

of a certain age

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by [gurlsrool](#)

Summary

“Wait, I could totally see that,” Connors says. “She wears reading glasses and he’s, like, obsessed with them. Sometimes on the road, he calls her from the bathroom and I hear him begging her to put them on.”

“The glasses! I heard that too.” Shit, it must be a fetish, right? She doesn’t just happen to be old. Rozy *likes* that she’s old.

Or: Cliff figures out why Ilya’s keeping his Montreal girl a secret. She’s not a girl at all...she's an elderly woman. Or maybe an elderly man?

Notes

This takes place post HR. It doesn’t include book spoilers besides briefly touching on the end of The Long Game

Although they're unrelated, the vibe here is similar to my fic "[Pike and Boiziau, Amateur Detectives](#)". It’s also partially inspired by the Check Please fic "[Betty and Jack](#)" and by my favorite HR fic trope: “I’ve connected the two dots” “You didn’t connect SHIT!”

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

- Inspired by [Betty and Jack](#) by [emimix3](#)

Cliff didn't choose this.

He didn't wake up one day and say, *him. That asshole. The guy who half the league has running bets on whether he's gonna get a DUI or have an illegitimate child first.*

That's my best friend. Protecting him extends off the ice now, a permanent full time job.

It just sort of happened. He's not sure when exactly, but if he had to pinpoint a moment, it would be early 2014.

Roz came back from Sochi a fucking mess. Stumbling around the locker room, mumbling in Russian, cursing loudly when he couldn't get his stick tape to cooperate.

Everyone was casting him wary glances. Russia's performance in the Olympics hadn't just been bad. It had been abysmal. Like, embarrassingly so.

It was clear to Cliff that the guys were desperate to ignore it. Like if they avoided eye contact long enough, Roz wouldn't know that they were all thinking about it.

Cliff cleared his throat. "Roz," he said.

His head snapped up. "What?"

"Just wanna let you know Toronto isn't Latvia," he said lightly. "We'd all really appreciate it if you scored tomorrow."

"Go fuck yourself," Roz said, but Cliff could see it in the set of his shoulders. Gratitude.

Gratitude that Cliff hadn't kept dancing around it. He'd had the decency to do a damn waltz to his face.

From that day on, Cliff keeps a closer eye on him. Double checks that he's getting home safe. That he's not drinking too much. That he's okay after one of those phone calls in harsh Russian (Cliff doesn't need a translator to know they're bad news).

He switches a vodka out for a water every now and then. He shows Roz dumb videos on his phone to distract him from himself.

He learns when to pull, when to push. When to crack a dumb joke, when to shut his ass up.

The end of 2016 is a test for sure. Roz is as wrecked as he was after Sochi, but this time Cliff has no idea why. Why Roz is spacy and aggressive and snapping at the boys for crimes such as "watching TV while working out" and, in one bewildering case, "blinking too much".

The closest he gets to an answer is at some club in Montreal. Roz's eyes track Hollander leaving with Rose Landry (the dude's hot, but how did he pull her?) and he just...starts crying?

It's not anything loud or dramatic. Just lips pulled tight and a hint of moisture welling up.

"Fuck," Cliff blurts. "You okay?"

Roz keeps staring straight ahead, mutters something in Russian. He takes a sip of his drink, then says in English, "I want..."

"Yeah?" It's one of those moments where Cliff has to pull.

"I just *want*." He shakes his head. "Stupid. I have lived in America too long, probably."

Cliff hums like he understands. He thinks maybe he does, following Roz's gaze to Hollander's hand firm on Rose Landry's back.

Cliff's seen the way Roz blushes at texts from his Montreal girl. Underneath all his posturing, he's a big softie. He stops to pet every dog he comes across and he makes funny faces at babies.

He must have that same tug as Cliff. That same subdued dream of coming home to a second pair of shoes by the door, a bed already warm.

Cliff gets it. Gets him.

At least, that's what he thinks—until the start of the 2017-18 season.

Roz comes back from the summer rested.

That's the first sign that something's amiss.

Cliff's become accustomed to spending a month and a half cramming Roz's soul back into his body. It always seems like he left it in Moscow, returning as a weak outline of himself.

So Cliff invites him out. Plies him with beer and women and dumb jokes and by November, he's more human, less hollow.

This year is immediately different. Roz walks into the locker room glowing. Literally. He has tan lines.

"Hello boys!" he says, so chipper it startles Cliff. "I know, I know, you missed my gorgeous face."

The guys all jeer but Cliff just stands there, stunned. This is Roz after their first win against Montreal of the season. This is not a Roz who just spent his summer with a family of ghosts.

"How was Russia?" Cliff asks.

"Girls. Video games. Training. The usual." Roz shrugs. He pulls out his phone and smiles. His Montreal girl smile, but even bigger than usual. Uninhibited.

He bites it down, but a few seconds later, it's back.

That's only the start. After practice, Cliff says, "Wanna hit up a club tonight?"

And Roz...hesitates. Like he's mulling it over. Like maybe he has a better option.

"What, you got a hot date?" Cliff jokes.

This makes Roz freeze more. He catches himself quickly, but Cliff knows him well enough to notice. "I will come. Just for an hour. I am still jet lagged."

Okay. Weird. Didn't he get back a few weeks ago?

It gets even weirder when they're at the club.

