

you'd rather die than take your eyes off me

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by [princebutt](#)

Summary

“Hey, Hollander, did you see the news about Rozanov?”

Shane’s head snaps up and he almost gives himself whiplash. It’s deja vu, and it throws him back to that moment last season when Ilya’s father passed and he went MIA. His teammates had speculated, but Shane had known the truth – Ilya’s father had passed and he’d flown back to Russia to take care of family matters.

“No?” He states simply, because he doesn’t trust his tongue to not betray him. What could Ilya possibly have done that would get him on the news?

A phone is passed over, and Shane squints against the light and the tiny font of the news article. In big, bold letters the title reads ‘HOCKEY STAR ILYA ROZANOV SEVERELY INJURED IN CAR CRASH.’ It’s accompanied by a generic picture from the Boston news channel, but Shane doesn’t scroll down any further. He can’t. He doesn’t think his brain is capable of any thoughts currently. The phone drops out of his shaking hand and he realizes belatedly that tears are blurring his vision.

“I gotta go.”

OR, Ilya is in a car accident. Shane hurries to be by his side, and outs them in the process. Set during the year Ilya is playing for Boston.

Notes

This honestly might be shit, I have no idea. I wrote it in a fuge state and I don't remember half of it. But it's done and it's edited so have at it boys. Thank you forever and always to [Anna](#) for betaing this bad boy!

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

Shane Hollander leaves the ice feeling frustrated, exhausted and spent after a grueling game against the Pittsburgh Puffins. Sure, the Voyageurs won, but Shane got slammed into the boards multiple times, fought hard for every goal, and was put through the ringer by the Puffins' defensemen. It had been a hard win, and the fight he'd had with Ilya directly before coming to the arena this afternoon didn't help anything.

Neither did the distance between them, that made it next to impossible to make it up to Ilya how he wanted.

So he'd have to call Ilya later, once he's showered and home, and grovel, because he'd not meant half the words he'd said. They'd just come out because he was frustrated and lonely and *sad* that his boyfriend is hundreds of miles away. He knows the plan – soon enough Ilya will be closer. But soon enough isn't now, and that truth weighs Shane down like rocks are tied to his ankles and he's being thrown into a lake. He's drowning in his feelings of loneliness, and how all consuming it is that he spends every waking minute missing Ilya.

This long distance thing is harder than he'd thought, but he's determined to make it work. He's never loved anyone like he loves Ilya, and that has to count for something.

The locker room is raucous, with music playing and guys talking animatedly, as Shane enters. He sits in front of his stall and unlaces his skates slowly, because while everyone else is happy for the win, Shane is replaying all the mistakes he's made today (both on and off the ice) in his head. He reaches for his phone once his skates are off, and prays for anything from Ilya – a voicemail or a text, hell he'd even take just a missed call at this point. But nothing.

And why should Ilya initiate contact? Sure, he'd said some hurtful things too, but Shane is fully taking responsibility for this on his shoulders. He'd been bitchy because he missed Ilya, and now it's time to grovel.

“Hey, Hollander, did you see the news about Rozanov?”

Shane's head snaps up and he almost gives himself whiplash. It's *deja vu*, and it throws him back to that moment last season when Ilya's father passed and he went MIA. His teammates had speculated, but Shane had known the truth – Ilya's father had passed and he'd flown back to Russia to take care of family matters.

But there's no aging father to pass now, and immediately, dread roils in Shane's stomach, hot and bitter like acid.

“No?” He states simply, because he doesn't trust his tongue to not betray him. What could Ilya possibly have done that would get him on the news?

A phone is passed over, and Shane squints against the light and the tiny font of the news article. In big, bold letters the title reads ‘HOCKEY STAR ILYA ROZANOV SEVERELY INJURED IN CAR CRASH.’ It's accompanied by a generic picture from the Boston news channel, but Shane doesn't scroll down any further. He can't. He doesn't think his brain is capable of any thoughts currently. The phone drops out of his shaking hand and he realizes

belatedly that tears are blurring his vision. He's in a room full of his team mates, but he can't get a hold on himself, because the one person in the world he'd do anything for is probably not ok, and he's hundreds of miles away and the space feels like a void that's sucking Shane under.

