

a thrill of hope, a weary man rejoices

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a thrill of hope, a weary man rejoices

by [honeybeebeeeight](#)

Summary

Christmas had never really been a joyous time of year for Ilya Rozanov.

This year is his first Christmas with the Hollander family and, despite his best efforts, he finds himself struggling. The Hollander's help in their own quiet way.

or, on a frozen pond outside of the Hollander home, Ilya allows himself to be loved.

Notes

this started as the thought of "if Ilya is from Moscow, he's probably never played pond hockey" and then it devolved from there into this clusterfuck.

author hasn't published any writing in months? years? and is plagued by the Mortifying Ordeal of Being Known so please be gentle.

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

Christmas had never really been a joyous time of year for Ilya Rozanov.

For starters, his Christmas came in January, thirteen days after the western churches. On the eve of January 7th, he dressed in his best suit and didn't protest as his mother smoothed his curls down into something manageable. They would be sitting in the church for hours and he hated having to sit straight, eyes forward, hands clasped, for eternity. The only solace he had getting through the Liturgy was the feast after.

Papa brought them along to some fellow police officer's home, most likely a captain or some higher-up, and the table would be laden with dishes. They were still fasting until tomorrow, but there was plenty of herring and carp, pirogi and blini, sochivo and vareniki. Tomorrow, they would have meat again, most likely roasted goose, and Ilya couldn't wait. Papa always encouraged him and Andrei to fill their plates up, boasting about how he was raising big, strong boys. Ilya preened at the attention from all the adults as they cooed and fawned over him and his "strong skating", as papa called it, but he also didn't want to leave mama's side.

Irina always shone at these events. She pinned her golden curls up in some complicated twist and lined her lips with a rouge that made her pretty smile look radiant. Irina let Ilya help put on her crucifix necklace and small pearl earrings before she adjusted his tie and brushed dust off his little suit. As he grew older, he cherished these small moments with her. It was their time away from his father and Andrei.

But these moments always came with a catch. His father made them stay at the dinners late into the night when Andrei and Ilya were already flagging, but Grigori would hear nothing of it. The drinks kept coming and Irina did a remarkable job hiding the strain on her face as her husband pawed at her in front of everyone. Eventually, they would get Grigori into a waiting cab and the second the door shut, it was as if the switch flipped. Spittle fell from his mouth as he raged about his ungrateful children, his bitch wife, and everything slight infraction he perceived in them that night. With time, he learned to take it on the chin.

It was often they showed up to church the next morning with bruises under their clothes.

Perhaps he only liked Christmas because it was mama's favorite holiday. If he closed his eyes, even now, he could picture her at Liturgy.

The church felt like something out of the old stories of the past, with rich maroon walls covered in layers and layers of gold. Incense blanketed the air and candles flickered as they walked down the aisle to find their customary seats. Papa vied for closer spots to show that they had ties to the bishop, but there were a few families that were deemed more *devout* than them. It incensed him to no end. But mama didn't care. She simply wanted to be in church. Every time they sat down, he glanced up at her and marveled at the way her face relaxed under the glow of the candles. She closed her eyes and clasped her hands in prayer, her lips moving silently along to the chants. She always lit a candle and placed it in the sand before pressing her lips to the icons at the front of the church. When Ilya asked who she prayed to, mama always smiled and told him that she liked to speak to St. Dymphna.

She prayed in a wistful voice, as though she was asking for something she knew she shouldn't ask for, or knew wouldn't come to fruition. As he grew older, her prayers grew shorter, as though she was losing the faith she once found peace in.

After his mama passed, they stopped attending church as much. They went just so papa could look good and could socialize. It became less of a holiday and more of a chore. There was no light or laughter around Christmas. Just vodka and fists.

He stopped looking forward to Christmas.

In Boston, he spent the day alone. They gave everyone a three-day break so people could celebrate with families and friends. Svetlana invited him, once, in the early days. He still felt guilty for how harsh his reply was. He didn't want to be around people that knew him. He spent his Christmas, the western date, under the covers of his bed with a lump in his throat and an ache in his chest. His fingers hovered over the screen, over the unsent text to Jane that he couldn't bring himself to press send. Instead, he flung his phone against the wall, ignoring the cracking sound that echoed from the contact, and burrowed deeper into his blankets in the hope that he could just disappear.

