

malicious compliance

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by [heydoeydoey](#)

Summary

It's supposed to be an honor, being chosen for the All-Star game, especially being named a captain, recognition from the league and the fans and other players. Shane didn't know until now it could feel like this, too, like a punishment.

Notes

I alluded to Shane and Ilya's last All-Star game in [come home to my heart](#) and then the idea wouldn't leave me alone (as with every idea I have for these boys) so I had to write it. Set after The Long Game, during their first season on the same team.

“What the fuck is this?” They’re in the locker room, changing after practice, and Ilya has paused in the process of putting socks on, sitting on the bench, his phone in his hand. The rest of the team has left for the day; Shane wanted to do a longer run on the treadmill, which Ilya spent alternating between trying to distract him and racing on the treadmill next to his, of course.

“What?” Shane asks. Something on Instagram, probably, or Twitter. Ilya stays more plugged into everything happening online, what people are saying about them, posting things on his own Instagram, replying to comments and messages from fans. It doesn’t stress him out the way it does Shane, to take in so much input about their lives. Ilya can brush it off, normally, or find it funny. Shane just feels the pressure of expectations and judgements.

“We have email from league.”

“Both of us?”

Ilya nods, and Shane digs his own phone out of his bag. He doesn’t check his email on his phone often, has tailored the settings specifically so that he only gets notifications from a few apps and people, therefore he’s not surprised to see that the email has been sitting in his inbox for several hours, since before they got to the arena this morning for practice.

The subject line says *All-Star Game* and he taps it open. He reads it once, then scrolls back up and reads it again. It doesn’t have Crowell’s signature on it, just the name of some lower level guy, but it sure reads like he wrote it.

“Different teams,” Shane says, and he feels a little stupid for how much it makes his heart sink. It shouldn’t feel like such a big deal. He and Ilya played against each other for over a decade. They’ve been on the same team for barely half a season now. When he looks at Ilya, he at least sees the same feeling reflected back at him from Ilya’s face.

“Captains of different teams.” Ilya frowns. “All the bullshit that comes with. Press conference. Promo shoot. Instagram posts.”

“I know. I read it too.”

It’s supposed to be an honor, being chosen for the All-Star game, especially being named a captain, recognition from the league and the fans and other players. Shane didn’t know until now it could feel like this, too, like a punishment.

“What do you want to do?” Shane asks.

“I don’t know.” Ilya lets his forehead drop forward, hiding his face against Shane’s stomach.

“We can think about it. Maybe ask Farah what she thinks?”

Ilya nods. “Yes. Okay.”

Shane forwards the email to Farah, making sure Ilya is still on the thread too. She knows them well enough he doesn't feel like he needs to add anything more to it beyond the red-faced swearing emoji.

Shane slips his fingers into Ilya's hair, tipping Ilya's face up to look at him. "Home?" he asks, and Ilya nods.

At home, Anya greets them at the door, her whole body wriggling with excitement, like it's been days rather than hours since she last saw them. Ilya scoops her up, lets her lick his face, and Shane can't even complain about it because it's the first time since getting the email that Ilya isn't frowning.

"I will walk her," Ilya says. "Long walk, probably."

"Okay. Do you want company?" Shane offers.

Ilya shakes his head. "I need to think."

Shane nods, and kisses Ilya's cheek (the one Anya *didn't* lick). "See you soon."

It might've bothered him, a few years ago, Ilya wanting time alone. Their time was so precious then for how scarce it was and Shane remembers feeling like every minute they weren't together in the handful of days they were able to spend together per month was time wasted. Now, they have so much time together that they *need* time apart or they'd drive each other crazy. (More than they already do, obviously.)

Shane is cleaning up their breakfast dishes in the kitchen when his phone rings, Farah's name on the screen.

"Hi Farah," Shane says, putting the phone on speaker in case Ilya comes back while they're talking. He doubts it, though, he and Anya have only been walking for twenty minutes or so, and a long walk for them usually is over an hour.

