

a simple man

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by [writer_in_theory](#)

Summary

“What does it fucking matter?”

The voice is more familiar like this, in the brief burst of anger that came with those words. David had heard it on TV and in videos on his phone countless times over the last decade. He may not have put it together, except this entire hotel was reserved specifically for the All-Star teams and their families, and there weren't many Russians in attendance except for-

David's son was secretly dating Ilya Rozanov.

--

Or, why David was so calm when the rest of the world found out about Shane and Ilya.

Notes

anyone else remember when this was going to be one singular oneshot? yeah, me too.

David Hollander was a simple man.

He enjoyed hockey but was never good enough to play it professionally. He was proud of his job and the good work he'd done to help the people of Ottawa. He sometimes missed the thrill of the game, but it was okay because he could watch his son live their mutual dream instead. He adored his wife with everything he had and he would give everything to see her happy. He enjoyed a good pour of vodka and he was willing to pay an exorbitant amount of money for it. He loved to drive his car for the gentle rumble of the engine and the cool leather of the wheel under his hands. His son was his life's greatest achievement.

Not because of hockey.

The hockey was a plus, and certainly the dedication that his son put into it made David all the more proud, but it wasn't what cemented Shane at the top of the podium of David's life. No, it was because Shane was *good*. He was kind, almost impossibly so. He was loyal to a fault, even when that loyalty got himself hurt. David's son felt everything so much, loved people with *everything* he had every time. Shane was a horrible liar, a testament to the earnest honesty that he lived his life by.

Which was how David knew that he was hiding something.

It started when Shane called to let him and Yuna know that Rose was now just a friend, and Yuna could stop "secretly" looking at wedding magazines.

"We just, uh, we aren't *compatible*," Shane told them, coughing over the word like stifling it may make the blow land easier.

"Is it the distance? As much as you love the Metros, we could look at teams on the west coast," Yuna tried, ever the problem-solver. There was no puzzle that Yuna could not solve, no obstacle that she could not clear. Yuna Hollander was a force to be reckoned with, and David was proud to stand by her side.

"Mom, what? No, I'm a Metro for life," Shane said. *Loyal to a fault, always.*

"These things don't always work out," David supplied, reaching out to save his son from having to explain what he clearly didn't want to. "It sounds like it was a mutual choice."

"It was," Shane agreed. "Rose and I are gonna be friends."

"If you need to take the morning to process, it would be okay. You don't have to go to every optional practice."

"No, I'm okay, really. I just want to get back to how things were before."

They continued to talk over the phone for a few minutes, but David could hardly pay attention as he considered what Shane said. The two of them seemed really happy. They'd dated for *months*, even. David knew from experience that it wasn't something that someone could get over in a day.

No, Shane was hiding something.

His son tended to do that. He'd tuck his feelings in close, hiding them away for safe keeping. Shane would wait for a safe place where he could bring them back out one-by-one to study and process them alone. Sometimes it worked. After all, he had Yuna's fiery spirit that refused to let anything get in their way.

Then there were times like when Shane was sixteen and his breath escaped him for so long that David thought that his son might fall over and die right then and there.

The moment had come out of nowhere—in one instant they went from having a casual family dinner the night before Shane was meant to fly out to his first International Prospects Cup, and the next Shane was gripping his chest as it heaved with every breath he failed to take in. David would never forget the look of pure fear his son had given him then; the beautiful brown eyes he'd gotten from his mother, wide with terror and wet with tears. He had no idea what to do, had really only vaguely heard the term 'panic attack' in a brochure about mental health from work, but he knew that his son was hurting. All he could do was fall from his chair to crouch in front of Shane's, hands holding onto his son's cheeks firmly as he tried to talk him through it.

Take a breath with me, Shane, okay? You can do it, bud, that's it. Your mother and I are so proud of you, no matter what happens in this Cup. How about another breath for me, Shane? We love you, it doesn't take a gold medal to win us over. One more breath, you're doing great. See? Overachieving even at this. There's the Shane Hollander I know, thank you for coming back to us. Do you want to talk about what happened?

