

Captain of the Sinking Ship

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Captain of the Sinking Ship

by [winter_ninja](#)

Summary

"Never have I ever checked out my teammates in the locker room." Comeau said, looking directly at him.

Shane left his beer exactly where it was and met Comeau's gaze without saying a word, waiting for someone else to break the silence, because surely that had to have been a joke.

"Come on, Cap. It's no fun if you're just gonna lie." Drapeau let out with a quiet snort.

Shane frowned, genuinely confused. "What?"

"You really expect us to believe you've never taken a peek at us in the showers?"

Or: A game of Never Have I Ever with the Voyageurs turns ugly, it's a good thing Ilya is not too far way.

Notes

Set after Shane comes out to his team, but before the Irina Foundation announcement.

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

The bar was louder than Shane usually had the patience for, a constant swell of clinking glasses, shouted conversations, and music turned up just loud enough that everyone had to lean across the table to be heard, but for the first time in weeks he found that he didn't mind it nearly as much. When Drapeau had mentioned after their game that night that a bunch of the guys were heading out for drinks before turning to Shane with an almost casual, *You're coming too, Cap*, it had felt like something frozen between them had finally begun to thaw.

Coming out to his team over the summer hadn't gone badly, not openly anyway, but the silence afterward had been almost worse than outright hostility. Conversations died when he walked into the room, invitations stopped appearing, and the easy camaraderie that had once defined the locker room had been replaced by an awkward politeness that somehow felt even colder, as though no one knew how to act around their captain anymore.

Shane couldn't even bring himself to resent them for it. If anything, he blamed himself.

He knew it wasn't rational, but every time the room fell quiet after he entered or another team dinner happened without him, he couldn't help wondering if he'd been the one who had broken something that had always seemed unbreakable. They'd spent years becoming more than teammates, more like brothers, and now every interaction felt rehearsed, every joke carefully measured before it was spoken.

So when Drapeau had invited him out tonight, Shane hadn't even hesitated. If this was their way of extending an olive branch, he wasn't going to turn it down.

"Let's play Never Have I Ever," Wilson shouted over the music, slamming his glass onto the table hard enough that beer sloshed over the rim.

J.J. groaned immediately. "What are we, fifteen?"

"Oh, come on," Wilson protested. "It'll be fun."

"If I come home drunk," Hayden muttered, lazily pointing his bottle at the group, "Jackie's going to kill me."

"Cap?" Wilson looked across the table.

Shane raised an eyebrow, then shook his head. "I don't think so."

"Come on, captain. If you play, everyone else will." A rookie immediately leaned forward, determination written all over his face.

Shane looked around the table. Some of the guys wore amused grins, others looked genuinely hopeful, waiting to see what he'd say, and that tiny flicker of expectation was enough to wear down whatever resistance he had left.

He let out a resigned sigh. "Fine. One round."

The rookie threw both fists into the air. "Fuck yeah! Guys, captain's in!"

"Seriously?" Hayden laughed.

Shane only shrugged. "They want to bond," he said, offering a small smile. "How bad could it be?"

Two tables were dragged together, chairs scraped across the floor, and within minutes nearly the entire team was squeezed around them with drinks in hand.

"I'll start." Wilson pointed dramatically around the circle before stopping on Shane with an unmistakably mischievous grin. "Never have I ever won an MVP award."

A dozen pairs of eyes immediately landed on Shane.

"Oh, we're doing this?" He sighed with theatrical suffering before taking a long drink.

Laughter rippled around the table.

"My turn," Mitka said. "Never have I ever been the youngest captain in NHL history to win back-to-back Cups."

Shane lifted his beer again without hesitation.

"Okay," he said after swallowing, shaking his head at the group, "you assholes are just trying to get me drunk."

"So far, it's working," someone called from the other end of the table.

A few more harmless turns followed, earning laughs, groans, and more than a few reluctant drinks before J.J. slapped the table. "These are getting boring. Somebody spice it up." He pointed across the circle. "Hayden, your turn."

Hayden's grin immediately turned dangerous.

"Never have I ever kissed a guy."

Shane gave Hayden an unimpressed look, then reached for his beer without giving it much thought. Across the table, J.J. did exactly the same.

Shane froze halfway through his sip. So did everyone else.

"J.J.?"

"What?" J.J. replied with an innocent shrug. "I had to make sure."

The table erupted into laughter.

Hayden leaned across the table, eyes sparkling. "And?"

"Very nice kiss." J.J. paused just long enough for the anticipation to build. "Just wasn't for me."

Another wave of laughter rolled around the table, and even Shane found himself shaking his head with a grin. The mood relaxed again, for a moment, everything felt easy. Like things were going back to normal.

Then Drapeau spoke. He looked down into his drink, the corner of his mouth curling into a smirk that made something in Shane's stomach tighten.

"Never have I ever sucked a guy's dick."

