

Purple-Pink Skies

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Purple-Pink Skies

by [stardust_and_sunlight](#)

Summary

Over the course of his NHL career, Shane Hollander had come face-to-face with Ilya Rozanov hundreds of times. But in all of that time, Shane had never seen him like this.

“Hollander,” Rozanov said, accent even thicker than usual.

Ah. He was drunk.

[Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov have been NHL rivals for over a decade. One strange chance meeting leads to more.]

Notes

Hello hello! I started writing this pre-show but finished during the show airing, so I’ve tagged it as both because it’s an AU and probably uses characterisation from both. I am fucking loving the show by the way. They are smashing it! I’m gonna cry again at episode 6 I know it!

This fic is mostly finished. It will be three chapters and I’m hoping to post them daily—I work in retail and I’m working tomorrow so it MAY depend on how tired I am but I have the highest of Christmassy hopes.

Everything I know about ice hockey comes from the books/the show, any fanfic I’ve read of them, or my straight brother who was pleased I suddenly was invested in one of his sports hobbies and is very used to my shenanigans. Everything wrong is either my fault or my choice. Sorry hockey fans.

Minor emeto warning towards the end of this (offscreen and mentioned), see end notes for more specifics.

Title is from [invisible string](#) by Taylor Swift.

Kudos and comments always appreciated <3

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

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

Over the course of his NHL career, Shane Hollander had come face-to-face with Ilya Rozanov hundreds of times.

The very first time they had met, when they were seventeen, playing in the Youth Championships. When Rozanov had beaten Shane to be first in the draft, and then they had been rookies the same year. Every season since, the two of them framed as rivals, playing for Boston and Montreal, two teams with a hundred years' head start on their own rivalry.

They were the NHL's top players. Shane had three Stanley cups under his belt, Rozanov had two. They were frequently the league's top scorers, and they were the captains of their respective teams. They had been chosen for the All Stars every year since they had been rookies.

And earlier this very day, Rozanov had scored the winning goal in this year's All Stars game against Shane, making it 3-2 to his team, and he'd grinned at Shane as he skated away.

Shane had seen Rozanov on the ice, smirking at him and insulting him and winning the face-off, shoving him against the boards and stealing the puck and getting sent to the penalty box, unrepentant. He had seen him in press conferences, talking about their rivalry, charming and arrogant and pithy and still likable, acting in a way that Shane never could. He had seen him at award ceremonies, one of them winning and one of them losing. He had seen him at parties, flirting constantly with women, drinking and dancing and laughing, always laughing.

But in all of that time, Shane had never seen Rozanov like this.

Shane was heading along the corridor to his hotel room, tired and ready for bed. And in between him and his door was Rozanov, sprawled on the floor.

He was slumped against the wall, long limbs sprawled akimbo. His eyes were closed.

For one alarming moment, Shane wondered if he was dead.

But as Shane got closer, Rozanov's eyes flickered open.

"Hollander," Rozanov said, accent even thicker than usual.

Ah. He was drunk.

A flicker of exasperation shot through Shane.

The All Stars after-party had been its usual intense time. Drinks, food, friends and family. It was always draining, especially for Shane, who had only allowed himself one drink. He had spent time socialising with his teammates present and past, commiserating with his All Stars

team, talking about the league and gossiping about other players. He'd had a good time on the whole, but he had been trying to leave for the past hour.

He had caught sight of Rozanov a few times throughout the evening, always with a drink in his hand, celebrating with his team or dancing with people's mothers.

Shane hadn't seen Rozanov leave, but then he hadn't been looking. He had friends in the opposing All Stars team and he had spoken to them. Rozanov wasn't one of them.

Usually, Shane would speak to Rozanov, when he saw him off the ice. But he hadn't gone out of his way to speak to the man this time, not when Rozanov was likely pleased about his team's win and his goals against Shane in particular.

Shane didn't think it was arrogant to say that—he felt the same with his goals against Rozanov, and he felt he played better when Rozanov was on the other line, the fire of their rivalry spurring him on.

So he hadn't noticed Rozanov leave. If he had spared it a thought, he would have assumed Rozanov had left to go to a club, like some of the younger players. He wouldn't have expected Rozanov to have left to try to make it to bed, but he must have, to have ended up here.

Shane didn't particularly like being around drunk people. Even those who didn't get angry tended to get touchy, and clumsy, and when he himself was sober it wasn't necessarily *fun* for him. He was not in the right frame of mind to deal with a drunk and happy Ilya Rozanov, lying on the floor outside his hotel room.

Although... Rozanov didn't actually look happy, now that Shane thought about it.

His slump wasn't that of a sleepy, pleased drunk person, limbs loose and relaxed, head tipped back as if to nod off.

He looked *sad*.

His shoulders were hunched over, and for such a big man he looked small, even with his legs stretched out in front of him. There was just something about his posture that wasn't the delight of a man who had won a game earlier today

"Your room is the next floor up," Shane said, choosing not to comment on the strangeness of Rozanov's mood. Rozanov blinked slowly up at him, as if trying to parse the words.

Shane only knew where Rozanov's room was because when he had first arrived yesterday, he had ended up on the wrong floor.

Rozanov had been just entering his own room, and had laughed at Shane when he'd walked past and then had to double back on himself.

This should feel like some kind of karma, but Shane just wanted to sleep.

"Okay," Rozanov said, a questioning lilt in his voice.

Shane rolled his eyes. “You’ll need to get up,” he said, trying to keep the edge of irritation out of his voice, but Rozanov just blinked up at him again. Shane had never seen him look so out of it. He must have consumed lethal amounts of alcohol to be *this* drunk.

Rozanov shifted his weight, getting his hands on the floor and trying to push himself up, to no avail, and Shane was just about to make another scathing comment when he looked properly at Rozanov’s face.

His eyes were red-rimmed and puffy. He looked like he had been *crying*.

A bolt of sympathy ran through Shane, and he couldn’t stop his question. “Are you okay?”

Rozanov tipped his head up to look at Shane. “I am fine, Hollander,” he said, and he smiled, and that smile was one of the worst expressions Shane had ever seen on his face.

Shane had seen Rozanov’s usual smirk more times than he could count, when they were against each other on the ice. He’d seen him laughing with his teammates. He’d seen his smile after he scored, after his team won a game, after they won the *cup*.

This was not that.

This was empty and dull and it was worse than if he’d broken down in front of Shane. Even so drunk that he couldn’t stand up, Rozanov was pretending he was fine, and he was pretending *badly*.

The smile slid off of Rozanov’s face like butter as he saw Shane’s reaction, and his shoulders dropped even more. There was dejection in every line of his body.

If they were friends, Shane would have asked him what was wrong. But they weren’t.

So instead, he cleared his throat, and straightened up. “You should go to bed,” he said, hating how prim he sounded. “Sleep it off.”

“Yes,” Rozanov said, his eyes closing, making no move to stand up.

And honestly, Shane doubted whether he could make it to the elevator. He wasn’t even sure how Rozanov had made it *here*. And Shane certainly wouldn’t be able to help him—he was strong, of course, but Rozanov was a few inches taller than him and broader, too, dense with hard-fought-for muscle. There was no way they were getting to Rozanov’s room.

And so in the end he *did* do what he would do for a friend.

“You can sleep in my room,” he said, stepping over Rozanov’s legs to slide his keycard against the door lock. The door beeped, and he pushed it open before turning back to look at Rozanov.

The other man was looking up at him with naked shock and confusion on his face, but Shane couldn’t judge him for that, not when he himself was surprised at his offer.

He might come to regret his decision, but he could hardly leave Rozanov sitting on the floor in the corridor. They were *sports rivals*. They weren't *enemies*, and as annoying as Rozanov was, he wasn't a bad person. For once Shane didn't let himself overthink it. There would be time for that later.

For now, there was the task of getting Rozanov actually into his room, which proved embarrassingly difficult. Rozanov was obliging but unhelpful, and his lack of coordination was such that he was essentially deadweight. They staggered awkwardly across the threshold, Rozanov's entire weight on Shane's shoulder, accompanied by several bursts of Russian that Shane had to assume were expletives. Shane gratefully deposited him on the bed and then left him there to get a glass of water from the bathroom.

When he emerged, Rozanov had successfully removed his shoes and was slumped back against the pillows. His suit jacket had already been missing, obviously a casualty of the evening, but now he'd loosened his tie and undone the top buttons of his shirt, and he looked much more comfortable and relaxed. Shane's gaze was drawn again to the redness around his eyes.

He was his usual handsome self, even as drunk as he was, even with that cloud of sadness. An irritating thought, but unavoidable.

Shane handed him the glass of water. Rozanov took it with a muttered *thanks* but made no move to drink it. Shane hadn't meant to say anything—he'd helped enough, already more than he'd meant to—but he couldn't help himself.

"I thought you'd be happy, after that game and your goals," he said, trying not to sound too bitter. "I'm surprised to see you sad."

"I am not sad," Rozanov said immediately, and it was such an obvious lie that Shane almost laughed.

"Drink your water," he said. "And yes you are."

He was instantly annoyed at himself. He and Rozanov weren't friends! Why was he prolonging this conversation when he didn't care?!

But he did care.

Even in rough losses and agonising injuries, he had never seen Ilya Rozanov cry. A huge part of him wanted to understand the man, wanted to know what could have upset him today of all days.

