

it's the monster hiding under your bed

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by [some1_around](#)

Summary

Shane's ex-girlfriends keep coming out as queer. He's trying to be supportive, he really is, okay? Listen, he's an ally! But it's sort of becoming a problem. For pretty obvious reasons, because people are definitely starting to notice—Ilya most of all.

(AKA, I give Shane the most absurd queer community and convoluted coming-of-age journey of all time and it still somehow gradually makes things better in the long run.)

Notes

This is less cracky than the summary might imply because if there's one thing I'm gonna do, it's explore the truly devastating nature of Shane's competh.

I love the headcanons about Jessica and Shane's high school girlfriend in fanon! I've read a lot of them but I'm not sure where all I've incepted lore from, but for a few, I adore [Jessica](#) by feeisamarshmallow and I'm loving The_Lady_Disdain's WIP [Shane's \(Ex\) Girlfriend](#). I also definitely didn't come up with the name Sarah for Shane's high school gf, and I think I'm also borrowing the idea that she was a fellow athlete/soccer player, but I cannot remember where from, so if you recognize that, lmk and I'll link it too!! Also, I wrote this crazy fast even for me and then really lost steam while editing, so I am sorry for any mistakes!

(In this universe, the PWHL was formed in like 2012 and has survived under that name until the modern day but still with a lot of the financial struggles of the real-life institutions. Actually, don't worry about it.)

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

2006

“Is anyone sitting here?”

Shane glances up, already answering, “No,” before he takes in the speaker.

She is tall and thin, with brown-blond hair, straight and darker at the roots. She looks visibly uncomfortable speaking to him, her eyes averted toward the front of the classroom as she drops into the chair next to his at the adjoining desk.

Shane clears his throat and offers her his hand. It’s his first day at school, and he doesn’t know anyone in Kingston other than his hockey team and billet family, so he made a deal with his mom that he was going to introduce himself to three people today. Three seems like a shitload to him, but Yuna wouldn’t negotiate any lower. “I’m Shane.”

She takes his hand. “I’m Sarah. It’s nice to meet you.”

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2018

Zamboni driver enthusiast @alexhockeystntwt

lol i love how before scott hunter came out the nhl’s whole strategy to show how “inclusive” and “okay with gay” they were was to 1) make pride jerseys that didn’t even have rainbow on them 80% of the time and cost \$300, 2) host “pride nights” but mostly not even call them pride nights because thats too gay so instead it was mostly milquetoast ass “hockey is for everyone” nights, and 3) just put shane hollandrs face everywhere lmao #gayashell

on the third day she rose @roselandryhitmewithyourcar

→ this is like crazy racist what the hell? just cause he’s asian he’s also gay??? literaly what the fuck are you saying

Zamboni driver enthusiast @alexhockeystntwt

→→ NOO bitch, jesus, you don’t know the lore okay?? hollander’s had like three ex-girlfriends come out as fucking LESBIANS after he dated them, like every public relationship he’s ever had (except for r*** l***** but i cant get into that, i value my life)

[@roselandparty retweeted @alexhockeystntwt, “NOO bitch, jesus, you don’t know...”]

Landing Party @roselandparty

new to hockey, deadass is this real?

peonies ftw @peoniessoccerfan

→ yup, he has dated three lesbians that we know of. Sarah Hill (soccer player for the Montreal Peonies FC, married to another player on the canadian national team, Joey Razia), Jessica Clarkson (yoga and pilates instructor based out of montreal, married to wellness influencer Carrie Nile), and Hazel Marsay (fellow pro ice hockey player, defense for the Montreal Triomphe, works for charity You Can Play with Leah Campbell and Max Reilly)

TorontNO @fuckdallaskent

→→ they're all fucking athletes lmaooooooooo shane hollander is the most predictable man on the planet (except for the lesbian part, idk how to explain that but good for him (maybe?))

Carrie On @linscarrieblog

→→ ugh, jessica is literally bisexual she's not a lesbian!!! Shes said it one million times!!!! This is literally bierasure!!!!

peonies ftw @peoniessoccerfan

→→→ oh sorry, i didn't know. I don't follow her or Carrie, my bad

Carrie On @linscarrieblog

→→→→ ugh hockey fans

peonies ftw @peoniessoccerfan

→→→→→ *ugh women's soccer fans, i barely know this man cut me some slack, to me he was just the best man in my favorite soccer players wedding ffs

watch under dark!!! @xsquadfortheirls

→→ hate to ask it because i know he's rose's bff but he is still a hockey player so i dont trust him. Is this... a fetish thing?

hollandurrrrr @mohreyall_

→→→ it doesn't seem like it? at least, none of the women were publicly out when he dated them. Sarah and Shane were literally teenagers when they dated and he was her best man in 2016, so she probably didn't have it figured out yet

"he's more than a brother" @shayden59socials

→→→ all these women still follow and interact with shane on social media, it seems like they're all still friends with him, so there's at least no public bad blood (people in the fandom get mad when you point this out, but it's pretty obvious that they were his

beards and eventually decided to come out even though he's still in the closet, sorry but it's soooo obvious come on, don't shoot me omg)

true hollzy tea @hollzyeraeraera

→→→→ you again? i thought i blocked you

dwomen @hockpockmark

→→→ i think shanes type is just masc, athletic women (good for him!!!! GOOD FOR HIM!!!! KING SHIIIIITTTTTTTTTTTT) unfortunately i think it's probably just a rough coincidence lol

dwomen @hockpockmark

For no reason in particular, just putting it out there, I am a super masc, super muscular 6'0 straight woman with a very small dating pool so shane hollander, if you're out there, please give me a shot, i promise not to switch up on you and marry a woman!!!!

Sue Cs It @voy.vag.uers

uh oh, the timeline got its annual reminder that shane hollander, golden boy, captain canada himself has dated three (3) separate queer women and everyone's being Weird™ about it again

#shanehollandereater @lesbian24truthr

→ tbh i dont know how anyone ever forgets. i literally cant see his face without thinking "that man has gone down on AT LEAST three lesbians" like that's fact numero uno about shane hollander to me

voyageur voyeur @voyeurismhockey

→→ shane hollander just woke up in a cold sweat somewhere

stuck in the hollandaise @hollandaise

→→ shane hollander just started seeing auras

Montréballer | Nix @montreballer

→→ shane hollander is thinking about going back to church

ilya hollander @shanessecretthirdnipple

→→ shane hollander blink twice if you need help

Boozy Luvrr @boiziWOW

→→ meanwhile yuna hollander is trying to secure that sponsorship with PrideTape and get Reebok to agree to do a June lesbian sneaker lineup and let shane be the face of the campaign

Goalie girly @indacrease

→→→ i mean, what the hell, he's pretty enough, i'd let him

Brad @montrealhockeydad

Are we not gonna talk about how gay this Shane Hollander thing is?

Zamboni driver enthusiast @alexhockeystntwt

→ no we aren't <3 love you shane!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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2016

When Shane gets a weirdly formal text from Hazel (*'Hi Shane, I know you said you were coming to our next game, do you think we could grab dinner after? There's something I'd like to talk about.'*) he immediately gets a bad feeling.

Or, not bad, precisely. Bad would probably mean that he's homophobic, and he's not homophobic even though he can already tell where this is going, okay? He really, really isn't. How could he be, given his track record? So he confirms a time and a place with Hazel and is pleased when she proposes going to his apartment after (*'for privacy,'* another bad sign), and steels himself. It's the beginning of the season. Montreal doesn't play Boston for another month. He can get dinner with his ex-girlfriend-turned-close-friend, and they'll probably talk about hockey all night, which is what they usually do. It'll be fine. Shane loves Hazel, he really does, even if it's purely platonic these days.

Shane and Hazel met when they both represented Canada at the 2014 Olympics. Shane attended every single Canadian women's game that didn't interfere with his own game schedule and training, so he was in the stands when Hazel's teammates were awarded their gold medals. They invited Shane to the locker room afterward, which he felt a little weird about because he knew it was because men's hockey was so much more popular and they wanted the extra press his presence would bring. But Shane wanted to support in any way he could, even if it felt a little slimy, and his mom literally would have killed him if he didn't get a picture with Leah Campbell, so he went, and that was the night he met Hazel.

Hazel is about Shane's height and just as broad. She is Ojibwe and very proud of her heritage. They are equally obsessed with hockey. They have a lot in common, and a lot to talk about, and they clicked immediately, becoming fast friends. That doesn't happen very often for Shane, so whenever it does, he tends to grab on with both hands, maybe a little too tightly.

Shane liked Hazel right away. He enjoyed hanging out with her, talking to her, being with her, which meant he had a crush on her, and Shane was pretty familiar with what it felt like when he had a crush on a woman. So, a few months later, when they were both back in Montreal, he asked her out on a date. She said yes.

It only lasted two months, but they were papped together several times, and Shane attended enough Triomphe games that people started noticing. While Shane would have preferred it if they could have kept things private, that wasn't really an option in a city as hockey-crazed as Montreal. The idea of two stars from Montreal's men's and women's teams dating each other was absolute catnip to the entire province. There were a lot of weird jokes about genetics and the "future" of hockey, which Shane tried to ignore by putting all his focus on Hazel, which was easy, because Rozanov had been ghosting him since February.

Yeah. Easy.

They watched a *lot* of hockey together. Hazel had played for McGill, so Shane's parents absolutely adored her. She was beautiful, but she was also in the middle of her own season and just as tired as Shane, so they were content to take things slow. Very slow, actually.

Shane got some flak from his teammates for dating a woman as muscular as Hazel, but those insults rolled off his shoulders. He was literally dating a woman; how could there be anything gay about that? Jackie liked Hazel, even after she outright refused to be inundated into the WAG chat, and she was strong enough to hold the twins up with her bulging biceps when she flexed, so the little Pikes loved her too.

Shane got along with her teammates on the Triomphe, and their relationship gave him another avenue to support the PWHL, which was still struggling a few years after its creation. Again, it felt pretty slimy that whenever he attended games, the cameras and phones in the audience seemed more focused on him than on the players on the ice, but he'd talked with all the Triomphe players and some of the franchise's management and received their approval to keep attending. Shane swallowed it as a net positive. Women's hockey needed all the press it could get, and Shane wanted to help. He knew better than anyone: if hockey couldn't be for everyone, then it was for no one.

Sarah taught him that.

Hazel and Shane's breakup was inevitably pretty amicable in the end. Hazel ended things just after the start of the NHL's playoff season, saying that Shane needed to focus on his game and she needed to dedicate more time to her second job as a youth hockey coach. Shane was sad, but he wasn't broken-hearted. Or, not about her, at least.

At that point, Rozanov had not responded to his texts for three months.

Hazel and Shane never had sex because they were both so tired from the season, and they technically never went Instagram official either. But they didn't hide their dates, and Shane always repeated the same tagline to reporters whenever they asked about her: "I respect the hell out of her as a player and a person. I consider Hazel one of my closest friends, and I don't think that's ever going to change." He refused to say anything else, and eventually the story faded.

They kept in touch and stayed friends. Shane is actually very good at remaining friends with his ex-girlfriends, and he already had some practice by that point, so it isn't entirely unreasonable for her to ask to meet up after the game, and yet....

And yet. By 2016, Shane sees it coming like a bullet.

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2008

Sarah is Shane's best friend. The competition isn't even close.

Sure, Shane has his teammates, and he's their captain, and they respect him on the ice and mostly don't fuck with him off the ice anymore, but there's a distance there. Everyone in the OHL wants to go pro, so theoretically, everyone should be equally obsessed with hockey. Shane always figured that by the time the Kingston team drafted him, he would finally be surrounded by players who took the game just as seriously as he did.

