

First cut is the deepest

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First cut is the deepest

by [GingerBaggins](#)

Summary

Ottawa face Montreal away from home ice, and for the first time in eleven years, Shane Hollander is not in red and blue.

OR

Ilya watches Shane battle his old teammates and fails to stay calm about it.

Notes

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

Never, in all the years Ilya had been playing, had a hockey stick felt so fragile. It was already groaning in his hands; a single squeeze would surely snap it.

“Relax,” Bood’s steady voice came from his left, but Ilya would not relax—how could he, when Shane was picking himself off the ice for the second time this shift?

If Ilya’s counting was accurate, which it was, Shane had been out there for close to forty-six seconds. There was, at most, half a minute left until he would be recalled to the bench, and it couldn’t come a second too soon. Ilya swallowed his fury as Shane shook himself and set off down the ice, charging after Comeau.

It was the first time Ottawa and Montreal were meeting this season, a home game for Montreal, and the first time since the 2010 draft that Shane Hollander hadn’t worn Montreal colours in this stadium. The animosity of the crowd seemed only to be rivalled by that of their team.

Shane lunged for the puck as it shot around the boards, and Ilya had to close his eyes when a Montreal player checked him hard into the plexiglass. The rattle could be heard from the other side of the rink, the crowd erupted with jeers, and Ilya felt sick. He wanted to leap over the boards and launch pucks directly into the stands; he wanted to rip the headset off the passing refs and scream into the microphone. *He gave you everything*, he wanted to say, *the whole time, over and over again*. He wanted to wrap Shane in his arms and drag him off that ice, out of this stadium, and far away from this whole city.

But he couldn’t, because he’d promised.

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Ilya felt more than a little silly collecting his husband from a separate hotel room, on a separate floor. Shane’s insistence that they keep some distance on their first road trip was as commendable as it was infuriating. Still, today was *not* the day to pick a fight about it.

Tonight, they would be stepping onto the ice to face Montreal for the first time this season, and Shane was worry in human form. As much as Ilya wished he could have held Shane last night and worked those nerves off with careful passes of his tongue, he understood the need to remain professional. Now that they were teammates, there had to be a line, and he supposed this was it. Maybe, with time, that line would ease...but it was Shane’s first season with the Centaurs, and Ilya could hardly complain; he was finally within reach.

In the elevator, Ilya watched Shane shift his weight from foot to foot, watched his fingers flex and curl into fists again and again, before he could stand it no longer. He reached out and wrapped his hands around Shane's, squeezing tight.

“Do not panic,” Ilya said.

Shane laughed, the sound already breathless. “Great, yeah, that really helps.”

But Shane's posture was already relaxing, the fingers in Ilya's hands had ceased twitching, and the slow exhale that passed his lips was one of relief. They headed straight for the breakfast bar, which had been set up especially for the team. Players were already up; some sat together, some were already deep in their pre-game rituals, some weren't even fully awake yet. Ilya marched towards the eggs and piled his plate high, hoping Shane would mindlessly follow suit.

There was a low hum of conversation through the room, but it quietened the second Ilya and Shane approached the long central table, which meant only one thing: they'd been talking about them—or, more specifically, about *Shane*. Nobody was pretending not to have seen the Montreal fans waiting for them outside the hotel last night, nor the signs they'd held high above their heads, labelling Shane a traitor, nor the #24 jerseys they'd defaced, nor could they claim not to have heard the threatening chants that swept through the crowd. Ilya saw it every time he blinked. He simply couldn't linger on it, or there was a high chance he'd become homicidal.

Ilya dipped his head in greeting as he and Shane sat amongst the team. Ideally, he would have been focused on the game ahead, on getting into the right headspace, but he was too focused on how Shane tried to appear interested in what Wyatt had to say, or tried to laugh when Evan cracked jokes. Ilya was well-versed in watching Shane Hollander, and all he could see was that Shane hadn't even begun to touch his food, and that was...not good. Things were better now that he was working with a new nutritionalist, but high stress still triggered that lifelong need for control, and today was, if nothing else, a breeding ground for high stress.

Ilya tapped his foot against Shane's under the table, which earned him a half-questioning, half-affronted glare. He glanced down at Shane's plate, expecting Shane to roll his eyes, kick him back, maybe flip him off. Instead, and to his absolute delight, Shane took a tentative bite of scrambled egg.

"They're gonna be gunning for you, Hollander," Bood spoke into his steaming mug of coffee.

"I know," Shane mumbled.

