

we keep it secret (won't let them have it)

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by [poppypickle](#)

Summary

“We had a wedding this weekend, Miss Emma! With Uncle Shane,” Ruby Pike announces during Monday morning circle time. Miss Emma nods and tries to play it cool. It was exciting when the Pike twins mentioned Uncle Shane. Like he was just their dad’s totally normal BFF instead of the greatest hockey player Canada had seen in two decades. But she wasn’t going to fangirl in front of the kids.

“Well, it was a pretend wedding—” Ruby starts to clarify, but then Jade Pike interrupts her.

“Uncle Ilya said if you do the rings it’s a real wedding.”

Miss Emma’s eyebrows shoot up into her hairline. Uncle...Ilya? As in...

“Uncle Ilya said the rings and kiss made it real so we should tell Daddy to get him and Uncle Shane a very, VERY expensive gift,” Jade continues.

There’s that name again. Uncle Ilya. In the same breath as Uncle Shane. With the word kiss. That couldn’t be right...

Or: Five times someone unexpected keeps Shane and Ilya’s secret, and one time they don’t have to. Featuring the Pike twins, Zane Boodram’s pregnant wife, Ilya’s neighbors, and more.

Notes

This is a mix of show canon, Long Game canon, and real-life canon (because I just wanted to call it the NHL).

Title and lyrics are from "Once More to See You," by Mitski.

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

*In the rearview mirror, I saw the setting sun on your neck
And felt the taste of you bubble up inside me
But with everybody watching us, our every move, we do have reputations
We keep it secret
Won't let them have it*

1.

Julien doesn't know what the hell he's doing at this club, watching someone named Fabian flit between weird instruments. The guy's gauzy white outfit is completely sheer in the stage lights, and his bare chest is covered in a thin sheen of sweat and something else that makes him sparkle like a diamond in the shifting, strobing lights. Glitter, probably.

Well, okay, Julien *does* know what he's doing here.

He had finally worked up the nerve to come out to his sister two months ago. They were sitting on his couch in their usual seats, watching the Metros game like they always did. Sophie had been supportive, of course. She'd sensed that he needed to get this huge, life-altering thing off his chest but wasn't really ready to *talk* about it. So she'd merely clinked her beer gently against his and murmured, "Thanks for letting me know."

And Julien felt the tightness he'd been carrying around in his chest for *weeksmonthsyears* start to unclench. He'd let his biggest, scariest secret out into the world, and the world hadn't ended.

Well, the fucking Red Wings had won the game, but what were you gonna do? Shit happens.

But then Sophie had started sending him texts. There was Drag Queen Bingo at some brunch spot in Plateau-Mont-Royal, maybe they could go together sometime? Singles night at a gay bar in Old Montreal, wouldn't that be fun to try?

Julien didn't have the heart to tell his sister that he wasn't ready for that stuff yet—to be out beyond the confines of his ratty apartment couch. That even though he very much wanted to touch and suck and fuck another man's cock, that Drag Queen Bingo might be a little *too* gay for a guy who only drank Molsons and never missed a Metros game.

But she'd worn him down, eventually. It was just a concert, she'd said. Some up and coming artist she'd heard good things about. It was the off-season, anyway, no Metros game to watch tonight, *right?*

So, that's how he'd ended up here, standing in the middle of a very queer crowd, watching a very queer man living his best life up on the stage. It's not that the music is bad. It's actually pretty good—maybe even great. Pulsing and evocative, unique and haunting in a way that slithers inside Julien's chest and curls itself around the tender chambers of his heart.

It's just that he doesn't know how to *be* here. The whole theater is filled with people who look like they know who they are—bold and unburdened, so much further along in their journey that they're already reveling at the finish line while Julien is still tripping over the starting blocks. He looks down at his tattered Metros shirt. It's so faded you can barely even see the logo in the dim light of the club. It's old in the *old* way, not in the cool vintage way. There are tiny holes along the frayed edge where it meets the waistline of his fucking cargo shorts.

He doesn't belong here.

But he also doesn't belong in those grungy sports bars filled with guys who call every player they hate a *cocksucking faggot*.

So, maybe that's it. Maybe even after everything—after finally letting that tiny seed in the back of his mind take root, push its way through the darkness, and start to unfurl its petals in the light—maybe he still belongs nowhere.

Julien suddenly feels lightheaded, like he's going to be sick.

"I need—" he starts to say, trailing off as he holds up his beer toward Sophie, shaking it a little even though it's still full. "I—I'll be back."

