

Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right

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Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right

by [errantgods](#)

Summary

At the penalty box, Shane grinds his jaw so hard his ear starts hurting. Then he remembers that ESPN caught one of his players using a homophobic slur in front of the most famous gay player in the league, flaunting Shane's authority as team captain in the process. His ears are ringing and he feels like a zoo animal, but he catches Scott Hunter's eye for long enough to say, "I'm sorry," then averts his eyes.

When Hunter says nothing, Shane looks back up long enough to see the guy bracing himself to say something pitying, and Shane would rather die, so he cracks a joke first. "So what d'you think? Most dramatic way to come out in the NHL? Or do you still have me beat?"

Hunter snorts so hard he almost overbalances, then looks at Shane like he's lost his fucking mind. "I think we don't need to talk."

Notes

I would hope nobody's taking legal advice from AO3 fics but like, to be clear. I am not Canadian, I do not know Canadian immigration law, I do not know sports entertainment law in the USA or Canada.

Obviously I love this show and have frankensteined vague details from the book canon without reading the books. But if we're being honest a lot of this fic comes from having just read *Catch and Kill* and being wayyyy too interested in sports journalism (shoutout Pablo Torre Finds Out).

Also pretty obviously inspired by "who among us hasn't had a job that treated us like shit and convinced us we deserved it!"

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

Shane is having a difficult month, not that he's complaining. The Metros are playing their second away game in a row tonight, and they have one more before they get back to Montreal. Ilya is starting his second season in Ottawa, and he's struggling with what it means to leave all his friends and teammates in Boston and what it means to be a big fish in a small pond and what it means to be in a safe relationship.

At least, Shane hopes that Ilya feels safe in their relationship, but it doesn't always feel like he does. Ilya keeps going quiet for days at a time, once for nine days, and Shane is worried about him. Now, Ilya doesn't have a support system and Shane still can't see him more than a couple times a month.

It doesn't help to dwell on all the ways Shane is letting Ilya down. The most important thing is that Ilya feels like he can depend on Shane, that he knows that Shane isn't going anywhere.

The dressing room before tonight's game is tense, like every dressing room Shane has stepped into for the last six weeks. Pike and JJ are friendlier than ever, teasing each other and, when Shane resists their attempts to draw him into conversation, allowing him to just be for a few minutes before they hit the ice.

The rest of the team is chillier. A lot of the guys have retreated into their own cliques, and while they're generally respectful and friendly, they don't seem to be as enthusiastic before games as they did at the start of the season. A vocal minority has been edging towards a mutiny. They're not outright hostile, just resentful and a little cruel.

So Shane is handling it—he'll earn their trust back, because that's his job as team captain. For now, he rolls out his shoulders and straightens his spine and calls everyone in for a pre-game pep talk that he thinks sounds convincing.

Shane puts on his game face, locks away his personal angst and lets someone from ESPN hook him up with a mic so that viewers can watch him face off against Scott Hunter.

The first period of their game against the New York Admirals is two bulls locking horns and trying to toss each other. Nobody scores, checks are edging towards unsportsmanlike conduct, goodnatured chirping is rare and getting rarer. They're only halfway through the second period when Shane loses control of the situation.

He watches Drapeau's gloves come off as he gets in Scott Hunter's face, shoving him hard and spitting something. Shane beats the refs to them and forces himself between them. His goal is simple, back Drapeau off before he draws a major penalty.

Instead, Drapeau calls Scott Hunter a fairy. Then he says, "Of course you're picking his side, you're just like him," and, "Get your hands off me, fag," and then Shane is knocking Drapeau on his ass, and Scott Hunter is pulling him away from his own player, and the refs are fielding about seven hundred players telling them what happened and what they should do.

Shane doesn't stick around to find out, he just lets Scott Hunter and Dagenais escort him to the penalty box while Pike bullies Drapeau to the dressing room.

At the penalty box, Shane grinds his jaw so hard his ear starts hurting. Then he remembers that ESPN caught one of his players using a homophobic slur in front of the most famous gay player in the league, flaunting Shane's authority as team captain in the process. His ears are ringing and he feels like a zoo animal, but he catches Scott Hunter's eye for long enough to say, "I'm sorry," then averts his eyes.

When Hunter doesn't answer, Shane looks back up long enough to see the guy bracing himself to say something pitying, and Shane would rather die, so he cracks a joke first. "So what d'you think? Most dramatic way to come out in the NHL? Or do you still have me beat?"

Hunter snorts so hard he almost overbalances, then looks at Shane like he's lost his fucking mind. "I think we don't need to talk." Shane hums and watches the refs confirm that Drapeau's out for the night. Hunter goes back out and Shane watches the Admirals take advantage of the short-handed Metros to score the first goal of the game.

Shane finishes out the second period, then plays half of the third period before Coach Theriault calls him off the ice. Getting off the ice again feels like losing an arm, it hurts so badly to not be pushing himself to score and set up shots for his team.

On the bench, he's just a zoo animal again, and he spends the last stretch of the game watching the puck so intensely that when an Admiral trips during his possession, Shane's almost convinced that he tripped him up psychically.

ESPN sends someone over to retrieve his mic before the game is even over, and the guy looks like he expects Shane to jump off a bridge after this game. Once the mic is off and put away, he looks Shane in the eye and says that the NHL oughta fine Drapeau two games' pay.

Shane shifts uncomfortably and says, "I don't think that's really necessary," and watches the game end 2-0, Admirals, with Scott Hunter triumphant on the ice. Most of Shane's team won't look him in the eye.

The post-game press conference gets cancelled, of course. Shane is almost dizzy with relief, and thinks, almost deliriously, that he'd rather field a dozen hamfisted questions about Ilya Rozanov's mysterious move to Ottawa and their peculiar charitable partnership, instead of answering a single question about his team.

Drapeau's out of the dressing room before the rest of the team gets back there, and Shane doesn't say a single word about him but he thanks everyone for playing so hard and promises that they'll review game footage after their next match.

They shower and change out and go back to the hotel and Shane doesn't say a word to anyone. He's on his Kindle, pretending his phone doesn't exist. The distance between him and Ilya is a physical weight, and the Centaurs are playing their own away game in Seattle

tonight. Everyone, including Ilya, probably saw him draw a major penalty for fighting his own teammate and then lose his game before they took the ice. He hopes it doesn't throw the Centaurs off their game.

Hayden puts the Seattle-Ottawa game on for all of 30 seconds before Shane's headshot pops up and Hayden presses the off button on the remote so viciously that the device creaks. Instead, he watches Shane reread the same page of his ebook a hundred times and calls out updates from where he's watching on his own phone.

The score is 1-2 in Ottawa's favor when Hayden winces loudly and holds out his phone, saying, "Scott Hunter wants to talk."

