

feel you vanish like sugar into tea.

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by [Jooocccc](#)

Summary

“He looks so happy,” Jackie said, joining him at the railing. She rested her head against his shoulder, wrapped an arm around his waist. “It’s really nice to see.”

“Yeah, it really is,” Hayden said. He sighed heavily. “Fuck. I’m gonna have to start liking Ilya Rozanov, aren’t I?”

Jackie giggled, rubbing his back in a placating manner. “I’m afraid so, babe.”

OR

5 times Hayden started understanding Shane and Ilya's relationship, and the 1 time he finally told Shane he did.

Notes

Prompt:

Moments where Hayden starts to understand Shane and Ilya's relationship, or slowly bonds with Ilya, starts to see the good in him, starts to see how happy Ilya makes Shane and how perfect they are.

Maybe a 5+1 or something?

Thank you so much for the fun prompt! I wanted an excuse to write Best-BFF-Hayden, and I hope I did him some justice.

Trigger Warnings: Referencing Shane's eating disorder and obsessive compulsive tendencies

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

“Shane, Jesus,” Hayden said, throwing his arms around him the moment the door shut behind him. “How are you? I wanted to call but—“

“No - I... It’s okay. He’s okay.” The words sounded hollow, and Hayden led him to the bed. It was obvious Shane had been crying. Maybe he’d only just stopped, had only held the tears back long enough to answer the door when Hayden had knocked. It was jarring, the emptiness on Shane’s face. He’d never been the most expressive guy, guarding his emotions behind about eight hundred walls, but he’d never been this shut off.

Hayden had been out for the game in Washington, but had joined them the next day in Vancouver. Immediately upon his arrival, Hayden beelined to Shane’s room, desperate to see his best friend after the numerous headlines he’d seen.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t here when you got the news, stupid fucking Achilles tendon, it always fucks everything up. This is, like, the third time it’s made me miss something super important. I’m so sorry. How are you?”

“I’m...” Shane said, trailing off. Then he shrugged, letting his arms fall back to his side. Not for the first time, Hayden wished he could read Shane’s mind. For a decade, it had been an ongoing battle, getting Shane to share how he was feeling, to open up about whatever was going on in his mind. He ached with the desire for it sometimes, ached with the longing to be able to reach into Shane’s mind and help him untangle the wires in there.

“J.J. thinks he’s straight,” Shane finally said, which was... decidedly *not* what Hayden had been anticipating.

“Huh?”

“Uh,” Shane started. “J.J. - he came by yesterday, and told me he knew I had a crush on Ilya, and that it was rough, because he’s straight. He thought that’s why I was so... fucked up about it.” With a humorless laugh, Shane hid his face in his hands. “A *crush*, Hayden. What the fuck? He thinks I’m some... pathetic gay guy with an unrequited crush. It’s - we’re not - I’m... *god*, we’re in *love*. I love him so much, and nobody fucking knows. I’m going to fucking marry him, and one of my closest friends thinks I’ve been pining after him helplessly for god only knows how long. And for what? For *what*, Hayden?”

“I don’t—”

“He could’ve died. He almost did. He fucking texted me his last words and, what? I was just going to have to come here and play Vancouver and hide the fact that I’ve lost the most important person in my life?”

For a brief, guilt-inducing moment, Hayden felt a little bit hurt by that, which wasn’t fair. Jackie was the most important person in *his* life. It just... still blindsided him that Rozanov was to Shane what Jackie was to him.

“I couldn’t have done it. I couldn’t have. I would’ve crumbled completely and told the whole world that it was because I lost him, and it would’ve been too late. It was almost too fucking late.”

“It wasn’t too late, Shane,” Hayden said, feeling that Shane may have needed the reminder. “He’s okay.”

“But he almost wasn’t!” Hayden flinched at the volume, just a bit. Shane rarely yelled and had never raised his voice at Hayden. “He almost fucking wasn’t, Hayden. And my life would’ve meant nothing. It would’ve meant nothing. I would’ve died with him, and every stupid trophy I’d ever won would’ve meant nothing. I’m tired of it. I’m done, Hayden. Done waiting for the hockey world to be ready for us. Maybe they never will be. I don’t care. I’m - I don’t know...”

Shane sniffled, swiping at his cheeks.

“I’m going to propose.” That was... *also* not what Hayden had been anticipating. “As soon as we get home, I’m driving to his house and I’m proposing. I don’t care what happens next. I don’t *know* what happens next. I just know I’m going to propose. I can’t waste another second not knowing that he knows what he means to me.”

“Okay,” Hayden said, even though this all felt a little bit like a fever dream. Shane was going to get fucking married? To *Ilya Rozanov*? Was it the right thing to do? Was Hayden supposed to be talking him out of this?

No. *No*. He wouldn’t talk him out of this. Shane had looked broken when he opened the door to him. He looked shaken to the core. As if the very ground that had always kept him steady had been scooped from beneath him. He looked - as much as Hayden hated to admit this - about like he would probably look if it had been Jackie on that plane. “Okay. Yeah. What can I do to help?”

“You want to help?”

“I... look, I might not *get it*,” Hayden said. “But you’re my best friend. If you’re going to propose to somebody, I’m gonna fuckin’ help.”

For a beat, Shane was quiet. Then, in the blink of an eye, Hayden was wrapped up in Shane’s strong arms. Wordlessly, he hugged Shane back, grateful to be able to provide even the tiniest bit of comfort.

“What do I do?” Shane asked, sounding more vulnerable than Hayden had maybe ever heard him.

“Let’s start with getting you back to Montreal as soon as we can. We’ll talk to the coach. Get you on an early plane, maybe. Say it’s an urgent matter with the foundation, something with the plane, and donors being worried? You can fly out first thing tomorrow morning instead of later in the afternoon.”

“Right, yeah. Good idea.”

“And you need a ring.”

“I... might’ve been looking at some when you got here. I found a place that can get one to my house by tomorrow morning.”

“What?! Dude, let me see!”

