the golden age of mosaic broken hearts

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by writinginasnowglobe

Summary

If you ask anyone who knows even the slightest bit about hockey, they would say that Shane Hollander is one of the nicest players out there. A generational talent with talks of a dynasty.

If you ask Ilya Rozanov, he'd announce loudly that Shane Hollander is the best thing that happened to him. Don't get it wrong; he'd still call him boring and polite and "very Canadian" and only the second best hockey player in the league. But there'd be a sparkle in his eye and a soft smile on his lips, and it wouldn't be hard to see the pure adoration the man had for Shane Hollander. He'd mock him with "golden boy Shane Hollander," but there'd be a thread of something hidden in his voice. Almost as if he doesn't truly believe it.

Or, Shane Hollander left Montreal. He's not sure if all of him did, though.

Notes

i've been writing this one for a while now because i am forever fascinated by shane hollander's character !! i feel like both in universe and in fandom, shane's complexities aren't always talked about and i realized that i needed to talk about them ! title is adapted from the song state of grace ! i hope you enjoy <3

also general disclaimer: i know next to nothing about hockey and all the hockey references in this come from either my knowledge of heated rivalry or two second google searches ! also FUCK AI i did not use ai for any part of this and my excessive use of em dashes is solely because of me and my love for them thank you

finally small tw that there is a small panic attack scene in this fic

See the end of the work for more notes

If you ask anyone who knows even the slightest bit about hockey, they would say that Shane Hollander is one of the nicest players out there. A generational talent with talks of a dynasty.

If you ask his fans, they would talk undoubtedly about his stats first. Leading the league in points—though Ilya Rozanov isn't far off—with a shooting percentage most players could only dream of every night. But eventually, they'd declare that despite all of that, Shane Hollander is still humble and compassionate and isn't misogynistic or a jackass like some of the hockey bros out there.

If you ask the journalists, they'd voice how easy the interviews with Shane Hollander are. Straight to the point, articulate, and usually answers the questions they throw at him. They might complain a little about the strict media training or lack of drama or headline-worthy clickbait with him, but that's just the way it is. If you'd asked his team back when he was with Montreal before everything happened, they'd imply Shane Hollander is reserved in a way that doesn't always gel with everyone, but he makes for a good captain. The golden boy, in more ways than one.

Then, if you ask the people who didn't like him, they'd rag on about his declining performance—which is, well, pointedly false—his sexuality, his race, his awkwardness, but might eventually reluctantly admit that Shane Hollander is good in a way that many hockey players don't seem to be.

If you ask his parents, they'd mention his work ethic and his passion and his focus. His unwavering determination to be the best and following through. They'd also slip in a comment about how he hasn't changed much since he was young; how he's still gentle and kind like the little boy they raised.

If you ask Ilya Rozanov, he'd announce loudly that Shane Hollander is the best thing that happened to him. Don't get it wrong; he'd still call him boring and polite and "very Canadian" and only the second best hockey player in the league. But there'd be a sparkle in his eye and a soft smile on his lips, and it wouldn't be hard to see the pure adoration the man had for Shane Hollander. He'd mock him with "golden boy Shane Hollander," but there'd be a thread of something hidden in his voice. Almost as if he doesn't truly believe it.

Because if you ask Shane Hollander, well. He might not say it, but he'd think it. Think that *maybe,* there really are no nice guys in Montreal.

It starts, like everything seemed to after being outed, with Montreal.

Shane loves being a Centaur, appreciates the guys on the team and the fact that he now gets to play hockey with his husband by his side (at least on the power play). Sure, it took him some time to fit in, find his footing on a brand new team that seemed to do everything the complete opposite way of his old one. It took him a while to unclench his mind, figuratively, and unclench his fists, literally. But eventually, it was hard not to see the Centaurs for what they truly were: genuinely caring guys who weren't being friendly just because he's their captain's partner but because they actually like him. Because they like playing hockey with

him, but also like hanging out with him during one of Bood's barbeques. Because they don't have any ulterior motives.

And so, Shane loves the Centaurs and learns to not dread locker room talk and realizes that maybe for the first time in his life, he can breathe freely while doing one of his favorite things in the world.

None of that, unfortunately, prepares him for Ottawa's first game against Montreal. Or more accurately, prepares him for the maelstrom of emotions that racket their way through his body and mind ever since he'd seen that the game against Montreal is the second of the season.

"You are panicking."

Shane glances up from where he's been staring blankly at his empty plate to see Ilya's body turned towards him, eyes honed in on his face. Ilya's phone is leaning against a water bottle in between both of them, where Ilya'd been showing Shane a funny edit some fan had made of the two of them. The song is still playing, and Ilya taps on the screen once to pause it, before placing a hand on the counter and swiveling the stool he's on until he's fully facing Shane.

