

looking in from the outside

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by [syntjjh](#)

Summary

After their retirement, Shane and Ilya have spent over a decade in a public relationship, but the world still doesn't understand how serious, boring Shane Hollander and cocky, irritating Ilya Rozanov are the perfect match.

Now working as television panelists on Saturday hockey broadcasts, their relationship is put on display.

// Five times outsiders can't understand Shane and Ilya together, and one time it's impossible not to.

Notes

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

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [站在场边看你爱我 \(授翻\)](#) by [SLoan_1007](#)

1 - Hayden Pike

Hayden had known Shane for a long time. They spent years on the same team, Shane was close to his children and Jackie, Hayden attended Shane's retirement ceremony, and Hayden had begrudgingly spent time with Rozanov as a result. He accepted it, that somehow Rozanov made Shane happy - happier than Hayden had ever seen him. But he still didn't *understand* it. For every sweet moment, there was also teasing and bickering and insults. Hayden and Jackie weren't perfect (though Hayden would argue otherwise), but Shane and Rozanov seemed like complete opposites.

Hayden and Jackie were visiting the cottage when Shane casually broke the news over dinner.

"Ilya and I are going to be panelists during Saturday games this season."

Hayden choked on his wine and Jackie put a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"What?!" Hayden said. "*Both* of you? On TV?"

Shane looked at him, confused; fork hovering in the air as he hesitated at Hayden's reaction. Rozanov, the bastard, leaned back in his chair and seemed to be holding in laughter.

"I mean, yeah," Shane said cautiously.

"Don't let fuckin' Rozanov force you into this."

"*Hayden*," Jackie scolded him. She warned him years ago that constantly criticizing his friend's partner would strain their friendship, and Hayden was *trying*, but this didn't make sense. Shane didn't enjoy the spotlight, he was never one to seek out the cameras. That was Rozanov.

"He's not," Shane said, frowning.

"I make him do nothing," Rozanov added, still watching Hayden's reaction with amusement.

"Other than the foundation, I don't really go anywhere. It's weird, being retired. And I miss hockey," Shane mumbled. "It's only Saturdays."

"I think it sounds like a great idea," Jackie said. Hayden looked at her, eyes wide, feeling slightly betrayed. She was friendly with Rozanov, and as much as Hayden knew he was being childish, it felt like she was taking the side of his nemesis.

"Is what happens when you are a top player, Pike," Rozanov said, still leaning back in his chair. "People want to see more. Crazy, yes?"

"Oh, fuck you, Rozanov!"

Jackie put her hand purposefully on his arm as he gripped his fork tighter. He saw Shane mutter something quietly to Rozanov. Hayden took a deep breath and counted to ten in his head.

“Cut it out, both of you,” Shane said. “Ilya, come help me with dessert.”

Hayden gave a tight-lipped smile to Jackie as they stood from the table, who just shook her head.

When the first Saturday of the season rolled around in October, Hayden walked into the living room to see Arthur and Amber sitting on the couch as commercials played on the TV.

“What’re we watching?” Hayden said, ruffling Arthur’s hair as he walked by and sat next to Amber.

“The first period just ended,” Amber replied.

“Uncle Shane and Uncle Ilya are on the panel tonight,” Arthur added.

Fuck. Hayden had tried to put that evening at the cottage out of his mind. He saw enough of Rozanov in person, he didn’t need to see him on his television too.

“Why don’t we check the score of the other games?” Hayden attempted to distract his children and reached for the remote on the coffee table.

Before he could grab it, Amber grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

“Dad, stop,” Amber said. “I want to see what they say.”

Hayden huffed and slouched down in his seat with his arms crossed. It was because his kids were big hockey fans, he told himself. They watched the first period, so of course they want to hear the analysis from the panel, whether Rozanov was there or not. They weren’t young children anymore, Rozanov’s immaturity would no longer be funny to them.

The last commercial ended and the panel host appeared on the screen.

“The Metros are down by three in the first, outshot by Buffalo eleven to two. I’m Carolyn Fournier, joined by Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, and Jennifer Cooke.”

