

never fallen from quite this high

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by [quantumoddy](#).

Summary

People always know that any hockey game with Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander on the ice is going to be interesting.

They're the two best players in the league and the intense hatred that's burned between them their entire careers turns every game into a fierce battle. The checks are harder, the goals come thick and fast and the tension is heavy in the air.

But this particular game will bring more surprises than even they know.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

It would always claw at Ilya, knowing that the only time he could be close to Shane without fear was out on the ice. Where he had to hate him. Where he had to hurt him.

The crowd roared as the two of them slammed into the boards, hard enough to rattle Ilya's teeth. He took the brunt of it, he could tell by the dull flare in his shoulder, the impact waking up half a hundred old injuries from all the other times he'd done this. Or when he'd pissed off the wrong alpha in the wrong bar, it was hard to tell the difference.

Either way, his first thought was for Shane. The way his face tightened at the impact, paling slightly behind the grill of his helmet. That caught his attention more than any of the old aches growling in his own body.

"You okay?" Ilya gasped out into the few seconds they were given, the brief time he could hold Shane against him the way he wanted, the way that always felt so natural.

Those dark eyes rolled, that smile tilted in a way that wasn't fully convincing, "Of course. You're going to have to hit harder than that, Rosanov."

Ilya couldn't help grinning back, though Shane's cheeks were still unusually flushed, almost like a bruise, the rest of his face staying drawn and a few shades paler than it had been before. He opened his mouth to ask again, more insistent, letting Shane know he wasn't fooled, that he didn't need to lie to him.

But then the referee was there, his voice firm and exasperated like he was a schoolteacher pulling the same kids off each other for the fifth time that day, "Alright, alright, break it up. We got a game to play, fellas."

Shane pushed off Ilya's chest, holding his hands in the air to show he'd obeyed. Ilya did the same, giving a pantomime shrug of exaggerated innocence and getting a roar of laughter from the crowd, the home fans and the visiting Ottawans sharing the same voice for once. Because of course Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were taking the chance to get some extra blows in. Of course they had to be pulled away from each other, their alpha instincts baying for blood as soon as they were sharing the ice. What other explanation could there be? No other one they'd accept, that's for sure.

Ilya pushed away a discomfort that had nothing to do with being slammed against the boards or taking a puck to the teeth or getting punched in the gut outside a nightclub. Nothing to do with any of the pains the world would gladly take from him. He watched Shane skate away, noting the tightness in his shoulders, the way he hesitated ever so slightly when he took the lightning fast turns he was famous for. Was he really okay?

Of course he wasn't. At least they would actually have time to talk, as soon as the game ended and they could sneak away from their respective teams. Ilya would be able to hold him, untangle him, reassure him that he didn't need him to be alright all the time. That they were alone and safe and Shane could let himself be something other than perfect. That they

could be alpha and omega, exactly as they'd been made, nothing wrong with either of their bodies or the bond that ran between them.

Ilya sighed, trying to push off fast enough to leave those thoughts behind and snap himself back into the game. He didn't think he'd ever find himself wishing for a hockey match to be over.

He tried to enjoy it, the way he usually did. Playing made him feel alive and playing against Shane made him feel something more, something bigger that he'd never been able to put into words, English or Russian or even the halting French that Shane had been trying to teach him over their video calls.

Ilya knew people thought he was an arrogant asshole, he'd be insulted if anyone said otherwise. But when he was on the ice, facing off against Shane, moving like his blades and his stick and the puck were all just extensions of his body, he really did feel like he was as unstoppable as he always acted. He felt the rest of the world fall away, leaving him in this place where he could be in complete control, where the shadows he always carried with him finally receded and he could stand in the light, fully assured that he was supposed to be here, that he had a purpose.

When he played, the other team had always been like ghosts to him, temporary obstacles he could sail through like fog, their taunts laughable, their anger just more fuel for Ilya to burn. Playing hockey helped him believe he could make all his problems just blurs beyond his helmet, as helpless to stop him as the other team.

Until he played against Shane.

Ilya knew people got sentimental and superstitious about the idea of fated mates, the idea of alphas and omegas who were two halves of one being, incomplete until they found their soulmate and bonded with them again. He'd never really believed in it. It sounded like people draping silk and lace over their innate biological urges, pretending there was a hand guiding it all when really it was just chemicals firing in the brain. It was just hard to believe in something that felt so impossible.

An ironic opinion for a man who wore a crucifix around his neck.

But Shane had refused to become a ghost, he'd stayed solid and glowing and standing firmly in Ilya's way. He couldn't go through him, he couldn't go around him, he couldn't shut his eyes and pretend he wasn't there because, god help him, he didn't want to. So Ilya had done the only thing that had made any sense, the improbable truth he'd been left with after eliminating the impossible. He'd gone into his arms.

And he had no other way to describe how it felt but *complete*. Complete and like taking a puck directly to the teeth.

Which, he realised, he was about half a second away from doing if he didn't turn his brain back on. He just about managed to dodge the hit, though it sent him careening right into Troy Barrett.

“You planning on waking up anytime soon?” his winger’s helmet did nothing to soften his trademark scowl, “Preferably before Shane Hollander buries us?”

Ilya had stopped taking Barrett’s grumpy affect seriously a long time ago but there was still something in his friend’s voice that brought him up short. A kind of exasperated stress on the name that suggested his teammate knew more than they all liked to pretend he did. Part of the problem with actually being close to his fellow Centaurs and dropping his guard around them, they tended to notice the electricity that ran between Ilya and Shane. They tended to realise why Ilya smiled at his phone so often or why they could never be found after games between their teams. They tended to see why two supposedly available, eligible alphas had never found mates, much less a date every once in a while.

