

## Eternal Flame

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# **Eternal Flame**

by [cameralucida](#)

## Summary

Ilya Rozanov burned, until the moment Shane Hollander's body hit the ice.

Shane's accident scares Ilya in ways he didn't think possible, and he's forced to confront just how deeply in love he really is.

## Notes

I am a native English speaker (sorry). All French and Russian words translated using an online translator.

Main/specific warnings will be at the start of each chapter where relevant.

# Chapter 1: Fire

Ilya Rozanov burned. It was a constant, enduring fact of his life.

Of course he did; he was Russian. Russians were passionate, powerful. There was no softness, no weakness, in the way he lived. No fuzzy-edged kindness in his pursuit of success or his drive to win. His decision to play hockey for America was forged en fuego, as were the nameless hookups that warmed his sheets in every city he played. He summoned fire to rally his team before every game, and then again to seduce his way into temporary bliss behind steamy hotel room doors.

And if he wasn't feeling the heat, the boiling pressure to succeed, the rush of dominance in-game and in bed, he was ignited by anger instead. The anger burned fastest of all. Anger at Alexei, for being a selfish piece of shit leech. Anger at his father, for being his father, and then for forgetting to be his father. Anger at his mother, for leaving him, for not being stronger. Anger at his rival, his foil, his Shane Hollander. Hollander's perfect life, perfect parents, perfect English and perfect French, perfect golden boy smile.

Most of all, Ilya was angry at himself. All the time.

The anger kept his blood pumping. Kept his game aggressive, moves sharp, plays lethal. Kept his attachments casual and skin calloused against the bitter cold of Russia, Boston, Canada. It had to, because when things got too much, when the anger burned so fast and so bright it burned itself out, he was left in the dark, unforgiving cold. Like the cold he'd felt shiver down his spine when Shane bolted from his home - Ilya's own clothes still on his body - hell freezing over when Marleau had broken the news that *Shane Hollander and Rose Landry are dating!* weeks later.

It was his fits of fury - sparked through reckless behaviour during gameplay and increasing fights with his brother - that kept him sane during those long months. Without them, Ilya would have been forced to confront that he felt other things instead. Longing, heartbreak, sadness. He was Russian, but more than that, he was Ilya Rozanov. Ilya Rozanov did not feel things. He paid his way, played hockey, had lots of casual sex, and burned. In a club in Montreal, after a terrible game that left a glacial emptiness threateningly settling in his stomach, he had rushed to keep the burn from fizzling out. Grinding against warm bodies like kindling, frantically hoping the friction would catch flame. The forest fire that had blazed through him the second he'd locked eyes with Shane had burned, and burned, and burned, all the way to Florida.

That day in Florida, compatible had become Ilya's favourite English word.

"I looked up '*compatible*'." Ilya said to the sea, eyes fixed on the endless horizon. The blazing sun dipped, kissing the ocean, two things that could not meet, should never touch, defying the odds and uniting anyway. "Thought I knew what it meant, but I wanted to be sure."

Shane said nothing, though out of the corner of his eye, Ilya could see the way Shane's head turned away from the sunset, softly gazing at Ilya instead.

"Is adjective. You and Rose Landry are not '*able to exist or occur together without problems or conflict*'." He hoped the warmth of his cheeks wasn't visible beneath the orange haze. Not that he was blushing; Russians did not blush.

"You memorised the definition?"

*Russians do not blush.* Ilya tilted his head a little further away from Shane, hiding his face. "Helpful for learning." He lied, because he couldn't admit that he had to learn it by heart, had to commit the meaning to memory, to take what little scraps he could get from Shane that he wasn't in love with someone else. Which was stupid and ridiculous, because Shane should be in love with someone else. Ilya wasn't in love with Shane, he just... Liked him, a lot. After all, they could never be in love, so it didn't matter if Ilya was in bed with Sacha, or Svetlana, or a random person from the club. Nor did it matter if Shane was in love with a movie star. "We can't all be good at two languages."

"Don't sell yourself short. You're incredible in two languages." Ilya shook his head and said nothing, because no matter what language he replied in, he didn't trust his tongue. The same tongue that scorched the roof of his mouth. "Though that definition isn't quite right." For a flash of a moment, a moment Ilya would never consciously allow himself to have, his chest seized. His English wasn't as good as he thought. The internet had gotten it wrong. Shane and Rose were really soulmates. "Well, I guess it is, for other people. Not for Rose and I." *Rose and I. Rose and I.* Not *Ilya and I.* Never *Ilya and I.* "She's great, she's really great. She's amazing, actually. You'd like her." Ilya huffed a disbelieving laugh at that, biting the inside of his cheek. "I'm serious! She's smart, she's funny, she's kind..."

"...You are sure she is not your girlfriend?"

In Ilya's periphery, Shane's shoulders sagged. "I'm sure." The sweet, gushing tone was replaced with a deflated sadness. It was both a relief to hear him stop talking about someone else so lovingly, and painful to hear the dejection in Shane's voice.

"She leave you?" The thought that Shane still romantically loved Rose, that his heart really did belong to someone else, that Ilya had been existing under a heartbreakingly false fantasy that Shane was completely gay for the last few days, was too much to bear. It was like his heart was being shattered all over again, like the headlines were plaguing his phone for the first time. "You want her back?"

"Yes- and, well, no." Shane sighed, scrubbing his right hand over his face. "What's your room number?"

"No." The fire was burning inside Ilya again. He focused on it intently, stoking the flames. "No room number, unless I know you are single."

"I already told you, I am sin-"

“-no, I mean single *in here*.” He at last turned to face Shane, brows furrowed, tapping his temple with his left hand. “I will not share bed with Rose Landry.”

It was always the eyes with Shane. The rest of his face may remain stoic, but his eyes were an open book that Ilya could read in any language. Big, sad brown eyes gazed up at him, ever-so-slightly glistening with tears, drawing Ilya in. No, reeling him in. A hook deep in Ilya’s flesh that he could never escape from. “She’s shared one with you.”

“Oh,” Ilya said flatly, taking a moment to catch up with what Shane meant. “Oh.” He repeated once it clicked. Whilst imagining Shane and Rose in bed was something he actively wanted to avoid doing, there was a very large part of his ego that was stroked by the knowledge Shane hadn’t forgotten him in their time apart. Had *needed* him in their time apart. The *time apart* which had felt much, much more distanced than every other *time apart*. “You need me in your head to get it up? To get over finish line?” The shy smile and rosy hue of Shane’s cheeks beneath his freckles enraptured Ilya in ways that he knew, objectively, should concern him greatly. “You need me to help you come?” Ilya grinned, shaking his head. “Pft, why I ask. I know this. I know you need big strong Russian to get you off.”

“Fuck off!” Shane swore, head ducking as he tried not to smile, but his laughter got the best of him, tugging at his lips.

Ilya grinned wildly. “Is okay, I know I am sexy irresistible. Hazard of job.”

Shane looked down between the two of them, right where their hands rested inches apart, embarrassed but smiling. A small, sad sigh escaped his lips. “Rose and I are incompatible not because we have conflict. We get along great. She’s wonderful, and my parents love her, and the world loves her. And I love her too, just not...” He took a big, steadying breath. Looking up, finally, their eyes properly met. “...Not in the way I should.”

Their palms inched across the gritty sand, thumbs touching. Ilya’s hand burned. “Room 459.”

Every moment with Shane Hollander that Ilya managed to steal from then on felt like extra. Sneaky extra time he was never supposed to get. Their story, the one that shouldn’t have been written in the first place, had ended in 2016 in Boston. Anything more was an epilogue that Ilya needed to put a stop to, before Shane - or the world, or both - went ahead and did it for him again, but he selfishly burned through each page anyway. A candle with its wick too long, he burned hotter, brighter, and faster with Shane against him again. Not only had he missed the heat of their companionship, but he had missed the heat of their rivalry. The most boring games were the ones Shane wasn’t a part of. Other players were skilled, but Shane was better. Shane knew every trick, every push and pull, to really challenge Ilya, to make each victory against the Metros feel even sweeter, and each loss cut with the knowledge that he had put up a good fight, that the opposing team deserved their hard-won victory. Since Boston, even when they were both present at the rink, neither of them had really *been there* until the All Stars game.

Then of course, Father Russia, in all his frozen icy bitterness, had to ruin it all by dying. Still, he burned all through Russia, because the snow meant nothing when his hatred for Alexei was hotter than ever, and his love for Shane brighter than he’d thought possible. That’s what

it was. *Love*. What he'd at long last admitted to himself - and to Shane, in Russian - in a snowy underpass in Moscow. It was true. It was always Shane. He *was* so in love with him, and he didn't know what to do about it. They were getting older, and life was getting real. They weren't rookies rolling around in the sheets when their schedules happened to align anymore. They were winners stealing every moment they possibly could, moments that weren't theirs to steal, while their teammates married and had children and Ilya's father *fucking died*.

Ilya was fucked, well and truly fucked. He hated Russia, he hated that he had to return every year, but it was still home, and he hated the thought that he couldn't go back. What he hated even more than that, even more than the idea of never being able to walk his childhood streets, eat his home comfort foods, or speak to anyone in his mother tongue, was the idea of ruining Shane's life. Ilya had thought his life was hockey, but it wasn't. His life was Shane. Shane's life, however, was definitely hockey. Hockey and a nuclear family and mainstream brand deals and good, wholesome press coverage. Even if Shane one day came out - already an incredibly unlikely possibility - Ilya knew it wouldn't be with his arch rival. Not someone he'd have to marry to keep in the country once he was kicked out of the MLH. Shane deserved someone simple, someone as apple pie as he was. If Ilya declared his love for Shane, he would never be able to safely return to Russia, and he'd never, ever be able to have Shane, either. Not forever. It was lose-lose.

So he resolved that, after the 2017 season ended, he would break it off. Once and for all. Not because he didn't care, or because he didn't love Shane, but because he loved Shane so much that the fire was consuming him.

"We still on for tonight? After?" Shane had asked during Ilya's first game after his father had died. Ilya nodded casually, aware of their audience, aware they were not alone. Hyper aware that the ticking clock he had imposed upon their relationship was counting down, ringing in his ears louder with each passing second. "1919." Shane said, equally casually, keeping a professional distance. "That's the code for the front door. I'll text it to you."

Ilya had to resist pulling Shane closer to him. "Front door. Brave."

"Fuck you."

"Later." It was chirping. That's what it was, to any onlookers, to anyone within earshot, to Ilya himself. He wasn't flirting with the man he was in love with, the man he was planning to fuck within an inch of his life after the game had ended. With great difficulty, he resisted watching as Shane skated away, his incredible ass obscured by the layers of his unflattering hockey uniform.

They lined up, ready for the game to start, for the puck to drop. As with every game, especially against the Metros, Ilya's world shrank. He couldn't hear the crowd or the commentators. Nor could he think about his life, his family, or anything to do with Russia. Everything zeroed in, quiet enough to hear a pindrop, on the game. His shoulders squared, hand gripping tight on his hockey stick. Shane Hollander in front of him, so close he could almost taste him. Could lean forward, lift their helmets, and kiss his pretty pink mouth, all for the love of the game.