Shane looks at the phone in Hayden's hand and tries to make sense of that. After thirty seconds of silence, Hayden's hand dips and Shane jerks forward to grab the phone. He calls Scott Hunter before he can think twice. Hayden steals Shane's phone, throws on a hoodie and his shoes, and leaves the room.

"Shane?" Scott Hunter says, the way that you talk to a cornered animal.

Shane feels exhausted, and humiliated, and a little relieved, and totally, unbelievably incompetent. He sighs elaborately, then says, "Hayden said you wanted to talk?"

"Yeah," and then the longest silence of Shane's life. "We were worried about some stuff we saw tonight and wanted to check in with you?"

The casual way he says "we" and the way that his partner is clearly coaching him through the conversation is unbearable. The familiarity and openness feel like a miracle, like an open wound. Shane wants nothing more than to be at the cottage with Ilya, cracking jokes and living out of each other's pockets. Instead he's in New York and Ilya is in Seattle and everyone knows about Shane but nobody knows about him.

The silence stretches and Shane realizes he doesn't actually know what Scott Hunter said. He blinks and says, sincerely, "Listen Scott, I'm really sorry. We're working on the, well, the culture on the Metros," and then he curses himself silently for admitting there's something to work on, instead of dismissing it as a moment of passion.

"One second," Scott covers his phone in his hand and Shane listens to the muffled sounds of Kip Grady yelling at his partner. "Shane?"

"Still here," Shane leans back against the headboard of his bed.

"Uh," Scott says, then stops. Grunts, starts again, "We wanted to talk to you. Or offer you an ear?"

"Oh." Shane stares at his shoes, which he's still wearing, apparently. "I don't really know what to say, besides sorry?"

Scott exhales a laugh. "I really don't need an apology from you," and after a pause, he continues, "I'm gonna text you—well, Pike—our address. Please consider coming over, I'm

no good on the phone.”

Shane has already opened his mouth to decline but instead he snorts very loudly and says, “You know what? Sure, why not. Fuck it.”

Shane texts his own number where he’s going and he does not ask where Hayden went because he’s not a very good friend today. By the time he gets to Scott Hunter and Kip Grady’s apartment, he’s running on empty. Kip puts a wine glass in his hand as soon as he has his jacket off, and Scott Hunter is tossing a remote from hand to hand, Seattle-Ottawa game playing behind him. The score is still 1-2 in the Centaurs’ favor.

They have him sit at their kitchen island, and when he doesn’t touch the wine, Kip brings out every available drink in their home, waiting for something to spark Shane’s interest. By the time he’s done, Shane feels too embarrassed to ask for water. No ginger ale, so he asks for a Sprite instead, and glances over his shoulder at the game.

Scott sits down across from him, and after a few minutes of fussing, Kip allows himself to be pulled into a seat as well.

They ask him how he’s doing. (Fine.) They ask if this is an ongoing problem with Drapeau, or a total surprise. (He hasn’t heard anyone say anything like that all season.) They ask how the Metros front office will discipline Drapeau. (He doesn’t know yet, they didn’t tell him and he didn’t ask.) They ask if Drapeau’s been disciplined for his attitude before. (It’s the team captain’s job to get the players in line, coach doesn’t step in for that kind of thing unless it’s really bad.)

At that, Scott looks at him like he’s grown a second head, and Kip pulls out his phone. Shane catches a glimpse of the search and thinks he’s looking up Coach Theriault.

“That’s insane. You realize that’s insane, right?” Shane does not, in fact, realize that’s insane. He shrugs and looks back at the game. The third period’s about to end, and then the teams will warm down and shower and do the first press huddle since the New York game ended.

Kip decisively sets his phone down and says, “I just don’t understand how this happens. I’ve literally never heard anyone say anything bad about Shane fucking Hollander.”

Scott snorts and says, “You’ve never heard Ilya Rozanov discuss his backhand then.”

Shane wrinkles his nose and replies, “I literally picked a fight with you, like, two years ago.”

Scott hums his assent and Kip interjects carefully, “Seriously, though. Do you know what happened?”

Shane exhales loudly and takes a sticky sip of his Sprite, sets it down. Smooths out his shirt. “I came out to the guys a month and a half ago, so,” he says, and forces himself to look them each in the eye.

“...So some of them decided to blow up their own season about it?” Kip says, seeming genuinely lost.

“It’s just growing pains,” Shane offers.

“No, growing pains is a few insensitive jokes and a serious conversation about trust and privacy. Did the coaches know?” Scott grinds his teeth through the question so hard Shane wants to ask him to unclench.

“Know what?”

“Christ, this is like pulling teeth. Did the coaches know whatever was going on behind the scenes? The resentment?” Scott pushes back from the table to walk around the room, for no reason that Shane can see.

“Maybe I brought it up a few weeks ago? But it’s a personal issue, not a team issue. I caused the tension, I make sure the team works through it.”

“Shane, if your coach told you any of that, it means he’s bad at his fucking job,” Scott holds his hands out and stares at him, begging him to get it.

Shane feels a pit open up in his stomach and pushes his drink away. He glances at the press room, where a Seattle player has already sat down. Ilya’s late. “I think I’d better get going,” he says as evenly as he can. “Thanks so much for having me over. Again, I’m really sorry about all this.”

“Whoa, hold on,” Kip says loudly, “You can’t leave like this.”

“Seriously, thank you, but I don’t think it’s a good idea for me to stick around.”

“No, please, sit, we’ll talk about something else, just sit down and unwind a little bit before you go back to the hotel, okay? Scott, tell him we’ll talk about something else if he stays.”

Scott grimaces like he’s holding half a lemon in his mouth, but he looks Shane head on and promises.

They make a few awkward minutes of small talk on the couches in front of the TV, talking about the weather in Montreal and the differences between there and where he grew up. The whole time, his attention keeps drifting back to the screen.

Ilya’s seated next to the Seattle goalie. They run through a bunch of questions with the goalie, presumably because Ilya showed up late. When they turn their full attention to Ilya, Shane stops pretending to be fully engaged in the conversation.

Scott whistles at him and throws him the remote. Shane turns on the sound.

Locking in to play that night in Seattle is the hardest thing Ilya’s had to do in a long time. Two guys on the ice were supposed to be mic’d up for the game, but ESPN pulled the plan during warm ups.

Ilya thinks about how far away New York is from Seattle, how far New York is from Ottawa, and he shuts down those thoughts a hundred times over. He thinks about how quickly he can get to his phone to call Shane, to make sure he's okay, and then he stops thinking at all.