The All Stars games were meant to be fun and they were, mostly. Rozanov had been clearly buzzed by his win, and he had smirked at Shane when he'd shaken his hand. This mood... Shane couldn't account for it, and he wanted to.

Rozanov didn't respond straight away. Instead he pushed himself upright, his movements slow and careful, and drained the entire glass of water, the long column of his throat moving as he drank.

He set the empty glass down on the side table, and then reclined back into the cushions, looking intently at Shane.

Shane realised that he was just awkwardly standing in the middle of the room and he turned to pull over the chair from the dresser, and all the while he could feel the weight of Rozanov's gaze on him.

It seemed that even appallingly drunk, Rozanov wasn't one to blurt out his life story. He seemed to be thinking, and Shane was about to say something himself when Rozanov spoke up.

"Is three years since my father died," he said, slowly.

Shane winced. He vaguely remembered this—it had been reported in the news that Rozanov had flown separately from his team after a game of theirs, and later been reported that he had returned to Russia for the funeral. Shane had awkwardly given his condolences at the next game where they had played each other, and Rozanov had been understandably but uncharacteristically solemn and withdrawn for his next few appearances.

"I'm sorry," Shane said, feeling stupid. "That must be difficult."

"Yes," Rozanov said, and then he hesitated. His sadness made complete sense, now that Shane knew it was the anniversary of his father's death. In fact, it made him feel like an ass for questioning him.

"I am not sad because he is dead," Rozanov said, suddenly, enunciating the words extremely clearly. Shane stared at him, startled by the words and by the *honesty* he could hear in Rozanov's voice.

"I—" Shane started, not knowing what he was going to say, and he was strangely glad when Rozanov cut him off.

"I hated him. He hated me. We did not get along. Was nothing good about what we had."

Shane didn't say anything. What could he say?

"But... is three years since he died. Only three. Is seventeen years since my mother died. She should have had longer. I am sad because of her."

Rozanov's voice was thick with emotion and his accent was much stronger than usual. He wasn't slurring, but he seemed to be concentrating very hard on the words he was saying. It was as if now he'd started talking he wanted to keep going.

"Your mother?" Shane asked, quietly. He hadn't known anything about Rozanov's mother.

"Yes," Rozanov said, and his face softened into a sad little smile. "Irina. She was lovely. She deserved better." He moved his hand up to touch the gold cross that was ever-present around his neck. Shane had noticed it before, but he had never thought about it.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said, and this time he meant it even more, wishing that he could express himself better. He had two living parents who both loved and supported him. His heart ached for the other man, to be that young when his mother had died.

Rozanov shrugged, an oddly graceful movement. “It was a long time ago.” His thumb was rubbing along the edge of the cross.

Shane just looked at him.

He was very still, other than the movement of his thumb. He could be sleeping, except for how he was staring off into space, gaze unfocused.

Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov had spent time together in the past. They were rivals, but sometimes that just made the league want them to spend *more* time together. Photoshoots, press conferences, award ceremonies where they were made to co-present a sportsmanship award, because someone had a sense of humour.

They had spoken about the cities they’d travelled to while they were waiting to be called on stage. They had talked about the Olympics while the cameraman changed lenses. They had spoken about hockey, always hockey, while they had make-up applied and hair fixed.

They had never spoken about anything serious, never about anything *real*. But Shane had thought he had known him.

Rozanov was self-assured and confident. He had an arrogance to him that would have been unfounded in anyone else. But he was talented, and he knew it, and that arrogance was earned. He was hated through the league on the ice, and well-liked off of the ice. Women loved him, men respected him, his team fought for him and cheered for him, and even Shane had to grudgingly admit that he was *good*.

But this...

Shane had never seen Rozanov like this, and it was forcing him to think that perhaps the public persona that Rozanov presented was just that—a persona.

His fingers were still resting lightly on the cross at his neck. Shane wondered if it had been his mother’s.

“I was happy to win today,” Rozanov said suddenly, his eyes snapping back to meet Shane’s. “Is always good to beat you.”

Shane scoffed. “You were lucky,” he said, instinctive, as if they were on the ice, and he was relieved when Rozanov smirked, looking a little more like his usual self.

“It can’t always be luck, Hollander,” Rozanov shot back, voice very level and reasonable but eyes lit up with mischief, and Shane resisted the urge to stick his tongue out childishly.

It was quiet for a moment. Shane looked around his room, critical, as if he was a stranger here. He was glad that it was tidy. He was used to a series of constant hotel rooms, a decade

in the NHL making it feel normal to him, but he still missed the controlled comfort of his apartment. Keeping his hotel room neat was the closest he could come to that.

The only thing out of place was Ilya Rozanov, lying on Shane's bed, eyes glassy and limbs loose. Shane forced aside another extremely inconvenient thought about how handsome he looked. His cheeks were flushed now and his hair was tousled, curling around his ears.

"Was brave of you," Rozanov said, out of the blue, turning his head to look at Shane. Shane blinked at him, thrown off by the change of subject.

"What was?" he asked, somewhat stupidly. He couldn't think of anything he'd done that was brave.

"Telling everyone," Rozanov said. He pushed himself up, slowly and awkwardly and still a little unsteadily, to lean back against the pillows and look at Shane with seriousness in his gaze.

Shane must have still looked confused, because Rozanov sighed, an exasperated expression much more like his normal one sliding across his face.

"When you told everyone that you were gay," Rozanov said, steadily and carefully.

Even now, there was a tiny part of Shane that flinched to hear him say it. A part of him that heard the word *gay* and expected it to be followed by slurs, by sneers. Part of him braced for it every time.

But Rozanov was still looking at him, still with that strange fragile seriousness in his eyes.

Shane managed a smile. "I wasn't that brave," he said, pleased with how level his voice was even as his heart-rate had picked up. "Scott was the brave one."

Rozanov scoffed. "Only one man can be brave?" he said, and then scoffed again, even louder. "Scott Hunter. Stupid American with his handsome face and his handsome boyfriend."

Shane couldn't stop his surprised laugh. He'd met both Scott and Kip. They were good people, even if Shane had never quite forgiven Hunter for beating Canada in the Olympics in 2014.

Rozanov's eyes still had that glassy drunken sheen, and he was staring at Shane with that intensity that drunk people got. Shane found he didn't mind it so much coming from Rozanov. He forced himself to hold his gaze.

"Scott Hunter had someone to be brave for," Rozanov said. "*You* were brave for yourself, yes?"

Shane shook his head, his chest feeling tight. "I don't—" he said, and then he cleared his throat.

He still didn't feel comfortable being *complimented* on coming out, not when he hadn't done anything like what Scott had done. Being first, that was the hardest thing of all.

When Scott Hunter had won the Stanley Cup and then in that moment of victory, kissed his boyfriend, something had shifted within Shane.

Perhaps part of him had always known he was gay. But he had never allowed himself to consciously think about it, never allowed himself to address that side of himself. Maybe he had hoped he would never have to, hoped he could be happy without *knowing*. Hockey players weren't gay, and he was one of the best hockey players there were. So he couldn't be gay. He wasn't.

He had had girlfriends, he had slept with women, and it had always been just fine. He had expected that one day he would get married to a woman and have kids just like his teammates did, and that would also be fine.

But then Scott Hunter had kissed a man on live TV with millions watching, and everything had changed.

Suddenly Shane felt like his reasons for not letting himself think about it were pointless and stupid. He had watched the clip of the kiss over and over again, and had watched Scott's post-match interview clip over and over as well. Hunter had been calm, and thrilled by his win, and pleased to have come out. He had looked like a weight had been lifted. He had been someone to *admire*, and he had looked *happy*.

And Shane had realised that he himself was not happy. He wasn't happy with the women he dated. He wasn't happy with his *life*.

So he had finally allowed himself to *think*. He had spent that summer having a private and very intense freak-out in the comfort and privacy of his cottage. In fact, he had spent most of the following *year* having a private and very intense freak-out, which hadn't quite been fully fixed by an illuminating hook-up with a very discreet man who didn't follow hockey.

It turned out that even when he'd been stressed out of his mind and worrying about every aspect of the hook-up, sex with a man was infinitely better than any sex he'd ever had with a woman.

That had pretty much answered his last question.

Shane's actual coming out had taken him time, and had been a lot less climactic than Scott's.

He had come out first to his parents. He had cried, his mom had cried, and then she had been so quick to reassure him that she was so happy for him. His dad had hugged him so tightly he had felt like a child again.

He had told Hayden, his best friend and teammate, and then J.J. Boiziau, his other close friend on the team. They had both taken some time to accept it, but they were good people, and it wasn't long before J.J. kept trying to set him up with a seemingly endless array of hot men that he knew.

It was easier to come out to the team knowing that Hayden and J.J. were firmly in his corner, but it wasn't *easy*. The team had been much slower to accept it.

The locker room had been awkward for weeks after, as if men who had known him for years were suddenly worried he was ogling them. But Shane didn't change how he played, or how he acted, and they kept winning games, and gradually, gradually, they thawed. He didn't think it would ever be exactly the same. But they respected him as their captain and their teammate, and that had to be enough.

Winning the Stanley Cup had helped, of course. He'd come out publicly shortly after—just in a small press conference, with much less pizzazz than Scott. But he couldn't deny that Scott's own announcement had inspired his own—he had paved the way, opened a dialogue, and, as annoying as it was, he had changed Shane's life.