Yuna may be the planner, the achiever, the manager, but David knew he could protect his family. He didn't know how to protect his son from his own mind, but he'd sure as hell try.

So he started to take notice of the small things. When Shane's shoulders stayed tense through entire lunches despite him laughing and talking like normal. When his lunches went from salmon and salad to half of a chicken breast on quinoa, because 'it was the day before a game, Dad'. When his son's eyes glazed over with the fresh unshed tears he knew that Shane wasn't aware of.

David Hollander knew when his son was suffering.

And right now? Dealing with a break-up the week before the All-Star Game? Shane was suffering.

So David planned.

It was supposed to be a nice surprise.

Shane had told him and Yuna that it was fine they were going on vacation at the same time as the All-Star Game, even though this would be the first one in nearly a decade that they missed. Even though they asked, David knew that Shane would never really give them the real answer if he were disappointed. He may be a bad liar, but he was good at pretending, at

stuffing those negative emotions away from where others could see them. He really was David's son in that way.

So David got on a plane and flew to Tampa from the house he and Yuna were staying at in Mexico. It would just be for a day, but he was sure his son would appreciate seeing a familiar face, especially after having to work with some of the more...*challenging* personalities in the MLH.

He got in late enough that he missed the game entirely, but David hoped his son would forgive him for that. They could spend the night in his hotel room, spending way too much money on room service and watching old tapes of hockey games from when David was a kid just like they'd done when Shane was a teenager and David had taken him to all of his international tryouts. It would be like old times, before the weight of being the MLH's golden boy was dropped on his shoulders.

David never meant to eavesdrop.

He had his hand raised, nearly about to knock on the hotel door when the voice rang out clearly from the other side of it.

"Bullshit!" Shane. He was angry at someone, someone in his hotel room this late at night.

David told himself it wasn't eavesdropping if he was making sure that Shane was safe, that he wasn't being hurt by someone else. Had Rose surprised him here too? Were they arguing about the recent break-up?

There was nothing for a few moments, or maybe it was too low for him to hear, until-

"Okay, so you're gay! So what?"

That wasn't Shane. The voice had a Russian accent, and was definitely masculine. A Russian man was in Shane's room at night, yelling that he was-

David's face burned at the realization of what he'd stumbled across. It *was* a lover's spat, but it had nothing to do with Rose Landry.

"Well it's kind of a big deal! To me at least. Sorry if I'm being boring again."

Shane was gay.

The thought rattled around in David's chest, like it was trying to find something jagged and hateful to land on. All it found was the distinct worry for Shane. Not because he was gay, but because he was still hurting. Because Shane still loved deeply and completely, and here he was having secret conversations in the middle of the night in hotel rooms, with a man that he couldn't share with anyone else in the world.

God, how his son must be hurting.

David found himself rooted to the spot, unable to move away from the door when he knew his son was on the other side of it, in pain and unable to do anything about it.

He even keeps his love close to his chest now, in that safe place where all the hurt goes.

“What does it fucking matter?”

The voice is more familiar like this, in the brief burst of anger that came with those words. David had heard it on TV and in videos on his phone countless times over the last decade. He may not have put it together, except this entire hotel was reserved specifically for the All-Star teams and their families, and there weren't many Russians in attendance except for-

“Because Russia! I would not be able to go back to Russia!”

David's son was secretly dating Ilya Rozanov.

David lowered his hand, still raised as though he could still knock on the door and announce he was there. No, this conversation, whatever it was meant to be, was more important than whatever surprise comfort David had tried to bring.

Shane was hurting, but he didn't need his dad. No, that night, he needed Ilya Rozanov.

And as long as there was someone there for Shane, David was okay.

It was obvious watching the Montreal-Boston match-up only weeks later.

David didn't know how he never saw it before, watching the chemistry that Shane and Rozanov shared despite being on either side of the puck. This wasn't the heat of a decade-long rivalry, no, this was something else entirely.