That's not exactly true in practice, though.

Shane got drafted early at fifteen on a pretty dubious exception because of his talent. His rookie year, he was the youngest in the room by an entire fourteen months. Now in his second year, he is still the youngest on the team. Half of the players are legal adults—eighteen, nineteen, or twenty, and they've already been up for the draft at least once and didn't get in. Maybe they'll go late, or they'll head off to play college or AHL hockey, and maybe, maybe they will still make it to the big leagues, or find satisfaction playing on still lucrative contracts for the developmental league, but maybe not. For a lot of them, dreams are starting to falter. Starting to fade.

In 2008, Shane is the only Kingston player selected to represent Canada at the upcoming World Junior Championships. The day it's announced, a twenty-year-old d-man snaps his stick over his knee, points a sharp end at Shane, and declares, "How the fuck are *you* gonna be the fucking face of *Canada*? *You*? You're not even from here, you *fucking*!"

Coach sent him home immediately and benched him for a game, but he said it in front of the entire team, even though Shane was already wearing his jersey with the C on the front. None of their teammates really said anything in response. The d-man was back by the next week, and Coach told them both to shake hands and buck up, and they did. They actually play pretty well together on the ice, once they leave the noise behind in the locker room.

Shane doesn't hate the guys, but they aren't his friends. He doesn't get invited to parties anymore. The d-man still does, though. He enjoys them more than Shane would, anyway.

Kingston is only two or three hours from Ottawa, so Shane isn't very far from his parents, but with all the traveling for games, it's not like he gets to see them every weekend. They chat over the phone or on the computer. It's not the same. His billet family has a son who is playing in Hamilton, and they keep pushing Shane to recommend his name to the scouts he talks to.

Things are easier with Sarah.

Sarah's parents watch hockey but aren't obsessed with it. They also aren't too concerned about Shane and Sarah hanging out without supervision, and Sarah has a TV in her bedroom, so they spend a lot of afternoons sitting on her bed and watching European soccer games in the afternoon, and hockey games at night. Sarah's bedroom looks kind of like Shane's, covered in jerseys and with shelves stocked with trophies and medals, because she's a soccer player, and just as dedicated to it as Shane. As a couple, they make sense. They fit together. They're the best athletes in their school, bar none. They're obsessed. They sit together in the cafeteria and scarf down thousands of calories every lunch period, talking about team dynamics, athletic gear stores, and the local sponsorship opportunities cropping up for both of them. Sarah loves her team, though, and she has plenty of friends—other athletic, tall women with blonde hair in high ponytails and grass stains beneath their fingernails—so when Shane gets invited to parties, it's with the girls' soccer team, and sometimes he goes. They still drink and play music too loudly, but it's... different from the hockey parties Shane has been to. It's nicer, definitely. Shane doesn't feel so on edge the whole time.

Shane eats lunch with the soccer girls sometimes, too. His teammates make fun of him, but they were going to do that either way.

Sarah and Shane sit next to each other on her bed, their legs extended in front of them, and Shane listens intently as Sarah explains again why FIFA is so notoriously corrupt but no one can do anything about it, nodding at all the right moments. In a few minutes, it will be his turn to talk, and he'll explain why the 1980 Winter Olympics were such a big deal, and Sarah will listen to him just as closely. In the background, *Bend It Like Beckham* plays on Sarah's grainy TV. It's her favorite movie. They've watched it a hundred times.

Sarah's mom drifts past her cracked door and pops her head in, asking if they need a snack, a drink, anything, and Shane really likes her. She's a lot nicer than Shane's billet mom, who often complains about how quickly he goes through the food in her pantry and threatened to take his door off its hinges when she heard he was dating a girl.

"We're good, Mom, thanks," Sarah says when Shane shakes his head, and her mom smiles at them and closes the door all the way. "She gave me condoms last night," Sarah tells Shane. "Like, multiple. It was so awkward." She leans over, opening her bedside table drawer and pulling out several foil packets with nondescript, clinical advertising.

"Oh," Shane says.

She drops them on the table. "Yeah. It wasn't—I mean, it wasn't like they were encouraging it, you know. I think they think we're already sleeping together, though."

"Oh."

"Yeah." Shane keeps his eyes on the screen, where Kiera Knightly is wearing white athletic shorts and a black sports bra. She has abs like Sarah's, which Shane has seen a few times after games and during practices he's attended, and the few times that their kisses have progressed to make-out sessions in her bed, surrounded by the gold trophies on her walls. "Do you—want to?"

Sarah puts a hand on Shane's thigh. "Yeah. I think."

Shane gets on the bed between her legs. He kisses her stomach, hard and flexing, and she keeps quiet and turns the TV volume up. Shane puts his mouth on her and it's alright, but he's a little confused. "Does that feel good?" he asks after a while.

"Yeah, just-" And then she puts a hand in his hair and starts moving his head, and he likes that better, and she seems to as well.

It takes a while, and Shane sort of zones out, which is easier than he thought it would be, but then her fingers flex, and the pressure on his tongue increases, and so does the flavor in his mouth, and Shane thinks he did a good job when she pulls him up, looking flushed and sweaty as if she recently finished a game.

Did you win? "Was that good?" he asks.

"Yeah," she says, sounding a little breathless. She looks awkward again, but he believes her. Neither of them are good at lying. She's still wearing her sports bra. Shane looks down at her body, at her tanned skin and abs and the heaving of her small breasts. Shane punched one of his teammates for calling Sarah flat-chested, even though it is true. When his teammate said it, though, he said it like an insult, so Shane laid him out. The guys liked that a lot more than most of the shit Shane did. He did not tell Sarah about it, of course, but he's worried she's going to hear about it through the rumor mill.

Sarah looks down his body as well, and they both realize that Shane is still visibly soft in his loose gym shorts. Shane flushes.

"Sorry," he says. "I think I was really focused. You're sure that was okay, right?"

She nods. "It was great. Next time I'll return the favor, I promise. Do you want to brush your teeth or something? I have a spare toothbrush."

Shane thinks about it, and yes, he does want to brush his teeth. "Thanks."

She smiles. "You're such a gentleman. That's why my parents trust you, I think." It's a nice compliment, but they both wince at the mention of her parents, eyes flickering to the unused condoms, and then they're both laughing, Shane falling to the side so that they can just laugh and snicker together at the weirdness of everything, while Juliette and Jess embrace on the screen across from them.

Sarah smiles at Shane. Sarah's hair looks blonde because of how much time she spends in the sun. She's nice to Shane. Shane likes her, and he wonders if this is what love feels like. Maybe it is. Or the precursor to it, at least.

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2015

Shane never dated Jessica, technically.

They meet at a hot yoga class in September, when Shane has just returned to Montreal for training camp. With their recent Cup win, Shane's profile in Montreal is even higher than before, so he feels pretty antsy when Jackie drags him to the studio. It's becoming hard to go outside in the city without getting swarmed or photographed, or outright grabbed. But he trusts Jackie, and she swears that he's going to love the class, so he goes with her and meets Jessica, the instructor, and she asks permission before putting her hands on his lower back to smooth his pose. The next time Shane goes to the class, she asks permission again before touching his calf, helpfully pointing out all the muscles he is activating. She asks permission to touch every time.

After the third class, Jackie bullies Shane into asking Jessica out for coffee, and she agrees.

Jessica isn't shy about expressing her mild disdain for contact sports—"I believe in the importance of taking care of our bodies and fostering them to their greatest potential, not slamming them into walls until you have a permanent limp by forty." That disdain differentiates her from most of the women who flirt with Shane at bars and nightclubs (or grocery stores when he is desperately trying to stock up on Greek yogurt), who are usually loudly appreciative of his hockey-playing physique. But Jessica still understands nutrition and anatomy, and she and Shane have very similar nonfiction reading tastes in fitness and wellness literature, so they have plenty to talk about.

"I'm bisexual," Jessica tells him bluntly the second time they get lunch together after class. "I date and love women and men, and I'm very open about that on my socials. Is that going to be a problem for you? For your brand?" She gestures at the cafe they're sitting in. Two people have already asked Shane for selfies, and he obliged because his mom says he shouldn't turn everyone down.

"Oh," Shane says, then shakes his head. "No."

I think I'm bisexual too, he kind of wants to say, but he's still holding out hope that it isn't true. Maybe Rozanov is some weird exception that Shane is still trying to excise from his system. He really likes the sex they have. That's physical. It's just bodies. It's got nothing to do with anything else. Maybe. Shane doesn't know what's wrong with him, this cognitive dissonance that shakes him and makes him feel sick whenever he spends too long thinking about it.

"No problem at all," he repeats.

"Good," Jessica says, winking at him. "Then would you like to take me home, Shane Hollander?"

She is beautiful and classically feminine. Her body is muscular but covered in soft fat that makes her smooth and curvaceous all over with wide hips and a prominent bust. She's wearing makeup, which Hazel and Sarah never did. She looks like any other WAG.

"If you'd like," he says, and Jessica laughs as if he told a joke, and Shane takes her home.

Jessica is heavier than Shane, and it's a familiar weight. Shane can close his eyes and picture something else. He likes that she can, and does, push back against him in bed. She has a few

beauty marks on her arms and shoulders, and he likes those too. Jessica is good at grabbing his hair and putting him where she wants him. Shane is good at going along with it. He takes direction well. She says, "Good job," and "Good boy," and he gets hard because he's been conditioned to respond to those words. Not by her. Not by any woman.

He likes her bluntness. He likes people who tell him exactly what they want him to do.

He likes Jessica.

But not that much.

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2009

Shane meets Ilya Rozanov and loses the tournament.

"You did not lose," his mother fusses from the front seat of the car, digging through her purse aggressively. She's just as upset as Shane. Maybe more so. "You came in second. Second in the world, Shane! And you did it with a shit goalie and as the only competent two-way forward on the entire team."

David sighs. "Yuna."

"You're right. Sorry, Mom." Shane isn't thinking about the Cup, though. He's thinking about Ilya Rozanov. Actually, he has been thinking about Rozanov a lot lately.

Maybe that's why he lost.

He spends the few remaining days of the holiday break with his parents before he has to go back to Kingston. Since that first night, he's gone down on Sarah twice, and she'd given him a blowjob once but had seemed pretty uncomfortable the whole time, so after a while, when it had really been dragging on for what felt like forever, Shane had pulled her up to lie on top of him and jerked himself off as they kissed.

They haven't had sex yet, and a lot of his other teammates brag about all the sex stuff they do, but Shane was gone for a few weeks, and he's still only seventeen. Being a virgin wouldn't be such a big deal if Shane wasn't constantly sharing locker rooms with older, more experienced guys, or if he was a better liar.

Also, for the past couple of weeks, Shane has kept forgetting that Sarah is supposed to be his girlfriend.

As soon as he gets back from the tournament, Sarah drags him to her bedroom with a stilted line about "wanting to fuck a World champion," that she definitely workshoped with her girl friends before Shane got silver. No one expected Canada to lose this tournament, after all. He tries not to feel bitter about it. She pushes him onto the bed. She really is strong. Shane likes that about her. She straddles him, all knees and bony elbows, and whispers, "I'm not nervous anymore." Shane knows what she means, but he hooks his arms under her knees and flips

them over anyway, getting his face between her legs, and she seems pretty happy about that, too, and eventually she relaxes all the way.

Shane enjoys giving head best on the rare occasions when Sarah is wearing a skirt, something that she can flop over his head, or when she pulls the sheets over him, which she sometimes does when she is self-conscious or nervous about her parents bursting in on them. He likes the darkness and his limited vision. He likes her thighs, thick and muscular from hours of soccer practice, flexing around his ears, hard enough to muffle every noise.