After the first period, he texts Shane, “Я тебя люблю”. After the second period, he doesn't have a response. After the game ends, he volunteers to do the press conference and then he calls Shane, and it goes straight to voicemail. He calls again, same thing. He calls Yuna from an empty PT room, and she answers on the third ring.

“How is he?” he asks, too harshly by far.

“We haven't been able to get ahold of him yet.”

“Well what the fuck? What the fuck?”

“Ilya—“ Yuna starts, a warning in her voice.

“I'm sorry, just. Just fuck. What the fuck?” His ears have been buzzing since the game ended, and it seems like the noise is only getting louder.

“Hayden said he was okay. Or as okay as can be expected. Quiet. Reading. Checking your score.”

Ilya tries to take a deep breath, but it shatters into a sob on the exhale.

“Did you know it was this bad?” Yuna asks him quietly, carefully, like she knows he'll take it as an accusation otherwise. It feels like an accusation anyway.

“No,” he says, feeling lost. “He said that it was an adjustment, but he has Pike and Dagenais with him, that he will be okay.”

“He will be okay, Ilya,” Yuna says, which makes him so angry he has to put his phone down for a moment and breathe deeply.

He picks the phone back up. “I'm sorry, is a lot to process. I'm a little bit in shock, I think. Wanted to speak to him, know what I can do for him.”

“Of course you're in shock. Listen, you don't have to do the press conference. You can back out, it'll be okay.”

“I can support him there. Cannot support him any other fucking way right now.” Ilya exhales wetly, blinking at the ceiling.

“Ilya,” Yuna starts, now with urgency in her voice, because she's learned how to read between the lines with him, a little. “Listen to me, nobody, especially Shane, wants you to jump off this cliff. Don't make any rash decisions. Weather the storm, then we can all talk with Shane about what he needs from us, and make a plan.

Ilya squares his shoulders, exhales through his nose, and says, “You're right. Does this mean you have not secured Pride partnerships for Shane yet?”

“Not yet, David talked me down,” she says wryly.

“Ah, it was his speech you just gave me, then. Makes sense.”

“Careful, Rozanov,” she warns, but Ilya thinks he can hear her smiling.

“I will do press conference anyway,” he says, scrubbing his face. “Responsibly, of course.”

“Of course,” Yuna says. “Knock ‘em dead, kid.”

In the press room, Ilya sits and breathes methodically while the Seattle goalie wraps up his questions. As soon as Ilya walked into the journalists’ view, the room started buzzing again, but Ilya does not think it’s in his head this time.

When, finally, the goalie thanks the press for their time and steps up to leave, everyone falls silent, waiting for someone else to speak.

Ilya looks around the room before saying, as casually as he can manage, “It was good game, yes?” He thinks hard for a moment, calling on the memorable moments from this game that make it different from the last six games they played. The most important difference, he thinks, is that this game was in Seattle.

The whole room mumbles their assent, and then someone from a national outlet raises their hand. He asks, “Have you spoken to Shane Hollander since his game earlier this evening?”

Ilya says, “No,” and almost plays dumb, almost follows it up with “Why, did something happen?” but it will sound cruel to everyone but him. Instead, he continues, “but I do not live under rock. Hollander has had a long day.”

A dozen more hands go up. Ilya notes the people who shift uncomfortably, mostly from local news outlets looking to hear more about tonight’s match against their own beloved team. He’ll get to them, but first, he calls on a reporter from an international hockey mag.

“Some outlets are reporting the incident at the Metro-Admiral game as a misunderstanding. Others are reporting that another one of the best players in the NHL has just come out of the closet. Given what you know of Shane Hollander personally and professionally, do you have any comment?”

“What?” Ilya leans forward, feeling defensive and mean and like he probably should have let Yuna talk him out of this press conference. “What the fuck are you talking about?” He’s going to get fined.

“Is Shane Hollander gay?” she asks, so bluntly that Ilya is genuinely stunned for a moment.

“That part did not confuse me, you said ‘misunderstanding,’ what misunderstanding?”

“... Well, Drapeau used some potent language, but that can happen, in the heat of the moment. We all know how NHL players can be.”

Ilya forces himself to lean back in the way that would make his father rail against him for his laziness. “‘Potent language’ is pretty way to describe such ugly words,” he says, almost to himself. “Two generational talents in NHL are called homophobic slurs in middle of match, by mid-tier player, if I am generous. Metros release statement apologizing for Drapeau and Hollander, as if they have committed same offense. And you think story is whether or not the slur was accurate for both players, or just one?”

Everyone in the room is on the edge of their seat. It feels a little bit like the Boston dressing room on game days, except Ilya doesn’t know where to direct that bloodlust.

Another reporter pipes up without waiting for him to call on him, and says, “Do you have any comment on Shane Hollander’s sexuality?”

Ilya stares at him until the guy looks away. He hopes his disgust is clear, even if it will never be enough. “I see two options. One, Drapeau used that word because he is homophobic asshole and Metros front office do not care that their team is imploding. Two, it is possible that one of best players in NHL is outed during game, and everyone is only concerned about pushing him out of closet as fast as possible.”

Four reporters inhale deeply, ready to shout invasive questions again. Ilya cuts them all off to finish, “I think we will all survive until Shane Hollander makes statement. I’m done talking about this.”

He immediately calls on a local reporter and bullies his way through the press conference. They ask what his favorite thing about playing against Seattle was tonight. (Nobody committed a hate crime on ice.) They ask what his favorite part of the game was. (Watching one of their defensemen completely shut down Seattle’s best center in the third period.) They ask him if he’ll be seeing any of the sights while he’s in town. (Sadly no, not with their early flight. But he misses Pike Place. He’ll visit soon.)

Finally, after fifteen minutes or maybe three lifetimes, Ilya is released from press duty. To his surprise, the entire team is still around, and they start cheering for him when he goes to hunt down his duffel bag.

“We already celebrated win, what is this for?” he looks around suspiciously.

“The press conference is going viral, a lot of people are calling you the ally the queer community deserves.”

Ilya laughs and forces himself to relax, though he’s not sure he even remembers everything he said. He worries that he’s spoken out of turn without meaning to, but he can’t really do anything about that right now.

Everyone chatters about how much they hate the press and the Montreal Metros as they get ready to go back to the hotel. Ilya follows behind the last man as he checks his phone.

He has a text from Hayden Pike’s contact that says, “It’s me, I’m proud of you.” He watches the bubble appear and disappear several times as he walks, before Shane finally texts, “I want to talk to you but I’m at Scott Hunter’s place right now.”

“He and Kip Grady want third?” he texts, then “And they ask you, not me???” and then finally, “I don’t care if they hear, need to see you yesterday.”

Shane sends a thumbs up and asks him to say when he’s available to talk. Ilya hums even though Shane can’t hear him and exits the conversation.

