The Interview

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The Interview

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Summary

After their wedding but before the start of their first hockey season on the same team, Shane and Ilya sit down for a sports network interview, finally explaining their relationship to the world.

They sat in the green room, huddled together on the couch, hands clasped, Shane breathing suspiciously fast and loud. Ilya wondered how close he was to full-on panicking. He squeezed Shane's hand, and leaned over to kiss his cheek.

"Hey," he intoned softly next to Shane's ear. "It will be fine. All is OK here. Just you and me talking to a nice guy like we are in our living room."

Shane made a distressed noise. "If our living room had five thousand cameras in it."

Ilya smiled. "Is only three cameras, I think. You can ignore them. Come on. We have cameras in our faces every day. This is no different."

"Except we're talking about our relationship to millions of people, not just having our picture taken or talking about hockey. Why did we agree to this?" Shane whined with an upward, slightly hysterical lilt to the last few words.

Ilya decided being sympathetic and soothing was not working. Time to change tactics. "Enough of this. You are Shane Hollander, hockey superstar. Your picture is hanging on the wall of every teenager in Canada. You told off Roger Crowell to his face. You have given a million interviews to reporters before. You can sit down for one more. This is nothing for you."

Shane huffed out a breath, put his hands on his thighs, and stood up. "You're right. I'm being stupid. It's fine. We don't have to hide anymore. We don't WANT to hide anymore. So let's get this over with and then maybe people will stop asking us annoying questions everywhere we go."

Ilya smirked as he also stood up and moved next to Shane. "That is maybe a little too optimistic, but yes. We need to, what is the phrase? Set the record straight."

Shane leaned over and kissed him softly. "OK. I'm good. Thank you."

Just then, the young intern who had been put in charge of them returned to the room. "Mr. Ryland is ready for you. Let me bring you to the stage. As a reminder, this is pre-recorded, so if you don't want to answer a question, or you flub a sentence, we'll edit around it. No worries. Just be relaxed."

She escorted them to a soundstage with a couch facing one direction, and a leather armchair angled catty-corner toward it. She pointed to the couch and asked them to sit. The PAs fitted them with microphones as Thomas Ryland, anchor of a popular TSN show, came over to shake their hands. He settled into his own chair and fiddled with his notes. The director announced they were rolling and Ilya took Shane's hand in his and squeezed.

"Good evening everyone. I'm here with NHL superstars Ilya Rozanov of the Ottawa Centaurs, formerly with the Boston Bears; and Shane Hollander, also an Ottowa Centaur as of a month ago, formerly of the Montreal Voyageurs, for their first official interview since

coming out as a couple last season. Gentlemen, we're honored you took the time to be here with us."

"Thank you for having us," Shane replied on cue.

"You can understand that the news that two world-famous rivals were actually in a secret relationship for years is both shocking and of great interest to many people. Can you tell us what it's been like the last several months, being out as active LGBT players, being out as a couple, and now being on the same team?"

Shane huffed out a big breath. "Wow, those are complicated questions. On the one hand, it's such a relief not to hide anymore. It was so stressful every day, worrying who could find out and how, and what would happen then. But also, just like we feared, it has led to a lot of gossip and recrimination, and invasions of our privacy. And then again, so many people, especially young people, have reached out to us, telling their stories, and saying we gave them courage to come out to their teams, their schools, their parents. So it's a mixed bag."

Ilya added, "I can say that playing on the same team is wonderful. The Centaurs are made of the best people in the league. Everyone loves us and accepts us and knows that for us, there is nothing more serious than playing hockey and winning. We have never brought personal feelings to the ice and we still don't now."

Shane smiled. "It's also a big plus to see each other every day. To live together. The hockey season was always hard on us. We were really limited in the time we could spend together. On the whole I'd say there are way more positives than negatives to being out."

Ryland nodded seriously, as if they were discussing world peace instead of hockey. "Probably the biggest question on everyone's mind is, exactly how long has this been going on? At what point did an epic rivalry turn into an epic love story?"

Ilya turned to Shane, and they smiled softly at each other. They had debated how honest to be in this interview and ultimately had decided there was no benefit to avoiding the truth. "Well," Shane said slowly, "that's not a simple question. But in the end, the answer is that we've been together for about eleven years."

Ryland had trouble masking his surprise. As if to verify he had heard correctly, he asked, "Eleven years?"