"If they go too far, Roz will take care of them."

Shane's head snapped back to Ilya, eyes wide and searching. Ilya shrugged, said, "Will be my pleasure."

"No, you won't," Shane said, voice tight. "You can't."

Ilya frowned. "Uh, I can. Montreal players are...very weak."

"No." Shane's fork clattered to his still-full plate. "That's not...if you cause a scene—" Ilya sighed, but Shane wasn't having it. "You have to treat me like any other teammate."

"Yes, is my job to take care of my teammates," Ilya said. "That is why I'm captain."

"Okay...then *don't* treat me like any other teammate."

“Hollander.”

“Please.” Shane was leaning over the table now, a desperation in his voice that was so unlike anything Ilya had heard from him before. “I need...please, Ilya, promise me you’ll leave it alone.”

Nervousness was nothing new for Shane. He could work himself into a panic about almost anything without even having to try, but never about hockey. It was, and had been for as long as Ilya had known him, the one absolute certainty in Shane’s life. Yet, as Ilya met Shane’s gaze across the table, he found only sickening alarm.

Which is why he turned his eyes to the ceiling, blew out a slow breath, and said, “Fine. I promise.”

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“Are you *fucking* kidding?” Ilya screamed to the passing ref. He wasn’t alone, either; the whole bench was on their feet, bellowing obscenities onto the ice. Even Coach Wiebe had climbed over to join in their fury.

Shane was deep in Montreal’s endzone, getting to his feet after an obvious trip that had, for some unholy reason, gone uncalled.

“They’re fucking blind,” LaPointe spat, kicking the boards as he fell back on the bench.

It felt like an inevitability at this point that Shane would be injured; the question was not if, but *when*, not how, but *how badly*. To everyone’s relief, Shane skated straight for the bench to swap out, and it was not yet Ilya’s turn on the ice. He leaned across his teammates, ready to shove them aside if he must, and found Shane.

“It’s okay,” Shane mouthed, turning his attention back to the ice.

But it wasn’t okay. Nothing had ever been less okay. When Ilya finally felt Coach’s hand on his shoulder, he didn’t hesitate before diving over the boards and skating straight for Hayden Pike.

“Is Shane alright?” Hayden managed—*dared*—to ask in the split second before Ilya shoved him against the boards and swiped the puck out from under his stick.

“The fuck are you playing at?” Ilya barked, sending the puck back over the blue line.

“I tried, I’m sorry, they won’t listen—”

“Fucking make them!”

Ilya took off down the ice, his blood rapidly approaching volcanic temperatures.

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The locker room was unusually quiet during the first intermission; Shane was even more so. The first period had been frustratingly scoreless, but Ilya wasn't even thinking about that right now. He tried to keep to his own stall, he really did, but then Shane rolled his shoulder with a deep wince, and his feet moved of their own accord.

"Shane."

Shane didn't look at him. "You promised."

"*Shane.*"

Finally, Shane's gaze flickered up, and he looked so fucking heartbroken that Ilya felt his eyes burn. Every cell in his body wanted to gather Shane up and abscond with him, hockey gear and all. He might have done it anyway if he hadn't been painfully, brutally aware that it was not what Shane wanted.

Besides, he *had* promised.

Ilya turned away before he could say anything else, making his way back to his stall just in time for Coach Wiebe to enter and take over, calling everyone's attention to the whiteboard in the centre of the room.

Shane was a seasoned, multi-Stanley Cup champion who had spent the better part of his career captaining a team to great success. He knew his limits, and while he'd never been known as much of a fighter, he knew how to hold his own. Still, that didn't stop Ilya from grabbing Troy by the arm as they prepared to head back out onto the ice. He didn't even need to say anything for Troy to understand his orders implicitly: *if it happens again, drop them.*

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There was nothing—nothing in the world—like playing alongside Shane. They didn't often get time on the ice together, unless it was a power play, like right now. Shane was so good, so precise, that it made Ilya better, too. Passing the puck as they skated over the blue line came as easily as breathing.

He would have stayed out there for the whole game if he could, but Coach Wiebe was waving him over for a shift change, and it made sense; he'd been on the ice for almost three minutes now. Every inch of him was burning; it was long-gone time to swap out...but then he saw it. The opening was right there, players parting like the Red Sea, and there wasn't a chance in hell he wasn't going for it.

Ilya moved the puck to his backhand and fired it down the boards, watching it bend around the rink as he flew towards the bench and switched with Luca. He turned, gloves wrapping around the board as he stretched to watch Shane collect the puck and fire it through traffic, into the fresh, waiting curve of Luca's stick.

