

in defense of a moral victory

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in defense of a moral victory

by [A Different Type of Flower](#)

Summary

He walked back to the living room, where Jackie and Hayden were standing, having a whispered conversation, Shane's jacket folded over Jackie's arm. They stopped talking and turned to Shane as he entered.

"Hey, bud," said Hayden slowly, not moving.

"Uh, do you want me to leave?" asked Shane, gesturing to his jacket, panic rising in his throat.

"What? No. No. Absolutely not. We were afraid you'd try and sneak out of here, so I grabbed your coat and keys," explained Jackie.

"Oh," said Shane, letting out a shaky laugh as he ran his hand through his hair. "Good call. I can't say it didn't cross my mind."

or

Ilya has a new philosophy in how he picks fights, Shane doesn't understand the appeal of a moral victory, and Hayden is so fucking glad he married Jackie.

Notes

The show/books have me by the motherfuckin' throat.

Okay, so you really don't need to know anything about hockey for this fic, but for anyone interested in player performance points, a brief explanation is below:

Player performance points are a way to track individual players' impact on the ice, offensively. A player will get one point for every goal and assist they execute. For example, if a player scores 25 goals and executes 40 assists, they will have 65 points.

If you wanted to break down of points per season corresponding with the talent of a player:

100+ points: Elite player.

80-100 points: Star player.

60-80 points: Great player.

40-60 points: Good player.

20-40 points: Role player.

1-20 points: Fringe NHL player.

P.S. FUCK Carter Hart, one of the real world Dallas Kents of the league. I wish him nothing but the worst. (Remember kids, the real enemy here is the NHL. Hopefully, this infusion of new hockey fans can help change the culture.)

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

moral victory: *noun* :

1) the achievement of something that is important and good

2) a consolation prize where you gain honor, prove a point, or achieve a significant ethical or spiritual win, despite a practical or score-based defeat

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Ilya Rozanov was an instigator.

He, if pressed, could philosophize the strategic value of starting shit. It was a way to find limits, force others' hands, prompt them into becoming sloppy, unstable, and stupid.

But ultimately, it was just *fun*.

Chirping on and off the ice was a valuable way to find others' breaking points. Off the ice he could annoy Shane until he cursed him out or kissed him into oblivion. On the ice, it can chip away at a player's focus until they eventually make an error and/or drop their gloves and throw a punch. Either way, the baseline thrill is the same.

Ilya had no problem finishing a fight, but going after the face of a franchise was an easy way to have the Boston enforcer singled out for an ass kicking. Ilya could not deny that he loved the rush of pushing, pushing, and pushing until someone snapped, giving Ilya the chance to fight with a clear head and obvious advantage. He would also never deny that he loved pissing certain people off.

There was no real reason to start a fight with Vegas, even though Ilya hated the Las Vegas Scorpions. Despite liking Vegas as a city, the team itself was no fun to play, erring on the side of dirty and petty players with no real talent to speak of. The only real boon of this game was that they were playing in Boston, leading 2 to 0. Winning with a shutout was always fun, especially winning a shutout at home.

It was the last TV time out during the third period of Boston vs. Las Vegas, and Ilya wanted it over with. He was standing over by the boards when the Jumbotron above began showing highlights from the previous week. Last, and as loath as he was to admit it, impressively, was Scott Hunter shooting not only a fucking beautiful goal, but the goal that gave him his one thousandth point.

Ilya rolled his eyes while rolling out his shoulders. *Thousandth point for a thousand-year-old man. Good for him, I guess.*

“That cocksucker really pisses me off,” said a voice to his left. Ilya slowly turned to see Vegas forward Terry Murnane looking at him. “That fag’s such an embarrassment to the league.”

Ilya looked at him, a practiced laziness hiding his calculating assessment. Terry Murnane was a below-average center forward for Las Vegas, second line, third year in the league. His dark hair was stuck to his forehead with sweat underneath his helmet, and his dark eyes were looking at Ilya expectantly. It was not a leading question. It was not a subtle accusation. This fuck was looking to *bond* with Ilya, so sure that the Russian also fucking hated gays.

“You think so, huh?” he asks casually.

“Yeah, man, obviously.”

