that unless something changes in your personal life, we’re going to take a long, hard look at the C on your sweater. Got it?”

Shane felt numb. He was realizing he probably should have recorded this meeting, like J.J. always did. J.J. recorded it because he could never remember what he needed to work on, though, not as evidence of- of- of whatever was going on here.

Nodding, he stonefaced replied to Bourque, “Got it.”

“Good. I hope to see you take this feedback to heart, okay?” Bourque stood up and held out his hand. In a daze, Shane got up and shook it.

“You can send Comeau in if you see him!” Bourque yelled after him as Shane robotically exited the room.

Opening the door, he saw that Comeau was waiting outside, texting on his phone. Comeau looked up, a carefully blank look on his face.

“Hey, Roy says you can come in,” Shane offered.

Comeau grunted in response as he got up out of the chair.

“If I don’t see you before camp, I hope you have a great summer!” Shane tried extending an olive branch. “I can’t wait to hear what you end up doing with your day with the Cup.”

Comeau just ignored Shane and stepped into Bourque’s office, shutting the door loudly behind him.

Shane swallowed. Hard.

He made his way through the team offices, nodding and waving at the business ops staffers as he passed them in their cubes. He didn't let himself think about that meeting until he got back to his dependable Jeep Cherokee.

But then, finally safe in his car with the door closed, he let all the feelings bubble up to the surface. Hugging the steering wheel as he pressed his forehead into it, he let out a huge, watery sigh.

I can't believe I shook that guy's friggin' hand.

Chapter End Notes

References

Greeting at general aviation; lots of examples but easiest to find was Utah getting welcomed
Magician's failed card trick at the NHL Awards was an actual thing that happened
Stanley Cup riots happen in Montreal and Vancouver semi-regularly
An explainer on what Coris and Fenwick are, also called Shot Attempts and Unblocked Shot Attempts
WOWY is With or Without You, measuring on-ice impact on teammates
xGF is expected goals for, which is a little more modern than this fic but couldn't just leave Corsi in there when the world has moved past it
Corsi Hockey League was a derogatory term towards analytics-forward writers
Truculent became a meme after a GM used it to describe what he wants in a team (ironically, this was used by the visible LGBT advocate in the NHL, but is very indicative of the old school hockey mentality)
Good ol' hockey game is a lyric in a song about hockey
I can't believe I shook that guy's friggin' hand is a direct quote from Kris Draper after the infamous Avalanche-Red Wings brawl

Chapter 3: July 1, 2018

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

James:
Hello everyone, welcome to the 2018 edition of TSN's Free Agent Frenzy. I am James MacDonald, and we are currently an hour away from the start of free agency.

Joining me for the next three hours are Doug Moranis and Gord Fleury.

There are plenty of free agents on the board but of course, the biggest name of the day is centre Ilya Rozanov, who stunned the hockey world by electing free agency instead of re-signing with the Boston Raiders. Rozanov, who has won the Hart, Art Ross, Rocket Richard, and the Stanley Cup, is certainly the biggest free agent to become available since the start of the salary cap era.

Gord:
Rozanov signed that big deal with Boston right after his entry level contract expired, but there were some eyebrows raised at the time that Boston wasn't able to lock him up for the full eight years. Six years is nothing to sneeze at, but when you look around the league, the trend is to try to get your big stars locked up.

Doug:
There was nothing coming out of Boston that led anyone to believe Rozanov was anything but happy with the situation there. He has his on-ice reputation, sure, but by all accounts he's been a great captain for the Raiders and certainly contributes on the scoresheet.

And Boston doesn't believe they are completely out of the picture. While they can't sign him for the full eight years anymore, they have a seven year deal on the table for Rozanov in case he does want to return.

James:
But will there be any hard feelings there? It wouldn't feel great that Rozanov decided to test the market instead of re-upping with the Raiders. Would definitely have to question his loyalty to that franchise.

Doug:
There might be, but winning solves a lot of issues, and the Raiders haven't done much except for win with Rozanov on the roster.

Gord:
It has been a while since they won the Stanley Cup, though, and there's got to be some questions about if Rozanov can take them back to that point.

Doug:
There's still "Ilya Rozanov" stamped on the Cup, though, and that's experience that you can't

ignore. I don't think any team is going to care how long it's been, especially with the chance to get a perpetual Hart Trophy candidate on their roster.

James:
Have you been hearing of any front-runners for Rozanov?

Doug:
Rozanov's camp has been keeping everything close to the chest. Like I said, there were no hard feelings towards Boston, and it wouldn't be a surprise if he stayed put.

Gord:
It's where his stuff is.

Doug:
Exactly. But otherwise, Rozanov's landing place is the biggest unknown in the MLH. I've heard that upwards of twenty teams are prepared to send him an offer, including some teams that have the number one centre position set.

Gord:
But how many teams can say that Rozanov wouldn't be an upgrade at centre? The Metros and Admirals, maybe? And that's if Hunter can keep up his pace as he enters his mid-thirties.

James:
Really, all thirty-one teams should be preparing Ilya Rozanov an offer.

Doug:
James, while the salary cap has gone up, it hasn't gone up that much. Unless there are other moves in the works, there are teams that are already right up against the cap that still need to re-sign their own free agents.

James:
And thanks for the segue. While all eyes are on the free agents, there are still some trade rumors rumbling around. Doug, anything that you've heard?

Doug:
After a quieter-than-usual draft day, there has been more buzz around the league with potential moves. With the cap not going up as much as expected, there are teams out there that need to offload some problem contracts.

Gord:
Montreal in particular I've heard has been active. GM Ron Bourque has the reputation of only making his move at the trade deadline, which has gotten him three Cups in four years. But my sources are telling me that he's been blowing up the phones more than usual for this time of year.

It's hard to imagine why - they just won the Cup, and all their major pieces are locked up for at least next season - but it sounds like the Metros will be making some sort of move today.

Canada Day. The first day of the league season and also the national holiday for Shane's home country. The MLH had to have done that on purpose - ensure that Canadians had a guaranteed day off so they could follow all the free agency news. Ignore that the league started in 1917, before games were even broadcast on radio. It was un-patriotic to think otherwise. They probably got all the free agent news on telegraph.

Shane and Ilya were at Shane's cottage, having gone there as soon as they got back from the MLH Awards in Las Vegas. Both were as eager as the other to start their summer in seclusion together.

All the hamburger fixings were ready, fresh from the refrigerator. Shane might have been a bundle of nerves, waiting to see what offers would come through for his boyfriend, to see if what was left of their plan would work, but he wasn't going to use that as an excuse to not enjoy a Canada Day barbecue.

Ilya had turned the TV to TSN, and with the cottage's doors open they could hear the analysts chat faintly in the background while they were outside on the patio.

It wasn't noon yet, so technically no teams could reach out to Ilya. There was another offer from the Raiders waiting for him in his email, with a mind-blowing number of zeros and a full no-move clause, but Ilya didn't even bother opening it.

"How many burgers do you want?" Shane asked as he lit the grill.

"Does it matter? You're going to make eight no matter what I say," Ilya teased, stretched across the outdoor couches.

"Fuck you, that was one time," Shane paused, taking a look at the ingredients he had out. He turned red.

"Moy pomidor, did you do it again?" Ilya grinned broadly.

"Shut up! We ate all of them last time anyways," Shane somehow turned even redder as he tried to figure out how to retroactively divide the recipe in half.

"Yes but I was like a big ball of food afterwards, couldn't even fuck you," Ilya shifted in his seat. "I don't want to be too stuffed for when you give me reward for being your sugar daddy."

"Sugar daddy? Of course you'd know that one."

"Yes, with my new contract I am going to be your very rich sugar daddy and be able to treat you to all the fancy watches that you'd want. You'd never have to do photoshoot again," Ilya conspicuously licked his lips. "You would just have to do a few things for me, yes?"

The ingredients were forgotten, Shane's pupils blown. "A few things, huh? What would those be?"

“Come over and I can give you a preview.”

Climbing in Ilya’s lap, he ground down on Ilya’s lap. “Fuck, you’re hard already?”

“Always when I’m around you,” Ilya said honestly before pulling Shane’s face towards him.

“Just for a bit, the grill’s on,” Shane mumbled into Ilya’s mouth between kisses.

Ilya couldn’t give a fuck about the grill at the moment. He could, however, give a fuck to Shane. That sounded like a pretty good idea, actually, and he started moving his hands towards Shane’s shorts to try to slide them off.

Suddenly, a cell phone started buzzing, interrupting what was going to be a very nice pre-lunch quickie.

“Is that yours?” Shane asked, pulling back from Ilya’s face.

He shook his head. “No, mine is in my pocket.”

Shane sighed. “I really don’t want to get that.”

“Then stay here!”

“No, what if it’s important?” Shane extracted himself from Ilya’s lap to minor protests. He momentarily fixed his shorts, then strode over to the grill area, where his phone was still ringing.

Shane’s face scrunched up in confusion after seeing the caller ID. “Why would Farah be calling me today?”

Ilya shrugged as Shane answered the phone.

“Hey Farah, what’s up?”

Shane moved back over to the couch to sit next to Ilya.

“How much thought did you put into your no-move list that we submitted this morning?” Farah, Shane’s agent, cut straight to the chase.

“Uh, the normal amount?” Shane looked over at Ilya, confusion written all over both of their faces as Ilya mouthed “What?” while Shane shook him off. “Tried to only include the teams nearby or the ones that wouldn’t be able to get me.”

Shane closed his eyes, thinking back to the list he emailed to Farah to fax to the league. “Ottawa, obviously. Detroit. Both New York teams, though there’s no way either of them can get me with the amount of trade protection they’ve given out to their guys.”

“And would you be fine with any of those four?” Farah’s voice was tense, clipped.

Shane sat up a little straighter. “Hold on, Farah. What’s going on?”

Silence on the phone.

Then Farah let out a sigh.

“Montreal is trying to move you. Today.”

“What!?” Shane gave up all pretense of sitting. He shot up out of the couch, running his free hand through his hair.

Ilya shot up right after, moving to put his hand on Shane’s good shoulder.

“Montreal has been working on a trade for the past couple of weeks,” Shane could faintly hear some clicking on the line as Farah dug through her emails. “They approached me this morning about how willing you’d be to waive your no-move to go to Phoenix or Cleveland.”

“Phoenix or Cleveland,” repeating Farah’s last three words was all Shane could handle right now. His brain was done. Nothing was making sense.

No, this makes perfect sense, the little voice in his head said quietly. *They want to get rid of you and the easiest way to do that would be to send you to the furthest, most irrelevant corners of MLH.*

Farah’s voice broke through the fog. “Obviously, all the power is on our side here. We negotiated the no-move, so unless they’ve worked out a trade with one of those four teams you sent over, you’re staying a Metro.” Farah’s voice grew soft. “If you do want to waive your no-move, that’s also okay. From what you told me, it might be the best thing for you. Personally.”

The phone crackled as she took a deep breath. “But as your agent, I do want to add that Montreal does give you more financial opportunity,” Farah paused. “Though I don’t anticipate fewer brand deals if you end up in Ottawa or Detroit. Or even either New York team.”

“Oh yeah, no. I mean no, I don’t want to waive my no-move,” Ilya’s eyebrows shot up as Shane’s side of the conversation became much more clear. “I chose those four teams for a reason, and it’s their problem now.” Shane glanced over at Ilya, who was gripping Shane’s shoulder even harder. “Just- just let me know as soon as you hear anything.”

“I will,” Farah promised. “From what I’ve heard, Bourque wants this done today to free up your cap hit for free agency.”

Shane put the pieces together in his head, still staring at the very large, very Russian, very much not signed to any team at the moment hockey player standing next to him.

“They want to sign Rozanov.”

“They want to sign Rozanov,” Farah confirmed. “Not that there’s anything official - they don’t want accusations of tampering, and I’m his agent as well so shouldn’t be privy to this information -”

We should let her know about us, Shane thought off-handedly. He hadn't told Farah that he was gay, or that he had come out to his team, but he probably should.

What with whatever is happening now.

"- But given your comparable cap hits and roles on your teams, and that he hasn't re-signed with Boston, it's a good bet."

Shane could laugh. He wanted to laugh. This was, objectively, funny. Or ironic. The Montreal Metros wanted to get rid of him for being too gay, and wanted to replace him with an equally gay Ilya Rozanov.

Okay, not equally gay. He could mentally hear Ilya's protests that he was simply bisexual, that he liked both, while Shane was *super gay*. It was one of those arguments that Shane always rolled his eyes at but secretly loved. Well, it probably wasn't too secret, because it usually ended up with at least one of them having an orgasm in the next 30 minutes.

"Well, I guess it's a good thing that I didn't include Boston on my list," Shane chuckled wetly.

Ilya was still staring at him intensely with wide eyes. God, what it must sound like, only hearing half of the conversation.

He let out a deep breath.

"Okay, so it's a definite no to Phoenix and Cleveland but just- I don't think everything else is an immediate no, so if there are any other potential trades, pass it along. I'm here with… I'm here with my partner, and I want to discuss with them before making any decisions."

If Farah was surprised at the mention of a conspicuously non-gendered partner, she didn't let it show in her voice. "Thanks, Shane. I'll forward any potential moves to your email, so I'd recommend keeping your phone close to you today," Farah said. Her voice went soft. "I know this probably isn't the way you wanted to spend your Canada Day, but we'll get through it."

"Thanks Farah, I'll keep an eye out," Shane hung up, then shakily pulled the phone away from his ear.

"What? What is going on with Phoenix and Cleveland? Who wants to sign me?" Ilya's grip on Shane's shoulder grew tighter.

"Montreal is trying to trade me," Shane swallowed, not anticipating how hard it was to get these words out into the world. "Today. They had deals with Phoenix and Cleveland, but my no-move prevented them…"

"Oh moy lyubovnik, thank goodness for Farah and your no-move I think I would die if I had to sign with Phoenix or Cleveland just to stay near you and your freckles," Ilya shifted, pulling Shane into his arms.

“Phoenix has an internal cap so there’s no way they’d sign you if they traded for me,” Shane mumbled into Ilya’s shoulder. Then he pulled back slightly. “You would have followed me to Phoenix or Cleveland?”

“Of course! That is the plan, yes? I sign with team to be near you. It would be even better, I think, because we would be on same team and not two hours away.” Ilya started rubbing Shane’s back.

Shane buried his head back into Ilya’s shoulder. “Montreal also wants to sign you, so if I get traded to Ottawa we’ll still be two hours away.”

“Hollander, they say you have highest hockey IQ but they must be lying because you are being so stupid right now,” Ilya smiled slightly as he felt Shane snort into his shoulder. “I would not sign with the stupid Metros, not even if they are the last team in MLH and offered me five billion dollars and all the fast cars I wanted.”

“Really?”

“Of course! What, you think I am willing to sign with Ottawa Centaurs because I enjoy the city? Ottawa is boring. So boring. It must be the most boring city in the world. But it would also let me be close to the very boring hockey player who I love very much. And I would be willing to move to any city in MLH or AHL or SHL or Liiga or even SPHL if it meant I got to be near Shane Hollander.”

“The SPHL, huh? I didn’t even know you knew about them.”

“They do well on hockeyfights.com.” Ilya nuzzled into Shane’s hair.

James:
Welcome back from that commercial break. Gord, I think you were saying that you had something big?

Gord:
Earlier I mentioned that Montreal GM Ron Bourque was very active in the trade market. I’m now hearing that the Metros are shopping captain Shane Hollander.

James:
That certainly would be quite a bombshell if true.

Gord:
It would be. It’s hard to think of why Hollander, fresh off another Conn Smythe and Art Ross win, would be on the block for Montreal.

Doug:
Hollander has two more years on his deal, with a limited no-move clause that only allows

him to be traded to four teams. I certainly can't imagine any reason why Montreal would want to trade away their captain, and his contract certainly won't make it easy.

Gord:
On the surface there's no good reason to trade Hollander. But there have been rumblings out of Montreal that all is not well in the province of Quebec, as they'd say. Something happened between their Cup win and now that has Metros GM Ron Bourque looking for a change.

