

are you loyal to yourself in advance?

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by [byulelle](#)

Summary

“Hollander has a fire lit up under them,” Wiebe agrees, but it isn’t quite enough just yet. They weren’t pushing just to score, they were pushing to widen the gap as much as they could.

“He’s fast,” Rozanov taps his temple. “And has very sharp eye for openings. Very smart with his movements,”

“I’d be weeping if I had someone like that drafted from my team,”

“All I am hearing is that you would make sure Hollander retires in this team,”

Wiebe smirks, “Maybe after a Stanley Cup or two,”

Shane finally goes toe to toe with Montreal under Ottawa's flag. The rookies are scared shitless, and his old team looks worse for wear. It breaks his heart, but there can only be one who holds the Stanley Cup. It wasn't going to be the Metros.

Notes

so, disclaimer, im a hockey newbie so im a by-the-book in terms of rules, and i try to explain as succinct as possible how plays happen without heavy hockey jargon. If you wanna come and womansplain hockey to me, please do! i have watched canucks, ducks, and penguin games, but so far thats all i got so please go easy on me.

Admittedly, Shane hasn't been to Montreal in a while. With his marriage, his parents opting most days within the same vicinity for game nights and brunches, he didn't have much reason to come back. His father still worked in Montreal, but he was so close to retiring anyway. And when David did, he and Yuna would find solace in their cottage, in marital and retirement bliss.

But he knew the city like the back of his hand. And knew the people like his own. So when he sees the 'BRING SHANE HOLLANDER BACK' signs fluttering outside his old apartment building, he couldn't help but ruefully laugh. The city is littered with his face, fervent with demands to have him back. Ottawa and Montreal never had as heated a rivalry compared to other teams before he got traded off.

Thierault had been disgraced, Montreal now demanding their star player back.

"Oh now they want you back, huh?" Zane leans over, looking out the window of the team bus, seated beside him. "Would you? If you had the chance?" he asks as Shane shakes his head.

"No," he mutters, continuing to look out the window, "I had a good run. The way I got fired was an absolute disaster...but I need this also," he turns to face Zane, and the focus of his eyes shifting to Ilya's conked out body on the singular aisles, absolutely knocked out after being rowdy for a whole hour. "Ilya needs this too. It's good for us both,"

"And we need you too," Zane laughs. "Give us a winning chance and everything,"

"I mean you guys were close even without me,"

"You don't have to be all humble about it Hollzy," Zane beams, nudging his side.

"I- I'm really not," he smiles along, taking it for face value as he finally pulls the blinds closed. "Anyway, let's try to get them tonight,"

"Damn right we would!"



"You slept well," Shane chuckles, amused at his husband's face while he smooths out the clothes' wrinkle lines on Ilya's mole-dotted face. "You had your mouth open and everything,"

"Yes, surprisingly comfortable when I travel with you," Ilya admits with a dopey-eyed smile, craning his head back while relishing in his husband's touch. "And not on plane,"

"Yeah, I mean you have a death grip on my hand every time we fly,"

“Sorry,” Ilya shrugs. He isn't, Shane knows that. And he shouldn't be.

“Anyways, we gonna get dinner with the others later or do we have our own thing?” he asks Ilya. It wasn't unusual for them to have off-shoot activities with just *them*. After all, Shane had gotten more comfortable showing affection openly and being alone with Ilya in public in the few months he had joined the Centaurs.

“We should just get take-out from gross health shop you always used to get and talk,” Ilya suggests with a scrunch of his nose as Shane raises a brow.

“Yeah? Talk about what?”

“Talk about Metros. You have been tense since we got here in Montreal,”

Shane presses his lips together, not knowing his shoulders were tensed up as he hesitantly lets go of Ilya. He was sure he was keeping his anxieties under a good mask, but his husband had always been able to read him like an open book—knowing normal from otherwise—and during moments like these, Shane knew he didn't have to pretend he was scared shitless.

“I'm...just worried the nerves would compromise my game. I keep telling myself that it isn't personal. It shouldn't be, it's just hockey politics,”

“Oh but it is personal, sweetheart,” Ilya interjects. “Until few months ago, you were going to retire with Metros,”

Shane sighs, heavy and overwhelmed. “I guess so,”

Ilya smiles, tender and always so accommodating, spreading his arms when he sits on the edge of the bed. Finding himself drawn, deposits himself down Ilya's lap, arms circling around his neck. “Is it bad if I'm still bitter?”

Ilya downturns his lips in a slightly missive pout, “Absolutely not. They are asshole, no use calling it what it is not,”

“But Hayden and J.J...”

