

Love at First(Aid) Sight

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Love at First(Aid) Sight

by [Ilya_fell](#)

Summary

The McGill Redbirds have been very naughty boys.
Their punishment? Mandatory life-lessons on a Saturday morning until Coach Wiebe no longer wants to cry.

Captain Ilya Rozanov is hungover and hoping to slump his way through first-aid.
But....who is that unsheathing his stethoscope.....?

“Right you shitheads, this is serious. We’ve been training for this all year. We have a hot doctor and two hours to work some magic. I need to know who has mints, who has aftershave, and who I can count on to big me up.”

Notes

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

“Marleau, would you put him the fuck down? This shit is the reason you’re all here at 9.30am on a Saturday.....” groaned Coach Wiebe. “Are you even awake Rozanov? Feel like getting your team under control?”

Ilya opened a single eye and tried to focus on the scene before him. It was probably not obvious behind his Ray-Bans, but he made the effort, and that should count for something.

Sure enough, all 6ft5 of Marly had Pike suspended upside down by the ankles. Pike was eating a bear-claw pastry from the coffee shop next to the rink, swallowing against the laws of gravity and slowly turning purple.

“Give it up Pike. Is you fifth attempt, and you have still not beat my time. Takes a real Russian man to handle the bear-claw....” he drawled, puffing his chest until he remembered he was hungover. How was Pike even able to eat after last night’s Tequillathon?

Through his one open eye, he saw a pair of hot-pink Converse enter the frame, pausing next to Pike’s head, which currently looked like a ripe blackcurrant.

“You realise my three-year old niece knows it’s dangerous to eat upside down? Please get up before I have to perform an emergency tracheotomy with nail scissors and a biro.”

Ilya’s eyes, (the second had decided this was interesting enough to join in), travelled up long legs encased in skinny black jeans towards a pretty face currently set in a frown of disapproval. She was cute, annoyed, and staring at Pike like he was a new species of stupid.

Within seconds, Pike forgot how to chew, swallow, and breathe at the same time, and was unceremoniously dumped upright, where angry-lady proceeded to thump him between the shoulder blades until the bear claw stopped clawing.

“God....I’m sorry guys, I hoped they could hold it together at least through introductions.” Coach Wiebe looked like he was ready to cry, which was pretty much life as a University hockey coach. The second person he was addressing slowly swam into focus.....

Oh. Hmmm. Yes.

Fuck. Okay. Yes.

This was going to be a problem.

He was beautiful.

Not in an *every-girl-in-the-club-looks-the-same* kinda way. Ilya was used to beautiful. At McGill it often took the form of long hair curled to perfection, a soft tan, white teeth, and artfully applied make-up that aimed towards the same agreed-upon idea of perfection. The girls *were* beautiful, no doubt. But it was the same kind of beauty, over and over, like an army of dolls come to life.

This. This was different.

This was soft black hair carelessly tucked behind one ear. Not styled per say. It looked like he'd missed a couple of haircuts and then just forgotten about it.

This was alert brown eyes framed by long natural lashes, no need for mascara.

This was a bottom lip that could launch a war. The top lip was fantastic, no offense meant, *it was doing a fine job*. But Ilya wanted to suck on that plush bottom lip like he wanted to breathe.

And then....oh fuck. The freckles. Actual freckles, on a grown human man. A very grown human man, with thick biceps peeking out from his shirt sleeves....

Concentrate Ilya, he chastised himself. We are talking about freckles just now, there is time to admire his arms once you are married.

The freckles were a revelation. Nobody with that height and those muscles and that air of competence should have the cutest little freckles dancing across his face. Like little shooting stars. It made Ilya want to shoot something else across his cheeks. This must be the love-at-first-sight feeling that American movies rhapsodised over.

Coach was still talking and maybe he should listen in case this angel had a name.

“Team, listen up. You all know why you’re here. We will turn up every Saturday morning for mandatory life lessons until you fuck-ups can go a week without pranking your way to A&E.”

Coach Wiebe attempted a stern glare, which missed, as he was half-man, half-puppy. “This week we’re lucky to have Dr Shane Hollander and Nurse Jackie Woods join us, from Montreal General Hospital. They are giving up their free time to teach you some basic first-aid. Try not to embarrass me.”

Oh my god he was a fucking doctor. His husband-to-be was beautiful *and* smart. It was like god had carved a perfect man, dressed him in ugly chinos, and sent him to earth for Ilya’s own pleasure.

And then the angel spoke. “Jackie and I have caught a few games this season, so it’s great to meet you all. Give us a minute to unpack our supplies and we’ll get started.”

His voice was deep, but soft. Authoritative, but gentle. A voice used to giving commands but not being a dick about it. This made Ilya smile, because 80% of his own words could definitely be considered dickish or dick-adjacent.

Okay, time to get to business.

“Coach?” he asked, putting on his sensible big-boy voice. “Perhaps I could have a few words with the team while our visitors prepare? Make sure we’ve all got our gamefaces on?”

“Sure Rozanov,” agreed Coach Wiebe, a hint of suspicion in the wrinkle of his brow. “Why don’t you do that. And lose the sunglasses, there’s no windows in this room.”

Ilya beckoned his players to the far side of the common room, and gathered them in a huddle.

“Right you shitheads, this is serious. We’ve been training for this all year. We have a hot doctor and two hours to work some magic. I need to know who has mints, who has aftershave, and who I can count on to big me up.”

“Reporting for wingman duties Cap,” declared Marly, in his deep New-York drawl. “I have breath mints but no aftershave. Old Spice deodorant in my locker, can pretend I have the shits and make a dawn raid if required.”

God Ilya loved Marly. The brother he’d always wanted. And approximately 3,000% better than the actual shitty brother he had back in Russia. If he’d found his strong jaw and Elvis-haircut even mildly attractive he’d have married him in freshman year. Sadly, no boners for Marly.

“I appreciate that my friend. *Yes* on the mints, *maybe* on the Old Spice. If I ask about your dinner at Juan’s Mexican Beanfest, that’s a *go* for the shits.”

“Roger, Captain.” Marly clapped him on the back with the reassuring thump of a 240lb beefcake with hands like boiled hams.