James:
What possibly could have gone wrong to want them to trade Hollander? As you said, he just won another Conn Smythe, and finished top three in Hart trophy voting for the fifth year in a row. These are the kind of guys that you have to tank for, and even then it's no guarantee.

Gord:
I'm not saying that Bourque is correct to look for a change. Montreal knows that Hollander is an absolute superstar who bleeds bleu, blanc, et rouge. But nearing a decade, it might be that the Metros are looking for a fresh voice in the room.

Doug:
And with Ilya Rozanov available, the Metros may feel that it's the perfect opportunity. I've got a source saying that the Metros are putting together a big offer for Rozanov as we speak, though obviously any details are confidential until free agency opens in about five minutes.

James:
But to try to make that move, and to even let it slip out that they're trying to trade their captain, that's certainly risky. There's no guarantee that they get Rozanov. Doug, earlier you even said that there were at least twenty teams putting together an offer.

Doug:
That's right, and honestly I don't know why Montreal is making this move.

James:
Certainly doesn't make sense today, when at the draft a lot of teams had a lot more capital they'd be willing to give up for Hollander.

Gord:
Hollander was also due a big signing bonus today, which probably scared a lot of teams that could fit him under their caps. But with less real money in the picture now, a lot more options open up.

Doug:
But remember, Hollander has a four-team no-move. Unless one of those four teams comes up with a suitable package, Hollander gets final say whether he stays or goes.

James:
Well, this Free Agent Frenzy certainly got a lot more interesting. Fitting that Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, rivals ever since they got drafted in 2008, would continue to battle for the headlines even today.

@TheRealGordFleury ✅ Gord Fleury
Sources say that Montreal is closing in on a deal to trade captain Shane Hollander.

@hollysgirl katie
WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK

@ol_and_ssons Sara Olsson
Is Montreal still drunk from the Cup?? Why the actual hell would they trade Hollander?

@kachica_phx maria
PHOENIX PICK UP THE PHONE HOLLANDER IS AVAILABLE

> **@joshmetrosfan Josh**
> *In reply to @kachina_phx*
> You know he has a no move? And that Phoenix is probably not one of his teams?
>
> **@kachica_phx maria**
> *In reply to @joshmetrosfan*
> A girl can dream

@freecandy Brooks Toepick
Shane Hollander. Three-time Stanley Cup Champion. Reigning Conn Smythe winner. Perpetual Hart Trophy finalist. Calder Trophy winner. THAT Shane Hollander????

@wisniewski ✅ Paul Wisniewski
I… I'm speechless.

@havefunoutthere Trevor Greene
Wait but does that mean a team can get BOTH Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov?

> **@milesnsmiles Colorado Hockey Girl**
> *In reply to @havefunoutthere*
> omg I didn't even think of that!
>
> **@royalpain gwen**
> *In reply to @havefunoutthere*
> WAIT can you even imagine?

@Granlund Granlund
Hearing Hollander to Cleveland (G5)

@james_macdonald ✅ James MacDonald
As @DougMoranisTSN mentioned on Free Agent Frenzy, Montreal is putting together a big

contract offer to Ilya Rozanov. They may see him as a better long-term fit, especially with Hollander's history of concussions.

@star_banner ✅ Robert Banner
League sources say Hollander to the Royals.

@makeitmakecens Abigail
Hollander and Rozanov both play for Ottawa. Imagine.

> **@thatshockey24 Doug Hockey**
> *In reply to @makeitmakecens*
> Ottawa? If Ottawa even gets one of those two I'll print out this tweet and eat it

@The_Blueline Ryan Johnson
Oh shit, Boston can get Rozanov, Hollander, and Kylington here

@metrosbrad Brad
There's no way the Metros are trading Hollander, right?

@viewsfromtorsix Tom Hunter
But let's say that the Metros do trade Hollander. There's nobody as good as him, so it's gotta be for like, three firsts, a roster player, and a prospect. At minimum.

> **@MLHethan Ethan Williams**
> *In reply to @viewsfromtorsix*
> Throw in a third on the Metros side to round it out and I think that'll get it done

> **@raidersnroz sammy**
> *In reply to @MLHethan*
> What is this, HFBoards?

@boringhollander Boring Shane Hollander
What.

@DougMoranisTSN ✅ Doug Moranis
Trade is one for one: Jesper Lundell for Shane Hollander

Shane stared at his phone.

The grill was still on, the too many hamburger ingredients forgotten as soon as he got the call from Farah.

Both he and Ilya immediately started scrolling Twitter. It sucked, but a lot of times the reporters got news of a trade before the players in the actual trade did.

Ilya had told him a story where once, during media day at training camp, one of his teammates was doing something with the social media manager's phone for the Raider's Instagram, and a Twitter notification popped up that he was traded.

At least he was going to be at home, with Ilya, when he was traded. And not doing something stupid for the social team.

"I'm not going to be a Metro anymore, am I?" Shane threw out there while both of them scrolled, TSN still playing in the background.

"No," Ilya replied simply.

Shane kept swiping down, refreshing his feed constantly.

Then.

There.

The tweet from Doug Moranis.

Doug was a national reporter. *The* national reporter. If he reported on something, it was gospel, as far as the hockey world was concerned. Shane had watched him on TSN growing up, and it was surreal sometimes seeing Doug talk about him.

But now, in ten words, Doug Moranis had marked a shift in Shane's life.

Shane stared at the tweet, watching as retweets and replies wracked up.

"Who the fuck is Jesper Lundell?"

Ah. Ilya had seen the tweet too.

"Top four defenceman for Ottawa. Stay at home type," Shane responded automatically. "Reliable, but not going to win any Norris Trophies."

"They traded you for Jesper fucking Lundell?" Ilya stared in shock. "One for one? Will the league even allow?"

Shane laughed wetly. "There have been worse trades before. I mean, in the '70s-"

"But none of them were stupid enough to trade away Shane Hollander!" Ilya declared.

They sat in silence. Shane's phone started vibrating as the news spread, with friends, family, and reporters reaching out.

"I'm going to Ottawa," Shane whispered as the realization swept over him.

Ilya's head jerked up. "What?"

"They traded me to Ottawa," Shane, wide-eyed, looked at Ilya. "Do you… Do you think they'd still try to sign you?"

Ilya's wide eyes met Shane's. That wasn't something they even dreamed of. Sure, Ilya joked about it when Farah reached out, but there was no way that Montreal was going to trade Shane within the division.

Until they did.

The enormity of the news had them sit in shock until Shane's phone started ringing, "Ron Bourque" showing on the caller ID.

Shane answered the phone, already knowing what Ron - no, Bourque, he didn't deserve the familiarity of a first name - was going to say.

"Hello?"

"Hollander. Hope you're having a good Canada Day."

Shane didn't respond. He didn't need to, and more importantly, he didn't want to.

"Anyways, I'm going to cut to the chase. You've been good, real good for us, but we felt the team needed to go in a different direction. We got a great offer, and so we traded you to Ottawa."

Great offer?!?

Shane stayed silent, biting his tongue. As much as he wanted to yell, scream, berate this man - what was the point? He was already traded - for Jesper fucking Lundell - and Ron Bourque no longer had any say over his life.

"Well, er, I wish you all the best with the Centaurs. They should be reaching out to you soon." Bourque seemed uncomfortable with Shane's silence. Good.

"Uh, goodbye Hollander," Bourque said, Shane ending the call before Bourque finished saying his name.

"He said they got a great offer," Shane started laughing hysterically. "They traded me one for one for a defenceman you didn't even fucking know, and Bourque said it was a great offer."

"They are just - posing?"

"Posturing," Shane supplied.

Ilya added it to his mental database. "Posturing. They know it's a shit deal, but they talked themselves into it. They don't want to look bad." Then Ilya grinned wolfishly. "I cannot wait to see what they are saying online."

Shane groaned and put his head in his hands. "There isn't anything I want to do less right now, quite frankly."

@comeauyoudidnt METROS ARE CUP CHAMPS
Okay but just because Doug Moranis tweeted it doesn't mean it's true, right? Right???

> **@raidersnroz sammy**
> *In reply to @comeauyoudidnt*
> Oh honey

@maydaymaydaymayday April
I refuse to believe this trade is true.

@wisniewski ✅ Paul Wisniewski
Wow. This has got to go down as one of the most lopsided trades in MLH history.

@ol_and_ssons Sara Olsson
If Lundell was the price for Hollander, how were more teams not in on this?

@ottapoppy Poppy
I'm going to miss Lundell but we just got SHANE FUCKING HOLLANDER

@MetrosMTL ✅ Metros Montréal
Les Metros acquièrent le défenseur Jesper Lundell des Centaurs d'Ottawa en échange de Shane Hollander.

The Metros have acquired defenceman Jesper Lundell from the Ottawa Centaurs in exchange for Shane Hollander.

#GoMetrosGo

> **@rosemary__ mary**
> *In reply to @MetrosMTL ✅*
> Delete this before anybody sees

> **@thatshockey24 Doug Hockey**
> *In reply to @MetrosMTL ✅*
> Hacked??

> **@leblondpat Patrick Leblond**
> *In reply to @MetrosMTL ✅*
> Please be lying

@freecandy Brooks Toepick
If Montreal doesn't get Rozanov this has to be an all-time fumble, right?

@RobertTremblayTVA ✅ Rob Tremblay
The Metros defense was a real weak point last season. This trade for Lundell will go a long way in shoring it up.

@shawncmpeters Shawn Peters
In reply to @RobertTremblayTVA ✅
Sure but is the answer really to trade Shane Hollander?

@matt_gostly ✅ Matt Gostly
I get the initial reactions to the Hollander-Lundell trade. On its surface, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. But if you put 200 hockey men in a room, with a one goal lead in Game 7 on the line, they're going to want Lundell.

@youppisbff meg
In reply to @matt_gostly ✅
Are you stupid or something?

Chapter End Notes

References

It's where his stuff is is a popular saying for when a free agent chooses to re-sign with his team because moving is harder than staying
The Cleveland Barons and Arizona (Phoenix) Coyotes were the two most recent inactive (versus relocated, technically) teams, so I chose to make fun of them versus active franchises
Hockeyfights.com is a real website dedicated to the rating an analysis of all hockey fights
The (notoriously unreliable) E-system rating was used by one blogger that became a running joke in the early days of hockey twitter
Direct reference to the famous draft day tweet Oh shit, Boston can get Barzal, Connor, and Kylington here (Boston did not get Barzal, Connor, and Kylington there)
Malkin to the Kings was a long-running rumor that became a long-running joke
The infamous HFBoards trade rumor and proposal forum, where every trade proposal had oodles of draft picks attached to "balance things out"
The tweet that inspired this whole fic (yes, seriously, this single tweet): Trade is one for one: Adam Larsson for Taylor Hall
Free candy was an early hockey twitter/blogosphere nickname for Brooks Orpik
200 hockey men is now a derogatory term for old-school NHL moves; the term was coined from an article about the trade this fic is based on.

Here it is, the chapter that I had initially set out to write and then a whole multi-chapter arc sprung from it. In my defense, I wanted there to be more of a reason behind the trade than what we got in real life (which I still don't fully understand).

Chapter 4: July 1, 2018 (Still)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

James:
Welcome back to TSN's Free Agent Frenzy coverage. As a reminder, I am James MacDonald, and joining me at the desk are Doug Moranis and Gord Fleury.

While we are still paying close attention to free agent signings, they've all been overshadowed by a blockbuster trade that, frankly, none of us saw coming. Doug?

Doug:
The Montreal Metros have traded centre and captain Shane Hollander to the Ottawa Centaurs for defenceman Jesper Lundell.

I'm told that the Metros have been trying to move Hollander for a while, and had a couple of trades ready to go that Hollander rejected. Hollander has a modified no-move clause, with only a four team trade list, and it appears Ottawa was one of the teams on the list.

Look, Lundell is a good player, but he's not the same caliber of player that Hollander is. If Montreal wasn't getting an offer they liked from a team on Hollander's list, they should have held onto him.

Gord:
Doug, I have to agree. Hollander is a special, special player. Generational. I wouldn't be surprised if he was on hockey's Mount Rushmore by the time he hangs them up. I just don't see how this trade makes sense.

James:
Now Doug, you had mentioned earlier that Montreal was going after Rozanov. I'm assuming that's still the case?

Doug:
Yes, and Montreal has made it their number one priority to sign Rozanov. I'm told that they're prepared to make him the highest-paid player in the league.

James:
Free agency opened 30 minutes ago, and we haven't heard anything on the Rozanov front. Would he even want to go to his old rival's team? Hollander left some pretty big shoes to fill, and it's got to be tiring to constantly be compared to him. Montreal would probably intensify those comparisons, especially if Rozanov doesn't manage to win the Cup with them in 2019.

Gord:
Rozanov's a huge competitor. He thrives off that sort of thing, and I think he'd be jumping at the chance to show Hollander what he could do with the Metros. Now, I don't think that means he'll be signing with Montreal, but I don't think it's off the table.

James:
Let me throw it out there: Ottawa just showed that they aren't afraid of making a big move, trading for Hollander. They have the second-most cap space in the league even after you add Hollander's deal. Could they be a potential landing spot for Ilya Rozanov?

Gord:
Oh wow, imagine Hollander and Rozanov together? Those are two superstars, and we've seen superstars clash when put on one team. Sometimes the egos can't handle it. And these guys have been rivals before they even entered the league. Do you think they even like each other?

Doug:
We all saw them dominate during the past two All-Star Games. And while the MLH is not the same as the All-Stars, Ottawa has got to be salivating at the chance to bring those two together. After all, when do you get the chance to have the two best players on the same team?

An unknown number with a 613 area code popped up on Shane's phone. His phone had been blowing up ever since the trade was announced, but mostly with his saved contacts.

Simultaneously, a text notification from Farah appeared.

Ottawa Centaurs GM Adam Patrick is going to call you.

Trusting his agent, Shane answered the phone. "Hello?"

"Shane Hollander?" the voice on the other end asked. "Your agent Farah gave me this number…"

Montreal didn't even give Ottawa his number, Shane thought with some bitterness.

"Yeah, that's me."

"Oh good! This is Adam, Adam Patrick. I'm general manager of the Ottawa Centaurs," the man's warm voice said through the phone.

"Hi Adam, I'd say it's great to meet you, but I got to admit, I'm still in shock…"

"Yeah, yeah, totally understandable Shane. I wanted to call to officially welcome you to the Ottawa Centaurs. We were surprised that you were available, but were honoured that you included us on your no-move list."

Shane nodded, forgetting that Adam couldn't see him momentarily. "Uh, yeah. I'm from Ottawa, and grew up a big Cens fan. My parents still live there."

Somehow, Shane could hear Adam smile through the phone. “That’s what we heard! So glad to get confirmation, though honestly if you had hated us, we would have traded for you anyways and just tried to change your mind.” Adam chuckled before he switched to a slightly more serious tone. “I know you’ve spent your whole career with Montreal, so this is going to be a big change for you. We’re hoping to make this as smooth of a transition as possible.”

“I appreciate that.”

“Our VP of hockey administration, Julia, is going to email you with some basic info about the team, the facilities, and general Ottawa info. Where a lot of the guys live, real estate agents, moving companies, grocery stores and the like. Not that you need info about Ottawa.”

Shane smiled slightly at that.

“Julia is your guide to everything Centaurs. If you have any trouble at all, don’t hesitate to give her a call.”

“Thanks Adam, I’ll keep an eye out for that email from Julia.”

“Great, great,” Adam paused a bit. “We’ll also want to have you do some media, welcome you to the team, get you some face time with our beat writers… Are you near Ottawa right now, by chance?”

Shane looked out over the lake in the back of his cottage. Ilya had gotten up from the couch, resigned to the fact that Shane was *not* going to go back to what they were doing before the news broke about the trade. Which was, in order, having sex and then make hamburgers.

Priorities.

Instead Ilya had gone to turn off the grill and clean up the ingredients that had been sitting out for the past hour. And probably check his email. If TSN was right, he had around twenty different eye-popping offers in his inbox right now.