Ilya rolls his eyes at the mention of their names, “They are bad players, but smart men. They will live,”

“I know the team like the back of my hand,” Shane lowers his gaze, forehead resting on the crest of Ilya's sternum while his husband gently runs his fingers through his hair. “I— I don't know. I feel wrong, something feels wrong”

“Is probably discomfort,” Ilya mumbles, “You have so little time to process, barely a year before entering Centaurs and now you're going against Metros so soon,” Ilya sagely says, “Your mind has barely caught up, then you are already back on ice on very different terms and environment,”

Shane couldn't help but lift his head and softly smile at Ilya, “Wow...when have you gotten so wise?”

“Hey,” Ilya protests, “I have always been wise, excuse you,”

“Is that what Galina has told you?”

“I tell her almost everything. I could not help myself. Sorry,” he shrugs, and Shane knows its his most insincere yet. And it does help—to put a name on what prickling being is crawling under his skin—discomfort. Longing. Mourning. Bitterness.

“I just feel like it's a little overkill,”

Ilya presses a kiss beneath Shane's eye, “Never,” he whispers, “If there is one thing you deserve after everything...is to not suppress your feelings,”

“Wow, feelings,”

“Moya lyubov, I am trying to help you,” Ilya groans exasperatedly, making Shane chuckle as he tightly clings to him, “I know. I know, and thank you,”

“You ready to play against them?”

A scoff, then, “Absolutely not,”



Troy taps his stick against the ice and Shane swipes it over before Luca could intercept. He slams it into the goal and Evan doesn't have enough momentum to catch the puck as they score.

Ilya, with his arms crossed, watches over the rink while his eyes span over. “They've gotten good,” he hears Brandon step up beside him, hand on his shoulder briefly.

Ilya nods, “Better chemistry with each other,”

“I think he'd eventually need a left winger,”

“Barrett or Hollander?”

“Maybe both, actually,”

Brandon glances at Ilya, unable to hold back from looking him up and down. “You look plucked,”

“What is that?” Ilya asks, brows slightly furrowed when he faces his coach. “You look a little mad,” Brandon points out, “Penny for your thoughts, Rozanov?”

The corner of his mouth tugs up into something like a scowl, not too keen on digging into his feelings right now. “Is nothing. We play against Metros, and we win. Easy,”

“Sure,” Brandon tucks his hands in his pockets, watching Shane pass the puck to Troy who slams it into the net, another assist. “Easy,” he parrots and that's enough to make Ilya crack. Brandon Wiebe knew his seasoned players like the back of his hand, especially his captain, the Ilya he relied on a lot.

“I hate them.”

“Of course you do,”

Ilya sucks in a breath, “No, coach. I *hate* them,” he finally faces him, eyes blazing with pure and unrelenting anger. “Pieces of shit, giving Hollander a hard time. I want to *punch* someone in that team and I cannot because everything I do is going to fall on Shane's back. Especially with them,” Ilya scowls and balls his fists against the boards. “I'm going to kill them,”

Brandon simply stays silent. He'd understood, to some extent, that no matter how professionally Hollander and Rozanov play and interact on the ice, they're *husbands*. They can separate the players from the spouses long enough but when it came to games like these – Ilya was a different beast.

Ilya tried promising himself that he wouldn't ride on the coattails of Shane's anger. That it was his to rightfully feel, all by himself, while Ilya makes sure every assist has a goal, and every shot matters. But love has a funny way of tethering every emotion to you, and for Shane who was a little more relaxed on ice now, it was Ilya who carried the brunt of *anger*.

“They are stupid. Stupid fucking team with a stupid fucking coach,” Ilya mutters more under his breath, accent thickening, “150 goals in three years, the only player with most assists in a singular season, three fucking Stanley Cups. Without him, Montreal is fucking *nothing*,” he seethes.

“They dare make fool of my husband,” his face crumples in distaste, “Drag his name like he had not built Metros from the ground up. They were Shane's life and they treated him like he was *nobody*,” his jaw clenches before finally looking away after rubbing his face. “Maybe I am a little mad,” he admits.

“You don't say,” Brandon dryly responds and takes one good look at him, taking a deep breath. “I cannot blame you. Nobody could,” he starts, “But that's the name of the game we're trying to change, isn't it? To make sure there are no more Shane Hollanders doing their walks of shame off a team just because of who they are,” he reminds Ilya.

He still remembers the energy in the boardroom the moment Shane Hollander's vacancy had opened up. There was momentary hesitation, of course, there always had to be—before the gripping reality of seeing a bright and big star traded to a backwater team settled into a feeling of devastation. And then of hope.

“That's why we wipe Montreal tonight,” Brandon pats his back, “And stand by him when we do it,”

Ilya rigidly nods. He had seen Shane pick up the splintered and fractured pieces of himself throughout the duration of his drafting – always assuring Ilya none of it was his fault, that this was the change of pace he needed, and that maybe it really was time to branch off. And Ilya knew that Shane's veneer of resilience had something crumbling beneath, his poor husband was slow to acclimate himself to change, but time wasn't in his favor, forcing him to take it all in stride.