Ilya's heart hammered as they stared each other down, enjoying the tension, the build-up, the heat. It was one of the only times they could be that close, could look directly at one another for more than a fraction of a second, in view of the world. The electricity that ran beneath Ilya's skin, his love for hockey, for a great challenge, for Shane Hollander, all converging at once, their suspended moment alone in front of thousands, was euphoric. This was the moment Ilya lived for. Everything else was just static, filling the gaps of time before he got to burn with Shane Hollander again.

Ever the risk taker, ever the fool, Ilya smiled, a grin so wide his teeth were showing, and for a brief glimpse of time, Shane smiled back, and everything was blazing, hot, perfect.

The puck dropped, and the tension snapped like a taut band, each team scrabbling to be the first to get the upper hand. Shane got it, of course he did; in their game of cat and mouse, Ilya enjoyed the chase. Quick as lightning, Shane zipped across the rink, pushing the puck towards their goal. Ilya was hot on his heels, high on the rush of adrenaline, determined to wrestle the early lead from the Metros' grasp. Teasingly or lovingly - Ilya wasn't sure which was worse - Shane turned back to check how close the Raiders were behind him, and grinned madly when he saw Ilya. It was beautiful - an athlete in his prime, taunting his arch rival, and it only riled Ilya up to snatch back their victory even more.

It happened fast, too fast. The game hadn't even hit the 30-second mark. One moment, Shane was there, beaming, winning. The next, Cliff Marleau came barrelling in, a bull in a china shop, and Shane hit the floor.

Ilya Rozanov burned. No matter what he went through, no matter what happened, he never let the fire die, because he couldn't afford it.

Until the moment Shane crumpled and didn't get up.

The heavy thud Shane's body made was louder than the blood rushing in Ilya's ears, a haunting sound that would torment Ilya's nightmares for the rest of his life. It all fell quiet again; the crowds disappeared, the only thing that mattered was Shane. Shane Hollander, who was not moving. Not even a twitch or a groan. Never had Ilya thought he'd want to hear Shane in genuine pain, until he realised that any sound was better than nothing at all.

Everything around him became fuzzy, a high-pitched ringing in his ears as his brain refused to accept what was in front of him. He was no longer at the rink. The world fell out from under him, the ice that was once beneath his skates now running through his veins. A chill settled deep in his bones, the wind knocked from his lungs like he'd been the one to fall. But he hadn't, it was Shane, *it was Shane*. He wanted so desperately to kneel by his side, to scream at him to get up, to hold his hand and whisper sweet nothings in any fucking language Shane wanted.

Distantly, he sensed there was chaos surrounding them. The whistle had blown. The crowd was unruly, yelling wildly. Hayden Pike was being restrained by multiple people as he lunged for Cliff Marleau, something Ilya knew his usual self would want to do as well. But the fire was gone, extinguished with Shane.

Medics were running onto the rink with a spinal board. Ilya was vaguely aware of the referee putting his arm out, pushing Ilya back, but he refused to skate away; knew he couldn't if he tried. He was frozen in place. If it was only his future, his career, his life on the line, Ilya would have been at Shane's side in a heartbeat, fuck the rest of them. He was stupid for thinking any of it mattered in the first place. But it was Shane's future, Shane's career, Shane's *life*, and that left Ilya paralysed.

"Move, Hollander." Ilya shouted desperately. His love for Shane, his need to protect Shane's privacy, acted as the last vestiges to remind him to keep up their act for the cameras. "Wake the fuck up."

"Rozanov, off the ice." The referee ordered. Ilya ignored him. He had to see Shane move. Had to see him help himself onto the board, to shuffle, to twitch. Any sign of life. Then he would go. He'd go to the ends of the earth, he'd go back to Russia and scream his love for Shane at the top of his lungs, he'd go to church and get on his knees and pray before God to do anything he wanted, if Shane Hollander was still moving. Yet his pleas were in vain, because the medical team manoeuvred Shane's body like a ragdoll, placing a brace on his neck, gently, so gently, and far too fucking slow.

"Is he okay? Fucking tell me!" Snapped Ilya, the only player still within Shane's vicinity.

"Get to your bench, Rozanov. I'm not gonna tell you again." The referee reprimanded, pushing Ilya backwards until he hit the wall. Ilya complied, stepping off not because he wanted to, but because the medics were carrying Shane away, and if he didn't step back, he'd chase after them, witnesses be damned.

Ilya backed away far enough to no longer be within sight of the public or other players, lingering in the shadows behind the bench, stomach dropped, heart empty, utterly devoid of anything. His numb hands shook inside his gloves, teeth chattering as tears welled in his eyes.

There was no warmth, no fire, no heat. There was only ice.

## Chapter 2: Ice

### Chapter Summary

Ilya recalls a conversation he and Shane had in 2013 to help him cope with Shane being taken off the ice.

### Chapter Notes

Happy Cottage Day (/eve, for those of us in different time zones) + ° ★ ❄ ★ ° +

Chapter warnings (/spoilers for contents):

- Oral sex
- Handjobs

Though I imagine if you're a HR fan, you're perfectly fine with (and are frothing at the mouth for) both of those.

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

Shane had once said an English phrase to Ilya that had stuck in his mind ever since. Well, he'd said several phrases in their time together - several in this night alone - but this specific one came up during the first time they'd arranged a hotel rendezvous after a disrupted game. Hayden Pike had been injured on the ice, walking away with bruised ribs, but without a pebbly white tooth that had bounced across the rink almost comically.

It was late 2013, and Pike had been slammed into the boards by a player on the Boston Raiders - one whose name Ilya could no longer remember, he was traded not long after - six minutes into the game. He was ultimately fine, but had been taken out of the game as a safety measure.

The night it had happened, Ilya had prepared himself to take care of a shaken Shane, upset over the injury of his friend. His yappy, annoying friend, whom Ilya did not care for, but Shane's friend nonetheless. Turns out, his concerns were misguided.

Ilya opened his hotel room door to a kiss, Shane shuffling them inside just enough to shut the outside world behind them with a kick of his sneakers, before latching onto Ilya like his life depended on it. Ilya - still worried, though he'd never admit it - allowed Shane to take control for a moment, before deepening the kiss with a swipe of his tongue on Shane's bottom lip. He flipped them around so it was Shane against the wall, pulling back to kiss the corner of his

mouth, his jaw, behind his ear. Shane made the cutest little huffing sounds, fingers curling tightly around Ilya's arms.

"Hello to you too," Ilya murmured teasingly, breathing hot air into Shane's ear, which earned him a small moan. "You wish to celebrate victory, yes?" When Shane gave no verbal response, simply hooking his ankle behind Ilya's calf, Ilya pulled back. He grinned wolfishly at Shane's pathetic little whimper. "Come, bed." He insisted.

They sat on the plush double mattress, Ilya enjoying the pliant way Shane let him pull his shirt off, knowing well enough by now he liked it folded neatly and set down, before starting on his belt loop. Shane kissed along Ilya's throat, eventually mouthing at his collarbone, head buried in the crook of Ilya's neck as his mind was in its own world, cock hardening under Ilya's touch. Ilya palmed him through his boxers, the kisses on his skin stopping as Shane shuddered a needy moan, like putty in Ilya's hands. Stray hands began to tug at Ilya's own shirt. Shane's hands. Ilya took pity on him, leaning back to pull his own shirt off. Despite being the one who wanted it off, Shane whined when he was forced away from Ilya's neck, scruffed by his hair in Ilya's strong grasp.

"Awe, poor Hollander." Ilya cooed mockingly. "Must be forced to wait for two seconds while I get naked. Life is so hard."

Shane, whose eyes had fallen shut, blinked several times then glared at Ilya. It was adorable, like a pouting puppy. "Something is certainly hard." He quipped.

"Ooh, you are brat tonight?" He stood up, pulling his sweatpants and socks off, before pushing Shane down to the centre of the bed. His dark hair and soft freckles were framed beautifully by the deep blue pillowcase. Ilya got on top, straddling Shane's thighs, hovering so their clothed cocks were not quite touching. "This will be fun."

Shane threw his head back and defiantly raised his hips, seeking friction, frustration endearingly evident on his face when Ilya simply angled himself backwards, out of Shane's reach.

Ilya tutted. "Her." *No*. "Winning game has made you cocky. You wait. You take what I give." He blanketed himself over Shane - save his hips, which he kept angled up - and kissed his bottom lip messily. Shane's fingers curled into the soft sheets, melting relaxedly into the mattress as Ilya explored his body. Kissed his way down to his pecs, taking a nipple between his teeth and nipping lightly. The breathy gasp that pushed its way out of Shane's lips was sinful; Ilya needed to hear it again. His pulse pounded as he mouthed Shane's nipple, swirling his tongue across the sensitive nub that earned him more high-pitched sounds from the writhing man beneath him. He switched to the left nipple, his right hand coming up to pinch at the one he just abandoned, and Ilya could only just about forgive Shane for ignoring his instructions to stay still and instead gyrate his hips into the mattress. Ilya knew it wasn't truly satisfying, that his cock was straining untouched in his boxers, desperate for attention.

"Good boy," Ilya said, popping his mouth off Shane's nipple to lick around it instead. "Listen so nicely for me, yes?"

Shane made an affirmative noise, one that sounded like he'd attempted to say yes, but it had died on his tongue with a gasp.

"Mhm," hummed Ilya, pulling his mouth away completely so he could look up at Shane. His eyes were glazed over, hazily half-lidded, hair sticking out haphazardly from where he was rocking his head back into the pillows. Ilya smirked at the sight, finally trailing his hand down to squeeze Shane's cock. A responsive jerk of the hips met his movements, and when he flattened his hand to grind at Shane's messy tip, a shot of arousal ran through him at the low moan Shane gave in response. "So wet for me." As if on cue, a spurt of pre-come wet the waistband of Shane's boxers further, slicking the palm of Ilya's hand as he rubbed in circles. "Pretty pillow princess."

Shane mumbled something, but it was muffled by the pillow. Ilya sat up and reached down with his other hand to rub at Shane's shaft. "Speak up." He ordered.

"Can I touch?" Shane rushed out. The words slurred together charmingly.

"Hm," Ilya hummed, pretending to even consider turning such an earnest request down. "Depends. What is special word?"

"Magic word."

"Huh?"

"It's, *what's the magic word?*"

"Oh, so now you are Mr. Magician." Ilya squeezed Shane's cock hard, then let go entirely, enjoying the petulant pout and displeased scrunch of Shane's brow. "What is '*the magic word*'?" Ilya snarked. *Magic word*. English was a stupid language.

More muffled mumbling. Ilya squeezed Shane's hipbones instead. "Maybe you do not want to touch after all." He shrugged.

"No!" Shane said quickly, head tilting up. "I mean, yes. I mean-" he huffed frustratedly, head falling back down onto the pillows. "Please let me touch."

"Huh," Ilya hummed again. "I do not know these words. Cannot understand you. Cannot help you. Sorry." He said derisively, face turned into an exaggerated frown. They both knew Ilya understood him, but they both loved it when Ilya teased him, too. And that *magic word* thing really was bullshit anyway.

Shane let out an annoyed exhale, despite the fact that Ilya saw his cock twitch in its confines. "Please," he said slowly. "Please let me touch."

"I do not understand. Touch what?" He pushed further, delighting gleefully in watching Shane unravel. His own cock was aching hard, tip poking out the waistband of his boxers, but the reward was worth the wait.

"Rozanov."

“Hollander.”

“You!” Shane cried.

“What about me?”

