

The Ringer

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The Ringer

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Summary

‘What did they say when you told them I was joining the team?’

A slow grin spreads across Ilya’s face.

‘What did you do?’ Shane asks, dread seeping into his expression.

‘Nothing.’ Ilya tells him innocently.

‘.... You told them. Right?’

‘I did not.’

‘Ilya!’ Shane gasps. ‘I start training tomorrow!’

The Centaurs meet their new player

Notes

Disclaimers:

I know nothing about hockey and I haven't read Long Game yet so I'm mostly guessing the teams personalities!

Chapter 1

Moving in with Shane is a dream come true. It's been an awful few months, especially with how cruel the Metros have been to the man who fought tooth and nail to win them two cups. But despite how terrible things have been, they can finally be honest. They're married with their whole lives ahead of them. No more hiding.

Ilya is helping Shane unpack the latest round of boxes that the moving company sent over. He's diligently following Shane's carefully curated order for his books, determined to make sure Shane feels at home.

He opens a box labelled "Hockey" while Shane fetches them more coffee. The box opens up to reveal countless binders, almost like a homework project. He takes out the first binder which has the logo of the Toronto Maple Leaves on the cover. He flicks through to find the pages full of notes about their players and predicted plays. He digs through the box, finding a similar binder about the Raiders. It's shockingly insightful. Shane has notes about injuries not disclosed to the public, incredibly accurate descriptions of their personalities and up to date statistics for each player. Ilya looks through the pages, frowning to himself, when Shane walks in with two mugs in hand.

'Ah.' Shane clears his throat awkwardly. 'I can explain.'

'Why am I not in this?' Ilya pouts.

Shane just laughs, passing Ilya his coffee and sitting on the floor next to him. 'Because you don't play for the Raiders anymore.' Shane explains. 'Your profile got moved the the Centaurs folder.'

Ilya immediately abandons the binder, hunting for the one on his new team. 'Ah-ha!' He cheers, grabbing the folder and opening it up to the "captain" tab. There's a picture of him taken from the draft, where he's holding up one finger smugly. The rest of the page is a black square with the word "redacted" in bold white letters.

'Shane!!'

Shane is laughing so hard he has to put his mug down so he doesn't spill his coffee. Ilya can't even be mad at him. It's the only time Shane has ever played a prank and it was so perfectly executed.

'No fair!' Ilya pouts, playing up his outrage. 'I want to see what you think of me.'

'You know what I think of you. I married you.'

'You know what I mean.' He scowls. 'You have notes on me?'

Shane nods. 'They're all digital. In a locked folder. You'll never see them.' Shane teases.

‘So cruel to me.’ Ilya whines. He turns his attention back to the binder, realising that Shane knows more about his new team than he does. ‘You have always done this?’ He asks, realising that the research goes back years.

‘Yeah, mostly during breaks or when I need my brain to shut up. It’s helps when I have a solid task to tackle when things get too much.’

‘I see...’

‘I know it’s weird.’ Shane admits, starting too look self conscious.

‘No, it’s amazing. You are very perceptive.’

Ilya gets to a tab labelled “suggested improvements” and finds training schedules designed to tackle every weakness the team has. He reads through it reverently.

‘You can ignore all that if you want.’ Shane says quickly, realising what section Ilya is reading. ‘I’m not the Captain. It’s not my place. It’s just like... a logic puzzle for me.’

‘This is amazing.’ Ilya assures him immediately.

Shane gives him a small smile and taps his foot against another box labelled “Hockey M”.”
‘That’s all info on the Metros.’

‘The whole box?!’

‘I can condense it all into a battle plan.’

Ilya raises an eyebrow, silently asking what Shane means.

‘I refuse to lose a single game against them this season.’ Shane says with a fierce determination.

Ilya pulls him in for a kiss. ‘Good plan. Best plan.’

While they take a break for lunch, Ilya checks his phone and reads through the Centaurs group chat. Boyle has shared an article about the Metros. Screenshots of a group chat have been leaked where Theriault and some of their players have been saying disgustingly homophobic things about their previous captain.