Shane noticed the difference before he'd even finished processing the words. The statement wasn't said with the same playful curiosity as the others. There was something underneath it, something ugly, the words lingering just a little too long, carrying an edge that made the entire table noticeably quieter.

Still, he picked up his beer and took a sip. A few of the rookies immediately cheered, as well as Hayden and J.J.

"Way to go, Cap!"

"I knew my boy had game," J.J. laughed as Hayden bumped his shoulder against Shane's.

Shane managed a small, awkward laugh of his own before instinctively glancing back toward J.J. His bottle hadn't moved this time.

"Alright, Cap," Wilson said, eager to pull the game back toward something lighter. "Your turn."

"Um..." Shane thought for a moment. "Never have I ever had a threesome."

Half the table groaned before several players reluctantly lifted their drinks.

Comeau leaned back in his chair, an almost lazy smile spreading across his face as he swirled the last of his beer around in the bottle, looking far too pleased with himself before he'd even opened his mouth.

"My turn."

Something about the expression made the hairs on the back of Shane's neck stand up. Comeau looked directly at him.

"Never have I ever checked out my teammates in the locker room."

The words hung over the table for a moment. Nobody reached for their drink, nobody even shifted in their seat.

Shane left his bottle exactly where it was, resting against the edge of the table, and met Comeau's gaze without saying a word, waiting for someone else to break the silence, because surely that had to have been a joke.

But Comeau didn't look away, watching Shane with the patient confidence of someone convinced he would eventually crack, yet the seconds stretched on and Shane's expression never changed, denying him the reaction he had so obviously been hoping for.

Then Drapeau let out a quiet snort. "Come on, Cap. It's no fun if you're just gonna lie."

Shane frowned, genuinely confused. "*What?*"

"Oh, don't bullshit us," Drapeau said, his easy smile hardening into something far less friendly. "You really expect us to believe you've never taken a peek at us in the showers?"

The words landed like a brick in Shane's stomach, not because they embarrassed him, but because of how casually they were said, as though the conclusion was so obvious it hardly needed explaining.

The laughter that had been bouncing around the table only seconds earlier disappeared completely.

"I've never done that," Shane replied evenly, refusing to let the irritation creeping into his voice become anything more.

"Bullshit," Comeau scoffed.

"What the fuck, guys?" J.J. cut in immediately, looking between the two of them in open disbelief. "Are you fucking serious?"

"What?" Comeau said, as though he couldn't understand why anyone was objecting. He folded his arms across his chest. "He's a faggot."

The words were delivered so matter-of-factly as though they were supposed to explain what he was implying.

"What the fuck, Comeau?" Hayden shouted angrily from beside Shane, already trying to stand up and confront him, but Shane was quick to grab his arm and pull him back into his seat.

Across the table, J.J. was seconds away from pouncing on Comeau, but a simple gesture from Shane, silently telling him to stay seated, made him sit back down, though his body remained tense, ready to attack at any moment.

For a few long seconds, Shane simply stared at him. Then, to everyone's confusion, he laughed.

It wasn't because he found any of this funny, it was because the accusation was so spectacularly stupid that his brain couldn't quite process how anyone sitting at this table actually believed it.

"You really think that I would check *you* out?" he asked, still smiling in disbelief.

"Yeah," Comeau shot back, the challenge obvious in his voice. "I do."

Drapeau nodded beside him in agreement, so did a few of the older players.

Shane let out another short laugh before leaning forward, resting both forearms on the table as he looked directly at Comeau, the smile still sitting on his face despite the complete absence of warmth behind it.

"Just because I'm gay doesn't mean I don't have standards," he said, his voice calm enough that it forced everyone at the table to listen. "Or taste. Being attracted to men doesn't magically mean I'm attracted to every man I happen to lay my eyes on."

Comeau rolled his eyes. "I know what your kind is like," he muttered. "You probably jerk off thinking about what you see in the locker room."

Shane's smile widened, though there wasn't an ounce of amusement behind it anymore.

"Comeau," he said almost conversationally, "I have a man who's built like a Greek God and is packing nine inches waiting for me at home."

A couple of players blinked, someone choked on their beer, but Shane never looked away from Comeau.

"So, tell me," he continued, his voice calm enough to make the words sting even more, "why the fuck would I waste my time looking at your shrimp of a dick?"

The sentence left his mouth before he had the chance to reconsider it, and for a brief, surreal moment he almost didn't recognize himself. Maybe it was the beer loosening his filter, maybe it was a month of swallowing every awkward glance and every uncomfortable silence, or maybe spending so much time with Ilya had finally rubbed off on him, because that was exactly the kind of merciless comeback Ilya would've delivered without thinking twice.

For exactly one heartbeat, nobody moved. Then Hayden folded over the table, laughing so hard his chair nearly tipped backwards. J.J. slammed both hands against the tabletop with a bark of disbelief. Wilson doubled over, wheezing into his drink.

