

Baby, you know it ain't fair

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Baby, you know it ain't fair

by [WhimperSoldier](#)

Summary

The square in front of the rink was plastered with posters of the players, ticket prices, and the location of games. Nowhere was there a poster of the Montreal Mighties because the team Shane played for was, according to everyone in that building, not the main attraction.

After all, it didn't matter that in their last game Shane scored more goals in the first period than most do all game, or that he won every face off, or that he can out-skate anyone on any of the teams in his league. No, what mattered was that three months before his rookie year his traitorous body pushed itself into a heat and any chance he had of playing pro had vanished with it. No pro team wanted to sign him, even when he'd been in the running for first draft pick, and he'd taken up the only offer he did get from the Montreal Mighties because it was close to home and it allowed him to be close, if not a part of, the sport he'd dedicated his whole life to.

Then he gets the call from All-Stars. The catch? His captain is the obnoxiously perfect alpha Ilya Rozanov.

Notes

Ok, first thing: I don't know how hockey works. Like at all. I did research but I completely made up what All-Stars looks like to fit what I wanted to happen, FYI. In this story hockey is more a metaphor than anything else so please be kind! Secondly, I love all versions of alpha/beta/omega and these two are interesting in literally all combinations of those three, please write more!

Title is from The Last Dinner Party's "Second Best"

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

Shane tore around the outside of the rink, puck clicking against the blade of his stick, circling again and again as each shot landed cleanly in the net. He'd worked up a sweat, having spent the early morning in the gym before getting onto the ice, but his time was limited and he hated feeling like he wasted it.

Already he could hear the faint sounds of the team shuffling into the locker room. He took one more shot, arching perfectly to hit the corner of the net, before packing up his things, grabbing his rag to wipe away his sweat, and was snapping his blade guards in place right as the team poured out the far doors and onto the ice. If the sound hadn't alerted him, the thick, cloying, scent of so many alphas would have done it for him.

A few gave him polite nods, a few others smirks, and Shane felt the type of tiredness that had nothing to do with all the exercise he'd done.

“Hollander!”

Shane turned and smiled at Hayden. The man was waving him down and Shane almost wished he'd just text him instead of starting up another round of rumors about their relationship.

“Jackie's inviting you over for dinner Tuesday. Said to not take no for an answer.”

“I'm not sure—” Shane started but was immediately cut off.

“Glad to hear it, she'll be excited to hear you're so excited!” Hayden said dramatically and then more subdued when he realized they'd garnered an audience. “Don't be a stranger, that's all.”

“I'll be there Tuesday.” Shane promised and ignored the long look one of the defensemen gave him on his way out.

“Heading out, Shane?” Amalie, the rink's receptionist, asked as he slipped out the doors. She wore an overbearing perfume which did nothing but highlight how heavy her alpha scent was.

“I'll be back for the Littles around three.” He said, annoyed now considering she saw him make the same trek each morning during the season for the last two years.

“I caught the game last week. You dominated that team!” She leaned out over the desk. Shane wished she'd just let him leave without too much more small talk. “You made like three goals before the other team could score one. That got me thinking, maybe you might want to get together sometime—”

“Thank you.” Shane said, because that was what you said to a compliment, even when it almost felt like an insult at this point, completely missing the way her face fell. Shane had moved on. Thinking about the game opened flood gates he'd been holding shut and which seemed to spill open now as he watched people walking the street through the big windows in the lobby. “Doesn't matter anyway. But thanks for coming, every ticket goes to charity.”

Shane spoke on rote, looking back to smile and then wave to indicate he was leaving now.

The square in front of the rink was plastered with posters of the players, ticket prices, and the location of games. Nowhere was there a poster of the Montreal Mighties because the team Shane played for was, according to everyone in that building, not the main attraction.

After all, it didn't matter that in their last game Shane scored more goals in the first period than most do all game, or that he won every face off, or that he can out-skate anyone on any of the teams in his league. No, what mattered was that three months before his rookie year his traitorous body pushed itself into a heat and any chance he had of playing pro had vanished with it. No pro team wanted to sign him, even when he'd been in the running for first draft pick, and he'd taken up the only offer he did get from the Montreal Mighties because it was close to home and it allowed him to be close, if not a part of, the sport he'd dedicated his whole life to.

His apartment was empty when he got home. He made himself a smoothie, using less than stellar ingredients but on his salary anything fancier was out of the question. From there he did some yoga on his balcony and then flipped through his feed while ESPN played in the background.

“—another amazing play from Ilya Rozanov. He really is in a league of his own!” The announcer called as the dark blur that was Rozanov launched a perfect puck in the sliver of space between the goalie's glove and the net's edge. It really was a spectacular shot but Shane hated it on principle.

It was a little stupid to feel so strongly about a one-sided beef but Shane felt justified. On the screen, Rozanov made a quick pass and Shane watched as the whole crowd roared. He felt his stomach roll in anger.

The ringing he heard sharpened and Shane realized it wasn't just in his head. His phone vibrated on his counter and Shane nearly jumped his couch when he realized who the ring tone belonged to.

“Shane, I have amazing news!” Farah burst out the moment Shane accepted the call. “I know you've been looking to break out and when this came across my desk—”

She went off on a long speech. Shane let her go, working to tamp down his excitement. Most of his already meager salary went into hiring Farah, and considering she was already offering him a discount to get practice was saying something about his salary. His patience was just beginning to circle around to dread when Farah reached her point. “So they call me and ask if we can get you into LA All-Stars. I say sure, but with the requirement that they not stick you on the omega-beta teams. No skills categories, but they say they have room for the final day, the captain-picked games, the ones for charity. You're too good and I say it'd be good television to get you front and center. They agreed.”