"Uh, no." Shane clears his throat quietly, watching the way that Ilya's eyes travel over and across his face, like he's mapping some expedition that Shane is not privy to. "I'm fine."

Ilya snorts. "You are panicking." His tone is resolute, giving Shane no room to argue about it. Not that he really can, because, well. They've somehow become the kind of people that seemed to be able to see right through each other even in the dark.

"Maybe a little," Shane acquiesces, standing up and taking both his and Ilya's plates to the sink. The tips of his fingers itch a little as he stands there looking down at the dishes, and he reaches to turn the tap on. "It's fine."

Shane feels Ilya's presence behind him even before he feels his arms slither around his waist and his chin rest on his shoulder. "Montreal is next week," Ilya notes, the words rumbling against his neck.

He hums noncommittally, scrubbing a bowl with the exact same level of precision he always devotes to doing the dishes. Ilya, however, is well-versed in the enigma of Shane Hollander, and presses his lips to the back of Shane's neck for a moment. A silent plea that has Shane closing his eyes briefly before reopening them.

"We will destroy them, yes? They are missing best player." Shane scoffs lightly, and Ilya's arms get tighter around his waist. "They will be messy and they will make mistakes. And then," Ilya continues, moving one of his hands to close the tap before turning Shane around with his other one. "We will destroy them."

Shane lets out a sigh, tilting forward until his forehead hits Ilya's chest. He can feel his crucifix necklace pressing into his skin, and the slight edge of it grounds him. In all honesty, he's not sure that winning against Montreal is what his mind is latching onto. Practices have been going well, Shane having to learn the ins and outs of playing with brand new guys, but

it hadn't taken him *too* long. And yeah, sometimes he still turns to the side, expecting to see Hayden, but is instead hit with Haas. But the new lines are working, and Shane truly thinks that winning-wise, they'll probably be fine. Especially since Montreal doesn't seem to be clicking that well as a team these days—Hayden's words, not his.

It's everything else that might be the problem. Not to say that he doesn't want to destroy Montreal, because he definitely does. There's just…a hundred other feelings attached to that desire. And while Shane is struggling to parse through the entire intricate tangle of emotions in his chest—he's not even sure he *can* name all of them—one of them grinds against the back of his brain a little rougher than the others.

"Moy lyubimy."

"Hm."

"You are angry."

Shane feels his husband's hand slide across the back of his neck and into his hair before tugging down gently but firm enough that he lifts his head up to meet Ilya's eyes. Ilya doesn't say anything but lifts a brow, and Shane lets his shoulders drop as he exhales again.

"Yeah."

It's a single word, but Shane feels like it carries the weight of every thought that's been racing through his mind since he left Montreal. Since he *had* to leave Montreal, because his former teammates suddenly didn't see him anymore. Didn't see past the Ilya-Rozanov-shaped hole in his heart and to the Shane Hollander that he has always been.

The Shane Hollander that had led them to three *fucking* Stanley cups, not that it seems to matter to them anymore. The Shane Hollander that had been with them since his rookie season, that had given them his *best years.* The Shane Hollander that had been their captain and their friend.

Ilya's eyes flicker between his for a few beats, his hand continuing to softly pull at his hair in the way that he's learned Shane craves.

"Okay. Be angry," he finally says, and Shane's head tilts a little to the side as he peers at his husband. The corner of Ilya's lips tilt up into a small smirk before speaking again, and Shane tries to ignore the way that sends a small tingle down his spine. "We can use anger, yes? They deserve to see what they lost. You will show them you are Shane Hollander. And that you know it."

The emphasis on his name feels important, reminds Shane of Ilya and their trophy room. And with the way Ilya's smirk has grown, he thinks that maybe that had been on purpose. But Shane puts that to the side for a second, and instead lets Ilya's words roll through his mind again. Feels them collide with the sharp sting of betrayal and hushed fury that have been simmering in him since he left.

Be angry. Show them you are Shane Hollander. Be angry. Be angry. Be angry.

Hockey is a violent sport, but Shane's never really played it that way. Never really gets into pointless fights, never throws his gloves down unless he really needs to. That one time with Scott was the only time his fear and ire had gotten the best of him, and he still remembers the media coverage afterwards.

Shane Hollander Finally Throws Gloves Down Against Scott Hunter. Shane Hollander—yes, that Shane Hollander—Gets Into Fight On Ice. Golden-Boy Shane Hollander Involved In Post-Game Altercation.

So, yeah, Shane's been known to have a tight grip on his emotions and push everything into a neat little box the second he steps onto the ice. Part of it is the way hockey has always helped his mind quiet down and focus. The other, less glorious part of it is that Shane had realized pretty early on in his hockey journey that it was not just useful, it was necessary. A necessary tool against the words thrown at him in locker rooms and on ice. Said in that grating tone that all the guys claim as joking or harmless chirping, but Shane can always hear the bitterness twisted in each syllable.