They're there for a grand total of thirty seconds before a woman walks up, leans into Roz's space.

Cliff starts playing his usual game: guessing if she's a puck bunny or just finds Roz hot. It's seeming like the latter tonight.

He's zoned out looking for a girl himself, so he doesn't notice at first that the woman's gaze has pivoted to him.

"Cliff here plays with me." Roz pats him on the back. "He is very good. Almost as good as me. And almost as handsome, yes?"

The woman laughs, runs a hand up Cliff's arm. "Wow. You're so *tall*."

What the absolute fuck?

The thing about Roz is he doesn't wingman. Ever. He cares about his own dick and no one else's.

In fact, he's sort of the opposite of a wingman. On two separate occasions, they've been talking girls up together only for Roz to take *both* of them home, the asshole.

This almost feels like a test or something. But the woman's blinking up at him and her tits are huge, so he fails. Or passes?

Whatever the case, he takes her home. He stops thinking about Roz at all because, well, he's only human.

But then it happens again. And again.

Every time they go out, women throw themselves at Roz and he passes them all off to Cliff, Connors, Carmichael, the awkward rookies.

The guys are *thrilled* with this development. They're playing better because of it. God, they may actually win another Cup this season, all because Roz finally became selfless.

Or, more likely, his Montreal girl locked him down once and for all.

He doesn't get why Roz is lying about it. When anyone asks, he insists he's single, holds his phone tighter to his chest. Sometimes he even implies he took a girl home, but his smile is pinched. Cliff's not buying it.

He knows the guys would give Roz shit for settling down. Call him whipped, because he obviously is. He left a bar at *ten* last weekend.

But they'd be happy for him. Hammersmith's wife would add her to the WAGs group chat and invite her to their wine nights or whatever.

Unless she already has?

Cliff caves and asks Hammersmith about it, but he looks at Cliff like he's insane. "Roz? In a serious relationship? There's no way."

"But he's always on his phone." Cliff's whining, he knows, but really? Does no one else see it? "He never takes girls home anymore."

Hammersmith stares at him blankly.

Cliff is, evidently, alone in his curiosity.

He finally gets some proof in November. He's managed to drag Roz to a club, because that's something he has to do now.

Gone are the days of dragging him home while he lists into Cliff's shoulder. Now, he has to drag him *out*.

They're at a table together, drinking. Well, Cliff's drinking. Roz is mostly texting.

Him and that damn phone. It's turning Cliff into a grandpa.

The song shifts and Roz perks up. It's Britney Spears, which always activates him like a sleeper agent.

He abandons his phone on the table and lunges to the dance floor.

Cliff laughs. At least some things never change.

He's about to take a video, but he's distracted by a text popping up—on Roz's still unlocked screen.

Cliff's three drinks in and dying a slow curiosity induced death, so he taps the screen before it can go dark.

They're...interesting to say the least.

Ilya: Pleaaase wait up sweetheart? 🙏

Jane 🐱💧: You know it's already 2 hours past my bedtime. I'm beat

Ilya: Ughhh boringggg

Ilya: But I miss youuuu

Jane 🐱💧: I miss you too

Jane 🐱💧: I can call in the morning?

Ilya: Please

Ilya: Good night my love. Make sure you take your vitamins and probiotics

Jane 🐱💧: Already took them

Jane 🐱💧: Good night. I love you ❤️

Cliff drops the phone on the table. He looks back to where Roz is deftly dancing away from a woman trying to grind on him.

Wow. Okay.

So Roz is in love.

And not just in love, but in love with a woman who needs reminders to take supplements and has a regular bedtime of...

He checks the time. Jesus, she usually goes to bed at 9:00 P.M.?

How old is this chick?

It's a joke at first. An inside joke with himself, if that's a thing.

Like, oh yeah. Roz is keeping his girl a secret because she's old as balls. She eats soup for all her meals and does crossword puzzles for fun.

There's no way. She's probably just, like, a loser. A very hot loser in her early twenties.

But then the phone call happens.

Cliff is hosting Connors, Hammersmith, and Roz to catch a game.

He was surprised Roz showed up, but he did, with vodka and everything.

Right before the game starts, Roz gets a phone call and leaves the room, barely concealing his smile. Cliff rolls his eyes.

“What’s up with him?” Connors asks

“Marly’s convinced he’s locked down,” Hammersmith says around a mouthful of pizza. The fact that he’s the only one of them who’s married is baffling.

Connors tilts his head. “That would make sense actually.”

“Thank you!”

“He’s always smiling at his phone and shit. Huh.”

“Do you have more Coke?” Hammersmith asks, licking ranch off his fingers.

Cliff scoffs and gets up to grab another.

His place isn’t as large or fancy as Roz’s though. It’s fucking Boston. Being a millionaire just means he can afford a nice two bedroom. The only person who can afford a house here these days is Ilya Rozanov or a Kennedy.

The sound proofing is shitty enough that when he gets to the kitchen, he can hear Roz giggling in the guest room turned home gym. *Giggling*.

“Oh of course,” he says. “You have to read another boring book. How else would you remember anything about hockey?”

Silence for a moment. Another huffed laugh. Then, “Are you wearing your glasses? Don’t hurt those pretty eyes.” Wow, this is fucking weird. Cliff shouldn’t be listening, but he can’t stop. He’s, like, hypnotized by this alternate reality he’s stepped into. One where Ilya Rozanov is nauseatingly sweet. “Send pictures. Pleaaaaase, I want to seeee.”