He turns around abruptly, trying to weave his way through the throng of lithe, dancing bodies as quickly as he can. He's almost there, mentally halfway out the exit doors when something near the back corner of the venue catches his eye. His mind stumbles for a second, caught on the way a beam of light cuts across a familiar jaw. Julien slows down his steps. Shit, is that—

He sucks in a breath and turns quickly to press his back against a half-wall next to the exit. That's Shane Hollander. *The* Shane Hollander. Standing next to—holy shit. Ilya Rozanov? What in the fucking hockey royalty is this?

They're with a third man, someone even bigger and taller than the both of them. Julien can't quite place his face, but he assumes the man has to be another hockey player based on his sheer fucking hugeness. All three of the men have their gazes trained on the stage, so luckily they don't notice Julien staring at them with his mouth open like a goddamn idiot.

He knew Hollander and Rozanov were supposedly friends now. He'd sort of followed their whole joint charity thing, back when it was first announced. But like most of the other guys on the Metros subreddit, he'd figured it was a PR thing. Some kind of effort to mature their "brands" as they headed into the second decades of hockey careers that would inevitably land them both in the Hall of Fame. Julien had never really given a shit what anyone did off the ice, so why should it matter if the Metros' and Centaurs' captains were actually *not* mortal enemies—

A bolt of light suddenly cuts across the crowd once more, illuminating Hollander's hand as he slowly slides it onto Rozanov's back. The Russian tilts his body toward him almost imperceptibly, then turns his head to catch Hollander's eyes for a few moments before looking back at the stage with an enigmatic smile.

Julien goes completely still. He feels lightheaded again, but in a completely different way. He should—he should look away. This isn't any of his business. Whatever *this* is.

But Hollander's hand is still on Rozanov's back, his fingers making slow, even circles against the silky fabric of his shirt. And Rozanov is still stealing furtive glances at him every so often, like they're the only two people in the room.

Suddenly, Julien feels like an idiot. For worrying about his stupid cargo shorts. For feeling sorry for himself. For thinking belonging was a black and white sort of thing instead of something infinitely more complicated.

"Julien!" Sophie says suddenly, appearing at his side without warning. Her face is twisted with concern. And guilt. "Are you okay? We can go, if you want. I shouldn't have—"

Julien tears his gaze away from the corner of the club and looks down at his sister, then reaches one hand out to squeeze her shoulder. "No, we should stay. This—this is good." His lips tilt up into a shaky smile before he suddenly pulls Sophie in close, wrapping both arms around her in a crushing hug.

He holds on tightly to her for a few moments before whispering against her neck, "I'll be okay, I promise." His voice hitches on the words, but it's good. Letting himself feel it.

Sophie pulls back a little and smiles softly up at him, like she gets it. Then she reaches down to take his hand. As she starts to pull him away from the exit, Julien spares one final glance over at the darkened club corner.

Hollander's hand hasn't moved from its place on Rozanov's back.

It had meant a lot to Julien, getting to share his own truth on his own terms. Hollander and Rozanov deserved at least as much. So he tucks the moment away like an oath and follows his sister back out into the crowd.

2.

"We went to a wedding this weekend, Miss Emma!" Ruby Pike announces during morning circle time.

Emma grins at the little girl. It's her first year teaching and she loves Monday morning circle time. The kids are always so excited to share their weekend adventures in joyful, breathless, and, okay, occasionally mind-numbing detail. But they're so fu—stinking cute.

(At the start of the term, Emma had confessed to a veteran teacher that she was a little worried about accidentally swearing in front of the kids. She'd grown up with three older brothers who all played hockey and, well, the language at home had been colorful. She was pretty certain she was going to accidentally drop an F-bomb in front of a bunch of six and

seven year olds someday. But the older teacher had just advised her to practice thinking only in PG phrases at school so she wouldn't accidentally slip up. Emma is...still working on it.)

She's about to ask Ruby a follow-up question when Ruby's twin sister Jade Pike pipes up, "The wedding was in our living room!"

Emma frowns a little in confusion. "You had a wedding in your living room?"

"Yes," Jade nods, just as Ruby clarifies, "It was a *kind of* wedding."

"What's a *kind of* wedding?" little Benjamin Potter squeaks from the other side of the circle, wiping his runny nose against the back of his sweatshirt sleeve.

Emma grimaces reflexively. She does *not* want to catch another gosh darn cold. She's been sick five times already this year.

"It was a pretend wedding," Ruby starts to explain, but Jade interrupts her.

"It was *not* pretend—"

"Yes it was," Ruby protests with an exasperated sigh, like they've had this argument five times already today. "Mom said kids can't get people married for real. And Uncle Shane said you gotta have a driver's license to get people married."

Jade Pike rolls her eyes, looking equally as exasperated. "You need a marrying people license, not a driver's license."

