

how do you feel?

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how do you feel?

by [exogenesissymph](#)

Summary

No one is going to win a Pulitzer interviewing him, and Shane is okay with that. He spends most interviews rephrasing the same five sentiments--*I'm happy we won* or *We need to work harder after that loss*.

They are a good team; the win was hard fought or *They are a good team; there is a lot for us to take away*.

And finally: *I love playing on this team, for our fans*.

Then Ilya Rozanov bursts into his life, and answering questions becomes a little more complicated.

or: Shane Hollander, interviewee, throughout the years.

Notes

cw: homophobic language

rolls up to the gay sex hockey yaoi fandom w 10k of character study: heyyyyyy divaasss

a lot of references to things that happen in the books / haven't been covered by the show yet so be warned!

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

The first time Shane Hollander was interviewed as a hockey player, he was eight years-old, standing on Ottawa Centaurs ice, breath shaking and trying to hide it.

His parents probably still have footage of it, fuzzy VHS tape carefully copied to a hard drive, like all their early home videos.

A couple times every season, the Cens invite junior hockey teams from the area to play a short scrimmage during their intermissions. The littler the kids, the better. Something cute for fans to watch in between bites of ice cream and fries. That year, two teams from Shane's Mites league were chosen for the first intermission of a game against Toronto.

He imagines what he must have looked like—black hair that liked to stick straight up, even hours after being flattened by his helmet, missing front tooth, his swatch of freckles across his cheeks, barely just fading from their summer relentlessness as the days grew shorter. He can picture it because David had countless pictures of Shane at that age, on the walls of their house but now also digitized, organized into folders on the same family hard drive.

Shane remembers much more how it felt—the clear certainty that he was about to play in front of more people than he ever had before, his heart beating in double time. He stood in the tunnel with his team as they waited for the ice crew to finish setting up the scrimmage and give them their signal. Everyone had jitters they couldn't contain, bouncing on their skates and shoving each other when their coaches' backs were turned. Their opponents were lined up against the other wall of the tunnel, and two of the kids hitting each other back and forth in the shins as they argued.

"I'm going to score a goal!" One of them declared and whacked his friend with his stick.

"Well, I'm going to score *two* goals!" His friend whacked him back.

"I'm going to score, *and* I'm going to win a fight!" WHACK.

"No, you're not. Coach's totally going to bench you if you fight. I'm going to get a hat trick." WHACK.

"I'm going to get a *Gordie Howe* hat trick." WHACK.

Their coach came over and pulled them apart, asking them to stand still.

Shane squirmed. Standing still felt impossible, then, even to him. He tugged at the thin gold chain he wore, pulling it out from under his jersey and tangling it into his fingers. He wanted to put it into his mouth, like he saw some hockey players do on the bench, but his mom said he wasn't allowed to.

"Whoa, is that kid wearing a necklace?" One of shin-whackers pointed at him.

Shane dropped his chain.

"Oh my god, he is." Said the other one with glee.

“It’s a *chain*,” Shane protested.

“Yeah, right. That’s like, your mom’s necklace. It’s all sparkly.”

“Oh, wait, I know him.” One of the kids elbowed the other, having drifted back together as soon as their coach turned away. “He’s the Japanese kid. Konichiwa! Konichiwa! Konichiwa!” They chanted the word together, bobbing their heads up and down in mock-bows, and anything Shane had to say to defend his gold necklace died in his throat and he turned away.

Their coach came storming back and pulled one of the boys to the end of the line. “One more word out of the two of you and you’re benched!”

Coach Chip came over and patted Shane on the shoulder. “Hey buddy. Just ignore them, okay? Shut them up with how you play, yeah?”

Shane nodded, though as he stepped onto the ice, his stomach was still twisted around the kids’ shrill voices, trying their best to make a simple greeting sound as ugly as possible. He took deep breaths and focused on the puck, on the ice beneath his skates, still scratched up from where the NHL players were battling not five minutes ago.

The puck dropped and Shane won it back.

The scrimmage was only for a couple minutes, so Shane knew that there wouldn’t be time for anything like a hat trick like the other kids were boasting, but he did want to score. His teammate skated through the other team’s defense and shot at the goal, the puck bouncing off the goalie’s pads. The crowd *oohed*, and that small murmur was already louder than anything Shane had heard at his games. He pounced on the rebound and snapped it towards the goal, slotting it top shelf, and the crowd cheered, the sound vibrating through Shane’s body, all the way down to his toes.

If that was what it felt like in a half-full NHL arena with most people not even in their seats...

Shane laughed as his teammates swarmed him into a hug, all jumping up and down.

But they weren’t done, and the puck dropped again. Shane won it back again, this time passing it back and forth with his friend Austin until they caught the goalie out of position and Austin sniped the puck in. The PA voice crowed during the announcement of their goal and Shane waved at his parents, filming from their seats, a wide smile across his face.

For the last puck drop, Shane leaned down for the faceoff and found himself across from the boy who had wanted the Gordie Howe in the tunnel. The boy watched him with narrowed eyes, and that was enough to make Shane feel like his stomach was full of stones, again.

He lost the faceoff and had to chase after the other team. Just when he won the puck back, his skate got caught in a deeper groove in the ice and he fell, his opponent sprinting away with the puck, shrieking, “Arigatou! Arigatou!” and then scoring on their goalie.

They still won, but Shane felt a little funny about it. He wasn't as happy as he thought he'd be. There was no time to do a handshake line after the game, and Shane thought he'd be glad, but really he was trying to ignore how the twist in his stomach was tightening as he got pulled over to the corner of the ice where a smiling lady was waiting for him with a microphone.

"I'm here with our star of the scrimmage, who had a goal and an assist, leading his team to victory! Could you tell us your name, number 24?"

"Shane." Her voice was so bright and his was so small.

"Well, Shane! How does it feel to have played the way you played in front of all these fans?"

"Um." Shane glanced up at the lady. The weight in his stomach grew. He had tripped in front of all these people. And then that boy had skated away and scored, while—while—

"I—" He started, but he couldn't finish his sentence.

The lady was still smiling but it looked more awkward. This close, he could see the powder on her face and the pencil around her eyes. Did she really want him to talk about how he felt? He didn't really want to do that. He felt bad. He felt worse, with every passing second.

She was still waiting for him to say something, her eyebrows inching up on her face. The crowd was starting to laugh, a little. "I can do better," he finally blurted out, the words tumbling out almost too quickly to be understood.

The reporter laughed, a little bewildered. "Alright! A young man with some ambition. I hope we see you in the big leagues, someday, Shane!"