Finally, *finally*, Shane cracked a smile. A small one, quiet and fragile, but there.

“Yeah? I’m not, like, I don’t know, being ridiculous?”

Hayden saw the question for what it was - an out. Hayden *could* very well express that, yeah, he kinda thought Shane was being ridiculous. But, also, love was pretty ridiculous. How could Hayden try to talk him out of the first thing that brought a smile to his face?

“Yeah,” Hayden said, shrugging his shoulders. “It’s ridiculous. But aren’t we all, when we’re a little stupid and in love? C’mon. Show me the rings.” He patted Shane’s back, rubbing between his shoulders. They plopped onto the end of the bed, side-by-side, as Shane pulled out his phone.

“So, I kind of liked this one, but it seems too... flashy?”

“Rozanov’s not flashy?”

Shane gave a good-natured roll of his eyes, nudging Hayden’s shoulder with his own. “Shut up. He is. But... I don’t know. I think for this, both of us want something... simple. Everything’s been so complicated. I think we deserve simple.”

“Do you know what metal he likes? That’s where I started with Jackie’s. She, like, *hates* silver. And white gold is kinda silver-y. So I just went to the store and chose the biggest gold one I could afford.”

“He likes gold. His crucifix - his mother’s, I guess, but it’s his - is gold. The chain he keeps it on is, too. He...” Shane looked down, chuckling softly. “This is stupid. He got drunk and got his ear pierced, and did it with gold. So... yeah. Gold probably.”

“Okay, so you’re on the right track. But less flashy. Look for one without any stones, maybe?”

“Yeah. That’ll help. These all feel a little obnoxious.” Shane toyed with the filters and began scrolling. Silently, he hovered on and decided against a few before landing on one and lingering there for a while. It was nice. Simple, like Shane wanted. A black band with a gold interior. Loath as he may be to admit it, Hayden could definitely see Rozanov wearing it.

“That one?” He prompted, gently pulling Shane out of his silent reverie.

“I... yeah,” Shane said, his voice cracking around the word. “I think so. I like it. It’s simple. But it’s got the gold on the inside. Like... like the good part’s just for us.” And god dammit, Shane sounded so fucking *dreamy* that Hayden couldn’t help but appreciate that Rozanov

brought that side of him out. “Yeah. This one.” Scrolling through the rest of the pictures, Shane nodded resolutely. Except - “Fuck. I don’t know his ring size.”

Hayden wanted to crack a joke about how nobody would know it better than Shane, but he was still kinda grossed out every time he thought about them having sex - which, like, wasn’t *often*, okay? It just happened sometimes. On accident. And it wasn’t gross in a *homophobic* way. Just, like, the fact that this huge fucking jerk of a guy was doing it with his perfect best friend. But whatever. That was beside the point. Also, it just didn’t seem like the time for a joke.

“Uh, mine’s an 8.5, if that helps?” Holding his hand up, he let Shane stare at his finger appraisingly, watched as he hummed and selected an 11, which Hayden tried not to take personally.

“I guess if it doesn’t fit, we can order another one.”

“Do you know what size you are?”

“I dunno, probably like a 9 or something?”

“You’re not gonna order one in your size?”

“I... well, maybe not yet. Not until - you never know. I’ll wait. Just in case.”

And Hayden wanted to go on and on about how disgustingly obsessed with him Rozanov was, but getting that message through to Shane would take a lifetime. Instead, he just wrapped an arm around Shane. “It’s gonna go perfectly, Hollzy,” he said, placing a playful, smacking kiss against the side of his head. “And when it goes perfectly, you’d better text me. And make sure you let Rozanov know I helped choose the ring. It’ll drive him crazy.”



Hayden had never been accused of being the sharpest tool in the shed, but he wasn’t stupid. And, yeah, Shane had changed a lot, and he’d always been conscious of the food he ate, so it *could* be harmless - it just... wasn’t. And Hayden didn’t know how he knew, he just knew.

And so, as he sat in the backyard of Shane’s cottage, eating burgers that his best friend had cooked for them all, he watched Shane a little closer than usual. He watched him take bites of his lettuce-wrapped chicken burger and subtly slide his fries onto Rozanov’s plate. He watched Rozanov eat the fries without making a big deal about it, even though it was a big fucking deal. Shane wasn’t eating. Why didn’t anyone seem to care that Shane wasn’t fucking eating?

Shifting uncomfortably in his seat, Hayden fought the urge to point out the behavior to everyone. To yell and scream and demand the universe make Shane *better*. He watched, dread filling his stomach just as much as the burgers as Shane slid the uneaten half of his patty onto Rozanov’s plate, the move seamless and well-practiced. Just as he had with the

fries, Rozanov ate it quickly, easily. If Hayden hadn't caught the action, he never would've noticed that it had happened.

He felt sick. Shane wasn't eating, and Rozanov was, what? Enabling it? He knew the guy was bad news, and now it was too late, and they were engaged, and Shane wasn't eating, and how fucking long had this been going on? How long had Hayden been missing this?

He'd had enough. He was going to do it, point it out, put Rozanov on the spot, demand to know why he wasn't forcing Shane to get the help he so clearly needed. He opened his mouth to do so when Shane spoke.

"So, we aren't really doing wedding parties," he said, sipping his sparkling water. "But I was wondering if you'd be our witness?"

What?

"What?"

"We need a witness, somebody to sign our wedding certificate. Obviously, if you aren't comfortable with it, my parents can do it. I just... since you can't be my Best Man--"

"Of course I'll do it," Hayden said, even though he was still planning out how to confront Shane's soon-to-be husband. "That means a lot, Shane. Thank you."

"That's *so* sweet! Oh my god, can I take pictures? I won't post them, obviously! Just for us!"

Shane smiled at Rozanov, who was smiling at Jackie. "Of course," he said, that stupid, charming Russian accent making the words sound *sophisticated*. "You have both been great friends to us. To Shane. He wants you to be a part of the day; you will be part of the day."