“You two could do it together,” Brandon says sagely, like he could read Ilya's mind. “At the very least, Shane isn't alone. And you two aren't alone,” Brandon motions towards the ice, where all of his teammates but him ran drills with Shane front and center. “We need to make space for the change we want to see, to make sure there's room for it to take,”

The weight of Brandon's fist gently hitting the spot above Ilya's heart was comforting, “And I promise you, these men have more space to help the both of you with that endeavor,”

With a beat more of silence, Ilya straightens his back. “Bench me first round,”

“You sure?”

“Yes,” he assesses the ice, “Is better. He gets to be center by himself for now, I get to watch. It is his game after all,”

Brandon adjusts the small placeholder magnets on his board, spreading center and wingers out. He could trust Shane and Troy to have baseline chemistry. It wasn't like it was their first time on the ice together, and Zane held up well against Shane's spontaneity better than he ever acclimated to Ilya's play style.

“And where exactly do I put you?”

“Just make sure the power play is going to be complete,” Ilya mutters. Brandon tries not to grimace.

The penalty box wouldn't be empty tonight.



“Why the fuck are they benching Rozanov?” Theriault stands from his seat, eyes coming into contact with Wiebe's as he remains steadfast and calm, arms crossed while he rolled his players out. Rozanov in the bench, eyes fixed right on the ice. Theriault narrows his eyes, “What the fuck are they planning...*calisse*.”

The boos from Montreal was loud, near deafening—which would've put him off, if it wasn't for the fight he had at stake. Rozanov scoffs and stands from the bench, facing the Ottawa audiences as he makes a chomping motion with both his arms, the crowd starting at a lull, until the low, bass-like sounds start getting louder.

Hollander's brow raises, facing Barrett with bewilderment as he scoffs. "Are they—"

"Barking? Yes," Barrett smirks while skating up towards Hollander's right, getting in position, and he motions his head to the right, seeing Rozanov waving his hands like a conductor as the pack of Ottawa fans start sounding like a gaggle of feral, neighborhood dogs. Or Loons.

"What? Why?" Hollander couldn't help but ask with a stuttered laugh. Barrett pats his shoulder, "If the captain tells you to bark for his husband? Bark."

He bites back a smile, ducking down to center ice as he comes face to face with Comeau, now inheriting his 'C' patch. The lineman skates up between them, ready to get this show on the road as Comeau scoffs, "Enjoying your faggot team so far? I see Barrett riding up your ass, bet you like getting banged up like a goddamn slut in that locker room," he says with a grin.

Hollander says nothing. And wins the face-off.

He's quick on his feet, immediately pushing the puck towards Barrett who meets him slide for slide, hooking the puck and immediately being flanked by Dykstra and Chouinard, going low and fast while Hollander darts forward, keeping himself free in the middle.

"Barry!" he hears Boodram make his call, immediately stopping by the blue line, waiting for the puck to reach the right winger. "Hollzy! Hollzy! Let's go!" Bood and Hollander skate forward in tandem, the puck reaching Hollander before Coulliard slams against Boodram.

Hollander makes a shot, blocked by Miitka, only for Boyle to get the puck back, passing it to Barrett then to Hollander who aggressively presses into the puck with a slapshot, skipping against the ice and getting past the goalie. 10 minutes in, one goal for the Cents already.

"Fuck yeah!" Boodram roars and crashes against his teammates, "Let's fucking go boys!" he beams, giving Hollander a loving shove and pat to the helmet. "Atta boy rookie," he teases as Hollander throws his head back, a chuffed laugh escaping him, "Outta my case, Bood,"

"Absolutely not. Let's fucking gettem," Bood shoves his shoulder as they skate back to their positions, Comeau worse for wear as Hollander makes his mouthguard hut out, eyes down on the ice, smile immediately wiped as he faces Comeau.

"Why? You jealous I get game? I can help you to our locker rooms later and nobody would want anything to do with you,"

The puck drops, and Coulliard is immediately on Hollander, checking him hard before Hollander could get a good pass at Boodram. But with the puck momentarily off their sticks, Barrett breaks through, slamming against Koch, snaking it out of his grasp with Dykstra doing the roughing for him, flanking his side.

The chemistry was great, skates were fast, and nobody stopped moving against the ice. Rozanov has his grip tight against the boards, eyes following closely. "Bood is in good condition tonight," he mutters.

“Hollander has a fire lit up under them,” Wiebe agrees, but it isn’t quite enough just yet. They weren’t pushing just to score, they were pushing to widen the gap as much as they could.