Maybe he could go out and find a bar full of all the other sorry fucks who didn't have family, or their family didn't like them. Maybe he could get drunk and call up Andrei and get wheedled out of more money.

Maybe if he just turned off the lights, fell asleep, and woke up the next day, the pain wouldn't be so bad.

He'd been saying that for years and it had yet to come true. Until now.

Until a cold, wet nose pressed right against his cheek.

"You are not supposed to be on bed," Ilya grunted. Anya snuffled right up against his ear and then promptly flopped down so her head was laying in the crook of his neck. Ilya reached up to rub the sleep out of his eyes and nudged her snout as he did so. She merely huffed louder and snuggled closer.

She was definitely his dog.

"Morning." Lips pressed against his cheek and he preened under the touch. Shane drove in yesterday after a two-week roadie and Ilya was very, *very* grateful to see him. Ilya cracked his eyes open to find Shane standing next to the bed, already fully dressed. He pouted and reached out for his boyfriend, but Shane rolled his eyes and batted his hands away.

"C'mon, we gotta head out. Mom made breakfast already." There was a spark in his eyes that Ilya saw only when he was playing hockey. Or sucking Ilya's cock. Which he could totally be doing right now if he was in bed with him, undressed.

Shane tangled his fingers with Ilya's and tugged gently. "Mom also said to bring a pair of skates and a stick."

"Do your parents have rink under house as well?" he teased. "Is where Yuna put you when you acted up?"

"No, you asshole. The temps dropped this week so we can play some pond hockey."

"Sweetheart, I believe the English term is 'tonsil hockey'."

"I will leave you here and take all of your car keys and you can walk to my parents."

God, nothing was hotter than a riled-up Shane Hollander. But it was Christmas and he clearly wanted to get moving to his parent's place so Ilya would behave...for now. He reached up to scratch under Anya's chin.

"Давай," he murmured. She perked up and hopped off the bed, looking very pleased with herself considering she wasn't supposed to be up there in the first place. Ilya peeled himself off of the very comfortable, very warm mattress and swung his legs over the side.

"I will be down in just a minute, yes? If you make me coffee, I will blow you later."

"As if you weren't already planning on sucking me off tonight," Shane retorted.

"Well, yes, but it is nice to add incentive."

Shane flipped him off as he left with Anya hot on his heels. Ilya rubbed a hand down his face and then inhaled long and slow, like Galina instructed him to do when he felt like the world was a bit too much at the moment. Yes, he wanted this. He wanted mornings with Shane and he wanted to be with the Hollander family and he wanted to spend time with them, but Christmas had never been his favorite time of year.

It was just one day. He could handle one day.

It was just a simple Christmas with his boyfriend and his family. Their first Christmas since he was stuck in Boston last year due to a snowstorm. But now he lived and played in Ottawa, just a short drive from his boyfriend's parents house.

Yeah, he could handle this.

"And you made sure to bring a pair of skates, right?"

"No," Ilya said, straight-faced. "I did not hear you say it before, or the time before that. Or the time before that."

Shane stared at him blankly and then turned to look forward as he began to ease the car out of the garage. He shook his head and muttered something under his breath.

"Yes, I brought skates and extra toy for Anya, but I know David got her a bone. I think your dad likes her more than me."

“My dad likes her more than *me*,” Shane said. He turned on the radio and Christmas music poured out of the speakers. For someone who rarely listened to music, he didn’t seem to mind the cheerful tune. His nerves were raw today and the music scraped over them in a way that wouldn’t normally bother him. Ilya was the one who pissed others off. He didn’t like it being the other way around. But this was one of Shane’s favorite holidays so he bit his tongue and listened to the people singing about so many fucking birds.

Ottawa in winter was pretty, he had to admit. He kept his eyes locked on the landscape as Shane drove. Snow blanketed the normally lush green grass and the gray skies indicated that more snow was on its way. When Ilya moved here, Yuna and David helped him find a house (on the downlow, of course) and he liked being further out from the city. In Boston, his apartments had always been smack dab in the heart of the city and his house had been modern and cold and *empty*. The house he got here was still huge, bigger than one person needed, but he bought it with Shane in mind. There was space between them and the neighbors, and while it still had flashy and grandiose chandeliers, it felt warmer than the Boston home. It felt lived in.