Luca scored with a slapshot to the high right corner, and the groans of the stadium were not enough to drown out the raucous cheers of Ottawa's bench. Relief flooded his veins as he

watched Shane rush to celebrate with Luca and the others, every tap of his stick against the boards a victory drum.

Luca led the players along the bench to bump fists, and Ilya happily lingered on the little smile Shane shot him as he passed by, wondering if it was really all going to be okay.



It was *not* going to be okay.

Ilya swore in outrage as one of the Montreal players was sent to the penalty box, a smirk on his stupid fucking face after deliberately high-sticking Shane. The whole team were on their feet, barking at the Montreal players on the other side of the plexiglass, promises of violence passing through the cracks.

Play hadn't resumed yet, and Hayden was checking on Shane, but Ilya could already see the blood dropping from his husband's perfect nose and collecting on the ice below. Shane returned to the bench immediately, where Ilya was already waiting, ready to help him out of his helmet and out of this whole fucking province.

"It's nothing," Shane wheezed, dodging Ilya. "Just caught my eyebrow."

"He's a dead motherfucker," Bood snapped, and Ilya was more than inclined to agree.

"Shane?" One of the team doctors gingerly touched Shane's elbow. "Come with me?"

Ilya watched them take him down the tunnel and into the locker room, a cloth pressed to his bleeding brow, and tried his hardest not to scream.

"You're up, Rozanov," Wiebe called, because of course, the game was still on, the power play was beginning, and Ilya still had a job to do.

Ilya had played plenty of hockey while spitting mad before; he knew exactly how to channel his rage and exactly where to hit the opposition. He won the face-off with a hissed curse, slammed Montreal players into every available board as they fought for position under the three Stanley Cup banners his husband had earned, and outpaced them with furious strides as he closed in on their offensive zone.

Still, when he fired the puck into the back of the net, all he could taste was blood.



Ilya was chewing fire as he marched into the locker room for the second intermission. Shane was already there, his brow glued back together and a weary smile on his flushed, bloodied face.

"Who scored?" he asked, and maybe somebody answered. Ilya wasn't sure...he could hardly even see straight.

"You need stitches," he said instead, stopping at Shane's feet.

“Probably.” Shane shrugged. “It can wait till the game is done, though.”

Ilya felt like he was on another planet, where everything had been turned upside down, and Shane was acting like a fucking mediator instead of a hockey player. Ilya knew the team was watching him, knew Coach Wiebe would soon tell him to sit down and listen to the plan, but none of it mattered.

“Why aren’t you fighting back?” he asked, much to Shane’s surprise. “You have nothing to prove to them. Is ridiculous, letting them beat you like piñata.”

“I’m not trying to prove anything,” Shane said.

“I’m watching with my own fucking eyes, Hollander, you don’t need to—”

“That’s not what I’m doing.”

“What, then?” Ilya was trying not to raise his voice, truly, but it was difficult.

“If they want to waste their time on me, that’s fine. I don’t care about anything but the score on the board.” Shane lifted his chin, leveling his gaze with Ilya’s. “I’m not here to play their game, I’m here to fucking win ours, *Captain*.”

There. *There*. Ilya had seen that look so many times in face-offs, in rushes across the ice, in the split seconds before Shane pulled his stick back to shoot the puck deep into the back of the net. Ilya had done exactly what he’d promised not to, he’d been acting like it was *his* Shane out there, the one who blushed when Ilya kissed his nose and squealed when their dog jumped on the bed, instead of Shane fucking Hollander.

Ilya stepped back, rolling his lips together to stop from smiling. He wasn’t sure what to say, only that he had to say something.

Bood beat him to it, launching to his feet and slapping his gloved hands together sharply. “Fucking right!”

Shane blinked, clearly startled by Bood’s enthusiastic agreement. It wasn’t just Bood, though. As Ilya turned to take in the room, he found the whole team burning with energy; they were impressed, they were *hungry* for it. Shane swallowed, and it struck Ilya that he’d played two periods out there thinking he was battling solo, that the fight was one he had to win alone. Perhaps that had been true in Montreal, but it wasn’t true here, and it was Ilya’s job to make sure he knew that.

“Let’s fucking get it, then,” Ilya said, holding out his hand to Shane, pulling him to his feet and knocking their helmets together, as he’d do with any other teammate.