He can't see, and he can't hear, and everything is tactile and olfactory.

His tongue is inside her, feeling her pulse, and he remembers the scent of Rozanov's cigarette smoke.

His cock starts to get hard against her soft bedsheets.

Shane pushes down instinctively, trying to focus on the sensation, always pleased when his dick actually pays attention to what he is doing instead of staying stubbornly soft.

"Are you-" Sarah gasps, pushing into him, her body straining toward his mouth, hard abdominals curling over his forehead.

What if this was Rozanov's body?

The thought comes to him unbidden, breaking Shane's focused concentration, and he groans into Sarah's skin and presses his hips into her mattress.

Rozanov's body is strong like this. He probably smells a little like this, or close enough to it, or he could smell like anything and the taste and the scent wouldn't bother Shane. His thighs could close around Shane's head, just like this, squeezing, blocking out the noise.

Some days, Sarah doesn't always seem that into what they do in bed, which Shane can relate to. They're both so stressed, probably. Sex is allegedly supposed to relax people, but they are both so new to it that most of the time, they're awkward. But not today. There's something in the room today.

Shane strains. She strains with him. Her fingers are beneath the sheets, touching herself, blunt nails on calloused hands in front of Shane's face. He slides a hand beneath himself. He's hard, and he's damp, so he wraps a hand around himself and strokes.

The sheet is still covering his head. Shane breathes through his nose, smelling musk and sweat, feeling hair tickle his face and cheeks. Her nails bump his nose again. Shane thinks about Rozanov's wind-chapped palms, soft and dry on his own.

They both get off together for the first time.

"Did you..." she pants, eyes wide.

Shane winces, flushed with humiliation and a sudden, all-encompassing self-hatred. "Sorry," he winces. His skin feels clammy. His stomach hurts from how hard he was clenching it.

There is a swath of bruises down one side of his ribcage, light purple, not deep enough that he can actually pinpoint the moment he received them. But he thinks he got them when Rozanov pinned him to the boards in the second period of the gold-medal game and held Shane there for a moment longer than necessary. Shane had felt his breath on the back of his neck, so of course he hadn't noticed the pain from the check until Rozanov was already skating away.

She pulls him up and kisses him. She licks his lips, tasting herself. "Yes."

"I'm sorry," he says against her mouth, "about the sheets."

"It's okay." She squirms against him. Shane is overwhelmed and sticky, and the sheets are dirty. "Do you," she panted, "do you think you could get hard again? I'd let—I want you to fuck me, Shane."

She sounds like she means it. Her eyes are closed, but she's so soft and wet. Shane gets hard thinking about bruises and ice and cigarette smoke, but when he can't come, it's easy to blame it on the first orgasm. She doesn't come either, so it's fine, probably.

They break up a few weeks later. It's very mutual. Both of them are busier than ever, and she has to start really thinking about college. Her parents are more upset than either of them.

They actually stay friends, though, and that makes Shane feel such a relief it nearly sends him to his knees. She still lets him eat lunch with her friends. Nothing really changes.

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2015

It's December, and the Voyageurs are looking good this year, looking strong. They'll make another playoff run, and Shane is superstitious about his hopes that they will do more than that. Montreal and Boston have played each other twice so far and split wins. Rozanov fucked him after both games, but when Montreal beat Boston in their own barn a week ago, he also pinned Shane to the mattress and sucked him off through two nearly back-to-back orgasms. Shane thought he was going to pass out.

Shane hasn't seen Jessica since the beginning of November. They meet up for coffee one day. Shane knows there are phones pointed at them, but they've already been photographed together a few times so it doesn't really matter at this point.

Shane is trying to figure out how to call this thing off. He loves Jessica's classes, and she's a phenomenal instructor even though they've been hooking up less since games resumed. He wonders if she's expecting him to take her home today, and wonders if he'll be able to get hard after Rozanov wrung three orgasms out of him a week ago. All-Stars is coming up, too. Shane doesn't think he wants to hook up with Jessica anymore, but he can't quite find the words to tell her.

Luckily, Jessica says, "So, I started seeing someone."

“Oh,” Shane says. God, he hopes he doesn’t sound relieved. “That’s nice.”

“Yeah,” she agrees, and she smiles at him warmly. Sometimes Jessica looks at him like Shane is a puppy, something adorable but a little dumb. “Thanks, Shane. That means a lot.”

“You’re welcome,” he says awkwardly. He’s drinking green tea. The cup is warm between his palms. All-Stars that year will be in Nashville. When the location was announced, Rozanov texted Shane a gif of a girl riding a mechanical bull and clutching a rhinestone cowboy hat, captioning it, *‘bet you could do better.’* Shane didn’t respond. He wonders if Nashville is warm this time of year.

“Anyway, it was casual for a while, but it’s not anymore, so you and I can’t keep seeing each other.”

Shane nods immediately. “Right, of course. Absolutely.”

“And I’d prefer it if you found a different yoga instructor.”

Damn it. “Oh. Okay.”

She laughs at him. She sounds like Rozanov when she does. “Jesus, Shane, you’re so predictable,” she chuckles. “Listen, I’ll text you some numbers and profiles, okay? I don’t mind if you keep taking classes at the studio, I don’t feel comfortable teaching you myself. Sorry. I know you liked the lessons.”

“You’re a great teacher,” Shane says, a little annoyed at himself. If they never hooked up, then she could keep instructing him. He doesn’t want to push the point, since she’s been very clear, but he says, “Genuinely. I really loved your classes, so I’ll miss them, but I would definitely appreciate your recommendations.”

“Thanks. I’ll make sure to text you.” She looks happy and deeply amused, which is usually how she looks around him.

He takes another sip of his tea, wondering when he can leave without being impolite. “So, it’s serious?”

“Yeah,” Jessica says. “That’s the other thing I wanted to talk about. We’re a little high-profile, so I just wanted to give you a heads-up that you might hear some stuff about it as well.”

“Oh,” Shane says, blinking. “That’s nice of you, but I’m sure I’ll manage.”

“I know that there’s been some gossip about us,” Jessica says, gesturing vaguely around the cafe, where there is indeed more than one patron who thinks they’re being subtle as they snap pictures of Jessica and Shane together. “People found my name, and that doesn’t bother me, or whatever, except I really don’t appreciate the Insta comments from girls claiming they would be better for you than me-”

“Oh, god,” Shane groans, “I am so sorry!”

“No, no, it’s fine. Or, it’s not your fault.” She rolls her eyes. “I get it, trust me. I knew what I was getting into. But, again, I wanted to warn you that my partner is pretty well-known online—she’s a wellness and yoga influencer, she’s got a few million subscribers so a pretty good fanbase, and we’re going to announce our relationship some time next week. I expect you’re going to catch some flak for that, since everyone will probably assume I’m only attracted to women.”

“Ah,” Shane says, finally understanding what she’s getting at. “Oh, okay, I get it. Uh.” He blinks, then shakes his head. “You know, this actually isn’t the first time this has happened to me. My high school ex-girlfriend and best friend got engaged last month. To another woman, I mean,” Shane clarifies. “They’re getting married next year. Professional soccer players—they both just played in the World Cup—so yeah, pretty high profile. I guess what I’m saying is, I’ve done this before, so don’t worry about me.”

Jessica laughs harder, sounding delighted. “Oh my god, no way! I knew I liked you for a reason! Okay, now I almost feel worse! You are going to be so flamed, my guy! Ugh! Well, I’ll make sure to say that I am bisexual in the post, and if anyone asks about you, I’ll make it very clear that what we had was genuine but casual and it’s over. Okay? Sound fair? I really don’t want this to be something that sucks for you.”

“I appreciate that,” Shane says warmly, “but I don’t think it’s your job to worry about it. Thank you for the heads-up, that will be very helpful. And, um, congratulations, by the way. You said she’s popular? Would I know her stuff?”

“Carrie Nile?” Jessica suggests, and Shane’s mouth drops open.

“No way, I *love* her content!”

Jessica laughs. They finish their drinks. It feels easier than anything else ever has between them.

At the end of the meeting, Jessica kisses his cheek. “You’re a sweetheart,” she says, “but you’re way too nice for me.”

“Same, actually,” Shane says before he can remember to bite back the words.

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2010

Kingston wins the national youth tournament in Shane's final year playing for the junior team. Sarah is in attendance. She’s already at college and becoming an important member of her D1 soccer team, so Shane knows that when people start posting the photos of them embracing on Facebook, someone will probably identify her. That’s okay. He’s just glad she could make.

They go out for dinner without his parents after the final game of the season, catching up. Shane tells her about the draft, but he doesn’t tell her everything.

She's the one who asks about Rozanov.

"All that rivalry stuff is intense," she says, shoveling poutine into her mouth.

"Yeah," Shane agrees. "We're actually doing an ad together this summer for CCM themed around the rivalry angle. You know, Boston versus Montreal, Russia versus Canada, rookie versus rookie."

"Wow," she says. "What's he actually like, though? You met at the draft, right?"

Shane remembers water bottles and sweat. "Yeah. Briefly."

It's weird to sit at a table with the only person he's ever had sex with and have such a normal conversation, right?

She looks happier now than she did in high school. She's the same height, but she holds herself like she's taller. She also cut her hair off and buzzed the sides. Her roots look darker now.

It's after midnight. They're in a 24-hour Tim Hortons with surprisingly clean floors, and they're only selling coffee at this point. Sarah puts her elbows on the table and leans forward. "Hey Shane?" she says, chewing on her lip. "Can I tell you something?"

It's the first time a girl has said this to him, but it won't be the last. Shane nods. "Of course."

"Okay." She chews a little harder, then sighs and rucks a hand through her short hair. The strands on top are thicker than the sides but barely any longer than Shane's own short haircut, though equally straight. When Yuna saw the haircut, she'd exclaimed about what beautiful hair Sarah used to have until David elbowed her. Shane watches her fingers sink between the short strands. "Okay," she says again, and, "Okay. I, um, there's this girl. On my team."

"There are a few of them, I think," Shane says dryly.

That startles a laugh out of her. "Yes. Right. Anyway—there's one, like, pertinent girl. Maisy."

"Is she any good?" Shane asks.

Sarah shrugs. "She's alright."

"Okay." Shane stares at her, wondering when she's going to get to the point.

"We hooked up," Sarah says very quickly, rushing through the words. She clams up as soon as they're out, sinking her teeth back into her bottom lip and slumping against the booth. Her eyes go down and to the floor, not looking at Shane anymore.

"Oh." Shane immediately thinks of Rozanov's fingers brushing against his in a hotel gym in LA and coming onto Sarah's bedsheets. "That's—you mean, you... as in..."

“We... had sex.” Sarah winces. “A few times.” She’s twisting her fingers together hard enough that the skin stretches white over her knuckles.

“Okay,” Shane says. “That’s... fine? Right? Did you... like it?”

She glances up, then away again. Shane picks up his tepid coffee and drinks half of what remains. “Yes,” she says after a moment. She’s basically whispering. “I liked it a lot.” She takes a deep breath. “I think I’m... a lesbian. I pretty much know I am.”

“Oh.” Shane doesn’t mean to, but he thinks about the jokes his teammates used to lob at him about Sarah when they were in high school, about how unattractive they found her, her athleticism, body, and clothes. They’d thrown around some shitty words—words like *dyke* and *lezzy*, and Shane really hates that he thinks about those insults and the fights he got into with the guys over them. He hates himself because he wonders if he should have seen this coming.

Sarah is shrinking in front of him. They haven’t talked as much this year, but it’s not like Shane has made any new friends since high school, so she’s still definitely his best friend.