“He’s fast,” Rozanov taps his temple. “And has very sharp eye for openings. Very smart with his movements,”

“I’d be weeping if I had someone like that drafted from my team,”

“All I am hearing is that you would make sure Hollander retires in this team,”

Wiebe smirks, “Maybe after a Stanley Cup or two,”

Hollander slams against Koch attempts to steal the puck mid-pass, gaining enough momentum to not fall before he shoves the defenseman away, a little more unrelenting and aggressive as he shoves and the whistles blow, Koch penalized for charging. One player down, Montreal up for a power play once the drop resets.

The Metros have been playing terribly, nearly uncoordinated, fumbling with the pucks with obvious terror in their play. When you only have chirps to hide behind, the moment Hollander gets a pass at you like the goddamn angel of death, it’s over.

“Side! Side!” Hollander calls, intentionally making a wrong call as Barrett and Boodram spread, Boiziau pushing forward to block him before Hollander makes his leg go right, arm reaching out left, intentionally letting the puck bump off Comeau’s momentum before Barrett finally gets a swipe.

He misses the goal, but Dykstra is immediately riding behind the net, checking Wilson and Coulliard before skating faster to the north, sending both players on the floor, an absolute tank before he hands Hollander the puck again from a near court span, immediately backhanding it into the goal and the horns ring.

Another goal for the Centaurs. The frustration on Thierault’s face is obvious, nearly radiating against his other players—now hungry and out for the head of Shane Hollander. There was a reason why Pike was benched for this game. No mercy, no heart.

“Just getting started, ey boys?” Dykstra grins, patting Hollander’s helmet. “I thought these fuckers were supposed to be good, yeah?”

Hollander shrugs, earnest in his assessment, “They’re playing fast and aggressive. There’s no grace and coordination to them since we got the first goal,” he looks up at the scoreboards, a little more of eight minutes into the first quarter. “But they got Dealon on ice, he’s fast. Keep an eye out, right side,”

“Got it Hollzy. We’re gonna go get these guys, ey?”

One of the rookies glance at the alternate captain of the Metros, fiddling with his fingers as he clears his throat. “He’s really good at assists,” he observes. Pike shakes his head, “That’s him playing offensive. He may be the only one making goals for now but once they put Rozanov in that ice we’re done for,”

“But...didn’t they used to be rivals? Even if just on a technicality,” the rookie points out, “They’re opposition since they started. And aren’t they both centers? Shouldn’t we just be cutting in the middle when they play?”

“Rozanov is Hollander’s right winger when they’re both in on ice,” Pike pats the rook’s shoulder, “You’ll see. That’s why Comeau and the other guys should get a goal now before we get deadlocked by 2nd period,” he explains.

“The longer Rozanov stays on that bench, the harder it is to play against him.”

By the end of their first period, they’re at a 2-1, Metros getting in a goal when Dykstra stayed penalized in the box for punching a player who checked Hollander into the boards, an array of neighs and barks accompanying the walk of pride to the box while they play at a deficit.

Wiebe looks up at the boards, nodding at Rozanov. “Get ready. Barrett, to the bench first son,”

Rozanov hops over the boards, the moment his skates hit the ice, the Montreal crowd grows louder with boos and Hollander meets him halfway the center, tapping their sticks together before bumping helmets and lovingly swatting at their chests, where the heart rests. A tradition, a good luck charm.

“Good luck captain,” Shane nods, serious and ready to turn his dial up to a hundred.

“Good luck Hollander. Always on your right,”

“*Я тебя люблю*,” Hollander nods, preparing himself on center ice.

“*Я тебя люблю, Моя любовь*,”

“Jesus...” Barrett mutters from the bench. They’ve seen Shane and Ilya on ice, constant chirps, sticking on home ice and a *lot* of smacks on the ass. And they’ve seen Hollander and Rozanov—*beasts*, apex predators that devoured and rampaged on whatever frozen surface they set their skates on.

Hollander’s speed and intelligence feeding to Rozanov’s offensive and brawns. With a language only the both of them spoke, playing puppeteer to the others on the ice, finding themselves at Hollander’s beck and call. There is nothing more terrifying than two formidable forces once in opposition, now on the same side of the fucking ice.

With his pride on the line, Thierault would never concede to the bloodbath he makes his team endure.

Heigl faces off with Hollander, the rookie too terrified to make a peep, and he could respect that. Not making a singular sound, the puck drops, Hollander wins the face-off and Rozanov is immediately on his feet.

When he has the puck under him, Wilson immediately checks him, pushing Rozanov and taking the puck, “Fucking faggot!” he chirps, baseline and childish as he beams and doesn’t

see Bood coming when he comes in hot, certain to be penalized by charging, not giving a shit when he pushes Wilson on the ice and swipes at him to make sure ice flies across his face.