“They agreed.” Shane parroting back. His heart was pounding now, hammering against his ribs and getting loud enough that Farah's voice seemed to float distantly in the background. “Whose team?”

That's when Farah went silent and that sinking feeling was back in his guts.

“Fucking Rozanov, huh?” Hayden muttered from the benches while Shane scared around and set up cones in a rough circle around the ice. He’d hung back after training to talk when he’d seen how pale Shane’s face was. “Still, he’s a good player. Not as good as you, but if you work together, you’d be a nightmare.”

“He’s a show-off and an attention whore. I don’t think we have a single thing in common.” Shane checked the clock and then cursed. The kids would be shuffling in soon and he still hadn’t gotten the goals from storage. “Give me my guards.”

Instead of shutting the conversation down, Hayden just followed him. “I’m serious, I know you like to try and keep humble, but this is a big fucking deal. I’m proud! Now we really have to celebrate on Tuesday!”

“I just don’t want...” Shane didn’t know where he was going and instead he let his fear be subsumed by his anger when he saw a distinctive set of equipment where his goal posts should be. “Did he move my stuff again?”

“Coach? Maybe. His wife finally moved out so he was in a nasty mood today.” Hayden looked around too but Shane knew the patch on the bag.

“No, Tremblay.” Shane huffed and went marching up the stairs to the other storeroom. “He tried to call me last week and I blocked him again.”

“He still bothering you?” Hayden questioned. “It’s been months!”

Greg Tremblay was an older alpha on the team and when Shane had first met him, he’d been one of the few people willing to talk to him. It had been only a few months into his first season, still trying to get scouts to come and see him train, still hoping, when Tremblay had come in early and seen Shane practice. He’d said all these things about him, about his skill and how he knew people. Shane had been taken in with him, had liked the way he seemed to always have everything planned out. When they could meet, where, what they could do. It’d been nice at first.

Then the conversations drifted from getting scouts down to taking on more roles at the rink. Shane talking about hiring a rep had spiraled into a fight about wasting money. It was somewhere around the six month mark that Greg couldn’t be bothered to hide it anymore.

“What if you just focused on the Littles classes? Wouldn’t you like that?” He’d asked and Shane, who’d been cleaning himself off in his little sink, realized Greg didn’t know him at all. He defended himself, arguing “It just seems like a long shot!”

“I’m good!” Shane had defended. “You said I had a chance—”

“Oh, Shane, come on! I just wanted to talk to you and all you wanted to talk about was hockey!” Greg sat up and huffed like he was berating a small child. Shane had never felt their age difference more than in that moment. “You’re good, sure, but let's be realistic here, you’re not going pro.”

“Why not, I’m better than you.” Shane said and knew he shouldn’t have said that. They’d not gotten onto the ice to train together in weeks after Shane dominated him in their practices. It didn’t matter that he opened his mouth to apologize, Greg was already talking.

“Don’t be a bitch. You really think you could handle it out on the ice with eleven other alphas?” He gestured to Shane’s bed he lounged on. “The way you fold under me, all it would take is one alpha to growl at you, and you’d be on your knees in the middle of a pass.”

“Get out.” Shane said sharply and when Greg didn’t move, he hissed again, “Get out!”

That had been almost nine months ago and still Greg was calling and leaving notes in his gym bag, easy to do considering they’d removed the Mighties lockers in the hall to make room for a fan photo station for the Voyegeres.

Shane shouldered open the door and found his goal posts lodging the handle shut. He let his head clunk against the wood for a second before he shoved his hand in to push things around until he could open it enough to remove all his equipment.

By the time he’d made it down to the ice, a small collection of kids had already gotten their skates on, waiting on the benches like the good students they were.

“Good morning, Mighties!” He smiled when they parroted him with such earnest enthusiasm. He clicked off his guards and jumped out onto the ice before any of the parents could stop him to chat. They always seemed to have something to ask him and he got tired of fending off questions about coffee places around the rink. If they wanted to know, they could look it up, why did they always feel the need to ask him?

“Mr. Holly?” One kid, Sammy, yanked at his shirt. When he knelt down to be on her level, he asked “Who’s that?”

Shane glanced up and saw Tremblay along the boards. He looked back down to Sammy. “Just a friend of mine. Go practice your backhand.”

“Saw your name on the roster for All-Stars. We’re playing against each other.” Tremblay opened with. Shane just rubbed at the pressure he suddenly felt building behind his eyes. “I just don’t want to see you hurt.”

“Tremblay, I’ll be fine.” He said and noticed the way he seemed to flinch at his own last name. “And stop moving my things.”

“How will I get you to talk to me then?” He laughed. “You keep ducking my calls.”

Shane didn’t know what else to say other than *stop calling then* but instead he just shook his head and slid back into the controlled chaos of ten six year olds trying to aim.

The hour and a half class flew by and by then his high school level class filtered in. They were just as enthusiastic and didn’t require his full attention. He mostly gave them stations to work through as he skated around to help. If he was being brutally honest, there were only two students who showed the sort of promise for the big leagues.

“Stevie, would you help him?” He asked and the female alpha looked up from where she was nailing shots to look over at her partner who kept looking up too soon and missing every shot he took. She shot him a look but when he raised an eyebrow, she rolled her eyes but followed his ask. In the games they’d played, he could see the grinder she could be and wanted her to avoid making too many enemies before she even started. There were already so few female alphas in the majors, and he wanted to give her any leg up he could.

“Mr. Hollander?” Eddy, a small alpha but with a nasty skill of always nailing the five-hole, smiled at him. He could go pro if he wanted, was fast and clever enough for it, but he always shook when he talked to Shane and he worried how the boy would handle being in a room with all those overwhelming pheromones if he couldn’t even handle Shane’s. “Am I doing it right?”