Sometimes it was comforting, knowing those closest to them could see it and would still say nothing, choosing their happiness over the unwritten rules. Sometimes it was terrifying, realising how thin their walls really were, how careful they had to be with who got near.

“Leave Hollander to me,” Ilya muttered, letting some of the possessiveness he felt bleed into his voice, a little of the *he’s mine to chase, mine to take down, mine to earn* his alpha voice was always whispering.

He left Barrett standing there, pretending he didn’t see the sadness in his eyes. He forced himself to drop everything, letting it disappear into the rush of air whistling in his ears as he surged forward, the roar of the fans as he launched himself back into the game. He focused entirely on Shane, on the goal behind him that he needed to reach.

If this was all they were going to be allowed, Ilya would give it everything he had.

The game became a battle, goals rocketing back and forth as both goalies and both defensive lines and even the LEDs in the scoreboard struggled to keep up with Shane Hollander and Ilya Rosanov at their very best. Eventually, it was as if there had never been anything to worry about, anything in the world beyond their rink and this game. Eventually, Ilya had that golden feeling back, the power and certainty and the burning joy. And, maybe even better, he saw it in Shane as well.

The universe clicked into place and everything made sense. Which meant Ilya really should have seen it coming because when had that feeling ever lasted?

Later he would tell Shane he never saw the collision. He’d tell him he was halfway up the ice, closer to the Centaur’s goal because he knew Shane had the puck and would be gunning for it. He’d tell him he only heard the sickening thud against the boards, the one that turned every player’s head because they’d all been in the game long enough to know, from that sound alone, that someone was hurt and they were hurt badly. He’d tell him he didn’t even know he was the one who went down until he heard it announced.

Ilya would tell him that because he knew it would make Shane feel better. And he’d be lying.

He’d seen every single second of his own team’s defenseman losing control of an illegal check and slamming Shane into the boards head first. And he’d see it again in his worst nightmares, over and over, probably until the day he died.

A few meters was all it took to leave him utterly helpless, unable to do anything but feel his heart snap clean in two as Shane went limp on the ice. That pain was the only thing that stayed, all other thoughts shattering like lightbulbs bursting under a surge of power. That control he'd had evaporated, leaving him to be piloted by that screaming, furious agony.

So Ilya felt himself yanked forward, running at twice the speed of the world around him. He closed the gap between him and Shane, throwing himself over him, like the damage wasn't already done, like there was still some way to protect him.

"Shane? Shane, please, no," he heard himself sob in Russian, though his voice echoed strangely like it was coming from far away, from all the way back when he was small and seeing his mother's limp hand dangling in mid air, "Wake up, *wake up*."

But Shane couldn't hear him, no more than Ilya's mother had. Futile, fitful breaths caught in his chest, blood beaded in his nose and broke free, leaving a trail of ruby against pale skin, cutting a cruel, violent line through the freckles on his cheek.

"God, I'm so sorry, I didn't...I just couldn't stop..."

That voice reached Ilya loud and clear as a bell. It stopped being attached to a teammate, a friend, someone he travelled with and played with. That voice was only attached to the person who had hurt Shane, who'd hurt his omega, and his fury lunged.

Ilya didn't have words in any language, just a strangled, guttural snarl that came from some very hurt, very old part of him. He had no idea what would've happened if he'd gotten his hands on the guy but, thanks to his wingers, he didn't need to find out. It took both Barrett and Hayes to hold him back, their combined strength forcing him down onto his knees again, even as he snarled and snapped, fangs bursting free so fast it filled his mouth with the taste of his own blood.

"Ilya! Come on, man, it was an accident, any one of us could have fucked up like that! You think this is what Hollander wants?"

It was that desperate hiss from Barrett that finally tipped the scales inside him and let his fear overwhelm his anger again. He crumpled, all the fury leaching out of him as it dawned, cold and clear and terrifying, that he couldn't fight this. He couldn't snap his teeth and save his omega from this threat. Shane was hurt.

And it could so easily have been him that caused it.

All he could do was cling to Shane, weakly begging him to open his eyes, unable to even let his tears fall because this would already be hard enough to explain. Even now, he had to remember the rules and pray no one around them understood Russian. Hayes had to make him back off, more gently this time, so the EMTs could get to Shane. He knew they were helping him, he knew they were his omega's only hope, but still that part of him wanted to roar at them and make them let go because Shane hated being touched by strangers, he'd get uncomfortable with them lifting his shirt up in front of all these people, Ilya left senseless in his own terror.

Coach took him off the ice for the rest of the game. Ilya couldn't argue with that. After watching Shane being carried off the ice, still limp, chest still struggling to rise and fall, he wasn't fit to do anything but slump down in the dark, empty away team locker room, trying to get his arms to stop tensing like they were still holding Shane against him, his own muscles refusing to believe they were doing anything else.

Ilya couldn't say how long he sat there with his gear scattered around him, head between his knees, his whole body wracked by bone deep shakes. So much of his brain was decades in the past, it was a shock when the door opened and he realised he wasn't a teenager anymore, he was in Canada rather than Moscow, he was facing an exhausted looking Coach Wiebe and not his stone faced father.

"What hospital have they taken him to?" he croaked, voice still heavy with the tears he'd trapped in his throat.

Because of course they had, Ilya knew the policy. A blackout on the ice meant the stadium's medical wing would be skipped entirely in favour of the closest trauma center. If he thought Shane was still in the same building as him, he would be by his side and heaven help anyone who tried to stop him.