The camera zoomed out to a wide shot, where Shane sat in an understated blue suit, and Rozanov wore a dark red suit and patterned tie.

“I love his socks!” Amber giggled beside him.

Peeking out of Rozanov’s dress shoes was a pair of socks with little dogs on them. Hayden rolled his eyes. *Always trying to get attention.*

He was proud of Shane, though. In Montreal, especially during his early seasons, Shane would constantly be sent out for interviews before the game or in between periods, and they

would joke about the boring, repetitive questions he received every time. Now, two decades later, he was confidently sitting on TV as an analyst.

As video of one of the goals played on screen, Shane began talking.

“This is a good play by Buffalo. The difference between these two teams is the structure: Buffalo sends the puck in and forechecks, winning the battle for the puck in the corner, and setting up the play for the goal in front of the net.”

The video switched to a different clip, now showing the Metros with the puck.

“When Montreal comes into the Buffalo zone, there’s no structure,” Shane continued.

“Hanninen is trying to carry the puck in along the boards by himself, and his wingers are out of position. The giveaway then leads to Buffalo’s first goal.”

“Problem is also arrogance,” Rozanov said. “Is good to want the puck, but the Metros are fighting each other, not Buffalo.”

Hayden uncrossed his arms and sat up a bit from his seat on the couch. Had Rozanov finally learned how to behave? After all these years it was hard to believe, but as Hayden watched him engage with Shane and the other panelists, it *almost* made sense. Shane needed someone who could match his hockey intelligence. And this Rozanov, the one who sat calmly in a nice (albeit a bit flashy) suit and spoke professionally about hockey, could almost be someone Hayden saw as Shane’s partner.

“There’s no player who can beat the other team one-on-five,” Shane said from on the TV.

“Is not completely true,” Rozanov said, and Hayden felt dread fill his stomach. “I can, of course. Easy. Maybe Hollander, if he is lucky.”

Hayden groaned as Rozanov winked at Shane. He took it all back, he still didn’t understand. Shane liked this guy? *Loved* him, even? The guy who was taunting him on national television?

“But yes, no one else. Most players are... do you know Hayden Pike?” Rozanov didn’t even pause to let anyone answer. “No, no, is okay, the audience would not know. But players like him, they need teammates.”

Hayden’s jaw dropped open. He heard the other panelists chuckle, and Shane gave Rozanov a stern look that was completely undermined by his inability to hide his smile. Hayden lunged forward to grab the remote and powered the TV off, but the laughter didn’t stop. He turned around to see Arthur laughing and Amber hiding her smile behind her hand.

“Fucking Rozanov,” Hayden muttered under his breath.

Following his retirement, Cliff was hired as a scout for the Boston Raiders. He travelled across the US and Canada, sometimes even going to Europe, to watch young players and report back to the Raiders on which players they should draft. It was a job he enjoyed; his kids were adults now, and he found himself growing restless when he stayed home for too long. His wife accompanied him on some scouting trips when the destination interested her, and it was nice to rediscover cities he had partied his way through as a player.

His wife chose not to travel with him on his overnight trip to Edmonton, a city they had visited together last year. Cliff scrolled through social media in his hotel room, not interested in braving the winter weather until he had to leave to catch his flight the next morning. A message flashed across the top of the screen from an old Raiders teammate.

The good old days, the text said, followed by a link. Cliff opened it to see a clip of a young player getting hit and the ensuing brawl between the two teams as the trainer jogged across the ice to tend to the injured player.

The video cut to Ilya Rozanov sitting behind a desk in a studio, wearing a suit. Cliff knew Roz started as a panelist at the beginning of the season. It was good to have a vibrant personality representing the hockey world, in Cliff's opinion.

"Is like a family," Roz said. "Someone comes after the little brother, and it is a problem."

"It's hard to see any teammate get hurt," Shane Hollander agreed as the video zoomed out to show them both.