He had wondered more than once, growing up, if the other guys thought he was stupid enough to believe them. Years later, he'd realized that perhaps they just didn't care. So, Shane compartmentalizes and plays hockey and it works. Has been working for over a decade now.

As a result, no one—including him—really sees it coming when it happens during the Centaurs' second to last practice before the game. Troy has the puck and Shane is chasing him down, and for a flicker of a moment, Shane's mind somehow twists the contours of his body into the shape of Comeau. Maybe from the habit of playing against him in scrimmages for years. Or maybe because Shane is more than a little exhausted from the constant overthinking and anxiety, and his brain just—lags for half a second.

The sudden, *violent* rush of anger is overwhelming. In a way that Shane is not used to feeling on the ice. It's happened all the time off of it: bright strobe lights and excruciatingly loud music at a club, or an offhand comment from a Montreal teammate after a hard loss, or even the harsh buzz of his refrigerator, sometimes. But never on the ice.

Shane barely registers his body moving, or the hit, or the way everything goes deathly still for a millisecond.

"Fuck."

The word is groaned quietly, and all of a sudden, Shane's eyes are moving down, widening as he sees Troy splayed out on the ice on his back. There's no blood, no limbs in unnatural positions, but Troy's eyes are squeezed shut and Shane's heart drops.

"Barrett, *fuck,"* Shane breathes out, taking his gloves off and dropping down, trying to determine what the hell he just did. He vaguely hears the others start to pull up to them, but he keeps his eyes trained on Troy. "Shit, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I didn't—"

His voice cuts out, because he doesn't even know how to end his sentence. Can't pick a word from any of the ones he knows, because they all feel wrong and sharp and grim. A hand lands on his shoulder and suddenly, Ilya is next to him, weight pressing into him from the side.

"M'fine," Troy murmurs, slowly taking a breath and letting it out. "Just knocked the wind out of me for a second."

Shane helps him sit up, and then Bood and Ilya are on either side of him, making sure he's okay. Okay after what *Shane* did to him. After *he* lost control. He could've—could've taken out their first line right winger before the season has even really started. Could've hurt him.

He could've hurt one of his own teammates.

One of the people who'd welcomed him into their team. Jokes around with him during practice. Had come up to him one day and told him that moving to this team is one of the greatest things that had happened in his life, and that he hopes it's the same for Shane.

He distantly realizes that his hands are shaking. Also distantly hears his name, but the dissonant ringing in his head is louder.

"-ane. *Shane.*" Hands grasp his cheeks tightly, and Shane blinks once. Ilya's face swims in his vision, worry painting every line and curve of his expression. It makes Shane even more nauseous.

"Fuck," Shane swears, jerking away from Ilya abruptly as his voice cracks on the syllable. Ilya reaches for him, but Shane scrambles backwards and onto his skates, the tension in his body and the guilt in his mind tearing into every piece of him. He sees Troy again, who's still slightly leaning against Bood, but is also watching him with furrowed brows. The guilt amplifies so strongly that he almost folds over in half. Shane's voice is low and hoarse, and the words barely make it out of his throat as he keeps his gaze locked on Troy. "I'm sorry."

And then he's skating. Rushing off the ice with a frantic energy he doesn't know what to do with. He hears Ilya call out his name. Hears some of the others also call out. Hears some hushed curses flying around the rink, too. Shane ignores it all, the hum in his veins now almost painful as he turns and turns and turns until he finally makes it to a small bathroom far from the locker room.

He barely pushes inside before the air gets stuck in his lungs, and he chokes on his inhale. The fluorescent lights are too bright, and there's some muffled sound echoing from behind one of the walls. Shane is vaguely grateful there doesn't seem to be anyone else in here to watch him—watch him like *this,* but that's as far as his brain lets him acknowledge it in the midst of his spiraling.

He falls forward onto one of the sinks, his hands gripping the edge so tight that his fingers are pale. Shane's breaths are ragged, hiccupping in his chest with an ache that *burns,* and he squeezes his eyes shut hard until he sees stars behind them.

He lost control. He could've hurt one of his own teammates. He failed—he failed, he failed.

Logically, in the back of his mind somewhere, he knows that Troy is not badly hurt. But logic has never been his friend in situations like this before, and it doesn't seem inclined to lend him a hand now.

The entire thing is replaying in his head now, over and over like some fucked-up version of a highlight reel. He sees the sequence of events repeatedly, like a broken record he wishes he could reach into his brain and grab, and then smash it over and over and over on the tiled floor underneath him.

Puck. Comeau. Boards. Troy. Puck. Comeau. Boards. Troy. Puck. Comeau. Boards. Troy.

It's not until he feels two hands wrap around him that he even realizes someone had entered the bathroom.

"Shane, moy lyubov, *breathe.*"

The words enter one ear and go right back out the other, his brain choosing not to process them.