“Keep your feet planted, you’re leaning towards me.” Shane said.

“Imagine that.” Stevie huffed, shoving her teammate’s head down to keep him from looking up. Under her breath, he thought he heard her mutter *kiss-ass*, but he couldn’t be sure over the sounds of sticks hitting the ice. When he gave her another raised eyebrow, she just smiled and gave him a thumbs up.

Eddy was glaring at her too but when Shane looked back, he was smiling again.

Shane landed in LA on an empty stomach and a back ache from the economy seats. He knew some teams had private jets but the Mighties were nowhere near popular enough to warrant the money. Instead he and a few other team members who snagged their own deals all carpooled to the airport and bought all the tickets on Willis’ card so they could turn around and use the points on the return flight. Willis was a lanky red-head with a quiet temperament and decent movement on the ice where he played right wing, but he was limited all the same. Most of the team was betas and the Mighties who weren’t were mostly skaters out of their prime but unwilling to give up the limelight like their left defenceman John Allard, or players with injuries who didn’t know anything else.

Then there were people like Shane. He and Willis were the only omegas on the team and there were only a few others in other minor league games. There was always talk that someone might be hiding behind mass market scent dampers but Shane couldn’t care less. He was an amazing player and he knew it. His team knew it. The few reporters who were forced to come out and take a few photos for a puff piece learned it too.

Shane had a few of those articles saved in his phone, reminders that he wasn’t overreacting, that entering his third year in the minor league was wrong because he was a better player than so many others. He was limited only by the fact that he’d been seventeen and stupid and hadn’t realized what had happened until it had been too late and half the NHL and the whole world knew.

But All-Stars was a chance. Farah and he had spent hours on a blurry facetime going over the optics of everything, of how he couldn’t be stand off-ish but also not simpering, that he needed a careful balance to show that he could work in the majors if some owner or coach was just willing to take a fucking chance.

When he got to the hotel they'd rented out, any thought of what he had to do felt flooded by the sheer number of people he knew and who knew him. So many faces turned to watch him pass, and it set his teeth on edge. The other players had checked in and Shane followed, robotically moving until a hand landed on his shoulder and he nearly yelped.

“Gerard?” Shane asked and the man smiled, giving him a hug he wished he could have avoided. “Good to see you.”

“Hollander! I had almost lost hope we'd see you again!”

He fucking would. Gerard had taken the spot everyone had assumed Shane would take on Montreal. It didn't matter that in the Juniors Shane had routinely outshot him, was faster and with better accuracy to boot.

“Saw you're stuck with Rozanov, tough break.” He said and Shane wanted to shrug out of the touch Gerard still had on his arms. Shane felt his skin crawl under the weight of all the eyes.

“Sure.” Shane muttered and then drew his body in so that he could back up. “I have to go grab something.”

That something was some peace and fucking quiet out from under the watchful eyes he could feel following him. He turned down halls until a blinding red EXIT sign seemed to call to him.

The door banged open and Shane turned to lean against the cool concrete wall of an underground parking garage. The heavy breathes slowed, the frantic beating of his heart calmed, and eventually he looked up and realized there was a man leaning against the wall about three feet away, his cigarette sending lazy curls of smoke up towards the ceiling.

Stupidly, he said, “You're not supposed to smoke here.”

“Ok.” The man muttered and realization stuck him then with all the subtlety of a train wreck.

Ilya Rozanov was so tall he literally cast Shane in his shadow. Otherwise, he was just as stunningly attractive as he was on television, a fact that only served to piss him off more. Rozanov crooked his head, cockily leaning back with a hand on the waistband of his low slung sweatpants, the other raising his cigarette for another drag. “You are Shane Hollander, yes?”

“Yes. You're Ilya Rozanov.” Shane said stupidly.

“Yes. Now we have met—” Rozanov said something else but Shane felt his throat clench tight.

Because they'd met before. He'd introduced himself to Rozanov when they'd both been hopefuls. For him to have forgotten that brief meeting shouldn't have been so surprising and yet Shane felt something in his chest go tender, like pressing on a bruise.

Rozanov had been first draft pick and then Rookie of the Year and then won game after game after game. He had everything Shane wanted and all he could think as he spoke was how easy Rozanov made it look and that pissed him off too.

"I'm going to the gym." He said suddenly.

"Ok?" Rozanov seemed startled but caught himself quickly. Shane marched himself in a direction that he realized was the opposite of where he needed to go and then had to back track enough for Rozanov to smirk and say "Lost?"

"Nope." Shane hissed and then wanted to growl when Rozanov followed him. "I'm sure you have better things to do than follow me around."

"Nope," Rozanov mimicked him, even popping the P. Just when he saw the sign for the gym, Rozanov said, "I've seen your games. You're good."

Shane stopped and looked up at him. Rozanov seemed to relish his attention, looking down on him with a smirk that, on anyone else, would look condescending. Yet on him it looked gleeful, as if seeing Shane all riled up excited him. So that's how it was.

Rozanov wouldn't be the first alpha on the ice to think that Shane would jump into his bed because he complimented him on his skating.

Shane put headphones in and picked the treadmill farthest from the door. That didn't stop Rozanov from picking the machine next to him and proceeding to talk to him for the next hour. He also subtly raised his speed and incline, mirroring Shane until they were panting and damp with perspiration. He tried to make it clear he wasn't interested in talking by making his responses only grunts but it didn't seem to deter him.

"-but really, you should work on—" Rozanov said and Shane tuned back in.