He has a text from Shane’s number, which must be Hayden, that just says, “Good kind of asshole ”

A text from David in the Hollanders’ group chat that says, “Proud of you kid, you knocked that out of the park.” A separate, private text from Yuna, “I’m so glad he has you, especially now.”

A few texts from Svetlana ranging from, “Maybe free press is overrated,” to “I hope you are both okay,” to a link to a tweet.

Ilya opens the tweet, even though he should know better than to open Twitter right now. It’s a screengrab of his face during the press conference with the caption “getting confrontational with Ilya Rozanov at a post-game press junket is like throwing a rock at someone holding a machine gun”. Ilya leans over to show it to his teammate on the bus, and he cackles.

Ilya retweets it, then goes through the comments, generously blocking anyone with a bad take.

He mostly ignores his mentions. He retweets some of the local coverage of the game tonight because he’s petty, interacts with a few guys from the NHL and more women from the PWWHL who have good takes or hate in their heart. Finally, he follows a few queer accounts that do sports reporting. They’re putting out statements about how homophobia is damaging for straight and queer players, how permissive workplaces allow resentment and discrimination to fester and warp professional relationships, and how public outing has affected some high profile U.S. actors.

Then he’s in a private hotel room, facetimeing Shane before he even puts his bag down.

Shane casually says, “Rozanov’s gonna call soon to check in,” then feels stupid, because there’s no way Scott and Kip won’t realize they’re in love by the time the phone call ends.

Scott looks at him carefully and then opens his mouth to say something. Then he closes it.

Kip looks up from where he’s scrolling through Ilya’s twitter to say, “Can I tell him I’m in love with him?”

Shane laughs and says, “Absolutely not,” and shows them their text conversation because it feels easier than saying, “He’s my boyfriend,” or “He’s taken, back off,” or “If his ego gets any bigger it’ll be a health crisis.”

Scott reads the texts about six times before once again staring at Shane. Kip simply takes the phone from him and stares at the texts again like he’s trying to decipher an ancient language.

“I thought you guys were just fuckbuddies.”

Kip drops the phone on the couch and yells, “What?”

Shane deliriously misses Ilya calling them lovers to his parents. He takes a deep breath and says, nervously, “Well, I mean, we were. But he’s my boyfriend, since last summer.”

Scott says, “That’s one hell of a secret to keep,” and then Shane watches in real time as he realizes, “This is why he left Boston?”

Shane ducks his head and says, “Yeah,” and wishes he weren’t blushing so hard.

Kip and Scott start bickering about “fuckbuddies,” and Shane refuses to look either of them in the eye. He has a pretty good guess of how Scott figured them out, and he has no interest in helping them construct a timeline.

Blessedly, his phone rings, and he answers immediately. He feels like a marionette with its strings cut, he’s so relieved to see Ilya’s face. He says, lamely, “How are you?”

Ilya looks at him a little wildly and says, “You watched press conference?”

Kip calls, “You bet your ass we did.” Shane reluctantly turns his screen so Scott and Kip can say hello to Ilya. Kip gives him a double thumbs up and a wide smile.

“...And?” Ilya continues, when he can see Shane again.

“And what?”

“Was it okay?”

“Oh,” Shane blinks and realizes just how worried Ilya has been about not being able to speak to him. “I think you did amazing, way better than I could have asked for.”

“I bet the Metros take issue with the whole ‘your team is imploding thing,’” Scott says, “but someone had to fucking say it. Better that it’s Rozanov.” He tips his water to Ilya and Shane.

Ilya and Shane grunt at the same time and Scott gets this villainous little twinkle in his eye. It reminds Shane of why he tried to knock him out in Montreal a couple years ago, but he’s older and wiser now, so he just flips him off and takes a breath.

“So,” Ilya says, after a pause, “Yuna is not seeking Pride endorsements, yet. But you maybe need plan before she has heart attack.”

“Oh shit,” Shane slouches further into the couch. “I haven’t even talked to them.”

“Shh, is okay, Hayden talked to them,” Ilya wrinkles his nose melodramatically when he says Hayden’s first name. “Yuna convinced me not to come out during press conference.”

Scott and Kip shift anxiously in their seats, like they might get up to leave. Shane leans forward and sets the phone up so everyone can see each other instead. They need to be

practical about this, and if it's just Shane and Ilya right now, he's pretty sure they'll just try to put this grease fire out with water.

"Thank you," Shane starts, thinking and fiddling with his sleeve, "For not doing that." Ilya hums but doesn't say anything else, so Shane continues, "I don't think you coming out to protect me would have helped. Two wrongs don't make a right."

Ilya seems lost for words, but Scott clears his throat and says, "At the press conference, the reporters seemed open to the possibility that you might not be gay. You could play off what you said to me in the penalty box as a shitty joke, field some uncomfortable questions, and continue your season." As he talks, he tenses up.

Shane watches Ilya when he concedes, "It would make things a lot easier for the organization." Ilya frowns but looks away. It feels terrible, all of this feels fucking terrible. He wants to scream, he wants to move to Ottawa and he wants Ilya to hold him and he wants none of this to have ever happened. "But I don't think I can lie. I don't want to lie. Two wrongs don't make a right," he says again.

Kip grips his shoulder, catches his eye, and says, "Okay."

Scott leans in as well and says, "We've got your back, for whatever it's worth."

Ilya says, "You have me, your parents, Metros who are not going to hell. You are not alone. Centaurs will put Drapeau through wall when we play you again."

Shane hums and then, humiliatingly, begins to cry, almost without warning. He covers his face and chokes out an apology. "I'm sorry, I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Well fuck, I think we have a pretty good idea," Scott says, because he's a bit of an asshole.

Shane flips him off without looking up, and he lets Ilya and Kip and Scott talk about god knows what. Kip conjures a charger out of thin air and plugs in Hayden's phone.

When Shane has pulled himself back together, he wipes his face and looks up. Ilya is saying something truly disrespectful to Scott, but before Scott can respond, Ilya looks at Shane and asks, "You ate after game?"

Shane frowns, opens his mouth, shuts it. Remembers the salad bowl Hayden set next to him back at the hotel and admits to himself that he maybe didn't even touch it.

"How could you, Scott Hunter?" Ilya asks, all drama to pull the attention off of Shane who is, again, feeling spectacularly embarrassed that he can't even take care of himself. "You invite saddest man alive into your home and do not even offer food."

"Oh fuck off, Rozanov, we'll get him something to eat now, calm down."

Shane sighs and says, "I don't really know that I can keep something down right now." He's not sure if it's true, he feels a lot better than he did right after the game, but that could change.

