Line Change

by InsaneTrollLogic

Summary

After the Time War, the Doctor really just wants to hit something. Hockey seems a lot healthier than another genocide.

Notes

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It seemed a bit silly to have multiple hockey verses. The stories are only loosely connected.

Until his ninth body, he's a football fan. It's worst in his fourth body. It's not that he supports any team in particular, just that he loves the sport, sneaking the Tardis to matches when his companions are distracted. In retrospect, the scarf was actually a bit excessive.

The first match he goes to after the Time War very nearly puts him to sleep. Somehow, the beauty's flown out of it. There's no score in the match until the eightieth minute when a defenseman goes in for a tackle, studs up, clearly intending to injure. The referee sends him off and the Doctor walks out as the crowd roars their disapproval for a call that was obviously correct. He feels empty and feels silly about feeling empty because it's just a game.

He goes to the Tardis, sets the destination on random and when he opens the door he's in Lake Placid and it's 1980 and they're playing a funny little game on ice with sticks. The Doctor wants to sneer, wants to call them stupid apes and leave for Space Florida and adventure, but a rumble goes
up through the crowd and suddenly he's entranced.

There's a violence to this game, yes, but it's controlled, accepted and for the most part without real malice. The Americans are an interesting group, the team made up of amateurs and players still in university, the Russians, a juggernaut. It's the kind of story he loves, the underdog weathering a storm and there's such genuine jubilation on the ice that the Doctor finds his face curving into the unfamiliar shape of a smile. Over the radio, Al Michaels is saying, *Eleven seconds, you've got ten seconds, the countdown going on right now! Morrow, up to Silk. Five seconds left in the game. Do you believe in miracles?... yes! and just for a second, the Doctor believes again.*

He goes to see the game another six times. This body seems prone to oscillating between despair, wild joy and debilitating anger and this sport feeds into them all. He gets into the Tardis, sets it to random and when the doors open, he's still in America. He turns into a hallway and walks straight into a sharply dressed man in a suit. Before he has a chance to say anything, the Doctor whips out the psychic paper and waves it in front of his face.

"So you're my new winger," he says. The accent is Canadian though the Doctor is sure he's in America. "Took you long enough to get here, Smith. Suit up, you're late for practice."

He trails the man, the coach, into a foul smelling room where a locker with *J. Smith* stencilled over it has a pile of equipment all in his size. He finds that this body knows exactly how to lace up skates and adjust pads. He's never done this before, never become part of an ongoing *thing*. He's never needed it before, but he's different now. It's not just his body that has changed, it's him, and right now he needs this. The Tardis, bless her, seems to realize that as well, and there are no aliens, no impending doom, just the slow route and the game.

It's the longest he's stayed in one place in recent memories but he's addicted to this feeling, the team. The support. The hugs after the big goal, faces twisted in jubilation. He needs people around him right now, needs to remember how to live again. Needs something to channel the rage flowing through him.

He winds up on the checking line, which suits him just fine. There's something about the ability to slam into another person at full force and still shake hands at the end of the day that puts that elusive smile on his face. The hockey stick in his glove feels like an extension of himself, like the sonic screwdriver and the ice sliding past his stakes is like flying.

His teammates call him Smithie at first, Johnny on occasion, but five games into his tenure, the dark haired top line center says, "Just get the Doctor to mark him. Guarentee you they'll be no more problems."

The name sticks and it's a wake up call. The team's calling him the Doctor and he takes a closer look at the forward and notices a million irregularities in his accent and demeanour.

"You," he says to Harkness after a particularly hard practice. "You don't belong here. 50th century?"

Both hearts are beating furiously. He can hear their echoes batting around in his skull. Jack Harkness is one of the team's alternate captains. He'd made a few overtures at friendship but the Doctor had elected to remain in moderate isolation. Harkness smiles at him. He's a twenty-goal scorer and they're still a month short of the end of the season. He's been in the league for four years and there's no reason for it.
"51st actually," Harkness says.