"What? You're lecturing me? You lose half your face offs because you're too busy snarking and you think you can give me pointers?" Shane was annoyed. He tried to keep his voice down, there were other players he recognized around, but Rozanov's face for the first time all day wrinkled up in confusion, even as he kept up his smile.

"You missed all the compliments I gave you, but hear that." He said, stopping his machine and leaning over the hand rails. "I am very good at face offs. You know that, because you watch my games."

Shane wanted the floor to open up and swallow him whole. Why didn't he just drop to the floor and present, that would be just as embarrassing as admitting that Rozanov was one of the best players in the league and Shane had just as well admitted it to his stupid, smug face.

"Is ok, I watch your games too." Rozanov turned and started running again. Shane was so thrown off kilter he nearly face planted onto the treadmill when his foot came down wrong.

Shane didn't have anything to say to that so he just turned and looked ahead where his reflection stared back. It was a mistake to let his eyes flash over to the neighboring machine, especially because he realized Rozanov was staring back at him.

Eventually Shane gave up, got off, and with a stilted goodbye, left. The room was blessedly empty for now, he'd picked an earlier flight than most other players and apparently his

roommate, and when he hopped into the shower, his hands trailed down to the vee of stomach with those eyes on his mind.

It was a massive mistake, mostly because when they got on the ice to practice, Rozanov was there. Shane felt his cheeks warm as Rozanov caught sight of him. He slid up to the boards in a tight fitting black shirt and padded pants which emphasized the trimness of his waist. Shane hated him.

“Hollander.” Rozanov smirked.

“Rozanov.” Shane responded, clicking off his guards.

He didn't have a spare uniform like most of the other players, their league didn't really have the money, and it showed here. He felt even more like a fish out of water, half in part because he worried that the scentless soap he'd used wouldn't be able to hide what he'd done in the shower.

A few players turned to look at him, saying something to the player next to them, but most seemed focused on clapping each other on the back and calling over old friends to chat. Being anonymous would be nice.

If only Rozanov would leave him alone.

“Want to practice?” Rozanov gestured to where a bag of pucks had been tossed onto the ice.

Shane wanted to, desperately. He could outscore literally everyone in the lower league but he also knew Rozanov's stats. They were close. That little itch he got at the back of his neck at a challenge started acting up.

“Want to bet on it?” Rozanov leaned forward, resting his weight on his stick. “Winner gets to lift the trophy first.”

“Confident are we?” Shane huffed. “We might not win.”

“We'll win.” Rozanov smiled, crooked and large. “After all, you have me.”

Shane just skated out to one of the practice lanes they'd set up, flicking the first puck in and waiting for Rozanov to do the same. He did.

It went on, each nailing their shots until the bag was empty and Rozanov nicked a shot on the pole when trying a trick shot. The flood rush of winning seemed to crash over him and Shane let out a laugh that seemed to echo over all the other sounds of the rink.

“You just had to try the trick shot!” Shane laughed again, wiping away the thin layer of sweat he'd worked up, looking to where the fateful puck rested outside the net. He wondered if he could get Rozanov to sign it.

When he looked back with the comment on his tongue, he realized Rozanov was looking at him intently, smiling a bit, mouth open to take long, deep breaths. Shane didn't need to sniff

himself to know the soap wore off. Usually he had on medical strength patches and packets placed along pulse points in his pads, but he hadn't intended for this to go on for so long.

The rush of winning faded when he realized people were staring. Players leaned against the boards, other practices had come to a standstill and Shane felt like a butterfly trapped under glass, beating its pinned wings at being observed.

"Hollander, you are good for a Canadian." Rozanov said to break the tension and Shane focused back on his face. The rink, now that he was actually paying attention, was deadly quiet. "When we win, you hold trophy first."

"Thanks." Shane muttered and then tried to pick up all his gear before making a quick exit.

Halfway down the hall, he was blocked from the exit doors by a pair of familiar broad shoulders. "You know Rozanov?"

"Tremblay, I just want to go back to my room." Shane sighed. He didn't have the energy to deal with alpha posturing right now. "Move."

"You just looked pretty chummy out there." Tremblay tried again, following him when Shane just moved around him. "They say he has a different girl in every city."

"Why should that matter to me?" Shane muttered. The door was so close when a hand clapped down on his shoulder. "What the fuck?"

"I'm talking to you!" Tremblay muttered and Shane pushed him off.

"Hollander?" Rozanov was at the end of the hall, his boots still on and his stick in his hand. He looked like he was thinking about swinging.

"I'm fine, Rozanov." Shane said. "Tremblay was just leaving."

Greg didn't look to be just leaving but he did step back enough for Shane to slip past him and to the door. If the two idiots fought, he didn't want to have anything to do with it. As far as Shane knew, they never had any animosity, at least not any more than Rozanov had with every other player, so he wondered when that had started.

Most of the next day was taken up by the skills categories. Shane had no interest in buying a ticket and even less interest in watching the other players win with scores he knew he could beat. Instead he moped around his room, called Hayden who let him complain for a while, and then eventually called his parents when his moping felt like it might slip into honest despair.

"Shane!" His mom called when she picked up. "We have the TV on!"

"I won't be playing for another day." Shane reminded her.

"Just want to be safe!" She seemed thrilled and something in his stomach seemed to clench.

He knew his mother would be proud of him no matter what, but they'd given up so much when he was young to get him ready to go pro. How many games had they driven to, equipment had they bought, time had they wasted, just for him to flop into the minor leagues? He had to do his best here, not for him but for them.

“Rozanov seems to be in good form.” She said thoughtfully and Shane leaned over to see his own screen that he'd turned on like the masochist he was. She wasn't wrong. Rozanov had dominated the speed category and was in the current lead with the scoring too.