Shane reaches across the table. She meets his hand eagerly, until their fingers latch. “That’s okay,” Shane says. “You’re good. I don’t have a problem at all with that, Sarah. I still love you, bro.”

Their fingers hang in the air. Shane wonders if he’s lying to her. He doesn’t understand how he feels, except that he hates himself, but he doesn’t hate Sarah and could never hate Sarah, and what does that mean?

She smiles. It’s fragile. Her eyes are bright, and his probably are, too. Shane thinks again about how strangely enthusiastic her parents were about their relationship and how they almost seemed to push them together whenever they had the chance. Giving her condoms and being extra nice to Shane, letting him stay over and shutting her door for them. He thought they were weirdos back then. Now he thinks about it, and he just feels sad.

His fingers curl down tighter. Sarah holds back just as hard.

In a month, he’ll be in Toronto in a shower with Rozanov, and he’ll try really hard not to think about this moment at all.

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2016

Shane has had practice with this, is the thing. He sees it coming, and he knows what to expect, so he really isn’t surprised when Hazel dishes up two enormous plates of Mediterranean takeout and sits next to him at his kitchen island, familiar with his space even two years after they broke up because they’ve maintained the friendship (Shane is so *good* at being friends with women who don’t want to date him anymore), and turns to face him. “So,” she says, “I am really sorry to do this to you.”

Shane laughs. The tension breaks. She puts a hand over her mouth, trying to keep a straight face while stifling her chuckles. Shane lets out a fake groan, tossing his head back. "Okay. Okay. Spit it out, come on. Rip the band-aid off."

Hazel rolls her eyes and shoves his shoulder. "I'm a lesbian, you jackass," she says, and then they're wrestling, gripping each other's shoulders and shoving back and forth as their stools creak and wobble.

"How could you!" Shane laughs. "How could you do this to me? Don't you know what I've been through already?"

She knows. With Hazel, Shane has shared some of the most insightful conversations of his life about ethnicity, nationality, and what it means to represent Canada. He's a second-generation immigrant on one side and descended from French colonialists on the other, and she is First Nations, so in some ways they could not be more different, and yet they keep finding common ground. Hazel helped Shane understand what it really means to belong to a place. Hockey, Hazel thinks, and sports in general, are uncomplicated ways that people can feel proud of the places they come from, separate from the complications of families and governments. People want to feel connected to their cities and countries, and it makes communities feel good to have something simple to cheer for, and that's why it's important that people who look like them are representing the sport now.

Hazel plays dirty, kicking harder at the base of his chair, and Shane has to jump up to avoid falling on his ass. He snatches up a spoon and brandishes it at her.

She's still laughing. "Yeah, honestly," she says, "at this point, I'm starting to feel like a cliché in your life, so I don't know *what* that says about you. I wanted to wait for a better time, but..." She shrugs. Her shoulders are enormous. When they were together, Shane's favorite thing about being with her was sitting side-by-side, their bodies pressed close, and letting his head fall to rest on her shoulder. She is so sturdy, and though they never had sex, he liked the way she felt against him.

He pulls her into a hug before she has to finish, feeling the strength of her. "If now's the right time, then you do it now. That's got nothing to do with me." He's gotten a lot better at this part over the years. He's had practice.

"Well." She doesn't sound choked up, but she squeezes him hard, and Shane likes that part too. Her muscles are so much bulkier than the whip-strong liveness of Sarah, or the controlled balance and core strength of Jessica, and it feels right in Shane's arms. "It does have a little bit to do with you. I'm planning to come out on Instagram next month, as part of the charity drive I'm doing with Leah and Max. I'm not dating anyone right now, but I just... I want to get it out of the way. I want to be out there and have it not be a question in anyone's mind, you know? And I knew I wanted to tell you first. But I am sorry if I'm adding fuel to the fire."

Shane sighs. "It's already fucking burning. At this point, who cares?"

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In the beginning, Shane can catalogue every single time Rozanov has ever touched him.

The first time is the handshake. The second time is the second handshake. Shane has never been cool about anything in his life.

The third time is in the hotel gym after the draft, and the drag of Ilya's fingers over Shane's as they pass his water bottle back and forth. It feels like a burn, like Shane didn't stick his hand under cold water fast enough, and his skin is still on fire long after he touched the flame, burning deeper and deeper. His cells are lighting each other on fire. He feels branded.

Then they are filming a commercial for CCM together, and suddenly Shane is hard, and Ilya is hard, and Ilya is jerking off. It's the first time Shane sees Rozanov's body in full, and he looks nothing like Sarah. His body is nothing like Sarah's body, but that doesn't change anything for Shane like he thought it might. He likes Rozanov's body, unfortunately.

In a public shower stall, he watches Rozanov jerk off for too long. Rozanov raises his eyebrows and nods at Shane's hard cock like he's goading him to join in, offering to jerk off together right here, side by side, watching each other.

Shane doesn't want that. He doesn't want to touch himself. He barely notices himself. He wants to get on his knees and put his mouth on Rozanov's cock and map out the ways that it's different from what Shane has experienced before. What does he smell like?

Shane doesn't give a shit about his own erection. How could he? Who would? It's only logical that he wants to taste, and hold, and peel back.

Shane barely has enough self control to leave the showers. He does not have enough self-control to tell Rozanov to fuck off when he asks for his room number. He just gives it.

Rozanov touches him all over. Shane takes it as permission to touch him back. Their hands are on each other's shoulders, their waists, then their knees and thighs when they get to the bed. It doesn't feel perfunctory or casual, the way they touch each other and the way Ilya puts his tongue and then his thumb in Shane's mouth. It doesn't make Shane feel nervous. He feels... curious.

Rozanov tells him to get naked. Shane gets naked. Rozanov "lets" him suck his cock. Shane sucks his cock.

It's bodies. It's just bodies. There are no thoughts and certainly no comparisons. There is heat, scent, flavor, and something in the pit of his stomach that Shane has never felt before.

It takes Shane a moment to remember to feel outraged when Rozanov stands up and pretends to leave, because at first he's disappointed by how fast it was. Sarah definitely took a lot longer than that. Shane wants to go again, try again, see if he can get Rozanov down farther or ask if he's allowed to swallow—and then Rozanov smirks at him and Shane suddenly remembers that he is also hard and it's generally considered impolite not to return the favor,

and he feigns outrage over Rozanov's dismissal even though he actually doesn't care at all about his own erection.

Well. He cares a little.

He never did with Sarah.

Shane remembers every moment of that first encounter. He could list them out chronologically, every kiss, every brush of Rozanov's knuckles against his face, every lick, the way he touched and gripped his hair, the way it felt to put his cheek on Rozanov's chest.

He also remembers the way it felt after Rozanov was gone, his clothes with him, and Shane actually realized what he had done.

It was unsettling to feel so awkward and nervous in the prelude to Rozanov's arrival, and to feel so disgusted and terrified in the aftermath, when everything in the interim had felt only natural. The most natural Shane had ever felt off the ice.

It's not a good realization.

And yet he still goes to Rozanov's hotel room in Nashville. It's like his body forgets every time.

After that first time, Shane quickly loses count of the touches. Between Toronto and Nashville, Shane loses the ability to separate individual touches from each other. What counts as one kiss when they spent five minutes making out, Rozanov's hand on his ass? What are the qualifications? How should each be categorized? Does it matter which hand Rozanov uses, or if it's his tongue? So Shane loses track, and all he knows is that he needs more.

When Rozanov fucks him for the first time, something lights up inside Shane. That's the best way he can phrase it. He isn't good with words. It's like there has always been an empty room somewhere deep in his stomach, and Rozanov and only Rozanov can reach in and turn on the lights. Before this, Shane had been groping in the dark, hands in front of him searching for the chain hanging from the lightbulb, but every time his fingers brushed it, it swung out of his reach again.

Rozanov doesn't create something that wasn't there (at least, Shane doesn't *think* he does), and he doesn't instantly fill all that empty space, but he illuminates it.

Shane comes untouched. He's not really thinking about anything while it happens.

Rozanov's cross glitters above him, and Shane feels hypnotized by it.

(Is this how Sarah feels, Shane thinks, and tries to unthink, when she is with a girl?)

Rozanov leaves. They establish a pattern. Shane rarely breaks it.

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2013

It becomes harder every year to find time to hang out with Sarah in person, but they never stop talking over messengers and through late-night texts. Their seasons run opposite to each other, so right when Shane's season ends, hers is beginning to ramp up. They miss each other's playoff games and the starts of their season.

But for the past few years, Sarah has been coming to Yuna and David's house for Christmas. They have three days—her break is longer, but his is so brief—where they can hang out while Yuna and David dote on them, and sometimes it feels like they're back in high school and things are simple enough.

Sarah is happier. Shane likes the Voyageurs more than he liked the Kingston team, and he prefers NHL hockey, and he loves living alone now, but the rest of the time, in the truly quiet moments, he feels the same.

He feels stuck, especially compared to her.

"You okay, Shane?" she asks quietly.

She probably knows, Shane thinks. Not the Rozanov of it, but the rest. She's probably guessed, maybe even before she came out to him—but guessed *what*? What does she think he is? Has she figured it out before him?

He's pretty sure she knows, so he doesn't know why he can't make himself say it.

He shuffles so he can put his head on top of hers. "Yeah," he says. "I'm okay."

She takes his word for it. Or at least, she doesn't press him for anything he can't give her yet.

It's a lucky break when she starts playing for the Montreal Roses FC after finishing college. They don't have to rebuild their friendship from scratch, but in some ways, it does feel like a fresh start.

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2016

It becomes a story in the summer of 2016 because Shane attends two weddings, and they are both to his ex-girlfriends, and both of said ex-girlfriends are marrying other women, and all of them are relatively high profile.

The worst part is explaining it all to his parents.

"Sarah was literally sixteen when we got together," Shane says calmly, "and she didn't understand her sexuality yet. That had nothing to do with me. Jessica is bisexual, and I knew that when we were hooking up, and now she's fallen in love and is getting married to a woman. It also has nothing to do with me."

His parents exchange a dubious look.

“Okay,” Shane says, “it’s a little bit of bad luck on my part, and very bad timing, but what am I going to do? Ask Sarah to delay her incredibly important symbolic wedding to the love of her life?”

“I suppose you could ask Jessica,” David jokes, sounding a little miffed.

Shane snorts. “As if Jessica would listen to me.”

“This is just,” Yuna says, then cuts herself off. “Well, I mean, it’s just-” She goes quiet again, then shakes her head. “Well, it’s just going to be hard to spin, Shane.”

Shane ducks his head.

Slowly, David says, “Obviously, son, we don’t have a problem with-”

“Oh!” Yuna exclaims. “No, no, of course not! Never! We love Sarah, Shane, you know we love Sarah—and good for her, I hope she’s very happy, and of course she’s asked you to be her best man, no, that all makes perfect sense, of course! It’s just... it’s just, well.”

David picks up for her again. “You know, I think we should just be happy that they’re happy, right?” he says. “That’s all that matters at the end of the day, isn’t it? Good for them.”

“Yes,” Shane echoes.

Yuna nods. “I bet a lot of kids will be really happy. Sarah is going to be such a good role model for them,” she finishes decisively, already pulling out her phone. She’s probably texting the other members of Shane’s management team, getting ready for the inevitable shitstorm that is going to happen when two of his exes get lesbian married within a month of each other.

Shane stares at the back of her phone, aware of his dad’s gaze heavy on the side of his face. “Yeah,” he agrees. “She will be.”

