

The Devil Wears Rozanov

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77061116) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77061116>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander & Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander , Hayden Pike , Minor Characters
Additional Tags:	Fluff , Hockey , One Shot , Secret Relationship , I Wrote This Instead of Sleeping , Sharing Clothes , Humor
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-04 Words: 3,922 Chapters: 1/1

The Devil Wears Rozanov

by [noedovenest](#)

Summary

"On the ice, he acted quick. Found the puck fast, moved to the net faster. Years of experience had honed his reflexes into second nature. But here, off the ice, wearing ROZANOV on his back like some doe-eyed puck bunny in the stands, his brain short-circuited completely."

Or: Shane accidentally wears Ilya's shirt into the locker room.

“Oh.” Ilya rested his head back on the pillow, looking over at Shane. “So you are the asshole.”

A wide smile stayed frozen on Shane’s face. He couldn’t help it. “No, it’s still you.”

“No, it’s not me.” Ilya feigned offense, thumb stabbing toward Shane. “You’re the asshole.” He sat up an inch and cupped his hands around his mouth. “Everyone! Shane Hollander is an asshole!”

Shane’s grin was starting to hurt his cheeks, his laughter coming easier than it had in months. He gave Ilya a playful shove, sending him tumbling back into the pillows. In an accent that had begun to fade, Ilya added, “I am feeling too good to lose tonight, anyway.”

“Oh yeah?” Shane turned onto his side, propped on an elbow. “’Cause I’m feeling pretty good too.”

“No shit,” Ilya murmured, sliding a hand beneath the sheets to squeeze Shane’s thigh, spurring an echo of pleasure that still clung to the edges of his mind.

Sunlight soaked their bare chests, a rarity when their time together was usually isolated to late nights and unfamiliar hotel rooms. It felt better than Shane was willing to admit. Almost normal. The thought sobered him. In reality, they were both supposed to be on the ice in a few short hours.

He grabbed his phone from the nightstand, eyes widening. “Shit, Ilya. We’re late.”

Ilya’s eyelids had gone heavy, an arm flung over his face. “Hm?”

“I need to get back to my hotel for pickup,” Shane hissed, kicking the sheets aside.

Behind him, Ilya groaned, long and dramatic. How he’d earned the captaincy with his complete indifference to punctuality baffled Shane. Then again, no one seemed to mind when he kept dragging Boston to victory night after night. It took effort not to marvel at him in those brief moments from the bench, the way he made it all look effortless.

Their clothes lay in a heap by the bedroom door. He hadn’t even folded them.

Shane scooped up half the pile and tossed it across the room, a pant leg smacking Ilya in the cheek. “Sorry.”

“Liar,” Ilya groaned, expression pinched as he slipped free of the sheets and stretched, arms reaching overhead.

Shane was already tugging on his sweats, shirt slung over his arm, when he caught sight of Ilya dangling off the edge of the mattress. Light brown curls stood in every direction, a faint sheen still clung to the dip of his spine, a wrinkle pressed into his skin. For a moment, panic gave way to something softer. There were few things he allowed to disrupt his routine, and Ilya had held the top spot since they were eighteen.

Shane crossed the room in a few long strides, leaning in to press a firm kiss to his lips. "See you soon, Rozanov."

Ilya's hand came up, cupping the back of his neck and pulling him closer, deepening it.

"Stop trying to distract me," he murmured against Ilya's mouth.

"Stop trying to leave," Ilya countered, fingers twisting into Shane's hair, tugging lightly. It was almost enough to convince Shane to crawl onto his lap and see how quickly they could fit in round two. Or was it three?

Shane bit back a sigh. "Tonight?"

Ilya's jaw ticked. "Tonight."

The distance Shane was forced to put between them had grown harder to bear lately, recent confessions weaving new threads into place. He'd ask him soon, about the cottage. Two uninterrupted weeks, no deadlines, no schedules breathing down their necks. Ilya would probably say no.

But what if he didn't?

"Go," Ilya said at last, breaking the kiss.

Part of Shane was grateful, because he wasn't sure he had the willpower to do it himself. The absence of Ilya's touch settled in immediately, a dull ache that followed him as he turned for the door.