“Roz?” asked a nervous voice.

“Pike?” replied Ilya, his patience already stretched by the sight of his winger’s earnest face.

“Are we sure they’re not like...a couple? Dr Hollander did say they’d caught some games together. And she’s really pretty.”

There it was. Pike pissing on his parade. Apparently when god was making angel-Shane he’d had enough leftovers to make this demon.

“I cannot say for sure Hayden, without 48 hours of surveillance and a social media deep-dive...” he explained in his most patient of voices. “But no engagement or wedding rings, no visible hickeys, and he didn’t check out Nurse Jackie’s ass when she was wiping claw off your face. So it’s worth a shot, yes?”

“Yes Cap,” agreed Pike, almost poking himself in the eye with his salute. “I volunteer to distract Nurse Jackie while you tackle the good Doctor. You know, to help you, not because she’s pretty.”

“Sure, give it your best solider. Or fuck, give it my best. Try to channel my personality instead of yours.” It was the soundest advice Ilya had ever given Pike.

“Roz, are you sure this is a good idea? Do you think trying to fuck around while Coach is actively punishing us for fucking around might make things worse?” Troy was probably his best friend apart from Marly. And a decent wingman for queer clubs, where Marly’s 6ft5 frame attracted too much attention for Ilya’s liking. But this was not the time for doubt from his third in command.

“Troy, I hear you, I understand you, but I’m going to marry him anyway.”

Troy rolled his eyes in response. “Okay, but if the outcome of your seduction is bag-skates, you will take full responsibility with Coach.”

“Sure. I would love to discuss this further, but Coach knows my pep-talks are short and sweet. Let’s make this happen boys. On three, ‘go redbirds’.”

The boys bumped their fists with a low-key cry of ‘go redbirds’, and returned to the front of the room where the trio stood chatting.

Noticing their return, his sweet angel baby doctor hooked his thumbs into his pockets and smiled. “So as Coach mentioned, I’m Shane and I’m an emergency doctor at Montreal Gen. Jackie here is one of our emergency nurses, specialising in trauma injuries.”

Pike raised his hand like a five-year old who needed to pee. “What are trauma injuries Nurse Jackie?”

Jackie bit her lip, and Ilya suspected she was trying to smother a smile.

“The emergency department receives all types of injuries. My speciality is patients who are in a serious condition due to trauma, for example car-crash victims. I am part of the team who assess and prioritise for treatment.”

Pike’s eyes widened, and even from ten feet away Ilya could tell his pupils were now heart-shaped. “Wow, that’s incredible....” he murmured. “You look so young to have that type of job. Would you say you are under 25?”

Ilya cringed at Pike’s inability to form a coherent sentence. This was NOT channelling Ilya. Fortunately Nurse Jackie seemed amused rather than worried.

“Yes, I would say that I am under 25. I started my nursing diploma at 17 and went straight into my trauma Masters course. Do you need to see the certificates? To be sure I’m qualified to teach first aid to puckboys?”

Awww. Ilya liked her already. Maybe she would be bridesmaid at his wedding to Dr Shane. But it was time to show leadership while subtly flexing his biceps.

“Thank you Nurse Jackie, that won’t be necessary. We already saw you save Pike from a bear-claw attack. Maybe you and Dr Shane could continue your lesson?”

Smooth.

“Please, you can call me Shane,” his sweet boy suggested, a faint pink flush on his cheeks. “To start, Jackie and I will talk you through some of the common medical scenarios you might encounter, and what you should and shouldn’t do in those situations. Sometimes what you shouldn’t do is just as important as what you should. Then we’ll have a quick break, and afterwards we’ll split into groups for some practical lessons such as bandaging and CPR.”

Pike put his hand up again, and Ilya considered whether he could use his cap like a throwing-star and chop his arm off at the elbow.

“Erm, quick question for Nurse Jackie? Do you...have to practice bandaging, a lot? Like for example, do you go home at night and practice, say, on your boyfriend?”

Oh my baby jesus this was embarrassing. In his hungover state, Ilya had let Pike take point on flirting with Nurse Jackie, and it was going to bite him in the ass every minute for the next two hours. Dr Shane turned away to fiddle with a bandage, but Ilya could see his shoulders shaking.

Nurse Jackie sighed. “I am already QUALIFIED, so no, I do not need to practice my bandaging at home. Because I am QUALIFIED and bandage patients during my working hours at the HOSPITAL.”

“Yeah, no that makes sense...” nodded Pike. “But if your boyfriend needed a bandage, you could do it? You know, assuming you have a boyfriend?”

Oh my god Ilya was going to die.

Troy was shaking his head and staring morosely at the carpet. JJ was cursing softly in French. Marly was clapping Ilya on the shoulder and giving him his *well-we-gave-it-our-best-shot-but-it-wasn't-meant-to-be* look.

Fortunately his sweet Shane stepped in for the rescue. “Great, well, we need to get on with the lesson, but there will be time to ask Jackie and I about our *jobs* during the practicals. Though there is a high chance you will be randomly assigned to my group rather than Jackie’s,” he smiled at Pike.

Ilya waited until Shane was looking elsewhere and caught Pike’s eye, making the universal sign for *shut-the-fuck-up-or-I-will-slit-your-throat*. Pike gave him a wide-smile and victorious fist-pump in return. This was not the type of telepathic second-nature communication a centre wanted with his winger.

Shane and Jackie continued to cover common injuries such as cuts, burns, and heart-attacks, and the ideal response in each situation.

Ilya was mildly surprised, how comfortably Shane handed the reigns over to Jackie. His experience of medical practitioners in Canada was minimal, but in Russia a male doctor would never bow to the opinion of a nurse. These two worked together like a well-oiled machine. Like Marly and him explaining a play to the rookies.

So they were probably friends, not just colleagues. That was worth remembering.

After around forty-five minutes Shane suggested they take a break, before moving on to the practical session. Ilya beelined for him like his pants were on fire.

“Dr Shane, Nurse Jackie, there is a decent coffee shop next to the rink. What can we get for you?” he asked in his most suave but respectful tone.