"Montreal General, according to the Voyageur's coach," Wiebe didn't waste time asking why he cared or acting like Ilya's question was strange, something Ilya would be grateful for when he could think clearly again, "Game's over, I'll drive you. I'd be a pretty shitty coach if I let you get behind a wheel like this."

Ilya was already on his feet, barely listening. All he cared about was closing the distance between him and Shane. But he paused when Wiebe touched his arm, voice low even though they were alone.

"He came back around when they were getting him in the ambulance. Not much sense, obviously, but he was asking for you. Asking where you were."

Ilya didn't have the words to thank his coach, especially not with his throat closed tight and his heart clenching so he could barely breathe. He could only nod. But from the way Wiebe squeezed his arm, he understood.

The drive was a frustrating blur of far too much traffic, too much stopping and starting, bouncing his leg and resisting the urge to put his fist through the window every time the car in front of them hit its brake lights. He didn't even think to ask what the final score had been, he just kept his teeth sunk into his lower lip and told himself over and over again, *he's awake, he's asking for me, he's awake and he's asking for me.*

The hospital was a glowing, buzzing hub of activity in the middle of a city that was winding down into night. Ilya was opening the door before Wiebe had even stopped the car, only hesitating for a moment.

"Thank you," he spoke quickly, scared his emotions would overwhelm him if he relaxed his grip for too long.

Wiebe nodded, eyes sympathetic and soft in a way Ilya never thought he'd see from another alpha, let alone one who was older and whose whole job was to be in charge of him. The way he'd always wanted his own father to look at him, deep down in that childish part of him that wished for other impossible things like summer lasting forever or his mother coming back to life. The way that told Ilya there was nothing wrong with the way he was made, that he would change the rest of the world if he could.

"Tell him to get well soon. Though not too soon, we might have a chance of beating Montreal if he's off the ice."

Ilya managed a smile, there would be a few teams thinking the same thing. He was fiercely proud of Shane for that, even more so that they were all getting their asses kicked by an omega. His omega. Even if he had to be proud in secret.

Ilya tried to ignore the pounding of his own heart in his ears, tried to focus on the directions the receptionist gave him towards the neurology department. It was hard not to feel like this place, with its signs he was too keyed up to translate and winding, constructing corridors, was trying to keep him from finding Shane. He fought to stay calm, to think clearly and speak kindly, asking himself what Shane would do if their positions were reversed.

Finally Ilya found himself at what must be the right place, watching the on duty nurse's eyes widen as a frantic man in sweat soaked athletic gear rushed up so fast he nearly slammed into the desk.

"Shane Hollander. Is he here?" Ilya demanded, just about remembering to speak in English.

She tapped on the keyboard of a nearby computer, frowning a little as she scrolled through information he couldn't see, "I don't think...oh! Sorry, he's only just been checked in."

Ilya sagged in relief, "Can I see him? Please?"

Hesitation crossed her face, eyes darting back to the screen, "The only next of kin he has listed is his mother. If you're not family or a bonded partner..."

Ilya felt his heart writhe in pain, flinching back from that reality. Suddenly it felt so naive that they'd never considered this possibility, that one of them could get badly hurt. What was their secret worth when words on a computer could keep them apart?

Ilya took a deep breath, trying to relax his knuckles and force his fangs to withdraw. He let his voice crack a little, the fear welling up like blood.

"My name is Ilya Rozanov," he rasped, vision swimming, "I know I'm not in his file but I'm asking you to please tell him I'm here. That I'm waiting for him. I just...I just need to know he's okay."

The nurse bit her lip, touching her sleeve reflexively. Ilya would be willing to bet there was a bond mark there on her wrist, just under the fabric.

Finally, after a pause that could have lasted a thousand years for the toll it took on Ilya, she exhaled and nodded, dropping her voice like they were co-conspirators, “I’ll let him know you’re here. If he gives his consent, I can fill the form out retroactively.”

Ilya exhaled, giving her his most charming smile, “Thank you. I swear, talk to him and it’ll all make sense.”

Thankfully there was a chair he could sink into after the nurse turned the corner. He could feel his limbs shaking, the same feeling he got when the adrenaline leaked out of him after a game but turned up to eleven. He put his head between his knees, imagining Shane’s voice telling him to breathe. *It’s all going to be fine, he’s okay, he’s okay and soon I’ll be able to hold him and see for myself.*

Ilya’s eyes snapped up as footsteps interrupted his thoughts. His muscles tensed, ready to stand, the same way he anticipated the puck coming towards him. But the nurse’s expression stopped him dead, swift and sure as if he’d been checked right against the boards.

He’s gone, there was no other explanation, no other reason she’d look so grave and drawn, something went wrong and they lost him and there’s so much I’ll never get to say.

“Mr Rozanov?” her voice was soft, already heavy under the weight of bad news.

Part of him wanted to run, to bolt, like he could outrun the truth the same way he outran all his other problems. Like if he put his hand across her mouth and stopped the words from spilling out, Shane would still be in one of those rooms just beyond the desk, waiting for him.

But the rest of him knew this had always been coming. He should have known there would never be any real happiness in his life, he wasn’t built for it. He should have expected that they could only ever be Rozanov and Hollander, that a bitter rivalry was the only thing that could safely bind them. He’d forgotten the rules and now Shane had paid for his mistake. He’d dared hope for too much and lost everything in the process.

And Ilya was right. Just not in the way he’d expected.

“Mr Roznaov, I’m really sorry but...but Mr Hollander, he...he’s asked not to see you.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Shane Hollander seems to have decided that whatever he and Ilya had is over. He hasn't texted, he hasn't called and, maybe more worrying, he hasn't been on the ice.