Bood:

Hope your boy is doing okay Cap

Haas:

Can’t believe they’d say this shit!

Dillon:

Welcome to the league kid.

Dykstra:

If you guys need anything, let us know Cap!!

Hayes:

Yeah, happy to drive to Montreal and kick their ass

Barrett:

Count me in!

Bood:

I'll book a bus for us

Rozanov:

No bus.

Thank you, we have seen article.

No fighting necessary.

Just help me wipe the floor with them next time we play them

Haas:

You got it boss!!!

Ilya laughs and puts his phone away when Shane sits next to him. 'Team is on warpath to defend your honour.' He says with a proud smile.

'What did they say when you told them I was joining the team?'

A slow grin spreads across Ilya's face.

'What did you do?' Shane asks, dread seeping into his expression.

'Nothing.' Ilya tells him innocently.

'... You told them. Right?'

'I did not.'

'Ilya!' Shane gasps. 'I start training tomorrow!'

'I thought it would be funnier this way.'

'You have to give people time to process news!'

'Only when is bad news. This is not bad news. This is best news.'

'We don't know that for sure. What if they're not happy about me being there? The Metros weren't...'

Ilya moves quickly, wrapping his arms around Shane. 'They already know about us. Here, look at this-' He says, opening the group chat to show Shane.

Boyle:

Those idiots have lost their only good player

LaPointe:

Whatever team Hollander transfers to is going to decimate the playoffs

Chouinard:

RIP the montreal winning streak

‘They have been worried about you.’ He says as Shane scrolls through the supportive messages. ‘They love you already.’ He promises.

‘Yeah... okay.’ Shane says, relaxing minutely. ‘I still think you should warn them.’

‘Absolutely not.’ Ilya declares, kissing Shane’s cheek. ‘I’ve been looking forward to this since you signed.’

Chapter 2

‘Alright, listen the fuck up!’ Ilya declares once the team has filed into the locker room. ‘I have announcement and I need you all to listen. No interruptions. Understand?’

The Centaurs all nod in agreement, giving them his full attention. It almost feels like a class of small children, leaning in to hear what their teacher is about to tell them.

‘We have one goal this season. I don’t care about playoffs. Don’t give a fuck about the cup. Our only goal is to embarrass the fuck out of the Metros by destroying them.’

It’s probably not the best message he could be giving as the captain. But the team certainly shares his passion, muttering curses about Montreal in agreement.

‘To do this, we’re making some changes to the roster. You will all have to work hard to integrate our new player. I want best behaviour from you all.’

‘Who are we getting?’ Barrett asks, clearly surprised by the mid season transfer.

‘What happened to no interruptions?’

‘Sorry, couldn’t help it.’ Barrett replies awkwardly.

Ilya laughs. ‘No worry. You do not have to wait long. He’s already here.’ Ilya looks to the doorway where Shane is waiting with an unimpressed rise of his eyebrow.

The sight of Shane in his Centaurs hoodie fills Ilya with glee. The symbol of his team, *their team*, on his husbands chest is more than Ilya can handle.

‘You want me to put you out of misery?’

There’s a chorus of “yes” and “get on with it!” that makes Ilya laugh.

‘Alright, alright. Shane come say hi to team.’

The team whips around to look at the door, falling off the benches as they scramble to their feet.

There’s a long moment of silence where the men just stare at Shane who shifts awkwardly.

‘...Hey.’ Shane says, breaking the silence.

‘Oh my fucking god...’ Haas exhales.

The tension broken, the team erupt into chaotic cheers.

‘Fuck yes!’

‘Oh my god, we’re absolutely getting the cup.’

‘Is that really Shane fucking Hollander?!’

‘Alright!’ Ilya shouts over the noise the second Shane starts to look overwhelmed. He walks over to Shane before the team pounce on him. ‘Everyone, meet my husband. Shane Hollander-Rozanov.’ Ilya says, voice bursting with pride. He puts an arm around Shane’s shoulder to pull him in, careful not to go too over the top with PDA while Shane is still adjusting to the team. ‘He has taken huge pay cut so we can afford him so you all better be grateful.’