"I gotta go."

JJ grabs for the phone at Shane's feet and taps two fingers against Shane's knee. "Hollander? You ok?"

The words sound far off, and Shane's so lost in his panic that they barely register. His ears are ringing and his head feels foggy, and all he can see are those big block letters spelling out his worst nightmare. Ilya isn't ok, and this is all his fault. Things have never unraveled faster in Shane's hands than this moment.

Without warning Shane stands from the bench. He finishes shucking off his gear and doesn't bother with a shower, just pulls on his suit he'd worn to the arena today and – leaves.

He just fucking leaves.

Shane hears a chorus of people calling out to him as he exits the locker room, but he doesn't stop. He can't stop. He can't stand the fact that Ilya isn't close, and he's *injured*, and Shane is absolutely helpless because he doesn't know *one* of Ilya's team mates. He doesn't have a single one of Ilya's friends' numbers saved in his phone. He doesn't know who to call or how to deal with this, so he does the one thing he can do – he gets into his car, sets his GPS for Boston, and starts driving.

Five minutes after he merges onto the highway, reality sets in. Up until now he'd been on autopilot. He was reliable captain Shane who holds it together in times of crisis and doesn't panic. Sure, he walked out of the locker room and didn't look back, but it wasn't panic so much as determination that drove him. Now, the panic is taking over. He can feel it like cold fingers tickling his spine. There's a massive stone in the pit of his stomach that weighs heavy on him, and *finally* the dam bursts, and tears, hot and overwhelming, roll down his cheeks as a sob shudders through him.

It isn't supposed to be like this. They're supposed to live outside of the hands of fate, but it was silly of him to think they were greater than that.

The tears keep coming, and Shane just keeps wiping them away so he can see the road. He knows this is not really his best idea, driving when he's this emotionally distraught, but trying to get a flight, or even worse, just waiting it out, isn't an option. So he's going to drive to Boston, and he's going to fucking find Ilya one way or another.

Finally, after a good forty minutes of salty tears burning his cheeks, they stop coming. Now he's just deflated and exhausted emotionally. His eyelids feel like sandpaper whenever he blinks, and the panic has him high strung and jumpy. He's holding the steering wheel with a death grip, and he's leaned forward in the seat of his Cherokee, but he doesn't care. All he cares about is making it to Boston.

Shane stops at a rest stop about two hours into his four hour and forty five minute drive. He uses the restroom and buys a bottle of water, and he looks at what food is in the vending machine but decides his stomach is too upset to eat anything. The anxiety and dread that have taken a home there cause roiling and cramping in his abdomen, and swallowing is already hard without adding sugary sweets to the mix, so he just goes back to his car, gets back into the driver's seat, and takes a deep breath.

The thing is, he hasn't looked at his phone since he left the arena. And when he finally does, he's not surprised to find a missed call from JJ and one from Hayden, but also two voicemails from his parents. Shane steels himself and dials Yuna's number, and he puts the call on bluetooth so it filters in through his car's sound system.

"Shane?" His mother's voice is thick with worry when she answers, and Shane pushes his thumb and forefinger into his eyes to keep himself from immediately breaking back into tears.

"Hi mom," His voice breaks on 'mom,' and the tears start fresh, because he knows she knows. She must have seen it on ESPN.

"Oh, honey." The sadness that echoes in her words is impossible to miss, and Shane tries to repress his sobs but fails miserably. Yuna just lets him cry and stays on the line, and hearing the steady sound of her breathing in and out, and the muffled noises of the TV on in the background, is soothing. "Where are you?" She finally asks, and Shane sniffles.