"Former time agent," the Doctor guesses. "Stranded or you would have left ages ago."

"I'm waiting for someone." There's a second of complete seriousness in his face before it breaks into a grin. "And I never thought you'd be leading the NHL in hits. Always figured you'd be a playmaker."

"You know me?" His voice sounds far different than it ever has and it's part the surroundings, part his chosen profession. He wonders if it will shift when he leaves, or if this is a permanent change.

"Not yet."

The nickname Doctor gets shortened to Doc. Jack laughs at his indignation but it feels like less of a lie than Johnny ever did. In a game against Boston, he takes a slapshot to the face and feels his nose shatter. The explosion of pain is something he doesn't expect. He can usually talk his way out of any physical pain and even the Time War, for all its carnage, was rather lacking in injuries that weren't death.

They set the nose in the trainer's room, and there's a dull ache every time he breathes. He refuses the painkillers and goes back onto the ice.

In the Tardis that after the game, he sits and looks at the skeletal regenerator. He can fix the nose if he wants, but he has to smile as he prods at the swollen mess of his face. It's a right of passage in a way and he's earned this.

The nose heals crooked and on their road trip, Jack looks at him with a bit more familiarity.

The team is eliminated from the playoff race on the last day of the season. It isn't their fault. They do their part, winning their last one of the season by a whopping 5-1 as the Doctor nets his fourth goal of the year. But results of the other games don't favour them and the season ends with the Doctor suddenly painfully aware that he's been in the same place for nearly six months.

Wanderlust floods back into him and it's almost a relief to feel something normal again. He's got to get out of here.

Jack heads him off before he can get to the Tardis. The Doctor's been hiding it in a closet off the locker room, but he suspects Jack already new that. "Not staying with us, Doc?"

"Come with me," the Doctor says. "I can take you back to your time. You don't belong here any more than I do."

Jack twirls the stick against the ground. It's got a wicked curve to the blade and it gives the turns an uneven rhythm. "I like it here," Jack says. "And I told you, I'm waiting for someone."

"I hope you find them," the Doctor replies. "If you ever reconsider…"

"I won't," Jack promises.

The Doctor gets into the Tardis and lands in London.
The urge hits him out of nowhere when they're hanging upsidedown by their ankles, under immediate threat of death. Beside him, Rose is near tears but the Doctor just wonders if this will be the time in his life that he gets punched in the face. He misses his old nose, the one that earned its creaks.

What he thinks, while hanging in mortal peril, is that he really misses hockey. That silly little game where men batted bits of rubber at a net with some sticks. But it's not just a silly little game.

He starts talking. He doesn't really listen to what he's saying, but he uses the phrase five for fighting twice before he manages to undo the bonds with the sonic screwdriver and after the running, Rose looks at him, out of breath, curious and so very young. "You just talked your way out of certain death using a metaphor about hockey."

Scanning back through his memory, the Doctor can't refute this statement. "Yes," he agrees as an idea takes hold. "We should go to a game, oh it's absolutely glorious, wait until you see it. Gretsky in his prime is…"

They go to a game, but there appears to be some sort of alien influence in the area surrounding them and Rose hauls him out of the arena. The Doctor's goal is to solve it before the third period. He blows the deadline by about forty minutes but the cheers from the rink tell him the game's about to start overtime.

Rose grabs his arm and tugs him toward the Tardis. "Quick, we're about to be arrested."

The Doctor wonders if she'd invented the last threat so that she didn't have to go see the rest of the game.

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He doesn't try to get into the league himself until Bad Wolf Bay. He's well aware that this version of him isn't built for hockey like the last one was. There's a an oddly delicate look to his features and there's a ninety percent chance the first hit would knock him out, but while he has no hope for the strength, he has some hope for skating. This is a body built for running and he hopes legs are enough to connect the skill.

It turns out what this body can actually do is stickhandle which works for the Doctor for about a game and a half before the defenseman pick up on the face that he can be pushed off pretty much any puck. The coach suggests a weight training regiment and a stint back in the AHL. The Doctor keeps the sweater, letting it fold into the abyss of the Tardis wardrobe and leaves.