There's a hand on his chest now, pressing him back into a solid chest. One he knows, intimately. Another hand curves around his lower stomach, squeezing and also pulling him back. The weight of both hands feel like a lifeline amidst the storm in Shane's head.

"Breathe, Shane. In, out. With me, yes?"

Shane feels the chest behind him expand, consequently pushing his own chest into the hand placed directly above his racing heart. The hand pushes down, and he feels the warm steadiness of the chest again. And so they stay there, Shane slowly following the rhythm set by the man behind him. The combination of moving between the press of his chest and the press of his hand is soothing, and it begins to pull Shane out of the sea he'd been stranded in. The faint ringing in his head slowly lowers to a low hum as he keeps breathing.

"Like that, good. Breathe." Ilya's voice is quiet, murmuring right next to Shane's ear, and the heat gives Shane another grounding point. "You are okay, Shane. You are okay."

Shane desperately wishes that were true.

Ilya seems to realize the exact moment when Shane is back, because he lets out a quiet sigh and grips Shane just a little tighter.

The words scrape against his throat, Shane's voice small and gravelly when he finally speaks. "Sorry."

And that, after everything, seems to be Ilya's breaking point.

Shane feels Ilya turn him around, his husband not letting him get more than a centimeter's distance between them as he does. Ilya's expression is a patchwork of concern and anger and guilt and other things that Shane can't fully pick apart at the moment. He almost can't bear the consequent shame it invokes in his chest, but Ilya's hand moves to keep his head pointed at him before he can turn away.

“Is not something to be sorry about,” Ilya states, and Shane suddenly wants to snarl like he’s a cornered animal rather than a perfectly functioning human being. Because a perfectly functioning human being is what he has had to be; the role of his entire fucking life. But he wants to snarl and scream. He wants to cry. He wants to take the labyrinth of feelings in his chest and rip it out until it’s all gone, bared and bloody on the floor for everyone to see.

“Ilya—”

“Barrett is okay.” It feels like another punch to the gut. “Was an accident. They happen to everyone. He said to tell you.”

Shane doesn’t know what to do with—with this shade of kindness. He remembers the last time something like this had happened in front of someone, years and years ago during school. He’d only been seven, back when he couldn’t fully understand what exactly happened in his brain that felt like he was fine one second and hysterical the next. But his friend had been with him, and ran off to grab their teacher. Shane had gone home when his mom came to pick him up.

The next day, his friend had ignored him. Deliberately sat with some of the other boys during lunch instead.

It had been a lesson, an important one, that he learned that day.

Shane is not allowed to make mistakes; he is not allowed to fail or be weak or lose control.

“It’s not okay. I could’ve—I could’ve given him a concussion. I could’ve taken him out of the ga—”

And like always, Ilya sees that Shane’s on the verge of another meltdown as his voice pitches up higher. His hands clasp either side of Shane’s face, tilting it up until their eyes meet. Ilya’s stare bores into him, his heart still thundering away to a beat he despises.

“Yes, you could have hurt him.” Ilya doesn’t let Shane look away. “You could have hurt him. You could have hit the boards and hurt yourself. I could have slammed into Bood and hurt both of us. Haas could have slipped and twisted his knee.” Ilya’s gaze flicks between his eyes, his voice deep, but serious. “Hockey is dangerous sport. Accidents happen, yes?”

“But this was my fault.”

“Still accident.”

“But it wasn’t.”

At that, Ilya’s expression finally cracks, surprise filtering onto his face. He leans back slightly, and Shane’s stomach turns with remorse and self-contempt.

“What does that mean?”

“I—” Shane’s pulse skips, and he feels Ilya’s thumbs gently glide over his cheekbones. It sends a surge of *something* to his heart. “I thought—it was Comeau. For a second. Barrett had

the puck, and I saw Comeau in my head, and then I felt…felt this, this *rush* and then—"

He cuts himself off, but both of them know exactly what came after the *and then.*

Shane sees the look on Ilya's face, and opens his mouth before his husband can.

"I know, *I know,* Montreal's got me all, all fucked up." Shane huffs humorlessly. "But I'll be fine."

"No."

Shane jolts a little at the word, and Ilya lets go of his face, instead lowering his hands and placing them on the sink behind Shane.

"You are *not* fine. Stop pretending you are," Ilya proclaims, leaning closer to Shane as he does. "You are like—like bomb. You say everything is fine and you are fine but there is clock in your chest counting down. You will explode. You are *not* fine, moy lyubov."

And that, well. That almost decimates Shane, the declaration striking his body with an intensity that incinerates him. He's sure he would've crumpled to the floor had Ilya not been there to hold him up.

They both breathe for a few long moments, time stretching into something thin and flimsy. The weight of the truth bores down relentlessly, and Shane takes in a shaky inhale after the air feels too suffocating to sit in silently.