Okay, that’s more on brand. But then, Roz says, “But they’re *my* glasses. Yes, mine. No one else can see them. Just me. Let me seee.”

Wait what? He’s not demanding nudes, he’s demanding *glasses photos*?

Huh. Cliff didn’t see that coming.

“Mmm. Counting down the hours, yes?” Cliff tunes back in to hear Roz saying. “And you are ready for me? Taking your probiotics? Doing your stretches?”

What the fuck does that mean? “I want to get you in that position we did when—yes. Exactly. No more injuries for you this year. Not on my watch.”

Injuries?

Cliff hears a soft *I love you*, so he grabs the Coke and hustles out to the living room.

The puck drops, but it’s Ottawa versus Toronto, so the results are already obvious.

He zones out, making a list in his head of everything he knows about Roz’s girl:

- Her name is Jane
- She's a secret
- She goes to bed at 9:00 P.M.
- She takes vitamins and probiotics (for sex?)
- She stretches to "prepare" for ? sex??
- She got injured this year (during sex???)
- She reads "boring books"
- She wears reading glasses
- She has a bad memory?

Oh God.

She really is old.

The first thing he does is tell Connors.

No, the first thing he does is lose his mind.

But after everyone else has left, he asks Connors to hang back, because he seems the most susceptible to the idea.

He's immediately on board, which is maybe not a good sign. Connors once watched a YouTube video on the moon landing being fake and believed it until Roz called him an idiot ("You win the space race, then say, just kidding, never happened? Americans are so dumb").

But Cliff's just relieved to not be alone in this.

"Wait, I could totally see that," Connors says. "She wears reading glasses and he's, like, obsessed with them. Sometimes on the road, he calls her from the bathroom and I hear him begging her to put them on."

"The glasses! I heard that too." Shit, it must be a fetish, right? She doesn't just happen to be old. Roz *likes* that she's old.

"Oh and then there's her diet? She eats all this weird healthy shit and she doesn't drink, I've heard him talking about that. Maybe it's for her cholesterol or something."

"That would make sense." Cliff nods. Damn. She must be geriatric. What kind of twenty-something chick doesn't drink and goes to bed before 10 P.M.?

“What do we do? Should we, like, drop hints that we’re okay with it? We could find a bingo night to go to.”

“No, no,” Cliff says. The kid means well but he has the subtlety of a brick. “Leave it to me.”

Cliff brings it up on their flight to Ottawa.

He presses play on the movie *Red*, which he specifically downloaded for this purpose, and nods at the screen. “Hot, right?”

Roz looks up from his phone long enough to raise his eyebrows. “Her?”

“Yeah. Helen Mirren could, like, get it.”

“Okay?”

Cliff has no idea how old Roz’s girl is. If he had to guess, he’d say fifty at the youngest, but that feels generous. He’s gone with Mirren in case she’s pushing seventy. Or shit, eighty?

“Like, girls are great but there’s something about a *woman*, you know?” Cliff gives Roz a look that he hopes is reassuring. Like, *I get you. I get this. I’m totally into sagging tits too.* “She looks like she’d be really experienced. A total beast in the sack.”

“A beast,” Roz repeats. He points at Helen Mirren. “You are talking about her?”

“Totally.”

“Okay...” Roz says again, cocking his head. “Why are you telling me this? You want me to know you eat cobweb pussy?”

Wow, he’s really overcompensating to cover his tracks. Poor guy. “Just saying I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it. Being with an older woman.”

“Good for you. Can I take a nap now?”

Cliff nods. Mission accomplished.

Cliff’s in his hotel room watching *Red 2* (it’s a damn good series, with or without an old lady fetish) when he gets a FaceTime call from Connors.

Weird. They don’t really call each other out of the blue.

He answers and is met with a grody close up of Connors’ mustache. “Dude,” he hisses.

“What?”

“So I’m at the store getting my sister Smarties. She likes the Canadian ones, you know, that are chocolate?”

“Okay?”

“And look who’s here.”

“All I see is your ugly face,” Cliff says.

“Oh! Hold on, I’m trying to be covert.”

The camera flips. It takes a second for Cliff to figure out what he’s looking at. It’s Roz. In the grocery store with an older white man.

They’re looking at pasta together, laughing. The guy points up and Roz reaches, grabs a box. He clasps a firm hand on Roz’s shoulder, smiles warmly at him. Roz smiles right back.

Holy shit.

Holy shit!

With a start, Cliff remembers how drained Roz is every time he comes back from Russia. Remembers when he nearly decked a rookie for calling Hunter a slur last month. Remembers his hips swaying to Britney fucking Spears.

Roz isn’t in love with an older woman.

He’s in love with an older *man*.

It explains everything.

Of course Roz has to keep it a secret. It’s not just the old thing, it’s the man thing.

Cliff’s good with it personally. He has a gay cousin who came out last year. And Cliff, like, watches the shit out of *Modern Family*. That Cam guy cracks him up. But he’s heard what some of the guys say in the locker room, he’s seen the news coming out of Russia. No fucking wonder Roz is tight lipped about this.

What doesn’t make sense is the man feels...familiar to Cliff.