‘It’s not that big of a deal.’ Shane huffs.

‘Yes it is.’ Ilya corrects. ‘Shane comes with incredible support team. Yuna Hollander will be here next week to give talk on brand opportunities and put you in touch with agents if you want to make more money. She has also arranged new gear for us which arrives tomorrow. Many brands want to show their support and Yuna is working with Harris to organise many deals. She has also gotten us a new coffee machine so we do not need to drink swill anymore. And David Hollander has sent chocolate chip cookies for after training. This is the best news. They are delicious.’

Shane scoffs but seems more relaxed that Ilya had thought he would be.

‘And now the bad news.’

The team stills, clearly suffering from emotional whiplash.

‘I’m sure that you have all heard that Shane has highest hockey IQ in the world.’

Ilya can’t see him but he knows that Shane is rolling his eyes.

‘This means that each of you has a personalised training plan to follow.’ Ilya reluctantly moves away from Shane, opening his locker to reveal the new binders he had stashed in there. ‘This will be the hardest season you have ever played. But I promise you. It will be worth it.’

Shane smiles at the team as Ilya hands out the binders. It’s not quite the real smile that Ilya is used to but it’s a good pretence of comfort for the team.

‘Let’s fucking go!’ Boodram roars and the team cheers excitedly.

‘Alright! Get ready for training. I want you on the ice in ten.’ Ilya declares, dismissing them.

Every member of the team takes a moment to talk to Shane, personally welcoming him to the Centaurs. Ilya thinks that Haas might explode from excitement when he shakes Shane’s hand.

Boodram moves over to Ilya, planting a hand on his shoulder. ‘You should demote me.’ He says, not at all bitter about the circumstances. ‘We need Hollander as alternative captain.’

‘We’ll talk about it later.’ Ilya tells him. ‘He wants to settle first, not step on any toes.’

‘We’re lucky to have you both. It’s going to be a hell of a year.’

Ilya smirks. ‘You will not be so happy when you read your training plan.’ He tells the man.

‘Spread the word for me. No team hazing for this transfer. That is not what Shane needs right now.’

‘Understood. We’re going to fucking destroy the Metro’s.’ He promises, squeezing Ilya’s shoulder before leaving to get changed for practise.

‘Damn right.’ Ilya says to himself, winking when Shane catches his eye.

Chapter 3

It's an intense training session. The team all working harder than ever, showing off for Shane. Ilya grins at the sight, his players acting like little kids desperate to get a scrap of attention from their new team mate. Shane slots into the team immediately, like the last puzzle piece they've been waiting for.

He's glad to see Shane chatting with LaPointe when they pause for water. The Canadian comes from a predominantly french town, so his English has been rusty. He looks impossibly happy to have another french speaker on the team.

Ilya is so lost in his admiration of his husband that he doesn't notice Luca Haas skating over to him.

'I need to change my number.' Haas says, the words all coming out at once.

'What?' Ilya blinks, still mentally translating what was said.

'My number!' Haas hisses, tapping the 24 on the arm of his jersey.

Ilya suddenly realises what the man means and starts to laugh.

'It's not funny man! I can't be on a team with *the* Shane Hollander while I'm number 24. That's insane!'

'Shane is not a proud man. This was quick trade, no time to consider numbers. He's happy for you to keep your number.'

'Rozanov. Captain. You don't get it. Hollander is my hero. I had posters of him as a kid. When I got this number I thought it was a good luck charm. But playing on the same team as him? That's so much better. But I am *not* going to be the one to fuck up Hollanders legacy. He *needs* to be 24.'

It's the most Ilya has ever heard Haas talk. There's a strong determination in his eyes that Ilya can't help but admire. Probably because it reminds him of Shanes angry kitten expression.

'Okay, okay. Breathe. We will have meeting okay? Get you new number.'

Haas exhales. 'Thanks Cap.' He skates away, tripping over his own feet as he passes Shane. Ilya snuffles a laugh, hopefully the star struck fanboy mode will fade before their first game.