"Holy shit!" Mitka shouted from the other end of the table.

The laughter spread around them in waves, growing louder with every passing second, while Comeau's face darkened from bright red embarrassment into something much uglier, his jaw clenching so tightly that Shane thought he might actually crack a tooth.

The Boston Bears had been thoroughly outplayed.

Ilya had watched from his boyfriend's apartment as Shane and the Voyageurs dismantled his former team, and although a small, admittedly childish part of him had enjoyed seeing

Boston humbled after he had left in free agency and signed with the Centaurs, he couldn't deny that he missed the level of competition Boston had always demanded from him.

But more than that, though, he missed Shane, and watching him dominate a game from miles away was becoming harder.

By sheer coincidence, the Centaurs had a day off while the Bears were in Montreal, and after the game a few of his former teammates had invited him out for drinks before everyone headed home the following morning.

Not everyone had shown up. Some of the guys were still too frustrated by the loss to sit in a bar pretending they were in a good mood, but the handful of players Ilya had been closest to during his years in Boston had made the effort anyway. Leaving in free agency hadn't changed much between them. They all understood how this league worked; contracts expired, teams changed, and careers moved on. It had never been personal.

As much as he wanted to see his former teammates, that hadn't been the reason he'd come to Montreal. He'd come for Shane, and nothing else.

They had planned to spend the night together before Ilya had to return back to Ottawa the following morning, stealing what little time they could from the chaos of the season.

Instead, his phone had rung barely twenty minutes after the final buzzer.

"The guys are dragging me out for drinks," Shane had said, sounding almost... excited.

The surprise in his voice had been enough to make Ilya smile.

Shane almost never chose a crowded bar over a quiet evening together, and considering how distant the Voyageurs had seemed ever since Shane came out over the summer, hearing that his teammates had invited him out felt like the first genuinely hopeful sign in weeks.

"That's good," Ilya had replied, doing his best to keep the relief out of his voice. *"You should go."*

"You sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. You should go out and have fun with your team."

There had been a brief pause before Shane spoke again.

"But you came all the way to Montreal, I don't want you to have wasted your time—"

Ilya couldn't help smiling to himself.

"The chance of seeing you is never a waste of my time, sweetheart," he'd said softly. *"Even if I only get to see you for an hour before we both leave tomorrow, I will still fall asleep with you in my arms tonight, and that is worth it."*

"Oh."

The single word carried so much fondness that Ilya could picture the smile on Shane's face without even seeing him.

"Maybe," Ilya had continued, "I find Marly and a few of the Boston guys while I'm waiting. They're still in Montreal anyway."

"Oh, yeah sure, then have fun with the guys," Shane said, sounding noticeably lighter. "I'll see you tonight. I love you, Ilya."

"I love you too, Shane."

The call had ended there, but the unease hadn't.

Every time Ilya had asked Shane how things were going in the locker room over the past month, he'd been met with the same easy smile and the same carefully rehearsed answers.

Shane had never been a good liar. He'd never outright lied to Ilya, but he had always been spectacularly bad at hiding when something was bothering him, and lately every reassurance had sounded just a little too practiced, as though he were trying to convince himself as much as he was trying to convince Ilya.

Which was why Ilya had been strangely relieved to learn the team had invited Shane out tonight. Maybe he'd been wrong, and things really were getting better.

The bar the Bears had chosen happened to be only a block away from the one the Voyageurs had gone to, a coincidence Ilya secretly appreciated far more than he was willing to admit. He caught himself glancing toward the entrance every few minutes, almost hoping Shane's group might wander in by accident, if only so he could see his boyfriend laughing with his teammates and finally put the nagging feeling in the back of his mind to rest.

He was halfway through a conversation with Marlow about Boston's power play when a familiar name drifted across the table.

"...Can you believe what Comeau said about Hollander?"

The words cut clean through the conversation.

Ilya's head turned before he even realized he'd stopped listening to Marlow. His stomach dropped.

"What did Comeau say about Hollander?" he asked, doing his best to keep his voice casual despite the sudden knot forming in his chest.

The table fell quiet.

Hammersmith visibly stiffened, as though he hadn't realized Ilya was close enough to hear him. "Nothing."

It didn't sound like nothing.

Ilya looked from one former teammate to the next, only to find every one of them suddenly fascinated by their drink, the table, or literally anything that wasn't him.

"What the fuck did Comeau say about Hollander?" he asked again, his voice noticeably sharper this time.

"Roz..." Marlow sighed. "If what Comeau said is true, then it's really not our secret to share. I'm sorry, man."

Ilya's pulse quickened. His mind immediately jumped to the worst possibility.

Had Comeau outed Shane?

Shane had trusted his teammates enough to come out to them, but he'd also made it clear that he wasn't interested in making some league-wide announcement. If Comeau was running around telling players on opposing teams, then he wasn't just betraying Shane's trust, he was deliberately painting a target on his back.

