but i understand it now

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by orphan_account

Summary

Cliff just doesn't understand what makes Hollander so special.

Notes

there is no specific timeline for this, and it's also not canon-compliant for either the books or the tv show, but shhh <3 who doesn't love outsider POV?

also, cliff has some some mildly biphobic thoughts in the beginning of this story. nothing major, just some outdated thinking, but i wanted to give a heads-up.

See the end of the work for more notes

Cliff just doesn't understand what makes Hollander so special. To Rozanov, that is. Obviously he's a fantastic hockey player - the only one who can give Rozanov a run for his money - but that can't be the entirety of his appeal.

Because the thing is, Cliff knows how much Rozanov loves women. He's walked in on his captain balls-deep in a girl in the bathroom of a club more often than he cares to admit - the first two times were genuinely an accident, and the third was sort of-maybe-kind-of-on-purpose, but Cliff doesn't really want to think about what that might mean right now - and Rozanov had been clearly enjoying himself every single time. So, obviously, he wasn't fully gay, the way Hollander was. So he had more options, didn't he? Certainly more than Hollander did. He didn't need to put himself through all this risk, the constant fear of the wrong person finding out, what it might mean for his career, even potentially for his visa, et cetera. What made Hollander so special, that Rozanov would jeopardize his entire life for him?

Cliff's been trying to figure it out ever since Rozanov both came out to him and revealed his relationship with Hollander a couple of weeks ago. Cliff can't even begin to imagine how much trust that had required, to share his two biggest secrets at once, and to hope that Cliff wouldn't fuck it all up. So Cliff's honored, he really is, because he's always cared about Rozanov as more than just his captain, and he's so pleased that the feeling seems to be mutual. And yet...he still can't help but wonder. It just seems so out-of-character, so mismatched with the idea of Ilya Rozanov that Cliff has built in his mind. Clearly, he's been way off-base, and the idea of it bothers him, because Cliff really thought he had his captain-slash-best-friend figured out.

He's on the way to the Raiders locker room now, having realized only when he pulled into his driveway that he'd forgotten his phone charger at the arena, and unfortunately, he needs the damn thing, otherwise his phone will die overnight and what's he going to use for an alarm then? So he turns back around, grumbling the entire time, and is just steps away from the door to the locker room, when he hears voices.

He recognizes Rozanov's right away, and wonders if he's on the phone with someone, but then another voice answers - much less familiar, but still recognizable. Hollander.

Cliff hesitates for a moment, but then continues forward, because it sounds like they're just talking, and they're also in public, technically, so there's no way -

Well. Cliff freezes in the doorway, unable to look away. Rozanov is sitting on a bench, his hair still damp from the shower, shirtless and wearing nothing else except sweatpants. There are several fresh bruises on his torso from the game tonight, and Hollander, who is in a similar state of undress and is practically straddling Rozanov's lap, is gently running his thumb over one of the marks as he asks, "You think any of these are from me?"

"Don't know. Probably. You like to be rough," Rozanov murmurs, a slight grin pulling at the corner of his mouth.

Cliff knows he should either leave or speak up now - and if he were going to speak, to say something like, *What the fuck is wrong with you two? You're in public! Anyone could walk in! I just walked in!* (Admittedly, everyone has been gone for over an hour. All post-game interviews have been conducted, the players from both teams have showered and left for home, and the cleaning company isn't scheduled to come in today. So he can understand why they thought it was safe. *Still.* It's a miracle they've never been caught, when they let themselves be this reckless).

And he knows he should leave, he knows that, but he can't, for some reason. He thinks it's because he's never seen his captain this quiet and calm before. He always seems to be full of an undefeatable energy, whether it's on the ice or prowling through a club in search of his next conquest. But this? No, this is new. And that's why Cliff stands there, transfixed, because he's realized that there are entire parts of his captain, his teammate, his friend - that he never knew existed.

Hollander grins back, and it's a little flirty, but mostly it just looks happy, and that's something Cliff has never seen before either. Granted, he barely knows the guy, but on the ice, Hollander has always seemed like some kind of machine built specifically to play hockey, not an actual human being with real feelings. Clearly, Cliff was wrong about that too, and jesus, how many things can he possibly be wrong about?

