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by [LadyRagnelle](#)

Summary

Five times Cliff doesn't connect the dots and the one time he finally realizes Ilya Rozanov is in love with Shane Hollander.

An outside pov of Ilya Rozanov's increasingly badly hidden feelings for Shane Hollander.

Notes

I am using the tv show name for Cliff (Marleau) and the tv show names for the teams, so let's say I am writing this with the tv show in mind but also after recently rereading The Long Game! Keep in mind the story has The Long Game spoilers too.

Also please be kind, I know nothing of hockey.

*

Five times Cliff doesn't connect the dots and the one time he finally realizes Ilya Rozanov is in love with Shane Hollander.

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

February 2017

Rozanov had been all over the place.

Cliff had had no idea what had been going on with him, but his captain had been on a rollercoaster of emotions these past few months. Ilya Rozanov had gone from moody to positively radiant. It had given Cliff a headache just thinking about it.

It had given Cliff a headache just seeing him spend sleepless nights pacing in hotels, before suddenly returning to his flowery energetic self after a particularly good All Stars Game. If there was a thing Cliff knew was that surely no one cared about All Stars Games that much. And yet Rozanov had returned from it with a spring in his step, a smile on his face and a phone in his hands.

Of course, Cliff suspected what was going on. Rozanov was quite the womanizer, and Cliff had always imagined the man had a woman in every city, but even a blind man could see the giddy look Rozanov wore a few of the times they were visiting Boston or Montreal.

Two mysterious women that had mysteriously disappeared for a couple of moody weeks where Rozanov had slept like shit and stared at his own phone as if attempting to break it with the force of his will.

"Your Montreal girl is putting out again?" Cliff asked, one afternoon, after seeing Ilya grab his phone and smile down at it for the third time in the span of what had to be just twenty minutes.

Ilya's delayed annoyed reaction made Cliff chuckle. The man was not as subtle as he was thinking.

"I thought you got caught cheating by your Boston girl, you know." That had been his first theory when Ilya had stopped making excuses to come out with them in Montreal, or to join them bar hopping in Boston. "But I guess it is one and only, right? That Jane girl?"

Now Rozanov finally put down his phone. He leaned back into the airport chair, legs spreading with ease, which made Cliff laugh in its absurdity, because Rozanov looked pissed. Fucking mad.

"Alright, man, don't worry. She is married or something?"

"Yes," Ilya answered, slowly. "Something like that."

Cliff nodded, he hummed in understanding, not that he had ever been with a married woman - too much drama for just some sex on the road - but it was clear this Jane girl was important. It must have been at least four years before that Cliff had first caught Ilya texting her.

"More gossip?" Rozanov barked out, not trying to hide his annoyance anymore, before rolling his eyes and returning his attention to his texts.

To be completely honest, Cliff had so many questions.

He only managed to resist their allure for a few seconds.

"She's an actress?"

Rozanov glanced up, a snarl on his open mouth. "What?"

"Your girl. She's an actress? You've been checking those tabloid sites.

His Captain's foot kicked at the row of chairs they were sitting on and Cliff raised his hands in surrender. "Alright, Rozanov, message received."

"Shut your mouth, Marleau. Don't you have game to think of? We played like shit last night."

April 2017

The hit had been messy. After the game Cliff had refused to check online, not sure he could stomach to see the videos, or the comments.

Cliff sighed, pressing the heel of his hands over his eyelids. He took a deep breath before he decided it was time to get changed. The locker room was more silent than usual, a sober feeling permeating through it.

They had not played well after the hit.

Cliff glanced up at his captain.

Ilya had already changed, quicker than usual. He had skipped the shower and was now shoving clothes into a bag.

"You okay, Rozanov?" Cliff asked. The words were just out of his mouth when he realized he had no idea why he was even asking. Apart from the fact that the hit had apparently rattled his teammate to the core. When the brawl on the ice had ended, Cliff had found Rozanov pale and still, seemingly lost.

It was probably because his father had passed away so recently, Cliff decided, but the thought sounded unconvincing.

Ilya shrugged.

"Don't feel bad man," Carmichael blurted out, and Cliff realized he was talking to him only when his teammate started squeezing his shoulder. "I am sure Hollander will be back on the ice in no time."

"Yes," Ilya answered, eyes already scanning his phone.

Charmichael shook Cliff's shoulder, aggressively, making the man almost trip on himself, which was impressive given his teammate was the shortest guy on the team. "Come on, let's go out to drink, it'll take your mind out of this shitshow."

Some of their other teammates seemed on board with the suggestion and Cliff knew he had no intention of going back to the hotel and moping alone.

"Rozanov?" he asked, and Ilya finally looked at him.

There was a calm, almost stony, careful veil over him. His mouth twitched, eyes jumping all over Cliff's face, searching for something. "No," he answered, and he did not add an explanation, or an excuse. He never did. "But you go. It was bad hit, it's not fun for you either."