Coach Chip came to guide Shane off the ice. "Got nervous in front of the camera, eh, kid? That's alright. You played great. Really showed 'em." They went around the building to the small locker room where the kids had their stuff. Shane shuffled his feet, hoping the kids from the other team were already gone.

"You know, those interviews don't have to be scary," Coach Chip continued. "They just want you to say that you're happy for your team if you won, or that you'll work harder next time if you lost. Just remember that and you'll never blank on another interview, alright? I have a feeling there's going to be a lot of those in your future." This last part he said more to himself, and Shane barely heard him, because he saw his parents at the end of the hall.

"Shane!" Yuna exclaimed. "You did great!" Shane ran towards his mom, not caring that he wasn't supposed to do that with skates on in the hallway, and buried himself in a hug against her. Everyone was praising him, but it didn't feel right. There was this pit in his stomach that he couldn't explain. He knew he should be happy, but he couldn't pretend, with the pit there, all huge and heavy.

Yuna rubbed her hand across Shane's back. "Is something wrong, baby?" He shook his head.

"Ah, just got a little stage fright, I think." Coach Chip explained.

Yuna squeezed her son. “Oh, it’s okay, baby. We all get nervous sometimes. It’s okay to be shy.”

Shane nodded but he didn’t feel much better. The rest of the Centaurs game was a blur. On the way home, the more he tried not to think about the two other boys, the more he found himself going over the whole thing, from beginning to end. Finally, he leaned forward in his seat. “Um, mom?” He reached up and unclasped his chain. “I don’t think I want to wear a chain anymore. You can have it back.” He dropped it in her hand and then sank back into his seat.

In the front row, his parents cast a look at each other, confused. “Okay,” said Yuna. “Whatever makes you happy, baby.”

He wasn’t sure it did, but it felt important to do, anyways.

So, yes. The footage exists somewhere, but Shane’s never watched it back.

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For the most part, Coach Chip’s advice gets him through most of his junior hockey career.

Leading Kingston to the OHL Championship and beating Sault Ste. Marie in 5 games? *I couldn’t be more thrilled. I’ve always dreamed of this moment, with this team. We couldn’t have done it without each other.*

Losing a pivotal Game 3 in the Memorial Cup Final against Seattle because someone on his team had taken a stupid penalty? *We all need to do better. We know that we have more to give, whether it’s on the penalty kill or even strength. We have our backs to the wall now and I know we won’t make it easy for them.*

No one is going to win a Pulitzer interviewing him, and Shane is okay with that. He spends most interviews rephrasing the same five sentiments—*I’m happy we won. We need to work harder after that loss. They are a good team; the win was hard fought. They are a good team; there is a lot for us to take away.* And finally, *I love playing on this team, for our fans.*

He’s hockey’s good Canadian boy, and he’s okay with that. The good Canadian boy can be bland. Polite. The good Canadian boy doesn’t have to explain how sometimes he walks through the locker room with a weight in his stomach that has never gone away. And because he doesn’t have to explain it, he doesn’t need to think about it. At all.

Then Ilya Rozanov bursts into his life, and answering questions becomes a little more complicated.

Shane, what did you see from Ilya Rozanov this tournament, especially in the gold medal game where he had a tremendous contribution to Russia’s win? Shane, what was going through your mind when you heard Ilya Rozanov’s name called before yours? Shane, have you gotten a chance to know Rozanov off the ice? How was it filming with him this summer?

And for the first time since he was eight, Shane doesn’t quite know what to say.

He's an asshole. He's the best hockey player Shane's ever played against.

Boston will regret not picking Shane. He loves playing for Montreal and couldn't imagine it any other way.

They don't know each other at all off the ice. He knows, intimately, what Shane sounds like when he comes.

Shane, how does it feel, knowing you're going up against Rozanov for the first time in the regular season?

He says simply, "Rozanov is good, but we will be better tonight."

And when he walks away from the reporters to get back into the locker room, he knows that he didn't give them what they wanted. Didn't give them a flirty wink or promise 51 goals, didn't feign forgetting Rozanov's position. Gave them the measured, responsible, future Voyageurs captain that they expected.

He sits down and finishes his prep. Taylor stands a couple feet away from him, taping his stick around the knob, counting under his breath. "Aieee," J.J. clomps over to his stall. "Everyday I look at your stick and see the gayest tape job I've ever seen. What you need that knob to be so fat, for, hm?"

Taylor rolls his eyes. "Man, you made me lose count."

J.J. tsks. "60 times around... 70 times around, what's the difference? Why not 69 times around, eh?"

"Like you didn't freak out that time you lost your 'lucky socks' in Carolina," Taylor shoots back.

Shane lets it all wash through him. Even with a couple NHL games under his belt now, his heart still hitches into double time before they step out onto the ice. The waiting in the locker room is the worst, his senses heightened, casting about for any little thing to worry about. He just needs to focus on the game to come. Visualize the power play. Remember what they went over in video. Boston's goalie drops his glove too low. Rozanov will have to be contained.

And then on the ice—Rozanov. Refusing to be contained.

He skates by Shane what is surely an abnormal amount, just close enough so that their jerseys brush hems. It seems like every time Shane steps on the ice, Rozanov is there, and Shane doesn't let himself look at him. Except, when they glide to the faceoff dot, leaning in towards each other, Shane allows himself to lift his eyes to Rozanov's, only to find Rozanov's gaze already trained on him.

Rozanov's teeth flash at him. "Two for seven on the faceoff tonight, Hollander. You sure you should be one taking this?"

“I’m two for six.” Shane grits, breaking his eyes away to watch the puck in the referee’s hand. How did hell did Rozanov even know that? How many players’ live stats did he have tabs on, just so he get in a couple digs throughout the game?

“Hm,” Rozanov says, winning the puck back. “Two for seven. I’m right.”

“Oh, fuck you.” Shane’s neck heats. Hayden, having heard all of that from just outside the circle, tries to check Rozanov off the puck, but Rozanov leans into the hit, instead sending Hayden stumbling backwards, barely catching himself from falling.

“What an asshole,” Hayden grumbles when they’re back on the bench. “He doesn’t even have a point tonight, and you have three! He thinks he can chirp you with some faceoff stat?”

Comeau snorts from Shane’s other side. “That cocksucker is chirping you with faceoff stats?” And Shane can’t quite tell from if the derision in his tone is directed towards Rozanov, for knowing the stat, or Shane, for letting himself get chirped by it. He can only respond with a shrug and weak laugh, aiming for *well, what can you do?* and not knowing if he landed anywhere close. Or if Comeau even heard him.