Ilya nodded and shrugged his shoulders. “Okay.”

The TV timeout came to an end, and wouldn’t you know it, Murnane and he are standing across from each other getting ready for the face off. The puck is dropped, and Ilya whacked

Munane's stick out of his hand, throwing his gloves to the ground, dropping his own stick. The man looks confused, but instinctively drops his gloves too.

The crowd roared; they fucking *loved* him. They loved it when he fought, but he rarely started a fight, and even more rarely threw his gloves first. Ilya loved to push an opponent to the edge of anger, making them sloppier. It was more fun when they went down. He didn't anticipate having this problem with Murnane, who was looking more bewildered than pissed off.

Maybe he couldn't fight every homophobe in the league, but he could amend his fighting policy to allow the homophobes who were stupid enough to involve Ilya in their vitriol.

Ilya raised his fists, looking for Murnane's easiest weaknesses and openings, grinning. He knew this would be fun too.

Ilya beat the shit out of the guy. It was embarrassingly easy. Well, not embarrassing for Ilya. Murnane was shorter than him but had twenty pounds on Ilya. It didn't make a difference. Ilya got the standard five for fighting, plus an additional two-minute instigator penalty. LeClaire wasn't thrilled, and Ilya spent the rest of the game in the box, but Boston maintained its lead, and a fight won was good for crowd morale.

The only thing he felt a little bad about was that all of the press questions would be about the fight, and not about their new guy from Dallas scoring his first goal with Boston.

“Rozy!” said one of the reporters as soon as Ilya stepped out of the locker room. “What did Terry Murnane say that had you dropping your gloves?”

“Ugh,” said Ilya, waving his hand like he was batting away a fly. “Murnane lazy hockey player and bad ally.”

“Bad ally?”

“Yes. Does not speak like ally.”

“Ilya,” said another reporter. “What does that have to do with your fight tonight? Can you explain?”

“Da. Scott Hunter show league a lot: about bravery, about conviction, but also about being ally. I am best player in league, so I must show I best ally too, yes? But action is bigger than word. Murnane is bad and lazy at hockey, and also is bad ally, speaking with hate speech. I show what happen to both. Also, Scott Hunter is very old. Is good to respect elders, yes?”

A few reporters laughed uncomfortably, some looking confused, while others pressed on.

“Do you think it's a valid criticism that alternative lifestyles distract from the sport? That Hunter wasn't even on the ice and is affecting game play?”

“Alternative lifestyle? Questions like that create a bad argument. Everyone goes home to their family, should not matter what family looks like. What is important in hockey is *hockey*. I have Stanley Cup. Hunter has Stanley Cup. Murnane? No cup. I don't even know his points, is so low. Everyone should concentrate on that. Hunter scored thousandth point and Murnane is acting like little piss baby. But I guess when you're bad at your job, you talk stupidity. I wouldn't know. I am good at everything.”

“Roz, what about -”

“Also I would like to congratulate new teammate, Hector Diaz, for scoring his first goal with Boston! Set the momentum for Boston to win two-nil. And Bazzzy for having a shutout. Very good game for Boston, yes?” Ilya said, smiling winningly at the camera.

Jane [9:42 PM]: holy shit

Jane [9:42 PM]: hot

Jane [9:43 PM]: but what the fuck did Murnane do?

Ilya [10:55 PM]: aw, you jealous?

Jane [10:56 PM]: of what?

Ilya [10:57 PM]: my attention. don't worry i still think you the prettiest girl at the party

Jane [10:58 PM]: shut the fuck up

Ilya [10:58 PM]: make me 🥰

Yuna Hollander [9:42]: Honey, I'm in the process of landing you a Versace campaign. Please do not unnecessarily mess up your face.

Yuna Hollander [10:27 PM]: Just saw your post-game interview. Good job, that prick had it coming. Proud of you ♥

Ilya [11:02 PM]: thank you Yuna 😊

Scott Hunter [10:35 PM]: You fighting for my honor, Rozanov?

Ilya [11:28 PM]: in russia we respect our elders. think of it as a retirement present

Scott Hunter [11:37 PM]: Fuck you dude

Scott Hunter [11:37 PM]: I'm not fucking retiring

Ilya [11:44 PM]: go to sleep grandfather before I tell your nursing home man you up past your bedtime.