“Hey, please, call me Shane. And you don’t have to do that, Jackie or I can grab something,” he murmured, eyebrows raised in surprise.

“No, you are here helping us, would be our pleasure. Plus, our second-line centre is trying to work up the courage to ask out the barista. You would be doing him a favour.”

Shane laughed and it sounded like one hundred angels ringing tiny bells of joy. “Okay, thanks, two chai lattes please. We wouldn’t want to stand in the way of true love.”

Ilya grinned.

“Troy, get over here, you are on coffee run,” he shouted across the room.

Troy sloped over, eyes shifting to his watch before a tiny smile curved at his lips. “Sure, happy to help. What can I get you?”

“Two chai lattes please, and the usual for me. And for the love of god, please ask Harris out before you get the caffeine jitters.”

“How many coffees are you drinking per day?” asked Shane curiously, tucking his hair behind his ear.

“I don’t know.....” mumbled Troy. “Maybe five or six? But not every day.”

“Yessss.....” agreed Ilya. “Marly managed to get a copy of Harris’ shift-pattern and that has significantly decreased his intake.”

“That amount of coffee will take its toll on your sleeping and concentration. Have you tried drinking decaf?” asked Shane, big brown eyes focused intently on Troy.

“Eh yeah, sometimes. But, yeah, I’m usually chatting to Harris and he doesn’t man the decaf station, so I end up getting caf.”

Shane smiled softly. “Well I’m not your doctor, but my advice is to ask him out soon. For the good of your health.”

“Okay, yeah I should,” agreed Troy, no doubt wishing Harris was as pretty as Shane. “I’ll...I’ll try today. Maybe ask if he wants to get coffee sometime.”

“Solid plan, my man.” Ilya clapped him on the shoulder and gently pushed him towards the door. Which left him alone with Shane. Pike was currently miming something to Jackie, possibly a shark attack?

He turned back to Shane, trying not to stare at the soft scattering of freckles. “It’s kind of you to come along today. You like hockey?”

Shane’s gaze shifted to the floor, before he nodded shyly. “Yeah, I love hockey. I used to play a bit, now I mainly watch. Live when my schedule allows, if not I try to catch the highlights.”

“You and Jackie made it to some McGill games this season?” he asked curiously. If he’d been, he’d have seen Ilya. Hopefully looking strong and impressive and scoring lots of goals.

“Yeah, three home games so far this season. Queens, New Brunswick, and Ontario.”

Ilya gave him a flirtatious grin, running his fingers through his hair in a way that drew attention to his muscular shoulders. “Three times huh? You must have seen something you liked.”

“After the Queens game? No. Your forecheck after the turnover was way too conservative considering the speed you and Troy have. I went to the Brunswick and Ontario games to see if it had improved any.”

Ilya stalled, aware his face was now stuck in a weird nervous grin. Shane had said it so plainly, so calmly, as if pointing out a major hockey flaw was a normal response to flirtation. Usually girls just smiled and touched his bicep.

“Aaahhh, yes, we have been working with Coach on our turnover forecheck. But college hockey is the big leagues, yes? A little different from strategizing for your local beer league.” He didn’t want to piss-off his beautiful boyfriend-to-be, but he would be damned if he let an amateur criticise his forecheck.

“I guess,” shrugged Shane. “But even beer league players know the different uses of a 2-1-2 forecheck and a neutral zone trap. Unless you’re not as fast as Bren says you are?”

“Bren....sorry, Coach Wiebe, is entirely aware how fast I am. It is the reason I am a first-line centre with a hockey scholarship. Maybe next time you come to a game we can grab a drink afterwards. I can explain the plays to you.” Ilya was mildly proud of himself. He had turned a contentious discussion into an excuse for a date. If he had to teach his sweet Shane about hockey along the way, so be it.

Shane gave him a long look, a smile curving at the edge of his glorious mouth. “You want to teach me about hockey?”

“Sure,” said Ilya. “Will be fair swap. You are here teaching me how to save lives. I will teach you....I don’t know.....penalty-kill strategies in case you ever play against actual good players.”

“Actual good players....” repeated Shane softly. “Sounds like I would be out of my depth.”

“No, no! Hockey is fun. That is the point? Maybe doesn’t matter if you play with your friends, or at college, or in the MHL. As long as you enjoy it.”

“Hmmm, that’s true. Sometimes we can love something but forget how to like it.”

He said it with such gentleness that the thought seeped into Ilya’s soul, through the cracks he usually covered with brash confidence and a stubborn will. His mind immediately flashed to Russia, to his father, to his brother....the things he loved but hadn’t liked in so long.

Fortunately Coach Wiebe sidled up before Ilya spilled his life story and sobbed on Shane’s shoulder

“Rozanov, taking the opportunity to pick Shane’s brain, huh?” he asked with his usual jovial smile.

“Ah, sure,” agreed Ilya. “If you have a medical emergency I’m the man you want around.”

Coach furrowed his brow and scoffed. “I meant about the Frozen Four?”

“The Frozen Four? I don’t understand.” Why the fuck would they be talking about an NCAA hockey tournament Ilya had never played in?

“You didn’t tell him?” asked Coach Wiebe, turning to Shane.

“Why would I? That would be a weird thing to drop into conversation,” argued Shane, confusion marring his perfect features.

Coach Wiebe sighed. “Sure, why would hockey players be interested in talking to a Frozen Four winner.” He turned to Ilya this time. “Roz, Shane was Captain at Harvard when I was Assistant Coach. That’s how we met.”

Oh.

Oh.

His beautiful boy, beautiful smart doctor boy, was a fucking hockey champion. This was unbearable.

Ilya did not say this lightly, but it was possible, *possible*, he was punching a little above his weight here, with the beautiful, freckled, doctor-hockey-god.

“Right,” he mumbled, his voice cracking on the short word. Shane’s cheeks were now flushed, his eyes fluttering between the floor and the ceiling. Apparently being the smartest, most beautiful, and best at hockey in the room was highly embarrassing. “No, Shane did not mention how you met.”

“Okay, well I’ll leave you with that. I need to check on Jackie, Pike appears to be showing her a mole on his stomach. At least I hope that’s what he’s doing.” And with that, Coach wandered off.