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There were three long minutes left on the clock, and Ottawa were winning by one. Anything could happen in that time, and not a single person on the bench was unaware of it. Knees were bouncing, hands were fiddling with the taped ends of sticks, mouthguards were flipped and chewed.

Ilya wiped at his visor, still breathing hard from his shift. Shane was on now, taking his place for an endzone face-off, head down and focused despite the visible chirping from his opponent. Ilya felt like a coiled spring waiting for the puck to drop, half-wishing he could hear what was being said, half-relieved that he couldn't.

The ref dropped the puck, and Shane scooped it up and shot it sideways instantly, dropping back and falling into position. It all went as planned, as smoothly as they'd practised day in and day out, until it didn't. Before Ilya could blink, Shane was thrown clean off his feet, checked hard by a Montreal player. He hadn't even been close to the puck; they'd simply wanted to put him on the ground.

Just like that, Ilya was sent back to 2017. In this same stadium, watching that same man be sent to the ice, feeling the same lurch of bile crawl up his throat. Shane on the ice. Shane not moving. *Shane not fucking moving.*

Ilya was over the boards in a heartbeat, seeing nothing but burning red and *Shane*. He didn't know if he wanted to fall at Shane's side or fight the fucker who put him there. Maybe both. Probably both. Shane was blessedly rising to his feet by the time Ilya reached him, but that did nothing to quell his nausea.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

Shane grimaced. "Peachy, why do you ask?"

"Are you hurt?"

"No, maybe, I don't think so. I'm—Ilya, stop." Shane batted Ilya's fussing hands away. "I'm fine, he just knocked the wind out of me."

"I'll knock more than the fucking wind out of that asshole," Ilya grumbled, ready to drag Shane over to the bench if he had to.

Shane looked over Ilya's shoulder, his eyes flying open wide. "I don't...think you'll need to."

Ilya followed his line of sight, turning to find almost every member of the Ottawa Centaurs on the ice and throwing punches. It was going to get them all into trouble, would certainly send half of them into the penalty box, might even lose them the whole game. The scrum broke off into pairs, some doubled up, and Ilya had never felt quite so grateful for his team. He turned back to Shane, finding his expression caught somewhere between dazed and overwhelmed.

"You are good?" he asked one more time. Shane nodded. "Go for concussion check, then."

Shane hesitated, still locked onto the scrum. "I should join in, I—"

"Do not make me drag you."

With that, Shane ducked his head and made for the bench. Ilya, on the other hand, tossed his gloves aside and set about finding a dance partner, a vicious grin pulling at his lips.



The locker room had never had so many black eyes, nor so few frowns. Ottawa had won by two, despite most of their players watching the final minutes tick down from the penalty box. They might have spent more time there than on the actual ice, but Ilya didn't mind at all. In fact, he'd never been prouder.

Coach Wiebe didn't even attempt to conceal his amusement when he called for everyone to listen.

"Wow," Wiebe laughed. "I knew it would be a rough one, but *wow*. If anyone needs any immediate medical attention, tell me now."

Shane stood, kept up by what could only be adrenaline, and cleared his throat. "Sorry, not in need of medical attention—" Ilya begged to differ. "—but I, uh, I wanted to say...thanks, guys. It means a lot to know you've got my back."

He wasn't moving his shoulders, which meant he was hurt. Ilya wanted to take care of that right away, but he would have to call upon his limited reserves of patience, because Shane needed to know he was not out there alone; he would never be out there alone again. The room echoed with scoffs and muttered assurances and yes, *yes*, of course they had his back.

"You're ours now, Hollander," Bood said, throwing him a puck. "Keep hold of that, your first as a Centaur."

Shane caught it, turning it over his hands with a smile that made Ilya's heart thump hard against the cage of his ribs; he'd frame it, he'd hang it by the front door and point it out to everyone who visited, he'd put it under lights.

"Right, let's get into it," Wiebe called, tapping the whiteboard. "Then I'm sending you *all* for check-ups."



Ilya waited no longer than the time it took to shove his things into his duffel and climb one flight of stairs before knocking on Shane's hotel room. There was no chance that he would be staying on his own tonight.

It took Shane too long to answer the door, long enough that Ilya began considering how much trouble the team would be in if he kicked it down. When the door clicked open, Ilya almost toppled over.

"Ilya?" Shane asked, an ice pack strapped to his shoulder. "What are you—we have an early flight—"

"Don't care."