"I just don't think it should be counted as an underdog movie," said Shane, as he began dressing in the locker room after the Metros' open practice. Shane didn't love the extra scrutiny open practices provided. Sometime during the last twenty minutes of practice and during all of the time spent in the locker room after practice, Hayden began listing all his favorite underdog movies and why.

"Bro," said Hayden, toweling his hair. "Rocky is, like, the *epitome* of an underdog movie."

“An underdog movie is when the person who is supposed to lose, against all odds, wins. Rocky loses in the first movie.”

“It’s a moral victory!”

“A moral victory is still a loss.”

“He’s up till the end! He proves to himself he can do it! It’s about determination and perseverance!”

“I don’t disagree,” laughed Shane, amused by Hayden’s passionate defense. “But you can’t say he won, in the end. Which means it’s not an underdog movie. At least, not the first movie.”

“God, man. It’s not just about winning. It’s about *heart*. It’s about that type of *winning*, you know?”

“Not really,” said Shane.

“Hollandar! Press wants five minutes.”

“Duty calls,” says Shane. He doesn’t sigh, but it's a close thing.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll wait for you. Get going, Cap,” says Hayden, waving him off.

Shane had hoped the scrum would ask about the practice they just witnessed. He had already been rehearsing in his head his comments about Adler’s lower body injury and how he was pleased with how Butler, Adler’s substitute from their farm team, was playing with the rest of the team.

But, of course, they didn't ask him about *Metro* hockey.

"Hollander! What do you think about the Rozanov/Murnane fight earlier this week, and about Rozanov's comments after?"

Shane was so media trained by now that it took almost no effort to hold in his sigh.

"I mean, I hate to say it, but Rozanov was in the right there. As he proved, it doesn't take a genius to know the difference between hate speech and chirping."

"What would you say to players and fans alike who say that woke culture makes it hard to know where the line is?"

"Uh, well, it really shouldn't be this hard to figure out?" said Shane. He paused, hoping someone would ask another question. This time he did let out a small sigh. "If someone is really struggling, then a good litmus test is, if you spray-painted it on a wall, would you get charged with vandalism or a hate crime? Most of us are just trying to play hockey and win the cup, not do whatever Murnane did."

Shane paused again and looked around the scrum of reporters, thinking about Illya, and figured if he could go looking for a righteous fight, the least Shane could do was support via his response.

"Listen, just because slurs on the ice are nothing new, doesn't mean they should be acceptable. But I think the league would be a better place if more players responded like Rozanov. Hopefully, we'll get there one day."

"Has anyone ever used a slur at you based on your cultural background?" asks one reporter. The room went silent.

Shane wanted to hit him.

Shane wanted to say *‘when I was eleven someone’s dad called me a chink when I was put on the first line and his kid made the B team. So yeah, I’ve been called all types of slurs, you stupid motherfucker.’*

Shane loved hockey. For a long time, hockey was the easiest way to quiet his brain, that the sound of skates on ice focused him in a way that hours of meditation only come close to. That he’s thoughtless fucking good, and that by sacrificing and hard work has made him one of the best, if not the best hockey player the league has ever had.

But loving a sport that was not built to love him back on multiple fronts could be exhausting. He pushed his body to its limit with how hard he trained, how much he restricted his diet and habits, took great effort to mask his body language not to react to microaggressions, slurs, and just generalized homophobia.

What a stupid fucking question.

He wanted to say all of that, but today, in this moment, his years of media training and anxiety won out over his righteous indignation and rage.

“What, you guys didn’t know I was Japanese?” Shane jokes, trying to lighten the mood.

Because, even though being Japanese (and being gay) is not something he wants to tuck away, guarding fervently, he does because he knows that half of being a modern-day professional athlete is narrative.

Before he came out, Scott Hunter was an orphan who built his new family among the ranks of hockey players and support staff, determined to give back to the community that raised him, paying it forward through fundraisers and talent. Ilya Rozanov, arrogant working-class Russian kid who the hockey gods kissed, clawed his way into first draft pick, and won’t let anyone forget it because he can put his money where his mouth is. Shane was Canada’s golden boy, full of disciplined passion, talent, and unerringly dedicated, leading his team to multiple cups before the age of twenty-six.