Ilya stared at Shane, unsure how to rescue a conversation in which he’d offered to teach hockey to Sidney Crosby’s cuter cousin.

“It’s not a big deal, you know?” mumbled Shane shyly.

“I mean, I think it might be a big deal?” replied Ilya. “That victory is what got Coach Wiebe this job?”

“He deserved it. He’s a great coach. He was a big part of that victory.”

Ilya considered his own coaches back in Russia, whose style was...a little harsher than Coach Wiebe’s. “Yes, he is a good coach. This group would have given any normal person a mental breakdown by now. But...you? You were winning Frozen Four while training as a doctor?”

Shane shook his head, the soft black strands of hair brushing against his cheekbones. “No, I only played during my pre-med. Once I was in med school proper I had hospital rotations that I couldn’t miss to play hockey.”

Ilya frowned, trying to make it make sense. “But, to Captain Harvard, you must have been good? Good enough to play professionally?”

Shane blushed further, the soft pink reaching towards his cute little ears. As far as Ilya could tell, around 75% of his personality was embarrassment.

“Yeah, I had options to play professionally. But I had to choose, and I chose medicine.”

“Why?” asked Ilya bluntly. He didn’t mean it to sound harsh, but why choose a lifetime of long hours and sick people over accolade and wealth?

“It’s just....I thought about it, all through my final year of pre-med. There was a few months where it could have went either way. But when I looked five, ten, fifteen years in the future, medicine made sense.”

Ilya watched him. Watched his eyes flick around the room, tiny hints of discomfort in his tight jaw and furrowed brow.

He was missing something, some vital piece of information. “And what made it make sense?”

Shane looked up this time, head-tilted like he was waiting for Ilya to get bored. Eventually he sighed, his shoulders dropping. “My dad was in a car crash that year? He was okay, but it took time to be okay; surgeries, treatments, appointments. And him and my mom did all of that with me in Massachusetts, joining in via Facetime. I was either in class or playing hockey, and neither of those things were much help.”

Ahhhh. “You felt guilty?”

Shane grimaced. “I wanted to be there, like they’ve always been there for me. And the more I thought about it, the more I realised that if I chose hockey, I’d never be there? I’d have no control over where I was or where I was going, apart from three months during the summer.”

“But you have that with medicine?”

Shane shrugged. “Yeah, now I’m in my residency. My parents are in Ottawa. I can make birthdays, I can make Christmas, I can make it there in two hours if they need me. And if Montreal ever stops working for me, I can find a new hospital in a different city. My choice.”

Ilya thought about choices. About a boy choosing family over fame.

It was unexpected. Maybe because he’d always been running away from something, rather than running towards it.

“But you are happy? With the ways things worked out?”

Shane grinned, genuine this time. “Yeah. I loved hockey when I was a peewee at school. I loved it when I was U16 trying to study between scrimmages. I loved it at University between classes and essays. And now I love it when I’m not at the hospital working stupidly long shifts and maintaining friendships via text. I’ve always found a way to have both.”

Beautiful. Smart. Doctor. Hockey-god. Sweetheart. Ilya was so fucked.

“And now you love it enough to spend your Saturday morning teaching first aid to idiot redbirds.”

It was worth calling himself an idiot to get Shane’s soft laugh.

“Bren talks about you guys all the time. I wanted to experience it for myself.”

A clattering drew Ilya’s attention to the doorway, where Troy was shouldering his way in, carrying four to-go cups. And the facial expression of a man who’d been to hell and back.

“Oh fuck,” Ilya muttered, as he slouched towards them. “Troy. It happened again?”

Troy nodded mutely, handing out the drinks. There was a bead of sweat at his temple.

“Sorry man, should not have sent you in alone. That’s on me. What was it this time?” queried Ilya, ducking down to make eye contact.

Troy took a deep breath. “Cake pop. Started sucking on it while making the chai lattes.”

“Shit. What flavour?” asked Ilya, feeling the tension radiating off his friend.

“Strawberry.” squeaked Troy. “The icing was pink!”

“He is a siren Troy, this is not your fault. We will go together this afternoon. I will check for anything...*phallic*...he can suck on, and only signal for you to enter when it’s safe. I will stay with you while you ask him out, okay?”

Troy nodded softly, steely blue eyes big and round. “Thanks man. I just...”

Ilya clapped him on the back. “No need to explain. We’ll make that hairy little barista yours, okay? Go splash water on your face and think of something calming.”

He watched Troy stumble towards the bathroom, suddenly aware of Shane’s intense gaze.

This probably needed an explanation. “I think Harris is trying to signal his interest, to make Troy more confident? Because he gets nervous and runs away? But it is actually making things worse.”

Shane’s brow furrowed. “He’s trying to signal his interest....by sucking on things?”

“Yes. Third time this week. Monday it was a candy cane. Thursday was a boiled egg.”

“An actual boiled egg? Is that even sexy?”

“Was a whole boiled egg. He was sort of rolling it around his mouth...” Ilya tried to demonstrate using his tongue, aware his own attempt at seduction had taken a wrong turn. Damn Harris and his harpy ways.

Shane stared for a few seconds, before bending at the waist and collapsing into soft, uncontrolled laughter. It was maybe the prettiest sight Ilya had ever seen.

It continued for a few seconds, before Shane straightened, rubbing at his eyes. “ Fuck, Bren was right about you guys. This is not a normal team.”

Ilya bristled a little, holding Shane’s gaze. “What do you mean? You think there is something wrong with this? Helping our teammate find love?”

Shane stilled, head-tilted again, like he was trying to do difficult math.

“I guess if there’s one place I can say this, it’s right here. There was another reason I couldn’t imagine myself playing professional hockey. I’m gay.”

“Oh,” murmured Ilya, tugging at the drawstring on his hoodie because it was that or pass out with excitement. “Yes, that’s...that makes sense. Our team is very accepting, but that is, maybe not the norm.”

“No,” agreed Shane, fiddling with his watch. “No. A couple of guys on the team at Harvard knew, but not the whole locker room. Weirdly, people don’t care about your sexuality when you’re resuscitating them or sewing their finger back on. But put on three inches of padding and a helmet and suddenly it’s a problem.”

