hold you as the water rushes in

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/75662796.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid, Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Hayden Pike, Ottawa Centaurs Team Ensemble (Game Changers)
Additional Tags:	Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers), Injury, Concussions, public outing, Coming Out, (kind of), Hurt Ilya Rozanov, Autistic Shane Hollander, Hurt/Comfort, Team as Family, Angst with a Happy Ending, Relationship Reveal
Language:	English
Collections:	pov outsider reveals reactions and other forms of perception, my fav gay hockey players, HEATED RIVALRY, HollaNov fanfics I Love, Hockey Boyfriends, moony's collection of FAVOURITE HR fics, Nohn's Favorites
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-12 Words: 6,417 Chapters: 1/1

hold you as the water rushes in

by justhockey

Summary

"Ilya," Shane whispers. "Ilya, baby, can you open your eyes?"

He's met with silence, and the frantic tremor of his heart turns into an earthquake. The ice beneath him seeps into his veins and freezes his blood. Panic claws at his chest, scaling his ribcage like a ladder and lodging in his throat. He can barely breathe around the terror.

"Ilya, you need to open your eyes. You need to look at me."

Notes

Title from *Dancing With Our Hands Tied* by Taylor Swift.

See the end of the work for more notes

There's nothing in the world like the cut of blades against ice.

It doesn't matter how long he's been doing this for, or how many games he's played; the moment Shane steps foot on that ice, the entire world narrows down to one singular focus. Winning. Everything else fades into nothingness, and Shane is overcome with a feeling of tranquility he can't find anywhere else.

It's as easy as breathing for him. *Easier,* sometimes.

Because this is the one thing that he's good at. The thing that he's the *best* at. He doesn't have to second guess himself out here - doesn't have to consider where his hands are supposed to go, or if he's making too much eye contact or not enough. He doesn't have to worry about saying the wrong thing, or saying the *right* thing but having people interpret it wrong. He doesn't have to think, he just *does.* It's instinct, something that lives in his bones.

On the ice, with a stick in his hand and a puck on his tape, Shane gets to just *be.* No performance or pretence. No fear. Just skate, play, win. Simple.

There are six minutes left in the third and Montreal are tied 2-2 with Ottawa. Rozanov had scored both of Ottawa's goals, Shane had put the Voyageurs on the board with a slap shot in the second, and J.J. tied it for them just seconds into the third period. They're neck and neck, both fighting like this is a must-win playoff game instead of a regular season face off that won't affect either of their standings.

The rivalry runs deep between the two teams, simmering in their blood like something alive - something ferocious. Of all the teams in the league, the Centaurs are Shane's favourite to play. And the only thing better than playing against them, is *beating* them. Especially in their own barn.

Especially when he gets to go home with their star player tonight.

Because it doesn't matter how many people chant his name, and it doesn't matter how many fans have his number splayed across their back, *81* belongs to Shane.

Rozanov is his.

And he's fucking gorgeous to watch on the ice.

Sometimes Shane wonders what it would be like to play *with* him, instead of against him. He wonders how it would feel to celebrate wins with him. How much better everything would feel. Because that feeling of tranquility that Shane can't find anywhere but on the ice? Somehow, miraculously, he's found it with Rozanov too.

Even though Rozanov doesn't love hockey in the way Shane does, he was still made for this. He glides across the ice like he was born with skates on his feet, and his mere existence demands respect. Everyone shifts the moment number 81 hits the ice, as if they have to make space to accommodate for him - for the way he takes up the whole rink simply by being there, by being better than everyone else.

He's fast, and agile, and powerful when he plays. The way he commands the team - the way he controls the ice - is so competent and experienced that it makes Shane a little hot under the collar, and it's not because he just pulled a double shift. It's because Rozanov is beautiful, and Shane belongs to him, and he can't wait to be reminded of that fact tonight.

Once Shane beats him, of course.

His blades cut the ice as he hops the board for another shift. Rozanov is battling for the puck along the boards in the neutral zone, so Shane sets his sights on him. He's skating hard and fast, ready to pin Rozanov by his numbers and wrestle the puck off his stick. With only two minutes left on the clock he's hungry for a win in regular time, because the sooner this game ends the sooner he gets to go home with his boyfriend.