He can’t shake the sense that he’s seen this guy before.

Connors is no help, hopped up on sugar from eating all the Smarties he bought his sister.

He just keeps talking about how the guy is *old* and a *guy* and kind of handsome, but he would expect more of a Brosnan type for Roz if he’s gay and also into elderly men. Or maybe an Idris Elba type?

Connors doesn’t seem to recognize the guy. It nags at Cliff. He was sort of a blur through FaceTime, but Cliff knows him. He *knows* he knows him.

They're warming up for their game against the Centaurs when Roz looks up, smiles, and waves at someone in the crowd.

Cliff follows his gaze and finds the grocery store guy waving back. Holy shit. He's here? That's fucking bold.

He squints, trying to place him, when an Asian woman walks up bearing two drinks.

That's when it hits him.

Cliff *has* met him before, briefly, at the NHL awards. Hell, Cliff sent flowers to his fucking house a few months ago after concussing his son.

Roz isn't just in love with a man—he's in love with Shane Hollander's *dad*.

Cliff is freaking the fuck out.

He has to do something about this.

Something more substantial than dropping heavy handed hints. This is some serious shit.

Hollander Senior is married. Cliff looked it up as soon as the game ended, found some sappy anniversary post his wife made *two weeks ago*.

He's married. To a woman. And he's Roz's rival's *dad*.

What is this? Is it some sick game? Some ploy to get in Hollander's head?

But it can't be. Roz is practically floating these days, an earnest smile affixed to his face. He texts the guy near constantly under what must be a code name, tells him that he misses him, loves him.

Cliff tries to talk to Roz after the game, but he disappears as soon as he's done with press. Probably to go to some hotel room with Hollander Senior and fuck those brittle bones out. God, this is so messed up.

The next day, Cliff waits to get him alone.

And waits. And waits.

Finally, when they arrive at their hotel in Buffalo, Cliff wraps an arm around him. "We need to talk," he says lowly.

"What do you want?" Roz shoves his phone in his pocket.

"I know."

Roz lets out an exasperated sigh. "Know what?"

“I know about you and Hollander.”

Roz stops walking. Right there, in the hotel lobby, he stops. “You know nothing.”

Cliff drops his voice to a whisper, “I know you’re fucking him.”

Roz grabs him by the collar. Cliff’s a huge guy. People don’t just *grab him by the collar*. But Roz does it like it’s nothing.

He pulls him into the empty business center, practically shoves him in a desk chair. He crouches down, leans in until he’s a breath away from Cliff’s face.

“You tell no one. No one. If you tell anyone, I will kill you. Your mother too.”

Jesus. Why’d he have to bring Cliff’s mom into this?! “I won’t!” Cliff puts both hands up in surrender. “I would never. I’m just worried. This is some deep shit.”

“Is none of your business.” Roz rubs a hand over his jaw, reels back a little.

“What are you doing here, man?” he asks. “Is this real? Or do you just get off on the fact that you shouldn’t be doing it?”

Roz inhales sharply. Exhales slowly. “I love him,” he says quietly. “Maybe it was that at first, but...but no. I have always loved him.”

“Wow.” Cliff lets out a low whistle. “Okay. Fuck. But isn’t he...?” *Married*. He’s fucking married.

“A terrible idea, I know. It has to be a secret, obviously. Only his parents know.”

Cliff gapes. They’ve told this dude’s parents? Damn. They must be old as fuck. He wonders how they took it. “I won’t tell anyone, I swear. Do you have a plan though? I mean, he’s so far and...”

And he’s *married*. Like, seriously, what the fuck?

Roz glances at the door. “Next season, I am signing with Ottawa. This is my last season with Boston.”

“Holy FUCK,” Cliff yelps. Roz shoots him a warning look. “You’re moving to Ottawa for *that guy*?”

Roz’s whole face hardens, like after one of those phone calls in Russian. “Yes. I am going to marry him.”

“What?! How? Is that even legal?”

“Yes? It has been legal there for years!”

It has? When the fuck did Canada make bigamy legal?

Cliff shakes his head. "Fuck, man. So this is serious. He's it for you?"

Ilya nods. "I will miss Boston. I will miss...you." He looks down at his shoes and Cliff knows how much the words take from him. "But I have to do this. Plus, citizenship in Canada...it's safer for me."

"Okay." That part, at least, Cliff can understand. He wouldn't want to be gay (bisexual?) and Russian in this country right now. Hell, Cliff hates being a straight white dude in this country right now. "I think I need to meet him. I mean, meet him again...If he's that important to you...I really wanna understand."

Because this makes no sense. Like...okay, Hollander Senior isn't an ugly man. He's decent. He had to be to land his fox of a wife.

But Jesus, he's not throw your career down the toilet levels of hot. He must have a dazzling personality. Cliff needs to understand the appeal. And if he doesn't, he needs to pull the dude aside and tell him that his midlife crisis is ruining a future here.

"Yes. That would be nice," Ilya says. "I will ask. Maybe we can have dinner in two days? When we play Montreal?"

Cliff nods. "Okay. Yeah."

He stands and pulls Roz into a hug.

"I think you will like him," Roz says with a voice that's foreign, almost soft, "when you get to know him."

Cliff forces a laugh that he hopes doesn't come off as empty as it feels. "Alright. Whatever you say, dude."