"Hi Shane. Ilya there too?"

"No, he's walking the dog. I can fill him in."

Farah sighs. "I wish I had better news. There's not much we can do."

"Yeah," Shane says. "I figured."

"We could try politely declining, or at least declining to be captains, but I suspect they'd just send us a lovely legal reminder that you're contractually obligated to show up. Obviously you could choose not to go and take the suspensions; that would be up to you guys to decide. But I'm not sure it's the battle to pick with Crowell, either."

"Yeah."

"I can point out the positives for you, if that would help?" Farah offers.

“Sure,” Shane says, pretty sure he’s too close to the situation to see any positives on his own.

“The league clearly knows they can’t exclude you both from the game, not without pushback from fans. That’s a good thing. We were worried about them retaliating, and obviously this isn’t an ideal situation, but in some ways it’s just a return to form for them. They only bet on sure things. For them, you guys are still a sure thing, even if it isn’t being packaged in a way that we like or that feels particularly relevant.”

“They just want the promo shot of the two of us facing off against each other.”

“Yes,” Farah says. “They do. They want the publicity that will come from it, because now it’s not just Hollander versus Rozanov, it’s a house divided. It ups the stakes. It’s not so different from what they did a few years ago, with those twins who played for San Jose and Anaheim.”

Shane knows all this. He does. He’s in his twelfth season. He’s been inside the publicity machine that is Rozanov versus Hollander for his entire career. It was one thing when no one knew about them. But they’re out now, and they’re married, and they’re *teammates*. He just can’t see the point of pushing the rivalry anymore, except that Crowell clearly just wants to fuck with them.

“Yeah,” he says again. “Thanks Farah. I’ll fill Ilya in and we’ll let you know what we end up deciding.”

“Sounds good. I’m sorry, Shane. Crowell really is a dinosaur, maybe he’ll retire soon.”

Maybe Shane’s new goal should be to outlast Crowell. He won’t retire before that asshole does.

Ilya feels better after walking Anya. He knew he would. He doesn’t feel great, he doesn’t feel happy, but he feels less like driving to New York to yell at Crowell in his office or like screenshotting the email and posting it on his Instagram and calling it bullshit (although he still reserves the right to do that, if the urge comes back).

Predictably, he finds Shane on the stationary bike in the gym, because Shane always works out when he’s trying to figure out how he feels about something.

“Hi,” he says, and Shane stops pedaling so Ilya can lean in and kiss him.

“Good walk?” Shane asks.

Ilya nods. “Anya is very tired.”

“Farah called while you were gone. Want me to fill you in now or later?”

“Later. Let’s shower.”

“Yeah, okay,” Shane says, switching off the exercise bike and following Ilya upstairs.

Ilya cranks the shower almost as hot as it will go, letting the bathroom fill up with steam. Under the spray, he pulls Shane close and just holds him, arms loosely around Shane.

“This is really bothering you,” Shane says.

“Yes.”

“This stuff doesn’t usually get under your skin.”

Ilya shrugs. “Bad day, maybe.”

Most times, he can feel the bad days coming. Sometimes he even has enough warning to make an appointment with Galina, to lessen the weight of them before they take over. But other times, he is having a totally normal day and then, suddenly, he is not.

“What did Farah say?”

“I thought you wanted to talk about it later,” Shane says, smiling a little.

Ilya huffs a short laugh. “Let’s just get it out of the way. I think I know...nothing we can do?”

“Pretty much. I mean, we could just not go and take the suspensions, I guess. But that doesn’t seem super fair to the rest of the Cens.”

Ilya nods. “I don’t want to do that.”

“She doesn’t think it’s the battle to fight with Crowell. I think I agree with her.”

Ilya nods again. He knows it’s not the battle to fight, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t want to. He feels like a tiger in a too-small cage, the way he wants to fight about this. Not with Shane. With the assholes in league who think they get any say in how Ilya Rozanov lives his life.

