Side By Side (Shield Me From My Fears)

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Side By Side (Shield Me From My Fears)

by ItsSoLine

Summary

Seeing Shane Hollander laid out on the ice was one of the worst moments of Ilya Rozanov's life. But it made him realize that he could not hide the truth anymore, no matter the aftermath.

Notes

Okay, y'all got me. I appreciate the support my last fic has gotten so much! I feel like I've went back in time to my fanfic golden age lol. Here's another part. I'm not going to promise more (and I have other things to write), but I am very much obsessed, so maybe. I feel like there aren't enough extreme canon divergence fics in the fandom yet. Which is why this topic felt interesting to me. (Also y'all where are the Skip fics???). I got hella carried away with this fic, it was only meant to be a reaction fic to the last one, but oh well. 8k words later... It's gotten me out of my writing slump, so I'm not mad. I haven't written this much in one sitting in forever.

So I realized I messed up the Skip timeline midway through the Scott phone call... The kiss would have happened after Shane's injury. But I like how my story went and didn't want to change it. So let's just say that it happened a year earlier. I'm just going to use my own timeline, I guess. So Ilya's dad is also dead when this takes place,

Anyway, I specifically wanted Shane to go to Boston in this universe because, like, homophobia aside, Montreal treating him like shit is a horrible business move. I thought it would be fun to have Boston capitalize on that (also, I just love Boston, the city, idk shit about their real hockey team). Plus, I think it would be fun for Shane to go to his rival team. Ilya's Boston teammates aren't explored that often so I could do a lot with them. I think in this universe, they go to Ottawa eventually and retire there. But for now, they'll be in Boston for a few years.

Okay, to the story (as you can tell by the length of this story, I yap too much)

See the end of the work for more notes

Ilya Rozanov associated being on the ice with many things. The first was duty. He had learned the importance of winning from a young age. For as long as he could remember, he had not existed without hockey. Despite the pressure he often felt, being on the ice also meant freedom. He could soar on the ice and forget all his worries. There were other emotions: joy, pride, excitement. But for Ilya Rozanov, hockey was his safe space.

He never expected it to make him afraid. For all the hard hits he had taken and all the injuries he had sustained, he always knew it was part of being on the ice. He knew he would get back up again and give it his all. Fear was a feeling he liked to ignore. The last time he had let himself express it was when his mother had died. A part of Ilya had died with her.

The only other time he felt afraid was when he was tangled up with another man, but he chased the fear down with the pleasure. The thrill. He knew what would happen if he were ever caught. But that didn't stop him. He was careful. He was so careful. The only man he had let himself be reckless for was Shane Hollander. He refused to admit to himself why that was. The fear burned in the back of his mind.

When he had seen his "rival" before the game, his heart had soared, knowing that they would be seeing each other very soon. Ilya had quipped at Shane, baiting him for no reaction but a blush and an eye roll. To spectators, Ilya was being the asshole that Hollander hated. But they both knew better. This gentle, fragile thing between them had been growing. Ilya wouldn't admit but he was slightly afraid of what would happen next. What would happen if he uttered three words that he felt deep within his bones like a winter's chill. He was afraid that it would cause Shane to retreat. Like he had before. Ilya couldn't have that. So he kept his mouth shut.

He hadn't expected how much he would wish he had said it before tonight. He hadn't seen it with his own eyes. Just heard the aftermath of someone being slammed into the boards. Nothing new. Nothing strange. But when he turned to look and saw his— saw Shane lying on the ice, dazed, tethering in and out of consciousness, Ilya's heart felt as if it froze.

No, no, no. Shane was not meant to look like that. Someone so full of life should not look so… so lifeless. This was not something he could handle. It was as if he was thrown back into the body of the scared little boy after his mother's death.

His feet moved before his mind; he was skating over to Shane. He had to be near him, had to see if he was alright. There was a nagging voice of caution in his mind, telling him to stop, that he couldn't do this. But he drowned it out. He was ready to get on his knees and be with his love, to see if he was alright. But he didn't get the chance.

Everything passed by so fast, he hardly had time to ask questions before he was pulled back by Pike. Fucking Pike. Why did that asshole have to be in the way? Why did he have more of a right to Shane than Ilya?

He began to realize how this was looking, so he urged himself to call down. But then he heard something that completely shattered his heart. Shane, looking up, searching for him, he

reached out his hand and muttered, like a prayer, “Ilya?” His voice was desperate, sickly. It was as if it hurt him to speak, but he called out for Ilya anyway. And Ilya couldn’t follow.

Ilya had to play the rest of the game like everything was normal. Like his world wasn’t shattering. Like what he had just done hadn’t possibly given them away. Shane would hate him. But god, he needed to see him. Shane should be here with him. Or Ilya would be at his place. But instead, he was lying in a hospital bed without Ilya.

Ilya got through the game and did what he needed to do. He goes back to his hotel, alone, checking his phone for any word about Shane. He stops himself from texting Shane. After what was likely at least a concussion, the man would not be the one checking his phone.

He couldn’t sleep that night. He had a flight tomorrow, but he knew that he couldn’t leave Montreal. Not without seeing Shane. Luckily, overnight, the media reported which hospital he was at. So Ilya rose from his bed, put on a cap that didn’t really hide anything, and took a cab to the hospital. When he got there, he didn’t know what to do. How to find Shane. It wasn’t as if he were considered a family or friend. They wouldn’t just tell him. And he could not exactly go knocking on doors of the hospital to find him. He had been rash to come here without a plan. He could say that he was here to apologize on behalf of the team. For fucking Cliff Marlow, but…

He had begun to spiral in the lobby of the hotel room, he hadn’t realized someone had come up next to him until they spoke. “Ilya Rozanov?”