Cliff was always slightly surprised to see Hollander and Roz together. He put the pieces together that Hollander was his Montreal girl after they were outed, but by then Roz was already playing for Ottawa. They met up when their teams played each other, but Cliff retired not long after Hollander signed in Ottawa. He never got to see them *together*, at least not more than what they showed to the public. It made it difficult to reconcile everything he assumed the Montreal girl was with Shane Hollander, Boston's rival and a generational talent.

"Is funny, the team will tease rookies all the time, but it is okay when they do it," Roz said in the video. "When I was the rookie, my teammate Marly, he always was messing with me."

Cliff smiled. Back then, he was the one to take it upon himself to initiate the young guys, explaining all of the team's superstitions but also pranking them whenever he could.

"I did nothing, just told him he was a-" Roz stopped mid-sentence as Hollander placed a hand on his shoulder and shook his head.

"Ah, uh, right," Roz continued, "I told him he was not a nice guy. But I did not forget, I waited until my second season. Then every prank he ever did on me, I did it back, all same day."

"What kind of pranks?" Another panelist asked.

"Ah, you know, tape on skates, loose water bottle lid... Fun ones."

Cliff laughed at the memory. It was a chaotic day. They were on the road, and Cliff was a bit surprised to see Roz at morning practice before anyone else. That should have been his first warning sign. When he stepped onto the ice, he fell immediately and couldn't stand up without his skates slipping out from under him. He crawled to the bench and sat, looking at his blades only to see they were covered with clear tape. Then, when he went to hold the water bottle above his mouth to drink, the cap wasn't tightened and the entire contents of the bottle spilled down his face and jersey. It was continuous all day: his street clothes had been scrunched up into a ball covered by layers of hockey tape, his shoes filled with shaving cream, a weight hidden in his backpack. When he finally made it back to his hotel, the elevator door opened and he saw every piece of his furniture in the hallway, mattress included.

Roz hadn't gotten pranked again after that. Their teammates knew that anything they did would be turned back on them.

Cliff focused back on the video, where Roz was laughing as he continued to describe some of the pranks. The host then turned to Hollander.

"What was your best prank, Shane?"

"I don't think I really did any," Shane said. "I mean, I got pranked a few times as a rookie, and I sometimes helped guys out with their pranks, but..."

"Shane is boring," Roz said with an endeared smile. "And very serious about hockey."

Hollander rolled his eyes. "I was *focused*. And who has more Cup wins?"

"You do," Roz cooed teasingly and put a hand on Hollander's cheek, patting it a few times.

It made Cliff happy to see Rozanov so clearly in love. It was obvious in the way he looked at Hollander, the fondness in his voice even as he teased him.

Hollander took a drink of water out of his glass, and Roz glanced at him a few times before using his index finger to slightly raise the bottom of Hollander's glass. Water spilled down Hollander's chin as the other panelists laughed and Roz looked at him, a wide-eyed expression of false innocence on his face. Hollander turned his whole body in his chair to look at Roz, who could no longer hold in his laughter. Nothing was said between them; Hollander kept a flat expression on his face, and Roz gave him a placating "okay, okay" before getting up to fetch some tissue.

As the clip ended, Cliff was lost in thought, letting his phone turn off in his hands. He thought back to Roz's words, how *serious* Hollander was. It was such a stark contrast to Roz, who always had a witty remark no matter the situation and led the team out to parties, win or lose. Did he believe it when he called Hollander boring? It was hard to imagine what they would have in common other than hockey, and now they had retired from playing.

Cliff shook his head and turned his phone back on. Roz seemed happy, and it certainly wasn't Cliff's place to get involved, even if he couldn't understand the two of them together. He just hoped that Hollander wouldn't extinguish Roz's humour.

3 - Jessica, Shane's ex

Jessica didn't think about her ex-boyfriends much, not now that she had been happily married for a decade, but when your ex was Shane Hollander, it was harder to forget. They hadn't dated long, only a few months, but Jessica thought of him fondly. He was kind and sweet, not what she thought a professional hockey player would be like. Shane was gentle; he would listen attentively to her interests and never pushed her for anything. Jessica knew now that it was partly because he was gay and not attracted to her sexually, but it didn't change the person he was when she was with him.