Countless other players who had similar elevator pitches of their personality that the media cycle through, to keep engagement up, building up players to either be every man's or gods, or sometimes both.

"Thanks, everyone, for coming. Hope you enjoyed practice, enjoy the rest of your day," Shane says, flashing his media smile and a wave, walking to the players' tunnel. Hayden was leaning against the wall, fiddling with his phone. He wordlessly matched Shane's stride as they made their way to the garage.

"Damn," Hayden said, letting out a long whistle. "Good for you, man."

"Thanks."

"You good, bro? I know you don't like talking about that type of stuff."

Shane shrugged. Hayden threw his arm around Shane's shoulders and gave him a shake.

"You still coming to dinner?"

"Yeah, man," Shane said, laughing a little.

The controlled chaos of Jackie and Hayden's home definitely helped keep Shane from having time to spiral. Dinner was fought on multiple fronts, Shane mostly sitting with Arthur on his lap, looking at books about outer space, while Jackie and Hayden herded the twins. Amber, only seven months, was extremely fast in her walker and had a giggle that could be heard throughout the house. Ruby and Emma delighted in making her cackle, and constantly tried to out do each other in doing so. Suffice to say, the Pike household was loud and bright, sometimes bordering on overstimulating. Still, somehow, Shane loved dinner at the Pikes.

After dinner, Hayden, Jackie, and Shane sat in the living room while the twins watched a movie upstairs, and Arther and Amber were asleep.

“I saw your post-practice interview today,” said Jackie, swirling her glass of red wine as she lounged next to Hayden. She raised her glass to him. “Well said, Shane.”

“Agreed,” said Hayden. “Even if you said some positive things about Rozanov.”

“I think the reporters were looking for me to disagree with him or take a shot at him,” said Shane, tapping his ginger ale can with his finger. “But I agreed with what he said.”

“I mean, yeah, obviously,” said Hayden. “And I guess it's nice to know he's just a fuckin' dick and not a fuckin homophobe.”

“Low bar,” commented Jackie.

“But still, that guy sucks. I wonder what Murnane said about Hunter that got him beat to shit.”

“I'm sure we can imagine,” said Shane, doing his best to keep the bitterness out of his voice. When he asked, Ilya danced around the subject, and honestly, Shane didn't push too hard. He's sure it was vile and stupid, and whenever they came out, he was sure they would hear it then. *Which will be years from now*, Shane thought, swallowing over the lump in his throat. At least they had a plan, a path forward.

“So, Shane,” said Jackie, pulling him from his sour thoughts. “I know Hayden has mentioned this, but I have this friend, *beautiful girl*, she played volleyball in college with me. She just moved to Montreal for work, and I think you and her -”

“I'm gay.”

The silence that rang in the living room was deafening. Shane felt his eyes widen. He did not mean to say that. He absolutely, one thousand percent, *did not mean to say that*. Somehow, his mortification was worse than when he let slip that he wished Ilya was with him when they were on the phone after Ilya's father passed. Plus, added an added terror that had always encompassed the notion of coming out to others. *What the fuck, what the fuck, what the fuck is wrong with me??*

Jackie was frozen, still leaning into Hayden, whose jaw was dropped.

Shane put down his ginger ale with a little too much force.

"Shane -"

"I need to use the washroom," he said single-mindedly. He felt lightheaded and lead-footed as he stumbled off to the washroom, closing the door quickly and locking it. Before he knew what he was doing, he was sitting on the closed toilet, head between his knees, phone held to his ear as it rang.

"Hi Hollander," said Ilya. "Driving home from dinner?"

"I fucked up, I fucked up," said Shane in a rush, breath ragged and hurried.

"Shane? What - what happened? Where are you?"

"Jackie was just talking about setting me up with a friend, and instead of brushing it off like I usually do, I just told them *I'm gay*," hissed Shane.

"Pike and his wife?"

"Yes! Now I'm hiding in their washroom."

“Shane, I need you to take a few breaths with me.”

“I’m so fucked, Ilya.”