This time Emma manages to keep her expression neutral. Yes, it was exciting to have the children of a professional hockey player in her class. Her oldest brother Hank had lost his forking shirt when she'd told him. And yes, okay, it was actually very, *very* exciting when Jade and Ruby mentioned Uncle Shane. Like he was just their dad's totally normal BFF instead of the greatest ducking hockey player Canada had seen in two decades. But she wasn't going to fangirl in front of the kids. She was a *professional*.

"If you do the rings, it's a real wedding," Jade is insisting now.

"Says who?" Ruby shoots back.

"Uncle Ilya."

Emma's eyebrows lift up into her hairline before she can even attempt to stop them.

"He did not say that."

"He did too!" Jade insists, folding her arms across her chest. "Uncle Ilya said the rings and kiss made it real so we should tell Daddy to get him and Uncle Shane a very, VERY expensive gift."

There's that name again. Uncle Ilya. In the same breath as Uncle Shane. With the word kiss. Holy cra...bapple. That couldn't be right—

But Emma doesn't have time to decode the Uncle Shane (as in definitely Hollander) and Uncle Ilya (as in maybe? probably? inexplicably? Rozanov) of it all right now because Ruby Pike is lifting herself up onto her knees and pointing across the circle at her sister with an accusatory finger.

"I'm gonna tell Mom you were talking about this after she told us not to!"

Jade gasps in betrayal and lifts up onto her own knees, "You started it!"

"I did NOT!" Ruby shouts.

"Girls, girls, girls," Emma interrupts, finally managing to emerge from whatever strange, hockey-gossip fugue state she'd been in for the last two minutes. "I—I think your turn for sharing is over."

She looks around the circle at the rest of the grade one kids, who seem like they couldn't care less about this maybe real, maybe pretend wedding and the definitely famous hockey players who might have gotten hitched. Emma decides it's best to take their lead.

"Does anyone else have anything they want to share from their weekend?"

Benjamin Potter raises his hand tentatively. Miss Emma can see the trail of snot still on his sleeve. She makes a mental note to ask the school nurse to take his temp to see if she can send him home early.

"Yes, Benjamin. What do you want to share with the class?"

"My little brother pooped on the floor yesterday and the dog ate it."

The entire class erupts in giggling squeals of "ewwwwww gross," and just like that, the Pike sister drama is forgotten. Emma nearly forgets it too, convincing herself she misunderstood or misheard whatever the girls were talking about. Seven year olds are full of tall tales and fuzzy facts. It's part of what she loves so much about teaching this age.

But later that night, she gets an email from Ruby and Jade's mom.

Hi Miss Emma,

The girls said share time might have gotten a little interesting today. They both have such active imaginations, don't they?

It's so nice they have a teacher they can trust. A teacher the whole family can trust. Maybe you'd like to join us at a Metros game sometime?

Best,

Jackie Pike

Emma blinks at the email for a few moments.

What. The. *Puck*.

No, she's off-duty. This deserves the real thing. She grabs a throw pillow off the couch and presses her face into it to scream *holy shit crap fuuuuuuck* a dozen times. Then she takes a few deep breaths in through her nose to compose herself before finally clicking the reply button.

There's no real decision to be made here. She's not going to break the Pike family's trust—or the trust other people have clearly put in their hands. Like she said, she's a professional.

But Emma is definitely going to accept that Metros ticket offer. And maybe ask if they can spare a few extras for her brothers.

3.

Cassie is so tired of being pregnant. She can't believe she still has ten more weeks to go—can't fathom that this baby has more growing to do and that she's somehow going to get even more huge. *Impossible*.

She's excited to be a mom. Excited to start building the little Boodram hockey team she and Zane talked about in giddy whispers under the covers, back when they were first falling in love. She still wants that more than anything, no question.

She just also wants to be able to see her feet again. And to not have to pee every thirty seconds.

It's the peeing thing that has her venturing away from the increasingly sloppy Centaurs team Halloween party downstairs. One of the rookies is throwing up in the powder room, and the other guest bathroom is occupied by the second string goalie Anders Daggson and his new girlfriend. Cassie's not even judging. She's been there, done that with Zane a few times over the years. Good for Anders.

She just really, *really* needs to pee and she doesn't think Rozanov will mind if she uses an upstairs bathroom. He's been so attentive to her all night. *Did she need to sit down? Could he mix her a special mocktail? How was she feeling and did they have a name picked out yet and wouldn't Ilya be just perfect if it was a boy?*

Cassie had honestly been a little worried when Rozanov had been traded to the Centaurs. The vibes on the team were so much better than any other team Zane had played with, aside from the whole losing most games thing. She wasn't sure a cocky, showboating Russian would fit in—wasn't sure she wanted some notorious womanizer hanging out with her husband on road trips.