The Voyageurs hold a steady lead throughout the game, responding quickly as soon as Boston closes the gap. Even so, the bench is full of grumblings. *Rozanov, that asshole. Rozanov, that motherfucker.*

And there are pros and cons to this. The con to this is that his chest tightens every time Rozanov is brought up. A nervousness, but not because Shane is worried about Rozanov spilling their secret. So then, why? He doesn’t really know how to name it. It’s just a strange off-kilterness, wondering at what Rozanov is saying. About what he’s like, with people who aren’t Shane.

The pro is that Shane’s teammates cursing Rozanov gives Shane has a good reason to look at him. He eyes those golden curls peeking out from under Rozanov’s helmet and shakes his head in disapproval.

After they win, Shane sits down again in the media room. The reporters bombard him with questions, their intensity not changing just because the Voyageurs won. He answers questions, then answers them again in French. *J’suis heureux qu’on ait gagné. Ils forment une bonne équipe, cette victoire n’était pas si facile.*

Hayden’s next to him at the table, having scored the game-winning goal. He scowls on Shane’s behalf at the questions about Rozanov. “Well, I know that it isn’t my rivalry, but he gets under my skin, I can tell you that.” He juts his thumb out at Shane. “Hollzy’s too polite to say so, but I know that none of us like him much. Just the way he is.”

The thought of Rozanov getting under Hayden’s skin saddens Shane, for whatever reason. He knows Rozanov pesters everyone he lays his eyes on—Shane’s not special. Maybe it’s more that this rivalry talk saddens him. Did everyone really have to make such a big deal out of it, constantly, all the time? And now his teammates all want to add in their two cents, too.

He clears his throat, trying to shove away the mix of feelings. The post-game interview room is not the place to unpack all that. So, he says the lines knowing it's not what he wants to say—*Being a pest is part of the game, and Rozanov is very good at it. It's a good thing that today, we were better at the other parts of the game.*—and not knowing what it is, exactly, that he does want to say.

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The All Star Game is the first time Shane sits down at the same interview with Rozanov, the two of them captains of Team North American and Team Europe. Directly next to Rozanov, listening to him make the room laugh with his deadpan one-line quips, Shane has never felt more like a little wooden puppet, dancing on strings.

How does he do it? A reporter asks Shane if he thinks he will beat Rozanov to fifty goals. He opens his mouth, daring himself for just one second to go for the lighthearted answer. He could take a page out of Rozanov's book and just say yes. He could give them the honest answer, which is, *I don't want to jinx myself, but let's just say that I really, really want to.* This is the All Star Game. It's okay if his media answers were a little more off the cuff than usual, right? That's what fans want.

But he chickens out at the last moment, saying, "I don't really think about stuff like that. This is a team sport, and I'm happy when my team is doing well. I just try to contribute."

He doesn't blame Rozanov for rolling his eyes. Shane is a caricature of himself.

He takes the question Rozanov was struggling with and answers it with a variant of the *I love playing on this team, for our fans* answer. He feels Rozanov's foot press against his, and his heart pounds.

Why is playing best friends with the media so easy for Rozanov, when the idea of Shane doing it himself feels like standing on a cliff's edge, being asked to jump?

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Shane, how does it feel to win the Calder trophy over your rival, Ilya Rozanov?

I'm happy I won. He's a good player, and I'm sure it could have gone to either of us. It's nice to have the trophy, but the work isn't done. I love playing for our fans in Montreal, and I really want to bring playoff hockey back to Montreal.

Shane, congrats on the brilliant performance in this year's Olympics. Any reactions from you, watching Ilya Rozanov's Russia crash out of the tournament so early?

I mean, you feel for him. I know he loves playing for his country—not to mention playing in front of his country—just as much as I do. I think they had a good team over there this year, things just didn't quite go their way. I hope he's not being too hard on himself.

Shane, you won the Calder trophy last year, but Ilya Rozanov is the first between the two of you to hoist the cup. Did you watch the playoff finals this year? And how did it feel to watch

Rozanov win?

Yes, uh, yes, I watched. I thought the Bears played really well, obviously. It was well deserved. But more than that, I thought about how much the fans here in Montreal deserve to experience that again. I'm ready to get back to work.

Shane! I heard from your teammates that you met Rose Landry last night. What was that like? Do you have a favorite movie of hers?

Uh, haha, yes. Still feel a little star-struck, to be honest. I really liked her in that Poirot movie, *Cards on the Table*?

Is it true that you and Rose have started dating?

We... are really good friends. I'm not comfortable saying more about my personal life.

Shane! Despite rumors that you and Rose Landry have broken up, you two were seen together last night in New York. Are the rumors false, then?

Does anyone have a question about hockey? I'll answer a question about hockey.

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The All Star Game after he and Rose break up, Shane arrives thinking only of Ilya Rozanov. After six years—they were finally playing for the same team, with Shane as captain. The media, bloodhounds that they were, have sunken their teeth into this narrative, speculating relentlessly if the two rivals were going to see eye to eye on the same side of the ice.

He sits through the media session, answering their questions almost without a second thought, with how many times he's heard them before. After yet another reporter tries a variation on *Shane, how does it feel to play at your 6th All Star Game / to be named an ASG captain / to finally play with Ilya Rozanov*, Shane thinks about what Rose said to him, right before he flew to Florida.

They had been on a video call—her filming in Japan and him on the west coast playing the three California teams. Post-break up, they stuck to their agreement to stay friends, and talking to her was still as easy as it had ever been.

“How's it been?” She asked. “Any closer to *figuring stuff out*?” She had latched onto the little euphemism he gave when he turned down Miles' number and loved asking for updates. Shane hadn't directly told her about him and Ilya, but was unsightly vague enough that she probably suspected the truth.

He blew out a sigh. “No. I don't know. We haven't really...talked. Still. I'm seeing him in Florida. I want to--I don't know, clear the air then, but I have no idea what I'll say.”

She hummed. “Well, how do you think it'll feel, seeing him again? What do you want to happen?”

Shane thought about this. “I mean, it’ll be nice to see him. Strange, and new. Honestly, I’m excited—”

“Shane,” she cut him off.

“What?”

“I don’t know how to tell you this, but—” her brows furrowed. “You have a talking-to-the-media voice. You were using it just now.”

“I was?”

“Yeah, it’s like, we’re talking about feelings, and then something in you just closes off. And you might as well be telling me *just gotta get the pucks in deep*, or whatever.”

“Oh. I’m sorry?”

“You’re not doing it on purpose?”

“No...?” Shane felt his cheeks heat. “I don’t think I realized I was doing it?”

