so i hear you've been talking 'bout me

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so i hear you've been talking 'bout me

by darkminded (wasteofmind)

Summary

"What is it about you specifically that inspires such vitriol among the other teams' fans?"

Ilya shrugs easy with one shoulder, tries to make sure the pull of his lips strikes the right balance of contrite and nonchalant. *What do they even want him to say?* He leans closer to the microphone shoved towards him, starts. "I don't know, maybe…"

He considers his next words. Imagines his coach's reaction. What his teammates will say. The headlines the media will pick.

He says them anyway.

On Ilya and Shane and their different media strategies, set to the backdrop of their slow-moving romance.

Notes

i'm new to hockey but as a long time sports fan i've always found it fun how bad most after-event sports interviews are and how much athletes seem to *hate* them. that and a general fascination with how sports journalism can create and drive a narrative is the inspiration for this.

set during the episode 4 opening montage, before the metros 2nd cup win.

See the end of the work for more notes

Ilya never goes into post-game interviews with any high expectations but it is…amusing? Yes, amusing the way these reporters still manage to fall short of the very low bar that's set out for them.

"—hot off another great showing, Rozanov, still the crowd boo'ed every time you touched the puck. How does that feel? What is it about you specifically that inspires such vitriol among the other teams' fans?"

Ilya feels out the shape of the word in his mouth. *Vitriol*. He's faintly familiar with it, must have read it at least once, spoken it out loud never, and either way it's easy enough to pick up on the meaning through context. He barely refrains from the urge to roll his eyes, or otherwise letting it show on his face what he feels about the question. What a thing to ask, after the Raiders have just extended their winning streak to six games unbeaten, when Ilya himself has added to his goal tally by two, one of which was a real fucking beauty. And yet:

'Why do people hate you so much?'

Ilya shrugs easy with one shoulder, tries to make sure the pull of his lips strikes the right balance of contrite and nonchalant. What do they even want him to say? He leans closer to the microphone shoved towards him, starts. "I don't know, maybe…"

He considers his next words. Imagines his coach's reaction. What his teammates will say. The headlines the media will pick.

He says them anyway. He's feeling generous.

"Maybe, it's jealousy." He darts off a quick glance to the side, sniffs, and admittedly, maybe some of it is pure performance. He might as well have some fun. "Because I'm young, because I drive fast cars and I always score against their team. I don't know, maybe that's it."

Ilya shrugs again, makes sure his eyes are in line with the camera as he finishes his statement. He can basically see the reporter take in his answer and prepare for the follow-up, bracing for take-off. Eyes shining with the knowledge of the sound bite Ilya's just provided, like striking gold. Before the next question is lobbied his way Ilya steps back, makes it clear that he's done for the day, and thankfully there is no further clamoring, no more calls for his attention. In any case there's no beating the comment he just made.

The vultures will have a field day with this one.

By the time he's on the team bus heading for the airport, freshly showered and starting to come down from their win, the clip from his interview has been uploaded and started making the rounds. He's already heard it blaring from three different phones, accompanied by the laughter of his brothers-in-arms.

“Roz, my man. You’re a fucking word-smith.” Marlow claps Ilya on the shoulder as he takes the seat next to him and starts shaking him, eyes practically glittering with delight. “Why the fuck did you say that?”

Ilya scoffs and pushes off the hand on his shoulder but he can’t help the curl to his lips, the laughter bubbling up his chest. “They ask stupid question, get silly answer in return. It was funny, yeah?”

“Already being inducted into the Rozanov quotes Hall of fame as we speak.” Marlow reaches across the bus aisle, hand held out as if holding a mic towards Feller who’s been following the proceedings with obvious glee. “Hey, why do the other fanbases hate you so much?”

Feller puts on an expression of great concentration before he clears his throat and starts speaking in the worst attempt at an Russian accent Ilya’s ever heard, and the contenders are many. “They’re obviously jealous of me because I’m young, and my cars are fast, and I’m the best hockey player in the league.”

Another wave of laughter sets off.

Ilya grins and puts a knee on his seat to half-stand now that at least half the bus is caught up in the antics. An entertainer holding court. “Ah, I should have continued probably,” he exclaims, a slight pout of his lips to suggest pretend remorse. He turns to Marlow’s fake microphone to amend his previous statement. “Also because I’m handsome, and rich, and I get my dick wet whenever I want.”