But Rozanov had turned out to be nothing like she expected. He was kind, warm, and funny. Unfailingly considerate towards the WAGs and the team staff. A little cocky, sure. But aside from maybe Shane Hollander, no one in the NHL had more of a right to be cocky than Ilya Rozanov, so Cassie could allow it.

Zane also swore up and down that he'd never seen Rozanov with a woman, let alone the roster of hookups he'd always been rumored to have. Hazy and Zane had puzzled over it many times over beers while she and Lisa rolled their eyes at their gossiping husbands. The guys were convinced he had a secret girlfriend. Famous or married or in the CIA or something. Cassie wasn't so sure. She couldn't reconcile why a guy who was so *loud* would want to keep someone special to him so quiet. But she didn't know him all that well.

She finally makes it up the stairs—not waddling, exactly, but also not *not* waddling—and over to the first door she sees on the right, pushing it open gently. Ilya's bedroom, it looks like. The bedside lamps are both on, and on the table on the left there's a half-filled water cup, a pair of AirPods, a phone charger, a small tray laden with bracelets and two little plastic rings, and a framed photo of a beautiful blond woman sitting next to a little boy with a mop of wild curls. The nightstand on the right has a book and a second phone charger. Cassie stares at that for a second. You can't really ever have enough phone chargers these days, she supposes.

She suddenly feels a little strange invading Rozanov's personal space like this, so she hurries toward the door on the opposite side of the room, hoping it's the bathroom. Her guess turns out to be right and she wastes no time getting down to the business of doing what she came in here for. All finished and feeling infinitely more comfortable now, Cassie flushes the toilet and turns toward the sink to wash her hands. And there on the counter are two electric toothbrushes, one black and one white. Standing right next to each other. Cassie furrows her brow and stares again. Maybe you can't have enough toothbrushes these days either?

Now she *definitely* feels like she might be encroaching on Rozanov's privacy. She washes her hands quickly, but when she turns to dry them off there's no hand towel on the hook. In the mirror reflection Cassie can see a built-in cabinet behind her, so she turns around to see if there's a spare towel inside. When she opens the cabinet door, she does find a set of soft gray hand towels, neatly folded and stacked on top of each other. She also finds rows and rows of yellow post-it notes stuck onto the back of the cabinet door. Each featuring a scrawl of tidy handwriting.

Two weeks and then I'll see you in Montreal. Counting down the minutes. Love you. -S

Kicking Boston's ass tonight won't be as much fun without you there, but I'm still gonna do it. I love you. -S

Sad I can't watch the world juniors finals with you and my parents tonight. Do NOT give my mom shit if Canada loses. Love you. -S

Your hat trick was fucking hot last night. Almost as hot as mine last week. I love you. -S

Think they'll put us on the same All Star team again this year? I hope so. Love you. -S

Jackie and Hayden want to do dinner at their house after our game next week. Well, Jackie does. Be nice. Love you. -S

You're the best thing that ever happened to me. -S

Je t'aime. я тебя люблю. I love you, I love you, I love you. -S

Cassie blinks once, twice. Then she closes the cabinet door slowly, careful not to disturb the fluttering collection of mementos. She decides to forgo the hand towel and instead wipes her still damp hands against the front of her unicorn costume, then quickly flicks off the bathroom light. It's only when she's standing on the threshold of the bathroom that she pauses for a moment, her gaze sliding back to the bedside table on the right side. To the second charger and the book. She hadn't let her eyes linger too long before, but now that she's actually looking, she can see the title along the spine.

Against All Odds: The Untold Story of Canada's Unlikely Hockey Heroes

Cassie nods her head absentmindedly. She hadn't really needed any additional confirmation. Zane had played with Hayden Pike for one season on the Avs, before Pike had been traded to the Metros. She's met Jackie Pike a handful of times over the years, at various league charity events and awards. Jackie is good people. So is Hayden, Zane always says. Of course they'd be good people about this.

Cassie quickly pads out of the bedroom and closes the door softly behind her. She makes her way downstairs and out onto the back deck where most of the party guests are gathered. Zane, Rozanov, and Hazy are sitting next to each other on the outdoor couch, in the same spots she'd left them in a few minutes ago. But it's impossible not to see it, now that she knows. Rozanov is smiling, laughing, talking shit with the guys loud enough for the whole neighborhood to hear. But there's a certain melancholy in his eyes as he looks over at Lisa Hayes plopping herself down onto Wyatt's lap. Cassie watches Ilya fiddle with his phone, turning it face up then face down again on the couch cushion next to him, like he wants to do something with it but knows he can't. He presses his lips together and tilts his head back for a moment to look up at the stars, and Cassie feels a lump rise in her throat.

It must be torture, she thinks. Being a loud guy who has to keep something special to him so very, very quiet.