“Sweetheart, please, with me, breathe in. One, two, three, four. Hold it: One, two, three, four. And let it out slowly: one, two, three, four. Again -”

Shane breathed with Ilya, matching his deep breaths three more times. He wiped his eyes after the third time, realizing that he had been crying,

“Feel a little better?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you,” Ilya paused, looking for the words. “Do you think Pike is homophobic?”

“He wouldn’t be one of my best friends if he were,” admitted Shane.

“What about his wife?”

“No, definitely not.”

“So, maybe it’s okay you told them?”

“I blurted it out and *ran*,” admitted Shane. “Didn’t wait for them to say anything.”

“Oh, kapustochka,” said Ilya, fondly.

“Uh...is that cabbage?” asked Shane, feeling his heart begin to slow down. His Russian was still very rudimentary, and Ilya had gotten into the habit of throwing random words into their conversation to help Shane practice.

“Is like little cabbage, baby cabbage, *cute* cabbage,” teased Ilya.

“Fuckin’ stop,” snorted Shane, sitting up.

“Is because you're so small,” Ilya said smugly.

“Oh, fuck off, I’m fucking *not*.”

“So *tiny*. I can throw you around with one arm behind my back.”

“That's only because you’re, like, stupid big,” complained Shane.

“Oh, *Mr. Hollander*, are you flirting with me?”

“Jesus Christ.”

“No, Shane, it’s Ilya.”

“Shut the fuck up,” said Shane, laughing.

Ilya laughed too, and Shane could imagine his pleased smile perfectly, the one that was a little smug and triumphant, as if getting Shane to laugh or getting under his skin was his number one goal.

“I think it will be nice for you,” said Ilya quietly. “To have someone to talk to. Other than Rose and your parents.”

“Maybe,” said Shane, just as quietly.

“You trust Pike, yes?” said Ilya.

“Yeah.”

“Then maybe you tell him about me, too.”

“I - Ilya, that’s not fair to you,” said Shane.

“Why not? I say so, so is fine.” They were both quiet for a moment. “If it’s too much at once, you don’t need to,” said Ilya. “But if you want to, is okay.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I promise.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

“I saw your post practice interview,” Illya said.

“Yeah?”

“Sorry if I -”

“Shut the fuck up,” said Shane. “You did the right thing. Don’t let their shitty journalism make you feel bad. I am fine. I wanted to fucking smack the guy for such a stupid question, but I pulled it together.”

“You could have,” said Illya. “He would have deserved it.”

“That’s what they want, for me to like, freak out. It’d be more interesting than my answers were about, I don’t know, fucking *hockey*.”

“Maybe that is why you came out to Pike and his wife. You couldn’t respond how you wanted to in presser, so you did with them.”

“I don’t know,” sighed Shane. Illya’s explanation had merit, but Shane had no space to give it any real thought at the moment. “Least of my fucking worries right now, to be honest.”

There was a long pause, during which the two just sat in silence together, despite being far apart.

“I miss you,” said Ilya softly.

“I miss you, too.”

“Shane?”

“Yeah?”

“You should leave the washroom. They might think you have heart attack and die. Like Elvis.”

“Jesus Christ. Okay. Yes. I should.”

“Call me on your way home?” asked Ilya.

“I will. Thank you. I love you.”

“I love you, too. Bye.”

Shane hung up, quickly splashing cold water on his face, trying to hide the fact that he had been crying. Taking one last deep breath, he opened the door and left the washroom. He walked back to the living room, where Jackie and Hayden were standing, having a whispered conversation, Shane’s jacket folded over Jackie’s arm. They stopped talking and turned to Shane as he entered.

“Hey, bud,” said Hayden slowly, not moving.

“Uh, do you want me to leave?” asked Shane, gesturing to his jacket, panic rising in his throat.

“What? No. *No*. Absolutely not. We were afraid you’d try and sneak out of here, so I grabbed your coat and keys,” explained Jackie.

“Oh,” said Shane, letting out a shaky laugh as he ran his hand through his hair. “Good call. I can’t say it didn’t cross my mind.”

