

stuck in symmetry

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Summary

He's almost at his own door when the muffled sound of his own name catches his attention.

“—like an idiot. Scott Hunter is *right* next door.”

Scott pauses, blinking. He then finds himself unconsciously stepping towards the door his name was uttered behind— before he abruptly freezes, eyes locking on the room number.

It's the room directly next to his own. The one Rozanov had walked out of just this morning.

But that voice... it's vaguely familiar, and it *certainly* doesn't belong to Rozanov.

Or: Scott Hunter has the unfortunate experience of rooming next to Ilya Rozanov at the 2011 All-Stars.

Notes

So I watched the Heated Rivalry premiere, blacked out, and finished a fic for the first time in over a year.

Specifically I cracked up at the thought of Scott having to room next to Ilya, thought about all the potential ramifications that could have, and this fic was born! I hope you all enjoy <3

While this is technically canon-divergent, this world of this fic is show-compliant rather than book-compliant (as of the first two eps) but some book characterizations might come through, especially for the first Game Changers book.

(Though I do call it the NHL because I'll drive myself crazy going back and forth between this and my book-compliant WIPs)

Fic title is from Primrose Path - Beef

January 2011 — Nashville

Scott likes the All-Stars games.

It's generally a nice quasi-break during the season— it can't be called an actual break considering he's still here working, dealing with the media, but it's often something of a lighter atmosphere.

He enjoys catching up with players he doesn't often get to see, enjoys the novelty of competing *with* guys he was normally competing against. The games don't count in the rankings of course, so while all the players still put on a good show— wanting to exemplify *why* exactly they deserve to be an All-Star, it doesn't come with the same level of grit and intensity that so many regular-season games did.

That isn't to say that Scott didn't love the grit, because he absolutely does, he *loves* the heady competition of his normal games, loves this sport and all it is, endlessly. But it's nice, sometimes, to just *play the game* without worrying about the rankings.

...At least that's something he's trying to remind himself of as he watches Ilya Rozanov shatter his record in the shot accuracy competition.

It's not a big deal, really, it's not a record of his that *actually* matters.

But the fact that it's Rozanov... that does, admittedly, piss him off. Just a bit.

Scott doesn't think he's ever met a more arrogant rookie. Well, that might not be true— there are some *very* arrogant people in the NHL. They just usually aren't so *showy* with their arrogance. On some level, Scott begrudgingly admires the boldness of the kid, because seriously— a rookie, claiming he's going to score 50 goals in his first season? It's baffling.

Almost as baffling as Rozanov actually having the proper skill to back up his arrogance.

Scott has only played against the guy twice so far, but each time he and the Admirals had been met with relentless chirping from the newcomer (something that got under Scott's skin more than it should've at this point in his career) and an even more relentless first line with Rozanov at the center of it.

So really, Scott isn't all that surprised by Rozanov beating his record from the previous All-Stars competition— but that doesn't mean he has to be *happy* about it.

It's why when Shane Hollander, only minutes later, goes on to beat *Rozanov's* time, Scott feels a small gleam of satisfaction over Rozanov's record being so extremely short-lived.

...Until he realizes he's just been bested by not one but *two* rookies, back to back.

Internally he groans, but when Hollander returns to the bench he still gives the kid a congratulatory pat on the helmet.

Honestly, he's even less surprised by Hollander beating his old record than he is Rozanov, and this time he is, genuinely, happy for the rookie. Scott really admires the clean game Hollander plays, one that couldn't be more different from Rozanov.

While they're both incredibly fierce competition on the ice, Rozanov often seems like he's holding court, practically oozing well-earned confidence and smug charm. Meanwhile Hollander is sharp to an almost startling degree, intensely focused in a way that Scott rarely sees from some of the most seasoned veterans. That of course comes with a well-developed confidence in his sport, but he never carries that aura of arrogance that Rozanov seemingly basks in.

Both rookies were thrust into the spotlight together, the NHL absolutely lapping up the opportunity to make a spectacle out of two generational rookies. Seemingly, the rivalry bloomed in Juniors when Canada and Russia had both made it to the finals two years in a row, each with one win apiece. Them being drafted to opposing Original Six teams only added fuel to the fire.

Scott can't say he envies them—he's already not particularly fond of his own level of stardom, he certainly doesn't want to imagine it being amped up even *more*. He was a first-round draft pick himself, sure, but being swept up in a rivalry with another star player before your first game on NHL ice? It's on another level completely.