But he seems to have forgotten that he has the most stubborn alpha in the world.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Please call me

I need to know you're okay

Whatever I did, I'm sorry.

If you need us to be over, ok. Just tell me you're alright.

Please don't hate me

Ilya didn't know why he'd hoped for anything different.

Shane hadn't replied to any of his texts from the past two days, he wasn't going to answer just because Ilya had managed to tear himself away from his phone and go to practice. The universe wasn't going to reward him because, for an hour, he'd actually done his job instead of lying on his bed, staring into the darkness beyond the glow of his screen. That wasn't how this worked and he knew that.

But still, he'd hoped. And it hurt like hell to yank his phone out of his bag and see no message from Shane.

"Rozanov? You okay?" Hayes asked in a way that really showed he knew the answer but was trying to keep things casual.

Ilya grunted, using the excuse of sweat running into his eyes to avoid his winger's concerned gaze. Of course Hayes knew the answer. He'd just seen Ilya come back after disappearing for days and then play hockey like he'd never put on a pair of skates in his life.

"Tired," Ilya grunted in response, which he supposed was a safe amount of truth.

Hayes nodded slowly, realising there was no easy, painless path to the conversation they really should be having. Around them, the other Centaurs continued their normal, after

practice chaos, shoving each other and shouting over the pounding music the way a group of alphas simply had to when they were crowded into one room.

Ilya should be deep in amongst them, laughing louder than anyone, leading the insults and inviting plenty of his own, hiding genuine praise and advice for his team in his teasing. Now it felt like his team were behind a pane of glass, their simple joy muffled so much it was incomprehensible to him.

Hayes too, though he was doing his best, trying to reach out towards him, “We could go get a drink? I’ll pull a couple of the guys together or maybe just you and me? We can talk about... about how tired you are.”

Ilya slumped, his bare back hitting the wall. Part of him wanted to say yes. Part of him wanted to go to some bar and sob his heart out into a glass of lukewarm beer, wanted to have his friend pat his shoulder and agree with him how fucking shitty this was. He wanted someone to help him understand how it had gone so wrong.

But he couldn’t. Telling Hayes, telling anyone, would still feel like a betrayal. He couldn’t bring himself to share a secret that wasn’t solely his, even if it might mean nothing now.

And besides, it would be too close to admitting that this was over, that he and Shane were something past. And however much it hurt, Ilya couldn’t keep himself from hoping. Not yet, anyway.

“I’m...I’m good,” he sighed, hearing how rough and raw his own voice was, “I think I’ll just go home and...”

And stare at the wall? And send more pathetic texts? Call again and again and cry every time he heard Shane’s voice asking him to leave a message? Poke at the empty space inside him, throbbing like a missing tooth, and wonder how he was supposed to go on with this ache inside him, how anything was ever going to matter again?

Ilya was saved from trying to come up with a less depressing end to that sentence when Harris burst into the locker room, clearly making a beeline for him. His face was tight with anxiety, an expression that simply didn’t sit right on a face so used to grinning. Instantly, the mood shifted, the noise died down, even the music seemed to edge back a couple of notches. If Harris Drover had a face like that, something had to be very, very wrong. No one on the Centaurs team had seen him without a smile since Troy Barrett had put his bond mark on his shoulder.

“Hey, uh...have you seen this?” Harris held out his phone to Ilya almost apologetically, “It was announced when you were on the ice so...”

It was an article, posted on a well known sports news site that, at least in Canada, was ninety percent devoted to ice hockey. Ilya never looked at it unless they’d posted a good photo of him but it was the kind of thing Shane had probably been checking every day since he was ten years old. He’d often sent Ilya articles from it, usually looking for a playful argument about whatever was going on in the league, some snapping back and forth even though they were usually in agreement.

Ilya's heart clenched as he wondered how it had felt, for Shane to wake up and see himself right there on the front page. Under the headline *NHL Star Shane Hollander benched for the rest of the season*.

"Shit, for real?" Barrett read over his shoulder, wincing the way any hockey player would, understanding what a blow that was, "How bad was that injury?"

Exactly the question that was reverberating around Ilya's mind, over and over, clawing at the inside of his skull. The playoffs were just around the corner, Shane would rather knit his bones together and hold his organs in place by sheer force of will than miss those games.

"It doesn't say why," Harris grimaced, "But obviously people are running their mouths in the comments anyway, you know what people are like and-"

"His contract is up at the end of the season," Ilya's voice came out flat, hollow, fist tight around the phone.

Harris nodded bleakly, "Yeah, they noticed that too. Even the article is wondering if...if they're maybe not gonna renew it?"

A quiet, collective wince ran through the locker room, every Centaur now focused on their little group and this strange news. Shane Hollander not playing for the Voyageurs was unthinkable, it was 'sign of the apocalypse' levels of wrong.

"What the hell happened?" Lucas Haas' boyish voice actually trembled a little, like he was genuinely afraid.

All eyes slid over to Ilya. Even if those who weren't close enough to guess what was really going on still knew he and Shane were business partners, friends. Hell, even if they still believed he hated him, the idea of one without the other was still something painful, something broken.

Ilya barely felt their eyes. He was too lost in thinking how much Shane would be hurting right now. How he'd be torturing himself, rethinking everything he'd ever achieved, convincing himself that he'd never been worth anything at all. And he would be doing it all alone, all because he'd kept Ilya at arms length.

All because of this fucking secret.