"I went to Comeau's birthday parties. Every year. They were always in a club or bar and it was always too loud and too crowded and I hated it." The words are barely above a whisper, and Ilya watches him carefully. "But I went because we were friends. Because I didn't go out with the team a lot, but this was important to Comeau, so I fucking sucked it up and went."

Shane's eyes burn, and the lump in his throat feels more like a stone wrapped in barbed wire.

"When I—last season. After. I didn't even…recognize him." The rush of ire ignites in Shane's chest again, and his voice grows harder. More bitter. "I went to every one of his birthdays when I was with Montreal. I knew his girlfriend, knew when she became his wife, was at his *fucking* wedding. I knew his dog's name and that they were trying for a kid. I knew —so much, and none of that. *None* of it fucking mattered anymore the second he found about —"

You.

Shane's voice had risen into a yell by the end, but he chokes on the last word. Chokes on the perpetual ache that can't seem to leave his body.

"I gave them so many years, Ilya," Shane finally says, eyes lowered to the tile below. "I gave them three cups. My best hockey. And they couldn't even…"

He trails off. No words seem to fit into the gaping hurt that his former team had left behind. Shane's been covering it up, haphazardly placing band-aids onto bullet wounds and foolishly

hoping they'd heal, but he knows it's still there. Festering like a bruise, black and blue and *agonizing.*

"They did not deserve you." Ilya cups Shane's cheek, the warmth seeping into his skin. Shane's eyes flutter for a split-second as Ilya's scent envelopes him completely. "Did not deserve your hockey or cups or wins." He prods at Shane's jaw lightly with his thumb, and Shane meets his gaze. "They did not deserve your kindness or your heart."

Shane scoffs, but the words settle somewhere in his ribs. Pulse gently as Ilya keeps talking.

"You are angry and hurt and betrayed, yes? You are *allowed* to be all those things." Shane hears the *but* before Ilya even speaks it. "But I think…moy lyubimy, I think is time to talk to someone."

Shane knows exactly what he means, and feels the immediate, automatic *no* that rushes to the tip of his tongue. Barely manages to stop it. Doesn't manage to stop the self-loathing that comes with the idea that he's weak. Objectively, Shane knows this is the stigma talking, that he doesn't think Ilya is even the tiniest bit weak for having a therapist. But this is *him,* and he doesn't—he can't lose control. Ilya observes him, probably sees every thought crossing Shane's mind like they're written on a billboard across his forehead.

"It will help, Shane," Ilya breathes out, and it feels like both a confession and a plea wrapped into one. "Is scary and very annoying sometimes, I know. But it will help."

Shane doesn't say anything, finally letting his head drop against his husband's chest. Ilya hugs him tight, encasing him wholly until all of Shane's senses are taken up only by the thought of Ilya.

The next morning—after a long, restless night of research—Shane glances next to him to where Ilya is still sleeping, face relaxed and open the way it always is when he's asleep, and presses *Book Appointment.*

Annoyingly, it helps.

It doesn't *fix* him, not that there is anything to fix. He's still angry and bitter and upset, and one therapy session the week before the Montreal match cannot change that. Shane is not expecting miracles, by any means.

But talking it through with someone else, someone who is outside of his tight bubble of hockey and the league and family, does help. It takes him a while to really open up about it—old habits die screaming and all that—but Naomi eventually wears him down somehow.

So, when Shane walks into the locker room for their last practice before the game, he feels—better. Stronger.

All of the Centaurs had checked on him after the previous practice, and that information had lodged itself into the forefront of Shane's mind. They'd all been concerned, not just taking

Ilya's word for it when the captain had told them he was fine. They had texted him and called him and even showed up at their door all to make sure that Shane was okay.

It's a welcome change from the previous locker room he'd shared. Makes him remember that every one of his current teammates were at his wedding. And that—that distinction feels important.

He'd also talked to Troy, alone. His guilt hasn't fully left yet, but explaining it and apologizing alleviated it, at least a bit. Troy, for his own part, repeated that it was still an accident, no matter who Shane had seen in the moment.

And so they practice and they plan and they strategize, and Shane feels…*good,* about the upcoming game. He is not optimistic enough to expect an easy game, or even a fair one. It'll be brutal, it'll be rough, and he knows he will be a moving target on the ice. The only saving grace of the whole thing is that it'll be in Ottawa, and they don't have to deal with an arena full of Montreal fans.

The morning of the game, however, Shane's anxiety takes up every corner of every room, and Ilya tries to help him by doing what he does best: being an (affectionate) asshole.

Shane does not let Ilya know that it does, in fact, help a little, but he knows that Ilya knows. See through each other in the dark and all that.

His knee bounces erratically the whole drive over to the arena, and even Ilya's hand can't stop it.