Ilya drew a slow breath, forcing himself to stay calm.

"I respect that," he said, looking around the table. "if this was anyone else, I would tell you to keep your mouths shut." Nobody interrupted him. "But Hollander is my friend," he continued. "If something is happening in his locker room, or if his own teammates are treating him like shit, I need to—"

"Wait." Carmichael cut in. "Since when are you and Hollander friends?"

"He reached out after I signed with Ottawa," Ilya answered without hesitation, just as he had rehearsed for when the charity would be announced and the questions would start to roll in. "He is from there. We became good friends, and we are even starting a charity together."

"Seriously?" St. Simon asked.

"Holy shit..." Connors added.

The reactions barely registered. Ilya didn't care what they thought of his friendship with Shane. He just needed someone to answer the question.

Marlow studied him for another long moment. "So..." he said slowly. "Then you already know about Hollander?"

"I know *everything* about Hollander." The words came out louder than Ilya intended, earning a few surprised looks from around the table.

"So stop worrying about protecting him from *me*," he said, the frustration finally creeping into his voice. "Tell me what the fuck Comeau said."

Marlow exchanged one last glance with the others before finally exhaling. "We'd never out a guy," he said. "Not to anyone."

Ilya nodded once. "I know."

"But... If you're telling the truth, and you already know..." Marlow rubbed a hand across the back of his neck before he continued, "Comeau came up to us during warm ups and told us that Hollander is... gay. That he'd come out to the Voyageurs over the summer, and... that we should remind him this is... a man's sport."

The words hit Ilya like a punch to the ribs.

Before he could say anything, Hammersmith spoke up from across the table, looking visibly uncomfortable. "He didn't say 'gay,'" he admitted quietly. "He used another word."

Silence fell over the table once again, somehow heavier than before, and for a long moment Ilya could do nothing but stare at its surface as the full weight of what he had just heard sank in. Anger crashed into him so violently it almost drowned out everything else, but beneath it was something far worse: guilt.

Shane had been carrying this by himself for weeks, smiling through every phone call, insisting that his teammates were fine and that they simply needed time to adjust, all while they were apparently throwing slurs around behind his back and making him question whether he still belonged in the very locker room he had captained for years, and Ilya had let himself believe it because Shane had smiled just convincingly enough to make him want to.

"Roz..." Marlow's voice was careful now, almost hesitant, as he reached to rest a hand on Ilya's shoulder. "You okay?"

A hollow laugh escaped Ilya before he could stop it, and he slowly shook his head.

"He didn't tell you?" Marlow asked.

"He did not fucking tell me it was this bad with his team," he admitted quietly, his voice rougher than he intended.

Every time he had asked how things were going Shane kept telling him everything was fine, and that they just needed time, but deep down he knew he wasn't telling him everything, he just never imagined it was *this*.

"Would Hollander tell you?" Carmichael asked carefully. "I mean... you guys are still relatively new friends, right?" His voice was hesitant enough that it was obvious he wasn't trying to be insensitive, only genuinely confused.

Ilya's eyes remained fixed on the table for another moment, working against every fiber in his body to shake his head no, instead he just nodded, pressed his lips together then "Yes." he whispered, his voice barely audible over the noise of the bar. "Maybe that's why he did tell me."

Ilya could feel their eyes still on him as they exchanged puzzled glances across the table, each of them trying to piece together why their former captain was reacting as though the news they had just shared was something deeply personal rather than the concern of a fellow

player who had happened to become friendly with an opposing captain, but none of them pressed him for an explanation, sensing there was far more to the story than Ilya was prepared to tell.

"Don't worry, Roz," St. Simon said carefully, "we got Comeau pretty hard during the game tonight."

Ilya's jaw tightened. *Not hard enough* he thought.

The conversation drifted after that, or rather everyone around the table made a deliberate effort to drag it somewhere else, with Marlow and Connors resurrecting old stories from Boston, reminding him of road trips, playoff runs, and locker-room pranks that would normally have him laughing until his sides hurt, but none of it reached him because his mind had already left the bar and crossed the street to wherever Shane was.

Was he safe now? Would he have to walk back into that locker room tomorrow morning and pretend nothing had happened? How many more teams had Comeau already told?

They had been lucky with Boston. Marlow, Connors, St. Simon, Hammersmith, and Carmichael, they were good men who had shut the conversation down instead of feeding it, but what happened the next time, when Montreal played Toronto, or Dallas, or any other team with players who didn't have the same decency, players who might decide that what Comeau had said was an invitation rather than a warning?

The thoughts chased one another around his mind with relentless speed, each one darker than the last, until the vibration of his phone against the tabletop cut clean through the spiral, the sharp buzz sounding unnaturally loud in the middle of the bar and snapping his attention back to the present.