“I’m a couple hours outside of Ottawa at my cottage, actually,” Shane decided to admit.

“Ah, the Canada Day cottage time, huh?” Adam chuckled. “Well I don’t want to interrupt that any more than I already have. If you’re not able to get down to the arena in the next few days, we might want to set something up on Skype. I just know our media is going to be itching to talk to you.”

“Uh, yeah. I’ll see if I’m taking a trip into the city this week. I was kind of planning on staying out here all summer, but…”

“...But you were also planning on being a Metro too, I get it.”

Shane liked Adam. Maybe it was because he wasn’t Ron Bourque, which was a huge plus in his column already, but Adam Patrick seemed like a more modern GM. And more modern meant more open-minded. Well, he hoped. It was honestly a pretty low bar at the moment. He honestly would prefer that one GM that beat that fan with the shoe to Bourque at the moment.

“Listen, Shane. I know we haven’t been the most successful team, but I’m aiming to change that. Our ownership is also dedicated to changing it, and has decided to invest a lot more heavily both on the hockey side and the business side,” Adam hesitated. “What are your thoughts on us trying to sign Ilya Rozanov as well?”

Well.

Ilya Rozanov, whose back was currently to Shane, leaning over the kitchen counter with his ass sticking out while he scrolled on his phone, was oblivious. Ilya Rozanov, who was the second best player in the MLH (though Ilya would vehemently deny that, saying that Shane was the second best, at which point Shane would probably bring up Scott Hunter just to rile Ilya up). Ilya Rozanov, who was Shane’s absolute favorite person in the world. Ilya Rozanov, who was planning on signing with whatever team was closest to Shane’s team, success be damned.

Except for the Metros. Fuck the Metros.

Shane’s thoughts were a *lot* more than what Adam probably expected.

“Wow. Well, Rozanov is a fantastic player,” Shane picked his next words carefully. “I always have fun with him at the All-Star Game, and he’s a great guy.”

He could hear Adam’s sigh of relief. “Oh thank God. I’ve heard about your rivalry, but was never sure if that was a media thing or if it was real.”

“Oh, we’re competitive as hell but there’s no real animosity there,” Shane grinned. “Outside of when he gets mad when he loses to me. He still hates that I won the Calder over him back in 2010.”

Adam burst out laughing, staticky through the phone. “I love that! Anyways, we have an offer out to him right now. Who knows if he’ll sign with us, but I wanted to check with you to make sure that you were okay with it.”

Shane was touched. He was on the team for all of five minutes, and Adam was willing to listen to him more than Bourque ever did.

“What about the rest of the guys? I know me and Ilya - Rozanov - would take up a lot of the attention,” Shane thought back to the ugly stares and cold indifference of the Metros. “Will they be okay with that?”

“Hell, I think they’d just be glad that we got any attention,” Adam laughed again. “We need to put butts in seats, and the team knows that you guys would help us do that.”

The stark reminder of Ottawa’s extremely different position from Montreal startled Shane. So used to playing in front of a packed barn for his entire career - even on the road, because Metros fans were known to travel - he forgot that some teams would play in half-empty arenas. Ottawa was one of the worst offenders there, with the Metros’ AHL team out-drawing them some nights.

“I’ll try my best,” Shane promised. “And I’ll look out for that email from Julia.”

“Right. Well, again, welcome to the team, Shane. I’ll let you get back to your cottage and try not to bug you any further.”

Shane hung up and sat silently for a moment.

He was a Centaur.

An Ottawa Centaur.

What. The. Fuck.

“Ilya!” Shane called out.

“Are you done?” Ilya called back, not moving from his spot at the counter.

Looking down at his phone, he still had hundreds of unread texts to go through. He should probably call his parents back soon, and would need to discuss the move with Farah, and - fuck - Hayden and J.J. deserved a call at least.

But nothing immediate. Nothing more important than Ilya.

“For now,” Shane got up and walked over to hug Ilya from behind. “I’m a fucking Ottawa Centaur.”

Ilya turned around in Shane’s arms. “Yes, yes. It is all over TSN.” He grinned widely. “All this time I was thinking I would have to wear stupid Ottawa cartoon on my chest and now you get to do this!”

“Fuck you, I loved that logo when I was kid.”

“Were you the one who drew it? Is baby Shane the reason for the ugly Centaurs logo?”

“Shut up!”

Ilya stopped his teasing. “Shane. You… okay? With this? I know it’s not the plan.”

Sighing, Shane shrugged. “I kinda threw the plan out the night I won the Cup. This has to be the best case scenario.”

“No, best case scenario is that the Metros are not assholes,” Ilya brought his hand up to run his thumb over Shane’s freckles. “And now we have to find another team for me. I do not want to sign with asshole team, and Toronto and Buffalo are just as far as Boston was.”

Shane’s face blossomed into a smile. “Well you’re not going to believe this.”

“What?”

“The Cens GM asked me if I would be okay playing with you. They still want to sign you too,” Shane couldn’t stop grinning.

After all the shorting out Shane's brain had done over the past few weeks, it was Ilya's turn to be speechless.

"Both?" he whispered.

"Both," Shane confirmed.

He crushed Shane to his chest, head buried in Shane's hair, tears starting to well in his eyes. "Fuck, Hollander. We're going to be fucking unstoppable."

"Ilya," Shane's voice was watery too. "We don't know what their offer is yet. They could be offering you a shit deal."

"I would play league minimum if I could play with you," Ilya declared. "You would be my sugar daddy, and I would give you a blow job every time you assist on my goals."

"Fuck, that few?" Shane teased. "You sure you're not trying to punish me?"

"Brat. That's on top of normal daily blowjob."

"Mmmm. A normal daily blowjob, huh?" Shane relaxed into Ilya's arms. "You know we never finished what we started earlier."

"Whose fault was that, Shane?"

"The fucking Metros."

Ilya snorted. "Yes, the fucking Metro cockblocked us." He sighed and released Shane, causing Shane to whine. "I should probably look at all the very nice offers all the teams sent me to get them to play for them."

Normally, the GMs try to court the big name free agents in person, traveling to their agent's office or flying the player out to wine and dine them. Ilya told Farah that he wasn't interested in that, all he wanted was the offer. "All teams are the same," he told Farah, when in truth he didn't want to give up another minute of his summer with Shane.

Plus, Ilya had been in the league for almost ten years. At this point, between All-Star Games and MLH Awards ceremonies and the shuffle of teammates in and out of Boston, he had a pretty good idea of how all the teams operated. Which teams treated the players well, which ones skimped out on benefits, which one didn't even have a fucking practice rink.

Not that it mattered.

He looked at Shane, who had started to wilt after the adrenaline of the day had started to wear off. "You will be okay, yes?"

"Yeah. I should probably call my parents."

"No, moy lyubovnik, you should stay with me and look at offers," grinning, Ilya continued. "I heard from Marly that some teams send silly things to try to convince you to sign."

“What, really?”

“Yes, like little videos with celebrities,” Ilya walked over to the primary bedroom where his tablet was. “I hope one of the teams sends a dog video!”

“A dog video?”

“Yes! If a team sends me a video of cute dogs, I may also have to change the plan and sign with them instead.”

“Fuck you, you’re not going to sign because of a dog video.”

“I’m not *not* going to sign because of a dog video,” Ilya pronounced as he opened up the email app.

There were a LOT of emails.

His eyes scanned the subject lines, reading the English as fast as he could. It looked like all 31 teams had sent him some sort of offer, which… fuck.

It felt good to be wanted.

He glanced quickly over at Shane, who had just gone through the experience of being not wanted. But Shane had either gotten over it quicker than Ilya would have thought or - more likely - he was burying his feelings to deal with later.

That was fine. Ilya would be there for him. Ilya would always be there for Shane.

Ilya tapped on the most recent email, one from Phoenix. They must have sent it after it was confirmed that Shane wouldn’t waive his no-move.

Nothing special in this one, just a lot of zeros for a long time. Boring, honestly.

Ilya and Shane methodically went through the emails, pausing only a few times at the offers that contained a little extra. A couple of teams had photoshopped Ilya into their uniform, like it would help him visualize signing with them.

One team had gotten a local celebrity to record a video telling him how great their city was, except the FanMail watermark was still on the video and the celebrity did not say Ilya or Rozanov correctly.

(The team was Cleveland.) (The celebrity would remain nameless, because Ilya didn’t actually know who he was.) (Shane had told Ilya that the celebrity was on an American sitcom in the ‘90s.) (It was not a very popular sitcom.)

Ilya paused before opening the offer from the Metros. He glanced over at Shane, who had also gone still.

“I can ignore it,” Ilya said quietly. “I’m not signing there anyways.”

“Just open it,” Shane said, gritting his teeth. “It’s going to eat me up if I don’t know.”

Tapping on the subject line, they both took in the offer. $13M for seven years. That was $5M more than what they were paying Shane, and more than anyone else in the league. A massive signing bonus for the 2020-21 season - lockout-proofing - and a full no-move.

If Ilya wasn’t in love, and didn’t hate the Metros with every fiber of his being, he would be very tempted.

But, alas.

There was also an attachment - they were one of the teams that had sent a video. Ilya paused again.

“Fuck it, let’s watch,” Shane reached over and opened the attachment.

It was a professionally produced video, starting off with one of the Metros legends greeting Ilya and telling him how great the Montreal organization is, and how much greater it will be with Ilya Rozanov.

Shane quietly murmured commentary about how he got a similar message from the same guy when he was drafted. An observation, more than anything

Then it cut to another person. Shane drew in a sharp breath next to Ilya. J.J. Boizeau appeared on the screen, smiling and saying how much he hoped that Ilya would consider signing with Montreal. Then it cut to another one of Shane’s former teammates. Then another. All in all, about twelve of the players on the team appeared in the video, extolling the Metros’ virtues and saying how much they would love Ilya to be their teammate.

Hayden Pike wasn’t in it, though, despite being part of the formal leadership group. Fourth best Metro, Ilya mentally amended.

The video changed locations, and all of a sudden a group of women appeared on screen. “We can’t wait to see you at our club,” one of them winked.

“Oh my god, they included the strippers,” Shane cackled, his stupor from seeing his former teammates broken. He turned red, but continued. “I recognize them from the photos Olsson makes everyone look at in the room. Well… they’re a lot more dressed here. They perform at one of the clubs down the street from the arena.”

Ilya’s eyebrows shot up.

“Strippers? The fucking Metros thought I was interested in strippers?”

“Oh my god, I can’t believe they thought the strippers would help convince you to sign!” Shane doubled over in laughter, tension releasing.

“I did not sleep with that many women,” Ilya muttered.

“Yes you did.”

“Yes I did, but I have not slept with a woman in more than two years. Metros are stupid,” Ilya went to tap delete, but then had an idea. “What if everyone saw how stupid Metros are?”

Shane slapped his hand away and deleted it himself. “Ilya, you are not posting that on the internet.”

Sighing, Ilya nodded. “Fine, you are right this time. I will not post it on the internet today.”

“Ever!”

“Fine, ever.” Ilya muttered under his breath, “But the Metros would deserve it.”

They turned back to the tablet. Only a handful of offers remained, including the ones from the Raiders and the one from the Centaurs.

Suddenly, Ilya was tired of going through the offers. It was fun, sure, but the Metros had made it less fun.

Fucking Metros.

“Let’s see how much I am going to make next year, yes?” Ilya smiled at Shane as he tapped on the Centaurs’ offer.

Seven years. $10M. Full no-move.

“Looks like you’re my sugar daddy,” Shane said, grinning next to Ilya. “Two mil more than me.”

It was less than what most teams had offered, but not much less. It was more than what Ilya had made on his last contract, and would place him in the top five highest players in the league.

It was perfect.

“They sent a video too,” Shane said, pointing to the attachment at the bottom of the email.

Ilya frowned. “I don’t know if I want to open it and see more strippers and ruin Ottawa for me.”

“C’mon,” Shane whined, fully into this process. “Let’s watch. If there are strippers, I promise I’ll make you forget allll about it,” Shane grinned wickedly.

Ilya looked Shane up and down. “Deal.”

He tapped on the attachment, and the video started playing.

All of a sudden, a cartoon dog popped up.

“What the fuck,” Shane laughed.

Ilya laughed too, but in disbelief. The little cartoon dog started talking, it was talking to Ilya, telling him about the history of the Centaurs (nothing notable) and the sights of Ottawa (same).

But, holy shit.

It was a dog video.

“I am sold. Centaurs are the best team in the MLH,” Ilya declared.

“Well, fuck, they’ve got the two of us, what else can they be?” Shane was still laughing at the absurdity of the dog animation the Centaurs put together.

“No, they sent a dog video!”

James:
Everyone, it has been a day full of surprises, and we just got another one.

Doug:
Ilya Rozanov is signing with the Ottawa Centaurs. The deal is reportedly for seven years and $70M, with a $10M cap hit and full no-move clause.

Gord:
Wow.

James:
Who would have thought that the Ottawa Centaurs would be the big winners of July 1?

Gord:
I don’t think anybody saw this. But I absolutely love this for them. They went out and aggressively went after Hollander, who was only shopped to a handful of teams. Then they opened their wallets and got the biggest free agent of the year. I’d say he’s probably even the biggest free agent of the salary cap era.

Doug:
Who wouldn’t love this for the Centaurs? They got the two best players in the MLH, full stop, without giving up much of anything.

Rozanov also left a lot of money on the table with this deal. Montreal was offering him $13M a year, and I know at least five other teams were offering him over $11M, including the Raiders. That’s going to raise a lot of eyebrows around the league.

James:
It certainly was surprising that Rozanov signed such a team-friendly deal, but in the wake of the Hollander trade, the Centaurs are suddenly a very attractive destination.

Gord:
That's for sure. I've already had agents reach out saying they wished their clients held off on signing so they could play in Ottawa instead. Imagine someone saying that this morning. We're in a whole new MLH.

Doug:
And Rozanov's deal, plus with two years left on Hollander's $8M per, gives the Centaurs plenty of flexibility to add around them. They're not handcuffed to two massive contracts, they've got options.

Gord:
But this has got to hurt the Montreal Metros. They started the day with Shane Hollander, offered the richest contract in MLH history to Ilya Rozanov, and here we are at 2PM Eastern and all the Metros have to show for it is Jesper Lundell. Who is a great player, don't get me wrong, but is not on the same level as Hollander or Rozanov.

Metros GM Ron Bourque is going to have to take a long, hard look at the decisions that were made today. Yes, they're reigning Stanley Cup Champions, but it certainly doesn't look like they want to repeat that experience any time soon.

James:
We can get back to the Metros in a second, but I want to look at the Centaurs. This is a team that's had struggles on the ice and at the gate, and has had some recent relocation rumors. All of a sudden, they're the prettiest girl at the dance. They have both Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. Centaurs GM Adam Patrick is playing fantasy hockey with actual MLH players.

Gord:
I don't think the Hollander for Lundell trade would have gone through in any fantasy league I know.

Doug:
Centaurs fans are certainly going to have fun over the next few months imagining line combos with Hollander and Rozanov. Who is on the first line, while who gets the second line? Does one of them move to the wing? It's an embarrassment of riches.

Gord:
The Centaurs probably need to shore up their defence before they're serious Cup contenders, but today puts them in the conversation. And that's something for the organization to celebrate.

James:
Well they're certainly going to be celebrating along the Rideau Canal in Ottawa today, that's for sure.

@Centaurs ✅ Ottawa Centaurs
BREAKING: The Ottawa Centaurs have signed centre Ilya Rozanov to a seven-year deal.

Per team policy, terms of the deal are not disclosed.

#GoCensGo

@wisniewski ✅ Paul Wisniewski
Ilya Rozanov to the Centaurs. 7 years, $10M cap hit, and a full no-move.

@ottapoppy Poppy
THIS IS THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE

@makeitmakecens Abigail
LOUD NOISES

@raidersnroz sammy
Rozanov you're breaking my heart :(

@bloodysox Charlie
ROZANOV YOU BUM YOU'LL NEVER BE WELCOME IN BOSTON AGAIN

@bradyzringzzz Bobby
FUCK YOU ILYA ROSANOV YOUR A COMMIE TRAITOR

@notamasshole Tommy
How the fuck did the fucking Raiders let Rozanov go.

