

at the lonely end of the rink, you and me

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by [vahosi](#)

Summary

The first time Ilya coughed up a flower, he was kneeling over a toilet in the penthouse of the Fontainebleau Las Vegas, for entirely the *wrong fucking reason* to be kneeling over a toilet in Vegas.

There was no point in trying to pretend it wasn't happening. He wasn't an idiot. Hadn't he seen his own mother waste away, coughing up clumps of clean white chamomile stained shocking scarlet? Hadn't he *known*, on some level, that he was fated to follow in her footsteps one day, to throw his entire heart and soul into loving a person who would never — *could* never — love him back?

No, Ilya knew what this was. He also knew he'd never set foot on the ice again if anyone found out.

Blindly, he reached for the toilet paper, wiped his mouth, and then flushed the whole thing. Petals, too. He didn't want to know what kind they were. *Pizdets*. It should've been a fucking maple leaf.



the Hanahaki AU, in which Ilya loves Shane Hollander's stupid face so much it makes him sick (literally)

Notes

on god I tried so hard to be a sideline participant in this fandom and here is proof of my failure

work title from *The Lonely End of the Rink* by Rush

Chapter 1: Ilya — in a room where you do what you don't confess

Chapter Notes

chap lyrics from Gordon Lightfoot's *Sundown*

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

The first time Ilya coughed up a flower, he was kneeling over a toilet in the penthouse of the Fontainebleau Las Vegas, for entirely the *wrong fucking reason* to be kneeling over a toilet in Vegas.

He stared at the wad of wrinkled petals in his palm, unable to even muster up the courage to wonder what kind of flower they belonged to, mind gone utterly blank with panic.

There was no point in trying to pretend it wasn't happening. He wasn't an idiot. Hadn't he seen his own mother waste away, coughing up clumps of clean white chamomile turned shocking scarlet? Hadn't he *known*, on some level, that he was fated to follow in her footsteps one day, to throw his entire heart and soul into loving a person who would never — *could* never — love him back?

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He snorted at his own pathetic joke, and let his head *thunk* against the bathroom wall. *Zhizn' ebet meya*.

The buzz of an incoming text rattled harshly on the tile beside him. Ilya watched his hand move without his permission for his phone.

Jane: *See you next season*

The floor was icy under Ilya's bare feet. Slowly, painfully, he dragged himself off the bathroom floor and over to the bed. His hands shook as he refilled his glass, but he relished the clean burn of the vodka, imagined it scrubbing the petals from his throat, scouring his lungs. Out of nowhere, he was seized by the sudden, insane urge to beg Hollander to come back. As if that would make it all better. People didn't throw up flowers because they were happily in love. No, Ilya was alone in this, too, as with everything. But that was fine. As long as he stayed far away from Shane Hollander, he'd be fine. It would probably go away.

Ilya drained his glass. As he poured himself another, he wondered idly if being aware of his own doom and pretending it would go away was better or worse than pretending it wasn't happening at all.

Chapter End Notes

nice cheerful beginning c/o world's biggest drama queen ilya rozanov

pizdets = damn it

zhizn' ebet meya = fuck my life

no guarantees re. translation quality yawl

Chapter 2: shane — thoughts don't fit the man, they never can

Chapter Notes

chap title from Joni's *I Had A King*

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

The way the light bounced off the lake made Shane think of Rozanov's eyes.

It was beyond stupid — it's not like blue eyes were exactly *uncommon*, after all, and what the hell was Shane even doing, thinking about that asshole in the first place? — but the thought kept popping up; when he stepped out onto the back deck with his coffee, as he hauled the paddleboard down to the dock, during his morning run along the rocky shoreline.

Maybe it was the way the sunlit water danced around, never quite letting Shane's gaze focus on it for more than a moment. Or maybe it was because it was so dazzling, impossible to stare at for too long without feeling like you were looking directly into the sun itself, overwhelmed with the force of it. Looking at Rozanov felt kind of like that. Like if you didn't tear your eyes away in time, soon you'd be blind to anything else.

But thinking about Rozanov inevitably led to thinking about Vegas, and thinking about Vegas made Shane's stomach twist itself into knots, and he couldn't exactly focus on what the hell the landscape designer was telling him if he was thinking about how his stomach hurt and how Rozanov had never replied to his—

With an effort, Shane tuned back into Monique's monologue.

“—and I think some perennials would be best for out here, with a wilder look to them — some bee balm, and blue sage, and maybe some bleeding hearts—” She broke off at Shane's sudden snort of laughter.

“Oh, no — I didn't mean—” Fuck. Shane felt himself flush. “Sorry, I wasn't laughing at you, I just — I was thinking of something else. Sorry.”

“No problem,” Monique smiled, and it seemed like she genuinely meant it. “But does that sound good?”

“Uh — yeah, of course,” said Shane vaguely, hoping she hadn't noticed he'd been barely listening. “But, um. Maybe not the heart one?”

Christ. As if he needed a visual reminder of his own inability to keep his shit together, when it came to—

“Sure,” said Monique cheerfully, and she was off suggesting alternatives. Shane forced himself to focus. He was *done* thinking about Rozanov.

Except as Shane followed the designer down the winding steps to the dock, he couldn’t help wondering if Monique had any suggestions on how to block out the glittering light on the water without ruining his view. Somehow, he doubted there was a solution. But when it came to Ilya Rozanov, that was nothing new.

Chapter End Notes

never in my life have I encountered a fictional character more in need of a weighted blanket

Chapter 3: Ilya — in the forget, your skates dream

Chapter Notes

chap title from *It's A Good Life If You Don't Weaken*, by The Tragically Hip

also this is VERY handwave-y with canon timelines but I just don't have it in me to write eight years of hanahaki yawl

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

By the time the season rolled around, Ilya had settled comfortably into his self-imposed delusion. He hadn't had a single *incident* all summer — unless you counted vomiting up some bad shrooms Svet had convinced him were 'probably still good' after digging them out of the back of her freezer one night. Which he didn't. And they weren't.

He tried not to count down the weeks until the first Montreal-Boston game. It was his first season wearing the C on his jersey, and while he'd expected the additional responsibility and pressure, he hadn't considered the mental toll of keeping up team morale, integrating the rookies and keeping the respect of the veterans. It wasn't like any of the other captaincies he'd held before; way more intense, *relentless*, and it wasn't going anywhere anytime soon. Not like the Olympics — but the thought of them still stung, even after Ilya's failure had faded from his father's memory.

"You see Hollander's goal against the Islanders last night?" Marly asked him, as they laced up an hour before puck drop. Ilya just nodded curtly. He had seen it, had watched the way Hollander effortlessly wove in and out of the Islanders defence like they were nothing more than plastic pylons, the clean flick of his wrist as the goalie dove in the opposite direction, puck sailing past his left ear. It had given Ilya such a fucking hard-on he'd had to break his 24-hour pre-game celibacy rule. He'd shot his load all over the shower tiles, panting heavily and trying not to overthink the rasp at the back of his throat.

Ilya made sure he won the face-off, fuelled by the need to get the fuck away from the sight of Hollander's face, the serious set of his mouth, the intensity of his dark eyes. The game passed in a blur of sound and noise and colour, and Ilya was grateful for it, grateful he had no time to *think*, had to simply rely on instinct and intuition, the feel of the stick in his hands and sweat trickling into his eyes.

Two goals and an assist later, and Ilya was flying, hopped up on adrenaline and aggression. Hollander had scored, sure, while the second line was out, adding to the one Pike had snuck in just before the end of first period, but this was *Boston*, and the Ilya could feel the roar of the crowd in his veins, amping up the team, fuelling the furious pace of the action.

Hollander was barrelling down the corridor, now, dodging Charmichael and Varkov's pincer defence as easily as everyone else could skate in a straight line, and Pike was on his flank, open, Ilya could *see* him shouting even if he couldn't hear it, and then Hollander passed — a smooth, effortless movement from shoulder to hand, the puck arcing across the ice in a perfect line to smack against Pike's tape — Pike was winding up to shoot —

But St-Simon had been studying the Voyageurs front line like a maniac over the past few weeks, staring at the footage until his eyes blurred and the janitors had to ask Ilya to kick him out of the screening room so they could clean. His arm shot out, a near-instant reflex, and caught the puck in his gloved fist.

Just seconds later, the buzzer sounded, and then the team was jumping the boards, grabbing Ilya as they made their way to the defending zone to pile up on St-Simon. Ilya didn't see Hollander again until it was time to tap gloves, and then it was just a flick up of those dark eyes before Ilya was faced with the next man in line, and Hollander was gone.

It was only after his shower that Ilya allowed himself to check his phone, bracing himself for the familiar disappointment. But there it was, under his physio reminder for tomorrow —

Jane: *Celebrating tonight?*

Fuck. Ilya dropped onto the bench like a stone, unable to rip his eyes away from the screen as the locker room emptied out around him.

He shouldn't answer. He *definitely* shouldn't answer. The best thing for him was distance, as much and for as long as possible — but. He had to know. He *had* to know if he'd truly gotten rid of it. And what other way was there to tell?

Lily: *was that a question or an offer?*

Hollander's response came quickly.

Jane: *Both*

Ilya stared down at the word, letting it percolate, letting the implication sink into his bones and warm him through.