For one brief, hopeful second, Ilya allowed himself to believe it was Shane letting him know he was finished for the night, already asking where they should meet so they could salvage at least a few hours together before he has to head back to Ottawa in the morning, but the name that lit up the screen erased that hope almost instantly.

Hayden Pike.

Pike: [Location]

Pike: He needs you.

Pike: Come now.

Every trace of color drained from Ilya's face as his stomach dropped so violently it almost made him nauseous, because Hayden was one of the last people who would ever send a message like that unless something had gone catastrophically wrong, and if Hayden believed Shane needed him, then Shane wasn't simply having a bad night anymore.

His chair scraped violently across the floor as he stood so abruptly that several heads turned toward him.

"Roz?" Marlow asked immediately, alarm replacing the concern that had been lingering in his expression ever since the conversation about Shane had begun. "What's wrong?"

Ilya was already reaching for his jacket.

"Sh— Hollander," he said, his voice tight enough that the single word explained everything. He looked back down at Hayden's messages one more time, as though somehow hoping they would read differently the second time around, before shoving his phone into his pocket. "He's out with his team," He swallowed hard. "I think something happened."

Connors' expression immediately fell. "Are you serious?"

Before Ilya could answer, Marlow was already pushing his chair back from the table, reaching for the jacket hanging over the back of it as though the decision had already been made. "Wait, Roz, I'm coming with you."

"We all are," Hammersmith added without hesitation, earning a chorus of quiet agreement from the rest of the table as chairs scraped across the floor and hands reached for coats, nobody questioning whether they should get involved because, whatever had happened, they all knew Ilya well enough to recognize the look on his face, and none of them were about to let their former captain walk into whatever waited for him alone.

Ilya opened his mouth to argue, to tell them there was no time and that this wasn't their problem, but the words never came, because he knew they would ignore him anyway, and if Hayden's message meant what he feared it did, every second they wasted standing around was another second Shane was facing it without him.

By the time Ilya reached the bar Hayden had sent him to, the shouting had already spilled out onto the sidewalk, drawing curious glances from passing pedestrians and a crowd of patrons who had gathered just outside the entrance, all craning their necks to see what had happened.

The scene waiting for him stopped him dead in his tracks.

Comeau was pinned against the wall by J.J., who had both forearms pressed across his chest while Mitka and two other teammates stood close enough to jump in if he broke free, and only a few feet away Drapeau was having considerably less luck, straining against the grip of the rookies of the Voyageurs roster as he continued shouting insults that Ilya could barely register over the pounding of his own heartbeat.

Hayden stood directly in front of Shane, trying to keep everyone else away from him.

Ilya's eyes settled on the man standing behind Hayden's shoulder.

Shane wasn't fighting or yelling, he wasn't even looking at Comeau. He was standing perfectly still, breathing heavily through a split lip that had painted one side of his mouth

crimson, a bruise already beginning to bloom across the sharp line of his cheekbone, and despite the blood and the swelling there was something almost unnervingly calm about his expression, as though the hardest part of the night had already passed and he had somehow made peace with it.

That calm terrified Ilya far more than if Shane had been throwing punches.

Something inside him snapped. He didn't think, or even wait to ask what had happened. He didn't stop to wonder who had thrown the first punch or whether the fight had already been broken up. All he saw was Shane's blood, and the rest of the world disappeared.

He started walking straight toward Comeau with the slow, deliberate certainty of a man who had already decided exactly what he was going to do.

Only then did the Voyageurs seem to notice he was there.

"Rozanov?" Someone asked.

"What the fuck are you doing here, Rozanov?" Comeau spat, still struggling against J.J.'s grip.

"This isn't any of your concern, Rozanov." J.J. added, looking at Ilya with a mixture of anger and fear, afraid of what Shane's supposed rival would do in this situation.

After spotting the cluster of Bears players following only a few steps behind Ilya, Drapeau barked out a bitter laugh. "What, did you forget you signed with the shittiest team in the league?"

"I think the shittiest team in the league is the one that just hit their own fucking captain." Marlow said from where he was standing behind Ilya.

Ilya didn't even look at him.

Whether it was the rage flooding every corner of his mind or the blood still staining Shane's face, he couldn't have said, and in that moment he honestly didn't care. The only thought capable of forcing its way through the haze was that someone had hurt the man he loves, and for one terrifying instant every instinct he possessed screamed at him to make sure they understood exactly what that mistake would cost them.

He was close enough now that one more step would put him within arm's reach of Comeau. But then he heard it.

"Ilya."

His entire body froze where it stood.

The world suddenly rushed back into focus as Shane stepped around Hayden and quietly closed the distance between them, placing a gentle hand against Ilya's chest before slowly guiding him backward, one careful step at a time, never taking his eyes off him.