As expected, that starts the howling again.

Marlow glances back at him, catching Ilya’s gaze amidst the uproar. An edge to his grin. “They’re gonna eat you up online, brother.”

Ilya leans back into his seat, feeling satisfied. “They can try.”

Predictably, Shane brings it up the next time they see each other. It’s two weeks later, in Shane’s swanky Montreal flat. Ilya has just fucked the other so good and deep that when he started rooting through his clothes in search of a cigarette Shane had just gestured towards the bedroom windom instead of cussing Ilya out.

It’s a balmy night for late March and Ilya’s slouched in a chair he dragged over next to the cracked open window, feet kicked up onto the bed, doing his best to siphon out the smoke. Shane’s watching him, propped up onto one of his million pillows, looking soft and sated and radiant, the flush on his cheeks framing his beautiful freckles.

It’s only a little after midnight. They should have time for another round.

“What made you say that?” Shane asks, out of the blue.

Ilya hums, a bit distracted. “I say a lot of things. Which do you mean?”

Shane huffs softly. “You know, the interview. That thing about people only hating on you because you’re rich and stuff.”

Ilya grins around his cigarette. “It’s true, no?”

“I mean maybe. Still, you must have known it'd be a shit storm.”

“Was a stupid question, why should I answer seriously?” Ilya shrugs. It’s too imprecise an explanation, but he doesn’t feel like fumbling after words he doesn’t have, words that still won’t be enough to convey that feeling of stepping off the ice, adrenalin pumping, muscles aching, and knowing beyond any doubt that you’ve done a good job, that the team has done a good job, only for those dickhead reporters to start up like clockwork with their boring fucking questions, the verbal equivalent to a cold shower. Forced to crash-land back on Earth. And that's the good days, when they win.

“No I get it,” Shane replies mildly and… right, Ilya doesn’t have to explain. If there’s *anyone* who gets it, it should be Shane Hollander, the golden child of Canadian hockey, alternating between media darling and scapegoat depending on how his season is going. Veteran of the game. ”It’s just, they’re gonna go after you, you know.”

They probably have already. Ilya hasn’t paid any attention to the fallout but it’s all too easy to imagine. Talking heads dissecting his words down to the last syllable and inevitably reaching the conclusion that he’s arrogant, or cocky, or ungrateful. The list goes on. Nothing he hasn’t heard before. Briefly, when he was new to the league, he’d wondered if maybe there’d come a day when his English was better, when he’d find better words. Words that wouldn’t be misconstrued or misunderstood, taken at their worst always. Then he wised up.

Ilya waves his hand dismissively, letting the cautioning words waft away in the air like so much smoke. “Maybe, but they have short attention span, journalists. Maybe someone will bring it up next time I have to talk to the press, or maybe not.”

“And if they do? How are you gonna handle it then?” Shane questions. It’s good-natured, the way Shane always is. Is it the captain in him speaking now? Ilya’s a captain too. For a moment he wonders if they’re different as leaders, or if they’re alike. If the responsibility sits easily on Shane’s shoulders or if it chafes. He shakes the thought loose.

“I should double down, I think,” Ilya replies cheekily instead and furrowes his brows in mock thought, as if he’s contemplating some great problem. Shane laughs, just the way Ilya was fishing for. It’s a good sound, but constrained. Ilya wants more of it, wants the full thing. Wants Shane to stop holding back around him.

“Double down?”

Ilya nods. He puts out the cigarette in an empty glass before moving onto the bed, crawling on top of Shane until he’s straddling his knees. Unbidden his hands are tracing over the other’s thighs, his hips, tracing the divots between muscles, outlining the stretch marks on his skin, fingertips skimming. It’s proven too difficult to restrain himself when all that skin is put on display — put up on offer — so he’s decided to not even try.

“Yeah. Give them a list of all the other things to be jealous of.”

“Such as?” Shane raises an eyebrow, looking sceptical. Looking like he can’t wait to see where Ilya is taking this, and Ilya…well, he’s always loved a captive audience.