Jane: 338

Jane: *The Lenox.*

"*Dolboyob*," Ilya cursed himself under his breath, and, grabbing his bag, headed for the arena's main entrance instead of the player's exit, already opening up Uber on his phone. He'd come back tomorrow for his car.

ilya: I bet going to hang out and most likely fuck the person I'm irrevocably in love with to the point of developing an incurable disease will probably help my symptoms. there's really no way of knowing until we try I guess

dolboyob = dumbass

Chapter 4: shane — up is why he chooses, the kisses and the bruises

Chapter Notes

chap title from *Up* by Great Big Sea (in case you haven't noticed, the title theme for this fic is iconic Canadian musicians)

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

Lily: *give me half hour*

Shane tossed his phone onto the coffee table like it had burned him, as if Rozanov's words had leaked through the screen to scorch the metal and scour his skin. He felt jittery, unbalanced — his shower had done fuck-all to settle his post-game rush, and now the leftover adrenaline clashed queasily with the roiling anxiety in his stomach, leaving him disoriented and a little lightheaded.

Miitka was on a three-game mandated rest, and Theriault had demanded he stay home to fit in more physical therapy, instead of travelling with the rest of the team. This meant that they had an odd number of players, and — one of the few benefits of being captain, Shane found — this also meant he had a room to himself, this time.

Idly, Shane wonders what he would've done if he'd roomed with Hayden. Gone to Rozanov's? He couldn't exactly invite himself over there.

He had no idea how long he'd been pacing a track from bathroom to window before his phone buzzed again. Shane scrambled over the back of the couch to get to it, self-control blinking out in an instant, like it always did whenever Rozanov was nearby. And he *was* nearby, because Shane hadn't even opened his text before there was a firm rap at the door.

Shane's footsteps were nearly inaudible over the hammering of his heart, and he hurried to slide the chain free and turn the deadbolt back. Fuck, why was he so *nervous*?

He only caught a brief glimpse of the fierce expression on Rozanov's face before he was being pushed backward, the heavy door closing quietly but firmly behind them. Shane reached past the other man, fumbling for the deadbolt, but Rozanov just batted his arm away impatiently, throwing the bolt one-handed behind his back as he carelessly kicked off his sneakers.

The Russian looked paler than usual, and there was a slightly manic gleam in his eyes that worried Shane nearly as much as it fascinated him, but there was no chance to him to ask or even *think* about it, because Rozanov's mouth was on his, a hot, bruising weight that slammed him into the wall without hesitation or restraint. Rozanov slipped one strong hand

around his waist, using the other to cushion the back of Shane's head, fingers tangling in the short dark hair at the nape of his neck, *tugging*, and the moan that slipped from Shane's lips was more embarrassing than every stupid ad campaign he'd had to pose for put together.

"Fuck," he panted, muffled, as Rozanov bit down hard on his lower lip, then scraped his incisors along Shane's jaw. "Fuck, Rozanov, *shit*—"

"*Zamolchi*," Rozanov muttered, or something like it. It was hard to tell, given that he had ducked down and was dragging Shane's t-shirt up with his teeth, exposing the planes of his stomach to the relentless grasp of his hands — dancing along his ribs, squeezing his pecs, thumbing at his nipples. Shane felt dizzy, the lightheadedness worse than ever, like he was being cut loose from every thread tying him to earth, sent spinning out of orbit.

Rozanov sank lower, hands sliding to the drawstring of Shane's sweats. He let out a noise as his knees bent, a grunt of discomfort that Shane knew all too well from every time he tied his shoes or got up too quickly. They were still young, but their joints were already showing the strain from years of impact.

"Wait," he gasped, reaching forward to work one hand through Rozanov's curls. Fuck, his hair was soft. Blue eyes flicked up to meet his, wicked, filled with white-hot arousal, and Shane's cock kicked inside his sweats. Rozanov looked like sin incarnate like this, like every bad idea Shane had ever had, but —

"Not here, your knees — the tile's gonna hurt like a bitch later, c'mon, let's—"

Rozanov had been mouthing at his hard-on through his sweats while undoing the tie. But now he froze, so abruptly still under Shane's hand that for a moment, Shane thought the other man was listening to someone coming down the hall, someone had *heard* them, and his lungs seized up in sudden fear.

"What—?"

But then Rozanov was jerking back, so violently that he lost his balance and fell back on his ass, and he was coughing — deep, guttural hacking noises that came from deep inside his chest, powerful enough that he was soon hunched over, gasping, and then Shane was the one kneeling, icy fear still freezing his blood but for an entirely different reason.

"Shit, Rozanov — are you okay? Fuck — do you, d'you want water or something? I can—"

Hesitantly, Shane reached out. His fingertips just barely brushed Rozanov's back before the other man flinched back, like he was expecting a blow, and Shane froze in surprise and confusion.

"Are you—?"

"Fine," Rozanov rasped, in between coughs. "Is fine. I must — need to go."

"*What?*" Shane sat back on his heels, utterly bewildered. With a jolt of shock, he saw Rozanov's bottom lip was bright with blood. "Oh shit, you're bleeding—"

In a flurry of movement, Rozanov scrambled to his feet, groping for his shoes. Shane could see his hands trembling as he fought with the laces of his sneakers.

“You must’ve bitten my lip too hard, I guess,” Shane fumbled, not knowing *why* he felt the need to offer up an explanation, to *comfort* Rozanov like he was a little kid scared by a nosebleed, wishing with an urgency that surprised him that Rozanov would fucking *look* at him. Shane had never seen him like this, movements tight and panicky, almost — almost scared.

But that couldn’t be right. What the hell did *Rozanov* have to be scared of?

“Roz—”

“*Nyet*,” said Rozanov curtly. He had his back to Shane now.

“But—”

“*Goodbye*, Hollander.”

Shane heard the thunk of the deadbolt, and then Rozanov was gone, as if he’d never been there, leaving Shane with a rucked up shirt, a flagging hard-on, and more questions than he’d ever had in his entire life.

Chapter End Notes

zamolchi = shut up

nyet = no

Ilya = idiot

Chapter 5: Ilya — the icy fog is in my bones, and the ache won't go away

Chapter Notes

chap title from *Take It From Day To Day*, by the wonderful Stan Rogers

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

NAME: ROZANOV, Ilya Grigoryevich

DOB: 15-JUN-91

DIAGNOSIS: *Pulmonis florentis*, Stage II-A

GENUS: *Prunus serrulata* (P. subg. *Cerasus*) — deciduous; BKA “sakura blossom,” “Japanese cherry blossom”

The words were mostly in English. Ilya recognized them, knew that somewhere, deep in his brain, he understood what they meant. But the lab report might as well have been written in hieroglyphics, the words slipping and sliding off of Ilya's mind without gaining any traction, leaving nothing beyond the spasming pain in his lungs, hammering at his ribs, screaming to get out.

He'd made it a block from the Lenox before emptying his guts in a back alley, blue Gatorade and what remained of his post-game protein bar coming up alongside the bloody clumps of his broken heart. The coughing had gone on for what felt like hours, and by the time it finally slowed, he was chilled to the bone, fingers numb from the autumn air as he fumbled for his phone.

“Kak dela, zolotoj mal'čik?” *What's up, golden boy?*

“Sveta,” he gasped, between huge, rattling breaths. “Sveta, ja oblažalsja... ja tak oblažalsja —” *I fucked up, I'm so fucked.*

“Iljuša?” Svetlana's teasing tone sharpened immediately, urgent in his ear. “Il'ja, čto slučilos', gde ty?” *What's wrong, where are you?*

“Vse končeno... ja bol'she nikogda ne budu katat'sja na kon'kah... ja bol'she nikogda ne uvižu ego...” *It's all over, I'll never skate again, I'll never see him again.*

Svetlana said something back, her voice high and worried, but Ilya was coughing again, *hard*, it felt like he was ripping out his own insides, but his love for Shane seemed to have settled into his marrow, immovable, permanent.

By the time Svetlana found him, he'd been nearly unconscious, mumbling nonsense Russian in between bouts of coughing as she shouted him to stay awake. He hadn't really come back

into himself until the first heavenly breath of oxygen in the back of the ambulance. Everything snapped into focus as the air filled his straining lungs. Svetlana was there, holding his hand so tightly he could feel the bones grinding together, and for the first time since they were small, he saw tears spilling down her cheeks.

“Mne očén’ žal’,” he gasped. “Ja ne hotel, čtoby tak polučilos’, ja nikogda ne hotel ètogo—” *I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean for this to happen, I never wanted this.*

“Ne govori, Iljuša,” she whispered, and pushed the hair out of his eyes with one shaking hand. The gesture reminded him so much of his mom that Ilya felt tears stinging his own eyes. “Vse v porjadke, vse budet horošo...” *Don’t talk. It’s alright, everything will be fine.*

She kept up the litany of soothing words until they wheeled him in for the MRI, and the doors shut on the only friendly face he had left.