Shane continues, “I’ll feel better about picking fights with Crowell once you have your permanent resident card. I know it’s the Centaurs sponsoring your visa, not the league, and I know that the owners and the front office support us, but I just...worry.”

“You worry? About me?” Ilya jokes. “But you are normally so chill.” Shane doesn’t roll his eyes or tell him to fuck off, like he would if he weren’t actually *that* worried, and Ilya sighs. “I will also feel better when I have my card.”

They started the process almost immediately after getting married (before they’d even left for their honeymoon), and when they last spoke to the immigration lawyer Yuna found for them, he said the card could come “anytime in the next six months”, which was an infuriatingly nonspecific amount of time. They were into month four of that six months, and Ilya knows Shane checks the mail eagerly every day *and* has one of his parents come check when they are on the road for away games. It’s only the first step in the process of getting his Canadian citizenship, but it will mean he can stay in Canada legally regardless of whether he’s playing hockey.

“Farah tried to sell me on the upsides,” Shane says.

“What upsides?” Ilya scowls.

“I know.”

“The weather will be nice, maybe. I cannot think of others.”

“Me either.” Shane frowns, and closes his eyes. “I don’t understand why it’s bothering me so much. We’ve been on the same team for like three months. It shouldn’t be so hard to imagine playing against you again. It used to be fun, even.”

“I don’t think that’s why,” Ilya says. Shane is like this too, sometimes, needing to talk about how he feels to understand it.

“No?”

Ilya shakes his head. He understands how he feels about it, and he thinks it’s probably how Shane feels too, but he doesn’t fully know how to say it in English and all the words and feelings he has are too complicated for Shane’s Russian. He tries anyway. “Is like they want to use our faces and our names and our marriage to make sure people watch this silly game that means nothing, but they don’t want to use our faces and our names and our marriage for anything that matters.”

Shane lets out a sigh, his shoulders relaxing. “Yes, that. And maybe also that they think they can still tell us how to be around each other.”

A thought occurs to Ilya, and his mouth curves into a smirk.

“What?” Shane asks.

“They think that, yes, but they can’t *make* us.”

“I mean, they can make us play. It’s literally in our contracts.”

“But they can’t make us play their way.” As much as he’s finding it comforting to stand under the hot spray of the shower with Shane, Ilya twists to turn the water off. “I have idea. And I’m hungry.”

They step out of the shower and towel off and get dressed. When they’re downstairs and Ilya is waiting for leftovers from dinner with Shane’s parents two nights ago to reheat in the microwave, he says, “They want Hollander v Rozanov, yes?”

“Yeah,” Shane says. “They want the whole thing. The faceoff stare-down, probably some shit-talking in the press conference, us being extra competitive...the usual bullshit.”

“So we give them, what is it? The dash when two people combine last names after they marry?”

“A hyphen?”

“Yes. Hollander *hyphen* Rozanov.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“We are...” Ilya frowns, trying to think of the word. любящий. “Sweet? Cute? With each other. Rather than rivals.”

“What, you want to kiss me on the ice like Scott Hunter?”

“Always,” Ilya says, and is gratified when Shane goes a little pink. “But more like...call you pet names in press conference and hug you when you score a goal against me. Flirt with you at face off.”

“You’ve been doing *that* since we were eighteen,” Shane laughs. And then, “Okay.”

“Really? You always want to be so professional on the ice. Is boring.”

“They aren’t treating us like professionals, so why should I? I’ll play this however you want,” Shane says, and Ilya loves him so much.

Shane calls Farah back and they explain the plan to her. He might have a few misgivings but Ilya has always been better at the press stuff than Shane has, plus Shane’s pissed off enough at the league he’s willing to agree to just about anything. But he’s also willing to rein it in if Farah tells them they shouldn’t do it. Instead, she laughs.