“Shane will eat something or I will haunt you until you die, and then I will haunt your ghost,” Ilya says, face now very close to the phone camera. “Kip makes smoothies, yes?”

Scott rolls his eyes and flips him off, going to the kitchen with Kip to make something that won’t unsettle Shane’s stomach. The apartment is open concept, and it doesn’t take two people to make a smoothie, but Shane appreciates the attempt at privacy anyway.

“You shouldn’t come out right now,” Shane says, now holding his phone again.

Ilya immediately gets defensive. “Why not?”

Shane rubs his forehead for a minute, feeling like he’s aged ten years in the last five hours. “This fucking sucks, but it doesn’t actually have to change that much. My contract’s up at the end of this season, maybe I can join the Centaurs or another team if things don’t work out with the Metros. I know you’ll get your permanent residency any day, but there’s still years before you can get citizenship. I’m not going anywhere, you’re not going anywhere. We have time.”

He’s trying to convince himself, too, but by the end of it Ilya looks relieved and guilty and resigned. “And if I want to?”

Shane gives him a watery smile and says, “Then we can talk about it in a couple weeks.” Ilya nods once, and Shane says, “Hey, look at me. You deserve to choose how you come out. This doesn’t change that.”

Ilya curls in on himself a little. “Just twelve days.”

Shane wipes his eyes roughly and says, “I can’t wait to see you.”

“I love you,” Ilya says and presses his fingers to the screen.

“Ya tebya lyublyu,” Shane says, and returns the gesture.

Kip comes back with a smoothie but refuses to hand it over until Shane accepts a hug. It’s a little weird but mostly such a relief that he doesn’t even feel embarrassed. He drinks his smoothie and chats with Scott and Kip and texts Hayden and his parents to let them know he’s okay. His mom tells him she’ll follow his lead, whatever he decides to do.

Shane oversleeps the next morning, so he and Hayden have to throw everything they find into their travel bags and rush to make the team bus to the airport. He’s pretty sure his toothbrush is in Hayden’s bag, and he’s somehow ended up with all of Hayden’s dirty socks.

On the team bus, everyone is, again, not meeting his eyes. Drapeau isn’t there. He chooses avoidance again and checks his phone. Hayden cleared out most of the useless bullshit, but he finds an email from 1 AM from Metros PR asking for feedback on a press release before its scheduled release at 4 AM. It’s already 5:30, and if the timestamp isn’t strange enough, it’s weirder that his mom isn’t CC’d on the email. It’s just him and the PR@metros address.

He forwards the email to his mom without reading it, and then checks the Metros twitter to see what's been released to the public. It feels like getting tackled without your gear.

The Metros have determined that the unfortunate incident the previous night reflects an issue of team culture and a personal indiscretion. Nothing stated or implied during the altercation was derogatory or intended to malign any player's sexuality or identity. Hollander and Drapeau are committed to working with the rest of the Metros to improve team culture and communication, both on and off the ice.

Shane turns off his phone and stares at the back of the seat in front of him. He takes a deep breath, ignores Hayden's concerned look from where he's facetimeing Jacki and the kids, and turns his phone back on.

He skims a few of the responses—some say that nobody gives a fuck, some say it smells like bullshit, and a few weird ones say that Shane's reaction to being called a slur was, itself, homophobic.

Shane takes a few deep breaths, but when he can't calm down, he scrolls back up and rereads the statement. Coach Theriault shook his hand when he got on the bus this morning and didn't say anything about this. He triple checks—nobody from management called him to confirm the statement was good to go. They left his agent out of the conversation. They're forcing his hand, and forcing him back into the closet.

The bus gets to the airport and they pass through security. When they're at the gate for their flight to Toronto for an early afternoon game, Shane is still shaking with what might be anxiety or rage and is probably both.

He pulls out his phone again, quote tweets the Metros press release, and types out, "I told my team that I'm gay before the regular season started, six weeks ago. I can't speak for public relations, but coaching staff knew, and Drapeau definitely knew. Try again." He hits post, puts his phone on airplane mode, and boards the flight.

By the time the team lands in Toronto, the Metros front office has released two more statements. First, that Drapeau has been bought out of his contract with Montreal, which shocks Shane. Second, that Hollander has been suspended for one game because he fought his own teammate.

Coach Theriault announces this to everyone on their way to the stadium, in case they haven't checked the news. "Drapeau's off the team. Hollander, you won't be dressing out for the game, and you won't be warming up with them. If you want to head home to Montreal early, let me know."

JJ says, "What the fuck, Coach?" and then everyone starts talking over each other.

Shane consciously releases the tension in his shoulders, unfurls his fists, and steps into the aisle. If he can't warm up or play with the guys, this is his best shot to prepare them for the game. He turns to face the team, back to the coaches, and claps his hands to stop everyone from their urgent, confused side conversations.

For the first time in weeks, everyone turns to listen to him at the same time. “First, I’m not going anywhere. Suspended or not, I’m with you guys, every step of the way. We’re a damn good team, and you’re gonna kick Toronto’s ass, right?”

Everyone yells back, “Right,” though they still look tense and angry.

Shane takes a big swing to break the tension, and says, “Nobody talked to me about Drapeau’s buyout, I found out on Twitter with everyone else. It sucks to see him go, but we’ll manage, we’re better than any one player.” Players clench their jaws and whoop and stomp their feet.

Shane nods, mostly to himself, and turns to sit back down. Before he can step out of the aisle, Comeau calls out, “What happens when someone else hurts your feelings? Will you get them fired too, Hollander?”

Shane sits down and throws back on his shoulder, “As long as you don’t call anyone a fag on an international broadcast, I think we can make it work.” He hears some childish ooh-ing and a couple guys cackling.

The Metros lose the game in overtime, and Shane is cheering from the box the whole time. As the guys dress out, he thinks that they can make this work.

Then Theriault hands him a formal notice of a further two-game suspension for inappropriate conduct.

“What the fuck does this mean, inappropriate conduct?”

“Front office is cracking down on language, even for you. No saying slurs in front of the team.”

Shane stares at him, his mouth hanging open, as guys begin to file out of the showers. Theriault doesn’t look away, and doesn’t even have the decency to look ashamed. Shane feels something harden in him. He folds the notice of suspension carefully into quarters and nods.

When everyone files out of the showers, he calls for everyone’s attention for the second time today. “Listen up, I owe you all an apology. Coach just handed me this,” and he waves the notice of suspension. “I’m out for the next two games for inappropriate conduct. No saying slurs on the team bus either,” he laughs. “Sorry about that.”

Hayden snatches the notice out of his hand and starts cursing in English and broken Quebecois. As he passes the notice to JJ, he throws in a couple hideous Russian curses, so Shane kicks him in the shin. The note gets passed around and after a couple minutes the notice is a mess and almost everyone is yelling at Theriault.