"How many teeth will be on ice by end of game, you think?" Ilya asks him as they push open the door to their locker room, and Shane rolls his eyes. Wyatt, Bood, and Troy are already by their stalls and clearly heard the question, and Shane offers them a tight smile. The tension in all of their shoulders is hard to miss, but Shane is counting on Ilya to lighten it at least a little, as he tends to do.

"Hopefully none," Shane responds, and Ilya snorts.

"You are not that naive, moy lyubov."

Shane flips him off as Zane and Troy both chuckle. As more of the team filters into the locker room and they all start to suit up, the tightness in Shane's shoulders seems to get worse and worse. Until he feels a hand clap his left shoulder, squeezing casually.

"We've got your back, Holzy," Wyatt declares, and Shane can't stop the tilt of his lips in response to his comforting grin. Some of the other Centaurs call out their support in return, and it loosens Shane's apprehension just a bit.

"Today, we go hard, yes?" Ilya chirps in, his voice transforming into his captain voice, the one that commands every room effortlessly. He looks around, gaze meeting every player's eyes stubbornly, though it does linger on Shane's a hair longer than everyone else. It doesn't go unnoticed, judging by the muffled snickers. "We send Montreal home crying, *yes?* They play mean, we play meaner. They play dirty, we play dirtier."

Cheers echo throughout the locker room, and Ilya's rising voice combined with the excitement permeating the air settles deeply into Shane's skin. But as Ilya continues his pre-game speech, his statement lingers in Shane's mind. Because obviously, the less time they spend in the sin bin, the greater their chances of winning. And so, he doesn't *want* to play dirty, doesn't want his team to play dirty either.

Even if it is against Montreal.

That sentiment lasts a good fifteen minutes into the game.

Montreal, apparently, does not have any hold ups about good sportsmanship or that their former captain is on the other side of the ice. In fact, Shane can pretty accurately guess that that fact makes it worse.

Shane, Ilya, and Troy have all been brutally checked multiple times already. Hayden and J.J. have been shooting apologetic looks his way since the game started. Barring them, his former teammates are out for blood, and not just his. It makes the guilt inside of him intensify as the lines switch, especially when he sees Gagnon slam Bood into the boards so hard that Shane winces. But Ilya still gets a hold of the puck, and shoots.

The resulting screams from their fans as it makes it past Drapeau and gives Ottawa the lead are both gratifying and intense.

But then Shane sees Comeau say something to Ilya, and can't miss the way his husband stiffens. He spits something back, and his former teammate's eyes flare with contempt. But Ilya skates away for the faceoff.

The expression on Comeau's face doesn't change, though.

And so, Shane almost sees it coming, when it happens.

Ilya has the puck, carries it down the ice, and passes to Troy at the last second. It's a beautiful setup, the kinds of assists they practice over and over for moments like this. Troy takes the shot, and scores.

But the second after Ilya passes to Troy, Shane sees Comeau in the corner of his eye. Sees when he realizes Ilya doesn't have the puck anymore. Sees when he doesn't slow down.

Ilya goes down, and Shane's whole body freezes.

It's a dirty hit, and everyone knows it. So, though the refs have been missing calls left and right in favor of Montreal, even they know they can't let this one go. The whistle blows, and Comeau is guided to the penalty box.

Ilya is still lying on the ice.

Luca is gripping his forearm tightly from next to him on the bench, and Shane doesn't know whether it's to reassure him or to stop him from vaulting over the boards and bashing Comeau's head in.

With the way his fury is burning down his veins, Shane thinks it should probably be the latter.

Bood and Troy are next to Ilya, and a couple of tense seconds later, he slowly gets up. The crowd cheers, and though relief sweeps through Shane's chest at the sight of his husband up and skating, the edges of his vision are red.

The period ends a couple seconds later, but as Shane walks next to Ilya towards the locker room, his hands are trembling a little. His eyes flicker over Ilya only once they're inside, cataloguing every movement to make sure there are no lasting injuries.

Ilya's lips quirk up into a smirk, although there's a hint of coldness visible in his eyes. "They have to do better than that to take me out, Hollander."

Wiebe is shouting out notes and instructions to players, the strain of the game hovering in the air, but for once, Shane is not listening. Can't listen, not with the way his brain is replaying Ilya going down. Replaying Comeau's cruel set of his mouth as he flew towards Ilya. Replaying the victorious expression on his face even after the penalty was called.

There's a sweltering haze around him that Shane's not exactly trying to push away throughout the intermission, even as Ilya's body presses into his from the side in a silent *I'm here.* Even as the team makes its way back to the rink. Even as the second period starts, and Wiebe has the second line start.

Even as Shane skates to the middle of the ice, getting ready for the faceoff. The Montreal centre is just a rookie, but the callous look on his face tells Shane that there's no love lost here. And then he opens his mouth.