"Somewhere in Vermont," he manages, his voice weak. Yuna inhales sharply, and he can practically see her shaking her head.

"You shouldn't be driving Shane." And he knows what she's implying – that emotionally he isn't well enough to do this. And she's probably right.

"I have to get to Boston."

Yuna sighs, and Shane bites his lower lip, because he knows she's right, and he knows he's causing her stress with this, but he won't be talked down from it, either. "Maybe you should _"

"No, mom." He's harsher than he means to be, but he has to make her understand; he has to be by Ilya's side or he might *die*. "I need to see him."

"Sweetie, you won't do any good if you get yourself hurt as well."

It hangs there between them, and Shane breathes deeply, lets the implication of it all sink into him and cut through him. Suddenly feeling constricted and hot he tears off his suit jacket and tosses it in the back seat, then lets out an anguished cry as he hits his steering wheel with the palm of his hand.

"I can't believe this is fucking happening." He's not angry at his mom, but she's in front of him now and there's nowhere else to place his anger.

“It’s going to be ok.”

“Is it?” He asks through gritted teeth. There’s silence on the other line. He thinks she must be realizing she can’t promise him that, and Shane’s heart breaks all over again. “I just need to get to Boston. I’ll call you when I get there.”

Another sigh falls from Yuna’s lips. “Drive safe, Shane.”

“Love you, mom.”

“Love you, Shane.”

The call disconnects, and Shane does what he’s been dreading – he searches Ilya’s name in google on his phone, and clicks on the first news article. It’s not helpful, with no details of the crash and even less information on what happened to Ilya. The second one is not much better, but it does have a picture of Ilya’s bright orange sports car, which looks awful after they’d pulled it away from the tree he’d wrapped it around. The third article is the most useful, and even says which hospital Ilya was taken to.

Shane steals himself, plugs the hospital into his GPS, and gets back on the road.

After hours of driving, Shane’s back is sore and his eyes burn, but he’s made it to Boston. It’s 5 in the morning and dark as death, and the bland, bright lights of the hospital’s parking garage are stark compared to the softness of the road lights outside of the city, but he’s *made* it. He’s in Boston, and nothing can *touch* him. Not one person or thing can hurt him more than his panic and anxiety already has. The whole drive here his mind brewed up scenario after scenario – not making it in time, Ilya never playing hockey again, or, even worse, Ilya being *gone*.

Ilya.

Gone.

That can’t be the reality.

But the truth is, he doesn’t *know* what’s happened to Ilya. That makes his stomach roll, and Shane inhales as he steps through the automatic doors and into the hospital.

The fluorescents are harsh as Shane steps into them, even worse than the parking lot lights. Shane’s eyes scrunch against the brightness as he makes his way up to the front desk.

“Hi, sir, how can I help you?”

Shane’s fingers rake through his hair and he bites on his lower lip to contain the tears that are threatening to fall *again*. He’s been crying on and off the whole way here, and he honestly didn’t think he had any tears left, but apparently he’s wrong.

“I, uhh, I need to see Ilya Rozanov.” The name falls from his lips like a prayer, because he can’t believe he’s saying them in this context.

The woman's brow furrows and she clicks on her computer, then lowers her glasses from atop her head and looks at the screen.

"Sorry, sir, but unfortunately we're outside of visiting hours."

The woman says it with little authority, just like it's a known fact, and everything inside of him *breaks*.

"Listen, I don't give a *fuck* about visiting hours." Shane hisses the words out between clenched teeth, and his hands grip the edge of the desk. "I *need* to see him." It's not a question, not a suggestion – his voice is authoritative and serious, and he's every inch the NHL Captain right now.

The woman's wide eyes look up at him, and a frown curves down the corners of her lips. "Sir, I would hate to have to get security involved." It's a thinly veiled threat, and Shane knows it for what it is. His fingers are white with the force he's gripping the desk, and his jaw clenches.

"Fuck. Fine. Can you at least tell me he's still..." Shane's voice cracks over the last word and he steps from the desk and shoves his hands into his pockets.