Zane turns his head then and spies her in the doorway. He grins brightly and stands up to stride across the deck toward her.

"I missed you guys," he says, planting a kiss on her forehead and a hand on her rounded belly.

"We missed you too," Cassie replies softly. The baby kicks against his hand once, twice. Cassie threads both of her hands into Zane's hair and pulls him in for a tender kiss. "I love you, I love you, I love you," she whispers against his lips.

She knows Zane would be good people about this too, if she told him. But it's not her place, so she won't.

"Let's have Rozanov over for dinner after the game against the Admirals next week," she says instead.

"Whatever you want, babe." Zane grins and leans down to kiss her again.

"You are talking about naming baby Ilya, aren't you?" Rozanov quips from the couch, interrupting the moment.

Cassie pretends to think about it for a second, then smirks. "You know, it's starting to grow on me..."

Zane huffs out a groan, but the brilliant grin that splits Rozanov's face is worth it.

4.

O'Malley's has been absolutely dead for the last two hours. Probably because it's -10 degrees outside. And because O'Malley's isn't exactly a hot spot, even when it's *not* cold enough outside to freeze your balls off.

Jack is dying to close early. It's only half past nine, but he'd probably save his asshole bar owner boss a few bucks on electricity and the measly hourly wage he pays if he locked up right now. Rudy would still be pissed, but Jack doesn't even care anymore. He needs to find a new job anyway. One where he makes enough tips to actually pay his goddamn rent.

Jack has already swept the floors, cleaned and prepped the glassware for opening tomorrow, and started his closing inventory for the night. It won't take him long because, well, he hasn't sold shit tonight. He's about to recount the cash in the till to balance the drawer before getting the hell out of there when the door suddenly swings open with a blast of frigid air and two large men step inside. One has longish dark hair that's swept back off his face, and the other has brown hair and one of those clean-cut, nice guy faces. Neither is wearing a hat.

"Are you still open?" one of them asks with a polite smile.

Jack hesitates.

"And do you get the NHL network?" the one with the longer hair adds.

Jack looks up at the TV he had *just* turned off. He thinks of the warm bed waiting for him in his apartment. The apartment he can barely afford because no one ever comes into this goddamn bar. He sighs and picks up the remote. "Yeah, we get it. What game are you looking for?"

"Ottawa vs. Tampa Bay."

Jack presses the power button. Then he has to press it again with another firm jab. Like everything else in O'Malley's, the TV has seen better days. "Give it a minute. Can I get you guys anything to drink?"

The clean-cut guy cranes his neck to survey the options, his cheeks apple red from the cold. "I'll have whatever light beer you've got on tap and he'll have ginger ale, if you've got it."

Jack groans internally. One of them isn't even going to drink? Goddammit. "We don't have ginger ale."

"Club soda with lime then," he amends. He swivels his head slowly around to take in the empty bar. "And I'll, ah, I'll have two beers, actually."

The men slide onto the barstools as Jack pours their drinks and sets them on the bartop, then grabs the remote again to flick through the channels.

"Thanks for coming with me," the long-haired one says as Jack turns his back. It's quiet and almost under his breath. "I—I didn't want to watch at the hotel bar."

"Of course, man." Jack hears the sound of their glasses clicking together. "Good goal today, by the way."

"Good assist today."

Jack's not *trying* to listen to their conversation. It's just that there's no one else in the bar and the channel guide on this TV is always stupid slow.

"I fucking hate playing the Raiders."

"Same."

Hockey players, Jack notes with mild interest, finally making it down to the sports channels. Who had the Raiders even played today? Oh that's right, Montreal. Well, that explained the lack of hats. *Canadians*.

"Did you hate playing them before?" one of them is asking now. Quiet again and a little awkward, like he's dancing around something. "I mean, I know I *thought* you did, but maybe..."

The other man pauses for a few moments, as if he's considering the question. "No, I didn't. Not really. It was... more complicated for me."

"Yeah, that makes sense."

Jack finally finds the game they're looking for and clicks on the listing so it fills the whole screen.

"Fuck, they're losing."

"They're always losing."

“Don’t be an asshole, Hayd.”

“I’m not being an asshole. I’m just—I mean, their record is... what it is.”

Jack steps down to the other end of the bar and slides his phone out from underneath the counter. He’s more of a Celtics and Sox guy than a Raiders fan, but he’s still a little curious. He opens a new browser tab and navigates to the Montreal Metros team page. Looks like... okay, clean cut guy’s name is Hayden Pike. And oh, Mr. Ginger Ale is Shane fucking Hollander. Well shit, maybe he should run down the street to the CVS and see if he can actually pick up a few cans. Could be worth a decent tip. But then the two men are talking again.