God, this kid is a piece of work.

Roz ignores him the next two days.

It hurts, but he can't blame the guy for being nervous.

He keeps shooting Cliff looks that are probably supposed to be threatening. Like he needs to be warned not to blab to TMZ.

Cliff would rather die than tell anyone about this weird shit. In fact, he does the opposite.

He goes to Connors and tells him that the guy Roz was with is his mentor. That he's not dating an elderly person, not gay, it was all a misunderstanding.

Connors instantly believes him, gullible as ever. Hopefully he never gets an email from a Nigerian prince.

When they land in Montreal, Cliff tries to say something to Roz, but he hustles off the plane.

A few minutes later, Cliff receives a text with an address.

It's in Montreal, not far from the team hotel, which is nice. Cliff figured he'd be driving out to Ottawa. But of course they can't go to Hollander's home. Where he lives with his wife. God, this is fucked.

Cliff goes to his hotel room, changes into something more casual, then takes a cab to the address.

He doesn't have a bottle of wine or anything, he realizes too late. This guy's at an age where he's totally going to judge him for that. But whatever. Cliff isn't the one on trial here. Cliff isn't the one dating his twenty-six-year-old son's rival.

He takes a deep breath, walking up to the house. It's nice. He wonders idly if they rented it. How much money Roz shelled out for it.

Is that what this is? His son isn't enough of a prized pig, he had to get a rich boy toy? Maybe he's in a lot of debt. Maybe wealth and success gets him off.

Or maybe he's just a perv. Dating an older guy is one thing, but it's hard for Cliff to ignore how Freudian this is. Especially considering Roz just lost his father...it's like a blueprint for daddy issues.

Cliff rings the doorbell, heart hammering. Now that he's about to actually face this guy, he feels sort of nauseous.

Immediately, the door opens—and Shane Hollander stands there, smiling at him.

“Um,” Cliff says.

“Hi,” Hollander says shyly. “Come in. You can just leave your shoes...”

Cliff follows him tentatively inside, kicking off his shoes as instructed. Why is Hollander here? Does he *know* about this thing with his dad?

Hollander leads Cliff through the house, mumbling about the color he repainted the entryway recently. Okay. So this is his place.

They couldn't meet at Hollander Senior's house, so they're meeting here. That makes sense. But shit, Cliff can't get over the fact that Hollander knows? And is crashing their dinner? No, not crashing. He's hosting it.

They sit at the table and Hollander offers him a beer, thank God. Cliff wouldn't survive this sober.

“Ilya will be out in a minute,” Hollander says. *Ilya*. It's surprisingly friendly. Maybe they're adjusting to being on a first name basis before Roz becomes his step dad. It's like something out of *Modern Family*.

Cliff drains a quarter of his beer in one gulp. “He good?”

“Oh yeah, he’s just wrapping up a phone call.”

A phone call. With Hollander’s dad, presumably. Who must be en route from Ottawa as they speak.

“Sorry, I have to ask,” Cliff says. “You’re really fine with this whole...arrangement?” He can’t bring himself to call it a relationship.

“Arrangement?” Hollander sits down across from him with a ginger ale.

“Like, Roz coming up to Canada and...” *And fucking your dad.* He can’t say it. If someone said that to him, he’d punch them in the fucking face.

“Oh. The move, yeah.” Hollander rubs the back of his neck. Jesus, he knows about that too? What, are they having slumber parties after Roz gets Hollander’s dad off? “I’m sorry. I know he really likes playing with you guys, but it’s just so far. And with citizenship...”

“Right.” So he’s in on the top secret move to Ottawa. And he’s fine with it? He thinks it’s only logical for Rozanov to move countries in part to have easier access to his dad’s asshole? “And what does your mom think of all of this?”

“My mom?” Hollander asks, clearly caught off guard. It’s nosy, sure, but Cliff needs to know. He nods. “Um, she was surprised at first, but she’s supportive. She’s been a big help in this whole process.”

What the fuck? Okay, so it’s an open marriage or something? Or are they gonna get divorced?

That still doesn’t explain why Hollander’s, like, good with this. He seems almost *excited*.

Even though they hate each other. Even though it’s his dad. Roz is fucking his dad. Hollander knows that Roz is fucking his dad and he hasn’t committed homicide followed by suicide yet?

“Gotcha,” Cliff says, because what is he supposed to say? Your mom needs therapy? “And when exactly did this all...begin?”

“Um, that’s a complicated question.” Hollander’s eyes dart to the side, like he’s hoping Roz will swoop in and save him. Maybe they really have embraced being family. “It’s been awhile now. But things didn’t become serious until this summer.”

Exactly what Cliff thought. “He wasn’t in Russia, was he?”

“I think maybe we should wait for Ilya before we get more into the details.”

“Okay.”

They fall quiet for a moment. Hollander asks polite questions about their game against Buffalo. Cliff answers.

It's awkward, considering Cliff accidentally put him in a hospital bed earlier this year.

It's also awkward considering he knows that his best friend is fucking Hollander's Dad.

Seriously, how is Hollander not freaking out? Okay, he is freaking out a little. He's definitely nervous, looking off to the side a few times, fiddling with the tab on his ginger ale can.

But he's not catatonic. Cliff would be fucking catatonic.

