

Heel Turn

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76754666) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76754666>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Ottawa Centaurs Team Ensemble (Game Changers) , Montreal Voyageurs Team Ensemble (Game Changers) , Svetlana Vetrova
Additional Tags:	Spoilers for Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , Canon-Typical Violence , My love letter to the Montreal Voyageurs/Metros , Moderate Innuendo
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-31 Words: 5,771 Chapters: 1/1

Heel Turn

by [DistantStorm](#)

Summary

“If we are burning jerseys,” Ilya begins, eyeing the massive blank space on Shane's side of the room where his Montreal sweaters used to live, “I would have gone to the store for marshmallows.”

“Burning polyester smells like shit,” Shane replies, scrunching his nose.

OR: The one where Ilya is attracted to Shane an absolutely normal amount, the Centaurs go 1-1 in their first two games against the Metros, and Shane reckons with Montreal as a concept.

Notes

Inspired by the "we're not fucking wrestlers" line from Episode 6.

— December 21st, 2021 —

MTL @ OTT; 3rd Period — 09:46. OTT 2; MTL 2

With just over ten minutes left in the third, Ilya comes down the tunnel toward the bench from the dressing room. He'd been slashed four minutes earlier and had gone to the dressing room for what the commentators on TV called minor repairs. It is minor, Ilya supposes. He's got tacky, half-dried medical glue and butterfly sutures holding the long gash on his right cheek together. Just another day in the office, or so Boodram—who has never held an office job—says.

Ilya shakes his head and grits his teeth. The cut doesn't really hurt, it's more annoying than anything. He makes it two more steps, halfway to the bench before the boys are on their feet and the crowd goes crazy.

There's no goal horn, which means nobody scored, but the crowd is acting like it, spectators losing their absolute minds.

Ilya charges forward, but when he gets to the bench it's not entirely clear what happened beyond a fight. There are still gloves on the ice, which Bood sweeps toward the bench with his stick. Carnage and a commercial break, Ilya thinks, noticing the ice crew trucking along with their shovels and garbage cans.

Haas points up, leaning against the boards on the other side of the bench and Ilya cranes his head back to look at the jumbotron just in time to see confetti gloves and a pileup, followed by Montreal's Comeau getting the absolute piss beaten out of him in Ottawa's defensive zone. His assailant is half a head shorter than him.

Hollander, Ilya thinks fondly, pressing his tongue against the inside of his mouth where the gash from Comeau's supposedly accidental slash is on his cheek, *you animal*. Ilya is fine, of course, he's had far worse. However, it will never not set fire to his blood to be defended by the love of his life, and Ilya will be teasing him about it mercilessly until he can get Shane alone. It's just another happy day of playing hockey with his husband.

On the screen, Hollander takes Comeau down with a haymaker and gets dragged down with the stupid oaf because he's got Shane's collar in a tight grip, stretching the material. It takes the linesman and the referee to pull him off of Comeau, and while the larger man gets a jab in, his bloody lip and broken nose suggest he didn't give half of what Ilya's husband gave him.

The linesman pushes Hollander back when the sea of white and blue jerseys start coming toward him, motioning to the penalty box. His cheeks are pink flags of color from exertion and the stripes is following closely, yelling at him, but his head is turned toward the benches and—

Well. That's about the sexiest thing Ilya has ever seen in his entire life.

You see, Shane Hollander has this dead eyed stare, this way of looking at the world like he's seeing right through you but it's actually worse than that. It's like you're insignificant, not worth his attention, this otherworldly state, this effortless way of saying *I'm up here at the top and you are so far beneath me I can't even tell you're there*.

It's tunnelvision for the elite, because make no mistake: That's what he is, what he has always been. There are very few players in the league who can match him, Ilya included.

Hollander glides backward, away from the conflict, alongside the benches. The Ottawa bench is a war-drum of stick taps on the boards, the boys whistling and hollering.

The Montreal bench, well. That's the thing. He treats them to the Shane fucking Hollander experience: ice cold dead-eyed stare, face expressionless, but then he throws up his arms and Ilya is pretty sure he'd be fined if he had been on the ice. It would not have been appropriate for an audience, of that he's certain.