Shane had expected the league and the public to react poorly. There had definitely been pushback from the fans, but there had been support as well, so much that it had made Shane cry. There had also been some strangely veiled threats from the league commissioner, and Shane had been convinced that he wouldn't be chosen for the All Stars this year.

But the stats didn't lie, and excluding the captain of the current Stanley Cup holders, who'd been the top goal scorer in the entire NHL last year and was looking to be the same this year... It was clearly a fight that the league didn't want to have.

And so Shane was here, post-All Stars game, with Ilya Rozanov lying drunk on his bed and telling him he was *brave*.

"Thank you," he said eventually, sure that the pause had been stupidly long, and Rozanov just looked at him.

There was still a sadness in his gaze, underneath the sheen of alcohol, but there was something else there too.

"I didn't do it to be courageous," Shane said, feeling stubbornly that he had to disabuse Rozanov of this notion, while still not really knowing why he valued the man's opinions. "I just... I'd had enough of hiding."

"I understand," Rozanov said. "I wish—" and then he cut himself off, looking away. His eyelids were drooping—he looked tired now. He said something in Russian very softly under his breath, as if barely aware he was saying anything, and then he switched back to English.

"You are braver than me," he said, quietly.

Shane stared at him. It almost sounded like... but surely Rozanov wasn't...

He opened his mouth to say something, but Rozanov's eyes had closed.

He'd fallen asleep.

Shane dithered for longer than he'd like to admit about what to do.

He didn't want to wake Rozanov up. He clearly needed the sleep, and Shane couldn't bring himself to disturb him, never mind try and get him upstairs. But Shane wasn't selfless enough to sleep on the floor of his own hotel room either, not after playing a hockey game today.

In the end, he brushed his teeth and changed into his pyjamas and then, too tired to overthink it, slid into bed beside Rozanov, who had started snoring quietly.

Rozanov was on top of the covers. Shane was underneath. They were big men, but it was a king-sized bed. The chances of them touching at any point was unlikely.

If Rozanov kicked up a fuss about it, Shane would simply highlight that it was Rozanov's own fault for getting so drunk that he couldn't make it to his own bed, and he would maybe emphasise how Shane could have left him on the floor, or kicked him out of the room.

But... Rozanov had never been the homophobic type. The NHL had, for the entire time Shane had played in it, been rife with homophobia, casual and automatic and almost constant. Slurs flung as insults on the ice, jokes in the locker rooms, it had simply been a part of Shane's life. But for all the time that Rozanov had spent insulting Shane's hockey, his hair, his face, his country, his personality, he had never hurled slurs the way so many other players did.

He didn't seem like the type to not want to be in the locker room with a gay man, to not want to touch him casually on the ice and off, and surely to not want to share a huge bed platonically and chastely.

And then there was the way he had spoken, right before he fell asleep...

It had sounded like the start of a confession. It had sounded like he wanted to say more.

Shane wouldn't read into it. No matter how curious he was, how much he wanted to wake Rozanov up and ask him *what did you mean by that?*, he wouldn't. He would give Rozanov that grace—the man had been drunk beyond his usual limits, and by his own admission he had been grieving, and most importantly he and Shane were not friends.

They were rivals on the ice, acquaintances off of the ice, occasional All-Stars teammates. They were not friends. If Rozanov had intended to confess something to someone, it certainly wouldn't be to *Shane*.

Beside him, Rozanov made an odd snuffling sound, and then shifted his weight.

Shane thought that the presence of someone beside him and the thoughts burning around his brain would make it hard for him to drift off, but he was asleep within minutes.

Shane was woken up by a groan.

He opened his eyes blearily, blinking awake, sunlight streaming into the room.

It took him a few moments to work out where he was, to place the sound, to remember what had happened.

And then he did remember.

Rozanov.

Beside him, there was another agonised groan, and a muttering of confused Russian, and then Rozanov was levering himself upright.

Shane looked up at him, squinting in the sunlight peeking through the curtains he hadn't fully drawn closed. Rozanov looked distinctly worse for wear. In fact, he looked like he was going to throw up.

"Bathroom's there," Shane said, extricating an arm from the covers to point, and Rozanov shot him a grateful look before pushing himself to his feet. He stumbled across the room, veering unsteadily but moving fast, and the reason was obvious as soon as he closed the door behind him.

Shane grimaced as the muffled sounds of vomiting reached him, and he was glad Rozanov had woken when he did. He didn't regret helping Rozanov last night, but vomit on his bed might have slightly changed his outlook on that.

While Rozanov made miserable noises, Shane pulled on some of his workout clothes and started taking himself through one of his easiest daily stretching routines, feeling the sweet ache of it, allowing Rozanov the privacy to throw up, by the sound of it, everything he had eaten the previous day.

Eventually the sounds subsided, and the toilet flushed, and Shane folded himself out of his lotus pose and knocked gently on the door.

"Are you alright?"

There was the noise of running water, and then Rozanov emerged from the bathroom. His curly hair was a lank mess, his eyes were bloodshot and puffy, and his face was wet as if he'd just splashed water on himself. His dress shirt was appallingly crumpled, and his cheek was creased from how he had been lying on the pillow.

He looked *terrible*.

"Yes," he answered, belatedly and drily, and Shane couldn't stop his laugh at the very obvious lie.

"How's your head?" he asked, and Rozanov rolled his eyes and then winced.

"It feels," he said, contemplating, "as if someone is skating in it. But they are very bad skater, keep crashing into the sides."

Shane laughed again, and was rewarded by a tiny weak smile from Rozanov. His voice was hoarse, which wasn't surprising, but despite how bad he looked he didn't appear to be about

to throw up again.

“Do you want painkillers?” Shane offered.

“No, thank you,” Rozanov said, “I will go back to my room and sleep for several more hours.”

“When’s your check-out?” Shane asked, rather than asking any of the other questions that he *wanted* to ask.

Have you ever properly grieved your mother? Why did you and your father not get along? Do you have any family left? Why do you think it’s brave that I came out as gay? What were you going to say before you fell asleep? Are you...

But he couldn’t ask. He *wouldn’t* ask.

One night of Shane looking out for Rozanov, one oddly honest conversation, didn’t break down years of them being opponents. It wasn’t Shane’s place to ask any of those questions, no matter how much he wanted to know the answers. No matter how that one night had left Shane feeling oddly compelled by this new side of Rozanov.

Rozanov shrugged. “Late,” he said.

“Good,” Shane replied, feeling suddenly and horribly awkward. They were both just *standing* there, and while Rozanov had an excuse for monosyllabic non-answers, Shane did not.

“Well, I hope you feel better,” Shane managed, but Rozanov still didn’t move. He was looking at Shane with something odd in his eyes.

“Give me your phone,” he said suddenly, and Shane blinked at him.

“My phone?” he said stupidly, and Rozanov sighed.

“Phone, yes,” and he reached out his hand impatiently.

Shane moved to pick it up from the bedside table and hand it across to Rozanov, who shook his head and gave it back. “Unlocked,” he demanded. Still confused, Shane followed the directions.

Maybe he was being too trusting. Maybe he just wanted to see what Rozanov wanted.

Rozanov was quick, and when he handed Shane back the phone it was open to his contacts, and there was a new number there.

Best hockey player in NHL, it said, and Shane scoffed.

“Strange of you to add my own number to my phone,” he said, and Rozanov smirked at him, that oh-so-familiar smirk.

“Good one, Hollander,” he said, and then he was moving, stooping to get his shoes, not bothering to put them on.

Shane just watched him, his hand curled tight around his phone. Rozanov turned at the door to look back at Shane. “Thank you,” he said.

“Anytime,” Shane replied, and he found to his surprise that he meant it.

Rozanov nodded, smiled, seemed about to say something else, and then let himself out of Shane’s room without another word.

Shane just watched the door for a moment, feeling foolish and mind buzzing, before turning his attention back to the phone in his hand and his new contact.

Rozanov had made one brief outbound call to his own number. *So he would have Shane’s*, Shane realised, unsure how he felt about that. He had given Rozanov his phone, he had trusted him.

He could delete the number if he wanted.

Instead, after a moment’s hesitation, he changed the contact name simply to *Rozanov*.

Chapter End Notes

I fully confused myself on my OWN timeline and despite thinking deeply about the timings I did mess up slightly. In this fic Ilya’s dad dies in Jan 2017 instead of March 2017. No other timeline changes (as far as I remember...)

Minor emeto content starts the paragraph after the dialogue "Bathroom's there," and is fully over by dialogue "Are you alright?"

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Rozanov texts Shane.

Chapter Notes

A little note to say that a key part of this fic is the messaging back and forth of gifs. I had written so much of it before I had a totally unreasonable panic about when you could first send gifs via text, and if you could do that in 2020. For the purposes of this fic please imagine they both have iPhones, or maybe that when they say 'text' they're meaning another platform. All this specifically so they can send gifs back and forth. Look, I'm an iPhone user, idk how other phones work. It's important to the plot that they can send gifs!!

Also, can you believe that January 2020 was nearly SIX years ago?! Awful.

When Rozanov and Shane had been rookies together, Shane had spent quite some time obsessed with the other man.

He had been compelling, the first hockey player to properly challenge Shane on the ice, and Shane had known straight away that the two of them would continue to challenge each other for their entire hockey careers.

So Shane didn't blame himself for his mild obsession.