“It must be hard for him. Going from being a perpetual Cup contender to... this,” Pike is saying, like it pains him a little, for some reason.

Jack’s eyes flit up to the TV to watch the game for a moment. They’ve gotta be talking about Ilya Rozanov, right? Even the most casual Boston hockey fan heard about *that* trade. The local sports broadcasters obsessed about it endlessly for what felt like months.

Hollander sighs heavily and fiddles with his straw. He casts a sideways glance at Jack across the bar, and Jack pretends to be absorbed in his phone again. He’s not quite sure why the guy’s got such a wary, cautious look on his face. It’s just two hockey players shooting the shit about another player in the league. Jack’s not going to, like, call up ESPN about it.

Just then, a loud gasp from the game announcers comes through the TV speakers. A hard hit, it sounds like. Jack watches the screen for a moment and sees Rozanov down on the ice. Then he glances across the bar and sees Pike looking at Hollander with concern. Hollander, meanwhile, has gone deathly pale as he stares up at the TV.

“Shane, I’m sure he’s fine—”

“Is he moving? Can you see him moving?”

“I think—yeah, I think he’s moving his legs a little.”

“Medical needs to get out on the fucking ice—”

Hollander’s phone suddenly buzzes from its place atop the bar, and he picks it up immediately. “Mom, hi—yeah, I’m watching right now. You’re there, right? Can you tell what’s happening from where you’re sitting?”

He listens intently, his face screwed up in a mask of terrified concern. “Can you get any closer? Can you tell if he’s talking?”

Jack realizes with a start that his mouth has dropped open ever so slightly and that he’s staring, so he darts his eyes back up at the TV again. Rozanov is moving a little more and looks like he’s coming to, but just barely.

“No, I know, I’m seeing it too.” Hollander is still on the phone. He’s gotten up from his barstool and is sort of aimlessly stepping from side to side now. His free hand is pulling at his

hair nervously, but his eyes are still glued to the screen.

Rozanov is trying to stand up, it looks like, but his legs are wobbling unsteadily beneath him on the ice. Instead of soothing Hollander's obviously frayed nerves, that just seems to piss him off. "Sit the fuck back down, Ilya," he hisses through his teeth.

Pike reaches back to place a hand on his friend's arm, but Hollander is distracted by whatever is being said to him over the phone.

"I don't care, they should still take him to the hospital. Fuck, what if they don't bring his phone?" He sounds utterly tortured. "I don't—we thought about putting you and Dad as his emergency contacts, but I thought it was too risky—"

Jack has been very, *very* carefully trying to only look at his phone for the last thirty seconds, but his gaze snaps up involuntarily at that. Hollander is too lost in his own head to notice. Pike, however, is looking right back at Jack.

"Yeah, will you see what you can find out?" Hollander is still talking on the phone. "*Please*. And take him anything he needs tonight? I'm gonna..." The poor guy looks utterly lost as he watches Rozanov hobble off the ice with two of his Ottawa teammates holding him up. "Fuck," Hollander says then, his voice breaking on the word. "This... this fucking sucks," he whispers after a moment, and it's clear he's talking about so much more than one hard hit.

"Why don't you go back to the hotel?" Pike finally says in a low, soothing voice. He drags his eyes away from Jack's and reaches for Hollander's coat. "I'll settle up here and catch up with you."

Pike holds the coat open for Hollander, who steps into it without paying any attention. He's still got his phone pressed up against his ear and he's watching the TV like a hawk for any update. "Th—thanks," he says, hovering in limbo for a few seconds. But when Rozanov finally disappears from the arena through a tunnel, he's out the door in a flash.

Pike watches him leave, then slowly turns back around to look at Jack. The two men stare at each other for a few long, tense moments.

"The drinks are on the house," Jack finally ventures. Because what the fuck else is he supposed to say?

Pike nods his head uneasily a few times, looking like he's debating his next move. Then he heaves out a sigh and reaches to pull his wallet out of his back pocket. Without a word, he takes three crisp one hundred dollar bills out and sets them down gently on the bar.

"Maybe we were never here," Pike says then, flashing that same nice guy smile he'd had when he first walked in. But there's an obvious edge to it now. "Maybe you closed up early."

Jack wants to laugh, because yeah, that's all he's wanted to do for fucking *hours*. And now he's knee deep in some kind of heartbreaking hockey player drama that is absolutely none of his goddamn business.

But he manages to keep a straight face as he leans one hip against the bar. Then he offers Pike an exaggerated apologetic smile, like this is the first time they're talking, and says, "Thanks for stopping in, sir, but we're closing up early tonight. Try O'Shaughnessy's down the street."

That answer seems to satisfy Pike, who nods once before pulling his own coat on. "No worries, man. You have a good night."