But then-

Shane sees it happening in slow motion. He clocks the way Comeau is moving and the way Rozanov has his head down as battles along the boards. Recklessly - *stupidly* - Shane almost calls out a warning, or a plea, or *something,* but he doesn't have enough time. One moment Rozanov is fighting for the puck, and the next…

The next he's being crushed into the boards.

Shane sees the way Rozanov's head hits the glass face-first, the way his body fails him, the way he crumples to the floor. Like a marionette with his strings cut, he lies in a broken heap on the ice. Motionless.

Ilya.

The rink falls silent as the play is blown dead.

Shane doesn't even realise he's moving at first. He didn't think about it, didn't decide to do it, he just…skates. Before he can reach Ilya - before he can touch him, hold him, check that he's okay - he's colliding with another body as an arm wraps around his waist to stop him.

"Back up," the ref says, trying to block Shane's path to his boyfriend.

Frantic, and afraid, and desperate to reach Ilya, Shane looks him dead in the eyes and says, "Let me go."

"You're not going over there," he tries to argue.

Shane is having none of it. There's not a force on this earth that could keep him from Ilya now.

He shakes his arm off, more rough than he really needs to be, and tells him, voice low and lethal and *scared*, "Get the fuck out of my way."

He doesn't wait for a response. He barges past, ignoring the way the ref calls after him, the way Ilya's teammates - Bood, and Haas, and Dykstra - all try to stop him, too. He hears other voices calling out his name, his teammates, probably, but none of that matters. The only thing

Shane cares about, the only thing he can see, is Ilya, still collapsed on the ice, still not moving.

Shane knows fear.

People say you're only born with two fears: loud noises and falling. Shane doesn't think that's true. He's been afraid for as long as he can remember.

Afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, afraid of not being good enough, of failing, of letting his parents and his team and his country down. He was afraid someone would see past the wall he'd put up and realise what he was hiding inside. And when Ilya finally *did,* Shane was afraid of loving him and even more afraid that Ilya wouldn't love him back.

He's spent years terrified out of his mind that people would find out about him, about them, about their love. Terrified that his whole life would come crashing down and he would lose everything he's worked for. It's enough to give him nightmares, and panic attacks sometimes, too.

Shane knows fear all too well.

But he's never been as scared as he is right now.

He grinds to a stop as he reaches Ilya, and he doesn't think - doesn't consider the implications, or the thousands of people watching, or all of the cameras on them - he simply drops down to the ice by Ilya's head.

"Ilya?"

Shane says his name like it's a prayer. Ilya doesn't answer. It feels like he's going to cry, throw up, *die,* right here in front of everyone.

Ilya's helmet is on the ice, the chin strap snapped and the visor cracked from where he was crushed face-first into the boards. The sight makes Shane feel sick. Ever-so-gently, as if one touch could break him, Shane takes Ilya's head between the palms of his hands. Steady, unmoving, holding Ilya still in case…in case something is wrong, with his head or his neck or his spine. Shane widens his knees, cradles Ilya's head between them, and lowers his face.

"Ilya," Shane whispers. "Ilya, baby, can you open your eyes?"

He's met with silence, and the frantic tremor of his heart turns into an earthquake. The ice beneath him seeps into his veins and freezes his blood. Panic claws at his chest, scaling his ribcage like a ladder and lodging in his throat. He can barely breathe around the terror.

"Ilya, you need to open your eyes. You need to look at me."

His voice shakes but his hands remain steady, and just seconds later - less than a minute since the hit, even though it feels like a lifetime - the Centaur's medics skid to a stop beside them. They drop to their knees like Shane had done, and start doing whatever it is they do… examining Ilya, talking to him, trying to get him to reply.

“Keep talking to him,” one of the medics orders Shane.

“Okay, okay,” he says. “Ilya. Ilya can you show me those pretty eyes of yours? Need you to let me see them.”

“Keep his head steady, just like that.”

“Why isn’t he waking up?” Shane’s voice cracks.

“Give him a minute,” the other medic says, sounding sure, calm, in control.