Shane isn’t very close with Jessica anymore, but ironically, he’s grown close to her new wife. They’ve even worked together a few times in the past year, doing joint videos mostly on her socials, and they’ve helped each other out with sponsorship connections. He attends their very fabulous wedding, which is cloyingly hipster-themed, and leaves smelling of incense and the herbal tea wedding cake that he allowed himself a few bites of.

He prefers Sarah’s wedding by a mile. It’s much smaller, with just close friends and Joey’s family. Ultimately, Sarah decided not to invite her parents. They’re still not all the way there yet, even if she hasn’t cut them off completely, but she won’t allow them to ruin her and Joey’s day. Shane is the only person from her childhood present, and he stresses himself nearly to tears trying to get his best man duties perfectly right, to make the day perfect for them, even though every few minutes he thinks to himself, *Will my parents come to my wedding? Will I ever get a wedding?* and nearly has a dozen panic attacks in the process.

The day goes perfectly. He dances with Sarah and posts a few pictures of them at the reception on his Instagram, which is heavily monitored by his social media manager, who has

to delete hundreds upon hundreds of hateful comments, but Shane still sees a few that slip through the cracks. One of the pictures is Shane murmuring something into Sarah's ear while they dance. For the life of him, Shane can't remember what he was saying to her. What did he tell her? Did it matter? Why won't he just *talk* to her?

And then he wonders if Rozanov saw these pictures of Shane at these queer weddings, and what Rozanov thought of them. Did he wonder what Shane's motivations were, or if this was actually some conniving plan? Did he think about Russia, or his own future wedding?

Sarah is so much happier now. Shane can't imagine what it must feel like to be that happy.

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2014

"So," Rozanov drawls in the bathroom of the NHL Awards, one arm propped above his head on the paper towel dispenser like he's still fucking trying to look cool even though he interrupted Shane literally having a breakdown three seconds ago, "I hear you found another hockey player to replace me. She seems strong, can probably push you around like you like. You did not bring her with you tonight, though? Why is that, I am wondering?"

Shane can't fucking believe him. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Rozanov shrugs. "Nothing is wrong with me, except I try not to be a homewrecker. Because I am a good person, as you know."

"I don't know shit about that," Shane snaps. And he doesn't know why he fucking says it, but something compels him to add, "There's nothing to fucking home wreck. We broke up months ago. We were barely together, the media just—just blew it out of proportion."

"Ah, yes," Rozanov says. "I thought maybe you missed me. Tried to find a good replacement. But that's hard to do, huh?"

Shane could hit him. He can honestly imagine it, pushing his fist between Rozanov's sharp, white, slightly crooked teeth. He would cut his knuckles on those teeth. He knows Rozanov would lick the blood up with a smirk. "What the fuck do you want from me? You haven't answered a text from me in like six months, and now you're asking me about my fucking ex-girlfriend? What the fuck, Rozanov! What the *fuck* do you actually want from me?"

Rozanov tells him exactly what he wants.

Shane would have done it, too.

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2016

Hazel comes out like she said she would, right at the start of the season. Shane is 0-3.

The PWHL has several out gay players and a few married couples, so she's in good company. She doesn't worry about what her coaches are going to be like or whether she's going to be booted from her team or excised from her locker room. All of the people in the PWHL are already fighting gender stereotypes by playing a professional contact sport, by wanting to be respected in that sport and in the broader sports world, so they are less dependent on the gender-sexual normalities of society. So Sarah says.

By comparison, the NHL's locker rooms are mired in that brand of stoic tradition. They are built upon it.

It doesn't go well for Shane, that is to say.

Jessica and Sarah were both already technically public with their sexualities and relationships, Jessica more so, but the publicity of two of his exes getting gay married, followed by a third coming out all in the span of four months is a dumpster fire that Shane never expected to have any control over. Hockey blogs and websites eat it up. The fans implode. Every article about Sarah and Joey's pioneering marriage and Hazel's bravery includes some kind of reference to their romantic pasts with Shane. It's all terrible, and it's a mess, and Shane is tired of it before the preseason exhibition games are even over.

He does get it, is the thing. Of course people are having strong reactions to the mostly inaccurate headline that runs in *E!*, "*Shane Hollander has turned THREE women into lesbians; is he really that bad in bed, ladies???*"

He gets it, but it's no fucking fun.

He's just captained them to back-to-back Stanley Cups, but the guys don't let him forget it.

"Don't listen to them," Hayden says confidently, jostling Shane's shoulder. "You'll find the right girl one day, I know it."

"Yeah," Shane agrees.

"Ignore those cocksuckers," is JJ's decisive declaration. Shane gives him a look but JJ shrugs, unrepentant.

"JJ," Shane says warningly.

"Fine!" JJ throws his hands up. "Ignore those fucking assholes! Happy now?"

Shane shrugs. The locker room makes jokes and players on other teams volley acerbic chirps at him—they call him a fag and a cocksucker and a dyke-fucker and, of course, make the inevitable quips about how bad in bed he must be to keep "turning" women. Yuna is very professional at handling the bad (weird?) press that comes from it all, doubling down on representing Shane as a strong queer ally because that is really their only option now. Shane doesn't do as many advertisements and photoshoots during the season, so if it really is impacting his image, he won't know for sure until the summer.

"Hey man," Hayden comforts, "seriously, don't sweat it. At the end of the day, you've still got Lily, right? I've seen the freaky shit that chick is texting you—no *way* she's faking it."

"Shut up, Hayden."

Shane puts his head down. He muscled through. He makes it to October 26, Boston v. Montreal, and he hopes desperately for a reprieve.

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2006

"What are you, a fag?" Doober asks, having caught Shane in the middle of turning down a woman at the house party they're attending. He doesn't even know her name, but she just offered to suck his dick in the coat closet.

Shane blinks at him. "She was, like, twenty."

Doober snorts. "Yeah, she's old, I guess, but everyone knows Mary gives great fucking head. I should call her back, shove you two in there together." He slings a heavy arm over Shane's shoulders.

Shane is very fast, and he's just as strong as the rest of them, but for now, he's still shorter and lighter. He bears the arm without complaint even as Doober steals the beer straight from his hand. It's not like Shane minds, anyway. He wasn't going to drink it. Not here. "Whatever," he grumbles, looking away.

"Maybe," Doober says, shifting a little so that the bend of his elbow is right up against Shane's throat, his forearm draped down his chest, "I could tie you to a bed upstairs before I bring her back, huh? Make sure our new little rookie actually loses his v-card and doesn't run away again?"

"The fuck?" Shane snaps, shoving him away. His heart is pounding. He's in Kingston, and his parents are two or three hours away. Beer sloshes from the bottle and down the front of Doober's shirt.

"Fuck you, man!" Doober yells, flinging beer off his fingertips. "The fuck is wrong with you, fag?"

"Shut up," Shane says, shoving out of the kitchen.

The house is hot and loud and not any fucking fun. How could anyone think this is fun?

He stumbles out onto the lawn. It's October, so it's not as cold as he would like, but it's better than being inside.

Shane sits on the front stoop, hands dangling between his spread knees.

He's here for hockey, he reminds himself. It's worth it for the hockey. This is what he has to do to be the kind of player he knows he can be.

He needs hockey, and so this needs to be worth it.

He needs to make it work.

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2011

Shane Hollander's best friend is a lesbian.

This is a fact that people know about him. Some people, at least.

The FIFA Women's World Cup is taking place that summer, and Shane attends as many games as he can fit into his schedule, mostly with Sarah at his side to explain the finer details of the game to him. She's playing soccer at a Division I school, already one of the brightest prospects in the sport, and some people take pictures of them together and post them online.

Shane gives a brief, generic interview about their friendship. "Sarah's my best friend from high school. We have always shared a drive to be the greatest in our respective fields. That's something that's always bound us together. Yes, of course, I love and respect women's sports. No, I am not in attendance as a political statement; I am in attendance as a fan. Athletes are athletes. Go Canada."

Sarah has a Pride flag on her Facebook page. Shane's fans, voracious and hungry after just one season, find it. There is some online commentary about it for a few weeks—noise that Shane intentionally tunes out, and which doesn't follow him back into the locker room. Not yet.

Canada doesn't win the Cup, but Sarah says she's optimistic for the next one. "After all, I'll be playing for them by then," she says confidently.

Shane believes her.

He wonders why it's so easy to believe her, and not himself.

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2016

Things are easy with Rozanov too, when the noise in Shane's head lets up. Things are nice.

He likes watching hockey and shitty TV with Rozanov. He likes that they mostly eat the same sort of things, that Rozanov understands how to feed a professional athlete and doesn't give Shane weird looks when he sees how much food he can put away at a time. He likes working out with Rozanov, and talking about working out with Rozanov, and talking about hockey all the time because Rozanov never gets bored of hockey, just like Shane. Rozanov is funny, and he's rude and sharp and blunt, and he's confusing as hell when it comes to emotions, but he always tells Shane exactly what he expects or wants him to do in the moment, if nothing else. He likes the feeling of Rozanov against him, and he likes sharing a bed with Rozanov, likes having his thighs around his head, likes the scent of him, sweat, musk, and skin.

He likes Rozanov.

Shane likes a boy.

“Do you like them? Girls?” Rozanov asks, eyeing Shane intently.

“Do I like them?” Shane asks, not even sure what that means. “Of course I like women, I’m not a fucking asshole. What the fuck makes you think I don’t like women?”

Rozanov laughs in his face. “No, is not what I meant. Okay, so you are not, uh, woman-hater? What is word? Like racist but for men who hate women? It’s like, miss-something, yes?”

“Misogynist,” Shane tells him, and this feels weird. This is weird, right? He’s telling his hook-up, his extremely masculine Russian hook-up who just fucked Shane in the ass and then fed him tuna melts, what the word for systemic and personal prejudice against women is. It’s maybe the weirdest thing he’s ever done. He’s also smiling while he does it, which is even fucking weirder. He clears his throat. “Mis-og-y-nist.” He wants to be helpful, and it’s an important word, okay?

“Misogynist,” Rozanov repeats. Shane nods. “Well, it is good to know you are not a misogynist, but is not what I meant. I meant do you like girls like—like you like me?”

“Like you?” Shane is a broken record.

Rozanov gestures between their bodies. “Sex,” Rozanov says frankly. He oscillates between being the most enigmatic, confusing communicator Shane has ever had the displeasure of trying to understand, and being about as blunt as a baseball bat. When he wants to, Rozanov is very good at cutting to the chase. Shane appreciates this side of him more. “You like sex with women?”

“Sure,” Shane says.

What else can he say?

Rozanov puts his hand—fingers long, palms rough—on Shane’s stomach. Shane hates the way his muscles jump, like even the organs inside his body are desperate to be closer to Rozanov. Like he fed Shane and now he’s going to try to coax something out of him in return. “Really?” he asked. “Because I was thinking that you maybe like my cock more.”

Shane swallows. “I like that too.”

Rozanov snorts. His hand presses down a little, his thumb settling against Shane’s bellybutton. “Yes, I know, you are a very slutty bottom and cannot resist my cock.”

Shane’s breath catches. “Maybe.” That’s as vulnerable as he can get. He feels sticky. His breath smells like tuna and cheese, but Rozanov’s smells the same, and it’s starting to homogenize. “I like what we do.”

Rozanov looks at him, long and hard. “Good. You should always like what we do.”

“Do... you?” Shane asks. “Like it?”

Rozanov nods. “Very much. I don’t do things I don’t like.”

“Well. Good.”

Rozanov smiles, brief and crooked, then shrugs. “I read an article about you.”

Shane looks away. “Yeah? That’s not surprising.”

“No. The story is everywhere. ‘Shane Hollander is so bad in bed his dick turns three women gay, he is the ultimate ally.’ Very impressive record.”