"Rozanov looks alright over there on the bench, *Hollander.* What, you suck his dick during the break or something?"

Shane stills for exactly half a second, before red crowds his vision again. Surprisingly, the dark rage crackling through his brain and body sharpens everything in him. He bends over for the faceoff, keeping his face hard and blank. But right before the puck drops, he looks up to meet the eyes of the rookie, not even bothering to remember his name at the moment.

And whatever the rookie sees in Shane's eyes seems to clue him into *something,* because for a split-second, Shane sees fear. It sends a swell of cool satisfaction down his spine, and he almost smiles.

The puck drops.

Shane is off with the puck before the rookie even seems to realize it, because no matter which way Montreal wants to paint it, no matter how they try to spin it, Shane Hollander had been the best thing that they'd had.

And now he'll be their biggest regret.

He scores in the first thirty seconds, but it does nothing to dispel the razor-sharp wrath in his system, even when the first line replaces the second. Does nothing to all the months of

betrayal that had built up, and the irritation from all of the dirty hits that both him and his team had taken this game.

He recalls Ilya's advice from last week.

Be angry. Show them you are Shane Hollander.

Naomi had given him one more.

When you feel like you're getting too swept up by the anger, feel the way your blades sit on the ice. With every single step. And remember that you *made every step to get to where you are now. To be one of the best hockey players in the world. They can never take that from you, Shane.*

Shane's eyes are still on the puck, but as the lines switch and he hops over the boards, his attention is on the blades of his skates. He notices how they cut into the ice, propelling him forward. How they slice down as he turns. It centers him, and not for the first time, he's grateful for Naomi. For Ilya for giving him the push he needed.

All of a sudden, he remembers something that Hayden had asked once, early on after he'd found out about Shane and Ilya.

There weren't any nice guys in Montreal?

At the time, it had annoyed Shane. Because, yes, Ilya Rozanov is a little bit of an asshole. Shane knows that intimately. But that's not all he is, and the world doesn't seem to understand the difference between Ilya's public persona and *him.*

But now, Shane lets the question flow through his mind, eyes narrowing as he watches Montreal take the puck. Wilson has possession and moves towards Hayes, but Shane remembers this play vividly, knows the moment when he'll pass to Comeau.

There isn't even a sliver of hesitation in his body as he checks Comeau violently into the boards. Vicious enough that the ref calls a penalty as Comeau is sprawled across the ice.

He hears a *holy shit* from Luca on the ice. Hears the low gasps from the crowd as they realize who exactly had checked Comeau. Distinctly *doesn't* hear any surprise coming from where his husband is on the sidelines.

There weren't any nice guys in Montreal?

He hears the curse that flies from Comeau's lips as he glimpses up and sees Shane Hollander.

Shane smirks.

They win the game, and it hadn't been close.

Because at the end of the day, even with the refs missing calls and their ruthless playing, Montreal could not compete against Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, and Troy Barrett.

Especially when, for the first time in Shane's career, instead of compartmentalizing away his anger, he channeled it furiously.

The adrenaline clambering in Shane's body makes him restless, even as the team yells and celebrates in the locker room after the win. There are hugs and shaking and loud whoops, but they all quiet down when Bood slaps Shane's back lightly, disbelief marring his face.

"Who knew Holzy had that in him?"

Shane lets a small smile pull at his lips as the rest of their teammates whistle and clap. Ilya meets his eyes, amusement splashed across his expression.

"*I* did."

Ilya's announcement is met with shaking heads and incredulous glances.

"Is true," he continues, tossing an arm over Shane's shoulder. Shane automatically leans into his body on instinct. "Shane does not play like this usually, but not because he can't. *Obviously.*"

Today's game had proven that, at least.

"You got hidden depths or something, huh, Holzy?" LaPointe's teasing question from across the locker room makes him snort.

"Guess I do," he chirps back as he shrugs nonchalantly, to everyone's delight. From there, the room devolves into loud replays of moments from the game and various shouts of glee. The post-game routines all happen a little slower today, but eventually they hit the showers and get ready.

Eventually, they finish with the media and their incessant questions. Eventually, Shane is in the passenger seat as Ilya drives them home, sending off a quick text to Hayden and J.J. Their handshakes at the end of the game had been warm, but Hayden had pulled Shane into a quick hug as he'd whispered a quiet *sorry* again. But this isn't on him, has never been on him, and so Shane had just shook his head, patting his back.

Eventually, they're both laying in bed, sated and flushed. Shane's head rests in the crook of Ilya's neck, and Ilya's leisurely drawing patterns on Shane's back with his fingers.

"Are you mad?"

Shane's question is mumbled into Ilya's skin, but his husband seems to hear him all the same.

"Why would I be mad, moy lyubimy?"