@ol_and_ssons Sara Olsson
If I got a nickel every time the Centaurs acquired one of the 2018 Hart Trophy finalists today, I would have two nickels. Which isn't a lot, but it's weird that it happened twice.

@james_macdonald ✅ James MacDonald
It might be too early to declare winners and losers for free agency, but it's hard to imagine anyone doing better than what the @Centaurs have done.

> **@james_macdonald ✅ James MacDonald**
> *In reply to @james_macdonald ✅*
> On the other hand, the @MetrosMTL are emerging as the clear losers of the day. Wow.

@cawlidgehawkey It's Good To BU
lies down *tries not to cry* *cries a lot*

@milesnsmiles Colorado Hockey Girl
WELL DOUG WE'RE WAITING

> *Quoting:*
> **@thatshockey24 Doug Hockey**
> Ottawa? If Ottawa even gets one of those two I'll print out this tweet and eat it

@REDBLACKS ✅ REDBLACKS
Welcome to Ottawa, @Rozanov81!

@hollysgirl katie
The Montreal Metros are dead to me.

@RobertTremblayTVA ✅ Rob Tremblay
Lots of disappointment from the Montreal Metros on missing out on Rozanov. Sources say they were prepared to make him the highest paid player in the league, but now have a big hole at centre.

> **@24sixeight24 Holla At Me**
> *In reply to @RobertTremblayTVA ✅*
> Uhhhh try not trading Shane Hollander next time????

@Real_Lytras ✅ Ben Lytras
#Blockbuster Edmonton trades William Berroth to Nashville for Christian Vaillancourt

> **@makeitmakecens Abigail**
> *In reply to @Real_Lytras ✅*
> NOT NOW EDMONTON THE CENS ARE DOING SOMETHING

> **@chickenparm Johnny B**
> *In reply to @Real_Lytras ✅*
> Ben I hope you realize while this would be a huge trade normally these are unprecedented times

> **@trapezoidhater Goalie Guy**
> *@In reply to @Real_Lytras ✅*
> The MLH equivalent of a Friday 5PM news dump

@BoodsLettuce Bood's Lettuce
Sure the Ottawa Centaurs just acquired two of the three Hart trophy finalists and the Montreal Metros are imploding and Edmonton and Nashville swapped Norris trophy winners but what does this mean for the Toronto Guardians??

> **@viewsfromtorsix Tom Hunter**
> *In reply to @BoodsLettuce*
> People like you are the reason Toronto keeps getting mentioned, actual media don't make everything about the Guards.

@toby_thompson ✅ Toby Thompson
With the @Centaurs loading up, the @MetrosMTL going in a new direction, and @EdmontonDrillers swapping defencemen, what does that mean for the Toronto @Guardians?

> **@BoodsLettuce Bood's Lettuce**
> *In reply to @toby_thompson ✅*
> I WAS KIDDING

@The_Blueline Ryan Johnson
The @MTLMetros had to have known that Rozanov was no sure thing. Why not hang on to Hollander until they have the deal signed? Teams can go over the cap during the summer.

> **@khaleesi_snipe Mother of Hockey**
> *In reply to @The_Blueline*
> That would require the Metros to be smart.

> **@havefunoutthere Trevor Greene**
> *In reply to @The_Blueline*
> Honestly in retrospect none of GMRB's moves have worked except for "luck into drafting Shane Hollander" and that's been good enough for a decade

@MetrosMTL ✅ Metros Montréal
Déclaration du directeur général des Metros Ron Bourque
"Je tiens à remercier Ilya Rozanov de l'intérêt qu'il a porté aux Metros de Montréal. Bien que nous soyons naturellement déçus par la décision finale, il est extrêmement réconfortant de savoir que les meilleurs joueurs de cette ligue continuent de considérer Montréal comme un endroit où ils souhaitent jouer."

> **@MetrosMTL ✅ Metros Montréal**
> *In reply to @MetrosMTL ✅*
> Statement from Metros GM Ron Bourque:
> "I want to thank Ilya Rozanov for his interest in the Montreal Metros. While we are naturally disappointed in the final decision, it's extremely heartening to know that the top players in this league consistently view Montreal as a place they want to play."

> **@pikeplacehockey #1 hayden pike fan**
> *In reply to @MetrosMTL ✅*
> This is embarrassing

> **@raidersnroz sammy**
> *In reply to @pikeplacehockey*
> Wow and that's coming from a Hayden Pike fan

> **@rosemary__ mary**
> *In reply to @MetrosMTL ✅*
> Has a team ever put out a statement about somebody not signing with them before??

> **@metrosbrad Brad**
> *In reply to @MetrosMTL ✅*
> L franchise

@boringhollander Boring Shane Hollander
I asked Ilya Rozanov if he wanted to be rivals anymore because we're now on the same team. He said no. I said okay, and now we're not rivals.

@NotTheRealRonCerise Ron Cerise
HEY YOU KIDS OUT THERE ILLA ROSENOV THAT GUY HAS NO LOYALTY THE

LOYALTY TO RUSSIANS IS NOTHING N-O-T-H-I-N-G NOTHING DALLAS KENT GOOD CANADIAN BOY PLAYED IN THE GTHL WOULD NEVER DO THAT

Chapter End Notes

References

Former GM Mike Milbury beat a fan with his own shoe when he played for the Boston Bruins
Example of free agent meetings; Tavares inspired the free agency portion of this because Stamkos ended up re-signing
The Vancouver Canucks are finally building a practice facility after being the last team in the NHL to not have one
Gilbert Gottfried reading Brady Tkachuk's statement on Cameo is exactly what you'd think
The traveling group for NHL teams visiting one of the many, many strip clubs within walking distance of Bell Centre is as infamous as their press box hot dogs, just not as widely publicized. No citation, just insider knowledge.
Similarly, I can't prove that an NHL team sent a free agent a commissioned animated video of a pet to convince them to sign, but you're going to have to trust me that it did happen.
The Subban-Weber trade happened the same day as Hall-Larsson and the Stamkos contract.
San Jose Sharks GM issued a statement after they missed out on a free agent
Don Cherry on Coach's Corner was a Canadian institution for decades.
For further reading, the timeline for the day that inspired everything.
And the oral history from notable reporters and writers

It lowkey makes me sad how many classic tweets are gone because of people fleeing Twitter. I mean, I nuked my original account too, but it still makes me sad.

Chapter 5: July 5, 2018

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was decided - proclaimed even, at least according to the Ottawa mayor - that July 5 was the date that Shane and Ilya would be introduced as the Ottawa Centaurs' Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. The Centaurs were eager to show off the duo to the world, almost afraid that if they didn't soon the league would come to their senses and void everything. Shane and Ilya, for their part, didn't want their phones to blow up with one-off media requests any more than they already had.

But Ottawa had to deal with Ilya's visa - it wasn't exactly a rubber-stamp process for a Russian to switch from an American team to a Canadian one - and enough national media asked them to hold off on scheduling a presser until they could book flights out to Ottawa that the Centaurs pushed it off as much as they could. But not too far off, because said national media had cottages of their own to get to in the post-free agency flight out of Toronto's newsrooms.

So, July 5.

They had driven separately from Shane's Montreal apartment, just so it wasn't suspicious if they'd showed up together, but it didn't matter. The Centaurs organization was so happy that they had Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov - Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov! - the two could have shown up in the Oscar Meyer Weinermobile without anybody batting an eye.

Not that Shane would ever bring up that idea to Ilya. He knew what would happen.

But Shane had driven his Jeep, and Ilya had driven the bright red Porsche rental he had picked up from the Montreal airport the day he flew in from Boston. They had parked at the arena, in the players' lot by the loading dock, the dull black of Jeep contrasted against the bright red of the Porsche.

"Cens colours already, love it!" Adam joked as he welcomed them in.

"Shane, Ilya, I want to formally welcome to you the Ottawa Centaurs," Adam said as he shook both of their hands as soon as the two were ushered through the doors into the bowels of the arena. "I hope the drive in wasn't too bad?"

"Ah, no, I make the drive from Montreal a lot. My parents still live here," Shane shoved his hands in his pockets as he took a look around. Both he and Ilya had been there dozens of times before - the visiting team always arrives through the loading dock, and takes the hallway to the left to the road dressing room - but it felt different that it was theirs.

"I'm glad the airport had a fun rental," Ilya added, grinning. "Makes the drive not so bad."

Adam laughed in the way someone laughs when they're trying to impress somebody, and then gestured over to two people chatting casually near a pair of parked zambonis.

"Guys, this is Julia and Vinny. Julia is the one who you've been emailing over the past week-"

"Ah Julia! I think you are already my favorite person," Ilya gestured broadly, smiling. "You sent me so many great Russian restaurants I did not know exist in Ottawa, I think I might be in love."

"-And Vinny leads our media relations and communications team. He'll be the one you'll deal with for any media inquiries."

"Great to meet you both," Vinny said as he went to shake Ilya's and then Shane's hand. "I'm sure you'll be sick of me soon enough, but I promise not to bug you more than necessary."

Vinny was holding a pair of jerseys in his other arm. "So, just to run you guys through the plan for today. We have a formal press conference set up on the arena floor, with about a hundred of your closest friends out there."

Shane cracked a slight smile.

"Adam will start things off with a quick statement, and then present you both with jerseys, at which point we'll take a couple of photos for Getty and the website of you guys holding them. After that, we're going to open it up for questions for about twenty minutes," Vinny grimaced. "I wanted to keep it to ten, but we had to move this to the arena floor and turn down credential requests as it was."

"Jesus," Shane said involuntarily. He was no stranger to press - he'd come up through Montreal's army of beat writers, double the size of most contingents due to the bilingual nature of the market and being one of hockey's two unofficial capitals, and had endured multiple Stanley Cup media days that were their own form of torture - but it was a lot.

Granted, the two of them were a lot.

"Yeah. I'll do my best to shut down any question that you guys aren't comfortable with answering, but both of you have got to be pros at this point."

Ilya nodded. "Ah yes, Hollander loves the media."

"Shut up, Rozanov."

"Not very media trained there, Hollander. What about pucks in deep?"

"Just because I don't make insane promises about scoring 50 goals-!"

"But I did score 50 goals that year, you remember, yes?"

"That's besides the point!"

Vinny, Adam, and Julia suddenly looked nervous. Very nervous. Adam's eyes, in particular, went very very wide.

"Uh, you know…" Adam began, trying to figure a way to prevent his two very, very big cap hits from killing each other.

A beat.

Then both Shane and Ilya started laughing, Ilya bending over as he braced his hand on his knee as he cracked up.

"Sorry, forgot," Shane started, collecting himself. "Rozanov and I are friends, but half of the time we're insulting each other."

"It's true. I tell him he has boring car-"

"It's practical!"

"-And he replies with a boring answer, and then we go on the ice and score five hundred boring goals together," Ilya added.

Adam still looked a little uneasy, but accepted the explanation. "Okay, I just want to make sure you guys can get along."

Vinny cleared his throat. "Anyways, after media availability, our broadcasters wanted some exclusive interview time with both of you for radio and TV, and then we have a couple of things for marketing to use until we have the formal media day at camp."

"If we're able to wrap early enough, I was hoping that you guys could swing by the rookie camp at the practice rink, but I promise you'll be free to go by 5. I know it's a long day, so we got you both rooms at the Brookstreet."

Shane and Ilya pointedly did not look at each other. They could not look at each other, not if they wanted to keep everything under wraps. But they knew exactly what the other was thinking.

"Ilya, do you need help booking flights or anything? Wasn't sure where you're staying over the summer," Julia asked.

"Oh, no, I am fine. Thank you though," Ilya replied. If Julia was curious about Ilya's non-disclosure of his summer plans, she didn't show it.

Probably was just relieved that Ilya didn't have more requests. The Russian restaurant exchange had gone on for twenty emails alone.

"Well then, I guess it's showtime!" Adam said brightly, leading them towards the zamboni tunnel, which was currently draped with a curtain.

Ilya peeked out, taking in the scene.

The video board had lowered to floor level, serving as a backdrop for a stage set up with a table and three chairs. A school assembly's worth of folding chairs were laid out in front of the stage, every one of them taken with media members hunched over their phones or laptops or chatting with their neighbors.

In the back, an army of cameras was set up. Everyone from the local Ottawa news stations to TSN to RDS to NBCSN had a camera, complete with camera operator. Ilya had never seen so many pairs of Keens being worn in his life.

Well, showtime indeed.

"Everybody, I want to thank you for being here," Adam said to the assembled media, sitting at the far right hand side of the table next to Shane and Ilya. "And I'm going to keep my comments brief because I know you will have a lot of questions and we only have limited time, but I wanted to officially welcome both Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov to Ottawa. We're excited to add them to our organization, but we're also excited to add them to our community.

"It's rare that this caliber of player becomes available, you talk about your difference-makers in the league, and somehow we got lucky enough to have two of them. It's an understatement to say that our coaching staff and their new teammates are excited to have them here. And judging by how many credential requests Vinny had to handle this week, I think you guys are too."

"Thanks Adam," Vinny said from his spot standing off to the side of the seated reporters.

"I'm going to open things up for questions now. Raise your hand and we'll pass you the mic."

The reporter next to Vinny raised his hand, and Vinny dutifully passed him the mic.

"Shane, do you have a statement on the trade?"

Shane took a deep breath, and then went into the statement that he had rehearsed with Yuna earlier that week.

"It's been an emotional period for me and my family, and it's an unfortunate part of the business. I would like to thank the Montreal organization for giving me the chance to be an MLH player. Growing up, it was always my dream to play for the Metros, and I'm glad I had the chance. I'd also like to thank my teammates, especially Hayden Pike and J.J. Boiziau, who played alongside me through three Cup wins. I would not be the hockey player I am today without their support. I am also excited to join this up-and-coming organization, returning to my hometown of Ottawa."

Nailed it.

Another reporter raised their hand and took control of the mic.

“Shane, what was going through your head when you heard Montreal had traded you?”

Now this was the part less rehearsed, the part that Shane knew would be clipped and quoted and overanalyzed media across Canada and the US, in English and in French, until some other organization was dumb enough to trade one of the best players in franchise history for an unremarkable middle pairing defenceman.

So until the end of time, probably. Or at the trade deadline, if Toronto’s GM had anything to say about it. It’s a tossup.

Shane felt Ilya’s foot gently knock into the side of his, a gentle reminder that he wasn’t alone in this.

“Well, you know, it came as a big shock. Coming off a Stanley Cup win, an Art Ross, getting traded doesn’t run across your mind. Especially when, you know, I was in Montreal my whole career, and drafted by them. So it was mostly shock. But it’s also a business, and anyone can be moved.”

Another reporter had the mic.

“Shane, did you have any idea that you were on the block?”

Shane fiddled with his thumbs. “No, I think I found out about fifteen minutes before you guys. My agent called to give me the heads up that something might happen, and then it did.” He grimaced wryly, not really caring how the next statement made the Metros look. “I honestly found out I was traded to Ottawa while I was scrolling Twitter and grilling burgers for a Canada Day barbecue. Unfortunately, the burgers didn’t make it.”

A clattering of keyboards typing filled the area as the reporters rushed to share that nugget to social media.

The next reporter had a thick Boston accent. “Ilya, what made you decide to leave the Raiders?”

Ilya leaned forward. “Like Hollander said, it’s a business. I enjoyed my time with the Raiders. Marly, Simmer, Soupy, I have a lot of love for the boys. But there are things that Ottawa has that Boston does not. It is not Boston’s fault.”

“What does Ottawa have that Boston doesn’t?” Another reporter followed up, ignoring the mic.

“Hollander,” another reporter loudly muttered, drawing a laugh from the rest of the press.

“Yes, that is very true, Shane Hollander is a very good reason,” Ilya grinned widely as he playfully shoved Shane with his shoulder. Cameras clicked around them, capturing the moment.