"Thank you, Hayd. Having you as a confidante probably literally saved my life a few times."

"Stop. It was nothing. Just being a friend."

"A good friend," Rozanov said.

"A *great* friend," Shane corrected. "Jackie, I got these homemade popsicles for the kids. Do you want to help me pass them out?"

And then Hayden was alone with Rozanov, who was about to serve himself another monstrous helping of the potato salad Shane had made. He was going to kill Rozanov, eviscerate him with his words or something, send him on his merry way.

"Shane's not eating," he said instead, his fear overpowering his rage. Rozanov froze for the briefest moment. A blink of an eye, but it was there.

"You noticed?"

"I'm observant," Hayden said, feeling defensive.

“Da. Yes.”

“And you’re just... letting him?”

“What?”

“You’re just letting him starve himself!”

“I cannot snap my finger and make him eat, Pike. He is not a dog to be trained.”

“You can *not* eat *for* him, maybe?”

“And let him sit there with full plate, being worried about other people seeing? I will not.”

“Well... fix it!”

“I will get right on that, Pike, thank you,” Rozanov said, his tone dry, bordering on offended.

“Is he trying to fix it?” He asked, a desperate edge to his voice.

“Is not my question to answer,” Rozanov said, cleaning up his place at the table.

“It’s your problem to fix!” He was sure of it. If Shane wasn’t with Rozanov, if he wasn’t forced to hide, if he wasn’t with someone who would just let him starve-

“Shane is not a *problem*,” Rozanov said, his voice stern and chilling. “And this is not your business unless Shane wants it to be. This conversation is over.”

And Hayden didn’t want it to be, but Rozanov was an impossible man to disagree with. Even if he weren’t, he was already heading to the kitchen with their plates.

“Shane! Save me a grape popsicle!”

Later that day, Rozanov, Jackie, and the kids were running through a sprinkler while Hayden sat with Shane, who was sitting in the shade and reading a book.

“Are you okay?” Hayden asked, probably not as smoothly as he’d wanted to.

“Huh?”

“Are you okay?” He repeated.

“How so?”

“You’re...” Hayden cleared his throat. Well, the only way out was through. “I just - I’ve noticed...”

“You can say whatever you’re thinking,” Shane said, bookmarking his page.

“You aren’t eating.” He finally blurted out. “And I’m worried about you.”

“Oh,” Shane said, sounding taken aback by it. “Well... yeah. Okay.”

“What’s going on?”

“Complicated question.”

“Is it because of the wedding? Because you don’t have to do that.”

“What? No! Of course not - I can’t wait to be married! It’s not-“ Shane looked a little angry. “It’s not because of Ilya, Hayden.”

“I just saw him, like, eating your food! He’s enabling you! And I’m worried about you, okay?”

“Enabling-“ Shane’s cheeks burned a bright, embarrassed pink. “Fuck’s sake, I’m in treatment, okay?”

“What?”

“I’m getting help. And I didn’t want anyone to know about it! God, does everyone know about it?”

“No, no, it’s just me, Shane, I promise. Nobody else knows about it. You’re... you’re in treatment? Like... inpatient?”

“I - no, not like *that*,” Shane insisted, looking visibly uncomfortable. Maybe Hayden should’ve waited to bring this up. Consulted with Jackie on the best way to do it. “It’s - I don’t...” He sighed, struggling for the words. “It’s a control thing. I haven’t had a lot of control over my life for a while. And so I was controlling that, and it... got out of hand.”

Hayden wondered what that meant. What an eating disorder looked like when it got out of hand. He wished he’d noticed, wished he’d helped Shane through it. He wondered if he was part of why he’d lost control, if that stupid fucking video had contributed to the way Shane’s face had thinned out a bit. Maybe this whole fucking thing had been his fault, and he’d been out here blaming Rozanov. Jesus fuck. Not only had he not helped Shane, but he may have actively harmed him.

“Ilya sat me down and made me realize something was wrong. He’s the only reason I got any fucking help, okay? He’s not the reason I’m struggling. Some days are harder than others, and I get... it’s embarrassing when someone notices it.” Shane said, adding to the guilt Hayden was already feeling. “So when it’s a hard day, I sneak him some of my food, and he eats it so I don’t get embarrassed, like I am right fucking now.” He was quiet for a long, uncomfortable moment. “I wish you’d stop blaming everything on him, Hayden. You’re my best friend, but he’s going to be my husband. I would *never* talk about Jackie the way you talk about him.”

And wasn’t that a slap in the face?

For a decade, it had been Hayden protecting Shane, keeping him safe from the criticisms and expectations and jealousy and body checks. It had been Hayden who’d seen the quiet, shy,

prodigal hockey player standing nervously in the corner of the locker room, looking unsure of his place there, even though everyone there knew he was going to be the best goddamn player of the century. The entire team had stared at him with the knowledge that it would be Shane's name going down in history, and they would be lucky if theirs ended up tacked onto the storyline. Shane must've felt it, too, keeping his head down as he prepared for his first practice. And, well, that just wouldn't do. So Hayden walked up to him, decided they were going to be friends, and Shane had been stuck with him ever since.

He couldn't imagine trusting anyone but himself to stick with Shane that way - especially not Ilya Rozanov. But maybe it was time to.

"You're right," Hayden admitted. "I'm sorry. To me, it all still seems so... sudden, but it isn't. I'll do better."

For a few beats, Shane stayed quiet, his arms wrapped protectively around himself the way he'd done for years. Finally, he nodded. "Good. Thank you."

"And I'm... sorry that I sorta... ambushed you with this. I've just - I've been worried for a while, and today it happened right in front of me, and I just - I wouldn't have forgiven myself if I didn't say something. But I'm sure I could've done better."

"Thanks," Shane said, slowly unfurling from that self-protective ball he'd curled himself into.

"I'm glad that you're getting help. From someone who... probably knows how to help a hell of a lot better than I do."