Scott spares a glance towards Hollander. He can't help but hope the kid is handling it all okay. From what little interaction he's had with the rookie off-ice, as well as the few interviews he's seen, he certainly seems much more reserved, like maybe he doesn't take to celebritydom in the same way Rozanov clearly does... like maybe Hollander is a bit similar to Scott in that way.

It's perhaps this line of thought that leads Scott to speak to Hollander, after he watches Rozanov skate up to their bench, quickly mutter something unintelligible to the other rookie before darting off again.

"Nice shooting, rook," Scott says, aiming for something jokingly self-deprecating and hoping he's not missing the mark.

Hollander huffs out a laugh. "Thanks."

Scott counts it as a win. "Glad to see that Rozanov didn't hold my record for more than a minute," he replies, because it's the truth. He spares another glance towards Hollander. "What did he want, by the way?"

Chirping is just a part of hockey, but usually the guys leave any particularly biting insults for the regulation games. Scott isn't so sure that's something Rozanov is aware of. Or even conceptually able to understand.

Hollander shakes his head, brow furrowing. "Oh, nothing, just shit-talking."

Well that certainly tracks. "He's an asshole, right?"

Hollander holds his gaze for a second before replying, something curiously indecipherable flashing in his eyes. “I mean, yeah, basically.”

Hm. It couldn’t have been too harsh then, whatever Rozanov had said, given Hollander’s rather milquetoast assent. Good.

Scott is curious to ask Hollander more seriously how he feels about his and Rozanov’s rivalry, but he knows this isn’t the time or place, or if that’s a question Hollander would even entertain from a near-stranger. It’s the captain in him, maybe— Scott knows it’s his job to look out for his teammates, and Hollander being only a temporary-teammate doesn’t seem to make him an exception.

But instead of attempting to pry further, Scott goes for the safe option, and jokes, “Lucky me. I’m in the room next door to him at the hotel.”

Before Hollander can reply, if he was even going to, he’s called off the bench and Scott watches him skate off.

Scott had been joking with Hollander about being upset about rooming next to Rozanov... but also, he kinda hadn’t been.

Scott has stayed in this hotel before, most recently being the last time he was in Nashville playing the Raptors, and he learned very quickly that despite the overall quality of the hotel, the walls are... very thin. And while occasionally overhearing your teammates fuck is just par for the course with the NHL, that certainly doesn’t mean he has to like it. He never wants to overhear his own teammates having sex, and he *certainly* doesn’t want to overhear Rozanov having sex.

He figures tonight will be fine— it was just the skills competition today, and they all have to be up early tomorrow for the actual game— but the same can’t be said about tomorrow night, especially if Rozanov’s team wins. Despite only having been in the NHL for a few months, Rozanov has already gained quite the reputation of being a total womanizer.

But maybe that’s the wrong word— it’s not something Scott has ever heard anything *negative* about, in the way that some players are, unfortunately, absolute creeps. The only thing he’s gotten from the rumor mill is that Rozanov likes to fuck and fuck often, not terribly notable other than maybe his above-average success with women compared to most rookies his age.

But tonight, at least, Scott is optimistic that he won’t need to break out the earplugs he hates sleeping with. Hopefully both his room neighbors will be asleep. It’s later than Scott should be heading to bed, having admittedly lost track of time— he’d been busy getting cleaned out at poker with a few guys he was still friendly with from Juniors.

As Scott continues down the hall and turns the corner, he absently notes the sound of a door closing. Clearly he’s not the only one who’s been up later than they should be.

He’s almost at his own door when the muffled sound of his own name catches his attention.

“ —like an idiot. Scott Hunter is *right* next door.”

Scott pauses, blinking. He then finds himself unconsciously stepping towards the door his name was uttered behind— before he abruptly freezes, eyes locking on the room number.

It’s the room directly next to his own. The one Rozanov had walked out of just this morning.

But that voice... it’s vaguely familiar, and it *certainly* doesn’t belong to Rozanov. Scott’s sure he’s heard that voice recently, but he can’t quite place—

With sharp, sudden clarity, Scott’s mind flashes back to the press conference he watched on his phone this morning, the one with Hollander and Rozanov— then to later, on the bench, talking to Hollander, joking about rooming next to Rozanov—

Scott blinks again. Because... that’s certainly curious.

But maybe he’s wrong. He could definitely be wrong. The voice was a bit muffled, and it’s not as if Hollander would have any good reason to be visiting Rozanov’s room past midnight —

Four gravelly words immediately demand Scott’s attention. They’re quiet, muffled, and yet in the stark silence of the surrounding hallway, they’re clear as anything.