The minutes tick by, Montreal forced to go in their defensive play when Ottawa had them cornered and pummeled by the offensive. If it wasn't for Bozieu and Renaud, they'd be dead meat. The defenseman and goalie being worked to the bone.

During a rally, with the puck weaving between Rozanov, Chouinard, and Hollander, he is slammed against the boards by Comeau, immediately toppling over the other Centaurs on the bench as Young and Dillon laugh, helping his legs down first rather than pushing him out immediately.

"You good there, H?"

Hollander's mouthguard slips out, latching his incisors against the acrylic with a smile, "Never been better,"

"Go get em tiger," Dillon finally pushes him back out, and the moment his skates hit the ice, he manages to push past Comeau, swiping the puck off him while managing to dodge Boizieu trying to slam against him before essentially scooping the puck up, bringing it over Renaud's leg, sliding it against the west wing, allowing Ilya to get a swipe at the assist before slamming it in the net.

"Hell yeah!" Ilya roars and immediately speeds towards Shane, his husband bracing for impact as they slam against each other's chests. "Fuck yeah baby!"

"Not yet! One more, one more. Bring those fours home!"

Coulliard gets subbed for Pike mid-game, the left winger zipping quickly towards the puck, managing to get it off the scrimmage of bodies, only for Hayes to block its trajectory with his shin. No goals, and the puck is pushed back to Hollander's side.

With the offensive right in the defense line, Pike checks him, slamming down against him as the puck slips to Rozanov but the fighting doesn't stop when Hollander huff, "Are we really doing this?"

"Absolutely, take your fucking gloves off,"

Hollander strips his gloves and drops his stick, going toe to toe with Pike as he throws the first punch and immediately has his rocker hit, both of them caught in each other's punches and blows—the anger, hidden resentments, all in contention between them.

"You enjoying yourself buddy?" Pike beams as he takes another swipe at Hollander, making him laugh.

"You should try it some time. Being in a team with your husband,"

"Yeah, well Rozanov kinda stole my work husband under my nose so," Pike hooks his arm against Hollander's neck, locking him before the linemen finally intervene. He lets go, not

one to truly hurt Shane. He just missed him, and seeing him on the opposite side of the rink did sting.

“Miss you buddy,” Pike picks his gloves up, “See you for brunch tomorrow?”

“Yeah,” Hollander nods before Rozanov finally skates closer, “10:30?” he asks, interjecting with a grin as Pike scoffs.

“Wipe that smug ass smile off your goddamn mouth, Rozanov. Fuck off,”

“Ah-ah, swear jar,”

Pike shakes his head and skates back to his side of the rink, the play reset. However, with Montreal’s only buffer back in his line, no mercy befalls any other person. In this game, Pike and Boizieu were untouchable by virtue of sheer grace from Hollander.

Anyone else?

Free game.

The time continues as the skidding of skates sound sharply on the ice, a lot of checking, a lot of scrums. But Koch as another fight in mind, “So when are disqualifications by spreading of AIDS going to happen for the Cents, eh?”

Hollander doesn’t immediately react, simply narrowing his eyes as he offers the puck to Boodram, pacing himself before charging against Koch and making sure he’s slammed into the ice, a sharp gasp knocked over the defenseman as Dykstra and Chouinard essentially help jump him while he’s down. Rozanov curses under his breath, not quite joining yet but trying to pull Hollander away, fists flying amongst his teammates.

Once the penalties are doled out, Hollander, Dykstra, and Chouinard sit in the bench—Haas joining Rozanov at the helm at the bare minimum of a 5-for-3 when Boodram gets subbed. They couldn’t leave an open goal, the pair fighting on ice just with the two of them.

With Rozanov carrying the puck, he doesn't stop even when two defensemen try to corner him, their bodies colliding when Ilya swipes to the left, after ensuring that Troy was right there. The Metros crash against the ice, and he doesn't bother to stop as he shoulder checks another that had been waiting to get a strike on him.

Body like a solid brick wall, the Metros seem winded at just how aggressively strong he was. A fortress, not succumbing to fights which in itself was surprising, but also being so solidly impenetrable. Never in going against the Russian Terror have they actually seen him play the Shane Hollander way. Focused, legalistic, and too fucking strong.

“Man...” Chouinard watches with a smile between his mouth guard, watching Rozanov practically rip both Metros off him, the linemen making sure he is left alone with no indication he was willing to scrum against the low-lives he knew the Metros to be. “He's heavy handed today,”

“Never seen him play like that, ever,”

“Maybe you really were the buffer from preventing this beast out the ice,”

“I wouldn't try to stop him now,” Hollander smirks, “Don't you think it's cute how he defends my honor?”