Shane knows what *he* sounds like, how he looks, he just doesn’t care. Doesn’t care about anything other than the man he’s holding in his hands. Ilya. The love of his fucking life, who is lying unconscious on the ice with a gash on his cheek from his broken visor.

Shane sucks in a heaving breath, and it sounds so loud, so echoing, that he immediately becomes aware of just how quiet the arena is. There’s a low murmur of conversation from fans in the stands, but other than that there’s nothing. No sounds of blades on ice, of chirping, of music or chanting or yelling.

Just…silence. Stillness.

But when he glances up, prepared to be met with thousands of hungry, curious eyes locked onto him - *them* - that’s not what he finds at all. Instead, there’s a line of players circled around them. Ilya’s teammates, stood shoulder to shoulder, with their backs to Shane and Ilya as they block out the rest of the arena. As they hide them from prying, judgemental eyes. Shane can’t quite believe it, but he doesn’t have time to dwell on it because-

“Shane?”

Ilya’s speech is slow, slurred, like he’s struggling to find the words. It’s the best sound Shane has ever heard. His eyes are still closed but they’re twitching, now, like he’s trying to open them but can’t quite remember how to.

Shane wants to cry.

“I’m here,” he says. “I’m here, Ilya. You’re okay, baby. It’s okay.”

“Wha’ happened?”

“Hard check. You hit the boards,” Shane explains. “But it’s gonna be okay. I’m here.”

He moves his thumb just a little, brushing Ilya’s temple to soothe him. It makes Ilya smile softly, and then his eyes flicker open and find Shane’s, and it floods him with a kind of relief he has never known before.

“Did we win?”

Shane snorts, rolling his eyes in fond exasperation. Because of course that’s what Ilya is worrying about right now. He’s not even sure why he’s surprised.

“Not yet,” Shane tells him. “Two minutes left on the clock. We could still beat you.”

Before Ilya can reply - before he can demand to play, probably - the spinal board and c-collar arrive.

“Move, Hollander,” one of the medics orders. Shane would glare at her if she wasn’t busy taking care of his boyfriend.

“I have to move out of the way now, Ilya, but I’m not leaving you. I’ll be right here.”

“Solnyshko…they can see us.” He’s slurring again, his eyes flickering before falling shut.

It shakes something loose inside of Shane, the kind of shapeless memory that he isn’t sure is even real. Something that disappears like smoke when he tries to reach for it.

But he doesn’t have time to dwell on it, because everything happens so quickly after that. The c-collar is fitted, and then Ilya is being strapped to the board, and then - to the sound of stick-taps and thunderous applause - Ilya is being wheeled off the ice. And Shane, well. He has no choice but to follow. He shouldn’t - *can’t* - there’s two minutes left in the game, his team needs him, and there are thousands of people watching this unfold like it’s a serial drama on ice, but.

Shane won’t let Ilya go through this alone.

He skates after them hurriedly, ignoring the chatter and the stares and his teammates calling after him. He’ll deal with all of that - later. When he knows that Ilya is going to be okay. When his eyes are open and clear, and his words aren’t slurred, and he isn’t bleeding onto Shane’s hand. Until then, the rest of it is just noise. Meaningless.

He stumbles down the tunnel after them, listening to - but not really *hearing* - the team doctors and trainers as they talk about Ilya, and his injury, and his status. He follows them all the way to the ambulance that’s waiting to rush his boyfriend to the hospital, and only then does he realise he’s still in his gear. His skates.

He walked out on a hockey game for the first time in his life.

“I need - can you. I need to change my skates, can-“

“You can’t go in the ambulance, Hollander,” someone says, but Shane doesn’t know who.

Someone from the Centaur’s team. Someone who doesn’t understand who Ilya is to Shane - who Shane is to *Ilya.*

“No, just let me-“

“Hollander, what the fuck are you doing?” Someone else yells.

He turns around to see his assistant coach, red-faced and furious, looking for all the world like he’d strangle Shane if he got his hands on him. He holds his arms out in a shrug of disbelief.

“I have to go with him. I can’t - my skates. I need to change…” he trails off, not bothering to finish his sentence.