“*Get on your knees.*”

Scott’s brain completely blacks out for one, two, three seconds, before pure self-preservation instinct takes over. He immediately turns on his heel, abandoning the prospect of even entering his room, and marches himself back towards the elevators.

Ten minutes later, Scott finds himself sitting at the near-empty hotel bar, nursing a beer he hasn’t taken a single sip of.

Because. Holy fuck.

The more he tries to tell himself that he can’t possibly be right, that clearly he misheard Rozanov, clearly he attributed Hollander to the wrong voice... the more he’s convinced that he’s absolutely completely right.

And he has *no* earthly idea what to do with this information.

Not telling a soul is a given, obviously. He’ll take this shit to the grave if he has to. But how he personally feels about the revelation is a different story.

It’s not as if he really ever thought he was the *only* gay guy in the NHL. That always seemed statistically improbable, if not impossible. But fuck if it didn’t feel like it sometimes, when he had no real confirmation otherwise.

But now he does, he knows there must be at least two other gay NHL players— or two who are both attracted to men, at least— and it's... it's a *relief*, really. Sweet, giddy relief, so much so that he almost wants to giggle with it.

Although... the more he thinks about it, he realizes it's a selfish kind of relief. He just overheard something he was absolutely *never* supposed to overhear, a secret that was never his to discover. Even if it's something he'll never reveal to anyone, even if he knows there's nothing he can do about it now, it still feels *wrong* to hold the information at all.

And it's not like he knows *exactly* what's going on between the two of them, either. Something sexual in nature, sure. Scott has, comparatively to a lot of people he knows, very little sexual experience, but he certainly knows enough to know *that*. But whether it's something purely sexual— a hatefuck between two rivals, maybe— or if there's something more *personal* going on between them... that he doesn't know.

Scott thinks back to his short conversation with Hollander earlier, to that indecipherable look on his face.

Scott then thinks back to Jacob— his teammate back in Juniors and his first ever crush— and feels a sudden, violent burst of envy. He thinks back to everything he had wanted with Jacob but knew he could never have, what he had been too utterly *terrified* to even consider acting on. He thinks of Hollander and Rozanov, who clearly *did* act on it, who somehow found *something* with each other, who could *have* that with each other, two fellow hockey players who both—

Immediately the envy is snuffed out as quickly as it previously ignited, as Scott realizes that there is *nothing* about their situation to be envious of. If anything, it's simply... sad.

Even if they were... romantically involved, Hollander and Rozanov don't have what Scott had truly wanted with Jacob. They certainly aren't *out*, and there's still no precedent of anyone in the NHL coming out, ever. They're clearly still as terrified as Scott was (and still is) of being discovered, if Hollander's outburst is anything to go by— Scott winces again at the memory, his guilt creeping back in.

And as disastrous as Scott imagines his own potential outing to be, he can admit how much worse it would be for the two of them if they were ever discovered— they're extremely talented rookies, yes, but they are *still* rookies who don't yet have the cushioning of a successful career to fall back on should they be faced with a barrage of homophobic backlash, from both the media *and* the League.

(And perhaps in Rozanov's case, Scott thinks with no small amount of dread, it'd be *far* worse than just dealing with a media circus, were his country of origin to ever find out.)

They're also... *them*. Formidable rival rookies playing for long-standing rival franchises. The media simply adores pitting them against each other, loves picking apart their face-offs and talking about how much they must hate one another.

If the media found out they were far *friendlier* than two hockey players have ever admitted to being, well...

Scott shakes his head. Maybe it is just a casual, one-time fuck. Something to indulge in once, then never again.

He hopes, for their sake, that's really all it is.

June 2011 — Las Vegas

Scott knows he should leave well enough alone.

It's been months since he accidentally overheard Hollander and Rozanov together. It's not often he thinks about that secret, but well. He supposes it's often enough, such as whenever he sees the two of them duking it out over the puck in a highlight reel, or if he happens to catch ESPN doing some stats comparison between the two of them.

Or right now, as Scott claps along with the crowd, watching as Hollander makes his way onstage to accept the award for Rookie of the Year. The only other real contender, of course, had been Rozanov.

As he watches Hollander give a short speech— polite and professional, his wording precise and clear despite how Scott can absolutely tell how he's uncomfortable in front of a crowd like this— Scott wishes he could just say *something* to him, to let him know that he's not alone.

Alone in the way Scott so often feels.