'Hey Cap, you seen this?' Hayes asks when they're back in the locker room, showing Ilya an article about the Metros last game.

'What is it?' Ilya asks, his nose wrinkling at the mention on Montreal.

'The fans boycotted the game.'

‘What?’

‘After all the leaks, there was an impromptu pride parade at Montreal, right in front of the stadium. And the only people in the stands of the game were there to support the Admirals. Not a blue jersey in sight.’

‘Hah.’ Ilya laughs bitterly, glad to see that Scott Hunter was the first to beat the team after their homophobia went public.

‘It’s good to see the fans standing up for Hollander.’ Dykstra says, leaning over Ilya’s shoulder to look at the article.

Boodram looks up from where he’s been lacing his boots. ‘I saw a post saying Hollanders Metro jersey is sold out everywhere.’

‘Which is still money in the Metros pockets.’ Barrett points out bitterly.

‘Still good for him.’ Boodram shrugs. ‘He’s probably the most purchased jersey in history now.’

‘There’s no way he’s beating Gretzky’s sales.’ Hayes argues.

‘Has this fucked any of his brand deals?’ Dillon asks. ‘He’s like the most booked player in the league right? I’m always seeing him in ads.’

‘They’re actually more eager to work with me now.’ Shane says, stepping out from the showers.

The men jump, embarrassed to be caught talking about Shane within earshot.

Shane doesn’t seem too bothered. ‘They were already pushy about how good I was for “*diversity*” before all this.’

‘...Huh?’ Barrett asks, confused.

A small amused smile crosses Shane’s face. ‘You didn’t notice I’m the only Asian in the league?’

‘Oh!’ Barrett flushes, embarrassed. ‘Hadn’t thought about it...’

Shane shrugs to show it doesn’t matter. ‘Now they can really double down on the diversity angle. My Mom’s looking over all the offers.’ He dries his hair, looking over at Ilya. ‘You have an email from Rolex by the way.’

‘Is too many words. Tell them I do not read English.’

‘You have to read your contracts Asshole.’ Shane says, tossing the towel at him. Ilya catches it before it hits his face.

He notes the look on his teammates face as they recalculate whatever they thought his and Shane's relationship would be like. He's glad that Shane clearly feels comfortable here, joking and arguing with Ilya instead of clamming up.

Harris pokes his head into the locker room. 'The post about Hollanders transfer is live. Do whatever you can to show support. Whoever gets the most liked reply gets a gift basket from Yuna Hollander.'

Shane laughs, cheeks tinged pink from all the attention.

'Like... a fruit basket?' Dykstra asks.

'I think I saw a pretty pricey bottle of whisky in there.'

The men immediately reach for their phones.

Harris looks at Shane, giving him a thumbs up. 'Welcome to the team!'

'I think that went well.' Ilya declares happily once they're alone in the car.

'Yeah.' Shane nods his head. 'They're really welcoming. I still think the locker room theatrics was too much.'

'I had fun.' Ilya snickers. 'Haas threatened me during practise.' He tells Shane conversationally.

'What?!'

'He *demand*ed I give you his number. Said the world would end if Shane Hollander was not number 24. Too important to your legacy. And Bood thinks you should be alternative captain.'

'I've only been there a day.'

'I think they would have offered you all this the second you were signed. They know a gift when they are blessed with it.' He takes Shane's hand, pressing his lips against the knuckles.

'And you are a true gift.'

Shane blushes.

'Is too much?'

'It's just... going to take some adjustment. It's good though. Could have been a lot worse.'

Ilya nods, understanding. 'Let's go home, yes. I can reward you for good first practise.'

'If you have that kind of energy left you haven't trained hard enough.'

‘Do not underestimate me.’ Ilya grins, grabbing Shane’s Centaurs hoodie to pull him in for a kiss. ‘Drive us home, yes?’

Shane looks like he’s considering letting Ilya do whatever he wants to him right there in the parking lot. Sanity wins out and Shane puts the car into gear, clearly determined to get them home as soon as possible.