His blades are getting worn down without his guards. He doesn’t know why, but he can’t stop thinking about that. About his blades, and Ilya, and how he can’t stay here but he can’t go to the hospital either. It’s all too much - too busy. He can barely catch his breath.

“Hollander, get back on the *fucking ice,*” coach hisses, as venomous as a snake.

“It’s *Ilya,*” Shane pleads, as if that means anything to anyone other than him. “I can’t. I have to-“

“Here.”

Hayden appears, hobbling on his own skates, holding something in his hands. He thrusts them at Shane, and when Shane looks down he realises they’re his dress shoes he’d worn to the game. He clutches them against his chest.

“Hayden. Thank you. I-“

“-go with him!” Hayden insists, and that’s all the permission Shane needs.

The ride to the hospital is mostly just a blur.

He’s squashed into the back of the ambulance with one of the paramedics and a team doctor, and he knows he’s in the way but he refuses to move. Refuses to let go of Ilya’s hand for even a second.

He’s in and out of consciousness, bleary-eyed and confused for a moment or two when he wakes, before quickly falling back to sleep.

He murmurs Shane’s name every time.

Shane doesn’t want to risk Ilya waking up without Shane being by his side - without Shane holding his hand. Back on the ice Ilya had said his name before he’d even opened his eyes and seen Shane there with him. He’d wanted him, *needed* him, and that’s not something Shane takes lightly. Not when Ilya never asks for a damn thing from anyone.

So Shane stays, steadfast and unmoving, while the doctor and paramedic work around him. He reassures him with soft, simple words when Ilya wakes, and he gently rakes his fingers through Ilya’s hair while he sleeps.

He never once lets go of his hand.

Once they finally make it to the hospital, it takes a while for all the tests to be carried out. Shane waits impatiently, pacing around the tiny little visitors room they’d stuck him in, and promised to keep everyone else *out of*. The team medic who’d treated Ilya on the ice is there too, waiting just like he is, but Shane can’t bear to look at her. He doesn’t want to see the look in her eyes.

He's uncomfortable and sweaty in his full hockey gear, except for the dress shoes Hayden had thrust at him - the ones he'd worn to the rink with the Armani suit that Iyla says is his favourite. *"Makes your ass look good,"* he always teases, and Shane always blushes.

The thought makes the blood in his veins turn icy as he fields frantic texts from his parents and Rose. There are some from his teammates, too, so the game must have ended by now. Shane doesn't bother to read those, though. He can only deal with one crisis at a time.

He's just sank down into a chair - aching and exhausted from almost a full game played, and the way he's been holding himself tense since Ilya went down - when a tall woman in scrubs walks into the room.

He jumps to his feet.

The doctor glances between Shane and the team medic, and for a moment he worries that she'll go over to her. That he won't get to hear what's happening. But then-

"Shane Hollander?"

"Is he okay? What's going on? Is he awake? Can I see him?"

The questions tumble out of his mouth like an avalanche - a thing that he can't hold back. He's been trying to temper his fear, trying to stave off the panic attack that's hovering in his chest just waiting to pounce, but he's almost at the end of his thread. He needs news, *good* news, and he needs Ilya. Needs to see him, hear his voice, hold him close.

The doctor smiles warmly.

"He's okay," she says.

It's a small miracle that Shane's legs don't give way and he doesn't collapse to the floor in relief. He does sigh, though, loud and breathless, like he's exhaling all of the terror that's been running riot inside him. He sinks back down into the chair he just vacated and drops his head into his hands, giving himself a second to just breathe.

"Thank god," he whispers into the palms of his hands.

There's movement, and then he feels the moment the doctor takes a seat beside him. She doesn't put a hand on his back to comfort him, and he's grateful for that, but her mere presence is enough to settle him.

"My name is Dr Laila Mahmoud and I've been treating Mr Rozanov this evening," she introduces herself. "We've performed a CT scan which showed no fractures of the skull, neck, or spine, and no bleeding or swelling of his brain."

It's the good news Shane has been waiting for. He keeps his face buried in his hands to hide the tears running down his cheeks, but he nods his head so she knows to continue.

"We also did an MRI scan which, thankfully, showed no spinal cord damage either. Mr Rozanov has a pretty severe concussion but aside from that - and the laceration on his cheek,

which has been glued - he's been extremely lucky."