Ilya turned toward the voice, his mouth parted in surprise when he saw who it was. He recognized Shane Hollander’s father very easily. He had seen him around hockey games often enough. Although they had never interacted. Why was he approaching him now? Did he know? Ilya had ignored any speculation about the moment on the ice, only looking for news of Shane’s state. Shane’s father could tell him.

But would he tell him? Ilya had to make something up quickly before something went wrong. What if the man wasn’t so keen on Ilya seeing his son? What if he told him to go?

“Mr. Hollander, I—” Ilya froze up again. That fear had returned. He didn’t know what to say.

The man sighed, “You’re here to see Shane?”

Ilya simply nodded, waiting to see what happened next.

“He’ll be happy to see you. Look, I’m not sure what’s going on here, but when the only thing my injured son is asking for is you, I don’t need more details.”

“He is?” Ilya couldn’t believe it. Shane was asking his parents and anyone around to listen to *him.*

“Yes. He’s not exactly coherent right now. But he keeps saying your name. And before he went to sleep last night, he said, ‘tell Ilya…’ He didn’t finish that sentence. We can discuss what this means later, but you should see Shane first.”

“Yes. Please.” He added the pleasantry after a few moments. He didn’t know how to talk to Shane’s father or what to say. But the thought of seeing Shane made him forget any frustrations.

“My wife kicked me out to pick up some coffee while the doctors came in, so you’ll have to join me for a moment. The less people in the room, the better.”

Ilya didn’t argue, he would do anything to see Shane. So he followed his dad to the hospital cafeteria and held the cup that he had filled for Shane’s mom as he prepared his own.

“You should get some. You look exhausted.”

Ilya shrugged, “Is alright. I couldn’t sleep last night, I’ll be fine.”

The man eyed him. “Yeah, I didn’t sleep much either. So what are you, a black coffee guy?”

“Is okay,” Ilya assured him again, shaking his head. He didn’t need it.

“You want to look like you’re going to kneel over when you see Shane? Maybe that’s a good thing, actually. It might make him laugh.”

Ilya was in disbelief. Was Shane’s dad joking with him? It was shocking, especially when he seemed to know that there was something going on here. Shane spoke highly of his parents. He felt the most guilty lying to them. Ilya wondered if he knew that he had nothing to worry about.

“I like sugar.”

Mr. Hollander smiled and began to pour coffee into another cup. Ilya poured his own sugar from the packets as the man watched him with an amused smile.

“Didn’t know athletes drank that much junk.”

“Shane eats like a rabbit,” Ilya shook his head. “Not all of us have bad taste.”

Shane’s dad laughed, full and loud. “Ah, I needed that.” He shook his head. “Yuna won’t believe it. Ilya Rozanov making me laugh. Come on, I think we’ve given them enough time. I had been loitering in the lobby for some time before I saw you. Work phone calls.” He explained when he didn’t have to explain anything to Ilya.

Ilya followed him up the elevator to the fifth floor, and to Shane’s room. Ilya’s breath was caught when Shane’s dad knocked on the door, and Shane’s mom opened it. She took a look at him and said nothing, just ushering them inside.

“Perfect timing, he’s still awake.”

Shane was lying in his hotel bed, barely awake. His eyes were fluttering shut, and he looked a mess. Bruised and broken.

“Shane,” he breathed out. And those perfect, beautiful, dazed eyes locked on him. Shane looked at him as if Ilya had just fulfilled his wildest dreams.

“Ilya!” The man said, jerking to sit up, wincing through the pain. Ilya went to his side immediately.

“Careful, moya lyubov. Don’t hurt yourself for me.”

“Hug.” Shane pouted at him, holding his arms out. He was clearly on drugs, but it was endearing. Ilya did his best to carefully hug him without aggravating any injuries.

“You look like shit,” his love said through slurred words, but Ilya understood.

“I know. You worried me. I…” he didn’t know how to say it. “I messed up. The world may know how much you worried me.”

Shane didn’t crumble in fear as Ilya expected. But he was loopy; he wouldn’t be thinking straight. He just smiled. “Yeah? Ruined your image.” He laughed like it was a joke.

Ilya wanted to tell him the full truth so badly right now. But not now. Not while he was drugged and not while his parents stood by watching their every move.

Shane’s mother rescued him. “The doctor was saying that he should be getting some more rest right before you came. Why don’t you sleep now, Shane? I’m sure Mr. Rozanov won’t be going anywhere.”

Ilya nodded his head. “I won’t.” He would see Shane through this hospital visit, even if he had to miss his next game.

“Ilya,” Shane said.

Ilya looked at him, “Yes?”

“No,” he shook his head and looked at his mother. “His name is Ilya.”

His mother’s lips quipped up. “Alright. Ilya then. Get some rest, Shane.”

At her agreement, Shane closed his eyes. Ilya sat next to him and held his hand until he slept. Shane’s parents were silent through it. Ilya could feel their eyes.

Finally, when Shane drifted off to sleep, Mrs. Hollander spoke.

“Thank you for coming… He looks comfortable around you.”

“Of course. Nothing would keep me away.”

Her eyes narrowed on him, knowing. “You know, he was calling for you. We tried to find your number in his phone.”

“It wouldn’t be under my name,” he responded.