With the benefit of hindsight, he may have also had a bit of a crush on the big Russian, but he had been so firmly deep in the closet back then that he would never have thought that, and he would certainly *never* have acted on it, even if he had realised his crush.

But whatever it had been, Shane had followed the man's career, tracked his stats, all through that first year, until he had forced himself to stop.

How quickly he fell back into those habits.

Ever since that night, Rozanov drunk and honest and falling asleep in Shane's bed, Shane had become a little obsessed with him again.

He had carried out some fairly intensive research (not stalking, when all the information was freely available online). He had watched clips of Rozanov's best moments. He had scrolled back through his social media.

The fact that he had Rozanov's number in his phone didn't in any way help with this obsession.

Rozanov didn't text, and neither did Shane, and Shane was sure he was relieved. What would he and Rozanov even text *about*?

But every time he texted his mom, or his dad, or his teammates, he thought about how easy it would be to text Rozanov, to ask him the questions that were burning through Shane.

Of course he didn't. He couldn't. And yet his obsession rolled on.

At least this time Shane was pretty confident it *wasn't* a crush. Now he knew what that felt like, to have a crush on a man. This wasn't that.

Shane simply wanted to learn more about Rozanov, learn things that maybe he would have known already, if they hadn't been pigeonholed as rivals from day one.

But if he had expected to find something revealing, something that would have made what Rozanov had said make sense, he was out of luck.

Rozanov dated women. Rozanov slept with women. Pretty much constantly, it seemed, and Shane was oddly impressed by the variety and number, and by the fact that all of them had virtually left glowing reviews.

There was nothing at all in Rozanov's public life that matched that odd vulnerability he had shown just for a moment in Shane's room.

Shane told himself that it was *hockey research* when he watched Boston's first game back. It had nothing to do with him wanting to see Rozanov. The Boston Bears were Montreal's biggest competition, after all, and the Voyageurs would be playing them soon enough.

He settled himself on the sofa, stretched out and comfortable. His sofa was the only thing about his Montreal apartment that he really loved. It was gigantic and comfortable and blue, which was all he wanted in a sofa.

He hadn't chosen a lot of the things in his apartment. He didn't choose a lot of things in his *life*. He had hired an interior designer to style and purchase everything in this place. His schedule was laid out by his team. Even his clothes were bought on the recommendation of the personal stylist he had hired years ago when he had been dating Rose Landry, and first realised how boring his outfits were.

It was easier this way.

But he had chosen the couch himself. It reminded him of the one his parents had had when he was a child.

So he stretched out, oddly on edge despite the familiarity of the space and the moment, and he turned on the Boston game.

Boston won easily, and Rozanov scored two goals, and not for even a second did Shane see a glimmer of the man who had had such a strange look in his eyes in that hotel room after the All Stars game.

Ilya Rozanov antagonised the opposition. He was fast and aggressive in his movements and his shots. He yelled when he scored, he booed when he missed. He grinned when he was sent to the penalty box, and he laughed with his team when the final buzzer sounded.

He looked as if he was having the time of his life.

And all Shane could think about was Rozanov's voice as he had said "*you are braver than me*".

He couldn't stop thinking about it. He even watched the highlights, scrutinising every glimpse of Rozanov's face. The commentators said the usual things, the stats were as they usually were.

It was driving Shane crazy.

When his phone buzzed, he seized it with relief, more than ready to be distracted, even if it was by Hayden talking about his children or by J.J. talking about another pilates instructor he was trying to set Shane up with.

When he saw the name on the screen he almost dropped the phone on his face.

It was Rozanov.

Shane clicked on the message with trepidation and excitement. He had absolutely no idea what Rozanov could have to say to him.

Rozanov had sent a gif.

He had sent a gif of *himself*, scoring the winning goal in the game that Shane had just watched. Shane glanced up at his TV, where the replay was showing the goal yet another time. He snorted, a smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

He sent back an unimpressed face emoji, and Rozanov started typing immediately.

Rozanov: rude

Shane replied with just the laughing face emoji, and Rozanov's response was quick again.

Rozanov: do you only text in emojis?

Shane grinned. He was having more fun than he'd expected, and he couldn't resist replying with the shrugging emoji.

There was a pause, and then Rozanov sent another gif, this one of him beating Shane in a face-off.

Shane: Do you have all of these gifs saved?

Rozanov: yes

Rozanov: of course

Rozanov: i suppose there are none of you scoring goals

Rozanov: a shame

Shane didn't want to admit that he wasn't entirely sure how one found gifs of themselves. He'd only recently even started using *emojis*.

Rozanov: wait, i have found one

Shane just looked at his phone, waiting for the message, knowing that there was no chance Rozanov was going to send a gif of Shane doing something impressive.

He was proved correct when the next message from Rozanov was a gif of Shane tripping over his own skate and falling flat on his face. Shane watched the tiny image of himself slide across into the boards and shook his head with a smile.

Shane: Very funny.

Rozanov: that is why i am greatest player in league

Shane chuckled, remembering that Rozanov had saved his number in Shane's phone as *best player in NHL*.

Shane: What did you save my number as?

Rozanov replied simply with a screenshot of their chat. And the contact name said *second best player in NHL*.

Shane: Well, at least I beat Scott Hunter.

Rozanov sent a gif of *Scott* falling over, and this time Shane's laugh was loud and real.

Shane spent an embarrassing amount of time that evening working out how to access gifs on his phone, how to *search* for gifs, and how to save them.

He spent an even more embarrassing amount of time looking through endless gifs of Rozanov, just as many of him, and *almost* as many of the two of them, in face-offs or against the boards or at awards ceremonies or pushing into each other.

The next day, Shane sent across a gif of Rozanov falling over and sending the puck flying at the glass.

Rozanov responded with a gif of himself scoring the winning goal of the first Stanley Cup he had won.

They sent gifs back and forth intermittently the whole day.

Shane didn't stop smiling.

Over the next month, Shane and Rozanov texted frequently.

At the beginning, it was Rozanov sending the first text. He would send either a gif of him scoring or of Shane falling, Shane would retaliate with the opposite, and then that was them.

Shane had wondered if Rozanov was making these gifs himself. They came with such frequency and so quickly after various games were shown on television.

But then his own searching led to the discovery of the social media accounts of all of the different NHL teams. He was vaguely embarrassed not to have known before now about these accounts.

He himself *had* been asked to create various accounts, someone telling him about *engagement* and *involving the fans*, and he had made an extremely half-assed attempt at an Instagram that he rarely used.

He certainly hadn't realised that there was someone working for the Montreal Voyageurs whose sole job was talking about them online, making gifs and graphics to post during and after their games, and, apparently, arguing with other NHL team's social media staff online.

There were also many videos of the rest of the team doing ridiculous challenges. Hayden seemed to be in every single one, and looking through them Shane was unsurprised that *he* had never been invited to participate. He didn't mind having a reputation for not being *fun* if these were the kind of things he missed out on due to it.

He did appreciate the work that went into the accounts, though, and the fans did seem to love the videos and things. And after a Montreal or a Boston game, Shane could find any number of gifs and images on the social media accounts of the teams themselves or their opponents for the games. He was impressed by how quickly and *well* they did their jobs, and he felt quite bad at how he had never even considered their *existence* before.

The Boston account was always tweeting about Shane falling over, and they seemed to be the most popular with the Boston fans.

Those were Rozanov's favourites to send, too.

Shane's ability to find the gifs *he* wanted did improve, however, a skill that he couldn't quite believe he was proud to have.

It just made it easier to chirp back at Rozanov, that was all. It wasn't in any way related to how much he enjoyed choosing gifs that he thought would make the other man laugh.

And then, after they had exhausted the gifs from that day's game, and any retaliatory shots, they... texted.

Shane played hockey for a living. Shane lived and breathed hockey, and he loved it. He had never once wanted to do anything else. But he had found, to his chagrin, that even most of his hockey-playing friends often liked to talk about other things too.

They wanted to watch the games and then switch off, go for a drink and wait to debrief the next day.

Shane was very pleased to find that Rozanov was just as keen to text for hours about hockey as he was. Often after his own games he was out, and he mentioned to Shane once in an emoji-laden innuendo-filled message that he usually was hooking up with someone. But Shane headed back to his room as soon as possible after his own games, and he always wanted to talk about them.

And Rozanov always obliged him.

It should feel strange, talking to a rival about their shared sport. Talking to an *opponent*.

And it had, a little, at the start. But it wasn't like they spoke about secret team strategies. It was just messages, back and forth, about how the game had gone, about errors the other team had made, and largely it was gossip about the players.

It turned out that Ilya Rozanov hated Hayden with a strange intensity that Shane found startling.

Hayden was a good friend and a solid hockey player and he had Shane's back in life and on the ice. Rozanov did not see any of his good points, and occasionally he peppered in some gifs of *Hayden* falling over, to his seemingly endless supply of Shane falling over.

And then they started texting after games that weren't Montreal or Boston games, and from then they started texting *during* those games, and Shane found that he was having fun again. It was like watching hockey with his mom, if his mom was a handsome arrogant Russian hockey player who he really shouldn't enjoy talking to the way he did.

Rozanov was knowledgeable, and insightful, and he seemed to have a diamond sharp recall. Shane shouldn't be *surprised*—after all, Rozanov was captain for Boston and had been for multiple seasons, and so of course his game knowledge should be good.

But he was surprised, pleasantly so.

And he found that he looked forward to their hours spent texting through a game.