The game floods out of his system again, but if the Doctor has learned anything about this version of himself is that he has a hard time letting things go. So after the fourth time Martha asks to see the Lunar Landing, the Doctor accidentally on purposes sets them down in Lake Placid. Martha stays the entire game, all the time sneaking him sideways glances as if wondering why he enjoys this.
Disappointed, the Doctor resigns himself to the fact that most companions wouldn't care for hockey. Maybe he should take the next one from Canada or Russia.


Donna loves hockey.

But what Donna loves most about hockey is the fighting or more accurately, the strapping young men pummeling one another.

The Doctor supposes he should be more worried about this.

"You know I used to play," the Doctor says. "Well, the old me used to play, well—"

"Shut up, space boy," Donna snaps back. "One touch and they'd snap your little bird neck. Now that one, he's a real man. HIT HIM AGAIN!"

The Doctor starts to protest but realizes that in this body, that's really kind of true and changes the subject to the fabled Aztec alien encounters.

(eleven)

He can tell almost immediately that this is a body that can play hockey. He's got a certain amount of height and while he's not as bulky as he the time he played and entire season in the NHL, he's also not the (delicate boned) fellow who could be pushed off the puck with just a breeze. He has big hands and the kind of massive chin that could take a punch if need be. When he tests out the voice he half expects him to sound like he belongs in Ontario.

The first trip out he lands outside Toronto and nearly plunges through the ice of a backyard rink.

A tiny ginger thing is wearing a nightie and wielding a hockey stick. She watches (poised to an attack) as he opens the doors to the Tardis. She narrows her eyes in suspicion and asks, "Did you come about the crack in my wall?" The accent's all wrong for this part of the worlds, Scottish if he's not mistake (and he rarely is).

There's some sort of prison behind the crack in her wall and the Doctor aims the screwdriver at the crack with one hand, raises the Amy's hockey stick with the other.

Prisoner Zero has escaped.

Five minutes, he tells the girl. Five minutes and he'll take her to see the stars.

Turns out five minutes is really more like twelve years and this time Amy does bash his head in with a hockey stick. When he wakes up and sniffs, he's sure his nose has been broken which would make him smile except for the fact that Prisoner Zero is still here.
Prisoner Zero as it turns out is hiding on the Toronto Maple Leafs and a particularly sharp center called Rory Williams puts most of it together before the Doctor gets there. Amy knows him in that odd way, she seems to know the entire team already but that's not important at the moment. The Doctor saves the world with a hockey stick and a mobile phone.

Unfortunately Prisoner Zero's absence leaves a void on the Leafs and the Doctor feels some responsibility. Amy's flabbergasted when he elects to lace up. Rory's skeptical but the protests are gone the second he's on the ice.

"Lucky pick-up," the coach says. "You're a godsend."

The sweater reads J. Jones this time and the nickname Jonesie lasts approximately a day and a half before he's the Doctor again. On the ice Doctor is shortened to Doc, and he's not so bothered as he once was. But the reoccurrence of the nickname makes him look up Jack.

Harkness is (the Harkness he knew once) on the Minnesota Wild. He's made a bit of a name for himself, captain of the team, a thirty goal scorer for three of the last eight years. It's been four years since he played on a team with John Smith and he's still waiting for (the Doctor) someone.

The Doctor gages the time period. It's safe to stay around the NHL (he's checked) almost any year but 09-10 which is historic for reasons not known to the public. That season was the first year the Lawrence Rage enters the league and the first year that the so called hunters (Winchester brothers, Novak, Staals) start fightingly openly against so called demons (really parasitic aliens made entirely of mist, that bind to the cerebral cortex…) and somehow win. That's a fixed point, but this is several years later and he can stay.