That smile, the one Shane gave to Rozanov as the Russian won the face-off and took off down the ice, that was one that came straight from David. It was one he remembered giving Yuna, when they were young university students freshly in love before he ever really understood what that word meant.

Then Rozanov went down on the ice, and the entire stadium roared.

Rozanov didn't get back up.

“Looked like a clean hit,” David said, as if to tell himself. “That's too bad. You hate to see that.”

It's simple, lowkey. It's everything opposite from the words still rattling in his chest, from the yelled confessions that David knew he wasn't supposed to have heard. Because if he said anything else, then he'd compare Rozanov to Yuna again, and if he had to picture Yuna laying there motionless on the ice while he is unable to do anything but stand there and watch-

So David kept it simple. And he sipped his nice expensive vodka because if he was busy with that then he wouldn't have to see his son clutching his secret love's motionless chest and *begging* for him to wake up, to be okay, to come back and it's all too reminiscent of the night Shane's breathing stuttered out, and David was kilometers away and all he could do was

watch and drink and pray that his son's love was not killed in front of him, that his son's breathing wouldn't give out again, that *Shane and Rozanov would be okay*.

"David," Yuna called out. At first he thought it was because she noticed his panic, but when he turned all he saw was Shane's fearful eyes reflected back to him on Yuna's face. "David, what do we do?"

Yuna was always the planner. David was always the protector.

Except David was too far away to protect his son from the rest of the world, and Yuna was too scared for her son to have a plan.

So David does the only thing he can think to do: he made a plan.

"He'll be at the hospital. Give him time to answer. He will."

He'll be at the hospital, waiting at the bedside of his secret love. His secret love that isn't so secret anymore, now that it was revealed to the world in the cruelest of ways. David was sure he would never get that terror-filled shout of Rozanov's name out of his head, that he would hear it in his nightmares that night.

God, his son was so afraid, and he couldn't do anything to help him.

"He didn't tell us. He didn't trust us," Yuna said, voice cracking with the cries she obviously held back.

Maybe he truly could help Shane, in this one small way.

Because Yuna hadn't heard the pieces of conversation he had. She didn't know about all the guilt and fear Shane had, how much emotion had gone into simply admitting the truth to even the man he was secretly seeing.

That boy had always been under so much pressure. They never intentionally placed it on him. In fact, Shane often had the loftiest expectations for himself and the harshest consequences for when he didn't reach them.

Even from the beginning, Shane never gave himself a break. As soon as he learned how to tie his skates on his own, he'd disappear to the pond for hours until David or Yuna had to urge him back inside for dinner. He'd cry and get angry when he messed up, no matter how miniscule the mistake was. He'd think about it for weeks and would let it affect his mood for even longer.

Shane would tuck away the pieces of himself he deemed imperfect in the pursuit of being the golden boy, of being *their* golden son.

And they'd let him.

David had been concerned, yes, but had he done anything about it other than stand back and wait for the fallout? He could repair the pieces, could shuffle the hurt and ache away once they became inescapable, but had he ever tried to prevent it in the first place? He'd tried to

tell Shane that he was too hard on himself, but had he ever made it clear how little he cared if Shane was perfect?

Shane was living the dream he'd had since he was a kid, the dream that David had had as a kid, yes, but that was not why David was proud of him. It was for every ounce of goodness that Shane held onto, even under the crushing weight of all of those impossible expectations they'd done nothing to shake away.

"What do you always tell that boy about jumping to conclusions?" David finally told Yuna, because he couldn't tell her what he actually thought of the issue. He couldn't say, *Yuna, of course he was scared to tell us. This could change everything for him. When was the last time we talked about something that didn't involve his hockey career?* "You know how Shane is. He...needs to have all the answers for himself first. He probably needed time, and this wasn't in whatever Yuna Hollander-style plan he had built up."

Okay, so you're gay! So what?

Well it's kind of a big deal! To me at least.

Shane needed time, time that he no longer had. Now, Rozanov was being carted off to the hospital with a head injury bad enough to knock him unconscious for at least a minute. David had seen injuries with shorter losses of consciousness do irreparable damage.