Dykstra could hardly believe it as he listens to his teammate. *Cute?* Rozanov had sent down half of what Thierault had deployed on the ice on their backs and he didn't even dignify it with a scrimmage. Dogwalking every Metros winger like it wasn't charged by pure rage. Without Hollander on the ice, he was fueled by nothing but the foreboding sense of ego.

Of pride.

Of *loyalty*.

“He's getting piled on,”

“Well no shit Nicky, he has the puck,” Dykstra comments.

Hollander slips his mouth guard on, standing, the two minutes finally lapsing in thirty seconds as one of the referees hold the gate.

Twenty-nine, eight, seven, six.

He sees Rozanov try to get a shot in, the puck solidly hitting the metal frame but not quite a goat Miitka manages to swipe off his stick, a loud curse echoing through Rozanov's trajectory, catching up to reclaim the puck.

...five, four, three, two, one.

The gate opens and Hollander takes off into a running start, relentless and fast. “Влево! Сдвиньте в середину!” *To your left! Let's move middle!*

Rozanov immediately catches up, both of them in separate sides of the rink and getting swarmed, but Hollander manages to scoop it up before Comeau's stick manages to get a swipe at it as he makes a fakeout wrist shot only for him to take such a sharp turn back it trips Wilson with lost of momentum trailing him.

While skating backward, Rozanov serves as defense for him, uncharacteristically cautious to not check anyone while giving Hollander a wide enough berth to have him take the shot. With a flick of his stick, the puck comes flying and it zips past the goalie's face, over the shoulder as the horns ring.

5-2 at the very last second of the 2nd period.

Their best power play is barely realized yet.



Intermission rolls in, the fifteen-minutes starting when all the players file in their respective benches and sides, taking a break while Wiebe watches the clips from earlier, drafting up a new strategy.

Shane taps the water bottle against the side of Ilya's leg, a grateful smile offered by his husband. "We're a little short on the right angle of the throughline," Shane says, pointing towards center, down to a small offset of a degree. "The shot would go over the crease if I put it in like that,"

"Yes, so you move a little backward, I do the angling," Ilya nods, agreeing with his husband. "Will take a few more shots, yes? You would look like idiot who cannot score a goal, but better than them,"

"Oh fuck off, without my assists you wouldn't have goals," Shane fondly rolls his eyes, giving his husband a gentle shove. "Their new goalie has promise, huh?"

"What is his name...uh, Robertson, yes?" Ilya pins his eyes on their opposite side, "He is good at anticipating shots. Not fast enough yet, but very smart,"

"I think flashy shots is the name of the game when it's him," Shane suggests. Ilya nods, still a little rigid from the tension as his husband looks at him up and down, then over his shoulder before scooting closer and bumping their shoulders. "Hey..." Shane softly says, "You alright?"

"Are you?" Ilya asks, hand on his husband's knee. "You seem okay. Did the fight with Hayden help?"

"Yeah, it actually did," Shane places his hand atop Ilya's, "You didn't answer my question,"

Ilya sighs, laying his head against his husband's shoulder, staring at the horizon, the opponent's keen eyes zeroed on them. "I do not like the way they speak to you,"

"It happens. We're in hockey."

"Maybe I am just...mad on your behalf. I cannot help it and I would not do anything to change that," Ilya mumbles. "What do you want me to do?" he frowns, looking up at Shane helplessly before his husband turns his head, their faces so close together. The gears were turning in his head, Ilya knew whenever he started processing things, the different glints in his eyes.

"Whaveter you wanna do," Shane finally responds, as if confirming and enabling Ilya to release all the tension and anger. "Just don't get a concussion or any career-ending shit you got up here," he sneaks a small peck on Ilya's forehead/. He'd been hesitant about PDA for the longest time ever, but just this once, he wouldn't hesitate.

"Okay," Ilya smiles and lifts his head from Shane's shoulder. "I make bet. Whoever has the most checks against Montreal puts on the cock ring ton—"

“Ilya!” Shane’s ears turn red, cheeks flushing further. “Christ, not *here!*”

“But you agree to my wager, yes?”

Shane stands, heading to Wiebe after a small, “Sure,” escapes his lips in a breath and that makes him beam like a devious school boy caught vandalizing. An absolute delight.



“Kimmy, you're up,” Thierault rubs the bridge of his nose.

Jeoffrey Kimmy. Star rookie that had his heart broken to know his life long idol was gay. He'd been dashed by the fact that Hollander was, in fact, dating Rozanov. And that he was just allowed to do that.

And Thierault knew he was deploying a dirty strategy. But he refused to lose to Wiebe and his ragtag team of gays and fathers, the legacy of Montreal heavy on his shoulders as he narrowly glares at the ice.