Shane also shouldn't have been surprised that someone had noticed the change in his texting habits, but he was surprised that it was *Hayden* who commented on it.

With four kids at home, Hayden often had enough to worry about. But Shane supposed that he was being a little obvious, sitting in the locker room with his phone in hand, half out of his training kit.

"What's wrong with you?" Hayden said suspiciously.

"Nothing," Shane said quickly, almost slamming the phone face-down beside him.

Hayden looked even more suspicious at that. His accusatory stance was faintly ridiculous when he was clad in just his jock and socks. "You're smiling at your phone," he said.

"Yes?" Shane said.

"No, it's not a question," Hayden said, sounding exasperated. "You are. Why?"

"Just a funny text," Shane said, which didn't help matters at all.

"Who are you texting?! All of your friends are in this room!"

Shane thought that this was quite rude, actually, but Hayden was mostly right and so he couldn't really dispute it.

Hayden called for J.J., and J.J. came over with every expression of interest. No-one else in the locker room had even remotely responded to Hayden's dramatic outburst, but then it was par for the course.

"Shane is *smiling* at his *phone*," Hayden said, and J.J. gasped with an appropriate level of mock-surprise. Shane rolled his eyes.

"Hey, Shane, is it the pilates instructor?"

Shane snorted. "Definitely not," he said. He had seen the text from J.J. with the man's number, and had ignored it. J.J.'s partner Sofia was fantastic, but Shane did not trust J.J.'s taste in *men*.

"Then who?" J.J. said, with a similar level of suspicion as Hayden. Shane sighed, but he couldn't hold back his smile. His friends were annoying, but he supposed it was nice that they cared and that they were invested in his relationships and his happiness.

But again, he did not trust either of their recommendations.

When he didn't answer, J.J. glared at him. It was a dazzling effect—J.J. really was very attractive, and had Shane never seen him naked and crying ugly tears with a broken heart, he might have had a crush on the man. As it was, that had firmly killed any latent attraction he could have held.

“You would have liked the pilates guy!” J.J. said, somewhat plaintively. “Sofia said he was *stunningly attractive*. And she said he was nice, as well. What else is there?”

“Just because two people are gay doesn’t mean they’re going to be good together,” Shane said, in his preachiest tone, even as this extra information gave him pause. *Sofia* obviously had good taste. The ridges of J.J.’s abs were about a foot away from Shane’s face, and they were clear proof of *that*.

But frankly, that was besides the point. He knew that J.J. and Hayden were trying to help. This was their way of showing him that they supported him. By speaking about it in the locker room as if it was no big deal, they *made* it seem like no big deal.

He appreciated them hugely for that. But he had told them both many times before that he did not want them setting him up with men, and they *kept doing it*.

He simply did not have the energy to deal with it again. He had never properly dated a man before. He had had sex a handful of times. He had been out publicly for less than a year.

And call him old-fashioned, but part of him wanted to meet someone by himself, find someone by himself. Not date a man that his teammate’s wife had found.

He was frustrated by it all, and frustrated at himself for *being* frustrated when his friends were only trying to help. He was fed-up with their questions, and his own stupid hold-ups, and annoyed at himself for enjoying texting Ilya fucking Rozanov. And all of those things together were the reasons he said what he said.

“Who are you texting?” Hayden asked again, a deliberately whining tone to his voice, and Shane said something colossally stupid.

“It *is* a guy I’m seeing, alright?”

He regretted it instantly. But the damage was done.

Hayden’s face *lit up with excitement*. “Shane! Buddy! I’m sorry for making you tell us, but can I say I’m so proud of you?!”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Hayden,” he started, but then J.J. joined in, and if Shane had thought that J.J. would be above this, he was sadly wrong.

“Well done, man,” J.J. said, and there was a sincerity in his tone that made Shane feel terrible.

“Guys, it’s not a big deal,” Shane insisted.

Hayden scoffed. “You’re right, except that it *is* for you! Have you ever even been texting a guy before? Do you know what emojis to use?”

“Hayden,” Shane sighed, deliberately not thinking about how had not, in fact, known how to use gifs until very recently.

“If you like this guy, you need to be normal,” Hayden said, seriously, and J.J. nodded as well.

“Look at us,” J.J. said. “*We’re* successful in love. We can help!”

“Guys...” Shane started, feeling bothered and cared for at the same time. “We don’t need to talk about it anymore, alright? It’s not serious.”

They both nodded, in sync, and then Hayden froze.

“Fuck, Shane, sorry for making you tell us! You don’t need to tell us anything else.”

“Unless you want to,” J.J. interjected.

“Unless you want to,” Hayden repeated solemnly.

Shane was stuck between the urge to giggle and the urge to hit his head against the wall. And on top of it all there was a strange gratitude, for his stupid friends and their support, no matter how misguided.

“Thanks, guys,” he said, and then started pulling off the rest of his kit. Hayden and J.J. started chatting about something else, shifting the conversation easily, while Shane got stuck briefly on a vision where he *was* seeing Ilya Rozanov. Where their texts were flirty and they liked each other and Rozanov wanted him, Shane Hollander.

He shook his head, as if he could physically dislodge the thought from his head.

Ilya Rozanov was handsome, and fit, and strong, and tall. Shane had spent a lot of time during his sexuality crisis reflecting on what exactly his type was, and unfortunately Rozanov ticked a lot of those boxes. It had been easier when Shane had hated him. Now he knew that as well as being obnoxious and annoying, Rozanov was also funny and ridiculous and quick, that he was good at finding gifs to make Shane laugh... well, now it was harder to deny this crush.

It didn’t matter.

Some gifs sent back and forth were not flirting. And Shane didn’t even want them to be! Rozanov’s texts had been a convenient way to get his friends off of his back, nothing more.

Shane deliberately didn’t look at his phone until he got home to the quiet of his apartment, plain and simple and his.

Rozanov had sent a picture of a fan-created t-shirt which consisted of a badly photoshopped picture of Shane flying on a hockey stick like it was a witch’s broom.

Shane thought about Rozanov seeing the shirt and thinking of Shane, taking a picture to send to him.

Shane sent back a series of question marks, smiling as he did so.

His apartment felt much less empty when he was texting Rozanov.

Shane met up with Rose Landry one morning after a tough game in New York. She was in town for the premiere of a movie that she seemed pleased with; the Voyageurs had played the New York Admirals and drawn 1-1.

They went to one of Rose's favourite New York spots, a classy but low-key diner that had loads of famous people coming through the door. Rose liked New York, she had told him before. Sometimes she liked not being spotted all the time.

They hugged, and kissed cheeks, and by the time they sat down Shane already felt more settled.

Shane was very lucky to call Rose Landry one of his closest friends. They had dated a few years ago, to much media attention and excitement from Shane's friends and family. It had been *good*, to an extent. With retrospect, Shane had enjoyed spending time with her just as a friend. The sex had been lacklustre, and when she'd finally broken up with him he had been sad to lose her company.

In hindsight, she had broken up with him in the nicest possible way. When he had replayed the conversation much later, she had clearly suspected he was gay and was trying to tell him that he could tell her.

Obviously, he hadn't acknowledged that about himself at that point, so she had graciously bowed out with a final comment that they should stay friends.

When Shane had come out publicly, she had got in touch to congratulate him, something that had never stopped feeling weird, and then they had both been in Boston at the same time, and they had met up.

It had been good. He had apologised for being a terrible boyfriend. She had apologised for not staying in touch. He had cried, a little, still in those early days where everyone knowing he was gay was overwhelming and a bit horrifying.

And now they were fast friends.

Rose enjoyed hockey, had grown up in Michigan and still followed it avidly. Shane could still talk to her about hockey, and she understood that world, but she also lived a life that was so different from his, and he found it endlessly interesting.

"This is a good movie, I think," she said after they had ordered, tucked away at the back in a cosy little nook.

Shane had watched all of Rose's movies. Before they knew each other, it had just been because he spent a lot of time on planes, and most of Rose's movies were ideal plane movies—mildly entertaining, nothing you had to pay a lot of attention to, and easily forgotten.

As much as Rose was a fantastic actress, she seemed to be cursed with very average scripts.

But a few of her movies were fantastic, and Shane hoped that this was one of those.

He told her as much, and she smiled at him, bright and happy.

“Oh, and I’m seeing someone,” she said, leaning forward conspiratorily. Shane leaned in to listen. Some people might guess that hockey players didn’t care about gossip, but in Shane’s experience he had never known a group of people more in each other’s business, and he had never pretended to be above that.

“Is he a hockey player?” he joked, and Rose rolled her eyes.

“No, I tried that already and wasn’t impressed,” she said, and Shane laughed, glad that they *could* laugh about this now.

“Hey, I’m an anomaly.”

“Not that much, anymore,” she said, giving him a meaningful look, and Shane understood immediately. Just last month a couple more NHL players had come out as gay. Still a drop in the bucket, but... something was changing. Slowly, so slowly, but it was changing.

Although none of them were options for Shane, not really. He knew the men, vaguely, had played against them, but he was quite sure that an NHL that was ready for a handful of out gay men who were discreet and well-behaved might not be ready for two male hockey players being publicly together.

He almost scoffed at himself. So he could think that with a straight face, but still felt giddy whenever Ilya Rozanov texted him?

“Well, who is the lucky guy?” Shane said, turning the attention back to Rose.

She grinned. “He was the camera guy on the last movie I shot.”