Shane's mom simply nodded, as if she were expecting that answer. "Well, I'm glad you showed up regardless. He was distressed and we didn't know what to do. How to fix it."

She looked away from him, but Ilya saw the fear in her eyes and heard it in her voice. He had seen Yuna Hollander plenty times before, passionately cheering her son on in the stands. It was fierce and loving. Something Ilya would never have. He often envied it. But he did not like the way that Yuna Hollander appeared so small and afraid now. Ilya was sure that he wasn't helping by being this confusing presence she never accounted for.

Ilya took a look at the sleeping Shane, watched his chest rise and fall, before he looked over at Shane's parents again. "I love him." He said. A confession that he had been waiting to make to the sleeping man first, but he had a feeling that they needed to hear it.

Mrs. Hollander's lips parted in surprise as she said, "Oh." She stepped closer to him, Ilya didn't know what to expect. He didn't expect her to take his free hand. "How long had this been going on?"

She was quick to understand that this was not a new occurrence. Ilya didn't know how to respond. He wasn't sure what Shane would want to tell his parents. He should wait for Shane to be coherent enough to join the conversation. But he needed to say something.

"For me… Maybe since I met him. Him, I don't know." Ilya looked down at the floor. Did Shane love him back? Would he even want to talk to Ilya once he found out that Ilya partially outed them? Ilya knew that if they didn't speak out soon, things might become disastrous for their careers. He had silenced his phone, but he saw all the messages whenever he glanced at the home screen. He didn't respond to any of them. He needed to speak with Shane.

"Trust me. I might not understand it, but I could see that he loves you, too. You'll get through this."

Ilya nodded his head. He believed her. Somehow, he did. Ilya didn't know what this meant for his career, but everything would be fine as long as they were together.

Ilya and Shane's parents settled into comfortable silence. Neither of them pressed him for more details. Mrs. Hollander went to typing on her phone. Ilya wondered if she was in contact with Shane's people. Mr. Hollander was working on a crossword puzzle. Ilya laughed in his head, now he knew where Shane got his boring habits from.

The time passed quickly, Ilya began to doze off in the chair next to the bed when there was a knock on the door. He just fluttered his eyes open when Hayden Pike walked in.

He hugged Mrs. Hollander, who had opened the door for him. "I wanted to come check on Shane." He greeted Mr. Hollander with a wave before turning towards the bed.

His worried expression turned hard when he saw Ilya. His jaw tight, just like it was when he pulled Ilya back from Shane at the game. Ilya wanted to hate him.

"Be nice, Shane asked for him."

“Why would—” Hayden cut himself off, shaking his head. He ran a hand through his hair. He sighed. “I hope he knows what he’s doing.”

Ilya stood up. “I’m going to step out.” He didn’t need to be questioned by Pike. And he felt it was the nice thing to do, give the man a moment with his best friend. He went out to the hallway and found himself a hard chair in the hospital waiting room. It was only then that he decided to scroll through his messages.

He had a few from teammates expressing their concern about him. They didn’t mention Shane. Didn’t mention what that moment of the ice could mean. Ilya thought they were nice enough. There were no slurs, no accusations. Yet. Who knows what would happen if he admitted the truth? And with every waking moment he spent since Shane had gotten injured, he was coming to the realization that he wanted to admit it. That he didn’t want to go back to before.

He glossed over the concerns from Svetlana. The missed calls from his agent. It was no surprise that there was nothing from his brother. If anything, it would be to call Ilya a disgrace, which he didn’t need to read that message right now. He finally settled on opening his messages with his coach. He typed a quick, succinct message, informing him that he would not make the next game due to a family emergency. His message would be loaded with meaning. He wondered if his coach would understand. After all, he had seen the paparazzi standing outside the hospital when he walked in. He knew he had been photographed.

Ilya had stopped himself from searching up his own name, but he needed to know now what people were saying. Sure enough, photos of him entering the hospital were already everywhere.

‘A Show of Sportsmanship or Something Deeper?’ a headline read. Most major sites were running with the sportsmanship angle, he was sure they didn’t want to acknowledge what the fans were speculating about online. Ilya scrolled through that too. Enough of the fans had guessed a semblance of what was going on. Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were closer than they appeared. He grimaced, reading the hateful ones full of slurs and hateful words (some that Ilya was unsure of their meanings, but refused to look up).

He smiled at those who were excited about the development. Who knew there were accounts dedicated to speculating about the two of them? ‘Hollanov,’ they called it. Ilya couldn’t wait to tease Shane with that. Finally, he got tired of scrolling and put his phone down. There was more support than he could have hoped. Perhaps coming out wouldn’t be so bad. Something inside him purred with happiness at the thought of others knowing that Shane was his and he was Shane’s. It would only be a distant dream until he spoke to Shane, but Ilya knew what he wanted. He didn’t give a fuck about the consequences. Not after seeing Shane laid out on the ice. So weak and small. He didn’t want anyone to separate them again. He wanted for people to know that if Shane got hurt, Ilya should be by his side… It may be too much to ask for. But he would ask.

His exhaustion caught up to him, and he closed his eyes, falling asleep on the hard chair.

He hadn’t expected hours to pass when he was finally awakened. He started up at Shane’s mom, who had been calling his name. He quickly straightened up, looking at his phone to see

that hours had passed.

“Hayden left a while ago. I came to find you, but I thought you needed the rest.” She began to explain, “Shane’s awake now and less loopy. You two should talk. David and I will go grab us something to eat. Any allergies?”