Then he disappears out the door without another word. Jack releases a long, slow exhale, then slides the three hundred dollars off the counter and into his back pocket. He picks up the remote to click off the TV and turns around to survey the once again deserted bar. Now where was he with closing duties? Ah yeah, he was just about to balance the drawer.

5.

Kate is staring out the front window again. She's not a nosy neighbor. She's just a neighbor. Who is a little nosy.

It's not her fault, okay? Her husband Mark works long overnight shifts in the emergency department, so it's usually just her and the kids. Willa and Andrew are sweet, easy children most of the time, but they're still kids. They still need constant help and attention and snacks—dear god, parenting requires so, *so* many snacks.

So, Kate likes to steal some alone time, when she can. Which is usually early in the morning or late at night, when the kids are tucked away in their warm beds and the house is finally quiet. She dims the lights, makes herself a steaming cup of tea, and curls up in one of the cozy armchairs that faces the wide front window.

She'd been sitting there early one morning, sipping a cup of chamomile and enjoying the perfectly peaceful stillness before the inevitable chaos of the day, when she'd seen the moving vans first roll down the street toward the big mansion at the end of the cul-de-sac. Then came an auto carrier with two sports cars in the brightest shades of green and orange Kate had ever seen. Then a sleek black Mercedes SUV. Thank goodness, Kate thought. Those Ferraris wouldn't even make it to the end of the block during the winter.

She'd heard from a friend of a friend in real estate that Ilya Rozanov was moving in. It was all Andrew and Willa could talk about. Like most Canadian kids, they were obsessed with hockey and dreamed of playing professionally one day, even though both were kind of shit at it. That was fine, though. Let them dream.

Kate was a little excited too, honestly. Her life was good. Fine. *Normal*. But it might be nice to have an interesting story or two about the celebrity who lived next door. Something to titter about with the other moms at the school bus stop. Maybe he'd decide to renovate the mansion and add something ridiculous, like a huge fountain or a bowling alley, and she'd get to grumble about all the construction trucks. Maybe he'd throw loud, raucous parties filled

with hockey players and supermodels. Maybe he'd invite her to one and she'd have to say *no no, someone needs to stay here to make the after school Bagel Bites and buttered noodles for dinner. Thank you so much for the offer, though.*

But Ilya Rozanov had turned out to be pretty boring. *Normal*, actually. She watched him go to early morning practices from her seat by the front window and then come home later in the afternoons. He went for runs in the neighborhood during the fall and spring, when he wasn't on road game trips, and always stopped to make conversation with Andrew and Willa when they were playing in the front yard. He was nice. Friendly and polite. A very good neighbor, truth be told. There just wasn't much to titter about at the school bus stop.

That is, until Kate started to notice something curious during her front window sessions. A Land Rover with Quebec plates that showed up often and usually stayed for at least a night, sometimes two or three. It didn't come every time Ilya and the Centaurs were playing at home, though. It was more intermittent than that. Kate couldn't quite figure out the schedule. And she wasn't trying to, because she wasn't nosy! She was just... intrigued. She saw the car all the time, but she never saw the guest. Not on walks or runs, not grabbing the morning paper, not sitting next to Ilya in the front seat with the top down on one of those silly sports cars. No, the Land Rover and its owner come and go like ghosts in the darkness of the early morning or late night. Like they don't want to be seen.

A secret celebrity relationship would be exciting. Worth tittering about, maybe, if she actually had any details. Which she doesn't.

Until there's a soft knock on her door late one night. Kate furrows her brow, setting down her cup of tea and wrapping her robe more tightly around herself. It's 11 p.m. and Mark won't be home from the hospital until the morning, so she grabs one of the kids' hockey sticks that's sitting by the front door and lifts up onto her tiptoes to look through the front door peephole. And standing there on her front porch looking tired and worried is Ilya Rozanov. Kate puts the hockey stick down sheepishly and unlocks the door to open it.

"I am sorry to bother you," he immediately says, his voice hushed, like he doesn't want to wake the kids. "I saw light on and I... I have guest who is sick with flu, and I wondered if you have any... how you say, the medicine that is bright green and helps you sleep?"

Kate stares at him for a moment. "You mean NyQuil?"

"Yes, NyQuil," Ilya says with a snap of his fingers. "I don't have any and I don't want to leave my guest to go get some."

Kate had seen the Land Rover arrive earlier today, while she was watching Andrew and Willa practice penalty shots on each other in the driveway. "I—yeah. Yeah, I think we have some. Just... give me a second."

Ilya nods and waits on the porch while Kate hurries to the cabinet in the kitchen where they keep the medicines. She grabs the half-full bottle of NyQuil, along with a few packets of Tylenol. Then she reaches for the box of chamomile tea she'd left out on the counter earlier.