Poor Shane was bright red, flushed all over, beautiful eyes shining with tears in the waterline.  
*“S’il te plaît, laisse-moi te toucher.”*

“Fuck,” Ilya exhaled, heat pulsing through him. He may not speak French, but he wasn’t stupid. Honestly, he was a little bit impressed that Shane had enough coherence to find a loophole. “Oui,” he replied, one of the only French words he knew. “You may touch.”

In an instant, Shane’s hands were on him, roaming his thighs, sliding up and down his torso, finally settling to his hipbones. Ilya decided to provide himself mercy as much as Shane, wanting to relieve the pressure on his cock, to feel his illicit rival contort beneath him, and lowered his hips. They both moaned at the feeling of their cocks together, Ilya grinding down as Shane rocked up. He leaned back over Shane, who immediately wound his hands into Ilya’s curls the second they were within reach, and kissed him sloppily, lips unable to find purchase on one another as the fire burned between them.

Shane’s gasps were getting shorter, breathier, punchier. Ilya knew him well enough now to know what those sounds meant. He pulled his hips back, glad Shane was unable to see his face as he, too, winced at the loss of contact, and held Shane greedily as his hips bucked up into nothing.

“*Why?*” Shane whined petulantly. “Rozanov, please-”

“-Now he knows please.” Ilya smirked, pressing a chaste kiss to Shane’s wrinkled nose, smoothing it. Shane was panting heavily, breath coming in shallow puffs, soft lips parted so irresistibly Ilya had no choice but to quickly peck those, too. “Don’t worry, *милая*.”  
*Sweetheart*. “I take care of you.”

Ilya pulled away, shuffling further down the mattress, until he was eye level with Shane’s hips. He mouthed over the wet, straining cock beneath him, secretly preening under the tantalising moan Shane made in response. After only a few seconds - not wanting to end the party before it started - Ilya moved back to pull Shane’s boxers down, discarding them haphazardly over his shoulder. Thankfully, Shane was too gone to care about the mess it made.

The eager hands that still gripped Ilya’s curls wound tighter, clearly trying to resist the urge to push Ilya’s head further down. Ilya paused for a moment, curious to see if Shane’s resolve would weaken, and when it didn’t, he rewarded him. “Good boy,” he praised before wrapping his lips around Shane’s cock and pushing down.

“*Fuck!*” Cried Shane, thighs tensing around Ilya’s ears. Ilya sank down further, hollowing his cheeks, flattening his tongue to a vein that ran down the underside of Shane’s cock. The cock he’d gotten to know so well, the body he knew intimately, knew where all the buttons were and exactly how to press them. He bobbed his head, setting a rhythm up and down, one hand

jerking where his lips didn't reach, the other massaging Shane's balls and perineum. The man below him trembled like a leaf, hips bucking minutely, and Ilya's own cock throbbed at the knowledge Shane was lost in the pleasure. That Shane wasn't focused on anything or anyone else, just him, just the feeling of Ilya on his cock, of fighting the war inside him. One side wanting to chase his release, the other wanting to please Ilya, listen to Ilya, obey Ilya. The side that relented to Ilya always won, and there was nothing that turned Ilya on more. Shane knew how to press his buttons, too.

"Roz," the hands in his hair moved down to his shoulders, tapping frantically. "M gonna-"

Immediately, Ilya doubled down, removing his hands to bury himself to the hilt, nose in Shane's pubes, as he swallowed. It was a dirty trick, they both knew it, and it had Shane coming down his throat instantly.

Ilya moved up quickly so he could swallow rather than choke, taking every last drop until Shane was spent and oversensitive. Once he pulled off, a trail of spit connecting his lower lip with Shane's spent cock, Ilya made quick work of shimmying out of his own boxers, kicking them away and wrapping a hand around himself quickly. He jerked himself without finesse, wound up and ready to follow Shane over the edge.

"Wait," Shane said distantly. "Let me."

Ilya was only human. He groaned at the request, at the desperate look in Shane's eyes, tired and boneless and still wanting Ilya's cock. "You want to take what is yours, huh?" His voice was rough, wanton.

"It's what a winner does." Shane smirked prettily, dazed and perfect.

"Then claim your prize." Ilya, admittedly with some difficulty, prised his hand from his cock, and flopped down on the mattress beside Shane, curling up against him and kissing his pulse point. It didn't take much. Shane curled in on his side towards Ilya, jerking him quickly. Four pumps and Ilya was gone, staccato breath stuttering as he came all over Shane's fist.

Shane continued to work him through the aftershocks, only stopping when things got too sensitive and Ilya batted him away. "Ew," Shane frowned at his come-covered hand.

"Messy."

"Was you who wanted to finish me." Ilya countered, rolling his eyes, even though he'd already started to get up and grab Shane a wash cloth, wetted with warm water. "Better?" He asked once he'd cleaned him off.

"Better." Shane hummed happily, blissed out. Ilya felt a tug at his heart, but ignored it. This was a fling. He'd leave soon. But first, he had to check in if Shane was okay after Pike's injury. Not that he cared. It was just the polite thing to do.

They curled into one another, sharing hot breath, basking in the afterglow. "Are you okay?" Ilya asked, a little awkwardly. Russians didn't do emotions.

"Huh? Yeah, good. It was good." Shane smiled.

“No, I mean- obviously. Sex with me is always good.” Shane snorted a laugh, whispering *asshole* playfully under his breath. “I mean after game today? Pike’s injury.”

“Oh,” Shane sighed, face falling a little. For a moment, Ilya was consumed with guilt for bringing it up. They were each other’s hook up, rivals-with-benefits. Perhaps Shane had wanted to fuck Ilya precisely because he didn’t want to deal with the emotions that came with thinking about his friend - his real friend - who had been injured.

“Sorry,” Ilya dismissed, shaking his head. “Forget I asked.”

“No, it’s okay.” Shane shrugged, a small smile returning to his face. “Just didn’t expect you to ask. I know you hate Pike.”

“Hate is strong word. I think he is dull average player. I do not wish him pain.”

Shane did what Ilya had secretly wanted to do and broke the chasm of mere inches between them, absentminded fingers dancing distractingly up and down Ilya’s chest. “He’s okay. Bruised ribs, bruised ego, needs a new tooth, but he’s cleared for the next game. He’s just Skyping Jackie and licking his wounds in our room.”

“He is doing *what?*” Ilya asked, horrified. He had no problem with kink, but he thought Canadians - specifically uptight ones like Shane and Pike - were very much not into casually mentioning anything risqué.

His gaping mouth and shocked expression must have looked amusing, because Shane laughed heartily, preciously. “It’s an idiom- a saying. It means, like, taking time to recover or feel a bit sorry for yourself after a defeat or blow of some kind. He’s not literally- how would that even *work?*”

“Is your saying, you tell me!” Ilya retorted, frowning heavily to force down the smile that was fighting its way onto his face as Shane laughed. “Stupid saying, stupid language, Mr. Magic Word.” When Shane’s fits of laughter doubled down, Ilya snagged a decorative pillow and playfully thumped it at him, because it was the only way to hide the fact he lost the battle against his own dumb smiling face. “Глупый!” *Silly, stupid (affectionately).*

“I’m glad he is cleared to play next game,” Ilya said. The words were too exposed, too vulnerable, so he quickly followed it up with, “means you will not be distracted and I can beat you fair and square.”

“Hey, we still won this game!”

“Fluke. Is fluke.” Ilya waved his hand in the air dismissively. “You score in last minute.”

“Hell yeah, I did.” Shane beamed. Ilya scrubs a hand over his face to avoid smiling again. Perhaps it was good they wouldn’t see each other for a few weeks after tonight. He needed to reset, to remind himself this was just sex. His brain was translating things incorrectly, crossing wires, getting the wrong idea. “After all, the show must go on.”

“What show?” Ilya was unsure on whether show could also mean game, or if this was another English phrase. “This is also a saying?”

“Yep,” Shane nodded, popping the ‘p’. Ilya wanted to kiss it off his face, but that was dangerous. That wasn’t sex-fuelled. That was sentimental. “Means no matter what happens, you have to push through, and keep going. The show went on, we won the game, Pike is fine. Everything works out in the end.”

“The show must go on,” Ilya echoed. He hated this one less, it made sense. Ilya had the same mindset. Even when everything burned around him, when he burned inside himself, he pushed through. For once, English had provided him a useful phrase; he could even see himself using it. “I like this.”

Four years on, 2017, the memory hit Ilya like a freight train. Shane was hauled off the ice, unresponsive, no silly little English phrase, no melodic laughter or infectious smile. The game paused for 20 long, agonising minutes, and then suddenly, their coach was corralling them back to the rink, benching Cliff Marleau, and getting ready to start back up again. Hayden Pike was missing from the Metros’ roster, and a shiver of jealousy ran through Ilya, knowing Pike got the privilege of leaving and being at Shane’s side.

*Shane might be dead, Ilya wanted to scream. Shane Hollander is in an ambulance, and he might be dying, or dead, or brain dead, or paralysed, or comatose, or fucking anything, and you people want to keep playing. None of this fucking matters if he is not here.*

But people were watching, and Shane cared about that, and the show must go on. So Ilya gritted his teeth, cursed a slew of Russian at the assholes who were making him do this, and played the worst game of his life. Usually, he played aggressively. His best games were the ones he harnessed that ruthlessness, and his worst ones were when the ruthlessness harnessed him. This game, this version of Ilya Rozanov, had no fight in him. He shambled around the ice, useless, any puck thrown his way fumbled right back out of his hands immediately. The Metros won 3-1.

“Looks like tonight got the best of Ilya Rozanov,” the commentators were saying. Parasitic vultures. “His first game back since his father’s passing started off rocky with the injury of Shane Hollander by his own teammate Cliff Marleau, and if the season continues this way for the Raiders, it might well be one of his last this year.”

“I guess he is human after all.” The other commentator joked. “What a victory tonight for the Metros, even without Hollander-”

Ilya undressed quickly, ignoring his teammates’ attempts to chat, to chirp, to commiserate. He provided no funny quips or encouraging ‘we’ll get ‘em next time!’ pep talks. All of his focus was on one thing, and that was finding out where Shane Hollander was, and if he was alive. Finding the nearest major hospital on his phone, he ordered an Uber and headed straight there. His raging mind was quiet, not with peace, but with grief. The cold, dead hand of loss, gripping his throat.

## Chapter End Notes

Next chapter coming tomorrow!

Comments + kudos are fuel <3

## Chapter 3: Air

### Chapter Summary

Ilya goes to the Hospital Shane has been taken to, and runs into the second most boring player on the Metros.

Content warning: use of in-universe homophobic language/slur

### Chapter Notes

OH MY GOD THE FINALE?! I am UNWELL. I couldn't have asked for more. Give Hudson and Connor every award ever made (and then make new ones just for them).

Content warning: use of in-universe homophobic language/slur

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

The cab ride to the hospital hung in suspended air, trapped in a pocket of Ilya's own bated breath. His heart wasn't working properly, his head stuck on a loop of *Shane, Shane, Shane*. He'd had just enough sense to grab a pair of sunglasses and a baseball cap to tuck over his curls, walking into the reception area with his black hood up. Thankfully, the paparazzi hadn't descended yet, though there was a good chance that was because Metros' media team were keeping them out.