Shane was trying to track down the sauna when Rozanov caught up to him that night. He could honestly say there were few people he wanted to see less. Then again, it stopped Tremblay from leaving his pull-up bar, so Shane would take the win.

“You and him?” Rozanov started as he fell in step beside him. He was too close and sweaty.

Shane knew Rozanov was an alpha, everyone did, but he kept his scent close to the chest, something apparently common in Eastern Europe. Wanting to avoid talking about his failed love life, Shane said “Good showing today.”

“Yes, I am very impressive.” Rozanov smirked and stretched his arms over his head, pulling up his shirt enough to reveal the small trail of hair down his navel. Shane jerked his eyes away. “You were watching?”

“My mom was.” Shane explained and that seemed to spark something in him.

“Is she a fan, I can sign something!” Rozanov had turned his whole body to walk now, almost hitting a group of players. “I am very popular with mothers.”

“Gross!” Shane laughed because the way Rozanov said it made it clear it was a joke and when he looked over, Rozanov had tripped over something. “Are you alright?”

“Yes, fine, fine.” He said and then cleared his throat. “Did you watch?”

“A little. Caught the end, watched you miss a few shots, turned it off.” Shane smiled a bit now and Rozanov threw his hand out.

“Everyone's a critic.” Rozanov muttered.

When they finally found the sauna it was little more than a hot box. It said it fit six people but only if those people were not bulky hockey players. As it was, it was empty, most players out celebrating, so he sat down on one side expecting Rozanov to take the other. He didn't.

Instead he sat down next to Shane in just basketball shorts. Shane had brought a towel to wear but it felt too intimate so he instead kept on his own shorts, even when it got too hot.

“You avoided my question about Tremblay.”

Shane peeked an eye over at Rozanov and sighed. “We dated, it didn't work out.”

“Because he's short?” Rozanov shifted next to him but Shane refused to look over. “What? He is.”

“Something like that.” Shane granted, then to shift focus, “If we're asking personal questions, you mind?”

“Mind what?” Rozanov asked and then seemed to get the context because he made a little shooing gesture. “Ah, ask.”

“How do you keep your scent locked down like that?” It was not taboo to talk about scents, but it could be a bit insensitive. Somehow Shane figured Rozanov wouldn't mind much. Rozanov just shrugged; Shane could feel it, they were so close.

“Rude in Russia. Here everyone is so—” He made a face and it drew another laugh out of him. “No word for it in English.”

“Discribe it. Maybe there's a word for it in French.” Shane joked and Rozanov looked down at him then, eyes half-lidded. “What?”

“You know French?” He asked.

“Of course.” Shane said, confused. “I'm Canadian.”

“Of course.” Rozanov repeated with a sly little tilt to his mouth. “See you tomorrow, Hollander.”

The man jumped up and quickly slipped out of the sauna, holding himself so Shane only saw his broad back. Weird.

The game the next morning was proving to be a messy sort of scramble, like putting all the teams into a blender and giving them a day to sort out players and positions. Rozanov was conferred captain pretty quickly with only mild griping from a few other players, none of whom were captains of their own teams. Why they thought they'd be named was beyond him.

Shane was playing right wing, not his position of choice but one he'd played before.

“It's your weakest side.” Shane had muttered when they'd been discussing placement and Ilya looked insulted.

“I have no weak sides.” Rozanov said. “No bad sides either.”

“Keep it in your pants.” a left winger muttered, an alpha from Florida. “You're practically panting.”

Shane wanted to melt into the ice. Rozanov looked at him with the type of expression which seemed like he was looking down on you, mocking you with his silence. He smirked, crooked and slightly cruel, head tilted like he was picking though which mean phrase to say. He settled on, “Who's panting? You can't even keep up with me.”

“Fuck you!” The man yelled and Shane shoved himself between them to keep from throwing hands. He found himself squished between two muscular bodies and when he braced his hands on Rozanov's broad chest for leverage, the resulting shove sent the other man stumbling over his skates.

“Stop it! You want those cameras to catch your pissing contest?” Shane demanded, pointing to where the gathered cameras were turning in their direction to catch the action they could feel building.

“I'd win that too.” Rozanov said snidely.

The practice wasn't much better; their defensemen were a middle of the line guy from New York and Roman Ivanov, another Russian who Rozanov had to have played with once if their banter was anything to go by. Or maybe Russians were just all really friendly because they were Russian, Shane didn't know.

Ivanov tried but the other defenseman was weak and too slow and Shane grew more frustrated the longer their limited time on the ice went on. That the NHL hired these idiots, but not him, made him want to hit someone. By the time their practice was up, Shane was more worried about them ruining what little reputation he had.

“They need work.” He said when Rozanov raised an eyebrow at him as they tugged off their jerseys.

“They need to not be bad.” Rozanov said instead. “Other team might win and their goalie has bum knee.”

Shane groaned and buried his face in his hands.

By the time the game started, Shane was more nerves than skater. He'd had to call his parents to talk him off his ledge and then Farah to confirm he'd still have some sort of career after they bombed this. She hadn't been stoked to hear his assessment of the team, but she'd been matter-of-fact and no-nonsense enough that it got him into the ice before the buzzer.

Waiting in the wings, watching Rozanov lean in for the face-off, his whole body sparked like a live wire. There was the silence of the puck drop, the way Rozanov sneared something and the other man's eyes shot up just enough that Rozanov snagged the puck out from under him.

What followed was some of the most exhilarating hockey he'd played in years. There were always good players stuck down in the minors, but to play against a whole team at the top of their game, it lit something in him.