Cliff's shoulders fell, tension easing out. He had not even realized he had been so coiled. "Yeah, man. It's shit." Rozanov nodded. "Maybe I should send him a message, or something. You know in which hospital he is?"

"I do. As captain, I'll send him a message."

June 2017

Cliff leaned into the table. Beside him, Brady was howling in laughter at something Carmichael had spouted, and the sound was starting to hurt his ears.

"Kick him for me," Rozanov blurted out, taking a sip of his beer, but Cliff decided to ignore him. He just moved slightly closer to the window wall and made sure to take his chips with him. Carmichael was a stealer.

"Man, he's wasted."

"Barely. He is just like that."

Brady had joined their team only a few months before, as a social media manager. He was basically a kid, but then most of the new guys looked like kids to Cliff. Over enthusiastic, over loud, able to invite himself to even wounds-licking bar hopping celebrations without any kind of shame.

Cliff stuffed a handful of chips into his mouth and returned his attention to Ilya.

"So, next year you're a free agent, right?"

Rozanov cocked his head. He hummed, which Cliff could barely hear in the loud bar.

"You're staying, right?" Cliff quickly added, because sometimes with Ilya Rozanov it was best to be direct and insist until an answer or a pissed off captain came out on the other side.

"Not sure, maybe Boston, maybe a better team, one that winds cups." He popped the p with a grin.

A joke then, and Cliff could laugh - he chuckled. He did, but he had the uncomfortable thought that the words had been too close to the truth. Not that they could not win Stanley cups, they already did it once, but since the Admirals had won, Ilya had had - well, an air of hopeful finality around him.

Fuck it, maybe Cliff was just too drunk to think.

"Just not Buffalo, alright?" But Rozanov was not listening to him anymore, he was looking to Cliff's left where Brady, Carmichael and St-Simon were discussing animatedly.

"- yeah, during a photoshoot, last year," Brady was saying when Cliff tried to catch what had captured his friend's attention.

Carmichael nodded. "I heard he is back next season; it was nothing too serious."

"Yeah, but I meant - he is so fucking weird, isn't he?" Brady continued. "It felt like talking to a robot, I swear. That Rose Landry thing must have been some kind of PR thing, because there is not way that man has any game. I was trying to chat; you know sometimes this advertisement things can get pretty long and awkward." He moved a hand in front of his face, waving it around. "He was just staring at me, like this." Brady relaxed his features into a stony neutral expression, and when he turned it towards St-Simon the man chuckled.

Suddenly, the table between them shook, the wooden edge ending up poking brady into the side and almost pushing Carmichael off of the bench.

Brady grunted in pain, as Rozanov slid out of his own bench, St-Simon quickly standing up to let him pass.

"Mh, my bad," Rozanov said, once he was standing up, leaning only to hit Brady's back amicably.

"No problem," Brady replied, wincing only a bit when Rozanov grabbed his shoulder.

Cliff tried to catch Rozanov's eyes, but the man was already standing up once more, now looking into his own pockets. He grabbed some bills and waved them up in the air. "Next round on me. Maybe we get you black out drunk, yes? Get some peace for the rest of us."

"Jesus," St-Simon whispered, when Rozanov walked off towards the bar. "What did you do to piss him off?"

Brady shrugged.

May 2018

"Back to Hawaii this year, man?"

Rozanov smiled at him, actually smiled. It was small, fleeting, quickly turned into a lazy smirk. "Lots of women there, lots of sun," he said, but Cliff had not missed the smile.

He suspected his captain was going to Hawaii with his Montreal girlfriend, again, especially given the man had turned into a monk after that woman put her leash on him. He was kind of hurt Cliff had not even seen a picture of her, he was embarrassingly curious about what kind of girl would even be able to tame him this way.

"Alright, out with it. It's some Canadian team, isn't it?" Cliff blurted out, already done with the small talk. He was sure the announcement would come out soon, he was also sure Ilya Rozanov was not going to stay in Boston. It did not feel exactly like a betrayal - except when it fucking did. Sometimes.

"Ottawa."

"Ottawa?" Cliff repeated, almost yelled, incredulous.

Rozanov shushed him, but they were the first one in the lockers so no one else was there. "Maybe. Maybe Ottawa."

"But they -"

"Oh, I know. But it's challenge, yes?"

It sure was. The Ottawa Centaurs were not exactly known for, well, for anything much.

"And the citizen process is easier there. In Canada."

Cliff shook his head, a laugh bubbling out of him. "Of all people, I never thought I would see you like this."

Rozanov cocked his head, eyes squinting lightly as if already knowing he was not going to enjoy this. "Like what?"

"Whipped."

"*Whipped*," Rozanov repeated, "What is whipped?"

"You're moving for your girl, or am I wrong?" This sounded like a disaster in the making, if Cliff was honest, but then what did he know. He was exactly not the poster boy of stable relationships. "She got you on a leash. You said she is married, right?"