Shane blinked, and then smiled as well. “A meet-cute?” he asked, and Rose shook her head.

“No, I knocked into him and messed up the take,” she said, but her eyes were warm. “We spoke afterwards, and then chatted in between scenes through the filming. He asked me out on the last day, after the very last take. We went for burgers and he asked to kiss me at the car.”

Her voice had gone a little dreamy as she spoke. Shane had never seen her like this—she certainly hadn’t acted like this around him when *they* were dating.

“Wow,” he said, after a moment of silence. “And is he hot?”

Rose shot him a look. “Of course he is,” she said, fishing in her bag for her phone and scrolling quickly before turning the phone to show Shane.

Shane made an appropriate encouraging noise. The man was cute, with a sharp jaw softened by a wide smile. He had dark eyes and dark hair and warm brown skin.

“Good work,” he said, and it sounded like a joke but he meant it. Rose had had bad luck in love—the fame and attention could be difficult, and she’d had a string of high-profile partners who hadn’t worked out, Shane included—although Shane was fairly sure they hadn’t *all* been gay. Maybe this man, who was happy behind the camera, would be different.

“And what about you?” Rose said, stowing her phone away and raising an eyebrow. She knew more than anyone about his extreme lack of game, something that hadn’t improved since he had come out.

He was well-aware of his own neuroses, his need for control, and how he pretty much only talked about and cared about hockey. He was picky about men in a way he didn’t want to analyse too much. He had been picky about women as well, in what he now knew to be a defence mechanism. This probably was too, from another direction.

“Well,” he said, stalling. He suddenly desperately wanted to tell someone about Rozanov, as if speaking about this ridiculous crush would make it seem less real, less important. Rose would understand, and had all the context, but hopefully she wouldn’t have the same visceral reaction that he was sure his teammates would have.

“I’ve been texting someone,” he said, awkwardly, and then kept going hurriedly before Rose could get the wrong idea. “I’m not seeing him or anything, it’s not romantic at all, but I like him. I think... I think I wish it would go somewhere.”

Rose had lit up. “Tell me everything about him!” she gushed.

“You’ll know him,” Shane said. He was still stalling, a little.

“Is it an actor?” she said, incredulously. “Where did you meet an *actor*?”

“Not an actor,” Shane said quickly.

“A hockey player? On another team? Who?!”

Shane hesitated. But he wanted to tell her. He *did*.

“It’s Rozanov,” he said, quietly and quickly, like pulling off a band-aid.

“You have a crush on *Ilya Rozanov*?” Rose burst out, and Shane grimaced.

“Yes,” he said, “but maybe don’t say it so loudly?”

“Sorry,” Rose said, shame-faced, and then repeated herself in a fierce whisper. “*You have a crush on Ilya Rozanov?!*”

“Yes,” he said again. It sounded even more exceptionally foolish when she said it.

“How...how did you even start *texting*?” she asked, almost bug-eyed she was so surprised.

Shane gave a quick overview of it. Rozanov had been drunk, they'd exchanged numbers, they'd started texting all the time. He didn't go into detail about what they'd spoken about on that first night, nor did he tell Rose how they had initially just sent gifs back and forth, but it was still *so good* to speak to someone about it.

For weeks and weeks he had been texting Rozanov almost every day, and no-one else in his life knew about it. It was good to tell Rose.

Even if she hadn't closed her mouth yet, jaw still dropped with shock.

"Ilya Rozanov," she said, almost to herself. "Ilya *Rozanov*."

"Rose," Shane said, when she didn't seem ready to say anything else, and she blinked and focused back in on him

"Well, he is hot at least," she said bluntly, and he snorted an unexpected laugh. "I wouldn't kick him out of bed. But *Shane*..."

"I know," Shane said miserably.

"He plays for Boston. You play for *Montreal*." The incredulity of her tone was that of someone who had grown up watching hockey. But she hadn't finished.

"You two have been rivals since before you were rookies. As far as the league is concerned, you're not even *friends*. And he's *straight*!"

"I know!" Of course Shane knew all this. He thought about it pretty much constantly. It was just...

"I like talking to him," he said, and he could hear how dejected he sounded but he couldn't bring himself to care.

"Oh, Shane," Rose said, softly, and now her gaze was heavy with pity. He liked this much less than the surprise.

"We could be friends," he said, and he wasn't sure who he was trying to convince. "*We are* friends."

Rose reached across the table, and her hand on his was a comfort. She didn't need to say anything more.

He and Rozanov could be friends. They had been rivals in the eyes of the league for a decade, but that was on the ice. Players with rivalries as big as theirs in the past had become friends.

But Rose was right.

Friends would have to be enough.

Rozanov: so you are dating rose landry again?

He'd also sent a picture, a screenshot from a tabloid newspaper that had snapped them leaving the restaurant. Shane rolled his eyes.

This happened periodically. No matter how discrete a restaurant was, they couldn't control the street outside. And every time Shane and Rose were photographed in public together, there were always rumours about the two of them, despite Shane being out.

This was common. But there was something about Rozanov asking that made Shane feel strange.

Shane: No, we're just friends.

Shane: We used to date.

Rozanov: i remember

Shane very determinedly didn't think anything of that. Everyone knew that Shane Hollander and Rose Landry had dated.

Rozanov sent another screenshot of a different article. This one had a photograph that Shane had seen before—Rose looked beautiful and poised and Shane had been caught at a very unflattering angle.

Rozanov: she is out of your league

Shane: Well, we weren't compatible, obviously.

Shane: But I'm glad we're friends now.

Shane thought back to the conversation that he and Rose had had, not even twenty-four hours ago. He was *so* glad to have her in his life again, and he was very lucky to call her his friend.

Rozanov: is good to have friends who don't play hockey

Rozanov: svetlana is good friend

Rozanov: although she knows more about hockey than anyone

Rozanov had mentioned Svetlana in their texts before. As far as Shane could work out, Svetlana was a close friend of Rozanov's, but they also slept together often.

Shane was definitely not jealous. That would be insane.

Rozanov: good that we are friends now also

Shane: You and Svetlana?

Rozanov: no

Rozanov: of course yes

Rozanov: but meant us

Shane stared at his phone, at the words on his screen, at the word *us*.

He started typing, deleted what he'd written. Started again, deleted it. And then finally, he sent back a simple text.

Shane: I'm glad too

Rozanov replied with a little-smiley-face-surrounded-by-hearts emoji, and then started texting rapid-fire about some juicy hockey news that Shane's mom hadn't told him yet.

Shane sank easily into the conversation, as he always did, and it was much later that he scrolled back up to look at those words from Rozanov.

Good that we are friends now also.

He liked texting Rozanov. He liked their conversations. And he was glad that they were friends as well.

The part of him that wished they could be something more...

Well, that part of him would just need to get over it.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I did have plans to finish and post this on Wed but instead I played genuinely five straight hours of Articulate with my family, and then I was so busy and so this had to wait! Cried at episode 6 on Thurs. Fantastic adaptation. I adored it.

I learned so much about the Stanley Cup playoff format for this fic and it actually ruined my set-up. I should have stayed in ignorance!! Kept phoning my brother and asking him questions and it was messing with my Fun Fictional Hockey!

me: i'll have boston beat montreal in the final :)

my bro: that would not happen because they're both in the eastern conference

me: okay they'll beat montreal in the eastern conference final then :)

my bro: that would not happen because they're both in the atlantic division

me: alright calm down

I created a semi-realistic bracket, loosely disregarding the Atlantic/Metropolitan division stuff so that they could at least meet in round three. And I also had a fun time making fake team names. I learned things! And then ignored some things. Sorry once again to the hockey fans. Please enjoy the smut.

Both Montreal and Boston made the playoffs this year, to no-one's surprise. The teams were on opposite sides of the draw, so if they made it through the first rounds, they would play each other in the final of the Eastern Conference.

Shane found himself oddly pleased by this. Boston had been their biggest rivals forever, and this year in particular every game had been closely fought. It seemed right that he and Rozanov would meet on the ice at that last round, that final chance.

Rozanov texted Shane him a gif of himself holding up the Stanley Cup, but Shane had been expecting this and he had his own Stanley Cup-winning gifs ready to send right away.

They continued texting through the first rounds of the playoffs, but much less frequently than they had been recently. They both had to focus on their own games. They both wanted this.

Boston Bears knock out Toronto Dominions in only five games! The article that Rozanov sent Shane was gushing and complimentary and Rozanov had specifically highlighted a line about himself. *Rozanov, who is leading his team in goals already this season, scored at least one goal per game, and seemed to breeze past the Toronto defenders whenever he was on the ice.*

Shane replied with an eye-roll and a gif of one of Rozanov's most egregious misses. He didn't bother sending the article that his mom had shown him. *Montreal Voyageurs beat Carolina Tornadoes 4-1, captain Shane Hollander dominating*, and Shane was glad they had won in five games—glad to have that tiny bit of extra breathing space, extra recovery and training time.

Montreal Voyageurs eliminate Tampa Bay Thunder in round two, after a series of hard-fought games. And they had been hard-fought, Tampa Bay not making it easy for them. In the end they had won four games to Tampa Bay's two, and they had been closer than Shane would have liked.

Boston were against Scott Hunter and the New York Admirals in their own second round, and Shane knew that Rozanov was determined to knock them out. New York put up a fight, but the end Boston won 4-2 across a tough six games. Almost the second Rozanov was off the ice he was sending Shane a gif of his winning goal.