There was a mindset Shane liked to settle into before a game, and he was struggling to reach it. It was clouded, inevitably, by the memory of Ilya's hands roaming over bare skin, teeth at his neck, the way he'd murmured filthy encouragement as they found their rhythm and slipped into Russian when they lost it. Maybe it was for the best that they didn't make a habit of afternoon meetings. This was torture.

Traffic was thick, and Shane tapped his fingers against the steering wheel, eyes flicking to the clock again and again. Was time moving faster today? By the time he'd parked and sprinted up to his hotel room, there was barely enough time to pull on dress pants and shrug into a high-end suit jacket over a wrinkled shirt. It didn't quite meet dress code, but he'd rather take the hit for that than further fuel Hayden's theory that he'd been late because he was with a woman named Lily. A woman Shane had vehemently denied existed. His protests had sounded less convincing lately, and maybe he'd stopped caring if they did.

Theriault waited outside the bus, and Shane was already apologizing before the coach could get a word in.

"My bad, Coach."

"First for everything I suppose," Theriault grunted, giving him a look that lingered somewhere between concern and curiosity. Shane was the captain. He was supposed to set

the tone, be the example. He was probably hoping that he wasn't losing him in the last stretch of the season. "Everything all right, kid?"

"Yep," Shane puffed, jogging up the steps.

On a bench near the front, Hayden let out an incredulous cough that passed for a laugh. He didn't say anything when Shane sat down, but he didn't have to.

"Shut up," Shane muttered.

Hayden lifted his hands in surrender. "I'm not judging."

From a few rows back, a thick Québécois accent called out, "I am! Your sweetie coming to the game tonight, cap?"

Yes, and he'd probably lay you flat on your ass for calling him sweetie, Shane thought. He grimaced as the bus quieted, waiting for his answer. Since when had Lily become public knowledge to J.J., to the rest of the team? Would he have to fake a break-up just to put this rumor to rest?

"I bet she is *une bombe*," Gilbert chimed in from the other side of the aisle, slipping easily between English and French. A pretty girl, he'd called Ilya. If Shane's cheeks weren't already on fire, he might've laughed. "This is why Hollander keeps her hidden. Too scared she will see me and change her mind."

Hayden rolled his eyes, dropping his voice. "More like she'd take one look at Comeau and start running."

Shane probably should've laughed. Instead, he was busy searching for a way out of this conversation, an easy pivot, anything to redirect the attention.

Relief came in the form of Theriault stepping onto the bus, commanding presence alone enough to quiet the noise. He tapped his clipboard. "We're gonna play hard tonight, boys. Stick to the game plan. Be in tune. Boston's gonna try to throw us off, split us up. I don't want to see that happening."

From the back, one of the defensemen muttered, "When he says Boston, what he really means is Rozanov."

He wasn't wrong. Ilya was a specialist in disruption. In dragging players off their lines, into making stupid mistakes, creating chaos on the ice like he was half-man, half-storm.

"You heard him," Shane said, standing, turning to face the team. His team. There were parts of the captaincy that still sat heavy on his shoulders, expectations and optics and responsibility pressing in from all sides. But this, this moment, when everyone was watching and waiting, felt right.

"Play smart. Play together," he continued, projecting his voice, showing special attention to the mouthy defense at the back of the bus. "And don't let anyone get in your head."

Somewhere nearby, he could almost feel Ilya smiling.

They shuffled into the changeroom with enough energy to power a small plant. It was electric, noisy, saturated with the hunger to win, and Shane wouldn't have it any other way. They fanned out to their cubbies, gear laid out and waiting.

The noise blurred into a steady hum as Shane stole one last glance at his phone.

Lily: *We have a problem.*

His brow creased. He typed back quickly. *What?*

When no response came, Shane slipped his suit jacket from his shoulders and hung it neatly on the hook. As his fingers found the fly of his pants, he began to tune back into the noise of the room.

Or rather, he realized with a pause, the absence of it.

Why did everyone look like Casper the Ghost had just drifted through the walls?

Hayden was staring at him like he'd sprouted a third arm. J.J. was hunched close to Ryan, whispering urgently. Patrice stood shirtless, pads forgotten in his hands, blinking hard like he was trying to shake off a bad fever dream.