“I am glad then. That apart from hockey, there was something else you loved.”

He was intricately aware of the sacrifices people like them made just to love.

“I guess we better get back to business,” smiled Shane, carefully setting his chai latte on the table. “Hey, everyone gather round and we’ll get started on the practical. Ilya, would you mind splitting your guys into two groups that will not result in any lawsuits?”

“Sure,” smirked Ilya, giving Shane a quick wink. He surveyed his troops.

“Okay, listen up. Best behaviour all of you, or I let JJ take control of the aux cord on the next road-trip and you have 4 hours of French love-songs. Marly, Pike, defencemen and goalies, you’re with me and Dr Shane. Troy, JJ, Summers, and the rest of the offense, you’re with Nurse Jackie.”

“Dottie was right, you are a good Captain,” whispered Shane, as his degenerate teammates tried to remember which position they played.

What? Ilya turned sharply to inquire further, but Shane was already moving towards the CPR dummy.

Ilya only knew one Dottie. The enigmatic and irrepressible Dottie Wiebe. First Lady of Wiebe’s Exceptional Redbirds, or *FLOWER*, as Ilya insisted she be called. That had gotten

him uninvited to Thanksgiving two years ago.

Dottie discussing Ilya with Shane was...troubling. Dottie adored him, the way people adore a puppy that keeps pissing on the carpet, or the baby that keeps biting their finger. She adored him in a way where she was entirely aware of his flaws but chose to keep him around anyway.

In all honesty, Ilya loved her too. Dottie was a little wild, a little spiky, fearless and bold and upfront. She was also warm and kind, and annoyingly perceptive when it came to Ilya. She had birthed three children, but over the years had amassed many more. But Ilya was sure, so very sure, she'd never mentioned Dr Shane Hollander.

He tried to look attentive as Shane demonstrated how to check for a pulse, then how to perform CPR. Watched as his strong fingers linked on the dummy's chest, biceps contracting and relaxing with each compression. Even with the limbless foam dummy his actions were careful and precise.

He nodded with interest when Shane mentioned that Stayin' Alive by the Bee Gees could be used to guide the compression tempo to 100-120 beats per minute. He also died a little inside when Pike insisted on singing Stayin' Alive, while staring longingly at Jackie across the room. Fortunately, he aced the falsetto even if his dancing was diabolical.

After practicing their chest compressions, the resources were swapped and Shane taught them how to bandage and make a sling. Which was how Ilya found himself sitting in front of Marly with a triangular bandage in his hand and a hypothetical sprained wrist that needed stabilising.

"How's it going brother?" asked Marly, his voice low, one eyebrow cocked towards Shane.

"We've had some ups and downs my friend. On the upside, we chatted and he is sweeter than chocolate pie. On the downside, I failed to recognise him as a Frozen Four-winning Captain, and offered to teach him the basics of hockey."

"Ooohhh, rough start. But what were the chances of Wiebe roping in a Frozen Four winner to set us on the straight and narrow?"

"As a Frozen Four winning coach with his last school, apparently quite high. Also, Shane knows Dottie." This last part was said with trepidation, and the implications were immediately apparent on Marly's face.

"Hmmm," murmured Cliff, squeezing his eyes shut. "And Dottie knows us. Knows about the zoo, and the ski trip, and why JJ has a swordfish tattoo. Not ideal."

"No, not ideal. Also, I mimed what it looked like when Harris rolled the egg around his mouth like he was sucking on a rogue testicle."

Marly considered this scenario while Ilya tried to wrestle his ridiculously long arm into a homemade sling. "Are we sure that's a negative? Ball-sucking has always been a positive in my experience."

“Usually I would agree,” whispered Ilya. “But Shane is a respected doctor. Maybe no-one has ever mimed ball-sucking for him while making full eye-contact. Other guys probably just, you know, invite him for coffee or write him a poem.”

“But you’re being your authentic self, Cap. You’re much more likely to rinse his balls than write him a sonnet.”

Ilya dragged his eyes away from where Shane was trying to untangle a bandage from around Pike’s throat, and squeezed Marly gently on the shoulder. “Wise words my friend. I...think I might ask him to grab a coffee, once we’re finished. Get to the bottom of this Dottie situation. Find out whether it’s terminal.”

Marly contemplated the issue, fiddling with the crucifix that rested on his Metallica shirt. “I mean, you could text her, try to sound her out. But it’s Dottie, she’d figure you out in 10 seconds.”

“Yes, I mean, what would I say? *Hi Dottie, I have chatted to Dr Shane Hollander in a very respectful manner, and he mentioned you are acquainted. Can you confirm whether it’s already too late to shoot my shot?* She’d get it printed on a t-shirt.”

Marly suddenly sat bolt upright, the change in posture pulling at his expertly tied sling. “Roz, what are we doing here? This isn’t us talking, this is the tequila talking. This is hangover self-doubt, and we cannot let it win.”

“You think?” he asked uncertainly. *Oh god, Pike had gathered all the spare bandages and was now lurching around after Holmberg, dressed as a mummy.*

“I *know*. Who has a 4.0 GPA though English is his second language? Who helped raise over \$10,000 to keep the student mental health helpline open? Who won the Puerta Valenta Beach Bar wet t-shirt competition against a team of fucking *cheerleaders*?”

Ilya smiled. “You think great tiddies will be enough to win Dr Shane?”

“My friend, I would go to *war* for those tiddies. And from the response on Twitter, so would half of Puerta Valenta. So let’s pick ourselves up, take a deep breath, and remember you’re a fucking catch. Okay?”

“Okay. You’re the best wingman out there Marly. And you’ll be the hottest accountant in all of New Jersey.”

“I hear ya,” nodded Marly, as Shane wandered over.

He examined Ilya’s work with careful eyes, gently turning Marly’s torso for a better view.

“Really nice work Ilya. Oh, wait, you’re a physiotherapist, right?” he chuckled, rubbing his fingers across his temples.

“Eh, yes, in my fifth and final year. So maybe a little advantage over the accountants and lit majors.”

Shane shook his head. “Rookie mistake, I should have made Marleau bandage you instead. But glad to see the physio department have taught you well.”