He’d made her leave two hours later, once they had finally removed the aspirator. She hadn’t wanted to — he could see the reluctance in her face, when he told her he didn’t want her there, but one of the many wonderful things about Svetlana was that she never pushed him. Never forced him, like his father. But then again, she never challenged him to be better, either, to reach beyond his limits, not like —

“Stage two,” the doctor had confirmed. She’d appeared with the results from his scans about an hour after Svetlana left, and in any other scenario, Ilya probably would’ve liked her. She was businesslike, matter of fact. There was no pity in her tone. “The first roots have attached themselves to your lungs. They won’t fully detach when you cough, anymore, and eventually, they’ll become too deeply embedded for surgical removal.”

“What—” Ilya faltered. English had never felt so clumsy — so *foreign* — on his tongue. “How long?”

“Until we can’t operate? Depends on how fast they grow. Could be as long as six months, if you take the necessary precautions.”

“Pre—? What are,” Ilya managed, then broke off into another cough.

“Things to avoid,” she explained. “Avoid all contact with the source of rejection. Your... the individual who is the cause.”

“Ah,” Ilya didn’t really know what to say. “I, um. Must see for work, sometimes.”

“Well, avoid direct interaction whenever possible. More time together will worsen the symptoms exponentially.”

“Ok,” said Ilya. It all felt too surreal, that someone else finally knew about this. Two people, really, with Svetlana.

“You may find this difficult.” The doctor’s eyes seemed to see far too much, and Ilya wished he could turn away from her gaze, hide under the bed, like a small child in trouble. “The pheromones that triggered the onset of the disease can also cause a powerful need to be close.

You'll feel better around them, at first, but this will only quicken the growth of the root system, do you understand?"

"Ok," repeated Ilya. He did understand, sort of. He just had no fucking clue how to *do* it. How the *fuck* was he supposed to avoid Hollander? Skip games?

"It's all in here, for you to go over later," She held out a plastic folder, and Ilya took it from her dumbly. "We did a quick ID on the flowers, too."

But that had officially been too much for Ilya, and he'd fled, nodding mechanically to all the promises to book a follow-up appointment, and more scans, on and on, buzzing white noise in his ears.

Sakura blossoms. He'd been unable to help himself, had looked them up the moment he stumbled into his Uber. Japanese. *Meant to symbolise life's transient nature, renewal, and hope*, according to the internet. Ilya laughed so hard he nearly choked again, too-loud, a little hysterical, and he was pretty sure only the fact that they'd arrived at his house kept the Uber driver from kicking him out.

And now he was bent over a garbage can in his front entry, puking up the symbol of fucking *hope*, and wishing, more than anything, for the gentle touch of Shane's hand on his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

wow what a great idea that was genius of the year over here

Chapter 6: shane — and it's crowded and cold in my secret life

Chapter Notes

chap title from *In My Secret Life* by Montreal's finest, Leonard Cohen

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

Jane: Are you okay?

Jane: Maybe you shouldn't go if you're not

Jane: You know

Jane: Feeling good, or whatever

(1) Outgoing Call: Voicemail

Jane: I'm in the lobby but I don't see you

(1) Outgoing Call: Voicemail

Jane: Did you get an Uber? Or did you drive here?

(1) Outgoing Call: Voicemail

(1) Outgoing Call: Voicemail

Jane: Can you at least let me know if you got home safe?

(1) Outgoing Call: Voicemail

Jane: Hello?

Jane: You're kind of worrying me man

(1) Outgoing Call: Voicemail

(1) Outgoing Call: Voicemail

(1) Outgoing Call: Voicemail

[UNDELIVERED] **Jane:** Look maybe I'm overreacting here but can you please let me know you're okay

[UNDELIVERED] **Jane:** Ilya?

(1) Outgoing Call: Number Restricted

Shane's hands trembled as he dialled Ilya's number again. Only the dull blare of the dial tone answered him, echoing around his brain like a knockout bell.

Ilya had blocked his number.

This was a good thing, right? Somewhere in Boston, Ilya was alive and well enough to block Shane's number. It was... a relief. If relief felt like having his insides scooped out with a melon baller and replaced with lead.

Shane's confusion and worry joined forces, coalescing into a pounding headache behind his temples. He stumbled back up to his hotel room in a daze, flinching away from even the soft light of his bedside lamp, and tumbled into bed, fully clothed. When he finally slept, Shane dreamed he was on an endless stretch of ice, skating as hard as he could, but no matter how fast he forced his legs to move, the silhouette of Ilya on the horizon never drew any nearer.



The next two months didn't fly by. They didn't lag, either. No, the weeks of hockey and travel and hockey and sponsorship deals and *hockey* simply marched on, one after another. Methodical. Predictable. Just the way Shane liked it. Or how he used to like it, anyway. Because now every week marked another milestone in Shane's new and least favourite hobby — watching the deterioration of Ilya Rozanov in real time.

Shane had always studied game footage, since his time in the CHL. It was as automatic as brushing his teeth at this point, to eat his dinner in front of the TV, playing and replaying each period at least a couple of times, so he could nail down the defence formations of the teams, their strengths on the ice, the gaps in their coverage. He was particularly vigilant about the Boston games — because they were Montreal's archrivals and they played together often, fighting for dominance in their division, and definitely not for any other stupid, humiliating reason.

Even when he and Rozanov were at their worst, Shane had always loved watching him play. There was a wild, almost brutal grace to the way the Russian skated, a reckless physicality that heated Shane's blood even through the screen. It made it all the more startling when, during Boston's match-up with the Rangers, Rozanov missed two goals and hit the ice from three separate checks. Shane could hear the bewilderment in the announcers' voices, the speculation of injury when Ilya was benched just two minutes into the third. The memory of Rozanov's deep, hacking coughs flared brightly in his mind's eye. His hand reached automatically for his phone, before he remembered that he couldn't contact Ilya — *Rozanov* — even if he tried. A kind of nauseating misery curdled sourly in Shane's stomach, and he scrabbled for the remote, suddenly unable to listen to another word, even if that meant he was left alone and worried in the dark.

The following week, Boston played Detroit. Rozanov started, as usual, and managed an assist near the end of the first period, but it had never been clearer that something was wrong. He seemed weighed down, as if each pass took an immense effort, his famous laser-sharp accuracy turned murky and unpredictable. Shane could still catch flashes of his regular brilliance buried under fumbled crosses and weak wrist shots, but it wasn't a surprise when Rozanov was benched during the first intermission, and didn't take to the ice again.

And it kept happening. Against Tampa Bay, Rozanov managed to play all three periods, but he was sloppy, his game all over the place — sluggish one moment, nearly frantic the next, flip-flopping between apathy and aggression. Shane could see the way the rest of the offensive line was unprepared to deal with it, unsure if they should pass to or work around

their star centre. It only got worse, with Boston racking up their fourth loss in a row — against Ottawa, of all teams — the week after that. His hometown's victory tasted like ash in Shane's mouth.

Rozanov sat out the two next games, and then Boston had a bye week, but his absence made Shane even more worried, jittery with a low-grade panic that never really went away. He went through the motions; not playing badly, but not well, either, relying on muscle memory and latent skill. For the first time, hockey felt like a chore to be accomplished.

He hadn't realized how much of his determination to be the best was fuelled by the need to outmatch Ilya Rozanov, to be prepared for their next clash, to prove himself — to *show off* for Rozanov, even, which was a humiliating revelation. So when Boston came to Montreal, and Rozanov didn't show, not even just to watch, it felt like a particularly cruel form of torture. Shane kept expecting to turn around and see the Russian on his flank, encroaching, *pushing*, kept waiting for his muttered taunts at face-off or when he was slammed up against the boards — but when Boston's chirps came, they just felt... meaningless. Unaccented. *Wrong*. He'd never been more relieved when the final buzzer sounded, or felt less proud of a win on home ice.

Seven weeks after that disastrous night in Boston, he went over to Hayden's to watch the other match-ups. They'd kicked Toronto's asses that afternoon, and the 10:00 PM game was just starting when Shane arrived, a six-pack of St. Ambroise for Hayden under one arm and a belated birthday gift for the twins in the other.

"Jesus, Hollzy." The girls started squealing at the sight of the Nintendo logo as they tore away the paper. Hayden shook his head, but he was grinning. "We were gonna wait til Christmas to get them Switches, you know that? Showin' me up here."

Shane managed a smile. "Least I could do."

They settled into the den, away from the girls' continued shrieks as Jackie helped them set up the console in their playroom. Shane was just about to make a trip back to the kitchen for snacks, when —

"Holy shit! The hell's wrong with Rozanov?"

Shane whipped around so fast he felt something crunch in his back. The national anthem was playing — just the American one, since Boston was playing Florida at home — and the camera's usual pan down the starting lineups had halted on Rozanov's face, as if even the camera operator was shocked by the sight.

The Russian looked... awful. Worse, *far* worse, too much for it to have only been three weeks since Shane had last seen him on the screen, and he hadn't looked well *then*, but *now* —

God. Shane's heart was thumping wildly, adrenaline rising with every second he stared at the screen. Ilya was *gaunt*. His cheeks were hollowed out, eyes sunken in his face and ringed with dark, bruising half-moons of purple. He was still broad across the chest and shoulders, but it was clear that he didn't fill out his padding anymore, his gear simply hanging off of

him like a coat on a wire hanger. He was slumped on his skates, looking blankly into the middle distance, and it was that dead-eyed stare that made Shane's legs give out, forcing him to lean heavily against the back of the sofa for support. Ilya's bright, flashing, mischievous blue, with its faint ring of hazel closest to the pupil — how many times had Shane stared up at Rozanov in wonder, amazed at the kaleidoscope of colour, mesmerized by the heat and intensity he saw there? It had all been drained away, dulling the blue, leaving it vacant. Lifeless.