Ilya shook his head, surprised to be included in the meal plan. But momma bear Yuna Hollander had seemed to take to this situation well. And now Ilya was also a point of concern for him. He wondered if she and Shane had spoken about them before she got Ilya. They must have. She looked slightly more relaxed.

Ilya entered Shane’s hospital room alone, Shane was sitting up on his bed, engrossed in his phone. It fell out of his hands when he looked up and saw Ilya.

“Pretty sure you’re not supposed to be using that,” Ilya scolded. Shane looked guilty that he had been caught. So cute.

“I had to see…” he paused, but they both knew what he meant. “It’s a lot.”

Ilya lingered near the door, unsure what to say. Shane looked nervous, but he didn’t look nearly as afraid as Ilya felt inside.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know why… I just couldn’t take seeing you like that.”

Shane stared at him, for a moment, Ilya worried he would become angry or worse, turn him away. But he didn’t. “Come here,” he said.

Ilya quickly followed his command. He sat down on the side of the bed, he leaned close to Shane, pressing their foreheads together. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” Ilya choked out, tears stinging at his eyes. He hadn’t cried when Shane was hurt. Hadn’t cried when he slept alone that night. He hadn’t cried when he entered the room. But everything was crashing down on him now.

“Why are you sorry?” Shane asked, wiping the tears from his face with his cold hand. “I would have done the same.”

Ilya looked into his eyes. “You would have?”

“I watched the hit. I know I shouldn’t have. But if that had happened to you… No, I don’t think I would be able to hold myself back from skating to your side. Not now. Not anymore.”

Ilya’s heart fluttered. Did that mean? “I love you.” He uttered, his mouth moving fast. He repeated it in Russian for good measure.

Ilya held his breath as he waited for a response. If it were negative, maybe it would be better to suffocate. But then it came, and it sounded even more beautiful than he could have hoped.

“I love you too.”

Ilya wasted no time, planting a kiss on Shane's lips. His love whined when he pulled away, clearly wanting more. "You are injured." They shouldn't be doing any of this, really. He should be letting Shane rest.

"Fuck you."

Ilya's lips turned up. "There will be no fucking until you are better. Understood?"

Shane's mouth opened, he glared at Ilya. But his glare was weak. Like a kitten. He couldn't dwell on it. There were things that needed to be said.

"They are speculating about us. Some are close to the truth. We'll need to say something soon."

Shane nodded. "I know. My mom told me." He smiled slightly, "She already had my agent prepare a few options for statements."

"Options?"

He shrugged, wincing at the shoulder movement. "It's up to us what angle we want to take it. How you want to."

"And if I wanted the truth?" Ilya said.

Shane blinked. "You do?"

"Yes. I don't think I can keep hiding how I feel for you. Yesterday proved that. I want to be by your side through everything. I don't want people to question it." Ilya said. The complexity of how he felt, he wasn't sure if he could say in English, but he tried.

Shane sighed. And that fear rushed back into Ilya's heart.

But then, Shane said something amazing that shook him to his core. "I want that too. It… It will be hard. Hayden told my parents that things aren't great with the team… I don't think—" Shane stopped talking. Ilya could see him begin to spiral.

"Whatever happens, we'll figure it out together. Montreal would be idiots to let you go for this."

Shane nodded, but he didn't seem to fully agree. "What about you?"

"I've been ignoring everyone. But right now it seems to be fine. Not sure what will happen after the statement. But they have to know. Or at least think."

Shane nodded, looking off in the distance. "When my parents come back, we can figure things out."

That didn't take long. The Hollanders may have been lingering in the hallway, waiting for a sign to come in as they knocked on the door exactly when Ilya and Shane fell silent.

Mr. Hollander was carrying two bags of food. “I hope you two are hungry,” he smiled.

“Good talk?” Mrs. Hollander asked.

Shane looked at his mom, he didn’t hesitate when he said. “We want to come out.”

Yuna Hollander was a formidable woman indeed. She didn’t blink at the news. She simply jumped into strategizing. She would call Shane’s agent and refine the “operation coming” out statement. Ilya should get in contact with his. When Ilya did so and confirmed the situation, he was quickly dropped. That was no roadblock for Yuna Hollander. She and Shane’s agent would take care of everything. Ilya could sign a temporary contract with her while he found his own.

Yuna began to strategize about the potential blowback. What would happen if both their teams took offense to this? It wasn’t against the rules to play against your significant other. But this was unprecedented; the league likely thought they would never have to make that rule.

“They won’t make it now. And they know the type of lawsuits that would be filed if they tried to intimidate you about this.” She shook her head. “I should give Shane’s lawyer a heads up,” she added as an afterthought.

Ilya was shocked by how prepared she was.

“When do you want to do this?” She looked at them.

“As soon as possible,” Shane replied before Ilya could. Ilya nodded his support. His sweet Shane. Ilya worried a bit that Shane didn’t want this as much as he did. But this proved him wrong.

“Alright. Tomorrow then. I’ll take care of the details. You two just need to approve the statement.”

Ilya met Shane’s agent over the phone. Farrah was just as formidable as Yuna. Ilya answered honestly when she questioned them about the state of their relationship and how they wanted it to be portrayed. He told her more than she had asked. Excuse him for being glad to admit that he had probably been in love with Shane for nearly a decade. It was very freeing. And Shane watched him with happy, proud eyes.