But Scott has entirely no idea how he'd go about bringing it up— not without either revealing what he overheard, or making what would seemingly be an assumption about Hollander to his face that he'd either find rudely presumptuous at best or downright offensive at worst, or Scott outing *himself* in the process.

None of those options seem appealing. At all. But maybe he can say something a little more... subtle.

And it's not as if he wants to pry, really. It's Hollander's own business, but that doesn't mean that Scott isn't worried. Hollander being gay is one thing, but him hooking up with another NHL player is an entirely different beast— let alone him *consistently* hooking up with the same player, if that is what's happening.

Let alone that player being *Ilya Rozanov*.

So yes, Scott knows he should just leave well enough alone. But he really doesn't want to see this blow up in the kid's face. And while he doesn't feel like he can bring it up directly, maybe he can bring it up subtly enough to at least get a gauge on the real situation between Hollander and Rozanov, and go from there.

Subtly really isn't Scott's strong suit. But he likes to think he is good at talking to other hockey players, especially the rookies, helping make them more comfortable when they often find themselves in overwhelming situations.

So when he sees Hollander alone at the bar after the award ceremony, he thinks to himself, what the hell.

“That better just be ginger ale, rook.”

Hollander looks up from his glass and towards Scott, meeting his eye.

“It is, Mr. Hunter. I wouldn’t indulge in front of you.”

Mr. Hunter. Jesus Christ. Scott knows he isn’t *that* much older than Hollander, but sometimes the age gap between your teens and your twenties feels like decades, plural.

Choosing not to reply to that bit, Scott sticks out his hand. “Congrats, man,” he says. As good as they both are, he really does think Hollander deserved the award over Rozanov.

Hollander grasps his hand, shaking briefly before letting go. “Thank you.”

Trying for nonchalant and cool in a way that hopefully doesn’t feel forced, he turns to lean against the bar and inclines his head. “Uh, so, what would you say if me and some of the other old fucks wanted to do some shots with the three rooks? Would you be into that?”

It wasn’t something Scott did often, shots with rookies, but he knows it’s usually something that made them feel less intimidated by some of the more veteran players. Not in a way where he’s purposefully trying to get Hollander inebriated or anything so dickish. But doing a single shot together, maybe that could be something of an icebreaker between him and Hollander, to help build a rapport later on.

“Fuck yes, I would,” Hollander says immediately with a smile. Scott smiles in turn, pleased to see him visibly relax a bit.

“Okay,” Scott says, and then, as offhandedly as he can manage, “Where’s your boy, Rozanov?”

“My what?”

As Scott takes a sip of his drink he catches the look in Hollander’s eyes— the barely contained shock that’s almost bordering on *fear*, and immediately Scott knows he miscalculated.

(Or, more accurately, he thinks he calculated the situation entirely correctly. Just as *he* feared.)

But, fuck. So much for *subtlety*.

“No,” he stammers out in a hastily attempted recovery. Because seriously, what was he thinking? *Your boy*? He might as well just lock the closet door while he’s at it. “I mean, not your boy. Just, like, it’s always, uh. Hollander and Rozanov, right?”

He winces internally but forces out a laugh, the words sounding stupid even to him. “I just thought— ”

“I— I don’t know where he is,” Hollander cuts him off. “We’re not, like, friends or anything.”

Scott looks at him. Over the course of his NHL career, he’s played— and lost— a lot of poker with a wide array of players.

Scott doesn’t think Shane Hollander would be very good at poker, either.

“No worries, man— no worries! I’m sure someone else grabbed him.”

Hollander nods, not meeting Scott’s eyes. Scott turns and takes a sip of his own drink.

Yeah, he could definitely use a shot.

Or five.

Thankfully he didn’t completely ruin things with Hollander, as he still agrees to a shot with him, Carter, Huff, and a few others. Scott has two, but Hollander just sticks to the one.

And later, if Scott happens to notice Hollander by the bar again, eyes darting around the room in search of someone who clearly isn’t here, well. This time Scott doesn’t say anything.

Maybe it makes him a coward. Maybe he’s sparing Hollander. Maybe he’s sparing them both.

Maybe there’ll come a time where he can bring it up in some capacity, any capacity. But that time clearly isn’t now.

Fuck. It’s only their *rookie year*.

But for now, Scott averts his gaze, letting Carter rope him into another terrible story of his.

He just hopes Hollander and Rozanov are prepared for what they’re getting into.

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Comments are kudos are <3

I'm [meebles](#) on tumblr!

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