Shane nods again, aggressively wipes at the tears on his cheeks, and turns to look at Dr Mahmoud. "So - so he'll be okay?"

"As long as he follows my instructions," she says, with a smirk on her face that tells him Ilya is already being difficult, "then he should make a full recovery."

Shane laughs, a pathetic, aching sound. It's relief, and joy, and leftover fear, all spilling out of him at once.

"Can I see him, please?"

She nods her head. "Of course. He's been asking for you."

She knows. Shane can tell by the smile on her face that she knows.

Though he doesn't suppose it matters all that much, because everyone in the world probably knows by now. It's not like Shane kissed him or anything - nothing as egregious or obvious as that - but still. He knows how he must have looked, holding Ilya's head on the ice as he whispered to him. As he followed him down the tunnel. As he walked out on a game for the first time in his career, hell, his *life.*

He had been painfully transparent; the whole world had been able to see his heart beating in the rhythm of Ilya's name.

Shane thinks back to the time when *he* got injured a couple of years ago, when he and Ilya were still dancing around their feelings and trying to pretend like what they had wasn't love. He doesn't remember much except for Ilya standing over him, but he remembers clearly when they watched the replay of it in that documentary, and the way Ilya's look of complete horror cleaved Shane in half when he first saw it. Ilya was terrified, but he'd held it together. He'd stayed professional. He'd kept their secret.

Shane had completely fallen apart.

Years of hiding, of keeping it private, of protecting their love, all down the drain because he couldn't - because he couldn't *what?* Act like Ilya meant nothing to him? Act like his heart wasn't trying to break out of his chest and burrow inside Ilya's body? Pretend like it didn't feel as if his world was collapsing around him?

Shane won't apologise for that. He can't. It's one thing to keep their relationship hidden, but it would be another thing entirely to abandon the love of his life when he's scared and alone and in pain. He couldn't do that to Ilya.

Whatever happens next - whatever comes from this - Shane won't *ever* regret being there to hold Ilya through it.

He follows Dr Mahmoud down the corridor without saying a word. Instead, he just listens to the sounds of the hospital - beeping machines, squeaky wheels on linoleum floors, and quiet

chatter - and takes slow, deep breaths. Shane thanks her when they arrive, and she points him toward the private room Ilya is being kept in.

He doesn't bother knocking on the door.

He steps inside the room, his heart in his mouth and his stomach tied up in knots. And there, laid out on the bed in the dimmed light, is Ilya. His beautiful, impossible Ilya. He turns his head slowly when he hears the door click shut, but Shane still sees the wince on his face from the small movement. It doesn't stop Ilya's face from lighting up, though, the second his bleary eyes lock onto Shane.

He hums quietly, a soft smile on his lips as his eyes flutter closed. "Shane. You're here."

Hearing his voice, whispered and slow but finally coherent, chases the last of Shane's terror away. He crosses the room and is by Ilya's side in an instant. He can't stop himself from touch Ilya - from taking hold of his hand and carefully running his fingers through Ilya's sweat-slick curls.

He bends down and presses a kiss to Ilya's forehead, letting the touch linger for just a moment too long.

Shane is choked up when he responds, "Of course I'm here, you idiot. Where else would I be?"

"We had hockey game."

"Well, it's over now," Shane says.

Because it would feel like too much right now, to say that hockey doesn't matter when Ilya is hurt.

"We won, yes?"

Shane snorts. "I don't know. Haven't checked the score."

Ilya pauses for a moment, and then his face is scrunching up into a confused expression. He winces again at the slight movement, and Shane uses his thumb to smooth out the frown between his eyebrows. Ilya - obedient for maybe the first time in his life - relaxes his face.

"You did not finish the game?"

Shane tries to swallow past the lump in his throat. "No. No I - I was in the ambulance with you. Don't you remember?"

Ilya hums again. "Yes, I remember. You were always holding my hand. But - game wasn't finished yet?"

"No. No I, uh, I left the ice with you."