Rozanov frowned, as if trying to remember if he had actually said any of the sort. And, strangely enough, Cliff noticed he almost looked nervous. It was bizarre sometimes to realize that he had gotten fairly good at reading his captain.

Well, not captain for long.

"Just keep in touch, okay? I doubt we'll see each other on the ice much, the Ottawa Centaurs can barely crawl into the qualifications."

"We'll see about that."

November 2018

Cliff looked down at the email he had typed. It felt all very formal, but it was probably easier to put everything into some awkwardly neutral letter than having to blurt out a "Hey, man, sorry your mother went through that, good idea with the foundation" next time he saw Rozanov.

Cliff had also sent a donation, because he was not an asshole, and because it was clear that this cause was something Ilya Rozanov deeply cared about. And he did consider Rozanov a friend, no matter that they did not know too much about each other's. They had played good hockey and that was enough for him.

"I never saw you that serious."

Cliff looked up from his laptop. His sister Sarah had a steaming cup of coffee in her hands and Mellanby, his cat, awkwardly balanced on her shoulder.

"Don't teach her that."

"What are you writing?"

Cliff turned the laptop towards her, so she could scan through the stiffly formal email. "This is grim."

"It's polite," he defended.

Mellanby finally jumped down, almost hitting the laptop before she went to find her spot on the printer sitting under the desk.

"It's for your old captain, right? Rozanov?" *The traitor*, she mumbled under her breath and Cliff rolled his eyes. He supposed it was not that common to leave the team who recruited you after you had led them through victory so many times before. And a cup.

"He wanted a challenge," he tried to justify.

"And now he is fraternizing with the enemy."

That was true, in a way, but Cliff doubted Rozanov would actually call Shane Hollander 'the enemy'. There had always been some intense rivalry between the two, but all things considered they had been pretty tame on the ice. No injuries, not even any overtly aggressive chirps. Cliff had always had the feeling Rozanov enjoyed the whole ordeal far too much for someone who considered Hollander an enemy. He had always seemed to look forward to their matches, vibrating with excitement. It was almost a pity Montreal had not offered to get Rozanov on board with their team – or, well, maybe that was for the best. Cliff wanted to be able to win, still.

"It's a good cause."

"What happened to the drama, the kayfabe of it all?" Sarah demanded.

"This is not wrestling, Sarah, we play hockey."

She groaned in disgust.

March 2021

Holy shit.

Fuck.

Cliff was staring at his phone. Mellanby squirmed in annoyance on his lap, probably outraged that Cliff had stopped scratching his head.

He tried to meow at him and then pushed his head against the phone. "Wait, wait, not now," Cliff mumbled, eyes glued to the video.

Someone had zoomed in a grainy clip of Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander kissing. Or eating each other's faces off. One of the two.

Cliff's first thought was: *Montreal girl broke up with poor Rozanov and now the man was spiralling into gay madness.*

The laugh that broke out of him scared Mellanby enough that the cat jumped out of his lap and huffed and puffed away from him, back to his favourite place under the desk.

"Jesus, I am such an idiot."

He had had the suspicion that Ilya had a girl in Boston and one in Montreal, but of course he must have met with Hollander during their matches, after their matches. For *years*.

And... *Jane. Shane.* Surely not – right? Maybe there was a Jane, somewhere, who knew, except that Cliff remembered quite well how Rozanov had stopped messaging Jane while Hollander was dating Rose Landry. It was hard to forget how ridiculously moody and annoyed his old captain had been during those weeks.

He was surprised to find he was not even offended or annoyed at being left out of this secret. Rozanov had not been that kind of friend. *He* had not been that kind of friend. They did not talk about this stuff, about family and their private lives, they simply had fun together and enjoyed playing hockey.

He was just baffled, mainly at himself. And at Rozanov.

Shane Hollander, goody two shoes Canadian captain, who always gave the most earnest and professional congratulative handshakes after a game. Shane Hollander and his three Stanley

cups – they must have done this for years.

“You fucking dog,” Cliff chuckled.

A message popped up and then another and another. It was mainly a few of his teammates and the team’s group chat, people asking if he knew, who had known, how could they have not known, if it was a joke, some kind of prank maybe. If Hollander, who was known to be gay in the worst kept secret of the league, had somehow converted womanized Ilya Rozanov and turned *him* gay.

He ignored them, looking instead for Rozanov’s number and chat.

So your Montreal girl is *not* married – CM

Get that citizenship in the bag, man. – CM

Soon. – IR

End Notes

If you are wondering, kayfabe is a wrestling thing. It is kind that code of illusion where everyone pretends wrestling is real, from the wrestlers themselves to the fans and the media. So if two wrestlers are "enemies" they also have to pretend to be all the time (ex. they cannot be shown outside to get along).

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