She had never been a huge hockey fan, so when Shane was accidentally outed, she was more surprised to find out her ex-boyfriend was gay than about the identity of the man he was kissing. Friends asked her about him as the news spread across the internet, but she didn't have anything to new say: he was kind, he treated her well, and she hoped he was happy.

Jessica didn't think about Shane again until she saw him and his husband during the intermission of a hockey game. They were standing on the studio floor in their suits and holding hockey sticks.

"It's not easy to win as many face offs as the Admirals have tonight," Shane said. "A great win percentage is above fifty-five percent, and an amazing one is around sixty. The Admirals as a team are sitting at seventy-one percent tonight."

Jessica shifted in her seat on the couch and pulled a blanket over her lap. It was interesting to see Shane outside of hockey gear after all these years, but she wasn't one to care much about hockey statistics. She checked her phone quickly before looking back at the TV, where Shane and his husband were now standing across from each other in face off position as another panelist stood between them with a puck in her hand.

"Don't do what Ilya's doing," Shane said flatly as his husband - *right*, Ilya - kept knocking his stick into Shane's. "The ref will kick you out of the face off."

Jessica watched as Shane continued his demonstration, but she was more focused on his interactions with Ilya, who seemed determined to find a way to derail the show. Shane had been different with his teammates than with her; a bit rougher and teasing, but still kind and patient. But when they were alone together, Shane was earnest and soft-spoken, never frustrated or short with her when she asked the simplest of questions about hockey for the tenth time. Jessica knew she shouldn't compare her insignificant relationship with Shane to the man he chose to spend his life with. They were older now, Shane was finally able to openly be himself, and more than anything, Ilya was simply a different person than her or anyone else. Of course their relationship would be different. Jessica's relationship with her husband was much different than any of her previous boyfriends, and she was happier for it.

But Shane just seemed... annoyed, maybe? Or frustrated with Ilya? Whatever it was, it seemed to make Shane impatient, which surprised Jessica.

"Can I do this at the face off?" Ilya asked.

On screen, Ilya hooked his stick under Shane's and pulled him closer to kiss his cheek. Jessica smiled; that was cute.

"No, Ilya," Shane replied, not seeming particularly charmed. "You can't interfere with the opposing player."

"What if the opposing player is your husband?"

"Doesn't matter."

"Not fair. Show me the rule book," Ilya insisted with a cheeky grin on his face.

Shane just sighed and went back to explaining which player got to put their stick down first on the face off dot. As the segment ended and the host segued into the commercial break, Ilya wrapped an arm around Shane's waist and began slowly sliding it down his side. Shane grabbed his hand and firmly moved it back to his waist.

Jessica was lost in thought as a commercial began playing. Ilya seemed nice enough: flirty, playful, a bit of a tease. But compared to Shane, who was professional and dedicated to his job... They didn't seem to *fit*. Even Ilya's affection seemed designed to mess with Shane. She kept waiting for Ilya to recognize Shane's subtle rejections, to realize that he might be crossing the line.

Jessica picked up her phone and began typing into the search bar, but paused and put it back down. It must be hard to have a high-profile relationship, especially for two men in a sports league that was stuck in the past. It didn't matter whether she thought Shane was happy with his husband or not. She didn't need to join the scrutiny and speculation that surely haunted Shane's every move.

4 - Sasha

Sasha knocked on the apartment door, and Svetlana appeared in front of him.

"Svetlana!" He cried out and pulled her into a hug. It had been years since he had seen her in person. She was settled in Boston and rarely came back to Russia now that both her mother and father had passed away.

She led him into the living room and they caught up over a bottle of wine. It felt like when they were young again, minus Ilya.

"So Ilya, what is he up to?" Sasha asked. They were never friends that would text, their relationship was always more physical. Svetlana was the glue that kept the three of them together, but once Ilya left Russia for good, Sasha hadn't had direct contact with him.

"He's a TV analyst now, with Shane. They're so cute together, let me show you."