"She's been good for me," Shane said. "And I *have* been getting better." And if *better* was still shoving half of his plate onto Rozanov's, Hayden hated to imagine what worse had looked like. But *worse* was in the past. Hopefully.

"Good. That's all that matters. And I'm... glad Rozanov's helping." He tugged at a hangnail. "If you ever need anyone else to talk to about it, I'm here."

"I know you are," Shane said. "And if I do, I'll let you know. But I'd really rather we *not* talk about it, if that's alright."

"Of course," Hayden said, nodding quickly. Looking back towards the yard, he caught Rozanov staring at them, appraising the conversation with tension in his shoulders. Whatever he saw in the way Shane relaxed next to Hayden, pulling his book open again, must've reassured him. The large man eased his stick straight posture, stared directly into Hayden's eyes, and nodded minutely. Then, as if nothing had happened, he effortlessly caught Jade, who was running towards him. She squealed happily, legs kicking in the air as Rozanov lifted her over his head.

Maybe, *just maybe*, Hayden could finally admit that Rozanov was not the big, bad guy he'd seen him as for years.



“We are going out,” Roz said. “You are coming with.”

“Out?”

The season was just about to kick back up again, and with Shane’s move to the Centaurs, Hayden had been feeling particularly clingy. He was really going to miss his best friend. He hated thinking about rooming with someone who *wasn’t* Shane. Not after a decade of basically living together when they were on the road. Their skincare routines had fit perfectly on either side of the hotel sinks, and Shane *always* brought an extra toothbrush because Hayden *always* managed to lose his. What if whoever he roomed with wanted to take the left side of the sink?! If Hayden lost his toothbrush, he was going to have to walk all the way to CVS to get one. God, what if they snored, or didn’t like his white noise, or thought it was weird when he answered Jackie at 3 in the morning just to watch the baby monitor?

He hated the thought of playing without Shane, of being on a team without Shane. He hated even more what the team had done to Shane.

But he was going to miss his best friend.

So he, Jackie, and the kids were spending a week at Shane’s cottage. And, apparently, they were going out.

“Yes. Out. As in not in this house. You are familiar with this concept, no?”

“What about the kids?”

“Harris and Barrett are coming to watch them. Your beautiful wife has already coordinated it.”

Hayden grumbled under his breath. “Yeah, *my* beautiful wife,” he said, rolling his eyes. “And what about Shane?”

“My beautiful husband? He is coming with, obviously.”

“Shane hates going out.”

“With you, maybe. He goes when I ask.”

God, this guy was hard to get along with. Maybe there was a not-insignificant part of him that was a little bit jealous of Roz. Not in a weird, he-liked-Shane way, obviously. In the not at all weird, this-guy-stole-my-best-friend way.

“Fine. Yeah. Obviously. When are we leaving?”

“An hour or two. Once Harris and Troy arrive. Jackie is making Shane pregame. Is very funny to watch.”

At that, Hayden snorted. “As long as it’s not vodka.”

“Is vodka. My fancy shit, too.” Roz smirked, an easy, lazy little grin that made him annoyingly endearing. “I think we will have our hands full tonight, you and I.”

~

Jackie was wearing a dress that Hayden had never seen on her. Which, he thought, was a crime. Because he never wanted her to take it off. Unless *he* was the one taking it off. Or, maybe, he’d ask her to leave it on. Run his hands all over the pretty silk as he worked around the tantalizingly short hem.

“This is why we have so many kids,” he murmured against the back of her neck. She was standing with her back to his front, swaying off-beat to the music that blared over the speakers.

“No more,” she reminded him sternly.

“No,” Hayden agreed. “But maybe we can practice?”

“I think we’re *very* well-practiced,” she teased, lifting a hand to run light scratches down his neck. “But it doesn’t hurt to try. Just so we don’t forget.”

Groaning against her shoulder, Hayden dragged his lips along the warm, soft skin. “I love you,” he said, gripping her waist.

“Love you, too. Wanna go makeout in our booth like we’re stupid teenagers?”

“Fuck yes.”

Hayden followed his wife up the stairs, nodding to the security guard who was monitoring the VIP section. He pulled aside a ridiculous velvet rope, letting the two in, and they made their way to the booth Shane had rented for them. Pouring them each a glass of whatever pre-made cocktail bottle service had left them, Hayden tapped his drink against Jackie’s. God, she really was fucking beautiful.

Without another word, Hayden grabbed her by the hips, hauling her down the patent leather couch they were seated on, and pressed his mouth against hers. She melted into the kiss immediately, lips parting as she tilted her head back. Fuck. Hayden could kiss her for hours. Days, if he could survive off of nothing but her mouth for sustenance. Their lips moved together in a dance made perfect by years of having learned one another. His long fingers threaded through her hair, holding her in place as he took her mouth. Her contented little sighs went straight to his dick, and the idea of working around her dress became even more appealing. They could find a bathroom. Or a closet. Hell, they could do it right here.

He lost himself in the taste of his wife and the fantasy of having her right there. He imagined the envy that would paint the other men’s faces, watching him devour her breasts, the want of the women in the club, wishing they had someone who made their toes curl the way he always managed to-

“Jackie,” he breathed out. “We gotta stop, or I’m going to embarrass myself.” Jackie giggled against his lips, running a hand down his chest.

“I was weighing the pros and cons of a public indecency charge, if that helps.” It did help; he was glad to know it wasn’t just him who’d been swept up in the moment.

“Do you think Shane and Ilya would mind if we left early?”

“Mm, who cares. Let’s get a taxi back to the cottage and fuck in your car.”

“God I love you.”

“Wanna take a minute to cool down?”

He assumed Jackie was offering it up because she could feel exactly how close he’d been to embarrassing himself, and nodded gratefully.

“Great idea,” he said. “I’m gonna stay up here and look for Shane.”

Jackie climbed off his lap, and he stood awkwardly, bouncing on his feet to get blood flowing literally anywhere but his dick. Leaning against the railing, he scanned the crowd below for his best friend. He wasn’t hard to find. Well, *Rozanov* wasn’t hard to find. Nor was Shane, whose body was glued to him.