Ilya pushed his way into the room, not even hearing Shane's half-hearted protest. He didn't care about the morning flight; he didn't care about anything but the man in front of him. Ilya

dropped his duffel to the ground with a thud, then his hands were on Shane, roaming up his arms, brushing his waist, holding the sides of his bruised, beautiful face.

“What hurts, moya lyubov?”

“Nothing right now.” Shane melted into the embrace. “Drugs were pretty good.”

That might have been the truth, but it wasn’t the whole truth. Shane’s eyes had taken on that particular glassy quality they always did when he was trying to bite something back, the one that always twisted in Ilya’s stomach like a knife.

“Tell me,” Ilya said.

“No...it’s silly.”

Ilya brushed his thumbs reverently over Shane’s cheekbones. “Tell me anyway.”

“I—” Shane tried to look away. “I’m not surprised by the way things went. We all knew it was going to be bad, but there was still a part of me that...”

“What?”

“I guess I hoped they might...say sorry.”

Ilya blew out a slow breath, doing a commendable job of not cursing the name of every Montreal player. Through gritted teeth, he managed a sharp, “Would have been nice.”

Shane leaned further into Ilya’s palms. “It didn’t matter in the end. We still won, they still lost.”

And what was Ilya supposed to do? Not kiss him? It wasn’t that he’d been counting the hours since he’d last pressed his lips to Shane’s, but to say he had not been aware of every passing minute that Shane was out of his reach would be a lie. Ilya kissed him softly, holding his precious face, careful not to bump his nose against any of the forming bruises. Shane kissed him back, body drooping with the same relief Ilya felt in his chest. They hadn’t been back long enough to have dinner, which meant that Shane tasted entirely like himself.

“You were so beautiful out there tonight,” Ilya murmured, running his lips along the line of Shane’s jaw. “Couldn’t look away.”

“You too,” Shane sighed, his fingers already drifting into Ilya’s hair. “I love skating together.”

Ilya loved doing many things together, nothing quite as much as this: wrapping his arms around Shane’s body and hauling him closer, pressing his tongue to the seal of his lips and being allowed entry, swallowing Shane’s moans and relishing his shudders.

“I want to make you feel good,” he said.

“Please, yes.”

Slowly, Ilya peeled Shane's soft cotton shirt up and over his head, expecting to feel that usual all-encompassing need to pin him down and press in close. Instead, the sight of Shane's angry, red, tender skin ground his movements to a halt. He was going to be covered in bruises by the morning, all over his ribs and shoulders. Ilya stepped back and cupped a hand over his mouth, trying to blink away tears that formed anyway.

"Hey," Shane said softly, reaching for him. "I'm okay."

Ilya shook his head, but Shane was already pulling at his wrist, bringing Ilya's hand back to rest lightly on the centre of his chest.

"You are going to be hurting for days," Ilya choked.

"It was worth it."

"No, it wasn't."

"It was," Shane said, closing the inches between them. "I feel...better now, like I'm actually part of this team."

"You *are*."

"I was with Montreal for eleven years, and I don't think they ever went to bat for me like that."

Ilya had to swallow hard to find his voice. "They should have."

"Yeah, well..."

Ilya couldn't stand to see the sadness creeping back into the corners of Shane's eyes, so he kissed him again, and again, hoping each would be enough. Shane returned it all in kind, whimpering softly when Ilya's teeth caught his lip and tugged. With absolute care, Ilya guided Shane to the edge of his hotel room bed, messing the pristine sheets—he wondered if Shane had left it this way that morning, if the cleaners hadn't even needed to bother, and the thought made him smile.

"What?" Shane asked, smiling back, freckles bunching in a way that made Ilya want to bite them.

"Nothing," he said, gently pushing Shane onto his back. "Relax, this will help. Promise."

Shane released a long, slow breath, his body sinking into the mattress along with it. Ilya knelt between his legs, kissing trails up the length of his thighs until he reached the waistband of his pants. The smallest of tugs had Shane lifting his hips to grant Ilya access, and then he was bare and beautiful, hard cock already glistening.

It was not a sight that Ilya would ever—*could* ever—take for granted. It was also...not a shock.

"Hard already," he murmured, nipping at the soft skin of Shane's hip.

Shane laughed. “Shut up.”

“Is not just you, I had to re-adjust when you assisted Luca’s goal.”

“Let’s not talk about Luca right now.”

“Or when you passed to Troy in—”

“Nope.”