“I can work with malicious compliance,” she says. “Call me if you need anything.”

“Malicious compliance,” Ilya grins, “I like this.”

“Yeah, that tracks.”

The league sends a photographer to Ottawa for promo shots, and Shane is reminded of the CCM commercial, how much they’d exasperated that poor director by not being able to really hit their marks or keep a straight face. They’re both infinitely more practiced at those things now, but the third time in a row that Ilya slides past the mark and gets close enough to press his lips to Shane’s cheek, Shane’s pretty sure he hears the photographer groan.

“Sorry,” Ilya says, clearly not sorry at all.

“Let’s try something else,” the photographer says, and has them stand back to back at center ice, arms crossed over their chests, instead of facing off against one another.

Shane gets the giggles, feeling like they’re kids trying to measure who’s taller, and his head falls back on to Ilya’s shoulder while he laughs. Ilya’s hand catches him by the hip.

It’s his turn to apologize. “Sorry, I think we’re just having a hard time taking this seriously. We’re on the same team, we don’t face off against each other anymore.”

“Also, is very weird to stand like this with my husband, yes?” Ilya says. “We are like children having a fight.”

The photographer gazes up into the rafters, possibly searching for his last shred of patience.

As a last attempt, he sends them to different benches, each at the end so they fit in the same frame, their arms braced on the boards.

“Just—I don’t know, glare at each other.”

Neither of them manages anything close to a glare, but the rest of the team starts coming up the tunnel for practice and their time is up.

“I’ll figure something out,” the photographer shrugs, “I’m sure there’s plenty of archive footage we can use.”

Ilya hops the boards and skates over to Shane, leaning down to touch foreheads. “I hope Farah sends us the pictures.”

“Hey, are we practicing or do you two need to get a room?” Hayes shouts across the ice.

“Fuck off, Hazy,” they say in unison.

The next week, when the league posts the All-Star game promo shots, the only one of Ilya and Shane has them facing off, grinning at each other. Ilya adds it to his own grid, and posts one of the candids from their CCM shoot too. He types out a caption *some things never change* ❤️🏏🌈 and hits post, watching the notifications roll in.

“You’re a menace,” Shane says, grinning.

Shane is skating around the rink in San Jose, practicing with his team—they’ve put him with most of the All-Stars first-timers, which feels pointed in a way Shane doesn’t want to examine—when Cliff skates up alongside him. They have a tentative sort of friendship now, him and Cliff, mostly because Ilya loves him and Shane isn’t one to hold grudges over clean hits.

“Roz told me about the email from the league. Trying to make you guys do the rivalry thing again.” Cliff says. “Kind of fucked up.”

“I think they’re just not that creative.”

“And also homophobic.”

“Well, yeah. There is that.” Shane sighs. “We aren’t playing into it.”

“We’re still gonna actually play, though, right?” Cliff grins. “I mean, isn’t playing against each other basically foreplay for you guys? Roz was never wound tighter than when we

played Montreal.”

“Fuck off, Marly,” Shane says, laughing.

“You remember that game back in your first season that got canceled because of the snow?”

“Vividly.”

“Ha!” Cliff barks. “I *knew* it was you he was meeting. I mean, not then obviously. But looking back...I thought the dude was going to combust in the airport.”

Shane files that away to tease Ilya about sometime. He thinks it’s been long enough now that they can laugh about how desperate they both were while also trying their best to not to show the other one back then.

“C’mon,” Marly taps his stick against the ice. “Let’s show these infants a thing or two.”

Ilya waits with Shane in a bland office kitchenette at the arena while the reporters assemble in the press room.

“This is really feeling like a nostalgia tour,” Shane says.

“Is like Farah said,” Ilya shrugs, “they only know one way to work with us.” Then he frowns. “Make us work for them, really.”

“Yeah.”