But it wasn’t the cottage. It wasn’t theirs.

“You okay?” Shane’s voice broke him from his thoughts. He nodded and reached back to pet Anya who was behaving very well in her little enclosure in the back seat.

“Tired,” he said in lieu of an explanation. “You wear me out.”

Shane sputtered out a protest. “I told you we should have gone to bed but you wanted to go a third round!”

“You are unable to resist me. You are...what is the word?”

“Insatiable?”

“Yes.” He nodded to himself. “You cannot keep yourself away from my sexy body.”

Shane rolled his eyes but when they came to a red light, he glanced over at Ilya and reached out, taking Ilya’s hand in his. “There’s no need to be nervous. My parents love you. Seriously.”

Good. He could handle Shane thinking he was nervous. He could *not* handle Shane if he really knew that Ilya was feeling like he wanted to crawl into bed, pull the covers over his head, and sleep for hours. Because then Shane would fret and get his parents to fret and Anya would look at him with those big sad eyes and Ilya would ruin Christmas.

So he was okay with letting Shane think that he was nervous.

The light turned green and Shane eased the car back into a steady, safe speed that Ilya pointedly did not tease him about. Instead, he focused his gaze on the man seated beside him. Shane looked positively sleep ruffled and soft despite the fact he was awake before him. The hoodie he was wearing, Ilya realized, was a bit too big to be Shane’s. A surge of emotion curled in his chest and gripped his heart. He slipped his hand out from under Shane’s and

reached up to rest his palm against the back of Shane's neck, the edge of his fingers tucking under his soft toque. Shane shivered at his touch but quickly adjusted and sank into the touch.

The drive proved uneventful, aside from Shane cursing out a driver who drove twelve under the speed limit, and Anya perked up the second he pulled into his parent's driveway. She loved coming here because she was spoiled rotten by Yuna and David. The second Shane parked the car, she was snuffling loudly in Ilya's ear.

"Yes, yes, I am coming," he teased her. She was impatient, just like her papa. He scratched under her snout and pressed a kiss against her whiskers before he finally climbed out of the passenger seat to unleash the beast. A blur of brown fur darted out of the car and rushed to the front door where she promptly spun in a circle and sat down like a little angel.

"She is so your dog," Shane chuckled. He lifted the back hatch so they could grab their bags. The Hollander's house was tucked back away from the main road and lined with trees with the nearest neighbor hidden by foliage. That meant Shane had no qualms in grabbing Ilya's bicep before he could pick up their bags.

"Hey." Shane let go of his arm and instead reached up to cradle his cheek. "Are you feeling alright? Mom and dad won't mind if you just want to go upstairs and sleep some more."

"M okay. Really." Maybe if he said it enough times it would come true. Shane didn't look like he fully believed him either, but he also didn't want to push Ilya. Shane stroked his thumb along his jaw, relishing in the prickly stubble that Ilya didn't shave this morning.

"Okay," he breathed and then he kissed him, sweet and soft and leaving him wanting more. Always wanting more. When Shane pulled back, he rubbed his thumb along Ilya's bottom lip and then grinned that stupid, bright smile of his.

"C'mon. Mom said she made your favorite."

Yuna Hollander was a saint. And her pancakes were heavenly. David greeted them at the door and hugged Shane first before he hugged Ilya too. It was always a bit strange to him, this easy affection shared between the Hollanders. He can't remember the last time his father hugged him.

"My boys!" Yuna exclaimed when she saw them. Anya yipped in excitement and danced around everyone's feet as hugs and greetings were exchanged. Yuna stood on her tiptoes in order to press a kiss to Ilya's cheek and he still bent down to help her out. She smoothed her hands over his shoulders and cupped his cheeks.

"You look tired. Is my son keeping you awake?"

Shane let out an affronted, "hey!" from the kitchen and Ilya smirked. "Yes, he keeps me up all night with his tossing and turning. Has he always snored?"

"I don't snore!"

“I always had to bring earplugs when I went with him on trips if I wanted to get any sleep.” Yuna patted his shoulders and then ushered him towards the kitchen. “Come on, boys! I made enough pancakes to feed an army so that should be enough for you two.”

“Food first and then Yuna got a new board game she wants to absolutely destroy all of us with. Then we can go out and play some pond hockey,” David announced when they were all in the kitchen. “Where Yuna will destroy us again.”