Everything was finalized, the sky had darkened, and Shane was ready to go get some rest. Shane’s parents, who had told him to call them Yuna and David, left Shane in his trusted hands to go back to their hotel.

Ilya knew he was not going anywhere. He would see Shane out of the hospital and maybe even to his parents’ house. It depended on what happened next. He chose to miss his next game until Shane was discharged. But after tomorrow, he might not have a choice. He was not so fearful of this. Losing hockey was better than losing Shane. Anyone who disagreed could fuck off. Besides, he didn’t believe that the league would let go of two of its best

players. Perhaps their teams. (Or Shane's team, his mind whispered). But there were other teams. New York was accepting enough of Hunter. New York was close to Boston.

They would be able to see each other more frequently if Shane were in New York. Ilya wasn't a fan of him playing on the same team as Scott Hunter, but he would suck it up for Shane to be close. He would drive in the New York traffic just to see his lover. Or perhaps he would subject himself to a train. It would be faster.

But these were hypotheticals. The best case scenario was that their teams did nothing. Shane loved Montreal. He wanted to retire there. Ilya liked Boston. But he wasn't as attached as Shane. He could leave. He would be fine with it. But Shane… Ilya sighed. He had noticed that Hayden Pike was the only one to visit him. They were in Montreal for goodness sake.

Ilya simmered in rage as he forced himself to try to sleep in the small, uncomfortable hospital cot. Shane tried to convince him to sleep with him on the bed. But he refused. That thing was way too small, and any sudden movements from him could aggravate Shane's injuries. So he took the visitor's cot.

The next morning, the Hollanders came with breakfast. They did not discuss the statement that would be released later that day. Instead, Shane's parents wanted to get to know Ilya. And also know him as Shane's boyfriend. What their relationship was like. When David said boyfriend, neither Shane or Ilya had denied it. They had confessed their love for each other, yet hadn't labeled their relationship. But being called Shane's boyfriend made him feel warm. He was very much fine with that.

Shane's doctor came in to check on Shane and informed them that Shane would be ready to go home tomorrow. Ilya was ready to follow him to wherever that home was.

Their lazy morning was interrupted when Ilya's phone rang. He had forgotten he had switched the silence off. He stared down at the contact. Trevor Hayes. The Boston Bears' general manager. He debated picking it up. But he knew that he shouldn't, especially with the plan for today. At the last ring he accepted the call, ignoring the stares in the room.

He wanted to have the first word. "Hello, Mr. Hayes. I already told coach I will not be at the next game. Is family emergency. Please respect that."

He heard Hayes shocked breath on the other line. It took a few moments before he spoke.

"Yes, I was not calling to scold you." He paused before continuing. "How is Hollander?"

Ilya's eyes widened at the direct question. Sure, the paparazzi had spotted him yesterday, but how did Hayes know he was still here? Or was he just asking in general?

Trevor Hayes was a smart man. He was not the coach, so Ilya did not speak with him much. But to handle all the behind the scenes, contracts, and the minuscule details of the team, he had to be smart. When Ilya did speak with him, he sometimes felt out of his depth. But Trevor Hayes was also a good man. He was being sincere in asking about Shane.

Ilya glanced at Shane, who was watching him. When they locked eyes, Shane gave a supportive smile. “He will be fine.”

Ilya took a deep breath. When he accepted the call, he knew this would need to be said at some point. He should give the man a heads-up about what was to come. After all, Hayes would be the one who would have to deal with the headache of it all.

“Listen. We are making a statement soon… You should know that we’re together.”

“Okay.” He replied. “How soon is soon?” His tone was neutral, he didn’t give away how he felt. But there was no disgust. That was good.

“Um—” Ilya suddenly felt guilty at springing the news on him just a few hours before. “Today.” He admitted.

“Okay.” Okay? That was all he had to say? “We will deal with what comes next.”

“Deal?” Ilya asked, what did deal mean in this context? It sounded as if Hayes was saying he would help him with what came next. “You are not angry?”

“No. But others will be.” Ilya knew that to be true. “But we will deal with it. Together. You’re Ilya Rozanov. It would be a disservice to forget all you’ve done for Boston because of who you love.”

Those words were both comforting and shocking. How did Hayes know? “Love?”

“Kid, if you’re about to tell me that what I saw isn’t love, then spare me the bullshit. Give Hollander my well wishes, will you?”

Hayes hung up before he could reply. The Hollanders were silent, waiting for him to speak first.

He turned to Shane with a smile. “My GM wishes you well.

“Is that all he had to say?” Yuna asked.

“No. I think Boston will be fine with this. He said… that it would be a disservice to forget all I’ve done for Boston because of who I love.” He tried hard to remember the exact words.

Yuna let out an excited “whoop” as if he had scored a goal. “That’s great. And he’s right.”

“Yeah. He is.” Shane was smiling next to him. “I’m happy for you.” But there was a sadness to his voice because he hadn’t heard much from his team other than them telling him to get well soon right after the injury.

For Ilya, things couldn’t get better. His spot on his team was safe, and he had a boyfriend. But Shane only had one of those things. He was wishing that the statement was released now so they could get the blowback over with.

Shane did not want to inform the team beforehand. Ilya hadn't planned on it. But it would all come out soon.

"Maybe we should tell Farrah to go ahead?" Ilya suggested seeing the anxiety in his lover's eyes.

"Yeah." Shane looked at his mom. "Let's get it over with."

So Yuna made the call, and within the next hour, the statement was put out on behalf of both of them. Yuna made Ilya promise that he wouldn't read the discourse online. And she had Shane's phone, so he couldn't. But Ilya read the messages that began to pour in from people he knew.