He doesn't throw up his arms in that way the brawlers on the fourth line do to rally the boys and get the crowd going, though Ilya thinks the crowd probably took it that way. Shane is awkward like that, but that isn't what he's doing.

His arms are out, held perpendicular to himself. He looks almost like a wrestler, one of those evil ones named after feet (but are much sexier than the good guys in Ilya's opinion even if the wrestling itself is very fake), hands out to the side to indicate himself, like he's nonchalantly saying *Do you fucking see me now? Do you see me for what I am? I was the best thing that ever fucking happened to your team and I'll never be yours again*.

The crowd is still amped up when the replay ends and Ilya finally sits down. He hasn't taken a breath in probably a minute. Shane is a beautiful creature when he's awkward and soft and anxious, but when he's confident in himself, when he feels comfortable in his skin he's like touching a live wire, a wildfire set alight in Ilya's veins.

A hand finds his shoulder. Weight follows as their head coach leans down. "If you find an excuse to put yourself in the penalty box before he's out of it, I will scratch you," Wiebe murmurs in his ear.

"I would never," Ilya mock-gasps, scandalized, pulled back to the moment. Wiebe laughs while Ilya takes another look up at the board, but that doesn't make the threat any less real. "We're on power play?"

"Comeau started it," Troy says. Ilya follows him over the boards. "Fuck if I know what he said, it was in French. Hollzy replied, 'You wish,' in English. Comeau found that offensive."

Ilya makes his way to a blue line faceoff at the edge of their zone. He can't see Shane from here but knows he'll never hear the end of it if he doesn't personally score a goal this shift.

(He scores, because that's what he does.)

Hollander comes out of the box at the whistle when his five is over and makes a come hither motion to Haas who jumps over the boards like it's Christmas morning, stars in his eyes and Boyle in tow. The kid's well on his way to being a top performer on the team, hasn't been sent down to the minors for at least a season now, but he recognizes greatness. Knows that if he's on a line with one of his heroes, he better fucking keep up or someone else will find a way to replace him.

It's interesting, Ilya thinks. This is the first time he can recall Shane calling the shots on the ice since he became a Centaur. Everything has been deference with him, trying to lay low, to fit in and not make waves.

Hollander treats it like it's Ilya's team, not theirs. Like he's not a leader in his own right, even if he doesn't have a letter on his chest right now. Like he isn't babysitting the kids on the second line, inflating their points production beyond their wildest dreams. Like he hasn't put on a masterclass in how to handle shitty beat reporters across the league spinning even shittier narratives about him being washed for not having ten goals in October like Ilya did.

Ilya hasn't been the one adjusting to a new organization after the one he gave more than a decade of his life to shunned him. And when he returned to Boston, the organization celebrated his time with them with a video tribute and standing ovation even though they spent the rest of the game booing the shit out of him.

The rest of the game is the best sort of blur. Shane scores on a ruthless slapshot from the point, goes down on one knee, puck goes bar down so fast there's a delay between his celly and the goal horn. It's a disgusting goal, one that has the kids crowding him and Dystryka mock-bowing as he comes around to bump gloves with the boys. Moments later, Montreal pulls their goalie and Hazy *almost* gets a goalie goal.

It might be the best regular season game of Ilya's life, despite having a one point night, a single power play goal.

They win 4-2.

The locker room is understandably rowdy afterward. Bood raises Shane's bloodied knuckles up to the sky like he's announcing the winner of a boxing match and boys howl like a pack of wild dogs as Wiebe says, "Atta fuckin' boy, Hollzy," while they start shucking off their equipment.

Shane's still got the dead-eyed stare going when Harris comes in and apologetically relays that the media is requesting that he be one of the guys made available, and since he never spoke to them following their loss to the Metros in October it's probably the closest thing he'll get to a fair fight with the few beat reporters who traveled for their game against Ottawa. Ilya wonders if Harris will let him watch—they very rarely are made available to the media together, for obvious reasons. They know most of the local outlets, but some of the guys that travel with visiting teams are ignorant fucking idiots.