A few confused ‘*What the fuck?*’s and ‘*Wait... are they friends?*’ rippled through the Voyageurs players, but neither Ilya nor Shane paid them any attention.

Ilya's eyes never left the blood running from Shane's split lip, the sight of it making something twist painfully inside of him until it became almost impossible to think about anything else, and when he finally spoke his voice came out low and dangerously controlled, carrying none of the anger threatening to consume him because it had settled into something far colder.

"He hit you, Shane."

"I know," Shane answered without hesitation, as though he had already anticipated exactly what Ilya would say the moment he arrived. "And I'm okay with that," he added in a quiet voice.

Ilya was genuinely confused, his anger momentarily giving way to disbelief as his gaze finally lifted from Shane's injuries to search his face for some explanation that would make those words make sense.

"How the fuck are you okay with that?" he asked quietly.

Shane let out a breath before glancing past Ilya toward the crowd that had formed around Comeau, his expression remaining remarkably composed despite the swelling already spreading across his cheek, because whatever anger he had felt had long since been buried beneath the practical part of his mind that had spent years captaining a hockey team and learning that the difference between reacting emotionally and reacting intelligently often decided far more than the outcome of a single game.

"He assaulted his captain because of his sexuality," Shane said, turning his attention back to Ilya as though the shouting behind them had faded into nothing more than background noise. "Every person standing here, every security camera inside this bar, and every report that's written afterward will tell the same exact story, which is that one of my own teammates, who has spent the last month turning my sexuality into a problem, hit me."

His eyes drifted briefly toward the cluster of Voyageurs players still restraining Comeau before settling once more on Ilya.

"If we hit him back, it's a fight. If we don't..."

Ilya looks directly at Comeau. "...it is assault. And a hate crime."

Shane nods.

"I can file a police report, I can walk into management's office tomorrow morning and tell them that I no longer feel safe sharing a locker room with him, and if they decide that moving him isn't an option, then I'll use every bit of leverage this gives me to ask for a trade somewhere I actually want to be."

Ilya could not believe the words he was hearing. He was left momentarily speechless. "You're serious?" he asked in a tone barely above a whisper.

"Yes, Ilya," Shane answered softly, lowering his voice enough that no one else gathered inside the bar could hear what he was about to say. "I'm serious. I don't want to spend another season wondering which teammate is going to decide I'm less of a man because of who I am, and I don't want to keep pretending that if I just play well enough they'll eventually forget I'm gay, because tonight proved they won't." His eyes softened. "I want this, Ilya. I want you."

Something in Ilya's expression finally broke, the fury that had carried him all the way to the bar dissolving beneath an overwhelming wave of relief and love, because despite the split lip, the bruises, and everything Shane had just endured, the only thing he was thinking about now was building a future that no longer required them to hide from moments like this.

"Ya tebya lyublyu," he whispered, his voice thick with emotion.

A tired smile finally found its way onto Shane's face. "Ya tebya lyublyu."

His eyes flicked briefly toward the crowd that still surrounded them before returning to Ilya with unmistakable affection. "I really wish I could kiss you right now."

"When we get you away from these shitty teammates," Ilya murmured, "I'm going to kiss you in front of everyone."

"You better."

A faint smile lingered on Shane's bruised face for only a moment before Marlow's voice carried across the bar, dragging both of them back to the reality of where they were standing.

"Yo, Rozy," he called, nodding toward the growing standoff that had effectively split the room in half. "What do you want us to do with these assholes?"

The atmosphere inside the bar remained impossibly tense, every conversation having died the moment the fight broke out, the music now little more than distant background noise beneath the shouting of players and the increasingly frustrated demands of the bartenders for everyone to either calm down or get the hell out. Chairs had been knocked over, several abandoned drinks covered the floor, and somewhere behind the crowd a server was carefully removing glass bottles away from the scene while casting nervous glances toward the collection of professional hockey players who looked as though they were only one bad decision away from starting another fight.

"Would you take your fucking hands off me, J.J.?" Comeau snapped, once again trying to wrench himself free.

J.J. didn't so much as loosen his grip. "The only reason you're not knocked out on the floor right now is because Shane ordered me not to hit you," he gritted through his teeth.

A few feet away Drapeau continued straining against his teammates, throwing insults toward anyone willing to listen, though by now most of the Voyageurs seemed far more interested in

making sure he stayed exactly where he was than in whatever he still had left to say.

“No one touch these fuckers.” Ilya ordered his former teammates, his voice carrying across the room with enough authority that every player in the bar immediately turned toward him.

“Are you fucking serious, Rozanov?” Hayden stared at him in disbelief. “I didn't text you just so you could stand here and do nothing.”

“Why the fuck would you text Rozanov?” Drapaue asked, but the question was ignored.

J.J. gave Hayden a confused look, but did not press further, especially not now when he was holding down a 200 pound hockey player.

St. Simon gestured toward Shane, whose split lip continued to bleed. “Roz, look at what they did to Hollander’s face.”