Shane locks eyes with the coach and sees a dare there, to let the team spiral about this. He inhales noisily and shouts everyone into silence. When he has their attention, he hesitates, then says, “Obviously, I won’t say that word again, simple as that. No slurs, no disrespect, and we’ll be back to normal this time next week, okay?”

Everyone grunts their assent. “Good,” Shane says, then musters a sincere smile. “You all kicked ass today. Let’s hit the road. If we’re lucky we’ll be back in Montreal before the bars close.”

JJ laughs loudly and tackles him into a hug, teasing him about how he never hits the bars with them. Shane ducks out of the tackle and smacks JJ’s head gently. “Let’s get a move on,” he says, and makes sure everyone gets out of the dressing room with all their stuff in tact. Almost everyone looks him in the eye.

Things don’t get back to normal, really. The Metros make it to the playoffs anyway, and Shane mostly gets to play with them.

Shane and Ilya find a rhythm of seeing each other and working on their charity. He talks his mom out of the more ludicrous brand deals, and he only loses a couple partnerships. The rest suggest some modifications and otherwise keep it pretty lowkey. Rose terrorizes Shane into making a group chat with her, “Lily,” Jacki, and Kip. After threatening for two months to add Svetlana so that she can bully Scott Hunter into early retirement, Ilya finally does add her. It’s nice, and warm.

But a month after the first (and second) suspension of his career, Shane tweaks his ankle during a scrimmage and gets put on medical suspension for five games. The team PT tells him it doesn’t seem like he needed to be put on the bench at all, and makes a joke about his delicate constitution. Ilya convinces him to see an independent doctor, who confirms that at most, it warranted a couple days’ rest. Some of the guys start muttering again.

After that, he gets tackled during a game so hard he tells the coaches he needs to get pulled. They try to talk him back onto the ice, and only when he says he can’t see straight do they let him step off for concussion protocol. They make it clear that they’re disappointed with him.

At some point, someone at their home stadium has arranged for the Nutcracker to play whenever Shane sets foot on the ice for warmups and scrimmages. One of the guys has to point it out to him, saying his brother-in-law is a professional ballet dancer and that someone’s fucking with him. It’s such a bizarrely homophobic thing to do that Shane laughs out loud, and then feels humiliated every time he steps on the ice after that.

He butts heads with the coaches and the front office more than ever before, and he can’t figure out why. He doesn’t think he’s being more difficult than he was the last few years, but when he asks for accommodations for players or pushes to limit media access to the dressing room after one of the newer guys has a bad experience, they act like he’s being unreasonable.

Shane starts picking his battles more sparingly. He can’t look his players in the eye all the time, and he’s playing through aches and pains that he’d normally ride the bench for. He sees his teammates doing the same and it makes him want to puke.

They get knocked out of the playoffs in the second round and Shane tells the press that he’s proud of what the team has been able to do. He dodges questions about the shaky start to

their season and questions about where they would be if they hadn't been plagued by controversy and team drama.

Rose, Kip, Jacki and Sveta send about 80 texts in the group chat demolishing the reporters and hyping Shane up for a solid but unremarkable playoffs performance. Then, Ilya, to annoy Shane, goes through and likes every single message.

The Centaurs are doing so well that it distracts Shane from his own pathetic season. They beat the Admirals in the first round, and the Raiders in the second. Shane is very carefully not saying nothing really stands between them and the Cup, because that would be cocky and irresponsible.

While Ilya has been dragging the Centaurs to their first finals appearance, Shane and his mom have been carefully assembling a complaint to the NHL against the Metros. He has a few anonymous notarized statements from sympathetic employees of the Metros like Hayden, and he has his own statement. He has medical records and a psychological evaluation and the press release email he received at 1 AM after he was outed on an international broadcast. He has emails from the minority owner, the general manager, and the head coach.

The attorney they've discreetly hired is asking if they could provide one more witness statement that isn't anonymous, just to tie it all together. Shane is caught between asking Ilya for advice and just saying no. He doesn't want to endanger the livelihoods of anyone with the Metros, but he feels like he has to ask Hayden or someone else to attach their name to their statement.

After the Metros get knocked out of the playoffs, Shane goes to Ottawa to stay with Ilya. It's weird in a nice way, to take care of Ilya between away games. To just exist and celebrate how good his boyfriend is at his job, how far he's come.

After the Centaurs win the Eastern Conference Finals, they have a breather. Ilya flings himself onto the couch and sticks his head in Shane's lap, knocking his Kindle away.

"Hi," Shane grins, and Ilya grins back.

They're both sweaty and lying on the couch and wearing a lot less clothes when Ilya says, "What is wrong?"

"What do you mean?" Shane asks even though he knows he's been caught.

Ilya rolls his eyes and says again, carefully, "What is wrong?"

"It's the complaint," Shane starts, and then doesn't say anything else.

"Yes, no shit," Ilya says, playing with Shane's hand.

"Fuck off," Shane says, but doesn't pull his hand away. "The attorney's asking for another statement corroborating the complaint. One where the author is named. I can't figure out how to get that without leaving them open to retaliation by the front office. It's already so risky, I

don't want to hurt them, but I can't afford for this complaint to get buried or dismissed. I don't know if I should just leave quietly, or..." He trails off, feeling choked up.

Ilya waits, still playing with his hand, until Shane looks at him. "I will write it."

"What?"

Ilya leans in and kisses him. "You said tell you if I want to come out, yes? I want to come out."

"Coming out in an affidavit for the NHL is not what I had in mind," Shane says, swallowing a hysterical laugh.

"Yes, but is not fair for you and Scott Hunter to have dramatic coming out and not me. Will be fun to terrorize the Metros. You are planning to come to the Centaurs for next season, yes?"

"You know we can't talk about that, it's collusion or a crime or whatever," Shane groans.

"But you want to play with me in Ottawa."

"Yes, I do," Shane says dopily, gripping Ilya's hand tighter.

"So I write affidavit for boring legal case, I tell Centaurs front office and team so they know how good it will be for you to join us. When affidavit is leaked to press, I am offended, hurt, already we have been through so much because of Montreal front office and homophobic hockey fans. Everyone wins!"

Shane laughs so hard he rolls off the couch, and then he keeps laughing, a little hysterically.

When he catches his breath, he looks up at Ilya, who is leaning over the couch and looking at him with so much love Shane has to take another breath. "There's no guarantee that the Centaurs will sign us both."

"No, it is risk. But the Centaurs are good to me. No matter how finals go, two offensive players are retiring this summer. We need more players. If Centaurs cannot take you, someone in this league will. At worst we do a little more long distance, suffer a few years. Look for trade if we can."