“Actually, half the squad would be in pieces if Roz wasn’t around to do running repairs. His hotel room is like a doctor’s surgery after away games,” said Marly, bumping Ilya’s shoulder with his unbandaged hand. “Sometimes we steal the ice machine from the hallway and relocate it to his bedside.”

“Your Captain is multi-talented. Top hockey player, matchmaker, medical caregiver....what else can he do?”

“That’s for you to find out, doc....” murmured Marly, easing to his feet. “Excuse me, I gotta go rescue Pike. He’s got his bandages tangled around a plant.”

Shane turned his attention back to Ilya, and he felt a shiver of terrified anticipation run down his spine. Time to play offense.

“So, Shane, are we almost finished here, you think?” he asked, his knee vibrating gently against the floor.

“Oh, yes, of course, sorry,” rapid-fired Shane, eyes flickering towards the door. “I guess I should let you guys get on with the rest of your day.”

“Actually, I was, ahhh....hoping you might have a little time? To grab a coffee or lunch? With me?” It was a solid effort. He made it all the way to the final word before getting high-pitched squeaky.

Shane’s eyes rounded in surprise. Which was ridiculous, because there was no way a man this beautiful wasn’t asked out at least once a day. Even sick people in hospital had to be making passes.

He had just parted his lips to say something, when Jackie strode over and stood directly in front of Ilya.

“Okay,” she started. “What age is Pike? Because he’s trying to tell me he’s 22, but the only proof-of-age he has with him is his Costco membership.”

Ilya sighed. Sweet Jackie’s bridesmaid status was on the verge of being revoked. “He is 22, I assure you. He just has the energy of a child who’s eaten a whole share-bag of Skittles.”

“Right....” she drawled. “He just asked me out. Well he sort of did. I could hear your friend Marleau whispering lines to him from behind a plant.”

“Yessss, is for the best,” agreed Ilya. “Marly actually has a very poetic heart.”

Jackie dipped her head, pulling gently on the hem of her sweater. “I don’t date much, my job is exhausting and I don’t always have the energy to make conversation. It seems like maybe your friend would prefer someone more lively?”

There was an attempt at nonchalance, but Ilya was the king of nonchalance. He could see the tiny waver of her lip, the doubt in the way she worried her sweater.

“No, fuck no, Nurse Jackie. Pike does not need someone who can match his energy. He needs a strong woman who can direct his energy somewhere *useful*. You wouldn’t ask a puppy to housetrain another puppy, would you?”

She laughed, visibly relaxing, and shared a look of some sort with Shane. “So you think I should say yes?”

“Honestly, I think Pike is an idiot. But he is a sweet idiot, who will worship the ground you walk on and arrange his life around your happiness. I think you could do worse.”

“Okay, I guess I could give him an hour for coffee. Thanks Captain Roz.”

“Anytime, Nurse Jackie. And when you need peace just give him his Gameboy. That’s what we do.”

Ilya turned back to Shane, internally cursing Pike’s impressive ability to cockblock from across the room.

And there he was. They shy smile. The soft flush across his freckles. The slight line of worry between his brows. “I have to be at the hospital in a couple of hours, but wouldn’t mind grabbing a tea and stretching my legs first?”

“Sounds good,” breathed Ilya. “I’ll go gather your bandages.”

They collected their belongings and said their goodbyes, Coach Wiebe watching them leave with a curious glance.

“Are you parked nearby?” asked Ilya, eyeing Shane’s bags. “You probably don’t want to take your CPR dummy on a tour of McGill.”

“I’m just over there,” replied Shane, nodding towards a dark blue SUV. “And you don’t need to give me a tour, I’ve been on campus plenty.”

“You have?” asked Ilya, watching Shane carefully stack bags into his trunk.

“Captain Rozanov, you need to read up on your McGill history. You haven’t heard of the great redbird goaltender David Hollander?” asked Shane with a playful smile.

“Ahh, no, to my great embarrassment I have not. He was a legend in these parts?”

Shane chuckled. “According to my dad, yes. According to my mom, he lacked focus. Probably because he met her and within 24-hours hockey became the second-most important thing in his life.”

“Your parents met here? At McGill?”

“Yeah,” nodded Shane. “Dad was studying business and loved playing hockey. Mom was studying finance and loved shouting advice at hockey players. He never stood a chance.”

“And that’s how a hockey dynasty was born,” smiled Ilya, directing Shane towards the coffee shop.

“Something like that. I think they had me on skates the day after I learned to walk. I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t on the ice.”

Ilya knew the hard work required to play at the highest level. He knew it didn’t happen overnight. So he also knew the answer to the question he was about to ask. “You played a lot, growing up?”

“Hmmm, maybe too much,” he shrugged. “I was always highly competitive, whether it was hockey or school. Being good at both didn’t leave time for much else.”

Ilya reached the entrance to the coffee shop first and held the door open, guiding Shane with a gentle touch to his back. “I am sorry to change the subject, but since you are now involved in redbird soap-opera, the bearded cutie by the coffee machine is Harris.”

Shane giggled. “He doesn’t look like the type of guy who would cause this much drama?”

Ilya sighed. “Harris is an actual sweetheart, like sunshine trapped in human form. That is partly the problem. Troy cannot believe someone as lovely as Harris would want to be with him.”

“Oh, that’s....really sad,” murmured Shane.

“Yes, he has self-worth issues - it’s a whole thing we’re working on. Being on a team that isn’t full of homophobic assholes is definitely helping.”

Ilya guided Shane towards the counter, where they were met with Harris’s blinding smile.

“Well hello Ilya. How’s my second-favourite hockey player?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “I am good Harris, though I would be better if you’d stop suggestively licking things in Troy’s vicinity. Could you just ask him out before he has a heart-attack?”

Harris snorted. “Me, ask him out? He looks like a fucking Calvin Klein model. Sucking on a corndog while staring into his baby blues is the closest I’m going to get.”

“Oh my god Harris, please say you don’t have a corndog behind the counter? He likes you, I promise. I just need one of you to be brave before I have to sell a kidney to finance Troy’s coffee addiction.”