“Oh. Well, I’m glad I asked, then, because I thought it was your way of telling me you didn’t want to talk about something.” She paused, seeing he was still embarrassed, “And it’s totally okay! I forget to turn it off sometimes, too, especially after a press junket.”

Shane rubbed his brows. “What was your question again?”

“How do you think it’ll feel, seeing him?”

And that’s the question Shane ponders as he sits in front of the media, answering on autopilot. The last time he saw him, Ilya had a girl flush against his front, her hands up his shirt, their open mouths molded together. But the time before that, Ilya’s eyes wide and intense, calling him *Shane* for the first time, expression unreadable as Shane panicked and ran from it.

Something in Shane’s chest is tight. He brushes a knuckle over his heart, as casually as possible. What is this feeling?

He’s scared, still. Scared like he’s standing on a tightrope and could fall at any second. For so many years, he’d blithely walked across his rope, assuming he could jump off safely at any point. Even at the start of this season, he had promised himself that he would end this, somehow. See Ilya one more time, then move on. But watching Ilya at that club with the girl, feeling like someone had punched him in the solar plexus, Shane’s not sure anymore that there is a safe way off this rope.

No matter which of them ends this thing between them, there’s an eighty-foot fall with no safety net waiting for him.

He ducks the rest of the press for the whole weekend. Let the media hound one of the other players, for once. They were *all* stars, after all.

And then, he just—watches Ilya. Ilya at the pool, golden in the Florida sun, face bright with laughter, three kids hanging off him. Ilya during the skills competition, foul-mouthed when Shane edges him out in their category by half a second, eyes darkening in a way that makes Shane's stomach flip. Ilya sneaking in a kiss onto Shane's cheek when he scores off Ilya's assist, then disguising that tenderness with a slap on Shane's back, so hard it was almost a punch.

How could he ever have believed he could walk away from this?

After the game, a group of players go out for drinks, and Shane finds himself squished into a booth next to Ilya. The bar is serving hockey-player themed specialty cocktails this weekend, and they all laugh at Shane's, some sweet abomination with maple syrup and sake as the main ingredients. Ilya's is, uncreatively, a variation of a White Russian.

Shane sips at his drink, already more tipsy than he's been in a long time. There's conversation, but Ilya's right thigh pressed against his left, radiating heat, is all he can think about.

Bolstered by the alcohol, Shane drops his palm onto Ilya's thigh and leaves it there, pointer finger drawing the smallest circle around the spot Shane loves to kiss, because it makes Ilya gasp every time.

Ilya downs the rest of his White Russian like a shot.

"Man, Roz, you really don't know who James Kingsley was?" Matheson asks from across the table. "Played for Nashville for like a decade—"

"Ah," Ilya laughs. "That's the reason why I don't know him."

Everyone laughs but Matheson continues, "—Like, five-time All Star, was nominated for the Selke, like every other year, probably the best faceoff percentage in the league, ever?"

"He never won the Selke, though," Shane pipes up, though he has no idea why they're talking about Kingsley. "I remember his Corsi was off the charts."

Ilya rolls his eyes. "How can you think I am nerd like you? All those little numbers, pfft. I don't need little numbers to tell me if hockey player is good or not."

"Yeah," someone else laughs. "The only numbers Rozanov cares about are his goals and assists."

"That, and how many phone numbers he can get in a night."

Shane lifts his head from where it is dangerously close to being slumped on Ilya's shoulder. "Wait, that's not true." He looks at Ilya's big, hazel eyes. Ilya's thigh tenses, just a little, under Shane's left hand. "You know stats. You chirp us with our stats all the... time."

Shane trails off, and Ilya is suddenly very interested in the plate of cold fries in front of him.

"What? Hollander, Rozanov chirps you with *stats*?"

“Yeah,” Shane says slowly, watching Ilya’s throat bob as he swallows. “Like, if I’m shit at faceoffs that day, he’ll make sure I know. Or the number of giveaways I have in a game.” Or Shane’s missed shot attempts. Or how many times he gets checked off the puck. Or—

With the hand he had under the table, Ilya reaches for Shane’s left wrist, resting his fingertips gently against the skin there.

“What? Rozy, how come when I play you it’s just jokes about fucking my sister?”

Ilya clears his throat. “Well, you see, Hollander does not have sister. Very boring person. Boring person needs to be chirped in boring way.”

Everyone laughs again, and Shane makes a show of rolling his eyes. In his chest, his heart is hammering so hard, he wonders if Ilya can feel his pulse from the feather light contact he has with his wrist. All these years, Shane thought that was just how Ilya played the game—hyper observant, quick to tally everyone’s mistakes—but no. It was just him who Ilya had been watching.

Something warm coils in his stomach, and he smiles, despite himself.

Just Shane.

Later, when the group settles up and moves to leave, Shane catches Ilya alone and whispers in his ear. “Here’s a *little number* for you. One. Five. Oh. Eight.” He lets the ghost of his breath settle on the shell of Ilya’s ear then he walks out of the bar, feeling the burn of Ilya’s gaze on his back the entire time.

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After that, they hurtle towards a terrifying *something* that Shane no longer wants to fight. He still worries, and overanalyzes, because of course he does, but most of that worry takes on a shape more akin to prayer, almost. *Please, don’t let anything fuck up my chances of having him. Please, let there be a way for me to have him. Please, I want him so badly.*

And then Ilya goes to Russia to bury his father, and Shane worries for Ilya like he’s never worried before. *Please, let him be okay. Let his brother leave him be. I want to see him tonight. Please, let us see each other tonight.*

So, when he walks into the locker room before the Boston game, it’s almost a shock to hear a reporter ask, *Shane, another game against your rival Ilya Rozanov tonight. Does anything change about your preparation for games like these?*

For the first time in a long time, Shane blanks on his answer.

“No,” he says.

The reporters break out in some nervous laughter.

He rubs his face, begging his brain to come up with something, anything that isn’t *I make sure the lube and condoms are stocked at my place or I shower extra thoroughly.*

Finally, he gives in to the awkwardness and admits, “I think I’ve just kind of run out of things to say about this rivalry.”

There is not a single hockey cliché that can adequately convey the feelings he has about Ilya Rozanov, and in a moment of uncharacteristic petulance, Shane just doesn’t want to feed these reporters the pretend, scripted lines he’s peddled for almost a decade, now.

He’s still Shane Hollander, so he does say, “Maybe ask me during post-game. I’m sure I’ll have more to say after he’s been in my face for 60 minutes.” And the reporters laugh, again, though it isn’t as satisfying as Shane imagined it would have been.