Shane actually laughs. Fuck Rozanov, but he laughs. “Oh, come on, *you* know that is not how it works-”

Rozanov makes a face and cuts Shane off by blowing a raspberry. “Yes, duh, of course I know how it works! Even your dick isn’t so bad as that.”

“Hey-!”

“And one of your women is bisexual, so you had nothing to do with it anyway. Really, it’s two out of three if anything.”

Shane is *still* laughing. “I mean, I guess that’s a little better.”

Rozanov nods. He picks one of the last fries off the plate and puts it in his mouth, seemingly just to piss Shane off because he immediately starts talking around the half-masticated food. “I am this too.”

“What?” Shane asks, picking up a napkin and pointedly holding it in front of Rozanov’s mouth.

Rozanov grins. It’s broad and it touches every feature on his face. The napkin has no chance at hiding it. “Bisexual,” he says. “I am bisexual. Like your ex-girlfriend.”

“Oh.” Shane drops the napkin. He picks it up off the floor and starts folding it before he realizes what he’s doing and drops it onto the plate haphazardly. “Good for you?”

“Ugh, Hollander, is that what you say to your many gay ex-lovers? No wonder they all left you.”

Shane shoves him. They wrestle for a moment, jostling for space, and Shane almost gets on top of him before Ilya sweeps the leg he’s planted on the floor for balance and Shane falls back, Ilya racing on top of him, eager in his victory. “You are the worst,” Shane complains, but he likes the way Rozanov is pinning him, likes the way his knees settle wide on either side of his hips, buried into the deep, soft couch cushions.

Rozanov kisses him. Shane turns to butter beneath him. “Not the worst,” Rozanov says.

“No,” Shane agrees.

Rozanov shifts. They’re both growing hard. Their breath is absolutely rank, but somehow Shane finds himself capable of ignoring it, just this once.

Shane has to crane his neck and strain his shoulders, pushing against the hold Ilya has on him to capture his mouth again. Rozanov makes him reach for it, watching the approach with a growing smile, but the second their lips touch, he’s pushing down, pinning Shane again.

Rozanov shifts to get one knee between Shane’s leg so that he’s perched over one of his thick thighs. He lowers himself onto it, rubbing a little through his joggers, and Shane watches the way his legs have to split to settle over his thick, overdeveloped muscles, tightening the fabric at his crotch.

“You like what you see?” Rozanov asks, placing a hand on Shane’s stomach and inching up his shirt. Rozanov’s shirt, that is. Shane is wearing his clothes, from head to toe.

Shane nods. “I do.”

Rozanov pushes the shirt up, exposing the plane of Shane’s stomach, and then he shoves his pants and boxers down. He doesn’t move, so Shane has to lift Rozanov’s entire weight to get his ass far enough off the couch to wriggle the fabric down. Shane manages it, though. He carries Rozanov’s entire body into the air. Rozanov’s blue eyes are almost swallowed by the black of his pupils even though the room is flooded with sunlight. Shane’s cock is already hard enough to spring up between them. When Rozanov puts a hand beneath his mouth, Shane knows what he wants, so he spits into Rozanov’s palm. They don’t always need words in the middle stages.

“Good boy,” Rozanov purrs. He pushes down his boxers and they both look in the space between their bodies, golden skin bracketed by dark clothing, lit by natural light, two hard, reddening erections between them.

Shane groans. His eyes want to flutter shut but he fights the urge because he doesn’t want to look away.

Every inch of Rozanov’s body is a masterpiece. He lets Shane look at it a few times a year.

“So hard for me,” Rozanov coos, and he’s spitting into his palm as well before he wraps it around both of them, and it only works because his hands are huge, but he manages to get both of them in his grip, and Shane nearly seizes. “Is this for me?”

“Fuck,” Shane pants, watching the slide of their cocks together. “Fuck, yes, fuck, it’s all for you.”

“You get hard for me?”

“Yes, yes, I-”

“Harder than for anyone else, yes?”

“Yes, fuck, of course-”

“Wet for me too?”

Shane nods.

“Me too,” Rozanov says. He lets go and Shane whines, but he’s grabbing Shane’s wrist and spitting into his palm. “I’m wet for you too, Hollander. Stroke us.”

Shane does as he is told. His hands are broad too. He can fit both of them in his palm.

“Fuck, just like that, Hollander,” Rozanov murmurs, sitting up a little more so that he is perched on Shane’s lap, looming above him, undeniable, unimpeachable. Shane strokes them both, tries to make it good. Like he’s reading his mind, Rozanov says, “You always want to make it good, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“You are so good for me,” Rozanov coos. Shane gets into a rhythm and it feels right. It just does. “Fuck, you can feel it, yes? You make me so fucking hard. All for you. Will you make it good for me?”

“Please, let me, let me make it good.”

"Am I better than your women?" Rozanov asks.

He shouldn't ask that. Shane definitely shouldn't answer. He shouldn't say, "Yes. Of course."

“If I had a pussy,” Rozanov pants, “would you lick me like that? Would you make me come on your tongue? Would you fuck my come back deeper into me while I did, lapping me up?”

“Yes,” Shane pants. There's no hesitation. Isn't the answer obvious? “Yes, of course.” He doesn’t have to think about it. Imagining *anything* with Rozanov turns him on.

Rozanov arches above him, pressing his hands to each side of his own chest at the fattiest parts of the tissue, and Shane understands immediately, so he lurches up and sucks one of his nipples into his mouth, hard, like he’s actually trying to get something out of it.

Rozanov groans like he’s been shot. “Fuck, fuck, suck on my tits, Hollander, *fuck*,” he moans, about as wrecked as Shane feels, a way he’s never felt with anyone else. “Stroke my clit. Tell me I’m pretty.”

Shane whines but does as he’s told, letting Rozanov’s nipple slide out between his lips but keeping his mouth pressed against his breast as he pants and rambles, “You’re pretty. You’re gorgeous. You’re so, so beautiful, fuck, Roz-”

“Lily.”

Shane’s breath catches so hard he has to cough. “Lily, Lily, you’re so fucking pretty, please, let me lick you, I promise I’ll-”

“Touch my clit.”

Shane speeds up, lapping at his nipple. “Please, please, let me, I promise I’ll make it so good for you.”

“Shane,” Rozanov groans. He’s rocking his hips like he’s riding Shane, grinding on top of his thigh like he’s actually rubbing his pussy against Shane’s leg, and Shane can read it on every inch of this body he knows so well—Rozanov is about to come.

Shane’s right there with him.

“Come for me,” Rozanov says. “Make me come.”

Shane doesn’t have to do anything. They both go over the edge, spilling together on Shane’s stomach, and Rozanov’s hands disappear from his chest so he can grab Shane’s skull on either side and yank him into a kiss. Firm. Hard. Long.

Rozanov’s mouth always feels softer after they’ve been kissing for a while.

“Lily,” Shane says again, slurred around someone else’s tongue and his own swollen lips.

“Ilya,” Rozanov corrects this time.

Shane swallows.

Sarah was so unhappy in high school and she hid it so well. Jessica was so straightforward, so unashamed in everything about herself from the first day Shane met her. Hazel has come a long way in a short time, and sometimes she looks at Shane with soft eyes and talks about Pride and being true to herself.

“Ilya,” Shane says.

Ilya smiles.

It’s a good feeling. The moment stretches.

Shane could run away now. Or he could stay. He could stay and think about Sarah’s pinky interlocked with his, and Jessica laughing in his face, and Hazel hugging him tightly, and all those things that Shane has spent about six years trying and mostly failing to internalize.

Six years is a long time. He should probably get a move on.

But Shane is also starting to feel gross, and their breath is really going to get to him any minute now. There’s only so many parts of his identity that he can push at the same time, but if he doesn’t get this come cleaned off his stomach, he might still freak out.

Maybe Ilya can sense that. They do know each other pretty well by this point. He leans in for another brief kiss before pulling back. “Do you want to shower, or want me to wipe you down with a towel now?”

Shane swallows. Why is his heart threatening to beat out of his chest? Can Ilya hear it? Can he feel Shane's pulse when their lips press together? "I'll shower."

Ilya nods. "Okay." He kisses Shane again and topples himself backward onto the couch cushions, one arm slung over his eyes, their legs still tangled together in the middle.

Shane looks at his body. Hard lines, strong muscles, hair in all the right places. He's sweaty. He's big. He smells clean and masculine, and people look at Ilya and they hear him talk and they see a man, a playboy, a womanizer, and no one looks twice. Ilya can call himself Shane's girl in bed all he wants, and it will never change that.

Shane doesn't care. He doesn't want him to change, and there is no universe where he would.

"Ilya?"

"Yes?"

"I don't want you to be a girl. Or, you know, *need* you to pretend, or anything. Just... if that's what you thought this meant. That's not what I want. I want... you."

From this angle, Shane can watch the rise and fall of Ilya's chest. "Okay," he says.

Shane spends the night and stays for breakfast. They fuck a few more times, but Rozanov doesn't talk about having a pussy again, which is probably for the best, because Shane's brain feels fucking fried already.

When he's getting ready to leave, Ilya kisses him at the door.

"Are you coming home to me?" he asks, pressing their cheeks together.

"Maybe," Shane says, and he caves and adds, "yes," almost immediately.

Ilya nips at his ear. "Good boy."

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2015

Jessica breaks up with Shane and makes her #InstaOfficial post, and Sarah is now publicly dating her teammate, although there hasn't been a grand announcement. Shane's met her, and she's nice. They're good together. They treat each other well. Hazel hasn't been with anyone publicly since Shane (or at all, as far as he knows), but people still speculate about her, judging her appearance, build, and height in the shittier rags that Montreal media publishes.

The story is already percolating in the hockey gossip mill, essentially. People are talking about Shane, and the things they're saying are weird. It's not hard to find for the people who go looking for information on Shane's romantic history. It's weird and invasive and deeply presumptuous on so many levels, and it's not the kind of thing that reporters bring up to him before or after games, which he's grateful for, but it does get mentioned in comment sections and hockey Twitter.

There are two main versions.

Does Shane Hollander have a fetish for lesbians?

Or, Were these lesbians actually Shane Hollander's gay beards?

Both are bad in different ways, obviously.

The latter comes up enough that Shane does some reading on what a 'beard' is, and he briefly thinks, "*Huh, that's not such a bad idea, especially if it's mutual,*" and then he immediately remembers how that's already worked out for him so far completely by accident.

It's just noise, though. Noise and judgmental looks in locker rooms and on the ice. Confused glances from his parents, because he's still appearing on Sarah's Instagram stories. Shane ends up liking Jessica's girlfriend a lot more than he ever liked Jessica when they meet at an event for wellness influencers in Montreal, which he shouldn't admit but also doesn't really try to hide because Jessica doesn't give a shit and Carrie thinks he's hilarious. He ends up on her Instagram too, with its millions of followers, and people just keep asking questions.

Noise.

It doesn't effect the game. It doesn't touch the ice.

Scott Hunter walks up to him after Shane wins his first MVP trophy. "Nice one, rook."

Shane smiles a little. "Thanks, Mr. Hunter," he says, cheersing his drink.

They make small talk. Shane turns down an offer to do shots, and then turns down an invitation from Scott to head to another bar. Scott looks a little disappointed, but Shane doesn't really care why, because Rozanov won the Rocket Richard this year, which means they're both in town, which means there is already a keycard to a hotel room not his own tucked in Shane's front pocket. He's distracted.

"It was nice catching up, Hollander," Scott says after a while and Shane bobs his head.

"Yeah."

Scott taps the counter. "If you're ever in New York, and you want to get a drink or something—let me know."