Ilya loved the Hollander house. It was always warm and so welcoming. The house was clearly lived in and loved. The kitchen was worn with mismatched appliances that Shane kept attempting to upgrade but David refused to accept anything until the old one broke. The cabinets and countertops hadn’t been updated since the 90s, but Ilya loved it. He loved the way it felt like an actual home rather than the mausoleum of his parent’s house in Moscow.

All the walls in the home were cluttered with pictures, most of them Shane at various ages. He looked so tiny in his first day of school photos with his backpack basically bigger than him, like a strong breeze would tip him over. The fridge was full of newspaper clippings, recipes, and photos. Every part of this house was filled with love.

He can’t remember a time his house had been anything other than pristine.

Ilya didn’t have much more time to think with the way Yuna loaded up his plate with pancakes, bacon, and fruit. She waved him towards the table because the Hollanders were firm believers in eating together at the table.

“I’m grabbing some coffee,” Shane said as he passed him. “Want some?”

“Please.” The cup he chugged before they left Ilya’s house clearly wasn’t enough. Ilya settled into the wooden chair next to Shane, wincing as it creaked under his bulk. Anya wound her way around the chair legs and then sat patiently next to his chair, as if she knew he would give her some of his food.

He would, but she didn’t need to act like she already knew that.

“Thank you,” he said once Yuna and David joined him at the table.

“Of course, honey.” Yuna nudged the bottle of pure, 100% Canadian maple syrup towards him. “Dinner might be a bit later so we wanted to make sure you two aren’t starving by then. If you want a snack, David baked a million cookies.”

“They were for the cookie swap and for the neighbors!”

“Six batches, I understand. But thirteen? Really?”

“If Dad loses to Michelle in HR again, I think he might finally snap.” Shane set down a mug of coffee in front of Ilya, already full of cream and sugar. “Do you guys want any more coffee?”

“No thanks, kiddo. Any more coffee and I won’t be sleeping tonight.”

Shane settled in the seat next to him and bumped his thigh against Ilya's. There was something looser in his posture, like a weight had been lifted off. Ilya loved seeing his boyfriend here, in his parent's home, surrounded by people that loved him. Shane always became a little more carefree, a little less cautious. He wanted to kiss him senseless.

He wanted to add bacon to his fucking plate because that little shit didn't grab any. In fact, his stack of pancakes was noticeably smaller and his portion of fruit bigger.

Пиздец.

He wasn't going to start a fight today. It was Christmas.

He could kill the Voyageurs dietitian later.

When breakfast finished, Ilya nabbed Shane's plate before he could move and brought it to the sink. David tried to shoo him out of the kitchen, but he couldn't just accept their kindness without anything in return. It also gave him a chance to talk to David about a New Yorker article he read about Mikaela Shiffrin. Even if Ilya wanted to participate in the Olympics in 2018, the MLH and Russia both weren't participating, which gave him a chance to get unnecessarily invested in sports he hadn't even heard of. They were in the middle of a passionate discussion about curling when Yuna stuck her head into the kitchen and said if they didn't hurry up, she would be opening presents without them.

Knowing Yuna, and her son, that wasn't an empty threat.

Anya led the way to the living room but Ilya stopped to grab three haphazardly wrapped gifts out of his duffel bag. He quietly shuffled into the living room and placed them under the tree before he settled next to Shane on the couch. Anya was perched next to David, her head already in his lap, even though she wasn't supposed to be on furniture.

Definitely his dog.

"Shane, it's your turn to do the honors." Yuna shook the fluffy red hat in her hand and Shane reluctantly extracted himself from Ilya's side to grab the hat and settle it on his head. He made a cute Santa, but he couldn't grow a beard. Maybe he would be an elf with his height.

"I can practically hear you coming up with something to say," Shane shot towards his boyfriend. Ilya merely shrugged, a smirk on his face. Shane flipped him off to the absolute shock of Yuna Hollander.

"Shane! Apologize right now. He's innocent."

"Oh my god," Shane groaned. "We're talking about the same person, right?"

"You are being particularly Grinch-y today, Shane," Ilya teased, his tongue stumbling a little over the word. Shane rolled his eyes and went back to sorting the gifts under the tree into four little piles. He distributed everyone's gifts before unwrapping Anya's new bone and

stuffed animal, a plush centaur. She gratefully accepted her new toys and promptly snuggled right up against David once more.

