

the perfect pair

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the perfect pair

by [Literal_Multifandom_Trashcan](#)

Summary

Shane had no issue helping Ilya. He knew English was a frustrating language-knew the struggles that came with having to learn a whole other way to communicate.

And honestly, it gave him a feeling of fulfillment. He loved being helpful, loved being useful.

So he was more than happy to translate when Ilya needed.

Shane just never thought the day would come when their roles would be reversed.

or:

a hard of hearing! shane hollander fic

Notes

hi! hope yall enjoy <3 i want to say that while i am not hard of hearing or deaf, my dad actually is! so i have some personal experience with this topic!!!

credit for this whole idea goes to this tweet !!!!

<https://x.com/destinanniee/status/2004669359239893082?s=20>

enjoy!

Shane knew he was good with languages. He was no genius, no prodigy, but he was pretty proud of his multilingual abilities.

Growing up in Canada meant knowing both English and French was a given, especially considering the province his family grew up in. But in addition to that, his mom made sure that he spoke Japanese growing up.

It was important, she said. As he got older, Shane appreciated the insistent way she had him do kanji workbook pages after school, the way his dad and mom made sure home was a mix of English, French, and Japanese, regardless of what he spoke outside of the house.

Shane knew he was pretty lucky. He had been surrounded by people who engaged with him in different languages since he was young, which meant he never really had to go through the process of fully learning a new language as a young teen or adult.

There was this saying, that kids' brains were like sponges. Everyone agreed that if you wanted to learn a new language, the easiest time to do so would be as a young child. Shane supposed languages were pretty similar to sports, in that way.

So while Shane had a pretty easy time switching between English, French, and Japanese, he knew for a fact that Ilya did not.

Even back at that press conference all those years ago, Shane could tell Ilya had been getting overwhelmed with the complex English questions being thrown his way. Shane empathized deeply.

He grew up speaking English, and sometimes even he got overwhelmed by it. It was, objectively, a stupid language, with stupid rules and tons of exceptions.

He didn't know much about Russian (though now that him and Ilya had their weird friends-with-benefits not quite a relationship thing going on Shane was definitely considering learning the language), but he figured it was pretty different from English.

Different enough that Shane got used to random texts throughout the day asking for help translating. Things were-sort of normal? After the clusterfuck that had been Vegas, Shane had been having a non-stop low level anxiety attack about their relationship.

And then he had gotten into a fight with Scott Hunter, and that night Ilya, or 'Lily', had been texting him teasing him about the fight telling him he looked like an angry kitten.

From there things went back to...normal. Or, well, Shane and Ilya's normal.

So here Shane was, checking his phone after his morning workout, furrowing his eyebrows at Ilya's most recent text.

Lily: what does it mean when someone says

Lily: "i would tap that"

Lily: i don't understand

Shane choked on his own saliva. He wasn't even sure he wanted to know the context of whatever conversation Ilya was having. It would probably drive him insane.

Jane: who is telling you this ???

Jane: it means you want to have sex with that person-if you think someone looks hot enough to have sex with you say "i'd tap that"

Shane watched as the text bubbles popped up on screen before disappearing and then popping up once more. He tried to pretend he wasn't impatiently waiting for Ilya's response.

Lily: ah okay

Lily: marlow saw picture of svetlana on my phone

Lily: said ‘she’s so fine, i’d definitely tap that’

The mention of Svetlana shot a pang of jealousy through Shane. He knew he had no right to feel envious-they weren’t exclusive, Ilya was allowed to hook up with his super hot Russian best friend who looked like a model.

(Shane tried to convince himself he was fine with it. Even though his chest ached and he could feel himself envisioning a future where he cooked breakfast for Ilya, where Ilya and him would cuddle on the couch all day, where he could openly and honestly say “I love you” and-

Better not go down that route. He didn’t think his heart could take it.)

She *was* beautiful, this much Shane knew. He wasn’t surprised about the comment. Hockey locker rooms were open ground for stuff like that. He tried not to participate—he got enough shit for being Asian, and his mother and grandmother made it very clear that talking about women like that was objectifying at *best*.

Shane was pulled out of his thoughts by another ping.

Lily: when i see you next

Lily: i will tap that

A fond smile made its way across Shane’s face. He rolled his eyes at his phone, resolutely ignoring the pink blush that was sneaking its way across his freckles.

Yeah, he was so screwed.

—

After the cottage, after his parents finding out, after *everything*, Shane found himself in a weird limbo.

They were waiting for Ilya's contract to finish up-meaning they were waiting for the hockey season to finish. It was almost over, a few more games on the road and then Shane would get to go back to Montreal and hang out in his apartment and talk to Ilya all day.