“Shane, why do you think Montreal traded you?” one of the national columnists asked as he was handed the mic.

“I won’t pretend that I know what’s going on in Montreal or what they were thinking,” Shane said, shrugging his shoulders, lying. “But I do know that I’m a Centaur now, and I’m thrilled to join this organization.”

“Ilya, going back to that comment earlier, did Shane’s signing with the Centaurs affect your decision at all?” one of the local Ottawa guys asked.

Ilya paused. “I had been thinking about Ottawa before,” Ilya said carefully. Then he grinned. “But the chance to play with second best player in the MLH helped make the decision.”

Shane rolled his eyes in exasperation as the assembled press chuckled. “Second best, huh? Who got the Art Ross last year?”

“Yes, but who won the Rocket Richard?”

“But I also won the Conn Smythe-”

“Oh who hasn’t. Speak to me when you have a Rocket Richard.”

The collective media followed the two’s barbs like a tennis match, eyes darting between the two.

“So I’m guessing there’s no love lost between the two of you,” another Ottawa beat writer offered, Vinny’s mic ignored as the presser devolved.

Shane grinned, joining Ilya’s. “This is probably going to come as a surprise, but Rozanov and I have been friends for a while,” Shane noticed more than a few eyebrows rise in the crowd at that. “What you guys have called a rivalry has mostly just been two competitors going at it.” Shane ignored Ilya’s snort. In all fairness, that phrasing was on Shane. “That’s not going to change just because we’re wearing the same sweater.”

“Are you worried that, after spending your entire careers as the top player on your respective teams, it’ll be hard to share the spotlight sometimes?”

“No, actually, it will be a relief to finally play with somebody who can keep up with me,” Ilya leaned into the mic. “It has been hard slowing down for teammates.”

“Shut up, Rozanov, you’ve had some great teammates,” Shayne playfully shoved Ilya.

“Yes, the Raiders were great,” Ilya looked out and caught the eyes of the handful of Boston beat writers that made the flight out. “As I said, I will miss the boys and Boston, and will always be sad that we never won the city another Cup.”

“Then why make the move?”

“Ah, personal reasons,” Ilya set his mouth, then decided to elaborate with a tiny bit of the truth. “I want to get Canadian citizenship, very strong passport, and so goal was to go to

Canadian team."

Shane sensed that the media were going to dig more into it, and jumped to anticipate the question. "Well, I'm glad you want to join us here in Canada. I can't wait to get out on the ice and finally be on the same team as Rozanov."

Shane's eyes glinted. There was something about sitting next to Ilya that made him want to joke around a little more than usual. Well, a lot more than usual.

"You know it's all about getting a big two points," Shane took an overexaggerated sniff that he had heard from teammates in neighboring stalls far too many times. "Roz and I are going to focus on getting pucks in deep, and playing a 200 foot game for the full sixty minutes this season."

Shane's dense hockey cliche statement drew the laughs he knew it would.

After all, he said essentially the same thing after all 82 regular season games last season. And all 26 playoff games. As well as - to his everlasting shame - his first Cup parade four years back. He was so nervous, he defaulted to autopilot "good teammate hockey cliches" rather than the speech he had written. Ilya still hadn't let him live it down. A lot of people haven't - he dutifully gets tagged in the comments whenever another player pulls out one of the cliches in their interview.

Shane was about 50% sure some of the players on the other team do it just to bug Shane and blow up his phone. That was mostly because Ilya told him that some of the guys in Boston did, but then again Shane couldn't completely trust Ilya's word on that.

And besides, the hockey interview cliche was a cliche for a reason. Sometimes it was easier to say, "We didn't play the full 60 minutes," than saying, "Our goalie couldn't stop a beach ball back there" or "Half the team is hungover as shit."

"But in all seriousness, I'm looking forward to showing Rozanov around my hometown and getting to know him better off the ice as well."

Shane recognized one of the regular columnists from Montreal, who raised his hand and grabbed the mic. The columnist was known to be an unofficial mouthpiece for the team. He did not write a flattering column about Shane after the trade. "Ilya, we heard that you left a $91M contract from Montreal on the table, which would have made you the highest paid player in the league this season. Care to comment on why?"

Ilya leaned back in his seat, confident. "If I only cared about money, I would probably be in Montreal. But there are more things than money, yes? I can still afford plenty on measly $10M." He gestured over to Shane. "But I think, if they would trade my good friend Shane Hollander, who won them three Cups, I think they would not hesitate to trade me too."

"Oh, so I'm a good friend now," Shane said low into the microphone, drawing some chuckles.

“Why you trade Shane Hollander, I don’t know,” Ilya had gotten into the groove of “Roz”: big, audacious, and no filter. “He is the first in so many fancy stats, it is like the Ritz-Carlton of stats. And not so fancy stats that he made me promise not to say. Do not dare mention plus-minus to Hollander unless you want to be bored to death.”

“And remember, he is the second best player in the MLH despite being so slow-”

“I literally beat you in fastest skater at All-Stars!”

“-and needs work on his backhand. But I think that he is still better than anything in Montreal.”

Shane did not think that the assembled press had expected… any of what was coming out of Ilya’s mouth right now. But his boyfriend’s vehement defense of Shane - as brash as it was - made him feel good. It was also making Shane slowly turn bright red, but two things could be true at once.

“And yes, Hollander is boring-”

“I’m not boring, Rozanov.”

“-So boring that Metros must have been lulled to sleep and dreamed of crazy reason to trade Hollander.”

Ilya paused, letting his words sink in, the keyboards clacking dutifully.

“I also liked what Ottawa sent to me much better than Montreal,” Ilya’s face absolutely lit up. “Adam, who did the animated dog video? It was the greatest thing, I almost would sign for league minimum for that video.”

“Ah, that was our video production team,” Adam said awkwardly into the mic, still processing what Ilya had said.

“Best video production team in the league!” Ilya declared. “Much better than Montreal’s video, which showed some probably very nice ladies who like to take their clothes off.”

Shane buried his face in his hands. Ilya pretended not to notice. The assembled press seemed to freeze, not sure how to react.

“I do not want to speak about Montreal’s video, it was uh, a lot of no respect?”

“Disrespectful,” Shane supplied, slightly muffled, his face still buried.

“Yes, disrespectful. It says to me about the whole team. Deleted it right away.” Ilya paused, surveying the frantically typing contingent. “Also, Montreal hot dogs are bah, overrated.”

Okay, to that Shane brought his head up. *Hot dogs?!*

Ilya, though, was immensely pleased with himself. He was able to air so many of his grievances.

“Shane, did you know about Montreal’s video?” A reporter called out.

Shane blinked, his eyes owlish.

“No! I mean…”

“They were trying to replace him with me, I do not think the Metros would be dumb enough to tell Hollander about it, but ehhh who knows?” Ilya helpfully finished for Shane.

“Any chance we can get eyes on that dog video?” One of the reporters called out, wisely choosing to ignore any further mention of Montreal.

“That’d be up to Ilya, it’s his video,” Adam said, turning to Ilya.

“Of course everyone can see the video! It is amazing video, will go viral for sure,” Ilya grinned out at the reporters while Shane kept shaking his head.

“Okay folks, we have time for one more question!” Vinny clapped, wanting to wrap before Ilya derailed things any further. Vinny, in retrospect, wasn’t fully prepared for his crash course in Ilya Rozanov media availability.

The final reporter - someone from the local TV news station - grabbed the mic and stood up. “Shane, any plans for your day with the Cup?”

“Besides ignoring how awkward it is?” Shane joked. “I have a small get together planned with close family and friends at my parents’ cottage. Nothing big, had a few other things pop up that made planning harder than the other two times.”

That earned a polite chuckle from the press.

“Might even invite Rozanov, remind him of what it looks like,” Shane looked over at Ilya, his eyes dancing.

Ilya fought to keep a grin off his face. “Hollander! You finally are funny!”

“Shut up, Rozanov.”

“I will come to your boring Cup party if you promise to throw an absolute rager when Ottawa wins the Cup,” Ilya challenged Shane.

Shane rolled his eyes. “Fine, I’ll throw a rager when Ottawa wins the Cup.”

When. Shane had said when, not if. And so what Shane thought was loud before was nothing compared to the utter silence and then bedlam that broke out among the media at that.

Ilya Rozanov brought out the best of Shane Hollander. Who knew?

@StarGunderson ✅ Tony Gunderson
“Shocked” is how Hollander described his reaction to the trade. He looks like he still can’t believe it.

@AMoranis ✅ August Moranis
Hollander specifically mentioned former teammates in Pike and Boiziau when thanking his former team.

@comeauyoudidnt METROS ARE CUP CHAMPS
Hollander found out he was traded through TWITTER??

@mommametros Metros Mother
Shane Hollander was making burgers when he found out he was traded I’m gonna cry

@TSN_Sports ✅ TSN
BREAKING: Shane Hollander confirms he and Ilya Rozanov are friends.

> **@ottapoppy Poppy**
> *In reply to @TSN_Sports ✅*
> The fact that this is a breaking news alert is so funny to me

@thetaurpits The Taur Pits Blog
“You know it’s all about getting a big two points. Ilya and I are going to focus on getting pucks in deep, and playing a 200 foot game for the full sixty minutes this season.” Wait is Shane Hollander funny?

> **@ottapoppy Poppy**
> *In reply to @thetaurpits*
> HE’S SO SELF-AWARE

> **@hollysgirl katie**
> *In reply to @thetaurpits*
> I was DYING at that sniff why do hockey players even do that?

@24sixeight24 Holla At Me
Shane Hollander gets a personality the minute he leaves Montreal

@dcrisp D Crisp
What EXACTLY that Ottawa has that Boston does not?

> **@hoserngo Gord**
> *In reply to @dcrisp*
> Free healthcare?

> **@raidersnroz sammy**
> *In reply to @hoserngo*

Okay 1. That is such a tired argument and 2. He is a professional athlete I'm pretty sure he's covered

@dcrisp D Crisp
In reply to @dcrisp
Apparently "is in Canada" is the answer

@centaursfan25437 Centaurs #1 Fan
In reply to @dcrisp
Museums should at least be in the conversation

@dcrisp D Crisp
In reply to @centaursfan25437
What conversation

@centaursfan25437 Centaurs #1 Fan
In reply to @dcrisp
For the reason Rozanov moved to Ottawa. It should be obvious but everyone has a serious Canada bias.

@dcrisp D Crisp
In reply to @centaursfan25437
Museums

@centaursfan25437 Centaurs #1 Fan
In reply to @dcrisp
Museums

@dcrisp D Crisp
In reply to @centaursfan25437
In Ottawa

@chickenparm Johnny B
I wonder if Roz has a girlfriend in Ottawa? That would be the only thing that makes sense imo

@cawlidgehawkey It's Good To BU
In reply to @chickenparm
Why tf would Roz have a girlfriend in Ottawa?

@RobertTremblayTVA ✅ Rob Tremblay
Rozanov cites going after Canadian citizenship as one of the reasons for choosing Ottawa.

@havefunoutthere Trevor Greene
Why does Rozanov want to get Canadian citizenship?

@marlydefender Marly Love
In reply to @havefunoutthere
He specifically said he wanted the passport, maybe he wants to travel more?

@havefunoutthere Trevor Greene
In reply to @marlydefender
But becoming a US citizen would probably be easier at this point

@makeitmakecens Abigail
“Who won the Art Ross?” “Who won the Rocket Richard?” “Well who won the Conn Smythe-” I CAN’T BELIEVE THEY BOTH PLAY FOR MY TEAM

@maydaymaydaymayday April
Ilya Rozanov went on an extended rant about how stupid the Montreal Metros are for trading Shane Hollander while also managing to insult Hollander the whole time.

@dollarsandcentaurs Bobby
In reply to @maydaymaydaymayday
Man’s commitment to the chirp game is impressive

@raidersnroz sammy
I swear to god this better be the greatest dog video of all time

@freecandy Brooks Toepick
Imagine losing out on Ilya Rozanov to a team that sent him an animated dog video.

@BoodsLettuce Bood’s Lettuce
Cens animated dog is current the front-runner for the Hart Trophy

@ol_and_ssons Sara Olsson
Forget Moneyball, the newest market inefficiency is dog videos

@RozanovDogVideo Rozanov’s Dog Video
Already have 1M views and I’m not even public yet.

@dollarsandcentaurs Bobby
Was Rozanov saying what I think he was saying?

@joshmetrosfan Josh
Metros you are dead to me

@cawlidgehawkey It’s Good To BU
“Probably very nice ladies who like to take their clothes off” just say strippers, Ilya

@youppisbff meg
In reply to @cawlidgehawkey
Wait was that what he meant?

@metrosbrad Brad
Which club’s strippers did the Metros use for Rozanov’s video? For, uh, research purposes.

@khaleesi_snipe Mother of Hockey
In reply to @metrosbrad
Google exists so you don’t have to be gross

@rahrahrozanov Ily Ilya
What did Montreal's hot dogs ever do to Ilya Rozanov?

> **@pikeplacehockey #1 hayden pike fan**
> *In reply to @rahrahrozanov*
> Be mediocre, apparently
>
> **@rahrahrozanov Ily Ilya**
> *In reply to @pikeplacehockey*
> Just like your fav
>
> **@pikeplacehockey #1 hayden pike fan**
> *In reply to @rahrahrozanov*
> Uh that was uncalled for??

@youppisbff meg
The way that Rozanov is more offended by the Metros trading Hollander than Hollander is

@MMarcusMLH ✅ Mike Marcus
Based on how the introductory press conference went, the Rozanov-Hollander media scrums are going to be must-see TV this season.

@trapezoidhater Goalie Guy
I know stuff leaks but Montreal really did Hollander dirty.

> **@notamasshole Tommy**
> *In reply to @trapezoidhater*
> Hell it sounds like they did Rozanov dirty too

@TheRealGordFleury ✅ Gord Fleury
No comment from @MetrosMTL or GM Ron Bourque on the Ilya Rozanov recruitment video.

@antoinelechemin ✅ Antoine Lechemin
Selon certaines sources, la moitié de l'effectif montréalais a également fait une apparition dans la vidéo de recrutement de Rozanov.

> **@metrospourmoi Luc Bellemare**
> *In reply to @antoinelechemin ✅*
> Qui??
>
> **@etlebut Marc**
> *In reply to @antoinelechemin ✅*
> J'espère que Pike et Boiziau ne s'imaginaient pas être les meilleurs amis de Hollander

@antoinelechemin ✅ Antoine Lechemin
According to sources, half of the Montreal roster also made an appearance in the Rozanov recruitment video.

@denvermetrosgal mack
In reply to @antoinelechemin ✅
Thank you two minutes later English Antoine

@StarGunderson ✅ Tony Gunderson
Ilya Rozanov will attend Shane Hollander's Stanley Cup party.

@wisniewski ✅ Paul Wisniewski
Hollander: I'll throw a rager when Ottawa wins the Cup

@wisniewski ✅ Paul Wisniewski
In reply to @wisniewski ✅
This is a direct quote, by the way.

@The_Blueline Ryan Johnson
What we learned from the Hollander-Rozanov availability:
1. Hollander had no idea he was going to get traded
2. Rozanov is looking to get Canadian citizenship
3. The rivalry is no more

@ol_and_ssons Sara Olsson
In reply to @The_Blueline
What we *actually* learned from the Hollander-Rozanov availability:
1. Rozanov hates Montreal
2. Hollander = funny???
3. Dogs yes, hot dogs no

@boringhollander Boring Shane Hollander
I am throwing a party with the Stanley Cup. I asked my new teammate Ilya Rozanov if he would join. He said maybe.

After their presser wrapped, Vinny whisked them away to the hands of the Centaurs marketing department, who had the two take some additional photos.

First they had Ilya pose as if he was signing his contract with a comically large quill - they would not let Ilya keep it - and directed Shane to recreate a photo of himself sleeping under Centaurs bedsheets that his mom had helpfully provided.

"Awww, look at baby Hollander!" Ilya cooed, drawing the laugh of the photographer. "Hollander, do you still have those bedsheets?"