"Will do."

Scott walks off. Rozanov appears as if summoned.

"What did the dinosaur want?" he demands. "Was he trying to siphon off your youth and beauty?"

"Siphon, nice. New Yorker again?"

"Hollander."

“We were catching up. Why are you talking to me right now?”

Rozanov looks offended. “Oh, old man Hunter is allowed to talk to you but I am not for thirty fucking seconds? Real fucking nice, Hollander.”

“I meant,” Shane says slowly, taking a sip of his drink, “that we can’t be seen leaving together, so as long as you’re standing next to me, neither of us can go up to your hotel room.”

Rozanov pauses. “Follow me in five minutes or I get started without you,” he snaps, and practically flees the ballroom.

Shane smirks.

Just noise. Shane is used to tuning out the noise.

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2014

“So, are you seeing anyone these days?” Sarah asks.

She’s probably probing for information about Hazel, who Shane stopped seeing almost six months ago.

She has no idea that two weeks ago, Ilya Rozanov snuck into Shane’s hotel room in Boston and dropped to his knees to suck his dick in the shower, sneaking his fingers and his tongue back until Shane came down his throat. She has no idea that after, Rozanov kissed his way up Shane’s body, over every joint and muscle and dimple, until he reached Shane’s mouth and kissed Shane as the water poured between their faces and tried to drown them.

He and Rozanov didn’t talk about what happened in Vegas, and Shane didn’t tell Sarah about that either.

“Nope, not since Hazel. What about you?”

“Yeah, actually,” Sarah says, shifting a little as a light blush dapples her cheeks. “I met a girl.”

There’s a quiet thrill in the sentence. Shane wishes that he could echo those words verbatim and mean them like she means them. He’s still waiting to meet the girl who makes him sound like that, and in the meantime, at least Rozanov has started kissing him again. He’ll take what he can get.

He smiles. “Good for you.”

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2016

Shane meets Rose Landry in a restaurant he didn't really want to go to in the first place.

They talk for hours. She's one of those people, like Sarah, like Hazel, who Shane clicks with immediately. Conversation comes easy, and there's no learning curve associated with it. They talk about movies and growing up in very different industries, but still starting their professional careers very young. Shane, who's mostly been surrounded by other athletes his whole life, is fascinated to hear about how different it was to start in cereal commercials and then graduate to feature-length films by eight years old. Rose, who has been very close to hockey her whole life, is knowledgeable enough to find Shane's insights and contributions interesting without him needing to explain the repetitive details of a pro hockey player's life.

It really is that easy.

His phone buzzes two hours into their conversation. Shane looks down.

From Lily, two words. *'at home?'*

"Sorry, one sec," he says to Rose, typing out, *'No, sorry, JJ invited me out to a new restaurant - guess who I met?'*

"Girlfriend?" Rose asks. Shane glances at her. She shrugs a little, a soft smile on her mouth, arms folded over her chest. "The way you were smiling," she explains.

"Oh." Shane turns his phone off. "Um, no, not really—I mean... no labels?"

"Wow," she teases, "Shane Hollander, are you a player?"

Shane laughs at the absurdity of that. "I think you probably know that I am definitely not," he says, because at this point he has accepted that no one who follows his career can be totally ignorant of the rumors about his ex-girlfriends.

She gives him a knowing smile and leans forward conspiratorially. "Can I tell you something funny?"

"Sure."

"I've had four ex-boyfriends—*four*—come out as gay after I've dated them."

Shane bursts into laughter. "Shut up, are you serious?"

She nods vigorously. "Oh, yeah. So, admittedly, I might have had ulterior motives about talking to you tonight because I thought, 'finally, here's someone who understands.'" She sighs, big and gusty, and leans back. "Except woe is me, because I'm still beating you by two. Unless you have any more secret lesbian lovers in your past?"

"Well, first of all, one of my exes is bisexual, you homophobe," Shane says and Rose laughs. "And second, no, actually. Unfortunately, I've only ever dated incredibly successful people who are celebrated for their work, so all my relationships have been regrettably public."

Rose tilts her head. "Except..."

Shane glances at his phone. “Except,” he agrees. Yes. That’s private.

Rose watches him. Shane lets her look her fill.

“You seem sweet,” she says. “Maybe in another lifetime I could have been your fourth queer ex-lover and put the final nail in the lesbian fetish rumors.”

“That would have been nice,” Shane says, and he doesn’t say anything else or finish the joke, but he thinks Rose gets it.

Well, she definitely gets part of it, probably better than anyone else in the world actually, because it is kind of a unique situation they’re in, but he has the sense that she has a better picture of the entire truth.

Of Shane, in general.

Somehow, that doesn’t make him panic.

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2017

Rose and Shane decide to be friends instead. For once, Shane is happy to skip the relationship stage in his usual “how-to-make-friends-and-influence-people-into-coming-out” guideline, and he’s happy Rose still wants to hang out even though they are both busy, and even though she knows about the person buzzing away on Shane’s phone.

Despite their best efforts, Shane and Rose still get papped together, at the restaurant the first night, and then a few weeks later after getting dinner in a private backroom in the moments before they step into her car. Overnight, the pictures are everywhere. Everyone Shane’s ever met is texting him, including Carrie, Jessica’s wife, who DMs him with the message, *‘If she’s also a lesbian, you are legally obliged to tell me so that I can try and arrange a threesome. If you don’t tell me, I’m revoking your ally status on account of the fact that you fucked my wife.’*

Shane reacts with a thumbs down and moves on to the more important messages.

Notably, there’s nothing from Ilya.

Shane has been friends with emotionally intelligent, relationship-literate women for at least half a decade, but it still takes him two hours to work up the courage to script a painfully honest message to his sometimes long-distance fuck buddy, and another hour before he manages to send it:

‘Rose and I are just friends. We’ve already talked about it, and neither of us are interested in pursuing anything, so all of the gossip is just rumors, but we have become friends, so you might see some more pictures of us together.’

It’s very honest. Shane spends all that time working up the bravery to send it, and then, on complete impulse, he double-texts and immediately tacks on, *‘I am not interested in anyone*

but you right now, actually.'

He only has to wait a few minutes for a response. Shane gets a thumbs up in return, and then, right when he's about to be annoyed about it, Ilya texts, *'and we are still on for next week?'*

Bravery pays off, sometimes.

The jokes flood in quickly over the next weeks—only two of Rose Landry's gay ex-boyfriends are famous enough for people to know or care that they are gay, but that's still more than enough coincidence for every comedian on the continent to dust off their microphones and podcast equipment. The jokes go every which way, questioning whether this means they're both gay and finally found their perfect beards, or if only one of them is going to convert the other (most of the money is on Shane turning Rose Landry into a lesbian, which is unfair because his track record is technically still better than hers), or if they are actually both straight despite their absurd dating histories and they've bonded over their failed love lives.

Ilya hates it.

Shane thinks that's funny. It makes him lean into the bit, just a little, and Rose snickers when she tells him her plan to wear his jersey to a game. It leads to very fun, jealousy-driven phone sex, so Shane doesn't feel too bad for Ilya.

Then the Bears come to town, and it's the most thrilling experience of Shane's life to play on the ice with Ilya, knowing better than ever before where they stand with each other. They're probably way too obvious about it, grinning into face-offs and pointing at each other after they score goals, but Shane is feeling wild.

He's feeling good.

"I think I'm gay," he tells Ilya that night. Ilya is half-asleep, drooling on Shane's shoulder, and he snuffles like a pig when Shane wakes him up to tell him this important news.

"Do you have a concussion?" Ilya slurs.

"No. I just think I'm gay."

"Okay? What, did one of your lesbians finally tell you this?"

"No, you asshole. I figured it out myself."

Ilya groans. "Why the fuck are you waking me up right now?" he whines. "Is this punishment? Did I not fuck you good enough so now you are being petty about it? I can try again in the morning, just let me *sleep*," he drags out the final word.

Shane lets him sleep, but he's awake for a while after that, despite how comfortable and warm he is. This happens sometimes, when he's trying to work out a problem, and he's on the brink of a solution. His brain won't let him fall asleep until everything is fully resolved.

There are a lot of problems with this, actually. He and Ilya haven't said what they are to each other. Ilya gets twitchy when Shane ever tries to press the issue, to ask or imply a question anywhere near, "What are we?" There's Russia, and the five hours between their homes, and Shane's parents, and he should probably just go ahead and tell them he's gay already, because they mentioned that thing about a Swedish prince again last month so they probably figured it out before him. Jackie has started using more delicate, gender-neutral terminology around him, and even JJ has started side-eyeing Shane since he told the team vehemently that he and Rose are not dating, so maybe he'll go ahead and tell some of his straight friends too. And other people have guessed.

It's not just that so many of Shane's exes are queer, which is funny enough, but also that he is still friends with them. And through Hazel, now he's also friends with Leah Campbell and Max Reilly. In the NHL, having gay friends is basically the equivalent of being gay yourself. It's regressive, and it's another reason for the league to push all their diversity points onto Shane, which is bizarre and kind of terrifying, but he's working through it. He wants it to be less terrifying. Maybe somehow it'll be helpful, somehow, for some rookie in the OHL or AAA to look up and see all the jokes about how all of Shane Hollander's best friends are lesbians. It was kind of a big deal that he was Sarah's best man. Maybe that is helpful enough for now.

Ilya's dad is sick. They live in different countries. Shane is pretty fucking sure he loves him. None of those are problems that he can solve tonight. Not all of them are problems at all, actually.

Shane resists the urge to wake Ilya up again. He closes his eyes.

Eventually, he drifts off to sleep.

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2006

"Nice to meet you too, Sarah." Shane drums a pencil on his desk. He remembers his promise to his mother—*introduce himself to three new people on the first day at his new school*—and steels himself to make conversation with this shy, nervous-looking girl sitting next to him. "I just moved here. Uh, this is my first day." He realizes he sounds like a baby, but Sarah nods along.

"Oh, cool. I was born here. I've gone to school with these people since I was, like, four years old. Why did you move here? Did your parents get a job or something...?"

"I play hockey. I got drafted to the Kingston team, so I'm billeting. My parents are in Ottawa."

"Wow." Her eyes go a little wide. The OHL is kind of big in Kingston because they don't have an AHL or NHL team but are just as obsessed with hockey as the rest of Canada.

"That's incredible," she says, and, "I play soccer."

“Oh, cool,” Shane says immediately. “Ice hockey is, like, mostly cardio so I bet you’d be good at it. Can you skate?”

“Yes,” she bobs her head. Her hair falls out from behind her ear. She tucks it back with a practiced gesture and an annoyed purse to her mouth. “Can you kick a soccer ball?”

“Not at all,” Shane tells her honestly. “I’m awful. I can play pool and golf, though. I’m good at anything where you have to hit a ball with a stick.”

The teacher is late even though it’s the first day of school. They keep chatting. Sarah is easy to talk to. They both seem content to exchange very basic get-to-know-you questions, which is much easier than trying to make normal conversation.

"Where did you grow up?"

“I grew up in Ottawa, and we have a cottage in the country.”

“That’s nice.”

"What about you?"

"I’ve always lived in Kingston. What’s your favorite movie?"

Shane blushes. “I really like *Miracle*, which I know is cliché, but it’s super good, okay?” She laughs when he explains why it’s cliché. “What about you?”

“I’m also cliché,” she says with a pretty, crooked smile. “My favorite movie is *Bend It Like Beckham*—which is about girls playing soccer,” she explains when Shane doesn’t react. “I’ve watched it at least once a week for the past, like, four years. I could quote the entire thing to you.”

“I’ve never seen it.”