Svetlana pulled up a clip of Ilya sitting behind a desk with three others. Sasha recognized Shane Hollander from photos. When the news of their relationship broke, Sasha spent hours

on the internet from his old apartment in France learning about Shane Hollander: what he looked like, his personality, anything about his relationship to Ilya. Now that he was back in Russia, he kept his internet history clear of their relationship. He doubted there would be much available anyway.

The video starts with the host discussing the score of whatever game must have been broadcasted that night.

“Tampa Bay is looking very composed tonight,” the host said.

“Is true. They are very focused. Look at this,” Ilya said.

It was weird to hear Ilya speak in English. Sasha had spent enough time throughout Europe to understand what they were saying, but Ilya sounded so unfamiliar.

Svetlana laughed as the video cut to a Tampa player sliding across the ice, the blade missing from his left skate. After attempting to stand up again and falling, the player got onto his knees and used his right skate to push himself to the bench before the other team made it back down the ice.

“Not as easy as you think,” Ilya’s voice said over the clip. “Now see this.”

A new clip started of a player in a blue jersey, a blade missing from his skate. He tried to stand once, and then twice, before trying to crawl across the ice on his hands and knees. Sasha laughed as the camera angle changed and *Hollander* appeared in block letters on the back of the player’s jersey.

“Is that actually him?” Sasha asked.

“Yes,” Svetlana said, laughing. “From when Shane was a rookie.”

A teammate finally appeared next to Hollander and offered him his stick. He dragged him to the bench as play went on around them. The video returned to the panel, where Sasha could tell Ilya was holding back laughter.

“Pike is good for something, yes?”

“Shut up, Rozanov,” Shane Hollander muttered, his face flushed. “Don’t make me pull up old videos of you.”

“Can you show when I scored a hat trick against you?”

“You’re such a jerk,” Shane said, turning towards the other panelist and changing the subject.

Svetlana paused the video and looked at him expectantly. “Aren’t they adorable?”

“Adorable? Ilya is funny, but that guy completely shut him down!”

Svetlana’s face dropped as she frowned. “Shane?”

Sasha raised his eyebrows. *Duh*. Had they not watched the same video?

“You’re so dramatic, Sasha.” At Sasha’s disbelieving look, she sighed and rewinded the video to stop on a frame of Ilya and Shane Hollander. “Look at him, Shane is trying so hard not to smile. And look at Ilya, he’s so in love with him!”

“I don’t see it.”

“Whatever. They’re so good together. Ilya is really happy, *Shane* makes him happy.”

There was a small part of Sasha that was jealous, a part of him that was still there from when they were young. But he was under no illusions that him and Ilya would’ve ever ended up together. He wasn’t ready to settle down back then, and even if Ilya had wanted to, Sasha had needed freedom. Freedom to explore other people and himself and his sexuality without the eyes of the government weighing him down. He didn’t regret the way his life turned out. He was a bit resentful, maybe. He resented that Ilya had left his home and his family and his country, all for a boring life with a boring man. Then Svetlana had left, too. Only Sasha remained.

“He gave up everything,” Sasha said. “For this?”

“I don’t see it that way. I don’t think Ilya does either,” Svetlana said gently. “I think he gained so much.”

Sasha felt chastised, despite Svetlana’s kindness. “He could be nicer to Ilya,” he mumbled.

Svetlana put her hand on top of Sasha’s.

“He’s very sweet. And Ilya loves him the way he is.”

Sasha just poured himself another glass of wine.

5 - Fans

Yasin was new to hockey. His dad had been a fan for a long time, but he was always partial to soccer. The boys who played hockey at school were arrogant and mean, and it pushed him away from the sport as a whole. But his dad had gotten sick, and after an emergency surgery, he was confined to either the couch or his bed to recover. He would be fine, better than fine, once he was healed. Yasin worried about him anyway.

Normally, Yasin would find something else to do when his dad watched the game, but this time he sat down in the living room as the first period started. His dad chatted excitedly about Toronto’s new goalie, their revamped power play, their chances of being first in their division this year. At the end of the first period, the TV ran through some commercials before a young Toronto player appeared on one side of the screen wearing a headset, along with a group of broadcasters sitting at a desk on the other side.