He and Rozanov were on fire. The puck bounced between them like a pinball until Shane made like he'd pass before nailing it between the goalie's legs.

“That's it, Hollander!” Rozanov cheered and someone, maybe Ivanov, grabbed him by his shoulder and shook him good-naturedly.

Rozanov got another goal, then the other team smashed New York into the boards and Tremblay got a shot in. Shane got it back and when he finally let his mind focus back in, he realized the crowd was screaming his name.

He was working through when he'd be switched out when Rozanov lost the puck and Shane dove in to retrieve it, snagging it back just as someone smashed into him.

Shane's helmet hit the ice with a sickening crack, but his pads took the brunt of the impact. Still, when he shook it off and stood up, he realized it was a familiar jersey standing over him. In the confusion, the sound of a goal for the opposition sounded and Shane wanted to scream.

"Are you fucking him now too?" Tremblay huffed. None of Shane's temporary teammates came closer to break up the fight and all the spectators seemed to be itching to see one too. Shane would have to disappoint them.

"The hell are you talking about?" Shane yelled as he got to his feet. "I asked, are you fucking--" The refs hovered a ways back, unsure if they should let the fight go or break it up like they'd been trained to do with omega league members. Shane made their decision for them by decking Tremblay in the mouth.

Tremblay took him to the ice, having almost fifty pounds of muscle on him, but Shane refused to make it easy on him and swung whenever he got an opening. Then his helmet came off and Tremblay got a good hit in; white spots burst over his eyes when his head ricocheted off the ice. His vision was so spotty that he only realized someone had pulled Tremblay off him when the black-white blurs of the refs shot past to pull Rozanov off Tremblay.

Rozanov backed off quickly, but his face was furious and when he skated over to help Shane up, Shane pushed him off and stood up himself. "The refs were coming! You just gave them a chance to make up point and won't even be on the ice to stop it! What were you thinking?"

Shane dabbed at his lip, whipping away the blood from a split lip. The refs were calling to rewatch the footage, probably to calm the crowd which had gone crazy. Shane was shoved off the ice to get a concussion check by an exasperated paramedic.

"Pupils look good, but I'd recommend sitting out." She shouted over the din of noise. Shane was trying to pay attention but the refs were finishing up and he was watching them like a hawk for any indication of their ruling. When she spoke though, Shane shook his head.

"I'm good." He promised and then looked to Rozanov. "I'm good."

"We could put in Danvers. He's played center before." New York offered and Shane shot him a glare.

"I'm better than Danvers." Shane said.

"He's better than Danvers." Rozanov repeated. "With a concussion even. Maybe missing a leg." Then to Danvers, "No offence."

Someone muttered something, a slur Shane thought, but he couldn't pin point who and instead focused on Rozanov who pointed him back onto the ice just as his penalty was announced.

The moment the power play started, it was a fight for every inch of ice. Half the battle was not a single player would pass to him and the one run they took failed before they could pass neutral ice. Shane felt snapping his stick might have been more useful than using it.

"Pass it!" Shane yelled but New York kept skating and got checked by a defenseman before they snapped up the puck. Even with Shane defending, he could only be in one place at a time and the sound of the puck hitting the net nearly brought him to his knees. Across the ice he could see Rozanov leaning onto his knees, eyes on Shane.

Shane watched the clock count down. If they didn't score in the next two minutes the other team would win. Rozanov was out in a minute. It wouldn't be enough time.

Shane knew what he was going to do before he was aware he was doing it. Rozanov knew, or understood something from Shane's look, because he was standing, leaning out to watch Shane slip between players who were all but ignoring him.

Shane couldn't blame them, what use was a player none of his teammates would pass too? Worthless. Except if that player was also an exceptional handler.

Shane nipped the puck out from under some Florida center's stick and had turned on a dime. They were coming for him but he was faster. He was already gone. All his teammates had gone on the defence, surrounding the goal, all the other team had fanned out in anticipation of a goal. Bad play in his book. All it meant was that the only thing between him and overtime was a goalie with a bad knee.

The move came to him easily. He'd practiced it alone during those long, lonely mornings, leaning over his phone replaying the game footage until his muscles memorized the movement. The feign got the kid into position for a shot he wouldn't be making.

There was a breathless second where the puck left his stick and he lost track of it, waiting for the sound. The kid went down onto his knee, too slow to accommodate a recent injury, and the puck hit the net with a clear *snick* which was immediately overwhelmed by the screams of the crowd.

People were shaking him by the shoulders, the other team mostly, but their goalie too when the bell marked the need to go into overtime.

"What the hell, Hollender!" Rozanov was in front of him, shaking him. "That's my move! They will call that the Rozanov!"

"Maybe they'll call it the Hollander." Shane just laughed and then hesitated when Rozanov's finger brushed his chin.

"You have some blood." Rozanov explained and then gestured stiffly to where they were gathering for overtime.

The other team had a final line change and Trembley came out looking for a fight. Shane could see it and so could the others. Rozanov waved him forward as the lines settled. "You do face-off. I get Trembley."

Rozanov smiled at that, pulling his mouth up into a smile so wide, it showed his whole mouthguard. Shane asked quickly as they switched positions, "You mean you got him?"

"Sure, that too." Rozanov rolled his neck, his eyes never leaving Trembley.

When Shane leaned down into Dom Thompson's face, he was expecting something cruel, or a smirk, instead the man just said, "Great play man, sorry I'm going to have to take this puck."

"Maybe. Think you'll be able to keep it?" Shane snarked back and Dom laughed right as the puck dropped and Shane showed them just why he was number one in his league. There was no time to focus on whatever Rozanov was doing to keep the players off him, there were only the three players defending and Ivanov back on the ice, meaning he could pass.