Suddenly, Hayden was in front of Shane, hugging him tightly. “I love you, man. You know that, right? Like, it totally doesn’t matter to me if you are gay. I mean, like, *it matters*, because I want you to be happy, but it doesn’t change how I feel about you. You get me?”

Shane was still for a moment before hugging Hayden back. He met Jackie’s eyes over Hayden’s shoulder, and she smiled at him.

“Yeah, man. I love you, too.”

They patted each other on the back a few times and broke apart, smiling.

“I’m sorry,” said Jackie, laying his coat on a chair and walking over to Shane, giving him a big hug. “If I have been making you uncomfortable, pushing all these women at you.”

“It’s fine, Jackie. I know it’s because you care.”

She pulled away from him, cupping both his cheeks. “Yeah. And because I think you’re so special, Shane. I want you to be happy. I’m sorry if I was stressing you out.” She kissed his cheek in apology.

“Nothing to forgive,” Shane insisted, touched.

He sat back down in his chair as Jackie and Hayden sat on the couch.

“So,” said Hayden. “How long...”

“Have I been gay?” asked Shane, torn between exasperation and amusement.

“*Hayden*,” said Jackie, not amused at all.

“No! Not like...I just mean - look, dude. I know you’re a private guy. But like, I want you to share anything you feel comfortable with. You can trust us. I just...I don’t want you to feel like you need to hide anything, you know?”

“Hayd, I do trust you,” said Shane. “It wasn’t about that. I just had to figure it out for myself, you know? All I ever wanted to do was to play hockey. And hockey had enough hang-ups about me not being white. I didn’t know how to play and...” Shane trailed off. “For a really long time. It just felt impossible.”

“And now?”

“I’m not ready to, like, come out or anything. But now I have a plan, and having a few people know, it’s okay for the time being. Not great, but enough for now.”

“Of course you have a plan,” Hayden said fondly.

“Who knows?” asked Jackie.

“My parents, uh, Rose. Landry.”

“*Rose Landry?*”

“Yeah, she kind of, um, figured it out herself?”

“Oh. *Oh*. Yikes.”

“She was so nice about it, too. We really are good friends now.”

“Wait, what about Lily? Boston Lily?” asked Hayden.

“Well, *his* name isn’t actually Lily,” admitted Shane.

“Shut the fuck up! Dude, you’ve been texting her - uh, I mean him, *forever*.”

“Yeah, we - uh, were just hooking up for a while, before we decided to - you know - actually be together.”

“So, he’s your boyfriend?” asked Jackie.

“Yeah,” confirmed Shane, a smile widening on his face. “He’s my boyfriend.” He loved to be able to say it. Out loud. To someone other than Ilya and his parents. *Boyfriend*.

“*Shaaaaaaaane!* That’s so great! Is he a part of this plan, too?”

“Yeah, we came up with it together. He’s not out either.”

“Oh. *Oh shit*. Is he a player too?” asked Hayden.

Shane nodded.

“Oh my fucking god. Oh, oh wow. Damn. *Fuck*. Were you on the phone with him in the bathroom?”

Shane nodded again.

Jackie was looking at him pensively. “Lily, huh?” she asked. “From Boston. A hockey player.”

Shane nodded a third time, eyes bouncing between Jackie and Hayden. Shane could almost see the wheels in Jackie’s head turning.

“I told Jackie about how you were always texting this girl - well, guy, but I didn’t know that at the time - and how happy you looked when you were texting, and how you had been going off to meet them for like *years* and-”

“Is he Ilya Rozanov?” asked Jackie.

Shane felt his eyes widen in shock. Hayden laughed. “*Fucking imagine*. That would be...” he trailed off, seeing Shane’s wide eyes, lips pressed together. ”Shane?”

“Yeah?”

“*Is* he Ilya Rozanov?”

“Yeah. Yeah, he is.”

“Shane.”

“Yeah?”

“Are you fucking serious?”

“Yes.”

Hayden stood up, then sat down, then stood up again, paced twice in front of the couch, and then put his hands on his knees like he had just finished a sprint. “Shane, buddy, this is not good.”

“It is not ideal.”

“*Rozanov?!?*”

“He is *hot*,” said Jackie, raising her wine glass to Shane, then taking a sip. Shane blushed.