"Come on, guys," Shane said, waving his hands, searching for the spark that had vanished. As captain, he should have had a better handle on this. Weren't they hollering like a frat house two minutes ago? "Let's keep the energy up. We've handed them their asses twice already."

J.J. spoke first. "Turn around, Hollander."

His eyebrows knit. "What?"

"Se retourner!" Gilbert snapped. "C'est quoi ce bordel?"

Hayden glanced at Gilbert. "Uh, yeah. What he said."

Why did they want him to turn around? And why did they all look so mad? Equal parts uneasy and unwilling to challenge a full-room stare-down, Shane turned back toward his cubby.

"What the fuck, Hollander!" the mouthy defenseman shouted, recoiling like he'd been dropped into a pit of snakes. "That's, like, sacrilegious or something."

"Blasphème!" Gilbert spat.

Hayden edged closer, lowering his voice. "Listen, cap. If this is some weird way of getting the team riled up for a win, I, uh, don't think it's landing the way you hoped."

Shane waited for the moment for an explanation to click into place, for a realization to dawn. It didn't. Instead, his phone buzzed again, the vibration against his palm calling his attention as the screen lit with a message preview.

Lily: *You took my shirt.*

Shane's stomach flipped as he dropped his gaze to himself. The front of the shirt was black, indistinguishable from the one he'd worn over to Ilya's earlier that afternoon. The same fabric, the same familiar weight. His had been league-issued, handed out alongside their bonuses last Christmas. The one with HOLLANDER stitched across the shoulders in big, bold letters.

If he'd worn Ilya's by accident...

On the ice, he acted quick. Found the puck fast, moved to the net faster. Years of experience had honed his reflexes into second nature. But here, off the ice, wearing ROZANOV on his back like some doe-eyed puck bunny in the stands, his brain short-circuited completely.

"Oh," he breathed, the sound wobbling on the edges. He tried to force a laugh.

Gilbert pressed a hand to his stomach. "I'm going to be sick."

It was Ryan, the quietest in the room, who suddenly decided this was the perfect moment to find his voice. Shane could have throttled him. "How did you even get that?"

"Alright, calm down," Shane raised his hands in surrender, teetering on the edge of a plan that his tangled thoughts and racing pulse couldn't fully grasp. "I... uh, figured we'd need the extra kick tonight. Little something to get our blood pumping." *His certainly was.* "Everyone angry now?"

"For fuck's sake," J.J. growled, ignoring Shane's attempt at turning this into a lesson. "Take it off, Hollander!"

"Fuck! Fine!" Shane barked, abandoning his attempt at composure. He yanked the fabric over his head, lacking any grace. It hit the floor in a heap, ROZANOV glaring up at him. In another life, he might have liked the idea of wearing that name, making it clear exactly where his loyalty lay. Instead, he kicked it beneath the bench, chest cracking open an inch. "Better?"

"Not fucking really," J.J. hissed. "Don't think I'll ever get that image out of my head."

"Agreed," Hayden murmured, and Shane tried not to wince at the casual disregard in his best friend's voice. "Rozanov would have a field day if he knew about this."

Hayden was right, but probably not in the way he thought.

"I don't know if I can even look that asshole in the eye anymore," Gilbert muttered, his accent curling around the words.

"Relax," Shane shrugged, forcing himself to meet their disgust with a bravery he didn't feel. Lying had never been his skill, but here went nothing. "My junior captain did this once.

Showed up wearing the other team's jersey before a big game." He let out a short breath, the echo of a laugh lost somewhere in the exhale. "Said it pissed everyone off so much they couldn't lose."

Hayden's gaze lingered longer than usual, careful and assessing. They'd been close friends for years, long enough to read Shane like a bad poker hand, to spot the tell in his eyes, the tremor in his voice. Shane braced for Hayden to call him out.

"Yeah... you know what, I think I heard about that," Hayden said instead, nodding with restrained enthusiasm, like he couldn't quite force himself to buy in. "It worked, didn't it?"

Shane swallowed the lump in his throat. "Yup. Won by four that day."

A tense quiet settled over the room, unease prickling in the air like a loose wire, threatening to set a tone for disaster. And they were only minutes from warm-ups.

The door creaked. Theriault stepped in, took one look at the half-dressed, wide-eyed players, and roared. "What the hell is happening here? Why isn't anyone ready?"