She clicks away on the computer, then looks over her glasses at Shane. "Are you a relative of Mr. Rozanov's?" She asks, and has the audacity to pop the gum she's chewing.

The muscle in Shane's jaw twitches. "No."

"Then unfortunately I cannot release any information to you."

Shane hisses out a breath. "He's my boyfriend," he says, under his breath and softer than he wants. He wants to be courageous in this, wants to love Ilya and say it with his chest. But he knows the risk that comes with that. There are people in the waiting room, and he doesn't know who any of them are, or if any of them know who *he* is. And outing himself in this moment would mean outing Ilya as well, and that makes him feel *slimy*.

But then the receptionist gives him a look, one that seems to convey how badly she wants this conversation to be over with, and the dam bursts, and he doesn't know when he started yelling, but it's happening, and everything is coming out.

"He's my *fucking boyfriend*, ok? Is that not e-fucking-nough for you?"

A security guard steps out of the shadows to Shane's left – he hadn't seen the man there. Shane's hand anxiously tugs through his dark hair then down his face, wiping at the tears cresting from his eyes.

"Family only, Mr. Hollander," the woman says, and Shane could *swear* she's smirking at him.

The muscle in Shane's jaw twitches as he clenches his teeth. "Fine. When do visiting hours start?"

The woman clicks away at her computer then looks at him with a bored expression.

“Four hours.”

He turns to move to a chair in the waiting room when it registers, and everything crashes down on him. She’d called him *Hollander*. This woman knows who he is.

Fuck.

The hospital stays quiet until about 8 AM. Shane weaves in and out of sleep in his chair, arms crossed over his chest. When he’s not sleeping he just stares at the ceiling and lets the anxiety wash through him like a raging river. So much is balancing on the tip of a knife in this moment, and everything feels like it’s been tossed up into the air and juggled around. He loathes the uncertainty, hates that he doesn’t have an exact answer. The not knowing is killing him almost more than the knowledge that Ilya is behind those metal doors, in pain and alone, and Shane is so close and yet so far. He wants to hold Ilya’s hand. He wants to kiss each knuckle and each valley in between and promise him it’s going to be alright.

Instead he’s jiggling his leg in a waiting room chair and praying he’s allowed back there soon.

The receptionist changes at 8 AM, and Shane debates asking this woman if he can go back early, but he knows the security guard has been watching him, so he opts to stay in his chair until 9 AM on the dot. He watches his phone closely from 8:43 AM until 9, and as soon as the hour switches over, he’s up on his feet and striding towards the desk.

And the thing is... he hasn’t showered in twenty four hours, he’s still wearing his suit he’d worn to the arena last night, and he’s *fucking exhausted*. And all he wants is to see Ilya. All he wants is reassurance that the love of his life hasn’t left him, that he isn’t wholly and utterly alone. He just wants affirmation that the soul that makes up the other half of him is still here. Is that so much to fucking ask for?

This woman behind the desk is much more chipper than night-shift Nancy, and she smiles widely at Shane as he approaches with caution.

“How can I help you, sir?” She asks as she types on the computer, and Shane leans his forearms against the desk and lets his head droop a little.

Shane takes a deep breath, feels some tension leave his shoulders, and breathes out. “I’d like to see Ilya Rozanov.”

With some taps at the computer, the woman leans forward, eyes squinted, before nodding and reaching for a clipboard. “Of course. Can you just fill this out? And I’ll need to see your ID.”

Relief floods through Shane. He’d not been told there was no Ilya to see and he wasn’t turned away, both good things. He fills out the paperwork with basic information about himself then slides it back over to the woman. She taps at her keyboard again, then nods and looks up at Shane with a sympathetic smile.

“Looks like he’s just coming out of surgery. You’re going to go to room 1181 and he should be there.”