Shane was writhing against Roz, still just as allergic to any beat as he’d always been. His cheeks were flushed from the heat of the dance floor, the alcohol, and the way Roz was staring at him. And, like, shit, they were so in love it was almost nauseating to witness. Shane’s arms were wrapped around the taller man’s neck, while Roz’s roamed Shane’s body. He was much better at staying on beat and would occasionally guide Shane into a few moments of actually dancing to the rhythm. Every time, Shane just went right back to wiggling around, laughing so carelessly that he was almost unrecognizable.

He’d never looked so... *free*, and Hayden’s heart ached for him. How awful must it have been, years and years of hiding himself? How amazing must it be to finally have the weight of those secrets off his shoulders?

“He looks so happy,” Jackie said, joining him at the railing. She rested her head against his shoulder, wrapped an arm around his waist. “It’s really nice to see.”

“Yeah, it really is,” Hayden said. He sighed heavily. “Fuck. I’m gonna have to start liking Ilya Rozanov, aren’t I?”

Jackie giggled, rubbing his back in a placating manner. “I’m afraid so, babe.”

“Oh well. That’s a problem for another day. C’mon, let’s get a cab.”

~

Hayden was only *marginally* more alive than Jackie the following morning. As such, he was voluntold to go get some coffee. Bleary-eyed, he trudged his way downstairs, realizing

halfway to the kitchen that he still had no fucking clue how Shane and Rozanov's zillion-dollar coffee maker worked. Fuck. He was too hungover to watch a tutorial.

He was considering the merit of DoorDashing two large coffees when he stumbled into a solid wall of muscle.

"Mmf," Roz grumbled, rubbing his face. "You do not watch where you're going."

"Too tired. Too hungover. Can't argue."

"Da. Yes. Same." The large Russian shuffled around the kitchen, yawning loudly as he did. "Coffee?"

"Fuck, yes, thank you. I was literally about to order some to be delivered. Jackie sent me down for some. If I can bring her some?"

"I am making coffee for her, yes. Not you."

"Wha-" Hayden stopped himself as he took in the glint of mischief on Roz's face. "Fuck you."

"You make it too easy, Hayden Pike. And even worse, too fun."

"Whatever."

"Of course I make coffee for you, too. You are guest in my home." As Hayden watched, Roz pressed a complicated sequence of buttons, bringing the coffee machine to life. "Will be done in 5 minutes. Maybe less."

"Where's Shane?" Hayden asked, though he was sure he knew the answer.

"Morning run," Roz answered, rummaging around in another cabinet. "Ridiculous, he was slurring his words last night, and now he is running miles."

"Dude's a beast," Hayden said. "I was gonna say he's always been that way, but I don't think I've seen him drunk enough times to know what he's like when he's hungover."

"Does not happen often," Roz said. "But I think he is too stubborn for hangovers. He will not allow them to happen to him."

"Sounds about right."

"Coffee should be done. I will make breakfast sandwiches," Roz said. "Shane and I froze pancakes for the kids before you got here. Will be an easy breakfast for them when they wake up."

"Oh. Thanks, wow. That was... you guys are great hosts."

Dutifully, Hayden brought Jackie her coffee - mixed just the way she liked it, of course.

“Still tired,” she mumbled.

“Sleep some more,” Hayden said, kissing her head. “The babies are still asleep, and I’ll cover the morning routines when they wake up.”

“Mm. Love you.”

She was back to sleep before Hayden left the room, and he couldn’t help but smile at her sleeping frame. Back downstairs, Shane had returned, sweat beading along his hairline, cheeks flushed, a huge, dopey smile on his face directed at his husband. Ugh. Hayden hated how adorable he was starting to realize they were.

“You have nobody to blame but yourself,” Shane said, his nose turned up. “I told you I could make you a smoothie and we could go for a run, but *no*. You wanted to sleep in.”

“Yes, and I enjoyed my sleep very much, and it is annoying how awake you are right now,” Roz responded, his tone flat, even as he placed his hands on Shane’s hips, tugging him forward. Just in case something was about to happen that he didn’t want to see, Hayden made his presence known.

“I hate to agree with Rozanov, but I agree. Super fucking annoying.”

“You’re both just mad that my metabolism takes such great care of me.” Shane said with a dramatic little *hmph* noise. “I’m gonna shower.”

“I am making breakfast sandwiches. Do you want one?”

“Yes,” Shane said, leaning in for one more kiss. “Only if you make it-“

“Yes, yes, I know. Go. You stink.”

“Asshole.”

“Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Shane disappeared, and Hayden stood there awkwardly as Roz began preparing the ingredients for their sandwiches.

“Can I help?” He asked, eager for something to do that *wasn’t* standing in silence alongside his best friend’s husband.

“You can grab the eggs?”

“Yeah, of course.”

They worked together in a surprisingly companionable quiet, Hayden pouring glasses of orange juice and setting the table as Roz scrambled a bunch of eggs. In a second bowl, he

separated the egg whites with a practiced precision, plopping the yolks into the scrambled eggs.

“Bagel or English muffin?”

“Uhh, bagel, probably. For Jacks and I.”

Roz hummed his acknowledgment, dropping two bagels onto a sizzling pan and crisping them up with butter. He flipped them over, sprinkling cheese on the insides before turning his attention to the eggs.

“For Jackie,” he said, handing Hayden a plate. Silently, he delivered the sandwich to the bedside table just as he’d done with the coffee.

“For you. For me.” Hayden carried the plates to the table. “Am finishing Shane’s.”

“Egg whites?”

“Da. Is...” he was quiet, seemingly searching for a word. “Compromise.”

“That makes sense,” Hayden said. And, really, it did. He’d done a little (okay, a lot) more research into eating disorders and knew that compromise was much more important than force. He was grateful that Roz shared that with him; that he’d allowed Hayden a small glimpse into the fact that it was still work, but it was a work in progress. Roz finished making Shane’s sandwich and brought the plate to the table. Hayden steeled himself for this next part. “You’re really good for him,” he said. Roz looked surprised - which, like, fair.