Shane threw himself down on the couch and Ilya couldn't help himself. He slung an arm over his shoulder and pulled him closer. They only got so much time together that he found himself wanting to take any and all chances to touch Shane. To have him pressed up against him.

"You need two hands to open presents," Shane chuckled.

"I can do it with one hand. I am good like that. Elite. Shame you cannot say the same."

"You're such an asshole." Ilya bent down and stole a kiss from Shane's smiling lips before he turned his focus on the small pile of gifts addressed to him. His throat grew tight as he looked at the pristinely wrapped and beribboned presents from Yuna and David. Shane still wasn't on the level of his mom's wrapping skill, but he clearly tried based on the neat lines and misshapen corners. He suddenly felt a bolt of shame strike his chest as he thought about how messy his gifts looked. Would they think he didn't care?

"Oh, Ilya!" Yuna exclaimed. "This is amazing, thank you." She held up an Ottawa Charge jersey, signed by captain Brianne Jenner, and then displayed the two front row tickets he got them. He remembered Shane telling him that Yuna grew up playing hockey, but the opportunities were limited for women, especially as she grew older. There was no professional league when she was in her 20s, but now the PWHL exists. He wanted to give her an opportunity to see how far the world had come.

"Brianne is very nice. I met her at a sponsorship thing for the teams. She said she would like to meet you. Talk about growing the sport and getting more women and girls into Irina Foundation."

Yuna's eyes were shining with more than just excitement and she blinked away the tears quickly. "Thank you so much. I'd love to meet with her someday."

Ilya wanted to say, *she has a wife. Many players are out and proud in the PWHL. I want that someday. I am so scared that we can't have that.*

But he bit his tongue and gently pulled at the ribbon on the box in his lap. Shane was eagerly flipping through the book his dad got him, and David was chatting with Yuna about something. Ilya didn't want to admit it, but Shane was right and he needed both hands to do this. He eased the ribbon off and felt, for a moment, like a fool with how delicately he handled the plastic bow. But he wanted to savor this.

The last time he remembered getting a Christmas gift was his dad tossing a new stick at him and telling him that maybe it would help him actually get a puck in the goal. After his mama died, there was no time for meaningful gifts.

But here and now, in this moment, things were different. He smiled at the puzzle box, one that had one thousand pieces with various dogs scattered across the cover. He would set it up on the front room table where there was better lighting. Thanks to David, he started working

on puzzles at the Hollander house and it had transferred into something he kept to himself at his own home, in between roadies and games. He loved when he had a chance to sit in the sunlight streaming in from the windows and sat in silence, just focusing on the puzzle before him. The only mornings he liked better was when Shane was with him.

Under the puzzle sat a messily knit toque with a matching scarf in Centaurs red and black. Ilya ran his fingers over the soft yarn and tried to ignore the burning behind his eyes. He could picture Yuna on the couch, flipping between Ottawa and Montreal games, with a pair of knitting needles in hand. He picked up the toque and held it with a reverence he rarely afforded most things.

Ilya Rozanov spent thousands on flashy cars and expensive booze, but he had never held something as valuable as the Hollander's love.

"Is it okay?" Yuna asked. "I wasn't sure what to get you, to be quite honest. I asked Shane but he was really no help. And then I kept getting restless watching your games so I learned to knit from some YouTube videos and...well..." Was that nerves in her voice? Uncertainty?

Ilya nodded, unable to find the words in English or Russian to express his gratitude. He lifted the toque up and pressed it against his chest, over his heart, over the crucifix that hung around his neck. With his other hand, he swiped at the tears that threatened to escape his eyes. Shane laid a gentle hand against his back and he sank into his touch. He let it ground him again until he could catch his breath.

"It's perfect," he finally choked out. "Thank you."

Yuna grinned and, to save him from further embarrassment, reached out to open her next present. The family all went back to the task at hand, giving Ilya a moment to sort out this jumbled mess of emotions that had lodged its way into his heart.

"You okay?" Shane murmured. He leaned in closer and rested his cheek on Ilya's shoulder. The fluffy ball at the end of his hat flopped down and smacked Ilya in the face. The two sat there silently for a beat until Shane snorted out a laugh and reached up to move the pompom.