Ilya stood, shoving Harris' phone back into his hand so he could yank on a shirt and start gathering his kit. No one tried to stop him as he shouldered his way out of the locker room, no one asked where he was going or tried to make him explain. They'd all seen that look in his eyes before, out on the ice, and they knew to keep out of the way.

"I don't know what happened," Ilya answered Haas' question honestly, the last thing he said before the door swung shut behind him.

But I'm going to find out.

Ilya sent one last text before throwing his phone into the backseat, for once not caring if there would be a reply. He'd find out for himself soon enough.

I'm coming to the cottage. You don't want to see me, don't be there.

He still gave Shane the choice, he wouldn't force him into anything, but he wouldn't let his omega, his lover, his friend, his rival, whatever they were to each other, he wouldn't let him hurt himself any more. Whatever had made him run from Ilya, it couldn't be worth him sitting up there in the middle of nowhere, going through the worst day of his life by himself.

And if it was, if Ilya really had done something so terrible, then he supposed he'd know when he knocked on the door and no one answered.

Ilya would have wondered if he was making the right call, assuming Shane would be up at his lakeside cottage. But he knew he was right, the same way he knew when his shot would land directly in the back corner of the net. Shane would have fled there the moment they let him out of the hospital, he would have needed the silence and the distance from the rest of the world. Every time they'd been up there, Ilya had gotten to watch the weight physically leave his shoulders, his eyes brighten a little, each of his breaths get slightly deeper.

He saw the same thing when Shane looked at him. It was hard for Ilya to believe he could offer someone that kind of peace, some wires had gotten crossed upstairs and he'd been given a joy he should never have been allowed. But he'd seen it with his own two eyes and right now, Shane needed that.

Fuck this weird attempt to punish himself. Fuck Shane's stubbornness. Fuck his assumption that that Ilya just stay away, that he wouldn't fight for them.

Ilya would do what he'd been doing his entire career. He'd chase Shane Hollander down and remind him there was another future beyond the one he'd planned out.

Ilya slammed his foot on the gas, roaring out of Ottawa and into the wilderness that was still so easy to find in this country, nature simply too strong here to fully bow down. It felt good to finally be moving, to shake off the paralysis and do something, to watch the minutes count down on his GPS until, for better or worse, he'd have an answer.

Until he'd see Shane, look him in the eyes and tell him he wasn't giving up so easily.

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Ilya had never thought about the bond between two mates before, assuming it was something he'd never experience for himself. He'd heard his teammates go on and on about the connection they felt with their partners, usually while drunk and sentimental, always parroting the same lines from bad movies and old poems that had probably been written when someone else was drunk and sentimental. He'd always nodded, insisted he was happy for them, teased them about it.

But behind his eye rolls, he'd always thought of how his father had used his bond mark like a chain around his mother's throat. How his brother had claimed his own wife before telling

her about his gambling debts, shackling them together before she could get away.

Ilya had always told himself he would never trust anyone to hold that kind of power over him, that freedom would always be better than love if love could turn so sour and acidic.

He'd told himself that was why he'd never brought it up with Shane, not even in some distant, dreamlike future where they were retired and their rivalry maybe wouldn't matter anymore. That word *mate* was heavy, weighed down by bad memories and strange, remote feelings Ilya couldn't see fitting inside himself. Best to leave it alone.

He told himself that. But somewhere along the way, when the hook ups after their games together became long Skype calls and flurries of texts back and forth and a loon inked on his arm, he'd realised how thin a lie it was. Ilya just couldn't bear to ask out loud and watch Shane's deep, dark eyes turn sad as they both felt the weight of their reality press down on them. He didn't want to make them confront yet another thing they could give each other. Another thing where *maybe one day* would sound like *never*.

But it felt like his body had decided for him. Whether he believed his teammate's stories or not, he couldn't deny the way the sick feeling he'd carried for days was retreating, the more miles he chewed under the car's wheels. He couldn't deny how he seemed to breathe a little easier, how it felt like a rope was wrapped around his chest, taut and trembling for days and only now starting to slacken as the distance between him and Shane grew smaller.

Or maybe it was all in Ilya's head. Maybe Shane wouldn't be there. Maybe all of this had been some lie his hormones had told him.

The doubts came as he pulled up outside the cottage, as the smooth growl of the engine and the headlights cut out, plunging him into the silent darkness punctuated only by the falling snow. There was only the pounding of Ilya's own heartbeat in his ears, sounding anxious, like a bird beating against the bars of a cage, desperate to fly out into that darkness and find its other half.

Still, it was a long, trembling moment before he could open the door and step outside, a pause that was half a prayer. Ilya didn't know who he was pleading to, to his mother, to a god, to the goddamn loons out on the lake, to the bond that held him and Shane together that could be fraying even now. Whoever was listening and looking to give a guy a fucking break really.

But, whether they heard him or not, none of them could take the first step for him, none of them could walk up to the door and knock on it. Ilya was left to do that himself. He winced at the loud crunch of snow and gravel under his sneakers, feeling like an intruder already as every step shattered the quiet. He knocked quickly, somehow feeling more nervous than the first time he'd done it, years ago now.

Ilya remembered it so clearly. It had been summer then, no snow on the ground, the air warm and filled with the sound of life in the trees. He'd stood on the porch, trying to hard to keep his hands in his pockets and slouch in a cool, effortless way that would show this wasn't a big deal and he wasn't internally panicking about what this meant for their relationship, at all.

He'd been so close to bolting, to telling himself this was a step too far, that he had to pull back before he and Hollander crossed a line they weren't ready for.

Until the door had opened and he'd seen Shane standing there. And in that one moment, everything had clicked into place and Ilya had known he was standing exactly where he was supposed to be.