"So how did you figure it out?" Hollander blurts. "Sorry, I know we should wait. I've just been wondering..."

"You're good. I saw his texts."

"Ah." Hollander's cheeks redden. "You saw...?"

Oh no. He's probably imagining his dad sending wrinkly dick pics. "Nothing bad! Just some messages about probiotics? And an 'I love you'? It's wild seeing Roz so serious about someone, I've gotta admit."

"I'm sure." Hollander chuckles. "Honestly, sometimes it surprises me too."

Well. That's gotta be the understatement of the century.

Cliff taps his beer, considering Hollander. Maybe he's dropping a hint because he's too polite to say it outright. He is Canada's poster boy, after all. "Can I be totally honest?"

Hollander swallows. "Yeah."

Fuck it. He may as well go for broke. There's no way Hollander won't agree, right?

"I'm kind of grossed out by the whole thing," Cliff says.

Hollander goes pale. "Oh..."

"Not in a homophobic way! But you've gotta wonder about Roz's taste a little, right?" Cliff says. Hollander's whole face sort of crumbles. Oh God. Maybe that was too mean. It is his dad, after all. Cliff tacks on a weak, "No offense or anything."

"Oh of course. None taken." Hollander sounds sarcastic, almost bitter. Fuck.

How is he screwing up so badly? This should be easy. Hollander should be relieved that someone knows and can commiserate. Instead, he's looking at Cliff like he shot his dog.

"I just mean, it's so different," Cliff tries. "Unexpected. I'm used to seeing him with bikini models and shit, you know?"

"Bikini models," Hollander says under his breath. "Right. Yeah."

"It's kind of like that girl you go to high school with who's super hot, could be with anyone she wants, and instead she marries that ugly guy who's balding at twenty. I mean, why make

that choice? If you could have a Ferrari, why settle for old scraps from a junkyard?" Cliff's being too harsh maybe. Or definitely? Hollander's blinking a lot, like he's about to cry. Fuck. He must really love his dad. "Um. Sorry? I didn't mean—"

"I know exactly what you mean," Hollander snaps. Which is just rude. Cliff isn't the enemy here. He's on Hollander's side!

A door opens and Hollander visibly deflates a little. Roz walks in wearing a t-shirt and sweatpants. He smiles at Hollander and Hollander smiles back. It's strangely warm, but, Hollander's on board for some reason. They're family now apparently.

"Sorry, sorry," Roz says. "Sveta is having problems with her coworker again."

"Gonna commit murder for her?"

"I might have to." Roz stalks the room, sits down at the table, and kisses Hollander on the temple. Cliff stares at them, awed. This is getting unnervingly close to that old Folger's ad. "What?"

"I—" Cliff closes his jaw, which he apparently dropped.

"You have a problem with this?" Roz snaps.

"No!" Cliff rubs a hand over his face. "I mean, kind of?"

"Marlow was just telling me that he's 'grossed out by the whole thing'," Hollander says.

What the fuck? What a tattle tale! It's like Hollander's sucking up to his soon to be second dad or something.

"Are you fucking serious?"

"I didn't mean—I just thought—" Cliff steels himself, resists the childish urge to scream, *I told you that in confidence!* "I guess I just don't understand how it works."

"Oh?" Roz raises his eyebrows. "So you want details, hmm? You want to know that I top? That he loves to ride me?"

Cliff gapes, a series of horrifying images searing his brain. This is insane. Why is he acting like Cliff's the freak here? And how does a man that old even ride a dick? No wonder he has to stretch.

"Ilya," Hollander says. He takes a deep breath. "Let's...I think we all need to cool off. Start from the beginning."

"Right. Yeah." Cliff takes a long pull of beer. "Can you tell me exactly how it happened? Like, how did you even meet?"

Roz gives him that look like he's stupid. "Guess."

“I don’t know. Through hockey?”

“Ding ding ding!” Roz claps. “You are not brain dead after all!”

Cliff scoffs. “I wanna be very clear. It’s not the gay thing.”

“Bisexual,” Roz says sharply.

“Right. I figured. It’s not the bisexual thing. But why him?”

Hollander flinches. Roz shrugs, shoots Cliff a look that he knows is a challenge. “He is hot. And he takes my dick so well.”

Hollander chokes on his ginger ale, which is more than fair. “Stop.”

“Yeah, seriously.” Cliff gives Hollander a nod of solidarity. “We don’t wanna hear that shit, man.”

“Oh sorry. I did not mean to disgust you,” Roz says.

“Come on! Are you seriously mad at me? I’m glad you’re happy I guess, but you must know this is fucking weird.”

Roz bristles, and Hollander places a hand over his. Because Shane Hollander is, apparently, a deranged human being.

“I know it’s surprising to you or whatever,” Hollander says. “But it works. It makes sense whether you understand it or not.”

“It makes sense,” Cliff repeats slowly. Literally in what fucking world? “So this is fine with you? Love is love, no problems here?”

“Uh, I mean, yeah?” Hollander says. “Obviously.”

Obviously? Cliff glances at the door. When’s this old guy getting here? Cliff’s ready to beat his ass up. He must be manipulative as fuck to have the two best players in the league under his spell.

“Really? You’re one big happy family and you two are, what? Just putting the rivalry aside because you’re...” *Being blackmailed? Brain dead?*

“We’re in love,” Hollander says, jutting his chin out like he does on the ice.