The teammates who had texted him earlier told him that they hoped Hollander got better. Cliff, who Ilya was still pissed about, sent an apology and his well wishes to pass on to Shane. Ilya knew it wasn't intentional. He would get over it eventually. Cliff was his closest friend in Boston after all. Although many of his teammates appeared to be accepting enough, Ilya was sure that there were a few who weren't. Ilya needed all the friends he could get. He would forgive Cliff eventually. Maybe when he got back to Boston.

Ilya scoffed when a new message came in. "Can you believe Scott Hunter?" he turned to Shane to read the message out loud. "Proud of both of you. Let me know if either of you needs anything." He mocked the man's stupid American accent as he read, making Shane laugh. He wasn't even aware Hunter had his number. He even signed off his name because Ilya wouldn't know who it was without it. Ilya hoped that he did not have to send Shane off to play on the same team with Hunter.

Yuna informed them that the man had sent Shane a longer, nicer message. Ilya wouldn't admit but he was glad for the support. When Scott had kissed his boyfriend, Ilya's heart soared, thinking of a possibility he thought would never come. But it was here.

It wasn't long before they were given word that they were suspended. Neither of them were surprised. Shane was awfully upset, as if he would be able to play the next few games anyway.

Yuna read the few messages Shane received from Hayden and Rose. No one else from his team. Not yet. Ilya hoped that they were just sleeping in.

"Montreal isn't happy. I haven't heard from Boston, but they may not be aware of your change in agents yet," Farrah informed them.

"I talked to my GM before the statement was released. He sounded supportive," Ilya told her. "I will send you his number."

"The Roger Crowell wants to meet both of you. He said that he'll be in Montreal tomorrow. I'll be there too." She told them.

Ilya squeezed Shane's hand.

“Does he know Shane is injured,” Yuna tsk’d.

“He doesn’t care.”

Ilya knew that summed up how the meeting would go. Ilya held Shane’s hand and told him it would be alright anyway.

“What if it’s not?” His eyes were red, tears ready to come out. “I’m not so lucky that my team cares about my stats instead of who I fuck. It’s easy for you. I’ve barely heard from anyone from the team that I dedicated years to. Put my body on the line for.”

Ilya did not flinch at his anger. It was understandable. They both knew the risks of this. But only one of them was being affected. If Ilya had to worry about being dropped too, at least they would be in it together. Shane was not selfish for thinking that way. He was hurting,

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. Is not fair, I know.” He just stroked Shane’s hair as he cried. “If Montreal does not want you. Fuck them. Someone will. You are Shane Hollander.”

“He’s right,” David said from the doorway. Shane’s parents had stepped out for a bit, but they came back. “They should be fighting over you.”

“Yes, Montreal would be stupid to let you go. But the other teams can’t be as dumb,” Yuna agreed.

Shane didn’t look so sure, but he nodded to placate them. Shane changed the subject, asking his mom to tell him how the New York game went last night. Ilya’s mind drifted back to Scott Hunter.

He opened his phone and replied to his message only.

‘Thank you. Shane may need the support the most.’

Scott texted back quickly.

‘Of course. Feel free to give me a call. Both or either of you.’

Ilya waited for Shane to doze off to step away to make a call. Hunter answered quick, so predictable.

“Hunter, didn’t you win last night? You should be sleeping in. That boyfriend of yours did not congratulate you?” He said, instead of a proper greeting, because he was still Ilya Rozanov.

“Oh fuck off,” Hunter said, but his voice was not angry like it would be on the ice. “Shouldn’t you be playing nurse to Hollander instead of watching my games.”

“I never said anything about watching. You can look up scores now, old man.”

Ilya knew that Hunter was rolling is eyes. “Whatever. How’s Hollander? Is he with you?”

“He’s sleeping. He will recover. He’ll miss the rest of the season, but we are suspended anyway. Who knows for how long.”

“That sucks, man. The league wasn’t great when I came out either. But I think it helped that Kip is not a hokey player. They could just ignore that I was gay except when I kissed him on national TV. But it was still difficult.”

“We have a meeting with Roger Crowell tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow? Isn’t Hollander still in the hospital? Fucking asshole,” he did not expect those words from Hunter.

“He’s getting out tomorrow,” Ilya replied. “I don’t expect good things from the meeting. But we will survive.”

“It won’t be easy for you two. I mean, you two never do things in halves.” Ilya didn’t exactly understand what Hunter was saying, but he sounded surprisingly fond. “Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander. That couldn’t be a worse pairing for the league. Even just my team is in shock.”

“Your team… How was your team when you came out?” It was what he had wanted to ask when he picked up the phone.

“Better than most teams would have, I would say. My friends were supportive. Then there were others who didn’t care, acted like it was no different than me being with a woman. But it’s hockey. There were some who didn’t like it. Luckily, I have a good coach, he made it clear from the start that he wouldn’t tolerate homophobia in the locker room. I still know the ones that have animosity for me, I see it in their behavior. But it’s gotten better with time. Some people can’t fathom knowing a gay person until they do.” He scoffed.

Ilya nodded even though Hunter could not see him. It sounded like New York could be a good place for Shane then.

“How’s your team taking it?” Hunter dared to ask.

“Fine. I should be okay. Shane may not. His—” Ilya paused, finding the words, “leadership is not so supportive. And he hasn’t heard much from his team. He won’t ask, but it would be good to hear from you.”