And-something he didn't want to mention to anyone because he knew they would freak out-sometimes, his ears would ring. It wasn't really an issue, didn't interfere with his day to day all that much, but he found himself having to up the volume on nearly every device he owned.

He figured it was just remnants of the bad concussion he had gotten. Hockey was a notoriously heavy contact sport, after all.

But other than that, Shane found himself waiting, stuck in this weird in-between.

Then it happened.

It was an away game. Shane was no stranger to racism. Even when he was younger, it seeped through into every corner of his life. He used to wonder why the other moms avoided Yuna at practice, why kids would pull their eyes back and speak gibberish and laugh at him.

After he joined professional hockey, it changed a little. The NHL was by no means a progressive organization, no matter how much they liked to claim they were after signing

Shane on. But they were generally against outright hate speech, and the guys knew better than to be so blatant with their hate.

It was mostly microaggressions. Lots and lots of them. Small comments here, a scowl and a hard shoulder check there, fans of certain teams yelling about how people like Shane didn't belong in Canada.

Sometimes, though, other players got bold. They were playing against Detroit, who had recently suffered a string of rough losses. Everyone on that team was in a fouler mood than usual-not that Shane could blame them, he'd played many a game fueled by anger alone.

But he generally had no issues with any of the Detroit players. And while he felt a little empathy that they were losing 4-1 to Montreal, Shane was just doing what he did best-played good hockey.

Which is why it caught him *really* off guard when he lined up for a face-off, and Matthews snarled an insult at him. Shane was by no means a small man, but Matthews was pretty bulked up, even in hockey player terms.

"Fucking chink. Shocked you can see the puck with those eyes. You should go back to whatever country you came from." He spat.

And Shane...froze. His blood went cold. He didn't even register Hayden throwing off his gloves and immediately lunging at Matthews, didn't notice the whistle being blown—all he managed to do was stand on the ice wide-eyed.

His coach yelled at him from the bench.

"It's just a chirp. Ignore it."

Shane managed to snap himself out of his state long enough to focus on the game. Managed to get the puck, managed to score a goal during the last minute of the game, managed to win

for Montreal, but his head wasn't really there at all.

He was sure the press would want to talk to him. According to Hayden the mic had picked up what Matthews said. Shane was sure his mom was doing damage control already, was sure Detroit would put out some bullshit statement about how they didn't tolerate hate speech or something like that.

Weirdly enough, the part that bothered Shane the most wasn't the comment. It wasn't the slur calling, wasn't the insult to his appearance, wasn't the comment to go back to his country despite the fact that his family had been in Canada for two generations.

No, what was really getting under his skin was what his coach had said.

It's just a chirp.

But it's not. It's really, *really* not. And Shane knows it, his mother knows it, his dad knows it. It was just blatant racism disguised as hockey ribbing. And shit like that *affected* you, your family, your community, even after you got off the ice.

If it was just a chirp, the comment would have stung, but Shane would've shrugged it off and forgotten about it by the end of the night. But it's more serious than that, because Shane knows he's going to have to text his mom to be more careful if she decides to go out tonight, knows that there will be people online calling for him to be removed from the league because he was too soft-skinned. Knows people will use him freezing up as an excuse to critique other Asian athletes, because Shane does not exist in a vacuum, and he had been a kid once, too.

He knows there are young kids who are Detroit fans, young *Asian* kids who are Detroit fans, who are probably asking their parents what those words mean. Knows that there is an Asian hockey player in a junior league out there somewhere who's going to be forced to listen to digs at his race because his teammates' favorite player thought it was okay to say slurs on tv.

By the time Shane got back to his apartment, he didn't even feel real. He tossed his hockey bag onto the ground, sliding into a chair at the countertop and hunching over, sighing.

He checked his phone instinctually, ignoring the numerous texts from his parents about how Matthews was a piece of shit, about how they were handling the PR stuff, to call them if he needed anything.

Another notification caught his attention though.

Missed call from Lily

Shane furrowed his brow, panic immediately coursing through him. Had something happened? Was Ilya injured? Did something happen with his family in Russia?

He felt himself start to breathe faster. He couldn't help it—today had already been so much, and normally Ilya texted Shane first before calling, and everything felt like it was spiralling out of control because this wasn't the *routine*.

Immediately, Shane called back. He worried his lower lip as the phone rang. Slowly inhaling and exhaling. It was just a phone call, not a life-or-death situation.

Ilya picked up, and Shane immediately started talking.

“What’s going on? Are you okay?” Shane asked quickly. He knew he was coming across as desperate, maybe a little pathetic, but he truly could not bring himself to care in that moment.