But in the end, there’s no post-game, because Cliff Marlow breaks Shane’s collarbone and sends him to the hospital. In his last moments of consciousness, Shane thinks of Ilya’s wild, frightened face, and pleads with whoever’s listening, *Please tell him I’m okay. Please.*

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Ilya at Shane’s parents’ house is a sight that Shane can’t wait to get used to. They aren’t there every day, of course, but ever since they came out to David and Yuna, they eat dinner together every couple of days.

Seeing Ilya desperate to be on his best behavior makes Shane laugh, with the way he jumps up to help with the cooking, the dishes, the cleaning, even David’s puzzles. But more than that, he’s comforted that he can give Ilya this. He knows Ilya didn’t have the same kind of childhood that Shane did, and if he’s ever somehow in danger of forgetting that fact, all he has to do is to catch Ilya staring with a quiet wistfulness at the, frankly, too many, childhood pictures of Shane on the walls to be seized with animosity towards that man who fathered Ilya.

His parents also notice Ilya lingering in front of their family photos, and David shamelessly pulls out family album after album, showing Ilya all the embarrassing pictures of Shane, from him being buck naked in the bath to being Scarecrow in the fifth-grade school play.

“School play?” Ilya lights up. “Shane was actor? Do you have video?” And Shane pretends to groan while his dad goes to pull out the family hard-drive, knowing that his parents have also waited a long time for him to bring someone home like this.

Ilya curls up on the couch and watches the camcorder footage of Shane’s only acting credit, his arms around Shane’s waist, head nestled in the crook of Shane’s neck. He laughs at Shane’s first line, a shy rush of words. “You are much better at acting now,” Ilya reassures him, squeezing Shane’s waist and plopping a quick kiss on his jaw. “Great at pretending to look at time on fancy watch. And running in new running shoes.”

Shane pinches him, just a little, but the videos David captured of Shane’s parts play one after the other, and Shane hides his fond smile every time Ilya giggles at something. At the final bow, Ilya smiles into Shane’s neck. “Mm. Deserves ‘standing O’, but I am too comfortable here.”

They watch the kids scamper off the stage, and neither of them gets up to turn off the video player. The next video plays, one of kids skating out to play a scrimmage on the Ottawa Centaurs ice. It takes Shane a second too long to recognize the video, being so wrapped up in Ilya, but when he does, he stiffens.

Ilya looks up at him, eyes concerned.

“Oh, ha. Um. This is a video of my Mites team playing a scrimmage during intermission for the Cens. Boston does that, too, right?”

Ilya looks back at the screen, and when he recognizes little Shane, #24 in black, he exclaims, “My god, you are a baby!” The delight in Ilya’s tone is hard to miss, and perhaps Shane is just too far gone for this 200-pound Russian lying on his chest, wanting him to be happy, always, but he doesn’t get up and change the video.

David and Yuna had moved to the kitchen, and if they notice Shane acquiescing to watch the video he always staunchly refused to, without being able to give any coherent reason why, they keep it to themselves.

On screen, Shane recognizes the slight wobble in his skating stride, a tendency to favor his right side that he doesn’t quite fix until his Peewee years. His snapshot is already pretty promising, but his celly has miles to go—he was never that flashy as a kid, preferring to just let his teammates swarm him with a big group hug.

He watches Ilya watch the video, trying not to tense when they get to the part where Shane trips and lets the other team score a breakaway goal. He doesn’t think he succeeds, because Ilya looks up at him, curiously. Shane waits for the chirp, the *you are like baby deer on ice!* that he gets treated to every so often, but instead Ilya just sniffs and says, “Wow. Did not think it was possible for someone to have worse backhand than you, but there it is.”

Shane feels his brows furrow. “He scored with it, though?”

“Well, yes. Your goalie is too busy watching himself on the jumbotron. Smart, probably his only chance. Don’t think he made it very far in hockey.” Probably not. Shane has no idea.

Then the game ends and little Shane skates over to the reporter. The recording pans up to the jumbotron, where the in-arena camera is trained on Shane’s flushed cheeks.

Through the video, the reporter’s voice sounds, echoing through the arena, *I’m here with our star of the scrimmage, who had a goal and an assist, leading his team to victory! Could you tell us your name, number 24?*

And then Shane’s young voice, shakier and quieter than Shane had remembered, barely above a whisper, answering. *Shane.*

Well, Shane! How does it feel to have played the way you played in front of all these fans?

Um. I—I can do better.

The pauses in Shane's answer are just as excruciatingly long as he remembers them being. Unwittingly, his eyes grow wet, and his nose is suddenly sore with the tender ache of holding back tears. That little boy on screen, heart weighed down with so many little hurts he didn't have the words for yet, putting on a brave face for the camera.

Ilya turns to look at him, and Shane closes his eyes, not ready for Ilya to see. Ilya grazes Shane's undereye with his thumb. It comes away wet.

Alright! A young man with some ambition. I hope we see you in the big leagues, someday, Shane!

"Oh, solnyshko." Ilya whispers. "You made it, and none of them did." Shane lifts his lashes and gazes into Ilya's gentle expression. What did he see? What did he see from the video that made him understand that Shane needed to be held tight and soothed, in that moment?

Ilya holds him, his solid body a comforting tether to the present. Ilya's eyes are searching, still.

Shane's heart swells. Maybe Ilya is not sure why Shane has flinched with hurt from this simple home video. But that doesn't stop him from comforting Shane, regardless, vaguely in the right direction.

Shane loves him.

Ilya continues murmuring. His finger comes down to trace Shane's collarbone. "You used to wear chain, hm? You should, again. Would be so handsome. And then, I would—" He leans in close to Shane's ear and whispers the rest, filthy and borderline physically impossible that Shane almost laughs.

Instead, he pulls Ilya up from the couch, excuses them to his parents (with a totally normal tone of voice that is not strangled by desire), and breaks a speed limit or two on the way back to their cottage.

**

Another season, another eight months of enduring hockey locker room talk, counting down the minutes until he can step onto the ice and tune out everything that isn't the *thwack* of pucks hitting sticks.

Their home opener this year is against the New York Admirals, fresh off of their world-altering cup win. Okay, maybe Shane is the only one who's had his world altered. He's thought of Scott Hunter kissing Kip Grady on national television so many times this summer he barely even feels the sharp tug of want in his ribcage anymore, wanting that for him and Ilya. The rest of his teammates seem to be carrying on as usual, perhaps with some more acerbity.

"You think if I check Hunter too hard, he'll get hard?" Comeau chuckles to himself as he finishes taping his stick.

“Surely not,” J.J. says, straight-faced. “He can’t have won a cup if he had to play that many games while being hard in a jock.”