“Of course. Let me know when it would be a good time. I don’t want to disturb his rest. And I know it will be a hard week for you two.”

“I will let you know… New York may be a good place. For Shane?” His words floated between a statement and a question.

Hunter was silent. Then he spoke. “If it comes to it, I’m sure the team would love to have him. I would, that’s for sure. I will suck for Boston. Me and Hollander on the same team. The two best players in the league.”

“Oh fuck off, old man. That would only be true if Shane came to Boston.” Ilya said. When the words left his mouth, he was quickly filled with longing. He had never dared to think about Shane and himself on the same team. It was not a possibility. Yet. He wanted it.

“Whatever you say.”

Ilya could hear a voice in the background; he smirked. That must be Kip. Ilya smirked. Perhaps that celebration would happen now.

“Look, I have to go. But let me know when you’re back in Boston. We could get dinner. There or in New York. Whatever works.”

The thought of getting dinner with Scott Hunter before now would have made him laugh. But now he was looking forward to it. “Sure, bring that boyfriend of yours.”

“Will do. And if Hollander is in town. You better bring him. I’m not sure how he’s dealt with you for years. Let me know about that phone call.”

“Bye, Hunter.”

The call was reassuring. Ilya knew how worried Shane was. Ilya wanted to have a backup plan ready to go. Shane’s anxiety could cause him to spiral. Nothing would make him spiral more than the possibility of losing hockey. Ilya wouldn’t let that happen. Ilya wouldn’t deny that Shane was more attached to hockey than he was. Ilya would hate to stop playing for anything other than his own wishes, but he would handle it better than Shane.

Ilya was even amazed that Shane had agreed to come out, knowing what they both did. His boyfriend had spiraled plenty of time before about the possibility of being caught and what it could mean. They had almost ended before because Shane was afraid. But Shane chose this repercussions be dammed. Ilya would not take that for granted. Shane would not lose him or hockey. They could have both. He believed it deep down.

And his traitorous mind would not keep quiet about the desire to play on the same team as Shane. Now that he thought about the possibility, he wouldn’t be able to stop. As he returned to the hospital room, he kept thinking of it. Perhaps they could find a team that would take both of them. Ilya would sacrifice a lot to make that happen, if it were even possible. Shane was his home anyway.

It wasn’t as if Ilya could return to Russia now. He didn’t want to. There was nothing left for him there. He hadn’t spoken to Alexei since the funeral, and it would not happen now.

Time passed slowly until the meeting the next day, but Ilya was just glad to be around Shane and his parents. Shane was surprisingly calm going into the meeting with the commissioner. Ilya wasn’t sure if it was because of the concussion or Farrah’s presence. But he put on a brave face as they stepped into the meeting room. Ilya’s brave boy.

Farrah didn’t lie about taking care of things. She eloquently stated that their suspensions were bullshit and the league would have to deal with a lawsuit if it went further. Crowell didn’t like that. But he knew she was right. He tried to say that a lawsuit wouldn’t look good for

either of them. That no team would want to deal with them after it. If they even wanted to deal with them now.

But it was clear that Crowell had been in talks with both teams and knew that Ilya would be safe, so he targeted his heat mostly on Shane. He strongly suggested that they retract the statement or stage a break up and all would be fine.

Shane glared at him with intensity that Ilya didn't think he could muster and said, "No."

The way he spat out the word was almost as if he told the commissioner to go fuck himself. Ilya had to hold back a laugh. Especially when Crowell looked as if he had swallowed something rotten.

"I don't care what you or anyone else thinks. Ilya is more important than that. I'll always choose him."

Ilya wanted to cry. To hear those words meant more than he could express. For Shane to say them in this meeting… Ilya couldn't think of anything else.

They left the meeting still unsure. Their suspensions would be lifted, they knew that. But what came next, well, that was up to their teams. Crowell said that he would be speaking to both of their team's leadership right after they left.

Ilya and Shane went straight to Shane's home. They had only briefly had time to freshen up after Shane was discharged before they had to head over to the meeting. Yuna and David stayed back, they were cooking lunch when he and Shane arrived. Ilya caught them up on the meeting as Shane had retreated into himself, not saying much. Ilya was learning Shane's habits, and he did his best to support him. But Shane anxiously awaited a phone call from his team. He was so sure he would get one whenever the meeting with Crowell ended. Ilya hoped it came. But he also hoped it didn't. If the news were bad, that was. They had no idea how long the meeting would last, there would be a lot to talk about, he was sure.

They ate lunch. Shane didn't even complain about breaking his diet. His parents insisted he indulge. They settled on the couch once they were full. He held Shane in his arms. It was then that Ilya's phone rang.

Trevor Hayes.

So the meeting was done. Ilya picked up quickly, eager to learn what had happened. He had hoped that Shane would have heard back first to ease his anxiety. But Ilya could push for some information for both of them.

"Hello Rozanov?"

"Good afternoon," Ilya responded, then waited. What did Hayes have to tell him? Ilya wasn't going to start the conversation; the man had called him first.

"I just left the meeting with the commissioner. Say… Is Hollander with you?"

Ilya looked at Shane, who was watching him with sleepy eyes.

“He’s next to me, yes.” Shane realized that he was being spoken about and woke up slightly.

“Who is it?” He asked quietly.

“Hayes,” he mouthed.

“What happened?” Ilya asked, why was Hayes asking about Shane?

“Feel free to put me on speaker.”

Ilya followed the instruction, Shane sat up at attention.