“Good. The marriage certificate you signed would be a real waste if *you* thought we were bad together.”

“I did,” Hayden admitted. “For a long time - I just didn’t *get* it. You were his first... so many things. I think I was worried that there was better out there, and he would never find it because he was too hung up on some asshole Russian.” Roz snorted. “And I still think you’re an asshole. But... I get it. I think he... found the best. Last night, at the club - I never thought he’d find someone - no, I never thought he’d even *relax* enough to have that much fun. I’m glad he did. I’m glad you bring that out in him.”

“Thank you, Hayden Pike,” he said, as sincere as it’d ever been. “I meant what I have said, too. You have always been a good friend to him. Am glad he has had you, too.”

Hayden nodded, biting into his sandwich. “Fuck, that’s good.”

“Yes. Is why Shane married me.”

“Why did Shane marry you?” Shane’s voice said, his damp hair flopping perfectly over his forehead.

“For my breakfast sandwiches. Nothing else.”

“Your tuna melts, too,” he said, smiling at Roz, who *almost* seemed to be blushing at whatever the inside joke between them was. “Proud of you for not killing each other in my absence.”

Hayden felt a little guilty at that, but Roz only rolled his eyes.

“Only because Hayden could not take me in a fight,” he said dramatically. “And I do not think killing your best friend would make you want to give me blow jobs. Decisions, decisions.”

“Pervert,” Shane shot back, smiling at his sandwich.

Hayden had *also* read that it wasn’t great to stare at people while they ate, so he busied himself with looking pretty much anywhere else. Shane was getting better, and Hayden smiled with the knowledge. Worse really *was* in the past - maybe not forever, but for now, and Hayden was finally certain he could trust Roz to keep Shane safe.



The Voyageurs sucked. It was immediately obvious upon Shane’s exit that he’d been the reason they excelled. In his absence, the team had fallen apart. As Captain, Shane had watched hours and hours of their gameplay, learning each players’ strengths and weaknesses, and planning around them. All of their chemistry had disappeared under the new leadership. Half of the players still hated Shane for what he did, a quarter of them couldn’t care less, and the other quarter of them were disgusted by the team’s treatment of their former Captain. Several of the players had reached out to Shane in the months following his wedding, apologizing for how they had reacted, congratulating him on his marriage. All in all, it lead to a team divided.

And so, they really fucking sucked.

He and Jackie had had more than a few conversations about requesting a trade. Ottawa couldn’t afford him, he hated Toronto’s leadership, and none of the nearby Canadian teams needed what he could provide. So in the end, he stuck with the Voyageurs, regardless of how much he hated them for hurting Shane, and regardless of how much they sucked right now.

Still, as he sat in Ottawa’s arena, he couldn’t help but hope the Centaurs won.

If he were being completely honest, a sick, twisted little part of him almost found satisfaction in the fact that they’d fallen apart without Shane. The bigger part of him longed to win again, but that tiny part didn’t want a win unless it was won with Shane. That tiny part didn’t want the Voyageurs to win after what they’d done to him.

And, well, there wasn’t much danger of them winning, anyway, so he really didn’t need to worry. Their players were battling each other for puck time more than they were fighting the Centaurs, and several of their defensemen had seemingly made it their mission to keep Shane out of the action. It was ridiculous. The entire Ottawa team was made of successful, talented

players that should've *all* been focused on, and instead, they were playing as if they had a personal vendetta against Shane. Which, Hayden supposed, some of them did.

Except, as the Voyageurs focused all their efforts on Shane, players like Barrett and Haas scored on them. Even fucking Evan Dykstra had gotten a goal. Not for the first time, Hayden was embarrassed to be wearing Montreal's colors.

Hayden was called to the ice, replacing the other left-winger who'd taken Zane Boodram's stick to the face. Hayden hadn't even had time to be upset on his teammates behalf. He'd probably deserved it.

On the ice, he still played as hard as he could. No matter his personal feelings about the team he was representing, he would never embarrass *himself* by playing poorly. He played the game he knew how to play, forcing himself past the discomfort of knowing Shane was playing against him.

Except it was hard to ignore when Shane had the fucking puck, and was racing past Hayden to get it to their goal. For the tiniest moment, he wondered if he should just... let Shane go. Let it be Drapeau's problem. But no. He couldn't. And he wouldn't. Shane would be furious if he did. So Hayden tried to swipe the puck from him.

But - again - Shane had been the best part of the Voyageurs. So with a fancy bit of handling, he'd batted Hayden's stick out of the way and smacked the puck towards Tanner fucking Dillon, who landed it cleanly in the net with an audible *swish*.

All I Do Is Win played over the speakers, and it felt a lot less ironic this year than it had the years prior.

Skating away from the Centaurs' celebration, Hayden missed the start of whatever confrontation had begun behind him. All he knew was that by the time he turned around, Comeau had Shane by the collar of his jersey and shoved him *hard*. Refs were already approaching, but Shane (uncharacteristically) shoved back. Comeau's head bobbed with the force of it, and it devolved from there. Before Hayden could really process what had happened, Shane was splayed out on the ice, holding his elbow and seemingly steeling himself to stand back up. Before he could, before referees could separate them any further, hell, even before the rest of their teams had a chance to join the fight, Roz was there. Large, looming, and plowing into Comeau so quickly his skates nearly came out from under him. Gloves came off, and the two were - put plainly - fist fighting in center ice. Barrett and Boodram were helping Shane up, trying to pull him off the ice to see a medic, but Shane stayed stuck in place, staring at Roz as he brawled with Comeau.

There were an array of emotions on his face: fear, anger, perhaps most alarming, adoration. Roz's lip was busted, blood flying across the ice and dripping down onto his Jersey. He looked rugged and brutal and like someone whose husband you definitely shouldn't pick a fight with. Comeau was running out of steam, Hayden knew it, and Roz seemed to, too, because with a closed, perfect fist, he landed one last blow against Comeau's jaw before dropping him to the ground like trash.