“Well tell him to be brave! I’m not embarrassing myself by getting rejected in my place of work.”

Ilya ran his fingers through his curls. He was not built for this. This required a sitdown special with Oprah and a team of therapists. “Harris, there is undoubtedly security cam

footage of you sucking-off a cake pop in front of customers. Trust me, that is worse. Just. Ask. Him. Out.”

“I’ll think about it big guy. Now, do you want something to drink or are you just here to lecture me in front of your cutie-pie friend?”

Time to admit defeat. “Colombian roast for me please. For you Shane, tea?”

“Yeah, green tea if you have it. If not, black is fine thanks.”

“Green tea coming up. So are you a new recruit to the hockey team Shane, or is Dr Romance interfering with your love-life too?” asked Harris with a cheeky grin.

“Neither, I think? I’m too old for college hockey, and I have no love-life to be interfered with. We’re just out for a walk.”

Harris’s gaze flicked between them, and Ilya could see responses stockpiling behind his gentle hazel eyes. Fortunately he chose kindness.

“Well you’re in safe hands with Roz. He loves McGill, and the folks of McGill love him.”

“Yeah, I’m getting that impression. And, this is maybe weird because we just met? But I almost had to fit Troy with a pacemaker this morning. Please ask him out before it becomes a medical situation,” smiled Shane, accepting his tea.

“Oh my god. My favourite bisexual matchmaker brought back-up. Are you guys about to start a wedding planning business or something?”

“Eh, no,” replied Shane. “Just a shared interest in seeing hockey players live their best lives, I think.”

“Well you are adorable, so please take these free cookies and get out of here before my cuteness-aggression kicks in and I bite you both,” declared Harris, snapping his teeth.

“Not the threat you think it is Harris!” called Ilya, retreating back outside.

Ilya glanced left and right, opting to head towards the nearest green space. It was a relatively mild day for early November, and the pale winter sun seemed to make Shane’s skin glow. His toque flattened his soft black hair against his cheeks, which were pink from the stuffy heat of the coffee shop. He was like a fucking Hollister campaign brought to life.

“So, you seem to have built something special here....” Shane murmured, eyes on the sidewalk.

“What do you mean?”

“At Uni, I had friends, but we kind of existed in our own world. Here it feels like you’re maybe....part of a community? Like people actually know you?”

Ilya felt his own cheeks blush. “Eh, maybe. It’s an easy place to be known.”

“And....Russia wasn’t? I don’t meant to pry, but Harris mentioned....”

“Yes, I am bisexual. And no, that was not easy in Russia. Pretty much impossible.”

“Yeah, I’ve seen stuff on the news. About non-traditional families and propaganda. Is that....part of the reason you’re in Canada?” asked Shane softly.

“It’s a long story Dr Hollander. Let’s just say looking towards the future, Canada made sense.”

“What about it made sense?”

Ahhh, There it was. Shane throwing back the words Ilya had used earlier when asking about the MHL. Damn his excellent memory.

“I will give you the short version if you don’t ask five hundred questions. Deal?”

“Sure,” agreed Shane. “I’ll save the questions for next time we grab coffee.”

Ilya would have called him a brat, but *the next time we grab coffee* was causing a tight feeling in his pants. Damn, love-at-first-sight was *real*.

“Okay, buckle up and we’ll try to do this in one minute or less. At 17 I was a hockey talent with decisions to make. My father, who does not like me very much, wanted me to stay in the KHL. I owed it to him and Mother Russia, the US is weak and immoral, *etc etc*. I wanted to move to the MHL, where I could be immoral and wealthy and leave Russia behind. Still with me?”

“Yeah. I take it your father didn’t know about your sexuality?” asked Shane curiously.

“Fuck no,” exclaimed Ilya. “He would have marched me to the police station himself. But that was only a part of the reason I wanted to leave and never go back. My family situation was not good, and by that age I had accepted it would never be good. What is the saying? Me and Russia were a square peg and a round hole.”

“I’m sorry....” murmured Shane, gently squeezing his arm.

“Yes, well, unfortunately we do not get to choose where we are born. At that point I was thinking short-term – get to the MHL, get away from Russia, worry about the rest later. Then I took a hard knock and twisted my knee. We knew within a few days it wasn’t serious, there’d be no lasting damage, but for two days I thought I was fucked. Everything, every plan, out the window. *Go directly to jail. Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200.*”

“Shit. You must have been terrified.”

“Yes. I went from 17 and immortal to realising that it would take one injury and my career would be over. And if I was in the US, my visa would be revoked. Who needs a broken hockey player with no other skills? So I sat down with the smartest person I know – my friend Sveta – and we went through every single option and came up with a plan.”

“Fuck. You couldn’t even get advice from your family?” asked Shane, brows furrowed in outrage.

“No, my dad would have told me I was weak for even thinking about injury. And the less said about my brother, the better. Sveta and I decided a hockey scholarship was the safest way to move here. I would be playing hockey at a high level, I could still transition to the MHL in a year or two if I wanted to. But most importantly, I would have the opportunity to get trained in *something*, and maybe have visa options even if the hockey went tits up.”

Shane spotted a bench and tugged on Ilya’s sleeve until he changed direction. “Oh my god Ilya, I can’t believe you were dealing with that at seventeen. I don’t think I was even buying my own clothes at seventeen.”

“Well, I was lucky I had Sveta doing most of the thinking. It was her that persuaded me this was the best option, even if it was not the most obvious.”

“She sounds like a great friend. Did she help you choose McGill?”

Ilya leaned back, tilting his head to catch the weak rays of the sun. “I wanted the US, to stay visible to American MHL teams. She persuaded me Canada was safer. Better visa and residency options, especially if returning to Russia became....*untenable*.”

“Political asylum, you mean. Yeah, we’re definitely more liberal than the US,” agreed Shane, bumping his shoulder against Ilya’s in some attempt at solidarity.

“So that is the story,” shrugged Ilya. “My father would never support me, and McGill offered the best scholarship conditions, so I moved over at 18. I initially chose physiotherapy because I understood the purpose and I don’t like sitting still. But then....it turns out I love it, actually. And I made friends, settled into redbird hockey. Uprooting my life to move to the MHL....became less of a priority. So this year I am 23, almost qualified, and have a new decision to make.”