“Now tell me, did Hollander really tell Crowell to fuck off about your relationship?”

“What?” Shane’s mouth went wide open. “I did not—” he sputtered.

Ilya laughed. He couldn’t help himself. Who knew Hayes was so funny? Ilya hadn’t felt so light in a long time. “He did.” He said proudly. Shane might not have said those exact words, but Shane had told Ilya to go fuck himself enough times on the ice for Ilya to recognize the tone he had used when talking to Crowell. Expect their was pure hatred in his voice with Crowell instead of the playfulness Ilya was used to.

“It wasn’t like that.” Shane insisted. “You have news for Ilya?” Shane was biting his lip, twisting his lower lip with his teeth. He was just as anxious about Ilya’s fate as he was about his own. Even if they felt that Ilya was safe, Shane wanted to hear confirmation.

“Yes. You both know your suspensions won’t hold. And no pressure is going to make Boston drop you as a player.”

Ilya and Shane sighed in relief at the same time.

“That’s great, Ilya,” Shane said softly, squeezing his hand. Ilya squeezed his hand back. Shane was happy for him, but his voice carried a sadness, knowing that he wasn’t so lucky right now.

Then Hayes spoke again. “Hollander. I’m sorry to say that it doesn’t seem to sound like your team sounds the same way.”

Shane looked gutted at the news, Ilya almost wished that Hayes hadn’t spoken at all. He continued anyway. “But I hope you know there’s a team out there that will fight for you. In Boston, perhaps. It would be good to play on the same team as your boyfriend, don’t you think?”

Ilya and Shane locked eyes. There was a gasp from Yuna, who was listening in from the dining room where she and David were working on a puzzle.

Ilya couldn’t believe what Hayes had just said… He hadn’t dared to hope… No matter how the thought had stuck with him, he told himself that it was stupid and that it would never happen. But now an offer was practically being laid out in front of them. Shane brought him out of his thoughts with a small sob that broke from his throat. A happy sob.

Ah, I didn't think Boston would be so bad. But—" Hayes joked.

"I didn't think," Shane cut him off. He was at a loss for words. "Thank you."

"Nothings happened yet. Don't thank me. And between us, why wouldn't we want to take Montreal's only chance of winning another cup away from them if they are so stupid to give it away?"

Ilya was glad that his team wasn't so stupid. "Well said." He agreed.

"Right. Well, I'll let you two get on with your evening. I have a feeling the next few weeks will be busy for all of us. And I have a feeling that we'll be talking soon."

Ilya was filled with so much joy. It was rare to feel this much joy off the ice. Being with Shane was the one thing that did it for him. Now, if everything went well, he had the chance to be with Shane all the time.

"Thank you, Mr. Hayes. Seriously." Ilya had to express his thanks before the man hung up.

"Like I said. I'm just ready for a few more cup wins. We'll talk soon."

Yuna descended into the room before Hayes could even hang up. But the GM did before she spoke.

"I can't believe it. Shane with Boston," she shook her head. "It's unexpected, but this could be a good move. And you'll be with Ilya." She said.

"Yeah," Shane nodded. "I can't believe it either."

Ilya couldn't read Shane. While Yuna seemed to be more in awe, he was in disbelief. Suddenly, Ilya wondered if things weren't simple. Ilya was ecstatic at the possibility of being together that he ignored the difficulties of what this might mean. Shane loved Montreal, he had built a life here. To ask him to come away to America was too much.

Ilya could never return home to Russia. But Canada was Shane's home. How could Ilya be so selfish?

"It's okay if you don't want Boston," Ilya said carefully. "Other teams will see your value as well." Ilya wasn't sure where else in Canada Shane might go. He started to make pros and cons lists of the teams in his head, he felt like Shane.

"What?" Shane looked at him in surprise. "You don't want to play together?" He looked terrified at the thought, and Ilya wanted to crumble.

"No. Of course I do. But moving to America… I thought it may be hard for you. Boston especially." It would also be difficult to play for the team he had aimed to beat his whole career. Ilya was sure that his teammates would treat Shane with the respect that he deserved. Even if they were homophobic, they liked to win. And Shane Hollander had been a curse on their tongues because he was a thorn in their sides. But if he was helping them win…

“It would. But you would be there. And most of my options would likely be in America anyway. I would rather play with you, live with you. Everything is out in the open now, there’s no reason to be separated again.”

“I agree. But if you don’t want Boston. I would follow you anywhere.”

Shane looked at him with wonder. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Ilya replied instantly. Shane touched their foreheads together.

“Canada’s my home. But so is wherever you are. Maybe in a few years, when things die down, we can reassess if there’s a team for us here. But I would love to be in your home for longer than a night, for you to show me around your city. We can do that now.”

“We can,” Ilya swallowed hard. Shane’s words weren’t poetic, but they were the most beautiful ones he had ever heard. Ilya never thought he would get this. “I love you. I want to always be by your side.”

“That’s what I want too,” Shane promised him.

They couldn’t do anything with Shane’s injury and his parents close by, but having Shane in his arms was enough. Ilya kissed him gently and began to dream of their future.

End Notes

Thanks for reading my hyper fixation slop. I meant for this to be dual POV, but Ilya's POV really captivated me. If I can muster up the inspo, I can see myself doing other POVs (Shane, Yuna/David, Scott) and maybe when Shane actually transfers. But we'll see. I also want to avoid hockey as much as possible because idk shit about hockey lol.

Okay I'm sleep deprived, good night.

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