"Fuck off," Shane said while buried under the covers of the makeshift cot dressed up to look like a bed, drawing more laughs.

Ilya knew that Shane did not have those bedsheets at any of his three homes, given the number of times they've had to change the sheets after sex. Were they maybe hidden away in the linen closet at his parents' place? Sure, but Ilya didn't need to know that.

The two were then taken to the dressing room, where side-by-side stalls had been staged with nameplates and jerseys.

"We would have tried to get your gear in there, but the equipment guys have their hands full with the rookie camp this week," Vinny apologized as he led them around the comically oversized Centaurs logo on the floor, careful not to step on it.

The photographer took a few more photos, some solo, some together. Soon he directed the two to put their arm around each other's shoulder.

"Act like you like each other!" he said as he took a few photos, Shane and Ilya sporting similar grins on their faces.

It was refreshing. Sure they weren't out yet, and they couldn't fully be themselves, but they didn't have to pretend to hate each other. They could be friends - *friends!* - publicly and nobody would bat an eye. Hell, the city of Ottawa would be glad that their two new superstars are good buddies instead of trying to kill each other on the ice.

Why did we never think of playing on the same team? Shane thought to himself briefly as the clicks of the camera filled the room.

But Ilya's favorite moment had to be when the marketing department decided that the two needed to recreate their CCM ad from before their rookie season, but with two Cens sweaters.

"We're on the same team! This doesn't make any sense!" Shane protested.

"Okay, but moy lyubovnik, but we can also recreate what happened after the shoot tonight…" Ilya murmured into Shane's ear.

Shane turned bright red, spreading from the tips of his ears to his cheeks.

"I guess we can do it," Shane acquiesced.

They ended up with a great photo to pair with the original - and the outtakes from the original - in Shane's cottage. The photographer promised to message it to both Shane and Ilya as soon as he was done with retouching.

They did manage to make it to the rookie camp before their promised 5PM dismissal, where all the recent draftees were absolutely star struck by the appearance of the two recent acquisitions. Some more than others; this year's first round pick out of Switzerland turned absolutely scarlet at the sight of Shane and Ilya.

But soon enough, after the whirlwind of a day, the two were headed to the hotel, separate but together. They checked into their rooms, and immediately went into Ilya's, not even bothering with Shane's.

Exhausted, Ilya flopped onto the king-sized mattress. “Shane, I am so tired that even if you gave me a blowjob I would come maybe only once.”

Shane still stood in the entryway, having barely gotten into the room.

“We should go public.”

“Ugh, don’t tease me like that,” Ilya groaned from the bed.

“No, I’m serious, Ilya.”

Well that made llya sit up on the bed.

“You want to go public?”

“No! I mean yes, but not immediately. I just think…” Shane trailed off as he fidgeted with the hem of his tee. “I think it’s going to be hard to hide. Us.”

Ilya motioned to the spot besides him on the bed. “Come, sit.” Shane hesitated, then joined him on the bed. “Moya belka, we have been hiding for almost ten years.”

“Yeah, but today was different,” Shane said as he moved his hand to slightly touch Ilya’s, their pinkies grazing. “Fuck, if everyone wasn’t still afraid that we hate each other, they would have seen right through us. We spent half the press conference flirting. You straight up told them that you moved here for me!”

“Shhh shhh it was only the first media, we can do better,” Ilya yearned to comfort Shane, sensing that he was about to spiral and panic and maybe go back into the place that he was in directly after Montreal.

“No, fuck, Ilya. I don’t want to have to do better,” Shane brought his hand up to Ilya’s face. “I don’t think our ten year plan is going to work.”

Ilya let out a snort. “Shane we had thrown the plan in the garbage three weeks ago when Montreal turned out to be a bunch of homophobes.”

“Then let’s make a new plan. One where we don’t wait until we’re retired to come out,” Shane said, just as confident at 6PM as he was at 3AM the year before.

“I would tell the world how much I love you right now moy lyubovnik. But-” Ilya didn’t want to bring it up. It would ruin things, but he also knew Shane would catastrophize if he didn’t. “What if Ottawa is the same as Montreal?”

Shane closed his eyes, and placed his forehead against Ilya’s shoulder. “Then we deal with that when it happens. I just… I want to be with you. *Fully* with you.” He let out a single chuckle. “Plus I doubt the Metros are going to be discreet about me.”

“Discreet?”

“Like, keep it a secret, not let anyone know.” Ilya filed the word away as Shane continued. “It’s going to come out, if it hasn’t already. I just… I want to be ready. I want to do it - do all of it - on our own terms.”

Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane. God, how he loved Shane. He didn’t think he could love someone as much as he does Shane and then Shane does something else and holy crap, he loves Shane even more.

“Okay. We come out.” Ilya started rubbing his back.

“This season,” Shane mumbled into Ilya. “Or as soon as you get permanent residency and don’t have to worry about your visa.”

“This season,” Ilya repeated, wondrous. *This season!*

The two sat for a while, embracing, Ilya rubbing Shane’s back.

This season.

@Centaurs ✅ Ottawa Centaurs
[Photo of Ilya Rozanov signing a conspicuously blank piece of paper with a giant feather quill]
Ilya Rozanov makes it official 🪶

> **@bradyzringzzz Bobby**
> *In reply to @Centaurs ✅*
> TRAITOR

> **@BoodsLettuce Bood’s Lettuce**
> *In reply to @Centaurs ✅*
> I can’t believe this is real life

@NESNDanFrank ✅ Dan Frank
Ilya Rozanov was selfish to not let the Raiders know he wasn’t going to re-sign and give them a chance at getting some assets back.

> **@raidersnroz sammy**
> *In reply to @NESNDanFrank ✅*
> The Raiders literally went to the playoffs though? Would you really trade your captain before a playoff run?

> **@NESNDanFrank ✅ Dan Frank**
> *In reply to @raidersnroz*

They could have traded him at the draft and gotten a third round pick or prospect, instead he walked for free

@raidersnroz sammy
In reply to @NESNDanFrank ✅
But it sounded like Boston thought they still had a good chance of re-signing him?

@cawlidgehawkey It's Good To BU
In reply to @raidersnroz
Yeah, that's weird considering Rozanov said that he was only looking at Canadian teams

@Centaurs ✅ Ottawa Centaurs
[Photo of a young Shane Hollander sleeping under Ottawa Centaurs-branded bedsheets; another photo of a present-day Shane Hollander pretending to sleep on a cot under similar Ottawa Centaurs-branded bedsheets]
Boyhood dream is now a reality

@dollarsandcentaurs Bobby
In reply to @Centaurs ✅
Wow Hollander wasn't kidding that he grew up a Cens fan

@makeitmakecens Abigail
In reply to @Centaurs ✅
LOOK AT BABY HOLLANDER

@thetaurpits The Taur Pits Blog
In reply to @Centaurs ✅
I remember when Ottawa was granted an expansion franchise, and now we have MLH superstars who grew up fans.

@youppisbff meg
In reply to @Centaurs ✅
What, so all that talk of Hollander being a Metros fan was just lying?

@hollysgirl katie
In reply to @youppisbff
No, I think it was that his mom was a die-hard fan and people ran with it

@StarGunderson ✅ Tony Gunderson
Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, fresh off their introductory press conference, made a brief appearance at the @Centaurs rookie camp.

@AMoranis ✅ August Moranis
#GoCensGo 2018 first round pick Luca Haas on meeting Hollander and Rozanov: "It's crazy. I grew up idolizing both of them, and now to be drafted to their team. I can't believe it."

@ottapoppy Poppy
In reply to @AMoranis ✅
Aww don't worry Haas we can't believe it either

@Centaurs ✅ Ottawa Centaurs
[Photo of Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov sitting in a dressing room stall, arms around each other and smiling for the camera]
Did we just become best friends?
Yup!

@ottapoppy Poppy
In reply to @Centaurs ✅
The Cens are feeding us today

@ol_and_ssons Sara Olsson
In reply to @Centaurs ✅
Imagine showing this photo to me in 2010

@ol_and_ssons Sara Olsson
In reply to @ol_and_ssons
Hell imagine showing this photo to me a week ago

Chapter End Notes

References

Dougie Hamilton was possibly traded because he loved museums
Should be in the conversation is my current hockey twitter meme format
NHL Podium was a parody account during the 2012-13 lockout, and indicative of how quickly parody accounts popped up in 2010s hockey twitter
John Tavares's bedsheets have become a point of contention among Islanders fans after he left in free agency
Mats Sundin refusing to waive his no trade clause was also a point of contention
This was originally a three paragraph flashback and then somehow turned into the longest chapter of the whole fic. No idea how that happened, but hope you enjoyed!

Follow me/ask me anything about hockey on Twitter at @frensanemones. There's no such thing as stupid questions, and I want to do my part to get more hockey accurate fics :)

Chapter 6: July 7, 2018

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

July 7, 2018

After their conversation in the Ottawa hotel room, Shane and Ilya came up with a plan. Well, another plan. The Plan 2.0.

It mostly involved slowly coming out to their friends over the summer, then moving on to the Centaurs after training camp kicked off and they could get a better handle on their new teammates.

Hayden. Svetlana. J.J. Cliff Marleau. Rose Landry. The select few that Shane and Ilya wanted to tell before anyone else.

The rest of the world was still in some hazy future time, though both were painfully aware the clock was ticking. Loudly. Shane had already gotten a curious text from Scott Hunter, checking in on him.

His former teammates were not keeping their mouths shut, and the news was starting to spread.

But before they could come out to their friends, there was one person that they agreed needed to know.

Their agent.

In all honesty, they probably should have told her before the presser in Ottawa. If Shane was really being honest, he should have told her the previous summer when he had first dreamed up The Plan (1.0).

In Shane's defense, he and Ilya have always been a little bit stupid about each other. See: the last decade.

"Hi Farah."

"Hi Ilya. How are things going with the move to Ottawa? Are they giving you enough support?"

Shane let Ilya have the coming out honors this time. Partially because he felt like he fucked it up last time, partially because Ilya looked at Shane with big puppy eyes and begged Shane for the opportunity.

It was too adorable to resist.

"Yes, Ottawa is good. I uh, I am looking for a house now. Their Julia is very helpful."

“Great to hear. So what’s the reason behind the call?”

Ilya swallowed, looking over at Shane. He wanted to do this - so much! - but he also knew Shane was a bundle of nerves. Even if it was Shane’s idea.

Shane nodded.

“I have something important to tell you. You okay with being on speaker?” Ilya asked.

“Sure, Ilya. Go ahead.”

Ilya tapped the speaker button and placed the phone down on the table between him and Shane.

“Uh, I wanted to let you know that I am bisexual.”

Farah paused only momentarily. “Okay, not entirely what I expected. But thanks for telling me. Is there a reason you’re telling me now?”

Ilya glanced over at Shane for reassurance. Shane nodded once again, giving Ilya the go-ahead.

“I have a boyfriend. He is also in the MLH.”

“Is this a new thing? You don’t have to disclose any personal relationships, though I know the league probably wouldn’t be too happy to hear about it,” Farah asked.

“No, we have been involved for almost ten years,” Ilya responded.

Well. He could hear Farah’s silent surprise over the phone. “Wow. Okay. So I guess, going back to my original question, is there a reason that you’re telling me now?”

Shane placed a hand over Ilya’s, mouthing, “Should I?” in a silent question.

Ilya nodded. To be honest, he was almost giddy to hear Farah’s reaction. Wait, that was a lie. He was entirely giddy to hear Farah’s reaction.

“Hi Farah, this is Shane. Hollander.”

Silence, and then Farah sighed loudly over the phone. “Well, things are certainly making a lot more sense. I’m guessing that now that both of you are on the same team, you’re afraid that your relationship will be under more scrutiny, is that right?”

“Yeah.” “Yep.”

“Shane is also worried that he will not be able to keep his hands off me.”

“Shut up,” Shane’s ears turned bright red.

Farah sighed again. “Okay. I’ll pull together some statements to have at the ready in case you guys are suddenly discovered, and look into workplace laws to ensure we’re covered legally.

We shouldn't have any issues, but this certainly is an unprecedented situation."

The sound of typing came through the phone line as Farah made some notes on her computer. "Is there anything else you want to bring up? Do either of you plan on coming out, either separately or together?"

"We want to come out this season," Ilya said. "Not immediately, but soon, yes?"

"I'm pretty sure my old teammates have been telling people that I'm gay," Shane added, Ilya's eyes darkening in response. "So I'm not sure how long we can keep this quiet irregardless."

"Irregardless?" Ilya mouthed to Shane, confused.

"Shut up, it's a word," Shane mumbled.

"Got it, I'll start thinking about contingencies and plans for whenever you boys do decide to go public." Farah continued wryly, "In the future, if you two have any other hidden relationships, can you give me the heads up? I can't help you if I don't know."

"Yes, Farah." "Sorry, Farah."

"Well, I hope you boys have fun. Let me know if you need anything else."

"Thanks Farah, bye."

One down. The rest of the world to go.

July 15, 2018

Considering the circumstances, it was going as well as it possibly could.

It was Shane's day with the Stanley Cup, a mere two weeks after the Montreal Metros had unceremoniously sent him to the Ottawa Centaurs for a defenseman that most casual fans couldn't even name. In the past, Shane had thrown a big party at the Ottawa rink he had played bantam in, giving back to the community that had supported him on the way to MLH stardom.

And while that would have been a nice full circle moment - he was now playing for his hometown team, and a lot of the kids who played bantam and mites at his rink were big Cens fans - Shane was tired. He also didn't want to have to put on his media smile and pretend that he was thrilled at what happened over the summer.

Yeah, Shane was happy with how things ended up, but he certainly wasn't happy with the road it took to get there. And he wasn't about to pretend he was okay with the Metros any

more than necessary. That presser with the Centaurs was enough.

So Shane's day with the Stanley Cup ended up being a small get together at his parents' cottage. Hayden and the Pike clan came, as well as some friends from bantam and juniors that were in the Ottawa area. J.J. was invited but already had a European vacation booked (he apologized to Shane about missing it every day since the Cup day schedule was released) (Shane accepted the apology but Ilya still grumbled). Rose also had to decline due to reshoots in London. England, not Ontario. His OHL billet family came. And Ilya.

As they had promised at the availability, Ilya would be attending Shane's Cup party. One of the immediate benefits of playing on the same team as Ilya is that it became an instant excuse for them being seen together. Not that it cut off all questions.

"So, why is Ilya Rozanov here?" Hayden asked, his first comment after enveloping Shane in a big bear hug. What with everything going on, the Metros Cup parade dinner invite kept getting pushed back until Shane's day became the first time they saw each other.

Granted, it didn't help that Shane was kind of avoiding Hayden. Sure, they were texting, but not the same sort of constant communication they were used to over the past nine years of being best friends.

"Hey, he's my teammate now. Gotta make the guy feel welcome," Shane grinned wryly. "Plus I'm up 3-1 on him in Cup wins. It's killing him."

Hayden slapped Shane on the back, "Glad you still haven't totally given up on the rivalry. Fuck man, I don't know what I'd do if you were all kumbaya with Rozanov."

"Swear jar!" Jackie slid up behind Hayden, Amber on her hip. "Hayden, I thought we had talked about bringing up the Centaurs."

"I wasn't bringing up the Centaurs!" Hayden protested. "Just Rozanov. I can't believe Shane is going to be teammates with that guy."

"Why, you scared?" Shane laughed.

"F- Screw you! No, I just know that you hate him."

"Eh, he's not that bad," Shane glanced over at Ilya, who was gesticulating wildly as he was telling some outlandish story to Shane's billet family. "The guy is kind of sweet, if you get past all of his posturing."

"Ilya Rozanov? Sweet? Shane, did they give you a brain transplant when you got traded to Ottawa?" Hayden looked at Shane in confusion.

"Hayden! Be nice!" Jackie admonished her husband. "Shane didn't exactly have a choice, you know."

Hayden's expression sobered up at that.