“See those two guys in the middle?” Yasin’s dad asked. “They were the best hockey players. Legends! They could probably still outplay most guys in the league.”

Yasin just nodded. He didn’t recognize them, though he didn’t recognize anyone he’d seen so far, but he didn’t want to ruin the wistful look on his dad’s face.

“We’re here with Daniel Ibarra, Toronto’s star rookie,” the host began. “Congratulations on your first NHL goal!”

“Thank you,” Ibarra said.

“Hi, Daniel,” a male panelist with black hair said. “It’s Shane Hollander. Walk us through your goal. What did you see out there?”

“It was a great pass from the captain. You know, I just tried to get to the front of the net and keep my stick on the ice, and I was lucky to get one in.”

“When the game is over, how are you going to celebrate?” The other male analyst with curly hair asked.

“I don’t know,” Ibarra chuckled. “Weren’t you the expert on that, Rozanov?”

“I do not know what you’re saying,” Rozanov said, and then put his hands on either side of Hollander’s head to cover his ears. “There is a great club downtown Toronto. Good vodka there, from Russia.”

Hollander rolled his eyes on screen, and Yasin could hear his dad chuckling.

“You think I didn’t know what you were doing back then?” He said, before adding, “Daniel, congrats again on your goal. And don’t drink tonight, you have the second half of a back-to-back tomorrow.”

The host wrapped up the interview, letting Ibarra head back to the dressing room before the next period.

“Looks like you’re in trouble, Ilya,” the host said once Ibarra left the screen.

“I did nothing wrong!” Rozanov insisted, putting his arm around Hollander. “I had no time for clubs, I was busy falling in love.”

“That’s nice,” Hollander said mildly. “I was only thinking about hockey, back then.”

Rozanov pulled his arm back and slouched forward in his chair. The host laughed, and Yasin heard his dad join in too.

“Ibarra’s goal was more than him being in the right place,” Hollander changed the subject, and they were back to talking about the game.

Once the segment ended and commercials began playing, Yasin’s dad still had a smile on his face as he looked over at him.

“You look confused,” his dad laughed. “They’re married, you know.”

“Those two guys?” Yasin was surprised. Of course there were gay hockey players, but he heard how the hockey players in his school talked. He didn’t think hockey culture would have a space for two married men, no matter how good they used to be.

“It was a big deal when people first found out,” his dad said. “That was years ago. I’m glad they stuck around as analysts after they retired. I wouldn’t blame them if they hadn’t, but the league wouldn’t be the same without them.”

Yasin thought back to the interview. The conversation between Hollander and Rozanov made more sense now, but they had spent the whole time arguing.

“They seem like opposites,” Yasin said.

“Yeah, you should’ve seen them years ago. They hated each other. Well,” his dad stopped himself, “everyone thought they hated each other.”

From watching their difference in questions and whether they thought the Toronto rookie should go out tonight, to what seemed like unresolved arguments from their pasts, they didn’t agree on anything.

“I can see that. They kind of seem like they still do,” Yasin said.

His dad laughed again.

”Sometimes the people you love drive you crazy.”

Yasin didn’t really understand, but the commercials ended and the second period was set to begin, so he didn’t ask any further. Maybe watching hockey with his dad wasn’t *that* bad.

+1 - Carolyn Fournier, host

Carolyn had grown up surrounded by hockey. She watched it as a child, she played it professionally as a young adult, and now analyzing it on television was her job. When her boss told her that Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were joining the panel on Saturdays, she was excited. The men’s league wasn’t like the women’s professional league she used to play for, which wasn’t perfect but was much more accepting. It was long past time for hockey culture to change.

So while she had expected some homophobic comments, she was surprised to see comments that weren’t confused that two men were in love but were confused that *Shane and Ilya* were in love. She had the advantage of sitting in the studio beside them, but nothing she witnessed in their first season broadcasting together made her doubt how perfect they were together.

On their first day, Shane was nervous. He had asked her multiple questions about logistics after they introduced themselves, and then ten minutes later he apologetically approached her

again with more questions. Later, as Carolyn turned the corner on her way to the washroom before the live broadcast began, she came to a halt in the middle of the hallway.