“Jackie! You are not helping!

“What’s there to help? You just said how happy he was just *texting* the guy for the last few years. I’m sure things are even better now that you’re not just hooking up?”

“Yeah,” said Shane. “A lot better.”

“How long have you been doing *things* with Rozanov?!?”

“*Things?* What are you? Twelve?” said Jackie, exasperated. She smacked him in the chest. “Grow up.”

“Uh, we got together properly this past summer, but we have been...uh, *seeing* each other since before our Rookie year.”

“Bet you saw a lot,” said Jackie slyly.

“Fucking *rookies*?? Like, when you were *teenagers*? That’s like *eight years*!?!”

“Hayden,” said Shane, quiet but firm. “We love each other, despite us both trying not to, it happened anyway. I love him.”

Hayden looked at Shane for a long moment, hands still on his knees. He turned to Jackie, grabbed her full glass of wine, and chugged it.

“So I guess I need to meet him properly then, huh?” he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Oh! Maybe we can all have dinner or something. You guys probably don’t go out to eat, but we can cook.”

“Yeah,” said Shane, smiling at Jackie. “That would be really nice.”

“And you said you and he have a plan?”

“Yes, Ilya’s a free agent at the end of this season, so he’s going to make inquiries about going to a east coast team. Ideally, Ottawa.

“*Ottawa*? They fucking suck.”

“They’re looking for a center forward, and they are looking to rebuild the team. Plus, it’s only two hours away from Montreal.”

“He’s going to leave Boston to go play in Ottawa? A team that hasn’t even made the playoffs in I don’t know how many years.”

“That’s *romantic*.”

“He must love you if he’s willing to go to *fucking* Ottawa.”

“Shush,” said Jackie.

“Plus, Ottawa gives him the chance to start putting down roots for Canadian citizenship, since Russians like him aren’t safe in Russia.”

“Oh, fuck, I didn’t even think of that,” said Hayden,

“Yeah,” sighed Shane. “He doesn’t even want to go back at this point, but to not be able to is just fucked. For better or worse, it’s his home.”

“Christ,” said Jackie.

“So, Rozanov moves to Ottawa, and...”

“We figured the league pitting us against each other would die out a bit, you know, as younger, new players filter in. It’s only a two-hour drive from Montreal, and that’d be year-round. We thought that he and I plan to start a charity together. You know, to prove we don’t hate each other, make sense that we are seen together. And then one day, we retire and come out, I guess? I don’t know. Definitely be together, get married hopefully, you know, the whole thing. Maybe even,” Shane paused, the urge to edit himself rising up, but he was just so relieved and happy that he pushed through. “You know, kids.”

“Holy shit,” said Hayden. “*Kids*.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be a Shane Hollander Approved Plan if it wasn’t thorough,” said Jackie. “Babe, can you get me more wine? Since you just drank all mine?”

“Yeah, of course,” said Hayden, grabbing her wine glass and going back to the kitchen. “Shane, do you want another ginger ale?”

“I’m good.”

Jackie leaned forward, grinning. “*Kids*, huh?” she asked in a joyful hushed tone.

Shane grinned back, unabashed, cheeks heating. “Yeah.”

“I didn’t know you wanted kids.”

“It always felt impossible, but yeah. I do. And so does he. He’s so good with them, which if you know him I guess shouldn’t be surprising, but I was at first. Obviously, it will be harder, and we haven’t exactly talked about details, but I can see it. Him and me. He’s just...” Shane trailed off, putting a hand over his mouth, shugging, a laugh bubbling out from his lips.

Jackie moved from her seat and hugged Shane again, her eyes wet and smile wide. “He makes you happy,” she said. It wasn’t a question.

Shane nodded. “Like, really happy,” he said into her hair. Jackie gave him an extra squeeze. When they broke apart Shane’s eyes drifted to where Hayden was rattling around in the kitchen. His anxiety began to rise again.

“He’s more thrown by the Rozanov of it all, not you being gay,” supplied Jackie, as she sat back down on the couch. “He’ll get there, don’t worry.”

Shane looked at her, surprise on his face. “How did you know -?”

“Cause she’s *Jackie*, man,” said Hayden, handing Jackie her wine and flopping back on the couch. “She’s smarter than both of us combined and then some.”