”Well, I am beautiful, and strong,” Ilya starts, hand stroking across Shane’s stomach now, watching as the touch makes him draw for breath, the hollowing out of his belly as he inhales. He leans down and places a kiss just below the bellybutton. Trails another kiss above one nipple, swipes with his tongue through the hollow of Shane’s throat. “And,” he continues, mouthing at Shane’s neck, voice descended into a low rumble. “There’s this boy who’s crazy about me, and his ass is so tight—”

“Fuck off,” Shane exhales, shoving at Ilya.

Ilya holds steady. He was expecting that reaction. Knows that the smile pulling at his lips is doing him no favors so he ducks down again to kiss Shane just below his ear and feels him shiver in turn.

“—and I’m crazy about him too.”

And only like this can Ilya admit it, even to himself. Cloaked behind layers of jokes and exaggeration. Smoke and mirrors and plausible deniability.

His hands find Shane’s ass, starts groping until Shane is moaning and writhing underneath him, pulling Ilya closer, heat building up again.

Letting their bodies speak for them.

A month later, Ilya’s wasting time before practice, eyes on his phone while the TV drones on in the background. White noise and tinny voices filling up empty space. Boston have made the playoffs and so have the Montreal Metros which is why it comes as no surprise when suddenly Shane Hollander’s face fills the screen. Fresh-faced and even-keeled. Eyes intent.

“—you’ll be going into the playoffs this year with last year's success fresh on your minds—”

Shane doesn’t move a muscle as the reporter drones on, a long-winded preamble only to arrive at the same question they always ask. The only one that matters. The one it always boils down to no matter how they phrase it:

“Do you have what it takes?”

Shane, born and raised into the pressure cooker that is elite level hockey, doesn’t buckle.

“For sure last year’s Cup win means a lot. That the team has experience at this stage, the knowledge that we’ve already gone the distance once, it’s something we carry with us. At the same time, this is a new season. All we can do is focus on the here and now, one game at a time, and doing all we can to secure the win that’s in front of us.”

It's a boring, predictable answer.

It's the correct answer.

"You're heading into this playoff series on track for another record-breaking season points-wise, followed closely by Boston's Rozanov. Are you expecting this streak to hold? How does it feel to have another player vying for your top-spot?"

Ilya rolls his eyes, free to finally express his disdain in the comfort of his home.

The Shane on his television screen betrays no such reaction to the trite comparison.

"I mean, like I said, my focus is on doing my best for the Metros and not on any personal records. I'm not competing against Rozanov. I want to win the Cup with my team."

Shane Hollander, ever the consummate professional. Gold fucking star.

Ilya reaches for the remote. Not even the promise of Shane's pretty face filling his screen in high definition is enough to be worth the tedium of what hockey tries to pass off as journalism.

"But, that said," Shane goes on, eyes flicking away briefly from the reporter in front of him towards the camera instead. For one impossibly long second it feels like he's looking at Ilya directly. "At the end of the day, I'm a hockey fan too. I want to play at my best and I want to win against the best. And I mean, there's no doubt that Rozanov's one of the best in the game currently. Probably the best I've played against personally."

Later that evening, after team practice, Shane's words are still going through his head. Ilya's bone-tired but his mind is still buzzing, that familiar feeling of restlessness itching underneath his skin.

As usual his place is quiet and dark when he enters. He shoulders off his bag in the hallway and steps out of his shoes before dropping down on the sofa. The only light comes from the lit-up screen of his phone. Blue and harsh. His fingers move across the glass before he's even decided what to say.

I'm the best?

Didn't know you were so humble

I said the best I've played.

I'm still better than you.

Sure

That's good excuse

Fuck you.

Ilya grins at his phone, chewing lightly on the string of his hoodie. He swipes with his thumb, moving their chat history up and down but doesn't start typing. There's no quick, snappy translation for the warm feeling filling his gut, slow and overwhelming. He wants to move. The urge to get back on the ice builds, like an ache in his muscles, desperate to stretch. Tension, coiling tighter. That hunger to win, so potent that his teeth hurt with it. The desire to test his strength and his skill against another and come out on top. To be the best. To best someone.

When can I see you again?

End Notes

ilya: only one person has ever understood me and half the time i can't decide if i want to beat him or fuck him

let me know how this one landed! and shoutout to any football fans who recognize where i got the inspiration for ilya's quote lol

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