"Sorry," he said with an unconvincing tone of sincerity.

"It's okay, sweetheart." Ilya let his voice drop so the parents wouldn't hear. "You just want to put your balls on my face, I get it."

"Fuck, Ilya. Not in front of my parents!"

"Ilya, you shouldn't have." But this wasn't a reprimand from David. No, it was spoken in pure shock. David held up the new e-reader Ilya got him (the newest model, of course, he wasn't a fucking cheapskate) and a few other gadgets any e-reader would need (which he totally asked Hazy for advice).

"You read more than Shane does." Ilya nudged his boyfriend and grinned when Shane automatically bumped him back. "I figured this would be easier to travel with."

“Thank you, son, truly.” The word burned into his brain, his heart, all the way down to his toes. When was the last time someone called him “son” without burning, mocking derision behind the word? Fucking hell, he was not going to cry. He focused on his next gift and carefully peeled off the wrapping to find a homemade bound book.

“Since you two said you liked to cook together, we combined some family recipes so you can make them at your place,” David explained when he saw Ilya flipping through the pages. “Yes, Shane, your grandma’s nikujaga recipe is in there.”

“Oh sweet.” Shane peered over Ilya’s shoulder as he flipped through the pages, occasionally pointing to recipes that he loved. Ilya made a mental note to perfect those for the future. Because he wanted...fuck, he *wanted* this so much and the world was actually giving him this chance. This life. Sure, it was messy and imperfect and they were hiding their relationship from the world, but in this living room, in this house, they could dream of a future.

Ilya traced his fingers over the words on the cover. It was handmade, like an old scrapbook, with letters cut out from magazines and glued on. He loved it. He loved every single inch of this house and the people inside.

“Thank you,” was not enough. “Thank you for giving me a chance to feel loved again,” was too raw. He settled on a smile, a squeeze of Shane’s hand, and a nod of gratitude to David and Yuna. Ilya nudged Shane and jerked his head towards the misshapen lump of wrapping paper on his lap.

“Open it,” he murmured. Shane tore open the paper and then rolled his eyes when he saw what was inside. Ilya smirked and kissed his cheek.

“I highlight words you should know,” Ilya said as Shane flipped open the Russian dictionary. Shane’s eyes caught the words “hard” and “ejaculate” covered in yellow highlighter and he quickly slapped the book shut, his cheeks flaming. Shane’s cheeks were still pink as he picked up the next item and his brows furrowed in confusion.

It was a puck.

An MLH puck.

He turned it over in his hands and paused to read the words scrawled on the tape in Sharpie. Shane inhaled sharply and blinked up at Ilya, his grip tightening on the rubber puck.

“How...? You kept this?”

“Yes. I asked the equipment guy for it. Told him I wanted to destroy it.” He offered him a small smile. “I kept it whole time, but I thought, maybe it could go in trophy room at the cottage.”

Shane’s eyes grew misty as he read the words again, rubbing his thumb over Ilya’s handwriting. *ASG 2017, it read. First goal from Rozanov-Hollander line.*

“You would put yourself first, asshole,” Shane said, his voice thick with emotion.

“Is only right.” Ilya said, pleased as can be. Shane leaned over and kissed him, something that he was still getting used to doing in front of his parents, and Ilya savored the taste of him on his tongue. When Shane pulled back, Ilya found himself counting those damn freckles again.

“Is it...you like?” Years in America and English still tripped his tongue when he tried to ask questions he found himself scared of the answer. Shane grinned and nodded.

“Yeah, I fucking like.”

“Good.” Ilya cleared his throat, his tongue darting out to steal the remnant of Shane’s kiss. “I am glad.”

Ilya focused on the last gift in his lap and Shane fidgeted as he watched him open it. It was a larger box and Ilya took his time reading the words. He glanced at Shane and noticed that the other man was chewing on his bottom lip. Wordlessly, Ilya reached out and pulled his lip from his teeth and then let his knuckles skate gently across his cheek.

“I set the other one up already in my apartment and I figured it could be a way for us to like...communicate. Without having to say anything.”

It was a lamp activated by touch. One simple press of his fingers and the lamp would send a pulse to Shane’s light, letting him know that Ilya was thinking of him. And Shane was *nervous* about Ilya’s reaction.

“Спасибо, любимый.” He whispered against Shane’s temple. “Я люблю это. Я тебя люблю.”