Amy is everywhere and the team around the Doctor call her a puck bunny and tease Rory mercilessly for dating her. The Doctor instead volunteers to be his roommate on away swings. Rory agrees readily because the Doctor spends most of the between game time in the Tardis and it more than willing to smuggle Amy in though the coach has mandated game nights be spent in solitude. In exchange Rory doesn't say a word about his alien nature and reaps the benefits of being one of the few players who perform better after a night in bed with their girlfriend.

They sneak away from the linear life sometimes, the three of them gallivanting through the universe but always returning in time for the next practice, the next game.

Passing is his forte in this body. The offence is a fine thread spun in silk, intersperced with the blinding red of the opponent. It's flowing all the time, just like the sea of time he holds in his head and he can see. Can pick out every thread, find every passing lane.

But there are holes in his defensive game. He has trouble sometimes seeing things that are right in front of him. He'll fail to block the obvious pass because he's waiting for the impossible one. He makes some spectacular interceptions. Other times he's caught unaware when the puck careens off a skate and into the back of the net.

Rory Williams is the best player on the team. It takes even the Doctor ages to discover it. He's undersized and stammers through all his interviews, never quite comfortable when not on skates. He's not fast but he's quick, not big but he's always in the way. He plays defense and draws the toughest assignments. He's on every single penalty kill. He doesn't score much but he's in the smart kind of places and manages to keep the puck in the offensive zone. Every thing he does, he does very quietly.
And very quietly, on a team that's flirting with .500, he leads the entire league in plus-minus.

Normal life seems like it goes faster around hockey, the Doctor is learning this body as he goes. He likes this body, likes the one touch passing, Amy, Rory, the bruising check and the ice under his feet.

The season passes and little by little he starts to be aware of the time slipping away, vitality slowly bleeding (out of a broken nose and onto the ice) into the world around them. The last game of the season is an away match in Minnesota and he's not at all surprised to find Jack waiting for him at the Tardis.

Harkness greets him with a big hug. The Doctor hadn't been sure he was recognized, but the odd tugging in his stomach won't let him forget Jack.

"Leaving now that the season's done."

Both Amy and Rory are behind him. The Doctor hasn't asked either officially, but they both already know they're welcome. He locks eyes with Jack and asks, "Do you want to come with me."

For a second the Doctor genuinely does not know what Jack's going to say but then his features soften and he says, "No, I think I'm going to stay where I am."

"Still waiting for someone."

"I was waiting for you," Jack confesses. "I found someone else."

The Doctor claps him on his shoulder. "Good for you. What's their name?"

"Ianto," Jack's smiling when he says it. "We got him in a trade midseason. He's got soft hands and he's hell around the crease. Next year we're going to be a force to be reckoned with."

"Jack and Ianto," the Doctor tries out the names and they feel right on his tongue. "I wish you all the best. I can see those names going down in history."

"You can see it for yourself," Jack retorts. "You don't have to run all the time. Come back. I'm going to be here and I was your teammate before I was ever your companion."

When Jack leaves, the Doctor turns to Amy and Rory in turn. "How about you lot. Up for a life of adventure."

Rory still has a neat row of stitches across his cheekbone, something he won't let the Doctor heal. A practical sort, Rory is, he doesn't trust much outside his own skin.

"It's a time machine, yeah?" Amy asks. Her hand is tucked into Rory's. "You can have us back before the next season?"

"I can have you back yesterday," the Doctor replies.

Rory licks his lips and then asks the impossible question. "And you'll come back next year too?"

The Doctor hesitates. Can he do it? Can he make some place, some time a home? A place where he can return, play the game he loves, be fantastic with his teammates (friends). He won't have to give
this up. The Tardis has an ice rink now as well as a swimming pool. There are skates of all sizes in
the wardrobe. Next year is Sherlock Holmes's first in the league -- though Watson and greatness
are a few years out. He missed the team's only game against the Winchester brothers. Can he be a
part of that? Can he make Toronto his touchstone, like London used to be?

Amy's grinning at him even as she hangs off Rory's arm and Rory, brilliant, faithful, quietly
outstanding Rory is torn between terror and a naked desire. He can read the question in their faces.

*Will he come back with them for next season?*

Can he say no?

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