She fiddles with a strap on her bag, adjusting it back and forth in a motion that looks soothing. “You could come over to mine and watch it sometime?” she offers. “If you want?”

“Okay,” Shane says. “Maybe I can find a copy of *Miracle* and we can watch that, too.”

“Awesome.”

“Awesome.”

Shane isn’t good at making friends, but Sarah was always the exception.

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2017

Ilya and Sarah meet for the first time a few days before Christmas. She comes to Shane's apartment in Montreal for dinner the night before he and Ilya will drive out to Ottawa to

spend the holiday with his parents. Sarah does Christmas with Joey's family these days, and Shane's happy for her, but he also misses her enough to know how important this is.

Shane's a little embarrassed to see them standing there, sizing each other up—have they noticed the similarities between themselves, like Shane is just now putting together? Does it even matter when he is gay and she's a lesbian? Is Ilya going to be smug about this or weirdly jealous (it's always a coin toss with him)?

Sarah has known Shane for longer, but actually not that much longer when he thinks about it. She's still his oldest friend. Ilya, conversely, has been a consistent, persistent part of Shane's life for the past eight years, and Shane has probably seen more of him in person than Sarah. Ilya has been the sole purveyor of Shane's deepest secret, his truest self, something that he never let Sarah see because—as he realizes in retrospect—he was always worried that she would think he hated her too.

And now they're here together, in Shane's cottage, just looking at each other. Shane knows he's bright red. Steam is going to start pouring out of his ears from embarrassment if one of them doesn't say anything soon.

Sarah holds out her hand and Ilya immediately takes it. "It's nice to meet you."

"Yes, you too."

They shake hands. Shane watches the movement like a hawk.

"Shane says you guys have been seeing each other for a long time," Sarah says.

"Yes," Ilya agrees. "He says that technically, he has known you for longer."

"He's my oldest friend," Sarah agrees.

Ilya nods. "Thank you for taking care of him," he says, and Shane blinks and glances up.

Sarah doesn't look surprised. "I'm glad he had you."

"Yes," Ilya says slowly, "Same."

Shane doesn't know what to do. He understands what people mean when they say their hearts feel too big for their chests.

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2019

"So, here's the thing."

Shane narrows his eyes at Rose. Before she spoke, he was perfectly content and completely relaxed, lounging on the pool deck with the comfortable scent of sunscreen in his nose, but he feels his shoulders go a little tense as he turns to face her. He doesn't trust that tone of voice. Not at all. "What?" he asks carefully.

She immediately throws her hands into the air. “Why are you asking me like that? You don’t even know what I’m going to say yet!”

“I can tell that you think I’m not going to like it,” Shane says. He sighs and sits up, swinging his feet off his deckchair so he can reach for his water bottle. Sitting upright, he can see the rest of the small party they invited out to the cottage for the weekend playing down near the shore—Jackie and Hayden, valiantly trying to wrangle their daughters, and JJ, conspicuously avoiding being helpful, and Sarah and Joey racing each other farther out in the water, and Jessica and Carrie, waddling in the shallows with their two-year-old son, and Hazel, still single and still happy, building a sandcastle with Arthur, and Svetlana and Ilya, lying side by side on the floating dock with sunglasses on and towels tucked beneath their necks, looking like supermodels as they sunbathe together.

Shane escaped back up to the cottage to get a break from the bustle, but looking down at them all, it is definitely a welcoming sight.

It’s been two years since Scott Hunter came out. Shane no longer had to be the confused face of queer acceptance in the NHL. His team knows that he’s gay now, and Shane knows enough about what true acceptance feels like to know that he still has a ways to go with most of them. It’s an open secret in the league that Shane is gay, and plenty of people outside of it still speculate, and the slow accumulation of those rumors has made it a lot easier for Shane to process. Ilya just finished his first year with the Centaurs, and he is already confident enough in the room that he’s talking about coming out as bisexual next season, and Shane thinks that’s probably a good idea. It’s nice to be known. It makes life feel more real.

“So what is it?” he asks Rose, turning back to her.

“Well,” she draws out.

“Just get to the point!”

“Fine.” She rolls her eyes but finally admits what’s on her mind, leaning in. “Svetlana. She’s the most stunning woman I’ve ever laid eyes on, and I think she’s making me realize some things about myself. Do you know if she’s...?”

“Oh my god,” Shane groans. “No! Not you too!”

“Hey!” Rose laughs. “When you and Ilya finally go public, everyone’s going to say the same things about me! It’s only fair! We did this to each other!”

“It’s not fair at all!” Shane fires back, picking up a dry towel and tossing it at her head. “What are you even saying to me right now? Did you already...?”

“No, not yet,” Rose says, suddenly looking a little flustered as she repeatedly glances off toward the deck, where Svetlana and Ilya are looking conspicuously attractive. “It’s just... well, she’s been a little obvious, actually, right? Like you’ve noticed it too, right?”

Shane sighs and nods. Svetlana has been flirting with Rose non-stop since they got here, and maybe it’s a Russian thing, or maybe it’s childhood best friend telepathy, but she’s almost as

shameless as Ilya. If Shane had outdoor showers for the pool or the lake, she probably would have already given Rose a show. (Also, Ilya told Shane that Svetlana has been begging him to be introduced to Rose for two years, ever since the first summer they spent together at the cottage, because, “She is talented and stunning and finally I have found an equal, Ilyusha. Do you know how rare that is for a woman of my caliber? No, you do not.”)

Rose shrugs. “And, I don’t know. I’ve just been doing some self-reflection lately, I guess. And talking to all your lesbian friends. It’s been... eye-opening.”

“Yeah, I know how that goes,” Shane murmurs. He stands up and sits down next to her, putting an arm around her shoulders. She leans into him. “Hey Rose?”

“Yes?”

“Whatever happens, it’s all gonna be okay, I think.”

“I think so too, Shane.”

They sit together for a while until Rose takes a fortifying breath and stands up, dusting off her swimsuit cover-up. “Wish me luck.”

“You don’t need it.” Rose gives him another grin before she turns and strides confidently down the hillside.

Shane watches as her shadow falls across the sunbathers, waking them up. Svetlana perks up immediately, shoving Ilya away so that Rose can sit next to her, and Shane can hear Ilya’s grumbling from all the way up at the house until Ilya finally stands, stretches, and walks away, leaving the girls to sit on the edge of the dock, their feet in the water.

Ilya comes to Shane.

“It’s weird,” Shane starts as soon as his husband is within earshot.

Ilya yawns, falling next to Shane and dropping his head onto his shoulder. “You hate lesbian love now?” Ilya asks. “I would not have expected this plot twist. Svetlana will be thrilled. I have never seen her so pathetic for a girl.”

Shane elbows him gently. “Not that, you asshole,” he mutters. “No, I mean—all of this. It’s weird, right?”

“You just gestured at a lot of lesbians, bisexuals, and Pikes,” Ilya says. “I still don’t understand.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “I didn’t have any idea I was gay when I met Sarah,” Shane explained. “We just clicked. It was just luck, I guess. And Hazel and I both didn’t understand ourselves at all when we met, and I didn’t know Jessica was bi when I asked her out-”

“I cannot believe I am so chill about how many of these women you have slept with,” Ilya grumbles.

Shane ignores him. “And it was a complete coincidence that I met Rose, and somehow we still all ended up here. Like, literally how did we figure this out?”

Ilya yawns into his ear. “Queer people find each other,” he says simply. “Whether we are looking or not. We find each other, we recognize each other. In Russian, Sasha, Svetlana and I—we found each other when it was very risky to do that, even though we were only children.” He nudges Shane. “You found your people. You and me, we found each other. It's not always so hard. We were never supposed to do this thing alone.”

Shane leans all of his weight onto Ilya. “I love you.”

Ilya yawns again, and this time Shane can tell it's completely fake. “I love you too, even though you have been inside half the women on this lawn.”

“Ilya! That is not—that is—That isn't even true, fuck you!”

Ilya raises an eyebrow, ignoring the battering smacks Shane is giving his shoulder. “How many?”

“Only two, you jackass—and you've slept with Svetlana, that's only one less, so shut the fuck up, you fucking asshole, *ugh*, that is so gross.”

Ilya starts snickering, that sort of quiet laughter he does where he's hissing out little breaths between his clenched teeth without making much sound. It graduates slowly into a few proper wheezes and tapers off when Ilya eventually plucks Shane's hand off his shoulder and pulls it toward his mouth to give his knuckles a fat, slobbery kiss. “You love me,” Ilya teases.

“Of course I do,” Shane grumbles, crossing his arms. “You're still disgusting.”

“That makes it mean even more,” Ilya says happily. “You love everything about me. You got off during lesbian sex by imagining I was a woman-”

“I told you that in confidence—and it was still heterosexual sex, technically-”

“-with fat tits and a big clit for you to suck on-”

“There are children on the beach, oh my god, you are so crass-”

“-because you think I'm perfect,” Ilya says, “because all of your very smart lesbians whipped you into shape. Lucky me.”

“Lucky you,” Shane agrees, giving in and climbing into Ilya's lap. “And Jessica is bisexual.”

“This is getting very tiresome to say every single time, you know. It's an umbrella term.”

“It definitely is not-”

Ilya kisses him. Shane kisses back.

Sometimes Shane feels guilty about the ways he hated himself, because there was really no way to wholly divorce that shame and hatred from the people around him, the other people in his life. He thinks that probably what he and Sarah did when they were teenagers only made things harder for her in the long run, and maybe she would have figured things out earlier if it wasn't for him. But they also had each other, and hopefully that made a bigger difference.

Rose has her head on Svetlana's shoulder now. Shane is pretty sure that's how women flirt with each other. The kids are happy, and the straight people are vastly outnumbered. All is good.

Shane is happy. They're moving things along in the NHL, a few sideways steps and lateral moves at a time. There are other gay players, and there always were, because they were never as alone as they felt.

Ilya and Shane are definitely not alone.

"If you break up with me," Shane murmurs. It's the middle of the afternoon, but he's thinking about taking another nap, right here, sprawled over Ilya and tuckered out from their playfighting, "you should still come out. It's nice."

"Come out as what? Another lesbian on your roster?" Ilya asks dryly, working his fingers through Shane's hair, longer than he used to wear it. Shane smiles a little, thinking about how he grew his hair out while Sarah cut hers short, and how dumb it is to still feel like that is a victory.

"Shut up."

"I'm never going to break up with you," Ilya adds. Shane believes him, obviously.

"Nope," Shane says. "I wouldn't let you go."

Ilya kisses his temple. "Good."

It's nice. It's easy. It's just bodies, and there's no noise anymore.

End Notes

This shit is jam-packed with so many of my headcanons/hr thoughts ive been spinning around for a while, they all just came pouring out into this one fic. Despite that, I can still imagine myself coming back and adding another 5k to this concept...

Some of this was cannibalized from another stalled out fic I was working on where during all Shane's encounters with people with AFAB anatomy he imagines that he is still sleeping with Ilya in a different body and that gets him off (my Ilya-sexual Shane thesis, basically) because gender and sex are weird and fucky, and what does attraction/sexuality really feel like for a character who has fundamentally only ever been attracted to exactly one person? Obviously that snuck in a few places here but it's an idea I'm still enchanted by (air raid sirens sounding in my own damn head as I wrote Ilya's, "if i had a pussy would you lick it" what does this say about me personally? Don't answer that)

Also I have a [Tumblr](#) now. I really don't understand how Tumblr works yet lol, I tried to make one in like 2013 but I genuinely couldn't figure it out, and I'm honestly still a little confused about how blogs work. But come say hi if you want to (or if you want to educate me). Thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed it :)

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