"Yeah, it's risky," Shane says, and stares at the ceiling. "But maybe we could live together," he says, reaching for Ilya's hand again. "Are you sure?" he asks, sitting up and leaning close to Ilya's face.

"да, this will work. We will make it work," Ilya says, wrapping his free hand around the back of Shane's head and pulling him in for a kiss.

A month later, the Centaurs have won their first Cup ever, and Shane and his mom are waiting for Ilya to finish his notarized statement for the case. His attorney, Calvin, seemed a

little starstruck when he realized who the mysterious boyfriend was, and Shane is trying not to take it personally. They're there on a Sunday afternoon and the office is almost entirely empty because they asked for discretion. It feels like Shane is breaking some sort of rule, but they have little cups of water and nobody's yelled at them about why they're here.

Through the conference room walls, Shane watches Ilya stand and shake hands, first with the paralegal, then with the attorney. Ilya asks something, Calvin responds, and Ilya waves him off. He asks another question, and Calvin catches Shane's eye to wave them over.

The paralegal opens the door to let them in, and Calvin exclaims, "Please, have a seat!"

Once they've all sat down, he continues, "Mr. Rozanov had an excellent question about privacy," and he waves to Ilya.

Ilya clears his throat and does not look at Shane's mom as he repeats his question, "Could NHL review our conversations? Texts?"

Shane feels like he's entered a hostage situation, actually. The only thing that could make this worse is if his dad was here.

His mom inhales sharply and says, "I can't believe we didn't ask before, is that a concern?"

Calvin launches into a very long, lawyerly explanation. Technically yes, but probably no. They would only require those records if the inquiry turns confrontational, which it shouldn't. Attaching Ilya's name to the complaint should apply even more pressure for a quick, respectful resolution. If they force Shane and Ilya to release their texts, Calvin can argue for redactions of irrelevant and explicit material.

If necessary, the firm can designate someone to coordinate redactions so that their privacy is respected. At this, the paralegal waves a little cheekily and makes Shane's mother laugh.

"That doesn't sound too bad," Shane says hesitantly.

"No, it really isn't. Shane, nobody is asking for your texts right now. If they do, we'll work with you to protect your privacy as much as possible."

"Is good enough for me," Ilya says, clapping his hands together and standing up cheerily.

Ilya leads the way out of the building into the attached parking garage. In one hand, he has two copies of the notarized affidavit.

The next morning, Ilya goes to his agent's house because she has chosen not to rent an office space since she moved to Ottawa. He gives her a copy of the affidavit and sips a glass of water while she reads through the whole thing.

"You're a terrible client," Noor says, tossing the affidavit and her glasses on a loveseat.

“Everything I do, I do for love,” Ilya hums. She knows that he’s bisexual, because when he hired her during his rookie season, she asked if there were any scandals that might come out about him. They’ve never talked about it since. Ilya likes Noor. She’s easy to work with and loyal and they barely have to work together at all these days.

“You’re a menace to society,” she continues, staring wistfully at a landscape photo of the Houston skyline, where she grew up.

“Yes,” Ilya says.

“When will this be public?” she asks.

“We do not know. Complaint will be filed with NHL by mid-June. Is confidential, but will be leaked.”

“And you’ve talked through this with Hollander? With family?”

“I have not talked to my family in two years, Noor,” Ilya says, and scrunches up his nose at her.

“You—“ she starts, then decides not to follow him down that rabbit hole. “Okay, but you’ve thought this through? You know things might not go well for you or Hollander?”

“Yes, we have talked and talked and talked about this. I am sure.”

“And what do the Centaurs know?”

“That Shane and I run charitable foundation together.”

“Oh fuck,” Noor sinks so far into the couch that Ilya worries she’ll slip right off it. “So you’re asking me to figure that out now?”

“No, we have plan. Just thought you would like to know,” Ilya says and winks at her.

Noor stares at him, waiting for him to continue. When he doesn’t, she grumbles, “Okay, I’ll bite. What’s the plan?”

“Well first, here is Shane’s agent’s number,” he says, texting her Yuna’s phone number and email address. “Yuna is already planning big couple interview and photoshoot with GQ for next month or month after.”

“Well what the fuck am I gonna do?”

“You are going to stop Yuna Hollander from making me wear rainbow suspenders or other ugly shit.”

“Oh my god,” Noor looks like he hit her over the head. “Sure, yeah, easy, me versus the final boss helicopter mom. What about the Centaurs?”

“We draft email to Centaurs front office, ask for meeting with legal counsel present. I give them copy of affidavit. I promise relationship never affected my performance or Shane’s. I swear I never pressure Shane to move teams or leave Montreal. I jump through hoops, prove I want to stay with Centaurs.”

“Oh, is that all,” Noor says faintly.

“No,” Ilya says cheerfully. “If all good with Centaurs front office, I call meeting with players and tell them I am bisexual and dating second best player in NHL. That part will be fun!”

“This is psychological warfare, Rozanov.”

“You’ve been complacent, Noor,” he says with a smile. He sobers for a moment and says, “I am sorry I said nothing before. I will be okay if it goes wrong, and I will make sure you are okay, too.”

“Calm down, Rozanov, you’ve been going easy on me, let’s draft an email.”

On June 29, Ilya sits down with the Centaurs players and head coach and suppresses the urge to puke.

A couple players chirp Ilya for looking so nervous, and several others are talking loudly about how they bet Shane Hollander is joining the Centaurs. One player, who Ilya worries is not particularly bright, speculates that Scott Hunter is joining the team. Scott Hunter, who has a year left on his contract with the Admirals.

Ilya holds his hands up and everyone falls silent. He takes a breath, rubs his hands together, draws a few concerned looks from his teammates.

“First,” he starts, “no free agent news. Is against rules, and rules are important.” He is not being particularly convincing, based on the looks he’s getting. The head coach drops his head loudly against the wall behind him. He tries again.

“Fuck it. I am bisexual,” he says, and someone squawks.

“Congratulations?” someone says, and bizarrely, half the team starts cheering for him. “Did we need a meeting for this?” someone else asks.

“That is not big news,” Ilya says waving his hands a little frantically.

“Ooookay, what’s the news then?”

“My boyfriend is Shane Hollander,” he says and tries to swallow down his smile. It doesn’t work.

Everyone seems to stop breathing, and then someone says, “Holy shit, we’re gonna have the two best players in the league in fucking Ottawa.”

And, “Damn Rozy, you don’t waste time.”

And, “Finally, a good reason to move to Ottawa.”

And suddenly everyone’s chirping him and cheering and asking how the fuck that happened.