“Da, am fine. I should be asking *you* that. I watched game on tv.” Shane turned the volume on his phone all the way up, frowning a little at the way he had to strain to make out what Ilya had just said. Once he figured it out, Shane sunk in on himself. He heard Ilya hesitate over the phone.

“What did Matthews say? I heard on tv-he said word that started with c-I will not repeat because sounded very bad, but I do not know what this means. So I call and ask. And check if you are okay, because you haven’t responded to Yuna and David and they are very worried.”

Shane let out a watery chuckle.

“You’re talking with my parents without me? I think you’re their new favorite son. And...”
Shane exhaled, pursing his lips and looking down at his countertop.

He could hear the hesitance in Ilya’s voice. Could hear the way Ilya was almost beating himself up over not knowing enough English to know what a fucking *slur* meant. Shane knew that Ilya struggled to be vulnerable, but they’d always had an unspoken agreement with each other.

Shane had sworn to himself, way back at that first press conference, that he’d always help Ilya with English if he needed. Because Shane remembered how difficult it was for his grandmother to acclimate to Canada when she was alive, remembered how sometimes his mom had stumbled over English words and was treated with mocking ridicule instead of help.

Sometimes words were mean. And sometimes fucking Detroit hockey players put Shane in the uncomfortable situation of describing what a discriminatory word meant to the man he loved.

“It’s-it’s a slur. An insulting word towards Asian people.” Shane explained. He started fidgeting with his shirt. He wished Ilya was there, in that moment. Wanted nothing more than to sink to his knees and suck on Ilya’s thumb and let his head drift in that pleasant calming way.

“Oh, so Matthews is racist *and* shit at hockey. I will kill him.” Ilya sounded absolutely furious over the phone. Shane’s chest warmed at the protectiveness. It was sort of unfairly hot when Ilya got mad, especially on Shane’s behalf.

“Please don’t, I won’t be able to cuddle with you in jail. And it’s...well, it’s not *fine*, but it’s not the first time I’ve heard guys say shit like that.” Shane said, all of a sudden exhausted.

“They shouldn’t. You are better hockey player than all of them combined. Ok?” Ilya said it with a tone of finality. Like he was daring Shane to even try to disagree with him.

Shane smiled softly.

“Okay. I think I’m gonna try to get some rest-I have early practice tomorrow. You still okay to visit when you come to Montreal for your away game next week?” Shane asked. He stifled a yawn at the end of his sentence. He was sure Ilya heard it.

“Yes, I will be there. Go to bed, my little English book of words.”

Shane laughed tiredly, holding his phone at his ear as he walked over to his bedroom.

“A dictionary?”

He heard the sound of Ilya typing on his computer, likely looking the word up. Ilya made a little noise of agreement once he presumably read the definition.

“Exactly. My own dictionary. Goodnight, мой котёнок. Love you.”

Shane shrugged off his gross sweaty hockey shirt. He knew he was grinning at himself like an idiot, but he didn’t care. Hearing Ilya say he loved Shane would never, *ever* get old.

“Love you too.”

With that, Ilya hung up.

Shane ignored the way his head sort of hurt and the way his ears ached after the phone call ended.

It was probably nothing.

—

Shane was *out* and *married* to the love of his life and on a team with awesome players who made him feel so comfortable and safe.

He honestly didn't know what he had done to deserve this, he thought to himself as he sat down on a bench in the locker room. He was disgustingly sweaty, as was everyone else on the Cens, but there was a feeling of pride in the room.

They'd won today's game against Montreal, everyone had skated insanely well-really, Shane had nothing to complain about. Sure, it had stung that his old teammates sans Hayden and JJ barely even looked at him.

And sure, it hurt when they'd checked him hard into the boards-multiple times, mind you-even though they had all been on the ice those years ago when Shane had been taken off on a stretcher.

So sure, his body ached and was bruised, and sure, he was sort of hearing every other word his teammates were saying, but he couldn't bring himself to ruin the post-win cheer and joy that permeated.

He forced himself to tune back into the conversation when Ilya tapped at his shoulder. He focused as hard as he could to understand the words that were being said, relying mostly on lip reading.

Barrett was laughing, punching Young jokingly in the shoulder, who was looking extremely red-faced and flushed.

“Man, that’s crazy. You got your back blown out by a hot dominatrix-good for you, honestly.”

Shane blinked, immediately regretting deciding to tune into the conversation. Because he liked Young, respected him very much, thought he was a great player and fun socialite, but he did *not* need to know about his sex life in that much detail.

Ilya nudged Shane again, looking vaguely confused.