Shane burrowed closer, the little heat seeking missile he was, and Ilya let himself be grounded in the feel of the warm body pressed against him. Ilya absentmindedly stroked his hand over Shane’s soft hair as he read the instructions on the box. He would be setting this up the second they got back to his place.

A soft sigh escaped Shane and Ilya glanced down to check on him. His lips curved into a smile when he saw that Shane was fine, just relaxed. He was like an angry kitten sometimes, but now he was just a soft kitten.

“Shane, don’t you dare fall asleep,” Yuna laughed. “You promised me pond hockey.”

Shane’s eyes snapped open. “I wasn’t sleeping.” He moved to stand and Ilya’s hand gravitated to his lower back, helping steady his boyfriend. Shane tangled their fingers together and pulled him up. Despite the fact that Ilya had several inches and a bit more bulk, Shane pulled him easily to his feet. (He let him, of course).

“Ilya, have you ever played on a pond before?” David asked.

“No, there are not many places to skate outside in Moscow. My papa always took me to the rink to skate.”

Shane grew up with this frozen pond in his backyard and two parents that knew how to skate. Ilya and Andrei were forced onto the ice until their ankles bled from their skates digging into their skin. Hockey, for Ilya, had always been something he was expected to do. Something to excel at. Andrei resented him for being good. Grigori resented him for not being better.

He liked hockey because it was something to do away from his father. He could turn his rage and anxiety into action. He liked the rush of adrenaline as he chased after a puck and he craved the ache in his fist after a fight. For Ilya, hockey was an escape from the world.

For Shane, hockey was his world.

Ilya wished that he could love the sport as deeply as Shane did. He loved hockey, yes, but he didn't sink his entire being into it. He played his fucking heart out, but he didn't eat, sleep, and breathe hockey. Granted, Ilya had learned that Shane was just made to be a little more fervent in his passions and his devotions.

Ilya loved that about him. He loved the flush in Shane's cheeks during a game or the way his eyes grew dark, like a shark on the attack, in a face off. Ilya gave him shit about it, but he begrudgingly admitted (to himself, that is, only to himself) that Shane Hollander was the fastest player in the league. It was an honor to watch him fly past the bench when they played against each other. He was a blur until the siren wailed and the goal lit up.

Until this moment, Ilya only saw Shane skate in full gear with his insatiable drive to win fueling him. Now, as Shane stepped onto the untouched, glassy ice of the pond, Ilya found himself entranced. Someone, David, he presumed, had already shoveled the snow off of the ice and set up two nets. Shane skated lazy circles around the pond, his breath escaping him in puffs of cloudy air. Ilya stopped tying his skates just to take in the sight of his love, more relaxed than he had been in a long time.

Clad in jeans, one of Ilya's hoodies (thief), and a Montreal toque (disgusting), Shane looked completely different from Shane Hollander Hockey Player. He stood tall, skated easy, and held the same confidence, but there was a looseness to his frame that made Ilya want to tell the MLH they could fuck off and burn if it meant Shane feeling this free forever.

Ilya grabbed his stick and joined him in skating around the pond. The air was crisper outside than it would be in a rink. He inhaled deeply and then exhaled as he pushed his legs to cross the ice so he could gently check Shane. They pretended to wrestle for a second until Anya barked from the sidelines. She attempted to climb onto the ice when they first came outside, but her claws scrabbled uselessly over the glassy surface and she decided then and there that she preferred snow. But it didn't mean she wouldn't stand on the side of the pond and run back and forth as her dads horsed around.

"I need to warn you that Mom does not play nice," Shane said as he skated backwards so he could face Ilya. He dragged a puck from the pile on the side of the pond and passed it to Ilya.

"I figured. Your Dad mentioned that rules were made because of you two."

"No maiming, no broken bones, no intentional bruising." Shane recited. "Aunt Cathy still won't let her kids skate with us anymore and it's been six years."

“And here I am asking you not to fight anyone, Котик.” Ilya smoothly handled the puck away from Shane’s stick and passed it between his legs. Shane let out a breathy laugh and darted for the puck again, but Ilya quickly swung his body around and blocked him.

“Stop calling me a kitten.”