The two moments couldn't have been more different. But when the door finally, *finally* creaked open and Shane stood there, Ilya was filled with the exact same certainty. He needed to be here.

Shane looked rough. His eyes were painfully red, shadows under them that suggested he'd been getting as much sleep as Ilya had. His usually perfect hair was all out of place, stuck in the shape his anxious fingers had combed it into. And he still looked so pale, ashy the way it had been on the ice even before his injury. He looked like a man whose life had fallen apart in the space of a few days but, mercifully, he was standing and walking and breathing which was all Ilya could care about in that first split second.

"Shane..." he blurted out almost reflexively, a response to the relief that struck him hard in the chest.

Shane's lower lip trembled, his voice a rasp like he hadn't used it in a while, "I didn't...I didn't think you'd actually come."

Ilya didn't try to hide the pain he felt at that, "You really didn't?"

Shane wrapped the arm that wasn't holding the door around his body, like he was trying to physically hold himself in one piece, "I thought you'd get the message."

Ilya barely felt his hands clenched into fists with how hard he was having to keep himself from taking Shane in his arms, "Kind of hard to do when you don't actually say anything to me, no?"

Shane flinched a little at that but he didn't argue, eyes ducking and darkening with shame. He stepped back into the cottage, giving Ilya space to walk past him into the warmth. The fire was roaring but it was the only light in the place, the dancing shadows thrown far up the walls and looking more sinister than comforting. There was a blanket bunched up in front of the fire, still half in the shape of Shane's body, clearly where he'd been curled up until Ilya knocked on the door and disturbed him.

Something about that tugged on Ilya's instincts, like he was supposed to realise something. It was almost like a haphazard nest but Shane wasn't in heat. At least he shouldn't be, they'd have given him suppressants at the hospital, surely?

Ilya shook his exhausted mind back to more important things, "Seeing as I'm clearly too stupid, you want to just tell me in person what this grand message is?"

He wanted Shane to get angry, he wanted the stubborn, snapping rival he'd always known, the one who wasn't afraid to push back and had no trouble convincing the narrow minded

world that he was an alpha. He wanted to see something in those eyes that wasn't pure misery.

But Shane didn't bite back. He just looked so tired and so deeply, deeply sad, in the glimpse Ilya got before he turned away.

"That's not what I meant, Ilya, I just...I thought it was clear that I had a good reason for ending this."

That word terrified Ilya more than he could say, however much he'd prepared himself to hear it.

"There is no reason good enough," he growled, the fear turning into anger the way it always did, a chemical reaction in his heart he'd always been unable to control.

Shane's breathing hitched, a broken sound that was trying to be a laugh, "You sure about that?"

Ilya looked at him helplessly, wondering where this gulf between them had come from and how he was going to get across it, all he could do was reach out and hope Shane could hear him.

"I'd rather decide that for myself, Shane. Please?"

After a long moment, Shane finally turned around to face Ilya, leaning against the back of the couch like just standing was draining him. Ilya felt his heart clench as he realised he was wearing the Boston Bears shirt he'd left for him years ago, after a heat they'd shared together. It was faded now, the graphic peeling slightly at the edge, but Shane's hands were fisted in its fabric like it was his only anchor right now.

"You're right," Shane croaked, eyes finally meeting Ilya's like he'd been trying to keep them apart but just couldn't any longer, "I'm sorry."

Ilya blinked, a little surprised. He couldn't remember the last time his famously stubborn omega had admitted someone else was right. But Shane said the words like they were the only things he was sure of in the world, his eyes soft and sad, no longer trying to hide the shame in them.

"I guess...I guess I got scared," he bit his lip, forcing it to hold still before he could continue, "I thought this way would be cleaner somehow but I was just being a coward. You deserved better than that. And I'm sorry."

"Shane..." Ilya heard his voice crack, struck by the unmistakable sense that something was rushing at them, hard and fast and he didn't know what would be left afterwards.

He'd always known that Shane Hollander was brave. Anyone who strapped knives to their feet and threw themselves into a roller derby on ice had to be called brave, he supposed, but it was more than that with Shane. To defy everything anyone thought about omegas, to put himself in the public eye and risk being found out, to smash every record the way he had, to

be the captain of twenty three other alphas and earn their respect over and over again. It took so much for Shane to face and Ilya was perhaps the only person who understood why. Because some things were worth that risk.

Ilya saw that now in Shane's eyes, the stubborn set of his jaw, the sharp breath he took. At that moment, he knew that Shane Hollander was maybe the bravest person he'd ever met.

"I'm pregnant, Ilya," he said the words in a rush, like a desperate strike at a goal in the final moments of a game.

Of all the things Ilya had been expecting him to say, that had pretty much been last on the list. And the moment he knew, he felt like an idiot for not seeing it.

"They told me in the hospital, after I went down," Shane was still talking, rambling and clutching anxiously at his shirt, "I wouldn't ever have gone out on the ice if I'd known, I swear, I had no idea. They realised I was an omega, did a test and...and they're there."

Ilya opened his mouth but the words kept pouring out of Shane, like some valve had burst inside him after days of building pressure, tears rolling down his cheeks as it all wrenched free.

"And I know you didn't ask for this, I know this ruins absolutely everything. I mean, fuck, it's already done it, hasn't it? I can't play, I already know the Voyageurs won't renew my contract, Coach said as much. They were all fine with me being an omega as long as it stayed a secret but now it can't be so they're dropping me, after everything. I just couldn't let it ruin your life too, Ilya, I thought I was protecting you. I promise, I don't want anything from you, you can leave and I'll do this by myself, I won't tell anyone whose it is. I can't ask you to--"

Ilya couldn't hear anymore. He didn't have the words for this so he simply didn't speak. He just acted.