Harris has loved Shane more than Ilya since the moment he signed his contract with the Centaurs last summer. To be fair, Harris has good taste, even if he insists his bias is to do with

Shane's media training and not the old Speedo ads he found in the Drover-Barret residence when snooping around during a houseparty.

Shane is perfectly boring in interviews. Charming and awkward in the most adorable way.

He nods when his name is called, not really looking at Harris. That isn't unusual for Shane, but this variety of not looking at him is different than his usual avoidance, which Harris instantly notices.

Shane is still keyed up from the game. It's visible in his posture as he rolls his shoulders back and stalks off towards the showers, incapable of meeting the reporters in anything less than his suit or full uniform. Ilya wants to devour him.

He grins at Harris when their eyes meet, watches the younger man wince when he winks in his direction. "I want every single angle of fight," he advises. Harris, now forced to wait, is doing a bad job of pretending he isn't staring at Troy but in his defense, Troy *is* sweaty and naked from the waist up. Whatever changes he's been making to his workout regimen are doing wonders for his muscle composition.

"You say that like it hasn't already gone viral," Harris smirks at him.

When Shane returns from the showers, Ilya has watched the video four times in full and taken several compelling screenshots to use as potential lock screens. "Can I come too?"

"No," Shane and Harris say at the same time, before looking at one another and sharing a slightly more amicable exchange. The ten minutes he'd needed to shower and dress are enough to have loosened some of the tension in his shoulders, but not to truly relax him.

Then Harris gives him an up and down, tilting his head and squinting, as if trying to determine if Shane is serious or not. It's actually a look that's more often than not turned on Ilya, though Harris is a bit more stern and boisterous about it.

To be fair though, Shane is *always* serious about hockey. It's a very obvious part of his personality.

Ilya tries to see what Harris is worried about. He makes it from the top of Shane's head and his slightly longer, but still carefully combed hair to his shoulders when he notices that the top two buttons of his dress shirt are undone—a downright scandalous state of dress for Ilya's very boring husband in public—and parted just enough to catch a glint of his wedding band on a gold chain that matches Ilya's own.

"Moy lyubimyy muzh," he croons, utterly besotted, "Are you looking to start another fight with original six franchise or did you forget tie from your bag?"

Shane's lips—slightly bruised and extra pouty from trading blows with Comeau—quirk, just the tiniest little bit, like it's a secret and Shane's ignoring him. Ilya almost tells Harris that he doesn't care what their player contracts say about media access, he needs to get Shane home *immediately*, but then Shane looks down at Harris and murmurs, "Let's get this over with."

“I’m just confirming you aren’t going to drown in mortification when they run even more headlines about you tomorrow,” Harris says, voice always a little bit too loud. His hands are on his hips, but he doesn’t seem angry, just a little exasperated.

“I probably will,” Shane admits, honest to a fault even if he won’t meet Harris’ eyes. He looks like he wants to say more, but he doesn’t, licks his lower lip instead. Ilya gets the feeling he might have bit when Comeau punched him back. He can’t wait to peel it back and look at it, to press his thumb against the swollen seam of those pink lips and let him suckle on it.

“Then maybe we should—”

“No,” he refuses. His voice isn’t petulant like it would be if Ilya had asked the question, which is a shame, but his dark eyes eventually raise from the floor, and he meets Harris’ gaze intently. “They made me their problem,” he says slowly, each word with weight. “Now they’ve got to deal with it.”

The room hushes with the admission. It’s a respect thing, but it will make Shane uncomfortable to have the room’s attention on him for too long, especially for something like this.

“You’re taking forever, Hollander,” Ilya drawls, wagging his eyebrows. “I want to go home sometime this millenium.”

Just like that, the silent bubble pops.

“Millenium? Did you bring the dictionary today?” Bood chirps from the door, easily catching onto what’s happening here.

“Maybe.”

“Fuck off, Rozanov,” Shane quips without heat.

“I would love to, but first you must tell media that I am best hockey player in our relationship.”