With a finger to his lips, he mimed a shushing noise and whispered his name to the administrators, relieved that they were both willing to let him through, and to do so subtly. Not that the victory had lasted long. Pacing in the luminescent hallway was Hayden Pike, looking stressed and unkempt in his compression shirt and some sweatpants. He was on the phone, angrily rambling about something - too fast and too far away for Ilya to easily understand what, though he assumed it was related to Shane.

Ilya ducked around the corner out of sight, heart quickening in his ribcage, feeling like he was committing a crime. A nurse walked by, the perfect person to make his accomplice.

"Excuse me," he whispered, taking off his sunglasses, eyes darting in Pike's direction to make sure he wasn't about to round the corner and catch Ilya red-handed. "Can you help me?"

"What do you need, sir?"

“Do you have an update on Shane Hollander?”

The nurse paused, eyes wide, caught between two conflicting emotions. “We’re not allowed to-” she ducked her head, worrying her lip. “-Are you Ilya Rozanov?”

“Yes,” he hissed sharply, hating the awkward way with which Westerners danced around their intentions for the most simple things. “Is Shane Hollander okay?”

Once again, the nurse hesitated, taking a deep breath before sighing apologetically. “I’m sorry, Mr. Rozanov, but we’re not allowed to share the confidential details of our patients. Especially Mr. Hollander. We’ve been briefed specifically for his stay.”

“I am not crazy fan. I am-” *lover, rival, hopeless fool*, “-hockey player.”

Her lips twisted as she bit the inside of her cheek and winced. Ilya would feel sorry for her if she wasn’t holding him back from knowing whether the only person that mattered was alright. “His teammate Mr. Pike is around the corner. He’ll be able to share information with you.”

*Shit*. “Pike does not like me very much. Rivals.”

“Isn’t Shane Hollander also your rival?”

All Ilya could see in his mind’s eye was Shane’s beautiful smile, bracketed by the harsh smack of his body on the rink. “Yes.” He replied icily.

“You should speak to Mr. Pike, Mr. Rozanov. I- I’m sorry I can’t help you.” She hugged her clipboard tight to her chest, a look of pity on her face Ilya despised, as she ducked her head and walked off.

“Блядь!” *Fuck*. Ilya had to hold back from kicking the wall, not wanting to draw attention to himself, or risk being forcibly removed. His team would be wondering where he was. He was supposed to be on a flight back to Boston in the early hours of the morning. Ilya scrubbed a hand over his face, forcing out a long exhale as he tried to come up with a plan.

A glance around the corner showed Pike was done with his phone call, now sitting in a hard plastic seat with his elbows on his knees, head in his hands. It didn’t look good. Ilya wanted to run up to him and demand he tell him what was going on, or beg him to give him any insight into Shane’s condition. But Pike would have questions of his own, and none of them could be satisfactorily answered without betraying Shane.

Ilya’s phone buzzed, and like a dog salivating at the ringing of a bell, his first thought was reflexive: Jane. It wasn’t, obviously, it was a random app notification, but it was enough to give Ilya an idea. Before he could talk himself out of it, he opened Jane’s contact and hit the call icon, peeking at Pike as he did so. At last, with a bit of luck, Pike fished Shane’s phone out of his pocket, his jaw dropping as he read the contact.

“Hello?” Pike said down the receiver. Ilya immediately hung up and started typing.

**LILY:** You are not Shane. Where is Shane?

A small wave of relief washed over him as he saw the three little dots appear; watched Pike type with shaky fingers in real time.

**JANE:** This is Shane's teammate, Hayden. Did you watch the game today?

**LILY:** Yes

**LILY:** they carried him off. where is he?

**JANE:** He's in the hospital. Are you his girlfriend?

**LILY:** is complicated. is he okay

**JANE:** No

One simple word broke Ilya's heart in two. Bile rose to his throat, knees buckling as he fell back against the wall.

**LILY:** ????

**JANE:** This isn't appropriate news for texting. lets talk?

Then his phone was ringing. Out loud. His phone was ringing out loud on full volume, 10ft away from Hayden *fucking* Pike.

In the subtlest, most svelte move of all time, Ilya dropped his phone like it had scorched his hand, the cursed thing clattering down on the unforgiving linoleum floor. Pike hung up, and for a moment, Ilya thought he'd gotten away with it, but then the phone started ringing again, and the sound of heavy footsteps forebodingly filled the hallway.

In the time it took for Ilya to scoop up his phone and put it on silent, Pike turned the corner, unadulterated confusion on his face spliced with anger the second he saw Ilya. "Rozanov?" He spat, voice filled with venom. "The fuck are you doing here?"

Ilya hadn't felt this much fear since the first time Alexei called him a faggot. "I am team captain. Team captain sends well wishes to injured player. Is customary."

"I know what's fucking customary, asshole, and it's not sneaking into the hospital before any official news has been shared." His angry gaze landed on the offending phone in Ilya's hand. Shane's phone was still in his own; he pressed 'call' on Lily's contact. Ilya's phone lit up like a Christmas tree. "And why do you have his girlfriend's phone?"

It wasn't the right thing to say, or do. In fact, it was very much the wrong thing to say and do, but Ilya was exhausted from the emotional whiplash. From the fire, the ice, the too many hours spent not knowing. "For fuck's sake, Pike! Have you really not figured it out by now?" He yelled, voice echoing in the hollow waiting area. "I am Lily, блядь, блядь, блядь!" *Fucking fuck fuck.* This time, he didn't hold back from kicking the skirting board, but it didn't help, didn't stoke the fire that could no longer hold a steady flame within him. He sighed exasperatedly, head coming to rest on the ugly white wall, eyes closing in a last-ditch

attempt to shield himself from reality. To shut everything and everyone out. Shane Hollander already existed permanently at the forefront of his mind - it felt safest to retreat to him there.

Torturously slow, Hayden gasped, the edge slipping from his voice as he exclaimed, “*You’re Lily?*”

“Yes.” Ilya replied, curt.

“That’s not possible. He’s been texting her for years.”

Ilya shrugged, eyes still closed. He didn’t feel like defending the one secret he was supposed to take to the grave to a disbelieving Pike. Pike didn’t deserve to be a part of it, of his and Shane’s bubble. “Is true.”

“Holy shit.” Pike exclaimed, though thankfully in a quieter tone. The private ward was empty, but it was still maintained by staff that might not take their oath of confidentiality as seriously as Ilya’s new nurse frenemy. “Boston Lily. Boston *Ilya*. I need to sit down.”

“Then go, sit.” Ilya’s eyes snapped open, head against the wall, side-eye glaring at Pike. “First tell me how Shane is.”

The expression Ilya had expected to see on Pike’s face was pure shock, potentially cut with some disgust and confusion. What Ilya was actually faced with was much worse, because beneath the wide-eyed shock and the slack-jawed confusion was a face softened with sorrow. Pike pitied him, and it made the air-restricting tightness in his throat constrict even more.

“Come.” Pike nodded towards the small recessed section he’d been sitting at. Ilya reluctantly followed, uneasy about going with Pike, but knowing he’d go to the ends of the earth if a happy, healthy Shane was there waiting for him.

They sat opposite each other, chairs diagonal, still not comfortable being in close proximity. This close, Ilya could see Pike had been crying. Face blotchy, nose puffy, eyes red-rimmed. A crumpled tissue was tucked into the sleeve of his shirt. “Shane’s alive.”

Ilya let out the breath he knew he’d been holding, but didn’t realise quite how tightly until the knot in his chest untied just a little bit. Which was ridiculous, because obviously Shane was alive. They were in a hospital, not a morgue. “Concussion?” A concussion, a mild concussion. That was surely all it was. A few garbled phrases, some light bruising, and no screens for a few days, and it would be like Shane had never been hit at all.

Pike nodded lightly, his lips pressed into a tight, thin line, the corners wobbling. “They said he was conscious when they took him off the ice, but he wasn’t able to stay awake during the ambulance ride. They’ve put him into a medically-induced coma due to brain swelling.”

*Russians do not panic*, Ilya told himself as his hands started to tremble. *Russians do NOT panic*. “For how long?”

“‘Til the swelling’s peaked and starts going down on its own. A few hours, hopefully. Six, maybe twelve.” Pike sucked in a sharp breath, blinking back tears. “They said it’s not the

unconsciousness that's the problem. It's what his brain is protecting itself from. Even after they take him off the sedatives, if the injury is bad enough, there's a chance his brain won't-" a wet, stuttered gasp, "-won't be ready to naturally wake him up. It'll keep protecting him, and keep him unconscious, and if that happens for too long, then..." Pike turned fully away from Ilya, hot tears falling down his cheeks. The crumpled tissue was brought to his nose, and all Ilya could think about was how disgusting Shane would find it. "...Who knows. We go from there I guess."

There was no reaction Ilya could give that would be appropriate enough. He was intimately familiar with grief; it ran through his family line like the rings of a tree, ancient and twisted. His own father had just died, a strange, hollow feeling that was equal parts sadness and relief, as Ilya mourned the loss of a man that had never really existed, and now never would. Yet that wasn't the sorrow which immediately conjured in his mind as his chest constricted, mouth dry, gravity weighing harder against the disconnected freefall of his very being. It was a loss that felt much closer: his mother. All of a sudden, Ilya was 12 years old, shaking the ice-cold shoulder of his dead mother, pleading with her to wake up. Her flame smothered, while his flickered unsteadily, dying with her. Only, he didn't die, something that he'd regretted ever since.

"Fuck you, say something." Pike bit out, tears streaming, laced with contempt. "You come here, you tell me you're- you're *close* with Shane, or whatever, and then you just sit there? Fuck you."

"I need a cigarette." Ilya stood quickly. He would not cry in front of Hayden Pike.

"Me too." Pike said angrily.

"You smoke?"

"No."

Pike followed him out the back, snatching the cigarette Ilya lit for himself out of his fingers. Ilya laughed sadistically at the way he choked on it, coughing loudly as Ilya lit himself a replacement.

"He'll be alright." Pike sputtered, still recovering from his pathetic little inhale. "That's what Jackie - oh, uh, she's my wife - keeps saying. He'll be fine, and we'll all be laughing at ourselves for worrying so much over a routine injury."

"Laughing." Ilya repeated, turning the word over in his mouth. He certainly didn't feel like laughing about Shane's health. "Stupid."

"The Raiders know you're here?" Pike asked suspiciously.

"No." Ilya leaned against the red brick wall. The little alcove stunk of stale cigarettes and rotten trash. "No one knows."

"Sounds like that's a theme." Hayden ran his fingers through his hair, wastefully discarding a perfectly good cigarette in the ashtray attached to a nearby trash can. "You wanna tell me

more?”

“No,” Ilya let out a long exhale, smoke billowing a sharp line in the chilly fall air. “But I think you will not let me stay unless I do. Is this true?”

“Well- I mean, come on, man, look at it from my perspective. You’re such an asshole.” It wasn’t said the way Shane said it, with warmth and affection. It was both baffled and accusatory. “Shane told me he offered his condolences and you told him to fuck off, like, 30 seconds before the game started.”

“Is lie, is act. He gave me room door code. 1919.” He shook his head, pushing the heel of his hand into the corner of his eye, hard enough to see black dots in his vision. “I should not be telling you this, Shane will not be happy.”

“Shane,” imitated Pike, hushed, like he couldn’t believe they were on a first-name basis. Which, in fairness, Ilya couldn’t blame him for that one - he couldn’t believe they were on a first-name basis, either. “He’s been texting Lily - *you* - for, like, five years or something.”