Shane lifts onto his elbow, peering down at Ilya's face. It's open, open like how Ilya's had to learn to be over the years, because Shane knows he hadn't always been growing up. It hits him again how goddamn *lucky* he is to be loved by Ilya Rozanov. "For playing…like that. For letting my anger out on the ice. You know."

Ilya's smile is understanding in a way that flays Shane open, like he can see all the messy and complicated parts of him that he tries so hard to hide. Like he can see all of the worst of him, and loves him anyway.

"Can I tell you truth?"

Shane nods, suddenly apprehensive. What if Ilya *is* mad? What if he thinks that Shane's ability to get on the ice and cast aside his emotions is his best kind of hockey? What if—

"Was very hot, Hollander."

Shane's thoughts stutter. That…is not what he'd expected to hear.

"You think is hot when I fight on ice sometimes, yes?" Shane doesn't give him an answer, but they both know what it is. "Why are you surprised when I think the same?"

Because it's me, Shane thinks. Ilya seems to read his mind, somehow.

"You do not like to play like this, I know. But is *okay* if you play like this sometimes, if you need to. Is not bad thing."

Shane exhales, tilting his head down a little as he moves his gaze between Ilya's eyes and contemplates. "You don't think it's—weird? Cause of, you know, my whole—"

"Ah, the golden boy Shane Hollander thing," Ilya finishes, and all of a sudden he flips them. He hovers above him, his crucifix dangling down against the hollow of Shane's throat, and the shock of cold sends flutters of sensation down his stomach. Ilya drags a finger across Shane's cheekbone as he continues. "The world does not know you like I know you, correct? They think you are nice—"

"Hey, I *am* ni—"

Ilya shushes him with his finger and Shane glares up at him. "You are also asshole, Shane Hollander."

Shane's jaw drops slightly, and chooses not to dignify that with a response. But Ilya just keeps talking.

"You are asshole about hockey sometimes. And also laundry and dishes and shoes and vacuuming. And when you are mad, you are not nice."

Shane can't tell if this is supposed to be helping him, but Ilya's smile is radiant on his face as he speaks. So radiant that he wants to forget about this conversation, and pull his husband back down on top of him. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem like Ilya is on the same wavelength for once.

"But is okay, moy lyubov." Ilya cards a hand through Shane's hair, and Shane shivers. "You can be asshole and mean and also kind and polite. You can be—what's word, hm. Can be… *mosaic,*" Ilya's voice brightens and his eyes light up when he remembers the word he'd been

searching his brain for. “You can be mosaic of many things, yes? And none of them make you bad person.”

There’s a slight burn behind Shane’s eyes, but he doesn’t let the tears fall. Over a decade of knowing Ilya Rozanov, and he still surprises Shane, sometimes. He’s never been described as a mosaic before, and the word glitters and soothes somewhere deep inside his chest.

“Ya tebya lyublyu,” Shane whispers, hoping the words conveyed every one of the emotions flitting around inside him. They will never be enough, he thinks, to accurately represent everything that Ilya means to him. They will never capture the bone-deep ache and the longing in his ribs and the breath in his lungs that all start and end with Ilya Rozanov. He hopes Ilya understands, anyway.

“Ya tebya lyublyu.” The tenderness in Ilya’s eyes slowly shifts into something a little lighter. Something a little more carnal. And just like it has for over the last decade, Shane’s body reacts immediately. “Let me show you how hot you were in game, moya mozaika. Yes?”

Shane hooks a finger in Ilya’s necklace and yanks him down, even though he knows that there will be more to this conversation later. Even though he knows that he still has a lot of things to work through—years of things, in fact. Even though he knows that Ilya is deliberately distracting him. He knows all of it, but frankly, he doesn’t care.

He is a mosaic, after all.

End Notes

a small dump of various notes and thoughts i had while writing:
- this fic was almost titled "no nice guys in montreal" but that felt a little too on the nose to me LOL
- i love love love exploring shane's feelings about montreal and how that affects him, because i feel like that was a huge betrayal and would have lasting impacts on his life in a lot of ways. this was also the basis behind this whole fic, because a part of shane feels like there's still a piece of him in montreal, hence "no nice guys in montreal"
- shane's "golden boy" persona is so fascinating to me, especially when it comes to him being autistic and half-asian and how those things affected him growing up in the hockey world
- similarly, i love the "need to be perfect" angst, and i feel like that gels well with shane in general. i want to reiterate that shane in this fic does NOT think ilya or anyone else who goes to therapy is weak in any way; it's just the way he still has some internalized stigma about it combined with his incessant need to never fail and be perfect all the time (hence the "perfectly functioning human being" bit)
- i ! love ! ilya ! rozanov ! not a very eloquent thought, i know, but it is true and i needed to say it
- also, i am OBSESSED with the microtrope of shane hollander realizing he is shane mf hollander and showing it on the ice okay
- once more, with everyone: FUCK MONTREAL !!!!!

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