Comeau smiles, an oil-slick leer that turns Shane’s stomach even more. “Guess we’ll find out tonight!”

Shane sighs, standing to look at his uniform, hung in his stall, the letter C stitched neatly over where his heart would be. He doesn’t want to do this—he never does. But he hates the idea of not saying anything even more, and that’s the urge that wins out every time. Most times. Thankfully.

“Comey—” He calls over, steeling himself. “That better just be talk.” Bad enough that it was even talk.

Comeau points at himself in faux-shock. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean, captain.”

“I’m serious.” Shane could feel his double-time pulse jumping in his chest. He’s the buzzkill, Good Canadian Boy captain. That’s who he needs to be. “No targeting players because of their sexualities. Am I clear?”

Comeau’s hand slowly drops to his side. “Of course.” His gaze hardens, and Shane forces himself to turn away slowly, normally, naturally.

During the game, Shane is hyperaware of every check that Scott Hunter takes, every shove, every chirp. It’s a normal part of the game. They play on. His chest still squeezes every time it happens. There’s no egregious language or anything, not that Shane can hear, but the hits feel more intense than usual. More targeted. And he feels helpless, because what can he do?

They enter the third period tied 2-2. Shane takes the opening faceoff against Hunter and tries to give him a friendly look, but Hunter’s eyes are locked on the puck, so Shane leans down as well, feeling the thin chain he’s started wearing fall out of his jersey.

Hunter wins the puck back and New York starts setting up in their zone. They play on. Montreal wins the puck back, but Comeau’s pass to Hayden gets intercepted by Hunter, and him and another Admiral tear down towards the Montreal goal. Shane hears Comeau snarl as he rushes towards Hunter.

He sees it happening in slow motion: Hunter passes the puck to Vaughn, Comeau, a charging bull with his vision narrowed, barreling into Hunter from behind, sending the unsuspecting Hunter sprawling. The ref’s whistle blows immediately, giving New York a two-minute powerplay.

“What the fuck, man?” Shane yells, as Comeau skates towards the penalty box. “What the hell did I tell you before the game?”

“Fuck off, Hollander.” Comeau sneers. “Did you forget what sport you’re playing? He should have had more awareness—”

“You were late as fuck! The puck wasn’t even in the same zone anymore!” Shane doesn’t care that the camera is probably following the two of them, the internet lip-readers getting ready to dust off their craft.

Comeau marches into the penalty box. “Shut up and go kill the penalty.” He slams the door shut.

Shane stares, incredulous. He turns. At least Hunter has gotten up on his own, even if he’s skating to go down the tunnel to the locker room. He lines up with another New York center for the face off and tries to focus on the penalty kill.

They don’t kill the penalty.

In Shane’s defense, it happened just after his line change. But he still sits on the bench with his teeth gritted, knowing that they’ve got to get another goal as soon as possible. Comeau skates out from the penalty box and shuffles back on the bench, refusing to meet Shane’s glare.

It stays 3-2 long enough that Theirault pulls their goalie, and then Comeau is the extra man on the ice. They pass the puck around uselessly until there’s just about thirty seconds left on the clock. The defender between Shane and Hayden drifts after Hayden, and Shane taps his stick on the ice, yelling at Comeau, who has the puck. “Over here!”

Comeau meets Shane’s eyes, but instead of passing the puck he slams it towards the goal, and it’s easily blocked by an Admirals defender, who throws it back across the ice and into Montreal’s empty goal.

The game ends like that, 4-2 New York. Shane skates straight off the ice, following his teammates into the locker room. He passes Comeau and mutters, “What the fuck is your problem?” but he doesn’t linger to hear Comeau’s answer, if there even is one.

Shane undresses through Theirault’s dressing down, half listening. Marcel, the PR head mentions that the media want to talk to him, and he hides his grimace and nods. He can’t help but notice Comeau isn’t pulled for media. Must be nice. Only getting interviewed when he makes positive contributions to the team.

Shane quickly pulls his phone out and checks his notifications. The ones he’s looking for are at the very top.

21:05 Lily: you are trying to kill me, hollander

21:04 Lily: fuckkkk, now you have it in your mouth like you don’t know what you are doing to me

...

19:35 Lily: when did you get that chain????

Shane smiles and saves them to read later, after he’s been grilled for losing their season opener.

He sits down and they run through the normal lines: *We still have work to do, they're a good team over there, there's a lot we need to improve, still, this early in the season.* Then, someone brings up Comeau.

“Shane, there seemed to be some agitated exchanging of words between you and Comeau tonight, do you think that impacted your chemistry as the night went on?”

Yes, he thinks. Yes, I play with a homophobe who couldn't bring himself to play with me tonight because I reprimanded him for a reckless, unnecessary penalty and joking about headhunting.

“No,” he says. “I admit, there was some frustration on my part because that was a very avoidable penalty. But in the end, there are some nights you have to play a little selfish and some nights where you can't. We're just still figuring it out, shaking off the rust, still. And once we click...” Shane smiles, hoping it comes off as legitimate. “Let's just say I'm really excited for what we can do this season.”

By the time he finishes showering, he's one of the last people in the locker room, including the equipment staff. He ducks into the gym and rolls out a yoga mat in the corner, running through a couple of stretches, taking stock of how his muscles feel, one game into the season. Then he settles down into child's pose, closing his eyes, trying to take stock of his feelings.

It's something his yoga instructor, Demi, suggested to him, after he confessed that he sometimes has trouble turning off his media persona. She gave him a lot of resources on mindfulness and grounding techniques, exercises for the mind, reconnecting with his emotions but not fixating on them, either.

So, how does he feel?

Tired.

Bitter that he had to take media when it should have been Comeau up there, justifying his choices.

A little frustrated that he has to essentially apologize whenever they fall short of a win.

Scared that they won't live up to the promise he made tonight, scared that the chemistry won't come, because there's a thought that's been lurking for the last couple of years, getting louder and louder: *Sometimes, I hate this team.*

This is a thought that Demi would tell him he needs to let pass through him. So he presses his forehead against the yoga mat and thinks of playing beautiful hockey, thinks of that fourth cup, thinks of winning.

Someone pushes the gym door open and Shane lifts his head.

It's Jacobson, one of their free agent signings from over the summer, a Midwesterner who played in Winnipeg the last couple of seasons. When they first met at camp and Shane took

all the new guys out, he had asked Jacobson if he wanted to grab some Thai food. Jacobson had grimaced and said, “I don’t know. I’m not really feeling ethnic food.”

“Ethnic food?” Shane had asked, not sure he’d heard him correctly.

“Yeah. Wait, I mean, no offense—” Jacobson winced. “I know you’re like,” he gestured broadly at Shane.