“Nine.” Ilya corrected.

“*Nine?*” Exclaimed Pike. “Bullshit.”

“Was just sex,” he rolled his eyes at the way Pike grimaced. “Grow up. We are hockey players, we like casual sex, this does not surprise you. Or is it because gay sex?” His voice lowered, a threatening edge disguising his fear that he’d turned Shane’s best friend against him by outing him against his will.

“It’s not the gay thing, it’s the *you* thing. Full offence.”

“None taken.” Ilya ribbed, unable to bring himself to care that Pike hated him, or for thinking that Shane deserved better. That wasn’t news. “Sex at first, when convenient. Some sexting when bored. Then things changed.”

“How?”

How indeed. “I do not know. They just... did.” Another long drag of his cigarette. “I know we should break things off. We have tried many times. I was going to try again-”

“-You were going to fucking leave him?”

*Pick a side, do you want us together or not?* Ilya wanted to snark, but he held back. “How could I not? We cannot be together!” Ilya shouted, not caring who heard. He was like a shaken soda can being cracked open, exploding everywhere. There was something about straws and the spines of camels Shane had said to him once, but he couldn’t recall the proper phrase. “I am sneaking into hospital, hiding from fans and strangers and staff, being asshole and exposing Shane’s secret to his best friend, because I cannot even directly ask how he is and have someone give me an answer. My team will notice I am missing and I have to either get on plane and leave Shane for dead, or think of bullshit lie to keep me here that is believable enough that rumour will not spread. I have never spent more than a few hours with

him alone at one time and cannot save his name in my contacts or keep pictures on my phone.” The more he spoke, the angrier he got, running on fumes, everything pouring out in a rush of pent-up pressure snapping loose. “Everything we do is sneaking around, and lying, and pretending and вести себя так, будто я не влюблена в него-” *acting as if I’m not in love with him*, “-and I am so scared because my heart is outside my body and inside that hospital bed and *no one fucking knows*.”

For the first time that day - possibly for the first time ever - Pike didn’t look at Ilya with any form of dislike. There was still surprise, but most of all, he looked truly sad. Not only for the situation in general, but for Ilya, a heart breaking for the heart that was broken. “Jesus Christ,” He uttered, processing. “You’re serious.”

Ilya hadn’t even realised he was crying until he felt a tear roll down his cheek. He wiped it away quickly, pulling on the burnt-down filter of his cigarette before grinding it forcefully beneath his heel. “Nine years,” he affirmed, chin up, jaw squared, trying to keep more tears at bay. “Nine years and I cannot visit him in hospital. Do you see why we keep trying to end it? *You* are angry about us together, and you are his best friend. What would world think? He’d never be able to play hockey again.”

“And you?” Pike asked softly. “Your hockey career?”

“Fuck my career.” Ilya snarled. “Meaningless without him on the ice anyway.” He didn’t get into the fact that for Ilya, his very safety in his home country was on the line if they came out. It didn’t matter; Pike wouldn’t get it. Besides, with Shane in a medically induced coma, Russia almost felt meaningless too.

Pike kept looking at him, wordless. It made Ilya feel exposed, like an ant beneath a magnifying glass on a hot summer’s day. “What?”

“Nothing. It’s just... A lot to process.” He cleared his throat, moving from next to Ilya to directly opposite him. “Rozanov may be an asshole, but... It’s nice to finally meet you, ‘Lily’.” He held his hand out to shake. Ilya’s instinctive reaction was to consider it a trap, but out of options, he cautiously unfolded his arms and shook Pike’s hand. Enemies calling for a temporary truce during unprecedented times of crisis were not unheard of.

Pike’s phone ringing cut the silence. *Yuna Hollander* flashed on the screen. “I gotta take this.” They nodded to one another, Pike ducking inside as Ilya let out a long, agonising breath, slumping down the brick wall to squat on the floor.

It was bitterly cold out, even for Ilya’s standards, but the alcove provided a small sheltered reprieve from the loud winds thrashing above him. Every private moment Ilya had away from the public eye felt wasted if Shane wasn’t there with him. Even now, his palm itched with the need to call Shane, to speak with him, to hide behind flirting and Russian until the eternal ache inside of Ilya was soothed.

He let the tears fall. Slowly at first, silently, until they became full-on suffocating heaves. Loud, heavy, ugly things that stole his breath and punctured his insides. Fingers clutching to his necklace, he looked to the murky wind-whipped sky and prayed for Shane’s health, for Shane’s safety, for Pike not to come looking for him and find him a snivelling wreck.

Eventually, with wobbly knees and shaky hands, he took a steadying breath and stood. With all the courage he could muster, with Shane on his mind and his mother in his heart, he walked back into the fray.

## Chapter End Notes

Next chapter coming tomorrow!

as always comments + kudos are appreciated. i cannot wait to join you all in the cottage

# Chapter 4: Earth

## Chapter Summary

Ilya remembers when he and Shane discussed their future in a hotel room in 2016.

## Chapter Notes

Content warning for NSFW content near the beginning (as all good HR content must have in some capacity).

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

There was pulsating heat sliding between their bodies, sweaty and slick as Ilya pounded hard into Shane. They were facing one another, Shane's limber body, loosened from years of yoga and pilates, bent backwards at the waist as Ilya pushed his legs back, Shane's ankles locking behind Ilya's neck. The angle was deep, Shane always so tight, always flexing so beautifully around Ilya, his jaw slack as he was pinned to the mattress by the force of Ilya draped on top of him.

It was the start of 2016, barely a few days into January, but early training schedules in unlikely aligned cities had permitted them exactly one unexpected night in a hotel room in Toronto.

Lost in pleasure, Shane was making the most sinfully melodic string of noises Ilya had ever heard. Though he thought that every time he heard Shane come undone at his fingertips. Ilya could feel himself getting close, his necklace swinging between them as he lowered himself onto his left forearm, bracketed around Shane's head. The move grounded him, zeroed his focus down to their shared breath, like they were the only two left on earth.

"Mhm, want to see fun trick?" Teased Ilya, his nose against Shane's, nipping his cheeks and jaw uncoordinatedly. When Shane moaned - possibly in affirmation, possibly only in pleasure without hearing Ilya at all - Ilya stopped the merciless jacking of Shane's cock he'd been doing at a brutal pace.

The twisted part of Ilya that got off on their power play preened at the helpless little displeased whimper of complaint Shane made as he took his hand away completely. He ignored them, moving his now-free hand to push Shane's thigh further back, probably near-painfully so, an illicit thrill flashing through him like lightning as he watched Shane's eyes cross over. Ilya loved seeing Shane like this, so blissed out he didn't even consider the fact he had hands of his own, content with being pliable putty in Ilya's grasp instead.

Not a minute later, Shane's breathing choked off, and he came wordlessly all over his stomach. It was the last push Ilya needed, and thirty seconds later, he was coming inside of Shane, thrusting through the aftershocks even as the man below him writhed oversensitively.

"See, good trick, yes?" Unable to resist, Ilya pressed a soft kiss to Shane's lips. "Hands free."

He knew Shane was far gone when he didn't even have it in him to call Ilya an asshole or tell him to fuck off in that grumpy little voice he always used. It was replaced by a tetchy inarticulate sound, which Ilya adored equally as much. They kissed once more, then Ilya rolled off of Shane, standing immediately to grab a washcloth and wipe them down, Shane first. Always Shane first.

They laid there for a while, basking in the afterglow, intertwined with one another, Shane lying weightily on Ilya's chest. Ilya permitted himself the danger of playing with Shane's hair, idly fiddling with the dark strands as he waited for Shane to feel more like himself again. Ilya couldn't pinpoint exactly when, but at some point, his favourite part of his secret rendezvous with Shane had changed. It wasn't the sex - though that was most certainly a highlight. It was this. The silent calm, just the two of them in the eye of the storm. Each time they met up, they stayed together a fraction longer, taking that little bit more of a risk just to have a few more seconds as one. With Shane in his arms, Ilya was anchored, rooted to the earth, floating adrift whenever they were apart.

"R'znu?" A drowsy Shane spoke into Ilya's skin. Ilya stroked Shane's head once, grounding his grasp gently, yet firmly, on the base of Shane's skull as he cocked his head to the side to get a better look at Shane's beautiful face.

"Да, that is me, Hollander." He smiled, appreciating the sleepy look in Shane's eyes. "Seems I did not quite fuck your brains out." A puff of laughter danced hot breath over Ilya's right pec. "Oh well, there is always next time."

*No, there isn't always next time.* A voice scolded him in the back of his head. *Do not get comfortable thinking there will be a next time.*

"Hmm... What time is it?" Shane asked, shifting a little. Ilya had to concentrate to avoid succumbing to the urge to pull his arms tightly around Shane, to stop him from potentially leaving. The time for control was over. Their entanglement was sex, and more recently, cuddling. Sometimes both, but never more.

"Almost 2AM." Ilya replied. "Sleeping beauty need more pretty princess rest?" He teased, because it was the only way he could ask Shane to stay in his bed for a little while longer.

"I should get back, 'fore Hayden notices I'm still missing."

Ilya placed a kiss to the top of Shane's head. "Say you met sexy Russian lady and you went back to her place." It was a stupid comment, masked by levity, because they shouldn't spend a full night together. Not just couldn't - *shouldn't*. There was no road such behaviour could travel down that would lead anywhere good. "He will believe. Russian girls are very beautiful, very hard to resist."

“Hmph.” Shane mused noncommittally, though there was a twinge to it, less boneless humming, more contemplative. So many questions teetered on the tip of Ilya’s tongue. He hated having to dance around things so much. *Will you stay tonight? When will I see you again? Who else do you have sex with? Do you like women? Do you miss me as much as I miss you?* But none of them were safe or sane to ask, so he didn’t. For the moment, Shane stayed put, and that was a good enough consolation prize.

Before he could think better of it, Ilya repositioned them, shuffling down so they were eye level, curled into one another. He twined his legs with Shane’s and raised a hand to gently stroke his gorgeous starry spattering of freckles. “Tell me what you are thinking about.” Ilya requested, because if he couldn’t crawl inside of Shane’s skin and live there, this was the next best thing.

“Women.”

Ilya snorted a laugh, then laughed more when Shane’s eyes widened in shock, as if he wasn’t the one to have said it. “No, wait, I didn’t mean-”

“-No, by all means, Hollander. Get best dick of your life then immediately start thinking about pussy instead.” He was still laughing, because Shane looked mortified, and it was the harsh smack of reality Ilya needed to remind himself that there was no real attachment between them. Even when it felt like it, even when it felt like he was tethered to Shane so strongly that that bond was the only thing mooring him to the earth. “You have no interest in fucking me, so you must get fix somewhere.”

“Would you want me to fuck you?” Shane asked, slightly nervously.

It wasn’t often that Ilya bottomed. It was fine, but it didn’t really do it for him. Especially with Shane, who was so much more responsive on the receiving end than anyone of any gender he’d ever slept with. He shook his head. “No. Why would I deny myself pleasure of you cross-eyed on my cock?”

That wry, embarrassed smile was back. “I do not get cross-eyed!”

“You do!” Ilya exclaimed, giggling. Or, close to giggling, because Russians also did not giggle like lovestruck school children. “*Oh, yes, Rozanov, fuck me harder! Make me come, no hands.*” He attempted an awful Canadian accent, delighting in the laugh it pulled from Shane.