“I can fucking see his face,” Ilya shot back, louder than he intended, his eyes flicking briefly toward Shane before settling once again on Comeau. “That is why we are taking him to hospital.”

A few disapproving murmurs rippled through the room, accompanied by skeptical looks from several of the Voyageurs players.

“You think we're just gonna let our captain leave with you?” Wilson asked.

Before Ilya had the chance to answer, Shane spoke instead.

“Why not?” he asked, looking directly at Wilson. “You think something bad's going to happen to me? Like maybe getting assaulted by one of my teammates?”

The silence that followed seemed to spread through the entire bar, leaving even the handful of strangers who had been watching from a distance unwilling to interrupt whatever was unfolding in front of them.

Without another word, Ilya reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone, stepping close enough to Shane that he could gently tilt his chin toward the overhead lights before taking several photographs of the cut on his lip and the bruise already darkening across his cheek.

Shane raised an eyebrow but didn't pull away.

“For the police report,” Ilya explained, taking another photograph from a different angle before checking the image on his screen. Then he grabbed some napkins from a nearby table and gently pressed one against Shane's busted lip, only letting go when Shane took the napkin from his hand.

“Hayden,” Shane said, his voice calm but stern, “do not leave this fucking bar without a copy of the security footage.”

Hayden nodded immediately. “I'll take care of it.”

“And when the police show up, you can send them over to my place,” Shane added, still holding the napkin against his lip. “Tell them I want to press charges.”

Shane’s words stripped away any lingering illusion that this had been nothing more than a fight between teammates after too many drinks, and everyone present understood that this was no longer going to be handled inside the walls of the Voyageurs' locker room, nor quietly buried by management in the morning, but by police reports, witness statements, security footage, and every consequence that came with assaulting another man in a room full of witnesses.

The walk from the bar to Shane's car passed in complete silence, with Ilya refusing to let more than a few inches separate them while Marlow and St. Simon followed a step behind, having ignored every attempt Ilya made to convince them to stay at the bar with the rest of the Bears, who had volunteered to wait for the police so they could give statements about both the assault they had just witnessed and the conversation Comeau had forced upon them before the game. Because if this was going to become a criminal investigation, as everyone now suspected it would, they wanted the police to know that what had happened inside the bar had not been an alcohol-fueled argument that spiraled out of control but the culmination of weeks of targeted harassment that had begun long before Comeau ever threw a punch.

They climbed into Shane's car without discussing who would sit where, the arrangement somehow happening naturally, with St. Simon sliding behind the wheel, Marlow settling into the passenger seat, and Shane allowing Ilya to guide him into the back seat, where they remained so close that their knees and shoulders never quite stopped touching. Neither of them making any effort to create the kind of polite distance that existed between friends, because after everything that had happened inside the bar, they both seemed to need the quiet reassurance that the other was still there.

The silence that settled over the car was unlike the comfortable kind that usually accompanied long drives after games, heavy instead with shock, exhaustion, and the lingering disbelief that everything they had just witnessed had actually happened, leaving no one quite able to find the words to break it, until St. Simon quietly pulled out his phone, opened the navigation app, and entered the address for the nearest hospital.

"I don't need to go to the hospital," Shane said at last, his voice sounding almost apologetic as he adjusted the bloodstained napkin still resting against his split lip. "It's not that bad of a cut, and the bruise will probably go down in a couple of days."

"Hospital is for evidence," Ilya answered gently, turning his head just enough to meet Shane's eyes. "Doctor will write medical report with the date and time. We can't depend on photos alone. Comeau can say they were taken on another day, or that something else caused them, or say they are fake."

Shane considered that for a moment before giving a small nod. "Oh. Okay."

Neither of them spoke again after that, but Ilya quietly shifted his leg until his knee rested against Shane's, the touch so slight that anyone else might not have noticed it, though it grounded Shane all the same, even if, in truth, it was Ilya who seemed to need the physical reassurance more, his body unable to shake the image of Shane standing bloodied in the middle of the bar no matter how many times he reminded himself that Shane was safe now.

Several minutes passed before Marlow finally broke the silence, having spent most of the drive staring absently through the windshield as though weighing whether the question was worth asking at all, and when he finally turned slightly in his seat to look back at Shane, there was nothing resembling curiosity in his expression, only quiet concern.

"Hollander..." he began carefully. "What happened in there?"

Shane flinched almost imperceptibly at the sound of his name, the reaction so small that neither Marlow nor St. Simon seemed to notice it, but Ilya did, and without saying a word he reached across the narrow space between them and rested a reassuring hand against Shane's bicep, his thumb rubbing absentmindedly through the fabric of his sleeve in a silent reminder that he was safe now, that no one in this car was going to judge him for whatever he chose to say.

Shane drew in a slow breath. "Um..."