Shane feels heat flooding his cheeks, knows they're turning that embarrassing shade of pink that Ilya loves so much. *"How far down does this go?"* he'd asked once, and proceeded to strip Shane naked and trace the blush with his tongue. Even now, concussed and in pain, his eyes soften as soon as he notices it and he squeezes Shane's fingers where they're tangled with his own.

Shane can't stop himself from bringing their joined hands up to his mouth to kiss Ilya's knuckles.

"Do you remember what happened?"

Ilya scoffs. "Fucking Comeau."

Shane lets out a quiet laugh. "Yeah. Fucking Comeau," he repeats.

Ilya's expression becomes pensive for a moment, like he's trying to recall something that's just out of reach. Shane gives him a second, trailing the tips of his fingers along Ilya's hairline, down his nose, and gently over the bandage on his cheek. Ilya turns into the touch like a sunflower seeking the sun.

Shane's thumb is sweeping back and forth over the curve of Ilya's jaw when he finally speaks.

"You were with me. On the ice. Yes?"

Shane hesitates for a moment before nodding. "Yeah, Ilya. I was."

Ilya tries to nod, too, but quickly aborts the motion when he realises how badly it hurts. Shane tightens his hold on Ilya's jaw ever so slightly, just trying to keep his head still and give his brain tome to recover.

"I - I mean. I freaked out, Ilya," Shane confesses. "You were down, and not getting up, and I just - I had to be with you."

"Moya lyubov, it is okay."

Shane shakes his head.

Earlier, all of his fear - all of his panic - had been focused solely on Ilya. It was like he had blinkers on, or tunnel vision; the only thing he could see was his boyfriend. So the reality of the situation, of what Shane had done, had felt like some faraway problem that he didn't need to concern himself with.

But now that Shane knows Ilya is okay, the gravity of the situation is starting to hit him.

Shane had sunk to his knees and cradled Ilya's head in front of all of their teammates. He'd whispered desperate, pleading words to him in front of 18,000 fans. He'd followed Ilya down the tunnel like a dog after its owner in front of hundreds of thousands of viewers on TV. He didn't kiss him, but he might as well have.

His behaviour was as good as a confession.

“I think everyone knows, Ilya. I was too obvious - too *scared.* I couldn’t, I didn’t-“

“Shane. *Shane,*” Ilya interrupts his rambling. “It is okay. Is all okay.”

“You don’t understand. People *know,* Ilya.”

He won’t apologise for doing what he needed to do; Shane still stands by that. But. This wasn’t part of their plan. Ilya should be furious with him.

And yet, Ilya is smiling so sweetly and his unfocused eyes turn clear as he looks at Shane. There’s no anger on his face, there isn’t even fear. He’s just watching Shane with a look of complete adoration, and it makes Shane feel breathless. It makes him want to cry. Ever so slowly Ilya reaches upwards, cradling Shane’s cheek in the palm of his hand. Shane melts into his touch.

“Sweetheart,” Ilya whispers. “I am okay, and you are okay, and nothing else matters. All those other people - they are just noise. We will be okay. Yes?”

And while Shane knows it can’t possibly be as simple as that, he finds himself nodding his head anyway. It’s impossible not to agree with Ilya when he’s touching and looking at Shane so tenderly.

“Yes. Okay,” Shane agrees. “We’ll handle it. Together.”

“Together. Always,” Ilya confirms. “Now kiss me please. I am hurt. It will fix me.”

Shane snorts, rolling his eyes at the fact that Ilya is still demanding even as he lies in a hospital bed. It shouldn’t come as much of a shock to Shane, but Ilya still finds ways to surprise him even after loving him for over a decade.

Never one to deny Ilya anything, Shane bends down to catch his mouth in a gentle kiss. Ilya hums against his lips, and Shane can feel the way they curve into a slight smile even as they’re kissing. It makes his heart ache in the very best way, because Ilya is so sweet and loving and needy, and Shane is the only person who ever gets to see him like this.

It feels like the greatest honour, being entrusted with Ilya Rozanov’s soft underbelly. It’s not a privilege that he takes lightly.

“Better?” Shane asks, and Ilya’s grin is answer enough.

“Much,” he says. “But maybe try again? Just to be sure.”

Endeared, and charmed, and hopelessly in love, Shane dips back down to give him another kiss. But just before their lips touch there’s a knock at the door.