The play continues for the third period, and after face off, Kimmy proves formidable on ice, his huge body an advantage against Hollander and Barrett by sheer mileage alone.

“Barrett!” Shane calls, managing to evade him by an inch, making a pass for him to take as Barrett swipes the puck, veering to the right sharply before Kimmy slams against him, sneakily digging his stick in his skate and stretching the space just enough to twist his ankle.

The play stops, whistle blowing as Hollander immediately pushes Kimmy off Barrett, removing his gloves. “Troy! Troy, fuck! You okay buddy?!”

“He got my fucking ankle,” Barrett winces as Hollander immediately helps him up, noticing the limp now present on his stride.

Not a misconduct, and it *looks* like an accident. Five minutes in the box, and the horror settles on both Hollander and Wiebe. This was Thierault’s strategy? To slowly incapacitate players until the advantage was drained from the ice. Three minutes in, and they were already down a powerful right winger.

“Is that not supposed to be a removal of the opponent too? He stucked him!” Wiebe argues against the referee who just argues back that it was a simple misdemeanor. No intent, apparently because its how Kimmy immediately backs away, no scrimmage.

With his teeth grit and watching as Barrett gets hauled off to Terry, he gathers his players. “If he's going to stay on ice, who knows what he'll do. *Be careful.* Play apart, if you could.”

Dirty players were frustrating, and especially one the linemen and referees would have a habit of defending. In Wiebe’s mind, maybe the reason the rookie wasn't deployed all the

time was because they needed incapacitation. He was a contingency plan.

The period continues, 17 more minutes in the clock as Hollander and Rozanov nod at each other, making sure the Metros won the face off. Was it a backward strategy? Yes. But something only they could pull off. With Dykstra and Chouinard handling the puck, they move board-side.

“I want a slap shot across. Do not make it if it is not sure to come to me or net,” Rozanov murmurs against Hollander for a brief moment, only audible to their bench as they start moving fast again. “Верно! Верно!”

“Rozanov cannot possibly expect Hollander to make that shot!” Young protests but Wiebe simply holds out a hand to calm him down.

Wiebe knows it's a hard maneuver. It's not a power play and he didn't anticipate a monster of a player such as Kimmy. He played dirty, and had already cost him one player. He was sure to go after Hollander and Rozanov next.

“They'll work it out,” he offers, and Young gives him a disbelieving scoff. “You know what made their rivalry good? It's because neither of them backed down from what the other had to offer,” he takes a deep breath. He was nervous too. If the linemen would keep on siding with calls against Kimmy, there was no knowing until when he runs out of players to put on the ice.

But he had to trust them.

“They aren't prodigies for no reason. They didn't serve as captains for no reason. Hollander still holds the highest points per player, and Rozanov is not yet dethroned for his goal count,” he says, as if statistics would calm him down. “And they trust each other, nobody but them would be able to pull it off,”

Kimmy's presence on the ice proved to be their biggest obstacle. The size was not anything to scoff at, a clear advantage to have a center his size. But taking their coach's words as gospel, they're spread out, only closing in on each other to avoid offside shots.

With his teeth grit, Hollander avoids another shot to the goal, passing the puck to Dykstra again, Haas right on his tail as his intuition tells him to look back. “Haas! Behind you!”

With enough force, Haas manages to swipe sideways, heart pounding to see Kimmy skate past him, a clear attempt to also disarm him. The clock keeps running, slowly dipping down for a chance of an overtime.

Which cannot happen because that was basically bending over to what the Metros wanted, a chance to keep up. It's already at a 5-4 with how defensive the play is, so close to a tie.

At three minutes trickling down the clock, Hollander's arms are locked, tense, and trying to find an opening. Briefly, his eyes meet Rozanov's, a glint of something as he quickly spans his gaze. Then a tap of his stick.

In Hollander's mind, it doesn't make sense. He's flanked, with a very slim space between legs and blades. Within his angle and position, he's close to being deadlocked.

They talked about in one night out. *"If I tap it twice it means pass," Ilya suggests while Shane has his hands intertwined, the late night settling down on the streets of Ottawa, the alcohol shaken off their systems while walking.*

"Yeah? And three?"

"Pass to the left, or if the opportunity calls for it, pass to anyone but me,"

"And what about one tap?"

Hollander twists his stick, letting the puck off contact for just nearly a second and a half, poised to pass the puck to Rozanov as Montreal doesn't bother to look as he runs through, facing him who also fakes maneuvering a puck in his stick.

The moment they realize Hollander didn't leave without the puck, it's too late. Rozanov has created a wide enough space—a singular chance for Hollander to nail it before he slams his stick into the puck, sound echoing throughout the arena before darting into the net.