“I get that. Not that different to the choice I had to make at 21. And maybe not so different to the decision I had to make at 25. Whether to find a residency in Massachusetts or move my life to a new city. I’m not sure it ever gets easier.”

“I’ve been talking to Coach and Dottie about it. He told me about choosing between the safety of his Assistant Coach job at Harvard, or moving the whole family to Montreal for McGill. Said he barely slept for a month.”

“I remember. I kept up with Bren and Dottie via text messages and midnight emails before and after the move. In the end he was so pumped to move from Assistant to full Coach, and shape his own team. Dottie was just happy to get back to Canada.” The fond expression on Shane’s face told Ilya much of what he needed to know.

“You and Dottie are close?” he asked, attempting *nonchalance* but succeeding at *worried*.

“I guess since we’re doing honesty....yeah. I told you in my final year of pre-med my dad got hurt? I was a mess for a few months. Trying to keep my game up, keep my grades up, support

my parents. Dottie took it upon herself to look after me. Meals with the family when I could. Care packages when I couldn't. She got to know my mom via phone calls and they ganged-up on me without mercy."

Ilya laughed. "That sounds like Dottie. She's never afraid to insert herself into a situation."

"Her name's not on that Frozen Four trophy, but maybe it should be. She kept me together. And she would do it again in a heartbeat."

"She adopted half of the hockey team. Me included. Invites us to Canadian thanksgiving and Christmas and insists on a written itinerary of our plans for spring break."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Yeah, she wanted to introduce us at thanksgiving, but my shift pattern changed and I went back to Ottawa for the day. She was grumpy."

"This confuses me. Clearly Dottie has spoken to you about me. But I don't remember her ever mentioning a Dr Shane Hollander."

"Really?" asked Shane, surprise obvious in his raised eyebrows and pouted lips. "Maybe she wanted to catch you unawares. I was meant to give you a talk about how difficult it is to remove tattoos you've gotten while drunk."

"That is worryingly relevant. But the only person she mentioned meeting was some girl called Sha....*oh my god. Shaney*. Does she call you Shaney?"

"To my eternal embarrassment as a grown man, yes," groaned Shane. "Even at pick-up hockey where everyone else is Johnson or Smith or Kocek."

"Right. Well that makes sense. She said she wanted me to meet Shaney because I need more good influences in my life."

Shane dropped his head into his hands, and shook with laughter. "She told me she wanted me to meet you because I need more bad influences in my life."

Ilya joined in with the laughter. "Fucking hell Dottie. Way to sell a guy. Did she tell you....anything else about me?"

This was the crux. This was the point of no return. Had Dottie sold him as a loveable idiot? Or a miscreant too absurd to date her sweet precious Shaney?

"She mentioned the whole hockey team is blackballed from the zoo. Apparently JJ got too close to a swordfish? And you're all banned from drinking whisky after Marly killed her prized petunias. And there was something about you wearing an outfit made entirely of balloons, and charging students \$100 to pop one?"

Ah. Okay. Dottie had not held back. None of this was the suave and respectable behaviour required of Shane's husband-to-be. *RIP Ilya Hollander-Rozanov*. That was a beautiful three hours.

Shane continued. “But she also mentioned the balloon-popping was a fundraiser. And it was you that got JJ *out* of the fish tank. And you made Marly mow the lawn for pissing in her petunias. It made me think maybe there was more to being a Captain than just running drills and directing plays.”

“I’m not sure a Frozen Four winner needs to be taking advice from me, Shane.”

And there it was, the little head-tilt that signalled thoughts were being thunk.

“I’ve watched you all morning Ilya. Looking after your boys. Setting the tone. It makes sense that Dottie loves you. You look after people the same way she does.”

“Take that back! I am nowhere near as interfering,” he grumbled.

“Shall we ask Troy? Or Harris? Or Jackie?”

“Total coincidence that all happened today. Normally I am a picture of Russian stoicism. I am very....cold. And uncaring.”

“That’s a shame. I kind-of like the soft version.”

“Oh,” blinked Ilya, tugging on the sleeve of his jacket. “Enough to do this again sometime?”

“Yeah. You still have to teach me how to run a successful offense, remember?”

“Oh my fucking god, please do not tell Dottie I said that. She will tell everyone. She will stop strangers in the street. She will ice it on a cake at Christmas,” he begged.

“Sorry,” smirked Shane. “She messaged me earlier to ask how things were going. When I told her she sent a thirty second voice note of her laughing.”

“Really? And you’re meant to be the good one in this partnership?”

Shane turned, all warm brown eyes and freckles and sweet smiles. “Guess I’ll need to find a way to make it up to you,” he murmured, biting on his bottom lip.

“Hmmm, yes. I think maybe you will. Can we start with a picture to send Dottie? Prove I have not disgraced myself too badly?”

“Sure. It’ll also prove I’ve spoken to someone this week who isn’t a work colleague or gym bro. Win-win.”

“Yes, win-win....” whispered Ilya, slinging an arm around Shane’s shoulder and unlocking his phone.

* * *

2 hours later:

Ilya : *Good news Dots! Your favourite hockey player finally met your other favourite hockey player. [photo of Shane and Ilya crushed together on a bench. Ilya's arm is around Shane's shoulder. Shane's head is tilted back in laughter while Ilya stares at his freckles].*

Dottie : *YOU will teach HIM about hockey Ilya? Really?*

Dottie : *Also, about time. If you break Shaney's heart I will destroy you. Consider yourself warned.*

Dottie : *He likes Italian food.*

End Notes

Okay, it's important you know how Ilya ended-up in wet t-shirt contest. Sveta took offense to young, drunk women being encouraged to jiggle about for entertainment. As a political statement, she sent in Ilya. When he won she bought him a whole tray of churros. She still has the picture on her wall.

This Dottie is partially inspired by Change Your Win Conditions, which is probably my GOAT. Just god-level stuff.

I should get back to writing 'Your Freckles Spell Out Cutie-pie', now this story is out my head. Thanks for reading, I appreciate you giving precious minutes to my ramblings. xxx

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