Ilya chuckled, letting his warm breath drift across Shane’s cock and loving the full-body shiver it pulled from him. He bent forward and kissed the tip, licking at the salt that gathered there, before sucking him in as deep as he could. Shane gasped, his hands instantly flying to Ilya’s hair and pulling hard; it was a wonderful, otherworldly sting. There was very little he loved more than how quickly Shane lost himself to pleasure.

They had an early flight, so Ilya couldn’t take as much time with this as he wanted to, but that didn’t mean he was in any rush. He licked up and down the length of Shane’s cock, humming his approval at every twitch, every shudder, and every stuttered plea for *more*.

“*Fuck*, Ilya,” Shane moaned; the sweetest sound in the world.

Ilya reached down to take his own cock in his hand, giving it a few firm strokes. On any other occasion, he might have shuffled closer and ground his length onto Shane, might have pressed him down and rolled their bodies together, but this wasn’t about him.

It never took long for Shane to get there. Ilya hardly even needed to touch him, but oh...he wanted to. He ran his nails up and down Shane’s thighs as he took him deep in his throat, flicked his tongue over the head of his cock until it pulsed with desperation, spread his palm over Shane’s stomach when he tried to sit up.

“I’m...Ilya, I’m—”

Ilya already knew it; he always knew. Shane writhed beneath him, all gasps and moans and hot skin. Ilya sucked harder, urging him on with swirls of his tongue, preparing for the sudden taste of Shane’s release. It hit him hardly more than a second later, that blissful taste coating the back of his throat. Ilya pulled his mouth from Shane and swallowed, nuzzling against his pelvis, smiling when Shane’s trembling fingers wove into his hair.

“You were right, that really helped.”

Ilya peered up. “Say that first bit again?”

“Fuck off,” Shane laughed, then flopped back to stare at the ceiling. “God, I think I’m going to sleep for a week.”

“Our flight is in nine hours.”

“On and off, then.”

“Shower first, then sleep,” Ilya instructed, hauling Shane to his feet.

The hotel had good water pressure and gentle, natural soap. These were the sort of things a person noticed when they spent most of their year on the road, aching and sleep-deprived. Shane stood under the stream, dead on his feet, while Ilya took care of him. Washing Shane was almost as fulfilling as fucking him; Ilya got to run his hands over every dip and bevel of his body, got to lather shampoo into his hair and rinse it out, got to press his palms to Shane’s face to keep his eyes safe.

All the while, watching that content little smile curl upon his face.

Shane drew the line at being towel-dried, demanding he be ‘*allowed to keep a bit of dignity*’. That dignity was entirely abandoned the moment Shane realised he couldn’t lift his arms high enough to dry his hair, and Ilya, despite his eagerness, waited until Shane asked nicely. He was, after all, so very good at asking.

“Come here,” Shane sighed as he slid into bed, arms open in an offer Ilya was never going to be able to refuse.

He settled beside Shane on the mattress, as connected as their bruises allowed them to be. Shane was already blinking heavily and breathing slowly, limp limbs searching to tangle with Ilya’s own.

“Thanks for keeping your promise,” Shane mumbled.

“Which one?”

Shane yawned. “All of them.”

With one last re-shuffle, Shane, despite his battered body, fell into a peaceful slumber, and Ilya’s heart had never felt quite so large.



Five days after their game in Montreal, the Ottawa Centaurs were taking their positions on home ice, ready to face the visiting New Jersey. An unlucky—or lucky, depending on who you asked—roster of injuries from their road trip meant that Shane was moved from center to right wing for tonight’s game. It also meant that he was going to be sharing the ice with Ilya for most of the night, something Ilya had very few complaints about.

The roar of the crowd was so loud that Ilya couldn’t hear a single word the ref was saying, too focused on the chant that washed over the stadium like a high tide:

*Hollander, Hollander, Hollander.*

The ref said something, and Ilya didn’t mean to ignore him; he was a nice enough guy, but he simply couldn’t resist peering over his shoulder to get a glimpse at Shane. Ilya found him right where he was supposed to be: at home, with his team, with his crowd, at the side of the man who loved him.

Shane caught his eye, a blush briefly rising to his cheeks before he schooled himself. Ilya had the absolute joy of watching Shane's face fall into unwavering focus, his still-sore shoulders squaring as he bent over his stick and zeroed in on the puck, still in the ref's outstretched hands.

"Rozanov, you with us?" the ref snapped.

Ilya turned to take the face-off with a smile.

## End Notes

This is how I am \*coping\* with the wait between episodes and the fact that Quinn Hughes got traded. Hope you understand.

Edit as of feb 2026: I am no longer upset about the Quinn Hughes trade.

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