What would happen if Shane's Rozanov was hurt that badly?

David grabbed his keys as resolve settled over his shoulders like a cape.

David would be there for his son, that's what would happen.

There was an injured Russian hockey star in David's son's childhood bedroom.

It still felt like a whirlwind, the entire sequence of events that led to Ilya Rozanov being shuttled back to their home in Ottawa, asleep in the backseat of their car with David's old sunglasses over his eyes to protect from the sunlight.

Since before their rookie season.

Maybe Shane wasn't as bad of a liar as David initially thought, if he'd been able to hide this from them for almost a decade. Really, it would've stayed a secret to everyone but David for longer if it weren't for that unfortunate hit on the ice.

Rozanov was lucky to be as okay as he was.

David was not particularly religious. He had no issue, but simply did not find the every day comfort in it that many others did. Still, he found himself in bed that night, hands clasped together as he thanked whoever was listening for protecting Rozanov and therefore his son's heart.

Because Shane was more than just having secret rendezvous at All-Star Games with Rozanov, he *loved* him the way that David loved Yuna. He loved him with everything he had, and maybe even more.

The first day, Rozanov understandably stayed in Shane's bedroom. David could still recall the concussion he'd had in university, when he'd been laid up in bed for days with a pounding head that was made worse by light, and noise, and moving, and really anything at all that came with general consciousness. It was painful, and it was incredibly lonely.

That was why David brought two plates of lunch upstairs to Shane's old bedroom, he told himself. It was because he didn't want the other man to be lonely, and not because he was desperately curious about why it was Rozanov that Shane fell for.

The man had a very specific persona out on the ice, and even off of it. He could be brash, and rude, and he was in more than one gossip blog for all of the women he'd been with over the years. None of this added up to someone Shane would love, someone he would risk everything he'd spent his life working toward for, and yet he had.

So David knocked gently on the doorframe so as to not agitate Rozanov's head, and he padded through the dimmed room to the bed tucked away in the corner by the window with the closed curtains. He handed a plate over to Rozanov—who looked a little more as though he were handing him boxing gloves instead—then sat down on the old office chair left behind by the desk Shane used to do his homework at.

"How are you feeling?" David asked, making sure to keep his voice low.

"I am okay." Rozanov still watched him like one might watch a tiger, as though he expected David to attack the moment he looked away.

"It's okay if you're not. That was one of the worst hits I've seen in quite awhile."

"I am okay." It was like having this conversation with his own son, with the way Rozanov insisted on hiding the clear pain he must've been in.

"Did you know Shane broke his wrist when he was 8?"

Okay, so that made Rozanov look even more nervous. *Just hold with me, Rozanov.*

"That stubborn kid hid it from us for two days. When we finally found out, Yuna was distraught. I mean, that drive to the hospital was nothing but yelling because neither of us could believe what that kid was thinking. You know what he told us in the waiting room?"

"What?"

"He hid it because he didn't want to miss hockey practice." David breathed out a laugh, then grinned as he heard Rozanov's startled laugh of his own. "I mean, sports aren't life-altering at that age yet. There's no contracts, or scouts, or international call-ups. One missed practice wouldn't have affected anything, but to Shane it would've been the end of the world. Hockey's always been that for him."

“Why are you telling me?”

To the point.

David nodded, setting down his fork so Rozanov would understand how much he meant this. “He was willing to sit out of a playoff game for you, Ilya. He loves you.”

“Will this be a problem?”

Oh, there was a flash of anger in Rozanov’s eyes, and maybe some fear too. Even now he was trying to protect Shane, would be willing to defend him even while laid up in bed injured.

‘What does it fucking matter?’

“I’m sure you know Shane doesn’t like to talk about how he feels. All I’m saying is that this? Us having to coerce him to go play in the playoffs? I don’t think he’s ever cared for anyone the way he cares for you. That makes you important to us.”