“What does this mean? Blow back out?” He voiced. The locker room quieted a little bit, with everyone looking at each other trying to decide who should explain it.

“Well-um...” Bood trailed off, looking shockingly awkward.

Shane sighed. He figured he’d take one for the team. It had been enough explaining what a creampie was to Ilya years ago-that conversation had nearly taken five years off Shane’s life.

(And had resulted in very, *very* messy sex.)

“It means you get fucked so hard that it’s basically life changing and you can’t walk for a few days after.” Shane explained with a light blush on his cheeks.

Ilya brightened up, immediately smirking. Shane mentally prepared himself.

“Ah, so in sentence I could say...after All Stars game, Shane Hollander got his back blown out.” The light blush on Shane’s face expanded into a full flush, and he smacked Ilya hard in the shoulder.

The guys in the room whistled and cheered.

“Wait-the All Stars game? How long have you guys been together?” Dykstra asked. His question brought up multiple noises of confusion in the room, with everyone asking them about the timeline of their relationship.

Ilya just winked at them.

“That is for us to know.”

Shane smiled. He had no real issue with sharing the timeline of their relationship, but it was nice to still have something to themselves.

He saw Ilya say something again, but he frowned at the way he could barely hear it. It felt like his head was underwater. He watched as Ilya and his teammates went from joking around to looking at Shane in worry-watched as their mouths moved faster than Shane could process. He felt something drip down onto his lip, and brought his hand up.

His nose was bleeding. His ears were ringing and his nose was bleeding and his head fucking *hurt* and before Shane could even process what was happening he was being ushered out of the locker room and into the car with Ilya.

—

Hearing loss. Concussion-related hearing loss. Partial deafness that would likely get worse over time until Shane was fully deaf.

It shouldn't have been all that surprising, in hindsight. Especially considering the job he had. But Shane still found himself feeling like his world was falling apart regardless, sitting on a bed in front of a kind looking doctor, Ilya holding his hand sitting right beside him.

The doctor spoke again. Shane forced himself to actually listen, instead of the weird dissociation he had been doing for the past few minutes.

“Being hard of hearing means that things will likely be a little different for you in everyday life. You are still going to be able to play hockey, but I cannot stress enough how important it is that you try to limit heavy contact. I understand in your profession it's somewhat inevitable, but your head cannot take another high stress injury.”

Ilya frowned at the doctor in front of them, glancing worriedly at Shane out of the corner of his eye.

“I do not know these words when they are together like this. Hard of hearing?” Frustration bled into his voice. Shane knew Ilya *hated* not knowing things.

It was sort of funny. Shane used to help translate for Ilya back in their rookie days, patiently explaining English metaphors and commonly used phrases. Now Ilya would be returning the favor, because the ringing in his ears would apparently only get worse with age and Shane could barely *fucking hear now*-

Shockingly, the biggest emotion Shane was feeling was not upset.

No-it was guilt.

Guilt that now Ilya would be burdened with this. Ilya had dealt with enough throughout his life, and now he would have to deal with a defective husband who would probably spend the rest of his life using hearing aids.

Shane figured he would have to learn sign language, too. He'd never force Ilya to learn it as well, even though he was sure the other man would insist.

The doctor explained the term to Ilya. For the first time, Shane couldn't bring himself to translate.

"It means he has hearing loss. You likely struggle with hearing softer, lower sounds, as well as processing multiple noises at once, yes? Additionally, I am assuming you experience some form of tinnitus occasionally-which is a ringing in the ears."

Ilya scanned Shane, frowning at the way he was almost hunched in on himself, looking guilty. The doctor turned back to Shane.

"I'm going to assume before this episode you noticed some hearing issues?" He asked. Shane felt guilt course through his body, nodding. He didn't dare look at Ilya.

"Yeah-it's in my chart but, um, a few years ago I took a pretty bad fall on the ice during a game. After that I noticed my hearing wasn't what it used to be, but it's never been this bad before." Shane said. The words sounded weird in his own ears.

He could *feel* Ilya's gaze burning into him.

"I understand you played a game earlier today. Was it particularly physical?"

Shane snorted, unable to contain himself. It had been nothing *but* physical, with what felt like every Montreal player other than two gunning for him as punishment for him loving who he loved.

Ilya cursed in Russian, deep scowl on his face.

"Yes. Fucking Montreal. They kept checking you into boards. Your head kept getting knocked around."

And Ilya had gotten multiple penalties for roughing them up in return. He knew Shane could fight his own battles, but even the other Centaurs were willing to bat for Shane.

The doctor pursed his lips.

“That likely triggered the sudden degradation, then. I’m going to write you a recommendation for an ENT specialist as well as recommend you get fitted for hearing aids. Additionally, while not a strict medical recommendation, learning sign language can be very beneficial for those who are hard of hearing.”