He gets a middle finger as his reply.

Harris shakes his head and leads Shane away. His cheeks are pinker than they were a second ago, freckles a little more obvious. He’s absolutely gorgeous.

“You really think he’ll tell Montreal’s reporters where they can shove their bullshit?” Haas asks quietly. He’s got nothing on but a towel and his slides as he crosses the room, going over to his stall to throw on his street clothes.

Ilya purses his lips. It makes the gash on his face pull tight, but he can’t really feel it. “Probably no,” he admits. “Hollander is better than they deserve. They will make up whatever story they want regardless.”

One of the first things Shane does after their honeymoon is talk to Terry, the Centaurs team doctor. Ilya had given the entire organization a glowing review, from the front office to the players, coaching, and medical staff, though Shane is sure he'd deny it if it ever got out. He has a reputation to maintain, which Shane is pretty sure no longer fools anyone given the reveal of their lengthy relationship and subsequent marriage.

Ilya may be a bad boy, but he is also married to someone who self describes as regimented and (privately, because Ilya already throws this adjective around enough) boring. Shane organizes his clothing by texture and will make the bed prior to getting into it—even when Ilya says he's made it but has mostly just pulled the covers up haphazardly.

Anyway. The thing is that he goes and talks to Terry. If Ilya trusts the guy enough to help him manage his depression medication, maybe he can help Shane by recommending him to a new sports psychologist. He wants one who's local, but maybe not associated with the team.

In Montreal, everything went through the team physicians but needed to be approved by management. If a guy needed surgery, they were told when they'd get it and were expected to grit their teeth and bear it. If it was something related to mental health, they were told to get their head in the game or get the fuck over it and never, ever bring it onto the ice with them.

Shane had always thought that was just how it was. It had been that way in junior, too. There's always been pressure on him. Pressure makes diamonds, he'd been told. Pressure makes you better. It's good for him.

But over the last five months he's come to realize that some of the bad parts of pressure outweigh a lot of the good. Like how he's spent twelve years burdened by expectations, trying to mold himself to fit the shape expected of him while keeping so much of himself hidden. In hindsight, it's no wonder he goes through a little bit of a hockey-related identity crisis after his breakup with Montreal.

He goes through a lot of visualization exercises with Audrey, who Terry recommends and Shane clicks with immediately. She almost reminds him of Rose at first, except she knows how to pull him out of his tangents without making him feel self-conscious. She's also lesbian, happily married. He hadn't even thought about asking for a queer person to help him.

Terry is kind of actually the best.

It's hard at first to go through these situations, trying to identify tools to help navigate these nightmare scenarios that are highly possible if not already on the verge of happening. He knows his production is going to go down. The Centaurs don't have as much depth, and he's not going to unseat Ilya from the top line. His top fears include letting Ilya down—which he would rather die than admit to his husband—which Audrey picks apart with another exercise which gets him to admit that Ilya loves him more than anything and makes his entire argument irrelevant, and not being able to perform up to the expectations: his own, certainly,

but also the league—which has it out for him, and the fans—many of which have turned on him for losing an edge, a freak accident.

It's a bad time for this kind of thinking. He's thirty years old, a veteran in any locker room, has won more cups than most guys he'll ever play with. But logically, the highest production years of his career are not ahead, but behind him.

He talks a lot about Montreal, about the fallout from last year, about the lack of support from most of the guys he'd played with for the last several years, from the coaches and trainers who seemed to forget what he is when confronted with proof of his sexuality.

When they reframe it outside of hockey—they're all Human: imperfect beings, not machines (though sometimes Shane does think of his body this way, it's easier)—and realizes that shitty friends or colleagues don't deserve the space they occupy in his life. It's easier said than done, and something he really, really struggles with.

He misses *his* team. Doesn't know how to walk into a room of guys he's met off ice maybe twice, husband notwithstanding, and not be the leader. Doesn't like the squirmy feeling of the younger players looking at him with stars in their eyes despite him being an absolute tire fire, out of place and fucking up in practice.