Rozanov didn’t say anything back. Honestly, David didn’t expect anything from him. He knew it was a lot, throwing this on the man while he was recovering, but Shane didn’t date often, if at all. His entire life had been devoted to hockey, to being the perfect player at all times. So the one person who was able to disrupt all of it without him or Yuna even knowing?

Yeah, David wanted to know him, too.

David couldn’t breathe.

Watching the Metros play always made him nervous. It was a simple fact that Shane was a star player, a generational talent that took over a lot of the attention from the media. He was strong, too, from years of extensive training and strenuous workout routines, but Shane was still on the smaller side for a center. It was easy for the other guys to land a hit that would be carried away in a deep bruise for days after the game. Usually, though, Shane had plenty of teammates around who were always willing to go to bat for their captain.

“They do not protect him.”

Shane was on an island tonight.

He was getting pummeled left and right, shoved against the boards so hard it made David’s own shoulders ache from muscle memory. It was a wonder Shane was able to stay out on the ice, a testament to how much this game truly meant to him.

“They hope he gets hurt, because he is gay.”

David wasn’t stupid. He also wasn’t innocent, either. He’d played the game for years, he’d been a part of those locker room chats and those particularly callous chirps to the players that got under his skin the most. He’d thrown around some hateful words, *that word* in particular, the one now that turned his tongue to ash at the mere thought of saying ever again.

He knew what those players would be calling his son under their breath. He knew what word lay underneath his dirty hit and the lack of a fight that came after.

David knew that word, and he couldn't breathe.

He didn't remember leaving the room, but suddenly David was in the kitchen, pulling his vodka out from the freezer where Ilya had placed it the last time they'd shared a glass. He still wasn't confident that the other man was cleared to drink alcohol yet considering the head injury, but it was too nice to have someone else to share in this with to really think about it too much.

"Shane is okay."

Speak of the devil.

It was a testament to how comfortable Ilya had become that he wordlessly grabbed a glass and slid it across the island for David to give him a pour. David did though, as he always would for anyone who could appreciate it and not tease him for the amount of money he invested in this hobby.

David gripped his glass tight enough he feared it might shatter, picturing the amount of bruising that would litter his son's skin after this game. "It's game 1 of 7. They'll kill him by the end of it and we can't do a damn thing about it."

"Hollander won't let them. He would miss too much hockey if it happened." Ilya smirked over his glass at the startled sound that came from David. "Yuna is researching new teams. She says Ottawa needs center."

"Ottawa needs a whole new team."

"That is what I tell her, yes."

"He just..." David sighed, sagging enough to rest his forearms on the island, glass abandoned in front of his hands. "He's never really fit in on any team he's been on. He's always been too talented, too disciplined, too quiet....too *Shane*. Then he finally finds one that's like his second family, and what do they do? They leave him behind, they hurt him, for what? Because of..."

David made eye contact with Ilya, who was giving him that cautious look that he hadn't seen since that second day here. "Because of me."

"No," David corrected, firm but kind. "Because of that *word*, because they're worried he'll..., because they're fucking scared. And I can't do a damn thing to fix it."

"You are. Fixing it. Yuna and you are not scared."

"Oh, I'm terrified," David admitted, finishing off his glass. "As a father, you only want what's best for your kid. We couldn't have a second kid. While we were sad about that, we tried to focus on making Shane the best person he could be. I think we've done a good job of that."

David smiled as Ilya nodded his assent.

“But despite that, he’s still hurting. He’s hurting so much and I can’t protect him from it anymore.”

“You are not like many fathers.” The statement was simple, but said enough. Ilya hadn’t told him anything outright, but David could read between the lines enough to know that when he said his father could be strict, it meant *harsh*.

David squeezed his glass even harder at the thought of what Ilya’s own family must have put him through.

“Shane is lucky to have father like you.”

“Ilya, you know you have us too,” David told him. If it weren’t such a serious moment, he might have laughed at the startled look on the normally well-composed man in front of him. “You’re important to Shane, that makes you family.”