“But you are so much like a little kitten! So small, so fluffy, so angry...” Shane snatched the puck and darted away before Ilya could retrieve it. Ilya raced after him but Shane was always quick on his skates. Ilya had the bulk to defend, but Shane was an excellent offensive player. He turned on his ankles in a way that would send anyone else flying across the ice, but Shane was every bit steady in his stride. He glanced at Ilya over his shoulder, a brilliant grin on his face, and Ilya felt his heart surge.

Shane fired the puck into the back of the net and threw his hands into the air, imitating the roar of the crowd in a raspy yell.

“A beautiful goal by Hollander. Will he go for a hat trick?” His whole face was scrunched up with his smile and Ilya couldn’t help himself from grinning as well. He dropped his stick and surged forward so he could wrap his arms around Shane’s waist and pull him flush against his chest.

“You got lucky,” Ilya teased. Shane’s dark eyes brightened with the challenge and he tilted his chin up in a defiant, smug smirk.

“I beat you at the All Star Game speed competition. I beat you now. Admit it, Rozanov, I am the fastest skater.”

“I have not had time to warm up, that is all.”

Shane patted his chest dismissively. “Okay, babe, you keep telling yourself that.”

Fuck, Ilya loved him. He loved him and his brilliant hockey brain and his laugh and his adorable little freckles. He loved waking up next to him and falling asleep beside him. He loved being wrapped up in Shane Hollander. He loved being worthy enough to exist in the same world as this man.

And so he let himself have this moment without fear or frustration. He let himself enjoy this moment and memorize every little detail. Every single line carved into the ice from their skates. Every spot of mottled fur on Anya’s head. Every word of the cheesy Christmas song that echoed from the house. Ilya cupped Shane’s face with his hands and smiled down at his boyfriend, the man he loves, and studied his face, etching every freckle into his memory. Maybe he wouldn’t keep his mind forever, falling ill to it like his father, but he would cling to this memory until it was torn from his grasp.

“Merry Christmas, Ilya.”

“Merry Christmas, Shane.” Ilya kissed him, soft and tender, until he lost sight of where he began and where Shane ended. Here, on this frozen pond outside of the Hollander house, where inside Yuna and David were dressing warm so they could play pond hockey (which

Yuna would absolutely destroy them at), Ilya Rozanov found himself clad in a chunky knit toque in his team colors with the man he wanted to spend the rest of his life with in his arms. Despite the freezing temperature and the snow falling on them, his whole body was warm. Warm with the overwhelming love of a family he found himself inextricably tied to, hopefully for the rest of his life. Warm with the idea that somehow, despite all of the obstacles ahead, he could have forever with Shane.

And for the first time in a long time, he understood why his mama loved this day so much.

End Notes

a few notes:

- the PWHL doesn't exist at this point in the timeline but shhhh, this is my sandbox and these are my barbies. if you are interested in hockey and want to get to know the sport, I highly recommend watching the PWHL!! and there are a lot of queer/trans/enby players in the PWHL!!! there are married couples in the PWHL!!

- this show has activated a deeply rooted hyperfixative level I have not sustained since I was maybe in high school. I live in the hollanov tag.

- hudson or connor if ur reading this, you deserve all the emmys. jacob too. as a queer woman who is not "visibly queer" and who struggles with the idea of not being queer enough, I find myself so invested in this love story because sometimes well, ah, to put it as francois said, the scene-y LA gay guys forget that there are other stories out there that aren't indicative of everyone's shared queer experience. I am a cis, femme, straight-presenting woman who struggles so deeply sometimes with feeling like I can be myself simply because others don't view me as queer. But this show has inspired me to not only lean into my identity, but also to seek out queer spaces while maintaining how I view myself. if any PWHL players are reading this,,,,,heyyyyy *debby ryan hair tuck*

I also have been absolutely destroying my glutes in the gym so, thanks for that.

- shane feels OOC to me here but full respect to Mrs. Rachel Reid but, again, these are MY barbies now and I viewed Shane in this as someone who can un-mask a little more than he usually does because he's in a safe place surrounded by his safe people. He cares deeply about Ilya and while he's more book smart than people smart (aHEM), he has learned a lot of Ilya's cues. furthermore, I will die on the hill that when Shane is comfortable with people, he can be as equally a little shit as Ilya is on the ice. you're telling me 7-year old Shane wasn't throwing his gloves down while Yuna held him back from pummeling his cousins??

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