Shane and Ilya stood hugging, Shane's face tucked into Ilya's neck and Ilya's hands rubbing slowly up and down Shane's back.

"I don't know if I can do this," Shane said, muffled by Ilya's shoulder.

"You can," Ilya said quietly. "You are brave, you are smart. You can do this. But if you don't want to, then we leave."

"We can't just leave."

"Sure. We get sick, and we are so terribly sorry, but we have to leave."

"We can't both get magically sick at the same time," Shane huffed.

"Okay," Ilya said. "Then we will tell them that I am just so handsome in my suit, and you can't stop yourself."

Shane laughed. "How about the other way around?"

"Fine," Ilya said. "I will tell them like this: 'oh, Shane is so fucking sexy, if we do not leave I will be on my knees under the desk', and then if they still say no, I will have no choice."

"Please don't try to suck my dick on national television," Shane said, but the tension had drained out of his voice.

Carolyn blushed - she was *not* supposed to be hearing this - and turned to tip toe down the hallway. She made it halfway towards the studio before her bladder reminded her why she had stumbled upon Shane and Ilya in the first place. She checked her watch. Shit, no time to make it to the bathroom on the other side of the studio. She took a deep breath and turned back towards the bathroom, making sure to click her high heels loudly on the tiled floor as she went.

When she turned the corner, Ilya and Shane were already looking in her direction, now separated from their embrace.

"Hey, boys!" Carolyn said brightly and then cringed internally. Not very nonchalant.

From that day on, nothing was lost on Carolyn. When Ilya teased Shane on air, she could see Shane's pink cheeks from her seat beside him. When Shane scolded Ilya in return, she could see the slightest upturn to Ilya's lips and fondness in his eyes.

When they were preparing for coverage of a Metros game, Carolyn was surprised to see Ilya in a bad mood instead of Shane when they arrived at the studio. There had never been anything confirmed, but it was an open secret that Shane and the Metros didn't part on amicable terms. Other than in reference to a few former teammates he remained close to, Shane never spoke publicly about the team that drafted him, the team where he spent half of his career and won multiple Cups.

“Why are they interviewing that bastard,” Ilya muttered as he and Shane walked towards their dressing room to get ready.

“He’s the GM,” Shane said calmly.

“He’s a fucking asshole,” Ilya retorted.

Carolyn looked down at her cue cards for tonight’s game. Before the game, and before Shane and Ilya were on air, there was a pre-recorded interview with Pascal Tremblay, long-serving general manager of the Montreal Metros. The same man in charge when Shane left the organization.

Carolyn grimaced; the anger certainly made sense now. She had been in the hockey industry for a long time, she didn’t need to know the details to have an idea of what might’ve happened behind the scenes.

“Caro!” The producer called out to her: “Can you get Shane and Ilya out here for a quick camera test and run through?”

“Sure,” she called back, and walked towards their dressing room.

As she approached, she could hear their voices through the door.

“You are not mad?” Ilya said.

“How can I be? You’re already angry enough.”

“Fuck,” Ilya said. “Sorry.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Shane said softly. “I just mean... I have you, and you care about me so much. So whatever those assholes did back then, it doesn’t really matter now, when I’m next to you.”

Carolyn put her hand over her mouth, and there was silence on the other side of the door until Ilya said something gently in Russian and Shane repeated it back.

“Can I hit him?” Ilya said in English.

“No,” Shane laughed. “I don’t want to visit you in jail.”

In the lull in their conversation, Carolyn took the opportunity to knock.

“Come in,” Shane said.

She opened the door to see them sitting on a small couch together.

“They want to do a quick run through,” Carolyn said, pointing towards the studio.

“Okay,” Ilya said, much less grumpy than before.

“Let’s go,” Shane said, leaning over to kiss Ilya softly before standing up.

Carolyn smiled and walked back to the studio. Maybe others didn't understand them, but they clearly understood each other.

End Notes

check out the pwhl, folks!

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