Several penalties were handed out, Shane was drug off to the medics, and Hayden was left staring at Roz, who sat in the penalty box with a shit-eating grin on his busted up lip.

In the end, the Voyageurs lost - badly - just as they had many times before. The last thing Hayden saw before heading to the Visitors' locker room was Roz fussing over Shane's elbow and Shane running his fingers along the gash on Roz's lips.

Good. Shane deserved someone who would throw their gloves off for him, and he could no longer hold it against Roz that he'd finally found that.



Shane's anxiety attacks had been an open secret among the Voyageurs, another bit of their behavior that now disgusted Hayden. He'd always held things together on the ice and in the locker rooms and during practice, so everyone just... *decided* that he was alright. That his anxiety was none of their business.

He and J.J. were the only two players who'd ever acknowledged it, who bothered to learn how to help Shane with it.

As such, Hayden could see the signs in Shane. They were in the airport, preparing to fly down to Mexico for a week. Juggling six different passports, Hayden wrangled the countless suitcases as he handed his family's identification over. From his peripherals, he watched Shane wring his hands together, tug his outer layer off, shove his hands through his hair.

Hayden really wanted to reassure him, talk him through their steps, the breathing exercises that Hayden knew worked. It was just that his children and Jackie needed him to not fuck up their travel plans and he was worried he might if he split his attention.

Before he had another moment to feel guilty about it, he watched Ilya force Shane to sit down. With perhaps a bit more sternness than Hayden had ever used, Ilya guided him through breaths. In, out, in, out. In an instant, relief - surprising and unfamiliar - flooded Hayden's veins. For the first time, he trusted that Ilya *had this*. He knew that Shane was in the best hands because he was in Ilya's. He knew that Ilya could do this, and god, wasn't that a revelation?

"I have to do the bags-"

"You do not," Ilya said, his tone calm.

"But I didn't do the bags when you-"

"You did many things for many flights. It never did anything bad."

"But I-"

"Moya lyubov," Ilya interrupted. "We have been on hundreds, thousands of planes, you and me. No?"

“Yeah.”

“And did you do the same thing every morning?”

“Probably not.”

“Definitely, you did not. And it was always okay, until the one time it was not. You cannot blame your breakfast for what happened. Same as you cannot blame the color of your socks or who checks the bags. We did... compromise for this, no?”

“But I...” The fight seemed to spill from Shane’s chest, but Hayden saw him nod. “Okay. You’re right.”

“I am always right. Stay. Will be alright, okay? I promise.”

Ilya approached the desk, then, and undoubtedly charmed the agent with his annoying smile and boisterous laugh. Not wanting the kids to linger long enough to notice Shane’s current state, he started ushering them towards security.

“Rozanov said they’d meet us at the gate.” He said to Jackie. Then, looking down at the kids, “Who wants to play I Spy in the security line?”

At the gate, Amber was already asleep on his lap, Arthur was scribbling unintelligible words on his notebook, and Jade and Ruby were playing some made-up game where they tried to read each other’s minds. Honestly, Hayden wouldn’t be surprised if they got it to work one day.

Rounding the corner, Hayden saw Shane and Ilya walking towards them. Ilya - annoyingly - was carrying both of their bags, and Shane had a little more color in his face. Holding two drinks, Shane lifted one to his own lips and held the other out for Ilya to sip from. Hayden searched inside himself to find that familiar flicker of disgust at the sign of open affection between the two.

Instead, he only felt grateful.

A final, sure sense of certainty that Shane was exactly where he meant to be. Exactly who he was meant to be with. Ilya understood and protected and loved Shane, and that was all that anyone could really dream of their best friend finding.

“God dammit,” Hayden said aloud, drawing Jackie’s attention.

“Hm?”

“Shane found his Jackie.”

“Yeah. Obviously.”

“I’m living in a world in which my best friend’s Jackie is Ilya-fucking-Rozanov.”

“I think you love him,” Jackie teased.

“Impossible.”

“Just a little?”

“Maybe. But don’t tell him.”

“You love Shane.”

“Obviously.”

“Then maybe you should tell *him*.”

“That I love him?”

“*No*, Hayden. That you love Ilya!”

“Only a little bit!”

“It’ll still mean a lot to him,” she responded. Which, like, true. “Just think about it.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he said, his tone fond as he looked over at his wife. “I’ve still got the best Jackie. The original. The one and only.”

“Dork. I love you.”

“Love you, too.”

“Arthur!” Came Ilya’s booming voice. “Look at your art, is beautiful! What are you making?”

Ilya placed he and Shane’s bags into two empty seats before immediately dropping himself onto the ground with Arthur. Hayden could finally admit that it was pretty fucking cool that his kids had not one but *two* of the generation’s best hockey players as their pseudo-uncles. He smiled at Arthur, who was excitedly describing what he was drawing in his half-baked English skills.

Shane sat down next to him, careful not to wake Amber, and smiled at Hayden.

“All good?” Hayden asked in a hushed voice.

And Shane nodded, a soft smile on his lips. “Yep, all good.”

With a big, bright smile, Hayden nodded. “Good.”



Compared to Hayden and his family, Shane and Ilya were, like, *rich* rich. Which made sense. Hayden had a few sponsorships and brand deals, and his contract was *healthy*. Shane and Ilya, though - well - their salaries reflected the impact they’d had on the sport.

As such, Hayden had no qualms about letting them book their accommodations for the trip. Which was exactly why they were staying in a beautiful, 5-bedroom private villa overlooking the Pacific coast.

“I think I could get used to this,” Hayden said, joining Shane on one of the balconies. He had a sparkling water in hand and an easy smile on his face, grinning at the yard below them.