"One of Hollander's fastest slapshots yet, Ottawa taking the score!" the color commentator's voice booms with excitement, Ottawa off their feet as 30 seconds finally clock in, another goal as the time runs out. "It's not their first brush with the playoffs since Troy Barrett but by god have they finally conquered Montreal!"

"Yeah!" Ilya immediately tears his helmet off, dropping his gloves and stick as he surges towards Shane, stripping off his helmet and latching their lips together, caught in the jumbotron while a mixture of sweat and tears coat Shane's cheeks.

"Sweetheart!" Ilya laughs, pure delight surging through his veins, "We won, moya lyubov! We won!"

"Outta my way!" Zane shoves Ilya off Shane, the boys piling onto him so much he drowns in the sea of sweaty, heavy, and boisterous players, cheers and barks coming from the smaller Ottawa crowd as the lights flash in victory.

"Fuck yeah! Hollzy! Hollzy! Hollzy!" Zane starts and the rest of them continue the chant, celebrating on ice as Shane cranes his head to see Ilya, fondly smiling over the crowd of their teammates, pride written all over his face and finally a real smile since they've started playing.

Vindication. His very reason to start anew, and to start with fire under his skates.



With no Monk's in Montreal, they had to make do with a subsidiary of Kingfisher, The Cardinal, not quite a gay bar, but it had enough of a reputation to deter any Metros associated with players or fans.

As they occupy the entire back half, Ilya raises his stein, patting his husband's back. "To our victory!" the men cheer and bump their steins and bottles against each other's. "And to wiping the fucking ice with Metros!"

"To wiping the ice with the Metros!"

The adrenaline is buzzing, the thrill of a win finally settling in as the chatter grows. Especially for Shane who was still flushed, even more so now with alcohol in his system as he takes another chug of his Corona Light.

"Congratulations on the winning shot, son," Brandon Wiebe approaches, patting his head with a beaming smile. "How are we feeling?"

"Is it bad if I say I feel absolutely no sympathy for them?" Shane beams, a little sheepish and all too earnest.

Brandon simply chuckles and stands beside him, "Well, it can't always be about them, couldn't it?"

"Yeah. Yeah it can't coach," Shane nods in agreement, slightly twisting his bottle. It was cathartic, to be able to face his old team proudly, able to send a message that their biggest mistake was providing an opportunity in which Shane Hollander is teamed up with Ilya Rozanov. His rival, his love, his *husband*.

"I gotta ask, did you and Ilya have that planned out long before? Your winning shot, I mean,"

Shane couldn't help but laugh, a sense of lightness unshrouding his chest, "It was our first time deploying it on the ice,"

"What?" Wiebe looks at him, shocked. "Not even during drills?"

"Well, we've talked about it. Mildly tipsy and after a night out, it sounded cool so we were going to practice it eventually. We knew how it would've worked, *theoretically*, just not how it would actually look like on ice,"

A surprised, breathless scoff comes from Wiebe, disbelief painted over his face as he laughs. "Well...I'll be damned. And you still managed to pull it off,"

"Honestly from my perspective it looked a little impossible," he finally admits. "But I trust him and the calls he makes,"

He doesn't know if it's barely half the drink he'd already consumed, but something warm and tender settles in Brandon's chest, a gentle realization that within the center of Shane's hockey world, was also his husband. Blind trust with a move they haven't even practiced and yet it was pulled off with such efficacy it won them the game.

What skill and what absolute chemistry.

“What are we talking about here?” Ilya finally squeezes himself in the conversation, hooking his arm roughly around Shane, slightly knocking the wind out of his husband before receiving a firm and loving smack to his side. They settle not long after, an arm around Shane's shoulder, and a hand on Ilya's waist.

Brandon simply shakes his head and smiles, “Just how proud I am of you all. Keep it up,” he says with a nod. “And keep practicing that maneuver. It's gonna be the next big thing for other players,” he advises before reconvening with the other boys.

“Did you really think I could've pulled it off?” Shane looks up at Ilya.

“No. I made gamble,”

“Oh fuck you!”

“Yes, yes. Was very thrilling to deceive you and other players,” he sarcastically says with rolled eyes. “Of course I knew, Shane. Who else could actually do that?”

“You,”

“Well, yes.” Ilya shrugs “But I did not have puck,”

Shane gently pinches Ilya's side, eliciting an exaggerated yelp from his husband. “I won the pool, by the way. Turns out being whole parts gay helps,”

“No way, Comeau and Kimmy got boxed checking me,”

“Sure but I had the puck most of the time. Count how many I would've gotten,”

“Is nothing to be proud of,” Ilya grumbles.

“Yeah, well I still win,” Shane grins and pats his pocket—cock ring nestled deep against his thigh. “Shall we?”

“Since when did you have that?”

“Since we got in the car,”

“Shane!”

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