Chapter 4

Their first game against the Metros is in Montreal. A move clearly chosen by the league for maximum publicity. And more than likely designed to help the Metro's abysmal ticket sales post boycott.

They're naturally tense when they walk into enemy territory. The history of Shane's accolades is plastered on the walls, impossible to ignore. There's a moment where Shane goes to take a wrong turn, heading to the Metros locker room rather than the one designated for visiting teams.

Ilya moves quickly, grabbing his husband's hand to get him back on track before anyone on the team notices.

'Fuck.' Shane mutters to himself, squeezing Ilya's hand to say thank you.

Thankfully, after a month of playing games together the team knows not to bother Shane in the locker room. Shane sits in focused silence as he diligently moves through his pre-game ritual.

While they're gearing up, Boodram shows Ilya a post on his phone. It's a picture from the stands showing that the Metros stadium is packed for the first time since Shane's departure. The picture is taken from the back, showing that every Metros jersey has "Hollander" written across the back. Some fans have even DIY'd their jersey, covering other players names with Shane's.

Harris has re-posted it to the team's socials and it's already gone viral.

Ilya smiles at the sight of it. 'Metro's will be out for blood.' He warns. 'We will make sure they don't get too close to him.'

'You got it.' Boodram grins, tapping his fist against Ilya's.

Shane's game face doesn't budge as they approach the ice.

'And here's the moment the fans have all been waiting for-' The announcer's voice is drowned out the second Shane steps onto the ice. The crowd is on their feet, a roar of applause shaking the building. Ilya spots pride flags dotted about the crowds and signs professing the fans love for Shane. Shane pays it no mind, too locked in on the game ahead of him. Ilya waves to the crowd, eternally grateful for the support.

'Shall we give them what they want to see?' Ilya asks, even though they've already planned this.

‘On it.’ Shane nods, locking eyes with Ilya for a moment before he skates away to take his place for the face off.

Ilya thinks back to one of his earliest face offs against Shane.

‘Will you disappoint them?’ He’d asked, intending to rattle the man.

But Shane hadn’t batted an eye at the question. He’d replied with one simple word. *‘No.’* So confident in his abilities that it was borderline erotic. At least as far as Ilya was concerned.

His plan to shake the mans confidence had backfired so disastrously that Ilya was the one who lost the puck.

Now, as Shane skates to the centre of the rink, Ilya shares that same confidence. A stadium full of fans there to support Shane and Ilya knows for a fact that Shane won’t disappoint them.

He faces off against Berkes who says something to Shane with a sneer. Shane doesn’t react. Doesn’t lose focus. And flies away with the puck the second it’s dropped, setting the precedent for the rest of the game.

Shane has a hat trick by the second period. The Metros are relentless, desperately chasing after Shane. It’s clear that their intent is to knock into Shane, not caring about the puck. But

Shane is far too fast for them and Ilya and Boodram stay on his tail, blocking any Metros from getting close. The Metro’s are too focused on Shane and play sloppily as a result. They miss every opportunity they have to score and face an embarrassing defeat. Shane doesn’t let up, even when there’s no way Montreal could possibly catch up.

They beat Montreal 12-0 and Ilya kisses Shane on the ice after the final buzzer.

As the teams line up to shake hands, Ilya purposely puts himself before Shane and crushes the hand of every player with the exception of Hayden and JJ, the only ones who reached out to Shane after he was kicked off the team. He wants to make sure that the Metros know not to say anything stupid too his husband. They mostly behave, too focused on the sudden pain to say anything they’ll regret.

Hayden is the last in the line, he pulls Shane into a tight hug. ‘Way to go man.’ He says, slapping Shane on the back before moving on to the next in line.

The locker room is predictably explosive. The men cheering and congratulating Shane on the hard earned victory.

Shane is quiet, contemplative, but does his best to match his teams enthusiasm.

‘We’re celebrating, right?’ Barrett asks. ‘Lets find a club.’

Ilya steps in before Shane can scramble together an excuse. ‘Tomorrow. I want my husband all to myself tonight.’