“Honestly? I could, too,” he said, clinking his glass against Hayden’s. Following Shane’s gaze, he couldn’t help but smile, too. In the massive yard, Ilya was playing butler for the kids, bringing them imaginary snacks as the kids lounged on their giant beach towels.

“He’s great with them,” Hayden said. “I don’t know that I’ve said that before. But he is.”

“Yeah, he really is.” Shane sighed dreamily. “They love him - your kids, obviously, but also just kids in general.”

“Do you want them?”

“Hm?”

“Kids? With Ilya?”

“Oh, god, yes. Yeah. We’re waiting until we’re retired - two parents on the road wouldn’t be fair to them. But... yeah. I do.” Shane lowered his voice. “Can I tell you a secret?”

“Anything.”

“I kind of... can’t wait. I mean, I *can*. I don’t want to retire any time soon. But... it’s nice, having something to be excited about afterwards. Ilya’s going to be an amazing dad.”

“You will too, man,” Hayden said, nudging Shane’s shoulder with his own.

“Thanks,” Shane blushed. “We’ve got time. Years. And Ilya and I... we both have plenty of things to work on for ourselves before we take on a child. But yes. We want kids. Uncle Hayden, eh? It has a ring to it.”

All of a sudden, Hayden pulled him into a hug, tight and suffocating. Shane, although caught off guard by the sudden display of affection, returned the embrace.

“I’m so excited for you, Hollzy,” he said. “God. I’m just *so* excited for you.”

“Oh,” Shane said, sounding as sentimental as Hayden was feeling. “Thanks, Hayd.”

“No, like, I mean it,” he said, pulling back and holding onto Shane’s shoulders. “Look, I - I didn’t get it for a long time, you and Rozanov. And... I’m sorry if I ever let you down in the way I handled the two of you being together. Honestly - you’re my best friend, and I was scared, and I... I don’t know, it’s embarrassing to say, but I feel like I’ve always tried to protect you. And it was like - by the time I learned about you two, you were already so deep in it that I couldn’t, like, protect you from him.”

“Hayden you don’t-”

“No, I know I don’t need to protect you from him, of course. I know that *now*. I just - I don’t know. I didn’t get it, and I was wrong. I’ve spent ten years wanting the best for you, and I didn’t think he was it. And, honestly, I was a little jealous. He’s known you for even longer than I have, and he’s been part of this huge secret I didn’t know about you, and then he swept you away to Ottawa, and I just - it was a lot. So I think I was *looking* for reasons not to like him, just to... justify all of the weird feelings I was dealing with. But... like, *fuck*. He’s perfect for you, and I haven’t told you that yet, so I wanted you to know. You don’t *need* my approval, but I wanted you to know that I’m so happy for you. I’m happy you have him, and I’m happy that he has you, and I’m happy that you have someone who takes care of you and loves you and wants to have kids with you and who you can dance with in a crowded club and... I’m just so *happy* for you.”

“Hayden-” Shane said, his voice cracking around the word. “I... *thank you*. That’s - wow. That means a lot.”

The two men met in another tight embrace, and Hayden smiled into Shane’s shoulder.

“I love you, dude,” Hayden said. “You’ve never been this happy, and I’m just so happy *for* you.”

“I love you, too, man. You *have* always protected me. I don’t know what my life would’ve looked like if you hadn’t strong-armed your way into it,” Shane said, his tone teasing as he broke the hug. “Now I have you and Jackie and the kids, and Ilya, and it’s perfect.”

“Ugh,” Hayden said, shoving a hand through his hair. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to get all in my feels. I just... I’m in Mexico with my best friend, and it’s beautiful, and we’re both married to amazing people, and your husband is, like, perfect with my kids, and I just, I’m getting all mushy.”

“No, no, it’s okay,” Shane shook his head. “I’m glad you said it. I’ll allow a *little* mushy.”

“Phew.”

“If I knew all it took for you to accept my relationship was a five-star vacation, I would’ve done it years ago.”

“Shut up,” teased Hayden, shoving Shane’s shoulder. “It’s not because of the vacation. Well, not *just* because of the vacation. Though the private villa is a great touch. And the breakfast sandwiches.”

“You’re such an idiot.”

“Yeah, I have been. But I’m wising up, I promise.”

With another bump of their shoulders, Shane sniffled, wiping at his nose. “C’mon. I’m gonna cash in on this ‘butler’ role Ilya’s playing and make him get me another sparkling water.”

“I like the way you think.”

~

Later that night, Hayden, Jackie, Shane, and Ilya were floating in the villa's private pool when Hayden spoke up again.

"Hey, I wanted you guys to hear it from me first," he said, drawing everyone's attention. "My contract is up at the end of this coming season."

"Ah, so you are finally retiring?" Ilya teased, sputtering when Shane splashed water in his face.

"No," Hayden said. "But I don't want to renew with the Voyageurs. They're a shitty team full of shitty people."

"Are you saying-"

"It's not a sure thing yet. But with Boyle retiring, there's an opening on the Centaurs..."

"Oh my god-"

"And with all the interest you guys have brought to the team, they *could* afford me..."

"Hayden, oh my god!"

"So... we'll see, but... yeah, I wanted you to know."

"Hayden!" Shane shouted, falling out of his pool float and paddling over to him. "You're kidding!"

"You want to be on team with your boyfriend again," Ilya teased. "I understand."

"Shut up, Rozanov," Hayden and Shane said simultaneously.

"I kid, I kid! I am happy to hear it! You want to be a Centaur?"

"I want to humiliate the Voyageurs," Hayden amended. "And I want to do it with Shane." A beat, then Hayden continued, looking right at Ilya. "And with you."

"Da," Ilya said, swimming over to wrap his arms around Hayden and Shane. "We will be amazing, all together."

"Yeah, I think we will."

End Notes

hooray!!! I hope you enjoyed! If you stuck it out, thank you for reading 🧡 i truly love Hayden as a character and think he did his best, it just wasn't always good enough SO i hope this filled in some of him learning to trust Ilya! 😊 as always, kudos & comments are much appreciated, love ya, mwah!

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