And Shane didn’t really know what to say to that, so he just said, “Why don’t you tell me what you’re in the mood for?” And then they went and got burgers.

Jacobson gives Shane a nod and heads for the elliptical.

Shane puts his head back down. There’s that knot in his chest, again.

Sometimes, he hates this team.

**

In March, the Voyageurs clinch a playoff spot. Their chemistry did arrive.

And thank god for that, right? Shane smiles bitterly as he stands in the Voyageurs locker room, Theirault silhouetted in his office door.

“Shane, a word.” Theirault says.

Everyone in the room knows what this is about. The video of Shane and Ilya’s reflections, kissing in the background of Hayden’s FanMail video. Shane’s never felt so gawked at, which is pretty impressive, considering how everyone is so pointedly pretending to not look at him—except Hayden. Poor Hayden, his big eyes full of apology, looking absolutely crushed.

He knows what Theirault’s going to tell him, because Ilya’s already gone through it, told him the message that the league forced Ilya’s coach to say.

Shane suspects that Theirault’s version will be a little less *I’m sorry that you have to go through this, the league wants us to bench you until it gets a handle on things* and a little more *How irresponsible of you get caught at this time, when we’re still fighting for playoff positioning! And a rival captain? An in-division, rival captain?*

Whatever. Shane will fuck off to Ottawa for however long he’s benched and wake up late everyday with the love of his life, a man who is the first hockey player in Shane’s life who makes him wish desperately he could be honest about who he is, makes him want to lay himself bare, to not hide. What a punishment.

He catches the eye of Marcel, the PR manager, as he walks into Theirault’s office. Marcel has on the strained smile of someone who’s job just got a lot harder, but at least he meets Shane’s gaze with the meek understanding that all the media’s going to get from Shane for a long time going forward is *no comment*.

**

Ilya Rozanov's Centaurs eliminate the Montreal Voyageurs from the playoffs. Shane arrives for locker room cleanout day simultaneously numb and furious. Not at Ilya, of course. Ilya had stayed up late on the phone all night with Shane and listened to Shane's fretting, despite playing Game 1 of their series against New York the next day.

"Just don't go," Ilya said, voice deep with sleepiness.

Shane felt miserable, keeping him up, but his brain just couldn't stop going in circles. "I have to. It would look way worse for me not to attend. Like I'm hiding the truth and I really did trip on purpose to let you win. I would look so guilty."

"You could just keep it simple," Ilya said. "I did not trip. No comment. No comment. Bye-bye fuckers. See you in Ottawa."

"Ilya..."

"Okay, sorry. I know you don't want to say it until it's final. Here, I knock on wood for you." Shane heard three dull knocks of Ilya's knuckles rapping against his side table. Despite his anxiety swirling, Shane smiled.

They talked very little after that, Shane quiet with his thoughts and Ilya's snores soon drifting through Shane's phone speakers. Locker room cleanout is the last time he would see most of his Voyageurs teammates, though most of them wouldn't give him a second glance, ready to blame Shane for all their playoff heartbreak. And good riddance. The people who mattered—Hayden, a newly penitent J.J.—he would see at his wedding this summer.

It was talking to the media that he worried about.

He rolled over, smushing his face into his pillow. Two decades later, another trip. Both times, the hurt of his body slamming against the hard ice surface secondary to the pain of his hockey peers' eagerness to make sure he knows that hockey isn't for people like him.

Asian. Gay.

He fell asleep, somehow, still ruminating.

When he woke up, it was to Ilya murmuring gently into their call, still connected. *Solnyshko, I have morning skate now. Keep sleeping. Nothing they tell you today changes anything about you, okay? Call me as soon as you need.*

Now, as he walks through the door to the media room, it's his own little face Shane thinks of, frozen with panic, not sure why the sports he loves despises him so, vowing to be better because that's the only way he can imagine not getting hurt again. Well. He's won three Stanley Cups, and he's still here, about to get hurt again. He's not sure how much better he can be.

The reporters all perk up once he settles in at the podium, readying their recording devices. *Fuck you.* Shane thinks as he sweeps his eyes around the room. *Fuck you, and you, and you.*

They cut straight to the chase.

“Shane, can you walk us through that moment in overtime when Ilya Rozanov scored the goal that knocked the Voyageurs out of the playoffs?”

“Um. Yeah.” Shane takes a deep breath. If they want the facts, he can give them the facts. “I had the puck and I could see Barrett barreling towards me. I sent it back to J.J. so we could get a moment to regroup, but Ilya intercepted it. I chased after him. Then I tripped. And he beat Drapeau five-hole.”

Another reporter jumps in. “Shane, a lot of fans were devastated by that sequence. What is your response to the narrative that your relationship with Ilya compromised your play against him?”

Fuck you. Shane stares the reporter straight in the eye, someone he never really liked from this tabloid site that passes itself off as hockey journalism, and answers as coolly as possible. “It didn’t.”

“Can you elaborate on that?”

Shane forces himself to unclench the grip he has on the edges of the podium. The spiral of thoughts that plagued him last night rises to his throat, and he holds them there for a second, knowing he should swallow them back down but not sure if he wants to. Not sure if he can.

“I didn’t trip on purpose,” Shane finally says. “Which I can only guess is the true question behind your question. Because the question of if my relationship with Ilya compromises my play against him is a ridiculous question.” He finds that he cannot stop. “Does anyone doubt the authenticity of play when Hubert brothers play against each other? The Thompsons? What about when Jake Crockett plays against Winnipeg, where his father is an assistant coach? Or when Max Sutherin was called up to play goalie for Nashville and faced his brother J.P. in his goalie debut? Isn’t the narrative that gets spun by you all,” Shane levels the crowd with a glance, “that they’re able to elevate their game when they’re playing each other, because they have such intimate knowledge of how the other thinks, how they react in hockey situations? So please, tell me why my professionalism, in particular, is called into question.”

The reporters all glance at each other, a little stunned. Shane thinks his heart is racing more than it does after he finishes playing a hockey game. One of the reporters finally says, “Well, Mr. Hollander, these players were related to each other by birth. That’s not something within their control. In your case, the fans see a new development in your relationship with Mr. Rozanov—they’re going to connect it to some discrepancies that they see in your game.”

“Discrepancies?” Shane says, incredulous. “I *tripped*. Surely you’ve seen me trip before. I seem to remember doing it almost every game. You know, the game that I play on ice with knives strapped to my feet.”