“*Da, Hollander, you feel so good. You are best player in league! Blyat!*” Shane mimicked back, affecting a Slavic twang that Ilya found both charming and incredibly hot.

“О, вы русский?” *Oh, you are Russian?* Ilya snorted at Shane’s impression, eyebrows raised, though made a note to keep a closer eye on what he was saying in Russian around Shane. He was sharp enough to pick up the odd word or phrase if repeated regularly. All it would take would be for Ilya to say the wrong word just enough times for Shane to be able to plug it into an online translator. Thus exposing Ilya as the idiot struggling to separate no-strings sex from foolish emotions that he was. “This is what you think of me?”

“Cat’s out the bag.”

“What bag? What cat?”

“It’s a-”

“-a ridiculous saying, yes, I am sure.” Ilya rolled his eyes. “Не всё коту масленица.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Translation is ‘*not every day is Maslenitsa for the cat.*’ Means all good things end.”

“Wow, that’s cheery.” Shane deadpanned.

“Is Russian.” Ilya shrugged. “There is second part. Будет и Великий пост. ‘*Lent is also coming.*’”

“And that’s... Good?”

Another shrug. “Depends. Some say it means things are final. Good things end, cannot be avoided, reality must set in. Others, they think it means good things do not last, but nor do bad ones, more hopeful. Most people just use it generally. ‘*This won’t last forever.*’ Interpretation is yours.”

“What was it again? The full thing.”

“Не всё коту масленица. Будет и Великий пост.”

Very unsuccessfully, Shane attempted to mimic the words. Gibberish had never sounded so seductive; Ilya had to kiss it off his face. He then pulled Shane into his arms at the same time as Shane leaned forward to burrow his head under Ilya’s chin, two magnets drawn together. They held each other close, not for long enough - they’d never have long enough - but *just* enough to lose track of time. Seconds slipped into minutes, cocooned in Ilya’s temporary bed. Being a hockey player was so busy, so loud. The fans cheering, sticks bashing, cameras flashing. Chirping and flirting and bantering. Planes and clubs and brand deals, photoshoots, press releases. Yet in the heart of the hurricane, Ilya felt safely tucked away from it all with Shane, animistically enshrined in their own microcosmic reality. They clung to one another, Ilya gently pressing his lips into Shane’s hair; Shane tracing patterns reverently across Ilya’s skin. Everything was blissfully still, silent.

“This won’t last forever,” Shane whispered into Ilya’s chest, fragile and small.

“No.” What exactly ‘*this*’ referred to dangled pendulously. He needed to bring them back down, before they inevitably smacked into the ground. “It won’t.”

They both spoke simultaneously.

“Maybe I could stay f-”

“Is late. You should go.”

Shane froze in Ilya's arms. It hurt immensely, which meant it was the right thing to do. Hurt a little now, instead of hurting a lot more later. *Just sex, just sex, just sex.*

That night - well, technically that morning - he refrained from kissing Shane goodbye. It took three days for his once-steadfast resolve to break and start texting 'Jane' again.

Over a year on, as Shane laid in the hospital bed, Ilya was once again confronted with the awful reality that waiting was the very worst part of any situation.

Tension was different. Tension was great. It was charged - sexually, romantically, angrily. On or off the ice, there was a volatile push and pull that dynamically oscillated ever-so deliciously. Waiting was slow and torturous. Stagnant - no, worse than stagnant, because stagnant meant no change at all. Waiting was like being stuck in sinking mud, being pulled down slowly, with no one coming to the rescue. Even as the hospital bustled around him, as his phone pinged relentlessly from teammates finally noticing his absence, Ilya was isolated in the centre of a storm that had turned into a blizzard. Feet glued to the ground, unable to move.

"Can we see him?" Ilya had asked Pike, the first time they'd ran into each other again. He'd take any sign of life he could get. Even if it was Shane unconscious on a private ward, attached to tubes and wearing a hospital gown.

Pike shook his head. "Too much risk. Infection, stimulation. He's not just lying there; staff are monitoring him closely. It's safer for him if we're out here."

It didn't feel safer, but Ilya listened anyway.

The liminality of the waiting room didn't help matters. Sterile fluorescent lighting made it hard to accurately judge the passage of time. As much as Ilya didn't want to bond with Pike, he had to give him credit that he was being far kinder to Ilya than he expected - or really, deserved, at least from Pike's perspective. When Shane's parents arrived, as sweet-natured and doting as they seemed on TV, though exponentially more distressed for their only child, Pike was the one to make excuses for Ilya's presence.

"It's customary for the team captain of the opposing team to visit the injured player-"

"-but I thought that was only after they were in recovery." Yuna had challenged.

"Raiders are supposed to be flying out early, this was his only opportunity. Now, the guy's asked to stay 'til Shane wakes up, something about respect or Russian pride or whatever, I don't know. Told him as long as he's polite and stays out of trouble, he can stick around. Don't worry, I'm keeping an eye on him."

Ilya knew if that were his family... Well, his family wouldn't have visited, for starters, but in the hypothetical scenario in which they had, they'd be telling the loitering rival captain to get out. That they didn't care about his feelings, or some misguided sense of right and wrong. It was a private family affair, so *fuck off*. But of course, Shane's parents were as kind and forgiving as the son they had raised, so they permitted Ilya to stay with only a raised eyebrow and a socially polite offering to go get everyone a cup of coffee.

“Thank you.” Ilya mouthed to Pike behind David Hollander’s shoulder. He then resumed holding his head in his hands, primed with the excuse that he was tired if anyone asked. No one did.

Over the hours, the hellish hours in that perpetual waiting room, Ilya’s mindset readjusted. It shifted to this new reality. The one rooted to the hard plastic chair, immovable. He memorised patterns in the ceiling, counted the nurses as they passed, knee bouncing anxiously. His mind raced with all sorts of scenarios. Shane permanently injured, unable to play hockey ever again. Or worse, unable to do basic functions by himself. What if he lost his memory? Lost every kiss, every touch, every heated exchange of looks in a crowded room they’d collected like precious mosaic fragments over nine years? Perhaps that would be for the best. The injury didn’t change anything about their situation. Ilya would still face ostracisation and potential imprisonment in Russia if they came out - he’d never lay flowers on his mother’s grave again. Shane would still be forever changed in the public eye, his legendary player status tarnished by a secret gay love affair. Amnesia would mean Shane could wipe the slate clean, and Ilya could carry all their pain with him, let it weigh him down, down, down to the earth, in the same way it had taken his mother.

“Не всё коту масленица. Будет и Великий пост.” He mumbled, lost in thought.

“Did you say something?” Pike asked. Ilya hadn’t realised he’d sat back down. The tip of a sneaker kicked Ilya’s right shoe. “Rozanov?”

Ilya raised his head, inhaling sharply. “Just a Russian saying.”

“What is it?”

Westerners were so infuriatingly nosy. “Means ‘it won’t last forever.’”

“That’s nice, I like that.” Said Pike fondly. In an off-character moment that immediately threw Ilya off kilter, Pike clapped a comforting hand on Ilya’s back. “It won’t last forever. He’ll wake up sooner or later. He has to.”

Some time later, around 1AM, Ilya had pulled off his hoodie to create a makeshift pillow and laid across the plastic chairs. He was the only one still waiting. David and Yuna Hollander had checked into a nearby hotel, with both the hospital and Pike under strict instructions to call them the moment an update was available, no matter how unsociable the hour. Pike had gone back to his own hotel room, and had tried to encourage Ilya to do the same.

“They’ve said he’ll be out until at least the morning. Get some proper rest, Rozanov. It won’t do him or you any good to see you all dishevelled and gross.”

“If I go back to my hotel room, it will be much harder to sneak back in. More people will be here, media will wait outside. Teammates will see me and ask where I have been, where I am going, why I am not getting on flight. Best if I stay here.” The fact that the logistics were secondary, that Ilya couldn’t bring himself to leave even if he’d had a secret tunnel direct to his suite that guaranteed not a soul would spot him, was irrelevant. “I will buy cleaning things from the convenience store downstairs.”

That awful pitying look that Ilya was beginning to associate heavily with Pike was back. No wonder Shane liked him so much; Pike wore his heart on his sleeve. There was no second-guessing his emotions or opinions on something at any time. “You’ve had to think of these things a lot, haven’t you?”

Ilya said nothing, because it was a stupid question with a very obvious answer. An obvious answer that risked setting the tears off again if he affirmed it aloud. So instead, he settled uncomfortably on the plastic chairs, raised ridges digging into his flesh, neck stiff from the angle, and waited for a miracle.

## Chapter End Notes

final chapter tomorrow :^)

# Chapter 5: Water

## Chapter Summary

Shane wakes up.

## Chapter Notes

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

At the edge of a small hole cut in a frozen-over lake, Ilya Rozanov prepared to slide in.

It was March 2017, and Ilya's father was dead. No one knew, except the Rozanovs themselves, the Raiders' coach, and Svetlana. Ilya wanted to talk to Shane, which was precisely why he hadn't called him. In Moscow, Ilya was a fly, tightrope walking a well-connected web. One wrong move, and the spider would descend, swallowing him whole. News would spread about his absence from the league; Shane would call eventually. He'd brave the conversation then, sequestered away somewhere private. A place where he wouldn't have to be the first to share his emotions. Not again.

Despite the thick layer of snow that covered most non-gritted surfaces, the peak of ice swimming season was very much past. The thrill-seeking novices had moved on to safer pastimes, and the hobbyists would be switching to safer cold open waters. But Ilya's father had been dead for three days, and he'd been in Russia for 30 hours, and the remaining living, breathing skeletons in Ilya's closet were already driving him crazy. Constantly demanding more, more, more. March wasn't an ideal time for extreme swimming in Russia - 0°C out, the ice was thawing, becoming unstable - but Ilya was itching to go somewhere he knew what little family he had left wouldn't follow. He wondered if his mother felt the same itch.

It didn't matter how long he spent in the Americas; every time he returned to Russia was like jumping headfirst into quicksand. The contradictoriness of it all infuriated him. The US & Canada were so unlike anywhere in Europe, sometimes he felt like he was at a theme park rather than in a real place. Which was fun - so, *so* much fun - until it wasn't. Until everything was overwhelming, and played by a set of rules and customs that Ilya was still constantly struggling to learn. Until he wanted to say something but couldn't find the words, and yearned with a deep-seated ache to be understood, to hear and engage with his own mother tongue, his own rules, his own customs once again. Then, he'd fly back to Russia, and he'd remember that even if they spoke the same language, he wasn't understood there, either. A shadowy sense of foreboding would settle in, and it seemed to Ilya as if he'd never left at all. As if being an MLH captain in Boston was some highly vivid fantasy; a drawn-out delusion slipping through his fingers like running water. Of course, he missed professional hockey in Russia, but he found himself missing the parts of the Americas that frustrated him, too. He'd miss their ridiculous over-the-top commercials and weak alcohol and disgustingly delicious food - even the annoying buzz of English.

All of which to say: no matter where Ilya was, he was alone, unfulfilled, and ultimately, deeply unhappy.

There was only one place that felt like home to Ilya. It wasn't Russia, or the US, or Canada. It was with Shane. The fact that Russians did not get sentimentally cliché like this was irrelevant, because Ilya didn't define his existence by one dimension anymore. Wherever Ilya was, if Shane wasn't there too, he was homesick.