“Yeah dude, that was really fu- messed up how Bourque treated you,” Hayden swallowed. “I had no idea he was going to do that. He was asking me all these questions about you at the end of the year meetings, but I wasn’t thinking it would lead to anything.”

Shane frowned. “What was he asking?”

“Stupid stuff, like if I had already known you were gay or if I was comfortable around you,” Hayden noticed the slight panic on Shane’s face. “Dude, I told him I was totally okay with you, and that anybody who wasn’t didn’t deserve to be on the team!”

Hayden blew out air. “But our team sucks.”

“Your team sucks,” Shane corrected.

Hayden winced. “Right. My team. Still blowing my mind that we’re not going to play together next year.”

“Yeah, it’s surreal,” Shane swept his gaze over his parents’ backyard at the small gathering. “I honestly never imagined playing for another team, and a part of me still doesn’t think it’s real. Even with all the press we did, it probably won’t completely hit me until camp starts.”

“I don’t think it’s going to hit me until the regular season,” Hayden admitted. “And of course it’s Metros-Cens opening night too.”

“Yeah, not sure how I’m going to feel about that. I’m going to stand there watching a banner get raised that I played for all last season, but on the other side,” Shane closed his eyes. “Fuck, I don’t even want to think about how they’re going to handle the rings.”

“Fuck man, yeah. I can see if they’re willing to let me give it to you privately?” Hayden offered.

“I might just take you up on that,” Shane put his hands in his pockets, not wanting to talk about the Metros further.

“Soooo… dude,” Hayden looked like he was dying to ask Shane this. “You never answered me after the bus. Boston Lily?”

Shane groaned and wiped his hand across his face, then looked around. Nobody was close to the two of them. Jackie had started chatting with his parents, while Ilya was playing with Jade, Ruby, and Arthur. His billet family and bantam teammates were all clustered around the table with the food and drinks, taking full advantage.

“Lily is a guy,” Shane confirmed, lowering his voice.

Hayden’s eyes widened. “Holy shit, man. I mean, I guessed that after the whole gay thing, but wow.” He leaned towards Shane. “Are you guys… serious?”

A soft grin came over Shane’s face. “Yeah. He’s my boyfriend. He’s actually in Ottawa now, so…”

“Fuck, dude,” Hayden breathed. “Guess you don’t need that list of guys Jackie and I were pulling together.”

“Yeah, I think he might punch you if you try to set me up with anyone.”

Hayden winced. “You know? Wouldn’t blame him. So I guess this move is working out pretty well for you huh?”

“Yeah. We thought we’d still have to be long distance, but things just started to click into place,” Shane couldn’t stop the lovey-dovey look on his face, what Ilya called “heart eyes.”

But also. Hayden. Dude. No wonder he never figured out Shane was gay. All the pieces were there for Hayden to figure out that Lily was actually Ilya, but instead of putting them together Hayden was instead leaving them on the table like someone who gets overwhelmed by Lego Duplos.

“When can I meet him?” Hayden asked.

“He’s not out yet,” Shane said hesitantly, “And right now we want to keep it just us, you know?”

He wanted to tell Hayden everything. He and Ilya planned to tell Hayden everything - eventually. Later that summer. But given the history of Metros-Raiders, and the utter disdain Hayden and Ilya had for each other, it was probably safer for everyone if Hayden was told in a much less public setting.

Preferably one where it was just Hayden and Shane. Maybe Ilya and Jackie. But that was it.

Hayden was disappointed, Shane could tell, but tried to hide it. “Okay, but whenever he’s ready, we’ve got to do a double date, right?”

“When we’re ready, it’s a date,” Shane confirmed.

“Pike!” Ilya had trudged his way across the yard over to the pair, one twin holding on to each leg for dear life while giggling the entire time.

“What do you want, Rozanov?” Hayden answered, already tired of Ilya. He had not spoken to Ilya once yet that day.

“How does it feel to be on a sh-” Ilya started, then stared down at his two very large, very squirmy ankle weights. “On a very bad team.”

“Screw you Rozanov, I don’t see you hosting a Cup party this summer.”

“It is after July 1, new league year! And now you are on a team with no Shane Hollander and a management that thinks that it can attract free agents using…” Ilya’s eyes darted back to the girls. “Nice ladies.”

Hayden deflated at that. “God, I still can’t believe they did that. I’m sorry.” Hayden spit out that last bit reluctantly.

“Hey man, at least you weren’t in the video,” Shane said, patting Hayden on the shoulder in comfort.

“I mean, I get the idea behind it, because it’s you,” Hayden gestured to Ilya, oblivious to the obvious out he was given and instead choosing to dig himself a hole. “And I would have thought using the girls would have worked much better than some Blue’s Clues ripoff, but it’s dumb to bank your entire offseason on that.”

“Dude,” Shane said flatly, looking pointedly at Hayden.

“What? Rozanov, you’ve slept with more women than the rest of the MLH combined, it shouldn’t have been surprising the Metros leaned into that.”

“*Dude*,” Shane said sharply.

“It is alright Hollander, I know I was… promiscuous when I was younger,” Ilya grinned at Hayden, which made Hayden slightly uneasy. “But I am ready to settle down, have one partner. Maybe try to have one million kids like Pike.”

“I have four!” Hayden protested.

“Jesus,” Shane muttered. Kids… kids was a new discussion. Not appropriate for right now, but something that Shane suddenly realized might be a possibility.

And it was a possibility that Shane was feeling that he might be really open to.

Especially with Ilya.

Wow.

Oblivious - as always - to how much Shane’s world had been rocked, Hayden continued on. “Well, anyways, I am sorry Rozanov,” he turned to Shane, “I’m not sure if you’ve seen the video…”

“I have,” Shane confirmed, flicking his eyes towards Ilya. “Rozanov had a lot of fun showing me all the videos the teams sent to get him to sign.”

Hayden let out a deep breath. “Fu- dang. Okay. So you know who was in it.”

Shane nodded in confirmation.

“Y’know, J.J. feels bad,” Hayden said, apologetic. “Bourque had asked us all to shoot a few short videos to attract free agents, and he had no idea that it was to try to replace you.”

Shane stared dumbly. “He could have guessed. The Metros were right up against the cap.”

“Dude, we all came up through juniors. You should know that the high school math expectations were, like, minimal,” Hayden protested. “Besides, there’s always some capologist who can figure things out. Put someone on LTIR, I dunno.”

“Then why weren’t you in the video?” Shane asked, his curiosity gnawing at him ever since July 1 but also afraid of the answer.

Hayden grimaced. “To be honest, the only reason I said no was because it was Rozanov. I might have definitely done a few for some other guys.”

God. Shane’s best friend was kind of a dumbass.

The most popular girl at the party, the Stanley Cup was rarely without a small crowd for much of the afternoon as Shane’s family and friends - united by a shared love of hockey - couldn’t stay away. But for a brief moment, Shane found himself alone with the Cup.

It was weird - Shane had been with the Cup before, hours and hours of time with the Cup just this year between the on-ice celebrations, locker room party, club afterparty, his hotel room, the team charter, and the parade - but this was the first time that he had a moment to just look at the Cup.

And he looked. He found his name on the bottom ring - twice, once for the 2015-16 season and once for 2014-15. He ran his fingers over his name, etched forever on the silver underneath “Montreal Metros.” It still stung, that he would forever be associated with the Metros, literally stamped into metal, after everything they did.

But then he moved a little to the left and - there. “Ilya Rozanov.” Similarly stamped onto the Cup, listed with the players for the 2013-14 champion Boston Raiders.

Together on the Cup. But also not.

“Hollander,” Ilya said softly, approaching quietly from behind. “Still sad about me winning Cup first?”

Shane snorted. “I’m still up by two Cups, asshole. Plus, we’re on the same team now. That means you are never going to catch up to me.”

“Ah, but you could always retire first, join the WAGs, and I win three more Cups without you with Ottawa,” Ilya said, low, cautious of the others. “Of course, that means first we have to get Ottawa their first Cup.”

“Y’know, Ottawa already won a bunch of Cups,” Shane said offhandedly, his fingers moving up the Cup towards the bowl. “Back in the early 1900s.”

He ran his fingers over where “Ottawa” was engraved on the top of the bowl. “It was technically a different franchise, but Ottawa won a bunch early on.”

“Ah, Mr. Hockey Player is also Mr. Hockey Nerd. You will tell me what their Corsi is too?” Ilya teased, his eyes following Shane’s hand on the Cup.

“Fuck off, they didn’t have Corsi back then. I just mean, it wouldn’t be the first time Ottawa’s won. It’s not impossible.”

“Hollander, of course it’s not fucking impossible. Ottawa has the number one and number two hockey players in all the MLH, their record last year is bah, not relevant,” Ilya put his hand on Shane’s shoulder. “The new ring they put on will be very boring, yes? It will just be Ottawa Centaurs, Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander over and over and over again. All the other teams will complain.”

“It won’t be all Ottawa Centaurs,” Shane said, swallowing. “The Metros get to be the first ones on the new ring.

Ilya breathed deeply out of his nose. “But Shane Hollander is still on the ring, no? Just because stupid Metros are also on the ring doesn’t take that away from you,” he grinned as he rubbed Shane’s shoulder. “Plus, how mad must they be that super gay Shane Hollander is the first player listed on the brand new ring.”

“Shut up, I am still just the normal amount of gay-”

“No Shane, you are super gay. And I love that about you.”

Shane softened at that, almost forgetting where they were and who was around until-

“Shane! Why don’t you bring the Cup over here! The guys were going to share some stories,” Yuna Hollander called out across the yard. She was already starting to set up a motley collection of chairs. Adirondack, patio, beach - they were all there, arranged in a circle, with some already occupied by the Pikes and the Cup handlers.

“Sometimes I feel like I’m a distant third in the list of her favorite children, after you and the Cup,” Shane joked as he grabbed the rim of the Cup.

“Ehh, I think you are still number two. Like always,” Ilya teased, following Shane to the gathering.

“Again, I won the Calder Trophy our rookie season, and have more Hart Trophies than you.”

“Yeah but I got drafted first, won Cup first, won Rocket Richard first…” Ilya continued as the two joined the circle of people.

“Man, that rivalry thing wasn’t just for show, huh?” the Cup handler - Bill, maybe? - joked.

“Just two competitive guys,” Shane said, his smile strained.

Jesus, how many times are we going to have to explain that?

“So, Bill,” *ah, that was his name!* “Do you have any good stories about what players have done with the Cup?” Yuna asked, ever the hockey fan.

“Well, it’s become something of a tradition for the captain to sleep with the Cup the first night,” Bill started, looking pointedly at Shane.

Shane turned red. Ilya snorted.

“Moy pomidor, of course you had to do the boring tradition!” Ilya laughed.

Shane could see Jackie mouth the words “moy pomidor” in confusion, trying to work something out.

“Rozanov, I have a very interesting photo on my phone from when you won the Cup…” Bill grinned.

“Liar. Is photoshop, is what it is. I would not do something as boring as sleep with the Stanley Cup,” Ilya said as he took a swig of beer.

“Well, besides that, a lot of the crazy stories happened before they got us to escort the Cup around,” Bill answered. “Though teams still get up to plenty of shenanigans, right Rozanov?”

This time, it was Ilya’s turn to turn red. He knew exactly what Bill was referencing.

“Wait, we gotta hear this. What did Rozanov do?” Hayden said, suddenly looking like Christmas came early.

“But Bill, it was an experiment! For science!” Ilya protested. “Marly and I wanted to see if it could float!”

“You could have easily tested that without having to throw it off a second story balcony into a pool,” Bill responded. “And besides you weren’t the first or second team to wonder that. We told you guys it would sink!”

“But we wanted to see it for ourselves,” Ilya pouted. “Wasn’t our fault Cup accidentally hit the edge of the pool and dented.”

“Sounds like it was entirely your fault,” Shane teased. “You never told me that you did that!”

Ilya shrugged. “Eh, I was young. Next Cup I win, I now know to not throw in a pool from second story balcony.”

Hayden snorted from across the circle. “Good luck with that in Ottawa!”

“Hayden!” Jackie said sharply. “Not the time or place.”

Hayden looked like he was about to say something before he remembered that while yes, Ilya Rozanov signed with the hapless Ottawa Centaurs, Shane had just been traded there and it was Shane’s Cup party and thus he was surrounded by everyone close to Shane.

So.

Not the time or place.

“So, Pike, how do you think the Metros are going to do now that you have the amazing… what’s name? Jesper Lundell, I think?”

“Guys, cool it,” Shane said. “Play nice.” He turned back to Bill. “Any other stories, Bill?”

“Well, if you go back to the early days, one of my favorites was when the Montreal Voyageurs left the Cup at a photographer’s house, and the photographer’s mother used it as a flower pot for some lilies.”

“Voyageurs?” Ilya asked. “I thought Montreal team was Metros?”

“There used to be two Montreal teams,” Yuna explained. “Back in the early days of the MLH. But the Voyageurs folded when their arena burned down.”

“Hollander, I have a great idea,” Ilya’s eyes glinted in mischief.

“We are not going to commit any arson, Rozanov.”

“Please?”

“Not even a little.”

“Bah, you are boring. Is only joke, why you have to be mad.” Ilya lowered his voice to a mutter, “Even if Metros deserve it.”

Bill cleared his throat. “Anyways. The Metros also have quite the history with the Cup. They once accidentally left it on the side of the road back in the ‘40s. And then, uh.” Bill started blushing. “Once the team forgot the Cup at a strip club.”

And now Christmas had come early for Ilya Rozanov, it seemed.

“Oh really?”

Hayden Pike, despite his best efforts, had also turned bright red.

Which Ilya, to his delight and Hayden’s shame, had noticed.

“Pike, was this one of the old timey stories or is this maybe more recent?”

“First of all, I was not there, and I certainly did not condone it,” Hayden started, wrongly.

“So it was the stupid recent Metros!” Ilya crowed.

“A couple of the guys, Olsson and Comeau, I heard they wanted to impress some of the girls that they knew at the club, and thought they could do it with the Cup,” Hayden said, digging the hole deeper and deeper.

“Aw poor babies, thinking the stripper loves them,” Ilya teased.

“Shut up, even I thought it was stupid,” Hayden protested. “Apparently they got too fu- messed up, and forgot the Cup there.”

“It wasn’t awkward at all for us to go to a strip club at 9 in the morning, that’s for sure,” Bill added.

Shane frowned. “Hayd, why didn’t I ever hear about this?”

“Ah, you know, you’re the captain, and the other guys saw you as uptight,” Hayden said, then realized what he had said. “I mean, understandably, and fuck it worked for you, but the other guys weren’t quite as dedicated to hockey.”

“Swear jar,” Jackie said on reflex.

“You know, if they were more dedicated to hockey than judging me, maybe you wouldn’t be going into next season with Jesper Lundell as your big name acquisition,” Shane bit out.

Hayden swallowed whatever he was about to say because, you know, fair.

“And Jesus Hayden, how the hell did I not know how much the team was obsessed with the strip club?” Shane shook his head.

“Centaurs not such a bad team now, eh Pike?” Ilya grinned toothily.

“Shut up,” Hayden muttered into his own beer. “Bill, any other stories? Preferably not of my team, if possible?”

Bill had been watching the scene with detached amusement. “Well, I could give you a laundry list of things people have eaten and drank out of the bowl. Cereal, beer, dog food… You name it, it’s been in there. But personally, after what I’ve seen, I would think twice about consuming anything from there.”

At the curious looks from all, Bill continued on. “I mean, the entire Toronto Guardians team peed in it back in 1940. And I know at least two players’ kids have pooped in it. Sure we sanitize it all the time, but still grosses me out a little, right?”

Shane suddenly felt ill. Hayden had also gone pale, while Ilya didn’t look quite as confident.

“Poop?” Ilya asked hesitantly.

“Yeah, back in ‘08 was the most recent time,” Bill then noticed the unease across all the past Cup winners’ faces. “Don’t worry! We disinfect the Cup after every players’ day. It should be totally sanitary.”

“I really didn’t need to know that,” Shane said, closing his eyes.