"I can be rougher," Hollander says, a slight sing-song quality to his voice, but instead of pressing down on one of Rozanov's bruises like Cliff expects, he reaches up and brushes some of the damp curls off of Rozanov's forehead, his thumb gently caressing the skin. He's still smiling, staring at Rozanov with such an open, steady look of affection, and Cliff suddenly feels like he's intruding. And sure - he's technically been intruding this entire time; he wasn't supposed to see any of this. But the feeling that he's witnessing something very intimate and private is much, much stronger now. He should go. But he still can't look away, because he thinks he's just received the answer for the question that's been plaguing him for the past two weeks.

Rozanov is staring back at Hollander with an expression Cliff doesn't think he even has a name for. Like...like he's just stumbled out of the desert, and Hollander is his first sip of water in three days. Like Hollander is his salvation. Cliff doesn't think he's ever looked at anyone with a similar expression before, and he's absolutely positive no one has ever looked at *him* like that. He feels a sudden, sharp twinge of envy.

Rozanov says something in Russian then, something Cliff doesn't understand. He has learned some of the language in the seven-ish years Rozanov has been on the team, but mostly just the dirty ones. It sounds something like *ya tebya lyublyu* (Cliff will have to look it up later). Based on the tone, though, he doesn't think it's something dirty.

But whatever it is, it makes Hollander suddenly slide to the floor and settle between Rozanov's thighs with a graceful fluidity that's both surprising and kind of hot. And ok - yeah - Cliff definitely has to get out of here now. So what if his phone dies and he oversleeps and is late for morning practice? He turns to leave, but his sneaker catches on the floor with an incriminating squeak, and Rozanov's gaze snaps up from where he'd been eye-fucking

Hollander. He sees Cliff, and suddenly all of the tension Cliff is used to seeing seems to flood back into Rozanov's posture. He looks back down at Hollander then.

"*Moya lyubov,* it pains me to say this, but you need to stop. We have company."

Hollander doesn't seem to hear him, so Rozanov gives a sharp, painful-looking tug to a lock of Hollander's hair, and Cliff would not admit this aloud if someone was holding a gun to his head, but the way Hollander moans in response - whether it's in response to the pain or being dragged away from where he'd been mouthing frantically at Rozanov's crotch through his sweatpants - is so hot that his own dick automatically twitches. Cliff forces himself to take a deep breath and then focus on releasing it, so he doesn't have to think about the wet patch on Rozanov's crotch (that can't all be from Hollander's mouth, can it...? It's only been thirty seconds!)

"We have company," Rozanov repeats, and the back of Hollander's neck immediately turns red. His shoulders scrunch up too, and Cliff almost feels a little bad for him, although not nearly as bad as he feels for himself. He can't read the expression on his captain's face at all, but it's kind of scary.

"Shh, come here," Rozanov says soothingly, and Hollander is immediately scrambling back into Rozanov's lap and tucking his face into Rozanov's neck, which is a little weird. Yeah, this is embarrassing, but the dude can't even look at him? Cliff certainly isn't being given the option to look away - he tries, but Rozanov's death glare seems to have him pinned in place. And that's when Cliff realizes: yes, Hollander is embarrassed, but that's not the reason (or at least, not the main reason) he's refusing to make eye contact. It's because he's somehow sensed, without Rozanov saying so, that Cliff isn't allowed to look at him. Not when he's like this. This version of Hollander is for Ilya Rozanov only.

"I didn't - I just forgot - in my locker," Cliff scrambles to explain. He cringes when Rozanov's scary death glare doesn't waver. "I don't need it," he amends. "I'll just - I'll just go. Yeah." And then he spins on his heel and flees.

Not fast enough, however, because he's still able to hear Rozanov murmuring, "Is alright, sweetheart. We can trust him, he won't tell." Well, that's good, right? That doesn't sound like Rozanov is planning to murder him at morning practice.

Cliff risks a glance over his shoulder and sees Rozanov press a kiss to the tip of Hollander's nose. "Will have to be extra rough on him tomorrow, though. You are for my eyes only, *moy dorogoy*."

Oh, fuck.

Maybe he'll be lucky enough to get into a car crash on the way home.

End Notes

i had to write cliff as a little bit in love with ilya, sorry but not sorry. just like hayden is lowkey in love with shane. those are the rules.

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