And he hates that Ilya holds back his commentary, feels like he can't tease or provoke Shane about hockey. Like he's fragile.

Like what happened last playoffs and its aftermath has broken him.

They've done summer training together for the last couple years, partly necessary for scheduling reasons around camps with the Irina Foundation, but also to further their whole 'friendship' narrative. This year, his mom and Farah gently encourage him and Ilya to skip the one in Montreal, let Hayden and J.J. lead or cancel the event there altogether.

Ilya votes to cancel it entirely, and it breaks Shane's heart to find he agrees.

The backlash from cancelling is rough, but hosting an event, putting himself and his new husband in a position to be ridiculed by the public for a decision he didn't entirely make himself—he'd *wanted* to play in Montreal his entire career—would be worse.

The truth is that if the room had been even slightly accepting of him, and even if they hadn't but management had wanted to keep him he would've resigned in Montreal.

It's a shitty truth, one he's almost glad the Metros decided to make for him. He's worth more than that. As a player, but especially as a person.

When he tells this to Audrey, she nods. She doesn't praise him or tell him that what he's feeling is normal or valid, things she did in their initial session. He doesn't realize this until after, and it feels good to realize he doesn't need to hear it.

Eventually, it gets better. The lines at practice take shape, and he feels less like a WAG and more like a teammate. He still feels a little untethered, and he's angry at himself for his

perfectly logical decision not to try to compare his goals and assists to Ilya's this season, even though he's been chasing Ilya for years. Ottawa's PR team works hard to shelter him from media vultures, even if he knows for certain Harris would rather have him talk to the reporters than Ilya, who runs his mouth and makes problematic statements to anyone who accuses Shane of being anything less than almost as good as him.

Then, they go to Montreal. It's the Metros' home opener and it's a sea of blue and red and white, a wall of boos and a chanting directed at Shane, *Fuck you Hollander* and *Traitor*, which only grow more and more aggressive when he touches the puck. He gets hit a lot by the young defensemen who are trying like hell to prove themselves.

They lose the game 3-1 and Shane's a minus two. He ignores Hayden's apologetic messages and J.J.'s gentle chirping. He's sad, and he'd known he would be.

"They didn't even do video tribute," Ilya snarls, yanking him close on the plane. "Twelve fucking seasons. Like you left them, not other way around. Like you are fucking villain." Shane lets him, lets the words sink in. It's a statement, what his former organization didn't do. He thinks about how it was technically the home opener so maybe they'll do it in January when the Centaurs are in Montreal again, then hates himself a little bit for hoping for something that isn't going to happen.

He spends the entire plane ride with his head on Ilya's chest, tucked under his husband's chin, fingers smoothing his hair, brooding. It's telling that Ilya keeps the rest of his commentary to himself and none of the guys talk to either of them.

He can already see the headlines the Gazette and Le Journal de Montreal will run tomorrow, not to mention the narratives the commentators will spin up on Sportsnet and ESPN and MHL Network. Credibility aside, none of these news outlets know him. They see him the way he was trained to show himself: polished, never giving too much of himself away even though he gives it everything because up until Ilya hockey was all he ever knew how to want with his entire being.

He feels every minute of the thirty-nine minute flight, caught up in the complicated tangle of his emotions. By the time they touch down at YOW, Shane decides he doesn't know all the answers, but the worst has happened. That part's done, which means it's time to figure out how to rise above it.



The morning after, Shane wakes to Ilya's face smooshed into his pillow and Anya, who should absolutely not be in their bed but ends up there more often than not, burrowed between them.

This is normally the part where Shane either kicks her out so he can wake Ilya up for sex or they leave Ilya to sleep in and go for a run together (she usually only makes it three

kilometers, so he does two loops and drops her off after the first, shorter one) and pretends he doesn't know that she always goes back to bed with Ilya, as if he doesn't lint roll the duvet on a daily basis).

Today, however, he does none of that. Today, he holds his fingers to his lips like the dog can understand the gesture (she doesn't, but she stays quiet, so it's a win) and leaves her to cuddle with Ilya. He pads across the house and down the stairs, dressed only in his boxers and a pair of socks, and comes to a stop in what is now *their* trophy room.