“Here you go,” she says, returning to the front door and handing the pile of items to Ilya. “This should hold you over until you can get more.”

He smiles gratefully at her. “Thank you so much. I appreciate it very much.”

“It’s no problem,” Kate says, but Ilya is already turning around to jog back over to his home, like he’s been away longer than he would have liked. “I hope your guest feels better soon!” she calls after him with a wave she hopes looks casually cool instead of awkward.

Then she closes the front door and pulls out her phone to text Mark a question about whether he can get a prescription for Tamiflu from the hospital before his shift ends. Kate smiles a little giddily to herself, thinking about what she’ll tell the other moms at the bus stop on Monday. She had aided Ilya Rozanov in his time of need. With... over-the-counter medicine. Okay, maybe she could massage the story a little to make it more exciting.

The next morning is a chaotic shit show, with 7 a.m. hockey practices for both Andrew and Willa. Kate is mid-yawn, only half-listening to the sports news radio program the kids insist on tuning into when something catches her ear.

“And in hockey news, Shane Hollander is out for the Metros versus Maple Leafs game tonight. Team sources say their star center is sick with the flu but should be back for the road game against the Panthers next week.”

Kate nearly misses the stop sign at the end of the block and has to stomp on her brakes at the last second. The kids both squawk in protest as their equipment slides around in the back seat, but Kate’s brain is too busy assembling the puzzle pieces to pay them much mind.

The Quebec plates. The intermittent visiting schedule. The guest who never shows their face. The *NyQuil*.

Holy shit. This was the most exciting, interesting, and utterly un-normal thing that had ever happened in Kate’s life. And she knew she absolutely could not titter about it with the other moms at the bus stop.

“Sorry, guys,” she finally says, shaking herself out of her thoughts to look back at Willa and Andrew in the rearview mirror with an apologetic smile. “I was just thinking about how we should get hot chocolate after practice before Daddy gets home. What do you say?”

The idea earns cheers, and Kate presses gently against the gas pedal to continue their drive to practice.

A week later, the kids are watching the NHL network when one of the sportscasters says, *“And some bad news now for Ottawa Centaurs fans hoping to eke out a win against the also struggling Sabres tonight: Captain Ilya Rozanov is out with the flu...”*

Kate shakes her head and grabs one of the reusable grocery bags out from under the sink. She drops the Tamiflu, another box of tea, and the new bottle of NyQuil she’d bought yesterday into it and calls into the living room:

“Andrew! Willa! Can you go run this stuff over to Mr. Rozanov’s house, please?”

+1.

ESPN @espn

Hockey legends Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov release joint statement after days of speculation: “We are in a committed, romantic relationship, and have been for several years.”

Carrie @puckhunny

Replying to @espn

Several years?! How the hell did we all miss this???

Sav @vroomvroomboxbox

Replying to @espn @puckhunny

I was one of Shane Hollander’s nurses when he got hurt in the 2017 Boston game. Rozanov visited him and it was pretty clear something was going on. But snitches get stitches so 🤔🤔

Mir @ohhhhcanadaaaa

Replying to @espn @puckhunny

I saw Hollander pick up Rozanov at the airport in Ottawa one time. Good for them. 💙

Heather @girlatthebar

Replying to @espn @puckhunny

I bartended for them in Tampa during the 2017 All Star game and they were very cozy. Several years gotta be an understatement.

eLIZabeth @aMUSEd

Replying to @espn @puckhunny

I worked with David Hollander until a few months ago and he talked about Rozanov’s games as much as he talked about his son’s. It was real cute.

Vero @twentylime

Replying to @espn @puckhunny

Ask me about when I did Rozanov’s loon tattoo while he watched Hollander’s play-offs games on TV like this 🥰. Or don’t ask me, because I keep my fucking mouth shut.

JoKay @onlyremember

Congrats to every rando who knew about Hollander and Rozanov and kept it to themselves. You’re the real MVPs. Not sure I could have done the same.

Julien @gaymetrosman

Replying to @onlyremember

It’s pretty easy when you remember that some secrets aren’t yours to tell. Wishing them all

the best. Go Metros! (And go Centaurs too, I guess. That part is gonna take a little more getting used to.)

End Notes

Baby's first Heated Rivalry fic! Like everyone else, I've become absolutely feral for Shane and Ilya, sorry not sorry. I adore outsider POV fics and there's so much to work with in this world. Kudos and comments are appreciated, as always!

Thanks so much to [heatherwentwest](#), [waterlanding](#) and [buckupbuttercup](#) for the beta.

I'm poppypickle on [tumblr](#) and [twitter](#). Come say hello!

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