Shane let out a noise, a choked, strangled little moan. Hayden was talking, but it was just meaningless babble in his ears, and Shane couldn't tear his eyes away from the man on the screen. It was like looking at an entirely different person. Like Ilya had aged ten years, or been through a war, or *died*. It was the face of a man who had nothing to live for.

The camera finally panned away, and the teams squared up for the puck drop. Shane felt numb all over, except for a weird tingling sensation along his arms and down his spine. Everything felt very far away. He had no idea how long he stood there, staring mindlessly at the little moving shapes on the TV, when a sudden blast of noise jolted him back into awareness.

“Oh, *fuck!*” Hayden was on his feet, mouth hanging open. Reality roared back in, bearing down on Shane like an avalanche. There was red on the ice. There was *blood* on the ice, and on a prone figure wearing a jersey with Rozanov's name on it, *no*, it couldn't be —

The figure wrenched off his helmet, spitting his bloody mouthguard out as he gasped for breath, curled up on the ice like he was trying to ward off a blow, and right before the camera cut away to show the medics rushing onto the rink, Shane saw them.

Petals. No, not petals — entire *blossoms*, wrinkled and soaked with blood — *Ilya's blood* — but undeniable. Flowers. Spilling out of Ilya's throat, dotting the ice around him like bouquets thrown for figure skaters after their performance. Only these were for someone else. For someone Ilya...

For someone he loved. Someone who didn't love Ilya back.

Shane's first thought was *impossible*. Surely, that was impossible. Ilya was... he was *everything*, dazzling and bold and almost inhumanly gorgeous, talented beyond belief, funny, and charismatic, and —

And dying. He loved someone so much he was dying from it. Even through Shane's panic and horror he felt a piercing stab of grief at this final, irrefutable proof that he'd never stood a chance, because *of course* Ilya had found someone he loved, someone as bright and beautiful as he was, so far from boring, uptight, neurotic *Shane Hollander*.

Ilya wasn't visible anymore. Medics were making their way over to the little cluster of figures on the ice with a stretcher.

“Oh my fucking God,” Hayden said lowly. “Jesus Christ. Was that — does he have...?”

Acting on irrational instinct, Shane pulled out his phone. His conversation with Lily was already open from this morning, when he'd been staring at it, trying to force himself to delete the text thread. But he couldn't make out the words, the screen blurred with tears. Dimly, he felt the moisture trickling down his cheeks, dripping off his chin and into the collar of his hoodie. His ears had stopped working again. Terror seemed to have calcified around his organs, weighing them down, dragging him underwater where everything was muted. Suffocating.

His breath was coming far too fast, he could *feel* the panic rising in his lungs, and he *ran*, out of the room and toward the little bathroom off the front hall. He barely made it, scrambling on his knees for the toilet, coughing, gagging on his own misery.

It was only with the vaguest feeling of surprise that Shane looked down into the bowl and saw red.

Chapter End Notes

happy new year im so sorry

Chapter 7: Ilya — ice frozen six feet deep, how long does it take?

Chapter Notes

title from Neil Young's *Borrowed Tune*

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

Ilya leaned a little against the checkout counter, ignoring the chafe of the moving conveyor belt against his hip. Standing for more than a couple of minutes had started to become an issue these past few weeks, and the old lady in front of him was seemingly determined to use every possible coupon in the grocery flyer. Who needed *eight* boxes of Wheat Thins?

Hollander. The thought rose against his will, nudging at the surface of Ilya's attention. Hollander would dutifully stock up on his boring, flavourless crackers, would probably carefully cut out the coupon and present it to the cashier instead of just ripping it out of the flyer like a normal fucking person. Hollander would take them home in an eco-friendly foldable tote bag and remember to put the bag back in his boring fucking car later, the way *no other human being on earth* remembered to do. He'd stack the boxes neatly on the correct shelf in his kitchen, but not before making careful note of the expiry dates, as if crackers ever fucking expired, as if anything bad would happen if they fucking did.

A familiar knot of what felt like barbed wire was caught in Ilya's throat, scraping the sides of his oesophagus as it rose. He swallowed it down, biting back a grunt of pain as he forced the flowers back into his lungs. His chest hurt all the time, now; a dull, throbbing ache, punctuated by bouts of razor-sharp agony, like hundreds of needles stabbing at his insides, accompanied by the terrifying sensation of his throat closing up, clogged with petals, until he was wheezing and dizzy with oxygen deprivation.

He had his own O2 tank now, though — three of them, actually, one for his bedroom, one for downstairs, and a portable one he kept in his car — and he was on a bunch of bronchodilators and corticosteroids and various other medications, all of which seemed to help. Except all that crap was at home right now, and his portable tank was in his car, and now Ilya was scrabbling for his anti-fungal inhaler, desperate not to splatter blood and petals all over the conveyor belt as Mrs. Wheat Thins painstakingly counted out exact change for her bill. The rush of chemicals into his lungs brought his breathing down to barely manageable, which was better than near-suffocation, so Ilya counted that as a win. He'd had precious few of them recently.

Bronchitis — that was the official line, the one that Ilya told his agent, and that his agent parroted to Boston's upper management to get them off his back. It was the lie he texted to his teammates, accepting their well-wishes and good-natured chirps in return. It was the explanation he emailed to the coaching staff and the team doctors, along with a list of his new

medications, which seemed to satisfy them for the time being. He'd left out the anti-fungal one, though, which would've been a dead giveaway.

Only Svetlana knew the truth. Ilya had never been more grateful for her. She hardly ever left his place, now, sleeping next to him to monitor his raspy, rattling breaths, brewing pot after pot of tea to soothe his aching throat, making him soup, heavily blended so that it went down easy. Lately, she'd taken over tracking his meds for him, too, and checking his blood oxygen levels and heart rate, as the creeping fog of exhaustion grew denser, leaving him fuzzy and disoriented no matter how much coffee he drank or how long he slept.

They both knew it was a textbook symptom of Stage III — Christ knows they'd both read through the fucking paperwork from the hospital enough times, helping one another translate the medical jargon — but neither mentioned it. What was the point?

“But you will get surgery, of course,” Svetlana had said matter-of-factly, the first time she'd seen him after the hospital. “When can they fit you in?”

“Nyet, Sveta.” Ilya's head was throbbing. A side effect of the pheromone imbalance, apparently. “Ja ne budu delat' operaciju.” *I'm not having the operation.*

The fight that followed was the worst they'd ever had. It took nearly two hours of screaming and sobbing — and, in Svetlana's case, three broken dishes — before they were cried-out and exhausted in each other's arms, surrounded by the shards of Ilya's best plates and Ilya's lost future.

She didn't understand. How could she? Ilya barely understood it himself. He *knew* he needed to get the surgery, *knew* he was getting worse with every passing day. There was no reason at all to wait. But he also knew the hospital package by heart, and understood that phrases like *parasitic side effects* and *breakdown of logical decision-making* and *pheromonally-driven reluctance to seek treatment* now applied to him, a perfect fit. He knew if it was up to Sveta, she'd wrestle the power of attorney from his shaking hands in seconds, would have him in a surgery room within hours — but Hanahaki didn't fall under the grounds for medical incapacitation in the United States, so Ilya was able to dig his own grave. Lucky him.

Ilya half-wished he didn't know *why* he was putting off the surgery. Maybe then he'd be happier with the choice. Maybe anything was better than watching it happen, unable to stop himself.

Finally, Mrs. Wheat Thins paid, and moved on to badgering the poor shopping cart attendant into carrying all her bags. Ilya managed a faint smile at the clerk as she scanned his items, and was relieved to see no spark of recognition in her eyes. Ilya Rozanov buying packs of baby wipes wasn't exactly front-page news, but he'd really prefer to keep the rumours of a hidden love child to a minimum, given the wild speculation already circulating over what the hell was wrong with him.

Ilya was going through a pack of wipes per day now, constantly checking and double-checking his mouth for any traitorous drops of blood, wiping his lips after every cough like a crazy old man with a nervous tic. When Ilya was little, there'd been a war veteran who'd haunted the park where he and Alexei used to play, muttering and tugging compulsively at

his own scraggly hair. His behaviour made a lot more sense, now that Ilya, too, felt like he was crawling out of his own skin, teeter-tottering between a haze of pain and sudden, violent mood swings.

The only constant was his craving for Shane. He was all Ilya ever thought of, anymore, a constant stream of memories behind his eyelids, haunting his daydreams and nightmares. He'd gotten a brand new phone to resist the temptation to unblock Shane's number, to make sure the knowledge of that number was completely beyond his reach. But every day the obsession grew, until he was hiding in the bathroom watching Shane Hollander goal compilations in between bouts of vomiting flowers, utterly incapable of resisting the tug of *Shane Shane Shane*, every cell in his body calling out for him, begging for the one person whose pheromones could make it all better.