The media were all talking about how Montreal and Boston had a similar path to the Eastern Conference final, how well-matched the teams had been this year, how inevitable it had been that they would meet here. Shane knew it. And he knew they would be fighting for every single goal.

Boston had the home advantage to start, and they used it to win their first game. Montreal upped the pressure and won two in a row. Boston fought back to make it two wins apiece. Shane had known it would likely take all seven, and he was proved right when Montreal won a third, and then Boston made it 3-3...

And then it was the last game. Boston vs Montreal, and this seventh game was in Boston.

It was going to be a tough game—tough opponents, tough home fans, after six gruelling games to get here.

Shane stood on the ice and listened to the fans yelling and hollering. He bent over his stick and stared Rozanov down.

The other man grinned at him, eyes bright, and Shane grinned back. Whatever happened, it was going to be a good game.

Shane won the face-off.

Shane's hotel room was quiet, and calm, and exactly what he needed, with the sting of disappointment curling through him.

He was freshly showered, hair damp and tickling the back of his neck. He'd finally shaved his pathetic attempt at a playoff beard, wispy tufts that weren't even worthy of the name, and he ran his hand over his smooth skin, glad it was gone.

He was wearing his sleep clothes, shorts and an old Voyageurs t-shirt, and he was more than ready for bed.

There were people who called him boring, people who said that Shane Hollander was no fun. He thought about his teammates, no doubt drowning their sorrows at a club right now, drunk and sweaty and surrounded by a heaving press of people.

He folded down the perfectly neat top sheet of the hotel room bed, and was glad that he *wasn't* fun.

It had been a hard series of games, and he couldn't deny that he was crushed to have lost this one. He was more than ready to sleep, to rest and recover and move past this.

He was just about to climb under the covers when there was a knock at the door.

Shane frowned. His teammates wouldn't be back for hours yet. No-one else he knew was here in this hotel in Boston.

He moved to open the door.

And there was Ilya Rozanov.

"Hollander," Rozanov said, simply, and Shane blinked at him

"Rozanov?" he said, startled.

"Hello," Rozanov said, with a smile. Shane stared at him. Of all the people to show up at his door, he would never have guessed Ilya Rozanov. Rozanov should be out with his team. Rozanov *always* went out after his games.

Shane had many questions. He started with what seemed the most important.

"How did you find my hotel room?"

"I asked Hayden Pike," Rozanov answered, sounding distracted.

Shane found that this gave him even more questions, but he shook off the bizarreness of the moment to say something he had wanted to say all evening. It had felt wrong to text it to Rozanov, something about this moment that felt more important than just some hastily typed words.

"Congratulations on the win today," Shane said, and he meant it.

Even just last year, if Boston and Rozanov had won the final round of the playoffs, and made it to the Stanley Cup finals by beating Montreal, Shane wouldn't have even been able to *think* the word *congratulations*, never mind say it and *mean* it.

But things had changed.

He and Rozanov were friends now, as strange as that was. And while Shane was devastated to have lost, he was glad that of all the people who could have beaten him, it was Rozanov.

It felt like a worthy loss. And he knew how much it meant to Rozanov.

But that still didn't explain why the other man was here.

Shane looked at him.

He was still wearing his post-game suit, a dark grey that made his eyes look very bright. His hair was curling perfectly. He looked his usual handsome self, and Shane pushed aside the usual pang he felt.

Except... maybe Rozanov *didn't* look like his usual self. His hands were in fists at his side, he was shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and his shoulders were tense.

"Are you alright?" Shane said, carefully.

Rozanov nodded brusquely but didn't speak.

"Rozanov... why are you here?"

"I do not..." Rozanov cleared his throat. "Can I come in?"

Shane stepped back with a nod, still confused, and Rozanov moved inside. The door closing behind him was very loud in the quiet.

The sight of Rozanov standing in Shane's room was so incongruous that it was jarring. The contrast of Shane in his sleep clothes and his feet bare on the carpet, and Rozanov still fully dressed in his formalwear and his dress shoes.

Shane's mind jumped back to the other time that Rozanov had been in his hotel room.

Rozanov drunk, sad, sprawled on Shane's bed, telling him about his parents and on the brink of a confession.

Everything had changed since then.

"Is everything okay?" Shane asked again. "Aren't your team out somewhere partying?"

Rozanov nodded, a quick jerk of his head. "Was at club," he said. He sounded strange, but he didn't seem drunk this time. "Lots of girls, drink. A good time."

Shane nodded, unsure of where Rozanov was going with this.

"Always I am with women. Sexy women, fun, but I have this problem."

Rozanov's stance was rigid. It looked like he was physically stopping himself from pacing back and forth.

"A problem?" Shane asked, carefully.

“Yes. Problem is, even though there are all of these women, I cannot stop thinking about this short, annoying hockey player with freckles and terrible backhand.”

Shane froze.

“No matter what I do, I cannot get him out of my head. It is very inconvenient.”

Shane had no idea what he was thinking. His own head was totally empty. He found himself staring at one particular curl of Rozanov’s hair.

“So are you—I mean, what—I mean, are you—” Shane tried, stupidly, his mouth feeling clumsy around the words of his own first language.

Rozanov seemed to understand immediately what he was asking.

“I am bisexual,” he said, dismissive, as if it wasn’t the most important thing Shane had ever heard him say, as if there weren’t so few out queer players in the NHL that Shane could count them on one hand.

“And... you like me?” Shane said. The whole thing still seemed like an elaborate prank, and the only thing that stopped him from panicking was the way the stillness on Rozanov’s face seemed to bely his own inner panic.

“Yes,” Rozanov said, and Shane’s heart leaped. “Unfortunately,” Rozanov continued, and then he smirked, so much like his usual self that Shane felt his heart racing.

“I...” Shane didn’t know what to say. The room could be on fire and he wouldn’t know. All he could see was Rozanov’s hazel eyes, bright and looking straight at him.

“All those flirty gifs and now you are quiet,” Rozanov said, and for the first time Shane heard the vulnerable note in his voice. Rozanov was putting himself on the line here, trusting Shane with *everything*.

Offering Shane everything he had realised that he wanted these last few months.

He had spent all this time not knowing what he wanted. Now he knew that he wanted Rozanov. And by some ridiculous, fantastical stroke of luck, Rozanov wanted him back.

“Rozanov,” he said, just to say it, nothing else in his mind, and then he took a step forward.

Rozanov stayed where he was. He had done everything else. Shane understood that *he* would have to make this next step, physically and emotionally.

He could be brave for this.

He took another step forward. Rozanov was very close now. Shane had only ever seen his eyes this close when they had been facing off on the ice, and he had never noticed the flecks of green amongst the hazel. They were beautiful, like a piece of sea-glass on a beach in the sun.

“Ilya,” he breathed, the syllables curling over his tongue, and at the use of his first name Rozanov—Ilya—twitched, and let out a hitching breath. Shane reached out a shaking hand to push that one rogue curl of hair back behind Ilya’s ear, and then brought his hand down to slide his fingers into Ilya’s play-off beard.

Shane had been admiring it from afar for the whole of the play-offs. It was dark, thick, framing Ilya’s plush lips, and he had been jealous of it on the ice, hyperaware of his own feeble efforts to grow one. Now he just wanted to feel Ilya’s against his skin.

“Shane,” Ilya said, and Shane marvelled at how good his name sounded in Ilya’s deep voice, as if he was whispering it just for Shane and he *was*, this moment was just for them.

They stood there for one frozen moment, their only point of contact Shane’s hand on Ilya’s face, and then they were both moving.

They crashed into each other with the force of months of repressed tension. Ilya’s mouth was hot and lush and insistent, and Shane kissed back with the same intensity, mouth opening for Ilya. Shane moaned into it, and Ilya deepened the kiss, and Shane could already feel the heat curling through his body.

Ilya’s hands were like brands on Shane’s hips through the thin fabric of his t-shirt, and Shane brought his other hand up to link them behind Ilya’s neck and pull him closer.

The inches that Ilya had over Shane had never felt like a lot, but Shane was tipping his head up into the kiss and he loved it, loved feeling the strength and solidity of the man in front of him.

“Shane,” Ilya hissed, and already Shane knew he would never get sick of his name said in that voice, in that tone. “I want—”

Shane bit at his lip and Ilya moaned, broken and gorgeous, and Shane was well on his way to hard now, with just Ilya’s lips on his and Ilya’s beard against his skin and the sound of Ilya’s voice.

Ilya pulled at his hips, pulling him closer, pulling their bodies flush, and oh, that was even better, the heat of Ilya against him and the pressure of his thigh against Shane’s dick, and Shane could feel Ilya’s erection pressing against him and a flush of anticipation flooded through him.

“I want—” Ilya tried again, but this time he cut himself off by kissing Shane again as if he couldn’t help it, one hand cradling the back of his head, fingers in his hair.

Shane wanted so much he didn’t know where to start. But then he shifted his head to kiss Ilya even deeper and he felt the stretch in his neck and he realised that actually he did know where to start, so he didn’t injure himself before they’d even started.

“Bed,” he suggested, and he was trying to be cool with it but his voice was shot to hell.

“Fuck, Hollander,” Ilya swore.

Shane liked Ilya calling him *Shane*. But there was something in that *Hollander*, in a voice that was laced with arousal and heat, that worked for him too. So different from how it was on the ice.