Shane cleared his throat. "My fault, coach. Tried something new.

"Is that right?" Theriault circled the room like a shark. "Care to share? Because it looks to me like you've got a room full of half-dressed players who already look like they lost."

Shame washed over Shane in a wave. Pissing off his team was one thing. Losing the trust of his coach was another entirely. He'd always been a good captain, the perfect teammate. It was what he'd been raised to do, trained endlessly for, dieted until he couldn't stomach another bite of chicken, worked out until his muscles ached.

Ryan was still staring, eyes narrow and curious. "But... how'd you get it?"

The shirt. He couldn't tell Ryan that he'd peeled it off Ilya's chest himself. "Online," he muttered.

"You... you spent *money* on it?" Gilbert's voice was tight, the accent fracturing around his English. "Coach, you need to bench le cap tonight. He lost his fucking mind."

Steam might as well have been coming out of Theriault's ears. "I don't know what happened here," he barked, "but I need you all to stop acting like rookies and screw your heads on straight. Everyone on the ice. Now."

It might've been a mistake, but Shane wondered if, in some strange way, it had worked.

Their team was pumping their skates harder than he'd seen in weeks, eyes narrowed with the kind of glare reserved for men at war. They shot the puck like it had wronged them personally, probably picturing Ilya's shirt every time it left their stick. The pieces were moving on the board exactly where he'd hoped they'd go. Still, the bench stayed quiet. The energy hadn't lifted. And they sat a little farther from Shane, shifting away like he'd contracted something contagious.

Maybe it was desperation, a need for a scrap of calm or courage, but he glanced at the Boston bench. Found Ilya on the other side of the penalty box, already looking at him, like he'd been waiting for Shane's head to turn.

His lips moved. Shane squinted, trying to read them.

The second line jumped on the ice, his attention pulled away as he drifted closer to the boards. When he looked back, Ilya spared him another second.

"Hit me," he mouthed.

What?

Shane must've misread that. Thank God his teammates were still pretending he didn't exist, because he instinctively leaned over the wall to get a better look.

Ilya lifted his arm over the bench, gesturing a punch. Then his gaze snapped back to the ice, features settling into something deliberate.

Had Ilya just told him to start a fight?

The lines changed again, and Shane skated toward the dot.

They met at center ice. The ref dangled the puck between them, and he had always loved being here with Ilya. The challenge of it, the closeness they were allowed in an arena full of thousands.

"Don't think," Ilya murmured, catching Shane's wary gaze through the visor. "Just drop your gloves."

Shane mouthed back, "Why?"

"I think you wore my shirt in the locker room," Ilya said, shrugging as his eyes dropped to the ice, "and probably team is not very happy with you."

He wanted Shane to win his team back. Didn't mind the black eye he'd earn for helping. Despite the sheer stupidity of it, something swelled in Shane's chest.

He wasn't a fighter. He barely joined in when brawls broke out, usually hanging back, ready with a pat on the shoulder or a quiet lecture depending on how it ended. But Ilya was right, as he so often was, a fact Shane hated admitting out loud. If he wanted his team to stop looking at him like he'd committed the ultimate betrayal, he had to prove he hadn't gone soft. Had to erase that image and replace it with something new.

"Tonight, though," Ilya added a second before the whistle blew. "You will wear it for me."

The puck hit the ice. Shane didn't even glance at it.

His stick clattered down. Gloves followed. He swung.

It was a weak shot, nowhere near enough to do real damage, but Ilya sold it, snapping back before lunging forward and grabbing Shane by the collar. Their skates dug into the ice as they spun, momentum carrying them down the rink.

“I can’t do it,” Shane hissed, fisting Ilya’s jersey, trying to force himself into this insane plan. At the edges of his vision, refs circled like vultures. His teammates watched in momentary shock as their captain got into his first scuffle of the season.

But there was fire in Ilya’s eyes, the same spark Shane had seen in too many hotel rooms to count.

He was *enjoying* this.

“You liked being mine, yes?” Ilya chirped, volatile enough to sound like an insult. “My name on your back. God. I wish I had been there.”

Shane tugged hard, nearly pulling Ilya to his knees, but he didn’t let go fast enough. They both went down, crashing onto the cold ice, helmets skittering away.