But they *wouldn't* make it all better. Ilya kept forgetting that. It was hard to keep it all straight in his head, his fantasies of seeing Shane, touching Shane, *loving* Shane, blending confusingly with the harsh reality that Shane didn't love him, couldn't help him, would only make it worse, even if Ilya flew to Montreal and collapsed on his doorstep and *begged*. He'd booked three separate flights with the intention to do just that over the past week, Sveta barely convincing him to stay each time.

"Segodnja ne stoit igrat," Svetlana frowned at him, when he finally stumbled in the door with his bag of stupid fucking wipes. "Ty vygljadiš' užasno. Daže huže, čem obično." *You shouldn't play today. You look like shit, even more than usual.*

"Otvali, ja velikolepen," Ilya shot back, but it came out weak and petulant. *Fuck you, I'm gorgeous*. He ignored her concerned eyes as he packed up his game bag and struggled into his clothes, clumsy and uncoordinated, like he was putting on a hazmat suit instead of Tom Ford.

They drove to the rink in silence. Svetlana was frowning at the road. Ilya was just trying to breathe as quietly as possible. His lungs had started to whistle unpleasantly on every inhale.

The walk through the tunnels to the change room was fine — better, even, because it gave Ilya something to focus on instead of how fucking shit he felt — and he was just starting to think that he might be able to make it through when Marleau's voice floated over from three lockers away.

"—*believe* Rose Landry went to their game today. I mean, it doesn't make any sense how Hollander bagged her in the first place, but a *second* time?"

Ilya's throat closed up. He shouldered past a couple of wide-eyed rookies as he ran for the bathroom, slammed the door shut and locked it. The mess in the toilet bowl looked worse than ever — whole blooms, now, two or three at a time, some even with *leaves* attached — and when the coughing finally abated, he didn't bother trying to clean himself up. He knew he'd be puking again in a second.

With trembling fingers, he googled *Hollander Rose Landry*, already knowing what he'd find. Rose Landry had been at the Habs game earlier that day. They'd beaten Toronto, 3-0. Shane had scored once and assisted the other two, but Ilya knew that already, had been obsessively

refreshing the game feed every time Svetlana turned her back. But he hadn't known Rose Landry was there, wearing a Montreal jersey and laughing beside a woman Ilya recognized as Yuna Hollander.

He *was* right about needing to puke again, though.

Then someone was banging on the door, yelling at him that it was time, they had to line up, and then Ilya was surrounded by a wash of noise and cold and colour, the crowd was screaming — singing? — and then he was *skating*, the only thing he'd ever been any good at and now he couldn't even do *that*, because blood was rising in his throat again, he couldn't *breathe* —

Chapter End Notes

can u believe I originally tagged this as light angst L M A fucking O

Chapter 8: shane — we're an endless emergency

Chapter Notes

title from *Emergency*, another masterpiece from Canada's greatest band, The Tragically Hip.

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

Shane was coming up on the sixth consecutive hour of his panic attack when he got the text.

Unknown Number: flight AC9203 YUL-BOS 6:30am

Unknown Number: today

The sheer unexpectedness of the message cut through the terror a little, and Shane sat up to reread the texts. Grabbed his glasses, so he could read them a third time, more clearly.

Me: Who is this?

Unknown Number: your worst fucking nightmare if u don't get on that plane

Yeah, that didn't exactly clear it up. Shane's chest was still heaving, his breath still unsteady — *just the panic*, he reminded himself wildly, *it's not the... the you-know-what, you're just panicking* — but the distraction was *working*, rolling back the waves of hysteria that had been crashing over him since he'd knelt over Hayden's downstairs fucking toilet and saw the bloody petals floating in the bowl.

His phone buzzed again in his sweaty palm.

Unknown Number: i have hated u for long time now jane

Unknown Number: for what u have done to my family

Unknown Number: for damage u continue to do

Shane stared, dumbfounded. *Jane*. This person was fucking calling him *Jane*, but surely this wasn't — couldn't be — Ilya? Even if he wasn't — Shane's mind flitted around and away from the thought of *what* Ilya might be, currently — he didn't text like this. And the last thing he'd want is for Shane to come to Boston.

More buzzing. Head spinning, Shane fought to refocus.

Unknown Number: if I could I would erase all memory of u from ilyusha's brain forever

Unknown Number: but I cannot so u must come to boston RIGHT NOW and make him choose surgery

The thought occurred to Shane that his brain might be broken. Nothing made sense, *nothing* — did Hanahaki cause hallucinations? Surely not, and it would be too early for that, anyway, right?

It took three times longer than usual to type. His fingers were trembling so badly he kept missing the right letters.

Me: What do you mean he's not getting the surgery

Whoever this was, they couldn't mean Ilya's *removal* surgery. Refusing that would be... insane. There was no way.

Unknown Number: he is not himself from stupid fucking flowers

Unknown Number: refusing to agree to operation

Unknown Number: because of YOU, u stupid asshole

The words burrowed painfully under Shane's skin. Ilya was refusing the surgery because he "wasn't himself" — that part, at least, made sense. Shane's frenzied googling of Hanahaki symptoms had sent him down a rabbit hole of all the terrible facets of the disease; the brain fog, the mood swings, the impaired judgement and all-consuming need to seek out the pheromones that would make it all go away. His heart hurt at the thought of Ilya that way, desperate and confused, *in pain*. He felt something rise up in his throat — not panic, this time — and he grabbed for the box of tissues on his nightstand, coughing wetly. He tried not to look at bloody clump of petals that stained the kleenex.

Unknown Number: I know u don't give a fuck about him but other people do and we can't help. will u come or not

Indignation flared faintly under Shane's panic. He crumpled up the tissue and returned his attention to his phone.

Me: Of course I give a fuck about him

Me: I don't know who you are, but you don't know anything about us

Me: But I can't help either

(1) Incoming Call: Unknown Number

He hit *Accept Call* automatically, without stopping to think if he should.

"Shut up," said a cool, melodic voice, before he'd even opened his mouth to say hello. A woman's voice, accented. "I talk, you listen. Do not interrupt me."

There was a beat of silence, and, when Shane didn't say a word — he was too stunned, even if he wanted to — she continued.

"Here is what I know. I know your name is not Jane, and you are not a woman, and that Ilyusha is in love with you. I know that you are the reason the most important person in my life is on a fucking ventilator right now. And I know that *you* are the only one who can fix it."

Silence. Then — “You may speak now,” she added icily, like a queen granting a favour to an unworthy subject.

“I—” Shane’s voice died before it left his lips. *She’ll know*, he thought wildly. *She’ll know I’m*— but the image of Ilya on a *fucking ventilator* tore the thought to shreds. “It isn’t me. It — there’s no way.”

“You think I do not know my best friend?” The woman — it *had* to be Svetlana, right? — sounded colder than ever. “I think I know him better than you do, *Jane*. Because I am the one here, *with him*. Taking care of him. Holding his hand. Where the fuck are *you*?”

“But — I, *we* — I don’t—” Shane’s head was truly aching now, a staticky, fuzzy sort of pain that seemed to skitter along his nerves, frying them black and blue. “But it *can’t* be me.”

“I do not give a fuck what you think!” Svetlana exploded, ice giving way to a blazing rage. “You think what you wish. I know. I *know*, you understand me? Now get on fucking plane or I will make sure you never play another fucking match again, Hollander. Do not test me.”

Beep. Shane watched the *Call Ended* screen flash back to their texts. His eyes flicked to the clock at the top. 4:13 AM. The sight jolted him into action, and he nearly ran from his bedroom into the living room. His backpack was by the door, where it always hung, and Shane could barely think, barely *breathe*, but he had to *go*. What did he need? Passport. Wallet. His charger was back in his bedroom. He hurried down the hall again.

Where the fuck are you? Svetlana’s words echoed inside his head. She clearly thought he’d triggered Ilya’s Hanahaki. It was impossible, of course, but he could see why, in a twisted sort of way, because Svetlana was *desperate*, desperate for anything, *anyone*, that could possibly help Ilya. Who knows how many people she’d called to demand they come to Ilya’s bedside? Shane’s lungs constricted at the thought, but he swallowed back the cough that threatened to erupt. He had to go *right now* if he wanted to make the flight. He should already *be* there, as someone who fucking cared about Ilya, even if it was just as his friend. And if there was even the smallest chance that Shane could convince Ilya to do the surgery, he had to try. He *had* to. Because — *literally*, Shane thought with a grim smile, as he tossed in a box of tissues — there would be no world for him without Ilya in it.

Chapter End Notes

my totally normal and unabridged placeholder text for this chapter before I wrote it:

· Svetlana texts “Jane” and says *ya I kno Ilya blocked u and I’m pretty sure ur the reason he has Hanahaki so get ur ass over here RIGHT NOW and convince him to do the surgery!!! ur a fcking idiot for not loving him but if u care about him at all at least save his life!!!!!! Wtf is wrong with you!!*

· Shane: *O shit it def isn’t me who did this to him but NOW i AM desperate to know WHY Ilya isn’t getting the surgery!!! sO I fly down even tho it won’t HELP bc I just have*

*to TRY and convince him!! Like YA I love him n I'm dyin from it but thats MY bidness!!
WHOEVER U LOVE IS NOT WORTH IT PLS DON'T DIEEE ILYAAAA*

Chapter 9: Ilya — octane running through these veins, burning all my fears down

Chapter Notes

chapter title from Rush's *The Score*

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

Shane Hollander was in Ilya's hospital room.