Rozanov was there then, and Shane passed right as a winger came to try and take the puck, too late except to see it sail right past him and into the stick of the only scorer Shane knew could get it where it needed to go. It was like they knew exactly where the other was, and when the net was right there, it was as easy as breathing to assist and watch Rozanov send the puck into the space Shane had helped make for him.

"Hollander!" Ivanov called, and then louder, throwing his hands up, "Rozanov!"

They talked in rapid-fire Russian and Shane wished everyone would quiet down so he could hear better, but he was quickly inundated with players clapping him on the back and talking to him about the game. He'd forgotten in the heat of it that it was all for charity and the game was supposed to be fun.

"Hell of a game, Hollander!" Their goalie, Frank-something, Shane now felt bad for forgetting his name, yelled as they celebrated. A few hats landed on the ice and something in him seemed to burn bright enough he was surprised he wasn't glowing.

"Don't piss yourself, Hollander, they're for me." Rozanov said as they made their way off the ice to let the next teams play. "A goal, an assist, and a fight. I really am amazing."

"You're something alright." Shane said but he was too happy to even pretend to be annoyed. Whoever they were celebrating for a hat-trick, Shane was proud of himself. "I played a good game."

"Yes, Hollander, that's what winning means." Rozanov said. "And I thought my English was bad."

"Asshole!" Shane laughed.

They didn't get to talk much after that. Most of the guys went out after, picking a large local bar which slowly filled as the day went on and the final two shortened matches finished.

Shane only learned that later. Mostly, he was focused on the alcohol and the way sweat rolled down Rozanov's neck when he took a shot of what he called "shit vodka."

Nearly every player Shane knew was somewhere in the bar. Lots had their girlfriends or wives on the dance floor, more still had a random woman sitting on their lap or grinding up against them. The third time someone had come up to him with a bad pick-up line, Shane had wanted to leave, but then Rozanov had offered shots and Shane had a bad habit of wanting to do what Rozanov asked him to.

They ended up in the back corner where the music was mostly muffled by velvet tufts on the wall. Shane knew Rozanov was telling a story, but his eyes were focused on the man's mouth, the way it curled around English like chocolate over cream. Rozanov seemed to notice, because his smile ticked up at the corner. "Lightweight?"

"Too sober." Shane decided. If he stayed here any longer then he'd make bad decisions, decisions like trying to date an ass like Trembley or telling his coach he was worried he was presenting right before championships. "Imma grab some water."

Rozanov might have said something but Shane was already pushing his way towards the bar. The bartender smiled and leaned over, smiling wider when he realized Shane wasn't another alpha. He was a beta, mild scent of liquor floating between them when he asked, "Something I can get you?"

"Two waters please." Shane asked and pulled a twenty from his wallet for the tip jar.

The bartender tried to talk to him, but he was yanked around into a hug he tried to shove his way out of before he realized he recognized the pale hair. "Ivanov? You alright there?"

"Wonderful!" He said and then sang something in lilting Russian before switching back. "You know when he called to say he wanted you, I said—" more Russian, then, "but look at us! Oh you played like a—"

Shane interrupted whatever Russian simile Ivanov was saying. "Who?"

"Rozanov! We all said to go with Vaga, he said 'I want Hollander.' Look how right he was!" Ivanov laughed and then saw Shane's confusion even in the low lights of the club. "Didya not know? Captains got a say in their teams this year."

"Two waters!" The bartender called and when Shane went to grab them, handed him an extra napkin. He ignored it, it was marked up with pen anyway, and walked in a fugue state back to their table.

"Always getting lost, Hollander. You should wear a bell." Rozanov hummed when Shane sat the glasses down. He kept talking, but Shane was focused on him now, watching the way his smile dimmed a bit when the alcohol caused him to slur his words.

"You watch my games." Shane said finally, interrupting Rozanov. The man seemed surprised by the change in conversation, but welcomed it.

“Why need to watch games, I’m the best.” Rozanov argued.

“You’re not the best.” Shane huffed, but it wasn’t much of an argument as it was a tired refrain he knew Rozanov wouldn’t agree with.

“Was not what you said at Junior Championships.” Rozanov shot back.

“You remember that?” Shane jerked upright. “You acted like you didn’t know me!”

“Says who?” Rozanov muttered and said something in a slurred Russian-English mix which he only caught one word of which was *freckles*.

“You asked for me! Why pretend not to know me?” Shane demanded. Any buzz of the alcohol was fading.

“I am a great player. I like playing great players.” The second part of that equation might as well have been spoken aloud: *you’re a great player*.

Shane was almost leaning over Rozanov who had slid down into the booth like he was boneless. They were locking eyes and he only looked up to check that the velvet curtains were covering them. Shane looked back down. Rozanov’s lips were wet, he’d licked them. Fuck, Shane thought, he’s won and Farah had sent him a long string of thumbs up emojis and his parents’ call had mostly been his mom cheering through the tinny speakers, so he deserved this.

“Come back to my room.”

Shane had thought the words, but Rozanov had said them. All Shane could do then was nod.

The cab ride back was strangely chaste and Shane was hyper-focused on all the eyes that followed him into the hotel. He went up to his room, waiting for Rozanov to send a room number so that they wouldn’t be interrupted by his roommate coming back early. His phone buzzed.

1326. Five minutes.

Shane was off like a shot. He threw himself into the shower, wanting to wash the stink of the bar off himself, but avoided his dick which grew thick between his thighs at the thought of Rozanov dropping an astronomical amount of money to get a room on short notice.

It might have been closer to ten minutes when Shane knocked on 1326 and just as he was about to start pounding, worried someone would see him standing out there, the door was thrown open and Rozanov was pulling him into a deep, wet, messy kiss.