It's a massive room. They had chosen to combine two guest bedrooms to make a single room dedicated to their legacies. It's mostly pucks, rings, sticks, and replica trophies. They're arranged tastefully by somebody far more knowledgeable in design and decorating than Shane will ever be. There's even more memorabilia in the giant walk-in closet that wasn't removed during construction, though the door to said closet blends into the wall for aesthetic purposes.

He looks around the room and lets out a massive sigh. There are jerseys on the wall. Front and center from the door are their draft jerseys, hung side by side. 09 on the back for both, Ilya's on the left and Shane's on the right. They're together here, but the rest of the room is divided. Ilya's jersey from his 2014 cup win is centered on the left wall. Black and yellow, matted and framed with a tasteful silhouette of Boston below it and a wide black shelf with awards and pucks below that. There are three jerseys on the right side of the room opposite that.

Blue and white and red, 24 on the arm, C on the chest.

Shane very quietly and carefully, but no less meaningfully, pulls them down from the wall.

Contrary to what others might think, they don't come into this room all that often. He tucks the framed jerseys into the closet and closes the door behind him.

If Ilya asks, he'll tell the truth: he's making space for what comes next.

The lack of symmetry in the room almost doesn't bother him.

— December 22nd, 2021 —

Ilya wakes to his phone buzzing and Anya's subsequent barking. He scrubs a hand over his face and reaches for it, slapping the bed next to him as Anya hops down and wanders into the hallway. It's cool, which means Shane is either finishing his run or doing yoga. Either way, he's in the basement. Anya, brilliant creature that she is, will probably go downstairs to alert Shane that he's awake.

“Hello?”

The only reason his phone is buzzing right now is because it is someone important calling him.

“You are a terrible influence,” Svetlana tells him in Russian.

“Probably,” Ilya grumbles. “What have I done now?”

“You have not seen the news,” she sing-songs, positively gleeful. *“The First Husbands of Hockey have no love for Montreal,”* she continues in English, reading out what must be the title of a news article in a bright, bubbly impression of a news anchor, *“Centaur’s center Shane Hollander is done playing nice with the city and team that shunned him.”*

Ilya had been mostly asleep when he picked up but he’s wide awake now, feeling as though he’s been up for hours, not minutes. Shane had refused to tell Ilya about his post game comments, and Harris hadn’t returned to the dressing room with him, so Ilya had assumed Shane had made his usual boring comments. (Team fought hard, hate to spend time in the box but that’s the game, Bolysy fed great pass, blah blah blah. Boring.) By the time they made it home, Ilya had already watched the video of Shane’s fight sixteen times and suffered a twenty minute drive home with Shane biting his swollen lip, looking deliciously pouty. He’d other things on his mind.

“What else?” He demands, throwing off the covers and stalking over to the hamper in the corner, fishing out the sweatpants he’d worn last night.

Svetlana giggles. It sounds wicked. He would pinch her if she were here and not in Boston, tickle her until she keeps reading. *“It’s hard coming into a room that’s this tight-knit as the new guy,” Hollander tells Jean Parentage of the Gazette, ‘But everybody in the organization has been really supportive. I’m grateful to join a team that’s like a family. They don’t freeze anybody out for things they can’t control.’”* She speaks in her normal voice to note, “He’s very cute when he’s bitchy.” He can hear her fingers tap and slide against her iPad screen. She mutters some general comments written about the game—lots of penalty minutes, dirty hits on both sides, Ilya scored despite Comeau’s blatant high-stick and switches back to her playful impression.

“When asked how he feels about being painted as a villain by Montreal fans, the Metros’ former captain shrugs. ‘It feels like it was inevitable,’ he admits, ducking his head and adding, ‘Wow, I don’t think I’ve ever said that to anyone,’ he laughs awkwardly—how does he manage to be a heartbreaker and a pure, innocent darling? You are so lucky he put a ring on it—‘My sports psychologist is probably doing a dance in her living room right now. I, uh, don’t think it’s a secret that this whole thing hurts. A lot. But I get it. We’ve all got to do what we’ve got to do to get over it. Montreal can be mad at me if it helps. I’m going to try winning a cup without them.’”