Ilya puts his hands on the counter and leans forward, stretching out his back. He tweaked something, the last game before the All-Stars, and the six hours sitting on the plane did not help, nor did this morning’s skate with his team. He is not in a good mood for this press conference and part of him wishes they’d told the league and Crowell to fuck off and just gone on vacation this week instead. They could be on a beach in the Bahamas right now for the low, low price of a one game suspension.

“We’re ready for you,” chirps the assistant or intern who had deposited them in this sorry excuse for a green room, and Ilya straightens. He doesn’t wince, because that will just make Shane fuss over him, but it’s a near thing.

They file onto the stage and sit at the plastic folding table covered in a black table cloth, Shane first, and then Ilya. Ilya leans in the chair in a way that probably looks cocky but is mostly about finding an angle that doesn’t hurt his back and Shane sits straight upright like he’s on trial.

The questions are, predictably, stupid.

“*What will it be like, playing against each other again?*”

“Like a normal day at practice in Ottawa,” Shane shrugs.

“Hot,” Ilya says. A laugh ripples through the room.

“Any bets riding on the outcome?”

Their eyes meet and Ilya smirks. “Yeah, what do I get when I win, honey?”

Ilya wanted it to be fun, baiting the reporters, but unfortunately it curdles in his stomach to call Shane a fake pet name he would never use otherwise. Shane must see it on his face, because his foot nudges Ilya’s under the table.

“Has it been an adjustment, shifting from rivals to teammates?”

“We’re married,” Shane says, flatly. “We know how to be on the same team.”

And so it goes, on and on, the same question asked slightly differently, so everyone could get their soundbite. Maybe it is so boring to watch that the league will never bother to put them in front of cameras again.

“Shane, you haven’t spoken much to the press since your controversial departure from Montreal last summer.”

Ilya watches Shane go pale under the bright stage lights, his freckles standing out in stark relief. He knows what’s coming next. Ilya does too.

“Do you have any response to the allegations that your trip at the end of game seven against Ottawa was intentional?”

Shane’s jaw tightens and Ilya swears he can hear him grinding his teeth. He increases the pressure of his foot against Shane’s under the table. Shane looks at him, his eyes desperate and angry, and Ilya gives the smallest of nods, the dip of his chin by a centimeter at most. Shane sees it, but he doubts anyone else does.

“I left Montreal because the majority of my teammates, the coaching staff, and the front office made it clear I was not welcome there anymore. I tripped in game seven because my skate caught an edge. I find it insulting to my own integrity as a player and that of my husband that anyone would assume we are unable to be serious competitors because we are in a relationship. It doesn’t seem to be an issue in the PWHL, but this league has a long way to go in becoming a safe space for queer players, so I’m disappointed but unsurprised.”

There is a stretch of silence, and then the room explodes in more questions. One voice rises above the rest.

“You have to admit, the timing does seem a little suspic—”

“Suspicious?” Ilya scoffs. “You think after keeping secret for eleven years while playing against each other inside your Hollander vs Rozanov narrative that we chose to be outed right before the playoffs so Shane could throw a game? Just for Ottawa to lose in the next round? Insulting is far kinder word than I would use, but my husband is kinder than I am. We are done. No more.”

It's only once he's off the stage, Shane close behind him, that Ilya realizes what he's done. How much he gave away. *Eleven years*. They'll all have done the math already, and the headlines are writing themselves.

"Shane," he says, low and miserable.

"Keep moving," Shane says firmly. "We'll talk at the hotel, away from the vultures."

In the Uber, Shane pulls out his phone. He sends a text, his phone buzzes almost immediately, and he nods and puts it back in his pocket. "Farah is on it," he says.

Ilya's own phone is buzzing incessantly in his pocket. Probably the Centaurs group chat, and the Hollander family group chat, and Marly and Svetlana.

"I'm sorry," Ilya whispers. Their Uber driver has the radio turned up loud enough that he probably can't hear, but Ilya doesn't need to add further fuel to the fire.

"I'm not," Shane says back, just as quietly. "It's okay."