Not *in* it, exactly, just silhouetted in the doorway, like a ghost — or maybe an angel. And he wasn't *actually* there. Ilya might be dying, but he wasn't delusional. Just hallucinating, which was fine. To be expected, even, given the strength of the meds they'd put him on when they removed the ventilator. They'd take him off it at his request, scribbling muddled Russian on a notepad for Svetlana to translate. What was the point, after all?

And now Shane Hollander was here, in a soft-looking blue hoodie Ilya recognized from the first time he'd visited Shane in Montreal. He looked exhausted, strung-out. Vaguely, Ilya wondered why he was hallucinating the love of his life looking like shit instead of happy. Maybe because he wished Shane was here, worried about him.

"Ilya," said not-Shane. He sounded sad. That wasn't good. Then he sniffled, coughing a little into his elbow, and looked over at Svetlana, who'd been glued to Ilya's side like an attack dog from the moment they'd dragged him off the ice.

"Thanks for the call. And the ticket."

"Is nothing," said Svetlana dismissively, and then it hit Ilya that this was *real*, Shane was actually *here*, in his room, talking to Svetlana, and all of the doctor's warnings came back to him in a rush.

"No, *nonono*, you cannot be here, Hollander, you make it worse—" But that was far too many words, too fast, and he broke into a fit of hacking coughs.

Shane stopped dead, one foot inside the room, but Svetlana shook her head and beckoned him to come in, though she was looking at him like he was something stuck to the bottom of her shoe.

"Iljuša, ja znaju, što ty emu ne skazal," she muttered to Ilya in an undertone. "Ty dolžen mne èto. Ty dolžen èto *sebe*." *I know you haven't told him. You owe me this. You owe yourself this.*

"What—" Ilya croaked, and fumbled for his cup. Svetlana raised the straw to his lips, and he sipped gratefully before trying again. "What are you doing here, Hollander?"

Shane was still frozen on the threshold, his eyes wide and scared. “I... I saw what happened. During the game yesterday. And I just—” he broke off, and Ilya saw his hands clench into fists. “Ilya, how long have you been like this?”

Instead of answering, Ilya turned to Svetlana. “Možete li vy dat’ nam nemnogo vremena?”
Can you give us some time?

Svetlana was still eyeing Shane suspiciously, like he was about to make a lunge for Ilya at any moment, but she nodded. She stood, pressing a kiss to Ilya’s forehead, so warm and loving that his eyes fluttered closed.

“Skaži emu,” she murmured. *Tell him.* He squeezed her hand in thanks, and then she was gone.

Shane had stepped into the room a little to give her space to pass him by, and now he seemed to come to some sort of internal decision, striding over to Ilya’s bedside and plonking himself down resolutely into the chair Svetlana had just vacated.

“How long?” he asked again, and Ilya felt a sudden, painful rush of love for this man, this singular, stubborn boy who kept his cards close to his chest and his heart on his sleeve, who felt emotions with his entire body but never spoke them aloud. The boy who bled talent from every pore, and loved the rhythm of well-worn routine, and who was utterly unstoppable once he’d made up his mind to chase down what he wanted.

Ilya was *tired*. He was tired of staying away from Shane Hollander, tired of trying to keep his head above water when all he wanted was to sink into his love for Shane like a warm bath and stay there for as long as he could. Until his final breath.

“Ilya.” Shane’s eyes were intent on Ilya’s face, *focused*, like when they used to stare each another down in that frozen, breathless moment before the puck hit the ice between their skates.

“Vegas,” said Ilya finally. The other man’s brow furrowed in confusion.

“Vegas? But—” Shane broke off, open-mouthed. “You don’t — do you mean the night of the fucking *awards*?”

Ilya managed a weak nod. His throat was starting to hurt badly, now.

“That was *June*, Ilya.” Shane looked aghast. “You’ve been sick for *six months* with this? Even—” he faltered again. “Oh, my God. *Boston*. Were you—?”

Ilya shrugged, a helpless sort of movement that was both confirmation and evasion.

Shane’s face had gone white, freckles standing out starkly along the bridge of his nose. “Fuck,” he breathed. “*Fuck*. Jesus Christ. I can’t — why didn’t you *tell me*? I could’ve — could’ve *helped*, or—”

For the first time in weeks, Ilya felt a laugh bubbling up, though it only lasted seconds before it was subsumed by coughing. The agony was so intense that he kept making involuntary,

humiliating little whimpers as he retched.

A warm hand landed at his back, a perfect recreation of Ilya's dreams — Shane was *here*, rubbing a palm soothingly up and down his spine, muttering low, indistinct words of comfort, holding layers of absorbent gauze under Ilya's mouth to catch the mess.

At last, the coughing died away, and Ilya was left panting weakly in Shane's arms, sweaty and trembling. He felt tears dripping down his face, pain and sadness and relief all mixed together, but he couldn't muster up the energy to care. He was so, so tired.

"I know." Shane's voice was agonized, and dimly, Ilya realized he must've said the words aloud this time. "I know you are, baby, God, I wish I could fix it, I'd do anything—"

Ilya hiccuped another wet laugh against Shane's neck. The irony of it all was too much to bear. Shane was rocking him back and forth, now, one hand coming up to card gently through his hair. It felt so good. He could feel tears that weren't his dripping into his hairline, could sense the vibrations of Shane's choked-back sobs, and suddenly it was the easiest thing in the world for Ilya to lift his head and press his bloody lips to that warm, perfect mouth. Shane didn't recoil, didn't seem to even *notice* the blood, chasing the kiss just as fervently as Ilya, just as desperate to get closer, as if he could replace the air in Ilya's oxygen-starved lungs with his own.

It ended far too soon, Ilya breaking away to scramble for the O2 mask and gulp down greedy inhaled. Shane cleared his throat a little, wiping the blood from his mouth with his sleeve, heedless of the way it stained the fabric. Selfishly, Ilya was glad that he was leaving some trace of himself behind that couldn't be scrubbed away.

"You have to do the surgery," said Shane at last, low and urgent. "Ilya, you *have* to."

"I do not," Ilya retorted, though his voice was so hoarse it was barely intelligible. "Not boss of me, Hollander."

Shane gave him a small, watery smile. "I know. And I know your brain's probably telling you it's the worst idea in the world, but — Ilya, *please*. Don't do this to me. Don't make me live in a world without you. Even if — I know we're not..." He gestured between them helplessly. "I know it's not me, for you, but *I don't care*, okay? I just want you in my life. I want to text you, and call you, and kick your ass on the ice—"

"That is not—"

"—and have you act like a complete fucking *asshole* to the point I want to smother you with a pillow," Shane talked over Ilya's faint protest, still smiling a little even as his mouth trembled. "I need you to *live*, Ilya. *Please*."

A silence fell between them, taut and charged with a tension Ilya couldn't name. His brain was all fuzzy, and his entire body ached, but something was cracking open inside Ilya's chest, flooding his veins like a dam finally let loose to soak a dry riverbed. Maybe it was the siren song of Shane's pheromones calling out to his, but suddenly, having the surgery wasn't just the sensible option, it was the *only* thing Ilya could do, it would be impossible — *unthinkable*

— to deny Shane what he asked for in any universe, but especially not when he was gripping Ilya's hand so tightly, his eyes big and sad, cheeks streaked with unchecked tears.

"Yes," Ilya rasped. It felt like knives stabbing into his throat, and he struggled to find enough air to make the words come out. "Yes, Shane."

"You— you mean it?" Shane's mouth was open again, astonished. "Are you fucking serious? You'll do it?"

"If makes... you happy... I do." Every syllable was an effort. The pain was escalating so rapidly that fear curdled in Ilya's stomach. Was this what the doctor had meant, when she said being around Shane would feel better at first, then make it worse?

"God," Shane breathed, and he bent down to kiss Ilya's knuckles. "God, okay. Okay. Thank you. *Thank you*, Ilya."

"Shane—" Ilya choked, but the flowers were rising in his throat again, scorching hot, and he barely tilted his head in time, splattering the floor with blood-soaked love.

"Oh, fuck—" Shane stared down, horrified. "Ilya, I think — oh my God, they've got *roots*—"

And just like that, Ilya knew he was out of time.

Everything felt oddly clear — surreal, but in high definition; the bright white of the fluorescent bulbs, the shocking scarlet on the floor, the deep amber of Shane's eyes.

"Shane," he rasped, suddenly panicked. He was out of time, but he wasn't *ready*, Shane had to *know*—

"Fuck, *fuckfuckfuck*, okay, hold on, just hold on, Ilya—" Shane was jabbing frantically at the call button. Ilya's monitors were beeping rapidly now, his heart rate climbing as his O2 levels dropped. "Shit, *fuck*, I gotta go get someone—"

"No—" Ilya struggled to sit up. Blood was trickling down his front now, and Shane let out a strangled sort of moan.

"Fuck! Don't move, baby, stay there, it's gonna be okay—"

"Love you." It wasn't a ringing declaration, filled with passion. The skies didn't break open into dazzling sunshine. No trumpets sounded. The words came out wet and weak, more of a whimper than a confession. But they were out there, hanging in the air between them. Relief joined the pain, and Ilya sagged back against the pillow.