“Yeah, this is going to lowkey ruin my own day with the Cup,” Hayden said, joining Shane in closing his eyes.

“Ah, so that will ruin your day, not just knowing that you are going to be on shitty team,” Ilya teased.

“Ilya! Enough,” Shane snapped. “I think Hayden knows that the Metros suck.”

“Sorry Shane,” Ilya said, wrenching his mouth to the side. “Sorry Pike.”

Jackie's eyes darted between the two.

"O-kay," Bill continued. "I can also tell you about the time I had to hitchhike in Quebec City with the Cup in tow…"

As Shane's Cup party stretched into the late afternoon, Shane started feeling overwhelmed with the extended socializing. He politely excused himself inside, sinking into his parents' couch in the living room.

A few minutes later, Ilya joined him, sitting next to him on the couch.

Shane leaned his head back and closed his eyes. "You shouldn't be here. Somebody is going to guess."

"Everyone is too busy taking photos with the Cup and drinking out of it and putting babies in it. Bill is being very entertaining with his stories." Ilya put his arm around Shane and pulled him over so he could bury his nose in Shane's hair.

"Mmmm," Shane relaxed into Ilya, as the two sat there, decompressing.

"You know, they don't plan to fly out the Cup until tomorrow," Shane said offhandedly.

"Really."

"I asked if I could keep it overnight. To make up for being traded unexpectedly after winning the Conn Smythe," Ilya could feel Shane smiling.

Ilya pulled back to stare at Shane, searching his face. "You didn't."

"Remember that idea you had a few weeks ago? The one with the Cup?"

Oh, Ilya remembered it. Ilya remembered it very well. Ilya had jerked off to that idea that night. And the next morning. And the night he had to be back in Boston so he could properly pack for the cottage. And the morning after.

"Well I couldn't get it out of my head," a wicked smile came over Shane's face. "And I figured…"

"Fuck, Hollander," Ilya stared at Shane like he was the the most wonderful thing to ever exist, which according to Ilya, he was. "Fuck, I need to kiss you."

"Somebody's going to come in and see us."

"You should have thought about that before you said we were going to fuck in front of the Cup," Ilya said right before he devoured Shane.

God, there was nothing quite like kissing Shane Hollander. It was the hottest thing he had ever done while also feeling like he was coming home all at the same time.

Shane's response - always willing, always eager - certainly helped.

Not satisfied with their closeness, Shane climbed in Ilya's lap, grinding against his crotch as he grabbed Ilya's face in his hands.

Ilya responded by running his hands beneath Shane's shirt, desperately trying to feel him and get closer. He moved his mouth to Shane's jaw, sucking and biting while Shane moaned against him.

"Fuck, Shane…"

"What the fuck?!"

The exclamation cut through their haze, and they pulled apart, lips still red and swollen.

Shane scrambled to get out of Ilya's lap, muttering, "Fuck, fuck, fuck, not again, fuck, damnit, fuck," all the while as Ilya couldn't help but grin and laugh.

Shooting him a withering stare, Shane threw a pillow at Ilya to cover his lap and the… evidence of what they were doing as he tried to breathe deeply to calm himself down.

Hayden stood there, wide-eyed, with Jackie close behind.

"Oh, errr…" Shane stuttered, not knowing what to say.

"Hello Pike and Mrs. Pike," Ilya said calmly.

"Rozanov, what the fuck are you doing?" Hayden's eyes darted between the two of them, his hands at his sides clenching air.

"Shane, moy vozlyublenniy, I think Pike knows," Ilya said as he rubbed his thumb over the back of Shane's hand.

"What the hell do I know?" Hayden asked, still sputtering, as Jackie placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Hayden, remember how earlier you told me that Shane had a boyfriend? And that he was going to tell you who it was later?" she gestured to Ilya. "I think you just found out who it is."

Shane, still in Ilya's lap, decided to save the freak out for later. "Hayden, I'd like to introduce you to Lily."

The confirmation seemed to short-circuit Hayden's brain.

"But- what- how- when-" Hayden sputtered.

“We got together a couple of years ago,” Shane supplied.

“Summer before rookie season,” Ilya clarified, adding about seven years to Shane’s suggestion.

“Okay, officially together a couple of years ago,” Shane said, rolling his eyes.

“What?!” Hayden still stared at them, wide-eyed.

“Hayd, I know you have a lot of questions, but those feel like the perfect questions you can ask on the double date that I know Shane will agree to,” Jackie calmed her husband down, while sending a pointed look Shane’s way. “Especially with the way he’s been avoiding the dinner invitation all month.”

“We’ll be at the cottage all summer…” Shane started.

“You’ll both be at the cottage,” Hayden repeated, staring off in the distance. “The cottage that you never invite anyone to.”

“...So our schedules are pretty free until we have to get to Ottawa for captain’s skate. Just let us know,” Shane continued, ignoring Hayden.

Jackie smiled. “Sounds good.” She turned to Ilya and held out her hand. “I don’t think we’ve ever been formally introduced. Jackie Pike, Hayden belongs to me.”

Ilya grinned widely. “Ah, the better Pike. Now I see why Pike’s children are so great despite belonging to Hayden.”

Jackie laughed while Hayden sputtered indignantly.

“Pike, if it makes you feel better, you have been upgraded to fourth best Metro.”

“You were the fifteenth best Metro until Montreal sent Ilya the video,” Shane supplied unhelpfully.

Hayden couldn’t do anything except run his hand over his face. “Fuck, you guys are really doing this, huh?”

Shane looked softly over at Ilya. “Yeah. Yeah we are.”

Jackie clapped her hands to get everyone back on topic. “Before anyone else catches you-”

“Don’t worry. David has already learned his lesson. What is the saying, fool me twice, shame on me?”

“Okay, I don’t even want to think about why that would apply to Shane’s dad. But before anyone else catches you guys, I think we should all head back into the yard to wrap this Cup party up.”

“Thanks, Jackie. Sounds like a plan,” Shane extracted himself from Ilya’s lap. “Besides, we still need to take pictures.”

“Yeah, it’s going to be the last Cup you guys see in a while,” Hayden joked.

“Fuck you, man.”

“Don’t worry, Shane,” Ilya kissed the top of his head. “Pike is just jealous that we get to be on amazing team together while he’s stuck on team of homophobes.”

@haydenpike35 ✅ Hayden Pike
[Photo of Hayden, Jackie, the Pike kids, and Shane with the Stanley Cup]
This sport is tough sometimes, especially when you have to say goodbye to close friends. @shanehollanderhockeyplayer, it’s been a blast playing on your wing for the past nine seasons. As far as Jackie is concerned, you’re her fifth child, and you’ll always have a spot at our dinner table. Good luck in Ottawa, not that you need it.

> **@ilyarozanov81 ✅ Ilya Rozanov**
> *In reply to @haydenpike35 ✅*
> Sorry you are fourth best Metro
>
> **@haydenpike35 ✅ Hayden Pike**
> *In reply to @ilyarozanov81 ✅*
> Who are the three Metros better than me?
>
> **@ilyarozanov81 ✅ Ilya Rozanov**
> *In reply to @haydenpike35 ✅*
> Basil the bomb sniffer dog, Youppi, and the man who tells the crowd “everybody clap your hands”
>
> **@haydenpike35 ✅ Hayden Pike**
> *In reply to @ilyarozanov81 ✅*
> ???
>
> **@shanehollanderhockeyplayer ✅ Shane Hollander**
> *In reply to @haydenpike35 ✅*
> Hayden, that’s a compliment.

@shanehollanderhockeyplayer ✅ Shane Hollander
[Photo of Shane, Yuna, David, Jackie, Hayden, Ilya, and the Pike kids surrounding the Stanley Cup sitting the grass, both Ruby and Jade climbing on Ilya while Shane laughs]

Had a blast with my family and friends today with the Stanley Cup! See you soon, Ottawa Centaurs fans.

> **@ilyarozanov81 ✅ Ilya Rozanov**
> *In reply to @shanehollanderhockeyplayer ✅*
> Jackie not joking I will babysit
>
> **@jackiepike Jackie Pike**
> *In reply to @ilyarozanov81 ✅*
> No takes-backsies!
>
> **@hollysgirl katie**
> *In reply to @shanehollanderhockeyplayer ✅*
> No #sponsored from Hollander? Biggest news since the trade
>
> **@dollarsandcentaurs Bobby**
> *In reply to @shanehollanderhockeyplayer ✅*
> I know they mentioned it in their press conference but I did not expect Ilya Rozanov to be there
>
> **@ottapoppy Poppy**
> *In reply to @shanehollanderhockeyplayer ✅*
> Whose kids are those?
>
> **@pikeplacehockey #1 hayden pike fan**
> *In reply to @ottapoppy*
> Hayden Pike's!

@ilyarozanov81 ✅ Ilya Rozanov
[Photo of Shane with the Cup, Ilya lurking in the background posed like he's about to tackle Shane]
Soon, @Centaurs)))

> **@shanehollanderhockeyplayer ✅ Shane Hollander**
> *In reply to @ilyarozanov81 ✅*
> Rozanov, really?
>
> **@ilyarozanov81 ✅ Ilya Rozanov**
> *In reply to @shanehollanderhockeyplayer ✅*
> Was trying to make your boring party more exciting
>
> **@rahrahrozanov Ily Ilya**
> *In reply to @ilyarozanov81 ✅*
> I know they're teammates now but this is still blowing my mind

@wisniewski ✅ Paul Wisniewski
Sources confirm that the Stanley Cup was left at a Montreal strip club by Metros players in 2016, allegedly the same club whose dancers featured in the Ilya Rozanov recruitment video.

@RobertTremblayTVA ✅ Rob Tremblay
While nobody is saying anything publicly, there's a sense that the Hollander-Metros divorce was prompted by player feedback during GM Ron Bourque's end-of-season meetings.

> **@BoodsLettuce Bood's Lettuce**
> *In reply to @RobertTremblayTVA ✅*
> What, they hate that Hollander got them three rings?

> **@makeitmakecens Abigail**
> *In reply to @RobertTremblayTVA ✅*
> Dirty that this drops on Hollander's day with the Stanley Cup

@dcrisp D Crisp
I analyzed the Montreal Metros players' performance in every MLH city to see if there is a correlation between the box score and the city's average strip club rating

> **@dcrisp D Crisp**
> *In reply to @dcrisp*
> For most players on the team, there is a statistically significant correlation between poor performance and highly-rated strip clubs

> **@dcrisp D Crisp**
> *In reply to @dcrisp*
> Notable exceptions are Hayden Pike, who performs best on the road regardless of city, and Shane Hollander, who performs best in any game against the Boston Raiders

> **@hollysgirl katie**
> *In reply to @dcrisp*
> Now THIS is journalism

@TheBeaverton ✅ The Beaverton
Peace in Middle East imminent, "Inspired by end of Hollander-Rozanov rivalry."

@milesnsmiles Colorado Hockey Girl
Day 15 of waiting for Doug Hockey to eat his tweet

> *Quoting:*
> **@thatshockey24 Doug Hockey**
> Ottawa? If Ottawa even gets one of those two I'll print out this tweet and eat it

@boringhollander Boring Shane Hollander
I had a party with the Stanley Cup and invited my old friend Hayden Pike and my new friend Ilya Rozanov. I asked them if they had fun. They said they did.

It was a few hours later, and everyone had left Shane's parents' cottage.

Hayden made a point as he was leaving to clasp Shane on the shoulder - still the bad one, though it had started to heal - and say, "We better have that double date soon."

"Don't worry Hayd, Ilya cannot wait for it," Shane grinned.

Hayden just groaned as he helped Jackie usher their four children out of the cottage and into the minivan.

Meanwhile, David and Yuna were packing up some leftovers in rubbermaid containers, pushing them on Bill as he prepared to head out to the hotel.

"We really appreciate you letting Shane keep the Cup overnight," Yuna said as she handed him enough food for at least a week.

"Thanks, ma'am," Bill said. "But it was the least we could do after what happened to Shane." He dropped his voice conspiratorily. "Between us, that was a real shit move by the Metros. There's a lot of people around the league that aren't happy with them right now."

"We aren't too happy with them either," Yuna said dryly. "But I think ultimately, Ottawa is going to show them how badly they messed up."

"Hollander and Rozanov on the same team? I think the league is going to be so annoyed at facing that duo that every team is going to show Montreal how badly they messed up," he nodded at Yuna, and then the rest of the group. "I'll be back tomorrow at 9AM to pick up the Cup. Hope you folks enjoy the afterparty."

Shane murmured his goodbye to the keepers as he walked out the door.

Yuna turned to Shane and Ilya, one eyebrow raised. "So, do you two boys have a plan for the rest of the night?"

Shane turned beet red and looked down at his shoes. Ilya placed one hand on his shoulder - always Shane's good one - and answered for them both. "Shane wanted to take it to his cottage. You know, christian the cottage with the Cup."

"Jesus Ilya, that's not what I said," Shane's head shot up, face still red. "I just wanted some alone time with the Cup. Last time I was so drun… last time I wasn't able to enjoy it."

Yuna, major hockey fan that she is, understood. Or thought she understood. "It makes sense that as captain, you'd want to have more time with the Cup, especially after Montreal traded you."

Shane nodded, "Yes, exactly."

"Then you boys better get on the road soon, it's getting dark and I don't trust some of these roads after dark."

Rolling his eyes, Shane went over to kiss his mother on the cheek. “Okay mom, we’ll head out. But we’ll be back with the Cup in the morning so the league can pick it up.”

“Sounds good, do you want anything for breakfast?”

Shane shook his head, but Ilya piped up behind him. “Can you make pancakes? With chocolate chips? And bacon?” Shane gave him a look. “What? Your mother offered.”

“See you tomorrow, mom.”

“Goodbye, Yuna!”

Shane picked up the Cup and headed out to his Jeep, Ilya following behind with their bags.

Ilya opened the door to the rear seats for Shane to put the Cup in, while he went to the trunk to toss the bags in.

As Shane was leaning over the Cup to buckle it in, Ilya came up behind and grabbed Shane’s hips, pulling Shane into him.

Leaning over, he murmured into Shane’s ear. “Shane, if we don’t drive to the cottage right fucking now and fuck in front of the Stanley Cup I will literally explode.”

Well. Couldn’t have that.

Chapter End Notes

References

The ultimate Stanley Cup, showing Ottawa on the bowl
Some of the misadventures referenced with the Stanley Cup - believe it or not, I didn't make any of them up, just switched up some of the teams.
Rangers left the Cup at a strip club by the man who has an NHL leadership award named after him
"It’s only game, why you have to be mad?" is one of the most iconic, enduring quotes
This guy on Reddit analyzed James Harden's performance based on strip clubs, which is not hockey-related but I felt relevant to this fic

If you enjoyed going down various rabbit holes from my references, I highly recommend these two books!
The “Down Goes Brown” History of the NHL is the epitome of “best sport, worst league” and where I pulled the Montreal Wanderers (Voyageurs) folding after their arena burned down referencence
Odd Man In is not relevant to this fic, but the EBUG is one of my favorite phenomenon

Thank you to everyone who has made this journey with me! I know I didn't get to every plot point that y'all wanted, but considering this was supposed to only be chapters 3 and 4, I feel like I still did a pretty good job. Also know that I read and appreciate every single one of your comments and bookmarks :)

I do have a rough outline for a sequel, but I also have a few other unrelated ideas floating about my head that I might want to explore first. So stay tuned!

End Notes

References:

Boring Shane Hollander = Boring Sean Monahan
Beaverton tweet = 2-Year-Old Never Thought He Would Live To See Giants Win World Series
Keepers of the Cup information
Roger Crowell's reaction to being booed = Gary Bettman urges fan to boo him
Famous NHL Stanley Cup playoffs commercial that states, "It weighs 35 pounds except when you're lifting it"
Infamous first overall pick and bust Alexandre Daigle once said, "Nobody remembers number two"
The Metros partying in Denver is like Alex Ovechkin partying with the Cup post-win
Shane getting to sleep with the Cup directly draws from Sidney Crosby sleeping with the Stanley Cup

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