Shane’s shoulders slump with relief. Coming out of surgery. He’s alive. The relief he feels is heady, and he has to hold back laughter that bubbles into his throat, a mixture of exhaustion and the rush knowing Ilya is alive has brought on.

“You’re going to go in through these doors to my left and go down the hall. Take a right at the elevators, and the room should be in that back corner. Don’t take any elevators, and you should be golden!” She tells him cheerily. Shane nods numbly, once, twice, three times, then gives her a mild grin.

“Thank you. So, so much, thank you.” He breathes, and she nods, then gives him a wink.

“Anytime, sir,” She trills, and Shane turns his back and heads deeper into the hospital.

It takes Shane a few wrong turns before he finds the room. At 1181 Shane hesitates, then knocks.

“You can come in,” A feminine voice calls, and Shane hesitates at that, but finally pushes the door open. A woman in scrubs is standing beside Ilya’s hospital bed. She has an ipad in her hand and is writing on it, and Ilya’s head turns, and immediately sunlight enters his eyes.

“*Shane.*” Hearing his name fall from Ilya’s lips at this moment is better than any hit ever could be. It floods through his veins, and the next thing he knows, Shane has crossed the hospital room in a few short strides, and his hand finds Ilya’s. Their fingers wrap together and he’s gentle, but he leans in to press the softest of kisses to Ilya’s cheek before stepping back and taking his boyfriend in. He’s got two black eyes and an obviously broken nose, and there is gauze wrapped around his torso, but if Shane didn’t know any better he might have thought Ilya was just in a bad fight during a game.

“You fucking idiot,” Shane laughs, and he wipes at his eyes. The joy of seeing Ilya alive in front of him has made him weepy, and he hadn’t realized he was crying again until the tears are running down his cheeks and he’s sniffing with an influx of snot.

Ilya has the audacity to look affronted, but his grip on Shane’s hand tightens as the nurse adjusts the bed so he’s sitting up.

“He just got out of surgery an hour ago, sir, so...” She gestures vaguely, and Shane understands the universal sign for ‘be careful with him.’ Shane nods dumbly and stands beside Ilya as the nurse moves a tray table over with a water cup. “Ilya, love, drink water and don’t move too much. No... *friends* on the bed, and no cellphones,” she instructs as she looks between Ilya and Shane and winks at Ilya conspiratorily.

Weakly, Ilya salutes her. She pulls a chair over and gestures for Shane to sit, which he does, but never once lets go of Ilya’s hand.

The nurse turns and leaves the room, and as soon as the door clicks closed, Shane leans forward and scrubs his hand down his face.

“I thought you were *dead*.”

“Shane —”

“No. No! Don’t ‘*Shane*’ me. Ilya what the fuck were you thinking? Had you been drinking? You could have hurt someone other than yourself.” Shane’s panic is making his voice high and tight, and he breaks, for what feels like the hundredth time today. How many times can he crack before he completely shatters apart? Shane inhales sharply, then his dark eyes meet Ilya’s once more, and a sob wracks through him. “*I thought you were dead*.” he repeats it, to really drive that point home.

“I am right here, Shane,” Ilya says, his voice soft, his accent heavier as his voice slurs with exhaustion. “I just went out for a drive after our fight, I had not had a drop of alcohol. I took a turn too fast and...” He shrugs, then squeezes Shane’s hand. “Could have happened to anyone. Was a true accident,” he explains. Shane’s shoulders shake as he tries to hold back the tears but fails miserably. “Shane,” Ilya says, a soft plea. His free hand finds Shane’s chin and he tilts Shane’s face up with his bruised knuckles.

“I’m so relieved you’re ok. They wouldn’t even tell me anything, and I just... I assumed the worst.” Shane chokes over the words, and a lump forms in his chest just thinking about the possibility of it. He hates himself for how weak he is for Ilya, but he loves this man so damn much that he can’t be too mad about it. Being in love is a fucking pain, he thinks as he looks into Ilya’s eyes, really looks, and searches for shelter there.