"Love... you," he repeated. "Ya t-teb...ya. Llyub...lyu, Shane."

Silence. Ilya forced his eyes open a fraction, unable to focus on the bleary smudge that was Shane at his bedside. Had he heard? Had he *understood*? Did he know, now — *finally* — that Ilya was *his*, had *always been his*? Hazily, Ilya wondered if this was what his mother had felt like, before the end. This floaty, staticky sort of peace, even as his breaths came shorter and his brain screamed for air.

“Ilya!” That was Shane’s voice, Ilya was pretty sure. It sounded far away, but he would recognize it anywhere. “*Ilya! ILYA!*”

A sudden explosion of violent coughing broke through the pleasant fog, and Ilya’s eyes startled open. Shane was bent nearly double over Ilya’s bed, not kissing his hand this time, no, he was *choking*, red was creeping over Ilya’s lap as Shane’s blood soaked the clean white sheets, and there were other people here now, voices loud and worried —

Everything was a wash of colour and noise, and Ilya’s chest had never hurt so badly in his fucking life, the pain was obliterating every other thought, but *Shane*, Shane wasn’t *okay*, Ilya had to do something, Shane had to be alright —

“It’s you,” Shane gasped, suddenly very loud and very close. His face was so near to Ilya’s he nearly went cross-eyed trying to focus on it, a blur of smooth skin and dark eyes and scarlet blood. “Ilya, it’s you, I love you, *I love you*, do you understand me? Ilya!”

He’d thought it was impossible for the pain to get any worse, but it did, a searing, indescribable *agony* spasming and contracting in Ilya’s lungs like writhing snakes, but the snakes were shards of glass, or maybe just pure *fire*, burning him from the inside out —

His eyes locked on Shane’s for half a breath, and in that moment, Ilya *knew*. There were no more secrets. Too late, of course, but irreversibly *real*, stripped of all insecurity and self-denial. And then the pain took over, and Ilya sank into it, let himself be buried under it at last, and his final thought was simple, clean *gratitude*, that the last thing he’d ever see was Shane Hollander’s eyes.

Chapter End Notes

ask me about my deeply traumatizing and personalized torture sessions. corporate packages and student rates available upon request

Chapter 10: shane — the best game you can name

Chapter Notes

as compensation for the psychological damage inflicted by the previous nine chapters, please accept this fluffy caboose to the pain train.

a huge (HUGE) thank you to [becca](#) for their last-minute (and sorely needed) beta of the final chapter. [everybody check out their tumblr](#) for all the cute hollanov and hudcon you can eat! 🍷

chap title from Canada's second national anthem, *The Hockey Song*, by Stompin' Tom Connors

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

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

The monitor kept time with Ilya's heart, impersonal and utterly indifferent to the way Shane held his breath between each one. Suspended, waiting, hundreds of tiny moments of terror where he feared the next beat would never come.

Shane's back hurt from a night spent leaning over Ilya's bedside. His eyes stung with salt, leftover from his most recent bout of tears. His skin felt tight and dry, itchy, too small for his body. There had been a migraine building behind his temples for the past hour. Worst of all was his throat, scraped raw, as if he'd been screaming for days on end. They'd given him some pain medication to allow him to at least swallow without crying. Svetlana kept shoving cups of honeyed tea in his general direction in accordance with some mysterious inner timetable known only to herself.

They didn't talk much; a muttered '*bathroom*' when they left the room, an answering '*no change*' from the other upon their return. Svetlana was just as regal as she'd sounded on the phone, even in a bulky sweatshirt and track pants Shane was pretty sure were Ilya's. The thought sparked no jealousy — things like that seemed so trivial, now, in the face of their shared love for the man in the bed beside them.

He was stable, they said, but the *hiss-whoosh* of the ventilator made it impossible to forget that Ilya *couldn't fucking breathe* on his own, which didn't exactly ease the rancid worry clawing at Shane's insides. It had been Stage IV — inoperable, if it weren't for the rapid disintegration of the root system caused by the pheromonal release of Shane's last, desperate confession. Shane's had been late Stage I, they thought, though it was hard to tell because the CT scan they'd dragged him off for had come back clean as a whistle.

But Shane hadn't needed that to put the last of his insecurities to rest. Ilya's confession had literally made Shane's body reject its own heartbreak, leaving behind a warm, rock-solid

certainty in its place. Ilya loved him — *loved him* — and the knowledge seemed to seep into his bones, even as it fuelled the worry and fear that grew with every hour Ilya remained unconscious.

“Thank you,” said Svetlana suddenly, jolting Shane out of his thoughts. He tore his eyes away from Ilya’s face, baffled, but she only shrugged, looking oddly self-conscious.

“I could not help. It was... horrible. But you came. I am grateful.”

“I— of course I did. You don’t have to thank me. I should’ve come sooner—”

Svetlana shook her head, smiling a little. “Ilyusha...” Her eyes moved fondly over Ilya’s face. “He is not easy to know. Easy to love, yes. But... not good at allowing himself to *feel* loved. You understand?”

“I think so,” Shane replied, though his voice trembled, and he could tell she noticed.

“Not easy person to confess love to,” she added. Without the terror of losing Ilya to sharpen her tone, she seemed much softer. Kinder. “But he is worth it.”

“Yes,” he agreed, and they both exchanged watery smiles, then little laughs of embarrassment at their own vulnerability.

“Do not say I cried over him, *da?*” Svetlana wiped her eyes with the sleeve of her sweater. “He will be insufferable.”

“I won’t if you don’t.”

“Ms. Vetrova?” Shane could tell the arrival of the nurse was just as much a relief to Svetlana as it was him. “We need to go over some of Mr. Rozanov’s insurance details.” He hesitated, gaze flicking between her and Shane. “You are his medical proxy, yes?”

“Of course.” Svetlana rose from her cramped hospital chair as gracefully as if it were a throne. Shane’s eyes were back on Ilya before the door had closed behind them.

Ilya looked so much younger when he was asleep — most people did, Shane supposed, but it was still strange to see him like this, vulnerable and pale against the stiff sheets. To Shane, he had always seemed to hum with a low-grade energy — a vibrant, charismatic presence in every room; magnetic, even when he wasn’t trying to be the centre of attention. But now he lay still and silent, strong hands limp at his sides. Shane reached for one automatically, only to jerk back at the sound of the door opening once more.

“Hello! Sorry to startle you.” Another nurse — this one familiar, from when he’d first arrived, panting and wild-eyed — poked her head around the door. “Doctor Janssen’s just given the all-clear to remove Mr. Rozanov’s ventilator.”

“No, that’s — that’s fine. Um, I mean — yes. That’s great.” Shane felt himself flushing. Earlier, he’d been too frantic to give a shit if anyone found out about him and Ilya. Now the caution was creeping back in, though it had been tempered by the events of the past forty-

eight hours. It was hard to muster up his usual paranoia with all his attention still focussed on the rise and fall of Ilya's chest.

He shoved his chair back from the bed so she could work. "This won't look pretty," she warned him. "And it'll sound worse than it is. But his latest scans came back clean, so he can breathe on his own now, and any discomfort should settle fairly quickly."

"Okay," said Shane nervously.

She gave him a smile, all warm sympathy. "How about you hold his hand while I work? He might panic a little. It's an unpleasant sensation."

Grateful for the excuse, Shane leant forward. He had to grit his teeth against the terrible sucking noise of the tube leaving Ilya's throat. Ilya's eyes snapped open, alarmed, but Shane grabbed his other hand, keeping him from scrabbling at the tube.

"Hey, *hey*, it's okay, she's just taking it out, you're fine—"

Thankfully, it was over quickly. Ilya broke into dry, scratchy coughs, and Shane lunged for the cup of water at his bedside. For a few minutes, everything felt tense and terrifying again, but gradually, Ilya's breathing began to regulate. After adjusting his IV and setting up a back-up oxygen tank, the nurse left, and then it was just the two of them, alone for the first time since that awful night at the Lenox.

Ilya seemed to be thinking along the same lines, too, because his smile, though weak, held a trace of his usual mischief. "Guess it was not just biting your lip too hard, Hollander. Too bad."

Shane let out a noise he'd never made before — a choked, broken thing — and slumped over their joined hands, until his forehead brushed Ilya's knuckles.

"You fucking asshole. You stupid, *stupid* fucking man."

"Mmm." Ilya's other hand carded through Shane's hair. It felt like fucking heaven. "I know. I am sorry I scared you."

"Scared me?" Shane lifted his head to glare at him. "No, Rozanov, this was way fucking beyond *scaring* me. You nearly—" He choked on another sob, and this time, Ilya coaxed him up and into his arms. It was an awkward angle, and Shane's heart nearly shattered into a million pieces when his hands met the too-prominent knobs of Ilya's spine, but it was still *Ilya*, warm and real and alive, heartbeat strong and steady against Shane's chest.

"So sorry," Ilya repeated, muffled from burying his face in Shane's shoulder. "*Zhizn' moyu*, is all okay now, I'm alright." He drew back a little, a faint crease appearing between his eyebrows. "Are *you* alright? I do not remember — you were hurt, no?"