Jackie smiled winningly at Shane, and he laughed.

“Tell us how you told Yuna and David,” Jackie said.

“Yeah, what did your mom think of Rozanov?” asked Hayden.

Shane groaned and recounted how his dad had walked in on him and Ilya and fled, leading Shane and Ilya to drive to his parents' house, explain the situation, and properly introduce them all. How it was mortifying and anxiety-inducing and exhilarating all at once. How Ilya said they were *lovers*, making Shane want to melt into the floor for *many* different reasons. How he and Ilya had had dinner with them, and after the initial shock, his parents seemed to really like him.

“My mom is determined to get him brand deals based in more North American and European markets. She thinks it will help his case when he applies for citizenship, as well as build a monetary safety net. Something about creating a vested interest? I don’t know, she’s being very *my mom* about it. I’m pretty sure she’s actually phasing out his manager without telling either of us.”

“So Yuna is in,” said Hayden.

“Yeah,” said Shane. “Ilya seems fine with it, and I’m not sure I could stop her, even if I wanted to. Also, she hates the energy drinks he sponsors. She thinks he is not getting paid enough for how tacky the ads are.”

“Your mom’s love language is acts of service, for sure,” agreed Jackie.

“Yeah,” smiled Shane. “And I think my dad is just happy he finally has an ally for when my mom and my neuroses get the better of us.”

By the end of the night, Jackie serenely gave back Shane's jacket and car keys. She and Hayden walked Shane to their door, both hugging him goodbye. They stood in the doorway as Shane got into his car, waving at him as he backed out of their driveway and turned down the street. He tapped the steering wheel with his thumbs and thought he might have to give Rocky another watch.

Shane had never been satisfied with a moral victory. He didn't get the point. The only way to win was to *win*. And sometimes even a win felt like a loss when he wasn't playing at his own standard.

But when he thought about what his life looked like this time last year. He and Ilya were so desperately in love and at a loss. The last time they had seen each other was at that stupid club. Ilya still thought he was with Rose, and Shane had run out of the club like his ass was on fire just to pull his car over and sob. They didn't speak for months, but dreading and aching to see each other.

A year later, they were in a committed relationship and spoke almost every day if not multiple times a day. His parents knew and loved Ilya. Hayden knew and loved Shane enough to be willing to re-meet Ilya. Shane was the happiest he had ever been.

But as he pressed Ilya's contact, phone ringing on his car Bluetooth, he could understand the appeal of a moral victory.

They weren't out. They couldn't be openly together for fear of their careers and Ilya's reception in Russia if he ever wanted to return. They played on different teams with wildly different schedules. It was hard.

But, even if it was slow, they were going in the right direction. Things in the league were changing. He and Ilya had a plan. They loved each other. They had their summers together. They were starting a charity together. He knew that this feeling would get old. That neither of them would be satisfied with this long-term, but right now, it felt *good*. It felt like a win.

And for now, that was good enough.

CODA:

As Shane's car took off down the street, Jackie hip checked Hayden and smiled at him. "That was very *Dad*, back there."

"What?"

"Your 'I need to meet him properly', bit" she said, bumping him again.

"I don't know!" Hayden groaned as he pulled her in for a hug.

"I'm not complaining! I am very proud that you were able to pull yourself together in the end and were able not to be a total maniac."

"Thank *fuck* for you," he sighed into her hair.

"I gotta say, I did not see our night going this way," she mused.

"You're telling me! We've hated the dude for years. Well, I thought *we* did. It's like, Shane is such a bad liar that he misdirected the lie and made himself a good liar. Like I thought the lie was when he said 'Boston Lily' was just a friend, but it turns out, not only was Boston Lily not just a friend, but she was Boston Rozanov! Is that what a double bluff is? Or a magician's trick?"

"Okay, Pepe Silvia," she said, pulling him towards the stairs, so they could see if the twins had fallen asleep during their movie. "Just don't pull out the shotgun when they come over for that dinner. It will be good practice for when our actual kids bring someone home."

“Jesus Christ, Jackie, are you *trying* to kill me?”

End Notes

Thank you for reading!

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