Ilya is his home. Ilya is his everything. He doesn’t know what he’d do if he lost Ilya, but the fact that he’d even had to grapple with that reality today is overwhelming in the worst way. Shane leans back in his armchair and lets his head tilt back. This chair is plush and comfortable, and he finally looks at his phone for the first time in hours.

He’s got plenty of texts from his mom and his teammates, but one specific one stands out to him. It’s from Hayden, and the tone is... harsh, to say the least.

Hayden: uhh, buddy, what the fuck?

It’s got a link to a TMZ article, and Shane is immediately taken aback by the headline.

“HOCKEY’S HOTTEST HUNK SPOTTED IN BOSTON HOSPITAL TREATING ILYA ROZANOV”

There are a slew of pictures of him striding into the hospital, and grainy pictures of him in the waiting room looking distraught. The article, if you can even call it that, is minimal. But what stands out to him are his own words mirrored back at him.

“He’s my fucking boyfriend, ok? Is that not e-fucking-nough for you?”

Shane knows it's a direct quote, and he loathes himself so fully right now. Not only is Ilya injured, but now he's been outed.

"Fuck." Shane breathes, and his head leans against the railing of Ilya's bed.

"What?" Ilya asks mildly, and Shane bites his lip before reading the article to Ilya.

"Oh." The sound falls from Ilya's lips with true exhaustion as his head slumps back against the pillows.

"I didn't... I wasn't thinking," Shane admits, and his Adam's apple bobs as he swallows thickly, anxiety clawing its way up his esophagus. He tries to breathe through it, but he can feel the panic winning out here, because they've worked so hard to conceal this secret for so long and now it's all crashing down around them. They didn't get to make this choice like they wanted to; they didn't get to come out on their own terms and time, Shane had dragged Ilya out with him. He really fucked this one up.

Ilya's hand wraps around Shane's, and his fingers trail through his boyfriend's hair. "Shane," Ilya says quietly, his voice gentle and his gaze soft. Shane is sure he can see the panic as it's setting in in real time, and he wishes he could be different. He wishes he could care less about what everyone thinks of him and what this will do to their careers and all of the implications that will come from this. But his mind won't stop racing with all of the bad that would come from this singular good.

"Shane," Ilya says again, more forcefully, as his hand squeezes. "It will be alright."

With a deep breath, Shane nods. He lets their fingers tangle together, and he leans back in the hospital chair as he forces himself to take deep, steadying breaths. This could be a good thing. There could be a silver lining in the bad. Maybe them being outed is better than continuing to harbor this secret.

"Maybe this is good. I don't want to have to hide my worry for you." Shane's voice shakes slightly as he says it, but he means it. He really does. He takes a deep breath and nods affirmatively, as if reassuring himself that they can do this.

At those words Ilya's head shoots back up, and he winces at the quick motion. "Do you mean it?" He asks, and Shane shrugs.

"I mean, I can't deny what I said. And I don't really want to."

"Da," Ilya agrees as he lets his head fall back again. "I am tired. We can work this out after some sleep, yes?" he asks as his eyes flutter shut. Shane nods, and taps at his phone again.

"I'm gonna call my mom, ok?"

Ilya nods, but Shane knows he's already half way to sleep.

After watching Ilya's chest rise and fall for a solid minute, Shane calls Yuna. He tells her what's happened, both to Ilya and with the TMZ article, and he worries his lower lip between his teeth as she promises this is all going to be ok, and will work out one way or another. He

doesn't stay on the line long, and opts to hang up and lean back in the chair, content to just be in the same room with Ilya again. Before long he's asleep too, and they both sleep until the nurse comes back in and wakes Ilya up, which in turn wakes Shane up.

The day is full of tests to make sure nothing else is broken inside of Ilya. He has multiple broken ribs, a severe concussion, and a punctured lung which they'd stitched up during surgery, and all of that is enough to create a deep well of panic inside of Shane. The nurse promises Shane that the road to recovery is easy, but Shane still worries.