“Svetlana, I am hanging up on you now,” Ilya says. He doesn’t hear whatever dirty innuendo she makes.

He stomps down the stairs, too focused to keep quiet. Anya looks up from her bed near the fireplace, nails clicking against the hardwood as she stretches to look for him and repositions with a huff when he doesn’t immediately indicate he’s taking her outside for a walk. Shane’s

phone is on the low table in the living room, and since it is not currently exploding with notifications, it is safe to assume he's turned it off.

Pausing near the open basement door provides no information, either. The staircase light is off and he can't hear the quiet clink of weights nor the whirr of a treadmill.

"Shane?" Ilya can't help the slightest anxiety in his voice. He doesn't like not knowing where Shane is, always flashes back to irrational fears there might be another waking nightmare to find.

"Trophy room," comes a slightly muffled call from the other side of the house. "I'm fine," he adds as an afterthought.

"You are," he purrs, and Shane scoffs loudly enough to indicate he doesn't buy the false bravado.

They're still working on it, laying down the foundation to building this new phase of their lives together, trying to understand the difference between secrecy and privacy. Some days are harder than others, but it's getting better all the time. It feels more permanent, like Ilya can wrap his hands around this, can let himself have this, and it won't slip away like sand through his fingers.

He pads down the hall, scratches at the edge of the tape that holds a gauze patch over the wound on his face, leans his hip against the door to their trophy room and stares.

"If we are burning jerseys," he begins, eyeing the massive blank space on Shane's side of the room where his Montreal sweaters used to live, "I would have gone to the store for marshmallows."

"Burning polyester smells like shit," Shane replies, scrunching his nose. "Besides, I'm sure the Hall of Fame would rather keep them in their archive."

"You are giving them away?" Ilya asks, tone sharp.

"No. Not today, at least." He looks up at their jerseys from the draft—it's the only blue sweater in the room as far as Ilya can tell. "They're in the closet," he says.

"In the closet," Ilya repeats deadpan. His eyebrows rise in a silent question as he approaches. "The *closet*," he emphasizes, chest shaking with an imminent laugh. It hurts his cheek to smile this widely but he doesn't care if it rips his stitches. "You are joking."

"I'm not?" Shane's face scrunches further, woefully confused.

"You put Montreal in the closet, Hollander." Ilya tilts his head, lifts Shane's chin with a gentle hand, waits for him to catch the double meaning in his words. "Is funny. You are funniest guy I know."

Shane reaches out half way, and Ilya guides his arms the rest of it. He's still marveling at the smell of Shane's skin, nose pressed to the spot behind his ear, when he registers what it is that he's said and his whole body shakes with silent laughter. "'S so stupid," he murmurs.

“Still funny.”

“Technically,” he murmurs, fingers sliding across Ilya's back as he calms, “I put them in the closet like two months ago.”

“Did you?”

“Mm.”

They pull back just enough to make eye contact. Shane looks up at him through dark lashes. Ilya cannot imagine how he survived not seeing this sight daily.

“I was thinking about what else to put there,” Shane admits.

“You have other jerseys,” he supposes. “We could get some framed and put up.”

“Yeah,” Shane drawls, sliding his hands down to meet Ilya’s and laces their fingers together, “But I was kind of thinking about leaving it empty for a while. I’m not in a rush,” He pauses, presses a kiss to Ilya’s neck, and murmurs, “But I’m pretty particular. I’m thinking... maybe a jersey with a hideous logo? Oh! And it needs to be black and red.”

Ilya leans in so they’re pressed together chest to chest, biting at Shane’s still puffy lower lip and feeling heat course through him when Shane sways into him like gravity compels them to be together. “I have always wanted to be the cute couple with matching rings and outfits.”

Shane blinks. “Really?”

“No,” Ilya admits, then revises, “Kind of, not really? I did not know it was a possibility until recently.”

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