With that, the doctor left the room. Shane’s hands trembled.

Fucking Montreal.

—

Shane knew Ilya would want to talk about it the moment they got home.

The car ride back was silent, and the silence continued even as they went inside and greeted Anya. Ilya sat himself on the couch. Shane stood awkwardly.

“Shane, why didn’t you say anything?” Ilya asked. He spoke at the same volume he always did (which was to say, sort of loud), but enunciated every word. Shane felt both thankful and humiliated by it at the same time.

“I just...for a while, I didn’t think it was that big of a deal. It wasn’t really affecting my life all that much. I just got used to reading lips, focusing a bit more when people were talking.”

Ilya frowned. He pat the empty couch cushion next to him. Shane walked over and allowed himself to sink down into the couch, leaning into Ilya.

All of a sudden, he felt his eyes start to water. He swallowed down a lump in his throat. In a few years, he might never be able to hear again. Even now, he couldn't hear the birds he *knew* were chirping outside, couldn't hear the neighbors car alarm that always went off.

It was just...muffled.

"You know, now you're going to have to be my translator." Shane said. Ilya hummed a little in confusion, tilting his head in the way Anya sometimes did when she heard a weird noise.

Shane let out a bitter laugh.

"In our rookie years, when you didn't know English super well, I'd always translate for you. You called me your dictionary. Now you'll have to be *my* dictionary, because, well..." Shane trailed off. He didn't want to say it out loud, but the unspoken words floated through the air.

Because you'll be able to hear what people are saying, and I won't.

Ilya just kissed Shane's forehead gently. Shane allowed himself to turn into Ilya, sinking his head into Ilya's shirt and allowing his tears to fall. Ilya pulled Shane away after a few seconds, staring at Shane intently, making sure he talked slowly so Shane could read his lips.

"I do not mind. Plus, we can learn...language doctor talked about. Sign language? I looked it up while you were in bathroom. We can have fun secret language that no one else knows."

Shane smiled through his tears, rolling his eyes fondly.

"Other people know sign language, Ilya. And I couldn't ask that of you-to learn a whole other language just for me."

Ilya tsked, gently flicking Shane's forehead.

“Yes, but no one else on team knows hand language, so I can finally tell you how hot I think you look after you do that trick during game.”

Shane flushed, glancing away. Ilya pulled Shane's chin so he was once again facing him, grip firm but kind.

“Shane, I would learn every language in the world for you. Okay?”

Shane nodded.

He allowed himself to sink into Ilya, kissing his husband through his tears. Sure, maybe he would have to wear hearing aids. And maybe he'd never really be able to hear the music Ilya likes in the way he used to. And he already knew he'd get frustrated with the press, knew he'd work himself into a panic over telling his parents and his team. Knew he'd get bothered by not being able to hear whispered conversations anymore, feeling excluded like there was a joke he wasn't in on.

But it would be okay.

Because he'd have his own little translator to help him along the way.

It had been months since the diagnosis, since Shane had told his parents and the team. He had gotten fitted for hearing aids, but they were still pretty finicky and honestly made his head hurt, so the doctor recommended he slowly acclimate to them.

Him and Ilya had decided to join the team out for dinner, and shockingly enough, Shane noticed a hearing aid in one of the waiters ears-a tall looking guy with purple hair and a little

pride pin. He had asked what everyone wanted to drink, voice sounding a little off in the way some other people who were hard of hearing sounded.

What had shocked Shane even more, though, was Ilya perking up and signing to the waiter.

Do you know sign language?

Shane watched in awe as Ilya signed the question to the waiter, who lit up, signing back. Shane himself only knew the basics of sign--he had thought Ilya also only knew the basics, but the speed at which Ilya was signing made Shane think he had been secretly practicing behind Shane's back.

It shouldn't have made Shane want to cry. It kind of did anyways.

Shane watched as Ilya signed something he was unfamiliar with, before pointing at Shane. The waiter glanced over between the two, winking at Ilya and nodding before walking away to grab their drinks. Shane pulled at Ilya's sleeve.

"What was that about?" He asked.

Ilya grinned.

"I was telling him about how hot my husband looks right now. He thought you were very handsome. I agreed."

Shane blushed, smacking Ilya's thigh.

"Can you...can you show me the sign you used?" Shane asked shyly. He wasn't used to this-to having to ask Ilya to explain and show things to him rather than the other way around. It reminded him deeply of when he was first learning Japanese, constantly asking his grandma to explain to him what his cousins were saying.

Ilya gave him a gentle kiss.

"Of course."

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