"Yes," Ilya said with a hint of humor in his voice, "since before our rookie season. We met for the first time at the World Junior Championship in Saskatchewan. We started a casual relationship afterward that lasted for many years."

Ryland was clearly gobsmacked but put on his professional reporter face and cleared his throat. "I imagine people are wondering how that worked. Ilya, you were in Boston, and Shane was in Montreal. The hockey season lasts nine months a year including training and playoffs. When did you see each other, and how did you keep it a secret?"

Shane answered, "We saw each other rarely, which is one of the reasons it was casual for so long. We were afraid for anyone to know precisely because of the famous rivalry. And also,

being queer in sports is still not as accepted as it should be, but this was eleven years ago. It felt like it would have been disastrous if the secret got out. We told literally no one for the first seven years."

"So was the entire rivalry fake?" Ryland questioned.

"No," they both blurted at the same time and laughed at each other.

Shane continued. "We have always been very competitive on the ice. Our relationship never made a difference when we were playing hockey. The NHL made a bigger deal out of the rivalry than was actually true. But what is true is that both of us have always wanted to be the best, and neither of us was willing to let that honor go to the other person."

"During those years, the two of you were very active in the media. Ilya was photographed with any number of women, some of them very famous. You had quite the reputation as a ladies man. And Shane, though you spent much less time in the spotlight, you were reportedly dating Rose Landry for a while. With the news of your relationship, that makes people wonder, was all of that fake, like a PR stunt to keep the truth hidden?"

Ilia smirked. "I think you are really asking, are we attracted to women? For myself, the answer is yes, I am, and none of those reports were fake. I am bisexual."

Ilya turned to look at Shane, letting him know that was all he wanted to say on the matter, and it was Shane's turn to answer. "I was in a relationship with Rose for several months, that was not a lie. However, at the time I had not acknowledged even to myself much less anyone else that I was gay. I thought perhaps I was bisexual like Ilya. And Rose is an extraordinary person. To this day, she is one of my best friends. She was at our wedding, and has been supportive of our relationship from the day I told her about us."

"So all of those media reports about your on-again off-again relationship since the initial break-up are not true?"

"No," Shane chuckled. "Shortly after she and I broke up was when the two of us became serious," he said, waving his hand between him and Ilya.

Ilya said, "When I would see the news reports about them, I would call him and say 'Congratulations! It looks like you two are back together. I hope you are very happy.' And we would laugh."

Ryland smiled. "So back to something Shane said earlier, that distance and fear were some of the reasons your relationship stayed casual for so long. Were there other reasons?"

"Yes," Ilya deadpanned. "We did not actually like each other very much at first."

Shane slapped him on the arm, and said in an exasperated voice, "Ilya."

"What? Is true. Was like where you both enjoy the person and also they are annoying at the same time."

"You are certainly annoying, that is true," Shane said, rolling his eyes.

Ryland looked like the cat who ate the cream in getting this unexpectedly juicy morsel. “So at what point did those feelings change? How did fun times with your rival turn into a committed relationship?”

“Scott Hunter,” Ilya answered. “We were talking during the Stanley Cup final when Scott Hunter came out on international TV by kissing his boyfriend. We were so shocked and also happy.”

Shane took over. “We realized we had been hiding not just from everyone else but also from ourselves. That it had turned into love probably a long time before, but we were both too scared to admit it because of what it would mean for our careers and for our lives. That’s when we came up with the plan to start our charity, The Irina Foundation, and for Ilya to sign with Ottawa when his contract with Boston ended, so that we’d be nearer to each other.”

“And did you still keep it a secret from everyone until this year when you were accidentally outed on social media?”

“A few people knew,” Ilya offered. “Shane’s family. A few friends. That’s it.”

“So if the online incident hadn’t happened, would the world still be in the dark?”

“No,” Shane said forcefully. “At first we thought maybe we would keep things a secret until we retired. But it was exhausting and unfair to both of us that this whole other side of our lives had to stay hidden. We had decided to come out and announce our relationship this summer, but the video circulated first before we had the chance.”

“Speaking of videos, another one was posted to your Instagram, Ilya, announcing your wedding. I notice you’re both wearing rings. Are you already married?”

Ilya beamed. “Yes. We had a simple ceremony at home, with some good friends and family. Was very nice. Then we went to Spain for a honeymoon. And now we are here, ready for training and a new hockey season to start.”

“Do you have any plans or wishes for this upcoming season?”

Ilya beamed. “Of course! We will win Ottawa the Stanley Cup!”

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