The team boo’s him but it’s all in good nature. Shane flashes him a grateful smile, looking more relaxed now that he knows it won’t be long before he can escape being social.

‘Love you.’ He mouths to Ilya as he heads to the showers.

Chapter 5

Before they return to Ottawa, Ilya and Shane go to the Pike residence for dinner.

‘Best behaviour.’ Shane reminds him before knocking on the door.

‘I promised no such thing.’ Ilya counters as the door is thrown open.

‘Mon capitaine!’ JJ greets Shane excitedly, throwing his arms around the man. ‘That last goal was fucking beauty. I think Drapeau was about to retire before the game was over.’ He leads

Shane into the house, switching to French as he rambles about the game.

Jackie rolls her eyes, gesturing for Ilya to enter. ‘How’s he doing?’ She asks, kissing Ilya’s cheek in greeting as he passes her a bottle of wine that Shane picked out for them.

‘He is alright.’ Ilya tells her genuinely. ‘It helps that we won the game.’

‘First time I’ve ever hoped my husbands team would lose.’ Jackie admits conspiratorially.

‘Where is baby?’

‘The kids are at my parents place tonight.’

‘Ah, no, you misunderstand. I am asking about your husband.’

Jackie stifles a laugh. ‘Come on.’ She leads Ilya to the dining room where Hayden and JJ are still congratulating Shane on the game.

Jackie is an amazing cook and she seems to understand Shane’s eating habits better than anyone. There’s a wide selection of food to choose from, with plenty of health options conveniently in reach of Shane.

With all the stress, Shane’s issues around eating have been notably worse. But Ilya is glad to see him reach for food without hesitation, too lost in conversation to overthink every option.

‘I have an announcement!’ JJ declares suddenly, tapping his fork against his glass.

‘What’s up?’ Shane asks, sipping his ginger ale.

‘Paperwork is all done. Next season I will be playing for Toronto.’ He declares proudly.

‘You’re leaving Montreal?!’ Shane asks, face falling.

‘Fuck them.’ JJ huffs. ‘Metros have been pissing me off too much.’

‘JJ, you don’t need to change teams because of me...’

‘I do. I am sick of how they talk. Is disgusting.’

‘I’m looking at options too.’ Hayden admits.

‘Hayd.. You’re going to move your whole family because of this shit?’ Shane asks, looking between Hayden and Jackie as if they’re going to admit it’s all a joke.

‘JJ’s right. The morale has been shit. I want to punch someone every time I’m in the locker room.’ Hayden sighs. ‘And it doesn’t help that it’s all my fault.’

‘We know you didn’t do it on purpose.’ Shane tells him, maybe for the hundredth time since they were outed.

‘It still sucks...’

‘I know, but it kind of worked out for the best. We thought we’d have to wait until we retired to be out. And now we get to live together and play on the same team.’ Shane moves his hand to hold Ilya’s. ‘We’ve spent more time together this past month than we did the first decade of knowing each other.’

‘Is amazing.’ Ilya grins, not bothering to hide his pride.

‘We’ll work it out.’ Jackie tells them. ‘There’s bound to be a city that’ll be better for the kids. And then there’ll be three teams to kick the Metro’s asses.’

‘Cheers.’ Ilya raises his glass in toast and they all clink their glasses together. Shane’s foot taps against his and Ilya presses their legs together.

The conversation drifts away from hockey, turning into updates on the Pike children and JJ’s book club.

When it comes time to leave, Shane is pulled into long lingering hugs from his ex teammates. JJ moves to hug Ilya as well. Surprised, Ilya wraps an arm around him while he uses his other hand to flip Hayden off. The animosity between them has all but fizzled out these days but Ilya still can’t resist the opportunity to piss the man off.

They set off on the drive back to Ottawa, a classical music station playing quietly from the radio.

‘I’m proud of you.’ Ilya says honestly. ‘This was a tough trip. But you were amazing.’

‘It’s easier when you’re with me.’ Shane replies.

Ilya can’t stop the smile that spreads across his face. ‘We should get married again.’

‘How about we win the Stanley cup instead?’

‘Deal.’

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