"I'm fine," said Shane, truthfully. "I'm just..."

"Just what, *zolotse*?"

“I’m so — God, I’m *so fucking sorry*, Ilya.” Shane bit his lip, willing himself not to break down. He had always cried too easily, from anger or stress just as much as sadness, and he’d never quite managed to grow out of it. “I can’t believe I missed it for so long. You kept getting sicker and sicker, and I didn’t see, I didn’t *help*, and all along, it — it was *m-me* doing it to you—”

“Who says this?” Ilya struggled upright, eyes flashing with a familiar battle light that Shane hadn’t seen in months. “Who says *your* fault?”

“Not— no one,” said Shane, startled. “But it’s *true*, I didn’t—”

Ilya softened slightly, but his gaze stayed fierce, fixed intently on Shane. “I was one who didn’t tell you. I was one who refused surgery. Not you, *lyubimiy*. I did not *want* you to know. Not your fault. You understand?”

“But I—” Shane stared down helplessly at their entwined hands. “I could’ve told you how I felt sooner. Then you would’ve known that I— that I loved you.”

He could feel himself turning red, the words still new and foreign on his tongue, and he watched Ilya’s strong, capable fingers squeeze his instead of looking up to see the other man’s reaction.

“I could’ve told you sooner, too, *moj milyj*.” Ilya’s voice was gentle enough that Shane found the courage to meet his gaze. His eyes were so blue here, flecks of green and hazel washed out by the harsh fluorescence. Beautiful, but Shane ached to see them in the soft sunlight, someplace where the dark rings of exhaustion around them could fade, and he could watch Ilya’s laugh lines deepen at the corners.

“Why didn’t you?” Shane asked softly. “When it got bad — why didn’t you say something?”

Ilya’s smile was rueful, bordering on bitter. “At first, I hoped it would go away. When it did not...” he shrugged and looked away. “I did not think there was a chance. After what happened at Olympics, and Vegas, and then hotel, last time... I could not believe you would feel the way I do.”

“I’ve wanted this for a long time,” said Shane quietly, and Ilya’s eyes met his once more. “Years, really. It’s, well.” He blushed harder, trying not to feel self-conscious. “It’s always been you, Ilya. Always.”

Ilya’s smile grew to a dazzling grin. With his free hand, he tugged Shane closer, so that their foreheads brushed together. “*Dusha moy*,” he murmured. “For me, too. Always you.”

And then, well, how was Shane supposed to resist? Ilya’s lips were chapped and dry, and Shane’s were bitten raw from too many anxious hours of watching, waiting, worrying — but the kiss sent sparks fizzing through his veins just the same, a hot, sweet undercurrent of pure connection that he’d never felt with anyone else. Had never *wanted* to feel with anyone else, not really.

“Doctors said keep airways free,” Svetlana sounded coolly amused, but when Shane turned, she was smiling. “Tongue counts as obstruction, no?”

“*Idi nahuj*,” Ilya shot back, and craned his neck, trying to get Shane to kiss him again.

“She’s right,” Shane protested, half-laughing, half-serious. “And sit back, you’re still hooked up to a bunch of stuff—”

“Am fine,” Ilya grumbled, but he allowed himself to be fussed over. Shane had a feeling he was secretly enjoying it.

“Thanks to me,” Svetlana agreed. She crossed the room and pressed a firm kiss to Ilya’s cheek. “Nikogda bol’she tak ne delaj, slyšiš’? Ja podožgu tvoj durackij garaž, ne dumaj, čto ja ne sdelayu ètogo.” *Don’t you ever do that again, understand? Or I’ll burn down your garage, don’t think I won’t.*

“Kak budto ty nikogda ne uničtožil by Pagani,” Ilya protested. *As if. You’d never destroy a Pagani.* “And you are being rude. We have guest.”

“Hollander and I are already good friends.” The gleam in Svetlana’s eyes was more than a little unnerving. “Is nice, to finally have help keeping you from being a complete idiot.”

“I don’t know if I’d go that far,” Shane grinned. “But to help minimize the damage, anyway.”

Ilya looked between them, eyes narrowing. “This.” He waved a hand in their general direction. “I do not like this. Not good friendship. Stop now.”

“Too late,” Svetlana sang, and sat down on Ilya’s other side. “Be grateful you are stuck with us both.”

“I am,” said Ilya quietly, and he reached out the hand not clutching Shane’s to grasp Svetlana’s arm. “Ja nikogda ne smogu skazat’, naskol’ko, Sveta.” *I can never say how much.*

Svetlana rolled her eyes. “Always so dramatic. Now, since I have you both here, I have been meaning to tell you. Hollander, your backhand is weak. You are hesitating too long before you flick the wrist.”

“I said this!” Ilya’s delighted, triumphant, *smug* fucking smile had Shane’s heart doing cartwheels inside his chest. “I have been saying this—”

“*Zatknis*, Ilyusha,” Svetlana snapped. “I have not gotten to your sloppy footwork. At least Hollander does not trip over his own feet—”

And then it was Shane’s turn to be smug. A warm glow seemed to settle deep in his belly as he let their arguing wash over him, and listening to the rise and fall of Ilya’s voice as he demanded Svetlana *take it back*, Shane thought he’d never heard anything sweeter.



It was another two days before Ilya could be discharged. The doctors had barely finished saying he would need several weeks of intensive home care before Shane was on the phone with his mom. Something had been freed inside his chest; some trapped animal, too frightened to leave its cage because it was all it had ever known, had finally ventured out to sniff the cool, clean air. Ilya was *his* — his responsibility, his to take care of. Everything else... as long as they were together, it would fall into place. The truth of Ilya's love, it seemed, had made Shane brave.

As soon as Ilya was cleared to fly, they were on their way, thanks to the private charter Svetlana had insisted on organizing for them both. Yuna and David met them at the airport, and Yuna — who'd taken the revelation that her son was "good friends" with Ilya Rozanov remarkably well, considering — was soon quizzing Ilya from the front seat about his dietary restrictions and the possible side effects of his medications.

The revelations that Shane was gay and madly in love with Ilya happened later, during aimless walks along the shore, and quiet dockside conversations under the stars. Slowly, Ilya healed, and Shane's heart healed with him. Here, in the place he loved best, Shane finally found the clarity and peace he'd craved his whole life — lazy days spent with those who cherished him for exactly who he was, and nights spent with Ilya's hands on him, their bodies fitting together, heartbeats synching up until they shared the same breath.

It wasn't always easy. Shane was only out for three games before he was back on the ice, but the damage to Ilya's lungs was an entirely different story. There was — according to the battalion of specialists Yuna Hollander had assembled — a very real chance that Ilya would never play hockey again. But Ilya was young, and strong, and more determined than anyone Shane had ever met. He would play again. He *had* to play again.

It would take the better part of a year, not to mention hours upon hours of rehabilitation. It would take nearly as long for Shane to stop feeling responsible for what happened, and for Ilya to finally let go of his own regret in keeping it hidden for so long. But as the months passed, time and love healed the tender bruise of memory, enough that when Monique returned to the cottage for the spring planting season, Shane asked that she bring a young cherry blossom sapling with her. They planted it in the sunniest corner of the lawn, beside the well, and there it grew, small but strong, full of potential and the promise of beauty for years to come.

At first, Ilya wasn't sure about the idea, until he realized he could point at it through the window as *proof of his undying love, zolotse, do you see this?* every time they had an argument. Not that it helped him actually win — Shane's puppy eyes made sure of that — but it was nice to pretend, anyway.

THE END

thus concludes the emotional equivalent of crushing my metaphorical balls between two concrete slabs.

P.S. Shane's flowers were [blue sage, also known as Russian sage](#), in case anyone's wondering. There wasn't a good point to mention it, but it IS one of the flowers he agrees to plant way back in chapter two :)



thank you so much to everyone who liked, commented, bookmarked, and otherwise showed their support for this weird lil emo take on the gay hockey yaoi. if you enjoyed it, **please consider leaving a comment** with your thoughts, feelings & feedback. it truly means the world for fic writers to know their work is appreciated. I'd love to revisit Heated Rivalry fic again at some point, and reader response really helps fuel my motivation to do just that!

[I have a tumblr, if you'd like to chat, share sexy hollanov gifs, and/or shout into the void together](#)

& as always, it wouldn't be one of my fics without the usual

STAT ANAL & AWARDS:

longest chapter: 2,642 words

shortest chapter: 407 words

number of em dashes: 176

times someone coughs: 24

times svetlana has to take matters into her own hands: 4 (or 40,000)

times shane was a brave little toaster: 3 (but also just every second he's alive tbh)

stress that could've been avoided if they'd just had one (1) conversation:

incalculable

first comment: [CissyNoir](#) ("Thank god they communicate properly," ie. had me read to filth by the end of ch.1)

best comment: [maxine8291](#) ("I am now suffering. I hope you're happy. I just logged in today to heal my HR hangover and then you shot me")

most dedicated supporter: [sarisa](#) 

funniest username: [bananakarenina](#) 

most likely to predict the next plot twist: [Savage Architect](#) 

most likely to crash out in the comments section: [fullsunsets6](#) 

so long and thanks for all the fish,

— V

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