As an athletic child, he'd taken a liking to an array of sports and high-octane activities. In an otherwise numb existence, it was one of the only things that shocked him into feeling alive. Especially after his mother died. His father had called ice swimming character building, and against his better judgment, Ilya agreed with him. Alexei had hated it, screamed bloody murder the first time they'd been forced to try, and gave up after ten seconds. Ilya had also hated it, but his father hadn't permitted him the same luxury to give it up as he had with Alexei. A decision no doubt motivated by favouritism, though of course, neither child was their fathers' favourite. He simply pretended to have a preference. To a young Ilya, Alexei was the favourite, because he hadn't been forced to do sport after sport, to shock himself in freezing waters until his limbs went numb and skin was set ablaze. To a young Alexei, Ilya was the favourite, because he was the one who had his father's faith. The one who was pushed to thrive, to succeed, to be drafted, while Alexei spiralled into mediocrity and drug abuse. They were both right, and they were both wrong. Ilya had eventually grown to enjoy ice swimming, though.

Many, many years had passed since Ilya had last gone ice swimming; the season didn't align with his hockey schedule. Shane had once taught Ilya about 'silver linings', which he thought applied here.

"Every cloud." Shane had said, pulling his clothes on as he prepared to leave Ilya's hotel room.

"What cloud? What saying could this possibly be?"

"'Every cloud has a silver lining.' Means there's always some good to be found in every bad."

"Hmm, you say this when you lose at hockey?" Ilya had taunted, lounging back on the bed relaxedly. "Was I your silver cloud tonight?"

"Silver lining." Shane corrected. His earnestness was adorable. "Yes."

With Shane's goofy smile and endearing freckles burning in his mind, Ilya gradually lowered himself feet-first into the ice. It took great restraint to hold back a gasp, hands gripping the edge of the entrance as he focused on breathing evenly. The piercing chill passed by quickly, moving straight into the familiar burning sensation Ilya knew intimately. Intense adrenaline surged through him, each nerve ending simultaneously on fire and completely numb. Every racing thought in his mind was silenced instantly, pure relief in the blessed silence.

He only planned to stay in the ice for a minute or two - a bit too rusty to stay for the full five minutes he used to do as a teen - when suddenly, his elbows gave way. His entire body

slammed down into the water, head under the surface in seconds.

Terror detonated like a bomb inside him. Years of training and discipline vanished as instinct took over, swimming up, up, up - and hitting a thick sheet of ice. He flailed his limbs uncoordinatedly, flailing in a blind panic. Ilya swam... Somewhere. Up, down, left, right. He wasn't sure. The hole was just here. He had just fallen through. Where the fuck had it gone? Why couldn't he find his way out?

Lungs stinging and vision spotting with oxygen deprivation, Ilya pounded on the ice above him, praying someone, anyone would be able to save him. But no one was around, and the world was getting darker.

“Помогите!” *Help*, he screamed, even as water flooded his lungs, the harsh sting burning and suffocating all at once. “Помогите мне!” *Help me*. His arms weakened. Against all logic, he was still screaming. Wait - how was he screaming underwater? “Shane!” He begged. “*Shane!*”

Ilya gasped awake like a drowning man surfacing for air. In a way, he was. “Shane?”

“Rozanov!” Exclaimed Pike, who was shaking Ilya's shoulder. “Jesus Christ, you sleep like a dead man. How were you even able to rest on those chairs?”

The dread from what he was quickly realising was just a nightmare sat heavy in his bones. “I am Russian.” He croaked in way of an answer, throat dry.

Pike, the asshole he was, heard the scratchiness in Ilya's voice and handed him a bottle of water. “Here.”

“Stop being nice to me. Is weird.”

“Well fuck you then.” Pike chirped, still holding out the water bottle. Ilya, still groggy, took it and drank gratefully. “Listen, Rozanov. Shane's awake.”

It was like a switch flipped. Ilya was instantly alert. “Why not lead with that? You are idiot?”

“Ilya Rozanov is not a morning person. Noted.” He assisted Ilya, stiff from the hard plastic, with sitting up, then sat down beside him. “He's been awake for a few hours, but they only cleared visiting an hour ago.” A genuine smile crossed Pike's face in tandem with light laughter. “I saw him first; he's high off his mind.”

Ilya matched his expression, grinning ear-to-ear. He couldn't help it. Shane was awake. “And he is okay?”

“Concussion and a fractured collarbone, but cognitively, he's doing great. Nothing he won't recover from.” The best news Ilya had ever heard in his life, and it was delivered to him by *Hayden Pike* of all people. Ilya could have sobbed from relief. “Yuna and David are with him now. That was fun, by the way: explaining why you were asleep in the waiting room.” He added with a sarcastic lilt.

“Ah, yes. Thank you.” A reminder that all was not well. Shane was alive, and that was what mattered most, but it wasn’t all that mattered.

“I did it for Shane, too. He deserves to make choices on things of this magnitude on his own terms. Besides, I know he hates lying to his parents, so either this *thing* that you two have-” he gestured wildly with his fingers “-is nothing, or it’s everything.”

“Is nothing.” Ilya insisted. Part instinctive, part protective.

“Sure,” Pike dismissed with a quick eye-roll. He leaned a little closer. “Y’know, he asked after you.”

“What?” Ilya blurted out, stunned.

“One of the first things he said.” He theatrically recounted a snippet of their conversation, raising his voice high for Shane. “‘*Hayyyden, what’s going on?*’ ‘Shane, you’re in the hospital. You were hit on the ice.’ ‘*Oh. Is Ilya okay? Tell him I’m okay, he’ll be worried.*’”

Like he was jumping straight into ice water, joy and fear gripped Ilya all at once. He pushed down the part of him that delighted in hearing Shane’s first drugged-up thoughts were of him, directing his attention to more pressing matters. “This is not good. What if he talks about me to nurses, doctors, his parents? You should go in there with them now, just in case. Moderate. Referee.”

“Relax, they’ll just think he’s high and making shit up. He also asked me if I knew who Hayden Pike was, then told me he really wants to be drafted into the MLH one day, so he’s not exactly making much sense.” The reassurance didn’t help, but he didn’t push back. Ilya knew Pike wouldn’t get it. No one could possibly get it, except a sober Shane. They’d managed to keep their secret underwraps for nearly a decade. Even the tiniest leaks could cause their little lifeboat to flood. “I know if this-” he gestured between himself and Ilya, “-hadn’t happened, and he told me he was having some secret gay affair with Ilya Rozanov, I’d have laughed and assumed he was on some really good stuff.”

“Ssh!” Hushed Ilya insistently. “Shut the fuck up. Less noise.”

Pike peered around at the empty hallway and continued, volume lowered. “Have you told your coach you’re not flying back to Boston?”

“Yes.” He’d texted them the night before. “Said I was grieving my father and wanted space to be alone, then travel back separately.” LeClaire hadn’t been happy, but he’d accepted the excuse, which was enough. “I will need to leave tonight.”

“I can’t imagine having to leave Jackie in the hospital.”

Ilya glared daggers at him. “You think I want to?” He snapped.

“That’s not what I meant!” Pike held his hands up in surrender. “I meant- wow, I still can’t believe this is a thing.” A deep breath. Another empathetic gesture, this time stroking Ilya’s arm. Ilya bristled somewhat at the touch, but let him go through the motions anyway. He

absentmindedly wondered if Pike was this touchy-feely with Shane. "I only meant that I can't believe you and Shane have been dealing with this much for so long on your own. It just feels so unfair." Ilya had to bite his tongue to avoid making a sarcastic comment. "Are you sure you can't find another excuse to stay for a few more days?"

The question was well-intended, but it set Ilya's teeth on edge. *You think I haven't already thought of that?* Ilya wanted to lash out. *You think I wouldn't do that if I could?* "Think it through, Pike." Ilya settled on instead, exasperated. "This is not my city. To the world, I do not have house here, or team here, or any ties here when there isn't a game playing that would make my staying here understandable. Suddenly, Shane Hollander takes a hit on the ice, and then his rival plays like shit, disappears, is seen by dozens of nurses on Hollander's ward, and does not return to Boston for days. How does that look?"

"It looks like..." Pike clearly wanted to protest; to find a simple, heterosexual explanation for the series of events. He trailed off in defeat heartbreakingly fast, switching gears. "...It doesn't immediately look romantic. I mean, I'm his best friend, and I hardly believed you when you told me straight to my face."

"Does not matter. Perhaps there is no fallout now, but it would just be the start. A little slip up here, a cause for suspicion there... Suddenly, the boat is sinking, and we both drown." Ilya finished the rest of Pike's water bottle and crushed the empty disposable plastic in his fist. "I can bluff polite team captain visit until the end of the day. Maybe tomorrow morning. Then I will not see him until he is healed and ready to play next season." Pike looked downcast, but Ilya would not allow himself to feel sorry or self-pitying about it. Shane was going to recover, which was more important than Ilya's sadness at not seeing him for the rest of the season and all through summer. They weren't strangers to being apart; he could lick his wounds later. "Is okay. Is what we do."

"Are you still planning on breaking things off with him?"

"Yes." *No.* "No." *Yes.* "I should."

"You keep saying that."

"*You* keep not understanding it." Ilya was getting incredibly frustrated now. Shane was awake, and all Ilya wanted to do was speak to him. Not be grilled by Pike on their doomed affair. "This isn't a fairytale where the power of '*friendship*' can overcome all obstacles. This would end our careers and tarnish our legacy. They would arrest me in Russia."

"When Shane was still unconscious, you didn't care about any of that. Hasn't that taught you anything?"

"It taught me it is too late for me. I would throw away my career for Shane. I will not make him throw away his for me."

"And you think it's fair for you to decide that for him?"

"None of this is fair!" Ilya exclaimed. They were going around in circles. "This is not known behaviour to Canadians, but I do not make decisions based on what is 'fair'."

Pike looked crestfallen, as if he had any right to be. “You’re making a mistake.”

“You do not even like me.”

“He loves you.”

That only made things worse. “How would you know?”

“I know his nauseatingly-smitten face every time ‘Lily’ texts. You’re not making him do anything, Rozanov. He can decide for himself.” Pike shook his head in disbelief. “The way he looked when he asked for you... Sounds to me like he already has.”

The last time Ilya dropped the puck at Shane’s stick, he ran for the hills. He was sick of this conversation, of this constant predicament. All he knew for certain was that he was weak, and above all else, he *needed* to see Shane. He stood up, aching knees still stiff, and stretched his arms. “I need to clean up before I see him.” He didn’t give Pike the chance to say anything, walking off with his hoodie back on, hood pulled up over his head. Thankfully, he wasn’t recognised when buying toiletries, and the bathroom stall was private enough to brush his teeth, wash his face, and apply deodorant without any onlookers.

His phone buzzed.

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** Hey Rozanov, uh, it’s Pike. I copied your number from Shane’s phone

[MESSAGE UNSENT]

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** hey rozanov it’s me. Jane gave me your number.

**ILYA:** What are you doing

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** Look idk how this works. feel free to give me a secret code name contact or delete this or whatever

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** just thought I’d let you know David and Yuna have left for a bit, if you wanted to go see him

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** i mean. Not david and yuna

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** shit

[MESSAGE UNSENT]

[MESSAGE UNSENT]

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** I’ve asked the nurses to knock first before entering. Privacy.