He stepped forward, closing his arms around Shane, holding him the way he'd been desperate to for days now, maybe even longer than that. He held nothing back, he held him like he was shielding him from the rest of the world, like the only things that mattered were right here, pressed against his chest. He hoped his heartbeat, thrumming frantically against his ribs like it was trying to jump the gap between them, said everything he couldn't.

Because all Ilya could do was rasp, "Are you okay? Both of you, are you okay?"

Shane trembled in his arms, clinging on for dear life like he was scared Ilya would disappear at any moment, "Yeah. Yeah, they ran a bunch of tests, there's no damage. Even did an ultrasound, I...I got to see them. Hear their heartbeat."

Ilya tried to wrap his mind around that, voice soft and awed, "What did they look like?"

Shane tucked his head against Ilya's shoulder, in the place where it always fit just right, like they had been made to hold each other, "Perfect. They look perfect, Ilya."

"Of course they do," a laugh burst out of his chest, "They're ours."

Shane stilled a little, like he couldn't let himself believe what he'd just heard. He pulled back just enough to search Ilya's face.

"Ours? You mean...you mean you want to..."

The answer came without any hesitation, starting Ilya with how deeply he could know something, enough to rattle his bones.

"If you are doing this, Shane, you will be doing it with me by your side," Ilya held him at the hips, keeping them joined, "That's a promise."

Shane's smile was like the sun rising, "God, Ilya..."

"Of course, if you don't want to have this pup, I'd never force you," Ilya had to add, just before he let himself start to believe this was happening, "I mean, fuck, it's asking so much of you Shane..."

"I know," his voice trembled, just a little, but his jaw was firmly set, "And they're worth it. *This* is worth it. I'm sorry it took me so long to realise that, Ilya, I just...I never imagined I'd find something I cared about more than playing hockey, I was scared to step back from it. But here I am."

Ilya felt tears rolling down his own face but, for once, he didn't try to hide them, "Here we are."

Shane let his head fall forward, resting on Ilya's chest right where his crucifix lay, "God...I was so fucking scared, Ilya..."

He tightened his arms around his shoulders, "Well now we can be fucking scared together, yes?"

That made Shane laugh, "I like that a lot better...still need to find a professional team who's willing to be the first in the league to publicly put an omega on their roster..."

Shane's voice was bleak, showing exactly how likely he thought that would be, a little easier than trying to play the game standing on his head. But Ilya was thinking about Coach Wiebe's hand on his arm as he told him that Shane was asking for him, about Troy Barrett reminding him what Shane would want, about Hayes' sympathetic eyes and Harris proudly displaying his bond mark when it was still so hard for queer men to do that in hockey. And Ilya felt something click into place.

"I think I might know one," he murmured against Shane's soft hair, feeling that grin return to his face, the one that had been making opposing teams groan his whole life, the one that said Ilya Rozanov had decided how the next sixty minutes would play out and it would end with him winning.

Shane drew back, not even needing to ask, the two of them had been virtually telepathic their whole careers even if they had used it mostly to provoke each other, "You really think they'd take me on?"

“I think it’s about damn time we played on the same team,” Ilya stroked his thumb gently across Shane’s cheek, “Let me talk to Coach.”

Shane still looked anxious but he clearly pushed it away, leaning into Ilya’s hand and focusing on that, “I love you...”

“I love you too,” Ilya let his free hand trail down to rest on Shane’s stomach, feeling something almost like a spark against his fingers, “I love both of you.”

It was like standing on the edge of a cliff, nothing but darkness below them. It was so easy to flinch back, to feel that sick dizziness in the pit of his stomach and have his muscles say *no, absolutely no fucking way*. But as Shane pulled him down into a kiss, Ilya realised it was okay not to know what was down there, it was okay to not know if he was ready.

Because with Shane in his arms and the life they’d made together under his hand, Ilya could believe that it was going to be something really, really good.

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Ilya knew where he would find the newest member of the Ottawa Centaurs an hour before their first game of the season. The two newest members actually, if the outfits were anything to go by.

“God, your mom’s taking this seriously, huh?” Ilya laughed, coming to join Shane where he and their son were sitting on the bench closest to the ice.

“Surprising absolutely no one,” Shane remarked, “Here, you hold him, I’ve been hogging all the cuddles.”

“You have and it will not be forgiven...”

It would never stop astounding Ilya how easily his arms moved to hold his baby son, instincts he’d thought he’d never been born with or had been beaten out of him spluttering to life the moment he heard he was going to be a father. He’d been so scared, more scared than he could admit to Shane until he’d done a few sessions with his therapist. How could he be a decent father when he’d never known one himself?

But then he held his son for the first time and the truth had become clear. He would do it by having the one thing his father had lacked. He would love his little boy with every atom in his body and work the rest out from there.

It helped that Alexi Ilyich Hollander was one of the most adorable things Ilya had ever seen. Even more so when he was decked out in Centaurs gear, made adorably small to fit an almost one year old.

“Who’s going out tonight, huh, me or you?” Ilya cooed, kissing his round cheeks, laughing as his son took eager fistfuls of his curls.

“Alexi might have more consistent assists...” Shane hummed mildly, beaming as he watched the two of them.

“Fuck you,” Ilya shot back, only just remembering to cover his son’s ears before he did.