Shane started shoving Ilya towards the bed, so impatient that Ilya laughed and pushed him to stop before they got very far.

“Wait, wait,” he said, and Shane tensed, ready to be rejected, but Ilya was just bending down to untie his shoes. He took his socks off while he was down there, pulled off his tie as he stood up, and then unbuckled his suit pants and stepped out of them before Shane could react.

“Oh,” he said, stupidly, because suddenly it was *real*, and he could see the bulge of Rozanov’s dick through his boxers and he wanted to touch him, wanted to get his mouth on him.

“Shirt too,” he managed to say, and Ilya grinned but obeyed him, unbuttoning the shirt and dropping it to the floor too.

Shane just looked at him. The breadth of his shoulders, the muscle there, the hard lines of his abs, the gold chain resting on his chest, and Shane had never wanted anything so badly before as he right now wanted to suck Ilya’s cock.

And, well. He *could*.

So he took a step closer, kissed Ilya once, a hard bruising kiss, and then he folded to his knees in front of him.

Ilya’s reaction was gratifying. He swore first in Russian, then in English, and when Shane dragged his eyes away from Ilya’s crotch to look up he saw Ilya staring down at him with hunger in his eyes.

“Shane,” Ilya breathed, like a prayer, and Shane could hardly believe that he was here, that Ilya was looking at him like that.

Shane pressed his mouth against Ilya’s crotch, the hardness of his dick through the fabric of his boxers, and he could feel the heat of him and it was driving him wild. He pressed a series of loose, open-mouthed kisses to Ilya’s clothed dick and it wasn’t enough, it wasn’t nearly enough, Shane was practically rubbing his face against Ilya but he needed more.

He’d never felt hungry like this for it, so turned on he could feel it in every cell of his body. He pulled Ilya’s boxers down, letting them fall around his ankles, and watched his cock spring out, hard and wet at the tip just from *Shane*.

Shane had done this once before and even scared out of his mind he had loved it, loved the weight of the cock in his mouth, loved the taste, loved the way he felt so powerful.

And now was no different. This was *better*, even, because it was Ilya gasping and moaning and twitching in his mouth, running a hand through his hair and down to touch his mouth

around Ilya's dick, murmuring words of admiration and lust in English and phrases that Shane didn't understand in Russian.

Shane was hard enough to drill nails without having even been touched but he didn't care, single-mindedly focused on this, on making Ilya feel good as best he could.

"Ah, Shane, Shane," Ilya gasped, and then he was pulling out, pulling Shane up with a hand on his bicep to kiss him again, ravenous.

"Was that good?" Shane managed, and he hated himself for asking it, but Ilya pulled back enough to look him in the eyes.

"Too good," Ilya said, and Shane knew that he meant it. "Too much, too good," he said, and Shane felt the arousal and pride curl through him in equal measures, as Ilya captured his mouth again, hands pushing under Shane's t-shirt to touch the skin there.

"Bed," Ilya demanded, a breathless repeat of Shane's request from so long ago, and this time they made it there, Shane shedding all his clothes until Ilya was pushing him down into the mattress, covering Shane's body with his, strong and muscled and burning hot, and kissing him hard and deep.

Their cocks moved together, Shane leaking and desperate even though he hadn't even been *touched* yet, and Shane wanted everything with this man.

He lost time in the kiss, syrupy and hot, the pleasure of their cocks moving together and Ilya's body against his and Ilya's mouth, always his mouth, and it was so good and Shane needed more.

"Ilya," Shane moaned into the kiss and Ilya bit at his lip, a sting of pain that sparked through him. "Ilya, please."

He didn't even know what he was asking for, but it seemed like *Ilya* knew.

He didn't break the kiss, but he shifted his weight off of Shane, going down on one elbow beside him. He ran one hand down Shane's chest, across his stomach, to stroke lazily at his cock, and Shane gasped at the touch, at Ilya's big hand curling around him. And then Ilya's hand was moving further down, fingers trailing.

He paused there, forehead against Shane's, fingers resting on Shane's ass, a silent question. And then when Shane didn't move, sudden panic gripping him, Ilya asked the question aloud.

"Shane, can I fuck you?" he whispered, voice thick and raw and his lips brushing Shane's ear, and Shane let out a shuddering breath.

"I don't—" Shane started, and then cut himself off, but Ilya had understood enough, and this time he kissed Shane slow.

"You have never?"

“No,” Shane said quietly, and he wasn’t embarrassed. Ilya’s fingers were gentle and his face was understanding beneath the obvious need there.

“You want?”

“I want,” Shane said, honest and brave.

Ilya grinned at him, sheer happiness in his eyes.

“It will be good,” he promised, and he kissed Shane again, lush and lovely and so so careful. Shane believed him. He knew that Ilya would be patient. Knew that Ilya *would* make it good.

Ilya opened him up agonisingly slowly, one gentle finger at a time. He had done this before to himself, but it was different with someone else.

It was strange and full and *incredible*, Ilya’s mouth teasing Shane’s cock as he used his fingers with unerring accuracy to find Shane’s prostate. It felt like no time at all before Shane was *ready*, so ready, and he wasn’t nervous any more.

Ilya pulled his fingers free and Shane winced at the odd emptiness, but Ilya kissed him again and he gasped into it. He lost himself in that kiss, opening his mouth for Ilya, head tipping back onto the pillows.

“Ready?” Ilya breathed, kissing messily across Shane’s jaw, the roughness of his beard driving Shane wild, and he *was* ready, and he managed to say as much. Ilya smiled at him and then moved, lifting himself up over Shane, and suddenly Shane was unsure all over again.

“Should I... turn over?” he asked, hating the uncertainty in his voice, but Ilya pulled back to look at him and his smile was warm and lovely.

“I want to see you,” he said, eyes full of heat and something more, and all Shane could do was kiss him again.

The first press of Ilya’s cock into him was almost too much. The stretch, the all-consuming pressure, and when he bottomed out there was a moment of breathlessness.

Shane could feel his heart racing, could feel his toes curling, could feel Ilya’s hands on his thighs holding his legs up, and it was indescribable.

“Ilya,” he gasped. “*Ilya*.” There was nothing else he could say, in this moment of stillness and fullness, and Ilya bent to kiss him and it was perfect.

And then Ilya started moving, and that was even better. He started slowly, pulling almost fully out before pressing in again, and Shane kissed him back as best as he could through his gasps.

“Ilya, more, please,” Shane moaned, Ilya’s breath hot against his jaw. Ilya thrust a few more times, that same achingly slow movement, and Shane was about to start begging when Ilya finally, finally sped up. Shane almost *screamed*.

Every single thrust was hitting his prostate, and his own cock was pressed between their stomachs and the friction of it was delicious. Ilya's hands were so tight on his thighs and Shane hoped suddenly and wildly that Ilya would leave marks, that Shane would be able to press his fingers into bruises tomorrow and know that Ilya had left them there.

He wasn't going to last long. It was all so much, and Ilya was here, and when he managed to gasp out garbled words to that effect Ilya groaned.

"Come for me, Shane," he said, guttural and hot, and it only took a few more thrusts before Shane was coming, all over their stomachs, with a shout and the feeling of it through his whole body.

"Fuck, Hollander," Ilya moaned, and he kissed him messily, his thrusts becoming uncoordinated until he made a noise low in his throat and stilled, gasping against Shane's mouth.

There was a moment of quiet, of stillness, Ilya braced over him, both of them breathing heavily, before Shane laughed.

He couldn't help it. Heat was still fizzing in his veins, the aftershocks of his orgasm sending little shivers through him, and he could feel the uniquely bizarre sensation of Ilya softening inside him, and he couldn't believe that any of this had happened.

He'd had sex with a man. He'd had sex with *Ilya Rozanov*. And it had been incredible.

"Ah, is funny now, huh?" Ilya said, a mock-disgruntled look on his face, as he pulled out and flopped to the bed beside Shane.

Shane winced at the emptiness, shifted, felt the ache in muscles he'd never used like that before.

"It was good," he said, grinning across at Ilya, and then before he could second-guess himself he reached for Ilya's hand.

Ilya's fingers closed around his without a moment's thought, comforting and warm, and Ilya smiled back at him, content and sleepy-looking.

"Are we—" Shane started, and then cut himself off. But Ilya seemed to know what he wanted to ask.

"I would like to do this again," Ilya said, and Shane beamed at him. He had never felt so good. "I would like to—" And then it was his turn to cut himself off, and for Shane to complete the thought.

"Date me?"

Ilya shrugged, easy and liquid, but Shane could see the seriousness in the way his brow had furrowed slightly.

"It would not be easy," he said.

Shane laughed. “Nothing has been.”

Ilya just looked at him, for a long steady moment. He shifted forward to press an achingly tender kiss to Shane’s forehead, and then he stayed close, lips brushing Shane’s skin.

“Yes, I would like to date you, Shane Hollander,” Ilya said, and it was possibly the best thing that Shane had ever heard.

“Good,” he said, and he was sure he was beaming, but Ilya was smiling back at him, eyes bright and crinkled, and he was beautiful and he liked Shane and they were *dating* now, and nothing else mattered.

Shane kissed him again, giddy with it. Hard to believe that earlier this evening he had been devastated to be knocked out of the running for the Stanley Cup, and now he was here, with Ilya, and he couldn’t be happier.

They fell asleep holding hands.

End Notes

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