He was vaguely aware of the door slamming shut behind them, too focused on the feeling of the lean line of Romanov along his front. He was trim, strong and warm every place Shane could shove his hands. He wasn’t drunk, nowhere close, but he felt tipsy with Rozanov’s hands in his hair. Quickly, he pulled at the tight jeans Rozanov was wearing, feeling the bulge and sighing in time with Rozanov when he’d wormed his way inside to touch the soft flesh of his cock for the first time.

“Let me fuck you.” Rozanov pleaded but it did come off as more of a command. Shane was learning lots about himself tonight. Shane nodded, hand still slowly rubbing until he could feel the dampness on his wrist and Rozanov grunted at him to stop with the choked off bite of someone about to cum.

Instead, Rozanov’s arms grabbed him by his thighs and lifted him, carrying him to the twin bed. “Fuck, Rozannov!”

“Ilya, call me Ilya.” Rozanov, Ilya, asked and Shane couldn’t do anything other than nod, leaning down to take his mouth in another kiss. Ilya ran them into the couch and the desk and Shane’s head smacked the mounted tv before they finally got anywhere close to the mattress. It didn’t matter.

When Shane pulled his shirt off, Ilya shoved down his pants and even with only the bedside lamp for light, he got his first good look at the other man’s dick. “Fuck.”

“Bigger than Trembley’s?” He said, then in earnest, “Told you I’d win pissing contest.”

“Please don’t mention Trembley’s dick.” Shane pleaded.

“Short like him?” Ilya asked.

Shane flicked Ilya’s nipple and that got him back with the program.

“Did you bring lube?” Shane demanded. He was getting hot and wanted something in him.

“Why need lube?” Ilya asked, hand slipping into Shane’s unbuttoned jeans to smear his slick up along his taint. “You’re so wet for me.”

The thing was, Shane never really got wet. It was a final nail in the coffin for his relationship with Greg, his inability to get himself going unless he had an hour of prep and about a gallon of lube. Even with the few women Shane had tried with before he realized his tastes ran strictly in the male direction, regardless of secondary gender, Shane had, in the darkest parts of his mind, thought himself not only to be a bad omega, but a *broken* one.

Yet now it was easy, second nature to follow Ilya’s hands, to shove his face into stretched pillows, grip the headboard, feel the warm weight of Ilya Rozanov press him into the mattress. It was so easy to let go, to let the tension in his shoulders unwind, to let Ilya’s words roll over him with each roll of the man’s hips. “So good, always so good, Shane. So good for me.”

“The best.” Shane slurred and Ilya laughed.

“Yes, the best.” He said and Shane felt himself tip over into climax, vaguely aware of Ilya cursing in bitten off Russian before he was rolled onto his back and Rozanov pulled out. There was the sound of a condom being tossed. Any complaints about the stickiness between his thighs was cut off by the feeling of a tongue cleaning up any mess he’d made.

“Oh fuck!” Shane gasped, hands sinking into Ilya’s curls to give himself something to keep from floating away in the hazy aftershocks the other man was extending with every lick.

“That’s the idea.” Ilya crooned, and Shane had to pull him up to clean away the shine of his slick from the other man’s mouth.

They went twice more, once in the shower where Ilya nearly slipped and brained himself and Shane laughed so hard that he slipped too. Somewhere in the night which was edging into morning, Ilya took him on his back, their eyes meeting, their breath mingling, no way for Shane to avoid the filth Rozanov seemed unable to hold back.

At some point, Shane had been astride him, muttering “you chose me, chose me.” Shane remembered this clearly because he’d cum when Ilya had gripped his hips and hissed, “I only take the best.”

When the morning sun intruded from under the curtain, they both knew the night was up. Shane had a plane to catch at one, Ilya’s at noon. Neither of them moved.

“Give me your phone.”

Shane listened. It was second nature at this point. He did sit up and see if Ilya was messaging someone but he just watched him add a new contact.

“Who’s Lily?” Ilya raised his eyebrow and Shane laughed. “What’s my name going to be?”

“Jane.” Ilya handed over his own phone and Shane added his number.

Maybe if he were pro, with the eyes of the world on him he would have hesitated a bit more, but he’d had fun, and he’d played a damned good game of hockey. He entered his number.

“Bye, Rozanov.” Shane said softly, feeling tender in too many senses of the word.

“Be seeing you, Hollander.” Rozanov said softly before they parted, leaning down where Shane was pulling on his socks and kissing him, slow and deep.

Shane made his flight, barely, and it was during the unloading when Farah’s name lit up his screen along with an unread text from ‘Lily’ which hadn’t come in on Airplane Mode. He stepped out of line to answer it. “Farah?”

“Shane, I got the Centaurs on the hook!” She almost yelled. She was talking so loud he could hear her even when he pulled the phone away to read the message. “The owners got a new captain and he’s looking to shake things up, and they want you! I sent them—”

Reality had snuck in somewhere around hour two not being overwhelmed by the sheer presence of Ilya Rozanov but now it felt like he was shoved back down into that soup of possibility. The Centaurs hadn’t won in decades, hadn’t made a player of note in just as long, and yet Shane knew one thing for sure: he was going to go all the way.

He walked out of the airport to where his parents were waiting to pick him up, cheering with signs and a banner between them. His mom even had balloons.

On his phone, the article Ilya had sent flashed: *Omega Dominates All-Stars: Who is Shane Hollander?* Under it was Ilya’s first text.

Same time next year?

End Notes

Thanks for reading kudos and comments are loved! If you want to talk, find me on Tumblr @whimper-soldier

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!