Though it gave him some hope to hear Shane trying to rile him up, he knew how nervous his mate was. Nervous enough to be sat here in the empty stands, watching the Zamboni chug over the ice, while the rest of the Centaurs were getting riled up in the changing room. It was just so many firsts piled on top of each other, the first game of the season, first with a brand new team, first after coming back from paternity leave. First after the world found out he was an omega. First with more pressure, more expectation, more eyes waiting for him to fail than Shane had ever known.

Ilya reached out and slid an arm around his mate’s shoulders, “Hey. I’m here if you need to talk.”

Shane’s eyes softened, heartbreakingly grateful. But he only leaned into Ilya’s shoulder, reaching over to stroke through Alexi’s soft dark hair, so like his own.

“Thanks but you’ve listened to me ramble enough, I think...I think I just need to play.”

Shane Hollander really was the bravest person Ilya had ever known.

“At least you’ll have one person in the stands who’ll love you no matter how tonight goes,” he reminded him, bouncing Alexi until he gave a burbling giggle that Ilya would never get tired of hearing, “And your mom, I guess, seeing as she’ll be holding him.”

Shane chuckled, leaning in and pressing a kiss to the top of their son’s head, his voice soft, “I just want to win and make him proud...”

Ilya squeezed his shoulder, “*Moy miluyi...* you don’t need to win to make him proud, or any of us. You’re doing it just by going out there. By being who you are.”

Shane pressed his face against Ilya’s neck for a second, inhaling deeply like he was drawing some kind of strength just from the scent of him. Ilya’s heart thudded in his chest.

“Thank you,” Shane smiled, “Guess I’d better go get ready...”

“And we’ll drop the Centaurs’ number one fan off with his grandmother,” Ilya nodded, standing with him, keeping Alexi cuddled in against his chest, wondering if he could hear how hard his papa’s heart was beating as the excitement built in him.

Though there was one thing he needed to be certain of, one thing that had been worrying him more than Shane.

“Just promise me something,” he nudged his mate with his shoulder.

“Sure?” Shane paused, tilting his head.

“Promise me you’ll be careful. I know you feel like you’ve got to prove something tonight but the only thing I care about is you walking off the ice on your own two feet. So please try and take it easy, okay?”

Shane's jaw tensed slightly, Ilya's protectiveness had strayed too far at times during his pregnancy, they'd had their fair share of arguments about it. But it eased after a moment, replaced by a soft, understanding smile.

"I won't put you through that again, Ilya. I promise, I'll be careful."

-

Ilya was pretty sure he'd spoken perfect English, nice and clearly, easy for Shane to understand.

And yet, about five minutes into the game, he found himself crashing into the boards along with Shane after his mate pulled a risky maneuver around an Admirals' defenseman that didn't go as planned. At least Ilya took most of the hit.

He grunted, feeling those same old injuries light up though there seemed to be more joining them this time, "Jesus. This is your idea of taking it easy, Hollander?"

"I would be if that asshole hadn't barged me!" Shane shook himself, his frustration easing as he looked up at Ilya, "You okay? Sorry, I didn't see how close you were..."

Ilya had actually been shadowing him as close as possible, ready to throw himself between Shane and any incoming check. But admitting that would start another argument about overprotectiveness so he chose not to mention that.

"I'm never going to complain about being close to you, *moy lyubimyy*," Ilya smiled wryly, "But we can beat these idiots without you getting another concussion."

Shane rolled his eyes, pushing himself off Ilya's chest, "I know, I know. I'll be careful."

"Sure you will," Ilya grinned, not believing that for a moment, "Now lets send these fuckers back to New York."

And by the time the final whistle blew, they'd done just that, though it was still enough of a fight to be fun. During the handshakes, Ilya caught a glimpse of Scott Hunter lingering over Shane's, smiling and seeming to congratulate him. Shane blushed and instinctively touched the still fairly fresh bond mark on his collar, the way he always did whenever anyone mentioned it. Like he was checking it really was there.

Ilya had wanted to wait before he asked him, thinking that pregnancy and getting back on the ice were more than enough to ask of Shane's body. But, like most things he planned, it went wrong. He'd ended up blurting out his proposal while Shane had been in the middle of labour, getting slightly over emotional. Not exactly the romantic setting Ilya been hoping for but Shane had been happy to accept, once he'd stopped laughing at him. And seeing that mark did give him a warm sense of pride, the knowledge that everyone in the whole stadium knew that Shane Hollander was his.

Of course when Scott Hunter got to Ilya, he just glared and throttled his fingers. But he deserved that.

The two of them lingered behind their teammates, finding each other on center ice like they knew this moment was one they'd want to keep. Shane was bright eyed, his hair swept into madness by the helmet now dangling from one hand, his cheeks flushed with effort and the widest smile on his face. He looked proud of himself, just as he damn well should.

"God I want to kiss you," Ilya purred, admiring his bold, beautiful mate.

"We're supposed to be careful about that kind of thing too..." Shane reminded him, though nothing on his face matched his words.

"Mm," Ilya smirked, "I think I'm done being careful about that."

"Thank god," Shane groaned, already moving to meet him in a fierce kiss.

People were filling out after the game, they didn't have quite as big an audience as Ilya was hoping for. But this wouldn't be the last time they did this.

Ilya Rozanov would take every opportunity to show the world exactly what Shane Hollander meant to him.

Chapter End Notes

I really hoped you like this, thanks so much for all asking for this because writing it was just a blast! I got to be so self indulgent! If you want more hollanov family head canons or fic requests, send them to me over on Tumblr @mollymauk-teafleak <3

End Notes

You all asked for it, you let my nonsense go unchallenged! I hope you enjoy this, please leave a comment if you did! I'm also on Tumblr, [@mollymauk-teafleak](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!