“We started relationship while I was in Boston. You get nothing else right now.” Someone whines very loudly, but Ilya cuts him off, “And I am serious, no deal or offer for Shane right now. Is important you understand that.”

Someone nods knowingly and says, loudly and clearly, “Okay, Rozy, understood. But it would be really, really awesome if Shane fucking Hollander came to Ottawa.” People start whooping their support.

“Are you guys going public?”

Ilya wiggles his hand in a so-so motion. “I filed affidavit with NHL saying I am Shane’s boyfriend,” five people break into grins, it’s very distracting. “We expect it will be leaked soon. And we have interview in late July. So yes. I don’t know when.”

“Can we tell our girls?” someone asks. Ilya hesitates, not wanting to have them keep this secret, which is silly. “We can wait,” the guy adds quickly, “don’t worry about it.”

The coach steps in and says, “Definitely do not tell anyone that Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander are in a committed relationship right now. I’ll make sure you all know when you can speak freely.”

Ilya grimaces and points at him, “Yes, that. Thank you Coach. Anyway, that is all. Have good summer.”

Everyone starts yelling at Ilya again, and then he gets tackled by twenty very happy guys and almost cracks his skull open on a floor tile. But he’s laughing the whole way down.

On July 17, a journalist with the New York Times contacts Shane Hollander through his attorney, with a story about a complaint he lodged against the Montreal Metros. The journalist has come into possession of the complaint and the attached exhibits, and is seeking Hollander’s comment about the case and the confidential information released to them. The attorney responds with a pre-prepared statement.

The next day, the journalist gets a hold of Noor, Ilya Rozanov’s agent, and asks the same question. They receive an identical statement from her on Rozanov’s behalf.

Rozanov and Hollander are in a committed, monogamous relationship. They take the rules and regulations of the NHL seriously and they are grateful for the opportunity to play together in Ottawa this upcoming season. They appreciate the support of the public but ask for privacy at the moment. They decline to comment on any ongoing investigation within the NHL.

On July 19, the New York Times runs an article about retaliatory business practices within the Montreal Metros, and across the NHL. The article focuses on the investigation, but it touches on Shane Hollander's experience, as well as former players who feel they were forced out of the NHL because of their sexuality, race, or mental health. The article reports that, in the course of the investigation into misconduct on the Metros, Shane Hollander has disclosed a two-year romantic relationship with former rival and future teammate Ilya Rozanov.

Shane and Ilya sit down with GQ on July 20. The GQ interviewer is a bit frustrated that she's been scooped by the New York Times, but the first face-to-face interview with Shane and Ilya as a couple makes up for a lot.

Shane and Ilya cannot stop flirting throughout the entire photoshoot. The interviewer, Carmen, is already there, and Ilya laughs very loudly as he recounts one of their first encounters, for a promotional commercial the summer before their rookie season. Much like this photoshoot, it was not very productive.

Shane shakes Ilya's shoulder and tells the journalist, like it's a secret, "He told me I looked pretty, and I thought he was making fun of me."

"My English was not so good then. Did not realize big strong hockey players could not be pretty," Ilya smiles.

"Right, 18-year-old bleeding heart Ilya Rozanov would never tease an 18-year-old with a stick up his ass."

"You admit the stick was up your ass!" Ilya crows, pointing a fake gourd at him. Shane responds by tackling him and giving the outfit designer a heart attack.

They reluctantly step apart with an apology to the crew. Carmen asks if she can use that in the article, and they seem surprised. "Yes, of course," Shane says.

"Is why we are here," Ilya adds.

They smarten up just enough to complete the photoshoot, trading chirps and innuendos so quickly it's hard for everyone else to follow.

After the photoshoot, they sit down to speak with Carmen in a more sedate environment. It's still a little bit of a riot to talk to them.

They tell her that it's terrifying to talk about this with a stranger, but they wanted to do it together. They tell her a little about what it means to be in a secret queer relationship in the NHL in general, and a little bit about what it means to be Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander in a secret queer relationship in the NHL in particular.

At one point, Carmen ventures, "You both made a point to tell the New York Times that the rules and regulations of the NHL are very important to you both. Could you explain what you

meant by that?"

Shane leans in a little, indicating he'll take that question. "First, obviously, because I was a free agent this summer and wanted a change of scenery." Ilya snorts and then covers his mouth when Shane glares at him. "I want to be very, very clear that Ilya did not broker my contract with the Centaurs in any way."

"Of course not, he is Shane fucking Hollander. Only idiots would not want him on their team," Ilya's grin is a little wild.

Shane smacks his arm and continues, "Anyway, the other reason is that, when my parents found out about our relationship, my mom asked me if I ever threw a game for Ilya. This was before he signed with the Centaurs."

Carmen says, "You know I have to ask. Did your relationship ever influence your performance in a game?"

Shane laughs and says very calmly, "No, it has never influenced our performance in a game."

Ilya hums and says, "Well..." and Shane whips around to stare at him, confused and offended. "Calm down, I have never been nice to you or Metros during match. Is fun to push each other to play harder. Beating Shane is best because we are best in NHL. Is like, finally, a challenge!"

"This is why everyone thinks you're an asshole," Shane says fondly. "But what he said, we get competitive."

"Yes, is like foreplay to us."

"Oh my god."

"What? We started as much because we both love hockey as because of convenience, yes?"

"I guess," Shane grumbles. "I definitely wasn't thinking about those things when we started, though." Carmen feels like she's lost control of the conversation, just a little, but she lets them wander.

"What were you thinking about, then?" Ilya teases.

"I'm pretty sure I was only thinking, 'Wow that guy's really, really hot,'" Shane says very flatly.

Ilya laughs very loudly and says, "Okay, true. Was 70% that, 15% convenience, 15% hockey. Sound right?"

Shane nods his assent and turns back to Carmen with a smile. Carmen finds her place in her notes, looks at Shane and Ilya holding hands, and asks, "What does coming out mean to you both, in an environment like the NHL?"

End Notes

I spent such a silly amount of time looking up (a) how penalties work in hockey, (b) the pathway to citizenship for professional athletes in Canada, and (c) basic geographic information about Canadian cities.

Also this is the longest fic I've ever written by a country mile, really hope someone gets a kick out of it!!

For the record, Sprite, as a product of the Coca-Cola Company, can rot in hell for their general obscene role in the destruction of access to free, potable water, the systematic undermining of sovereign governments, etc. The New York Times can also rot in hell given their insistence on manufacturing consent for Israel's war crimes and their insistence on both-sidesing truly ludicrous transphobia. I know I literally put them in this story myself, but that's because this story is set in 2019 and both these institutions are dead to me, so they add to the feeling that this is a period-piece <3

also no sequel (miiiight change my mind) but i wrote another hollanov fic [here](#) if you like my writing!

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