Wait what?

“*You’re* in love?” He looks between Hollander and Roz.

Hollander nods. “Yes.”

“Jesus. How the fuck does that work?”

“Enough,” Roz says, venom in his voice. “You will not sit in my boyfriend’s home and speak to him like this.”

“So he’s your boyfriend now? Is his dad your husband or just your mistress?” Cliff says. He’s met with silence, but that’s fine. He’s not done yet. “And your mom’s on board? Seriously? She’s fine with her husband sleeping with their son’s rival? And said son also fucking him? What, are you having threesomes with your *dad*, Hollander? Or, or, foursomes with both your parents? I’m sorry, but this is disturbing. I love you no matter what Roz, but—”

“Cliff,” Roz says. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“This!” He points between Hollander and Roz. They’re holding hands now, the sick fucks. “This weird...thing.”

“What thing exactly?”

“The thing where Roz is sleeping with your dad!”

“What?” Hollander says. That’s all he manages before Roz bursts out laughing.

“What are you talking about?” Roz says. It’s barely coherent through his laughter. “I am sleeping with Hollander’s dad?”

“Yes.” What, is he going to deny it now?

“What are you...” Hollander looks back and forth between them. “Why does he think that? Why do you think that? You saw texts...”

Oh no, fuck this. They are not gaslighting him just because he wasn’t ready to hop on board the family orgy train. “Yeah, that’s right, I saw the fucking texts, I heard the calls! I know you have an old people fetish.”

“An old people fetish?” Hollander whispers.

“I’m sorry if you thought he was with your dad for his dazzling personality, but really he’s just hot for his reading glasses.”

“Oh am I?” Roz raises his eyebrows. Like this is all a joke.

“Look, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have read your texts, but I saw you, you know, talking about his supplements. And his early bedtime. I overheard you begging for glasses photos. I know you’ve got an old man kink and that’s fine. Whatever. But this ‘all in the family’ shit—“

Roz laughs again. He keels over laughing. He’s hysterical, practically delirious. Oh no. Maybe he’s having a full on mental break. That would explain a lot.

“It’s not funny,” Hollander says, but he’s smiling too for some reason.

“No. Is actually very sad for you. You are so boring that Marlow thought I must be fucking a sixty-year-old.”

“Shut up!” Hollander slaps his arm. For a surreal second, it’s like they forget Cliff’s there. Then, Hollander turns. “Those texts were from me. Ilya’s not dating my dad. He’s dating me.”

“What? But...”

But. Huh? No way.

Hollander stands and rustles through a side table. He emerges with a pair of reading glasses, slides them on. “They’re my glasses. See? I know I’m kind of young for them, but bad eyesight runs in my family.”

“Mmm, yes. Exactly why I am fucking David too.” Roz smiles. He looks over at Hollander, taking in his glasses with eyes that can only be described as hungry. Oh. *Oh*.

“So you’re not fucking Hollander’s dad?” Cliff says slowly.

“No. Just Hollander.”

“But why were you at the grocery store with him then?”

“The grocery store?” Roz says. “Are you stalking me?”

“No! Connors happened to be there.”

“Sure.” Roz rolls his eyes. “We were making pasta. I was helping my boyfriend’s parents with dinner. That is the polite thing, yes?”

“I mean. Yeah.” Huh. That makes sense. Actually, it doesn’t, because Roz being serious enough with Shane Hollander to grocery shop with his parents is batshit. And also... “What about the probiotics? The stretching? Who needs to prepare for sex like that if not a sixty-year-old?”

Hollander’s face turns even redder somehow. Roz laughs again. “Gay sex is more...involved. I will send you some porn. Will be educational for you.”

“Oh. OH!” Ohhhh. Okay, honestly, he doesn’t totally understand, but he gets the gist. Mostly. “So you got injured during sex?”

“What? No. I don’t know what exactly you heard, but Ilya’s always checking in on me because someone mowed me down on the ice a few months ago.” Hollander gives him a very pointed look.

“Ohhhh!” Cliff says aloud again. “Uh, sorry again. Wait, so you just...go to bed early? And don’t drink? And eat really healthy?”

“Yes?” Hollander says. “I’m a professional athlete.”

“We are too,” Roz says. “You are just an old man who wished on a star to be young and beautiful.”

“I am not.”

“Lies. You are very young and beautiful.”

“Okay,” Cliff cuts in, reeling. “So just to be crystal clear, you’re not—”

Roz sighs. “It sounds like you are the one who got concussed. I am not fucking David Hollander. Or Yuna Hollander. Just Shane Hollander. No one else.” He squeezes Hollander’s hand. “Him. Only him.”

Cliff exhales. “Wow. Thank fucking God.”

“Thank God?” Hollander says.

“Yeah. I mean, this is surprising, but I’m just so relieved you’re not fucking an old married guy. I thought I was gonna have to kill him.”

Roz grins. “You are a good friend, Marlow. Very stupid. They should invent a thicker helmet just for you. But a good friend.”

Cliff ignores the helmet chirp, busy looking between the two of them. Roz’s thumb is lightly stroking Hollander’s knuckles. Like he doesn’t even notice he’s doing it. “You’re really moving to Ottawa?”

“Yes. I need to be closer to Shane.” His lips pull up in a far too familiar smirk. “And Shane’s parents are in Ottawa. So even when he is traveling, I will get laid.”