“Well, yes, of course—” The reporter’s face is red, not used to so much attention being turned back on him. “I’m just suggesting that a lot of fans are still adjusting to your

relationship with Mr. Rozanov. Especially since they are more used to the ideas of the two of you hating each other—they might wonder if your game is emotionally compromised—”

“Emotionally compromised.” Shane repeats, cutting him off coldly.

“Maybe that’s not the best term—”

“There is not a single trophy or accolade that I have won in my NHL career without Ilya ‘emotionally compromising’ me.” His stomach flips at the admission.

He wishes, immediately, that he could take it back. Not because he is ashamed. But because he hates that he’s handed such a core truth about his and Ilya’s relationship to these vultures so callously. Hates that he spat the fact out, like it was a weapon.

A quiet murmur sounds in the room as more people catch onto the meaning behind his statement.

“Shane. Surely... Surely you don’t mean your Calder trophy was also...”

Shane nods. He's starting to feel a little like he's outside his body. He can see thumbs flying over keyboards, and he can imagine the kinds of tweets that are being posted. *SHANE HOLLANDER CONFIRMS HE WAS INVOLVED WITH ILYA ROZANOV SINCE ROOKIE YEAR*. He hopes he gets some time to warn Ilya before reporters on his side start bombarding him. And if he doesn't, he hopes Ilya forgives him.

“So, this rivalry between you was never real?” Someone else asks.

Shane shrugs. “Wasn’t it real enough that you all wrote about it, endlessly, for a decade?”

“Well, but clearly you’ve lied to us for all these years. Or haven’t been completely honest.”

Shane looks at the reporter who spoke and meets his eyes. “Should I apologize for not divulging details about my personal life at 18 because I didn’t want to get called a faggot by your readership?”

His hands are shaking but he presses on.

“Listen, none of you are asking the right question. The truth is, Ilya and I push each other to be better hockey players. If there ever was a rivalry, that is what it was all about. He would kill me if I ever threw a game between us, or if I wasn't giving it my all. And here’s the question that you should be asking: If Shane Hollander can give all of himself to hockey, bringing three cups to Montreal in the process, but hockey cannot accept all of Shane Hollander—should Shane Hollander," he pauses, taking in the reporters' wide eyes, "reevaluate what he’s doing here?”

The crowd is so silent, Shane can only hear the blood rushing in his own ears. He touches the chain around his neck, focuses on the ridges of metal pressing into the pad of his fingertip.

A brave reporter takes the bait that Shane has dangled in front of her. “So Shane, is that a *no* on resigning with the Voyageurs after your contract ends this summer?”

Shane smiles sadly. *I love playing on this team, for our fans.* “What a great question, Marlene.” He releases the podium and walks out of the media room, to the clamor of the crowd of reporters.

His legs are shaking, but he breathes through each step. He just needs to make sure he can sit down and call Ilya before he passes out.

**

Shane’s never had much faith in the “hometown kid coming back to play for his childhood team” story. Playing in Montreal, almost every season they would have a new French-Canadian signing, excited to finally wear the logo that they worshipped as kids.

Of course, the media would have them gush about how it’s a dream come true, playing for their childhood team, how special it was to have family in the building every night; the TV broadcasters trot out the pictures of them as kids, swimming in Voyageurs merch.

And in the end—so few of them stick around. They get waived, or traded, or simply not offered another contract. Hockey’s just a business, after all.

Shane stares at the Ottawa Centaurs logo on his chest, the red, gold, and black colors the same shades that decorated his childhood bedroom. For more reasons than he could have ever come up with, he never thought he would end up here.

His husband—his *captain*—is running around the locker room, howling and barking and generally making incomprehensible *hype up* noises at his teammates.

Their neighbors had a sign in their yard that said *We love Shane + Ilya!* in rainbow colors when they left for the game together.

Throughout training camp, their open practices were flooded with more of the same kinds of signs, held up by kids, by new fans, by season ticket holders.

Everyone in this locker room looks him in the eye.

Harris, the PR manager, walks around with a vest littered with rainbow pins. Bood came up to him before preseason and told him to let him know if anyone was being an asshole in any kind of way. And so did Troy Barrett. And Wyatt Hayes, the goalie. He said he would gladly fight his first NHL fight in Shane’s honor.

Already, then, Shane felt shaken by how good of a room Ilya has built. And even if world outside is still not ready to accept him, it makes all the difference that he has a room full of good guys who have already folded him into their group, made a space for him.

So, when Shane skates out to his name being announced for opening day, he’s a little overwhelmed, but not like he ever was in Montreal. That little pit in his stomach where his nerves would be knotted and frayed—filled with an excitement. He’s been playing the sport he loves for a living for more than a decade, but it’s been a long time since he was *giddy*, skating out in front of a crowd.

He stands next to Ilya while they listen to the Canadian national anthem and touches his glove to Ilya's. They hold hands through the song and don't let go until the house lights come back on and Ilya has to skate to the center of the ice for the face-off. And Shane watches Ilya take the faceoff, catalogues the golden curls peeking out from under Ilya's helmet and smiles to himself.

Ilya wins the faceoff and the crowd roars. Shane skates after him, chest flooding with a warmth that he desperately wants to trust isn't just a mirage.

They win the game. Shane doesn't score, but he has an assist on each of the three goals. They name him the first star of the game, and he spends his curtain call sweeping his eyes over this crowd of people, on their feet, clapping for him.

He sits down with the Centaurs' in-game reporter, Dora, and she asks, voice broadcast to the whole arena. "Shane, how does it feel to win your first game in a Centaurs jersey?"

I love playing on this team, for our fans.

"Thanks, Dora," he says, a little shocked at how loud his own voice is, echoing off the rafters of this building he's played in so many times across the years. "It means a lot. It means so much more than you can imagine for me to play on this team, with these players, wearing this logo."

There's a little boy sitting behind the glass next to him, waving a sign with big red and black words: *We accept ALL of you, Shane!*

And maybe he's been a cynic for too many years, but his first thought is—you *don't even know all of me*. He has to remind himself to relax. To soak in the love and support while it's given. To not take it for granted.

"I can't tell you how grateful I am for our fans' support. I'm so thrilled we were able to get the win for them today."

He thinks of his parents in the audience, just like they were when he first skated on Centaurs ice, two decades ago; of his teammates, willing to jump to his defense no matter what; of Ilya, waiting for him in the locker room so they can drive home together, and says, "Thanks for welcoming me home." And means it.

End Notes

this exists bc i am a hockey/hrpf enjoyer who has, just, so many thoughts about the way that hockey players are interviewed and how they talk about themselves. but conditions have never been right for me to write fic UNTIL *pointer finger emoji* shane hollander came across my screen.

@ iknowofthestarsandsea on tumblr :)

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