"He's out for the rest of the season, though," The doctor warns when she stops in later in the afternoon.

Ilya huffs with frustration. "There are only a few games left, and –"

"Mr. Rozanov," The doctor cuts him off and holds up a hand. "Doctor's orders. No hockey for at least a month."

It deflates Ilya, and Shane grabs for his hand and kisses the valley of Ilya's knuckles.

"And you need to stay with someone until the concussion has cleared, a few weeks at least."

Ilya's lips form a line, and Shane brightens. "He can come stay with me. In Montreal," Shane offers. Ilya looks at him carefully, a question in the glance. "I mean, we have nothing to hide anymore, why not?"

The doctor flips through her chart and shrugs. "I don't see why not. I can refer you to a good doctor there, Ilya."

Shane and Ilya nod, and the doctor leaves them, closing the door behind her.

"Are you serious?" Ilya asks, and his words are careful, like he doesn't dare hope, but wants nothing more than what has been offered.

Taking a deep breath, Shane nods. "Yeah. Come live with me." He kisses the palm of Ilya's hand this time, and then holds Ilya's hand with both of his. "You can heal in Montreal, then you'll be a free agent and we'll sort it all out."

Sort it all out. Together. The only thing he can think of is that they can properly be together now. Shane feels like a huge weight has been lifted. Letting the public see inside of their private lives had been a scary prospect, but now that it's here, Shane only feels brave. He wants to sing from the mountain tops that Ilya is his, and maybe he will. He wants to give interviews and write exposes, wants to make sure everyone knows this brilliant, beautiful man is his.

Which reminds him – "I'm sorry for what I said. On the phone. I didn't mean it."

Ilya's head turns on his pillow, and his hazy eyes meet Shane's. "I know, moya lyubov," he says with a little sigh. "But I do appreciate it." Ilya squeezes his hand and Shane slumps with relief.

Then, Ilya looks at him – really looks. Shane feels like he’s an open book and Ilya is ruffling through his pages and extracting all of the information he needs. His nose wrinkles and he tugs at the collar of Shane’s shirt.

“You stink,” Ilya comments, and Shane frowns at him.

“I didn’t have time to shower after the game, I came straight here. Asshole,” Shane grumbles.

This gets a chuckle out of Ilya, which morphs into a cough and a look of intense pain on his boyfriend’s face. Shane smooths his hand over Ilya’s brow with worry, but Ilya waves him off. “You should go to my apartment. Shower. Sleep. I will be fine.”

“But I want to be with you,” Shane protests, sounding much like a petulant child.

“Visiting hours are over in thirty minutes anyway, Shane. Go. Get rest. I will see you in the morning.”

Shane sighs, and he hates that Ilya is right. So he kisses Ilya as deeply as he dares with the pain he’s in and takes instructions for where Ilya’s spare key is. As he drives back to Ilya’s Boston penthouse, he feels the emptiness of his passenger seat acutely. He lets himself into Ilya’s apartment, and hates how big and hollow this place feels without Ilya in it. Shane just goes through the motions – he showers, then slips into a pair of Ilya’s sweats. He eats something from the fridge, though he’s not even sure what it is. He brushes his teeth with the toothbrush he left here a month ago, then crawls into Ilya’s massive bed. Only then, once he’s enveloped in the scent of Ilya, once he’s completely consumed with the memories this bed possesses, does he call Hayden.

“What the fuck, man?” No hello, no how are you. He guesses he should have expected that.

Shane sighs into the phone and rolls onto his back. Hayden doesn’t wait for a response.

“For how long?” Hayden asks, sounding hurt.

“Since our rookie year.”

“Rookie year? What the *fuck*, Hollander?” Hayden cries, and Shane pulls the phone away from his ear. Hayden is ranting about something, but Shane feels so empty, like someone’s scooped his innards out like a pumpkin, that he can’t be bothered to listen.