“Stop.” Hollander shoves him. “I don’t want to think about you sleeping with my parents. That’s disgusting.”

“That’s what I’m saying!” Cliff throws his hands in the air.

Hollander cracks a smile. “I’m gonna go get the salad. You want another drink, Cliff?”

“That would be great, thanks.”

“I will help.” Roz moves to stand but Hollander pushes his shoulder down, gently keeping him in place. It’s so painfully domestic, the way they circle around each other. So obvious now that he knows what to look for.

Also, Shane literally rhymes with Jane. And that night last year when Roz was glaring daggers at Rose Landry...shit. Maybe Cliff *has* gotten one too many concussions.

He looks back at Roz, whose eyes are still following Hollander’s retreating figure. “You’re really gonna marry him, huh?” Cliff says.

“Yes. Of course. I love him.” His open face shuts once again. “And you are okay with this?”

“Yeah. I mean...wow. It’s fucking complicated. But Hollander’s a decent guy. And he’s your age. And honestly? He’s hot as fuck.”

He expects Roz to laugh, but instead, he looks murderous. He's actually kind of looking at Cliff like he's Rose Landry. "He is mine."

"I'm not trying to take him! I'm straight."

"No one is straight around Shane Hollander," Roz says. Cliff can't really blame him. The guy's attractive enough to pull Rose Landry *and* Ilya Rozanov. And he's nowhere near sixty years old. Maybe there is a God out there.

Hollander comes back in with another beer and a big bowl of salad. "Anyone need anything else?"

"I'm good," Cliff says, grabbing one of the bowls stacked neatly on the fourth place setting.

"No." Roz takes Hollander's hand and kisses it. "We're perfect."

Cliff smiles. For the first time in years, he's not worried about his best friend.

"God, that just explains so much." Hollander chuckles, sitting down beside Roz. "I really thought you were saying I was as ugly as a junkyard car."

Roz swivels his head in Cliff's direction. His glare is so menacing that the last one look like a grin in comparison.

Oh fuck.

Cliff sits down on the grass, drunk enough that he stumbles.

If someone told him in 2014 that one day he'd be Ilya Rozanov's best man, he'd...well, actually, he wouldn't be all that shocked. In hindsight, this feels inevitable.

Cliff looks out across the lawn, where his girlfriend is laughing with Rose Landry. Somehow, Rose Landry has made it through the whole wedding without being murdered. Roz really has grown up.

"Hi." A voice says from above him. Yuna Hollander sits elegantly in the grass—he didn't realize that was something a person could do.

Cliff straightens, because that's what you do around Yuna Hollander. "Hey. Amazing wedding."

"It'd be at a banquet hall if they let me have my way."

He laughs. "I wish they'd at least sprung for chairs."

"Wouldn't that be nice? This is very them though." She shakes her head. "Listen, I wanted to thank you."

“Thank me?” All he did today was give a speech, which really wasn’t parent appropriate. In his defense, the speech was about Ilya Rozanov.

“For taking care of him in Boston. His mother isn’t here to say it, so I wanted to,” Yuna says. “I know that’s what teammates do, but it seems like you went above and beyond for him. I’m grateful for it.”

Cliff’s throat gets all tight. Fuck softie Ilya Rozanov and his equally soft family. “Of course. He’s a good guy.”

“The best.” She smiles, then sighs. “If only he wasn’t sleeping with my husband.”

Cliff’s eyes widen. “What?”

“Yeah, I mean, I’d prefer monogamy, but it helps both of them, that yearly hall pass.” *Fuck—but—he*—Yuna bursts out laughing. “I’m kidding. Wow, I need to lay off the champagne.”

“Oh thank God.” Cliff drops his face in his hands. “So Shane told you about that?”

“Are you kidding? He’d rather die. Ilya told us.” She tilts her head. “You really thought he was with David?”

“It seemed...plausible at the time?” Cliff says weakly. He looks across the lawn where David’s doing a terrible attempt at the sprinkler. Cliff wouldn’t say he has good gaydar, or really any at all, but that’s clearly the straightest man alive. “Shane just seemed like an old man to me.”

He winces, realizing too late that that sounds like an insult. But Yuna just laughs.

“Yeah,” she says. “He takes after his father.”

“Hey Marlow!” Ilya calls out. Cliff looks up to see he’s now attempting the sprinkler with David. “Come dance with me and my boyfriend!”

David laughs, Roz laughing along at his own damn joke.

Cliff flips him off, but he gets up to dance anyway.

Because when Roz says jump, his answer will always be ‘how fucking high?’.

He supposes that’s something he and Shane Hollander have in common.

End Notes

Ilya learns “gullible is written on the ceiling” from David and says it in the locker room. Cliff and Connors both look up. Cliff still maintains that he’s smarter than Connors. He wins by a small margin when Connors approaches David at the wedding and asks him what it’s like being Ilya’s mentor

Ilya is at Peak Menace levels with Cliff for approximately 5 years to punish him for what he put Shane through in that conversation. So when Ilya meets Cliff’s girlfriend, he says, “Ah, I see why he likes you. You look like a young Helen Mirren.” Cliff still makes Ilya his best man

Thank you for reading, comments are appreciated as much as Shane appreciates the value of good sleep hygiene

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