Marlow immediately shook his head. "Sorry," he said quietly. "You don't have to tell us anything. Forget I asked."

"No... it's okay," Shane answered after a moment, his voice barely louder than a whisper, his eyes instinctively finding Ilya's and refusing to leave them as though he needed something familiar to anchor himself before reopening a wound he had spent the last month pretending did not exist.

"Back in the summer, I told my team something about myself, and I thought they were okay with it. Nobody said anything at the time, so I convinced myself everything would be fine, but then the season started, and the locker room just changed. Conversations stopped when I walked in, I was no longer included in team activities outside of the rink, and every now and then someone would make a little comment or a joke that wasn't really a joke."

"And tonight..." His voice caught for only a moment before he forced himself to continue. "Tonight they invited me out with them for the first time in a while, and I honestly thought things were finally getting back to normal..." He let out a quiet, humorless laugh. "...I guess I was wrong."

Ilya felt his heart crack a little more with every word. He had known Shane's teammates had been distant, but hearing Shane finally admit how much he had been hoping tonight would be different hurt far more than anything Comeau's fist could have done.

In the front seats, Marlow and St. Simon exchanged a hesitant glance, the kind shared between two people silently debating whether saying the truth would make things better or infinitely worse. Their shared glances made Shane uncomfortable, and Ilya could feel the uncertainty radiating from them strongly enough that it made Shane tense beside him.

"Spit it out," Ilya said, his tone carrying slight annoyance, rather than gentle encouragement. "You're making Shane uncomfortable."

Marlow let out a slow breath before turning around in his seat. "Hollander..." he began. "I'm really sorry for tonight, and I'm really sorry your teammates have been treating you like that, but there's something we think you should know."

"What?" The single word came out flat, almost emotionless, but Ilya knew Shane well enough to hear the panic hiding beneath it.

"Before the game tonight," Marlow hesitated only briefly, "Comeau came over to a few of us and told us... that you'd come out to your team."

Shane went perfectly still, his breathing didn't change, his expression didn't change, but the silence that followed was so complete that Ilya suddenly couldn't tell what Shane was thinking anymore.

"It should've been your choice to tell us," St. Simon said quietly from the driver's seat. "We're really sorry he took that away from you."

"And we wanted you to know," Marlow added, "that none of us are going to tell anyone else. Not me, not Sainty, not anyone in our team."

For several long seconds, Shane simply stared at them.

Then, in a voice so quiet it was almost lost beneath the hum of the engine, he asked, "You know I'm gay?"

"Yeah," St. Simon answered immediately.

Marlow nodded apologetically.

Shane looked between them, almost searching for something. "And... you're okay with it?"

"Yes." St. Simon answered.

Marlow looked genuinely confused. "Of course we are."

Shane sat with that for several moments, his thoughts unreadable, before slowly turning back toward Ilya. His eyes lingering on his face before drifting, down to his lips, where they remained for just a heartbeat too long, then drifting back up to meet Ilya's eyes again.

Ilya understood immediately what Shane was asking, and so he answered with nothing more than a nod and a soft smile.

And that was all the permission Shane needed.

He closed the already tiny distance between them until his lips met Ilya's in a kiss that was neither rushed nor hesitant but impossibly relieved, as though the weight he had carried since coming out had finally become light enough for him to set it down.

And Ilya kissed him back with equal desperation, one hand rising instinctively to cradle the uninjured side of Shane's face while taking every care to avoid the bruise blooming across his cheek, only for the metallic taste of blood to touch his tongue a heartbeat later, reminding him all at once that Shane's split lip had not magically disappeared simply because they finally had the chance to kiss.

Shane winced ever so slightly as the movement tugged at the fresh cut, a quiet breath hissing through his teeth despite his obvious attempt to hide the pain.

Ilya immediately began to pull back, concern replacing relief as he searched Shane's face for any sign that he had hurt him. But Shane chased Ilya's lips before they could fully part, closing the tiny gap between them once more.

"I fucking knew it!" Marlow blurted out, unable to stop the grin spreading across his face.

"What?" St. Simon asked, before glancing instinctively toward the rearview mirror, where the sight of Shane and Ilya still kissing caused his own face to light up with a smile.

"Holy shit," he said, shaking his head. "Way to go, Cap."

"Oh, come on," Marlow groaned dramatically. "Would you stop calling Roz 'Cap'? I'm your captain now."

St. Simon didn't bother correcting himself or even looking away from the mirror.

Marlow rolled his eyes before laughing anyway. "But yeah.. way to go, Rozy."

Neither Shane nor Ilya seemed to hear a word beyond that, still kissing each other with the quiet desperation of two people who had spent far too long convincing themselves they had to wait for a safer moment.

Marlow smiled to himself before looking back through the windshield.

"Guess he really *does* know everything about Hollander."

End Notes

This one's for the people who treat Shane Hollander as a damsel in distress.

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