Their car deposits them at the front doors, and Shane takes Ilya's hand as they cross the lobby. There are a few other players milling around, waiting to meet up to go to lunch maybe, but nobody stops them as they head for the elevators.

As soon as the door to their room closes behind them, Shane has his arms around Ilya, holding him close.

"Next time you want to change the plan," Shane says, rubbing soothing circles on Ilya's back, "just give me a heads up."

"I didn't know I wanted to," Ilya says. He drops his forehead onto Shane's shoulder. "I told them too much. I'm sorry. I just got so angry. They keep asking more and more of us and it's not fair."

"You didn't tell them anything anyone with half a brain couldn't have already figured out," Shane says. "Cliff was giving me shit about our first season *this morning*. Something about you nearly exploding in the airport when that game was cancelled?"

"I will kill him," Ilya says, feeling more murderous than the situation probably calls for. But Marly should know better. Bro code, or whatever.

"Baby," Shane says, and Ilya lets out a shuddering sigh. Shane tightens his hold on Ilya. "You didn't tell them anything off limits. We know the things that are just ours."

Ilya thinks about Shane folding his clothes, that first time in Toronto. Kissing Shane in his stairwell before the Olympics. The way Shane had held him in that Florida hotel room, five All-Star games ago. Shane on one knee in their living room, surrounded by electric candles.

He nods. "Okay." He lifts his head to look at Shane, just to be sure, and there's something about the look on Shane's face, the way he looks after he scores a particularly beautiful goal. Smug. Proud. Confident. Ilya squints at him. "You *like* that I told them."

Shane doesn't even have the good grace to seem apologetic. "A little, yeah. I'm never going to be mad about people knowing who you really belong to. How long you've been mine."

"Since the beginning, lyubimyy."

"I know," Shane says. "Same."

"Do you ever think about them?" Ilya asks. "Those two idiot boys in that Saskatchewan parking lot?"

"All the time," Shane smiles. "I almost didn't go talk to you. My parents were waiting. What a tragedy that would've been."

Ilya kisses him the way he'd wanted to that first day, soft and gentle. And then not so soft or gentle, because Shane leans into him, hungry and insistent.

"We have game," Ilya reminds him.

"Stupid game," Shane says. "Meaningless game."

"It will still be better, after. I know you remember that much."

Shane snorts. "What do I get if I win?"

"Whatever you want," Ilya says, not remotely afraid of how much he means it anymore. "But I will win."

Ilya does win, of course. Shane's not even mad at it, because after every goal they celebrate together, Ilya slinging his arm around Shane's neck and pulling him in to kiss his helmet.

"This is so mushy and I'm embarrassed for you," Cliff says to them sometime during the third period. Ilya throws his other arm around Cliff's neck for good measure, kisses his helmet too.

"Good," Ilya grins. "That's the point. Go hug that asshole Byrd, make Crowell worry it's contagious."

Cliff clearly wants to flip him off but can't in his gloves, so he skates away, shaking his head.

They shower and change in their separate locker rooms after the game and meet up in the hallway between them after. Ilya is leaning against the wall, scrolling through his phone.

"Well?" Shane asks.

"We are trending on twitter. There is a BuzzFeed list of '25 Times Hollanov Were #CoupleGoals'. Some of the gifs are from our rookie season. Farah is dealing with Crowell, she isn't worried. Someone on tumblr is building a timeline of our entire relationship; she is

doing a pretty good job. I think you were right that anyone with half a brain could do the math. Maybe we spend too much time with brainless hockey players.”

“Probably,” Shane agrees. “Want to get dinner somewhere? There’s supposed to be a good sushi place near the hotel.”

“Wait, you have not heard the best part. Farah says there is an interview request about homophobia in hockey,” Ilya’s face splits into a huge grin, “with The New Yorker.”

Shane laughs, “Well, I guess we have to do it. Since you’re such a fan.”

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