“Hayden.” This shuts his friend up, and Shane tugs the covers around himself as he curls onto his side. “I love him. And that’s all that fucking matters.”

Because it is. It wouldn’t matter who Ilya was – Shane’s love for him was the important part. Hayden sputters, but finally comes down from his anger.

“Couldn’t it have been anybody else?”

Shane’s agent, Farah Jalali, sets up a press conference, which is held in a conference room at a nearby hotel. As he’d expected, the press is absolutely wild with the promise of learning

more information about Shane Hollander's illicit affair with Ilya Rozanov. But Shane spells it out for them simply, using a script he and Ilya and Farah came up with. It details all the smallest parts of their love, proves just how much this relationship means to both men, and explicitly states that this isn't a publicity stunt, they truly are deeply, madly in love.

And it feels like *flying*, admitting all of this. It feels like shucking his earthbound body and becoming a bird soaring through the clouds, being honest and forthcoming about their relationship. The reporters go absolutely nuts with questions with every new detail Shane reveals – that they've been doing this for *years*, that Shane is staying at Ilya's Boston condo right now, that Ilya won't be finishing the season with the Bears and will come to Montreal to heal. Shane shares what's necessary and holds some details close to his heart. They aren't allowed to know about that first kiss, that's not for them. They can't know about the cottage, about saying I love you and making love on the dock, about Shane's family accepting Ilya with open arms. They can know the broad strokes, but he won't grant them the beauty of the minute details that make up who they are.

After forty five minutes of questions, Shane leaves the hotel and goes back to the hospital. Pictures are snapped of him as he goes inside, and he keeps his sunglasses on until he's at the receptionist's desk checking back in. Ilya is being released today, and Shane's going to take him *home*, and that's not nothing.

Shane snakes his way through the hospital, tracing the route he now knows well, and stops in front of Ilya's room. He can hear a multitude of voices from inside, and Shane hesitates before pushing the door open. Multiple nurses who have taken care of Ilya the past few days are inside, as well as two of his doctors, and they're all laughing and chatting, and of course Ilya is the center of all the attention as he sits on his hospital bed, legs dangling over the edge.

Over his shoulder is a bag of Ilya's things, and a suitcase with more of his clothes is in Shane's car. Shane is wearing Ilya's t-shirt and a pair of jeans he'd left behind in Boston accidentally a few trips ago, and Ilya smiles knowingly as he recognizes the Irina foundation t-shirt.

"Ah, my sweet boyfriend has come to take me home," Ilya teases, and Shane leans in to press a kiss to his forehead.

"Don't worry, we'll miss you too, Shane," one nurse, named Mike, says to Shane as he moves to leave the room. Shane gives him a soft smile, and more of the nurses file out after Mike.

A few minutes later, it's only Shane and Ilya in the room together. Ilya's grin is crooked but wide, and Shane cups his cheek as he kisses him tenderly, lovingly.

"My knight in shining armor, come to take me home," Ilya jokes as his fingers tickle at Shane's hip bone.

Shane chuckles and leans away from him, then tugs at Ilya's hand. It's a long road back to Montreal, and Shane knows his team isn't happy with him, but what matters the most is that Ilya is his, and Ilya will be there with him through it, and that's more than he could ask for.

“Yeah, yeah.” Shane smirks and tugs Ilya up off the bed. “The sooner we leave, the sooner we can crash on my couch and watch ESPN highlights.”

“That sounds more like your fantasy than mine,” Ilya points out, and Shane nods.

He missed a game for Ilya. He’s uprooted his life for days to be here, and now he’s making space in that same life for this man. But that’s what love is – it’s giving and taking, it’s a constant push and pull, and an understanding that things won’t always be sweetly scented roses, but when they are, they’re beautiful.

“My fantasy is being wherever you are,” Shane admits, and he hates how earnest his voice is. But all he wants is to encircle Ilya in his arms forever and keep him safe for always.

That would be enough.

End Notes

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