Ilya groans.

“Ignore it,” he insists, right as a second, more persistent knock echoes through the room and makes Ilya flinch.

Sighing, Shane untangles their hands and heads over to open the door. He’s expecting a doctor or a nurse or, at most, the doctor from Ilya’s team coming to check on him. What Shane doesn’t expect is to open the door to a hallway full of people.

He almost slams it closed on instinct, but he manages to register who’s standing there just in time to stop himself.

Hayden is the one who had knocked. He’s got Shane’s bag that he’d left in the locker room slung over his shoulder, and a worried expression on his face. Then there’s Troy Barrett, Zane Boodram, Evan Dykstra, Wyatt Hayes, and Luca Haas. The team medic who’d ridden in the ambulance with them, and then silently watched Shane pace in the waiting room, is there too. And finally, Coach Wiebe.

“Uh, hi.”

“Who is it?” Ilya asks from behind him.

“It’s, well, everyone.”

Ilya groans again. “No. Tell them to leave me and my boyfriend alone.”

Shane feels his cheek turn red yet again, and he kind of wants the ground to swallow him whole if he’s being honest. But then Boodram lets out a bellowing laugh, and Coach Wiebe joins in, and then suddenly everyone in the hallway is laughing.

Not at them, but with them.

The relief that washes over him is so immense, so visceral, that it almost makes his knees buckle. Because whatever kind of response Shane had been expecting, it certainly wasn’t… *this*. It wasn’t this easy, unconditional support. Though maybe he should have had higher expectations of the Centaurs, given the way they had tried to shield Shane and Ilya from the fans and the cameras earlier.

“We wanted to check on him,” Hayes says, glancing over Shane’s shoulder.

“He’s, uh, he’s okay,” Shane tells them all. He picks a spot on the wall behind them to look at, so he doesn’t have to worry about meeting their eyes, and then continues, “A pretty bad concussion and a small cut on his cheek, but. His scans are clear. Nothing he won’t heal from.”

Shane can’t just see, but can actually *feel* the way everyone instantly relaxes. It’s like they had all been holding their breath as they waited for the news, and Shane feels so unbelievably happy that Ilya has these people in his corner. In *their* corner now, perhaps.

“You’ve got a hard head, Rozanov,” Barrett calls out, loud enough for Ilya to hear but not so loud that it would hurt his head.

“Kiss my ass,” Ilya responds.

“Think we’ll leave that to Hollander here, eh?” Boodram teases.

Shane pinches the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger, Ilya chuckles quietly behind him, and the rest of the team all try - and fail spectacularly - to keep a straight face.

Shane can’t quite believe that this is happening. He’s standing in the doorway of his boyfriends hospital room after he probably just outed them on national television, and there’s a small army of hockey players outside, teasing them and joking with them about their relationship. It feels like the kind of thing Shane might have dreamed of once upon a time, before he realised just how impossible it would be.

And yet it’s happening now. It’s real.

“I brought your bag,” Hayden says, handing it over to him. “Figured you wouldn’t be leaving the hospital tonight.”

“Thanks, man,” Shane says as he takes it from him. “How, uh. How is everyone?”

He knows just from the way Hayden grimaces that it’s not good news.

“They’re shocked, y’know? It might…take a minute, for them to adjust.”

Shane nods. “Right. Yeah. Of course.”

It stings, obviously, even though he’d been preparing himself for it for a long time. Because he’s given two cups and a decade of his life to that team. He brought them back from the dead when resuscitation seemed impossible, and breathed new life into a franchise that had forgotten what it felt like to win. He’d given all of himself to them, but he’d already known that would never be enough.

But he’s got Ilya, and he’s got Hayden, and he thinks - if he wants them - he’s probably got Ilya’s team, too. And that’s enough for him. It’s more than enough, even. Because if the only thing Shane had left in the world was Ilya, well. He’d still be the richest man on earth.

Before Shane gets to say anything else to the guys, another person appears in the hallway.

“I told you *one at a time,*” Dr Mahmoud reprimands the gaggle of hockey players outside Ilya’s door.