At last, the fire within him reignited, sparked by the rush of urgency to see Shane.

**ILYA:** ok

**ILYA:** thank you

**ILYA:** delete my number

Then, after a beat, he followed it up with:

**ILYA:** thank you for everything Hayden

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** [Heart reacted to a message]

**UNKNOWN NUMBER:** you're not so bad Ilya

**ILYA:** do not ruin it.

Whilst it had been incredibly difficult to hold back from running through the halls, Ilya found himself approaching Shane's door with a nervous slowness. His hands shook slightly of their own accord - barely perceptible, but filled with trepidation. He swallowed anxiously, feeling like there was glass in his throat, as a clammy palm turned the handle to Shane's hospital room.

Unlike the apprehension that swelled within Ilya, Shane was incredibly relaxed. It was the most beautiful thing Ilya had ever seen in his life. "*Ilya!*" He beamed excitedly. His right arm was in a sling, and his hair was slightly static from where it rubbed against the pillows that were propping him up. Shane radiated a calm, care-free demeanour that Ilya had never seen from him before, eyes half-lidded yet bright as he shot Ilya a dopey smile. Ilya's heart hammered.

"Shane," Ilya sighed, relieved to finally see him, to finally have verifiable proof with his own eyes that Shane was awake. The knot in the pit of his stomach remained, but a huge weight was lifted from his chest. It took great fortitude not to run to Shane's side and pull him into his arms. "You are okay?"

"I am now that you're here," and *oh*. Ilya knew that wasn't simply flirting; Shane meant it. Shane was equal measures hot and cute at the best of times, but now he had no mask to hide behind, and Ilya was unsure what to do with Shane's every unfiltered thought. He wanted to keep them, to store them forever, but it was a risk - everything was a risk. Perhaps Russians did blush, just a little. "Apparently I got hit. Did you see it?" His words were combining, inflecting up and down like waves of the ocean.

"Yes," and *it nearly killed me, too*. "Marleau sends his apologies; he feels terrible about what happened." Marleau probably had texted Ilya something along those lines, but he hadn't bothered to check. If he hadn't, Ilya would needle him until he did apologise. It was the only way Ilya would be able to stop himself from punching him.

"Yowch." Shane grimaced overexaggeratedly, almost cartoon-like. Ilya huffed a small laugh, enamoured. "Hey, why are you so far away? Hey..." He elongated his vowels, waving grabby hands in Ilya's direction.

Shane was a galaxy, and Ilya was the sun orbiting him, helpless to resist the gravitational pull to be at his side. Sheer relief washed over him when their fingers intertwined. “Yes...” Shane drawled, starry freckles standing out against a redshift hue. Ilya smiled lovingly, feeling the same way. It was the first real breath he’d been able to take since before the game. “Better.”

“You scared me,” Ilya confessed. His eyes kept roaming over Shane, greedily taking him in. The last few hours - the longest hours of Ilya’s life - had let Shane slip away. Just like the Americas did when he returned to Russia, Ilya had grieved both their secret moments and the life they had never gotten the chance to live. Staring at Shane, face still red, eyes unfocused yet somehow boring directly into Ilya, he knew his father was right. Ilya was a lazy, selfish, spoiled man. He’d just gotten Shane back; there was no way he couldn’t indulge himself now that they were together again. He could beat himself up later, make plans later, ruin things *later*. Right then, he needed Shane - needed to commit him to memory. To study every inch and remember every twist and line, to prove he was real. That he wouldn’t slip through Ilya’s fingers too. “I thought... Bad things.”

“Oh no!” Shane pouted, bottom lip sticking out comically. “Why?” A little quirk of the head like a confused dog punched a laugh out of Ilya, cheeks warm.

“No reason,” Ilya shook his head. “Not anymore.” He indulged the urge to stroke Shane’s cheek gently, memorising every curve of his face. Shane leaned into the touch like Ilya’s palm was moulded just for him. It was.

“I’ve got a concussion.” Shane stated matter-of-factly.

“You do.”

“‘nd a broken collarbone.”

“Yes.”

“An-a concussion.”

It was unfair how funny Shane - Mr. Boring - really was. “Thank you for letting me know.”

“Did they tell you?”

“Who? The nurses?”

“Medics. Told ‘em to tell you I’m okay.”

“You did *what*?” Ilya hoped it was some mixed-up memory Shane’s drugged-up mind was making up. An even deeper primal part of Ilya hoped it was true. The sweet expression on Shane’s face tinged with distress, so Ilya hushed him with a brush of his thumb over his scrunched-up nose. “They told me Shane, do not worry.” He lied.

Shane’s face smoothed out. “Good.” He sighed, relieved. “You came to see me.” He sounded awestruck.

“Of course,” Ilya pulled up a chair one-handed so he could sit closer to Shane. “Я иду туда, куда идешь ты.” *I go where you go.*

“Huh?”

“I said this is celebrity visit. Montreal Metros' captain was too busy, so they paid extra for the best player to come instead.”

“Je suis tellement contente que tu sois là.” It didn't surprise Ilya one bit that, even on heavy painkillers, Shane easily switched between languages. “Hey! J'ai dit que j'étais très heureuse que tu sois là!” The middle of his brow creased with a cute frown. A grin split Ilya's face in two.

“I don't understand you, милая.” *Sweetheart.* With a cautious glance at the door, which rudely had a small window built into the frame, he leaned forward to chastely kiss the frustration off of Shane's face.

“S'okay, Ilya speaks Russian, too. So hot.”

*Fuck it.* He kissed him again, a smirk forming devilishly. “Неужели?” *Really?*

Shane's eyes had briefly slipped shut. When Ilya pulled back, one hand still caressing Shane's jaw, Shane's eyes lit up once more. “*Ilya!* You're here!”

“I need to find out where I can buy whatever they have given you.” He also had to doubly-ensure he never ended up injured like Shane. There was no way he'd be able to refrain from babbling about his arch-rival like a fool to anyone who would listen - not in any language.

“I'm sorry I didn't text you last night.” Shane sat up a little, stretching. “I think it was last night? How long have I been here?”

“A little under 24 hours.” The timespan felt so short in retrospect. Less than a day, yet Ilya had lived a hundred lifetimes since. “Is okay. Everything is okay.” The truth - or lack thereof - in that statement was unimportant when they were in the palms of each other's hands.

“I'd been really looking forward to it.”

“Me too.” *Next time*, he wanted to say, but didn't. A lot could change in the next six months before they saw each other again. “No matter.”

“Yes matter!” Shane pouted again. “Nothing matters more than you.”

“*Hollander.*” Ilya warned reflexively. They were flying too close to the sun. He knew Shane didn't mean it anyway; hockey was more important than anything to him.

“*Ilya.*” Shane countered. “I mean it. You're my...” he scowled.

“Rival.”

“No, not that.”

“Sexy top?”

“No! Fuck. What’s the word?”

How the tables had turned. “You ask wrong person about English word.”

Ilya could see the cogs turning in Shane’s brain. He wanted to help him, but couldn’t, not necessarily because his English was limited, but because there wasn’t a word that could accurately describe them.

“...Whatever. I wanted to ask you something. I had this whole plan.”

Plans were not good. Plans were dangerous. They played everything by ear, dancing on a knife’s edge. Planning laid foundations and set expectations, two things that neither of them could have together. “You should rest now.” He suggested weakly, hoping to divert Shane’s flighty attention.

But Shane was determined, and wholeheartedly candid. “Will you come to my cottage this summer?”

“Hollander-”

“-Don’t go to Russia.”

The request was so sincere that it knocked Ilya sideways. In the exposing light of day, in a hospital room, Shane’s heart rate monitor beeping steadily; Shane had crossed yet another one of their many invisible lines. Lines they kept crossing; goalposts they kept moving. Just like how Ilya had selfishly risked staying with Shane in hospital instead of flying back to Boston, Shane wanted them to break their routine; for Ilya to stay.

*Why not?* A small voice inside him whispered. Nothing was drawing him to Russia anymore, other than his mother’s resting place. His father was dead, his relationship with Alexei severed in all ways but financial. He wasn’t an American citizen, so he had to go back at some point, but would it be considered *that* weird if he stayed an extra week or two before flying back? No, of course not...

...If he was seen out and about in Boston, or vacationing with friends.

His absence from anywhere - the US or Russia - might not be noticed, but it also could speak volumes. One fan account to tweet ‘where’s Ilya Rozanov?’. One random Redditor to notice there were no outbound flights booked BOS-SVO under his name. One off-duty pap to snap a picture of them in Ottawa. A little slip was all it took, and the hospital stay was proof of that; of their recklessness. Shane stared at Ilya a fraction of a second too long in a game, and suddenly, Shane was injured, staff had seen them, Pike knew they were... whatever they were..., and Ilya was missing from Boston.

That was why not.

“Hollander. *Shane*-”

“Come to my house, it’s so private, no one will know...” Shane was high. He didn’t know what he was asking. Ilya tried to shush him again, but Shane merely grumbled, as if he couldn’t understand why Ilya wasn’t on board with his perfect plan. “We could have a week, or even two. It would be perfect. We’d be all alone, *together*.”

The contended smile on his face betrayed Shane’s delusional mindset. Alone, *together*. It was forbidden fruit, proffered by the serpent himself, and Ilya’s mouth watered tantalisingly with the urge to bite.

He couldn’t bring himself to say no, to break Shane’s heart as well as his own. Not while Shane was recovering in this state. Not when he wouldn’t even remember they’d had this conversation in the first place. “Maybe.” He lied, lips pressed into a thin line that he hoped resembled a smile, even as his chest ached. “Maybe.”

Ilya Rozanov burned, but Shane’s happy smile burned inside of Ilya brighter than anything ever had before.

Shane pushed upwards, trying to sit up further. Ilya’s hands were on him in an instant, steadying him on his good shoulder and elbow to pull him up. “Careful.” Ilya chided. “Do you need a nurse?”

“No. Just you.” He wobbled in his attempt to lean closer to Ilya. Ilya caught him, pulling Shane to his chest and tucking him under his chin.

Tears pricked the corner of Ilya’s eyes; he blinked them away. “Я тоже.” *Me too*. He inhaled sharply. “I should go. Back to Boston. Шоу должно продолжаться.” *The show must go on*.

“Don’t go.”

That was it. The dam broke, and every emotion Ilya had been repressing for 24 hours - for nine years - came crashing through. All the arguing, the back and forth with Pike, with Shane, with himself. All the raging elements at war inside of him, converging into a perfect storm. Yet the die was cast the moment the man he loved came back from the dead and told him to stay.

Ilya wrapped his arms tighter around Shane, rocking them gently.

He’d take the risk. He’d find some excuse. He’d stay for just one more day. Until he could talk to a sober Shane again and properly kiss him goodbye. Goodbye for now, not forever, because Ilya couldn’t lie to himself anymore. No matter what their future looked like - whether it was Ilya being tossed scraps of Shane for the rest of time, or they eventually drifted apart - Ilya knew he was never going to be the one to end things. He wasn’t strong enough, or selfless enough. He was desperately, hopelessly in love.

He placed a kiss to the top of Shane’s head. The monitor beeped steadily. Shane was warm, grounding. Ilya clung on tight.

“Okay.”

## Chapter End Notes

I had a lot of fun writing this :^) any comments or feedback appreciated.

Inspiration permitting, this won't be my last hollanov fic <3

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