“Now, Hollander,” Ilya breathed. “Make it count.”

And he’d never been one to deny Ilya’s demands.

Pain flared through his knuckles on impact. He’d kiss that spot on Ilya’s chin a hundred times later, apologize properly for the bruise it would leave, hold ice to the ache until it was numb. But there wasn’t a flicker of pain on Ilya’s face as he spat blood across the ice, just as two hands hooked under Shane’s shoulders and hauled him back to his skates.

Ilya shouted something in Russian as he wiped the blood from his lips, baring his teeth, and Shane yelled back, “Get fucked, Rozanov!”

A flicker of amusement almost betrayed Ilya’s facade. On his way back to the bench, he winked. To anyone else, it would look antagonizing, a way to dig further under his skin. To Shane, it was a promise.

His teammates clapped him on the back when he returned to his bench, a familiar camaraderie found in their sweaty, tired expressions that he’d been robbed of for the first half of the game. And maybe he wished, hoped, one day, that he could wear a shirt with Rozanov’s name printed on the back and still maintain the respect of the league. But their rivalry had fueled the team’s competitive spirit for years, and he knew the importance of that, too.

“Nice hit,” Hayden said as they watched the puck slide across the ice, chased by their third line. “What’d he say to piss you off?”

Shane winced, the sting on his knuckles too fresh. “You don’t wanna know.”

“That bad?” His team mate jostled into his side, “Well, guess you’ll just have to go buy some more Rozanov merch. That should show him.”

Shane glared from beneath the visor, but at the sight of Hayden's teasing smile, he couldn't stop the laugh that slipped from his lips. "Dumb idea, huh?"

The whistle blew, and they got on their feet. "Pretty bad."

And it sounded like Hayden might have been talking about more than just the lie he'd told, but Shane had a game to win.

Shane stepped into Ilya's penthouse just past one in the morning, and the laughter that burst out of him was like nothing Shane had ever heard.

"You're laughing?" Shane blurted, eyes wide, his stomach still flipping with the memory of their fight. "I can't believe you're laughing."

Laughing wasn't quite the right word. It was closer to hysteria. Tears clung to the corners of Ilya's eyes, slipping over the swollen edge of his busted lip, his cheeks flushed red because he couldn't quite catch his breath. And then, from the sheer relief of seeing the man he'd hurt doubled over in glee, because it was a little funnier now that he'd gained back his team's trust, Shane started laughing too. Until they were both teary, snotty messes, bent over the kitchen island.

"I cannot believe you wore my shirt in your changeroom," Ilya choked out.

Shane pressed his palm to the side of his head. "You should've seen their faces. Like I'd confessed to murder."

Ilya's smile was untethered, wide, a little unhinged. "Is the same, I think?"

"Just about," Shane said, momentarily stunned by how beautiful Ilya looked right now, the aftermath of their fight blooming pink along his jaw. He moved on instinct, brushing his fingers gently over the injury, careful not to make it worse. "Does it hurt?"

"My niece hits harder than you, Hollander," Ilya said without hesitation, his grin sharpening. "And she is five."

"God," Shane breathed, pressing his lips to the broken skin, again and again, tasting salt where tears had pooled on Ilya's chin. "I can't believe I hit you."

Ilya caught Shane's chin, tilting his face up, forcing his gaze into hazel eyes still bright with delight. "It worked, yes?"

Shane collapsed into him, nodding into his chest. He hadn't even taken his shoes off.

"I didn't know how to say sorry, so..." Shane took a nervous step back, reached for the zipper of his thin athletic coat, and dragged it down slowly. This was easier when he hadn't known it was there. With his breath held, he watched satisfaction flicker across Ilya's face as understanding set in. Then he shrugged the coat to the floor and turned. "There."

"Oh," Ilya gaped, covering his mouth to stifle a gasp. "Fuck. It is worse than I thought."

Shane groaned. “Fuck off, Rozanov. You want your apology or not?”

Arms wrapped around him from behind, hands gripping tight, hauling his ass back into Ilya’s lap and turning him toward the counter. Shane’s stomach met cool marble as Ilya’s hand skimmed over the bold name stretched across his back.

“I want,” Ilya murmured. “I want very much.”

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