It looked a little like Ilya might break down and cry, if David said any more on the subject. He’d almost brought up the fact that he knew, that he’d known for weeks before the rest of the world did. He wanted to say how much it meant that Shane had trusted him enough to finally say those words aloud, the ones that had been haunting David’s son for...well, for years. He would’ve, if it weren’t for the already tenseness in Ilya’s jaw as he fought down his hurt in a way only Shane knew how to do with the same level of skill. So David didn’t admit it, and he had no problem setting both glasses in the sink and nodding toward the living room.

“C’mon, let’s go plot how to get Shane away from those fuckers.”

Ilya grinned, that feral smile he gave right before knocking a player so hard into the boards it left the other guy rattled. David had no doubt that next season, Ilya wouldn’t pull his hits against the rest of the Metros team.

It was a comfort, knowing that Ilya would be there for Shane even when David was unable to be.

When Shane was picked second in the MLH draft, David thought he would never feel more proud of his son. Watching him drop his gloves and swing his fist as his own teammate during Game 4 of the playoff series, David knew he’d been wrong before.

Truly, David didn’t know how Shane was still standing. Each game had gotten more brutal than the last, with the Admirals becoming more fired up with each win and the Metros taking out all of their anger on their captain. It was a fucked situation, one that made David thankful for the Metros to be knocked out of the playoffs so quickly. He wasn’t sure he could stomach continuing to watch the beating that Shane took.

David watched as Shane shouted, cheeks bright red in his anger. The other man was a defenseman and was much larger than him. He easily got in a hard swing at Shane’s face that

had David wincing and wondering if they had any bags of frozen peas left in the freezer. Shane didn't fight often. In fact, David could count on one hand in the last ten years how many times Shane has even joined a scrum, much less dropped his gloves on the ice.

In the end, it was Scott Hunter who had to pull Shane away from the Montreal defenseman, saying something that couldn't quite be picked up by the cameras.

If they hadn't already discussed Shane leaving the Metros, this would have sealed his fate.

"Does Ottawa need two centers?"

The sentence was so sudden and so out of place that it nearly gave David whiplash as he tried to contextualize it.

Yuna though, of course she understood immediately.

"Why? Will you be a free agent too?"

"Not next year. Year after." A pause. "It would be nice to be on same team. I could stop this fucking shit from happening."

Ilya glanced to Yuna after, cheeks starting to turn pink as he realized his language in front of her. She only smiled and nodded, likely as thankful as David felt at how determined he was to protect their boy.

"You would leave Boston for Shane?"

"I mean, yes, I think so. Ottawa would love me, and I would get to be on same team as Shane."

Boston had been in a slump when Ilya had been drafted there, but that didn't mean they weren't a legendary team. They were historic in the same way that Montreal was, and it was no small thing that Ilya had stayed there for going on a decade now. Going somewhere else, especially somewhere like *Ottawa*, well that-

Well, maybe Ilya was a simple man too.

He enjoyed hockey and was damn good at it too. He was proud of his job and the legacy that he'd built for himself. David could tell even now that he missed the thrill of the game, but it was okay because he'd come back with a vengeance and a thirst for the Cup next season. He adored Shane with everything he had and he would give everything to see him happy. He enjoyed a good pour of vodka and he was always willing to have a glass and a chat with David. He loved to drive his car for the exciting rumble of the engine and the cool leather of the wheel under his hands. He treasured David's greatest achievement, his son, his Shane.

"Also you two are in Ottawa," Ilya said, long after David thought the conversation had ended.

The words hit David harshly and stole away his breath. These boys and their quiet hurt, their gentle affection. Both of them already experts at hiding it away until they were somewhere

safe to let it out, even at such a young age.

Somewhere in the last several days, David and Yuna had become one of those safe spaces for Ilya. David couldn't have pictured it, all those weeks ago when he'd stood outside a hotel room door in Tampa and overheard a conversation between Ilya and Shane meant only for the two of them. It loosened something previously damaged and long-since scarred over in his chest.

His boys certainly didn't need his protection, but they did want it, and that meant more to David than anything else.

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