“Technically we’re not *in* the room,” Haas says, but clearly she’s immune to his charm because her face doesn’t budge a millimetre. “Fine, fine. We’re going.”

They all poke their heads into the room to see Ilya, and call out quiet well-wishes and goodbyes to him. Then every single one of them shakes Shane’s hand or pulls him into a brief hug before they leave. Even Weibe hugs him, whispering, “We’re here if you need anything,” into Shane’s ear as he pulls away.

It feels big. Important. Like this is the moment that his entire life has shifted, but - but maybe it's all going to be okay.

"Call me if you need me," Hayden says.

And then Shane and Ilya are alone.

He closes the door and walks back over to Ilya's bedside, where he's still in the exact same position, with his eyes starting to droop closed but a smile still etched onto his face. Shane takes Ilya's hand and then leans down and kisses the corner of his mouth, giving him the one they were denied earlier when everyone decided to interrupt them.

Ilya mumbles something in Russian, then turns at just the right time to steal a kiss from Shane's lips. Then another, and another.

"I like your team," Shane says quietly.

Ilya hums. "Yes, they are good people."

"And - and they're okay, y'know, with us."

Ilya chuckles, then carefully turns his head to look Shane in the eyes. "We are gayest team in NHL. You should join us," he says.

At one point, the concept of leaving Montreal would have been unthinkable. *Unbearable.* He'd wanted to spend his entire career with the team that drafted him, and one day watch his number raised up into the rafters. But now, with Ilya's hand in his - and a team full of guys who have accepted them unflinchingly - the thought of moving on doesn't seem so impossible.

It might even be a good idea.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," Shane laughs, even though the wheels are already turning in his head.

Ilya tugs on Shane's hand. "Up. Up here. Come lie with me."

"Baby, your head-"

"-is fine," Ilya says. "Need you. Please."

And when he's like this - sweet, and needy, and vulnerable - it's impossible to ever say no to him. Especially when Shane knows what it costs Ilya to ask for things, when he knows the kind of bravery it takes for Ilya to allow himself to want something soft.

So Shane acquiesces.

He quickly strips out of his hockey gear, dumping his sweaty clothes and pads in a pile in the corner of the room, and changes into the sweats and t-shirt he had stuffed in the bag that

Hayden brought for him. And then, slowly and carefully, Shane slips into the too-small hospital bed beside Ilya.

It takes a little bit of manoeuvring, but eventually they manage to find a comfortable position: Shane on his side, facing Ilya as he lies on the pillow beside him. Shane is cuddling Ilya's arm like a teddy bear, his knee is thrown over Ilya's legs, and Ilya's hand is resting on Shane's thigh. They're entirely too squished together, but there's nowhere else in the world that Shane would rather be than here.

"You scared me today," Shane whispers.

"'m sorry, moya lyubov."

"I'm so glad you're okay."

"I'm so glad you are *here,*" Ilya says, as if there's anywhere else Shane would ever be.

He shuffles his head closer on the pillow, and presses a flurry of kisses against Ilya's cheek, and the curve of his ear, and the line of his jaw. Ilya leans into the touch like he can't get enough of it, and Shane's chest swells with so much love for him that it feels like he might explode.

"Ya lyublyu tebya," Shane says.

Ilya smiles. "I love you, too."

He's exhausted, and in pain, and still fighting desperately to stay awake. Shane understands. They're so used to stealing moments, so used to having to make the most of every single second that they can scrape together, that they never want to waste their stolen hours sleeping.

But Shane isn't going anywhere tonight.

He can call his coach tomorrow, tell him he needs a few days off to attend to a family matter. He doesn't really care what he has to say. He's sure there'll be phone calls and emails and meetings scheduled; if he was as obvious tonight as he thinks he was, then there will probably be strategy sessions and press conferences and interviews, too. That's a problem for tomorrow, though.

Right now, all Shane cares about is the man in his arms. The love of his life. The person Shane would choose over everyone and everything.

"Sleep," Shane whispers. "I'll be here when you wake up."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

And Shane never breaks his promises.

End Notes

don’t talk to me about episode 4, i’m fragile. *do* talk to me about season 2, i can’t wait.

also this is my 200th work on ao3, which is just absolutely insane to me.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!